An Archaeological Assessment of Six Cities in al-Urdun:
From the Fourth Century to the Mid-Eighth Century A.D.

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a contribution to the field of Islamic archaeology. Six cities in al-Urdun were studied in terms of a specific material culture remain—architecture which leads to the determination of the city plan. The six sites were cities, excluding Beit Rās, before the Roman conquest; they became members of the Decapolis league following that. They continued to be urban centres following the coming of Islam. The cities are: Fiḥl (Pella), Jarash (Gerasa), ‘Ammān (Philadelphia), Jadjar (Gadara), Abīl (Abila) and Beit Rās (Capitolias). Chapter I introduces the thesis and defines the research methodology. The archaeological records of these cities are the primary sources and are analyzed in Chapter II. This was an analytical interpretative process, which meant the re-assessment of the archaeological data.

The archaeological analysis attested to similar occupational sequences at the six sites following a destruction in the late fourth century A.D. As the significance and topic of this thesis is the nature of the cities during the early seventh to mid-eighth centuries A.D. and how they developed from the Roman phase, concentration has been placed on a re-analysis of the period between the late fourth century A.D. earthquake destruction and that of the mid-eighth century A.D. Consequently, as part of the proposed model of interpretation the re-phasing and synchronizing of the sites is defined in four phases. The occupational phases are delimited by earthquake destructions.
Phase I is a transitional one following the late fourth century A.D. earthquake. Phase II, during which was the revival of the cities under the Byzantines in the fifth century, is separated from Phase III by the mid-sixth century earthquake. The end of Phase III was a series of earthquakes which occurred before and after the advent of Islam. Phase IV extended between the early seventh and mid-eighth centuries A.D.; the cities were rebuilt during this period.

The model of interpretation is built on a hypothesis of gradual cultural change. Cultural changes are related to political, economic and social changes but not mechanically. The model excludes sudden changes in material culture remains in relation to political, economic and social changes. The model covers a period of four centuries of the occupational history in the six cities, which was rich in such changes in addition to natural changes. In the case of the six cities studied, they offer an ideal situation to investigate architectural development as material culture. These cities can be considered as six case studies to be analyzed in order to follow the architectural development.

Following the advent of Islam, the six cities being studied can be identified as "Islamic cities". i.e., they were controlled by Muslims. The coming of the Muslims was preceded and accompanied by a series of earthquakes which destroyed the cities and required extensive reconstructions and renovations during Phase IV. Chapter III is a discussion
of the "Islamic city" and its predecessors, the classical cities. The discussion depends on the archaeological analysis of Chapter II, attesting to the fact that the coming of Islam only precipitated a new phase in the development process of the cities. Contrary to what most scholars propose, this research proved that it is not possible to rely on architecture to determine the Islamic identity of cities.