GHARANDAL IN JIBĀL: FIRST SEASON REPORT

by

Alan Walmsley

With contributions by Malcolm Choat and Norman Ricklefs

Introduction

Settlement processes in the south of Jordan between Roman Late Antiquity and the Islamic Middle Ages (ca. sixth–fifteenth century) have, until recently, attracted only cursory interest. Little attention has been paid to issues of rural–urban interchange, the use of public space in towns and the role of local Arab elites during the Roman and Byzantine periods, at the time of the Islamic conquest (630 CE) and in the Islamic period up to and after the devastating Crusader interlude of the twelfth century. Was there a smooth continuum from one period to the next, or periods of rapid change, growth and decline? Did existing social structures adapt easily to new circumstances or were they overturned by the arrival of new ruling elites and beliefs?

These issues have been hardly addressed for the south of Jordan, especially from an archaeo-historical perspective. The emphasis has been on closely defined work at a few main sites, while surveys have found scant evidence for occupation after the sixth century - an observation clearly contrary to Arabic and Crusader sources. The Gharandal Archaeological Project (GAP) has adopted a comprehensive approach to the investigation of Gharandal by combining specific site work (survey, excavation) with regional, environmental and settlement studies. The intention is to form a "whole view" of socio-economic developments in the Gharandal region from Antiquity until the Islamic Middle Ages.

The first field season of the Gharandal Archaeological Project, a collaborative enterprise between the University of Sydney, Australia, and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, took place between 12 April and 22 May, 1997. A team of ten was engaged in the work under the direction of Alan Walmsley.[1] The Department of Antiquities was ably represented by Jihad Darwish, Inspector of the aṭ-Tafīlah District. David Kennedy of the University of Western Australia, Perth, joined the project for a few days to evaluate the aerial photographs of the survey area.

Geographical and Historical Location

Gharandal is most probably a Nabataean town, and it quickly replaced Buṣayra, Edomite Bozra, as the main political centre of al-Jibāl (Graeco-Roman Gabalitis), a mountainous district as the name would suggest. The town came to historical prominence in Byzantine and Early Islamic times when it was called Arindela and 'Arandal respectively. It was the third ranking town of *Palaestina Tertia*, capital of Jibāl and the seat of a bishop (Fig. 1).

Literary evidence for Christian Arindela is sparse.[2] Conciliar records register only two bishops for Arindela. The first, Macarios, attended a synod of bishops from the three Palestines called by Peter of Jerusalem

1. The team members were: Hugh Barnes (Surveyor), Noël Siver (Conservator and Finds Registrar), Malcolm Choat, Philip Karsgaard, Kathryn King, Penelope Middleton and Lawrence Pontin (Field Archaeologists), Norman Ricklefs (Field Archaeologist and Survey Assistant) and Betty Heading (Finds Assistant); my thanks go to all of them for making the first GAP season such a success. A team of 20 labourers was provided by the Department of Antiquities.
2. The following information on the bishops of Arindela is taken from an extended report written by Malcolm Choat, to whom thanks are due.

1. Map of *Palaestina Tertia* showing the location of Gharandal (Arindela).

in 536 to approve the decisions of a Council held earlier that year in Constantinople (Hefele 1883-96, vol. IV: 204). More interesting is an earlier bishop whose existence is not noted in Jones (1971: 547). A certain Theodore of Arindela was present at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431, where he supported the orthodoxy of Cyril of Alexandria against the "heresy" of Nestorius of Constantinople. Apart from Theodore, *Palaestina Tertia* was represented by the bishops of Elusa, Phaino and Augustopolis (Adru/Udhruḥ).

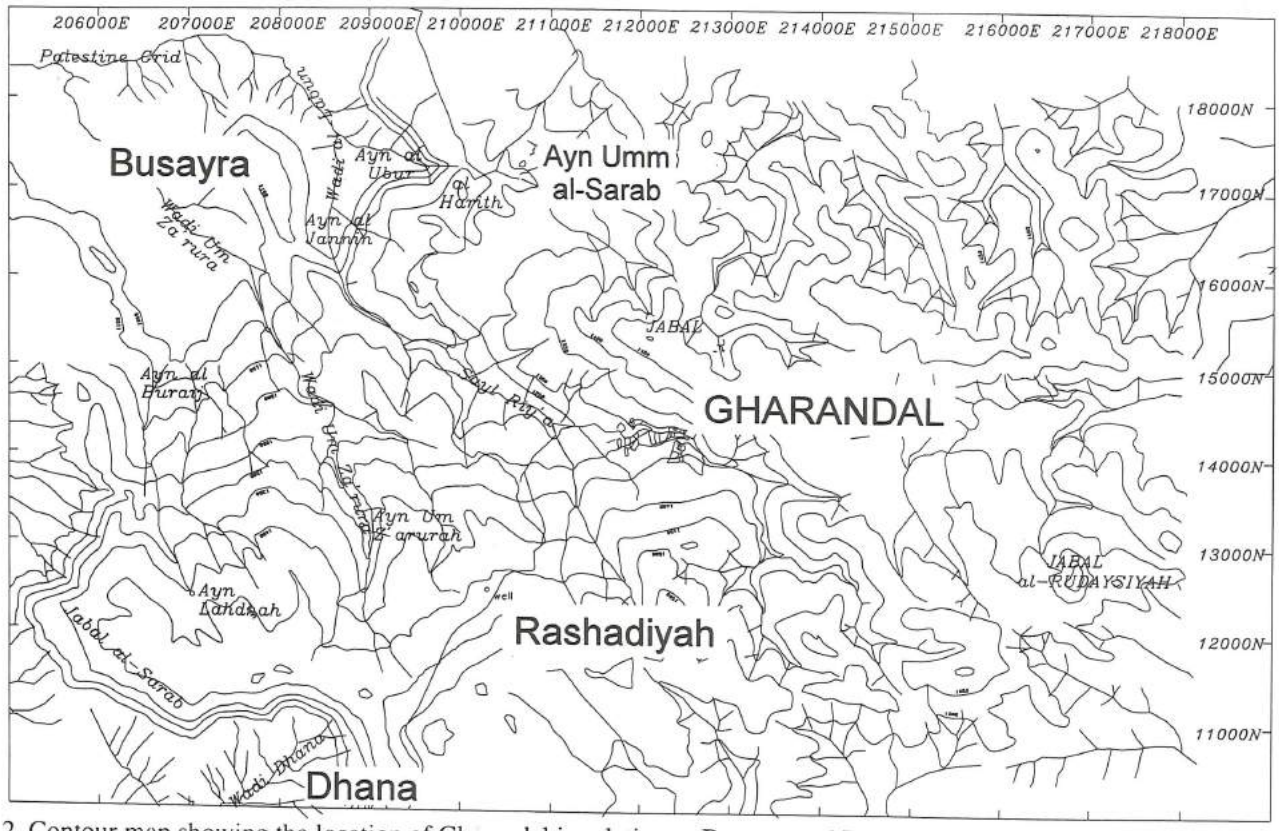
Gharandal surrendered early to the armies of the Islamic conquest (635 ce), and thereafter was placed, along with much of central and south Jordan, in the large Province of Damascus, the *Jund Dimashq* (Walmsley 1987). This arrangement reflected the considerable importance of south Jordan to the Early Islamic state, as the pilgrimage route passed through this region from Damascus to Mecca and al-Madīnah in the al-Ḥijāz. Superseded by adjacent Ruwāth as the political centre of Jibāl in the tenth century, the subsequent history of Gharandal is unknown but the continuation of the name suggests a long span of settlement. However, Jibāl, along with neighbouring districts, continues to be mentioned in historical sources dating to the Saljuk, Crusader and Early Mamluk periods.

Located some 15 km SSE of aṭ-Ṭafilah and 5 km SE of Buṣayra, Gharandal lies at 1300 m asl in the heart of the mountains of Jibāl where it holds a strategically advantageous position next to a spring at the head of a broad valley system named the Sayl Riy'a (Fig.2). The spring water is used to irrigate agricultural fields in the wadi to the west, where the principal produce is grapes, apricots and figs. The expanding fan of cultivable land in the wadi below the spring can be clearly seen in the aerial photograph of 1953 (Fig. 3), and is a feature of the wadi to this day. Water is distributed by way of open channels along the north and south banks of the wadi, and distributed as required amongst the fields below.[3] The substantial remains of a late period water mill, also once fed by a channel, are located on the north bank of the wadi. The valley continues by descending rapidly to the west, passing to the north of Buṣayra as the precipitous Wādī al-La'bān before continuing into the expanse of the Wadi 'Arabah.

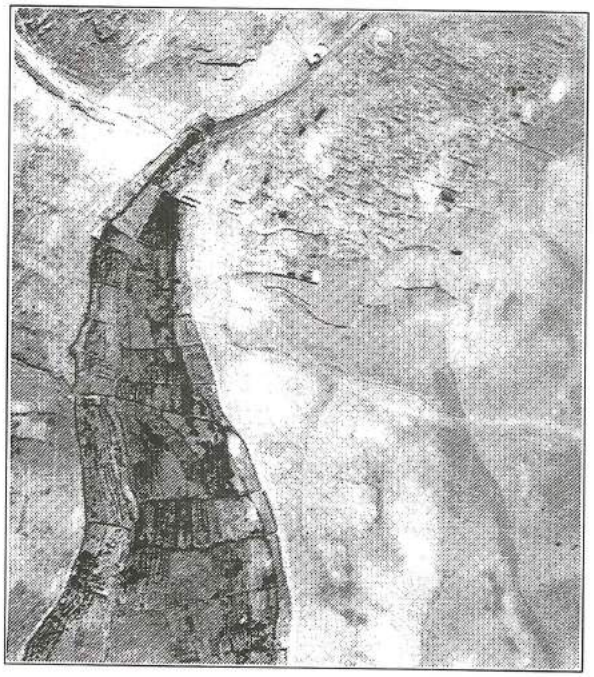
The largely non-studied remains of Antique and Islamic Gharandal are spread over the sloping south bank of the Sayl Riy'a between a ridge summit and the spring in the wadi (Figs. 4 and 5).[4] The archaeological remains include a Byzantine church with prominent upright monolithic columns, a large double-rectangular enclosure south of the church on the ridge summit, remnants of other substantial public buildings, and extensive domestic quarters. The modern village of Gharandal, consisting almost en-

3. Much more water-efficient drip irrigation is being progressively introduced to the valley, especially in recently opened areas of cultivation.

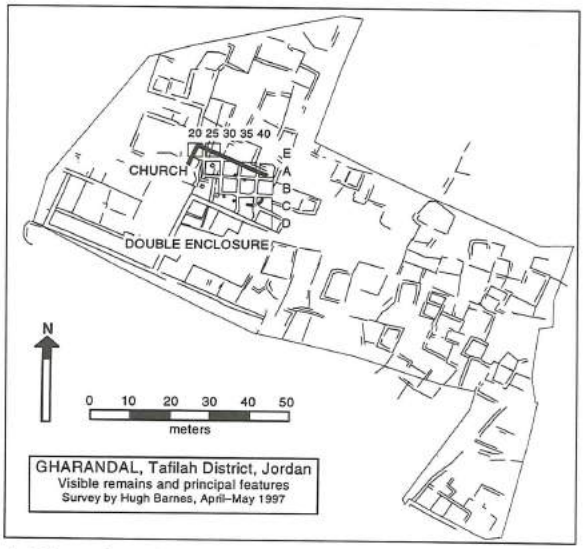
4. For the description of earlier travellers to Gharandal see Walmsley (1989).



2. Contour map showing the location of Gharandal in relation to Buṣayra and Ḍānā.

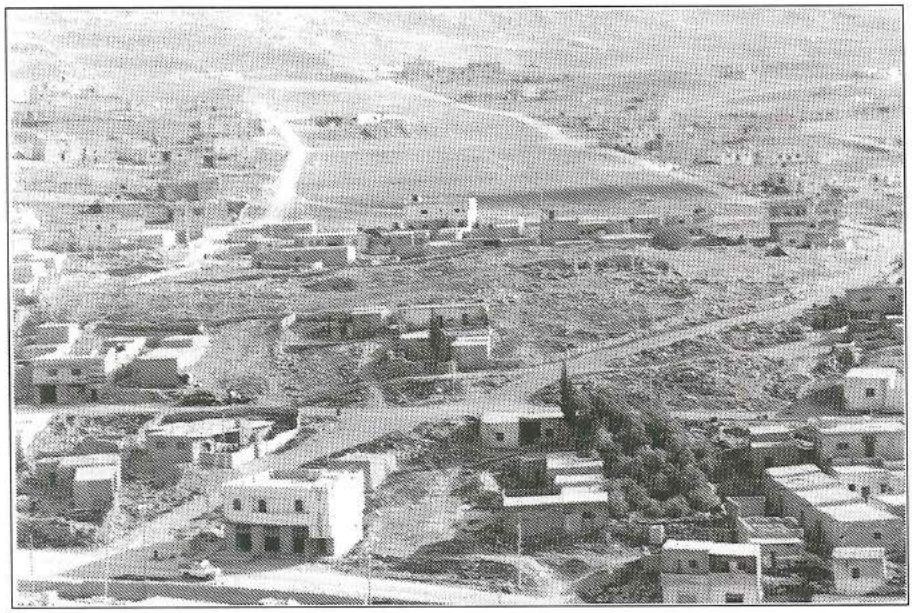


3. Aerial photograph of Gharandal in 1953, north to left. The site is located in the upper right quadrant of the photograph; irrigated fields fan out in the wadi below the spring (by courtesy of David Kennedy).



4. Plan of surface remains in the Department of Antiquities area, Gharandal. The excavated squares in Area A (the church) are also shown (H. Barnes).

tirely of relocated residents of Buṣayra, has encroached severely upon the archaeological site. By comparing the fenced antiquities area of today with the extent of ruins on the aerial photograph of 1953, it is clear that less than 25% of ancient Gharandal is preserved under the ownership of the Jordanian Government. The rest of the site has been



5. View of the Department of Antiquities area (upper centre of photograph). The site extends to the floor of the wadi (L. Pontin).

built over by modern housing, mostly in the last 15 years, and is now privately owned land.

Objectives

Particular attention was paid in the 1997 season to the recording, through maps and photography, of the topography and standing remains of Gharandal and its immediate environs. This was a major priority, given that the rapid development of the area has damaged many sites, including Gharandal itself, and threatens many others. Maps of three types were produced.[5]

1. A regional map encompassing the area from Ḍānā to north of 'Ayn Umm al-Sarāb and east of Gharandal (Fig. 2). This map comprises the area to be intensively surveyed in a later season with the intention of placing Gharandal within its regional context.
2. A detailed five-metre contour plan of the valley immediately adjacent to Gharandal, marking contemporary features, roads and the antiquities site.
3. Detailed plans of the Department of Antiquities property including all visible wall lines (Fig. 4) plus any remaining ruins visible on adjoining ground.

A second objective was the investigation of the Byzantine church, which was designated Area A (Fig. 4). In 1994 Jihad Darwish undertook initial work on the church, excavating fifteen 5 x 5 m squares in four rows labelled A-D. Rows A and B had five squares each, ascending from a fixed point by 5 m beginning at 20 (hence A20, A25, A30 etc.). Row C had three squares (30, 35 and 40) while Row D had two squares (35 and 40). These excavations uncovered a maze of Middle Islamic stone structures built around the still standing monolithic columns of the church, an underlying yellow clay deposit, and below that the largely intact floor of the church including mosaics and a paved nave. A first priority in 1997 was to further investigate and emend the occupational sequence of the church area by continuing the excavations and by commencing the systematic removal of the baulks and most of the later walls (many of which are unstable).[6] Two new squares were opened north of row A, and were designated E20 and E25.[7] They were intended to

5. This work, which took six weeks in all, was undertaken by Hugh Barnes with the able assistance of Norman Ricklefs.
6. The difficult task of excavating the church baulks was undertaken with much dedication by Penny Middleton and Philip Karsgaard.
7. The excavations were ably supervised by Kathryn King and Malcolm Choat respectively.

complete the excavation of the church's north aisle and to sample the outside areas immediately to the west and north.

Also central to the first season was a first assessment of outlying sites in the Gharandal catchment area, initially by reference to the aerial photographs of the region but also by visiting some of the sites on the ground. Undertaken with David Kennedy, this work shows great promise, not only for the valuable contribution of the aerial photographs (47 sites have been identified - see the report by David Kennedy, in this volume), but also the tremendous promise of locating numerous other sites in the vicinity through a systematic programme of site reconnaissance.

Results

The excavations and surface survey of Gharandal have identified a long and complex sequence of continuous occupation at the site, probably beginning in earnest under the Nabataeans and continuing into Islamic times. The 1997 season successfully isolated a series of significant structures and deposits very provisionally dated at this stage to the later fifth to sixth centuries, the eighth to (perhaps) early ninth century, possibly sometime around the late tenth to eleventh centuries, and the later twelfth/early thirteenth to fifteenth/sixteenth centuries. Ceramics also suggest widespread Nabataean (classic painted fine ware) and Roman (Sigillata and later Red Slipped wares) period occupation at Gharandal.

Area A: The Church

The excavations in Area A have revealed a detailed sequence which starts with the original Byzantine construction of dressed stone, the subsequent conversion of the building, and finally a progressive infilling with major stone walls for domestic structures. The summary that follows incorporates the results of the systematic excavation of a number of baulks in the body of the church, and those from the two new squares, E20 and E25, in the north-west corner of the building.

The Byzantine Building

The church, probably the cathedral of Arindela, turns out to be a well-constructed single-apsed colonnaded basilica announced by an impressive narthex. From a cobbled courtyard to the west three doorways, all blocked at a later date, opened into the narthex, the floor of which was laid with a geometrically decorated mosaic featuring three panels (see below). Both aisles were also floored with mosaic, while the nave was laid out with evenly spaced pavers. The one-piece columns of the aisle-nave colonnades, many of which still stand, are closely spaced, and suggest that flat lintels, probably of wood (no stone lintels have been identified), spanned the space between the columns as in, for example, the Justinianic Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Palestine. Two further columns, now represented solely by bases, separated the paved nave from the mosaic-floored narthex, and were linked to the aisle-nave colonnades by three-way facing piers. The recovery of numerous glass tesserae indicates that the internal wall faces above the colonnades were decorated with glass mosaic, while the mass of tile fragments found in the church area indicate that the church roof was certainly tiled. The raised sanctuary, at least in part surfaced with a plain light-brown mosaic, extended deeply into the body of the church in front of a well constructed apse. Slots for sanctuary screens and upright dividers are partially preserved around the edge of the sanctuary platform. Twenty-four pieces, some large, of the fine white marble screens that embellished the sanctuary were recovered in 1994 and 1997, and from these at least six different screens have been identified to date. Open lattice screens were particularly favoured.

The Mosaics

The main area of mosaic in the church is to be found in the narthex, and consists of three rectangular panels enclosed by a guilloche (Fig. 6).[8] The three rectangular panels comprise two identical outer panels and a central panel of a different type. The central panel has a vine leaf in each corner, the north-east and south-west being made up of yellow tesserae and the other two of red, with the tip facing towards a central motif. The central motif is a complex geometric pattern of interlacing squares and ribbons forming an octagon around a bunch of grapes. The two outer panels are made up of a central motif of a three-stranded 'Solomonic' knot in deep red tesserae within a diamond intertwined with a ribbon in a wide open figure-of-eight pattern. The central motif of each panel is lined on either side (north and south) with three patterned diamonds. The three panels are placed within a wide rectangular frame made up from a single line of red-purple stones, which also serves as the inner border of a guilloche, composed of red, yellow and white tesserae. The guilloche is further enclosed by a bold, triple-stranded outer border of deep red-purple tesserae.

6. The narthex mosaic of the Gharandal church, view to the north. Late walls are visible to the right, top and in the foreground; the west wall of the church, with blocked doorways, is visible to the left. The south narthex column base is visible under the late wall in the lower centre right. Squares E20 and E25 are visible at the top (L. Pontin).

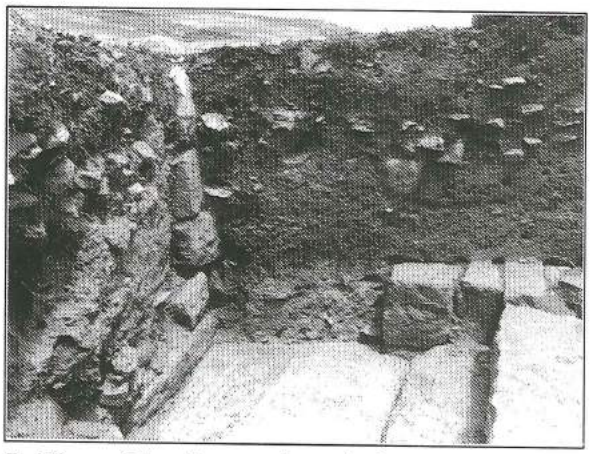
At the south end of the narthex mosaic, positioned in line with the south colonnade of the church, is a pattern of three roundels, each composed of six strands of different coloured mosaic. The three roundels are surrounded by a frame of two strands of brown tesserae. It can be assumed that, to maintain symmetry, there would have been a similar pattern on the north side (unusually, a later wall has been dug into the mosaic at this point; see to the top in Fig. 6).

The north aisle of the church was also paved with a geometric mosaic. The uncovered section of this mosaic comprises a central roundel, in the centre of which is a diamond made up of red and yellow and white tesserae on a white background, surrounded by four intertwining strands of yellow tesserae and a strand of white tesserae between the ultimate and penultimate strand of yellow. The mosaics of the Gharandal church are not provided with any inscriptions to assist in establishing the date they were laid.

Later Use of the Church

At some later date the ceramics suggest well after the mid-eighth century the sanctuary was stripped of its architectural detail and a thick chippy yellow clay fill placed within the church to raise the floor level to that of the sanctuary (Fig. 7). Seemingly the building no longer functioned as a church, but its subsequent role is not yet under-

8. The mosaics were cleaned by Noël Siver and Norman Ricklefs. The following report on the mosaics is an abridged version of a paper written by Norman Ricklefs, to whom thanks are due. A fuller report is due to appear in a future issue of *LA*.



7. View of baulk over the raised sanctuary of the church. A section of the north aisle mosaic is visible in the foreground, above which and running up to the sanctuary platform (right) is a thick yellow clay fill. Later structures and deposits lie over the fill (L. Pontin).

stood. Most doorways into the church were blocked at this time except, it seems, a central door in the north wall. A small installation was built between piers against the south wall of the building, consisting of a line of stones and upturned roof imbrices, but its function is unclear. The use of the building would seem to be more industrial than religious. The general absence of roof tiles in the fill suggests the roof of the building was still intact.

At a later stage dividing walls begin to appear and a continuous stratigraphical build-up can be identified throughout the church. Much tile material is now found, suggesting the collapse or removal of the church roof. An initial assessment of the pottery in the build-up suggests a date into the twelfth century when the first handmade ware appears, a relatively thin ware containing much short-cut chaff and similar to Robin Brown's Ayyubid painted ware from ash-Shawbak and al-Wu'ayra but without the paint (Brown 1987, 1988). Shortly after, a more characteristic Ayyubid pottery, painted in red with wavy thin lines and dots, appears at Gharandal, and this occupation phase is marked by further wall construction over the yellow build-up. In what can be roughly described as the Mamluk period plainly domestic occupation intensifies within the church, and is characterised by the erection of many more walls (sometimes built over fallen monolithic columns), numerous bread *ṭawābīn* and the prevalence of Hand Made Geometric Painted Wares (HMGPW). Fortunately the stout Mamluk walls mostly sit on the yellow fill and build-up and have not penetrated the mosaics.

The pottery sequence from the church at Gharandal promises much for increasing our understanding of Byzantine and Islamic ceramics for the south of Jordan. Links to the firmly dated north Jordan sequence, including pale faced, red-painted jars, reveal the overriding dissimilarity of southern pottery types, with Byzantine-style light orange to reddish blooms and wavy combing continuing well into the Islamic period. Darker reddish-orange to grey fired wares and handmade grey wares are conspicuous by their absence. The suspected misdating of southern ceramics (and the purported "decline" in Early Islamic settlement) seems supported by these initial working conclusions. Later ceramics of the late eleventh/early twelfth to thirteenth century feature the appearance of early handmade wares, at first unpainted but followed by Ayyubid red-painted handmade ware. These early handmade wares display distinctive regional variability (the Gharandal examples are dissimilar from those found at 'Aqaba and 'Ammān Citadel), but later HMGPW at Gharandal conforms to the types found throughout much of Bilād ash-Shām.

Although work has not finished in the church, it is now possible to outline a provisional chronology of the successive phases in the church since its construction (Table 1). In a future season it is hoped that a probe below the church floor (in an area where the mosaics are destroyed) will reveal pre-church occupation in Area A.

The Double Compound

The large Double Compound south of the

Table 1. Provisional levels and archaeological features in Area A.

Level	Features	Date
Level 1	Post-occupation collapse.	?Seventeenth–twentieth centuries
Level 2	Houses. Thick uncoursed two-faced stone walls, doorways, packed earth floors, *ṭawābin*	Fourteenth–?sixteenth centuries
Level 3	Houses. Uncoursed stone walls.	Twelfth–thirteenth centuries.
Level 4	Yellow clay fill within church; dividing walls; build-up.	?Ninth–eleventh centuries.
Level 5	Monoapsidal Church with nave paving and mosaics in the aisles and narthex.	?Fifth–eigth/ninth centuries.

church, measuring ca. 65 x 25 m and labelled Area B, has yet to be investigated in detail (Fig. 4). In 1997 attention was paid to mapping surface remains, and planning and photographing all exposed wall faces. Major excavations within the compounds are scheduled for 1998.

As the structure clearly predates the church, which abuts the massive north wall of the enclosure, it is either a Nabataean or Roman construction, most likely the former. The common occurrence of fine Nabataean pottery at Gharandal suggests a major presence in this period, and the masonry of the massive enclosure walls of the compounds share many architectural features with the temples at Khirbat adh-Dharīḥ, Khirbat at-Tannūr and al-Qaṣr to the north. Later structures within the Double Compound attest to its continuing function in the Late Antique and Islamic town, and the changing nature of this use is one of the most exciting prospects for future research at Gharandal: how did a Christian(ised) town deal with a large pagan structure in its centre (reuse, neglect?) and, following the change to Islamic hegemony, what further conversions were made to the structure?

Other Structures

To the east of the church and Double Compound the land falls away to an open area and, beyond that, a mass of exposed wall lines that probably represent houses of the Mamluk village (Area C, Fig. 4). An access route can be traced through the remains going down the hill to the north-west in the direction of the spring, and probably represents a passageway through the Islamic village. In the far south-east corner of the antiquities area another stout wall made of large stone blocks like the double enclosure stands a couple of courses above ground level. This wall seemingly represents another major Nabataean structure at Gharandal. A corner of a third large Nabataean building has been exposed immediately to the north of the church, indicating that the summit of Gharandal was the focal point of the town and endowed with at least three major public buildings in the first and second centuries CE.

Acknowledgements

Funding for the project was provided under the terms of the Large Research Grants Scheme of the Australian Research Council (Project number A59601327), and by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. I am especially grateful to the Director-General, Dr Ghazi Bisheh, for offering major financial, logistic and academic backing. The active support of Mr Jihad Darwish considerably facilitated the important first year of the project. The interest and encouragement of HE Ms Merry Wickes, Australian Ambassador in Jordan, is also much appreciated. Ms Alison McQuitty, Director of BIAAH, and the Assistant Director Mr George Findlater also lent considerable support. The assistance of Royal Jordanian Airlines, Sydney, is thankfully acknowledged.

Alan Walmsley
Department of Semitic Studies
University of Sydney, A17
Sydney NSW 2006
Australia

Bibliography

Brown, R.

1987 A 12th century A.D. sequence from southern TransJordan: Crusader and Ayyubid Occupation at el-Wu'eira. *ADAJ* 31: 267-88.

1988 Summary Report of the 1986 Excavations: Late Islamic Shobak. *ADAJ* 32: 225-45.

Hefele, C. J.

1883-96 *A History of the Councils of the Church.* Edinburgh.

Jones, A. H. M.

1971 *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, second ed. Oxford: OUP.

Walmsley, A. G.

1987 The Administrative Structure and Urban Geography of the Jund of Filastin and the Jund of al-Urdunn: the cities and districts of Palestine and east Jordan during the early Islamic, 'Abbasid and early Fatimid periods. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sydney. Sydney NSW.

1989 Khirbet Gharandal. Pp. 228-30 in D. Homès-Fredericq and J. B. Hennessy (eds), *Archaeology of Jordan II,1. Field Reports: Surveys & Sites A-K*. Leuven: Peeters.