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From Public to Private Space: Changes in the Urban Plan of Bayt Rās/Capitolias

Introduction

Bayt Rās/Capitolias,[1] located in northern Jordan, was one of the flourishing cities of the Decapolis[2] during the period between the first century AD and continuing (at least) through the ninth century.[3] Declared a *polis* in AD 97/98, the city was built only five kilometers north of Irbid, Roman/Byzantine Arbela. It has been argued elsewhere[4] that the founding of Capitolias was for political/administrative reasons. Although the cities were intimately connected, as is somewhat reflected in the textual documentation, Capitolias took precedence over neighbouring Arbela.[5] Recent archaeological investigations in Bayt Rās indicate continuity of occupation at the site from its foundation to the present.[6] However, the use of space has been altered considerably over time. As the site changed from city to village to town, the same space was utilized in different ways. This paper seeks to investigate the use of space in the archaeologically designated Area A.

Area A: Summary of Excavations

Archaeological research in Bayt Rās is a combination of salvage, rescue and long-term strategies. The fact that the ancient site is an inhabited, growing village is both a hindrance and an advantage to the research. Through the combination of various research methodologies, e.g., archaeological, historical and anthropological, it is possible to discuss the changes in the site from its foundation to the present.

Excavations have been carried out in Area A since 1985 and are on-going. Area A is located in the northeast section of the village: north of the modern east-west asphalt road which bisects the village from the main highway. The modern asphalt road extends to the "Rās", the highest point in the village as well as in the ancient city.[7] The Area is bounded on the west by the modern guesthouse (*madāfa*) of the Ḥamouri family; on the east, the Area is bounded by the modern mosque. Visible through 1987 were two west-facing and east-facing vaults, (below and west of the guest-house, below and east of the mosque) delimiting the area in antiquity. The major architectural features presently visible are the nine north-facing vaults. The Area was archaeologically defined in 1985 as extending to the field wall in the north;[8] however, this was circumscribed following the 1988 excavations.[9] The present northern boundary of the Area is a

[1] Survey was conducted in 1983 (privately funded) and in 1984 (the author was funded by NEH/ASOR). Since 1985, the project, directed by the author, has been supported by the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology (Yarmouk University) and the Department of Antiquities. The "Friends of Archaeology" (Amman) supported the "CW" and "R" excavations in 1988. Summaries of research can be found in the following: C. J. Lenzen, 'Tell Irbid and Beit Ras', *AJA* 95 (1991), pp. 271-272; C. J. Lenzen, 'The Integration of the Data Bases - Archaeology and History: A Case in Point, Bayt Ras', pp. 160-178 in M. A. Bakhit and R. Schick (eds.), *Bilād al-Shām During the Abbasid Period*, (*Proceedings of the Fifth Bilad al-Sham Conference*), Amman: The University of Jordan; C. J. Lenzen, 'Beit Ras Excavations 1988 and 1989,' *Syria* 67 (1990), pp. 474-476; C. J. Lenzen and A. M. McQuitty, 'The 1984 Survey of Irbid/Beit Ras,' *ADAJ* 32 (1988), pp. 265-274; C. J. Lenzen and E. A. Knauf, 'Beit Ras-Capitolias: A Preliminary Evaluation of the Archaeological and Textual Evidence,' *Syria* 64 (1987), pp. 21-46; C. J. Lenzen, 'Tall Irbid and Bait Rās,' *Sonderabdruck aus Archiv für Orientforschung* 33 (1986), pp. 164-166; C. J. Lenzen, A. M. McQuitty and R. L. Gordon, 'Excavations at Tell Irbid and Beit Ras 1985,' *ADAJ* 29 (1985), pp. 151-159.

[2] "Decapolis" is loosely used here geographically, although more lay behind it, e.g., a political and/or administrative idea.

[3] Cf. articles above; and, G. Walmsley, *The Administrative Structure and Urban Geography of the Jund Filastin and the Jund al-Urdunn*, Unpublished Ph.D. 1987, University of Sydney.

[4] Cf. C. J. Lenzen, 'Irbid and Beit Ras, Integrated Settlements, A.D. 100-900,' pp. 299-301 in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, IV, Amman: The Department of Antiquities.

[5] Discussions of the textual documentation can be found in the articles cited above as well as in C. J. Lenzen, 'Tell Irbid: A Problem in Archaeological Interpretation,' *Biblische Notizen* 42 (1988), pp. 27-35; C. J. Lenzen and E. A. Knauf, 'Irbid (Jordanie),' *RB* 95 (1988), pp. 239-247; and, C. J. Lenzen and E. A. Knauf, 'Tell Irbid and Beit Ras, 1983-1986,' *LA* (1986), pp. 235-241.

[6] If there is a hiatus in occupation, current excavations do not indicate this.

[7] According to oral history, this road consisted of basalt blocks until the late 1950s. It would appear that this was the main *decumanus* of the city, as shown in G. Schumacher's map, cf. Lenzen and Knauf, *Syria* 64 (1987), pp. 21-46.

[8] Cf. Lenzen, McQuitty and Gordon, *ADAJ* 29(1985), pp. 152-153.

[9] The inability of the Department of Antiquities to purchase the entire tract of land has meant that a number of the architectural features discussed here are no longer visible, thus limiting future excavations.

partially visible courtyard wall constructed at the turn of the century.[10] The archaeological phasing of the Area is shown in TABLE 1.

Table 1. Bayt Rās/Capitolias phasing chart (Area A).

Phase			
Phase	I:	a.	1980 to the present.
		b.	c. 1950-1980.
		c.	c. 1900-1920.
Phase	II:		19th/early 20th centuries.
Phase	III:		c.AD 1500-1800.
Phase	IV:	a.	c. AD 1100-1500.
		b.	c. AD 900-1100.
Phase	V:	a.	c. AD 700-900.
		b.	c. AD 600-700.
Phase	VI:	c.	AD 300-600.
Phase	VII:		Mid-1st century AD to c. 300.[11]

Table 2. Bayt Rās/Capitolias (architectural features).

The architectural features excavated in Area A, according to the phases, and their present status are shown in TABLE 2.

Area A: Narrative

The Roman construction of Capitolias followed the natural contours of the land. The exposed bedrock was cut and used as the foundation layer for structures. Minimal foundation "channels" were cut in the bedrock with the lowest course of walls being stepped out to provide a secure ashlar block foundation. The bedrock was not only levelled, it was also cut vertically to form the support for the back wall of the vaults.[12] The space that is presently encompassed by the nine vaults would have accommodated three vaults of the size of Vault 9, the Roman vault. Construction of the other vaults, "1"–"8", occurred during the fourth/fifth century.[13] Evidence of a *probably* Roman structure was excavated below the three

Phase	Features	Status
Ia:	Vaults; west, north and central walls, tessellated pavements.	Visible as archaeological features; housing in courtyard and part of facade destroyed.
Ib:	Vaults, two north walls; east and west vaults; housing on street and across from vaults; courtyard wall with arch; fragmented small courtyard walls; construction of vault facade.	Vaults visible. Use as domestic and agricultural space, later as storage; housing on street destroyed.
Ic:	Vaults, west and north walls, east and west vaults; housing in courtyard constructed.	Vaults and walls visible.
II:	Use of the vaults as domestic space; east vaults as cesspit; ovens and courtyard walls.	Partially visible within vaults. Excavated, not visible.
III:	Vaults; dividing walls; arcade standing; "minor industrial" use/robbing.	Visible, e.g., in baulks and in standing features. Collapsed arcade excavated.
IVa/b:	Flagstone resurfacing; arcade standing. Central wall rebuilt to accommodate resurfacing.	Vaults and flagstone visible. Central wall visible.
Va/b:	Refurbishing of vault arches; construction of installation outside of church apses; central wall and tessellated pavements restored.	Vaults, central wall visible. Church out of use and no longer visible.
VI:	Vaults reconstructed; tessellated pavements laid; central wall built; church reconstructed.	Vaults, pavements and central aisle visible.
VII:	Vault 9 constructed; structure below church excavated.	Vault 9 visible.

[10] The municipality of Bayt Rās has planned a road along this wall. At the time of this writing, the status of this road is unknown. The construction of this road will further encroach on the archaeological remains of the site.

[11] Phase VIII: Pre-mid-first century AD has not been excavated in Area A; although it is represented in survey data from the Rās.

[12] A preliminary analysis of the constructional techniques employed at the site can be found in: Zaydoon Zaid, *An Architectural Analysis of the Constructional Techniques in Beit Ras/Capitolias.* Unpublished Masters Thesis, 1989: Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan. Although the author is essentially in agreement with Zaid, much of what is contained here is *contra* Zaid's interpretations.

[13] It is tempting to correlate the rebuilding of the Area with either the AD 363 earthquake or with the growing power of the Byzantine/Christian author-

ities. The archaeological data, however, is silent; that is, there is no record of either as the rationale for the alterations. For a rather dogmatic approach to Christianity being the reason for the altering of the urban features, cf. 'Ali H. Zeyadeh, *An Archaeological Assessment of Six Cities in al-Urdun: From the Fourth to the Mid-Eighth Century A.D.*, Unpublished Masters Thesis, 1988: Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan. Although this author agrees that Christianity effected the urban features, witness the number of churches constructed in other cities, e.g. Jarash/Gerasa, the approach advocated is one less reliant on the religious/political phenomenon. For a discussion concerning the earthquake data in relationship to the archaeological record, cf. K. W. Russell, 'The Earthquake Chronology of Palestine and Northwest Arabia from the 2nd through the Mid-8th Century A.D.,' *BASOR* 260 (1985), pp. 57-59.

apses of the church.[14] To the north, a well-constructed wall, excavated in 1985, delimited the space. A space was created, albeit one for which there is minimal archaeological data.[15] Although the plan of Roman Area A is almost totally obscured, one can still assume that the space was defined during this period and remained essentially the same for several centuries following, through at least the beginning of Phase IV. The space was conceived as public in nature: vaults were built across from a structure with an open space between them. The Vaults were *probably* part of a market-place (*sūq*) across from a main structure.[16]

The Byzantine alterations of the space were extensive. Vaults "1" through "8" and the arches were reconstructed;[17] utilitarian tessellated pavements were laid inside and outside the Vaults; and the church was constructed. The configuration during Phase VI further supports the notion of this being a market-place. The major central wall was built at the same time as the Vaults and the tessellation; and, based on the constructional techniques, it would appear that the western and northern walls were built or rebuilt at the same time.[18]

The architectural features present by AD 600 remained essentially the same until Phase III. An arcade, founded on piers abutting the Vault facade and the central wall, was constructed *probably* at the same time that the upper courses were added to the central wall. As the construction of these courses is dated to the seventh/early part of the eighth century, the arcade can be safely dated to the same period. The date at which the church went out of use as a church cannot be determined based on the present data.[19] In the ninth/tenth century, the tessellated pavement outside of the Vaults was resurfaced with flagstone. This was eventually destroyed, during Phase III, when the area was robbed for marble.[20] After the collapse of the arcade, mud surfaces were laid and the Vaults were used as living units with the space in front used as a courtyard.[21]

Area A: The Problem

The above review of the occupational history of Bayt Rās/Capitolias as depicted in the schematic presentation of the archaeological data may present no interpretative problems. The formulation of archaeological phasing into a schematic/narrative presentation, acceptable archaeological procedure, generally suffices for interpretation. Simply stated, Area A was utilized first as public space and, then, in approximately AD 1500 to 1800 (Phase III) it was used for minor industrial purposes. Eventually, the utilization was totally for domestic purposes. Up until 1983 the space was seen as changeable and alterable — as fluid space.

Only with the inception of an archaeological programme has this space become static.[22] The actual space defined initially in the Roman construction of the vaults and delineation of the space had no meaning in and of itself; nor did it in the following centuries.

Space is a "socially constructed phenomenon";[23] and, if interpreted as such one is compelled to look beyond the "facts" of archaeological data. The "facts" are generally the physical descriptions of a place (or a space) with the addition of a typological series of the material cultural remains excavated within the place (and/or the space).[24]

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[14] A report on the church excavations can be found in C. J. Lenzen, 'Beit Ras Excavations 1988 and 1989,' *Syria* 67 (1990), pp. 474-476. The church is dated to the latter part of the fifth century on pottery.

[15] The Roman archaeological data from the 1985 excavation of the natural cave and surrounding area to the north is not part of the present discussion.

[16] Because of the continued use of the Vaults and the surrounding area, archaeological Area A, no *in situ* remains of the use of the Vaults has been excavated, nor should this be expected. See below, fn.'s 19 and 24. The forming of this "built" environment *may* be the one *typical* aspect of the introduction of Roman city-planning concepts into the region, cf. A. H. M. Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); and the various excavation reports on the sites of: Jarash/Gerasa, 'Ammān/Philadelphia, Tall Abīl/Abila, Ṭabaqat Faḥl/Pella, Umm Qays/Gadara. Similar comparative data exists in Roman/Byzantine Palestina Prima, the Jund Filasṭin, cf. excavation reports on Arsuf/Apollinia and Qaysariya/Caesarea Maritima.

[17] It should be noted that no alterations to Vault 9 are evidenced in either the frontal arch or within the Vault. This Vault seems to have withstood whatever natural or other destructive events occurred which necessitated the building and rebuilding of the others. In the recent past, i.e. Phase Ib and Ic, the Vault was used as a cesspit.

[18] This wall, parallel to the wall excavated in 1985, and the central wall were constructed during this period; the 1985 wall was rebuilt. Three parallel walls, extending east-west, existed in the Area. It is likely that the two most northern walls formed the north and south aisle walls for the church. The Phase I and II courtyard wall with the entrance arch (no longer visible) were constructed on generally the same line as the south (of the church and the middle of the three) wall; however, the existence of the extent of the wall across the Area may not have been known to the builders.

[19] It is unlikely, based on the accounts of G. Schumacher (*Northern 'Ajlun*, 1886) and G. Lankester Harding (Notebooks on file at the Registration Centre, The Department of Antiquities, 1930s) that the pottery, initially used for dating purposes, was *in situ*. It is more likely that this pottery, like the fourth century sarcophagus excavated in 1989, was moved into the area within the last one hundred years.

[20] The marble was probably broken down to be used as agricultural fertilizer in the surrounding fields.

[21] A series of ṭawābīn (ovens) were excavated in this space during the 1989 excavations.

[22] The transition from space perceived as fluid to static may not actually rest completely with the advent of the archaeologists; however, based on the accounts of the villagers and the results of the last few years, it is likely that very little if any of the archaeological remains would still be visible. The archaeological research has actually made the space mostly static. To this author's mind, this raises the issue of the validity of "cultural resource management". What "culture" is being managed? And, more importantly, whose perceptions of "culture" are being promulgated?

[23] Cf. P. Lane, 'Reordering Residues of the Past,' pp. 54-62 in I. Hodder (ed.), *Archaeology as long-Term History*, (Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 56.

[24] As should be clear, the likelihood of finding *in situ* pottery and coins, the normative dating tools for Near Eastern archaeologists, is extremely slim in Bayt Rās. This is not necessarily only due to the occupational use of the site since ca. 1800, but also due to the continued use and re-use throughout the site's existence. Essentially, one has to question some of our learned archaeological rules. For example, given the records left by Schumacher and Harding concerning this area, the oral history of the village and what the author has witnessed in the last decade, the "rule" that pottery outside of a *sealed* context can give a dating parameter is ludicrous. This is not, however, to create another dogmatic principle; but, merely to argue along with C. Renfrew (*Approaches to Social Archaeology* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984], I. Hodder (*Reading the Past* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986]) and several others that any site must be interpreted based on its specificity as well as its context within a broader understanding.

Little regard is paid to the conceptualizing of the space.[25] Whereas other disciplines have living informants, no archaeologist is fortunate enough to have this kind of data. The typological series, often mistaken for the chronology of a place or space, then takes on those characteristics of the living informant: the archaeologist "reads" the typological data and allows this to inform the interpretations of the space.

Pertinent textual documentation, whether it directly relates to the site or not, plays the same role as the living informant. 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*. The result is a schematic interpretation of events which is then anchored within a linear and by implication in an evolutionary understanding of time. Stated explicitly or not, the interpretation results are viewed as "peaks" or "highs" which devolve into "valleys" or "lows".[26]

As regards the urban environment of northern Jordan, such an approach produces clear results: urban areas flourished in the Roman and Byzantine periods, gradually fell into disrepair and eventually disappeared.[27] What is evident is an evolutionary approach, firmly anchored in linear historical events without regard to either natural events or social interactive contexts. The research is forced into taking a *position* or a *stance*. Once the particular *stance* is acknowledged, it becomes most important. It overrides the ability to formulate an interpretation of the past based on available data.

This is seen clearly in relationship to the urban centers of northern Jordan. It has been argued quite forcibly in various contexts that the alteration of the classical city plan of the Hellenistic and Roman world was a direct result of the Sassanian/Persian conquest of the region on the one hand and the take-over by the Muslim armies in the mid-seventh century on the other.[28] The alterations in the city plans of the major Roman/Byzantine cities have been interpreted as being a result of political changes within the region. Little attention has been paid to the degree of control exerted by the Sassanians or the early Muslims on the urban, physical, environment.[29] Textual documentation is evaluated as "meaningfully" constructed or not. The definition of "meaningful" has become whether or not it suits the argument proposed.

Underlying the interpretations is a conception of reality which is evolutionary and fraught with assumptions. The reasoning is something like this: before the conquest of northern Jordan urban life had not really evolved.[30] It was only with the conquest of the region by the Romans — and, indeed it should not be forgotten that it was a conquest — that a true urban environment was created. The accoutrements of the Roman city, as seen in the orthogonal street plan, theatres, odeons, hippodromes, forums, became the ideal. If that was the norm, then naturally anything that changed or was different from it cannot/could not, by definition, be ideal. This "historicist" understanding allows for what are determined to be fundamentals and for the establishment of entrenched categories.[31]

Conclusions

Asem Barghouti[32] clearly states the basic concept involved: that the idea of the urban plan was simply one of many "institutions" introduced to Jordan by the Romans. Furthermore, Barghouti points to a local modification of the introduction of the plan. Whether or not the Byzantine alterations in the space defined by the Romans can be identified as some kind of local modification is not presently evident.[33] In conjunction with this conceptualization of the process involved in the use of the space from public to domestic is whatever understandings one has of the "Islamic City". Janet Abu-Lughod[34] has succinctly argued for the *isnād* (chains) of misunderstanding concerning the formulations of the ideal Islamic City. Her arguments are not all that dissimilar from Barghouti's in that there must be a realization of a con-

[25] Cf. D. Canter, *The Psychology of Place* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), pp. 158-160 in particular.

[26] Anthropological literature addresses these issues. For a cogent summary cf. J. Rappaport, *The Politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 10-13.

[27] Cf. several of the articles mentioned above for refutations of the stance. Of course, the whole question of "objectivity" is raised as well as the idea of "history". R. Layton ('Conflict in the Archaeology of Living Traditions,' pp. 1-21 in R. Layton (ed.), *Conflict in the Archaeology of Living Traditions,* [London: Unwin Human, 1989], p. 5-7) states clearly his stance: "The failure to attend to cultural patterning in the archaeological record would be to disregard important aspects of variability in the data, even if the uniformed outsider cannot fully explain it."

[28] Cf. H. Kennedy and J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, 'Antioch and the Villages of Northern Syria in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries A.D.: Trends and Problems,' *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 32 (1988), pp. 65-90; H. Kennedy, 'The Last Century of Byzantine Syria: A Reinterpretation,' *Byzantinische Forschung* 10 (1985), pp. 141-183; H. Kennedy, 'From Polis to Madina: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria,' *Past and Present* 106 (1985), pp. 3-27. An approach has been established which forces homogeneity on all cities; and, the *use* to which archaeological "facts" are put is somewhat suspect.

[29] It would appear to have been relatively negligible.

[30] This reasoning is certainly faulty and is bellied by, in particular, the Late Bronze and Iron Age fortified cities, e.g. Tall Irbid.

[31] Cf. M. Rowlands, 'Centre and Periphery: A Review of a Concept,' pp. 1-13 in M. Rowlands, M. Larsen and K. Kristiansen (eds.), *Centre and Periphery in the Ancient World,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[32] A. N. Barghouti, 'Urbanization of Palestine and Jordan in Hellenistic and Roman Times,' pp. 209-229 in A. Hadidi (ed.), *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan,* I (Amman: The Department of Antiquities, 1982). Barghouti is also speaking of Hellenistic urban planning, for which we have even less data available from north of 'Ammān/Philadelphia.

[33] Zaid's preliminary analysis certainly points in this direction, cf. fn. 12 above.

[34] J. L. Abu-Lughod, 'The Islamic City - Historic Myth, Islamic Essence and Contemporary Relevance,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987), pp. 155-176.

textual understanding both in terms of the temporal and the spatial.[35]

Certainly, Bayt Rās/Capitolias easily falls into the category of a planned city in its broadest sense; it does not, however, easily fall into any of our present typological categories. And, perhaps that is the essential point: the occupational history of the site and the use of space need not be the same as other contemporary sites, nor need it diverge in all respects.

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[35] This raises the important issue of the "privatization" of space. The Islamic City has been partially defined as one enclosed, i.e., the construction of the arcade outside of the Vaults would necessarily point some to identifying this architectural feature as *typical* of the Islamic City. The altering of space from public to domestic (private) easily rests within a category of from "high" to "low", a devolutionary process. Could this not merely be an "outsider's" view of poorly understood processes?