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The Excavation in Umm Qays, Jordan, 2005–2017

Introduction

Umm Qays is located 25km northwest of Irbid in northern Jordan. Formerly known as Gadara, it was part of the federation of ten cities (the “decapolis”) in the Hellenistic period. Mentioned along with the Sea of Galilee in the New Testament, Umm Qays and its surroundings were an important base and a crossroads of culture and economy from ancient times.

Umm Qays was surveyed by Gottlieb Schumacher beginning in 1860, and excavation was continued by the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology, which also undertook its preservation. Up to the present, the Decumanus Maximus, Terrace Church, Five-Aisle Basilica Church, West Theater, and other sites, which date from the Hellenistic to Umayyad periods, have been made known. In recent years the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and Yarmouk University have been con-

ducting the excavation.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency, in cooperation with UNESCO and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, Kokushikan University, has carried out “Training in Third Countries to Support the Restoration of Iraqi Cultural Heritage, Jordan, 2005–2010.” Kokushikan University conducts environmental surveys, excavation surveys, conservation and restoration of ruins, and research on the utilization of cultural heritage under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology’s Academic Frontier “Cultural Heritage Research as a Social Infrastructure for Restoration of Cultural Heritage in Post-war Iraq, 2005–2010.” The research was carried out in Umm Qays, and the project “Excavation in Umm Qays 2008–2015,” the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, and Kokushikan University restored the West Theater from 2015–2017 with the support of the Asahi Shimbun

Foundation. However, the occupation of northern Syria after 2015 by the Islamic State and the spread of the coronavirus pandemic starting in 2020 made overseas travel difficult, so activities have been suspended up to today.

Purpose and Results of the Excavation

The purpose of the excavation by Kokushikan University is to excavate the area around the “Early Roman Gate” and clarify the life of Gadarā’s citizens (FIGS. 1 and 2). Stages of the excavation are explained from lower layer to upper layer.

Tomb

Under the “Early Roman Gate” there is an underground tomb (FIG. 3) that has eight chambers dug into the bedrock, but the unearthened artifacts are only a few pottery fragments (FIG. 4) of the early Roman/late Hellenistic period. This underground tomb was repurposed as cisterns or cellars during the Roman and Byzantine periods.

Building 4 (Bil.4); Roman House

In the center of Bil.4 (FIGS. 5 and 6) is a courtyard (atrium) with a basalt-paved floor and around the atrium stood basalt columns with ionic capitals. There is also a staircase that leads down to a cellar from the atrium. The cellar was originally built as a tomb but was later expanded to form a rectangular underground cistern or basement (about 5x6m and 1.8m high). Bil.4 is a typical Roman house provided with an atrium in the center and an underground room, of which parts of the wall are found under the Decumanus Maximus. For this reason, Bil.4 is certainly older than the Decumanus Maximus. At the time of its discovery, large cut stones had been thrown into the entrance of the cellar blocked it off. ¹⁴C dates from

carbon collected in that cellar were AD 130–260, AD 70–230, and AD 130–260.

Building 1 (Bil.1)

After the Roman House (Bil.4) was abandoned, this area was buried with a huge amount of sediment (approximately 30x30m and 3m high), the surface of which was white lime (approximately 10cm thick). A building (Bil.1) was built on it (FIGS. 5 and 7). Bil.1 is 45x10m in size and lies in an east–west direction. Its foundation wall was made by cutting out the wall of the Roman House and digging into the bedrock; then more than two meters of basalt stones were piled up for the foundation. Reproduction of the upper structure can only be assumed, since only a few fragments of limestone of the upper wall of the building has remained. The west end room of Bil.1 is divided by a 10 m x 8 m partition, and the floor is covered with a colorful geometric design. It might have been a special room (FIGS. 7 and 8: 1–3).

At the southern center of this building there was a staircase that led from the Decumanus Maximus and had a stylobate larger than others at the entrance. It is assumed that there was a large column on the foundation of the entrance. It was ascertained that Bil.1 and the Decumanus Maximus were connected at the entrance. Also, the Decumanus Maximus was connected to shops, a gate, the Octagon, and the Forum opposite Bil.1 in the Byzantine period.

Many scattered drums, cut lime stones, roof tiles, fragments of Byzantine pottery, lamps, coins, glass fragments, iron nails, and animal bones were found on and around the entrance of Bil.1. ¹⁴C dating was determined from carbon taken from the bottom of the building’s mosaic floor: Bil.1 (J14) mosaic floor, AD 60–480; Bil.1 (H11) mosaic floor foundation wall, AD 340–430 (4).

Building 2 (Bil.2); Terrace Facility

The Terrace facility (FIGS. 7 and 9) was attached to the north of Bil.1. It had a plain mosaic floor, the center of which was a small square floor (about 13x7m) paved by slabs. There was a stylobate around the square; columns might have stood there. On the east side of these, only fragments of the basalt foundation remain, and reconstruction is difficult.

Building 3 (Bil.3)

Bil. 3 (FIGS. 10 and 11) is 22x9m in size and lies in a north–south direction. One of the southern rooms is further divided into two and covered by a mosaic with a geometric design; the other southern room and the north end of Bil.3 are also covered by a mosaic, and the center room of Bil.3 is paved by limestone. There are three entrances in the eastern side of the wall, and every room can be reached through the entrance. ¹⁴C dating from carbon in the mosaic beds of Bil.3 was AD 330–430 and 420–560. ¹⁴C dating from cave R13 under the northwest foundation of Bil. 3 was AD 350–370 and AD 380–440. Incidentally, the R13 cave was sealed off and buried to build Bil.3.

Building 6 (Bil.6)

The related facilities (FIGS. 12 and 13: 1–3) built across the east side passage of Bil.3 were about 7.5x10m in size, and heart-shaped basalt pillars stood at the two corners (probably originally the four corners). Between the heart-shaped pillars, basalt columns were lined up so as to surround the stage-like remains. These remains are not in a very good state of preservation, and the overall shape is partly unknown.

Building 7 (Bil.7)

Bil.7 (FIG. 14) was built below Bil.3 and Bil.6, and the walls of Bil.3 and Bil.6

were built on the great wall of Bil.7. This suggests that the direction of Bil.3 and Bil.6 was not the same as that of Bil.1 in the same period (early Byzantine), but rather coincided with that of Bil.7 in the late Roman period, which is the foundation wall. Although the overall plan of Bil.7 is not clear, relics from the late Roman period could be found near the walls and on the floor of Bil.7, which were confirmed from the northern end (Grid R13) and the eastern end passage (Grid M20) of the excavation area.

Buildings 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6

Bil.6 has been reconstructed or reused. Bil.5 was possibly constructed to be lined with small rooms along the base wall of Bil.1 by piling up drums and covering the roof with a tent. Since there are not many excavated artifacts, it is difficult to determine the period of construction, but it may have been in the Umayyad period (FIG. 15).

Summary of Architecture

Bil.4 (Roman House) seems to be a typical Roman house with an atrium and cellar (hypogeum) dating to the middle of the third century. Fresco paintings seemed to have existed on the walls, as red and blue fragments have been excavated. Terracotta, Roman glass, Roman lamps, African red slip ware, and other wares have been found. Roman culture was imported into Umm Qays. The end of the Roman period in the third century produced new types of artifacts that were used in parallel with old types.

The Roman House was abandoned and was covered by a huge amount of soil. The southern area of the Forum to the south of the Decumanus Maximus was also covered with a huge amount of soil, although the reason is still not clear. Bil.1, with its mosaic floor, was built on top of Bil.4. Bil.1 is dated to the

fourth century AD by ^{14}C , as well as by the presence of early Byzantine pottery, lamps, coins, the geometric design of mosaic, a medallion molded with a cross and a woman (FIG. 12), and a lamp with a cross (FIG. 13.1). Since these artifacts belong to the early Byzantine period and are also related to the Christian church, it can be said that Bil.1 is a Christian church, which may be one of the oldest churches in Jordan. In particular, the medallion seems to be strongly associated with Christians, which is one of the major reasons for identifying Bil.1 as a Christian church.

Chronology of Coins

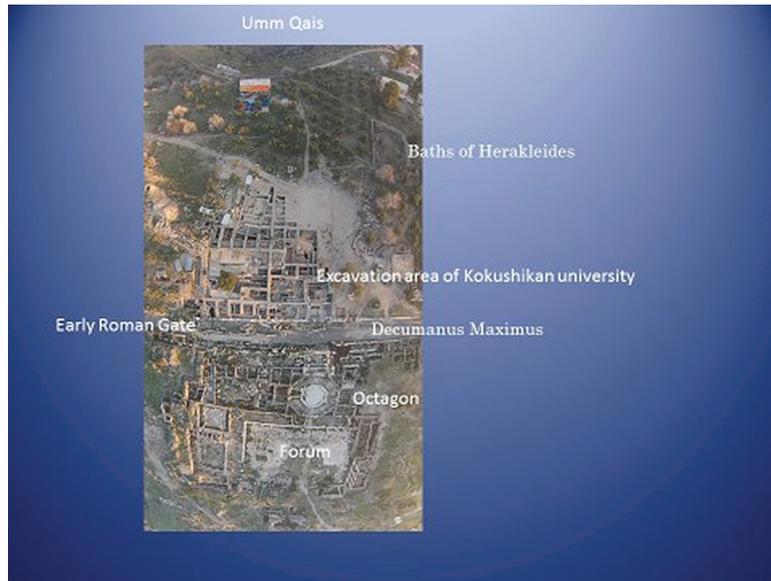
It is possible to read various types of information from coins: not only age, name of emperors and empresses, and minted coinage, but also trends of the times in coins. Frequency of usage of coins suddenly increased with Constantine I (AD 314–340) (TABLE 1; FIG. 16).

Since these correspond with the Milan Decree in 313 and the fact that it is close to the time of construction of the Bil.1 Christian church, it might be assumed to date to the early Byzantine period. It is also to be noted that the names of successive generations of emperors after Constantine I appear.

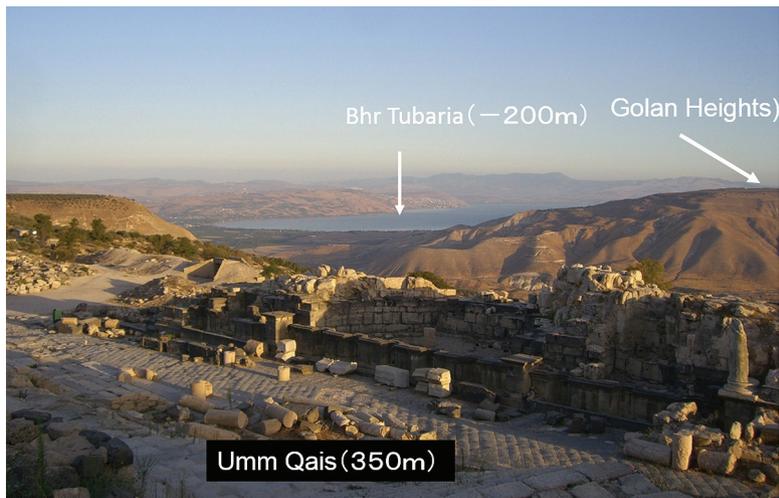
It seems that economic or religious activities were carried out during these times. However, coins after Marcianus (AD 450–474) suddenly decrease in number, and no coins have been unearthed that date later than those. In addition, the fact that there is no trace of activity indicates that buildings in the area were no longer in use. This trend is also seen with excavated pottery and lamps, and no artifacts from the late Byzantine period has been found, indicating that the area was abandoned during this period. What happened then is a subject for future research.

Table 1. List of coins unearthed by the excavations (edited from Ezoë 2010; 2013; 2014; 2015).

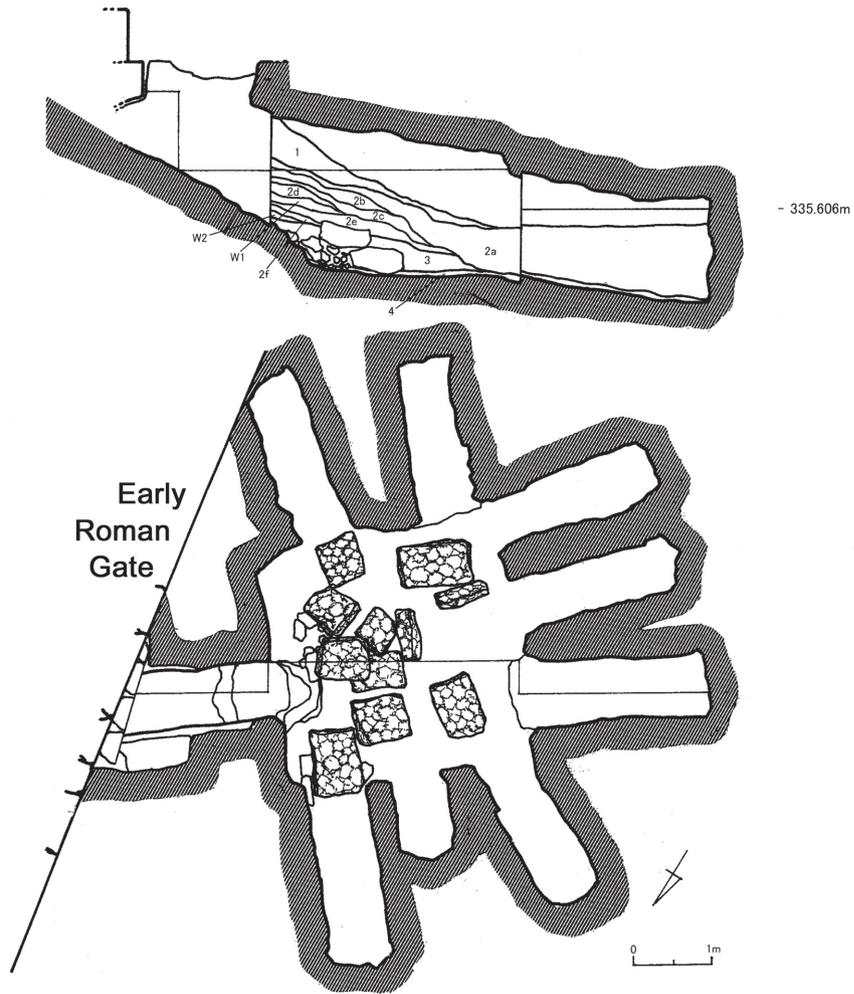
DATE	NUMBER	GOVERNMENT/DEDICATEE	NOTES
165–63 BC	4		
63–48 BC	6		
AD 41–54	2	Claudius	
AD 73–74	1	Titus	
AD 161–169	1	Lucius	
AD 270	1	Divus Claudius	
AD 297	2	Diocletian	
AD 314–340	5	Constantine	
AD 324	1	Crispus	
AD 325–326	1	Helena	
AD 325–361	23	Constantius II	
AD 337–340	2	Constantinople	
AD 335–348	4	Constans	
AD 337–348	2	Divus Constantine	
AD 351–355	2	Constantus Gallus	
AD 375–392	11	Valentinian II	
AD 367–375	1	Valens	
AD 379–392	11	Theodosius I	
AD 383–407	15	Arcadius	
AD 404–435	4	Theodosius II	
AD 450–474	5	Marcianus	
Indet. AD	1	Umayyad Tiberias ? (Tabariyya)	Within a circle
AD 1965	1	The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	Value within circle above date and star Beaded circle around the rim. Ten fils.
AD 1980	1	The 10 New Israel Agorot	
AD 1989	1	The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan	Value and date within wreath circle. Fifty fils.



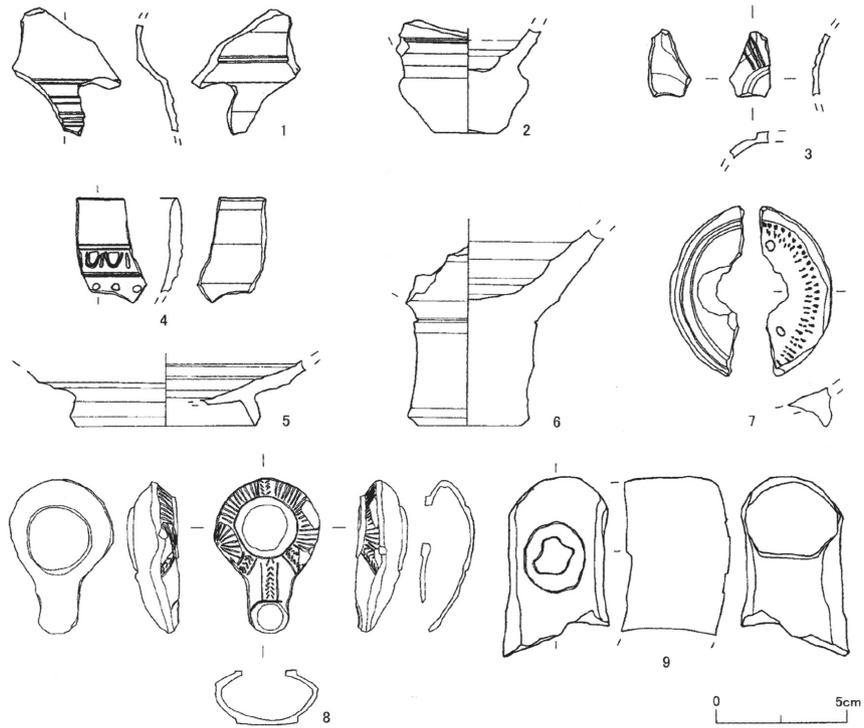
1. Excavation area of Kokushikan University (photo and editing by Ken Matsumoto).



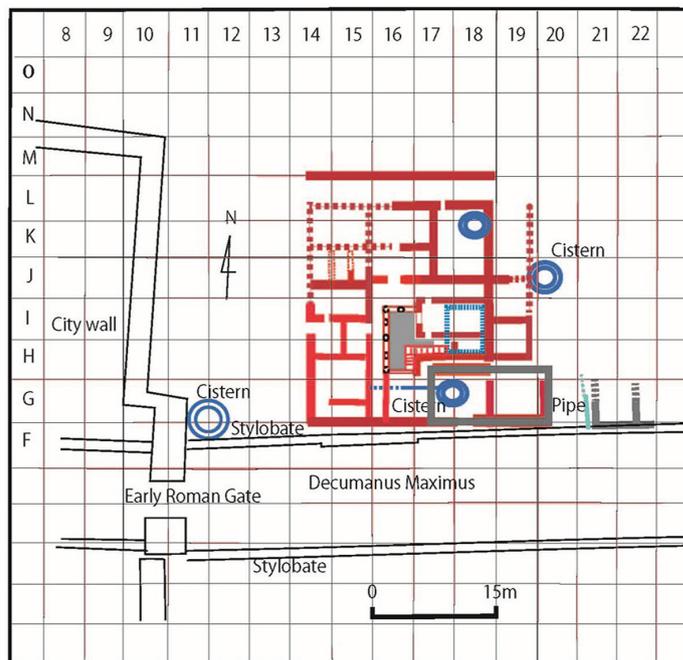
2. Landscape of Bahr Tabariyyā and Golan Heights (photo and editing by Ken Matsumoto).



3. Cross section and floor plan of the underground tomb (after Kotani 2009: 26).



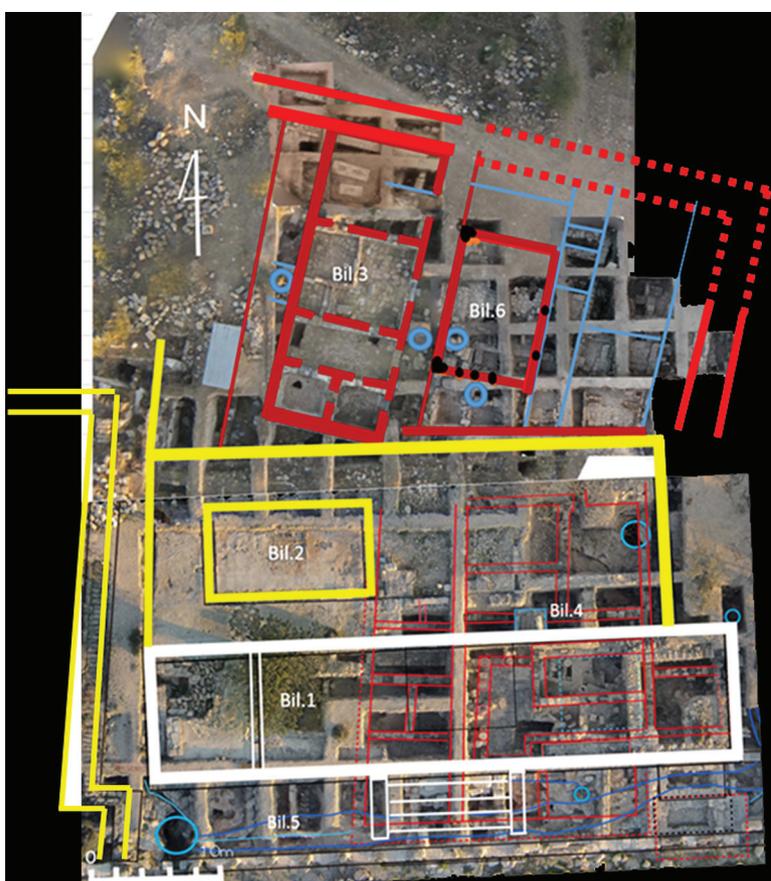
4. Artifacts excavated from the underground tomb (after Kotani 2009: 27).



5. Plan of Bil.4 (Roman House) (edited by Ken Matsumoto).



6. Plan of Bil.1 and Bil.4 (photo and editing by Ken Matsumoto).



7. Plan of Bils.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and the mosaic floor of Bil.1 (photo and editing by Ken Matsumoto).



8. Mosaic floors (Bil.1) (photos by Ken Matsumoto).



9. Plain mosaic floor (Bil.2) (photo by Ken Matsumoto).



10. Bil.3 (photo by Ken Matsumoto).



11. Mosaic floor (Bil.3) (photo by Ken Matsumoto).



12. Medallion (photo by Ken Matsumoto).



13. Lamps and stand (photos by Ken Matsumoto).



14. Part of the partition of Bil. 1 (photos by Ken Matsumoto).



15. Plan of Bils. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 (photo and editing by Ken Matsumoto).



16. Coins of Constantine (AD 314–15) and Helena (AD 325–326) (after Ezoe 2014:73 and Ezoe 2010:95).

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