

The Christian Presence in Jordan in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries

The Christians in the area of modern-day Jordan continued to thrive after the Muslim Conquests of the 630s AD and throughout the Umayyad period up to 750 and beyond into the first decades of the Abbasid period and they continued to have ties with what remained of the Byzantine Empire. But by the early ninth century, the Christians in Jordan had begun to dwindle into small remnant communities and any further relations with the Byzantine Empire are scarcely attested.

This article will examine the state of the remnant Christians in the area of modern-day Jordan during the years of the Abbasid period between the death of the Abbasid caliph Hārūn ar-Rašīd in 809 and the takeover of the region by the Fatimid caliphs in Egypt in 970 and focus on the extent to which there is historical or archaeological evidence for a continued Christian presence, including pilgrimage, in that century and a half¹.

General Political History

The political situation of the area of modern-day Jordan in the Abbasid period was unstable². After the Abbasid Revolution of 749-750 the region was ruled by the dynasty of Abbasid caliphs in Iraq. Central authority was broken for a time after the death of Hārūn ar-Rašīd by the anarchy of the civil war in 809-813 between his sons al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn and seriously weakened further in the course of the ninth century, especially after the assassination of the caliph al-Mutawakkil in 861. That weakening of central Abbasid authority enabled the largely autonomous governor of Egypt, Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn, to extend his authority to Palestine in 878, which he ruled until his death in 884, followed by his son Ḥumārawayh up his death in 896 and his two grandsons Ġayš and Hārūn up to 905. In 905 the Abbasid caliphs in Iraq regained tenuous administrative control of Syria for the next thirty years until Muḥammad ibn Ṭuġġ al-Iḥšīd, the governor of Palestine since 928 and Syria since 931, became the governor of Egypt in 935 as well. He was largely independent until his death in

946, succeeded by Kāfūr and others in the Iḥšīdid line until the takeover by the Fatimids, starting in 970.

The period ending in 970 was at the beginning of an epoch of regional collapse in the eastern Mediterranean from 950 to 1072 induced by prolonged drought and severe winters, which Ellenblum has recently studied³. He notes droughts in 949 and 953-955 and most notably a seven-year drought in Egypt from 963 to 969 and argues that the social breakdown caused by the severe drought of the 960s contributed to the collapse of Iḥšīdid rule and the Fatimid takeover⁴. He also points to the droughts of the mid-eleventh century, especially the seven-year drought of 1065 to 1072, and the resulting social breakdown, as contributing to an archaeologically observable abrupt decline in such cities as Tiberias, Caesarea and ar-Ramla and a rapid decline in the strength of the minority Christian communities in the region⁵. The area of modern-day Jordan would hardly have been immune from such collapse and social crisis, but the archaeological investigation of the period in Jordan is not yet developed enough for such effects to be detected, such as the discovery of hoards noted by Ellenblum⁶, which are so numerous in Palestine for the eleventh century.

Historical Geography

The Abbasid-period Arab geographers⁷, most notably al-Maḡdīsī writing around 985⁸, mention the major cities and towns in the area of modern-day Jordan in the Abbasid period and identify the area as mostly within the province (*ġund*) of Dimašq, while the northwest area east of the Jordan River between the Yarmuk and Zarqa Rivers, was within the Ġund of al-Urdunn. The geographers, however, have nothing to say about the presence of Christians beyond the statement of al-Ya'qūbī⁹, writing in 891, concerning the districts of Fiḥl (Pella), Ġaraš and the Sawād in northern Jordan within the Ġund of al-Urdunn that »the population of these districts is a mixture of Arabs and Greeks (*'Aġam*)«. One might also

1 This article covers the period between the end of the period covered in Schick, *Christian Communities*; Schick, *Settlement and the start of the period covered in Schick, Southern Jordan*.

2 For the general history of the period, see Gil, *History* 279-334; for the period up to 878, see Cobb, *White Banners*.

3 Ellenblum, *Collapse*.

4 *Ibidem* 41-45.

5 *Ibidem* 214-224, 240-248.

6 *Ibidem* 44f., 216-220.

7 See Le Strange, *Palestine*; Walmsley, *Administrative Structure*.

8 Maḡdīsī, *Aḥsan*.

9 Ya'qūbī, *Buldān* 327f.; Le Strange, *Palestine* 439, 462 and 532f.

consider Christians to have been among the »mixture of people« that al-Ya'qūbī identified in the districts of Ma'āb (Rabba) and Zuḡar (Ġawr aṣ-Ṣāfi)¹⁰; otherwise he identified the inhabitants in the various districts as members of various Arab tribes.

Historical Events in Jordan

The area of modern-day Jordan is rarely attested in historical accounts of the ninth and tenth centuries. In one such account, in the reign of al-Ma'mūn (197-218/813-833) an Umayyad rebel destroyed a fortress at Fudayn (Mafraq) in northern Jordan and then fortified himself in Masuh, and laid waste to Ziza, and stayed at a strong fortress at Hesban, all locations in central Jordan south of Amman¹¹. Christians are not mentioned in connection with these events.

Another time when events occurred in the area that were important enough to be mentioned in the Arabic sources is the devastating attacks in the early tenth century in southern Syria by the Qarmatians, who plundered and killed at Tiberias, as well as at Buṣrā, Der'a, and the regions of Baṭāniya and Ḥawrān in southern Syria in 293/905-906, and attacked the pilgrimage caravans in the south in 294/906¹². Additional Arab tribal attacks on the Syrian and Egyptian Haḡḡ pilgrimage caravans are recorded in the periods of 'Abbasid and Iḡṣīdīd control in 306/918-919¹³ and 354/965¹⁴. Christians are not specifically attested in connection with these events.

The Christians in Jerusalem and the Monasteries West of the Jordan River

Christians in Palestine west of the Jordan River are better attested than the Christians east of the Jordan River in the ninth and tenth centuries. Some developments west of the Jordan are worth citing that the area east of the Jordan River would also have undergone. Christians remained the majority of the population in Palestine during the Abbasid period and Greek culture continued to flourish through the eighth century; indeed Jerusalem and the monasteries to the east were a leading center of Greek culture at the time¹⁵. The thriving condition of the church institutions in Palestine is exceptionally well-documented at the beginning of the ninth century in a document prepared for the emperor Charlemagne¹⁶, during the exchange of embassies between Charlemagne, the caliph Ḥārūn ar-Raṣīd in Baghdad and the patriarch of Jerusalem¹⁷.

But the early ninth century marked the end of the golden age for the Christians in Jerusalem and the monasteries to the east. A breakdown in overall security in the region led to several episodes of the monasteries east of Jerusalem being attacked or sacked and monks leaving as refugees to the Byzantine Empire. The insecurity culminated during the civil war between 809 and 813, when churches in Jerusalem itself were made desolate or profaned for the first time, as were the monasteries to the east, resulting in another wave of refugee monks leaving for the Byzantine Empire¹⁸. Among those refugee monks were Michael the Synkellos, a native of Jerusalem born in 761, and Theodore and Theophanes Graptoi, natives of Ma'āb (Rabba), born in 775 and 778, who were educated in Jerusalem and became monks in the monastery of Mar Saba. The three of them played a major role in support of the veneration of icons in the Byzantine Empire during the second period of iconoclasm between 815 and 843¹⁹.

The refugee monks from Palestine also played a major role in the Byzantine Empire in the revival of learning and the adoption of the minuscule Greek script in the ninth century. The need for a more efficient means of copying Greek manuscripts may have developed in the monasteries of the Wilderness of Judaea and the Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mt Sinai, due to their reduced resources in isolation under Muslim rule and the challenge to produce writings that would refute iconoclasm. The refugee monks would have taken their manuscripts and techniques with them²⁰.

The Christians continued to be the majority of the population in Palestine, perhaps still up to the time of the Crusades, but by the time of the Fatimid takeover, the Muslim population was firmly entrenched, if not yet a majority.

But these historical accounts say little about the area east of the Jordan River. The document of Charlemagne mentions only the Baptism Site on the Jordan River: a »monument at the Jordan, a monastery of St John and another church where the Lord was baptized«²¹, among the other monasteries between Jerusalem and the Jordan River. But one can infer that if overall security was breaking down and the Christians were under belligerent attack in the areas west of the Jordan River, then the Christians east of the Jordan were experiencing much the same. However, that assumption is based on the idea that there were still sizable numbers of Christians around in the area of modern-day Jordan in the ninth and tenth centuries in the first place who would have been affected. The degree to which that was the case, however, is an issue to which we must now turn.

10 Ya'qūbī, *Buldān* 326.

11 Yāqūt, *Mu'ḡam* 3,859; Grabar, *Small Episode*.

12 Tabarī, *Ta'riḡ* 3,4, 2257f., 2270-2273.

13 Ibn Ḥallikān 5,91, no. 664, 5,57.

14 Miskawayh 2,215.

15 Mango, *Culture; Mango, Greek*.

16 Charlemagne's Survey.

17 For a chronology of those embassies and all other travels between Europe and Jerusalem between roughly 700 and 900, see McCormick, *Origins* 852-972.

18 Theophanes, *Chronicle* 665 (AM 6301) and 683 (AM 6305); see Gil, *History*, 473f. and most recently Auzépy, *Role*.

19 Theophanes of Caesarea, *Praise; Life of Michael the Synkellos; Kolia-Dermitzaki, Michael the Synkellos; Sode, Life*.

20 Mango, *Culture; Herrin, Formation* 404-407.

21 Charlemagne's Survey 210f., 228-230.

Christians in Jordan in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries

Individual Christians in the area of modern-day Jordan continue to be attested by name through the end of the eighth century. For example, Theodore and Theophanes, the *Graptoi* brothers mentioned earlier, were born in Ma'āb (Rabba) in 775 and 778. Christians and Christian sites in Jordan are also attested in the Life of St Stephen the Sabaite for the mid to late eighth century at Ġaraš²², al-Quwaysma, south of Amman²³, Arnon (Wādī Muġib)²⁴, St Lot (Ġawr aṣ-Ṣāfi)²⁵, St Aaron (Ġabal Hārūn)²⁶, Ma'āb (Rabba)²⁷, and the Baptism Site on the Jordan River²⁸. Saint Stephen and other monks used to wander in the Wilderness of Judaea and walk around the Dead Sea during Lent and at other times without fear of attack by Arab tribesmen, although once God had to protect Stephen from the consequences of stumbling into a Bedouin encampment at night²⁹. Among the places in Jordan where the monks stopped during their walks are caves of the holy fathers in Arnon (Wādī Muġib), and St Lot (Ġawr aṣ-Ṣāfi) and St Aaron (Ġabal Hārūn)³⁰.

But only one Christian is attested by name in the ninth and tenth centuries – Peter of Bayt Ra's in northern Jordan, from the ninth century³¹. He was the author of a work in Arabic, *The Book of the Demonstration (Kitāb al-burhān)*, erroneously attributed to Eutychios, the tenth-century patriarch of Alexandria³². He is not to be confused with the Peter of Bayt Ra's who was martyred in 715³³. In this work of Melkite Christian apologetics, Peter of Bayt Ra's, who was either a deacon or bishop, lists some of the major Christian holy places in Jerusalem and Palestine that bear witness to the life of Christ. For the area east of the Jordan River the list includes only the Church of the River Jordan where Christ was baptized³⁴.

In addition, a number of pilgrims are known to have come to Jerusalem in the ninth and tenth centuries³⁵, although only three are specifically stated to have come to the Jordan River, and none went any farther into Jordan than that: Germanus of Kosinitza, who came in the mid-ninth century and became a monk at the monastery of St John the Baptist on the Jordan River³⁶, Elias the Younger, who came around 878-900 and visited the Jordan River³⁷; and Lazaros of Mount Galesion,

who came in the late tenth-early eleventh century and spent six years at Mar Saba; during Lent Lazaros would wander in the desert and once visited the place where Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt³⁸. That is presumably located at the same place near the Baptism site where Epiphanius the Monk had noticed it, perhaps in the late eighth century³⁹.

There continued to be a church hierarchy in Jerusalem, and a very few bishops are attested in Palestine in the ninth and tenth centuries, although the numbers given in the report about the patriarchs of Jerusalem and Antioch, 185 bishops, 17 abbots, and 1153 monks meeting in an anti-iconoclastic synod in Jerusalem in 836 and sending a letter to the emperor Theophilos are not plausible⁴⁰. But no bishops in Jordan are attested in the ninth and tenth centuries. There are attestations of bishoprics in Jordan in a list from the eleventh century, but they appear to have been titular only, given to church officials resident in Jerusalem⁴¹. That list could suggest that the bishoprics within the old Byzantine province of Arabia (northern Jordan and southern Syria) had been transferred from the patriarchate of Antioch to Jerusalem sometime after the Muslim conquests.

There was only limited contact between the patriarchs of Jerusalem and the Byzantine Empire in the ninth and tenth centuries, after the waves of refugees from Jerusalem in the early ninth century. Some exchanges of letters between the pope, the patriarch of Constantinople, and the Oriental patriarchs continue to be attested later, such as the letter to the emperor Theophilos in 836⁴², just mentioned, and especially later in the ninth century during the time of Photios⁴³, but nothing points to Christians in Jordan being involved.

Nonetheless, there were substantial numbers of Christians around, based on the statements of al-Ya'qūbī, writing in 891, as already mentioned, about Fiḥl (Pella), Ġaraš, and the Sawād in northern Jordan that »its population was a mixture of Arabs and Greeks«⁴⁴. Christians are also attested in Jordan in the Crusader period, especially in the area of southern Jordan, including Kerak and Ṣawbak, that became part of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, as for example in 1107 in Wādī Mūsā/Petra⁴⁵. But in the period from the end of the eighth century up to the start of the twelfth century, the presence of Christians in Jordan is scarcely demonstrable from historical sources.

22 Leontios, Life 7.1.

23 Leontios, Life 8.1.

24 Leontios, Life 16.2.

25 Leontios, Life 16.2.

26 Leontios, Life 16.2.

27 Leontios, Life 39.1, 49.2.

28 Leontios, Life, 37.2, 46.2.

29 Leontios, Life 15.

30 Leontios, Life 14.9, 16.2.

31 Swanson, Peter 1,902-906.

32 Eutychios of Alexandria, Book.

33 Passion de s. Pierre de Capitolias; Eftymiadis, Martyrdom 1,419-422.

34 Eutychios of Alexandria, Book 168 (Arabic text); 135 f. (English translation).

35 Re, Italy to Jerusalem; Talbot, Byzantine; Pahlitzsch, Byzantine Monasticism.

36 Talbot, Byzantine Pilgrimage 102, 109.

37 Talbot, Byzantine Pilgrimage 102, 109; Re, Italy to Jerusalem, 173 f.

38 Talbot, Byzantine Pilgrimage 102 f., 109.

39 Wilkinson, Jerusalem Pilgrims, 121.

40 See most recently Signes Codoñer, Theophilos 367-408.

41 Gelzer, Bistümverzeichnisse 281 f.

42 Signes Codoñer, Theophilos 367-408; Signes Codoñer, Die melkitischen Patriarchen.

43 Dvornik, Photian Schism, 95 f.; 97; 41, 51, 141, 151; 118-120; 174, 184 f., 191-194.

44 Ya'qūbī, Buldān, 327 f.; Le Strange, Palestine, 532 f., 439 and 462.

45 Albert of Aachen, Historia 10,28-31, 644 f.; see Mayer, Kreuzfahrerherrschaft; Pringle, Churches I, A-K 251 f., 286-295; Pringle, Churches, II L-Z 304-314, 373-377; and most recently Sinibaldi, Settlement for other references.

Christian Sites East of the Jordan in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries

There are only a few archaeological sites with any physical evidence for Christians after the eighth century; that evidence will be summarized here. There are a larger number of other major sites known to have been inhabited in the ninth and tenth centuries, as well as sites with Christian occupation attested in the second half of the eighth century that may well have continued into the ninth century or beyond, but unless that Christian presence can be definitely demonstrated, those sites are not cited here⁴⁶.

The Baptism Site at Bethany Beyond the Jordan

The site of the baptism of Christ on the east bank of the Jordan River was the prime pilgrimage site in the Byzantine period within the area of modern-day Jordan. Over the centuries most every Christian pilgrim who came to Jerusalem also wanted to go to the Jordan River, so the Jordan River always remained a focus of Christian pilgrimage⁴⁷. The specific location on the Jordan River, however, where the Byzantine and early Islamic period Christians had focused their attention and built multiple churches, had fallen into unoccupied ruins by the Mamluk period.

In the early Islamic period, the pilgrim Willibald had gone to the Baptism Site in 724. He had previously visited places around the Sea of Galilee and then from Caesarea Philippi, he walked south along the Jordan Valley, without mentioning any stops such as Pella, to the Monastery of John the Baptist which had about twenty monks, and then went on a mile or more to the Jordan, where the Lord was baptized⁴⁸. The pilgrim Epiphanius the Monk also came, perhaps sometime around the second half of the eighth century⁴⁹. Also Anthony ar-Ruwaḥ, who was martyred in 799, was baptised in the Jordan River at the Monastery of Mar John the Baptist⁵⁰.

For the ninth and tenth centuries, the document of Charlemagne mentioned earlier listed a »monument at the Jordan, a monastery of St John and another church where the Lord was baptised«⁵¹. The pilgrim Bernard the Monk referred to the Baptism Site in 870: »Furthermore to the east of Jerusalem, at a distance of thirty miles, is the Jordan, and above it the monastery of St John the Baptist. In that district there are also many other monasteries«⁵². Peter of Bayt Ra's in the ninth century, the author of the *Book of the Demonstration* –

Kitāb al-burhān, falsely attributed to Eutychios of Alexandria, included the Church of the River Jordan where Christ was baptized in his list of holy places that witness to the life of Christ⁵³. Germanus of Kosinitza came to the Holy Land in the mid-ninth century and became a monk at the Monastery of St John the Baptist on the Jordan River⁵⁴, and Elias the Younger came as a pilgrim around 878-900 and visited the Jordan River⁵⁵.

After the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994, extensive archaeological excavations were carried out by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan in the former military zone around the Baptism Site and the nearby hill (Tell al-Ḥarar) 2 km to the east associated with traditions of the Prophet Elijah and his ascension to heaven (2 Kings 2). The excavations started in 1997, but the results have not been well published, mostly in a series of short articles in the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* by Mohammad Waheeb and Rustum Mkhjian⁵⁶, so the excavations contribute less than they should to our understanding of the Baptism Site and Elijah's Hill in the Abbasid period.

The main phases of construction at the two sites date to the fifth and sixth centuries, but for how long those buildings stayed in use remains unclear; Elijah's Hill, where a cluster of buildings included a monastery, may have not lasted long into the early Islamic period, while pottery from the early Islamic periods was found at the Baptism Site⁵⁷. In any case, the Russian pilgrim Daniel the Abbot who came in 1106-1107, as well as other Crusader-period authors, mentioned various buildings and caves associated with the baptism as well as with Elijah⁵⁸, showing a continuity of Christian interest in the site.

‘Aqaba

The Christian presence in ‘Aqaba, ancient Ayla, in the early Islamic period is obscure. The city was a thriving port in the Byzantine period, excavated extensively between 1994 and 2003 under the direction of S. Thomas Parker⁵⁹, but no church remains are known beyond the building from the third century that possibly was a church, but that in any case went out of use as a result of the 363 AD earthquake⁶⁰. In the mid-seventh century the new Muslim rulers established their incipient settlement nearby, which continued up to the start of the Crusades, excavated by Donald Whitcomb⁶¹, and later by Belgian and Danish teams⁶², but no church remains are

46 See Schick, *Christian Communities*; for general surveys of the archaeology of Jordan in the early Islamic periods see Walmsley, *Middle Islamic and Crusader Periods* and Whitcomb, *Umayyad and Abbasid Periods*; for archaeological evidence for churches in general, see Michel, *Les églises*.

47 Ruben/Taylor, *Beyond the Jordan*.

48 Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims* 128f.

49 Donner, *Palästinabeschreibung*; Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims* 120.

50 Dick, *Passion* 123; Vila, *Anthony*.

51 McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey* 210f., 228-230.

52 Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims* 144.

53 Eutychios of Alexandria, *Book* 168 (Arabic text); 135f., paragraph 315 (English translation).

54 Talbot, *Byzantine Pilgrimage* 102, 109.

55 Talbot, *Byzantine Pilgrimage* 102, 109; Re, *Italy to Jerusalem* 173f.

56 See also Waheeb, *Bethany*; Waheeb, *Elijah's Hill*; Waheeb/Bala'awi/Al-Shawabkeh, *Hermit Caves*; Waheeb/Abdelaziz/al-Masri, *Unique Byzantine Complex*; see Ruben/Taylor, *Beyond the Jordan*.

57 Abu Shmeis/Waheeb, *Recent Discoveries*.

58 Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage* 136-138.

59 Parker/Smith, *Roman Aqaba Project*.

60 Parker, *Brief Notice*.

61 Whitcomb, *Misr*, among other articles, Whitcomb, *Ayla*.

62 Damgard, *Castrum*; Damgard, *Fatimid Jordan*.

known there either. Only a few scattered Christian architectural elements and marble fragments have been found over the years to point to a Christian presence. In the early Islamic period site, reused Christian marble fragments and other Christian objects are usually found in stratigraphic contexts no earlier than the ninth or tenth century, indicating that whatever churches from which they were taken were not robbed out before then⁶³.

ʿAqaba was a bishopric, so Christians are well-attested in historical sources in the Byzantine period up to the seventh century⁶⁴, but rarely beyond. Al-Bakrī, an eleventh-century geographer, records a monastery in Ayla in the Umayyad period by the name of Dayr al-Qunfuḍ (Monastery of the Hedgehog)⁶⁵; Shahid connects the name with the Qunfuḍ clan of the Balī tribe that lived in the area⁶⁶. ʿAbd al-Masīḥ, a monk at the Monastery of St Catherine at Mount Sinai who was martyred in the 860s⁶⁷, often came here to deal with tax officials⁶⁸, but his trips do not necessarily imply a substantial remnant Christian community there at the time. Muslims, on the other hand, are well-attested⁶⁹, but the Muslim historical sources have nothing to say about Christians in the Abbasid period.

Ġawr aṣ-Ṣāfi

Ġawr aṣ-Ṣāfi, in a fertile area at the south end of the Dead Sea, has been occupied over the millennia; two Christian sites in particular need to be mentioned.

The monastery at Lot's Cave (Dayr ʿAyn ʿAbata) to the north of the modern city commemorated where Lot and his daughters stayed after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:30-38). In the Byzantine and early Islamic periods it was a prime Christian pilgrimage site, with substantial accommodations for pilgrims built as part of the cave church and monastery compound⁷⁰. The church was renewed in 572-573, 605-607 and 692, as recorded by inscriptions in the mosaic pavements⁷¹.

The monastery would have continued into the late eighth century. Saint Stephen, a monk from the monastery of Mar Saba who died in 794, came to Mar Lot during his wanderings around the Dead Sea during Lent, according to his *Vita*⁷². But the last phase of occupation at the site in the ninth century represents a final short-term, casual post-church occupation⁷³. Seemingly already in the ninth century, there was no longer any functioning church or monastery and nothing for a pilgrim to want to come for⁷⁴.

Ḥirbat aṣ-Ṣayḥ ʿĪsā, the main urban site of the Byzantine and early Islamic periods, has been under excavation in recent years, directed by Konstantinos Politis⁷⁵. The ongoing excavations, as yet unpublished, have uncovered a large early Christian church with clear evidence for the post-church use of the still intact building starting in the early Abbasid period.

Madaba

Madaba was a major Christian city in the Byzantine and Umayyad periods, but seemingly did not remain so for long into the Abbasid period⁷⁶. The last mosaic floors with inscriptions in the city date to the second half of the eighth century. Excavations in 1992-1993 in the area of the Madaba city center around a building known as the »Burnt Palace« showed that the palatial building from the Byzantine period suffered a major destruction by fire around the middle of the eighth century, plausibly due to the 749 earthquake, but that the building was partially cleared and reused later into the ninth century⁷⁷. One might want to think that the people who reoccupied the building after the mid-eighth century destruction were Christians, but that is not demonstrable from the archaeological remains.

In the excavations at the Tell Madaba site on the west side of the city since 1996, which have not been well published beyond articles in the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* since 2000, remains from throughout the Byzantine and early Islamic period were uncovered. Of special interest is a mansion in Field C, similar to the Burnt Palace, with mosaic pavements and fragments of Greek inscriptions painted on plaster that was abandoned by the early ninth century⁷⁸, around the time that the city as a whole may have ended as a major urban center.

Mar Ilyās

Ḥirbat Mar Ilyās, near the village of Listib in northern Jordan, was a pilgrimage site, identified as Tišbe, the birthplace of the Prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:1)⁷⁹. The main church at Ḥirbat Mar Ilyās, with its latest dedicatory inscription dated to 622 AD, seems to have continued in use at least into the eighth century but for how much later is uncertain, because the results of the excavations there have been inadequately published. In any case, local Muslim and Christian tradition has maintained an interest in the site up to the present.

63 Whitcomb, Ayla 14f.

64 Green/Di Segni/Tsafir, Iudaea 59f.

65 Bakri, Mu ʿġam 2,593f.

66 Shahid, Byzantium 309.

67 Vila, ʿAbd al-Masīḥ.

68 ʿAbd al-Masīḥ al-Gassānī, Account 365-372; Swanson, Martyrdom.

69 Cobb, Scholars.

70 Politis, Sanctuary.

71 Politis, Sanctuary 393-409.

72 Leontios, Life 16.2.

73 Politis, Sanctuary 538.

74 Ibidem.

75 Politis/Sampson/O'Hea, Ghawr aṣ-Ṣāfi.

76 Piccirillo, Madaba.

77 Schick, work in progress.

78 Foran et al., Tall Mādabā; Foran, Urban Residence.

79 MacDonald, Pilgrimage 69-81; Ruben/Taylor, Beyond the Jordan 106f.

Mount Nebo

The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo was a prime pilgrimage site for Christians in the Byzantine period, visited most notably by the pilgrim Egeria around 400 and Peter the Iberian around 430 and again around 477, but no pilgrim account survives from between the Piacenza pilgrim around 570 and Magister Thetmarus in 1217⁸⁰. The site was marked by a large basilica and a monastery complex around it on the summit of Mount Nebo, as well as a separate cluster of churches and monasteries in the valley of 'Uyūn Mūsā to the north of Mount Nebo, and another Monastery of the Theotokos at 'Ayn al-Kanīsa in the valley to the south, all in use in the Byzantine and Umayyad periods.

But for how long the various components of the Memorial of Moses remained in use beyond the mid-eighth century is difficult to determine from the scanty evidence in the published reports of the excavation results⁸¹. A number of post-reform Umayyad coins were found dating c. 720-750, but none later⁸². The last person from Mount Nebo known by name was Kaium, »monk and presbyter of Phisga«, attested in 756 in a mosaic inscription from the Church of Saint Stephen at Umm ar-Raṣāṣ⁸³.

The monastery of the Theotokos at Ayn al-Kanīsa at the foot of Mount Nebo⁸⁴, originally built in the sixth century, has evidence for continued use into the mid-eighth century, based on an inscription recording its rebuilding in 762 AD in the days of Bishop Job of Madaba and George the Recluse⁸⁵. Seemingly the small monastery was rebuilt for the use of George and a small group of disciples supporting him, but the site may not have continued to be occupied once George the Recluse would have died around the end of the eighth century.

Mountain of Aaron

The Mountain of Aaron (Ġabal Hārūn), located just west of Petra and marking the traditional location of the tomb of Aaron, was a pilgrimage site in the Byzantine and early Islamic periods, consisting of a church at the summit of the mountain and a monastery on a plateau just below the summit⁸⁶.

During their first raid into the region of southern Jordan in 1100, the Crusaders came across the monastery there, previously unknown to them, as reported by Fulcher of Chartres⁸⁷. But the results of the archaeological excavations point to the monastery having been in ruins since long before. The

monastery and church suffered from the 749 earthquake (Phase 8). There was later limited domestic occupation in the site during the second half of the eighth century (Phase 9), followed by another destruction sometime around the later eighth or early ninth century (Phase 10), after which there was no longer any ecclesiastical use to the church and chapel, although there was limited continued domestic occupation in the ninth century (Phase 11), with a final destruction in the very late ninth or tenth century (Phase 12). There seemingly could have been something for pilgrims to come see up to that point, but none are attested after the time of Saint Stephen the Sabaite, a monk in the second half of the eighth century, who came to Mar Aaron among the other places he visited while walking around the Dead Sea during Lent⁸⁸. The Muslim author al-Mas'ūdī, writing in 344-345/955-956 also listed it as one of the holy mountains of the Christians in the possession of Melkites⁸⁹. Whether that statement implies a continued substantial Christian occupation in the mid-tenth century, which is not evidenced by the archaeological remains, is debatable. Crusader sources document other Christians in the Wādī Mūsā / Petra area, as mentioned earlier⁹⁰, but there seems to be no archaeological trace of them other than here at the Mountain of Aaron in the ninth and tenth centuries.

Al-Quwaysma

A monastery at al-Quwaysma, south of Amman, and its abbot Kosmas, is attested in the Life of Saint Stephen the Sabaite in the 730s-740s⁹¹. The monastery continued into the ninth century at least, as the results of archaeological excavation have shown⁹². A burial chamber to the west of the church contained pottery lamps of the pear-shaped type characteristic of the ninth century. But the monastery seemingly did not continue long into the tenth century or later.

Rihab

Another small town, east of Ġaraš, had a number of churches in use in the eighth century⁹³, but the absence of much of any information about the excavation results beyond the mosaic floors that were uncovered makes it difficult to say when the Christian presence came to an end. One hint at a continued Christian presence in the early ninth century comes from the Church of Saint Constantine, where two enigmatic Greek letters in its mosaic floor might indicate repairs to the deliberately damaged images in the floor in 832 AD, but that interpretation of the letters and its possible relevance to

80 Piccirillo/Alliata, Mount Nebo 71-83, 218.

81 Piccirillo/Alliata, Mount Nebo 179.

82 Gitler, Coins 563.

83 Piccirillo/Alliata, Umm al-Rasas 251 no. 8a.

84 Piccirillo/Alliata, Mount Nebo 209-216.

85 Piccirillo/Alliata, Mount Nebo 197; Di Segni, Inscriptions 448-450 no. 56.

86 Fiema/Frösén, Petra.

87 Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia* Book 2 V, 9; Frösén/Meittunen, Aaron 13f.

88 Leontios, Life 16.2.

89 Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, 143f.

90 See Mayer, *Kreuzfahrerrherrschaft; Frösén/Miettunen, Aaron; Pringle, Churches, II L-Z, 373-377; Sinibaldi, Settlement.*

91 Leontios, Life 8.1.

92 Schick/Suleiman, Preliminary Report.

93 Piccirillo, *Giordania; Husan, New Archaeological Discoveries.*

the question of the date of the damage to the images are speculative⁹⁴.

Umm Qays

Umm Qays (Gadara) was a major city of the Decapolis⁹⁵. There is no historical attestation for Christians after the account of the martyrdom of Peter of Capitolias in 715 AD⁹⁶, while wine production is attested in Arabic poetry in the early Islamic period. A five-aisled basilica and pilgrimage church in the city center was damaged in the 749 AD earthquake. It was rebuilt in reduced form later, but remained in use as a church, although for how long is not clear from the excavation report. It was later converted into a mosque, seemingly in the Ayyubid period⁹⁷.

Umm ar-Raṣāṣ

This Christian site with its multiple churches certainly continued to thrive in the eighth century, but for how long the individual churches and the site as a whole continued into the ninth or tenth centuries is obscured by the lack of details in the published excavation reports⁹⁸. Pottery typical of the ninth century is ubiquitous at the site, but not later types such as glazed ware.

The church of St Stephen at Umm ar-Raṣāṣ is of special interest. The use of Greek, the Byzantine indiction year cycle, and the era of the province of Arabia in the church inscriptions by the Arabic-speaking population of this small remote town, but major pilgrimage site, as late as 756 AD is indicative of the residual prestige of Greek and the degree to which the inhabitants had not yet reconciled themselves to

being under permanent Muslim rule. The illiteracy shown in the later repairs of damage to these Greek inscriptions reveal, however, that knowledge of Greek was on the wane by the late eighth century⁹⁹, at a time when the Christians in the region in general were shifting to the use of Arabic.

Conclusions

The brief survey of a few archaeological sites shows a remarkable lack of evidence for a Christian presence in Jordan beyond the ninth or possibly early tenth century. The scarcity of historical attestations for Christians in the ninth and tenth centuries beyond the Baptism Site on the Jordan River and such statements as that by al-Ya'qūbī that there were Christians in some districts in northern Jordan is also striking. The references to Christians in the Crusader period, however, indicate that Christians were still around in the twelfth century, most notably in the Petra/Wādī Mūsā area, but elsewhere as well. So how to account for the lack of evidence for Christians in the period between the ninth century and the Crusades in the twelfth century is a question that remains to be resolved. Archaeological investigation is the main prospect for new insights, but if the evidence for Christians is there, the amount of archaeological excavation in Jordan has already been large enough that one would expect that presence for Christians in the period, for example in al-Ya'qūbī's northern districts, to have already been found. Were the Christians genuinely already declining by the ninth century to the point that they were becoming historically and archaeologically invisible, or is the observed gap until the Crusaders an artificial one caused by our failure to recognize their presence?

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94 Di Segni, *Varia*.

95 Weber, *Gadara*.

96 *Ibidem*.

97 al-Daire, *Basilika* 92-96.

98 Piccirillo/Alliata, *Umm al-Rasas*, numerous articles since 1986 by Piccirillo in *Liber Annuus*.

99 Piccirillo/Alliata, *Umm al-Rasas*.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung

The Christian Presence in Jordan in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries

The Christians in Jordan continued to thrive after the Muslim Conquests of the 630s and throughout the Umayyad period and beyond into the first decades of the Abbasid period, and they continued to have ties with the Byzantine Empire. But by the early ninth century, the Christians in Jordan had begun to dwindle in number and any further relations with the Byzantine Empire are scarcely attested. This article examines the state of the remnant Christians in the area of modern-day Jordan during the years of the Abbasid period between the death of the Abbasid caliph Harūn ar-Rašīd in 809 and the takeover of the region by the Fatimid caliphs in Egypt in 970 and focuses on the extent to which there is historical or archaeological evidence for a continued Christian presence in those two centuries. The article also seeks to establish whether Christian pilgrimage continued in the area in the ninth and tenth centuries and addresses the question of what a Christian pilgrim would have still found in Jordan at that time.

Die christliche Präsenz in Jordanien im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert

Die Situation der Christen in Jordanien in der Zeit nach den muslimischen Eroberungen der 630er Jahre sowie während der gesamten Umayyadenzeit und darüber hinaus bis in die ersten Jahrzehnte der Herrschaft der Abbasiden kann weiterhin als gut bezeichnet werden, und auch die Verbindungen zum Byzantinischen Reich bestanden fort. Vom frühen 9. Jahrhundert an nahm die Zahl der Christen in Jordanien jedoch ab und weitere Beziehungen zum Byzantinischen Reich sind kaum belegt. Dieser Beitrag untersucht den Status der verbliebenen Christen im Gebiet des heutigen Jordaniens während der Abbasidenzeit zwischen dem Tod des Kalifen Harūn ar-Rašīd im Jahr 809 und der Übernahme der Region durch die fatimidischen Kalifen in Ägypten im Jahr 970. Der Fokus liegt dabei darauf zu ermitteln, in welchem Ausmaß historische oder archäologische Belege für eine anhaltende christliche Präsenz in diesen zwei Jahrhunderten vorliegen. Darüber hinaus wird untersucht, ob die christliche Pilgerfahrt im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert in der Region fortgesetzt wurde, wobei es um die Frage geht, was ein christlicher Pilger zu dieser Zeit in Jordanien noch hätte vorfinden können.