ABSTRACT

URBANIZATION AND IDENTITY: THE BUILDING OF AMMAN IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

by Andrew David Pilder

This thesis examines the building of Amman, Jordan over the course of the twentieth century, showing how the features of the city’s history and development have shaped its unique identity. From its modern founding as a small Circassian village in 1878 to a major metropolis of over two million in the last decade, Amman’s growth has been both dynamic and consequential. By exploring the people, their architecture, and the successive attempts by city leaders to define and control the urban fabric, this thesis shows Amman as constantly changing, absorbing, and responding to social and spatial practices, state policies, and transnational influences in ways that highlight the specificity of the case of Amman as well as its relevance for broader questions on how urban identity is constructed in relation to both modernity and nationhood.
URBANIZATION AND IDENTITY: THE BUILDING OF AMMAN IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Introduction

While the site of Rabbath Ammon has had human settlement since the Neolithic period, the modern-day city of Amman, Jordan is new. In its present iteration, people have continuously inhabited Amman only since the late nineteenth century, when the first wave of Circassian refugees began settling the site. Since then, the city’s population has flourished from a small town of 5,000 in 1921 to a major metropolis of over two million in the last decade. This meteoric growth alone makes Amman an interesting, although not unique, subject for study. Other cities in the Middle East such as Tel Aviv and Ankara were born during this same time period and experienced similar population increases, although not quite to the same extent. In this thesis, I will demonstrate what is unique about Amman’s history and development—three factors of which make the city distinct and I will discuss in detail. For one, while new, the site on which the city was built carries a historic legacy. Two, the city’s population has been formed by numerous waves of displacement and refugee movements—and this dynamic, more than any other, has shaped the city’s identity. And three, because Amman has experienced continuous and rapid expansion, attempts at planning and social cohesion have largely failed. By exploring the people, their architecture, and the successive attempts by city leaders to define and control the urban fabric, this thesis shows Amman as constantly changing, absorbing, and responding to social and spatial practices, state policies, and transnational influences.

Between Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt in 1798 and the end of World War II, the urban population of the Middle East increased almost tenfold, from 2.8 million to 26 million inhabitants.¹ This extraordinary growth, while notable, is not peculiar to the Middle East. The whole world experienced similar demographic upheavals as the Industrial Revolution spread out from Europe and the West—the result being a new society dominated by cities. From an urban population perspective, the urbanization of the Middle East grew steadily from 10 percent of the aggregate population of the region in 1800 to 23.8 percent in 1950 to 39 percent in 1970. In comparison, comparatively rural China and North Africa stood at 11.1 and 9.7 percent respectively in 1950 and the industrialized states of Europe and North America sat at just over 50 percent, placing the Middle East somewhere in the middle.² However, the demographic changes and the evolution of urban space in the Middle East do exhibit a number of distinct features.

² Ibid., 155.
According to Bernard Hourcade, three factors make Middle Eastern urbanism unique: the dominant role of Istanbul and Cairo in the region; the diversity of the varied cultural contexts and regional politics; and the existence in the Middle East of several kinds of cities, differentiated both by their antiquity and the variations in their dominant activities.\(^3\)

The most notable point of departure in this collective urban history concerns the “oriental city”—or the traditional city in the Middle East at the beginning of the nineteenth century—with its architecture and spatial organization reflecting the environmental, cultural, and religious orientation of the region.\(^4\) Even during periods of slow demographic growth in the mid-nineteenth century, Middle Eastern cities became overcrowded, largely because of their confinement within their city walls. The streets were narrow and there were few open public spaces. At least as long as the original foundations remained in existence, waqf properties were maintained and kept in order; as they could not be sold, a significant proportion of urban real estate remained frozen.\(^5\) This partly explains the fairly long survival of traditional inner cities.\(^6\) Although far from identical, the oriental city provides a useful point for comparison both amongst Middle Eastern cities themselves, and with their counterparts elsewhere. From the 1798 French expedition on, the Industrial Revolution, the opening of the Suez Canal, the fall of the Ottoman Empire, European colonization, the discovery of oil, and globalization affected to greater or lesser extent each city in the Middle East.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Middle Eastern rulers who had visited Europe or had a significant European presence within their countries began to reconstruct their capitals; this took place in earnest in Cairo, Tehran, and Istanbul. Major transformations also took place across North Africa, with new European cities being built alongside the medinas of Algiers.

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3 Ibid., 154.
5 In Islamic law, a waqf is an irrevocable charitable trust. Essentially, a person, with the intention of committing a pious act, declares part of his or her property unalienable, and henceforth designates a person or public entity as beneficiary of the property in perpetuity. For a detailed definition, see: G.C. Kozlowski et al., “Wakf (a.),” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* vol. XI, ed. by P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960-2005): 59.
Meknes, Marrakech, and Rabat. New “Western” suburbs were built in Aleppo and Cairo, and Reza Shah saw to the extensive redesign of Tehran after 1925. Thus, between 1800 and 1950, many Middle Eastern and North African cities found new identities, largely as a result of the recasting of the relationship between their traditional cores and their modern peripheries.

Colonialism in particular made cities in the Middle East more heterogeneous. As seen in Cairo, the “dual city” now complimented the established one, created by the juxtaposition of a new city inhabited by Europeans and local elites, with the traditional city, peopled almost entirely by the local Muslim and underprivileged populations. The model of new and old has some utility for the analysis of urban space, but the numerous exceptions to the dual city in the region, Amman being one, leaves the paradigm somewhat deficient as the exemplar of opposition between tradition and modernity.

While many scholars have criticized the role of the colonial powers, there has been a marked tendency towards viewing modernization as the exclusive gift from Europe. As Talal Asad suggested, crucial to understanding the colonial encounter, modernity, and historical change in the Middle East at the onset of the twentieth century “is the determination of [the] new landscape, and the degree to which the languages, behaviors, and institutions [that modernity] makes possible come to resemble those… [obtained] in the West European nation-states.”

According to Edward Said, the orientalist, or, Western scholar of the Middle Eastern—the heir to a “narcissistic” tradition of European writing founded by, amongst others, Homer and Aeschylus—“creates” the orient through his writing. In this process, he assists in the creation of a series of stereotypical images, where the West is seen as being essentially rational, developed, superior, and authentic, while the East is seen as being irrational, backward, inferior, and inauthentic. This dichotomous relationship contributes to the construction of a “saturating hegemonic system,” designed, consciously or unconsciously, to dominate, restructure, and have authority over the orient—intended, as Said argued, to promote European imperialism and colonialism. Even so, the characterization of entire peoples by their position geographically and their place along the trajectory of modernization was as much embraced by regional leaders as it

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7 Medina, from the Arabic *madina* (town), is used, especially in French North Africa, to differentiate the ancient part of Islamic cities from their modern quarters.
9 Said, *Orientalism*. 
was imposed by European power and ideology. It is not wholly inaccurate then to view colonial powers as agents of change in the Middle East.

Indeed, Amman owes much of its heritage to colonial control under the British Mandate—both in its founding and its subsequent structure. This alone does not distinguish it from its neighbors, also recent colonial constructions. However, the history of the site on which the city sits, and the dismissal of that past in the identity of Amman and its residents, does set the city apart. Amman is a new city not just because of its recent creation, but because “newness” is central to the city’s identity.

On this newness of Amman, by most accounts, the site was resettled in 1878 after a long break in permanent settlement, became a town in 1903, and a capital city in 1921. That still represents more than 130 years of settlement, 110 years of urbanization, and 90 years of being the cultural and national capital of a state. Given the creative imagination displayed in constructing historical identities and cultural imaginaries in neighboring Israeli Tel Aviv, for example, there would appear to be a fertile enough ground for the invention of a historically urban Amman out of the Rabbath Ammon of the Ammonites (13th century B.C.E.), Philadelphia of the Greco-Roman Decapolis (3rd century B.C.E.), or the relatively recent Amman of the Ummayads (7th century A.D.). For the most part, that has not happened. Until the last decade or so, few planning or building efforts have focused on Amman’s “ancient” history as a means to establish identity or create a sense of place. While several museums exist, for example, including the Jordan Archeological Museum (1951) and the Jordan Folklore Museum (1975), only the Royal Automobile Museum, built in honor of King Hussein after his death in 1999, speaks specifically to Amman. In a nod to the King’s prevailing vision of the city, according to the museum’s website, the museum is a reminder that “the automobile was always present when historical matters were attended to [in Amman].”

In the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was only a very limited notion of identification with the local community in the sense of the city-as-a totality, partly because of the lack of local autonomy and partly because of a general tendency to identify first and foremost with the religious community into which one was born. It is no surprise then that for his first public structure in Amman, the new Hashemite ruler of Transjordan Emir

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11 Sluglett, Urban, 14-15.
Abdullah built a mosque. The Hashemites were not a Transjordanian family, having come from the Hejaz, and only gained power in the country because the British conferred it upon them. The decision of the Hashemite prince to erect a mosque was essential as it cemented his religious status in the new community to which he did not truly belong. However, the state erected very few public structures in Amman over the following sixty years, and none that city residents view today as iconic elements of the city. Eugene Rogan emphasized that the power of the new state of Transjordan was exhibited more through ceremonial parades than by construction of public buildings—an important one being the Emir’s ride from the palace to the new mosque for Friday prayer. The absence of a central authority in the construction of the city, along with the pull of transnational identities, has resulted in an abstract modernism in Amman that permits no landmarks of identification and spaces of particularism.

The second feature that lends to the city’s uniqueness is that, by and large, Amman is composed of people that view someplace else as “home.” A brief overview of the various displacements and migrations gives a sense of the multiplicity that forms the urban population as well as the circumstances that brought people to and through Amman. Just after the turn of the century, merchants from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and the Arabian Peninsula, especially after the construction of the Hejaz railway, followed the first Circassian settlers to Amman. Arab nationalist dissidents seeking refuge from Ottoman and later French Mandate suppression and Bedouins settling in the environs of the town also augmented the population. After the establishment of the Transjordanian Hashemite state under the British Mandate in 1921, the newly formed bureaucratic center of Amman drew in migrants from other Transjordan towns as well as from Palestinian cities on the coast. In the 1920s, Armenian refugees fleeing from the massacres in Turkey also began to arrive in the city.

Two dates changed the population structure of Amman (and Jordan as a whole) like no other. 1948 and 1967 marked the two largest influxes of Palestinian refugees to Amman following the creation of Israel and later the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Palestinian refugees filled the city, expanding its size and population rapidly. In 1970, bloody clashes

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12 For more on the founding of Transjordan and the Hashemite dynasty, see M. Wilson, King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
14 Seteney Shami, “Amman is Not a City: Middle Eastern Cities in Question” in Urban Imaginaries: Locating the Modern City, ed. by Alev Cinar and Thomas Bender (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007): 214.
between the Jordanian army and the Palestinian Liberation Organization forced an exodus of many of the Palestinian leaders and intelligentsia, but the Lebanese civil war starting in 1976 brought many of them back.\textsuperscript{15} The 1970s and 1980s also saw waves of emigration and immigration due to economic reasons. During the oil boom years, many Jordanian workers migrated to the Gulf States. At the same time, Egyptians working in construction and semi-skilled labor and Southeast Asian domestic workers moved in to Amman to fill the void. The 1990-1991 Gulf crisis disrupted this pattern of in and out migration and brought back to Jordan around 300,000 Palestinian and Jordanian “returnees,” many of whom had never lived in Jordan, despite their Jordanian citizenship.\textsuperscript{16}

The 1990s and the 2003 Gulf War brought about the last great wave of migration to Amman in the form of some 500,000 Iraqis, among whom intellectuals, professors, and artists figure prominently.\textsuperscript{17} While some of the Iraqi immigrants are currently seeking refugee status and resettlement in other countries, most have settled in Amman as temporary residents, waiting until Iraq proves to be more stable. This last phase of migration has put a great strain on the city’s resources, both in terms of housing and infrastructure. On the one hand, the recent influx has been an economic benefit, as more bodies equal more consumers. Yet, on the other hand, the new Iraqi migrants have been unwilling to make permanent investments in the city, as their situation still remains uncertain.

It would be difficult to see how the city could maintain urban coherence through all these upheavals, whether materially or discursively. All the more so since the migrations have mostly represented forced, rather than voluntary movements. For most of these migrants, Amman was supposed to be a temporary destination, although for many it ended up being a more lasting one. Yet, paradoxically, while the extreme porosity of Amman may prevent identification with the city as home, it does provide people with a strong sense of attachment to place. Accounts of settlement in Amman, whether Palestinian or settled Bedouin, almost always elicit statements of pride of place: “There was no-one here before us, these were empty lands, wastelands, we made

\textsuperscript{15} Many Palestinians fled from Jordan to the supposed safety of Beirut in 1970. After 1976 and again after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Palestinians and Lebanese, alike, migrated back to Amman, bringing with them a financial windfall and a resultant construction boom in the city.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 214.

Still, the children and grandchildren, especially of the many Palestinian refugees, continue to look in two directions at once: at their temporary “second home,” and toward a homeland lost but not forgotten. For the Palestinian poor in Amman, neighborhood belonging is strong, but refugee identity is stronger. Given this social composition, it is perhaps not surprising that the inhabitants of Amman do not easily identify themselves as “Ammani.”

The third and final element central to the history of Amman, and that which makes it unique amongst other Middle Eastern cities, concerns the features of its built environment. The dramatic physical growth of the city, from a small encampment situated near a water source along the pilgrimage path from Damascus to the Hejaz to an urban sprawl doubling in size every decade or so, is manifest in the spatial disjunctions that characterize Amman. The hilly topography reinforces the disconnectedness of the city; as new neighborhoods populated the hills around the original settlement and commercial areas filled the valleys in between. As new immigrants moved in to the existing areas, the older inhabitants built new neighborhoods to the west, creating a pattern of expansion and movement of wealth in Amman from east to west. Downtown Amman gradually lost its importance as the economic and social center of the city; and without an anchor, the urban fabric frayed apart. Wealth accrued abroad in the 1970s and 1980s led to the desire amongst the elite for larger dwellings and continued to push the city westward into agricultural lands. As those owning those lands sold them, often at great profits, they too became part of the pattern of creeping urbanization to the west.

The resultant urban sprawl and discontinuity of the city belies the numerous planning efforts made by the state to turn Amman into a modern, structured city. Standing atop one of Amman’s many hills, the city seems the epitome of the modern aesthetic: with white stone-faced buildings dotting the skyline. Reduced to its fundamentals, being modern requires either a passive or active assent to the universal nature of modernity, a commitment to an assault on the forms of the past, and the incorporation of a specific, although ultimately mutable, set of ideas and practices. Moreover, being modern has to be observable and reproducible, something that intersects both public and private spheres—not only the city hall and the mosque, but also the

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20. Various Bedouin tribes owned much of the agricultural land to the west of Amman. The sale of this land had the inadvertent effect of settling the tribes and creating a new bourgeoisie.
store front and the apartment building. In a comment on the latest planning efforts for Amman, King Abdullah II assented to those goals: “Our leading challenge is to strike the right balance that encourages the growth, development and modernization of our city on the one hand, while preserving the aesthetic quality, culture, tradition and charm that uniquely characterize and differentiate our city.”

Fawaz and Ilbert point out that the adoption of technology and other outward signs of modernity have done little to disrupt the traditional ties of family, clan, region, and religion of the various residents of Amman. With Palestinians in particular, the proximity of the land to which they cannot return has fueled their nostalgia and brought it into the areas where they have settled. As Seteney Shami stated, though, “Nostalgia is for the past but also for a future, one that is no longer marked by the search for locality but rather for unfettered modernity—a desire to escape and leave behind the messy processes of contested nationhood, of unrealized Palestinianess and Jordanianess, of unrequited nostalgia for a series of lost places: Jerusalem, Beirut, and Baghdad.”

The recent creation of Amman—mirroring the modern formation of the Jordanian kingdom itself—dramatically contrasts with the inveterate history of its neighboring Middle Eastern cities and capitals. Amman lacks the historic depth of Cairo, Jerusalem, and Damascus and does not have the clear-cut identity and image of Tel Aviv and Ankara (although a more thorough comparison of these three modern metropolises is warranted). The culture and social life in the city is in many ways limited and traditional—a recent colleague of mine at the University of Jordan calling Amman “the diet coke of the Middle East”—and this “provinciality” is only partially overcome by the government’s protracted plans to transform Amman into a captivating symbol of modernity.

Amman does not fit into the prototype that has long provided and continues to provide the model for theories on Middle Eastern urbanism. The particularities of Amman defy standard generalizations about the historical formation of the “oriental city,” urban morphologies, population structures, political control, aesthetics, or the social and cultural dynamics of community and family. In all of these topics, Amman does not fit with the governing regional

paradigms. It is commonplace among both residents and scholars of Amman to attribute this “lack of fit” to a missing ingredient of the city itself. In this way, the “diet coke” analogy seems appropriate. How the city is constituted may not attract the scholarly attention of Cairo or Istanbul, but it undoubtedly illustrates the profound modernity and inimitability of the city that is Amman.
Chapter One  
Amman: The Taxi Cabs and Sidewalks of Modernism

Seeing Amman from its northern edge, the city sprawls out inconceivably. Beneath the dust and bleaching sun, white limestone and glints of reflection, clinging to the craggy terrain, rise up over the traffic and noise of Queen Rania Street, fall down past the lush western hills of Shmaisani and Abdali, rise up again to meet the heroic beginnings of Jabal Amman, and finally succumb to the din of the Wasat al-Balad. A texture of forms. Its vibration is momentarily frozen like a Polaroid. It is transformed into the moment when boundaries collide—extremes of intention and reality, contrasts between modernity and tradition, incompatibility between religion and secularism, where nondescript white apartment buildings block out neon-lit minarets. Unlike Cairo, Amman has never learned to grow old. As in Michel de Certeau’s description of New York, “Its present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future.” The quintessential modern city—created from scratch in the first decades of the twentieth century with the expectation of modern urban planning and the desire for modern forms of architecture—struggles in its fulfillment. The pedestrian can see this intention in both the public and private spheres—not only the city hall and the mosque, but also the store front and the apartment building. On this stage of concrete, rebar and stone, perched between the desert and the river valley, Amman is continuously made and remade through discursive and material disjunctures in the consumption of space, in the definition of boundaries, and in competing visions of the good city, the good life, and the public good.26

From nowhere is this voyeuristic view of Amman in its entirety possible. No Eiffel Tower pierces the city skyline, no Empire State building with a panoptic viewing deck—at least not yet. Buildings that rise four stories give little perspective when most other buildings rise the same. Only the pedestrian experiences the city in Amman; the pedestrian and the taxi. Those on the ground in the dust and exhaust only see streets and buildings and neighborhoods. Elites complain of the lack of cosmopolitanism and nightlife, but they cannot read the achievements of the city planner. Intellectuals complain of the lack of artistic or literary movements, but they cannot grasp Amman’s history. Expatriates complain about the lack of authenticity, but they

cannot understand the pressures put on the city by mass migration and urbanization, first by the Palestinians and then by the Lebanese and Iraqis. Ethnic groups complain about the lack of ethnic neighborhoods, but they cannot understand the sedentarization of the Bedouin. The poor, of course, have a great deal to complain about. From afar, this thesis highlights the specificity of the case of Amman as well as its relevance for broader questions on how urban identity is constructed in relation to both modernity and nationhood. Seteney Shami calls Amman “a much-maligned city.” Its inhabitants complain endlessly about its dullness and lack of charm. Yet, it is crucial to realize that the “negative” discourse and its associated practices are quintessentially urban constructs as well as essentially Ammani, and historically situated. Most residents of Amman do not see their city this way. They are blind because of their proximity.

A Walk in Amman

Certeau wrote that “to walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of the proper.” This constant movement is broken up, of course, by instances of deportation and exodus—moments where time stands still at the coffee house, the café, the souk, or the mall—and the intersections of these moments intertwine to create the fabric of the city.

Ironically, walking around the city of Amman is a difficult proposition. The hilly terrain makes a stroll from one’s apartment to the store an arduous task, but this in itself is not prohibitive. With the exception of parts of downtown Amman, where continuous functioning sidewalks are available, most of the city is the undisputed realm of the automobile. Crossing the street is often treacherous, as most intersections do not have crosswalks. The conversion of a number of intersections into underpasses and overpasses in an effort to alleviate traffic congestion has made life even more difficult for the pedestrian. While pedestrian bridges have been set up in some locations, they are too few and far in between. Along the southern edge of the University of Jordan on Queen Rania Street, for example, only three points exist where a pedestrian may cross the street with some level of safety—this to accommodate more than 40,000 students.

Of those places where sidewalks do exist, they often lack continuity from one block to the next. The heights of sidewalks off the street pavement in Amman vary considerably, and residents regularly plant trees with low-hanging branches in their centers. The widening of

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28 de Certeau, Practice, 103.
streets—a not unusual occurrence—tends to eat up adjacent sidewalks, with little thought of consequence. Even in issues of maintenance, the city engineers place priority with the street over the sidewalk. Long after streets are paved and painted, sidewalks habitually remain unfinished.

Unfortunately, the rehabilitation of sidewalks would not address the pedestrian-unfriendly nature of Amman in its entirety. Planning efforts beginning in the 1950s that gave primacy to the automobile still permeate the city’s consciousness. Large thoroughfares that bisect the city in an effort to shuttle cars from one point to the next divide the urban fabric like dams—isolating communities and marginalizing pedestrian life. Shami questioned how modernity translated into quality of life and into the physical and mental well-being of the city’s inhabitants. A “modern house” for the poor, she wrote, also means “conveniences and commodities and the compartmentalization of space.”29 Yet obtaining “modern” spaces does not necessarily ensure “modern” activities or economic benefits. In this way, the forces that govern the production of space do not always control its consumption, and different “modernities” emerge within the city.

Not able to walk from one end of the city to the other, a taxi is a necessity—although it can be a harrowing ride. According to the Department of Statistics, as of 2001, there were more than a quarter million cars registered in Amman and an additional 30,000 taxis.30 As convenient or consistent mass transportation is lacking, for those who cannot afford a car, or those visiting the city, a taxi is the only means of getting around. A ride in a taxi down Queen Rania from the main gate of the University of Jordan in the north to the Husseini Mosque in downtown Amman takes about thirty minutes and costs approximately three JD.31 This journey will inevitably entail the complete disregard for traffic laws and common sense—traffic lanes and speed limits are more suggestions than hard and fast rules. Car horns replace turn signals and greetings—used just to let the other drivers know that they are there. The blasts of car horns also represent a recent wedding celebration, offering an interesting relationship between modernity and tradition.

Beyond the car horn, sound pervades the city. The call to prayer happens five times a day, beginning at about four AM in the summer. In the smoke-filled coffee houses, men chatter about news, politics, and football. Street vendors blast popular Arab and Western music. In the

31 The ride in a taxi (price and duration) is from my personal experience, summer 2010.
souk, merchants call out the prices of vegetables and spices, while traders next door peddle tourist kitsch. Not far from the Wasat al-Balad (center of the city), middle-class Ammani youth mingle with their foreign counterparts in the posh cafes of Jabal Amman. Further west, taxis converge on Amman’s two largest Western malls, City Mall and Mecca Mall. Both have multi-screen movie theaters, food courts, gourmet grocery stores, and any retailer one could find in an American mall. At night, the bubbling sound of argila (water pipes) and the smell of apple-flavored tobacco hover over the cafes and restaurants, and waft out from the private courtyards of the street-lined houses.

In Amman, city officials, planners, tribes, architects, refugees, ethnic groups, and the royal family simultaneously strive to define and modify the spaces they inhabit. The present shape of the city is a result of this ongoing process. Furthermore, the history of Amman over one lone century is really that of multiple histories: Ottoman, British, Bedouin, Palestinian, Iraqi, poor, wealthy, and the emergent middle class. What did each of these groups contribute to the development of the city? How did they see themselves? How did they see each other? The built environment of the city is the accumulation of the desires of these disparate groups: houses, apartment buildings, religious institutions, souks, squatter tents, parks, plazas, shopping malls, and streets provide an increasing variety of spaces, both public and private. Particular assemblages of goods, activities, and behavior in the city are seen to constitute “modern, urban living,” others are valued as “culturally authentic,” and yet others are merely aberrations. How the government and city leaders see the city is evident. The current Amman Master Plan calls for an efficient, modern, and smart city, built to a human scale: “A Green and Pedestrian City.”

Yet, as James C. Scott stated, “The state is the vexed institution that is the ground of both our freedoms and our unfreedoms.” There are alternative narratives in Amman and of Amman. And no one narrative has a greater ontological legitimacy or validity than another.

**The Discontinuity of Modernity**

The relationship between East and West and modernity and tradition nevertheless charges modern Amman society. Arif Dirlik in “Is There History after Eurocentrism? Globalism, Postcolonialism, and the Disavowal of History,” concluded that “modernity is incomprehensible

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without reference to Eurocentrism.” Indeed, in Jordan, European influence significantly 
affected the political and social structure of the country during the Mandate period and continues 
to affect the topographical organization of Amman and the architectural aesthetics of the city 
after independence. Keith Watenpaugh warned that any account that privileges a linear narrative 
of modernization or “Westernization” tends “to reinforce Eurocentric prejudices about Arab and 
Muslim societies by putting the onus for change solely on the shoulders of Westerners and 
characterizing reform as a mimetic reaction to the West.” However, Marshall G. S. Hodgson 
counterected that what is “critically distinctive about modernity” is that “modernity has been not 
simply the rational emancipation from custom, nor has it been simply the further unfolding of a 
bent for progress peculiar to the Western tradition; it has been a cultural transformation sui 
generis.” Hodgson’s claim is particularly relevant as he was examining the transformative 
nature of modernity in parts of the world tangential to its place of origin. Consequently, 
categorizing modernity as a distinct cultural transformation is important not only to 
understanding the history of the Middle East for the past two centuries but to de-centering—or 
perhaps rationalizing—the presence of the West in that history.

Hodgson continued that “being modern required either a passive or active assent to the 
universal nature of modernity, a commitment to an assault on the forms of the past, and the 
incorporation of a specific, although ultimately mutable, set of ideas and practices.” What, 
though, are the Jordanian forms of the past within a created Jordanian culture? And perhaps 
more importantly, how does one regard experience within a heterogeneous context—that is, not a 
“shared” experience? “Experience,” in the words of Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, is 
“always itself discursively framed and understood [and] creates identities of ‘interest,’ textures 
of identification and architectures of community.” At issue for the historian “is the way in which 
experiences are handled in cultural terms, embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas, and 
institutional forms.” Mohammad Al-Asad argued that the history of the Middle Eastern

37 Ibid., 16.
modern city since the middle of the twentieth century has been “a story of severe discontinuities and harsh ruptures.” In order to discuss what Al-Asad meant by “severe discontinuities” and “harsh ruptures,” some consultation on the history of Amman and its residents is in order.

The Founding of Amman

Amman is located on the undulating plateau that rises above the Jordan rift valley in the north-west of Jordan. The original site of the city occupied seven hills, or “jabals,” around a wadi which flows north-east from the plateau to the Zarqa River basin—although expansion in the last twenty-five years has spread across some nineteen hills in total. The topography of the city consists of steep hills and narrow valleys. Most of the districts in Amman take their names from the jabals on which they are located. While initial development principally occurred on the upper slopes of the jabals and in the flat bottoms of the valleys, urban development over the last half-century has filled in most of the steeper mid-slope sections.

Although archeological evidence suggests that there have been inhabitants in the hills around Wadi Amman since at least the seventh millennium B.C.E., the modern city of Amman does not have the long history of continuous settlement of its neighbors Jerusalem and Cairo. Amman was a site of varying importance from the thirteenth century B.C.E. through the medieval Islamic period. In the year 1200 B.C.E., the Ammonites, after whom the city is named, captured the hill that dominates the present-day city center. Amman flourished during the Roman and Byzantine eras as the city of Philadelphia, and its good fortunes continued under the Umayyad dynasty, centered in nearby Damascus. Amman began its gradual decline in the eighth century with the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate and the rise of the Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad; and by the end of the thirteenth century the city had fallen into ruins. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that Amman again became a site for permanent settlement. In the 1870s, Circassian Muslims from the Caucasus seeking refuge within the Ottoman Empire settled in Amman. Subsequent waves of Circassian immigration followed with the last major group arriving in 1912. At the same time, Bedouin Arabs from the surrounding areas, including

Palestine and Syria, began establishing permanent roots in the growing town; and by 1920, Mohammad Al-Asad estimated, the population of Amman had reached some 5,000 inhabitants.\footnote{For further information on the history of Amman, see: Al-Asad, “Ruptures.”; Jane M. Hacker, \textit{Modern Amman: A Social Study}, Research Paper Series, No. 3 (Durham, England: Department of Geography, 1960); J. Hannoyer and S. Shami, eds., \textit{Amman: The City and its Society} (Beirut: CERMOC, 1996); and A. Radwan et al., \textit{Amman: History and Civilization} (in Arabic) (Municipality of Greater Amman, 2000).} 

In April 1921, the Emirate of Transjordan was established under British mandate and Emir Abdullah bin al-Hussein, its first ruler, selected Amman as his new capital over the town of al-Salt to the west. Al-Salt was the largest town in the area and had been the region’s administrative center in the last decades of Ottoman rule. Besides the opportunity to build his capital anew, Abdullah’s choice of Amman was partly attributable to the city’s central location within Transjordan and its place along the Hijaz Railroad line, which had reached the city in 1903. As a result of Amman’s new political and administrative importance, the population of the city grew quickly, reaching 60,000 inhabitants by 1948 (see figs. 1 and 2).\footnote{Al-Asad, “Ruptures,” 47.}

Indeed, the capital of Amman grew in parallel with the development of the state. Reiner Biegel observed that, unlike most cities that grow due to their economic functions, the growth of Amman has largely reflected wider political and geo-political circumstances.\footnote{Reiner Biegel, “Urban Development and the Role of the Service Sector in a ‘Rentier-State’,” in \textit{Amman: The City and its Society}, ed. by J. Hannoyer and S. Shami (Beirut: CERMOC, 1996): 383.} Successive waves of migrants from Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt have sought political stability in Amman. The city has also been the focus of domestic migration, with workers moving to the city to seek jobs in the public sector. However, it is the Palestinians, displaced as a result of the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, that have formed the main wave of migrants to Amman.
Palestinian Migration

Palestinian identity in Jordan is a complex issue, often categorized by place of origin, period of migration, and location of settlement. The fact that these would-be simple classifications vary even between members of nuclear families only serves to complicate efforts at defining what it means to be a Palestinian in Jordan. The first wave of Palestinian migration to Amman happened in the 1920s and 1930s. These first migrants, numbering some 10,000 before 1948, came mostly from Safed, Haifa, and Acre on the northern Mediterranean coast of Palestine, tended to be educated, and came to the new capital in search of positions in civil service. The towns of Irbid, Salt, and Zarqa’ also absorbed a number of immigrants during this period, although they were often from rural villages and migrated due to familial ties.44

The 1948 War over the newly-formed State of Israel brought the second wave of Palestinian migration. Beginning in 1947, refugees fled west across the Jordan River seeking shelter from the conflict and this exodus continued throughout the war. In all, perhaps 100,000 of the 450,000 Palestinians who crossed into Jordan (both East and West Bank) settled east of the river.45 While refugees from the eastern Galilee region went to Irbid and northern Jordan, those from the larger towns of Lydda, Ramleh, and Jaffa preferred Amman and Zarqa’, places that could provide better employment opportunities and accommodations.46 The first to arrive in Amman were mostly wealthy or those that owned vehicles or buses. This initial movement was followed by the arrival of large numbers of villagers who scattered all over the East Bank, but especially in the areas just north of Amman. Palestinian Bedouin migrants with their herds and flocks found it difficult to encroach on cultivated areas and settled in the central river valley, both east and west of the river, where water was available.47 The constant movement of refugees had an accumulating effect, as Palestinians followed east in search of relatives and employment.

Much of this migration and displacement paralleled the process of urbanization. With the growth of cities came competition amongst the Palestinian immigrants, as well as between them and the local population. Nearly a year after the beginning of the conflict, and with the prospects of a quick return of the refugees to their homes fading, the United Nations General Assembly

46 Plascov, Palestine Refugees, 33.
47 One result of the 1948 War was the classification of the Bedouin as either East Bank or West Bank, and therefore Palestinian. While the East Bank Bedouin saw their West Bank counterparts as Palestinian refugees, the notion of a Palestinian nationality had little meaning for the latter at the time.
granted a three-year mandate to a special agency to provide for refugee needs in cooperation with the local government.\(^{48}\) The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was to conduct “direct relief and works programs” among the Palestinian refugees, and to “prevent conditions of starvation and distress and to further conditions of peace and stability.”\(^{49}\) In an effort to solve the immediate housing crisis brought on by the influx of refugees, UNRWA established four camps in the years following 1948: the first near Zarqa’ (1949), the next just outside Irbid (1951), Jabal al-Hussein northwest of Amman (1952), and al-Wihdat (The New Camp) southeast of the city (1955). Although each started as little more than a group of tents and temporary structures, all four camps are now fully-developed neighborhoods, integrated into their respective cities.\(^{50}\)

Three more waves of Palestinian migration occurred over the next half-century. In 1967, as a result of the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, an additional 180,000 refugees fled to Amman. More recently, over 170,000 refugees are estimated to have settled in the city following the 1990-91 Gulf crisis\(^{51}\) and perhaps up to 500,000 more Iraqis and Palestinians have moved to Amman since the beginning of the 2003 Gulf War, prompting Simone Ricca to call Amman the “virtual capital of Iraq.”\(^{52}\) All told, there are currently ten official UNRWA camps and three unofficial ones in Jordan, housing more than two million total refugees. According to a 2010 UN-Habitat report on the State of the World’s Cities, one in four of the two million plus residents of Amman today are refugees, the highest proportion of refugees of any city in the world.\(^{53}\)

But how has the local population regarded this influx of newcomers? While many Jordanians viewed and continue to view the plight of the Palestinian with sympathy, many looked down on the refugees with massive contempt.\(^{54}\) UNRWA only provided work for those


\(^{50}\) According to the UNRWA, the Zarqa’ camp currently has more than 20,000 registered refugees; Irbid (25,000); Jabal al-Hussein (29,000); and Wihdat (51,500). Each faces severe overcrowding. Figures as of Dec. 31, 2010. <www.unrwa.org> (Oct. 6, 2011).


\(^{53}\) UN-Habitat, “Urban Trends.”

\(^{54}\) Plascov, *Palestine Refugees*, 34.
they defined as registered refugees, or one “whose normal residence was Palestine for a minimum period of two years immediately preceding the outbreak of conflict in 1948 and who, as a result of this conflict, lost both his home and his means of livelihood.” This did not sit well with the poorer Jordanians, especially in the rural South where unemployment tended to be higher. In Amman, where Palestinian immigration had occurred for twenty years or more before 1948, the Jordanian-Palestinian dynamic was more nuanced. Palestinians already played a large role in the economic life of the city, and many of them even acquired the local Arabic dialect to better integrate into Jordanian society. All the same, the locals viewed the frequent Palestinian protests against the Hashemite monarchy as an affront to their generosity. With every Israeli military action in the West Bank, Palestinians accused the monarchy of not sending military help, or arming the Palestinians themselves. The Jordanians in turn reminded the Palestinians that “they ran away from their country in the face of the Jews,” and that anything done for them was undeserved. The tensions between the Palestinian refugees and their Jordanian hosts came to a head on July 20, 1951, when a Palestinian gunman assassinated King Abdullah on the steps of the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem as he entered for Friday prayer.

The relationship between Jordan and her Palestinian refugee population has been multifarious since the death of King Abdullah. On the one hand, Jordanians as a whole are sensitive to the Palestinian plight. Between December, 1949 and 1988, the government granted nearly all Palestinian refugees full Jordanian citizenship—including voting rights, access to education, and healthcare—without having to give up their UN refugee status. On the other hand, violence between the armed Palestinian fedayeen and the Jordanian army erupted into civil war in 1970, leading to the ouster of Palestinian leadership from Jordan in 1971. Finally, on July 31, 1988, King Hussein formally renounced Jordan’s claim to the West Bank. Jordan was not the West Bank, he declared, and responsibility for the West Bank was henceforth to rest with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), headed by Yasser Arafat. As a result, and at the encouragement of the PLO, thousands of Palestinians denounced their Jordanian citizenship in order to prevent the possibility that they might lose their rights of return. Most, though—long-

56 Plascov, Palestine Refugees, 35.
57 Ibid., 35.
58 The Fedayeen, from the Arabic word for sacrifice or ransom (fada), were the armed militant faction within the Palestinian resistance, specifically against Israel.
since entrenched in Jordanian society—chose to remain citizens. In 1989, even though both sides conceded that those of Palestinian descent now represented the majority in Jordan, Parliament passed electoral laws to guarantee a Jordanian majority status in parliamentary representation, on the grounds that they were the original Jordanians and provided the “backbone” of the country.60

**Palestinian Identity**

Perhaps more important than how Jordanians viewed the refugees was how Palestinians viewed themselves. Palestinians refer to the feelings of loss, alienation, tragedy, and betrayal that surround their loss of land and identity in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War as *al-nakba*, or the catastrophe.61 That year, the nakba year, has played a central role in the construction of Palestinian historical consciousness as well as Palestinian identity. Palestinians in exile use the *nakba* to periodize their existence, with the pre-1948 period romanticized and referred to as one of stability and happiness, and the post-1948 era referred to as a series of displacements, miseries, bad luck, and suffering.62

Palestinian identity also reflects these pre and post 1948 periods in the symbols they use to represent themselves as distinct from their Jordanian neighbors. Most Palestinian refugees in and around Amman retain artifacts from their ancestral villages, such as keys to their homes or deeds to their land. In Amman, many refugees emphasize their peasant origins to demonstrate that they don’t belong to their urban setting. For example, they use the term *fallah* (peasant) to distinguish themselves from the other people of Amman. Despite their origins, these kinds of activities have nothing to do with performing current skills as peasants, as Palestinian refugees work in all manner of skilled and unskilled employment in Jordan. In this way, “the *fallah* has been made the symbolic representative of the cultural and historical continuity of the Palestinians.”63

As migration increased after 1948 and through 1967, housing structures in al-Hussein and al-Wihdat in Amman went from tents to clay huts to concrete and stone houses and apartment buildings. From an aesthetic standpoint, little separates Palestinian vernacular architecture from

60 Ibid., 270.
that of its Jordanian neighbors. Jabal al-Hussein, the older of the Amman camps, is indistinguishable from its surrounding neighborhoods. There is no fence or wall surrounding it. The mostly three and four-story concrete and white limestone buildings exemplify the same unornamented, modernist aesthetic as the rest of the districts just west of central Amman. The structural form which developed in al-Wihdat (The Amman New Camp), on the other hand, is more historically interesting. The haphazardly organized tents and temporary structures that refugees in al-Wihdat initially lived in lasted beyond the period when other settlements began to build more permanent structures. When concrete and stone buildings finally emerged in al-Wihdat, they did so piecemeal, with each new structure replacing an old one. As a result, the urban form of the permanent camp matched the irregular nature of its transient roots. In an interview with Salman Rushdie, Edward Said said, “Palestinians are a people who move a lot, who are always carrying bags from one place to another. This gives us a further sense of identity as a people.”

**Bedouin Identity and Place**

Although, numerically, few Jordanians today live a traditional nomadic life, the cultural traditions based on this way of life are still prevalent, with the country’s Bedouin heritage deeply entwined in modern Jordanian culture and identity. Generally, clear social groupings are characteristic of nomadic societies, which usually reflect kinship relationships. The tribe is the basic production unit of this hierarchically-based social structural system. J. Festner described nomadic societies as a process where “kinship groups gather into tribes, and tribes gather into groups of tribes, which together form confederations. These social divisions facilitate living in the desert conditions where water and fertile soil are scarce.” While the issues of nomadic desert life (scarcity of food and water, security) become less of a concern in sedentary communities, in many ways, the social structure built in the desert remains. The importance of kinship affects interpersonal relationships, marriage, business dealings, education, as well as

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housing, which Amos Rapoport said tends to be “mobile, undermanned, and defined in terms of highly specific people, social organizations, and ways of doing things.”

It is difficult to assign distinguishing individual characteristics to any group, but Jabril Jabbur offered the following portrayal of the Bedouin of Jordan. In general, the harshness of the desert environment lends itself to a certain tolerance of hardship. With that said, the Bedouin value independence and hold contempt for any regulatory system that restricts individuality. The Bedouin are well known for their loyalty, but this loyalty is first to the tribe and the tribal leader (sheikh) before all else. Generosity is so deeply rooted in Bedouin culture that all guests are welcomed and must be given food and shelter. Bedouin on the verge of starvation have been known to give away their last food to visitors, saying that they have plenty. Perhaps, most importantly, the Bedouin place great importance on honor, or ird, both as individuals and as members of a group. While honor serves to guard behavior, it also manifests itself in the seeking of revenge for perceived wrongs, and in “honor killings,” notably of tribal women suspected of immoral acts.

Within Jordan, some twenty six tribal groups occupy the Northern, Middle, and Southern regions of the country. All have common and consistent cultural features, including Sunni Islam, Arabic language (although dialects vary), and patrilineal social organization. Under Ottoman rule, “the central government had little interest in the region beyond the tax revenues obtained from its sedentary population.” Interest in control over the various Bedouin tribes in Jordan did not begin in earnest until after the British Mandate. The new central administration took several steps to integrate the Bedouin into the sedentary Jordanian society, including the establishment of international borders and the imposition of transit requirements. Most important to these sedentarization efforts, though, was the creation of the Jordanian national army. Through the army, the Bedouin learned to accept the existence of the central government, first as a source of help in the case of drought, and later as a means of education. Beyond introducing formal education through military training, the army set up primary schools held initially in police stations or in tents along the Bedouin’s paths of migration.

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Sedentarization of the Bedouin tribes in Jordan, and by corollary, urbanization of the populace, has been the result of procedural efforts by the central government. Carl Salzman argued that the Jordanian Bedouin tribes were “drawn into modernity,” through a process of sedentarization in which “detribalization and deculturalization” were the tools used by the State.\textsuperscript{70} Prior to 1921, nomadic peoples from around the Jordan valley enjoyed freedom of travel throughout the Ottoman territories, spreading from the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq in the east, to the Sudan in the south and Syria in the north. After WWI, when the Arab nation-states began to emerge from the fallen Ottoman Empire, Arab leaders including Abdullah Bin Al-Hussein sought to restrict the movement of nomads across state boundaries. Paul Jureidini claimed that “one of [Emir Abdullah’s] first efforts was to establish a coherent security force that would ensure his control” over the borders of his land.”\textsuperscript{71} The Jordanian government enacted tribal laws in 1924, 1929, and 1936, all meant to “shift the loyalty of the Bedouin tribes from [a] loyalty to [a] person… to a loyalty to Jordan in a national sense, to its institutions and political organizations.”\textsuperscript{72} While laws tended to evoke a negative reaction, the spread of education, compulsory military service, and the centralization of basic services in urban centers such as Amman brought about the desired result of detribalization the government sought.

Some interesting correlations exist between the nomadic Bedouin tent and the sedentary Arab house, which forms the basis for much of the villa architecture in Amman. Among the Bedouin, the word \textit{bayt}, or house, represents not only the physical structure but also the people inhabiting it. For example, a Bedouin tribesman named Mohammed will refer to his family as \textit{bayt} Mohammed. Accordingly, the rules that govern Bedouin society also dictate the spatial arrangement of the Bedouin tent. Tents, traditionally made of black goat hair, are divided into two compartments by an ornately decorated curtain called a \textit{qata’}. The first space is the living area, which women occupy during the day performing domestic work such as cooking, and in which family members sleep at night. The other side is a larger, male-dominated space, oriented around a fire pit for making coffee, with a grouping of mattresses and rugs meant for receiving guests. The two compartments remain carefully separated in order to preserve women’s privacy. Going from one space to the other requires leaving the tent from one side and reentering it on the

other. Bedouin consider hospitality and protecting women’s honor important components of Bedouin culture and both are considered as much the man’s responsibility as it is the woman’s.

In regards to the color of the tent, Mahmoud Na’amneh, et al argued that the black tent is the “archetype of subversive anti-architecture.” The specific “blackness” of the tent serves to underline the “otherness” of the structure in comparison to the fixed house or building, where, at least in twentieth-century modernist attitudes toward architecture, “white” is superior and progressive. It is no coincidence that strict building code requires all buildings in Amman to be made from white limestone. From a more practical standpoint, goat hair as a construction material is a good insulator and once wet, becomes waterproof as the hair fibers swell and the natural oils help to repel moisture. Even so, a dialectical relationship is evident in Bedouin culture and place making: man and woman, public and private, desert and city, nomadic and sedentary, goat hair and stone, black and white. Although these relationships have broken down in the city over time, Amman remains tied in many ways to these traditions.

In the fixed Arab house of Amman, the plan is the physical representation of the Bedouin relationship between culture and place. The interior of the house is identified with the sacred family sphere. As the woman represents this sacred aspect of the house, she is traditionally encouraged to veil herself when leaving the protective shell of the house and entering the public realm of the city – a basically male domain. In a similar fashion, this concern is reflected in the special care with which openings in the architectural skin of the house are treated. Windows are “veiled” with ornate wooden latticework (mashrabiya), gates often have smaller doors incorporated into them, so as to minimize the opening whenever possible, and entry vestibules are positioned in such a way as to obstruct the view of the inner home.

The interior arrangement of the house is usually based on a number of cellular units grouped around a central distribution space or courtyard. The cellular system is a reflection of the need to subdivide larger family groups into several smaller units. The single rooms do not correspond to archetypes such as bedroom, living room, or dining room, as all domestic activities took place in one space within the Bedouin tent. The polyvalent use of space in the fixed house recalls the underlying nomadic simplicity of the inhabitants, and, as such, implies a minimum of

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73 Na’amneh, “Modern Sociocultural Significance,” 149-163.
75 For more on the traditional Arab house, see Stefano Bianca, Urban Form in the Arab World: Past and Present (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000).
permanent furniture. Storage space is mostly integrated into wall niches. The lack of furniture, which would have been too unwieldy to carry from camp to camp, led to the habit of living on the ground, using mattresses and pillows. Tables, rather than large boards, consist of collapsible stands with metal trays on which to serve food. The flexibility of space also comes into play with regard to climate, where the lower rooms of the house can take precedence in the summer, and the upper, sunnier rooms are given preference in the winter.

**Conclusion**

While house design traditionally reflects the culture of its inhabitants and is reflected in the spatial organization within, architecture in Amman also is representative of the modern social, economic, and technological realities of the period. The massive influx of migrants to the city, whether from Palestinian refugees or Bedouin urbanization, forced the urban environment to change and adapt and put pressure on the populations to change as well. This is Amman’s version of the “severe discontinuities and harsh ruptures” that Mohammad Al-Asad argued formed the crux of the Middle Eastern modern city. The traditional courtyard house became the apartment building, itself a mere expansion of its own cellular system. Swimming pools replaced courtyards. The family house detached itself from the street according to set-back building legislation. Cheaper concrete block or precast concrete units replaced skilled masonry stonework. Reinforced concrete columns with steel rebar spearing out awaiting an additional floor slab that may never come are now ubiquitous across the Amman skyline. Modernity is the shared experience of the hybrid culture of Amman; and it is this experience that has created the city.
Chapter Two
Building an Identity

From the perspective of the built environment, the history of Amman is two-fold: one, creating an identity where one did not readily exist; and two, adapting to enormous periods of population growth and migration. As to the first, the planning and architectural history of Amman shows that the city’s identity has been and continues to be re-imagined. As for the second, while planning efforts have proven themselves unable to account for the instability caused by population influx, the pattern of incorporating new cultures into the city, in itself, has created a kind of physical identity for Amman.

During the nineteenth century, several factors affected urbanization across the Middle East, with urban growth generally matching population growth as a whole. Besides high mortality rates, large-scale epidemics and periodic famines marked the century. In Cairo, for example, a cholera epidemic in 1831 and a plague in 1835 resulted in 500,000 deaths. Famine ravished the Maghreb in 1866 and 1888, and cholera hit Tehran in 1870-71. With that said, Istanbul and Cairo dominated the urban geography of the Middle East during this period of transition. One townsman in five lived in one of these two urban centers at the middle of the century, which had 391,000 and 305,000 inhabitants respectively.

As sanitary conditions, medical treatments, and communications improved in the first half of the twentieth century, mortality rates declined rapidly. Between 1870 and 1930, modernization policies, either under the direct aegis of colonization (the Levant and North Africa) or through the influence of Europe (Egypt, Turkey, and Iran) led to the first large-scale efforts at urbanization. The population of Cairo rose from 374,000 in 1882 to 1.3 million in 1937. In 1927, half the population of Cairo had not been born in the city.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, almost all cities in the Middle East corresponded to the oft-described model of the “oriental city.” Walls surrounded all the major cities, even if those walls were in ruins (as was the case in Baghdad and Tehran). In Jerusalem, the gates to the city’s walls closed every evening until 1880, partly out of security concerns but also to underline the political authority of the city powers and to stress the identity of the city in

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76 Hourcade, “Demography,” 162.
77 Ibid., 163.
78 Ibid., 164.
contrast to its rural surroundings. The royal palace or governor’s palace and the great mosque dominated architecturally, along with the souk or bazaar. Peter Sluglett noted that all Muslim Middle Eastern cities contain two of the major normative establishments of Islamic society, the Friday mosque and the law court. The plan or network of streets in the medina, though, was not that different from its nineteenth century European counterparts. Streets (and consequently, sanitation) wound narrowly between the closely spaced buildings, with little thought to circulation or hierarchy. Wide avenues or great piazzas like those in Isfahan or Istanbul were exceptional.

In Cairo, substantial redevelopment began in the 1830s, but it was only during the reign of Khedive Isma’il Pasha (1863-79) that the city was fundamentally transformed. Influenced by the Haussmanian reorganization of Paris, Isma’il ordered the construction of a European-style city to the west of the existing medieval center of Cairo. The new districts of ‘Azbakiyya, ‘Abdin, and Isma’iliyya featured a network of expansive boulevards connecting a dozen open squares (maydans), consistent with French city planning principles. For Isma’il, the new quarters gave the city a façade of urban respectability, but after the British took control in 1882, they functioned more as a colonial enclave. Andre Raymond remarked that after 1882, Cairo became two cities, “an indigenous city [with dilapidated streets fit for the poor and unemployed] and a ‘European’ city [the new center of tourism, politics, and banking].”

From above, the oldest quarters (medina) of a Middle Eastern city thus has a particular look of disorder. Streets, lanes, and passages intersect at varying angles with a density that resembles the intricate complexity of some organic process. States and city planners have striven, as one might expect, to overcome this spatial unintelligibility and to make urban geography transparently legible from without. The aboveground order of the grid city in modern planning facilitates the underground order of the layout of water pipes, storm drains, sewers, electric cables, natural gas lines, and subways. Delivering mail, collecting taxes, conducting a census, moving supplies and people in and out of the city, putting down an insurrection, and

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80 Sluglett, Urban, 2.
planning public transportation, water supply, and trash removal are all made vastly simpler by the logic of the grid.

Awqaf, or Islamic religious endowments, played a significant role in the organization and administration of the traditional city, yet proved to be a hindrance to modern planning efforts. Waqf properties, inviolable in nature, gave permanence to whole sections of cities. So long as the foundation behind the waqf remained in existence and the mutawalli (caretaker) continued to perform his duties, mosques, libraries, fountains, schools, and even houses were assured of their maintenance and their fixed place in the medina. In some cities, waqf properties contributed to a type of rent control and helped maintain a competitive balance between small retail and craft shops and the bazaar.82

However, the capacity of the waqf to arrest new development and limit modernization efforts affected most of the larger Middle Eastern cities in the second half of the nineteenth century as urbanization began to increase.83 While the institution of waqf was effective in maintaining the traditional medina, it forced urban developers to move expansion projects outside the city walls or to build new cities altogether. Besides contributing to the difficulty traditional cities had adapting to urban growth, the waqf status of too many buildings in the city core hindered the medina’s ability to adapt to modern trends such as the automobile and closed sewer systems.84

World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire marked a dramatic shift in the direction of Middle Eastern urbanization, characterized in part by the development of new urban centers such as Amman, Tel Aviv, Ankara and Riyadh, but also by the reconstitution of long-established Islamic cities as modern metropolises. The extremely rapid urban growth in the region in the latter part of the twentieth century was primarily due to three tendencies: the extreme centralization of political authority, the greater availability of services in the cities, and the social and economic conditions in the countryside that made agriculture increasingly unprofitable and unattractive.85 One major contrast between the twentieth-century urbanization in the Middle East and the similar happenings in Europe was the emergence in the Middle East of huge capital

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cities, often two or three times the size of the second and third cities in their countries, largely because of the acute centralization of political and administrative functions in the developing world.

Common among the colonial cities of the Middle East, in particular, was an interest in the preservation of indigenous culture and architectural style. Although well intentioned, this interest contributed to the segregation of cities. Amman was never the “double city” of Cairo, but the city was and remains economically divided from east to west—with the western hills of Jabal Amman and Abdoun the enclave of the wealthy and eastern Amman consisting of the Islamic center and refugee camps. In Weber’s study of the city, the medieval European city-state, with its autonomous municipality and independent urban bourgeoisie, was a precondition for the development of the modern city; this could be contrasted with the Islamic traditional city which lacked these features. Modern urban planning was an ideological statement acting on the very arena where the forces of modernization were clashing with tradition.

The French urban planner Henri Prost, in describing his achievements at the first conference on colonial urban planning, boasted that he had subjected the oriental city of Rabat to “the genius for order, proportion and clear reasoning of our country.” The grand plan has no necessary relationship to the order of life as it is experienced by its residents. Although certain state services may be more easily provided for and distant addresses more easily located, these apparent advantages may be negated by such perceived disadvantages as the absence of dense street life, the intrusion of hostile authorities, the loss of spatial irregularities that foster attachment to place, gathering places for informal recreation, and neighborhood feeling. In Amman, the role of the colonial planner in the city’s planning history was perhaps more nuanced. Fawaz and Ilbert argued that, although the British deeply affected the history of Jordan as its creator and colonial ruler, they did not greatly affect the physical layout of Jordan’s main cities, including Amman.

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88 Leila Fawaz and Robert Ilbert, “Political Relations between City and State in the Colonial Period,” in The Urban Social History of the Middle East, 1750-1950, ed. by Peter Sluglett (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008): 148.
with the spacious “European” cities the French and Italians built in North Africa, and Fawaz and Ilbert reason that there is not much lasting physical evidence of colonial rule in the Levant.\(^8^9\)

**The Planning of Amman**

Since 1955, city and government officials developed five plans for the city of Amman, each nearly ten years apart: 1955, 1968, 1978, 1988, and 2008. Physical plans usually have their own rationality, and that rationality is not always the same for all planning efforts. They normally contain a survey of existing resources; estimates of current and expected population and geographical distribution; trends in urban and rural growth as well as the physical limitations on growth; recommendations on administrative reform, and so on. They also can include specific urban design and architectural proposals and recommendations for an overall image for the city. Since the turn of the twentieth century, planning efforts in the Middle East have been primarily concerned with the often dynamic population growth of the urban centers. According to the United Nations 2003 World Urbanization Prospects report, in 1950, the countries of Western Asia (every “Middle Eastern” country, with the exception of Egypt) had a collective urban percentage of 27.1%. In 1990, that figure stood at 61.2%; and in 2030, the urban percentage is expected to reach 72.3%. In Jordan, the 1990 figure already stood at 72.2%.\(^9^0\)

These planning efforts have been largely dependent on European expertise, whether directly or indirectly. While either European, North American, or Japanese planners developed each of the first four plans for Amman, Egypt, for example, began training its own engineers and architects as early as 1887 at the *Muhandiskhana*, although this was a decidedly western-influenced institution. Between 1867 and 1868, Ali Pasha Mubarak, who had studied in Paris, designed the first comprehensive plan for Cairo, based on a Haussmannian western planning model.\(^9^1\) Elsewhere, the European influence was more direct. The first plans for Baghdad were made by German and then British planners. The Greek planner Constantinos Doxiadis also left his mark in Baghdad in 1959 and later in Kirkuk in 1972.\(^9^2\) In Syria, the French architect and

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\(^9^1\) Raymond, *Cairo*, 309.

urbanist Andre Gutton planned a road scheme for Aleppo that first brought motorized traffic into the Old City.

Likewise, Amman has had its share of planning efforts: each an attempt, as Seymour Mandelbaum has argued, at defining policy, creating a design opportunity, or telling a story.93 Gerald King and Max Lock, authors of the earliest plan for Amman (1955), wrote of the importance of linking urban design and architectural proposals to the social and economic context of the city: “The future of this unique city is in the hands of those who will administer the Plan, for if the scheme has been designed upon the right economic and social foundations, the plan will be judged by its architecture and the relation of this to the landscape and civic design.”94 The 1955 Plan called for the development of self-contained hilltop neighborhoods, grouped around the valley from which the original city had extended, and linked by a series of roads from hilltop to hilltop which also connected back to the city center. Interestingly, many of the proposals illustrated in the first four plans for Amman have been implemented, although at times begrudgingly. The time lag between proposal and implementation ranges from ten years to forty-seven, causing Nabil Abu-Dayyeh to term Amman’s planning history a “persisting vision.”95

Unlike Cairo’s somewhat regular development, Amman’s population did not grow incrementally but experienced sudden and massive growth in 1948, 1967, 1973, 1990, and 2003. From a mere population of 60,000 in 1948 to over 2.2 million today, Amman has grown tremendously in the span of sixty-two years.96 This has led to severe shortages in arable land, housing, infrastructure, and services, and contributed to the creation of the image that Amman’s growth has been uncontrolled and unplanned. Urban sprawl to the west and north during the burgeoning decades of the 1950s and 1960, then again during the oil boom of the 1970s, and more recently with the repatriation of nearly 300,000 Jordanians after the First Gulf War and perhaps 500,000 Iraqis after the Second Iraq War has contributed to this image of a city struggling to accommodate its fast-growing local and migrant population (see fig. 7 in Appendix).

95 Abu-Dayyeh, “Persisting Vision,” 82.
96 Al-Asad, “Ruptures,” 47.
This image, however, belies the substantive planning efforts made by the national Jordanian government and the city municipality. Fuad Malkawi, in his dissertation on the history of planning in Greater Amman, saw a continuity between the first planning efforts in 1955 and the 1988-2005 Greater Amman Comprehensive Development Plan (GACDP). In both, he saw the persistence of British planning principles and the idea of preserving historical areas; the second of these he connected to the need of forging a national identity for the new-born Jordanian nation-state.97 As for the influence of British ideas, these persisted even when the non-British participated in the planning efforts, such as the Czech planner Victor Lorenz in 1968. Concepts such as limiting the geographical size of the city through the preservation of a surrounding green belt and the creation of satellite communities were consistent visions throughout, and are integral parts of the newest Greater Amman Plan. These at first would seem incongruous with the desire to connect to a national past; but as the piecemeal planning of Amman shows, the development of identity in Amman is an ongoing process. In 2007, King Abdullah II wrote in a letter to the Mayor of Amman, “Our leading challenge is to strike the right balance that encourages the growth, development and modernization of our city on the one hand, while preserving the aesthetic quality, culture, tradition and charm that uniquely characterize and differentiate our city.”98 Indeed, creating such an identity for Amman remains a struggle.

Under the 1988 GACDP, the greater metropolitan area of Amman was consolidated under a single administrative apparatus, the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM). This consolidation process brought the city enormous economic benefits through streamlining bureaucratic processes and expanding the city tax base. It also made possible several large civic undertakings in the form of roads, bridges, parks, and public buildings.99 Furthermore, the GACDP included recommendations for satellite communities towards the eastern and southern outer edges of the city, as a means to combat the ongoing sprawl to the west, to fight inflationary land prices, and as a solution to future population concerns. In the course of the years that followed, though, instead of implementing the proposals for two separate satellite communities, the GAM opted instead to expand the city boundaries, making the proposed settlements part of the city itself.

98 al Hussein, “King Abdullah's Letter.”
Although Amman experienced periods of great upheaval and transformation before—it is perhaps the city’s defining feature—migration, again, drastically affected the physical nature of the city during the First Gulf War. Unlike the previous Palestinian migrations, the substantial group that came to Amman in the 1990s was largely comprised of professionals from Kuwait and other countries of the Gulf region. Most of these migrants had enjoyed a high standard of living and, consequently, had considerable savings. These newcomers provided a significant economic boost to Amman during the decade that followed. They bought properties, invested in business, and, most importantly, introduced new consumption patterns to the city. New restaurants, nightclubs, supermarkets, and megamalls emerged to meet these new demands.

Equally, Amman’s skyline changed considerably in the 1990s. Whereas before, most buildings were limited to a height of four stories, a number of high-rise buildings began to emerge in the city, particularly international hotel chains. This trend increased throughout the decade, damaging the unified scale that had characterized Amman. The high-rises also increased pressure on the infrastructure, particularly the roads, which were already subject to considerable traffic congestions. Throughout Amman’s planning history, the automobile has played a significant role. In an effort to facilitate traffic concerns, the city constructed tunnels and overpasses at major intersections, thereby forcing some city streets to take on the mutually exclusive task of serving as a motorway or service road. Consequently, these decisions have substantially hampered pedestrian movement, which already suffered from lack of access to sidewalks. This is further complicated by the inadequate public transportation system, which tends to be used solely by those who cannot afford personal cars or private taxis.

As highlighted earlier, the groups that make up the varied population of Amman fit into a range of categories, including socio-economic, ethnic, and national. These groups sometimes occupy different physical spheres in the city, sometimes share the same, and sometimes intersect in their use of physical space. Amman is neither highly well organized in terms of planning or zoning practices, nor is it subject to an extensive authoritarian system which seeks to segregate its inhabitants. Yet, Amman also is not a fully integrated city that contains cultural, social, and economic spaces where different inhabitants come together. Instead, the city remains a mixture

of economically and socially distinct districts, as well as “hazy” areas that are less easy to categorize or define.

Efforts aside, the inability to enact an overarching plan for Amman in a timely manner has had its effects on the city. Lack of efficient planning and the emergence of a real estate industry that benefited from the absence of proper zoning and land use regulations are both to blame for the chaotic fabric of the city. Ignorant and at times corrupt city officials zoned large agricultural lands on the periphery of Amman for development at the behest of investors, with little regard for proper land use.\footnote{Mohammad Al-Asad, “Urban Sprawl,” \textit{Jordan Times} (17 September 2004).} Indeed, simply defining the boundaries of Amman is one of the major functions of the 2008 Amman Master Plan. Even decisions made by well-meaning public officials were not always effective—with chaotic building development, urban sprawl, pollution, traffic congestion, inefficient public transportation, and inadequate infrastructure services the outcome. Malkawi argued that “planning discourse, as it [has existed] in Amman, [has been] produced by several contesting political and ideological elements. The combination of these elements is too powerful to allow one element to prevail and completely dominate the discourse. Hegemony is embedded in the discourse by its association with the various elements, rather than one single element.”\footnote{Malkawi, “Hidden Structures,” 8.} As Fawaz and Ilbert pointed out, modernization requires a greater degree of centralization on the part of the state.\footnote{Fawaz and Ilbert, “Political Relations,” 141.} While the Hashemite leadership exerts complete political control over the Jordanian state, this has so far not reduced the chaotic, disorderly, and constantly changing social and physical reality of Amman.

**Limestone Modernism**

Like its planning history, Amman owes much of its architectural legacy to its relationship with the West. From a cultural standpoint, Western interest in the Middle East in the late nineteenth century focused almost obsessively on biblical history and the origins of mankind. James Henry Breasted, in founding the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago in 1919, wrote that he hoped the institute would “[trace] ancient man’s ‘progress’ towards civilization, long before the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome.”\footnote{The Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, “Brochure,” \textit{Sifting the Sands of Time: The Oriental Institute and the Ancient Near East}, (Oct. 6, 1991 – Dec. 31, 1992).} When attention turned specifically toward the Islamic period, it too centered on the question of origin. The first archeological excavations consequently began at the Umayyad palaces and mosques in Syria.
and at the Abbasid capitals of Baghdad and Samarra in Iraq. While grand imperial palaces and mosque complexes attracted the most attention, archeologists mostly ignored sites that would now be termed “popular culture,” such as local shrines and bazaars.

Certain cities and monuments in the Middle East were familiar to Europeans as early as the seventeenth century, when documentation and descriptions by travelers such as Adam Olearius and Engelbert Kaempfer in Iran emerged. Whole-scale architectural documentation came about in the nineteenth century, first on the occasion of Napoleon’s conquest of Egypt with Description de l’Egypt (1828) and later through diplomatic commissions, such as those undertaken by Pascale Coste. Travel literature, catalogues of exhibitions and fairs, and architectural surveys all served to provide an extensive, if decontextualized, documentation of architecture in the Middle East within the colonial frame. They nevertheless proved the precursor to the more academic works that followed, finally providing some intellectual and historical interpretation for the sites and buildings already catalogued.

Perhaps the most influential Western figure in the writing of Islamic Architecture was Keppel Archibald Creswell. An electrical engineer by trade and an accomplished draftsman, Creswell trained himself in Middle Eastern architectural history, his self-proclaimed passion. After World War I, while working for the British army in Egypt, Creswell requested and received the help of King Fu’ad I to assist in funding his masterwork, Early Muslim Architecture (1932-1940). The project, as Creswell described it, would catalogue “one of the greatest and most interesting branches of Muslim architecture, which will make known in all parts of the world the glorious achievements, as well as the history and evolution, of modern architecture in Egypt.” Creswell’s statement is valuable in pointing to his mixed goals with regards to the study of Islamic architecture: to both locate and describe a glorious past, and, as he wrote to King Fa’ud in the dedication to his book, to inspire the future. In contrast with many of his contemporaries in the West, who advocated a modern architecture devoid of historical reference,

107 Coste’s Architecture Arabe; ou, Monuments du Kaire: Mesurés et dessinés, de 1818 a 1826 (1839) and Monuments modernes de la Perse, mesurés, dessinés et décrits (1867) were milestones in the way architecture was presented to the viewer in an academic, Beaux-Arts fashion.
108 The life and legacy of K.A.C. Cresswell is discussed at length in Muqarnas 8 (1990).
Creswell advanced the idea that the past might itself serve in the creation of new nationalist ideologies in the Middle East.

Creswell’s concern for the past and the future seems rather contemporary considering the current Jordanian architectural discourse. How can Amman establish its legitimacy in architectural terms in a way meaningful to its populations and at the same time position itself along the axis of development and progress? How can one be both rooted and modern when identity requires inheritance from the past but modernity is seen as the conscious distancing from one’s roots? In his PhD Dissertation, Jordanian architect Salim Al-Faqih reflected on what he saw as the two competing forms of architecture in Amman. For one, he noted the local vernacular architecture of the city, prevalent during the interwar years. These buildings exhibited a mixture of styles, based mostly on regional Ottoman architecture seen in other cities in Transjordan, Palestine, Iraq, and Syria. Most were simple, two-story boxes, punctuated by windows and doors that fit with the interior plan. Most were clad in yellow or white limestone—as it could be found in abundance in the area—although some concrete building also existed. Ornamentation was eclectic: with vegetal designs carved into the architrave above classically-ordered columns. The interior spaces matched the usage and privacy concerns of a traditional Arab culture (see fig. 3).

While buildings of all types exhibited this style during this period—villas, apartment buildings, mosques, commercial buildings, and the like—stylistic cues were generally taken and advanced from villa architecture. In 1968, Albert Hourani coined the phrase “the politics of the notables” to describe their place in the scheme of Ottoman politics as indispensible mediators who were both instruments of government and checks on its power. Other Middle Eastern scholars have shown that there were variations in the behavior of notables in different cities and regions and that rivalry among the local elites often factionalized the privileged classes. From a theoretical standpoint, historians such as E.P. Thompson and Antonio Gramsci suggested a

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110 For an in depth look at Amman architecture in this period, as well as how architectural style began to transform in the 1950s, see Sharif Fawaz Al-Muhanna, House’s of Old Amman (in Arabic) (Amman: Greater Amman Municipality, 2003).
move away from top-down history, advocating a history based on the “common people,” or as Gramsci called them, “subaltern.” 113 While it is important to take into account the heterogeneity of class and to not disregard the point-of-view of source material, there is little sense in pretending that notables were not pivotal in urban life. In Jordan especially, family name or tribal affiliation has meant jobs, political and military appointments, land, and social mobility. So, from an architectural standpoint and although formally related to the elite, for Al-Faqih, these early buildings in Amman emphasized “the direct and subconscious tradition of the people.” 114

![Figure 3 - Jabal Amman, ca. 1930.](image1)

![Figure 4 - View from Jabal Amman, 2010.](image2)

The second type of architecture that Al-Faqih reviewed was what he called the “new architectural style.” 115 Beginning in the 1950s, design in Amman began to follow a modernist aesthetic, if not formal construction. As the editors of Progressive Architecture wrote in 1948, “Modern design—design of our time—is not a style. It is a solution to modern problems in modern terms.” 116 Buildings began being built with new construction techniques such as reinforced concrete, advanced structural design that allowed for open plans, and a new concern for climate control; and attachment to place through either ornament or aesthetic feature began to diminish. The massive influx of new residents in 1948 and again in 1967 also brought, at the same time, new cultural identities into the city. This, of course, continued with the new identities

115 Ibid., 80.
and nationalities migrating to the city over the next four decades. Modern architecture in Amman interestingly emerged at the same time as the new nation was escaping colonial rule. Yet, although derived from the West, modern architecture provided an avenue to help consolidate identity in the city by providing a degree of social cohesion and iconic forms that could become a source of pride for the community. The ubiquitous white limestone exteriors of Amman—that gives the city a sense of uniformity, even if it is truly just a façade—is this most obvious example (see fig. 4).

The process in which this occurred distinctly contrasts Amman from the likes of Ankara, Cairo, or Tehran, where architectural modernization from the beginning emerged under the direct aegis of the state. In Amman, villa architecture, rather than grand public buildings, served as the model for modernization. As wealthier Ammanis designed and built homes that matched their attraction to the “new,” commercial developers—seeking to capitalize on the need for new housing—built apartment buildings and mass housing complexes that matched the modern style favored by the wealthy, if built with cheaper building materials. The continuation of this process proved unremitting, and international modernism served as the primary architectural inspiration in Amman for the next three decades.

As stated earlier, large-scale public building in Amman did not begin in earnest until after the oil boom years of the 1970s. This was also in direct contrast with the aforementioned cities of Ankara and Tehran—and Tel Aviv, as well—where public building was central to government efforts to create a national identity. In spite of efforts to localize architecture in Jordan through home-grown architects trained at Jordan Universities, the most dominant public buildings during this time period came from foreign architects trained outside the country. Architects came from England, France, the United States, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, and Italy; and each of them worked individually to provide a solution to a particular task.

In 1980, the Halcrow Group from London designed the Holy Relic Building, the Queen Alia Mausoleum, and the Royal Cultural Center, all in Amman. They attempted to adapt forms from the Islamic past to make the buildings conform to what they saw as the traditional perception of the client (the royal family) and the population. In the Queen Alia Mausoleum, the blue domes of the mosque—commemorating the first queen of Jordan—and the pointed arches which form a colonnade around the exterior of the otherwise cubic and geometric forms, are meant to stand out as specific Islamic building symbols, while the interior fulfills the
contemporary requirements of the building’s usage. The choice of blue for the dome connects the building to numerous historic examples, the most obvious being the mosques in Isfahan and Bukhara.\textsuperscript{117} Indeed, the blue domes and the pointed-arch cut-outs lend an “oriental” quality to the otherwise modern aesthetic of the building, but nothing conveys it as specifically Jordanian.

The new Royal Court in Amman (1973-1975) by the Italian architect Paolo Portoghesi, although never built, also provides an interesting insight into one of the competing visions of the city during this stage in its development. According to Portoghesi, he attempted in his scheme to create a design in which the essence of the country is identified with its tradition.\textsuperscript{118} The complex was to consist of the government center, dining and festival halls, administration facilities, the residence for the king and his family, and a guest palace. For Portoghesi, the massive project was simultaneously new and old, expressing his understanding of the historical position of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

“To identify the Jordanian architectural tradition, references must be made on the one hand to an architecture rich in plastic and light-dark effects, which represent a liberal and fantastic version of Roman and Greek buildings, on the other to proto-Islamic architecture which has in the Dome of the Rock its basic monument, and in the series of desert castles a most original manifestation. In both cases, continuity with classical tradition is a decisive factor.”\textsuperscript{119}

Several elements in Portoghesi’s design for the Royal Court in Amman directly reflected those traits he saw as “Jordanian.” For one, the barrel-vaulted coverings of the Royal Court apartments related to the Umayyad Qusayr al-Amra and the triangular shape of the king’s offices correlated with the façade adornment of the Mshatta Palace, both just outside Amman (see figs. 5 and 6).\textsuperscript{120} Moreover, the interrelated open and enclosed spaces within the complex as well as the landscaping were supposed to represent reevaluations of the Arab garden in a contemporary form. That Portoghesi chose to connect Jordanian architectural tradition in Amman with an Umayyad legacy, when the progenitors of the city had not yet done so themselves, speaks to the fluidity with which a distinctively local style was imagined.

\textsuperscript{117} The exterior of the dome of the Blue Mosque in Istanbul is not actually blue. It was named the Blue Mosque because of the tiles that adorn the interior of the dome.


\textsuperscript{119} Paolo Portoghesi, “The Royal Court of Amman,” unpublished manuscript.

\textsuperscript{120} The Mshatta palace façade was removed to Berlin in the early twentieth century, as a presentation to Kaiser Wilhelm II. It currently is installed in the south wing of the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.
A third example from this first period of public building in Amman, the Jordanian National Geographic Center (1979) by the French architect Roger Taillibert, provides yet another contending architectural perspective on the city. Located on a hilly site northeast of Amman towards Zarqa, Taillibert’s elegant building has no reference to any derived notion of a Jordanian tradition. There are no Islamic arches or vegetal motifs, no classically ordered columns reminiscent of Amman’s Greek and Roman heritage, and no reference to the Umayyad castle ruins that pepper the desert east of the city. Rather, the typically modernist building follows Le Corbusean principals of pilotis, reinforced concrete, an open plan, horizontal orientation, a flat roof, and ribbon windows—in this instance, inset into the structure to account for the harsh sun in the climate.

Conclusion

During the last two decades, the central tenet of modernism in Amman—the irrelevance of the past for the problems of the present—has come into conflict with renewed Jordanian architectural interest in nationhood and identity. This is partly due to a new class of architects trained at Jordanian universities, struggling to find meaning in their surroundings. Although no singular paradigm has emerged, these new scholars and designers by and large advocate a return to the artifice of “Islamic” architectural tradition in Amman. They directly link the history of Jordan with a broader Arab-Islamic culture, and therefore gain access to a rich architectural heritage that never justly existed in the city. What Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi called the “burden of representation” strains this desire—as all architects in service to nationhood try to develop forms that make sense of the uniqueness of place and of the varied combinations of
ethnic groups marshaled under one’s flag.\textsuperscript{121} Combine these renewed desires for national identity (or at least regional identity) with the most current city planning efforts, and it is apparent that, after a century or so of development, Amman continues to struggle with simultaneously representing the rooted particularities of place and population with the desire for progress toward future prospects.

\textsuperscript{121} Isenstadt and Rizvi, Modernism, 20.
Conclusion

Seteney Shami wrote that the city is often looked upon as the physical embodiment of history—“a space that encapsulates time.” Nowhere is this truer than in Amman, where the development of the city and the development of the nation were one and the same. Cities are central in constructing nationhood as well as other forms of political domination, but the state is not always responsible for, or able to control, this development. Among the powerful makers of cities are planners, architects, advertising agencies, and artists, as well as shop keepers, religious clerics, and home owners. Understanding the roles and motivations of these urban designers means knowing their social origins, where they were educated, how they organized, how autonomous from the state they were, and how they link the making of the city with their visions of modernity.

When K.A.C. Creswell published his iconic *Early Muslim Architecture* during the heyday of colonial involvement in the Middle East, western scholars gave little thought to what the term “Islamic architecture” meant. Oleg Grabar, the first Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture at Harvard University, wrote that, at the time, being a historian of the Middle East meant that “there was a geographical area with a history and a culture and our task was to tell, as intelligently and sensitively as possible, the story of that art, to explain the monuments, occasionally to elaborate on their context, perhaps to evaluate their quality and their impact on later times or on surrounding areas.” This changed with the rise of what Said and his followers know as Orientalist scholarship. New research by anthropologists and sociologists brought to the fore the involvement of the actual existing society being studied, with its life, its behavior, its economic state, its hopes, its fears, and its traditions. This new scholarship was mixed, often wrongly, with the philosophical notion that the terms by which a society’s cultural artifacts were to be defined—architecture being a prominent one—must come from the traditions of that society, and in the case of the Middle East, a predominately Muslim one. To do so was both ahistorical—in that it rendered much of these new findings permanent, marked only by differences of degree or form—and reinforced the very binary opposition between East and West which Said’s work set out to undo.

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122 Hannoyer and Shami, *Amman*.
Beyond these reactions against the perceived paternalistic Orientalism of Western scholarship, politics and ideology also entered the fray. Scholars such as James C. Scott wrote that social or governmental authority wanted to express its existence and its power through forms that would demonstrate the modernity of the nation-state or of the society, and exhibit, not only its relationship to the “sacred past,” but also how fully they symbolize the utopian aspirations that rulers hold for the future. While some of these ideological reconstructions were national—in ways well understood in the West—some were also regional and labeled pan-Arabic or pan-Islamic. Thus, scholars united cities from different contexts with very different histories, like Amman and Cairo, for example, in the same bag.

All of these historical approaches, while attempting to cultivate a richer understanding of the region, come into conflict with the inimitability of modernity in the Middle East, or what Grabar labeled “new modernism.” Most strikingly expressed in the concept of “typology,” new modernism implies a universality of procedures rather than of forms or techniques in understanding the built environment. Only the city, the collection of buildings in the urban ensemble, can or should be defined through terms like “Islamic,” “Jordanian,” or “Modern.” Deep down, buildings and infrastructure represent the needs and functions of the city and her residents which are local and immediate, successful or not, beautiful or not. This is so even if the maker and the user prefer to identify and define the work in culturally restricted terms. The psychological and ideological needs of a new nation, practical problems created by demographic growth, and periods of newly acquired wealth led to massive building efforts which required, if not a philosophy, at least a set of guidelines, a collection of formal and verbal slogans to justify and at times inspire designers and builders. By looking at the construction of Amman, from a small village to a major metropolis, a unique Jordanian identity emerges.

124 Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 259. Scott was not writing only about the Middle East, but modern urbanism in developing nations as a whole.
125 Grabar, “Forward,” ix-x.
Bibliography


Appendix: Maps

Figure 7 – Physical Growth of Amman (1946-2005). IFPO Atlas of Jordan Project with the Royal Jordanian Geographic Center (2009).
Figure 8 – Map of Amman (Wasat al-Balad and Jabal Amman, inset).