

THE 1986 SEASON AT ABILA OF THE DECAPOLIS

by

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The 1986 season of excavation at Abila of the Decapolis — Quweilbeh, northern Jordan,¹ (Pl. XXXIII,1) was conducted from June 21 to August 8 with Dr. W. Harold Mare, Director, and Covenant Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, as principal investigators, under the general supervision of Dr. Adnan Hadidi, Director General of the Department of Antiquities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The 1986 excavation was also sponsored by Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Cincinnati Christian Seminary, Ohio, with St. Louis Community College, Florissant Valley, giving valuable assistance.

The 1986 excavation received the valuable counsel and help from Dr. Adnan Hadidi and also from Dr. Ghazi Bisheh, Dr. Hadidi's assistant, and from Mr. Sultan Shureidah, Irbid District Inspector and Department Representative. Others from

the Department of Antiquities also helped greatly in the Abila Educational Program by giving scheduled lectures: Dr. Ghazi Bisheh on "Archaeology in the Early Islamic Period"; Dr. Zahida Safar on "Tomb Painting and Tomb Excavation"; and Dr. Fawzi Zayadine on "Roman Religion."

The American Staff of twenty-six members² was aided by the Department Representative, Sultan Shureidah, and augmented by the Camp Cook, Abu Yusef 'Adawi, and his assistants and by the thirty local workmen hired for various secondary excavation tasks. The staff headquarters in the Khureibah Boys School, Mr. Ibrahim Mustafa Ibrahim, Principal, located just 1.5 kilometers south of the site near 'Ain Khureibah — a school graciously provided through the Department of Antiquities and the Ministry of Education of Jordan —

1. A site on Wadi Quweilbeh, about 15 kilometers north-northeast of Irbid and 4 kilometers south of Wadi el-Yarmouk.
2. The American Staff consisted of twenty six persons, including Dr. Mare, Director, Dr. W.W. Winter, Cincinnati Christian Seminary, Dr. Horace D. Hummel, Concordia Seminary, Dr. Bastiaan Van Elderen, The Free University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and Mr. Michael J. Fuller, St. Louis Community College, as core staff members. The staff members were as follows: director, W. Harold Mare; associate directors, Dr. Reuben Bullard, Cincinnati Christian Seminary, Horace Hummel, and Michael Fuller; area supervisors, Michael Fuller, chief architect and surveyor, Neathery B. Fuller, tomb supervisor, Horace Hummel, Area A supervisor, Bastiaan Van Elderen, Area B supervisor, and Wilkie Winter, Area D supervisor. Square supervisors included: Amy Deeds, Mark Hartmann, Judy Herzog, Dr. Jack Lee, Robyn Magner, Deomar Roos, Dr. John Shoup, Robert Smith, Tim Snow, Dr. Sujai

Suneetha, Doyle Theimer, John Wineland, Gretchen Witte and Mark Ziese. Also included were the following specialists: ceramicist, Lee Maxwell; osteologist, Valerie Haskins, with Sujai Suneetha and John Wineland as assistants; photographer, Douglas Potter; ethnoarchaeologist, John Shoup; flotation, Neather B. Fuller and Gretchen Witte, assistant; registrar, Lee Maxwell and assistants, Julene Gernant, Judy Herzog, Jack Lee, John Shoup, Doyle Theimer, Deomar Roos, Amy Deeds, Mark Ziese, John Wineland and others; conservator, Shelley Dunn; artists, Mark Ziese, Doyle Theimer, Deomar Roos, Amy Deeds, Mark Hartmann and others; educational director, Wilkie Winter and Robert Smith, assistant; architect-surveyors, Michael Fuller, and John Wineland, Gretchen Witte, Mark Ziese, and Doyle Theimer, assistants; camp manager, Robyn Magner; medical advisors, Dr. Eleanor Soltau, M.D. and Aileen Coleman, R.N., An-Noor Hospital, Mafrag; and cook, Abu Yusef 'Adawi, and assistants.

proved most adequate to meet the housing and research needs of the excavation.

The objectives set forth in the Research Design submitted to Dr. Adnan Hadidi and the Department of Antiquities included the following: 1) to do pure research into the physical materials available for excavation at the site (i.e., ceramics stratigraphic evidence, architecture, human skeletal remains, geological, faunal and floral evidence, numismatic evidence, etc., which would help in understanding the cultural history of the site); 2) to do salvage archaeology, thus retrieving and preserving as much as possible the physical remains exposed or disturbed by unlawful digging; and 3) to continue an educational program composed of weekly lectures and week-end archaeological trips to help the staff obtain a better understanding of the history, culture and disciplines involved in excavating at Abila of the Decapolis as well as understanding the culture of Abila in the light of other archaeological excavations, especially in Jordan.

It was determined that the excavation on Tell Abila at the sixth century A.D. basilica needed expanding to define better the nature and function of this structure as well as that of any other structures on the same site built before and after the basilica; the trench just to the northeast of the basilica needed further probing to determine the extent of the Hellenistic-Roman structures there and their relation to any Iron and Bronze Age strata and structures. On Umm el-'Amad the nature and function of the seventh century A.D. basilica there needed further defining, and along the north-northeast slope of Umm el-'Amad the debris at the theater cavea called for probing to get some understanding of the size, form and complexity of that structure. Further work was needed in the Roman-Byzantine cemetery along the wadis to the east and south of Tell Abila and Umm el-'Amad to get further understanding of the burial customs, practices and beliefs of the people buried there (Fig. 1).

Area A:

The Excavation on Tell Abila (Supervisor, Horace D. Hummel)

Major attention was placed on excavating further the east section of the sixth century triapsidal basilica where there was evidence of later structures built over parts of it and where there was evidence of the builders of the basilica having used materials belonging to an earlier structure abutting and under it. Attention was also given to the materials from an earlier time which were in a north trench located at the northeast corner of the basilica.

The following periods were in evidence in Area A in the 1986 season: Post Umayyad (Late Islamic), Umayyad/Byzantine, Byzantine, Roman, Hellenistic, Persian (slightly), Iron Age and Bronze Age.

The excavation of Squares A 11-16 added additional evidence as to the Umayyad presence and activity in the area of the basilica, particularly in A 11 in upper loci of the north apse of the basilica where additional loci were found, and further evidence was uncovered of the Umayyad buildings on the south side of the basilica, constructed on the foundation stylobate of the basilica (Fig. 2). Umayyad wall stubs extended west of the south apse into Squares A 12-16, with north-south cross walls in evidence in some places. Investigation of what appeared to be a possible break on the south outer wall of the basilica (A 15-16) did not yield evidence that at this point an Islamic prayer niche had been built. In Square A 8, the place of the "capital graveyard," excavation produced continued evidence of Umayyad activity, pointing again to Umayyad use and storage of the column and capital pieces there.

The Byzantine period of Area A (Fig. 3) was clearly evident in the further excavation of Squares A 4 and A 8 (located within and also just to the west of the central apse of the basilica) and in Square A 11 (within and just to the west of the north apse) where excavation finally uncovered part of a podium platform of an earlier structure. (Part of this podium was

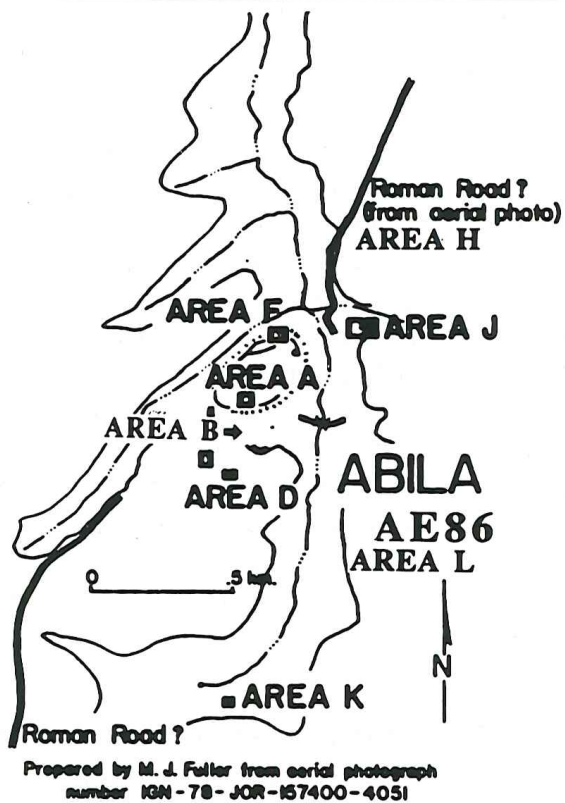


Fig. 1

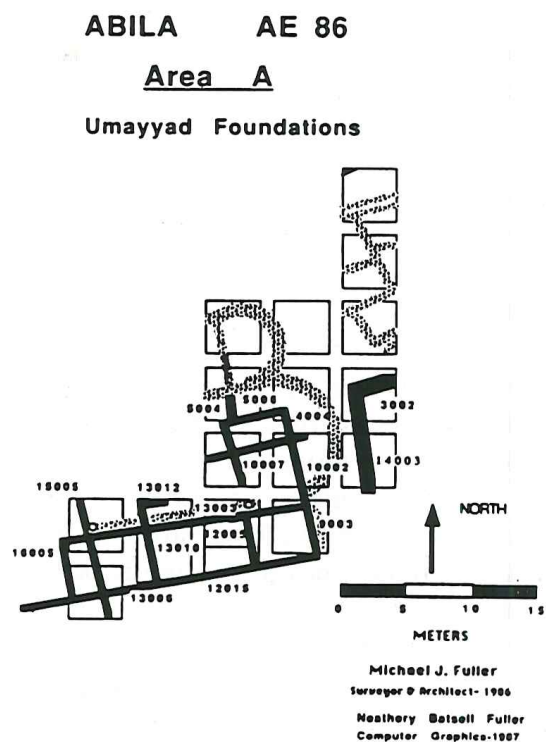


Fig. 2

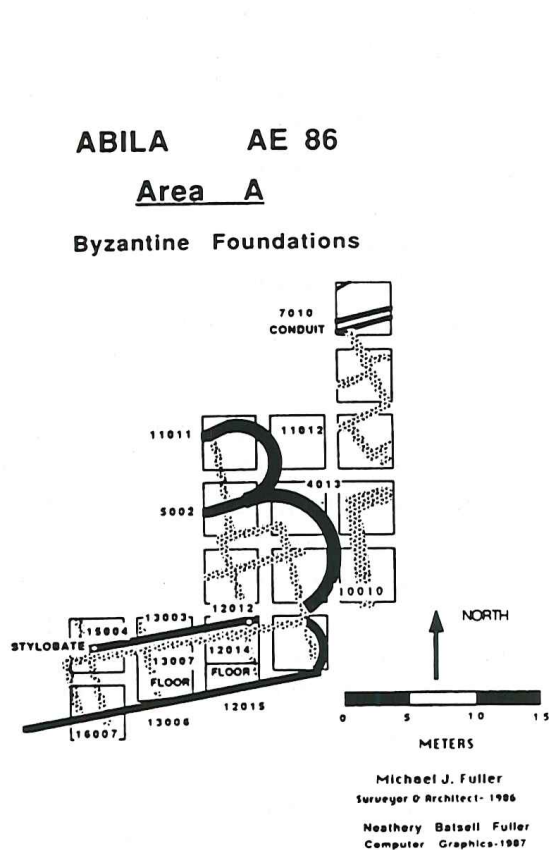


Fig. 3

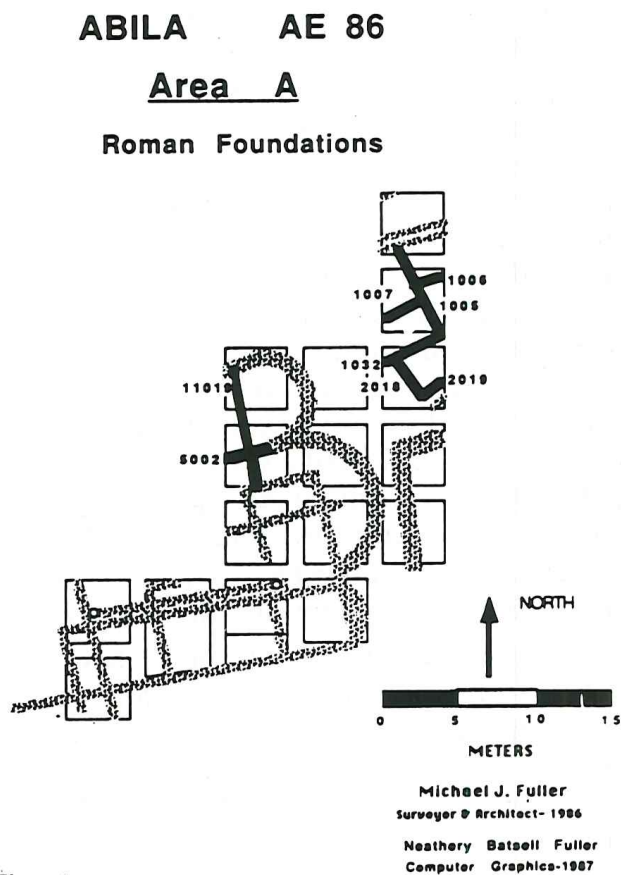


Fig. 4

also uncovered in the lower loci of A 8). It had been noted in 1982 and 1984 that the joint where the south arc of the north apse and the north arc of the central apse met — at a point where the north stylobate extended west — that the joint of the apses and the stylobate was uneven; it was thought at that time that the builders of the sixth century basilica here had used part of an earlier structure (possibly a Hellenistic or Roman structure) (Fig. 4) but had not made the join a smooth one. The excavation in 1986 in A 11 and A 8 demonstrated that this thesis was correct. The jumble of many large blocks of stone within A 11 (the result of an earthquake or some other disturbance) was removed in large part, producing a great amount of debris loci (Byzantine in pottery date) down to a large podium. Just to the east of the podium within the north apse further excavating of the Byzantine loci brought to light supporting stones (A 11026) under the podium for an underground chamber which was choked with blocks which had fallen through parts of the podium (compare the Jarash temple of Artemis and its underground chamber.) Further excavation here will help determine more precisely the dating of this earlier building. According to the evidence on the south east sector of the structure (A 11 to A 16) the flooring of the basilica, at least in this section, proved to be an *opus sectile* one, made up of black and white flagstones in pattern design; at one point a flagstone piece containing a Christian cross in relief, was reused in the floor. The latter and also a column showing dowel impressions in the form of a cross further point to the fact that the structure was indeed a Christian basilica. In addition to the many fragments of columns and capitals found, other architectural features included a part of the marble iconostasis screen for the basilica.

Excavation in the north-south trench (in A 1-3), in that sector extending north at the northeast corner of the basilica, exposed further material in wall and soil loci there from the Roman and Hellenistic periods, and uncovered as well loci of the Iron Age and Bronze Age periods (Fig. 5). In Squares A 1 and A 2 the Hellenistic-

Roman walls were further exposed, and in removing some of them an earlier Iron Age phase came to light evidenced by an Iron II wall (A 1083) and both Iron II (A 1113, 1120, etc.; A 2092) and Iron I (A 1126; A 2110) soil loci. Some evidence of Bronze Age periods came to light in the excavation lower in the same squares of earlier Bronze Age loci: Late Bronze (*cf.* A 1116-1119; 1121, 1125 and 1138, mainly; also some in A 2108); Middle Bronze/Late Bronze (A 1003, 1117, 1121, 1137); Middle Bronze II (A 1100, 1115, 1147, 1149; and A 2096, 2099, 2113); and Early Bronze — the pottery in this latter phase was fragmentary and not abundant and dates to Early Bronze II/III (example, A 1102, A 2108).

Area B:

The Khirbet Umm el-'Amad Theater Cavea (Supervisor: Bastiaan Van Elderen)

Excavation at the theater cavea (Area B) on the north-northeast slope of Khirbet Umm el-'Amad began for the first time in 1986 with the opening up of four squares, B 1-4. Trench B 1, 10 meters long and 2.50 meters wide was opened up perpendicularly to the north-northeast orientation of the theater cavea back into the cavea, excavating through extensive fill debris up to a depth of *ca.* 3 meters; below this fill there was encountered a tumble of large limestone blocks, largely of ashlar construction. Below this tumble a finely cut ashlar block(s) (B 1012) was encountered which with a very slight curve extended back into the cavea. The massive amount of soil debris in the upper layers of B 1, an accumulation of material which had filtered down from above from the top of Umm el-'Amad over the centuries, represented a number of periods: Early Bronze; Middle Bronze (MB II); Iron Age; Hellenistic; Roman; Byzantine; Umayyad; Abbasid; Fatimid; Ayyubid/Mamluk and Ottoman. Due to the nature of the fill which had gradually filtered down over the centuries it was not possible to separate definitively the periods and phases represented in this debris.

Square B 2 (4 meters by 4 meters) was

laid out several meters to the northeast of B 1, near the modern donkey path which runs east-west along the southern edge of the saddle depression. After the removal of ca. 2 meters of soil layers and rock, a well-cut basalt pavement (with some striation and possible curbing evident) was uncovered (Fig. 6). It was projected that the pavement was part of the roadway which ran in front of the theater (compare the Jarash *Cardo Maximus* and main *Decumanus* roadways, and the *Decumanus* roadway which ran in front of the north theater at that site). The loci in Square B 2 evidenced the following periods: Late Islamic (slightly); Umayyad; Byzantine (heavily); Roman; Hellenistic; and Iron Age.

Square B 3 (4 meters by 4 meters) was opened about 2 meters to the southwest of B 2, thus being located just to the east of the northern end of B 1. The excavation here exposed two substantial walls (B 3003 and B 3004) running north-south and east-west respectively and adjoining each other perpendicularly at the southwest sector of the square. An archway (B 3005) perpendicularly adjoining Wall B 3003 was uncovered. This archway was filled two-thirds with debris and had a small step just to the north of it which rested on a pavement which extended at the bottom of the Archway (B 3005) north-south back into the cavea. At the juncture where Walls B 3003 and B 3004 met, excavation continued down ca. 3.50 meters to a stone flooring of large ashlar blocks or of bed-rock. The mixed pottery in the loci of Square B 3 ranged over the following periods: Late Islamic; Umayyad; Byzantine (largely); Roman; Hellenistic and Iron Age.

Square B 4 (4 meters by 4 meters) was opened 1 meter to the south of B 3, farther up into the cavea debris; this was east of B 1. In Square B 4 two walls were exposed, one wall, B 4004, running east-west along the south side of the square, and the other, Wall B 4005, running along the east edge of the square; they joined perpendicularly at the southeast sector of the square. As Wall 4005 was being exposed another archway, B 4007,

built into Wall 4005 began to come to light (compare the various small archways found in the excavation of the North Theater at Jarash). The mixed pottery found in Square B 4 represented: Late Islamic (slightly); Umayyad; Byzantine (largely); Roman (slightly) and Hellenistic (slightly).

Much debris must yet be removed from the cavea before details of the plan of the theater cavea can be determined.

Area D:

The Khirbet Umm el-'Amad Excavation (Supervisor: Willard W. Winter)

Excavation on Khirbet Umm el-'Amad in 1986 concentrated on the eastern sector of the acropolis at the eastern half of the ruins of the seventh century A.D. basilica where excavation in several squares opened in 1984 (D 1-4, 11 and 12) had exposed part of a structure which Gottlieb Schumacher³ had called a "temple," but already in the 1984 excavation a capital with a cross carved in relief had been uncovered, which indicated that the structure was surely a Byzantine basilica. Excavation in 1986 further confirmed this conclusion: other capitals were found with crosses cut in relief. Further squares were opened in the eastern sector of the basilica: D 13-25. In all of these squares there was practically no evidence of Post Umayyad habitation, but the stratigraphic evidence combined with pottery finds points in Strata I-III (especially in D 14, 15, 16 and 22) to Umayyad habitation here.

The Byzantine period was well attested in the additional squares opened up in 1986: fairly plentifully in all squares, and especially in Squares D 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21 and 22. In some of the squares (D 13, 14, 15 and 21) a moderate quantity of Roman Period sherds were found. In overall dimensions the Umm el-'Amad basilica has been shown to be 20 meters wide (nave 10 meters wide and each side aisle 5 meters wide) and 41 meters long, with three apses on the east, two main stylobates, one each on the north and south, extending east to west from the joint where the north and central, and south and

3. *Abila of the Decapolis*. London: Palestine Exploration Society, 1889.

ABILA AE 86
Area A
Plan of Foundations

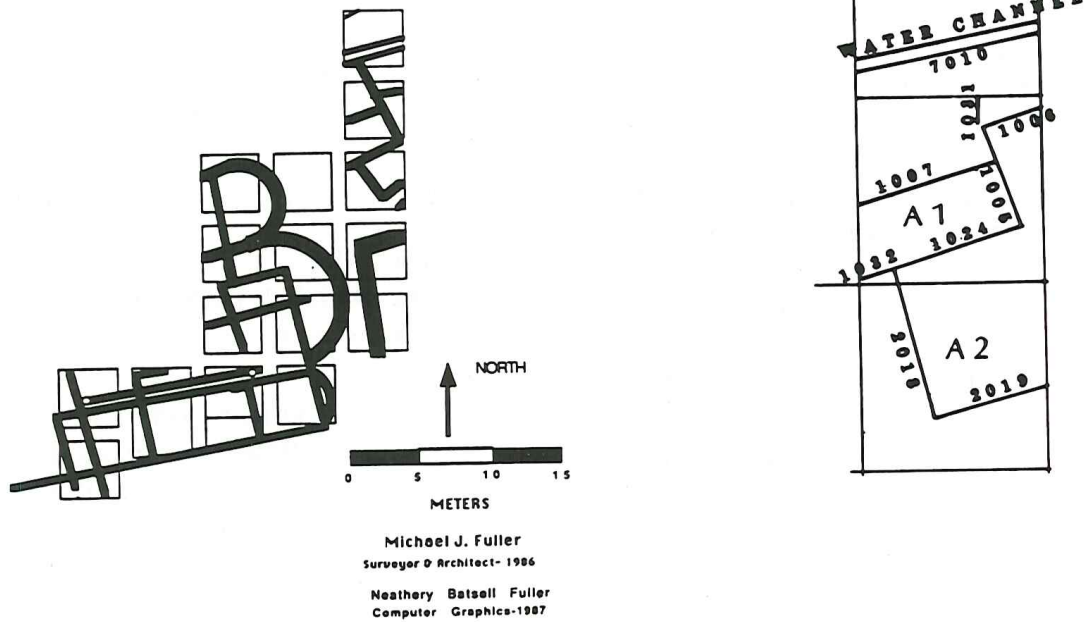


Fig. 5

ABILA AE86
Top Plan of Square B-2

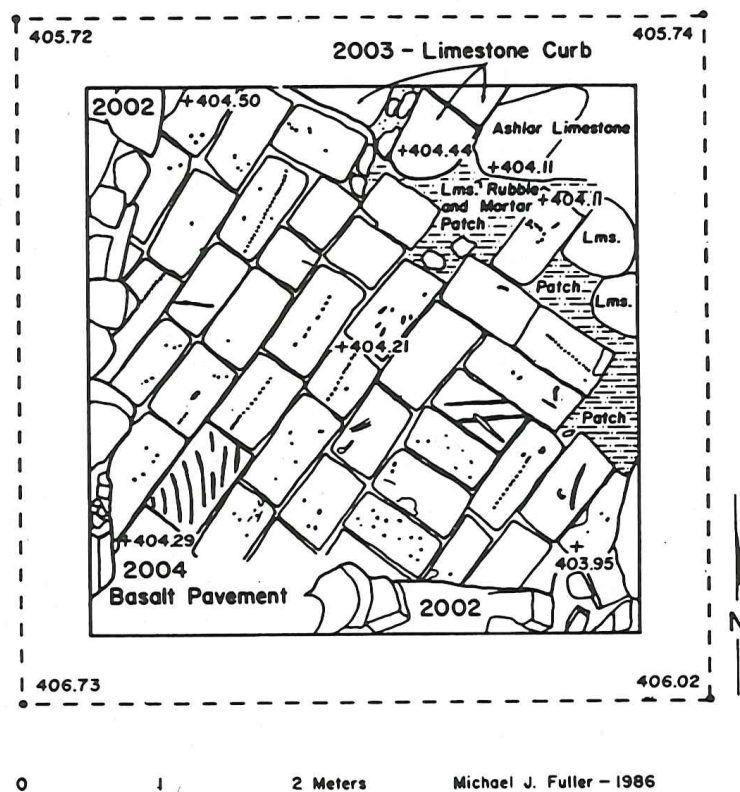


Fig. 6

central, apses meet respectively (Fig. 8). Columns with their capitals, alternating in limestone and basalt, had stood on their respective stylobates 2.35 meters apart (from column center to column center, Fig. 7). Flooring for the basilica, at least in most of the eastern half of the basilica, even between the columns, was in opus sectile flagstone of red and black stone and/or white marble, with a portion of the design in one sector (D 3) in scallops filled in with white marble discs. In many cases the marble discs and squares had been robbed out in antiquity, but the mortar matrix bedding was still in evidence. Although no mosaic flooring is yet in evidence, in Square D 14 a quantity of tesserae chips was found in concentration indicating tesserae and mosaic manufacture, possibly for wall or ceiling mosaics.

In Square D 14 and elsewhere evidence of foundation trenches cutting through at least two floor surfaces in laying down the stylobates for the basilica points to an earlier structure having been built on the site before the basilica was constructed. A part of the foundation stylobate for the iconostasis altar screen was found in D 13 and D 18 (Fig. 9).

In the western sector of the basilica massive column and capital pieces are to be seen resting on the surface soil across the western entrance of the basilica. These flanked the entrance to the structure and led into a narthex, which seems to have been ornamented with red marble columns; a piece of red marble protruding slightly from the surface of the ground here points to this. This sector of the basilica will be a subject of investigation in 1988.

In 1980 a smaller single apse basilica located on a ledge just to the east of the theater cavea was investigated and drawn; the basilica also had a narthex. The dimensions for the nave were 24.5 meters by 18.7 meters; the narthex extended 4.5 meters farther west of the outer wall of the nave. The three basilicas (one each on Tell Abila and on Umm el-'Amad and this single apse basilica) all within a radius of

200 to 300 meters of one another, suggest that there may have been a bishopric at Abila in this period.

Areas H, K and L:

Tomb Excavation

(Supervisor: Neathery Batsell Fuller)

Again in 1986, as in 1984, tomb excavation of both salvage and undisturbed tombs uncovered evidence of Late Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine tombs. Procedurally, in Area K, Tomb K 4, looted between the 1984 and 1986 seasons, was excavated first, with looted Tomb K 3 nearby receiving minimal investigative attention; these tombs were located on the south wadi ledge to the south-southeast of 'Ain Quweilbeh, just to the south of Umm el-'Amad. After work in this area a greater part of the season was spent in Tomb Area L, located on the east wadi ledge just to the east of Umm el-'Amad, where Tombs L 1-3 and 5-17 and Columbarium L4 were excavated (Fig. 10). Near the end of the season Tomb H 3, located on the east wadi ledge to the northeast of Tell Abila was excavated. In all, eighteen tombs and one columbarium were excavated.

The Late Hellenistic - Early Roman Periods (198-63 B.C.; 63 B.C.-A.D. 135), Tombs L 15, L 16 and L 3.

Tomb L 15 (Fig. 11) was a standard type of Late Hellenistic-Early Roman tomb, consisting of a well-cut dromos with sealing stones and steps leading to the entrance; Byzantine sherds were found in the fill above the sealing stones. The tomb itself consisted of a central chamber with five loculi cut into the three sides of the central chamber. The slight amount of soil deposit within the tomb leads to the conclusion that this tomb has remained closed since it was sealed in antiquity. Tomb L 15 is similar architecturally to Abila Tomb H 2 (excavated in 1982) and L 3 (1986) and to Pella Tomb 8 (second-third century A.D.)⁴; and to the Group III Dura Europos tombs (100 B.C.-A.D. 100).⁵ The

4. R.H. Smith, *Pella of the Decapolis*, 1973, p. 187.

5. Toll, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos*, Part II, 1946, p. 10, 13.

ABILA AE86

Reconstruction of Columns 12-15 in the Area D Basilica Nave

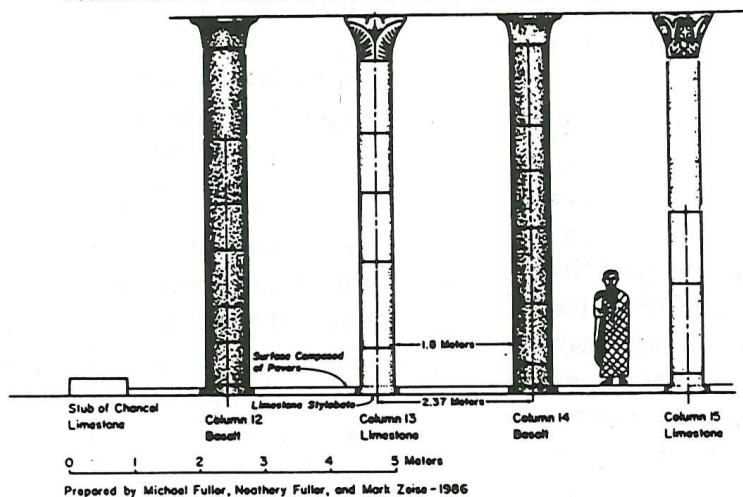
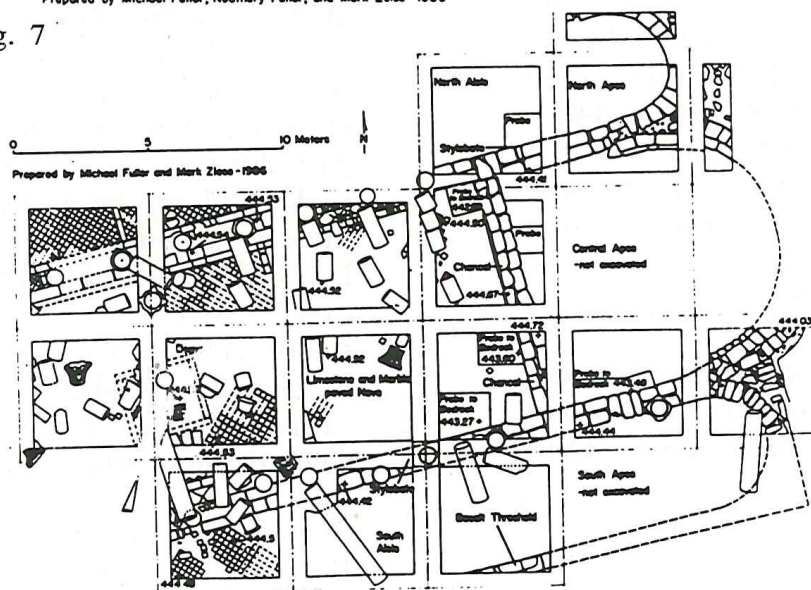


Fig. 7



ABILA AE86

Top Plan of Area D, Squares 1-4 and 11-25

Fig. 8

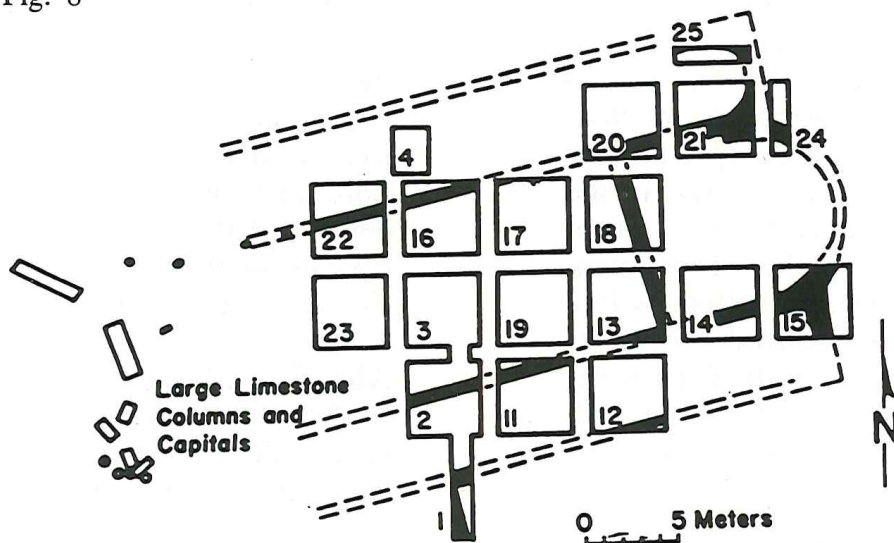


Fig. 9

120 objects found in L 15 included a mortar-pestle, Roman Period jar and cooking pot, small bowl, three Hellenistic lamps, a glass unguentarium (Gl 397), a mold blown glass vessel (Gl 396), earrings (M 334), bracelet (M 333), two spindle whorls, fibulae (M 259), and a bell (M 345). Also remains of burnt incense (or of food?) were found on stones in the main chamber. Numbers of human skeletal remains and grave goods were found in the loculi in L 15. A coin of Archelaus (4 B.C.-A.D. 6; No. 212) from Loculus 3 helped in the dating of the tomb.

Tomb 16 was also an undisturbed Late Hellenistic-Early Roman tomb, located about 20 meters south of Tomb L 15; its dromos was sealed by three rectangular stone blocks located on ledges. Byzantine sherds were found mixed in the fill above the sealing stones. The tomb consisted of a central chamber without loculi; the minimal amount of soil on the chamber floor again points to an undisturbed tomb. Forty-six artifacts on the floor were plotted *in situ*. These included three Late Hellenistic ceramic piriform unguentaria, coffin nails and braces. The remains of three adult males were found here; they had been buried in wooden coffins and a juvenile (12-16 years old) had lain on top of the coffins. A similar second-first century B.C. tomb has recently been excavated at En Gedi.⁶

Tomb L 3 was of the standard Late Hellenistic-Early Roman type with a single central chamber (also with a sump) and eleven radiating loculi; this compares favourably architecturally with Tomb L 15 and Tomb H 2⁷ and Tomb 8 at Tell en-Nasbeh.⁸ An Early Roman Herodian lamp (No. 556) and a Roman lamp (No. 803) were among the finds in the tomb. A Byzantine lamp fragment found in the sump could point to the latest use of the tomb in the Byzantine Period. The six Eastern Terra Sigillata sherds dated to the

Late Hellenistic-Early Roman Periods point to an earlier usage of the tomb. Remains of four individuals were found in the tomb.

The Early Roman Period (63 B.C. - A.D. 135), Tombs K 4 and L 5.

Tomb K 4 was located on the southeastern slope of Wadi Quweilbeh, to the southeast of 'Ain Quweilbeh (Pl. XXXIII, 2) and Tomb K 3 was located nearby. Both tombs, recently robbed, were large, with carved basalt swinging doors, central chambers and two tiers of loculi radiating around the central chambers. Tomb K 3 was investigated and Tomb K 4 was excavated; it had twenty three loculi and two floor graves. Nineteen loculi and the two floor graves were excavated. Tomb K4 had evidently been robbed in Ottoman times for among the jumbled materials in Grave 2 was found a silver Egyptian coin (No. 003) dated to 1168 A.H. = A.D. 1754. Among the many artifacts and sherds were sixteen lamps, mostly from the Roman and Late Roman Periods; three lamps from the Byzantine Period point to a Byzantine phase in the use of the tomb. Among the human skeletal remains were a number of babies as well as male and female adults. There was a standard array of grave goods (bracelets, earrings, beads, etc.).

Tomb L 5, located on the east ledge of Wadi Quweilbeh opposite Umm el-'Amad, was one of the painted tombs set apart by the Department of Antiquities and numbered by the French fresco conservator team as Q 13. Tomb L 5 had been looted in modern times. The wall fresco paintings include fish, griffins, gazelles, birds, wreath designs, two female mourners and the bust of a man; between each loculus a fluted Corinthian column was painted. A Greek inscription in the tomb has been dated to A.D. 151.⁹ This tomb had a central chamber with several stone sar-

6. Hadas, 'En Gedi'. *Excavations and Surveys in Israel*, Vol. 4 (1985), p. 25.

7. Davis, *NEASB* (1983), p. 33.

8. McCown, *Tell En-Nasbeh*, Volume I. Berkeley, The Palestinian Institute of the Pacific School of

Religion and the American Schools of Oriental Research, 1947, p. 109, Figure 14.

9. Vibert-Guigne *et.al.*, 'Qouelibeh-Abila, Étude et conservation des fresques romaines de la nécropole'. In *Contribution Française à l'Archéologie Jordanienne*, 1984, p. 36.

ABILA AE86 AREA L SURVEY

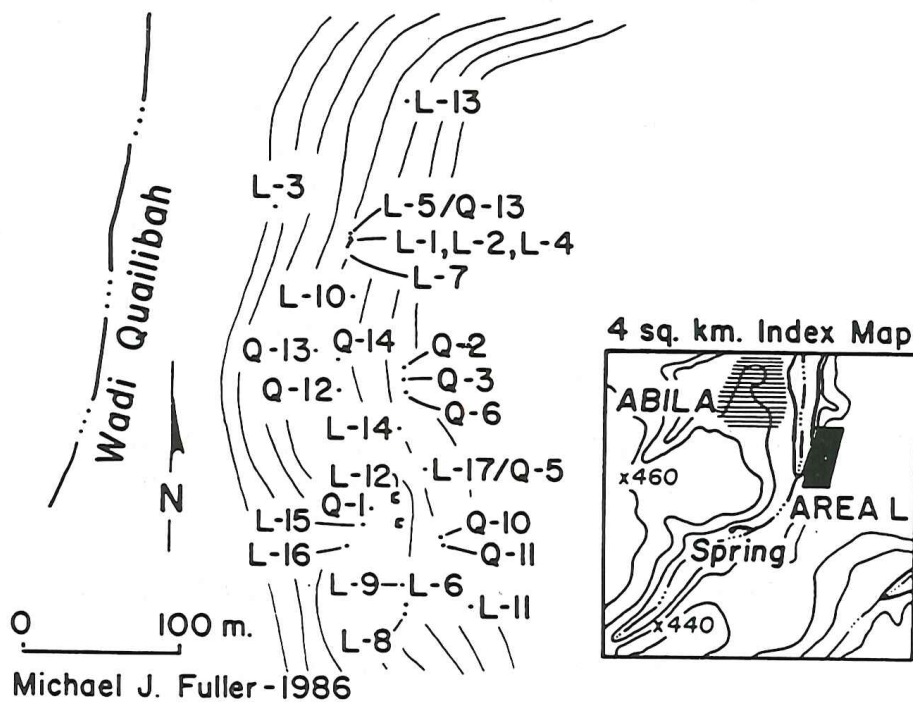


Fig. 10

ABILA AE86 Top Plan of Tomb L-15

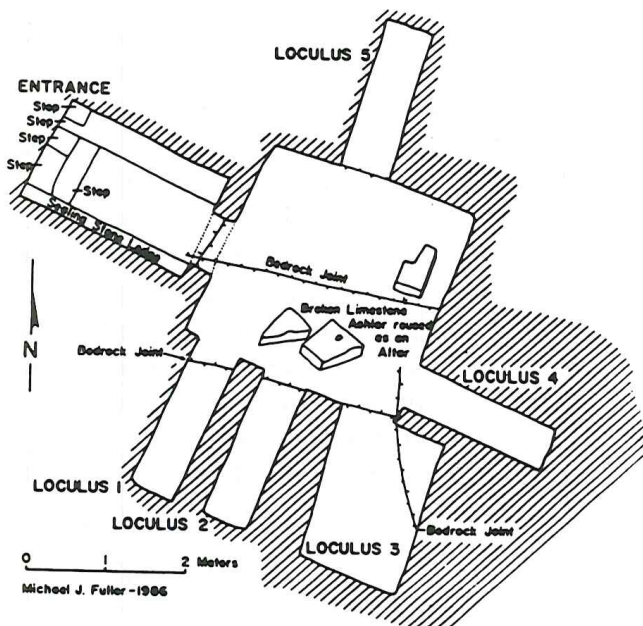


Fig. 11

Villages and Basic Land Divisions Based on local Informants

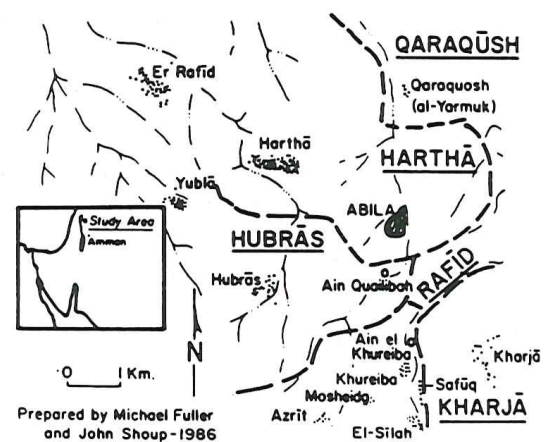


Fig. 12

cophagi and two tiers of loculi. Among the many loculi twelve were excavated, and they yielded a variety of standard grave goods, including lamps (several Roman and a Byzantine lamp fragment, and an Eastern Terra Sigillata sherd). Human osteological remains found represented at least thirty nine individuals.

The Late Roman Period (A.D. 135-324), Tomb L 13.

Tomb L 13, also located on the east Wadi Quweilbeh ledge opposite Umm el-'Amad, contained a central chamber, thirteen loculi, five graves, an arcosolium, frescoes, raised relief, Ionic columns and two painted sarcophagi carved from the central chamber floor. A large cut platform, with surface recess, in front of the arcosolium at the rear of the tomb suggests an altar. The entrance to the tomb contained a facade with two columns, pitched roof and parts of three figures cut in relief which bear resemblance to the image of Heracles, such as depicted on Abila coins minted during the reign of Commodus (A.D. 187-188).¹⁰ This tomb had been looted in modern times. A minimum of ninety three persons had been buried in L 13. Among the number of artifacts were many Roman (60%) and Byzantine lamps (40%). Grave 5 produced two limestone busts: the head of the male may represent that of a satyr (similar to a stucco head from an apsidal temple at Taxila, India¹¹).

The Late Roman - Byzantine Periods (A.D. 135-324; A.D. 324-491), Tomb L 17.

Tomb L 17, a painted tomb, located toward the south end of Area L along the east ledge of Wadi Quweilbeh, had been designated by the French fresco conservators as Q 5. It contained two chambers,

with seventeen loculi cut in the main chamber. The pottery sherds and lamps recovered show that the tomb was used in the Late Roman and Byzantine Periods. The human osteological remains from the ten loculi excavated represented twelve persons.

The Byzantine Period (A.D. 324-640), Tombs L2, 10, 11, 8, 6 and 7.

Representative of Byzantine period tombs was Tomb L 2, an undisturbed tomb, which included a small central chamber, two finished and one unfinished arcosolia. The entrance had been sealed with three stones. Tomb L 2 was very similar to arcosolium Tomb 5 at Pella — a lamp with a cross points to the Byzantine Period.¹² All the ceramics found in our Tomb L 2 are Byzantine or Late Byzantine. Among the grave goods were included a glass lamp filler, a mold blown glass bottle, a glass double *kohl* tube and a bronze fourth century A.D. coin (No. 050). Tomb L 6, a deep 3.90 meter shaft, had three loculi practically empty; there were some Byzantine sherds. Twenty four persons (minimum) were buried in this tomb.

Miscellaneous Burial Units

Important among the miscellaneous burial units was Tomb H 3 (Nabataean?-Roman in date), a salvage project in 1986; the low frequency of pottery sherds and lamp fragments in the tomb point to the fact that the tomb was investigated at an earlier time, possibly in 1959.¹³ Aside from one late Hellenistic and one Roman sherd, the sherds found were from the Byzantine period. There were three raised relief stelai in a recess above the lintel.

Another important miscellaneous installation was Columbarium L 4, with fifty four shallow niches, located just to the

10. Spijkerman, *Coins of the Decapolis and Provincia Arabia*. Ed. by M. Piccirillo, Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1978, p. 52, 53, Nos. 13, 14.
11. M. Colledge, *Parthian Art*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 92-96, Figure

25b, dated this to ca. A.D. 40.

12. Smith, *op. cit.*, 1973, p. 180.

13. 'Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Jordan,' *ADAJ*, IV-V (1960), p. 115-6, Pl. V-VI; 'Chronique Archéologique,' *RB* (April, 1960), p. 229.

south and slightly above the entrance level of Tomb L 5. The niches had probably been used to hold cremations,¹⁴ which argues for a Roman date.

The 1986 tomb excavations confirmed further that the burial setting of the Late Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Umayyad Abila ranged from elaborate and painted tombs and loculus and arcosolium structures to simple grave types. Tomb Areas H, J, K and L represent a fairly wide socio-economic range: from the more affluent upper classes to the less affluent. The design, architecture and fresco paintings point to frequent use of skilled masons and other artisans and, on occasion, of ordinary unskilled workmen.

Ethnoarchaeological Studies

(Supervisor: John A. Shoup)

The ethnoarchaeological research in 1986 followed along the same general guidelines which had been formulated in the 1984 season. With the change of excavation staff headquarters from Hartha to the village of Khureibah in 1986, it was natural for the ethnoarchaeological study base to be enlarged to include Khureibah and its environs; also included in the research was the village of Qaraqush (newly renamed el-Yarmouk; Fig. 12). Research was also done on the Abila folk stories, and emphasis was placed on the impact of village social events on the total ethnoarchaeological picture.

Three primary villages within two districts of 'Ajlun, es-Saru and Kafarat, were the focus of study: Khureibah, Hartha and Qaraqush. Hartha, meaning "plowed field", was the subject of report in 1984; the four 'Ubaydat subtribes there own land north to the Yarmouk River and most of the land at Abila, except for the spring, 'Ain Quweilbeh which belongs to the 'Ubaydat village, Hubraş. The small village (200 to 250 persons representing several tribes) of Qaraqush (the name possibly coming from Qaraqush, a Mamluk

Governor in Egypt and Palestine), located northeast of Abila, has very little agricultural land but specializes in sheep and goat raising, stone cutting, and some farming. Just to the south of Abila is el-Khuraybah (or, Khureibah), "ruin", established about A.D. 1800, with about 1,000 persons today. Agreeable to its name, "ruin", Khureibah has a number of Roman/Byzantine tombs in and near the village.

As to tribal groups in the area, one major tribe, the el-'Ababnah tribe are major inhabitants of Khureibah, with the Palestinian Namarnah tribe minority occupants. Members of the el-Mu'maniyah tribe, who came from Baghdad are the main inhabitants of Qaraqush. Among other groups is the Shureidah (Sharaydah) tribe, and the Mazariyah who claim the first Umayyad Khalif, Mu'awiyah (A.D. 661-680) as an ancestor. Among the Bedouin tribes, the Sab'awi Bedouin, Palestinian refugees from the Negev, have established themselves around Khureibah, Hartha and Hubras.

In the region, villagers who are often farmers, and the Bedouin pastoralists (although sometimes the roles are reversed) have good contact as evidenced by mixed marriage and agreeable rent contracts and charges for the 'Ain Quweilbeh water.

Two social and political principles are important in the activity of the villages and tribes of the area: legitimacy which is based on the Islamic law principles of power; and solidarity (or, blood bond between male kinsmen) which is "a system of balanced opposition between tribes,"¹⁵

Sheikhs are important especially in inter-tribal matters but in recent days government elective positions of Mukhtar (Head Man) and Ra'is el-Baladiyah (Head of the Municipality) have been established to bring a closer relationship between the central government and the local citizens.

14. Cf. Yigael Yadin, *Masada*. Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1960, p. 139.

15. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*. London: Oxford University Press, 1949, p. 59.

Folk tales about ancient Abila center around three stories. In one the clergy of the ancient church at Abila (either the Tell Abila church or the Umm el-'Amad one) had to bury the church treasures and the large copper bell in order to protect them from ancient enemies (such as the Persians; A.D. 611-623), these being hidden under the protecting power of a female *jinni*. In the second story a large vessel filled with water from heaven (holy water?) has been hidden inside the water tunnel. In the third story a book bound in copper was hidden in the water tunnel. Another story states that the Turkish army, in retreat in 1917, buried a large cache of gold coins at Abila; widely believed, many people locally and from Irbid engage in searching for the buried church treasures and for the Turkish gold coins.

The 1986 Season in Perspective

The 1986 excavation at Abila of the Decapolis confirmed further the evidence obtained from the earlier excavation seasons, namely that there was a substantial settlement at Abila in the Roman, Byzantine and Umayyad periods. Evidence became clearer in the 1986 season that during the Hellenistic, Iron Age, and Late and Middle Bronze Periods there was some habitation at Abila, particularly on Tell Abila. Further excavation in 1988 should give an even better understanding of Hellenistic, Iron and Bronze Age Abila, as well as settlement there in the later Islamic periods.

Selected Finds from the 1986 Excavation at Abila of the Decapolis

(Listed by object or sherd number and area identification number).

Fig. 13 (Ceramic materials)

Fig. 13:1, No. 0760 (A 2096). Rim fragment. Slightly flaring and folded over with internal and external ledges, from a medium size bowl or jar. Core light gray (10YR 6/1), surface color pinkish gray (7.5YR 7/2) to light reddish brown (5YR 6/3). Medium to coarse clay with fine to

coarse calcite grits and red and gray inclusions. Dia. 20.0 cm.; thickness 1.1-2.5 cm. Middle Bronze.

Fig. 13:2, No. 0155 (A 8013). Flat base, from a plate. Eastern Terra Sigillata. Fired pinkish white (7.5YR 8/2), red (2.5YR 4/8) slip on interior and exterior surfaces. Rouletted design on bottom of plate surface. Foot ht. 1.0 cm.; dia. 8.5 cm.; thickness 0.7 cm. Hellenistic.

Fig. 13:3, No. 1753 (L 13007). Lamp, complete. Fired very pale brown (10YR 8/4), with traces of yellowish red (5YR 5/8) slip on the exterior. Length 9.5 cm.; width 7.0 cm.; ht. 2.2 cm. Byzantine.

Fig. 13:4, No. 0208 (B 1001). Rim fragment. From a shallow bowl, or plate. African Red Slip. Core red (2.5YR 5/6) slip on interior and exterior. Dia. ca. 30.0 cm. Byzantine. Cf. Hayes, *Roman Pottery* (1976), Pl. 14, Nos. 107, 108; *Jerash Archaeological Project* (1986), 285, Pl. XV, No. 1.

Fig. 13:5, No. 0232 (K 4014). Rim fragment. From a "Galilean" bowl. Fired red (2.5YR 4/6). Dia. 26.0 cm.; thickness 0.4 cm. Byzantine. Cf. Eric M. Meyers *et al.*, *Excavations at Ancient Meiron* (1981), 180, Pl. 8.3, Nos. 1, 2.

Fig. 13:6, No. 0133 (A 11002). Rim fragment. From a jar. Core and interior surface pinkish white (7.5YR 8/2). White (10YR 8/2) slip and red (10R 4/6) paint on the exterior. Dia 7.0 cm.; thickness 0.5 cm. Umayyad. Cf. R.H. Smith, *Pella of the Decapolis* (1973), Pl. 45, No. 488.

Fig. 13:7, No. 1147 (B 1005). Rim fragment. From a deep bowl. Core grayish brown (10YR 5/2). Interior very pale brown (10YR 7/3), exterior grayish brown (10YR 5/2). Dia. ca. 8.0 cm.; thickness 0.4 cm. Umayyad.

Fig. 13:8, No. 0379 (B 2001). Handle fragment. Loop handle oval in section, from a jar. Fired white (10YR 8/2). Dia. 7.0 x 1.5 cm. Later Islamic.

Pls. XXXIV:1,2 (Coins from the 1986 Season):

No. 028 (D 13012). Bronze coin, 3.2 x .25 cm. Place of origin: struck in the mint of Theoupolis (Antioch); reign of Justin II. Date: A.D. 573/4. Obverse: Justin II on



Fig. 13:1

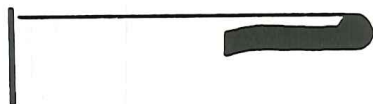


Fig. 13:4



Fig. 13:2

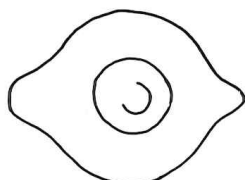


Fig. 13:3

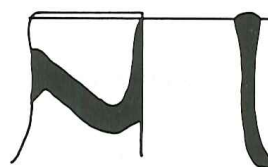


Fig. 13:6

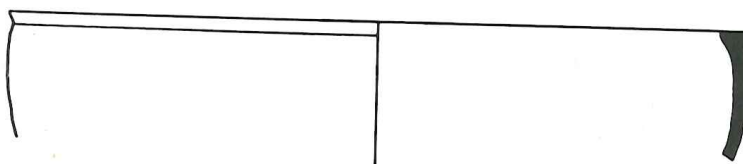


Fig. 13:5

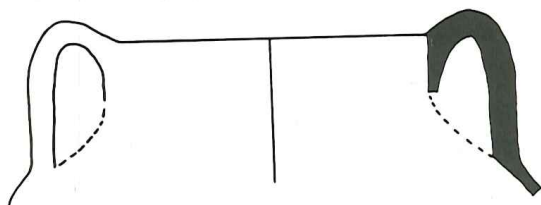


Fig. 13:8

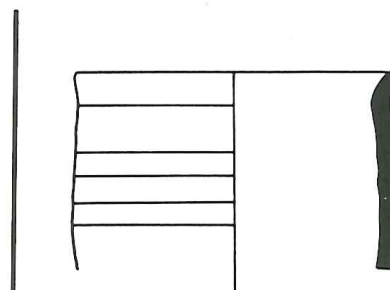


Fig. 13:7

the left, Sophia on the right, double throne, both nimbate; they hold between them a globus cruciger. Reverse: Large M between letters ANNO on the left and numerals representing regal year on the right.

No. 212, (Tomb L 15013, Loculus 3). Bronze lepton, 1.75 x .2 cm., average dia. 17 mm. Reign of Herod Antipas. Date: 4 B.C. to A.D. 6. Obverse: Inscription above: HP—; below, bunch of grapes on vine and small leaf on left. Reverse: Tall helmet with crest, viewed from front; caduceus to left off flan; inscription below: ΕΘΝΑΡΧΟΥ.

Pl. XXXV (Coin from the 1986 Season)

No. 256 (Area B 1 balk trim). Bronze coin, 3.1 x .4 cm. Place of origin: Minted at Constantinople; reign of Maurice Tiberius. Date: A.D. 583/4. Obverse: Inscription: D N MAVRC PP AUG; crowned bust with cuirass, facing front, holding globus cruciger and shield. Reverse: Large M between ANNO on the left and number 11 (regal year = A.D. 583/4); cross above M; below line CON.

New Areas of Archaeological Importance

Expanded excavation on Tell Abila at the basilica will help answer some of the questions about the relationship between the Byzantine basilica and the earlier

Roman (or, Hellenistic?) structure below it. Continued excavation adjoining the Tell Abila basilica in Area A 1 and 2 will give us further evidence as to the breadth and depth of the Iron Age and earlier settlements at Abila. Excavation of the western sector of the Umm el-'Amad basilica needs to be done to give us a more comprehensive picture of the form, content and composition of that structure.

Extensive excavation at the theater cavea on the north slope of Umm el-'Amad will help answer a number of questions as to the extent and composition of the structure. A probe at the ruins near the theater cavea will begin to reveal the true nature of that building complex (possibly a bath/nymphaeum complex). Also an expansion of our probe at the city wall on the north edge of Tell Abila will enable us to date that structure more accurately.

Although we have excavated extensively in the Late Hellenistic-Roman-Byzantine cemetery, more needs to be done here to fill in the cultural gaps. A search for the earlier Iron and Bronze Age cemeteries needs to be made to help us understand the culture of those earlier periods.

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