

JORDAN IS A RIVER -- NOT A STATE

THESE DAYS WHEN WE ARE SO CONCERNED WITH THE PRECISE HALACHIC DEFINITION OF WHO IS A JEW IT MIGHT ALSO BE WORTH WHILE TO CAST A GLANCE AT THE IDENTITY CARD AND BIRTH CERTIFICATE OF OUR STATE. FOR ISRAEL IS A YOUNG STATE AND THERE ARE MANY WHO TRY TO CAST DOUBT ON HER LEGITIMACY.

Our examination will show that the mother of the State was the everlasting hope and yearning of the Jewish people for redemption from exile; and its father - the urgent need to save the Jewish people from physical and spiritual annihilation. And with all due respect to that father - it is a good thing that with us it is the mother who counts most.

By analogy, the identity of Jordan, or as it was called until twenty years ago "the Hashemite Kingdom", reveals that its mother was an abandoned, ownerless land, without people or heritage its father was an imperialism that happened to cast its seed about at random, almost by an act of artificial insemination.

It might be worth while pondering this phenomenon at a time when this bastard state is in a condition of turmoil and uproar, with many outsiders stirring up internal anarchy, when all that is left is the vestige of a half-Bedouin half-British-made king and a welter of Syrian, Iraqi, and Pakistani troops, and dozens of terrorist organisations, when many covetous eyes are directed at it for the multifarious purposes - and it still has not managed to produce a nation or in fact anything since its bastard birth. For our interest, is much more far-reaching than the interest we rightly take in all our neighbours.

THE KEEPER OF ISRAEL

There never was a state or a country by the name of Jordan, nor a people nor nation by that name. Jordan is the name of a river, a river whose size is totally disproportionate to its fame.

Yet it has certain characteristics of its own - some ultra-individualistic tendencies and idiosyncrasies. There hardly is another river that coils and twists and circumambulates like the Jordan - following a course almost as meandering and circuitous as that of the Jewish people. From the peaks of the Hermon down to the Dead Sea, the lowest spot on earth, the distance it has to cover is only 87 miles, but it makes this way in 153 miles, almost twice the actual stretch. It meets many adventures and obstacles along its course. The swamps of the Huleh are muddy, but what does a little dirt matter to the chief river of the Holy Land? Then comes something more pleasant - the Lake of Kinneret, called after the Hebrew KINNOT, the soothing harp in whose shape it is moulded.

The temptation to succumb to its charms and become drowsy with pleasure is great, but the Keeper of Israel knows no sleep and neither does the River Jordan. Strengthened by its brief respite it goes on to resume its task, telling us, as it were, that even when everything is quiet on the surface, deep below the people of Israel never ceases to rumble, as the Jordan waters never cease to flow. And then come the basalt rocks, the jungle and the desert that have to be traversed in order finally to end in that Sea which may be called Dead, but constitutes one of the richest mineral treasures on earth. There may be no fish but what the people of Israel are already getting from it today when only a small part of its wealth is being extracted, is enough to revitalise many a piece of land and feed many a mouth.

REVISUALISE A KINGDOM

Yet it is not its physical singularity that has given our Jordan its historic renown, but all that has happened on its waters and shores. All the many natural and supernatural events that it has witnessed. For it has seen much in its long life. Many Imperial armies have marched across it and along it. But the imprint they left was far less than that of Jacob, crossing it with his flock, that of Joshua, leading the people of Israel across it on dry land, and that of David who again recrossed it on his way to the eastern bank - David who others hold holy only because he has become holy to us, and whose name would never have reached the corners of the earth unless we had revived his Kingdom here. Nor would the name of this country have

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spread far and wide, had it not been for us and our connection with this land.

There are politicians who think that pragmatism is the be all and end all, that one should heed neither history nor faith nor ideals. They speak about the Kingdom of Jordan as something substantial, a factor to be taken into account by them and the State of Israel. This approach might be right for every other place in the world, but it does not apply to this country.

Here, there can be no pragmatism that goes against history. This would be as much of an impossibility as that the Jordan should flow back from the Dead Sea up to Mount Hermon. There is no power in the world that can turn the Jewish people back from its course. Nor can the Arab inhabitants on both banks of the Jordan be turned into a new "Jordanian" nation.

AN ARTIFACT

One can have no quarrel with the younger generation that was born to today's map and accepts the state of Jordan as an existing fact. These youngsters have no reason to doubt that there is some ethnic, national, historical and cultural reality behind this concept. After all, they hear about many new countries that are springing up in Africa these days, and though even about them the last word has probably not yet been spoken, they usually do stand for some tribal reality. In Jordan there is not even that. The entire state of Jordan is a product of accident and connivance.

In 1921, the river Jordan became the administrative boundary between the two parts of the Land of Israel, and the Jew's authority to build a national home was restricted to the West Bank. Subsequently, Abdullah, by the grace of the British, was made king of the bedouin tribes roaming that area.

MISPLACED LOVE

But not only under the auspices of the British. Indirectly, he also ruled by the grace of the Jews. For in our eagerness to find "good" Arabs who would consent to the realisation of the Zionist ideal we sought out this Abdullah, a man who had no followers among the local Arabs and who would not have been there at all, and certainly not as a king, had it not been for the British. While Britain was our misplaced love, Abdullah and his kingdom were our misplaced hope. For the sake of this hope we neglected natural potential allies among the national and religious minorities - the Kurds, the Maronites and the Druze, who are all suffering from Arab oppression.

But if, in 1948, the first year of our statehood, we had at least seen to it that this foreign dynasty on the other side of the Jordan, should stay in Trans-Jordan! From the military point of view there was nothing to stop us from getting as far as the Jordan and dealing with Shechem (Nablus) and Hebron in the same way as we dealt with Lydda and Ramle.

It was our unhappy love that betrayed us. And at a meeting in Jericho, of all places, we abandoned the entire central part of Cis-Jordan to Abdullah's rule.

Yet all to no purpose, for in the Western territories too, the Hashemites never managed to set up a nation, a culture or a state worthy of the name. There is no comparison between what we have accomplished in the past twenty years and what they have done.

Abdullah was assassinated, his son Tallal was declared insane and so his grandson Hussein came to the throne. And again we believed that he was the one good Arab ruler, the one who would be our ally. What forlorn hopes! Dashed to the ground when in 1967 he opened fire and issued orders to kill and destroy - women, children, old and young.

Now he is fighting for his throne and for his state, which can have no future because it has no past, which has no justification because it fills no need, not being a viable entity in any sense of the

word. Saudi, Iraq and Syria all regard it as part of their own territories. Yasser Arafat's terrorists regard it as the bridge-head for the annihilation of Israel. And we?

SITTING ON THE FENCE

We have the historic memory of the land of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasse, of the land of David and the Hashmonians; we have a Divine promise and the temporal promise made by the fifty-two nations who ratified the Balfour Declaration according to which Trans-Jordan is part of the Jewish homeland; we have the recent memory of the lands bought there by the Zionist Organisation right down to the thirties (the Rothschilds held lands in the Horan, Ussishkin bought lands in Moab). And in view of all this, are we still going to sit on the fence, in passive expectation of the events that may take place there?

We made two glaring mistakes in the Six-Day War: We did not take Aqaba, which could have been done, hardly firing a shot, so as to sever all contact between the "Kingdom" of Jordan and Egypt and cutting off all military supplies. This would have forced the Hashemite ruler either to negotiate for peace or to close shop. And then we failed to take the Gilead heights together with the Golan, so that the settlements in the Jordan Valley might be removed from the firing line.

Jordan was always a western protectorate, first British and then American. It was these western powers who always prevented us from doing what was called for. In 1956, during the Sinal campaign, our forces had already penetrated into the Hebron mountains and crossed the borders in Jerusalem but a British ultimatum checked their advance. To this day the Western powers regard Jordan as theirs, a private possession which Israel must not touch. Yet Jordan hardly is sacrosanct. What happened in Libya is also likely to happen there, with the only difference that while Libya is far off, Jordan is as close as can be. When overnight the "good" Hussein went over to Nasser's camp and joined in the "good" fight for our annihilation, the West did not stand in his way.

A PREDICTION

Do we need much imagination to predict what will happen to us if the Iraqis, the Syrians, the Egyptians or Arafat's terrorists take over and line up against us along the Jordan?

It is our duty to intervene, so that justice may be done to us and to others. The map of the Middle East must be revised through the emergence of national, national states. The artifact of Jordan is nearing its natural end. The fate of this territory must be our primary concern. Even without any reference to historic rights and Biblical promises - Aqaba and Gilead are vital necessities. And in taking them no violence will be done to any existing nation; the political sovereignty of these territories has already been infringed upon - by our worst enemies. If Canada were about to disintegrate and the Russians were going to take over, would the United States have a single moment's hesitation? Hardly. For this is no longer the same case as Vietnam.

The Jordan as a borderline? That might be conceivable in the event of a real peace with a real state, a civilised state. In the absence of such the only true border can be the desert - a fact already recognised in ancient times when, like now, Trans-Jordan was the invasion route of savage nomadic tribes out to despoil the settled land. No state and no nation was ever founded there, not in Biblical times and not in our own era, and this was hardly an accident.

The battle for the succession is brewing. And let it be remembered: The Jordan - as every decent encyclopaedia, Judaica and Britannica, will tell us - is the main river that flows through the middle of Palestine - the Land of Israel.