

In the framework of the long-established tradition of Crusader studies, the Lordship of Transjordan, explored and settled by the Franks in the years 1100–1189, has hitherto been, surprisingly, in view of its great significance for the kingdom of Jerusalem, a relatively neglected subject. Despite the scarcity of available sources, the general assumption appears to be that for the Franks, the main function of Transjordan was to serve as a frontier land located on the south-eastern periphery of the kingdom. Recent research has, however, revised this long-standing narrative. Based on a detailed examination, critical analysis and combination of the available historical and archaeological sources, including the results from a case study of Petra, the study has challenged this traditional view and reconstructed a different picture for this region. It argues that both the region of Transjordan and its castles fulfilled more complex functions than defence, and demonstrates that for Transjordan the definition of frontier is incorrect and reductive. Moreover, it shows that the lordship had a great importance for the entire kingdom, to which it was tightly connected. Transjordan was essential to the Latin Kingdom, from economic, ideological, military and political perspectives. Therefore, a deeper analysis of the socio-economics of Transjordan is a necessary step for progressing towards the understanding of the overall picture of the Crusader period in the Levant.

The study has demonstrated the important potential of archaeology for progressing towards our understanding of this region; since the documentary sources are extremely scarce, archaeology, although still fragmentary, is of crucial importance. Results have been obtained through a collection and interpretation of all available archaeological documentation, including archaeological literature, recent excavation results, Buildings Archaeology, and ceramic analysis. These methods will be adopted in a new study and will be matched with additional archaeological tools, including the study of landscape and of the flora and fauna, with the goal of collecting as many data as possible from the archaeological record.

Results of the former study have shown that the Lordship included various forms of settlements, and that Southern Transjordan was clearly the area where their presence was planned permanently and extensively. It is here that recording settlement patterns is crucial for our deeper understanding of the overall Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. The next step is therefore to examine more in details the archaeology of the area between the Karak plateau and Petra, by focusing on sites specifically selected on the basis of their archaeological potential.

The project goals consist in contributing to clarifying the following crucial research questions: what are the characteristics of society in the Crusader period in Transjordan, and what was the impact of this phase on the existing society? How does this contribute towards our better understanding of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem? It is expected that this study will produce significant data contributing to clarifying these important questions and to this aim, more specific ones will be addressed while carrying out the study and interpreting the archaeological record. These will address the elements of continuity and change of the Crusader period in Transjordan with the earlier and later periods; the defining characteristics of settlement in Southern Transjordan, including settlement intensity, location, typology of sites and defining characteristics for each area of the territory which the Franks chose to settle permanently; the impact of this period on the local economy, lifestyle and living standards, as reflected by elements like diet, financial investment in architecture and ability to purchase imported objects; the intensity and dynamics of trade and agriculture.