
FOREWORD TO THE ARTICLES
FROM RGT2019 CONFERENCE

Between 7th and 9th of June, 2019, the first *Routes, goods and ties. Recent discoveries and problems of southern Levantine archaeology* meeting took place in Krakow. This international conference organized by Jagiellonian University Institute of Archaeology and Euclid Foundation was dedicated to the archaeological research and protection of southern Levantine cultural landscape. It was attended by over fifty scientists dealing with cultural heritage of this important region. Conference was financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland. Articles published as part of this volume are the aftermath of selected conference presentations.

The Near East is an area not only very important for the history of culture, but also very vast and diverse. The history of the land, rendered legible thanks to many scientific analyses, makes it one of the most significant for learning the history of mankind – from the earliest traces of our species until the present times. Between the Paleolithic and the Middle Ages, the whole region was an arena of key events and changes crucial for the development of the Near East societies, which worked out the rudiments of agriculture, statehood, urbanization, highly specialized craftsmanship, religious canons, social and burial rituals, trade routes and methods, etc. It is also obvious that the area of southern Levant was not isolated from its neighboring regions. Therefore, another important problem that needs to be discussed concerns handicraft production traditions as well as the related issues of technologies or trade customs and methods, both local and coming from outside. Due to the situation in the Near East, the area of the southern Levant (Jordan, Israel, and Lebanon) became a subject of particularly intensive research and has brought a wealth of new data in recent years.

Scientific studies on the southern Levant have a rich history and fascinating future. However, the details of boundaries between periods, areas and groups are disproportionately researched, which hinders a comprehensive understanding of ancient Near Eastern societies. Some periods remain poorly examined, with the transitional times between them lacking adequate studies and chronologies. We should strive, therefore, to adopt a broad view that stays open to phenomena and processes covering vast chronological and geographical areas. The new excavations together with laboratory research, supplementary surface surveys, and meta-analysis will lead to creating a coherent image of the region and determining the dynamics of changes occurring here at specific moments of its history.

The format of the conference provided an important opportunity for scholars to present their research as well as discuss problems concerning southern Levantine archaeology revealed by other colleagues. The main topics of the meeting focused on the latest discoveries in the southern Levant, trade routes and migration phenomena, cultural and social changes, settlement traditions, agriculture and urbanization, as well as heritage protection and public archaeology. The conference was to be continued in 2021, however, due to the pandemic, it will probably be delayed. Nevertheless, we hope it will become a permanent point on the scientific map of Near Eastern archaeology.

Piotr Kołodziejczyk

As part of the conference, a special session was devoted to the activities of the Italian project conducted in Jordan and dedicated to a historical archaeological research itinerary, which can be defined as ‘From Petra to Shawbak: a Mediterranean frontier, among Crusaders to Ayyubid.’

The participation of a representation of qualified scholars who have long been members of the Mission ‘*Medieval Petra. Archaeology of the Crusader-Ayyubid Settlement in Transjordan*’ of our University,¹ aims to offer – first of all, to the Polish scientific community that has engaged for

¹ The institution supporting the project is the University of Florence (Medieval Archaeology Chair at the Dep. SAGAS) in collaboration with the *Department of Antiquities of Jordan*; ‘Pilot Project’ of the MAE, and also being financed several times by the MIUR as one of the ‘Scientific research programs of relevant national interest’ and by the Italian-French bilateral scientific program ‘Galileo/Egide’; it has the continuing support of the MAE’s ‘Cultural Relations’ G. D. as Mission of archaeological project (1987-2020) and since 1999 it has been part of a ‘Strategic project’ of Florence University for Medieval Archaeology.

some time in an archaeological enterprise in Jordan with approaches not unlike ours (from the role of territorial archaeology to a ‘public’ use of their scientific presence²) – a concise and updated picture of some of the main results achieved in 35 years of archaeological campaigns on the ground for a historical research project.

First of all, the surprising connotations of the settlement in the South-Jordan region, between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea, with the Petra valley and its territory emerged as the fulcrum and key to the interpretation of the entire period, proposed, as the results appeared to us, as ‘Crusader-Ayyubid:’ a proposal that, in fact, in 1986 (the year of the first survey campaign) could appear unrealistic and that the campaigns of 2016-18 could definitely confirm as a renewed perspective of long-term historical interpretation for the entire region considered. The historical period which, by virtue of the cultural characteristics found for both material and, deductively, mental structures (such as the one of a frontier re-emerged as an ancient function but declined in Euro-Mediterranean terms), can be defined as part of a shared Mediterranean Middle Ages (therefore without the prudent inverted commas – Petra ‘Medieval’ – of the 1986 title...).³

Thus, it seemed particularly appropriate to us – also because of the welcoming spirit combined with the high competence and efficiency of the team directed by our friend and colleague Piotr Kołodziejczyk – to participate in this ‘working’ Conference dedicated in part to the recent activities in Jordan of the Archaeological Missions belonging to two academic institutions (the Jagellonian University and the Florentine University), which have been able to collaborate cordially at different levels (from logistical assistance to academic and institutional cooperation) while cultivating very different interests.

The circumstance, therefore, seemed favorable to us to offer in a semi-formal, colloquial way (albeit without leaving room for approximations) a collective contribution that could paint a relatively broad picture of the various registers, also methodologically experimental, that the Petra Mission ‘Medieval’ has practiced in its decades of experience in Jordan. Specifically, especially through a selective exemplification of results, some contributions illustrate peculiar aspects of the methodology (‘cultural’ one

² I am alluding first of all to the Mission of the Jagiellonian University (which hosts this Conference) directed by Piotr Kołodziejczyk and to the start of a medievalist program (of great interest, also methodologically) conducted by Przemek Nocuń (Kołodziejczyk 2018).

³ First reports and readings already in Berretti *et al.*, *Ricognizione*, 1-32, Cardini 1987.

included) adopted and refined in the field in some cases in an intentionally experimental way. This remark refers in particular to the ‘light’ procedures of territorial archaeology at different scales (and to the specific function of the excavation tests within such a strategy⁴) adopted in different research scenarios: from the rocky roughness of the Petra valley at the time of the first Crusader settlement,⁵ to the territorial context of Shawbak.⁶

The occasion for a reinstatement of some of the project’s main axes was therefore offered by the very recent discovery of the capital city founded

⁴ Francesca Cheli, Raffaele Ranieri, *Archaeological research in the Petra valley: some results from the excavation at the ‘Corinthian Tomb’*. The same choice of the site where continuation of the light analysis derives from the detection of some characteristic reuses (‘suspicions,’ in the view of a medievalist) on the façade of the ‘Corinthian tomb’ and from the remains of a masonry structure typologically referable to Crusader-Ayyubid structures documented in Petra itself (Al-Wu’ayra and Al-Habis) and in the castle of Shawbak. Analogies were later confirmed by findings on some ceramic finds related to the same contexts.

⁵ Andrea Vanni Desideri, Silvia Loporatti, *Monks across the desert. Hermitic life in Christian Petra*. A wide-ranging historical approach – but strictly within the chosen historical parameters – practiced through an application of experimental features has led to the documentation of a real settlement universe of Christian-Byzantine culture that, moreover, ‘describes’ in a systematic way the ‘landscape’ on which the Crusader settlement presence was based, partly conditioning the same choices. A landscape now ‘buried’ only metaphorically – though never before observed by the numerous and well-equipped classical (excavation-based) missions that have been operating there for decades (the closest thematically is Z. Fiema, J. Frosén, M. Hollapa 2016) – as the detected archaeological traces are made up only of presences often just perceptible on the rocks themselves exposed here; a scenario that has shown flexibility, sustainability and efficacy of a methodologically ‘light’ approach that, with different targeted declinations, characterizes basic choices in the archaeological work of the Chair (see *infra*).

⁶ Chiara Marcotulli, *Documenting the rural village of Al-Jāyyah (Shawbak): methodologies and first results. A systematic analysis of the housing complexes toward the contextualization of the settlement in the ‘longue durée’*; Giacomo Ponticelli, *A possible ‘pre-crusader’ fortification besides Shawbak castle: towards a first contextualization through GIS visibility and spatial analyzes*. An example of the tourism master plan, cited in the framework of the public archaeology program foreseen in the European targeted project CIUDAD, “Liaisons for Growth” (see *infra*), shows, in concrete terms, how this is closely connected to the light analysis conducted on a territorial scale around the monumental archaeological site of Shawbak: the documented settlement structure (here too, conceptually ‘buried landscapes’ recognized stratigraphically, but without excavations) constitutes the basis for ‘building’ itineraries aimed at the valorization (including the premises for a protection based on acquired knowledge) of the investigated area. With a chronological spectrum that – with a view to *longue durée* applied to landscape archaeology, from some pre-Crusader conditions it reaches the key site of Al-Jaya, then the object of successful targeted excavations (see *infra*).

by Saladin,⁷ which had been the subject of a strong scientific hypothesis through intense and targeted ‘light’ investigations (Campaigns 2006 *et seq.*) – later supported also by precise stratigraphic excavation confirmations – in a series of Ayyubid and then early Mameluk interventions inside the site and which now finds a splendid and precise definite confirmation in what appears to be a residential district of the highest quality, worthy of a capital, albeit regional, at the foot of the Shawbak hill (Vannini 2016 and forthcoming; Bonacchi, Nucciotti, Vannini 2014).

It is also worth to underline the close relationship between history and archaeology that has characterized the Italian Medievalist School since its origin, which had in these moments a sad recurrence, the memory of a great Polish historian, Karol Modzelewski, who died days before the conference (Pl. 1). I would like to dedicate this series of communications relating to the Mission of our University in the Petra region to this dear friend, illustrious medievalist and splendid protagonist of civil life, even before politics, and a European – if Polish friends allow me – even before Polish. A dedication that has a more specific motivation for the Italian archaeological culture, as a protagonist, since he was a young fellow at the Cini Foundation in Venice and member of a famous PAN mission, of a founding season for Italian medieval archaeology, as I can testify personally. I am also pleased that the students of our School – some of whom will be speaking shortly – have had the opportunity, for a brief but intense season, to listen to his lecture directly at the start of a new promising chapter of collaboration between our Schools.⁸

Guido Vannini

⁷ Guido Vannini, *Al-Jaya Palace and the new Shawbak town. A medieval frontier and the return of urbanism in the Southern Transjordan*. The discovery of a magnificent civil residence at the base of the relief of Shawbak surmounted by the old Crusader castle now transformed into a citadel of the new Ayyubid city is the crowning achievement of a long investigation that had already led to the recognition of the city founded by Saladin (with the interpretation of an extraordinary building and topographical stratigraphy, finally on an archaeological and seismological basis). A fact that fully draws a historical dimension of the first rank, since it documents for the first time ever Saladin’s political program to ‘re-urbanize’ the southern Jordanian territory giving it, after the Roman-Byzantine season, a renewed centrality on the basis, what is really interesting, of that covered, after centuries, by the ‘experiment’ of the Crusader Lordship.

⁸ *Incontro con Karol Modzelewski 2014; Archeologia Medievale fra Italia e Polonia 2013-2014.*

PLATE 1



Pl. 1. Photos from the conference