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**The occupation of Belvoir by the Hospitallers: chronology
and written sources**

**A ocupação de Belvoir pelos Hospitalários:
cronologia e fontes escritas**

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ABSTRACT

What do we know about the occupation of the castle of Belvoir by the Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem? This paper endeavors to draw up the state of the written documentation, consisting of a few chronicles, both Arabic and Latin, supplemented by charters from the Hospital's collections. The history of the castle is put into perspective with the process of militarization of the Order and its growing involvement in the defense of the Latin states of the East. Acquired between 1165 and 1168, Belvoir quickly played a key role in the defense of Galilee, to the point of appearing as a major fortress of the Hospital. By January 1189, however, the place was taken over by the Ayyūbids. In 1241, following a treaty with al-Kāmil, Sultan of Egypt, the castle and its territory were returned to the Hospitallers. However, we do not know the circumstances under which the brothers moved back into a castle that had, in the meantime, suffered several destructions. In 1255, the Order strengthened its position by absorbing the possessions of the monastery of Mount Tabor. But, between 1263 and 1266, the campaigns of the Sultan Baybars resulted in the destruction of the Hospitaller settlement in eastern Galilee.

Keywords: Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem; castle; crusades; Ayyūbids; Mamluk.

RESUMO

O que sabemos sobre a ocupação do castelo de Belvoir pelos Hospitalários de São João de Jerusalém? Este artigo procura traçar o estado da documentação escrita disponível, composta por algumas crônicas, árabes e latinas, complementadas por cartas das coleções do Hospital. A história do castelo é colocada em perspectiva com o processo de militarização da Ordem e o seu crescente envolvimento na defesa dos estados latinos do Oriente. Adquirido entre 1165 e 1168, Belvoir rapidamente desempenhou um papel fundamental na defesa da Galileia, tornando-se numa das principais fortalezas do Hospital. Em janeiro de 1189, no entanto, o local foi tomado pelos Ayyūbids. Em 1241, na sequência de um tratado com al-Kāmil, Sultão do Egito, o castelo e o seu território foram devolvidos aos Hospitalários. No entanto, desconhecem-se as circunstâncias em que os cavaleiros voltaram para um castelo que, entretanto, havia sofrido vários danos. Em 1255, a Ordem reforçou a sua posição absorvendo os bens do mosteiro do Monte Tabor. Contudo, entre 1263 e 1266, as campanhas do Sultão Baybars resultaram no desmantelamento da presença do Hospital no leste da Galileia.

Palavras-chave: Hospital de São João de Jerusalém; castelo, cruzadas, Ayyūbids; Mamluk.



Belvoir, an iconic representation of the “Crusader castle”¹ is, above all, one of the emblematic fortifications of the Order of the Hospital, along with Margat and the Crac des Chevaliers. However, it is hard to imagine what such a construction could represent for this military order: knowledge of the site, and even more so of its occupants, is blurred by the disparity of the written documentation. Mentions of Kawkab al-Hawa in Arab chronicles are, of course, relatively numerous but, being all to the glory of the power of the Ayyūbids, they don't give much details about the Christian occupation of the fortification². The Latin narratives, on the other hand, are more likely to be written by travelers, and tend to take an overhanging position, often merely emphasizing the beauty of the site and the strength of its strategic position. Consequently, there is not much left beside the diplomatic documentation relating to the Hospital to give a chronological reference on the occupation of the site by the Latins. Unfortunately, after the many trials and tribulations of the central archives of the Order, only scattered acts remain, which are more likely to shed some light on the estate managed from the castle rather than on the castle itself³. Hypotheses of identification of the spaces can therefore only be based on archaeological analysis, supported by comparisons, as is the case for most of the fortifications of the Latin states⁴. In fact, contrary to what the archives of the

¹ On this aspect: ELLENBLUM, Ronnie – *Crusader Castles and Modern Histories*. Cambridge, GB; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 85. In Paul Deschamps' work, Belvoir is among the buildings representative of what Anglo-Saxon historiography would later call “concentric castle” (DESCHAMPS, Paul – *Les châteaux croisés en Terre Sainte. La défense du royaume de Jérusalem*. Paris: P. Geuthner, 1939, vol. 2, p. 236). However, it must be admitted that the illustrious scholar had a very limited interest in this edifice, probably because his plan was difficult to read at the time (see in particular the brief survey taken from the *Survey of Western Palestine*: DESCHAMPS, Paul – *Les châteaux croisés en Terre Sainte*, vol. 2, p. 121).

² In general, if the ambivalent character of the brothers of the Temple and the Hospital intrigued Muslim observers, they had only a very approximate knowledge of the functioning of the Military Orders. For a recent synthesis, but which adds nothing new: LEWIS, Kevin – “Friend or foe. Islamic views of the Military Orders in the Latin East as drawn from Arabic sources”. In SCHENK, Jochen; CARR, Mike (eds.) – *The Military Orders*. Vol. 6.2. *Culture and Conflicts in the Mediterranean World*. London-New York: Routledge, 2016, pp. 20-29.

³ Finally, on the peregrinations of the central archives of the Templars, whose tormented destiny was largely linked to the Hospitallers' own archives: LUTTRELL, Anthony – “The Templars' archives in Syria and Cyprus”. In BORCHARDT, Karl; *et al.* (eds) – *The Templars and their Sources*. London-New York: Routledge, 2017, pp. 38-45.

⁴ See the exemplary case of the Crac des Chevaliers studied in parallel by several research teams, notably a German and a French one. For the German team: BILLER, Thomas (ed.) – *Der Crac des Chevaliers. Die Baugeschichte einer Ordensburg der Kreuzfahrerzeit*. Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner,

Western commanderies sometimes reveal⁵, charters provide no topographical or chronological indications likely to provide information on the construction of the castle, the organization of life within, or how it protected itself. We won't try either to grasp what such a monument would represent in terms of "identity" for a religious order as the Hospital⁶. It is well known that the living quarters of the Military Orders had to adapt to the specific *propositum vitae* of the brothers and that the castle of Belvoir, like any other Hospitaller fortified *domus*, was part monastery but, mostly, a military compound.

This article is not a historiographical essay on a building that is still regarded by historians and archaeologists as "the most symmetrical concentric castle"⁷. Nor will it be a question of setting this fortress in the context of the fortified architecture of its time, nor of revisiting the question of the various sieges that it faced: there is, indeed, a comprehensive bibliography on these issues⁸. The circumstances surrounding the establishment of this castle in this part of Eastern Galilee are discussed by Hervé Barbet in this same dossier. Our aim will therefore be more modest: situating Belvoir's involvement within the military activity of the Hospital in the Kingdom of Jerusalem and, more particularly, the Latin occupation of Galilee. The chronological articulation will necessarily be dictated by the two phases of the Hospitallers' presence in Belvoir, first between 1168 and 1189, then between 1241 and 1266.

2006 (Forschungen zu Burgen und Schlössern; 3). And for the French team: MESQUI, Jean; GOEPP, Maxime – *Le Crac des chevaliers (Syrie). Histoire et architecture*. Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 2018.

⁵ See, for example, the case of Manosque discussed in the same publication.

⁶ This issue is discussed in SHOTTEN-HALLEL, Vardit; SASS, Eytan; PERELIS GROSSOWICZ, Lydia – "The Hospitaller castle of Belvoir: setting the scene for a discussion of the topography, geology and architecture". In BOAS, Adrian J. (ed.) – *The Crusader World*. Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2016, pp. 492-495.

⁷ For example, in the general overview book of FULTON, Michael S. – *Siege Warfare during the Crusades*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2020, pp. 232-234.

⁸ Of the written sources relating to the siege of Saladin in 1187, the most comprehensive statement is still that of BILLER, Thomas – "Die Johanniterburg Belvoir am Jordan. Zum frühen Burgenbau der Ritterorden im Heiligen Land". *Architectura* 19 (1989), pp. 105-136.

The Hospitaller Order During the First Latin Occupation of Belvoir

Approved in 1113 as a religious institution with a charitable vocation, the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem was fairly quickly turned into a military order, inspired by the Temple⁹. The changeover from a charitable institution to a true Military Order really took place under the magisterium of Gilbert of Assailly (1162-1170). With the encouragement of the sovereigns of the Latin States, the mission assigned to the religious order evolved and, in particular, led the brothers to receive guardianship of fortifications. Before 1160, the Hospitallers held fewer than a dozen fortified places within the Latin States – some, such as Bayt Jibrin (1136) and Crac des Chevaliers (1142-1144), had been acquired early. Then, under the magisterium of Gilbert of Assailly, a dozen additional fortifications were acquired and seigneurial rights were obtained over half a dozen other sites¹⁰. The castle of Belvoir was purchased in this context between 1165 and 1168, as was the castle of Margat. Acquired in 1186, the latter was to become one of the major fortifications of the Order¹¹. The Hospitallers therefore had, from that time on, a sufficiently solid financial base to assume the costs of their military orientation.

The acquisition of the Belvoir estate, which Hervé Barbé is discussing here, came at a time when the Hospital is said to have been going through a difficult financial situation¹². The Order, engaged in the Egyptian campaigns of King Amalric I of Jerusalem, seemed heavily in debt in 1168 and 1169. Furthermore, the bellicose policy of Gilbert of Assailly had been contested from within the convent, which had led to his resignation in 1170, which in turn caused an institutional crisis for four

⁹ On the militarization begun in the central years of the eleventh century: RILEY-SMITH, Jonathan – *The Knights of Saint John in Jerusalem and Cyprus, c. 1050-1310*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1967, pp. 52-59; DEMURGER, Alain – *Les Hospitaliers. De Jérusalem à Rhodes, 1050-1317*. Paris: Tallandier, 2013, pp. 79-104.

¹⁰ RILEY-SMITH, Jonathan – *The Knights of Saint John in Jerusalem and Cyprus, c. 1050-1310*, pp. 69-70 and p. 136; DEMURGER, Alain – *Les Hospitaliers. De Jérusalem à Rhodes, 1050-1317*, pp. 369-376.

¹¹ BURGTORF, Jochen – “Die Herrschaft der Johanniter in Margat im Heiligen Land”. In CZAJA, Roman; SARNOWSKY Jürgen (eds.) – *Die Ritterorden als Träger der Herrschaft: Territorien, Grundbesitz und Kirche*. Tagung Ordines militares - Colloquia Torunensia Historica (14; 2005; Toruń, Poland). Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 2007, pp. 27-57.

¹² On the establishing of the Hospitaller estate, see above all: DORSO, Simon – “Change or continuity? Rural settlement in Eastern Galilee at the time of the crusades. The Hospitaller estate of Belvoir”. In SHOTTEN-HALLEL, Vardit; WEETCH, Rosie (eds.) – *Crusading and Archaeology: Some Archaeological Approaches to the Crusades*. London-New York: Routledge, 2020 (Crusades – subsidia), pp. 263-283.

years¹³. In spite of this, the Hospitallers remained involved in the defense of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. In the 1170s, the pilgrim John of Würzburg noticed the significant expenditures of the Order “which maintains, in its castles, many men educated in the arts of war, for the defense of the Christian lands against the incursions of the Saracens”¹⁴. As for Belvoir, the pilgrim Theoderic had noted that the construction was ideally placed to defend the Kingdom of Jerusalem against Nūr al-Dīn, the emir of Aleppo¹⁵. The castle defended a land within reach of enemy raids. Already before Saladin's great offensives, this sector had twice been the scene of raids and clashes between Latins and Muslims, in the summer of 1182 and two years later¹⁶. In practice, as has been noted, the castle's garrison could only have watched from afar as Saladin's army passed by on its way to the plain of Hattin in 1187¹⁷. In the 1180s however, Belvoir appeared to be one of the Order's most significant fortifications. Besides, the chronicler Abū Shāma refers to this site as the headquarters of the Hospitallers¹⁸, which is erroneous, but reflects the importance the fortress had acquired in the eyes of Muslim observers. It is possible that the monument quickly acquired a certain prestige as far as the West, if we are to understand in this sense the founding diploma of Belver, the first castle owned by the Hospitallers in the Kingdom of Portugal. In fact, the name "Belver" was imposed by the king Sancho I himself when, in 1194, he ceded territory on the border of the

¹³ RILEY-SMITH, Jonathan – *The Knights of Saint John in Jerusalem and Cyprus, c. 1050-1310*, pp. 60-63 and p. 73. According to Guillaume de Tyr, the debts of the Order amounted to 100,000 besants at the time of Assailly's renunciation in the summer of 1170. And on the schism opened by the departure of Assailly: BURGTORF, Jochen – *The Central Convent of Hospitallers and Templars. History, Organization, and Personnel (1099/1120-1310)*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008, pp. 65-74.

¹⁴ JEAN DE WÜRZBOURG – “*Descriptio terrae sanctae*”. In *Peregrinatores tres: Saewulf, John of Würzburg, Theodericus*. Ed. R. B. C. Huygens. Corpus Christianorum, 139. Turnhout: Brepols, 1994, pp. 131-135.

¹⁵ “*In cuius vicino [Bethsan] monte precelso hospitarii fortissimum et amplissimum castrum constituunt, ut adversus Noradini Halapiensis tyranni insidias terram citra Jordanem sitam possint tueri. Est et ibi iuxta ad occidentem quoddam castrum Templariorum vocabulo Sapham, adversus Turcorum incursiones valde munitum*” (THÉODORIC – *Libellus de Locis Sanctis*. Ed. T. Tobler. St Gallen: Huber, 1865, pp. 97-98).

¹⁶ GROUSSET, René – *Histoire des Croisades et du royaume Franc de Jérusalem*. Paris: Plon, 1935, t. II, pp. 707-709 and 723-726; PRAWER, Joshua – *Histoire du royaume latin de Jérusalem*. 2 t. Paris: Éditions du C. N. R. S., 1969, t. I, pp. 601-604 and 631-633; RILEY-SMITH, Jonathan – *The Knights Hospitaller in the Levant, c.1070-1309*. Houndmills-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 38-39.

¹⁷ FULTON, Michael S. – *Siege Warfare during the Crusades*, pp. 79-80.

¹⁸ “Kawkeb, capital of the Hospitallers, dwelling place of the ungodly, residence of their chief, storehouse of their weapons and provisions” (ABŪ SHĀMA – “Le livre des deux jardins”. In *Recueil des historiens des croisades publié par les soins de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres. Historiens orientaux*. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1898, t. IV, p. 388).

River Tagus to the Hospitallers in order to erect a castle¹⁹. Although the royal charter does not go as far, Portuguese historiography does admit that the name of this fortification, whose architecture shows influences from the Latin East, is an explicit reference to the Belvoir of the Holy Land²⁰.

The most important castles of the Hospitaller Order were placed under the command of a castellan (*castellanus*), according to common usage in the feudal organization of the Holy Land²¹. Thus, the names of three “*castellani*” attested to Belvoir between 1173 and 1185 have been preserved²². However, nothing is known about the garrison that defended this castle. By way of comparison, in addition to the garrison itself, Margat is said to have housed about a thousand-armed people, while the Crac des Chevaliers housed some two thousand combatants in peacetime. These estimates, however, date from the beginning of the thirteenth century²³. At the time of Belvoir's first occupation, the proportions would be much more modest. In the second half of the twelfth century, the small hospital fortification of Belmont, near Jerusalem, was held by a dozen knights and nearly 330 other men²⁴. The number of troops present at Belvoir could be situated between these different

¹⁹ “*terra illa que vocatur Guidimtesta in qua concedimus vobis ut faciatis castellam quodam cui imponimus nomen Belver hec hereditas istis circumdatur terminis citra Tagum...*” (COSTA, Paula Pinto; BARROCA, Mário – “A doação de Belver à Ordem do Hospital por D. Sancho I. Leitura e contextualização do documento de 1194”. In FERNANDES, Isabel Cristina (ed.) – *As Ordens Militares e as Ordens de Cavalaria entre o Ocidente e o Oriente. Actas do V Encontro sobre Ordens Militares (Palmela, 15 a 18 de fevereiro de 2006)*. Palmela: Câmara Municipal de Palmela/ GESOS, 2009, p. 684).

²⁰ BARROCA, Mário – “Os castelos das Ordens Militares em Portugal (séc. XII a XIV)”. In FERNANDES, Isabel Cristina (coord.) – *Mil anos de Fortificações na Península Ibérica e no Magreb (500-1500)*. *Actas do Simpósio Internacional sobre Castelos*. Palmela: Câmara Municipal de Palmela / Ed. Colibri, 2001, pp. 538-539.

²¹ PRINGLE, Denys – “The role of castellans in the Latin East”. In FERNANDES, Isabel Cristina (ed.) – *Castelos das Ordens Militares. Encontro internacional (Tomar, 10-13 Outubro 2012)*. Palmela: Direção-Geral do Património Cultural; Câmara Municipal de Palmela, 2013, vol. 2, pp. 183-203. The title of “*castellanus*” could occasionally be carried in the West by commanders whose headquarters were actually located in a castle. It is thus the case in Manosque although the association “*preceptor and castellanus*” was in no way systematic (CARRAZ, Damien – *Un commandeur ordinaire? Bérenger Monge et le gouvernement des hospitaliers provençaux au XIII^e siècle*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2020, p. 127).

²² *Fratre Oldino, Bellivideri castellano* (1173, Jerusalem); *frater Alebaudus, castellanus Belviderii* (1184, Acre); *fratris Monterii, castellani de Belveeir* (1185) (*Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers de Saint-Jean-de-Jérusalem (1100-1310)*). Ed. J. Delaville le Roulx. Paris: E. Leroux, 1894-1906, t. I, n.º 443, 663 and 754).

²³ BURGTORF, Jochen – “Die Herrschaft der Johanniter in Margat im Heiligen Land”, p. 40; DESCHAMPS, Paul – *Les châteaux croisés en Terre Sainte. Le Crac des Chevaliers. Étude historique et archéologique*. Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1934, vol. 1, p. 87. According to the pilgrim Wilbrand of Oldenburg, in 1211, Margat was guarded by only 4 Hospitaller knights and 28 watchmen but leading a force of 1,000 defenders (FULTON, Michael S. – *Siege Warfare during the Crusades*, p. 92).

²⁴ BARBER, Malcolm – *The Crusader States*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012, p. 229.

estimates. It is thought, however, that the fighting brothers of the Hospital were probably never more than two or three hundred on the scale of the whole Latin East²⁵. The Hospitallers themselves were, in any case, in the minority and would therefore have been unable to hold fortifications of this magnitude without resorting to vassals and mercenaries²⁶. The indigenous population could eventually be called to the service of the Hospitallers. It is the case of the Bedouins, some of which offered their help to the Frankish armies and the Military Orders²⁷. In 1180, King Baldwin IV offered the Hospitallers the rights he held over a population of about one hundred Bedouin tents stationed near Belvoir²⁸.

As mentioned earlier, due to their profile and because they contain gaps, the written documents don't shed much light on the architectural organization of the castle itself. One space in particular was at the core of the interrogations of our research program: the chapel, such as it could be reconstructed from the lapidary deposit abandoned by Meir Ben Dov. Apart from the few texts quoting Belvoir, the challenge will be to widen the focus in order to see if other written sources would at least help to clarify the chronology of this construction presented here by Anne Flammin and Florian Renucci. The quality of the construction and the decoration suggests that it was the work of a prestigious commissioner, perhaps influential enough to have encouraged the arrival at Belvoir of craftsmen trained overseas²⁹. To imagine an initiative of Master Gilbert of Assailly would, for example, be a seductive hypothesis.

²⁵ RILEY-SMITH, Jonathan – *The Knights Hospitaller in the Levant, c.1070-1309*, pp. 82-83.

²⁶ Despite a recent article by Alan Forey, the question of mercenaries employed in the armies of Military Orders in the East remains a field to be explored (FOREY, Alan – “Paid troops in the service of Military Orders during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries”. In BOAS, Adrian J. (ed.) – *The Crusader World*. Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2016, pp. 84-97). It appears, however, that very early on the Hospitallers had recourse to paid *servientes* to protect pilgrims (BELTJENS, Alain – “La papauté et les querelles récurrentes qui opposaient les Hospitaliers aux Templiers”. *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire et du patrimoine de l'Ordre de Malte* 24 (2011), pp. 6-7).

²⁷ RICHARD, Jean – “Bédouins”. In JOSSERAND, Philippe; BÉRIOU, Nicole (eds.) – *Prier et combattre. Dictionnaire européen des ordres militaires au Moyen Âge*. Paris: Fayard, 2009, pp. 149-150.

²⁸ “...centum tentoria Beduinarum apud Bellum Videre, libere et quiete, jure perpetuo habenda et possidenda, illorum videlicet Beduinarum quos ab alienis partibus convocare poteritis, et qui in regno meo sub meo vel hominum meorum potestate nunquam fuerint.” (MAYER, Hans Eberhard – *Die Urkunden der lateinischen Könige von Jerusalem*. T. 2. Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2010, pp. 714-716, n.º 420; 28 April 1180).

²⁹ An inscription simply bearing the signature “VILLELM(US)” could be linked to a mason involved in the construction of the chapel (SHOTTEN-HALLEL, Vardit; INGRAND-VARENNE, Estelle – “William of Belvoir (?): A Short Note on an Even Shorter Inscription”. *Crusades* 18 (2019), pp. 21-24). But this is a very challenging hypothesis to support on the basis of this artefact alone.

But, apart from the fact that we would have to imagine a well-advanced construction site if not completed by 1170, neither the origin nor the networks of relations of this Grand Master are really known³⁰. In the state of reflection, we simply note two elements. On the one hand, this high officer was well enough introduced to obtain, on several occasions, from King Louis VII to come to the aid of the Hospitallers³¹. On the other hand, within the Order of the Hospital, relations between the Latin East and the rear bases in the West, and especially Mediterranean France, seemed to be quite regular already in the last third of the twelfth century³². It is therefore by no means impossible that officers of the Order, who were accustomed to traveling from one shore of the Mediterranean to the other, took sculptors and lapicides to Palestine, and why not to Belvoir. In his time, on the basis of comparisons that would probably have to be taken up again, Paul Deschamps thought that the "architect" of the chapel of the Crac des Chevaliers could be Provençal³³. In the same way, let us recall the activity in Jerusalem in the 1160s of a sculptors' workshop that seems to have worked in the cloister of the Templar house as well as in the Hospitaller church, and whose work has been compared with certain Provençal works³⁴.

³⁰ On the Assailly mandate as Master: DELAVILLE LE ROULX, Joseph – *Les Hospitaliers en Terre Sainte et à Chypre (1100-1310)*. Paris: E. Leroux, 1904, pp. 63-80. The historiographer Jean Raybaud, well-informed on the facts concerning the Hospital proper but less reliable on family identifications, considered Assailly as a "native of Languedoc", more precisely of Toulouse (RAYBAUD, Jean – *Histoire des grands prieurs et du grand prieuré de Saint-Gilles*. T. I. Ed. C. Nicolas. Nîmes: Imprimerie Clavel et Chastanier, 1904, p. 70).

³¹ *Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers*, t. I, n.º 307 and 310 ([1163-1169]), n.º 377 ([9 April] 1167). Queen Constance, sister of the king and wife of Count Raimond V of Toulouse, continued her work on behalf of the Hospital (*Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers*, vol. I, n.º 440 (1173); CARRAZ, Damien – *L'Ordre du Temple dans la basse vallée du Rhône (1124-1312)*. *Ordres militaires, croisades et sociétés méridionales*. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2005, p. 114).

³² In 1143, the Prior of Saint-Gilles, Aimon, was present in Jerusalem (*Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers*, vol. I, n.º 150). The second Master of the order, Raymond du Puy (c. 1121/3-c. 1158/60), was on tour in Occitania in 1157-1158 (*Cartulaire du prieuré de Saint-Gilles de l'Hôpital de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem (1129-1210)*. Ed. D. Le Blévec, A. Venturini. Paris: CNRS éd.; Turnhout: Brepols, 1997, suppl. 1, n.º 353 and 343). In June 1164, Raymond de Tiberias, then Commander of Jerusalem, also attended a chapter at the priory of Saint-Gilles, where he received a donation from Count Raimond V of Toulouse (*Cartulaire du prieuré de Saint-Gilles...*, n.º 323). Finally, Jean Raybaud likens Oldin Roland, Prior of Saint-Gilles from 1177 to 1182, to Brother Oldinus mentioned as *castellanus* of Belvoir in 1173 (RAYBAUD, Jean – *Histoire des grands prieurs et du grand prieuré de Saint-Gilles*, p. 82; this identification is followed by BURGTORF, Jochen – *The Central Convent of Hospitallers and Templars. History, Organization, and Personnel (1099/1120-1310)*, p. 604).

³³ DESCHAMPS, Paul – *Les châteaux croisés en Terre Sainte*, vol. 1., pp. 198-199.

³⁴ JACOBY, Zehava – "The Workshop of the Temple Area in Jerusalem in the Twelfth Century: its Origins, Evolution and Impact". *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 45 (1982), pp. 325-394. The author evokes Saint-Trophime in Arles and the portal of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, but it is obvious that these leads should be reviewed in the light of recent reconsiderations of Provençal Romanesque sculpture (see: HARTMANN-VIRNICH, Andreas; HANSEN, Heike – "Saint-Trophime in Arles und Saint-Gilles-

However, the Latins evacuated Belvoir as early as January 1189, following a siege that lasted nearly eighteen months³⁵. The fate of the chapel after the capture of the castle is still uncertain: was it entirely demolished? Or was the building refurbished for another use? In any case, whatever its sponsor and its architectural qualities, the chapel at Belvoir did not have the longevity that could have made it one of the great centers of sacrality in the Holy Land, like the chapels at Crac des Chevaliers and Margat³⁶.

From the restoration of the Latin settlement to the Baybars campaigns

Galilee was marked by a reinvestment of the Latin presence as early as 1241 with the restoration of the citadel of Tiberias and the return of the monks of Mount Tabor to their monastery³⁷. By this time, the organization of the Hospital on the scale of the Holy Land had evolved. The loss of Jerusalem had led to the relocation of the headquarters to Acre, where the brothers had built a huge complex, while the defenses of the main castles of Margat and Crac had been reinforced³⁸. It was probably the treaty signed between Earl Richard of Cornwall and the Sultan of Egypt al-Sālih 'Ayyūb, in the spring of 1241, that returned the territory of Belvoir to the Hospitallers³⁹. Matthew Paris transcribes a letter in which Richard of Cornwall gives an account of his crusade and lists the places given back to the Christians, including

du-Gard. Neuere und aktuelle archäologische Forschungen zu den romanischen Kirchenbauten und ihren Skulpturenfassaden an der provençalischen *Via Egidiana*". In NICOLAI, Berndt; RHEIDT, Klaus (eds.) – *Santiago de Compostela. Pilgerarchitektur und bildliche Repräsentation in neuer Perspektive*. Pieterlen: Peter Lang, 2015, pp. 363-383).

³⁵ Arab chronicles tell with some accuracy of the siege of Belvoir by Saladin's army (BILLER, Thomas – "Die Johanniterburg Belvoir am Jordan. Zum frühen Burgenbau der Ritterorden im Heiligen Land", pp. 107-109; ELLENBLUM, Ronnie – *Crusader Castles and Modern Histories*, pp. 283-284).

³⁶ The priors of the chapels of Crac and Margat enjoyed a recognized position within the Hospitaller hierarchy (*Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers*, t. III, n.º 3075, §. 7: statutes promulgated at the General Chapter of Acre in 1263).

³⁷ PRAWER, Joshua – *Histoire du royaume latin de Jérusalem*, t. II, p. 292-295; RICHARD, Jean – *Histoire des croisades*. Paris: Fayard, 1996, p. 339.

³⁸ BURGTORF, Jochen – *The Central Convent of Hospitallers and Templars*, pp. 74-90; BRONSTEIN, Judith – *The Hospitallers and the Holy Land. Financing the Latin East, 1187-1274*. Woodbridge: Boydell press, 2005, pp. 11-19.

³⁹ PRAWER, Joshua – *Histoire du royaume latin de Jérusalem*, t. II, pp. 285-287. This treaty ratified an agreement made the previous year between Thibaud IV of Champagne and the Amir of Damascus al-Sālih Ismā'il. But this last compromise was established on fragile foundations, on the one hand because the territories conceded in Galilee did not in fact come under the power of Damascus but under that of Cairo, and on the other hand because the Latins were divided between the partisans of an agreement with Damascus (led by the Knights Templar) and the Hospitallers who preferred to negotiate with the Sultan of Egypt (PRAWER, Joshua – *Histoire du royaume latin de Jérusalem*, t. II, pp. 279-282; RICHARD, Jean – *Histoire des croisades*, pp. 333-335).

Belvoir (under the spelling “Benaer”)⁴⁰. As Hervé Barbé recalled, the fortification had been dismantled for the first time around 1212 by order of Sultan al-‘Ādil b. Ayyūb (1193-1218)⁴¹. But the castle seems to have been targeted by destruction twice again. The first phase of destruction was ordered by the Emir of Damascus, al-Mu'azzam 'Isā, when the army of the Fifth Crusade laid siege to Damietta, until negotiations initiated by Sultan al-Kāmil (1218-1238) suspended work in the summer of 1219. Against the evacuation of the Nile Delta by the crusaders, the Sultan of Egypt proposed the restitution of Latin possessions west of river Jordan. The intransigence of Pelage, legate of the Apostolic See, and of the Military Orders, however, doomed these talks to failure. Even though the ruler of Cairo had offered, in addition to compensation, to raise the fortifications of Kawkab and three other major places (Jerusalem, Tibnīn and Safed)⁴². In the fall of 1227, when dissension broke out among the heirs of Sultan al-'Ādil and Emperor Frederick II arrived in the Holy Land, al-Mū'azzam completed the dismantling of the castles of Galilee (Kawkab, Tibnīn, and Safed)⁴³. Such a policy, on the part of al-Mu'azzam, was both directed against his brother al-Kāmil and against Frederick II's crusaders, all of whom coveted his possessions in Palestine.

One wonders, in this case, in what state the Hospitallers recovered the castle, if at all. In fact, no written source formally attests that the brothers reoccupied the place from the 1240s onwards. However, unlike the Mameluks, the Ayyūbids still

⁴⁰ “... the castle of Benaer, the castle of Amabel, Amoot, Alau, and the castle of Hybilis with its outbuildings, which castle is beyond the river on the eastern side, Safed, Nazareth, Mount Tabor, Ligum, Aschalis, the castle of Beithgirim, with their outbuildings and with all the villages which belong to the house of the Hospital of Saint John, and those which are known to belong to him in the outbuildings of Jerusalem and Bethlehem...” (MATTHIEU PARIS – *Grande chronique*. Trad. par A. Huillard-Bréholles. Paris: Paulin, 1840, pp. 185-194 [year 1241]). For a discussion on the locations recovered from the Franks: DORSO, Simon – “Templiers et Hospitaliers dans la Galilée du XIII^e siècle: stratégies d'implantation et d'administration dans un territoire en sursis”. In CHEVALIER, Marie-Anna (ed.) – *Ordres militaires et territorialité au Moyen Âge entre Orient et Occident*. Paris: Geuthner, 2020, pp. 59-61.

⁴¹ BILLER, Thomas – “Die Johanniterburg Belvoir am Jordan. Zum frühen Burgenbau der Ritterorden im Heiligen Land”, pp. 110-111; IBN AL-ATHĪR – *The Chronicle for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh*. T. III. Trad. D. S. Richards. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010, p. 158, § 300.

⁴² “Et tant plus que il vos donra par la conoissance de quatre prodes homes... tant d'avoir come costeront a fermer Jerusalem et Beauveoir et Safet et le Toron”. (GUILLAUME DE TYR – “L'Estoire de Eracles, empereur”. In BEUGNOT, Arthur; LANGLOIS, A. (pub.) – *Recueil des historiens des Croisades publié par les soins de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres. Historiens occidentaux*. Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1859, t. II, liber 32, §. XI, pp. 341-342).

⁴³ PRAWER, Joshua – *Histoire du royaume latin de Jérusalem*, t. II, pp. 154-156 and 176-179.

authorized the Latins to fortify the places retroceded by the treaties. Sultan al-Kāmil even offered to finance the restoration of Kawkab in 1219, although, as we have just recalled, the negotiations failed. Actually, according to Simon Dorso, both the Hospital and the Temple expressed a relative lack of interest in their former fortifications in Galilee. This lack of interest is explained both by the poor unity of the participants in the Fifth Crusade and by the fact that the Latins focused more on the defense of the coastline⁴⁴.

Later, the treaty of Jaffa of 1229 also authorized the Latins to fortify in the recovered territories, and Richard of Cornwall obtained confirmation of this principle in 1241. However, Joshua Prawer rightly noted that “to draw borders on the map of Palestine is one thing, to occupy and control the territories thus recovered is another. The Franks needed a stronger central power, financial means to raise the fortifications, and European immigration to populate the new territories”⁴⁵. Yet none of these conditions were really met. In addition, the Hospitallers would have remained on the sidelines of the negotiations with the Sultan al-Kāmil, unlike the Templars, who were more concerned with defending their interests in Galilee⁴⁶. On the other hand, one would have to consider the financial capacities of the Hospital of St. John. If Judith Bronstein notes a drop in the Order's investments in the West from the central decades of the thirteenth century⁴⁷, it seems that its capacity to support the *Subsidium Terrae sanctae* was not in any way affected at that time. To take just one example, in the 1280s, in a context that was much more difficult for the Holy Land, if not for Hospitallers finances, the Manosque commandery, in Provence, was still

⁴⁴ DORSO, Simon – “Templiers et Hospitaliers dans la Galilée du XIII^e siècle: stratégies d’implantation et d’administration dans un territoire en sursis”, pp. 54-55.

⁴⁵ PRAWER, Joshua – *Histoire du royaume latin de Jérusalem*, t. II, p. 287.

⁴⁶ DORSO, Simon – “Templiers et Hospitaliers dans la Galilée du XIII^e siècle: stratégies d’implantation et d’administration dans un territoire en sursis”, pp. 57-59.

⁴⁷ BRONSTEIN, Judith – *The Hospitallers and the Holy Land. Financing the Latin East, 1187-1274*, pp. 81-92. The author's assessment of the situation of the three priories in France is contrasted. But the impression of an economic slowdown that occurred from the middle of the century is, in my opinion, largely attributable to the profile of the documentation consulted, based essentially on published diplomatic fonds. However, the change stems above all from a change in the documentary profile where, in a simplified form, charters were gradually replaced by registers, both notarial and relating to day-to-day management (see for example: CARRAZ, Damien – *Un commandeur ordinaire?*, pp. 222-231).

able to devote almost 40% of its income to the contribution (*responsiones*) sent to the East⁴⁸.

Even if we qualify the material difficulties that the Order would already have had to face, we can legitimately wonder about the importance of the building campaign undertaken by the Hospitallers at Belvoir in the central years of the thirteenth century⁴⁹. In this period, the defense of the Latin states was essentially based on the Military Orders, which alone could maintain themselves in the main strongholds. In the logic of a defensive strategy in the face of the rising power of the Mameluks, Alain Demurger clearly showed how the Templars had literally “encircled” themselves in some enormous fortresses⁵⁰. If the same was true for the Hospitallers, it is not clear that, in the Kingdom of Jerusalem where Templar fortifications were much more present, Belvoir was then among the priorities of the Order⁵¹. The Hospitallers were also the first to be able to defend themselves against the Mameluks.

However, the traveler Burchard of Mount Sion, who visited Galilee in 1283, had of course heard that Belvoir – then lost for twenty years – had belonged to the Hospitallers⁵². While we know nothing about the realities of the Hospitallers' reinvestment in the castle, it is attested that they had retained land from their former lordship. Proof of this can be found in an agreement of 1259 concerning the

⁴⁸ This is a global weighing of the seven years (1283-1290) covered by the accounts (CARRAZ, Damien – “Echoes of the Latin East among the Hospitallers of the West: the priory of Saint Gilles, c.1260-c.1300”. In FISHHOF, Gil; BRONSTEIN, Judith; SHOTTEN-HALLEL, Vardit (eds.) – *Settlement and Crusade in the Thirteenth Century: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Latin East*. London-New York: Routledge, 2021 (Crusades – subsidia), pp. 247-248).

⁴⁹ Jonathan Riley-Smith similarly believes that the Order probably did not restore its castles of Bethgibelin, Belmont, and Belvoir, although these were in the territories returned to the Christians in 1229 and 1241 (RILEY-SMITH, Jonathan – *The Knights Hospitaller in the Levant, c.1070-1309*, p. 79).

⁵⁰ DEMURGER, Alain – *Les Templiers. Une chevalerie chrétienne au Moyen Âge*. Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 2005, pp. 232-242.

⁵¹ Independently of the interpretation presented here by Anne Flammin and Florian Renucci, let us recall that Vardit Shotten-Hallel put forward the hypothesis, in the second phase of the reoccupation of the castle, of a reconstruction of the castral chapel using in part the materials of the first church building (SHOTTEN-HALLEL, Vardit; SASS, Eytan; PERELIS GROSSOWICZ, Lydia – “The Hospitaller castle of Belvoir: setting the scene for a discussion of the topography, geology and architecture”. In BOAS, Adrian J. (eds.) – *The Crusader World*, pp. 502-512).

⁵² “castrum Belveir, quod fuit hospitale sancti Iohannis” (BURCHARD DE MONT-SION – “*Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*”. In *Peregrinatores medii aevi quatuor*. Ed. J. C. M. Laurent. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1864, p. 48).

tithes to be taken from the territory covered by the castle⁵³. In addition, as was frequently the case in the Latin East, certain Hospitallers' possessions and those of the Templar Order, also present in this sector of the Lower Galilee, may have been intertwined. In 1262, at the end of a well-established negotiation procedure, the Knights Templar thus ceded to the Hospitaliers the rights they had over the *casal* of La Fève⁵⁴. In the central years of the thirteenth century, the Hospital of St. John therefore sought to consolidate its presence in eastern Galilee, in particular by acquiring a series of properties and rights around Nazareth⁵⁵. The charters that have been preserved especially highlight the interest of the Hospitallers in the position of Mount Tabor. The monastery of Mount Tabor and its possessions, then severely tested by the Muslim raids at the time of the Fifth Crusade, were given to the Order of St. John by Pope Alexander IV in April 1255⁵⁶. In the summer of that same year, Brother Jocelin de Tournel was charged, on behalf of Master Guillaume de Châteauneuf, to take possession of nine *casalia* located "between Mount Tabor and the Sea of Tiberias"⁵⁷. The Order thus considerably increased its possessions in eastern Galilee, while a *castellanus* responsible for collecting taxes in the villages around Mount Thabor and Nazareth is attested in 1259⁵⁸. The Hospitallers had

⁵³ DELAVILLE LE ROULX, Joseph – *Inventaire des pièces de Terre Sainte de l'ordre de l'Hôpital*. Paris: E. Leroux, 1895, p. 61, n.º 318 (after Archives Départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône, 56 H 77, "Inventaire des chartes de Syrie" by Jean Raybaud, 1742).

⁵⁴ "nos, le dessus nommé maistre et le covent dou Temple, ... quitons et renuncions à vos frere Hugue Revel... et à vos le covent de ladite maison del Hospital... toz drois... seignories... que nos avons... au casal qui est apelez la Feve..." (*Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers*, vol. III, n.º 3028; 31 May 1262). On the same day, the Templars abandoned several other rights and properties to the Hospitallers, including a *casal* located in the jurisdiction of Tiberias (CLAVERIE, Pierre-Vincent – *L'Ordre du Temple en Terre sainte et à Chypre au XIII^e siècle*. 3 vols. Nicosie: Centre de recherche scientifique, 2005, n.º 152, pp. 153-155).

⁵⁵ RILEY-SMITH, Jonathan – *The Knights of Saint John in Jerusalem and Cyprus, c. 1050-1310*, p. 425.

⁵⁶ *Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers*, vol. II, n.º 2726 (1 April 1255); RILEY-SMITH, Jonathan – *The Knights of Saint John in Jerusalem and Cyprus, c. 1050-1310*, pp. 413-415; BRONSTEIN, Judith – *The Hospitallers and the Holy Land. Financing the Latin East, 1187-1274*, pp. 28-29 and 56. The monastery's collection of charters, part of which was placed in the Hospitallers' archives, gives a measure of the extent of the possessions and rights (*Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers*, vol. II, appendix, pp. 897-914). More specifically on the occupation of the territory and the villages under the monastery's jurisdiction: KHAMISY, Rabei G. – "The Mount Tabor Territory under Frankish Control". In SINIBALDI, Micaela; LEWIS, Kevin J.; MAJOR Balázs; THOMPSON, Jennifer A. (eds.) – *Crusader Landscapes in the Medieval Levant. The Archaeology and History of the Latin East*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016, pp. 39-53.

⁵⁷ *Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers*, t. II, n.º 2747 ([30 June-2 July] 1255). On these nine villages: KHAMISY, Rabei G. – "The Mount Tabor Territory under Frankish Control", p. 47.

⁵⁸ *Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers*, vol. II, n.º 2934 (24 October 1259). The same Jocelin de Tournel is attested as castellan of Mont-Thabor by two other charters of 1259 (*Cartulaire général de l'ordre des Hospitaliers*, vol. II, n.º 2934 and 2935; see also BURGTORF, Jochen – *The Central*

pledged to fortify the site and establish a strong garrison there, but they clearly did not have the means to undertake a real construction campaign. In fact, the place easily fell into the hands of the Mameluks during the first campaign that Sultan Baybars undertook in Palestine in 1263⁵⁹.

It is assumed that Belvoir was definitively taken away from the Christians during one of the campaigns of Sultan Baybars, between 1263 and 1266, even if no source formally testifies to any siege. It should be noted, for example, that the polygraph al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442), which devotes long developments to the campaigns of Baybars – and in particular to the capture of Safed – does not mention Kawkab anywhere⁶⁰. In the spring of 1268, the Master of the Hospital Hugues Revel sent a detailed report on the situation in the Holy Land to the Prior of Saint-Gilles, Feraud de Barras. He listed the fortifications that had just been lost as a result of the campaign of Sultan Baybars. Belvoir is not mentioned, which suggests that the castle was no longer in the hands of the Hospitallers at that time⁶¹. It can be assumed that the loss of the castle occurred as early as 1263, during the campaign that the Mamluk sultan led against Nazareth and Mount Tabor. If the castle was actually abandoned at that time, it is conceivable that it was made without glory because Christian resistance would have been reported in Latin and Arabic chronicles.

Convent of Hospitallers and Templars, p. 596; and LOTAN, Shlomo – “St. Louis’ Pilgrimage to Nazareth: A Reflection of Nazareth and Lower Galilee in the Mid-Thirteenth Century”. In YAZBAK, Mahmoud; SHARIF, Sharif (eds.) – *Nazareth. History and cultural heritage. Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference, Nazareth (July 2-5, 2012)*. Nazareth: Nazareth Municipality, 2013, p. 13). Note that Jean Raybaud also assigns to this Jocelin de Tournel the title of castellan of Belvoir, which would argue for a union of the estates of Belvoir and Tabor under the same direction (RAYBAUD, Jean – *Histoire des grands prieurs et du grand prieuré de Saint-Gilles*, p. 167).

⁵⁹ PRAWER, Joshua – *Histoire du royaume latin de Jérusalem*, t. II, pp. 441-455.

⁶⁰ AL-MAQRĪZĪ – *Histoire des sultans mamlouks de l’Égypte*. T. I, vol. 2. Trad. É. Quatremère. Paris: Printed for the Oriental translation fund, 183, p. 29 and p. 151 (list of strongholds conquered by Baybars). Nor is Belvoir mentioned in the truce of 1266 by which the Hospitallers obtained from the Sultan the safeguarding of their castles of Margat and the Crac des Chevaliers (Hisn al-Akrād) (AL-MAQRĪZĪ – *Histoire des sultans mamlouks de l’Égypte*, p. 42).

⁶¹ “...in Acconense civitate multas et immensas et irrationabiles expensas nos oportuit facere annis plurimis in egressibus soldani perfidi Babilonis, et in hoc ultimo egressu in duplo et plus quam in duplo expensas facere compulsi fuimus largiores quantum ex quo nobilis civitas Antioche subiit periculum captiois, tota marchia et fronteria Sarracenorum conversa est super castra nostra Cratum et Margatum, et etiam super Beldam, ubi expensas nimias facere nos oportet; et nulla alia loca christianitati extra maritimam remanent, preter Cratum et Margatum, que cordi sunt soldano nimium memorato, et locis minatur plurimum prenotatis”. (*Cartulaire général de l’ordre des Hospitaliers*, t. IV, n.º 3308 bis, pp. 291-293).

By way of conclusion, it will suffice to recall the salient chronological landmarks. Taken from the Franks in 1189, Kawkab/Belvoir probably hosted an Ayyūbide garrison until about 1212, when the castle was first dismantled, before undergoing further destruction in 1219 and 1227. Returned to the Christians in 1241, the stronghold was undoubtedly reinvested by the Hospitallers, even if their presence in the place itself has left no tangible textual trace. The castle was definitively evacuated by the Latins, probably in 1263. In the present state of knowledge, the site does not seem to have really aroused the interest of the Mamluk powers.

As can be seen, after the first period of Frankish occupation (1168-1189), each phase of reinvestment (1189-1213; 1241-1263) left only a period of about twenty years to expand and modify the castle built by the Hospitallers. Unless we suppose that after 1263, the Mamelukes were able, as in many other Crusader fortresses, to make developments of a certain scale that would have escaped the attention of chroniclers. It remains to be hoped that archaeology will bring in the future revelations in this sense.

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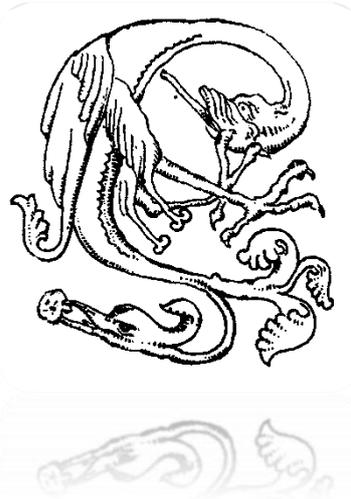
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