Early Islamic Settlement

Urban and Rural transformations

Tropes of Early Islamic Settlement

- Bedouinization of the civilizations of antiquity
- Assimilation to the luxuries of civilized life
- Neglect and Disorder, Rupture and Decline

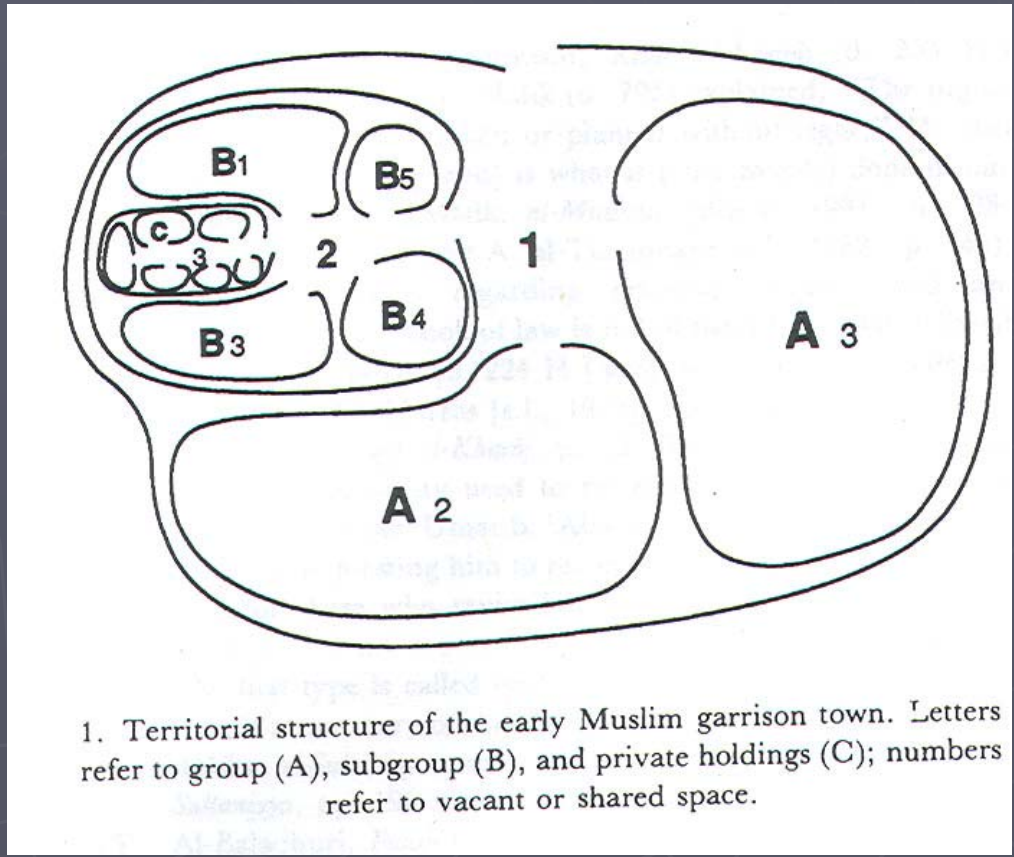
Some historical realities in the settlement process

- Vast majority of Arab settlement was in Syria and Iraq
- Movement of peoples was closely associated with the conquests and the army
- The emergence of the *amsar* (s. *misr*) as nodes for Arab/Muslim settlement
- Maintaining the productive capacity of the land was reflected in patterns of land tenure

The Thundering Arab Hoards

Basra, Kufa and the earliest *amsar*

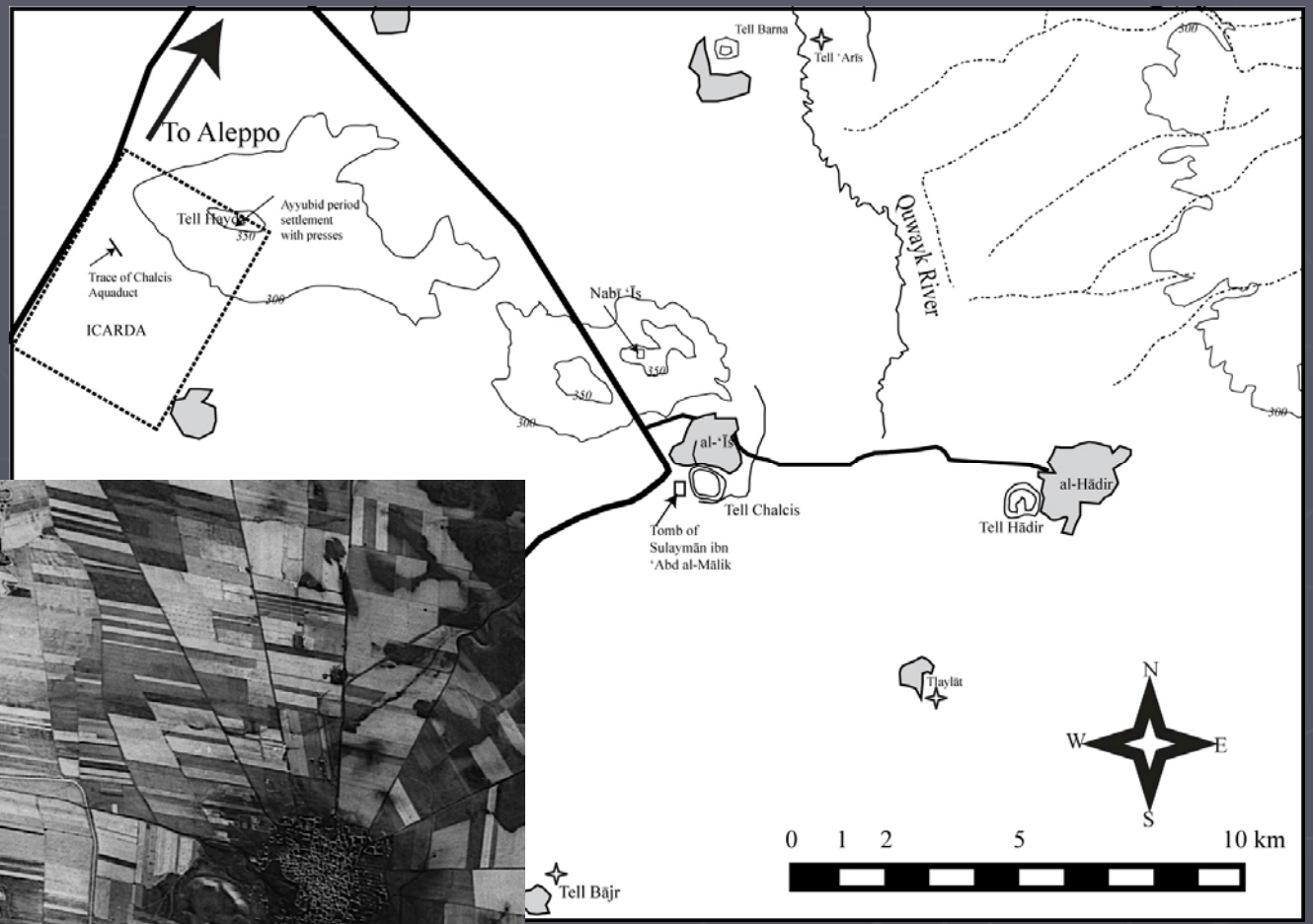
- Conventional designation is as “garrison towns”
- Served as foci of Arab/Muslim settlement that segregated them from indigenous populations
- Presumed tribal organization of the *khitta*
- What accounts for the absence of *amsar* in Syria?



1. Territorial structure of the early Muslim garrison town. Letters refer to group (A), subgroup (B), and private holdings (C); numbers refer to vacant or shared space.

Model of the *khatta*

Semi-settled Arab groups and the evolution of the *hadir*



In the Arid Margins

The Late Antique site of Andarin

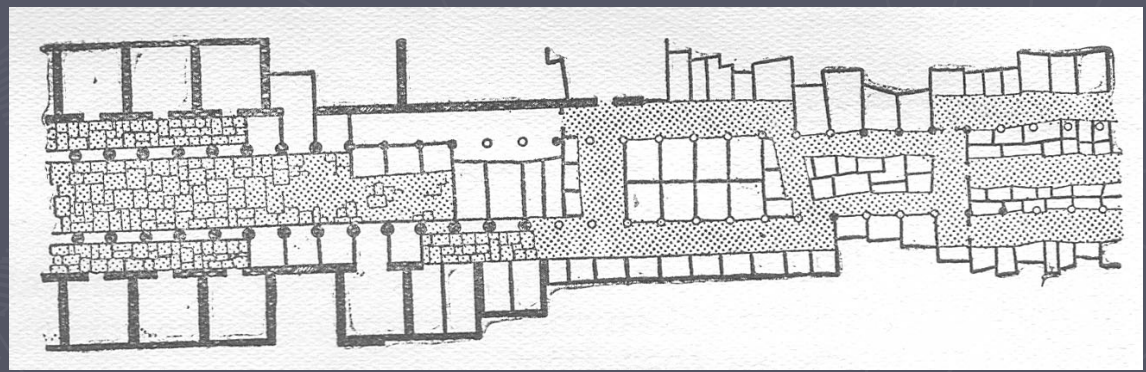
Bringing Fertility to the Steppe

The site of Balis and its Environs,

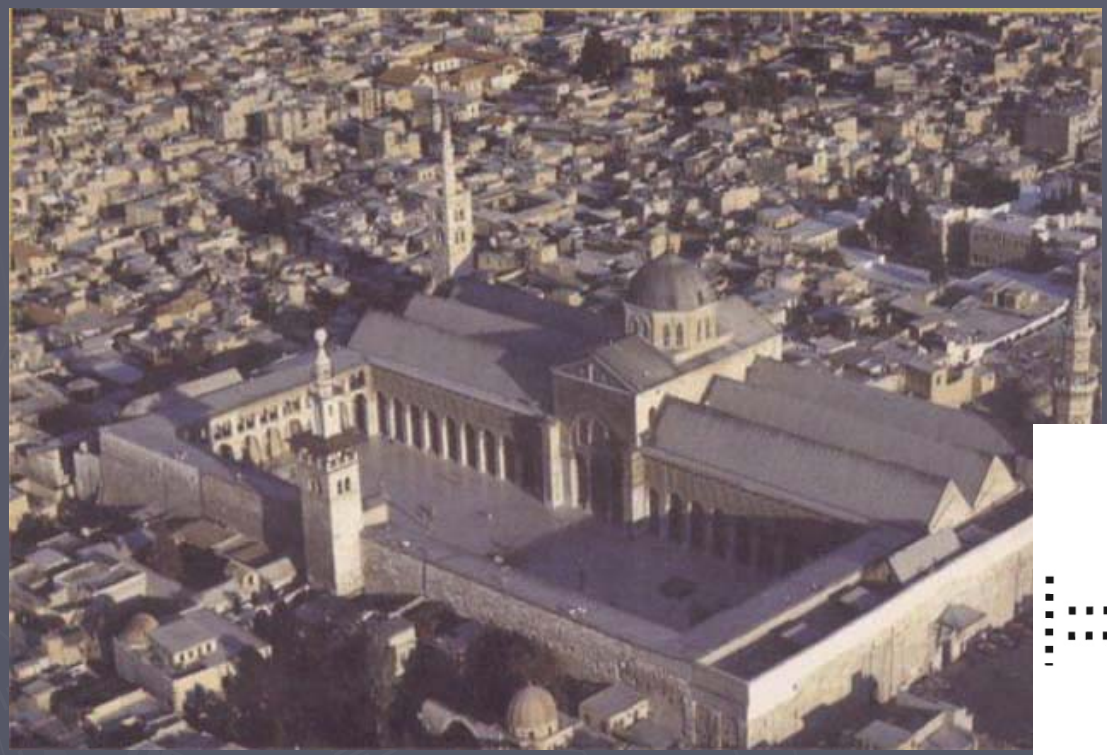
Syria, Middle Euphrates

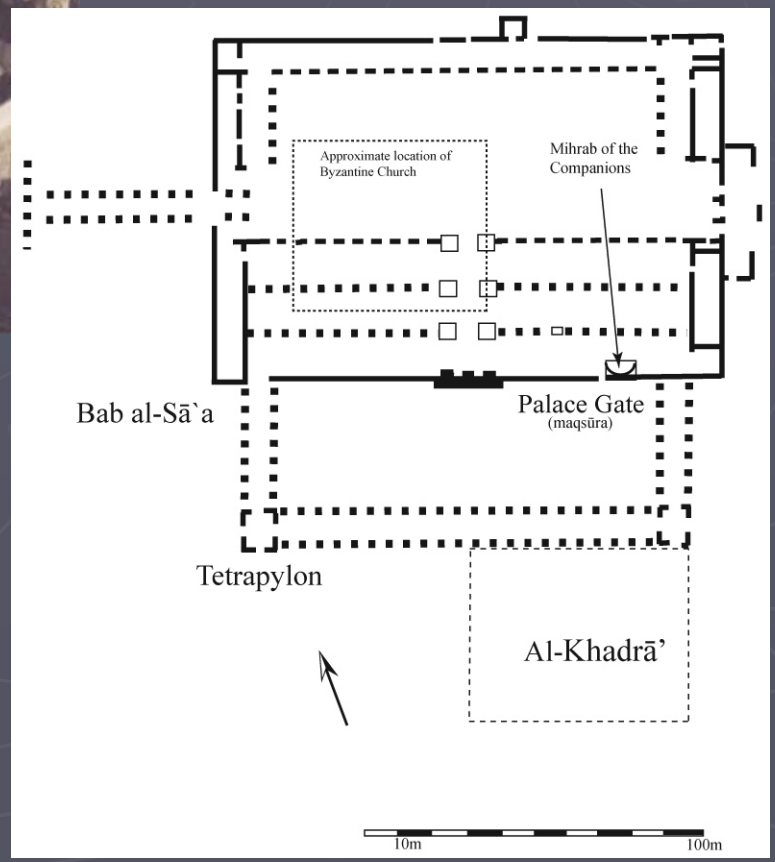
Why Settle in the City?

- Was the Islamic *medina* something new?
- What happened to the urban landscape of late antiquity?
- Was early Islamic society an urban one?



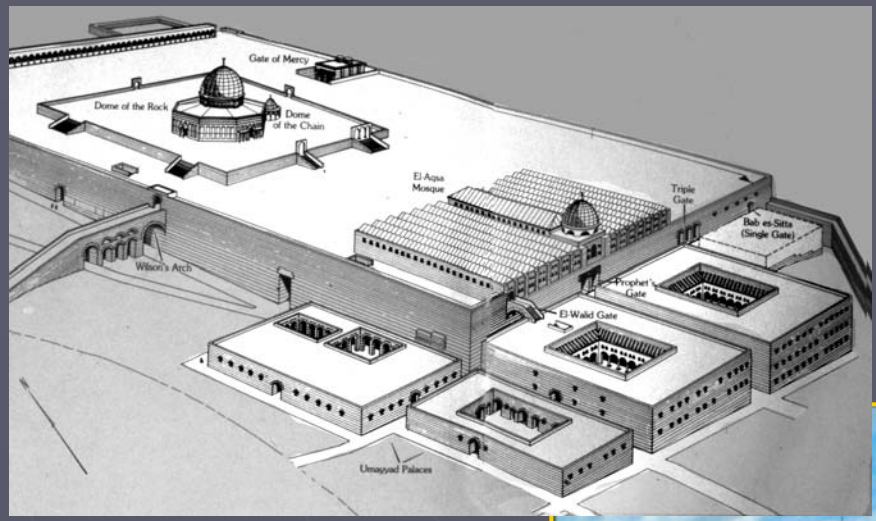
Sauvaget's schematic of the Aleppo market from the Roman period to 10th century.



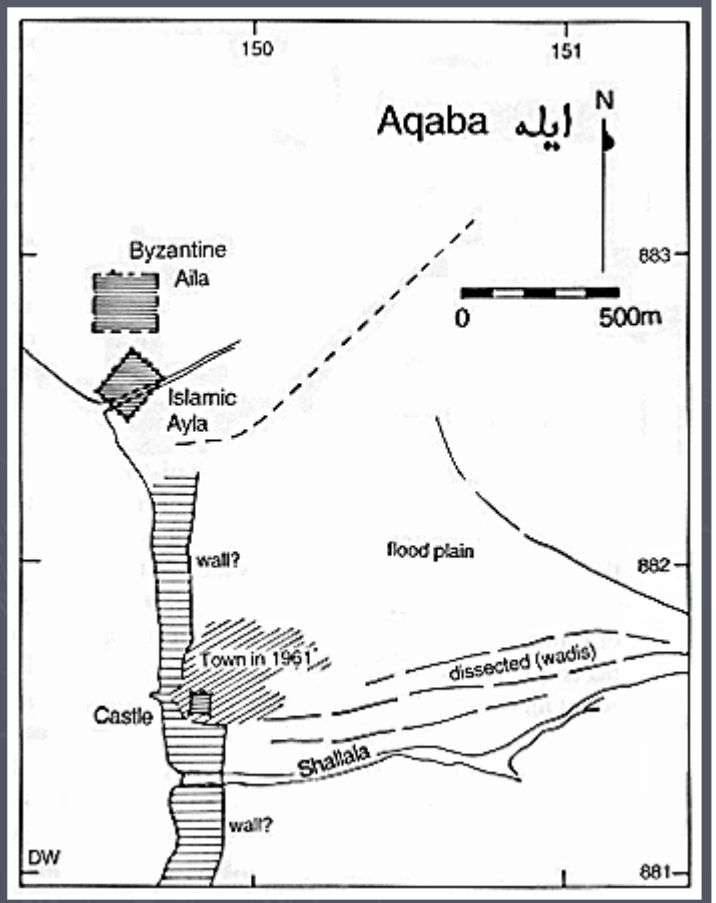

Approximate location of Byzantine Church
Mihrab of the Companions
Bab al-Sā`a
Palace Gate
(maqsūra)
Tetrapylon
Al-Khadrā'
10m
100m

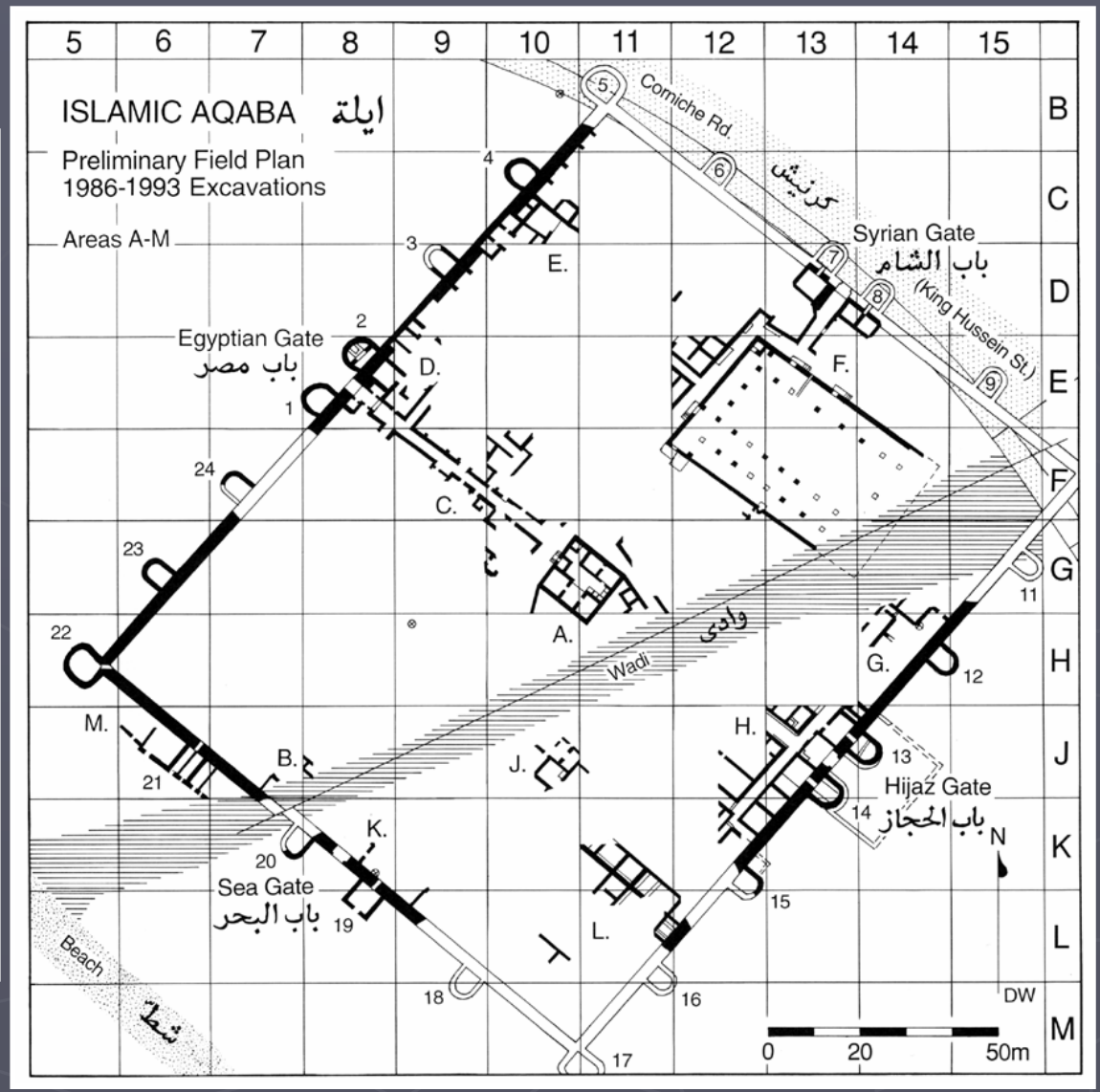
Talking to my uncle one day I said: “Oh my uncle, surely it was not fitting for al-Walid to expend the resources of the Muslims on the mosque at Damascus. Had he expended as much in building roads, or the water tanks, or in repairing the fortresses, it would have been more proper and more to his credit.” Said he: “You simply do not understand, my dear son. Al-Walid was absolutely right, for he accomplished a worthy work. He saw that Syria was a country settled by Christians, and he noted in that place all their churches so handsome with their enchanting decorations, renowned far and wide… So he undertook for the Muslims the building of a mosque that would divert their attention from the churches, and make it one of the wonders of the world…”

--- al-Muqaddasi (10th c. Muslim geographer)

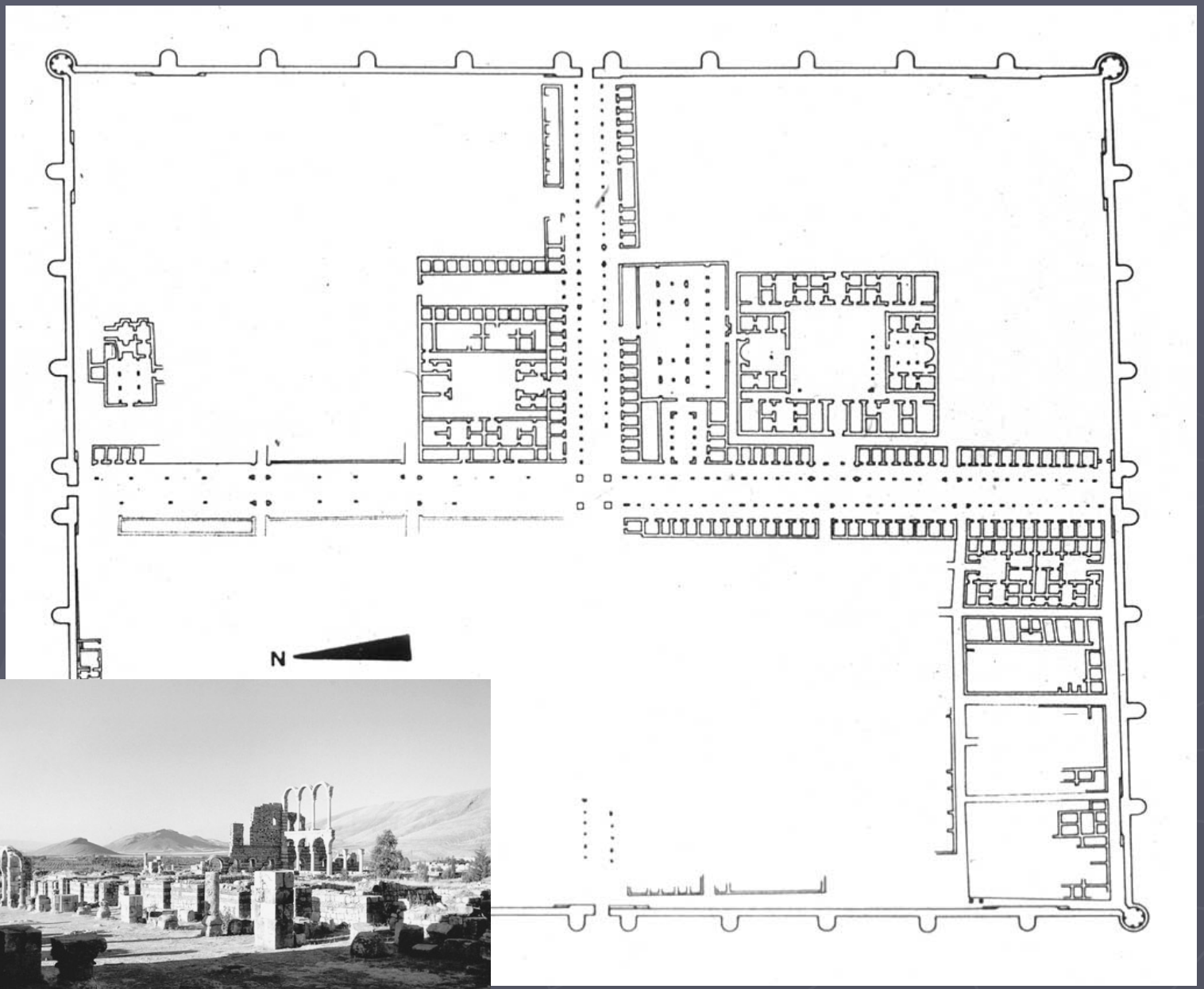

Gate of Mercy
Dome of the Rock
Dome of the Chain
El Aqsa Mosque
Triple Gate
Bab es-Sitta (Single Gate)
Wilson's Arch
Prophet's Gate
El-Walid Gate
Umayyad Palaces

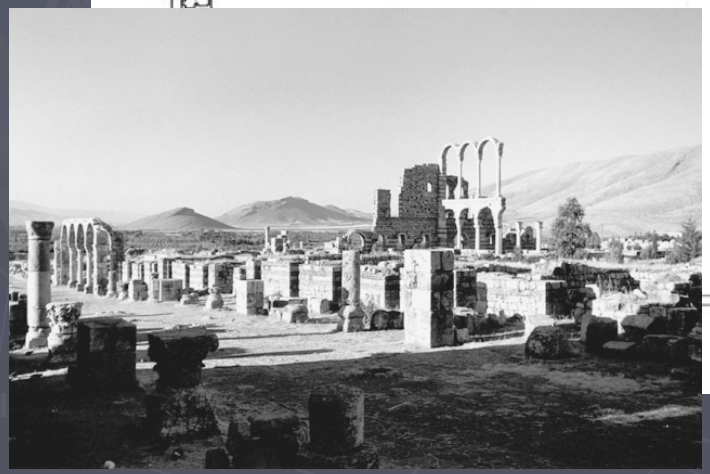
Ayla (Islamic Aqaba)





source Whitcomb (1994)





Anjar