

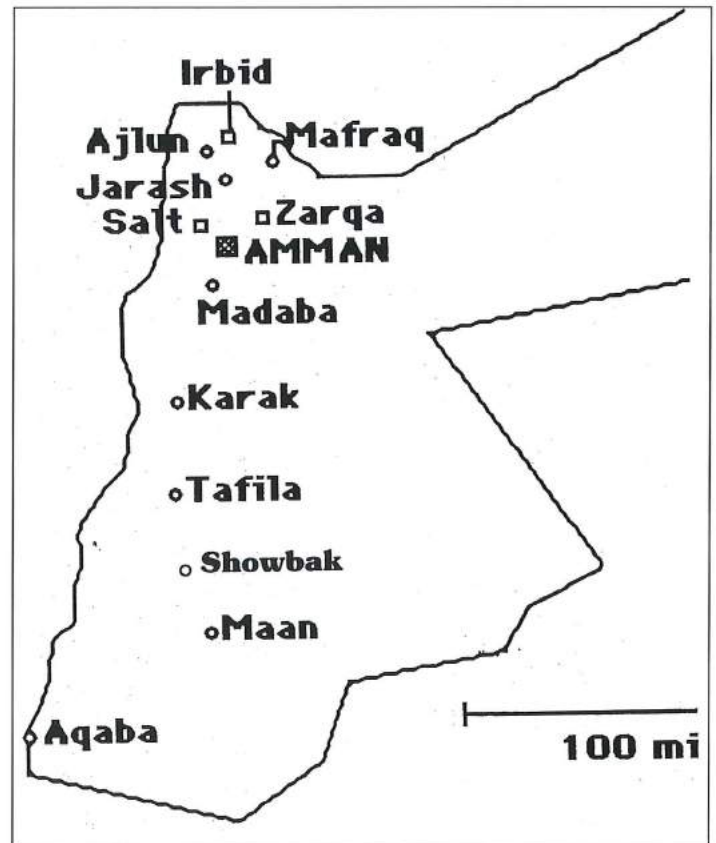
The People of Jordan during the Second Millenium AD

A thousand years ago, the population of Earth stood at 250 million people, a figure which was unchanged for probably the preceding one thousand years. Like nowadays, China had one quarter of these people and Cordova, the largest city, had only 450000 inhabitants. These revealing facts are the result of an extensive research carried out by the *National Geographic Magazine* (vol. 193/1, January 1998) in their attempt to spotlight six subjects that will shape human destiny the next one thousand years. The subject of this important study "Making sense of the Millenium" will undoubtedly be an outstanding contribution about the pressures of population growth, the relations of humans to nature and to one another, science and human culture.

During that period the Arab world had what the distinguished historian Albert Hourani called "A long period of dislocation and these changes may have been symptoms of a deeper disturbance in the balance between Government, population and production" (Hourani 1991: 213).

The population of Jordan with those of the other parts of Bilād ash-Shām must have felt the effects of that dislocation (refer to FIG. 1). In the year 1000 the political and military powers were in the hands of Al-Ḥākīm, the Fatimid ruler. His name is well-remembered for persecution and mistreatment of the people in a grand attempt to spread Shi'ism. His ruthless measures greatly disturbed the religious setup prevailing in the land, and many Christians converted to Islam. Probably it was during his reign that farmers of the southern parts of Jordan started migrating northwards, especially to the Ḥawrān. Al-Ḥākīm who declared himself in 1017 a god, at the encouragement of Al-Durzī, died in mysterious conditions in 1021. Al-Durzī managed to escape to Lebanon where he founded the Druze sect (al-Sa'id Sulaeman 1969: 132).

Prior to this unhappy episode in the life of the people, happenings of major importance took place. In the year 941 Muḥammad al-Ikhshīd, who was already an independent ruler of Egypt under nominal loyalty to the



1. Main population centres in Jordan during the second millenium.

Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad, occupied Bilād ash-Shām. He died in 946 and as his two sons were young, the real authority fell into the hands of a black eunuch of the palace named Kāfūr. Being originally an African slave, his authority was questioned by many in Bilād ash-Shām and in 960, Shabib ibn Jarir al-'Uqaili, Governor of 'Ammān and al-Balqā', advanced against Damascus with an army of ten thousand horsemen and, after a short siege, occupied the city. Jarir, however, died in mysterious circumstances that same day, and his troops, whilst making a disorderly withdrawal, lost over four hundred horsemen.

This short-lived event has been fortunately put on record by a famous poem of Abū aṭ-Ṭayib al-Mutanabbī, when he was still at the court of Kāfūr in Cairo (see al-Mutanabbī 1944).

Conditions in Jordan during the 261 years of Fatimid rule must have been dominated by the instability of Al-Ḥākim's period and the hardship brought about by the many Crusades that followed. The First Crusade was two years after the visit of Peter the Hermit to Jerusalem in 1094. Jerusalem fell in 1099 and a few years later the new Latin Kingdom in the Holy Land started its incursions into the Jordanian territories. The first expedition was against Wādī Mūsā, and in 1107 Baldwin attacked the southern parts. In 1110 he built the castle of al-Ḥabis and in 1115 he built the castle at ash-Shawbak, better known in European history as Montreal. After that the occupation of the southern parts of the country followed up in a more systematic manner. The castle at Wādī Mūsā was repaired, al-'Aqaba was occupied and a castle was built on Fir'aun Island. Castles were also built at aṭ-Ṭafila, Ma'ān and al-Wu'ayra in the ash-Sharāh Mountains. The building of the castle at al-Karak was completed in 1142, and this city became the centre of Crusader life in Transjordan until 1188 when it was retaken by Saladin, never to be attacked again by the Crusades.

These ninety years of wars must have had their deep effect on the life of the people in this area. Agriculture must have suffered during the expeditions and fruit orchards and olive groves were sometimes used as tools of warfare. In 1144 the Crusaders were only able to occupy the citadel at al-Wu'ayra after threatening to cut down all the olive trees in the Wādī Mūsā region (Peake 1934: 124; Kennedy 1925: 37). The people had no choice but to adapt themselves to situations and in spite of all the odds, they continued to produce wheat, cochineal, dates, wines and sugar. They also paid their taxes and especially their import and export dues on goods. The Crusaders established a fleet at al-'Aqaba and were exacting dues on all sea and land trade in and around the Gulf, as well as collecting taxes from trade between Jordan and Palestine across the Dead Sea (Peake 1934: 125; Schlumberger 1923: 164).

During these times, the area — for all purposes — was split in two halves, the northern being under the Governors of Damascus, and the southern under the Crusaders who had no interest or strength to occupy the north. The mountainous area in the north was saved the agony of continuous fighting although the citadel at Jarash was attacked and destroyed by Baldwin II in 1121. Life in the area nevertheless continued as usual and it was only in 1183 that Saladin ordered the building of the ar-Rabaḍ Castle at 'Ajlūn, mainly as an outpost to watch the enemy's movements.

The Ayyubid rule in al-Karak continued from the de-

feat of the Crusaders at Ḥiṭṭīn in 1187 until after the Mogul invasion in 1263. Four kings ruled and the countryside seems to have regained wider stability and economic progress. Al-'Ādil, Saladin's brother and first King of al-Karak controlled all Transjordan. He extended the ar-Rabaḍ Castle in 1214 and built the castle at as-Salt after putting down a revolt in the same year. The region continued to be an important agricultural area but it also continued to play an important role as a result of its geographical position. It was the transit arena for all caravan routes between Egypt and Bilād ash-Shām and this resulted in income to the ruler and ruled alike. It also enjoyed the benefits of the pilgrimage yearly caravan and what it brought with it in trade and transport activity.

Following these developments the people in Jordan experienced a new phase of stability, and prosperity under the famous ruler Baibars who became Mamluk Sultan of Egypt and Bilād ash-Shām in 1260. He gave Jordan all the importance it deserved as the link between Cairo and Damascus. In his endeavors, he aimed to reconstruct the general system in the land after its bad treatment at the hands of the Moguls who had destroyed the infrastructure, demolished the castles at as-Salt and 'Ajlūn, killed many of the men, while on their withdrawal they took the women and children captive. In addition to rebuilding the castles, Baibars reconstructed public buildings at 'Ajlūn, as-Salt, Ḥisbān, Zizia, and the Dāmīa bridge at the Jordan River (al-Ghawanmih 1979: 83). His plan of reconstruction must have succeeded in bringing back to the area the people who had left during the Mogul invasion and new settlers who were impressed by the strong government. Baibars gave special attention to the Jordan Valley in general and the produce of sugar cane in particular, including that of his own estate at ash-Shūna ash-Shamāliyya (al-Ghawanmih 1979: 85). Needless to say that Al-Karak and ash-Shawbak and their populations benefited a great deal as they became garrison cities as a result of their strategic importance on the road to Cairo. This importance was so impressive that during Baibars rule and for many decades after him, the region was attached to Egypt administratively.

The Mamluk rule in Jordan — which extended until the Ottoman conquest in 1517 — was relatively good for the people as it gave to the area the benefits of the strategic importance mentioned above. Al-Karak, during different periods, became a kingdom under kings who trusted the people and received their loyalty. A certain standard of economic progress seems to have prevailed allowing development in the social and cultural fields. Arab historians relate that *'ulama*, singers and musicians traveled from al-Karak and ash-Shawbak to Cairo where they acquired fame and that a Christian merchant of ash-Shawbak presented to Sultan Barquq one hundred thousand gold dinars to assist in the mobilization of his army

in the year 1399 (al-Ghawanmih 1979: 116).

The study of population in the area meets with a landmark in the year 1005 H/ AD1595, when the first Ottoman census was carried out. This census gave the figures of nearly 51000 for all the areas of Transjordan for the settled population and although there is mention of the Bedouin tribes Banī Šakhr, Na‘im, Šumaydāt and Banī Mahdi (Hütteroth and Abdulfattah 1977), the stress there was on the amount of taxes and not the population. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the Jordanian countryside had possibly a population of 100,000 people in the year 1595 (see FIG. 2). This is considered by researchers as evidence of an increase of population during the 16th century, when it is taken into consideration that the last part of the 14th and the 15th centuries have been periods of depopulation as a result of the plague and the decline in economic activity following it (Dolls 1977).

The start of the census period in Bilād ash-Shām did not mean that Transjordan was to continue having them and we are unaware of any similar census during the 17th, 18th and eight first decades of the 19th centuries. This situation necessarily takes us back to the use of estimates depending on other administrative and fiscal governmental records, local chronicles, and travellers reports. The basic fact remains however that during that period of stagnation and instability, the true population figures will never be known.

Perhaps it will be useful at this point to discuss the different systems that have been used by historians and researchers to assess the numbers of people in other areas. These included the study of living space and the areas of settlements. Archeologists have made good studies in this direction but fast development and drastic changes in the

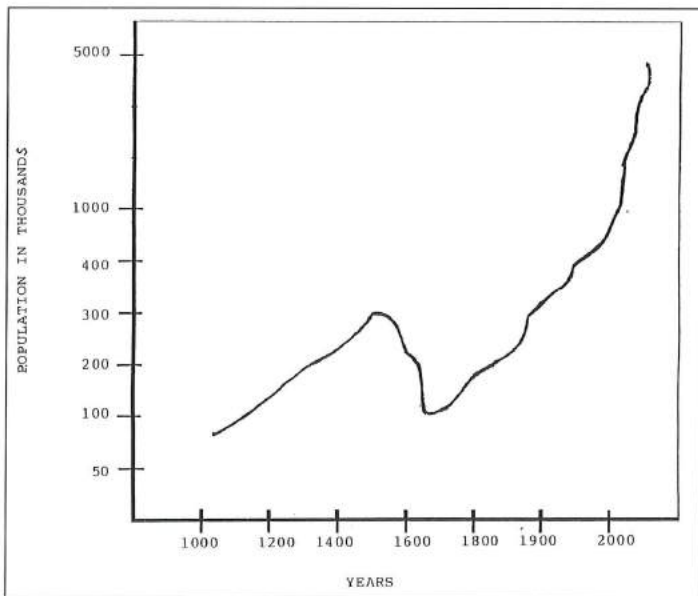
countryside make this a difficult proposition for Jordan. Food requirements, such as wheat and other cereals production, will be a good base for estimates since Jordan has been all throughout a producer. Furthermore the areas where wheat and cereals were produced can still be assessed since the frontier of settlement is still known. A third scheme may prove more useful through the study of ruined sites in a certain period and counting the wells of water in the suburbs of sites that still have them. In this regard I would mention al-Yādūdāh which was repopulated around 1860. Sixty years ago it had an estimated population of around 400 people who had at their disposal around 120 repaired wells, having an estimated total capacity of 7000 cubic meters of water. Considering that the village had a big *birka* (pool) for watering the livestock, this gives an average of no more than 17.5m³ per person per annum. It is not much by today's standards but it is definite that people living to the east of al-Yādūdāh had to do with much less.

It is therefore very difficult to give even reasonable estimates for the population figures during the different periods before AD 1600. A rough estimate of people at the time of the Crusades may be around 200,000 with perhaps some 80,000 under Crusader administration and the remainder in the eastern areas and in the north under the Ayyubids. This number may have increased at the time of the Kingdom at al-Karak and later Baibars to some 300,000 people. The 15th and 16th centuries had a decreased population of around 20,000 that increased to around 100,000 when the census was carried out in AD 1595. Larger figures as some researchers tend to present, are not convincing since the water supply in the plateau without any rivers and a limited number of springs, could not have supported a population of larger numbers.

The situation during the Ottoman period followed the same pattern and the population of Jordan at the end of that administration in 1918 could not have been more than 200,000 people. Ruppin in 1915 estimated it at 131,788 while Grobba in December 1917 estimated it at 141,198. Both figures did not include Bedouins and refugees and therefore the figure 200,000 may be the one acceptable under the circumstances.

An attempt at an administrative survey in Jordan was carried out in the different districts in 1938 and the result of 300,214 people showed an increase of importance. The actual official census was the one held in 1943 which showed that the country's population was 340,000 people of whom 75,000 lived in the four cities of 'Ammān, as-Salt, Irbid and al-Karak. The population in 1948, when the first wave of Palestinian refugees arrived, could have been between 375,000 and 400,000. It was then that the real change started and the population suddenly increased.

The story of this striking change within 50 years



2. Preliminary chart attempting to show the population changes in Jordan during the second millennium.

where the population grew from 400,000 to 4,600,000 people is a story of great endeavor. It will be registered in the annals of history that Jordan, a relatively poor country with very little water or natural resources, managed with the wisdom and perseverance of a progressive king and the planning and hard work of the government not only to keep the country going but to improve the standard of living for millions in the general public. This outstanding performance, it is hoped, will continue as the numbers increase and the population of Jordan will hit the figure of five million at the turn of the century when we enter the third millenium.

The twentieth century when it comes to its end, will close with 12 times as many people in Jordan as there were when it started in 1900. In spite of the fact that the high rate of annual increase has been reduced, the world will have a population of 6.2 billion in the year 2000.— Jordan on the other hand had around 200,000 around the year 1900 and will end the millenium in 2000 with nearly 5 million or an increase of 12 times compared to the world's average of 3.6. Providing for all of them as *The Times Atlas of the World* states, is “the great challenge of

the next few generations”, but for the Jordanians the challenge is much greater than the standards known to humanity up till now.

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