

**Raouf Abujaber**

## **Conservation and Management “Three Historic Sites Completely Destroyed in as-Salt”**

Government executives involved with the different aspects of archeology including the management of the affairs of the Department of Antiquities when the Emirate was established in 1921 were definitely a learned and well-meaning group. The Vanguard amongst them had their University education during the thirties and forties of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century at either AUB or the Damascus University. Not one amongst them, to my knowledge studied Archeology, but the late Dr. Abdul Karim Gharaybeh was the second Jordanian student to attend a University in England where he was awarded a Ph. D. in History by the London University.

Leading amongst this group was Mr. Wasfi Al-Tell who became Prime Minister on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 1962. There was then no Ministry of Tourism and the Department of Antiquities was directly attached to the Prime Minister’s Office. He and few of his colleagues lived in as-Salt for few years to follow up their school in the only secondary school built in 1924. They knew the town well and must have felt a duty towards modernizing it. Modernization then, meant to us, doing away with old ways of life, including the demolition of old dilapidated buildings and

the opening of New Wider Streets to accommodate the larger number of motorcars that were coming into the country.

And that is how the whole story started for the three oldest relics in town. These were in order of historical sequence, the castle *al-Qal’a*, the water spring *al-’Ayn* and the Government house *Sarāyā*. What remained standing of the castle after seven hundred years of intermittent service, was demolished altogether. Likewise the *Sarāyā* which was still being used by the Government Departments was brought down to the ground. *al-’Ayn* –the water spring– which use has come to an end after the water project in the town provided running municipal water supply through pipes to the population, was neglected and later demolished.

This sad episode in Jordan’s history which happened during the second half of the twentieth century, will be documented in this study. The history of each of the three sites will be presented and the events that witnessed their disappearance will be registered in detail. Photographs of the three sites during different periods of their existence will also give the reader an idea about the historic and touristic grave

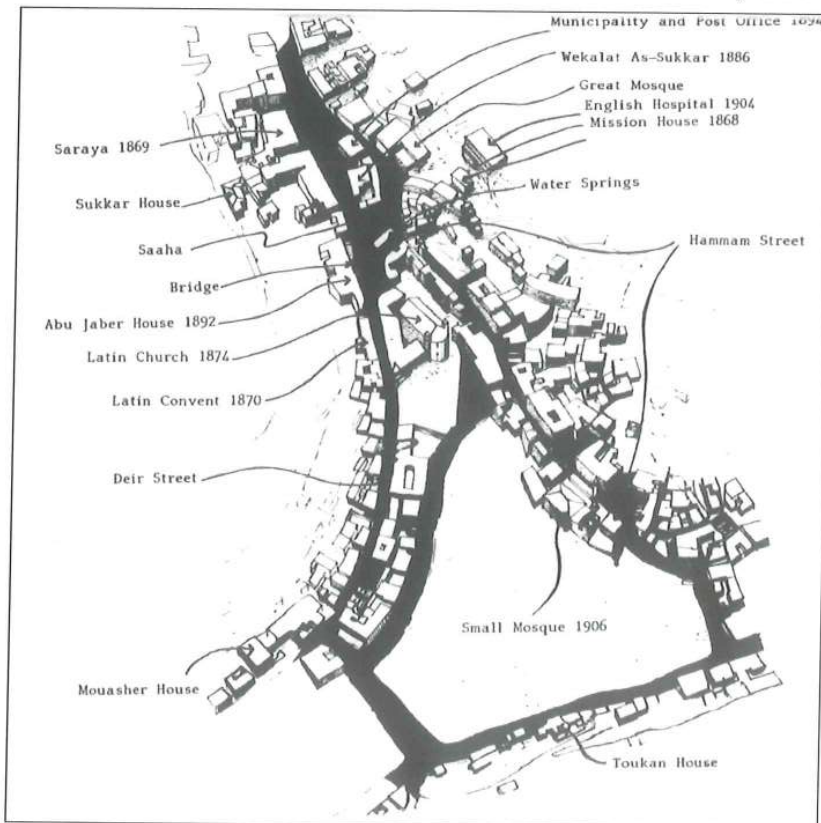
loss that our hometown suffered ever since.

However before we proceed any further we believe it is useful to give the reader an idea about the location of each site as it appears on the plan of the mid-town prepared by the as-Salt Development study program in the late 1980's. *al-Qal'a* does not appear but it's location is to the west of the *Sarāyā* –Government House–. It was built on the mountain rising between the *Wādī al-Akrād* and *Wādī al-Maydān* at a height of 780m. above sea level or 2600 feet. The *Sarāyā* was built in the street going up from the town's center to *Wādī al-Akrād* while the water springs – *al-'Ayn* is located in the *Sāḥa*- town square near the bridge (FIG. 1).

The oldest of these three relics is the *Qal'a* –the castle or citadel– which history goes back to the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. Around the year 1204 the King *al-Mua'dham*, son of King *al-Adil* the brother of *Saladin* built it. One of the stories about the reason for its construction is that the

village of *Kafr Hūdā*, few kilometers west of as-Salt, had a clan called *Bano Rahman*. They attacked one of the king's caravans, plundered it and took few of the *Sutlan's* concubines captive. The king immediately attacked the village and demolished it. He wiped out its population to build the castle. On his death, king *al-Naser* took it over and it remained as part of his domain until 1224 AD. when it was taken over by the King *al-Salih Najm ad-Dine Ayoub*. When *Saladin* passed away in 1238 the citadel was part of his domain<sup>1</sup>.

The second part of *Ibn Shadad's* story induces us to think that building it had another motive. *Saladin* was busy fighting the Crusades and needed such an outpost to watch their movement in Palestine. This seems to have more credence, when we note it has been always kept in the realm of *Saladin's* close family members. It was later taken by the Moguls and when they were defeated at 'Ayn Jālūt in 1260.



1. Top plan.

1. *al-A'alaq al-Khatira* in the mention of the Princes of *Bilad ash-Sham* and *al-Jazira*. *Iss Eddine al-Helali Ibn Shadad*. French Insti-

tute for Arab Studies, Damascus 1962: 83.

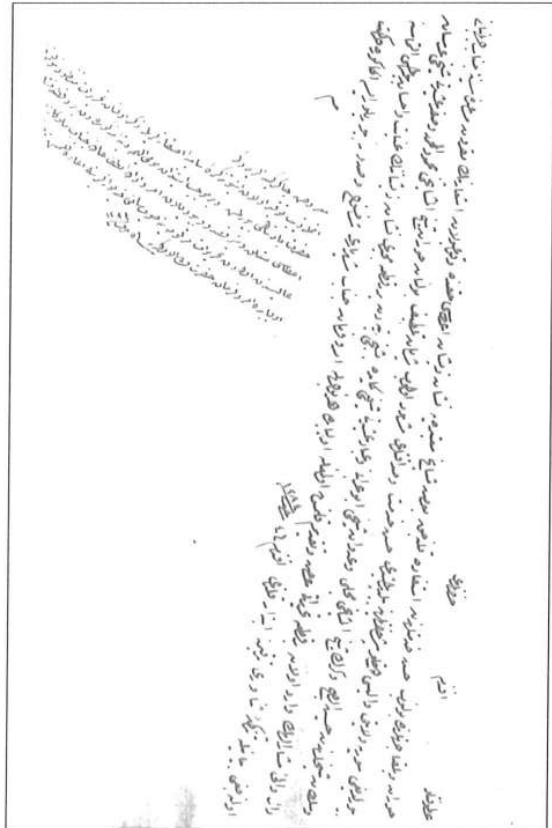
It became part of the realm of Mamluki Sultan Qutuz. Abu al-Fida, the Arab Historian however mentions another reason behind its building. He states that when the people of the area revolted, the King *al-Mu'adham* built the castle<sup>2</sup>.

The castle, during the seven hundred years of its life, was an outpost of the Ayubids, the Mamluks and Ottomans. The whole region did not have any strategic importance when *Bilād ash-Shām* and Egypt were under one Command although it had some effect on the outcome of local fights between the different functions.

The earliest mention in modern times was when, the Governor of Damascus and the southern parts of Palestine and Transjordan, was ordered to subdue the area. In 1867 he appointed a *Qa'im Maqam* in as-Salt to supervise the new administration and collect taxes. After having subdued the town at the head of an expeditionary Force he resided with the Garrison of 150 troops in the castle. For the coming two years the countryside was quite. The Beduins of the region as well as the sedentary population seems to have been pacified. However in 1869 an alliance of the Bani Sakhr and the 'Adwan, the two largest Tribal federations, with a united force of around 2000 fighters pillaged ar-Ramthā on account of the refusal of its villagers to pay the *Khawa* or Beduin Tax. The Governor Rashid Pasha had to act and in May 1869, at the head of a large force of around 4000 men with artillery, entered the area and being asked for an *Aman* (Protective truce) by the leaders of the Beduin alliance, he subdued Salt and brought to an end the state of lawlessness which prevailed until then. To win over the population he recommended awarding decorations to six dignitaries of the area. Amongst them were three of al-Balqā', and a copy of the Ottoman order with a translation in Arabic is hereby published with a picture of the castle then<sup>3</sup> (FIGS. 2, 3).

The role of the castle was diminished when the new *Sarāyā* was built in Midtown after

1869. It became the office of the *Qa'im Maqam* and the Departments of Police and Courts. Few photographs of the *Sarāyā* after the 1870's will be shown in an attempt to give an idea about the



2. Ottoman order.



3. Translation in Arabic.

2. Taqweem Al-Buldān, Imad El-Dine Ismail Abu El-Fida, Sultan Press, Istanbul 1840: 288.

3. Pioneers over Jordan, Raouf Sa'd Abujaber Tauris and Co., London 1989: 37-39.

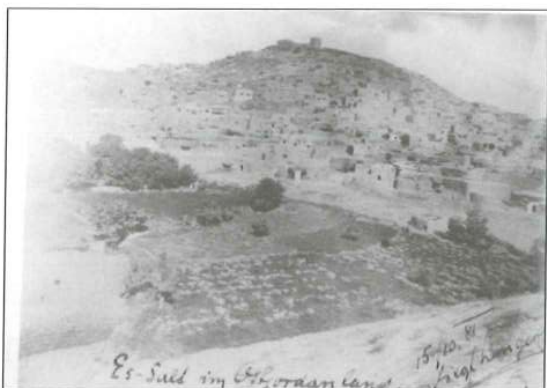


site during different dates and with special reference to the source. In this connection I wish to register my gratitude to Fr. Jean-Michel de Tarragon, the scholar and archeologist at the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem for his assistance in this regard (FIGS. 4-9).

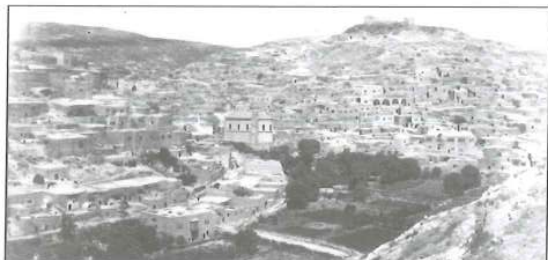
The historic site persisted until the 1980's when the Government and the municipality considered the possibility of clearing the site. A generous contributor Hamdu Al-Anis offered



4. A photograph by the famous photographer Dumas dated around 1880 showing the empty grounds around the castle.

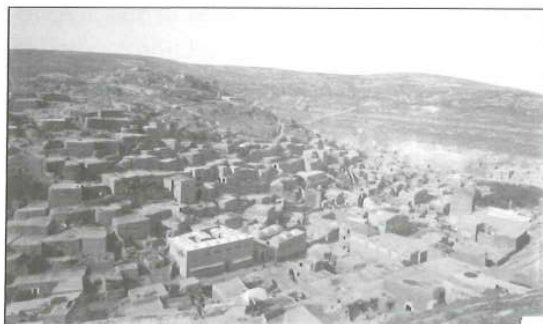


5. A photo by Langer dated 15.10.1881 with the title "Es-Said in Ostjordan Land" showing the un-developed area around the castle.



6. A photo from the "White Fathers" (Pères Blancs) from the Convent of Sainte-Anne, in the Old City of Jerusalem. Number: "18711-Ste A.-Cont. 624".

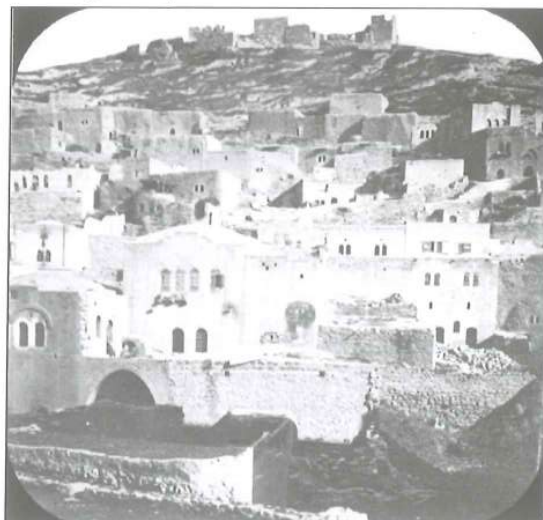
to build a mosque in its place. In 1985 the work was completed and the Mosque (see FIGS. 10a, b), started its work to the community.



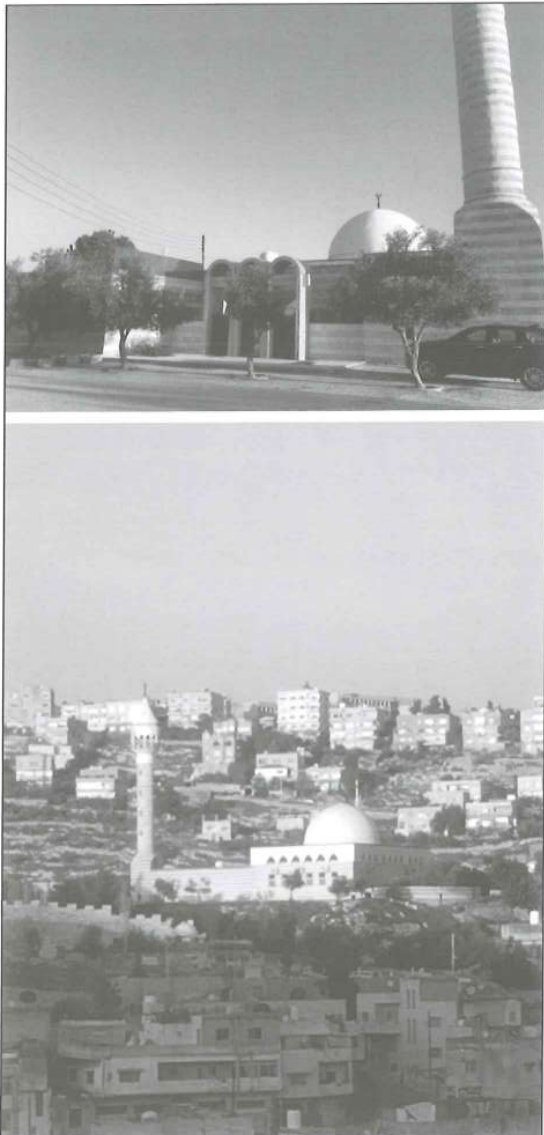
7. A photo from the Notre-Dame de France Convent, Jerusalem. Number: "12474-NDF-607". It is a nice glass-negative, which is now at the Ecole Biblique.



8. A photo from the Dominican Collection of glass-negatives of the Ecole Biblique. Number: "07332-1137". Taken by Father Savignac in 1904. It shows on the right side part of the Latin Church.



9. A photo by David Gordon Lyon taken in 1907 showing clearly the castle and the houses around it.



10a, b. The Mosque.

### The Water Springs

The building of *al-'Ayn* is not documented and we could not determine any specific date for the construction of this useful public work. However I have two chronicles, the first which I mentioned in my book relates that a member of al-Far family who migrated to as-Salt from Nazareth in 1798 was commissioned to build the 'Ayn or Water Spring<sup>4</sup>. The other chronicle is similar but mentions him as Hanna al-Far,

without a date<sup>5</sup>. Probably either al-Far built a crude water spring but the three outlets – the main 'Ayn the women's 'Ayn across the Saḥa and the Men's 'Ayn just next to the Gate of the Abujaber house were built later during the second half of the nineteenth century. There was an underground tunnel between these water sources and the castle. In my opinion the public works as were standing in the 1930's and removed later were built during Ottoman times after 1869.

It is indeed a pity that there is only one photo for the 'Ayn which is now in the collection of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem. The 'Ayn of Women and that of men seem not to have been photographed for special considerations and our endeavors to find any have been fruitless. However it is to be mentioned that the Bridge over the main 'Ayn-spring was part of the main street going into the town. When it was demolished, its surroundings became part of the main *Sāḥa* of the town. Likewise the women spring became the northern side of the *Sāḥa* while the Men's spring remained as part of the compound that is now the as-Salt Museum, previously *Dar Abujaber* (FIG. 11).

### The *Sarāyā* – Government House

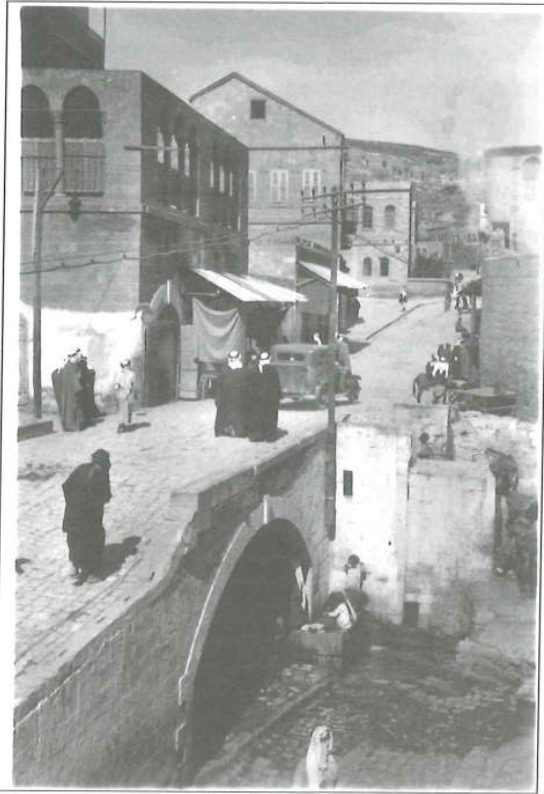
The construction of this public building must have been started few years after the Ottomans subdued the area to their control in 1869. We confirm this as Conder who surveyed al-Balqā' in 1882 wrote the following: "It is only within the last years that the Turkish Government has succeeded in obtaining a firm footing in this district, which was previously independent and paid no taxes. Once gained, the Turkish influence is not likely to be very soon lost, for a castle and a garrison and a Kurdish Governor keep the village beneath them in awe"<sup>6</sup>.

To give an idea about the control position of the *Sarāyā* in the city of as-Salt we publish hereafter the photo taken from the Matson Photo

4. Pioneers Over Jordan, Raouf Abujaber, Tauris London 1989:27.  
5. as-Salt Wa Jiwārha, Dr. George Tarrif Al-Safir Press, Amman 2009:67.

6. Heth and Moab, Claude Reignien Conder R.E. Richard Bentley London 1883:184.





11. Photo of the Water-Spring in the collection of the Latin Patriarchate. Number: "LPJ, 1420". Taken by Father Médebielle around 1922. The house on top is part of the Abujaber House and then the house of the Bisharats and the *Sarāyā*.

service at the Library of Congress published after 1950. It shows the *Sarāyā* with its Grey Tile Roof in the midst of the photograph in direct line with *Dar Abujaber* – the Museum and the Bisharat houses with the Latin Church nearby (FIG. 11).

The enlarged center part of the photo appearing afterwards shows clearly the position of the *Sarāyā* from the East, after the Latin Church, the *Dar Abujaber* – Museum and the Bisharat Houses (FIG. 12).

The political events seem all to have been carried out in the *Sarāyā*. One of the earliest was held on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1920 when Sir Herbert Samuel, High Commissioner in Palestine and Transjordan addressed the Meeting with the proclamation of Great Britain to the Inhabitants of Transjordan (FIG 13a, b).

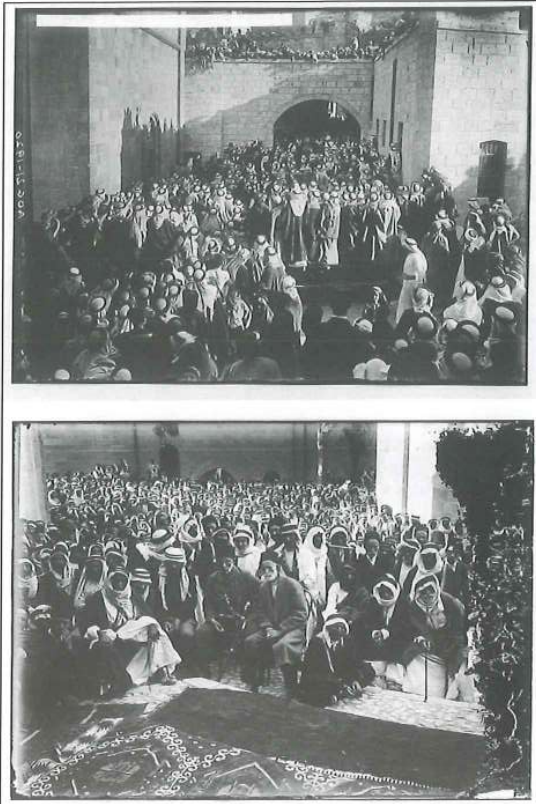
The first photo was created by the photo



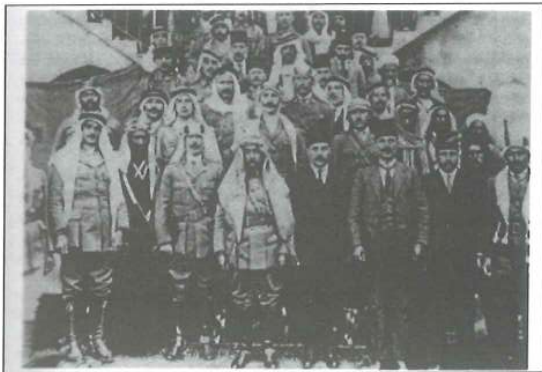
12. Position of the *Sarāyā* from east after Latin Church, Dar Abu Jaber, the Museum and the Bisharat Houses.

Department American Colony and was drawn from the collection at the Library of Congress, the second photo likewise but with Matson as its creator. He gave it the title of Durbar in as-Salt August 21, 1920 which must have been the result of British tradition in India.

Political activity became more intense after



13. The Political events.



14. Prince Abdulla with some of his supporters and officials.

the arrival of Prince Abdullah and the writer Mary C. Wilson<sup>7</sup> published a photo of His Royal Highness with the new cabinet in front of the *Sarāyā* (FIG. 14).

Another important event is that depicted through a photo that has been published by an English traveler Ms. Steuart Erskine who visited

7. King Abdullah, Britain and the making of Jordan Mary C. Wilson, Cambridge Middle East Library, P 63.



15. The celebration Anniversary of the Arabs Independence.

as-Salt in 1924. It is the celebration Anniversary of the Arabs Independence<sup>8</sup>. It shows the façade of the *Sarāyā* very clearly and is therefore the only record available to us (FIG. 15).

In the social field, the *Sarāyā* seems to have been the center for most events in the town. Three photos of such events, are hereby introduced (FIGS. 16-18).

This relic, in the center of the town, stood there for just over half a century as it was demolished in the year 1965. On the fifth December 1965, a defense order No. (42) was issued to evacuate the tenants from the 800 Sq. m of the Bisharat Houses and 441 sq<sup>2</sup> of the Nabulsi Houses next by, so as to add its area to the Building Project of a new Government House. The result of this sad end was completed and a new building was constructed. In August 1999

8. Trans-Jordan, Ms. Steuart Erskine, Ernest Benn, London 1924: 30.

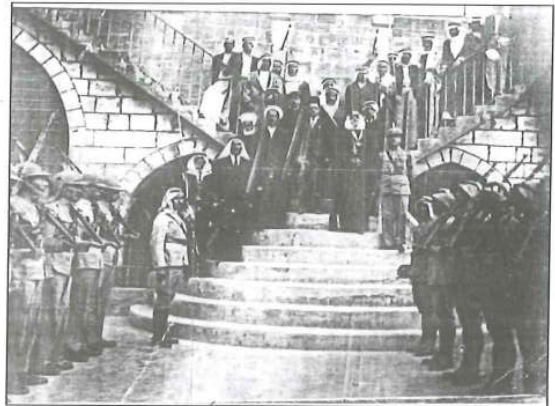


I kindly asked my late friend Kamel Kawar to take some photos of the Abujaber House. Museum and the Government House and the enclosed photo shows the center of as-Salt in 1999 before the new demolition was made and new ideas for the site being considered (FIG. 19).

And so it came that relics that stood for hundreds of years like the castle disappeared without any consideration of their historical value with the only excuse being that all was made in good faith and in an endeavor to improve the outlook of the town which continues to be most important center of Transjordan's past.



16. Probably in 1936 a commemorative photo at the end of a celebration that was attended by all the important Government employees, dignitaries, Muslim and Christian Religious leaders in as-Salt and its province.



18. Photo kindly presented by a friend shows the Police Force giving Salute at the Gate of the *Sarāyā* in 1942 to the Municipal Council, Religious leaders and dignitaries of the town.



17. The Police Force headed by its head Commander Khalil Zaza in 1940 as published by al-Ra'i daily on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2012.



19. Abujaber House. Museum and the Government House and the enclosed photo shows the center of as-Salt.