

## THE CULTURAL IMAGE OF THE MONARCH IN JORDAN

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In April 2021, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence. For this one hundred years, it has been continuously bound with the Hashemites, the Jordanian ruling family. It is in fact hard to imagine Jordan without its kings. This is why, if we walk in the streets of Jordan, stay at a hotel or go to any museum or a shop, we can encounter images of the king, the crown prince, late monarchs or, less often, the royal family. The Hashemite monarchs have become an integral part of Jordanian culture. The discussion on the image of the king as a part of Jordanian culture cannot be restricted to the person of the contemporary monarch. The impact of monarchs on Jordanian culture is a process that has continued from the creation of state to the present times.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the official image of the king of Jordan including the process of its creation by successive monarchs in light of the role this image plays in the country's contemporary culture.

In this paper, the sources of information about the king and the royal family are press releases, scientific literature about Jordan, official websites of the royal family and their social media profiles – the latter proved particularly interesting in answering the questions raised in this paper. On Instagram, there are official profiles of the Royal Hashemite Court<sup>1</sup> which

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<sup>1</sup> Official Instagram page of the Royal Hashemite Court, source: <https://www.instagram.com/rhcjo/>, [accessed 27.02.2021].



*Fig. 1. King Abdullah II inaugurates the 18th first ordinary session of the Parliament and delivers the throne speech. Amman, 7 November 2016*

serve as the official profile of the king, crown prince Al Hussein<sup>2</sup>, or Queen Rania Al Abdullah<sup>3</sup>. Counting the numbers of followers, the profiles of the royal family members are more popular than the profiles of some movie stars. Al Hussein has 2.7 million and Queen Rania 6.3 million followers. There are even fan-pages of the Hashemites as such, e.g., the Hashemite Royal Family profile<sup>4</sup>.

The social media presence of the royal family is not restricted to Instagram. They are present also on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The

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<sup>2</sup> Official Instagram profile of Al Hussein bin Abdullah II, source: <https://www.instagram.com/alhusseinjo/>, [accessed 27.02.2021].

<sup>3</sup> Instagram profile of Queen Rania Al Abdullah, <https://www.instagram.com/queenrania/>, [accessed 28.02.2021].

<sup>4</sup> Instagram profile of the Hashemite Royal Family, <https://www.instagram.com/hashemitefamily/>, [accessed 17.03.2021].



*Fig. 2. Pictures of king Abdullah II and Crown Prince Al Hussein at building of Al Quds restaurant in Amman*

Royal Hashemite Court has 3.4 million followers on Facebook<sup>5</sup> and 1.2 million followers on Twitter<sup>6</sup>. Queen Rania's YouTube channel<sup>7</sup> has over 83 thousand subscribers and some videos have more than one million views.

The article begins with the presentation of the historical, dynastic and social setting, including the origins of the country, the people of Jordan and the history of the monarchy. Further, the image of the king and the royal family is presented. The paper closes with the discussion on the place of the official image of the king and monarchy in Jordanian culture.

## **A FEW WORDS ON THE CREATION OF JORDAN**

It is not possible to understand the cultural image of the king in Jordan without knowledge of the country's history and ethnic composition. The territory of contemporary Jordan has been inhabited for thousands of years.

<sup>5</sup> The Royal Hashemite Court Facebook profile, <https://www.facebook.com/RHCJO>, [accessed 28.03.2021].

<sup>6</sup> The Royal Hashemite Court Twitter profile, <https://twitter.com/RHCJO>, [accessed 28.03.2021].

<sup>7</sup> Queen Rania's YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/user/QueenRania>.



Fig. 3. King Abdullah and Queen Rania with their children, Crown Prince Al Hussein, Princess Iman, Princess Salma and Prince Hashem. Amman, 2016

Since 1516, the area of Jordan formed a part of the Ottoman Empire, although it was not subject to strong Ottoman administration and the dominant population group were nomads. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Empire strengthened its administration and in 1878 began to populate the area with Circassians and Arab settlers from Palestine. The development of the country was accelerated by the construction of the Hijaz railway which connected Damascus with Medina through Amman and Ma'an<sup>8</sup>. In those times, Jordan did not constitute a separate administrative unit within Ottoman Empire. It was a part of the vilayet<sup>9</sup> of Syria<sup>10</sup>.

The First World War brought new developments in the Middle East. In 1916, Hussein bin Ali Al-Hashimi, Sharif of Mecca<sup>11</sup> and the ruler of Hijaz,

<sup>8</sup> B. Wróblewski, *Jordania*, Warszawa 2011, p. 21–26.

<sup>9</sup> „Province” in the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>10</sup> N.H. Aruri, *Jordan: A Study in Political Development (1921–1965)*, The Hague 1972, p. 15; B. Wróblewski, op. cit. p. 22–23.

<sup>11</sup> Sharif (arab.- noble) title of descendants of the Prophet Muhammad descending from Hassan, older son of Ali bin Talib and Fatima. Also the title of rulers of Mecca from the Hashemite dynasty.

allied with the British, which marked the beginning of the Arab Revolt. For his support, Hussein received an informal promise that an Arab kingdom be created in the territories where Arabs constituted the majority<sup>12</sup>. In 1918, forces commanded by Faisal, son of Hussein entered Damascus, and in March 1920, Faisal was proclaimed the king of Syria.

At the San Remo conference in April 1920, the “A” class mandates of the League of Nations were established for administration of three Ottoman territories in the Middle East. The territories of contemporary Lebanon and Syria fell under the French rule as the mandate of Syria. The British became administrators of modern Palestine and Jordan (as the mandate of Palestine) and Iraq.

The French expelled Faisal from Syria. Abdullah, the second son of the Sharif of Mecca, invaded British territories east of the Jordan river in November 1920, claiming the rights of his elder brother Faisal, the overthrown king of Syria. The British did not act against Abdullah, their ally in the war against the Ottoman Empire. Instead, they divided Palestine into two regions: Palestine (west of the Jordan river) and Transjordan (east of the river) and agreed that Abdullah would be the emir of the latter. The fate of Faisal was not particularly lamentable either, as he became the king of Iraq.

The British created the Emirate of Transjordan with Abdullah as its emir in order not to engage in direct governing of the region, which was scarcely populated, mostly by nomadic Bedouin tribes, as well as some settled population of Arabs, Circassians and Chechens. The new emir managed to subordinate both settled population as well as the Bedouin tribes as the “highest sheik”, but Transjordan did not become a sovereign state. It remained a British protectorate<sup>13</sup>.

In 1946, Transjordan transformed into the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, what is recognized as a moment of gaining independence. As an aftermath of the first Arab-Israeli war, Jordan incorporated the Palestinian territory of the West Bank. That had changed the Jordanian society – from that moment the majority of Jordan’s citizens were Palestinians who lived in West Bank or who had moved in to the territories east of the Jordan river. Palestinians saw the king of Jordan as being partly responsible for the failure of the

<sup>12</sup> B. Wróblewski, *op. cit.*, p. 35–36.

<sup>13</sup> N.H. Aruri, *op. cit.*, p. 16–21, 37.

Palestinian statehood. Therefore, the unification of the East and West Bank provoked a strong Palestinian opposition<sup>14</sup>.

## THE PEOPLE

Jordan is inhabited by more than 10.9 million people<sup>15</sup>, 98% of them Arabs<sup>16</sup>. Other data suggest that 50% to 70% of Jordanian citizens have a Palestinian background<sup>17</sup>. The data concerning their national self-identification indicates that 69.3% identify as Jordanian, 13.3% as Syrian, 6.7% as Palestinian, 6.7% as Egyptian, 1.4% as Iraqi, 2.6% as other<sup>18</sup>, including the Circassian and Chechen minorities.

It is important to stress that these data are not contradictory. Apart from Circassians and Chechens, all of the abovementioned nationalities are Arabs. Jordan has faced the same identity problems as most countries of the region. The first article of the constitution of the Kingdom states that the people of Jordan form a part of the Arab Nation. The question whether Jordanian, Palestinian or Arab identity is dominant remains valid. An important factor in the Jordanian society is the religious affiliation. 97,1% of the citizens are Muslim, predominantly Sunnis. Christians comprise only 2,1% of the society<sup>19</sup>.

A significant part of the population are Bedouins, whose number is estimated to total 1,3 million<sup>20</sup>. Not all of them have remained nomads. Most of Jordanians live in the cities. The country has high level of urbanization exceeding 91% of the population<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> B. Wróblewski, op. cit., p. 116-118, 125. N.H. Aruri, op. cit. p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> CIA Factbook, *Jordan, People and Society* <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/jordan/#people-and-society>, [accessed 11.09.2021].

<sup>16</sup> J.M. Sharp, *Jordan: Background and U.S. Relations*, Congressional Research Service 2013, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> S. Nanes, *Hashemitism, Jordanian National Identity, and the Abu Odeh Episode*, in: *The Arab Studies Journal*, Spring 2010, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 171.

<sup>18</sup> CIA Factbook, *Jordan, People and Society*, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> Joshua Project, *Bedouin Arabs in Jordan*, [https://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/10758/JO](https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/10758/JO), [accessed 9.10.2021].

<sup>21</sup> CIA Factbook, *Jordan, People and Society*, op. cit.



## THE KINGS

The Hashemites are descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. As the rulers of Hijaz, they were responsible for the protection of most holy sites of Islam in Mecca and Medina, as well as for enabling the pilgrimage of Hajj and Umrah. They were eager to play an important role in the Muslim world, which turned out to be one of the causes of the downfall of King Hussein bin Ali, king of Hijaz. He declared himself a caliph, which stood in contradiction to the plans of Great Britain and other Muslim leaders. The Kingdom of Hijaz was conquered by the ruler of Najd, who later became the king of Saudi Arabia<sup>22</sup>.

The first emir of Transjordan and the first king of Jordan was Abdullah I bin Hussein. He extended the Hashemite custodianship over the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, as well as other Islamic sites both in the West and the East Bank. His actions laid foundations for modern Jordan. Abdullah I was assassinated by a Palestinian at the steps of the Al-Ahsa mosque in 1951. All future kings had to face the fact that a part of their citizens were in opposition to the monarchy.

His successor was King Talal bin Abdullah. His reign was short because of his mental illness, yet brought an important development – the Constitution which, with several amendments, continues to form the basis for the political life in Jordan today. This event established Jordan as constitutional monarchy with a bicameral, partly elected parliament and a strong head of state. Despite the fact that Talal laid the foundation for today's Jordan, he is sometimes ignored in the ruling family's "hall of fame".



*Fig. 4. Picture of king Hussein and Queen Noor at souvenir shop in Amman*

<sup>22</sup> A. Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, New York 2000, pp. 261–264.



Fig. 5. Pictures of kings of Jordan in Abdullah I Mosque. From left king Abdullah I, king Hussein, king Abdullah II and Crown Prince Al Hussein. The absence of king Talal is worth of notice

Most important for the creation of modern Jordan, however, are the last two kings. Talal was succeeded by his son Hussein. His long reign, lasting from 1952 to 1999, established Jordan as it is today. Hussein had to find the place for himself and his state in postcolonial world. The fall of the Hashemite Kingdom in Iraq and the rise of Arab socialist governments in Egypt, Iraq and Syria, as well as an increasingly stronger Palestinian resistance put Hashemite Jordan in a particularly difficult position. Hussein had to build his authority and his kingdom based only on the capabilities of his state. He suppressed democratic movements in the 1950s and pursued a flexible foreign policy allying sometimes with his former enemies in Arab states, as well as building ties with the United States. Despite his failure in the 1967 Six-Day War, he was able to hold to power and introduce the policy of nation-building. His reign was an era of a new narrative about the heritage of Jordan. Through his policy, he succeeded to create a notion that the Hashemites are Jordan and Jordan is the Hashemites. Hussein was a particularly charismatic leader, never afraid of mingling with the crowd and meeting the people. He gained a lot of popularity by not supporting the Western intervention against Saddam Hussein during the first Gulf War<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> B.S. Anderson, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan. The Street and the State*, Austin 2005, p. 1–2. B. Wróblewski, *Haszymidzkie Królestwo Jordanii – między autorytarną tradycją*



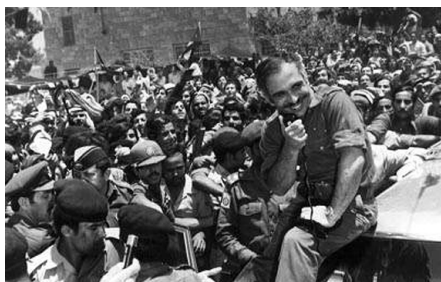


Fig. 6. Delivering a speech from a car megaphone to crowds in Mafraq, Jordan, July 12, 1974



Fig. 7. Mosaic image of king Abdullah II in Petra. Photo by the author

Despite controversies, as the abovementioned suppression of the democratic movements, he remains the most popular king for the Jordanians. This is even admitted by the political opposition<sup>24</sup>.

The currently ruling King Abdullah II bin Hussein ascended the throne in 1999 after the death of his father. King Abdullah II is a direct descendant in the 41<sup>st</sup> generation of the Prophet Mohammad. He received secondary education in Great Britain and the United States. Like his father, he studied in the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the United Kingdom. Upon his return to Jordan, he enlisted in the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army serving as an officer from the rank of first lieutenant up to major general in 1998 in different branches of armed forces. He ended his military carrier as the Commander of Royal Jordanian Special Forces.

When discussing the role of the king, the royal family cannot be forgotten. King Abdullah married Queen Rania Al Abdullah. They have two sons: Crown Prince Al Hussein, (born 1994) and Prince Hashem, (born 2005), and

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*a demokracją*, [in:] *Bliski Wschód, coraz bliżej*, ed. J. Danecki, S. Sulowski, Warszawa 2011, pp. 270–275.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with the Secretary General of Islamic Action Front Murad Al-Adayleh. 6.02.2020.

two daughters: Princess Iman (born 1996) and Princess Salma (born 2000)<sup>25</sup>. Queen Rania comes from a prominent West Bank Palestinian family<sup>26</sup>. In addition, there is the larger royal family comprised of other sons of King Hussein, his brothers and other branches descended from Hussein bin Ali.

## IMAGE OF THE KING AND HIS FAMILY

Abdullah II is often presented in his uniform as a military commander, in reference to the king's military career before acceding the throne. The army played an important role in constructing the national identity in Jordan. The military, at its early beginnings, brought into existence one of the most important Jordanian symbols. In 1931, the red-and-white *shemagh*<sup>27</sup> was introduced for Desert Patrol uniforms. At that time, most Transjordanians wore white or black-and-white *shemaghs*. The latter were adopted from the Bedouin by the settled Palestinian population. That is how the red-and-white *shemaghs* became a symbol distinguishing the "real" Transjordanians (or later simply Jordanians) from the Jordanians of Palestinian origin<sup>28</sup>. This is the reason why the king is presented in a uniform – to create a notion that the king is as a strong



Fig. 8. King Abdullah II and Crown Prince Al Hussein during military exercises, Official Instagram profile of Al Hussein bin Abdullah II

<sup>25</sup> Official website of king Abdullah II, *Profile*, source: <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/page/profile>, [accessed 16.01.2021].

<sup>26</sup> H.L. Wagner, *King Abdullah II*, Philadelphia 2005, p. 84.

<sup>27</sup> *Shemagh, keffiyeh or hattah* – traditional Arab headdress fashioned from a square scarf.

<sup>28</sup> J.A. Massad, *Colonial effects. The Making of National Identity in Jordan*, New York 2001, pp. 100, 121.

leader able to defend the country and strengthen its national identity as well. It is worth mentioning that this impression is built not only through pictures. In 1998, he led an assault by the special forces against a hideout of gunmen who killed 8 people in Amman, earning him the respect of many Jordanians<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, Abdullah I in the process of establishing his country had to gain loyalty of the Bedouin tribes. Thanks to his victories, the support from Great Britain and through dispensing wealth among the tribal shaykhs, Abdullah I managed to create an image of a superior shaykh. Hashemites have continued this policy of maintaining good relations with tribal shaykhs, by visiting the Bedouins in their communities, as well as bringing their leaders into politics and administration<sup>30</sup>.

Furthermore, the king is often presented in a suit, as a politician. It is contradiction to other gulf states where rulers are never shown wearing suits or western cloths. The aim is to present him as an important political figure, respected both domestically and internationally.

That is why the king is often shown with heads of other states. To complete his national-Jordanian image, the king often wears a red-and-white *shemagh* on his head. If we confront that image with that of other regional royals, it is notable that most of them have no official Instagram profiles. Those that exist, like the profile of the Emir of Qatar<sup>31</sup>, present rulers in official situations, wearing *thawb*<sup>32</sup> and *bisht*<sup>33</sup> and, importantly, without their families. The images of the Hashemite Royals with *thawb* and *bisht*, typical for other Gulf Countries, are especially rare.

The above-mentioned images of King Abdullah II are similar to the images of his father Hussein, and his son Al Hussein. This appears to highlight the continuity of the Hashemite family. The association with his late father constitutes an important element of improving the social perception

<sup>29</sup> H.L. Wagner, op. cit., pp. 79, 81.

<sup>30</sup> N.H. Aruri, op. cit., p. 37, Y. Alon, *The Making of Jordan. Tribes, Colonialism and the Modern State*, New York 2007, p. 115, Y. Alon, *The Shaykh of Shaykhs. Mithqal al-Fayiz and Tribal Leadership in Modern Jordan*, 2016, pp. 162–165.

<sup>31</sup> Instagram profile of Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, <https://www.instagram.com/tamim/>, [accessed 28.03.2021].

<sup>32</sup> A kind of long robe or tunic commonly worn in the Arabian Peninsula.

<sup>33</sup> A prestigious cloak worn for special occasions.



*Fig. 9. King Abdullah and Queen Rania with US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump at the Oval Office, the White House. Washington, DC, 5 April 2017*



*Fig. 10. King Abdullah holds talks with President of Russia Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin, during His Majesty's visit to Russia. Moscow, 25 January 2017*

of King Abdullah II. As mentioned earlier, Hussain was popular, while Abdullah has never managed to secure the level of popularity enjoyed by his father. A prominent reason for his limited popularity is that his mother, Princess Muna Al Hussein, is actually British – her name was Antoinette Avil Gardiner. He has been, therefore, pictured as a foreigner, subordinated

to the West, owing also to his pro-American policy<sup>34</sup>.

The Hashemite origins going back to the Prophet Muhammad oblige them to take care of Muslim heritage. That is why the monarchs of Jordan were involved in Jerusalem both when it was a part of Jordan, and after the city was lost to Israel in 1967. Kings of Jordan funded four restorations of the Al Aqsa Mosque. Two of them were funded by King Hussein and one by King Abdullah II<sup>35</sup>. Because of their ancestry, the Hashemites still present themselves as the ambassadors of Islam, taking initiatives to advocate the positive image of the religion<sup>36</sup>.

Such position of the king in the Islamic context is reflected in the official imaginary. He is presented as a pious man, praying or participating in a pilgrimage. Monarchs of Jordan, as good Muslim rulers should, have also founded mosques in the country. The Grand Hussein Mosque was built based on Abdullah I's foundation at the place of a mosque built in Amman by Caliph Omar Bin Al-Khattab in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. King Hussein founded King Abdullah I Mosque as a memorial to his grandfather. Abdullah II founded Hussein mosque, the biggest mosque in Jordan, as a memorial to his father. It is worth mentioning that Hashemites do not limit their activity to Islam. They also became protectors of the Christian minority and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, and made donations for the



*Fig. 11. King Hussein (on the right) and king Abdullah II (on the left) in military uniforms, Official Instagram profile of the Hashemite Royal Court*

<sup>34</sup> B. Wróblewski, op. cit., pp. 250, 267.

<sup>35</sup> Official website of King Abdullah II, *Custodianship over Holy Sites*, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/page/the-hashemites/custodianship-over-holy-sites>, [accessed 16.01.2021].

<sup>36</sup> Official website of King Abdullah II, *Faith*, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/page/vision/faith>, [accessed 16.01.2021].





*Fig. 12. King Abdullah and Crown Prince Al Hussein performing Umrah, Official Instagram profile of Al Hussein bin Abdullah II*

restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and Tomb of Christ<sup>37</sup>. Another important element of image-building, also related to Islam, this time regarding the royal family as a whole, rather than of the king exclusively – is charity work. The royal family created numerous foundations, including the best known, established by Queen Noor, namely King Hussein Foundation, which focuses on programs promoting education and leadership, economic empowerment and participatory decision-making. The Jordan River Foundation, established by Queen Rania, works on child safety and empowerment of communities. King Hussein Cancer Foundation fights cancer in Jordan and across the region. It was established by the royal decree of King Abdullah II and is chaired by Princess Ghida Talal, wife of Prince Talal Bin Muhammad, a cousin of the king. The Crown Prince Foundation was established by Al Hussein with the aim of engaging the youth in the national development efforts.

The royal family constitutes an integral part of the king's image. This is why he is often presented in the company of his son Al Hussein, which is understandable as the prince is the heir to the throne. Abdullah II is also shown with his wife, Queen Rania. At times, this includes informal scenes, for instance when the king is surrounded by his family or daughters, playing with kids. The image here is of a simple father, not a king. This is untypical compared to other Arab monarchies in the region, where women are generally invisible in official image policy.

<sup>37</sup> *Custodianship over Holy Sites*, op. cit.



Importantly, such imagery of the king and his family is not an innovation of Abdullah II. It was introduced by his father, King Hussein. Looking at private photos of Abdullah and Hussein, one could think that they are a typical family from Europe or America – simple people enjoying their time and passions, instead of Middle-Eastern monarchs. The image of the Jordanian royal family can be compared here to the one of the British royal family. They create an impression of being close to the simple people.



*Fig. 13. King Abdullah, then Prince, and Queen Rania, then Princess, with their children, Prince Al Hussein and Princess Iman; at home, Baraka Palace. Amman, September, 1998*



*Fig. 14. King Abdullah, then Prince (centre row, far right), with: Central row, from left to right: Princess Zein, Queen Noor, the late King Hussein, Princess Aisha Back row, from left to right: Prince Hamzah, Prince Faisal, Princess Alia, Prince Hashem. Front row, from left to right: Miss Abir Muhaisen (adopted daughter of the late King Hussein), Princess Iman, Princess Raya, Princess Haya, Prince Ali. Amman, March 1989*

A good summary thereof is the bio on Queen Rania’s Instagram profile. In Arabic it states “Queen Rania Al Abdullah, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan #love\_Jordan”, and then in English “A mum and a wife with a really cool day job”.

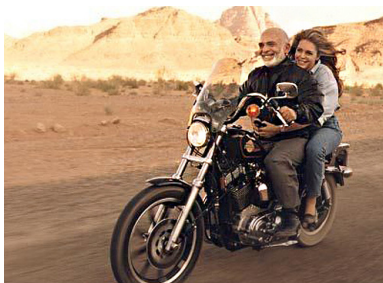


Fig. 15. King Hussein and Queen Noor riding a motorcycle in Wadi Rum, 1994

The created image of the House of Hashim has not only a domestic, but also an international dimension. The positive image of the king and the royal family helps to build a positive image of the country. As an example, Queen Rania is compared to Princess Diana<sup>38</sup>. The aim is to show that Jordan and its rulers are modern and open-minded leaders, treated as partners by the western leaders, and to obscure their role as authoritarian rulers that suppress democracy. This is crucial for the survival of Jordan, which needs foreign aid as well as military support from the USA.

## CRACKS IN THE OFFICIAL IMAGE

“Do you love the king?”

“Yes, I love him.”

“Do you love the queen?”

“No<sup>39</sup>”.

This was the conversation I had with a taxi driver during the route from Queen Alia International Airport to Amman. Some elements of the official image of the monarch and the royal family are not perceived as genuine by all Jordanians. People love the king, at least in public. After the Arab Spring it is easier to criticize the government as whole, but still direct criticism of the king is something unusual. The imagery discussed above and official declarations obfuscate a less positive image of the king and the monarchy. Queen Rania is criticized because of her modern, western style, the media hype. For some people she is also unpopular because of her Palestinian origin<sup>40</sup>. This is probably one of the reasons why the taxi driver said that he did not love the queen. Alternatively, the taxi driver was afraid to criticize

<sup>38</sup> K. Andrys, *Polityka wizerunkowa Haszymidzkiego Królestwa Jordanii ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem roli pierwszej damy*, [in] POLIARCHIA 1(4)/2015, s. 70.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with an anonymous taxi driver.

<sup>40</sup> K. Andrys, op. cit. s. 71–72.

the king, so he said that he did not love the queen, as a hidden act of general discontent of the monarchs.

Therefore, a less positive, unofficial image also has to be noticed. Primarily, the king and the royal family are criticized for corruption. Several recent cases can be given here as examples. A strong blow for the monarchy was the “Hamzah affair”, which coincided with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jordan. Prince Hamzah, the king’s half-brother and former heir to the throne, accused the government of corruption. He was subsequently accused of planning a coup against the king and put under house arrest. After a few days, Hamzah issued a statement pledging his alliance to the constitution and put himself in hands of the king<sup>41</sup>. In 2019, the former minister Amjad Hazza al-Majali demanded from the king the return of stolen land and money<sup>42</sup>. There are many more cases of that kind. Recently, King Abdullah was linked to Pandora Papers, as uncovered documents showed how King Abdullah II created a network of offshore companies in tax havens to amass a \$100 m, including three beachfront mansions in Malibu worth \$68 million purchased by the king of Jordan in the years after Arab Spring. The king’s lawyers stressed that mansions were bought with the king’s personal resources and offshore companies were used for security reasons<sup>43</sup>.

As already mentioned, Abdullah II, as well as his ancestors, is seen as an authoritarian ruler who is suppressing democracy. For example, the government manipulates the electoral system. Southern and eastern regions of Jordan are mostly occupied by the Bedouin population, which is considered as a support base for the monarchy. These regions enjoy a better ratio between the number of votes needed to receive a mandate than the north-western regions predominantly inhabited by Jordanian Palestinians

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<sup>41</sup> Jordan’s Prince Hamzah pledges allegiance to the king after mediation, BBC, source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56644578> [accessed 11.09.2021].

<sup>42</sup> Jordanian politician slams King Abdullah for ‘sponsoring’ corruption, Middle East Eye, source: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/jordanian-politician-slammed-king-abdullah-sponsoring-corruption> [accessed 11.09.2021].

<sup>43</sup> The king of Jordan exposed over tax havens and luxury homes, Al Jazeera, source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/3/investigation-reveals-offshore-assets-of-heads-of-state> [accessed 11.09.2021].

standing in opposition to monarchy<sup>44</sup>. Also the Christian, Circassians and Chechen minorities, which also constitute a support base for the monarchy are overrepresented in the Jordanian House of Representatives. This creates a stronger group supporting the king and the government in the lower house of parliament, even if for numerous Bedouins, Christians, Circassians and Chechens, the official image of the king does also fail to reflect the reality. Support for the king gives these groups an opportunity to maintain a disproportionately high representation in the army and state administration posts, as well as constitutes a safeguard of a certain level of security for Christians.

The legal framework of the country is intended to help the king preserve his good image. The monarch governs, but he does so indirectly through the prime minister and the government. The people are thus not supposed to blame the king directly, but rather the prime minister and the government. If the social anger grows, the king dismisses the prime minister and appoints a new one, showing that he is listening to the people. Jordanians are pragmatic. There is no popular conviction that the king should be changed<sup>45</sup>, as well as most of key actors in political life are more focused on preserving the stability and security over opening up the political life, i.e. democratization<sup>46</sup>. For the people, the king is a good as long as He serves the good of the people and does not betray its beliefs. People support him, because they do not wish for division and disarray. They observe the situation in the surrounding states and see chaos and civil wars. That creates an impression that they prefer to live with a limited level of freedom than lose their safety and

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<sup>44</sup> G.Ł. Małachowski, *Rozwój parlamentaryzmu w monarchiach Bliskiego Wschodu*, [in] *Zmiany polityczne w państwach arabskich. Wybrane zagadnienia ustrojowe*, ed. A. Rothert, J. Szymanek, A. Zięba, Warszawa 2012, p. 204.

<sup>45</sup> B. Wróblewski, op. cit. 251–252.

<sup>46</sup> A. Malantowicz, *Przemiany Arabskiej Wiosny oczyma obywateli Jordanii*, [in] ed. M. Woźniak, D. Ściślewska, *Badania nad światem islamu. Dzieje, dzień dzisiejszy, perspektywy*, Łódź 2015, pp. 409–410.

security<sup>47</sup>. The king is a guarantor of stability<sup>48</sup>, because he is successful in preserving the Jordanian unity and the territorial integrity of the Kingdom<sup>49</sup>.

## THE CULTURE AND THE KING IN JORDAN

Before 1921, Jordan did not exist. Arabs were the national group dominant in this territory, therefore the local culture was Arabic, although divided into urban, rural or nomadic varieties. That is why it was not possible to speak about Jordanian culture as such, but rather about different cultures of people living at the territory of present Kingdom of Jordan. The creation of “Jordanian culture” began alongside the creation of the state.

The policy of the Hashemites has created a vision of the country’s heritage indicating the Bedouin traditions as national ones, sometimes presenting combined costumes, not directly affiliated with the style of a single tribe. The monarchy has co-opted the clothing and customs of the Bedouins, as part of the national narration and rooted it in the Jordanian – non-urban experience. In glorifying the culture of indigenous Jordanians (or Transjordanians in fact), the regime delineated the difference between Jordanians and the majority Palestinian population, solidifying the loyalty of the former<sup>50</sup>.

Alongside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Jordan is one of only two countries where the official name of the state incorporates the name of the ruling family. This underlines the role of these royal families in the establishment of each state.



*Fig. 16. Her Majesty Queen Noor, patron of the Jerash Annual Festival of Culture and Arts in Bedouin styled gown, with king Hussein in Jerash*

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, p. 410.

<sup>48</sup> Based on anonymous interviews conducted in an Amman restaurant and with Secretary General of Islamic Action Front Murad Al-Adayleh.

<sup>49</sup> U. Dekel, O. Perlov, *The Question of Identity in Jordan and the Peace Treaty with Israel: Jordanian Discourse on the Social Media*, “INSS Insight” No 546, May 8 2014, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> B.S. Anderson, op. cit. p. 201.



Fig. 17. Jordanian royals pictures in Hashem restaurant in Amman. Photo by the author

The Hashemites determined a great deal of developments in the country as well in the culture that came to be defined as Jordanian. The Hashemites transformed a colonial state into a nation<sup>51</sup> and there is no Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan without Hashemites. This is acknowledged even by their political opponents. The monarch and his ancestors are everywhere in the public sphere. In pictures, in television, in newspapers.

The king is a statesman, creator of state policy, yet not directly governing the state nor being responsible for contemporary politics. The king is a part of the Jordanian nation-state identity. Hashemites, foreign rulers, have grown into the society of Jordan, so it is impossible to separate them from the political and cultural aspects of the country and its people. The king is both a creator and a product of this culture and politics. If we ask people around the world about Jordan, most would probably mention the ancient city of Petra and beautiful queens married to Jordanian kings. Jordanian identity derives from a broader Arab identity because of the existence of the state, whose central element is the king and the monarchy. Hashemites are one of the elements of national identity that differ Jordan and Jordanians from other Arabs.

The cultural image of the monarch in Jordan is an image of a person who was grown in Arab culture, but was raised and educated in western.

<sup>51</sup> B.S. Anderson, op. cit. p. 203.



The created image is a reflection of the surrounding world incorporating western patterns. It is a legacy left by the colonial heritage and Muslim ancestry. A pious and generous man, defender of faith, builder of mosques, those are qualities of a Muslim ruler. Militarism, strong political leadership and modernity, accompanied with the image of a father of his family are western cultural elements. The cultural image of the king is the same as the image of Jordan. The image of culture bridging the East and the West.

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### Sources of Illustrations

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Figure no. 17 – Jordanian royals pictures in Hashem restaurant in Amman. Photo by the author.

## Abstract

King of France, Luis IV said “I am the state”. The rulers of Jordan could repeat that phrase because their country is unique. It is one of a few states holding the name of the ruling family. Like the neighboring Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Jordan was created by members of a family after which the country is named. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan – this is its full name, was created and ruled by the Hashemites, direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Monarchs from the Hashemite dynasty have left a distinct mark on the state and people living in it. They adopted certain elements of the local culture and carved a unified, albeit somewhat artificial version out of them.

Who are they? How did they achieve it? How are they presented? What is Jordanian culture? And finally, what is the cultural image of monarch of Jordan? These are the questions that the author will try to answer in this paper.

**Keywords:** King; Jordan; monarch; cultural image; Hashemites; monarchy; Middle East; queen; Arab; nation-state identity; Hussein; Abdullah II

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