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## Mamluk Investment in Transjordan: a "Boom and Bust" Economy\*

The fourteenth century witnessed a flurry of economic activity not only in Egypt but also in the most remote and previously neglected of the Mamluk provinces, such as *Mamlakat Karak* and the southern districts of *Mamlakat Dimashq*. This region, which constitutes today's Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, benefited from intense capital investment from Cairene sources, as well as an expansion of the local military and administrative apparatuses. From the reinstatement of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad to the sultanate in 1310 until the end of the century the agriculture of geographical Transjordan prospered. Yet, in spite of this prosperity and the obvious financial benefit gained by the Egyptian state from this region, large parts of the Transjordan were abandoned by the fifteenth century.

The handful of historians who have written on Mamluk Jordan and the much larger number of archaeologists working in the region's "Middle Islamic" period have largely agreed on the factors behind this phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> They regularly cite natural disasters (earthquakes, droughts, locust infestations, and floods), plague and other epidemics, currency devaluation and changing trade and transport routes, political factionalism in Cairo, and the region's unruly bedouin, who are said to have been eager to devour villages once the garrisons protecting them pulled out, as creating the conditions for the economic collapse of the fifteenth century.<sup>2</sup> They describe this collapse as total, affecting the entire region, and permanent, a financial,

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\*The following is based on a paper presented at the MESA Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., on November 25, 2002, as part of the pre-organized panel "From Alexandria to Aden: Commerce and Society in the Medieval Middle East." I want to thank Dr. Warren Schultz for organizing this panel and for his encouragement in submitting my contribution for publication here.

<sup>1</sup>The most prolific of the historians are Jordanian nationals: Drs. Yūsuf Ghawānimah and Muḥammad 'Adnān al-Bakhīt. The most relevant archaeological literature will be cited throughout this paper.

<sup>2</sup>Yūsuf Ghawānimah, "The Affects of Plague and Drought on the Environment of the Southern Levant During the Late Mamluk Periods" (in Arabic), *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 2 (1985): 315–22, and idem, "Earthquake Effects on Bilad al-Sham Settlements," *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 4 (1992): 53–59; R. M. Brown, "Late Islamic Settlement Patterns on the Kerak Plateau, Trans-Jordan," M.A. thesis, SUNY-Binghamton, 1984; Jum'a Mahmoud H. Kareem, *The Settlement Patterns in the Jordan Valley in the Mid- to Late Islamic Period* (Oxford, 2000), 12 and 16–17.



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DOI: [10.6082/M1222RX3](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1222RX3). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1222RX3>)

DOI of Vol. VIII, no. 2: [10.6082/M12F7KHB](https://doi.org/10.6082/M12F7KHB). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/KDWH-BN42> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

political, and demographic ruin from which the region recovered only briefly in the sixteenth century. Their conclusions are based largely on contemporary Egyptian sources and interpretations of archaeological surveys in the region now twenty or more years old. They are regularly cited in both the historical and archaeological literature and have colored the way both groups of scholars "read" their respective sources.

The economic decline of Transjordan should be understood as part of the larger pattern of political, financial, social, and environmental decline of Greater Syria and the Mamluk empire as a whole. Its local conditions, however, must also be considered in any debate about the agricultural and demographic shifts of the late Mamluk period. Transjordan was unique in many respects. Outside of Kerak in the south (the nursery of sultans and a provincial capital) and the smaller administrative center of 'Ajlūn to the north, it had no large or permanent official centers. Although the structure of Mamluk administration throughout Syria was irregular, the Transjordan seemed to have been particularly susceptible to shifts in district capitals, fluid administrative borders, and frequent changes in the ranks of its local governors, phenomena perhaps reflecting the state's precarious relationship with the region's large bedouin population.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, investment by the state and state officials had an ambiguous effect on the fortunes of this region. While the location of the hajj and caravan routes through its interior certainly benefited Jordan, the plantation-style development of the Ghôr (Jordan Valley) for growing and processing cane sugar and the conversion of some of the best farmland in the well-watered northern highlands and central plains to vast, grain-producing *iqṭā'āt* may have contributed to uneven development of the region, favoring particular districts over others. In addition, much of this land was made *waqf* for institutions outside of Jordan. Many of these endowments, and the farms that supported them, survived well into the Ottoman period.<sup>4</sup> This was not necessarily the case with the agricultural properties in the Ghôr, a large portion of which belonged to the sultan as part of his personal estate (*khāṣṣ*). In the absence of a strong, centralized government, irrigation canals fell into disrepair, there was no longer any direct supervision of sugar manufacturing and transport, and many industries were abandoned, to be replaced by new agricultural projects.<sup>5</sup>

A general over-reliance on written sources from Egypt has obscured many of

<sup>3</sup>Bethany J. Walker, "Mamluk Investment in Southern *Bilād al-Shām* in the Fourteenth Century: The Case of Ḥisbān," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 62, no. 4 (2003): 243 ff.

<sup>4</sup>See the discussion of the Ottoman tax registers for northern Jordan below.

<sup>5</sup>In his archaeological survey of the northern Jordan Valley, Kareem began to document the rise and fall of the local sugar industry through mill sites, storage facilities, canals, and road systems (Kareem, *Settlement Patterns in the Jordan Valley*, 9 ff).



these developments. What was true for Egypt was not necessarily true for the Transjordan, as a reading of Syrian sources seems to indicate. Among the chronicles of the period, those of Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah (who died in 1448) and Baybars al-Dawādār (*Zubdat al-Fikrah fī Tārīkh al-Hijrah*) are illustrative of the kind of data available on local agriculture. Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah's *Tārīkh* includes regular excerpts of letters exchanged between this judge and his colleagues posted in other cities throughout Syria. These letters often discuss how crops are doing that year in villages under the judges' jurisdictions, occasionally mention the prices of agricultural goods, and lament the cold spells and floods that have ruined local harvests. Significant in this regard are passages describing farms in northern (the village of Ḥibrāṣ) and central (the village of Ḥisbān) Jordan.<sup>6</sup> The Mamluk amir Baybars al-Dawādār served as the governor (*nā'ib*) of Kerak from 1286 to 1291.<sup>7</sup> While this source is primarily concerned with political events and military campaigns, the author makes the occasional reference to towns and villages in southern and central Transjordan and the road networks that connect them. The Syrian geographies of the period are also a rich source of information about the location of towns and villages, the topography of the region, water resources, and agricultural specialization. Most significant in this regard are *Al-A'lāq al-Khaḥīrah* of Ibn Shaddād (d. 1285) and *Nukhbat al-Dahr fī 'Ajā'ib al-Barr wa-al-Baḥr* of al-Dimashqī (d. 1327).<sup>8</sup> In addition, the secretary's manual of Amir Khalīl al-Zāhirī, who served at Kerak in 1437, not only describes the administrative structure of Greater Syria in his day but also describes, however irregularly, the topography, climate, and crops that characterize each region.

These sources are very general and treat the smaller villages of the region in only a cursory fashion. Mamluk *waqfīyāt* and early Ottoman tax registers (*defters*) are much richer sources of information on demographics, the size of farms, ownership of rural estates, crops grown in the smallest of villages, and the revenues they yield. With one exception, the *waqfīyāt* remain in manuscript form; several from the Dār al-Wathā'iq and Wizārat al-Awqāf in Cairo are presented publicly for the first time in this study.<sup>9</sup> Many of the Ottoman registers in Istanbul relevant to Jordan have been published and translated into Arabic by Muḥammad 'Adnān

<sup>6</sup>Abū Bakr Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah*, ed. 'Adnān Darwīsh (Damascus, 1977–), 3:164 (entry for year 761) and 4:181 (year 803).

<sup>7</sup>Baybars al-Manṣūr al-Dawādār, *Zubdat al-Fikrah fī Tārīkh al-Hijrah*, ed. D. S. Richards (Beirut, 1998), XVI.

<sup>8</sup>These sources, however, should be used with caution. They often combine data from much older sources with contemporary descriptions, not always specifying the time period to which they are referring. In order to locate rural sites from archival sources (such as *waqfīyāt*), one should combine the medieval geographies with a reading of more modern travel accounts.

<sup>9</sup>They are listed at the end of this paper.



Bakhīt and charted into map form by the historical geographers Hütteroth and Abdulfattah.<sup>10</sup> These are a gold mine of detailed data on Mamluk agriculture and rural endowment practices, because the Ottomans inherited the Mamluks' local tax apparatus and applied it with little alteration in the sixteenth century and the registers make regular reference to *awqāf* in the region dating back to the Mamluk period.<sup>11</sup> In the absence of any comparable Mamluk tax records, these sources are priceless for this kind of research. The picture of Jordanian agriculture that emerges from these documents is one of continuity. While it is clear that many villages were abandoned during the fifteenth century and that there was some level of decline in agriculture throughout Jordan, some areas, particularly the north, continued to be relatively productive throughout this period and grew rapidly in population in the first half of the sixteenth century.

In addition to the underutilization of these textual sources, there are archaeological reasons for reconsidering the phenomenon of decline in Mamluk Jordan. A refinement of ceramic chronologies during the last fifteen years has resulted in the identification of many Middle (or Ayyubid and Mamluk) and Late Islamic (Ottoman) occupational levels and sites that were mistakenly assigned to other time periods.<sup>12</sup> This, combined with an intensified effort at regional surveys

<sup>10</sup>These are the registers published by Bakhīt and used for this study: three registers for Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah (*Tapu Defteri* #430 of 930/1523, #401 of 950/1534, and #99 of 1005/1596–97) and two for Liwā' 'Ajlūn (*Tapu Defteri* #970 and #185 of 1005/1596). There is no date given for #970 in the manuscript used by Bakhīt, but he suggests a date of roughly 1538, based on the year of service for an amir named as an *iqṭā'* recipient in one entry (Muḥammad 'Adnān Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah [Shamālī al-Urdunn] fī al-Qarn al-'Āshir al-Hijrī/al-Sādīs 'Āshir al-Milādī* [Amman, 1989], 9). Hütteroth and Abdulfattah use the following: *defter-i mufassal* of Liwā' Quds al-Sharīf (#112), Nablus (#100), Gaza (#192), Lajjūn (#181), 'Ajlūn (#185), Şafad (#72), and Shām al-Sharīf of Ḥawrān subprovince (#99) (Wolf-Dieter Hütteroth and Kamal Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography of Palestine, Transjordan and Southern Syria in the Late 16th Century* [Erlangen, 1977], 4). Bakhīt also used two of these registers. They date to 1005/1596–97 and reflect the results of the "new census" taken at the end of the century, which was the last the Ottomans administered in the Arab provinces.

<sup>11</sup>The Ottomans levied the 'ushr on charitable *awqāf*. This is why they appear as a source of revenue for *khāṣṣ*, *timar*, and *za'āmāt* holders in the registers.

<sup>12</sup>Ceramicists are slowly beginning to visually differentiate Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman variations of the Handmade Geometric Painted Ware (Jeremy Johns, "The Rise of Middle Islamic Hand-Made Geometrically-Painted Ware in Bilad al-Sham [11th–13th Centuries A.D.]," in *Colloque international d'archéologie islamique*, Textes arabes et études islamiques no. 36 [Cairo, 1993], 65–93; R. M. Brown, "A 12th Century A.D. Sequence from Southern Transjordan: Crusader and Ayyubid Occupation at el-Wu'eira," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 31 [1987]: 267; and idem, "Summary Report of the 1986 Excavations: Late Islamic Shobak," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 32 [1988]: 225–45) and handmade burnished cookpots with "elephant ear" handles (ibid.). One category of crudely handmade bowls, often attributed to "bedouin"



and the excavation of late medieval sites, is forcing archaeologists working in the country to rewrite the occupational history of late Mamluk and early Ottoman Jordan.<sup>13</sup> On the basis of archaeological data alone it is becoming clear that while certain regions were abandoned by the fifteenth century (such as much of the Kerak Plateau),<sup>14</sup> much of the remainder of the country was still occupied and retained viable local markets and a productive agricultural base.<sup>15</sup>

The most damaging evidence against general economic decline in Jordan at the end of the fourteenth century is the numerous endowments of productive agricultural land located throughout the country and dating to the third quarter of the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth centuries. Thus, Jordan's overall economy, as it can be measured from *awqāf* alone, would appear to be thriving at the very time that the Mamluk economy was in "decline."<sup>16</sup> Among the published examples of the endowment of rural land in Jordan by sultans are: the endowment by Barqūq of the villages of Nimrīn, Kafrīn, and Zarā'ah in the Jordan Valley and

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manufacture, is generally acknowledged by archaeologists to be Ottoman to modern in date (B. Mershen, "Recent Hand-Made Pottery from Northern Jordan," *Berytus* 33 [1985]: 75–87) or twelfth-century to modern (Dr. Roberta Tomber, Museum of London and Wādī Faynān Expedition, personal communication, citing parallels from Petra and Gharandale; the Wādī Faynān pottery is as yet unpublished). For a general downdating of several Mamluk wares to the Ottoman period, consult G. Ziadeh, "Ottoman Ceramics from Ti'innik, Palestine," *Levant* 27 (1995): 209–45.

<sup>13</sup>An important survey in this regard is that of Wādī Faynān (interim reports have been published in recent issues of *Levant*; see also previous note and forthcoming monograph *Archaeology and Desertification: the Wādī Faynān Landscape Survey, Jordan*, ed. G. Barker and D. Mattingly [Amman]). For excavated sites, see Brown, "Summary Report" (Shobak); A. M. McQuitty, M. A. Sarley-Pontin, M. Khoury, M. P. Charles, and C. F. Hoppe, "Mamluk Khirbat Fāris," *ARAM* 9 (1997): 181–226 (Khirbat Fāris); and B. J. Walker and O. S. LaBianca, "The Islamic *Quṣūr* of Tall Ḥisbān: Preliminary Report on the 1998 and 2001 Seasons," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 14 (2003): in print (Tall Ḥisbān).

<sup>14</sup>J. Maxwell Miller, *Archaeological Survey of the Kerak Plateau* (Atlanta, 1991); Brown, "Late Islamic Settlement Patterns."

<sup>15</sup>Walker and LaBianca, "Islamic *Quṣūr* of Tall Ḥisbān"; Walker, "Mamluk Investment in Southern *Bilād al-Shām*"; Jeremy Johns, "The *Longue Durée*: State and Settlement Strategies in Southern Transjordan Across the Islamic Centuries," in *Village, Steppe and State: The Social Origins of Modern Jordan*, ed. E. L. Rogan and T. Tell (London, 1994), 1–31.

<sup>16</sup>Endowments of rural properties are only one measure of economic health. Other factors that are quantifiable or can be documented textually or archaeologically, and which will be examined in my forthcoming *Life on the Mamluk Frontier, Transjordan 1260–1516 A.D.*, are minting and exchange of coins, prices, distribution and longevity of industrial sites (copper smelting, sugar processing, textile factories, etc.), continuity of local and regional markets, maintenance of roads and caravansaries, evidence of continued exchange of luxury goods (certain categories of glazed wares, imported semi-precious stones, exotic building materials), and educational facilities and programs.



several properties in Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, and Syria for his mosque-madrasah complex in Cairo;<sup>17</sup> Khushqadam's endowment of a *mazra'ah* (isolated plot) in the Ghôr and the villages of Marw and Harhar in northern Jordan for his madrasah in Cairo;<sup>18</sup> and Sha'bân's endowment of the village of Ādar and a bathhouse and garden in Wadi Kerak in 777/1375.<sup>19</sup>

The following is a preliminary discourse on the success of Mamluk agricultural investment in Jordan in the fourteenth century and its apparent failure by the fifteenth. The oft-repeated wholesale abandonment of this region at the end of the century is far from proven. It remains to be determined to what degree Jordan really was abandoned by the Mamluk authorities and subsequently depopulated and what factors account for this. Was this image of a "boom and bust" economy true for the entire country or only parts of it? What were the Mamluk state's administrative and agricultural objectives in the region and what impact did they have on Transjordanian society, in terms of its economic health and settlement patterns, and the local environment?

In order to assess the regional differences, if any, in settlement history or agricultural development, I have selected individual villages in four different districts in Jordan as case studies: Malkā and Ḥibrāṣ in the Sawād (northern Jordan, between the Yarmouk River and Irbid and southeast of the Sea of Galilee); Nimrīn and Kafrīn in the Lower Ghôr (central Jordan Valley); Ḥisbān in the Balqā' (central Jordanian highlands, the Madaba Plains); and Ādar (a suburb of Kerak) in the Shira' (southern Jordanian highlands) (Fig. 1).<sup>20</sup> All six villages are

<sup>17</sup>There is no date for the Ghôr endowments—Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 23; M. A. Bakhīt and Nūfān Rajā' al-Ḥammūd, *Daftar Mufaṣṣal Liwā' 'Ajlūn: Ṭābū Daftarī Raqm 185*, 'Anqarah 1005 Hijrī Muwāfiq 1596 Milādī (Amman, 1991), 32. The other endowments appear in an unpublished manuscript (*Waqfiyah* 9/51) and date to 796/1393.

<sup>18</sup>No date—Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 45 and 57; M. A. Bakhīt and N. R. al-Ḥammūd, *Daftar Mufaṣṣal Liwā' 'Ajlūn: Ṭābū Daftarī Raqm 970* (Amman, 1989), 187; and idem, *Ṭābū Daftarī Raqm 185*, 32.

<sup>19</sup>Manuscript incomplete, and recipient remains unknown—*Waqfiyah* 8/49, sections relevant to Jordan published in Yūsuf Ghawānimah, *Tārīkh Sharqī al-Urdunn fī 'Aṣr Dawlat al-Mamālīk al-'Ulā' (al-Qism al-Ḥadārī)* (Amman, 1979), 243–44; idem, "Al-Qaryah fī Junūb al-Shām (al-Urdunn wa-Filistīn) fī al-'Aṣr al-Mamlūkī fī Ḍaw' Waqfiyāt Ādar," *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 1 (1982): 363–71; and M. A. Bakhīt, "Awqāf During the Late Mamluk Period and the Early Ottoman Times in Palestine and Jordan," in *Urbanism and Islam*, ed. Editorial Committee of the Research Project "Urbanism in Islam, a Comparative Study" (Tokyo, 1994), 186.

<sup>20</sup>Jordan in Mamluk times was administratively divided between the southern section (*safaqah*) of the Province of Damascus (*Mamlakat Dimashq*) in the north and the Province of Kerak (*Mamlakat Karak*) in the south (Nicola Ziadeh, *Urban Life in Syria Under the Early Mamluks* [Beirut, 1953], 13; Aḥmad ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, *Al-Ta'rīf bi-al-Muṣṭalaḥ al-Sharīf*, ed. M. Mas'ūd [Cairo, 1894], 177–81). The northern half of the country consisted of five regions ('*amal*): the Balqā' (its



attested historically, having appeared in medieval geographies and been recorded in some detail in Mamluk *waqfiyāt* or Ottoman tax registers or both. All have been either excavated or surveyed and appear in formal archaeological reports. A combined analysis of all of these sources indicates that each village experienced the mixed benefits of an uneven investment in local agriculture by the Mamluk state. Moreover, two were local administrative centers and enjoyed some political prominence: Ḥibrāṣ was one of the largest villages in the Sawād in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, and Ḥisbān served as the capital (a *wilāyah*) of the Balqā' (an *'amal*) for roughly the first half of the fourteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

I am most concerned in this article with determining when and where (and under what circumstances) agricultural investment in Jordan began by Mamluk officials; quantifying that investment (and determining to what degree that system was exploitative); and identifying when it came to an end, why it did. These questions can only be fully addressed by using all the sources available, that is to combine textual, archival, and archaeological data. The data gleaned from archaeological surveys, in particular, are ideally suited to a rereading and fleshing out of medieval *waqfiyāt* and tax registers. All three sources are concerned with historical and economic geography, their coverage overlapping with and complementing each other in various ways. This is an experiment in methodology that I believe is beginning to bear fruit.

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capital shifted among Amman, Ḥisbān, and Ṣalt), Jabal 'Awf (and its capital 'Ajlūn), the Sawād (containing the districts, or *aqālīm*, of Bayt Rās and Fahl/Pella), the Upper Ghôr (with its center of al-Quṣayr), and the Middle Ghôr (its center was 'Amaṭah) (A. G. Walmsley, "Settled Life in Mamluk Jordan: Views of the Jordan Valley from Fahl [Pella]," *ARAM* 9 [1997]: 129; Shams al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Dimashqī, "Nukhbat al-Dahr fī 'Ajā'ib al-Birr wa-al-Baḥr," published as *Manuel de la Cosmographie du Moyen Age*, ed. M. A. F. Mehren [Amsterdam, 1964], 270 ff.). For the rank of the amirs stationed in the local capitals, see Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā fī Ṣinā'at al-Inshā'* (Cairo, 1913–), 5:207–8. This was the agricultural heartland of the country. Southern Jordan, while agriculturally less productive, on the whole was more important politically because of the prominence of Kerak in the Mamluk period. This province included Kerak, Shobak, and the Lower Ghôr. Jordan in the Ottoman period was part of Damascus Province in three parts: the southernmost sections of the subprovince of the Ḥawrān (Qaḍā' Ḥawrān), Liwā' 'Ajlūn, and Niyābat Karak. Four districts in the southern Ḥawrān in this period are located in modern Jordan: Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah (in the Sawād, today's Irbid District), Nāḥiyat Jumah, Nāḥiyat al-'Asar, and Nāḥiyat 'Uqbah (Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 1–2).

<sup>21</sup>For an administrative history of Tall Ḥisbān, see Walker, "Mamluk Investment in Southern *Bilād al-Shām*," and idem, "Mamluk Administration of Transjordan: Recent Findings from Tall Ḥisbān," *Al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭá* 13, no. 2 (2001): 29–33.



### NORTHERN JORDAN

One of the richest agricultural regions in Jordan is the “Sawād,” the rolling hills and deep wadis located between the Yarmouk River and Irbid. Because it is so close to the border with modern Syria, the Sawād fell under the administration of either Syria or Jordan through the medieval and early modern periods.<sup>22</sup> This location placed it at the crossroads of communications and commerce; an extensive network of roads connected the regional center, Irbid, with the markets of medieval Damascus, Baghdad, Jerusalem, and Cairo.<sup>23</sup>

This region occupies a high plateau (800–900 meters above sea level) above the eastern slopes of the northern Jordan Valley and enjoys temperate weather and good soil.<sup>24</sup> It is well watered, with an average annual rainfall of 376 mm, or 15”, (heaviest in the winter), wadis with running water for at least part of the year, and numerous springs. In the Middle Ages the region was known for its forests of oak, evergreen, and cypress. During the Mamluk and Ottoman periods the Jordanian Sawād specialized in wheat, barley, and olives; today it produces some of the best olive oil in this part of the Middle East.<sup>25</sup> A variety of summer crops are also grown, such as lentils, chickpeas, and carobs. The rolling hills and low grass cover, moreover, make for excellent grazing: sheep and goats were a significant

<sup>22</sup>In the thirteenth century Kūrat Sawād was part of Jund Urdunn, a subprovince of the Province (*jund*) of Damascus (Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Shaddād, “Al-A’lāq al-Khaṭīrah fī Dhikr Umarā’ al-Shām wa-al-Jazīrah,” published as *Liban, Jordanie, Palestine: Topographie historique d’Ibn Ṣaddad*, ed. Sāmī Dahhān [Damascus, 1963], 123, citing Ya‘qūb). By the fifteenth century Iqlīm Baysān fell under the authority of Ma‘āmilat Dimashq of Mamlakat Shāmīyah (Ghars al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Shāhīn al-Zāhirī, “Kitāb Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik wa-Bayān al-Ṭuruq wa-al-Masālik,” published as *Zoubdat kachf el-mamālik: Tableau politique et administrative de l’Égypte, de la Syrie et du Hijāz sous la domination des sultans mamloûks du XIII au XV siècle*, ed. Paul Ravaisse [Paris, 1894], 44). During the sixteenth century the Ottomans, as part of their administrative reorganization of Bilād al-Shām, defined this area as a *nāḥiyah* (district) in the southern region of Qadā’ Ḥawrān (Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 3).

<sup>23</sup>Ghawānimah, *Tārīkh Sharqī al-Urdunn*, 39. This was true for the Roman period, too.

<sup>24</sup>Most of the region lies at 400–500 meters above sea level (JADIS entries for Khirbat Malkā and Ḥibrāṣ). Temperatures of the last ten years have ranged from a balmy 39.3° C in the summers to -92° C in the winter, with an annual average of 18° (www.dos.gov.jo/env/annual/environment\_2001). The relatively cool temperatures, high rainfall, high water table, and high percentage of humus in the soil makes this region ideal for agriculture (Kareem, *Settlement Patterns in the Jordan Valley*, 6).

<sup>25</sup>George Adam Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (New York, 1898), 612–13, describes the extensive wheat fields as they existed in the late nineteenth century. For references to olive groves and presses in the vicinity of Malkā in the fourteenth century, see *Waqfiyah* 9/51, fol. 18, l. 18, and fol. 19, l. 22. Ottoman taxes on olives, olive oil, and presses have been published in Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*.



part of the tax base in this region during the sixteenth century.<sup>26</sup> It has always been a densely settled region, with numerous small villages that experienced marked population growth in the fourteenth and the middle of the sixteenth centuries.<sup>27</sup> Because of its continued prosperity into the nineteenth century, the region was among the first in Transjordan to fall under the jurisdiction of the Tanzimat administrators.<sup>28</sup>

The Sawād was, moreover, richly provided with public institutions, financially supported through endowments of largely local farmland. *Zāwiyahs* for Companions of the Prophet, pre-Islamic prophets, and local Sufi shaykhs and small village mosques<sup>29</sup> punctuated the landscape, as they do today.<sup>30</sup> The remains of a barrel-vaulted mosque still stand in the largest village of the region, Ḥibrās; the minaret of another mosque, which once carried an inscription that can be dated to 686/1287, was either dismantled for building material or collapsed at some point during the

<sup>26</sup>These taxes, like all others, are published on numerous pages throughout Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*.

<sup>27</sup>For population figures from the early Ottoman period, see Hütteroth and Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography*, and Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*. Evidence of population growth in the Mamluk period is based on a reading of ceramics from surface surveys, architectural inscriptions (see below), and written sources. For published reports on archaeological surveys in the region, see T. Kerestes, J. Lundquist, B. Wood, and K. Yassine, "An Archaeological Survey of Three Reservoir Areas in Northern Jordan," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 22 (1978): 108–35; G. King, "Preliminary Report on a Survey of Byzantine and Islamic Sites in Jordan, 1980," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 26 (1982): 85–96; G. King, C. J. Lenzen, and G. O. Rollefson, "Survey of Byzantine and Islamic Sites in Jordan, Second Preliminary Report, 1981," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 27 (1983): 85–437.

<sup>28</sup>The appointment of an Ottoman governor in Irbid in 1851 predated the Syrian Land Reform Law by thirteen years (for Ottoman administration of the Sawād in this period, see E. L. Rogan, "Bringing the State Back: The Limits of Ottoman Rule in Jordan, 1840–1910," in *Village, Steppe and State: The Social Origins of Modern Jordan*, ed. E. L. Rogan and T. Tell [London, 1994], 34–41).

<sup>29</sup>The Ottoman tax registers record 23 mosques in 23 villages in 950/1534 and 28 mosques in 25 villages in 1005/1596–97 (Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 15–16).

<sup>30</sup>Among these are the *zāwiyahs* of Shaykh ‘Uthmān al-Ḥamāmī and Shaykh ‘Īsā in Malkā and those of Shaykh Mismār, Banī Ḥamīd, and Shaykh Samādī in Ḥibrās (Table 9 in Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 36–37). Eight *zāwiyahs* are listed in Bakhīt’s tax registers as having been supported by properties in Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah (ibid., 16). How many of the *zāwiyahs*, and not just the *mawāqif*, were located in this region cannot be determined from these registers alone. Biographical dictionaries of the Mamluk period also describe the careers of individuals trained in such local mosques (and perhaps madrasahs). For references to shaykhs and *fiqh* scholars from Ḥibrās, Malkā, and other smaller villages in their vicinity, see Ghawānimah’s lists of names compiled from these sources in his *Al-Tārīkh al-Ḥaḍārī li-Sharqī al-Urdunn* (Amman, 1982), 128, 134, 181, 182, and 185–86. (He relies heavily on Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, al-Sakhāwī, and Ibn Kathīr.)



last eighty years.<sup>31</sup> According to the *deft̄er-i mufassal* #99, there were three muezzins and three khatibs serving perhaps two mosques in the same village.<sup>32</sup> Large landholdings by Mamluk sultans and amirs account for the cultivation of cash crops (such as olive oil) and the withdrawal of tax revenues levied on them for *awqāf*.<sup>33</sup> According to the early Ottoman *deft̄ers* of *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, some of the most productive villages (or parts of them) were endowed for institutions located outside the region. Sultan Khushqadam endowed three shares of the village of Marw (population of 28 households) and three shares of Harhar (38 households) for his madrasah in Cairo. The annual revenues for each of these villages in 950/1534 were 9900 and 9100 *aqja* respectively.<sup>34</sup> For Harhar the revenues came entirely from tax on wheat, the yield of which was among the highest in the region.<sup>35</sup> Although the size of the fields was not mentioned in any of three *deft̄ers* for this *nāḥiyah*, those of Marw amounted to 12 feddans (approximately three acres or 1.5 hectares).<sup>36</sup> Although the Ottomans continued to recognize Khushqadam's endowment, they made the rest of the remaining shares of the two estates the private property (*khāṣṣ*) of the provincial governor.

Parts of three other villages were endowed by amirs for various purposes<sup>37</sup>: Bulūqs (population of 3 households in 1005/1596–97) for al-‘Izzīyah madrasah in

<sup>31</sup>D. C. Steuernagel, "Der 'Adschlūn," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Palestinien Vertrag* 49 (1926): 155–56; Michael Meinecke, *Die mamlukische Architektur in Ägypten und Syrien (648/1250 bis 923/1517)* (Glückstadt, 1992), 2:65, entry #43.

<sup>32</sup>Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 111. This register names properties in Ḥibrāṣ that were made *waqf* for two mosques, but whether these mosques were also located in the village, as Bakhīt asserts, is not clear (*ibid.*, 15).

<sup>33</sup>In the Jordan Valley these cash crops include sugar, bananas, and indigo. The excavated site of Mamluk Tabaqat Fahl falls into the same pattern of land use in this regard (Walmsley, "Settled Life in Mamluk Jordan," 131). Excavations of Bayt Rās (C. Lenzen and E. Knauf, "Beit Rās/Capitolias: A Preliminary Evaluation of the Archaeological and Textual Evidence," *Syria* 64 [1987]: 21–46; C. Lenzen and A. McQuitty, "The 1984 Survey of the Irbid/Beit Ras Region," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 22 [1988]: 265–74) and Khirbat al-Burz (C. Lenzen and A. McQuitty, "Khirbat el-Borz," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 29 [1985]: 175–78) provide further archaeological evidence for intensive agriculture and growing population in this period.

<sup>34</sup>Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 38 and 45.

<sup>35</sup>Only Ḥibrāṣ produced as much wheat for that year.

<sup>36</sup>Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 45.

<sup>37</sup>The registers do not provide the date the endowments were originally made. Amirs are generally not named, so it is far from certain that the *awqāf* are Mamluk in origin. While this seems to generally be the case, Bakhīt suggests that the Bulūqs and Dullūzah endowments are Ayyubid (*ibid.*, 15, n. 36). Nonetheless, the *mawāqif* were still productive and the endowments recognized as such by the Ottoman authorities.



Damascus, Dullūzah (14 households in 950/1534) for the same institution, and Ḥawar (17 households in 1005/1596–97) for an unnamed recipient; all three were *timars* in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>38</sup> The highest revenues of any recorded year from each of the villages (2400, 2950, and 8220 *aqja* respectively) are primarily from grains; olives also figured prominently among the revenues from Ḥawar (2579 *aqja* in 950/1539).<sup>39</sup> The field size for Dullūzah and Ḥawar were recorded at six (ca. 1.5 acres or .3 hectare) and ten feddans (ca. 2.5 acres or 1.25 hectares), respectively.<sup>40</sup>

The village of Ḥibrāṣ, located eight kilometers northeast of Bayt Rās and twelve kilometers north of Irbid, was one of the largest villages in Mamluk Jordan's Sawād and the largest of the Ottoman's southern Ḥawrān.<sup>41</sup> Archaeological surveys have documented continuous occupation at the site from the Byzantine through Ottoman periods.<sup>42</sup> The remains of two contemporary mosques, both dated by inscriptions to 686/1287, have stood in the modern village of the same name until modern times.<sup>43</sup> The one, comprised of enclosure walls enclosing a small nine-bay mosque of later date, can be attributed to the Mamluk period on account of an inscription that once adorned its minaret, destroyed in the 1970s, and its construction;<sup>44</sup> nine-bay mosques, with the aisles running parallel to the qiblah wall, pointed arches, reused basalt columns (often from Byzantine churches), and deep mihrabs can be found throughout northern Jordan at thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sites.<sup>45</sup> Ḥibrāṣ does not seem to appear in contemporary written sources

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 21–22.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 170, 62, and 92.

<sup>40</sup>Dullūzah: p. 42 (930/1523); Ḥawar: p. 126 (1005/1596–97). In 1005/1596–97, Ḥawar's revenues had dropped to 5600 *aq/yr*.

<sup>41</sup>Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 15.

<sup>42</sup>JADIS site #2223.007.

<sup>43</sup>The twelve-meter high minaret that carried the dated inscription is now gone, but it was recorded in the 1920s by Steuernagel ("Der 'Adschlūn [1926]," 155–56). The inscription, not fully translated in the survey report, was apparently an abbreviated endowment text that carried the name of the donor, Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb II. Steuernagel attributes the minaret, on this basis, to 686/1286 (ibid., 156). The mosque to which this minaret was attached was no longer standing at the time of the survey.

<sup>44</sup>The inscription has been reproduced in Yūsuf Ghawānimah, *Madīnat Irbid fī al-'Aṣr al-Islāmī* (Irbid, 1986), 59.

<sup>45</sup>A published floor plan of this mosque can be found in ibid, 55. Mamluk mosques at Tabaqat Fahl, Amman, and 'Azraq (Walmsley, "Settled Life in Mamluk Jordan," 134, Figs. 3–5; 137, Fig. 6; and 137, Fig. 7) and several in the vicinity of 'Ajlūn are of roughly the same scale, construction, and design (Yūsuf Ghawānimah, *Al-Masājid al-Islāmīyah al-Qadīmah fī Minṭaqat 'Ajlūn* [Irbid, 1986]; N. MacKenzie, "Ayyubid/Mamluk Archaeology of the 'Ajlun Area: A Preliminary Typology," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 46 [2002]: 615–20).



until the middle of the fourteenth century, when historians note it for its connection to scholarship and agriculture.<sup>46</sup> The village continued to grow throughout the Mamluk period and into the Ottoman. The village had a large population by 950/1534 (at 90 households, two “bachelors,” and two imams) and has been described as “crowded.”<sup>47</sup> It also was a market center, one on the same scale as Kerak, Şalt, ‘Ajlūn, and Irbid;<sup>48</sup> the market taxes were paid directly to the provincial governor.<sup>49</sup> Taxes on wheat and barley supported, in part, local *zāwiyahs* and mosques.<sup>50</sup>

The much smaller village of Malkā, eight kilometers west of Ḥibrāş and seven northwest of Um Qeis, figures prominently in an unpublished manuscript in Dār al-Wathā’iq in Cairo.<sup>51</sup> In this lengthy *waqfiyah* of 796/1393, Sultan Barqūq has endowed several of his personal properties throughout Egypt and Syria for his madrasah complex on the Bayn al-Qasrayn in Cairo. These include businesses in Cairo, all of the district of Baḥrīyah and entire villages in the district of Kursīyah in Egypt, villages near Jerusalem, villages around the south shore of the Sea of Galilee, villages in the Golan, and a share of rural properties in the district of Ma‘arrat Nu‘mān. The section of this manuscript that concerns this study deals with villages in the Lower Galilee, specifically one called “Ḥay Malkā.”<sup>52</sup> Here is described a hilltop settlement hedged in on all sides by deep wadis, a tight network of villages and hamlets, and well-traveled roads. The land around Malkā, according to the *waqfiyah*, is full of vineyards, olive trees and presses, smaller villages, *mazra’as* (isolated plots of farmed land), and shrines. The only evidence in the *waqfiyah* of economic decline is the occasional reference to an outlying settlement in ruins (*kharāb*), fields that have been abandoned, or presses (*ma‘āşir*) that are no longer working (*baṭṭāl*). This is remarkable, given the fact that the endowment dates to the end of the fourteenth century. Clearly this part of Jordan was still densely settled and economically viable then.

<sup>46</sup>Neither Ibn Shaddād nor Baybars al-Dawādār, two local sources for the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, make any reference to this village (Ibn Shaddād, *Liban, Jordanie, Palestine*; Baybars al-Dawādār, *Zubdat al-Fikrah fī Tārīkh al-Hijrah*). On the other hand, in passages cited above from Ibn Qādī Shuhbah’s chronicle, Ḥibrāş emerges in several annual entries, including one for 761/1359 in which the village’s qadi is said to have drowned in a flood there that year, and in an obituary for 762/1360, when a religious scholar by the name of Aḥmad ibn Mūsā, a companion of Ibn Taymīyah, dies in the village.

<sup>47</sup>Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 23 and 8.

<sup>48</sup>Hütteroth and Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography*, 87, Fig. 8, and 199.

<sup>49</sup>Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 14.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 37, 59, and 111.

<sup>51</sup>*Waqfiyah* 9/51. I will publish the Malkā section of the manuscript in my forthcoming *Life on the Mamluk Frontier*.

<sup>52</sup>Fols. 18–21 of this manuscript.



The occupational and agricultural history of Malkā provides the perfect example of the intensified investment in the region by the Mamluks in the fourteenth century. Contemporary Arabic sources do not mention this village until the late fourteenth century, when scholars using the *niṣbah* "al-Malkāwī" appear in the biographical entries of Syrian chronicles.<sup>53</sup> The relative prosperity alluded to in the *waqfiyah* of 796/1393 seems to have continued into the sixteenth century. Its revenues in "summer crops" (melons, beans, and vegetables) and "trees" (here olive groves are likely) were among the highest in the region, according to the *defter* of 1005/1596–97. It had its own mosque by mid-century, and its population had doubled in size by the end of the century.<sup>54</sup> The village was still occupied in the late mandatory period and is today a thriving center of olive oil production.<sup>55</sup>

#### CENTRAL JORDAN—THE BALQĀ'

The Balqā', a highland plateau situated between Wādī Zarqā' and the Sawād in the north to Wādī Mu'jib and the Kerak Plateau in the south, has historically been one of the bread baskets of Jordan.<sup>56</sup> Its annual rainfall (350–440 mm) is sufficient for dry farming, and the high clay content of the local soils allow for a harvest even in drier seasons.<sup>57</sup> Although never a densely settled region, the Balqā' sustained a political importance as a communications corridor. The Mamluks retained the classical period "King's Highway" as the caravan route through Syria and placed their pigeon, postal, and pilgrimage routes, which led travelers from Damascus to

<sup>53</sup>Neither Ibn Shaddād nor Baybars al-Dawādār mention Malkā, even though they do write about other villages in Jordan (for passages on Nimrīn and Kafrīn, for example, see Baybars al-Dawādār, *Zubdat al-Fikrah fī Tārīkh al-Hijrah*, 180).

<sup>54</sup>For tax entries for Malkā in 950/1534 and 1005/1596–97, see Bakhīt, *Nāḥiyat Banī Kinānah*, 88 and 162. See also Hütteroth and Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography*, 202 (entry MZ65).

<sup>55</sup>Hütteroth and Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography*. Archaeological surveys in this region 1885–1914 and during the 1920s and 1960s documented many of the sites discussed above (Siegfried Mittmann, *Beiträge zur Siedlungs- und Territorialgeschichte des nördlichen Ostjordanlandes* [Wiesbaden, 1970]; Steuernagel, "Der 'Adschlūn [1926]"; idem, "Der 'Adschlūn," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Palestinien Vertrag* 47 [1925]: 206–40 and *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Palestinien Vertrag* 48 [1925]: 1–50, 121–34). (For Malkā, see Mittmann, *Beiträge zur Siedlungs- und Territorialgeschichte*, 24–25 and 257; Steuernagel, "Der 'Adschlūn [1926]," 118–19; and JADIS site #2223.016—"Khirbet Malkā.") The results of these surveys indicate that occupation was most intense during the Roman, Byzantine, and Mamluk periods. Renewed fieldwork in the Malkā region by Oklahoma State University in October, 2003, aimed at updating the database of these earlier surveys (see the author's upcoming field report, "The Malkā-Ḥibrāṣ Survey: Archaeological Investigation of Mamluk Agricultural Policy").

<sup>56</sup>The Balqā' was also known for its fruit and walnut groves.

<sup>57</sup>M. Russell, "Hesban During the Arab Period: A.D. 635 to the Present," in *Hesban 3: Historical Foundations*, ed. L. Geraty and L. G. Running (Berrien Springs, MI, 1989), 33.



either Cairo or Mecca, in this, Jordan's heartland. The region was also of political importance to the state, as local tribes actively participated in the internal power struggles among the Mamluk elite.<sup>58</sup> The capital of this district (*Wilāyat Balqā'*) from early in the fourteenth century until 1356 was the town of Ḥisbān.<sup>59</sup> At 895 meters above sea level, this hilltop site commands a view of the Madaba Plains and the northeast end of the Dead Sea and offers a glimpse, on clear days, of Jerusalem and Jericho. According to al-Ẓāhirī, Ḥisbān was the center of an agricultural district that included over 300 villages.<sup>60</sup> It was also strategically located on several important communications corridors: on the *barīd* and interior pigeon routes of Syria and just off the hajj road from Damascus.<sup>61</sup>

Phase II excavations at Tall Ḥisbān, begun in 1998, are contributing to our knowledge of the Mamluks' official presence in Transjordan in the fourteenth century.<sup>62</sup> Most of the architecture standing on the tell dates to this period, when a citadel occupied the summit. This complex consisted of what has been identified as the residence of the governor of the Balqā'<sup>63</sup> (a building loosely based on a

<sup>58</sup>For the role of the tribes of the Balqā' in Baybars' campaigns against the local Ayyubid princes and in reestablishing al-Nāṣir Muḥammad on the throne for his third reign, see Walker, "Mamluk Investment in Southern *Bilād al-Shām*."

<sup>59</sup>Ḥisbān was the capital of the southernmost district of Mamlakat Dimashq (al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ al-'asha'*, 4:200–1). For documentation of its rise and decline as a rural capital, see Walker, "Mamluk Investment in Southern *Bilād al-Shām*."

<sup>60</sup>Al-Ẓāhirī, *Zoubdat kachf el-mamālik*, 46.

<sup>61</sup>Yūsuf Ghawānimah has compiled lists of postal, pigeon, and pilgrimage stops from brief references in al-'Umarī, al-Qalqashandī, Ibn Shāhīn, al-'Aynī, and Ibn Aybak in his *Al-Tārīkh al-Ḥaḍārī*, 64 and 69.

<sup>62</sup>The most recent excavation reports and historical studies related to the project can be found in O. S. LaBianca, P. J. Ray, Jr., and B. J. Walker, "Madaba Plains Project, Tall Ḥisbān, 1998," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 38, no. 1 (2000): 9–21; B. J. Walker, "The Late Ottoman Cemetery in Field L, Tall Ḥisbān," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 322 (2001): 47–65; idem, "Mamluk Administration of Transjordan"; idem, "Mamluk Investment in Southern *Bilād al-Shām*"; and Walker and LaBianca, "The Islamic *Quṣūr* of Tall Ḥisbān." For on-line overviews of the project and weekly field reports, consult the following web sites: [history.okstate.edu/depttour/histarch/index.html](http://history.okstate.edu/depttour/histarch/index.html) (Oklahoma State University) and [www.quonic.com/~hisban](http://www.quonic.com/~hisban) (Andrews University). The Tall Ḥisbān excavations are under the senior direction of Dr. Øystein LaBianca of Andrews University. The author is Co-Director and Chief Archaeologist of the project. Andrews University began fieldwork at the site in 1968. For a full bibliography of this Phase I work, see B. J. Walker, "Military to Nomadization: The Middle and Late Islamic Periods," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 62, no. 4 (1999): 202–32. Tall Ḥisbān is registered in JADIS as site #2213.001.

<sup>63</sup>To date I have found only one name of an amir who is said to have served at Ḥisbān: Jarkas al-Jalālī (d. 791/1388) (Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh*, 4:308). The source does not specify the years he served at this post, only that he was a mere *jundī* when he served as *wālī* at Ḥisbān and was



four-*īwān* plan, with four clusters of rooms opening onto an open-air, paved courtyard), a small *ḥammām*, the remains of a kitchen, and a series of high barrel-vaulted rooms that may have been the barracks. The field seasons of 1998 and 2001 concentrated on the long storeroom of the "governor's residence," a room preserved by an earthquake and fire in mid-century.<sup>64</sup> This space was full of lamps and storage (sugar jars) and serving vessels (glazed relief wares), the latter monumental in size and bearing lengthy dedicatory inscriptions to unnamed amirs.<sup>65</sup> In the second half of the century the military installation on the summit was abandoned, while the town below and surrounding the tell, with an active marketplace and possible madrasah, continued to thrive until the end of the century.<sup>66</sup>

The architectural remains of the citadel and the objects recovered from its storeroom attest to Ḥisbān's role as an administrative center, garrison, and sugar transport point in the fourteenth century.<sup>67</sup> Both tell and town, however, were all but abandoned by the middle of the fifteenth century.<sup>68</sup> The Ottoman *defters* of the sixteenth century suggest that the population of Ḥisbān had been reduced to a small village. The register of 1538 states that Ḥisbān was the only village between Na'ūr and Wādī Mu'jib and that it had a population of only seven households.<sup>69</sup> The only tax category was "olive oil and grapes."<sup>70</sup> By the end of the century (1005/1596), there was no permanently settled population living there (*khālī*).<sup>71</sup> The village was not resettled until the late nineteenth century.<sup>72</sup>

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later promoted to an "amir of 100, commander of 1000" and transferred.

<sup>64</sup>Earthquakes in the vicinity of Ḥisbān are historically attested for 1341, 1343, 1366, 1403–4, and 1458 (Ghawānimah, "Earthquake Effects").

<sup>65</sup>The inscriptions are formulaic and generic: no historically attested name of amir has yet been deciphered. The two most common are: "Among the things made [on order] of the amir" (*mimmā 'umīla bi-rasm al-amīr*) and "Glory, good fortune, achievement, and happiness [to the owner]" (*al-'izzah wa-al-iqbāl wa-bulūgh al-āmāl wa-sa'ādah*).

<sup>66</sup>Walker, "Mamluk Investment in Southern *Bilād al-Shām*."

<sup>67</sup>There is no evidence for sugar production or processing at the site. However, water mills (of questionable date and use) have been identified during archaeological surveys (Robert D. Ibach, Jr., *Hesban 5: Archaeological Survey of the Hesban Region* [Berrien Springs, MI, 1987], 194). Moreover, the proximity of the tell to the Jordan Valley, its location on important transport routes, and the large quantity of sugar jars found in the storeroom (too many to serve the dietary needs of the garrison alone) suggest that Ḥisbān served as a sugar distribution point.

<sup>68</sup>The absence of fifteenth-century pottery at the site suggests this.

<sup>69</sup>Bakhīt and al-Ḥammūd, *Ṭābū Daftarī Raqm* 970, 100.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>71</sup>Bakhīt and al-Ḥammūd, *Ṭābū Daftarī Raqm* 185, 149 (entry #138) and Hütteroth and Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography*, 169 (entry P138).

<sup>72</sup>Walker, "Late Ottoman Cemetery."



## CENTRAL JORDAN—THE LOWER GHÔR

The agriculture of the Jordan Valley received considerable attention from Mamluk officials over the course of the fourteenth century. High temperatures (surpassing 45° C in the summers) and an abundance of water ensured that *iqṭā'āt* located here would be productive. Many factors contributed to the growth of large towns and villages in this region during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries: the destruction of Tiberias and Baisan during the Ayyubid-Crusader wars, the new geographical division and administration of the Jordan Valley by the Ayyubids and Mamluks, security, the *barīd* system of Sultan Baybars (the routes of which now passed through the Ghôr), and the sugar industry.<sup>73</sup> In the Jordan Valley new villages emerged and others were transformed into agricultural storage places (for grains and sugar), industrial sites (primarily for sugar), and centers of large "plantations" for large-scale production of grains. Some of the most lucrative *iqṭā'āt* were located here, and many of these were made *waqf* for sultanic institutions in Cairo.

As quickly as the Jordan Valley benefited from official investment, however, it suffered from its gradual withdrawal. The plague of 748/1347 may have been the initial cause of this decline. Maqrīzī is only one of many sources that describe this event in Jordan. He claims, "According to the news that I have received, the people of al-Ghôr and Baisan find the lions, wolves, wild asses, and other wild animals dead and on them the trace of the bubo."<sup>74</sup> The heat and crowded living conditions may have made the effects of the plague worse than in other parts of Jordan. The Ghôr, unlike other regions of the country, did not recover; many villages were abandoned, and the sugar industry eventually collapsed.

It is possible to trace these developments through textual and archaeological sources. Ottoman tax registers for Liwā' 'Ajlūn make reference to two villages in the central Jordan Valley endowed by the Mamluk sultan Barqūq for his madrasah-mausoleum complex in Cairo.<sup>75</sup> Nimrīn (185 m below sea level) and Kafrīn were little more than rest stops on a well-traveled road between Kerak and Damascus at

<sup>73</sup>Kareem, *Settlement Patterns in the Jordan Valley*, 10–11. For a bibliography on Mamluk sugar, see Walker, "Mamluk Investment in Southern *Bilād al-Shām*." The best archaeological evidence for sugar processing comes from Abū Sarbut and Tall Abū Ghurdān. Tall Ḥisbān and Tabaqat Fihl appear to have been sugar distribution sites.

<sup>74</sup>Kareem, *Settlement Patterns in the Jordan Valley*, 16.

<sup>75</sup>Bakhīt and al-Ḥammūd, *Tābū Daftarī Raqm 970*, 102 (*defter-i mufassal* #970) and 125 (*defter-i mufassal* #185). Register #185 is based on the 1005/1591 census. Register #970, on the other hand, is undated, but has been attributed to 945/1538 by its editors on the basis of the name of one *iqṭā'* holder (*ibid.*, 9). See also Mehmed İpşarlı and Muḥammad Dāwūd al-Tamīmī, *Awqāf wa-Amlāk al-Muslimīn fī Filasṭīn* (Istanbul, 1982), 32, 53, and 94.



the turn of the fourteenth century.<sup>76</sup> By the end of the century they were lucrative enough for the sultan to have set aside the entire village of Nimrīn and shares of Kafrīn for his Cairo complex.<sup>77</sup> Excavations at Tall Nimrīn and surveys of the region have documented a long history of occupation in the area that peaks in the Mamluk period.<sup>78</sup> Evidence of sugar production in the form of water mills and *abaleeg* (sugar jars) has been identified here and in the region.<sup>79</sup> The Ottoman authorities respected Barqūq's endowment in both of these villages, at least through the end of the sixteenth century. They invested in the Ghôr in order to rejuvenate their tax base in the area. While Nimrīn remained a small village throughout, the population of Kafrīn grew to 43 households, which oversaw 20 feddans of some of the richest grain fields in central and southern Jordan.<sup>80</sup> Cotton and sesame replaced sugar cane as cash crops; the Mamluk sugar industry was never revived.<sup>81</sup>

#### SOUTHERN JORDAN—KERAK PLATEAU

Southern Jordan was dominated by Kerak Castle, which was the capital of its own province (*Mamlakat Karak*), a favored place of exile for deposed sultans, and the

<sup>76</sup>Baybars al-Dawādār, *Zubdat al-Fikrah fī Tārīkh al-Hijrah*, 180.

<sup>77</sup>Bakhīt and al-Ḥammūd, *Tābū Daftarī Raqm 970*, 23.

<sup>78</sup>JADIS, site #2014.027; J. Mellaart, "Preliminary Report of the Archaeological Survey in the Yarmouk and Jordan Valley for the Four Point Irrigation Scheme," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 6–7 (1962): 126–57, Pls. 24–32 (site #58); M. Ibrahim, J. Sauer, and K. Yassine, "The East Jordan Valley Survey, 1975," *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 222 (1976): 41–66; A. Ḥadīdī, "Archaeological Work of the Department of Antiquities," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 25 (1981): 15–42, 6 Pls. (in Arabic); M. Piccirillo, "A Church at Shurat Nimrīn," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 26 (1982): 335–42, Pls. 103–10; R. H. Dornemann, "Preliminary Comments on the Pottery Traditions at Tell Nimrīn, Illustrated from the 1989 Season of Excavations," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 34 (1990): 153–82; J. Flanagan and D. McCreery, "First Preliminary Report of the 1989 Nimrīn Project," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 34 (1990): 131–52; J. W. Flanagan et al., "Preliminary Report of the 1990 Excavation at Tell Nimrīn," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 36 (1992): 89–111; and Kareem, *Settlement Patterns in the Jordan Valley* (site #182). Flanagan, McCreery, and Yassine excavated Tell Nimrīn/Tell al-Shūnah South from 1989 to 1994. For Kafrīn, see Ibrahim, Sauer, and Yassine, "The East Jordan Valley Survey" and Kareem, *Settlement Patterns in the Jordan Valley* (site #197—p. 69, Pl. 48).

<sup>79</sup>See Ibach, *Archaeological Survey of the Hesban Region*, and Kareem, *Settlement Patterns in the Jordan Valley*, for a list of sites.

<sup>80</sup>Bakhīt and al-Ḥammūd, *Tābū Daftarī Raqm 185*, 125. For a chart comparing the yield of wheat and barley among villages in Liwā' 'Ajlūn, see p. 52.

<sup>81</sup>Ibn Taghrībirdī provides the last historical account of sugar production in the Jordan Valley in 802/1399 (Kareem, *Settlement Patterns in the Jordan Valley*, 17).



nursery of sons of sultans during the Mamluk period.<sup>82</sup> This is one of the most inhospitable regions of Jordan; it is crisscrossed by deep canyons, is mostly desert, and, for the period under discussion, was frequented by nomadic groups who had a reputation for attacking trading and pilgrimage caravans and local villages. Contemporaries emphasized how difficult travel was there and how little water there was.<sup>83</sup> Nonetheless, villages, mills, *mazārs*, and *mashhads* were numerous on the Kerak Plateau under Mamluk suzerainty. Many of these fell into ruin, however, over the course of the fifteenth century, as villages were abandoned for the security of the hills on the western and southern fringes of the plateau.<sup>84</sup> The withdrawal of Mamluk troops from the local garrisons, which protected these villages and the road system, quite likely contributed to this state of affairs.<sup>85</sup>

A partially published *waqfiyah* in the Dār al-Wathā'iq in Cairo describes the endowment by Sultan Sha'bān of the village of Ādar and a bathhouse and farmland in its vicinity in 777/1375.<sup>86</sup> The document describes a large and thriving farming community of 140 households (both Muslim and Christian),<sup>87</sup> where a variety of foodstuffs were produced (including walnuts, fruit, wheat, olives, and cheese), and there was local industry (flour mills and oil and wine presses) and public services (mosque, madrasah, bathhouse). However, the *waqfiyah* also bears witness to some degree of economic decline: 10 of the 83 houses in the village were uninhabited, as were several cisterns. By the early Ottoman period Ādar had been

<sup>82</sup>Both al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and Barqūq lived here during their periods of exile from Cairo, and it was from here that they plotted the return to their thrones. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, moreover, grew up at Kerak, as did the sons of Baybars. For an archaeological description of the Mamluk palace in the citadel, see R. M. Brown, "Excavations in the 14th Century A.D. Mamluk Palace at Kerak," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 33 (1989): 287–304.

<sup>83</sup>Al-Zāhirī, *Zoubdat kachf el-mamālik*, 43.

<sup>84</sup>Brown, "Late Islamic Settlement Patterns on the Kerak Plateau"; R. Brown, "Late Islamic Ceramic Production and Distribution in the Southern Levant: A Socio-Economic and Political Interpretation," Ph.D. diss., SUNY-Binghamton, 1992, 363–467. Archaeological surveys attest to the widespread abandonment of settlements during this period (Miller, *Archaeological Survey of the Kerak Plateau*). Jeremy Johns argues, however, that the farmers of the Kerak Plateau shifted from a market to a subsistence economy as early as the thirteenth century. For his argument, based entirely on ceramic production, see his "The Rise of Middle Islamic Painted Ware" and "The *Longue Durée*."

<sup>85</sup>For a recent reassessment of this period, see Shawkat Ḥujjah, *Al-Tārīkh al-Siyāsī li-Miṭṭaqat Sharqī al-Urdun min Janūb al-Shām fī 'Aṣr Dawlat al-Mamālik al-Thānīyah* (Irbid, 2002), which attributes much of Jordan's social and economic decline in the fifteenth century to amiral rebellions.

<sup>86</sup>*Waqfiyah* 8/49, sections published in Ghawānimah, "Al-Qaryah fī Junūb al-Shām," and idem, *Tārīkh Sharqī al-Urdunn*, 243–44. The name of the recipient of this endowment is missing from the extant manuscript.

<sup>87</sup>Ghawānimah estimates a total population of some 700 people (Ghawānimah, "Al-Qaryah fī Junūb al-Shām," 364).



reduced to a mere *mazra'ah*: an isolated, cultivated field, with no permanent settlement.<sup>88</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

I have come across three Mamluk *waqfiyāt* that record sultanic endowments of agricultural land in Jordan.<sup>89</sup> They are roughly contemporary, dating to the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>90</sup> All three describe a relatively healthy economy and thriving village structure in different parts of the country. These, combined with references to Jordanian villages in contemporary sources and evidence from archaeological surveys and excavations, indicate that in terms of population and agricultural production, Jordan was doing very well throughout the fourteenth century. While there is evidence of decline in some regions of Jordan fifty to a hundred years later (villages are abandoned, certain industries disappear), this is far from true for the country as a whole.

If the Black Death of 748/1347 was the catalyst for economic decline across the Mamluk Empire, why was there an agricultural flowering in Jordan in this very period? What do the flurry of endowments, population growth, and continued market activity mean? Perhaps the importance given to this single event has been exaggerated, and attention should be paid, instead, to other factors, such as environmental change, agricultural diversity, and the peculiarities of Mamluk administration of the Transjordan. Pollen analysis of cores taken throughout Jordan indicates that the higher precipitation that allowed for increased intensive agriculture in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries began to decrease during the fifteenth.<sup>91</sup> This would have heavily impacted water-intensive crops, such as cane sugar, and would have diminished overall agricultural yields for areas without irrigation.

Political problems may have been an indirect factor in the abandonment of villages in southern and central Jordan. In northern Jordan, where local farming did not have to rely on state support (to repair irrigation canals, for example) and had a diversified agricultural base (not a plantation economy), there is very little evidence of real economic or social decline. On the other hand, administrative centers (and especially those garrisoned with Mamluks, such as Ḥisbān) and "plantation farms" (Nimrīn and Kafrīn) seemed to have suffered the most from

<sup>88</sup>Bakhīt and al-Ḥammūd, *Ṭābū Daftarī Raqm 970*, 152 and Bakhīt and al-Ḥammūd, *Ṭābū Daftarī Raqm 185*, 306.

<sup>89</sup>*Waqfiyah 8/49*, *Waqfiyah 9/51*, and *Waqfiyah 704*.

<sup>90</sup>777/1375, 796/1393, and 792/1389, respectively.

<sup>91</sup>N. Shehadeh, "The Climate of Jordan in the Past and Present," *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 2 (1985): 25–37, and W. van Zeist, "Past and Present Environments of the Jordan Valley," *ibid.*, 199–204.



economic and political problems in Cairo, which drew away locally-based soldiers and administrators. The affluence of the fourteenth century and general impoverishment in some of these regions in the fifteenth may be related to the successes and failures of the *iqṭāʿ* system, after its reorganization by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad during his *rawk* of 1313–25.<sup>92</sup> While it is dangerous to base even preliminary assessments on only a handful of villages, such a pattern of regionally based growth and decline is generally supported by archaeological surveys, which document hundreds of sites.

The traditional views on Mamluk “decline,” culled largely from Egyptian chronicles, do not do justice to the complexities of economic developments and settlement cycles in Jordan. Here economic trends are not so easily explained by epidemics, changes in trade routes, the depredations of soldiers in urban streets, and abusive taxation practices. Mamluk investment in Transjordan was exploitative and short-term, but only in some districts did it produce a “boom and bust” society for the period under consideration.

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<sup>92</sup>Sato Tsugitaka, *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam: Sultans, Muqtaʿs and Fallahun* (Leiden, 1997), 237.



## ABBREVIATIONS FOR SOURCES

## MANUSCRIPTS

*Waqfiyah* 8/49 *Sijill* 49, *maliff* 8, *Ḥujjaj ‘umarā’ wa-salāṭīn*, Dār al-Wathā’iq, Cairo (Sultan Sha‘bān’s endowment of 777—lands in Egypt and Syria, name of recipient missing from manuscript)—*mawqūf* of village of Ādar and its dependents, also published in Ghawānimah 1982 and 1979: 243–44.

*Waqfiyah* 9/51 *Sijill* 51, *maliff* 9, *Ḥujjaj ‘umarā’ wa-salāṭīn*, Dār al-Wathā’iq, Cairo (Sultan Barqūq’s endowment of 796—lands in Egypt and Syria for his madrasah complex on the Bayn al-Qasrayn in Cairo)—*mawqūf* of village of Malkā and its dependents, fols. 18–21.

*Waqfiyah* 704 *Sijill* J.-704, Wizārat al-Awqāf, Cairo (Sultan Barqūq’s endowment of 792—miscellaneous rural properties, locations throughout southern Syria).

## ELECTRONIC SOURCES

JADIS: Jordan Antiquities Database and Information System (courtesy of the Department of Antiquities office, Amman, Jordan; also available on-line at [www.nis.gov.jo/anti](http://www.nis.gov.jo/anti)).



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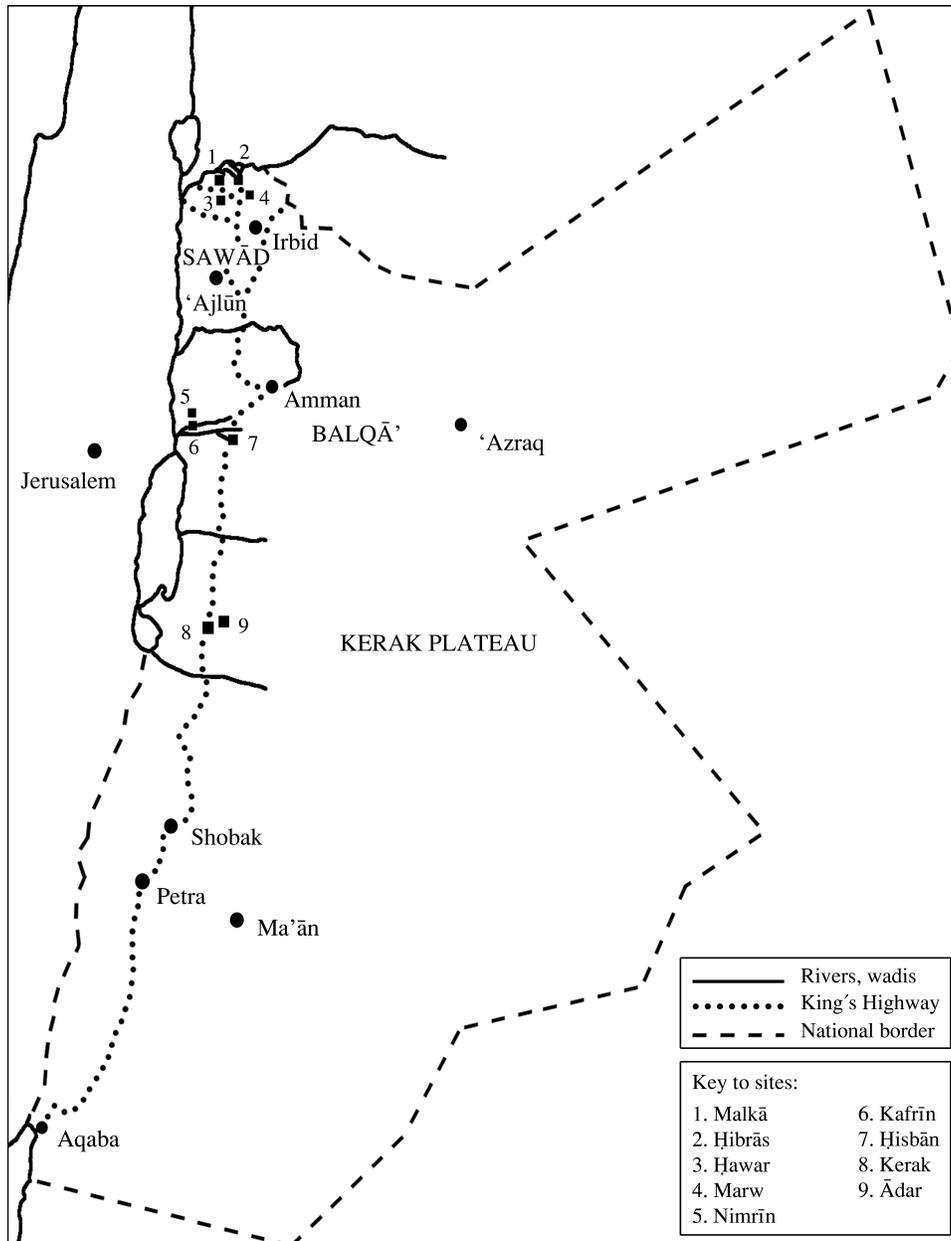


Fig. 1. Agricultural map of Mamluk Jordan.





Fig. 2. Mamluk mosque in Ḥibrāṣ. Built in two phases and reused in modern times, this mosque has never been formally excavated. A recent architectural survey by Oklahoma State University indicates that the central building, a late Ottoman or Mandate-period mosque, was built within the remains of a larger thirteenth–fourteenth-century mosque.



Fig. 3. Interior view of later Ḥibrāṣ mosque. This small, three-aisled mosque is typical of constructions in northern and central Jordan. Like many historical mosques in the region, it had no minaret: a staircase of basalt steps engaged in the exterior face of the qiblah wall led to the roof, from where the muezzin called the faithful to prayer.





Fig. 4. Modern village of Malkā. Malkā produces some of the highest quality olive oil in the region, as it did in the Mamluk period.



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Fig. 5. Network of wadis surrounding Malkā. Sultan Barqūq's *waqfiyah* of 796/1393 lists numerous wadis, watercourses, springs, and hills that demarcated his estate in Malkā. It is difficult to identify the nearby wadis today with those detailed by Barqūq's scribe: the residents of Malkā today know the river beds by a variety of names, and there is little consensus among them.



Fig. 6. Tell and grainfields in Ḥisbān. Once the administrative capital of the Balqā', Mamluk Ḥisbān was known for its wheat fields, orchards, gardens, and market. Grains and olives dominate the villagers' agricultural production today.



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Fig. 7. *Qa'ah* of Mamluk "governor's complex" at Tall Ḥisbān. When first excavated in the 1970s, the flagstones of the central courtyard were in pristine condition, and some walls were preserved to a height of a meter and a half. Although greatly dilapidated today, it remains one of only two Mamluk palaces in Jordan. It is currently undergoing restoration.



Fig. 8. Mamluk sugar jar. The Mamluks produced several different sugar products, each of varying degrees of fine or coarse crystallization and priced accordingly. Sugar cane was cut and boiled and then dried in ceramic cones, where crystallization occurred. The final product was eventually stored in cylindrical or hourglass-shaped ceramic jars for storage and transport. Sugar cones are found in production sites, primarily in the Ghôr. Sugar jars (*abaleeg*) are associated with both production sites and administrative centers, which may have doubled as redistribution points.





Fig. 9. View of Jordan River Valley. The Jordan River and the wadis that flow into it were the focus of intensive sugarcane cultivation during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The industry then largely disappeared in Jordan, as epidemics decimated the workforce and the local *iqtā'* system that supported the industry collapsed. By the sixteenth century cotton and indigo became the main plantation crops in the Ghôr.



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Fig. 10. Wādī Mu'jib. This deep canyon, the largest in Jordan, made transport to and from Kerak Castle quite difficult. In spite of this, parts of the Kerak Plateau were fairly densely settled in the Mamluk period with well-to-do farming villages.



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Fig. 11. Village of Ādar. Sultan Sha‘bān endowed this village for a charitable purpose, according to a partially published *waqfiyah* of 777/1375. Nothing of the Mamluk village remains, however; the core of the modern village is Ottoman. Today Ādar is a prosperous village of wheat farmers, a large percentage of whom are Roman Catholic.



Fig. 12. ‘Ajlūn in the springtime. ‘Ajlūn is located in one of the best watered and richest agricultural regions of Jordan. Unlike other areas, this part of northern Jordan appears to have been continuously occupied and agriculturally productive from the Middle Islamic period until today.

