

Fihl (Pella) and the Cities of North Jordan during the Umayyad and Abbasid Periods

1) Introduction: Islamic Urbanism and Archaeological Models

The uncritical use of ill-defined models to explain the nature of settlement in Jordan following the Islamic Conquest has impeded the recognition of a continuing urban tradition during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Two consecutive models can be identified: the **Fisher Model**, apparent in the works of C.S. Fisher, and the more recent **Sauer-Smith Model**, evident in the writings of J. Sauer and R.H. Smith and widely accepted in Jordan today.

In the last two decades most historians and archaeologists have rejected the notion that the Islamic Conquest of Bilad ash-Sham resulted in the destruction of the Byzantine cities. This preconception, more the product of Western prejudice than scholarly endeavour, impeded the work of Jordan's pioneer archaeologists. A major proponent of this view was C.S. Fisher, who consistently down-dated the extensive early Islamic deposits at Jarash to the terminal Byzantine period (Fisher 1938a: 133, 138; 1938b: 275, 283-88). Thereafter many archaeologists conformed to the **Fisher Model**, for instance the Franciscans at Şiyagha (Mount Nebo; Schneider 1950: vi-vii, for dating examples see pp. 43-47, 78-81).

Fisher's conclusions were discredited by new excavations in the late 1960's and early 1970's; yet the failure of the Fisher Model did not prevent the adoption of an equally subjective interpretation of Islamic settlement history in Jordan. The demise of the Fisher Model and the formulation of a replacement theory stemmed from the work of J. Sauer at Ḥesban during 1971 and R.H. Smith at Ṭabaqat Faḥl in 1967 (Sauer 1973a; Smith 1973). The **Sauer-Smith Model** postulates that the Conquest was followed by only a few decades of social equilibrium before a combination of economic, political and natural factors lead to the rapid decline of the urban centres east of the Jordan River, most of which were abandoned shortly after the establishment of a supposedly "hostile" Abbasid Caliphate (132AH/AD 750) and the transfer of the capital to Baghdad. Recent articles by Sauer (1982: 332-333; 1986: 304) and Smith

(1984: 59; 1985: 485-488) demonstrate their unwavering belief in the validity of this model.

The Sauer-Smith Model has attracted a wide following in Jordan. By assuming that urban life ended with the rise of the Abbasids, the authors of numerous site reports readily adopt the doctrine of relentless and accelerating decline during the first half of the second century AH (eighth AD). Recent examples include B. De Vries' urban history of Umm aj-Jimal (De Vries 1985: 251-252, 255), the excavation and survey work at Qweilbeh/Abil by W.H. Mare (Mare *et al.* 1982: 40, 47-48; 1987: 217), the Danish excavations of the bath house at Umm Qeis (Holm-Nielsen *et al.* 1986: 228-229), and J. Eadie's survey of Ḥumeima (Eadie 1984). Authors of area surveys have also argued for the incremental abandonment of settlements during late Umayyad times. There are many examples, for instance the Wadi al-Ḥasa survey of B. MacDonald (1980: 179-180; 1982: 40; MacDonald *et al.* 1982: 129), the badiyah survey by V. Clark during S.T. Parker's *Limes Arabicus* Project (Clark 1987: 128, 135), J.M. Miller's archaeological reconnaissance in central Ma'ab (Miller 1979a: 49-50), the 1981-1982 survey of southern al-Balqa' by G. King (1985: 45), O.S. LaBianca's land-use survey around Ḥesban (LaBianca 1984), and R.G. Boling's regional survey within the Madaba Plains project (Geraty *et al.* 1987: 197). R. Schick's recent study of Christian society in Palestine and Jordan after the Conquest indicates the extent to which the Sauer-Smith Model has found general acceptance amongst archaeologists and historians (Schick 1987, especially pp. 236-237).

In order to test the validity of the Sauer-Smith Model, this paper combines literary sources with archaeological results in an attempt to reconstruct the nature and extent of settlement in north Jordan during Umayyad and Abbasid times. Central to this analysis is the present author's research into the occupation of Fihl/Ṭabaqat Faḥl after the Islamic Conquest (Walmsley 1987; 1988); which finds support in work at Beit Ras (Lenzen, Gordon and McQuitty 1985: 155-159; Lenzen and Knauf 1987), Jarash (Zayadine 1986), and Ayla Aqaba (Whitcomb 1987; 1988;

1989). Some preliminary comments are also offered on the problems of identifying post-Conquest occupation in southern Jordan where the Sauer-Smith Model is often invoked.

2) The Historical Geography of North Jordan: The Literary Evidence

a) Sources

Four major Arabic sources offer a reliable account of the principal urban centres of north Jordan in the first four centuries of Islam, and indicate a complex pattern of settlement development after the Islamic Conquest.

i) The *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān* by al-Balādhurī (d. 279AH/AD 892). Published in 255AH/AD 869, this work offers an indispensable account of the Islamic Conquests with much valuable geographical information on the places and administrative divisions of Bilad ash-Sham.

ii) The *Kitāb al-Masalik wa'l-Mamālik* by Ibn Khurdādhbih (211-300AH/AD 826-913). Issued in 232AH/AD 847 and 272AH/AD 885-6, this official manual on the regions, administrative divisions and road system of the Empire accurately describes the urban geography of Bilad ash-Sham under the early Abbasids.

iii) The *Kitāb al-Buldān* by al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284AH/AD 897 in Egypt). This quasi-official work was published in 278AH/AD 891 as a practical guide to the topography, regions, routes and peoples of the Islamic World and beyond. Al-Ya'qūbī's critical evaluation of his sources recommends *al-Buldān* as a reliable geographical source.

iv) The *Kitāb Aḥsan at-Taqāsīm fī Ma'rifat al-Aqālīm* of al-Maqdisī (d. 390AH/AD 1000). Published in 378AH/AD 988, this book presents a full and critical account of the Islamic World in the third quarter of the fourth century AH (tenth AD) based upon al-Maqdisī's own observations.

b) Evaluation of the Source Material

The four works, although often frustratingly short on details, identify broad trends in the urban history of Jordan, and counteract the concept of rapid settlement decay and abandonment in the century after the Islamic Conquest. Ibn Khurdādhbih identifies five urban centres in north Jordan: Fiḥl (Ṭabaqat Faḥl), Jadar (Umm Qeis), 'Abil (Qweilbeh), Beit Ras and Jarash (de Goeje [ed] 1889: 78.7-10). Each of these centres formed the chief city of a *kūrah*, or administrative district, in the Jund al-'Urduḥ (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 42; Walmsley 1987: 104-120, 277-283), which stretched from coastal Ṣūr (Tyre) and 'Akka to al-Jawlan and Jarash (FIG. 1, Walmsley 1987: 88-133). Ibn Khurdādhbih's practical objective leaves little doubt that the urban role of these centres extended into the first half of the third century AH (ninth AD) and, equally importantly, indicates the continuing interest of this dynasty in the affairs of north Jordan.

Al-Balādhurī's book names three of the five locations listed by Ibn Khurdādhbih: Fiḥl, Jarash and Beit Ras (de Goeje [ed] 1866: 115, 116.19). He pays particular attention to Fiḥl, the venue for a crucial battle between the



1. The Jund al-'Urduḥ, as originally constituted in 18 AH/AD 637.

Byzantine and Islamic armies in 13AH/AD 635, and the subsequent peace agreement between the people of Fiḥl and the Muslim commander Shuraḥbīl. Excavations at Ṭabaqat Faḥl have confirmed a peaceful transition to Islamic rule, as there is no hint of a brutal conquest of the city (Walmsley 1988). This agrees with the situation throughout north Jordan, where any substantive evidence for the violent overthrow of the old order is completely missing from the archaeological record (MacAdam 1986: 534-536). The two other centres, Jarash and Beit Ras, are simply listed with the other districts of al-'Urduḥ taken by *ṣulḥ* (peace covenant). The omission of Jadar and 'Abil may be explained by the leading role of Beit Ras in the affairs of north Jordan, as by 96AH/AD 715 this town had been joined with 'Abil and Jadar to form a *Tri-chora* (three districts) under the control of a single *'amel*, or governor (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 40; Peeters 1939: 305-306, 310, 313-314).

In the last quarter of the third century AH (ninth AD), southern Bilad ash-Sham was enjoying a period of stable government under the Egyptian Tulunid dynasty after the rural uprisings in the Caliphate of al-Mu'taṣem (218-227AH/AD 833-842) and his immediate successors. When combined with long term economic factors, these social disturbances could explain the decreasing administrative

ground floor functioned as the work area of the household, with a small workshop in one unit and rooms for the stabling of animals, particularly cows, sheep/goats, and *equids*. Overall, the domestic structures in Area IV reflect the reasonably high standard of living enjoyed by the inhabitants of Fihl at the end of the Umayyad Period (Walmsley 1988; 1989a).

The close economic relations between Fihl and the other centres of north Jordan in the first half of the second century AH (eighth AD) is demonstrated by a shared ceramic tradition. The Area IV domestic wares have many features in common with late Umayyad ceramics from sites in the Jordan Valley and the north Jordan range; from Kursi on Lake Tiberias to the southern Hawran and Jarash (Lenzen 1990; Tzaferis 1983; Zayadine 1986). Much of Fihl's pottery came from the kilns of Jarash; particularly the cooking pots and casseroles, small jugs and jars, large hand-made mixing craters and some lamps (Walmsley 1986a: 355-357; 1988; Schaefer and Falkner 1986: 433-435). This, and the many post-Reform coins from the Beisan and Ṭabariyah mints found at Jarash (Walmsley 1987: 147-151), indicates that the route between Fihl and Jarash retained considerable provincial importance during the first and second centuries AH (seventh and eighth AD).

The continued settlement of Fihl after the momentous earthquake of 129AH/AD747 is indicative of the social and economic resilience of the city in the mid second century AH. Although evidence for post-earthquake occupation of the central mound is limited (Walmsley 1990), recent excavations in two sizable structures located on a low knoll in the valley to northeast of the main mound have uncovered stratified Abbasid deposits dating to the third and fourth centuries AH (ninth and tenth AD) (Walmsley 1986b: 182-195; 1988). The two rectangular buildings, which cover an area of around 70 by 40 metres, were constructed on different levels next to one another either side of a four metre wide street. Doorways lead to paved courtyards flanked by rooms, some of which served a public function while others were devoted to domestic purposes. A number of associated outlying units, probably houses, are traceable to the north, west and south.

Excavation of the east building in early 1989 has identified a number of occupational phases dating to the third and fourth centuries AH (ninth and tenth AD), producing ceramic lamps, domestic wares and pinch-decorated glass. In 1985 two 1.75m deep rubbish pits yielded ceramic jars, jugs, bowls, and casseroles along with an iron dagger, nails, a limestone box, glass fragments and chicken bone. An initial study of the pottery from the pits has identified nine different wares, including new shapes and production techniques unrepresented in the extensive Umayyad corpus (Walmsley 1986b: 193-194; 1988: 156-157). The new, distinctly Abbasid, varieties may have initially appeared towards the end of the second century AH (eighth AD), but became very common in the following two centuries. A greater proportion of the

pottery from the pits represents a strong continuation of the late Umayyad ceramic traditions well into the third century AH (ninth AD), and clearly indicates that the imposition of an Abbasid administration over al-'Urdunn had little immediate cultural impact in the provincial centres. This material refutes Sauer's argument for "a rather sharp break in ceramic traditions" following the Abbasid revolution (Sauer 1973b: 16).

The twin buildings seem to have served as the new city centre of Fihl after the 129AH/AD747 earthquake, with markets and administrative quarters. If this proposition is correct, Area XXIX may contain the city's *masjid al-jami'*, as congregational mosques were probably built in all the major cities of Bilad ash-Sham. Examples are known from Jerusalem, Ṭabariyah and Qaysariyah (de Goeje [ed.] 1866: 116.14, 143.1-8), Beit Ras (Peeters 1939: 302, 304), Jarash, and Amman (Northedge 1984: 53-56).

b) *The Archaeological Evidence for Umayyad and Abbasid Settlement at Jarash, Beit Ras, Jadar and 'Abil*
Renewed archaeological activity at Jarash during this decade has revealed a major Umayyad and Abbasid presence at the site (Zayadine 1986). Evidence for one or both of these periods has turned up in most of the newly excavated areas, particularly in and around the North Theatre and during the unearthing of shops and houses to the north of the western South Decumanus.

The original Umayyad structures of the South Decumanus consisted of adjacent shops along the street front and, behind them, a large house with two wings of rooms on either side of a central open court. In the latter part of the second century AH (eighth AD), the Umayyad house was subdivided into three and the shops converted into another house (Gawlikowski 1986: 114-115). By the third century AH (ninth AD) these dwellings had been destroyed, perhaps by an earthquake, and the area turned into a potters' workshop with four kilns for the production of lamps, cooking pots, bowls and cups (Gawlikowski 1986: 117). Pottery manufacturing was a major industry at Jarash in the first to third centuries AH (seventh to ninth AD). Other areas with kilns include the courtyard of the Artemis Temple (Fisher 1938a: 133; Pierobon 1983-84b: 85-111; 1986), the domestic quarter west of St Theodore's church (Fisher 1938b: 284), and the North Theatre (Schaefer and Falkner 1986) and portico (Walmsley 1986a: 355-357).

In addition to the kilns, R. Pierobon (1983-84a: 27-28) has collated further evidence from earlier excavations for Umayyad settlement at Jarash. Domestic and industrial structures, including a blacksmith's shop, were uncovered around the South Tetrapylon by the Yale-British School-ASOR Joint Excavations between 1929-1934; the presence of numerous Umayyad coins and at least one Abbasid piece in the debris of these buildings dates their use throughout the second century AH (eighth AD), if not later (Harding 1949: 19; Kraeling 1938b: 105, 109, 111-14). Pierobon also notes the late first to second century AH (seventh to eighth

AD) housing quarter built over the Oval Piazza (Harding 1949: 15-17), the small mosque discovered in 1981, and the recent identification of Jarash as an Islamic mint of the Jund al-'Urdunn. To this should be added evidence for Umayyad occupation in the Baths of Placcus and adjacent shops, where 23 "Arabic" coins were found (Fisher 1938b: 269); the Clergy House of St Theodore's church with ten "Arabic" coins (Fisher 1938b: 274-275); and Umayyad period usage of the churches (Crowfoot 1938: 172-173, 241 [Synagogue Church], 242, 244, 248-249 [John the Baptist, St George, SS Cosmas and Damianus], 254 [SS Peter and Paul]).

Recent archaeological work at Beit Ras, 'Abil (Qweilbeh) and Jadar (Umm Qeis) has recovered clear evidence for continued urban settlement after the Conquest. Excavations in Area A at Beit Ras by C.J. Lenzen have established three major pre-Crusader phases: phase V (mid 7th century - AD 750), phase IV (AD 750 - 850) and phase III (AD 950 - 1100). The area consists of adjoining vaults, identified as one of the city's markets, and a water installation in use between the late first and third centuries AH (seventh and ninth AD) (Lenzen and Knauf 1987: 32, 39-42; Lenzen, Gordon and McQuitty 1985: 156-158). Umayyad and Abbasid pottery was also identified during a survey of the nearby rural site of Khirbet al-Burz, northwest of Irbid, confirming the ongoing settlement of rural north Jordan (Lenzen, McQuitty and Rousan 1985).

At Qweilbeh, W.H. Mare has identified a strong Umayyad presence, but only limited evidence for settlement in Abbasid and Fatimid times (Mare *et al.* 1982: 40, 47-48; 1987: 217). Soundings between 1982 and 1986 in Area A on Tell Abila have uncovered building foundations dated to the Umayyad Period, but no evidence for any subsequent habitation until "late Islamic" times (Mare 1984: 40-41; 1985: 221; Mare *et al.* 1987: 206). A similar occupational history is proposed for the Byzantine church in Area D on Khirbet Umm al-'Amad, except here the "late Islamic" is missing (Mare *et al.* 1987: 209). A more complete sequence of Islamic settlement at 'Abil is suggested by the material recovered from the debris within the Khirbet Umm al-'Amad Theatre Cavea, where the Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid periods are all represented (Mare *et al.* 1987: 208-209).

At Jadar/Umm Qeis, the excavation of the city baths by a Danish team has revealed three periods of reuse as dwellings during Umayyad times, ending with the AD 747 earthquake. Other soundings in the western part of the site indicate near-continuous occupation at Jadar after the earthquake into the Mamluk period, although the nature of this settlement is not clear (Holm-Nielsen, Nielsen and Anderson 1986: 220-229). An inscription from the Roman baths of al-Ḥammeh, located 3kms north of Jadar in Wadi al-Yarmuk, details the refurbishment of these facilities under the Caliph Mu'awiyah in 42AH/AD662 (Hirschfeld and Solar 1981; Green and Tsafirir 1982). The benefits derived from bathing in these thermal waters were known

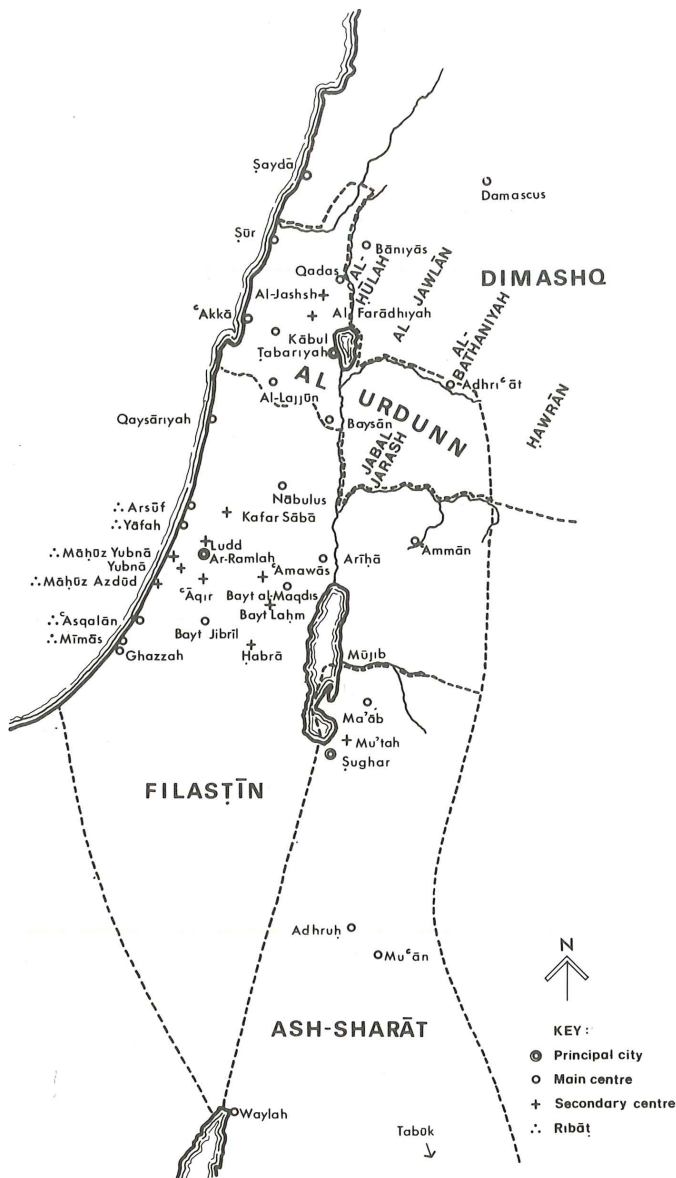
to al-Maqdisī (de Goeje [ed] 1906: 185.7-13), although his discourse about the dismantling of the al-Ḥammeh baths suggests that they were no longer functioning at the end of the fourth century AH (tenth AD).

c) *Identifying Islamic Settlement in South Jordan*

Archaeological surveys south of Wadi al-Mujeb have usually overlooked Islamic occupation after the Conquest. J. Sauer noticed only a few Umayyad sherds in B. MacDonald's survey of 552 sites on the south bank of Wadi al-Ḥasa, and saw nothing familiar from either the Abbasid or Fatimid periods (MacDonald 1980: 179-180; 1982: 40; MacDonald *et al.* 1982: 129). Similarly S. Hart (1986: 54, 58) concluded that settlement in south Edom/ash-Sharah was only "scattered" in Islamic times after surveying an area west of Ma'an; while further south at Ḥumeima, J. Eadie (1984: 220) collected, i.e. could identify, only a "sprinkling of Umayyad sherds". S.T. Parker's *Limes Arabicus* survey, for which Sauer also read the pottery, found little evidence for earlier Islamic settlement in the east of south Jordan (Parker 1976: 28; 1986: 12), as did V. Clark (1987: 128, 135) during the *Limes* desert survey. In central Moab/Ma'ab, J.M. Miller (1979a: 49-50; 1979b: 90; again Sauer read the pottery) noted "occasional" Fatimid sherds, but makes no mention of either Umayyad or Abbasid material and occupation. Finally during a survey of the southern Ghor and Wadi 'Arabah, G. King (1985: 41-45) found evidence for Umayyad and Fatimid occupation at al-Mutraba on al-Lisan, but nothing further south. This, he suggests, could be attributable to one of two factors: Either a decline in settlement or a separate ceramic horizon for south Jordan.

Both literary and archaeological sources identify a distinct cultural tradition for south Jordan after the Islamic Conquest, while demonstrating that the settlement of the region's major sites continued well into the fourth century AH (tenth AD) (Walmsley 1987: 172-175, 182-183, 284-285). In al-Maqdisī's *al-Aqālim*, the region south of Wadi al-Mujeb is placed into a separate geo-cultural district called ash-Sharah (FIG. 3), with Ṣuḡhar/Zuḡhar, Ma'ab, Ma'an, Adhruḡ, Wayla/Ayla, Tabuk and Madyan as its principal centres (de Goeje [ed] 1877: 155.2-3, 178.1-13). Works of the third century AH, notably al-Ya'qubī (de Goeje [ed] 1892: 326.11), add 'Arandal (Gharandal) or its district of Jibal as another major locality south of Wadi al-Mujeb (Walmsley 1987: 126, 134, 284, 298; 1989b).

Al-Maqdisī's identification of a separate cultural region south of Wadi al-Mujeb finds support from recent archaeological work on two of the major sites of south Jordan. At Ayla/Aqaba, the Umayyad and Abbasid ceramics recovered by Whitcomb (1987: 261-266; 1988; 1989) during the 1986 and 1987 seasons have little in common with the north Jordan wares. Notably absent at Ayla are the diagnostic Umayyad and early Abbasid wares produced at Jarash and known from Fihl, Amman (Harding 1951) and numerous other sites (Sauer 1982: 330-332,



3. Southern Bilad ash-Sham in the later fourth century AH (tenth AD), according to al-Maqdisi.

Walmsley 1988: 182). Nearly all of these sites are located north of the Dead Sea and Wadi al-Mujeb. Similarly at Udhrūḡ the Islamic pottery from the excavations appears unrelated to the Umayyad and Abbasid ceramics of north Jordan (Killick 1983: 125-129), a further endorsement of the cultural independence of south Jordan during the first centuries of Islam.

4) **Conclusions on the Settlement History of North Jordan**
The evidence from written and archaeological sources attests to the continued settlement of Fiḡl, Jarash, Beit Ras, 'Abil and Jadar into Abbasid and Fatimid times, although the nature of this occupation underwent an

important transformation in response to identifiable political and economic changes. The source material identifies three major periods in the occupational history of north Jordan: Urban continuity, extending into the early Abbasid period; contraction, from the second quarter of the third century AH (ninth AD) onwards; and finally rural stability, with north Jordan settled by numerous village communities. The gradual reduction of the five urban centres into village communities is probably to be explained by the political and economic reorientation of Amman and the lands south of it with Damascus in the first two centuries of Islam, and the impact this had on communication routes in the region (Walmsley 1987: 286-288).

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