

“They Came and Stayed” A Study of Population Movements into Jordan 1800 - 1948

The area between ar-Ramthā in the north and ‘Aqaba in the south, which we now call Jordan, has been a crossroads for many over the centuries. Some of them were conquerors and others were raiders, but most were ordinary people who were simply travelling for one reason or another. The majority of these people were nomads of Bilād ash-Shām, Hedjaz, Nejd and Iraq who were continuously on the move, in search of pasture and water for their herds of camels and flocks of sheep and goats. The fact that Jordan does not have any natural barriers made it easy for large numbers of people to move freely. In the south and east, the desert was an open space for nomads travelling with their camels, whilst in the north, the Ḥawrān was a vast stretch of farmland. In the west, the Jordan River was never a natural barrier as it had at least ten fords and its depth, especially at the end of summer, could be extremely low.¹

The population in the area under discussion was, at the start of the nineteenth century, extremely small. Although the Ottomans were always eager to collect taxes, their presence in Jordan at that time had become nominal. They had no armed forces in the area and the guards who accompanied the annual pilgrimage caravan had to depend on the goodwill of bedouin tribes along the route. To ensure the safe passage of the caravan, the authorities in Istanbul and Damascus therefore developed the “surra” system by which every tribe on the route received, through its shaykhs, a certain amount of money in a “surra” or purse. In general

this system was successful, but on few occasions misunderstandings occurred, with catastrophic results. Records relate how, in 1757, a shaykh of the Banī Ṣakhr tribe named Qi’dan al-Fayiz became unhappy with new arrangements that the caravan commander tried to impose on him. He therefore amassed a force of nomad warriors from the Banī Ṣakhr and other tribes and attacked the relief column, al-Jurda, on 5th September 1757 between al-Qaṭrāna and Ma‘ān. Encouraged by this success and with the reinforcement of his party by additional warriors seeking plunder, on 24th October 1757 Qi’dān attacked the pilgrimage caravan on its return journey somewhere between TABūk and Dhāt Ḥaj.² The caravan was completely destroyed with heavy loss of life and property.³ Insecurity on this scale must have had an adverse effect on settled life and population alike.

Population levels during these times were extremely low when compared with the 2006 population of nearly six million people. Study of a 1596-7 Ottoman census of tax-paying households revealed that at that time the population numbered only 51,885.⁴ This is broadly comparable with a study of the population in the early 19th Century, which is based on information recorded by J. L. Burckhardt during his travels in Syria and the Holy Land in 1812.⁵ This estimated that the then population of the area represented by modern Jordan was around 90,000 people. Natural growth and improvements in security encouraged more people to move in during the second part of the 19th century, leading to

¹ The Palestine Campaigns, Col. A. P. Wavell, Constable and Co., London, 1928 mentions a few of the fords that the British Army had to cross during the First World War of 1914-1918. Al-Ghoranieh and Umm al-Shuratt appear on Map XVI “The Jordan Valley”.

² Arabs and Ottomans (1516-1916), Abdul Karim Rafiq, Damascus 1974, p. 268.

³ Hawadith Dimashq al-Yawmieh (1741–1762), Shaikh Ahmad al-Budairi al-Halleq, Damascus 1997, p. 248.

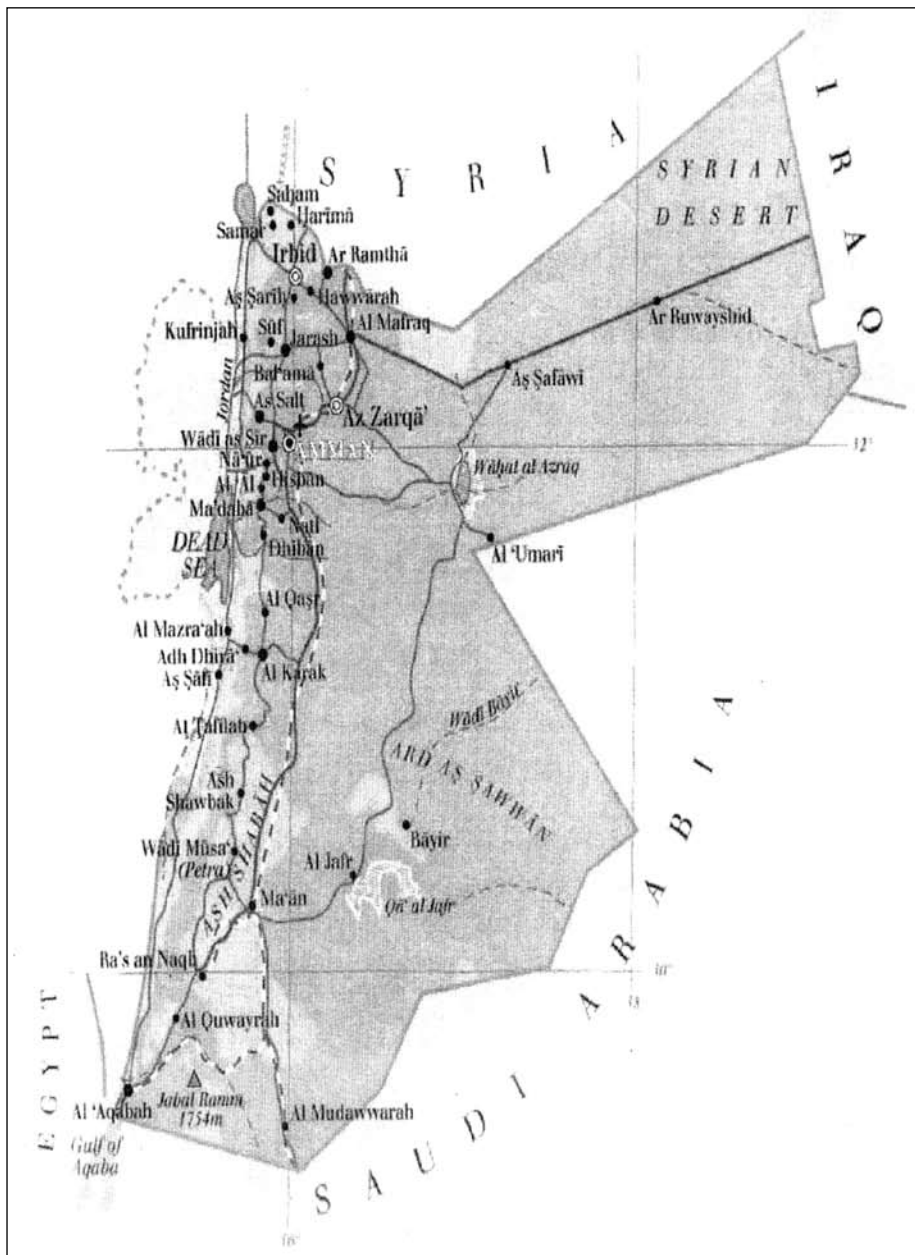
⁴ Pioneers over Jordan, Raouf Sa'd Abujaber, I.B Tauris London 1989, p. 26.

⁵ Travels in Syria and the Holy Land, J. L. Burckhardt, John Murray, London 1822, (visit reports)

further population increases. A preliminary census in 1922 recorded a total of 275,380 people. In 1929 the British government, in a report to the League of Nations, estimated the population at 300,000, whilst the census of 1946, carried out to facilitate the distribution of rations such as rice, sugar and tea, gave the population as 433,659. Of these, people in towns and villages were thought to number 334,398 while nomads living in the *badia* were thought to number 99,261.⁶ These figures could have been inflated by as much as fifteen percent if the primary purpose of the census is taken into

consideration, but the fact remains that no sudden increases in population were recorded until 1948.

However, in order to explain the natural reasons behind the gentle increase in population prior to 1948, it is necessary to realise that the period with which we are concerned in this study was relatively quiet in comparison with the political and military upheavals in Palestine that pushed the population of Jordan to over five million between 1948 and 2000. During the previous 150 years population increases occurred under more or less natural circumstances, whereas those that occurred after 1948



⁶ Amarat Sharqi Al-Urdon, Suleiman Musa, Jordan History Com-

mittee, Amman 1990, p. 316.

did so as a result of wars and abnormal circumstances. A chronological study of the natural pre-1948 increases, in the context of the then prevailing conditions, will, in the opinion of the author, lead to a better understanding of the natural causes that led to these acceptable and natural increases in the population of Jordan prior to 1948.

Initially, demographic change was mainly a bedouin phenomenon that involved tribes such as the 'Nazze, Banī Şakhr and al-Ḥuwayţāt, who were seeking better pastures with better water resources. In 1812 Burckhardt mentioned that the 'Nazze were heavily defeated at the hands of the Christians of al-Karak. He also noted that they intermarried with the people of the town, even to the extent of giving their girls to them in marriage.⁷ This is evidence of their willingness to have close relations with the settled population. As for the Banī Şakhr and al-Ḥuwayţāt, Burckhardt mentioned that the shaykhs of the Banī Şakhr received considerable presents by way of friendly tribute, including a Spanish dollar from each Christian family and the fifteen mule loads of Karak-manufactured carpets which the Muslims sent to them annually.⁸ Less than fifty years after Burckhardt's visit, the Banī Şakhr moved northwards and are now the dominant tribe in central Jordan. The Ḥuwayţāt established themselves in the south and hundreds of Jordanian families whose origin goes back to the 'Nazze tribes, such as the Rūwala and Wuld 'Alī, now live all over the country.

Twenty years after these events, the *Wālī* of Egypt, Muḥammad 'Alī Pashā, dispatched an expeditionary force under his son Ibrāhīm Pashā to conquer Syria, then also known as Bilād ash-Shām. He conquered the entire area, as far as central Anatolia, and administered it for ten years. When the European powers woke up to the danger of a union between Syria and Egypt, they rallied to the assistance of the Ottomans and Ibrāhīm Pashā had to withdraw his forces to Egypt. As was often the case in such circumstances, many Egyptian personnel and their families decided to stay. Their descendants in Jordan, both Muslim and Christian, still

carry Egyptian family names such as Maşrī, Quṭṭī, Bilbaysī, Faysūmī, Şa'idi and Shnūda. Other clans such as the Halasah in al-Karak,⁹ al-'Awāzim in Mā'in¹⁰ and al-Kafawīn and al-Dhunaybāt¹¹ in Judayda, a village in the district of al-Karak¹², are descended from Egyptian forefathers.

A decade or two later, a whole tribe of the Ḥijāz area moved northwards and settled in Transjordan. These were the Banī 'Aṭiyya whose story is related by the then Canon of Durham, H. B. Tristram, who visited during 1872 and published his book in London in 1873. He and his party were attacked by members of this tribe while crossing a stream in Ghawr Şafīyya on their way to al-Karak. After describing the encounter he wrote: "It turned out that the tribe were the dreaded Bani 'Atiyeh, a new tribe from Arabia who have only recently taken to marauding in this part of the country and have the worst possible reputation".¹³

Not many years later, in 1879, a non-Arab group entered the Jordanian demographic arena. These were the Circassians, who came to Jordan from the Rumeli districts as a result of the war of liberation against the Turks in Bulgaria, and settled in al-Balqā' in the central part of the country. Laurence Oliphant mentioned their initial arrival in April 1879¹⁴. Abujaber has looked at this first immigration in detail, describing the tribal origin of the groups of immigrants.¹⁵ In 1884 official Ottoman records described their number as 90 males and 72 females.¹⁶ Presently there are over 50,000 Circassians from the tribes of Qabarday, Shabsugh, Bzadugh, Abzach and Abaza in the areas of 'Am-mān, Wādī as-Sir, Nā'ūr and Jarash.

A few years later, consecutive waves of Chechen, Laziki and Daghestani immigrants arrived from different parts of the Ottoman Empire. They were also religious refugees and, like the Circassians before them, were allotted pieces of land, mainly during 1905, in Zarqā', Ruşayfa, al-Sukhna and Şuwayliḥ. Their number may now exceed 20,000.

Although not exactly an immigration of newcomers, the movement of the three Christian tribes from al-Karak to Mādabā in 1880 was further evi-

⁷ Travels in Syria and the Holy Land, John Lewis Burckhardt John Murray, London 1822, P. 382, 385.

⁸ Same as above, P. 389.

⁹ Transjordan and its tribes, Lt Col. F.G. Peake, P. 501.

¹⁰ Ibid, Jerusalem, 1934, P. 351.

¹¹ Ibid, Jerusalem, 1934, P. (501).

¹² Ibid, Jerusalem, 1934, P. 310 and 245.

¹³ "Land of Moab", H. B. Tristram, John Murray, London 1873, P. 44. "Transjordan and its tribes" Peake, P. 310.

¹⁴ The land of Gilead, Laurence Oliphant, London 1880, P. 51.

¹⁵ Pioneers over Jordan, Raouf Abujaber, Tauris London 1989, P. 197.

¹⁶ Salname (official calendar) 1884.

dence of changing times. A group of 'Uzayzāt, Ma'āy'a and Karādsheh tribesmen, numbering 151 men and their families settled in Mādabā,¹⁷ where they played an important role in the development of Jordanian agriculture and society.

The Transjordanian countryside was deeply affected by the fact that the Ottomans, after neglecting Transjordan for two and a half centuries, had at last realised the importance of re-imposing their authority, at least in the western agricultural districts. In 1851 an expedition suppressed irregular activities by a number of bedouin clans in the north and a governor was forcibly installed in Irbid with the help of the police. In 1867 another expeditionary force subdued the 'Adwān and Banī Ṣakhr in the Balqā' and an additional governor was installed in as-Salt, with a stronger police force at his command. This left the southern districts around al-Karak in a state of administrative chaos that lasted until a similar expeditionary force was dispatched in 1894.

Thus, by 1880 northern and central districts were ready for more activity in the fields of agriculture and trade. Merchants from Syria and Palestine, especially Damascus and Nablus, started venturing into the countryside with their wares laden on camels, mules and donkeys. Some found this activity so rewarding that they decided to stay. Small communities established themselves in as-Salt, the principal settlement at that time, and in 'Ammān, then a developing Circassian village. Most of those who came to as-Salt were from Nablus, but there were also those who came from Damascus, Hama, Aleppo, Jerusalem, Jaffa and Nazareth. Their numbers grew and they established a quarter in as-Salt that became known as Maḥllat al-Aghrāb or Ḥarat an-Nawābilsa. There are no reliable population figures for as-Salt at that time, but we have estimated a figure of 6,000 people for 1880. This more than doubled between 1918 and 1920, during the Arab rule of King Feisal. Estimates derived from the records of the Islamic court in as-Salt¹⁸ are as follows:

Akrād Quarter	900	families	4061	people
al-'Awāmleh Quarter	620	families	2366	people
al-Quṭayshāt Quarter	510	families	1507	people
Christian communities	651	families	3160	people
al-Aghrāb Quarter	138	families	584	people
Total	2,819	families	11,678	people

It should be noted that these authors commented that the population was probably larger than these figures suggest, as some inhabitants refused to register their names for fear of being enlisted as soldiers.¹⁹ This suggestion is supported by the fact that the average family size seems lower than was normal at that time.

A second group of non-Arab immigrants came to Jordan sometime after 1874, from their temporary settlement in Izmir²⁰. These were Turcoman nomads who were given a "land-grant colony" by the Wālī of Damascus in 1886. Fifty properties were gifted to 211 Turcoman, according to documents registered at Nablus.²¹ Grandchildren of these settlers were still present in the 1980s, when some applied for Turkish passports.²² After that they began to sell their properties and left the village. Today there are none left in the area.

Earlier research, conducted in 1994 by the historian Dr. George Tarif, gave the following figures for the geographical origin of newcomers to as-Salt: seventy six families from Nablus, twenty one from Jerusalem, seven from Hebron, three from Nazareth, two from Bethlehem, four from Lebanon, two from Turkey and one each from Lydda and Jenin.²³ This total of 102 families accounted for nearly 10 percent of the town's population. Research into the Irbid court records has revealed that those who settled in the town of Irbid were merchants from Damascus, Beirut and Nablus, and craftsmen from Nazareth, Nablus and Lebanon. There were also Armenians, mainly women, and Kurds from southern Turkey.

In 'Ammān, further immigration occurred some ten years after the arrival of the Circassians when

¹⁷ Al-'Uzayzāt fī Mādabā, Dr. Yusuf al-Shuwayhat, Amman 1964, P. 68.

¹⁸ Tārikh as-Salt 'Abr al-'Uṣūr, Dr. Mahmoud Abu Talib, Dr. Muhammad Khreisat, Dr. Mustafa Al-Hiyari, Mu'asasat I'mār as-Salt, 2000, P. 364.

¹⁹ Tārikh as-Salt 'Abr al-'Uṣūr, Dr. Mahmoud Abu Talib, Dr. Muhammad Khreisat, Dr. Mustafa Al-Hiyari, Mu'asasat I'mār as-Salt,

2000, P. 364.

²⁰ Peake, P. 529.

²¹ Rogan, P. 124.

²² I heard myself from the Turkish Ambassador to Jordan, H. E. Mr. Resat Arim.

²³ Es-Salt and its suburbs, Dr. George Farid Tarif, Bank Al-'Amal, 'Ammān 1994, P. 248.

merchant families such as al-Baṭīkhī and al-Sa'ūdī arrived from Damascus and other families, such as Aṣḥūr, Mango, Khair, Bilbaysi and Abū Qūra, moved from as-Salt to 'Ammān. The Circassians of 'Ammān did not seem to have had any capacity or desire to be traders, and it was often mentioned that all they could offer was a single shop owned by one Othman Hassan, which sold hardware, kitchenware and kerosene lamps.²⁴

Irbid soon followed suit, with the arrival of a small trading community from Damascus and the cities of northern Palestine, such as Safad, Nazareth, Acre and Haifa. Jarash was next, following the arrival of the Circassians in 1905. A few Damascene and Nabulsi families settled in the town, where they dominated trading activity.

In the countryside around Irbid the situation was different, as the majority of immigrants were farmers from Galilee, the Ḥawrān and the villages of Jabal Nablus. Although the historian Dr. Hind Abu al-Sha'er was unable to obtain exact statistics, she estimated that newcomers comprised nearly one third of the population in the town, but much less in the surrounding district.²⁵

1894 witnessed another episode of Egyptian settlement in Jordan. Egyptian farmers, who originally migrated from Zaqaḏīq to Gaza in 1869 in order to avoid the unpaid labour, known in Arabic as *as-Sukhra*, associated with the construction of the Suez Canal. After 12 years in Gaza, they moved to the lands of by the Banī Ṣakhr at the invitation of Shaykh Sattam Ibn Fayiz. However, as they were unable to buy land for themselves from the Banī Ṣakhr, they instead purchased Khirbat Sahab, an old archeological site with wheat fields around it. The story of this endeavour is described in detail in "Pioneers Over Jordan" but the village, which has an area of around 12000 dunums, now has a population of around 30,000 people with agricultural, commercial and industrial estates forming its suburbs.²⁶

After the Circassians, Chechen and Turcoman, Jordan witnessed a fourth immigration of non-Arabs. These were the Bahai Persians, who came in 1910 and settled in 'Adassiyya, a village in the northern Ghawr where their spiritual leader Sir Ab-

dul Bahā' 'Abbas had previously bought half the village lands from the Governor of Tabaria and various residents.²⁷ These settlers built houses and farms, where they prospered until the 1970s when the East Ghor Canal Authority expropriated their land and allotted them new plots in different locations. They did not stay for long afterwards. Their number, which in 1950 comprised around thirty households, is now dispersed over Irbid, Zarqā' and 'Ammān.

Another wave of collective migration occurred in 1925, when the Druzes migrated under the leadership of their renowned commander Sulṭān Pāshā Al-Aṭrash. They left their homes in Jabal ad-Drūz to avoid retribution at the hands of the French, who occupied Syria in 1920 and against whom they were conducting an armed struggle for independence. Many families followed the fighters and settled in the oasis of al-Azraq. Today around three thousand Druzes live there, with smaller numbers in Zarqā' and 'Ammān.

One group of immigrants is often forgotten about, as their settlement was smooth, gradual and continuous. These were the government officials who came to Jordan from different parts of the Ottoman Empire. Generally speaking, they were civil servants in working in the Islamic courts, government administration (especially in the fields of finance, tax collection and education), army and police. The Turks amongst them were typically few in number and worked primarily in administration and security.

Although the Turkish military withdrew in 1918, many of the non-Turks amongst their number stayed on with their families, as did a number of Turkish civil servants. Some of them have retained the al-Turki name. Indeed, in 'Ammān alone there are 162 families of that name, of which only nine are Turcoman.²⁸ The majority those who stayed were Arabs from Ḥijaz, Yemen, Bilād ash-Shām and Iraq, but there were Kurds, Armenians and Circassians as well. After performing their duties for a few years, some decided to make Jordan their home. No less than three Jordanian prime ministers and numerous other ministers and public figures are numbered amongst their descendants. The

²⁴ His name appears in the Jordanian telephone directory of 1946. His number was 321 and could have been installed in his shop as early as 1936.

²⁵ Irbid and its suburbs Dr. Hind Abu al-Sha'er, Bank Al-'Amal, Amman 1994, P. (96/115)

²⁶ Pioneers Over Jordan, Dr. Raouf Abujaber, Tauris, London 1989, P. 231-240.

²⁷ Peake, P. 530.

²⁸ 1995 telephone directory of Amman, p. (813/814).

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prime ministers were Sa'ad Juma'a, the son of a finance official in at-Ṭafila, and the brothers Mudhar and 'Adnan Badran, sons of an Islamic judge in Jarash.

The end of the First World War in 1918 saw the end of the four hundred-year Ottoman occupation. The Arab Syrian government under King Faisal in Damascus, which succeeded the Ottomans, attempted to improve the people's quality of life and, to assist in that mission, government employees were recruited from all parts of Greater Syria. When this regime collapsed in 1920 as a result of French military action at Maysaloun and Damascus, some of these officials went back to their home towns. However, some stayed and within a year assumed posts in the new administration formed by

Amir Abdullah after his arrival at 'Ammān on 21st March 1921. Most of them were successful in their service to the land and its people, and a good number of them went on to become Jordanian citizens.

It is indeed a real source of satisfaction and happiness that all those who stayed are now an integral part of the population of this small country. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is proud to have accomplished so much in human integration and citizenship not only during the eighty five short years of independence, but also during the Ottoman times that preceded them. I believe that all Jordanians can look forward to an amicable settlement of Middle Eastern affairs, so that present demographic concerns can be addressed to the advantage of all involved.