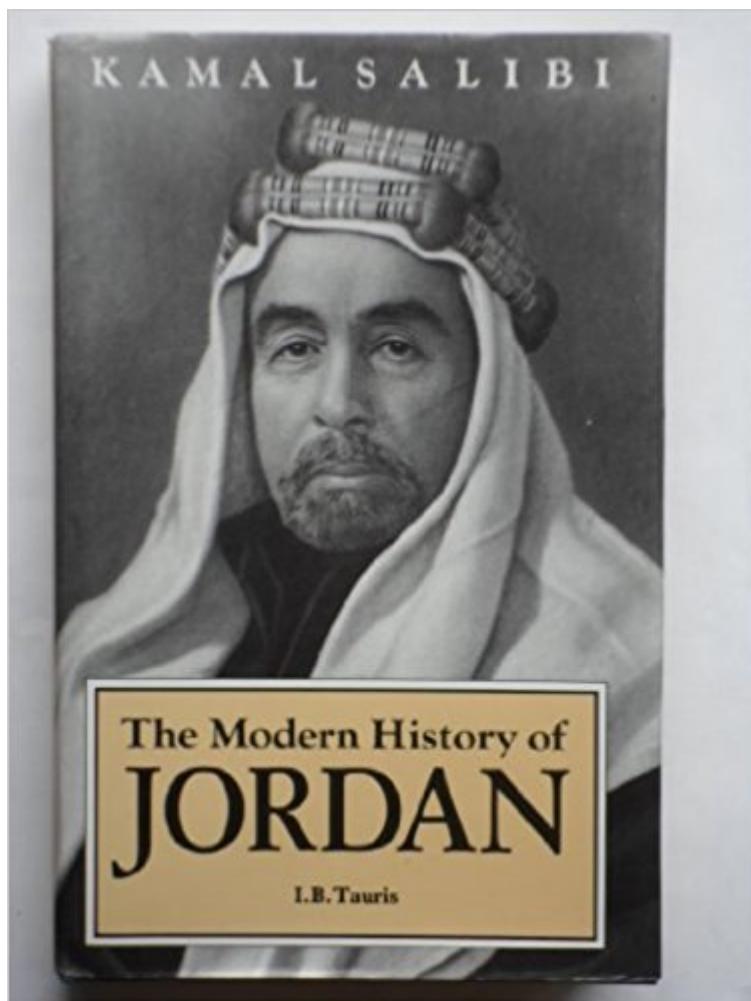


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The Modern History Of Jordan



Synopsis

Few states in the modern world have had a less promising birth than Jordan. When in 1921 the Hashemite Emir Abdallah was recognized as the ruler of this romantic backwater of the former Ottoman Empire, it was sparsely populated, extremely poor, and widely regarded as ungovernable. Today against all the odds, Jordan has become one of the most prosperous and stable of Middle Eastern countries and a major player in the region's politics. In this political history, Kamal Salibi attempts to explain how this transformation was achieved. The book traces the story of modern Jordan from its origins in the Arab revolt at the end of World War I and the political success of the astute and colourful founder of its ruling dynasty. It includes a detailed examination of the far-reaching implications for Jordan of the Palestinian tragedy and a constantly tense relationship with neighbouring Israel and it shows how King Hussein, the longest surviving ruler in the contemporary Middle East, has guided the country through these difficult times to introduce democracy in 1988.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It is a comprehensive book. Salibi was a great Historian.

Salibi writes with his usual lucid and detailed style making this book a pleasure to read. Despite his attempts at objectivity, the book was careful, in fact too careful, to insult the sensibilities of some parties. Salibi attempted to trudge his way through the sensitivity of many historical controversies

in an attempt to be fair to all parties concerned. For those expecting a critical account of history, do not expect much. However, if you are merely looking for an interesting history of modern Jordan, this is your book especially in relation to the minor details many historians overlook in the process of grand theorisation.

I read this book as preparatory material for a study abroad program in Jordan, and was initially pleased with how informative it is. While it is informative as a general history, the real purpose of this book is to be an apology for the Hashemites. When Salibi isn't actively seeking to bolster the image of Hussein and the Hashemites in general, he is downplaying the significance of internal struggle and strife within Jordan. For example, compare accounts of the 1960s in Jordan in Salibi to other accounts. What Salibi describes as minor domestic troubles are described in other accounts as the Hashemites nearly being overthrown. He also, to my mind, shamefully neglects the full scope of the Palestinian issue as it has played out in Jordanian politics and identity-formation. His treatment of Black September discounts the Palestinian perspective while attempting to say the Hashemite's brutal repression really wasn't all that bad. I have had "A History of Jordan" by Philip Robins highly recommended to me, however I have not read it. It is likely to be a more objective account of the history of Jordan. If you do choose to read The Modern History of Jordan do so with a critical eye towards the goals of Salibi, which appears to be proselytizing for the Hashemites. It is also important that you supplement your reading on Jordan with other books, such as Joseph Massad's extraordinary "Colonial Effects" and Marc Lynch's "State Interests and Public Spheres." While I certainly don't want to resort to ad hominem attacks on Kamal Salibi, I do question the rigor of his scholarship given the apologetic nature of "The Modern History of Jordan" and his controversial and discounted theory that historical Israel was in fact Yemen. He appears to be a scholar with an agenda, and it shines through very clearly in his work.

Jordan—that country conjured out of sand and hills by Winston Churchill at the Cairo conference in March 1921—has always had a question mark over its existence. For the first thirty years, King 'Abdullah tried to trade Amman, his backwater capital, for Damascus or Jerusalem. King Husayn struggled during four decades to fend off many predators, including Gamal Abdel Nasser and the PLO. As recently as July 1994, he stated that Jordan "is susceptible to fragmentation." Salibi, professor of history at the American University of Beirut, provides an excellent basis for grappling with these fundamental questions about the Jordanian polity. In two of the book's most important chapters, he chronicles the Hashemite dynasty which produced the kings of Jordan and tells the

history of the territory that Churchill would eventually make into Jordan. Particularly important for today's Jordan-is-Palestine advocates to note, Salibi shows that the British did not control Transjordan during the eight critical months between the French conquest of Damascus in July 1920 and the Cairo Conference. The sections dealing with more recent history provide a competent and useful account of political developments, but they do not provide new perspectives; more surprisingly, they have nothing to say about the culture and economy of modern Jordan, a major lapse.*Middle East Quarterly*, September 1994

This is THE book on the history of Jordan. I mean that literally: you won't find any other general works in English. Salibi is a respected historian who has written interesting works about Lebanon, so this tepid history of Jordan is something of a disappointment. It's not an awful book, but nor is it a very good one. This is a history intended for the general reader, so it lacks detail and analysis, but it fails to make up for this in readability. The writing, while accessible, is hardly inspired. Salibi notes that he was given access to (former) Crown Prince Hassan's private library for the book, and reading his hagiographical treatment of Abdullah and Hussein, one wonders how beholden to the Hashemite throne Salibi is. Still, it's the only game in town.

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