

## The Gaza-Damascus Roads in the Medieval Periods

### Summary

Throughout its long history the port of Gaza, in southern Palestine, was a thriving emporium and a strategic Crossroad between Egypt, Arabia and Syria despite the fact that it was wide open on the Mediterranean and active in maritime trade, thanks to its two harbours 1. the Maioumas (Tida', al-Idrīsī 1154AD) and 2. Anthedon (Balakhia). However, the land routes were busy with international commerce with Palestine, Egypt and Transjordan. There was the coastal route of Joppa (Yafa) — Ptolemais ('Akka) and from there to Tyre, Sidon and Berythe in Phoenicia, this was an active route. Moreover, the inland roads (see FIG. 1) to Jerusalem, Nablus, Şafad, Baysān and Damascus were of special concern for trading with Syria and Mesopotamia. Another track to Bayt Jibrin/ Eleutheropoli, al-Khalil/ Hebron, al-Karak descended to the Dead sea and through Ghawr aş-Şāfi proceeded to al-Karak and continued on to Mādabā, Ḥisbān and 'Ammān. From there it could pass through al-Dayr/ Burj al-Abyaḍ, al-Badiyya, then on to 'Ajlūn and Irbid. It entered Syria by Ṭafas, al-Juwayn, Şanamayn and al-Kiswa before it reached Damascus (Demombynes 1923: 242-44).

Taking the road from Gaza one met with that segment of the road coming from Bayt Jibrin and descended to Engedi and crossed the Dead Sea, when the water was low, or the route turned around the southern tip of the sea towards Ghawr aş-Şāfi and climbed to al-Karak through Kathrabba, Madinat ar-Rās and 'Ayy (FIG. 2). This section of the track was recently surveyed and its stations were identified with more precision on the Madaba Mosaic Map (below).

### Gaza in the Recent Research

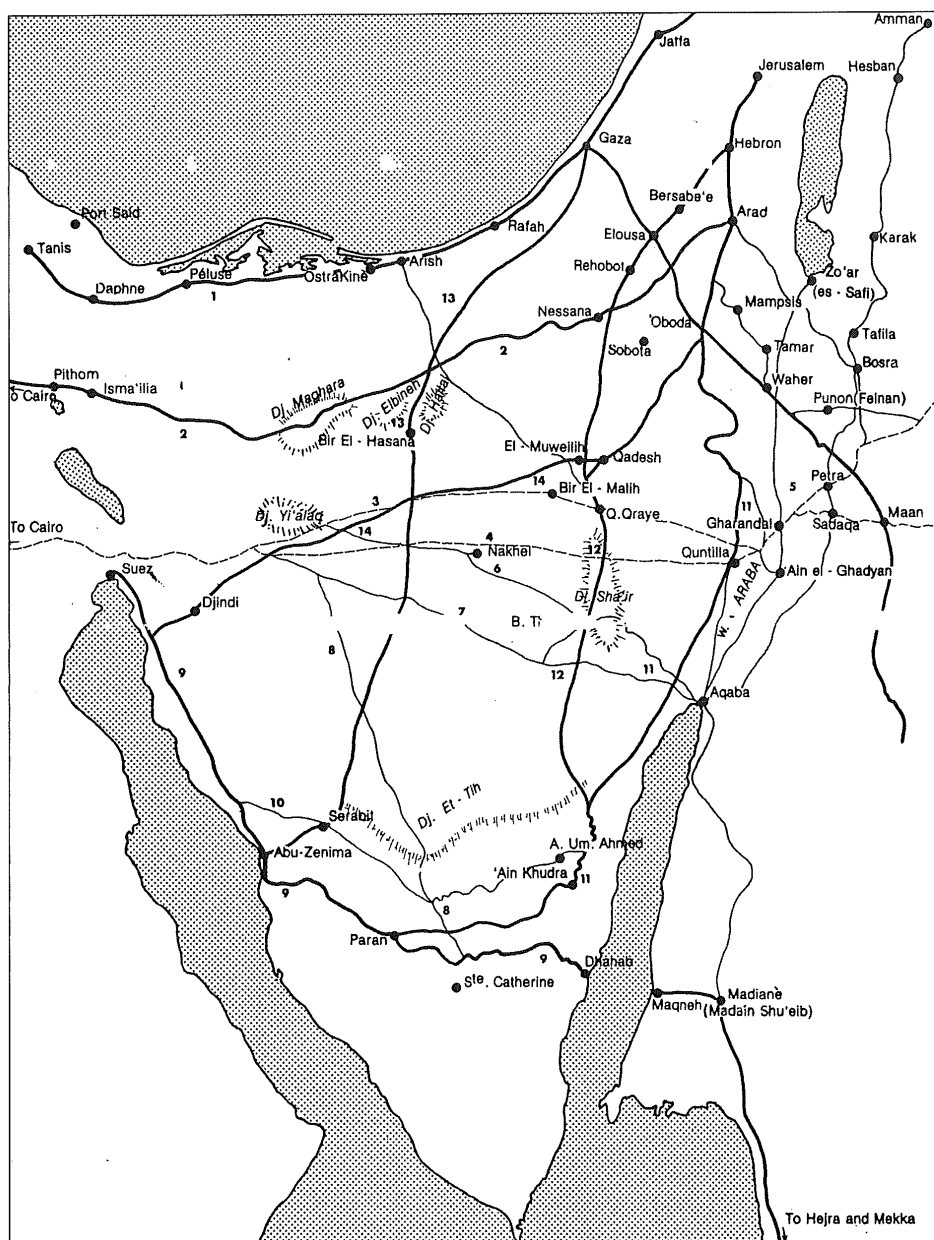
After the independence of Gaza in May 1994, there

arose a revival of interest in the city and its environs: A long-term project of excavation was started by the Ecole Biblique et Archéologique Française of Jerusalem (Humbert, Abu Hassuneh 1999). Another study was launched by Clarke *et al.*: "to examine the evidence for settlement in the Gaza region during the second Millennium BC and to assess the region's wider external contacts, specifically, with Egypt and the Mediterranean world" (2004: 31ff.). In addition a well documented monograph by Butt 1995 offers a useful synthesis on the history and archaeology of the Gaza Strip. These studies would gain more light from the ancient Arab chroniclers, or from the modern research studies: of the more significant ones are aṭ-Ṭabarī (915AD), Iṣṭakhri (951AD), al-'Umarī (1340AD) and adh-Dhāhiri (1425AD).

The modern publications of Abu Bakr (1994) and 'Atallah (1986) supply reliable information on the city and its environs in the Islamic periods up to recent times. The volume of W. Popper on the Mamluk roads was not available; instead, it was possible to consult Godefroy-Demombynes work: Syria in the Mamluk Period (1923). As one would expect, several studies dealt with al-'Ilāf agreement of Quraysh in Arabic, especially Daradkeh (1984) and Saḥāb (1992) (see below).

### The Road System Between Gaza and Egypt

Since Gaza and its districts were in close economic and cultural contact with Egypt and Sinai, this study will describe the network of tracks with this country. The earliest caravan road is known today as "Darb al-Gazza" which connected the city with the coastal roads of Rafaḥ (Raphia), al-'Arish (Rhincolura) and al-Farama/Pelusium. From there the travelers reached Tanis in the Eastern Delta, (see FIG. 1). This road was reported by Strabo (*Geog.*

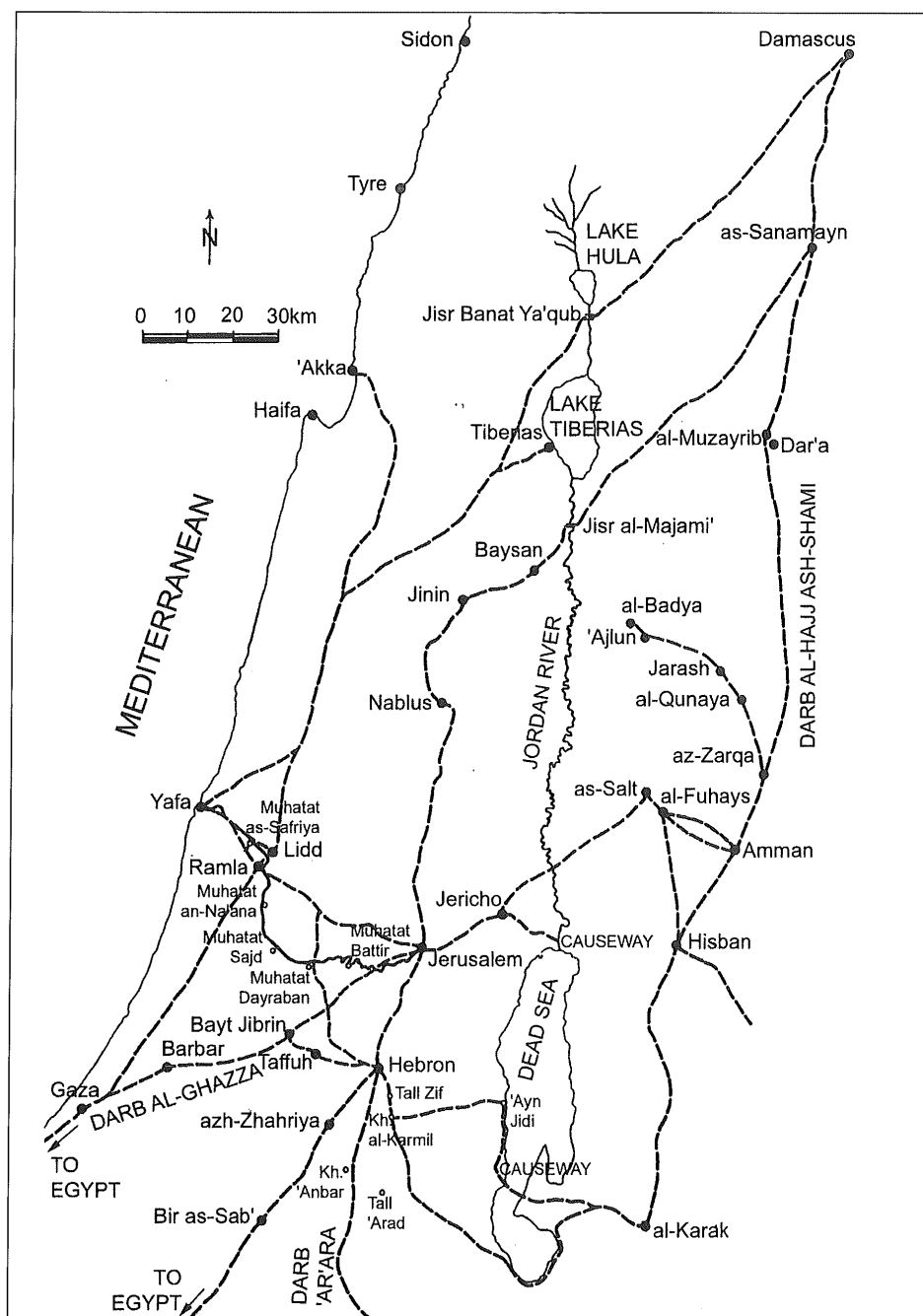


1. Darb al-Ghazza, the Earliest Road between Egypt and Gaza.

16. 2. 30) and was then called the 'Via Maris': the same route taken by past Egyptian armies penetrating into Palestine. The first recorded campaign was that of Tothmosis III in 1468BC, who defeated a coalition of the Prince of Qadesh at Megiddo (de Vaux-1971: 93; Kafafi 2005: 55). In actuality, the first contacts between Egypt and Palestine date back to a so-called colonial period, in the first half of the fourth Millennium BC. The motive for these contacts was, according to Miroshedji, "the rise of complex societies in need of raw material, or prestigious objects which they could purchase from nearby countries" (Giroud 2000: 28-29). The first exchange of material was made via caravans of donkeys which carried aromatics from Arabia, mainly myrrh and frankincense, in addition to nard,

cinnamon and precious stones from India (Giroud 2000: 42-44). However, of more concern to the Egyptians were the copper mines in the "Araba valley" of Jordan (Hauptmann, Weisgerber, 1987: 419-437; Levy *et al.* 2001: 159-187). Other rich copper mines were exploited in Timna', in the Negeueb, north of Ayla ('Aqaba), Pratico 1993; Rothenburg 1972, 1988. Of special concern to the Pharaohs was the bitumen of the Dead Sea, because of its use in the mummification process (Diodorus, XIX, 99).

To reach Gaza, the caravan could proceed from the 'Araba Valley to Kuntillat, Gharandal and from there to 'Oboda, Elusa and Gaza (FIG. 3). In his 'Roman 'Aqaba Project' Parker (1998: 388-89) drew attention to the large amount of imported jars

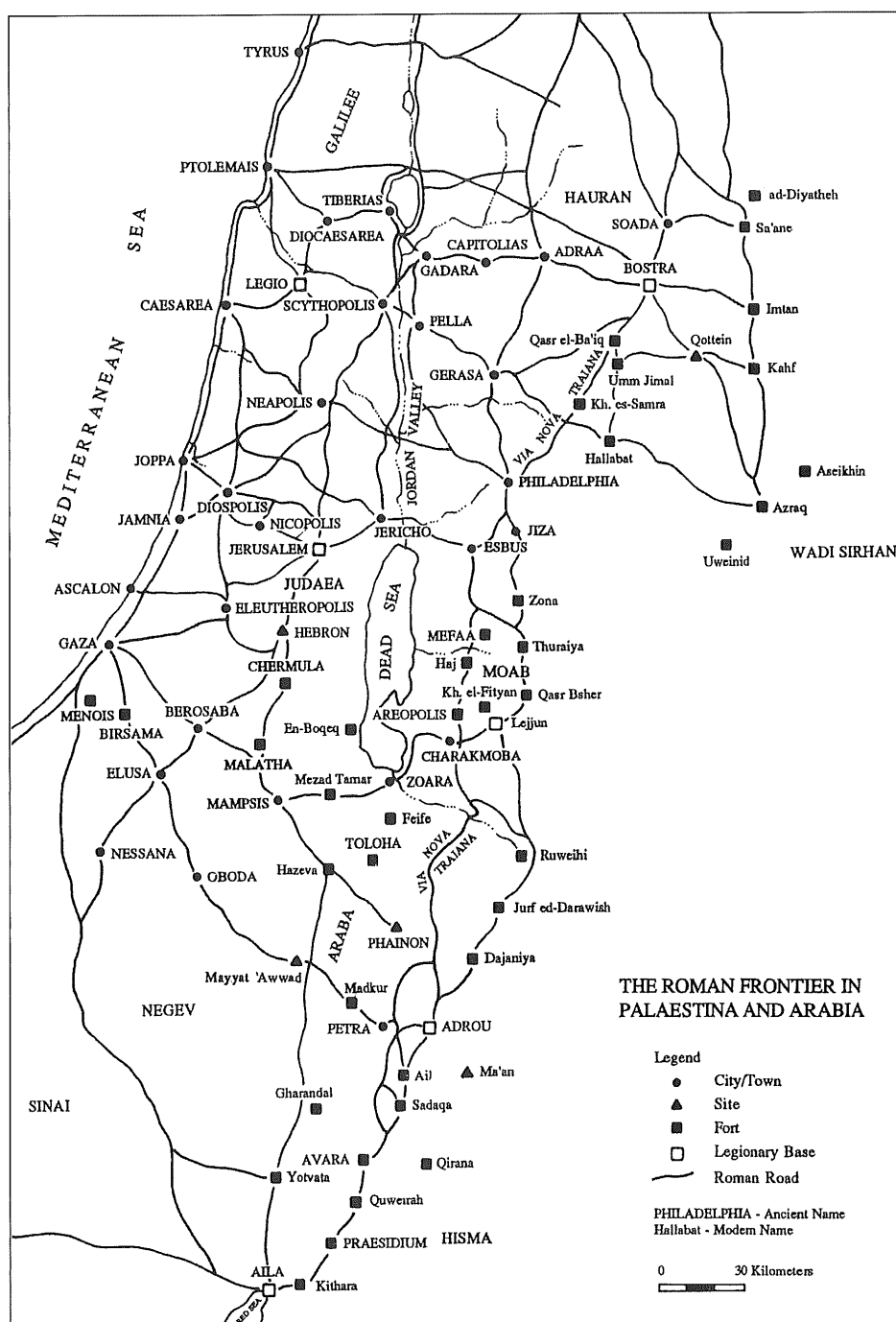


2. The Roads from Gaza to al-Karak and Damascus.

from Gaza and Egypt through Wādī 'Araba. Another road may have started from Petra, Bīr Madhkūr in the 'Araba Valley and penetrate into the desert by Mayyat 'Awwad (Moa of the Madaba Mosaic Map?) (see FIG. 3).

In the summer of 1998, a caravan expedition was organized with the intention of training tourist guides by following the "Incense Road" from Petra to Gaza. The writer was lucky to have been able to participate in this expedition which reached Gaza in four days under the leadership of A. Goren (2000: 105-115). The first station in the desert was Mayyat 'Awwad, possibly Moa of the Madaba mo-

saic map. A fort at this station controlled a caravan-serai close to a hidden cistern in a depression. The next stations were Wādī 'Omer and Qasra: at the latter we halted where a fort was built at the summit of a hill. After this station the caravan crossed the deep valley of Neqarot where another fort controlled the track. It included several rooms around a central courtyard; the water supply came from a cistern concealed in a little valley. This hidden water reservoir was part of the Nabataean long Traffic policy. After the ascent of Palm Grove of Ma'ale Deqalim, the road traversed the ancient volcano site of Makhtesh Ramon, an impressive valley of



3. The road System from Aila-‘Aqaba to Gaza through Wādi ‘Araba and the Negeub, after Parker “Limes XIX, Supplying the Roman Army on the Arabian Frontier” (Parker 2005: 415-420).

40km in length and 10km in width. This natural geological fault was formed at the same period as the rift valley of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. The 400m climb along a winding track, protected with a retaining wall, was exhausting for our camels. At the summit a small fort offered a much welcomed rest and the hidden cistern nearby supplied cool water to the caravaneers.

The next station was the famous city of ‘Obodat (‘Avdat), so named after the Nabataean King ‘Obodat I, the God, who died in this desert after his victory over the Seleucid King Antiochus XII in

85BC. A substantial military camp by this famous station was built by the Nabataeans and re-used during the Roman-Byzantine periods. Churches were built here, as was a large reception hall. The churches date from the fourth to the sixth century AD and were built over Nabataean temples and monuments (Negev 1986: 40-43).

Thereafter the caravan stopped at Khalasa/Elusa at the outer limit of the desert and the cultivated land. A good amount of Nabataean pottery was reported at the ruins of this city and the earliest Nabataean inscription was found there (Negev 1986). A

festival was celebrated to the goddess al-'Uzza as late as the Byzantine period (Starcky 1966: col. 1003).

To the north of Khalasa, the Wādī Besor was rich in abundant water springs. We crossed it on a bridge that was the last refreshing halt before Gaza. The city is built on a hill 4km from the sand dunes and the sea, and is surrounded by opulent groves of citrus, vine and fig trees. The oranges of Gaza are famous all over the world, but more famous are the two ports of Maioumas and Anthedon.

When Alexander the Great captured Gaza after a long siege in 331BC, he conveyed to Leonidas, his tutor, 500 talents of frankincense and 100 of myrrh to allow him to be lavish with the gods when performing a sacrifice in the temple (Plutarch, *Vita Alexander*, 25: 6). This is, indeed, good testimony that the port of Gaza was the terminal of Arabian aromatics in the fourth century BC.

Heading from Egypt or Petra, the caravaneers crossed the Wādī al-Ghazza, an ancient riverbed, where several archaeological sites have been investigated: the earlier excavations were conducted by Flinders Petrie in 1926-27, at Tall Jemmeh, about 10km south of Gaza (Petrie). This site was identified with Yurza of the 'Amarna texts (1900-1550) and was occupied by the Philistines, and later by the Assyrians (Aharoni 1956; Mazar 1952). The next important mound was Tall al-'Ajjul, 6km south-east of Gaza. The cemeteries in this site were exceptionally rich in gold jewellery from the time of the campaign of Ahmose against the city; it was identified with Sharuhēn of the Egyptian Annals (Kempinski 1993: 52-53). Tall as-Sakan, 5km south of Gaza on the way between Egypt and Palestine, was recognized in 1998, following modern building operations. A rich archaeological material was recovered at the site and dated to the Early Bronze period, 3300-2350BC (Miroschedji and Sadeq 2000: 101). In the 3 soundings A-C, the archaeological occupation included two phases:

- 1) An Egyptian phase consisting of levels A9-A6, about 2.5m thick and dating to the pre-dynastic period (fourth-third millennium BC), corresponding to the EBI in Palestine.
- 2) A Canaanite phase, levels 5-1, about 6m thick.

The most distinctive features were the fortifications in A8, which consisted of 3 successive walls dating from the pre-dynastic period, the oldest fortifications of mud-brick in both Egypt and Palestine (Miroschedji and Sadeq 2001: 34-35). As expected, the ceramic finds in these levels were 90-95% of Egyptian origin, the rest being of a local Canaanite fabric. The finds included mainly holemouth jars usually dated to the end of the EBI (3200-3000BC).

### The Issue of 'Ilāf Quraysh

It was noted above that Gaza was the terminal of the aromatics trade, at least in the Fourth century BC when Alexander the Great captured the city. The Nabataeans, who took over this lucrative trade from the Minaeans, most probably in the second century BC, transported the spices to the port of Gaza and were in conflict with the Hasmonean Prince Alexander Jannaeus who occupied the city around 100BC. The Gazaeans asked for Aretas II's help, but the latter was unable to secure them although he did eventually recover the city. The Nabataeans continued to act as middlemen for the trade of spices from south Arabia or from the Arabian-Persian Gulf until late in the Byzantine period. According to the Petra papayri, a citizen of Petra, Theodoros son of Obodianos, had some heritage in Gaza. He traveled to the city in 593 (see Lehtinen in Frösen *et al.* 2003: 9-10). In his account of the battle of Tabuk, al-Waqidi reports that the Nabataeans supplied al-Medineh/Yathreb with white flour and oil (*zayt*) (see Lehtinen in Frösen *et al.* 2003: 9-10) (Waqidi, *Maghazi* 3: 989 after Hamarneh 1990: 428).

On the rise of Islam, "news of Syria used to reach the city of Medina every day because of the great number of Nabataeans who arrived there" (Waqidi in Hamarneh 1990). Crone is skeptical about the tradition of the long distance Meccan trade and the Quraysh caravans "According to one exegete, it was on the rise of Islam that the international trade of the Meccans came to an end" (1987: 111). Furthermore she estimated that: "the stories on the beginning and end of the Meccan trade are legends told in explanation of the Quran, not of the past" (1987: 114)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> A judicious review of this volume was published by Serjeant R.B. in JAOS, 111, 1990 and by Heck, G.W., "Arabia Without Spices: An Alternate Hypothesis" in JAOS, 123.3 (2003): 547-575. In his review, Serjeant stated that Crone's "novel theories to be sure, but founded upon misinterpretation, misunderstanding of sources, even

at times incorrect translations of Arabic" *op.cit.*: 472. The article of Heck is well balanced and asserts that perfumes from Yemen were traded to Makkah and that grains were imported from Syria in the sixth-seventh century AD (*op.cit.* 572-73).

The 'Ilāf Quraysh, in fact, was the commercial agreement which was settled, according to Muslim tradition, by Hashim bin 'Abd Manāf, the ancestor of Prophet Muḥammad, for the safe passage of Arabian caravans in Syria. This took place at the beginning of the sixth century AD (Ya'qubi, I, 242; Daradkeh 1988: 102). According to Daradkeh, the date of Hashim can be deduced from the fact that he was contemporaneous with al-Ḥarith bin 'Amr al-Kindi, a leader of Dumat al-Jandal (Adumatu), probably met with a governor of Syria — not with the emperor himself. He was known for his generosity: he used to slaughter a sheep everyday and invite the people around him to eat. According to Ya'qubi, he was reported to Caesar who sent him a messenger and was pleased with his well-mannered speeches. Hashim said: "O king, I belong to a people who are the traders of Arabs; write for them a permission granting them a safe passage for them and their caravans". Caesar granted him his wish and Hashim left. Each time he passed in a camp of Arabs in Syria, Hashim took the 'Ilāf from their dignitaries to secure safe passage for the caravans in their dominions (Ya'qubi, I: 243). Crone considers this tradition to be a legend of the Arab storytellers on the grounds that the Meccan trade "used to be purely local" (1987: 109). However, it is a fact that the Nabataean and the Palmyrene caravans conveyed foodstuffs to Mecca and Medina, as noted above around the advent of Islam. Furthermore, a few historical facts cannot be denied: the Muslim raid in the year 2 of al-Hijra on a caravan of Quraysh is acknowledged by Crone who analyzed the four battles of Badr (1987: 226-230). That there were contradictions among the story-tellers about the exact month of the encounter does not negate their historicity. The Arab chroniclers, such as Istakhri and Ibn Ḥawqal, reported that the tomb of Hashim bin 'Abd Manāf is in Gaza "and here Omar ibn al-Khattab in al-Jahilyyeh (pre-Islamic period) grew rich for this place was a great market for the people of al-Ḥijaz" (Istakhri, quoted by Le Strange 1965: 442).

In another recollection by aṭ-Ṭabari, II, 2002, 128, Abu Sufian b. Ḥarb reported that he traveled with some traders of Quraysh to Syria and reached Gaza "in the year Heraclius campaigned against the Persians who occupied his land, drove them out and retrieved from them the greatest Cross", then went on foot from Ḥums to pray in Jerusalem" (aṭ-Ṭabari, 2002: 129). This was in 628, when

Heraclius triumphed over the Persian armies. The mention of the victory of Heraclius by aṭ-Ṭabari was an obvious pretext to introduce Heraclius who inquired about the Prophet Muḥammad (aṭ-Ṭabari, 2002: 129).

However, when Hashim b. 'Abd Manāf's 'Ilāf agreement is considered, a reliable historical event must be mentioned: Surat Quraysh 106 follows Surat al-Fil 105 which refers to the expedition of Abraha of Abyssinia against Mecca in 750AD, the year of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Both Surat(s) are considered to have been one unit (Shahid 1981: 429-436), therefore the 'Ilāf agreement must have preceded 750AD. This would accord with Hashim's trade treaty initiative in the early sixth century AD. The tradition reported by aṭ-Ṭabari (aṭ-Ṭabari I, 2002: 504) that the three brothers of Hashim concluded the 'Ilāf agreement with the Negus of Abyssinia, with the Kisra's of Iran and a third agreement with the Kings of Ḥimyar in Yemen, could be a mere legend engendered by Hashem's trading activities. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the Ḥijazi traders reached Syria, Palestine and southern Arabia. Like the Nabataeans, they traveled to Yemen in the winter season to catch the Indian ships which arrived at the port of Qana thanks to the monsoon winds, carrying pepper, cinnamon, precious stones, together with the silk of China. In this season, the harvesting of frankincense and myrrh took place in Ḥaḍramawt, in Dhufar and in the Somali lands and was brought to Shabwa in Yemen to be transported to Petra, Gaza and Damascus. In the summertime the Meccans arrived in Ḥawran after harvest to buy grain and sell spices or clothes from Yemen.

### **The Northern Road System: Gaza-Damascus**

Starting from Gaza, the road passed by the village of Brayr and by Bayt-Jibrin/Eleutheropolis to meet with the route from al-Khalil/Hebron, and from there proceeded to Jerusalem, Nablus and Jenin. Al-'Umari notes the existence of a magnificent Khān: "of beautiful construction, very serviceable, no other caravanserai on this road is more elegant or stronger or valuable or better decorated" (1988: 248).

From this halt, the road descended to Zere'in, ancient Jizreel. A new post was built at 'Ayn Jalut, where the Mamluks defeated the Mongols in 1260AD. From Baysan the caravan passed on to Jisr al-Majami' and onward to Ṭaybat Ism, mod-

ern Ṭaybat Bani ‘Alwān, and onward to Irbid. In 1340AD al-‘Umari, who was appointed to the post of Scribe in Damascus, recommended this station to be shifted from Ṭaybat Ism to the nearby village of Zaḥar. This was functional advice, since the road to the Jordan valley (Waqas) is short, 7km, compared

with the road from Ṭaybat Ism, which is a tortuous 10km up and down a rigid slope (al-‘Umari 1988: 248). At this modern village (Ṭaybat Ism), ancient ruins are visible among the houses and the re-built mosque still has, in its eastern wall, a fragmentary Mamluk inscription — unfortunately much erased (FIGS. 4, 5).

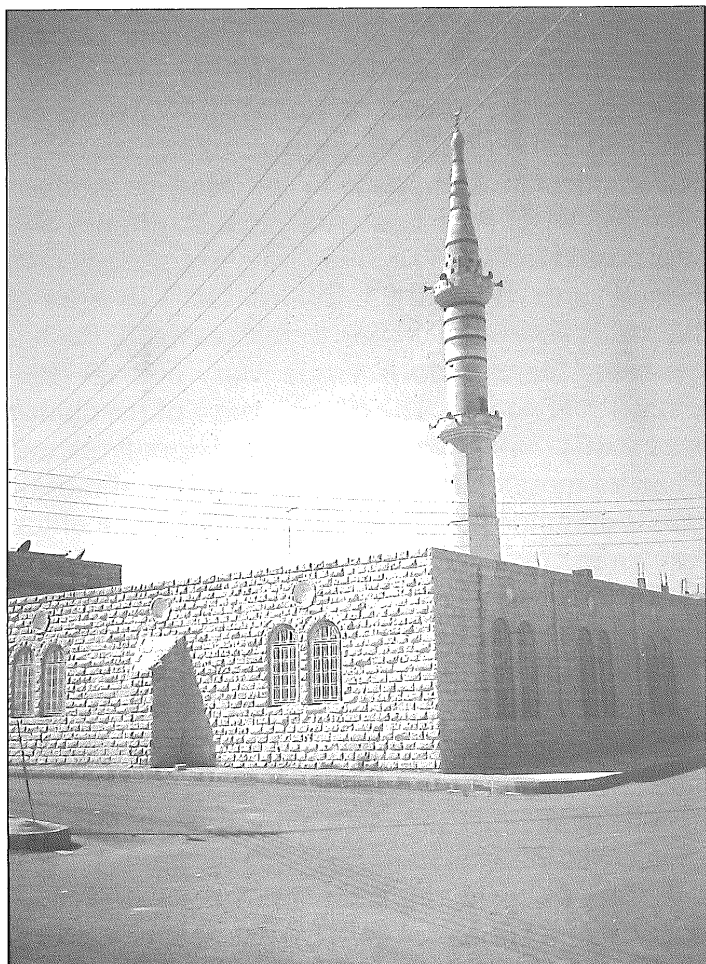
A direct, but longer, track could have departed from ar-Ramla, a city built by Sulayman bin ‘Abd al-Malik in 90H/ 708AD. It would proceed north to Nazaret, Tiberias and cross the Jordan River at Jisr Banāt Ya‘qub from there to Damascus (see Abu-Bakr 1994: fig. 7).

### The Southern Tracks By Karak

The first haltstop from Gaza on this track route was Mulaqis (or Umm Laqis), then Bayt Jibrin onward to al-Khalil/Hebron, (Khirbat al-Karmel); from whence it descended to ‘En Gedi. At the Dead Sea it was possible to cross the ‘Causeway of the Lisan’ if the water was low, or to turn around the southern tip of the sea to Ghawr aṣ-Ṣāfi (Zoar or Zaghar). In Medieval times this settlement was a major center for the production of sugar cane at the mills of Ṭawāḥin as-Sukkar<sup>2</sup>. It was also a centre for indigo.

At the request of Lot, Yahwa agreed to save this “little town” from destruction when he annihilated both Sodom and Ghomora (Genesis 19: 23-29). Lot and his two daughters were allowed to take refuge in a cave in the hills, perhaps that excavated and identified by Politis (1997: 341-350). Politis identified ancient Zoar at Khirbat ash-Shaykh ‘Īsā (1998: 627-633). The sites of this area are represented on the Madaba mosaic map: the Church of Saint Lot is depicted above Zoar. Aia and Tharais are located to the left (Alliata and Piccirillo 1999: 61). The first site was identified with ‘Ayy, south of Karak. (Canova, 1854: LXIV, following Eusibius’ Onomasticon 10, 12). According to Miller (1991: 163-166), the ruins of Muḥayy on the junction of the *Via Nova* to the desert are better candidates to the site of Aia. However this site, well-known for its remarkable Byzantine structures and cemeteries, is far from the route from Zoar to Karak.

Tharais is more difficult to locate: Alt (1937) placed it at Khirbat at-Tara‘in, southwest of Karak, but according to Canova, (1954: LXIV) there are



4. Ṭaybat Ism, the modern Mosque from south-east.



5. Ṭaybat Ism, a Mamluk Arabic inscription engaged in the eastern wall of the modern mosque.

<sup>2</sup> Politis suggests that the Arabic name of sukkar was derived from the name *Zoar-Zaghar* (1998: 630), but this is not certain because

the village has this name in the Old Testament (Genesis 19: 20).



no Byzantine remains on this site. Germer-Durand (1895) identified it with Dhāt Rās on the northern edge of Wādī al-Ḥasā. Several Nabataean to Byzantine monuments are known in this village. Students of Mu'tah University found a mosaic floor, damaged by vandals that did not belong to a church (H. Mahasneh *pers. comm.*).<sup>3</sup> In 1979 S. Mittmann explored the road from Zoar to Karak (FIG. 2). By careful surveying of the area he successfully identified the site of Lu'ith in the Nabataean inscription of Mādabā, dated to the 46th year of Aretas IV — equivalent to 37AD. The inscription was an epitaph of two persons named 'Ytybl/Aytibel, a grandfather and grandson buried in Madaba; the grandson was the military commander at Luḥitu and 'Abrata. Mittmann identified the camp of Luḥitu with Kathrabba, southwest of Karak (Mittmann 1982: 175-180). He located a 5.70m wide Roman road and noted: "nowhere in Palestine has a Roman road been so well preserved (1982: 178). A Nabataean military camp was discovered in the vicinity of Kathrabba. A Nabataean horned basalt capital, together with a column drum and base, found in a courtyard of the east border of the terrace are good evidence of Nabataean occupation (Mittmann 1982: 180). Mittmann noted that the "road was apparently unpaved", but the rock-bed was exposed and smoothed "under the thin layer of earth" (Ben-David 2003: 179). Recently, however, C. Ben-David (2003: pl. 11) photographed a long segment of the road from Kathrabba to the Dead Sea. Ben-David identifies Tharais of the Madaba mosaic map with the ruins of Madinat al-Ras, overlooking the Roman road to Ghawr aṣ-Ṣāfi (Zoar) (Ben-David 2003: 255-56). This site includes a group of buildings "some built of dressed stones, with a large water cistern" (Ben-David 2003: 255). Young 'Aytybel was the commander (*strategos*) of both Luḥitu and 'Abrata. 'Abrata means a ford' or causeway. It was not identified by Mittmann and probably corresponds to the Lisan passage on the Dead Sea (see FIG. 2).

### From Karak to Ḥisbān

This route follows the King's Highway via Rabba/Areopolis to Qaṣr ar-Rabba/Bayt Karm and traverses the Wādī al-Mūjib/Arnon, a dreadful and dangerous canyon according to Eusibius: "*hor-*

*ribilem et periculosum*" (Onomasticon, 11, 15). This arduous road was first paved by King Mesha' of Moab, according to line 26 on his famous stele (Lemaire 1986: 121). It was re-paved under Trajan by the governor of the Provincia Arabia, between 111-114AD, and was protected by forts and military camps. A large camp overlooks the southern rim of the valley. On the same southern slope a small station was reported by Miller (1979: 84). The segment between Aila and Mādabā was terminated in 111-112AD. A segment of the east-west paved street was exposed in the Madaba Archaeological Park. It is laid with large flagstones and was coated in the Byzantine/Umayyad periods with beaten earth (Bikai 1996: 29-30). On both sides of the street several churches were excavated, the latest being the church of Virgin Mary 667AD (Piccirillo 1998: 41-66). The circular nave of the church was partly built over the Hall of Hippolytus and Phaedra mosaic. This type of mythological mosaic was a common expression of the Byzantine elites, known in Greek as the "*Paideia*".

Two roads led to Ḥisbān in the Roman/Byzantine period: the *Via Nova Triana* and the Jordan Valley Road to Livias/Tall ar-Rāma, Jericho and Jerusalem. This was the route taken by the Christian Pilgrim Egeria at the end of the fourth century AD (Alliata 1999: 121-124). After Livias, it climbs to Wādī Ḥisbān and halts at the large camp of Khirbat al-Maḥaṭṭa (Ibach 1994: 65-79). Near that site, a substantial segment of the paved road, about half a kilometer, was rediscovered by a team of the Andrews University; its width averaged 4.90 to 5.80m (Ibach 1994: 70). It was well known that Ḥisbān was the administrative center of the Balqā' in the Ayyubid-Mamluk periods and the residence of the governor.<sup>4</sup> Contacts with Karak via the *Via Nova*, and with Gaza via the Jordan Valley Road were continuous in the Medieval period.

### From Ḥisbān to Burj al-Abyaḍ, al-Badiyya and 'Ajlūn

In his exploration of the as-Salt region, de Vaux (1967: 147-149) identified the ruins of ad-Dayr (on the track from 'Ammān to al-Fuḥays and as-Salt), with the Mamluk station of Burj al-Abyaḍ. This rounded tower, which was constructed with roughly dressed huge blocks, is about 10m in diameter

<sup>3</sup> The late Tayseer 'Attiyyat reported this floor in the local newspapers.

<sup>4</sup> The governor's administrative headquarters was excavated and a complete bath complex was exposed (De Vries 1986: 223-235).



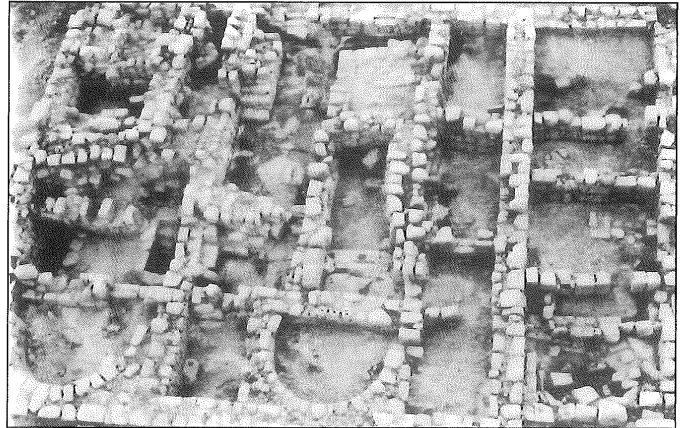


6. Burj al-Abyaḍ/ ad-Dayr from the east.



7. Burj al-Abyaḍ/ ad-Dayr from inside, notice the apse looking west.

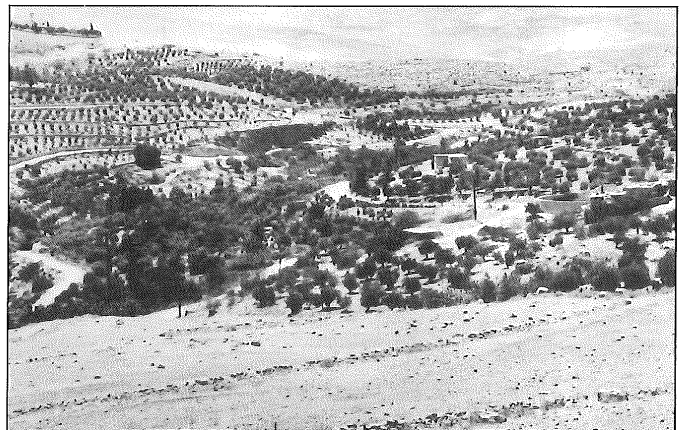
(FIGS. 6, 7). The tower was excavated by Sa‘ad al-Hadidi and Yazid ‘Aliyyan (2002: 50-51). From the main gate one moves into a circular space divided in two — in the eastern half an apse for a church was added (FIG. 7). A wine press was carved in an open rock surface to the north. Several heaps of Iron slag can be observed around the tower and prove that weapons were produced in this station. The Iron ore was imported, most probably from Maghārat al-Warda in the ‘Ajlūn hills. To reach the mine the road passed via al-Fuḥays, al-Yazīdiyya, az-Za‘tari, then to Maghārat al-Warda. From this Iron mine, the track passed via al-Badiyya at 15km from the modern road to ‘Ajlūn/‘Anjara. The ruins opposite the village of Ballāṣ, cover an area of 150 by 50m (Mittman 1970: 84, ‘el-Bediye’). At the northern entrance of the site a rectangular structure might have been a control post. The archaeological remains include 3 churches, side by side (FIG. 8), and a mosque (Shamayleh 2002: 24-33). The 3 churches were paved with coloured mosaic tiles, and were re-used in the Islamic period as dwell-



8. Al-Badiyya three churches, looking east, after (al-Muheisen 2002).

ings with the addition of inner walls. A cave, which is accessible from the nave of one churches, functioned as a wine press, dating to the late Roman and early Byzantine periods. (Shamayleh 2002: 29-30). A tower on the eastern hill was built with huge dressed blocks of 1.75 by 1m, and arranged in the header-stretcher technique, a building system well known in the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Shamayleh 2002: 17). This station was formed a stopping point between Burj al-Abyaḍ, ‘Ajlūn, the Jordan Valley, by way of Wādi Rājil and from there to Jericho, Jerusalem and Gaza.

In his description of the road system Khalil adh-Dhāhiri, 1425AD, recorded the following stations from Ḥisbān to Damascus: al-Burj al-Abyaḍ, al-Baradiyya, and al-Qunayya. Al-Baradiyya was not identified by de Vaux (1967: 149). It might be a corruption of al-Badiyya. As for al-Qunayya, de Vaux confused it with another site, although it is a major station with abundant springs and a water mill (FIGS. 9, 10); it lies between Zarqā’-Sukhna and the Jarash crossroad at exactly 23km from al-Qunayya. This was, in fact, a detour on the direct



9. Al-Qunayya village (general view).



10. Al-Qunayya water mill.

road to Damascus, but it was a good station because of the springs and the rich pasture land. The modern village on the eastern hill preserves some Ottoman old houses.

### General Conclusions

The network of roads between Gaza, Egypt Arabia and Syria was complex and confusing when looked at without the help of maps. In this short contribution it is possible to present 3 maps. Nevertheless, the writer was fortunate to have been able to experience most of these routes, either by caravans or by car, except for those in the northern part of Palestine near Tiberias and Nazareth. To summarise: this road system highlights the crucial position of Gaza, on the crossroad of several civilizations. The communication line with Egypt was the most vital and natural for the Gaza strip since the Pharaohs. For Arabia, the Petra-Gaza road was the best outlet. However, this caravan road was disturbed by the

Thamudic tribes during the Mid-first century AD (Graf, after Negev 1978: 6). This argument is based on a misreading of the name “‘Aya’ in a Nabataean inscription of the Sinai (cf. Zayadine 2000: 78). On the other hand, “‘Ilāf Quraysh” can be considered historical and real because Surat Quraysh 106 and al-Fil 105 are one unit and refer to a historical event, the expedition of Abraha in 570AD. Furthermore, Gaza is known today as “Ghazzat Hāshim” in memory of the ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad who died in this city. When the Muslims fought their earlier battles against the Byzantine troops in 634AD at Datin or Tadoune, near Gaza (Hitti 1982: 148; Sadeq 2000: 78), they occupied the city peacefully in 637AD, as a testimony of the high esteem Muslims had for it. This non-violent conquest of Gaza is in striking contrast with the cruel and destructive siege of Alexander the Great of 331BC.

### References

- Abel, F.M. 1923. La Liste géographique du papyrus 71 de Zenon. *RB* 32: 409- 415.
- Abu Bakr, A.M. 1994. *Qada, Al-Khalil, 1864-1918*. Amman. University of Jordan, University of Yarmouk (Arabic).
- Aharoni, Y. 1967. *The Land Of The Bible*. In A.F Rainey (ed.), London.
- ‘Aliyyan, Y., Hadidi, S. 2002. Khirbat ad-Dayr. *Mun-jazat* 3: 50-52.
- Alt, A. 1937. Zum Romischen Strassennetz in der Moabitis. *ZDPV* 60: 240-244.
- Atallah, M.K. 1986. *Niyabat Ghazza fi al-‘ahd al-Mamluki. Beirut*. (Arabic).
- Ben David, C. 2003. Identifying Aia & Thraia to the East of the Dead Sea. *RB* 110: 249-257, Pl. I-IV.
- Bienkowski, P. and Galor, K. 2005. *Crossing the Rift, Resources, Routes, Settlement Patterns and Interaction in the wadi Arabah*. Suppl. Series 3.
- Bikai, P.M., Daily, T.A., 1996. Madaba Cultural Heritage. Amman: ACOR 30-31.
- Butt, G., 1995. *Life At the Crossroads, A History of Gaza*. Budapest.
- Canova, R., 1954. *Inscrizione e Monumenti Protochristiani del Paese di Moab*, Rome. City of the Vatican.
- Crone, P. 1987. *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*. Princeton University Press.
- Daradkeh, S.M., 1988. ‘Ilaf Quraish. Pp. 101-103 in *Buhuth fi Tarikh al-‘Arab qabl al-Islam*. Amman, (Arabic).
- Demombyns, G., 1923. *La Syrie à L’époque des Mamluks*. Paris, Geuthner.

- De Vaux, R., 1967. Histoire et topographie transjordanienne. Pp. 145-149 in *Bible et Orient*. Paris. Cerf.
- De Vries, B., 1994. Hisban in the Ayyubid & Mamluk periods. In D. Merling, L.T. Geraty (eds.), *Hisban After 25 Years*. Michigan: Andrews University.
- Erickson-Gini, T. 2005. Down to the Dead sea: Nabataean Colonization in the Negev High Lands. Pp. 157-166 in P. Bienkowski and K. Galor (eds.), *Crossing the Rift*.
- Giroud, P. 2000. Gaza à L'époque perse Pp. 40-46 in J.-B. Humbert (ed.), *Gaza méditerranéenne, Histoire et archéologie en Palestine*. Expo. Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris.
- Goren, A. 2000. *Les routes du Proche-Orient*. A. Le-maire (ed.) Le Monde laBible. Paris.
- Hamarnah, S. 1990. The Nabataeans after the Decline of their political Power: From Arabic-Islamic sources. *Aram* 2: 1 & 2: 425-436.
- Hauptmann, A. and Weisgerber, G. 1987. Archeometallurgical and Mining Archaeological Investigations in the area of Feinan, wadi Araba (Jordan). *ADAJ* 31: 419-437.
- 1992. Periods of ore Exploration and Metal Production in the Area of Feinan, Wadi Araba (Jordan). *SHAJ* IV: 61-66.
- Hitti, P.K. 1982. *History of the Arabs*. Tenth Edition. London: MacMilan Press.
- Humbert, J.-B. 2000. *Gaza méditerranéenne, Histoire et archéologie en Palestine*. Expo. Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris.
- Ibach, D. Jr. 1994. Two Roads Lead To Esbus. In D. Merling, L.T. Geraty (eds.), *Hisban After 25 Years*. Michigan: Andrews University.
- Kafafi, Z. 2005. RHB and Yeno'am, Two Late Bronze Age Sites in North Jordan. In O. al-Ghul (ed.), *Proceedings of Yarmouk Second Annual Colloquium on Epigraphy and ancient Writings*, Irbid-Jordan: Yarmouk University.
- Kempinski, A., 1993. Tell el-Ajjul. In Stern *et al.* (ed), *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 1, Jerusalem.
- Le Strange G. 1965. *Palestine Under the Moslems, A Description of Syria and the Holy Land from AD 650 to 1500*. Beirut: Khayats.
- Levy, T.E. *et al.* 2001. Early Metallurgy, Interaction and Social Change: The Jabal Hamrat Fidan (Jordan) Research Design and 1998 Archaeological Survey: Preliminary Report. *ADAJ* 45: 159-187.
- Miroschedji, P., Sadek, M. 2001. Gaza et L' Egypte de L'époque prédynastique à l'ancien empire: premiers resultants des fouilles de tall es-sakan.
- Mittmann, S. 1982. The Ascent of Luhith. *SHAJ* 1: 175-180.
- 1970. Beitrage zur Siedlungs und Territorialgeschichte des 1963. Nordlichen Ostjordanlandes, weisbaden.
- Muheisen, Z. 2002. Preliminary Report of the first season of Excavations at Khirbat el-Bediye, 1998. *Newsletter of the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology* 24(2002). Yarmuk University.
- Negev, A., 1989. Nabataean Inscriptions from 'Avdat Oboda. *IEJ* 13: 122-124.
- 1986 Nabataean Archaeology Today. N.Y & London.
- Piccirillo, M., Alliata, E. 1999. *The Madaba Map Centenary*. Jerusalem.
- Plutarch 1969. *Vita Alexander*. Trans. and Commentary: J.L Hamilton. Oxford.
- Politis, D. K. 1998. Survey and Rescue Collections in Ghor es-Safi. *ADAJ* 42: 627-634.
- Pratico, G. 1993. Nelson Gueck's Excavations at Tell el-Kheleifeh; A re-appraisal. Atlanta.
- Rothenberg, B. 1972. *Timna': Valley of the Biblical Copper Mines*. London.
- 1988. *The Egyptian Mining Temple of Timna'*. London.
- Sadeq, M. 2000. Gaza à L'époque Musulmane. In J.-B Humbert (ed.), *Gaza Méditerranéenne, Histoire et archéologie en Palestine*. France: Paris.
- Sahab, V. 1992. 'ilaf Quraish, riḥlat ash-shita' wa-ssayf. Beirut.
- Shahid, L. 1956. *Two Quranic Suras* (in Arabic) 3: 181-213.
- Shamayleh, A.R. 2002. El-Bedyeh Churches: an Architectural and analytical Study. A Master Degree, Yarmouk University (Arabic).
- Strabo 1966 *Geography*. Trans H.L Jones. London: Loeb Class. Lib.
- Starky, J. 1966. Pétra et la Nabatène. *Dic. BiB. Supp. VII*. Paris: Col. 886-1017.
- Ṭabari, Abu Ja'afar Muhammed 1966. *Tarikh al-Rusul Wal-Muluk*. M. Abu Al-Faḍil (ed.), Cairo.
- Al-'Umari, Ibn Faḍlallah 1988. *Al-Ta'areef fi al-Mustalah Ash-Shareef*. M.H. Shams-ad-Din (ed.), Lebanon: Beirut.
- Waqidi, Abu 'Abdallah Muhammed 1966. *Kitab al Maghazi*. Cairo: Dar el-Ma'aref Al-Misriyyah.
- Ya'qubi 1960. *Tarikh*. Beirut.
- Zayadine, F. 2002. The Settlement of the Arabian Tribes in South Jordan and the Sinai at the end of the First Millenium BC. *SHAJ* V11: 365-372.
- Zenon Papyri, cf. Durand, X. 2003. Des Grecs en Pal-

FAWZI ZAYADINE

estine au IIIe Siecle avant Jesus-Christ. Le Dossier  
Syrien des Archives de Zénon de Caunos, (261-252).

Paris: J. Gabalda.