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From Castrum to Rural Settlement.

The Archaeological Evidence of Umm er-Rasas/Kastron Mefa'a (4th -9th century)

The presentation intends to investigate the process that led to the transformation of Castrum Mefa'a (modern Umm er-Rasas) into a thriving rural settlement. The site, located at the southern edge of the Moabite plateau, about 35 km southwest of Madaba, was part of the Province of Arabia, and under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Bishops of Madaba. The discussion will examine how the strategic function of the Roman Castrum evolved from an active defensive system to its disappearance and decline. In particular, in the fifth century significant spatial transformations and functional reorganizations transformed the late Roman castrum into a rural center. The new village showed a strong Christian identity and established a strong link with the episcopal see, municipal authorities and monastic communities. The economic growth which reflected in the construction of churches and in the creation of devotional paths was based on the extensive land holdings that extend beyond the boundaries of the village and are visible in the aerial photographs. Umm er-Rasas, especially in the 6th-8th century, served as an important cultural and economic center, testified by fine mosaics, sculptures, and ceramic assemblages. The village played an important role in the polarization of a sophisticated and dominant model that actually prevailed in the longer historical context at least until the end of the Umayyad dominance in Bilad esh-Sham.



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Short CV

Basema Hamarneh, acting director of the Department of Classical Archaeology, and vice-director of the Doctoral Schools of the Faculty of Historical and Cultural Studies of the University of Vienna, received her MA in Byzantine Studies at Moscow State University “Lomonosov”; PhD in Post Classical Antiquities at Rome University “La Sapienza” with honours; and a PhD in Christian Archaeology from the Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Christiana in Rome (*summa cum laude*). She taught in various Italian Universities, and since 2017, she is Full Professor of Late Antique and Early Christian Archaeology at the University of Vienna.

Her research covers the interdisciplinary field of Late Antique Archaeology (including Early Christian/ Byzantine and Early Islamic archaeology) in the Levant, and more specifically: settlement patterns, visual and material culture; Byzantine Hagiography applied to topography and to visual culture. Her studies are published in monographs, book chapters, articles and presented in National and International Conferences. She actively participated and directed several excavations in Italy and Jordan since 1986, she directs since 2018 the archaeological excavation project in Khirbet al-Jumaiyil in Jordan.

Selected readings

Bujard, Jacques. *Kastron Mefaa. Un bourg a l'époque byzantine. Travaux de la mission archéologique de la Fondation Max van Berchem a Umm al-Rasas, Jordanie (1988-1997)*. Fribourge 2016.

Bujard, Jacques, and Michelle Joguin. “La fortification de Kaston Mayfa’a/Umm ar-Rasas.” *Studies in History and Archeology of Jordan V* (1995): 241-249.

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____. “Eglises Geminees d’Umm er Rassas.” *ADAJ*, Vol. XXXVI (1992): 291-306.

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Pappalardo, Carmelo, and J. Abela. “Umm al-Rasas: XXth Archeological Campaign.” *Liber Annuus 56* (2006): 568-572.

Piccirillo, Michele. “Les églises paléochrétiennes d'Umm er-Rasas (Jordanie): cinq campagnes de fouilles,” *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 135/2 (1991): 273-294.

Piccirillo, Michele, and Eugenio Allita. *Umm al-Rasas: Mayfa’ah I: Gli scavi del complesso di Santo Stefano*. Jerusalem; Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 1994.