

# ABILA BETWEEN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

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## Introduction

This research aims to study the relationship between the Abila society and its site through the study of historical, cultural and tourism importance for this site. In addition to the study for the local society will be comments on the illegal searching of archaeological pieces, and finally the results and recommendation.

The main reason behind choosing this subject is the absence of specialized studies in this area.

Abila lies in the north of Irbid, 15km within Ḥarthā village, which consists of three branched communities under the administration of Ḥarthā municipality. These communities are: Yarmūk (Qaraqush), Barashtā and Ḥarthā. Ḥarthā is one of Banī Kināna districts (Fig. 1).

In spite of the historical and cultural importance of this site, the available information about it is limited. This site has not been recognized for a long time either by the government or by the public establishments, which leads to minimal knowledge of it. Several important archaeological pieces were destroyed especially in the cemetery because of random looting.

There is an absence of general recognition and the lack of knowledge about the archaeological site

and the archaeological pieces, and the ability of creating good economy. In addition to the absence of recognition about the importance of this site regarding tourism and cultural aspects.

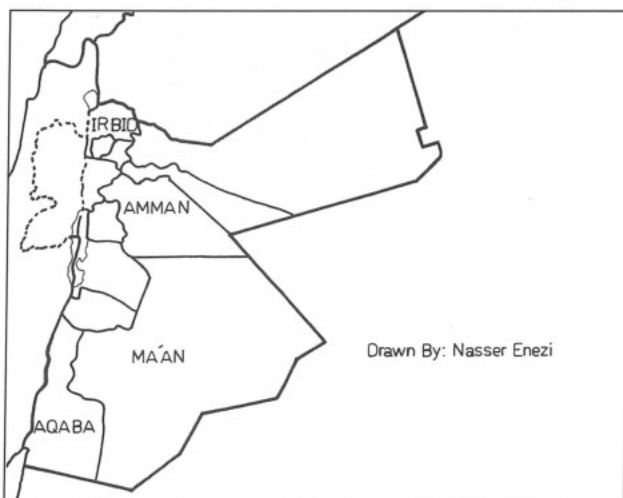
Hence, we aimed, with continuous support and correspondence between archaeological site and the local community, and people who have an interests in searching for archaeological pieces, to formulate a comprehensive and integral study. This study is of the image of the local community and ideas, in order to create suitable conditions to investigate the site in a suitable scientific manner. This approach was taken because ideas usually succeed more when not imposed, which may lead to the rejection of them because of conflicts with their thoughts and values, which may lead to failure.

The public awareness has an important rule in maintaining the archaeological sites, in addition participation in the recognition the archeological pieces and tourist values. The lack of the awareness contributes strongly in the damage of such sites, when the community does not care about the value of such sites. Hence, focusing on the creation of public awareness is very important.

## The Problem of Study

In spite of the historical and cultural importance of Quwayliba site (Abila), as one of the Decapolis, and its rich archeological elements, which may complete the archaeological elements in Jarash and Umm Qays, the tourism activities are still too limited. This site also, faces considerable looting — from inside and outside the area — which has caused destruction of some archaeological areas. Finally the local community's knowledge about this site is too limited. Hence there are many questions that should be answered:

1. What means of maintenance are lacking for this site since its discovery?
2. How could we create the public awareness and push people to recognize the importance of this site and to participate in maintaining it?
3. Who is the responsible for these mistakes? Lead-



1. Map of Jordan.

ing to increased destruction and looting.

4. How can we liaise between the local community and the archaeological site? And how could we present it to them, hence pushing them — with an integral populated base — to present it to the world for themselves?

These questions are one of many questions that need answers, which are discussed in this study.

### The Importance of Study

This is a very important study because it is the first of its kind in Jordan, which is created in a comprehensive and wide ranging manner. Hence it can be considered as a first step to be expanded and applied to many other sites in order to improve and create the awareness.

### The Study objects

This research aims to study Abila and its community in general. Also this study aims to study the phenomena of the repeated destruction to this site by the looters, and the ability to create the public awareness about location importance and its contents, and present it to the world for themselves.

### The Study Methodology

The method of descriptive study was combined with the analytical method, which relies on studying the information that is gathered from the local community. The information was collected by using the 'open presenting' and we forced to use the 'intermediate manner'. When trying to collect sensitive information we faced trouble reaching individuals by direct manner.

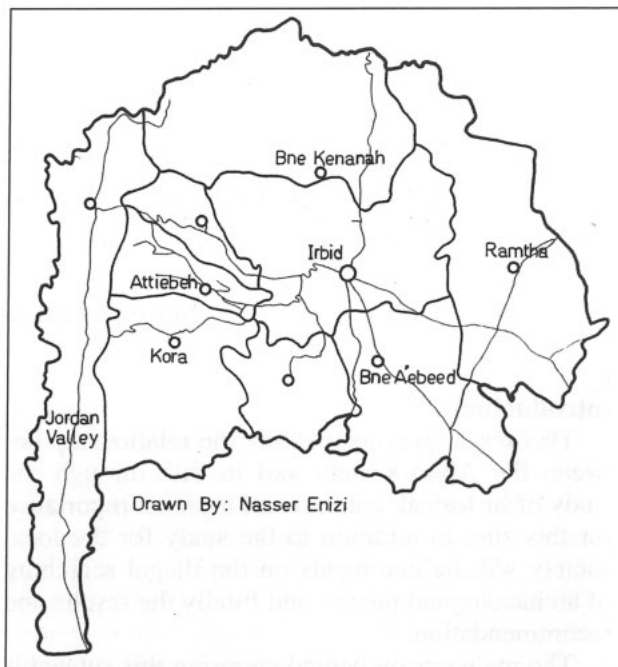
### The Study Environment

This study was applied on Abila community and the local people who are living around it and living in the three congregation: Ḥarthā, Yarmūk (Qaraqush), and Barashtā which fall into the administration of Ḥarthā municipal, a village in Bani Kināna district in north Irbid (Fig. 2).

### Abila, History and Civilization

What does Abila mean?

This word is inherently differentiated from the root Abila meaning "green" (Bin Manthour 1955: 76) or grasslands. This name is related to the presence of water. Maybe Yarmūk River and its evergreen are the main reasons of giving Abila its name. Abila kept its name until the Greek at 333BC, when it was modified by the addition of "A" at its end which was to become Abila. This name was discovered carved on a rock in Abila (Mare 1996: 30).



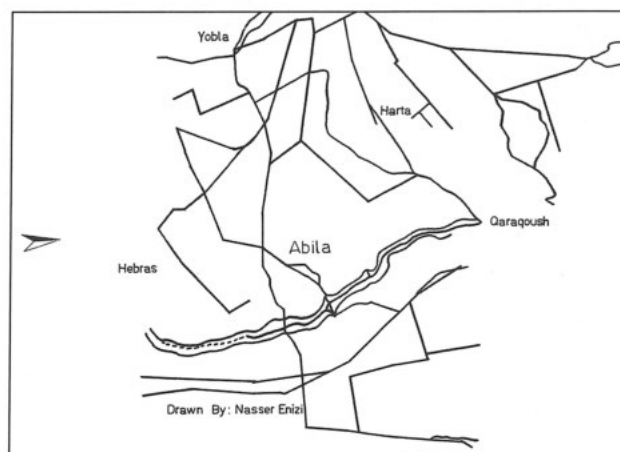
2. Map of Irbid.

### Geographical Location

Abila lies 15km north of Irbid City within the Bani Kināna district, one of the northern districts. It lays 4km south of Yarmūk River. Abila area is distinguished by a wide area, where dimensions are 1.5km north, south and east west, it is about 440m above sea level. Abila consist of three regions: Tall Umm al-'Amad, Tall Abila and Abila valley, which is famous with pomegranate trees, aided by the presence of water sources to keep them green (Fig. 3).

### History of Archaeological Searching

Many excavations and surveying were carried out by the Department of Antiquities (Jordan) and Theological Institute (U.S.A.). Before exploring



3. Map of Abila.

these excavations we should introduce the travelers who visited it and recorded some archaeological monuments. Here is the history of archaeological work in Abila:

*1889:* the traveler Merrill visited it and recorded his visit in his book 'East of Jordan' in 1881.

*1888:* traveler Schamecher visited it. He drew and recorded its monuments in Palestine Exploration Society magazine under the title 'Abil of the Dap-olice', in 1889 (Schumacher 1889: 170).

*1959:* excavation began on this site by the Department of Antiquities. A graveyard was discovered near the edge of Abila valley from the north of Tall Abila. This graveyard was discovered by Fresco drawings.

*1980:* the site was surveyed by the Department of Antiquities with the cooperation of the Decapolis, and was supported by University of Louis (U.S.A). The main monuments were discovered in this survey such as the general buildings, basilica, temple, and graveyards which were decorated by Fresco drawings (Mare 1981: 343).

*1982:* this season was the complementary part of survey works of the previous season in addition to some excavation which took the place on Tall Abil and in Abila valley (Mare 1984: 39-54).

*1984:* the excavations were completed for the previous season in Tall Abil and at the edges of the city wall from the northern side and in Umm al-'Amad in addition to the discovering of water system in the city (Mare 1985: 221-237).

*1988:* the survey work continued.

*1990:* completing the excavation work, which carried on to discover general building in addition to graveyards in Abila valley where a lot of them were discovered.

*1992:* excavation was done outside of Abila site and the whole work focused in the region of the graveyards in the addition to the general buildings.

*1994:* in these seasons the work focused on the region of the temple where Artemis sculpture were discovered (Mare 1996: 259-271).

*1995:* in this season the excavation was varied. The work was distributed over Umm al-'Amad, the discovery of the Basilica area was completed in addition to the excavation works in the region in Sbīl al-Ḥūriyyāt (Nemphaum), also some monuments like theaters were discovered (Mare 1996: 259-271).

### Abila History

The survey and excavations proved that Abila was populated since the Paleolithic until the later Islamic period including the lithic periods, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic (Umayyad, Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk

period).

After exploring the settlement periods in Abila, it is clear that it passed through several human activities in different period, but it was established as a city in the Hellenistic period. The occupation by the Greek were at that time as such cities as Gerasa, Jadar, Capitolias, and Philadelphia, and many other cities which then formed the Decapolis confederacy.

In the Roman period Abila became one of the Decapolis in the first century AD. It is mentioned in Ptolemy, whilst Pleny did not mention it.

### The Archaeological Monuments

As with the rest of Roman cities, Abila has a city plan that consists of the following elements: streets, public courtyards, theaters and temples. The Decapolis cities consider Rome as their guide; they planned and built their buildings exactly as the great city (Fig. 4).

The earthquake in the year 749AD destroyed the whole city, and nothing except little monuments remained, but the later excavation between the years 1980-2000 discovered many important monuments

### Churches

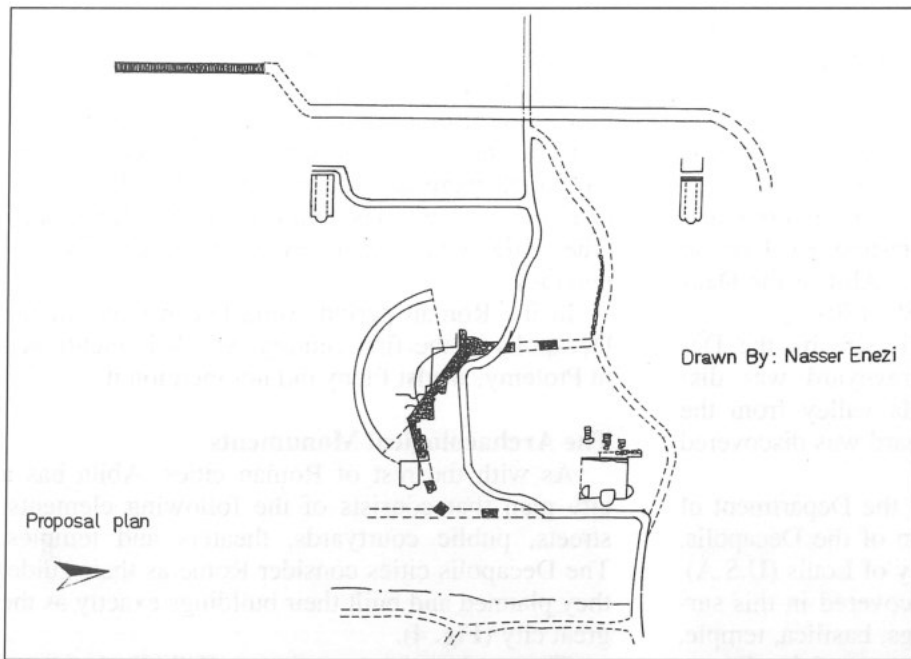
The Byzantine building pattern was predominant on most buildings, which were discovered. The American mission discovered four churches built according to basilica pattern; the first in Umm al-'Amad with dimensions of 20 x 34m and it was paved with a mosaic floor. This church contains three aisles from the east. Roman columns have been reused in the building of this church (Fig. 5).

The second church lies in Abila valley region in the southern region east of Tall Abila, it was built according to the basilica pattern. This church was specialized from the other churches by the presence of three apses. The major one lies in the usual place in the eastern side, and in front of the burial region, where the other two lie on the sides of the burial region, one of them towards the north, and the other one to the south. The ground is covered with a layer of mosaic, like the first church, the Roman columns were reused in the building of this church (Fig. 6).

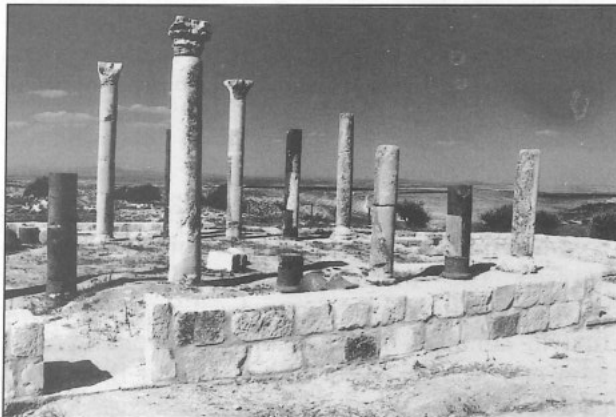
The work on the other two churches are not completed yet, and they need more seasons of investigation, the third one lies on Abila Hill (Fig. 7) and the fourth one lies on Abila Valley to the south of the second church.

### Sabīl al-Ḥūriyyāt (Nemphaum)

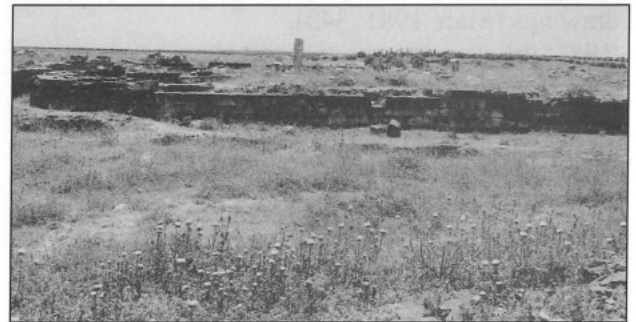
One of the building foundations discovered in-



4. The Proposal Plan of Abila.



5. The Church of Umm al-'Amad.



7. The Tall Abil Church.



6. The Abila Valley Church.

cluded some cellars connected with a water storage tank in the lower region of Abila, which is thought to be a part of Sabil al-Hūriyyāt (Nemphaum). This part is connected to a channel, it is thought that this

channel is connected to the main channel, which supplies water to Abila fountain (Mare 1996: 259-271).

#### *The Umayyad Palace*

This palace is on the north east side of Tall Umm al-'Amad. It is related to the Umayyad period and it was built using limestone, consists of a number of paved rooms. This palace is connected to the basalt-paved street that leads directly north to Tall Abila (**Fig. 8**).

#### *Cemeteries*

Because of the different civilizations on Abila and the different populations on it and the different population housing periods since the lithic periods till the new century, the city contains several cemeteries, which related to several periods. But the most important cemeteries are related to the Roman period, where 25 decorative burials were discovered with the water based pattern (fresco). These cemeteries lie on the Abila hills and expand





8. The Umayyad Palace.

along the valley. The paintings took the shape of geometric shapes, plants, human figures and animals (Fig. 9).

#### The City Plan

Great modifications occurred in Abila, especially in the Roman City. The plan of the city showed the presence of two main streets (Cardo) that extended from north to south, the first one from the western side along the city wall and the other one in the lower region of the city along Abila valley, and they are connected by a branched street (Decumanus) and expanded from east towards the west (Fig. 4).

The ideal method to visit the site could be through the branched street which connects the main street with Umm al-'Amad, where part of the city wall is clearly seen 400m to the east of the main street toward Umm al-'Amad. Some Byzantine basilica from the sixth century, where basalt

stones were used in the construction in addition to the columns which are thought to be transferred from Artemos temple.

200m further on the north east of Umm al-'Amad a part of the theater (Mare 1996: 262) can be seen, after that it is possible to go to the north west of the theater region, the visitor can notice some foundations of Artemos temple. The stones of these foundations were used in the building of the basilica in Umm al-'Amad.

200m to the north of Umm al-'Amad there is Abila Hill. The basilica foundations can be seen from the top of this hill, it was built in the sixth century by using calcic and basalt stones together with reused Roman features.

In the addition to the basilica and on the edges of Tall Abila some foundations of undiscovered buildings can be seen.

In the lower region of Abila and in the part located between Tall Umm al-'Amad and Tall Abila are some signs which related to different periods. The noticeable thing is the presence of a feature on the northeast of Umm al-'Amad. This castle was built from calcic stones, that relate to the Umayyad period, and connected to the flagged street with basalt stones extending towards the north and curved from its front towards the east, the eastern and northern sides remain undiscovered. About 25m to the north of the palace region visitors can explore some domes. The domes were built using huge calcic stones and connected to a water channel and storage tank in the north side of the building. From these signs it can be concluded that the building of Sabil al-Hūriyyāt, and the dimensions of this building were estimated to be 25x25m (Mare 1996: 262).



9. The Fresco inside the Cemeteries.

To the north east of Sabil al-Hūriyyāt, it is easy to see one of the unique planned churches with dimensions of 32x26m is built with some reused Roman basalt columns.

It must be mentioned that these do not exceed 10% of the city contents.

### **Abila Signs and the Illegal Searching Phenomena**

Because of the historical and cultural importance of this site there are many specialized objects from different periods. Thieves corrupt the site (Fig. 10), without recognizing the economical and tourism importance and consequences of this activity.

In the creation of new job opportunities and supporting the Jordanian economy and the increasing of the local and individual income and the variable benefits that could be gained to the local community in that region we aimed to study this phenomena in a wide range to look for its reasons, hence, we can suggest effective solutions to get rid of it completely — if possible.

Information was collected by ten individuals who study these phenomena. Data was collected through asking some questions that relate to their previous exploits and reasons of practice, the size of benefits that they were recognizing, the importance of these pieces, and facts after the selling, in addition to suggestions to get rid of looting and many other questions relating to this subject.

The following are the details of this study: -

It was noted that 90% of looters have strong relations with the location and usually live near it. They began working on the land, and by chance, through finding some finds during their working in their lands inside the location. This behavior developed to a wide variety of jobs and in several locations. The remaining 10% represented outsiders connected by strong relations with persons inside the site.

Reasons behind practice of these phenomena include: the money representing 30%, hobby 60%,



10. The Vandalism and Looting.

and both of habit and money representing 20%. It was proved that 100% from these practices had converted into habit and money aims over time.

Regarding the future of these finds and it was revealed that 40% are exported out of the country, 20% are sold to rich people in 'Ammān to decorate their homes, and 40% are unknown.

Regarding traders, 90% of peoples who sell objects to known and limited traders or to tourists and to traders and outsiders who are living in Jordan who export them using diplomatic means.

90% of them use the same type of equipment I- which are pickaxe, shovel, and screw drive. The other 10% use special instruments for locating coins. Such instruments use variable methods to look for metals and have the ability to specify the metal type too.

According to the economical benefits, 10% was high, 60% accepted, and 30% was little.

20% of them do not care about the value of these finds and the possibility of investigating it, they only care about the profits. Where the rest, 20%, realize that it could be investigated through the national income through museums in different regions.

Regarding guards, 70% declare their carelessness of the guards and relate this behavior to the guards fearing their safety, especially during night shifts. The other 30% said that the guards hide the location from thieves, hence they began to look for specimens in new regions without guards. This sample accuses some guards of cooperation with thieves in exchange of bribery.

90% of the sample does not know about the archaeological laws where the rest 10% knows some parts of the law. 70% of the sample does not trust of the archaeology laws where the rest refused to say their opinions.

On the subject of ending looting, 70% of the sample announced that they are ready to leave these practices if they were employed in the archaeological department to practice the same task with an accepted wage, 30% they did not accept leaving these practices because of its high income, which is much more than the wages of the governmental departments. On the other hand, 80% of these people said that they are ready to leave the practices if the police and security organizations restrained their restrictions, where 20% of them are going to keep at these practices.

### **Abila Archaeological Signs and the Local Community**

This subject is considered one of the most important, it decides the relationship between the archaeological location and the local community,

where it is positive or negative, and the possibility to improve and support it in cases of positive relation and changing this relation toward the positive and combining the local community with this location and encourage them to take care of it, and protect it for future generations.

The researchers aimed, through the open meetings with the local community, to study the nature of the relation between the archaeological site, the importance of unity and the archaeological site, and the local community, and the general realization of the importance of this site and how it could be investigated, and how such level of realization could be approached, and to push local community to give more attention to this site.

The information collected through a sample consisting of fifty individuals. While choosing these a sample members, the ages, and geographical distribution, where considered where the researcher had aimed to collect the largest amount information in order to study this relation and measure the public recognition. These information were collected through asking them to answer some questions related to their knowledge about the information size, then responsibility of people about the lack of information, the poor knowledge of the local community about this site and its importance, in addition to ignoring it as a tourist site in spite of its historical and archaeological importance. Also they were asked about the phenomena of repeated aggressions and their suggestions about investigating this site and its contents in a suitable manner to bring the benefits for both of community and the homeland, in addition to their suggestions to increase the public recognition and get rid of looting, and their reliability to participate with the education program, and governmental activities which support this study by following these details: This study shows that 85% of this sample do not know the history of the archaeological site and they do not know anything about it. In addition they are not connected to the location with any type of relation and they did not visit the site for a long time. Only 15% of the sample had a good knowledge of the site history.

In response to the lack of the information, 70% relies on the Ministry of Propaganda in general and the Jordanian television, while 25% of them relies on the Ministry of Education and on the parents. This percentage of the sample declare that the educational syllabuses do not give any attention to the historical, political and cultural importance of this site and hence there is no information in the syllabuses about these sites in spite of their importance. Also they place some responsibility on

the schools, students taken on schools trips to other archaeological locations but they have not been taken to this site.

In response to the site being ignored as a tourist site in spite of its importance, 90% of the sample said that this responsibility lies on the tourist and the Department of Antiquities because of the absence of the tourist programs like any other sites, and the exclusion of this site as one of the tourist destinations. The other 10% of the sample said that it is the responsibility of the local community beside the Ministry of Tourism and Archaeology, the local community has not tried any public activity to investigate it like the other sites.

100% of the sample rejected strongly the aggressive activity which occurred in the site especially by using the mischief and they described this phenomenon by the corruption process which prejudice the homeland. Also they said that such people are guilty because of their selfish acts and the predominance of self-interest rather than the public interests.

When they were asked about investigating this site from a tourism point of view, 25% of them suggested establishing a museum, inside the site itself. The rest 75% did not answer because of their little experience in such subjects.

On the point of the possibility of getting rid of aggressive phenomena, 80% of the sample suggested extensive education programs to the local community. The rest of the sample, which represents 20% of the sample, emphasize guarding of the archaeological site.

Regarding the site protection, 90% of the sample said that they are ready to inform police about any noticeable aggressions, and 10% remarked on their fear.

On the subject of education programs, 85% announced that they are ready to adopt and participate in the local community education program about the importance of the archaeological site for both cultural and tourist views. It could also be useful for the community in general, and 15% of those asked do not have the ability to do that because they do not have the scientific background.

100% of the sample are ready to participate in the public and formal activities especially if these activities aim at marketing the site locally and universally.

35% of the samples are ready to present the site to the tourists if they have the suitable language and enough information about the archaeological site. The rest apologized because of their inability in languages but they said that they are ready in case of suitable communication being available be-



tween them and the tourists.

### **Model to Present Abila to Tourists**

Abila is considered as one of the most important archaeological sites in Jordan. The history of Abila extended from the very ancient centuries till the later Islamic centuries

#### *First Stage: Modern Century*

There is no evidence of housing in Abila the last 100 years except some bedouins in this region and surroundings.

#### *Second Stage: Ayybid and Mamluk Period*

There is some evidence about housing in Abila region in the Ayybid and Mamluk period. Some foundations survive of buildings, which are related to that period, and also some pottery fragments in Umm al-'Amad region.

#### *Third Stage: Umayyad Period*

The presence of palace foundations related to the Umayyad period is the best evidence for housing in Umm al-'Amad at that century. In addition there is the presence of some building foundations from the same period.

#### *Fourth Stage: Byzantine Period*

The archaeological remains in the Abila region, especially the churches, refer to the level of development in this period. Four churches have been discovered, relate to this period. The first is in Umm al-'Amad, the second in Abila Hill, the third west of Umm al-'Amad in Abila valley and the fourth in Wādī Abila in the south-eastern region of Tall Abila.

#### *Fifth Stage: Roman Period*

The height of Abila development was in the Roman period. It was organized comprehensively such as the Roman city planning with its streets, parks, public buildings, theaters and many other architecture elements in the Roman city.

Some Reused columns and stones of the Roman buildings were used to build new buildings in Byzantine period that lead to destruction of temples and Sabīl al-Ḥūrīyyāt (Nemphaum).

#### *Sixth Stage: Hellenistic Period*

The presence of Hellenistic was noticed through some walls and buildings foundations, in addition to the pottery fragments and some coins.

#### *Seventh Stage: Persian Period*

Some parts of pottery were found in the site,

from the settlement in the site during Persian colonization in the region.

#### *Eighth Stage: Iron Age and Bronze Age*

It is thought that Umm al-'Amad was established in the Iron Age. Also it was noticed that some walls and pottery fragments are related to the late and Middle Bronze Age.

### **Results**

According to the studies and information analysis from the sample, the study can be summarized as follows: -

- 1- Abila is considered one of the most important archaeological sites in Jordan because of its wealth of the rare archaeological finds in addition to its special geographical location and its natural environment.
- 2- The absence of archaeological knowledge is one of the most important reasons for searching and selling artifacts where 60% of the sample does not know the future of sold pieces.
- 3- 'Sport' and money represents the most important reasons behind looting. The aim to make a quick fortune wastes the national fortune of important archeological finds.
- 4- A weakness lies in guarding archeological sites and there are a small number of guards in custody of the large area of the site, and the lack of means to deal with looters.
- 5- The Department of Antiquities is responsible for education programs, which aim to inform people about the importance on a national level, and its historical and economical importance.
- 6- The Department of Antiquities is responsible for the absence of spreading and explaining the Jordanian archaeological law, where 80% of the samples do not know the archaeological law, also they do not trust it.
- 7- In spite of the good relation between the local community in Abila region and the archaeological site, they do not know its historical and tourism importance.
- 8- The Ministry of Education and the schools are responsible for educating about the archaeological sites. The scholar syllabuses do not contain any information about these sites.
- 9- The Ministries of Tourism is the main body responsible for the education programs about Abila and inform the people about this site and its importance. Also, the absence of cooperation between the Ministry of Tourism and archeology and the Jordanian television create some of weak programs in the presentation of archaeological sites.



- 10- The sequential governments, especially in the 1970s and 1980s periods, the largely responsible for the lack of location protection and development of other sites such as Jarash, Umm Qays, and Petra.
- 11- The strong opposition from the local community to the aggressions and looting indicates that they are ready to participate in the protection scheme.
- 12- In spite of the community awareness in Abila, the community does not have the knowledge to investigate the site and its contents, hence the community needs extensive education programs by specialists in this domain.
- 13- The local community is ready, especially the young people, to present the site to the tourists, and attempt to break language and information barriers.
- 14- The local community is ready to participate in development programs of site and different education programs.

### Recommendations

According to the conclusions and the results stated above, some recommendations to improve the local community, develop and investigate this situation, and strengthen the relation between the local community and the archaeological site. These recommendations are:

- 1- Creating education programs by the specialist departments especially the Ministry of Tourism and Archeology, these society programs on the importance of this site and its ability to benefit both homeland and community. Hence it should be referred to the importance of cooperation presence between these different sides to approach an integral programs.
- 2- The inclusion the Ministry of Education with tourist movement and the necessity of the cooperation with Department of Antiquities to create new types of syllabuses aims to define the importance of the archeological sites to the students. The Ministry of Education can cooperate with the Department of Antiquities and the Ministry of Tourism and Archeology to educate the students. Periodical lectures in the schools, especially locally, will benefit the society as a whole.
- 3- There is a necessity of the Department of Antiquities to correct the behavior of looters, and to create new suitable educational programs.

This can be done by using the different publicity methods. It is necessary also to strengthen the protection of the archeological site, and includes the cooperation of police and security specialists.

- 4- Looting and the trading of archaeological finds continues because the punishment are not adequate to discourage them from repeating these processes.
- 5- There is a need to encourage the community to establish new societies to protect archeological finds and the public traditions. The management must be held by competent individuals.
- 6- The recommendation includes establishing a new archeological office in Abila site in the addition to a museum. This aims to strengthen the connection between the local community and the site by presenting suitable information and maintenance processes to the archaeological sites and by expanding investigations on a national level through excavations (other than American delegation).
- 7- The cooperation between the Ministry of Tourism and Archeology and the publicity bodies to produced marketing programs aimed at marketing the site nationally and internationally.
- 8- The necessity to encourage the local community with cooperation with specialist establishments to perform new festivals and parties in cooperation with local and international bodies.
- 9- Holding courses and programs for local individuals who care about Abila in foreign languages in order to present the site to the tourists.

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