

Ancient Water System in Tel Mar Elyas during the Byzantine Period: A Study

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ABSTRACT Recent archeological survey and excavations conducted in Tel Mar Elyas (Bethany Beyond the Jordan) confidently provide explicit answers about early ecology and history of Christian community east of Jordan. Churches, caves, prayer halls and water system installations were recovered in and around Tel Mar Elyas. The discovered remains of elaborate water system include pools, cisterns, wells and aqueducts refer to skilled engineering water system built during the Byzantine period. The author of this paper with his team systematically surveyed and excavated some 20 sites along both banks of the perennial Wadi Kharrar, covering an area of several square kilometers east of the Jordan River. This work has confirmed the location of the main settlement of Bethany at the head of the Wadi Kharrar, about 1.5 kilometers east of the river. Here, the team uncovered a 1st century AD settlement with plastered pools and water systems that were almost certainly used for baptism, and a late Byzantine settlement (5th-6th century AD) with churches, a monastery and other structures that probably catered to religious pilgrims. The present study includes also the results of field survey which has documented the ancient pilgrimage route that linked Jerusalem, via the Jordan River and Bethany in Jordan, to Mt. Nebo. Several Byzantine churches and other structures have been identified between the river and Bethany and are under publication. Some of them commemorate Jesus' baptism while other structures were monasteries for ascetic monks. The paper concluded with conclusion and recommendations aiming to preserve the remaining fragile water system installations.