

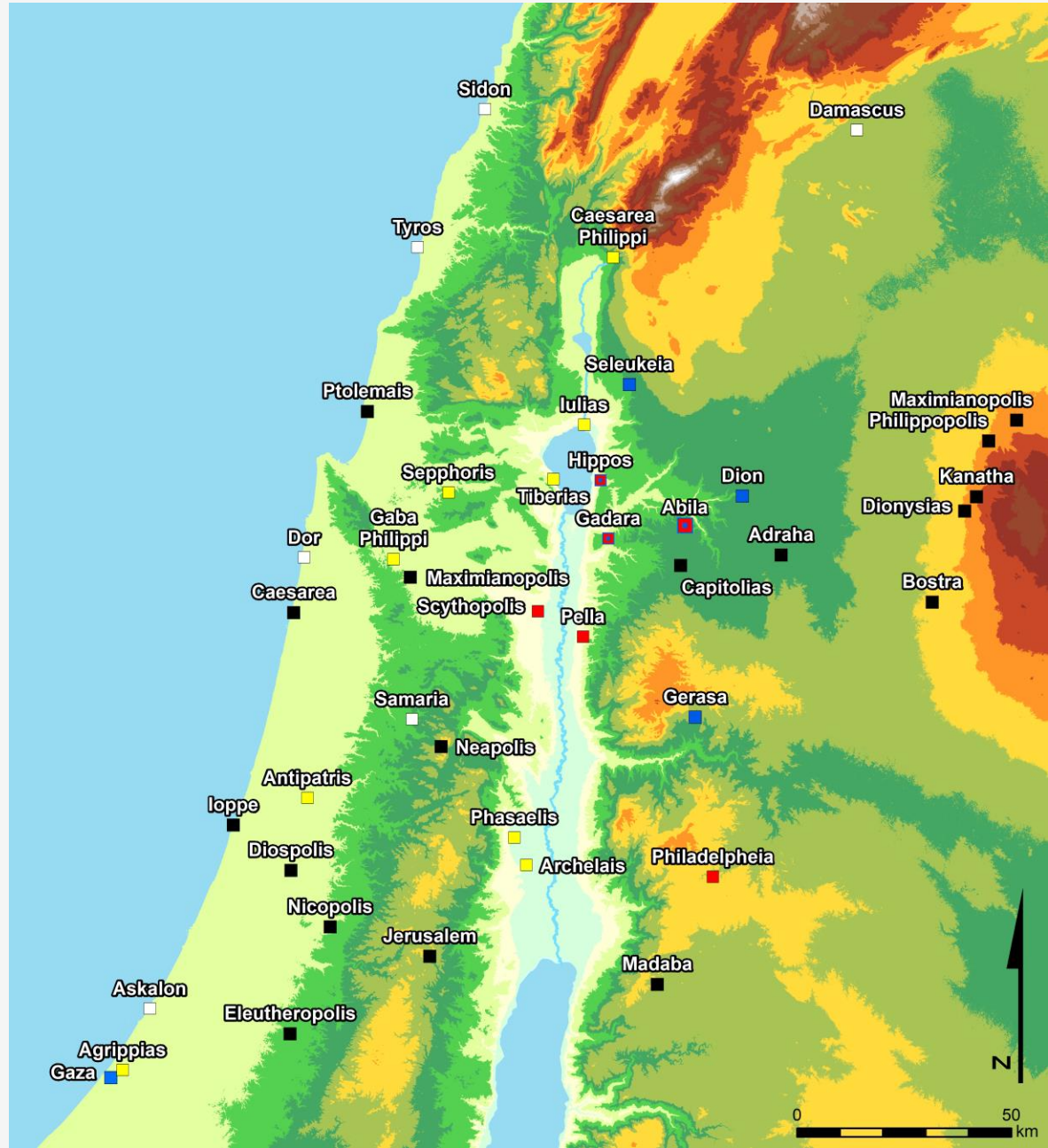
# The Decapolis: History and Archaeology

## 10 The 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> c. transition

Jones, A.H.M. 1964: *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*. Oxford.

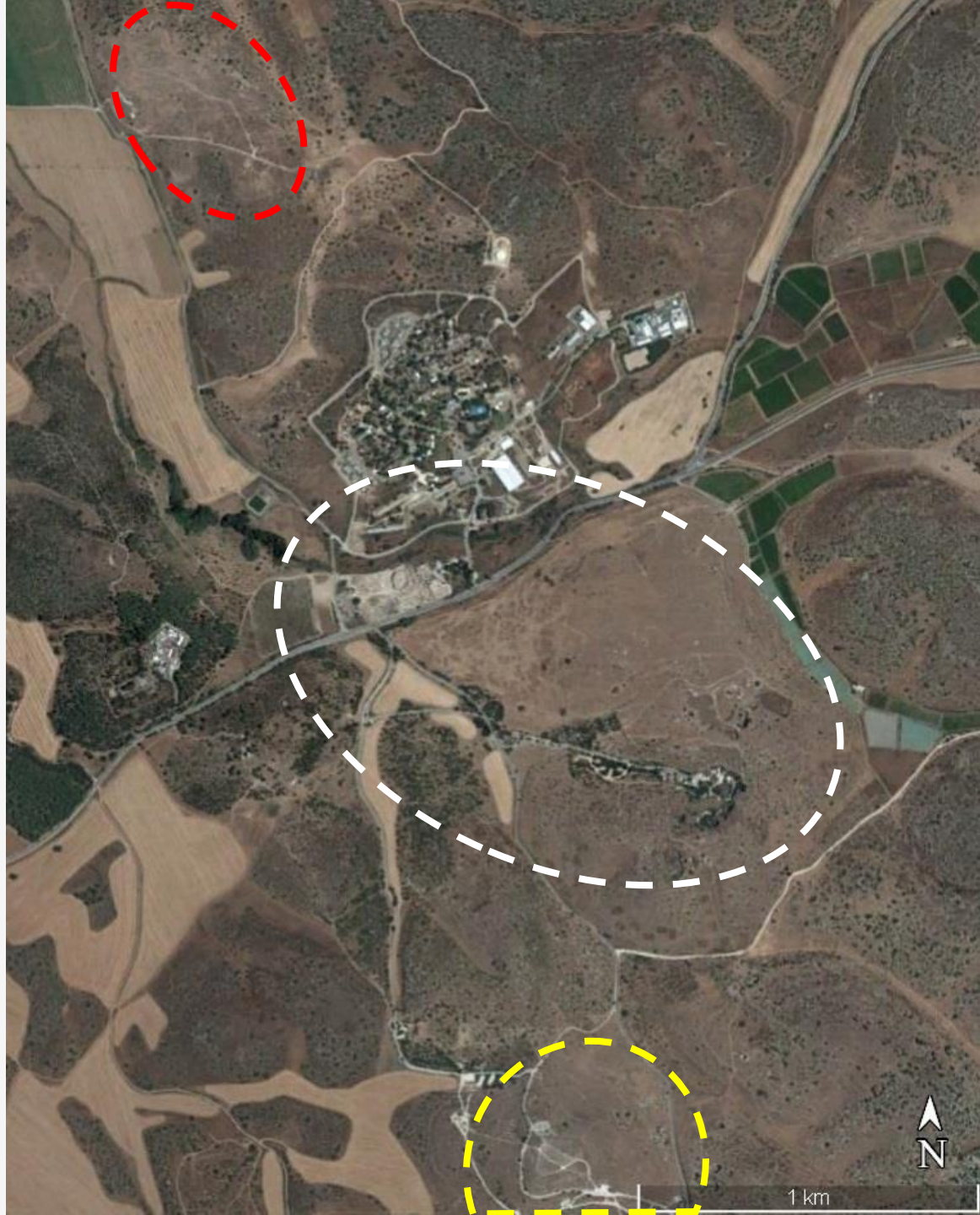
# Context

- The Severan period represents the peak of the prosperity in the Roman period
- The building programs in most cities culminates during this period – it is best represented construction phase of the Roman period in most cities before new construction boom in the Byzantine period (5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> c.)
- Many more communities are elevated in status and became Roman *coloniae/municipia*
- The promotion of communities to the city status reflect growing urbanization during the Roman period
- Some were older settlements, that grew organically and then were re-founded and enlarged by the Romans
- Few of them were not settled before the Roman period



## Context

- Example: Beth Guvrin - Eleutheropolis
- A settlement chamber in the Shephela (piedmont of the Judaeian Highlands) SW from Jerusalem
- Maresha (in yellow) - Hellenistic town destroyed by Parthians in 40 BCE
- Roman auxiliary camp and *vicus*? - Roman period settlement (in red)
- Bet Guvrin - Eleutheropolis - settled from at least 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE, elevated to *colonia* in 199/200 CE (in white)
  
- In this case a presence of Roman garrison had strong positive effect on the settlement
- First, the demand of the garrison for supplies created economic incentive to the locals
- Army veterans presumably settled in the vicinity of their former base and this settlement was then given city status by Septimius Severus



## Context

- New status of cities is reflected in their coinage – in the Severan period, the largest number of cities mints coins
- Bostra – older urban settlement; Philippopolis – village elevated in status and developed on Imperial initiative
- Eleutheropolis – new Roman settlement



42

Ob. Draped bust of Severus Alexander, r., laureate  
 Rev. Emperor as founder, ploughing with ox and cow; above, altar  
 COL BOSTR N TR ALEXANDRIANAE  
 (Colonia Bostra Nea Traiana Alexandriana)  
 AE coin, Bostra, 222-235 CE



3

Ob. Draped bust of Philipp I, r., laureate  
 Rev. Roma seated l. on shield, holding a spear and eagle supporting two figures  
 ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΠΟΛΙΤΩΝ ΚΟΛΩΝΙΑΣ ΣΚ  
 (of the colony of Philippopolis, Senatus Consultum)  
 AE coin, Philippopolis, 244-249 CE



2

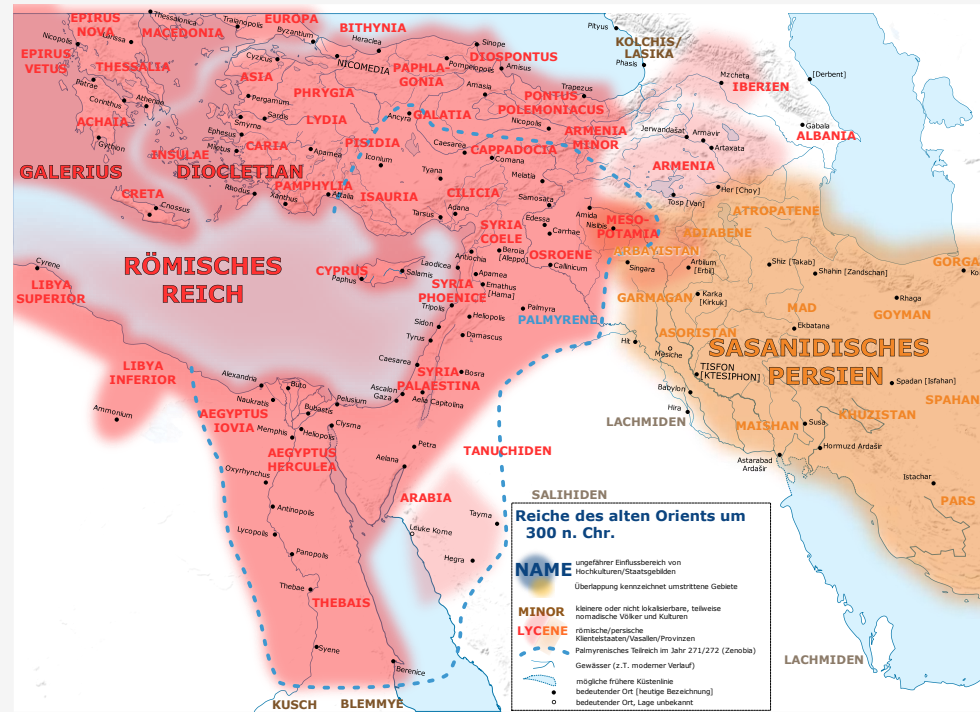
Ob. Draped bust of Severus, r., laureate  
 Rev. Within tetrastyle temple with central arch Tyche standing l. on river god, holding cornucopia and small bust  
 Λ Σ Ε Σ Ε Ο Ε Λ Ε Υ Θ Ο  
 ΕΓ (year 3 = 201/2 CE)  
 AE coin, Eleutheropolis

# Context

- After death of Alexander Severus an era of political instability begins (“The Crisis of the Third Century“)
- No large scale warfare is known to happen in the eastern provinces before the Sassanid invasion
- Major wars were Roman-Sassanid conflicts between 253-260 CE and 296-8 CE
- Sassanid wars involved mainly northern Syria
- And wars involving usurper Palmyrene Empire between 270-275 CE
- Some military encounter between Zenobia and Roman army is recorded in 270 CE around Bostra
- The region was consolidated with Aurelian’s conquest of the Palmyrene Empire in 275 CE and by Diocletian after 298 CE



Ob. Draped bust of Zenobia, r., set on crescent S(eptimia) ZENOBIA AVG(vsta)  
 Rev. Juno standing l., holding scepter and patera, peacock standing l., star in left field IUNO REGINA  
 AE Antonianus, 271/2 CE



## Context

- Most cities stops minting coinage before ca. 250 CE and from the period of the first tetrarchy (284-305 CE) only Imperial bronze coinage is allowed and pseudo-autonomous city coinage is forbidden altogether
- Some epigraphic and archaeological evidence shows that cities begun (re-)building their city walls in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. – apparently reflecting security concerns of the time
- Diocletian is said to give great care to the frontier forts and roads (Strata Diocletiana)
- Overall, cities probably suffered increased financial burden from incessant warfare and further expenditure to build/maintain fortifications and large civil projects of the Roman period



Ob. Diocletian draped bust r., radiate, IMP C C VAL DIOCLETIANVS P F AVG

Rev. Emperor standing r. in military dress, receiving Victory on globe from Jupiter standing l., leaning on sceptre, CONCORDIA MILITUM  
Mint mark ANT

Post-reform AE radiate, Antioch mint, 301-305 CE

Ἐπεὶ σωτηρίας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν αὐτο-  
κράτορος Γαλιεῖνου Σεβ. ἀφιέρωσι ὁ πύργ-  
ος μετὰ τῆς δεκανίας, προνοία Ἰουνίου  
Ἰούμπου τοῦ διασημοτάτου ἡγεμόνος,  
ἐφ'εστῶτος Φλαυιανοῦ β(ενε)φ(ικιαρίου), προεδ(ρία)  
Μάγνου Βάσσου ἑ(τους) ρυζ

Building inscription of a tower in the city wall of Adraha (Dera'), dated 261/2 CE

# Context

- The Imperial government increasingly interfered with the municipal autonomy since the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. with introduction of new offices (*curatores, defensores civitatis* etc.)
- These were at first temporary, but from the Diocletianic-Constantinian period some of them became permanent
- Constantine further confiscated the city revenues to the Imperial fiscus
- The whole 4<sup>th</sup> c. is marked by increasing pressure of Imperial government on the municipal government
  
- Another blow to the city life was slow disappearance of the decurions
- *Decuriones* were class of citizens that formed the city council in each city
- They had financial obligations to their communities in forms of *leitourgiai/munera*
- The membership became hereditary in the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. but many *decuriones* were trying to avoid the *munera* as they became increasingly financially burdensome
- Thus, *decuriones* were entering Imperial service or fleeing to the countryside, or since the time of Constantine entering church offices
- City councils became increasingly paralyzed by the flight of its members, and the traditional city autonomy and interest in local politic and public life s slowly vanished to the point where cities were governed by few Imperial officers, wealthy notables and church officials (by the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> c. CE)
- Church starts to play major role in public life, especially when expressing its stance against “pagan” practices such as public bathing, theatres, public spectacles and pagan cults
- This is the “Decay of the Classical City” and the beginning of the “Medieval City”
  
- This process is reflected in the transformation of urban space from the 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE onwards

# Urban transformation

## Hippos

- The decline of the decurial class?
- Dedication of a statue to the governor of the province (238/9 CE) on marble column erected on the agora

“Good luck. Aelius Calpurnianus, the former cornicularius (in the office) of the procurator summarum rationum ( . . . ), and Domitia Ulpia, matrona stolata, his wife, (erected the statue of) the legatus Augusti pro praetore [= governor of Syria Palaestinae] to the native city. In the year 302, (in the month of) Dios (day) 8.”

- Aelius Calpurnianus is definitely native of Hippos
- However, he apparently served in the army and later was appointed as non-commissioned officer in the office of procurator summarum rationum (we do not know whether in Rome or in the province)
- After his return to the home town he and his wife erected this statute
- Nowhere in inscription he presents his civic status or offices, since due to his Imperial service he was exempt from councillor duties and he did not participate in local political life
- He was still a patriot to return to the native town





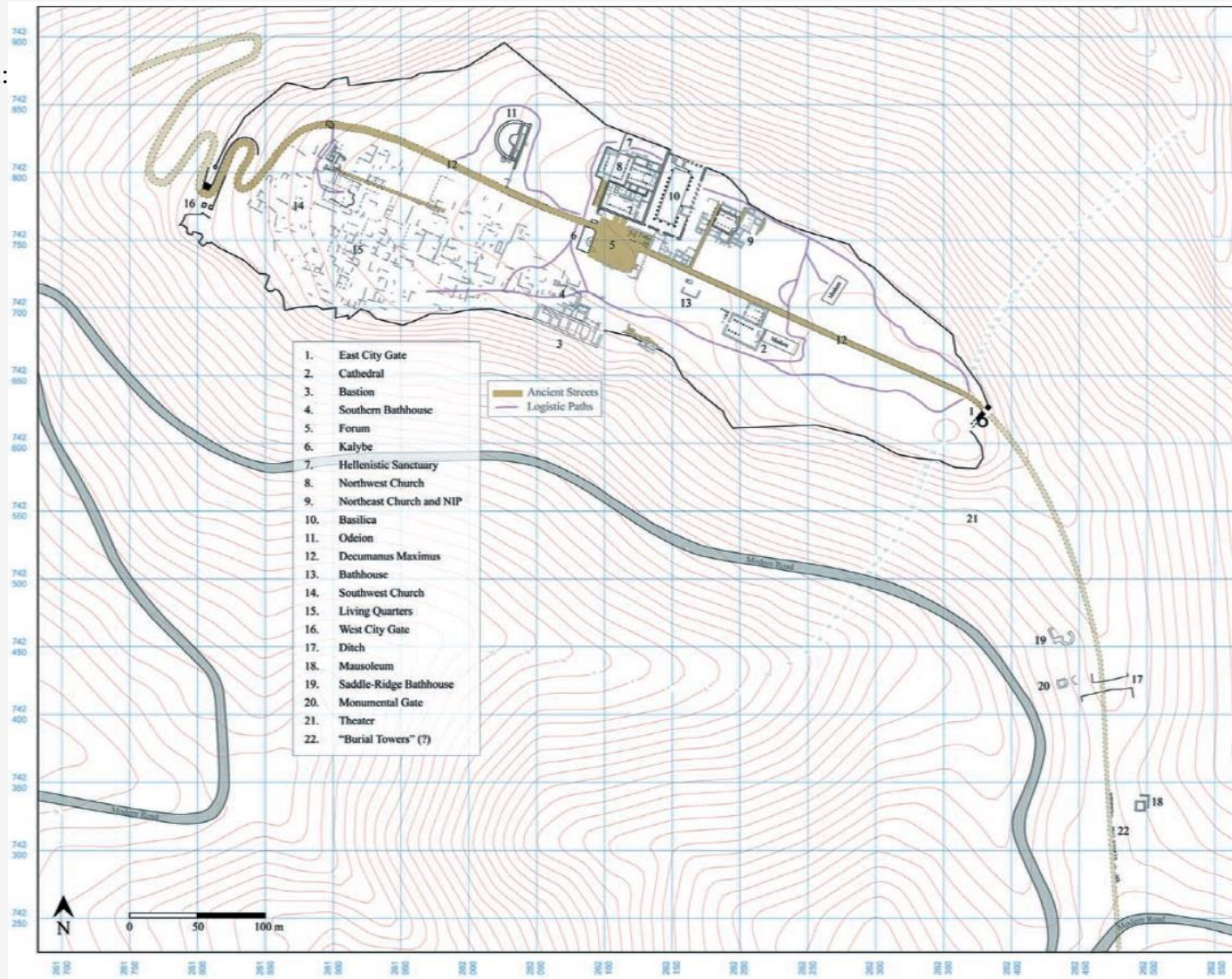
# Urban transformation

## Hippos

- Hippos was considerably small city (4-6,000 inhabitants max), with presumably small decurial class and therefore the processes described above were apparently strongly pronounced here

### Public buildings in the 3<sup>rd</sup> c.:

- Temenos (Hellenistic compound)
- Basilica
- Kalybe
- Odeum
- Theatre
- Southern Bathhouse
- Saddle ridge Bathhouse
- We may add colonnaded streets and agora as important public spaces



# Urban transformation

## Hippos

- Changes start to occur before the 363 CE earthquake but they are hard to grasp
- Both Southern Bathhouse and Odeum are apparently out of use already before the earthquake
- Odeum might have been dismantled before as no earthquake damage was noticed in the excavations
- The fate of the temple is unclear due to massive Byzantine construction in its place



# Urban transformation

## Hippos

- Basilica (erected in the late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> c.) received rich decoration in marble in the Severan period
- The marble lintel (ca. 2 m long) below probably decorated the eastern entrance to the basilica

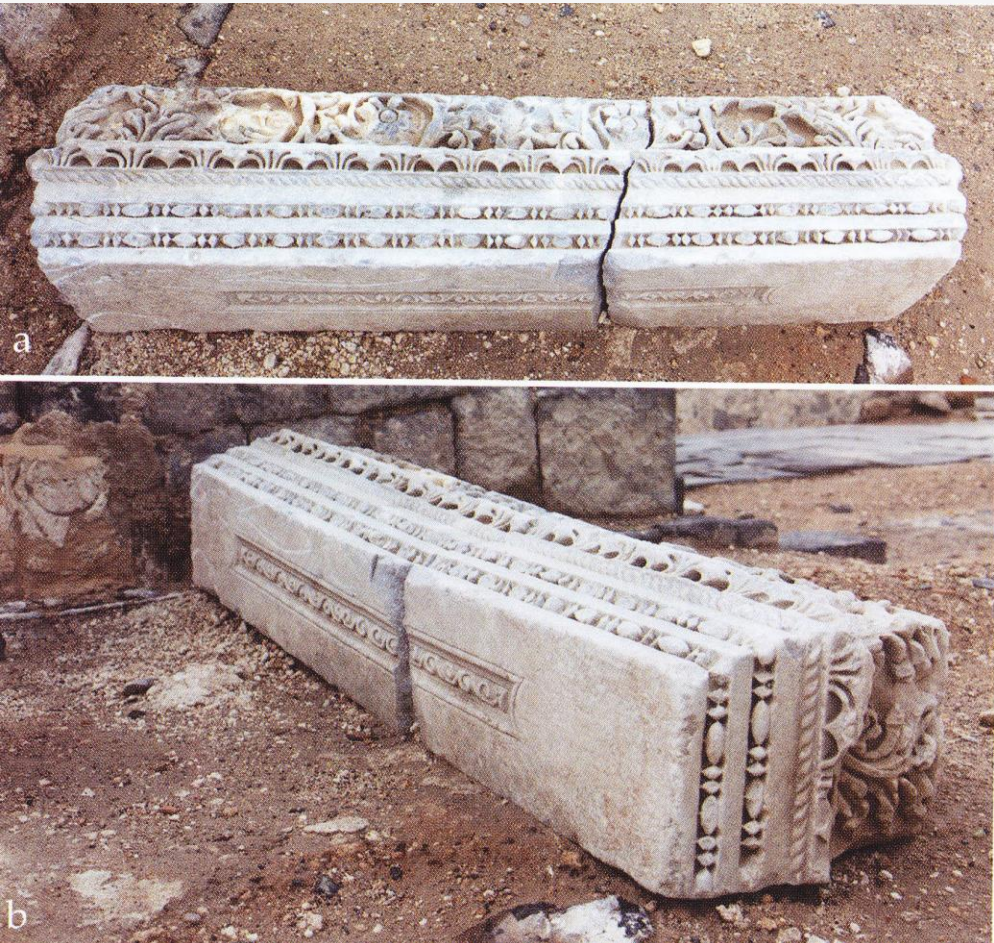
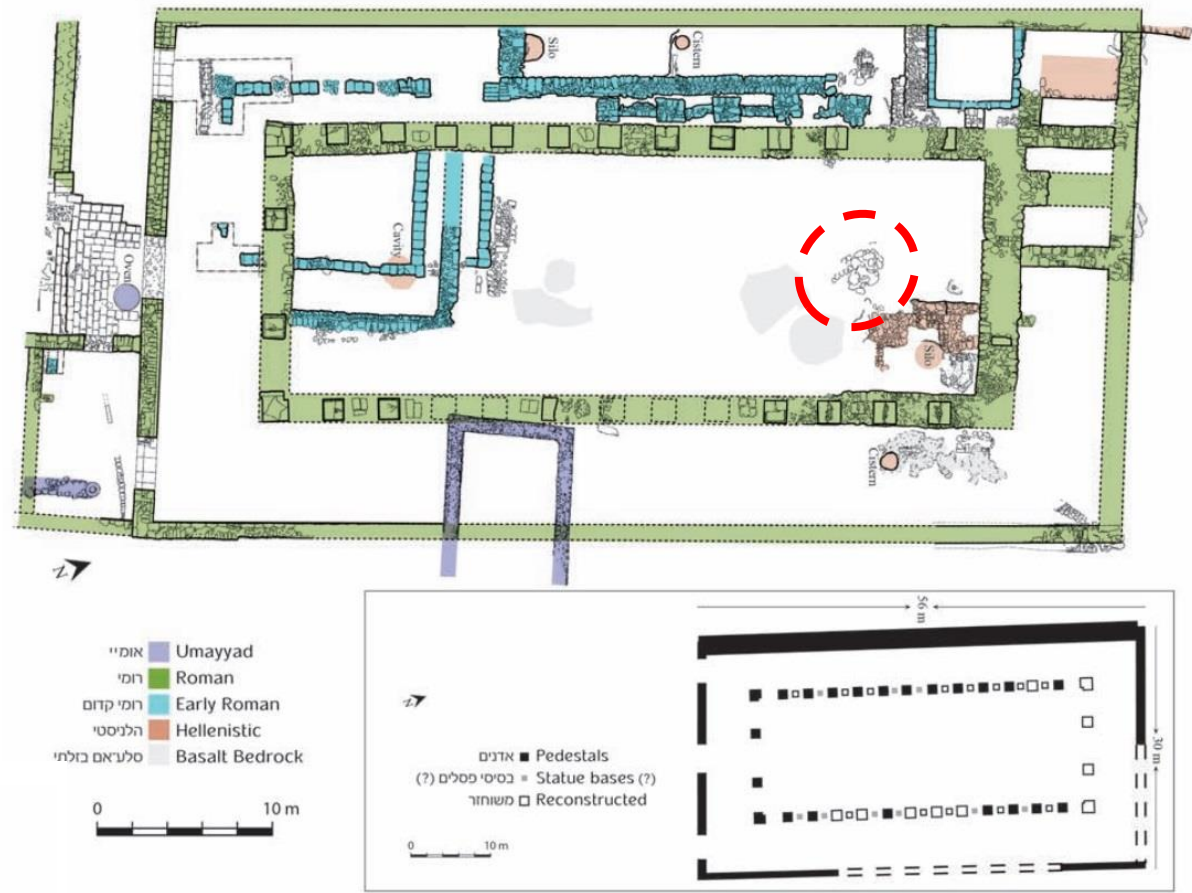


Fig. 233 a, b, c White-gray marble lintel as found in the southern aisle of the *basilica*

# Urban transformation

## Hippus

- The destruction of basilica by the earthquake of 363 is well attested – the building collapsed and was not re-built
- The sealed destruction layer contained bodies of a young woman, an adult man and at least two other individuals (in red)
- The finds and coins from the destruction layer fits into the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> c.
- Young woman had a gold pendant in the shape of a dove with pearls and gems

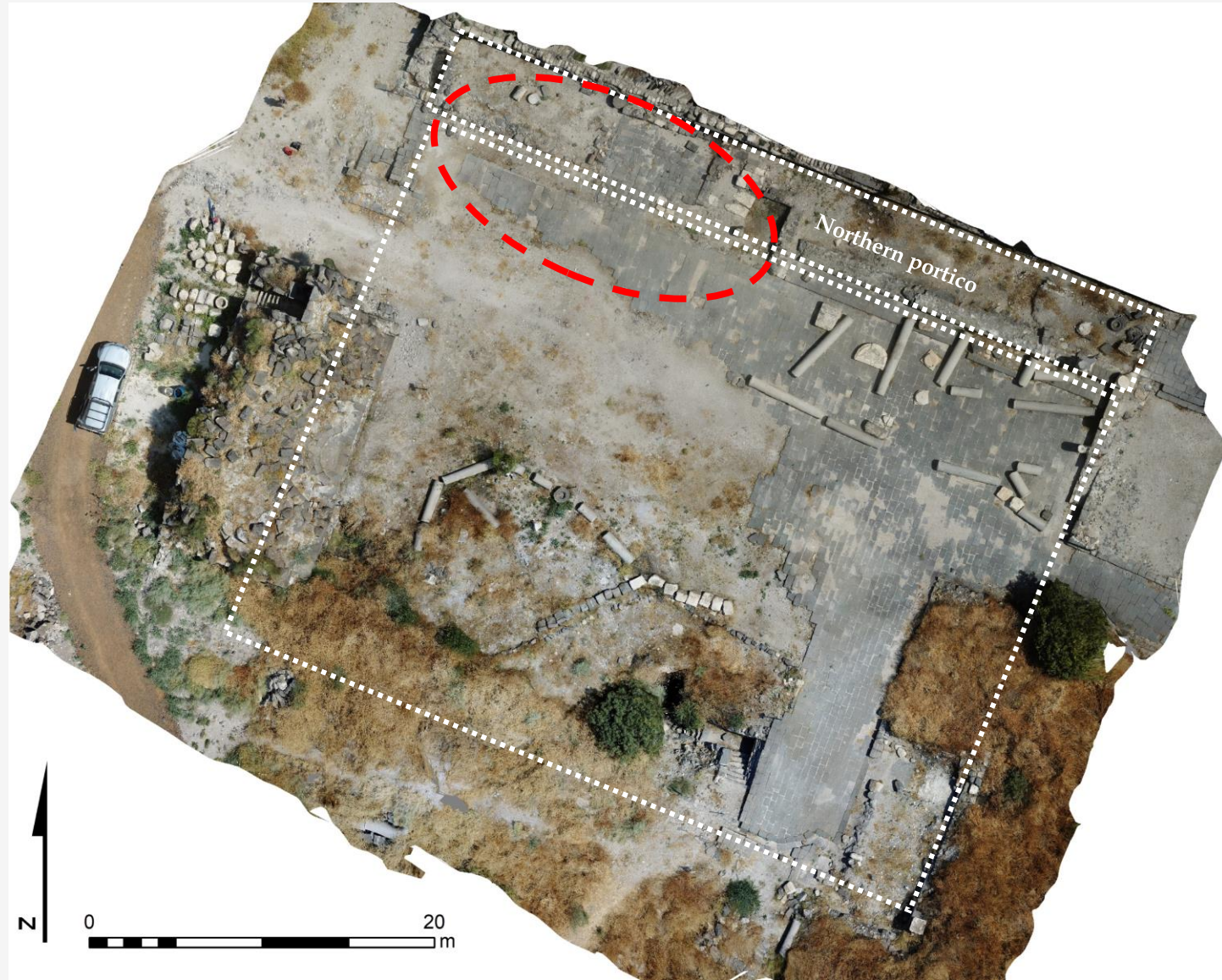


- The whole basilica was sporadically quarried for building material but no new building was built in its stead until the Umayyad period (ca. 300 years later)
- Why was such large place in the middle of a city left in ruins for such long time is unclear
- There are only some floors at the southern end of basilica dated by coins after 380 CE
- The fact that the bodies were not recovered and the destruction was not even cleared suggests that the earthquake dealt serious blow to the community, and perhaps the basilica was no longer needed and its public function ceased
- The floors after 380 CE suggest at least a generation **before the start of the recovery**

# Urban transformation

## Hippos

- The porticoes flanking the agora/forum were also erected during the Severan period
- As a result of the earthquake parts of the porticoes and stylobate were dismantled
- These places were later in turn built over with (work)shops from spoliated material, diminishing the area of the agora (in red)



# Urban transformation

## Hippos

- The sidewalks of the Decumanus were taken by later buildings, too



# Urban transformation

## Hippos

- The infilling of public space (colonnades, plazas) with low quality construction is typical of the Late Antiquity
- At first such constructions were probably temporary from perishable material and could be removed
- Continually they began to be built in stone and remained permanent

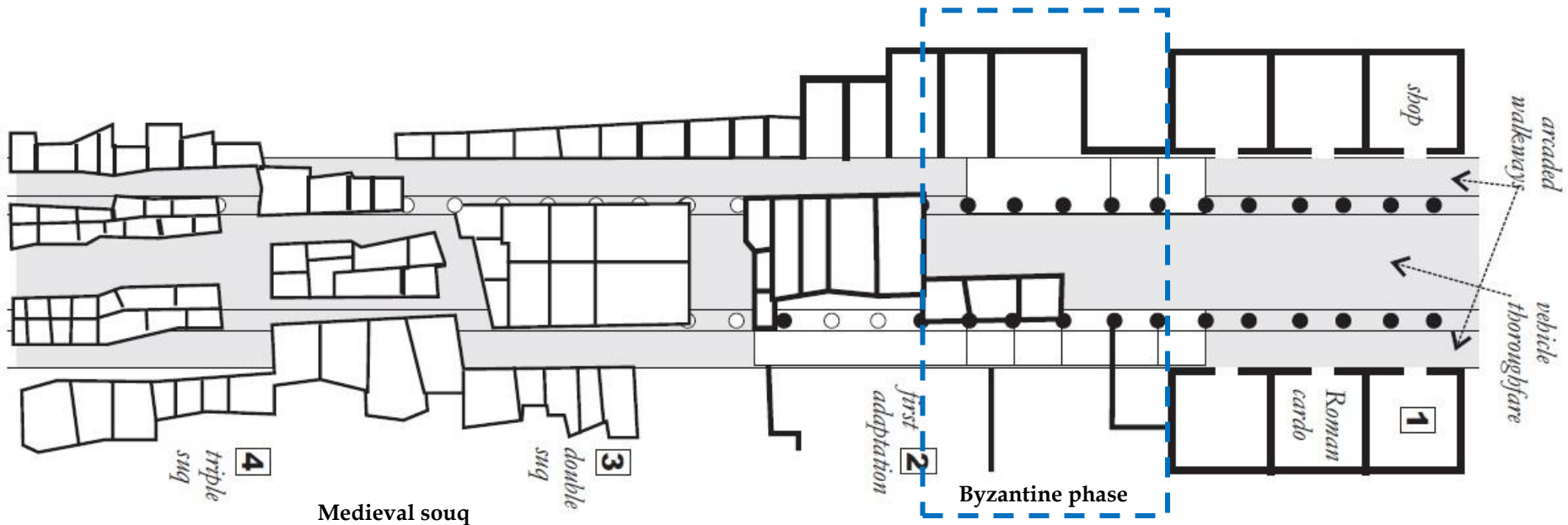


Byzantine-Umayyad shops  
on the agora in Hippos

# Urban transformation

## Hippos

- This process slowly led to the creation of the Medieval souqs, which are characterized by narrow streets with multiple small shops and workshops along their course
- This development is well attested in Jerusalem, Damascus, Aleppo and other cities surviving to our times
- This process was at first undesirable by the city officials
- But new commercial/industrial space represented welcomed economic gain
- Also the weakening city autonomy was increasingly less and less able to enforce the law in the city and the wide colonnaded streets were probably no longer seemed as a necessity for a city





# Urban transformation

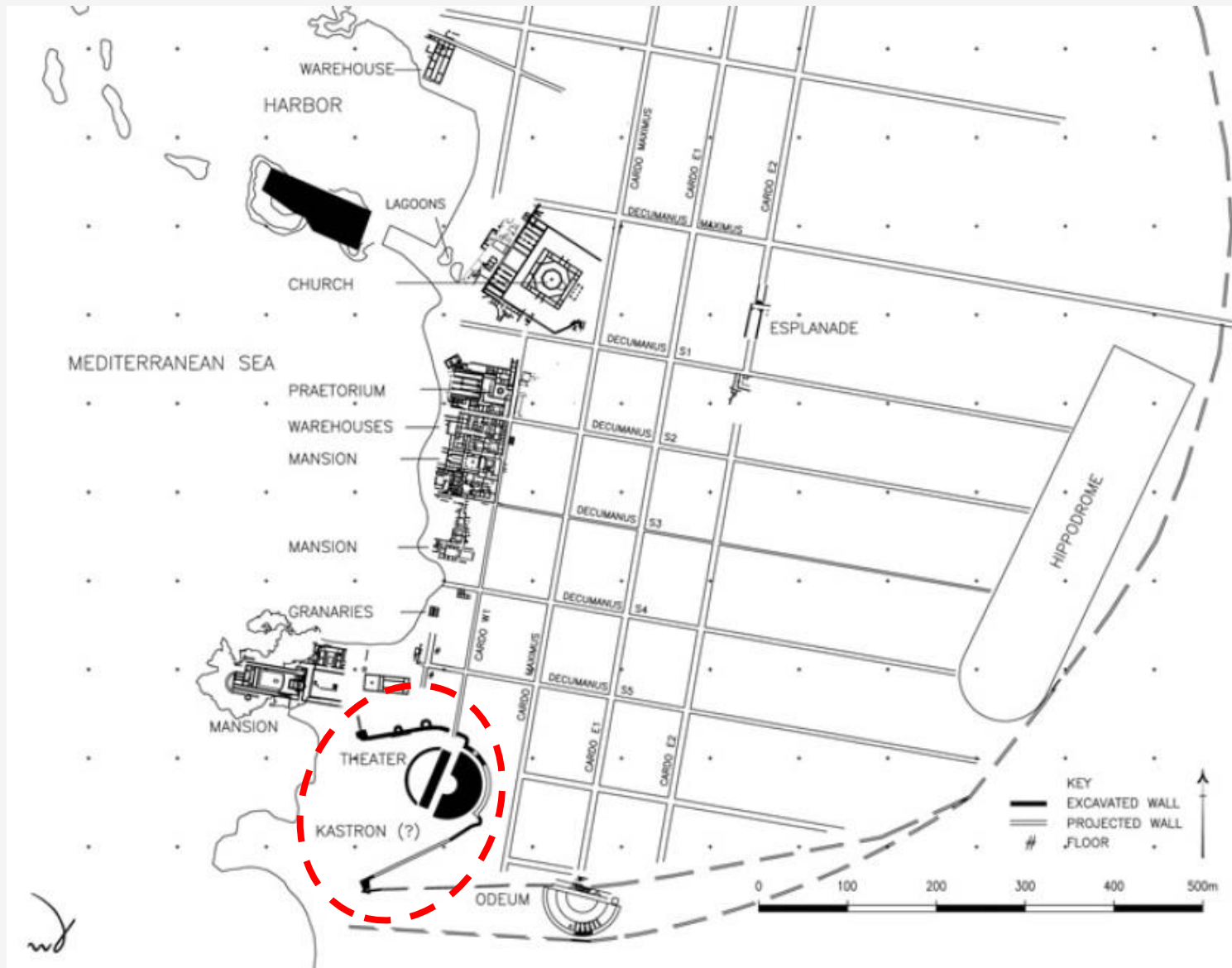
## Hippos

- Theatre is also destroyed in 363 CE and not re-built
- Only at the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> c. a massive wall of unknown purpose is built along the edge of the cavea



# Urban transformation

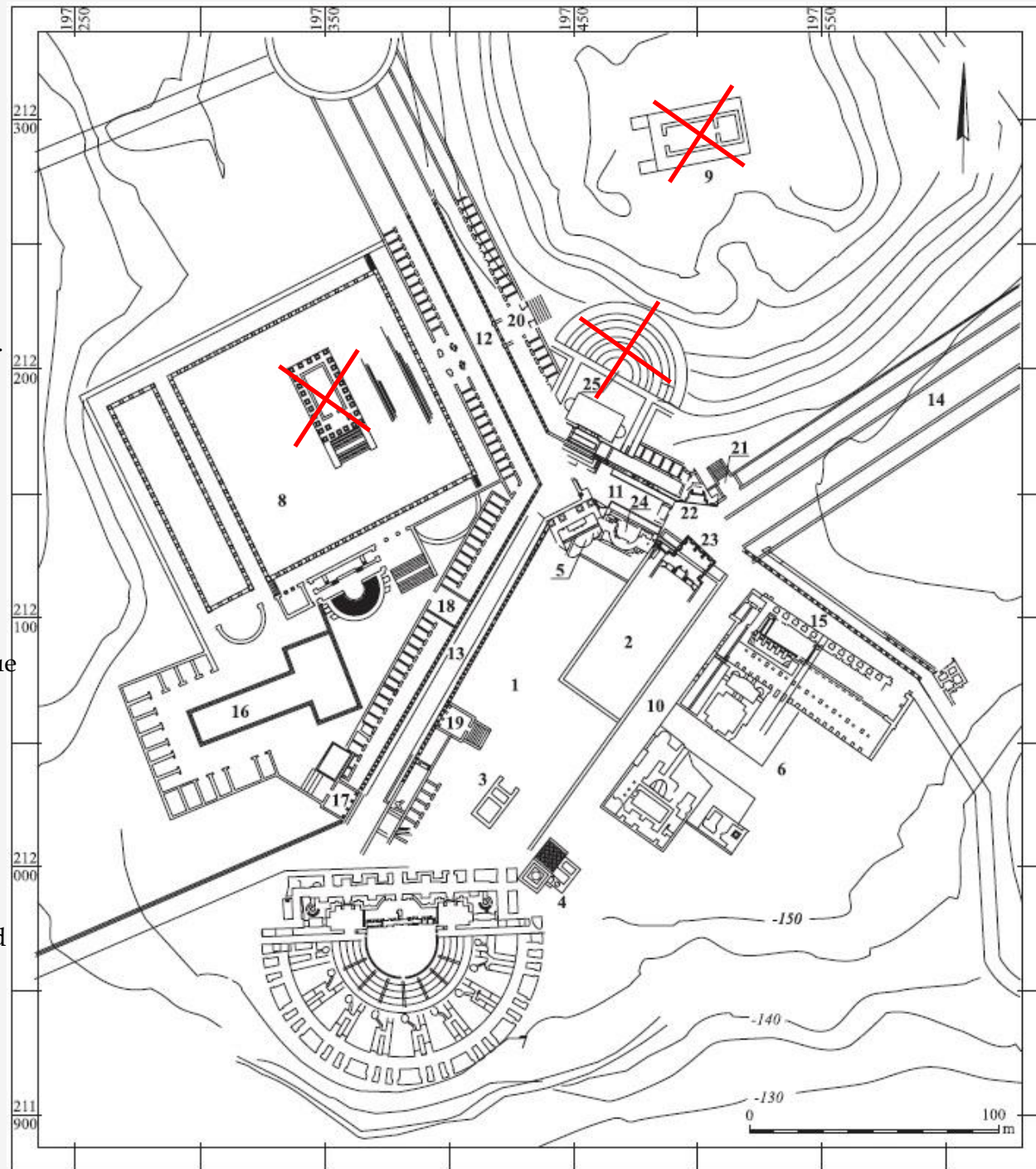
- Similarly in Caesarea Maritima a Herodian theatre went out of use during the 4<sup>th</sup> c.
- In the 6<sup>th</sup> c. the Caesarea's theatre was incorporated into a fortress (*kastron*) - perhaps something similar happened in Hippos as well



# Urban transformation

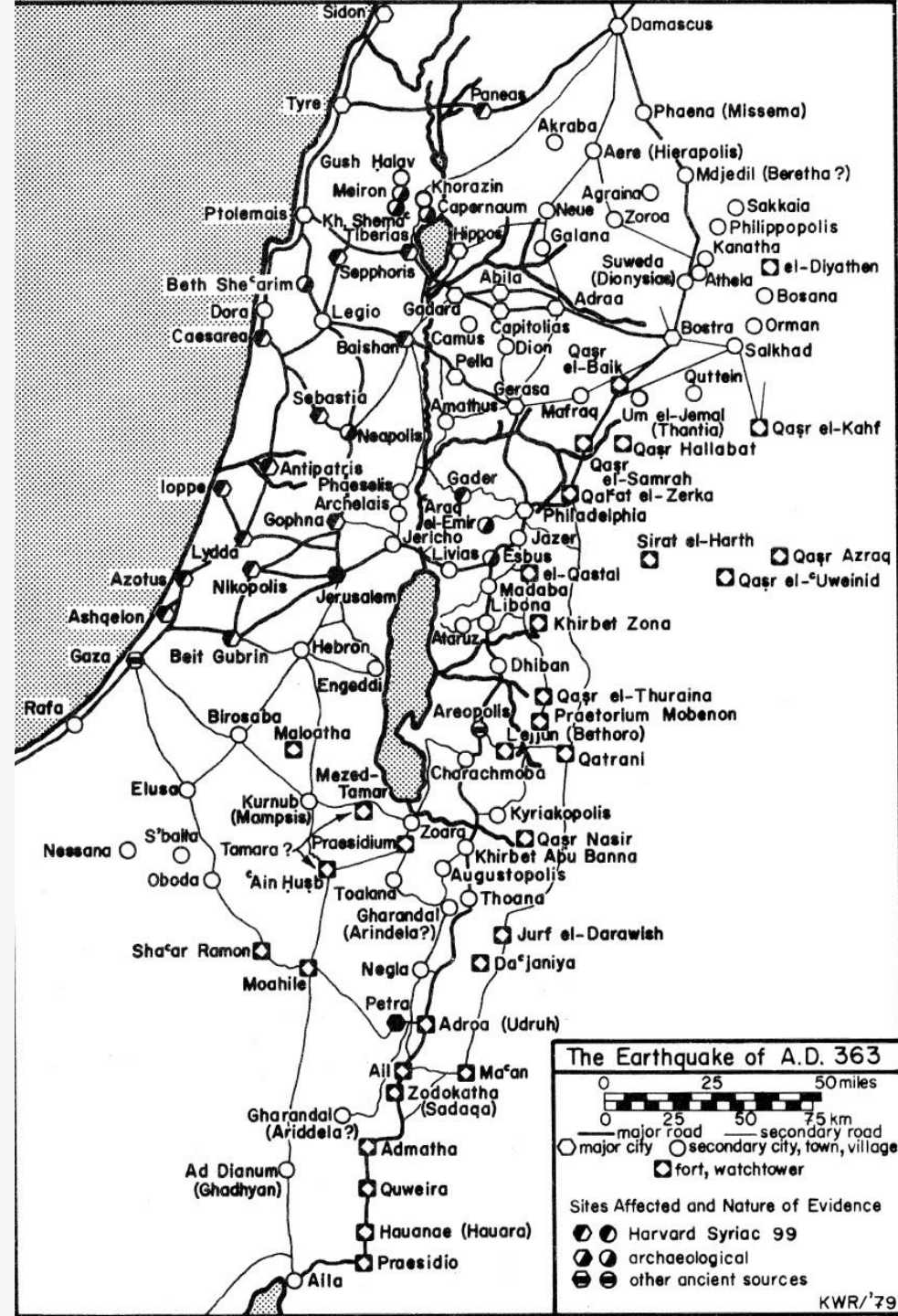
## Scythopolis

- Caesarea and some other cities however shows quicker recovery from the earthquake and more continuous development in the 4<sup>th</sup> c.
- In Scythopolis the 363 earthquake apparently quickens the Christianization of the city, as the pagan temples are all dismantled in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> c.
- Odeum and basilica of the Caesareum are repaired and continue to be used until the mid-5<sup>th</sup> c.
- The scaenae frons and cavea of the southern theatre are repaired and decreased in height and the theatre appears to be in use until the end of the Byzantine period (much reduced in size)
- Northern theatre was heavily damaged in 363, never repaired and finally dismantled in the 6<sup>th</sup> c.



# 363 Earthquake

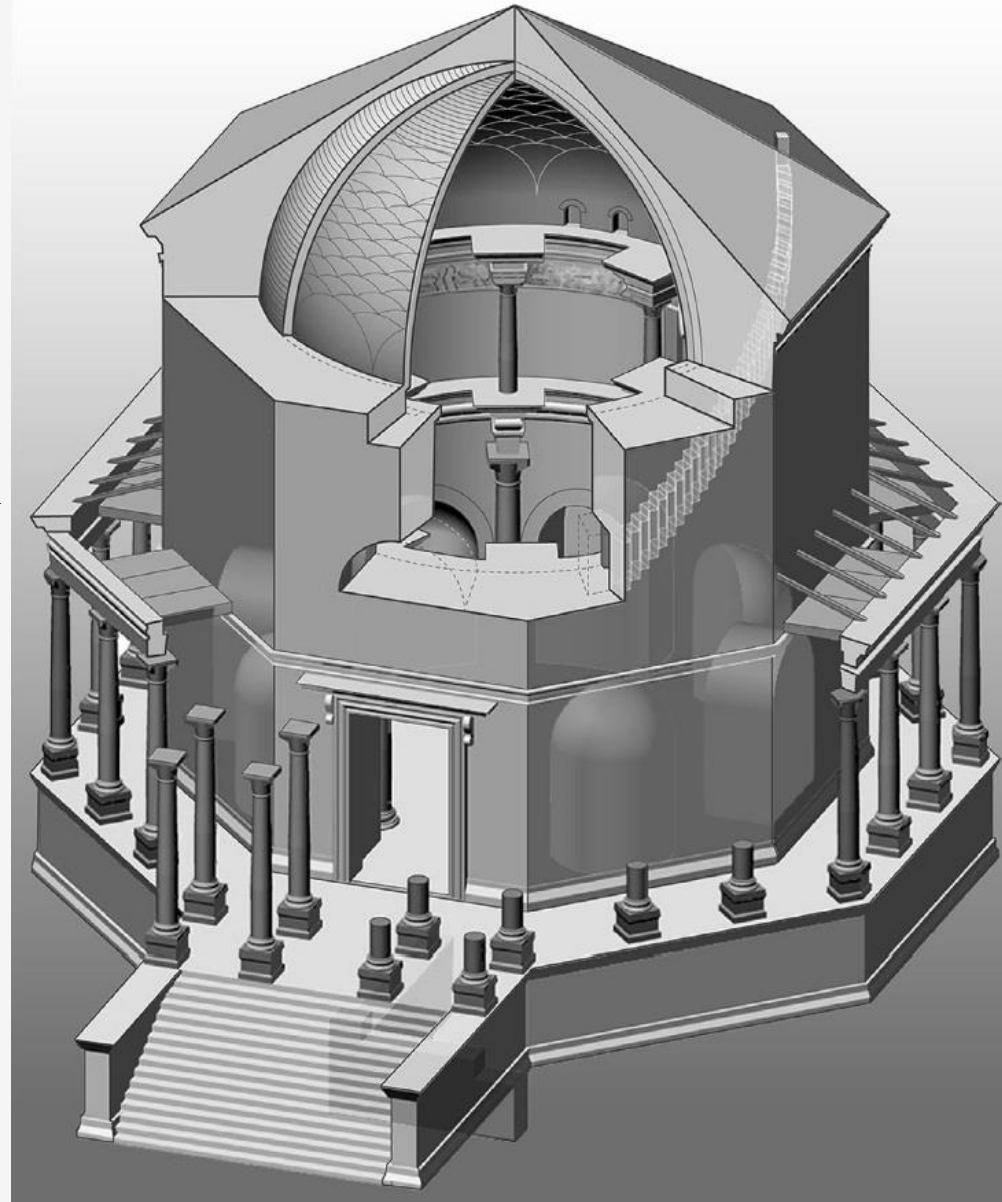
- The earthquake is mentioned in several Christian sources, as it coincided with the (alleged) attempt of Emperor Julian The Apostate to rebuild the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem
- Another interesting source is a fragment of a Syriac letter (Harvard Syriac 99) which enumerates places damaged in the earthquake
- The destruction spanned from Caesarea Philippi-Paneas in the north to Petra
- It apparently affected also places along the coast and in Judaea, Samaria and Galilee
- Archaeologically it is further attested in Jerusalem, Petra, 'Iraq el-'Amir and probably in smaller towns and villages in the Galilee (Beth Shearim etc.)



# Christianity

- The early church before the reforms of Constantine the Great is elusive and its representation in the archaeological material is usually restricted to symbols in funerary and small art
- The pre-Constantinian house churches (*domus ecclesiae*) are rare – due to the similarity to regular city houses, their identification is problematic without additional evidence (typically parietal or floor decoration with Christian motives or inscriptions)
- The earliest churches of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. are built exclusively in the major pilgrimage centres (Church of Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and Church of Nativity in Bethlehem)
- They are all of the so-called “Constantinian Basilica” type – an adaptation of a Roman basilica, since its spacious layout allows for large congregations of people and axial plan focuses the congregation on an altar
- Centralized plans (buildings with central domed space) appear along the basilicas
- In the rest of the cities, churches are being built only during the 5<sup>th</sup> c.

Mausoleum of Diocletian in his palace at Split, early 4<sup>th</sup> c.  
The type of monumental centralized building (perhaps emphasizing vertical axis to the heavens) became popular form for monumental Christian church-tombs (martyria) and baptisteries



# Christianity

## Dura Europos

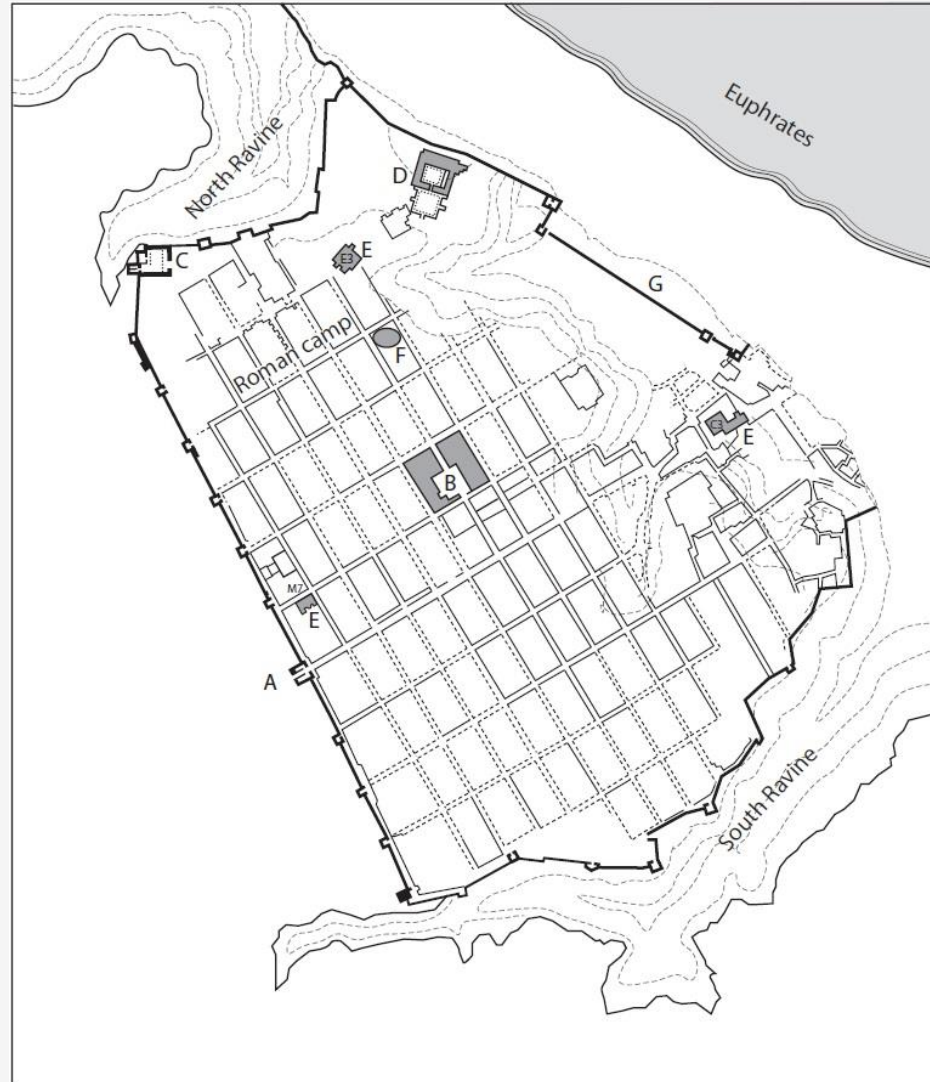
- Founded by Seleucus I around 300 BCE on the Euphrates - rectangular insulae, agora and fortifications
- Captured by Parthians in ca. 114 BCE
- In Roman hands between 165-256 CE - a camp built in the northern third of the city
- Captured and completely destroyed by Sassanids in 256 CE, never resettled



# Christianity

## Dura Europos

- Among the monuments of the Roman period are numerous shrines and sanctuaries, a synagogue and a *domus ecclesiae*
- The destruction, lack of latter settlement and desert climate facilitated preservation of frescoes and objects from perishable material (textiles, wooden shields and arms, papyri etc.)
- Heavily looted since the start of the Syrian War



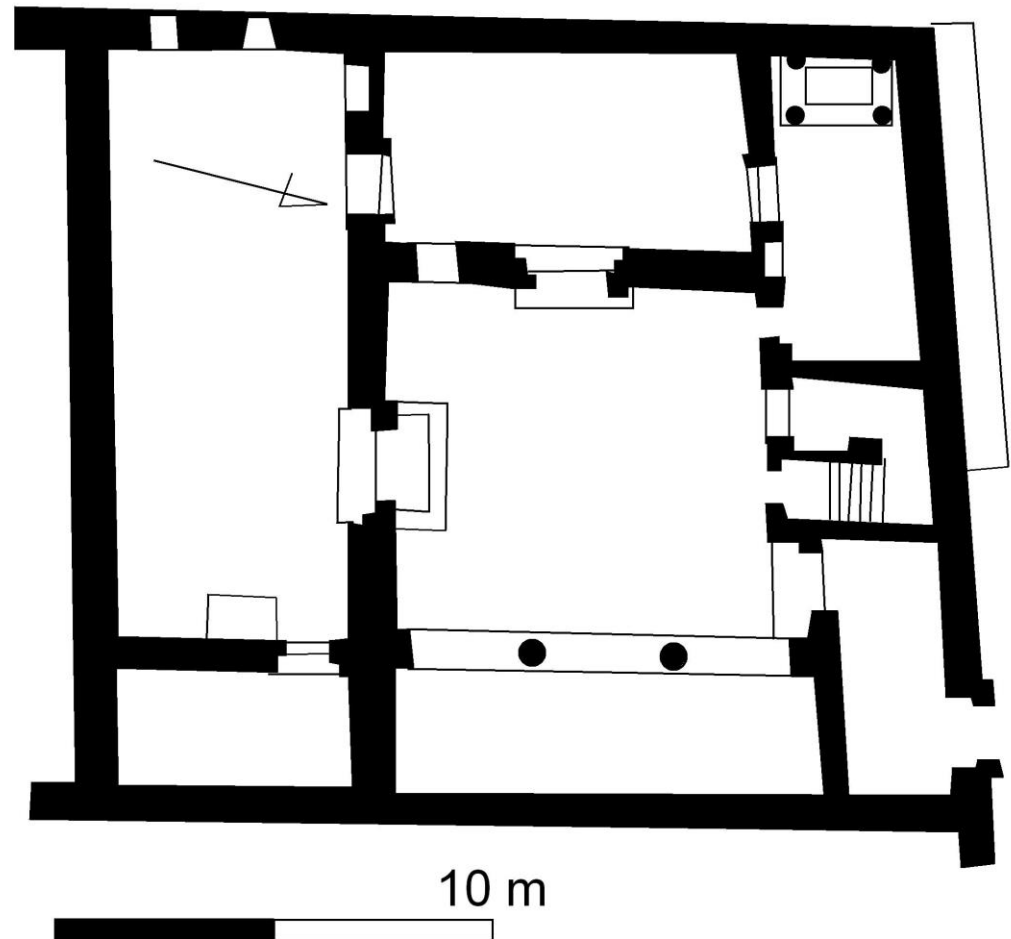
- A Palmyra Gate
- B Agora
- C Temple of Palmyrene Gods
- D Palace of Dux Ripae
- E Baths
- F Amphitheater
- G Citadel



# Christianity

## Dura Europos

- The *domus ecclesiae* was built as a regular courtyard house attached to the inner face of the city wall (tower 17) in the SW part of the city around 200 CE
- After ca. 230 two rooms were joined to make large assembly hall in the south
- Additional two rooms were converted into a baptistery in the north
- Baptistery contains a small immersion basin under a canopy
- The house is built of mudbrick, with a courtyard also paved in mudbrick
- Fresco decoration of the baptistery and some graffiti attest this house as a Christian place of worship

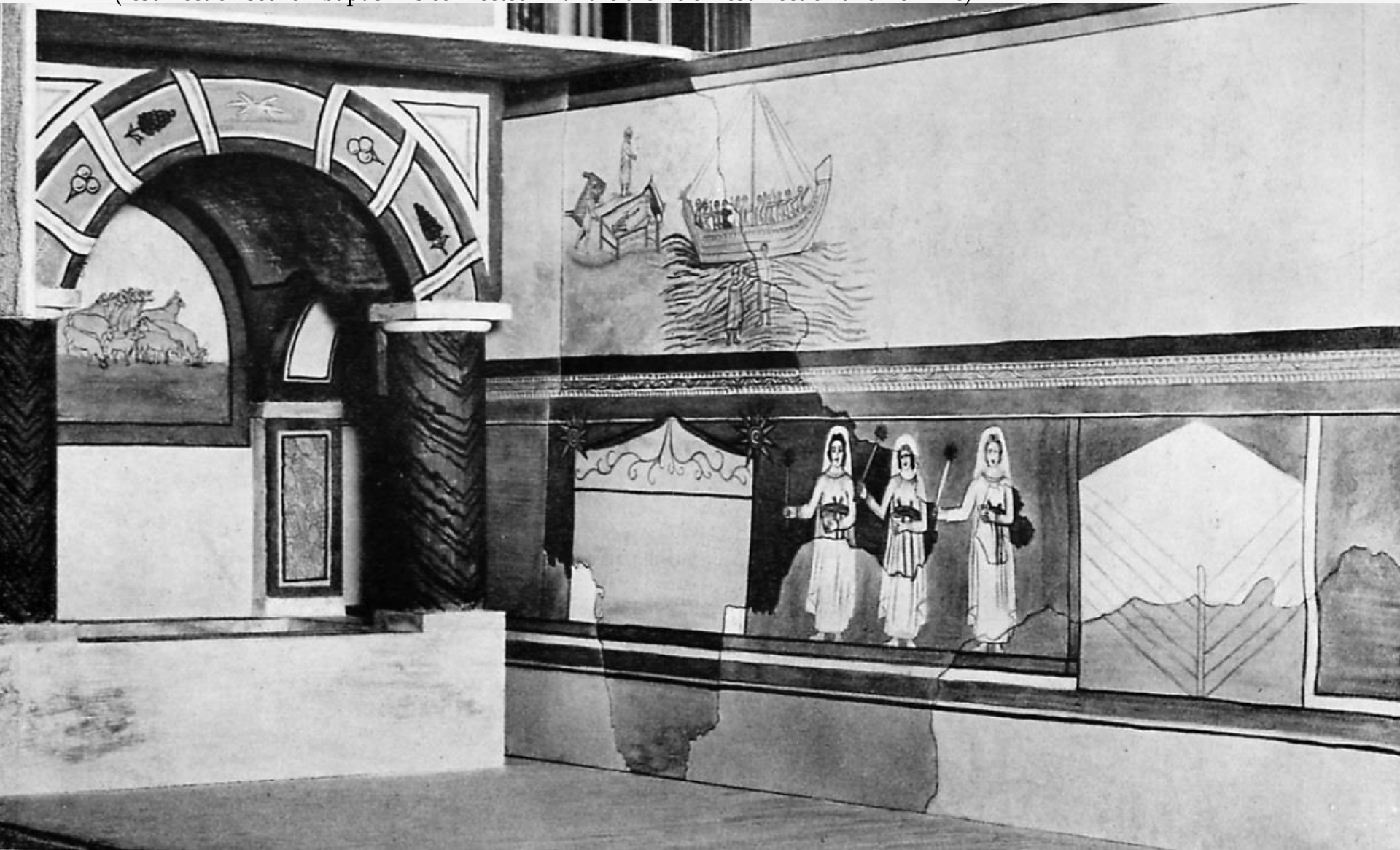




# Christianity

## Dura Europos

- Reconstruction of the baptistery; the frescoes include walking on the water (upper register) and women at the tomb (resurrection scene - baptism is connected with the theme of resurrection and new life)



# Christianity

## Dura Europos

- Baptistry during the excavations (note the imitation of a stone coloration on the column of a canopy)



# Christianity

## Dura Europos

- Central scene above the baptismal basin – Christ as a good shepherd



# Christianity

## Dura Europos

- A view of the *domus* towards the west, assembly hall on the left, baptistery on the right, tower 17 in center right



# Christianity

## Legio - Maximianopolis

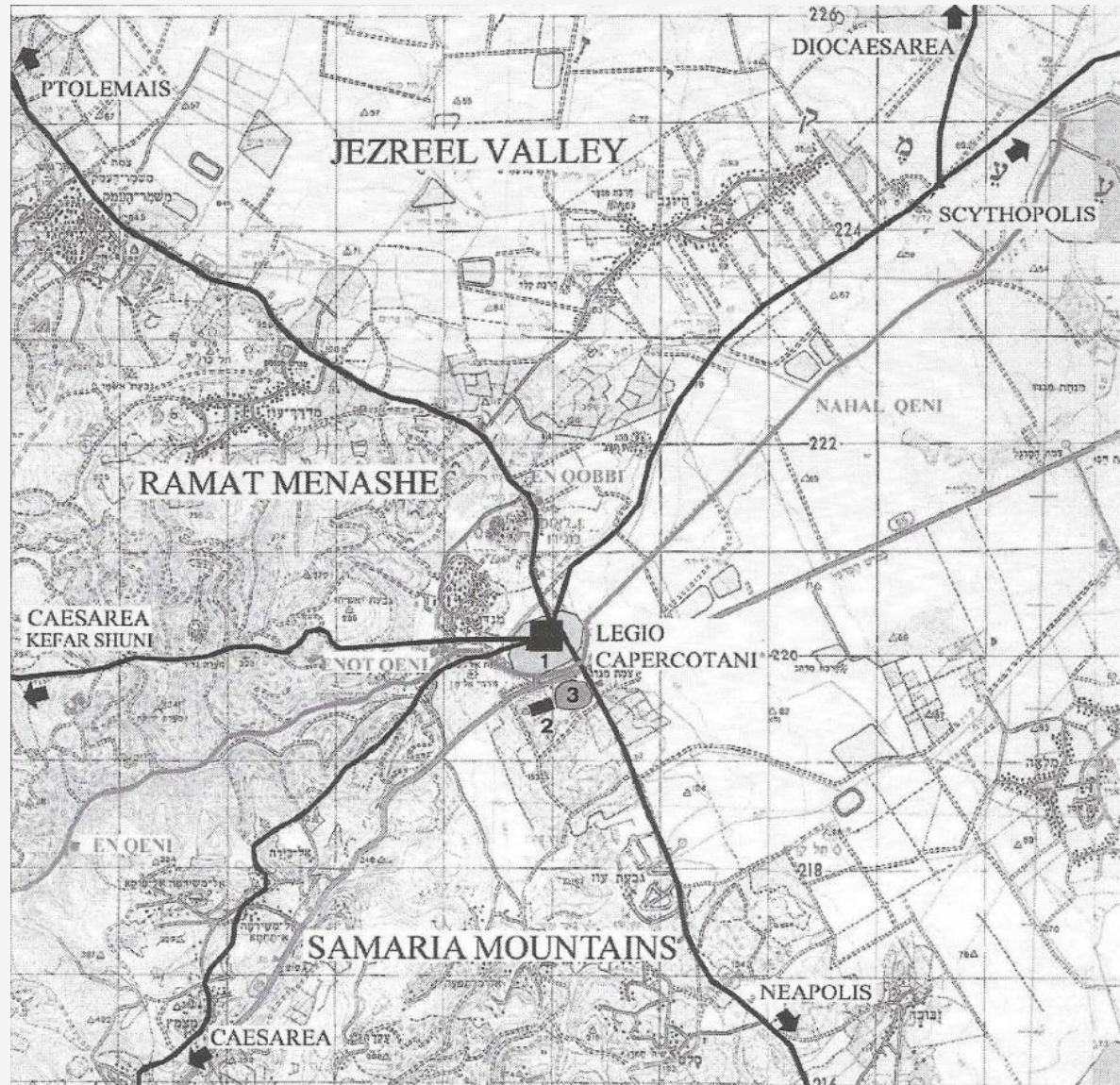
- A legionary camp was established next to Tel Megiddo around 120 CE and became base of Legio VI Ferrata
- The site is strategically located on main crossroad at the entrance to the Yezre'el valley
- The legion was relocated to 'Udruh in Arabia probably by Diocletian
- The civilian settlement surrounding the camp was transformed into a town called Maximianopolis (suggesting initiative of tetrarch Maximian)
- A Jewish village known as Kfar 'Otnay (Caparcotna) was located south of the city - apparently a *vicus* of a small auxilliary camp

1 - Legionary camp - Maximianopolis

2 - Small (auxilliary?) camp

3 - Kfar Otnay

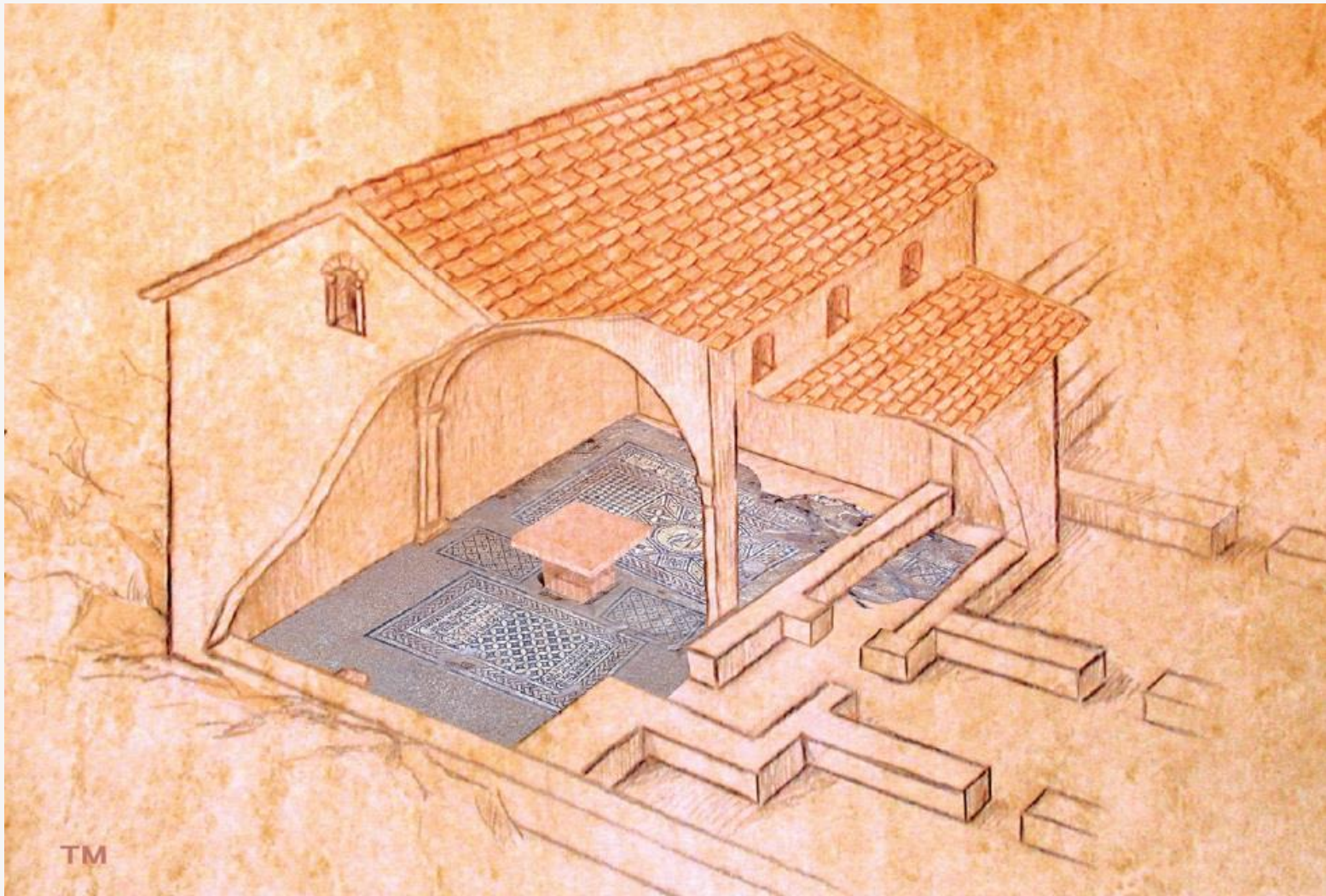
Solid black lines - Roman roads



# Christianity

## Legio - Maximianopolis

- A hall (5x10 m) oriented N-S was uncovered in Kfar 'Otnay village, associated with officer's housing
- Two pilasters supported arch in the centre above a stone pedestal (0.6x0.7 m)
- The hall was paved with a geometric mosaic (with fishes) with three inscriptions
- The structure, style of the mosaic and the inscriptions are dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> c., the building was abandoned in late 3<sup>rd</sup>/early 4<sup>th</sup> c.

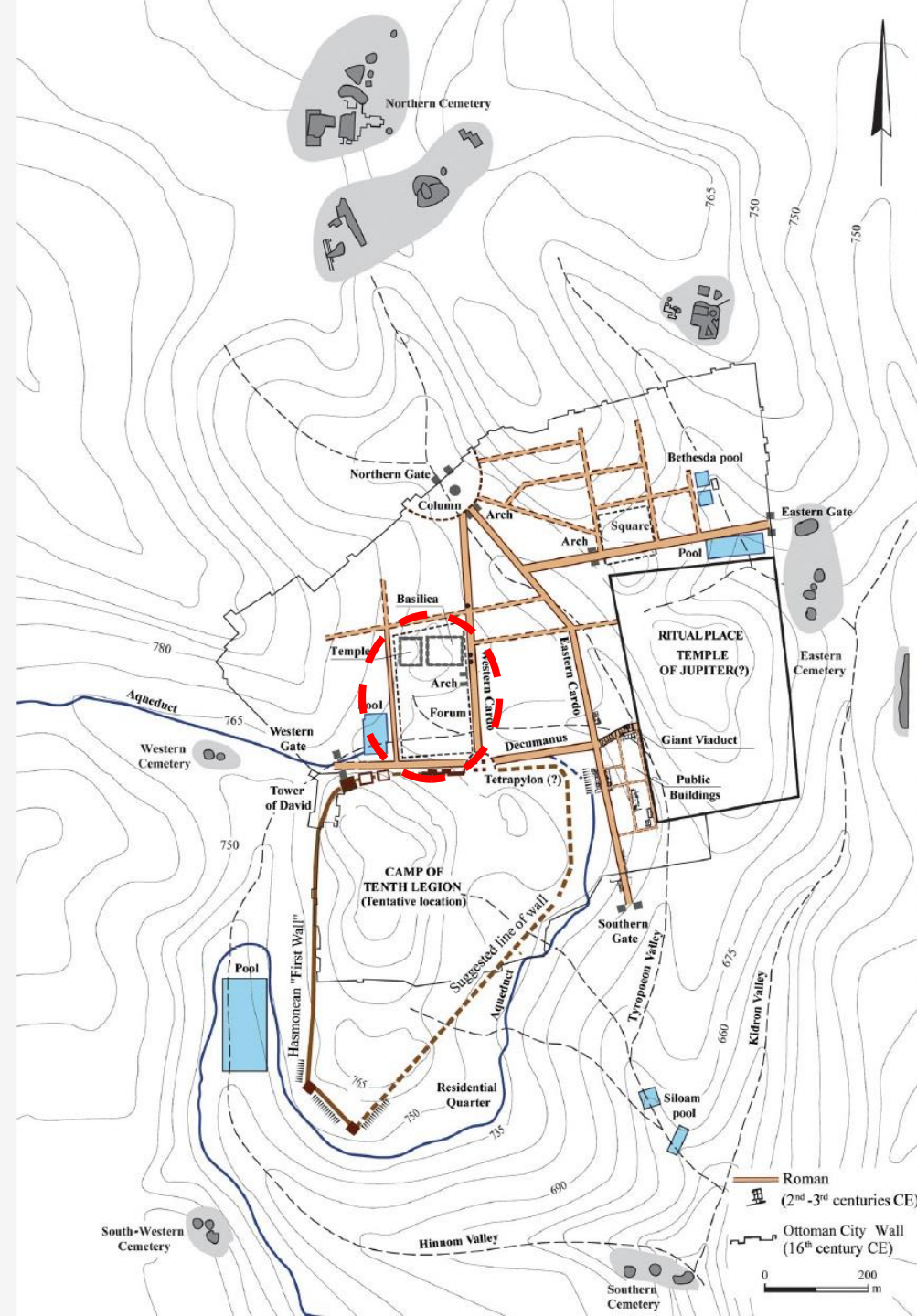




# Christianity

## Constantinian basilicas

- The traditional place of Jesus' tomb was overlaid by Temple of Venus and basilica next to the new forum after foundation of Aelia Capitolina
- Building of the Church of Holy Sepulchre was begun by Constantine in 326 CE
- Basilica was dedicated 336 but construction works around the tomb continued for many more years
- Constantinian church thus replaces old pagan and secular monuments in the civic centre of the city

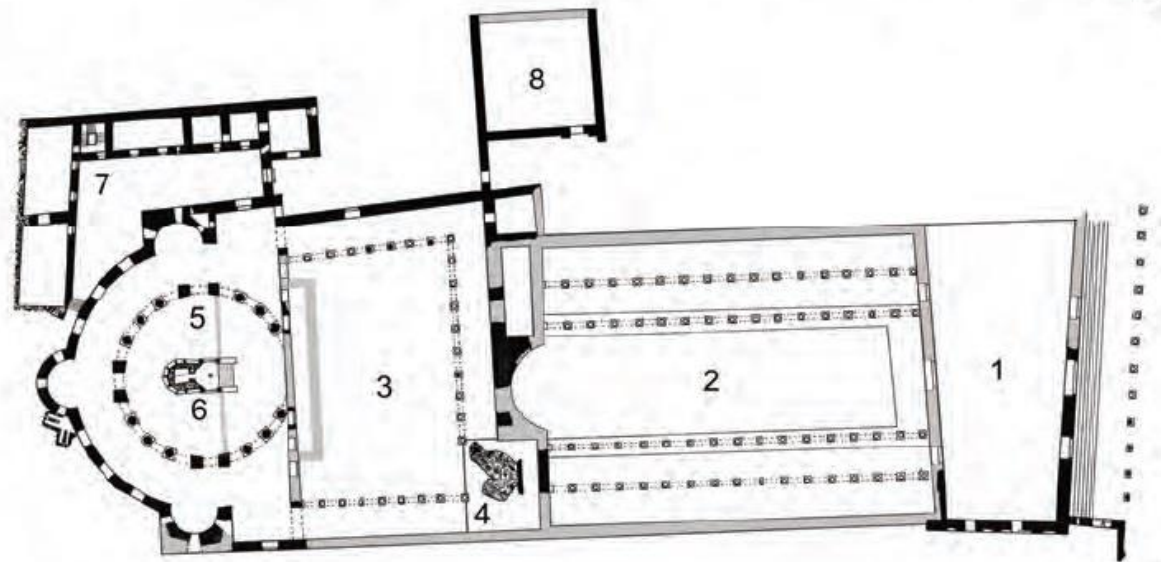
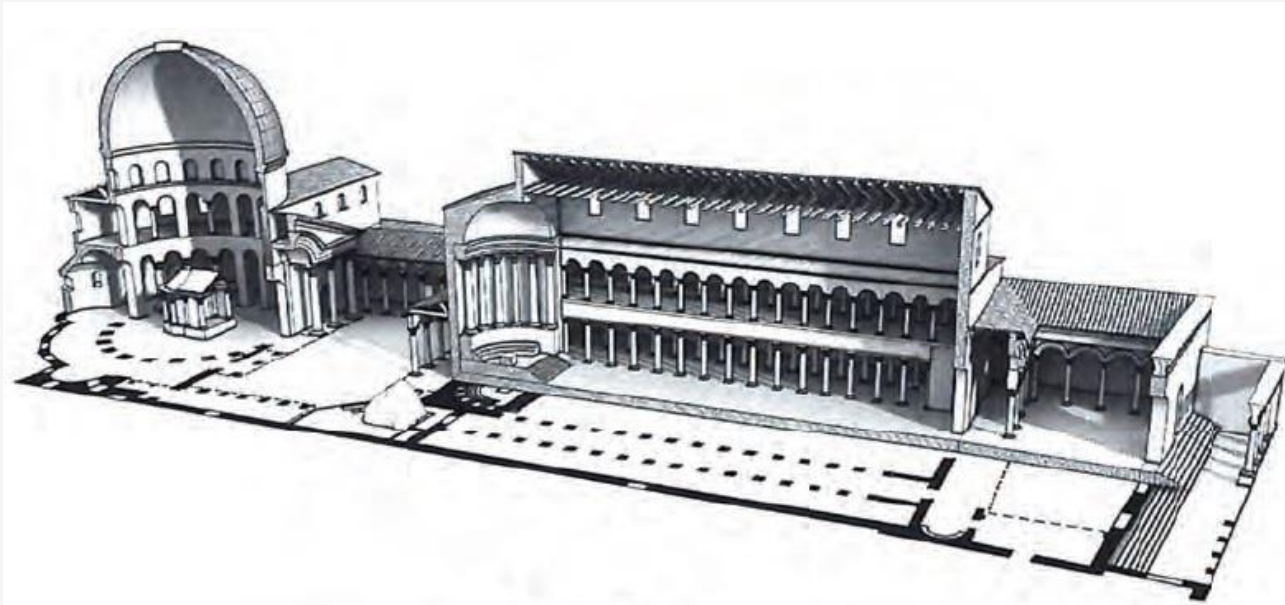




# Christianity

## Constantinian basilicas

- Entrance to the complex was from the east, from the western cardo of the city
- The five-aisled basilica (40x58 m) is oriented to the west towards the tomb
- In the south-eastern corner of the inner peristyle courtyard (3) is Calvary (4)
- Above the tomb (6) an Anastasis (Resurrection) Rotunda (5) was erected
- The tomb was originally carved on a slope and much quarrying was needed to isolate it and put it in the center of the Rotunda
- The core of the Rotunda still stands



# Christianity

## Constantinian basilicas

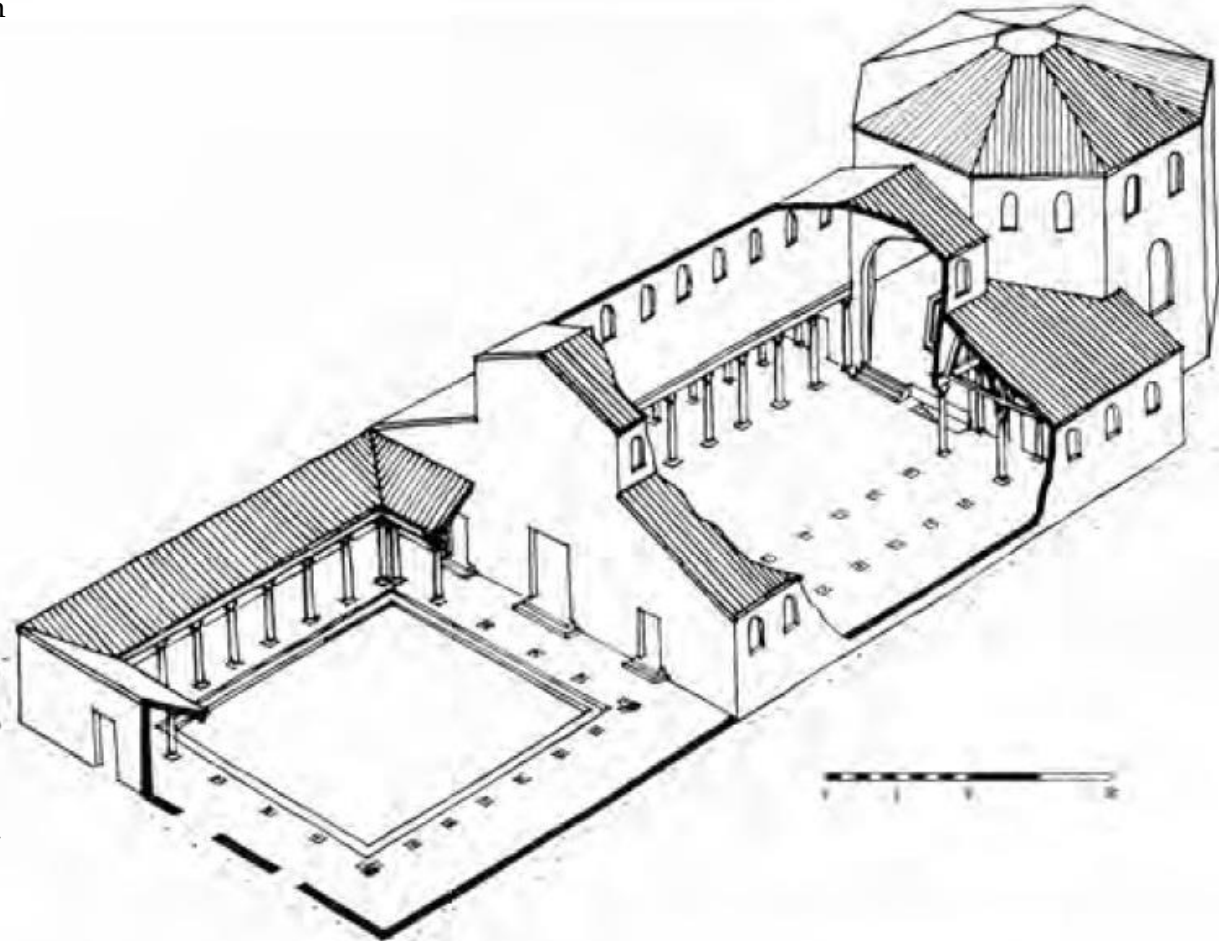
- Reconstruction of the Byzantine church, forum is to the south of the church (lower left)



# Christianity

## Constantinian basilicas

- Church of Nativity was built between 330-333 CE
- It comprises of pentagonal central structure (above the nativity cave) and five-aisled basilica with a peristyle courtyard
- It was destroyed during the Samaritan revolt and rebuilt by Justinian on different plan (without the central structure) and this building stands to this day
- Both churches are monumental buildings re-inventing basilica as a Christian temple (other Constantinian basilicas are in Rome – old St. Peter’s and Lateran) built only thanks to the Imperial patronage
- Central structures are used for emphasizing the holy places (a tomb and a nativity cave)



## Brief summary

- The transformation of Classical city begins during the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE
- It begins with decline of the decurial class, when many of them are not able or unwilling to participate in the public life and pay for the city expenses (*leitourgiai/munera*) out of their own pockets
- Imperial government thus increasingly intervenes in the city autonomy which in turn weakens the cities even more
- This process leads to rule of informal notables (Imperial administrators, oligarchs and church officials)
- Many public buildings lose their function or the community cannot bear the expenses to maintain them and so the decay of public space begins
- Church has strong influence on the disappearance of public baths, theatres and public spectacles
- During the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. practically all public buildings are replaced with churches, and only a handful of theatres, amphitheatres, hippodromes and public baths are still functional
- These processes proceed differently in different cities (smaller communities like Hippos are more strongly affected)
  
- One of the earliest examples of Christian art and architecture are coming from the Near East
- House churches were probably more prevalent, but their identification is problematic
- The close association between early Christians and military is typical also for other private mystery religions in the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. (Mithraism, Manichaeism etc.)
- Only large pilgrimage sites (Jerusalem, Bethlehem) receive monumental churches through Imperial patronage
- The 4<sup>th</sup> c. Christian architecture is still indebted to the Roman architecture with its adaptation of basilica and centralized structures
- The Christianization of the country apparently proceeded continually as town churches are being erected only in the 5<sup>th</sup> c.