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A History of the Balqā' Region of Central Transjordan during the Umayyad Period

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September 1995
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements of degree of Masters of Arts

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Abstract

Drawing on a variety of primary and archaeological sources, this study attempts to recreate the political history and the social and economic character of the Balqā' region during the Umayyad period. The Balqā' was a provincial area of Transjordan, which had long been part of the classical world heavily influenced by the Arab tribes of the Syrian desert. After the Arab conquest the Balqā' took on a new role as the home of some of the ruling Umayyad elite. But a process of economic, demographic and urban decline had already begun in the middle of the sixth century . Even the ethnic and religious composition of the Balqā's population remained stable; the region was primarily inhabited by Christian Arabs during both the late Byzantine and the Umayyad periods. In passing from Byzantine to Umayyad control the Balqā' underwent a process of transformation, especially in regards to political matters. But the more important trend was one of continuity, even the transfer of political power from the Byzantine bureaucracy to Arab notables was but the culmination of a trend which had begun with the rise of the Ghassānids in the previous century.

Résumé

S'inspirant d'une variété de sources primaires et archéologiques, cette étude tente de recréer l'histoire politique ainsi que le caractère social et économique de la région de Balqā' pendant la période omayyad. Le Balqā' etait une région provinciale de la Transjordanie, et fit longtemps partie du monde classique tout en étant fortement influencé par les tribus arabes du désert syrien. Au lendemain de la conquête arabe, le Balqā' est devenu le lieu de résidence de plusieurs membres de l'élite omayyad. Toutefois, un processus de déclin économique, démographique et était enclenché depuis déjà le milieu du sixième siècle. Néanmoins, la composition ethnique et religieuse de la population du Balqā' demeura stable; de la fin de la période byzantine jusqu'à l'époque des ommayads, la région fut principalement peuplée par des Arabes chrétiens. En changeant de mains, le Balqā' subit des transformations, particulièrement en ce qui concernait la vie politique. Mais la tendance qui primait en était une de continuité, même le transfert de pouvoirs politiques, de la bureaucracie byzantine aux notables arabes, ne représentait que le point culminant d'une tendance qui avait débuté avec l'ascension des Ghassānids au siècle précédent.

Transliteration

Arabic words within my thesis will be transliterated according to the Library of Congress system (titles of works cited and quotes will be left in their original forms to avoid confusion). Commonly used "anglicized" forms will be retained (thus Caliph instead of Khalīfah), as well as Jerusalem, Aleppo, Beirut and Damascus. Names of places will be used appropriate to the time period in which they occur. Thus Roman 'Ammān will be referred to as Philadelphia, while 'Ammān will be used to refer to the subsequent medieval and modern cities. Any general reference to a site will utilize the modern form of the site's name; this will also be the case if there is not a commonly known classical name for a particular site. When any name first occurs in this study it will be followed by the name of the modern site in brackets, thus Philadephia ('Ammān). The name Palestine will be used for the geographical entity and for the Byzantine provinces of Palaestina Prima, Palaestina Secunda and Palaestina Tertia; Filasṭīn will be used in reference to the Umayyad *jund*. Damascus refers to the city; Dimashq to the *jund*. Transjordan will be used to describe the lands east of the Jordan River; Jordan describes the modern Hashemite Kingdom. Titles will be left intact; quotes will be adapted to the Library Congress system. Names of battles will be given in their most frequently used forms; the battle of Faḥl rather than Pella.

Acknowledgements

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my late father, John Wood.

Introduction

This study is an examination of a provincial area undergoing a process of transformation. In the mid-630's the Balqā' region of central Transjordan passed from Byzantine rule to eventually become an integral and valued part of the Umayyad Caliphate. It is natural to assume that such a change in the political control of an area coupled with the new religious orientation of at least some of its population would provoke noted changes in the political, social, economic and religious character of the region. But this may not necessarily have been the case. It is not clear how much of an impact the coming of Islam and of Arab rule actually had on the inhabitants of the Balqā' region. This study will examine these issues by reconstructing the political history as well as the economic and social character of the Balqā' region from the last days of Byzantine control until the downfall of the Umayyads. Transformation trends within the Balqā' will be identified. In doing so the impact of Islam and the Arab conquest on a provincial region of Byzantine Syria will be assessed.

Why the Balqā'?

The Balqā' region of central Transjordan has been chosen as a case study of processes of cultural and historical change for a number of reasons. First the Balqā' can be considered an identifiable geographic entity. Although it was part of larger structures during the Byzantine and early Islamic periods, such sources as Muqaddasī refer to it as the "Balqā' region". Second,

the Balqā' region was one of the first areas within the Byzantine empire and outside the Arabian peninsula to fall under Muslim political control. Third, this region was an area of Syria, containing both urban and rural settlements, located some distance from such concentrations of political power as Caesarea and Damascus. In examining the Balqā' one can observe the processes of conversion to Islam and the application of Muslim political control in a provincial area. Fourth, these processes of conversion and the consolidation of a new political regime took place in an area that had long been part of the classical, urbanized world and yet bordered on the desert, the home of the Arab tribes who had originally spread Islamic hegemony. Lastly, the Balqā' region is a rich source of archaeological data. It is this last point that makes the Balqā' region particularly suited to be the focus of this study. The Balqā' contains several sites of archaeological significance, which have either been preserved intact (Qaṣr Kharānah, Quṣayr 'Amrah, Qaṣr al-Ḥallabāt) or have been extensively excavated (the 'Ammān Citadel, Ḥusbān, Mādabā, Umm al-Raṣāṣ, Tall Jāwā). The area has also been subjected to several important archaeological surveys (in the 'Ammān region and the Mādabā plains).

Time parameters

This study will concentrate on a time period stretching from just before the Arab conquest of Transjordan until the downfall of the Umayyads in 750, corresponding roughly to the Umayyad Period.

The restoration of Byzantine rule to Transjordan, in 629, after the Persian occupation might serve as a useful starting point; it will be kept in mind, however, that Byzantine institutions extant in Transjordan on the eve of the conquest might have a centuries-long history. The 'Abbāsid takeover of 750 is a useful termination point. By that date direct Byzantine influence can reasonably have been said to have ended; other influences, such as those coming from Persia, which are outside the scope of this study, can be expected to have come into play. The label "Umayyad Period" has been chosen for a variety of reasons. Archaeological labels described by Whitcomb and frequently used for earlier time periods of Middle Eastern history (i.e. Middle Bronze IIa) were rejected as too awkward and ahistorical (this study's focus would fall within the Early Islamic I Period (600-800)) (Whitcomb 1992:386). Instead, "Umayyad Period" will be employed with the understanding that the Arab conquest of Balqā' itself as well as the establishment of many institutions that marked Arab rule of the Balqā' took place before the Umayyad dynasty had come to power.

The Balqā' region

The label "Balqā' region" has been used in two distinct ways by Arab geographers. Some held the Balqā' to include the entire region of Transjordan which made up the ancient lands of Ammon, Moab and Gilead (Sourdel-Thomine 1960:997) By this definition, the Balqā' might include both Irbid, to the north, and Ma'āb and Mu'tah, to the south (Buhl 1927:622) The term was also used to

refer to a more limited and specific geographic area centred around 'Ammān, Ḥusbān and al-Ṣalt. Throughout the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods the Balqā' region was part of a variety of administrative units; the relevant administrative units of the Byzantine and Umayyad periods will be described in greater detail in the following chapters. The modern Jordanian Balqā' Governate is an even more restricted area consisting of the region northwest of 'Ammān around the city of al-Ṣalt. Today, the Balqā' is usually held by scholars to identify a restricted geographic area, a limestone plateau running from the eastern rim of the Jordan valley into the Syria desert and located between the Wādī al-Zarqā' (the ancient river Jabbok) in the north and the Wādī al-Mūjib (the ancient river Arnon) in the south (Sourdel-Thomine 1960:997-998, Royal Geographical Centre 1989). It is this latter definition which will be used in this thesis with one minor modification: archaeological ruins found within the eastern desert itself, such as Qaṣr Kharānah and Quṣayr 'Amrah, are also included. Although the Transjordanian desert is usually identified as a separate region (called the *bādiyah*), these so-called "desert castles" may have had a dependent relationship with centres within the Balqā' (for a map of the Balqā' see Figure 1 after Northedge 1992:Plate 6).[1]

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[1] The Balqā' region is within the northern part of the Transjordanian Plateau, east of the Jordan valley. This plateau rises between 750 and 1500 m above sea level and is marked by a series of wādīs running from east to west. The most northerly wādī, the Wādī al-Yarmūk, marks the traditional boundary between Syria and regions to the south. The Wādī al-Zarqā, north of 'Ammān, marks the northern border of the Balqā' region. Below the

Sources

In undertaking this study a variety of sources will be utilized. The focus of this study will, to some extent, be determined by the availability and the concerns of these sources. As will hopefully be demonstrated below, the available primary sources, in translation or otherwise, are an inadequate source of information from which to reconstruct Umayyad Balqā'. Archaeological evidence, while certainly abundant, cannot stand alone; such evidence lacks the historical reference points, which only primary sources can

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Wādī al-Mūjib is the ancient region of Moab stretching south to the Wādī al-Ḥasah. This canyon marks the end of the larger northern part of the plateau and the beginning of the high region which once made up the kingdom of Edom. Below Ma'ān the Jordanian plateau drops dramatically into an area of low mudflats called the *hismā* which run south to the Gulf of Aqaba. The northern part of the Transjordanian plateau, within which falls the Balqā', is mostly made up of limestone with some deposits of chert. This contrasts sharply with the sandstone and granite heights of Edom and the volcanic basalt flats which make up the Leja' region to the northeast (Bowersock 1983:6,8). The Balqā' region itself consists of a network of deep ravines, created by rain-driven erosion, which run between high hills with an average elevation of around 900 m above sea level. These ravines are especially deep and broken in the vicinity of the Dead Sea and the Jordan valley between al-Ṣalt in the north and Mount Nebo in the south. The regions around al-Ṣalt and 'Ammān are quite steep, 'Ammān itself being built on a series of hills. Tall Jāwā, a hill some 900 m above sea level and 10 km south of 'Ammān, overlooks the Mādabā plains, a somewhat flatter region encompassing Mādabā and Ḥusbān. The Balqā' also flattens out as it runs into the eastern desert; this characteristic of the region is particularly noted in the area around Qaṣr Kharānah. A Mediterranean climate is apparent within the hills and valleys of the Balqā' with hot dry summers and cold wet winters; the average July temperature in 'Ammān being 24.7 C while the average temperature in January in 'Ammān is 7.3 C. The Balqā' is an arid region but there is, however, sufficient rainfall for the cultivation of crops, especially at the base of ravines and on the flatlands. The annual rainfall around 'Ammān exceeds 400 mm. Rainfall occurs generally between October and April; May rain is rare but not unknown (Sourdel-Thomine 1960:997, Royal Geographic Centre 1989, Personal Observations 1989-1993).

provide. Secondary sources are often too broad of scope, although they can continue to be useful if approached with caution.
All three sets of sources will be drawn upon in describing and analyzing Umayyad Balqā'. It is hoped that these sources will allow an adequate performance of the task, although it is possible that some aspects of Umayyad Balqā' may be simply not available for examination by the historical researcher.

Primary sources

As a provincial area, the Balqā' was seldom the focus of medieval historians or geographical writers. Henry MacAdam writes that knowledge of the final phase of the pre-Islamic history of Philadelphia ('Ammān) is woefully inadequate; literary sources are rarer than for any earlier period of classical era. Philadelphia was a peaceful, prosperous, provincial city with no real role in the political and religious events of the day (Northedge 1992:39). Walter Kaegi notes that few Byzantine historical writers deal with the reign of Heraclius (610-641), the last emperor to control Syria. Kaegi also notes that there are no seventh or eighth century Byzantine travel or geographical texts dealing with the Islamic world (Kaegi 1992:3,6). John Haldon states that there are essentially only two Byzantine histories of the seventh century. The *Brief History* of the Patriarch Nicephorus (Patriarch from 806-815) covers the period from 602 to 769 with a gap in describing the years 641-668. The *Chronography of Theophanes* (compiled between 810 and 814) describes events of the seventh and eighth centuries

(Haldon 1990:15). Some earlier sources, from the fifth and sixth centuries, are also very useful. One of the best sources of information on late Roman administrative practices is the *Notitia dignitatum omnium, tam civilium quam miltarium in partibus Orientis et Occidentis*, usually shortened to *Notitia dignitatum*. This document may have served as a manual of statecraft and can be tentatively dated to the early fifth century. It offers a description of the administrative structure of the empire in the fifth century and although both the western and eastern halves of the empire underwent many changes during the next two centuries the basic structures of the empire may have remained intact until the Arab conquest; in any event, this fifth century administrative framework is a good place to start in examining seventh century Byzantine government practices.[2] The *Onomasticon*, a topographical dictionary compiled by Eusebius, the fourth century bishop of Caesarea, offers much information on the road systems, cities and administrative boundaries of early fourth century Palestine (Northedge 1992:39). Again, like the *Notitia dignitatum*, the *Onomasticon* must be used with caution; boundaries and roads may have undergone at least some changes between the fourth and seventh

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[2] Werner Seibt feels that this manuscript may have been commissioned by the Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire, Stilicho, on the occasion of his going to Constantinople to assume the regency in 408. The manuscript would have served as a type of "state handbook" describing the operations of the empire which Stilicho was to take control of. This manuscript was not completed before Stilicho's assassination in August 408; the manuscript was subsequently completed by the Generalissimos of the Western Empire and his widow by the third decade of the fifth century (Seibt 1986:36-37).

centuries.[3]

The situation does not change with the advent of Islam. Yusuf Ghawanmah, a Jordanian scholar, has published a study of medieval Arabic texts which deal with 'Ammān; this survey clearly demonstrates that there is little information on the medieval history of the city. Alastair Northedge notes that in itself this is not remarkable; it is difficult to reconstruct the local history of many provincial cities of the Middle East, if the city was not a centre of the *'ulamā'*, from whom much medieval historical writing originated. Usually, one can find isolated historical references to a given city in a diverse set of sources. However, in the opinion of Northedge, the references to 'Ammān, seem particularly sparse (Ghawanmah 1979, Northedge 1992:47). If references to 'Ammān, the largest urban centre in the Balqā', seem sparse then so are references to the region as a whole. Nevertheless, Northedge lists three primary sources which describe the geography and the administrative boundaries of the Balqā'. These consist of the *Kitāb al-buldān* of Ya'qūbī (d. 897), the *Kitāb al-mamālik wa-al-masālik* of Ibn Khurdādhbih (820-911) and the *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* of Balādhurī (d. 892) (Northedge 1992:167).

Alan Walmsley notes a similar set of four major Arabic sources which offer reliable accounts of the major urban centres of Jordan during the first four centuries of Islam. In addition to the sources noted by Northedge, Walmsley cites the importance of the

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[3] Michel Avi-Yonah draws links between the Roman system of milestones and the *Onomasticon*. Eusebius may have utilized a road map in composing his dictionary (Avi-Yonah 1966:128).

Kitāb aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī-ma'rifat al-aqālīm of Muqaddasī (d. 1000); this work, written in 988, offers a full and critical description of the whole Islamic world of the late tenth century. Balādhurī's work, in addition to providing many valuable geographic and administrative details, also offers a full account of the Muslim conquest of Syria. The *Kitāb al-mamālik wa-al-masālik* of Ibn Khurdādhbih, issued in 847 and 885, is an official text of the 'Abbāsid empire describing roads, regions and administrative districts; it accurately describes the urban geography of Syria at the time. The *Kitāb al-buldān* of Ya'qūbī is a semi-official text, issued in 891, intended as a practical guide to the geography and the peoples of the Islamic world and beyond; Walmsley notes the author's critical evaluation of his sources. According to Walmsley these sources, while often short on detail, are useful in identifying broad geographic trends (Walmsley 1992:378).

These four sources, then, are the most comprehensive primary descriptions of Umayyad Balqā' available today. However, these sources are very problematic. They were all written from one hundred to two hundred years after the fall of the Umayyad dynasty, in 750; as such they are certainly not first-hand accounts, although the authors of these works probably had access to earlier historical and geographical texts. There is a problem of possible bias, particularly as historical events and administrative decisions which took place during the Umayyad period would have had an effect on subsequent taxation policy. But beyond questions of the veracity of these texts there is a wider problem of the overly

broad scope of these accounts. The authors of these works were concerned with the geography, and in Balādhurī's case, the history of the whole Middle East; the Balqā' and 'Ammān, like many provincial regions and cities, were simply not of much interest to these authorities and were consequently seldom described in any great detail.

In addition to this core set of primary sources Northedge lists place-names within the Balqā' as being cited by the following authorities: Ṭabarī, in his *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, Ibn 'Asākir, in *Ta'rīkh Dimashq*, Abū al-Fidā', in his *Kitāb taqwīm al-buldān*, Mas'ūdī in his *Murūj al-dhahab* , Yāqūt, in his *Kitāb mu'jam al-buldān* and Ḥamdānī, in *Takmilat ta'rīkh al-Ṭabarī*. Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ, in his *Ta'rīkh*, notes the names of three early governors of the Balqā' (Northedge 1992:168). Guy Le Strange, in *Palestine under the Moslems*, provides several additional sources on the geography of the Balqā'. In addition to offering translated extracts from Ya'qūbī, Ibn Khurdādhbih, Muqaddasī, Mas'ūdī, Yāqūt, Abū al-Fidā', Le Strange also notes geographical information provided by Ibn al-Faqīh, Idrīsī and Ṣāfī al-Dīn.[4] Ṭabarī's work,

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[4] Mas'ūdī (d. 955) was responsible for a universal history, called *The Meadows of Gold*, which begins with Creation and ends with events of the year 943. Mas'ūdī had travelled extensively (India, Ceylon, Persia, Madagascar, Palestine and Egypt, where he finally settled and died) and he was a keen observer; many geographical references are scattered throughout this history. Yāqūt completed, in 1225, a geographical dictionary which described in alphabetical order every town and region with which he was familiar. Yāqūt had travelled through much of Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia and his dictionary describes the Muslim world of the thirteenth century from Spain to India. Abū al-Fidā', prince of Ḥamā and a descendant of Saladin, completed a geographical work in 1321; his chapter on Syria and Palestine is apparently based on

as a detailed and comprehensive history of the Islamic world from the rise of Muḥammad to the height of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate, is of particular interest; it is a fruitful source of information on the political events of Umayyad times. The other geographic and historical works, cited by Northedge and Le Strange, are even more problematic than the four core sources previously noted as sources for the history and geography of the Balqā'. Ibn al-Faqīh's work, written a century and a half after the fall of the Umayyads, comes to modern scholars second hand. Mas'ūdī's work is very broad and references to the Balqā' are consequently scarce. Safī al-Dīn's work is mostly a reworking of that of Yāqūt. The other works are all written at least four to five hundred years after the end of the Umayyad dynasty, and though they may have utilized earlier works, they must be used with extreme caution.

Geoffrey King and Patricia Carlier both draw attention to references by Iṣfahānī, in his *Kitāb al-aghānī*, to the activities of al-Walīd II, in the desert estates of the Balqā' (King 1992:371, Carlier 1984:350). Robert Hamilton uses Iṣfahānī to reconstruct the life and times of al-Wālīd II; Hamilton is more concerned with

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personal observation rather than on the works of earlier authorities. Ibn al-Faqīh wrote a geographical description around the year 903; this description exists only in a somewhat arbitrary abridgement made by a person called 'Alī Shaizarī. Idrīsī, of Spanish Arab background, in 1154 wrote a geographical text for Roger II of Sicily; Idrīsī had travelled extensively, even observing the coasts of France and England, his knowledge of Palestine was apparently excellent. Ṣafī al-Dīn was responsible, in approximately the year 1300, for a summary and revision of Yāqūt's earlier work. This revision was entitled *Marāṣid al-iṭṭilā'* or "The Watch-Tower of Information" (Le Strange 1890:1-13). For a fuller discussion of early Arab historical and geographic sources, see Dunlop 1971:Chapters 3-4.

the lifestyle of al-Wālīd and his friends than with political events and he uses Ṭabarī as a source of political events in the Balqā'. This approach may reflect Iṣfahānī's own interests (Hamilton 1988).

Fred Donner and Kaegi note several sources who offer information regarding the Arab conquest of Syria; much of this literature is of only marginal interest to this study, it being broad of scope with few mentions of the Balqā' region. But beyond Balādhurī there are several historians of the conquest who note the region. Donner cites Ibn Iṣḥāq (d. 767) (*Kitāb ḥurrāb al-Basūs bayna Bakr wa-Taghlib*), Wāqidī (d. 823) (*Kitāb al-maghāzi*) and the Syrian scholar Sa'īd ibn al-'Azīz al-Tanūkhī (lived around the year 800); Ya'qūbī, in addition to his geographical work, was also responsible for a history, which covers the conquest, *Ta'rīkh al-Ya'qūbī* (Donner 1981:128, Wāqidī 1966, Ya'qūbī 1960). Kaegi notes the *Ta'rīkh futūḥ al-Shām* of Azdī (late 700's or early 800's) as an authority on the history of early Islamic Syria (Keagi 1992:67, Azdī 1970).[5] Azdī's work is more concerned with making a spiritual point regarding the significance of the Byzantine defeat as opposed to Balādhurī who is more interested in the establishment of Syria as a political entity; thus, Azdī is not greatly interested in political details. The most interesting portion of the work seems

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[5] Lawrence Conrad, in a reexamination of the work, finds that Azdī's work was most likely written in the late eighth-early ninth centuries, rather than the time of the Crusades, as had been earlier maintained, and as such is usable for early Islamic history (Conrad 1987).

to be Azdī's familiarity with Christian communities and with Arabs in Syria at time of conquest (Conrad 1987).

Some details on economic and demographic matters are provided by Moshe Gil, who extensively utilizes documents from the Cairo Geniza; these documents, in Judaeo-Arabic, were found in a cabinet for storing old documents in the Cairo Synagogue during the last century. Most of these documents, including many private letters, date from the early medieval period; several of them note commercial contacts between the Balqā' and the Mediterranean Jewish community (Gil 1992). Although Gil offers a unique glimpse into the world described by these documents, it must be kept in mind that they date to several centuries after the Umayyad period.

Most of the above-mentioned sources are additionally problematic for this study in that they have not been translated into English, French or any other European language; many of them are only available in older Arabic editions or as unpublished manuscripts. Balādhurī, Ṭabarī and Muqaddasī are available in English; Ya'qūbī's geographical work has been translated into French. Le Strange, as noted, offers translated excerpts of several geographers. Other Arabic sources must be utilized indirectly, through the secondary sources in which they are cited. By utilizing such secondary works this study will have access to additional, non-translated primary sources.

Archaeological sources

Northedge contrasts the dearth of written sources on the

history of the early Islamic Balqā' with the abundance of archaeological data for the period (Northedge 1992:47). Early archaeological surveys of the 'Ammān area, such as those of Charles Warren in 1867 and of C.R. Conder, on behalf of the *Palestine Exploration Fund* (PEF), in 1881, are of value. These early researchers surveyed the Balqā' before the birth of the modern city of 'Ammān in 1882.[6] Photographs and drawings from this era, by both formal archaeological expeditions and private individuals, are invaluable as the subsequent growth of 'Ammān destroyed much of the Byzantine and Islamic era ruins, which had been previously visible. Systematic archaeological survey work was pioneered in Jordan by Nelson Glueck in the 1930's. His surveys of 1933 and 1936-38 covered the Balqā' region and found evidence of Byzantine and Umayyad occupation (Glueck 1934, 1939).

After the work of Glueck, there was little in the way of archaeological survey work in Jordan until the 1970's. Since then, many areas of Jordan have been extensively surveyed. The Andrews University Heshbon Expedition undertook regional surveys, in a 10 km radius of Tall Ḥusbān, in 1973, 1974 and 1976 (Ibach 1987:3). Andrews University continued survey work in 1984, 1987, 1989 and 1992 with the Mādabā Plains Project which conducted a survey in a 10 km radius of Tall al-'Umayrī. Between the two projects, Andrews University was able to cover an extensive amount of territory between 'Ammān and Mādabā. The *Limes Arabicus Project*, undertaken

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[6] 'Ammān was abandoned during the fourteenth century and remained a ruin until the settlement in 'Ammān of Circassians fleeing from Tsarist persecution.

by S. Thomas Parker and associates, examined a large area of the eastern desert from 1976-1987 (Parker 1992). King, in 1980 and 1981, surveyed northeastern Jordan as well as the area between Mādabā and the Wādī al-Mūjib (King 1982, 1983). These recent surveys have done much to advance present knowledge of settlement patterns within the Balqā' as well as knowledge of economic conditions in the Byzantine and Umayyad periods.

Like archaeological survey work, actual archaeological excavation did not really take place within Jordan, to any great extent, until the 1970's.[7] The Tall Ḥusbān excavations of 1968, 1971, 1973, 1974 and 1976 were pioneer studies and were particularly important for the development of a reliable pottery typology for the Byzantine and Umayyad periods (Ibach 1987:3).[8]

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[7] Western archaeologists have, until recently, tended to concentrate on sites with Biblical associations in Israel and the West Bank. Islamicists have been mostly concerned with more substantial ruins, such as the virtually intact remains of the Umayyad estates in the desert east of 'Ammān and the functioning Umayyad mosques of Jerusalem and Damascus. Jordanian researchers began serious archaeological research in the 1970's, with a primary interest in the Neolithic, classical and Islamic eras.

[8] The Heshbon Expedition conducted excavations at Tall Ḥusbān as well as a series of archaeological surveys in a 10 km radius of the site. The Expedition adopted the name "Heshbon" in the belief that Tall Ḥusbān was the Biblical site of that name mentioned in Exodus; as the focus of the Expedition shifted the name "Hesban" was adopted. For consistency, this study will use the Arabic name Ḥusbān when referring to the site and the survey, the expedition itself will be referred to by its original name. The Heshbon Expedition, in the view of many archaeologists working in the Middle East, was a "state of the art" operation, both in terms of archaeological methodology and in the mode of publication (the expedition's results will eventually be published in a 14 volume series with a fully developed theoretical framework of alternating cycles of urban *sedentarization* and rural *nomadization*). The Heshbon Expedition marks the successful synthesis of the "Biblical Archaeology" practiced by the likes of Glueck and W.F. Albright and

Subsequent important excavations took place at Tall al-'Umayrī (1984, 1987, 1989 and 1992) and at Tall Jāwā (1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994), at which Umayyad remains were unearthed. The Umayyad palace on the 'Ammān Citadel has been excavated and studied by Crystal Bennett, Northedge and Spanish researchers. The remains of several churches, of the Byzantine and the Umayyad eras, have been uncovered in the 'Ammān and Mādabā areas as well as at the sites of Mount Nebo and Umm al-Raṣāṣ; these churches provide clues to the strength of the local Christian community under Muslim Arab rule. A mosaic from Umm al-Raṣāṣ is of additional interest, in that it portrays the topographical makeup of several cities of the Balqā' during the Byzantine-Umayyad period (Piccirillo 1988).[9] Archaeological research has continued on the desert castles; many of these estates have survived virtually intact down to the present day. Early research on these estates, such as that conducted by K. Archibald C. Creswell, consisted of architectural study; later

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the "New Archaeology" developed by American anthropological theorists in the 1960's (for a fuller discussion of the significance of the Heshban Expedition see Dever 1993).

[9] A more famous typographical mosaic of the Byzantine era is the Mādabā Map. This map, created sometime in the second half of the sixth century, displays towns, rivers, mountains and deserts, many with Biblical associations. The map shows the Near East from Damascus in the north to the Red Sea and the Nile Delta in the south and from the Mediterranean in the west to the Transjordanian desert in the east. Unfortunately, the map was severely damaged in the 19th century; most of the territory north of the Wādī al-Mūjib and east of the Jordan is missing, including Philadelphia and Mādabā (Northedge 1992:44). The Mādabā Map is of primary interest to this study for its portrayal of the Byzantine road system; some of these roads passed through the Balqā' (more complete treatments of the Mādabā map can be found in Avi-Yonah 1954 and Gold 1958).

researchers such as Ghazi Biseh and Stephen Urice, conducted actual archeological excavations (Creswell 1969, Biseh 1982, Urice 1981, Urice 1987).

This copious archaeological data allows one to examine an area and deal with issues not adequately dealt with by scarce primary written texts. Archaeological data can serve to illuminate many points of provincial life that the medieval historian or geographer, usually concerned with the political interests of an educated elite, either failed to note or else intentionally overlooked. Archaeology may allow one to move beyond the biases and shortcomings inherent in most historical texts and to obtain a fuller picture of provincial Syria, especially in economic, social and demographic areas. However, archaeological sources share a problem with written sources, that of focus. Written sources address certain concerns, those of their authors, which are not necessarily those of the modern researcher. Similarly archaeological remains are preserved by an accidental process and this accident of preservation tends to push the line of historical inquiry in certain directions. The preserved archaeological evidence does not allow the posing of certain questions; certain elements of Byzantine and Umayyad Balqā' cannot be reconstructed through an examination of either written or archaeological sources.

Secondary sources

A variety of types of secondary sources will be utilized in this study, although many of them, as will demonstrated below, are

problematic and must be used with caution. General histories of the Arabs, of Syria and the Umayyad dynasty, such as Julius Wellhausen's *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall* (1927), Phillip K. Hitti's *The History of the Arabs* (originally published in 1937; 8th Edition 1964) and *The History of Syria* (1957), Muḥammad Shaban's *Islamic History AD 600-750 (AH 132): A New Interpretation* (1971), Kamil Salibi's *Syria under Islam: Empire on Trial* (1977) and Gerald R. Hawting's *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750* (1986), tend to focus on the centres of political events, Damascus and Iraq; provincial areas, like the Balqā', are often ignored. Similarly, general histories of the Byzantine empire, notably the works of A.H.M. Jones (1964, 1971), Georgi Ostrogorsky's *History of the Byzantine State* (1968) and Peter Brown's *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971), devote little space to events in the Syrian provinces; this problem is compounded by the dearth of primary source material from the reign of Heraclius, little attention is paid by historians of Byzantium to an era for which they have little information.

Secondary sources dealing specifically with the Balqā' are available, but these sources are narrowly focused or else do not cover events of the sixth-seventh centuries. Glen Bowersock's *Roman Arabia* (1982) was one of the first works to deal with the Hellenistic and Roman history of present-day Jordan, but its analysis stops in the fourth century. Irfan Shahid's work on the pre-Islamic Arabs and their relations with the Byzantine empire has been important, but he has yet to produce a full length work

dealing with the events of the sixth or seventh centuries. For an examination of late Byzantine and early Islamic Balqā', his most interesting work consists of a series of articles from the early 1980's, which examined the Byzantine *themata* system and its possible relationship to the Umayyad *jund* system. Donner has focused on the Arab conquest; his book *The Early Islamic Conquests* (1981) is a rich source of primary histories not available in English or French. Kaegi's *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (1992) is likewise a source of Byzantine and early Arab historical data; he is more concerned, however, with the reasons behind the Byzantine military collapse than with what happened after the conquest.

Several scholars have drawn on textual and archaeological data in an attempt to analyze urbanization and settlement patterns in sixth-seventh century Syria. Hugh Kennedy has written two notable articles on the decline of urbanism in Syria (1985, 1985b). Parker has written extensively on the Roman and Byzantine defence of the eastern desert frontier (as has been noted in the previous section on archaeological data). F.E. Peters has written on the pre-Islamic Arabs (1984). King has written on the distribution patterns of Umayyad *quṣūr* in the eastern desert (1989) and Oleg Grabar has similarly written on early Arab settlement patterns (1984). The work of the latter three scholars was published as part of the *Proceedings of the Symposium on the History of Bilad al-Sham;* this conference, held at the University of Jordan on a semi-annual basis throughout the 1980's was responsible for much interesting material on the history, historiography, archaeology and architecture of Syria.

Naturally, these secondary sources deal with the particular concerns of their authors. These works can be used as a source of information; whether to access primary sources which have not been

translated into English or French or to examine theories and ideas which may relate to the work of this study. This present study will hopefully break new ground by bringing together a diverse set of primary, secondary and archaeological sources to reconstruct a provincial area undergoing a processes of transformation.

Outline of study

Chapter One will begin with a general description of the Balqā', as a political entity, on the eve of the Arab conquest when it was under Byzantine control. Political and military institutions in the region will be described. The events of the Persian occupation and the Arab conquest of Transjordan will also be briefly outlined.

The political dimensions of the area will then be discussed in Chapter Two. The role the Balqā' played in the history of the Umayyad dynasty will be noted. The importance of the area to the dynastic capital of Damascus will be stressed (mention being made here of the desert castles, which may have served as residences or administrative centres for the Umayyad Caliphs). The system of political administration under which the Balqā' was run will also be described. Possible debts the early Arab administrators may have owed to their Byzantine predecessors will be acknowledged.

Chapter Three of this study will consist of an assessment of the social and economic character of the region. The settlement density and population of the Balqā' after the Arab conquest will be examined as will possible changes in the economic basis of the region and the character of urban centres. The inhabitants of Umayyad Balqā' will be described and the question of whether the ethnic makeup and the religion of the inhabitants of the region changed with the conquest will be discussed.

The study will conclude with some comments on the transformation processes the Balqā' region underwent.

Chapter One: The political dimensions of late Byzantine Balqā'

This chapter will sketch the political character of al-Balqā' in the period before it passed to Arab control. This description is important for two reasons. First of all, the Arab conquest did not step into a vacuum; it is really not possible to understand Umayyad Transjordan without at least a cursory understanding of the period that preceded it. Second and more specifically, certain trends and institutions existing within Umayyad Balqā' may show a continuity with certain Byzantine trends and institutions. In describing Byzantine Balqā', the system of political and military organization will be outlined. The effect of the Persian occupation from 611 to 629 on the area will be assessed with attention to the possible implementation of a new system of administration, the *theme* system, in the wake of the Byzantine reconquest of Syria in 629. This description of pre-Islamic Balqā' will conclude with a look at the immediate impact of the events of the Arab conquest of Transjordan. In general, connections between Byzantine and Umayyad institutions will only be made when the latter are described in subsequent chapters.

Al-Balqā' on the eve of the Arab Conquest

Before the Arab conquest, the Balqā' had been an integral part of the Roman system of administration which, despite a major overhaul during the reign of Diocletian and several major wars with the Persians, had survived basically intact for five hundred years

(Avi-Yonah 1966:108). The Byzantine empire was an autocracy in which power flowed downward from an emperor who based his authority on the Church and on long-held Roman imperial traditions. The state structure by which the empire was governed consisted of an administrative bureaucracy along with a military establishment. This state structure was based on absolute monarchical power, a philosophy of centralization and a division between civil and military areas of responsibility (Haldon 1990:23, Vasiliev 1952:64). An examination of this complex state apparatus is, for the most part, outside of the scope of this study. It will be sufficient here to outline the three spheres of Byzantine rule which had the most immediate effect on later developments in Umayyad Balqā': provincial administration, city government and military organization. The particular relationship of these aspects of Byzantine rule to Umayyad institutions will be indicated in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

Provincial and civic administration of Byzantine Balqā'

The provincial and civil administration systems in place in the Balqā' at the time of the conquest are an indication of the political and urban character of the area as it passed to Arab control. The empire was divided for adminstration purposes into *praetorian prefectures*, dioceses and provinces; this study is not really concerned with the first two of these jurisdictions.[10] Most

[10] *Praetorian prefectures* were very large territorial groupings; up to the time of Justinian there were only two in the east, Illyricum and Oriens. Oriens stretched from eastern Bulgaria

of the Balqā' fell within the province of Arabia which had been created by the annexation, in 106 AD, of the ancient kingdom of Nabataea and by the transfer of two cities, Gerasa (Jarash) and Philadelphia, which had once been part of the province of Syria. This province apparently had its capital at Bostra (Buṣrā), although Petra remained an important city within the province, being made a metropolis by Trajan in 114, it was never the provincial capital (Bowersock 1983:80, 86, 91, Parker 1986:125, for a map of the province of Arabia and adjacent provinces see Figure 2, after Kaegi 1992:48). The northern and western borders of Arabia were well defined. In the north, a line just north and due east of Bostrā marked the provincial border. In the west the provincial border could be found just west of Mādabā and Esbus (Ḥusbān); the whole of the Jordan valley was, in fact, within the neighbouring province of Palestine (later the two provinces of Palestine I and Palestine II). In the east the provincial border was an undefined point in the desert. In the south the province of Arabia may have earlier extended into the northern Ḥijāz; although by the time of the Arab conquest the southern border of Arabia had

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through Anatolia and Syria to Egypt and Libya. Justinian added two more, Italy and Africa; the Balqā' was included within Oriens, which had its capital at Constantinople (Seibt 1986:37, Haldon 1990:176). The Balqā' fell within the diocese of the *comes Orientis*; this diocese stretched from Cilicia to the Sinai (Seibt 1986:37). Dioceses were by the seventh century a defunct level of administration (Haldon 1990:217).

become the Wādī al-Mūjib (Bowersock 1983:142, Parker 1986:124).[11] The governor of the province of Arabia is not found within the *Notitia dignitatum's* list of civil governors; the *dux Arabiae*, the regional military commander, was at the same time the provincial governor. This case was an exception to the usual pattern of strict separation of military and civil power (Seibt 1986:38). A Greek inscription at Qaṣr al-Ḥallabāt, from the reign of Justinian mentions the *dux* Flavius Anastasius (Glueck 1940:36). The last *dux* of Arabia known by name was Paullus, mentioned in 535. The next year Justinian apparently appointed a civic governor with the title of *moderator* (Kennedy 1985:174).[12] The Roman empire was further divided into *civitates*, municipal areas centred on urban centres. Independent city states had a long tradition in the Hellenistic Near East; a group of cities in Syria which had been founded in the wake of the conquests of Alexander had been grouped into a

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[11] Bowersock notes that a temple dedicated to the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus and mentioning two Roman governors of Arabia is found at the remote site of Ruwwāfah, to the northwest of Madā'in Ṣāliḥ in the Ḥijāz; his interpretation is not universally accepted (Bowersock 1983:96). Later during the reign of Diocletian, no later than 314 AD, the most southern part of Arabia, centred on the metropolis of Petra, separated to form the new province of Palestine III (Avi-Yonah 1966:118).

[12] In addition to the territories of the Balqā' encompassed by the province of Arabia, a small strip of its territory fell within the province of Palestine (later Palestine I). This strip of land consisted of lands within Peraea, a territory which had once been ruled by the Herodian family, before formal annexation by the empire. Most of Peraea was within the Jordan valley itself but it extended in several places east of the valley edge, in one case, Jazer (possibly Khirbat Sīr) comes within 16 km of Philadelphia (Avi-Yonah:102, 179, Bowersock 1983:92). The *Notitia dignitatum* notes that Palestine I was under the charge of a governor of the senatorial class of *consul* (Seibt 1987:38).

confederation of self-governing cities by Pompey in 62 BC as he reorganized the Near East after the collapse of the Seleucid empire. This confederation, called the Decapolis, had a fluctuating membership, but it included from its founding the Transjordanian cities of Pella (Faḥl), Gadara (Umm Qays), Gerasa and Philadelphia (Jones 1971:259). Later, with the creation of the province of Arabia, the Decapolis was broken up as a formal institution, as various cities were assigned to different provinces. Decapolis cities, however, continued to identify themselves with the confederacy for reasons of prestige and continued also to retain certain civic rights (Bowersock 1983:92). Up to at least the reign of Justinian, the old Decapolis cities of Pella, Gerasa and Philadelphia joined other cities within the province of Arabia such as Esbus and Mādabā in carrying out certain functions which were crucial to the operation of the Roman administration system. Through city councils and local magistrates cities carried out the duties of local government, such as the organization of the local supply of food, the arrangement of festivals and the administration of certain types of justice. The cities also carried out some duties for the imperial government such as the collection of taxes, the recruitment of troops and the building of roads and bridges (Jones 1971:xiv).

Later, however, cities lost both autonomy and power. By the early seventh century civic autonomy had in actuality ceased to exist. Revenue collection bypassed the local civic notables (the *curiales*) who had traditionally made up city councils. Imperial

revenue officers, in particular the *vindices* of the *praetorian prefecture*, dominated local fiscal administration. The actual day-to-day running of municipal territories had also largely passed from the hand of the *curiales*. Local authority rested with imperial revenue officials, and a local assembly of bishops, clergy and large landowners. Some local landowners apparently held minor defence duties such as the repair of watchtowers. Much power was also held by the local representatives of provincial governors; these representatives carried out certain local duties, such as ensuring the water supply and repairing the city walls, and acted in effect as city governors (Haldon 1990:96-99). Local defence was, however, largely outside the sphere of Syrian urban dwellers. The imperial government (in decrees such as that of Justinian issued in November of 539) tried to prevent the possession of weapons by private individuals. Cities were often responsible for the upkeep of their walls but, as the events of the Arab conquest show, they would usually attempt to negotiate terms with aggressors rather than risk a futile battle (Kaegi 1992:50).

Thus, for administrative purposes, civic territories on the eve of the Arab conquest were little more than regional divisions which helped the collection of revenue by the central government, although civic territories, throughout the empire, often retained both prestige and economic importance. The Balqā' was divided among the municipal territories of the cities of Philadelphia, Esbus and Mādabā, as well as the non-civic territory of Peraea (Peraea, consisting of the rich rural areas of the Jordan valley,

was set aside as an imperial estate) (Avi-Yonah 1966:112).[13] According to Kennedy, in an article on urbanism in sixth-seventh century Syria, Philadelphia was ranked second only to Bostra among the cities of the province of Arabia (Kennedy 1985b:175). It appears that Byzantine Philadelphia was a peaceful and prosperous city; it was not the centre of either Church or political activity. Eusebius describes it as a "distinguished (*episemos*) city of Arabia" (Northedge 1992:39).[14] As will be noted in a subsequent chapter, Esbus was described frequently in Church documents

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[13] For a detailed description of the boundaries of these territories, along with the method Avi-Yonah used to determine them, see Avi-Yonah 1966:127, 177-179.

[14] There is little archaeological evidence from Byzantine Philadelphia (Kennedy 1985b:175). Amminanus Marcellinus describes Philadelphia of the late fourth century as being well fortified but there is archaeological evidence that these walls were destroyed earlier; Adnan Hadidi, an archaeologist with the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, attributes the destruction of Philadelphia's Roman fortifications to the earthquake of 363 (Hadidi 1974:79). It seems quite possible that the Byzantine Citadel was unfortified (Northedge 1992:122). The city as a whole, consisting of the Citadel and the lower city, was, in Roman and Byzantine times, never totally fortified. Such Roman era monuments, and symbols of urban status, as the Forum, the Theatre and the Odeum were in the lower city and outside the walled Citadel (Northedge 1992:57-58). It is not clear whether these amenities remained in use up to the Arab conquest; Kennedy outlines the general transformation of classical cities during the sixth century and notes the general drying up of funds, from both private individuals and the central state, for the institutions of a typical classical city. He also notes that the theatre fell into disuse because of Church disapproval (Kennedy 1985a) (the decline of classical urbanism will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three). Classical monuments were joined, in the Byzantine period, by at least six churches, one of which has been identified, on account of its size, as a "cathedral" (Northedge 1992:59) (more information on the history and archaeological topography of Roman and Byzantine Philadelphia can be found in Northedge 1992:32-45, 57-60).

(Russell 1985b:27). Mādabā is not mentioned as one of the cities that capitulated to the Arab conquest, although, from the number of churches found in its vicinity, it seems that it was a prosperous and notable town during the sixth-seventh centuries (of nine Christian monuments found in the area the earliest dates from 578, while the latest can be dated to the early eighth century) (Kennedy 1985b:179).

The military organization of pre-Islamic Balqā'

The system of military organization which was in place in the Balqā' is of interest for several reasons. First as an indication of the degree of Arab involvement in the area before the arrival of the first Islamic armies. Second, there is the possibility that certain Byzantine military institutions may have influenced the military organization of Umayyad Balqā'. The Byzantine military as outlined in the *Notitia dignitatum* consisted of two classes of troops: *comitatenses*, or mobile field troops, and *limatenai*, or garrison troops.[15] The precise locations of the field troops guarding the eastern frontier are not listed in the *Notitia dignitatum* (Seibt 1986:39). Frontier troops were generally quartered in towns. The *limes*, the line of fortresses strung

[15] Mobile field troops were under the command of a *magister militum*. The empire's eastern border was guarded by the *magister militum per orientes* who commanded ten units of cavalry, two units of barbarian (German) auxiliaries, ten legions of elite infantry and ten legions of regular infantry. The strength of these units is not clearly known; it is likely that these legions would have been considerably smaller than the 6000-man units of Caesar's day; a fourth century legion may have contained less than 1000 armed troops (Seibt 1986:39).

across the frontier, were used to house small units who were intended to police the bedouin and to guard trade routes; these forts were of little value against a powerful external foe (Peters 1984:143). Garrisons were under a number of independent commands, or *dux*. Syria and Palestine had independent *dux* who acted separately from local civilian governors, there being a clear separation between civilian and military officials (Haldon 1990:208). As noted before, Arabia was a special case; its military governor also retained civilian duties. The *Notitia dignitatum* lists several stationary garrisons in Arabia: the *legio* III Cyrenaica at Bostra and the *legio* IV Martia at Bettoro (al-Lajjun east of the Dead Sea) (Seibt 1986:43, Northedge 1992:39). According to the *Notitia dignitatum*, there were no troops stationed in Philadelphia or any other large town outside Bostra. But a unit of locally recruited mounted archers was placed at Gadda, which, according to the Peutinger Map, was some twenty miles north of Philadelphia.[16] Gadda might be identified with modern Ḥadīd or Qal'at Zarqā' and it would have guarded the eastern and northern approaches to the city (Northedge 1992:40, Parker 1986:32).

These regular forces, however, were clearly in decline in

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[16] The Peutinger Map is a medieval copy of an earlier Roman map which incorporates features datable to the first century AD and originally may date to an even earlier time, the reign of Augustus. It is a good source of information for the geography of late antiquity, especially for information on the location of ancient towns and roads (Northedge 1992:37). In addition to the above-mentioned troops, most provinces, including Arabia, also had four five hundred-man-strong units of cavalry and an equal number of irregular infantry and cavalry (Peters 1984:142). For further discussion of the Roman-Byzantine *limes* system, on the Arabian frontier see Graf 1978.

Balqā' and elsewhere on the empire's southeast frontier by the reign of Justinian (527-565). Troops were needed on other frontiers and garrisons were withdrawn. Fortified cities became increasingly important (Peters 1984:143). By the late sixth century few of the numerous forts once occupied by the Romans remained in use.[17] During this later period the frontier forts which had once been intended for fixed garrisons may have been used for the protection and shelter of local populations in times of need (Kennedy 1985b:166).

From the time of Justinian, according to Procopius (*Secret History* 24.12-14; *Persian War* 1.17.45-48), the empire came to rely increasingly on Arab *foederati*, such as the Ghassānids (Parker 1987:162). These Arab *foederati* were organized under *phylarchs*, or tribal leaders, who would often receive various Roman titles and who would usually be paired with a Byzantine *dux*, or military commander. Each group of Arab allies would receive a subsidy in return for policing the border and protecting it from incursions by other Arab tribes or more serious external threats (Jones 1964:611, Shahid 1965:1020, Peters 1984:162, Mayerson 1989:76). A distinction has been drawn between the Euphrates valley and the Aleppo area, where imperial troops remained stationed, and the

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[17] In the northern part of Arabia, the archaeological evidence indicates that only a group of four or five forts guarding the Wādī al-Sirḥān remained occupied (the forts being Bā'iq, Ḥallābāt, Aseikhin, Azraq and possibly Umm al-Jimāl). In the southern part of the Balqā' only three forts remained in operation; the two *castella* of Maḥaṭṭat al-Ḥajj controlled the crossing of the Wādī al-Mūjib; while the fort at Khirbat al-Zūnah, twenty kilometres south-east of Mādabā, controlled caravan traffic to the northeast (Parker 1986:152).

desert frontier, where defence was entrusted to tribal leaders. Archaeological evidence, from the sixth century, points to the defence of the southern Syrian frontier being in the hands of individuals rather than in the hands of the empire; official dedications, which usually graced any building erected by the empire, are often absent. The barracks at Androna were built by an individual by the name of Thomas and his nephew Jakobos; the two also constructed a bath-house in a nearby town. One could conclude that frontier defence, in the sixth and seventh centuries, was in the hands of local landowners and nomadic tribal allies. The imperial government remained chiefly concerned with repelling a large-scale, organized Persian attack; local order and defence were left in local hands (Kennedy 1985b:167). By the time of the Arab conquest, then, the Byzantine authorities were almost entirely dependent for the defence of the southern Syrian frontier on local landowners and their poorly armed retainers and also, and to a much greater degree, on Arab allies (Kaegi 1992:50). It is unclear from the historical sources whether these Arab allies, especially the Ghassānids, also held political sway over areas of southern Syria. How Arab tribal leaders were integrated, if at all, into the Byzantine administrative system is not certain. Even in the province of Arabia their political influence may not have been great; the great urban centres probably remained outside of their control. Urban Syria would have coexisted with Arab clients and would have flourished under the latter's protection (Gaube 1984:64). Note should be made, however, of the wealth and fame of

the Ghassānids, which might lead one to conclude that Arab military importance was reflected in certain political duties. Hitti refers to the "Ghassānid kingdom" and notes the verses of Ḥassān ibn Thābit, a Medinan poet (died c.659) who sings the praises and lauds the wealth of the last Ghassānid ruler Jabalah ibn al-Ayham (Hitti 1957:405). A Ghassānid settlement existed at Jābiyah just to the west of Bostra, the capital of the province of Arabia. A house was constructed on the eastern slopes of Jabal al-Dūrūz by Flavios Seos, the chief administrator of the Ghassānid leader al-Mundhir in 578; Kennedy seems to believe that a type of administration parallel to the provincial bureaucracy existed at the time. He also feels that the decline of imperial authority throughout the borderlands of Syria and Arabia (except for the area from the Euphrates to Antioch) resulted in a transfer of power to nomad leaders and local notables; well before the rise of Islam, Arabs had become well established outside Aleppo and Chalcis (Qinnasrīn) and even within Damascus (the governor of the city at the time of the conquest was an Arab named Sarjūn ibn Manṣūr (Kennedy 1985b:147, 174, 180). Other archaeological remains point to the involvement of the Ghassānids in Arabia's urban prosperity; they are credited with the building of such towns as Jilliq as well as cisterns, monasteries and castles such as that of Ḍumayr (Shahid 1965:1021). Many of the desert estates used by the Umayyads, which will be examined in a subsequent chapter, may in fact, have been originally constructed or at least used by the Ghassānids (Peters 1984:165).

The Ghassānids were the Arab allies who were responsible for defending the Balqā'. The Ghassānids were at the height of their influence during the reign of al-Ḥārith ibn Jabalah (c. 529-569), who was given the titles of *phylarch* and *patricus*, which were rendered by the Arabs as *malik* or king. He was succeeded by his son al-Mundhir (c. 569-582) who came into conflict with the emperor Justin over religious issues and was eventually deposed. His son al-Nu'mān turned against the empire and made several raids into Byzantine Syria; he was captured by trickery and the Ghassānid kingdom was broken up into several principalities of varied loyalties. Anarchy prevailed on the Arabian frontier until the Persian conquest (Hitti 1957:404). Other tribal groups were apparently active in the Balqā'; the Judhām, the Lakhm, the 'Āmilah and the Balī were all Byzantine allies who were present at the battle of Mu'tah. The Ghassānids were by this time mostly concentrated in the Ḥawrān and around Damascus (Donner 1981:107). There is some evidence that one of these groups, the Judhām, may have acted as governors of the Balqā' region as the Ghassānids once had. According to Ibn Sa'd, the Judhām leader would have carried the title of *'āmil* (Ibn Sa'd 1904:2,17, Donner 1981:292). Ibn Hishām and Ibn Sa'ad both note a story that alleges that Farwah ibn 'Amr al-Judhāmī, the governor of Ma'ān (or possibly 'Ammān), converted to Islam and as a consequence was crucified by the Byzantine authorities (Ibn Hishām 1955:958, Ibn Sa'd 1904:2,18, Kaegi 1992:68, Donner 1981:105). However, it is possible that the Ghassānids were reasserting their control over the Balqā' and that

a revived Ghassānid *phylarchate* may have taken part in the defence of Syria during both the Persian and Arab invasions (Shahid 1989b:219, 222). According to Ibn Sa'd, the Ghassānid "king" al-Ḥārith ibn Abī Shāmir received and rejected a message from Muḥammad asking him to convert (Ibn Sa'd 1904:2, 17). Another account mentions that the same leader sent messengers to disaffected leaders in Muḥammad's camp before the early battle of Tabūk (Wāqidī 1966:1051-1052). Donner feels that these diplomatic activities may mark an attempt on the part of the Ghassānids to reestablish their relationships with the Byzantine authorities and with other tribes. A Ghassānid man, Ibn Abī Sabrah, was by some accounts in charge of the Arab forces allied to the Byzantines at Mu'tah (Ibn 'Asākir 1951:392, Donner 1981:107). Other accounts place a man of Balī in charge at Mu'tah (Ibn Hishām 1955:792, Donner 1981:103). The last Ghassānid prince Jabalah ibn al-Ayham, according to Balādhurī, took part as a Byzantine ally in the decisive battle of Yarmūk (Balādhurī 1966:208).

The Persian occupation of Balqā' (610-629).

Little is known about the Persian occupation of Balqā' (or of the occupation of Syria as a whole) and little is also known about the region's history for the four years which elapsed between the Persian evacuation (629) and the Arab conquest (634).[18]

[18] This is partly due to the historical magnitude of the latter event; the Arab conquest eclipsed the Persian war as a focus for historians examining the seventh century. Byzantine chroniclers paid little attention to the era. There was no equivalent of Procopius to document the reign of Heraclius (Shahid notes that

Consequently, this study can offer little in the way of a description of Persian-occupied Balqā' or draw any major conclusions as to the effect which this occupation may have had on subsequent periods. As far as can be ascertained the conquest of the Balqā' itself probably took place after the Persian victory at Aḍri'āt (106 km south of Damascus) in 613/614; this battle opened up Palestine and Jerusalem to attack (Shahid 1989b:219). Khusraw II sacked Mādabā in 613 (Peake 1958:34); the Persians may have marched westward from Ḥusbān to Jerusalem (Saba and 'Uzayzi 1961:114 cited Russell 1985b:27). The Persian advance and subsequent occupation of Syria involved, it is generally conceded, a great deal of destruction, depopulation, deportations and intercommunal strife between Orthodox Christians, Jacobite Christians and Jews (Morony 1987:88-90). Wilken draws attention to a seventh century Greek lament, which notes the deportation of notables such as the patriarch of Jerusalem and his entourage (Wilken 1988:234). It is unclear what effect, if any, these events had on Umayyad Balqā', but it is probably important to reiterate the oft-repeated claim that the destructive Persian-Byzantine war and ill-conceived Byzantine reactions to the occupation may have made the Arab conquest easier. Little is known about the system

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Procopius devotes two entire books to Justinian's war with Persia, a border skirmish compared to the seventh century, twenty-year Persian occupation of the eastern provinces) (Shahid 1989b:227). Chronicles tend to concentrate on events which took place in the primary zones of military activity: Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Armenia rather than Syria (Morony 1987:87). Modern historians, blinded by the far-reaching importance of the Arab conquest and naturally loath to study poorly documented periods, have largely ignored the Persian occupation of Syria (Shahid 1989b:228).

under which the Persians administered their Syrian conquests; it may have been run as an extension of the Quarter of the West (Khvarvarān), the nearest administrative unit. The generals involved in the conquest of Syria were also the chief administrative officials of this area (the commander-in-chief Shahrbarāz being also the governor general of the area). Such campaigning generals would not have stayed in permanent administrative centres and may have appointed a local official to collect tribute. Michael the Syrian, Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch from 1169-1199 , states that Khusraw II appointed a local notable at Edessa to collect tribute while a different person controlled military administration (Michael 1901:403-404, 408). Similar administrative practices may have been in place in the rest of Syria. Ibn Rustah offers a list of administrative centres but these may be anachronistic as they include Ramlah; it is thus not possible to positively identify such a centre for the Balqā' although Damascus and Tiberias, mentioned by Ibn Rustah, are possibilities (Morony 1987:91-92). Any Persian administrative system in place in Balqā' came to an end in 629 when as part of the peace terms the area was evacuated of Persian troops (Morony 1987:95).

The *themata* system

One possible result of the Persian occupation was an administrative reorganization by the returning Byzantine authorities. Some scholars have proposed that all of the Byzantine

east was organized in the wake of the last Persian war into military provinces called *themata* (singular *theme*). These *themata* would have been under the direct control of a *stategos*, a military officer who would have also taken on the responsibilities of the displaced civilian governor. The military staff of these *themata* consisted of soldier settlers as well as elite standing regiments. These *themata* were a commonplace feature of the later Byzantine empire and are certainly attested to by the ninth century. The development of the *themata* system is considered by most scholars to have taken place first in Anatolia towards the end of the reign of Heraclius; Syria would have been lost to the Arabs before this reorganization took place (Haldon 1990:211, Ostrogorsky 1968:97). Some will concede that the reorganization of the empire into *themata* may have been initiated by Heraclius as a response to the recovery of eastern territories from the Persians and as a defence against the advancing Arab armies. The success of the latter prevented Heraclius from getting beyond the reorganization of Armenia before he died (Vasiliev 1952:229). It is also possible that Heraclius placed local military commanders in command of some cities on an ad hoc basis. Azdī notes that Heraclius "appointed as his deputies over the cities of Syria commanders from his army" (Azdī 1970: 31, Kaegi 1992:77).

Shahid is the main proponent of an early Syrian origin for the *themata* system. He argues that Heraclius reorganized Syria into four large military provinces in the aftermath of the Persian occupation, during the four year period which elapsed between the

Persian evacuation of 629 and the Arab invasion of 634 (Syria had previously been divided into ten provinces). The new larger provinces acted as a series of lines of defence from northern Syria to Palestine; Persian counterattacks were expected to originate on the northern Mesopotamian frontier and move south. The provinces were oriented towards the sea, each province having adequate sea ports; this aided reinforcement by sea (Shahid 1986:50-51). Shahid bases his argument on two primary lines of thought. First, on the internal military logic of a series of large east-west provinces running in a line from northern Syria to southern Palestine; Shahid finds it inconceivable that a emperor of Heraclius' military background would not have taken some administrative and military steps to protect the Holy Land from a repeat Persian attack (Shahid 1989b: 229-234).. Shahid does not offer any Byzantine sources which refer directly to the existence of Syrian *themata* during this time period; he puts down this dearth of references to the factors which have been mentioned above as clouding the period of the Persian invasion in general. His second line of reasoning is used to establish that early sixth century Syrian *themata* did indeed exist and that they would conform to the internal logic he proposes; this line of reasoning involves an analysis of the character of the early Islamic institution of the *jund* (plural *ajnād*). In arguing backward from a known set of facts in Islamic history to prove contentious points in Byzantine history Shahid is by his own assessment adopting a novel approach (Shahid 1989b:213). This study is not concerned with establishing whether Shahid's theory of

an early Syrian origin for the *themata* system is correct. The Islamic system of administrating the Balqā' is known and whether it was immediately proceeded by the *themata* system or the centuries-old Diocletian system of provincial administration is of more concern to Byzantine scholars. However, note will be made in the subsequent chapter of possible *themata* influences on the *jund* system of administration. At the very least Shahid's studies of the possible relationships between the *themata* and the *ajnād* offer valuable information on the latter institution.

The Balqā' and the Arab conquest

A detailed examination of the events and the controversies surrounding the Arab conquest of Syria is outside the scope of this paper. Instead it will be chiefly concerned with the date that population centres within the Balqā' region fell to the Arab conquerors and with whether these centres were subjugated peacefully. Consequently, a detailed description of the Syrian campaign is unnecessary. Donner's assertion that many of the details of the conquest cannot be accurately gleaned from primary sources, but that these sources do reveal wider trends, will be kept in mind. He feels that exact dates and places can often not be assigned to particular events but that an accumulation of evidence usually points to the certainty of an event at least occurring. His division of the larger conquest into three broad stages will be followed (Donner 1981:111-112). Details affecting the Balqā' will be noted and an attempt will be made to assess

their veracity.

According to Donner the first stage took place before the arrival of Khālid ibn al-Walīd and reinforcements from Iraq in the neighbourhood of Damascus in 634. During this period the Arab armies came to dominate much of the Syrian countryside. The second stage involved an extension of control to several southern Syrian towns (such as Bostra) which provoked a strong Byzantine reaction and led to several decisive pitched battles (Ajnadayn, Faḥl, Marj al-Suffar and Yarmūk). The final period was one of consolidation, in which the remaining countryside was rapidly conquered and remaining towns were besieged and subjugated.

The Balqā' was probably conquered as part of the first and second stages. Muslim emissaries and armies were present in the Balqā' at an early date, possibly before the death of Muḥammad. Wāqidī mentions that the Byzantine "ruler of the Balqā'" intercepted and executed the first Muslim messenger to Syria at Mu'tah. Kaegi feels that this reference may actually refer to the governor of Palestine III (Wāqidī 1955:755, Kaegi 1992:69, Donner 1981:105). Ziyād ibn 'Amr Nuqīl, an early convert to Islam, was killed by a Christian mob at Umm al-Raṣāṣ before the battle of Mu'tah. This latter skirmish took place in either April, or more likely September, 629, 19 km south of present day Karak. Keagi feels that these early contacts and clashes in Transjordan took place after the Persian withdrawal and before Byzantine control had been firmly reestablished (Kaegi 1992:70). Donner asserts that during this time of restoration Byzantine control may have only

extended as far south as the Dead Sea; both the Byzantines and the Muslims were competing for the allegiance of Arab tribal groups in Balqā' and Transjordan as a whole (Donner 1981:100).

Troops passed through the Balqā' soon after Abū Bakr authorized the actual invasion of Syria. According to Balādhurī, Abū Bakr sent three columns of troops under three commanders into Syria: 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ was sent to Palestine, Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān was sent against Damascus and Shuraḥbīl to northern Jordan. The latter two commanders were to pass through the Balqā' on the Tabūk road (Balādhurī 1966:167). Ibn Isḥāq, in a manuscript now in Teheran, mentions another general, Abū 'Ubaydah, accompanying the forces advancing up the Tabūk road (Donner 1981:115). Ṭabarī notes Yazīd, Shuraḥbīl and Abū 'Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāḥ as taking the same route into Balqā' (Ṭabarī 1993:74). It is not clear what impact these troop movements had on the Balqā' at this early stage; the area was somewhat urbanized and it was agriculturally rich but the aim of such commanders as Yazīd operating in the area may have been to subdue the semi-nomadic tribes who were an important feature of local life (Donner 1981:115).

It was during Donner's second stage that the Balqā', and particularly such cities as Philadelphia, came under firm Muslim political control; prior to this stage the Arab conquerors had mostly avoided the main Syrian cities (Damascus, Jerusalem, Gaza, Bostra, Pella and Philadelphia) (Donner 1981:117).[19] The fall of

[19] The taking of cities is often considered to have begun with Bostra; this city came to terms just after the arrival in Syria of Khālid ibn al-Walīd. Balādhurī mentions the fall of Ma'ab in the

most of urban Balqā' must instead be placed in a context of rapid urban conquest. Balādhurī specifically mentions this:

> "At the arrival of Khālid, the Moslems gathered their forces against Buṣrā, and it capitulated. They then were dispersed throughout all Ḥawrān which they subdued. The chief of Adhri'āt came to them offering to capitulate on the same terms on which the people of Buṣrā had capitulated and agreeing to make all the land of al-Bathanīyyah a *kharāj* land. The request was granted, and Yazīd ibn Abī-Sufyān entered the city and made a covenant with its people. Thus the two districts of Ḥawrān and al-Bathanīyyah came under the full control of the Moslems. Thence they came to Palestine and the Jordan, invading what had not been reduced. Yazīd marched against 'Ammān and made an easy conquest of it, making terms of

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district of Balqā' shortly afterward to Abū 'Ubaydah. He notes that some place the fall of Ma'āb before that of Bostra or possibly later in the times of 'Umar (Balādhurī 1966:173). Other sources note that Ma'ab (Byzantine Areopolis, modern Rabbah) was the first Syrian city to fall to Muslim armies. Thus, Azdī notes Abu-'Ubaydah proceeding to "Ma'āb in the territory of 'Ammān" and taking the city after a short battle (Azdī 1970:29, Kaegi 1992:66). Ṭabarī offers a similar account, noting that the first peace treaty that took place in Syria occurred at Ma'āb, which he describes as a tribal meeting place rather than a city (Ṭabarī 1993:108). These three accounts (although Balādhurī does not cite the source of his information) as well as that of the early Armenian writer Sebēos lead Kaegi to identify Aeropolis as indeed the first Syrian city to fall to Muslim invaders; this occurred in either late 633 or early 634 (Kaegi 1992:85). In any event, the early fall of this city might be regarded as more of an indication of things to come; the actual conquest of the Balqā' took place later, a short time after the fall of Damascus to the Arab armies. It must be noted also that Ma'āb falls to the south of the Wādī al-Mūjib and is thus just outside the previously defined study area (although Azdī does describe Ma'āb as being in the district of 'Ammān).

capitulation similar to those of Buṣrā. Besides, he effected the complete conquest of the province of al-Balqā'. When Abū 'Ubaydah came to power, all that was already conquered. At the conquest of Damascus, Abū 'Ubaydah was the commander-in-chief; but the terms of capitulation were made by Khālid, Abū 'Ubaydah concurring" (Balādhurī 1966:193).

Problems, however, arise in placing the conquest of the Balqā' and the fall of Damascus in the overall context of Donner's second stage, as Damascus may have fallen twice to Arab armies. One reconstruction of the fall of urban Syria is offered by Ya'qūbī and is based on accounts of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767), Wāqidī (d. 823) and Sa'īd ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Tanūkhī; Balādhurī's account of the Syrian conquest is similar in many details and draws on many of the same sources. This reconstruction, in Donner's assessment, places the battle of Ajnadayn in July 634, the battle of Faḥl in January 635 and the fall of Damascus in August-September 635. Damascus and other Syrian cities were abandoned before the decisive battle of Yarmūk in August-September 636 and then reoccupied in late 636-early 637 (Donner 1981:128, 133, Kaegi 1992:67). Balādhurī does not specifically mention the abandonment of Damascus before Yarmūk (although he does mention that the Muslims left local Jews and Christians in charge at Ḥimṣ as Heraclius's forces advanced and that this situation applied to the other Syrian cities which had capitulated; it is possible that this occurred at Damascus also) (Balādhurī 1966:211). To add to the confusion he mentions two occupations of Bostra; one early in the Muslim conquest and the

second at the time of the fall of Damascus. Perhaps it is not possible to assign Balādhurī's passage, which gives a clear account of the fall of the Balqā', a precise date beyond stating that the Balqā' fell peacefully to Arab armies sometime between January 635 and early 637.

Of more importance than the date of the fall of the Balqā' is the character of its conquest; it was apparently taken with little bloodshed. The overall Syrian conquest was decided in a series of battles after which most cities submitted peacefully. In the passage cited above, Balādhurī notes that 'Ammān surrendered on terms similar to those to which Buṣrā submitted. Balādhurī's earlier description of Buṣrā's terms describes how the city's people agreed that their lives, property and children would be safe in exchange for payment of the poll-tax. This tax may have amounted to one *dināṛ* and one *jarīb* of wheat per inhabitant. Hitti, in the notes to his translation of Balādhurī, defines *al-jarīb* as a measure of land 10 by 10 rods in size; *al-jarīb* was also used in some areas as a measure of wheat (Balādhurī 1966:173).

Balqā', then, passed to Muslim political control with little disruption or bloodshed; this smooth transition may have been facilitated by a large Arab presence in the area before the conquest.

Chapter Two: The political dimensions of Umayyad Balqā'

This chapter will deal with the political character of the Balqā' region on two levels. First, a description will be offered of how al-Balqā' was organized in the wake of the conquering Arab armies and whether this organizational process was influenced by previous Byzantine institutions. Second, an attempt will be made to note the importance of the region for the history of the Umayyad rulers of Damascus; the role of the *bādiyah* estates in the politics of Umayyad Balqā' will be stressed.

The *jund* system

It was the Caliph 'Umar who, in the opinion of Ira Lapidus and others, devised the administrative system under which Umayyad Syria was ruled (Lapidus 1988:42).[20] One of the most important administrative principles to emerge during the early years of Umayyad rule was that the conquering Arabs were to remain an armed military elite separate from the rest of the population; it was this elite who were both to garrison conquered areas and to undertake further conquests. The Arab newcomers would be settled

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[20] The so-called Covenant of 'Umar issued by 'Umar at Jābiyah on the eve of the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem outlined the relationship which was to exist between the conquering Arabs and the subject peoples. It is quite possible that this document was actually issued by 'Umar II or was a compilation or a tradition based on several separate treaties made by different generals in different places during the conquest (Tritton 1970:10-12). In any event, basic administrative practices are clearly observable during the reign of 'Umar, whether or not he was personally responsible for bringing them into existence.

in garrison cities called *amṣār* (singular *miṣr*) and would thus be prevented from indiscriminate raiding and from destroying agricultural land. In Iraq and in Egypt the most important of such garrison cities were Baṣrah, Kūfah and Fusṭāṭ. The situation was somewhat different in Syria (Lapidus 1988:43). Here, according to an interpretation of Balādhurī by Shaban, the original plan was to establish a major garrison town at Jābiyah (Shaban 1971:41). This city in the Golan was clearly important; 'Umar made it his camp while he was in Syria (Ṭabarī 1992:144). But events on the ground made this plan impractical; Balādhurī mentions the objections offered by Mu'ādh ibn Jabal to 'Umar, that the division of Syria among individuals would eventually lead to the land passing into the hands of a few people and the alienation of the land from the Muslim community (Balādhurī 1966:233). This was exactly the situation occurring as the Muslims consolidated their power in Syria; much of the cultivated land and many of the towns of Syria lay deserted as the Greeks and their Arab supporters fled; local Arabs, some of whom had converted, simply seized such land for themselves. In order to avoid conflict between these local Arabs and the conquering armies and to populate outlying districts which might come under Byzantine counterattack, the plan for a single garrison city was rejected (Shaban 1971:41). Nor in Syria were new cities generally founded; the exception being Ramlah in Palestine, which according to Balādhurī was founded by Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Malik during the reign of al-Walīd (Balādhurī 1966:220). Instead the Arab armies were settled into many existing cities, towns and

suburbs (Lapidus 1988:42). These garrisons were in turn integrated into the centrepiece of Syrian provincial administration: a system of military provinces called *ajnād* (singular *jund*).

Balādhurī offers two possible explanations for the name *jund* (Shahid notes that the term is uniquely used to designate provinces in Syria; *wilāyah*, *'amal* and other terms are used elsewhere in the Muslim world, Shahid 1987:45). The first explanation is that the name *jund* was given to Palestine and other Syrian provinces because each province was a collection of many smaller provinces. Alternatively, each provincial district was called a *jund* to signify that it had quartered within it a group of soldiers (a *jund*) who would receive a monthly allowance; mention is made of payment being made to troops from the *kharāj* revenues of the particular province in which they were stationed (Balādhurī 1966:202). These soldiers could be mobilized for seasonal campaigns and consisted exclusively of Arabs drawing regular pay; besides payment from the land-tax it is possible that these troops were also offered land grants (Sourdel 1965:601, Walmsley 1987:33).[21]

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[21] Shahid notes that the officials in each *jund* went by a variety of titles: *al-kātib* was the secretary; *ṣāḥib al-shurṭah*, the chief of police; *ṣāḥib al-ḥaras* the chief of the guard; *al-qāḍī* the judge; and *'āmil al-kharāj*, the chief revenue officer (Shahid 1989b:210). Hitti identifies provincial governors by the title of *'āmil* (Hitti 1957:47?) In fact *'āmil* (plural *'ummāl*) could refer to a variety of officials during the time of the Medina Caliphs and their Umayyad successors. An *'āmil* could be a provincial governor (a governor of a *jund*) or his lieutenant or a lesser official. Ṭabarī uses the title to refer to the governor of Egypt and also to the official responsible for a tribe of Arabs in the Jazīrah (Ṭabarī 1990: 45, 184). Collectors of *kharāj* and *jizyah* as well as the administrators of local districts, who collected taxes are also referred to as *'ummāl*. When the finances were separated from other administrative duties the title *'āmil* was usually applied to a

During the Umayyad period Syria was originally divided into four *ajnād*: the *jund* of Dimashq (Damascus), the *jund* of Ḥimṣ, the *jund* of Filasṭīn and the *jund* of Urdunn. A fifth *jund*, that of Qinnasrīn, was later separated from Ḥimṣ by 'Abd-al Malik (Balādhurī 1966:202). These divisions lasted well into the 'Abbāsid period (Sourel 1965:601). It is unclear to which *jund* the Balqā' region belonged. Yāqūt identifies 'Ammān as one of the principal cities of the province of Filasṭīn (Le Strange 1890:29). Muqaddasī assigns the Balqā', with its capital at 'Ammān, to Filasṭīn (Muqaddasī 1897:254, 287, Harding 1960:447, Le Strange 1890:39).) Other authorities place the Balqā' within the *jund* of Dimashq. Ibn al-Faqīh mentions the *jund* as including 'Ammān and the outlying parts of the Balqā'. Idrīsī also includes 'Ammān and the Balqā' as falling within the *jund* of Dimashq with the Syrian desert to the east and the 'Arḍ al-Samāwah (the Arabian desert) to the south (Le Strange 1890:33). Yaq'ūbī describes the Balqā' as part of the territories of Dimashq (Yaq'ūbī 1937:174, Le Strange 1890:34). No clear picture emerges but it is possible that the Balqā' changed jurisdictions while it was under Umayyad control. Perhaps the Balqā', whose many palaces indicate its importance to a dynasty dwelling in Damascus, was part of the *jund* of Dimashq for much of the Umayyad period. This area, as will be noted below, was an important base for the Umayyads as it was in proximity to many

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financial officer. Ṭabarī mentions the chief of the local police under the title of *'āmil ma'ūnah* (Duri 1960:435). For a fuller description of the administrative functions of the *jund* system see Walmsley 1987:44-50.

of the dynasty's tribal supporters. Later, as the Umayyads felt more secure, the region might have been transferred to the control of Filasṭīn with its newly built capital of Ramlah (for separate maps of Filasṭīn, Urdunn and Dimashq *ajnād*, according to Ya'qūbī and Muqaddasī, see Figures 3 and 4, after Northedge 1992:Plates 11 and 12).

Byzantine Influence on the *Jund* System?

The *jund* system may have been influenced by earlier Byzantine administrative practices. It is known that the early Umayyads kept much of the Byzantine government system intact; many Greek officials remained in Umayyad employ. In fact, it was not until the reigns of 'Abd al-Malik (685-705) and al-Walīd (705-715) that the language of administration was changed from Greek to Arabic. Balādhurī describes this transition process as having been completed in one year; but it is more likely to have been a rather gradual process (Balādhurī 1966:301, Hitti 1964:217). Coinage also remained unchanged until sometime after the conquest; apparently the Umayyads did not begin minting coins distinctive from those of the Byzantines until around the year 697 (Bates 1989:195). There was also continuity of personnel; one Sarjūn ibn Manṣūr, the son of the Byzantine official who surrendered Damascus, was put in charge of supervising the *kharāj*, the *dīwān* and the army payroll (Shahid 1986:48). It is natural, then, to suppose that Byzantine administrative boundaries would be reflected in some way in the Umayyad *ajnād*. This, at least is the basic thrust of the argument

of Shahid, who as mentioned above, sees a clear connection between the Byzantine *themata* and the Umayyad *ajnād*.

Beyond the argument that it would be reasonable for the Umayyad Caliphs and their Greek servants to simply modify Byzantine institutions he offers a set of points to show that the *ajnād* do not really make sense as provinces with an uniquely Arab background and that Syria was already divided into four provinces at the time of the conquest. Ṭabarī notes that Byzantine Syria was already divided into four provinces. Arab historians do not credit 'Umar with originating a four-province system at Jābiyah even though he was credited with most other administrative innovations; it might, thus, be reasonable to assume that these divisions existed before the conquest. Further, Arab strategy seems to presuppose that Syria consisted of four Byzantine provinces. Ṭabarī notes the dispatch into Syria of four commanders against four different regions: Palestine, Transjordan, Damascus and Ḥimṣ; this would indicate the existence of four Syrian provinces. Events at Beth-Shān and Pella, facing each other on opposite sides of the Jordan river, indicate the east-west orientation of these provinces (Shahid 1986:46). Later authorities, such as the fifteenth century Aleppo historian, Ibn al-Shiḥnah, also apparently note a Byzantine origin for the original four-*ajnād* system (Ibn al-Shiḥnah 1909:9-11, Shahid 1987:395).

The features of the Umayyad *ajnād*, in Shahid's view, betray this Byzantine origin; all of the *ajnād* possess ports, which would have been of critical importance to a maritime power such as

Byzantium. The *ajnād* would also have been most effective in defending Palestine from an external enemy from the east. The Arabs, however, did not in the early years of the Umayyad dynasty possess a fleet nor were they concerned about external attack from the east.[22] The Arabs also did not find it necessary to construct new provincial capitals as they did in Iraq; in Shahid's view they simply retained previous Byzantine capitals. Even *jund* names indicate a non-Arab origin; neither Filasṭīn nor Urdunn is found in the Qur'ān. Filasṭīn was probably derived from the name of the Byzantine province; Urdunn, according to Shahid, would have had uniquely Christian connotations (presumably because of the importance of the river Jordan in the lives of Jesus and John the Baptist). If these names had been borrowed from other Semitic language, such as Hebrew or Aramaic, they would more likely have been Peleset or Ha-Yārdēn; instead they are likely to have been derived from the Greek Palestine and Iordanes (Shahid 1987:398, 1986:47).

There are, however, many problems with Shahid's argument for a Byzantine origin for the Umayyad *jund* system. The most glaring is that it presupposes that the Byzantine provincial system in place at the time of the conquest was the *themata* system described above. Unfortunately, Shahid's main line of argument in proving the existence, in early sixth century Syria, of the latter system is drawn from an examination of the very system (the *jund* system)

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[22] Mu'āwiyah led a naval expedition against Cyprus in 649; this marks the first use of Arab naval power (Shahid 1989b:234).

that the *themata* system supposedly influenced. One of his other arguments, that the *ajnād* did not make strategic sense for the Arabs and thus must have a Byzantine origin, is severely weakened without the prior existence of the *themata* system on which his strategic analysis is clearly based. The military impracticality of the *jund* system to the Arabs may also be overstated. If the *ajnād* are seen as provincial zones intended for the stationing, payment, feeding and deployment of Arab troops then they may make more sense. Their purpose may extend beyond strategic concerns and be more influenced by economic and political matters. Thus, provinces may have been drawn up to include enough land (and accompanying peasantry) to provision the local garrison. The size and location of a local garrison would be dependent on military factors but the size and boundaries of the *jund* supporting that garrison would be decided by economic factors. Political decisions seem to have been operative in the extension of *jund* Dimashq to include the Balqā', a region of important tribal support.

This is not to say that the *ajnād* did not answer certain strategic needs; although the Umayyads did not start with a navy, they developed one which was in action by time of Mu'āwiyah's expedition against Cyprus in 649 and the encounter at Phoenix (Finike) in 655 (Hitti 1964:200). It is an error to assume that certain Umayyad institutions (like a navy) were a late innovation and that others were in existence from the time of the conquest and that the latter must have been borrowed from the Byzantines. It is not clear when the *jund* system as a whole came into effect and thus

its firm relationship (if there was one) to other institutions cannot be established. As for frontier defence, the *jund* system's effectiveness cannot be ruled out. The eastern frontier was of course no longer hostile, but the northern frontier was (although in this area the Muslims were usually on the offensive). If Shahid's *themata* could be considered effective against an advance from the north-east (whether or not they were actually in place or not) a similar stack of small provinces might have formed an effective border with opponents coming from Anatolia to the north. The strategic importance of the *jund* system on the Byzantine frontier may be indicated by the creation by 'Abd-al Malik of the *jund* of Qinnasrīn in the Aleppo region.

Shahid's strongest argument for a Byzantine origin for the *jund* system is that continuity existed between Byzantine and Umayyad adminstration systems. It does seem very likely that the early Arab Caliphs relied on Greek and Persian administrators to run their expanding empire. But it also seems likely that conservative Greek bureaucrats, who continued to use Greek for administrative purposes for at least eighty years after the conquest, would be resistant to most administrative changes. The *themata* system, which Heraclius would have had to introduce into Syria during the four year period between the Persian evacuation (629) and the start of the Muslim conquest (633), would have been such an innovation, one which these same bureaucrats may not have been in a hurry to keep in place. It is more likely that if any system of Byzantine provincial administration influenced the

Umayyad system, and in particular the institution of the *jund*, then it was the old Diocletian provincial administration system. But the Diocletian system would have come under immediate pressure to be modified in light of the unique circumstances of Arab rule in Syria. Muslim-controlled Syria was at its heart a conquest state ruled by and for an armed, ethnically distinct elite. The *jund* system would have served a purpose, of feeding and paying large settled garrisons, which the Diocletian system was not intended for. Perhaps the Byzantines were inspired to set up their own system of armed provinces after seeing the success of the *jund* system, which the Umayyads found more than adequate to meet these defensive needs, rather than the reverse. Or perhaps there is no real connection between the Byzantine *themata* and the Umayyad *jund*.

'Ammān: capital of al-Balqā'

The *jund* was apparently the middle level of Umayyad administration. Above the level of the *jund*, at least in later Umayyad times, Muslim-controlled territory was divided into large vice-regencies. The *jund* of Dimashq, including the Balqā' region, rather than falling into one of these vice-regencies was probably controlled from the capital of the Caliphate at Damascus as were the rest of the Syrian *ajnād* (Hitti 1957:475). The *ajnād* themselves were subdivided into districts, variously called *iqlīm*, *istān* and *kūrah*.[23] Turning to *jund* Dimashq, Muqaddasī clearly

[23] These terms are problematic but the term *kūrah* is used consistently to describe administrative divisions, below the level of *jund*. These designations may have been used rather informally;

refers to the Balqā' as a separate identifiable district with 'Ammān as its capital; Balādhurī describes 'Ammān as the chief city of the Balqā' (Muqaddasī 1897: 287, Le Strange 1890:391, Balādhurī 1966). Ibn Khurdādhbih and Ibn Faqīh divide the Balqā' into three *kūrah*: 'Ammān, Ẓāhir ("outlying Balqā'", possibly the plains around Ḥusbān and Mādabā) and the Ghawr (the region around al-Ṣalt) (Le Strange 1890:32, Walmsley 1987:123). Ya'qūbī divides Balqā' into al-Ẓāhir, with its capital at 'Ammān, and the Ghawr (Yaq'ūbī 1937:174). But 'Ammān was clearly the most prominent *kūrah* in the area; Walmsley acknowledges that not all districts were of equal standing and that 'Ammān was clearly the chief city of the region (Walmsley 1987:121). The other districts would have been subservient to 'Ammān; all in all it seems reasonable to assume that the Balqā' functioned as a single region controlled from that centre. Perhaps, certain areas of the Balqā' were considered outside of the control of the district capital of 'Ammān; these regions, in an alternate reading of the term "outlying areas of the Balqā'", might include the palatial estates of the eastern *bādiyah* (steppelands) which may have remained under the personal control of

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the administrative system of the time held the *jund*, designed to pay and organize troops, at its centre; other levels of administration may have merely made this task easier. For a discussion of the various terms used to identify administrative districts see Sourdel 1979. Walmsley identifies the ten administrative subdistricts of Umayyad Filasṭīn as *kūrah*, each with a chief town controlling surrounding villages and territories (Walsmley 1987:84).

the Caliphs at Damascus.[24] Such an arrangement would not be unknown from elsewhere; Ibn al-Faqīh notes that the mosque of the *kūrah* of Tyre belonged to *jund* Dimashq while the *kharāj* revenues collected in the *kūrah* of Tyre went to *jund* Urdunn (Le Strange 1890:32)

During the Umayyad period, then, a distinct district with 'Ammān as its capital clearly existed and this region can be reasonably referred to as the Balqā' district. Coins, from the reign of 'Abd al-Malik on, bear the name of 'Ammān, indicating the

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[24] It might be noted that the Ghawr may have be involved in a similar arrangement with the Umayyad elite. The palatial estate of Qaṣr Khirbat al-Mafjar can be found just outside of Jericho, which Yaq'ūbī identifies as belonging to *jund* Dimashq and the Balqā' region (Yaq'ūbī 1937:174, for more information on Qaṣr Khirbat al-Mafjar see Hamilton:1988). For the purposes of this study, areas within the Jordan valley will not be included in the Balqā'; it will be assumed that the identification of the area as the region around 'Ammān, by Muqaddasī, is sufficient cause to restrict the term to the Transjordanian highlands, as noted in this study's introduction. In defining the region's boundaries, it might be noted that later sources, Yāqūt and Sāfī al-Dīn, extend the Balqā' district, with 'Ammān for its capital, much further to the south to include the region Jibāl al-Shārā, near the Ḥijāz frontier. But given the late date of their information, this should be taken with scepticism. Both Ibn al-Faqīh and Ibn Khurdādhbih clearly note Jibāl al-Sharāh as a separate district and the former specifically describes the area as being to the south of the Balqā' (Le Strange 1890:74). It is also possible that the southern regions of Jordan were during the Umayyad period administered from the Balqā' without actually being part of the district. Northedge notes Ṭabarī's reference to an event of the year 750 in which the governor of Dimashq, al-Walīd ibn Mu'āwiyah, was ordered to write his *'āmil* in the Balqā' to dispatch troops to arrest the 'Abbāsid Imām Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad, who was residing at Ḥumaymah, near Petra (Northedge 1992:48). To the north Jarash was certainly outside of 'Ammān's jurisdiction; Yāqūt places it between the "provinces" of the Balqā' and the Ḥawrān, while Ya'qūbī places it within the Jund of Urdunn (Le Strange 1890:462, Yaq'ūbī 1937:179). The Wādī al-Zarqā, just south of Jarash, seems, then, a reasonable northern limit for the area controlled from 'Ammān during early Islamic times.

area was important enough to possess a regional mint (as did other smaller centres, such as Ba'labbak and Buṣrā) (Bates 1989:218). Balqā' apparently had its own governor during the Umayyad and subsequent periods.[25] The dispatch of troops to Ḥumaymah, mentioned above, points to the existence of a local garrison (*jund al-Balqā'*), at least in the dynasty's final days (Northedge 1992:49).

But whatever its importance in the larger administrative structure may have been, architectural remains found at 'Ammān seem to confirm that the city was at the very least an important local centre. The Amman Citadel, Jabal al-Qal'ah, is topped by the ruins of a huge Umayyad palace complex and is protected by impressive

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[25] The names of three governors of the Balqā' are known. Abān, whose dates in control of the Balqā' are not known, was also known to have governed Filasṭīn under 'Abd al-Malik, who also happened to be his brother (Ibn 'Asākīr 1951:6, Crone 1980:124). Under 'Abd al-Malik (685-705), the Balqā' was run by Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Thaqafi, who was a Qaysī, the brother of the more famous Yūsuf ibn 'Umar and a relative of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (Khalīfah 1967:394). The final known *'āmil* of the Umayyad period is Ḥarith ibn 'Amr al-Ṭā'ī, who ran the Balqā' under 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz (717-720); Ḥarith was an Umayyad general who later went on to become governor of Armenia (Khalīfah 1967:465, Balādhurī 1966:322, Ṭabarī 1989:65, Crone 1980:127) This list of governors is drawn from Northedge, where it appears with references to primary and secondary sources (Northedge 1992:168). It is notable that Umayyad rule was certainly a family matter as well as a launching point for subsequent careers; two of the known Umayyad governors had relatives in high places and one went on to become the governor of the much larger area of Armenia. This tradition continued later, Ṣālīḥ ibn Sulaymān, governor under Hārūn al-Rashīd was an associate of the famous Ja'far ibn Yaḥyā al-Barmakī; Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ṭughj al-Ikhshīd, who governed Balqā' from 918-928, went on to found the Ikhshīdid dynasty in Egypt.

fortifications.[26] The palace complex has been only partially excavated but a thecretical plan has been drawn up by Spanish researchers showing the palace to have had at least 150 rooms, fourteen courtyards, a large cistern and a monumental pillared walkway (Almagro 1987:189) The pillared walkway, along with the sheer size of the palace, are among several features which are indicative of the symbolism of power and authority. Rooms laid out in a cruciform pattern and topped with domes are evidence of the influence of the Sassanid and Byzantine courts.[27] Byzantine

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[26] The earlier Roman era fortifications had by the end of the Byzantine period fallen into ruins; the Umayyad era fortifications consisted of a reuse of these ruined walls as well as new construction. The Umayyad Citadel was protected by a wall with ten towers and four gates; this defence system can be dated to sometime between the years 724 and 744 (Northedge 1992:123). The mosaic at Umm al-Raṣāṣ shows 'Ammān as having two gates each consisting of a single gate passage flanked by twin towers. The gates, towers and walls can be dated to the Umayyad period on the basis of pottery finds; more specifically, Tower A bonds to the palace complex and the fortification system can be therefore dated to the same scheme of development of 724-744. The fortifications were damaged in the earthquake of 747 and were subsequently restored by the 'Abbāsids (Northedge 1992:106, 124).

[27] Large palace complexes, originally a Babylonian and Achaemenid concept, influenced Parthian design and through it Sassanid and Roman concepts of imperial authority. Sassanid and Byzantine imperial culture, by the time of the rise of Islam, shared much in common. Diocletian's palace in Spalato (presently located in Split in Croatia) embodies concepts of imperial power closer to those of the Parthian or Sassanid empires than to those of the Roman Republic or even of Augustus (Almagro 1987:181). Although 'Ammān, at the crossroads of several trade routes, would certainly have been exposed to Persian cultural influences, this paper will assume that Byzantine influences were greater for several reasons. 'Ammān was located in territory which was formerly part of the Byzantine empire, Greek officials were still active, albeit under Umayyad tutelage, in the area. Structures from Byzantine Philadelphia were still intact when the Arab armies arrived in the area; in many cases these structures were reused or renovated (for a description of the architectural layout of Roman

influence is particularly evident in the domed vestibule of the 'Ammān palace; remains of a Byzantine structure were found under its vestibule and it is known from written accounts that the imperial palace at Constantinople was entered through a domed gate of cruciform design (Almagro 1987:181). Court protocol may have been evident in the design of the domed vestibule at 'Ammān as well as in the domed "throne room" which one approached from the main gate after crossing two courtyards and moving down a monumental pillared walkway. The dome, as a symbol, represented the universal nature of imperial power. Its presence in the vestibule, at the entrance of the complex, may reflect the common practice of dispensing justice at the gate (Almagro 1987:183). At 'Ammān these symbolic features may have represented the presence of the sovereign's representatives and the reach of his authority rather than the actual residence of the Caliph (although this palace may have served as a seasonal residence; to this day 'Ammān is noted for its moderate summer weather).

Several incidents in Ṭabarī's history point to the importance of 'Ammān as a political centre. In 743-744, al-Walīd ibn Yazīd (al-Walīd II) had his cousin and political opponent, Sulaymān ibn Hishām, scourged, shaved and imprisoned in 'Ammān (Ṭabarī

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and Byzantine Philadelphia see Northedge 1992:57-60; it is of note that Muqaddasī, writing in the tenth century, was still able to observe the "Circus of Solomon"; in all probability the Roman amphitheatre visible to this day, Muqaddasī 1897:287, Le Strange 1890:392)). Persian influences are apparent in some of the desert estates, such as Qaṣr al-Mshattā (Bisheh 1987:193), but by and large Syria was more culturally oriented towards Byzantium until the rise of the 'Abbāsids.

1989b:127). Evidently, 'Ammān was considered a reliable place to intern enemies of the ruling Caliph. Later, after al-Walīd's murder, Sulaymān emerged from prison, seized what revenues were available at 'Ammān and headed for Damascus (Ṭabarī 1989b:183).

'Ammān's importance as a regional centre during the Umayyad period, is also indicated by its possession of a congregational mosque. Muqaddasī, in the only historical reference to this mosque, notes that in 'Ammān, "there is in the area of the market a fine mosque, whose courtyard is ornamented with mosaics" (Muqaddasī 1897:287). This Umayyad mosque no longer exists, its last traces disappearing in the 1920's, but its plan has been reconstructed, by Northedge, from the drawings of nineteenth century survey parties and from photographs taken during the early years of 'Ammān's birth as a modern city (Northedge 1989:140).[28] The 'Ammān mosque is one of six urban *jawāmi'* (singular *jāmi'*) whose plans are known from the Umayyad period (the other five being those of Damascus, Jerusalem (al-Aqṣā), Buṣrā, Ḥarrān and Ruṣāfah). Such urban mosques can be distinguished from small palace mosques and the mosques of smaller settlements (Northedge 1989:151, Northedge 1992:68).[29] The 'Ammān mosque was an important building during the Umayyad period, reflecting the city's status as the seat

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[28] This mosque, as it first stood, consisted of a rectangular hypostyle hall. It had no minaret, but it did have a colonnaded porch and courtyard. Several architectural features, such as round-arched windows and doors with lintels and round relieving arches, are paralleled in the Umayyad Mosque at Damascus, in the Dome of the Rock as well as in Umayyad era mosques at Ḥallabāt and Buṣrā. These features, as well as the Byzantine-Umayyad style ashlar masonry, point to a clear Umayyad date for the construction of the 'Ammān mosque, probably to sometime between the beginning of the reign of al-Walīd (705-715) and the end of the reign of Yazīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik (720-724) (Northedge 1989:149).

[29] The 'Ammān mosque was small for an early Islamic *jami'*; the mosque at Damascus measures 157 m by 100 m while that of Ḥarrān measures 100 m by 100 m. It was, however, similar in size to the mosques of several regional centres of the 'Abbāsid period such as those of Susa (58 by 47 m) and Damghan (47 by 37 m) and it was larger than the Umayyad mosque at Buṣrā (Northedge 1989:153).

of the governor of the Balqā', but it was not among the most noted mosques of Syria. No monumental mosques have yet been found, from the Umayyad period, from any of the other old Byzantine cities of the region, such as Pella, Gerasa or Esbus, at which Umayyad remains have been found. Perhaps, such mosques have simply not been found, or this may reflect 'Ammān's importance as the seat of the governor of Balqā' and the city's status as the main Ummayad centre in Transjordan. The 'Ammān mosque would have served the needs of the city of 'Ammān; a *jāmi'* in theory should have been able to hold the entire adult male population of a given urban centre. However, the 'Ammān mosque may have served other needs; Northedge puts forward the possibility that the residences of the "desert palaces" (such as Qaṣr al-Ḥallabāt and al-Qasṭal) came into 'Ammān for Friday prayers, or at least for the 'Īd festivals. He notes the example of 'Īsā ibn Mūsā, the reclusive uncle of Caliph Manṣūr, who would leave his estate for Kūfah on only two occasions during the year to pray during religious festivals (Northedge 1989:153, Northedge 1992:69).[30] As will discussed in more detail below, the 'Ammān mosque as well as the 'Ammān Citadel palace may have been part of a complex relationship involving the urban population of 'Ammān, the regional officials of 'Ammān, the local bedouin tribes and the Umayyad Caliphs who dwelt for part of the year in palatial estates in the desert east of al-Bālqa'.

The "desert castles" - a centre of political power?

In the desert east of 'Ammān are located a group of palatial estates sometimes referred to as the desert castles. Ṭabarī refers to one of these estates, al-Aghdaf (possibly Qaṣr al-Ṭūbah, 61 km to the south of al-Azraq), as being within the territory of 'Ammān, so it is not unreasonable to hypothesize a connection between these

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[30] Northedge notes that the reclusive 'Īsā ibn Mūsā would have performed the minimum acceptable religious obligations by attending mosque twice a year, during important festivals (Northedge 1992:69).

estates and the settled region of al-Balqā' (Ṭabarī 1989b:148, 92).[31] The designation of some of these sites as desert castles stems from a theory, widespread among historians in the early part of this century, that these desert settlements were the pleasure palaces and hunting lodges of the Damascus elite, including the Caliph, who sought clean air and a return to their former bedouin lifestyles in the desert (Grabar 1984:67, Northedge 1992:50). Some scholars, such as Musil, saw the Umayyad desert estates, the *bādiyah*, as successors to traditional bedouin summer encampments; the desert offered cool summer nights and a refuge from the epidemics which were frequent in urban Syria (Elisseef 1960:116).

Indeed several of the desert estates are clearly luxurious in nature.[32] However, most of the Umayyad sites within the Balqā' and the *bādiyah* cannot simply be identified as pleasure palaces. Starting with Jean Sauvaget, many scholars have proposed a more

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[31] These ruins are among some 200 sites, datable to early Islamic times, located in the Syrian steppelands, the *bādiyat al-Shām;* within present-day Jordan itself there are ten known Umayyad estates and a further eight sites where it is reasonable to assume that there was a castle or reoccupation of an older Roman fort. For a complete list of these sites, classified by form, with comments on the environment in which these sites were located see Northedge 1992:169.

[32] Quṣayr 'Amrah, located some 80 km east of Ammān and dating from the reign of Walīd I, is noted for a decorated audience hall and bathhouse. Decorations include mosaic floors and elaborate frescoes. The subject matter of the frescoes reflects a luxurious lifestyle and the concerns of the political elite. Frescoes portray female dancers, musicians, hunting scenes, grape vines and defeated enemies of Islam, such as the Byzantine emperor, the Visigoth king Roderick, Khusraw of Persia and the Negus of Ethiopia (Creswell 1989:105, 110-112). Mshattā, a large unfinished structure about 32 km south of 'Ammān, has several features which point to it clearly being the residence of a member of the ruling elite. The large open courtyards and the triple-apsed "throne room" are reminiscent of the Ammān Citadel palace. Also of note are the carved decorated facades (Creswell 1989:201, 204, 206). In addition, outside the Balqā', but within the *bādiyat al-Shām,* are the luxurious palaces of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, between Damascus and Palmyra, and Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī, some 95 miles northeast of Palmyra, both of which were constructed by Hishām (Grabar 1963:6, Creswell 1989:135, 149).

complex role for the desert estates in the society of Umayyad Syria. Sauvaget noted that virtually all the identifiable Umayyad sites located in the Syrian steppes were obvious agricultural centres equipped with the canals, cisterns and aqueducts necessary to irrigate fields (Grabar 1963:7). Most of these agricultural centres had a long history of occupation; Umayyad structures were frequently associated with older settlements. In occupying these desert estates the Umayyads were simply retaining the pre-Islamic agricultural economy of the region (Grabar 1963:9). King notes that many of the desert estates, such as al-Qasṭal, Qaṣr Mshattā and Qaṣr al-Muwaqqar, may not have really been very isolated and were in fact located on the border of the settled lands of the Balqā'. Even estates further to the east were close to settled agricultural lands and to each other; Qaṣr al-Muwaqqar, located on the edge of sown lands, is only twenty km from Qaṣr Mshāsh, while Qaṣr al-Ḥallabāt is located only 27 km from Umm al-Jimāl (King 1992:370). According to Conrad, a passage from the Mu'tazilite text *Kitāb al-'ibar wa-al-i'tibār*, attributed to Jāḥiẓ (d. 868), points to the agricultural character of *bādiyah* estates. In a discussion of why even deserts were created to fit into a larger divine plan, Jāḥiẓ explains, "How many a barren waste has been transformed into compounds (*qusur*) and gardens by a group of people moving thither and settling there!". Conrad notes that this statement is made in a matter-of-fact manner, apparently assuming that it was common knowledge that waste steppelands were brought into cultivation; as this statement was meant to back up a theological argument it can be assumed that the practice was both widespread and widely known (Conrad 1991:273).[33]

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[33] Based on the work's attacks on Manicheanism, Conrad dates the work to the early or mid-ninth century, a century after the fall of the Umayyads (Conrad 1991:273). Conrad notes in the same article and elsewhere that *qaṣr* need not refer to "castles" or palaces but may refer to any permanent structure built where such buildings are not commonly erected. As such, the term *qaṣr* may signify a compound, an agricultural building, a fortress or a palace (Conrad 1991:274, Conrad 1981: 7-9, cited La Bianca

While these estates doubtless had some role to play in the economy of the Balqā', it seems likely that the this was only a secondary function. To support this assertion, this study will examine the later theories of Grabar and others regarding the political role of the desert castles in Umayyad Syria. Grabar starts in agreement with Sauvaget in identifying the desert estates as the economic centrepiece of a semi-arid agricultural zone stretching east of Damascus to a line in the desert which runs from the Euphrates in the north, through Palmyra, the Ḥawrān and al-Azraq to the Gulf of Aqaba in the south (Grabar 1963:8). However, he finds even this explanation for Umayyad settlement within the steppelands somewhat simplistic. Instead, the actual examination of the archaeological remains of Umayyad sites led him to propose a more complex role for the Umayyad desert castles. To illustrate his point Grabar uses the example of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī, which is outside the Balqā' but within the *bādiyat al-Shām*.[34] Grabar

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1990:224). The significance of Conrad's quotation from Jāḥiẓ lies in the fact that it indicates agriculture was commonly practiced in desert areas in the Middle East during the ninth century; it is reasonable to assume that such practices had a long history and that attempts were made during the Umayyad period to cultivate arid wastelands. Whether such lands were brought into cultivation as part of Umayyad political policies is another matter.

[34] This palatial complex consists of five distinct elements. A small enclosure is identified by Grabar, on the basis of its plan and its lack of decoration, as a caravanserai. Although this small enclosure has much in common with structures traditionally identified as palaces, such as Qaṣr Kharānah, it should be kept in mind that a square building, with a single entrance, a pillared courtyard and a number of covered halls was often utilized for a variety of purposes in the early Islamic world. The second element of the site is a larger walled square enclosure with a gate in each side and two smaller gates in its eastern wall which faces the small enclosure. This enclosure includes a porticoed courtyard surrounded by a number of sets of rooms fulfilling distinct functions. One of these units was a mosque, another an industrial complex consisting of olive oil presses. There were six sets of living quarters, each of which had apartments, latrines, rooms and yards surrounding a courtyard. A final unit, in this enclosure, consisted of a *dār al-'imāra*, an official building with three entrances and stuccoed decoration. Grabar identifies this

feels that desert estates would have been constructed to meet a variety of trade, military and agricultural needs; the Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī complex may have been built by the Umayyads as a residence for the Kalb tribe, whose alliance to the dynasty would have been cemented by allowing them to control the Iraq-Aleppo trade route. Grabar concludes that the *bādiyah* settlements were generally developed as a response to a whole range of possible challenges met by the Umayyad dynasty as they took control of former Byzantine estates. This area, the steppelands, had once been a sharply disputed borderland but it became, with the conquest, a vital communications link between Arabia, Syria, the Jazīrah and Iraq (Grabar 1984:69). Others agree with assigning multiple functions to the desert estates. King points out the proximity of many of the estates to trade routes running through the Wādī al-Sirḥān, Ma'ān and 'Ammān (roughly the course of the modern Ḥijāz Railway); perhaps some of these *bādiyah* settlements served as caravanserai, at least for travelling members of the Umayyad aristocracy (King 1992:370). Klaus Brisch proposes that the Umayyads controlled their territories through means of a travelling court which would reside for much of the year outside of the capital; at temporary seats of government, such as the desert estates, Umayyad officials would receive elements of society, such as the bedouin tribes, with whom they would have had little contact within urban centres (Brisch 1984:30). Ṭabarī notes al-Walīd II, while crown-prince, receiving and feeding pilgrims returning from

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enclosure as a *madīna*, an official centre with secondary residential functions. The third element of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr consists of a bath with a meeting-hall shaped as a basilica and a water tower for distributing water. The fourth element of the site is an enclosure with a 14 km perimeter wall, gates, two system of sluices and deflecting walls to protect against flash floods. There were no buildings within the enclosure, only one underground canal. Grabar feels that this enclosure may have been used for animal breeding. The final element of the site consisted of strictly agricultural installations such as a canal and a cistern to the north of the enclosure as well as an irrigated area south of the large enclosure (Grabar 1984:68).

Mecca, at Zizā', a large village in al-Balqā' which acted as a staging post on the *ḥajj* route. He would also feed the pilgrims' riding animals and even offer to provide, if it was possible, gifts, grants and assistance to pilgrims. Grants would be recorded by his scribes for later distribution on a monthly basis (Ṭabarī 1989b:103).

This passage from Ṭabarī might point to one of the more important functions of the desert estates noted by several modern scholars such as King and Svend Helms. It is likely that settlements within the Balqā' were critical in maintaining favourable contacts between the Umayyad family and their tribal supporters. In this regard King notes the importance of the Judhām tribe as a base of support for the Umayyad dynasty. This tribe, whose influence was felt during Umayyad times, throughout al-Balqā' as well as much of *jund* Urdunn and much of *jund* Filasṭin, was a loyal supporter of the dynasty from the time of Mu'āwiyah's confrontation with 'Alī to the dynasty's downfall.[35] Retaining the loyalty of these tribal followers, by means of periodic personal contacts with tribal leaders, was of crucial importance to the survival of the Umayyad regime. King feels that the palatial desert estates can thus be explained as meeting places where *shaykhs* would be received; this would explain the residence of Yazīd II at al-Muwaqqar (noted in a poem of blessing by Kuthayyir 'Azzā, who died in 723) and the residences of al-Walīd II (noted by

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[35] King describes the Banī Judhām and the Banī Kalb as the two most important tribes supporting the Umayyads. The Banī Kalb lived to the north of the Banī Judhām, with whom they maintained good relations (King 1992:371). Presumably, *quṣūr* in Syria, such as Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī, were as important in maintaining the Umayyad relationship with the Banī Kalb as the *quṣūr* of Balqā' were in the maintenance of a healthy relationship between the Umayyads and the Banī Judhām. This study will emphasize tribal groups operating in the Balqā'. The Banī Judhām and the Banī Kalb were by no mean alone in their support of the Umayyads; certain Caliphs, such as Marwan II, drew support from the Qays as a counter to the power of such Yamanī tribes as the Kalb (Hawting 1986:93). For a more detailed description of the Qays-Yaman dispute see Kennedy 1987.

Abū al- Faraj al-Iṣfahānī in his *Kitāb al-aghānī*) and 'Abbās ibn al-Walīd I at al-Qasṭal (Ṭabarī 1989b:137 noted that Yazīd ibn al-Walīd I was encamped in the desert a short distance away). Desert residences may, in fact, have been a tradition among the Umayyads from the earliest period; Mu'āwiyah apparently stayed in the desert with his Judhām allies (King 1992:371, Carlier 1984:350, Carlier 1989b:120, Northedge 1992:51).[36] Helms proposes that this system of desert diplomacy may have had a pre-Islamic bedouin origin and was not an unique feature of Umayyad rule. This bedouin system of diplomacy was multi-level in nature and involved personal contacts within tribes and extended families, between tribes and tribal confederacies and between tribes or confederacies and tribal and non-tribal states; these latter relations would take place with the aid of client agents. Tribal meetings might take place in a variety of venues including tribal encampments, palaces, farmhouses and churches (Helms 1990:29). Personal contact among tribal supporters is important even today. King notes that the present *shaykh* of the Banī Ṣakhr, the tribe currently resident in the area around 'Ammān, has a residence near the Umayyad ruins of al-Qasṭal, close to the lands of his tribesmen and close to main roads leading into the city (King 1992:371).[37]

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[36] Besides the desert estates, the Umayyad leadership apparently had a presence in the fertile uplands of the Balqā'. Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, according to Balādhurī, owned the village of Qubbash before the Arab conquest (Balādhurī 1966:197, Northedge calls this village Biqinnīs). Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Malik was in the *Mashārif al-Balqā'* (the highlands of Balqā') at the time of his succession in 743 (Ṭabarī). Less elevated members of Umayyad society also possessed desert estates; Yāqūt mentions the Umayyad poet, Khālid ibn 'Abbād owning a *ḥiṣn* (a fortress) in the unidentified village of Tanhaj in the Balqā'. Northedge feels that ownership of *quṣūr* was quite common among the Umayyads and their supporters; these estates were, in his view, principally residences for the elite (Northedge 1992:51).

[37] In regards to the importance of these tribal contacts, Patricia Crone identifies tribal notables, the *ashrāf*, as the main basis of the political power of the Umayyad dynasty during the Sufyānid period, which lasted until 683 (Crone 1980:29-33).

King also proposes that this system of tribal diplomacy may have prompted specific agricultural activity. He notes that Qaṣr Mshattā, which overwise lacks any obvious agricultural installations, would have acted as a natural "wintering place" for sheep and goat herding bedouin on account of the thick grass which grows there after the winter rains. Similarly water tanks at Qaṣr Mshāsh and the dam at Jīlāt would retain water which could be used by the Judhām tribes. Further to the north-east, on the edge of the Ḥawrān, at Qaṣr Burqu', water collected behind a dam would attract game which could be hunted by the Umayyad aristocracy and their tribal supporters (King 1992:372). Klaus Gaube stresses that the differences between the various theories explaining Umayyad settlement of the *bādiyah* disappear on closer examination; desert settlements were both agricultural estates and centres of diplomacy (Gaube 1984:124).[38]

Other roles which the desert estates and the Balqā' region as a whole may have played in the history of the Umayyad dynasty are suggested by an examination of Ṭabarī. The Balqā' was apparently a place of exile, conspiracies and refuge which is mentioned frequently in connection with the many conflicts which rent the Umayyad aristocracy in its last decades. Al-Walīd ibn Yazīd, the later al-Walīd II, criticised by Hishām, the current Caliph, for his irreligious behaviour and his drinking, realized that Hishām judged him unsuitable for the office of Caliph. Consequently, he left the Caliph's court at al-Ruṣāfah to reside at al-Azraq, between the territories of the Banū al-Qayn, the Fazarah (a sub group of the Dhubyān) and at "a watering place" called al-Aghdaf; a similar account is given by Iṣfahānī (Ṭabarī 1989b:91, Hamilton

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[38] Urice identifies Qaṣr Kharānah as the only desert estate intended solely to serve the needs of diplomacy; its defences were inadequate for a fortress and it lacked facilities for caravans or agricultural production. An imposing limestone structure, it was a highly visible monument in tribal territory and it provided a secure, private place for the meeting of notables from 'Ammān, Damascus and nearby estates, such as Quṣayr 'Amrah, which possessed more luxurious accommodations (Urice 1987:86).

1988:170).[39] It might be noted that al-Walīd was apparently a hunting enthusiast; one of his "crimes" (in the eyes of Hishām) was trying to hide dogs, in boxes, so that he could take them with him on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Presumably al-Walīd found the lifestyle at al-Azraq, with its abundant hunting, more to his liking. In the desert, if the frescoes at Quṣayr 'Amrah are an indicator, al-Walīd would also feel free to indulge his other great passion, wine. Others conducted more serious business in the eastern desert; Yazīd ibn al-Walīd ibn 'Abd-al-Malik (Yazīd III) sought the advice of his brother, 'Abbās, on whether to rebel against al-Walīd II, while they were both residing in the *bādiyah* (Ṭabarī 1989b:137). Yūsuf ibn 'Umar al-Thaqafī, governor of Iraq, was removed from that office by Yazīd III. Fearing for his safety, he fled to a place of refuge in the Balqā' only to be captured by Yazīd's men, imprisoned and executed; the fugitive governor apparently had a house and agricultural land in the region (Ṭabarī 1989b:200-203). Ṭabarī offers several versions of his capture; one account, it might be noted, mentions his capture by fifty men from the *jund* of al-Balqā' (presumably the paid, settled garrison of the area).

The Balqā' and the adjacent steppelands, then, met a diversity of the political needs of the Umayyad dynasty. 'Ammān was clearly a regional capital controlling rich agricultural lands. In

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[39] The "watering place of al-Aghdaf" has been identified as the ruins known as Qaṣr al-Ṭūbah or Ṭūbat al-Ghadaf in the Wādī al-Ghadaf on the basis of the similarity between the name offered by Ṭabarī and Iṣfahānī and the modern name of the area. Unfortunately, Qaṣr al-Ṭubah is miles from any source of water. Lammens notes the account of Sawirus (Severus) ibn al-Muqaffa', the tenth century Bishop of al-Ashmunayn in Egypt, in which Walīd attempts to build, with disastrous results, a desert "city" fifteen miles from any water. Henri Lammens identifies this city as Mshattā, but the description fits al-Ṭubah better. However, Ibn al-Muqaffa' states that Walīd's ill-fated project took place after the death of Hishām; a clear identification of al-Aghdaf, thus, remains a mystery (Severus 1910: 139-140, Hamilton 1988:170, Lammens 1930:348). For more information on Ibn al-Muqaffa', who may have had a role in the writing, compilation and editing of *The History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church* see Kubiak 1987:23.

addition ʿAmmām boasted a mint, a lavish palace, a treasury, a regional mosque and served as a political prison. The land to the east contained a number of estates, some palatial in nature, which acted as self-contained agricultural units and at the same time acted as the centrepiece of a complex diplomatic system involving mobile courts and local tribal supporters. While allowing the Umayyad court to keep in touch with some of its supporters, these estates also allowed the Umayyad aristocracy a measure of privacy, whether as sportsmen or as exiles. Final note should be made of Ḥumaymah, the estate south of the Dead Sea, where the ʿAbbasid family, which of course eventually overthrew the Umayyad dynasty, was based and where at least some of its anti-Umayyad conspiracies were hatched. Evidently the Balqā' and the eastern *bādiyah* had a political dimension to others besides the Umayyads, although it should also be noted that the Balqā', and Transjordan as a whole, rapidly lost much of its political importance with the dynasty's fall.

Chapter Three: Social and Economic Conditions in Umayyad Balqā'

In addition to affecting the political character of the Balqā', the Arab conquest also had an impact on social and economic conditions. This chapter will examine two broad socio-economic aspects of Umayyad Balqā'. First, an attempt will be made to determine whether the settlement density and population of the Balqā' fell after the Arab conquest and whether such changes, if any, were accompanied by changes in the economic basis of the region and changes in the character of urban centres, if indeed such centres continued to function at all. Second, the inhabitants of Umayyad Balqā' will be described: the ethnic makeup and the religion of the inhabitants of the region will be discussed in relationship to the population of the area during the preceding Byzantine era.

Did the Arab conquest initiate a period of decline?

It has been asserted, particularly by western scholars earlier this century, that the Arab conquest brought about a decline in population, settlement density and economic strength in Transjordan and the disappearance of urban life from the area. Walmsley describes this vision of post-conquest Transjordan as the *Fisher Model*, after C.S. Fisher, the excavator of Jarash, who consistently assigned early Islamic archaeological deposits to the late Byzantine period. Fisher's lead was followed, by the excavators of Mount Nebo (Kraeling 1938, Schneider 1950). The Fisher Model has been widely rejected in light of new excavations of the late 1960's and early 1970's, especially the work of James Sauer, who was responsible for producing a workable pottery chronology for the Umayyad period, and the work of R.H. Smith, who conducted excavations at Faḥl (Sauer 1973, Smith 1973). The resulting reinterpretation, which Walmsley dubs the *Sauer-Smith Model*, claims that the Arab conquest was followed by a few decades of stability before a combination of economic, political and natural factors caused a general abandonment of many of the urban centres of Transjordan; this decline was specifically connected to the rise of

a "hostile" 'Abbāsid Caliphate which was more concerned with territories to the east. This model has become generally accepted among archaeological researchers working in Jordan.[40] In a similar vein, others have argued that there was an incremental abandonment of sites towards the end of the Umayyad period. The Ḥusbān survey and its successor, the Mādabā Plains Project, argue for a gradual decline in rural and urban settlement as the Umayyad period progressed.[41]

Several scholars have recently questioned the *Sauer-Smith* model and have argued that a high degree of rural development in Transjordan continued into the 'Abbāsid period and beyond. Walmsley, basing his argument on a reassessment of Ibn Khurdādhbih, Balādhurī, Muqaddasī and Ya'qūbī, as well as on archaeological excavations at Faḥl, argues that Byzantine urbanism continued into the 'Abbāsid period before a period of contraction in the ninth century and finally a period of rural stabilization. This period of contraction was a result of changes in political conditions and trade routes at the end of the Umayyad period (Walmsley 1992:382). Donald Whitcomb offers a similar assessment; he feels there is more than enough published ceramic evidence to indicate a respectable level of occupation in Transjordan in the Umayyad and the 'Abbāsid-

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[40] Walmsley cites Burr De Vries' excavations at Umm al-Jimāl (De Vries 1985), W.H. Mare's work at Qwaylbah (Mare 1982) the Danish excavations at Umm Qays (Holm-Nielsen 1986) and J. Eadie's survey of Ḥumaymah (Eadie 1984), as all working on the assumption that the coming of 'Abbāsid rule brought urban civilization in Transjordan to an end (Walmsley 1992:337).

[41] Others offer a similar assessment: Burton Macdonald in his Wādī al-Ḥasah survey (1980:179-180), J.M. Miller in his survey of central Moab (1979:49-50), V. Clark in his work on the *limes Arabicus* project (Parker 1987:128) and King in his 1981-1982 survey of southern Transjordan (1985:45) all argue for the Umayyad period being one of gradual decline (all but the *limes* project were concerned with other parts of Transjordan, rather than the Balqā'). Robert Schick, in his survey of post-conquest Christianity in Palestine and Jordan echoes these sentiments (1987:236-237).

Fatimid periods (Whitcomb 1992:388).[42] It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the theories of Walmsley and Whitcomb, which this study dubs the *Walmsley-Whitcomb Model*, in any detail, but it must be noted that not all scholars see either the Arab conquest or the 'Abbāsid takeover as the end of urban and rural life in the Transjordan (and the Balqā').

An alternate theory, proposed by Kennedy, and thus identified by this study as the *Kennedy Model*, holds that changes in the urban character of Syria began before the Arab conquest; he feels that the late Byzantine period, particularly after the mid-sixth century, was one of urban decline; the number and size of sites decreased throughout Syria. The classical city, with its many civic amenities, its colonnaded streets and its open public spaces, largely vanished to be replaced by towns with poor-quality structures and narrow, winding streets which anticipate the medieval civic pattern. Before the years 540-550 Byzantine Syria was both prosperous and stable but after that decade it entered into a period of increasing decline; by the year 600 Syria had acquired the urban geography it was to have for much of the early Middle Ages. Patterns of prosperity changed; the rich coastal cities, Antioch, Seleucea, Laodicea (Latakia) and Beirut, fared worst, while cities on the edge of the desert, such as Damascus and Aleppo, seem to have entered into a period of relative prosperity. The steppe lands had increasingly fallen under the control of nomads; Kennedy describes the rise of the Ghassānids as more than a change in defense policy; it marked a significant stage in a long-term process of demographic and social change in Syria and Arabia. Kennedy attributes these changes to a variety of factors including Persian invasions (in both the sixth and seventh

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[42] He blames the currently accepted opinion of a post-Umayyad collapse on lack of specialists in Islamic archaeology, cavalier assessments of non-specialists, and an excessive reliance on the work of Sauer and the system of pottery reading (in which sites are dated in accordance with accepted interpretations of ceramic evidence, Whitcomb 1992:385).

centuries), plagues, earthquakes and the decline of trade with the Mediterranean region. None of these factors were decisive but together they changed the demographic landscape of Syria; urban centres came to resemble large agricultural villages rather than the classical *polis* (Kennedy 1985b 150, 180-181).

While all of these models, with the probable exception of the Fisher Model, can be argued for, this study will propose a model which stresses a long-term process of change; the transition from Byzantine to Umayyad rule was, on a societal level, part of a long process of demographic and social change, which had begun in the sixth century and continued into the Umayyad period if not later. In proposing such a process, this study will be leaning towards the Kennedy Model while acknowledging that the Sauer-Smith and Walmsley-Whitcomb models may have points of validity. In a sense Kennedy provides a starting date for the transition from the late antique to the early medieval world, while Sauer-Smith and Walmsley-Whitcomb offer alternative terminal dates. This broad process had three main characteristics: basic economic continuity, a drop in the population and in settlement density and a change in the nature of the surviving urban centres. These three currents are to an extent intertwined, so a certain amount of repetition is unavoidable in describing them. This process in change resulted in a uniquely Umayyad social and economic entity within the Balqā', which while possessing many new features retained a high degree of continuity with the Byzantine era.

Economic Continuity in Byzantine and Umayyad Balqā'

Byzantine society, and for that matter Roman society, was essentially rural in nature. The classical urban centres acted as places of residence for the political and ecclesiastic elite; Jones notes that the classical city was "a social phenomenon, the result of the predilection of the wealthier classes for the amenities of urban life". This situation persisted into the Byzantine period; the city was dependent on its existence for the support of its rural hinterland (Kennedy 1985:3, 23, Jones 1971:170).

Archaeological and written evidence indicates that the economy of Byzantine Balqā' was primarily based on agricultural. Jones estimates that 95% of the Byzantine empire's wealth was derived from the land; state, Church and private wealth were all derived from agriculture (Jones 1964:465).[43] Kennedy notes the

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[43] The social structure and the tax system of the empire were closely tied to the ownership and the working of the land. Byzantine society could be divided into two broad groups, the smaller group, consisting of state and Church officials and landed magnates of the senatorial class, owned the vast majority of arable land within the empire. This land was worked by a large mass of rural peasantry, many of whom were tied to the land in various degrees of servitude. Free peasants and small landowners also continued to exist. Landowners were responsible for payment of a land tax assessed on the basis of the size of the holding and the number of tenants working it (Haldon 1990:27). The particulars of the Byzantine system of land tenure are for the most part outside the parameters of this study (for a more detailed discussion of the status of landlord and tenant and the land taxation system in the sixth to seventh century see Haldon 1990). Comments about the Byzantine social structure and tax system are offered here to illustrate the overwhelmingly agriculture character of Byzantine society; social structures and the tax system cannot, for the most part, be determined for the Balqā' region itself. Records of the area, noting who owned land, who worked it and how much tax was paid on it are not available, although ecclesiastical and monastic estates can often be identified on architectural grounds. In addition to this dearth of information on matters of taxation and land ownership, ancient sources have little to say on more general economic matters. Avi-Yonah notes that an overall picture of economics in Roman and Byzantine Palestine and Transjordan is difficult to obtain. Ancient geographers are mostly interested in the unique and the extraordinary rather than what to them seems commonplace; historians, such as Josephus, note economics only when it helps build their narrative account of historical events, they also tend to exaggerate and generalize and to emphasize rhetoric over economic data. The Talmud and accounts of Christian saints mention economic matters in a selected manner, the former usually introducing economic information to illustrate points of Jewish law. Pilgrim accounts are usually ignorant of economic concerns (Avi-Yonah 1966:210-211).

agricultural character of Syria as being apparent in Balādhurī's account of the Arab conquest. Virtually no mention is made of trade or industry being practiced in the cities of Byzantine Syria captured by the Arabs. The treaty with Ba'labakk is the only one, mentioned by Balādhurī, which has provisions for local merchants to travel freely through Muslim possessions (Balādhurī 1966:198). Caesarea was apparently unique in possessing 300 functioning markets.[44] The conquering Arabs imposed taxes on vanquished cities, including payment in kind. Islamic taxation policy weighed most heavily on land, but it is of note that no reference is made to taxation of markets or trade; payment in kind was in the form of agricultural goods. The booty the Muslims took from Qinnasrīn consisted of cows or sheep; while the tribute from Buṣrā consisted of wheat and a payment of one *dīnār* per inhabitant, no mention is made of arms or manufactured goods (Balādhurī 1966:224, 173). Cattle were apparently kept by the inhabitants of walled cities; Latakia was captured when its inhabitants opened the gates to allow their livestock out to graze (Balādhurī 1966:203). The Greeks of Ba'labakk were expelled from the city but were allowed to pasture their cattle in the surrounding territory (Balādhurī 1966:198) (Kennedy 1985b:147-148).

The work of the Ḥusbān regional survey seems to confirm this picture of an agricultural society in Byzantine Balqā'; the survey portrays an area dominated by farmsteads and agricultural towns; 61 farmsteads were found in a 5 km radius of Tell Ḥusbān.[45] In

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[44] A doubtlessly somewhat exaggerated number, Balādhurī also claims the city was defended by 700,000 soldiers and had 30,000 Samaritan and 20,000 Jewish inhabitants (Balādhurī 1966:217).

[45] Typically, a farmstead was located on a hill or slope overlooking a fertile field; surrounded by a wall, a farmstead would consist of a number of buildings including an agricultural tower (LaBianca 1990:184). Such settlements would be maintained with water supplies drawn from reservoirs, cisterns, water channels, springs and aqueducts; such a sources of water would be used in the many wine presses found in the region, as well as to power flour mills (LaBianca 1990:187-194).

addition to wine and grains (wheat and lentils), olives were an important crop. Other fruits were also cultivated, including pomegranates, apricots, pears and apples; such local products can be seen being cultivated and harvested in mosaics found in the Mādabā area (La Bianca 1990:181, Van Elderen 1986:242).[46] Glueck, during his survey of the Balqā', notes that the cultivation of the vine was practiced at Suwaylah (near 'Ammān) from the Iron Age down to the present day (Glueck 1939:192). Avi-Yonah notes a verse from the Jewish Midrash as indicating wine production in the 'Ammān region; "Ammonite" wine was apparently used to befuddle the Israelites (Avi-Yonah 1966:209). This verse would indicate that wine was known as a product of 'Ammān, and possibly a product intended for export, at the time of the composition of the Midrash (c. 300-500 A.D.). The Ḥusbān survey also uncovered evidence, in the form of bones, indicating that a variety of animals were raised during the Byzantine period. Pigs, cattle, sheep and goats were all popular sources of food as were poultry and fish. Even horses were used for food, as is evidenced by the butchering marks found on at least one horse bone datable to this period (La Bianca 1992:199).

Evidence was found of numerous farming villages. Mādabā and Ḥusbān were both sizable towns acting as markets and places of refuge for the surrounding population; public facilities, paved colonnades and public plazas datable to the Late Roman and Byzantine periods are found at both sites (La Bianca 1990:184). Fr. Michele Piccirillo also sees agriculture and sheep grazing as the basis of the economy of the Balqā' (Piccirillo 1985:261). He

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[46] Mosaics with evidence of wine cultivation are also evident at the Church of St. Stephen (dedicated 587) at Umm al-Raṣāṣ (30 km southeast of Mādabā); scenes of hunting and fishing from the same mosaic may indicate that game was still hunted in the region (Piccirillo 1988:210). Similar hunting scenes are prominent in the sixth and seventh mosaics from Mount Nebo (Piccirillo 1982:297). However, these hunting and fishing scenes and even the viniculture scenes may have Biblical associations rather than be a true reflection of actual conditions in the region.

notes the economic importance of monasteries, which survived, like villages, off agriculture.[47]

Evidence points to a continuity of this agricultural basis into Umayyad times. Economic wealth, as reflected in taxation and land ownership policy, continued to be largely tied to agriculture. Eliyaha Ashtor, drawing on a variety of Arabic sources, notes that the overwhelming majority of the Middle Eastern population lived on the land. He emphasizes the importance that members of the Arab tribes who made up the Umayyad ruling class attached to the control of land revenue, whether this revenue took the form of taxes or the actual yield of the land. The Umayyad Caliphs granted *qaṭī'a* estates to their favourites; these land grants often consisted of lands abandoned by fleeing Byzantine notables taxed at a very advantageous rate, holders of these grants being responsible only for the paying of the tithe. The land itself would be farmed by poor tenant farmers who would be charged a high rent. Russell notes a similar arrangement for the Ḥusbān region (Ashtor 1976:36-37, Russell 1985b:27).[48]

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[47] At Mount Nebo the monks used terraces, in which were planted vineyards and olive groves; 14 wine or olive presses were found in the region (Saller 1949:13-15). Water for agriculture, human consumption and the watering of animals was provided by reservoirs and cisterns; 30 cisterns were found in the village of Nebo, while six cisterns and a large reservoir were found at the monastery itself (Saller 1949:10, Piccirillo 1985:257-260).

[48] In a similar manner, according to Gil, the Arab tribes, desiring land-based wealth, were granted *ma'kala*, the right to the taxes of a specific area which the tribe controlled and which was farmed by the non-Muslim tenants, a certain percentage would then be passed onto the central government (Gil 1992:137). The *kharāj*, the land tax, was one of the major sources of wealth essential for upkeep of the Umayyad aristocracy; the tax amounts were in the amounts of hundreds of thousands of *dinars*, Gil notes that the average monthly wage at the time was only two *dinars* (Gil 1992:145). The other major sources of income were *jizyah*, a poll tax paid by non-Muslims, and booty taken during the Arab conquests. As is the case with the tax and land tenure system of the Byzantine period, a detailed discussion of the Islamic tax system is outside the scope of this paper; terms such as *kharāj* and *jizyah*, while generally having the meaning noted here, were sometimes used to

The importance of agricultural wealth is reflected in the descriptions of Arabic geographers. Muqaddasī notes that 'Ammān was surrounded by villages and fields of grain; the Balqā' district was rich in flocks and had many streams, which powered mills. Fruit was both cheap and plentiful in the region (Muqaddasī 1897:287). Yāqūt mentions the story of Lot and his daughters and how they got him drunk on wine in connection with the city; one of Lot's grandson's was named Ammān, who later became the founder of the city. The story may have some connection with a viniculture tradition in the area; possibly one with which Yāqūt was familiar and perhaps also a continuation of the Roman-Byzantine industry alluded to in the Midrash. Abū al-Fidā' describes 'Ammān as possessing fields and fertile soil; he also mentions the founding of 'Ammān by Lot (Le Strange 1890:392-393). Muqaddasī, in a discussion of the weights and measures used in tenth century Syria, mentions specific measures used by the inhabitants of 'Ammān to weigh olives and dry figs, implying their cultivation of these products (Muqaddasī 1897:298, Le Strange 1890:50). He also mentions that honey was produced in the Balqā' (Muqaddasī 1897: 296, Le Strange 1890:18).

These descriptions are all quite late, several centuries after the downfall of the Umayyads, but a gap in agricultural production is unlikely. In the eleventh century 'Ammān even exported

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refer to the same type of taxation or were used in a different manners at different times and places (Lapidus 1988:44). The comments offered here are merely to illustrate the important of agricultural tax revenue to Umayyad society. In addition to cash assessments on land, taxes were often paid in kind. Ibn Khaldūn offers a details from a work of the early 'Abbāsid period, *Jirab al-Dawlah* (*The Provision-Sack of the State*), in which taxes from the *ajnād* of Filastīn and al-Urdunn are paid in cash and in olive oil. Similarly, the *Kitāb al-Wuzarā'*, written by al-Jahshiyārī for the *wazīr* of Hārūn ar-Rashīd, notes taxes for Syria being partially paid in raisins. Kudāmah in a work called *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, presumably a book devoted to land taxes, notes revenues in the hundred of thousands of *dināars* (Le Strange 1890:45-46). In contrast to Byzantine times, the land was mostly worked by free peasantry. Despite this free status the heavy tax burden often drove peasants to flee their land or to rebel (Ashtor 1976:38, 66).

agricultural wealth. In a letter from the Cairo Geniza, dated to 1029, Solomon ben Judah mentions that he deals with an individual who purchases and transports grain and that the source of this grain is 'Ammān (Gil 1992:211). This agricultural wealth is reflected in the results of the Ḥusbān survey. At least 16 farmsteads and 3 agricultural villages continued to function in the survey region during Umayyad times. There was an apparent shift away from intensive farming, involving oxen-driven ploughs, to a form of mixed farming involving cereal production and the herding of sheep, goats and camels (La Bianca 1992:216, 218). This shift, however, may have begun in Byzantine times and come to a conclusion in 'Abbāsid times. As the examination of settlement density and urbanization undertaken below will hopefully demonstrate, the late Byzantine and Umayyad periods are best treated as a single period, at least for economic purposes.

Decline in population and population density

Many scholars hold that the Byzantine period was one of intensive land use in Transjordan, including the Balqā' region. Several archaeological surveys, conducted since the 1930's, seem to demonstrate this premise. It must be kept in mind that this survey data, like all archaeological information, cannot speak for itself, it must be interpreted by the excavator. Thus, the assessments of the scholars who undertook this survey work are as important as the research itself. Roman, Byzantine and "Medieval Arab" pottery sherds were, according to the surveys of Glueck, found at the majority of sites in central Transjordan (Glueck 1939:226).[49]

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[49] Glueck surveyed archaeological sites in the area between 'Ammān and the Wādī al-Mūjib in 1933 and continued this survey between 1936 and 1938. Glueck's pioneering work must be used with caution. Most of the sites he notes consist of sparse ruins whose function cannot usually be determined; these sites are dated on the basis of pottery sherds, whose presence merely indicates habitation, rather than the date a site was actually built. Glueck seldom quantifies his pottery finds beyond noting "large" or "small" quantities. He seldom differentiates within the Byzantine period; a Byzantine site might be inhabited anytime between the

Glueck notes the southern Mādabā Plains as being particularly densely populated in Nabataean, Roman, Byzantine and medieval Islamic times (Glueck 1939:137). The Roman-Byzantine period was one of the two pre-modern periods during which Transjordan was most densely populated; based on the observable evidence of cultivation and the number of sites examined, Glueck estimates the population of Byzantine Transjordan as being around 900,000, three times its size in the 1930's (Glueck 1939:171).

Piccirillo notes that it is clear to archaeologists that Jordan was heavily settled during the Byzantine period.[50] The Ḥusbān survey documented a similar level of land use and settlement density for the Byzantine period. Øystein LaBianca, one of the survey's principal researchers, notes that in no other period of the region's history, before the twentieth century, was land used

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fourth and the seventh centuries. Nor does Glueck have a precise pottery typology for the Islamic period; his "Medieval Arab" period pottery might date a site to the Umayyad period or to any Islamic period before the region passed under Ottoman control. A precise pottery typology for the Umayyad period was not available until the Ḥūsbān dig of 1968-1974, where it was developed by Sauer.

In his 1933 survey Glueck identifies 52 datable sites; of these sites 23 of them are datable to the Byzantine period, a total of 44% (Glueck 1934). In his 1936-1938 survey of archaeological sites in Transjordan, Glueck notes 83 out of 162 sites in the area between Wādī al-Mūjib and Wādī al-Zarqā as containing evidence of Byzantine occupation, a total of 51% of all sites (Glueck 1939).

[50] Piccirillo notes the August 1937 survey of the aṣ-Ṣalt region conducted by Fr. Roland De Vaux and Fr. Benoit; this survey determined that 31 of 40 sites visited contained evidence of Byzantine occupation. Remains of Byzantine churches have been found in the 'Ammān, the Mount Nebo and the Mādabā regions (Piccirillo 1985:257, De Vaux 1938:398-425). A Belgian survey of the area between Ḥusbān and Karak notes Byzantine material at 16 out of 30 sites; an anomalous decrease from the 21 sites indicated for the Roman period. A survey conducted by a French team in the 1980's has noted 83 out of 145 sites in the vicinity of 'Araq al-Amīr as dating to the Roman/Byzantine period, around 60% (Northedge 1992:40).

as intensively (LaBianca 1990:181).[51] The 1984 Madaba Plains survey revealed numerous Byzantine sherds (Geraty 1987:197). Similar surveys in 1987 and 1989 uncovered sites in the hinterland of Tall al-'Umayrī which possessed ceramic evidence of Byzantine occupation (Geraty 1989:152, Herr 1991:166). Lawrence Geraty, the Mādabā Plains Project director, notes that the settlement of Tall al-'Umayrī and its hinterland sites reached its peak during the Byzantine period (Geraty 1989:157). Settlements did not just increase in number during the Byzantine period; in regards to the Ḥusbān survey, Ibach notes that the population was large enough to force settlements into unproductive marginal areas. Also, sites were set up in low-lying areas which were militarily indefensible; fortifications are rare at the Byzantine sites within the survey area. Apparently, population pressures took precedent over such concerns as defense from outsiders or the availability of water supplies; such a situation is an indication of the stability of the area (Ibach 1987:183).

Densely and highly populated Byzantine Balqā' stands in contrast to much of the survey data for the Umayyad period which followed.[52] In Glueck's *The Other Side of the Jordan*, a popular account of his earlier surveys, he seems to change his earlier assessment that Transjordan was heavily settled during the "Medieval Arab" period; he argues that from the seventh-eighth

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[51] La Bianca notes that Byzantine pottery was found at 107 of 148 sites surveyed (at a total of 72% of all sites); this represents an increase of 50 sites over the previous Late Roman Period (105-365 A.D.), for which 57 sites were identified (if the 21 Roman sites are added to the confirmed 36 Late Roman sites, La Bianca 1990:178).

[52] Glueck notes "Medieval Arab" pottery at 26 out of 52 sites visited during his 1933 survey, a slight increase from the Byzantine period (Glueck 1934). However, his 1936-1938 survey seems to indicate a drop in settlement activity, "Medieval Arab" sherds were found at 57 out of 162 sites or 35% (Glueck 1939).

centuries to the twentieth century Transjordan was virtually abandoned.[53] The Ḥusbān survey noted a settlement decrease during the Umayyad period.[54] In addition, most of the Umayyad sites were located on high, defensible slopes within the survey area; the valleys, inhabited during the Byzantine period, were largely abandoned (Ibach 1987:189). The excavations at Tall Ḥusbān itself reveal a drop in settlement activity; 201 archaeological *loci* (identifiable archaeological features) were assigned to Stratum 6 (Umayyad) at the site compared to 909 archaeological *loci* for the earlier Byzantine strata (LaBianca 1990:215). LaBianca concludes that land use passed from a high intensity pattern during the Byzantine period to a medium intensity pattern during the Umayyad period and a low intensity pattern during the 'Abbāsid, Seljuq and Fatimid periods (LaBianca 1990:218).

Northedge acknowledges that the Byzantine period was longer than the Umayyad period and that one settlement may have succeeded another during this long period of time and that the trend during the Umayyad period may have been toward fewer, but larger villages. Nonetheless, he feels that the agricultural system of the 'Ammān region declined after the Arab conquest. Northedge cites a number of recent surveys, just outside the Balqā' region, as indicating a decline in settlement density; surveys of the hill country between the Wādī al-Zarqā and the Wādī al-Yarmūk, of the eastern Jordan Valley, of Moab and of the Wādī Ḥasāh, all indicate a significant reduction in the number of settlements (Northedge 1992:50).[55]

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[53] Jarash, for example, according to William of Tyre in 1122, had been long abandoned except for a forty man Seljuq garrison sent from Damascus; Yāqūt describes the city as being in ruins. A similar situation prevailed at other cities of the Decapolis, such as 'Ammān (Glueck 1940:149-150).

[54] The survey collected Umayyad pottery from 23 out of 148 sites, a total of 15%; Umayyad pottery was dominant at none of the surveyed sites (LaBianca 1990:215).

[55] It has already been noted that Glueck had an incomplete understanding of Islamic pottery; his "Medieval Arabic" pottery may date from anytime from the Umayyad to the Mamluk periods. If so,

This decline in settlement in Umayyad Balqā', indicated by the fewer identifiable Umayyad site, may, in fact have been part of a longer trend beginning in the mid-sixth century. The impressive number of sites datable to the Byzantine period may date to earlier than the immediate pre-conquest period. Kennedy notes that certain problematic features of the available archaeological evidence, along with a dearth of historical sources from the period, has led researchers to misinterpret the last century of Byzantine rule in Syria.[56] Kennedy bases his reassessment of late Byzantine Syria on an examination of a wide variety of archaeological and written clues; he pays particular attention to architectural evidence and information derived from actual archaeological excavation, as opposed to an over reliance on ceramic evidence and regional surveys. His reassessment of sixth century Syria is mostly concerned with the fate of urban centres but a decline in rural settlements can be effectively linked to urban changes that will be described below. A sixth century decline in settlement numbers and in the population of the Balqā' is in line with what is known about

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then there may have been even fewer sites which actually date to the immediate post-conquest era.

[56] In particular archaeologists have assigned processes of long urban decline to convenient historical milestones, such as the Persian and Arab conquests. Also, the Byzantine period is often treated as a monolithic period, if a site can be shown to be occupied in the year 500 then it is often assumed that it was also occupied in the year 600. This latter problem is compounded by the imprecise nature of the archaeological data, especially that derived from survey work (Kennedy 1985b:150-151). LaBianca acknowledges that the ḥusbān survey was unable to identify subperiods within the Byzantine period; more precision was possible for the actual excavations of Tall Ḥusbān (LaBianca 1990:178). The experiences of this project are apparently quite common; it was earlier noted that Glueck could at best identify "Early" and "Late" Byzantine pottery. Full-scale archaeological excavations are often more effective, especially if archaeological strata can be correlated with datable inscriptions. Survey work tends to rely on ceramic evidence for the dating of sites (for further problems involved in archaeological survey work, involving the failure of many researchers to collect data in such a way as to avoid a skewed picture of the region being surveyed, see Banning 1986).

the various wars, plagues and earthquakes which dogged the region from the middle of the century on. Note has already been made of how Kennedy identifies these factors as influencing urban decline. It is reasonable to assume that such disasters would also damage rural society. The Persian Wars, of Justinian (527-532, 540-545, 549-562), Justin (573-575) and Heraclius (610-629), as noted in a previous chapter, probably caused widespread destruction, accompanied by sectarian strife and mass deportations. Conrad's studies of how the plague effected late Byzantine society are in line with a picture of both urban and rural decline. Conrad notes that much of Syria suffered through recurring epidemics from 542 until the eve of the Arab conquest (Conrad 1986:147-150). Conrad confirms from the written sources that these epidemics were indeed the bubonic plague, although the areas of Syria affected cannot really be determined in any great detail. He feels, however, that the plague was a recurring threat in southern Syria.[57] According to Conrad, these plagues would systematically decimate the population of Syria, as the plague would not grant immunity to its few survivors. Survivors might never return to their villages, being victimized by bandits; fields would be left untended compounding the problems of pestilence and flight with that of famine and economic decline. Economic and political power would during the course of these plagues pass to nomads who had a more realistic way of reacting to disease and who tended to live in less dense areas of population.[58] Surviving settled populations would come under increasing pressure to pay taxes from a shrinking agrarian base (Conrad 1986:155-157). Plague may have continued to

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[57] Areas affected by the plague included the territories of the Ghassānids; according to some Jāhilīyah poetry Ghassānid warriors were not afraid of battle, but were only afraid of being infected with the plague (*ṭa'ūn*) by *jinn* (Conrad 1986:151).

[58] Nomads tended to attribute disease to *jinn* whose attentions could be diverted with amulets or by simply avoiding those who had a disease and were already under attack; thus, acknowledging the theory of contagion. In contrast, the settled populations simply attributed disease to divine wrath (Conrad 1986:156)

depopulate the Balqā' into Umayyad times. Ghawanmah claims that the plagues which ravaged Syria from the eighth to the tenth centuries, in combination with a series of earthquakes, killed much of the population of Transjordan, causing severe economic, demographic, social and cultural affects (Ghawanmah 1985:316-322).

Settlements, both urban and rural, were certainly adversely affected by earthquakes. Many earthquakes struck Syria during the Byzantine period; some of these resulted in the complete destruction of urban centres (Ghawanmah 1992:54) Kennedy describes the sixth century as a particularly severe one for seismic activities (Kennedy 1985b:153, 181). La Bianca notes that Byzantine society, dependent on an elaborate system of aqueducts and cisterns, may have been particularly susceptible to earthquakes; a disruption of these systems would have caused widespread shortages of food and water in rural areas (La Bianca 1990:240). More damaging earthquakes struck during the Islamic centuries; according to Arabic sources a vigorous earthquake struck Damascus in 747-748, followed by a great earthquake the following year 748-749; the city was apparently partially destroyed as a result (Ghawanmah 1992:54,56).[59] It is likely that these earthquakes had a direct impact on the Balqā'.[60] Kennedy notes

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[59] Kenneth Russell, in a study of the earthquake chronology of Palestine and northwest Arabia from the second to eighth centuries, notes that Theophanes describes an earthquake which devastated much of Syria in 551 and as well as an earthquake in Palestine and Syria in 747. Sawarus ibn al-Muqaffa' and Michael the Syrian describe a similar earthquake, which occurred in either 747 or 748 (Severus 1910:139-140, Michael 1901:509). Russell feels that these accounts refer to a single earthquake occurring sometime in 747 or 748, although the actual date of the disaster cannot be pinned down further (for the details of his argument see Russell 1985:47-49).

[60] Evidence of the earthquake of 551 is identified at Ḥusbān by its excavators (Geraty 1993:629). The basilica of Mt. Nebo was, in Russell's opinion, destroyed by the earthquake of 748 (Schneider 1950:2-3, Russell 1985:49). A number of crushed human and livestock skeletons found in the ruins of an Umayyad building at

that earthquakes themselves are not a sufficient cause for major social changes; a healthy society should be able to rebuild even after major disasters. Earthquakes can be seen as a factor accelerating an already evident process of urban and demographic decline, rather than a direct cause (Kennedy 1985b:150). Nevertheless, along with plague and war, earthquakes doubtlessly altered the urban and rural landscape of the Balqā', causing a marked drop in settlement density and population size in the sixth and seventh centuries. Northedge also notes the high density of Byzantine settlement as a factor in eventual decline; cultivated marginal land, especially on slopes, would erode quickly and force an eventual abandonment of rural settlements (Northedge 1992:50).

These declines in population and population density, beginning in the mid-sixth century, reflect what the archaeological record indicates regarding continuity between the late Byzantine and Umayyad periods; the decline in settlement density apparent in the Umayyad period was part of a process which had begun much earlier rather than a sudden result of the Arab conquest. Many Umayyad or "Medieval Arabic" sites identified by Glueck, as well as the Ḥusbān survey, had been occupied during the Byzantine period.[61] Phyllis Bird, field supervisor for Tall Ḥusbān during the 1968 season,

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Tall Jāwā, 10 km outside of 'Ammān, may date to one of the earthquakes of 747-749, although it is possible that these skeletons date from a previous period (Personal Observation 1993, Personal communication with P.M.M. Daviau, September 1995). Northedge attributes the destruction of the Umayyad palace of 'Ammān to the earthquake of 747-748, although he also notes that 'Abdallah ibn 'Alī dispatched an army to subdue the Balqā' in 750 and that this may also account for some of the destruction (Northedge 1993:157).

[61] In his 1933 survey, Glueck identifies 18 out of 23 sites occupied during the Byzantine period as showing continued occupation in subsequent centuries (Glueck 1934). In his 1936-1938 survey, Glueck identified 83 sites as been inhabited during Byzantine times, 51 of these sites have evidence of "Medieval Arab" occupation (Glueck 1939). Of 23 identifiable Umayyad sites in the Ḥusbān survey, 22 of them show evidence of Byzantine occupation; while sites were abandoned few new ones were founded (La Bianca 1990:179, 216).

describes the transition from the Byzantine to the Umayyad period as being one of continuity rather than rapid change; structures were reused and new buildings were constructed in conformity with existing structures, this assessment was confirmed by successive excavators of the site (La Bianca 1990:215). King notes the continuity of settlement, from the Byzantine to Umayyad period, in villages on the edge of the desert (King 1983:385). King also notes a continuity of occupation in the desert castles and a continuing concern with utilizing irrigation systems for the cultivation of desert areas.[62]

Urban change in Byzantine and Umayyad Balqā'

The Kennedy Model, noted above, identifies changes in the character of early Islamic centres as part of a longer process which converted the classical *polis* into the medieval "Islamic" *medina;* this process apparently began in the mid-sixth century. What is often identified as the "Islamic city", with narrow, winding streets, was in fact a pre-Islamic development. This period of urban decline and urban change is attested to, by Kennedy, at Gerasa, 51 km north of 'Ammān. Here church construction, a sign of urban prosperity and civic integration, peaked in the period between 464 and 533, during which seven churches were erected. After that only two churches are attested to, one possibly erected in 565 and a small church erected in 611 by Bishop Genesius. The ancient temples of Gerasa were allowed to fall into ruin, the courtyard of the Temple of Artemis, in the centre of the old Roman city was turned into an industrial area and was utilized as a pottery workshop. The classical colonnaded streets were built over with a variety of structures; public baths used in the late-sixth century were considerably reduced in size

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[62] Qaṣr Mshāh, 16 km south-east of Qaṣr Kharānah, consists of a set of three walled compounds, with both Byzantine and Umayyad pottery; near this complex is an elaborate system to catch store and distribute water consisting of dams, barrages and catchment basins (King 1982:86-88, King 1983:391-392).

from when the city was at its height. For Kennedy, public life continued at Gerasa but on a considerably reduced scale (Kennedy 1985b:176-177).[63]

Archaeological research seems to support many of Kennedy's assertions regarding the character of urban settlements in late Byzantine Syria. Excavation conducted at Tall Ḥusbān indicates a peak in settlement in the period from 551-614 A.D.; after this date the site went into a period of decline during which the upkeep of the city's church was neglected and during which no new buildings were constructed (LaBianca 1990:178). Northedge feels that the Byzantine period was one of progressive decline; no new fortifications were built, seven churches, in the 'Ammān area, are thought to date to the Byzantine era, but many of the excavated churches were badly built (Northedge 1992:41, 59).

This change in the nature of Syrian urbanism fits well with what is known about Byzantine military arrangements in the sixth century and the empire's increasing reliance on Arab allies for defense and administrative purposes. As noted in Chapter One, few of the fortresses in the Byzantine *limes* remained in operation and Arab *foederati*, such as the Ghassānids, exercised power over the steppe lands as well as more settled areas.

Somewhat contrasting with this bleak picture from the centres of the Decapolis, was the situation at Mādabā, where the town apparently underwent a time of prosperity in the late sixth century and early seventh centuries. The churches of Mādabā and Mt Nebo,

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[63] The results of the 1928-1934 excavations of Jarash, cited by Kennedy, were published in Kraeling 1938. Kennedy offers a more detailed discussion of this process of urban decline for the city of Antioch, in present day south-western Turkey. For Kennedy's full description of sixth-century Antioch see 1985b:152-155; archaeological descriptions of the city can be found in Stillwell 1938, Stillwell 1942, Downey 1961 and Liebeschuetz 1972.

all with impressive mosaics, are comparatively late in date. Of some nine Christian monuments in the region, noted by Kennedy, the earliest dates to 578, while the latest was constructed in the early eighth century. Van Elderen, in an examination of the Byzantine churches of Jordan, notes that the large number of churches and the elaborate archways and mosaics indicates a large, wealthy Christian community (Van Elderen 1986:243).[64]

Mādabā's prosperity at this time was apparently based on agriculture, from the nearby fertile, dry-farmed fields, and on income from pilgrims visiting the nearby religious sites (Kennedy 1985b:178). As such, Mādabā is representative of the new successful towns dotting the Syrian countryside, towns whose success was based on successful relations with local cultivators, nomads and pilgrims. It seems then, that the Byzantine period as a whole was one of intensive settlement; various factors in the mid-sixth century transformed the classical cities of Syria (and the Balqā') into medieval agricultural centres like Mādabā. Such centres dominated the economic landscape of Syria, which, as noted above, was based primarily on agriculture and may have been undergoing a general demographic decline. Bert de Vries

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[64] In the Mādabā area there are remains of 14 churches which can be dated to the sixth-seventh centuries, Van Elderen notes five churches within the town itself: St George's Church, which contains the remains of the Mādabā Map; a basilica in the Salaytah district contains the remains of a mosaic floor; the residence of the Ghisan family contains the remnants of a mosaic floor from a late sixth century basilica; the Chapel of the Virgin Mary contains a mosaic floor dedicated in 661/662 which faces, across the Roman-Byzantine street, the Chapel of St Elianos built in 592. At Kfayr Abū Sarbut, a small village north of Mādabā, is a small basilica with mosaics of the late sixth century style, in addition to two other churches at the same site. Ma'in, a small village south west of Mādabā, has several churches and, on a nearby hill, is a small basilica. There are traces of mosaics in a number of villages near Mādabā, most of which are unstudied. At Mukhayyat are at least four Byzantine churches. Mt Nebo has a monastery complex with a large basilica which was rebuilt several times. Tell Masūh, 12km north of Mādabā and 6km east of Ḥusbān, has a large basilica with mosaics constructed in the mid-sixth century and repaired in the late sixth century (Van Elderen 1986:240-242).

differentiates rural towns of late antiquity, such as Umm al-Jimāl and Umm al-Raṣās, from those of the classical period. The former had the appearance of a mass of humble, indistinguishable buildings, with facilities for grain storage, cattle and private residence; even the local churches lacked a monumental character. Each quarter of a Transjordanian town of late antiquity would have its own unobtrusive church. Large monumental churches would be monastic in nature or else intended for pilgrims (de Vries 1988:223, 225-226). The mosaics of the Church of St. Stephen, at Umm al-Raṣās, dedicated in 756 and restored in 785, depict important cities from Palestine, Transjordan and Egypt.[65] The cities are shown with walls, towers and gates as well as one or two buildings within the city walls, which may be churches or civic structures (Piccirillo 1988:213, 229-230). While this mosaic dates to the 'Abbāsid period, MacAdam feels that it depicts Byzantine era cities (Northedge 1992:44). If this is indeed the case it is of note that such cities seem to resemble medieval walled towns rather than colonnaded classical cities. The mosaic at Umm al-Raṣās seems then to lend support to the Kennedy Model of pre-conquest urban transformation.

Continuity seems apparent between these late antique cities and those of the Umayyad era. The Arab conquest apparently altered neither the urban topography of the cities of the Balqā' nor their

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[65] Nine Transjordanian cities are portrayed in the St Stephen mosaics: Kastron Mefaa (Umm al-Raṣās), Philadelphia, Belemounta (Ma'īn), Aeropolis, Esbounta (Ḥusbān), Mādabā, Charachmoba (Karak), Limbon (unidentified) and Diblaton (unidentified), the monastery of Mt. Nebo is also mentioned, although it is not portrayed (Piccirrilo 1988:227). Of these representations, only Umm al-Raṣās contains an identifiable landmark, a watchtower (Piccirillo 1988:229). Unfortunately not enough is known, from literary or archaeological sources, to determine whether the representations are true portrayals or conventional depictions; Piccirillo feels that the monotonous similarity of most of these depictions indicates the latter (Piccirillo 1988:230). MacAdam, however, feels that there are enough differences in each representation to indicate that an attempt was actually being made at individual illustration (Northedge 1992:44).

function to any great extent. 'Ammān, Ḥusbān and Mādabā, the three classical municipal centres, all show evidence of uninterrupted Umayyad occupation.[66] Muqaddasī's description of tenth century 'Ammān is of a small agricultural centre with ties to the desert and, according to Northedge, a lower level of prosperity than in Umayyad times (as the Umayyad palace was by this time abandoned) (Northedge 1992:59-61).[67] It is possible that this humble city, noted by Muqaddasī, was the end result of a longer process of urban change; tenth century 'Ammān strongly resembles the rural centres, which the Kennedy Model identifies as the urban norm during late Byzantine times.

Umayyad pottery has been uncovered at both Ḥusbān and Mādabā; at the former site Umayyad pottery was found in association with Arabic *ostraca* (sherds with writing on them) and on the acropolis Umayyad occupation was built into the Byzantine church; the church

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[66] Northedge sees Islamic 'Ammān as a direct successor of the earlier classical city, which except for the addition of Christian monuments had changed little from the second century. It would appear that such amenities as the Umayyad Congregational Mosque and the Umayyad palace were simply added to the existing Byzantine city. Muqaddasī mentions both the Roman forum (the Circus of Solomon) and Qaṣr Jālūt (the Castle of Goliath). The latter has been identified as possibly the classical Temple of Hercules, indicating the continued existence of classical remains next to later Islamic structures. The identification of Qaṣr Jālūt as the Temple of Hercules was put forward by Zayadine. Northedge, however, feels, based on the archaeological evidence, that the Temple would not be visible to Muqaddasī in the tenth century; Qaṣr Jālūt would more likely be the abandoned Umayyad palace (Northedge 1992:60). Umayyad 'Ammān, like the earlier Byzantine city, covered both the 'Ammān Citadel and the valleys below; the centre of the city, both in Byzantine and Umayyad times, appears to have been at the juncture of the valleys, where is presently located the al-Ḥussaynī Mosque. This area was formerly the location of both the Umayyad Congregational Mosque and the Byzantine "Cathedral", both of which were dismantled at the turn of the century.

[67] Muqaddasī also describes 'Ammān, in the same passage, as "a harbour of the desert and a place of refuge for the bedouin Arabs" (Muqaddasī 1897:287, Le Strange 1890:392). An annual market day, the tenth of August, held for the benefits of the local rural inhabitants, is noted in the late ninth century 'Ammān, by the Nestorian writer Abū Zakariyyā' Yuḥannā (Gil 1992:211).

appears to have been abandoned before the Arab conquest and the Umayyad period marked a slight increase in prosperity for the city. At Mādabā, Umayyad pottery was found on the mosaic floors of several Byzantine churches, indicating a final date for the use of these structures (Sauer 1986:303, Geraty 1993:629). The representation of the Balqā' cities of 'Ammān, Ḥusbān, Mādabā, Ma'īn and Umm al-Raṣās in the mosaics of St. Stephen seems to indicate that these centres were in existence in the early 'Abbāsid period.[68] Piccirillo speculates that a "Mādabā school of mosaics", a collection of workshops and known artisans operating in the Mādabā region from the fourth to the eighth centuries, may have been responsible for a continuous artistic tradition, employing common artistic motifs, which culminated in the Umayyad period (Piccirillo 1993:1000). If this hypothesis is true then it is another indication of urban continuity between the two periods.

Outside of 'Ammān, however, there is little evidence of monumental construction in the urban centres of the Balqā'.[69] Northedge feels that by the seventh century Transjordan may have already been "over supplied" with churches and that its relatively small Muslim population would not have needed many mosques. It also seems possible that the Umayyad urban economy was relatively static; wealth was spent elsewhere in the Balqā', on desert residences for Umayyad officials (Northedge 1992:49-50). In a sense this transfer of wealth and influence from the urban centres of the Balqā' was a continuation of the earlier process whereby local political power passed into the hands of Byzantine officials.

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[68] Although it is possible that some of these cities were no longer large urban centres but were instead monastic communities or small villages.

[69] Piccirillo notes repairs to the mosaics of the Church of the Virgin Mary, in Mādabā, dating to 662 and at least four private residences with elaborate mosaic floors in the same town, dating from the early seventh century (Piccirillo 1993:997, 1000, Piccirillo 1986:333).

In the case of the Umayyads wealth and influence at least remained in the Balqā'.

The ethnic and religious composition of Umayyad Balqā'

Before the Arab-conquest the countryside of the Balqā' was dominated by a group of nomadic Arab tribes, the 'Āmilah, the Balī, the Judhām and the Lakhm. All these tribes were Byzantine allies who opposed the Muslims at Mu'tah. The Banū Irāshah section of the Balī tribe, according to Ibn Hishām, lived in the Balqā' (Ibn Hishām 1955:678, Donner 1980:103). The 'Āmilah dwelled south-east of the Dead Sea (Donner locates this tribe in the Balqā'). After the conquest this tribe lost importance and was eventually absorbed by the Banū Judhām (Lammens 1960:436, Donner 1980:107). The Judhām dominated the area from the northern Ḥijaz to the Balqā'; they occupied the area around 'Ammān. The Judhām claimed common Yemenī descent with the 'Āmilah and the Lakhm tribes and in fact at the time of the Arab conquest these three tribes were allied. The Lakhm had been already partially absorbed; despite the tribe's prestigious name, associated with the Lakhmid *phylarchate*, they were already fighting under Judhām banners and Judhām command. Both the Judhām and the Lakhm were superficially Christian, although Ibn al-Kalbī identifies some of the former as idol worshippers (Bosworth 1965: 573, Lammens 1986:632, Donner 1980:105).

After the Arab conquest the Judhām converted to Islam and dominated the area; the Judhām were one of the mainstays of the Umayyad regime, along with the Kalb (Bosworth 1965:573). As noted in an earlier chapter, the desert estates may have been partially intended to facilitate diplomatic communications between the Umayyads and their Judhām supporters. These nomadic Arab tribesmen, possessors of political and military power, made up an important section of the Balqā' populace. But it unlikely that the conquest brought a massive influx of nomadic tribes; the dominant Judhām tribe were already resident in the Balqā' and the small number of mosques, datable to the Umayyad period, indicate a

smaller Muslim population than one would expect with a large influx of Muslim Arab tribes.

But there is evidence that Arabs were already, before the conquest, dwelling within the towns of the Balqā'. Shahid notes the Arab character of the Balqā' region; with the exception of the inhabitants of the cities of Decapolis, those who dwelt within the Province of Arabia were descendants of the Nabataeans, identified by many as being Arabs.[70] Shahid feels that archaeological evidence supports his assertion of the Arab character of the region, including some of the urban centres. He notes the presence of Arabic grave inscriptions. The mosaic floor of the Church of

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[70] The ethnic identity of the Nabataeans is masked by their use of Christian and Graeco-Roman names. Some scholars, such as Glueck, have identified the Nabataeans as Aramaic speakers; he feels that by the time they were a historically identifiable group, in the middle of the first millennium B.C., they had already abandoned proto-Arabic (Glueck 1965:7). Shahid identifies a total of nine separate Arab groups, including the Palmyreans and the Nabataeans, who established themselves in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria and Jordan from the third century B.C. on. These groups have often not been identified as Arabs; ancient authors would identify these groups by name rather than as members of a larger Arab entity (Shahid 1984:3-6). These various Arab groups were subjected to various degrees of Aramaicization, Judaization, Hellenization and Romanization, the latter process was especially pronounced after the extension of citizenship to all free inhabitants of the empire in 212 A.D. Some of these groups, such as the Idumaeans, who inhabited the Negev and converted to Judaism (Herod the Great was an Idumaean), would have almost totally lost their Arab identity (Shahid 1984:8,13). The Nabataeans retained a much greater degree of Arab culture; in the fourth century Arabic is attested to in pagan liturgy. Shahid feels that like the Jews, the Nabataeans did not lose their cultural identity when they adopted Aramaic. In fact, he feels that the Nabataeans, who only adopted Aramaic for monumental inscriptions and for diplomatic and trade purposes and retained Arabic for daily use, would have been even more likely than the Jews to retain a large degree of their cultural identity (Shahid 1984:9). Justinian refers to the Province of Arabia as "the country of the Arabs" and indeed the name of the province, assigned in 106 A.D., must reflect a Roman awareness of the identity of the area's inhabitants (Shahid 1984:15). Salibi feels that large parts of Syria, including towns, had long been Arabized before the conquest (Salibi 1977:18).

St. George, in the town of Nebo, datable to the first half of the fifth century, has an Arabic inscription which reads "bi-salām". At Umm al-Raṣās, Arab benefactors are depicted in the mosaics of the sixth century church of Bishop Sergius (Shahid 1989:322-323, Saller 1949:171-172).

Piccirillo agrees on the Arab character of the Balqā' including its urban centres; based on the character of the inscriptions of the area, he feels that the vast majority of the population of the region, in Byzantine times, was of Arab origin (Piccirillo 1985:259). He notes that al-Bakrī, an Arab geographer, knew of the Arab character of Umm al-Raṣās in pre-Islamic times (Shahid 1989:323). Shahid cites Ernst Knauf, who notes that an Arab tribe, the Banū 'Amr, lived in the town of Mādabā as early as the second century B.C.; Semitic and Arabic elements were apparently strong in this city, going as far back as Biblical times (Knauf 1984:584, Shahid 1989:325). There was probably even an Arab presence in 'Ammān, a "Hellenized" Decapolis city. Note has already been made of the Judhām governor of 'Ammān, crucified for converting to Islam, but other Arabs were found among the elite of urban society.[71] Of note is the historian Malchus, from Philadelphia, who achieved a great deal of notoriety in the late fifth and early sixth century; his name is a transliteration of either *malik* (the Semitic word for king) or the Arab name Mālik

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[71] If Farwah ibn 'Amr al-Judhāmī was indeed the governor 'Ammān, then this may merely indicate a close relationship between the nomadic Arabs of the Balqā' and the urban centres; an Arab governor need not imply an Arab population for 'Ammān.

(Northedege 1992:44).[72] The fact that he retained his name may indicate that he continued to be familiar with the Arabic language.

It is not clear what happened to the indigenous Arab sedentary population after the conquest. Political power passed to the Umayyad family and their tribal supporters, although it is likely that some of the Arabs living in urban centres, such as 'Ammān, would have been given administrative positions, in a similar manner to the situation in Damascus, where the Arab Sarjūn ibn Manṣūr continued in his post after the city fell to the Arabs. Certainly the local church hierarchy, an important component of the Byzantine social and bureaucratic machinery, and according to Piccirillo's analysis of available inscriptions already largely Arab, continued to function relatively intact during the Umayyad period (Piccirillo 1982:292).[73] Conversion to Islam was apparently slow; Schick feels that the archaeological and literary evidence points to the vast majority of the population of Palestine and Transjordan having remained Christian (Schick 1988:221). If conditions in Transjordan were at all like those in Egypt, where the ruling Muslim elite provided little incentive for the native population to convert,

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[72] Given the Semitic nature of his name Malchus is unlikely to have come from the Lydian or Egyptian cities of Philadelphia and as a proper name Mālik seems a more likely transliteration of Malchus than the title *malik*, which could be either Aramaic or Arabic; Malchus seems likely then to have been an Arab. Despite his background, Malchus was quite hostile towards the Arab *phylarchs*; he was a completely assimilated Roman citizen, who saw politically powerful outsiders as a threat to the empire (Shahid 1989:103).

[73] After the conquest, Philadelphia apparently still had a bishop; in 649 Pope Martin I sent letters to a number of eastern dioceses, including one to Bishop John of Philadelphia (Northedege 1992:43). Pope Martin apparently authorized Bishop John to reorganize the church hierarchy of the region. Bishop Theodore of Esbus was also sent a letter by Pope Martin (Piccirillo 1984:340). The last reference to Christianity in Ḥusbān is from the middle of the seventh century and notes the heretical views of Bishop Theodore of Esbus (Russell 1985b:27). The last known Bishop of Mādabā, who paved the floor of the Church of the Virgin Mary in Mādabā in 662/663, is Bishop Theophanes (Piccirillo 1984:340).

then it is likely that the local Christians in the Balqā' retained their faith until at least the 'Abbasid period (Lapidus 1972:249-250). Only one congregational mosque has been found in the Balqā', that of 'Ammān; only two churches, in Transjordan, were apparently converted into mosques, those at Samah and Umm al-Surab (King 1983b). Many churches, however, were either built or renovated in the Balqā' during the Umayyad period.[74] The Church of St. Stephen at Umm al-Raṣās dedicated in 756 and restored in 785 is of particular note (Piccirillo 1988:213). This latter church indicates that the Christian community of the Balqā' still had the resources at the end of the Umayyad period to undertake the construction and decoration of a monumental structure.

Besides Muslim and Christian Arabs, others may have dwelt in the Balqā' during the Umayyad period. Balādhurī mentions Persian merchants residing at Ba'labakk; it is possible that such Persians, settling in Syria in the wake of the Persian conquest may have also resided in the Balqā' (Balādhurī 1966:198). A small Jewish community may have also been resident in the Balqā'; Ibn 'Asākir mentions a Jew named Yaḥyā ibn Irmiyā, who with two Umayyad supporters, led a small rebellion against the 'Abbāsids around the year 800. Ibn 'Asākir describes Yaḥyā as coming "from the Jews living in Balqā'", indicating that there was still a Jewish community in the area (Ibn 'Asākir 1951b:267, Gil 1992:171). The term Balqā' can have a wider meaning, as noted earlier, and a Jewish community is attested to at Udruḥ, in southern Transjordan, at the time of the Arab conquest (Peake 1958:48). However, a number of Jews are attested to in 'Ammān in the tenth and eleventh centuries, so a continuous Jewish presence in the area is quite

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[74] The church on the acropolis of Ma'īn was built and decorated with mosaics in 719/20 (Piccirillo 1984:334); Geraty, however, dates this church to 394 (Geraty 1986:42). One of the two churches at al-Quwaysmah, a suburb of modern 'Ammān, had its foundations and mosaics restored after the earthquake of 717 (Piccirillo 1984:335, Northedge 1992:42). The mosaic floor of the Church of the Virgin Mary was restored in 662 (Piccirillo 1984:339, Piccirillo 1982, 419).

probable. In a letter of the Cairo Geniza from about 1020, written by Solomon ben Judah to Abraham ben Sahlān, who was residing in Fustat, mention is made of a Jewish merchant, Isaac of Wādī'l-Qurā, who had abandoned his wife and family in 'Ammān. In the middle of the eleventh century a Geniza letter notes a Maghribi merchant travelling to 'Ammān for personal or business matters; his father-in-law is identified as Yaḥyā al-'Ammānī (Gil 1992:211).

Conclusion: Continuity and Change in Umayyad Balqā'

It can probably be concluded that the available primary and archaeological sources do not allow a complete reconstruction of the historical, economic and social character of Umayyad Balqā'. However, enough details are apparent to allow for the identification of some of the transformation processes the region underwent as it passed from Byzantine to Umayyad control. Similarities and differences between Byzantine and Umayyad Balqā' are notable, even if a more complete picture of the area's history remains elusive. During the Umayyad period the Balqā' region underwent a variety of changes, while retaining a degree of continuity with the previous period of Byzantine control. Processes of change are most visible in the area of political and administrative practices; the economic and demographic spheres are marked by a much greater degree of continuity. However, this division is a not a clear-cut one. Umayyad political institutions showed some continuity with previous Byzantine practices, while the Balqā' exhibited some economic and demographic change after the Arab conquest. Also, changes occurring during this period were sometimes the culmination of earlier trends. It must be kept in mind that a full description of the transformation processes the region underwent is probably beyond the grasp of the available written and archaeological sources.

In examining the economic and social aspects of Umayyad Balqā' a trend of continuity with the previous Byzantine period is very evident. In economic matters the Byzantine and Umayyad periods can be treated as a single entity. Agriculture remained the basis of economic wealth in the region, although there were some changes in land tenure and taxation systems. The shift from an intensive form of farming to a more varied form of agriculture involving cereal production and herding had probably already begun in the Byzantine period. Demographic decline, prompted by earthquakes, plaque and war, was also a long term process, which had started in the mid-sixth century. Urban change in the Balqā' also had its origin in the century previous to the Arab conquest. The classical *polis*,

with its amenities, its broad colonnaded streets, its monuments and its civic government, had been replaced by a new type of medieval town. This new form of town was unassuming, with walls, gates and numerous small churches replacing the more impressive architecture of earlier times. The towns of the late Byzantine and Umayyad eras were rural centres whose wealth and influence depended on strong relationships with the local peasantry and nomadic tribesmen; in the Balqā' the cities of 'Ammān, Ḥusbān and Mādabā fit this new urban pattern.

The ethnic and religious composition of the Balqā' changed little with the coming of conquering Arab armies. Here too can be seen a trend of continuity; on an ethnic and religious level, the population of Umayyad Balqā' resembled that of Byzantine Balqā' and would continue to do so into the 'Abbāsid period. The conquest did not even really encourage much conversion to Islam. Some of the conquering Arabs, including members of the Umayyad dynasty, stayed on, to become part of a ruling elite. But the indigenous population also took part in the running of the district; the dominant Arab tribes of the area, the Judhām and their allies, had been in the Balqā' before the conquest. The local church hierarchy, made up for the most part of Arabs, remained intact. Town dwellers and the rural peasantry were most likely Arabic speaking, descendants of the ancient Nabataeans and recently sedentarized bedouin. The religion of the majority of the Balqā's inhabitants, outside the Umayyad elite, remained Christianity, although small Jewish and Persian communities were probably present.

While economic and demographic continuity is very much in evidence between Byzantine and Umayyad Balqā', the Arab conquest produced several notable changes in the political circumstances effecting the region. The previous period of the Persian occupation had produced few, if any, changes which had a lasting effect on Umayyad Balqā', beyond making the Arab conquest easier. The latter invasion was responsible for very little in the way of physical devastation. But the conquest clearly replaced the

previous Byzantine administration with one run by an Arab dynasty based in the nearby city of Damascus. The Byzantine provincial and civic administration, as well as the imperial military machinery, was removed. This is not to say that there was no continuity between Byzantine institutions and those of the Umayyad period. Some aspects of the administrative system under which the Balqā' was run show signs of continuity with practices of the previous Byzantine era. Note has been made of the Byzantine *themata* system and its possible influence on the Umayyad *jund* system, but even if this connection turns out to be a false one, it seems clear that Umayyad administrators did not start from scratch. Many local administrative staff no doubt retained their positions under a new set of masters. The Balqā' was not unfamiliar with political control being in the hands of bedouin tribes; the Ghassānids had in the previous century exercised military and political control over the region and on the eve of the conquest a Judhām may have been governor at 'Ammān.

But the coming of Muslim Arab armies marked the high point of the long process whereby political power passed from the imperial civil and military bureaucracy to be localized in Syria and even within the Balqā' itself. Roman Arabia had been very much a province, with political decisions and military strength coming from outside the region. Despite their wealth, status and military power, the Ghassānids and their tribal successors had not totally changed this situation; Arabia remained peripheral to the main political structures of the Byzantine empire and a dichotomy, albeit a lessening one, continued to exist between the desert, controlled by Arab tribes, and the sown, controlled by imperial officials. In removing the Byzantines from the political equation of the area, the conquering Arabs finished a process begun by the Ghassānids; Arab political power, long dominant on the margins of settled territory was now recognized in the cities, which were already settled in the main by Arabs. A single political reality now existed in the cities, the rural villages and the steppelands of the Balqā'. This is not to say that decisions affecting the

Balqā' were necessarily made by its inhabitants, but those who made these decisions, the Umayyad elite, often chose to dwell in the Balqā' and some of the decisions they made would shape a wider world, far beyond the region's borders.

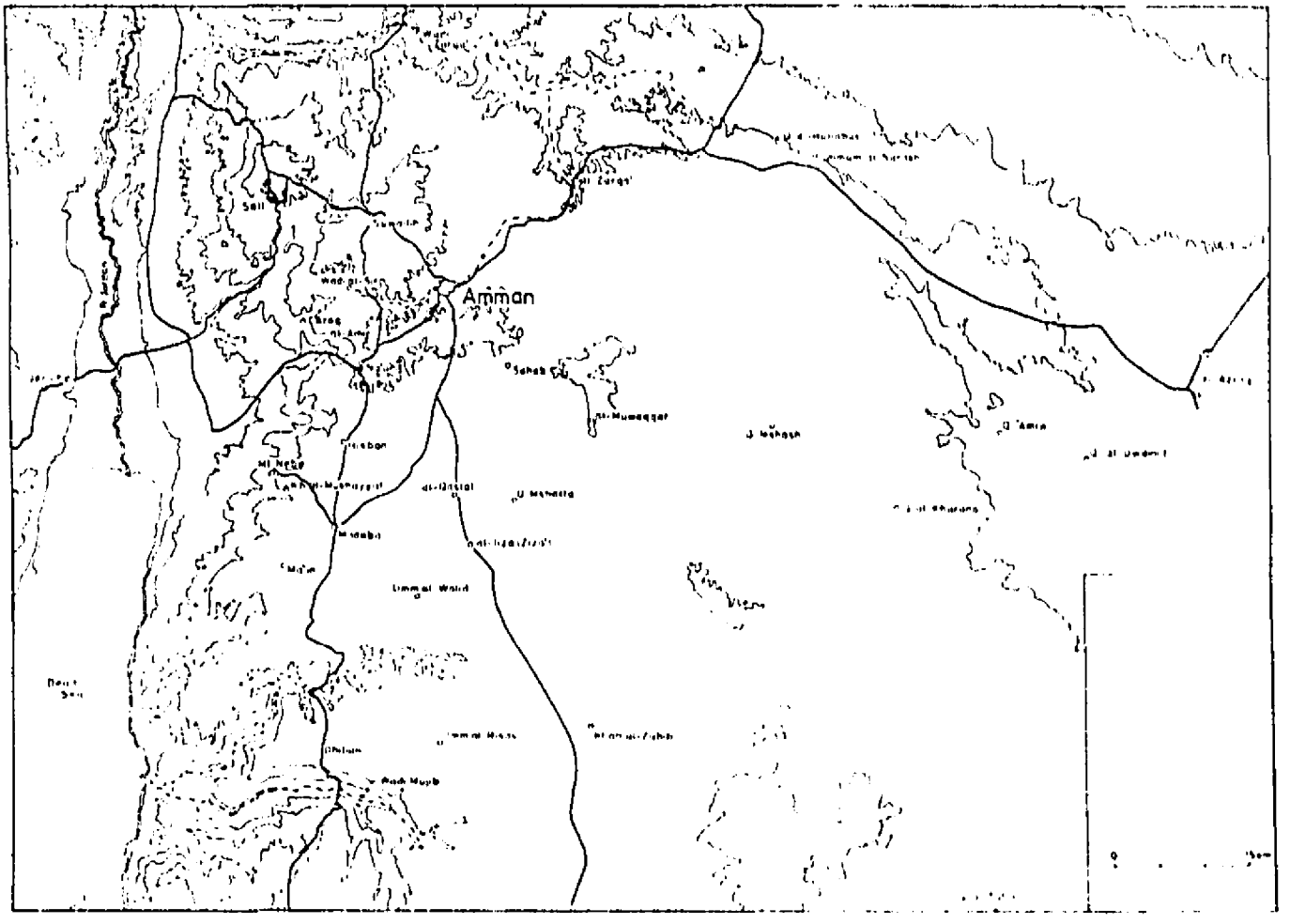

Figure 1: Map of Balqā' (after Northedge 1992:Plate 6)

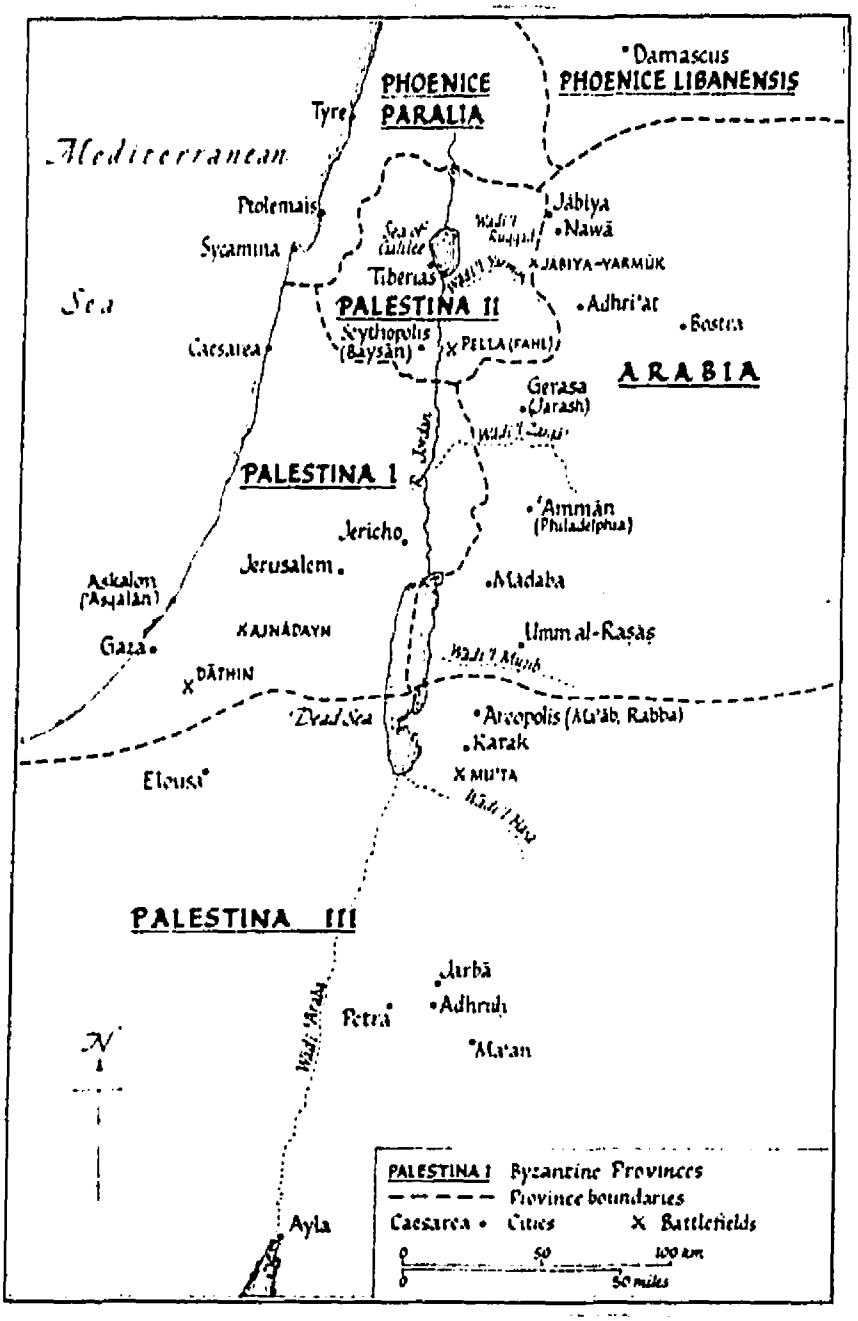

Figure 2: Map of Byzantine provinces (after Kaegi 1992:48)

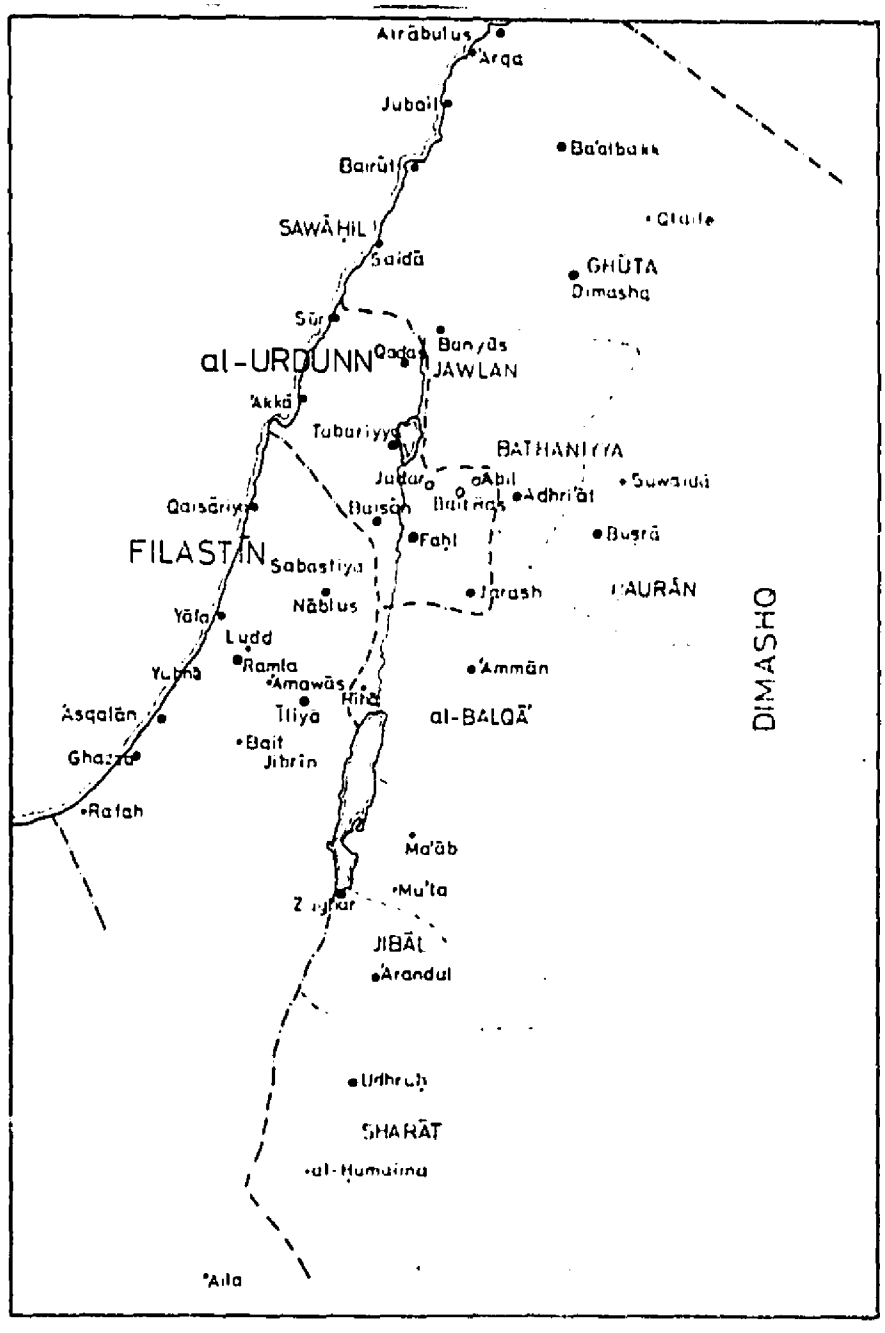

Figure 3: Map of Umayyad *ajnād*, based on Ya'qūbī (after Northedge 1992: Plate 11)

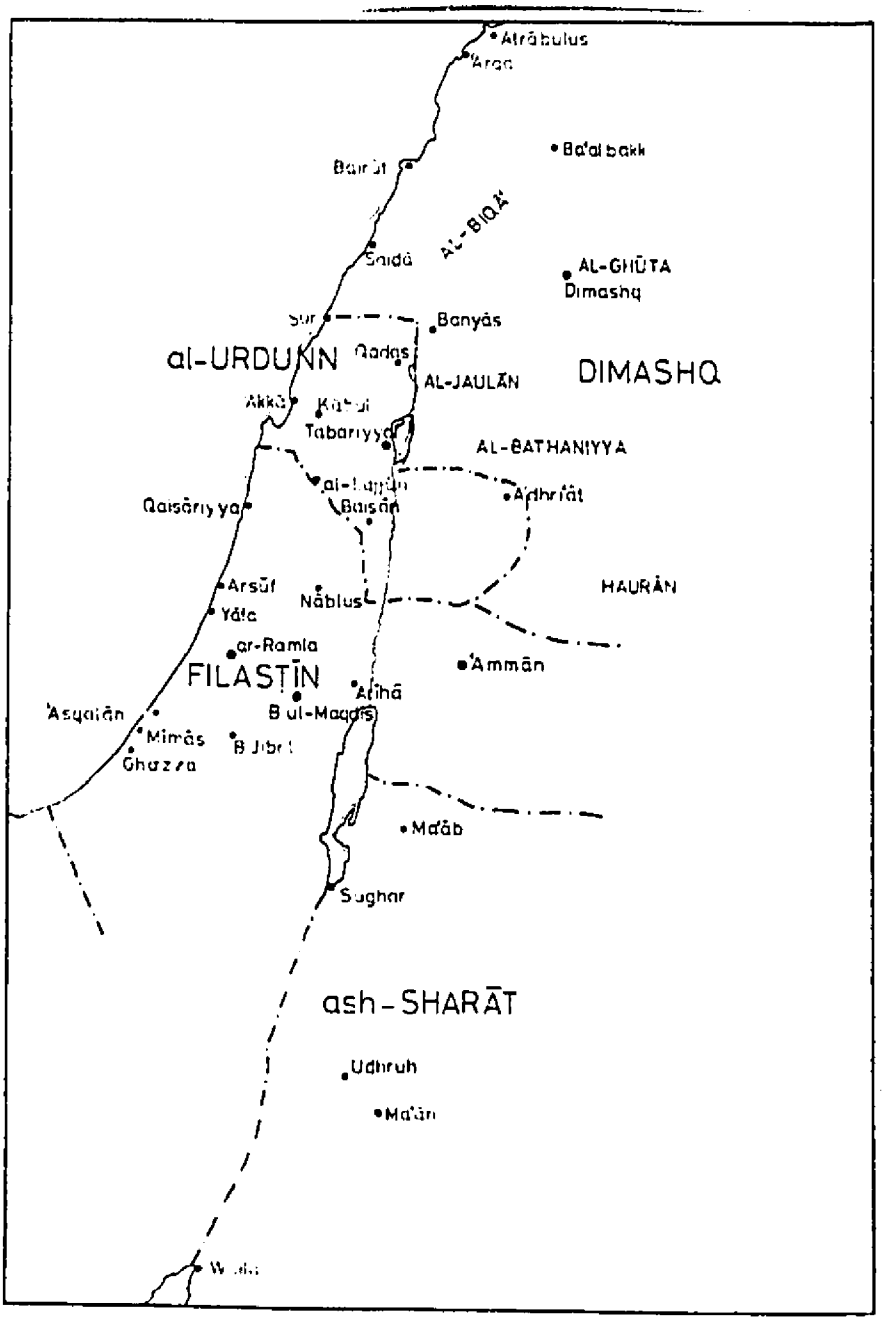

Figure 4: Map of Umayyad *ajnād*, based on Muqaddasī (after Northedge 1992: Plate 12)

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List of Abbreviations

ADAJ = *The Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*

AASOR = *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*

AJOS = *The Archaeology of Jordan and other Studies* (*AJOS*), ed. L.T. Geraty and L.G. Herr. Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1986.

BA = *Biblical Archaeology*

BASOR = *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*

EI 1 = *Encyclopaedia of Islam: First Edition*, 4 vols, ed. M.T. Houtsma et al. Leiden, 1919-1934.

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FICHBSU = *The Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilad al-Sham during the Umayyad Period*, Ed. M. Bakhit and R. Schick. Amman, 1989.

IME = *The Islamic Middle East 700-1900: Studies in Economic and Social History*, ed. A. Udovitch, Princeton, 1981.

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PSHBSEI = *Proceedings of the Second Symposium on the History of Bilad al-Sham during the Early Islamic period up to 40 AH/ 640 AD, The Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilad al-Sham, 1985*, ed. M. Bakhit. Amman, 1987,

RB = *Revue Biblique*

SHAJ = *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, 4 vols, ed. A. Hadidi et al. 1982-1992.

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