

Christian Churches and Arab Christians in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Citizenship, Ecclesiastical Identity and Roles in the Jordanian Political Field

Églises chrétiennes et chrétiens arabes dans le royaume hachémite de Jordanie. Citoyenneté, identité ecclésiastique et jeux de rôle dans le champ politique jordanien

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In the wider Middle East, Christians make up 4 percent of the population, according to the Pew Foundation Report on Global Christianity 2011. Traditionally estimated between 6 (as officially stated by the monarchy) and 4 percent of the population, the Pew Report states that Christians in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan now make up 2.2 percent of the total population (30,000 Catholics; 20,000 Protestants; 90,000 Greek-Orthodox; less than 1,000 belonging to other Christian churches) (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/2151/>). However, despite the demographics, the Christian presence in Jordan is quite important and carries a certain social and economic weight, also benefitting by political guarantees such as a precise number of reserved seats in the Assembly of Representatives. Moreover, since the 19th century, Christian missionaries and ecclesiastical institutions have developed an organized network of religious, social and education institutions (H. Kildani, 1993: 221-222). Education has been particularly strategic in consolidating and defining community borders and an effective pass key to accessing and playing an important role within the whole of Jordanian society. In fact, it has allowed Christian institutions to make large contributions to the development of the country, creating a positive climate of coexistence among Jordanian citizens (M. Haddad, 2001: 40). At the same time, the Christian presence within Jordan suffers both from some specific and overall problems that both Muslims and Christians experience within the region. On the one hand, emigration swells the Jordanian *brain-drain*, with numerous Christians seeking career opportunities abroad. This weakens their presence. On the other, there are still-unresolved issues related to religious holidays, inheritance, mixed marriage and the non-inclusion, in public school curricula, of Christians' historical role and presence in the country. These still raise some questions regarding the real extent of the concept of equality and, therefore, of full citizenship for Christians within Jordan (G. Khoury, 1996: 9; M. Haddad, 2001: 3).

The history of the Christian presence in the contemporary land of Jordan is quite peculiar compared to other Middle Eastern contexts. Before the foundation of the Hashemite Emirate (1921), the prevailing relationship between Muslims and Christians was not inspired by Islamic scriptural tradition or by Ottoman legal norms (S. Musa, 1989: 45; E. Rogan, 2002: 218; G. Chatelard, 2004: 48). At the same time, the Byzantine canon was not decisive either. Therefore, the traditional institutional frameworks of both *dimma* and the millet system were not decisive factors during the Ottoman period (P. Médebielle, 1987: 176). As in other isolated and mountainous areas of the Middle East, essentially independent from official political and religious authorities, tribalism concretely shaped their relationships and daily life. First, it determined traditional local balances of power, also favouring the development of forms of syncretism and popular religiosity (A. P. Jaussen, 1908: 79; A. M. Lutfiyya, 1966: 165). Later on, when proto-state and proto-community structures began to develop during the second half of the 19th century, it reproduced some of its logics within the newly established institutions, overlapping with and repositioning itself also within the dimension of local religious community institutions still *in fieri*. Afterwards, this peculiarity stabilized and consolidated along with progress in the nation-building process of the Hashemite state (G. Chatelard, 2004: 175; P. Maggiolini, 2011: 147). Also contributing to this situation was the absence of high-ranking religious authorities and poles of religious orthodoxy, traditionally located outside this territory in Damascus and Jerusalem, which were progressively established in Jordan only between the 1930s-1960s, never surpassing the bishopric level.

According to this specific 19th century legacy, when the Hashemite state was founded and the state-building process began under the tutelage of the British, the Hashemite family was able to approach and involve local Christians within their political field not only as part of a specific religious community to be guaranteed and defended – an aspect complementary to the Hashemite “moderate” Islamic discourse – but also as an integral component of the “(Trans)-Jordanian family” newly defined also according to tribal language and the rhetoric of Arabness.

“Disentangling” some knots

Approaching the study of the Christian presence within the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, may be disorienting even for someone acquainted with and expert in the contemporary history of the Middle East and, specifically, of Christianity within both the region and each country that composes the so-called “Arab world”. This is not just because of the fragmented ecclesiology that characterizes their presence, a condition shared by all Christians within the Middle East (A. O’Mahony, 2013: 232-233) but that in Jordan can be striking, given

their small percentage¹. This is, instead, due to a tendency to consider their position quite unproblematic thanks to the level of guarantees ensured by the Hashemite monarchy, or of little interest because of their limited demographics. Finally, their low profile partially stems from a tendency to dissolve them within the wider dimension of the “Holy Land”, its Christian population and Churches, which in turn results in the predominant analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian context to the detriment of in-depth research into Christians in Jordan. Therefore, any analysis of the Christians of Jordan first needs to concern itself with these attitudes, approaches and stereotypes.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has been traditionally depicted as essentially an “artificial” political entity, produced by the will of the British Mandate, consisting of an uneven population ruled by a dynasty originating outside the country. According to this interpretation, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has been frequently described and analyzed from its weaknesses and problems or through its perceived dichotomies (such as tribesmen-townsman or Transjordanians-Palestinians), underestimating the value of its national and socio-political experience. Nevertheless, the contemporary history of the Hashemite state has shown a clear ability to “survive” and endure, thanks to a careful and constant strategy of heritage – and nation – building able to sustain and legitimize its existence and status in relation to both its population and the international community. Accordingly, because the Hashemite state’s longevity and relative stability stemmed from its ability to manipulate the differences and complexities that characterize Jordanian society, the issue of the relationship between identity and legitimacy acquires a particular centrality compared to other state experiences within the contemporary Middle East. In fact, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan clearly demonstrates the pervasiveness and fluidity of the relationship between forms of power organization and the construction and classification of cultural categories that shape and sustain the “imagined” and “limited” character of every “nation” (B. Anderson, 1991; I. Maffi, 2003: 17; D. E. Corbett, 2009: 50). In Jordan, the relationship between politics and religion and the dynamic of the religion-state alliance, regarding both the Muslim and Christian dimensions, developed precisely through understanding the inherent institutional and ideological pluralism of its political field², where the monarchy is the ultimate and supreme point of

1. The Christian presence in Jordan is divided between Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic (Latin), Greek Catholic (Melkite), Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Catholic, Assyrian, Coptic, Anglican, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian churches, the Baptist Church, the Free Evangelical Church, Nazarene Church, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the United Pentecostal and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

2. Understanding the state as a “political field” means that it “is not the instrument or representative of a dominant class but, throughout its domination of resources, determines the relative advantages and powers of social groups and sectors. In this way, the groups which derive benefits from the state do not do so on the basis of class affiliation, but as individuals, families, particular communities, villages or religious” (S. Zubaida, 1993: 162).

unity. Consequently, the Jordanian political field is managed and regulated by a form of authoritarian pluralism functioning by promoting cooperation between the regime and the various elements and actors in its socio-political space, including religious movements and community and tribal institutions (M. Moaddel, 2002: 529). This aspect is particularly important in order to analyse the Christians' relationship with and presence and role within the Hashemite state and contemporary Jordanian history.

Indeed, from a historical and political perspective, it is necessary to locate and contextualize an analysis of their presence in Jordan within the wider dimension of the state-building process of, first, the Emirate of Transjordan and, later, the Kingdom. For Christians this political event not only generated the beginning of a new historical experience as citizens and protected religious minority within a newly founded Arab state, but also fostered the foundation or revival of ecclesiastical institutions and hierarchies, now needed to pursue (Trans)-Jordanian Christian interests with the Emir-King and his followers, favouring the development of new narratives and discourses regarding the Christian presence and heritage within the Hashemite political field and Jordanian state. The foundation of the Hashemite state forced local Christians to project their role within the new state boundaries. Moreover, they were called on to elaborate a notion of their past and heritage according to the new Hashemite political parameters. In fact, they were required to develop an authentic and original "Jordanian" expression of the millennial Christian presence within the Middle East, according to their religious affiliation, and to conform and give voice to a "Jordanian" Arab history, as being Arab citizens of the independent Arab state of Jordan. Accordingly, this also helps to highlight another important aspect of the Christian presence in Jordan, connecting the interaction of Arab Christian identity within the sphere of the state, the relationship between Islam and Christianity, between majority and minority and, finally, within the specific religious dimension of the ecclesiastical identity of Christian Churches in Jordan.

Therefore, adopting such a perspective it is possible to contextualize and understand their experiences and contributions as integral parts of the Hashemite state and Jordanian society, avoiding the risk of treating them as "exceptional" or merely as a religious minority. At the same time, this approach may be useful to understanding the progress and impact of the Jordanian and Hashemite state-building process and how this affected the development of Christian ecclesiastical identity and religious community institutions within this land and political field.

At the same time, an analysis of the Christian presence and role in Jordan needs to include the intricate and frequently overwhelming image and narrative of the "Holy Land" and, in some regards, it needs to be "disentangled" from it and re-configured. This does not mean negating the evidence that the Christians of Jordan are integrally part of the "Holy Land" as well as of the East bank of the Jordan River. The point is more epistemological and methodological. It pertains

to the need to reveal and fully evaluate their peculiarity and specificity regarding their contribution to the construction and development of such a concept, narrative and image. At the same time, this may facilitate focusing on the dual dimension of the Christian ecclesiastical identity and role within the “Holy Land”, which is both “national” and “transnational”, not simply the result of dynamics developing around Jerusalem but the sum of the complex and frequently controversial overlapping between politics and religion within Israel, Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza Strip) and Jordan and their citizens, without ignoring the influence of the international dimension.

Endorsing the perspective of “Christianity within the Holy Land” frequently results in solely focusing on the ecclesiastical history of Patriarchates within Jerusalem and the Holy Sites, consigning the Jordanian dimension to a secondary position. This attitude produces a double effect. On the one hand, for whoever is interested in analysing the meaning, extent and development of the image and concept of the “Holy Land”, this approach leads to missing an important component of this multi-vocal and vivid socio-political and religious landscape. Moreover, it also results in ignoring one of the contributors to the continuing development and change of the contemporary image of the “Holy Land” and the development of Christian ecclesiastical identity within this space. On the other, this perspective tends to by-pass research into the role and content of the experience of the Christians of Jordan in the contemporary history of Arab Christianity, concealing peculiarities and vicissitudes that have much to say about the relationship between both politics and religion and majority and minority within the “Holy Land” and the whole Middle East. Accordingly, combining an analysis of the specific role and contribution of Christians in the Jordanian political field with the influence of such relationships within the wider dimension of the “Holy Land” helps increase awareness of the complexity of such a space. A space which traditionally has been forcedly shared by different political, ethnic and religious actors on both the local and international levels, where each actor constantly seeks to claim and reclaim its own existence, socio-political rights and positions amongst and towards the others. In this particular socio-political and religious environment, which continuously fluctuates between the “national”, “transnational” and “international” dimensions, the relationship between the identities and origins of each community and political actor and their relationships with this specific land continuously fosters a desire to appropriate, give significance to and reclaim this space through specific cultural and social practises in order to assert their respective historical existences and roles within this field. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and, according to our focus, its Christian population and Churches are not just mere components or residual and added elements, but actors and contributors to the development and evolution of this space and landscape (K. Katz, 2003; I. Maffi, 2004). Accordingly, disentangling them from and reconfiguring their relation with the “Holy Land” means seeing

this space as a field in which to further analyse both their respective roles and involvement in its development (K. Katz, 2003; I. Maffi, 2004), investigating their specific relationship within Jordanian social and political fields.

Christian communities and the Hashemite state

In an analysis of the condition and presence of Christian Churches and Arab Christians in Jordan and, in particular, within the Hashemite political field, the community level has its specific importance. This because it represents both an institution and a field where state and the ecclesiastical and lay actors continuously interact and negotiate. More in detail, the analysis of the community helps explain both the relationship between lay and clergy for each denomination and the connection between these, the state and society.

The process of defining and consolidating Christian communal boundaries and spheres within the Hashemite state began in a historical regional situation characterized by the change from Ottoman rule to European colonial domination to the formation of distinct nation-states and new regional balances of power within the whole Middle East.

At the end of the Great War, the fall of the Ottoman Empire led to the first radical development in the position of Christians and their ecclesiastical institutions within the land that at the time began to be called "Transjordan". Of course, it involved all its inhabitants, regardless of their faith, who during the span of a few years were integrated into and recognized as citizens of the newly established autonomous Emirate of Transjordan (1921-1923). This occurred after having been Ottoman subjects and citizens living within different and distinct administrative units (Jabal 'Ajlun, al-Balqa', Karak and, finally Ma'an-'Aqaba) belonging to the Vilayet of Damascus and having experienced the brief rule of the Arab Kingdom of Syria (1920) and the British attempt to revive the Ottoman local administrative system (S. Musa, 1989: 88; M. Abu Nowar, 1989: 13-16; K. Salibi, 1993: 81-84; E. Rogan, 2002: 242).

During the first decades of the 20th century, the Christians of Transjordan and their ecclesiastical institutions faced a very different political situation compared to the late-Ottoman period. On the one hand, part of their traditional local autonomy began to be progressively eroded as the Hashemite state-building process proceeded and Christians were officially recognized as a protected religious minority through the adoption and integration of their community institutions. This developed by adapting the 19th century Ottoman millet scheme to the new Hashemite administrative and legal system. Compared to their previous experience, this was an important innovation because now there was a central authority able to concretely impose such a system, whereas in the past local balances of power and tribal customs had been prevailing even during the last decades of the 19th century when Istanbul had tried to impose its direct authority

(E. Rogan, 2002: 11-15). At the same time the Christians of Transjordan, both lay and clerics, remained attached to their tribal past. Tribalism persisted to be an important factor in the new-founded Hashemite state and offered the Christians a means to escape their narrow minority boundaries to access the Hashemite political field as equal partners of their Muslim tribal brethren. More in detail, the Christian socio-political position in the Hashemite state was determined by the intertwining between their tribal past, the role of Christian ecclesiastical institutions already important since the second half of the 19th century, the Ottoman millet legacy and the introduction of Western legal and state administration traditions.

On the other hand, by the 1920s local Christian parishes and missionary institutions were separated from their respective ecclesiastical centres of Syria and Palestine and became part of different political entities, namely the Hashemite Emirate of Transjordan and the French and British Mandates in Syria and Palestine. This prevented them from dealing with a single authority, as they had since 1516, complicating the management of their activities and state-church relations (A. O'Mahony, 1999: 27). Consequently, Christian ecclesiastical authorities were obliged to re-negotiate, re-configure and re-think their organization and role according to the newly established state borders.

Regarding Transjordan, Christians and their ecclesiastical and community institutions were integrated into the new administrative system and the Hashemite political field, participating in the state-building process of the Emirate (A. Hourani, 1974: 60). This fostered the creation or revival of new ecclesiastical institutions to promote Transjordanian Christians' interests with the Emir and his followers (P. Maggiolini, 2014: 204), centring their activity and community life within new state borders and political fields that had never existed before in history. Compared to other cases within the Middle East, the absence of high-ranking ecclesiastical hierarchies within the territory and the overlapping between tribalism and religious community prevented the development of narratives strongly centred on religious affiliation and identity in competition with the newly imposed Hashemite political discourse. Rather, this made it possible for Christian institutions to reconfigure, revive and develop their presence, role and identity in strict relation and according to the Hashemite state-building process and its discourse.

With the end of the Second World War, a new phase of reconfiguration began. In 1946 the Hashemite Emirate won independence, becoming the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and, later on, it extended its authority to the West Bank, ruling East Jerusalem from 1950 until 1967. This historical event reshuffled the condition of Christians and their ecclesiastical institutions on both banks of the Jordan River. On the one hand, part of the ecclesiastical administration system returned to referring to a single central authority, the Hashemites. At the same

time, along with a half-million Muslim Palestinians, an estimated 60,000 Palestinian Christians fled their homes along the coast and in the Galilean highlands and relocated within both the East and West Bank territories under Hashemite rule. This was an important shift, spectacularly raising the population of Jordan and prompting their rapid ramification, also laying the basis for the often cited tension between Transjordanian and Palestinian identities within the Hashemite state (K. L. Gandolfo, 2008: 439).

On the other, with proclamation of the State of Israel (1948), a component of the local Christian community of Palestine became for the first time in history a minority in a context where Jews were the majority (D. Neuhaus, 2004: 347-348). This has to be considered integrally part of the wider dynamic of reconfiguring Christian churches' institutional, political and theological positions both in regard to the foundation of the state of Israel and to the definitive partition of their dioceses between different state actors.

Parallel to the definition, consolidation and unexpected shifting of the Hashemite state's borders from 1921 until 1967, the Christians and Muslims of Jordan experienced a decisive change in the legal and political framework that regulated their coexistence, becoming citizens of a unified state under the authority of the Hashemite family within a modern constitutional state system. The first event in this historical path was enactment of the Organic Law (1925) (A. Giannini, 1931) that redrew the socio-political and legal relationship between Christian and Muslim citizens of what was now Transjordan, combining Islamic legal traditions with Western juridical and administrative practices. At the same time, although not officially recognized, tribal customs continued to be practiced by both Christians and Muslims, regulating and marking specific turning points in life (M. Haddad, 1992: 78-80; G. Chatelard, 2001: 127).

Through the Organic Law, Christians and Muslims found themselves citizens of a common state with equal rights (art. 5), subjected to different laws solely regarding their personal status according to their religious affiliations. Islam was declared the religion of the state and the Emir, but Christians were granted freedom of belief and religion (art. 10). Parallel to the creation and definition of the Hashemite state, Christian faiths and religious communities were integrated into the new Transjordanian administrative system. Established Churches were officially recognized by Transjordanian law and guaranteed rights as religious communities (art. 11), free to directly manage their own schools according to Transjordanian laws (art. 14). Moreover, the Organic Law recognized and reserved to Christians a specific number of seats in representative institutions (art. 25) allowing them to provide three of the thirteen deputies to the Legislative Council. Finally, it allowed for the creation of religious community councils to manage community courts and their socio-educational institutions (arts. 49, 53 and 44), provisions that were enforced and implemented by the Religious Councils Law (1938) (A. Hourani, 1974: 60).

After the end of World War II, the proclamation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1948 – which sanctioned the independence of the Hashemite state – and the promulgation of the Constitutional Charter (1952) did not introduce sizable changes to the legal status of the Christians. Islam was confirmed as the religion of the state and the King (art. 2, 28) and personal status continued to be regulated according to the specific religious affiliation of each citizen (L. Pruvost, 1987: 45). All citizens were again recognized as equal before the law regardless of their religion, language or race (art. 6). In fact, the Jordanian government reiterated that there were no minorities within the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and that all Jordanians were equal before the law, whatever their differences in race, religion, or language (P. Gubser, 1983: 18).

In addition, the Constitution sanctioned the right of freedom of worship and religious belief in accordance with the customs and tradition in the Kingdom (art. 14). This principle was again repeated and expanded in the National Pact of 1991 which called for securing the values of tolerance and objectivity, and respecting the beliefs of others (J. Al Shalabi; M. B. Alrajehi, 2011: 1381). Moreover, the Constitution guaranteed religious communities the right to create and maintain their own educational institutions (art. 19) and to establish community courts to judge issues relating to the personal status (arts. 108, 109) (J. Shuweihat, 1992: 35).

Recognized non-Islamic religious communities are not eligible for state subsidies and are financially and administratively independent from the state³. Religious groups lacking official recognition are subject to the Law on Associations of 2008 and need to be registered in the Ministry of Justice as “societies”, obtaining government approval of their budgets, foreign funding, and notification of the group’s by-laws and board members⁴.

Therefore, the state granted full freedom to its Christian citizens to organize themselves according to their own laws and traditions, with the only limit being respecting and conforming to the state laws and requested legal duties.

Regarding political representation, the Jordanian electoral system confirmed the parliamentary seats reserved for Christians, which are now 9 out of 120. Given the fact that their demographic weight oscillates between 6, 4 and 2.2 percent, depending on the surveys, the Hashemite state grants them a parliamentary representation of 7.5 percent, showing a concrete interest in integrating and

3. These are: Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic (Latin), Greek Catholic (Melkite), Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Catholic, Assyrian, Coptic, Anglican, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, and Presbyterian churches. The Baptist Church is registered as a “denomination” and, therefore, is not subject to the Law of Associations of 2008.

4. These are: the Free Evangelical Church, Nazarene Church, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). United Pentecostal and Jehovah’s Witnesses are unrecognized denominations and they are not registered as societies.

preserving their voices within the national political debate. At the same time, the provision of 12 reserved female seats further increases possible Christian representation within the House of Representatives, as confirmed by the election of a Christian woman in 2010. Moreover, in Jordan the monarchy has stably assured that cabinets include Christian ministers, also appointing Christians as palace advisors, to senior ranks in the military and high positions within public administration.

Therefore, thanks to these provisions, Christian community life has not only been recognized, but has also been guaranteed and institutionalized, so that Christians have experienced in the Hashemite state a higher level of guarantees and relative stability than in other Arab states within the Middle East, except for the case of Lebanon that is substantially different. However, a full picture cannot ignore the flip side of both these guarantees and the quota system. As a direct consequence of making Islam the religion of the State, so that Jordanian institutions have to instil Islamic values and enhance belief in Allah and the Islamic Message, restrictions arise and have repercussions on Christians' and non-Muslims' opportunities within the public socio-cultural and political spheres (M. Haddad, 2001: 41). On the one hand, unresolved issues endure, such as marriages between Christian men and Muslim women; some aspects related to inheritance; the custody of children in mixed marriages and the prohibition of conversions from Islam⁵, not to mention the impossibility for Christians to rise to the highest political and military ranks (S. Sayegh, 2006: 2-3). This means that important issues in the life of Christians (and of course of non-Muslims generally) and their families are not clearly regulated by fully involving them under the notions of "nationality" and "citizenship", but according to their religious affiliations and codes. The Jordanian laws guarantee full respect for their beliefs, but also weaken their position as individuals within society and the public sphere. On the other hand, giving Islam a significant place in the socio-political system reduces the manoeuvre room for Christians' involvement and contributions. Without overstating the negative aspects of such a schema, since their number is somewhat marginal both in terms of actual members and percentage of the overall population, the quota system clearly represents the will to grant them a solid and definite political representation, avoiding their struggle to attain it (F. McCallum, 2012: 12). Regarding this aspect, since it represents over 15 different Churches and is duly recognized by the Jordanian Government, it is also important to highlight the role played by the Council of Churches in freely discussing matters and expressing a common voice concerning Christianity and its presence in the country (B. Sabella, 2004: 8).

5. Constitutionally, matters concerning personal status, such as religion, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, are under the exclusive jurisdiction of religious courts. At the same time, because Islam is the religion of the state, in certain fields, such as inheritance, all citizens, including non-Muslims, are subject to Islamic legal provisions if their religion has no equivalent guidelines or if their religion does not have official state recognition.

In fact, transposing to the political level the principles expressed in the Jordanian National Charter, the quota system institutionalizes, represents and guarantees differences while at the same time affirming and recognizing minorities' contributions and attachment to the "nation", fully integrating community and religious institutions into the Hashemite political field. From the community's perspective, this ensures autonomy in the selection of candidates and full capacity to distinguish and differentiate from the majority by raising key issues that concern its affiliates. Nonetheless, it intrinsically limits the possibility of representation, both quantitatively and qualitatively, because it keeps their position and role on the level of the community and sub-state identities (F. McCallum, 2011: 12). Moreover, to this picture should be added the fact that the persisting significance of tribal networks within both Christian and Muslim dimensions still orients the selection of candidates and the nature of the representation. From this standpoint, the recognition of a quota for Christians as a protected religious minority gave the tribal networks control of a guaranteed field in which to replicate their logics, overlapping and intertwining with the community dimension and reinforcing each other. Indeed, at least for the Transjordanians, tribalism could be a way of expressing a political subjectivity rooted in the history of this land and its political system no matter what the faith professed. Nonetheless, it again embeds it in a sub-state level, amplifying the effect of the quota system above described.

Moreover, whereas Muslim citizens face no problems in identifying with the state and benefit from full citizenship status, Christians who have accepted the system and its laws yet seek full recognition of their rights beyond the solely religious dimension have to leave the safe field of their community and ecclesiastical institutions, directly questioning the same system that guarantees their position. This creates the paradox and stalemate that involves most of the Christians within the Middle East, and that in Jordan is particularly accentuated, also because the highest ecclesiastical institutions of each Church reside outside the country.

On the one hand, in the past this favoured Christians' militant over-representation in secular opposition parties, as happened with the Arab nationalist movement in Jordan during the 1950s and 1960s, and now fosters commitment to other forms of activism, such as within the human rights field, as a viable solution to overcoming the limits described above by directly engaging with the existing system. On the other hand, within the official political field, this has also favoured apolitical and conciliatory attitudes among most of the community's representatives, because stability and the status quo have been evaluated as the best safeguard of both their position within the community and Christians' freedom and existence within Jordan (F. McCallum, 2012: 120).

Although protected and guaranteed in their rights, the Christians' position within the Jordanian state system is inherently weak. Given the specific nature

of the Jordanian political field, centred on the role of the King and the royal court, Christian communities and institutions seek in the King and his entourage the real guarantee of their free existence and not in the state or social structure. This tendency is also reinforced by their uneasiness with political Islam's development within the country. Although the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has never questioned the legitimacy and existence of the Hashemite state and system, being integrally part of the specific Hashemite religious policy, the first Muslim Brotherhood governmental experience in 1989 raised some concerns and perplexities among Christians (M. Boulbly, 1999: 104). Controlling the Ministry of Education allowed it to re-arrange the school year, scheduling exams during Christian holidays and thereby creating problems for Christian teachers. This short experience showed the possibility of a reduction, if not an involution, in Christian guarantees (A. Pacini, 1996: 297).

Consequently, this situation inevitably concurs in restricting their potential contribution and the visibility of their political participation or makes it uncertain and fragile compared to that of their Muslim fellow citizens.

Churches, actors on the political scene in Jordan

Since the foundation of the Emirate of Transjordan in 1921 and its formal recognition as a state under the leadership of Emir Abdullah in 1923, the Hashemites developed a specific religious policy towards Christians and ecclesiastical institutions, and related activities, making them an integral part of their selective system of alliances. This embraces different spheres, among which the most important are social and educational activities, interreligious dialogue and the promotion of Jordan's archaeological and historical heritage and assets.

Accordingly, representing the large majority of total Christians in Jordan, an analysis of the Catholic and Orthodox presence within the modern Hashemite state is enlightening to point out some working principles of such policy and relations, that in turn can contribute to further focusing the workings of the Hashemite political field.

Granting Christians full social and political rights as a "minority" and integrating their community activities into the state system in turn ensured that Christian religious communities and institutions played their part in consolidating and legitimizing the Hashemite regime. Religious education promoted discourses about the legitimacy of the Hashemite monarchy and church social services accepted to partially make up for the state's own shortcomings (G. Chatelard, 2010: 500), becoming an integral part of its "rentier" system (L. Brand, 1992: 167-168). Despite the lack of natural resources, the Jordanian rentier system developed through the pragmatic ability of the Hashemite family to obtain and distribute money and financial resources to create wellbeing. Accordingly,

Christian communal institutions (schools and charitable institutions) supported this strategy, becoming a stabilizing factor for the monarchy.

During the Emirate period, the Organic Law guaranteed Christian communities and ecclesiastical institutions a broader statutory autonomy in managing their internal affairs and, within their jurisdiction, the personal status of their faithful. After 1946, with proclamation of the full independence of the Hashemite Kingdom from Great Britain, the content of this system and relationship was not totally unquestioned. However the margins and the prerogatives of this statutory autonomy were re-drawn in order to assert civil authority over community boundaries, especially regarding the curricula taught in community schools (required to conform to state schools), the freedom to invest in real estate (which was reduced and subjected to state control) and the receipt of financial aid from international organizations (D. Tsimhoni, 1986: 415).

Nevertheless, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan continued to avoid strict separation between the religious and state dimensions, granting collective autonomy to each religious community. The state recognizes a public domain for religion over which it imposes its legislation by guaranteeing the predominance of official Islam, moderate in its character, fully integrated and “co-opted” through its bureaucratization in the Jordanian administrative system (R. Antoun, 2006: 390) and established as the cornerstone of Islamic-Christian dialogue under the Hashemite family, as the Amman Message clearly stated in 2004 (www.ammanmessage.com). After the events of 2001, the Amman Message represented King Abdullah II’s attempt to legitimize the international status of the Hashemite state as the guarantor of a moderate interpretation of Islam and cornerstone of “Arab diplomacy” in explaining the Arab standpoint. It also represented the will to reinforce the role of Jordan as standard bearer of Islamic-Christian dialogue, a recurrent objective already manifested during the first Papal visit to the Holy Land (1964) and during the 1980s with the foundation of the Royal Ahal al-Bayt Islamic Thought Foundation (1980) and the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies in Amman (1987). Coherently with this, the Hashemite family invited Christian institutions to support and contribute to its initiative within the fields of interreligious dialogue and education, organizing cyclical events on the topics and giving them wide visibility in Jordanian public life.

Therefore, while official Islam dominates the public sphere, community and ecclesiastical institutions are recognized as the main actors within their constituencies. Accordingly, each denominational community’s inner autonomy and dependence on the state were determined by its precise internal organization, shaped by its respective canonical traditions, by the specific relationships between laity and clergy, and by the distinct relationship that each actor has with the state according to the status granted by state law.

Similarly, the nature and dimension of community boundaries and spheres were shaped, on the one hand, by negotiations between the state and Churches

and, on the other, by the dialectic between laity and clergy. Aside from their natural social and charitable vocations, both Catholics and the Greek-Orthodox defined their community boundaries and spheres not only by negotiating their legal status and the content of this double relationship of dependence on and independence from the state, but also by directly managing the spatial organization of their institutions.

Christian plurality

The Catholic Church created a branching network of religious institutions within Jordan with a dual purpose. On the one hand, investing in large-scale building operations enabled it to consolidate its boundaries and reinforce the relationship between clergies and laity (G. Chatelard, 2010: 485). Moreover, this allowed it to overcome the traditional Greek Orthodox accusation of being foreign to the country. This had been a recurring charge during the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, given the fact that the Catholic presence, namely the Roman-Latin (Western in character and not Oriental), developed through the conversion of Greek Orthodox affiliates. In fact, similarly to other experiences within the Middle East, the competition between Christian Churches and missionaries represented a fundamental aspect in developing and consolidating Christian community identities (B. Heyberger, 2013: 135).

After the end of the 19th century, and later on with the establishment of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches (1917), the Holy See recognized the provisional nature of the Western presence in the region, encouraging Arab Christian responsibility and participation. In Transjordan, this understanding was clearly testified to by the Holy See's support for the development of the Melkite presence that in 1932 was able to establish the Eparchy of Petra and Philadelphia in Amman. Regarding the Roman-Latin presence, the process of Arabization steadily progressed throughout the 20th century, reaching its "final" stage in 1987 with Mgr. Michel Sabbah, the first Arab Latin Patriarch.

On the other hand, through real estate investments the Catholic Church increased its ability to provide social and educational services (currently the Catholic Church has 25 functioning schools to which may added the University of Madaba). The Catholic Church reinforced its social role, proving itself capable of compensating for the state's own shortcomings and, through its educational institutions, promoting legitimizing discourse while reinforcing and stabilizing community borders. In exchange, after the foundation of the Emirate, the Catholic Church benefitted from a certain level of autonomy within its spheres and boundaries, although after the proclamation of the Kingdom it was substantially reduced (G. Chatelard, 2010: 486). Finally, an important aspect in this relationship has been the diplomatic relationship between the Holy See and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. It represented a necessary means for granting state cooperation in developing Catholic activities, reinforcing the position of the local Church

within Jordan, and a valuable channel for the Hashemite monarchy in promoting its international status with a Western audience (R. Badr, 2009: 109).

On the contrary, the Jordanian Greek Orthodox community consolidated and developed its presence under the influence of cyclical tensions between laity and clergy that favoured a more pronounced inclination to access and participate in the Jordanian public space compared to the Catholics. Since the mid-19th century, the Greek-Orthodox community had experienced periodic internal tension between the Arab laity and Greek clergy in Jerusalem and within the whole diocese in the Holy Land. The Arab laity sought to take control of Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical institutions and Arabize them, whereas the high-ranking Greek clergy in Jerusalem focused on defending traditional Orthodox privileges and the status quo within the Holy Land and on preserving the Greekness of the Patriarchate. The intertwining between religious and political issues regarding the laity-clergy contraposition within the Orthodox Patriarchate re-emerged in 1955, a few years before consolidation of Hashemite control over the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This was also a period marked by the development of the nationalist movement within the Kingdom. In 1956, the Orthodox Synod elected Bishop Athenagoras as *locus tenes* according to the Declaration of 1875. Trusting in King Hussein's and Samir Rifa'i's support, the Arab Orthodox reaction was immediate and tried to get the election suspended (D. Tismhoni, 1993: 37-38). During the development and growth of the nationalist movement, which in 1956 was able to impose its candidate Sulayman Nabulsi as Prime Minister (N. Aruri, 1972: 67), the Arab Orthodox were able to contextualize their program within the wider Arab nationalist cause, finally elaborating a new patriarchal constitution that was greatly inspired by their agenda. However, given the short life of the first nationalist government in Jordan, the good relations between the Patriarch and the King and concerns about alienating part of Western support led to a drastic change in the internal secular Orthodox status quo within the Holy Land. The 1957 draft was drastically amended and a new version was proposed in 1958, again making the Greek element the core of the patriarchal ecclesiastical organization. The statute required that the Patriarch and his suffragan bishops be citizens of the Kingdom able to speak and write Arabic. Moreover it increased Arab Christians' rights in the administration of finance, schools and charitable institutions (W. Zander, 1971: 89). It is also important to point out that during the same decades both the Anglican and Lutheran communities experienced the same tension as the Greek Orthodox. It was, in fact, during the Jordanian period of direct sovereignty over the West Bank that they obtained recognition of national churches, developing and consolidating an Arab-oriented identity (S. Kuruvilla, 2013: 31). In 1980, when Patriarch Benedictos died in Jerusalem, the issue of electing a new Patriarch fostered new tensions. Again, due to the political and economical difficulties the Hashemite state was experiencing, Jordan avoided supporting the Arabs' request, facilitating the election by naturalizing a large

number of Greek monks so they could meet voting criteria. Finally, in 1981, a royal decree officialised the election of Deodoros (M. Haddad, 2001: 21).

Unable to take full control of the Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical system, the Arab Orthodox laity engaged in the autonomous development of the Jordanian Greek Orthodox community, opening its communal spaces to the rest of the Jordanian population at large in order to build up a close political and economic relationship with the regime (G. Chatelard, 2010: 488).

Therefore, despite the differences between Catholics and Greek-Orthodox, the Hashemite decision to fully integrate and recognize non-Muslim communities and their ecclesiastical institutions within the new state system favoured the development of co-operative and goodwill relationships between Jordanian civil and Christian religious authorities. The Hashemite monarchy reinforced its legitimacy and international status by promoting its role as protector of Christian minorities under its Islamic rule, and locally found in Christian ecclesiastical institutions a valued ally against secularist opposition. Christians and Christian Churches gained the ability to autonomously develop their community institutions and their communal spheres (J. Ryan, 1986: 166).

Christian heritage and patrimonialization process

Of similar importance, the relations between the Hashemite monarchy and Christian ecclesiastical institutions found in the field of archaeological heritage a profitable sphere of cooperation, especially regarding the Catholics. Devising a specific sacred topography, Christian heritage was integrated into patrimony policies in Jordan to sustain the process of creating historical depth for Hashemite Jordan as a territorial entity (K. Katz, 2003: 182; I. Maffi, 2004: 354-355). In fact, in Jordan, the Hashemite state supported dynamics of patrimonialization with the intent of stressing the historical continuity between contemporary history and past civilizations within its boundaries (I. Maffi, 2004: 14). More recently, this is also occurring as regards Islamic sites (N. Neveu, 2010: 107).

Despite transformations and developments in terms of significance and interpretation, Christian heritage performed a persistent legitimizing function for the Hashemite monarchy and its political field within Jordan itself, the Middle East and in an international perspective (K. Katz, 2003: 187). Moreover, it was a valuable channel for asserting their nativeness to the land, underlining their Arabness and the traditionally pacific coexistence between Christians and Muslims within this space (S. Sayagh, 2009: 9). Finally, it also performed an important economic role, making it possible to share interests and divide revenues between the Hashemite state, Christian ecclesiastical institutions and the private tourist sector.

As clearly shown during the first papal visit to the Holy Land in 1964, the sacred Christian sites became integrally part of this strategy of selective celebration through the patrimonialization process. The Pope's pilgrimage allowed King Hussein to reinforce and promote his position within the country, the Middle East and on the international level. King Hussein presented himself as national ruler and "Guardian of the Holy Places", both Muslim and Christian, located on both the East and the West Banks (K. Katz, 2003: 182). Amman, where the King welcomed the Pope, was celebrated as the political capital of the Kingdom and the starting point of the papal pilgrimage in the Holy Land, allowing the Hashemite monarchy to extend the notion of the Holy Land to the East Bank, whereas Jerusalem was naturally celebrated as the spiritual capital of the Jordanian state (K. Katz, 2003: 182). "Striving" to have Amman as the first place visited by the Pope during each pilgrimage, as recently recurred with Pope Francis, underlines the interest in consolidating the idea of Jordan as the "gateway" to the "Holy Land" and, therefore, to Islamic-Christian dialogue.

Likewise, for Christian citizens and their ecclesiastical institutions this offered a unique stage on which to internationally display their existence and presence, reinforcing their status within the Kingdom. During the 1990s and in connection with the 2000 Jubilee and the papal visit to Jordan, the valorisation and promotion of Jordanian Christian sites increased in importance, symbolically, politically and economically. As the cradle of the three monotheistic religions, Jordan and its identification with the Holy Land was celebrated in order to promote the country as a land of tolerance, religious freedom and peace (I. Maffi, 2004: 355). Accordingly, through this image, the Hashemite monarchy reinstated itself as the best mediator between Christianity and the Arab-Muslim countries, linking this to multiple interreligious dialogue initiatives.

At the same time, the decision to separate the administration of Christian and Islamic sites and patrimonies explains another characteristic of Hashemite religious policies within this sphere, which is of great importance in understanding the workings of the patrimonialization process and the respective roles and contributions of the state and religious institutions. Charging the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Jordan with management of Christian religious sites – whereas Islamic "heritage" was placed under the responsibility of the Ministry of Awqāf – (N. Neveu, 2010: 120) replicated a condition of "controlled" and "accepted" autonomy of Christian communities and ecclesiastical institutions within the realm of Jordanian patrimony. Moreover, this separation allowed Christian community and ecclesiastical institutions to be directly involved in the promotion and valorisation of their heritage sites along with the state. The Hashemite state participated in the patrimonialization process of Christian sites solely according to their historical and tourist interest and value, positioning the monarchy as the protector and guardian of Christian sites and, consequently, of local Christians. In turn, Christian community and ecclesiastical institutions

were charged with defining and developing the religious and spiritual significance of these sites, gaining the ability to directly participate in and influence the state's patrimonialization process according to their interests and strategies, promoting their role and status within the Jordanian socio-political field. Therefore, this system allowed both parties to share and defend mutual and complementary interests.

And so, on the basis of constitutional provisions, the Hashemite monarchy, Christians and Christian Churches developed and maintained a positive relationship, sharing and defending mutual and complementary interests. At the same time, this does not totally remove problems and uncertainties, given their dependency on the regime's strategy. A consequence of this is the fact that the King, and not really the state system, is still considered a sort of "safety valve" and the supreme point of unity between the different aims and components of Jordanian society. A fact after all that partially unites Christians with their Muslim co-citizens (G. S. Khoury, 1996: 8).



For many decades, strong Western stereotypes have largely contributed to veiling and concealing the contemporary historical experiences and vicissitudes of Arab Christians within the "Arab World", a concept consolidated after the Great War with the development of nationalist movements. This tendency has been partially due to the inextricably multi-vocal character of Middle Eastern/Eastern Christianity. Fragmented ecclesiology has been a barrier to intra-Christian relations, with consequences far more important and relevant than still endure despite the development of ecumenical dialogues and initiatives that seek to reconcile and consider respective specificities through mutual understanding instead of deleting and dividing through them. Moreover, fragmented ecclesiology has offered another field where the schema of Orientalism developed and Christian denominational specificities became another possible channel through which Western colonial powers could project their presence within the region.

The contemporary history of the Hashemite state is an important field on which to develop new understandings of this. On the one hand, from the late Ottoman period on, the land of Transjordan testified to a particular combination of dynamics that involved the whole Middle East, such as the intertwining between institutional and ecclesiastical centralizing dynamics, the influence of foreign powers and Catholic and Protestant missionaries and, finally, the development of the concept of religious minority and its integration within the newly founded Arab states, with all the consequences in terms of citizenship, political role and ecclesiastical identity (B. Heyberger, 2003: 7). On the other hand, the Hashemite state and its specific religious policy offer a relevant field of research because, thanks to its relative stability and endurance, it is able to represent a wide "peaceful" historical parable in the relationship between Arab Christians and Muslims

and their participation within a common socio-political and cultural space, both contributing to the Hashemite state-building process.

From a political perspective, although the number of Christians in Jordan seems negligible compared to other Arab countries, Christians have always been actors present in both the Ottoman period and the Hashemite era. At the same time, the history of the 20th century also demonstrates the local Churches' constant efforts to express their individuality and identity within the Hashemite political field. In fact, reconsidering the historical vicissitudes that characterized the development of local Christian communal boundaries and spheres, since the mid-20th century local Christians and their Church institutions have been undergoing a dynamic of profoundly rethinking their identity and presence. This process involved their respective constituencies as well as their relationships with other Christian denominations. Accordingly, social and educational activities, inter-religious dialogue and the promotion of Jordanian archaeological and historical heritage were developed as strategic resources and as a means for allowing the Christians of Jordan to both consolidate their community boundaries and emerge from their traditional spheres, entering the local public space embracing both the religious and political dimensions.

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Christian Churches and Arab Christians in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Citizenship, Ecclesiastical Identity and Role-Plays in the Jordanian Political Field

This study aims at reconsidering the current position of Christian Churches and Arab Christians in Jordan, by analyzing the specific issues of ecclesiastic identity, citizenship and political roles while contextualizing this study within the broader Jordanian state and “nation” building process of the 20th century. The objective of this study is to offer an analytical overview of these recent historical vicissitudes, by identifying the developments and changes experienced by Christian Churches and Arab Christians as an integral part of contemporary Jordanian history. This inevitably entails the analysis of the community dimension and how it has been structured and integrated within the Hashemite state system. The overall aim of this paper is to highlight possible new paths of analysis regarding the Christian presence as part of the history of the Hashemite state.

Key words: Christian Churches, Arab Christians, Jordanian state building, ecclesiastic identity, community politics.

Églises chrétiennes et chrétiens arabes dans le royaume hachémite de Jordanie. Citoyenneté, identité ecclésiastique et jeux de rôle dans le champ politique jordanien

Cette contribution vise à reconsidérer la position actuelle des Églises chrétiennes et des chrétiens arabes en Jordanie, en analysant les questions spécifiques d'identité ecclésiastique, de citoyenneté et de rôle politique dans le contexte de la construction de l'État et de la Nation en Jordanie au XX^e siècle. L'objectif de cette recherche est d'offrir une vue d'ensemble de ces vicissitudes historiques récentes, en identifiant les développements et les changements traversés par les Églises chrétiennes et les chrétiens arabes comme une partie intégrante de l'histoire jordanienne contemporaine. Ceci entraîne inévitablement l'étude de la dimension communautaire, de sa structuration et de son intégration au système public hachémite. Le but de cet article est de faire apparaître les nouvelles voies d'analyse de la présence chrétienne dans l'histoire de l'État hachémite.

Mots clés : Églises chrétiennes, chrétiens arabes, construction de l'État jordanien, identité ecclésiastique, politique communautaire.

Iglesias cristianas y Árabes Cristianos en el Reino Hachemita de Jordania. Ciudadanía, identidad eclesiástica y roles en el campo político Jordano

El artículo se propone reconsiderar la posición contemporánea de las Iglesias Cristianas y los Árabes cristianos en Jordania, analizando los puntos específicos de la identidad eclesiástica, la ciudadanía y los roles políticos. Este estudio se contextualiza a su vez en el proceso más amplio de construcción del estado y la “nación” jordana durante el siglo XX. El objetivo es ofrecer un panorama analítico de las vicisitudes históricas recientes, identificando el desarrollo y los cambios que las Iglesias Cristianas y los árabes Cristianos atravesaron como parte esencial de la historia jordana contemporánea. Este hecho inevitablemente supone el análisis de la dimensión comunitaria, y las maneras en que ésta fue estructurada e integrada en el sistema del estado Hachemita. Esta perspectiva amplia apunta a destacar nuevos posibles caminos analíticos de la presencia cristiana en la historia del estado Hachemita.

Palabras clave: Iglesias Cristianas, Árabes cristianos, edificio de estado jordano, identidad eclesiástica, política de comunidad.