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## **“Reconstructing” Mamluk ‘Ajlūn: The 728/1328 Flood Report as a Source on Architectural Patronage**

“Crossing Jordan”, the conference title for the Tenth International Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan, might seem to encapsulate the Mamluk relationship with the land of Jordan, at least with its northern part, which fell within the administrative province of Damascus. No longer the contested space that it had been in earlier centuries, this region now assumed the role of geographic link between the imperial capital, Cairo, and the Syrian provincial capital, Damascus. The Mamluks “crossed” the land of Jordan on their *barīd*, the equestrian postal route for official communications and delegations (Sauvaget 1941). Carrier pigeons and fire signals bore messages across the land of Jordan, from one mountain station to another (Sauvaget 1941: 31-40). Pilgrims “crossed” Jordan, as did merchants and trade caravans (Tresse 1937; Peters 1994; Petersen 1991, 1994; Majali *et al.* 1987; Sauvaget 1940). Scholars and sufis moved from town to town in pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment, and Mamluk deputies and functionaries came and went in the course of their peripatetic careers (Petry 1985). Chronicles of the Mamluk period, generally written for and sometimes by members of the ruling class, document these “crossings” — the established routes and changes to them; the fords and bridges taken; the stopping places and their amenities; and the official, academic and religious posts assigned there. However, as several recent research projects have demonstrated, the Mamluk presence in this region was not only characterized by “crossings”. It also involved ownership, development, diplomacy, administration and architectural patronage. This paper will consider some of these aspects of the Mamluk role in the land of Jordan, with particular emphasis on the last, in light of one particular historical event: the great ‘Ajlūn flood of 728/1328.

In 728/1328, a violent storm passed through the region around ‘Ajlūn, causing devastating flooding and mudslides. The destruction from this storm to the town and its hinterlands was described in an official document prepared for the Mamluk government shortly after the event and summarized in contemporary chronicles. These reports provide valuable details about ‘Ajlūn’s architecture and institutions in the early Mamluk period. Simply by listing the houses, *sūq* (s), baths, madrasas and mosques damaged or destroyed in the flood, they record the existence of a wide variety of buildings, many of which would have been undocumented otherwise. Aside from the neighboring citadel, the town’s congregational mosque, and a few later structures, no standing medieval buildings are preserved in ‘Ajlūn. The geographies, local histories, and travel accounts for the Bilād ash-Shām provide at best only general impressions of the place, but nothing in the way of a topographical description. In this respect, ‘Ajlūn is not alone — the architecture and layouts of other towns in the southern Bilād ash-Shām of comparable stature are similarly passed over in historical topographies. For the most part, the research interests of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century archaeologists and explorer/travelers working on Jordan were concentrated on pre-Islamic periods of history, with little attention given to its late medieval architecture (Walmsley 2001; Whitcombe 1997). The best impression of official Mamluk architectural patronage in these towns is due to the efforts of the epigrapher, Max van Berchem, working at the end of the nineteenth century (van Berchem 1903). By combining information from the ‘Ajlūn flood report with the evidence available from extant architecture, epigraphic remains, and historical chronicles, an image of the town before the flood can be “reconstructed”.

In contradistinction to the general dearth of both standing architecture and literary description, is a wealth of information about the Jordanian part of the “Province of Damascus” emerging recently from archaeological excavations and surveys. Yusuf Ghawanimah published several studies integrating historical and documentary source material with archaeological and architectural survey of the region in the 1980’s, and his research has generated a number of related theses at Yarmouk University (Ghawanimah 1982 and 1986). These studies, together with research such as Alan Walmsley’s publications on Fahl (Pella) and its surroundings (Walmsley 1997-1998), Neil MacKenzie’s area surveys of the ‘Ajlūn region in 2000 and 2002 (MacKenzie 2002 and 2003), and Bethany Walker’s on-going “Northern Jordan Project” (Walker 2005), mesh to convey a sense of an widely settled local population flourishing in the area during the early phase of Mamluk history. Nevertheless, considering the generally scant evidentiary situation from literary and documentary sources on ‘Ajlūn and the poor preservation of its medieval phase, a vague impression might have been all that could be gleaned on the city, had it not been for a fluke natural disaster, the “Great Flood” of 728/1328. This flood nearly destroyed the town and necessitating an official damage report that survives in several versions. By piecing together the pre-flood town descriptions, the accounts of the flood and the damage it inflicted, and additional references to ‘Ajlūn, this paper represents an effort to “reconstruct” the medieval town and, more broadly, to contribute to the study of architectural patronage in the southern Bilād ash-Shām.

The town of ‘Ajlūn stretches along the foot a hill, north of the Jordan River tributary, Wādī Kafrañjah (Sourdel 1960: 208). It is situated at the confluence of two wadi(s) that converge at its center, and then flow southwestward to Wādī Kafrañjah. Surmounting the hill and looming over the town, is the Ayyubid fortress, Qal‘at ar-Rabaḍ (Johns 1932; Minnis and Bader 1988; al-Qudah 1993; Yovitchitch 2001). Evidently founded in the Ayyubid period, it was, by the beginning of the fourteenth century, a flourishing regional center praised by Dimashqī (ca. 699/1299-1300) for its running water, the variety of its fruits and its plentiful provisions (Le Strange 1965: 388). Ibn Battuta came through ‘Ajlūn, en route from Gaza to Damascus, in 1326. His travel memoir, composed decades later, de-

scribes ‘Ajlūn as “a fine town, possessing a large number of markets and an imposing castle, and traversed by a river of sweet water” (Le Strange 1965: 389). Al-‘Uthmanī, writing in the 774-78/1372-76, at least conveys a more personal note to the record, quoting the rhymed verse of a *qāḍī* in Ṣafad relating his fondness for ‘Ajlūn and its people, and his reluctance to leave it for his new post (Lewis 1953: 480).

Without the flood reports, only a few of the Mamluk architectural commissions that were carried out in the town of ‘Ajlūn and its vicinity would be known. One of the earliest of these commissions was the erection of the minaret at the congregational mosque of ‘Ajlūn during the reign of Sultan Baybars by the *Amīr* Sanjar al-Shayzarī 662/1263-4 (RCEA #4528). An inscription found on a displaced limestone slab re-used to cover a cistern on the “right hand side of the road leading to the Castle of Ajlun” documents the restoration of an unspecified mosque in 686/1287 by the *Amīr* Rukn ad-Dīn Mankuwīrish al-Fāruqānī, the governor of ‘Ajlūn during the reign of Sultan Qalāwūn (Mayer 1953: 155). Not far from the town, the Mashhad of Shaykh ‘Alī was restored in 687/1288 by the commander of ‘Ajlūn, ‘Izz ad-Dīn Aybak al-Mukhtaṣ (van Berchem 1903: 61f; Meinecke 1992: II, 66). At another site near ‘Ajlūn, Rihāb, an unidentified building was erected in 692/1292-3 for Sultan Ashraf Khalil (RCEA #4966; Meinecke 1992: II, 74).

According to Ibn Kathīr, Tankiz al-Nāṣirī, the long-serving *nā’ib* ash-Shām (r. 712/1312 – 741/1340) erected a *jāmi’* there (Ibn Kathir: XIV, 187). This building is no longer extant, and we have no information about its location within the town or its subsequent history. The *jāmi’* of Tankiz is not mentioned in the flood report, suggesting either that — if it was already in existence in 728/1328 — it was not damaged, or that it had not been constructed by that date. Ibn Taghribirdi also mentions ‘Ajlūn among the sites endowed by Tankiz, but provides no further specifics (Ibn Taghribirdi: IX, 158). Ibn *Qāḍī* Shuhba mentions a pious sufi from ‘Ajlūn who died in 779 in “Khānqāh al-Mujāhidiyya” (Ibn Qadi Shuhba: III, 561). Although this might look at first like evidence of another religious institution in the town, more likely it is a reference to the famous Mujāhidiyya in Damascus (Nu‘aymi: II, 169; ‘Ilmawi: 151; Sauvaire: VIII, 287; Badran: 285). It has been proposed that an anepigraphic

building southwest of the congregational mosque, known popularly as Maqām Sidī Badr, belonged to a Mamluk Khānqāh (Ghawanimah 1986: 71-82). If this building does predate the flood of 728/1328, its elevated, hillside location suggests how it might have escaped destruction. However, no solid proof that it is either Mamluk or a Khānqāh is available.

After the great flood of 728/1328, a detailed official document was prepared describing the event, cataloging the damage it caused and assessing the losses incurred. The report was apparently ordered by Tankiz, *nā’ib* ash-Shām. It was drafted by the *wālī al-wulā*, of the Southern “section” of the province (*al-ṣaqifat al-qibliya*), an individual named ‘Alam ad-Dīn Sanjar *al-Ṭarqashī*. Drawn up only two days after the storm, the report was signed at the bottom by witnesses and at the top by the *hākim*, and was sent to Tankiz in Damascus and to the other *wālī(s)* of the southern district. It was summarized in the historical chronicles of at least five contemporaries. Shams ad-Dīn Muhammad al-Jazarī (d. 1338) and ‘Alam ad-Dīn al-Qasim al-Birzālī (d. 1339) give very similar accounts, although not identical. A third chronicler, al-Nuwayrī (d. 1333) directly quotes and attributes al-Jazarī’s and al-Birzālī’s accounts back-to-back in his history (al-Nuwayrī 30, 266-70; Ghawanimah 1982: 286-89). A fourth chronicler flourishing at the same time, Mufaḍḍal ibn Abī’l Faḍā’il, writes a synopsis of the flood report (Kortantamer 1973: 23f/136f). Finally, the history of Ibn al-Wardī (d. 1349) contains a very abridged account (Ibn al-Wardī: 413-4). All of these individuals were well situated to have close knowledge of the report: for example, al-Nuwayrī was employed in the Mamluk administration at a high level (Little 1970: 31; Chapoutot-Remadi 1995: 156-160; Amitai 2001). There are numerous inconsistencies between these various transcriptions — a few appear to be straightforward scribal errors, others may be the result of omissions from the original, and some are unexplained.

All of the versions provide the exact day of the flood, Wednesday the 22nd of Dhul-Qi‘da in the *Hijrī* year 728, which converts to the 28th of September 1328. Part of the shock generated by the event may well have stemmed from the fact that it was early in the season for heavy rainfall, let alone a deluge on the scale described (The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Ministry of Transport and Meteorological Department 1971: 4). Al-Jazarī tracks the storm from its start the day before, as it moved

over the al-Beqa‘, drenching Ba‘albek, descending to the area of Ṣafad, and then reaching Jerusalem, Hebron and the Hauran region — where, he mentions, it filled reservoirs of the area that were empty after the dry season. Evidently, by the time the storm reached ‘Ajlūn, it had strengthened considerably, to take on the force described in the accounts. The fury of the storm — its torrential downpours, wailing winds, “heart-cracking” thunder, and flashing lightning — evoked apocalyptic visions in the terrified inhabitants. Ten people were killed.

The reports specify that it was only ‘Ajlūn that suffered so significantly from this flood. The natural contours of the town played a large part in this high degree of destruction. As mentioned above, not only is ‘Ajlūn located at the foot of a hill, but also at the confluence of two *wadis* — Wādī Jawd, running from the north, and Wādī Jannān, running from the east. The rain was so heavy that even before the two *wadis* converged, buildings on their flanks were swept away. The point of convergence would have been right in the center of the modern town, north of the congregational mosque. From there, the waters raged southward down the canyon, “taking with them whatever was in their path” — houses, *sūq(s)* and *qaysāriyyas*, mills and orchards.

The reports then go on to specify the particular buildings lost and damaged. At the congregational mosque itself, the eastern gate and the southern *riwāq* were destroyed, the ablutions-place swept away, and the prayer-hall interior filled with mud and debris. Not only did the mosque suffer physical damage: it also lost its *waqf* — although unfortunately the reports do not specify what specifically that *waqf* was. At least one madrasa was destroyed: the problem here is that each of three of the versions mention one madrasa, but each by a different name: it is “Madrasa al-Nafīsa” in one text, “Madrasa al-Naqībiyya” in another and “Madrasa al-Yuqayniyya” in a third. One source says that a hospital (*māristān*) was ruined. Two bath-houses are mentioned: one is referred to as “Ḥammām aṣ-Ṣaliḥī, known as *Amīr Mūsa*,” and the other is called “Ḥammām as-Sulṭānī”. Also swept away were aqueducts and bridges that were used to cross the *wadis* when they were flowing.

Most of the buildings in the inventories are related to commerce or manufacture. They list bakeries (*al-farānīn*), butchers (*al-laḥḥamīn*), fodder-venders (*al-‘allāfīn*), mat-weavers, a dye-works

(*al-maṣbagha*), a slaughter-house, the shops of the cooks (*ḥawānīt at-ṭabbākhīn*), and the shops of the bakers. Also damaged or destroyed were the *sūqs* of the leather-workers (*al-ādamiyīn*), the cotton-merchants (*sūq al-qattānīn*), the hat-makers (*sūq al-qabbā'in*), the gold-smiths (*sūq aṣ-Ṣagha*), and the rag-sellers (*al-saqāṭiyīn*), as well as *sūq al-bazz*, a building known as *Sūq al-Fāmiyya* (or: *al-Nāmiyya*), and another called simply "*al-qaysāriyya al-qadīma*" – the old *qaysāriyya*. Among the commercial buildings listed is one with the curious moniker: *Dār al-Ta'ām*. The precise purpose of this entity is unclear. In Damascus, a *wikāla* by this name hosted and monitored the activities of merchants from Cairo (Ghawanimah 1987).

A few of the commercial buildings are identified by personal names. Of course, such identification would not necessarily mean that a building was erected by the individual whose name it carried. Sometimes it simply indicates an association through past or current ownership, residence or dedication. But in this most of these cases, al-Jazarī explicitly states that these buildings were "known to have been constructed by" the individuals named. There was a *sūq* constructed by an *Amīr*, Rukn ad-Dīn who had been a *nā'ib* at the 'Ajlūn citadel, most probably identifiable as Rukn ad-Dīn Mankuwīrish al-Fāruqānī, whose name and titles (*jamdār al-manṣūrī*, *al-nā'ib bi-'Aljūn*) appear in an inscription commemorating the above-mentioned restoration of a *masjid* in 686/1287 (Mayer 1953: 155-156). In two versions, the report lists a slaughterhouse "known as Ibn Ma'abad", while another mentions a "*sūq* of 'Um Ma'abad": were there two such buildings, or is this a transcription error? The inventory also mentions shops serving as *waqf* of the *qāḍī* Fakhr ad-Dīn *nādhīr al-juyūsh*, endowed on his madrasa, the "Fakhriyya" in Nablus. This is doubtless Fakhr ad-Dīn Ibn *al-Qibṭī*, a Coptic convert to Islam who served as head of the army bureau from 1312 until his death twenty years later, and was a prolific patron with foundations in Cairo, Jerusalem, Hebron and elsewhere (Burgoyne 1987: 259).

Two different buildings are attributed in two different versions to the *Amīr* Sayf ad-Dīn Bakta-mur al-Ḥusāmī, one a *sūq* (*sūq al-khalī'*) and the other called *Qaysāriyya al-Tijāra* / *al-Tujār*. Not to be confused with the more famous Bakta-mur al-Sāqī, this individual also had a high profile in the Mamluk arena between 1310 and his death in

1324, holding posts such as *nā'ib* of Gaza, then *ḥājib* of Damascus, and *nā'ib* of Alexandria. Another *qaysāriyya* severely damaged in the flood was that erected by the *nā'ib* ash-Shām Tankiz and endowed on the *bimaristān* (hospital) that he built in Ṣafad. The flood carried off twenty of the shops from this *qaysāriyya*, destroyed its doors, and left the remaining walls unstable.

Only a couple of times does the inventory give a topographical point of reference that identifies approximate locations for the buildings listed. We can situate a neighborhood called "Ḥarat al-Mush-āraqa" in the north of the town next to Wādī Jawd, since the report specifically attributes the destruction of some of its buildings to the rising waters in this wādī before it converged with the other. The *Sūq al-Fāmiyya* is said to be "near the spring" – so this would situate it in the vicinity of the congregational mosque, which is also near the spring.

Is it possible to trace the course of the flood waters, based on the contours of the *wadis*, and extrapolate the approximate topographic locations of the buildings that were "swept away"? In the very broadest sense, the buildings described in the inventory would have been those in the low-lying areas of town, the *wadi* banks and beds. Of the types of buildings listed in the flood report, many of them (such as tanneries, mills, and slaughterhouses) would have required a location near running water or on the outskirts of town, because of the nature of their activities. The heavy concentration of *sūq(s)* and *qaysāriyya(s)* in the list is consistent with the idea that such commercial buildings tended to be co-located, and frequently were situated near the congregational mosque of a town.

Related to this, is another key question: is the organization of the buildings listed in the report topographical? Clearly, it is not typological. Likewise, it is evident that the buildings are not listed in order of how badly they were damaged, nor is their order based on the relative importance of the buildings. Can we learn anything from the order of the telling? This requires further clarification, especially since there are variations between the different versions of the report. However, there appears to be a general north-to-south flow to the description, as if it follows the course of the flood's path down the *wadis*, to the point of their convergence and then beyond. If this can be verified, it may be possible to plot out the mentioned buildings, at least in a general way.

Obviously, the report only catalogs what was lost or damaged. Possibly, a good deal survived. The physical contours of the town are very hilly, even within the small area of its town center. Buildings situated on the more elevated sites around town could have weathered the storm with minimal damage. Certainly, the official Mamluk administration of ‘Ajlūn, which operated out of the citadel, would not have suffered directly.

The flood report had been drawn up merely two days after the storm, and presumably was submitted to the authorities in Damascus promptly thereafter. What happened then? Ideally, our chroniclers would have followed up this notice in their annals for the subsequent months or years, describing the response of the Mamluk authorities to the destruction in ‘Ajlūn. Unfortunately, I have not found any such references. This does not necessarily indicate that no reconstruction aid was delivered, however. Rather, it might suggest that the follow-up was simply less newsworthy than the flood itself and was overshadowed by subsequent events unfolding in other places.

It should be noted that the flood struck ‘Ajlūn at a time of relative stability in the region, and the empire. However destructive, this disaster does not belong in the same category with the later chain of events – that included locusts, plague, draught, earthquake and Timur’s invasion – whose cumulative effects arguably contributed to economic decline in Northern Jordan. What were the after-effects of the ‘Ajlūn flood destruction in the short and long term? It was evidently the commercial sector that suffered most heavily. From the Ibn Battuta’s description cited above, there had been a healthy economic life flourishing in the town before the flood. One version of the flood report provides an estimate of the loss of goods to be 500,000 *dirhams*, apart from crops, livestock, gardens and mills outside the city. Did ‘Ajlūn reconstruct its markets and restore its economic vitality, reclaiming its role as regional trade center and income source for religious and charitable institutions in town and elsewhere?

At any rate, it is Tankiz *nā’ib* ash-Shām who is credited by modern historians with ordering the restoration of ‘Ajlūn and its Friday mosque in the aftermath of the flood, although the historical sources I have found so far do not specifically make this attribution. Meinecke, assuming that this flood damage would have been repaired immedi-

ately, asserts that the mosque “wurde vermutlich im Auftrag des Gouverneurs von Damaskus Tankiz restauriert” (Meinecke 1992: II, 150). At the time the flood report reached Damascus, Tankiz was midway through his posting there. Early in his career, he would have witnessed the great earthquake that struck Egypt and the wider region in 1303, and the long-term program of reconstruction that that event set in motion. During his tenure as governor in Syria, damage caused by violent storms in Damascus in 1317, 1319 and 1326 may have spurred a number of his many architectural and urban commissions there. At the end of his career, a great fire around the Umayyad Mosque and his response are described in detail in historical sources. His urban re-development programs in Damascus and Jerusalem were in full swing at the time of the ‘Ajlūn disaster (Kenney 2004).

In any case, it is clear that restorations were done at the ‘Ajlūn *jāmi’*: the *qibla* riwāq and *ṭahāra* in the court preceding the prayer hall were reconstructed and survived until just a few decades ago (Ghawanimah 1986: 213f). Furthermore, according to an inscription no longer *in situ*, the east portal was rebuilt in 732/1332: “Bismallah, [Quran 9:18], this blessed door was renewed in the days of our lord *Qāḍī* al-Quḍāa ‘Alam al-Dīn al-Ikhnā’ī of Damascus the well-guarded, under the direction of our master al-*Qāḍī* Tāj ad-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ikhnā’ī, the magistrate (*al-hākim*) at ‘Ajlūn in ... 732... (1332)” (RCEA #5618). The extended al-Ikhnā’ī family figured prominently both in Cairo and Damascus, with representatives filling the post of chief Mālīkī *qāḍī* in Cairo almost continually from 718/1318 to 779/1377 (Escovitz 1983: 152-3). In an unusual deviation from the epigraphic norm, it is not the sultan’s or the *nā’ib*’s name that follows the formulaic phrase “in the days of...” and the term *mawlana* (our lord) of this inscription, but rather the *qāḍī* al-Quḍāa of Damascus, ‘Alam ad-Dīn al-Ikhnā’ī. The inscription goes on to say that the project was carried out under the *hākim* at ‘Ajlūn, *Qāḍī* Tāj ad-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ikhnā’ī – perhaps the same individual who would later take up the post of chief Mālīkī *qāḍī* in Cairo in 750/1349.

Although Tankiz is not named in this text, the Damascus *qāḍī* mentioned here, ‘Alam ad-Dīn al-Ikhnā’ī, is closely associated with him: it was he who consulted with Tankiz on the subject of restoring the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, and who accompanied Tankiz two years earlier to set up the

*nā'ib*'s madrasa-complex in Jerusalem (Ibn Kathir: XIV, 148). It may be that Tankiz delegated to this *qāḍī* some of the oversight of the restorations in 'Ajlūn. Another building that must have been rebuilt after the flood is the *Qaysāriyya* of Tankiz, which had reportedly lost twenty of its shops, as well as its doors, and whose remaining walls were destabilized. A 1341 inventory of the properties confiscated from Tankiz after his arrest, lists "a *qaysāriyya* at 'Ajlūn" valued at 120,000 *dirhams* (Al-Safadi: X, 429).

Ironically, it is the reporting of the near destruction of 'Aljūn that has preserved the most extensive record of its buildings and institutions – much more informative than the appreciative accounts of visitors in happier times. In addition to providing the basis for a sketchy reconstruction of Mamluk 'Ajlūn and an inventory of some of its amenities, the flood report also gives a picture of high level Mamluk architectural patronage there, offering a helpful supplement to the epigraphic evidence, which is the main source of information about building patronage in the provinces.

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