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JORDAN CULTURAL FIELD GUIDE

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Foreword

The Jordan Cultural Field Guide is designed to provide deploying military personnel an overview of Jordan's cultural terrain. In this field guide, Jordan's cultural history has been synopsisized to capture the more significant aspects of the Jordan cultural environment, with emphasis on factors having the greatest potential to impact operations.

The field guide presents background information to show the Jordan mind-set through its history, language, and religion. It also contains practical sections on lifestyle, customs and habits. For those seeking more extensive information, MCIA produces a series of cultural intelligence studies on Jordan that explore the dynamics of Jordan culture at a deeper level.

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THE HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF JORDAN

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a small country bordering Syria, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the occupied Palestinian territory of the West Bank. The Arabian Desert covers the southern and eastern regions of the country; however, Jordan also has access to key waterways. Jordan shares a coastline along the Gulf of Aqaba with Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia and shares control of the Dead Sea with Israel. The most significant waterway in Jordan is the Jordan River, whose basin runs through northwestern Jordan. Similar to most Mediterranean countries, Jordan has hot, dry summers and cold, wet winters.

Despite its small size and limited resource base, Jordan commands significant influence within the region. Up until the 1980s, this influence stemmed from Jordan's unique position in the Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. In addition, many Western powers held the view that Jordan was a conservative ally compared to countries considered more radical, such as Syria and Iraq during



National Flag

Hussein's reign. Contemporary Jordan remains influential in the region, in part due to the country's close relationships with the West, particularly Great Britain and the United States, and with its wealthier Arab neighbors.

Jordan is a country of many contradictions. These contradictions influence social interactions and shape the perceptions that Jor-



Jordan

danians have of each other. The government's strong reliance on Western aid helps to stabilize the regime; however, this reliance is very unpopular with most of the population due to the perception that political strings are attached to the aid. Jordan boasts one of the highest female literacy rates in the region; however, national legislation and customary practices continue to reinforce patriarchy and the exclusion of women from certain spheres of society. The state promotes a tribal identity centered on East Bank tribes that explicitly excludes the largest sector of the population, Jordanians of Palestinian descent.

CULTURAL NARRATIVES

Population Indicators Quick Facts

Population	5,729,000
Gross national income per capita	4,820
Life expectancy (m/f)	69/74
Urban population	82%
Population below 15 years	37%
Adult literacy rate (15+ years)	91%
Unemployment	15%
Population with local health services access	99%

World Health Organization

The territory of present-day Jordan was home to Neolithic agriculturalists who founded some of the world's earliest cities in Jericho and Beidha, sites that are popular tourist destinations in contemporary Jordan. Jordan was occupied by the Greek, Persian, and Byzantine empires. The country was one of the first areas to come under the influence of Islam when the governor of Amman converted to the new religion in the seventh century. By the 11th century, Muslims outnumbered the once dominant Christians.

The Ottoman Empire conquered the east bank of the Jordan River in 1516, integrating the territory with the rest of the region. Under the Ottomans, the territory of present-day Jordan, then called Transjordan, was officially administered as part of the Greater Syrian region that included contemporary Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. The area was sparsely inhabited by nomadic Arab tribes and small groups of farmers and traders.



Jordan River

The area's primary importance for the empire was as a transitory location between the northern areas in Syria, Palestine, and present-day Turkey and the Hijaz, the western region of the Arabian Peninsula containing the holy places of Mecca and Medina. In the latter half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, increased regional integration and improved transportation strengthened connections between Transjordan and the rest of the region. Ideological movements, such as Arab nationalism, were forming in neighboring urban centers, including Beirut, Damascus, and Cairo. The Arab nationalist movement advocated Arab independence and unity and challenged Ottoman sovereignty. Arab nationalism and demands for independence increased after 1908, when the Committee of Union and Progress, also known as the Young Turks, came to power in the Ottoman Empire and began promoting policies to reimpose Turkish culture on the empire.

Burgeoning Arab resentment toward the Ottomans encouraged the Arab Revolt in support of the British in World War I, which subsequently facilitated the arrival of the Hashemite family in Transjor-

dan. The British enlisted the support of Sharif (an honorific title used for descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) Hussein ibn Ali, the ruler of Mecca, to lead an Arab revolt against the Ottomans. The British believed that Sharif Hussein would be able to gain the support of diverse segments of society because he was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, leader of the Hashemite clan of the Quraysh tribe (the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad), and was in contact with Arab nationalists in places such as Damascus. Sharif Hussein believed that after the war the British would appoint him king of a newly free Arab nation encompassing Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and the Hijaz. In June 1916, Sharif Hussein's son, Faisal, led Arab Bedouin (nomadic tribesmen) in a revolt against the Ottomans. Transjordan was the primary battlefield for the Arab Revolt.

Establishment of the Transjordan Emirate

The Arab Revolt was successful. However, the independent Arab state envisioned by Sharif Hussein did not materialize after the war. Instead, the British and the French divided the territories of the Ottoman Empire between themselves, creating the nation-state system that characterizes the region today. In 1923, the British created the Emirate of Transjordan in the area between Palestine, Syria, and the Hijaz. The new emirate was created to contain French influence in Syria, to stem Bedouin raiding in the region, and to appease another of Sharif Hussein's sons, Abdullah, who had amassed a following in the area. Abdullah leveraged the British for a leadership role in the region, and he was appointed the emir of Transjordan.

The Emirate of Transjordan developed slowly over the next two decades. Abdullah and the British expanded the governing capacity of the new state, providing essential social services and limiting the power of traditional centers of authority. In urban areas, the

state consolidated its authority by building infrastructure, developing a governing bureaucracy, and expanding state services. In rural agrarian areas, the state extended its control through a massive land registration and taxation program that began in 1927. Government employees involved in registration and taxation became visible representatives of the state. State courts had authority to determine land ownership. It was more difficult for the state to control the tribal periphery, particularly in the southern regions of Jordan.



Abdullah bin Hussein:
Emir of Transjordan (1921–1946),
King of Jordan (1946–1951)

In addition to developing infrastructure in rural and desert areas, the British also established the Desert Patrol, a strong military force that became a crucial part of the state infrastructure. The Desert Patrol recruited heavily from among the tribes, giving tribesmen new economic opportunities and a stake in the success of the new force. The patrol also controlled the state's newly demarcated borders and quelled unrest.

The British and Abdullah relied heavily on Jordan's tribal society to build the central state. This reliance created a co-dependent relationship between tribal elites and the state that continues to be significant in contemporary Jordan's society. The state used and preserved existing tribal characteristics — such as tribal solidarity, identity, organization, and leadership — to extend the state's influence over society. In areas controlled by powerful, nomadic tribes,

tribal leaders were made representatives of the state and formally given the responsibility to govern the newly created administrative units. Later, when a central legislature was established, many tribal sheikhs became representatives. The state blurred the lines between itself and traditional society, assuming deeper involvement in people's lives as it took control of the duties previously controlled by tribes, including security, economic relief, employment, health care, education, land ownership, and dispute resolution.

Independence

Jordan's independence was formally granted on 25 May 1946. The Emirate of Transjordan became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and Emir Abdullah became king. In 1948, the creation of the state of Israel and subsequent war between Israel and its Arab neighbors changed the course of Jordan's history. Since the earliest days of his rule, Abdullah desired to expand his territory to include Palestine. For decades, he negotiated with Jewish and British authorities to make this a reality, offering limited autonomy to Jews in his expanded state. Neither the British nor the Jewish leadership accepted this offer; however, they agreed to Abdullah's leadership over the Arab lands of Palestine after the partition. In 1948, Jordan entered the war, and in April 1950, Jordan formally annexed Palestinian territories in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. These events dramatically altered the demographics of Jordan. Annexing the West Bank tripled Jordan's population to 1.43 million, of whom only 476,000 were East Bank Jordanians. Additionally, approximately 100,000 Palestinian refugees fled into the East Bank. Some settled in the four refugee camps established by the United Nations; others integrated their families into Jordanian cities and villages. These refugees brought with them economic and security problems and long-term conflicts of loyalty and identity that continue to impact Jordan's society.

Many Palestinians believed that Abdullah's actions undermined the Palestinians' ability to acquire independence and autonomy. On 20 June 1950, while entering the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, Abdullah was assassinated by a young Palestinian. Abdullah's son Talal ruled for a brief period. He was popular due to his efforts of legislative and constitutional reform and his perceived resistance to the continued British presence in the country. However, he suffered from mental illness and was deemed unfit to rule in 1952. On 18 May 1953, Talal's son Hussein became king. Only 18 years of age, Hussein initially had a difficult time establishing his authority. His most significant threat came from other Arab states, such as Egypt, whose leaders espoused Arab nationalism. Arab nationalism reso-



King Hussein Walks to the Parliament Building before the Throne Ceremony, 11 April 1952

nated with many Jordanians, who began calling for deeper unity with other Arab countries and political and economic reform in Jordan.

King Hussein initially accepted the Arab nationalists' calls for greater cooperation with other Arab countries and limiting the British presence in Jordan; however, he did not support calls to institute representative government and expand political freedoms. Popular support of Arab nationalism resulted in uprisings and revolts. In 1957, following what appeared to be an attempted coup, Hussein responded fiercely to the movement. He dismissed parliament, arrested opposition leaders, and instituted martial law. He also strengthened his base of support. Domestically, he reached out to tribal and rural communities, religious groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and ethnic minorities. He strengthened his international support by forming alliances with conservative Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, and Western powers, particularly the United States.

The June 1967 war between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, and Syria dramatically altered Jordan's geographic and social makeup and ushered in a period of brief, but intense, fighting between the Jordanian and Palestinian populations. Jordan lost control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem to Israeli occupation. More than 200,000 Palestinians from the West Bank fled or were forced into the East Bank.

Following the war, Jordan became the base for various Palestinian organizations, which engaged in a power struggle with the Jordanian state. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), an umbrella group that rose to prominence following the 1967 war, asserted its sovereignty over Palestinian areas and constituencies. The PLO grew so strong within Jordan that the organization resembled a "state within a state." The PLO garnered the loyalty of many Jordanians of Palestinian descent, particularly within refugee camps.

Some Palestinian organizations, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), began employing radical tactics against Israel and challenged Hussein's ability to maintain order within Jordan. In September 1970, the PFLP took hostage two civilian airliners. After releasing the passengers, the PFLP exploded the planes in Jordan's desert. Hussein responded with a fierce offensive that escalated into a civil war known as Black September, which resulted in thousands of dead and injured. By the end of July 1971, Hussein had regained control and evicted the PLO.

Boom and Bust: The 1970s and 1980s

During the 1970s and 1980s, Jordan's society was affected by significant economic changes. In the 1970s, Jordan experienced an influx of foreign aid and investment, largely due to the regional oil boom. In addition to receiving aid from oil-producing Arab states, many Jordanians worked abroad in the Gulf and sent money home to relatives. These resources enabled the state to expand its public services and employment, which many Jordanians came to depend on for their livelihood. This period also brought social changes to Jordan, including an increase of women in the workforce, an expanded middle class, and more educational opportunities.

The 1980s ushered in a period of economic decline in Jordan; falling oil prices dried up the Gulf aid. Jordan was slow to respond to the economic downturn and continued to overspend. By 1989, Jordan had the largest foreign debt per capita of any nation in the world. With the economy on the brink of collapse, the regime sought International Monetary Fund (IMF) assistance to restructure the country's economy. The accompanying austerity measures, such as ending price subsidies and limiting public sector employment, brought large-scale opposition from the population. The regime was disturbed by riots in Ma'an and other tribal areas,

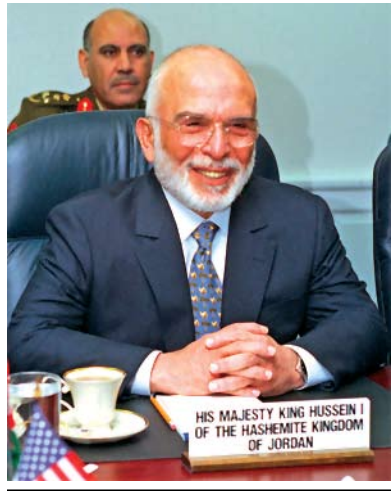
because these areas were traditional strongholds of monarchical support. In response to public discontent, King Hussein enacted limited political reforms, such as the legal establishment of political parties, greater freedom of speech and press, and parliamentary elections for the first time in more than two decades. These reforms were designed to reduce dissent and channel it into state-controlled institutions.

In 1991, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait also affected Jordan's economy and society. In part due to economic considerations, Jordan remained neutral during the war. During the 1980s, Jordan and Iraq had become strong economic and political allies. Jordan relied on Iraq's oil, aid, and trade for a large percentage of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Jordan's neutrality was popular within Jordan; many Jordanians supported Saddam Hussein's resistance to Western powers. However, Jordan's neutrality angered its conservative Arab and Western allies. These allies, including the United



A Woman Runs a Web Design Business in Amman

States, cut off foreign aid to Jordan. Additionally, approximately 400,000 Jordanian guest workers were evicted from the Gulf and returned to Jordan, further straining its economic resources. Following the war, Jordan attempted to rebuild its alliances and resume the flow of much-needed aid, in part by pursuing a peace treaty with Israel in 1994 to rebuild Jordan's alliance with the United States. Hussein pursued peace talks almost immediately following the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO. Anticipating popular opposition to the treaty, Hussein began to reverse political liberalization measures enacted only a few years earlier. Opposition to the treaty united diverse sectors of Jordan's population, including Islamists, secularists, leftists, and loyalists.



Hussein bin Talal (1953–1999)

Contemporary Jordan

After ruling for nearly 5 decades, King Hussein died in 1999. He had become a domestic and international symbol of Jordan. Many Jordanians mourned his death. A few days before his death Hussein shocked the country by appointing his son Abdullah successor to the throne, sidelining Hussein's brother Hassan, the former Crown Prince. Despite the quick transition, King Abdullah II has not faced significant challenges to his legitimacy; although, his domestic support base is not as strong as was that of King Hussein. Abdullah, to compensate for his limited domestic support,

has strengthened the Jordanian military, security services, and tribal sector of society. In addition, the Jordanian state continues to rely on support from external powers and from tribal and rural communities, economic elites, and ethnic and religious minorities, rather than on broad popular support.

The war in neighboring Iraq is the most difficult challenge Abdullah has faced. Abdullah was outspoken against the war,

echoing popular sentiment within Jordan. However, he has been supportive of U.S. forces, allowing them to use Jordan's bases in the desert. Abdullah's support of the United States has sparked popular opposition, prompting him to limit political freedoms and postpone elections for a number of years. As a result of the war in Iraq, the U.S.-Jordan relationship is increasing in value to both countries, demonstrated by increasing levels of U.S. aid to Jordan since 2003 and the presence of Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs), or U.S. duty and tax-free production and export areas, in Jordan. The war has also decreased political and economic stability in the region. Jordan witnessed the effects of this in 2005, when 2 hotel bombings in Amman killed 60 people. The government has responded to attacks by suppressing extremist activities.



King Abdullah II

DOMINANT VALUES AND BELIEFS

Most Jordanians are socially and religiously conservative, with values and beliefs heavily rooted in religion and the central role

of the family. However, many urban Jordanians, particularly in western Amman, are more socially liberal.

Equality and Hierarchy

Jordan has a patriarchal society. Within the family, members interact under a well-understood hierarchy based on age and gender; gender garners more authority than age. The eldest male, typically the father, is the decision-maker. It is generally considered unacceptable for other family members to challenge his authority in public. However, family members can influence him in private, commonly by enlisting the support of the eldest female. Despite this general hierarchy, Jordanian families are diverse; factors such as employment, residence, and religion also influence hierarchy within families.

Traditional Jordanian society was also influenced by a hierarchy based on lifestyle and mobility. Camel-herding tribes considered themselves the most noble. They demanded that lower-ranking tribes and settled populations pay tribute to the tribes for protection. However, each tribe, regardless of lifestyle, felt superior to other tribes and espoused long tribal histories and lineages to claim their nobility. Most tribal Jordanians have settled in villages or urban areas; how-



Jordan's Coat of Arms

Inscription: "King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, who hopes for help and success from God, Abdullah bin al-Hussein"

ever, claims of tribal superiority are still common. Most tribesmen know the basis of their tribe's historical claims of nobility.

The influence of hierarchy in Jordan is limited by shared ideals of autonomy and independence. Tribal autonomy is a strong ideal among Jordanian tribesmen. Many consider the lack of tribal autonomy in contemporary society a sign of tribal weakness. The desire for autonomy also shapes internal tribal relations. Tribal leaders have authority; they are considered first among equals and rule through example and persuasion.

Honor

Honor is very important to Jordanians. It is derived by upholding prescribed social norms such as generosity, honesty, deference to elders, and loyalty, and also by controlling one's behavior and emotions. Failing to do so brings shame on an individual and his or her family. Among the most important social norms are those governing social interaction between men and women. Relationships between Jordanians of opposite genders are considerably restricted. For boys, a limited amount of improper behavior is tolerated and considered normal boyish high spirits. The behavior of girls and women has a much greater impact on a family's honor. Improper behavior, such as interacting with unrelated men, having pre-marital or extra-marital sexual relations, or even the hint of improper activity, can bring shame on the family. However, the extent to which individuals abide by these values depends on their family's traditions and religious convictions.

Hospitality and Generosity

Hospitality and generosity are key values for Jordanians. These values are shared by all Jordanians, whether nomads, villagers, or urbanites, though the Bedouin often decry others' attempts at

hospitality as substandard. It is considered rude to turn away any guest, even a political or economic rival. Hospitality enables a family to demonstrate its wealth and morality. Food and drink are always offered; it is considered rude to refuse. Hospitality also demonstrates the wealth and power of the host and makes the guest indebted to the host. Such indebtedness could be called upon should the host need a favor at a later time. Elites are expected to carry out these practices to an extent worthy of their position. A leader who is unable or unwilling to do so risks his social position. In contemporary Jordan, the traditions of hospitality are changing. It has become a symbol of social status to meet friends and relatives at restaurants and coffee shops rather than at home.

AFFILIATIONS AND IDENTITY

Jordanians have numerous affiliations that influence and shape their identities. A collective “Jordanian” identity is difficult to define due to the diverse origins and histories of Jordanians. The most influential factors shaping modern Jordanian identity include region, ethnicity and origin, kinship, religion, and nationalism.

National Identity

Jordan’s lack of historical or naturally defined borders hamper efforts to establish a national identity. Most of its population has lived in Jordan for less than a century. Still, national identity has become important for many Jordanians. Jordan’s national identity has been actively cultivated by the state, which focuses on tribal heritage, the role of Jordan’s leaders in the Arab Revolt, and the Hashemites’ descent from the Prophet and guardianship of reli-

Jordan is often referred to as the “land of ahlan wa sahan” or the “land of welcome.”

~ John A. Shoup

gious sites. National identity has also been reinforced as citizens develop vested interests in the bureaucratic and military institutions of the state. As younger generations are born and raised in Jordan, they increasingly consider themselves “Jordanian.”

Region, Ethnicity, and Origin

Transjordanian and Palestinian

One of the greatest internal divides within Jordan is that between Transjordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian descent. The term “Transjordanian” refers to the population who resided in Jordan during the time of the Transjordan Emirate and their descendants. This term explicitly excludes most Palestinians, who arrived in large numbers after 1948, but incorporates groups such as the ruling Hashemites, who came to Jordan in the 1920s. Transjordanians are the foundation of support for the state and receive a disproportionate amount of state services. Transjordanians dominate the public sector to the extent that some consider public sector employment a defining characteristic of Transjordanian identity.

Some Transjordanians highlight their Bedouin ties to distinguish themselves from other groups in Jordan, particularly Palestinians. The state has made an effort to connect tribal and Bedouin identity to Jordan’s heritage. The Bedouin, typically desert and tent-dwelling semi-nomadic or nomadic



A Bedouin Man Lighting a Fire in Wadi Rum (Photo by Nick Fraser)

animal-herders, are commonly depicted as an authentic version of Jordanian identity. Bedouin symbols, customs, and clothing have been showcased as representations of traditional Jordanian culture. Once the principal group in Jordan, contemporary Bedouin make up between 7 and 10 percent of the population. Most are no longer nomadic or live in the desert; however, they still identify as Bedouin because of the dialect they speak and their family ties. Some Transjordanians believe that the Bedouin represent an outdated lifestyle from which contemporary Transjordanians should distance themselves. This is particularly true of urban, well-educated Transjordanians.

Palestinian identity within Jordan is complex. The notion of a single Palestinian identity or community overshadows meaningful differences that are felt by Palestinians. Significant distinctions among Palestinians include those arriving in 1948 versus 1967, Gulf War refugees, camp residents and property owners, and class



Modern Bedouin (Photo by Dmitri Markine, www.dmitrimarkine.com)

“The symbolization of tribes has been facilitated by the Jordanian government’s policy over the last several decades to unify and integrate individual tribal identities into one broad tribal identity, that is, to promote Bedouinism in a general way rather than encouraging each tribe to maintain and develop its own individual identity.”

~ Linda L. Layne, *Home and Homeland: The Dialogics of Tribal and National Identities in Jordan.*

differences. In general, refugees who arrived in 1948 are more integrated into Jordanian society than refugees who arrived in 1967. Palestinian identity is also influenced by kinship ties, religious background, and village of origin, all of which influence marriage partners and social networks.

An estimated 1.8 million registered Palestinian refugees live in Jordan; most live in urban areas, particularly in greater Amman. Approximately 300,000 refugees live in refugee camps established by the United Nations. Over time, these camps integrated into surrounding cities. Many camp residents have divided loyalty between



Amman at Night



Aerial View of Amman

Palestine and Jordan. For example, camp residents feel loyalty to Palestine-based organizations such as the PLO and HAMAS. However, Jordanian-based Islamic organizations, most prominently the Muslim Brotherhood and its political affiliate the Islamic Action Front (IAF), also have considerable support. The IAF has encouraged camp residents to take a more active role in Jordan's society.

There continues to be a strong Palestinian identity among Jordanians of Palestinian descent; however, many, particularly Jordan-born descendants of refugees, feel connected to their homes and family members in Jordan. Still, the Transjordanian-Palestinian divide is a salient factor of identity. Jordanians of Palestinian origin identify themselves as Palestinian. Transjordanians make it clear that they are not Palestinian. Some Transjordanians are concerned that the size of the Palestinian population, coupled with their dominance of the private sector, threatens national

unity. Likewise, some Palestinians believe that the dominance of Transjordanians in the public sector and the government's preferential treatment of Transjordanians pose a threat to national unity. These fears and tensions are accentuated during economic downturns and political crises.

Minority Groups

Most minority groups in Jordan share the social and cultural customs of the country. Significant minority groups are the Circassians, the Chechens, and the Armenians.

Armenians are both an ethnic and a religious minority. They came to Jordan after the 1915 massacres in the Ottoman Empire. They are Christian; most belong to the Armenian Orthodox Church. Armenians are a very small group in Jordan; however, they have established themselves in certain niches in the economy, such as palace guards.

The Circassians and Chechens are descendants of the Caucasian Muslims who fled Russian expansion into the Caucasus Mountains in the mid-19th century. Beginning in 1878, the Ottoman Empire settled the Circassians in the abandoned town of Philadelphia, which is modern Amman. The Circassians' current population is estimated to number more than 100,000. They continue to dominate some areas, such as Wadi al-Sir and Jarash. Most Circassians and Chechens in Jordan speak Arabic; some use their native languages at home. In the 1990s, both groups undertook cultural revival projects that were intended to preserve their customs and culture through cultural activities and teaching the younger generation about their heritage. Most strongly identify as both "Jordanian" and "Circassian."

Foreign Workers and Refugees

Iraqi refugees have had a significant impact on Jordan. It is estimated that there are between 450,000 and 750,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan. Most arrived after 2006. The impact of these refugees has been mixed. Most Jordanians view the refugees negatively and believe they are draining the country's resources and raising unemployment rates. However, the actual effects have been more balanced because Iraqis are generally well educated and some have invested money in Jordan's economy. The government is eager to secure economic aid to help with the burden of the refugees; however, the state is wary of providing refugees with services that might encourage long-term settlement.

Foreign workers are also a significant part of Jordan's society. Most foreign workers come from Egypt; however, there are also large numbers of workers from Pakistan and the Philippines. Foreign workers fill low-wage positions throughout Jordan. It is estimated that female migrant workers in the domestic sector in



Wadi Rum in Southwest Jordan

“Among ordinary Adwanis, loss of power and regional dominance is offset — at least in the privacy of their own diwans — by haughty nostalgia and tales of opposition. Among the Adwani elite, keeping hold of real power, however truncated it might be, has meant public disavowal of these themes. In their place, closeness to the Hashemites is offered as the only reliable measure of Adwani prestige.”

~ Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock, *“Ever a Guest in our House,”*
International Journal of Middle East Studies

Jordan number 60,000 to 70,000. There are few regulations protecting these workers. Allegations of abuse at the hands of their employers are common.

Kinship

Family ties are instrumental in shaping Jordanian identity. Most Jordanians are loyal to their families. In Jordan, the family has far greater significance than the individual. An individual is identified and judged according to his or her family. Family obligations and connections influence economic, political, and social activities. Extended family ties also shape identity and provide important social safety-nets and connections.

Tribal ties also influence identity, particularly in rural areas. Approximately 40 to 50 percent of Jordan’s population is descended from village and Bedouin tribal groups. Each tribe has its own history, territory, and genealogy that link the tribe to the past and to the physical space the tribe occupies. The social and political position of an individual’s ancestors can still influence that individual’s place in the tribe and his or her allegiances. Tribal connections are also important in enabling individuals to acquire jobs, to be accepted into universities, and to find marriage partners.

The strength of tribal identity varies based on tribe, region, and the socioeconomic position of individual families. Many tribesmen relish their tribe's real or embellished autonomous past and have feelings of nostalgia for their tribal histories. Tribal identity is different for tribal elites. Most live in urban areas physically and socially separated from their broader tribe. They typically study abroad, speak English, marry foreign or elite women, and attempt to be "Western."

Tribal elites' identity is not based on nostalgia for tribes' past autonomy, as it is with some other tribesmen. The Jordanian state could consider nostalgia for an autonomous tribal past as a challenge to the state's authority. Elites do not want to jeopardize their positions within the state. Tribal elites still identify with their constituencies, with whom they share kinship ties, because these connections make the elites valuable to the state.



Jordan Man Viewing Cave Writings

Religion

Islam

There are significant differences in the extent to which religion influences Jordanians' identities. For some, religion is paramount and overshadows their tribal and national identities; for others, religion is not a pivotal factor. Religious devotion is often very individualized and can vary substantially, even within families. Since the 1980s, religious identification has increased. Many Jordanians have become more religious and conservative.

Many Muslim women wear Islamic dress, more Jordanians seek economic support from religious organizations, and Islamic social organizations and charities are increasing in number and influence. Religious discourse is also frequent in Jordanian politics. The Hashemites frequently cite their Islamic credentials — including their descent from the Prophet Muhammad and their historic guardianship of Islamic holy sites — as justification for their position in Jordanian society, demonstrating the symbolic importance of Islam in Jordanian society. Religious political parties such as the IAF are the best-organized political parties in Jordan; these parties are increasingly popular among all sectors of the population.

Christianity

Christian Jordanians have a similar social structure, tribal heritage, and ethnic identity to that of Muslim Jordanians. Most Christian Jordanians strongly identify as Arab, except for smaller communities of non-Arab Christians, such as Armenians. The Christian Arabs' identity is shaped by multiple factors, including place of residence, occupation, and class. Tribal identities and rivalries are important for many Christian Jordanians, as are distinctions

Religion Quick Facts

Sunni Muslim	92%
Christian	6%
Other	2%

"Jordan" CIA World Factbook.

between Transjordanian Christians and those of Palestinian descent. The largest Christian denominations in Jordan are Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Greek Catholic. Interchurch distinctions are apparent, particularly between Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox. Inter-marriage between members of the two churches is rare. Some denominations, such as the Greek Catholics and Anglicans, are dominated by a single tribe; however, most churches have cross-tribal membership. As a community, Christians have a strong sense of religious identity based on shared values, symbols, legends, and customs. This shared collective identity is drawn upon when faced with external threats.

Jordan is generally welcoming of Christians. Christians are able to participate in most areas of the public sector; however, some high-ranking positions in the government or military are off-limits. Both Christian and Muslim Jordanians do not look favorably on Western Christians who come to Jordan to proselytize Muslims. These activities have caused the government to crack down on foreign missionaries. Christians are overrepresented in certain professions, such as medicine. Some Christians are increasingly concerned with the growth of radical Islam in the region and within Jordan. Some of those who are able to do so have sought to hold passports for other countries, should religious-based discrimination threaten their livelihoods in Jordan.

CENTERS OF AUTHORITY

Kinship Institutions

Jordanian society is organized according to kinship groups; both formal and informal kinship institutions are important in Jordanian society. Family units are considered important to Jordanians. An individual's family is very influential in choices of education,

“When King Hussein described his realm as ‘the big Jordanian family’ (al-usra al-urduniyya al-kubra), he invoked an image of community (and authorized a style of political exchange) that made immediate sense to his subjects. In his final years of rule, Hussein artfully consolidated his role as national father figure. His heir, King Abdullah II, who was 37 years old when he inherited the throne in 1999, affects the ‘older brother’ persona appropriate to his age.”

~ Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock, *“Ever a Guest in our House”*

occupation, and marriage. Patriarchs are the legally recognized decision-makers for the family; other members are held accountable to their decisions. This is particularly true for women. Husbands and fathers have legal responsibility for their wives and daughters, who can be forbidden to work, pursue higher education, or drive.

Kinship institutions govern clans and tribes. Traditionally, tribal leaders were responsible for many aspects of tribal life, including directing migration, raiding, and settling disputes. Contemporary leaders still play significant roles in settling disputes and mediating conflicts within the tribe. Leaders also can use their positions within the government to obtain employment opportunities and government services for their tribesmen. Many contemporary tribal elites have gained status through education and personal wealth and have challenged traditional elites, whose status is largely based on family ties, for leadership roles.

Government Institutions

Jordan’s state is a patriarchal state in which the king is the leading patriarch and dominates government institutions. The king appoints the prime minister, the upper house of parliament, and senior military and civil service officers. The king also ratifies

treaties and laws, commands the armed forces, and may dissolve the legislature and postpone elections as he sees fit.

Despite these controls, Jordanians have more freedom to express themselves, organize, and participate in government than people in many other countries in the region have. Nevertheless, Jordanians recognize clear lines that they cannot cross without prompting a severe response from the government and the General Intelligence Department, Jordan's premier civilian intelligence organization.

The Royal Court

The Royal Court includes members of the ruling family and tribal and economic elites. It is the link between the government and the king. The Royal Court advises and assists the king in all legislation and military and security matters. The Royal Court often writes parliamentary legislation and has more authority and influence within Jordan than the elected parliament.

The Legislature

Jordan has a parliamentary government composed of an upper house and lower house led by a prime minister. The king's selec-

“A recent poll conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies, Amman, found that 82% of respondents believe they cannot participate in peaceful political opposition activities such as: demonstrations, sit-ins, pamphlets and articles, conferences, workshops and political opposition forums without exposing themselves and their family members to negative consequences.”

*~ Democracy in Jordan 2007,
Center for Strategic Studies University of Jordan*

tion of the prime minister often signals the king's current agenda. For example, during economic reform efforts, the king appointed a prime minister known for his liberal economic views. While trying to pursue better relations with Syria, the king appointed a prime minister who had close ties to Syria.

The upper house (Council of Notables or the Senate) is appointed by the king and includes members of important tribes, leading families, and political and economic allies. The lower house of parliament (Council of Deputies) is popularly elected through universal suffrage. The law reserves a set number of seats for religious and ethnic minorities who are generally more supportive of the regime. The law also reserves a number of seats for female candidates. There are approximately 30 political parties in Jordan; however, only the IAF has a national following. Other political groups such as liberals, leftists, and loyalist parties have limited support. Most Jordanians consider these groups incapable of forming an effective government. Most Jordanians believe that political parties lack clear agendas and ideologies, and they consider the parties vehicles for elites to gain political power from their family and tribal ties. Many candidates run independent of party membership.

Most Jordanians desire democracy; however, they are cynical about the legislative and democratic process, in part because of the king's power to bypass and dissolve the legislature. Their cynicism is also due to the structure of the legislature, in which

On a scale of 1 to 10, Jordanians ranked the level of democracy in their country at 5.7. Although the Jordanian public generally believes that the level of democracy in Jordan has improved since 1993, they believe that it is still only halfway to being fully democratic.

~ Democracy in Jordan 2007, Center for Strategic Studies University of Jordan

electoral districts are drawn to favor regime loyalists and Transjordanians over Palestinians.

The Rule of Law

Jordan's legal system is a mix of European, Islamic, tribal, and Ottoman traditions. There are no juries. Cases are decided by a judge or a panel of judges. Religious courts handle matters of family and personal status laws; civil courts handle civil and criminal cases. In most cases, the courts act independently and fairly; however, they can be influenced in cases of importance to the regime.

Local customary law enforcement is still common in Jordan. Customary law, based on tribal and religious traditions, is administered by tribal and religious sheikhs, who act as intermediaries in disputes. At times, customary law is enforced in tandem with the judicial system; at other times, customary law is carried out extra-judicially. One example of customary law, the *diyya*, or payment of blood money in compensation for murder, is still common in Jordan.

Civil Society

Civil society organizations in Jordan address a number of key social issues. These organizations are subject to a series of administrative procedures, legal codes, and regulatory practices that allow the groups to be constantly monitored and controlled by the state. All forms of collective action must be registered with an appropriate state agency. Groups must report all financial activity and seek government approval for all gatherings.

Professional associations, such as doctors' and lawyers' associations, are also significant in Jordanian society. The 12 largest associations, whose total membership is approximately 120,000, are collectively organized into the Professional Associations Council.

These organizations are significant vehicles for political and social expression. Once dominated by Arab nationalists, professional organizations have become increasingly dominated by Islamists. The government closely monitors the activities of professional associations. As recently as 2005, the government passed laws to control and restrict the associations' political activities.

Media

Much of the Jordanian media is controlled by either government ownership or censorship. More than 24 laws regulate the media in Jordan. A new law passed in 2003 allows for greater press freedom; however, most media laws aim to limit freedom and impose strict government control. Many Jordanians have access to satellite television and the internet, which the government cannot as easily control.

Religious Institutions

Religious institutions play a large role in the lives of Jordanians. These institutions include mosques, social and political groups, and informally organized religious activities. The state controls some religious institutions, including mosques and religious teaching in schools. Some religious groups function within the state-sanctioned social and political bureaucracy. These groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and IAF, have been given limited room by the government to influence legislation on social and religious matters. This has encouraged the groups' continued participation in the bureaucracy and limited their criticisms of the regime. Other groups are organized through informal institutions and social networks and are generally more outspoken in their opposition to the state.

Many instances of open defiance and protest originate at mosques following the Friday sermon. Not only are large numbers of prospective demonstrators already gathered, but the khutba can be used to inspire and motivate individuals and groups to participate.”

~ Quitan Wiktorowicz, “State Power and the Regulation of Islam in Jordan,” Journal of Church and State

Mosques

Mosques are immensely important religious institutions in Jordan. Muslims pray, gather for religious teachings, collect and distribute alms, and receive religious rulings at mosques. Mosques are also important in life events such as marriage, death, and the resolution of personal and legal disputes. Mosques are centers for communication and tie the community together. The imam, or prayer leader, and the preacher are the most significant figures in the mosque.

Given the influence of mosques, the government has attempted to control them by regulating who is allowed to preach in the mosque and who is allowed to serve as an imam. Imams must obtain education at state religious schools and continue state-sponsored education throughout their careers.

Muslim Brotherhood

Islamist organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated political party, the IAF, are increasing in popularity in Jordan. The Muslim Brotherhood has enjoyed particular success in Jordan. In the 1960s, the Brotherhood was supported by the state as a challenge to Arab nationalism and communism. When King Hussein outlawed political parties in the 1950s, the Muslim Brotherhood was allowed to continue operating as a social organization. The king also hoped that by co-opting the group, it would

not become violent. Public support for the Muslim Brotherhood increased due to the closure of virtually all other avenues for dissent. The group is popular throughout the country and seeks to promote religious and social change through grassroots reform.

As an organization, the Muslim Brotherhood has a historically amicable relationship with the regime. The Brotherhood's criticisms have been directed against specific policies, not the political system or the regime. In the 1989 parliamentary election, Islamist parties, particularly the IAF, won large victories. This sparked concern in the regime, which considered the popularity of Islamist groups a threat. In response, the regime changed election laws in hopes of limiting the IAF's influence. These laws, and Jordan's peace deal with Israel, which the Muslim Brotherhood and IAF strongly opposed, have created tension between Islamists and the regime. In May 2008, following three years of decreased effectiveness and government repression of the organization, a religious hardliner, Hammam Sa'id, was elected to lead the Muslim Brotherhood. Sa'id initially proclaimed that the Muslim Brotherhood could no longer be considered loyal to the king; however, he has since actively worked to rebuild ties with the regime. The Muslim Brotherhood hierarchy continues to officially support the regime, but many members do not.

Salafis

The Salafi movement has been increasing in Jordan since the 1970s. Salafis dominate the country's official religious leadership (*ulama*). The Salafi movement's goal is to institute behavior and practices that capture what Salafis see as embodying the purity of Islam. The movement grew in the 1970s when many Jordanians went to Syria to study under Salafi scholar Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Bani. The Syrian regime began to brutally repress the

movement in 1979; many of its members fled to Jordan. The Salafi movement is informally organized. It is composed of decentralized networks that maintain contact by holding study groups, lessons in private homes, and private meetings. Salafis have built their organization around informal social networks, such as kinship ties and patron-client relationships, which are pervasive in Jordan and also difficult for the government to identify and control. Nearly every Salafi is converted through friends and family. This overlap between friendship and religion creates strong solidarity and trust within the movement.

The Salafi movement in Jordan is fractured. There is a divide between peaceful grassroots reformist groups, which make up the majority of Salafis, and jihadi groups. Jihadi groups endorse violence to promote change. Jihadi groups increased in popularity following the Gulf War, particularly in poor neighborhoods. Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the self-proclaimed leader of al-Qa'ida in Iraq, was a Jordanian Salafi who orchestrated the 2005 hotel bombings in Amman. These attacks shocked Jordanians and deflated support within Jordan for al-Zarqawi. The regime's difficulty in distinguishing between peaceful and violent Salafi groups has resulted in the broad repression of all Salafi groups. It has been reported that Islamic activists accused or convicted of crimes face greater abuse than other prisoners.

CULTURAL ECONOMY

Since the 1920s, Jordan's economy has shifted from predominantly agrarian and pastoral to an economy based on wage labor and public sector employment. King Hussein molded Jordan's economy around a welfare state that provided employment and services to large sectors of the population. Much of this system

was dismantled when the king pursued economic reforms in the 1990s.

King Abdullah II has quickened the pace of economic liberalization programs. These measures have largely benefited the elite, while proving costly for the middle and lower classes. In the past, the state redistributed aid to the population by building schools and hospitals, providing subsidies, and enacting price controls. The state has lost this ability. Aid is more commonly set aside for military spending or to develop specific infrastructure projects, such as large office buildings or mosques. Economic uncertainty due to regional volatility has also inhibited private investment and slowed private sector economic growth. However,

Labor Force Quick Facts

Labor Force	1.563 million
Agriculture	5%
Industry	12.5%
Services	86.2%

"Jordan" CIA World Factbook.



A Marketplace in Jordan

regional volatility has also had some positive impact on Jordan's economy. Some refugees have brought investment and expertise to the country.

Additionally, Jordan's recent support of the United States during the war in Iraq has resulted in large amounts of aid from the United States. Some argue that an end to the war in Iraq would have a negative effect on Jordan's economy by decreasing the flow of aid.

Resources

Jordan has few natural resources; water scarcity is a major concern. Environmental degradation and droughts exacerbate the water problem. The government controls the allocation of water, which the state has used to allow for economic development in some areas and prevent it in others. Jordan's reliance on external sources of revenue is in part due to the country's limited natural resources. Jordan is a rentier state, or a state that derives substantial revenues from external sources rather than domestic production or taxation. Jordan's biggest source of aid and external revenue is currently the United States.

The lack of natural resources and availability of external revenues to the state encouraged the development of a large public sector, which, in turn, spurred massive urbanization. There are large distinctions between rural and urban economies and lifestyles; however, it is common for Jordanians to engage in multiple economic activities. In urban areas, wage labor, principally in the service industry or government, is the main economic activity. In villages, many Jordanians still practice subsistence economic activities, such as farming and small-scale herding; however, many are also employed in wage labor. Nomadic communities depend on their livestock as an eco-

conomic staple. Livestock products are used for subsistence as well as offered for sale, such as cheese, milk, meat, wool, and camel or goat hair.

Services

The family and the tribe are traditional sources of protection, education, health care, and economic aid in Jordan. As the central government expanded, it assumed a leading role in providing these and other services to the population. The Jordanian welfare state created a relatively healthy, well-educated population with increasing economic aspirations.



Merchants in a Petra Market

The austerity programs enacted under the IMF restructuring program reduced many services. In response, many Jordanians have turned to formal kin-based organizations for services. These organizations are classified as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and are funded by private members and the government. These groups are exclusively for kin members; however, kinship may be defined as broadly or as narrowly as the group desires. These groups, which attract members from all economic classes, pool resources and distribute services and welfare to members. The poorest members receive welfare or subsidies, the middle class members receive valuable job connections, and the upper class members gain influence. Kinship organizations may also provide educational services, skills courses, and daycare facilities to enable members to be more economically productive. Islamist



A Young Jordanian Working at a Petra Tourist Attraction

organizations provide many services to Jordanians, including assistance with marriage, health care, education, and child care.

Sector Segmentation

Jordan's economy is segmented based on ethnicity and place of origin. Large-scale public sector employment is disproportionately available to Transjordanians, whereas Jordanians of Palestinian origin are disproportionately influential in the private sector. This is largely the result of government efforts to restrict the Palestinian presence in the country's political and state-owned economic institutions, following Black September. As a result of these efforts, only the private sector was accessible to Palestinians. Minority groups also have specific niches in the economy. Christians are prevalent among Jordan's highly skilled professional classes, including doctors; Christian Palestinians dominate the

tourist industry. Migrant workers, such as Egyptians and Filipinos, fill the lowest-level positions as either housekeepers or agricultural workers.

One factor that influences these economic distinctions is *wasta*. *Wasta* is defined as influence or patronage; the term generally refers to the use of personal connections and loyalties for economic or political gain. *Wasta* is pervasive in Jordan's economic and political systems; it is used by individuals to obtain educational and employment opportunities, interact with the government and legal apparatus, and build political and economic connections. *Wasta* can cross kinship and ethnic lines; however, it also reinforces these ties because family and tribal connections are primary sources of *wasta*. *Wasta* may bring short-term gains to the individual, but it represents a loss for the overall economy. *Wasta* reduces the level of experience and quality in any given position by granting the position to an individual through social connections rather than qualifications. Most Jordanians express unhappiness with the prevalence of *wasta*; however, they continue to use it in their daily lives.

Youth

Jordan's population is disproportionately young. Young Jordanians are better educated and healthier than older generations. Younger Jordanians have had greater exposure to the outside world and to the opportunities that an advanced economy can offer. New technologies, such as mobile phones and satellite television, and new arenas for social interaction, such as shopping malls and internet cafés, have changed the modes of communication and interaction for many young Jordanians. Young Jordanians have greater aspirations and goals; thus, many are frustrated by the lack of economic opportunities in Jordan. Unemployment is high in Jordan, particularly among youth. Despite having advanced degrees, many younger Jor-

danians are unable to find employment, even in positions for which they are overqualified. This has created discontent and frustration among Jordanian youth who are unable to support themselves or start families. Many younger Jordanians have been forced to delay marriage, an expensive undertaking in Jordanian society, which has limited their ability to fully transition into adulthood.

CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES

Language

Virtually all Jordanians speak Arabic. There are different Arabic dialects spoken within Jordan, including distinct Palestinian dialects, different regional dialects, and rural and urban dialects. However, these are all readily understood by Jordanians.

Many Jordanians speak English, particularly those who are highly educated. The prevalence of English has increased in recent years; it is now taught in schools and encouraged by the government for all Jordanians involved in the tourist industry.

Food

Jordanian cuisine is similar to the cuisine found within the greater Syrian region. The national dish, *mansaf*, is a traditional nomadic dish. The first layer of the dish is a paper-thin bread, *shrak*, over which rice is added. Lamb or goat meat is placed over the rice. The entire dish is topped with a yogurt sauce. The dish is eaten by hand and is served on important occasions and celebrations. *Mansaf* demonstrates wealth and the important Jordanian values of generosity and hospitality.

Among nomadic Jordanians, pastoral products — such as milk, cheese, and yogurt — are staples. In villages and urban areas,



A Platter of Mezes (Appetizers) *Photo by Unai Guerra*

chickens and varieties of fruits and vegetables are common foods, as are salads, stews, and dips. Many East Bank Jordanians of village or Bedouin origin do not eat fish.

Tea and coffee have important and symbolic places in Jordanian society. Tea is served at meals, between meals, and while receiving guests. Arabic coffee is also an important drink, particularly among the Bedouin, who roast the coffee for each serving. Cardamom is added to the freshly roasted beans and distinguishes Arabic coffee from Turkish coffee, which is also common in Jordan. Tea may be served during an important discussion (i.e., marriage proposal or business deal); however, serving coffee marks the close of such discussions.

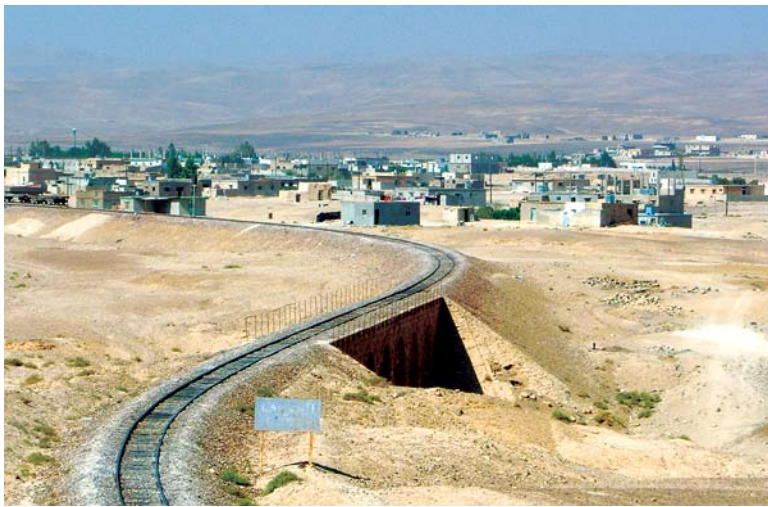
Housing

Housing styles vary in Jordan. Most Jordanians, both urban and rural, live in cement apartment buildings and houses. Nomadic Jordanians live in tents made from goat hair, which provides better insulation and is lighter than wool.

Settled Bedouin often pitch tents outside their homes during the summer months or for formal occasions. Many Jordanians' homes are divided into two sections, a public section used for receiving and entertaining guests and conducting local business, and a private section or family section, which male guests may not enter.

Marriage Ceremonies

Traditional marriage ceremonies last 5 to 7 days; however, many contemporary ceremonies are single-day events. Traditionally,



Most Jordanians Live in Cement Buildings

marriage between first cousins was preferred; however, in the contemporary period, this is less common. Contemporary Jordanians often have greater choice in their marriage partner.

The average age of marriage for Jordanians has risen in recent decades. This is in part due to the large number of Jordanians who are pursuing higher education before marriage. Marriage is also delayed due to the high cost of weddings. Some Jordanians must delay their marriages until they can afford to pay for the wedding celebration and rent an apartment or buy a home.

Clothing

Most Jordanian men wear modest, Western-style clothing, such as jeans and shirts. In urban settings, Bedouin men also wear Western-style clothing, but in private settings Bedouin men wear



A Woman in Islamic Dress in Petra

traditional clothing, such as a long cloth robe, or *dishdash*. Some of this clothing, such as the Bedouin head cloth, or *kuffiyah*, has important national and cultural symbolism; the *kuffiyah* is even part of Jordan's military uniform.

Many Jordanian women wear Islamic dress, which entails long dresses and some form of head covering, ranging from a simple scarf to a full head covering including a face veil. Some Jordanian women, particularly in urban areas, wear Western-style clothing.

Holidays

Jordan celebrates Christian, Muslim, and national holidays. Muslim holidays include *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*. *Eid al-Fitr* celebrates the end of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting. The holiday lasts for 3 days. During the holiday, Jordanians visit family and friends. *Eid al-Adha* commemorates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son Ishmael. *Mawlid al-Nabi*, the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, is also a holiday in Jordan. Many Jordanians take the day off; however, little else is done to mark the occasion.

Christian holidays include Christmas and Easter. Most Jordanian Christians are Orthodox and consider Easter a more significant holiday than Christmas. Orthodox Easter and Christmas are celebrated on different days than they are in other Christian denominations. The Orthodox churches in Jordan celebrate Christmas on 7 January and Easter on a Sunday between 4 April and 8 May, depending on the lunar cycle. Due to the large number of Western Christians living in the capital, Jordan officially recognizes the Western Christmas date, on 25 December, and the Orthodox Easter date, which varies from year to year. Additionally, Jordan also recognizes both the Christian and Muslim New Year's Days as holidays.

