Al-Franj: the Crusaders in the Levant | Saladin in the Holy Land

‘Castles repeatedly changed hands between the Crusaders and Muslims.’

The western areas of the Levant, which played a key role during the Crusader period, are peppered with castles of which those at Karak and Shawbak are fine examples. Castles repeatedly changed hands between the Crusaders and Muslims, and following their success at the Battle of Hittin, Saladin’s soldiers took a number of Frankish citadels, including the aforementioned Karak and Shawbak. Saladin’s Ayyubid successors made additions to these castles, as did the Mamluks, later, during the 7th / 13th and 8th / 14th centuries. Both Frankish and Muslim builders contributed to the fortifications, making it difficult to ascertain who was responsible for which architectural feature. However, it is clear that the Franks brought new military technology to the Levant, and that, in turn, they would have learned about some of the techniques used in Islamic structures.



Name:
Karak Castle

Dynasty:
Hegira 6th–8th century / AD 12th–14th century Crusader, Ayyubid–Mamluk

Details:
Karak, Jordan

Justification:
A Crusader castle captured by Saladin's army.



Name:
Karak Castle

Dynasty:
Hegira 6th–8th century / AD 12th–14th century Crusader, Ayyubid–Mamluk

Details:
Karak, Jordan

Justification:
Calligraphic inscription on the wall of Karak Castle which mentions Sultan al-Zahir Baybars.



Name:
Shawbak Castle

Dynasty:
Hegira 6th–7th century / AD 12th–13th century Crusader, Ayyubid–Mamluk

Details:
Shawbak, Jordan

Justification:
A Crusader castle captured by Saladin's army.



Name:
Shawbak Castle

Dynasty:
Hegira 6th–7th century / AD 12th–13th century Crusader, Ayyubid–Mamluk

Details:

Shawbak, Jordan

Justification:
General view of Shawbak Castle.



Name:
Shawbak Castle

Dynasty:
Hegira 6th–7th century / AD 12th–13th century Crusader, Ayyubid–Mamluk

Details:
Shawbak, Jordan

Justification:
An arched passageway at Shawbak Castle.



Name:
Warrior relief

Dynasty:
Hegira 6th century / AD 12th century Anatolian Seljuq

Details:
Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts
Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Turkey

Justification:
A relief-style warrior illustrative of the type who would have either defended or attacked Shawbak or Karak castles.



Name:
Ajlun Castle

Dynasty:
Hegira 579–658 / AD 1184–1260 Ayyubid–Mamluk

Details:
Ajlun, Jordan

Justification:
Ajlun was built in 580 / 1184 entirely by Muslims to protect the trade and communication routes between Syria and Egypt.



Name:
Ajlun Castle

Dynasty:
Hegira 579–658 / AD 1184–1260 Ayyubid–Mamluk

Details:
Ajlun, Jordan

Justification:
Detail of one of the corners of Ajlun Castle.
