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CHAPTER 1

BET SHE'AN IN THE Umayyad Period

RACHEL BAR-NATHAN AND WALID ATRASH

INTRODUCTION

THE GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

The ancient site of Bet She'an (Nysa-Scythopolis in the Hellenistic and Roman–Byzantine periods and Baysān following the Arab conquest)¹ is located in the northern part of the Bet She'an Valley, a wide and central region situated along the Jordan Valley. It sits on a major west–east crossroad, via the Jezreel Valley, that connects the *Via Maris* (the Mediterranean coastal route) to the *Via Nova Trajana* (the Transjordanian north–south route).

The Bet She'an Valley lies between the Gilbo'a and Samaria mountain ranges in the west and southwest, the Jordan River in the east, and Ramot Kokhav in the northwest. The terrain surrounding the site slopes moderately down from west to east, with a somewhat steeper slope toward the south and more steeply still at its far-eastern end, as it approaches the Jordan River. Basaltic rocks and volcanic tuff underly Ramot Kokhav in the northern part of the valley and extend to Naḥal Ḥarod. In the western part of the valley, the Gilbo'a Mountain slopes are composed of dolomite and hard limestone rocks, which also rim the Bet She'an Valley, while its floor consists of sedimentary travertine rock.

As the valley is below sea level, its climate is semi-arid; it marks the northernmost extension of the region's desert belt. However, 30–35 springs within the valley, with an annual water supply of *c.* 121 million cu m, mark it as one of the richest and most fertile regions in the country (Nir 1989:18). The area is crossed from west to east by the deep gorge of Naḥal Ḥarod (Wadi Jālūd [ed-Dawāi]), which serves as the valley's natural drainage conduit. Naḥal 'Amal merges into it from the southwest. Tel Bet She'an (Tell el-Ḥusn, Tell el-Ḥosn) rises over Naḥal Ḥarod's southern bank, while three consecutive hills (Tel Naharon, Tel Izṭabba [Tell el-Mastabah], and Tel Ḥammam [Tell el-Hūmmām]) rise over its northern bank (Plans 1.1, 1.2; Fig. 1.1).

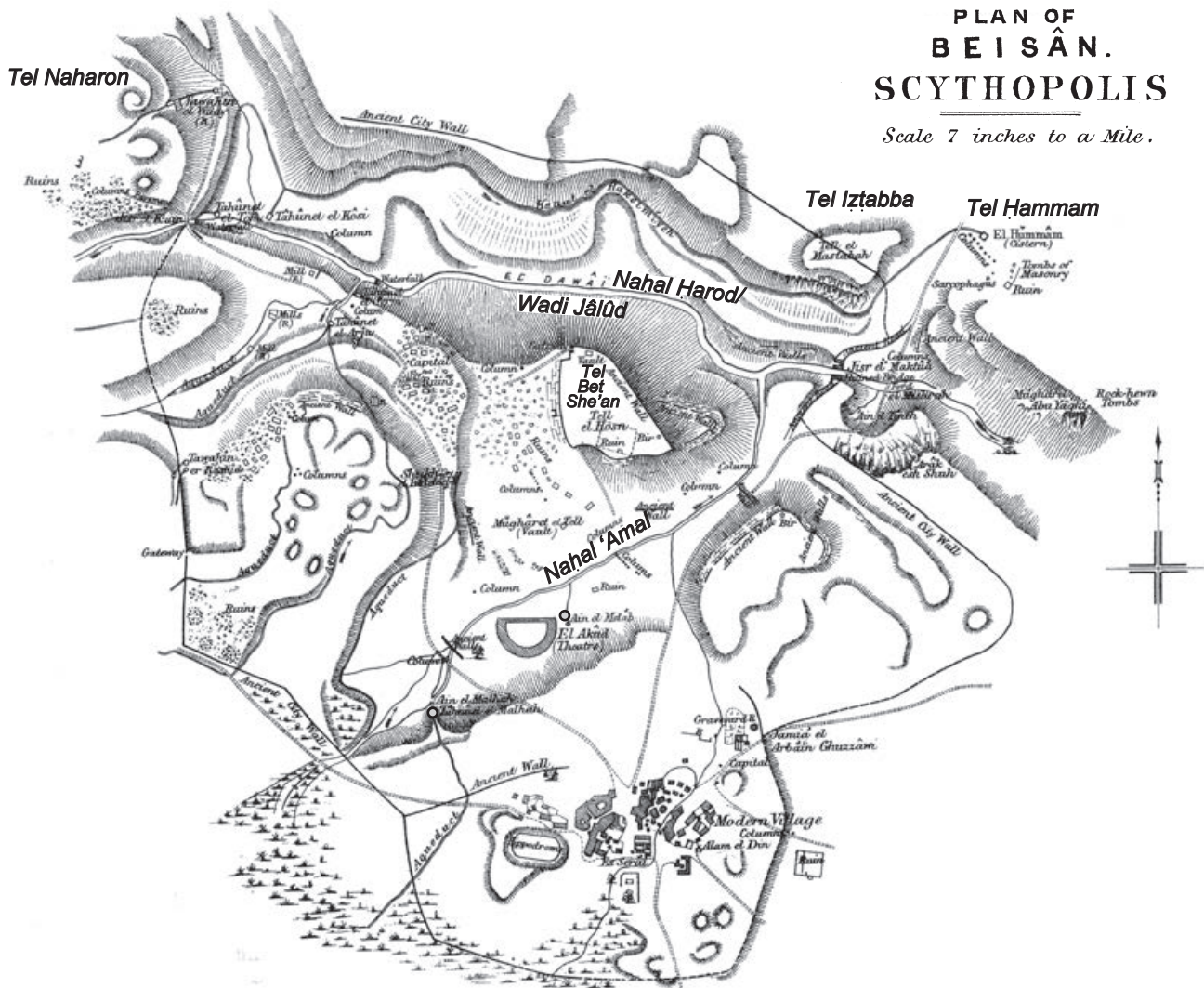
Throughout most of its history, the ancient city of Bet She'an was located on Tell el-Ḥusn, literally, 'the

mound of the fortress', situated on the southern bank of Naḥal Ḥarod. The mound was occupied almost continuously from the Late Neolithic to the Early Islamic periods and later, during the Crusader period. During the Hellenistic period, the city, renamed Nysa-Scythopolis (Fuks 1983:160–165), extended over Tel Izṭabba, a long, wide hill situated to the north of Naḥal Ḥarod. In the Early Roman period, the city moved again, this time to the 'Amal basin and its surrounding hills, spreading to the south, west and east. The city continued to expand throughout the Roman and Byzantine periods, reaching its greatest extent of over 400 acres around the sixth century CE (Plans 1.2, 1.3). With the Arab conquest, the ancient Semitic name of the city re-emerged as Baysān. Centuries later, a Crusader castle was built at the southern edge of the city on a wide plateau that later became the center of a small village, the domain of the Ottoman sultan. To the east, south and west of the ancient site, the modern city of Bet She'an was gradually built over the last fifty years (see Fig 1.2; Abel 1952; Avi-Yonah 1962; Fuks 1983; Raynor 1982; Tsafirir and Foerster 1997; El'ad 1998; Sharon 1999).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The first half of the seventh century CE was marked by significant historical and cultural changes in Syria-Palestine, starting with the Persian/Sassanian conquest of Palestine in 614 CE, and reaching a climax with the Arab conquest (634–636 CE) and the retreat of the Byzantine empire. These events resulted in political instability and the complete breakdown of the Byzantine government, especially of municipal authority (Tsafirir and Foerster 1994a:109–110).

By 634/635 CE, most of the cities of Palestine had been conquered by the Arabs. The remains of the Byzantine army were concentrated in the Jordan Rift Valley in the neighborhood of Nysa-Scythopolis, after their downfall in Ijnādayn when trying to stop the



Plan 1.1. Plan of Baysân (Beisan)/Nysa-Scythopolis: the Survey of Western Palestine (adapted from Conder and Kitchener 1882: after p. 104).

Plan 1.2. Nysa-Scythopolis in the Byzantine period. ►

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Civic center | 10. Church of the Martyr | 19. Circular piazza |
| 2. Round church | 11. Monastery of Lady Mary | 20. Bathhouse |
| 3. Northeastern (Damascus) city gate | 12. Northern cemetery | 21. Mosque |
| 4. Northwestern (Caesarea) city gate | 13. Hellenistic city | 22. Crusader fortress |
| 5. Southwestern (Neapolis) city gate | 14. Eastern bridge (Jisr el-Maktu 'a) | 23. Turkish serai |
| 6. Southern (Jerusalem) city gate | 15. Western bridge | 24. Amphitheater (hippodrome) |
| 7. Southeastern (Gerasa) city gate | 16. Eastern cemetery | 25. City wall |
| 8. Samaritan synagogue | 17. Cemeteries | |
| 9. Church of Andreas | 18. House of Kyrios Leontis | |





Fig. 1.1. General aerial view of the site, looking southeast.

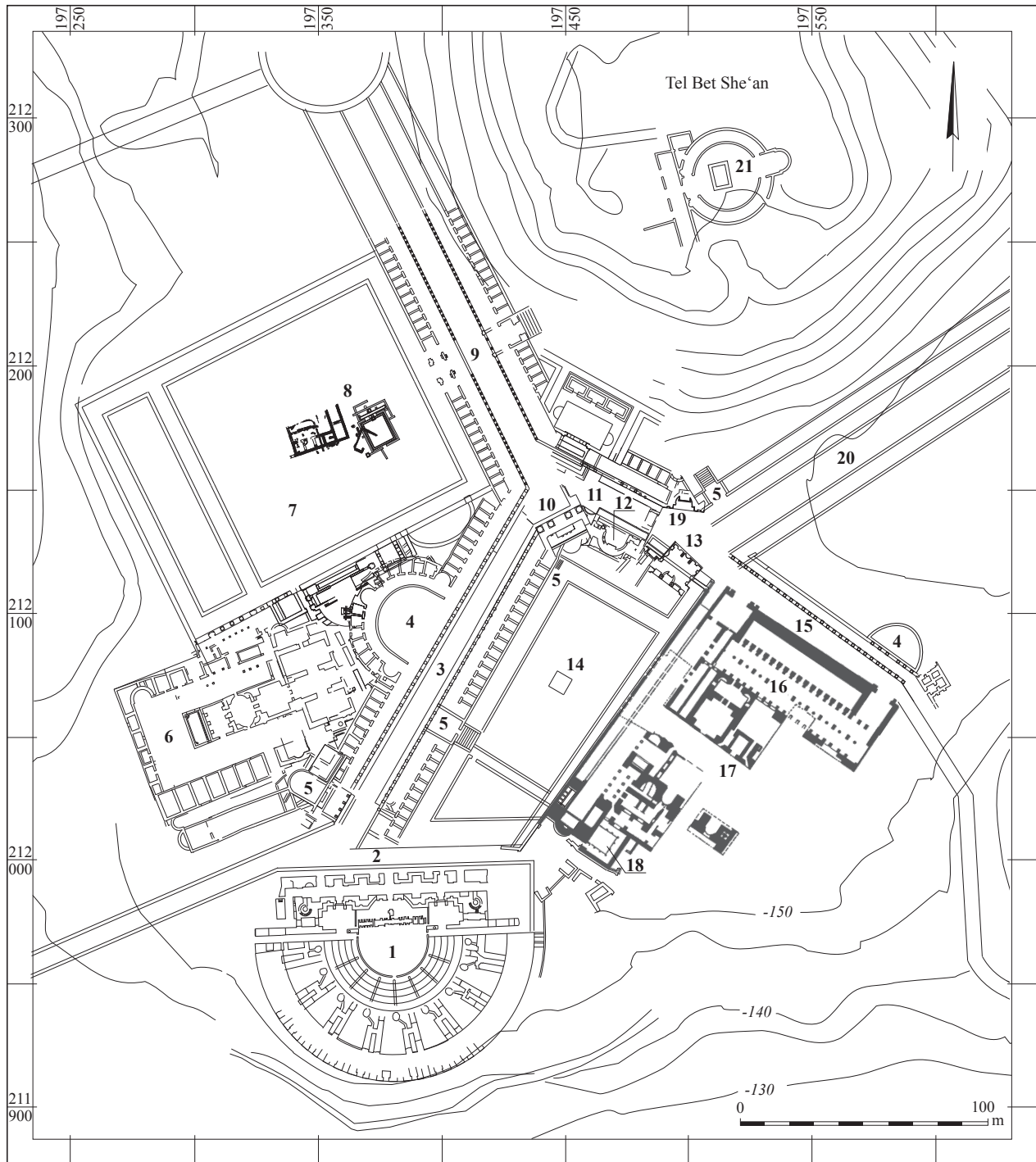
Arab forces from advancing northward to Tiberias and eastward to northern Transjordan (Gil 1992:43).

Historical sources from the ninth century CE report some resistance to the Arab conquest of Nysa-Scythopolis. According to a tradition related by al-Tabarī (al-Tabarī I:2145–2146, quoted in Sharon 1999:199), in the year AH 13/634 CE, in an attempt to defend the pass through the Bet She’an Valley and to stop the northward and eastward advance of the Arab forces, the Byzantines opened dams to create large swamps that would hamper the enemy’s cavalry brigades by making the traversing of the now very muddy area difficult (for which the city received the nickname *dhāt al-radghah*, ‘the muddy one’). According to another source, the Byzantines fortified themselves in Nysa-Scythopolis when the Arab army reached Fiḥl (Pella), which it conquered in January 635. Once the latter fell, the commander, Shurahbīl ibn Hasanah, crossed the Jordan and attacked Nysa-Scythopolis. This was followed by the conquest of all the cities of Syria-Palestine, ending with the Byzantine

defeat at the battle of Yarmuk in 636 CE (al-Balādhurī, *Futūh* 59–60; Walmsley 1988:143, 146; Gil 1992:44–48, n. 46; Sharon 1999:199–200). This defeat led to the retreat of Heraclius I, the last Byzantine emperor, from Antioch to Constantinople, and thus marked the loss of the eastern provinces by the Byzantines (Gil 1992:48).

However, despite al-Tabarī’s (al-Tabarī I:2158) recounting of a battle that occurred outside the city, the archaeological evidence shows that Nysa-Scythopolis was not conquered by force. Instead, the city was included in the peace agreement reached with Damascus (*‘ala sulḥ Dimashq*), under the terms of which half the houses of the inhabitants were put at the disposal of the Muslims, a poll tax was imposed, and a portion of the harvest was exacted from the populace (Gil 1992:43; Sharon 1999:200). Thus, the inhabitants retained much of their personal property, individual and religious freedom, and civic responsibilities (Walmsley 1988:143, n. 13; 2007a:47).

The administrative division of *Bilād al-Shām* (the Arabic name of Syria-Palestine) at the beginning of



Plan 1.3. Plan of the civic center of Nysa-Scythopolis in the Byzantine period.

- | | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Severan theater | 8. Byzantine building | 15. Silvanus Street |
| 2. Theater Street | 9. Northern Street | 16. Silvanus basilica |
| 3. Palladius Street | 10. Roman temple | 17. Eastern thermae |
| 4. Sigma | 11. Street of Monuments | 18. Eastern thermae latrine |
| 5. Propylaea | 12. Nymphaeum | 19. Monument of Antonius |
| 6. Western thermae | 13. Central monument (Roman altar) | 20. Valley Street |
| 7. Caesareum | 14. Agora | 21. Round church |

the Umayyad period is generally assumed to have corresponded in great measure to the Byzantine structure: *Palestina Prima* became known as *Jund Filasṭin*, with the capital at Ramla; *Palestina Secunda* became *Jund al-Urdunn*, with Ṭabariya (Tiberias) now its capital; and *Palestina Tertia* was dissolved, with part of it being assigned to *Jund Filasṭin* and the rest, to Dimashq (Damascus). However, the Muslim sources for the administrative arrangements in Syria, including its divisions into administrative regions, come only from the ninth- and tenth-century CE geographers (Sharon 1999:198; Walmsley 2007a:73–76). Therefore, it is difficult to say when this arrangement began—immediately after the conquest, during the Umayyad reign, or later.

The same difficulty applies to the borders between *Jund al-Urdunn* and *Jund Filasṭin*, i.e., apparently the Jezreel and Bet She'an Valley systems, with Bet She'an itself situated on the border between the two (El'ad 1998:23–24; Sharon 1999:199).² *Jund al-Urdunn* was divided into thirteen administrative districts, including Baysān, Ṭabariya (Tiberias), Samra (northern Samaria), Fiḥl (Pella), Jarash (Gerasa; Jerash), Bayt Rās [Capitolias], Jadar (Gadara), Abilla (Abil), Sūsiya (Sussita; Hippos), Ṣaffūriya (Zippori; Diocaesarea), Akkā ('Akko; Acre Ptolemeis), Qadas (Kadesh Naphtali), and Ṣūr (Tyre) (Walmsley 1988:144–146; Gil 1992:111–112).

After the Arab conquest, Nysa-Scythopolis resumed its ancient name, Baysān. The city, which had been the capital of *Palestina Secunda*, probably retained its administrative position and social and economic standing, as all the main offices and archives of the province remained there (Sharon 1999:199). However, at the end of the seventh century CE, as part of the reforms accompanying the establishment of Umayyad rule, the city lost its administrative status and the capital was moved to Tiberias by Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, who was based at Damascus.³ It seems that the Christian governing elite emigrated from the city at the time of the move of the capital. Bet She'an became a district center in *Jund al-Urdunn* and was further divided into subdistricts, one of which was called *Kūrat Baysān* after the name of its central city (El'ad 1998:23, n. 81; Sharon 1999:199).

Little is known about Bet She'an during the twenty-five years after the conquest, in the period between 635 and 659/660 CE, either from the written sources or from the archaeological record.

A series of events signify the beginning of the Umayyad period. On January 24, 661, the fourth caliph, 'Alī ibn Abi Talib, was assassinated after having waged a lengthy war against Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, the governor of Syria from the Umayya clan of Mecca and the first Umayyad caliph (Shaban 1971:56–60). Mu'awiya's success resulted in the founding of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750 CE). Following this, Mu'awiya established the capital of the Umayyad caliphate in Damascus (Walmsley 2000:269–270; 2007a:150). A number of earthquakes, which destroyed the towns/cities of the region, including Bet She'an, are known to have occurred from 659 to 660 CE (Russell 1985:46–47; Amiran, Arieḥ and Turcotte 1994:266).

The establishment of the Umayyad caliphate signals a new era, both historically and archaeologically. The shifting of the caliphate's capital to Damascus affected its strict rule over *Bilād al-Shām* and brought about increased involvement in construction and investment in this region. Bet She'an especially benefited from the patronage of two Umayyad caliphs, 'Abd al-Malik, 685–705 CE, and his son, Hishām, 724–743 CE. 'Abd al-Malik's reforms, introducing Islam to the region, contributed greatly to the renewed growth of Bet She'an, and Hishām especially did much to further the economic status of the city (see further, below). In the Umayyad period, Bet She'an became a major commercial and industrial center in the region (see below and Chapter 8). The Umayyads, especially during the first half of the eighth century CE, established regional centers that benefited from targeted programs of urban renewal, including the establishment of industries, the building of mosques, administrative complexes, and commercial infrastructures. Some of the projects were instigated on a high administrative level (or at least attributed to senior administrators), while others appear to have been local initiatives (Sharon 1999:198, 206).

In AH 131, on January 18, 749 CE, the region was affected by a strong earthquake (Tsafirir and Foerster 1992:231–235).⁴ Baysān was totally destroyed and the remains of the Umayyad settlement were stratigraphically sealed by the destruction rubble and collapse. Following this devastation, only a few scattered residential quarters, as well as flourmills probably constructed by the survivors, remained in the northern part of the ruined civic center, while the focus of the Abbasid occupation moved to the southern plateau.

LITERARY SOURCES

The literary traditions in regard to Baysān in the Umayyad period, despite its economic vitality and political importance, are silent. The few traditions that have come down to us mainly praise the area's fertility. One famous tradition claims that one of the area's springs, 'Ayn al-Fulus, was one of the water sources of paradise. This most probably is an echo of the Talmudic legend⁵ about Bet She'an being a possible gate to paradise (Sharon 1999:200; Yaqūt *Buldān* [Sādir] 1:527). Some early poets (Hassān ibn Thābit, d. 659 CE; al-Akhtal d. 710 CE; Layla al-Akhalayyah, d. 707 CE) describe the production of wine in the early days after the Arab conquest; wine production probably ended in the Abbasid period, but dates remained one of the main cash crops of the town (Sharon 1999:200–201). Writing in the ninth century CE, al-Yaqubi (1891: 327–328) included it among the settlements of mixed tribal and non-Muslim populations. In the tenth century CE, al-Muqaddasi (1974:162–180; Gil 1992; Sharon 1999:201) remarked on the abundance of its dates and the rice that it supplied to both *Jund al-Urdunn* and *Jund Filastin*, praised its indigo, noted the mosque (*jamia*) in the marketplace, and stated that the city's inhabitants were righteous. Various additional sources attest to the central status of the city, both before and after the 749 CE earthquake, and describe a number of famous natives of Baysān, such as Rajā' ibn Haywah, d. 730–731 CE, of the tribe of Kindah, which was well represented in Bāysan and in other parts of *Jund al-Urdunn* (Sharon 1999:201). Among his other achievements, he was responsible for the construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The city appears in a tradition as one of the dwelling places of the *abdāl*, the 'holy men', who are the basis for the existence of the world and its continued order (El'ad 1998:42 ff.; Sharon 1999:200).

OVERVIEW OF THE Umayyad CITY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE SEVENTH- TO EIGHTH-CENTURY CE OCCUPATION (STRATA 8–5)

Despite the virtual lack of literary or historical records, as mentioned above, the information that has accumulated from the UME and the IAHU excavations conducted on the tell, the various salvage

works carried out over the years, the excavation of the Severan theater (1960), and the extensive work of the Bet She'an Archaeological Project allows us to fill in the missing records and to draw a more detailed picture of the occupation of the city from the mid-sixth to the mid-eighth centuries CE (Strata 8–5).

The effects of a possible Persian/Sassanian invasion (614 CE) on Nysa-Scythopolis could not be identified in the excavations, nor was any clear evidence of the Arab conquest in 634/635 CE detected at the end of Stratum 8 (Byzantine III). The only possible archaeological evidence of destruction resulting from the first event was the abandonment of the Monastery of Lady Mary (*Kiri Maria*), dated by a hoard of ten gold coins to the end of the reign of Heraclius I, between 610 and 613 CE (FitzGerald 1939:11; James 1962:21–24; Grierson 1967; Bijovsky 2002:180–183), and the destruction of the warehouse and the glass factory inside the Damascus Gate (Plan 1.2; Mazor and Najjar, in prep.), dated by coins to no later than 610–613 CE. While these traces of violence may indicate a Sassanian threat or physical invasion, they could also have been the result of other violent acts, such as attacks by Jews or Saracens against the local Christian community (Baras 1982:323–327; Schick 1995:20–48).

The lack of archaeological evidence of the Arab conquest in 634/635 CE concurs with the historical evidence that the Arab takeover of the city was not violent, due to the peace covenant (*sulḥ*) reached with Damascus ('*ala sulḥ dimashq*), as detailed above.⁶ The Arab conquest and the arrival of Islam brought about neither the immediate end of the Byzantine administrative system (Walmsley 1992c:344; 2007a:72–76), nor of the Byzantine III ceramic industry and pottery forms (for Pella, see Watson 1992; Walmsley 1995:660–661, 2007a:56–57). Bet She'an retained its traditional role of economic, and perhaps political, influence over Pella, which had been under the jurisdiction of Scythopolis in the Byzantine period. Close commercial and administrative contacts were also retained with Jerash at this time, as evidenced by the great majority of Arab-Byzantine coins minted in Bet She'an that were found in that city, which became part of the province of *Jund al-Urdunn*, as did Bet She'an (Walmsley 1992b:258–259; 1992c:343).

The archaeological evidence for the period between 634/635 and 697 CE (Strata 7 and 6, the Arab-Byzantine and Umayyad I periods) is inconclusive; it seems that after the Arab conquest, the city

enjoyed a peaceful interlude, retaining its Byzantine architectural framework and cultural heritage, although simultaneously undergoing a slow, continuous process of decline, until the June 659/660 CE earthquake (Chapter 4; see Table 4.4). There was no construction or restoration of public buildings and, in fact, no building inscriptions date later than 550 CE, after the rule of Justinian.⁷ The picture of decline is also indicated by the numismatic finds (Chapter 3; Tsafir and Foerster 1989–1990:128). The loosening of the reins of the central government at the end of the Byzantine period permitted the introduction of semi-independent mints, which were active in different cities, including Bet She'an, and which produced imitations of government coins (Chapter 3; Amitai-Preiss, Berman and Qedar 1994–1999).

The end of the Stratum 7 city, caused by the 659/660 CE earthquake, also happened to signal the beginning of the reign of the Umayyad dynasty. The earthquake brought the Roman-Byzantine city of Nysa-Scythopolis to an end with the collapse of all the major commercial and public buildings in the civic center, among them the Byzantine agora, Palladius Street with the sigma building, the theater, the Byzantine piazza with the nymphaeum, the western and eastern thermae, and the large nymphaeum (Plan 1.3; Table 4.4), and probably the church on the mound as well. This destruction also brought an end to other cities of *Jund al-Urdunn*, especially Jerash (Gawlikowski 1986:111) and Pella (Walmsley 1988:148, 1992b:254, 1992c:349; Whitcomb 1995:488). From this time until the end of the seventh century CE, signs of continuing economic urban decline are attested in the civic center of Bet She'an (Stratum 6). Many of these buildings and monuments, such as the eastern row of columns of the destroyed Palladius Street portico (Tsafir and Foerster 1997:138) and the pavement of the theater piazza, were looted at this time. In the area of the caesareum, the Byzantine III buildings were dismantled down to their foundations (Mazor 2007:189; Mazor and Najjar 2007:107), providing evidence that large parts of the civic center were abandoned and used as a stone quarry. A layer of alluvium and erosion above the ruined Byzantine edifices is yet additional confirmation of this period of neglect and decline.

The fate of the commercial streets was slightly different than that of the public buildings at this time; evidence produced from the excavations shows that some parts of the streets continued to be active,

both after the Arab conquest and after the 659/660 CE earthquake (Tsafir and Foerster 1997:136–137). These shops continued despite the fact that nearby public edifices, such as Silvanus basilica on Silvanus Street, remained in ruins from the time the earthquake damaged them (Tsafir and Foerster 1997:138).

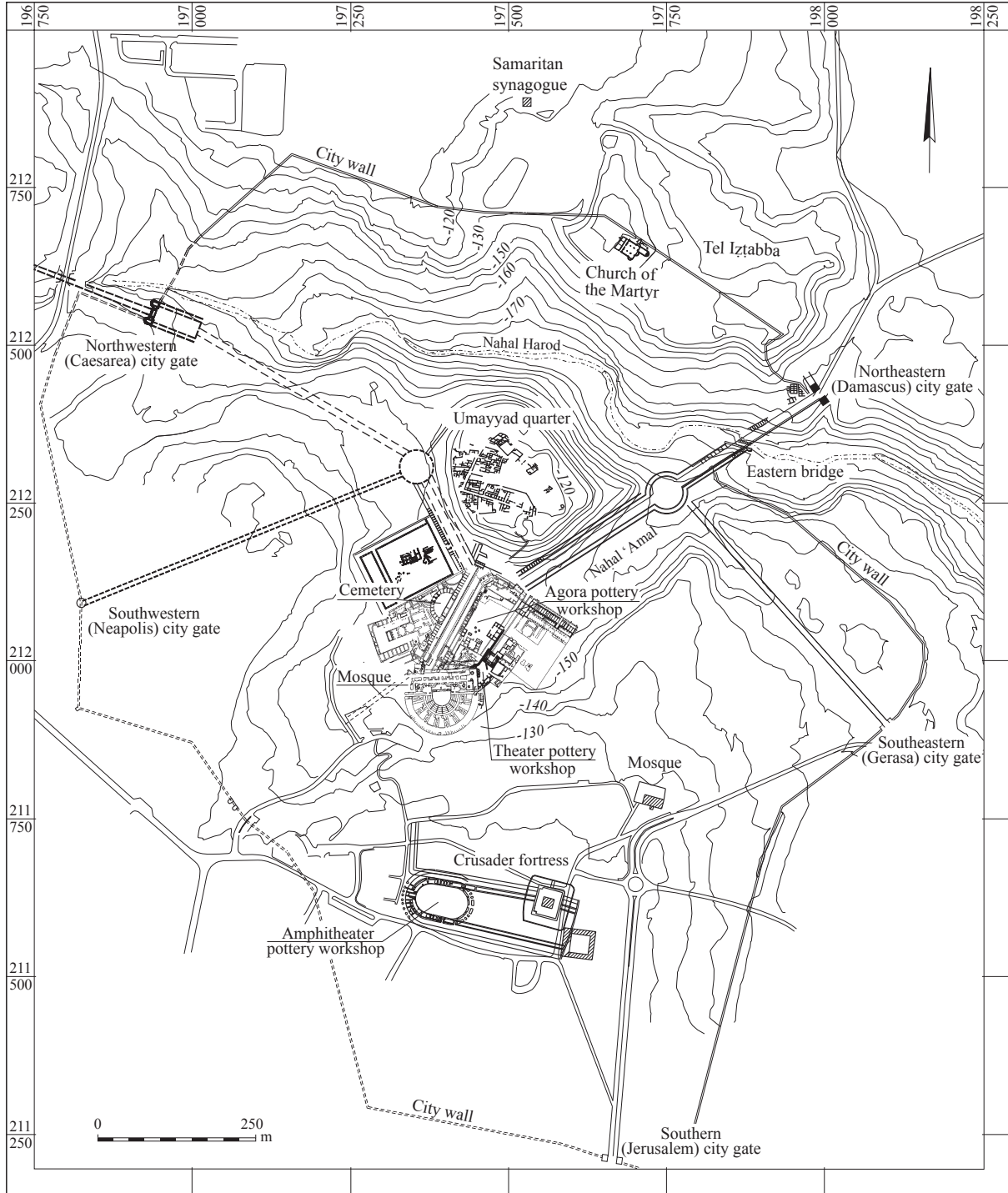
The pottery assemblage of this period, as seen in the pottery from the 659/660 CE earthquake layers excavated in Palladius Street and the sigma (Bar-Nathan and Najjar, in prep.), demonstrates that the dominant forms and technology continued to be generally that of the late Byzantine period (Byzantine III), with slight modification. The same situation was noted at Pella in Phase V (Watson 1992; see also Walmsley 1995:660–661, 2007b:326–331).

The archaeological data indicate the weakening of the regime and the virtual absence of official activity during the second half of the seventh century CE, especially during the caliphate of Mu'awiya (661–680 CE), although the local mint remained active (Amitai-Preiss, Berman and Qedar 1994–1999:133–151).

Stratum 5 (Umayyad II) evidences a revival at Bet She'an, with a new concept of urban planning and extensive construction, a consequence of the reforms instituted by 'Abd al-Malik c. 697 CE and followed by his successors (Khamis 1997:60–64). The reforms affected the administration, unified the monetary system, and brought about the adoption of Arabic as the language of government (Walmsley 2000:270). Bet She'an continued as a regional center, although no longer functioning as an administrative capital. The Roman-Byzantine institutions, such as the theater and the amphitheater, as well as the thermae, played no role in the eighth-century CE city (see also Tsafir and Foerster 1997:135, 137). Instead, an administrative center was established on the summit of the mound, and the civic center was divided into commercial and industrial zones (Plans 1.4, 1.5; Fig. 1.2; Chapter 8 and further below).⁸ At this time, the theater and agora pottery workshops and other industries were built over the earthquake rubble and alluvial layer that covered much of the civic center (Chapters 2, 4, and 8). The introduction of pottery workshops into the city (as opposed to their extra-mural location in the Roman-Byzantine period; see Chapter 8) was accompanied by a change in ceramic forms and technology, which can be defined as characteristic of the Umayyad corpus (Chapter 8; Walmsley 1995:660–665, 2007a:565–567). Shops and workshops were established by the

ruling elite and private merchants in the colonnaded porticos of the streets and in the monuments of the Roman-Byzantine city (Kennedy 1985:13), marking the Umayyad emphasis on commercial and industrial

endeavors over monumental public edifices. Further signs of the Islamization of the city are the erection of a mosque and the establishment of a cemetery in the civic center (Kennedy 1985:16).



Plan 1.4. Baysān in the Umayyad period.



Fig. 1.2. View of the Roman-Byzantine civic center overlaid by the Umayyad city, looking south.

A similar process of recovery and prosperity in wake of the reform of ‘Abd al-Malik, as well as the introduction of industry and commerce into the civic center and new pottery forms and technology, are evident at other cities of the Decapolis in Transjordan, especially Jerash (see below, Chapter 8; Walmsley 1992c:350, 2000:279, 280, 2007a:84–87).

All the commercial and industrial activity of Umayyad II (Stratum 5) came to an abrupt end with the earthquake of 749 CE. However, it seems that Bet She’an in the Abbasid period retained its important status, as indicated by the coins (El’ad 1998; Sharon 1999).

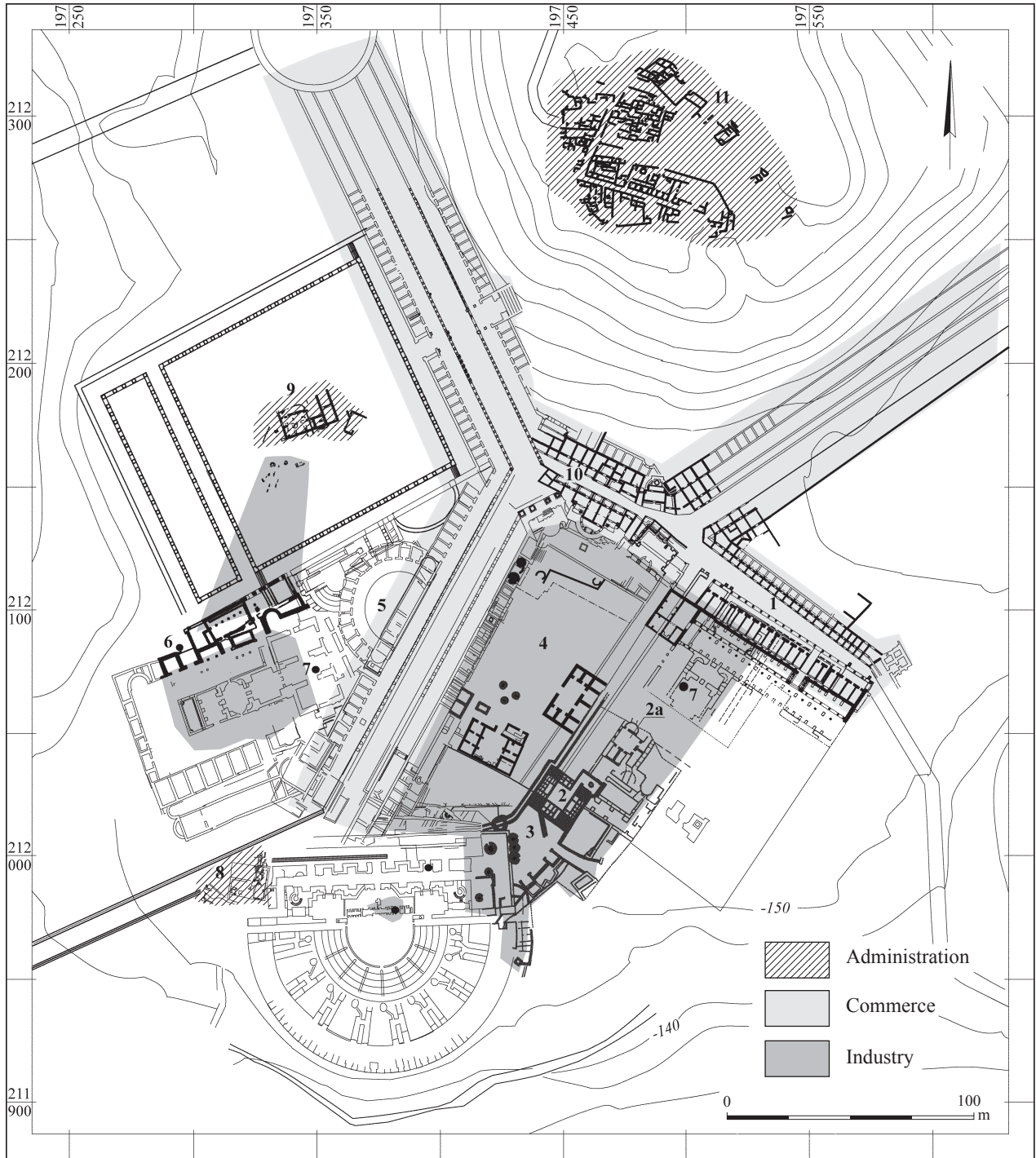
The Umayyad II City Plan

As noted above, after the reform of ‘Abd al-Malik, the city plan during Umayyad II completely changed its nature, as revealed by the widespread excavations on the mound (with its administrative zone), in the civic

center (with its industrial and commercial zones and cemetery), and in other parts of the city (Plan 1.5).

The Administrative Zone on the Mound

The mound (Tel Bet She’an, Tell el-Ḥusn) at the center of the city, already partly inhabited in the Byzantine period (late sixth century CE), with a Christian quarter and a major church complex, became a focal point of the Umayyad settlement (Plan 1.5). Although the Umayyad buildings on the summit have been considered residential (Mazar 2006:42–44, 254–258, 297–299), it is possible that the new quarter also served as the administrative and governmental zone, as at ‘Amman and Pella (Walmsley 2007a:88). The UME and IAHU excavations revealed a well-planned quarter, centered along east–west and north–south streets that ran above the Byzantine-period remains that were probably ruined in the 659/660 CE earthquake (Plan 1.4). The newly constructed quarter had large and spacious houses, consisting, for the most part, of three



Plan 1.5. The Roman-Byzantine civic center and the division of the Umayyad city into zones.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Hishām's sūq | 6. Umayyad kilns in western thermae |
| 2. Umayyad textile industry | 7. Lime kilns |
| 2a. Dwelling | 8. Mosque |
| 3. Theater pottery workshop | 9. Umayyad industrial building |
| 4. Agora pottery workshop | 10. Street of Monuments |
| 5. Umayyad cemetery | 11. Umayyad quarter |

or four wings of rooms opening onto a courtyard, and a large double compound encircled by a wall, which served as an administrative center (Rowe 1930:53–54; FitzGerald 1931:11–30; Mazar 1994:83, 2006:42–44, 254–258, 297–299; Walmsley 2007a:88). One of the buildings was identified as a mosque (Agady and Arubas 2009:82*).⁹ Neither the UME nor the IAHU excavations provided clear evidence of the date of this quarter; both assumed that it was probably constructed during the Umayyad period and continued in use in the Abbasid period (Mazar 2006:42–44). No signs of the 749 CE earthquake were found on the tell.

The Civic Center

A radical transformation can be observed in the civic center of the Roman-Byzantine city in Umayyad II; it now became a place of commerce and intensive industrial activity (Plan 1.5). Instead of the imposing public edifices and magnificent commercial buildings, such as the agora and the sigma, or the well-designed row of shops with elaborate roofed colonnaded sidewalks along the streets, commercial activities took over the colonnaded streets and slowly reshaped the city's Roman-Byzantine elements into the narrow lanes of a bazaar (*sūq*). Industrial complexes in the southeastern part of the city center and a cemetery were also introduced into the Roman-Byzantine structures.

The Industrial Zone. An industrial zone of ceramic and textile manufacture, as well as possibly metal production, was established alongside the commercial area, near water sources, inside two earlier public buildings, the theater and the eastern thermae.¹⁰ At least two pottery workshops were constructed: the theater pottery workshop (the subject of this volume) was located in the northeastern part of the theater and in the theater's piazza, which were ruined and deserted; the agora workshop was installed next to it in the southern part of the Byzantine agora that had been partly ruined in the 659/660 CE earthquake (Arubas 2005: Fig. 8). Old shops were restored on the western side of the Byzantine agora, probably to sell the ceramic merchandise produced nearby. Yet another pottery workshop was established in the amphitheater (Tsafirir and Foerster 1997:137, Fig. 51). The pottery workshops became a major commercial branch of the Umayyad city (Chapters 7, 8).

The great thermae of the city were in ruins after the earthquake of 659/660 CE. An industrial complex,

presumably of the textile (linen) industry, was founded in the area of the eastern thermae's frigidarium (Bar-Nathan and Mazar 1993:37–38). In another part of the thermae, still roofed with the original dome, a residential building with five rooms and a bathing pool presumably housed the owner of this industrial complex (see Plan 1.5).

Nysa-Scythopolis was well known in both Jewish and Latin sources for its flourishing linen industry.¹¹ It seems that in the Umayyad period, the city and its neighboring rural villages continued to be a center for the spinning, weaving, and dyeing of linen products, an industry previously dominated by Christian residents and now taken over by Muslim merchants, and which probably constituted an important element in the economy of the city.

Other industrial facilities also flourished. A lime-production workshop was introduced into the caldarium of the eastern thermae and a millhouse was installed. Only a few installations were erected in the western thermae, among them another lime kiln, probably to burn marble and sculptures, as well as several pottery kilns. A metal industry operated in the theater near the pottery workshop (Chapter 2).¹²

The Commercial Zone. The commercial activities in the main colonnaded street network that crossed the city (concentrated now only in the northern civic center, excavated by the IAHU) continued, although in a less monumental fashion. All the main arteries, including the city gates and bridges, still functioned. This network of streets, connecting the main gates and thoroughfares into and out of the city—the northwestern (Caesarea) gate, the southeastern (Gerasa) gate, the northeastern (Damascus) gate, and probably the southern (Jerusalem) and southwestern (Neapolis) gates—continued to enable regional traffic (see Plan 1.4). This traffic system, as well as the ceramic research (Chapters 9, 11), indicate the continuation of the city's centrality and the commercial activities that had begun in the Roman-Byzantine period.

The main streets (Northern Street, Street of Monuments, Valley Street, and Silvanus Street) were dominated by a crowded bazaar (*sūq*) that was subdivided according to commodities, for example, the meat market along Northern Street (see Plan 1.5), pottery shops and other shops containing metal tools along the Street of Monuments (Foerster and Tsafirir 1987–1988:34–35, 1988–1989:22, 1992:18–19, 22–25, 27–32; Tsafirir and Foerster 1989–1990:126–128,

1994b:108–112;¹³ summarized in Arubas 2005:2). This is typical of the eighth century CE at various Umayyad sites, i.e., Ṭabariya/Tiberias (Stacey 2004:30–33); Arsuff/Apollonia, Tadmur/Palmyra/al-Rusafa/Sergiopolis, and Hims/Emesa (see below, Fig. 9.1; Foote 2000:28–31; Walmsley 2000:276–283, 2007a:81–89).

The urban traffic routes in their Byzantine format almost vanished; the broad carriageways became narrow beaten-earth lanes between the new Umayyad shops, which extended onto the previous sidewalks and even into the streets, narrowing them even further (Arubas 2005:2). An example of government involvement in these commercial endeavors is the elaborate new market (*sūq*) that was erected by the authorities under the caliph Hishām in AH 120/738 CE along the southern side of Silvanus Street, above the ruined Byzantine basilica of Silvanus (Foerster and Tsafirir 1992:25–32; Tsafirir and Foerster 1994b:108–112, 1997:123, 138–139; Khamis 1997:45–64; Arubas 2005:2). The market comprised 38 shops built on two stories, each level opened to opposite sides of the civic center. An arcade opened onto Silvanus Street and a monumental gate, adorned with two gilded glass mosaic inscriptions attributing the project to the initiative of Hishām, were constructed at the center of the bazaar. It appears that Hishām, who showed more interest in the city than any other caliph, invested in a ruined area in the northeastern part of the civic center and built the bazaar, both to increase commerce in the city and for his own profit (Khamis 1997:45–64; Sharon 1999:207–214). Two glass bottles with a stamp found in this *sūq* and ordered by the caliph Sulayman ibn Abd al-Malik is yet another sign of the involvement of the caliphate in the city (Hadad 2005:26, 77, No. 304). Undoubtedly, the central position of this *sūq* along the main street must have greatly influenced all commercial and other activity in Umayyad Bet She'an (Khamis 1997:64). The rich activity of this *sūq* is illustrated by the finds; some of the shops sold glass, and others, pottery, including rare imported glazed vessels. One shop, which apparently belonged to a goldsmith, contained gold jewelry and hoards of gold *dinars* and silver *dirhams*; similar hoards were found in other shops as well (Amitai-Preiss 2002). Prominent among the finds from this period is a set of scales with incised gradations identified with pairs of numbers in both Greek and Arabic, attesting to the bilingual population

of the city (Tsafirir and Foerster 1989–1990:127–128). The luxury goods imply the existence of a wealthy upper class in this period (Arubas 2005:2).

Opposite Hishām's *sūq*, a row of shops was built above and against the northeastern side of Silvanus Street (Tsafirir and Foerster 1994a:110, 1994b:108–112, 1997:135–140; Arubas 2005:2).

The Umayyad Municipal Cemetery. In what marks a significant change in city planning and conception, the cemeteries, formerly extramural, were now moved into the center of the city (see Plan 1.5; Arubas 2005:1).

Palladius Street, which was partially ruined in the 659/660 CE earthquake, was not restored. The colonnade of its eastern portico collapsed, with the columns' limestone drums strewn across the street, and the sidewalks serving as agriculture terraces (Tsafirir and Foerster 1997:138). Only a few installations and poorer buildings were built on top of the debris of the eastern side of the street (Foerster and Tsafirir 1988–1989:17–18; Tsafirir and Foerster 1989–1990:122). The sigma, part of the western side of the street (Plan 1.5), was abandoned and robbed of its architectural elements and paving (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993:44–45; Bar-Nathan and Najjar, in prep.). It became a cemetery in Umayyad II and contained about 350 skeletons of men, women, and children buried in simple cists dug into the soft travertine rock and covered with soil (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993:44–45; Bar-Nathan and Najjar, in prep.). The deceased usually lay on their right side, facing south and with their head to the west. As the anthropological evidence shows that they are an indigenous population, they had probably converted to Islam (Nagar, in prep.).

The Mosque. At the opposite end of the cemetery, a public building (see Plan 1.5) was erected at the southern junction of Palladius Street with a street running westward to the Neapolis gate. The structure utilizes secondary architectural fragments (capitals from the theater and the western propylea). Its plan, a rectangular hall that ends with a niche (*mihrab*) in its southern wall (*qibleh*), is similar to early mosques erected in the Umayyad period in other cities in *Bilād al-Shām* (Walmsley and Damgaard 2005:363, 371–372; Barnes et al. 2006:287–299).¹⁴ In addition to this mosque and the one mentioned above on the tell, two others were identified in the civic center (Agady and Arubas 2009:81*–84*).¹⁵

The Urban Neighborhoods

The archaeological investigations indicate that the expanse of the Umayyad city was not much smaller than that of the Byzantine city (400 acres). Most of the original neighborhoods continued to be inhabited, with a different layout.

The Christian Quarter. The Byzantine occupation in the northwest of the city, centered especially on Tel Iẓtabba, continued in the Umayyad period. The Christian quarter shrank in size and the number of churches decreased. Only one church, the ‘Martyr’ church on Tel Iẓtabba, which underwent modifications until the earthquake of 749 CE, survived (Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998:30–32; Bar-Nathan and Atrash, in prep.). Some Byzantine villas in the northwest continued to be occupied in the Umayyad period (Tzori 1962; and unpublished IAA archive reports examined by the author [R.B.-N.]).

Other Quarters. Late Samaritan lamps from the theater workshop (see Fig. 11.53) may provide evidence that the Samaritan population continued to occupy the same area to the north of Tel Iẓtabba, where a Samaritan synagogue dating to the Byzantine period was found (Tzori 1967).

A Jewish quarter was possibly located in the vicinity of the house of Kyrios Leontis.

Additional occupation remains were found at the edge of the city in the area of the abandoned amphitheater, some within the amphitheater itself. The IAHU expedition uncovered another pottery workshop in the eastern part of the amphitheater arena (Tsafrir and Foerster 1994b:115; 1997:137). Here, as well, architectural fragments were reused as building material in the new construction and buildings were built over the paved Orestas Street, diminishing it to a narrow lane in the process (Tsafrir and Foerster 1994a:116). A Byzantine III–Umayyad residential quarter was excavated by D. Avshalom-Gorni (2004) next to the amphitheater, where another Byzantine street that probably led to the southern (Jerusalem) gate became a *sūq* in the Umayyad period (Syon 2004).

The Umayyad Suburbs

In the Umayyad period, occupation continued in the *extra muros* residential quarters that were probably added to the city at the peak of its expansion in the sixth century CE (Vitto 1991; Sion and Sa’id 2002).

Settlement Distribution in the District (*Kūrat*) of Bet She’an

Surveys in the Bet She’an Valley indicate that the number of settlements from the Umayyad period was not significantly smaller than those containing clear evidence of settlement in the Byzantine period (Bergman and Brandsteter 1941; Tzori 1962). Regarding the settlement distribution in these periods as indicated by the survey he conducted, Tzori (1962:135–136) stated, “In the Byzantine period, the settlement in the valley reached unprecedented dimensions. In this period, new settlements were added and monasteries were established, especially within the bounds of the city of Bet-She’an. In the Early Islamic period, a small decline is noticed, but the Muslims maintained the places in which they had settled previously and even established new settlements.” It would seem, therefore, that in the fertile Bet She’an Valley, there is a continuity of settlement from Byzantine times into (and beyond) the Umayyad period.

This was mainly a rural region, relatively densely populated with small settlements, most of which were agricultural. The city undoubtedly served as a commercial center of only marginal importance beyond the region itself. As indicated by the distribution of the pottery vessels produced in the city, the commercial ties are significant mostly within the boundaries of the Bet She’an Valley. Outside it, the connections, albeit limited, reach to the south as far as Jericho, to the north as far as the Sea of Galilee, and eastward to sites in Transjordan (Chapter 8).

FROM THE ABBASID TO THE MAMLUK PERIODS

The period after the 749 CE earthquake was characterized by major political changes under the Abbasids, who moved their capital to Baghdad. No effort was made to rebuild (Stratum 4) and Bet She’an was neglected and left in ruins. The center of the Abbasid settlement migrated to the southern plateau, near the great mosque, and the Abbasid fortress was placed in the area that would subsequently house the Crusader fortress. The area at the foot of the mound (formerly Valley Street, Street of Monuments, and Northern Street) was extensively inhabited, along with several mosques that were built on the mound and two others on the boundary of the Abbasid village (Arubas 2005:2; Agady and Arubas 2009). The area of

the theater pottery workshop was sparsely settled and part of the Byzantine agora became a flour mill (Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998:18–19). The city became a rural village centered on the mound and around its southern and western slopes.

The Crusader occupation in the twelfth century CE is reflected by continuity of occupation in two of the

three Abbasid sections in the Crusader fortress and around it and on the tell, where a *seigneurie* (a private fortified estate) was established. The reoccupation of the area by the Ayyubids and the Mamluks was marked by continuation of the settlement on the mound, as well as on the southern plateau (Arubas 2005:2).

NOTES

¹ Although the name Baysān pertains to the site during the period under discussion in this volume (the Umayyad period), the modern name Bet She'an will be used for convenience sake, apart from selected instances.

² The Muslim sources do not contain a detailed description of this division, and therefore it may be only generally delineated. *Jund Filastīn* extended from Rafiah to Megiddo and from Jaffa to Jericho. Sources disagree whether the Jordan Rift Valley (el-Ghor) served as its eastern boundary (Gil 1992:41–42; Sharon 1999:199). Did the boundary pass south of Bet She'an or did the entire Jordan Rift Valley, including the Dead Sea and its environs, and possibly Ayla/Aqaba (Eilat) as well, belong to *Jund al-Urdunn*, which also included northern Samaria, the Galilee and the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee, as well as a portion of the 'Atlit coast northward, with Acco ('Akko) and Tyre?

³ Walmsley (1992c:346) raised the possibility that the move of the provincial capital to Tiberias occurred during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik. However, we prefer the option of this move having been accomplished by Mu'awiya during his reign.

⁴ The 749 CE date for this earthquake is based on Tsafirir and Foerster 1992. While other dates (i.e., 747 CE at Pella, 750 CE at Tiberias) are cited in various publications for this event, we consider the date to be 749 CE and for the most part, cite that date accordingly.

⁵ The third-century *tanna*, Shimon ben Lakish (Resh Lakish) reportedly said "If paradise is in the Land of Israel, then it must be in Beth Shean" (BT *Erubin* 19a; BT *Ketubbot* 112a; cf. Klein 1945:17–18).

⁶ Although there are indications of violence, such as in the Christmas sermon of Sophronius the Patriarch of Jerusalem in 634 CE, which describes the pillage of the cities, the burning of fields and villages, and the destruction of monasteries by the Saracens (von Schönborn 1972:97).

⁷ The development described by Tsafirir and Foerster (1997:117–118, 125–126, 140–143, 145, 146), of buildings

erected at the end of sixth–early seventh centuries CE, is now accepted as Umayyad activity (Tsafirir and Foerster 1997:123, n. 163 and references therein; see also Arubas 2005).

⁸ Throughout this volume, we will use the term 'civic center' to indicate the city plan left by the Roman-Byzantines, and 'city center' to indicate the Umayyad construction that overlay the previous remains.

⁹ This mosque was dated to the Abbasid period, but in light of the poor remains of this period, it might have belonged to the Umayyad period.

¹⁰ Preliminary reports of many of these establishments have been published. The theater pottery workshop—Mazor 1987–1988:21, 1988–1989:29–30; Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993: the nymphaeum, pp. 35–36, the pottery workshop, pp. 36–37, the textile/linen building, pp. 37–38. The agora pottery workshop—Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998:17–20.

¹¹ The city's products appear in a price list from the reign of Diocletian as the choicest merchandise, whose quality is well known and which commanded especially high prices (Jones 1974:353–355).

¹² It is interesting to note that traces of the wine/date industry mentioned in Muslim sources have not been found in the city center; perhaps they lie in the agricultural periphery around the city.

¹³ The original Byzantine date of the Silvanus Street shops was subsequently changed to Umayyad II (Hisham's *sūq*) by the excavators (Tsafirir and Foerster 1997:123, n. 163; see also pp. 138–140).

¹⁴ The building was partially excavated by S. Applebaum in his first season during March–June 1960; the field plans are in the IAA archive; see also a brief mention in Chapter 2. The continued excavation of this building by the IAA expedition is not yet complete.

¹⁵ These mosques were dated to the Abbasid period, but might have belonged to the Umayyad; see n. 9.

