CHAPTER 11

The Early Islamic City of Ramla in Light of New Archaeological Discoveries, G.I.S. Applications, and a Re-examination of the Literary Sources

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Introduction

The importance of Ramla to understanding the urban planning and material culture that developed in the Levant under Islamic rule owes to it having been the capital of the province of Palestine (Jund Filasṭīn) in the eighth–eleventh centuries, and the only city founded in Palestine during the Islamic period. Several scholars have tried to reconstruct the layout of the city and its daily life through the analysis of historical sources and the examination of finds uncovered by excavations. This paper presents and elaborates on the following four topics, which are informed by the analysis of the archaeological data accumulated from the approximately 150 archaeological excavations, surveys and ancient monuments in the city of Ramla and its surroundings during the “Ramla Project (Fig. 11.1):”

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1 This paper is based on Oren Shmueli’s M.A. thesis, “The City of Ramla during the Early Islamic Period in Light of the Excavations Conducted in the Area of the White Mosque,” written at the Archaeology Division of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev under the supervision of Dr. Haim Goldfus and Prof. Isaac Gilead. I would like to acknowledge here my deep appreciation for their constant support and advice. The undersigned would also like to thank the anonymous readers and the editors of this volume for their comments and suggestions. Any errors that remain are our sole responsibility.

2 In this paper we apply the Geographic Information System (GIS) to examine the early topography of Ramla. By merging diverse sources of information—including excavation plans, aerial photography and antique and modern maps—through a coordinated, unified network, we were able to reconstruct a map of the town during various historical periods.
Figure 11.1 Map showing the excavations in the area of the White Mosque.