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Urbanism at Scythopolis–Bet Shean in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries

YORAM TSAFRIR AND GIDEON FOERSTER

I. INTRODUCTION

This study discusses some aspects of the urbanism of Scythopolis from the Byzantine period to the Islamic conquest (ca. 640 C.E.) and in the early Islamic period.¹ This introductory section briefly describes the origins and early history of the city and its setting in the Roman period in order to provide a general background for the study of the history and archaeology of Byzantine Scythopolis. During the period under discussion, Scythopolis did not experience destruction as a result of war or conquest, yet there

This article is based on a lecture delivered by Yoram Tsafrir at the 1995 Byzantine Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks. The material under discussion derives from the excavations of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem at Bet Shean, directed by Gideon Foerster and Yoram Tsafrir during the years 1980–81 and 1986–96 as part of the large archaeological project of Bet Shean, on behalf of the Ministry of Tourism, the National Park Authority, the Jewish National Fund, the Israel Antiquities Authority, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The maps and plans in this article were prepared by Benny Arubas; the photographs are by Gabi Laron. The members of the archaeological team and area supervisors who participated in these excavations are too numerous for us to mention all of them by name. The permanent members of the team are B. Arubas, surveying and archaeology; G. Laron, photography; S. Hadad, ceramics and glass; S. Agadi, computing; M. Drewes, architectural fragments and reconstructions; N. Amitai-Preiss and Y. Yanai, numismatics; E. Khamis, metals and registration of finds; L. Di Segni, epigraphy; and L. Kirilov, drawing. Among the area supervisors and researchers who worked in the dig, we mention the permanent team and those who participated for long periods: M. Arazi, Y. Arbel, E. Assaf, M. Avissar, W. Daud, H. Goldfus, S. Hadad, O. Moran, S. Nahari, O. Ron, G. Shelah, A. Shugar, I. Vitelson, and Y. Yanai. The Beracha Foundation has assisted the research toward final publication. To these and to those whom we could not mention by name, we owe many thanks. We should also like to express our gratitude to the two anonymous peer reviewers of this article, who made helpful suggestions for its improvement.

¹The term *Byzantine period* is used in this article to define the period between the mid-4th century and the Muslim conquest of Palestine in ca. 640 C.E. We prefer *Byzantine* to *late antique* (which is used today by many scholars), as the latter term seems too general and based on social and cultural criteria, and thus less appropriate as a chronological definition. The term *late antique* is perhaps inevitable if one attempts a synoptic historical survey of the whole Mediterranean world (e.g., A. Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395–600* [London, 1993]), but is less appropriate when a survey of a particular region is under discussion. In using the term *Byzantine* we continue an old tradition used by archaeologists and historians of Palestine, Arabia, and Syria, who have found the term *Byzantine* a practical code of classification for pottery, architecture, and the period itself. See also, for similar difficulties of nomenclature and in favor of the use of the term *Byzantine*, E. Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 1–3. However, one must view the 4th century as a transitional period in which no clear distinction between the Roman and the Byzantine eras can be drawn.

were many changes caused and influenced by political, religious, and social processes. Many of the archaeological features and social and cultural characteristics of Byzantine Scythopolis must be examined in the framework of its Roman origins, in which one finds both continuity and innovation.

At the beginning of the fifth century C.E. the city of Scythopolis was chosen as the metropolis of the newly founded province of Palaestina Secunda (Fig. A).² This choice expressed official recognition of the position of Scythopolis as the most important city in northern Palestine, whose riches and grandeur since the Roman period were based on its natural advantages. The site of Bet Shean had attracted settlers and the attention of the country's rulers since early times. The city is situated in the middle of a very fertile agricultural valley with an abundance of water. There are several springs in its vicinity; some of them are rather saline, but others yield fresh drinking water.³ The abundance of water and fertile land inspired Resh Lakish, one of the leading Jewish sages in third-century Palestine, to say that “Paradise if it is in Eretz Israel [the Land of Israel], its gate is Beth Shean.”⁴ The perennial river of Nahal Ḥarod and its tributary, Nahal ‘Amal, irrigate the region and the city. The site was situated near the junction of two important roads, one running via the Jezreel Valley from the coast (and from Egypt) to Syria and Mesopotamia, the other leading from Syria to Jerusalem along the Jordan Valley (Fig. B). The Canaanite and biblical tell of Bet Shean was located above the junction of Nahal Harod and Nahal ‘Amal, protected by steep slopes on the north, south, and east.⁵

Bet Shean was founded as a Hellenistic town in the first half of the third century B.C.E., probably under Ptolemy II Philadelphus.⁶ The town gained the status of *polis* perhaps a century later under the Seleucids. The name of the new town was Nysa-Scythopolis. The question of the origin of the unique name Scythopolis has not yet been solved.⁷ In the Roman period the name Nysa was explained by a local tradition, which found its way into the writings of Pliny and Solinus, that the city was founded by the god

²The exact date of the division of Palestine into three provinces is unknown. The *terminus ante quem* for the foundation of Palaestina Secunda is the edict of 409 C.E. (*CTh* 7.4.30), which mentions the three Palestines. For further discussion, see below, note 110.

³T. Tsuk, “The Water Sources,” in R. Bar-Nathan et al., *Guidebook to the Antiquities of Bet Shean (Scythopolis)*, in press. The author counts at least four main aqueducts from four different sources that brought a large amount of water to the city in the Roman and Byzantine periods. Three of the aqueducts were each some 5 km long, and the fourth was about 13 km long. It is significant that no cistern or water reservoir of the Roman-Byzantine period was found; rather, the main problem became the maintenance of an adequate drainage system to conduct waste water and winter floods out of the city toward the Jordan Valley.

⁴Bab. Talmud, *Erubin* 19a.

⁵See, in brief, on Bet Shean in the 2nd and 1st millennia B.C.E., A. Mazar, “Beth-Shean,” in *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern, 4 vols. (Jerusalem, 1993), I, 214–23, hereafter *NEAEHL*.

⁶For the early history of Bet Shean and its history in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, see, for example, M. Avi-Yonah, “Scythopolis,” *IEJ* 12 (1962), 123–34; B. Lifschitz, “Scythopolis: L'histoire, les institutions et les cultes de la ville à l'époque hellénistique et impériale,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase, II.8 (Berlin-New York, 1977), 262–94; G. Fuks, *Scythopolis: A Greek City in Eretz Israel* (Jerusalem, 1983; in Hebrew). For a general list of the sources and bibliography, see Y. Tsafir, L. Di Segni, and J. Green, *Tabula Imperii Romani, Iudea-Palaestina: Maps and Gazetteer* (Jerusalem, 1994), 223–25, hereafter Tsafir, Di Segni, and Green, *TIR*.

⁷See discussions of the name by Avi-Yonah, “Scythopolis,” 124–27; Fuks, *Scythopolis*, 160–65; K. J. Rigsby, “Seleucid Notes,” *TAPA* 110 (1980), 238–42, in favor of the interpretation that the city was originally named Nysa after the daughter of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV, while establishing Scythopolis as a *polis*.



Fig. A Map of the provinces of Palestine and Arabia in the sixth century (after Tsafir, Di Segni, and Green, *TIR*, fig. 4)

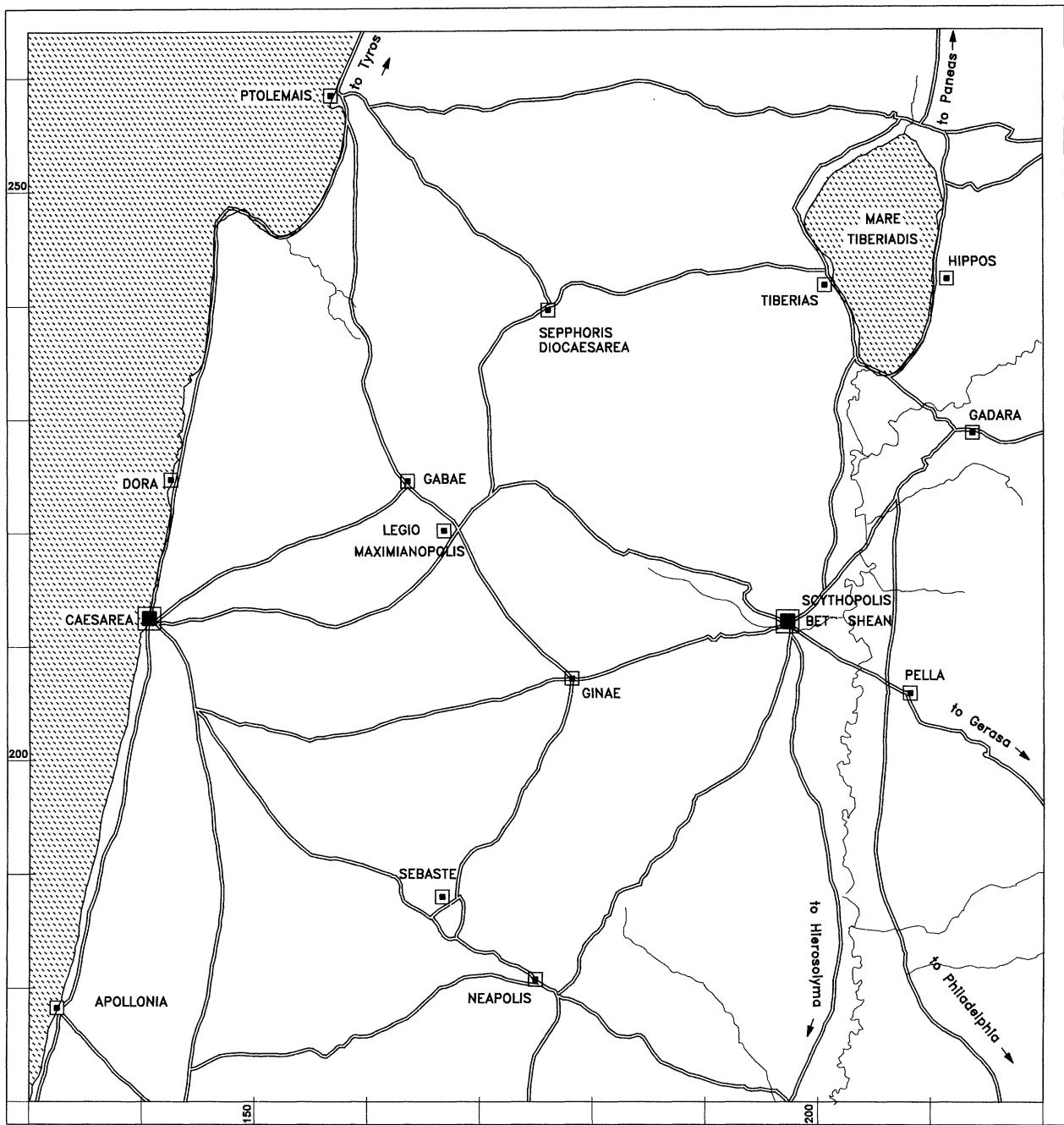


Fig. B The Roman roads to Scythopolis (after Tsafir, Di Segni, and Green, *TIR*, map of northern Palestine; roads drawn by I. Roll)

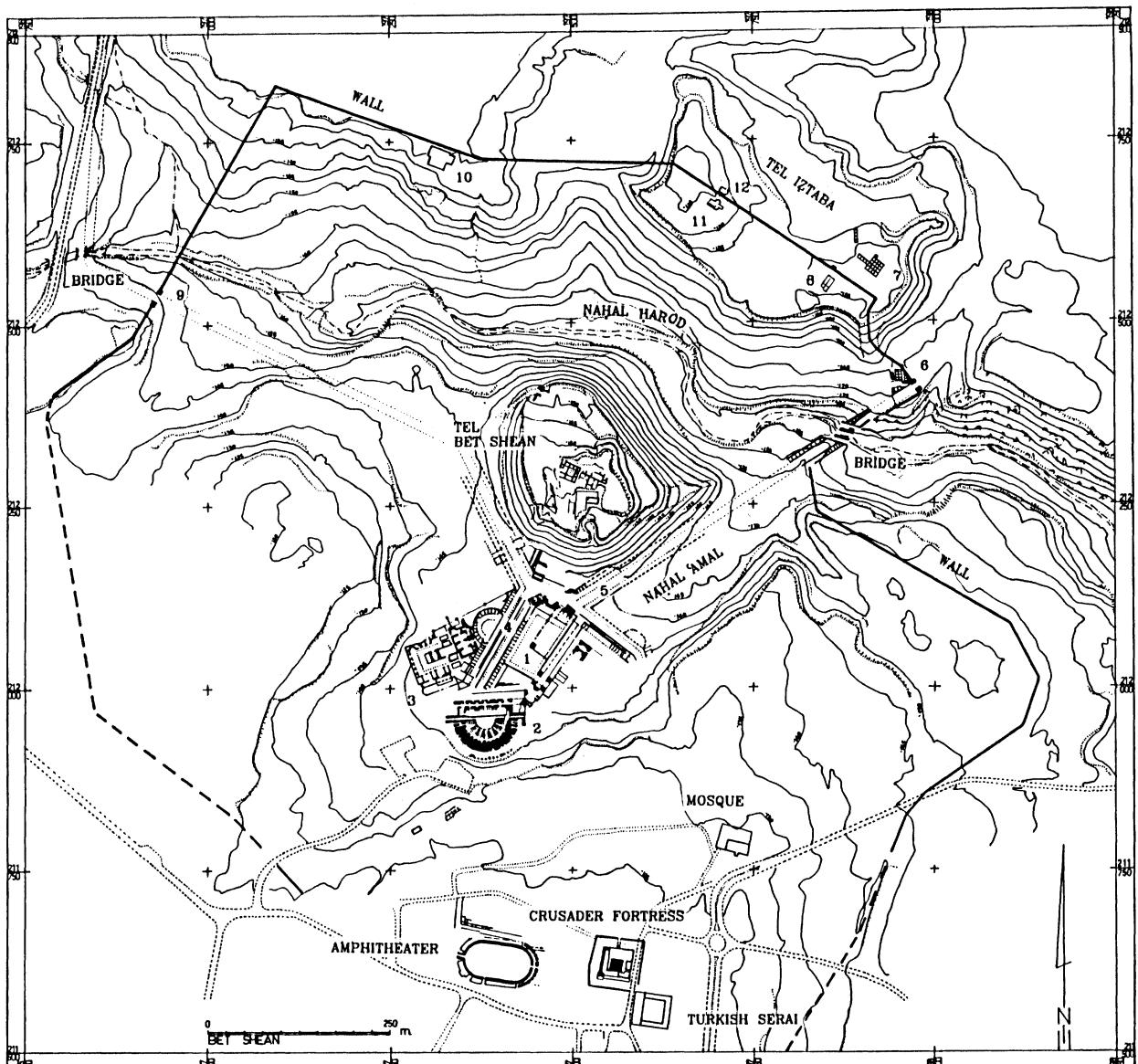


Fig. C General map of Scythopolis–Bet Shean

- 1. Civic center
- 2. Theater
- 3. Western bathhouse
- 4. Palladius Street
- 5. Valley Street
- 6. Northeast gate and Byzantine bazaar
- 7. Hellenistic quarter on Tel Iztaba
- 8. Hellenistic building
- 9. Northwest gate
- 10. Monastery of the Lady Mary
- 11. Church of the Martyr
- 12. Andreas' Church

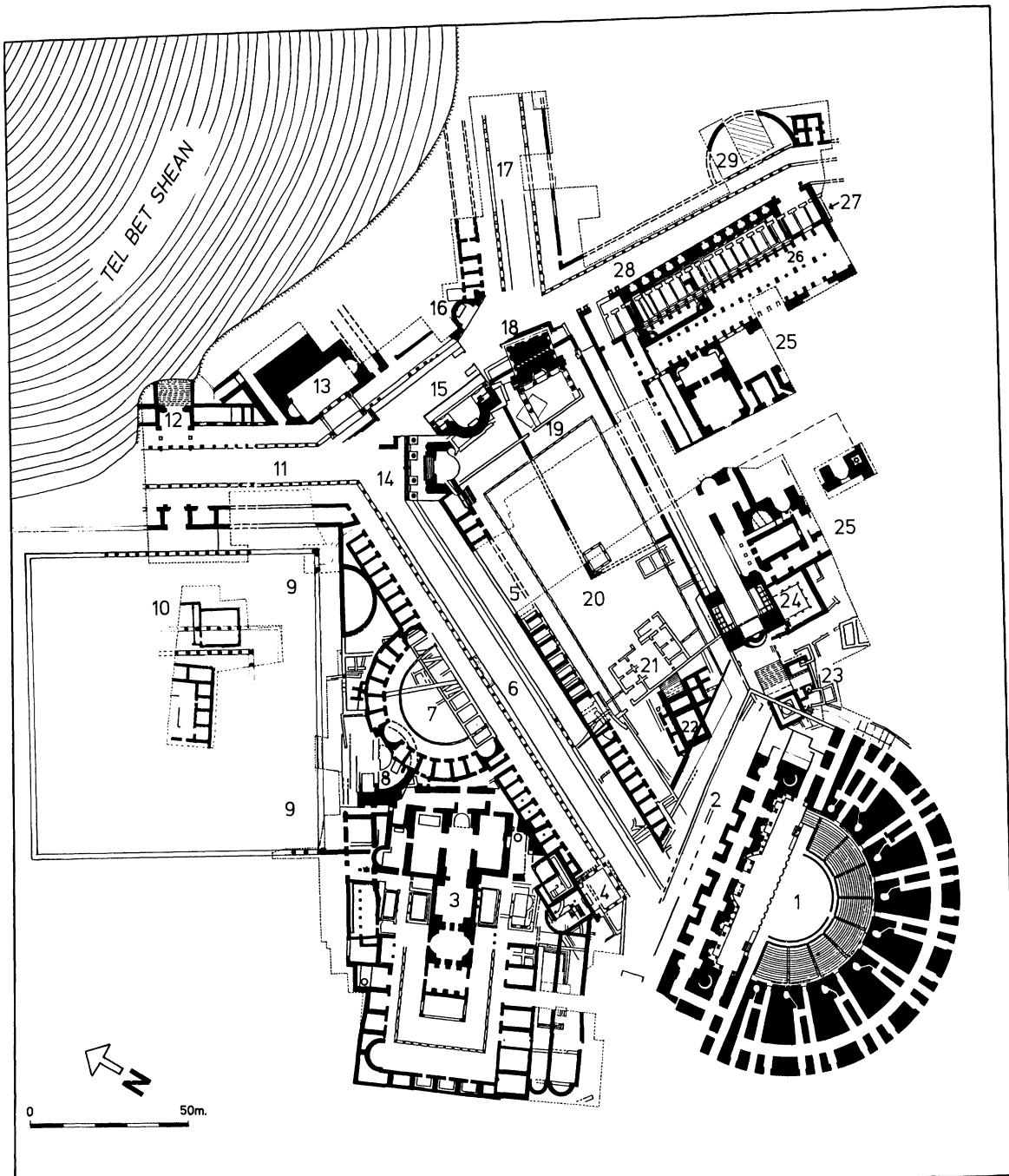


Fig. D Map of the central area of Scythopolis–Bet Shean (excavations of the Hebrew University and the Israel Antiquities Authority)

- 1. Theater
- 2. Portico in front of the theater
- 3. Western bathhouse
- 4. Propylon in Palladius Street
- 5. Shops of the Roman period
- 6. Palladius Street
- 7. *Sigma*
- 8. Odeon
- 9. Colonnades and reconstructed area of the Roman temenos(?)
- 10. Dismantled Roman colonnades, with a Byzantine public building above them
- 11. Northern Street
- 12. Propylon and stairway to the tell
- 13. Propylon between the temple esplanade and the tell
- 14. Temple with the round cella
- 15. Nymphaeum
- 16. Monument of Antonius
- 17. Valley Street
- 18. Central Monument
- 19. Roman basilica, with porticoes of the Byzantine agora above it
- 20. Byzantine agora
- 21. Umayyad ceramic workshop
- 22. Roman temple
- 23. Roman cult structures
- 24. Public latrine
- 25. Eastern bathhouse
- 26. Roman portico, later Silvanus Hall
- 27. Roman decorative pool, with Umayyad shops above it
- 28. Silvanus Street
- 29. Semicircular plaza

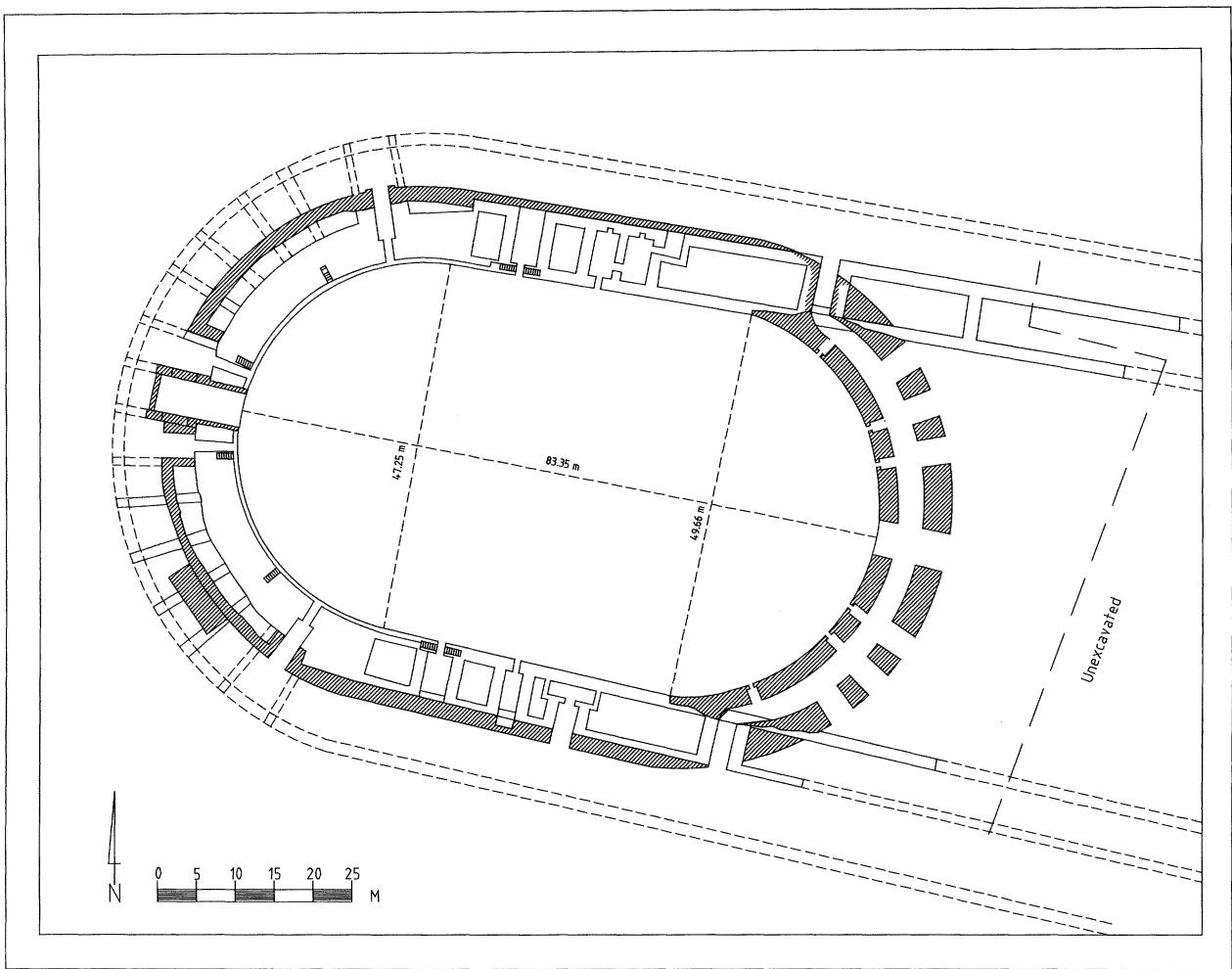


Fig. E Reconstructed ground plan of the hippodrome and the amphitheater (marked by diagonal lines).
Hypothetical reconstruction is marked by broken lines.

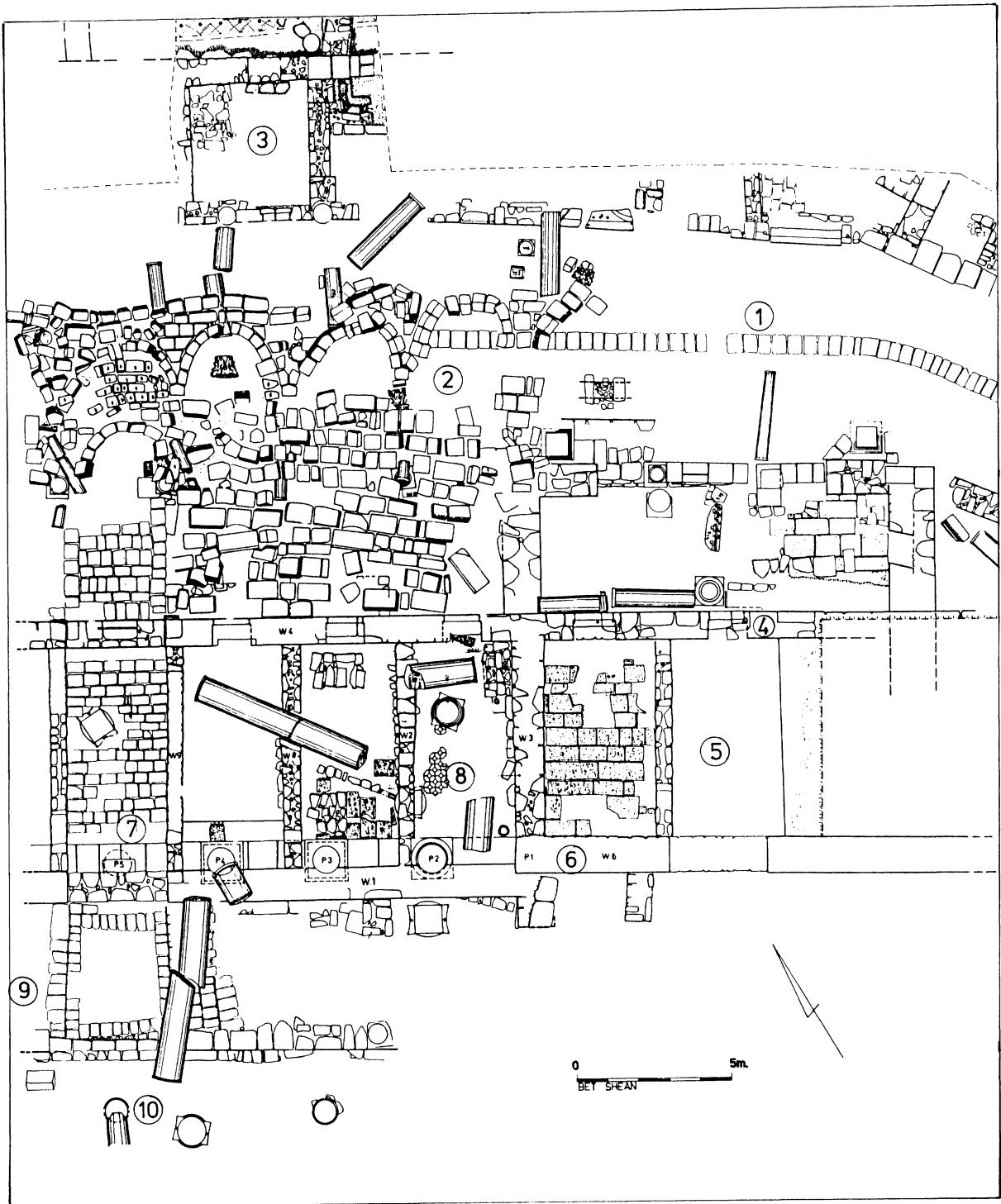


Fig. F Segment of the remains near the southeast end of Silvanus Street, showing the collapsed shops and arcade after the earthquake of 749 C.E. (after Foerster and Tsafir, ESI 11 [1992], fig. 45)

1. Silvanus Street (only the central line of stone is marked on the plan)
2. Facade and arcade of the Umayyad shops as collapsed in the earthquake of 749 C.E.
3. Later Umayyad building and installations
4. Facade of the Umayyad shops, built on top of the Roman decorative pool
5. Umayyad shops
6. Stylobate and line of the Roman colonnade, later blocked by the rear wall of the Umayyad shops
7. A lane crossing the Umayyad bazaar
8. *Opus sectile* segment of the promenade around the Roman pool
9. Umayyad portico built along the rear side of the shops
10. A base in the line of columns and piers of the Byzantine Silvanus Hall



1 Limestone water basin with a relief of the Roman period, showing Herakles fighting the Hydra



2 Ancient Bet Shean, looking north, showing the southern plateau and the amphitheater (in the modern town) (*bottom*), and the tell, the valley of Nahal 'Amal, and the civic center (*center*)



3 Ancient Bet Shean, looking northeast. In the center are the tell and the civic center. Tel Iżtaba is in the background (*top*), beyond the valley of Nahal Harod.



4 The junction of Valley Street (*right*), Silvanus Street (*bottom left*), and the street leading to the temple (*top*). The podium of the Central Monument is on the left, looking west.



5 Valley Street and the Central Monument, looking southwest. Note the mosaic pavements of the portico on the north side of the street.



6 The main junction of Valley Street (*center*), Southern Street (later Silvanus Street) (*right*), and the street leading to the temple (*bottom*), looking northeast



7 (above) The city center of Scythopolis, looking west, showing the slopes of the tell, Palladius Street, and the western bathhouse (*top, from right to left*). The Roman portico is in the center, with the decorative pool and street (later Silvanus Street) on its right and the eastern bathhouse on its left.



8 The city center, looking southeast, showing Palladius Street (*bottom right*); Northern Street (*bottom left*); the temple, nymphaeum, and Central Monument (*center*); Valley Street (*center left*); the basilica and part of the Byzantine agora (*center right*); and the Roman portico and Silvanus Street (*top*)



9 Looking north toward the slopes of the tell, showing the propylon and the stairway (*top*), Northern Street (*center*), and the colonnade of the Roman temenos(?) (*bottom*)



10 The podium of the Monument of Antonius, looking north



11 The nymphaeum after the removal of the collapsed architectural members of the facade, looking southwest



12 Rubble from the earthquake of 749 C.E. in front of the nymphaeum, looking west



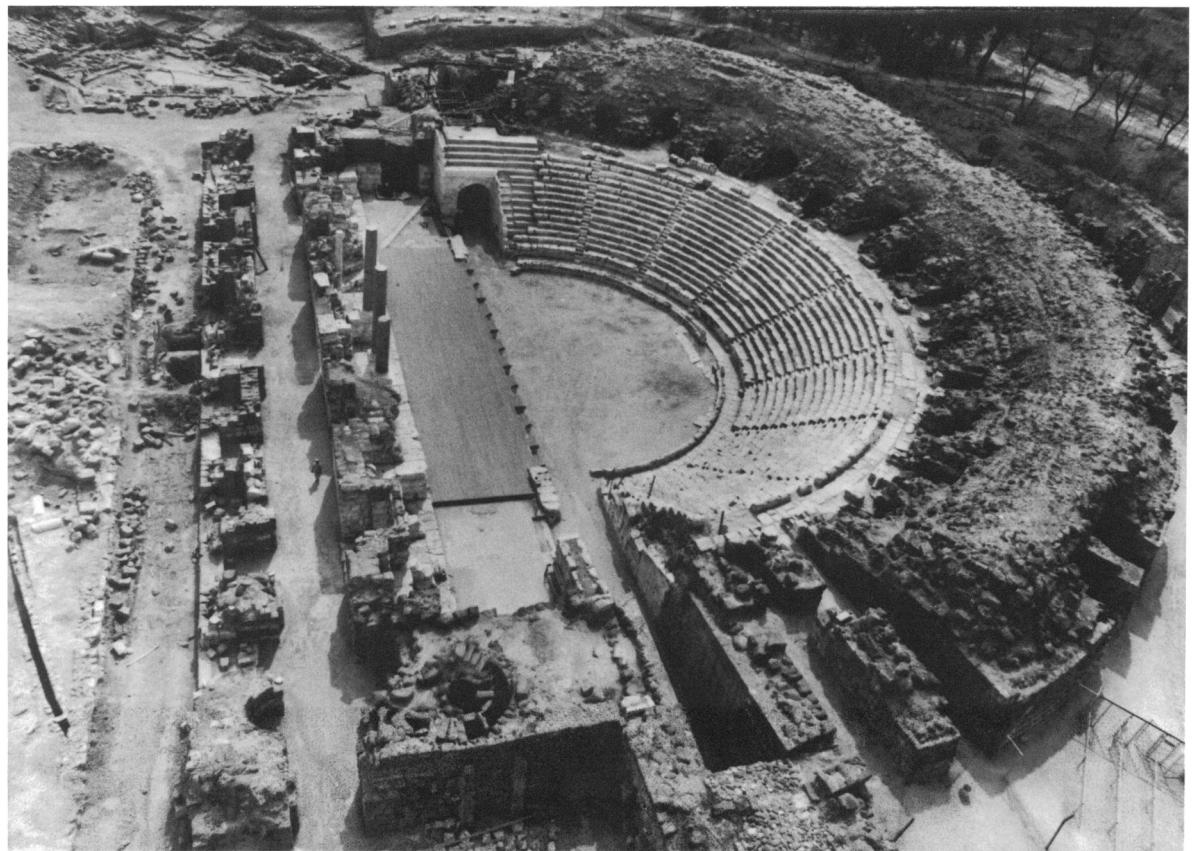
13 Architectural members of the superstructure of the nymphaeum as they fell in the earthquake of 749 C.E., looking south



14 The Roman portico after reconstruction, the decorative pool, and Silvanus Street during clearance of the rubble from the earthquake of 749 C.E., looking west. In the center are the Central Monument and the Monument of Antonius.

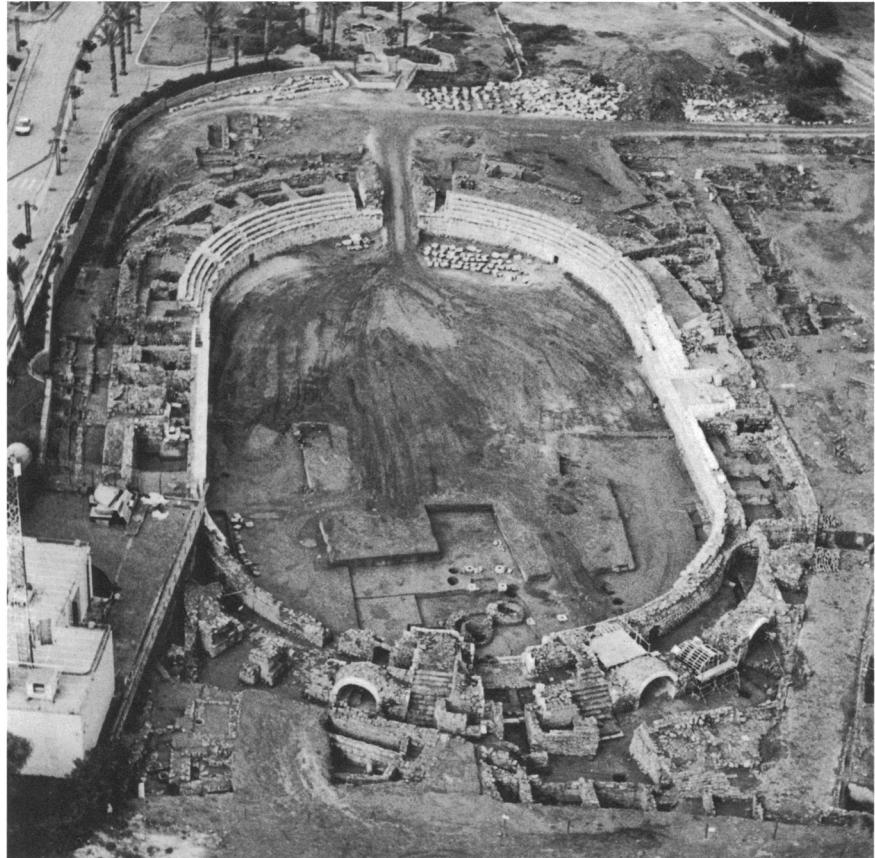


15 Palladius Street (*center*) and the stairway of the Roman temple, with the two monolithic columns as collapsed in the earthquake of 749 C.E. (*bottom left*), looking southwest



16 The Roman theater, looking east (after Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 [1994], 122)

17 The amphitheater, looking west, showing in the foreground the east wing with restored arches and the main entrance to the arena occupied by Byzantine and Umayyad structures



18 The amphitheater, looking west, showing the new east wing with the ring vault, parts of which survive (bottom). The main gate to the arena (*center*) is flanked by two stairways to the *cavea*. Later Byzantine and Umayyad constructions occupy the area.



19 The junction of the herringbone-patterned street and Orestes Street, with rows of slabs across it (*bottom right*), looking north. At the top right is the apsidal hall, and at the bottom is the Umayyad construction built on top of Orestes Street.



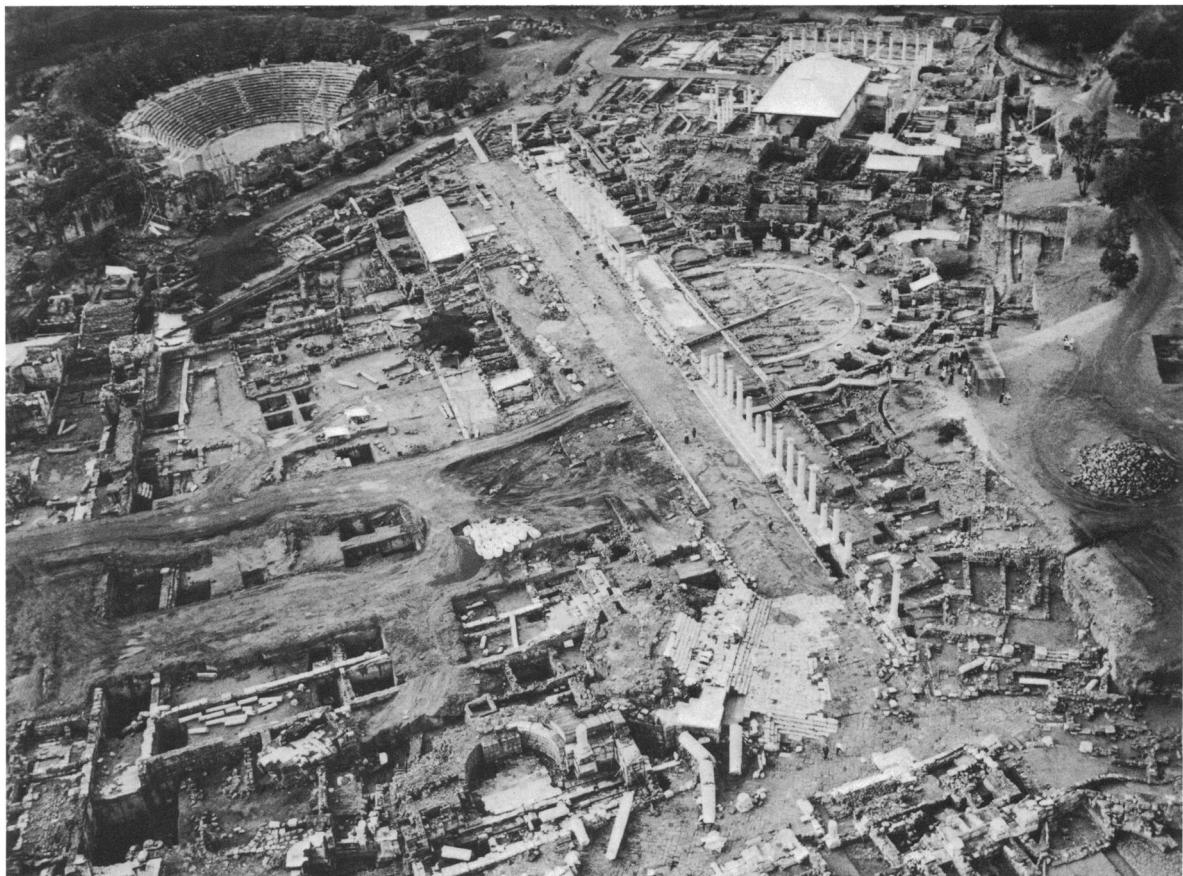
20 Orestes Street and the building inscription of 521/2 C.E., looking west



21 The dismantled stylobate (the lower part of one column survives in situ) of the Roman temenos(?),
Byzantine mosaic pavements of a public building (the walls of which were robbed), and an early Islamic
construction on top of the mosaic, looking south



22 The left part of the inscription engraved on a second-century decorated architrave mentioning the
governor Artemidorus and the construction of the nymphaeum



23 Palladius Street and the *sigma*, looking southwest. At the top are the theater and the western bathhouse, and at the bottom are the temple and the nymphaeum.



24 Mosaic pavement of the portico in Palladius Street, looking south (after Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 [1994], 130)



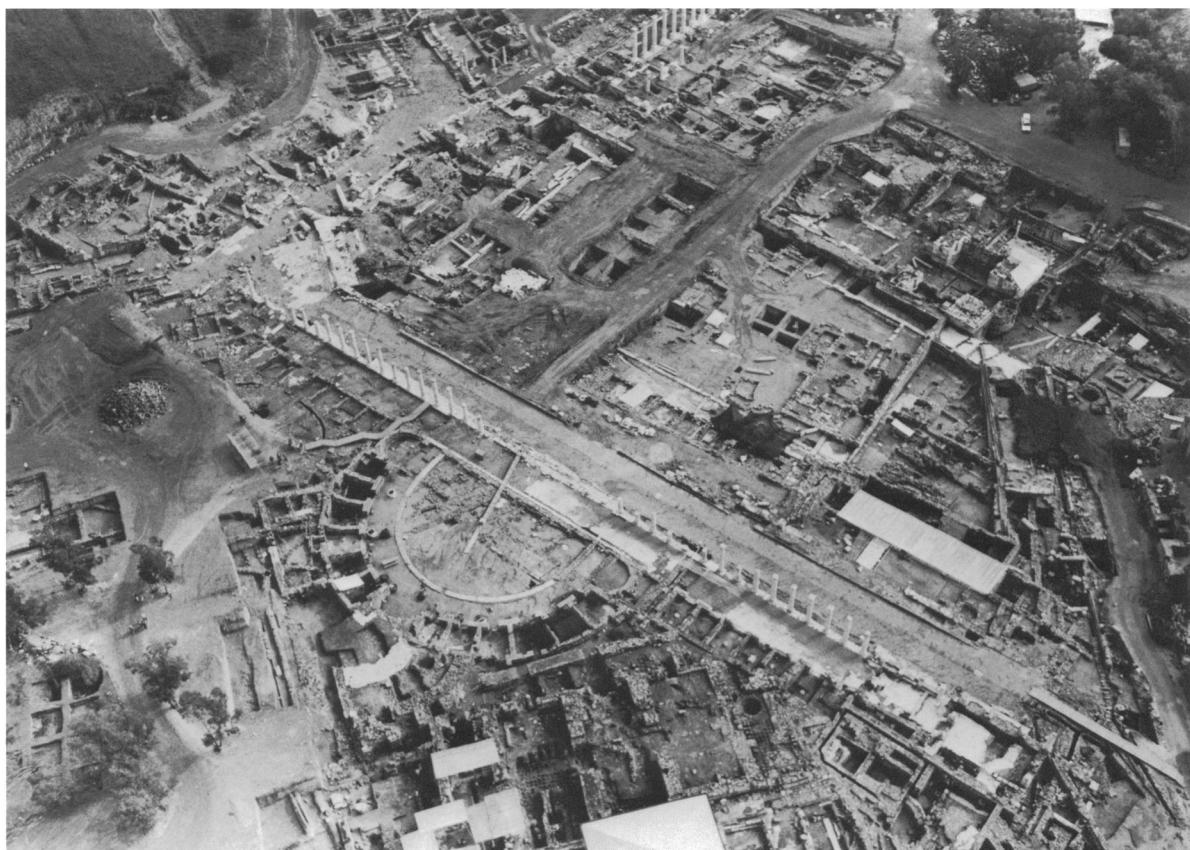
25 Pools, channels, and pottery pipes of the Byzantine period in the area of the propylon connecting the esplanade of the temple and the tell, looking southwest



26 Partially removed pools and a pottery pipe of the Byzantine period, in the blocked Roman propylon between the temple esplanade and the tell, looking south



27 Succession of layers in the area of the Roman basilica, looking northeast. In the center are Valley Street and the Central Monument, with the apse of the basilica flanked by the entrances to the basilica. In the west (bottom) are walls of the Byzantine agora and the partially preserved pavement of the Abbasid mosque.



28 The sigma and Palladius Street, looking east. Note the area of the Byzantine agora southeast of the street (center).



29 The *sigma* during excavation, looking southwest



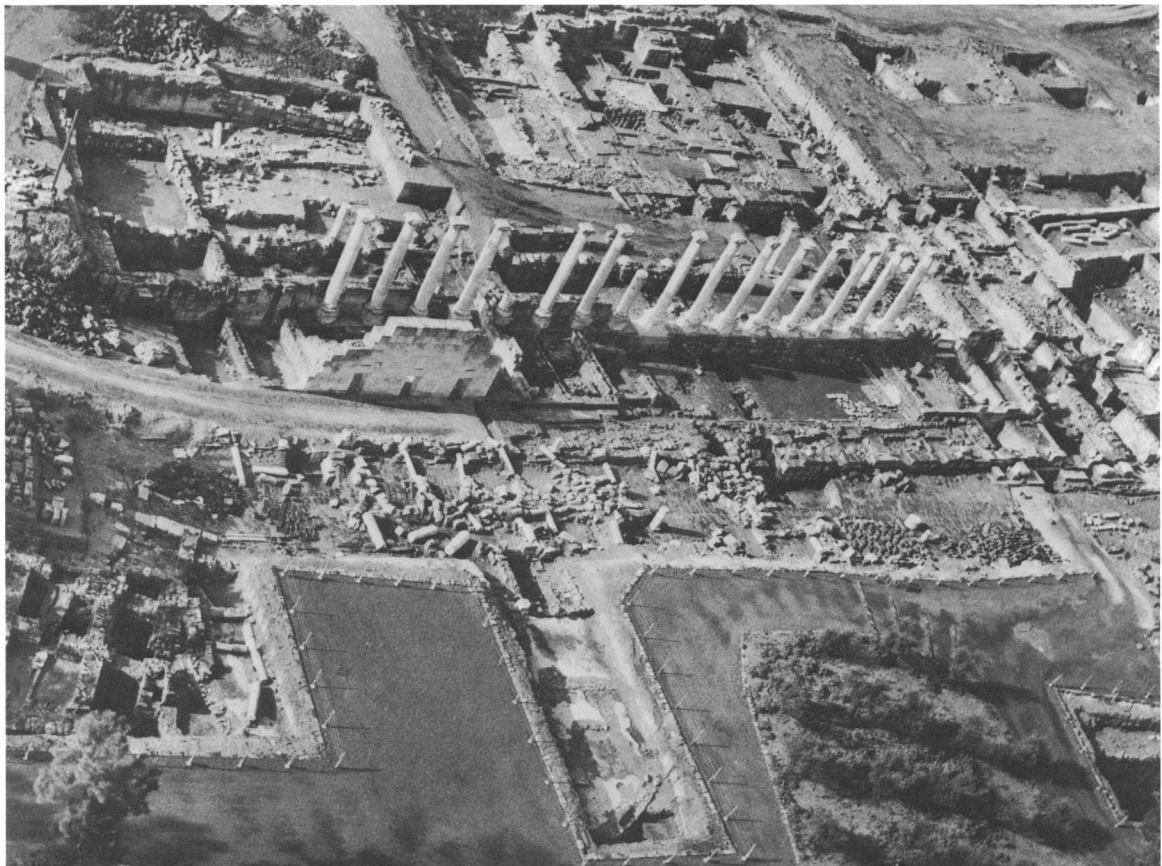
30 Byzantine building abutting the Roman colonnade opposite the nymphaeum, looking southwest. The Byzantine foundations are lower than those of the former Roman portico. Note the early Islamic provisional walls in front of the nymphaeum.



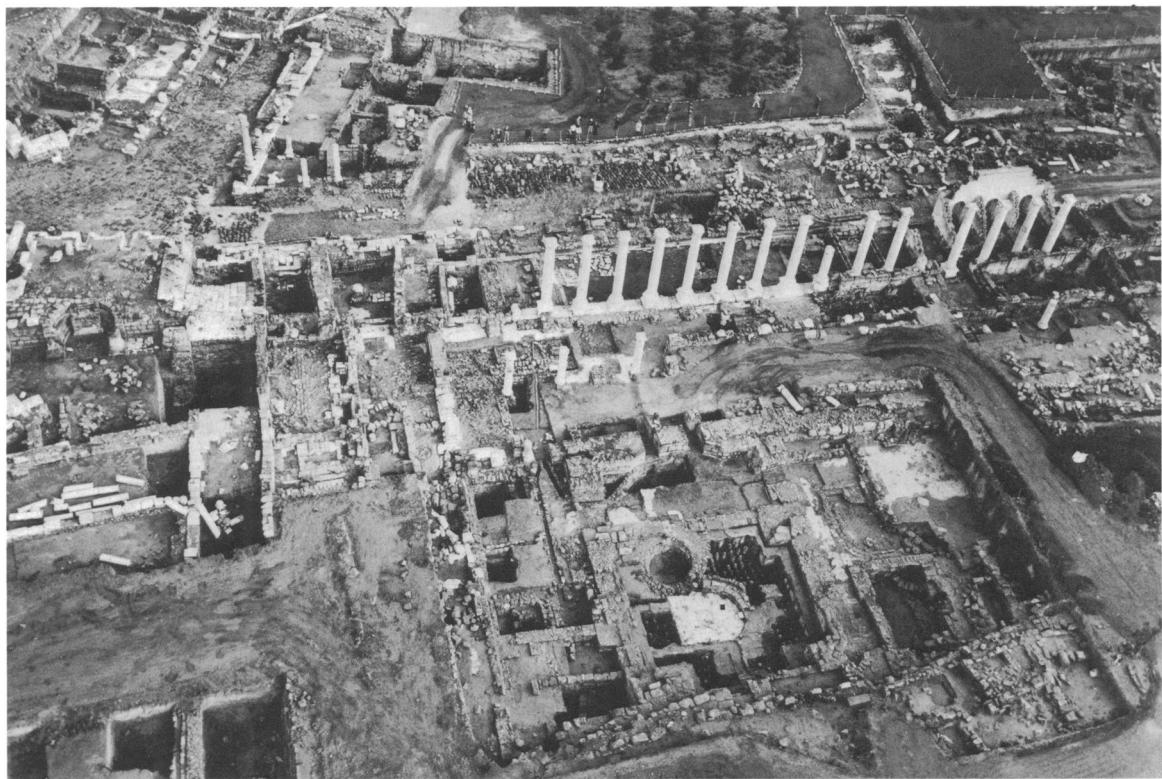
31 (above) The walls, stylobate, and oil-shale pavement of the Byzantine agora, looking north. On the right is the apse of the Roman basilica.



32 The Roman colonnade after reconstruction, looking southeast. Lining it on the northeast are the Roman decorative pool (partially excavated) and Silvanus Street. The rubble from the earthquake of 749 C.E. and the Umayyad shops are preserved in the southeast (*top*).



33 Silvanus Street, the colonnade of the Roman portico, the decorative pool, and the partially reconstructed Umayyad shops, looking southwest



34 The Roman colonnade and the northeast wing of the eastern bathhouse (*bottom*), looking northeast. Between them are three columns of Silvanus Hall.



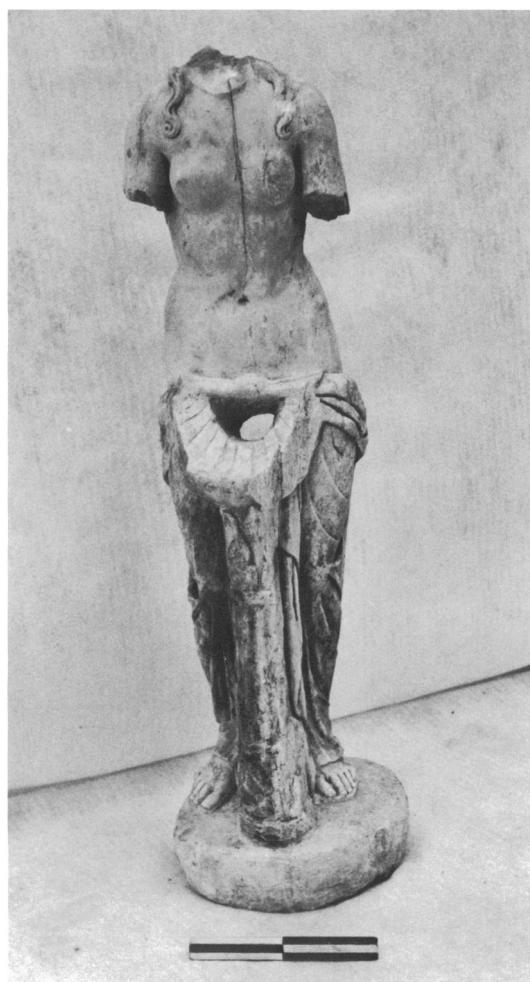
35 The north corner of the eastern bathhouse and the colonnade (composed of columns and piers) of Silvanus Hall during excavation, looking north. Two columns are restored; the third is shown as collapsed.



36 Reconstructed column of Silvanus Hall. The order of drums, which do not fit each other in diameter, is as found in the collapse, exposing the negligent masonry of the original column.



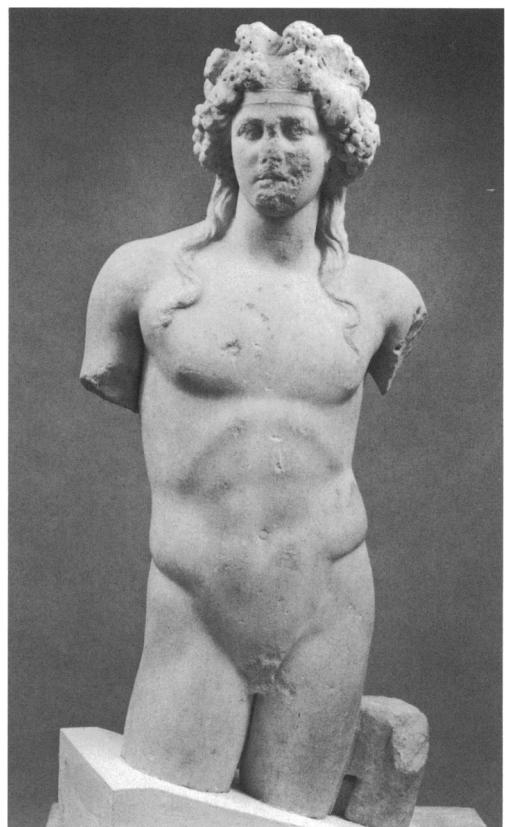
37 Headless statue of Aphrodite as found in the hypocaust of the eastern bathhouse



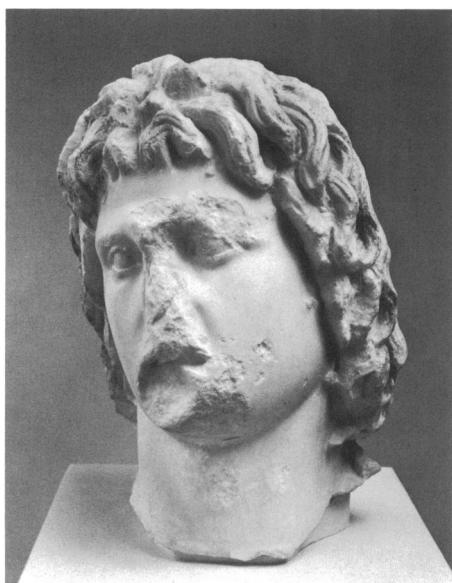
38 Headless statue of a nymph converted into a fountain, found in the hypocaust of the eastern bathhouse



39 Torso of a cuirassed emperor used as a building stone in a pier of Silvanus Hall. Parts of its decoration—Medusa, the griffins, and the eagle—had been defaced. (photo: courtesy of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem)



40 Statue of Dionysos. The mouth, nose, and eyes had been defaced before it was buried under the floor level of Silvanus Hall. (photo: courtesy of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem)



41 Defaced head of Alexander the Great, from the Hellenistic age, found on the tell (photo: courtesy of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem)



42 Early-sixth-century mosaic with the medallion of Tyche found in the *sigma* (after Mazor, *ESI* 6 [1987–88], photo 9)



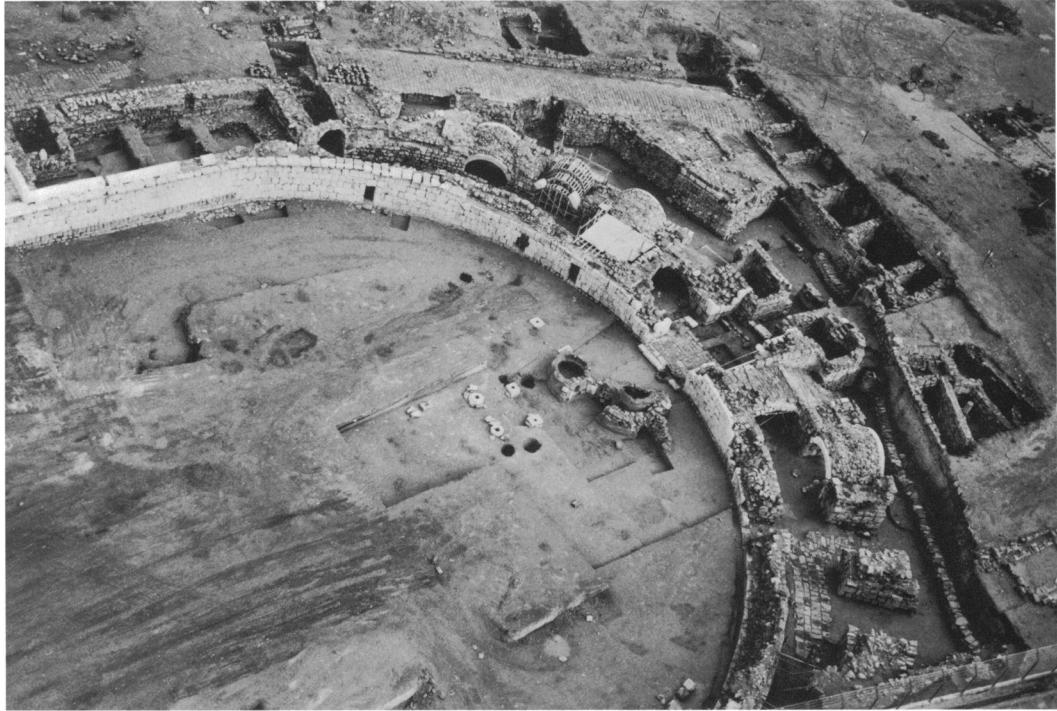
43 The western bathhouse during excavation, looking east (after Bar-Nathan and Mazor, *ESI* 11 [1992], fig. 55)



44 The entrance and the southwest wing of the latrine in the eastern bathhouse, looking west (after Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 [1994], 129)



45 The southwest wing of the hippodrome-amphitheater, looking south. On the left are the wall of the hippodrome and the benches; in the center is the constructional wall of the hippodrome, with two probes in its fill, which yielded second-century finds. On the right is the outer wall of the amphitheater, with excavated squares that yielded fourth-century finds. In these squares are seen the radial walls that carried the vaults supporting the (much wider) *cavea* of the hippodrome. The radial walls were dismantled during its conversion into an amphitheater.



46 The east side of the amphitheater, looking northeast, showing the entrance of the arena, narrowed by Byzantine and Umayyad constructions. Inside the entrance are Umayyad pottery kilns. Orestes Street is above.



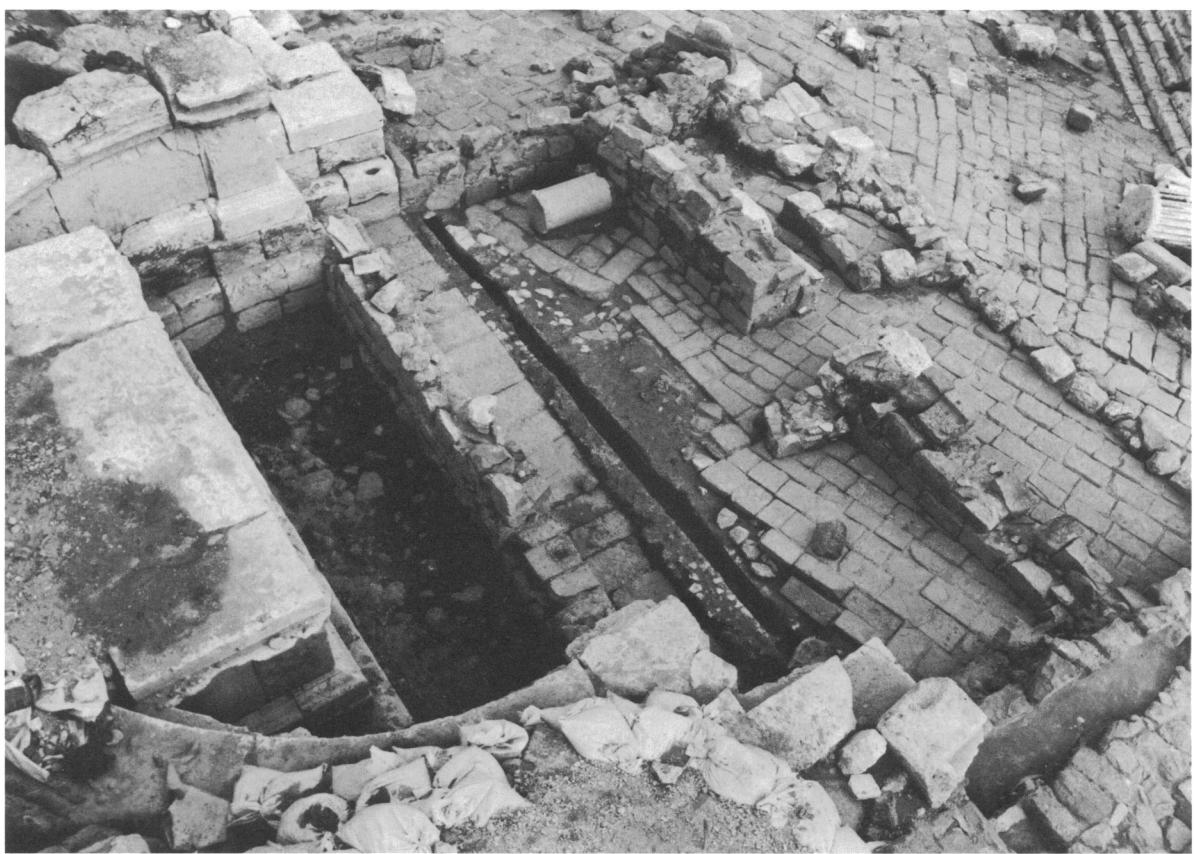
47 Valley Street near the Central Monument, looking west. Note the early Islamic provisional walls on top of the Roman street.



48 Columns collapsed on Valley Street in the earthquake of 749 C.E., looking southwest. Note the Umayyad walls that narrowed the street before the earthquake and the Abbasid building on top of the collapse (*top right*).



49 Umayyad building on the temple esplanade, looking south



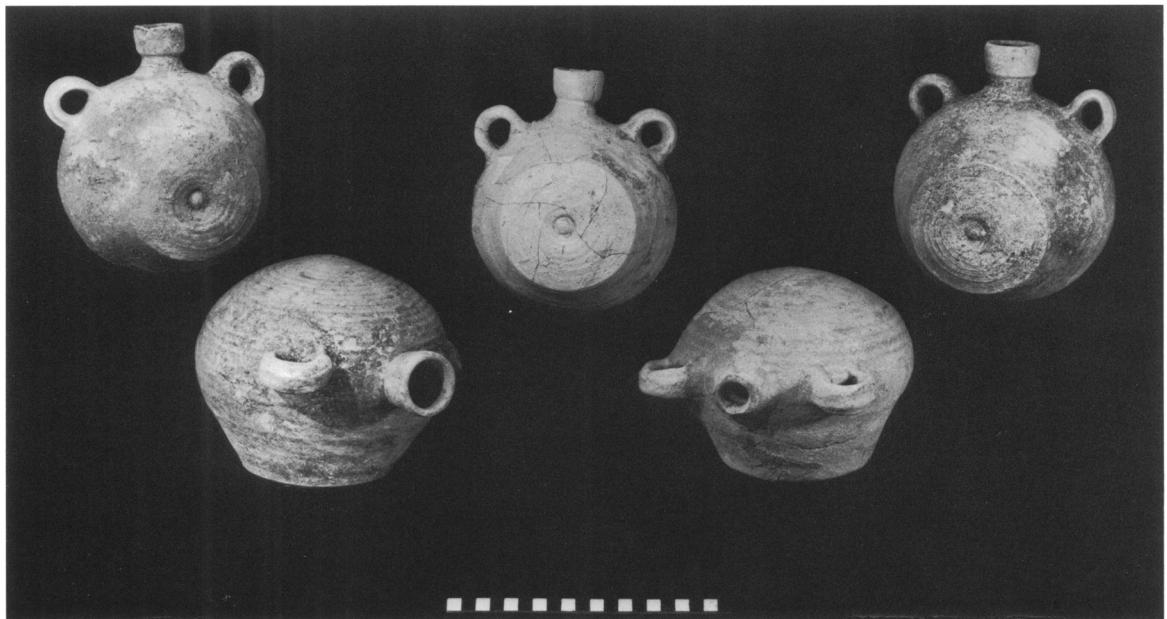
50 Late Byzantine(?) and early Islamic building built on Roman pavement, abutting the Monument of Antonius, looking southwest



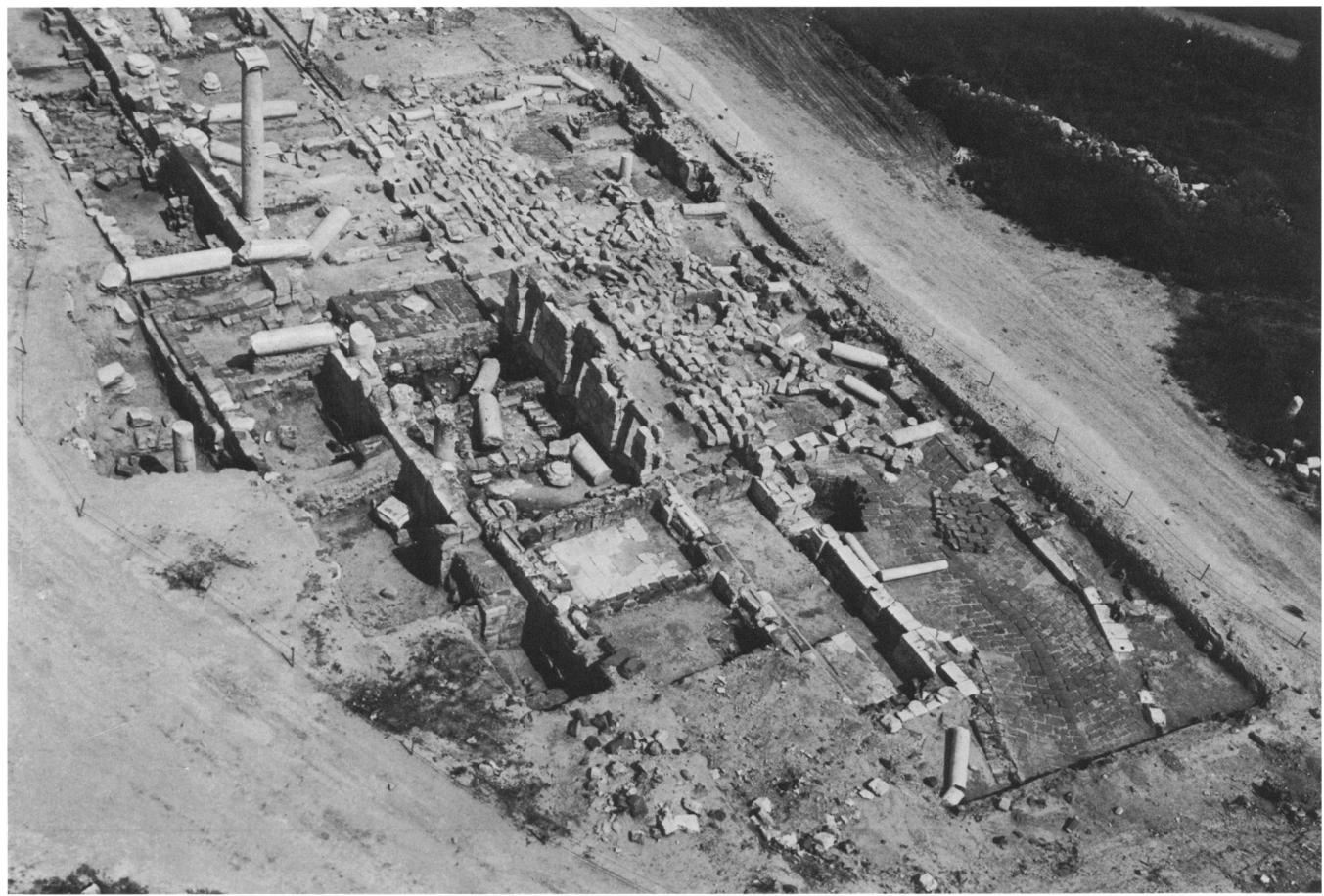
51 Two Umayyad pottery kilns inside the main entrance to the arena of the amphitheater (cleared of the remains of later period), looking southeast



52 Umayyad pottery kiln installed on a mosaic floor of a Byzantine shop, south of Palladius Street



53 Yellowish flasks, typical of the Umayyad ceramic factory of Baysan in the early eighth century



54 Silvanus Street during excavation and reconstruction, looking north. Note the collapse of the facade of the Umayyad shops and the arcade on the street.



55 The rear wall of the Umayyad shops, blocking the Roman colonnade along Silvanus Street, looking northwest



56 Succession of layers near the southeast end of Silvanus Street, looking southeast. The lower courses of the facade of the Umayyad shops can be seen cutting the mosaic pavement of the earlier Silvanus Hall. The mosaic was laid on top of the rather loose soil and ashes with which the Roman pool had been filled, and which later sunk along with the mosaic. The steps on the edge of the pool are seen on the far end of the pool (*top*); their shape can also be discerned on the northeast (*left*) through the margins of the mosaic that remained on their original level.



57 Silvanus Street, the partially reconstructed facade of the Umayyad shops, and the arcade of the portico as collapsed in the earthquake of 749 C.E., looking northwest



58 Umayyad gold *dinars* found in a shop near Silvanus Street, buried under the collapse of 749 C.E.



59 Silvanus Street during the removal of the rubble from the earthquake of 749 C.E., showing remains of the later line of Umayyad shops on the northwest side (*left*), looking southeast, and pedestals of the Roman colonnade before the anastylosis (*right*)



60 Drums of the columns of Palladius Street, terracing the area of the street and its northwest sidewalk, looking northwest



61 Drums of the columns of Palladius Street, terracing the northwest sidewalk of the street, looking northwest

Dionysos, who buried his nurse Nysa here. The full name appears on the city's coins and in official inscriptions, but in regular usage the city was called only Scythopolis. The local Semitic languages preserved the ancient name in the shortened form Beshan. This form appears in Hebrew and Aramaic in the Talmudic literature and also in Syriac; it was later changed in Arabic to Baysan.⁸

The Hellenistic town suffered destruction by the Hasmoneans in the later part of the second century C.E., although the settlement continued to exist.⁹ Pompey's conquest of Judea in 63 B.C.E. opened a new era, in the literal sense too, as the era of Roman Scythopolis, which continued to the end of the Byzantine period, began in 64 B.C.E. The city was returned to its Hellenic citizens, although a large Jewish minority continued to live in the city. Many thousands of these Jews were massacred by their neighbors during the early stages of the Jewish war against Rome in the year 66 C.E.¹⁰ Previously, in the earlier stages of Roman rule in Syria and Judea, Scythopolis had become a member of the Decapolis, the league of the Ten Cities. Although it was the only one of these cities west of the Jordan, it was specifically mentioned by Josephus as the largest city of the Decapolis.¹¹ The significance of membership in this league was probably less political than cultural and should perhaps be understood as a declaration and pledge of loyalty to the classical-Hellenic legacy. The classical heritage, indeed, remained alive in Scythopolis for a long period, and sympathy toward the Greek heritage survived among its elite as late as the sixth century. Needless to say, it shaped the social and cultural profile of the city in the early Byzantine period.

A series of excavation campaigns at Scythopolis has uncovered various areas of the city and its vicinity. The first to dig at Bet Shean were archaeologists from the University of Pennsylvania, who excavated the biblical tell and also exposed layers of the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, early Islamic, and medieval periods.¹² This expedition also excavated the Monastery of the Lady Mary on Tel Iztaba, at the northern edge of the city,¹³ and tombs in the same area. Small-scale excavations were carried out in various parts of the city during the 1950s and 1960s, particularly by the regional archaeologist N. Zori. These excavations revealed some of the more important discoveries on the site—segments of the city wall, pavements of streets, the city gates, churches and monasteries, two synagogues, mortuary chapels, and other monuments—many of which are mentioned in the

⁸For Bet Shean in the Talmudic literature, see in particular S. Klein, *Sefer ha-Yishuv* (Jerusalem, 1939; in Hebrew), 17–18; J. Sussmann, "A Halakhic Inscription from the Beth Shean Valley," *Tarbiz* 43 (1973–74), 88–158 (in Hebrew); idem, "The Inscription in the Synagogue at Rehob," in *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem, 1981), 146–51; for an English translation of the inscription, see *ibid.*, 152–53; G. Reeg, *Die Ortsnamen Israels nach der rabbinischen Literatur* (Wiesbaden, 1989), 81–84. For the Arabic sources, see G. Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems* (London, 1890), 410–11.

⁹Evidence of the destruction in the form of ash layers in Hellenistic houses in the northern part of the town at Tel Iztaba was recently uncovered in the excavations. See R. Bar-Nathan and G. Mazor, "Beth-Shean during the Hellenistic Period," *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 87–92 (in Hebrew).

¹⁰Josephus, *Wars* 2.466–68.

¹¹Josephus, *Wars* 3.446; however, Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* 5.74) calls Damascus the most important city of the Decapolis.

¹²See mainly A. Rowe, *The Topography and History of Beth-Shan* (Philadelphia, 1930), hereafter Rowe, *Beth Shan*, I; G. M. Fitzgerald, *Beth-Shan Excavations, 1921–1923: The Arab and Byzantine Levels* (Philadelphia, 1931), hereafter Fitzgerald, *Beth Shan*, III.

¹³G. M. Fitzgerald, *A Sixth Century Monastery at Beth-Shan* (Philadelphia, 1939).

later parts of this article. In the late 1950s the theater of Bet Shean was unearthed.¹⁴ In 1980–81 and especially since 1986, large-scale excavations have been conducted in various parts of Bet Shean by teams from the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Israel Antiquities Authority. The tell of Bet Shean is again being excavated, revealing, among other finds, remains from the Hellenistic, Byzantine, and medieval periods.¹⁵ The Crusader fortress on the plateau south of the main built-up area has been excavated and restored. In its vicinity, buildings of the Byzantine and early Islamic periods, as well as a sugar factory of the Mamluk period, were excavated.¹⁶ Most of the work has been done by two teams. G. Mazor and R. Bar-Nathan, on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, are directing the excavations of the western part of Scythopolis' city center, the northeastern gate and the bridge crossing Nahal Harod, and parts of Tel Iztaba in the north.¹⁷ G. Foerster and Y. Tsafir, on behalf of the Hebrew University, are directing the excavation in the eastern part of the city center, as well as the hippodrome-amphitheater on the plateau south of the main built-up area of Roman Scythopolis, and structures of the Byzantine and early Islamic periods in the same area.¹⁸ Excavation on the site is still being carried out, together with restoration and reconstruction work; thus some of the conclusions mentioned in this article remain preliminary.¹⁹

II. TOWN PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE IN THE ROMAN PERIOD

Hellenistic Scythopolis succeeded biblical Bet Shean on the tell, and in the third to second century B.C.E. expanded toward Tel Iztaba, north of Nahal Harod. This occupational strategy continued the practice of earlier periods, in which settlement was concentrated on and around the hills, which were easier to defend. The northern quarter of Tel Iztaba was deserted after the Hasmonean conquest at the end of the second century B.C.E. and remained unoccupied until the Byzantine period. A major change took place in the Roman period after Pompey's conquest, especially in the first century C.E.

¹⁴S. Applebaum, "The Roman Theatre of Scythopolis," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 4 (1978), 77–97.

¹⁵A. Mazar, "Four Thousand Years of History at Tel Bet Shean," *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 67–83, esp. 82–83 (in Hebrew).

¹⁶J. Seligman, "Excavations in the Crusader Fortress at Bet Shean," *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 138–41 (in Hebrew); also R. Gertwagen, "The Bet Shean Excavation Project (1989–1991): The Fortress," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* (hereafter ESI) 11 (1992), 56–59.

¹⁷For preliminary reports, see G. Mazor, "The Bet Shean Project: A. City Center of Ancient Bet Shean—South," *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 10–24; idem, "The Bet Shean Project—1988: Department of Antiquities Expedition," *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 22–32; R. Bar-Nathan and G. Mazor, "The Bet Shean Excavation Project (1989–1991): City Center (South) and Tel Iztabba Area. Excavations of the Antiquities Authority Expedition," *ESI* 11 (1992), 33–51; also G. Mazor and R. Bar-Nathan, "Scythopolis—Capital of *Palaestina Secunda*," *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 117–37 (in Hebrew).

¹⁸For preliminary reports, see G. Foerster and Y. Tsafir, "The Bet Shean Project: B. Center of Bet Shean—North; C. The Amphitheater and Its Surroundings," *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 25–43; eidem, "The Bet Shean Project—1988: Hebrew University Expedition," *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 15–22; Y. Tsafir and G. Foerster, "Bet Shean Excavation Project—1988/1989," *ESI* 9 (1989–90), 120–28; G. Foerster and Y. Tsafir, "The Bet Shean Excavation Project (1989–1991): City Center (North). Excavations of the Hebrew University Expedition," *ESI* 11 (1992), 3–32; also Y. Tsafir and G. Foerster, "The Hebrew University Excavations at Beth-Shean, 1980–1994," *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 93–116 (in Hebrew).

¹⁹The excavations are carried out as part of the development of the National Park and tourism center at Bet Shean. The project concentrates mainly on the area of the civic center of Scythopolis and its public monuments. Our knowledge of the residential quarters and private buildings is less extensive.

The settlement expanded from the peak of the tell to the valleys around it, mainly to the wide basin of Nahal 'Amal and the saddle between it and the deeper valley of Nahal Ḥarod. The tell, which was located east of the new built-up area, became the acropolis of the larger town. The public monuments and the civic center were located in the valley of Nahal 'Amal and its margins. The residential areas of Roman Scythopolis were most probably located on the slopes around the main valleys. The new conception of occupation reflected the atmosphere of security and confidence of the citizens under the Romans.

The main building material of Scythopolis in the early Roman period was the local basalt rock, which could be collected in the valley of Nahal Ḥarod or on the plateau north of the river. Many boulders, roughly hewn stones, and smoothly dressed ashlar were found everywhere. Another useful building material was the local soft limestone (*nari*). This stone was easy to quarry and dress but also easily eroded. Walls and architectural elements made of *nari* were therefore coated by plaster and frequently decorated by painting and moldings. Remains of stucco and fresco were found in various parts of the town.

Some of the monuments of the Roman city were built in the early Roman period in the first century C.E. Among them were the civic basilica, which abutted a street (ca. 12 m wide, with shops at its sides) along its southeastern wall; the theater (in its early phase of construction); a bathhouse (later covered by the building of Valley Street) and perhaps also the early stage of the eastern bathhouse; the first stage of the temple with the round cella; and basalt pavements of streets and squares, as well as other structures. A comprehensive map of first-century Scythopolis cannot be drawn at the present stage of research, but it is clear that some of the components of second-century Scythopolis already existed in the first century.

Roman Scythopolis was reshaped in the second century after the suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt (135 C.E.), mainly during the days of Antoninus Pius (138–161 C.E.) and Marcus Aurelius (161–180 C.E.). In this period, Scythopolis, like other cities in the region, reached its formative stage. The second century, during which the *pax Romana* reached its peak in the East, created better conditions for development of the cities and an atmosphere of investment in town renovations and erection of monuments. Scythopolis is undoubtedly one of the best representatives of Roman urbanism in its prime (Figs. C, D).

One of the main innovations of the second century (or perhaps the end of the first) was the use of a new kind of building material, the hard limestone that originated in the quarries on the slopes of Mount Gilboa about 7 km southwest of the town. The limestone, although not of the highest quality, enabled the production of large ashlar and architectural members of remarkable size. For example, the monolithic columns in the pronaos of the temple were 1.3 m in diameter, ca. 9.3 m long, and weighed some 25 tons. The importance of this innovation cannot be exaggerated, as quarrying, stone dressing, and building became major sources of income for the city's citizens. There is no doubt that the architectural parts were carved by local artisans, who acquired great skill and artistic ability. It is likely that the owners and workers of the quarries, the architects, stone dressers, and masons of Scythopolis also worked in other places in the region, increasing the gross income of the city. The high quality of construction and the architectural decora-

tion of Roman Scythopolis affected the shape of the city for generations. Some of the monuments survived through the Byzantine period, while columns and other architectural members were reused in the new buildings and monuments of later periods.

In several first-century buildings, such as the basilica and the theater, we find a second phase of construction in which the *nari* stone was replaced, at least in part, by hard limestone. The heavy, solid, and less expensive basalt continued to be used for constructing the core of the walls and the rear of monuments, while the hard limestone blocks were used for the facades. The production in limestone of well-carved architectural elements, such as the benches for the theater and the hippodrome, or elaborate Corinthian capitals, required less time and expense than the production of similar elements in the harder basalt. Good examples of such a policy are the nymphaeum, the hippodrome, and the theater. Private houses and shops were built mostly of basalt.

In two of the monuments, the theater and the central columnar monument, the columns and architectural decoration consisted of marble. But in many other structures, such as the basilica, we also find revetment made of marble slabs. As a rule, the main source of marble for columns or architectural parts was the Proconnesian quarries in the Sea of Marmara, but there are also many colored marble pieces from other sources, in particular Euboian green *cippolino*. Less common were columns of red granite from Egypt and gray granite from the same source or from Asia Minor. The port through which marble and granite were imported into Scythopolis was most likely Caesarea, some 55 km to the west.

Scythopolis preserved its Hellenic character, though many of its citizens were of Semitic origin. During the second century the Jews, many of whom lived in rural settlements in the region, returned to live within the city limits of Scythopolis.²⁰ Probably in the same period, many Samaritans also settled in the town. An altar with a dedicatory inscription, probably of the mid-second century, may illustrate this situation. The altar was dedicated to Zeus Akraios by a certain Theogenē, daughter of Tobios.²¹ The name of the father is undoubtedly of Semitic origin, while the name of the daughter is Greek. We may assume that Aramaic remained the popular spoken language of many of the citizens. Greek was used by the upper classes and was practically the only written language: only a few inscriptions of clear administrative or military nature were written in Latin, and Aramaic was not used for inscriptions. An inscription incised on a pedestal of the statue of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, which was installed in front of the temple in the city center, contained the full list of titles of the city: it was a holy city and a sanctuary (ἱερὰ καὶ ἀσυλον) and also one of the Greek cities of Coele Syria (κατὰ Κοίλην Συρίαν Ἐλληνίδων πόλεων).²² The emphasis on Scythopolis as a Greek city should perhaps be understood as a declaration of loyalty by the city's leading classes to the classical heritage, in view of the existence of nonclassical trends in the culture, ethics, and art practiced by the non-Hellenic citizens, whether pagans, Jews, or Samaritans. The existence of such

²⁰For the Jews in Scythopolis, see Klein, *Sefer ha-Yishuv*; Sussmann, “Halakhic Inscription”; and Reeg, *Ortsnamen Israels*.

²¹Y. Tsafrir, “Further Evidence for the Cult of Zeus Akraios at Bet Shean (Scythopolis),” *IEJ* 39 (1989), 76–78.

²²G. Foerster and Y. Tsafrir, “Nysa-Scythopolis: A New Inscription and the Titles of the City on Its Coins,” *Israel Numismatic Journal* 9 (1986), 53–58. The geographical meaning of the term *Coele Syria* may simply reflect the Decapolis of the past. See other examples on coins and in literary sources, in Fuks, *Scythopolis*, 170–72.

nonclassical trends may be seen, for example, in a limestone water basin found in a Roman stratum west of the Northern Street. The basin is decorated by a relief showing Herakles fighting the Hydra (Fig. 1). The style is very naive, without the slightest effort at naturalism. It belongs to the oriental “sub-classical” style, according to M. Avi-Yonah’s classification.²³ Other works belonging to the trend of “sub-classical” art are the numerous tombstones originating in the city necropolis, with busts of the deceased. These are dated to the late third and fourth centuries.²⁴ Around 300 C.E., Procopius, who in 303 C.E. suffered martyrdom in Caesarea (see below), acted as a translator of the Holy Scriptures, undoubtedly from Greek into Syriac-Aramaic, a language more familiar to his Christian fellow listeners in the church than the original language of the text.²⁵

Scythopolis was one of the best examples of Roman urbanism in the East; however, it did not utilize the most common model of Roman town planning, the orthogonal pattern (Figs. 2, 3).²⁶ This exception was dictated by the topography of the site. The rough terrain with the acropolis at the center and the two riverbeds, especially the valley of Nahal Harod with its steep slopes, made orthogonal planning very difficult and in parts even impossible. Scythopolis is not the only exception in the region; the planning of other Roman cities, such as Samaria-Sebaste and Philadelphia (Amman), was dictated by their undulating topography as well.²⁷ But in several places within the city center, such as, for example, the area of the temple and the Northern Street, or the basilica and the adjacent buildings to its west where the surface was relatively flat, orthogonal planning was maintained and rectangular *insulae* were created. Although there was no *cardo* or *decumanus* in Scythopolis, the main streets of the city ran through the civic center and connected it with the city gates. The streets were wide, with colonnades and roofed porticoes at their sides. The carriageways were paved with dressed basalt blocks. The average width of the carriageway was some 8 m, and it was usually flanked by uncovered sidewalks some 2 m wide. The porticoes rested on columns on the street side and on the

²³For the “sub-classical” and “popular” art, see M. Avi-Yonah, *A History of Classical Art* (Jerusalem, 1969; in Hebrew), 249–76; for “oriental” art, see idem, “Oriental Elements in the Art of Palestine in the Roman and Byzantine Periods,” pt. 1, *QDAP* 10 (1942), 105–51; pt. 2, *ibid.*, 13 (1948), 128–65; pt. 3, *ibid.*, 14 (1950), 49–80; idem, *Oriental Art in Roman Palestine* (Rome, 1961). The two last works are reprinted in M. Avi-Yonah, *Art in Ancient Palestine* (Jerusalem, 1983), 1–117, 119–211, respectively.

²⁴I. Skupinska-Løvset, *Funerary Portraiture of Roman Palestine: An Analysis of the Production in Its Culture-Historical Context* (Gothenberg, 1983).

²⁵Eusebius, *De Martyribus Palestinae* 9.6.

²⁶See, among others, F. Castagnoli, *Orthogonal Town Planning in Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971); J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Cities of Ancient Greece and Italy: Planning in Classical Antiquity* (New York, 1974); E. J. Owens, “Roman Town Planning,” in *Roman Public Building*, ed. I. M. Barton (Exeter, 1989), 7–30. See also W. L. MacDonald, *The Architecture of the Roman Empire*, II (New Haven, Conn.-London, 1986). MacDonald emphasizes the role of the main streets and thoroughfares in creating the city “armature” as a dominant factor of city planning, no less than the rule of orthogonal planning. Scythopolis may be counted among MacDonald’s best examples. On cities in Palestine, see also Y. Tsafir, *Eretz Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest*, II: *Archaeology and Art* (Jerusalem, 1984; in Hebrew), 59–92, hereafter Tsafir, *Archaeology*.

²⁷Tsafir, *Archaeology*; however, a comparison with Jerash (ancient Gerasa) shows that in the latter the overall orthogonal plan was firmly maintained (except for the ancient southern quarter, near the temple of Zeus), although the terrain in Jerash is rather rough as well, but to a lesser degree than in Scythopolis. The bridges above the perennial River Chrysorhoas (Wadi Jerash), which bisects the town, became part of the southern *decumanus* and the *via sacra* approaching the prominent hill of the temple of Artemis. Both streets were perpendicular to the main *cardo* and became an integral part of the orthogonal planning. It seems that the city planners of Jerash were more dedicated to the orthogonal model than their colleagues in other places.

walls of the shops (or monuments). The average width of the colonnades was about 6 m; thus the average width of the whole unit of the street was ca. 24 m.²⁸ The city was adorned with colonnaded streets and squares, porticoes, public monuments, fountains, and pools.²⁹ Among the public monuments we count at least four temples, a theater, a hippodrome (which was later converted to an amphitheater; see below), an odeon (which might have been used as a *bouleutērion*), at least two bathhouses, and a basilica. The monuments were richly decorated and ornamented with statues. In some cases much care was taken to improve perspectives and avoid sharp angles. A good example is the central columnar monument (hereafter the Central Monument) which was planned with a trapezoid shape in order to soften the angle between the orientation of the existing basilica and that of the second-century Valley Street.³⁰ The Monument of Antonius was built at the same location in order to disguise the angle between Valley Street and the portico in front of the nymphaeum and to provide a pleasing view for travelers who turned from the street to the right.³¹

The dedicatory inscriptions supply only partial information about the financial sources of this vast building activity.³² We have not yet found any evidence for an imperial donation, either direct or through the provincial governor, prior to the fourth century. Several inscriptions mention the decision of the city council, the *boulē*, but these inscriptions concern mostly the erection of columns or even a statue in honor of fellow citizens who contributed to the city. The inscription on the pedestal of the statue of Marcus Aurelius mentions a donation by (the people of) Nysa-Scythopolis in honor of the emperor. The statue was installed on the stairway of the temple with two small altars in front of it, probably used for the imperial cult.

On the other hand, many inscriptions mention donations by private citizens. A certain Cassiodorus, a prominent member of the city's aristocracy, is also described as a temple builder (*ἱεροκτίστης*). Others donated statues, staircases, or altars. One inscription mentions a donor who, out of φιλοτιμία, contributed the pedestal of a torch for lighting the Northern Street. The term φιλοτιμία occurs often in building inscriptions and combines its literal meaning of love of honor with that of generosity. Dedicatory inscriptions of this kind, which reflect the sense of obligation of the citizens to their city and its civic life, and the reward given to them in honors and appointments, were typical of the second and third centuries but seem to disappear in the fourth.

The process of expansion and monumental building continued in the third and early

²⁸Compare with the chart of dimensions of streets by MacDonald, *Architecture*, 41–42; for streets in the cities of Palestine and Arabia, see A. Segal, *Monumental Architecture in Roman Palestine and Provincia Arabia* (Haifa, 1995; in Hebrew), 15–60.

²⁹See the works cited above, notes 16–17; see also G. Foerster and Y. Tsafrir, "Nysa-Scythopolis in the Roman Period: 'A Greek City of Coele Syria'—Evidence from the Excavations at Bet Shean," *ARAM* 4 (1992), 117–38.

³⁰The names of the monuments and streets of the ancient site are modern; they have been chosen by the excavators and may be changed if better identification is established.

³¹On such "optical corrections" in Palestinian cities, see Tsafrir, *Archaeology*, 66–74. MacDonald, *Architecture*, mentions several examples; see esp. pp. 5–110.

³²On this question in general, see R. MacMullen, "Roman Imperial Building in the Provinces," *HSCP* 64 (1959), 207–33. A vivid illustration of the role of the emperor, through the provincial administration, in the management of individual cities is given by Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*, mostly in the tenth book, which presents his correspondence with Trajan.

fourth centuries, though it perhaps slowed during the crisis of the mid-third century, a trend that continued in the first part of the fourth century. The exact limits of the expansion of Scythopolis at its peak in the late third century are not clear. The city center was located, as mentioned above, on the acropolis (the former biblical tell), in the main valley of Nahal 'Amal and on the saddle between Nahal 'Amal and Nahal Harod. Two of the gates of the Roman city are well known. One is the west gate connecting the city with the Legio-Scythopolis road.³³ The gate is located on the south bank of Nahal Harod, a short distance after the road crosses the deep gorge of the river on a bridge resting on a single arch. The bridge and the road are built of dressed basalt blocks; the street was originally built in the Roman period but repaved in the Byzantine period.³⁴ The gate itself was built of carefully carved stones; its plan is not yet clear. The second gate is located in the northeast. The gate and its towers led into the city along the north bank of Nahal Harod. A bridge resting on two large arches crossed the river, and an earthen dam led the traveler to Valley Street.³⁵ The gate was adorned with a monumental inscription consisting of bronze letters; these, unfortunately, were robbed in antiquity, and neither the name of the builders or dedicators nor the date can be established. Both gates seem to have been originally freestanding: the city wall to which they were joined was probably built in a later period. Freestanding gates were common in the East in the second century.³⁶

Topographical conditions required at least one more gate, from which ran roads to Jerusalem in the south, to Pella and Jerash (ancient Gerasa) in the southeast, across the Jordan, and toward Neapolis in the southwest.³⁷ In the description of the limits of Scythopolis in the mosaic inscription of the synagogue at Reḥov, which is discussed below, Scythopolis has six gates. The inscription probably refers to a date later than the third century, but these gates, or at least some of them, may well have been of Roman origin.

The aerial distance between the two gates is approximately 1.1 km, but the walking distance following the streets that connected the two gates (either going north of the acropolis or south of it, through the city center) was somewhat longer, probably about 1.4 km. The total area of the city at the end of the third century is at present unknown.

³³ I. Roll and B. Isaac, *Roman Roads in Judaea*, I: *The Legio-Scythopolis Road*, BAR International Series 141 (Oxford, 1982).

³⁴ Limited excavations were carried out along the street in 1953 by N. Zori, and again in 1983 by M. Peleg. See the report on both excavations by M. Peleg, "Bet She'an: A Paved Street and Adjacent Remains," *'Atiqot* 25 (1994), 139–55.

³⁵ Bar-Nathan and Mazor, *ESI* 11 (1992), 48–50.

³⁶ Compare, for example, the Damascus Gate (*Porta Neapolitana*) of Jerusalem: M. Magen, "Excavations at the Damascus Gate, 1979–1984," in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. H. Geva (Jerusalem, 1994), 281–86; also R. W. Hamilton, "Excavations against the North Wall of Jerusalem," *QDAP* 10 (1944), 1–54; G. J. Wightman, *The Damascus Gate, Jerusalem*, BAR International Series 519 (Oxford, 1989). A monumental freestanding gate is known also in Gadara (Umm Qais); see P. C. Boll, A. Hoffmann, and Th. Weber, "'Gadara in der Decapolis': Deutsche Ausgrabungen bei Umm Qais in Nordjordanien, 1986 bis 1988. Vorbericht," *AA* (1990), 193–266 (esp. Hoffmann's discussion, 216–38). For the dates of the gates of Jerash, in the early 2nd century, and the wall at Jerash, which is of much later date, see J. Seigne, "Jérash romaine et byzantine: Développement urbain d'une ville provinciale orientale," in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, ed. S. Tell, IV (Amman, 1992), 331–41.

³⁷ See the roads as marked by I. Roll on the map of northern Palestine, in Tsafrir, Di Segni, and Green, *TIR*. For the gates of Scythopolis, see also G. Mazor, "The Gates of Roman Scythopolis and Its City Planning," in the acts of XIV Congrès Internacional d'Arqueología Clásica, Tarragona, 5–11/9 1993, II: *La Ciudad en el mundo Romano* (Tarragona, 1994), 268–71.

No Roman buildings have yet been discovered beneath the Byzantine remains on the southern plateau (except for the hippodrome), on the western hill, or on Tel Iztaba in the north. This evidence calls for the reconstruction of a city with an extremely impressive civic center and rather limited residential areas on the slopes of the central valley, the slopes of the acropolis, the valley of Nahal Harod, and perhaps some marginal areas, for example, the northern edges of the southern plateau. An estimate of about 70–80 ha seems reasonable (excluding the area of the hippodrome in the south). The area occupied by the streets and other public monuments may be counted as 20 ha, or 20–25 percent of the city area. If we use a coefficient of some three hundred people per hectare, we arrive at an estimate of fifteen to eighteen thousand citizens in Scythopolis at the end of the third century.³⁸

Only segments of the main streets of the Roman city have been excavated. Among them is a large segment of Valley Street (stretches along the north bank of Nahal ‘Amal), which connected the northeast gate with the city center. The street is straight, adorned with colonnaded porticoes and wide sidewalks. Its length from the center to the bridge crossing Nahal Harod was ca. 400 m. The street reached the city center in a little plaza containing the Central Monument, consisting of a wide platform supporting a monument composed of columns of green *cippolino* marble and decorated arches of white-gray Proconnesian marble (Figs. 4–6). Its main function was decorative: travelers could see this impressive monument from the moment they entered the northeast gate. Another short street (probably some 100 m long) ran from the square in front of the Central Monument toward the southeast (Fig. 7). This street was later covered by the Byzantine Silvanus Street (see below). A few sections were excavated down to the level of this street (beneath the pavement of Silvanus Street); however, it is clear that the street level was lower than the monumental portico and the eastern bathhouse (mentioned below) to its southwest. The connection between this street and the monuments was probably through propylaea with stairways, one near the far end of the street in the southeast and the other close to the Central Monument.

A third short street originated in the square in front of the columnar monument running northwest, between the nymphaeum on the west and the decorative Monument of Antonius and a portico, both on the eastern slopes of the tell. This street reached the small esplanade in front of the temple (Fig. 8). From here it continued through the Northern Street toward the north, going along the west slopes of the tell. Probably some 250 m north of the temple was another junction from which the main street turned northwest to the west gate and the road to Legio and Caesarea. Another branch turned east and ran between the slopes of the tell and the deep gorge of Nahal Harod. This street joined Valley Street (perhaps in a round plaza) not far from the bridge above Nahal Harod. This street has not been excavated and has been identified by randomly discovered segments; thus we have no information on its construction. Some Roman pavers found underneath Palladius Street (see below, pp. 113–14) show that there was also a street running between the esplanade of the temple and the theater.

³⁸ For the various methods of calculation of population density, see M. Broshi, “The Population of Western Palestine in the Roman Byzantine Period,” *BASOR* 236 (1979), 1–10; Y. Tsafir, “Some Notes on the Settlements and Demography of Palestine in the Byzantine Period: The Archaeological Evidence,” in *Retrieving the Past: Essays on Archaeological Research and Methodology in Honor of Gus W. Van Beek*, ed. J. D. Seger (Winona Lake, Ind., 1996), 269–83.

Another street issued from the square in front of the Central Monument and ran along the south wall of the basilica toward the cult site adjacent to the theater on the east. This street, some 170 m long and 12 m wide, was founded in the early Roman period. A line of shops was built along its north side. The ceiling of these shops, probably made of wooden beams, served as the floor of the long southeast aisle of the basilica above. During the modification of the basilica in the second century (see below), the street was narrowed and covered by a long vault, creating a cryptoporticus with openings to the shops beneath the aisle of the basilica on one side and a series of perpendicular short vaults on the other side. The cryptoporticus and the vaults created a podium above which the eastern bathhouse was built. Above the cryptoporticus was built another regular street that led to the same destination.

The other Roman monuments (excluding the streets and squares) may be divided into several classes: propylaea and monuments of decorative purpose, shops and markets, temples and cult places, monuments with social and administrative functions, and monuments for leisure and mass entertainment.

The connection between the acropolis and the civic center in the west was through two passages (other roads probably reached the tell from different directions). One climbed from the temple by a stairway and a propylon, the west facade of which consisted of three arched passages separated by pedestals and columns. The threshold of the triple gate was only slightly worn, and thus we conclude that this gateway was used only for special occasions; it was perhaps used as a *via sacra*, communicating between the temple of Zeus Akraiōs on the acropolis and the temple below its slopes. Another propylon was discovered a short distance further north. This road came from the west from the large temenos, or public square, through a monumental triple gate and crossed the Northern Street at a right angle (Fig. 9). East of the street was another propylon through which a monumental stairway, at present only partially uncovered, led upward to the tell. This latter approach to the tell was situated at the top of the “saddle” at the natural spot for such a stairway, as the difference in levels is minimal (some 30 m).

Among the monuments with a purely decorative purpose we have already mentioned the Central Monument and the Monument of Antonius (Fig. 10).³⁹ The latter monument consisted of a podium abutting the (soft) rocky slopes of the tell. The facade (17 m long) was made of smoothly dressed limestone blocks. It consisted of a central hemicycle with a platform at its center (a local phenomenon also found in the nymphaeum and the basilica) and a wing on each side. The superstructure was completely ruined; we intend to reconstruct it as a semicircular colonnade made of rather small columns. The inscription, incised on the facade of the west wing, mentions Antonius, son of Antoninus, the veteran (if our completion of the last word is correct). His statue was probably installed above this wing.

The most magnificent of the monuments was the nymphaeum, which was built in the second century between the Central Monument and the temple (Figs. 11–13).⁴⁰ This building consisted of a podium of basalt blocks with a facade of limestone. The plan comprised a central niche with a podium at its center and two wings. The total width was

³⁹Tsafrir and Foerster, *ESI* 9 (1989–90), 125; Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 11 (1992), 15–17.

⁴⁰For the nymphaeum, see Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 27–28; eidem, *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 19; Tsafrir and Foerster, *ESI* 9 (1989–90), 122–24; Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 11 (1992), 14–20.

ca. 23 m and the height above the street level ca. 13 m. The superstructure was made of two tiers of columns, one above the other, and a decorated entablature. The nymphaeum was undoubtedly one of the most richly decorated monuments not only in Scythopolis but also in Palestine. It served as a focal point for meetings and other social activities.

Another important monument, decorative in character but also of social value, was the complex of the portico and the decorative pool built between the Southern Street and the eastern bath (see below).⁴¹ The portico (56 m long) was supported by the outer wall of the bathhouse and a colonnade of monolithic limestone columns (ca. 7 m high) resting on pedestals and bases and adorned with Ionic capitals (Fig. 14). The width of the portico is 14.8 m (50 Roman feet). The roof of the portico was most likely a gabled construction of wooden beams and ceramic roof tiles. Next to the portico in the southeast was a long, shallow pool (48 m long, 7 m wide, 0.7 m deep). Although it is not impossible that the complex was an integral part of the eastern bathhouse and the pool was an open swimming pool (*natatio*) of the bath, such an interpretation seems unlikely. The pool was a reflecting pool in which the magnificent architecture of the colonnade and the facade of the portico were mirrored. It was approached from the Southern Street through decorated stairways on the northwest and southeast of the portico. A large number of statues and statue fragments was uncovered near the portico and the adjacent bathhouse.

The streets were lined by many shops, some of which had decorated facades. However, no open or constructed marketplace (*macellum*) has yet been discerned in the city center. We assume that the cattle market, food markets, and so on were located somewhere outside the city center.

The civic basilica may have been connected with economic activity, but such a conclusion depends on our understanding of the role of the basilica in the Roman city and not on any specific evidence from this building. The basilica was built in the first century C.E. and remodeled in the second.⁴² Its external width was some 30 m (almost precisely 100 Roman feet); the original length was ca. 70 m. In the second-century remodeling, the Central Monument was built above the basilica's northeast (short) wall, reducing the length of the basilica by some 5 m.

The excavations of the area west of the basilica (beneath the Byzantine agora; see below, pp. 122–23) have not yet supplied information about the use of this area during the Roman period. It is possible that the main part of this area served as an open square or forum. The available area is rather small and trapezoidal; it is limited on the southwest by the back wall of the theater and the portico adjacent to it and on the northwest by a row of shops. Small temples were built in the vicinity; thus all the vital components of a Roman forum—porticoes, temples, and a basilica—were located here, but the identification of the complex as a forum remains hypothetical.

Another area in which a forum could have been located is the leveled saddle between the valleys of Nahal Ḥarod and Nahal ‘Amal west of the Northern Street and north of

⁴¹ For the portico and the pool, see Foerster and Tsafir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 32–35; *eidem*, *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 22; Tsafir and Foerster, *ESI* 9 (1989–90), 126–28; Foerster and Tsafir, *ESI* 11 (1992), 25–32.

⁴² For the basilica, see Foerster and Tsafir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 31–32; *eidem*, *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 19–20; *eidem*, *ESI* 11 (1990), 3–8; also recently L. Di Segni, G. Foerster, and Y. Tsafir, “A Decorated Altar Dedicated to Dionysos, the ‘Founder,’ from Bet Shean (Scythopolis),” *Eretz-Israel* (J. Aviram vol.) 25 (Jerusalem, 1996), 336–50, esp. 336–40 (in Hebrew).

the odeon. Only a small part of this large area has been excavated. The southeast part of a large complex adorned by monumental colonnades, piers, and walls was uncovered here. The nature of the architecture, the use of limestone from the quarries of Mount Gilboa, and stylistic analysis of the architectural sculpture date this large monument to the second century. The orientation of the colonnades corresponds exactly to that of the temple and the Northern Street. The complex is connected with the Northern Street by a monumental gate (see above); after passing through the gate, one could cross the street and climb to the acropolis. The dimensions of the complex are not yet known, but the length of the east-west axis was at least 100 m, while the north-south one was even longer. The columns of the colonnades were thick and tall, made of drums, and crowned by Ionic capitals.⁴³ One possible interpretation of this compound is as the complex of the forum (with a basilica and other civic institutions). We prefer an alternative interpretation: that we have uncovered part of the temenos in which the largest temple of Scythopolis was located (or perhaps attached to it in the west). Only further excavation will verify this interpretation.

The temple that was located in the city center, near the nymphaeum, is better known to us, though we cannot reconstruct its plan (Fig. 15).⁴⁴ The temple was first built in the first century C.E. but was remodeled during the second. As the pedestal of the statue of Marcus Aurelius stood on the lowest step of the temple's stairway, the year 180 C.E. is a *terminus ante quem* for the building of the second phase of the temple. The view of its lavish facade welcomed travelers who approached the city center from the Northern Street. The god to whom the temple was dedicated is still unknown. The temple was built on a podium created by a system of well-built vaults arranged as a double cross, with a main vault terminating in an apse. In front of the temple was a wide stairway. The facade consisted of a tetrastyle pronaos (20.5 m long) perhaps adorned by a "broken" pediment. The superstructure was completely razed in antiquity and has further deteriorated during the ages; thus we can guess at its shape only from the shape of the substructure (a difficult task, as we cannot be sure if the remains belong to the first or to the second phase). The cella seems to be circular; however, we do not know whether the temple was also circular on the outside, like, for example, the Temple of Venus at Baalbek,⁴⁵ or was of the classical rectangular shape. Because of its central location and lavishness, we suggest its association with the cult of Dionysos, the legendary founder of the city. The underground vaults were connected with the round cella above them by a narrow spiral stairway, pointing to the possibility that the underground vaults played a part in the cult. This architectural phenomenon hints at the relation of the temple to the Dionysiac mysteries or the cult of chthonic gods. It is not impossible that Nysa, Dionysos' nurse who was buried by Dionysos in Scythopolis-Bet Shean, was worshiped here, but such an identification must remain hypothetical.

⁴³ It is impossible to calculate the exact height of the columns. However, the fact that they were made of drums and not of monolithic shafts points to a greater height than was possible for a monolithic column. The highest monolithic columns hitherto found (9.3 m) were in the pronaos of the temple.

⁴⁴ For the temple, see Foerster and Tsafir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 26–27; *eidem*, *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 18–19; Tsafir and Foerster, *ESI* 9 (1989–90), 121–22.

⁴⁵ F. Raggette, *Baalbek* (Park Ridge, N.J., 1980), 52–62.

Another temple, dedicated to Zeus Akraios, stood on the acropolis.⁴⁶ Little is known about its plan, as the excavators in the early 1920s entirely dismantled its remains and left only a very general plan of its location, in the “temples area,” and the dimensions of its foundations (ca. 37 × 22 m). Some of the large drums (1.25–1.32 m in diameter) and a Corinthian capital were left in the vicinity.⁴⁷ Only the basalt foundations were found in situ, but the decorated fragments show the high quality of the architecture. Two more temples and altars with dedicatory inscriptions were excavated near the theater to its east and north.⁴⁸

A significant group of public buildings was connected with leisure and entertainment. At least two baths functioned in the early Roman period, in the first century C.E. One was located near the riverbed of Nahal ‘Amal; in the second century it went out of use and was covered by Valley Street.⁴⁹ The second is the eastern bath, which was thoroughly rebuilt and remodeled in the second century.⁵⁰ Little is known about the first phase; the bath of the second century is better known, though not much more than half of its implied area has been unearthed so far.

The bathhouse, whose complete dimensions are unknown but appear to be no smaller than 70 × 70 m, was located on the south bank of Nahal ‘Amal. It was partially built above the vaults that leveled the area south of the basilica (see above). The bathhouse was bordered by a portico and the decorative pool in the northeast. So far, a hall of the *frigidarium* abutting the portico, and vaulted rooms that contained the *caldarium* on the southwest side, have been excavated.

The theater, the dominant monument in the south part of the city center (Fig. 16),⁵¹ was oriented north, like most of the theaters in the region, so that the sun was at the spectators’ backs.⁵² It was located on the south slope of the central valley. The semicircular *cavea* was partially dug into the soft travertine bedrock, but in general the builders of the theater exploited the natural terrain and installed the benches of the lower *cavea* on the slope. In the second century the theater was rebuilt: benches, vaults, and the *scaenae frons* were made of hard limestone. Granite columns, marble entablature, and a highly decorated frieze with populated scrolls containing *erotes* and animals enriched the *scaenae*

⁴⁶This identification, rather than that with the cult of Dionysos suggested by the excavators, is based on the inscriptions mentioning Zeus Akraios (Zeus of the high peak, i.e., the acropolis); cf. Tsafir, “Evidence for the Cult.”

⁴⁷Rowe, *Beth Shan*, I, 44–45.

⁴⁸The temples were discovered by the Israel Antiquities Authority team headed by Mazor and Bar-Nathan. As the discovery has not yet been published, we cannot add information about these cult sites.

⁴⁹A preliminary report on the remains of this bath will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Excavations and Surveys in Israel*.

⁵⁰For the eastern bathhouse, see Tsafir and Foerster, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 99–101; Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *ibid.*, 127–29; see also a forthcoming issue of *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* and the forthcoming *Guidebook to the Antiquities of Bet Shean* (as above, note 3).

⁵¹For the theater at Bet Shean, see Applebaum, “Roman Theatre” (as above, note 14); Mazor, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 19–23; *idem*, *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 28–32; Bar-Nathan and Mazor, *ESI* 11 (1992), 33–37; Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 121–22; for the architectural decoration of the *scaenae frons*, see A. Ovadiah and J. Turnheim, “Peopled” Scrolls in Roman Architectural Decoration in Israel: The Roman Theatre at Bet Shean/Scythopolis, *RArch suppl.* 14 (Rome, 1994).

⁵²Theaters were found in every large town, and even in some small ones, in the provinces of Palestine and Arabia; see the full list in A. Segal, *Theatres in Roman Palestine and Provincia Arabia* (Leiden, 1995).

frons. The back wall of the theater faced the city center. The diameter of the theater is ca. 110 m; its capacity was some seven thousand spectators.

The odeon was built on the other side of the Nahal 'Amal valley.⁵³ Only the foundations survive, but they give a clear idea of its plan. As in the theater, the *cavea* faced north. It was not roofed, and its definition as an odeon is due to its small dimensions. The diameter of the odeon was some 25 m; it had eight rows of benches, providing room for 350–400 spectators. Its small size has also given rise to the identification of the odeon as the meeting place of the city council (*bouleutérion* or *curia*), as in several towns in Asia Minor and in the North Theater at Jerash (ancient Gerasa).⁵⁴

Last in the list of mass entertainment installations is the hippodrome on the plateau south of the city center.⁵⁵ The hippodrome was built in the second century but in the fourth century was converted into an amphitheater (Fig. 17). Only the western part of the hippodrome has been unearthed, and we have no idea of the exact length of the edifice and the shape of the *carceres*, but a suggestion of an outer length of no less than 261 m (as at Gerasa)⁵⁶ and probably more than 300 m (as in the Herodian hippodrome at Caesarea⁵⁷ and at Neapolis)⁵⁸ seems reasonable. The hippodrome was a remarkably lavish and large edifice; the *cavea* (most likely ca. 16 m wide) could probably hold some twelve thousand spectators.

III. SIZE AND POPULATION: THE EXPANSION OF THE CITY FROM THE MID-FOURTH TO THE MID-SIXTH CENTURY

In the first part of the sixth century, Palestine reached its peak in terms of population and the number and size of settlements.⁵⁹ An estimate of about one million people in

⁵³ Mazor, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 18–19; Bar-Nathan and Mazor, *ESI* 11 (1992), 45.

⁵⁴ For the excavations in the north theater at Jerash and its use as an odeon and *bouleutérion*, see V. A. Clark et al., "The Jerash North Theatre: Architecture and Archaeology, 1982–1983," in *Jerash Archaeological Project, 1981–1983*, I, ed. F. Zayadine (Amman, 1986), 205–302, esp. 229, hereafter Zayadine, *Jerash*, I. For the odeon at Pella, see R. H. Smith and L. P. Day, *Pella of the Decapolis*, II: *Final Report on the College of Wooster Excavations in Area IX, the Civic Complex, 1979–1985* (Wooster, Ohio, 1989), 20–33.

⁵⁵ This monument is usually identified in the reports as the amphitheater; on the definition of its final shape (see below, p. 105), see Foerster and Tsafir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 35–38; Tsafir and Foerster, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 113–16. However, these preliminary reports are not up to date concerning the plan and history of the monument as described below. An updated preliminary report will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Excavations and Surveys in Israel*.

⁵⁶ E. B. Müller, "The Hippodrome," in *Gerasa—City of the Decapolis*, ed. C. H. Kraeling (New Haven, Conn., 1938), 85–100; A. Ostrasz, "The Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Report on Excavation and Research, 1982–1987," *Syria* 66 (1989), 51–77.

⁵⁷ J. Porath, "Herod's 'Amphitheater' at Caesarea: A Multipurpose Entertainment Building," in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research*, ed. J. Humphrey (Ann Arbor, 1995), 15–27. The discovery of the *carceres* and the exact length of the hippodrome were reported by Porath, and also by J. Patrich at the Twenty-Second Archaeological Conference in Israel, 1996; but see also, for the much longer Severan(?) hippodrome (480 m), J. Humphrey, "Prolegomena to the Study of the Hippodrome of Caesarea Maritima," *BASOR* 213 (1974), 2–45; idem, "A Summary of the 1974 Excavations in the Caesarea Hippodrome," *BASOR* 218 (1976), 1–24.

⁵⁸ Y. Magen, "Shechem-Neapolis," *NEAEHL*, IV, 1357–58. The length of the hippodrome is ca. 320 m.

⁵⁹ For the evidence and methodology, see also, in general, Tsafir, "Settlements and Demography"; and Tsafir, Di Segni, and Green, *TIR*, esp. 18–19.

western Palestine seems to be close to reality.⁶⁰ New settlements were founded all over the country, even in inhospitable regions like the Negev or the borders of the Syrian desert in Arabia. This expansion was a reflection of a long period of relative stability without major wars or natural disasters, which began after the suppression of the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 C.E.) and ended with the later Samaritan revolts (529 and 536 C.E.) and especially the bubonic plague of 541/2 C.E. We may assume that this long period of growth was disturbed by some major events such as the crisis of the Roman Empire in the mid-third century or the earthquake of 363 C.E. (see below), which had an impact on the demography of Palestine, but no substantial traces have been discerned.

Like other urban settlements in Palestine that during the Byzantine period expanded beyond their limits in the Roman period, Scythopolis displays its demographic growth by an extensive expansion. Surveys of existing remains and excavations around the core of the Roman town have shown that Byzantine quarters were founded almost everywhere. A wall (ca. 4.8 km long) was built around the city and encircled some 134 ha; however, many buildings were outside the course of the wall, thus adding to the city an area of at least 20 ha.

At present it is impossible to supply an exact date for the construction of the wall of Scythopolis. It was definitely later than the Roman period, as it encircled an area much larger than the Roman city. On the other hand, it incorporated at least two of the main monumental gates of the Roman city that had been freestanding: the west and northeast gates. The wall is about 2.5–3 m thick, like the Byzantine wall of Caesarea⁶¹ and the mid-fifth-century wall (Eudocia's wall) in the southern part of Jerusalem.⁶² It was made of basalt blocks, though in many places limestone ashlar, probably taken from deserted Roman buildings, were embedded in the wall. Three inscriptions were found, not in situ, that mention a renovation of the wall. Two of these inscriptions are identical and relate that this renovation was done through imperial munificence ($\epsilon\kappa\tau\eta\varsigma\delta\theta\epsilon\iota\sigma\eta\varsigma\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha\varsigma\phi\iota\lambda\omega\varsigma$) at the request ($\alpha\iota\tau\eta\varsigma\iota\varsigma$) of Flavius Arsenius, in the time of the governor Flavius Anastasius.⁶³ The third inscription resembles the others in context and date: Arsenius is mentioned again as the person who requested the imperial grant, in the time of the governor Leo.⁶⁴ Another inscription, which mentions the work of building a wall in the time of the governor Flavius Johannes, may also have belonged to Scythopolis.⁶⁵ These inscriptions do not use the era of Scythopolis but rather the indiction.

⁶⁰ Broshi, "Western Palestine" (as above, note 38).

⁶¹ For the wall of Caesarea, see K. G. Holum et al., *King Herod's Dream: Caesarea on the Sea* (New York, 1988), 164–65; K. G. Holum et al., "Preliminary Report on the 1989–1990 Seasons," in *Caesarea Papers*, ed. R. L. Vann (Ann Arbor, 1992), 95–97.

⁶² For Eudocia's wall in Jerusalem, see F. J. Bliss and A. C. Dickie, *Excavations at Jerusalem, 1894–1897* (London, 1898), 14–20; Y. Tsafir, "Zion—The South-Western Hill of Jerusalem and Its Place in the Urban Development of the City in the Byzantine Period" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1975, in Hebrew), 205–32.

⁶³ See discussion and references to earlier publications in M. Avi-Yonah, "Greek Inscriptions from Ascalon, Jerusalem, Beisan and Hebron," *QDAP* 10 (1944), 166–69.

⁶⁴ Fitzgerald, *Beth Shan*, III, 46–47; see also Avi-Yonah, "Greek Inscriptions," 167.

⁶⁵ The inscription will be discussed in a separate article by Leah Di Segni, who has also suggested its connection with Scythopolis. It was published by F. Cumont, *Catalogue des sculptures et inscriptions antiques (monuments lapidaires) des Musées royaux du Cinquantenaire* (Brussels, 1913), no. 144. The provenance is said to

The names of the governors mentioned in the inscriptions (Leo, Anastasius, and Johannes) are very common; thus it is somewhat risky to use them for absolute dating, although it is not impossible. We know of a governor (*archōn*) named Leo who built the exedras of the winter (building?) in the western bath, as mentioned in the inscription found there in an archaeological context that fits the first half of the sixth century.⁶⁶ On more solid ground, we may identify Flavius Arsenius, who held no official post in either the provincial or municipal administration but had the high personal rank of *gloriosissimus* (ἐνδοξότατος). This was probably the Flavius Arsenius whom Procopius of Caesarea described as a native of Scythopolis, a Samaritan who converted to Christianity but maintained close contacts with his Samaritan family in Scythopolis (see below for his father, Silvanus).⁶⁷ Arsenius was said to have contact with and influence on Empress Theodora, but lost much of his power as a consequence of the Samaritan revolt in 529. Thus the third year of the indiction, in the time of the *archōn* Anastasius, falls in 524/5 C.E. The fourth year of the indiction, in the time of the *archōn* Leo, falls in 525/6 C.E. (though if the letter marking the date of the indiction was A rather than D, the date is 522/3 C.E.).⁶⁸ In any case, the date of the wall's renovation falls in or near the end of the first quarter of the sixth century. Such a conclusion fits well with our general impression that Scythopolis reached its peak of building activity during the reigns of emperors Anastasius and Justin I rather than under Justinian.

We do not know the exact meaning of the phrase *πᾶν ἔργον τοῦ τείχους ὀνειρώθη* ("all the work of the wall was renovated") in the inscription of the year 525/6 and the almost identical phrase in the inscription of the year 522/3. In the absence of proper archaeological examination of the wall, we do not know the date of the former wall or its condition when the renovation of the early sixth century took place, and whether the renovation refers only to a repair of an existing wall or to the building of new segments that joined an ancient wall. In more than one place we learn of the building of city walls in Palestine and Arabia around the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century, as a consequence of the failure of the Roman administration to maintain an atmosphere of security.⁶⁹ The same phenomenon is known in other cities in the East and throughout

be northern Palestine. Di Segni's suggestion that it should be related to Scythopolis is based on the comparison with an identical fragment found in Bet Shean, published by B. Lifshitz, "Beiträge zur palästinischen Epigraphik," *ZDPV* 78 (1962), 82–84. We thank Leah Di Segni for her comments.

⁶⁶ Mazor, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 15.

⁶⁷ Procopius, *Anecdota* 11.24–30, 27.8–10. The identification was suggested already by Fitzgerald, *Beth Shan*, III, 46–47; see expanded discussion in L. Di Segni, "Scythopolis (Bet Shean) during the Samaritan Rebellion of 529 C.E.," in *Jews, Samaritans and Christians in Byzantine Palestine*, ed. D. Jacoby and Y. Tsafir (Jerusalem, 1988; in Hebrew), 217–27. Another possible but less likely identification is with another Arsenius, also a *scholasticus* from Scythopolis, the father of Silvanus and grandfather of our Arsenius. His name appears in an inscription of 515/6 C.E., which mentions the deeds of his sons (discussed below). However, it is hard to believe that he, too, gained the rank of *endoxotatos*.

⁶⁸ From another inscription found near the amphitheater (see below, pp. 105–6 and notes 89–91), we know that the *archōn* in the earlier part of the year 522, still in the 15th year of the indiction, was Flavius Orestes. If the earlier date is correct, it may prove that Orestes was replaced by Leo in the latter part of 522 or early in 523.

⁶⁹ For Jerusalem–Aelia Capitolina, see Hamilton, "North Wall of Jerusalem"; C. N. Jones, "The Citadel, Jerusalem, 1939–1949," *QDAP* 14 (1950), 157–58; Tsafir, "Zion," 72–78; H. Geva, "Jerusalem," *NEAEHL*, II, 761–62. For the date of the wall at Jerash, see Seigne, "Jérash romaine et byzantine." For the walls of Adraa

the Roman world.⁷⁰ We do not know whether this general tendency to build walls around 300 C.E. was shared by the builders of the wall at Bet Shean; if so, parts of the area encircled by the wall remained unoccupied. Therefore, a date for the construction of the wall in the late third or early fourth century seems unlikely. The *terminus ante quem* for building the wall is the renovation in the first quarter of the sixth century, and a date in the late fourth or fifth century for the original construction seems very reasonable.

Long sections of the wall were traced in excavations and surveys, and some are still visible above the surface; thus its course is rather clear for most of its circumference, except for the southeast and southwest. As mentioned above, two of the main gates, in the west and the northeast, have been excavated, and a round tower, which may belong to a gate, was unearthed by chance in the south.⁷¹ The Aramaic Halakhic inscription from the synagogue at Reḥov, some 5 km south of Scythopolis, mentions six gates in the circumference of the city.⁷² This is a legal text that is not mentioned in the legal Talmudic texts nor in any literary or exegetical text (in contrast to other parts of the inscription, which were incorporated into the canonical Talmudic literature). The text defines the limits of gentile Scythopolis, the capital of a region settled by Jewish villagers. The Jews who settled within the limits of the city were exempt from certain obligations: the tithe of the crops (*ma'aser*), the donation to the priests, and the prohibition of cultivating the land and eating the crops at every seventh (Sabbatical) year (*Shemita*). These specific obligations were binding only for Jews who were settled in the Land of Israel (*Eretz Israel*), according to the Halakhic law. The paradoxical exclusion of Bet Shean from the borders of Eretz Israel, that is, Jewish Palestine, by the Jewish patriarch encouraged Jewish farmers to settle within the city, as they competed with gentile farmers on equal economic terms. On the other hand, the Bet Shean valley around the city was densely occupied by Jewish villages, which were bound by the strict laws compulsory for Jews in Eretz Israel. Some of the fruits and vegetables imported to Bet Shean from the Jewish villages were subject to the same Halakhic taxes as the rest of Jewish Eretz Israel. For this practical reason, the town limits had to be defined in the most detailed manner.

The Jewish borders described by the Halakhic text are not necessarily identical with the physical or administrative limits of the town, though such an identification is reasonable. The most convenient way of describing the borderline was by mentioning the city gates as the boundary stations. The list starts with “the gate of the open field = *campus*” (*pulé de-campon*, פַּלְיָ דְקִמְפָּן) in the south. It proceeds clockwise to the “white field” (*hakla havarta*, חֲקֵלָא חֹוֶרֶתָה) in the west, which is also “the gate of the winepress(?)” (*pulé de-zaira*, פַּלְיָ דְזַיְרָה), to the “end of the pavement” (*sof ha-rizpa*, סֻופָּה הַרְצָפָה). From here it goes to the north to the gate of Sachota (*pulé de-sachota*, פַּלְיָ דְסָכּוֹתָה); the meaning of the name in Ara-

and Bostra in the mid-3rd century, see H. G. Pflaum, “La fortification de la ville d’Adraha d’Arabie 259/260–274/275 d’après des inscriptions récemment découvertes,” *Syria* 29 (1952), 307–30; M. Sartre, *Bostra des origines à l’Islam* (Paris, 1985), esp. 89.

⁷⁰On the dating of the walls, see above, pp. 100–102, and in general, A. Lewin, *Studi sulla città imperiale Romana nell’oriente tardoantico*, Bibliotheca di Athenaeum 17 (Como, 1991).

⁷¹The discovery was made recently, when a channel was dug in the main street of the new town (the tower was later reburied). It will be reported by the area supervisor of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

⁷²See, in particular, Sussmann, “Halakhic Inscription” (as above, note 8).

maic is “an observation point”), including the area from this gate to the village of Karnos (כְּפֶר קָרְנוֹס). From here it goes eastward to the Dung Gate (*pulé de-zablaya*, פִּילִי דַּזְבְּלִיָּה), including the area between this place and the mausoleum of Panuktaya (נְפֵשָׁה דְּפָנוּקְטִיָּה), and also to the gate of the village of Zamarin (*pulé de Kefar Zamarin*, פִּילִי דְּכָפֶר זָמָרִין) and the gate of Agma (פִּילִי דְּאַגְּמָה). It seems that we can identify the two main gates: the west gate, on the road going to Legio, may be identified with the gate of Zaira, and the northeast gate is the gate of Sachota. Other identifications of the places mentioned in the list with actual archaeological finds must remain hypothetical.

The mosaic inscription was installed in the narthex of the synagogue at Reḥov in its later phase, perhaps the sixth or even seventh century,⁷³ but the text itself seems to reflect an earlier period. However, as the gates (which might have been freestanding at the time of the composition of the text) are mentioned but not the wall itself, the description of the Halakhic borders does not help date the wall, and we remain with the archaeological evidence mentioned above as the only means of dating.

We can suggest two theoretical models for the city’s expansion during the Byzantine period. One assumes a gradual expansion of the area around the core of the Roman city by a series of “rings,” in which a new ring of houses encircles the previous one. The other assumes that new suburbs were built along the arteries, or, in response to local conditions, not necessarily first in the areas closer to the center (e.g., as in the Hellenistic period when the town expanded from the biblical tell to Tel Iẓtaba north of Nahal Harod, without territorial continuity). It is possible that during this process of expansion the city engulfed some small villages that became parts of greater Scythopolis. It is also possible that some of the local names mentioned in the Reḥov inscription, such as Kfar Karnos or Sachota, were originally independent villages north of Scythopolis that were later incorporated within the boundaries of the larger city.⁷⁴

The northern (Samaritan?) synagogue, some 280 m north of the Byzantine wall, was excavated in 1961 by N. Zori.⁷⁵ The excavator mentions the finding of some Hellenistic pottery and a “pocket” of Roman pottery of the third century C.E. in the vicinity. He discerns three periods in the architectural history of the synagogue: from the end of the fourth to the early fifth century; from the mid-fifth to the early sixth century; and from the late sixth to the seventh century. The existence of an early phase of the late fourth to the early fifth century seems doubtful, as neither the plan nor the finds support such a distinction. The majority of the finds, including the pottery, are of the period between the late fifth and early seventh century.⁷⁶ Such a chronological range seems to be more

⁷³Ibid., 155–56.

⁷⁴Scholars have even raised the hypothesis of a connection between the local name Sachota (Tel Iẓtaba?) and the rather bizarre and unexplained name Scythopolis. They claim that Scythopolis is merely a Hellenized contraction of the Semitic place-name Sachota with the suffix *polis*. S. Applebaum, “When Did Scythopolis Become a Greek City?” in *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel*, V (Haifa, 1980), 63–69. Applebaum refers to the tradition mentioned by Malalas that the first name of the place that later became Scythopolis was Tricomias (Joannes Malalas, *Chronographia* 5, ed. L. A. Dindorf [Bonn, 1831], 139–40). According to this hypothesis, Sachota was one of the three villages that were combined into one town by synoikism; see also the critical comments of Fuks, *Scythopolis*, 160–65.

⁷⁵N. Zori, “The Ancient Synagogue at Beth Shean,” *Eretz-Israel* (E. L. Sukenik vol.) 8 (Jerusalem, 1967), 149–67 (in Hebrew).

⁷⁶Ibid., 159.

reasonable.⁷⁷ On the other hand, some finds of fourth-century coins and pottery were made on Tel Iztaba within the city wall. However, the main discoveries in this area are of the fifth(?) and especially the sixth century.

The Monastery of the Lady Mary was built within the city close to the wall.⁷⁸ The exact date of construction is unknown, but it probably falls in the mid-sixth century.⁷⁹ A similar date in the sixth century has been suggested for the two other churches found on Tel Iztaba. One is the church of a martyr whose name in the mosaic inscription has not been preserved.⁸⁰ The church was located on the eastern spur of the tell, some 400 m east of the Monastery of the Lady Mary, and seems to be a part of a monastery. The other church was found north of the city wall and was identified by a mosaic inscription as the church of the Metropolitan Andreas.⁸¹ Another church, or chapel, of the year 522 was found beyond the city limits in the northeast, north of Nahal Harod and east of the cemetery; it belonged to the monastery of Abba Justinus.⁸²

The excavations in the western suburb, some 400 m west of the theater, in the House of Leontis (perhaps a hostel, built by a Jew from Alexandria) and the small Jewish synagogue within it, yielded similar results.⁸³ This area is a plateau, situated between the valleys of Nahal Harod and Nahal 'Amal, that was densely settled in the Byzantine period.⁸⁴ The early remains in this area (excluding some Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age sherds) are of the Roman-Byzantine period, many from the fourth century but most from the fifth century on.

More evidence was collected in the excavations at the north edge of the plateau of the southern quarter, south of the theater and north of the amphitheater. On the edge of the plateau south of the Nahal 'Amal valley a bathhouse of moderate size was discovered, and nearby were the remains of mosaic floors of residential houses.⁸⁵ Some 30 m

⁷⁷A mosaic in one of the side rooms of the synagogue was made by Marianos and Anina. These mosaicists also made the mosaic in the synagogue at Bet Alpha, dated by inscription to the days of Emperor Justin, most probably Justin I (518–527 C.E.). See E. L. Sukenik, *The Ancient Synagogue at Beth Alpha* (Jerusalem, 1932).

⁷⁸Fitzgerald, *Sixth Century Monastery*.

⁷⁹The earliest dated inscription probably refers to the year 553/4 C.E. (Fitzgerald, *Sixth Century Monastery*, 16), but it is clear that the foundation took place some time before that date. Fitzgerald also considers the date of 568/9, which is also supported by M. Avi-Yonah, "Mosaic Pavements in Palestine," *QDAP* 2 (1932), 143. If this is correct, the earliest dated inscription is the burial epitaph of the year 567: Fitzgerald, *Sixth Century Monastery*.

⁸⁰Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 136–37 (see also description of the church in Bar-Nathan and Mazor, *ESI* 11 [1992], 50). The excavators suggest that this might be the church of St. Procopius, mentioned by Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 75 (ed. E. Schwartz [Leipzig, 1939], 180.8), as being in the compound of the bishop's palace. Another martyrium known in Scythopolis was that of the martyr St. Basilios: Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Euthymii* 16 (ed. E. Schwartz [Leipzig, 1939], 26.14); also in Theodosius, *De Situ Terrae Sanctae* 2, CCSL 175 (Turnhout, 1965), 115.

⁸¹Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 137.

⁸²G. M. Fitzgerald, *PEFQ* (1932), 148; A. Alt, "Inschriftliches zu den Ären von Scythopolis und Philadelphia," *ZDPV* 55 (1932), 128–32; J. Starr, "The Byzantine Inscriptions of Bethshan-Scythopolis," *AJP* 58 (1937), 85–86.

⁸³N. Zori, "The House of Kyrios Leontis at Beth-Shean," *IEJ* 16 (1966), 123–34; D. Bahat, "A Synagogue at Beth-Shean," in Levine, *Ancient Synagogues Revealed* (as above, note 8), 82–85.

⁸⁴Two other sites that were excavated by Zori in the 1960s but not properly published were the "Imhof Monastery" and the "Mansion." See general remarks in N. Zori, "An Archaeological Survey of the Bet Shean Valley," in *The Beth Shean Valley: The Seventeenth Archaeological Convention* (Jerusalem, 1962; in Hebrew), 188.

⁸⁵M. Peleg, "The Bet Shean Project: D. The South Bathhouse," *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 43–44. The author defines the chronological range as late Roman to Byzantine.

west of the bathhouse a rock-cut pool and plastered walls of uncertain function were found.⁸⁶ The pottery and other finds show that this area was settled from the fourth century on. The amphitheater on the southern plateau was situated some 280 m south of the theater and some 180 m south of the above-mentioned bathhouse (Fig. E).⁸⁷ It was originally built as a hippodrome and was converted into an amphitheater only in the second part of the fourth century (see also the discussion below, pp. 133–35). It seems that at the time of the conversion there were some residential houses built in the vicinity, but many more were added during the fifth century. Further changes took place sometime after the conversion, probably during the fifth century. The main entrance to the arena in the east was narrowed and lost its monumental character, and the two monumental flanking stairways that led to the *cavea* on both sides of the entrance were blocked by utilitarian buildings (Fig. 18). These activities were part of the construction of the new suburban quarter in the south. One of the new buildings near the northwest side of the amphitheater included a rectangular hall (11.5 × 5.0 m) with an apse on its south side, probably a reception hall. This hall was flanked by pairs of rooms on the east and west. The house might have belonged to one of the city officials or to a wealthy citizen. The rooms on the west side were later destroyed, and the area was confiscated for the building of a new road that climbed from the main valley (Fig. 19). The street (5–5.4 m wide) was made of basalt blocks neatly laid in a herringbone pattern. The pavement is identical with that of Silvanus Street in the city center (see below, p. 123), and it seems that the road near the amphitheater was a continuation of Silvanus Street, which climbed to the plateau in the south.⁸⁸ The construction of Silvanus Street is dated to about 515 C.E. (see below, pp. 124–25); thus the construction of the street near the amphitheater probably took place shortly after 515 C.E. (but before 522, as discussed below). The apsidal building, therefore, must have been founded some time in the fifth century (or maybe even during the late fourth century).

The intensive building activity of the new quarter was accompanied by the paving of a new segment of a street that abutted the amphitheater on the north at a much higher level than that of the original entrances to the amphitheater (and to the Roman hippodrome that had preceded it). This new street continued the above-mentioned street, with the herringbone-patterned pavement, to the east. Its pavement was arranged in a different pattern: straight lines of basalt blocks were laid across the street. It was 5.8–6.4 m wide, slightly wider than the first street. Two limestone slabs with Greek inscriptions were embedded in the pavement. One was located near the place where the new segment meets the herringbone-patterned street. It says: “+ The beginning (*ἀρχή*) of the wonderful work of the most magnificent (*megaloprepestatos*) *archōn* Flavius Orestes.”⁸⁹ *Archōn* is the common title of the provincial governor in inscriptions found at Scythopolis. The second inscription, located some 55 m east (Fig. 20), is longer and more informative: “In the days of Flavius Orestes, the most magnificent *comēs* and *archōn* Flavius Orestes, the famous work of the pavement (*πλάκωσις*) and the new water installation (*νέον νόδρίον*) was carried out, under the supervision of Silvinus son of Marinus, the most illustrious (*λαμ-*

⁸⁶ F. Vitto, “The Bet Shean Project: E. Excavations West of the South Bathhouse,” *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 45.

⁸⁷ See above, note 55.

⁸⁸ Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 38–42; Tsafrir and Foerster, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 113–16.

⁸⁹ Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 41.

πρότατος) *comes* and *prōtos*. In the 15th year of the indiction, year 585.”⁹⁰ The inscriptions undoubtedly refer to the pavement of the new section of the street and to the replacement of the old ceramic pipeline by a new one. Both the old and the new pipes were uncovered in the excavation. The date 585 of the era of Scythopolis, in the 15th year of the indiction, corresponds to 522 C.E., a short time after the suggested date of the construction of the main street.⁹¹ The year 522 C.E. is, therefore, a *terminus ante quem* for the major changes in the amphitheater. The necessity of replacing the old pipeline (which was constricted by an accumulation of travertine and lime within the pipe) suggests that the earlier water installation was probably built during the fifth century together with the building of this quarter.

We believe that at this time the settlement in the newly built southern quarter almost reached its peak. This evidence is in accord with our general conclusion, that the zenith of settlement activity in the whole area of Scythopolis was attained in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, in particular under Anastasius and Justin I, rather than in the reign of Justinian.⁹²

IV. THE CITY CENTER FROM THE MID-FOURTH TO THE MID-FIFTH CENTURY: CHRISTIANIZATION, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES, AND THEIR IMPACT ON URBAN PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE

The fourth century was a period of transition and change. The processes of demographic growth and expanded occupation, which characterized settlements throughout the country and had a great impact on the shape of Scythopolis, were discussed above. The demographic growth affected the city center as well, as it dictated a new urban arrangement and the installation of shops, workshops, and homes for the growing population. The excavations have revealed much evidence of these developments.

In addition to demographic and economic factors, we have to consider the radical religious and cultural change that became a major force in shaping the city and its social and congregational life, namely, the process of Christianization.⁹³ Indeed, the change was gradual, and in many aspects continuity of the social order and cultural values can easily be recognized. However, the transition from the Roman to the Byzantine period was above all influenced by the triumph of Christians over pagans. A study of the process of Christianization of Scythopolis reveals a deep change in the political and social life of the city and in the daily behavior of the urban community. This transformation is reflected in the archaeological finds.

A Christian community is known in Scythopolis from the very early years of the fourth century; we may assume that Christianity reached the city in the third century or even earlier. Eusebius tells the story of Procopius, a native of Aelia-Jerusalem, who held

⁹⁰Ibid.; see also the Greek text and discussion by L. Di Segni, in *Ancient Aqueducts in Palestine*, ed. D. Amit, Y. Hirschfeld, and J. Patrich (Ann Arbor, forthcoming).

⁹¹See below, p. 135.

⁹²See discussion below, pp. 116–18.

⁹³For the crucial influence of Christian priorities on the shape and fate of the city, see in particular H. Saradi-Mendelovici, “The Demise of the Ancient City and the Emergence of the Medieval City in the Eastern Roman Empire,” *Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views* 32 (1988), 365–401.

the office of reader, translator (probably from Greek to Syriac-Aramaic),⁹⁴ and exorcist of the Christian congregation of Scythopolis.⁹⁵ He suffered martyrdom in Caesarea in the year 303, becoming the main saint of the latter city, though he was also admired as a martyr in Scythopolis.⁹⁶ Eusebius also mentions a woman from Scythopolis named Manathas or Ennathas, about whom no further information is given, who suffered martyrdom in Caesarea in 309 C.E.⁹⁷

We know little about the Christian congregation of Scythopolis. One can learn from Procopius' career that the common spoken language of the members of the congregation was Syriac-Aramaic. It should be emphasized that not a single Syriac-Aramaic inscription of the fourth century or earlier has been discovered in Scythopolis, and the only place where such an inscription (probably of the late 5th–early 6th century) was found was the Jewish synagogue.⁹⁸ The necessity for translation of Greek into Aramaic may point to the fact that in its early stages Christianity spread mostly among the lower classes and less among aristocratic circles, as the very act of conversion to Christianity constituted an act of hostility toward the state. The situation became more complicated later in the fourth century after the conversion of Constantine. From Constantine on, Christianization was recommended and well rewarded, but not compulsory until the severe antipagan measures in the days of Theodosius I in the last quarter of the century.

Epiphanius wrote with admiration about Joseph the *comes*, a converted Jew who devoted much effort to Christianizing the Jews in the area of the Sea of Galilee and Lower Galilee.⁹⁹ In his last years, Joseph settled in Scythopolis and became the owner of some fine buildings in that town. Epiphanius recorded the story as Joseph himself had told it to him. According to the description, the whole population of the city was Christian, but Arian. Joseph was the only Orthodox believer, except for Eusebius, the bishop of Vercellae in Italy who was exiled to this city around 353 for his belief in the Nicene creed and who spent some time here in harsh conditions. At about the same time we read in Ammianus Marcellinus about trials and interrogations under torture that were carried out in Scythopolis against suspected enemies of the regime.¹⁰⁰ This city was chosen because of its location far from Antioch and Alexandria, the capitals of Syria and Egypt, from which most of the accused were brought for trial. Ammianus Marcellinus had no interest in the city and its inhabitants and gave no hint that the population was Christian. There is no need to doubt Epiphanius' testimony that a large community of Christians, mainly

⁹⁴ Procopius' task as translator followed the Jewish custom of having the reading of the Hebrew scriptures in the synagogue followed by an oral translation into Aramaic, which was the language better understood by the members of the congregation. For example, see Bab. Talmud, *Megila* 3a; A. S. Amir, *Institutions and Titles in the Talmudic Literature* (Jerusalem, 1977; in Hebrew), 76–88. For more on this topic, see S. H. Griffith, "From Aramaic to Arabic: The Languages of the Monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods," *DOP* 51 (1997).

⁹⁵ Eusebius, *De Martyribus Palestinae* 1.1–2.

⁹⁶ See above, note 80.

⁹⁷ Eusebius, *De Martyribus Palestinae* 9.6–8.

⁹⁸ Bahat, "Synagogue at Beth-Shean"; J. Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic: The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues* (Jerusalem, 1978; in Hebrew), 77–79.

⁹⁹ Epiphanius, *Panarion seu Adversus LXX Haereses* 30.4–12; Z. Rubin, "Joseph the Comes and the Attempts to Convert the Galilee to Christianity in the Fourth Century C.E.," *Cathedra* 26 (1982), 105–16 (in Hebrew). See also Eusebius Vercellensis, *Epistula* 2.8 (PL 12, cols. 947–54).

¹⁰⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum Libri* 19.12.8.

Arians, existed in Scythopolis. We know that Patrophilus, the bishop of Scythopolis in the mid-fourth century, including the period of Eusebius of Vercellae's exile there, was one of the most prominent Arian leaders of the East.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, it is hard to believe that the majority of the leading class of Scythopolis had already converted to Christianity in the 360s. The contribution of epigraphic evidence is limited; there are a few Greek inscriptions, mentioning governors and building activities, which we tend to date to the fourth century on the basis of their content or the stratigraphic circumstances of their discovery. These inscriptions are adorned with crosses and therefore are no earlier than the mid-fourth century, but include no dates.

The excavations have shown that Scythopolis was damaged by the famous earthquake of the year 363 C.E.¹⁰² Beshan is mentioned as partly destroyed in a Syriac manuscript that gives a list of the ruined settlements in Palestine by name.¹⁰³ The excavations support the information given in the source that the city was only partially destroyed. The damage has been discerned mainly through the rebuilding of several Roman monuments in various locations at the site. The stratigraphy, the similar character of the rebuilding, and the distribution of ruined or renovated monuments all over the city center have led us to the conclusion that the monuments were damaged at the same time, most likely by an earthquake. The reconstruction of the monuments after the earthquake was somewhat inferior to the original second-century construction, but the classical character of the restoration proves that the classical tradition was still alive in the late fourth century.

The fate of each individual monument, whether restored or left in ruins, is significant, as the act of reconstruction and the extent of investment in each of the public buildings reflect the order of priorities of the citizens, the city council, the provincial administration, and the metropolitan bishop.¹⁰⁴ Most explicit and self-explanatory is the fate of the pagan cult places. We may assume that the damage caused to the city's temples during the earthquake was welcomed by the Christian administration. These damaged temples were not properly restored before their complete destruction by the Christians. Four or five temples have hitherto been found in the city; they were all abandoned no later than the fifth century, but we cannot be more specific about the exact date of their desertion.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ For Patrophilus, see G. Fedalto, *Hierarchia Ecclesiastica Orientalis*, II: *Series Episcoporum Ecclesiarum Christianorum Orientalium* (Padua, 1988), 1032.

¹⁰² For the earthquake, see K. W. Russell, "The Earthquake of May 19, A.D. 363," *BASOR* 238 (1980), 47–64.

¹⁰³ S. Brock, "A Letter Attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem on the Rebuilding of the Temple," *BSO[AJS]* 40 (1977), 267–86.

¹⁰⁴ An inscription on a large limestone slab was found near the theater (the original provenience is unclear) with an inscription saying that the city was renovated (*ἀνενέῳθη*) in the days of the Metro(*politan*) Ablabius: Mazor, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 22. The text refers to the restoration of the city (*ἡ πόλις*) in general; thus it is reasonable to connect it with the restoration of buildings in Scythopolis after the earthquake of 363 C.E. If the title of Ablabius means that he was the metropolitan bishop of the province of Palaestina Secunda (not to be confused with the governor, Taurus Syncletius Ablabius, mentioned in another inscription), we have an indication, dated no earlier than the foundation of the province in the late 4th or early 5th century, of the involvement of church leaders in municipal matters.

¹⁰⁵ For the destruction of temples and pagan monuments in general, and specifically in Greece and the Balkans, see H. Saradi-Mendelovici, "Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries," *DOP* 44 (1990), 47–61. See also Y. Tsafir, "The Fate of Pagan Cult Places in Palestine: The Archaeological Evidence with Emphasis on Bet Shean," in *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine*, ed. H. Lapin (forthcoming).

Only in one case, that of the temple with the round cella in the city center, do we have clear evidence of its being ruined no later than 404 C.E., as shown below. The first temple to be discovered was the Hellenistic-Roman temple of Zeus Akraios on the tell, the basalt foundations of which were excavated and dismantled in the 1920s.¹⁰⁶ The excavators showed that a Byzantine church with a round plan (the external diameter of which was ca. 38.8 m) was built near the temple and partly above it.¹⁰⁷ Several limestone drums, of remarkable thickness (1.25–1.32 m in diameter), were found in the vicinity, some of them in a reservoir that was covered by the church. The date of the foundation of the church, which may be used as a *terminus ante quem* for the destruction of the temple, is unknown. But a dating to the second half of the fifth or the early sixth century seems reasonable. The temple near the theater was probably deserted in the fourth century, but the circumstances of its abandonment are not yet clear. It is not impossible that it went out of use in the course of building a wing of the eastern bathhouse. Such interpretation may explain the fact that the altars were carefully buried under a cover of soil, above which new buildings were erected, while other, useful elements like building blocks and the fine limestone slabs of the stairway were taken for secondary use.¹⁰⁸ The other temple was discovered under the level of the Byzantine agora probably of the second half of the fifth or the early sixth century.¹⁰⁹ The same *terminus ante quem*, the fifth or early sixth century, is valid for the destruction of the supposed temple on the saddle between Nahal Harod and Nahal ‘Amal. As mentioned above (pp. 96–97), we excavated massive colonnades that we interpret as part of a large Roman temenos. One of the colonnades was completely dismantled during the Byzantine period and the limestone blocks of the stylobate were taken for secondary use, while the drums, bases, and capitals were left aside. A new public building, paved with mosaics with geometric patterns and Greek inscriptions, was built above the ruins (Fig. 21). The function of the new building is not yet known, but a limestone block mentioning an ἀπαντητήριον (“inn,” if our completion of the word is correct) may point to its identification.

The case of the temple with the round cella is different. As mentioned above (p. 97), this temple was located in the city center near the nymphaeum. A propylon consisting of a monumental stairway and a triple gate was built between the temple and the acropolis in the northeast. Although the propylon was only partially uncovered, it seems to be part of a processional road connecting the temple with the acropolis and more specifically with the temple of Zeus Akraios on its summit. The nymphaeum, next to the temple, was severely damaged during the earthquake and then rebuilt “from the foundations” by the governor (*archōn*) Artemidorus, the περίβλεπτος (*spectabilis*) *comes*. This information is supplied by a monumental inscription incised on the decorated architrave above the podium in the central niche of the nymphaeum (Fig. 22).¹¹⁰ The date of the rebuilding

¹⁰⁶ Rowe, *Beth Shan*, I, 43–45. See below, p. 111.

¹⁰⁷ For the location of the temple and the round church that was built above the wing of the temple, see A. Rowe, *The Four Canaanite Temples of Beth-Shan* (Philadelphia, 1940), pl. II. For the church and its dating, see Fitzgerald, *Beth Shan*, III, 18–33.

¹⁰⁸ The area is being excavated at present by the Israel Antiquities Authority team directed by Mazor and Bar-Nathan. No report has yet been published, and we are grateful to the excavators for this information.

¹⁰⁹ This temple, too, is being excavated by the same team and is not yet published.

¹¹⁰ For the inscription of the nymphaeum, see Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 27–28. Artemidorus’ high rank of *peribleptos* or *spectabilis* suggests that he was the governor of Palestine before its division into

is unknown, but the fact that the inscription is adorned by crosses shows that it could not have been incised before the mid-fourth century. Another inscription of the same Artemidorus was found in the same area on the pedestal of a statue of Empress Eudoxia, described as the “Queen of all Earth.”¹¹¹ This inscription dates the period of Artemidorus’ governorship to the time of Empress Eudoxia, 395–404 C.E., and more likely to the later part of her reign, between 400 and 404, when she gained the title of *augusta*.¹¹² Artemidorus’ *nymphaeum* received its water from a small aqueduct running from the west. This aqueduct, which reached the *nymphaeum* at its rear, was attached to the temple building in a way that leaves no room for doubt that the temple was out of use at that time. As a result we can say that the time of Eudoxia, no later than the year 404, is the *terminus ante quem* for the abandonment of the temple. This is a rare case in Palestine in which the desertion of a temple is precisely dated by purely archaeological methods. However, the conclusion is not surprising and accords with our general knowledge that classical paganism ended in Palestine and the neighboring regions no later than the end of the fourth century or the very beginning of the fifth.¹¹³ The coincidence of the destructive earthquake in the last year of Julian’s reign and the untimely death of Julian undoubtedly encouraged the Christians in their struggle against paganism. The laws issued by Theodosius I and his heirs against the temples and heretical practice of pagan cults demonstrated the trend and created a legal background for the destruction of the temples in the most explicit way.¹¹⁴

It is reasonable to believe that many individuals or small groups continued to practice pagan cults, often in secret, but formal, official paganism ceased to exist in Scythopolis no later than the early fifth century. The city elite and the leading classes, as well as the provincial administrators who from the early fifth century resided in Scythopolis, shifted to Christianity. Indeed, the practice of pagan worship transferred some of its morphological and urban characteristics to the Christian rite.¹¹⁵ But the replacement of the temple by the church was not a mere external or institutional change but marked a very significant transformation in the social and cultural life of the city and its citizens.

three parts and the foundation of Palaestina Secunda. As he was active around 400 (and no later than 404; see below), we may conclude that the division of Palestine took place some time between 400 and 409, the date of the edict mentioning the three Palestines (*CTh* 7.4.30). The date given by Malalas, *Chronographia* 13 (ed. Dindorf, 347), that relates this reorganization of Palestine to the days of Theodosius I (379–395 C.E.) seems, therefore, too early. Still, it is possible that Artemidorus gained his high rank for his personal virtues, with no relation to his appointment in a province of lower status, but such an interpretation seems to us less likely.

¹¹¹ For the inscription (translation only) of Eudoxia, see Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 29. We thank Kenneth Holm for his suggestion that Eudoxia in this inscription is not mere praise (“the glory”) of a divinity, as we translated in the first publication, but Empress Eudoxia herself.

¹¹² For Eudoxia, see K. G. Holm, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Calif., 1982), 42–78.

¹¹³ Saradi-Mendelovici, “Christian Attitudes”; see also, in general, R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman World (A.D. 100–400)* (New Haven, Conn., 1984); P. Chavin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990); J. Geffcken, *The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism*, trans. S. MacCormack (Amsterdam, 1978).

¹¹⁴ Especially *CTh* 16.10.10 ff.

¹¹⁵ The phenomenon of social, cultural, and intellectual integration and continuity, from the Roman world through the Christian period up to Islam, is extensively discussed by P. Brown, for example, *The World of Late Antiquity: From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London, 1971); idem, “Art and Society in Late Antiquity,” in *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium*, ed. K. Weitzmann (New York, 1980), 17–27.

The temple with the round cella had been left in ruins for generations before the area of the cella was occupied by poor walls later in the Byzantine period and the early Islamic period. This was an expression of the Christians' fear of settling on the sites of deserted temples, which were seen as shrines of demonic idols. The conception of the pagan temples as impure sites occupied by demons was common among Christians throughout Palestine and elsewhere until the sixth century.¹¹⁶ The sites of other temples in Scythopolis were used in later periods but probably only after a rather long period of desertion, though we cannot prove this conclusion by archaeological means. This seems to be true also in the case of the temple of Zeus Akraios on the tell. As mentioned above, the excavators of the site in the 1920s found that the round church was located above the eastern part of the temple.¹¹⁷ The archaeological report is very laconic, and we have no details about this reoccupation. However, the discovery of a church built above the site of a pagan temple, even if it had been completely dismantled, is a great exception. Another example has recently been discovered in Caesarea Maritima, where a hexagonal church (of St. Procopius?) was constructed, probably in the late fifth or sixth century, directly above the foundations of the great temple built in the early Roman period by Herod.¹¹⁸

The building of the churches at these two sites seems to have occurred not immediately after the desertion and destruction of the temples, but after a long period of abandonment. There are in Palestine only two cases of immediate, and demonstrative, occupation of temple sites by churches: the building of the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem above the temple of Aphrodite at the beginning of the second quarter of the fourth century and the building of Eudoxia's church above the Marneion in Gaza around 400 C.E. These two exceptional cases were accompanied by complete clearance of the impure site, including the soil beneath the temple, down to bedrock, which was followed by a solemn procedure of purification of the demonic sites.¹¹⁹ In contrast to the destruction of the cella and adytum of the pagan shrines, the pronaos or portico of the temple was accepted as a decorative element and therefore left unharmed. The citizens of the cities felt affection for these monuments and retained them as artistic landmarks in the urban landscape and skyline. The astonishing preservation of the facades, porticoes, and peripteral colonnades in front of and around temples in the East until the present day (e.g., in the temples in Jerash, Baalbek, and the Hauran) is clear evidence of this differentiation in Byzantine attitudes toward temples. Two of the four monolithic columns, with their huge, attractively decorated Corinthian capitals, and some elements of the entablature stood in front of the temple of Scythopolis until the early Islamic period, collapsing only in the earthquake of 749. This was a declaration of admiration for the art and architecture of the past, even if originally they were attached to the impure temple that had to be destroyed and desecrated.

¹¹⁶Saradi-Mendelovici, "Christian Attitudes"; Tsafir, "Fate of Pagan Cult Places."

¹¹⁷Rowe, *Beth Shan*, I, and idem, *Four Canaanite Temples*.

¹¹⁸For the church and its stratigraphy, see Holom et al., "Preliminary Report," 100–109. We thank Kenneth Holom for further unpublished information concerning the stratigraphic position of the church directly above the ruins of the temple.

¹¹⁹For the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, see Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 3.4–30; for Gaza, see H. Grégoire and M. A. Kugener, *Marc le Diacre: Vie de Porphyre* (Paris, 1930).

Our examination of the impact of the change from paganism to Christianity concludes with a survey of some other civil architectural complexes in the city center, which had no clear cultic purpose: (A) monuments preserved or restored as originally constructed; (B) newly built monuments, which reflect new trends in the development of the city; and (C) monuments that were deserted and whose area was reused for different purposes. (The fate of the theater and hippodrome-amphitheater will be discussed in the next section.)

(A) Our starting point is the presumption that most of the monuments were to some extent affected by the earthquake of 363 C.E. and that the city's authorities had to decide whether to restore them or leave them in ruins. The selection of the monuments and the process of their rebuilding and maintenance after the earthquake therefore reflect the attitude of the municipal authorities toward the city's monuments and institutions and reveal their order of priorities. In general, we see a major effort toward the restoration and rebuilding of the monuments in their previous Roman shape, though some regression from their architectural perfection can be discerned.

One of the monuments restored in its former shape, with little change, was the monumental portico near the eastern bathhouse (see above, p. 96). Some of the portico columns apparently survived the tremor, while others collapsed and had to be reerected. On the other hand, it seems that most of the Ionian capitals that had crowned the columns collapsed and were later reinstalled on the columns. We discovered these capitals in the rubble from the earthquake of 749 C.E., and some even as building stones in the provisional Abbasid structures in the vicinity. It was impossible to relate the capitals to the columns on which they had been originally installed, but we can easily discern a variety of shapes, sizes, and discrepancies in the symmetry and harmony of the architectural members; some of the capitals look like second-century "classical" work, while others are flat and less elaborate, indicating fourth-century manufacture. This feature accords with our assumption of a restoration of the portico, probably in the late fourth century. The restoration was done with care and a remarkable investment of work and money, but without attaining the high quality of the original second-century architecture. Proof that such a restoration took place in the late fourth to early fifth century is shown by the fact that the decorative pool lining the portico was replastered and a decorative gate and stairway were built on each side of the portico. These gates and stairways led from the street to the pool, the portico, and the adjacent bathhouse. The south gate was adorned by a new mosaic pavement in front of the entrance, with an inscription saying that the work of the mosaic was done in the days of Flavius Artemidorus, the *megaloprepes-tatos comēs and archōn*.¹²⁰

The propylon, through which a stairway connected the Northern Street with the tell (see above, p. 95), was also restored, probably in the late fourth century. During the restoration the plan of the monument was slightly changed, and one pair of decorated piers was removed from its original place to fit the new arrangement of the gateway to the acropolis.

The nymphaeum is another good example of a late-fourth-century reconstruction of a magnificent Roman structure. The monument was rebuilt by the governor Artemi-

¹²⁰ Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 33.

dorus, probably around 400 C.E.¹²¹ As noticed in other restorations, here too there is a slight deterioration in the shape and finish of the work in comparison to the original. The decision to restore the nymphaeum is very significant. This nymphaeum is probably one of the latest examples of the renovation of such a magnificent Roman building, demonstrating that its primary value was aesthetic. Water distribution through nymphaea continued to be of utmost importance in the cities, but the reconstruction of the nymphaeum here went beyond practical needs. The investment in the restoration of the nymphaeum shows the vitality of the classical traditions in Scythopolis and the prestige still involved in loyalty to the values of the past.

The old Roman colonnaded streets continued to exist with little change in their general appearance and the pleasing perspectives created by their long rows of columns and monuments (except for the individual cases of the temples and the monuments related to them). One important innovation was introduced in the late fourth or early fifth century: the mosaic paving of the porticoed sidewalks along the streets. The common patterns of the mosaics are geometrical or simple floral designs. The technique of the mosaics, the patterns, and the style of the northern portico of Valley Street are almost identical to those of the mosaic in front of the gate southeast of the portico, which is dated by inscription to the time of Artemidorus (see above, p. 112 and note 120). We may thus learn that the custom of paving with mosaics the covered sidewalks and porticoes along the streets was already common in the time of Artemidorus, at the end of the fourth or in the early fifth century.¹²²

Among the buildings of purely utilitarian character that continued to exist we find the eastern bathhouse, which was also enlarged during the fourth century. A new wing containing a large *frigidarium* covered by a dome was built on the west side, at the expense of the temple near the theater. The former *frigidarium* in the east wing of the complex was widened and converted into a *caldarium*.¹²³

(B) The process of demographic growth demanded the addition of new monuments and institutions of purely utilitarian function. This was probably the reason for the establishment of a new bath complex north of the theater (the western bathhouse), although it reached its peak only at the end of the fifth century.¹²⁴ Another important innovation

¹²¹See above, pp. 109–10 and note 110. Although the phrase ἐκ θεμελίων that appears in the inscription is commonly used in connection with an original building rather than a reconstruction, the style of the architecture leaves no room for doubt that the nymphaeum was a 2nd-century monument rebuilt in the late 4th century. Compare to the Latin *a fundamentis* used in the West for the rebuilding of ruined structures; see E. Thomas and C. Witschel, “Claim and Reality for Roman Rebuilding Inscriptions from the Latin West,” *PBSR* 60 (1992), 135–77. For reconstructions of nymphaea in the 4th century, see *CTh* 11.42.5–6; MacMullen, *Christianizing*, 217.

¹²²For Valley Street, see Foerster and Tsafir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 29. Similar mosaics were laid on the portico of Palladius Street: Mazor, *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 26–28; Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 130; Tsafir and Foerster, *ibid.*, 106. Pavement mosaics in covered sidewalks and porticoes along the streets are known in Palestine as well as in Sepphoris and Caesarea; see E. Netzer and Z. Weiss, *Zippori* (Jerusalem, 1994), 43–44, and Holum et al., *King Herod’s Dream*, 175–76.

¹²³For the new *frigidarium* and the renovation of the bath, see Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 127–29; for the conversion of the old *frigidarium* to a *caldarium*, see Tsafir and Foerster, *ibid.*, 100–101.

¹²⁴For the western bathhouse, see below, p. 131 and note 207. For the late-4th-century date of its foundation, see Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 124.

of the late fourth or early fifth century was the building of a new street, Palladius Street (perhaps on top of an earlier Roman street), stretching for a length of ca. 150 m between the theater and the square in front of the temple with the round cella (Fig. 23).¹²⁵ Neither the early history nor the final shape of this street is fully known to us, although the street was completely uncovered and in parts reconstructed (the frequent repairs to the pavement and the central drainage channel caused the infiltration of later pottery and coins under the pavement, which made the results of our sections and probes beneath the pavement less than decisive). The sidewalk on the northwest side of the street is partly situated above a line of Roman shops, the facades of which faced southeast (originally a wing of a Roman forum?). However, it is agreed that the street in its present state was built in the late fourth century, repaired several times, and remodeled in the early sixth century (see below, pp. 121–22). A line of some thirty shops was built along the street on the northwest side. In the late fourth or early fifth century a beautiful portico was built above the northwest sidewalk between the carriageways of the street and the shops. The covered sidewalk was paved with a handsome mosaic (Fig. 24). A mosaic inscription relates the work of the portico (*στοά*) and the mosaic (*ψήφωσις*) to the *hēgemōn* Palladius, son of Porphyrus.¹²⁶ The street bisected the civic center of Roman Scythopolis and became a major means of communication between the area of the theater and the acropolis. Its most significant contribution was, however, commercial. The building of the shops highlights the intensive economic activity of Scythopolis. Among its other advantages, the city was renowned throughout the empire for its manufacture of high-quality linen cloth and garments. Linen from Scythopolis was rated as most expensive in the price edict of Diocletian¹²⁷ and was praised in both the fourth-century *Expositio Totius Mundi*¹²⁸ and the Talmudic literature.¹²⁹

(C) The above-mentioned restorations emphasize the continuity and preservation of the Roman city, even at the price of massive restoration. The new buildings (the bathhouse and Palladius Street) reflected the same concept and benefited the growing city. The fate of the buildings of the third category, which were abandoned or completely changed their function, sheds significant light on the elements of transition and on changing social and religious values. An explicit example is the transformation of the propylon that connected the temple with the acropolis (or, less likely, with another sacred monument on its slopes). This Roman edifice (see above, p. 95) consisted of a stairway, a

¹²⁵ For Palladius Street, see Mazor, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 22–23; idem, *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 26–28; Bar-Nathan and Mazor, *ESI* 11 (1992), 42–47; Foerster and Tsafir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 25–26; eidem, *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 17–18; Tsafir and Foerster, *ESI* 9 (1989–90), 120–21; Foerster and Tsafir, *ESI* 11 (1992), 14.

¹²⁶ Mazor, *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 27. Unfortunately, no date is given, but if the title *ήγεμόν*, which is uncommon in Scythopolis (in contrast to *archōn*), is equivalent to the Latin *praeses*, we must date the inscription to a period later than the foundation of Palaestina Secunda, that is, the early 5th century (but see above, note 110). The official title of the governors of Secunda and Tertia was *hēgemōn* (*praeses* and *clarissimus*), while the governor of the larger and more senior province of Palaestina Prima was *consularis* (and, from the first half of the 6th century, *spectabilis* or *peribleptos*). See Hierocles, *Synecdemus* 717–23, ed. A. Burckhardt (Leipzig, 1893), 41–43; George of Cyprus, *Descriptio Orbis Romani* 997–1093, ed. H. Gelzer (Leipzig, 1890), 51–55.

¹²⁷ CIL III, suppl. 3, 26–28, nos. 1945–49; M. Giacchero, *Edictum Diocletiani et Colloegarum de Pretiis rerum Venalium* (Genoa, 1974).

¹²⁸ *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium*, 30–31, ed. A. Riese, *Geographi Latini Minores* (1878; repr. Hildesheim, 1964), 110.

¹²⁹ Pal. Talmud, *Ketubot* 31c; *Qiddushin* 3c.

triple-arched gateway, and a gatehouse with large semicircular niches. As the threshold of the gate showed little wear and was rougher than one would expect in a gateway in common use, we suggested that it served as a sacred way between the temple on the acropolis and the temple with the rounded cella. This *via sacra* was used only on special occasions. The regular ascent to the tell, in everyday use, was through the north propylon and stairway, which connected the city center and the Northern Street with the acropolis. The difference in the history of the two monuments is remarkable. The north propylon was restored after the earthquake of 363 C.E. with some modifications (see above, p. 112) and remained in common use. The other, which was connected, as we believe, with religious processions and pagan ceremonies, lost its importance. A short time after the destruction of the temple, this area was rebuilt as a complex of industrial character. Pools, water pipelines, and other installations blocked the gate and filled the gatehouse (Figs. 25, 26).¹³⁰ The whole area, which could be classed among the best architectural features of Scythopolis until the second part of the fourth century, became an area of utilitarian use. This transformation is an example of one of the new characteristics of the fifth and sixth centuries: giving priority to economic or practical necessities rather than architectural and aesthetic values, even if the area undergoing change was located in the city center.¹³¹

The fate of the Roman basilica (see above, p. 96) is most revealing, as it was not a pagan religious building but a civil institution that had an essential role in the tissue of urban life and the social and economic needs of the community. The basilica was probably damaged as well during the earthquake of 363 C.E. In contrast to the nymphaeum and other monuments, the basilica remained in ruins. When the Byzantine agora was established in the same area (Fig. 27), probably in the mid- or late fifth century, the walls of the basilica had already been dismantled (except for the southwest wall, which supported the cryptoporticus and the substructure of the eastern bathhouse). A thick accumulation of earth and debris, in which large amounts of pottery and coins of the fourth to fifth century were found, filled the area. Architectural elements from the basilica, bronze decorative doorknobs, fragments of stucco, and colored segments of the *opus sectile* decoration of the basilica walls were found in the area. Most impressive was an altar with masks of Dionysos, Pan, and their attributes: a panpipe (*syrinx*), shepherd's crook (*pedum*), and *thyrsos*, together with a dedicatory inscription of the year 141/2 to "the God Dionysos the Lord Founder" (κτίστης).¹³² The altar was found in front of the apse, in a place that does not seem incidental. Although it was found without the upper part, the table of sacrifice, it reveals the sentiments of the citizens of Scythopolis toward the legendary founder of their city. The crucial problem is why the governor and the city council

¹³⁰ Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 11 (1992), 8–13. A lintel was found in this area (in secondary use), with a monumental inscription headed by a cross (and therefore not earlier than the mid-4th century). It says that a certain podium (κρηπίς) and other structures were built by an official (probably the governor), Flavius Taurus Syncletius Ablabius. As his title is *megaloprepestatos peribleptos*, it seems that he functioned before the division of Palestine and the foundation of Palaestina Secunda. We tend to connect the inscription with the activity of rebuilding the propylon area in a new form (*ibid.*, 12–13).

¹³¹ Y. Tsafrir and G. Foerster, "From Scythopolis to Baysān—Changing Concepts of Urbanism," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, II: Land Use and Settlement Patterns*, ed. G. R. D. King and A. Cameron (Princeton, 1994), 115.

¹³² See Di Segni, Foerster, and Tsafrir, "Decorated Altar" (as above, note 42).

decided not to restore the basilica after the earthquake, as they did, for example, the nymphaeum, the Roman portico, and the bathhouse. In other words, why was the basilica placed together with the temples on the list of buildings destined to be abandoned and dismantled? The answer seems clear: the basilica had lost its importance as a central urban institution by the end of the fourth century. The commercial role of the basilica was transferred to the many new shops and porticoes, primarily to Palladius Street, while the social function of the basilica as a place of public meetings and social gathering moved to the churches. The abandonment of the basilica seems to be a most significant expression of the triumph of Christianity and the increasing power of the church and the bishop. Unfortunately none of the churches seems to be of the late fourth century, but we expect that such a major church will be discovered in the area of the civic center, perhaps in the spacious unexcavated area of the saddle between Nahal 'Amal and Nahal Harod.

V. SCYTHOPOLIS IN ITS PRIME: THE LATE FIFTH AND THE EARLY SIXTH CENTURY

The expansion of the city and its demographic growth have been discussed in a previous section. In the first half of the sixth century, not only did the extent of the city reach its peak but also the civic center became densely occupied, revealing social and economic vitality. A remarkable number of dated building inscriptions have been discovered in the excavations or by chance. It has been surprising to ascertain that the number of building projects in the days of Anastasius and Justin I was considerably larger than that in the time of Justinian. The ratio is even more astonishing if we count civil, rather than religious, structures.

A large number of inscriptions were found in the various parts of the western bathhouse, including one or two inscriptions from the time of Anastasius. The earliest dated inscription stated that the entrance hall (*propylaeum*) was built by the *archōn* Severus Alexander in the year 499/500 C.E.¹³³ One inscription is dated to the reign of Justinian (534/5 C.E.).¹³⁴ Some other parts of the bathhouse complex probably fall between the two dates (some of them represent architectural units that replaced each other; thus allowance must be made for a span of time between the various inscriptions). The building of the semicircular plaza (the *sigma*) was carried out in the days of the *archōn* Theosebius and the *prōtos* Silvinus, son of Marinus, in the year 506/7 C.E. (see below). In the year 515/6 (or less likely 500/1), Silvanus Street was constructed, together with the adjacent colonnaded hall (the “basilica”). The project was financed by a donation from the emperor. The building of the second stage of the Byzantine agora, under the *archōn* Romealkes, most likely took place during the reign of the same emperor. In addition to the civic buildings, we know of churches and monasteries that existed in the city and its close vicinity in 518 C.E. when Sabas visited Scythopolis.¹³⁵

From the reign of Justin I (518–527 C.E.) survive the three inscriptions that inform

¹³³ Mazor, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 16.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹³⁵ Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 61–63 (ed. Schwartz, 162–63).

us of the renovation of the city wall.¹³⁶ From the inscription inserted into the pavement of the street near the amphitheater, we learn about the project of paving the street and installing the new water system in the days of the *archōn* Orestes and the *prōtos* Silvinus, son of Marinus, in the year 521/2 C.E.¹³⁷ To Justin's time we may also relate some of the undated inscriptions of the western bathhouse and two religious institutions. One is the monastery of Abba Justinus, which was built outside the walls, close to Nahal Ḥarod, in the year 522.¹³⁸ A mosaic in the northern (Samaritan) synagogue at Bet Shean, made by the mosaicists Marianus and Anina, may belong to Justin's reign, as their work in the synagogue of Bet Alpha is dated by the Aramaic inscription to that time.¹³⁹ However, the work at Bet Shean may be several years earlier or later than that at Bet Alpha, in the reigns of Anastasius or Justinian respectively.

From Justinian's reign we find only two dated inscriptions for civic buildings: one is a building inscription for a renovation of the bath for lepers, built by Theodosius "the shepherd" (i.e., the bishop) in 558/9.¹⁴⁰ The second inscription, a dedicatory inscription of a portico (ἐμβολος) in the western bathhouse, states that Nysius (or Anysius) Sergius of Scythopolis built it "without touching public money," in the year 534/5.¹⁴¹ It is likely that some of the other building inscriptions of architectural units in the same bathhouse belong to Justinian's time as well. The Monastery of the Lady Mary on Tel Iztaba was most probably founded during Justinian's period, around the mid-sixth century.

The building projects attested to by the inscriptions have more significance than their mere number. The inscriptions from the days of Anastasius point to two cardinal enterprises that changed the face of the city center: the building of the semicircular plaza (the *sigma*) in 506/7 and the Silvanus Hall (and street?) in 515/6 C.E. Major works were carried out in the complex of the western bathhouse. Of course, not all the building inscriptions were preserved or discovered by us, and thus some of the projects can only be dated by stratigraphic and archaeological means. Archaeology indeed helps us to relate some of the building enterprises to Anastasius' time, for example, the construction of the Byzantine agora. The intense development activity continued under Justin I, with the renovation of segments of the wall, the paving of Orestes Street with the new water installation in 521/2 C.E., and additional works in the western bathhouse. The Justinianic era, in which we expected to find an increased number of major building projects, in fact shows some decline: the inscriptions document the construction of only two civic buildings, a portico in the western bathhouse and the rebuilding by the bishop of the lepers' bathhouse, somewhere in the town. We have already mentioned the strictly religious buildings (churches, monasteries, and synagogues) that were built throughout the period, although their construction (even if they were financed by private donors) may be considered an indication of general prosperity.

¹³⁶ See above, pp. 100–101 and notes 63–65.

¹³⁷ See above, pp. 105–6 and note 90.

¹³⁸ See above, note 82.

¹³⁹ See above, notes 75–77.

¹⁴⁰ M. Avi-Yonah, "The Bath of the Lepers at Scythopolis," *IEJ* 13 (1963), 325–26.

¹⁴¹ Mazor, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 17. The Greek text is in Y. Meimaris, *Chronological Systems in Roman-Byzantine Palestine and Arabia: The Evidence of the Dated Greek Inscriptions* (Athens, 1992), 86; D. Feissel, "Bulletin épigraphique," *Revue des études grecques* 106 (1993), no. 632, prefers to read the name as Anysius.

The inscriptions of Scythopolis, therefore, show a trend of decline in building enterprise and urban development after the mid-sixth century. There are two obvious reasons for such a decline: first was the Samaritan revolt of 529 C.E. and its aftermath; and second, the epidemic of bubonic plague that spread throughout the country and the East in the summer, fall, and winter of 541/2. The new circumstances, which led to some stagnation, will be discussed in a later section. Here we concentrate on Scythopolis at the end of the fifth and the early sixth century, when the city reached its maximal expansion and demographic growth and probably doubled the size and population of the Roman city.

The area of Scythopolis within the walls comprised some 134 ha, but large fringe areas, estimated at 20 ha, were occupied outside the walls, such as Tel Naharon in the west or the area of the northern (Samaritan?) synagogue. Any estimate of the population must be rather tentative.¹⁴² However, if we calculate the unoccupied areas—streets and squares, public buildings, and the steep slopes of Nahal Harod—as about one-fifth of the area, we arrive at an inhabited area of a little more than 120 ha. The coefficient of population density is unknown and may have varied from one region of the city to the other. A calculation of 250–320 inhabitants per hectare on average brings us to a rough estimate of 30,000–38,000 inhabitants in Scythopolis in the first half of the sixth century. It seems that Scythopolis was the third largest city in the three Palestines in this period, coming after Caesarea and Jerusalem.

We have little information concerning the city administration and the financial system. Most of the dedicatory inscriptions of the Byzantine period mention the name of the governor (*ἀρχων*) of the province. He is usually described also as a μεγαλοπρεπέστατος κόμης. The common formula appears, for example, in Orestes Street near the amphitheater: 'Ἐπὶ φλ(αούίου) Ὁρέστου μεγαλοπρ(επεστάτου) κόμ(ητος) καὶ ἄρχ(οντος) . . . If the governor has a consular rank, he is described as ὑπατικός. The governor allotted tax revenues to the city and the province for initiating new projects or maintaining existing institutions.¹⁴³ The fact that the governor resided in Scythopolis undoubtedly facilitated the ability of the local authorities to convince him to meet the city's needs.

In comparing the Byzantine building inscriptions to those of the Roman period, we readily discover a great difference. The category of private donors, who were extensively involved in the building of the city and its lavish monuments in the Roman period, is hardly represented in the inscriptions of the Byzantine period. It is hard to envisage the appearance of Roman Scythopolis without the architectural and artistic contributions of private, civic-minded donors who adorned their city with great love and commitment as well as with the expectation of being honored and praised by their fellow citizens for their generosity, feelings condensed into the expression ἐκ φιλοτιμίας.¹⁴⁴ Even donations for building temples and erecting statues of gods were rewarded and praised by the urban authorities, that is, the city council and the people (ἡ βούλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος). Because of their aesthetic contribution to the city and their role in civic life, these religious monu-

¹⁴²For the methodological difficulties in estimating population from archaeological data, see Tsafir, "Settlements and Demography" (as above, note 38).

¹⁴³L. Di Segni, "The Involvement of Local, Municipal and Provincial Authorities in Urban Building in Late Antique Palestine and Arabia," in Humphrey, *The Roman and Byzantine Near East* (as above, note 57), 312–32.

¹⁴⁴See above, p. 92.

ments were viewed as donations not only to the gods but to the city as well. On the other hand, private donors of the Byzantine period directed their donations almost totally to religious institutions: churches, monasteries, or synagogues. Indeed, in the Roman period we also find numerous dedications of small altars with well-carved dedicatory inscriptions to various gods, given as a token of piety (*εὐσέβεια*) or thanksgiving (*εὐχαριστία*). Such donations, which represent the personal devotion of the individual to his god and an expectation of divine mercy, were also typical of Jews, Christians, and Samaritans of later generations. Many donors donated money for buildings, mosaic floors, furnishings, and so on, mentioning the expectations of salvation (*ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας*) of the donor and his household and the memory (*ὑπὲρ μνήμης*) of the deceased.¹⁴⁵ Sometimes the number of donors was apparently too large to be mentioned individually; the inscription gives a general reference to “those whose name is known by God.”

In contrast to the numerous dedicatory inscriptions that mention donations to churches or synagogues, we hardly find any private contributions of money for civic buildings or institutions. The only exception is, perhaps, a donation of an officer of consular rank, a *comēs* and *megaloprestatos*, Flavius Nysius (or Anysius), son of Sergius the Scythopolitan, who donated a portico in the western bathhouse, “without touching public money.”¹⁴⁶ Although Nysius was an *archōn*, it is not impossible that he paid tribute to his native city without spending any municipal funds.¹⁴⁷ In one case, where the involvement of private citizens in the building of a civic project is mentioned, the inscription points to the enterprise and contacts of two (Samaritan) *scholastici*, Sallustius and Silvanus, sons of Arsenius, also a *scholasticus* of Scythopolis with the imperial court. They managed to obtain the donation (*δωρεά*) of Emperor Anastasius for building a magnificent basilica (Silvanus Hall, see below). These two brothers are mentioned not as the donors of the project but as solicitors who managed to inspire the imperial generosity. The same was the case of Arsenius, most probably the son of the above-mentioned Silvanus, who was involved in receiving, at his request (*οἰτησις*), an imperial grant for rebuilding the city walls.¹⁴⁸

Theodorus the “shepherd” (the bishop), who was responsible for rebuilding a bath for lepers,¹⁴⁹ and Ablabius, the metropolitan bishop (if the completion of the title is correct), in whose time the restoration took place,¹⁵⁰ are two examples of the involvement of ecclesiastical authorities in the physical aspects of urban affairs. Building a bath for lepers is in accord with the church’s commitment to the social and welfare needs of the community, in addition to its role in the leadership of religious life and, from the sixth century, also the cultural profile of public life, as described below, in section VI.

Responsibility for the management and financial support of the city was in the hands of the governor and the provincial administration, on behalf of the imperial treasury.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, in Bet Shean, Fitzgerald, *Sixth Century Monastery*, 13–14.

¹⁴⁶ See above, note 141.

¹⁴⁷ Di Segni, “Involvement of Authorities,” understands this inscription not as evidence that the donor used his own money, but rather as an indication of Nysius’ special interest in the project, by raising the money from other sources or other people, rather than using municipal funds.

¹⁴⁸ Above, p. 100 and notes 63–65.

¹⁴⁹ Avi-Yonah, “Bath of the Lepers,” 325–26.

¹⁵⁰ Mazor, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 22.

¹⁵¹ Di Segni, “Involvement of Authorities.”

The majority of the dedicatory inscriptions of the fifth and sixth centuries mention the governor: “In the time of the *megaloprestatos comēs* and *archōn* so-and-so . . . the work was done.” Sometimes the work is described in detail: pavements, water installations, buildings, stoas, exedras, mosaics, steps, and so on. The rather short term of office of a governor in the same province caused a constant rotation of governors, more than fifteen of whom appear by name in the inscriptions of Scythopolis.

The rather inferior status of the *boulē*, or *curia*, in the early centuries of the Byzantine regime has been widely discussed by scholars.¹⁵² It seems reasonable that a city council was appointed in Scythopolis, but it is not mentioned in any of the city’s inscriptions, in strong contrast to the Roman period during which the *boulē* and the *dēmos* usually appear as the city’s highest authority. As discussed below, the city’s odeon, which most probably served also as a *bouleutērion*, was destroyed not later than the building of the new *sigma* in 506/7 C.E. The only municipal magistrate mentioned by the inscriptions was the *prōtos*¹⁵³ Silvinus, son of Marinus, who had the rank of *clarissimus comes* (λαμπρότατος κόμης) and supervised the building of both the *sigma* in 506/7 C.E. and Orestes Street in 521/2. As *prōtos* (literally, the “first” citizen or head of the council), he may have been responsible for the regular municipal public works and maintenance operations and perhaps even for managing the independent revenues of the city (e.g., money received from the rental of shops and commercial rights in the baths). It is surprising that Silvinus is the only *prōtos* mentioned in the inscriptions found so far. It is not at all clear whether Silvinus was elected by his fellow citizens for his personal virtues or his financial and social prominence, or whether he was appointed by the governor. In both inscriptions his name appears after that of the governor and he is said to have taken care of (προνοησάμενος) the execution of the work. One inscription, not found in situ, mentions a project carried out by Constantius the *topotērētēs* (τοποτηρητής)—a military officer of the *dux*’s office, “the warden of a site”—who had the rank of *peribleptos* (*spectabilis*).¹⁵⁴ So far this is the only evidence found of the activity of the military system in Scythopolis.

The archaeological evidence from the civic center of Scythopolis reveals a flourishing city whose citizens respect the architectural achievements of the past but at the same time give priority to practical and utilitarian needs. Major projects, which demanded much investment and bold planning, changed the shape of some parts of the city center. On the other hand, the execution of the new projects was inferior in the quality of architecture and ornamentation to that of the earlier Roman monuments. The construction of streets displays a radical difference between the rigid approach of the Romans toward public architecture and the new loose, practical approach of Byzantine builders. Roman streets—whether arranged in a grid of parallel and perpendicular lines, or distributed

¹⁵² A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602* (Oxford, 1964), 737–63, esp. 757–63; for city councils, magistrates, and officers in Palestine, see Y. Dan, *The City in Eretz Israel during the Late Roman and Byzantine Periods* (Jerusalem, 1984; in Hebrew), esp. 68–117; and Saradi-Mendelovici, “Demise of the City,” esp. 372–74; but see also M. Whittow’s opinion against overestimating the mere “institutional rearrangement,” in “Ruling the Late Roman and Early Byzantine City: A Continuous History,” *Past and Present* 129 (1990), 3–29, esp. 4–12.

¹⁵³ For the πρώτος and πρωτεύων in Palestine, see Dan, *The City*; Di Segni, “Involvement of Authorities,” 323–24.

¹⁵⁴ Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 11 (1992), 32; see discussion by Di Segni, “Involvement of Authorities,” 326–28.

according to the terrain, as was the case in Scythopolis—were always straight and symmetrical.¹⁵⁵ Changes of direction in the course of the street, if less than ninety degrees, were achieved by an obtuse angle, in many cases optically “softened” by the erection of an arch, a tetrapylon, or a square. In any case, the segments of the street always remained straight as a ruler. The planners of the early sixth century did not hesitate to design curved streets and to change the width of streets according to their needs. A good example is Silvanus Street, which climbed from the city center to the southern plateau, its course curving gently. The new style, which was unacceptable to Roman architects and city planners but actually more convenient, is one of several changes in Byzantine architecture and town building. They all represent a rather loose, practical approach defined by G. H. Forsyth as “comfortable disorder.” This approach was commonly practiced by architects and masons of private and public buildings as well as by city planners.¹⁵⁶ It was more pronounced in the newly built areas in the suburbs, while in the civic center some effort was made to emulate the values of the past, in general program if not in details of execution.

One of the most impressive innovations was the modification of Palladius Street and the building of the semicircular plaza (called the *sigma* by its builders after its shape) abutting it (Figs. 28, 29).¹⁵⁷ The mosaic pavement of the portico of Palladius was replaced by the pavement of marble slabs. About ten shops in the center of the northern line of shops were dismantled in order to create a semicircular plaza, the chord of which was about 40 m. Along the new semicircular facade of the *sigma* were built twelve shops or offices; in fact, as one learns from the inscriptions inviting people to enter, they were in part places of entertainment. The shops were paved with colorful mosaics (including a mosaic of Tyche; see below, p. 130). Three decorated apses were inserted into the line of rooms, two on the sides and one in the center. A semicircular portico was built in front of the shops. Two identical inscriptions found on limestone blocks stated that the *sigma* was built in the days of the *archōn* Theosebius, son of Theosebius, of the city of Amisus in the province of Hellenopontus, under the care of the *prōtos* Silvinus, son of Marinus. The date is 570 of the era of Scythopolis, that is, 506/7 C.E.¹⁵⁸ The *sigma* was undoubtedly one of the most ornate plazas in sixth-century Scythopolis. It was located on the south slope of the saddle between Nahal Ḥarod and Nahal ‘Amal, facing the valley of the latter. In order to level the area of the *sigma*, the builders had to cut into the soft bedrock, destroying buildings that had stood on the slopes since the Roman period. One of these buildings was the odeon (see above, p. 99). As mentioned above, it is very likely that the odeon had also housed the city *boulē* in the Roman period. The demolition of the odeon therefore involved giving up not only one of the most important institutions of culture and entertainment, but one of the organs of social life and municipal administration. This act acquires even greater significance when we learn from the inscriptions of the

¹⁵⁵ MacDonald, *Architecture* (as above, note 26).

¹⁵⁶ For example, D. Claude, *Die byzantinische Stadt im 6. Jahrhundert*, ByzArch 13 (Munich, 1969), esp. 15–106; G. H. Forsyth, “The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian,” DOP 22 (1968), 1–19, esp. 6–7; Tsafrir, *Archaeology*, esp. 301–31 (for Palestine); Tsafrir and Foerster, “From Scythopolis to Baysān,” esp. 101–9.

¹⁵⁷ Bar-Nathan and Mazor, *ESI* 11 (1992), 42–44; Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 130–31.

¹⁵⁸ Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 130; one of the inscriptions was found in secondary use in an early Islamic building in the vicinity.

sigma that the person behind this act was none other than the *prōtos*, a prominent member of the *boulē* and perhaps its head.¹⁵⁹

On the slopes of the tell, opposite the nymphaeum, the Byzantine builders excavated into the soft bedrock that had been used by the Romans as a solid base for the pavement of the sidewalks and the portico. By doing so the Byzantines gained a wider leveled area for their buildings while leaving the columns of the Roman portico standing, with the pedestals of the colonnade “floating” above the new surface, revealing their unworked faces (Fig. 30).

Major work was done in the area bordered by Palladius Street in the north, the theater in the west, the eastern bathhouse in the south, and the nymphaeum and Central Monument in the east. In the Roman period this area housed the basilica, one of the temples near the theater, and perhaps a commercial square or forum. Probably in the mid- or late fifth century, a new commercial square was constructed in this place; it was named by the excavators the “Byzantine agora” (Fig. 31). This agora was remodeled at the beginning of the sixth century.¹⁶⁰ In fact, we do not know how this area was used before the building of the agora in the fifth century, though it is reasonable to suppose that part of it served as a commercial center (especially the line of shops abutting Palladius Street, at the northeast side of the agora, which survived from the Roman period). The area of the basilica, on the other hand, was left in ruins. Deep trenches were dug along the basilica’s walls down to their foundations, in order to extract the basalt building stones for new building projects. These trenches were filled with soil and waste, containing a large amount of pottery and coins of the fourth to fifth century.¹⁶¹ The Roman temple was dismantled as well, probably a century before the building of the new agora. The shape of the Byzantine agora was an asymmetrical trapezoid. Originally the maximum length was ca. 120 m and maximum width was more than 50 m, but through the later remodeling, probably in the early sixth century, it was shortened in its (triangular) southwest end to a maximum length of ca. 85 m. The agora was surrounded by porticoes, and, at least in its northwest section, the above-mentioned row of shops continued to exist. The porticoes were paved with mosaics decorated with depictions of animals and plants.

The building inscriptions mention two governors who were involved in the building of the agora or parts of it. One is Marcianus, whose name appears on the mosaic at the southeast corner; the other is Rometalkes, a *scholasticus* by training, whose name appears in two inscriptions in the area of the former basilica on the northeast side of the agora. One of the inscriptions, on a marble slab embedded into a pavement made of oil-shale pavers, attributes to him all the work on the pavement of the portico ($\epsilon\mu\beta\omega\lambda\circ\varsigma$) and the building.¹⁶² It seems that he served some time after Marcianus, and perhaps the agora was shortened during his governorship. The chronological framework of the two phases

¹⁵⁹ However, the stratigraphy is not clear, and it is possible that the odeon had been abandoned before the area was taken by the builders of the *sigma*. We thank the excavators of the Israel Antiquities Authority for this information.

¹⁶⁰ Tsafrir and Foerster, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 107; Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *ibid.*, 131–32.

¹⁶¹ Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 11 (1992), 6–7; Di Segni, Foerster, and Tsafrir, “Decorated Altar.”

¹⁶² Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 11 (1992), 7.

is not yet clear, but it seems likely that the second phase of building falls in the time of Anastasius.

A very ambitious building project was carried out in the area of the Roman portico, the decorative pool, and the Roman street southeast of the Central Monument. This project included a repaving of the Roman street at a higher level and the extension of this street toward the southern plateau, thus providing communication between the new developing area and the city center (Figs. 32, 33). A large hall (Silvanus Hall) was erected in the area of the former portico and pool. The hall occupied the entire area between the eastern bathhouse and the street (Silvanus Street). Later, during the Umayyad period and probably at the time of the caliph 'Abdallāh Hisham (724–743 C.E.), a long and well-built street of shops (*sug*) was constructed here, with a portico supported by a delicate arcade in front of the shops. We mention this later construction here because we mistakenly dated the Umayyad shops and arcade to the Byzantine period, and in our previous publications we defined this monument as the "Byzantine street of shops" or "Byzantine commercial street," dating it to 515/6 C.E. We named this street of shops after Silvanus and identified the arcade as the "basilica" mentioned in the building inscription (see below).¹⁶³ However, further excavation and a meticulous stratigraphic examination have shown that we had missed one level, the remains of which had almost completely disappeared. The correct order of events is as follows: around 515/6 a new street (Silvanus Street) was built over the former Roman street, burying under it the level of the Roman street and blocking the entrances to the Roman shops that were located along the street on the southwest (see above, p. 94). The starting point of the new street was in the square in front of the Central Monument, at the same level as the Roman level of Valley Street, but its level gradually rose to reach that of the higher southern plateau. The new Silvanus Street enabled direct access from the street to the level of the pool.

The new planning took place on both sides of the Roman colonnade and changed its character completely. A huge hall (Silvanus Hall) was built above the pool (northeast of the colonnade) and in the area of the Roman portico, southwest of the colonnade, between it and the basalt wall of the eastern bathhouse, which had gone out of use in this period (Figs. 34, 35). The new hall used the monumental Roman colonnade for carrying the apex of its gabled roof. The roofing system was of wooden beams; on the southwest they were supported by the colonnade of the Roman portico and rested on the wall of the eastern bathhouse complex. The large span of this southwest part of the hall (15.5 m) required the creation of a line of square piers and columns (the shafts of which consisted of limestone drums) arranged alternately, which ran through the hall parallel to its axis. Two additional lines of piers were erected, one near the columns of the colonnade and the other near the basalt wall of the bathhouse. The piers and columns enabled the construction of a system of arches supporting the roof beams. On the other side, between the colonnade and the street, the span was a little narrower (ca. 13.2 m), but on this side as well were piers that supported the roofing system; only some foundations of these

¹⁶³ Among the previous publications in which the dates of the shops and the arcade should be corrected from Byzantine to Umayyad are Foerster and Tsafir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 32–35; *eidem*, *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 22; Tsafir and Foerster, *ESI* 9 (1989–90), 126–28; Foerster and Tsafir, *ESI* 11 (1992), 25–32; Tsafir and Foerster, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 108–9; *eidem*, "From Scythopolis to Baysān," 105.

piers were preserved beneath the floor level of the later Umayyad shops. The outer wall, which served as the facade of the building on the street side, was a delicate arcade of small marble columns, the span between them ca. 3.1 m, that is, 10 Byzantine feet. The columns were crowned by marble Corinthian capitals and small arches that carried the facade wall above them. The reconstruction of the facade as described here is in part theoretical, as little has survived of the Byzantine arcade, apart from some rough stone bases on which the Byzantine pedestals were placed. We assume that this arcade was later reconstructed on almost the same lines by the Umayyad builders, who installed it in front of their shops. The Umayyads reused the marble bases, shafts, capitals, and perhaps even the soft limestone (*nari*) voussoirs of the arches.

The impressive Byzantine hall (ca. 60 m long and 28.7 m wide), with its elaborate roofing system, is described in two inscriptions incised on large limestone blocks. The inscriptions (not yet published) were inserted into the facade of the arcade in the Umayyad period and discovered by us in the rubble from the earthquake of 749 C.E. There is no doubt that they were originally from the Byzantine facade. One of the inscriptions says: “+ From a gift (*δωρεά*) of Flavius Anastasius, *imperator* Augustus, the basilica was made together with the ceiling and the ceramic (roof tiles), through (*διά*) the brothers Sallustius and Silvanus, the Scythopolitan *scholastici* (lawyers), children of Arsenius *scholasticus* of Scythopolis, in the ninth year of the induction, at the time of the most magnificent governor (*megaloprepestatos archōn*) Entrichius.” The other inscription is metric; the old building itself (probably the portico that stood there before the new project) praises the labor and art of Silvanus, who, through the wealth of Emperor Anastasius, saved it from collapse.

The first inscription defines the new building as a basilica, mentioning in particular the roofing system and the ceramic (roof tiles); there is no doubt that the massive roofing system was one of the most impressive features of this building. The basilica pavement was made of marble, oil-shale pavers (probably taken from the original pavement of the now covered pool), and mosaic pavement in the northeast. Only scanty remains of the mosaic have survived, but they are sufficient to indicate that the decoration consisted of plants and animals on a white background, resembling the mosaics in the portico of the Byzantine agora. Silvanus was probably the more prominent of the two brothers. He is undoubtedly the well-known Samaritan of consular rank who maintained close connections with the emperor; his son Arsenius had a successful career at the imperial court.¹⁶⁴ The ninth year of the induction falls twice in the reign of Anastasius, in 500/1 and 515/6. As Silvanus is mentioned by Cyril of Scythopolis in 518 as a powerful citizen, we assume that the inscription, and the whole basilica project, should be dated to the latter induction, that is, to 515/6 C.E. Arsenius the *scholasticus*, the father of Silvanus and Sallustius, gave his name to the other Arsenius, the son of Silvanus. This younger Arsenius is most probably the one mentioned by Procopius. He is the person who lived in Constantinople; though Christianized, he maintained close contacts with his family in Scythopolis. He succeeded in procuring an imperial donation for rebuilding the walls of Scythopolis, as

¹⁶⁴Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 61 (ed. Schwartz, 162–63), 70 (ed. Schwartz, 172–73); Procopius, *Anecdota* 27.8–10.

mentioned in the inscriptions dealing with the renovation of the wall.¹⁶⁵ The new inscriptions tell us about the high position of Silvanus the Samaritan, whose name appears before the name of the governor in the first dedicatory inscription. The second, literary inscription ignores the governor completely (unless Entrichius was mentioned in the missing part of the inscription, which is unlikely). It should be remembered that at about the same time the name of Silvinus, the *prōtos*, is mentioned twice as secondary to the governors Theosebius (in 506/7 C.E.) and Orestes (521/2 C.E.). It is also interesting that the inscription set up by the Samaritan citizens begins with a cross; this was probably the price that Sallustius and Silvanus had to pay for the right to record their names together with the name of the emperor.

The basilica was destroyed some time later in the sixth or seventh century. The fact that all the columns fell in a similar way and in the same direction proves beyond doubt that the hall of the basilica collapsed in an earthquake.¹⁶⁶ The position of the debris permits us to reconstruct the columns with their drums and capitals exactly as they were in antiquity. The result of the reconstruction is astonishing: it displays a very negligent arrangement of drums (which probably had been brought here as spolia) of varying thicknesses in the same shafts. A practical and economical approach was expressed in the erection of columns of rather poor appearance, in sharp contrast to the striking plan of the basilica (Fig. 36).

The city's prosperity appears to have come to an end in the mid-sixth century. This was a gradual process that becomes very obvious by the century's end. The new situation is discussed below, but here we consider two major factors that occurred in the first half of the sixth century and must have had strong influence on the general conditions of the city: the Samaritan revolt of 529 C.E. and the bubonic plague of 541/2.

Several sources inform us of the violent conflicts between the Samaritans and the Byzantine state, mostly in 488, 529, and 536 C.E.¹⁶⁷ These events, known as the Samaritan revolts, mainly affected sites in Palaestina Prima, where most of the Samaritans lived—around Neapolis, the Samaria hills, and the seacoast—and had a fatal impact on the status of the Samaritans. The Byzantine sources mention Scythopolis not directly in the

¹⁶⁵ See above, pp. 100–101 and notes 63–65.

¹⁶⁶ One may suggest that the damage was caused by the earthquake of 551, mentioned in several sources, or more likely another earthquake mentioned in sources of the 6th–7th century. For example, see K. W. Russell, "The Earthquake Chronology of Palestine and Northwest Arabia from the Second through the Mid-Eighth Century A.D." *BASOR* 260 (1985), 37–59, esp. 44–46; D. H. K. Amiran, E. Arieh, and T. Turcotte, "Earthquakes in Israel and Adjacent Areas: Macroseismic Observation since 100 B.C.E." *IEJ* 44 (1994), 266. However, this earthquake seems to have been less damaging than that of 363 C.E., and much smaller than the earthquake of 749 C.E. It is possible that Silvanus Hall collapsed in one of the minor earthquakes that are frequent along the Jordan Rift Valley; many of them have left no trace in the sources. Other monuments that might have fallen at the same time are the porticoes of Palladius Street, the *sigma*, and the Byzantine agora.

¹⁶⁷ M. Avi-Yonah, "The Samaritan Revolts against the Byzantine Empire," *Eretz-Israel* (Ben Zvi vol.) 4 (Jerusalem, 1965), 127–32 (in Hebrew); idem, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule* (Jerusalem, 1984), 241–43, 251, 254; A. D. Crown, "The Byzantine and Moslem Period," in *The Samaritans*, ed. A. D. Crown (Tübingen, 1989), 55–81; L. Di Segni, "Rebellions of the Samaritans in the Romano-Byzantine Period," in *A Companion to Samaritan Studies*, ed. A. D. Crown, R. Pummer, and A. Tal (Tübingen, 1993), 199–201.

description of the revolt¹⁶⁸ but in connection with the fate of the prominent family of Silvanus and his son Arsenius, mentioned above. Cyril of Scythopolis records the death of Silvanus, who was lynched by the Christians in 529, following a prophecy of St. Sabas, given during the saint's visit to the city in 518 C.E.¹⁶⁹ Procopius adds information about Arsenius (the son of Silvanus) who, though he had accepted the Christian faith, maintained close contacts with his Samaritan family in Scythopolis.¹⁷⁰ Both authors, and others, describe the damage caused in various places in the country during the revolt and its suppression. Cyril says that the damage to sites in Palaestina Secunda was minor in comparison with that in Palaestina Prima; he gathered his information from a survey carried out at the command of Justinian. An allowance of 12 centenaries (1,200 pounds) of gold was given, in the form of tax exemption, by the order of the emperor to the authorities of Palaestina Prima. The money was mostly dedicated to the restoration of churches burned by the Samaritans. The allowance for Scythopolis and its region, and for Palaestina Secunda in general, was much smaller, only one centenary (100 pounds) of gold.¹⁷¹ But if we assume that most of the damage was concentrated in Scythopolis and its vicinity, as Scythopolis was the most important center of the Samaritans in Palaestina Secunda, and if this sum was dedicated mainly to the restoration of buildings in Scythopolis, it indicates that the city was rather severely damaged in the revolt and the subsequent acts of punishment. No less serious than the physical damage were, perhaps, the loss of the contribution of the Samaritan community in Scythopolis to the city and the general unrest in Palestine. As the main effort and most of the financial resources were dedicated to the restoration of religious buildings, less money was available for initiating new development projects. It should be emphasized that at present archaeology throws no light on this subject, as there is no archaeological evidence of any structures destroyed by the revolt.

The second factor, the bubonic plague of 541/2, was probably even more devastating, although we have little information about the plague and its impact on Palestine.¹⁷² Some evidence from tombstones in the Negev¹⁷³ and other regions in Palestine indicates a rise in the number of dated burial inscriptions at the time of the epidemic.¹⁷⁴ These two factors may explain our impression of stagnation in Scythopolis during the second half of the sixth century.

¹⁶⁸See list of sources and suggested reconstruction of the events related to Scythopolis in Di Segni, "Scythopolis during the Samaritan Rebellion" (above, note 67); see also K. G. Holum, "Caesarea and the Samaritans," in *City, Town and Countryside in the Early Byzantine Era*, ed. R. L. Hohlfelder (Boulder, Colo., 1982), 65–73.

¹⁶⁹Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 61 (ed. Schwartz, 162–63), 70 (ed. Schwartz, 172–73).

¹⁷⁰Procopius, *Anecdota* 27.8–10.

¹⁷¹Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 73, 75 (ed. Schwartz, 176–77, 181).

¹⁷²L. Conrad, "The Plague in Bilad al-Sham in Pre-Islamic Times," *Bilad al-Sham* 2 (Amman, 1986), 143–63.

¹⁷³G. E. Kirk and C. B. Welles, "The Inscriptions," in *Excavations at Nessana*, ed. H. D. Colt, I (London, 1962), 168, 180–81; Y. Tsafir, *Excavations at Rehovot-in-the-Negev*, I: *The Northern Church*, Qedem 25 (Jerusalem, 1988), 161.

¹⁷⁴The information has been collected by Leah Di Segni in her comprehensive study of dated inscriptions in Roman-Byzantine Palestine (not yet published). The concentration of burial inscriptions around the latter part of 541 is very striking (although no evidence is available from the Bet Shean area). We thank L. Di Segni for sharing the information with us.

VI. THE CLASSICAL HERITAGE AND CHRISTIANITY: CULTURAL CHANGES IN SCYTHOPOLIS DURING THE FIFTH AND SIXTH CENTURIES

The destruction of the temple in the city center, no later than 404 C.E. (above, pp. 109–10), desecrated the cella and the adytum of the temple but left the pronaos and the magnificent facade standing as a prominent landmark of the city's architecture. This is only one of the ways in which the citizens of Byzantine Scythopolis revealed their warm feelings toward the classical heritage and the cultural values of the past.¹⁷⁵ Not only did the columns of the facade survive until they collapsed in the earthquake of 749 C.E., but the pedestal of the statue of Marcus Aurelius survived in its original place in front of the temple. The inscription on this pedestal includes, among other titles of the city, its status as a "Greek city of Coele Syria."¹⁷⁶ This unusual title may perhaps declare that the city's elite identified themselves with the classical Hellenic world. It is also reasonable to trace in this expression, in the second half of the second century C.E., some tension between the leading classes and the other, less educated, citizens of local Syrian and Palestinian origin, not to mention the Jews and the Samaritans. Such tension continued to exist in later centuries. The victory of Christianity, which rejected paganism during the fourth century, did not create an abrupt cultural change but a slow and gradual one. As mentioned above (pp. 90–91), there are some indications of the existence of a "sub-classical" art in Roman Scythopolis, but the great majority of artistic finds represent the taste and culture of the upper classes. The nature of this slow and complex cultural change will be examined through three criteria: (A) language and inscriptions; (B) figural art, statues, and mosaics; and (C) continuity of use and decline of the mass entertainment institutions.

(A) All the numerous inscriptions of the Roman period were in Greek, the language of culture. None was written in Aramaic or other Semitic languages, although a large part of the population used these languages in daily life. St. Procopius, for example, included, among his other duties, the translation (probably from Greek to Aramaic) of the Scriptures and of prayers in use in Scythopolis for the benefit of worshipers who could not follow the Greek texts.¹⁷⁷ The situation during the Byzantine period was similar. The only Semitic inscriptions were found in the Jewish and Samaritan synagogues, and even in these places, as well as in the neighboring synagogue of Bet Alpha, some texts are in Greek.

The best examples of the remarkable level of education and knowledge of the Greek language and literature are the inscriptions. Governor Artemidorus' inscription on the pedestal of the statue of Empress Eudoxia, at the very beginning of the fifth century,¹⁷⁸ says: "Artemidorus erected the golden (statue) of Eudoxia, the queen of all earth, in a place visible from all sides." The expression ἄνασσα ("queen") is archaic and literary; the phrase περισκέπτω ἐν χώρῳ ("in a place visible from all sides") is a direct quotation from the *Odyssey* (περισκέπτω ἐνὶ χώρῳ).¹⁷⁹ A poem written in Homeric style by Empress Eudocia in the mid-fifth century was found in the bath complex of Hammat Gader, also in

¹⁷⁵ See in general Saradi-Mandelovici, "Christian Attitudes"; also Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, esp. 128–51.

¹⁷⁶ Foerster and Tsafrir, "Nysa-Scythopolis" (as above, note 22).

¹⁷⁷ See above, note 94.

¹⁷⁸ See above, p. 110 and notes 111, 112.

¹⁷⁹ Homer, *Odyssey* 1.426, 10.211; cf. LSJ, s.v. περίσκεπτος.

the province of Palaestina Secunda.¹⁸⁰ At Scythopolis, metric Greek inscriptions in archaic style were written on mosaic pavements in the shops(?) in the *sigma*, or in front of them, some inviting people to enter. One inscription mentions Greek divinities in a rather profane context.¹⁸¹ The relatively late date, ca. 507 C.E., shows that the classical Greek literary style was still known and appreciated in Scythopolis in the fifth and early sixth centuries. The latest dated literary inscription to echo the classical past is the second building inscription of Silvanus Hall ca. 515 C.E.¹⁸² Judging from the inscriptions of Scythopolis alone, the literary tradition was preserved until the second half of the sixth century. Gaza, the city of great rhetors and authors such as Procopius, Choricius, and John, may serve as a paradigm of an impressive coexistence between the new Christian faith and the cultural and literary skills of the past.¹⁸³ The members of Silvanus' family (above, pp. 124–25) were not the only *scholastici* in town; Anoisius, who made a donation to the building of the monastery of Abba Justinus in 522 C.E.,¹⁸⁴ and the governor Rome-talkes are other examples.¹⁸⁵ These *scholastici* may have studied in the law school of Berytus or in other schools in Palestine or the East,¹⁸⁶ where they were exposed to the skills of rhetoric and to ancient literature. Anoisius, the devoted Christian *scholasticus*, may represent a group of highly educated citizens who succeeded in combining Christian belief and classical culture, as did Procopius of Gaza and Choricius of Gaza. These people could read and appreciate epigrams, poems, and literary inscriptions written in classical or even pseudo-Homeric style.

(B) A similar impression is created by the examination of the sphere of figural art. Artemidorus' inscription on the pedestal of Eudoxia is so far the latest evidence of a freestanding sculpture of the classical type being erected in Scythopolis.¹⁸⁷ No freestanding statue of the fourth century has yet been found in the excavation. Although such a discovery is possible, the number of fourth-century freestanding statues in Scythopolis was probably very small, as their production is known to have diminished everywhere.¹⁸⁸ However, the important question for this study is not the number of newly sculpted statues but the frequency of common older statues in the streets and public places of the city. It seems that during the fifth century, or at least during its first part, the general attitude toward statues, even of gods, was still tolerant. The statues were accepted as fine art and were favored for their beauty. We may assume that some conflict took place between the church authorities, who advocated the destruction of such statues, and the

¹⁸⁰J. Green and Y. Tsafrir, "Greek Inscriptions from Hammat Gader: A Poem by the Empress Eudocia and Two Building Inscriptions," *IEJ* 32 (1982), 77–96.

¹⁸¹Unpublished. The inscriptions were mentioned in Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 130–31.

¹⁸²See above, p. 124.

¹⁸³G. Downey, *Gaza in the Early Sixth Century* (Norman, Okla., 1963), esp. 82–159.

¹⁸⁴See above, note 82.

¹⁸⁵See above, pp. 122–23.

¹⁸⁶G. Downey, "The Christian Schools of Palestine: A Chapter in Literary History," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 12 (1958), 297–319.

¹⁸⁷In contrast to the rather clumsy funerary busts that were found in the cemetery and mostly related to the 4th century; see Skupinska-Løvset, *Funerary Portraiture* (as above, note 24).

¹⁸⁸A few freestanding statues of the 4th century were discovered in Caesarea; see, for example, R. Gersh, "Seven New Sculptural Pieces from Caesarea," in Humphrey, *The Roman and Byzantine Near East* (as above, note 57), 108–20, esp. 110–13.

city's aristocracy, who championed their preservation. If such a conflict existed, the city's elite managed to reach a *modus vivendi* in which the statues remained standing within buildings or even outside, in streets and squares.

Eventually, of course, the sculptures were discarded. We do not know the exact pace of their banishment, but we have discovered its *terminus ante quem*. During the excavations of the hypocaust beneath the hot room (*caldarium*) of the eastern bathhouse, we found a remarkable number of large and small fragments of marble statues. They were thrown into the hollow space of the hypocaust; it is clear that the statues were deposited there intentionally when the *caldarium* and the eastern bathhouse went out of use altogether. This abandonment took place around 515/6, when the adjacent Silvanus Hall was built. Among the statues were a high-quality life-size headless statue of Aphrodite (a version of the Capitoline type, with a cupid riding a dolphin) (Fig. 37), a headless nymph used as a fountain decoration (Fig. 38), and fragments of other statues.¹⁸⁹ A new building, the function of which is not yet known, was installed in the same area around 515/6; its floor level covered the statues. This succession of events means that the statues were thrown into the abandoned hypocaust not much earlier and not much later than 515/6. Other statues were covered by the building of Silvanus Hall itself. A torso of a larger than life-size cuirassed emperor, without head or legs, was embedded as a building stone into one of the structural piers of the hall (Fig. 39).¹⁹⁰ A life-size statue of Dionysos was discovered under the floor level of the same hall (Fig. 40); it is clear that it was deliberately buried there.¹⁹¹ A bust of a headless emperor was discovered in the near vicinity, and a statue of Athena with the *aegis* was embedded in a later wall at the same place; originally it was probably buried in the area of the same bathhouse.¹⁹² A statue of Hermes(?), which had stood in a niche in the *scaenae frons* of the theater, was found, broken into many fragments, in a hole nearby.¹⁹³ It is clear that the statue from the theater was deliberately broken and buried, but we cannot say when this action took place, although a date in the first half of the sixth century is likely. Another headless statue from the theater, of Tyche, was probably destroyed at the same time.¹⁹⁴ The most solid evidence is found, therefore, in the bathhouse: it is clear that statues were broken, discarded, and buried no later than 515/6 C.E.

Still, we remain with some unsolved questions. Most of the statues found in Scythopolis were headless. Very few had their heads preserved (among them the above-mentioned Hermes and Dionysos and another Hermes found near the odeon). A few heads were found separately in various parts of the site, but their number is much smaller than the number of headless torsos. The heads of the statues of Dionysos and

¹⁸⁹Tsafrir and Foerster, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 100–101, 109. On this phenomenon in general, see C. Lepelly, "Le musée de statues divines," *CahArch* 42 (1994), 5–15.

¹⁹⁰Tsafrir and Foerster, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 101; Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 33.

¹⁹¹G. Foerster and Y. Tsafrir, "A Statue of Dionysos as a Youth Recently Discovered at Beth-Shean," *Qadmoniot* 89–90 (1990), 52–54 (in Hebrew).

¹⁹²Another group of large fragments of marble sculpture—among them Herakles, Apollo or Hermes, and Leda and the swan—was discovered in the west wing of this bathhouse; they had originally stood in the bathhouse and were discarded and buried in the 6th century: Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 128.

¹⁹³Applebaum, "Roman Theatre" (as above, note 14), 85.

¹⁹⁴Mazor, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 21.

Hermes, as well as other heads, such as the Hellenistic head of Alexander the Great found on the tell (Fig. 41),¹⁹⁵ and even reliefs of Medusa and griffins on the cuirass of the emperor (Fig. 39), were defaced. By destroying the mouth, nose, and eyes of idols, the Christians believed that the demonic powers and evil spirits of the sculptures were disarmed.¹⁹⁶ It is hard to believe that the statues were defaced or lost their heads on the occasion of their burial or disposal or immediately before this act took place. Therefore, we may conclude that these statues continued to be exposed in their original location for some time, displaying their beauty and aesthetic values but already mutilated and lacking menacing powers, or even mocked and despised.¹⁹⁷ A famous example of a similar situation is known from Caesarea. Two large headless statues—one of porphyry, probably of Hadrian, and a marble statue of Zeus (or an unidentified emperor?)—were found in a Byzantine esplanade of the late sixth century in the middle of Caesarea.¹⁹⁸ The statues were installed rather carelessly on both sides of the esplanade, expressing the warm feelings of people in the city and the administration toward the art of the past. However, the statues from Caesarea seem to have been erected more than half a century after Scythopolis was cleared of its statues. If we assume that most of the statues found in the bathhouse or its vicinity in Scythopolis came from the same bathhouse, we can conclude that they were still standing in this place during the fifth century.¹⁹⁹ Later in this century, or in any case no later than the very early sixth century, the statues lost their heads and others were defaced. The final banishment took place no later than 515/6: the statues were removed, buried as waste material, or even smashed and burned for lime.

The abandonment of freestanding sculpture implies a detachment not from the entire classical heritage but from one of its aspects: the explicit expression of paganism. At the same time we find a great variety of representations on mosaics, including figural depictions of mythological images. All our examples are taken from mosaic pavements. Of the sixth-century wall mosaics of the western bathhouse, only one fragment, in which a bearded human head could be discerned,²⁰⁰ was preserved to a sufficient extent for the design to be identified. The mosaics found in the area of the *sigma* are important, for they are dated to ca. 507 C.E.; they include a medallion with the image of Tyche (Fig. 42),²⁰¹ a distant echo of the Antiochian prototype, which is probably one of the latest examples of this goddess in art.²⁰² The Tyche is a young woman, richly dressed, with a crown of city walls and turrets on her head. A local touch is added by the inclusion of a miniature palm tree to the fruits in the cornucopia, as palm trees were typical of the Bet Shean valley. From around the middle of the century, we find the colorful calendar of months in the Monastery of the Lady Mary, in the center of which are images of Helios

¹⁹⁵ Rowe, *Beth Shan*, I, 44–45, pl. 55 (identified in this report as Dionysos).

¹⁹⁶ See references in C. Mango, “Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder,” *DOP* 17 (1963), 53–75.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.; Saradi-Mendelovici, “Christian Attitudes.”

¹⁹⁸ M. Avi-Yonah, “The Caesarea Porphyry Statue,” *IEJ* 20 (1970), 203–8; Holom et al., *King Herod’s Dream*, 186–87. Avi-Yonah suggests that the head was destroyed during the Muslim period, but Holom’s suggestion that the statues were already headless when erected is more likely.

¹⁹⁹ For sculptures standing in a bath complex in Hammat Gader in Eudocia’s days, in the mid-5th century, see Green and Tsafrir, “Greek Inscriptions.”

²⁰⁰ Bar-Nathan and Mazor, *ESI* 11 (1992), 38.

²⁰¹ Mazor, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 19.

²⁰² The Tyche, however, is not at all unique; compare, for example, with Hippolytos Hall at Madaba: M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e mosaici di Madaba* (Jerusalem, 1989), 50–60; idem, *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman, 1993), 23–26, 51–66.

and Selene.²⁰³ In the Jewish mansion (or inn) of the House of Leontis, containing the small synagogue, a mosaic was found depicting Odysseus and the sirens, as well as Nilotic scenes.²⁰⁴ The exact date is unknown, but an early-sixth-century date for its execution is likely. From this point of view, the situation of Scythopolis is in accord with that of other places in Palestine. Even in Jerusalem, the earliest to complete the process of Christianization, we find a magnificent mosaic depicting Orpheus and centaurs, probably from the fifth century.²⁰⁵ Many studies discuss the phenomenon of the popularity of mythological-pagan motifs and images in Christian and Jewish art and their conversion to the needs and philosophy of the new users.²⁰⁶ As for Scythopolis and its vicinity, we can only note that no figural mosaics were discovered in civic buildings, churches, monasteries, or synagogues that can safely be assigned to a date later than the mid-sixth century. The reason, as seen below, is not any particular cultural or religious change, or more severe measures taken by church leaders, but the general stagnation in the development of the city at that time.

(C) The last criterion to be examined is the fate of the mass entertainment monuments: the theater, the hippodrome-amphitheater, and the odeon. We begin with brief remarks on the baths, although we do not take them as a test case. At face value, the church opposed the important role of the baths in the everyday life of the Christian citizen, yet no real conflict seems to have taken place between the two institutions. At the beginning of the sixth century, the eastern bathhouse went out of use, and the area served, as mentioned above, for other public functions, the character of which is not yet clear. On the other hand, the western bathhouse, whose construction was begun more than a century before, was expanded and became a large complex of some 0.9 ha (Fig. 43).²⁰⁷ The functional halls—the hot and tepid rooms, the dressing rooms, the cold pools, and the furnaces—were surrounded on three sides by porticoes and open courts (although no real palaestra was found), a basilica with an apse, small and large rooms, and public latrines. One of the inscriptions mentions the “exedra of the winter,” while others mention the propylon, a portico (έμβολος), or just the “work” (ἔργον) that was done by the various governors. Although spacious and lavish, and one of the largest municipal bathhouses ever found in Palestine, the bathhouse did not exceed the size dictated by functional needs and had nothing of the extravagance of the Roman *thermae*. The bathhouse functioned until the late Byzantine period (i.e., late 6th to early 7th century), together with several smaller bathhouses in other parts of the city. The water system of the bathhouses also served public latrines; the largest and best preserved was built as part of the eastern bathhouse and probably continued to function even after the bath-

²⁰³ Fitzgerald, *Sixth Century Monastery*.

²⁰⁴ Zori, “House of Kyrios Leontis” (as above, note 83).

²⁰⁵ H. Vincent, “Une mosaïque byzantine à Jérusalem,” *RevBibl* 10 (1901), 436–48.

²⁰⁶ This matter has been discussed by many scholars; see, for example, A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton, 1968); for numerous artifacts and works of art, see *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century. Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. K. Weitzmann (New York, 1979), esp. 126–268; for the adoption of Greek-Roman statues by the Christians, see Mango, “Antique Statuary”; for Israel, see G. Foerster, “The Survival of Some Classical and Hellenistic Themes in the Iconography of Late Antiquity in Israel,” in Πρακτικά των Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Κλασικής Ἀρχαιολογίας (Athens, 1983) (Athens, 1985), 130–34.

²⁰⁷ Mazor, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 10–18; idem, *ESI* 7–8 (1988–89), 22–26; Bar-Nathan and Mazor, *ESI* 11 (1992), 38–42; Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 124–26.

house itself had gone out of use (Fig. 44); two others were found in the western bathhouse.²⁰⁸ The large bathhouses and latrines show the interest and investment of the municipal authorities in maintaining a high level of hygiene and sanitation.

The theater, on the other hand, was one of the flagships of classical pagan culture. Already in the Roman period, the theater mainly presented spectacles of pure entertainment value and shows of satirical and vulgar character, rather than the great tragedies and comedies of the past. But even these performances were condemned by the church fathers.²⁰⁹ From their point of view, the main offense caused by theaters was the fact that they dealt with stories of the Greek gods. This was unacceptable even if the show depicted the gods as a target for mockery. The testimony of Bishop Jacob of Sarug, around 500 C.E., is of great importance in this regard.²¹⁰ The bishop's condemnation of the members of his congregation for enjoying performances in the theater informs us inadvertently about their content, which included dances, acrobatics, and mainly parodies of Greek gods and Greek mythology (probably performed by men only). The bishop's knowledge of the gods and their mythology is impressive and proves the vitality of the pagan-classical heritage even in the far northeast corner of Syria. Going to the theater is not good Christian behavior, he told them bitterly. They denied his accusation that they were not good Christians: "It is a show," they said, "not paganism; what will you lose if I laugh?" and continued their argument: "and since I deny the gods, I shall not lose through the stories concerning them." Jacob of Sarug remained unhappy; he wished Greek gods to be totally forgotten, even as objects of parodies. The adaptation to Christianity of the theatrical performances was impossible, in contrast with the successful conversion of mythological heroes and scenes from ancient art or the Roman environment.

The theater at Scythopolis ceased to function as a place of shows and entertainment during the sixth century;²¹¹ it went through a series of destruction and reconstruction throughout its history. The major restoration took place during the late fourth or fifth century, perhaps after the earthquake of 363 C.E., which left the upper *cavea* in ruins and damaged the facade of the *scaenae frons*. In the early Islamic period, however, the theater housed flimsy private dwellings and a potter's workshop. Other theaters in Palestine and Arabia are said to have gone out of use between the late fourth and the sixth century.²¹²

²⁰⁸Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 128–29. Scanty remains of another, fourth, public latrine were found west of the Northern Street. These latrines were of a type unknown in other Roman and Byzantine sites; see R. Neudecker, *Der Pracht der Latrine: Zum Wandel öffentlicher Bedürfnisanstalten in der kaiserzeitlichen Stadt* (Munich, 1994). Smoothed plates, usually of marble in secondary use, projected from the walls of the latrine, leaving narrow spaces between them; each user sat on two projecting stones. A deep channel with running water flushed the waste to the central drain; another shallow channel in the floor supplied water for sanitary use.

²⁰⁹See, for example, Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 19.6. Whether he is the author of the mid-4th century or, as others suggest, the bishop John II, later in the 4th century, it is clear that the newly baptized are exhorted to refrain from going to theaters, circuses, and amphitheaters, as they are all shows of Satan.

²¹⁰C. Moss, "Jacob of Serugh's Homilies on the Spectacles of the Theatre," *Le Muséon* 48 (1935), 87–112.

²¹¹Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 123 ("the latter part of the Byzantine period"); for a general description of the theater, see above, note 51.

²¹²See Segal, *Theatres* (as above, note 52), for the corpus of the individual sites; also Z. Weiss, "Games and Spectacles in Roman Palestine and Their Reflection in Talmudic Literature" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1994, in Hebrew). Many of the older excavations are unreliable, as the main effort of the archaeologists was directed toward the study of the date of the foundation of the theater and the study of its architecture and art. The question of the abandonment of the edifice, which calls for meticulous and

The exact dating of the abandonment of a large monument such as a theater by archaeological means alone (if there is no earthquake or other catastrophe involved) is extremely difficult, and one must suspect that some of the dates given by excavators have been influenced by their general historical understanding of the site. Even if a date for the abandonment is given, it can only point to the period in which the theater went out of use. We do not know whether shows, and if so what kind of shows, continued to be performed in the theater up to its abandonment. The famous essay of Choricius of Gaza in praise of the mime, in the mid-sixth century, describes not a vivid and flourishing art but a great tradition that is in danger of extinction and should be preserved.²¹³ We know of some renovations of theaters during the Byzantine period. An inscription found in the small theater in Halutza (Elusa) in the Negev records that the pavement (of the orchestra) was renewed in 454 C.E.²¹⁴ In the theater at Neapolis (Nablus; biblical Shechem), a mosaic pavement was laid in the late fifth to early sixth century over the orchestra and the lower benches in the *cavea*, which considerably enlarged the stage area and supplied enough space for a new kind of entertainment, "water dances," or other spectacles of neutral character.²¹⁵ Such a compromise—performances of singing, music, and dance, or even sporting competitions—was acceptable to church leaders, since they satisfied the human desire for entertainment but were totally lacking in pagan character. We have no reason to assume that the procedure at Scythopolis was different, and we may conclude that theatrical performances took place in this city until the fifth or early sixth century. After they ceased, the theaters themselves continued to exist, adorning the city and shaping its skyline.²¹⁶

The fate of the odeon is much better known; we have already mentioned (above, pp. 121–22) its destruction around 506/7 C.E., when the whole area was razed in order to supply enough space for the *sigma*, or even at an earlier date. The case of the amphitheater on the southern plateau is more complex.²¹⁷ This edifice was originally erected as a hippodrome and only in a later period converted to an amphitheater. The external measurements of the amphitheater are 102 × 66.5–68.5 m; and the inner measurements of the arena are 83.35 × 47.25–49.66 m (the width is slightly larger on the east side than on the west side because of the shape of the original hippodrome). The arena is surrounded by a wall ca. 3.2 m high. The width of the *cavea* was ca. 9.5–10 m, providing room for nine to twelve rows of seats, of which only part of the three lower rows has survived.

careful stratigraphic excavations of the layers above the ruined monument, was less thoroughly addressed. Among modern excavations one may point to the dig of the North Theater at Jerash–Gerasa, where a date in the late 5th–early 6th century was detected for a change in the function of the theater and the end of the use of the theater as such. Cf. V. A. Clark, in Clark et al., "Jerash North Theatre" (as above, note 54), 233–35.

²¹³Choricius, *Apologia Mitorum*, ed. R. Foerster and E. Richtsteig (Leipzig, 1929), 344–80; H. Reich, *Der Mimus: Ein litterar-entwickelungsgeschichtlicher Versuch* (Berlin, 1903), 204–30; Dan, *The City*, 200–209; Sarad-Mendelovici, "Demise of the City," 377–79.

²¹⁴A. Negev, "Elusa," *NEAEHL*, I, 380–81; idem, *The Greek Inscriptions from the Negev* (Jerusalem, 1981), 73–76.

²¹⁵Y. Magen, "The Roman Theater at Shechem," in *Zev Vilnay's Jubilee Volume*, ed. E. Schiller, I (Jerusalem, 1984; in Hebrew), 269–77; idem, "Shechem–Neapolis," *NEAEHL*, IV, 1356–57.

²¹⁶The Madaba mosaic map, probably of the second half of the 6th century, depicts at least two theaters in Palestinian cities, Gaza and Neapolis. See Magen, "Roman Theater," 269–70, for Neapolis; M. Avi-Yonah, *The Madaba Mosaic Map* (Jerusalem, 1954), 74, for Gaza.

²¹⁷See Foerster and Tsafrir, *ESI* 6 (1987–88), 35–38.

These seats were made of hard limestone, though the benches in the upper rows may well have been made of wood. The amphitheater was created by the building of a new semicircular wing inside the arena of the hippodrome, which occupied about one-third of the former monument. The new east wing consisted of a ring vault along the wall of the arena and several perpendicular vaults, which became wider and taller toward the outside in order to carry the tiers of seats. The central vault of the new rounded wing became the main entrance to the arena (Fig. 45). The barrier (*spina*), which divided the arena of the former hippodrome, was dismantled, but some of the blocks with sockets, in which the obelisks or flags had been fixed, remained, most of them not in situ. In addition to the old and new vaults beneath the *cavea*, two small rooms were hewn in the rock on the northwest and southwest sides of the amphitheater; these were probably used as animal pens. Remains of the iron grilles that blocked their entrances are still visible.

The transformation from hippodrome to amphitheater is not exceptional. Such conversions took place in the newly discovered Herodian hippodrome in Caesarea,²¹⁸ in Neapolis,²¹⁹ and in Gerasa,²²⁰ as well as in several stadia in Asia Minor.²²¹ The dates of the changes to these monuments differ from place to place. At the first stage of our research we dated both phases at Scythopolis to the Roman period and believed that the change took place after a rather short period of use, as in Neapolis. This conclusion, which is mentioned in our previous publications, proved to be incorrect. A series of sections was made in the *cavea* in order to determine the exact date of the foundation of the hippodrome and its change to an amphitheater. The ceramic analysis provided clear and indisputable conclusions: the hippodrome was constructed during the formative period of the making of Scythopolis in the second century (or at the latest in the first part of the third century) and the transformation to an amphitheater took place no earlier than the second half of the fourth century. Our conclusion is in accord with A. Ostrasz' dating of the destruction and abandonment of the hippodrome at Gerasa to the fourth century²²² (both perhaps effected by the earthquake of 363 C.E.?) and with the change that took place at Ephesus, which is generally defined as late antique. It is almost certain that no deadly gladiatorial combats took place in the amphitheater of Scythopolis at that late stage of the fourth century,²²³ but perhaps there were hunts (*venationes*) of wild beasts, which are known to have taken place even during the fourth and fifth centuries,²²⁴ or displays of exotic animals and various athletic competitions.

The structure of the amphitheater is not only smaller than the original hippodrome

²¹⁸For the hippodrome, see Porath, “Herod’s ‘Amphitheater’” (as above, note 57); the conversion of this monument to an amphitheater was discussed by the excavator at the Twenty-Second Archaeological Conference in Israel (Tel Aviv, 1996), but is not yet properly published.

²¹⁹Magen, “Shechem-Neapolis,” 1357–58.

²²⁰Müller, “The Hippodrome,” 98–99; Ostrasz, “Hippodrome of Gerasa,” 73–74 (both above, note 56).

²²¹See, for example, in Ephesus: G. Wiplinger and G. Wlach, *Ephesos: 100 Jahre österreichische Forschungen* (Vienna, 1995), 159–60.

²²²The poor state of preservation of the later wing that closed off the hippodrome of Gerasa and made it into an amphitheater has perhaps caused an underestimation of the new edifice as a poor provisional building. The evidence from Scythopolis calls for a reconsideration of the new stage of the Jerash monument.

²²³J. C. Golvin and C. Landes, *Amphithéâtres et gladiateurs* (Paris, 1990), 221–25.

²²⁴For example, J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, “The Syriarch in the Fourth Century,” *Historia* 8 (1959), 113–26; idem, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1972), 136–49; Saradí-Mendelovici, “Demise of the City,” 379–80; Dan, *The City*, 206–9.

but significantly inferior in its architectural design and general appearance. Even so, its construction called for a large effort and investment in planning, dismantling the no longer useful walls of the former edifice, and building the new amphitheater. Together with the major restoration of the theater, this investment provides evidence of a very positive approach toward the manners, culture, and leisure activities of the past. Inscriptions, literary sources, and above all the example of Constantinople teach us that hippodromes and not amphitheaters housed the most popular entertainment in the early Byzantine world. The charioteer rather than the gladiator was the hero of his time, and the circus factions, the “Blues” and the “Greens,” operated in the hippodrome and in chariot races.²²⁵ Gerasa, Neapolis, and Scythopolis (as well as most other cities in Palestine, except for Caesarea) no longer had the facilities for chariot races. We are forced to believe, although it seems unlikely, that these races took place in temporary racecourses in flat, open fields.

However, the vision of the builders of the new amphitheater seems to have been too optimistic. As early as the fifth century, only a few decades after its erection, the arena lost its monumental appearance. The entrances were narrowed by additional buildings, the two new stairways to the *cavea*, on both sides of the main entrance to the arena, were partially blocked by structures, and the whole area surrounding the amphitheater was occupied by private dwellings. The construction of Orestes Street on the north side of the amphitheater completely blocked the entrances to the arena and the *cavea* in the north (Fig. 46). The arena itself remained unoccupied until the early Islamic period. This shows that some activity continued to take place within the arena throughout the Byzantine period, but it seems likely that this activity had a local character, not necessarily connected with the traditional uses of an amphitheater. The amphitheater lost its role as an institution of mass entertainment that magnetized crowds of spectators and welcomed them with beauty and grandeur. The deterioration of the amphitheater sheds further light on the long and gradual process of change in the order of priorities in the Christian East; the individual case of Scythopolis is only one of the landmarks in this development.

VII. FROM THE END OF THE SIXTH CENTURY TO THE MUSLIM CONQUEST: CONTINUING CHANGE IN URBAN CHARACTER

This section discusses the last decades of the Byzantine period before the Muslim conquest, but during the discussion we use finds from the early Islamic and Umayyad periods. The structure of this section demands special explanation, as it presents the data and evidence in a way that may be called into question. First we discuss the situation in the later (Umayyad) period and only at a subsequent stage do we present an analysis of the materials of the earlier phase (before the Muslim conquest), which is the subject of our study. The reason for this strategy derives from the nature of the evidence. Methodologically, we have found it advantageous to start with the better-known period and then step back to the less well documented phases, the study of which calls for a greater amount of hypothetical reconstruction.

²²⁵ Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford, 1976); for Palestine: Y. Dan, “Circus Factions (Blues and Greens) in Byzantine Palestine,” *The Jerusalem Cathedra* 1 (Jerusalem, 1981), 105–19; idem, *The City*, 209–21.

The development of Bet Shean during the early Islamic period requires a detailed study, which will be carried out separately. However, as mentioned above, we must take this later period as a starting point for our discussion. One cannot analyze the situation of Scythopolis in the later years of Byzantine rule, that is, the second half of the sixth to the early seventh century, without examining conditions in the eighth century.²²⁶ The reason is a practical one: on January 18, 749 C.E., Bet Shean was completely destroyed by an enormous earthquake, well documented in literary sources and archaeological finds.²²⁷ Remains of the collapse were found everywhere in the excavation. In many places the survivors, or perhaps squatters, returned to the ruined houses and settled on top of the debris. No serious effort was made to restore the old buildings, let alone the streets and monuments. From the archaeological point of view, it is fairly easy to distinguish between the layers beneath the earthquake debris and the new buildings above it. Incidentally, the destructive earthquake occurred in the last year of the rule of the Umayyad dynasty, providing a convenient distinction between the medieval, Abbasid, and Fatimid strata above the earthquake debris and the Byzantine and early Islamic strata beneath it.²²⁸ Moreover, the Abbasid buildings after 749 C.E. were built in the style that had been widely used in the earlier Umayyad period; it is likely that many of these settlers were the people who had lived on the site before the earthquake. It is therefore legitimate to consider the rustic post-earthquake structures as representative of the character of Bet Shean before the earthquake.

A long time before the earthquake the name Scythopolis had been replaced by an old-new name, Baysan. The capital of the Arab province, now called Jund al-Urdunn, moved to Tiberias some time after the conquest. The Muslim sources, from the Abbasid period on, describe Baysan as a rather small town situated in a fertile region with abundant water and famous for its palm trees.²²⁹ The Greek name Scythopolis had been abandoned, like the names of several other important Palestinian cities, such as Eleutheropolis (Bet Govrin), Nicopolis (Emmaus), Diospolis (Lod-Lydda), or Diocaesarea (Zippori-Sephoris), whose old Semitic names are known to have continued to exist through their being mentioned in Jewish Hebrew and Aramaic texts, including the Talmudic literature. The Arabs usually revived the ancient names, although they had not been mentioned in the Greek sources (including Josephus, the Jewish author), in the official administrative lists, or in the Greek inscriptions.

The earthquake of 749 supplies a rare opportunity to study the shape of a town that was “frozen” at a single moment in its history. Baysan reveals itself as a medium-sized town of rather rural character situated within the frame of magnificent Roman architec-

²²⁶Tsafrir and Foerster, “From Scythopolis to Baysān.”

²²⁷This earthquake is well known from Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic sources. The dating to 749 is preferable to that of 747/8, as commonly suggested (for example, Russell, “Earthquake Chronology,” 37–59, esp. 47–49). The dating to 749 is based on the collation of the date of the earthquake as given by Theophanes (January 18 of the Julian calendar) with that found in documents from the Cairo Geniza (23 of Shevat according to the Hebrew calendar). The date of 749 is supported by unequivocal numismatic evidence; see Y. Tsafrir and G. Foerster, “The Dating of the ‘Earthquake of the Sabbatical Year’ of 749 C.E. in Palestine,” *BSO*[4]/S 55 (1992), 231–35.

²²⁸See, for example, S. Hadad, “Oil Lamps from the Third to the Eighth Century C.E. at Scythopolis–Bet Shean,” *DOP* 51 (1997).

²²⁹Le Strange, *Palestine* (as above, note 8), 330–41.

ture. If a traveler in Baysan's streets raised his eyes he could still see a skyline composed of impressive colonnades, porticoes, the remains of the *scaenae frons* of the theater, the upper story of the nymphaeum, and even the remains of the pronaos of the temple in the city center. If he lowered his eyes he would see how the lower parts of these monuments were concealed by ordinary residential buildings, shops, and workshops that were inserted into the porticoes of the streets and leaned against monumental facades (Figs. 47, 48). Rows of shops abutted the facade of the nymphaeum, while provisional buildings encroached on the esplanade in front of the temple (Fig. 49) and on the square between the Central Monument and Monument of Antonius (Fig. 50). Valley Street was narrowed to a lane (some 4 m wide) by walls built on the street, while the sidewalks had long been occupied by additional buildings in front of the original Roman shops, probably occupied by shop owners. The *parodoi* of the theater housed a potter's workshop, and the domed *frigidarium* of the eastern bath changed into an industrial center.²³⁰ The western bathhouse also ceased to function in the early Islamic period and was filled with small buildings and installations, ovens (*tabuns*), and so on. Large pottery kilns were installed just inside the entrance to the arena of the amphitheater, which no longer served any public use (Fig. 51). The nearby Byzantine buildings along Orestes Street continued to exist, but additional encroachments onto the street significantly narrowed it. Many more examples of such developments, which changed the shape of Roman and Byzantine Scythopolis, have been found almost everywhere. As a rule, no large public institutions functioned as such. The theater and the amphitheater naturally played no role in eighth-century Palestine, but the disappearance of the bathhouses does call for explanation, as bathhouses functioned throughout the Umayyad period, although mostly for the use of the rulers and upper classes. The regular Byzantine houses, residential and commercial, continued to be used, frequently after repairs and alterations. It is likely that many of the buildings belonged to Christian families who had owned them since preconquest times. Churches and synagogues continued to exist, at least in part, supplying the religious and communal needs of the non-Islamic communities of Baysan.²³¹ Surprisingly, we have not yet discovered any mosque of the Umayyad period in the civic center.

The majority of these alterations reflect an "organic" development in a city that shrank to a medium-sized town according to the new priorities that characterized the early Islamic municipal organizations (see below).²³² In two areas of the former civic center of Scythopolis we find more radical transformations, one destructive in nature and the other constructive. A major change took place in the area of the *sigma*, Palladius Street, and the Byzantine agora, most probably as a result of an earthquake. This region, which had been designed in the early sixth century as a splendid and bustling quarter of Byzantine Scythopolis, was completely changed, probably around 700 C.E., when the Umayyad dynasty reached its peak. The *sigma* was deserted, and its rounded portico and

²³⁰ Bar-Nathan and Mazor, *ESI* 11 (1992), 37–38.

²³¹ The question of the minorities under Islamic rule is beyond the scope of this study. However, we note that in general the intentional mutilation of figural images in mosaic pavements indicates that the building remained in use during (and after) the iconoclastic wave of 720/1 C.E., in the time of the caliph Yazid II. If a mosaic pavement is not harmed by iconoclasm, there is a high probability that the place was abandoned before 721 and that the floor was covered at the time of the iconoclasm.

²³² H. Kennedy, "From Polis to Madina: Urban Change in Late Antiquity and Early Islam," *Past and Present* 106 (1985), 3–27.

the building blocks of the stylobate, as well as the pavement of the semicircular square, were uprooted and taken for secondary use somewhere else in the vicinity. The area of the *sigma* was occupied by a cemetery; simple cists were dug into the soft rock and covered with soil, in which at a later stage more tombs were excavated. Some four hundred burials were counted; the deceased—men, women, and children—usually lay on the right side, head to the west and facing south; thus there is no doubt of their identity as Muslims.²³³ The neighboring Palladius Street was covered by alluvial soil. The colonnade of the portico on the north side fell down or was deliberately dismantled, and the limestone drums of the columns were arranged in lines across the street and the sidewalks (and even further south), perhaps in order to support agricultural terraces in the area. The Byzantine agora was occupied by a center of ceramic production consisting of a large building and numerous pottery kilns scattered in the vicinity (Fig. 52). Most common among the ceramic products are the jugs and asymmetrical flasks made of yellowish clay that are typical of the Umayyad layers of occupation everywhere in Bet Shean (Fig. 53). A row of shops on the north side of the agora was rebuilt above the ruins of the former Byzantine shops.

The second change took place in Silvanus Street in the first part of the eighth century. At that time Silvanus Street was one of the main arteries of the town, connecting the southern plateau with the center. On the other hand, Silvanus Hall (see above, pp. 123–25), situated between the street and the former eastern bathhouse, on both sides of the Roman portico, had fallen down, at least in part, in an earlier earthquake.²³⁴ A row of some twenty shops was built facing Silvanus Street, creating a *sug*, or oriental bazaar (Figs. F, 54).²³⁵ It should be repeated here that in all previous articles and preliminary reports the complex was defined as the “Byzantine street of shops” or “Byzantine commercial street.” Until recently we attributed the building of the complex to the time of Silvanus (515/6 C.E.) and believed that it continued to be used during the Umayyad period with some modifications.²³⁶ However, this does not affect the later history of the street and shops as we have presented it and their decline, which is discussed below.

In front of the shops was a well-built arcade that supported a portico (4–4.5 m wide). The great majority of the columns, bases, and capitals are made of marble; the style of the capitals is Byzantine, and we believe that the arcade in front of the shops was essentially a reconstruction of the northeast facade of Silvanus Hall, which was restored on almost the same lines, with a slight change in its orientation. The rather simple decorative profile that ornamented the wall above the arcade was most likely of the Umayyad period. The rear wall of the shops extended between the columns of the Roman portico (Fig. 55). A rather short period after the foundation of the *sug*, some additional building took place on the site. The facade of the shops and the dividing walls were placed above the area of the former decorative Roman pool; their foundations penetrated into the almost com-

²³³ Bar-Nathan and Mazor, *ESI* 11 (1992), 44–45; the date suggested in this first report for the desertion of the *sigma* (exedra) is in the late Byzantine period (the late 6th and early 7th century), while the cemetery is dated to the Umayyad period.

²³⁴ See above, note 166.

²³⁵ Mentioned above, p. 123 and note 163. A similar complex was erected in the same period along the Great Colonnade at Palmyra; cf. K. al As‘ad and F. M. Stepnikowski, “The Umayyad *sūq* in Palmyra,” *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 4 (1989), 205–23.

²³⁶ Tsafrir and Foerster, “From Scythopolis to Baysān,” summarized on p. 114.

pletely ruined mosaics and oil-shale pavers of Silvanus Hall (Fig. 56). On the other side of the rear wall of the shops, another portico was built as part of the same project, supported by the rear wall of the shops and a row of columns, only the bases of which remained in situ. A paved lane adorned with arches was built at the expense of one of the shops, creating a passage between Silvanus Street and the new *suq* and the rear portico in the west. The entrance to this passage from the west was ornamented by an arched gate. On the south (right) jamb of this gate, facing those who entered the gate, an emblem (1.16 m wide, preserved length 0.84 m) of wall mosaic was found in the rubble from the earthquake. The emblem was fixed within a decorated stuccoed frame; it contained an Arabic inscription written in Kufic letters typical of the early eighth century, made of gilded tesserae on a blue and green background. From the point of view of execution and epigraphy, our inscription, if one ignores the huge size difference between the two, resembles the monumental inscription on the Dome of the Rock. The inscription contains the Muslim declaration of faith that became common in the Umayyad period: "In the name of Allah the Merciful and the Compassionate; there is no god but Allah, the only one, who has no partner; Muhammad is the messenger of Allah." On the other, north, jamb is another mosaic inscription (1.2 × 1.35 m) saying that the building was erected on the order of the caliph 'Abdallāh Hisham (724–743 C.E.) by the governor Ishāq b. Qabīsa. We believe that the foundation of the marketplace took place in the early days of the caliph, in the 720s, while the modifications were carried out in the late 730s.²³⁷ The inscriptions and the whole project are of the Umayyad period, from the first half of the eighth century; the inscription proves the importance of the new building project, one of the monumental Umayyad undertakings in the Jordan Valley.

The new market functioned until the earthquake, and the finds from beneath the rubble, as well as in the Umayyad level almost everywhere, reveal lively commercial activity (Fig. 57). Two shops whose owners did not manage to save their property yielded considerable amounts of gold and silver coins, jewelry, and other artifacts (Fig. 58).

Still, from the point of view of municipal management, the condition of Baysan continued to deteriorate. Such a statement calls for extreme caution, as we run the risk of making a value judgment, an error from which we must refrain. In making this statement we refer to criteria such as the architectural character and maintenance of public areas and public services. From this point of view the evidence of a decline is clear. An examination of the later history of Silvanus Street, during the few decades between the erection of the Umayyad *suq* and the earthquake, leaves no room for doubt. We can illustrate this by the following discovery. During the excavation, many fragments of roof tiles were collected, but none could be restored to its complete state. This shows that all the roof tiles of the portico were removed while it was still standing, and only fragments of the broken ones were left in the area. We suppose that the new roofing consisted of palm branches, an economical solution typical of the area. The pavers of the sidewalk had been uprooted and taken away, and only a few marble or limestone slabs remained in

²³⁷E. Khamis, "Two Wall-Mosaic Inscriptions from Umayyad Bet-Shean," *Cathredra* 85 (1997), 45–64 (in Hebrew). Another famous building project of Hisham along the Jordan Valley is the palace at Khirbet al-Mafjar near Jericho. See R. Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar: An Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley* (Oxford, 1959); the dating to Hisham's days was suggested by K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (Oxford, 1969), 574–76.

situ. We may conclude that the public property was looted by private citizens. On the other side of the street, a new line of shops of very poor and provisional character was built, narrowing Silvanus Street to a lane (Fig. 59). It is clear that the street was no longer properly cleaned; the flagstones were covered by dust and soil, in places to a height of some 10 cm. A similar rise in level was discerned within the shops.

Remains of buildings of the Umayyad period were also found in the suburbs, though signs of a decline in the density of occupation are clearly discerned. At Tel Iztaba in the north, buildings were abandoned during the Umayyad period or before (i.e., in the earlier part of the 7th century).²³⁸ We cannot present clear evidence for such a development on the southern plateau, an area that in a later period (from the Abbasid period to the present) replaced the valley of Naḥal ‘Amal as the main area of occupation; it seems that there was no reduction in the number of the houses.

Although there are many indications of a gradual decline of the town, Umayyad Baysan was still a lively and busy settlement. Its urban character reflects both the presence of major governmental enterprise and a general trend toward disintegration of the old municipal systems and the decay of urban services. The departure from the old tradition of municipal management seems to have been so ingrained in the mind of the population that it created a new system of urbanism that government building policy was unable to influence.²³⁹

The attempt to reconstruct Scythopolis in the last decades of Byzantine rule, a period that is very difficult to define by archaeological means, must be made by locating this phase on the line of urban history between the two better-known periods. As a starting point we take the great days of Byzantine urbanism in the first half of the sixth century C.E.; the terminus is Umayyad Baysan as revealed by the earthquake of 749. Drawing a line between these two poles, we discern a clear process of decline and deterioration of the city as such. The main component that changed was the concept of urbanism that had shaped the city (as well as other cities of the East) since the Hellenistic period. For almost a thousand years, Palestine was ruled by western ideas and Greco-Roman concepts, blended with the cultures of the East, which created the world of Hellenism. The proportions of each of the two components, East and West, differed between countries and nations. The city was the main arena of the struggle between the different forces and the leading power of Hellenistic culture. Hellenistic and Roman urbanism introduced preplanned, usually orthogonal town planning,²⁴⁰ replacing the “organic” or “spontaneous” emergence and growth of cities, which had been typical of the pre-Hellenistic East. The idea of town planning had been known already in Iron Age sites in Palestine, although this planning seems primitive in comparison with the standards of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. In the Byzantine period we find the first signs of a reversion from rigid town planning to the organic or spontaneous style. This process completed its triumphant return in the early Islamic period. The analysis of the victory of the traditional

²³⁸For example, Mazor and Bar-Nathan, *Qadmoniot* 107–8 (1994), 137; Zori, “Ancient Synagogue” (as above, note 75). In the Monastery of the Lady Mary (Fitzgerald, *Sixth Century Monastery*), no coin postdating the time of Heraclius was found. However, our interpretation of the finds as evidence for a general decline calls for special caution, as the buildings mentioned here are churches, a monastery, and a synagogue of the (still large) minorities. No residential buildings were excavated in this area.

²³⁹Kennedy, “From Polis to Madina.”

²⁴⁰See the description of Roman Scythopolis above, pp. 88–99.

approach of the East should perhaps remain in the domain of sociology and psychology and will not be attempted here. However, we must emphasize that this phenomenon was by no means a result of the Muslim conquest, but began many years before the rise of Islam.²⁴¹ It should be remembered that the pattern of settlements of the organic type need not have been imported from distant regions; it had existed in rural settlements, large and small villages, in the close vicinity of the cities, throughout the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods.²⁴² Any defect in the structure of the municipal system of the cities and their traditional right to rule their own city impaired the will of the citizens to struggle for preservation of the old system.

We have already described the less rigid design and the practical-utilitarian approach that characterize architecture and town planning in the early Byzantine period. The discussion of this question brings us into the dangerous area of value judgment. It is very difficult to designate the various stages of this transformation. What is merely a "change" in the concepts of urbanism and the priorities of urban life? How can we discern a "decline" or a "deterioration" of the city? When can we speak about "disintegration" of the town and its institutions? At what stage do we declare the "demise" of the ancient city?²⁴³ Are scholars justified in interpreting the occupation of the porticoes along the streets by tradesmen and peddlers with their makeshift stalls as a sign of deterioration, or, on the contrary, should they see it as an indication of commercial prosperity and social activity? We have no clear answer, but there is no simple correlation between the deterioration of the city's monumental architecture and urban decline. As shown above, Scythopolis reached its peak, in terms of size and population, in the first half of the sixth century, at a time when it lost much of the quality of formal planning, fine masonry, and artistic perfection that had made it one of the most magnificent Roman towns in the East. On the other hand, there is a certain stage in the process of change when we are obliged to use terms such as "decline" or "deterioration" of the city. We believe that this stage arrived when the streets were narrowed to lanes,²⁴⁴ public squares were invaded by encroaching private buildings, facades of monuments were concealed by private buildings built against them, sewage ran in the streets, the streets were no longer cleaned of dust and waste, and no effort was made to reerect collapsed columns and fallen capitals. This situation means that the "department of public works" had ceased to function and no real effort was made to maintain municipal services.

The various explanations of the phenomenon of the decline of the cities cover a wide range. Prominent among the suggested reasons are droughts and plagues (in particular that of 541/2),²⁴⁵ loss of powers by the *boulē* and the *curiales*, and the exploitation by

²⁴¹ Kennedy, "From Polis to Madina"; idem, "The Last Century of Byzantine Syria: A Reinterpretation," *ByzF* 10 (1985), 141–83; Saradi-Mendelovici, "Demise of the City"; Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, 152–75.

²⁴² See Y. Hirschfeld, "Farms and Villages in Byzantine Palestine," *DOP* 51 (1997); in general, G. Tate, *Les campagnes de la Syrie du nord, du II au VII siècles*, I (Paris, 1992).

²⁴³ These are some of the terms used or quoted by Saradi-Mendelovici, "Demise of the City."

²⁴⁴ Although this phenomenon may also be understood as a practical step, caused by the abandonment of carts and chariots in favor of loaded oxen, mules, donkeys, etc., for which a narrow lane is adequate; cf. R. W. Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975).

²⁴⁵ For example, C. Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (London, 1980), esp. 66–69. Saradi-Mendelovici ("Demise of the City," esp. 371–72) suggests that these natural disasters were only catalysts in a process that had started a long time before.

the central treasury of money designated for buildings of individual cities.²⁴⁶ H. Saradi-Mendelovici emphasizes the role of the bishops and of new Christian principles that changed social and cultural thought, shaped the manners and customs of individuals and the public, and formed the cultural profile of life and leisure of the Byzantine city.²⁴⁷ None of these reasons can be denied or underestimated, although there was a great variety in their influence in particular places throughout the fourth to seventh century. Indeed we find, in addition to the universal processes, a number of historical events that apply to specific regions and not simultaneously to the entire Byzantine world. Among these regional and transient causes are the invasions of the Germanic tribes in Rome and other parts of Europe, the Vandals in North Africa, the attacks of the Slavs in the Balkans, the Persian-Sasanian conquest of the eastern provinces,²⁴⁸ and the Muslim conquest (see below).

No attempt will be made here to write a regional history of the cities of Palestine and Arabia; we concentrate only on the reconstruction of the urban history of Scythopolis. We have already pointed to the Samaritan revolts and the bubonic plague as two major events that probably had a strong impact on the city (above, pp. 125–26). Both took place during the days of Justinian, the great builder who contributed much to prestigious building projects in Palestine. Procopius, Cyril of Scythopolis, and other sources mention his works with admiration, and archaeology has corroborated these sources and added new data. In Jerusalem, Justinian built the magnificent Nea Church and probably renovated the southern part of the central colonnaded street (*cardo*) of the city.²⁴⁹ He also built a garrison on Mount Gerizim; a church and fortress in Sinai; monasteries and cisterns in Jerusalem and its vicinity, including Bethlehem, Jericho, and the Judean Desert; and the wall of Tiberias.²⁵⁰ Procopius does not mention Scythopolis, but, as noted above (p. 126), it is likely that Scythopolis received the greater part of the sum of 100 pounds of gold, allocated by the emperor, according to Cyril of Scythopolis, for restoring the damage that had been caused during the Samaritan revolt of 529 C.E. Most of the projects were connected with ecclesiastical buildings or welfare institutions directed by the Church, such as the hospitals in the compound of the Nea Church.²⁵¹

Examination of the case of Jerusalem, a city that enjoyed Justinian's financial support, is very instructive. Tiberias, the second city mentioned by Procopius, is known only from the excavations of its wall, its church, and a few buildings and therefore cannot be a subject of such examination.²⁵² Jerusalem, on the other hand, is much better known. It has become clear that at the same time as the foundation of the Nea Church and the renovation of the south part of the *cardo*, other regions of Jerusalem were designed with

²⁴⁶ See above, p. 120 and note 152.

²⁴⁷ Saradi-Mendelovici, "Demise of the City," 386–401.

²⁴⁸ See below, p. 145. For the possible role of the Persian invasion as a major event that ended late antiquity in Asia Minor, see C. Foss, "The Persians in Asia Minor and the End of Antiquity," *EHR* 90 (1975), 421–47; *idem*, "Archaeology and the 'Twenty Cities' of Byzantine Asia," *AJA* 81 (1977), 469–86; *idem*, *Byzantine and Turkish Sardis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), esp. 53–55; *idem*, *Ephesus after Antiquity: A Late Antique, Byzantine and Turkish City* (Cambridge, 1979).

²⁴⁹ Procopius, *Buildings* 5.6; N. Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, 1980), 211–46.

²⁵⁰ Procopius, *Buildings* 5.7–9.

²⁵¹ Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 73 (ed. Schwartz, 177).

²⁵² Y. Hirschfeld, *A Guide to Antiquity Sites in Tiberias* (Jerusalem, 1992); *idem*, "Tiberias," *NEAEHL*, IV, 1464–70; G. Foerster, "Excavations in the South of the City," *ibid.*, 1470–73.

little regard for the rigid principles of Roman town planning. The builders of these quarters followed the Byzantine organic and loose approach.²⁵³ Jerusalem teaches us that the trend toward change in urban concepts was widespread, even if great building projects were carried out in the vicinity. There are no indications of decline in Jerusalem before the Persian conquest. Gerasa of the later days of Justinian's rule presents another ambivalent example: in 565 C.E. the Propylaea church was erected,²⁵⁴ an event seen by M. Whitto as evidence of the continuing prosperity of the city.²⁵⁵ But the insertion of this church into the old propylaea of the Artemis Temple blocked one of the main arteries of the city, the west end of the large bridge that crossed the deep valley of the river Chrysorhoas and connected the eastern part of Gerasa with the larger western part. The conversion of the Roman monument into a church became possible only after the bridge had been destroyed (in the earthquake of 551 C.E.?). The act of building made it clear that there was no intention of reconstructing the bridge. Gerasa was left with only one bridge in the south, on the course of the southern *decumanus*—a significant reduction of the efficiency of the communication system in the city. Around 559 C.E. the church of Bishop Isaiah was built near the (already deserted) northern theater and some 200 m west of the north tetrapylon.²⁵⁶ At that very time the north tetrapylon was blocked and went out of use, as did the northern *decumanus*,²⁵⁷ causing further deterioration of the general state of the city.

We cannot point to any specific event that may have harmed Scythopolis in the late period of Justinian and that might explain the absence of building inscriptions postdating that period (except for the rebuilding of the lepers' bathhouse by Bishop Theodorus in 558/9 and perhaps the foundation of the Monastery of the Lady Mary before 553 or before 567).²⁵⁸ One significant additional natural disaster was an earthquake, the exact date of which is still unknown; it happened some time after the foundation of Silvanus Hall (and probably the Byzantine agora) and before the building of the Umayyad street of shops. We tend to date the earthquake, on the basis of general archaeological circumstances, somewhere between the end of the sixth century and the second half of the seventh. This earthquake caused the destruction of Silvanus Hall; all the columns in the southwest part of the hall were found collapsed in the same direction, in a way that leaves no doubt about the cause of the destruction (other columns and piers were taken away by the Umayyad builders, and thus we are unaware of how they collapsed). The earthquake rubble was covered by a layer of debris, beneath the floor level of the later, Umayyad, building. It seems likely that the same earthquake caused the collapse of the porticoes of the Byzantine agora, the portico of the *sigma*, and most probably the columns

²⁵³The best example is the 5th–6th-century quarter south of the Temple Mount, in which fairly large and substantial houses were built without concern for orthogonal planning. Cf. B. Mazar, *The Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem: Second Preliminary Report, 1969–1970 Seasons* (Jerusalem, 1971), 11–13; M. Ben-Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple: The Discovery of Jerusalem* (New York, 1985), 243–60; also, in general, Tsafrir and Foerster, "From Scythopolis to Baysān," 106–9.

²⁵⁴J. W. Crowfoot, "The Propylaea Church," in Kraeling, *Gerasa* (as above, note 56), 227–34.

²⁵⁵Whitto, "Ruling the City," 14.

²⁵⁶V. A. Clark, "The Church of Bishop Isaiah at Jerash," in Zayadine, *Jerash*, I (as above, note 54), 303–18, 321–22; J. M. C. Bowsher, "The Church Inscriptions," *ibid.*, 319–21.

²⁵⁷P. Watson, "Area B: The Cardo-Decumanus Corner. A Report on Seven Centuries of Occupation," in W. Ball et al., "The North Decumanus and North Tetrapylon at Jerash: An Archaeological and Architectural Report," in Zayadine, *Jerash*, I, 359–67, also 393.

²⁵⁸See above, notes 79, 140.

of Palladius Street. As mentioned above (pp. 125, 137–38), the drums of the columns were arranged in rows across the street and its sidewalks (Figs. 60, 61), perhaps creating agricultural terraces and provisional buildings, some time before the earthquake, concealing the pavement of Palladius Street and totally preventing any use of the street, even as a dirt road (although the large drainage channel underneath it continued to function). We tend to date this stage of terracing, together with the use of the *sigma* as a Muslim cemetery, to the very beginning of the eighth century. On the other hand, a follis of Justin II (565–578 C.E.) was found in a section made beneath the pavement of Palladius Street, indicating that the street was used and the pavement of the street was repaired, in that section, no earlier than 565 C.E. This earthquake, which is apparently not mentioned in the lists of earthquakes, affected the city but did not cause total destruction. The most important difference between this earthquake and that of 363 is that the earlier earthquake created a challenge that was vigorously met by the city authorities and by governors such as Artemidorus, who rebuilt many of the ruined monuments and added new ones. The later earthquake struck a town that could recruit neither the resources nor the motivation to respond to the damage with the necessary enterprise.

The two major events that remain to be discussed are the Persian-Sasanian conquest of Palestine in 614 C.E. and the conquest of Scythopolis by the Muslims in 635/6. So far no evidence has been uncovered of any physical destruction of Scythopolis during either of the two occupations. However, their impact is of the greatest significance. It is convenient to start the investigation with the Muslim conquest, as our information about this event is more firm.²⁵⁹ The conquest of Scythopolis took place as a consequence of the Muslim victory in the battle of Fihl (Pella) not far from Scythopolis, east of the Jordan, in the winter of 635 C.E.²⁶⁰ The tradition relates that the defenders of Scythopolis breached the irrigation channels in order to prevent the passage of the Muslim troops by flooding the area. After its fall, Scythopolis (now Baysan) is counted among the cities obliged to pay tribute in money and crops and, according to the Damascus articles of surrender, to transfer to the victors half of the houses of the city. If this is even partially correct, then a large group of settlers who were not familiar with western urbanism joined the citizens of the town. This new social element may have had a strong impact on urban life in the city and accelerated the abandonment of the urban concept of the past. In different Umayyad buildings or shops in the center, including a shop in the Umayyad *suq* along Silvanus Street, three bronze steelyards were found, on the arms of which are notches marking the weight; on one side of the arms the notches are numbered with Greek letters and on the other in Arabic. These balances were found beneath the rubble of the earthquake of 749, showing that business was carried out with both Greek-speaking and Arabic-speaking customers until the mid-eighth century. If this was the situation after almost ninety years of Umayyad rule, it is evident that some kind of *modus vivendi* had been achieved between Muslims and Christians after the Muslim conquest.

²⁵⁹ For the conquest and the early Islamic period in general, see F. M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, 1981), esp. 130; M. Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634–1099* (Cambridge, 1992), esp. 43–44; W. E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge, 1992), esp. 66–146. For Bet Shean, see Tsafrir and Foerster, “From Scythopolis to Baysān,” 111–15.

²⁶⁰ Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-rusul wa-l-muluk*, ed. M. De Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879–1901), I, 2145–46, 2159; *The History of al-Tabari*, XII: *The Battle of al Qadisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine*, trans. and annot. Y. Friedmann (Albany, N.Y., 1992), 174, 185–89.

One of the reasons for the loss of importance of Baysan under the early Islamic administration was the transfer of the capital of the province of al-Urdunn—the Arab equivalent of Palaestina Secunda—to Tiberias. We do not know when exactly this transfer took place, but it most probably happened not long after the conquest. The administrative and fiscal systems of the new state were dependent on the former Byzantine systems until the Umayyad reform in the mid-690s. We know nothing about the municipal system and the responsibilities of the local council (if such survived) for maintaining municipal services.

The impression is that little had been done before the major Umayyad building activity took place in selected parts of the town. If we try to imagine Baysan before these projects, we see a town that had lost many of its urban qualities. The Muslim conquest only accelerated a process that was already at an advanced stage. The Persian conquest of Palestine in 614 C.E. and the fourteen years of Persian rule of the country had a crucial impact on the cities of Palestine including Scythopolis.²⁶¹ Jerusalem suffered a terrible massacre and severe destruction of churches; some other settlements that lay on the path of the Sasanian army along the coast perhaps suffered as well, but in general most of the settlements, towns, and villages all over the country remained unharmed. The damage was caused rather by the loss of contact with the sources of authority in the imperial palace and the capital and by the complete breakdown of the provincial administration. In such conditions, individual settlements were obliged to take care of their own needs and their own security.²⁶² It is likely that the metropolitan bishops, the city bishops, or even priests of lower rank in smaller settlements had to take responsibility for leading their communities in the absence of the former governmental system. In any case, it is hard to believe that in these circumstances much attention was paid to the maintenance of current public works in the city, not to mention the rebuilding of public institutions. The hypothetical department of public works lost its authority completely, if it had any authority left. At this stage more license was given to citizens who had the power and enterprise to occupy parts of the public squares, buildings, and sidewalks, or even to dismantle existing monuments in search of building materials. The new policy triumphed after the Muslim conquest and in the Umayyad period. While dismantling some of the new buildings that were built in front of the monuments, into the porticoes, and on the pavements of streets and squares, we paid much attention to the pottery and coins that were found within the walls or beneath their foundations. The majority of these later walls proved to be of the early Islamic and Umayyad periods, but in several cases we tend to date these buildings to the end of the sixth or the early seventh century. One of these buildings was built in front of the Monument of Antonius, narrowing the passage from Valley Street to the nymphaeum, in front of the Central Monument.

The search for further evidence will continue by meticulous investigation of sections and probes, analysis of pottery and coins, and new epigraphic discoveries. Many questions still remain open, but the general trend seems clear. There was no correspondence

²⁶¹ Z. Baras, "The Persian Conquest and the End of Byzantine Rule," in *Eretz Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest*, I: Political, Social and Cultural History, ed. Z. Baras et al. (Jerusalem, 1982), 300–349, esp. 328–40.

²⁶² P. Mayerson, "The First Muslim Attacks on Southern Palestine (A.D. 633–634)," *TAPA* 95 (1964), 155–99, reprinted in his *Monks, Martyrs, Soldiers and Saracens: Papers on the Near East in Late Antiquity (1962–1993)* (Jerusalem, 1994), 53–97.

between the vitality, growth, and prosperity of Scythopolis and loyalty to the virtues of monumental architecture. A practical and utilitarian approach served the needs of the developing city. The Christianization of the city encouraged the emergence of an alternative social and cultural system that undermined the existing civil one. At a certain stage, mostly from the second half of the sixth century, the change in concepts of urbanism progressed from loose “comfortable disorder” into the domain of neglect and disintegration. The weakening of the municipal authorities evolved toward a complete breakdown as a result of the Persian and Muslim conquests, while natural disasters accelerated the process of decline.

CONCLUSION

After the earthquake of 749, Baysan barely recovered its position as a rather small town.²⁶³ The core of Baysan moved to the southern plateau, where it continued to exist through the Crusader, Mamluk, Ottoman, and modern periods. In the central valley and on the tell we find some remains of the Abbasid, Fatimid, Crusader, and Mamluk periods, mostly near the water in the central valley of Nahal ‘Amal and on top of the prominent, and therefore safe, tell. The main area of Roman-Byzantine Scythopolis actually ceased to exist in the medieval period. This study has attempted to shed light on several hundred years, during which the city transformed its shape and the community of its citizens changed its nature. We have searched in particular for the flourishing and decline of the city, a question that has attracted many scholars in the last generation. Our goal was not to arrive at a global or regional synthesis but to provide a case study for the writing of the desired new history of early Byzantine urbanism in the East.

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²⁶³Tsafrir and Foerster, “From Scythopolis to Baysān,” 114–15.