

The Historical Roots of the Naming of Ajloun (The City – The Castle)

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Abstract

This study examines the historical roots of the naming of Ajloun, with particular emphasis on the relationship between the name of the city and that of its renowned castle. Ajloun represents one of the historically significant regions of northern Jordan, having occupied an important geographical and strategic position throughout successive historical periods. The study seeks to investigate the origins, meanings, and historical development of the name “Ajloun” and to trace the various interpretations proposed by historians, geographers, and Arab and Islamic sources concerning its etymology. It also explores the emergence and development of Ajloun Castle and the extent to which the castle's name was connected to the geographical and administrative identity of the surrounding area.

The study adopts a historical-analytical approach based on the examination and comparison of available primary and secondary sources, including historical chronicles, geographical writings, archaeological evidence, and relevant scholarly studies. Particular attention is given to the historical transformations of the region from the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods through the Ayyubid, Mamluk, Ottoman, and modern eras. The study argues that understanding the naming of Ajloun requires consideration of the region's geographical characteristics, political and administrative transformations, and its strategic importance as a link between the Levantine interior and the Jordan Valley.

The study concludes that the name Ajloun has undergone historical interpretations and transformations that reflect the complex cultural and political history of the region. The relationship between Ajloun city and Ajloun Castle cannot be understood solely through linguistic explanations; rather, it should be examined within the broader historical context of settlement, political authority, military geography, and regional identity. Accordingly, the study contributes to clarifying an important aspect of Jordan's historical and geographical heritage and provides a critical framework for understanding the origins and development of the name Ajloun across different historical periods.

Keywords: Ajloun, Ajloun Castle, Jordan, Historical Geography, Toponymy, Ayyubid Period, Mamluk Period, Historical Names, Archaeological Heritage.

Introduction

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, Who created and proportioned, Who decreed and guided, Who taught man what he did not know. May peace and blessings be upon the most eloquent of the eloquent, our Master Muhammad, and upon his family, his companions, and those who follow their path and adhere to their way until the Day of Judgment. To proceed:

Delving into the heritage of the venerable early scholars brings one abundant goodness and beneficial knowledge. One also finds that they—may Allah have mercy on them—left no matter, small or great, that could be investigated without having subjected it to research and analysis. Among these studies is the present one on the historical roots of the naming of Ajloun.

When discussing the historical roots of the naming of Ajloun, it is essential to address the importance of Ajloun as a site, the factors that rendered this city significant, and the various archaeological remains and historical testimonies left behind by successive civilizations. This diversity in archaeological remains indicates the diversity of the civilizations that succeeded one another in Ajloun, especially considering that human settlement in Ajloun dates back thousands of years, making it an archaeological museum containing numerous remains that attest to the creativity, development, and diversity of the architectural styles those civilizations offered to humanity. The best witness to this is Ajloun Castle, which demonstrates the engineering ingenuity and defensive thinking adopted by Islamic societies throughout the ages. The construction of this castle was not limited to the military aspect but also encompassed cultural and social dimensions. Every castle has a story that is not merely told but studied as an example of innovation and engineering.

As for the difficulties that faced this study, they are represented in the scarcity of historical texts, in addition to the absence of any specialized study of this kind. Hence came my choice of this research topic, given its great importance, in addition to numerous matters that prompted me to write under this title, the first of which is the present-day need for such studies and research addressing important topics in civilizational history, since they are considered rare and of a high degree of importance.

First: The Importance of Ajloun in the Ayyubid Era

The historical importance of Ajloun emerged in the Ayyubid era when Sultan Al-Nasir Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (465–589 AH / 1169–1193 CE) ordered Prince Izz al-Din Usama al-Jabali—named after Jabal Awf, one of the most prominent princes and one of his commanders—to build a fortified military castle on the summit of Jabal Bani Awf. This was in the year 580 AH / 1184 CE, and its construction took two years, following Salah al-Din's return from his second campaign against the Ayyubid Emirate of Karak. He is also the one who built the bridge over the Jordan River, known as Usama's Bridge (Al-Nuwayri, 1423 AH; Al-Dimashqi, 1410 AH/1990).

Second: The Location

The city of Ajloun is located 75 km northwest of the capital, Amman. The Ayyubids realized from the outset the importance of the distinguished strategic location that Ajloun occupies, as it forms a connecting link between the two capitals of the Ayyubid state, Damascus and Cairo. It also constitutes a military base due to its overlooking Palestine, rising 1,023 meters above sea level. Sultan Salah al-Din wanted to build an Islamic military base to confront the strongholds and fortresses built by the Franks, such as Safed Castle, Kawkab al-Hawa, Habis Jaldak, and Belvoir Castle (Qal'at al-Sawad) in the district of Damascus, among other Crusader castles that stood as an obstacle to Muslim movements in Damascus and Palestine (Al-Baghdadi, 1412 AH).

As for the castle, it is located on the summit of "Jabal Awf," situated in the southwest of Ajloun, overlooking the Jordan Valley, and it can be seen from Jerusalem and from the heights of Nablus. The ridge on which it was built is known as Jabal Awf. It was built by Izz al-Din Usama,

one of the senior commanders of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi and the brother-in-law of King Al-Adil, in 580–581 AH / 1184–1185 CE.

Its location on the summit of Jabal Awf granted it a unique strategic advantage, as it is surrounded by a deep moat that was used to collect water, in addition to forming a strong barrier that is difficult to breach, along with its fortified gates and high towers, which constituted a unique site for observation and reconnaissance and strong defensive positions. Inside it, corridors and narrow passageways abound, alongside spacious halls that served as sleeping quarters for soldiers and stables for the Ayyubids' horses, in addition to water wells that can hold thousands of cubic meters of rainwater. Before it stretches the Jordan Valley to the west, Wadi al-Yabis (known as Wadi al-Rayyan) to the north, Wadi Rajib to the south, and Jerash to the east, overlooking the heights of Jerusalem and the mountain range of Syria, including Mount Hermon (Jabal al-Shaykh), which is covered with snow throughout the year.

The castle remained the focus of attention of sultans, kings, and princes in the Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman eras, and it was distinguished by an important role in their times, in addition to being a seat of government and judiciary at that time.

Ajloun Castle is considered an example of the art of Islamic military castle architecture with a defensive character, dating back to the Ayyubid period, reflecting the extent of the development of defense and attack techniques in the style of building Islamic castles, such as arrow slits, towers, bent passages, the sliding gate, fortified entrances, openings for pouring burning oil and boiling water, the drawbridge, the moat, and secret passages (Abu Abaileh, 2015). The construction and design system of Ajloun Castle shows the influence of castle-building styles built in the northern part of the Mediterranean basin, as the builders of Ajloun Castle integrated what they had adopted from their Crusader adversaries into the development of military construction concepts.

The author of *Masalik al-Absar* described it as a fortress possessing impregnable protection and invincibility (Ibn Fadl Allah Al-Umari, 1992), visible to the eye from the land of Palestine, specifically from the town of Beisan (Abu al-Fida, n.d.; Al-Baghdadi, 1412 AH). When Izz al-Din Usama began building the castle, the tribes of Bani Awf objected to him; they were a group of Arab tribes from Jarm of Quda'a who had migrated to Ajloun and settled there since the time of the Fatimids (Ibn Shaddad, 1962). The author of *Al-A'laq al-Khatira* described them as possessing valor, readiness to aid, and strength, and that they did not enter into obedience (Ibn Shaddad, 1962; Al-Qalqashandi, 1987). Jabal Awf was named after them (Ibn Fadl Allah Al-Umari, 2010; Ibn Kannan, 1993; Al-Qalqashandi, 1987). Other tribes also inhabited Ajloun in the Ayyubid era, the most famous of which was the tribe of Banu Wahran (Al-Qalqashandi, 1982).

Prince Izz al-Din Usama pursued a policy of leniency and truce with Bani Awf until they felt secure with him, and he convinced them that building a military castle on their lands would protect them from the raids and aggression of the Franks. They agreed with him and helped him in the construction until it was completed. Then he contrived a stratagem against them: he gathered them for a banquet, and when they had finished, he ordered his servants to finish off their sheikhs, and he imprisoned some of them in the castle until the rest submitted in loyalty and obedience (Ibn Shaddad, 1962; Al-Qalqashandi, 1987; Abu al-Fida, n.d.).

Izz al-Din Usama wanted to extinguish the embers of Bani Awf and limit their influence, so he stripped them of their authorities, even the name of the mountain (Jabal Bani Awf), which had been attributed to them and had witnessed their glory for many years. It is noticeable that from that time on, the name of Jabal “Awf” changed to Jabal “Ajloun.” One of the thirteenth-century historians wrote about it, saying that Ajloun Castle is located between the district of Al-Sawad—belonging to the province of Jordan—and the district of Al-Sharat. It is an important fortress despite its smallness, standing on a prominent elevation overlooking the Jordan Valley, and visible to the eye from Jerusalem and from the heights of Nablus. The ridge on which the castle was built is known as Jabal Awf because the tribe of Bani Awf had resided there since the days of the early Fatimid caliphs (Ibn Fadl Allah Al-Umari, 2010; Ibn Kannan, 1993; Al-Qalqashandi, 1987). This clan was ruled by sheikhs among whom disputes and wars were frequent, and the country remained in this state until the days of King Al-Adil Sayf al-Din Abu Bakr ibn Ayyub, the brother of Salah al-Din, when he granted it as a fief to Izz al-Din Usama, one of his senior commanders. Izz al-Din Usama began building a castle to which his followers could resort from the raids of Bani Awf, but the latter did not remain calm, so the prince convinced them that his aim in building the castle was to protect them from the aggression of the Franks. Thereupon, Bani Awf ceased their movements and began to contribute to building the castle (Al-Qalqashandi, 1982).

When the castle was built, the prince invited the sheikhs of Bani Awf to a banquet inside its walls, and when they had finished eating, he ordered his slaves to arrest them and imprison them (Ibn Shaddad, 1962).

Third: The Naming

Ajloun: with a fatha on the ‘ayn and a sukun on the jim, is a word derived from the triliteral root ‘a-ja-la (عجل), meaning roundness. It was mentioned in the Old Testament as the name of a village in the land of Canaan (Ibn Shaddad, 1962; Abu Abaileh, 2015; Al-Rashdan, 1994). Al-Dabbagh confirmed in his book *Biladuna Filastin* (Our Country, Palestine) that the name Ajloun comes from the root ‘ajal, a common Semitic root denoting the calf (the young of cattle) and roundness; the waw and nun at the end of the name are for diminution according to the Aramaic method of diminution, so the meaning becomes “the small round place” or “the small calf.” It is not unlikely that the Canaanites took the calf as a god for themselves within their mythical superstitious beliefs, since groups of people used to worship natural phenomena or the creatures existing in their environment. It has been mentioned in history that idol worship entered the Arabian Peninsula from the Levant, so it is no wonder that some names were given within religious beliefs (Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani, 1380–1390 AH; Al-Dabbagh, 1991; Al-Fayoumi, 1415 AH/1994). Another scholar held that the source of its name is derived from a Semitic root, “jl,” meaning “the small calf,” “the place of the calf,” or “roundness”; and it was said that its meaning is a small place or a place of rolling (Ahl al-Hadith Forum Archive, 1432 AH/2010).

The word Ajloun was also mentioned by the author of *Awdah al-Masalik*, with a fatha on the unpointed ‘ayn, a sukun on the jim, a damma on the lam, and a waw and nun at the end; and it is called Al-Ba’utha, with a fatha on the dotted ba’, an alif, a damma on the unpointed ‘ayn, a waw, a three-dotted tha’, and a ha’ at the end. It is a fortress, and its suburb (rabad) belongs to the Third [jund] of Jordan; the fortress is a horse’s gallop away from the town. Both are in Jabal al-Ghor opposite Beisan, and it has orchards and flowing water. It is a newly built fortress, built by Izz al-Din Usama, the greatest of Salah al-Din’s princes (Ibn Sabahi Zadeh, 1427 AH).

The word Ajloun was mentioned with a kasra on the 'ayn and a sukun on the jim as an Aramaic proper name of one of the kings of Moab (Ibn Habib, 1982; Abu Abaileh, 2015; Ibn Al-Ibri, 1992). The word Ajloun was also applied in the Byzantine era to the name of a monk who lived in a monastery on whose site Ajloun Castle was erected (Abu Abaileh, 2015). Ajloun was also known by the name Gilead in the books of the Old Testament, meaning roughness and hardness, or land difficult to traverse (Ibn Habib, 1982; Tadros Yacoub, n.d.; Abu Abaileh, 2015; Al-Dabbagh, 1991).

The Torah mentioned the name Ajloun in Transjordan. It is from the root ('ajal), a common Semitic root, and it denotes several meanings: among them roundness, from which comes the wheel (dulab) and the circle; rolling; and the young calf. It is not unlikely that "the calf" was the name of a Phoenician idol god (Dhahir, 1427 AH).

It was named Ajloun Castle, and Ajloun as the name of a city was mentioned by Al-Dimashqi (d. 727 AH / 1327 CE), the author of *Nukhbat al-Dahr fi 'Aja'ib al-Barr wa-l-Bahr*, who said: "The city of Ajloun, in which there is a fine and impregnable fortress. It has flowing water, abundant fruits, and plentiful provisions. It is elevated and can be seen from a distance of four days' march" (Al-Dimashqi, as cited in Al-Muqtabas, n.d.). As for Abu al-Fida (d. 732 AH / 1331 CE), in his book *Taqwim al-Buldan*, he said that (Ajloun) is the name of a fortress: "and its suburb is called Al-Ba'utha. The distance between them is estimated at a horse's gallop. Both are in the eastern Jabal al-Ghor opposite Beisan. It is a famous, newly built, impregnable fortress. It has orchards and flowing water. It was built by Izz al-Din Usama, one of the most prominent princes of Sultan Salah al-Din." Thus, Abu al-Fida defines (Ajloun) here as a fortress and describes "Ajloun fortress" as "newly built," that is, recent (Abu al-Fida, n.d.; Ibn Battuta, 1417 AH; Makhlouf, 1983). As for Ibn Fadl Allah Al-Umari (d. 749 AH / 1348 CE), in his book *Al-Ta'rif bi-l-Mustalah al-Sharif*, he states that it is a castle, and he confirms that the city of this castle is Al-Ba'una; Ajloun is the name of the castle built on the mountain overlooking Al-Ba'una: "It is a splendid fortress despite its smallness, possessing impregnable protection and invincibility" (Al-Umari, 1408 AH/1988).

In summary, Abu al-Fida and Ibn Fadl Allah Al-Umari agree that the word (Ajloun) is the name of the "fortress-castle" (Ajloun), that "Al-Ba'utha–Al-Ba'una" is its "suburb-city," and that it is located a "horse's gallop" from the "fortress-castle" (Ajloun), built by Izz al-Din Usama ibn Munqidh (Al-Hanbali, 1420 AH).

As for Ibn Battuta, in his *Tuhfa* (Travels), he says that the word Ajloun is the name of a city, when he said: "Then I traveled to the city of Ajloun, which is a fine city with many markets, and a formidable castle through which a river of sweet water flows." Thus, Ibn Battuta described for us "the city of Ajloun" without giving us a name for the castle, but he contented himself with saying that in it there is "the formidable castle" (Ibn Battuta, 1417 AH; Makhlouf, 1983; Majallat Majma' al-Lugha al-Arabiyya, n.d.), built by Izz al-Din Usama ibn Munqidh, one of the most prominent princes of Sultan Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, in the year five hundred and eighty (Ibn Fadl Allah Al-Umari, 2010). Meanwhile, Ibn Shaddad (d. 684 AH / 1285 CE) mentioned in his *Al-A'laq al-Khatira* that "Al-Ba'utha" was the site of a monastery inhabited by a Christian called "Al-Ba'utha," so it was named after him (Ibn Shaddad, 1962). He also mentioned Ajloun Castle between the land of Al-Sawad in the district of Jordan and the land of Al-Sharat, as a small, newly built [fortress] on a mountain overlooking the Ghor, visible from Jerusalem and from the mountains of Nablus; the mountain on which the castle was built was known as Jabal

Awf because it was inhabited by people from Bani Awf (Ibn Shaddad, 1962; Al-Qalqashandi, 1987). This is what the author of *Nihayat al-Arab fi Funun al-Adab* confirmed: that Ajloun Castle was built on Jabal Awf, which was inhabited by people from Bani Awf of Jarm of Quda'a, so it was known by them. Meanwhile, the author of *Masalik al-Absar* mentioned that in its place there was a monastery of a monk named Ajloun, so it was known by him; it is an impregnable fortress despite its smallness, and the city of this castle is Al-Ba'una, a horse's gallop from Ajloun (Al-Nuwayri, 1423 AH). Another said: "Ajloun: a castle of the jund of Jordan, built on a mountain known as Jabal Awf, overlooking the Ghor" (Al-Sanousi, n.d.).

As for the author of *Hawadith al-Zaman*, he says: "The city of Ajloun: an important city in Al-Balqa', containing a fortified castle built on Jabal Awf, built by Usama ibn Munqidh, one of the princes of Salah al-Din, during the sultanate of Al-Adil Abu Bakr; and it was said that there was a monk in his hermitage in its place called Ajloun, so it was named after him" (Al-Ansari, 1421 AH/2000). It was also known as Dayr Ajloun Castle (the Monastery of Ajloun Castle) (Dhahir, 1427 AH).

Mustafa Al-Dabbagh says that the name Ajloun is derived from the root "'ajal," which denotes the meaning of roundness (Ibn Shaddad, 1962; Al-Qalqashandi, 1987; Ibn Kannan, 1993; Ibn Fadl Allah Al-Umari, 2010), and Ajloun means the small round place (Al-Dabbagh, 1991). It was also said that Ajloun is a proper name attributed to one of the kings of Moab named Ajloun, and this king fought the Hebrews and defeated them (Ghawanmeh, 2011; Ibn Al-Ibri, 1992). And it is said: 'Aqloun, who is from the descendants of Lot (Ibn Fadl Allah Al-Umari, 2010).

The earliest mention of the word Ajloun occurred as a Hebrew name in the Old Testament, particularly in the Book of Joshua, and in another place it came as a Semitic name of a Moabite king. This leads us to say that the origin of the word Ajloun is not Arabic, according to what the study has concluded, because it is inconceivable that an Arab commander like Izz al-Din Usama would give it a non-Arabic name! And it is not in the character of Muslim Arab commanders to give it a non-Arabic name, especially in light of the Crusader campaigns.

Ajloun Castle was also called, at one period, Qal'at al-Rabad (the Castle of the Suburb), attributed to the Al-Rabadi clan, because the clan used to reside on the mountain on which the castle was built (Al-Fahawi, 2019; Peake, 2016). This is what some Western travelers confirmed—that Ajloun Castle was known as Qal'at al-Rabad—among them the Swiss traveler Johann Ludwig Burckhardt during his visit to the castle in 1227 AH / 1812 CE. He mentioned it, saying: "Qal'at al-Rabad is very fortified; its walls are thick, its passages are vaulted, and its strongholds are small" (Burckhardt, n.d.).

Or because it is crouching (rabida) on the summit of Jabal Awf, named after Bani Awf, who inhabited the mountain in the days of the Fatimids (Ibn Shaddad, 1962). It was also known by the name (Salah al-Din), in extension of the historical Islamic commander Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, who took it as a launching point to the city of Jerusalem, especially in the Ottoman era; it was also called Izz al-Din Usama Castle (Ibn Fadl Allah Al-Umari, 2010; Al-Saqqaf, n.d.). It was also called (Ibn Freih) Castle because Ibn Freih used to reside in it in the days of the Ottomans, in reference to the Freihat tribe, which ruled that region for hundreds of years at that time (Jordanian Ministry of Culture, n.d.).

Fourth: The Purpose of Building Ajloun Castle

Ajloun Castle was distinguished from other castles in that it played a prominent historical role in the phase of the Islamic-Crusader conflict. Prince Izz al-Din Usama was successful in choosing its location to confront the fortresses and castles built by the Crusaders, namely the castles of Kawkab al-Hawa near Tiberias and Al-Habis Jaldak on the road leading to Damascus. The goal of building it was to consolidate direct Ayyubid control over the trade routes (Dalal'ah, 1997).

The castle also contributed to providing security and stability in the Ajloun region. Since Bani Awf were inclined toward freedom and separation from the central government, Izz al-Din was able to subjugate them to actual control and rid the state of a source of disturbance.

Prince Izz al-Din used some Crusader prisoners in building the castle; they had taken a neighboring place known as Kufranja as their residence. These Crusader builders collected stones from old buildings, or cut them from neighboring places, carved them, and engraved on some of them certain emblems distinctive of some Crusader knights.

The castle is built in a nearly square shape to achieve the maximum degrees of military protection and defense and to distribute weights structurally in a solid manner that prevents collapse. It contains four towers, each tower consisting of two floors. Narrow windows (arrow slits) were opened in it for shooting arrows and monitoring the enemy. Ajloun Castle was distinguished by its unique architectural design, as it contains a surrounding moat that is considered the first line of defense. It is also characterized by the presence of a drawbridge used in times of war and restored in times of peace. The castle includes a number of authentic Islamic architectural elements that distinguish it from other buildings, such as arrow slits and openings for pouring burning oil and boiling water.

After the Battle of Hattin in 583 AH / 1187 CE, two towers were added, located to the right of the castle entrance. The castle is built on a towering mountain overlooking Palestine and the Dead Sea, and the most beautiful view of the Ajloun mountains can be seen when standing on one of the castle's eastern towers.

The first purpose of building Ajloun Castle was protection from the Crusaders and preventing the spread of Crusader forces in the Ajloun region. Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi ordered his commander Izz al-Din Usama to build a castle to protect the region (Al-Rihawi, 1990), to be a defensive point against any potential attacks by the Crusaders, and to protect the trade routes leading to Damascus and northern Syria (Al-Sha'ban, n.d.), and between Damascus and Cairo, and to secure protection for pilgrim caravans crossing the Ajloun region coming from the Levant to the Hijaz. It also served as a huge depot for storing grains, provisions, and weapons, from which the Ayyubid and Mamluk soldiers were supplied (Ghawanmeh, 1982; Harding, 1965). If we take into consideration that these routes are of special importance to Muslims, it was necessary to protect them from any interventions by the Franks (Maher, n.d.), and to control the road leading to Damascus and Al-Balqa' and prevent any expansion of the Franks in the region located east of the northern Jordan River, whether from Karak in the south or from Beisan across the northern Jordan River, thereby facilitating the movement of his forces and serving as a launching point for them in military operations (Ghawanmeh, 1982; Abdel Wahab, 1993). The Crusaders had fortified their northern and southern defenses with a series of fortifications, and the northern region appeared to be the source of danger coming from Damascus, so they established the

castles of Al-Shaqif (Beaufort), Tibnin, and Banias with the aim of consolidating control over the roads leading to Damascus, Tyre, and the coast. Likewise, they established Safed Castle, Al-Habis Jaldak, and Kawkab al-Hawa with the aim of monitoring the movements of Damascus, paralyzing its activity, intercepting its caravans, and cutting off the roads and paths leading to it (Ghawanmeh, 1982).

The Ayyubids achieved their goal from building Ajloun Castle, as it consolidated its control over the entire region extending along the Jordan River between the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias) and the Dead Sea. It also consolidated its control over the chain of Palestinian heights located west of the Jordan Valley from Jerusalem to Safed and Tyre, in addition to the eastern heights of the river and the northern part of Jordan—that important sector which was, and still is, the first line of defense for Damascus, and which the Muslims maintained throughout the Crusader presence in the region (Ghawanmeh, 1982).

The castle's location made it overlook the main crossings, the most important of which are Wadi Kufranja, Wadi Rajib, and Wadi al-Rayyan. Its location is considered strategic because it overlooks the Jordan Valley and controls the region extending between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, as it dominates the transportation routes between Syria and southern Jordan, protects the trade and pilgrimage routes between the Levant and the Hijaz from Frankish interference, monitors Crusader movements from the fortress of Kawkab al-Hawa, and exploits the iron mines in the Ajloun mountains (Magharet Wardeh—a historical archaeological and mining site located south of the town of Anjara in the Ajloun Governorate, in the Khashaiba area).

It also prevented Crusader expansion in the region located east of the Jordan River and [enabled] administrative control over the region's inhabitants. The castle was inhabited by a people called Bani Awf, who gave the mountain its name, having resided there since the days of the Fatimid caliphs (Al-Sha'ban, n.d.; Al-Bahnasi, 1998).

Ajloun Castle was also used as an administrative center for the region. It helped impose administrative control over the region's inhabitants, who sometimes rebelled against the central government. It also worked as a center and station for carrier pigeons for the rapid transmission of messages and mail between Damascus, Cairo, and Baghdad.

Thanks to its geographical location, the castle was able to control the surrounding areas and defend them effectively.

All historical and geographical sources confirmed that the construction of Ajloun Castle came on the ruins of an old monastery, and that it was inhabited by the people of Bani Awf, who gave the mountain its name. Therefore, it can be said that Ajloun Castle represents an important turning point in the history of the region, as it helped protect Muslims from Crusader attacks and [achieve] the stability of the region (Al-Bahnasi, 1998).

Fifth: The Defensive Advantages of Ajloun Castle

The castle was built in a square shape, with towers erected at its four corners (Abu Abaileh, 2015), giving the defenders precise angles of vision and fire covering the entire perimeter of the castle without blind spots.

The castle is surrounded by a moat ranging in width between 15 and 20 meters, except for the eastern side, where its width does not exceed five meters. In this narrow section there was a drawbridge connecting the land to the castle gate. Inside the castle are horse stables, in addition to bakeries, water cisterns, a wheat mill, and an olive press.

The castle is surrounded by a massive wall ranging in width between two and three meters, supported by several square-shaped towers, to which many additions were made in successive eras. For example, when King Al-Adil took over the kingdom of his brother Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, he appointed his mamluk Aybak ibn Abdullah as his deputy in Ajloun, and he added the southern tower to Qal'at al-Rabad.

Lankester Harding mentions in his book *The Antiquities of Jordan* that the castle was built in a nearly square shape protected by towers at its four corners, then other wings were added to the castle later in the east and south, and two towers were built at the corner of the eastern wing (Harding, 1965).

The right angles and straight lines help distribute the pressure of the stones and towers onto the thick walls in an even and stable manner.

The square design also facilitates the addition of new wings or supporting towers later without harming the solidity of the building's original foundations.

The square interior design also provides spacious and regular areas for dividing rooms, provision stores, horse stables, and soldiers' quarters.

The castle was a reason for the stability and prosperity of Ajloun, which transformed into a flourishing city with thriving markets, abounding in qaysariyyas (covered markets), bazaars, monasteries, churches, olive presses, and mosques. It holds great endowments (awqaf) for the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Ayyubids built about one hundred mosques in the Ajloun mountains, some of which still stand, such as the Great Ayyubid Mosque of Ajloun, 58 meters long, in the center of the town, by order of King Al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub in 647 AH / 1247 CE.

Ajloun Castle remained in the hands of the Ayyubids until the Mongol invasion of Syria. When the Mongols drove King Al-Nasir Yusuf out of Damascus, he took refuge in Ajloun Castle until the Mongol commander Kitbugha drove him out of it, and he headed to Egypt; thus ended Ayyubid rule in Syria. Ajloun Castle remained in the hands of the Mongols until King Al-Zahir Baybars drove them out after the Battle of Ain Jalut in 658 AH / 1260 CE. Then he appointed his deputy Izz al-Din Aybak ibn Abdullah Al-Ala'i over it, and he ordered its restoration and repair (Abu Abaileh, 2015).

In the year 728 AH, a great flood came to the city of Ajloun from the beginning of the day until the afternoon, demolishing much of its congregational mosque, markets, ribats, and houses;

seven people drowned, and people lost much wealth, grain, belongings, and livestock, the value of which approached a million dirhams (Ibn Kathir, 1417–1420 AH; Al-Saqqaf, n.d.).

As for Ibn al-Wardi, in his history he says: “A great flood came upon Ajloun; it destroyed the merchants’ market, the maristan (hospital), the tannery, and part of the congregational mosque; a group of people perished, and wealth estimated at two hundred and seventy thousand was lost” (Ibn al-Wardi, 1417 AH/1996; Issa, 1401 AH/1981).

In the Ottoman era, the traveler Burckhardt visited it in 1812 CE and mentioned that it was still inhabited, with forty men from the Al Barakat family living in it (Burckhardt, n.d.; Harding, 1965; Al-Abidi, 1973; Müller-Wiener, 1982).

Devastating earthquakes struck the castle in 1837, but it remained standing, bearing witness to the genius of Islamic military engineering, and its inhabitants from the Al Barakat family left it for Kufranja (Harding, 1965; Al-Abidi, 1973; Müller-Wiener, 1982).

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