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The Crusader Lordship of Kerak and Shaubak Some Preliminary Remarks

One of the most important lordships of the crusader kingdom of Jerusalem was the lordship of Kerak and Shaubak, also known in crusader days as *terra trans Jordanem*, the land beyond the Jordan River, or as *Oultrejourdain*, Transjordan. Many scholars have written on its history extending from 1115 to 1189, but there are still many thorny problems in its history because of the very large gaps in the source material. We must be content with sporadic notices in chronicles and a few isolated documents which have by chance come down to us. I am currently engaged in writing a coherent history of this crusader lordship, inasmuch as this can still be done and, in fact, there is more to know about crusader Transjordan than one would expect.

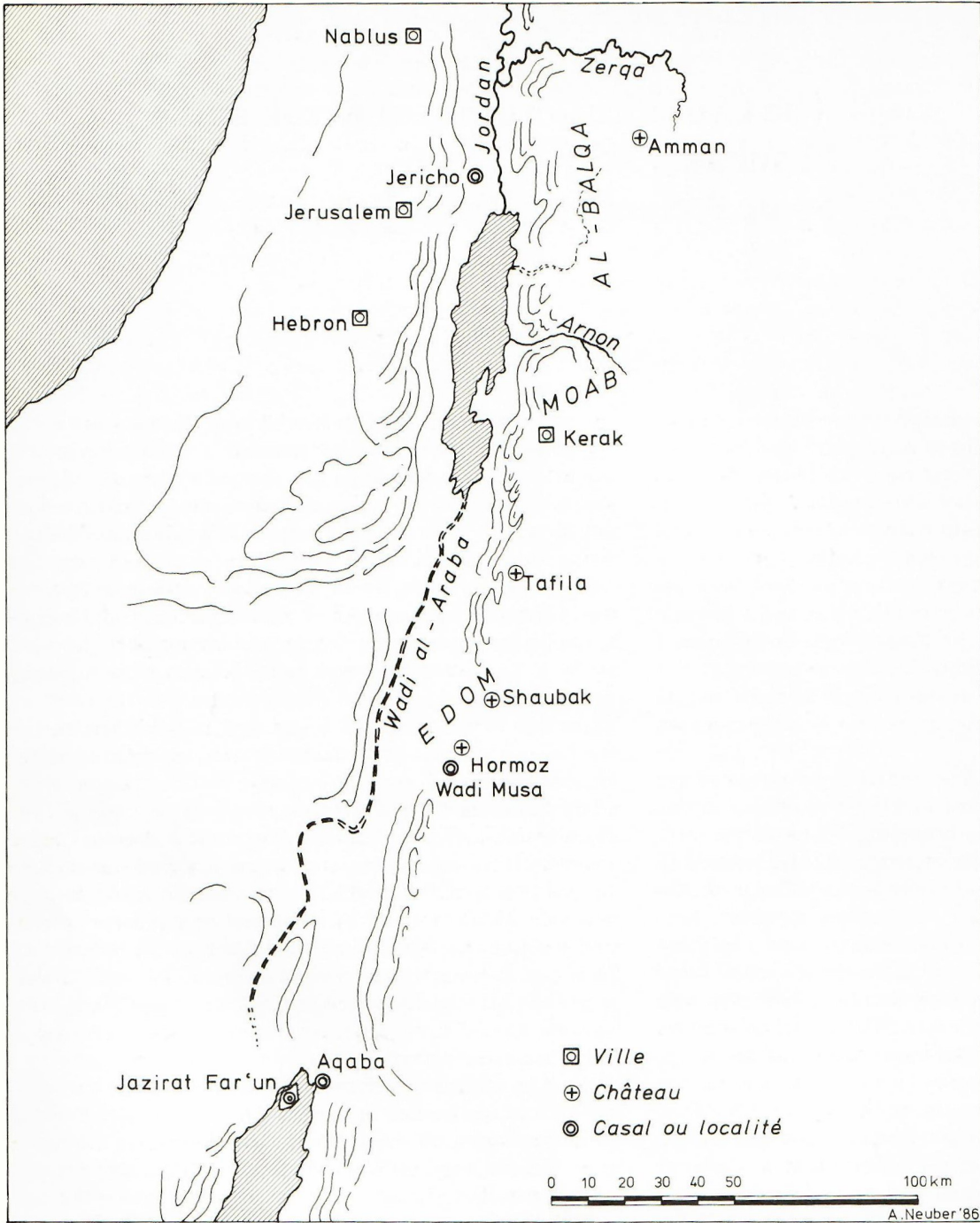
In scholarly literature *Oultrejourdain* appears out of the blue, as if what ceased to exist in 1189 had existed in this size and nature from the very beginning. Not even the lordship's name has been properly investigated. It is referred to in loose terminology as the lordship of Transjordan or of *Oultrejourdain*. This is undoubtedly so because the great chronicler William of Tyre at first sight seems to know a lordship *trans Jordanem*. But a closer look at his chronicle and other source material reveals quite clearly that *trans Jordanem* was, for William, only a geographical term. The official designation of the lordship most often used was lordship of Montréal, that is of Shaubak, or lordship of Crac, that is of Kerak, or both: lordship of Montréal and Crac. Reynald of Châtillon, the last crusader lord east of the Jordan had a seal cut for himself which named him on the obverse side as *dominus Montis Regalis*, lord of Shaubak, and showed on the reverse the castle of Kerak with the legend *Petracensis civitas*, 'City of Petra', because the Latin archbishop of Petra actually resided at Kerak. Because of this slight shifting of the evidence between Shaubak and Kerak and for the sake of brevity we shall refer to the lordship in this paper as *Oultrejourdain*; but it should be borne in mind that this is simply an auxiliary term which, territorially speaking, does not coincide with what is today Jordan and what was after World War I Transjordan. The crusader lordship was smaller, although over the years it became one of the largest in the kingdom of Jerusalem.

Much effort was needed to conquer it. Its geopolitical impor-

tance was evident. Repeatedly the later Ayyübid sultans of Egypt made generous offers towards a restoration of the kingdom of Jerusalem when they wanted to persuade the crusaders to evacuate Egypt, but they were always careful to specify that their offer did not include *Oultrejourdain*. With its string of castles at Hormuz, Wādī Mūsā (al-Wu'aira), Shaubak (aš-Šaubak), aṭ-Ṭafila, Kerak, and most likely Amman, *Oultrejourdain* held a vital importance for Islamic interests. Through it ran the land route from Aleppo and Damascus in the north to Egypt in the south, as well as the pilgrim route to Mecca for the people of Syria and Mesopotamia. But the eastward expansion of the crusaders began first in the north, east of the Lake of Tiberias in the Jaulan and the region of al-Sawād because these areas were more fertile than the regions south of the Yarmouk River. Expansion here began as early as 1100 but in the same year we hear of the first expedition into *Oultrejourdain*. It was no more than a reconnoitring mission by King Baldwin I of Jerusalem and he had to avoid the march through a hostile Moab. Instead he went and returned via Hebron and the Judaeen desert, and around the southern tip of the Dead Sea. Passing from there through the mountains, although it was not easy, he penetrated into Edom as far as Wādī Mūsā near Petra.

He returned with the knowledge that neither Egypt nor Damascus effectively controlled Edom. As long as this did not change, the limited fighting power of the crusaders could be concentrated on other fronts. But as soon as Damascus tried to build a fort at Wādī Mūsā in 1107, the king returned and destroyed it. However, he had no plans yet for the conquest of *Oultrejourdain*, so he evacuated the few Arabic speaking Christians he found there. Around 1110 we then meet with the first indication that the conquest of *Oultrejourdain* was being contemplated. The patriarch and the king of Jerusalem then assigned to the Church large revenues in the *Arabia Secunda* and the *Arabia Tertia*. These revenues did not accrue because the area had not yet been conquered, but the political programme was there.

The time for conquest came when the king had achieved a few years of peace in the northern crusader principalities by the victory at Tel Danīn in 1115. Before this year was over



The Land "Oultrejourdain" (according to Deschamps)

the king had marched into *Oultrejourdain* and in a short campaign had begun the construction of Shaubak, which he continued in the next year. He established a permanent garrison there and attracted settling farmers. As late as the 13th century Yāqūt, although in retrospect, clearly recognized the importance of this event in his Geographical Dictionary: 'Owing to the construction of this fortress the passage from Egypt

to Syria was blocked'. This time the king had come into *Oultrejourdain* via Jericho and Kerak, but for the time being he did not think of establishing his power in Moab. He was content to control Edom from Shaubak—Moab had to wait. He attracted at this time considerable numbers of Arabic speaking Christians from east of the Jordan to resettle the old Jewish quarter of Jerusalem. To take them from Edom where he

wanted to settle Christians around Shaubak would not have made any sense, but it did make sense in Moab where he could not yet control Kerak and its hinterland. *Oultrejourdain* was as yet very small; but the situation south of the Zerqa River was stabilized when in 1119 the crusaders firmly established their rule further north in the Yarmouk Valley, by retaining now, and for a long time, the cave fortress of Ḥabīs Jaldaq close to the Yarmouk.

It seems that *Oultrejourdain* was now very quickly assigned as a fief to a royal vassal and thus became a lordship. It is generally assumed that this happened under Baldwin I after the construction of Shaubak in 1115 and before the king's death in 1118. Romanus of Le Puy is generally considered to have been the first lord of *Oultrejourdain*. There is faint evidence, but evidence nevertheless, that the lord of *Oultrejourdain* already held possessions in the most northern part of the fully developed lordship, namely in the land of the Ammonites known as al-Balqā, although we have no evidence that at this time he already controlled Kerak and Moab.

Romanus is certainly found as lord of *Oultrejourdain* in the 1120s. Unfortunately most of our information concerns the end of his tenure and even for this the chronological evidence is not easy to interpret. In the early 1130s there occurred the first open feudal revolts by the Jerusalem nobility against the king. Romanus of Le Puy and his son Ralph were involved in them and, while this is an indication of their influence and ambitions, they were subdued and lost their lordship, which was confiscated by King Fulk. In 1133 we meet Romanus in the camp of the malcontent opponents. He was succeeded in *Oultrejourdain* by Paganus, the royal steward. It was he who began to build the great fortress at Kerak which he now controlled and which in time became the residence of the lord, the capital of *Oultrejourdain*, and, after 1168, the seat of the archbishop of Petra.

In the forties and fifties of the 12th century we hear very little about *Oultrejourdain*. By 1152 Paganus was dead and had been succeeded by his nephew Mauritius. The new lord continued the work on the fortress of Kerak. Its construction seems to have already reached by this time an elaborate stage, because in 1152 we hear of a barbican, i.e. an outlying defence work. It was located between two walls, so that Kerak was at that time at least partly encircled by a double ring of walls.

In 1161 *Oultrejourdain* was given by King Baldwin III of Jerusalem in a great exchange of fiefs to Philip of Nablus of the Milly family. Philip's father had been a crusader of the first hour and the Millys were the largest landowners in Samaria after the Crown. Philip gave up the family holdings in Samaria and received *Oultrejourdain* in compensation, a very rich prize indeed. Incidentally, it was under Philip (1161–65), so William of Tyre assures us, that the construction of Kerak castle was finished. From then on we must picture it as the splendid, almost impregnable fortress that appears today.

Pending my forthcoming study on *Oultrejourdain* where I shall discuss Philip's tenure in detail, a few brief remarks

must be made here. The exchange just mentioned contains the earliest mediaeval reference to Amman, for there is little doubt that the place *Ahamant* mentioned in the source is Amman. Furthermore the exchange reveals the extent and administrative subdivision of *Oultrejourdain* in 1161. It is expressly said that it then extended from the Red Sea, i.e. from 'Aqaba, to the Zerqa River. In the south there had been repeated attempts, although each time short-lived and unsuccessful, to expand on the western shore of the Gulf of 'Aqaba into Sinai. In the north the lordship covered less territory than Jordan does at present, because the land between the Zerqa and the Yarmouk Rivers was already a part of the principality of Galilee. To the east *Oultrejourdain* gradually spread out into the desert. Its western frontier ran along the Great Syrian Depression down the Jordan River and through the Wādī al-'Araba. The Dead Sea in the middle was not only important for its salt and its bitumen but there is also evidence for a limited amount of shipping on it. *Oultrejourdain* in 1161 was subdivided into several districts which, going from south to north, were grouped around the castles of Wādī Mūsā, Shaubak, Kerak, and Amman. It was only in 1161 that *Oultrejourdain* reached its full extent and also became a compact territory no longer pierced by lands belonging to other feudatories or to the Crown. It also means that the formation of the lordship was a long process stretching in time over nearly half a century from 1115 to 1161.

The last direct Crown fiefs east of the Jordan but outside the lordship of *Oultrejourdain* were now transferred to the lord of Shaubak. This was the case, for instance, with the fief of John II Gotman. It is unknown where precisely in *Oultrejourdain* this fief was located. Theoretically John remained a direct vassal of the king, but for all practical purposes he now became attached to the lord of *Oultrejourdain*, because the king decided that from now on John should render homage to the king but render service to the lord of *Oultrejourdain*. In a way, John was 'lent' by the king to Philip of Nablus, now of Kerak, an elegant solution which *de facto* integrated John's fief into *Oultrejourdain* without diminishing his social status as a direct Crown vassal.

A different case was that of the Crown fief of Baldwin, the son of the viscount of Nablus. He now relinquished this and it became part of *Oultrejourdain*, Baldwin retaining only, as private property, the farmers he had settled in his Transjordanian fief. He himself left *Oultrejourdain* for good and returned to his native Samaria where he received from the king new fiefs as compensation. From his old fief his father seems to have represented the interests of Queen Melisende of Jerusalem east of the Jordan against the party of her son, King Baldwin III, who forced her from power in 1152. Now Baldwin III could relocate the former vicecomital family of Nablus to Samaria because Queen Melisende was already desperately ill and died within a few weeks after Philip of Nablus had received *Oultrejourdain*.

The Crown in 1161 retained one important right in *Oultrejourdain*, namely, the exclusive right to control and tax all

caravans passing through the lordship. Since this right is now mentioned for the first time as a royal prerogative which did not belong to the lord of *Oultrejourdain*, we must assume that the control had previously been exercised on behalf of the Crown by royal vassals or castellans. They had been men of standing but had not been nearly as powerful as the lord of *Oultrejourdain*. The caravan control was of vital importance, not only for fiscal reasons but also for political ones. Even before Saladin united Syria and Egypt, it was clear that unstable conditions along this great trade and pilgrim route were unacceptable to the Islamic countries. The king had to guarantee the safe passage of the caravans through *Oultrejourdain*, even if it was expensive for the Muslims in taxes; he could not possibly leave this to the lord at Kerak. This was politically wise, but time showed that Kerak was too far removed from royal government. The royal prerogative gradually slipped into the hands of the lord at Kerak. It is well known that Saladin's *casus belli* against Jerusalem was the fact that Reynald of Châtillon, lord of *Oultrejourdain*, plundered a Muslim caravan and refused the king's urgent requests to indemnify the Muslim side.

Philip of Nablus only retained *Oultrejourdain* for less than five years. The increased size and importance of the lordship were very quickly felt. So far it had not played a noticeable part in the marriage politics of the Jerusalem nobility, but this now changed dramatically. The hand of the heiress of *Oultrejourdain* became a real prize to win. By January of 1166 Philip of Nablus had already resigned the lordship and appears as a simple Templar Knight. He must have had assurances for a career in the Order, otherwise he would hardly have left Kerak. By 1169 he had indeed risen to be the Master of the Knights Templars, a position of world-wide status which, surprisingly enough, he resigned in 1171. On the day on which he entered the Order of the Templars he made them large gifts from the *Oultrejourdain* which he was about to leave, especially *Ahamant* which, as we have seen, is Amman.

Philip was succeeded in *Oultrejourdain* by Walter III of Beirut who had married one of Philip's daughters. In return for becoming lord of *Oultrejourdain*, he had to sell his rich lordship of Beirut to the king. The Crown, which could neither prevent Philip from joining the Templars nor the succession of his daughter, had a lively interest in blocking at least the creation of a superlordship consisting of Beirut and the Shuf mountains and of *Oultrejourdain*. It seems to have been a political principle which can be observed in the case of various lords or heirs of *Oultrejourdain* that they could not hold other lordships aside from *Oultrejourdain*. Reynald of Châtillon is the exception to the rule.

Walter was not lord of *Oultrejourdain* in his own right but only by virtue of his marriage to Helena of Milly. That she died before him was less harmful to his position than the fact that their daughter also seems to have predeceased him. The demise of both mother and daughter terminated Walter's rule in *Oultrejourdain* early in 1174. He did not get Beirut back, and was insufficiently compensated in south-west

Palestine with the tiny lordship of Blanchegarde. *Oultrejourdain* now passed into the hands of Helena's sister Stephanie of Milly who had been widowed since shortly after 1168 but had a son from this marriage, Humphrey IV of Toron (today Tibnīn in Lebanon), who was heir to *Oultrejourdain*. To marry Stephanie now meant to become lord of *Oultrejourdain* as her husband and as guardian for Humphrey IV. As soon as she had a claim to the lordship, the king exercised his right to force her to remarry and gave her hand to his protégé Milo of Plancy who was universally hated by the nobility for his ambitions. When they could not get rid of him in any legal fashion, they had him murdered in October 1174, only half a year after he had received *Oultrejourdain*. Public opinion blamed the foul deed on Walter of Beirut who certainly had a motive, having lost *Oultrejourdain* to Milo.

Surprisingly enough, Stephanie now remained unmarried until 1177. There was now a new king, a minor and a leper who needed a regent, the count of Tripoli. It must have been the regent who decided not to remarry Stephanie. This secured the position of Humphrey IV of Toron as heir to *Oultrejourdain*, and Humphrey's grandfather on the paternal side was a close ally of the regent. When the regency had ended in 1176, the camarilla now in power under the king's mother married Stephanie to Reynald of Châtillon, who had once been prince of Antioch, and had been a prisoner of the Muslims from 1160 to 1176. When he was finally released he could not return to Antioch where a new prince had been installed long ago. His marriage to Stephanie now made him one of the great magnates of the kingdom of Jerusalem, especially since he succeeded in breaking the rule that *Oultrejourdain* could not be held simultaneously with any other lordship. By 1177 he was lord of both *Oultrejourdain* and Hebron.

Reynald was a reckless adventurer. More than any previous lord of *Oultrejourdain* he exercised political influence in Jerusalem politics. Between 1177 and 1187 the history of *Oultrejourdain* became part and parcel of the highly complicated power play by two political parties trying to impose their rule on the ever more disintegrating kingdom of Jerusalem. Reynald shocked the whole Islamic world when in 1183 he fitted out seven ships, had them disassembled and transported on camel's back to 'Aqaba and reassembled there. He left three of them near 'Aqaba to block the Muslim fort on Pharaoh's Island (Jazirat Far'un) and allowed the other four to plunder in the Red Sea along the Hejāz coast. This convinced Saladin that Christian rule in *Oultrejourdain* could no longer be tolerated, because the lord of Kerak not only interrupted the land communication between Syria and Egypt but openly threatened the maritime traffic in the Red Sea, equally important for the pilgrim traffic from Egypt and for the Egyptian spice trade from India. As has been said, Reynald gave Saladin the opportunity he had been waiting for when he robbed a Muslim caravan in peace time and refused to make amends. Saladin invaded the kingdom of Jerusalem and the campaign ended in the catastrophic Christian defeat on the Horns of Ḥaṭṭīn in July, and the surrender of Jerusalem in October 1187.

Reynald was taken prisoner in the battle of Ḥaṭṭīn, and while in general Saladin spared the lives of the high aristocrats, he decapitated Reynald with his own hands.

The Christian garrisons at Kerak and Shaubak sustained long Muslim siege operations with heroic courage. At Kerak they traded their women and children into Muslim captivity in return for food because they could no longer feed them in the castle. At Shaubak they ran out of salt, and in the long run this caused blindness among the defenders, an irony of

destiny so close to the Dead Sea. In the fall of 1188 and the spring of 1189 both castles were forced to surrender to Saladin's troops. Crusader rule east of the Jordan River had come to an end, and only a few isolated Franks remained in what had become their homeland. Thirty years after the fall of Shaubak the German pilgrim Master Thietmar passed through. He found there a French widow, still living at Shaubak in a Muslim environment, who gave him food and lodging and showed him the way to Sinai.