Muslim-Christian Coexistence Prior to the Modern State in El-Husn: An Arab Town in Northern Jordan

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to outline the relations between Muslims and Christians in a town in Northern Jordan prior to the formation of the state. These relations, contrary to information and expectation, proved to be harmonious. The problem is: what formed the basis for this harmony? To find an answer to this question, the researcher chose the town in which he lives to carry out this research making use of the oral history and documentation as far as these were available. The collected history has been subjected to anthropological analysis to produce this paper. The results showed that the harmonious relations between Muslims and Christians in the village formed a condition sine qua non for the survival of both Muslims and Christians in their tribal structure more than in their religious orientation. The religious identity was related more to the community in its tribal sense than to the individual.

Keywords: Muslims, Christians, harmony, conflict, tribal structure, religion, tribe, and state.

1- Research Problem

Between offense and defense of Islam vis a vis the adherents of other religions (Haddad, M. 1984), the question of coexistence between Moslems and Christians in the Middle East outside the realm of the formal political structure, i.e. in people's daily life, has got a scant attention. Christians in the Arab and/or Moslem Middle East have been approached as religious minority groups (Hourani, A..,1947). In one way or another, it is claimed, they were subject to oppression and even exclusion from different spheres in the social and political life of the societies concerned (Bat Yeor, 1980)1.

Numerically, Christians in the contemporary societies and states of the Middle East indeed form minority groups. Yet the concept of minority is somewhat obscure when related to the modern state where democracy or semi democracy is advocated1. The attitude of being a minority in the past had been closely related to the Islamic state where Christians lived as Dhimmis1.2.

The main classification of citizens in the Islamic state was based on religious Law: i.e. Muslims and non-Muslims. Since the establishment of the modern state in the Middle East in the post World War II era, the concept is related to both the new state and the mandatory power which helped establish that particular state. In the new state the concept of citizen in its Western sense (as an individual living in the state and exchanging with it rights for obligations) was difficult to apply not only because of the lack of the judicial definition of that concept in the new political entity but also because of the traditional heritage of the successive Islamic states (Allison, N. E. 1977:98--102; Patai, R. 1957:215-218). The Jordanian society has been and is considered a Muslim society where non-Muslim subjects have the rights of the citizen (in the sense that they are equal to others before the Law but exempted from certain duties and the occupation of certain high posts such as Prime Minister and army chief of staff, though as an unwritten rule).

The modern states in the Middle East were established in countries whose people themselves lacked awareness of the concept of the modern state. They were used to the idea that they were subjects of the Ottoman Empire as a Muslim state1. The concept of minority seems to have been used by the modern state as dictated by the mandating power aiming at avoiding the exclusion of non-Muslims from being represented.

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on the social, occupational and political levels. In the
daily life of the people, whether they were pastoralists
or agriculturists, the changes took place outside their
potential reach. Important in this case is to know
how did they as Muslims and Christians live beside
each other and regulated their relations in both the
situations, before the state formation.

The recent Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Jordan
in particular deals more or less with formal issues
related to belief in its institutional settings, super-
structural perspectives and as a source of ethical values
(church, state, clergy, education, politics, common pos-
sessions and differences, etc.). The organizing
institutions for these encounters seem to neglect that important
point in the relations between Muslims and Christians
as being one between citizens of the same state. This
paper is an attempt at outlining the relations between
Muslims and Christians on the local level outside the
influence of the state institutions.

Eight years ago I came to live in el-Husn, a beau-
tiful town in the North of Jordan. I knew the town
since my childhood. Its population has consisted of
both Muslims and Christians who have lived beside
and with each other for more than two centuries and
developed certain mechanisms to provide for relations
to secure their living. This is a special type of coexis-
tence I call "religio-tribal" coexistence. I advance
the thesis that in the daily life of people outside the influence
of the institutional religion as controlled by either the
state or any other super-structure, religion played but
a minor role in the interrelations between religiously
heterogeneous groups in the same community except
for issues of very sensitive and delicate matters all
relating to sexuality and honor. Tolerance and modera-
tion were the result of awareness on the Christian
part that they formed a minority in any case and that
they had to avoid any friction. In fact they experimented
an intense feeling of being menaced by the greater
majority. This attitude was also inherited from the tribal
way of life where a small group always attempted to
ally themselves to a stronger and more numerous
group(Jaussen,1949). Religion became a reinforcing
factor of that attitude.

Methodology

This research is of the type to be called anthropo-
logical research at home where the researcher carries
out an investigation in the community which is his
own and with which he shares the same values, norms
and way of life. It is not an easy task to be objective
in such a research, but the will to do that is surely
there. The methods used are those of anthropology
aiming at gathering data to describe and explain the
culture concerned: participant observation and the tech-
niques it applies, namely personal interviews and listen-
ing to conversations the people themselves have
with one another. During my stay in el-Husn, I used
to attend gatherings on both the formal and the informal
levels. These gatherings were either specific to a reli-
gious group or interreligious. The latter gatherings were
mostly of the formal types dealing either with elec-
tions(either local or national) or with issues concerning
some interests of el-Husn as a whole. In fact the
contents of the conversations between Muslims only
or Christians only were different than those where
Muslims and Christians were present.

The Town el-Husn

El-Husn is a town just six Kilometers South of
the city of Irbid, the center of the governorate carrying
the same name. El-Husn, with a number of villages
surrounding it to the west and south, form the Bani
Ubayd district(Liwa Bani Ubayd)49. The town is situ-
ated at the foot of the Ajlun mountains forming the
north western corner of the plateau, which stretches to
the north-west, north and eastward, known in history
as the Horan plains, once called by the Romans the
"silo of cereals".

El-Husn is a very old settlement. Some archaeo-
logical reports say that the Tel(artificial hill) marking
the north western edge of the town hides the remains of
successive ancient civilizations (Harding, L. 1965).
The Tel is assumed to form one of the ten Greco-Roman
defense cities, called the Decapolis. The town has been
inhabited ever since, but its present population appears
to be from recent time, not exceeding two and a half
centuries (Abu Al-Shar, H., 1995).

The present community of el-Husn is not so old.
Depending on various genealogies gathered from
among various clans and tribes in different villages
and small towns in Northern Jordan, some remarks
are necessary to clarify the recent formation of the
village communities in contemporary Jordan. First, the
largest number of generations of any given clan or
tribe does not exceed seven to nine, i.e., an average of
eight (Frederick Peake, 1935; Sraihi, 1987; Al-
some four to five of these generations have lived in the present century; the members of the fifth generation in ascendance were mostly born in the late 19th century. The other three or four generations in ascendance lived in the 19th century, one of them being either born in the same century or at the end of the eighteenth century. That generation which is the first to populate the area consisted of individuals who were born elsewhere and came to the Jordanian localities in search of a permanent residence, as is in the case of el-Husn. Taking account of the conditions of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries in Southern Syria (local wars, change of power, poverty, hunger, lack of security and conflicts based on religious grounds, such as in the Lebanon and Northern Palestine, epidemics and lack of health and medical care), it becomes clear that some process of natural selection played a role in man’s survival in the region: only strong born infants or strong people were able to survive (Gharaybeh, A.K. 1985; Ziadat, A.1990; and R. Patai, 1958). But considering that the first man who came to settle in el-Husn was an adult, and that before the 1960’s the people used to marry at a younger age than thereafter, the time span of the present settlement would be no more than two hundred years.

The reasons why those people came to live in el-Husn remain vague despite the pressing assumption that they came to escape the wars and conflicts from the more populated area of Northern Palestine, Syria and the Lebanon in the eighteenth or the nineteenth century. Additionally, the area of Transjordan or Southern Syria (as it had been known) at that time had been thinly populated and neglected by the Ottoman authorities so that escaping persons were able to find security in it (Mahafza, 1990; Musa and Madi, 1957). Some accounts refer to the Lebanon as the original home of el-Husns present Christian population. Others refer more to Hauran and North Palestine, especially Nazareth, as their place of origin. Yet it is rather certain that many of the Christian clans of el-Husn came from the region of Nazareth. In the long run more people came to live in the place, both Muslims and Christians. As these multiplied they began to build their houses and shrines.

The Muslim clans have different stories about their place of origin. Some of them are the remaining descendants of the Bani-al-Asar tribes who dominated the area for a long time in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries and before. (Hutteroth and Abdul fattah, 1979). Other clans are related to larger tribes inhabiting the area called Bani-Ubayd. The most important Muslim clans in el-Husn are the Nussirat, the Hatamia, the Rashdan and the Maghayra.

The first dwellers of El-Husn seem to have first lived in the many caves that were available either occurring naturally or artificially dug in the rocks by more ancient inhabitants of the place. Some of the caves are observable. Others, both natural and artificial caves, appeared clearly when the people began to dig the foundations to build modern houses. The sides of the caves had been cut symmetrically making it clear that they were meant for organized human living. Space division reveals clearly that they had been planned to house both man and animal. In the floor of several caves, wells were dug in the rocky ground to collect the rainwater.

The recent habitation in el-Husn in the last two centuries seems to have developed in three stages: one in the caves, a second in houses built of mud and stones, and the third in more modern solid houses built of cement and concrete or cement, concrete and stones. The houses which the inhabitants built in the second stage on top of the caves show similar division of space except for some houses of more well to do people. In general the house had two floor levels: the lower organized in the front part for animal habitation, particularly in the winter, and the higher one in the back part, elevated above a meter or less above the lower level and organized for human habitation. In some cases peasants used to have two rooms: one organized to store animal food, mostly hay, with its door leading right into the living room. Along the wall opposite to this door, they constructed silos for cereal storage from agricultural surplus to keep for the winter. Differences on the basis of religious distinctions, in fact, did not exist. Better-situated people used to have separate spaces, one for human and the other for animal habitation. Such particular organization corresponded with the economic way of life which combined between agriculture and animal husbandry.

The people used to live their tribal life deriving the rules, values and norms from the tribal custom more than any other source. The Orf (or customary law) formed the judicial system by which the tribes or
clans regulated their affairs and solved their problems as in pre-Islam periods. If we follow the distinction between formal and popular religions, the common people, although they maintained some knowledge of the formal religious texts (texts of the Koran and/or the Bible), they lacked education and thereby the ability to read their sacred books. This led them to practice oral teachings which had been subject to borrowings, especially when more than one religious group lived in the same community. Although different, in terms of formal religion, the people in the same community shared similar creeds and values and came to a mutual understanding on the basis of their tradition and customs which, although undergoing changes in time, had been operating for centuries, even before the rise of their formal religions. In the Middle East, neither Christianity nor Islam was able to eliminate the tribal organization and the tribal way of life remained the backbone of social organization.

The people used to marry at a younger age than they do at present and the difference between the one generation and the successive one varied between fifteen and twenty five years, i.e. with an average of twenty years. The extended family contained mostly three generations but sometimes four. Even when estimating the age differences between two generations at thirty years and considering that the first common ancestor of a given group (the founder) was an adult at his arrival in a given place to settle, we come to the conclusion that the recent occupation of the present-day el-Husn does not exceed 240 years. The majority of the people in el-Husn know well from where their common ancestor came. Frederick Penke (1935) documented that by clan, and despite the biases he might have had, most of the tribal genealogies he presented in drawing for Northern Jordan showed no more than 5 to 7 generations.

The first inhabitant of present day el-Husn, the people maintain, was the founder of the Ghanma clan whose members unanimously agree that their common ancestor came from the region of Nazareth. Various other Christian clans make a similar claim. Why did he exactly come to el-Husn? Different answer to this question were given. Some said that he was an agriculturist and found the area very fertile when he had come to it and settled down. Others say that he came to the village because he had been invited by the few inhabitants in the area to find a settlement for a conflict between them. As he was successful, they invited him to reside permanently among them. Yet, though the personal reasons for individual migration may remain obscure, the formal reasons are well known. The eighteenth century witnessed several troublesome events forcing many people to leave their home country and find refuge elsewhere. In that century the Shahah tribe took over the power from the Ma’iniyin who had ruled the Lebanon for some centuries. In South Lebanon, Omar Zaidani seized the power from the Wali (governor) of Damascus, captured Aka (Acre) and established his rule over the whole region including the Northern part of the East Bank of the Jordan river and Northern Palestine. Omars wars lasted for decades until he was defeated by Al-Jazzar in 1776 (Hitti, F., 1982; and Mu’ammel T. 1979). Yet the clashes among various sections of the population in the region did not come to an end. They continued as tribal conflicts and wars pushed more individuals, particularly Christians, to leave and go to more secure places. The problem of Christian population movement in Syria was aggravated by the incidents of 1860 A.D. when Muslims attacked the Christians of Damascus. The incident had its repercussions all over the region and many Christians fled from their living places out of fear of being slaughtered (Antonius, G. 1964: 57-59).

As an agriculturist Ghanma knew how to exploit the fertile land in el-Husn. He acquired oxen and cows, sheep and goats, and employed people to till the land and to herd the cattle. Within a few years he became a well- to -do person. The people he employed were mostly Muslims from the region itself. Agricultural employment in the region was regulated according to a system called Murabaa or 3:1 shares whereby the employee was obligated to live with his whole family in the place of his employment so that he could be available at any moment. His employment was not limited to working on the land, he also had to take care of the animals used in the agricultural process (Antoun, 1973). The Ghanma had already learned the lesson from his original home and was conscious of the fact that he was in need of people (particularly Muslims) to lean upon for protection. In the region of Hauran it was insecure for a small group of people to live alone in any given place. Christians in particular were in need of Muslims for defense purposes because
the region was subjected to the Nomadic tribes who remained outside the control of the state which had been consequently unable to protect its subjects in the remote areas, particularly those bordering the desert as this area of Southern Syria had been. Christians of Syria had always tried to avoid any clashes between themselves and Muslims in terms of religious groups.

In as much as he had been aware of not being able to survive without Muslims, Ghanma was also aware that he was in need of Christian allies. During his journeys in the Lebanon, Northern Palestine and South-east Syria, he started to encourage other Christians to come to el-Husn. He continued doing this until he had gathered a number of people around him, everyone of whom became the founder of a clan. It is said that he received those who came looking for refuge warmly and invited them to stay permanently in the village. Among those are the clans of Nmair, Suwardan, Bawwab, Azar, Ammari, Rihani and Ayyub, who became the founders of the clans called so in el-Husn.

The whole region of Syria formed one dominion of the Ottoman Empire which made travel from one part to another very easy. Geographical mobility of the population was rather uncontrolled. The Ottoman authorities seem to have neglected the Southern region of Syria for several reasons most important of which was that it had been very thinly populated. Another reason was to avoid the nomads attacks from the desert. The Bedouins had subjugated the peasants of Southern Syria for centuries and obliged them to pay the Khawa or tribute during both the Ottoman rule and that of Mohammad Ali between 1840 and 1860 (Rogan, E.L. 1979: 31-32; Schumacher, G., 1890: 101-102). In the long run more people, both Muslims and Christians, came to the village and settled down. All of them had to cooperate to defend themselves, their crops and animals against the one enemy they feared at that time: the nomads(Abu Jabir, ch. 2).

At present, el-Husn is a middle-size town in Jordan with some 25,000 inhabitants, 68% Muslims and 32% Christians. At the beginning of the 19th century, el-Husn was a small village consisting of some five hundred inhabitants of which 25 households were Christian (Burckhardt, J. L. 1822:268). Hind Abu al-Shar, a historian from el-Husn itself, mentions that el-Husn counted more than 2000 inhabitants at the middle of the 19th century, and insists that the increase was natural considering the time span between 1812 and 1855(Do Alger, 1995:81). Yet the increase seems to have been the result of immigration more than it was of anything else. She, herself, quotes Alex Maloon who visited el-Husn in 1905 and stated that its inhabitants counted some 2500 people and that the inhabitants had increased with more than 1000 inhabitants in the last ten years... (idem., p.82). Additionally, the birth rate of the population in the 19th century had amply been able to equalize the mortality rate. The increase of the population was due in the first place to immigration which continued in el-Husn until 1900 A.D. After that population increase became natural and remained so until the start of the growth of the cities in Jordan after the establishment of the state. Somewhere between 1940 and 1950 emigration of the people of el-Husn to the big cities, Amman, Zerka and Irbid started. Mainly the white collar Jobs available in the big cities and the Army played important role in this process of emigration. Private education, particularly missionary schools qualified the people of el-Husn to occupy posts in the administration, army and police. But since land ownership is the only reference to the original inhabitants of el-Husn, there are at least 30% of the people of present day el-Husn who do not own agricultural land. The Muslim population of el-Husn seem to have been less attracted by the big cities. The essential natural growth of the population in el-Husn is among the Muslim groups.

Before 1850, the village administration in South Syria, whether under Ottoman domination or under the Egyptian occupation had been left to the Shuyukh of the tribes (tribal chiefs). The chiefs of the tribes in el-Husn at that time were: one for the Muslims and one for the Christians. This happened due to the gratification of alliances between the clans. The Muslim clans gathered around the chief of the most influential Muslim clan at that time. This was al-Hindawi. The Christians were allied under the leadership of the Ghanma clan and that remained so until the Ottoman legislation of 1864 in the Law of the Ottoman dominions(Rogan, 1991). Article 59 of the Law dictated that in the villages of the districts local administrators should exist and it assigned to them a number of tasks as formulated in Article 60 (Abu al-Shar, 1995:186-187). This system of the Mukhtar(elect) had come to replace the system of the tribal leaderships in the administration and to weaken the influence of the tribal leaders in the
state. Yet it had never been able to eliminate the tribal system. In actual fact the two systems were integrated whereby the tribal leader became the Mukhtar. It was only at given times that the Mukhtar was elected from other clans.

3-Development of the Two Religious Communities.

The individual orientation of the clans had its impact on the intertribal relations regardless of religion. In the first stage the founding individuals of the clans were obliged by definition of the situation to work as a group in order to: a. maintain themselves economically and b. protect themselves against dangers embedded in the environment. Both groups, Muslims and Christians, were obliged, also by definition of the situation, to cooperate to defend themselves against the raiding nomad tribes occupying the desert area (on the role of the Bedouin tribes see Lewis, N., 1987 and Rogan, E. L. 1991). Such cooperation was not limited to the inhabitants of the village, but extended to the inhabitants of the villages and towns around it who allied themselves to face the danger. The alliance became one between peasant communities against the nomad groups. Religion became a secondary issue, for the nomads themselves were Muslims. The external danger forced the residents of the village into a kind of coexistence dictating the rule of independence of each group in regulating the own affairs.

Since specific information on the personal level of the individuals of the first generation of the clans in el-Husn is lacking except for the oral history gathered in the field, we can only hypothesize that the second generation in each of the religious groups started to intermarry so that we can speak of what I want to call here "religious endogamy", to refer to endogamous marriage among members of the same religious group in the village. In terms of clans, such marriages were exogamous. Intra-clan marriages, particularly among Christians, could not have started before the fourth or even the fifth generation as there they were all Greek Orthodox and the Greek Orthodox marriage law forbade FBD/s (father's brother's daughter/son) marriage, a prohibition based on the Byzantine codification. Marriage between relatives was allowed between people of the sixth generation of the same patrilineal descent. This makes it difficult for us to assume that the shift to clan endogamy in the Christian society of el-Husn could have taken place before the fifth generation in descent. FBD/S marriage among the Muslim groups had been vividly endorsed long before the rise of Islam and continued thereafter despite the warnings of the prophet to estrange marriage. Yet village endogamy appeared to have fortified the relations among the newcomers. These marriage ties seem to have formed the basic mechanism of solidarity among the Christian clans of el-Husn to form a kind of local socio-political and military unit with a religious identity.

The Moslems grouped themselves around a strong man from within their ranks and the Christians did the same. In the long run a tradition emerged whereby Muslims had their Wajh (Representative) and Christians had theirs. The first Muslim tribal leader was from a clan called al-Khasawna. His name was al-Hindawi. Having multiplied and become stronger, the Hindawis tried to dominate the village by force. Their rivals, a clan called Nuseirat, refused their claim. Because of the Nusairats good relations with the Christians and knowing that they preferred them, the Khasawna began to disturb the Christians by different means. The Christians, supported by the Nusairats, challenged them before the governor of the Sanjaq of Ajlun under whose authority el-Husn was classified. The Sanjaq Council ordered the Khasawna to leave the village and left up to them the choice of their new residence. They chose to live in Nuayma, a village at about five kilometers South-east of el-Husn. The sentence is clear from a document published by a certain Abu-Jabir (Abu-Jabir, 1890:167-170) as being issued by the Ottoman governor in 1868. The people sentenced were mentioned by name.

The story gathered in the field by the present researcher in fact differs from that of Abu-Jabir, who claims that the Nusairats pushed the Christians to do so against the Khasawna because they were more numerous than them and they wanted to get rid of the Khasawna. The present story tells clearly that a man of the clan called Hallush (Hallush is a name of a well to do clan in Nuayma nowadays), had an emotional relationship with a Christian girl. The girl's clan discovered that in time and requested the man not to approach their'ird, the'ird being the ultimate object of a clans honor (Antoun, R. 1968a and Allison Jr. N. E. 1977:164-201). As he refused their request, they called upon the Nusairat clan to help them. The Shaykh of the Nusairat
then asked the elders of the Christian community to challenge the Khasawna before the Governor, who, seeing that the case was one of honor which might at a given time lead to raid and killing, convinced the Sanjaq council to take that decision. It was exactly this reason which made the case so important, for other forms of disturbance, such as theft, robbery and the like were most common in the region. They were means for self-maintenance and most people practiced them (Muslims and Christians alike). It was also therefore that the Khasawna accepted the verdict without resistance. After their departure, the relations between Muslims and Christians in the village became harmonious. From that time on, it is commonly known, the Nusairat and the clan of the girl became so close so that the former used to get a present whenever the Christian clan married off one of its daughters.

For a long time after the arrival of the first settlers in the second half of the 18th century, el-Husn residents remained without religious leadership, particularly the Christians whose priests had to be ordained by the Patriarchs of the different churches in Jerusalem or Damascus. Local Muslim leaders were not bound to such cults: anyone who was able to read and write could be accepted as Muadhin (caller of the prayers) and at the same time he could perform funeral services and marriage procedures. The first priest from el-Husn, a certain Sulaiman al-Mirshid al-Nimri, was ordained in 1900 A.D., as a Greek Orthodox priest (from an interview with Naim Abu l-Shar on January 17, 1994.) Before that time there was only one priest appointed in the village around 1850. In 1878, the Orthodox Christians of el-Husn started building their church which they finished in 1882. The date is inscribed clearly on the upper door sill of the church. Some ten years later the Catholic Church was built.

The establishment of the Catholic Church, it is assumed, (Abu al-Shar 1995: 140-142)), was the result of a conflict between the parish and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem. The data gathered in the field, however, reveal a different story. The intervention of the Roman Catholic monk was prepared for by an ongoing conflict in the tribal leadership.

Until 1860, the year of the assault on the Christians of Damascus, the leadership was given to the Ghanma clan. To save the Christians in el-Husn which was a kind of Christian center in the Ajlun district, the Ottoman authorities asked them to leave their village and take refuge in a number of villages in the mountainous region to the South-west and West of el-Husn. The Nimri clan, mainly the Abu al-Shar with their agnates and some of the Haddad family in the Bani Ubayyid district went to a village called Jdaita nearby the village of Urjan where a clan of the Haddad tribe had settled and formed a force to be reckoned with and were good allied of the district tribal ruler at that time called Al-Shuraydeh, whose center was Tubna. Other clans went to a village called Khanzira and other even to Nazaret. In 1863 most of the emigrants returned to el-Husn. The man who became known during their absence was from the Ayyub clan called Ibrahim. As the reforms were implemented in the Ottoman dominions, the administrative authorities in the villages were given to the Mukhtar and the various councils in the districts centers. In villages where more than one religious group were living two Mukhtars were assigned: one for the Muslims and one for the Christians. The Christian Mukhtar became Ibrahim Ayyub and he occupied this position until he became a member of the Municipal Council of Irbid. Then he and his followers seem to have negotiated to choose the Mukhtar from among the smaller clans of El-Husn. Thus we find as the Mukhtar of the Christians in el-Husn a certain Naser al-Abbas (Abu al-Shar, ibid.: 188) from the Abbasi clan, a smaller and less influential clan in the village at that time. Later on, the Mukhtar was chosen from the al-Rihani clan. This remained so until after the formation of the state when the Mukhtar was chosen from a sub-clan of the Nimri clan called Manna and not from those seeking leadership.

Despite the presence of the state, the political structure of the population in Southern Syria consisted of alliances between prominent Shuyukh(pl. of Shaykh) in the region. The most prominent was al-Shuraydah in the region called al-Kura. The Shuraydeh ruled the DJebel Ajlun District. They depended on influential tribal leaders such as those of the Nusairat in el-Husn, Ibn Fraih of the Fraihat in Kufranja, the Azzam in Al-Wastiya. Among the Christians they recognized were al-Ghanma and later on Ayyub in el-Husn, Farhoud al-Haddad in Inba and Masud al-Abbud in Urjan. The other Christian clans were allied to one or the other among these. The Nimri clan started to appear on the scene after the formation of the state, particularly after
the first Parliamentary Elections in 1929 when a certain Najib Abu al-Shar won the elections as a Christian Candidate for the Northern region. In the second elections in 1931, the rival of the Nimri clan, Salti Ayyub won the election.

The Christian community in el-Husn has always known such competition on the level of village presentation to the world outside and therefore has always been divided into two camps under the leadership of two prominent figures: one representing tradition which knew how to manipulate the world around it, and one trying to take over the lead on the basis of the number of tribal followers. It was this competition which led to the tribal schism in the Christian community in the second half of the 19th century. The newly formed front (Roman Catholics) created the new ground on which to establish the new tribal leadership of Abu al-Shar. The traditional leadership grew with the Orthodox church, the new one tried to develop within Catholicism. No sooner the Roman Catholic church was established, a new schism took place within its adherents and those who separated called on the Greek Malachite Church. A fourth schism was already undertaken by another clan to call in the Anglican Missionary (Al-Nimri, S, 1935: 6-8). In fact, while leading to tribal conflicts among the Christians of el-Husn, this schism created golden educational opportunities for them for every Church started its own school and having its own charity for its followers. In fact the Churches engaged in a kind of race to maintain the own followers and win other followers from the same community. Schools formed a mechanism for this maintenance. As a result of this kind of private Christian education, many people were privileged to have education in the time when education in Southern Syria was rudimentary and schools were very rare. When the state was established in 1921 A.D. many of these people were qualified to get jobs in the administration, the military forces or the police.

The first Latin (Roman Catholic) priest in el-Husn was a certain Father Navoni, an Italian. Due to their good education at the Seminaries, Latin priests were able establish very good relations with the people. Additionally, they did a lot of charity work and distributed consumer goods all of which attracted many people to join them and convert to their church as the inhabitants were very poor and still lived a semi-primitive life.

More important is that the Latin church permitted marriages between close relatives, especially Fa Br Do (parallel cousins marriage) which the Greek Orthodox church prohibited. So, everyone who wanted to marry his parallel cousin was able to go to the Latin Church, be married there and at the same time declared his conversion to the new faith! 

The priest also established a school for both boys and girls which became known as the Latin School.

Rivalry between the Greek Orthodox congregation and that of the Catholic Church led to the separation of the clan called Azar whose elder went to Damascus and contacted the British Consul requesting him to send an Anglican reverend to el-Husn and declared that he and his clan members had converted to the Anglican Faith. This seems to have occurred in 1902. That Reverend was also called Azar from the Lebanon. He established a school for both boys and girls and assigned a room in the house of the Azars elder called Issa as a worshipping place. In 1920 the Anglicans built a small church in the village. Both the membership of this church and its reverends remained limited to this clan and its descendants. So also have its reverends been. The Anglicans now have a most modern and beautiful church in El-Husn.

The Latin congregation in the town was subject to many conflict which lasted until 1921 when one of the Swaidan clan went to Damascus after having served as an agricultural worker (Harath plougher) for the elder of the Abu-al-Shar clan for several years and was ordained as a Greek Catholic priest in 1923. He then returned to el-Husn and founded the Malachite Church. His clan with their allied shifted to the Greek Catholic Church. In 1925 they started building their church.

It was only in the sixties that other Protestant groups made efforts to establish themselves in el-Husn. The only group that found some ground was the Seven Days Adventists who succeeded in attracting some followers from different clans, but failed to have collective tribal support. They still have a church in el-Husn but their presence is not felt on the social scene as is the case with the other Churches.
4. Factors of Conflict and Harmony on the Local Level

Situations of conflict and harmony in el-Husn can be explained, as far as the period prior to the state is concerned, by various factors inherent in the means of existence, the socio-political conditions and the social organization which governed the community's life for more than a century and a half. Until the formation of the state in Jordan in 1921, the means of existence of the population in Transjordan were the land and animal husbandry in addition to commerce to a very limited extent. The social and political organization had been based on the system of primary ties, i.e. family and kinship relations. The individual was encluded in a group of people where the economic, political and social aspects were interwoven to form a way of life governed by interrelated sets of values and norms to be strictly observed unless an external intervention or internal changes took place. Three factors, at least, had worked for the realization of harmonious co-existence between Muslims and Christians in el-Husn.

First, the security of a community as a whole in the region, which had been rather neglected by the state (the Ottoman Empire) and left to the mercy of the nomads of the desert, was a primary concern to all clans alike. This security implied providing for protection of the people themselves, their fields and their animals. Everyone in the community felt the responsibility to work for this security. If anyone of the village was attacked by an outsider, all people of the village came to help. This community solidarity got the highest priority.

Yet, this solidarity had another dimension which was related to the situation in Southern Syria as a whole. Most of the vested and settled communities in villages and towns consisted of heterogeneous tribal groups among which one tribal group was the strongest and the dominant. Where more than one strong tribe or clan existed, tension prevailed until one was recognized as the leading tribe. Where the community consisted of religiously heterogeneous groups, the situation was not different, but in addition to the recognition of one dominating group in the whole community, the constituents of every religious community competed among themselves until one clan or tribe was recognized as the leading one. The leaders of both the dominating tribes then cooperated for the well-being of the whole community. El-Husn is a good example of this latter case. The leading Christian figure in the founding stage was the elder of the Ghanma clan and this clan leadership continued until another clan became stronger. The whole Christian community then recognized the leadership of that clan's shaykh. Among the Muslim tribes living in el-Husn, the shaykh of the Khasawna tribe had taken the lead and continued to do so until the tribe was sentenced to leave the village (Juli, or compulsory movement). After then the Nusairim tribe took the lead and maintained their leadership until just a short time ago. As for the Christians, the leadership of the Ghanma tribe was followed by that of the Ayyub clan and this clan maintained that position until the seventies, when most of its members left el-Husn to the bigger cities (Irbid and Amman).

Second, the basis for cohesion in the village had been the tribal structure which regulated the intertribal and intra-tribal relations in the community. The cohesion of the tribe has been a primary condition for self-maintenance and continuity regardless of religion. From the information gathered in el-Husn, the Christian community remained religiously amorph until 1850. It had no religious leadership which could provoke any sensitivity of Moslem leadership, even if this was available. Muslim religious leadership was represented in the Mudhir (the one who calls for the prayers) or as he was called the shaykh of the Mosque. In fact, this dignitary, though respected by his religious community, had no organizational tasks on the socio-political level. The people used to pay him in kind for his religious services which were limited, in addition to calling for the prayer five times a day, he gave some teaching to the people to read the Quran; performed burial ceremonies and issued marriage contracts. He had, in fact, no role in the economic activities as did his Christian counterparts, and had no say in settling disputes. Additionally, the shaykh of the mosque was usually a stranger who had no right to interfere in tribal matters. If he did, he did that on different grounds.

The tribal structure had been based on patrilineal kinship organization, in which the eldest man in the tribe or clan was the tribal leader (the shaykh) or the Wajih (representative) who was responsible for the members of his tribe or clan in their relations with both their fellow tribesmen and with the members of other tribes. The tribe used to form what is called in
sociology the 'corporate person' and functioned socially, politically and economically as one unit. The dominating ideology was neither religious nor political in as much as it was tribal. The tribal values and norms dictated the domains of behavior for the individual vis a vis his tribesmen and those of the other tribes or clans. Religion regulated only some aspects of man's life: worship, marriage, death, burial and inheritance. Sexual morality, honor and shame were regulated by the social values. Honor and shame were values forming a collective possession not only in relation to religious differentiation but also in the interaction of the individuals with one another within and outside the tribe. They formed part of the identity of the individual and the group. Distinction between the group and the individual was more or less superficial and it was perhaps this characteristic which was the basis for what E. Durkheim called mechanic solidarity (E. Durkheim, 1893 [1960]). Sexual taboos applied to both religious groups by definition and the two groups were intently in agreement about who married from what group.

Third, the economic system operating in the village community required such a socio-political organization. The main resources of living in the village community was agriculture and animal husbandry, both requiring collective work and the co-operation not only of the extended family, but also of the clan and the ensemble of clans regardless of what religion they adhered to. The villagers employed either one or two shepherds for all the goats of the village, one or two shepherds for the sheep, one for the donkeys and mules and one for the oxen and cows (called Ra'i al-Ajial). These shepherds were paid in kind yearly at the harvest (mostly in June or the beginning of July). To protect the fields the inhabitants used to employ a special person called al-Mkhaddir (the guard of the green, i.e. cultivated fields).

The land was distributed between Muslims and Christians rather proportionately 1:2 (Abu Jibir, R., 1989:166). Every clan distributed the land among its members according to a specific system which gave to a household head as much land as the number of males he had in his extended family as long as they were able to pay the taxes to the government, called the tabu. Since many people had not been able to fulfill the government requirements, they were refused the right to till the land. Many of these people were employed by the clan head to perform the agricultural activities. At the time the modern state decided to register the agricultural land many households got only a small share while others in the same clan were able to claim and get much more than others. Needless to say, bribery and the wasta (arbitrage) played an important role in that process which took place in 1939.

The houses were built so close to each other so that each two houses had one wall in common and the individual family had no privacy. Closed doors were virtually non-existent in the village and everyone could walk into a house without hesitation. Separation between male and female was relative, for most houses consisted of one room. Work in the field was collective; men and women worked together. In such an open society social control was very strong for everyone knew everyone else in various aspects. The villagers were so dependent on one another that at a given time the people were terribly in need of one another. The only prosperous person in the clan or tribe was the shaykh who in years of poor harvest provided his tribesmen and persons from other tribes or clans with their basic needs for survival.

Lack of education enhanced these three factors. The village began to have some education with the establishment of the Greek Orthodox Church. Around 1880, a teacher was employed by the Church to educate the children of the Christian community. The school grew to the third elementary grade. In 1890 the priest decided to promote the school and developed it to contain six classes. After the sixth grade, those parents who wanted their children to learn more had to send them to al-Salt, the only city in the region (20 kilometers to the West of Amman). Around the turn of the century another school was established by the Latin (Catholic) Mission. These schools in fact accepted only the children of their parishes and continued to do so until late after the establishment of the state. This is perhaps why many employees in the first decade of the establishment of the modern state were either Christians or foreigners for in many places where Christians lived the Christian missions had opened schools for their followers. Education of Muslim children had been limited to the rudimentary teaching given in the mosques, calle al-katatib as led by the religious functionary called al-Khatib or the Muadhin. This kind of education was the only known education in the country.
until the establishment of the state when public schooling virtually started (al-Tal, A., 1978:2-11).

Until the end of the nineteenth century, therefore, the people of el-Husn remained outside the indoctrination of the religious ideology and thereby also outside the probability of the rise of religious chauvinism. When at the beginning of the present century the religious and national leadership started to spread religious consciousness among the people, the tribal ideology remained a prominent factor in limiting the effectiveness of the dominance of religious indoctrination and maintained its function in regulating the social relations between the adherents of the two religions: Islam and Christianity. For different reasons, in fact, this trait of tribal organization has remained functional until the present day.

The factors mentioned here above seem to have limited the confrontations between Muslims and Christians in El-Husn to three major ones, all of which were resolved very quickly. One of them was that of 1868 mentioned before. The second was around 1903 when a Muslim let his oxen and cows into the cultivated field of a Christian which damaged his crops (an interview with Issa Azar, 95 years old, on January 11, 1996). The Christian attacked him and got help from his tribesmen whereupon the tribesmen of the Muslim came to help their relatives. No blood was shed and the problem was solved by the local leaders. Such incidents occurred very often, not only in el-Husn but in most of the villages in the region.

The third confrontation was in 1918 after the defeat of the Turks. During the war a man called Abdullah al-Hajjar lived in el-Husn. As he had no land and could not work in agriculture, he bought some 50 donkeys and used them as means of transport to provide sand and stones for the construction of houses. When the Turks were defeated and the British troops entered el-Husn he disappeared leaving the donkeys behind. The Shaykh of the Nusayrat confiscated the donkeys and tried to distribute them among his followers. The Christians became angry and demanded their share. A problem arose as to how to divide the donkeys. The Christians insisted that the same procedure applying to the division of land ought to be followed: i.e. two shares for the Christians and one share for the Muslims which was the proportional distribution of the population. Some Muslims refused and insisted on getting more than the half. One of them became so angry that he took his rifle and shot a Christian at the front door of his house. Another Muslim killed another Christian in the street. As a defense strategy all Christians gathered in the Latin Church whereas Muslims gathered in the cave in the Tel. The cousin of one of the deceased, called Salti Ayub, the recognized leader of the Christians went to the Muslim gathering and negotiated with the shaykh of the Nusayrat the matter promising to prohibit the Tha't or feud against the Muslims for the sake of peace. As a sign of good will he declared forgiveness of the killer of his own cousin. The Muslims accepted and the donkeys were divided proportionately. Yet the case was solved later on through arbitration of the Shuyukh of Hauran as led by the prominent tribal leader of the Kura district, a certain Klayb al-Shraydeh. This was the last clash between Muslims and Christians in el-Husn.

In fact these inter-religious conflicts were modest if compared to the confrontations between Christian groups. The problem of coexistence between the various Christian clans and for between the followers of the various churches were far more complicated and took more time to settle.

Conclusions

While the Ottoman state considered Christians in the same terms as Islam always did -as Dhimmis-classifying them in the Millet system, Christians of Southern Syria (present-day Jordan) used, as all inhabitants did, to live their tribal life either as farmers or as a combination of farmers and animal husbandrists. The Christians of el-Husn are all immigrants. They came to it from elsewhere in the region (Northern Palestine, Lebanon, Syria) in search of refuge escaping either war or epidemics. In el-Husn they started living as farmers, exploited the land and employed people from the region to do both the farming and raising of animals. In the long run two religious communities who lived in harmony developed. The concept of citizenship in its Western usage, in fact, was not known. On the formal level they were subject to the Ottoman State but this did not mean much on the social level.

Social life in the village was regulated on the
basis of the tribal custom and law, the Orf. On the
district level as well as on the village level, the tribes
used to live in alliances. This held true for both Muslims
and Christians. Both Muslim and Christian communi-
ties lived for a long time without religious leadership
and awareness of religious identity arose only as far
as it concerned some issues related to marriage and
sexuality. Outside that, Muslims and Christians had
had to cooperate to protect themselves. Collective labor
and the common interests in addition to poor education
and the aversion the people had against the state led to
a certain avoidance of involvement with the state and
its institutions. The state formed the feared other. All
these factors led to local cooperation. The common
effect in the region, the Nomads, left no space for
internal conflicts which could lead to segmentation
and non-cooperation. How this relationship between
Muslims and Christians developed after the estab-
ishment of the modern state needs a separate paper.

Notes
1- At the time when the modern states in the Middle
East were established neither the rulers nor the
people were informed about what democracy as
a Western concept included. Jordan, in particular,
had an illiteracy rate of 49.9%. It was even difficult
for the Prince (Emir Abdullah, the grand-father
of King Hussein) to find a Prime-Minister among
the population and brought Rashid Tali from Dam-
ascus to occupy that function. (Musa and Madi,

2- The concept of Dhimma (Dhimmis) referred to
non-Muslims in the Dar al-Islam, particularly Jews
and Christians, regardless of whether these formed
a numerical minority or majority of the population.

3- For a better understanding of the state of develop-
ment of the population in the region at the end of
the Ottoman period I refer here to the writings
of J.B Glubb, 1935, A.Kirkbridge 1946, Abidi,

4- It is so-named after one of the leaders of the first
Muslim army that conquered the area in 634 A.D.
He was a Sahabit (companion of the prophet) called
Abu Ubayd Allah al-Jarah. This leader was buried
in the Jordan Valley but has had a Maqam(shrine)
visited often in a town called al-Mazar where a
tribe called al-Jarah is living and claims to be
the descendent of that leader. The name of the
region seems to have been given in the seventeenth
century to replace the older name of the region

5- Such marriages at a younger age in the traditional
society were necessary for two reasons, one eco-

demic for children formed a cheap labor force
and formed the only guarantee for the parents at
their older age, and the other is military repre-
sented in the concept of Uzwah which means
support in socio-political and military perspec-
tives. This concept means also strength as opposed
to the concept of Da’f or weakness in similar
perspectives.

6- This phenomenon is visible in most of the villages
in Northern and Middle Jordan. The southern
part of the country used to be the habitat of the
nomads and pastoralists who used to live in tents
wandering around looking for water and pasture.
Unfortunately, is that most of the caves are disap-
pearing.

7- This situation is found by the author everywhere
in the villages around el-Husn and in other districts.
The author himself is a Jordanian and lived this
situation in the period between the 1940 and 1960.
Already as pupils in the secondary school the
majority of the pupils used to be jealous of their
colleagues whose parents had two separate spaces
one for human and one for animals.

8- In fact the notion of tribes in the Middle East
appears at the first site to refer to the Nomadic
tribes. This has so far been a common error for
the concept applies for social life in the rural
areas as well as in the urban centers. Despite the
introduction of new criteria for social interaction
such as in the state institutions or the industry
and commerce, tribal allegiance still forms a strong
criterion for social organization in all the spheres
in Jordan.

9- The Ottoman law on civil matters left the regu-
lation of marriage, divorce and inheritance to the
Religious courts. Christians were included in
the Millet System by which non-Muslim religious
communities in the Ottoman Empire enjoyed in-
dependence in regulating their internal matters
through the Millet Councils (Braude, Benjamin
that the very first Catholic Missionary came to el-Husn in 1885. The Catholic Church was built around 1892. The present Greek Orthodox church was built in 1882, to replace the older worship house built of stone and mud with wooden archy ceiling which was destroyed recently. In its place a reception hall is built to function as a party hall for the followers of the Church for local fund raising purposes.

13. His name is Yousuf al-Qus from al-Karak, the largest town in the South of Jordan which Christians, according to Jaussin (1908) and Gubser (1973) are from bedouin origin.

13. Allison (1977:113-137) dealt with the issue of endogamy and parallel cousins marriage among Christian Jordanians but did not pay attention to the phenomenon of the Western Christian missions in the region. He dealt with the issue in comparison with its counterpart among Muslims. Yet parallel cousin marriage among Christians is rather new and formed an opening for missionaries to attract followers from among Middle Eastern Christians. It is a fact that these missionaries were not able to succeed in their work among non-Christians(Haddad, M. 1991).

التعابيش بين المسلمين والسيكحين قبل الدولة الحديثة دراسة في الحسن بلدة في شمال الأردن

مهندس

جامعة اليرموك، أربد، الأردن

ملخص

ينبغي هذا البحث حول السؤال: ما هي ماهية التعايش بين المسلمين والسيكحين في الأردن قبل أن تتأسس الدولة؟ لإجابة على هذا السؤال أخبار الباحث مجتمع البلدة التي يعيش فيها واستخدام النهج الأنثروبولوجي في جمع المعلومات اللازمة وخاصة لتزويد التاريخ الشعبي من كبار السن وما وجدت مما يشير إلى مفاهيم كبار السن والثقافة الشخصية وقام بتبني هذه المعلومات الهندسة من صحتها بحيث استخدم منه ما تأكد من صحته ثم تم تحليلها وتفسيرهم منها. لقد بنيت الدراسة أن مسألة التعابيش في مجتمع ملتهب في الأردن، ولأنه كان فعالة لحلف الأفراد والجماعات، خاصة وأن الدولة على الصعيد
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