"From Polis to Madina" Revisited – Urban Change in Byzantine and early Islamic Palestine*

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The transformation of cities in the Byzantine and early Islamic Near East was discussed by a number of scholars in the last century. Many of them adopted a traditional approach, claiming that the Islamic conquest caused the total collapse of large classical cities, turning them into small medieval towns. The urban landscape was changed dramatically, with the large colonnaded streets of the classical Polis transformed into the narrow allies of the Islamic Madina.[1]

The main argument in all these works was the linkage between urban change and the coming of Islam, claiming that this major political and religious transformation had a direct impact on the cities of the Near East. Urban infrastructures were decayed, major public buildings were damaged and not repaired, and the administrative and organisational structure of the city was dramatically altered as a consequence of political changes. The outcome of the conquest was the disappearance of a millennium-long Hellenistic and Roman influence on this region, and the beginning of another millennium-long 'Dark Age'.

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[1]Many of these early studies were much influenced from the work of Max Weber, and were further stimulated by the detailed research of French scholars in North Africa and Syria. See for early conceptual works on Late Antique and Islamic cities: Max Weber, *The City*, translated and edited by D. Martindale and G. Neuwirth (London, 1960); G. E. Von Grunebaum, "The Structure of the Muslim Town", in *Idem*; *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition*. American Anthropological Association (Memoir 81) (Ann Arbor, 1955), pp. 141–158; X. de Planhol, *The World of Islam* (Ithaca, 1959); A. Hourani and S.M. Stern (eds.) *The Islamic City* (Oxford, 1970); I. Lapidus, *Middle Eastern Cities* (Berkeley, 1969); "Evolution of Early Muslim Urban Society", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15 (1973) pp. 21–50.; For Cities in North Africa and Syria see: R. Le Tourneau, *Les villes Musulmanes des L'Afrique du n*ord, (Algeries,1957); W. Marcais, "L`islamisme et la vie urbaine", *L'academie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Comptes Rendus* (Jan.-Mar. 1928), pp. 86–100; J. Sauvaget, *Alep* (Paris, 1941); "Le plan antique de Damas", *Syria* xxvi (1949), pp. 314–358. For summaries and critical evaluations of early studies see: J. L. Abu Lughod, "The Islamic City—Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19 (1987). pp. 155–176; A. Reynolds, "Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myths and Recent Views", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21/1 (1994), pp. 3–18; N. Alsayyad, *Cities and Caliphs – on the Genesis of Arab Muslim Urbanism*, (New York, 1991); and T. Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 202–218. gideon@israntique.org.il.

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A radical new perspective for the urban transformation in the Near East was provided by Hugh Kennedy, in his influential and much quoted 1985 article, "*From Polis to Madina – Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria*". [2] Based on examples from cities in Syria and Jordan, Kennedy suggested that urban change started as early as the sixth century, was not triggered by the Islamic conquest and was not connected with the religious change from Christianity to Islam, as previously believed. He concluded that by the coming of Islam changes in many cities were already formalised, both in their physical aspects – the contraction of main colonnaded streets and the privatisation of public spaces, but also in the political and social structures within cities – including the decline of the local authorities and their replacement by a direct rule of the central government.[3] Kennedy's ideas were widely circulated and debated, and his article, reshaping the views on the process of transformation from the classical city to the so-called "Islamic City", became a standard reference for archaeological and historical studies on the Near East in this transitional period.

Kennedy based his arguments on the archaeological evidence from few excavated sites in Syria and Jordan: the cities of Antioch, Apamea, and Jarash, and the towns and villages in the limestone massif of northern Syria and in northern Jordan.

This was a fresh contribution to the discussion on the evolution of early Islamic cities, which has previously been based mainly on architectural observations, historical descriptions and legal documents.[4] However, the archaeological information on the northern Syrian massif was based mainly on the surveys from the first half of the twentieth century, when chronological observations were inadequate,[5] and the data from Jordan included the early excavations at Jarash–Gerasa, from which no clear stratigraphic sequences were published.[6] Kennedy's chronological conclusions, dating the beginning of decline in cities to the second half of the sixth century, were based mainly on this limited archaeological data. The vast archaeological research conducted from northern Syria to the southern Negev from the 1980s provided abundant new finds which opened the road for a much wider view on the complicated process of change and decline in cities between the sixth and eleventh centuries. The large-scale excavations at Beth Shean, Tiberias, Hippos-Sussita, Jarash, Pella, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Ramla, Ashqelon and other major sites, together with the extensive research in rural and nomadic hinterlands, provides an opportunity to revisit Kennedy's thesis.

This article is aimed towards reviewing the process of transformation of cities in Palestine in light of this new archaeological research.[7] I will evaluate the archaeological findings from a number of major excavated cities, in which a continuous sequence of settlement between the sixth and eleventh centuries has been found, looking at patterns of urban change, and

[2]H. Kennedy, "From Polis to Madina – Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria", *Past and Present* 106 (1985), pp. 3–27. And see also his "The Last Century of Byzantine Syria: a Reinterpretation", *Byzantinische Forschungen* 10 (1985) pp. 141–183; "Gerasa and Scythopolis: Power and Patronage in the Byzantine Cities of Bilād al-Sham", *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 52 (2000), pp. 199–204.

[3]Kennedy*, From Polis to Madina,* pp. 18–19.

[4]For example von Grunebaum, *Muslim Town*; Lapidus, *Early Muslim Urban Society*; Hourani and Stern, *Islamic City*.

[5]H.C. Butler, *Ancient Architecture in Syria, Sections A and B* (Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1904–5 and 1909), (Leiden, 1913–1920); G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord. Le massif du Bélus a l'epoque romaine* (Paris, 1953–1958).

[6]C.H. Kraeling, *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis* (New Haven, 1938).

[7]The geographical framework of my inspection will be limited to the areas of modern Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan. The numerous excavations conducted in Syria in the last 30 years deserve a special study, and will only be referred to in passing.

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considering the relationship between change and decline: How can changes in the physical shape of cities be measured and evaluated, and does change inevitably lead to decline and deterioration? What were the effects of natural and man-made calamities on cities and urban populations in this turbulent period, and are these events notable in the archaeological record? How were changes in architectural values and urban design reflected in the archaeological record?

The Evidence of Recent Excavations

A number of large-scale excavations conducted in Byzantine and early Islamic cities shed new light, but also raise some questions, on Kennedy's paradigm.

Especially notable were the excavations in Beth Shean, Tiberias, Jarash, Caesarea and Jerusalem. These provide clear settlement sequences in which the process of urban transformation between the sixth and eleventh centuries could be evaluated in detail.

Beth Shean – Scythopolis

The Late Antique city of Scythopolis is probably the best case-study that correlates to the model proposed by Kennedy. The city developed in Hellenistic and Roman times to become the major urban centre of northern Palestine. Excavations conducted in Beth Shean between 1986 and 2002 revealed the splendour of the city centre, lying in the large valley southwest of Tel Beth Shean.[8] Shaped in the Roman imperial style of the second and third centuries CE, the city centre of Beth Shean consisted of monumental colonnaded streets that connected the large theatre, two spacious baths, a number of temples, a nympheum and other public monuments, with the monumental city gates (Fig. 1).

A colonnaded street "Palladius Street" was laid between the theatre and the central crossroad of the city at the bottom of Tel Beth Shean. To the west of this street was the spacious Western Bath, in between a semi circular piazza (the *Sigma*), with a small attached Roman Odeon. A large colonnaded enclosure and basilica (perhaps the Ceasareum) was located to the west of the Northern Street. The Agora and the Eastern Bath, with adjacent public latrine, were located east of Palladius Street. At the southern part of this street were a Roman temple, the Nymphaeum, and a monumental entrance leading to the Agora. Two additional colonnaded streets extended from this point to the northeast ("The Valley Street") and to the south east ("Silvanus Street"). At the top of Tel Beth Shean a round church was constructed in the Byzantine period, and additional churches and monasteries were established in Tel Iztabba, along the northern city wall.[9]

[8]Beth Shean was extensively excavated by two large expeditions that worked simultaneously in different areas of the civic centre: G. Mazor and R. Bar Nathan directed the Israel Antiquities Authority team, while Y. Tsafrir and G. Foerster led the Hebrew University excavations. These large scale excavations were only partially published to date. See: Y. Tsafrir and G. Foerster, "Urbanism at Scythopolis – Beth Shean in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997), pp. 85–146; B. Arubas, G. Foerster and Y. Tsafrir, "Beth Shean – The Hellenistic to Early Islamic Periods at the Foot of the Mound: the Hebrew University Excavations", *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land (NEAEHL)* 5 (2008), pp. 1636–1641; G. Mazor and A. Najjar, *Nyssa – Scythopolis: The Caesareum and the Odeum*, IAA Reports 33 (Jerusalem, 2007); G. Mazor, "Beth Shean – the Hellenistic to Early Islamic Periods: the Israel Antiquities Authority Excavations", *NEAEHL* 5 (2008), pp. 1623–1635.

[9]The round church at the Tel and the Monastery of Lady Mary at Tel Istabba were excavated in the 1920s. see: G.M. Fitzgerald, *Beth Shean Excavations 1921–1923: The Arab and Byzantine Levels,* (Philadelphia, 1931); *A Sixth*

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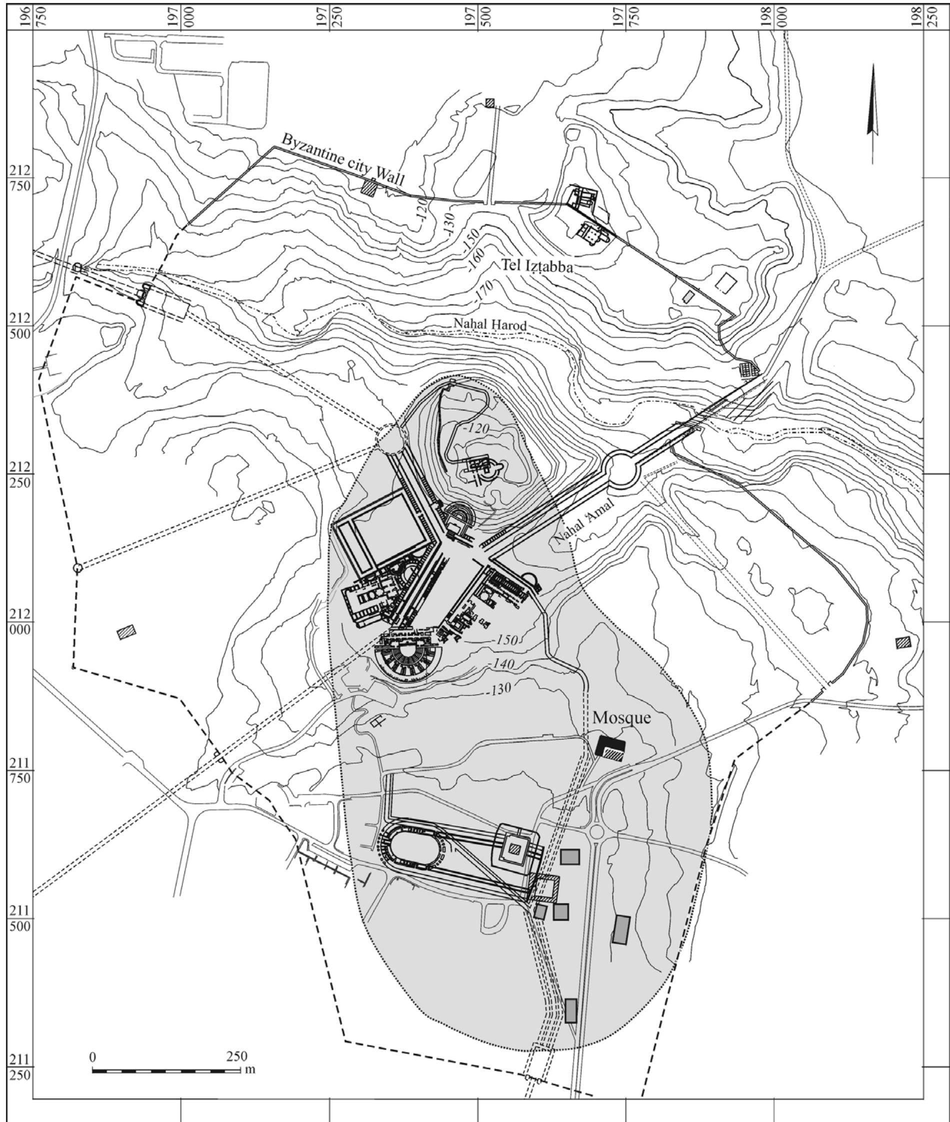

Fig. 1. Beth Shean – map of the Byzantine city and its main monuments; the shaded area marks the limit of the early Islamic town. (Source Mazor and Najjar, *Nyssa – Scythopolis*; drawing B. Arubas)

It should be noticed though that excavations have been concentrated on the site of the city centre and have revealed the remains of public monumental architecture, the residential areas of the Roman and Byzantine city, which lay on the hills to the south and west of the

Century Monastery at Beth Shean, (Philadelphia, 1939). And see Mazor, *Beth Shean,* p. 1634 for the monasteries at Tel Iztabba.

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central valley, have only been partially excavated, and are known from small-scale rescue excavations conducted under the modern town of Beth Shean.[10]

The city centre of Beth Shean was heavily damaged by an earthquake in 363 CE, but gradually recovered. With the new administrative division of Palestine, Scythopolis became the capital of *Palestina Secunda*. In the fifth century the city was surrounded with wall and in the early sixth century the civic centre was richly renovated and Beth Shean reached its zenith, expanding beyond its walls.[11]

Urban change in Beth Shean started around the middle of the sixth century. Monumental construction ceased, existing buildings were not maintained properly, major colonnaded streets were encroached, and private shops were introduced into the spacious colonnaded walkways.[12] The city's prosperity appears to have come to an end by this period.[13]

Nevertheless, the Persian invasion of 614 CE and the Islamic conquest of 636 CE, left no direct trace in the archaeological record of Beth Shean, and it seems that city life continued uninterruptedly in the first half of the seventh century. It was suggested that the gradual process of decline that started in the second half of the sixth century was much intensified following the 659/660 earthquake. Urban infrastructures were severely damaged by the earthquake, when large parts of the civic centre were destroyed and deserted. The Byzantine agora, Palladius Street and the *Sigma* were abandoned.[14] This space was used in the second half of the seventh century as a large cemetery with c. 350 simple cist graves.[15] Other public buildings were left to decay and some were replaced by humble private dwellings, which filled also the porticos of the colonnaded streets. Some sections of the streets were covered with alluvium.[16]

Several areas of the civic centre were gradually restored following the earthquake, but organised in a different pattern and concept. The major change was a massive introduction of small industries and commerce into the former public areas. Pottery production workshops were constructed in the agora, at the edge of the theatre and the Eastern Bath, on top of Palladius Street and into the arena of the amphitheatre.[17] The penetration of industrial installations into the urban area was evident throughout the city. A large pottery workshop was constructed on top of the Eastern Bath following the 659/660 earthquake, extending into the edge of the theatre.[18] Another industrial area, probably connected to the linen industry, was found at the western bathhouse, and nearby (at the adjacent frigidarium), a luxurious residence was constructed, perhaps to accommodate the workshop owners.[19]

[10] For example N. Zori, "The House of Kyrios Leontis at Beth Shean", *Israel Exploration Journal* 16 (1966), pp. 123–134; D. Bahat, "A Synagogue at Beth Shean", in L.I. Levine (ed.), *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, (Jerusalem, 1981), pp.82–85; M. Peleg, "Bet-Sh`an – A Paved Street and Adjacent Remains", *`Atiqot* 25 (1994), pp. 139–155.

[11] Foerster and Tsafrir *Urbanism at Scythopolis*, pp. 116–135; Mazor and Najjar, *Nysa – Scythopolis*, pp. xiii-xiv.

[12] S. Agadi *et. al*. "Byzantine Shops in the Street of the Monuments in Bet Shean (Scythopolis)" in L.V. Rutgers (ed.), *What Athens Has to Do with Jerusalem* (Leuven, 2002), pp. 423–506.

[13] Tsafrir and Foerster, *Urbanism at Scythopolis,* p. 125; Mazor, *Beth Shean*, p. 1634.

[14] Tsafrir and Foerster, *Urbanism at Scythopolis,* pp. 137–138; B. Arubas, "Introduction" in. S. Hadad, *Islamic Glass Vessels from the Hebrew University Excavations at Bet Shean* (Qedem Reports 8) (Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 1–2.

[15] Mazor, *Beth Shean,* pp. 1635–1636.

[16] *Ibid*; pp. 1635–1636; Arubas, *Introduction;* I thank R. Bar Nathan for sharing with me her yet unpublished information from the excavations at the *Sigma* area.

[17] Mazor, *Beth Shean,* p. 1635. Tsafrir and Foerster, *Urbanism at Scythopolis,* p. 137.

[18] I thank Rachel Bar Nathan for this information.

[19] Mazor, *Beth Shean,* p. 1635.

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New commercial activities were developed along the main streets, and were probably divided according to the different commodities. Most notable is the monumental construction of a market complex in 738, in the time of caliph Hisham (724–743 CE). This new elaborated market was built on the ruins of the basilica of Silvanus. It contained rows of shops in two levels, and a monumental entrance gate decorated by a wall mosaic with two framed Arabic inscriptions.[20] This monumental building was in use for no more than one decade, and it was completely destroyed in the devastating earthquake of January 749 CE.[21]

The transformation of urban space in Beth Shean, between the sixth and eighth centuries, included a conceptual change in the civic centre from the monumental 'clean' construction, a legacy of the Roman architecture, to the lively crowded area, with mixed functions of commerce, small industries, public and private constructions.[22] These large-scale constructions of industrial installations and commercial buildings within the former civic centre of Byzantine Beth Shean supports Kennedy's suggestion that urban change included the abandonment of the practice of creating a strict separation between the monumental and functional, public and private zones, and brought large-scale commercial and industrial activities into the city. In their assessment of Byzantine and Early Islamic Beth Shean, Tsafrir and Foerster follow Kennedy's paradigm, suggesting that urban change in this city had already started in the middle of the sixth century and was not connected to the early Islamic conquest. It is argued that between the second half of the sixth century and the 749 earthquake the city had witnessed a constant decline in its urban infrastructures. The short period of prosperity under caliph Hisham saw the last phase of the splendour, and Beth Shean declined permanently following its devastating destruction by the earthquake.[23]

Recent rescue excavations, however, showed that Early Islamic Baisān continued to flourish as a medium-sized town following the 749 earthquake. The former city centre in the valley was now inhabited with residential buildings constructed over the ruins of the former city, and the remains of two small mosques were found here in between the buildings.[24] Additional large scale constructions were conducted to the south of the central valley. A congregational mosque was established on the top of the southern ridge, containing a dedication inscription dated to 794–795.[25] Excavations conducted recently in the areas to the south and east of the mosque, revealed the remains of large-scale private buildings, and

[20]E. Khamis, "Two Wall Mosaic Inscriptions from the Umayyad Market Place in Bet Shean / Baysān", *Bulletin of the School of Islamic and African Studies* 61 (2001), pp. 159–176.

[21]Some sources mention the year 747 CE for the earthquake. On the 749 CE date see: Y. Tsafrir and G. Foerster, "The Dating of the `Earthquake of the Sabbatical Year` of 749 in Palestine", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55 (1992), pp. 231–235.

[22]Mazor suggested that following the 660 earthquake the city centre of Umayyad Baisān shifted from the central valley to the top of the Tel. Mazor, *Beth Shean,* pp. 1634–1635.

[23]Tsafrir and Foerster, *Urbanism at Scythopolis,* pp. 135–146. Mazor adopts this view: Mazor and Najjar *Nysa Scythopolis,* p. xiv.

[24]Tsafrir and Foerster mention the existence of humble houses built on top of the destroyed colonnaded streets. See a brief description by Arubas, *Introduction,* p. 2. S. Agady and B. Y. Arubas, *Mihrab* Representations in the Art and Architecture of Early Islamic Baysān, in L. Di-Segni, Y. Hirschfeld, J. Patrich and R. Talgam (eds.), *Man Near Roman Arch – Studies Presented to Prof. Yoram Tsafrir* (Jerusalem, 2009), pp. 74–87.

[25]M. Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae (CIAP)* vol. 2, B-C. (Leiden, 1999), pp. 221–222. The discovery of another building inscription from 753 provides additional evidence for the recovery of Abbasid Baisān from the damages of the earthquake. A. Elad, The Caliph Abū'l 'Abbās al Saffāh, the First 'Abbāsid *Mahdī* – Implications of an Unknown Inscription.

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it seems that these areas were extensively inhabited between the eighth and the eleventh centuries.[26] It seems that the civic and religious centre of Baisān shifted from the valley to the southern hills following the 749 earthquake (Fig. 1).

Careful observation on the 1923–1933 excavations at the upper levels of Tel Beth Shean reveals evidence for a crowded residential quarter that continued uninterruptedly from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic period.[27] A unique round-shaped church was excavated at the centre of the Tel.[28] It was suggested that this church was destroyed in the 559/660 earthquake,[29] but no clear archaeological evidence was found for this dating. The church might have continued to function after the 749 earthquake as it contains Islamic inscriptions scratched on its floor and columns.[30] A well planned Early Islamic residential quarter was built at the Tel.[31] This new quarter did not use the earlier Byzantine buildings and it was designed following a new town plan.[32] It included two intersecting streets that created a large *insula* in which several central court houses were built.[33]

A painstaking collection of the existing evidence from previous excavations, together with the data from the recent rescue excavations, show that following the 749 earthquake the new town of Baisān was centred in the southern part of the former Byzantine city and at the top of the Tel. Baisān continued to flourish as a medium-sized town until the tenth or eleventh century. Thus, it seems that previous model of Abbasid and Fatimid Baisān, i.e. of it being small town or village, with a concentration of humble residential dwellings that replaced a thriving Byzantine city, should be altered.

The evaluation of the archaeological evidence from Beth Shean points towards a complicated process of urban change that indeed started in the middle of the sixth century. Change was expressed in the introduction of commercial and industrial installations into the former civic centre. Colonnaded streets were encroached upon and public buildings were not properly maintained. It seems that this was not a mere indication of decline, but rather a manifestation of a more profound shift in local urban life, which included the weakening of the municipal authorities.[34] Nevertheless, the picture of a long and constant decline between the sixth and eighth centuries should be re-considered. The long-term significance of erecting commercial and industrial installations within the civic centre, and especially the

[26] For preliminary results of these excavations see: D. Syon, "Bet She`an", *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 116 (2004), www.Hadashot-esi.org.il; W. Atrash, "Bet She`an", *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 121 (2009), www.Hadashot-esi.org.il. And see: O. Sion and A. el-Salam, "A Mansion House from the Late Byzantine – Umayyad Period in Bet Shean Scythopolis", *Liber Annus* 52 (2002), pp. 353–367.

[27] Fitzgerald, *The Arab and Byzantine Levels.* Excavations Tel Beth Shean were renewed by the Hebrew University expedition: A. Mazar, *Excavations at Tell Beth Shean 1989–1996,* I: *From the Late Bronze Age IIB to the Medieval Period* (Jerusalem, 2006).

[28] Fitzgerald, *The Arab and Byzantine Levels,* pp. 14–27.

[29] Mazor, *Beth Shean*, p. 1635. R. Bar Nathan – oral communication.

[30] Fitzgerald, The Arab and Byzantine Levels, p. 48. One of the inscriptions was dated to 806 CE, see: Sharon, *CIAP* II, pp. 223–225; R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: An Historical and Archaeological Study* Studies in late Antiquity and Early Islam, 2. (Princeton, 1995) pp. 270–272.

[31] Unfortunately there is no adequate publication for this area. The excavation was described in brief. See: Fitzgerald, *The Arab and Byzantine Levels,* pp. 11–17.

[32] Mazar, *Tell Beth Shean,* pp. 42–43.

[33] This was the typical court house of the early Islamic period in the Near East, found also in Fustat, Ramla, Caesarea, Yokneam and other sites.

[34] Tsafrir and Foerster, *Urbanism at Scythopolis,* pp. 135–143. For other aspects of this process see: Kennedy, *From Polis to Madina,* pp. 17–19.

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establishment of a monumental market by caliph Hisham, should not be underestimated. It seems that during this period Beth Shean had witnessed a conceptual change in its urban landscape. Early Islamic Baisān was a lively town that contained many commercial values. The devastating effects of the 749 earthquake had only a short time impact on the city, and it was reconstructed immediately after the earthquake with the relocation of the civic centre to the southern plateau. Baisān continued to prosper until the tenth century, when al-Muquaddsī described it as a lively middle-sized town and a regional centre of rice growing and commerce.[35]

Urban change in Beth Shean should be also viewed in its regional context. The city's erosion of status in the Byzantine period was much influenced by the increasing prosperity of Tiberias as the capital of *Jund al-Urdun*. While in Byzantine times Tiberias remained over-shadowed by Beth Shean, the balance shifted in early Islamic times, when Tiberias became the major city of northern Palestine and Beth Shean became a medium-sized town.

Tiberias

Tiberias was founded c. 20 CE by Herod Antipas and developed during Late Antiquity into a major regional centre with a mixed Jewish and Christian population. The Byzantine city contained colonnaded streets, a number of churches and synagogues, and a civic centre with a basilica and a bathhouse. In the sixth century the city was surrounded by a long city wall, which included within it a new church and an adjacent monastery on top on Mt. Berenice.[36] Tiberias was taken peacefully by the Arabs in 635, and, with the establishment of the new Islamic administration, it became the capital of *Jund al-Urdunn*. Early Islamic Tiberias flourished between the eighth and the eleventh centuries, expanding further to the south beyond its former city wall, and reaching a zenith in area and population. Al-Muqaddasī described it as a large city, c. *farsakh* long (about two miles), but it lacked width due to the local steep topography. It was surrounded by a wall with two main gates to the north and south, while the eastern side of the city lay open to the Sea of Galilee. A congregational mosque was established in the city centre, and the city's markets extended all the way from the northern to the southern gate.[37]

The prosperity of Early Islamic Tiberias was the outcome of its administrative position as the capital of *Jund al-Urdunn* and its central location as centre of industrial production (pottery, metal and cottons), and as a consumer city to the rural areas of the Galilee. Thus, in the tenth century Tiberias was a much larger city in area and population compared with the Byzantine period.

Archaeological exploration in Tiberias began in 1921 with the discovery of the synagogue at Hammat Tiberias, south of the walled city. Large-scale excavations were conducted in the civic centre of ancient Tiberias between 1954 and 1968, but unfortunately these remain

[35] Al-Muqaddasī, *Ahsan al-Taqāsīm fi Ma'rifat al-Aqālīm*, M. J. De Goeje, (ed.), 2nd edition, Bibliotheca Geographicorum Arabicorum, 3 (Leiden, 1906), p. 169. For a translation see: B. A. Collins, *Al-Muqaddasī: The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions* (Reading, 1994), p. 138.

[36] Y. Hirschfled, *Excavations at Tiberias 1989–1994*. IAA Reports, 22 (Jerusalem, 2004); Y. Hirschfeld and K. Galor, "New Excavations in Roman, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Tiberias", in J. Zangenberg, H.W. Attridge and D. B. Martin (eds.), *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee* (Tübingen, 2007), pp. 207–230.

[37] al-Muqadassī, *Ahsan al-Taqāsīm* p. 161; Collins, *Al-Muqaddasī:* p. 137.

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unpublished.[38] Further excavations were undertaken at the southern part of the city, revealing the monumental southern gate,[39] and a number of small rescue excavations were conducted in different sections of the modern city.[40]

The exploration of ancient Tiberias was intensified between 1994 and 2009. A number of major excavations exposed further sections of the civic centre, a residential quarter, the Roman theatre and an early Islamic residential quarter that was built on top of its ruins, further early Islamic residential quarters outside the city wall to the south, and a large church and monastery from Byzantine and early Islamic times on top of Mt Berenice.[41] (Fig. 2)

A major contribution to the recent excavations in Tiberias is in delineating the layout of both the Byzantine and the early Islamic city. The urban core of Tiberias was located between the cliffs of Mt. Berenice in the west and the shores of the Sea of Galilee in the east. It consisted of a long north-south collonaded street with public buildings and residential quarters extended mainly to its eastern side.[42] A number of public buildings were constructed in the city centre, among them a bath-house and large basilica. A large structure supported by columns was first identified as a covered market (*macellum*),[43] but it was recently proved to be the main congregational mosque of early Islamic Tabāriyya.[44]

The Islamic conquest of Tiberias left no evidence in the archaeological record. It seems that after a short period of stagnation the city flourished again and expanded beyond its limits of the Byzantine period. Especially significant is the urban expansion beyond the southern city-walls. Recent excavations conducted in this area revealed a well-planned residential quarter with several long north-south streets, and a network of large buildings constructed along these arteries.[45]

The Roman theatre, lying on the slopes of Mt Berenice to the west of the civic centre, was deserted by the end of the Byzantine period. This area was extensively rebuilt in the early Islamic period when a crowded residential quarter was established here, and inhabited until the eleventh century.[46] Another residential area was excavated to the north of the theatre, revealing a network of buildings with central courtyards, flanking a narrow street. The upper phase of the buildings was dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries. In an inner room of

[38] Large areas were excavated by B. Rabani in 1954–1956, and by A. Druks in 1964–1968. For a short summary of these excavations see Y. Hirschfeld, "Tiberias", *NEAEHL* 4 (1993), pp. 1464–1470.

[39] This area was excavated by G. Foerster in 1973–1974 but only preliminarily published, except for the Early Islamic levels: D. Stacy, *Excavations at Tiberias 1973–1974 – The Early Islamic Period*. IAA Reports 21 (Jerusalem, 2004).

[40] For summaries of these excavations see: Y. Stepansky, "Tiberias", *NEAEHL* 5 (2008), pp. 2048–2053 and the bibliograhpy. A total of more than one hundred excavations were conducted in Tiberias before 2009.

[41] For the main publications and preliminary results of these excavations see: Hirschfeld, *Excavations at Tiberias,* Hirschfeld and Ganor, *New Excavations*. The most recent excavations at the theatre and southern areas are yet unpublished. I thank M. Hartal and W. Atrash for providing me with the information about these sites. K. Cytryn-Silverman, "The Umayyad Mosque of Tiberias", *Muqarnas* 26 (2009), pp. 37–61.

[42] See: Hirschfeld and Galor, *New Excavations*, p. 224, Fig. 14 for a suggested reconstruction of the Byzantine town.

[43] *Ibid*, p. 216.

[44] K. Cytrin-Silverman "The Early Islamic Mosque at Tiberias", *Muquarnas,* (forthcoming). The interpretation of this monumental building as a mosque was further reinforced by the discovery of two large metal chains that supported large lamps illuminating the inner structure. See: A.Lester and Y. Hirschfeld, "Brass Chains from a Public Building in the Area of the Bathhouse in Tiberias", *Levant* 38 (2006), pp. 145–158.

[45] These rescue excavations were conducted in 2008. for a preliminary notice see M. Hartal, "Hammat Tiberias (South), Preliminary Report", *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 121 (2009), www.Hadashot-esi.org.il.

[46] W. Atrash, "Tiberias, the Roman Theatre, Preliminary Report", Excavations and Surveys in Israel 122 (2010), www.Hadashot-esi.org.il.

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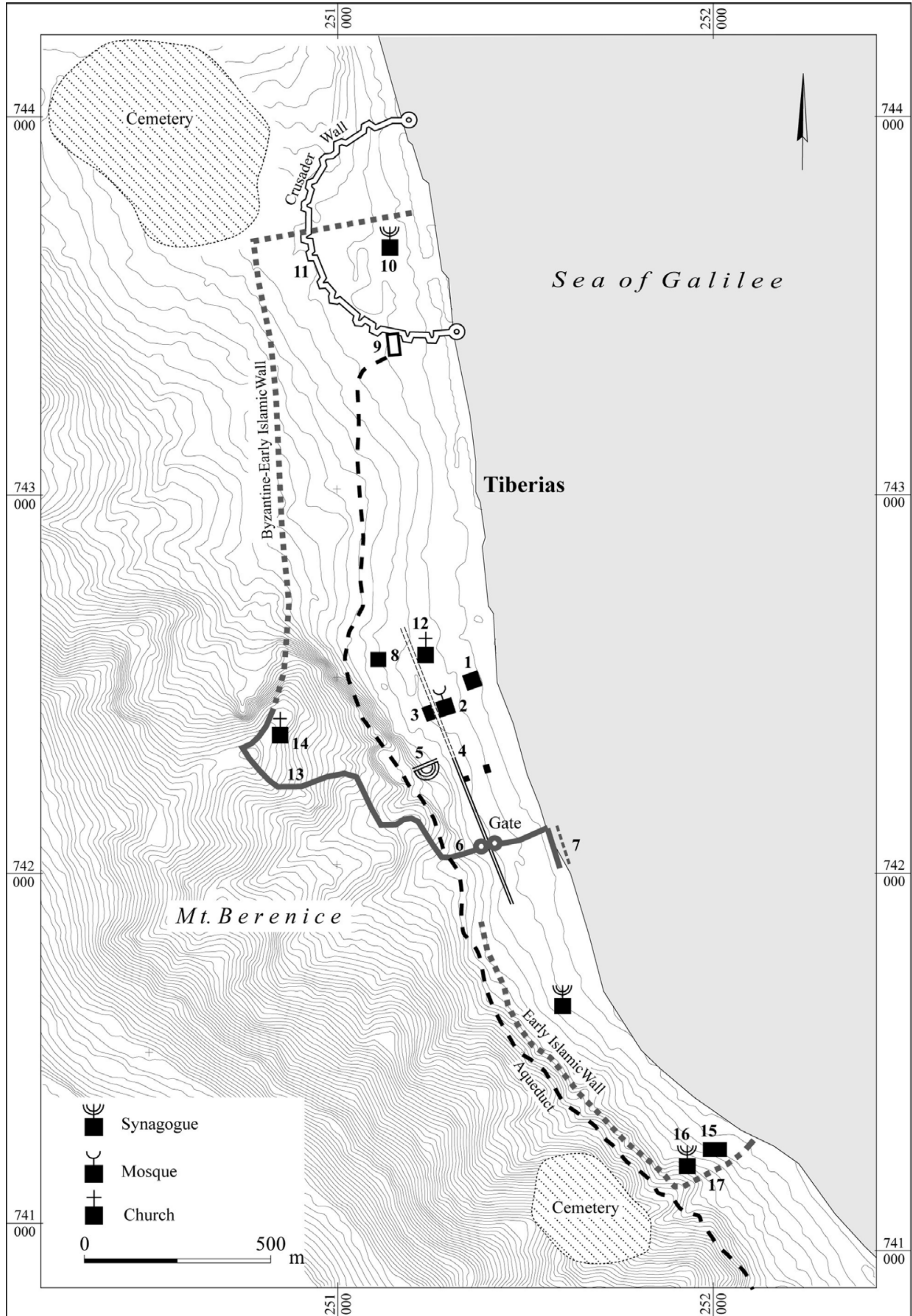

Fig. 2. Tiberias – map of the early Islamic city (courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

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one of these buildings a large hoard of bronze vessels from the ninth–eleventh centuries was found hidden in three storage jars.[47]

The northern section of early Islamic Tiberias was recently defined by large-scale rescue excavations conducted at the heart of the modern town centre. Another residential quarter was discovered here, divided into several *insulae* and dated to the ninth and tenth centuries. The houses were relatively small and of poor quality, consisting of simple rooms facing a courtyard.[48] This area was not inhabited before the ninth century, and it was partially destroyed by floods in the tenth century. The northern residential quarter was abandoned by the beginning of the eleventh century. To the north of this area there is a sharp decline in architectural remains, and it seems that the areas further north were not inhabited, and they were part of an urban cemeteries complex.

Tiberias presents a different process of urban change to that of Beth Shean. Like Beth Shean, its main north-south colonnaded street was encroached upon and shops were installed on its pavements, but the date of this change is not clear and it could post-date the sixth century. A new modest main street was constructed in the civic centre during the eighth or ninth century, with shops and small workshops along it.[49] At the southern end of this street, close to the city gate, several stages of construction were defined along the former collonaded street. The Byzantine street was encroached upon during the Umayyad period, and was further narrowed in the ninth and tenth centuries.[50] The previous monumental southern gate was narrowed and a new gate was introduced, apparently during the early tenth century. It seems that the expansion of Tiberias to the south was accelerated after the eighth century. At this time the city wall lost most of its function, and new residential quarters for the wealthy were constructed to the south of it. A new bridge was constructed immediately to the south of the city-gate, above a small stream coming down from Mt Berenice.[51]

The presence of buildings, constructed on top of burials containing early Islamic coins, suggests that the main expansion of the urban area south of the Byzantine wall occurred only during the ninth century.[52] Another building, also overlaying a few graves, was related to the late tenth or early eleventh centuries.[53]

Recent archaeological excavations in the southern part of the city show that Tiberias reached its maximal area in the tenth and eleventh centuries, becoming the largest city of northern Palestine and extending its urban limits far beyond those of the Byzantine town. This process contradicts the model presented at Beth Shean which evidenced decline from its major position in Byzantine Palestine. It seems that at both sites the process of change was triggered by external influences. Beth Shean shrank due to the administrative changes introduced by the new Islamic regime, and was further weakened following the devastating earthquakes of 659/660 and 749. Tiberias was probably affected by these earthquakes, but

[47] Y. Hirschfeld and O. Gutfeld, *Tiberias: Excavations in the House of the Bronze, Final Report* I*: Architecture, Stratigraphy and Small finds*. Qedem 48 (Jerusalem, 2008). "Tiberias – The `House of the Bronze and associated remains", *NEAEHL* 5 (2008), pp. 2053–2054.

[48] This area was excavated by M. Hartal in 2007–2008.See: M. Hartal, "Tiberias", *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 120 (2008), www.Hadashot-esi.org.il. I thank him for sharing with me his insight on the excavation.

[49] Hirschfeld and Galor, *New Excavations,* pp. 217–218.

[50] Stacy, *Excavations at Tiberias*. pp. 30–36.

[51] This is perhaps the bridge mentioned by al-Muqaddasī in his description of Tiberias. *Ahsan al-Taqāsīm* p. 161; Collins, *Al-Muqaddasī:* p. 137. The bridge was re-discovered in 2008 by M. Hartal.

[52] Stacy, *Excavations at Tiberias,* p. 67.

[53] *Ibid*, p.56.

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the fact that it became the district's capital increased its economic prosperity. The finds of churches and synagogues, together with the recently identified large congregational mosque, point to the multicultural character of the local urban society, and to the fact that both Jewish and Christian communities of Tiberias thrived during the early Islamic period.

The end of this prosperous city was abrupt, and by the second half of the eleventh century it was almost completely deserted. It seems that the combined effects of the 1033 earthquake, political instability and the deteriorating economical conditions put an end to the flourishing early Islamic capital of *Jund al-Urdunn*.

Jarash (Gerasa)

The extensive excavations at Jarash–Gerasa, the main city of Jordan during the Roman and Byzantine periods, show similar patterns of urban continuity in early Islamic times. This large Roman city with an area of c. 85 hectacres, encircled by walls, contained wide colonnaded streets lined with public buildings, a large agora, a main pagan temple, a theatre, an odeon, a nympheon, and a large hippodrome constructed south of the city walls. Gerasa's urban landscape further developed during the Byzantine period, when no less than 15 churches were constructed within its walled area. The city was conquered by the Muslims in 635, but continued to prosper in early Islamic times, preserving its Christian character. A large congregational mosque recently discovered and excavated points to a penetration of Islam into the local society[54] (Fig. 3).

Gerasa was explored in the beginning of the twentieth century, and thoroughly excavated in the 1930s.[55] These excavations focused on the monumental remains of Roman temples and Byzantine churches, and ignored the early Islamic remains. Only the second wave of excavations at Jarash, starting in the 1980s, revealed that the city continued to flourish also during early Islamic times.[56] For example, a careful examination of the churches of the city shows that none of them was damaged or went out of use in the course of the early Islamic conquest, and most churches continued to function at least into the eighth century and perhaps even later.[57]

The new construction of the large congregational mosque and its adjacent buildings, probably in the beginning of the eighth century, show that urban change in Jarash continued beyond the end of the Byzantine period. It is interesting to note that the new mosque was accommodated within the existing city centre and adjusted to the main arteries of Byzantine Gerasa. Located right near the junction of the *cardo* and *decumanos,* the alignment of the *qibla* wall of the mosque (slight east of the precise south) necessitated an adaptation of the new building to the existing urban grid system. The location of the mosque at the very heart of the city and its connection to the existing urban thoroughfares points to the prosperity of Jarash in the eighth century. This economic prosperity encompassed the introduction of

[54] A. Walmsley and K. Damgaard, "The Umayyad Congregational Mosque of Jarash in Jordan and its Relationship to Early Mosques", *Antiquity* 79 (2005) pp. 362–378; A. Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria – an Archaeological Assessment* (London, 2007), pp. 80–86.

[55] Kraeling, *Gerasa*.

[56] See: F. Zayadine (ed.), *Jerash Archaeological Project 1981–1983* I (Amman, 1986); II, 1984–1988, *Syria* 66 (1989). Occasional excavation reports were published in the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*.

[57] Schick, *Christian Communities,* pp. 315–322.

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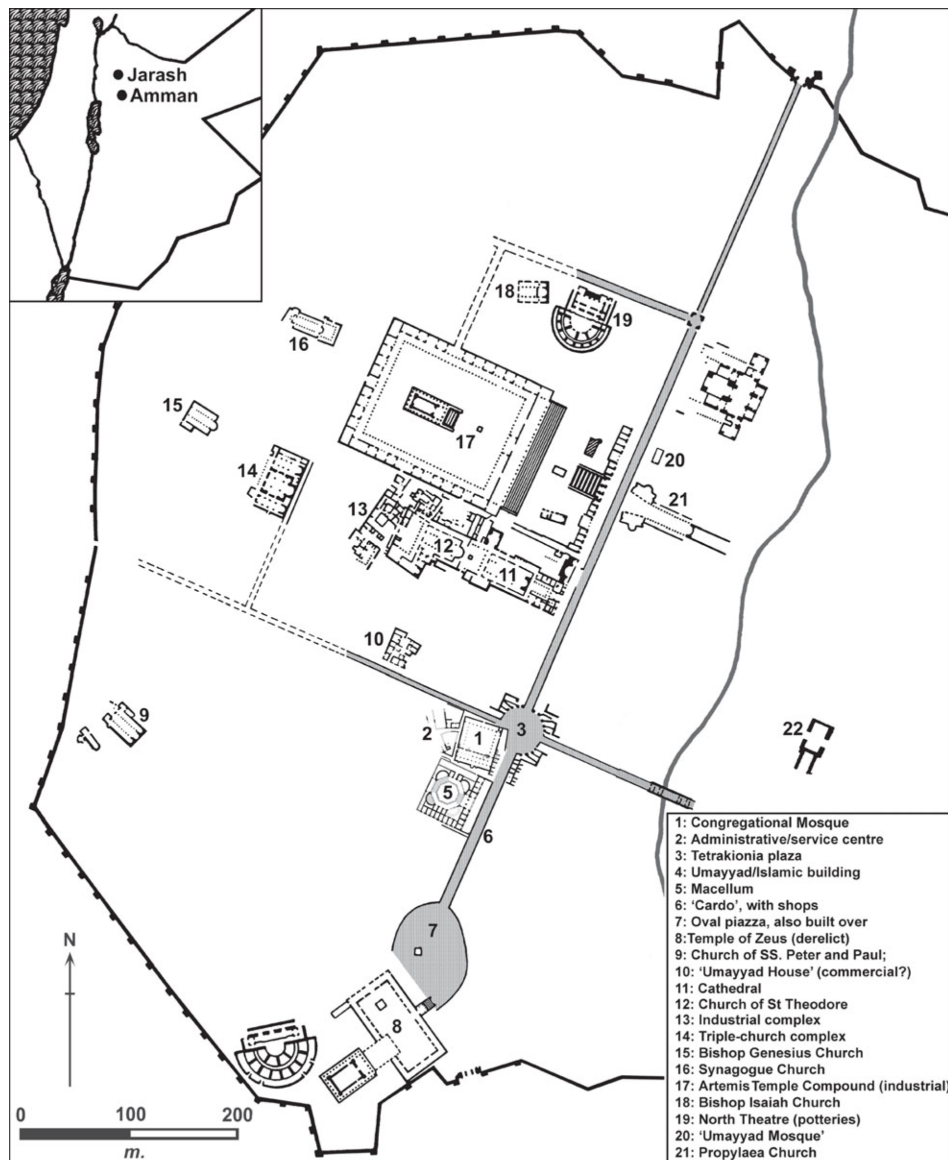

Fig. 3. Gerasa / Jarash - map of the Byzantine and early Islamic city (courtesy of A. Walmsley).

commercial and industrial facilities both into the wide-colonnaded streets and to the mosque surroundings. Additional new structures were built along the southern part of the *cardo*, at the southern *decumanos* and on the oval plaza, carefully accommodated into the existing urban framework.[58]

[58] A. Walmsley *et. al.*, "A Mosque, Shops and Bath in Central Jarash: the 2007 Season of the Islamic Jarash Project", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 52 (2008), pp. 109–137.

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The expansion of markets into the public areas of Jarash was probably related to the growth of economic activities in the city and its hinterland during the seventh and eighth centuries. The construction of churches was intensified in the seventh century in at least two large villages near Jarash. Rihab, a large village to the east of the city, contained no less than eight Byzantine churches. Two of the churches were dedicated in 635 CE, the same year as the major battles between the invading Arabs and the Byzantine army took place nearby. Two other churches were established shortly before the conquest, at the time of Persian Sassanian rule.[59] Khirbet es-Samra, a nearby village, revealed similar finds. It contained at least eight churches, and in two of them new mosaic floors were laid in 635–640 CE.[60] It seems that major construction at this site was undertaken in the first half of the seventh century, and settlement continued at least into the eighth century.[61]

The overall picture of change in Jarash and its hinterland between the sixth and ninth centuries thus seems to be more complicated than the one presented by Kennedy and followed by other scholars, suggesting a constant decline of urban structures starting in the second half of the sixth century.[62] Changes in monumental construction within the city indeed began in the second half of the sixth century and, as in Beth Shean, were expressed in the contraction of the wide colonnaded streets, additions to existing monuments, and a more liberal attitude towards private constructions in public spaces. But these were not an indication of decline but rather of changing attitudes to the urban landscape. The private constructions and the expansion of industrial and commercial facilities into the city centre indicated an urban vitality and increased prosperity of the local population rather than constant decline. It seems that this process continued into the eighth century, when Jarash and its hinterland experienced a period of economic prosperity. Several public buildings in Jarash were indeed abandoned by the middle of the seventh century (for example the areas around the Temple of Artemis), but in other areas of the city construction was intensified.[63]

The growing evidence for expansion of commerce within the city and its hinterland show that early Islamic Jarash experienced economic prosperity during the eighth and ninth centuries.[64] The prosperity of the city was probably endowed and supported by the local civic authorities, who made public spaces available for light industry and commerce. The

[59]The church of St Stephen was dedicated in 620, the church of St Peter in 624, The Prophet Isaiah church in 635, and the Menas church in the same year. See: M. Piccirilo, "The Antiquities of Rihab of the Bene Hasan", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 24 (1980), pp. 153–156; Schick, *Christian Communities,* pp. 442–443.

[60]The church of St George had an inscription dating its mosaic floor to around 640, and the church of John the Baptist had a mosaic laid over the original stone pavement around 635. See: J.B. Humbert, "Huit campagnes de fouilles au Khirbet as-Samra (1981–1989)" *Revue Bibilique* 97 (1990), pp. 252–259; Schick, *Christian Communities,* pp. 377–378.

[61]These conclusions are also supported from the excavations at the village cemetery, which yielded many inscriptions from the seventh and eighth centuries. See: H.I. MacAdam, "Settlements and Settlement Patterns in Northern and Central Transjordan, ca 550 – ca 750" in A. Cameron and G.R.D. King (eds.), *The Byzantine and Islamic Near East II.* Studies in Late Antiquity and Islam I (Princeton, 1994), pp. 49–94; A.J. Nabulsi, "The Ancient Cemetery of Khirbat as-Samra after the Sixth Season of Excavations (2006)", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 51 (2007), pp. 273–281.

[62]H. Kennedy, "Islam", in G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown and O. Grabar (eds.), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post Classical World* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 229; J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, "Late Antiquity (6th and 7th Centuries) in the Cities of the Roman Near East", *Mediteraneo Antico* 3 (2000), pp. 47–50. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 295–298.

[63]A. Walmsley, "Economic Development and the Nature of Settlement in the Towns and Countryside of Syria-Palestine, ca 565–800", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 61 (2007), p. 334.

[64]*Ibid*, pp. 335–338; *Early Islamic Syria,* pp.81–87.

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decline of several large public buildings in the city should not indicate an overall decline in the urban landscape, but rather a conceptual change in the focus of activities and the increase of lively local commercial networks.

It seems that these changes in the urban framework of Jarash were instituted already in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, and were formalised in the eighth and ninth centuries with the installation of the new mosque.

Caesarea Maritima

Caesarea developed in the Roman and Byzantine periods as a major administrative and commercial centre of the eastern Mediterranean and capital of *Palestina Prima*. In the fifth and sixth centuries the city was much affected by the Samaritan revolts but resumed its leading position when emperor Justinian promoted it and gave it jurisdiction over the three provinces of Palestine.[65] It was a thriving city with a major sea port serving as the main gateway to Palestine, covering an area of c. 120 hectacres and encircled by walls erected in the end of fourth or beginning of fifth century.[66] The major landmark of Caesarea was the monumental octagonal church constructed over the former pagan temple at the elevated platform facing the harbour. This elaborated church, constructed in the first half of the sixth century, continued to function until the middle of the eighth century.[67] In the southern part of the city the Roman *praetorium* became the residence of the Byzantine governor, containing vast courtyards and elaborate bathhouses. Other palatial mansions were constructed in this area, which was the most applauded quarter of Byzantine Caesarea.[68]

In the sixth century the city further expanded beyond its walls, creating extra-mural quarters with large residencies.[69] A large and wealthy agricultural hinterland stretched beyond the urban limits of Caesarea.[70] This urban expansion reflects the constant growth of the urban population, which made Caesarea the largest city in Palestine[71] (Fig. 4).

It was suggested that, similar to Beth Shean, urban change in Caesarea commenced in the second half of the sixth century, when the wealthy residential southern quarter of the

[65] L.I. Levine, *Caesarea Under Roman* Rule (Leiden, 1975); K.G. Holum (ed.) *King Herod's Dream – Caesarea on the Sea* (New York, 1988); A. Raban and K.G. Holum (eds), *Caesarea Maritima: a Retrospective after Two Millennia* (Leiden, 1996).

[66] J. Patrich, "Urban Space in Caesarea Maritima, Israel", in. T.S. Burns and J.W. Eadie (eds.), *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity* (East Lansing MI, 2001), pp. 77–110.

[67] The church was excavated by the Combined Caesarea Expedition (CCE – Area TP). For general description of the church and its excavation see K.G. Holum, "Ceasarea's Temple Hill – The archaeology of Sacred Space in an Ancient Mediterranean city", *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67 (2004) pp. 184–199; "Caesarea – The combined Caesarea Expeditions Excavations", *NEAEHL* V (2008) pp. 1665–1668. For the dating of construction and abandonment see F. L .Horton "The Advent of Islam at Sepphoris and at Caesarea Maritima", in E.M. Meyers (ed.), *Galilee through the Centuries – Confluence of Cultures* (Winona Lake, 1999), pp. 377–390.

[68] Patrich, *Urban Space*, pp. 90–92.

[69] An exceptionally large villa was discovered west of the city, built on top of a ridge facing the walls of Caesarea. See: J. Porath, "Palaces in Bizantine Caesarea", *Cathedra* 122 (2006), pp. 117–142 (Hebrew).

[70] See for example Y. Hirschfeld and R. Birger-Calderon, "Early Roman and Byzantine Estates near Caesarea", *Israel Exploration Journal* 41 (1991), pp. 81–111; Y. Hirschfeld, *Ramat Hanadiv Excavations: Final Report of the 1984–1998 Seasons (Jerusalem, 2000).* For the map of Caesarea's hinterland see: Y. Olami, S. Sender and E. Oren, *Archaeological Survey of Israel, Map of Binyamina (48)* (Jerusalem, 2005).

[71] Estimations of the population of Caesarea range between 35,000 and 100,000. See: J. Patrich, *Urban Space*, p. 80.

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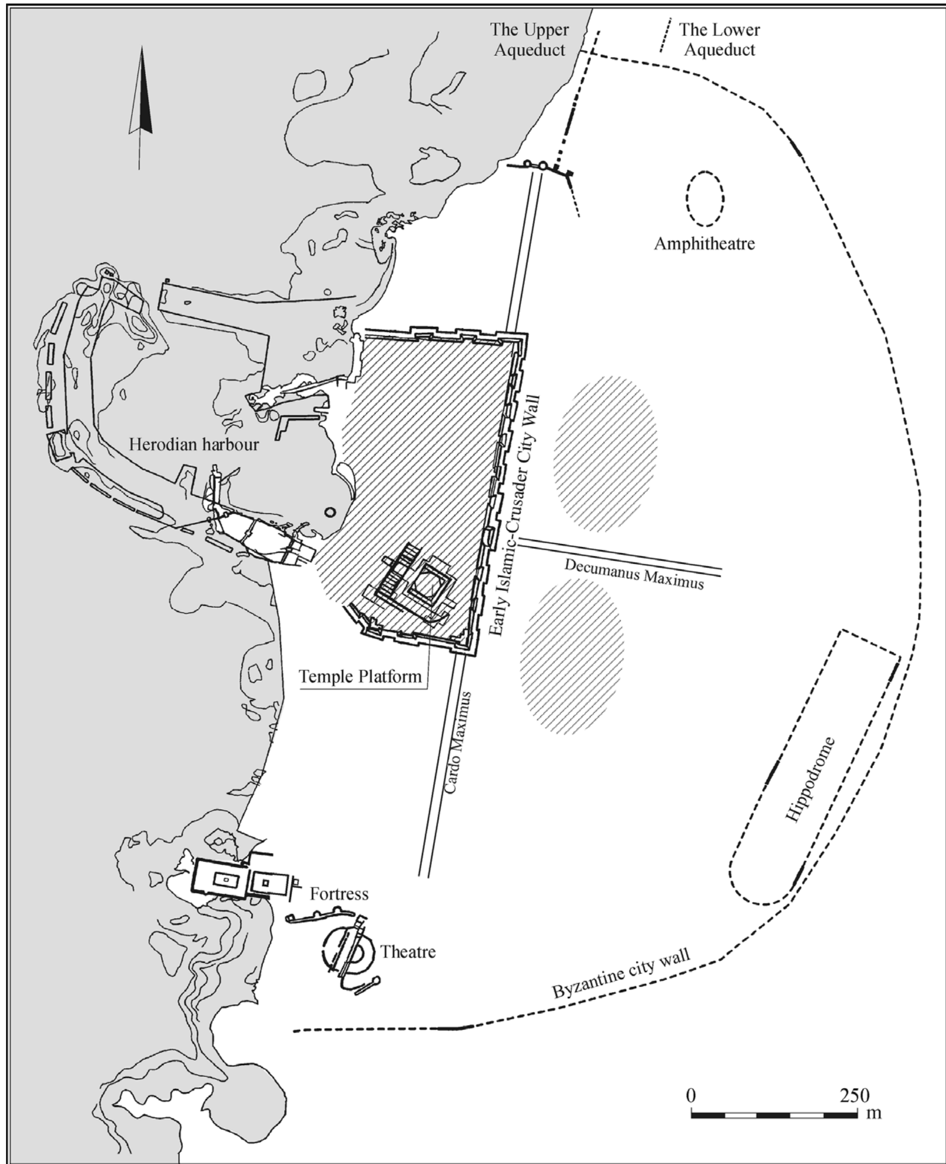

Fig. 4. Caesarea – map of the city and its main monuments; the shaded areas mark the limits of the early Islamic town (courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority).

city suffered from neglect, and the urban thoroughfares were narrowed.[72] Patrich pointed at a number of features that indicated urban decay: the deterioration of the public water system and the replacement of the major aqueducts of Caesarea with small cisterns installed in the courtyards of the buildings; the covering of decorated mosaic floors at the *Praetorium*

[72]Patrich, *Urban Space*; Levine, *Caesarea Under Roman Rule*, pp. 136–139.

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with crude stone pavements; and the introduction of industrial installations into the city.[73] Holum and Magness, on the other hand, pointed to an increased prosperity of Caesarea in the second half of the sixth century, which was expressed in the intensification of commerce and the increasing evidence for private construction all over the city.[74] They suggest that the city continued to prosper until the second half of the seventh century.

The impact of the Persian and Islamic conquests on Caesarea is also debated. While several scholars have suggested that these military raids severely affected the city and its population causing the migration of large segments of the Christian and Samaritan population,[75] others think that they had a minimal effect on the city's infrastructures and the local population.[76]

The Islamic conquest of Caesarea was described in detail by various Muslim, Christian and Samaritan sources. The city was besieged of seven years between 634 and 640, and then violently stormed.[77] However, no indications for a violent conquest exist in the archaeological record.[78] The Octagonal church, for example, was not affected by the conquest, and was probably destroyed only by the 749 earthquake.[79]

The large scale excavations at Caesarea bear clear indications for major decline in its area and population in the course of the seventh century, but this was evident mainly in the second half of this century, and was not the immediate consequence of the Islamic conquest. The decline of Caesarea was connected mainly to the administrative changes introduced by the new Islamic regime, and to the transfer of the political and administrative power to other places. These changes, together with the abandonment of significant part of its Christian and Samaritan populations, triggered the process of decline. The establishment of Ramla in c. 715 as the new capital of *Jund Filastin* further affected Caesarea, and following the 749 earthquake the transformation was completed. In the ninth and tenth century the prosperous Byzantine city became a medium-sized town concentrated in the areas around the inner harbour and surrounded by a modest city wall.

[73]Patrich dates some of the changes in the public buildings of the southern quarter to the time of the Persian conquest (614–628). J. Patrich, "Caesarea between Byzantine and Islamic Rule – The Archaeological Evidence from the Southwest Zone and the Textual Sources", *Cathedra*, 122 (2007), pp. 143–172 (Hebrew). This dating is based on an earlier dating of the buildings. See: L. E. Toombs "The Stratigraphy of Caesarea Maritima", in P.R.S. Murrey and P. Parr (eds), *Archaeology in the Levant: Essays for Kathleen Kenyon* (Warminster, 1978), pp. 223–232. However, these dates were refuted by Lenzen, Holum and Horton, based on the re-evaluation of the ceramic sequences from the JECM excavation. See: F. L. Horton, *The Advent of Islam,* p. 386 for a summary of different views.

[74]J. Magness, *The Archaeology of the Early Islamic Settlement in Palestine*. (Winona Lake, 2003), pp. 210–213 and references therein.

[75]For example Patrich, "Caesarea between Byzantine and Islamic Rule"; Toombs, *The Stratigraphy*.

[76]Magness, *Archaeology of the Early Islamic Settlemet*, p. 215; For a revised view of the impact of the Persian conquest on Caesarea see: C. Foss, "The Persians in the Roman East", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13 (2003), pp. 160–162.

[77]For general summaries of the siege and conquest see: M. Gil, A *History of Palestine 634–1099* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 58. For a detailed evaluation of the historical sources and the archaeological evidence see: J. Patrich, *Caesarea between Byzantine and Islamic Rule*. For the Samaritan sources relevant to seventh century Caesarea see: M. Levy-Rubin "New Evidence Relating to the Process of Islamization in Palestine in the Early Muslim Period – The Case of Samaria", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 43 (2000), pp. 259–276. "The Influence of the Muslim Conquest on the Settlement Pattern of Palestine during the Early Muslim Period", *Cathedra* 121 (2006), pp. 53–78 (Hebrew).

[78]While Patrich and Porath propose that the southern quarter was completely abandoned and converted into an agricultural area, Holum dates that abandonment to the years following the conquest. And see: G. Avni, "Archaeology and the Early Islamic Conquests – Three Case Studies from Palestine", in J. Schiettecatte and C. Robin (eds.), *Orient on the Eve of Islam (4th-7th Centuries) – the Setting of the Transition* (forthcoming) for summaries of the different opinions.

[79]Holum, *Ceasarea's Temple Hill*; *Caesarea*, p. 1668.

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Excavations around the inner harbour present the process of urban transformation of Caesarea in detail.[80] The southern area (Area I) had witnessed in the second half of the sixth century and the early seventh century an apparent process of "privatisation" of urban development. Throughout the seventh century this area functioned as a mixture of workshops, dwellings, and a market place, with no evidence for abandonment or decline. Towards the end of this century the inner harbour went out of use, and a paved street was laid on top of the eastern part of the silted harbour basin.

An entire new urban layout, consisting of a well-planned *insulae* and a grid of streets was established by the beginning of the ninth century, with only minimal adaptations to accommodate the former street pattern. Some of the residential units were enlarged in the tenth century and the streets were repaved. At least part of the built area was protected by a fortification wall with three gates to the east, south and north. A considerable increase of imported ceramics (mainly from Egypt) was observed.

The last decades of the tenth century were prosperous for Caesarea, expressed in the expansion and improvement of the residential quarters. A water supply from cisterns and local pipes predominated, together with subterranean storage bins probably designed to store large quantities of goods. But decline soon followed with the troubled years of the first half of the eleventh century. Several hoards found in the excavations attest to these years as being characterised by public disorder and political unrest, which led to deterioration of urban life.

Other areas of Caesarea show similar sequence of development and decay, although more fragmentary in nature. The southern part of the Byzantine city was completely abandoned in the second half of the seventh century. A large cemetery was installed here, containing tombs dating from the ninth to the eleventh century.[81]

The overall area of early Islamic Caesarea is unknown, but it is obvious that it was only a pale shadow of the former large Byzantine city. The town limits are well defined to the south and to the east, where it was bordered by a modest city wall. [82] Its northern limit is unknown, as no proper excavations were conducted in this area.

The detailed excavations in Caesarea provide a fairly good picture of the settlement process between the late sixth and the eleventh century. While the decline of the city in the second half of the sixth century is still disputed, it seems that, as in Beth Shean and Jarash, the archaeological evidence points towards continuous prosperity of the city together with a change in the concept of urbanism. There is no question about the decline of Caesarea following the Islamic conquest, but this process is not necessarily connected with the model suggested by Kennedy. It is more likely that the decline of Caesarea was an outcome of local circumstances: the change in the administrative status of the city and the abandonment of large sections of its Christian and Samaritan population. It seems that different patterns of

[80] A. Raban and Y. Arnon, "Caesarea in the Early Islamic Period and its Water Installations", *Cathedra*, 122 (2007), pp. 177–202 (Hebrew); K.G. Holum, J.A. Stabler, and E.G. Reinhardt, (eds.), *Caesarea Reports and Studies – Excavations 1995–2007 within the Old City and the Ancient Harbor* (BAR International Series 1784) (Oxford, 2008); Y. Arnon, *Caesarea Maritima, the Late Periods (700–1291)* (BAR International Series 1771) (Oxford, 2008), pp. 1–18.

[81] J. Patrich, "Caesarea between Byzantine and Islamic Rule", pp. 163; *idem et. al.* "The Warehouse Complex and Governor's Palace (areas KK, CC, and NN, May 1993-December 1995), in K.G. Holum, A. Raban and J. Patrich (eds.), *Caesarea Papers II* (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement Series, Portsmouth RI, 1999), pp. 82–83.

[82] The line of this wall was recently discovered in the course of excavations conducted by N. Fauscher and H. Barbe. I thank them for providing me this information.

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development and change could be observed in various areas of Caesarea in the early Islamic period. While the southeastern areas were deserted and remained outside the urban limits, the inner harbour and its surroundings were developed as a prosperous residential quarters of a medium sized town.

Jerusalem

Observations on urban change in Jerusalem highlight a different process from those presented above. The special status of the city as a major Christian and Muslim religious centre and its attractiveness to a large number of pilgrims affected development and changes in its urban structures. It could have been expected that the Islamic conquest and the religious change it triggered would have had a direct impact on the city's layout, but apparently no significant change is evident in most parts of the city, except for the large scale construction on the Temple Mount – *Haram el-Sharīf* and its surroundings.

Byzantine Jerusalem is well known from numerous archaeological findings, historical sources, and visual representations. The Madaba map, probably from the second half of the sixth century, shows the city's urban layout and its major monuments emphasising the central position of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre within the urban landscape.[83] All sources point toward an ongoing construction and urban expansion in and around Jerusalem between the fourth and the seventh centuries.[84] During the sixth century construction expanded beyond the city walls, especially to the north and east. Its main characteristic was a network of churches and monasteries established north of the Damascus Gate,[85] and on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.[86] Several monastic compounds were also constructed to the west, southwest and south of the city limits.[87] (Fig. 5).

This major expansion continued well into early Islamic times, and most of the Christian religious institutes functioned at least until the eighth and ninth centuries.

Unlike in Beth Shean, the second half of the sixth century was a period of relative prosperity in Jerusalem, and no changes were observed in the major religious buildings and

[83]The most comprehensive evaluation of Byzantine and Early Islamic Jerusalem is still the monumental work of H. Vincent and F.-M. Abel, *Jérusalem, Recherches de topographie, d'archeologie et d'histoire. Tome II—Jérusalem Nouvelle* (Paris, 1914–26). For recent comprehensive summaries of the archaeology of Byzantine Jerusalem see: H. Geva, "Jerusalem, The Byzantine Period", *NEAEHL* 2 (1994), pp. 768–785; Y. Tsafrir, "The Topography and Archaeology of Jerusalem in the Byzantine Period", in Y. Tsafrir and S. Safrai (eds.), *The History of Jerusalem—The Roman and Byzantine Periods (70–638 CE)* (Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 281–352, (Hebrew). For the urban components of Jerusalem as represented in the Madaba map, see: M. Avi Yonah, *The Madaba Mosaic Map* (Jerusalem, 1954); H. Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba* (Kempen, 1992); Tsafrir, *Topography and Archaeology*, pp. 342–351. For the archaeology and topography of Early Islamic Jerusalem see: D. Bahat, "The Physical lnfrastructure", in J. Prawer and H. Ben-Shammai (eds.), *The History of Jerusalem—The Early Muslim Period (638–1099)* (Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 38–101.

[84]Tsafrir, *Topography and Archaeology*, pp. 285–295, 330–342.

[85]M. J. Lagrange, *Saint Etienne et son sanctuaire a Jérusalem* (Paris, 1894); Vincent and Abel, *Jerusalem Nouvelle,* pp. 743–879; and for the recent excavations see: D. Amit and S. Wollf, "An Armenian monastery in the Morasha neighborhood, Jerusalem", in H. Geva (ed.) *Ancient Jerusalem revealed,* 2nd edition (Jerusalem, 2000), pp. 293–298; V. Tzaferis, N. Feig, A. Onn, and E. Shukron, "Excavations at the Third Wall, North of the Jerusalem Old City", in Geva. *Ancient Jerusalem revealed,* pp. 287–292.

[86]P. B. Bagatti, "Scavo di un monastero al Dominus Flevit", Liber Annus 6 (1955–56), pp. 240–270.

[87]G. Barkay, "Excavations of Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem", in Geva, *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed,* pp. 85–106; J.H. Illife, "Cemeteries and a 'Monastery' at the Y.M.C.A., Jerusalem", *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine* 4 (1935), pp. 70–80; D. Ussishkin, *"The Village of Silwan—The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom* (Jerusalem, 1993), pp. 346–359.

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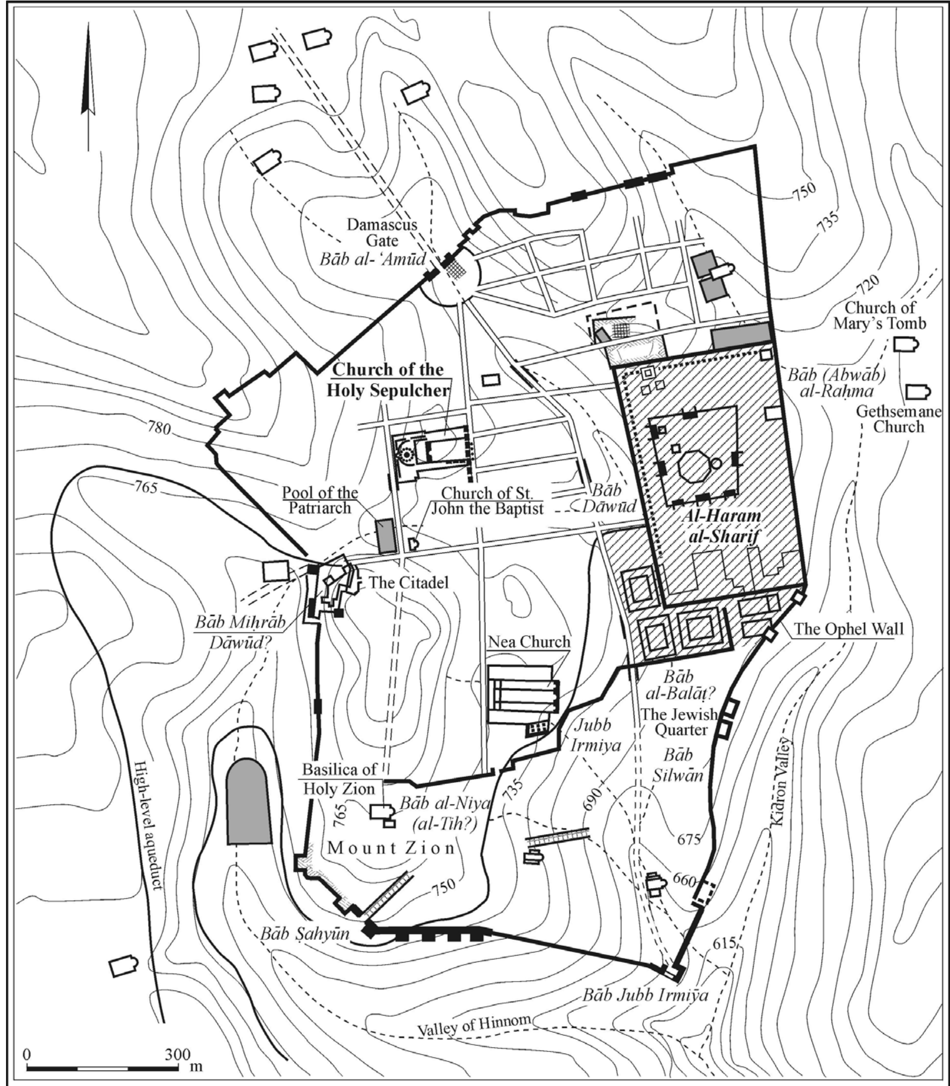

Fig. 5. Jerusalem – map of the early Islamic city (courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority)

main public arteries of the city. The archaeological finds show that the city was not physically affected by the Persian and Islamic conquests, contrary to previous evaluations that claimed massive damages.[88]

Early Islamic Jerusalem was traditionally identified with the monumental constructions at the Temple Mount / *Haram el-Sharīf* and its surroundings, conducted mainly in the seventh and eighth centuries. The construction of the Dome of the Rock and *al-Aqsa* mosque mark

[88]G. Avni, "The Conquest of Jerusalem by the Persians (614 CE) – An Archaeological Assessment, *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 357 (2010) pp. 35–48.

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a major urban change in this area, creating a new religious focus in Jerusalem, along with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.[89] The large scale excavations conducted south and west of the Temple Mount revealed the hitherto unknown remains of four large monumental buildings which were founded during the Umayyad rule in Jerusalem.[90] This massive construction represented a dramatic change in the function of the south eastern section of Jerusalem, with the newly erected monuments dominating the city's skyline.[91]

It should be noted though that the Temple Mount and its surroundings is the only part of Jerusalem in which a significant urban change was identified during the seventh and eighth centuries. In other parts of the city no changes were observed and the continuity of the Byzantine period city is evident. Archaeological evidence for continuity both in private urban dwellings and in churches and monasteries was found almost in every excavation, showing that early Islamic Jerusalem preserved most of its Byzantine urban characteristics. Several components in the urban layout of Jerusalem between the sixth and tenth centuries deserve special attention:

The city wall, reconstructed at the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century, continued to delimit the core of the urban area up to the tenth or eleventh centuries.[92] During the Early Islamic period the wall went through several stages of changes and reconstructions, and its northern section was probably renovated and partly rebuilt in the eighth century.[93] Large renovations and reconstructions were also conducted at the Temple Mount walls and at the southern wall of Jerusalem.[94] In spite of these changes, the archaeological evidence shows that the city limits of the Byzantine period were maintained throughout most of the early Islamic period, and only at the end of the tenth or beginning of the eleventh century the southern section of the city wall was abandoned, and the urban area was reduced to its present day city wall limits.[95]

[89]The main early Islamic monuments attracted the attention of scholars from the nineteenth century onwards. There is an exhaustive literature on the construction and role of the early Islamic monuments on the Temple Mount. For the major works see: K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture,* vol. 1 (Oxford, 1969); O. Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem", *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959), pp. 33–62; *idem, The Shape of the Holy—Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton, 1996); M. Rosen Ayalon, *The Early Islamic Monuments of al-Haram al-Sharīf, An Iconograhic Study*. Qedem 28 (Jerusalem, 1989); A. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship—Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (Leiden, 1995).

[90]The excavations were conducted by Mazar and Ben-Dov between 1968–1978 and by Reich and Billig between 1994–1996. See: B. Mazar, *The Mountain of the Lord* (New York, 1975); M. Ben Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple* (New York, 1982) pp. 273–321*;* R. Reich and Y. Billig, "Excavations Near the Temple Mount and Robinson Arch, 1994–1996", in Geva, *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed,* pp. 340–352. For the interpretation of the buildings see: Rosen-Ayalon, *The Early Islamic Monuments,* pp. 8–11; Grabar, *Shape of the Holy,* pp. 128–130.

[91]Several interpretations for the political and religious background that led to the establishment of the new Islamic centre in the Temple Mount / *Haram el-Sharīf* area were suggested; see: Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem,* pp. 147–162 for a summary of the previous researches.

[92]Tsafrir, *Topography and Archaeology*, pp. 135–142; Geva, *Jerusalem,* p. 693.

[93]R. W. Hamilton, "Excavations Against the North Wall of Jerusalem", *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine* 10 (1944), pp. 1–54; J. Magness, "The Walls of Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period", *Biblical Archaeologist* 54 (1991), pp. 208–217.

[94]M. Ben Dov, *The Historical Atlas of Jerusalem* (New York, 2002), pp. 174–182; Bahat*, The Physical Infrastructure,* pp. 43–45.

[95]Bahat, *Physical Infrastructure*, pp. 37–41. According to Vincent and Tsafrir, the southern walls were abandoned in the second half of the tenth century, see: Vincent and Abel, *Jérusalem Nouvelle,* p. 942; Y. Tsafrir, "Muqaddasi's Gates of Jerusalem, A New Identification Based on Byzantine Sources", *Israel Exploration Journal* 27 (1977), pp. 152–161. Ben Dov delays the date of abandonment of the Byzantine walls to the second half of the eleventh century. See: Ben Dov, *Historical Atlas of Jerusalem,* pp. 187–192.

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The basic urban street grid plan did not change significantly from Byzantine to early Islamic times. Although the wide colonnaded streets were narrowed, as in Beth Shean, Jarash and Palmyra,[96] the late Roman streets were in continuous use during early Islamic and later medieval times, and they still marks the present day layout of alleys in the Old city.[97] This continuity was evident by a number of probes conducted in the main alleys of the Old City, in which the large stone pavement of late Roman and Byzantine streets were unearthed directly underneath the present day streets.[98]

The division of the urban area into quarters was established already in Byzantine times. During the Early Islamic period the city quarters were rearranged according to the religious and ethnic affiliation of the population.[99] The Christian quarter was located approximately in the same area as the present day Christian quarter, in the northwestern part of the Old City and around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.[100] Significant renovations were conducted here in the ninth century[101] and again in the eleventh century, when several public buildings were constructed in the Muristan area, to the south of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.[102]

The construction of new Christian institutions in this part of the city during early Islamic times shows that the local Christian community maintained its leading position in Jerusalem. The most outstanding example is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre itself, which remained physically unchanged in the early Islamic period.[103] The Church did not suffer any significant damage during the 614 Persian invasion and the 638 Muslim conquest. During the early Islamic period considerable construction and renovations were conducted in the areas around the Church.[104] Although most sources claim that the Church was totally destroyed in 1009 by the order of the zealous caliph al-Hakim,[105] recent investigations conducted at the site show that this destruction left significant parts of the original fourth century church intact.[106]

Clear evidence for settlement continuity is evident from excavations in the southern urban area of Jerusalem, along the Tyropoeon Valley. The 1920s excavations revealed the remains

[96]For the streets in Jerusalem see: Bahat, *Physical Infrastructure*, pp. 49–52.; For Jarash see: Kraeling, *Gerasa,* pp. 116–117; for Palmyra: K. Al-As`ad and F. M. Stepinowski, "The Ummayad Suq in Palmyra", *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 4 (1989), pp. 205–223.

[97]J. Wilkinson, "The Streets of Jerusalem", *Levant* 7 (1975), pp. 118–136; Bahat, *Physical Infrastructure,* pp. 49–52.

[98]Y. Tsafrir, "The Topography and Archaeology of Aelia Capitolina", in Tsafrir and Safrai, *The History of Jerusalem,* pp. 142–156; *ibid*, *Topography and Archaeology*, pp. 295–300. A. Kloner and R. Bar Nathan, "The Eastern Cardo of Aelia Capitolina", *Erertz Israel* 28 (2008), pp. 193–205.

[99]Bahat, *Physical Infrastructure*, pp. 53–65.

[100]*Ibid*, pp. 58–65; A. Linder, "Christian Communities in Jerusalem", in Tsafrir and Safrai, *The History of Jerusalem,* pp. 121–162.

[101]Bahat, *Physical Infrastructure*, pp. 62–64.

[102]*Ibid.*, pp. 60–65; and See: J. Patrich, "The Structure of the Muristan Quarter of Jerusalem in the Crusader Period", *Cathedra* 33 (1984) pp. 3–17 (Hebrew); A. Boaz, *Jerusalem in the Times of the Crusaders* (London, 2001), pp. 85–88.

[103]Clear continuity from Byzantine to Early Islamic times is evident from a recent survey and excavations conducted at the Church and its surroundings. See: G. Avni and J. Seligman, "New Excavations at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Compound", in G. C. Bottini, L. Di Segni and L. D. Chrupcala (eds.), *One Land—Many Cultures—Archaeological Studies in Honor of Stanislao Loffreda OFM* (Jerusalem, 2003), pp. 153–162.

[104]One of the main finds of the recent excavations in this area are the remains of a hitherto unknown church built in the early Islamic period and annexed to the main complex of the Church. *Ibid.*, pp. 156–158.

[105]M. Canard, "Destruction de l'Eglise de la Rèsurrection par le calife Hăkim et l'histoire de la descente du feu sacre", *Byzantion* 35 (1965), pp. 16–43.

[106]Avni and Seligman, *New Excavations*; M. Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* (Phoenix Mill, 1999), pp. 72–73.

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of several houses which were dated to the Byzantine period,[107] but the evaluation of finds from these excavations shows a continuous sequence of use into the early Islamic period, and perhaps even later.[108] Although private houses in this area follow the Byzantine construction tradition, the urban layout was more spread out. Open spaces were identified between the dwellings, and it seems that these were used for small agricultural plots. Industrial installations were constructed within and between the houses.[109]

The distinction between the city and its hinterland during the Byzantine and Early Islamic period became less clear with the massive expansion of the urban areas beyond the city walls.[110] A number of excavations conducted to the north of Damascus Gate revealed an extensive network of monasteries and other Christian institutions, which were established in the Byzantine period and continued to flourish in early Islamic times, with considerable construction done between the sixth and eighth centuries.[111] The denomination of the Christian inhabitants was evident from a number of inscriptions found. Along with the common Greek inscriptions discovered in several complexes, a clear Armenian presence was defined in one of the excavated monastic complexes.[112]

Excavations in other sites outside the city walls show similar continuity during the early Islamic period.[113] For example, a large monastic compound excavated on the eastern slopes of Mount Scopus revealed continuous use between the fifth and ninth centuries;[114] several farmsteads, monasteries and churches to the northeast and northwest of Jerusalem evinced the same pattern of continuity;[115] a number of monastic complexes excavated to the south of the city, in the area between Jerusalem and Bethlehem were used also in early Islamic times.[116] Especially notable was the discovery of a Byzantine monumental octagonal church near the Jerusalem–Bethlehem Road, identified with the Paleo-Kathisma. The installation of a small mosque within the Byzantine church indicates that the site was used by both Christians and Muslims.[117]

[107] J. W. Crowfoot and G. M. Fitzgerald, "Excavations in the Tyropoeon Valley, Jerusalem, 1927", *Annual of the Palestine Exploration Fund* 5 (1929), pp. 58–60. R. A. S. Macalister and J. G. Duncan, "Excavations on the Hill of Ophel, Jerusalem 1923–1925", *Annual of the Palestine Exploration Fund* 4 (1926), pp. 137–145.

[108] J. Magness, "Reexamination of the Archaeological Evidence for the Sassanian Persian Destruction of the Tyropoeon Valley", *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 287 (1992), pp. 67–74.

[109] Bahat, *Physical infrastructure,* pp. 68–70.

[110] G. Avni, "The Urban Area of Jerusalem in the Roman and Byzantine Periods—a View from the Necropolis", *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 18 (2005), pp. 373–396.

[111] The main archaeological excavations in this area were conducted at the end of the nineteenth century, and again in the 1990s. For the main archaeological reports see: Lagrange, *St. Etienne;* Vincent and Abel, *Jerusalem Nouvelle,* pp. 743–801; Amit and Wolf, *An Armenian Monastery*; Tzaferis et al., *Excavations at the Third Wall*; Tsafrir, *Topography and Archaeology*, pp. 336–342.

[112] M. Stone and D. Amit, "New Armenian Inscriptions from Jerusalem", *Cathedra* 83 (1996), pp. 27–44 (Hebrew).

[113] For a detailed list of churches and monasteries in and around Jerusalem see: Schick, *The Christian Communities*, pp. 325–359; Bahat, *Physical Infrastructure*, pp. 87–95.

[114] D. Amit, J. Seligman and I. Zilberbod, "The 'Monastery of Theodoros and Cyriacus' on the Eastern Slope of Mount Scopus, Jerusalem", in Bottini,. Di Segni and Chrupcala, *One Land—Many Cultures*, pp. 139–148.

[115] Eg. R. Arav, L. Di Segni and A. Kloner, "An Eighth Century Monastery Near Jerusalem", *Liber Annus* 50 (1990), pp. 313–320; S. Gibson, "Ras et-Tawil: A Byzantine Monastery North of Jerusalem", *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Society* (1985–86), pp. 69–73.

[116] V. C. Corbo, *Gil scavi di Kh. Siyar el-Ghanam (Campo dei pastori) e I monastery dei dintoni* (Jerusalem, 1955)

[117] R. Avner "The Recovery of the Kathisma Church and its Influence on Octagonal Buildings", in Bottini, Di Segni and Chrupcala, *One Land – Many* Cultures, pp. 173–186. *Idem*, "The Kathisma: a Christian and Muslim Pilgrimage Site". *ARAM* 18–19 (2006–7), pp. 541–557.

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The archaeological evidence does not support claims for constant decline in Jerusalem during the early Islamic period. It rather points to a clear pattern of continuity between the Byzantine and the early Islamic period, with a very slow and gradual process of change. The city walls maintained their former layout at least until the tenth century, and domestic architecture was only gradually altered following the Byzantine period. This process is evident in many excavated sites, from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the heart of Jerusalem to the large network of monasteries, churches, and farms in the outskirts of the city.[118]

The only urban area in which a dramatic change occurred was the Temple Mount–*Haram el-Sharīf* and its surroundings. Other parts of the city remained practically unchanged, with Christian institutions still dominating the urban landscape. It seems that Christian religious institutions still flourished for few centuries following the Islamic conquest.[119]

Discussion

The question of decline in urban structures has been much debated in recent years with data coming from a large number of new excavations in Byzantine and early Islamic sites. Many discussions were influenced by Kennedy's model of urban change that revised previous assumptions and established the framework to a new paradigm for the urban transformation in Syria. [120]

Kennedy summarised his view with the following statement:

> The picture that emerges from this study suggests that the urban change in the Middle East took place over a number of centuries and that the development from the *polis* of antiquity to the Islamic *madina* was a long drawn out process of evolution. Many of the features which are often associated with the coming of Islam, the decay of the monumental buildings and the changes in the classical street plan, are in evidence long before the Muslim conquest. We should perhaps think in terms of a half millennium of transition.[121]

A re-consideration of some of his main arguments through the prism of the accumulating archaeological data since the 1980s, leads to a revised insight on the process of change in the cities of Palestine and Jordan, which can be extrapolated also to other regions in the Near East.

The central role of the city in both the Byzantine and the Early Islamic societies, one of the main arguments on which Kennedy's model is based, was much reinforced with the extensive recent exploration in the cities of the Near East. It is evident that the Islamic society, like the Byzantine one, was oriented around the city. Urban structures in Syria–Palestine

[118] Pottery assemblages from excavations in Jerusalem have a major role in refining this chronological picture. See particularly the contribution of J. Magness's in her *Jerusalem Ceramic Chronology, Circa 200–800* C.E. (Sheffield, 1993).

[119] T. Milik, "La topographie de Jerusalem vers la fin de l'epoque Byzantine", *Melanges de l'universite Saint Joseph* 37 (1960–61), pp. 125–89.

[120] Beside his *From Polis to Madina* see H. Kennedy, "The Last Century of Byzantine Syria: a Reinterpretation", *Byzantinische Forschungen* 10 (1985), pp. 141–183.

[121] Kennedy, *From Polis to Madina*, p 17.

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continued to exist, contrary to their decline in the Western Roman Empire.[122] While previous research saw the "Islamic city" as a degeneration of the classical planned cities that were designed according to the orthogonal principles,[123] Kennedy emphasised that similar principles of urban planning were applied both in the Hellenistic–Roman cities and in the Early Islamic newly-established settlements.[124] These were designed in a clear pattern of planned enclosures (for example in 'Anjar and Qasr al-Hayr East), and the Muslim town planners adopted the principles of their predecessors in Roman and Byzantine times.[125]

It seems that the evidence from the case studies presented above strongly support this argument. The urban continuity and development of early Islamic Baisān, Tiberias, Jarash and Jerusalem, based on the former urban tradition of the Byzantine period, show that the central role of the city in local societies did not change between Byzantine and early Islamic times.

A major point in Kennedy's argument is the chronology of urban change, claiming that the Byzantine–Islamic urban transformation in Syria was a long term process, which started as early as the sixth century. This transformation was the product of a profound social and economic change, in which the coming of Islam comprised only one aspect. The large-scale Justinian constructions in cities like Antioch and Jerusalem were the very last efforts of monumental Roman construction in the Eastern Roman Empire.[126] In other cities no monumental construction was conducted after the mid-sixth century and the maintenance of existing buildings suffered from a continuous neglect, which resulted in long term decline.

While the results of excavations in Beth Shean support Kennedy's argument of urban change starting in the second half of the sixth century, the connection between this change and long term decline has not been proved in the other cities presented above. The chronology of decline in Caesarea is debated and it seems that the city declined only in the second half of the seventh century, Jarash continued to flourish into the seventh century and was reinforced with the construction of the congregational mosque in the eighth century, and in Jerusalem there are no signs of urban decline before the ninth and tenth centuries. Thus the concept of long term decline starting in the sixth century should be reconsidered.

The accumulating archaeological evidence from the cities in Palestine and Jordan gives Kennedy's conclusions a different interpretation. While the process of change indeed spanned a long period of time, the connection between change and long term decline is not evident. There are no better words than those of Kennedy himself to warn against this type of value judgment:

[122]*Ibid*, p. 4. and See Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, pp. 295–310; B. Ward-Perkins, "Specialized Production and Exchange", in A. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins and M. Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History XIV – Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, A.D. 425–600*. (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 346–391; M. Whittow, "Decline and Fall? Studying Long-Term Change in the East", in L. Lavan and W. Bowden (eds.), *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology* (Leiden, 2003). pp. 404–423.

[123]See for example Von Grunebaum, *The Structure of the Muslim Town*; Alsayyad, *Cities and Caliphs,* pp. 14–22 for a summary of traditional ideas.

[124]Kennedy, *From Polis to Madina,* p. 16.

[125]The same planning concepts applied for the Abbasid large cities of Sammara and Baghdad, which revealed precise orthogonal planning patterns. See: A. Northedge, *Historical Topography of Samarra* (London, 2006). J. Lassner, *The Middle East Remembered: Forged Identities, Competing Narratives, contested Spaces.* (Ann Arbor, 2000), pp. 153–179.

[126]Kennedy, *From Polis to Madina*, p. 17.

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> We should avoid making inappropriate value judgments. The development of the Islamic city is often seen as a process of decay, the abandonment of high Hippodamian ideals of classical antiquity and the descent into urban squalor. On the contrary, the changes in city planning may, in some cases, have been the result of an increased urban and commercial vitality.[127]

It is interesting to note that although Kennedy uses the term "change" rather than "decline", he concludes that the outcome of these changes in cities was a constant decline in their political status, economic stability, and physical resilience. The contraction of the Roman style, wide colonnaded streets (at Apamea, Damascus, Palmyra, Jarash, and other large cities); the abandonment of theatres; the conversion of large baths to humble buildings designed solely for the functional purposes of bathing and not as social gathering places; the change of the location of markets from the main city squares to a linear pattern along the streets, all were viewed by Kennedy as indicators for decline in cities.

Tsafrir and Foerster, based on their excavations at Beth Shean, stated more clearly that the change in the city's layout, which started in the second half of the sixth century, inevitably led to decline. They define the process of narrowing the wide arteries and the loose style of buildings not as decline but rather as an indication of a change in values, preferring the practical approach in the design of the urban landscape to the aesthetic perfection of the former period.[128] However, they conclude that this process inevitably leads towards decline:

> There is a certain stage in the process of change when we are obliged to use terms such as "decline" or "deterioration" of the city. We believe that this arrived when the streets were narrowed to lanes.[129]

It seems that the distinction between "change" and "decline" as indicated in the archaeological record remains vague. Evaluations of urban landscape in the Near Eastern cities are much influenced by the concepts of Roman building tradition. Thus, contraction of streets and abandonment of monumental architecture are regarded as signs for decline. In their discussion of the meaning of urban changes in Beth Shean, Tsafrir and Foerster relate precisely to this issue:

> What is merely a "change" in the concept of urbanism and the priorities of urban life? How can we discern a "decline" or a "deterioration" of a city? When can we speak about the "disintegration" of the town and its institutes? At what stage do we declare the "demise" of the ancient city? Are scholars justified in interpreting the occupation of the porticoes along the streets by tradesmen and peddlers with their makeshift stalls as a sign of deterioration, or, on the contrary, should they see it as an indication of commercial prosperity and social activity? We have no clear answer, but there is no simple correlation between the deterioration of the city's monumental architecture and urban decline.[130]

In his evaluation of the mechanisms of physical change in cities, Kennedy found that demands for building space in the city centres, which in many places were triggered by expanded commercial activities, were the main reasons for the contraction of streets into

[127] *Ibid.*
[128] Tsafrir and Foerster, *From Scytopolis to Baisān,* p. 116.
[129] *Idem*, *Urbanism in Scythopolis*, p. 141.
[130] *Ibid.*

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narrow alleys.[131] Streets were narrowed also due to the disappearance of wheeled transport in the Near East. When donkeys and camels replaced chariots there was no practical need for wide streets.[132]

The change was also expressed in the role of local industries and commerce within the city. In the Byzantine period most economic systems were based on the agricultural and industrial hinterlands that provided services to the consumer city, while in the early Islamic period commerce and industry became the dominant factor of the urban economy, and the cities of Palestine and Jordan became centers for production and exchange.[133]

This process was also connected to changes in the involvement of the central or municipal governments in planning and development within cities. While in the Byzantine period the municipal authorities strictly prevented private construction in public domains, Islamic rule brought more a liberal approach, and in many cities the local authorities did not intervene even when private construction was penetrating public spaces.[134] Mark Whittow connects this process to the decline of the city's *curiale* during the sixth century. The imperial patronage, which replaced the local nobility, was not politically and financially strong enough to support public development in the cities.[135]

While enhancing the argument that the contraction of streets did not reflect decline of urban vitality, but rather showed an increased economic activity, Kennedy stressed the major role of both human and natural catastrophes as agents of change, weakening local societies and infrastructures.[136] The effects of the Byzantine–Persian wars, the 542 CE Bubonic plague, and a number of subsequent earthquakes were suggested as the main triggers of change and decline in the role of cities as centres of political power. When the Muslims came, this change (which was obviously also expressed in decline) was already in high motion, and many cities did not survive the combined effects of these catastrophes.[137]

Kennedy's view was adopted by other scholars who claimed that the decline in the cities of Syria-Palestine between the sixth and eighth centuries was an outcome of the combined impact of catastrophic events, which turned the cities into pale shadows of their former Byzantine greatness.[138]

However, no substantial archaeological evidence was discovered in the cities of Palestine and Jordan that may support the suggestion of massive damage to cities as a consequence of

[131] Kennedy, *From Polis to Madina,* pp. 21–22.

[132] *Ibid,* p. 26. and see: R. W. Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975).

[133] A. Walmsely, "Production, Exchange and Regional Trade in the Islamic East Mediterranean: Old Structures, New Systems?" in I.L. Hansen and C. Whickham (eds.), *The Long Eight Century* (Leiden, 2000), pp. 265–345.

[134] Kennedy, *From Polis to Madina*, p. 25.

[135] M. Whittow, "Ruling the Late Roman and Early Byzantine City: a Continuous History", *Past and* Present 129 (1990), pp. 3–29. And see: Tsafrir and Foerster, *Urbanism at Schthopolis*, p. 120.

[136] Kennedy, *From Polis to Madina*, p. 18.

[137] According to Kennedy only a few cities, for example Damascus and Aleppo, continued to flourish between 550–750 CE but these were the exception and not the rule. And see C. Foss, "Syria in Transition, A.D. 550–750: An Archaeological approach", *Dumbaton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997), pp. 189–269.

[138] For example Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford, 2001); pp. 295–298; A. Northedge, "Archaeology and Islam", in G. Barker (ed.), *Companion Encyclopedia of Archaeology* (London, 1999), pp. 1083–1085. For the retraction of economy from the middle of the sixth century see C. Morrisson and J.-P. Sodini, J.-P. "The Sixth Century Economy", in A.E. Laiou (ed.), *The Economic History of Byzantium: from the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*. (Washington D.C., 2002), pp. 171–220. See the opposing view in M.G. Morony, "Economic Boundaries? Late Antiquity and Early Islam", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47 (2004), pp. 167–194.

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the Byzantine-Persian wars or the Bubonic plague. In most cities construction continued throughout the period; moreover, in areas displaying a decrease in the number of public buildings in the cities,[139] it was complimented by an increase in construction of churches and monasteries in towns and villages. Evidence for continuity and even intensification of settlements during late Byzantine and early Islamic times is reinforced by finds in towns. The newly emerging rural and urban communities of the fifth and sixth centuries continued uninterruptedly into the Early Islamic period, as evident in Jordan (for example Reihab, Khirbet Samra, Madaba and Umm el-Jimmal) and in several towns in the Negev (particularly Shivta and Nessana).[140]

Conclusion

The extensive archaeological findings accumulated since the 1980s generated a revision of existing concepts concerning the timing and impact of changes in cities, between the sixth and eleventh centuries. The model suggested by Kennedy, featuring long-term change and decline spanning more than 500 years, should be modified. It seems that the process of urban change was more complex and involved a wide regional variability of intensification and abatement of settlements.[141] Some cities evinced abatement, but then recovered on a different scope, either enlarged or reduced in area and economic capacities (Tiberias, Beth Shean and Caesarea for example); few continued to flourish (Jarash and Jerusalem); other settlements declined or were totally abandoned. These processes were attested throughout the Early Islamic period in various regions of Palestine and Jordan, culminating in a nearly total collapse of settlements in the mid-eleventh century.[142]

The pattern and chronology of urban change varies from one site to the other, and was dependent on regional economic circumstances. Few consistent patterns could be observed: The introduction of intensive commercial and industrial activities into the cities blurred the separation between public and private domains, one of the basic principles of Hellenistic and Roman towns. Cities were gradually transferred into a more complex but lively and developing urban tissue, in which various functions were located together in the same area.

Applying the "Intensification and Abatement" model can explain the mechanism of change in cities. The combined threats of external political powers and natural calamities (plagues and earthquakes) were responded by the ability of the urban societies to accommodate their economic systems. Cities that were not resilient enough to produce such changes, declined.

However, the mechanisms of change in this region were not tightly connected with the major political events, but rather with long term economic and social processes. These

[139] As suggested by L. Di-Segni, "Epigraphic Documentation on Building in the Provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia*, 4th – 7th c". In J. Humphrey (ed.), *The Roman and Byzantine Near East II: Some Recent Archaeological Research* (Portsmouth RI., 1999). pp. 149–178.

[140] G. Avni, "The Byzantine – Islamic Transition in the Negev: An Archaeological Perspective", in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 35 (2009), *Idem,* "Archaeology and the Early Islamic Conquests of Palestine – Three Regional Case Studies". In. C. Robin and J. Schahciatte (eds.), *L'orient a la veille de l'Islam,* (forthcoming).

[141] This pattern was suggested for other regions of the Mediterranean. See: Whittow, *Decline and Fall?* pp. 414–417 and references therein.

[142] The reasons of the settlement collapse before the coming of the Crusaders in 1099 are beyond the scope of this paper and deserve a comprehensive study.

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included the transition from governmental and ecclesiastical support to private construction enterprises; changing conceptions of demand, production and consumption of goods from the governmental and municipal authorities to the private sector; decline in international trade which lead to an expansion of regional networks of commercial exchange; and a productive agricultural society that continued to function in the cities` hinterlands.

Further reinforcement for this regional process comes with the evaluation of the extensive research conducted in the countryside. Scores of small towns, villages, farmsteads and monastic compounds were surveyed and excavated, yielding evidence for the continuity of settlements from Byzantine to early Islamic times.[143] For example, a recent evaluation of the agricultural hinterland of Jerusalem shows that in most sites there is a clear pattern of continuity, with temporal abatement. In the rural and nomadic fringes of the Negev Highlands, settlement was intensified between the sixth and ninth centuries.[144] Other regions flourished with the growth and expansion of neighbouring cities, as in the hinterland of Ramla, the early Islamic established capital of *Jund Filastin*.

The evidence from Palestine and Jordan reinforces Kennedy's idea that classical monumental architecture and town planning became irrelevant to the cities of the Near East with the debut of economic and cultural changes in the sixth century. These cities gradually changed their appearance: contrary to the Roman imperial architectural principles, which emphasised a move "from Function to Monument",[145] the new trend in Late Antique urbanism was heavily concentrated on functional approaches, in order to maintain the cities' resilience. It was nineteenth and twentieth centuries' value judgments which influenced an admiration for (if not adoration of) Roman monumental architecture and subsequently labelled this conceptual change as 'decline'.[146]

It therefore seems that existing approaches to 'change' and 'decline' should be reconsidered. Monumental architecture of the Hellenistic and Roman styles indeed deteriorated, but that need not have necessarily meant a total decline in settlements, as previously proposed. The conceptual changes in city planning may have, in some cases, been generated by an increased urban and commercial vitality. That was the leading factor that triggered the slow and gradual changes in the shape of cities in the Near East between the sixth and eleventh centuries.

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[143]In the framework of a comprehensive study on the settlements of Palestine in the early Islamic period, which is currently under preparation by the author, a corpus of sites in which clear evidence of Byzantine Islamic continuity was found will be provided. It includes about 65 small towns and large villages, c. 110 rural sites, and about 25 churches and monasteries. For previous works see: Schick, *Christian Communities.*

[144]G. Avni, *Nomads, Farmers and Town-Dwellers – Pastoralists-Sedentist Interaction in the Negev Highlands, Sixth-Eighth Centuries CE.* (Jerusalem,1996).

[145]A. Segal, *From Function to Monument: Urban Landscapes of Roman Palestine, Syria and the Provincia Arabia* (Oxbow Monographs, 66), (Oxford, 1997)

[146]And see: R. Laurence, "Modern Ideology and the Creation of Ancient Town Planning", *European Review of History* 1 (1994), pp. 9–18 on the adoption and creation of the Roman town planning concept by the modern town planners in the early twentieth century.

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