

The Druze Communities in Jordan

By Ahid Quntar

The Beginning

We can not define the presence of the Druze in the Emirate of TransJordan without taking into consideration their presence in Syria. The Sykes Picot Agreement, which set the present borders in the area, caused much concern to date between Jordan and Syria which up to now has not been resolved. The interpretation of borders and lands are still not resolved even following a recent meeting on the 28–09 – 04, the Sykes Picot Agreement problems persist.

Since it was part of Syria during the Ottoman rule, Transjordan had neither geographical nor political borders, yet it had administrative borders represented in its provinces and districts.

The geographical location of the Druze presence was located between what is currently known as Jabal Al-Druze up to the Azraq area in Jordan since it is adjacent to Jabal territories.

There is a document dated Ramadan 15th, 1325 H., presented by Mustafa Al-Atrash, (Sheikh of Mtan village of Jabal Al –Arab), which was endorsed by the Ottoman authorities, indicated that Azraq territories were comprising the lands, located within the southern parts of Mtan village in Jabal Al-Druze. Most part of the lands stretched between Azraq and the southern part of Jabal al-Druze, were considered part of the Jabal Al-Druze territories till it had been amended during the mandate era.

Druze and the establishment of Transjordan

It is noted that a number of high ranking Druze played a crucial role in establishing the Emirate of Transjordan and that the first Jordanian government formed on April 11, 1921 was headed by premier Rashid Talie (a Lebanese Druze) who was then, the president of the Syrian Istiqlal (Independence) Party, the legal successor of Jamiat al –Arabia al- Fatat (The Young Arab Society).

In July 5, 1921, Rashid Talie had also formed the second Jordanian government, although Britain was neither pleased with the government nor with its independent structure and the national past record of its members.

On the heels of the end of Prince Faisal's reign in Syria, members of the Syrian Istiqlal Party had come from Damascus. Their aim was to revolt against the French in order to drive them out of Syria and to form a united Arab national government. Amongst the Druze figures of the Istiqlal Party who had come to Jordan, in addition to Rashid Talie, were Fouad Isleem; the first Jordanian army's chief of staff, Prince Adel Arslan; the head of Transjordan Emirate's Divan, Ajaj Neweihidh; the director of Broadcasting Station and afterwards the director of Printing and Publication Department, Dr. Suleiman Najar, the director of Medical Services and Fared Talie; the director of Medical Services who took over from Suleiman Najar.

Settlement of Druze in Jordan

Settlement of Druze in Jordan had begun in Azraq Oasis; near Jabal Al-Arab which was considered, as mentioned was part of the Jabal's territories. The Oasis is about 110 kilometres far from Amman, the Jordanian Capital.

The beginning of Druze settlement in Azraq was in 1918, when (22) Druze families left Jabal Al-Arab in the wake of the Turks pulling out of the region. These families had headed for Azraq Castle, an Umayyad fortress built from black basalt stones taken from the area itself, intending to live there.

Since the area was considered dreary and deserted, Druze families had used to close the Castle's stone gates, weighing five tones a piece in fear thieves' and Bedouin raids. The first time when one family member set up home outside the castle walls, was in 1937 which he built only 200 meters from the fort.

When Azraq became a base of the "Great Arab Revolt", Prince Faisal bin Al-Hussein moved his headquarters there. His Druze relationship with in Azraq became a link which connected Faisal with his Syrian loyalists and a large numbers of Druze joined the "Arab Revolt Army".

Following the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Turks' withdrawal from Jordan, the Druze movement continued to interlope into the newly born Emirate. Most of such

movements, whether individual or in family groups, had occurred for the following purposes.

1. Movement of those groups that were living adjacent to the Jabal Al – Druze, especially Umm Al – Quttein village as well as neighbouring villages were for the purpose of growing their crops and feeding their herds in lands owned by the population of Jabal Al – Druze.
2. Movement of those groups that had come to work to earn their living.
3. A compulsory departure which was as a result of the situation pertaining to the revolution launched against the French colonization, also from the circumstance prevailing, due to internal revolts broken out against domestic governments like the revolution against Adib Al-Shishakli.

By 1933, the number of Druze had risen and they began to become integrated into the Jordanian society. The main areas, in which they were living, were Amman, Azraq, Zarqa, Russiefa, Umm Al-Quttein, Aqaba and Mafraq.

A statistical document had shown that the ratio of the people who have had good command in foreign languages was 1.5% of the whole Jordanian population. They were distributed in the following way:

	1926	1927	1928
Moslems	343	331	730
Christians	110	113	145
Druze	3	3	4

Number of Druze in Jordan

Since the Druze in Jordan were considered as Arab Moslems, there were no official or non-official reliable statistics about the number of Druze in Jordan. In the

meantime, institutions of the Druze's civil society were unable to conduct a census for the Druze under which they could count their number in Jordan.

According to my own estimation, of the Druze in Jordanis, roughly, about 12500 nationals, distributed in Jordan in the following areas:

Azraq	5200
Amman	5000
Zarqa	1100
Umm Al-Quttein	450
Russaifa	400
Aqaba	100
Mafrq	100

Azraq:

Although the Druze in Azraq formed the majority of the population a similar number in Amman's 1.5 million population accounts to nothing. As I have stated, the Druze began to settle in Azraq in 1918. In 1924, additional numbers of Druze and their families sought refuge at Azraq following the deterioration of the situation in Jabal Al-Druze that had stemmed from French persecution. During the time of the Syrian revolution, the number had, accordingly, doubled.

When the revolution ended and the situation in Jabal Al-Druze calmed down, part of the Druze returned home to their own villages, meanwhile a number of families came to Azraq and made it their home.

During 1933-1945, additional number of families came to Azraq and Azraq had therefore, became their new home and permanent residence.

The most important source of income for the people of Azraq was to dig out and refine table salt that had been accidentally discovered in 1924. Digging out a hole in the ground as a lurking place for hunting purposes, the digger was surprised to find water running to fill out the hole. The man, who had returned to the same hole for the same purpose after some days found that the hole was dry full of salt. Afterwards, taking out salt had become the main job as well as the main source of living for the population of Azraq.

In 1997, a modern factory owned by the Azraq Society for Refining Salt had been built. Hence, taking out the refining salt became a job promoted amongst Azraq inhabitants to earn their income.

After being a closed and semi-isolated area, Azraq had vigorously awakened side by side with the modern advancement of Jordan. As a consequence, Azraq became a junction linking international highways between Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

Transportation had, therefore, invoked industrial, commercial and tourist activities, serving passengers thus creating new jobs and investments for local community. Moreover, a number of people in the area started to work in irrigated agricultural farms establishing farms of olives and grapes trees.

Amman:

Following the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan (1921) with Amman as its capital it became its administrative centre performing functions of the country. Amman had become important. Having been formerly a small village, the capital had flourished to become a place, full of energy and activities, able to receive Arab freedom fighters who arrived there in the wake of the collapse of Fiasal's reign in Damascus .

Subsequently, Amman began to attract many groups that arrived in batches to live in Jordan after the capture of Damascus by France. These groups had included the Druze of Lebanon, Jabal Al –Druze and Palestine.

The first batch was part of the Arab army or from the national resistance, who fled from the French persecution. Some came because of the revolution or had sought a living in Amman.

Furthermore, the success achieved by the first groups that came to Amman, had motivated the succeeding groups to come afterwards to it. These groups did not come from Jabal Al Druze only but also from Lebanon and Palestine.

Amman was progressing and becoming more prosperous in fields of construction and economy, the number of Druze had accordingly risen. So, they got jobs in all domains of work whereby part of them had evidently succeeded in construction and contracting fields.

Civil Society Institutions:

Like other citizens in Jordan, Druze continued to establish their civil society's institutions. Being an institutionalized framework set to organize charitable and social activities and to employ them to develop local community. The role played by their charitable societies had become prominent. Furthermore, like other citizen in Jordan, Bani Marouf had, from the outset, exerted their efforts energetically to establish their own charitable societies. These established societies are listed below listed together with their headquarters and years of establishment.

The Poor Druze Society:

Established in Haifa (Palestine) and commenced its activities in 1939.

Prior to carry out other societies' establishment, Druze in Jordan had implemented their social activities through this society. After 1948, part of the Society's activities was moved to Amman, and it remained in Amman during 1950s, yet, it was not officially registered.

Azraq Charitable Society:

Established in 1967 in Azraq.

This Society had maintained and is still maintaining the administration of efficient social activities under which it supervises all programs and support for the local community. Its social activities have included daily meals to school students, for many years.

Arab Jordanian Charitable Society:

Established in 1969 in Amman.

This Society played a key role in implementing various activities for the local community. Like other charitable societies in Amman, this Society's activities had included to training girls in different professions and included sports, social and cultural events aiming at driving Druze to interact with the local community. The Society owns a four-storey building in Amman.

Al-Hikmah Charitable Society:

Established in Zarqa in 1972.

Like other charitable societies representing Zarqa's social institutions, this Society had managed to shoulder different types of responsibilities, such as cultural and social; events.

AL –Hikmah Charitable Society – Russaifa Branch:

Established in 1986 for organizational purposes as an offshoot of the mother society "Al Hikmah Charitable Society (in Zarqa)", This Society, enjoyed administrative and financial independence, accomplishing many goals. One of its great achievements was hand made carpets. This society had been described by all official institutions as a society of distinction.

Azraq Ladies Society for Social Development:

Established in 1981 in Azraq.

This Society had given heed to social development issues and had taken care of women's affairs.

Cooperative Societies:

Cooperative work, performed in association with other workers efforts for the mutual benefit, is considered a work of advanced formula. Cooperative work unites the efforts to create a mutual consensus for building a positive mental attitude to enhance administration and production.

Azraq Cooperative Society:

Since table salt is considered the most important source of income, many attempts had been exerted to find a formula whereby salt can be marketed. So, a national company comprising some Azraq people and others to market the salt had been established between 1948-1951.

Prior to that company, many cooperative societies were established, the most important of which was Azraq Cooperative Society which was established in 1956 for cooperation and credit purposes. 1973, the objectives of the Society had been developed to include producing, processing and marketing the salt. Yet, this sector

is currently suffering from financial and marketing crises. Members of the Society had exceeded one thousand members. About 85% of them are Druze.

Azraq Ladies Cooperative Society:

Established in 1992.

The most important objectives of this Society are to invoke cooperation between the Society's member ladies (76 members). Willingness and ability to work with each others for productive purposes and to sponsor certain projects that contributes to improve the families' means of support and subsistence.

Al –Marouf Cooperative Society:

Established in 1963 in Amman.

The Society owns many buildings in Amman and other area, dealing in real-estate raisin much needed funds.

Cultural and Sports Clubs:

Al-Shulah Sports Club:

Established in Amman.

This club was unofficial and thrived between 1956-1966.

Azraq Club:

Established in 1971 by a group of enthusiastic young Druze. This Club's main objective is to serve the local community through performing sports, cultural and social activities.

As member of Jordan's sports federations, the Club plays a key role in the social activity, through its voluntary committees and the educational, cultural seminars it conducts at all times. In this context, the Club has formed a professional folklore

troupe which participates efficiently at local and national festivals throughout Jordan.

Azraq Cultural Forum:

Established in 1996.

The Forum's important activity is to organize Azraq Festival for Culture and Arts that had commenced its activities in 1993. The Festival, which has attained an outstanding success in Jordan and the Arab World, is conducted every year at Azraq's ancient Castle during the period from August 26 to 29. This festival's activities encompass all aspects of Jordanian heritage and culture.

Bani Marouf code of practice for families and social contract in Jordan

On December 12, 1990, Druze of Jordan had issued a social contract document whereby the frameworks of the social relationship between Bani Marouf in Jordan aiming to establish and ensure solidarity and cooperation between them.

The document stipulated that: "Being an integral part of the Arab nation, we have found that we shall have to protect our heritage, conventions and traditions.

It is considered an essential part of every community's distinctive identity, and any attempt to abandon these social frameworks shall never survive".

This social contract document has pointed out how to set out social behaviours, to strengthen the social relationships and to shun all manifestations of extravagance. Excessive outlay of money lacking in moderation like conducting wedding ceremonies, feasts and obituary occasions as well as other occasions such as visiting patients. In the meantime, it has upheld genuine Arab traditions of which Bani Marouf are proud of throughout their history.

The Assembly of Bani Marouf of Jordan

In an overall review of the presence of Bani Marouf in Jordan since their settlement there, attempts exerted by grandfathers and fathers to set up an authority that could bring Bani Marouf into unity, was begun. A number of Druze's, motivated by true loyalty in their country, have found that such authority should be

established in an institutionalized way with clear goals. Such institutionalized function shall have to reflect the democratic approach that might give way to the creative powers that seek accelerating progress, advancement as well as development in concepts and methods.

Paying heed to the goals that should be achieved by means of a proper program and clear and true vision, the group formed a preparatory committee to draw up the proper framework. They have agreed that the framework shall be a formula under which Druze in Jordan will come together into unity.

The main objectives of the assembly are as follows:

1. To unite the authority into one and to represent the Druze in official and non-official circles. Accordingly, be their spokesperson in all cultural, political and social events.
2. To work for promoting Bani Marouf by means of scientific, cultural and social development.
3. To confirm self-belief, representing a true historic dimension that stands for genuine meanings and concepts. To search and work for its promotion and circulation.
4. To contribute to the national social structure amongst its members and to stress the Arab national loyalty adhering to the national unity.
5. To participate in the democratic process among the Druze community by encouraging them to take part in drawing up official and no-official decision in the light of any changes in the Jordanian arena .
6. To contribute in holding seminars that serve the Assembly and to participate in conferences that is consistent with the Assembly's goals.
7. To encourage and support the Assembly's members in higher education, scientific field with the best possible means.

At the outset of 2004, the Assembly has managed to organize all of its commissions. The Assembly higher council, comprising (81) members

representing all Druze of Jordan of different locations, had been formed whereat (the Council) had been elected directly by them.

On April 16, 2004, the Higher Council had convened and elected the Executive Bureau comprising (11) members including the President and Vice President, Engineer Akram Abu Hamdan who is holding an important position in Jordan (Director General of the National Resources, investment and development corporation was elected as president and it was honouring me, Ahid Quntar as elected in the post of Vice President and in charge of Political Development.