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Abila of the Decapolis in the Roman Period: A Time of Revitalization and Expansion

Our excavations at Abila of the Decapolis (FIG. 1) have shown that Roman occupation at the site was large, diverse and thriving. Somewhere during the Late Hellenistic period, Abila became part of the Decapolis, sharing in its Greek culture and city-state plan, and joining through inter-city road systems in local and foreign commerce. This set the stage, at the time of the conquests of the Roman general Pompey in AD 64, for the beginning of further revitalization of all the site during the time when the Decapolis flourished and beyond that time into the Late Roman period after the reign of Hadrian and up to the time of Constantine the Great at the beginning of the fourth century AD.

By way of introducing Roman Abila in its expansion and sophistication, it is well to note that the excavated material culture: 1) sheds light on the culture, philosophical stance and religious values of people and city; 2) reveals levels of material/industrial/commercial and cultural advancement of people and city; and 3) reveals the political and military influences on people and city. The excavated Roman material culture from Abila of the Decapolis, according to these principles, has shed considerable light on the character of the people, on their beliefs, lifestyle and prosperity, and how they lived and what they believed in.[1]

The material culture remains thus far excavated at Abila of the Decapolis can best be reviewed as shedding light on the following:

1) Roman Abila's broad/diverse economic (industrial, agricultural) and commercial base;
2) the diverse cultural and social life; and
3) a strong religious element.

1. Material Culture Pointing to Roman Abila's Broad/ Diverse Economic (Industrial, Agricultural) and Commercial Base

Crafts and Industry

Glass: The excavated glass repertoire at Abila is extensive, with examples of glass lamps, bowls, platters, bottles, kohl tubes, perfume bottles (unguentaria), small jars, bracelets, quantities of glass slag, goblets (possibly wine goblets)—a large quantity of which we found in the theater ruins near the Zeus statue niche in 1994—etc. We have concluded that with all of this evidence, Abila had a glass factory, an installation we have yet to uncover. About the Roman glass industry, Fleming speaks about the production of glass of all shapes and kinds,[2] both in the Early and Late Roman periods.[3]

Pottery: The ceramic material at Abila is ubiquitous. In the controlled survey in 1980 when we covered less than one fifth of the site, we retrieved from the surface over 32,000 pottery sherds. In the succeeding excavation seasons, in addition to ceramic material from other periods, we have retrieved a large quantity of Roman pottery and pottery sherds, indicating heavy activity of the local potters and a lively commercial trade in ceramic vessels. We have recovered remains of a pottery kiln on the eastern edge of the site, located on the upper east ledge of Wādī Quwayliba, indicating active pottery making at Abila. Excavated remains of Hellenistic black ware and Roman Eastern Terra Sigillata (plates, rouletted ware, etc.), Megarian bowls, Cypriot ware, and the presence of well-made molded figurines from Greek and Roman mythology, such as Dionysos, Terpsichore, and horse and rider figurines found in Tomb H 2 in 1982, point to a flourishing commercial trade in the Eastern Mediterranean.[4]

Guilds, Craftsmen Projects

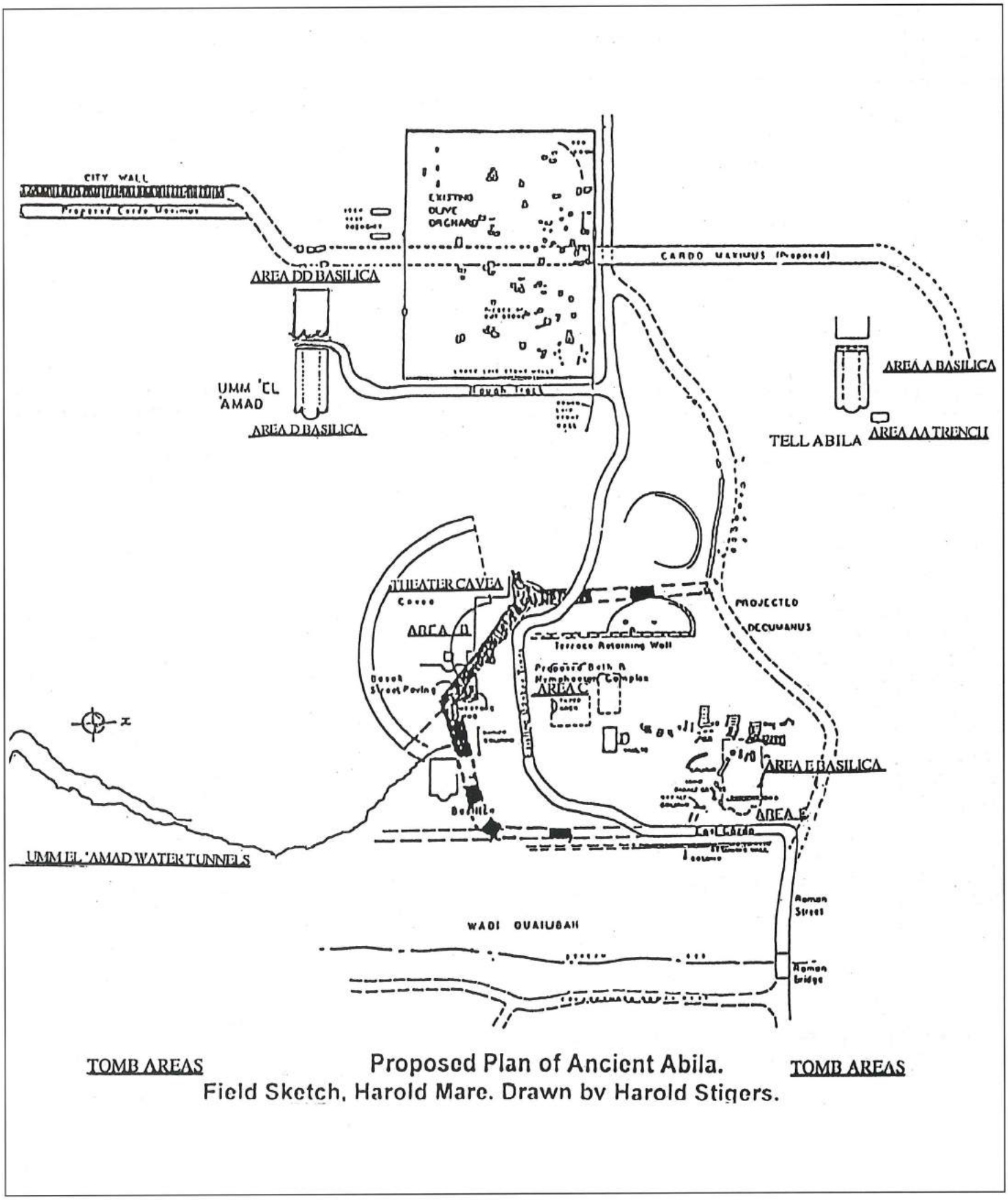
Tomb Stone Masons: In the many tombs and tomb complexes we have thus far excavated (94 to date) we have

[1] Cf. Stuart Fleming, "Reflections on the Roman World," *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 1988, Vol. 96, No. 6, pp. 31-35, who comments [for example] on how ancient Roman glass production reflects on the character of the people, on their skills, lifestyles, etc.

[2] Fleming, "Reflections," p. 34.

[3] Fleming, "Reflections," pp. 34-35.

[4] John W. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery* (London: British School at Rome, 1972), *Roman Pottery in the Royal Ontario Museum* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1976); *Ancient Lamps in the Royal Ontario Museum, I: Greek and Roman Clay Lamps* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1980).



1. Plan of Abila.

found evidence—through geotecture study of the tombs—of a class of artisans, a tomb guild who were evidently hired to hew out from the wadi limestone ledges large tomb complexes; the number of masons per tomb can often be calculated by the tool size, and by the nature of the stroke, whether the person was right or left-handed.[5]

Fresco Painters and Relief Sculptors: Examples of fresco painting can be seen, as, for example, in Tombs L 5 depicting columns, roofs and tympanum—in H 60 (FIG. 2), and in other tombs. Relief sculpture can be seen in tombs such as H 60 (sphinxes and lions). All of this suggests a class of artisans trained in painting and sculpturing in the Roman period.[6]

Wine and Olive Industry: We have what seems to be remains of a wine press installation built high up and behind the theater (Area R 1, 1997), and there is evidence today of many olive trees, of a large underground olive press installation cut out of the bedrock (excavated in 1998) (FIG. 3), and of modern olive presses in the region,[7] and we have found many carbonized grape seeds and olive pits[8], all of which strengthens the supposition that there was a wine and olive industry at Abila. With a great quantity of productive farm land all around Abila, we assume that in ancient times there were large landed estates for the growing of grapes and olives.[9] Excavation of Rhodian wine jar handles at Abila suggests also that the city imported wine in the Late Hellenistic period and beyond.

2. A 1996, Tomb H 60 Fresco.

3. A 1998, Area H olive press (underground).

The finding of large Roman mills (Abila 1980), and flat grinders, mortars and pestles, suggest that there was a local milling industry present as well.

Business, Finance: Coins found at Abila of the Decapolis point to the fact that there were wide ranging business transactions and dealings with Roman and other governmental administrations and sometimes with the Roman military that were being conducted in the Roman period. From the Late Hellenistic period comes a coin from Tyre (155/154 BC, Abila 1984, No. 132), and from the Nabataean and Roman period a coin of the Nabataean King Aretas IV and his Queen, Shaqillah (8 BC-AD 40, Abila 1984, No. 174), and a coin of Archelaus, son of Herod the Great (4 BC-AD 6, Abila 1986, No. 212).[10]

Architectural Craftsmen and Structures

Types of Building Material: The material used by the Romans in this medium included limestone, basalt, marble and wood.[11] Besides plentiful limestone and basalt, considerable marble pieces have been found at Abila, seen in

5 John J. Davis, "Abila Tomb Excavations, 1984," *NEASB*, New Series, No. 24 (Winter, 1985), p. 70.

6 Paul Veyne, ed., *A History of Private Life from Pagan Rome to Byzantium* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belnap Press, Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 314 (fresco in a Roman domus).

7 Rafael Frankel, *The History of the Processing of Wine and Oil in Galilee in the Period of the Bible, The Mishneh and the Talmud, Parts I and II,* Dissertation submitted (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, April, 1984); he discusses the types of ancient olive and wine presses and the processes in using them.

8 Cf. our archaeobotanical studies in 1984, etc. (*NEASB*, new series, 26 (Winter 1986), pp. 39-43, etc.

9 See Deena Berg, *Roman Wine and Oil Presses*, Dissertation for M.A. (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, May 1986), who talks about landed estates and the large amount of slaves necessary to work these landed estates. See also *Manual of Olive Oil Technology*, Multi-authored, Project: Centre for the Improvement and Demonstration of Olive Production Techniques (Cemedeto), Cordova, Spain (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1975), pp. 1-228.

10 W. Harold Mare, "Abila: A Thriving Greco-Roman City," *ARAM*, p. 14.

11 Cf. Doris Vanhove, *Roman Marble Quarries in Southern Euboea* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996).

the Artemis statue and the large marble foot (found in the theater area), in circular marble discs used in stone flooring, in a large red marble column from the Island of Euboea (Area D), etc.[12]

Large Public Buildings

Theater: The robustness of Abila's architechural achievements is seen in the theater which the city built in the Greco-Roman period into the north slope of Umm al-'Amad so that it was facing north and east (cf. the north theater at Umm Qays).[13] The fact that there are no seats visible in the theater cavea today, and the fact that Byzantine architectural structures were built within the cavea (cf. the altar posts found with in the cavea and remains of a basilica) and an Umayyad palace/fort built within the cavea, has raised a question on the part of some whether this cavea was truly a theater. However, according to Dr Reuben Bullard (in 1988), one of our geologists, the slope of the cavea is too steep to be a natural depression (one is reminded of the acropolis theater at Pergamos in Asia Minor built into a steep slope). Furthermore, Gottlieb Schumacher in his survey at Abila in 1888 said, "...the seats - of which but few remained - were placed on a masoned foundation, for the reception of which the soft rock had been prepared."[14] Also in the cavea, re-used classical columns and capitals and the large marble foot of a male statue have been found, all pointing to a classical monumental structure. In 1990, with our electronic theodolite, we determined that the diameter across the seating area of the theater is ca. 90 m (295.20 feet), and the height from the street floor in front of the cavea to the top of the cavea is ca. 25.0 m (82.0 feet). If MacDonald's estimate that the theater of Marcellus in Rome, 120 m wide and 32 m high, seated 11,000,[15] then the Abila theater (FIG. 4), about one third less than the size of the Marcellus theater, must have held 6,000 to 8,000 persons. It is well to remember that it is difficult to estimate the population size of an ancient city from theater capacity without knowing the amount of money the citizens and the city were willing to expend on such a cultural facility. In order to test further the fact that the Abila cavea was a theater, in a special probe in 1997 along the outer southeast edge of the theater, we uncovered a large cavity, some 4 m wide and 4 m deep as far as we were able to dig, a cavity which later had been filled in - packed with layers of stone fill, supported with two basalt cut stone supports to help hold the fill in place. This was all done to avoid the collapse of the limestone bedrock above and the limestone all around which had been fractured due to earthquake activity. It is to be noted that on the crest of Umm al-'Amad above and to the west of the theater's large cavity, the seventh/eighth century AD basilica had been destroyed by the severe earthquake of AD 747/748. We believe that the large cavity just behind the theater cavea is of a size and position to be identified as an exit for the theater. We have compared the cavity of the theater in size and location with the large theater exits of the west and north theaters in nearby Gadara (Umm Qays) which circle around the outer edge of those theaters. We project that after the time of the theater's use in the Greek and Roman periods, because of earthquake activity which fractured the limestone bedrock, the citizens of Abila filled in this large cavity for their own protection and for the preservation of the cavea.

4. A 1998, Theater cavea.

Stair Cases: On the north side of the civic center complex in the middle of the saddle depression, along the south slope of Tall Abila are ruins of a grand entrance stair way with side banisters, the remains of a grand staircase, leading from the commercial center to the acropolis of Tall Abila. These were used by interested participants who, following the conclusion of their business in the commercial center below, could proceed to the top of the *tall* and participate in worship and other activities in the Roman temple and Byzantine basilica, and, other public buildings and structures located there. Macdonald points out the importance of ancient classical stairways as "essential links in the architecture of connection" in ancient classical cities.[16]

[12] Dr. Reuben Bullard identifies this red marble column, actually found in the Area D basilica, as from Euboea.

[13] This northern position of the theater agrees with the strictures of Vitruvius who remarks that an ancient city's theater should be protected from the rays of the sun on the south and should be built preferably in a hillside where "above the foundations, the stepped seats ought to be built up from the substructure in stone or marble." Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, Frank Granger, ed., Vol 1 (Loeb Classical Library) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931), Vol. 1, V, VIII, 1, pp. 262-265.

[14] Gottlieb Schumacher, *Abila of the Decapolis* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1889), p. 30.

[15] William L. Macdonald, *The Architecture of the Roman Empire: II, An Urban Appraisal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 125.

[16] Macdonald, *The Architecture*, II, p. 66.

The Roman Bath House, Nymphaeum and Exedra: The ruins of the bath house located just north of the theater are extensive; from the excavation results we gather that the building probably faced south and/or east. This meets the requirement of Vitruvius who says that the bath house should be located in a place as warm as possible, with the hot (caldarium) and tepid (tepidarium) baths facing the winter west or else to the south.[17] In one east vault (either a holding or settling tank, *piscina*, or a water distribution tank, *castellum*),[18] or possibly part of a nymphaeum, water channels are to be seen which in ancient times brought water from the 'Ayn Quwayliba and Khurayba springs on the south, through the Khurayba and Umm al-'Amad underground aqueducts. Water was also brought from the south and west of Abila as indicated by the water shafts (*putei*) found in these areas. All of this indicates that a large amount of water was needed in the civic center of Abila for the bath and nymphaeum complex and other public installations there. Fletcher talks about the great quantities of water needed daily in Rome.[19] The Roman bath and its civic fountain which may have been part of this large complex (cf. the fountain at Jarash and its nearby bath house) were important parts of Abila's civic center. About this, Macdonald comments on the Roman habit of furnishing water for all kinds of installations, such as fountains, exedrae, courtyards, etc.[20] As noted above, to meet these needs of a flourishing and expanding city, Abila depended upon the water supply from the Quwayliba and Khurayba springs which were connected by an underground connecting segment, as well as water from four other springs from more distant areas, aqueducts which also seem to have been connected with Quwaylibа-Khurayba segments.[21] There is tentative evidence pointing to an underground aqueduct bringing water some distance from the west.[22] M. J. Fuller comments on how expensive it was and how essential it was for the people of Abila to bring water from 'Ayn Quwayliba to the center of the city.[23] Roman instruments used to accomplish the task of aqueduct construction and other major architectural construction (seen, for instance, represented in carvings of artisans at work) included the hammer, axe, adze, pick, plane, chisel, drill, file, screw, iron nail, windless, crane, metal clamp, groma (for extended line, or right angles), chorabates (leveling device), etc.[24]

Exedra and Nymphaeum: A small exedra (a semicircular recess)[25] is to be seen in the east wall of the bath house ruins in Area C; this exedra could have been a part of a small fountain (see the fountain on a main thoroughfare in Gerasa).[26] As for the nymphaeum, although not surely found yet, we assume it to have been located somewhere near or connected with the bath house. As to such fountains/nymphaeums, Macdonald comments that such structures in the classical world took various sizes and shapes.[27]

The craftsmen, as early as the Iron Age and also in the Roman period, cut a a series of underground aqueducts to take care of the need of an adequate water supply for the needs of the citizens, the city's industrial and cultural complex, and the farm animals. The Umm al-'Amad and Khurayba aqueducts, running underground for some 3 to 4 km, from 'Ayn Khurayba on the south, through the underground connection at S. Wādī Quwayliba, through the Umm al-'Amad 1400 m underground aqueduct running from 'Ayn Quwayliba on the south to the center of the city. This flow of water of the Spring 'Ayn Quwayliba at a rate of 7.7 liters per second, with the extra flow from 'Ayn Khurayba, and the flow from other connecting aqueducts coming from the south and the west (cf. West Transect 15 and the deep 24 m shaft on the western part of Abila), was sufficient (assuming the same flow as today) for a population of 8,000 to 10,000 persons.[28]

Other Public Buildings on the South Tall, Umm al-'Amad: In 1984. On this south tall in a probe to the west of the Area D basilica we uncovered a number of column drums, arranged in a pattern suggesting the presence of a Roman villa or forum or palaestra or even a meat market (*ma-*

17 Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, Vol. 1, V, X, 1, pp. 302-303.

18 Frontinus, *The Aqueducts of Rome*, Charles E. Bennett, tr., Mary B. McElwain, ed., Book I (Loeb Classical Library) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 25, 367, where he describes these features.

19 Bannister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture,* eighteenth edition, revised by J. C. Pales (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), p. 339.

20 Macdonald, *The Architecture,* II, p. 99.

21 W. Harold Mare, "Abila: A Thriving Greco-Roman City of the Decapolis," *ARAM* (Oxford University, 1993).

22 Through the discovery of a possible puteus in the West Transect 15, located 1.5 km. west of Abila, we postulate that water was also brought underground to Abila from springs south and/or southwest of the site. M. J. Fuller, "The Abila Excavation: The Third Campaign (1984), Part II," *NEASB* 25 (Summer, 1985), pp. 57, 58. In addition the discovery in 1995 of a puteus just west of Abila, a puteus some 24 meters deep adds to this assumption that water was brought to Abila from afar, in this case, some distance from the west.

23 M. J. Fuller, "The Abila Excavation: The Third Campaign (1984), Part II," *NEASB*, 25 (Summer, 1985), p. 57.

24 Colin O'Connor, *Roman Bridges* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1993), pp. 45-59.

25 William L. Macdonld comments, "Exedras-curved demi-plazas or recesses of semicircular plan unwalled along their straight, open sides-appeared in classical architecture from at least the mid-fifth century B.C. (Delphi). They served many functions, commemorative and ritual among others." *The Architecture,* II, p. 103.

26 William L. Macdonald, *The Architecture*, II, pp. 100, 103.

27 Macdonald, *The Architecture*, II, pp. 100-104.

28 W. Harold Mare, "Abila: A Thriving Greco-Roman City," pp. 9-10.

cellum) (1 *Cor.* 10:25).[29]

An Odeon: In our 1980 Abila survey we found a small semi-circular *odeon*- like structure on the top central part of Tall Abila, like the Early Roman *odeon* found at Pella,[30] and the small theater at the Asclepion at Pergamos. We will be excavating this structure in the future.

Basilicas and Temples: The Roman basilica structure was adopted by the structure of the Jewish synagogue (cf. The Capernaum synagogue and the earlier one at Masada), and then, in the Byzantine period, into the church building. That the public buildings of Abila followed in the classical style is shown in the classical architrave piece found east of the theater,[31] and the re-used triglyph stone block[32] found in a wall of an Umayyad building in Area AA 3 on Tall Abila, and this motif can be seen depicted in the paintings in the Temple Tomb on the south slope of Umm al-'Amad; some buildings are portrayed with a double roof (as is also seen on some Abila coins).[33] Although we have not as yet excavated any extant remains of Roman temples, some of the Christian basilicas (i.e., the Area A and Area D basilicas) seem to have been built on the foundations of earlier Roman temples. Compare the temple foundations upon which the Christian basilica at Heshbon was built.

Road and Street Building: One of the prominent features of Roman Abila was its well-constructed road system.[34] Bridges and roads were essential for the maintenance and spread of the Roman Empire. Therefore, the provision, construction, and maintenance of a well developed road system was of major importance. As Colin O'Connor describes the three essentials for building bridges and roads: 1) officials to make decisions; 2) technicians to implement them; and 3) a large labor force, including slaves, provided by the Roman army to do the work.[35] The Legion as a whole was responsible for all building and engineering works. Among the laborers were specialists (who were exempt from heavy labor) including surveyors, architects, craftsmen, bronzesmiths, carpenters, hydraulic engineers, leadsmiths, blacksmiths, stonemasons and the like.[36] Of course, for much of the heavy work the Romans used slaves who composed a sizeable segment of the population,[37] obtained through subjugated people due to successful military campaigns. Abila had an extensive, well thought-out and executed road system both, within the city (both a Cardo Maximus and Decumanus) and leading in all directions from it,[38] which the archaeological evidence has revealed.[39] Thus, it is to be assumed that a large quantity of slave labor was needed, and we would also assume that help from the Roman army, possibly from the Legions quartered in Syria, a small distance to the north, was also obtained. This well-established road system served Abila well in its commercial enterprises, such as its involvement in the lucrative spice and luxury Roman camel caravan trade business going from Mesopotamia, to Palmyra, over to Damascus, and south just to the east of Abila and on to Petra.[40]

Material Cultural Remains Pointing to a Strong Agricultural Economy: With excellent *terra rosa* soil and an

[29] W. L. Macdonald, *The Architecture*, II, pp. 118-119; a dining room has been found attached to the Temple of Demeter at Corinth, and presumable the meat from the sacrifices which was not eaten there was taken and sold in the meat market in the forum.

[30] Robert H. Smith and Leslie P. Day, *et. al.* , *Pella of the Decapolis*, Vol. 2 (Wooster, Ohio: The College of Wooster, 1989), pp. 20-33.

[31] George W. Botsford and Charles A. Robinson, Jr., *Hellenic History*, third edition (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 105, Fig. 9, and Bannister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture*, p. 224, for a diagram of an Ionic column and entablature. Fletcher (*op. cit.*, p. 1312) defines architrave, "Architrave (Greek, chief beam). The beam or lowest division of the entablature, which extends from column to column."

[32] This triglyph piece is further evidence for a Greco-Roman temple or other classical public building on Tall Abila. Cf. Botsford and Robinson, *Hellenic History*, p. 105, fig. 9, for a drawing of the triglyph. See Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, Vol. 1, Book IV, II, 3, 4, pp. 214-217, where in talking about ancient buildings, including religious temples, he discusses triglyphs and their place in classical building.

[33] Augustus Spijkerman, *The Coins of the Decapolis and Provincia Arabia* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1978), plates 7-9.

[34] Cf. *Roman Roads* (Swiss National Tourist Office), regarding Roman Roads in Switzerland.

[35] Colin O'Connor, *Roman Bridges* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1993), p. 36.

[36] O'Connor, *Roman Bridges*, p. 42.

[37] Findlay (1973) indicates that classical Greece and Rome were slave societies, and he states, "Caesar alone is said to have been responsible for I million (slaves) during his campaigns in Gaul between 58 and 51 B.C." The slave population in classical Athens is estimated to be between 20,000 and 400,000. Findlay goes on to say, "The slave population of Italy may have been twice that of adult males citizens at the death of Caesar." Loane (1979:11) estimates that in Rome in the first and second millennium A.D. there were about 1 million slaves. Cf. O'Connor, *Roman Bridges*, p. 42.

[38] The Jordanian Government's aerial maps show the connection between the Abila roads and the north-south road north to the Yarmūk and south to Bayt Rās (Capitolias).

[39] W. Harold Mare, "Abila: A Thriving Greco-Roman City, *ARAM*, p. 2-3.

[40] "Abila, for its part, at the southern end of Syria and located on the Wadi Quailibah, just west of Wadi Shallalah, and thus just to the west of this north-south route as it went through Edrei/Dera'a, was only 4 or 5 kilometers south of the Yarmouk Valley which had been a conduit, along with passages along the connecting wadis like Shallalah and Quailibah, for travel from the Jordan Valley east to where the traffic met the main north-south Palmyra-Damascus-Petra caravan route at Edrei/Dera'a. Abila undoubtedly played an important role in the north-south spice and luxury trade on this caravan route, particularly in the Roman and Byzantine periods, and she, no doubt, was a conduit for the Palmyra-Damascus caravan goods to be carried to sites to the west, to Gadara, Pella and Scythopolis, and the Mediterranean coast, and also south to the northern Sinai and Egypt." W. Harold Mare, "Abila and Palmyra: Ancient Trade and Trade Routes from Southern Syria into Mesopotamia," ARAM, 7 (1995), p. 201.

adequate water supply through the springs satisfying the needs of a sheep and goat industry, and an adequate annual rainfall of 350 to 450 mm for the production of grain and truck gardening crops. Abila's ancient agricultural industry in the Roman period was thriving, and large landed estates all around, each with a *pater familias* and his extended family, including slaves, is to be assumed. Our modern ethnoarchaeological studies at Abila (1982, 1984 and 1986) have shown a continued strong husbandry of sheep and goats, and also the raising of crops, such as olives, grapes, figs, wheat, barley, garden vegetables, melons of all sorts, and our botanical studies of the ancient Abila carbonized seeds shows that in ancient times the following crops were grown: olives, grapes, lentils, cultivated peas, date palm, legumes, bottle gourd, plums, grasses, hard wheat, etc.

2. Material Cultural Remains Pointing to Roman Abila's Diverse Social and Cultural Life

With its forum/agora in the center of the city and its theater, bath house/nymphaeum complex, temples and other public buildings, one can assume a complex and diverse social structure at Roman Abila. Compare the agora-forum plans of Greek and Roman cities with their markets, shops, administrative buildings, temples, coliseums, etc.

Social Classes

The societal structure of Abila of the Decapolis was no doubt influenced by both Greek and Roman culture. In the Greek format, these social classes were composed of ruler, soldiers and laborers; in the Roman format, there were the Emperor and his family, the Senatorial class, the Equestrian Order, the Decurions, the Magistrates, and the lower classes; in Jerusalem, there were the rich, the middle class, and the poor.[41]

Based on this cultural background, we project that Abila's Greco-Roman societal structure was made up of the following: 1) the wealthy composed of rulers, the *pater familias* members and their large household units, merchants, tax-farmers (for the Roman government), bankers and religious officiants; 2) The middle class entrepeneurs, composed of retail traders, craftsmen, ordinary religious officiants, freedmen, innkeepers and other service oriented businesses, etc.; and 3) the poor: slaves (poor in privilege and position) and day laborers.

Evidence from the Abila tombs support the above projection and depict the following social classes:

1. The wealthy. The elaborately painted tombs, containing loculi (L 5, L17, the Temple Tomb on the south slope of Umm al-'Amad, etc.), some with stone sarcophagi (H 1, L 5, K 2), monumental tower tombs (L12), and a wide ranging and expensive grave goods (as in J 1 with its two gold earrings, etc.), all point to wealth and affluence.
2. The middle class. Evidence for this class is seen in smaller and less elaborately decorated tombs (H 1 and H 2), also equipped with loculi (H 1 and H 2), and sometimes with arcosolia (J 13 and L2, etc.),[42] and with a moderate variety of grave goods (H1 and H 2).
3. The poor and day-laboring class. Evidence for this class at Roman Abila is seen primarily in Area J in the shaft and cist graves (J 9, J 10, J 14, J 15, etc.), with few grave goods buried with the dead. Davis comments, "...simple graves and cist burials reflect the hasty disposition of the body of individuals of a poorer class."[43]

The types of grave goods excavated from the Roman tombs are culturally instructive, including the following: cooking pots and lids, oil lamps, storage jars, limestone busts of humans, Roman hairstyle, drapery, etc., fibulae pins and other metal objects, such as hair pins, spatulas, bracelets, rings, earrings, necklaces, bowls, bottles, etc. Particularly instructive are elements found in a Late Roman tomb H 60, excavated in 1996. Here we uncovered an elaborate and well-decorated tomb with a large central chamber, with an elaborately carved façade around an arched doorway leading into an auxiliary room. The façade is carved with lions, sphinxes, garlands and the like. The walls and burial niches carved into the sides of the main chamber and auxiliary room contained frescoes and paintings of medallions with portraits of lovely women with Roman hairstyle and garments, paintings of birds, inscriptions, etc. From this tomb we have excavated Late Roman pottery and objects, cooking pots and lids, lamps, storage jars, coins, etc. The material just described points to a wealthy Roman social class, and their tombs tend to be located on Area L and some in Area H, with the Middle class tombs located in H and J. Grave goods in these tombs include weapons, vases and bowls, glass and ceramic unguentaria, needles, medical instruments, coffins (of wood and stone), coffin rings and bosses, iron nails, spatulas and other cosmetic instruments, jewelry, dishware, etc.

In summary, some of the items pointing to cultural sophistication, especially among the upper classes, include the following:

a. Personal items such as eye paint (the kohl tube, example Abila 1986, L 2010, G154, No. 111), the use of unguentaria both glass (A 1986, L 2010, G 155; A 90, H 25005, No 24; A 92, H 31011, 36), and ceramic (example, A 82, H 3002, No. 62); personal grooming

41 See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), Chapters IV to VII.

42 John J. Davis, "Abila Tomb Excavations, 1984," *NEASB* 24 (1985), pp. 79-80.

43 John J. Davis, "Abila Tomb Excavations, 1984," *NEASB* 24 (1985), p. 91.

items, such as hair pins, fibulae, earrings, rings, etc.

b. Other items include: tomb frescoes, as one one showing a figurine of a Roman figure wearing Roman clothes and holding a scroll (A 88, H 16001, #849), and home scenes such as that on a fresco in Tomb H 60.

Of course, from various areas of Abila we have excavated items used in every day life, items such as ordinary dishware and metal objects such as cups, and vases, bowls, lamps, etc.

3. Material Cultural Remains Pointing to Roman Abila's Strong Religious Element.

Remains of religious structures and objects in the Roman period include the following:

5. A 1982, Altar, Roman period.

6. A 1994, Artemis, goddess of the hunt, Marble, life size.

a. Religious statues, altars (FIG. 5), and other objects of worship, include 1) the life-size, white marble statue of Artemis (Roman Diana) (FIG. 6), goddess of the hunt, found in Area A in 1994, probably sculpted in the first century BC; 2) a large white marble foot probably belonging to the Zeus statue which stood in the niche (the letters DI(OS) are painted inside the niche), excavated in 1996 - all representing Zeus, the chief of the pagan gods[44] ; 3) the north Abila weathered limestone, small stone altar, with a *patera* on the top for libation, and carved scenes of a bull on the sides, an altar which may

[44] Cf. Charlotte R. Long, *The Twelve Gods in Greek and Roman Art* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1980), pp. i-xii, 1-357, Plates I-XI. Dr. Long states, p. 9, "In our study, therefore, we shall maintain that the Twelve Gods had as their primary responsibility the safety and prosperity of the state." Long comments further (p. 241) that in private monuments "The most elaborate of these reliefs have, at the top, an area corresponding to the heavenly regions of the gods. The number of gods varies; they tend to be male, especially Jupiter, Mars and Mercury. The Osterburken relief has the Twelve Gods with Jupiter enthroned in the center."

have been connected with the Mithraic religious worship, which was popular with Roman soldiers;[45] and 4) religious objects, such as the silver pendent amulet, used as a religious charm (Abila, 1982), figurines of Greco-Roman gods and semi-gods (Dionysos, Terpsichore, Abila, 1982), etc.

b. Cult practice at Abila. Tomb evidence at Abila has revealed religious artifacts as well as evidence of religious cult practices as follows: 1) The radiating loculi and central sump of a Roman tomb, as those in H 1, which may reflect a belief that life after death is an experience similar to living in a Roman house, with a compluvium pool in the atrium and rooms radiating off a courtyard. 2) The sealing of loculi with solid stone or of stones and plaster (often with fresco painting), would allow the families, soon after the internment to visit in comfort the tombs of their loved ones for cult worship; 3) The limestone busts or headstones found in a number of the Abila tombs, such as K 1 (where nine of them were found), suggesting the practice of cult feasts or annual family reunions,[46] 4) The Dionysos figurine found in H 2 (also possibly the figurine of Tersichore also found there) pointing to a tomb cult; a Dionysos mythology is associated with burial rites and the hope of life hereafter,[47] 5) Remains of food and incense offerings, found in L 15, also pointing to a tomb cult; 6) Many lamps and lamp niches (as in H 2, L 5 and L 13) pointing to tomb cultic practice, as borne out by Roman literature and inscriptions. The Romans brought their lighted lamps to honor the dead on the *Kalends*, *Ides* and *Nones* of each month, and yearly celebrated the dead in the *Parentalia* (or, *Dies Parentalia*), February 13 to 21. They lighted lamps and took them to the tombs. An Inscription indicates the practice of lighting lamps for the family's deceased on Rosalia and on the individual's birthday.[48] 7) The frequent presence of bronze bells in the tombs (as in K 4 and L 15) pointing to an apotropaic practice of warding off evil.[49] 8) The tomb inscriptions found in 1981 in one of the tombs of Area L, "Cheer up. No one is immortal," which would seem to speak to the individual's and family's sentiment on life after death; the exact words of this sentiment have also been found in a number of Jewish grave inscriptions.[50]

The material cultural evidence of Roman Abila thus far excavated points to a flourishing, expanding and highly sophisticated city.

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45 Charlotte R. Long comments, *The Twelve Gods*, p. 241, Mithras was....widely worshipped in the third century, and far more Mithraic reliefs have survived than all the representations of the Twelve Gods put together." Cf. Michael P. Speidel, Mithras-Orion:Greek Hero and the Roman Army War God (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), pp. 39-40.

46 John J. Davis, "Abila Tomb Excavations," *NEASB* 24 (1985), p. 72.

47 Davis, *NEASB* 24 (1985), p. 90; cf. J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 3-39, 236.

48 Neathery B. Fuller, "Abila Tomb Excavations, 1986," *NEASB* 29 (Summer, 1987), p. 59. J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, pp. 63-64.

49 Neathery B. Fuller, "Abila Tomb Excavations," *NEASB* 29 (1987), p. 59. N. P. Toll, *Excavations at Dura Europos, Part II. The Necropolis. Preliminary Report on the Ninth Season of Work, 1935-1936.* M. Rostovzeff, *et al.*, editors (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), p. 122.

50 R. P. Jean-Baptiste Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1952).