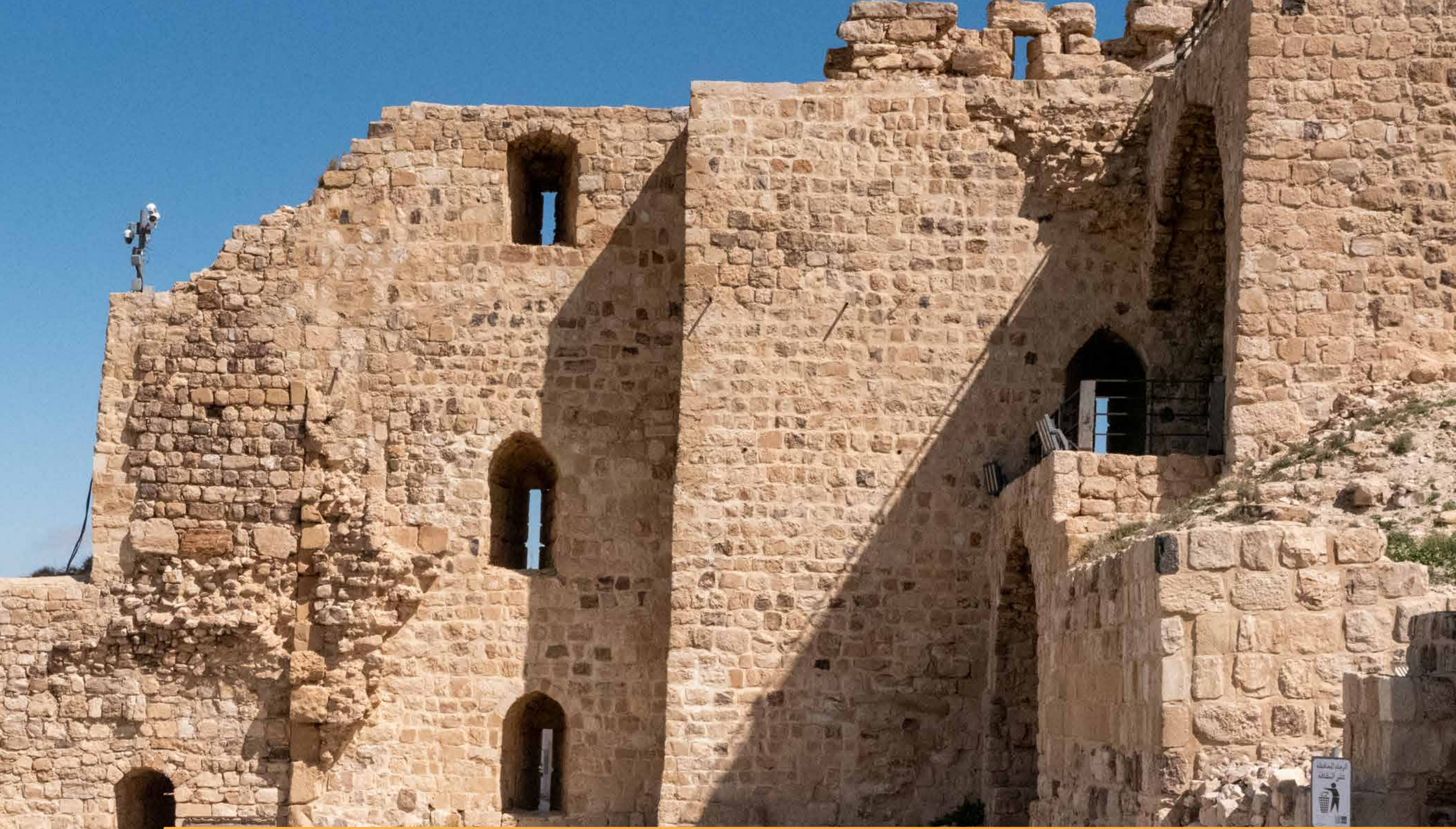


AL KARAK

WALKING TOUR



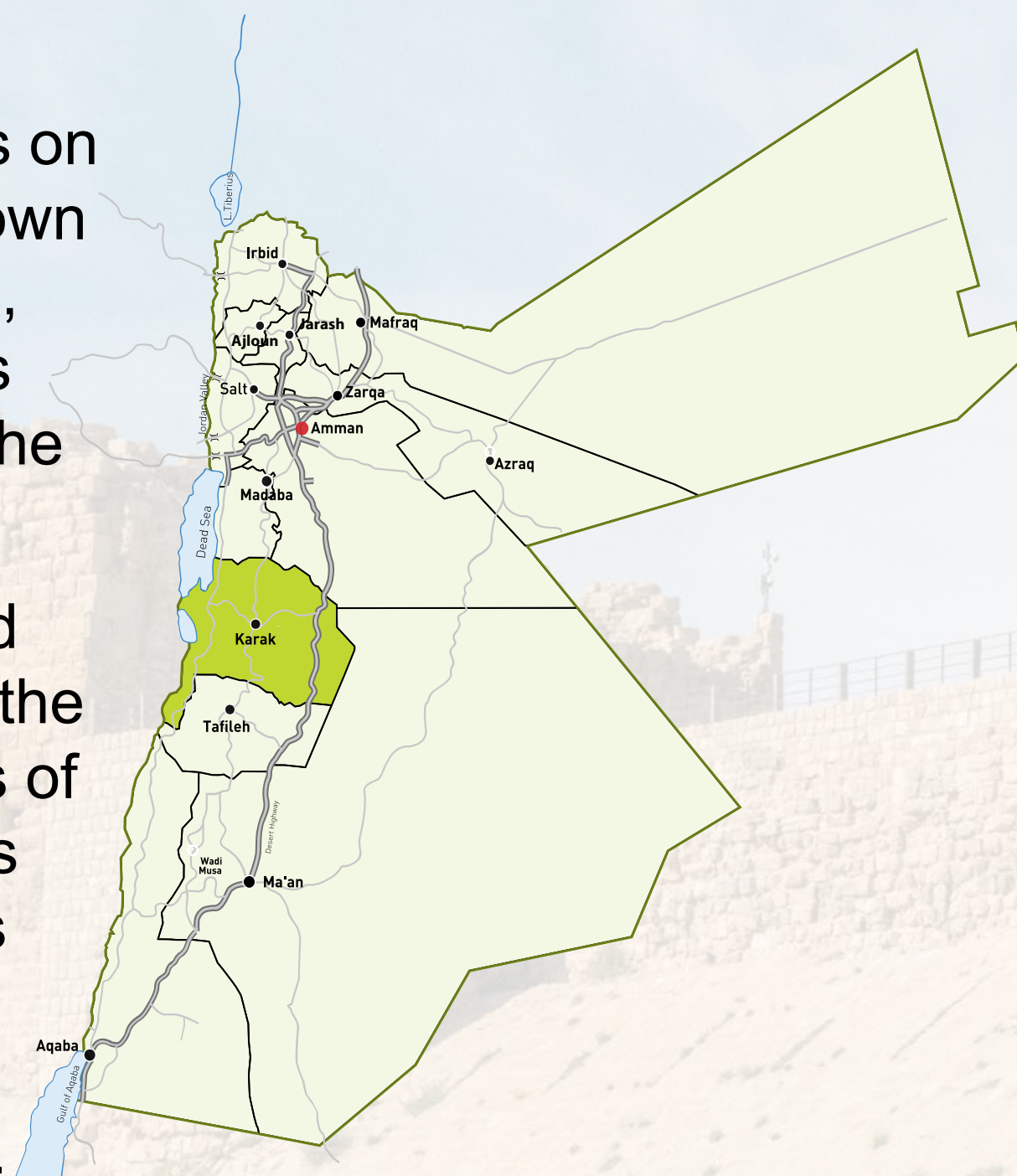


Introduction

Positioned along the King's Highway, Al Karak served as an important passage point for trade and pilgrimage, connecting ancient empires, merchants and travellers, Christian and Muslim pilgrims from around the world. The King's Highway has been in continuous use since before the 8th century BC, connecting Arabia, the Fertile Crescent, the Red Sea, and Egypt, as evidenced from archaeological remnants along this ancient passageway.

The magnificent Al Karak Castle can be seen dominating the landscape as it sits on a hilltop 1,000m above sea level. The town is surrounded by steep slopes, or wadis, surrounded by three valleys, and boasts an impressive 360 view that overlooks the Dead Sea and southern Jordan Valley.

Al Karak Castle is one of the largest and best-preserved mediaeval fortresses in the Middle East. Despite enduring centuries of damage from ancient wars, earthquakes and natural decay, the castle still stands as an impressive monument, displaying fortifications and architecture from the Crusader, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.



Al Karak was inhabited as early as the Stone Age and continued throughout the Early Iron Age, most notably when it was part of the Kingdom of Moab. In the 12th century, the Crusaders rebuilt Al Karak Castle on the ruins of an older one, taking several years to erect. With the Franks occupying Jerusalem, the castle was the main fortress in the region and used to secure and expand the Crusader's kingdom.



Al Karak withstood several sieges until it was taken by Saladin, the Ayyubid sultan of Syria and Egypt, ending the 46-year Crusader rule. Al Karak was later drawn into larger political configurations, from the Ayyubids, the Mamluks, the Ottomans and finally, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Al Karak was known by many names such as Kir Moab, Kir Hareseth, Crak des Moabites, and Le Pierre du Desert to the Crusaders. The name is believed to be derived from the Aramaic 'Karka', meaning fortified town.

Home to one of the earliest known Christian communities, Al Karak's descendants still inhabit the town today. Christianity flourished in Jordan from the Byzantine period and continued to be practiced during the Islamic period until today.

Al Karak region boasts a diverse natural landscape and geology. The dramatic landscape stretches along the Dead Sea rift valley, with Mujib Biosphere Reserve to the north and Fifa Nature Reserve to the south. The nature reserves are in abundance of *Wadis*, canyons and gorges, attracting numerous bird species and wildlife and acting as a major international bird migration flightpath.

Historical Evidence of Al Karak



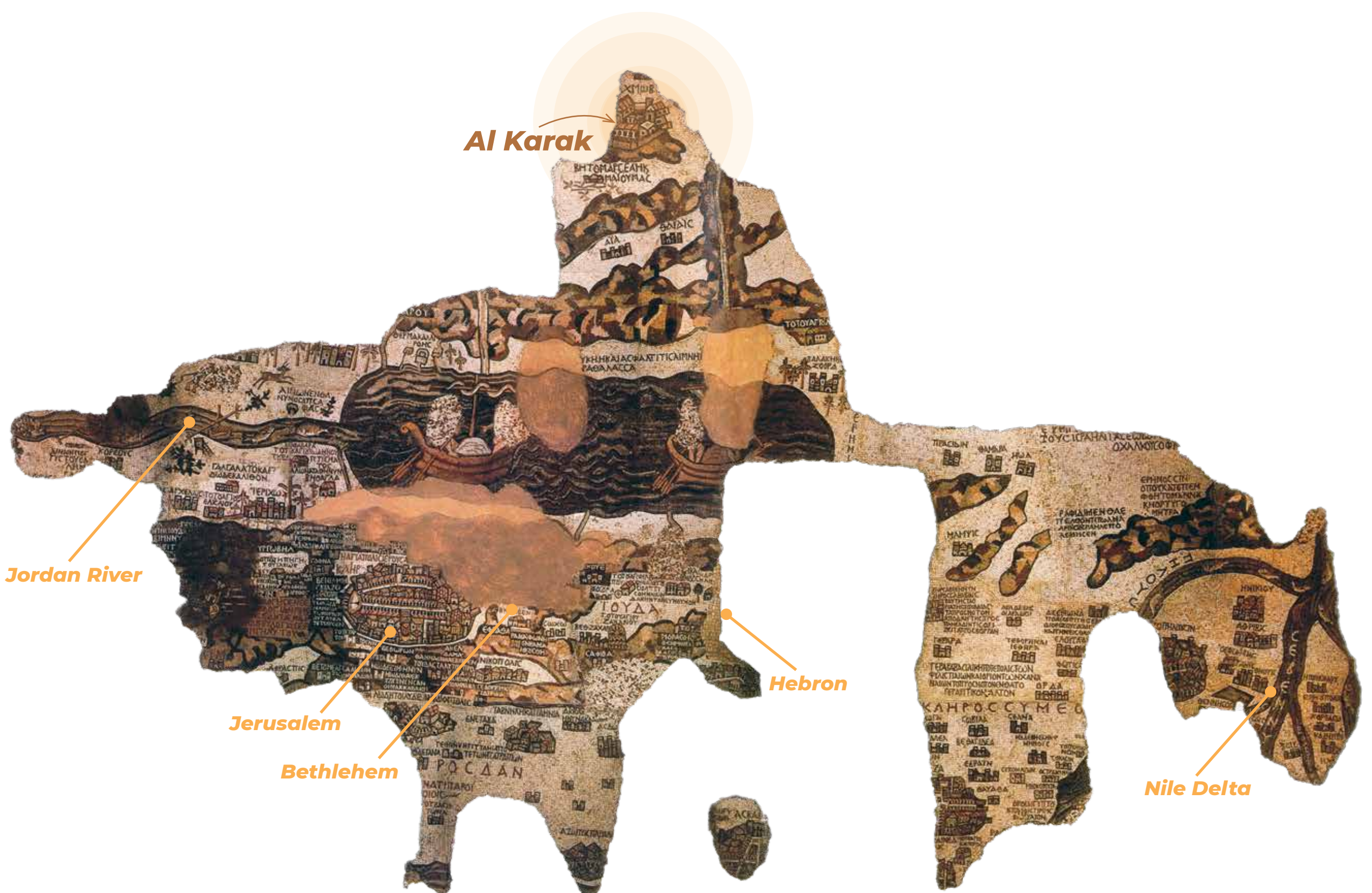
Moabite Stone [Mesha Stele]

“Then the travellers came to the castle of Al Karak which is one of the most marvellous, most inaccessible and most celebrated of castles. It is called the “Castle of the Raven”. It seems to be surrounded on all sides by valleys.,,”

Ibn Battuta, 14th century Moroccan explorer

The Mesha Stele, a Moabite Stone from 840BC contains a significant inscription in the name of King Mesha of Moab. The stele is displayed in the Louvre Museum in Paris, France since 1873.

Al Karak is depicted in the oldest map of the Holy Land known as the Madaba Map. The 6th century floor mosaic can be found in the Byzantine church of Saint George in Madaba.



Mosaic map found at the Greek Orthodox Church of St. George, Madaba - Jordan

Did You Know?



- Al Karak once held the Guinness Record for the longest serving city mayor in the world, where Al Karak native Pasha Dlewan Al Majali served as mayor of Al Karak for 57 years from 1919 to 1976.



- Al Karak Castle is the second largest and best-preserved castle in the Levant after Krak des Chevaliers “Castle of the Knights” in Syria.



- Al Karak is home to one of the oldest schools in Jordan which was established during the Ottoman period in 1899 attracting students from across the country.

- Many notable Jordanian figures are from Al Karak, including prominent prime ministers, military commanders, and politicians.

- For a fictional portrayal of Saladin’s siege of Al Karak, watch the motion picture Kingdom of Heaven starring Orlando Bloom when you return home!

- Al Karak is home to the lowest elevation nature reserve on Earth, the Fifa Nature Reserve, located 426m below sea level.

Wildlife & Nature

Birdwatching, hiking and canyoning are a few of the nature activities that can be enjoyed along the Jordan Trail and Ibex Trail in Wadi Ibn Hammad, Wadi Al Mujib and the Siq Trail, all situated in Al Karak governorate.



The Mujib Biosphere Reserve contains several river-filled canyons with hundreds of plant species, resident and migratory birds and animals such as the Eurasian Badger and the Nubian Ibex. The lowest part of the reserve reaches 410m below sea level.

Jordan is a great destination for dedicated birdwatchers! Al Mujib is an internationally recognised passageway for migratory birds. Vast numbers of White Storks and other bird species pass through Jordan, particularly during the two different migration periods in the spring and autumn. Some ending their journey in Jordan to breed.

The Fifa Nature Reserve is a semi-desert area, an essential habitat for rare and endangered local and regional birds. It is the world’s lowest elevation reserve at 426m below sea level.

Migratory species such as Imperial Eagles and White Pelicans have been spotted in Jordan.





1 Al Karak Castle

Al Karak Castle is considered one of the best-preserved fortresses left in the Holy Land located in the ancient town of Al Karak and built on the remains of earlier citadels that date back to the Nabatean period. The architectural marvels and complex history of the region can be explored, encompassing Crusader, Islamic, and Ottoman periods. After the end of Crusader rule, Sultan Salah Al Deen granted the castle to his brother, Al Malek Al Adel, who undertook extensive renovations to both the castle and its fortifications. Subsequently, Mamluk Sultan Ad Dahir Baybars carried out further restoration, renovation, and expansion works to the towers due to damage after many major earthquakes and battles.

Visitors can cross the wooden bridge above a dried-out moat to reach the castle's large Ottoman Gate. Its elevated location provides incredible panoramic views of the town, surrounding landscapes, and Dead Sea in the distance – and on a clear day, one can even see Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

Subterranean regions of the castle provide a glimpse into the lives of ancient inhabitants and soldiers defending the castle. Inside the castle walls one can fully explore the complex which extends across seven levels and include dark alleys of stone vaulted halls and passageways in addition to the towers, barracks, church, mosque, prison cells, palace, and an underground marketplace as well as Al Karak Archaeological Museum.

[Continue »](#)

1

120m

2

Visitors can also walk along the castle's outer walls, and ramparts and battlements, which once provided a vantage point for defenders to patrol and safeguard the fortress. These areas offer breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape.

Once outside the castle walls, the beautiful 19th century Ottoman administrative buildings can be explored which house a tourist center, restaurant, crafts center, and other facilities within the complex known as As Saraya Plaza.



Al Karak Archaeological Museum

Al Karak Archaeological Museum was established inside the old castle, which has remains from the Moabite period in the first millennium BC, going through the Nabataean, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic and Crusader periods. The museum was opened in 1980. The main part of the museum is a large hall in a vault of the castle, used as living quarters for soldiers during the Mamluk period. The collections date from the Neolithic to the Late Islamic periods and come from Al Karak regions. Among the sites is Bab Adh Dhira', famous for its Bronze Age burials. The museum holds the remains of skeletons and pottery from the Bab Adh Dhira' graves; Iron Age II artefacts; Byzantine glass vessels and inscriptions, and Roman and Nabataean artefacts from Ar Rabbah and Al Qasr.

Opening Hours.

Daily from 8am until 7pm from April to September & 8am until 4pm from October to March

Ticket Price.

JD 2 Foreigners, JD 0.25 Jordanians, Free when using Jordan Pass
Includes access to Al Karak Castle & Al Karak Archeological Museum.



2 The Folklore Museum

Established in 2016, the museum features cultural, historical, and popular heritage from past and present civilizations. The museum is housed in As Saraya compound, an Ottoman group of heritage buildings dating back to the 1800s. Once inhabited by local residents, the buildings were later used by the Ottoman army for administrative purposes until the Ottoman army abandoned Al Karak and its buildings in 1918 after the Arab Revolt.

The museum aims to preserve and celebrate the heritage of Al Karak. It displays a variety of agricultural, military, cooking, and textile tools from earlier generations. A collection of traditional hand embroidered Jordanian dresses, or *thawb*, display the diverse regions and tribes which women reflected in their embroidery.

The museum hosts many activities and initiatives throughout the year to encourage the community, and visitors alike, to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of Al Karak. Visitors are welcome to attend musical and dance performances, or to simply enjoy some local tea on the Bedouin-themed rooftop terrace that overlooks Al Karak Castle.

Opening Hours.

Saturday to Thursday from 8am until 2pm

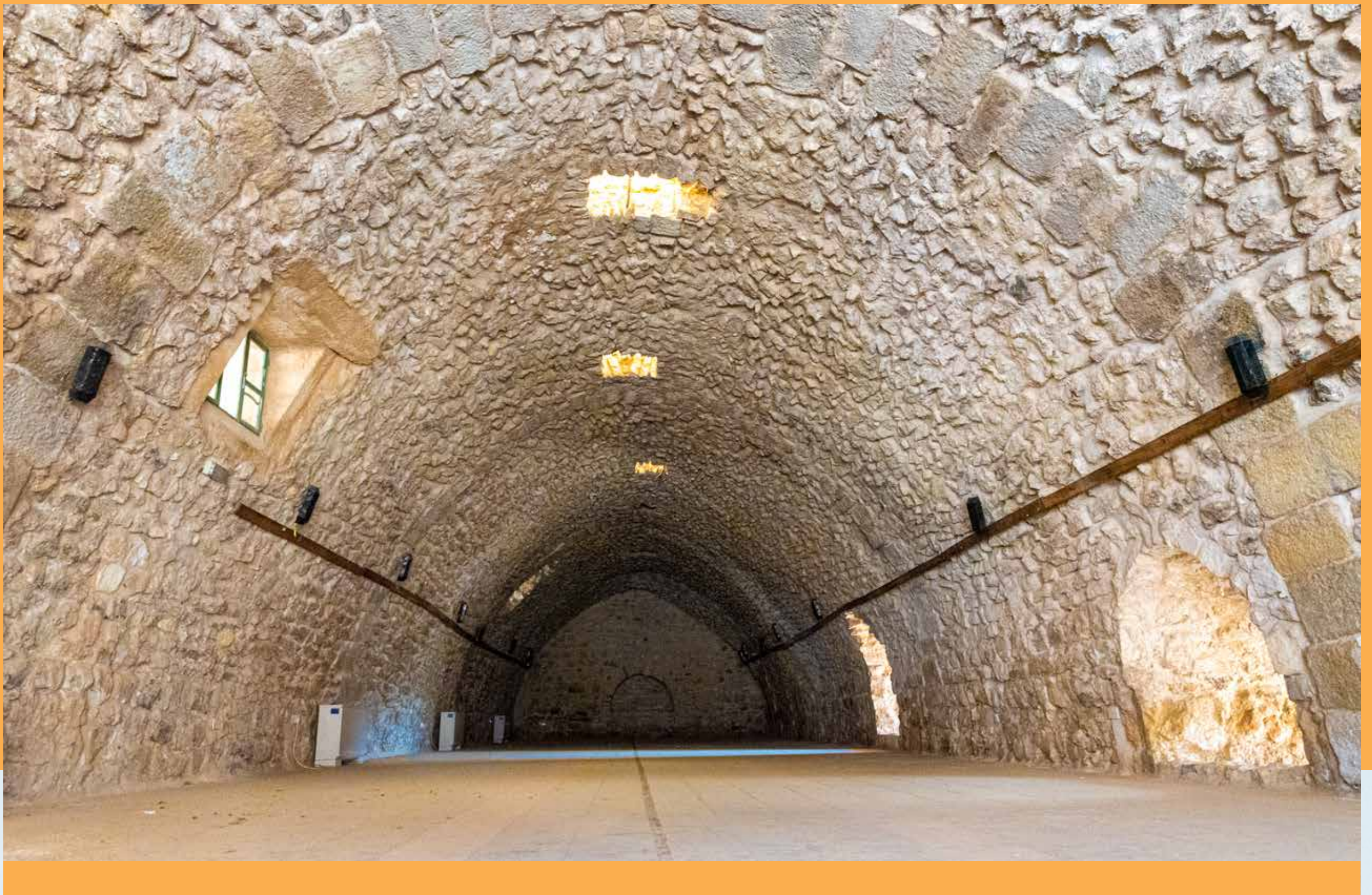
Ticket Price.

Free

50m

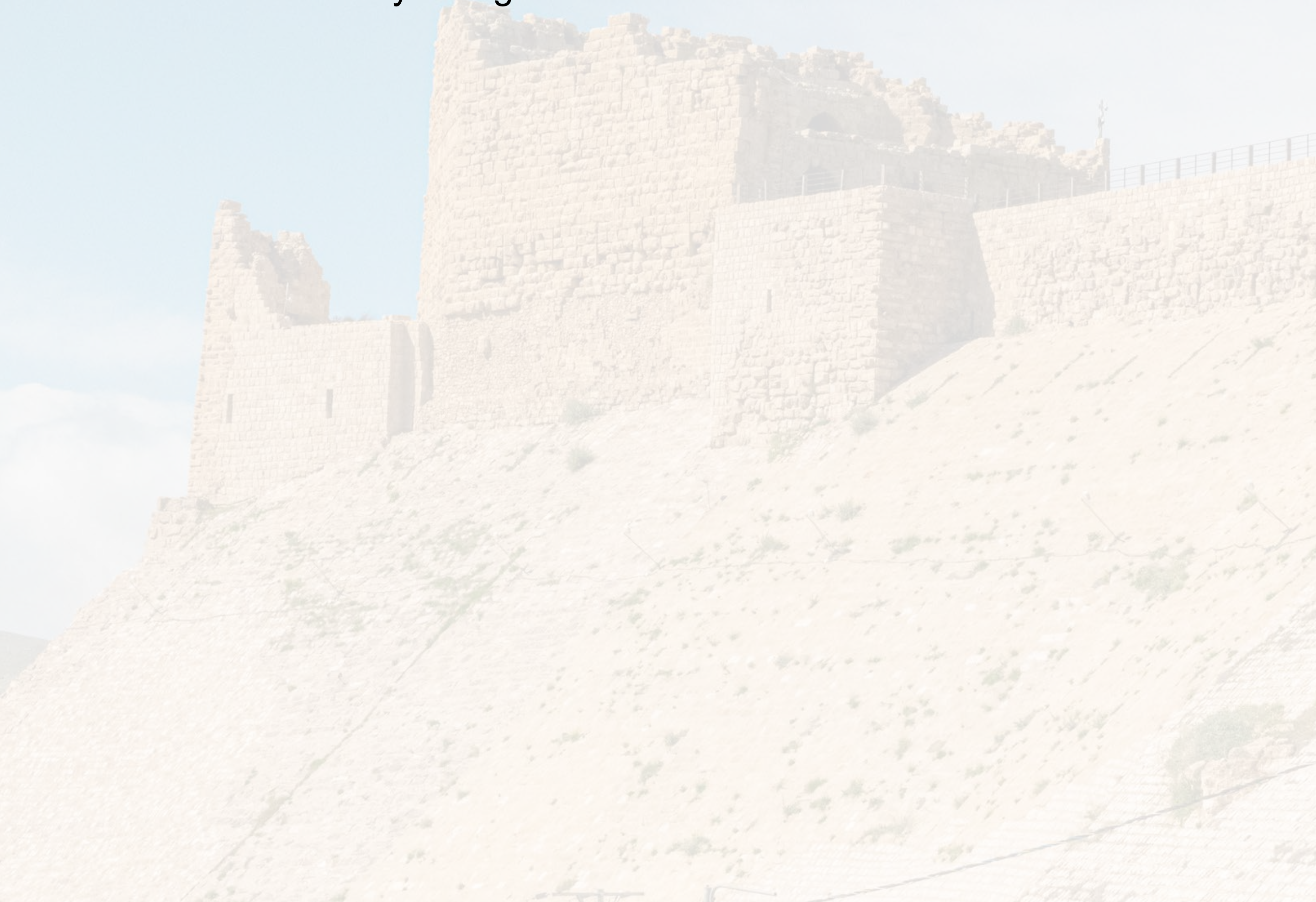
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3



3 The Vault

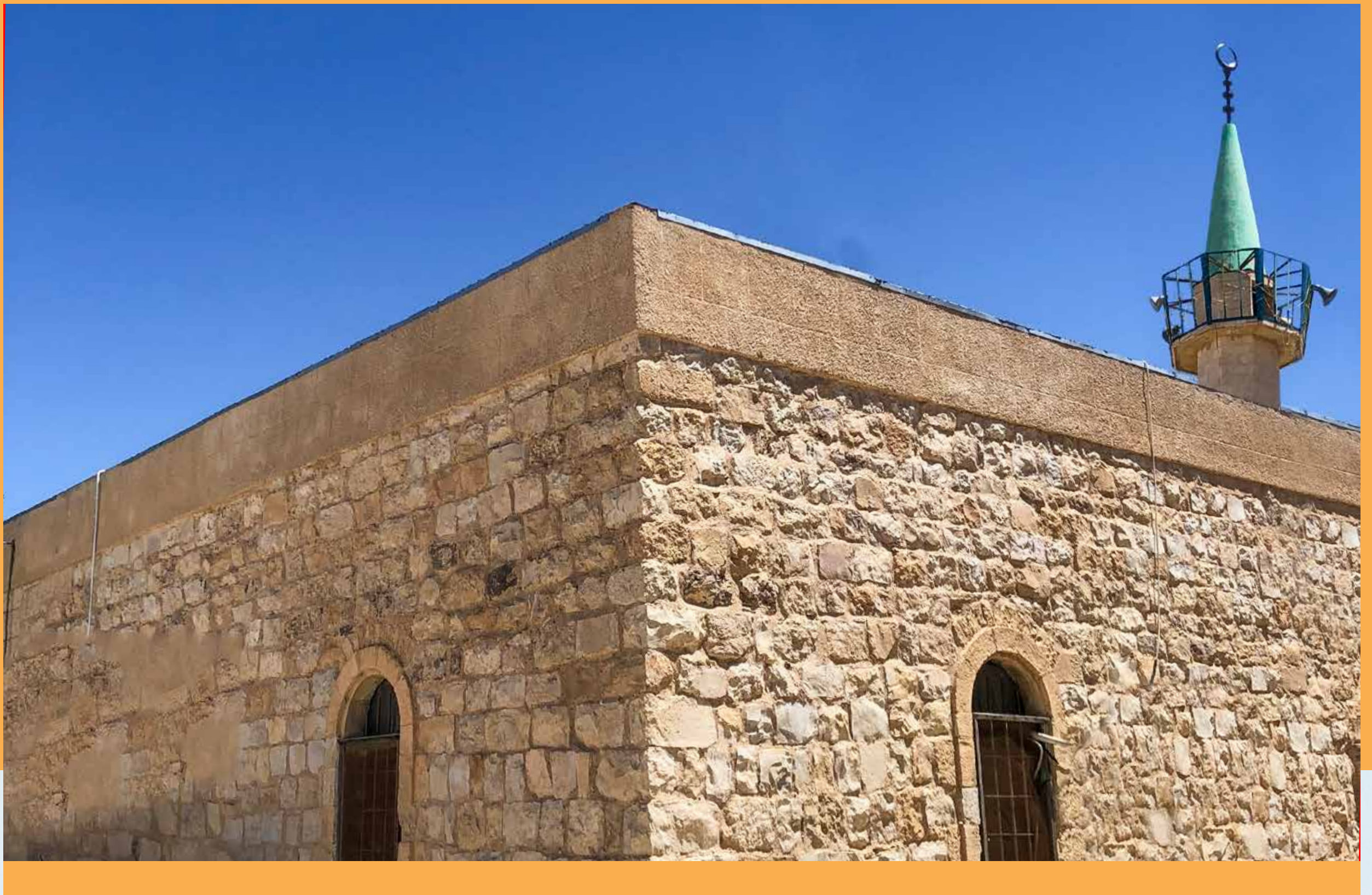
The vault is a hall located directly outside the castle's walls across the moat. Along with other administrative buildings in As Saraya compound, it is believed the vault was used by the Ayyubid and Mamluk Sultans to manage administrative affairs of Al Karak, and where leaders like Mamluk Sultan Baybars governed the Sultanate.



100m

3

4



4 Al Hamidi Mosque

As you explore As Saraya compound, one prominent landmark is that of Al Hamidi Mosque. Built during the late 19th century, the mosque takes its name from Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Its construction was commissioned as a gesture of loyalty and gratitude to the sultan and bears witness to the Ottoman influence in the region and the connection between Al Karak and the broader Islamic world.

As you step inside Al Hamidi Mosque, take a moment to appreciate the spacious prayer hall with its high ceilings and delicate chandeliers, creating a serene ambiance. Along the walls, the Quran verses and other religious speeches are lined up for worshipers to read. One of the highlights of the mosque is its central prayer niche, known as *Al Mihrab*. It serves as the focal point for worshippers during prayer, and symbolizes the direction of Mecca, which Muslims face during their prayer.



5

Burj Ad Dahir Baybars (Al Burj Ad Da'iry)

Burj Ad Dahir Baybars (Al Burj Ad Da'iry) is a historically significant structure built by order of Mamluk Sultan Baybars. The fortified tower atop the hill overlooking the city and its surroundings, once served as a crucial part of the city's defences. The tower's circular shape, thick stone walls, arrow slits, and strategic positioning allowed defenders to secure the surrounding area and repel attacks effectively.

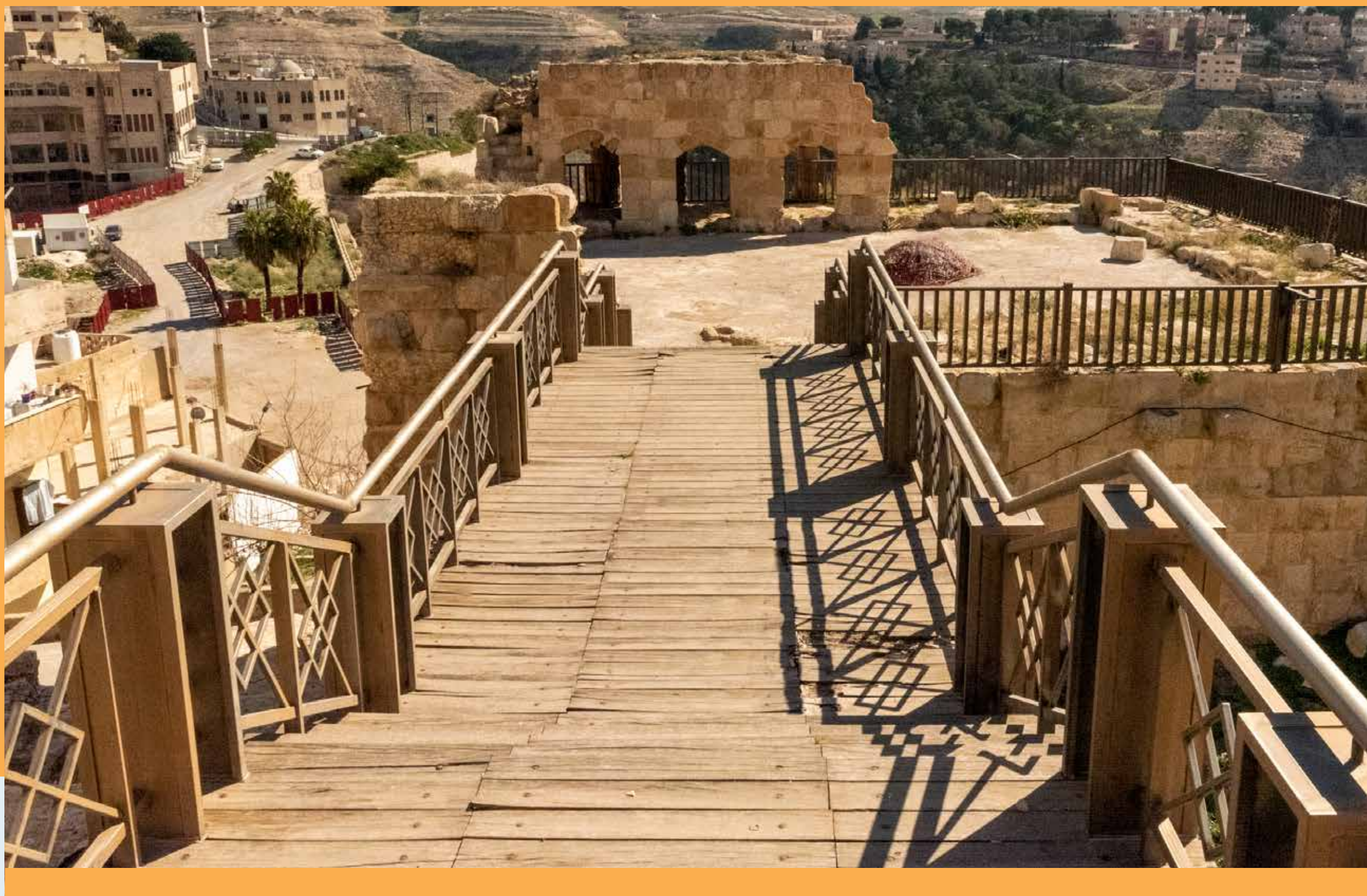
The tower design showcases the architectural and engineering prowess at that time. Inside the tower, natural light is retained by the circular shape of the hall.

An inscription commemorating Baybars can be seen in a decorative band on the upper part of the tower exterior. It carries two carved depictions of lions, a heraldic image that appears on many of the structures and objects commissioned by Baybars and is known to have acted as his personal emblem.

5

100m

6



6

Burj Ad Dahir Baybars Eastern Tower

Also known as Burj Su'ub, is located northeast of The Al Burj Ad Da'iry. It differs from all the other towers in its appearance and the presence of a parapet with mashikuli, or hinged loopholes. The Department of Antiquities recently restored the tower with bossed ashlar used in its construction.

The walls of Burj Su'ub are equipped with ten arrow slits. From one door to the north, one can climb to the roof of the tower and the box-machicolation. From this location soldiers would throw stones or other materials, such as hot sand and boiling water or oil, on attackers along the eastern wall.

From the eastern side of the tower, we can see the eastern entrance to the city, carved into the natural rock below the foundations of the wall. The wall was blocked by the Ottoman's who replaced it with an entrance through the northern fortification wall in 1894. The tower is accessible to visitors from Salah Ad Din Al Ayyubi (Saladin) Street.

6

200m

7



7 Al Birkah – Ancient Water Basin Site

Al Birkah, which means a pool in Arabic, refers to the ancient water basin at the eastern entrance of Al Karak, believed to have been built by the Moabites during King Mesha's reign in the 9th century BC. The city was believed to have been void of any water source and so the basin was used to collect rainwater. The pool had dual use, as water was stored in it during times of peace and served as an additional defensive fortification of the city in times of war. There was once a total of three historic pools in Al Karak.

Since the only ruins of this ancient water basin is a large empty area with little trace of its archaeological remains, it has been designated to serve as a tourist parking area in future regeneration plans for Al Karak.

245m

7

8



8 At Tahunah (Al Babur)

Along King Talal Street, stands the last historical mill in Al Karak. The 130-year-old mill was built during the Ottoman period and provides a fascinating glimpse into the town's past, offering a unique perspective into the cultural and economic heritage of the entire region.

Until the mid-1900s, the mill was an essential part of the community's livelihood and allowed farmers to grow larger quantities of grains to sell. Once a prime gathering spot, many locals still remember accompanying their parents to the mill to grind wheat or buy flour. Locals would travel on their horse or donkey with bags full of wheat and barley, and wait their turn to measure and value their grains before the milling process.

The word "Al Babur" was coined with milling in Al Karak and across the region during the Ottoman period. The word is said to be derived from the English word "vapour", in reference to the steam that was released from the diesel operated milling machines at that time.



9 Al Karak Secondary School for Boys

Established in 1899, Al Karak Secondary School for Boys is one of the first secondary schools founded during the Ottoman period in Jordan. It drew students from across the country and recruited educators from across the region to nurture the future leaders of Jordan. Its alumni boast prominent figures, including prime ministers, senators, ministers, army generals, and other Jordanian figures.

Commissioning the school was an achievement for its time. The Ottoman rule perceived the Jordan region as a nomadic, agriculture-dependent population, thereby excluding it from educational establishments like those in Jerusalem, Damascus, and Beirut. The people of Al Karak, spearheaded by Tawfiq Al Majali, their local representative to the Ottoman rule, repeatedly pressed for the establishment of the school until their request was granted.

The school's construction utilized stones from the Safad Earthquake which happened in 1837. Skilled builders were hired from Damascus and Jerusalem. Architectural features included the school's alignment with the Qibla in Mecca and seven entrance windows symbolizing the first seven verses in the Holy Quran. The school architecture is an exact copy of Istanbul's College of Military Defense.



10 The Byzantine Catholic Church

The Byzantine Catholic Church in Al Karak was built in 1932 and can be distinguished from its visible golden domes. The church is situated in the old city across the street from Al Karak Secondary School for Boys. The Byzantine Catholic Church supports residents from Al Karak and neighboring villages by working to increase access to education for all villagers, provide equipment from the government to support the health center, involve the village in agricultural programs, and other community activities.

The church plays an important and active role in community activities, encouraging tourism opportunities that support residents and the economic prospects of Al Karak. The church also provides a large space that can be used for functions, screenings and other activities. The Byzantine Catholic Church is open to the public for prayer services and visitation.



11

The Latin Patriarchate Complex Our Lady of the Rosary Church

The Latin Patriarchate Complex was established in 1876 by priests Macagno and Bandoli who arrived in Al Karak by request of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The priests soon started a parish, named 'Our Lady of the Rosary Church' convent, elementary school, and kindergarten as well as the priests' own housing.

In 1900, the Ottoman rule provided a license to the church to establish a boys' school. Two years later, a girl's school was established and in 1904 the first nuns 'Rosary Sisters', arrived from Palestine to teach French, Italian, English, Arabic, and religious studies.

The Latin Patriarchate in Al Karak is credited with educating girls from kindergarten until the fourth grade, an advantage students had over their peers upon entering government schools, which only started from the fifth grade.

Visitors can enjoy the fascinating photo exhibition within the complex, that showcases Al Karak life during the 19th century.



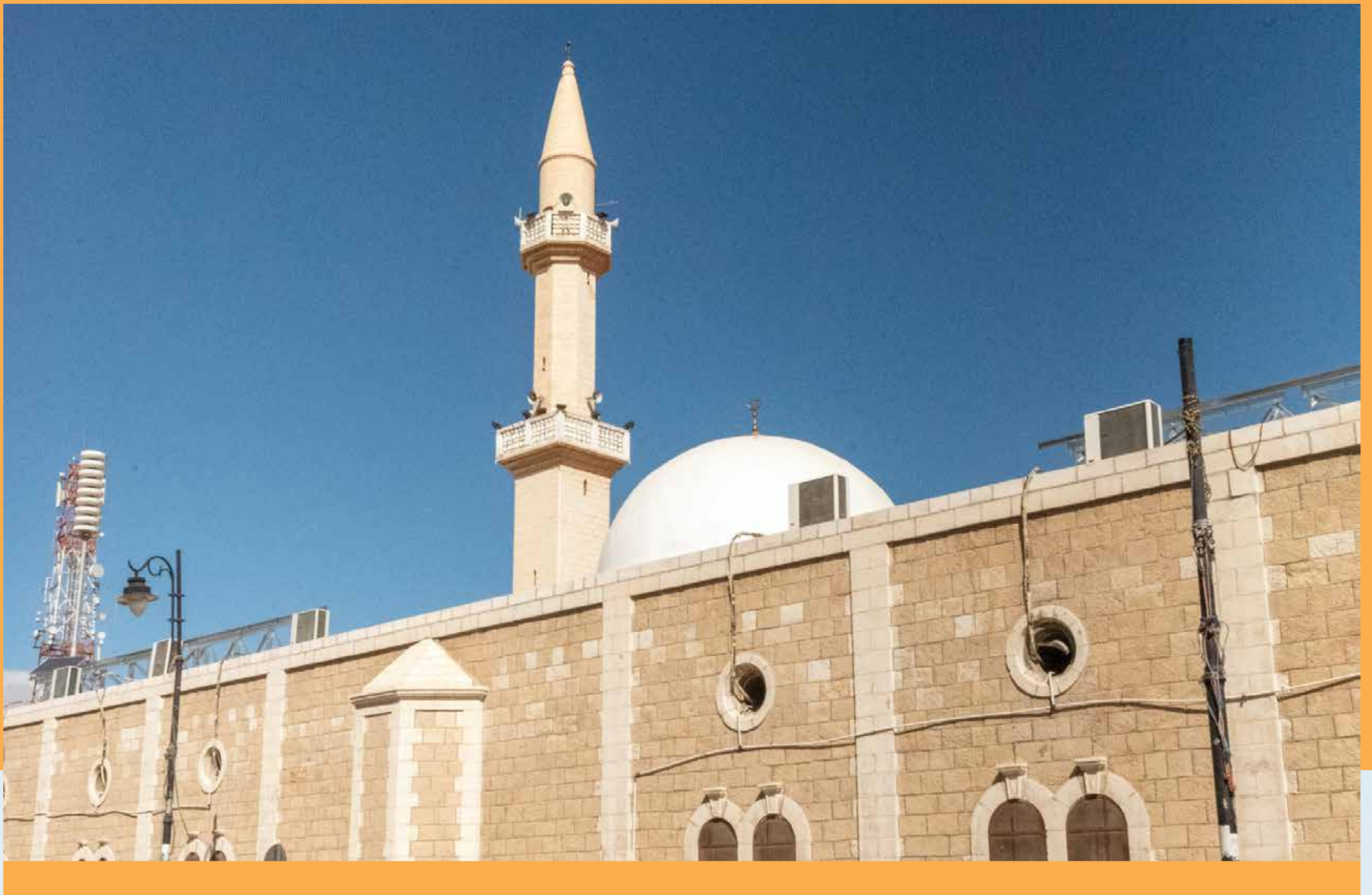


12 St. George's Greek Orthodox Church and Convent

St. George's Greek Orthodox Church is a significant religious, historical, and cultural landmark built in 1845 which was fourth restorations of the building that was inaugurated in 1849; the complex has rich historical significance that spans centuries. The site is believed to have been built on earlier Christian foundations, potentially tracing its roots back to the Byzantine period or earlier.

Architecturally, the church has a modest exterior of stonework. Upon entering the church, frescoes, stained glass windows, religious icons, and adorned altars, showcase the meticulous craftsmanship and devotion of the locals and Greek artisans who travelled distances to contribute to its embellishment. The church also has a collection of ancient books in languages ranging from Aramaic to Ancient Greek.

It serves as a spiritual haven and a place of worship for the Orthodox Christian community in Al Karak. The faithful gather here to partake in liturgical services, including solemn prayers, hymns, and sacraments. These rituals foster a sense of communal unity and provide a platform for spiritual growth and reflection.



13 Al Umari Mosque

Al Umari Mosque (known as Al Masjid Al Umari in Arabic) holds significant cultural and architectural importance. The mosque was built during the reign of Omar Ibn Al Khattab (634-644), who was the second Caliph to lead the Islamic Caliphate after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The mosque also played a fundamental role up until Crusader control of the region in 1136. After Saladin's conquest of Al Karak from the Franks in 1183, his brother Al Adel, known as Saphadin was assigned to rebuild the Mosque in 1210.

Over the centuries, the mosque underwent renovations and expansions, reflecting the architectural influences and historical periods of Al Karak. Inscriptions can be found between the two entrances of the mosque commemorating this restoration.

The mosque's facade showcases a blend of Umayyad, Mamluk, and Ottoman architectural styles. The intricate stonework, decorative motifs, and ornate minarets exhibit the skill and craftsmanship of the artisans who contributed to its construction and embellishment.

13

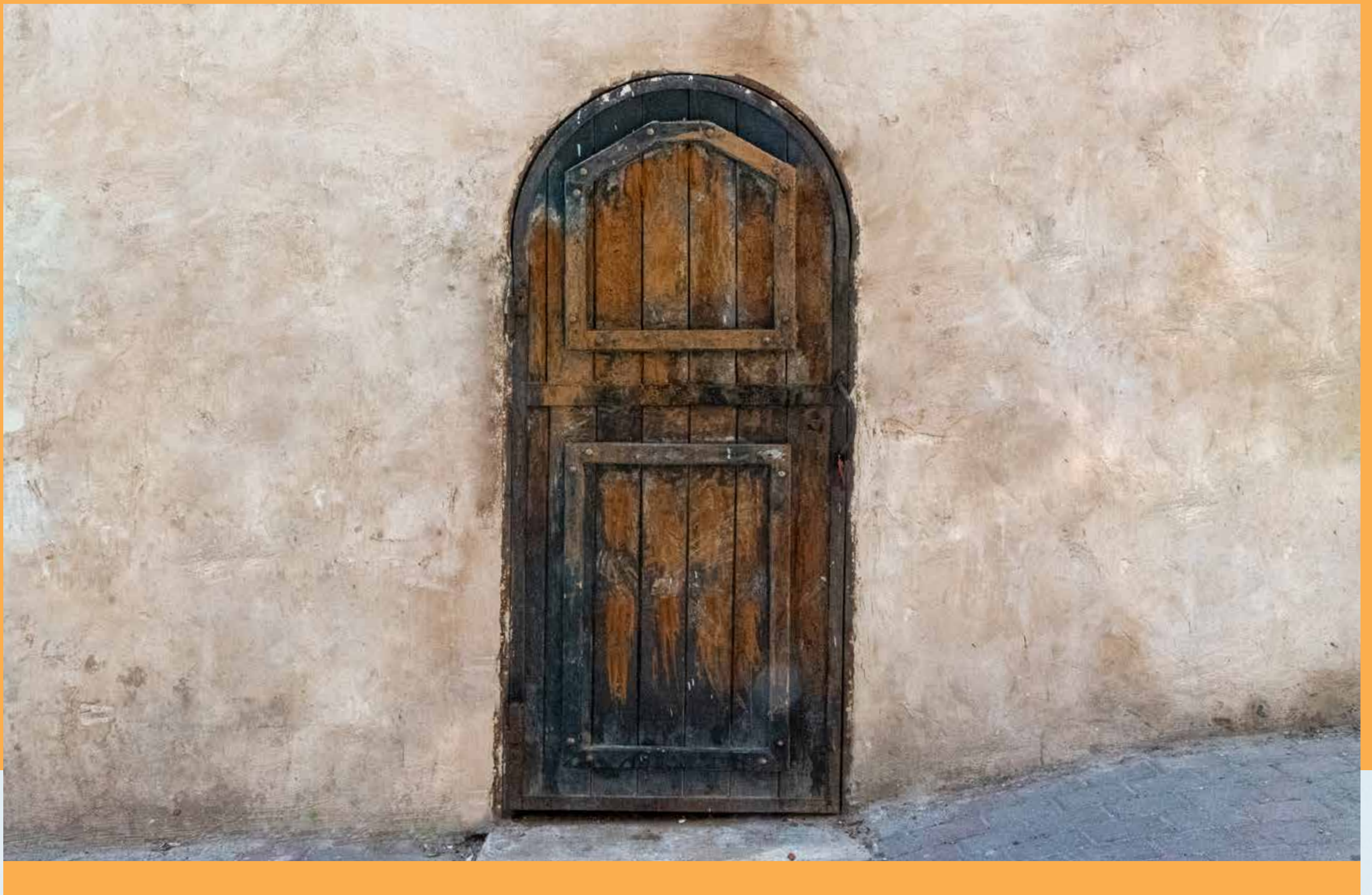
360m

14

13

395m

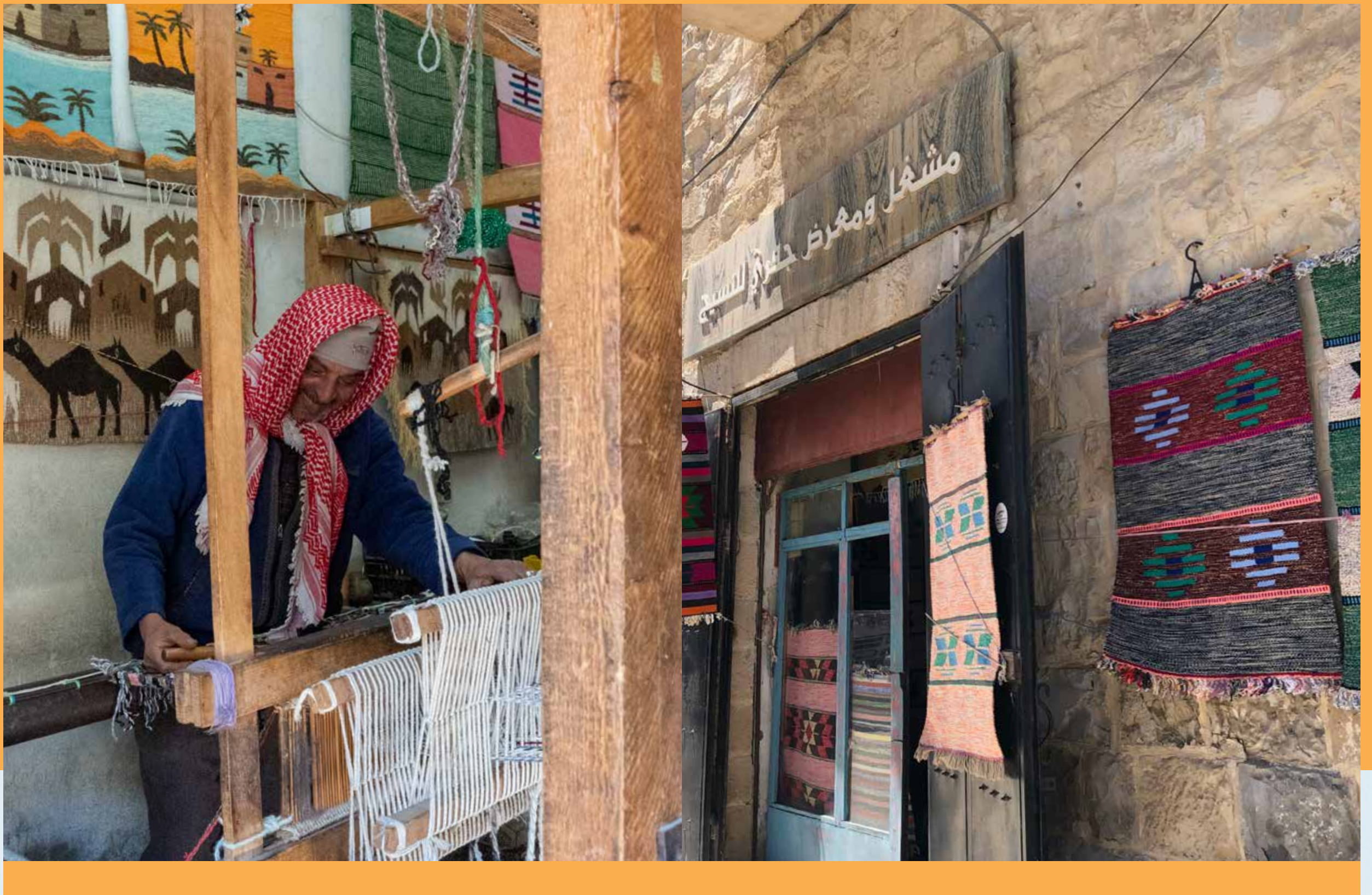
16



14 St. George's Chapel

St. George's Chapel, also known as Al Khadr Shrine (Maqam Al Khadr in Arabic), is a religious site considered sacred by both Christians and Muslims in the area. Make sure not to miss this small stone building situated at the end of a narrow lane overlooking the old town. The chapel is estimated to be hundreds of years old.

It has been renovated and restored several times over the centuries. Holding the keys to the chapel is a local priest from the Orthodox Church who acts as the chapel's custodian to ensure its preservation. It is decorated with beautiful frescoes and icons depicting St. George and other religious figures, and contains an ancient stone altar, church pews, and a well that is said to have healing properties.



15 Jifri Weaving Workshop

Housed in a historic 150-year-old building, and owned by the same family for generations, Jifri for Weaving Workshop operates one of the few remaining weaving workshops in Al Karak. Traditional weaving is a dying trade since the advent of imported rugs and carpets, but the workshop is committed to preserving and reviving a long integral part of Jordanian life.

The art of weaving is a traditional reflection of geographic and ethnographic features between Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians, Bedouins and other Arab groups. The weaver uses traditional techniques and patterns to create textiles that reflect stories of local life.

Visitors are welcome to stop by and watch the weaver at work, participate in a weaving workshop, and purchase handmade textiles. These workshops provide a unique opportunity to learn about Jordan weaving techniques and local history, and to create a woven product of your own!



16 The House of Sisters

Nuns began to arrive to Jordan in 1905 from Palestine to provide young girls in Jordan with an education. In the 1950s, the House of Sisters, which was once home to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese, was later used as a residence for volunteer nuns who arrived in Al Karak to teach and help the community following a famine in southern Jordan in the 1870s. The nuns lived and prayed here, dedicating their lives to the service of the local community of Al Karak. Over the years, many women volunteers would arrive from Europe to support the locals, earning the title 'sister' - a symbol of respect for their service.

The historical building was recently renovated with fully equipped pottery and clay rooms that now serve as a modern and beautiful venue for locals to participate in pottery workshops, develop their skills and improve employment opportunities.



17

Burj Ad Dahir Baybars Western Tower

Burj Ad Dahir Baybars is situated northwest of the castle, positioned on a hill that overlooks Al Karak. It served as a strategic military post for defence against invading armies and protection along the Kings Highway. It is the largest of the five known towers in Al Karak and was built by order of the Mamluk Sultan Baybars.

The tower has a unique trapezoid design and rectangular base. It is separated from the plateau by a 14m wide trench dug into the rock. The tower reaches 19m in height and its entrance can be accessed from the eastern side of the northern wall.

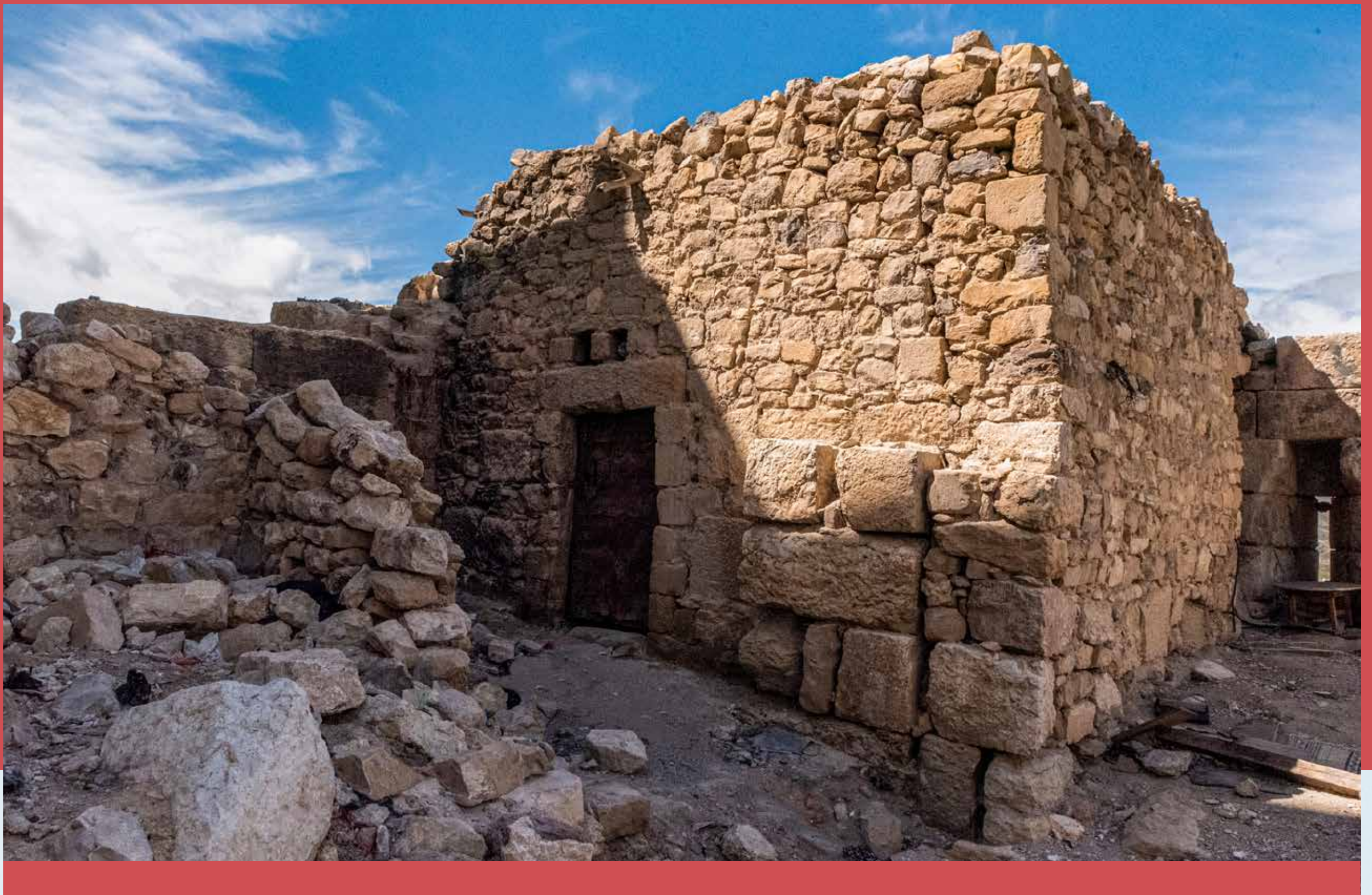
Inside the tower, a one-line inscription can be found that commemorates Baybars. The inscription was once surrounded by two stones that bore the images of a lion. Removed in 1928 they can now be found on the facade of the Italian Hospital building. Visitors can explore the various levels of the tower, climb up to the roof, and enjoy panoramic views of the city and surrounding countryside.



18 The Italian Hospital

Founded in 1935, the Italian Hospital was built from fallen stones following the devastating 1927 Jericho Earthquake which measured 6.3 on the Richter scale. The Italian Hospital is an important heritage building in Al Karak and was one of the first hospitals to provide healthcare services to the most vulnerable families in Jordan.

Many of Jordan's earliest hospitals were founded due to international cooperation and support toward the end of the Ottoman rule (1880-1916), playing an important role in introducing modern medical services, training nurses, and combatting endemic diseases across Jordan.

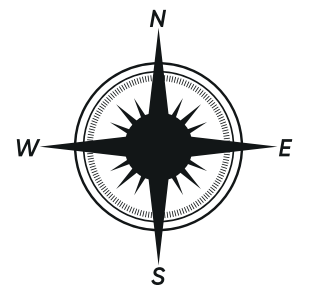


19 At Tanashat Tower

At Tanashat Tower, named locally after a family clan, is located on the western side of the town, parts of which are only visible between the houses that surround it. The western wall of the tower is retained using stacked mesh blocks to prevent the tower from collapsing, maintaining it at a height of 15m. The arrow slits in the southern and eastern walls indicate that this tower was once comprised of at least two levels. Unfortunately, the tower is inaccessible but can be viewed from the main road.

AL KARAK WALKING TOUR

— Main route
— Extended route



Main route / 2060m

Start

- 1 Al Karak Castle
- 120m 2 Folklife Museum of Traditional Life
- 50m 3 The Vault
- 100m 4 Al Hamidi Mosque
- 210m 5 Burj Ad Dahir Baybars (Al Burj Al Daery)
- 100m 6 Burj Ad Dahir Baybars (Eastern Tower)
- 200m 7 Al Birkah – Ancient Water Basin Site
- 245m 8 At Tahunah (Al Babur)
- 40m 9 Al Karak Secondary School for Boys
- 90m 10 Byzantine Catholic Church
- 170m 11 The Latin Patriarchate Complex
- 45m 12 St. George's Greek Orthodox Church and Convent
- 200m 13 Al Umari Mosque
- 360m 14 St. George's Chapel
- 130m 15 Al Jifri Weaving Workshop

Return to Al Karak Castle

End

Extended route / 3100m

Start

- 16 Al Umari Mosque
- 395m 17 The House of Sisters
- 510m 18 Burj Ad Dahir Baybars (Western Tower)
- 215m 19 The Italian Hospital
- 410m 20 At Tanashat Tower

Return to Al Karak Castle

End



The walking tour was developed with the support of the "Employment-oriented MSME Promotion" project, implemented by The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ)