Central and Southern Jordan in the Ayyubid Period: 

Historical and Archaeological Perspectives*

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Introduction

For most of the Islamic period central and southern Jordan has existed on the periphery of larger states.1 During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the political and economic life of the Muslim and Frankish polities of Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria) was dominated by cities like Damascus, Aleppo, Jerusalem and Acre. These urban centres contained the greatest concentrations of the military and civilian elite, and provided the largest markets for locally produced and imported commodities. Intellectual activity also prospered in such urban environments and, with few exceptions, it was the occupants of the cities of Bilad al-Sham who composed the histories of the Crusader states and the Ayyubid confederacy. These chronicles tend to reflect the interests of the ruling elites and generally pay rather less attention to rural areas. The lands between the Wadi Zarqa’ and the Red Sea – populated as they were by villages and small market towns – excited little interest among historians, and only Karak and Shawbak merit relatively regular mentions in the chronicles of the period.

This article concentrates on the regions of Jordan administered by Karak in the Ayyubid period (Fig. 1).2 The main focus is on the regions of Balqa’, Ard al-Karak and Sharat al-Jibal, but some comments are made about the Jordan valley, Dead Sea Ghawr, Wadi ‘Araba, the eastern desert, and the arid lands between the Shara’ escarpment and the Red

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1 This study developed out of research first presented in M. Milwright, Trade and Patronage in Middle Islamic Jordan: the Ceramics of Karak Castle (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1999). The author is currently working on a book that looks at the history and archaeology of Karak and its surrounding regions c. 1100–1650. The pottery from Karak was examined courtesy of the Department of Antiquities and Tourism in Jordan. My thanks to Dr Khalid Tarawneh and the staff of the Karak Castle Museum for their help during my visits in 2001 and 2003. Other valuable assistance was provided by Dr Robin Brown, Dr Jeremy Johns, Dr Jerry Mattingly, Dr Jihad Haroun, and Ms Rebecca Michaels. The map was prepared by Mr Chris Mundigler. The anonymous reviewers also provided numerous helpful criticisms of the initial draft of this paper.


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Sea coast (Hisma). The area of Jabal ‘Awf, with the towns of Jarash and ‘Ajlun, has a separate historical development in the Ayyubid period and is not addressed here. A number

3 The area corresponds to the list of the territories in the *mamlaka* of Karak written in c. 1300 by the geographer al-Dimashqi. He includes all of the lands south of the Wadi Zarqa including Azraq, Ma’an, Zughar at the south end of the Dead Sea, the east side of the Jordan valley, and the coast of the Red Sea. See al-Dimashqi, *Cosmographie de Chems-ed-Din Abou Abdallah Mohammed ed-Dimachqui*, ed. M. Mehren (St Petersburg, 1866), p. 213.

of questions arise out of a consideration of the events of the Ayyubid period in central and southern Jordan. First, what was the nature of the Ayyubid presence (comprising members of the Ayyubid family as well as the other members of the military and bureaucratic elite) in central and southern Jordan between 1188 and 1263. Second, how was the administration of the region organised during the different phases of the Ayyubid period. Third, what were the policy priorities of the Ayyubid princes who controlled Karak and its dependent territories. Fourth, what impact did these policies have on the economic development of Jordan in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Lastly, did the shift from Frankish to Ayyubid control have any impact on the direction and volume of trade in the region.

The extent to which these questions can be satisfactorily answered depends upon the quality of the available evidence, and this article seeks to build an overall picture of the Ayyubid period in central and southern Jordan through the correlation of findings drawn from historical and archaeological research. The main sources employed are: chronicles, geographical works, and travellers’ accounts; standing architecture and monumental inscriptions; and the results of selected excavations and field surveys (concentrating on the ceramic record). Each body of information has inherent strengths and weaknesses. The written sources provide a good general picture of the political history of Jordan in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Other information can be gleaned from the sources about the policies of the Ayyubid elite and administrative structure of the region, though there remain substantial lacunae in our knowledge. The architectural remains and monumental inscriptions of the period are an important source of information about the policy areas pursued by the Ayyubid elite. Ceramics and other items gathered on field surveys can be employed to provide a picture of medium- and long-term fluctuations in settlement through time as well as indicating the broad dynamics of localised trade and redistribution. Archaeological research in Jordan has led to the recovery of a number of excavated contexts containing artefacts dating to the Ayyubid period. These contexts provide information concerning the relative affluence of different socio-economic groups, as well as the extent to which the villages and towns of the region were connected into trading networks operating within Bilad al-Sham.

**Political History and Administration**

The construction of the castle of Montréal (Arabic: Shawbak) by King Baldwin I of Jerusalem in 1116 had important repercussions for the Muslim polities of the Middle East. The geographer Yaqut (d. 1229) notes that, “owing to the construction [of Shawbak] the passage from Egypt to Syria was blocked”. Not only did Shawbak stand on one of the main routes between Cairo and Damascus, but it also threatened the free traffic of Syrian pilgrims making the annual hajj to the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina. It is evident that one of the primary reasons for Baldwin’s decision to extend his authority into central and southern Jordan was the desire to extract payments from merchants and pilgrims passing through the region.

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through Jordan via the King’s Highway (darb al-malik, and also darb al-sultan and tariq al-rasif) and other routes further east. The Franks were also keen to consolidate their hold over the fertile and strategically significant lands of central and southern Jordan, and the first half of the twelfth century witnessed a surge of building activity culminating in the construction of Karak castle in the years after 1142. When Philip of Nablus assumed the title of baron of Oultrejouardin in 1161, the territories under his control stretched from the Wadi Zarqa’ to the Red Sea coast, including also the region of Hebron, and administrative responsibilities for the monastery of St Catherine’s in the Sinai.

Both Nur al-Din and Salah al-Din realised the critical importance of taking Jordan from the Franks. The presence of a series of Frankish fortifications – most importantly Karak, Shababek, Wu‘ayra, Amman, Tafila and Ayla – impeded communications between Egypt and Syria. Ayla (modern ‘Aqaba) fell to the forces of Salah al-Din in 1170, thus removing the only point of access the Franks had to the Red Sea. With the demise of the last Fatimid caliph in 1171, the kingdom of Jerusalem was faced with threats from Sunni Muslim rulers in Egypt and Syria. During the 1170s and 1180s Oultrejouardin was subjected to punitive attacks by Muslim armies, and the castle of Karak was besieged on several occasions. Doubtless, the strategic value and economic potential of the Frankish barony were the major factors behind the Zangid and Ayyubid military activity in the region, but an additional stimulus was also provided by the actions the last lord of Oultrejouardin, Reynald of Châtillon. He was installed as the baron of Oultrejouardin in 1177, and made use of this base to plan military operations including a raid on the hajj station at Tayma’ in 1181 and his notorious naval expedition in the Red Sea in the winter of 1182–83. It was Reynald’s breaking of the truce between the Franks and Salah al-Din that provided the Ayyubid sultan with the pretext for launching his decisive campaign against the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Captured after the battle of Hattin in 1187, Reynald was executed by Salah al-Din.

Karak, Shababek, and the other castles of Oultrejouardin surrendered to the armies of Salah al-Din in the years 1188–89. The castles and the surrounding regions formed part of

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9 On the identification of the other fortifications, see note 43.


the iqṭa’ of al-‘Adil, the sultan’s brother, and were given in return for the port of Ascalon. Al-‘Adil was to retain control of these territories after the death of Salah al-Din in 1193. Central and southern Jordan had a number of important assets. First, there were the natural resources of the region. The fertile plains of Balqa’, Ard al-Karak and Sharat al-Jibal were capable of producing regular agricultural surpluses, and the Jordan valley and Dead Sea regions were used for the cultivation of more specialised crops and possessed a range of mineral resources. Second, the bedouin of the southern and eastern deserts were important for their herds of sheep, goats, horses and camels. The bedouin could also be employed as auxiliary troops as well as for intelligence gathering. Third, Karak and Shawbak had already demonstrated their defensive qualities during the last years of Frankish rule. Al-‘Adil seems to have been well aware of this last factor for Karak became the location of one of his treasuries (the castle continued to function as a royal treasury throughout the Ayyubid period). Like his father, al-Mu’azzam ‘Isa also paid close attention to the administration of central and southern Jordan during his reign as sultan in Damascus (from 1198 under the tutelage of al-‘Adil and as an independent ruler 1218–27).

The negotiations conducted in 1218–19 between the Crusading army and the Ayyubids following the capture of the Egyptian port of Damietta cast an interesting light on the way in which central and southern Jordan was perceived in the period. The initial offer made to the occupying force for the return of Damietta comprised the fragments of the True Cross lost at the battle of Hattin, the release of captives, a thirty-year truce, and the return of the former lands of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, including the city of Jerusalem itself. The only territories excluded from the deal were Karak and Shawbak. Later, a sum of 30,000 besants was added as compensation for these two castles and their dependent lands. The negotiations broke down without agreement, and it is apparent that the future status of the Jordanian castles was a major sticking point. The Crusaders were well aware of the strategic importance of the castles, for Oliver of Paderborn (d. 1227), a witness to the events of the siege of Damietta, writes:

Now there are two places [i.e. Karak and Shawbak] located in Arabia, which have seven very strong fortresses through which merchants of the Saracens and pilgrims, going to Mecca or returning from it, usually cross; and whoever holds them in his power can seriously injure Jerusalem with her fields and vineyards when he wishes.

Similar strategic considerations may have been in the minds of Salah al-Din and Richard I during their peace talks almost thirty years earlier. Ambroise (fl. c. 1196) indicates that the

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14 For the list of territories allocated to members of the Ayyubid family in 1192, see Ibn al-Dawadari (1961–92), vii, pp. 120–122. See also Humphreys (1977), pp. 63–64, 75–77, 83.
sultan was unwilling to relinquish the castles,18 and the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi* claims that Karak (Crac) was among the few Frankish fortifications captured after Hattin to escape demolition.19

Al-Nasir Dawud b. al-Mu‘azzam was the next member of the Ayyubid family to be assigned central and southern Jordan. He assumed the title of sultan of Damascus in 1227 following the death of his father, but lost this sultanate two years later. From 1229 he ruled an amirate centred on the town of Karak. The extent of al-Nasir Dawud’s territories fluctuated, but in 1229 they comprised all of the lands of Jordan south of the Wadi Zarqa’ (except Shawbak), as well as the Jordan Valley, Nablus, and areas around Jerusalem.20 The 1230s and 1240s were marked by continual fighting over territory among the members of the Ayyubid family in Bilad al-Sham. The sultan of Egypt, al-Salih Ayyub (r. 1240–49), finally imposed himself over this unstable situation. Following a series of military campaigns in the 1240s only three independent Ayyubid princedoms remained: Salkhad, Banyas, and Karak.21 Karak was besieged in 1246 by the Egyptian army, and the town outside the castle was sacked.22 Al-Nasir Dawud finally lost his hold on the castles of Jordan in 1249 when, during an absence from Karak, his sons negotiated their surrender to the Egyptian sultan.23

Sultan al-Salih Ayyub was succeeded by his son al-Mu‘azzam Turanshah in 1249. The events of the new sultan’s short rule were to have unexpected repercussions in Jordan. Al-Mughith Fakhr al-Din ‘Umar, the son of the Ayyubid sultan al-‘Adil II, was exiled to Shawbak by the new sultan. Turanshah’s reign ended in his assassination in May 1250, and the Mamluk officer, al-Mu‘izz Aybak, assumed the sultanate in the same year. It was during this turbulent period that the governor of Karak and Shawbak, Badr al-Din al-Sawabi, released al-Mughith.24 Al-Mughith took advantage of the remaining money in al-Salih Ayyub’s treasury in Karak to build himself an army. One group hired first by the ruler of Damascus, and then al-Mughith in Karak was the Bahriyya under the command of Rukn al-Din Baybars (later sultan Baybars I). Al-Mughith’s political ambitions extended far beyond Jordan, and he made two somewhat optimistic (and unsuccessful) attempts to conquer Egypt.

The 1250s were a period of instability all over Bilad al-Sham. The military strength of the Franks was increased by the appearance of Louis IX’s army at Acre. Bands of Mamluks, Khwarizmians and other mercenaries were making themselves available for hire to the Ayyubid princes. These skilled soldiers proved to be unreliable allies, often choosing to raid the local countryside if they were dissatisfied with their pay. The largest threat to the continuing existence of the Ayyubid rulers of Bilad al-Sham however came from the east.

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21 Al-Salih Ayyub had suffered imprisonment in Karak for seven months in 1239–40. See *ibid.*, pp. 260–263.


23 For the rule of al-Nasir Dawud, see Gawanma (1982), pp. 231–280. On the surrender of Karak, see Humphreys (1977), pp. 296–297. Earlier in 1249 al-Nasir Dawud made an offer to al-Salih Ayyub to relinquish Karak in return for al-Shawbak and other compensation. He appears to have reneged on this offer when he learnt of the serious illness of al-Salih. For the eventful career of al-Nasir Dawud after 1249, see *ibid.*, p. 467, n. 47.

Al-Nasir Yusuf, the sultan of Damascus, tried unsuccessfully to elicit the military support of the Mamluk sultan Qutuz. Al-Nasir Yusuf was sent to his death in Tabriz following the Mongol invasion of Syria. Al-Mughith followed a different path offering his submission to the Mongols. The European emissary, William of Rubruck claims to have met a Christian in Damascus in 1254 who was carrying a message from the ruler of Karak offering to become a tributary and ally of the Mongols. The official appointed by Ilkhan Hulegu to oversee the administration of Karak did not reach the town before the Mongols were driven out of Syria by the Mamluk army.

In the aftermath of the Mamluk victory over the Mongol army at ‘Ayn Jalut in 1260, and the murder of Qutuz, a new sultan took power. Baybars followed a policy of territorial expansion based on a combination of vigorous diplomacy and military action. His desire to combat the twin threats of the Franks on the coast of Bilad al-Sham and the Mongols in the East was compromised by the presence of an Ayyubid prince in the stronghold of Karak. In 1261 the Mamluk sultan stormed the fortress at Shawbak, having first attempted to induce the troops stationed there to come over to his side. Karak was the next to be besieged, but Baybars was unable to take the castle by force of arms. The siege did have the effect of encouraging defections from al-Mughith’s camp and, in 1263, Baybars managed to lure the Ayyubid prince to negotiations in Baysan. Despite the offer of safe passage, al-Mughith was arrested and tried on the charge of having conspired with the Mongols. His sons chose to surrender the castle of Karak to the Mamluk sultan. According to the chronicler Ibn ‘Abd al-Zahir (d. 1292), one of al-Mughith’s sons was given an iqt. at Dhiban in Balqa’ province.

The status of central and southern Jordan fluctuated between 1188 and 1263. For the majority of this time the region remained under the direct control of the sultan in Damascus (or, less often, Cairo). Karak was the most important administrative centre, with other officials placed in secondary local centres. During the reigns of al-Nasir Dawud (after 1229) and al-Mughith ‘Umar, Karak functioned as the capital of an autonomous amirate. The period between 1188 and 1250 provides a few references to state functionaries. Badr al-Din Sawabi is recorded as the governor (nā′ib) of the region appointed by sultan al-Salih Ayyub in 1249. The significance of the governor of Karak is hinted at by a later governor of the region, Khalil al-Zahiri (d. 1468). He notes that, in Syria, only the governors of Damascus and Karak were permitted to carry out their official correspondence on red paper. This honour was a survival from the Ayyubid period. Qal’a Ayla possessed its own governor, and the names of two, ‘Ali b. Sakhtkaman and Husam al-Din Bakhil, appear in inscriptions.
from the site. Ibn ‘Abd al-Zahir observes that Kelbalso had the responsibility to act as arbiter (muh.akkim) between the state and the tribes, but this relationship was given a more institutionalised character under al-Adil through the creation of the imārat al-arab. The holder of the title of amīr al-arab received a substantial iqṭā’

36 For a discussion of this term, see H. Gibb, Studies on the Civilization of Islam, eds. S. Shaw and W. Polk (Princeton, 1962), p. 76, n. 32.
37 R. Dozy, Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes (Leiden, 1881), ii, p. 251.
40 Maqrizi (1934–72), i, pp. 481, 493.
in return for an oath of loyalty to the sultan. Al-Mughith appears to have made extensive use of bedouin, and it seems likely that close relationships were also cultivated between the administrators in Karak and the Arab tribes in earlier periods. These relationships continued to be the cornerstone of Mamluk policy in Jordan through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Baybars himself seems to have conducted negotiations near Petra with the leaders of Banu Mahdi as early as 1254.

**Ayyubid Patronage in Central and Southern Jordan**

The investment in southern Jordan by the Ayyubid elite was directed at several priorities. Security remained a major concern through the Ayyubid period, and monies were allocated for the establishment or repair of military installations in the region. These sites were also manned with soldiers and administrative staff. The fortresses and smaller watchtowers that dotted the lands south of the Wadi Zarqa’ performed a range of functions. The Franks had not given up the desire to reclaim southern Jordan, and it was this system of installations that could repel any attempted re-conquest of these fertile and strategically significant lands. The defensive qualities of castles like Karak and Shawbak also proved to be useful against threats posed by other Ayyubid rulers and, latterly, the Mamluks in Egypt. The military presence was also directed at internal security; there was a need to safeguard the villagers of the region from bedouin attacks as well as the commercial travellers and hajj pilgrims passing through. Other investment focused on the maintenance of the infrastructure of the region, including the construction of roads and the support of specialised agriculture. Lastly, the Ayyubids had a responsibility to construct and maintain mosques and shrines in Jordan.

The Ayyubids inherited a network of Frankish military installations, but not all of these fortifications were renovated in the period between 1188 and 1263. The differing fates of some of the minor castles and watchtowers of the Crusader period can be briefly sketched. Salah al-Din focussed his attention on the construction of a substantial castle on the island now known as Jazirat al-Fara’un or Île de Graye, and it is unclear whether the Ayyubids

41 For this institution, see M. Hiyari, “The origins and development of the amirate of the Arabs during the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XXXVIII (1975), pp. 509–524.


43 The precise number and location of the Frankish castles of Oultrejouardain remains the subject of debate. Jacques of Vitry and Oliver of Paderborn both claim that there were seven strong fortresses dependent upon Karak and Shawbak, though neither writer gives their names. Five can be identified with reasonable accuracy: Amman, Tafila, Wu’ayra, al-Habis and Ayla / Aqaba. The other two forts known in Latin sources as “Celle” (and Sal in Arabic) and “Hurmus” may be identified with Khirbat al-Sil’a and Khirbat al-Hurmuz respectively. See D. Pringle, “Crusader castles in Jordan”, in *The Archaeology of Jordan*, eds. B. MacDonald, R. Adams and P. Bienkowski (Sheffield, 2001), pp. 678–681. Somewhat different interpretations are offered in C. Brookier and E.-A. Knauf, “Review of Prawer, Joshua: Crusader Institutions”, *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Ver eins*, CXIII (1999), pp. 491–494. Ibn al-Athir’s list of castles that surrendered to Salah al-Din includes all of the sites given above, with the exception of Amman and Tafila. Perhaps these two had ceased to have any military function before the end of the Frankish period? Ibn al-Athir, ‘Izz al-Din ‘Ali b. Muhammad, *Extrait de la chronique intitulée ‘Kamel-al-tevarykh’*, in *RHCHOr*, I, p. 734.

44 For an architectural and historical study of this site, see Mouton and ‘Abd al-Malik (1995).
also chose to maintain the Frankish fortress on the coast at Ayla after 1170.\textsuperscript{45} The construction of the fortress on the island in the Red Sea formed part of a larger chain of installations along the southern route through the Sinai (\textit{tariq Sadr wa Ayla}).\textsuperscript{46} The castle of Wu’ayra (Vaux Moïse), near to Wadi Musa, continued in use for a short period after 1188–89, but with a considerably diminished military capacity. Excavations have revealed that the collapse of the curtain wall remained unrepaird in the post-Frankish phase, though the fallen masonry was removed from the defensive moat. A metal foundry was established in the castle while areas around the eastern and north-eastern towers were converted for domestic occupation. No evidence of permanent occupation was detected above the last destruction layer (possibly from an earthquake of 1201–1202).\textsuperscript{47} Another installation in the vicinity, al–Habis (in Petra), ceased to have any strategic function and was probably not maintained after 1188–89.\textsuperscript{48}

The watchtower at Taﬁla may well be the site of the Frankish fortress mentioned in a Latin document dated 1239 that lists the castles of Oultrejouardain.\textsuperscript{49} The present structure has been dated to the Ottoman period, though it appears to make use of older masonry. In the absence of inscriptions or written references to Ayyubid work at Taﬁla, it is likely that the structure was not the subject of extensive reconstruction between 1188 and 1263. A small, square tower about 8 m high and built of large dressed blocks and reused columns is located at the south end of the citadel in Amman (Fig. 2). Latin sources do mention “Ahamant” among the castles within the barony of Oultrejouardain,\textsuperscript{50} though recent surveys indicate the watchtower on the citadel is an Ayyubid construction dating to the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{51} No trace of any Frankish fortification has been discovered elsewhere on the Amman citadel. Alan Walmesly notes that this tower on the citadel is much smaller than the castle at Salt, and suggests that the settlement at Amman declined in importance in the Ayyubid period.\textsuperscript{52}

The forts known in the sources as Celle and Hurmus have not been conclusively identified, and suggests that the settlement at Amman declined in importance in the Ayyubid period.\textsuperscript{52} The forts known in the sources as Celle and Hurmus have not been conclusively identified, and no speculations are offered on their status under the Ayyubids.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{45} It is unclear whether a Frankish or Ayyubid fortified structure exists beneath the late Mamluk castle at ‘Aqaba. Current excavations on the site may resolve this question. See comments in Walmesly (2001), p. 532.


\textsuperscript{48} It may be that this site also continued in some reduced capacity between 1188–89 and the earthquake of 1201–1202, but this cannot be confirmed without excavation. For a survey and historical discussion of this castle, see P. Hammond, \textit{The Crusader Fort on el–Habis, Petra: its Survey and Interpretation}, Middle East Center, University of Utah, Research Monographs, II. (Salt Lake City, 1970). Also comments in L. Marino et al., “Crusader settlement in Petra”, \textit{Fortress}, VII (1996), pp. 4–5; D. Pringle, \textit{Secular Buildings in the Crusader Kingdom: an Architectural Gazetteer} (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 49–50, no. 97; Pringle (2001), p. 681.


\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Tabulae ordinis Theutonici}, ed. E. Strehlke (Berlin, 1869), p. 3, no. 3; Pringle (2001), pp. 679–680.


\textsuperscript{52} Walmesly (2001), p. 530.

\textsuperscript{53} Interestingly, Sal’a is listed in the territories of Karak in c.1300. It is not stated whether it was still functioning as a fort by this time (the account may, however, contain anachronistic data). See Dimashqi (1866), p. 213.
Fig. 2. Watchtower at the south end of the citadel in Amman. Probably first half of the thirteenth century. Photograph: author.

The most important castle, Karak, could not be ignored for long by the Ayyubids (Fig. 4). It seems likely that the castle and the defences of the town would have suffered considerable damage as the result of the sieges in the 1170s and 1180s. William of Tyre’s (d. c. 1186) account of the siege of Karak in 1183 indicates that the defences to the town were breached, because he mentions that the Muslim soldiers found the houses “well stocked with grain, barley, wine and oil”.54 William’s description implies that the settlement outside of the castle was not walled, though there are sections of the present city wall on the east side constructed of crude masonry in a manner reminiscent of construction in the Frankish phases of the castle fortifications. Presumably the Ayyubids retained anything that had not been undermined during the sieges. For instance, the north front of the castle is Frankish work and has survived largely intact through later reconstructions.55 Salah al-Din bombarded the castle from the south, and the damage caused by this necessitated the construction of a new keep at the southern end of the inner ward of the castle.56 This may have been one of the projects

Fig. 3. Masonry on the western side of the summit of Jabal al-Qal’a in Salt. Photograph: author.
ordered by al-‘Adil in 1192.\(^{57}\) Two other inscriptions, now attached to the outer wall of Karak’s main mosque (on the site formerly occupied by the Latin church), record further construction work by the amir Sarim al-Din Barghash al-‘Adil in 594/1197.\(^{58}\) According to al-‘Ayni (d. 1451), the fortifications of Karak were also improved by al-Nasir Dawud in 1244–45.\(^{59}\)

One of the most active patrons was the sultan of Damascus al-Mu’azzam ‘Isa. In Karak he commissioned the construction of a subterranean tunnel into the town in 624/1227. According to the inscription, the work was overseen by Shams al-Din Sunqur al-Mu’azzam.\(^{60}\) The sultan also ordered the improvement of the hajj road leading south from the Syrian capital, though only the section between the southern towns of Mu’ta and Ma’an was ever completed.\(^{61}\) An inscription from ‘Aqaba records that al-Mu’azzam ‘Isa ordered the construction of a khan there in 610/1213.\(^{62}\) The work was carried out by the ustadh-dar Abu Mansur Aybak under the administration of Shuja’ al-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Abd Allah.

The historian al-‘Umari (d. 1347) records that the sultan was responsible for the construction of castles at Salt and Azraq.\(^{63}\) There is no evidence to suggest that the Franks built any form of military installation at Salt, though ruins of more ancient structures may have occupied the area. The initial impetus for the construction of the castle at Salt in 1220 does not appear to have been as a defence against a Frankish threat from the west, but the need to protect passing caravans from raiding by local bedouin.\(^{64}\) The castle was maintained through the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, and was probably destroyed by Ibrahim Pasha between 1831 and 1840 (most of Jabal al-Qal’a is now covered with modern housing). The plan of the Ayyubid structure is unknown, but descriptions and photographs made by European travellers indicate that there were substantial stone towers and walls with fosses surrounding the upper part of the hill.\(^{65}\) Several courses of rusticated masonry of uncertain date can still be seen on the western side of the summit of the hill (Fig. 3). The plateau or

\(^{57}\) Baha’ al-Din (1969), p. 358; Ibn al-Athir (1969), ii, pp. 73, 76. Unfortunately, the authors do not specify the projects undertaken by al-‘Adil.


\(^{59}\) Al-‘Ayni, Badr al-Din Mahmud ibn Ahmad, Le collier de perles (‘Iqd al-juman fi ta’rikh abl al-zaman) in RHCHOr., II pt.2, p. 198; Deschamps (1939), p. 77.

\(^{60}\) RCEA, X, pp. 245–246, no. 3965.


\(^{62}\) RCEA, X, pp. 84–85, no. 3720.

\(^{63}\) Ibn Fadl Allah al-‘Umari, Shihab al-Din Ahmad b. Yahya, Masalik al-absar fi mamalik al-amsar, ed. A. Sayyid, Textes Arabes et Études Islamiques, XXXII (Cairo, 1985), p. 120.

\(^{64}\) Bakhit (1995), p. 999. A similar reason is given for the construction of Qal’at al-Rahad after 1188. Ibn Shaddad claims that the castle was intended to reduce the raiding by the Banu ‘Awf. Cited in Humphreys (1977), p. 77.

Fig. 4. View of Karak castle from the south showing the remains of the Ayyubid keep below the current Mamluk structure. Photograph: author.

summit is now occupied by a mosque, but in the early twentieth century the remains of a large oblong structure constructed of undressed stone were still visible in this area.66

The basalt fortress at Azraq was first built in the late Roman period (perhaps under Diocletian), but contains evidence of extensive later reconstruction. The inscription above the main gate gives the date of the reconstruction of the castle (qasr) as 634/1237, and names the former ustadh-dar of al-Mu’azzam ‘Isa, Izz al-Din Aybak, and the two individuals who directed the building work, ‘Ali b. al-Hajib and ‘Ali b. Qarjala.67 If al-‘Umari is correct in his attribution, then the rebuilding work must have started some years earlier during the rule of al-Mu’azzam ‘Isa. The Ayyubid work in the ancient castrum is impressive in scope encompassing the reconstruction of towers, outer walls, inner chambers, and the erection of a small, rather sombre mosque in the courtyard. A small square fort known as Qasr al-Shabib, located on a high point overlooking the Zarqa’ river, is also believed to be thirteenth-century in date.68

The external walls and towers of Shawbak castle were constructed in the early Mamluk period, with much of the work attributed to sultan Lajin in the last years of the thirteenth century.69 The Mamluk walls probably encase the rather smaller Frankish and Ayyubid

66 Duncan (1928), p. 29, pl. VII.1.
castle, but the complex structural history of the outer walls has yet to be investigated in detail. Robin Brown, the excavator of the four-iwan “palace complex”, suggests that the first phase of this structure belongs to the reign of al-Mu‘azzam ‘Isa.\(^7\) The type of royal enclosure seen in Shawbak appears to have been a feature of Zengid and Ayyubid structures in Syria.\(^7\) Other construction work can be seen in Wadi al-Bustan below Shawbak castle, including the remains of a mill, possibly dating to the Ayyubid period, that is believed to have been used for the processing of sugar cane. There are also other features that may have functioned to divert water from nearby springs for agricultural purposes.\(^7\) An inscription found on the door of a shrine east of Shawbak records the construction of a building by the amir Sharaf al-Din ‘Isa b. Khalil b. Muqatil in 646/1248.\(^7\) This may be identified as the shrine now associated with the local saint, Abu Sulayman al-Dirani.\(^7\)

The majority of the money spent by al-Mughith ‘Umar between 1250 and 1263 was directed toward the assembling of military forces, but there is one piece of evidence for architectural patronage in the early years of his occupancy of Karak. An inscription found outside the western walls of Karak describes the construction of an unspecified building (perhaps a mosque or shrine) in 651/1253 by an individual called Jamal al-Din Natr known by the title of al-majlīs al-sāmi ("the lofty council") who probably acted as the representative (wāli) of the prince.\(^7\) The name of the person responsible for the commission has been erased – perhaps as a form of damnatio memoriae ordered by Sultan Baybars or a Mamluk governor – but the date helps identify the patron as al-Mughith ‘Umar.

### Settlement Patterns and Agricultural Productivity

Central and southern Jordan was important to both the Franks and the Ayyubids for strategic and economic reasons. The significance of the roads leading through central and southern Jordan is easy to establish in the historical record, but the same sources are less helpful, however, for evaluating the settlement density and the income generated by the lands of south of the Wadi Zarqa’ between 1188 and 1263. The earliest surviving cadastral records for the region date to the sixteenth century, and the anecdotal references from the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries provide rather conflicting information.

In his study of the settlement patterns on the Karak plateau, Jeremy Johns combines the evidence from the available historical sources and archaeological data.\(^7\) He acknowledges

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\(^7\) For the inscriptions recording building work of the early Mamluk period see RCEA, XII, pp. 224–225, no. 4735; XIII, pp. 176–178, nos. 5048–5051.


\(^7\) Ibid., p. 227.

\(^7\) The tentative identification of the sugar mill is given in Brooker and Knauf (1988), p. 185. As noted by the authors, the climate around Shawbak is not ideal for the cultivation of sugar cane. Given that sugar cane must be processed within three hours of being cut, it seems unlikely that cane was being transported from estates in the Wadi ‘Arabá to Wadi al-Bustan. Interestingly, the fourteenth-century Italian merchant, Balducci Pegolotti notes the sugar of “Cranco di Monreale”. See F. Balducci Pegolotti, *Practica della mercatura*. ed. A. Evans (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), p. 395.

\(^7\) RCEA, XI, pp. 183–184, no. 4278.

\(^7\) This building is discussed by Walmsley where a date in the Mamluk period is suggested. See Walmsley (2001), p. 536, Fig. 15.11.


\(^7\) Johns (1995).
the historical evidence for short-term destruction caused by military conflict, bedouin raiding, and natural disasters, but suggests that a critical reading of the sources combined with an analysis of the results of survey work and excavation leads to an alternative picture of long-term settlement patterns. He concludes that levels of settlement did not experience the extreme reduction believed to have occurred in the Abbasid-Fatimid period, and that population levels remained relatively high from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. Johns provides a coherent and persuasive analysis of settlement on the Karak plateau through the whole Islamic period, but concentration on a shorter time frame (the period from 1188–1263) is likely to provide a somewhat different picture.

It is a reasonable, if unproveable, assumption that the turbulent political history of Jordan during the Ayyubid period had a detrimental effect on the productivity of the agricultural economy. For instance, Salah al-Din’s sieges of Karak in 1183–84 were accompanied by the systematic destruction of crops on the Karak Plateau and in the area around Shawbak. Such collective punishments must have brought significant hardship to the inhabitants of the region. Further, raiding of villages by bedouin and disaffected soldiers occurred in periods when the authorities in Karak and Damascus were unable to maintain their authority. The writings of the German pilgrim, Thietmar who visited the Karak plateau in 1217 suggest that poverty was widespread in the villages and towns of the region in the early thirteenth century. The instability of the last decades of Ayyubid rule may also have caused medium-term damage to the rural economy. Baybars al-Mansuri (d.1325), who served as governor of Karak between 1286 and 1291, makes much of his own efforts to revive agricultural production during his time in office. In his account he is keen to contrast the dilapidated state of the region as he found it with the improved situation he was able to create there (of course, his comments could also be read as an implicit criticism of previous Mamluk governors of Karak).

Other anecdotal information paints a more positive picture of settlement levels and agricultural production in central and southern Jordan during the Ayyubid period. Writing in the 1180s, the Spanish pilgrim, Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217), who visited Palestine in 1184, stated that the area controlled by Karak contained 400 villages. This estimate should be viewed with some caution – particularly given that the traveller did not visit Jordan – but it does suggest that the fertile plains of central and southern Jordan remained populous in the late twelfth century. The productivity of the plain north of the Wadi al-Mujib is also indicated by a reference that in 1192 the sultan made arrangements for 16,000 sacks of wheat to be sent

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78 Thietmar (1851), pp. 46–47. Of course, Thietmar may have wanted his readers to draw an unfavourable comparison between the supposedly careful stewardship of the land under the Franks with the mismanagement of the later Muslim rulers.
annually to Jerusalem from Balqa’ and Salt. The fine quality of wheat from the region of Amman is noted by the geographer Yaqut. Al-Mu’azzam ‘Isa seems to have taken an active interest in promoting the cultivation of the area around Shawbak. According to the Syrian geographer and historian, Ibn Shaddad (d. 1285), the sultan brought fruit trees from many other regions such that Shawbak came to resemble the gardens of Damascus. The economic and strategic value of Shawbak was sufficient to induce the Egyptian sultan al-Kamil to offer his cousin al-Nasir Daud the sum of 16,000 dinars for its purchase. The Jordan valley and Dead Sea Ghawr were also valued for their mineral resources (such as copper, asphalt, sulphur, and salt) and specialised agriculture. Most important was the cultivation of sugar, though indigo, figs, dates, bananas and citrus fruit were other cash crops. The early Mamluk period probably represented the most intensive period of activity, but the descriptions of the Dead Sea Ghawr and Jordan valley by Jacques of Vitry (d. c. 1240) and Yaqut show that the cultivation and processing of sugar cane were well established under the Ayyubids. The remains of sugar mills are common in the region, but the published evidence does not provide a means to isolate those mills that were constructed, or in use during the Ayyubid period.

Archaeological field surveys can contribute a different perspective on fluctuations in levels of settlement. Field surveys tend to concentrate on the identification of extant or ruined architecture and the collection of surface artefacts. The great advantage of surveys is that they provide a quick, and relatively cheap means to isolate the phases of occupation within a defined area. Often this dating relies on the ceramics gathered from the near vicinity of a given “site”, though it should be noted that the Islamic ceramics gathered on surveys frequently lack precise chronological parameters. In other words, studies of settlement patterns based on survey data do not tend to focus on periods of decades, preferring to identify changes occurring over periods of centuries. With this qualification in mind, the comments made below do not seek to draw sharp distinctions between dynastic phases preferring instead to isolate broader patterns visible in the period from the twelfth to the fourteenth century.

The Karak plateau has been the subject of a number of field surveys and makes a good starting point for the discussion. Most relevant for the present purpose is the Miller and

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81 Baha’ al-Din (1969), p. 300. Iron ore may have been smelted at sites near the Wadi Zarqa’ during the Ayyubid period. See R. Coughenour, “Preliminary report on the exploration and excavation of Mugharot el-Wardeh and Abu Thawab”, ADI, XXI (1976), pp. 71–78.
82 Yaqut (1866–70), i, p. 728.
85 Jacques of Vitry, Historia Hierosolymitana, in Gesta Dei Francos, sive orientalium expeditionum et regni Francorum Hierosolymitani, I, pt. 2, ed. J. Bongars (Hanover, 1611), liii (pp. 1075–1076); Yaqut (1866–70), iv, 51.
Pinkerton survey because of the wealth of information it provided about settlement and economic activity during the Islamic period. The ceramic record indicates that the period from the twelfth to the end of the fourteenth century marked a peak in the levels of sedentary occupation on the plateau, only exceeded by the later Byzantine period (fifth and sixth centuries). Pottery dated to the “Ayyubid-Mamluk” period has been found on almost all sites on the Karak plateau. The high number of villages on the plateau in this phase accords with the general picture of rural prosperity suggested in many of the historical sources, but the nature of the ceramics from the survey provide another, contrasting image. The widespread abandonment of wheelthrown pottery in favour of vessels made by hand is the dominant feature of the material culture of villages from the twelfth century (Fig. 5).

Though inferior in most technical respects to wheelthrown vessels, handmade wares did have the advantage that they could be made within villages using a minimum of specialised equipment. There was clearly a financial benefit to such localised manufacturing processes, but the extensive adoption of handmade pottery does also suggest that the villagers of the plateau no longer enjoyed much access to the specialised products of urban centres in Palestine and Syria. It is possible that the periods of political instability from the 1170s to the mid thirteenth century encouraged the inhabitants to make the pottery vessels they needed in their villages. Once established this craft continued into periods of greater prosperity in the second half of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The survey of the plateau also led to the recovery of much smaller quantities of wheelthrown and glazed wares. These are ceramics manufactured by specialists, often located in urban environments, and the presence of such items on rural sites indicates the involvement of the inhabitants of the Karak plateau in commercial exchange networks. Some glazed wares would have been manufactured in places like Karak, Balqa’, and the southern Ghawr, but there are also examples of imports from southern Syria and Palestine. The highest concentrations of glazed wares occurred on sites in close proximity to Karak, and those on


90 I owe this observation to Jeremy Johns.

Fig. 5. Handmade jug with slip-painted decoration. Thirteenth or fourteenth century. Karak Castle Museum. Photograph: author.
either side of the King’s Highway. The distribution of lead-glazed earthenwares illustrates the central role played by Karak as both the main economic centre and the market where these imports could be purchased. Further, it is evident that the majority of the imported wares found their way onto the plateau by means of the King’s Highway, with smaller quantities arriving from Palestine via the south end of the Dead Sea. In the case of stonepaste wares, there is little to support the idea that such luxury wares were a feature of village life in the late Frankish or Ayyubid periods. No securely dated examples of late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century stonepaste wares were recovered outside of the town of Karak.

Balqa’ province shares some of the general characteristics of the Karak plateau. The same high level of settlement occurred from the twelfth to the end of the fourteenth century. Most settlement was concentrated in villages, with small towns like Salt, Amman and Hasban functioning as the economic centres. Again, the ceramic record is dominated by handmade wares, though examples of Syrian and Palestinian imported ceramics are present in the assemblages. One type of sgraffito ware may have been manufactured in the north of Balqa’ and exported to other regions in Bilad al-Sham during the Ayyubid period. To the south, the settlements of the southern Ghawr and Wadi ‘Araba contained significant quantities of handmade wares, but there is also some evidence of greater economic activity generated by trade and industry, as well as the limited importation of glazed stonepaste wares from Syria. With the exception of Shawbak (see below), the area south of the Wadi al-Hasa appears to have been the least economically developed part of Jordan. The handmade pottery tends to be cruder in quality than further north, while imported wheelthrown and glazed wares are very rare.

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92 The distribution of glazed ceramics on the plateau is discussed in Brown (2000).

93 Stonepaste is the artificial paste made from white ball clay, ground quartz and ground glass frit (or ground glass) used in the manufacture of the majority of high quality glazed wares in the Middle East from the twelfth century. It is also known as frit ware or, incorrectly, as faience. For a general review of the stonepaste wares of Ayyubid Syria, see C. Tonghini, “The fine wares of Ayyubid Syria”, in Cobalt and Lustre. The First Centuries of Islamic Pottery, ed. E. Grube, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, IX (Oxford and New York, 1994), pp. 249–257.

94 The distribution of glazed ceramics on the plateau is discussed in Brown (2000).


96 For instance, writing in the 1420s, Khalil al-Zahiri estimates that Balqa’ contained 300 villages. His information is probably somewhat anachronistic, however. See (1894), p. 46.

97 This widely incised style of decoration is found over a wide area stretching from Tripoli and Damascus in the north to Karak in the south. See Milwright (2003), pp. 87–91.


99 For an example of a late twelfth-century stonepaste shard from al-Rujum, see MacDonald (1987), pl. 35.c.

Ceramics dating to the Ayyubid period have been identified on a number of excavations conducted in central and southern Jordan. It is beyond the scope of this article to review all of the published archaeological evidence for the late twelfth and early thirteenth century in the region, but a selection illustrating a range of site functions is presented here. Glazed and decorated ceramics are the main focus of attention in the following comments because these wares can be most accurately dated and also may be taken as signs of increased economic activity on a site. The available archaeological evidence suggests that lead-glazed earthenwares (both plain glazed and decorated) were manufactured in numerous workshops dispersed around southern Bilad al-Sham. With some exceptions, the unit cost of such wares was relatively low and the distribution was localised. This may be contrasted with the higher cost and long-distance distribution patterns of the decorated stonepaste wares produced in Syria. These, and the even more luxurious Chinese imports, are often indicators of the presence of members of the political elites on a given site.

The only published excavation in Karak castle was conducted in the group of structures near to the southern keep that have been identified as a palatial complex of the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{101} Ceramics dating to the late twelfth and early thirteenth century have been found elsewhere on the site in unstratified deposits (Fig. 6).\textsuperscript{102} Unlike all other twelfth- and thirteenth-century sites in central and southern Jordan, handmade ceramics constitute a small proportion of the overall assemblage. The lead-glazed earthenwares included a range of sgraffito wares, a few from the Frankish sites on the Mediterranean coast (Fig. 6.2), with the majority probably imported from Balqa’ or central and northern Palestine (Fig. 6.3).\textsuperscript{103} Perhaps the most significant finds are the glazed stonepaste wares, because these provide evidence of importation from Syria (Fig. 6.4–6). Recent petrographic analysis suggests that Damascus functioned as the principal manufacturing centre for the stonepaste vessels circulating in the south of Bilad al-Sham during the late twelfth and early thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{104} For instance, the polychrome painted stonepaste bowl (Fig. 6.5) fits into a known Damascene group. Robert Mason’s revised chronology for the “Ayyubid” occupation phase at the Armenian Garden in Jerusalem, and the recent excavations in the Damascus citadel both give a chronological range for this decorated ware between \( c. 1150 \) and \( 1200 \).\textsuperscript{105} At the top end of the scale, the finds from Karak included a variety of Chinese wares that can be dated to the Ayyubid period, though Far Eastern imports become a more common feature during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

The excavation of the palace complex in Shawbak castle revealed evidence of construction and use in the Ayyubid and early Mamluk periods followed by village settlement in the late Mamluk or Ottoman period. No evidence was recovered that would indicate the absolute


\textsuperscript{102} The ceramics from the site are discussed in greater detail in Milwright (1999).

\textsuperscript{103} For the widely-incised sgraffito, see Brown in Müller (1991), p. 236; Milwright (2003), pp. 87–91.


Fig. 6. Twelfth- and early thirteenth-century pottery from Karak castle: 1. Handmade unglazed earthenware with bands of red slip; 2. Sgraffito bowl with dark green glaze (interior and lip of exterior), unglazed on exterior; 3. Widely incised sgraffito bowl, yellow and green glaze on interior; 4. Stonepaste bowl with black under a transparent alkaline glaze; 5. Stonepaste bowl with black, red-brown and blue under a transparent alkaline glaze; 6. Stonepaste bowl with turquoise alkaline glaze.

dating of the initial phase of construction, though it was probably during the time when al-Mu‘azzam ‘Isa controlled the castle (1197–1227). Surprisingly, the two phases (I and II) dated by the excavators to the Ayyubid period were dominated by handmade wares and contained only one glazed shard. The complex evidently underwent a series of alterations, perhaps as the result of a structural collapse in the reception hall in the mid thirteenth century.

Phase III, associated with the reconstruction and subsequent reoccupation, contained a much more varied assemblage of glazed wares, including Syrian stonepaste wares and a fragment of a Chinese celadon bowl. Robin Brown places the beginning of phase III in c.1260, though the dating of the earliest imported ceramics could allow the *terminus post quem* to be placed in the later Ayyubid period.107

Excavations in Wu‘ayra have uncovered phases of occupation through the twelfth century. The Franks may have constructed a castle on the site as early as 1108, though the present structure probably dates from the 1140s. The Ayyubids downgraded the status of Wu‘ayra, and there is evidence for increased domestic occupation as well as industrial activity on the site. The two excavations conducted on the site both found evidence of phases of occupation during and after the period of Frankish settlement. While locally produced handmade pottery was ubiquitous in all phases, it is striking that the most diverse assemblages (including some examples of Syrian stonepaste wares) have been dated to the decades prior to the capture of the castle by the Ayyubids in 1188–89. Though the exact chronology is unclear, it seems likely that the inhabitants of Wu‘ayra continued to enjoy some access to the lead-glazed ceramics produced in the south of Bilad al-Sham in the early period of Ayyubid control (identified as phase IV in the excavations directed by Vannini). In the subsequent phases (commencing soon after 1200) the ceramic assemblages are composed exclusively of handmade wares, probably indicating that the site no longer performed any military or administrative function.108

Excavations at the Roman fortress of Lajjun, located east of Karak, led to the recovery of an assemblage of Islamic ceramics dating from the twelfth century through to the Ottoman period.109 Most important for the present purposes was a deposit found in area C.8 beneath a coin of 1196–1218, though thirteenth-century material was found in less precisely dated contexts elsewhere in area C. The high proportion of imported glazed and unglazed pottery from this excavated area is an unusual feature not seen on sites in the vicinity of Lajjun. Written sources from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century describe Lajjun as a convenient stop on the route of the Syrian hajj, and it was also the site of a meeting in 1231 between the prince of Karak, al-Nasir Dawud and his uncle, the Egyptian sultan, al-Malik al-Kamil.110 Brown is cautious about making an explicit link between the latter event and the shards from the excavations, but she is likely correct in suggesting that the regular, but transient presence of wealthy pilgrims at Lajjun accounts for the unexpected richness of the excavated finds.

Hasban operated as one of the local economic and administrative centres in Balqa’, and excavations on the site have provided evidence for near continuous occupation from the late twelfth through to the end of the fourteenth century. Importantly, the presence of numerous

coins allowed for the isolation of two main phases of occupation (c. 1200–60 and c. 1260–1400) in areas C and D. The end of the first phase was marked by extensive structural collapses. Locally produced handmade pottery is the dominant component in the ceramic assemblages of both the “Ayyubid” and “Mamluk” phases at Hasban. It is noticeable that the presence of wheelthrown and glazed wares is very sparse in the earlier “Ayyubid” phase on the site. Though the sample in the “Mamluk” phase is still small, finds of lead-glazed and underglaze-painted stonepaste wares indicate increasing economic interaction with other regions in southern Bilad al-Sham. The ongoing excavations at Hasban should provide more information concerning the material culture of the building complexes constructed during the early Mamluk period.

Conclusion

This article has presented a brief survey of the historical and archaeological evidence for the Ayyubid period in central and southern Jordan. A set of general questions were posed in the introduction, and the concluding remarks will assess the degree to which they are answered by the available data. The historical record allows us to identify the members of the Ayyubid family who controlled central and southern Jordan between 1188 and 1263. For most of the period, Karak was the administrative centre, with ultimate authority residing with the ruler of Damascus or, less frequently, Cairo. For shorter phases, under al-Nasir Dawud and al-Mughith Umair, Karak became the capital of an autonomous amirate. It should not be assumed, however, that having an Ayyubid prince in permanent residence assured prosperity for the region, for the most extensive investment in the defences and infrastructure of central and southern Jordan occurred during the reigns of al-‘Adil and his son al-Mu’azzam ‘Isa.

The architectural contribution made by the Ayyubids is less conspicuous than that of the Latin settlers earlier in the twelfth century. The Franks had a clear set of ideological and economic goals that necessitated the construction of a network of castles and watchtowers. To some extent, the Ayyubids needed only to repair and maintain what they had acquired in 1188–89, but the abandonment of some Frankish installations (such as Wu’ayra) and the creation of new fortresses and towers at Qal‘at Ayla, Salt, Amman, Azraq, and possibly Zarqa’, suggests that there were significant shifts in strategic priorities. The Red Sea fort of Qal‘at Ayla forms part of a defensive chain that stretches west along the route through the Sinai to Cairo, while the fort at Azraq perhaps points to the increased importance of the Syrian desert and the routes to Iraq. The structure at Salt was intended to prevent the raiding of merchants and pilgrims, but would also have provided a means to protect the lucrative farm lands of Balqa’ and the eastern side of the Jordan valley. Karak and Shawbak were both extensively renovated at different times during the late twelfth and early thirteenth century.


though the presence of many new structures dating to the rules of the Mamluk sultans Baybars, Qalawun and Lajin may indicate that both castles were in some disrepair at the end of the Ayyubid period.

The religious architecture of central and southern Jordan presents an intriguing picture. Some Latin churches were converted into mosques, but there are no references to the establishment of madrasas or other religious institutions. Although the region also contained several important shrines, evidence of Ayyubid patronage is difficult to locate. Thietmar claims that the Orthodox church at the shrine of Aaron was inhabited by two Greek monks at the time of his visit in 1217, and the mosque that now occupies the summit of Jabal Harun is generally dated to the fourteenth century.113 There are no surviving inscriptions to indicate that the Ayyubids ordered construction at either the tombs of the martyrs from the battle of Mu'ta or the cave (al-Kalaf) of the seven sleepers at al-Raqim (both localities were, however, the subject of Mamluk patronage in the fourteenth century).114 The only surviving epigraphic evidence of equivalent Ayyubid patronage comes in the form of the maqâm constructed near Shawbak in 1248.

The transition from Frankish to Ayyubid rule required the creation of new administrative arrangements in Karak and the regional centres. If the situation of 1263 represents a general guide to earlier bureaucratic structures, the governor or resident prince presided over a series of ministries operating within Karak that were responsible for the collection of revenue, the maintenance of roads and buildings, and the administration of the army. Other officials dealt with legal and religious matters and relations with local bedouin groups. The description of the army in al-Mughith's Karak is diverse in character, but it is also likely that groups of Kurdish officers, Mamluks, and common soldiers of Syrian or Egyptian origin would have garrisoned the castle during earlier decades of Ayyubid rule. The other major castles probably contained a senior military officer with a much smaller contingent of soldiers and administrative staff. It is not easy to establish how the presence of these different groups affected the lives of the inhabitants of central and southern Jordan. A standing force of soldiers placed a burden on the revenues of a region, and the rapacious activities of the Mamluk and Khwarizmian brigades operating in late Ayyubid Bilad al-Sham are well attested. An effective army and bureaucracy could, however, ensure a level of stability that would encourage both agriculture and industry (as it probably did between c. 1190 and 1224).

Some comments can be made regarding economic activity in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. Ayla had ceased to function as a major international port by the mid eleventh century,115 and there is no indication that the Ayyubids sought to revive economic activity there. All trade into the region passed along land routes. After 1188–89, the areas south of the Wadi Zarqa’ were incorporated into a larger Middle Eastern empire, and this

had the potential to create more varied economic relations than had been possible in the Frankish period. The presence of regular merchant caravans and hajj pilgrims making their way south from Damascus had the potential to stimulate the economy of Balqa', Ard al-Karak and Sharat al-Jibal. These regions produced regular surpluses of agricultural produce, and this could be traded for manufactured goods from Palestine and Syria. The distribution of the glazed wares found on surveys suggests that during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries this traffic benefited the villages and towns located nearest to the King's Highway, while other concentrations of economic activity can be seen around the town of Karak and along routes to Palestine via the south end of the Dead Sea and the Jordan valley. Conversely, the twelfth century was the time when locally produced handmade wares first became a dominant feature of the ceramic record in southern Jordan, perhaps indicating some impoverishment of the inhabitants of the villages.

The diversity of the material culture of central and southern Jordan in the Ayyubid period can be seen in the other excavations discussed in this article. The castle of Wu'ayra declined in status under Ayyubid rule, and this is reflected in the pottery found in this occupation phase. The castle was evidently of greater strategic significance to the Latins of Outrejourdain and the surprising discovery of stonepaste wares, probably from Damascus, hints at the relative wealth of the Frankish elite stationed at Wu'ayra after c. 1150. Shawbak benefited from extensive patronage during the Ayyubid period, and it might be expected that the finds from the excavation of the “throne-room complex” would bear this out. In fact, the deposits clearly associated with the Ayyubid period consisted largely of low quality locally-produced ceramics. By contrast, the presence of high quality imported pottery at sites such as Karak and the hajj station at Lajjun indicates that the Ayyubid elite did enjoy access to luxury objects produced in Syria and further afield.

The combination of historical and archaeological sources creates only a fragmentary picture of Ayyubid policy in central and southern Jordan. In military terms, the region was a useful possession for any Ayyubid prince because it contained several imposing castles, with a fertile rural hinterland. That the defensive qualities of Karak were particularly valued by the Ayyubid elite is made plain in the testament written by al-Salih Ayyub to his son, Turanshah,116 though it is unclear the extent to which this admiration for the Karak citadel translated into regular investment in other aspects of the infrastructure of the surrounding region. For instance, aside from the activities of al-Mu’azzam ‘Isa at Shawbak, there is little in the written sources or the archaeological record to suggest that the rulers in Karak and Damascus were greatly concerned with stimulating the rural economy. Certainly, the political instability of the Ayyubid period was not conducive to this type of investment, but there is another reason behind this neglect. While the kingdom of Jerusalem had relied upon the fertile lands of Jordan for the supply of basic foodstuffs, the Ayyubid capitals of Cairo, Damascus and Aleppo had access to the agricultural surplus of much more extensive areas in Syria and Egypt. Perhaps the most economically significant crop was the sugar cane grown

116 This remarkable document is preserved in a manuscript of the Nihayat al-arab al-funun al-adab of al-Nuwayri. Al-Salih Ayyub advises his son not to allow Karak “to leave your hand” and in negotiations to be willing to concede both Shawbak and districts of al-Sahil (i.e. the Syrian littoral) as a means to keep control of Karak. For the relevant passage, see C. Cahen and I. Chabbouh, “Le testament d’al-Malik al-Salih Ayyub”, Bulletin d’Études Orientales, XXIX (1977), pp. 104 (Arabic), 114 (translation).
in the Dead Sea Ghawr and the Jordan valley. A much greater concern for the Ayyubids was the need to maintain security along the major trade and pilgrimage routes, and here central and southern Jordan had an important role to play in supporting the economy of the wider empire. Investment was directed at the construction of new forts, watchtowers, khans and roads, as well as the formalising of relations with powerful bedouin groups. The success of this enterprise is difficult to assess, however, as it was soon eclipsed by the energetic patronage of the Bahri Mamluk sultans. It was not until the latter part of the thirteenth century that central and southern Jordan experienced the great revival of its economic fortunes.