

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN CITIES OF PALESTINE DURING THE EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD

THE CASES OF JERUSALEM AND RAMLA

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There is not among the towns of the provinces one larger than [Jerusalem]. . . . The buildings of the Holy City are of stone, and you will not find finer or more solid construction anywhere. . . . The markets are clean, the mosque is of the largest, and nowhere are Holy Places more numerous.

Al-Ramla . . . is a delightful and well-built city. It is situated in the midst of fertile rural areas. . . . Trade here is profitable, and the means of livelihood easy. . . . It possesses elegant hostelryes and pleasant baths . . . spacious houses, fine mosques, and broad streets.¹

These lively descriptions of Jerusalem and Ramla, written in the tenth century by the Jerusalemite historian and geographer al-Muqaddasī, represent the central position of these two cities in Early Islamic Palestine.² Although located only 30 miles apart, it seems that Jerusalem and Ramla had become two distinctive urban entities. In the three centuries since the Muslim conquest, Jerusalem, the main religious center of Palestine, had passed through a gradual process of urban change and transformation from a Roman and Byzantine city into a medieval Middle Eastern city. Al-Ramla, the newly created Early Islamic city that became the administrative capital of Palestine, introduced a new concept of settlement hitherto unknown in this region. Wide-ranging

questions of continuity and change in urban settlement patterns between the seventh and eleventh centuries are visible in a comparison of the two cities.

The pace of modern archaeological research in Jerusalem and Ramla has been fundamentally different. While Jerusalem has been the focus of large-scale surveys and excavations for the last 150 years that now permit reconstruction of the city layout during Byzantine and Early Islamic times (figs. 1, 2), the small town of Ramla has received little scholarly attention and its Early Islamic urban layout long remained virtually *terra incognita*. During the last fifteen years, however, both cities have been subject to extensive archaeological research because of accelerated modern construction. Recent excavations in Jerusalem, conducted mainly in areas surrounding the Old City, have revealed a large network of Christian monasteries and agricultural farms that was established during the Byzantine period and continued to expand and flourish in Early Islamic times. Small-scale excavations inside the Old City show the same chronological framework. In Ramla more than 120 rescue excavations were conducted between 1990 and 2008 that exposed significant segments of the Early Islamic city and provided an opportunity to establish the chronological framework for its development and a preliminary reconstruction of its urban layout (fig. 3). Study of large-scale

¹ Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fi Maʿrifat al-Aqālīm*, M. J. De Goeje, ed., 2nd ed. (Bibliotheca geographorum arabicorum, 3; Leiden: Brill, 1906), 164, 166–67.

² Parts of Muqaddasī's work were translated and published in G. Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems* (London 1890, reprint Beirut: Khaitas 1965). For a recent translation see B. A. Collins, *Al-Muqaddasī: The*

Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions (Reading: Garnet, 1994), 139–40. For the major role of Muqaddasī's descriptions in reconstructing the urban framework of the Arab world in the tenth century see P. Wheatley, *The Places Men Pray Together* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), viii–xv, 58–70.

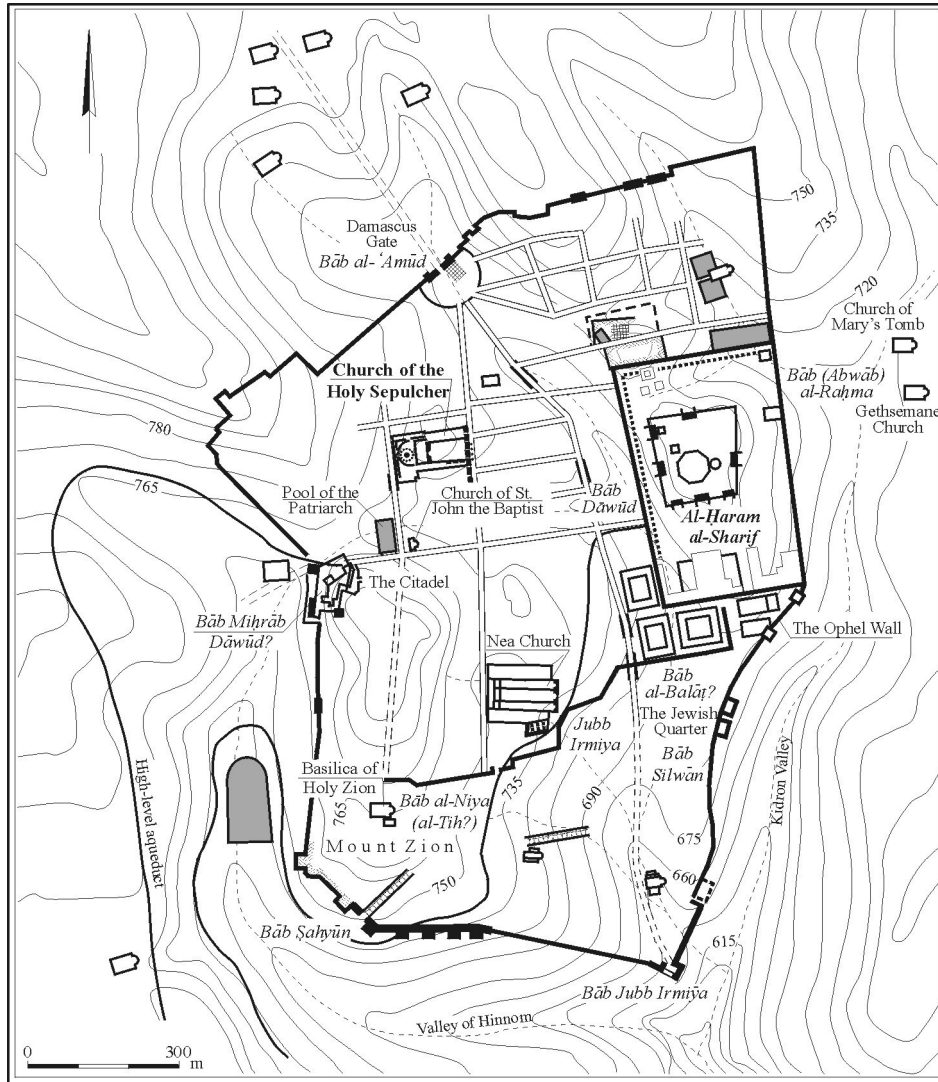


Figure 1
Map of Jerusalem in the eighth century (Israel Antiquities Authority)

processes of urban development in both cities reveals a most complicated picture that casts new light on settlement patterns and cultural changes in Early Islamic Palestine.

Early Islamic Jerusalem

This period in Jerusalem has traditionally been identified with the substantial new building and renovations conducted on the Temple Mount and in its

surroundings in the seventh and eighth centuries. Construction of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque marked a major urban change that shifted the urban focus from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher to the Temple Mount/Haram el-Sharif, renewing this area as the religious center of the city.³

Large-scale excavations conducted to the south and southwest of the Temple Mount during the last forty years have revealed the hitherto unknown re-

³ The main Early Islamic monuments on the Temple Mount attracted the attention of scholars from the nineteenth century onward, and there is an exhaustive literature. The major works are K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press

1969); O. Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," *Ars orientalis* 3 (1959), 33–62; *idem*, *The Shape of the Holy—Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); M. Rosen-Ayalon, *The Early Islamic Monuments of al-Haram al-Sharif, An*

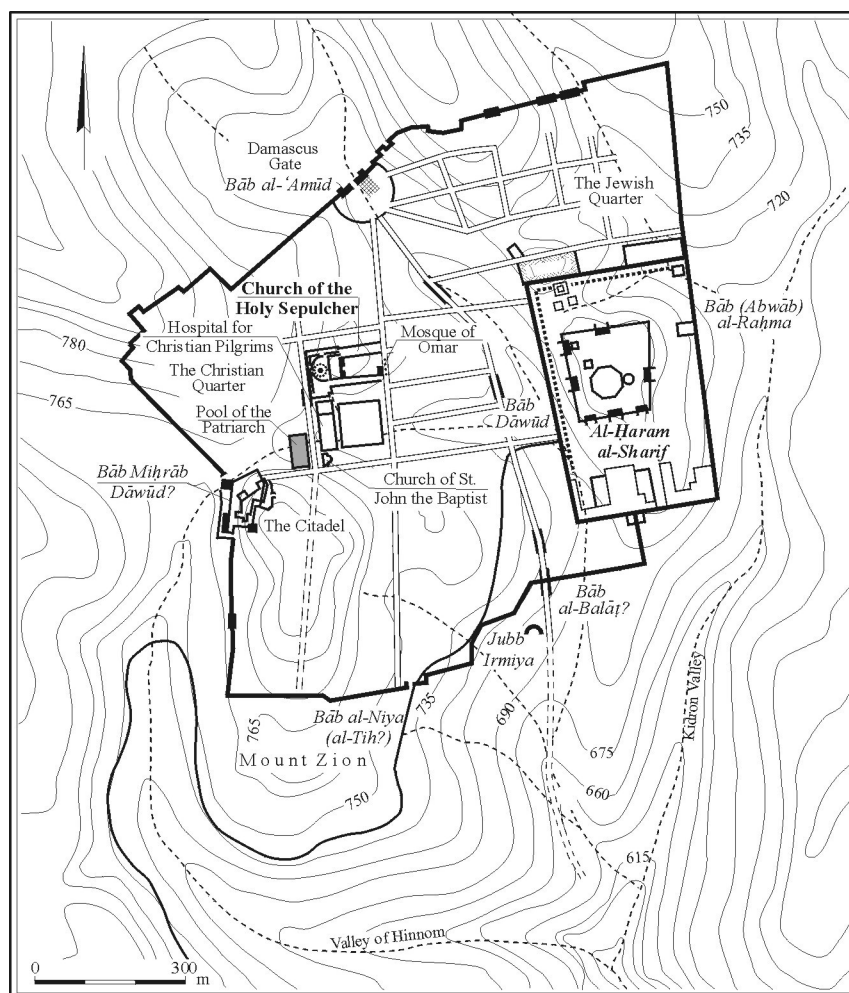


Figure 2
Map of Jerusalem in the eleventh century (Israel Antiquities Authority)

mains of four monumental buildings, identified as palaces or administrative centers,⁴ that were founded during the Umayyad rule in Jerusalem.⁵ This massive Early Islamic construction adjacent to the

Temple Mount represented a dramatic change in the function of this area, and the newly erected monuments dominated a significant part of Jerusalem's urban layout.⁶

Iconographic Study (Qedem, 28; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1989); A. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship—Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (Leiden: Brill 1995).

⁴ The excavations were conducted by Mazar and Ben-Dov 1968–1978 and by Reich and Billig 1994–1996. See B. Mazar, *The Mountain of the Lord* (New York: Doubleday 1975); M. Ben Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 273–321; R. Reich and Y. Billig, “Excavations near the Temple Mount and Robinson Arch, 1994–1996,” in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, 2nd ed., H. Geva, ed. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 340–52. For the interpretation of the buildings see Rosen-Ayalon,

The Early Islamic Monuments, 8–11; Grabar, *Shape of the Holy*, 128–30.

⁵ The recent excavations conducted at the southwestern “palace” raised the possibility that at least some large-scale construction commenced in this area already during the Byzantine period. This suggestion has been published only in a preliminary form; see Y. Baruch and R. Reich, “The Umayyad Buildings near the Temple Mount: Reconsideration in the Light of Recent Excavations,” in *New Studies on Jerusalem*, E. Baruch and A. Faust, eds., 8 [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2000), 117–32.

⁶ Several interpretations for the political and religious background that led to the establishment of the new

It should be noted though that the Temple Mount area is the only area of Early Islamic Jerusalem where a significant change of the urban layout has been identified as a direct result of the incoming Islamic regime. Other parts of the city show no significant change and continuity from the Byzantine-period urban fabric is evident. Archaeological evidence for continuity in both private urban dwellings and Christian religious institutions has become evident in excavations conducted recently in several places in and around Jerusalem. In fact, Early Islamic

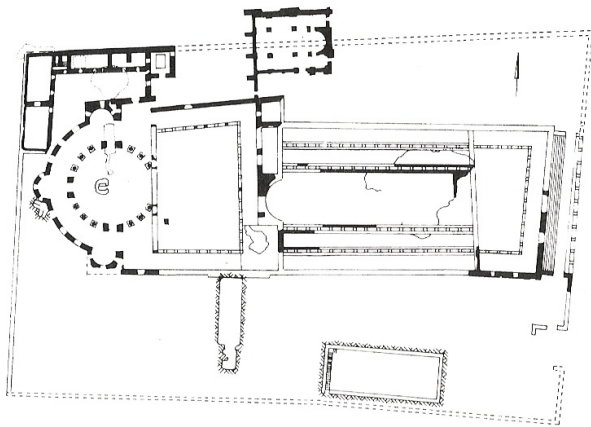


Figure 3
Plan of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the adjacent church constructed in the Early Islamic period (Israel Antiquities Authority)

Islamic center in the Temple Mount/Haram el-Sharif area have been suggested; see Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 147–62, for a summary of previous research.

⁷ The most comprehensive archaeological and historical evaluation of Byzantine and Early Islamic Jerusalem is still the monumental work of H. Vincent and F.-M. Abel, *Jérusalem, Recherches de topographie, d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 2: *Jérusalem nouvelle* (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1914–26). For recent comprehensive summaries of the archaeology of Byzantine Jerusalem, see H. Geva, "Jerusalem, The Byzantine Period," *NEAEHL*, 2:768–85; Y. Tsafirir, "The Topography and Archaeology of Jerusalem in the Byzantine Period," in *The History of Jerusalem: The Roman and Byzantine Periods (70–638 CE)*, Y. Tsafirir and S. Saffrai, eds. [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1999), 281–352. For the urban components of Jerusalem as represented in the Madaba map, see M. Avi Yonah, *The Madaba Mosaic Map* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1954); H. Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba* (Kampen: Pharos, 1992); Tsafirir, "Topography and Archaeology," 342–51. For the archaeology and to-

Jerusalem preserved many of its Byzantine urban characteristics.

Byzantine Jerusalem is well known from archaeological discoveries, historical descriptions, and even visual representations, such as the famous Madaba map, which depicts the city's urban layout and its major monuments around the sixth century, emphasizing the central position of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher within the urban landscape.⁷ The archaeological and historical evidence points toward ongoing construction process and urban expansion in and around Jerusalem between the fourth and the seventh centuries.⁸ Urban construction expanded far 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 Gate⁹ and on the slopes of the Mount of Olives¹⁰ to the east of the walled city. Several monastic compounds were constructed also to the west, southwest, and south of the city limits.¹¹ 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.¹²

pography of Early Islamic Jerusalem see D. Bahat, "The Physical Infrastructure," in *The History of Jerusalem—The Early Muslim Period (638–1099)*, J. Praver and H. Ben-Shammai, eds. (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1996), 38–101.

⁸ Tsafirir, "Topography and Archaeology," 285–95, 330–42.

⁹ See M. J. Lagrange, *Saint Étienne et son sanctuaire à Jérusalem* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1894); Vincent and Abel, *Jérusalem nouvelle*, 743–879; and for the recent excavations D. Amit and S. Wolff, "An Armenian Monastery in the Morasha Neighborhood, Jerusalem," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, 293–98; V. Tzaferis, N. Feig, A. Onn, and E. Shukrun, "Excavations at the Third Wall, North of the Jerusalem Old City," *ibid.*, 287–92.

¹⁰ P. B. Bagatti, "Scavo di un monastero al Dominus Flevit," *Liber annuus* 6 (1956), 240–70; *idem* and J. T. Milik, *Gli scavi del "Dominus Flevit," 1: La necropoli del periodo romano* (Jerusalem: Studium biblicum franciscanum, 1958).

¹¹ G. Barkay, "Excavations of Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, 85–106; J. H. Illife, "Cemeteries and a 'Monastery' at the Y.M.C.A., Jerusalem," *QDAP* 4 (1935), 70–80; D. Ussishkin, *The Village of Silwan: The Necropolis from the Period of the Judean Kingdom* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society 1993), 346–59.

¹² Amit and Wolff, "An Armenian Monastery"; D. Amit, J. Seligman, and I. Zilberbod, "The 'Monastery of

The city wall of Jerusalem, 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 century.¹³ During the Early Islamic period the wall went through several stages of change and reconstruction. Its northern section was probably renovated and partly rebuilt in the eighth century.¹⁴ Large-scale renovations and reconstructions were undertaken also on the Temple Mount walls and on the southern wall of Jerusalem.¹⁵ 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 was the southern section of the city wall abandoned and the urban area reduced to the boundaries of the present-day city wall (figs. 1, 2).¹⁶

The basic street grid system of Jerusalem did not change significantly from Byzantine to Early Islamic

times. Although the broad colonnaded streets were narrowed, as in other important cities of the Near East,¹⁷ the Late Roman grid system remained in continuous use during Early Islamic and later medieval times and still marks the present-day layout of streets and alleys in the Old City.¹⁸ Evidence for this continuity has come from a number of probes in the main streets of the Old City, where Roman and Byzantine pavements of large stones appeared directly beneath the present-day streets.¹⁹

The division of the Jerusalem's 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.²⁰ According to several historical sources, a Jewish quarter was established in the southern part of the city and later on moved into the northeastern area of the Old City, where it was located on the eve of the Crusader conquest.²¹ The Karaites were settled outside the city,

Theodoros and Cyriacus' on the Eastern Slope of Mount Scopus, Jerusalem," in *One Land: - Many Cultures: Archaeological Studies in Honor of Stanislaw Loffreda OFM*, G. C. Bottini, L. Di Segni, and L. D. Chrupcala, eds. (Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 2003), 139–48; R. Avner, "The Recovery of the Kathisma Church and Its Influence on Octagonal Buildings," *ibid.*, 173–86.

¹³ See Tsafirir, "Topography and Archaeology," 135–42; Geva, "Jerusalem," 693.

¹⁴ R. W. Hamilton, "Excavations against the North Wall of Jerusalem," *QDAP* 10 (1944), 1–54; J. Magness, "The Walls of Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period," *BA* 54 (1991), 208–17.

¹⁵ M. Ben Dov, *The Historical Atlas of Jerusalem* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 174–82; Bahat, "Physical Infrastructure," 43–45.

¹⁶ Bahat, "Physical Infrastructure," 37–41. According to both Vincent and Tsafirir, the southern walls were abandoned in the second half of the tenth century; see Vincent and Abel, *Jérusalem nouvelle*, 942; and Y. Tsafirir, "Muqaddasi's Gates of Jerusalem: A New Identification Based on Byzantine Sources," *IEJ* 27 (1977), 152–61. Ben Dov delays the abandonment of the Byzantine walls to the second half of the eleventh century (*Historical Atlas*, 187–92).

¹⁷ For the streets in Jerusalem see Bahat, "Physical Infrastructure," 49–52. For similar street narrowing in other cities of the Near East see C. H. Kraeling, ed., *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938), 116–17; K. al-As'ad and F. M.

Stepinowski, "The Umayyad Suq in Palmyra," *Damascener Mitteilungen* 4 (1989), 205–223; and more generally H. Kennedy, "From Polis to Medina: Urban Change in Late Antiquity," *Past and Present* 105 (1986), 11–13. In Bet Shean construction of the Umayyad Suq over Silvanus street significantly narrowed the original street; see Y. Tsafirir, and G. Foerster, "Urbanism at Scythopolis-Bet-Shean in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries," *DOP* 51 (1997), 138–40; E. Khamis, "Two Wall Mosaic Inscriptions from the Umayyad Market Place in Bet Shean/Baysan," *BSOAS* 61 (2001), 159–76.

¹⁸ J. Wilkinson, "The Streets of Jerusalem," *Levant* 7 (1975), 118–36; Bahat, "Physical Infrastructure," 49–52.

¹⁹ Y. Tsafirir, "The Topography and Archaeology of Aelia Capitolina," in *The Roman and Byzantine Periods*, 142–56, and *idem*, "Topography and Archaeology," 295–300. Unfortunately, the results of these excavations have not yet been published and it is not possible to determine the exact date of construction and renovations of the ancient pavements.

²⁰ Bahat, "Physical Infrastructure," 53–65.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 53–54. The location of the Jewish Quarter at the end of the Early Islamic period is debated; see J. Prawer, "The Vicissitudes of the Jewish and Karaite Quarters in Jerusalem during the Arabic Period (640–1099)" [Hebrew], *Zion* 12 (1947/48), 136–48; *idem*, "The Jewish Community in Jerusalem in the Crusader Period," in *The History of Jerusalem—Crusaders and Ayyubids (1099–1250)*, J. Prawer and H. Ben Shamai, eds. [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi 1991), 195.

perhaps in the Silwan area, and later moved into the southeastern areas of the city. The Christian quarter of Early Islamic Jerusalem 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 Sepulcher.²² Significant construction and renovations were conducted there in the ninth century, as part of the initiative of Charlemagne,²³ 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 Sepulcher.²⁴

The prominent location of the Christian quarter in the urban layout of Jerusalem and new construction of churches, monasteries, and hospices in this part of the city during Early Islamic times indicate that the local Christian community maintained its leading position in the city. The outstanding example is the Holy Sepulcher itself, which remained physically unchanged in the Early Islamic period.

Clear evidence for Christian continuity from Byzantine to Early Islamic times emerged from recent survey and excavations conducted in the Holy Sepulcher and its surroundings.²⁵ The church suffered no significant damage during the 614 Persian invasion or the 638 Muslim conquest, and during the Early Islamic period there was considerable construction and renovation in and around it. One of the main recent finds is a hitherto unknown church that was annexed to the main complex of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.²⁶ This church, built in the Early Islamic period, consisted of two aisles and a central nave and was probably roofed by a cen-

tral dome supported by four massive columns (fig. 3). The scant ceramic evidence found underneath small patches of the original stone floor slabs showed that the church functioned during the ninth and tenth centuries, and was probably demolished in the 1009 destruction of the Holy Sepulcher.²⁷ Although most sources claim that the Holy Sepulcher Church was itself totally destroyed on orders of the fanatic Caliph al-Hākīm,²⁸ recent investigations show that this destruction left significant parts of the original fourth-century church intact.²⁹

The only evidence for Islamic presence in the area of the Christian quarter is an Arabic inscription found in the Russian Hospice east of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher forbidding all non-Muslims to enter a certain mosque. This mosque was probably the Mosque of 'Umar, established near the Church in the tenth century.³⁰

The same pattern of continuity of Christian religious institutions was found in the course of excavations at several other sites in the outskirts of Jerusalem. The archaeological evidence from these sites shows that churches and monasteries continued to function during the Early Islamic period, some of them surviving until the tenth and eleventh centuries.³¹ The southern urban area of Early Islamic Jerusalem, including the City of David, the Tyropoan Valley, and the slopes of Mt. Zion, was inhabited in both Byzantine and Early Islamic times (see fig. 1). Clear evidence of continuity of urban dwellings appeared in several excavations. The City of David excavations of the 1920s revealed the remains of several private houses from the Byzantine

For a different opinion, see M. Gil, "The Jewish Community," in *The History of Jerusalem: The Early Muslim Period*, 171–74.

²² Bahat, "Physical Infrastructure," 58–65; A. Linder, "Christian Communities in Jerusalem," in *History of Jerusalem: The Early Muslim Period*, 121–62.

²³ Bahat, "Physical Infrastructure," 62–64.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 60–65, and see J. Patrich, "The Structure of the Muristan Quarter of Jerusalem in the Crusader Period" [Hebrew], *Cathedra* 33 (1984), 3–17; A. Boas, *Jerusalem in the Times of the Crusaders* (London: Routledge, 2001), 85–88.

²⁵ G. Avni and J. Seligman, "New Excavations at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Compound," in *One Land, Many Cultures*, 153–62.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 156–58.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 158–59.

²⁸ M. Canard, "Destruction de l'Église de la Résurrection par le calife Hākīm et l'histoire de la descente du feu sacré," *Byzantion* 35 (1965), 16–43.

²⁹ See M. Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1999), 72–73.

³⁰ Ch. Clermont Ganneau, "La basilique de Constantin et la mosquée d'Omar à Jérusalem," *Recueil d'archéologie orientale* 2 (1898), 302–62; M. Van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus inscriptionum arabicarum*, 2: Jérusalem ville (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1922), 53–54; Bahat, "Physical Infrastructure," 59–61.

³¹ For a detailed list of churches and monasteries in and around Jerusalem, see R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995), 325–59; Bahat, "Physical Infrastructure," 87–95.

period.³² Recent evaluation of finds shows a continuous sequence of use into the Early Islamic period, with no indication of destruction in either the 614 Persian invasion or the 638 Muslim conquest.³³ Some of the excavated houses seem to have been used for a long period and it is possible that an uninterrupted phase of occupation lasted into the Crusader and Mamluk periods.³⁴ The same domestic occupation came to light recently in the renewed excavations of the Tyropoean Valley, south of the Dung Gate.³⁵ Although the private houses in this area represent the Byzantine construction tradition, the urban layout had become more open and spread out. Open spaces between the dwellings appear to have been used for small agricultural plots and industrial installations were constructed within and between the houses.³⁶

The distinction between the city and its hinterland during the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods became less clear with the massive expansion of the urban area *extra muros* toward the hills surrounding the walled area of Jerusalem.³⁷ This urban expansion is particularly evident in the areas north of the Damascus gate, where several excavations have been conducted in conjunction with large-scale modern construction.³⁸ An extensive network of monasteries and other Christian institutions was established during the Byzantine period and continued to flourish in Early Islamic times.³⁹ Some of

these compounds saw much construction during the seventh and eighth centuries. New mosaic floors were laid during this period, and it seems that the whole system of Christian religious institutions continued to function uninterrupted during the Early Islamic period. A number of inscriptions revealed the ethnic affiliation of the Christian inhabitants; along with the common Greek inscriptions discovered in several complexes, there was a clear Armenian presence in one of the excavated monastic complexes.⁴⁰ Similarly, outside the urban limits there was a large monastery excavated on the eastern slopes of Mount Scopus that revealed a similar chronological sequence. Dedicated to Sts. Theodorus and Cyriacus, this monastery was founded in the fifth century and continued to function at least up to the ninth century.⁴¹

Several agricultural complexes incorporating monasteries or churches have come to light to the northeast and northwest of Jerusalem, showing the same pattern of continuity.⁴² The settlement picture was similar to the south and southeast of the city, where excavations have revealed a number of monastic complexes in the area between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.⁴³ Indeed, one of the most important witnesses to continuity of Christian presence in the Jerusalem area has been the discovery of the monumental octagonal church of the Kathisma, constructed near the ancient Jerusalem-Bethlehem

³² 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), 137-45; W. Crowfoot and G. M. Fitzgerald, "Excavations in the Tyropoeon Valley, Jerusalem, 1927," *ibid.* 5 (1929), 58-60.

³³ See J. Magness, "Reexamination of the Archaeological Evidence for the Sassanian Persian Destruction of the Tyropoeon Valley," *BASOR* 287 (1992), 67-74.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁵ D. Ben Ami and Y. Tchkanovets, "The Transition between the Byzantine and the Early Islamic Periods in Light of the Excavations of the GivYati Parking Lot," in *New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and its Region, Collected Papers*, vol. 2, D. Amit and G. S. Stiebel eds. [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority and the Hebrew University, 2008), 64-70.

³⁶ Bahat, "Physical infrastructure," 68-70.

³⁷ G. Avni, "The Urban Area of Jerusalem in the Roman and Byzantine Periods: A View from the Necropolis," *JRA* 18 (2005), 373-96.

³⁸ The main archaeological excavations in this area were conducted at the end of the nineteenth century and again in the 1990s. The main reports are Lagrange, *St. Etienne*; Vincent and Abel, *Jérusalem nouvelle*, 743-801; Amit and Wolf, "An Armenian Monastery"; Tzaferis *et al.*, "Excavations at the Third Wall"; Tsafir, "Topography and Archaeology," 336-42.

³⁹ Amit and Wolff, "An Armenian Monastery"; Tzaferis *et al.*, "Excavations at the Third Wall."

⁴⁰ M. Stone and D. Amit, "New Armenian Inscriptions from Jerusalem" [Hebrew], *Cathedra* 83 (1996), 27-44.

⁴¹ Amit, Seligman, and Zilberbod, "The Monastery of Theodoros and Cyriacus."

⁴² E.g., R. Arav, L. Di Segni, and A. Kloner, "An Eighth Century Monastery near Jerusalem," *Liber annuus* 50 (1990), 313-20; S. Gibson, "Ras et-Tawil: A Byzantine Monastery North of Jerusalem," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 4 (1985-86), 69-73.

⁴³ V. C. Corbo, *Gil scavi di Kh. Siyar el-Ghanam (Campo dei pastori) e i monasteri dei dintorni* (Jerusalem: Studium biblicum franciscanum, 1955).

road.⁴⁴ This elaborate octagonal church, originally constructed in the fifth century, revealed several stages of rebuilding. During the eighth century the church was restored and repaved with mosaics. A small rounded niche was installed blocking a passage in the southern wall of the inner octagon, and it is probably to be identified as the *mihṛāb* of a mosque. Beside the rounded niche a new mosaic floor was laid representing an elaborate pattern of palm branches. The stratigraphic evidence dates this renovation to sometime in the first half of the eighth century.⁴⁵ If the interpretation of the rounded niche as a *mihṛāb* is indeed correct, this is a most interesting early example of a Byzantine church that incorporated an Early Islamic mosque. It appears that the two cultic installations functioned together for some time and that Christians and Moslems, therefore, prayed together in the same site.⁴⁶

Accumulating archaeological evidence from Jerusalem and its surroundings suggests several conclusions. It indicates clear continuity of the main urban components from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic periods with a very gradual process of change. The Christian presence in Jerusalem by no means terminated with the Muslim conquest, and evidence of continuity and even expansion and new construction of churches and monasteries has appeared in many excavations conducted in the Jerusalem area.⁴⁷ Christian religious rituals were practiced during most of the Early Islamic period, as is clear also from a number of churches and monasteries excavated in the Jerusalem area.⁴⁸ The recent

archaeological evidence shows that between the fifth and the ninth centuries Jerusalem expanded considerably to the north of its fourth-century walls. An extensive network of monasteries, villas, and agricultural farms was constructed around the walled city, creating a vast suburban area.

Although Early Islamic Jerusalem has been identified with the monumental Muslim religious constructions on the Temple Mount, this was the only urban area where a dramatic change occurred. In most other areas, the slow and gradual religious and cultural transformation revealed by the archaeological findings does not represent a monolithic Islamic domination of the city. The urban layout of Early Islamic Jerusalem shows a direct continuity from Byzantine Jerusalem. The city walls maintained their former layout at least until the tenth century; domestic architecture changed only gradually after the Byzantine period; and Christian religious institutions still flourished for at least three centuries after the Muslim conquest.⁴⁹ That the major components of the former Byzantine city survived itself indicates a lengthy and gradual process of transformation between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Hence, during most of this period Christian monuments still dominated the urban landscape. This situation is evident in many excavated sites, from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the heart of Jerusalem to the large network of monasteries, churches, and farms in the outskirts.

Recent archaeological evidence does not support the claim of an Islamic predominance and an

⁴⁴ Avner, "Recovery of the Kathisma."

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 180–81; *eadem*, "The Kathisma: A Christian and Muslim Pilgrimage Site." *ARAM* 18–19 (2007), 541–57.

⁴⁶ For a similar example in the Negev town of Shivta see C. Baly, "S'baita," *PEFQS* 67 (1935), 171–81; G. Avni, "Early Mosques in the Negev Highlands: New Archaeological Evidence on Islamic Penetration of Southern Palestine," *BASOR* 294 (1994), 83–99. For the use of churches as mosques, see also S. Bashear, "Qibla Musharriqa and the Early Muslim Prayer in Churches," *The Muslim World* 81 (1991), 267–80. For the main church of Damascus, which was converted into a mosque, see R. Burns, *Damascus, A History* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁴⁷ For the Christian presence in Jerusalem see Schick, *Christian Communities of Palestine*, 325–59; T. Milik, "La topographie de Jérusalem vers la fin de l'époque byzantine," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 37 (1960–61), 125–89.

⁴⁸ For the updated summary of recent finds see Avni, "Roman and Byzantine Jerusalem."

⁴⁹ The pottery assemblages from excavations in Jerusalem have a major role in refining this chronological picture. This issue was very much sharpened with Magness' evaluations of the ceramic sequence of Jerusalem and other regions of the Levant in Byzantine and Early Islamic times. See J. Magness, *Jerusalem Ceramic Chronology, Circa 200–800 c.e.* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); *eadem*, *The Archaeology of the Early Islamic Settlement in Palestine* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003).

ongoing decline of the Christian population in Jerusalem.⁵⁰ Instead, accumulating evidence reveals continuity of the Christian presence in and around the city under Islamic rule.⁵¹

Early Islamic Ramla

Founded 715–717 in the sands of the coastal plain by Sulayman b. ‘Abd al-Malik, Ramla was a different type of city. Ramla became the capital of the province of Filastin and a thriving commercial and administrative center. However, despite its importance in Early Islamic Palestine, the ancient city was almost unexplored by archaeologists up to 1990. Archaeological research had included only a preliminary survey of existing monuments⁵² and a few small-scale excavations conducted near the White Mosque⁵³ and in the western outskirts of the modern city.⁵⁴ Scholarly reconstruction of Early Islamic Ramla was based mainly on the rich historical evidence, with little contribution from archaeological material.⁵⁵

This situation has changed dramatically since 1990, when modern development of Ramla began to accelerate and scores of rescue excavations were conducted in various parts of the modern town. These excavations have provided substantial archaeological data for a preliminary reconstruction of

Ramla’s topographical layout and chronological sequence. A number of large-scale excavations were carried out in areas north and west of the Old City and to the north and south of the White Mosque. Several excavations were conducted also some distance from the Old City and in the western suburbs of modern Ramla. In addition, the course of the Umayyad aqueduct carrying water into Ramla from the springs at Tel Gezer was located and examined (fig. 4).

The main focus of large-scale excavations at Ramla has been the area of the White Mosque. Although the existing remains of the mosque date to the thirteenth century, several scholars have suggested that an early mosque was established there in the eighth century and functioned as the central mosque of the early Islamic city, located in the heart of Ramla.⁵⁶ The dating of the first mosque to the Umayyad period was based on several probes conducted at the inner courtyard and near the walls of the compound.⁵⁷ Since the excavations have not been fully published, however, this dating remains insecure and reevaluation of the chronology and early development of the White Mosque is still tentative.

Recently, several large-scale excavations have been conducted in the open areas to the north and

⁵⁰ E.g., Linder, “The Christian Communities,” 121–22; M. Gill, “The Authorities and the Local Population,” in *The History of Jerusalem: The Early Muslim Period*, 109–11; literary evidence for the destruction of churches in Jerusalem during the Persian invasion of 614 is not conclusive and does not correspond to the archaeological findings. See also Schick, *The Christian Communities*, 20–47, and Magness in this volume.

⁵¹ Under the impact of this new archaeological evidence one can understand Muqaddasi’s complaint that the majority of the population in Jerusalem during his time was still Christian; see Muqaddasi, *Aḥsan*, 167; *The Best Divisions*, Collins, trans., 141; Le Strange, *Palestine Under the Moslems*, 87.

⁵² A. D. Petersen, “Preliminary Report on an Architectural Survey of Historic Buildings in Ramla,” *Levant* 27 (1995), 75–113.

⁵³ Unfortunately only short preliminary reports of these excavations have been published to date; see J. Kaplan, “Excavations at the White Mosque in Ramla,” *Atiqot* 2 (1959), 106–15; M. Ben Dov, “Umayyad and Mamluk Remnants of Public Buildings in Ramla” [Hebrew], *Qadmoniot* 66–67 (1984), 82–85; M. Rosen-Ayalon, “The First Century of Ramla,” *Arabica* 43

(1996), 253–54.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 254–56.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 250–63; N. Luz, “The Construction of an Islamic City in Palestine: The Case of Umayyad al-Ramla,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 37 (1997), 27–54; and S. Gat, “The City of Ramla in the Middle Ages” [Hebrew] (Ph.D. dissertation, Bar Ilan University, 2003). See also D. Whitcomb, “Islam and the Socio-Cultural Transition of Palestine—Early Islamic Period (638–1099),” in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, T. Levy, ed. (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 491.

⁵⁶ Luz, “Construction of an Islamic City,” 34–35; Gat, “City of Ramla,” 89–95; Rosen-Ayalon, “First Century of Ramla”; *eadem*, “The White Mosque of Ramla—Retracing its History,” *IEJ* 56 (2006), 67–83.

⁵⁷ See J. Kaplan, “Excavations at the White Mosque”; Rosen-Ayalon, “First Century of Ramla,” 253–54; Ben Dov, “Umayyad and Mamluk Remnants.” Another rescue excavation was conducted by E. Yannai and A. Rosenbeger near the northern wall of the compound but is not yet published (G-31/1990, A-1797/1991 in the IAA Archives).

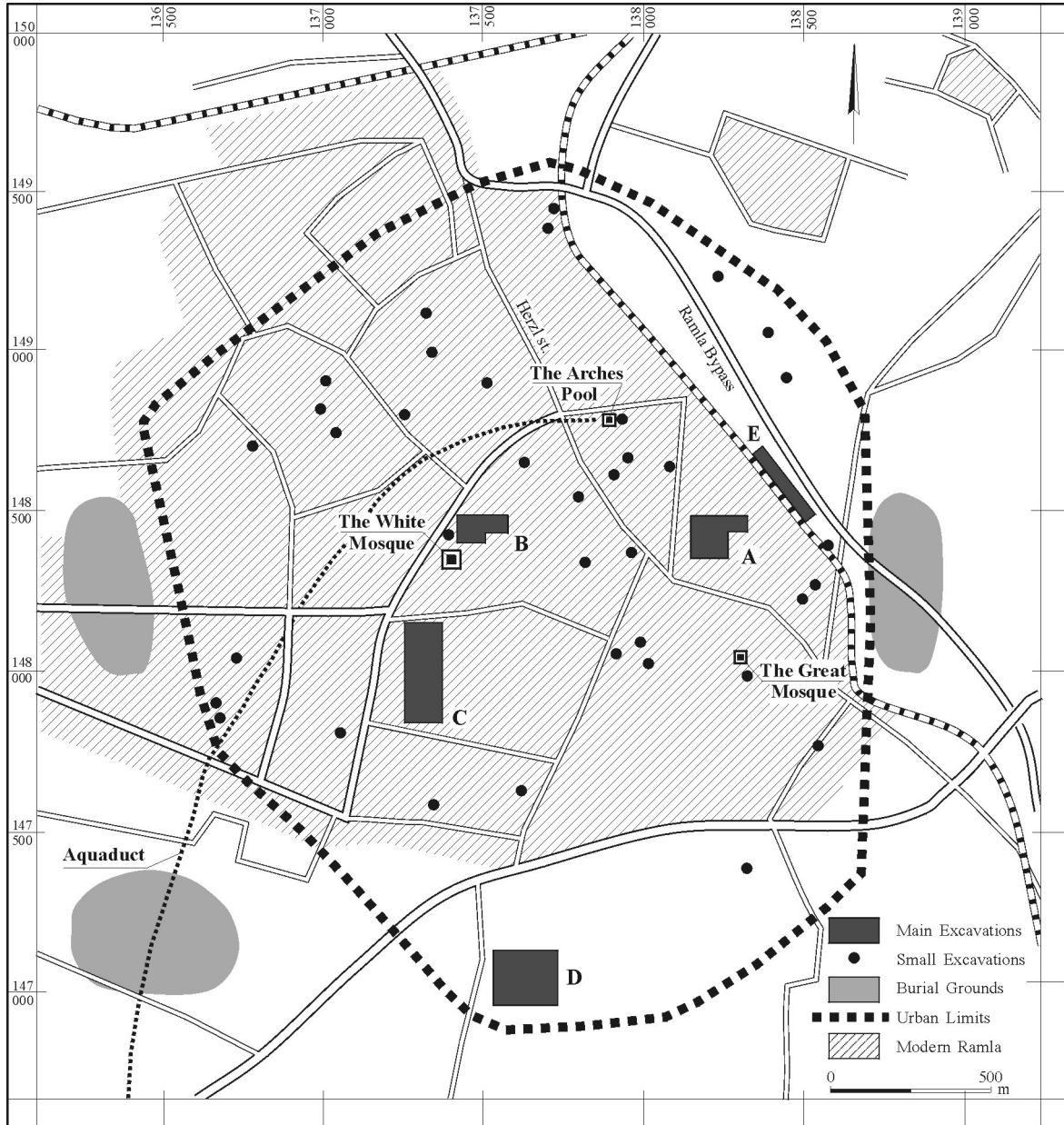


Figure 4
Ramla, locations of the main excavations (Israel Antiquities Authority)

south of the White Mosque (fig. 4B, C). In both areas the major stratigraphic and architectural evidence is from the ninth to the eleventh centuries. The Umayyad period was represented in most excavations by only isolated installations or pottery vessels laid on the sand dunes. To the north of the White Mosque the foundations of a large structure were found, constructed of ashlar stones.⁵⁸ Since most of the construction stones had been stolen, the accurate dating of this building remains unclear.⁵⁹ A large drainage channel dating from the ‘Abbāsid period was discovered nearby, probably part of the urban drainage system. Northwest of the White Mosque several habitation levels came to light, dating from the eighth to the eleventh centuries. The buildings and installations yielded evidence of a metallurgical industry during the Early and Middle Islamic periods. The remains included well-built water channels and smelting ovens, and the debris contained large quantities of metal production waste.⁶⁰

Recently large-scale excavations have been conducted south of the White Mosque, covering an area of about 4,500 sq. m. (fig. 4C).⁶¹ An uninterrupted urban sequence was exposed containing five main construction phases that dated from the second half of the eighth century to the eleventh century. All the excavated areas yielded remains of a complex urban network composed of dwellings—some of them luxurious—industrial installations, and an elaborate system of cisterns and water channels. Alongside the densely built residential neighborhoods were open areas with no building remains containing earth fills with a concentration of potsherds. The entire area was abandoned following the earthquakes of 1033 and 1068 and remained deserted until modern times.

The closest excavation area to the White Mosque toward the southeast (about 50 m. from the mosque compound) revealed a fragmentary section

of a large building dated to the eighth century (fig. 5). Built on the sand, the walls were constructed of massive ashlar stones that survived in places to a height of three courses. Beneath the building’s floor a vaulted chamber was discovered that may have served as a cellar or cesspool. In the ‘Abbāsid period it was turned into a refuse pit, where masses of pottery and glassware from the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsid periods, including richly decorated luster-type vessels exhibiting inscriptions in Arabic, were uncovered. The richness of the finds indicates that they came from a rich mansion or even a palace.⁶² This was the only find in the excavation that hints at a monumental construction possibly established in the Umayyad period.

Massive structural remains of dwellings also came to light about 80 m. south of the White Mosque. In this sector the earliest phase of construction dated to the eighth and ninth centuries. The foundations of a large structure appeared that consisted of a hall oriented north–south, paved with a colored mosaic decorated with floral and geometric designs. The surviving section of the mosaic is of a high standard and consists of small tesserae in various colors, representing continuity of the Byzantine-period mosaic tradition. The hall was enclosed on the east and west by walls of dressed limestone. Smaller rooms situated north and south of the hall, possibly living quarters, were only partially preserved because of the damage caused by later constructions. Above this large building were the remains of small dwellings dating to the ninth century and containing various installations and cisterns. On the eastern side of the area were found fragmentary remains of a small building with a central courtyard and cistern surrounded by small square rooms. North of the building were a number of installations and elongated rectangular pits that probably served as cesspits.

⁵⁸ O. Gutfeld, “Ramla,” *ESI* 109 (1999), 65*–67*; G. Avni and O. Gutfeld, “Ramla,” *NEAEHL*, 5:2007–10.

⁵⁹ Gutfeld dated the building to the Umayyad period, but the pottery retrieved from the foundation trenches cannot be dated earlier than the second half of the eighth century. I thank K. Cytryn Silverman for this information.

⁶⁰ Gutfeld, “Ramla.”

⁶¹ G. Avni, M. Avissar, Y. Baruch, and H. Torge, “Ramla Excavations South of the White Mosque,” *ESI* 120 (2008) (www.Hadashot-esi.org.il); Avni and Gutfeld, “Ramla.”

⁶² The glass finds from the excavation are exceptionally rich. See Y. Gorin-Rosen, “Glass Vessels from the Ramla Excavations” [Hebrew], *Qadmoniot* 135 (2008), 45–50.



Figure 5
Ramla, excavations south of the White Mosque (Israel Antiquities Authority)

From the latest phase the remains of a large building were discovered, dating from the tenth to eleventh centuries. It consisted of a number of inner courtyards surrounded by dwelling rooms, extending over most of the excavated area and beyond it to the north. A carelessly produced colored mosaic pavement in one of the courtyards was decorated on its southern side with floral motifs (fig. 6). Between the rooms and the courtyards were a number of cisterns, small pools, and water channels.

Another large building from the tenth to eleventh centuries was discovered in the western part of the same excavation area. It was furnished with a water system that included pipes, channels, pools, and apparently also an ornamental fountain. The central part of this building included an open courtyard surrounded by rooms. Part of the courtyard exposed north of the building contained elements of a water system, including pools with red-plastered floors and channels. In the middle of an octagonal pool in the center of the courtyard was an ornamental fountain fed by clay pipes. This building was apparently

destroyed in its entirety during one of the earthquakes of the eleventh century.

In the southern excavation area another large building from the tenth to eleventh centuries emerged. From this building survived the foundations of its walls, some installations dug into the ground, and a section of a colored mosaic pavement with geometric motifs. In the center of the building was a rectangular courtyard or entryway paved with a white tessellation, in the center of which, probably opposite the building's entrance, was a polychrome mosaic floor. It was decorated with a geometric design of two intertwining squares and in its center was a bowl and floral motif depicted within a frame. Little has survived of the building's living quarters. South of the courtyard (or entryway) were parts of square rooms with plastered floors.

The extensive excavations carried out south of the White Mosque allow a fairly clear reconstruction of the settlement pattern in this area during the Early Islamic period. The massive construction in this part of ancient Ramla probably took place no

earlier than the second half of the eighth century. Installations and storage jars that undoubtedly dated to the first half of the eighth century were found dug into the sand, but no buildings that predated the ‘Abbāsid period were identified in this area. Although the houses from the ‘Abbāsid period might have been constructed by the end of the Umayyad period, no firm stratigraphic or ceramic evidence has been found to prove this.

This part of the Early Islamic city became an area of primarily private dwellings during the ninth century. It seems that in the southwestern part of Ramla the most extensive construction took place in the Fatimid period, when clusters of luxurious houses were built around central courtyards, equip-

ped with sophisticated systems of conveying and storing water. Several of the buildings had decorated mosaic floors. This period apparently represents Ramla’s zenith in this area, and it appears that the city was composed of groups of houses interspersed with open spaces, courtyards, and gardens.

The earlier discovery of two decorated mosaic floors southeast of the White Mosque provides additional evidence for the richness of the private urban dwellings in this area.⁶³ Although at first dated to the eighth century, it seems that the mosaic floors actually were in use only from the ninth century and belonged to the same network of wealthy private buildings exposed in the excavations to the south of the White Mosque. These pavements likewise in-



Figure 6
Ramla, mosaic floors discovered south of the White Mosque (Israel Antiquities Authority)

⁶³ The mosaics were discovered in 1973 by M. Brosh and published by M. Rosen-Ayalon, “The First Mosaic Discovered in Ramla,” *IEJ* (1976), 104–19.

⁶⁴ The main excavations in this area conducted in 1995–97 by D. Glick and F. Vitto have not yet been fully

published; see D. Glick, “Ramla,” *ESI* 19 (1997), 107*; *idem*, “Ramla,” *HA/ESI* 109 (1999), 67; D. Glick and D. Gamil, “Ramla,” *ESI* 19 (1999), 52*–53*; F. Vitto, “Ramla, Ha-Shoftim (North) Quarter,” *HA/ESI* 111 (2000), 58*–59*.

dicating the prosperity of this area during the later stages of the Early Islamic period.

Additional large-scale excavations were conducted in the northeastern section of modern Ramla (fig. 4A).⁶⁴ Here ten excavation areas were opened that yielded evidence of continuous occupation in the Early Islamic period, comprising dwelling houses (most of them destroyed by thorough stone-robbing) along with subterranean installations and cisterns. Also found were the remains of an oil press and a white mosaic pavement decorated with geometric motifs intertwined with figures of animals: birds, donkeys (?) eating dates from a tree, and a tiger. The mosaic pavement abutted a cistern of which several phases of use could be distinguished.

Subterranean installations uncovered included silos, industrial pools, drainage systems, and cisterns. The two silos had outer walls constructed of fieldstones bonded with mortar, while the inner walls were plastered and the roofs were probably barrel vaults. In the southern part of the site were two rectangular pools, in one of which traces of red paint suggested the remains of a dyeing industry. Around these pools were remains of drainage channels, sewage systems, and cisterns. In all, thirteen cisterns were uncovered in different parts of the excavation areas, some of them close together (separated by only 3 to 4 m.). An elaborate system of channels drained runoff water from the roofs of the nearby houses and conducted it into the cisterns. A number of cesspools with vaults constructed of fieldstones were dug directly into the sand dunes. Elsewhere, in the middle of a plastered courtyard, a well 2 m. in diameter and 6.7 m. deep had been dug down to groundwater.

The mouth of the well, built of ashlar masonry, had been reconstructed several times in antiquity to correspond with the rising level of the building's floors.

Two Arabic inscriptions found in the excavations dated to the first quarter of the tenth century, at the height of settlement in this sector. Settlement finally ceased at the end of the Early Islamic period.

Additional excavations conducted in this area revealed further evidence for early Islamic construction in this part of the city (fig. 4E).⁶⁵ The northwestern sections of modern Ramla, probably located at the fringes of the Early Islamic city, yielded evidence for the large dimensions of ancient Ramla. No significant architectural remains emerged in this area and the rich finds indicated an industrial area rather than a residential quarter. Additional excavations conducted recently nearby revealed several phases of walls and floor segments.⁶⁶ It seems that this area marks the western fringe of early Islamic Ramla.

The areas to the south of the modern town were only recently excavated. A large-scale excavation conducted to the south of modern Ramla (fig. 4D) revealed an extensive large structure that was in use between the eighth and the eleventh centuries.⁶⁷ The existence of such an intensive Early Islamic settlement at a distance of about 1.5 km. south of the White Mosque hints that Ramla's urban area was much larger than previously predicted.

Evident in all parts of ancient Ramla was the effort devoted to the development of the public and private water supply system. This sophisticated system included the main aqueduct, which supplied water to the city from springs in the Tell Gezer area,⁶⁸ an elaborate system of cisterns and channels for con-

⁶⁵ O. Sion and R. Toueg, "Selected Problems from the Excavations in Eastern Ramla" [Hebrew], *Qadmoniot* 135 (2008), 26–30.

⁶⁶ The first excavation in the western outskirts of modern Ramla was conducted by M. Rosen-Ayalon and A. Eitan in 1965 but is unfortunately not yet fully published. For the preliminary publications see M. Rosen-Ayalon and A. Eitan, *Excavations at Ramla: Catalogue of Exhibition at the Israel Museum 66* (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum 1969); *idem*, "Excavations in Ramla" [Hebrew], *Qadmoniot* 4 (1969), 138–40.

⁶⁷ I thank A. Onn for providing me with this unpublished information. For additional recent excavations in this area, see O. Tal and I. Taxel, *Ramla (South): An Early Islamic Industrial Site and Remains of Previous Pe-*

riods (Salvage Excavations Reports, 5; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Institute of Archaeology, 2008).

⁶⁸ A section of the aqueduct from the Tel Gezer springs to Ramla was excavated in 1998–2001; see Y. Zelinger and O. Shmueli, "The Aqueduct of the Heretic's Daughter—Remains of the Early Arab Aqueduct to Ramla," in *In Quest of Ancient Settlements and Landscapes: Archaeological Studies in Honour of Ram Gophna*, E. C. M. van den Brink and E. Yannai, eds. (Tel Aviv: Ramot, 2002), 279–89. The aqueduct consists of a foundation of fieldstones bonded with cement and two parallel walls of dressed limestone masonry blocks. The parallel walls, 40–50 cm. wide, are plastered on their inner and outer faces and overlaid with another layer of fieldstones mixed with gray cement. The overall width of the aqueduct is about 1.5 m.

veying water, and finally a large number of clay pipes that delivered water into the houses and drained rainwater into the many private cisterns. The most impressive public water cistern known in Ramla, and one of the most elaborate monuments of early Islamic Palestine, is the large “Cistern of the Arches” (Birket al-‘Anaziyya), located in the northern part of Ramla (fig. 7).⁶⁹ This monumental stone-built and vaulted cistern was dated to the end of the eighth century on the basis of an inscription incised into the plaster covering its upper part. This elaborate cistern represents one of the earliest examples of the pointed arch in the Early Islamic architecture.⁷⁰



Figure 7
Ramla, the “Cistern of the Arches” (D. Silberman)

Urban settlement ceased in the southern and western parts of Ramla in the middle of the eleventh century, apparently as a result of two severe earthquakes that devastated the city in 1033 and 1068. After the second earthquake, which leveled most of the city’s buildings, the southern and western sectors remained completely deserted and were not resettled until modern times. The stones of the ruined buildings were reused in the construction of the Crusader and Mamluk town, which was apparently much smaller than the city of the Early Islamic period. The urban area of Ramla during the Ottoman period became even smaller, and the city did not return to its former glory.

The most significant contribution of the recent excavations in Ramla has been the establishment of a stratigraphic and chronological sequence for the development of the early Islamic city, along with enough architectural data for a preliminary reconstruction of the urban layout. The excavations defined four main stratigraphic units, ranging from the middle of the eighth century to the eleventh century. Umayyad-period remains were scarce and no clear architectural remains were traced prior to the ‘Abbāsid period. The major urban expansion of Ramla is dated to the tenth to eleventh centuries. Abundant remains from this period were discovered in the numerous excavations, revealing residential buildings, industrial installations, and an extensive water supply system.

Little archaeological evidence was obtained for the city in the first half of the eighth century and in none of the excavated areas was it possible to identify a complete building that could definitely be assigned to that period. The earliest city seems to have been small and the luxurious private dwellings of Ramla belonged to later periods.

Several houses from the ‘Abbāsid period appeared in the excavations south of the White Mosque, at least one of which contained a number of colored mosaic pavements alongside, as did numerous industrial installations and cisterns. There was no evidence of high-density construction over a large area and open spaces around the buildings were used as gardens or open fields. Many of the excavated areas provided evidence of intensive industrial activity, represented mainly by plastered installations with remains of dye and small collecting pools for various liquids.

The fragmentary architectural remains from different parts of Early Islamic Ramla revealed a consistent planned pattern, in that throughout the whole city the wall alignments faced roughly north-south and east-west. This pattern indicates a planned city covering a large area, with pre-planned insulae. Excavations south of the White Mosque revealed a number of structures clearly laid out on the same urban plan throughout the different stages of development from the second half of the eighth century to the eleventh century. This consistent urban align-

⁶⁹ M. de Vogue, “La citerne de Ramleh et le trace des arcs brisés,” *Mémoires de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* 39 (1912), 163–80.

⁷⁰ Rosen-Ayalon, “First Century of Ramla,” 259–62; *eadem*, “White Mosque of Ramla,” 79–83.

ment is evident also in the orientation of the White Mosque compound, located nearby, which faces roughly north-south with a slight western deviation of the walls. It is possible that this alignment was dictated by the direction of the mosque's *qibla* wall, which also affected the direction of nearby houses.⁷¹

The same consistent alignment of dwellings was evident in other published excavations throughout the southern, western, and northern parts of modern Ramla.⁷² Most of these remains were very fragmentary because of stone robbing and did not provide the layout of a single complete building, but consistency in the direction of walls was nevertheless evident. In a recent rescue excavation conducted in the southwestern part of modern Ramla, an intersection between two streets or alleys came to light, and its directions corresponded to the north-south orientation revealed in other parts of the city.⁷³

A similar urban grid pattern has been defined in the early Islamic levels of Caesarea, where a living quarter was excavated in the Inner Harbor area.⁷⁴ Additional evidence for orthogonal urban planning in the early Islamic towns was found in the excavations at Tiberias⁷⁵ and Yoqne'am.⁷⁶

Recent archaeological finds have not confirmed previous comparisons made between Ramla and 'Anjar in Lebanon, based on the similarity of the construction date of the two sites.⁷⁷ It seems rather that the urban layout of Ramla was influenced more by the large urban centers of the Islamic world. The consistent urban grid plan of insulae that appears in Ramla is paralleled on a much larger scale in Samarra in Iraq, but not in the small rectangular site of 'Anjar.⁷⁸

The recent archaeological evidence from Ramla does not enable us to distinguish between the ethnic components of the urban population. Besides the White Mosque, which probably existed already in early Islamic times as one of the city's central mosques, the archaeological record revealed no other public monuments. Archaeology does not provide any evidence of a Christian and Jewish population, attested to in numerous historical sources. The Jewish community is mentioned at large in the Geniza documents and evidence for the existence of several Christian churches is found in Christian sources, but no archaeological evidence for these religious communities has been found to date.

⁷¹ Although there is no solid proof for an Early Islamic mosque here, the same orientation of mosque and adjacent buildings may hint at an earlier monumental structure.

⁷² See, e.g., M. Priel, "Ramla," *HA/ESI* 109 (1999), 66*; M. Avissar, "Ramla," *HA/ESI* 112 (2000), 68*–69*; D. Glick and D. Gamil, "Ramla," *ESI* 19 (1999), 52*–53*; R. Kletter, "Early Islamic Remains at 'Opher Park, Ramla," *'Atiqot* 49 (2005), 57–99; A. Gorzalczany, "Ramla South," *ESI* 120 (2008) (www.Hadashot-esi.org.il); R. Toueg "Excavations in Marcus Street, Ramla," in *Contract Archaeology Reports, Institute of Maritime Studies Excavations*, 2 (Haifa: University of Haifa, 2007), 12–37.

⁷³ I thank A. Nagorsky for this information.

⁷⁴ A. Raban *et al.*, "Land Excavations in the Inner Harbor," in *Caesarea Papers* 2, K. G. Holum, A. Raban, and Y. Patrich, eds. (*JRA Supplement* 35; Portsmouth, R.I.: *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 1999), 198–225; Y. Arnon, "Early Islamic Caesarea" [Hebrew], *Qadmoniot* 127 (2004), 23–33; also Whitcomb in this volume.

⁷⁵ D. A. Stacey, *Excavations at Tiberias 1973–1974: The Early Islamic Periods* (IAA reports, 21; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004), 54–55 (Area B), 68 (Ar-

ea E), 83 (Area D1); Y. Hirschfeld, *Excavations at Tiberias 1989–1994* (Israel Antiquities Authority Reports, 22; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004), plan 1.4 (area B).

⁷⁶ A. Ben Tor, M. Avissar, and Y. Portugali, *Yoqne'am I: The Late Periods* (Qedem Reports, 3; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 2001), 14.

⁷⁷ E.g., Luz, "The Construction of an Islamic City," 38–42; and Gat, "City of Ramla," 73–77. For 'Anjar, see H. Hillenbrand, "'Anjar and Early Islamic Urbanism," in *The Idea and Ideal of the Town between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, G. P. Brogiolo and B. Ward-Perkins, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 59–98.

⁷⁸ For a summary of archaeological research in Samarra, see A. Northedge, *The Historical Topography of Samarra* (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2007); idem, "Remarks on Samarra and the Archaeology of Large Cities," *Antiquity* 79 (2005), 119–29; *EF*, 8:1039–41, s.v. "Samarra"; J. M. Rogers, "Samarra, a Study in Medieval Town Planning," in *The Islamic City*, A. H. Hourani and S. M. Stern, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 119–55; T. Leisten, *Excavations of Samarra, 1: Architecture: Final Report of the First Campaign 1910–1912* (Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zaberen, 2003).

How large was Early Islamic Ramla? According to Muqaddasi the city was surrounded by solid walls and its total dimensions were one square mile. The size of the Islamic mile during the ninth century has been calculated as ranging between 1.5 and 2.5 km.⁷⁹ The spatial distribution of urban dwellings in Ramla during the tenth to eleventh centuries, as known from the archaeological record, shows that the urban limits indeed extended about 2.5 to 3×2.5 km.⁸⁰ Although several historical sources describe Ramla's city wall,⁸¹ no evidence for it appeared in a number of excavations conducted in the outer areas. The recent discovery of a densely built-up area to the south of Ramla raises further questions about the actual size of the city and its periphery, and it might be that "Greater Ramla" was much larger than Muqaddasi suggests.

A hint of the actual size of the city might be provided by the distribution of cemeteries located by excavations surrounding the city. Several inscribed tombstones came to light to the southwest and northeast of modern Ramla (fig. 4), perhaps indicating a suburban cemetery nearby.⁸² A large concentration of simple cist graves dug into the ground, which was discovered recently in the southwestern outskirts might have been one of the major suburban cemeteries of Ramla.⁸³

Summary: A Tale of Two Cities

The recent archaeological excavations in Jerusalem and Ramla reveal the differing characters of the two cities during the Early Islamic period. Jerusalem preserved its Roman and Byzantine town-planning components, showing gradual changes in its urban layout. The special position of the sacred city as a major religious center for both Christianity and Islam had a direct influence on its urban tissue. Jerusalem was focused on its major religious monuments,

which were erected, reconstructed, and maintained as a main urban attraction for both local residents and foreign pilgrims. Both the Temple Mount/Haram el-Sharif and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher flourished as the religious centers of Islam and Christianity in the Holy Land, emphasizing the role of Jerusalem as a religious city rather than an administrative center.

The new city of Ramla was developed to be the capital of Early Islamic Palestine. Indeed, Ramla replaced Caesarea as the main administrative center, creating a distinction similar to the one existing during the Byzantine period: Jerusalem as the main religious center, but with no administrative capacities, and Ramla as the main commercial and administrative center.

The fragmentary archaeological remains discovered in Ramla show that its urban layout consisted of a pre-planned grid of streets and insulae. The city extended over a large area and industrial installations were introduced extensively into the urban area. No public monumental buildings dated to the Early Islamic period have so far been clearly identified in Ramla and the only evidence for monumental construction is the "Cistern of the Arches" and the possible earlier White Mosque. Like other early Islamic cities in Palestine and elsewhere, Ramla presented a new concept of town planning, with an extensive and spacious network of streets and dwellings, all of them keeping roughly the same north-south alignments.⁸⁴ This creation of a pre-planned city provides a unique opportunity to evaluate the concept of early Islamic town planning. The traditional stereotypical view of Islamic urbanism has perceived the "Islamic city" as a product of the new religious faith, containing a standard kit of urban elements, e.g., the Medina and the Casbah, and typically displaying a maze of narrow and winding

⁷⁹ A. Elad, "The Southern Golan in the Early Muslim Period: The Significance of Two Newly Discovered Milestones of 'Abd al-Malik," *Der Islam* 76 (1999), 33–88.

⁸⁰ It is interesting that the same dimensions are mentioned for the inner city of Baghdad. See J. Lassner, *The Middle East Remembered: Forged Identities, Competing Narratives, Contested Spaces* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 156–62.

⁸¹ For the suggested reconstructions based on Muqaddasi descriptions, see D. Whitcomb, "Islam and the Socio-Cultural Transition of Palestine," 489–502;

Luz, "The Construction of an Islamic City"; Gat, "City of Ramla," 80–82.

⁸² Kletter, "'Opher Park"; Glick, "Ramla." I thank A Nagorsky for permission to mention additional tombstones, not yet published, that she found.

⁸³ I thank A. Gorzalzcany Onn for providing this information, not yet published.

⁸⁴ Several sections of Samarra that have been surveyed and mapped show the same planning patterns as in Ramla. See A. Northedge, "Planning Samarra: A Report for 1983–1984," *Iraq* 47 (1985), 109–21 and fig. 2.

streets.⁸⁵ The archaeological evidence from Ramla, however, as from other Early Islamic centers, reveals a completely different picture.

Ramla did not develop as a typical medieval Middle Eastern city nor did it follow the Roman and Byzantine concept of city planning. Instead, Ramla appears to represent a new concept of planning, consisting of an orthogonal grid system spreading loosely over a broad area. The houses excavated in Ramla were relatively large, consisting of an inner courtyard surrounded by halls and dwelling rooms. Small-scale industries were introduced into the open spaces between the houses,⁸⁶ while the separation between industrial installations and the living quarters became insignificant.

This new type of urban planning appears in several early Islamic cities that were constructed and flourished in the eighth to tenth centuries. These cities did not contain the elements attributed to the “traditional Islamic city” but developed on a large-scale grid pattern.⁸⁷ A different type of planned city appears in Baghdad, where the inner planned round

city was probably influenced by the Sasanian concept of urban centers.⁸⁸

It should be noted, though, that the orthogonal grid system was not introduced in all the Early Islamic cities. The city layout of Fuṣṭāṭ, for example, consisted of clusters of living quarters that were connected by winding streets. The large houses predominating in the urban layout of ancient Fuṣṭāṭ were not arranged according to a planned urban concept, and there is almost no indication of an overall systematic plan in this major urban center.⁸⁹

While Ramla provides the grounds for evaluating the concept of Early Islamic urbanism, Jerusalem presents an example of a gradual process of urban change, which was typical of other Roman and Byzantine cities in the Near East and the Mediterranean region.⁹⁰ In a celebrated article, Hugh Kennedy claimed that the process of change in Classical and Byzantine cities started already in the fifth and sixth centuries and persisted in linear fashion for about 500 years.⁹¹ Yet other scholars have perceived the pattern of urban change to have been more com-

⁸⁵ See, for example, the studies of Islamic urbanism conducted in the first half of the twentieth century: W. Marcas, “L’islamisme et la vie urbaine,” *L’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Comptes*, 1928, 86–100; G. E. Von Grunbaum, “The Structure of the Muslim Town,” in *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition* (American Anthropological Association, Memoir 81; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, 1955); and the contradictory views of J. L. Abu Lughod, “The Islamic City—Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19 (1987), 155–76; and Kennedy, “From Polis to Medina,” 16. For the summary of different views, see T. Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 202–18 and A. Reynolds, “Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myths and Recent Views,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21 (1994), 3–18.

⁸⁶ Industrial installations were incorporated into living quarters in other early Islamic cities as well; see Kennedy, “From Polis to Medina,” 25.

⁸⁷ The most extensive example is Samarra, discussed above. Other cities that developed the same grid pattern are Basra and Kufa (see Lassner, *The Middle East Remembered*, 137–52). For the smaller cities that developed out of military camps (*’amsar*), see D. Whitcomb “The Misr of Ayla: New Evidence for the Early Islamic City,” *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 5 (1995), 277–88.

⁸⁸ Baghdad is known only from historical sources and no archaeological work has been possible because the modern city covered and destroyed the ancient remains; see Lassner, *The Middle East Remembered*, 153–77.

⁸⁹ W. Kubiak, *Al-Fustat: Its Foundations and Early Urban Development* (Cairo: American Research Center in Egypt, 1987); G. T. Scanlon, “Al-Fustat: The Riddle of the Earliest Settlement,” in *The Byzantine and Islamic Near East, 2: Land Use and Settlement Patterns*, G. R. D. King and A. Cameron, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 171–80. For recent excavations see M. Kawatoko, “Multi-disciplinary Approaches to the Islamic Period in Egypt and the Red Sea Coast,” *Antiquity* 79 (2005), 847–50.

⁹⁰ In recent years a number of publications have discussed the process of urban change in Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Near East; see, e.g., J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); N. Christie and S. T. Loseby, eds., *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Ashgate 1996); L. Lavan, ed., *Recent Research in Late Antique Urbanism*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Supplement 42 (2001); King and Cameron, *Byzantine and Islamic Near East*; Brogiolo and Ward-Perkins, *Idea and Ideal of the Town*.

⁹¹ See “From Polis to Medina.”

plex and affected by both long-term historical trends and local cultural traditions.⁹² The transformations of Early Islamic Jerusalem and Ramla support the latter view. Previous opinions claiming a persistent and continuous decline in the major urban centers of Palestine during and following the Byzantine period should be reconsidered. In two outstanding cases, the archaeological evidence shows that both Jerusalem and Ramla were lively and flourishing cit-

ies between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Although the Roman and Byzantine construction traditions in Jerusalem still influenced the urban layout of the city, a new concept of urbanism was introduced with the establishment of Early Islamic Ramla. These parallel lines of development represent the major feature of continuity and change in the urban tradition of Palestine during the first millennium.

⁹² For example, Whitcomb, "The Misr of Aila"; Magness, *Archaeology of the Early Islamic Settlement*, 195–216.