



Introduction

Introdução

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A roundtable entitled “Belvoir Castle and the Fortified Architecture of Saint John Hospital in Jerusalem” took place on December 1 and 2, 2016 in Lyons, in the premises of the Rhône Departmental Archives.

On the occasion of this publication, we wish to thank Mr. Bruno Galland, the Archives’ curator, for his warm and hospitable welcome, Lyon 2 University, the following joint research units: UMR ArAr 5138 (Archaeometry and Archeology) at the Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée, UMR 5648 (History, Archeology, Literatures of the Medieval Christian and Muslim worlds) and the Centre d’Histoire Espaces et Cultures (CHEC – UPR 1001) in Clermont-Ferrand for organizing this event.

This roundtable is a first assessment on the research on the Hospitaller castle of Belvoir carried out in the previous four years. Between 1966 and 1968, Israeli archeologist Meir Ben Dov had conducted excavations there¹. His goal was to clear the walls of the medieval fortification of the parasitic structures that were the houses of the Arabic villages that had appeared over the centuries after the castle was abandoned. The first level and parts of the moats had been filled with the backfill from the destruction of the upper levels. Photographs taken during Ben Dov’s excavations show that the backfill on which dwellings had been built by the local population could reach the top of the first vault of the inner castle. We know that many observations were made during these operations and that a large quantity of archeological material was unearthed by the excavators. However, the result from this research has never been published.

In 2012, Olivier Tourny, then chairman of the *Centre de Recherche Français de Jérusalem*, wanted to revitalize medieval archeological research in Israel. Due to the undeniable interest in the site and the feasibility of the operations, a new excavation research program was initiated at the Belvoir site.

¹ BEN-DOV, Meir – “Belvoir (Kokhav Ha-Yarden)”. In STERN, Ephraim – *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. Jerusalem: Carta, 1993, t. 1, pp. 182-186.

During the first field phase of 2013/2016 different researches of the fortification were conducted. A new plan was drawn up, the building analysis focused on the architecture of the inner castle. A near comprehensive study of the lapidary brought to light the dismantling of the Hospitaller chapel at an indeterminate period. These archeology issues relied on the analysis of the historical and topographic context in light of textual sources. The study of the Belvoir castle is an opportunity to take another look at the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem in the Holy Land².

The erection of the fortification took place under the rule of Gilbert of Assailly (1162-1170), which seems to have developed the military aspect of the Order over its initial purpose, the service of the poor, as evidenced by his involvement in king Amalric of Jerusalem's expedition in 1169³. Like the Krak of the Knights or the castle of Margat, Belvoir is a scaleback military base in a highly strategic location⁴. Almost ever since its foundation, the Hospital of Jerusalem draws on the "Fraternity" of the hospital, consisting of those who remain in the West and who receive the same spiritual benefits as if they were in Jerusalem⁵.

The Hospitaller castle of Belvoir has long drawn the attention of archeologists working in the Holy Land. At the very beginning of the twentieth century, Lawrence of Arabia came to Palestine to visit the Crusader castles and stopped in Belvoir. He offered a succinct map of the fortress from what he could observe⁶. Under the British Mandate, officials recorded various observations and tried to limit the deterioration of the remains. Meir Ben Dov's works has provided an overview of the site. The purpose of the archeological work that began in 2013 was a comprehensive, interdisciplinary study consisting of three main parts: the resumption of the study of documents, an architectural analysis of the fortification and stratigraphic

² BOAS, Adrian J. – *Archaeology of the Military Orders. A Survey of the urban centers rural settlements and castles of the military orders in the Latin East (c.1120–1291)*. London: Routledge, 2006.

³ GROUSSET, René – *Histoire des Croisades et du royaume Franc de Jérusalem*. Paris: Perrin, 1991. (Première édition 1934-1936).

⁴ ELLENBLUM, Ronnie – "Frankish and Muslim Siege Warfare and the construction of Frankish Concentric Castles". In BALARD, Michel; KEDAR, Benjamin Z.; RILEY-SMITH, Jonathan. (eds.) – *Dei gesta per Francos. Mélanges en l'honneur de J. Richard*, Adelshot, 2001, pp. 187-197.

⁵ PRAWER, Joshua – *Histoire du royaume Latin de Jérusalem*. Trad. G. Nahon. Paris: CNRS Editions, 2007.

⁶ LAWRENCE, Thomas Edward – *Crusader castles*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2004.

excavations. It brought a lot of new findings. From the historical standpoint, we've been able to specify the location of the site within the possessions of Galilee and the strategic location of the castle in the defense of the Frankish Kingdom of Jerusalem. It was also possible to specify the chronology of the alternating Frankish and Muslim occupations from the end of the twelfth to the middle of the thirteenth centuries. The excavations have uncovered a settlement occupying the top of the basalt organs that underlies the foundations of the castle and predates the Hospitaller castle. This first settlement can be tied to the property Yves Velos sold to the Hospitallers. This discovery is important in that it makes known the materiality of a small rural Frankish installation in the Holy Land in the middle of the twelfth century.

The archeological study shows that the castle was built very fast with local materials and according to a centered and regular plan with a double wall⁷. Some particularities have been noted such as the systematic installation of staples on the facing of the walls of the sloping banks, the use of basalt and two limestone rocks in the elevations. One important contribution of this study was the reconstruction of the chapel with its decorative elements.

This meeting was an opportunity to present other Hospitaller sites in the Holy Land, and opened the door to comparative perspectives that could be developed later. Other analyses done in Southern France, in Provence and around Toulouse, allow to add to the study on military orders and integrate the relations between the West and the East.

It is yet a step in the research on Belvoir. This will continue with the archeological study of the second wall, the study of materials, of the fauna, and a more in-depth work on the place of the castle in the castral architecture. This research will be published in a detailed monographic publication.

⁷ BILLER, Thomas – “Die Johanniterburg Belvoir am Jordan. Zum frühen Burgenbau der Ritterorden im Heiligen Land“. *Architectura : Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Baukunst* 19 (1989), pp. 105-136.

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