

Islamic Settlement in Ard al-Karak

Archaeological field surveys of different regions of Jordan show similar variations in settlement numbers throughout the Islamic centuries. The number of sites peaked in Byzantine times, and declined by more than 50 percent under the Umayyads. Abbasid sites were completely absent from some survey areas, and in others declined by more than 50 percent. In all regions, the number of Ayyubid/Mamluk sites increased, and occasionally approached but rarely exceeded the number of Umayyad sites. For the Ottoman period, there was considerable variation from region to region: in all but one case, the number of sites remained constant or declined, and in some areas no site was observed. Hashemite site numbers are significantly lower than Ottoman. Within this general pattern, settlement south of Wadi al-Mujeb suffered a sharper decline in the early Islamic period, and a less remarkable recovery in Ayyubid/Mamluk times. Ard al-Karak seems to fit the general pattern (Miller 1979; Worschech 1985a; 1985b; 1986).

Most of these reports conflict strongly with the historical evidence as reviewed, for example, by Alan Walmsley (1987), but sufficient methodological weaknesses can be found in most of the field surveys to call their conclusions into doubt, at least for the early Islamic period.

The first weakness lies in the analysis and presentation of ceramic data in terms of historical or political periods — Byzantine, Umayyad, Abbasid etc. Of course, no correlation between political events and ceramic style is necessarily implied, and these periods are usually conventional substitutes for actual dates. But the absolute chronology and regional variation of early Islamic ceramics in Jordan is still generally unknown, and there is considerable variation in the definition employed by archaeologists of certain ceramic phases (Falkner forthcoming). Thus, any attempt to assign even approximate dates to these ceramic phases is premature, can look ridiculous, and may obscure regional variations.

Second, the 'type-fossils' of early Islamic pottery are at present mainly derived from a few sites to the north of al-Mujeb. This may obscure regional variation in ceramic styles. Walmsley has drawn attention to the strong contrast between the Umayyad and Abbasid ceramics from Pella,

Jarash, and Amman, and those from Udhruh and Aqaba, and has suggested that "the supposed vacuum in the settlement history of south Jordan after the Islamic conquest...is an archaeological fiction, created by an ignorance of the material culture from the Early Islamic, 'Abbâsîd and Fatimid periods in the region'" (1987: 182-183).

Third, there is little consistency in the manner in which the various surveys were conducted. There seems to have been great variation in the sampling strategies employed, and in the level of intensity at which the surveys aimed. These variations will have had an unquantifiable effect upon the comparability of the data from any two (or more) surveys.

Fourth, a different problem of comparability is encountered over the definition of 'site', and over the on-site cultural variables recorded. Most surveys present no data at all for site hierarchy. Miller's Central Moab Survey, which recorded a full range of data regarding both settlement patterning and on-site cultural variation (Brown 1984: *passim*), is one notable exception. Once the results of such surveys are fully published, we shall begin to have the material for regional and chronological comparison.

Until these and other lesser methodological weaknesses are repaired, the general picture to be derived from the historical sources cannot be discounted. These suggest not catastrophic decline but broad continuity of settlement from the seventh until at least the 16th century AD. There is bound to have been change, but there is no evidence for 'gaps' in settlement, even south of al-Mujeb.

Continuing occupation into the eighth to tenth centuries can now be argued from the archaeological record for Pella (Walmsley 1982), Jarash (Gawlikowski 1986), the Amman citadel (Bennett and Northedge 1977-78), Hesban (Sauer 1973), and Dhiban (Tushingham 1972; Sauer 1975). Donald Whitcomb's recent re-examination of Baramaki's pottery from Khirbet al-Mafjar (1988) has demonstrated that this palace continued in use well into Abbasid times, and the probability that the 'desert palaces' of Jordan also had an Abbasid phase is raised by Oleg Grabar's proposed re-dating of Mushatta (Grabar 1987), and by the extensive evidence for Abbasid occupation from the Department of

Antiquities' recent excavations at al-Muwaqqar (Najjar 1989).

In the first twenty years of the 12th century AD, the Crusaders gradually wrested control of Transjordan from Damascus and Cairo. As yet, very little is known archaeologically of the Latin impact upon Transjordan, but the recent excavations by Robin Brown at Shobak, Karak, and al-Wu'eira (Brown 1987), the new Italian initiative (Cardini *et al.* 1987), and The Faris Project (Johns, McQuitty and Falkner 1989), together hold great promise for the future.

The Latin literary sources are completely independent from the earlier Arabic sources, and yet give the same impression of regional prosperity. The fertile soil of *Outre-Jourdain* yielded grain, vines and olives which, alongside sugar, dates, balm, salt and bitumen from the Ghor, were shipped across the Dead Sea. The king of Jerusalem derived revenue from merchants passing through the region, and an annual fair seems to have been held at Karak (Deschamps 1939: 48-50 and notes).

On the one hand, the sources attest to the continuity of settlement in the region under Christian rule. In c. AD 1184, Karak had a large, densely populated territory with "400 villages (*qarya*)" (Ibn Jubayr 1907: 287). "Muslims had lived in these parts from ancient times" ('Imād ad-Dīn *apud* Lyons and Jackson 1982: 209-211), and the houses of Karak "were well-stocked with wheat, barley, wine, and oil" (William of Tyre 1986: 1057).

On the other hand, there are reports of destruction, devastation, and constant insecurity. The hatred of the Muslims for Reynald de Chatillōn was so great that they used to raid his lands each year until he sued for peace ('Imād ad-Dīn *apud* Lyons and Jackson 1982: 248). In April, AD 1187, Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn's "Turkomans ravaged the countryside; vines had been cut down; villages destroyed, and the peasants had gone off with their wives and children to the lands of Islam ... Nothing remained in the territories of Karak ... except for 'one little citadel' ... the districts were empty, the villages ravaged and the inhabitants had gone" (al-Qaḍī al-Faḍīl *apud* Lyons and Jackson 1982: 249-251).

These accounts give evidence for two very different aspects of settlement in the region: long-term trends, and short term fluctuations. That Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn found crops to burn and villages to destroy attests to the continuity of agriculture and settlement under Frankish rule; that he did so attests to the interruption of that pattern in c. AD 1181-87. But it would be quite improper to assume, without positive evidence, that these accounts bear witness to permanent disruption of settlement in Arḍ al-Karak. Historical evidence for the medieval period tends to be predominantly anecdotal and, in this, it contrasts strongly with the evidence of regional archaeology, which is of particular use for observing broad trends on a large temporal and spatial scale. Should future fieldwork detect

no late 12th century AD hiccup in settlement, we should not ignore the witness of the written sources to a generation of terror, calamity and destruction.

Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn's reconquest of Jordan involved more than the return of the region to the Muslim world. The Latin presence had been "a blockage in the throat" of Islam (al-Qaḍī al-Faḍīl *apud* Lyons and Jackson 1982: 218) but, with the reunification of Syria and Egypt, Jordan became a crucial link between the two parts of the empire (Popper 1955: 47; al-Zāhiri 1894: 117, 119).

The literary sources suggest that Arḍ al-Karak remained prosperous under Ayyubid and Mamluk rule, until the 16th century, with many productive agricultural settlements dependent from the regional centre. Al-'Umārī in AD 1347, reported that the territory of Karak was fertile with abundant produce, and that it contained "grain lands and *iqṭa'at* for the troops" (1892: 183). In c. AD 1453, Khalīl al-Zāhiri, who had been emir of Karak in AD 1437, reported that the territory contained many villages (1894: 43), although he does suggest that the region had somewhat declined since his own time (1894: 131-132).

The prosperity of Karak town and, albeit indirectly, of the surrounding area was largely dependent upon the patronage of the Mamluk sultans (Irwin 1986: 55-57). Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad spent two periods of exile in Karak and, when he finally established himself on the throne (AD 1310-41), it was largely with the support of Karaki Arabs (Irwin 1986: 106). Al-Nāṣir was fond of his place of exile: he visited Karak often, and in 1311 his emir built a palace, a bath, a school, a khan, a hospital and a mosque, "the basic elements of a complete city" (Lapidus 1967: 73). The sultan's older sons were brought up at Karak, which Irwin has called "the Balmoral (or even the Gordonstoun) of the fourteenth-century sultanate" (1986: 115). It was from Karak that al-Nāṣir Aḥmad, the eldest of Muḥammad's surviving sons, launched his bid for the throne in AD 1342. And it was to Karak that he sought to transfer the seat of government soon after his acclamation. Karak continued to be an important centre, closely linked to the Cairo court, throughout the 14th century, but slowly declined in importance under the Burjī dynasty, when its links with Cairo gradually weakened.

The Baḥrī sultans were attracted to Karak not by the amenities of urban civilization but by a passion for things Arab and bedouin. The picture of al-Nāṣir Aḥmad setting out from Cairo in full bedouin dress, mounted on a camel, followed by his father's vast herds of sheep, horses, and camels, to refound the Mamluk state amongst the Arab tribes of Karak, may be ridiculous, but it is a useful symbol of the role which Karak had come to play—that of a semi-independent Arab outpost, a centre of resistance against first Mamluk and then Ottoman cultural domination. Quite apart from the personal inclinations and political alliances of the sultans, their interest in Arab affairs was related to increasing state involvement in the

rearing of livestock: horses for the royal stables and for the army, camels for army transport, and—perhaps most important of all—sheep for wool and mutton (Irwin 1986: 115-116). A branch of the administration was developed specially to oversee bedouin affairs (Hiyari 1975).

But if relations between Cairo and the Syrian tribes were to some extent institutionalized, this does not mean that the tribes were pacified, still less settled. The 13th century AD was characterized by a succession of troop movements and migrations on an unprecedented scale which provoked a reaction amongst the tribes. The armies of the Crusaders and of Ṣalāh ad-Dīn, the internecine struggles of the Ayyubid princes, the Mongol invasions (of AD 1258-1260, but also of 1281 and 1303), and the campaigns against the Franks of Baybars and Qalāwūn, all had a profoundly disruptive effect. Arab revolts were a common feature of the second half of the 13th century, and again grew frequent after 1340, becoming endemic in Syria under Burjī rule (Ashtor 1976: 285-288).

The model of social and economic decline under the Burjī dynasty is well-established (Ashtor 1976: 301-319), and Robin Brown has transferred it entire to ArḌ al-Karak (1984: 45-46 *et passim*), but it is time—perhaps—to exercise a little more caution. As long ago as 1967, Lapidus argued for a “fifteenth century restoration: 1422-1470” (1967: 32-38). The trade in luxury goods remained depressed, but the internal flow of basic commodities continued, and may even have slightly revived. Syria and Palestine continued to supply the markets of Cairo and Damascus with their staple needs. Military pressure was heavy, but was concentrated on the northern frontier and the Mediterranean coast, although the burden of expense was inevitably heaviest upon the centres of agricultural production in Egypt and Syria. Other variables may partly account for the apparent decline of Syria: such as the decay of historical writing in Syria, and the self-confinement of Burjī chroniclers within a narrowing Egyptian horizon (Irwin 1986: 158).

One archaeological background against which these historical considerations can be viewed is Robin Brown’s study of unpublished data for late Islamic settlement from the Central Moab Survey (Brown 1984). Brown divides the late Islamic phase into two periods: T1 (AD 1260-1400) and T2 (AD 1400-1600). Of a total of 158 sites occupied in T1, 15 were abandoned before T2, and 143 sites were continuously occupied in both periods. One hundred new sites were occupied in T2. These new T2 sites were more likely to be located in certain ecological zones than sites occupied in T1/2: “land use had decreased in the agriculturally optimal zones ... and had increased in both the tertiary agricultural zone of the north and, to a greater extent, in the remote and rugged secondary agricultural zone of the south” (1984: 81-85). Moreover, new T2 sites showed a 50 percent increase in the number of sites located on agricultural land, in comparison with T1/2 sites (1984: 93). Further, very striking contrasts were observed in on-site

cultural variables. First, the average number of T2 period sherds per site fell from 56 for T1/2 sites to 7 for new T2 sites. Second, 72% of T1/2 sites showed substantial structural remains, while 68% of new T2 sites had only the most rudimentary architecture (single structures and wall-lines) or even no architectural remains at all (Brown 1984: 106). The new sites were most heavily concentrated in the isolated and mountainous southwestern escarpment.

Brown concludes that T2 settlement shows two distinctive patterns: continuity of site occupation with the preceding T1 period; and occupation of new sites. Against the traditional historical background of rural depopulation (but see my comments above), Brown interprets these patterns as evidence for increasing population dispersal and mobility in T2, “as is characteristic of populations engaging in pastoral based economies” (1984: 108). This conclusion is supported by the low sherd concentration and minimal architecture on new T2 sites. Again, that T1/2 sites had tended not to occupy agricultural land, while new T2 sites were much more likely to be founded on farmland, suggests that conservation and maximization of agricultural potential was not a high priority in the later period (1984: 110). The relatively high concentration of sites on the southwestern scarp suggests that defence had become an important consideration in site placement.

In short, Robin Brown’s analysis makes the best archaeological case yet for the move towards pastoralism in ArḌ al-Karak in the period 1400-1600. Final assessment of Brown’s analysis must await the full publication of the data upon which it is based, but it constitutes at the very least a most useful working hypothesis and, at the same time, sets high standards for future analyses of field survey data.

If we know little of the history of ArḌ al-Karak in the Burjī period, we know still less of the region c. 1500-c. 1800, and even this is largely based upon the traditional tribal history of the Majālī (Peake 1958: 188-191), which displays features characteristic of extensive rationalization. Once again, a few general observations must suffice in the absence of detailed research.

By the reign of Sulayman the Magnificent, all of the southern Levant had been incorporated into the *wilāyat* of Damascus. Jordan, except the Ḥawran, belonged to the *liwā* of ‘Ajlun: the south was divided into three *nāḥiyāt* - Karak, Jibāl al-Karak and Shobak — which had no administrative function beyond fiscal organisation. Sulayman had built the new *ḥajj* road along the desert fringe, which replaced the *ṭarīq al-raṣīf* as the main pilgrimage route, although the old road was still used when local circumstances favoured it (Petersen 1986).

The background to these events was growing anarchy caused by the Arab tribes. In the late 15th and early 16th centuries, the written sources record a succession of bedouin raids and revolts, which culminated with the short-lived rebellion of Karak town against Mamluk rule in 1506. The dominant tribe in the region appears to have

been the Bani 'Uqba, although the immigration of a fraction of the Bani Tamīm from al-Khalīl (Hebron) threatened Bani 'Uqba's preeminence. In 1517, Karak and its region passed into Ottoman hands and a governor was installed. He is supposed to have ruled very much through the Tamīmiyya and their allies in the district. In c. 1560, however, the Tamīmiyya rebelled and were fiercely suppressed: their survivors fled back to al-Khalīl, thus gaining the name al-Majāli—'the Wanderers'. But the Ottoman governor and his troops soon went native and, assuming the name of Aghawāt (from their commander, the agha), asserted complete independence from Ottoman rule. Successive Ottoman expeditions in 1678/9 and 1710/11 failed to regain control over Karak.

It is at this point that the *daftar-i mufassal*—Ottoman tax registers—come into play. Hütteroth and Abdulfattah have analyzed the registers which bear the year 1596 (1977; I am particularly grateful for a letter from Prof. Hütteroth [18 November 1989], which comments upon an earlier version of this paper, and gives additional data). The figures for southern Jordan are as follows: *nāḥiyat Karak*—1 town, 13 villages, 16 *mazari'* (as separate units), and 28 *mazari'* (listed as a single fiscal unit); *nāḥiyat Jibal al-Karak*—7 villages and 4 *mazari'*; *nāḥiyat Shobak*—1 town, 7 villages, 6 *mazari'*, and 2 *qita'* arḍ. The *mazra'a* (pl. *mazari'*) was an agricultural estate with no permanent settlement upon it, inhabited perhaps only at certain seasons of the agricultural year—ploughing, sowing, and harvest—and the term *qita'* (pl. *qita'*) arḍ is generally used in the same way as *mazra'a* (1977: 29-32). If all of the above are counted as settlements, they give a total of 85. Accepting, for the purposes of argument, Ibn Jubayr's figure of 400 villages in the province al-Karak (see above), the 1596 register would seem to attest to a dramatic decline in the number of settlements since the late 12th century. Indeed, as Hütteroth has observed, if Bernard Lewis (1951) is correct in arguing that the Ottoman censuses show a clear increase in settlements during the 16th century, then the 1596 *daftar* should record an *increase* in settlements since Mamluk times. But, while Mamluk sources mention the villages of Ader, ar-Rabbah, Mu'ta, Nakhl, and ath-Thaniyya, only Mu'ta appears in 1596 (Ghawanmeh 1982).

There is, perhaps, little to be gained from comparing the imprecise and second-hand report of a 12th century diarist who had never visited the region with figures from a late 16th century tax-register. The *daftar-i mufassal* describe a fiscal landscape, which will not necessarily correspond to any landscape which may be reconstructed from the archaeological record. Of course, this does not mean that the tax-registers are useless: the fiscal and the archaeological landscapes are equally valid, equally evocative metaphors for a hypothetical past.

Hütteroth and Abdulfattah compared the data from the 1596 register with Conder's maps to observe changes in the pattern of settlement by the late Ottoman period (1977:

54-63). In the *nāḥiya* of Karak more than 80 percent of 16th century villages had been abandoned by 1880: in that of Jibal al-Karak (and Shobak), 40-50 percent of settlements were abandoned. When, how, and why had this transformation occurred?

Little sense can yet be made of the conflict and disorder which characterised the history of the region in the 17th to late 19th centuries (Burckhardt 1822: 381-384; Musil 1907-8: *pass.*, esp. 3.70-84; Peake 1958: 189-191; Gubser 1973: 15-19), but it does appear that one of its principal causes was competition for land and, although a great deal of research has yet to be done upon the origins of present land-ownership and settlement in Arḍ al-Karak, it is possible to propose a three-stage model for the origins of modern settlement in the region.

'Pre-settlement' is the association of a group of pastoralists with a particular site, typically an abandoned village or *khirbah*, as their summer camping ground. This has already been noted for the Bani Şakhr by Norman Lewis (1987: 125-131). The same pattern may characterize the contemporary expansion throughout the plateau of the Majāli and their allies from Karak. Tristram describes the level of occupation: in the ruins of Miḥna (5km southwest of Karak) "both the caves and arches had lately been inhabited by men and flocks. In many of the caves was the raised platform or 'maṣṭaba' for sleeping on, formed of earth, at the further end, and several fragments of sheepskin coverlets and garments, as well as fodder, were strewn about" (1873: 102-103). By 1896, Musil was able to record quite precisely the northern extent of the pre-settlement of the Majāli (1907-8: 3.84, 97-105).

'Proto-settlement', in which the 'owners' of these ruins began to farm the surrounding land with their slaves or with migrant fellahin, is again described by Lewis for the Bani Şakhr (1987: 127). Tristram records the same phenomenon amongst the 'Ajarma around Ḥesban (1873: 162-63), and amongst the Bani Şakhr at Madaba (1873: 303, 307-308, 320).

We are less well informed for the Karak plateau, but oral sources suggest that the same pattern occurred on the lands of the Majāli, and at Khirbet Fāris in particular. Khirbet Tadūn, as the site was originally called, was already pre-settled in 1896 by two cadet branches of Majāli (Musil 1907-8: 3.97). Thereafter, one disappears from Tadūn, but the other can be traced through Fāris himself to the present occupants of the site. Tradition records that it was Fāris who first settled fellahin from Filisṭin upon the site, and rebuilt the two Mamluk farm-houses. Fāris himself did not settle at the site, but merely camped there during the summer months (Johns, McQuitty and Falkner 1989).

'Full settlement', in which the owners of a site gave up their tents to settle besides their fellahin in villages in houses of stone and mud, occurred at only a very few of the proto-settlements, and the remainder were abandoned. This began to occur extensively on the plateau in the 1900s,

and most modern villages were founded before c. 1920 (Jaussen 1948, *passim*), although even after the Second World War the Majālī were still remarkable for their seasonal camping (Glubb 1948: 140). It was apparently in the 1930s that Khirbet Fāris was deserted by Fāris' sons and their farmers in favour of al-Qaṣr.

In conclusion, the broad trends which I have proposed for Islamic settlement in ArḌ al-Karak are rather different from those which have been suggested on the basis of recent archaeological surveys. I have argued that there was a basic continuity of permanent settlement on the plateau until the 16th century. There may have been a gradual decline from the Byzantine maximum in both numbers of sites occupied and total population, but this cannot yet be clearly observed, still less quantified. In particular, there is no good reason to postulate a total collapse of settlement from the ninth to thirteenth centuries, followed by a dramatic recovery under the Baḥrī Mamluks. At some point before c. 1800, and possibly as early as c. 1600, villages and fields were abandoned, and pastoralism with shifting cultivation became the rule. This transition from village-based agriculture to semi-sedentarism out of Karak town and semi-nomadism seems to have been relatively short-lived, and by the mid 19th century we can already observe pre-settlement and the first signs of a shift back towards settled agriculture.

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