

Mādabā and its Latin Church of Saint John the Baptist: A Synthesis

In the preliminary investigation of the church of Saint John the Baptist in Mādabā¹, we also explored the region from the perspective of its settlement history, as well as its visual and emotional impact on the nineteenth century explorers and missionaries who discovered the ancient site. Like the phoenix – the legendary bird embodying the cycles of death and resurrection – Mādabā rose from its ashes in the late nineteenth century after more than a millennium of total abandonment to become a significant place of Christian memories.

Just over one hundred and thirty five years have passed since the Christian tribes from al-Karak arrived at the collapsed and scatted ruins of Mādabā, once a thriving and important Christian town on the eastern edge of the Byzantine Empire. Until 1879, there had not been any sedentary villages between as-Salt and al-Karak. The entire way the explorers travelled, they saw only towns and villages in a state of total ruin. The whole country was uninhabited. However, the al-Balqā' was reputed to be the best land in Transjordan for pastures and agriculture. During the second half of the nine-

teenth century, the interaction between different interests and logics brought the country to modernity with the rebirth of old settlements and the foundation of satellite villages. The area known as the Mādabā Plains region that once had been a land, planted irregularly with dry crops by the various pastoral nomads who shared the plateau, had become an agricultural and commercial center of primary importance, upgrading the economic value of the al-Balqā'.

To explain the success of the new settlements in the Mādabā Plains region, we will start recounting the context, the causes, the key people, and the challenges. Then we will describe the photographic evidence that documents the steps leading to the settlement of Mādabā and the recent archaeological discoveries in the Latin Church.

The Context

The resettlement of the Mādabā Plains region can be traced back to policies that the Ottoman government set in motion during the *Tanzimat* (period of reforms) from 1839, and intensified under *Sultan Abulhamid II* (1876-1909). At this

1. É. Lesnes, R. W. Younker, *The Shrine of the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist and the Origins of Mādabā* (Jordan), Latin Patri-

archate Printing Press, Jerusalem Beit Jala, 2013.

time, the Ottoman government decided to exert more control over its frontier zones in its Arab provinces of Iraq and Syria, including Jordan. One reason was a desire to provide more security and stability for the pilgrim routes to Madina and Mecca that traversed the Arab territories. Another reason, and perhaps the most important, was the loss of agricultural and economic resources (including tax revenues) for the Empire because of the loss of western Ottoman territories in the Balkans.

In 1858, utilizing the new land code of 1839, the Ottomans thought they might regain resources by establishing new settlements, agricultural programs and taxation policies in the province of Transjordan. But the problem with this plan was the fact that the lands were controlled by Bedouin tribes who had enjoyed virtual autonomy and freedom and were not at all inclined to settle, grow crops and pay taxes for the benefit of Ottoman authorities. The Ottomans dealt with this challenge by changing the provincial administrative system. They placed government officials in existing and new towns and they established army garrisons in important ones. Even though the land reforms had been initiated on paper as early as 1839, the Ottomans had not been able to implement them in Jordan in any serious way. At this point, the migration of the Christian tribes from al-Karak to Mādabā presented one of the first opportunities for the Ottoman authorities to implement their reform policy in the region.

In addition to the Ottoman administrative reforms, another important contextual element for the refoundation of Mādabā was the establishment and growth of Christian missions in Transjordan by the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem. The early Patriarchs, Archbishop Giuseppe Valerga (1847-1872) and Archbishop Vincenzo Bracco (1873-1889), multiplied the missions first in Palestine and then in Transjordan. The first Catholic mission parish of Transjordan was as-Salt in 1866, followed by others: al-Karak in 1876, ar-Rumaymīn and al-Fuḥays in 1877, Mādabā in 1881, al-Ḥuṣun in 1885, 'Ajlūn in

1889 and 'Anjara in 1897.

In 1876, the Patriarch Vincenzo Bracco sent a Catholic priest, Alessandro Macagno (known as Abuna Eskandar) to al-Karak who, with the help of his assistant Paolo Bandoli (Abouna Boulos), opened a mission there as requested by the Christian *al-'Uzayzat* tribe. However, the existence of the small Catholic community became increasingly difficult because of frequent persecution by local tribes. Vincenzo Bracco, aware of the seriousness of the situation, asked for and received from the Grand Vizier of Istanbul, *Midhat Pasha*, the plain of Mādabā for the resettlement of the Catholic tribes of al-Karak. At this time, as the Ottoman administrative structure was being established in this region, the governor of the province of Damascus, which oversaw Transjordan (known as the Ottoman Syria in the south-east), was favorable to the establishment of a mission on the abandoned and uncultivated land of Mādabā. Actually, this was not the first case of emigration, since in the previous year, Muslim Circassian tribes were re-established in a number of abandoned sites of Transjordan including Jarash, az-Zarqā', 'Ammān, Nā'ūr, Ṣuwayliḥ and Wādī as-Sīr.

The Causes

The Christian missionaries were one of the main reasons for the migration of the Christian tribes. The population was divided in two main tribal alliances: the *Sharqah* and the *Gharbah*. The eastern alliance (the *Sharqah*) was headed by *aṭ-Ṭarāwnah* and included the *aṣ-Ṣarāyrah* tribe. The western alliance (the *Gharbah*) was headed by *al-Majālī*, and included three Christian tribes: *al-'Uzayzat* (who had recently converted to Catholicism in 1877), the *al-Ma'āy'ah* (Greek Orthodox), and the *Karadsheh* (also Greek Orthodox).

The advantage gained by certain tribes over others changed the previous balance of power, leading to the rise of internal conflicts or reinforcing previous antagonisms. However, the event that sparked the migration of the Christian

tribes from al-Karak to Mādabā was the abduction of an *al-'Uzayzat* woman (*Nejmeh*, daughter of *Salem at-Twal* and wife of *Jeries at-Twal*) by a man servant (*Mahmoud aṣ-Ṣarāyrah*, a member of the muslim tribe of the *Sharqah*). In traditional Bedouin society, the act of one of the tribe's women going off with another man (whether it is her fault or not) brings an extreme level of shame and dishonor to the entire tribe. Thus, the next morning, when they heard the news of this unspeakable act, *Nejmeh's* brother, 21 years old *Ibrahim at-Twal*, along with all the *al-'Uzayzat*, and their allies – the other Christian tribes and the *al-Majālī* rode to Kufur Rabbah where they demanded the surrender of both *Mahmoud* and *Nejmeh*.

The head of the *al-'Uzayzat* tribe, *ash-Shaykh Saleh Sawalha*, asked *Ibrahim at-Twal* how he wanted to redeem the lost honor caused by his sister's abduction. This new embarrassment was more than *Ibrahim* could bare and in his deep shame and anger he insisted on nothing less than the death penalty for both *Mahmoud* and *Negmeh*. While he was within his rights to demand such a severe penalty, *Ibrahim's* demand was nevertheless a cause for worry. The eastern alliance could not surrender one of their own without their own loss of face – thus, the practical effect of *Ibrahim's* demand was to investigate an ongoing war between the two alliances. Moreover, while the call for the death penalty was grounded in age-old Bedouin tradition, this ancient ethic collided with that of the Christian church, which called for forgiveness and mercy in this situation. As expected, the *aṣ-Ṣarāyrah* refused to give up *Mahmoud*, but agreed to return *Nejmeh*. At this point the Latin priest, Abouna Boulos intervened and arranged to have *Nejmeh* handed over to him; he then smuggled her to Nablus where he hoped to hide her, thus saving her life.

Meanwhile, the *aṣ-Ṣarāyrah* clan asked *Mohammad al-Majālī* to negotiate a reconciliation with *Ibrahim at-Twal*. However, *Ibrahim* refused their offer, declaring that he wanted

“no gold but only blood!” Father Macagno, the Latin priest, couldn't dissuade the *al-'Uzayzat* from taking revenge for the kidnapping. The entire tribe of the *al-'Uzayzat* loyally backed *Ibrahim* and declared war on the *aṣ-Ṣarāyrah*. Assaulting the village, the subsequent killing of several men of the *aṣ-Ṣarāyrah* by the *al-'Uzayzat* created an intolerable situation in al-Karak that threatened to degenerate into broader conflict between the *Sharqah* and the *Gharabah* alliances. It was within this context that the *Shuyūkh al-'Uzayzat*, already at odds with the *al-Majālī* decided to leave the *Bilad al-Karak* permanently.

The Key People

The choice of the *tall* at Mādabā as a new home for the al-Karak Christian tribes, was the result of discussions between the Ottoman government and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and, at a lower level, local missionaries and tribal *Shuyūkh*. Agreements among these various parties were reached concerning territorial, administrative, economic and political issues.

Aware of the seriousness of the situation in al-Karak, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Vincenzo Bracco, petitioned the government for new land for the Christians. Thanks to the correspondence between the priest and the patriarch, we know about the real preoccupation with what was happening in al-Karak and his total involvement to find the right solution. Getting the Christian tribe permission to settle in and occupy Mādabā, Vincenzo Bracco publicly demonstrates the success of the missionary campaign project in Transjordan, leading to the foundation of a new, wholly Christian village under his careful guidance.

The determination to let the Christians have Mādabā was made by none other than *Midhat Pasha*, a reformist statesman, and at the time of the al-Karak events, governor of Damascus. Since 1878, he had been engaged in developing economic activities in certain strategic places within the Transjordan territories. So, in order

to extend fiscal revenues, the issue of allowing several tribes to leave al-Karak to settle in the al-Balqā', expanding agricultural lands and settlements, was a very good opportunity.

Father Alessandro Macagno emigrated in 1880 with the Christian Bedouin families from al-Karak and founded the town of Mādabā. This emigration probably would not have been seen as permanent without his intervention. Knowing about tribal modes of conflict management, he interpreted the events in al-Karak as a conflict that he feared would degenerate into a massacre of the Christians.

Father Paolo Bandoli went to as-Salt with *ash-Shaykh Saleh Sawalha* and met up with Don Giuseppe Gatti, with whom they went scouting for 'unoccupied land'. They chose Mādabā to establish the new settlement for the *al-Uzayzat* because the tall was a strategic location for warding off and defending against attacks. The ruins of the ancient city also offered a good amount of building material ready to be used and the surrounding plain was fertile and suitable for agriculture.

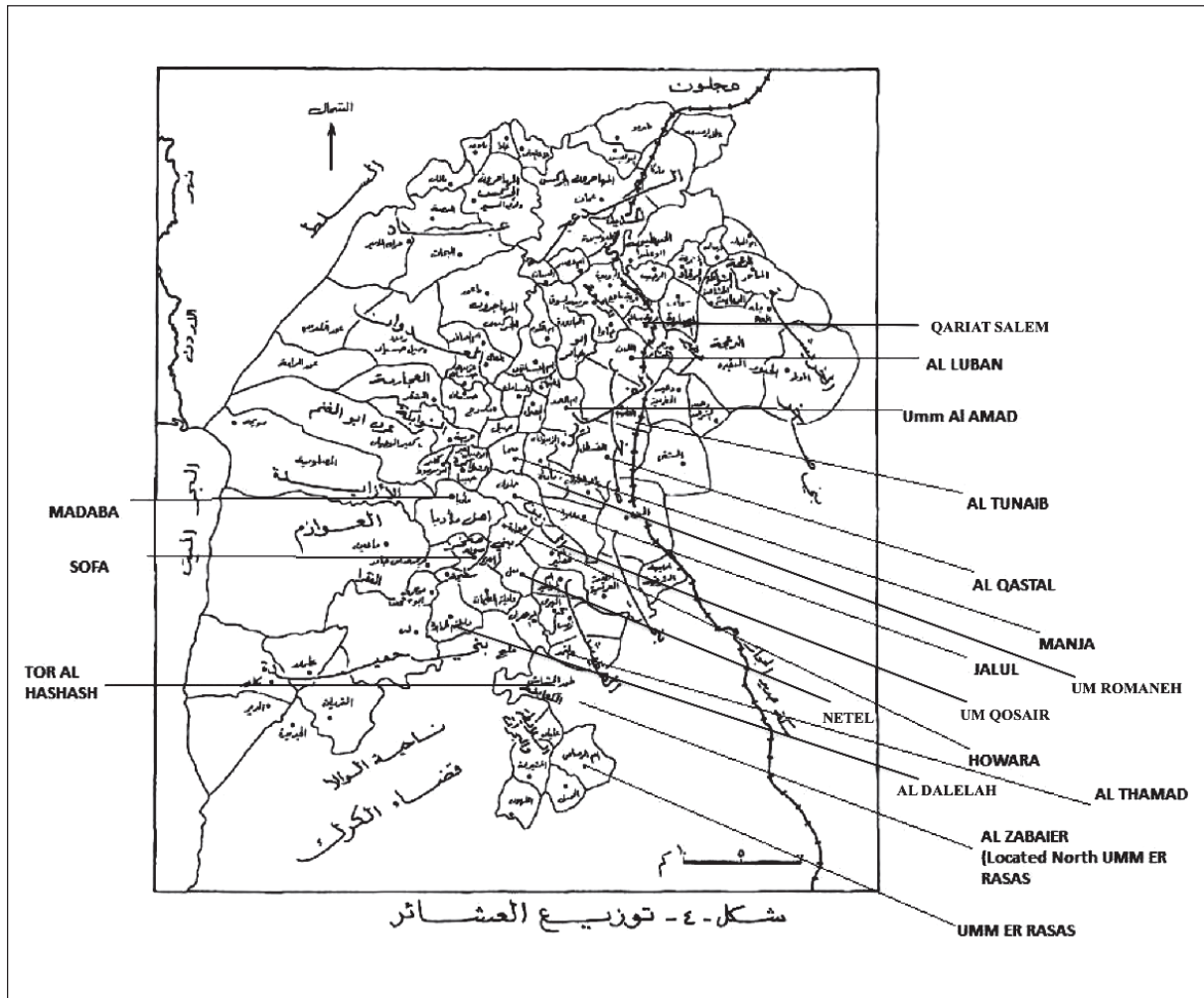
ash-Shaykh Saleh Sawalha of the *al-Uzayzat* organized the actual Christian migration from al-Karak to the al-Balqā'. The road to Mādabā was long and unsafe and went through various tribal territories where the sole protection by religious institutions and Ottoman authority was not enough. Accordingly, before moving out of al-Karak, *Shaykh Saleh* went to the *Hamaydeh* tribe, in the North of al-Karak, to request passage and place the Christian tribes under their protection. Then, for the settlement at Mādabā, he knew that the vast plain was claimed by the *Bani Sakhir*, the most powerful bedouin tribe of the region. So, to settle in Mādabā and become an *ash-Shaykh* al-autonomous, he needed to ensure that the other Christian tribes of al-Karak—the Greek Orthodox *al-Karādshah* and *al-Ma'āy'ah*—would follow him in their migration.

The Challenges

The rebirth of Mādabā was involved in inter-

nal tensions and heavy external conflicts about the Land Ownership. Without land registers until 1897, ownership was somewhat precarious and it was confirmed more by force rather than by law. The division and allocation of the lands granted by the Ottomans provoked an internal dispute between the Catholic and the Orthodox tribes about the right to occupy the top of the hill of Mādabā. The issue of property rights was more vexed because the *Bani Sakhir* tried to resist the Ottoman policies of confiscation of their land. These conflicts involved some of the fiercest clans (*Fayez*, *Zibin*, and *Hamad*) of the *Bani Sakhir* tribe who demanded financial compensation for their lost lands on the tall where the Christians had settled. There were also some bloody struggles with the *Bani Hamida* and other tribes and the Ottoman government had to repeatedly intervene by sending soldiers to protect the city from attack. In 1893, the establishment of a barracks near the village would restore some peace and stability to the mission and town. The Mādabā mission was considered, by far, the toughest and most dangerous of the missions under the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The problems eventually prompted the Ottoman authorities to send a *mudir*—a district chief—to Mādabā and in 1896 they built the *Saray*, which served as the local seat of government, on the acropolis.

The development of agriculture and the registration of the land favored the creation of many settlements. Jallūl is a good example of the development of a complex relationship between state, religious institution and tribe (in this case with *Shaykh Minawir bin Zibin*) and the understanding of new socio-political opportunities for the tribes in promoting their tribal status and possessions. Other *Bani Sakhir* families registered vast tracks of land to the east of Mādabā, including Umm al-'Amad, al-Qastal, *Zīzyā'*, *az-Zabāyir*, and *Şūfā* (FIG. 1). Villages soon sprang up in all of these locations (FIG. 2). In 1907, there were twenty villages in the al-Balqā' that soon formed a distribution network



1. Localisation of the villages.

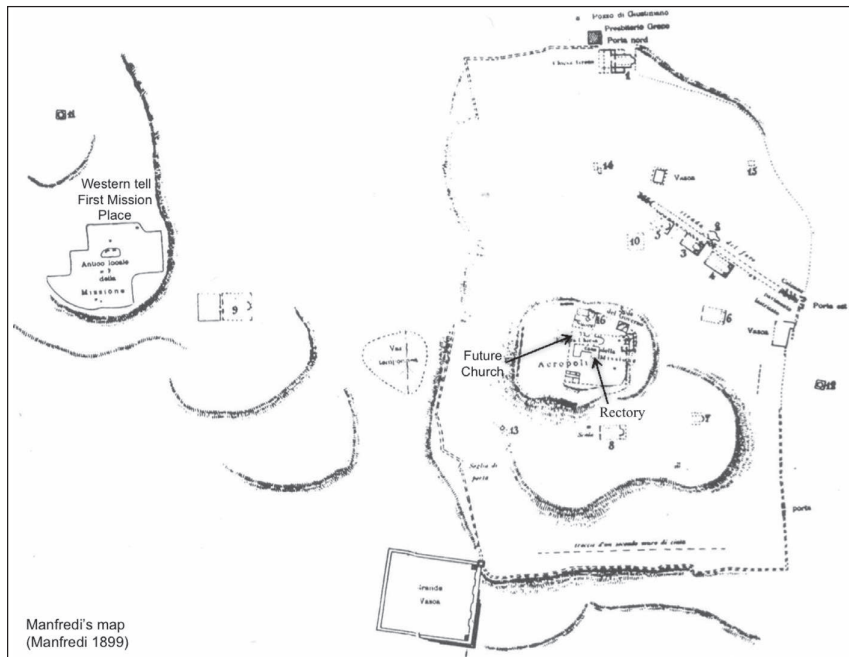
supported by the development of an infrastructure that included roads and railways (the Hijaz line). Two north-south roads were constructed that linked Mādabā to ‘Ammān. One followed the old road that passed by Ḥisbān and al-‘Āl, (Elealeh of the Bible), and which was soon extended to Nā‘ūr, a village founded recently by Circassians; the other road connected the first station on the east by Zīzyā’ near Jallūl, then turned north, bordering the desert, and then ran by Qaṣr al-Mushatta. The eastern route only partially followed the Darb al-Ḥājj, the famous pilgrim route from Damascus to Mecca (which has several parallel routes) and which, in places, had been traveled by so many large camel caravans, the road was as wide as 500 meters.

The Steps to Settlement

In late summer 1880, the first emigrants of al-Karak, who arrived in Mādabā with their Italian missionary, Paolo Bandoli, began to occupy a land located west of the tell, consisting of a small rocky spur with many caves (FIG. 3). According to some explorers, these caves numbered around one hundred. The Christian Bedouins used the caves as storage areas for crops, as shelter against the weather, and as refuge against attacks from other tribes. The priest used a larger cave as a chapel and school. Despite recent and intensive urbanization, some of these western hill caves have been preserved and incorporated into new constructions. A survey in this area, still called *Dayr* which means monastery, has also led to the identification of

Villages	Owners	Families	Tribes
Al Dalelah	Ben er-Redeiny		Beni Sakhr
Um Romaneh	Talâl Al Fâiz	Fâiz	Beni Sakhr
Netel	Qama'ân Zeben	Zeben	Beni Sakhr
Um Qosair	Met'ab bin Zeben	Zeben	Beni Sakhr
Howara	Felâh bin Zeben	Zeben	Beni Sakhr
Jalul	Menawer bin Zeben	Zeben	Beni Sakhr
Manja	Qcneïan bin Fâiz	Fâiz	Beni Sakhr
Al Qastal	Sattâm	Fâiz	Beni Sakhr
Barezein	Fendy, Talal al Fâiz	Fâiz	Beni Sakhr
Umm el Araed	Sattâm	Fâiz	Beni Sakhr
Qariat Salem		Fâiz	Beni Sakhr
Satiha	Eben Hamad	Hamad	Beni Sakhr
Al Mereigmeh	Qoftân bin Hamad	Hamad	Beni Sakhr
Sofa	Dahamseh		Beni Sakhr
Al Dulayla			Beni Hamidah
Al Mereigmeh es-Sahanbeh			Beni Hamidah
Al Zebay	Qoftân bin Sahen bin Fendy	Fâiz	Beni Sakhr
Al Tunaib	Romeihch	Fâiz	Beni Sakhr
Lubban	Romeihch	Fâiz	Beni Sakhr

2. Villages with their owners, families and tribes.



3. Manfredi's map (1899).

a large cave which probably corresponds to the rock chapel used by the first Latin missionary.

This primitive cave system lasted three years until the settlers decided to build small houses using stones from the ruins of ancient Mādabā. Those first houses were low, partly because they were half-buried. For security reasons, they did not have any opening other than a door. Dry stone walls marked off small enclosures for keeping animals (FIG. 4).

In terms of formalizing the settlement of

Mādabā, four key steps were involved: 1) Mādabā and the surrounding lands were immediately organized as a *nāḥiyah*, a sub-district in the Ottoman administration; 2) in Mādabā, the Ottoman authorities installed a *mudīr nāḥiyah*, a county head to collect the taxes; 3) they built a *saray*, the local administrative seat, and 4) they opened a land registry for the land management.

In terms of building the city, the key factors are linked to the competition between the Latin and Orthodox missions and later, the Muslims.



4. Primitive houses on the acropolis, from north-west (EBAF).

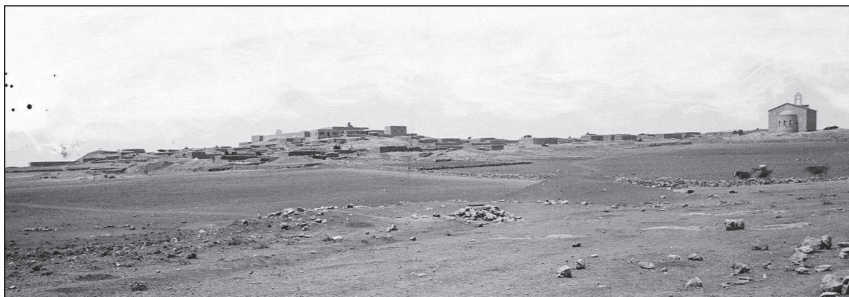
Religious places and schools were the pillar of both Catholic and Greek missionary strategies of expansion. They each rapidly built a chapel and a classroom where instruction was provided under the control of the missionary. Education became a marketplace where the supply had to constantly adjust itself to the demand and come to terms with the competition. The existence of two churches created two poles of attraction: one at the top of the hill for the Latin *al-'Uzayzat*, and one at the bottom for the Orthodox *al-Ma'āy'ah* and *al-Karādshah*. Between the two areas, a commercial street developed gradually. In 1935, the first mosque, with a building to lodge the imam and to serve as the Quranic School, opened on the market street, a space not saturated with Christian signs.

With the establishment of the Hashemite Emirate of Transjordan, religious spaces be-

came increasingly affirmed around the centers of worship. Other residential areas spread rapidly across the hill and soon invaded the surrounding areas.

In the historical center of Mādabā, the old houses have become part of the “cultural heritage” with the renewed interest in vernacular architecture. Many Christian families, after abandoning their old houses in favor of more modern places, rediscovered their own urban tradition of the late nineteenth / early twentieth centuries and benefited from public funds to restore the old houses in the city. Old photos of Mādabā taken between 1897 and 1952 reveal the process of the early settlement of the Bedouin tribes (FIGS. 5, 6) and later the rapid expansion and modernization of the town (FIG. 7).

Mādabā still retains some fifteen houses dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and some of them, identified in the old photographs, allow one to trace the stages of urban development –from the small village of modest low, half-buried houses of the first years– to the evolution of Mādabā with the establishment of stores such as the *Hamarneh* shops or the Farah shops and the large, tripartite houses like *Bayt Hamarneh* and *Bayt al-Halasa*, some public or government buildings



5. Mādabā from east, around 1898 (AC).



6. Mādabā from east, in 1952 (Madaba Cultural Heritage, p. 15).



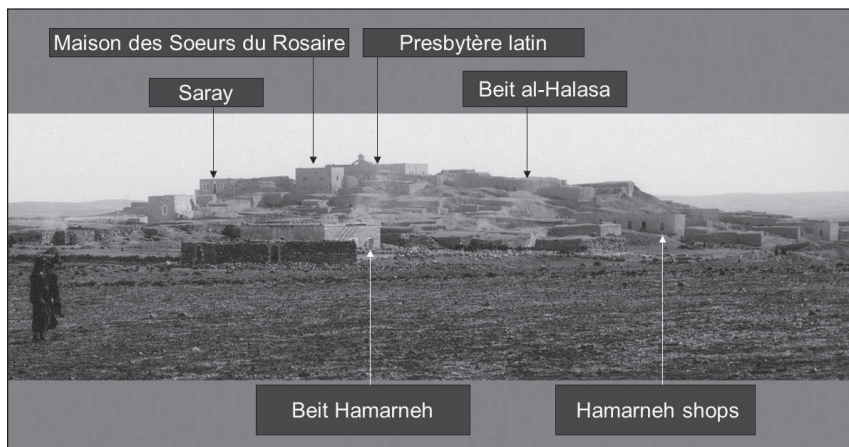
7. Mādabā from east today.

like the *Saraya* and religious structures such as St. George, St. John the Baptist, the parsonage house and the Rosary Sisters' house, all dating back to the turn of the century (FIGS. 8-9).

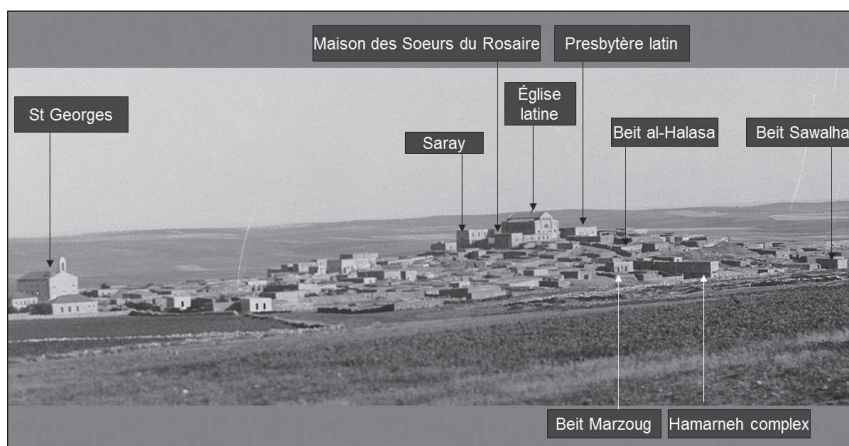
The location of these first houses generally reflects the religious allegiances of the owners who eventually established groupings of residential and commercial buildings that evolved into real neighborhoods identified by their surname.

The new century, of course, witnessed a dra-

matic growth of the small town which began to attract not only artisans, masons, stonecutters, but also goldsmiths, and silversmiths. By 1914, carpet shops had been opened near St Georges Church, thereby creating a shopping center – the *Sūq* on *al-Hashimi* Street and *King Talal* Street – between the Orthodox Church and the Latin Church, this last inaugurated on 1913. With the establishment of the Hashemite Emirate of Transjordan, religious spaces were increasingly affirmed around the centers of



8. Mādabā from north-west, between 1908 and 1910: location of the buildings.



9. Mādabā from north-west, between 1922 and 1932: location of the buildings.

worship: the Catholic church with its presbytery and schools in the burrow of *al-Uzayzat*; the Greek Church Orthodox and Melkite with its presbytery and its schools between burrows of the *al-Karādshah* and *al-Ma'āy'ah*; and finally, the mosque and Quranic school in the district of the *Sūq*. Residential areas spread rapidly across the hill and soon invaded the surrounding areas.

Building the Latin Church

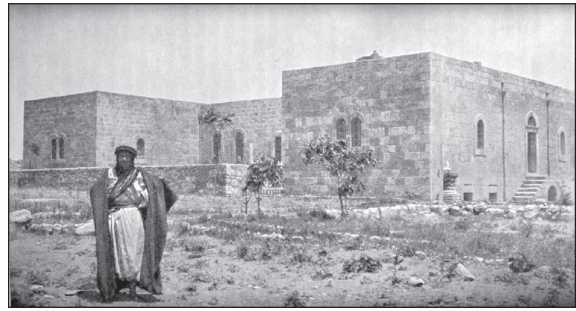
In 1883, Paolo Bandoli erected his new chapel on the acropolis. Thanks to the description done by Giuseppe Manfredi (Abuna Yousef), priest of Mādabā from 1887 to 1904, we know that it was “a three-room building with a mud-packed walls and a roof beam, supporting reeds and topped with clay mixed with chopped straw” (Conference of G. Manfredi of the 13th of September 1896: 9), and we could interpret one of the few pictures we found in the French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem, as the first Catholic chapel (FIG. 10).

In 1887, the new priest of Mādabā, Zephyrin Bieber, started the construction of the rectory (FIGS. 3, 11) and, in 1894, the chapel was inaugurated for worship by Manfredi (FIG. 12), until the construction of the church could begin.

At first, the mission of Mādabā had too few resources to support the construction of a new church. However, Manfredi was able to raise support from his hometown of Mondovì in Italy and also from Genoa because it was the city where he received his religious training.



10. The primitive Chapel by Bandoli (EBAF).



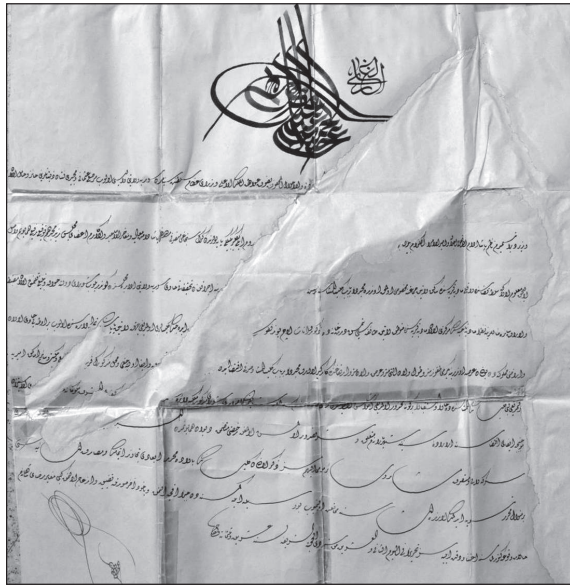
11. Bieber and Manfredi's presbytery, from south-east (Musil 1907, fig. 44).



12. Manfredi's Chapel (EBAF).

His letter began with a discussion of Machaeus, where John the Baptist was beheaded, because he thought it would naturally appeal to the people of Genoa since St. John the Baptist was their city's patron. Therefore, he proposed that a chapel dedicated to the memory of St John the Baptist be established in one of the side chapels of the transept of a new church at Mādabā, which was the nearest Catholic center. It is possible that this letter contains the premises of the name of the future church since the first idea was to dedicate the new church to the Sacred Heart, which was in vogue in the early twentieth century.

In the spring of 1903, Manfredi finally received his *furman* (the permit) (FIG. 13), and immediately began the work of building his new church, located on the site of the old “primitive” chapel, just north of the new buildings of the mission (FIG. 3). The plans of the church were made by the architect, Guglielmo Barberis. In 1910, the new priest, Jean Panfil, continued the construction work but with great difficul-



13. Construction permit from the Ottoman authorities (PL).

ty and *Antoin Abid Rabu*, the priest of as-Salt, had to energetically intervene in support of the church to the patriarch Camassei:

“It is time for me to tell you something about the Church of Mādabā. How long will we drag out the construction? It’s not for me to recount the moral evil which results from the delay. The local situation is such that even a religious person considers himself excused from attending Mass because of the lack of ventilation, and over-crowding. This creates an atmosphere that fosters of sin... The delay of ten years to complete the construction this church gives little honor to the patriarchy when it leaves such a large a parish without a proper place of worship. In human terms I would say it is not fair to take advantage of the presence of Panfil... So far this church has not cost much to the patriarchy. Your Excellency has said it would provide another 10,000 Francs for the church but please wait no longer. I pray V. E. that you will make a good decision and I guarantee to you that D. Panfil will complete the work, construction, plastering, roofing and the ornamentation... If you do not act now for that price, you will end up losing thirty thousand... This delay

*caused the deterioration of the walls that had already been built. Rain and sun are causing the lime to lose its cohesive strength. Over time, the mistreatment of this building will mean that the slightest tremor of an earthquake will cause cracks...”*².

On the 21st of December 1913, the church was finally inaugurated even though it was not completely finished. Glass was still needed for the large windows and the tiling and plastering of the walls needed to be finished. These would be completed later.

The Archaeological Discoveries

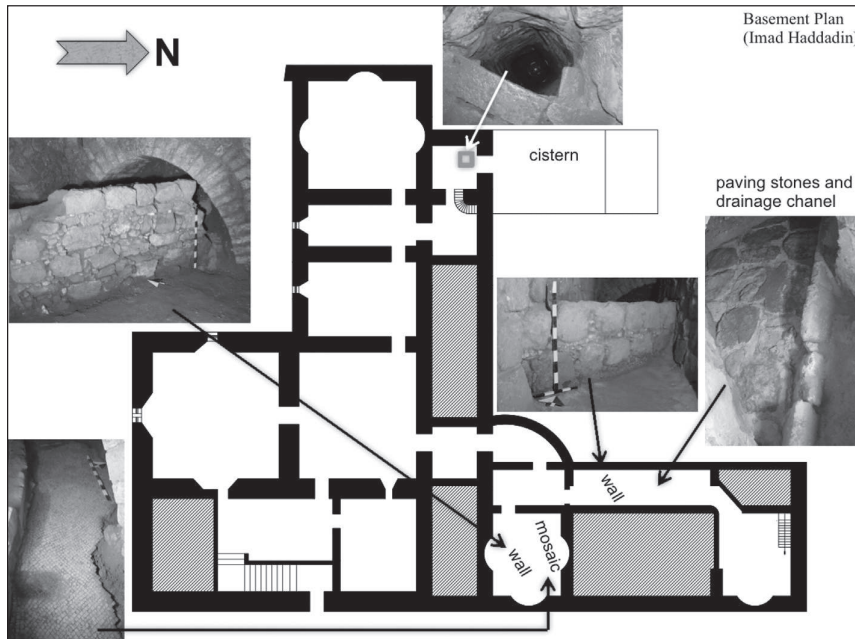
In 2010-2012, it became necessary to consolidate the church and some probes were opened under the apse of the church. In the south room, a wall was discovered as well as a portion of a white mosaic floor under the choir; immediately under the apse is located another wall with a drainage channel and a flagstone pavement (FIG. 14).

These walls could be part of the ancient structure that Father Hanna Sarena (*Abouna Sarena*) found in 1886, while digging on the acropolis to find building stones for the mission, and that he describes as “a thick wall providing beautiful stones that a man cannot handle alone and an ancient mosaic pavement”. Also, Father Zephyrin Biever (*Abouna Daoud*), in 1887, found, about a meter underground, “large stones that only need to be touched up a little to provide very good building material.”

The first wall, preserved to a height of 1.50m and a length of 3 m, has a thickness of 0.85m and consists of several courses made of two rows of larger stones with small stones at the core. The visible southwest face presents a fairly regular unit consisting of alternate courses of larger roughly cut stones alternating with smaller sized stones. Smaller stones reinforce the spaces between these stones. This structure is actually the foundation of the wall and is made up of five courses; above this can be seen

2. Letter from A. Abed Rabu to the Patriarch Camassei, 29th of July

1912.



14. Basement plan of the Latin Mission with the location of the remains.

the first course of the wall proper.

Northeast of the wall, there is a portion of mosaic that is related to the wall against which it rests. Consisting of one-color-white monochrome tesserae, this mosaic has a simple decorative pattern composed of a succession of oblique rows and an outer edge of three horizontal lines. The level of this mosaic corresponds to the first course of the wall proper. It is clear that this mosaic, partly destroyed during the construction of the foundations of the church, continues north under the floor of the present choir.

The other wall has the same architectural features but here the elevation is more visible than the foundation. It does not seem likely that the mosaic is preserved here. Interestingly, some ceramic fragments were found inserted in the gaps, along the side of the wall; based on these potsherds, the wall could be dated to the Byzantine period.

Against the latter wall, there is an open drainage channel defined by a row of raised white lime stones. The bottom of the channel is coated with hydraulic cement that goes over the top edge of the curbstones of the channel but does not cover the wall. There is a 2% graded slope that runs down in the direction southwest

to northeast. This channel was probably used to direct the flow of rainwater, perhaps to a cistern. These tanks are common on the site: first, created as a stone quarry for buildings, they were then used to contain water.

Along the water channel there is a pavement made of local stone. It consists of large, flat, smooth, multicolored slabs in shades of yellow, and pinkish white. A hard white mortar fills the irregularities of the stones on the surface. The flagstones, which are laid alongside the water channel, certainly belong to the same period of construction as the other structures, especially because the level of this pavement is the same as the mosaic floor. It appears that the pavement is outside the building, probably functioning as a court, or perhaps a street.

Despite the presence of the mosaic, the orientation of the two walls (45 degrees off an east west axis) would not seem to support the hypothesis of a Byzantine basilica on the acropolis, as some have suggested. And while it is still premature to interpret these structures, it can be argued that the top of the tell was occupied by a fortress and defended by a wall within which was the seat of local government. Political power is often located at the highest point of a site, while the religious power is spread in

many parts of the city below. For the mosaic, it could be a little later realization since its simple decoration seems to be a feature of the transition period from the late Byzantine into the Umayyad period (7th to 8th century AD). Identical examples of early Islamic period were found elsewhere in Mādabā and are currently visible in the Archaeological Park and in a building from the early Umayyad period in the Islamic Village of Jallūl.

These archaeological remains, discovered incidentally during some recent works in the church, merely confirm the written testimonies of the missionaries in the late nineteenth century but they only provide us with a peek of what yet lays hidden below the surface. With good scientific support, new research could continue to pull back the curtain of history just below the shrine of the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist.

Conclusion

For Mādabā Christians, the narrative of their emigration from al-Karak has become a foundational act belonging to the past. The variants of this shared history reflect how each group constructed its identity in opposition to that of the others. At the beginning, the two Christian religious congregations, including three tribes and a few families of diverse origins, cohabited Mādabā, each in a distinct territory, rarely carrying out matrimonial exchanges with each other. It was only within the market and administrative institutions that exchange and competition occurred and that Mādabā came to constitute a village community.

For the foundation of satellite villages around Mādabā, the tribes were encouraged to settle permanently on the lands that they usually occupied only in the spring as pastures or cultivated fields. They chose farming over pastoralism and registered their land holdings, in line with Ottoman policies in the region. Leadership roles were also redistributed with the missionary acceding to pre-eminence and the new emerging Christian *Shuyūkh*.

Mādabā and these other villages, refounded during those years, are the proof of interaction between foreign missionaries, local tribes and Ottoman authorities who collaborating or colliding with each other brought Transjordan to modernity.

Abbreviations

AC: American Colony in Jerusalem.

EBAJ: French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem.

PL: Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

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