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Great and Little Traditions of Transjordan: The View from Tall Hisban during Medieval Times

What makes archaeological research on frontier settlements such as Tall Hisban so interesting is the opportunity it presents for studying the ways in which successive imperial world-making projects influenced the daily lives of elites and local inhabitants and vice versa. A major focus of the Tall Hisban Expedition recently has been to develop a theoretical framework for examining such imperial-local interactions over the long-term. An important step in this direction has been the adoption of Robert Redfield's "great and little traditions" framework as a means to study the give-and-take between imperial and local world-making in Transjordan. "Great traditions" or "imperial world-making projects" that we are currently tracing in our archaeological research at Tall Hisban include those of the New Kingdom Egyptians, Sea Peoples, Neo-Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, Persians, Greeks (Alexander and his Hellenistic successor kingdoms), Nabateans, Parthians, Romans, Byzantines, Sassanids, Umayyads, Abbasids, Tulunids, Fatimids, Seljuks, Crusaders, Ayyubids, Mamluks, Ottomans, French, British and Americans. Concurrently we have also sought to identify "little traditions" or "local world-making projects" by means of which the indigenous population has managed to cope with over three millennia of nearly unabated imperial world-making in their homelands. To this end ethnoarchaeological research has been carried out in the present-day village of Hisban which has led to identification of the following seven little traditions:

- Water security through local capture and storage of rainwater.
- Risk-spreading through raising a mixture of crops and stock
- Residential flexibility or the ability to live in a house, a cave or a tent
- Cooperative sharing of pasture lands with other families and tribes
- Hospitality as a means to mutual aid and honor
- Reliance on honor and shame to enforce social obligations
- Organization of access to wives, water, land, labor and protection through reliance primarily on kin-based social networks or tribalism

This paper will update on efforts to refine and apply this theoretical framework to understanding Tall Hisban and Transjordan in the 12th and 13th centuries. The Tall Hisban Anthropological Archaeology Project is an undertaking of the Institute of Archaeology at

Andrews University in Michigan, USA; the Madaba Plains Project Consortium and the Department of Antiquities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.