LATE ISLAMIC SETTLEMENT PATTERNS ON THE
KERAK PLATEAU, TRANS-JORDAN

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Introduction

During the Late Islamic period, the Levant was ruled by two successive imperial powers; first, the Mamluk Empire (1250-1516) and second, the Ottoman Empire (1516-1918). The Levant constituted an imperial periphery, administered from the Mamluk capital city of Cairo, and later, from the Ottoman capital city of Istanbul. Under Mamluk rule, the economy of the rural Levant experienced progressive decline as this imperial hinterland came under increasing pressure to meet the demands of the weakening Mamluk economy. During Ottoman rule, much of the rural Levant continued to decline, particularly those regions that were isolated from the major centers of Levantine commerce. The Ottoman Empire had over-extended itself, with regard to its ability to administratively control those peripheral lands that, militarily, it had been able to conquer. The weak and unstable relationship between the Ottoman state and the remote regions of the Levant perpetuated rural isolation and encouraged rebellion against the state.

The causes of rural decline in the Levant are rooted in historically specific factors. Yet the pattern of decline reflects the basic nature of the relationship between centers
of imperial control and provincial hinterlands. Thus, the process of rural Levantine decline can be viewed within a theoretical framework that deals with the structure of these relationships.

In this study, this process of rural decline is presented in both its historical and structural contexts, through the use of a dynamic model of core-periphery interaction. This discussion provides a basis with which to generate specific inferences regarding economic transition within the rural sector. The implications of rural decline for local level rural subsistence strategies are examined through an analysis of rural settlement patterns. Archaeological data from the district of Kerak in Trans-Jordan are introduced in the analysis.

Chapter One describes the core-periphery interactions that characterized the political and economic relationship between the Levant and the core centers of the Mamluk and Ottoman empires. The history of the rural Levant is presented in Chapter Two. This discussion outlines the role of depopulation and political fragmentation in the economic deterioration of the rural sector from 1250 to 1600, and shows how these developments affected sedentary agriculture. An overview of the environment and history of the Kerak plateau region is presented in Chapter Three. Chapter Four
contains the analysis of the Late Islamic settlement data from the Kerak plateau. The relationship between the patterns discussed in Chapter Four and the later, nineteenth century, settlement pattern that characterized the southern Levantine region is discussed in Chapter Five.
Core-Periphery Relationships in the Mamluk Empire

In discussing the rural Levant in terms of the structure of core-periphery relationships, the concept of scale, as it pertains to the core-periphery model, is illustrated first. Core-periphery relationships may exist on a number of integrated levels (Galtung 1971). Thus, while the Levantine province was peripheral to Mamluk Cairo (Figure 1), and later to Ottoman Istanbul (Figure 2), it had an internal core-periphery structure of its own. Damascus represented the Levantine commercial and administrative core and its periphery consisted of a number of smaller towns, each serving their respective hinterlands (Lapidus 1967). In relationship to the core cities of Cairo and Istanbul, these rural Levantine hinterlands were the periphery of the periphery, henceforth referred to as the peripheral hinterland.

Economic interaction between cores and their peripheries, within an imperial structure, is characterized by unequal exchange. Cores profit from the resources of the periphery (Galtung 1971). As a result, cores are more developed and, as centers of raw material accumulation, they support industry and export trade. In comparison, peripheries are exporters of raw materials that remain