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MEDIEVAL RURAL
SETTLEMENTS IN THE
SYRIAN COASTAL REGION

(12TH AND 13TH CENTURIES)

Balázs Major

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Preface

The publication of this monograph marks a significant advance in our understanding of the archaeology of the territories in the Near East occupied by the crusaders. It originated as a PhD thesis – now extensively revised – that was prepared under the supervision of Professor Denys Pringle of Cardiff University and was submitted and examined in 2008. The examiners were Professor Hugh Kennedy of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, and myself.

As the title makes clear, the subject-matter is the archaeology of crusader settlements and settlement patterns in the areas of the present-day Republic of Syria that came under the rule of the crusaders at various points during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In political terms, that means that it is concerned with the northern portion of the crusader county of Tripoli and the southern parts of the principality of Antioch. Some areas were only under crusader rule for a few years, while others, for example ʿAṣṣūl and its environs, were held for around 180 years. Neither Tripoli nor Antioch is situated within the region discussed, but on the other hand, the whole of the coastal area and various inland areas, notably the Gap of Homs, are. The crusaders never occupied the cities of the hinterland: Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Shaizar or Damascus, although at times during the twelfth century their rule did include parts of the Orontes valley.

The great strength of this study lies in the integration of archaeological and literary data. Evidence for settlement and society from the western-language sources produced by the crusaders themselves is limited and patchy. The Arabic materials, on the other hand, are extensive and, until now, they have been comparatively little used. Professor Major's careful reading of these sources in conjunction with the detailed maps produced during the twentieth century provides a huge array of topographical information. On its own, however, this data is of little value. It is his extensive archaeological field work that makes this study so important and so original. This was conducted over a number of years in association with the Syro-Hungarian Archaeological Mission (SHAM) founded by him. Previously most work on the medieval archaeology of the region had concentrated on the larger and more obvious localities, but, often with the help of local residents, he was able to investigate the remains of a large number of smaller settlement sites and structures, many of which he identified as dating to this period for the first time. Vital in this respect is the ceramic evidence gleaned from field walking, which often provides the essential clue to occupation during the crusader period.

Starting in 2007, Professor Major has been the Hungarian director of the SHAM project engaged in excavating the castle and suburbs of the Hospitaller fortress of al-Marqab (Margat). The results of this work are spectacular, but, although some of the findings are now in print, publication of the full report will inevitably take some time. This programme has allowed the opportunity for further reflection on the subject matter of the present study – not least thanks to the ceramic material excavated under scientifically controlled conditions – and the findings mean that our understandings have advanced significantly since the thesis was submitted.

Professor Major's field work was timely. Back in 2008 when the thesis was completed, no one would have predicted the tragic events that have engulfed Syria in the past few years. The sort of detailed field work he undertook then would not now be possible. Professor Major had considerable help from the staff of the various Syrian archaeological services and also from local people who drew his attention to sites of potential interest and were able to tell him about what had once been visible but was by then destroyed. Without their assistance, far less could have been achieved, and the study should be viewed as a tribute to these people who at very least have had to endure the fear and privations brought about by warfare and who in many instances may well have suffered far more grievously.

Peter Edbury
Cardiff University
December 2015

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Notes on Transcription

Medieval sites in the Levant usually have at least two names, an Arabic and a Latin one. However there are often many versions in both languages. In order to have a consistent and practical system, the present day Arabic name of every site was used. The standardised version was taken from the 1:50.000 scale maps made by the Cartographical Institute of the Syrian Army and whenever it was necessary the *Muʿjam al-Juġrāfiyy li'l-Quṭr al-ʿArabiyy al-Sūriyy* was also consulted. In the case of a few large towns their well known English names are used, like Antioch instead of Anṭākiya or Homs instead of Ḥimṣ. The list of concordances (ie. the most frequently used medieval Frankish equivalent of the name of each site) is given in:

Database II. Settlements in the Syrian Coastal Region Featuring in the Medieval Latin and Arabic Documents

Database III. Sites Visited between 2000 and 2015 in the Syrian Coastal Region

In the transcription of Arabic names to Latin letters the use of complex fonts was avoided and whenever it was possible, the equivalent of the different Arab letters was given with the simplest combination of Latin letters. The concordances are summarized in the tables below:

أ	a	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	ʿ
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dz	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	ه	h
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ي	y
ص	ṣ	ء	ʾ
ض	ḍ	ة	a

Long vowels are indicated with dash line

Summary

This book is the result of more than a dozen years of research in the field of the hitherto unstudied medieval settlement pattern of the Syrian coastal region in the 12th and 13th centuries. The conclusions presented in this work were reached with the combined use of several source types including medieval documents, travellers' accounts, former research, map evidence, toponymy, archive and satellite photographs, oral sources and extensive archaeological field surveys accompanied by documentation between the years 2000 and 2015. After enumerating the historical events that influenced the settlement pattern of the coast, its centres, including the towns and castles (with special regard to the smaller fortifications of the countryside that seem to have been a Frankish introduction to the area) are analysed. Following the detailed examination of the written sources and the architectural material preserved at these lesser sites, a closer look at the villages and their environment aims to draw a general picture on the density of settlements and their basic characteristics. The book also discusses communication lines and provides an assessment of the medieval population that inhabited the region in the 12th and 13th centuries. The text is accompanied by a collection of maps, plan drawings, tables and illustrations on a selected number of sites visited during the field surveys.

1. Introduction

The Syrian coastal region has been one of the great centres of human civilization and its rich history is faithfully reflected in its archaeological material. Being the most important ‘sea gate’ of the Fertile Crescent towards the Mediterranean, the Syrian coast has always stood at the crossroads of civilizations and served both as a meeting point and melting pot of cultures. One of the outstanding periods in the life of the region occurred in the 12th and 13th centuries, when the Crusades and the settlement of the Europeans resulted in a period of historical changes at a level unprecedented in the previous centuries. Nearly two hundred years of a European presence left many marks visible in the archaeological evidence. A handful of large and spectacular sites, especially castles, were studied to a certain extent. But very little attention has been paid to lesser remains despite the fact that they are the sole indicators of the network of rural settlements that provided for the towns and large castles. Research on the pattern of rural settlements and their remains is essential to the understanding of medieval life and the history of the coastal region. This study is also of vital importance for more practical reasons. In recent decades the Syrian coastal region has been undergoing the largest transformation of its physical environment in history and as a result of this the infrastructural and agricultural developments now threaten a large part of the mostly undocumented archaeological heritage of the countryside. This process has only been accelerated by the tragic events that started in the spring of 2011.

Although the general outlook comprises the whole of the Levantine coast which showed more or less the same kind of development, this book of combined historical and archaeological study concentrates on the coastal territory between Antioch and Tripoli. These were the capitals of the two Crusader states that incorporated the Syrian coastlands in the 12th and 13th centuries. Apart from being a relatively compact geographical unit which included the coastal strip and was bordered by the coastal mountains, it was the hinterland of a single political authority for most of the two centuries. The area of research was also demarcated by present-day political boundaries and the availability of the necessary permissions for the archaeological fieldwork required.

The survey of the remains of the medieval rural settlements of the Syrian coastal region started in the framework of the Syro-Hungarian Archaeological Mission (SHAM) in 2000 and was directed by the author of this book. With the exception of the second survey season in the Upper Orontes Valley from the end of October until the beginning of December 2004, all surveys took place in the summer months and usually lasted between one and a half to three months. Most of the work was conducted between 2000

and 2011 but on-site visits and documentation of formerly collected material still took place in 2012 and 2015.

The authorisation for fieldwork was issued by the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic (DGAM) for the governorates bordering the coast (Latakia, Tartūs, Homs, Hama, Idlib) with a special regard to its southern part, the Governorate of Tartūs. Besides the results of the surveys, observations made during numerous trips to other regions of the Levant have also been included. With regards to the surveys referenced in this text, the reader can assume they refer to one of those conducted by the SHAM between 2000 and 2011, unless otherwise stated.

The presentation of the results of the research undertaken in recent years has been constructed around the discussion of more generalised subjects, but important questions and archaeological categories have at times been elaborated upon and illustrated by case studies relating to the investigation of a micro-region or a certain site. Special attention is paid to the rural towers which served as the local centres of the rural settlement and also to the cave castles of the Upper Orontes Valley which are expected to have fulfilled a similar focal role. Although they constitute the most tangible and informative remains of the medieval rural settlement pattern in the Syrian coastal region, none has been the subject of thorough documentation and study formerly.

The conclusions presented in this work were reached by the combined use of several sources, including medieval documents, travellers’ accounts, map evidence, toponymy, archive and satellite photographs, as well as oral sources, the usefulness and limits of which are explained in the chapter discussing the methodology employed during the research. As the dating of several sites depends on the ceramics collected during the surveys, observations on typology and distribution are dealt with in a separate chapter. The trends in the development of the network of settlements were to a large extent determined by historical events that have been outlined briefly in the next chapter.

The presentation of the individual elements of the settlement patterns start with a brief examination of the distribution and basic characteristics of their centres, the towns, and continues with the investigation of the role that the numerous fortified sites of the rural hinterland played in the life of the coastal region. Special attention is given to the information that the historical sources and field surveys have yielded, particularly with regards to the role of the rural towers and courtyard buildings. These were introduced as new elements into the landscape of the Syrian coastal region in the 12th century. Cave castles

in the northern region seemingly fulfil a similar role and are also dealt with in detail. Villages, the basic units of the medieval settlement pattern, tend to leave few traces and the chapter on them therefore deals to a large extent with data that derives from the written sources. In turn this data is then combined with the archaeological material collected from certain sample regions that provide information on the density and basic characteristics of the medieval villages. An understanding of the medieval life of the rural areas in question can be considerably refined by examining the elements of infrastructure that provide a correlation between the various settlements, or indeed form the basis upon which economic production was built. The final chapter examines the scanty sources on the identity of the medieval inhabitants of the coastal region, with special regard to an intriguing question, to what extent is there evidence for the physical presence of a European population in the rural areas in this period?

The text is supplemented by four basic categories of illustrations. Besides trying to find new material both in the written sources and out in the field, former scholarly research on the identification of rural sites was re-examined and the results indicated on a general map, containing medieval and present-day place names and the basic archaeological features of the sites. This '*Carte Generale*' is supplemented by regional and thematic maps. Information on the individual sites, ranging from elements of infrastructure preserved in the sources, to types of pottery found during the SHAM surveys are also summarized in the form of databases. Images illustrating the landscape of the coastal regions, representing both individual sites and ceramic types that are characteristic of the medieval settlements have been shown on figures and plates. Selected results of the documentation done on individual sites are presented in the form of a series of plan, section and elevation drawings. These provide further illustration for the discussions and conclusions of the book built on architectural evidence. A detailed gazetteer of the archaeological topography of the region is planned to be published in a separate volume that will hopefully follow soon.

Given the extent of the areas to be surveyed and the complex nature of the research required, work in the Syrian coastlands is far from complete. This book is a primary synthesis of the material collected during one and a half decades of fieldwork. Needless to say future research, including our ongoing fieldwork, is expected to bring further results that will enhance our knowledge and could change the perceptions we have of the countryside of the medieval Syrian coastal region considerably.