

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to study road networks in Palestine during early Islamic period (8th-10th A.D). The study concentrated on the road system in the Negev region as a case study. In this thesis Archaeological Surveys of Israel were the bases for discussion about the settlement in the Negev in early Islamic period.

Road networks are considered vital link between human activities with the whole landscape. Human beings since early periods of time try to make connections between their activities and their surroundings. In Palestine many road networks existed in different periods. The road system in Palestine developed greatly in the late antiquities especially in the Roman period, i.e. when the Romans built different road systems, and many highways crossed provinces or Romans districts, where they developed high techniques in constructing roads. Many historians and archaeologists agree that the transition from the Roman to the Byzantine period, inaugurated Palestine to a new stage especially after the religious transition to Christianity. New roads were constructed because of high movement of pilgrims to the Holy Land.

Few studies were published about road networks in Palestine or in greater Syria during medieval Islamic periods. These studies depended on historical or geographical sources or travelers who visited Syria, Palestine and Egypt. However

the early Islamic period between the 8th and 10th century A.D was poor in archaeological studies from that period until now.

At the beginning of the 60s of the 20th century, the Israeli Department of Antiquities and Museums which later became the Israel Antiquities Authority started to depend on a new method in surveying. This method depends on conducting a survey in a region of known scale 10x10 km². The aim of this survey is to document the archaeological remains of a surface. Sometimes excavations were conducted in selected sites. This method is known as regional archaeological survey, and in Israel this method was considered as evolution in archaeology.

In the Negev and in other areas in Palestine the Israeli Antiquities Authority conducted 13 surveys in the Negev. These surveys were published; and the whole area of these surveys was around 1300 km². Out of 13 surveys I read and reviewed the results of 12 surveys, these surveys are: 125, 139, 166, 167, 168, 196, 198, 199, 200, 203, 204, and 225.

This thesis consists of an introduction and three chapters; the first chapter had been addresses the problems of the cultural transition in urban centers, rural settlements and nomadic sites in the Negev from late Byzantine into early Islamic period. The second chapter deals with the Negev during the early Islamic period. This chapter analyzes the dating of material culture, settlements system and the distribution of settlements system in the Negev during early Islamic period. The third chapter

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addresses the main and the subsidiary road system in the Negev and Palestine during early Islamic period.

Mainly one conclusion of this study that the Negev region did not witness a decline of settlements and roads during early Islamic period. This conclusion is based on historical documents and archaeological sources.