

## Shobak Project 2022 and 2023 Seasons

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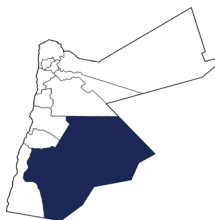
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In 2022 and 2023, the University of Florence, with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, collaborated with the Department of Antiquities on a research program at Shobak Castle (Qal'at ash-Shawbak). This program included excavation activities enriched by a Rural Archaeology component. The aim of the latter was to investigate the local Medieval agricultural production system through light archaeology surveys and excavation sondages in the vicinity of the castle site. Excavation areas included the basement of the Crusader High Church of Shobak Castle (CF 10), likely dedicated to St. Mary, and sondages in the deserted villages of Shbeikeh and Sihan. Light archaeology surveys focused on the Medieval agricultural transformation infrastructures to the south of Shobak Castle and Nijil.

The excavation in the basement of the Church of St. Mary (CF10) took place in 2022 both outside (area 41000) and within the undercroft of the church (area 42000, Fig. 1), as a preliminary step for establishing the permanent museum area envisioned in the AICS-funded project ([shobak.unifi.it](http://shobak.unifi.it)). The total excavated surface was approximately 160 square meters. Although the study of the contexts is ongoing, some reflections can be made on the analyzed stratification. Area 41000 revealed occupation phases from the Middle Islamic to the modern period. Notably, it is the only area inside the castle, so far investigated, with evidence of Mamluk domestic spaces. Pottery artifacts, including cooking and storage wares, suggest a date in the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century. Area 42000, the undercroft proper, presented a more complex situation. The excavation of UF3, the easternmost gallery, led to the discovery of the foundation trench of the Crusader church (1115–1118 CE, based on written evidence), confirming a 12<sup>th</sup>-century chronology. Evidence of a possible earlier occupation of the Roman-Byzantine period (Nucciotti 2019: 131–140; Ponticelli 2020) was highlighted by a water channel cut in the bedrock set below the Crusader-epoch eastern wall.

Preliminary analyses of contexts from UF1, the west gallery, suggest uninterrupted use of the undercroft in the Middle Islamic period and until the Ottoman age. A number of layers, such as US 42010, reveal significant amounts of 14<sup>th</sup>-century glazed pottery and Ayyubid-Mamluk fragments of glass tableware. At the bottom of the stratification, US 42016, the filling of a possible cistern cut in the bedrock and predating the vaulted room construction contained mostly Middle Islamic handmade geometric painted ware (HMGP) and plain wheel-made wares, as well as a well-preserved fragment of a blue blown-glass ampoule/sprinkler, likely attributable to the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 2).

The Rural Archaeology component in 2022 and 2023 aimed to identify evidence from the 12<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup>-century



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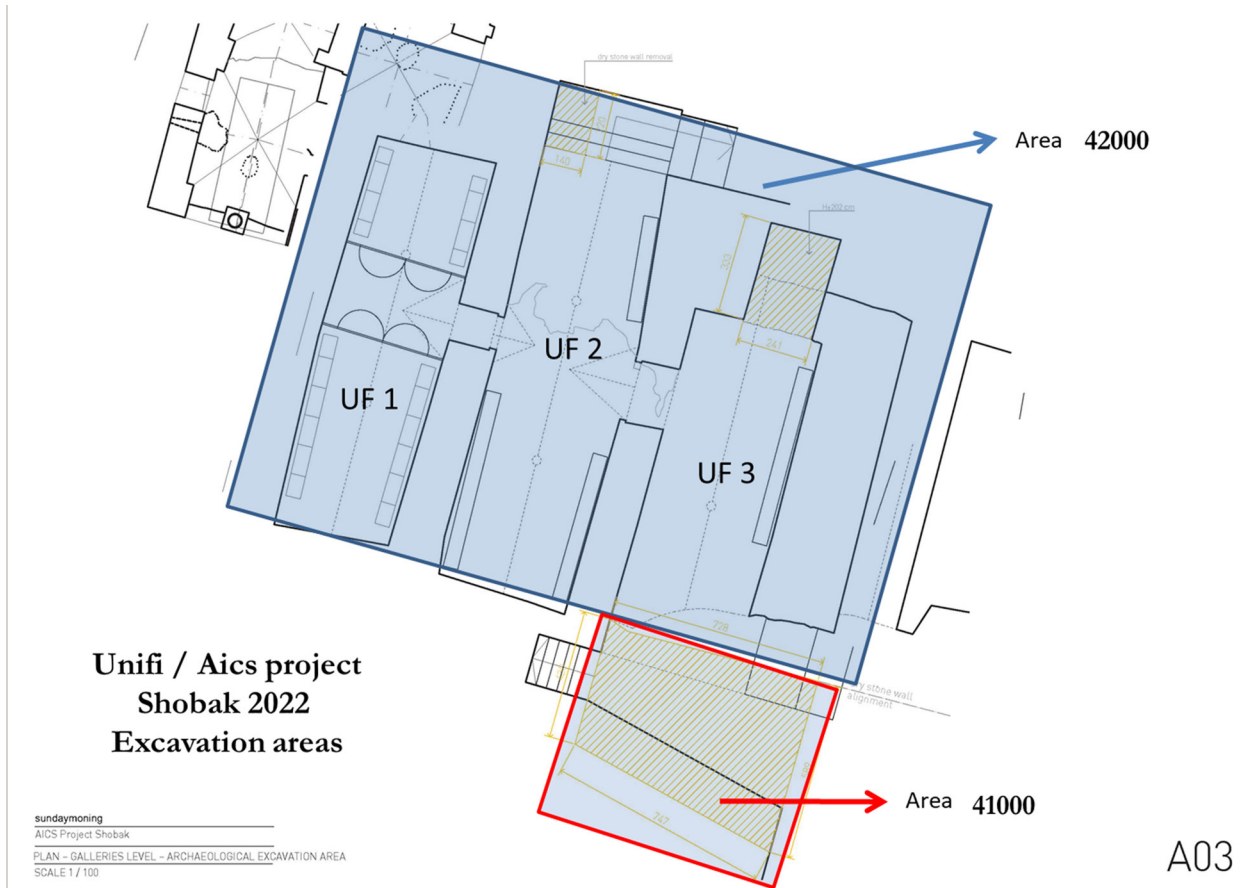


Fig. 1. Plan of excavation areas (41000, 42000) in Shobak castle, fall season, 2022. (Image courtesy of the University of Florence—Medieval Petra Archive.)



Fig. 2. Blue blown-glass ampoule/sprinkler of 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>-century date from SU 42016. (Image courtesy of the University of Florence—Medieval Petra Archive.)

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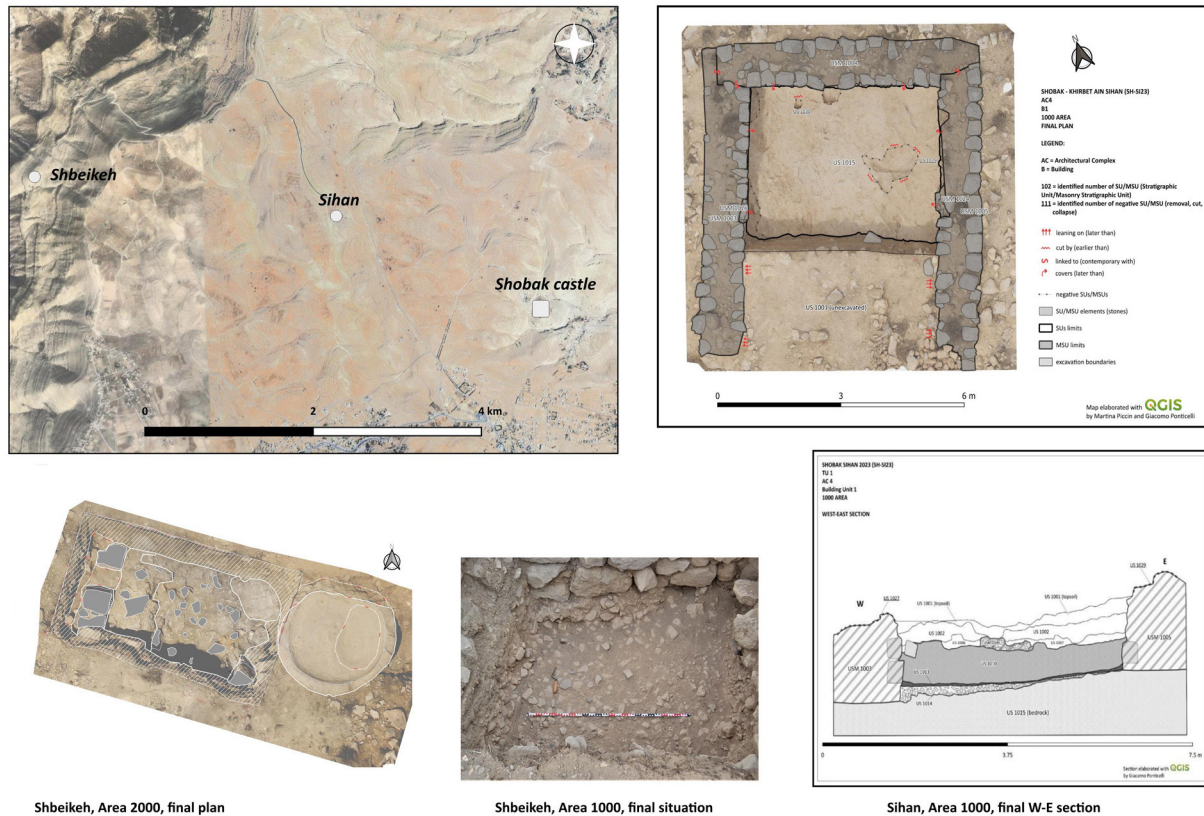


Fig. 3. Sondages in Shbeikeh (2022) and Sihan (2023). (Image courtesy of the University of Florence—Medieval Petra Archive.)

transformations of land use near the castle and in Nijil. The survey led to the identification of 11 watermills (10 around Shobak Castle, one in Nijil), two aqueducts, and a large water reservoir close to the shrine of Abu Suleiman al-Dirani. Within the same program, sondages were opened at Shbeikeh (2022) and Sihan (2023), respectively 5 and 2.5 km west of the castle. At Shbeikeh, a small, deserted village, excavations showed continuous use of the site from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century, atop a previous settlement from the Classical to Byzantine period. The domestic Medieval repurposing of an antique olive-crushing installation for flour production was documented in area 2000. In Sihan, a Medieval house/farm was excavated, demonstrating how the structure restored and modified (mortar floor and the insertion of supporting arches in the walls) a more ancient building. Sihan materials align with 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup>-century contexts at Shobak castle, featuring fragments of fine glass artifacts and imported glazed pottery (Fig. 3).

### References

- Nucciotti M. 2019. "Archeologia Leggera dei sistemi di difesa passiva: i Castelli Crociati di Petra (Giordania) nel XII secolo." In *Scenari bellici nel Medioevo: guerra e territorio tra XI e XV secolo: giornata di studi (Roma, 17 novembre 2016)*, edited by G. M. Annoscia, 135–152. Rome: Edizioni Quasar.
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