

KU LEUVEN

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES



CHRISTIANS IN JORDAN
EQUALITY AND SAFETY OF JORDAN'S CHRISTIANS

Supervisor

Prof. Dr. Mehdi AZAIEZ

Master Thesis (Research Paper),
Master in World Religions,
Interreligious Dialogue and
Religious Studies

by

Karle DE VOLDER

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Christians in the Middle East might be facing the greatest threats they have known in centuries. The number of Christians in the area is decreasing. Christians are facing violence and even extinction in areas where they have lived for centuries. Jordan seems to be a rare exception to violence against Christians and is seen as an island of peace and as an example of religious coexistence. Still it is hard to imagine that Jordan's Christians are unaffected by all that is happening around them. Is the situation of Christians in Jordan really as good as its reputation makes it out to be? Do they still feel safe, and why should they?

The first chapter describes different historical factors that have made Christianity in Jordan what it is today. This part is a literature study. The main factors described in this chapter are the division of Christianity, the rise of Islam and its *dhimma* system, the Crusades and its influence until today, the Ottoman Empire and its *millet* system and the *tanẓīmāt*, and finally the formation of the modern nation states.

The second chapter talks about Christianity in Modern Jordan. Some field experience was needed here as an addition to the available literature. The chapter looks at who Jordan's Christians are and what their status is in Jordan. It shows that Christians are an important and generally respected minority, despite having to deal with some legal issues. Discrimination against Christians is very limited.

Finally, the third chapter discusses the current situation of Christians in Jordan. The main question of this part is which reasons Jordanian Christians have to leave or stay in Jordan. Or in other words: what makes Jordan different from the other countries, that they would be able to stay safe? The reasons for them to leave are the same as in the other countries. The reasons for them to stay however show the exceptionalism of Jordan. Scientific literature regarding this research question turned out to be very scarce. Thus, the –very limited- fieldwork I conducted during my internship, combined with my personal experience in Jordan, were crucial in order to write this part. Existing literature was then used to support these findings. Three factors that support the idea of Jordan's exceptional situation are discussed: firstly Christians in Jordan have a strong bond to the Royal Family. They both need each other, and the King is very devoted to Christian-Muslim relations. A second factor is that nationalism and identity in Jordan are based on tribalism, not on religion. Thirdly, Christians in Jordan are visibly protected by the state. The safety services in Jordan are well trained and very present.

The results of my research show that Christians in Jordan have it well. They are treated as equal citizens. They have reasons to be afraid, but they are also right to assume that their situation is different. I believe that Christians have a future in Jordan and will not await the same fate as Christian communities in the surrounding countries.

NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

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De christelijke gemeenschappen in het Midden Oosten van vandaag worden sterk geconfronteerd met bedreigingen. Hun aantal neemt steeds verder af. Christenen hebben te maken met geweld, het is zelfs denkbaar dat sommige van deze eeuwenoude gemeenschappen zullen verdwijnen. Jordanië lijkt een zeldzame uitzondering op het geweld tegen christenen dat de regio kent. Jordanië wordt gezien als een eiland van vrede, en als een voorbeeld van religieuze co-existentie. Toch lijkt het onrealistisch dat de christenen in Jordanië niet beïnvloed worden door wat er rond hen gebeurt. Is de situatie van christenen in Jordanië echt zo goed als hun reputatie aangeeft? Voelen zij zich nog veilig, en waarom zouden ze zich veilig voelen?

Het eerste hoofdstuk beschrijft historische factoren die bepalend waren voor het huidige christendom in Jordanië. Met name gaat het over de splitsingen binnen het Christendom, de opkomst van de islam met het *dhimma* systeem, de Kruistochten en diens hedendaagse invloed, het Ottomaanse Rijk met het *millet* systeem en de *tanẓīmāt*, en de vorming van de modern natiestaten. Dit deel is een literatuurstudie. Het tweede hoofdstuk bespreekt de het christendom in het huidige Jordanië. Beperkt veldwerk was nodig als aanvulling van de beschikbare literatuur. Dit hoofdstuk bekijkt wie de Jordaanse Christenen zijn, en wat hun status is in Jordanië. Het hoofdstuk toont aan dat christenen een belangrijke en over het algemeen gerespecteerde minderheid zijn, ondanks enkele legale onrechtvaardigheden. Discriminatie van christenen komt zelden voor. Ten slotte bespreekt het derde hoofdstuk de huidige situatie van christenen in Jordanië. De basisvraag van dit deel is welke redenen deze christenen hebben om in Jordanië te blijven of om hun land te verlaten. Met andere woorden: wat maakt Jordanië anders dan de andere landen, dat christenen hier wel veilig zouden zijn? De redenen voor emigratie zijn hetzelfde als in de rest van de regio. De redenen die ze hebben om te blijven tonen echter aan wat er exceptioneel is aan Jordanië. Bronnen omtrent deze onderzoeksvraag waren schaars, en mijn –zeer beperkt- veldwerk, dat ik afnam gedurende mijn stage, en mijn eigen ervaringen in Jordanië waren dus cruciaal om dit deel te schrijven. Ik ondersteunde dit met bestaande literatuur. Drie factoren die de idee van de uitzonderlijke situatie van Jordanië ondersteunen worden besproken. Ten eerste is er een sterke band en een relatie van wederzijdse afhankelijkheid tussen de christenen en de Jordaanse Koning. Ten tweede zijn nationalisme en identiteit in Jordanië gebaseerd op tribalisme, niet op religie. Ten derde worden christenen zichtbaar beschermd door de staat. De Jordaanse veiligheidsdiensten zijn goed getraind en sterk aanwezig.

De resultaten van dit onderzoeken ondersteunen de idee dat Christenen in Jordanië het goed hebben. Ze worden behandeld als burgers, niet als christenen. Ze hebben enkele redenen om te vrezen voor hun toekomst, maar hun situatie is wel degelijk anders. Ik geloof dat christenen een plaats zullen blijven hebben in Jordanië, en dat hen niet hetzelfde lot te wachten staat als de Christelijke gemeenschappen rond hen.

PREFACE

This research paper is submitted in fulfilment of the Master in World Religions, Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Studies; complementary to a six-week internship I completed at the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) in Amman, Jordan earlier this year. RIIFS is an organization that focuses on intercultural and interreligious issues. Their activities strengthen cooperation between religious groups and interfaith relations, while trying to eliminate misconceptions that might exist about the 'other'. Its ultimate aim is to diffuse tensions and to promote peace.

The subject of this paper, Christians in Jordan, was motivated by my internship. My focus on Christians in Jordan came from my initial interest in Muslims in Belgium. I was hoping to learn from Christian-Muslim relations in Jordan, in order to then be able to look at the same relations in Belgium and the rest of Europe.

I am grateful to my university and faculty for having been given the opportunity to do this. Special thanks go out to Francis Van den Noortgaete who was always available for help and support during all stages of this internship. Not only was this experience crucial in order to write this article, it also provided me with the possibility to live and work in an Arabic country, which was a personal requirement for me after having obtained my Bachelor degree in Arabic and Islamic studies last year.

It would not have been possible to write this paper without the help of RIIFS. Special notice should be given here to Mona Deeb, Zina Ishaq and Dr. Amer Al Hafy, who supported me with my research and who brought me in contact with local Christians and specialists. I also want to thank director Dr. Majeda Omar and everyone else at RIIFS for welcoming me into their organization.

I am also grateful to my respondents and the other people who took time to share their opinions on this issue with me. The most important in this respect are Father Rif'at Bader and especially Father Bassam Shahatit, whose expertise in this field was crucial for this paper. The same counts for professor Herman Teule for his invaluable feedback. Thanks also go out to my friends Xenija and Hugh for proofreading this paper.

Last but not least I am indebted to my supervisor, professor Mehdi Azaiez, who was more than helpful to me during the whole writing process.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is mainly a literature study. I used written sources, mainly books and encyclopaedias, while writing the first chapter, which notes historical factors that had a strong influence on Christians in Jordan and in the Middle East in general. The second chapter depicts the current situation of Christians in Jordan. A combination of official reports and articles from scientific journals and newspapers form the basis of this chapter. Finally the third part is an attempt to explain the exceptionalism of Jordan where its Christian communities are concerned. Some field work was necessary in order to answer to the final question of this paper, namely if Jordan's Christians would face a different future than Christians in their surroundings, and even more importantly why this would be the case. However, since this paper had to be based on literature and not on own research, my fieldwork was limited to 6 short interviews. Half of the respondents were men, the other half women. They belonged to different age groups, lived in different areas in or around Amman, and belonged to different Christian nominations. Some of them were religious, others were cultural Christians. Despite being able to give a diverse image of Jordan's Christians, it is obviously clear that the number of respondents I questioned was too small to be representative for this diverse population. It is thus so that while I got my inspiration from conversations with Christians, most of the content of this chapter is, like the other chapter, based on literature. The sources used for this part were very diverse, including websites, articles, scientific reports and books. My interview with reverent Bassam Shahatit and Dr. Amer Al Hafy was also very inspirational for this chapter. While I believe that the factors described here are important, the limited resources available to me during my research did not allow me to regard all aspects potentially significant for the research question. Thus, further representative studies on the situation of Jordanian Christians are necessary and should be strongly encouraged. Another limitation of this paper is that it was not possible to include an extensive study of the other countries in the region, which makes that it was difficult to compare Jordan to these other countries.

Foreign words are noted in italic the first time they are used. The explanation of these words can be found in the word list in Appendix 1. The al-Masāq transcription system is used to transcribe these words from the Arabic alphabet. Names are written in their western variants. The reference system used is based on the magazine *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, as suggested by my faculty, and the Gregorian calendar is used for all dates.

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INTRODUCTION

Christianity has been present in the Middle East since the first centuries AD.¹ Eastern Christians have been living under Muslim rule, and often next to a Muslim majority, for centuries. In some areas, such as the region where Jordan is located today, Christians were a majority until the early 16th century.²

Over the last decades international concern for the Christian communities in the Middle East has been growing,³ and the last five to ten years have shown an even more dramatic deterioration in their situation. Many journalists have reported on this problematic situation of Christians in the Middle East today, stating that they are currently facing the greatest dangers they have known in centuries.⁴ Copts in Egypt are being killed while their churches get burned, making them an extremely vulnerable community; and Church leaders in Syria are trapped between the repression of their government and massacres by jihadist rebels.⁵ The Christian presence in Iraq has been strongly decreasing since the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein, some sources say that this population group dropped with 50% between 2003 and 2010. And now ISIL, the Islamic State in Syria and the Levant, has promised to fight against Christians and others who don't follow their teachings.⁶ ISIL sees itself as the successor of the Islamic Caliphate, and gave Christians in Mosul the same options Christians had under the Islamic rulers, namely to leave, to pay a special tax, or to convert. As a result, large populations of Christians fled the ISIL-held territories.⁷ Ban Ki Moon, secretary-General of the United Nations, called the prosecution against Christians in Iraq by extremists a crime against humanity.⁸

At first sight, Jordan seems to be a rare exception to this violence against Christians. The survival of the Christian communities in Jordan was never threatened by the state, nor were they ever the subject of religious persecution or oppression.⁹ Jordan is often seen as "the only Island of Hope in an Ocean of Despair"¹⁰ and as a model for peaceful coexistence and tolerance.¹¹ Still Jordan is no exception to the emigration of Christians.¹²

This paper takes a closer look at the situation of Jordan's Christians. Is Jordan really as good to Christians as its reputation states? Are they really equal to Muslims, and do they still feel safe living amongst them? As shown by the examples earlier, Christians in the Middle East have enough reasons to be afraid. So what is special about Jordan that their faith would be any different? These are some of the questions that this paper will try to provide an answer to. In order to do so I will first take a look at some historical factors that have influenced Christianity in the Middle East and in Jordan in particular. Afterwards I will examine the current situation of Christians in Jordan in detail, with special attention to what might make Jordan different from its neighbours.

¹ W. WALKER, *A History of the Christian Church. 4th Edition*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1986, p.41.

² R. SABBAGH-GARGOUR, *Jordan's Christians may feel safe, but they are also leaving*, in *The Daily Star, Lebanon*, 17.12.2004, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2004/Dec-17/94584-jordans-christians-may-feel-safe-but-they-are-also-leaving.ashx> (accessed 10.05.2015).

³ M. PRIOR & W. TAYLOR, *Introduction*, in M. PRIOR & W. TAYLOR, (eds.) *Christians in the Holy Land*. Essex, Scorpion Publishing Ltd, 1995, p.1.

⁴ M. BINYON, *Middle East Christians face a bleak future. Michael Binyon reports from Jordan in the high anxiety shared by all the long-established churches in the region*, in *The Times*, 07.09.2013, p.87.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ D. DESSIN, *Oprukkende haat tegen christenen*, in *De Redactie*, 11.02.2015, <http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/opinieblog/opinie/1.2054893> (accessed 11.02.2015).

⁷ J. DE GREEF "Vervolging Iraakse Christenen misdaad tegen mensheid", in *De Redactie*, 20.07.2014, <http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/buitenland/1.2038738> (accessed 11.02.2015).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ SABBAGH-GARGOUR, *Jordan*.

¹⁰ N. ISMAIL, *Jordan a Safe Haven for Christians in The Middle East*, in *Newsblaze*, 08.11.2010, <http://newsblaze.com/story/20101108145451neha.nb/topstory.html>, paragraph 15 (accessed 13.05.2015).

¹¹ ISMAIL, *Jordan*.

¹² SABBAGH-GARGOUR, *Jordan*.

CHAPTER I. CHRISTIANITY IN JORDAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST: HISTORICAL FACTORS

In order to understand the current situation of Christianity in Jordan, we first have to look at some historical factors that still influence today's situation.

1. The division of Christianity

Christianity emerged in the Middle East around 2000 years ago,¹³ and quickly expanded its range, arriving in many areas of the world.¹⁴ It became the official religion of the Roman Empire at the end of the fourth century,¹⁵ around a century before its division in the Eastern and Western Roman Empires. The idea was that they both belonged to the same religion, but over the centuries the differences between both churches kept increasing.¹⁶ Theological issues played an important role here. The first major controversy that arose amongst intellectual Christians was the Arian controversy. The subject of this discussion was the relationship of the person of Jesus to God. Arius, an Alexandrian priest, argued that this relationship could not be equal. This led to the organization of the first Ecumenical council in Nicaea in 325. They concluded that Son was consubstantial with the Father. The second council was held in Constantinople in 381, and included the role of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ The third and fourth council, respectively in Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon 451, were further discussions about the person of Christ and his relationship between His humanity and His divinity.¹⁸

As a result of the councils there now were three groups of Churches: the Chalcedonians, the churches that followed the two nature-Chalcedonian Christology, which concluded the Roman Catholic Church, The Eastern Orthodox Churches, and also Eastern Churches that united with the Roman Catholic Church. The latter contain Churches that are present in the Middle East, such as the Syrian Catholic Church, the Maronite Church, and the Coptic and Armenian Catholic Churches. The second group are the Oriental Orthodox Churches or non-Chalcedonians. These Churches follow the Miaphysite theology, stating that Jesus had one nature and one Hypostasis. This group contains, amongst others, the Syrian and Armenian Orthodox Churches. The third group is the Church of the East. This Church was not involved with the Council of Chalcedon and developed its theology based on the ideas of Theodore of Mopsuestia¹⁹.²⁰ At this point there were thus both Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Churches present in the Middle East, with a strong presence of Chalcedonians in Syria and Palestine.²¹

Rome and Constantinople were still united at this point²², but the differences between them were strengthened by politics, such as the wars between the Eastern Empire against the Persians, Slavs, and later the Arabs,²³ and by theological disputes that were mainly a result the Eastern

¹³ WALKER, *A History*, p.5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 24-25.

¹⁵ J. HICK, *Christianity: The alliance between Church and Empire*, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2014) <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/115240/Christianity/67431/The-alliance-between-church-and-empire> (accessed 12.03.2015).

¹⁶ *Christianity: Schism of 1054*, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2006) <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/587056/Schism-of-1054> (accessed 06.04.2015).

¹⁷ S. RASSAM, *Christianity in Iraq*, Victoria, Freedom Publishing Pty Ltd, 2010, p.16-17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁹ This Church united with the Roman Catholic Church in the 20th century.

²⁰ RASSAM, *Christianity*, p.xxviii-xxix.

²¹ Professor H. Teule, personal communication (email), 20.05.2015.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ J. HICK, *Christianity: Political relations between East and West*, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2014) <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/115240/Christianity/67439/Political-relations-between-East-and-West> (accessed 12.03.2015).

theology having its roots in Greek philosophy, in contrast to the Western theology which was based on Roman Law. All this culminated in the Great Schism of 1054, the mutual excommunications by the Eastern Patriarch and the Western Pope, which were only lifted in 1965.²⁴ The Eastern and Western Churches kept growing apart after this event.²⁵

2. The arrival of Islam

The seventh century witnessed the birth and rapid expansion of Islam²⁶, which had great consequences on the relationships between East and West.²⁷

The society of Mecca was predominantly polytheistic with some Christian and Jewish tribes. Arabic and Islamic sources indicate that Muhammad first considered these tribes to be his allies, since he thought his message to be similar to theirs. However, the respective communities did not share this idea, and did not want to convert to Islam. Muhammad still saw them as *ahl al-kitāb*, people of the book, and concluded treaties with most of the tribes, assuring them peace, toleration and freedom of worship. This became an example for Muhammad's successors.²⁸ The ahl al-kitāb would always be offered three options before an attack: they could convert, pay a tribute (*jizya*), or fight. A treaty would then be made up in the second (and third, if the Muslims won) case, stating that the Muslims, in exchange of them paying a tax and following certain rules, would protect the communities, which would then be called *dhimmī*.^{29,30}

Arabs were first confronted with large numbers of Christians and Jews during the conquests outside of the Arab Peninsula, such as in Egypt and Syria.³¹ Conversion to Islam was a slow process and Christianity remained a majority in the Middle East for at least five hundred years.³² Jordan, being close to Damascus, profited from the economical progress and good administration of the Umayyad Empire. A century later however, when the Abbasids came to power, the capital was moved to Bagdad, and Jordan was left abandoned. Christianity only survived in local tribes.³³

3. The Crusades

Available records show that there generally was harmony amongst the Christian and Muslim communities during the first centuries after the Muslim conquests. This changed when the Crusaders captured Jerusalem.³⁴

The division between the Christian and the Muslim world had become obvious by this time. Both sides attempted to restore this unity under their own religion.³⁵ The Crusades, initiated by Pope Urban II in 1095³⁶, were an example of this. Pope Urban II trusted that weakening Islam

²⁴ Christianity: Schism, in Encyclopaedia Britannica.

²⁵ Professor H. Teule, personal communication (email), 20.05.2015.

²⁶ See appendix 2 for an overview of Christianity at this time.

²⁷ HICK, Christianity: Political relations.

²⁸ N. SALIBA, Christians and Jews under Islam, in *The World*, October 2008, p.4-11.

²⁹ See appendix 3.

³⁰ Y. COURBAGE, & P. FARGUES, *Christians and Jews under Islam*. Translated by J. MABRO, New York, I.B. Tauris & Co, 1998, p. 26.

³¹ SALIBA, Christians, p.4-11.

³² Y. FRIEDMANN, Dhimma, in Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE (2012) http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.kuleuven.ezproxy.kuleuven.be/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/dhimma-COM_26005?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-3&s.q=dhimma (accessed 01.04.2015).

³³ J. VALOGNES, *Vie et mort des chrétiens d'Orient*, Paris, Fayard, 1994, p.614-615.

³⁴ O'MAHONY, A., Church, State and the Christian Communities in the Holy Places of Palestine, in PRIOR, M. & TAYLOR, W., (eds.) *Christians in the Holy Land*. Essex, Scorpion Publishing Ltd, 1995, p.11.

³⁵ COURBAGE & FARGUES, Christians, p.44.

³⁶ J. J. PELIKAN, *Roman Catholicism: The Crusades*, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2014) <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/507284/Roman-Catholicism/257681/The-Crusades> (accessed 18.03.2015).

and re-establishing the Christian authority in the East would positively influence the authority of his Church in the West.³⁷ The Crusaders knew that they needed a powerful Christian state and that this required a solid Christian population. However, the idea they had of a united Arab Christian population waiting for their salvation was false, because Arab Christians and Muslims were actually living in a state of coexistence. The Arab and Muslim influence had come over time, and therefore there had not been a rupture, which would have caused discomfort. They were at this time under the government of the Shia Fatimid Caliphate of Egypt³⁸, noted for their tolerant attitude³⁹ towards the ahl al-kitāb.⁴⁰

The similarities between Western and Eastern Christianity were slim and did not visibly increase under the influence of the Crusades. What did change was the composition of the population of these areas, since many new (Latin) Christians arrived while many Muslims and Jews died fighting them.⁴¹ Latin Christianity is still present in the Middle East.⁴² The Crusades were not able to realize their goal of relieving Eastern Christianity⁴³, and they actually deteriorated the situation of Christians in the East.⁴⁴ They also made the differences between the Eastern and the Western Christians more pronounced.⁴⁵ However, they did place the Pope and his successors at the head of a large army of volunteers, and the conquests of Jerusalem in 1099 and the establishment of a Latin kingdom in Palestine did gain them prestige while strengthening their position in Europe. They remained powerful for over two centuries⁴⁶, after which the Muslims started reclaiming the land.⁴⁷ The Christian population did not work against these recaptures; they were either neutral towards it or helped the Muslim armies. The Arab Christians saw the victories of the armies of Nur al-Din and Saladin as steps towards their independence from the religious burden of the Franks.⁴⁸

In conclusion, it can be said that the Crusades didn't only represent a confrontation between the Christians and the Muslims, but also between two Christianities. This stands in strong contrast to what the Western Christians were pleading, namely that they had to save their fellow Christians in the Middle East. Instead of welcoming the Christian Franks, they actually worked against them.⁴⁹

Today's military presence of what are considered to be 'Christian nations', such as the United States and the European powers, are considered by some to be new Crusades. Local Christians are sometimes associated with this,⁵⁰ thereby negatively influencing Muslim-Christian relations.⁵¹

4. The Ottoman Empire

Over the next centuries the Christian communities in the region faced ups and downs.⁵² The arrival of the Mongols started out as a good thing for Christians, as they formed mutual agreements. This strained their relationship with the Muslim population. The brief cooperation

³⁷ COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.44-45.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p.45.

³⁹ With the exception of Caliph al-Hakim (996-1021), SALIBA, *Christians*, p.4-11.

⁴⁰ SALIBA, *Christians*, p.4-11.

⁴¹ COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.46.

⁴² Professor H. Teule, personal communication (email), 20.05.2015.

⁴³ C. CAHEN, *Croisades*, in *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, cited in COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.52.

⁴⁴ COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.52.

⁴⁵ O'MAHONY, *Church*, p.11-12.

⁴⁶ PELIKAN, *Roman Catholicism: The Crusades*.

⁴⁷ COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.52.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.52-53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.44.

⁵⁰ M. ASSER, *Arab Christians squeezed by conflict*, 24.03.2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2879853.stm (accessed 22.05.2015).

⁵¹ Interview with Bassam Shahatit, Amman, 07.04.2015.

⁵² COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.54.

between the Mongols and Christians came to an end when the rulers converted to Islam.⁵³ The Mamluks of Egypt defeated the Mongols in 1260, and they made the Christians pay for their collaboration with the Mongols. Christianity came close to extinction under their rule, and many Christians converted to Islam.⁵⁴

The Christian communities were given a chance to recover under the Ottoman Empire. Sultan Mehmet II implemented the *millet* system after having conquered Constantinople (which was renamed Istanbul) in 1453. The millet system can be seen as an early example of religious pluralism. Every (recognized) religious group was allowed to rule themselves with little interference from the Ottoman government. Each millet had a leader, usually also their religious leader, who was in direct contact with the sultan. The power of this patriarch went beyond the purely religious, since he was also in charge of schools, administration, and civil law. During the first centuries the main millets were the Jewish, the Armenian and the Greek Orthodox.⁵⁵ The leaders of these millets were based in Istanbul and were not always interested in the faith of the Christians living in the Arab regions.⁵⁶ The European presence in the Ottoman Empire increased, mainly for economical reasons. Legal councils were created, and political exchanges were accompanied by an increasing influence of European culture. Roman Catholic missions reached the area by the 17th century.⁵⁷ These events made it possible for richer Christians to distance themselves from their country of residence, and to affiliate closer to the European Christian powers instead, thereby creating a gap between the religious communities.⁵⁸ In 1724 a group of Melchite Calchedonian Christians merged with Rome, forming a small group of Melchite Catholic Christians.⁵⁹ This group later became important in Palestine.⁶⁰

The European influence was one of the factors that lead to the *tanzīmāt* or the reformations in the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century. They handled administration, defence, the economy, land ownership, and more. The goal of the reforms was to centralize the Ottoman authority and to emphasize equality between civilians, despite of their different religious backgrounds.⁶¹ In practice this didn't mean the end of the millet system, but the increase of the amount of millets up to seventeen⁶², so that more different groups felt represented.

The Ottomans thus treated Christians relatively well. A tragic exception to this rule was the Armenian Genocide that took place by the end of the 19th century, when Sultan Abdul Hamid ordered the killing of one hundred thousand Armenians. The Sultan considered them to be a threat, while also believing that they could give Europe an excuse for a raid.⁶³

5. The nation states

The area of the Fertile Crescent had a Christian population of 7% when the Ottomans first arrived. This percentage had risen to 20-30% by the end of their reign four centuries later,⁶⁴ when

⁵³ COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.53.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁵⁵ M. A. KHOURY, *Legal Status of non-Muslims in Jordan. Jordanian Experience*, in S. SCHREINER (ed.) "*We All are Minorities – a Plea for Pluralism*". *Challenges and Chances of Religious, Ethnic-Cultural, and Political Diversification in Contemporary Societies*, New York, I.B. Tauris & Co, 1998, p.20-25, p.22.

⁵⁶ Professor H. Teule, personal communication (lecture,) Leuven, 04.05.2015.

⁵⁷ RASSAM, *Christianity*, p.100-101.

⁵⁸ Professor H. Teule, personal communication (lecture), Leuven, 04.05.2015.

⁵⁹ *Melchite*, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2006), <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/373844/Melchite> (accessed 22.05.2015).

⁶⁰ Professor H. Teule, personal communication (email), 20.05.2015.

⁶¹ RASSAM, *Christianity*, p.101.

⁶² KHOURY, *Legal Status*, p.22.

⁶³ DESSIN, *Oprukkende haat*.

⁶⁴ COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.57-58.

the Ottoman Empire was reduced to Turkey after having lost the First World War. Turkey, being a secular state, made an end to a millennium of multi-confessional history within ten years.^{65,66}

The Jordan we know today was a part of the Ottoman Empire until its dismantling in 1918, after having implemented the Ottoman Family Law in 1917. This law later became the basis of the modern Jordanian personal law. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan became a fully independent state, with Islam as the state religion, in 1946. A national legal system began to take form.⁶⁷

Many Arab Christians saw the end of the Ottoman era as a positive change. Christians enjoyed autonomy under their reign, but they were also subjected to cultural and economical limitations.⁶⁸ They were tolerated, but not considered as equal citizens.⁶⁹ The idea of an Arab nation, based on nationality instead of religion, was therefore very attractive to them.⁷⁰ Despite this initial optimism it was soon clear that the Western colonial powers that took over the area reversed a lot of the positive impact that the Ottoman rulers had had on the Christian and Jewish demography, an effect that was strengthened after the independence of these areas. Jews almost disappeared from the Arab countries as a result of the creation of Israel. Eastern Christianity did not face such a clear turning point, except for in Turkey where Christians were massacred and expelled.⁷¹ The Christian communities in the Arab countries declined⁷² slowly and silently. In Jordan Christians went from about 9,06 per cent⁷³ in 1914⁷⁴, to 5 per cent⁷⁵ in 1970 and 2,2 per cent⁷⁶ in 2010. As in the rest of the region, factors that aided this decline were the lower birth rates of Christians compared to Muslims, conversions due to mixed marriages, the emigration of Christians (mainly for economical reasons),⁷⁷ and immigration of Muslims from outside of Jordan.⁷⁸

Another important event of this time was the foundation of Israel in 1948. The wars that followed this event lead to a huge influx of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, changing the demographic composition of the country dramatically. While precise numbers are very hard to access, some sources estimate that Palestinians today account for 60% of Jordan's population,⁷⁹ thereby also influencing the situation of Jordan's Christians.

⁶⁵ COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.91.

⁶⁶ See appendix 4 for a visualisation of the evolution of non-Muslims in Turkey.

⁶⁷ KHOURY, *Legal Status*, p.23.

⁶⁸ COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.175-176.

⁶⁹ SALIBA, *Christians*, p.4-11.

⁷⁰ COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.175-176.

⁷¹ SALIBA, *Christians*, p.4-11.

⁷² See appendix 5 for an historical overview of the percentage of Christians in the Levant.

⁷³ COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.198.

⁷⁴ See appendix 6.

⁷⁵ Percentages vary according to different sources.

⁷⁶ CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (CIA), *The World Factbook: Jordan*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html> (accessed 06.05.2015).

⁷⁷ COURBAGE & FARGUES, *Christians*, p.174.

⁷⁸ KHOURY, *Legal Status*, p.21.

⁷⁹ VALOGNES, *Vie*, p.615, 620.

CHAPTER II. CHRISTIANITY IN MODERN JORDAN

1. Jordan's Christian communities

Jordan has a relatively important Christian minority.⁸⁰ While a majority of estimated 97,2% is Muslim, mostly Sunni, the Christians form about 2,2%⁸¹ of the population.⁸² Other religious minorities include Druze and Baha'i, two religious groups that are not officially recognized and face some forms of discrimination⁸³, despite not being prohibited to practice their religion.⁸⁴

Christianity in Jordan is very diverse. Around 70 to 75% of Jordan's Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. The remaining Christians mainly adhere the Roman Catholic Church. Other recognized but small groups include the Greek and Maronite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic, Assyrian, Anglican, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, and Presbyterian churches. The government must recognize all denominations in order for them to be allowed to practice their religion, which is not the case for some of the smaller Protestant Churches.⁸⁵

Many of Jordan's Christians are of Palestinian descent. Palestine traditionally had a higher percentage of Christians, and the huge influx of Palestinians after the wars lead to a growth of the percentage of Christians present in Jordan.⁸⁶ Generally speaking, Jordan was more of a Bedouin society, with Palestine being more urban. The same counted for the Christians of both places. As a result Christians with a Palestinian descent are still more present in Amman, while Christians of Jordanian descent are more present in smaller cities like Madaba and Kerak.⁸⁷ Apart from the Palestinians, who have been present in Jordan for decades, Jordan has also been housing Iraqi refugees since 2003. In 2010 they were hosting approximately 31.000 Iraqis. 8 per cent of them were Christians.⁸⁸ Syrian refugees have been arriving since the start of the civil war in 2011.

2. Position of Jordan's Christians

Christians are fully integrated⁸⁹ and play a vital role in Jordan, despite their relatively small number. Christian-Muslim relations are generally peaceful,⁹⁰ and cases of violence against Christians for religious reasons are very rare.⁹¹ Christians are present in all spheres of the public life, their presence and contributions even surpassing their number. They are well represented in the parliament and they take up high-ranking government jobs.⁹² 4% of the upper level military jobs are reserved for Christians.⁹³ However, there are jobs that are only available for Muslims as well. These include the Prime Minister, the head of the police⁹⁴ and all senior command positions

⁸⁰ H. ABU NI'MAH, *The Jordanian Integrative Experiment: Ethnic Profile Of Jordan*, in S. SCHREINER (ed.) "We All are Minorities – a Plea for Pluralism". *Challenges and Chances of Religious, Ethnic-Cultural, and Political Diversification in Contemporary Societies*, New York, I.B. Tauris & Co, 1998, p.17-19, p.17.

⁸¹ CIA, *The World Factbook: Jordan*.

⁸² Numbers from 2010.

⁸³ For example: their religion can't be written on their passport, like with Christians and Muslims. The Druze will get 'Muslim' and the Baha'i will either get Muslim or a blank space.

⁸⁴ KHOURY, *Legal Status*, p.20-21.

⁸⁵ KHOURY, *Legal Status*, p.22.

⁸⁶ VALOGNES, *Vie*, p.614-615.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.615.

⁸⁸ USDOS, *Jordan*, p.1.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ USDOS, *Jordan*, p.1.

⁹¹ SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.123.

⁹² ABU NI'MAH, *The Jordanian Integrative*, p.18.

⁹³ USDOS, *Jordan*, p.4.

⁹⁴ B. SHAHATIT, *I diritti e doveri dei Christifideles nello statuto personale dei paesi arabi specialmente in Giordania*, Rome, Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, 2013, p.231-233.

in the military. A reason for this might be that division-level commanders and above are required to be able to lead the Muslim prayer.⁹⁵ There has however been a Christian leader for the women's police department. The king has to be a Muslim as well. Some companies prefer to only hire Muslims.⁹⁶

Christians are legally equal to Muslims in terms of nationality and citizenship.⁹⁷ The dhimma system is officially no longer in use, and has been replaced by the idea of citizenship. This theoretically means that Christians aren't just a protected group anymore, a group that pays taxes in return of protection, but a citizens with the same rights and obligations as Muslims.⁹⁸ However, some of the limitations that dhimmīs faced during the Islamic rule⁹⁹ are still to be found in Jordan today, like the fact that it is forbidden for a Muslim woman to marry a Christian man, or that it is illegal for Christians to proselytize Muslims.¹⁰⁰

Christmas has been a national holiday for all Jordanians¹⁰¹ since 1999¹⁰² and Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday have recently been made into holidays for Christians.¹⁰³ The constitution grants freedom of religion and faith to all its citizens and a lot of effort is put into preserving diversity.¹⁰⁴

Religious education is considered to be an issue in Jordan. Government schools do not offer classes on Christianity, and Arab Christians are barely or not mentioned in the other (e.g. history) classes either. The King actually did issue a decree ordering to teach religions in public schools, but this was not put into practice. Christians, on the other hand, are lacking of one common handbook that could be used to teach these classes.¹⁰⁵

3. Legal status of Jordan's Christians

Jordan's constitution states that there shall not be any discrimination in the rights and duties of citizens based on their religion.¹⁰⁶ Non-Muslims are able to practice their faith, unless they violate the public order or morality.¹⁰⁷ The fact that Jordan grants full rights to its civilians, no matter which religion they belong to, is exceptional in the Middle East.¹⁰⁸ Apart from not officially facing legal discrimination, Christians also don't face restrictions while practicing their rights. They can build Churches or other religious buildings, and they can carry out religious activities without limitations. The Mass schedules are printed in the national newspapers.¹⁰⁹ However, Jordan is still an Islamic state by law, and the *shari'ah* is accorded primacy by the government.¹¹⁰ Christian citizens are thus not treated exactly the same as their Muslim

⁹⁵ USDOS, *Jordan*, p.4.

⁹⁶ SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.231-233.

⁹⁷ ABU NI'MAH, *The Jordanian Integrative*, p.18.

⁹⁸ SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.228-229.

⁹⁹ SALIBA, *Christians*, p.4-11.

¹⁰⁰ USDOS: DRL, *International Religious Freedom Report 2013*, p.3.

¹⁰¹ D. SPRUSANSKY, *Christians in the Holy Land*, in *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 31:1 (2012) 49-50.

¹⁰² SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.227.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.227-228.

¹⁰⁴ ABU NI'MAH, *The Jordanian Integrative*, p.19.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Bassam Shahatit, Amman, 07.04.2015.

¹⁰⁶ CHESNOT, Interview with MEYER.

¹⁰⁷ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE (USDOS), *Jordan*, 01.09.2011, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/171737.pdf> (accessed 4.05.2015), p.1.

¹⁰⁸ C. CHESNOT, Interview with A. MEYER, in *Églises du Monde: Jordanie*, KTO, 19.09.2012, <http://www.oeuvre-orient.fr/2012/10/08/chretiensjordaniens/> (accessed 19.05.2015).

¹⁰⁹ VALOGNES, *Vie*, p.621.

¹¹⁰ USDOS, *Jordan*, p.1.

counterparts.¹¹¹ The religious affiliation of all citizens is mentioned on national identification cards and legal documentation.¹¹²

The religious freedom the constitution provides does know some restrictions.¹¹³ For one, religion is very present in the public sphere¹¹⁴, which can be conceived as imposing to some people. Other examples of these restrictions are that it is not allowed for Muslims to convert to Christianity, that Christians are not allowed to proselytize Muslims, and that Muslim women can not marry Christian men. Slandering or insulting the Prophet or other important religious figures is also punishable, but this also counts for prophets of other religions.¹¹⁵

All religious groups have their own courts. These religious courts treat issues concerning marriage, adoption, inheritance, and custody. Issues between Christians and Muslims are to appear before the civil (and thus sharī'ah-based) court, and the Christian courts have to follow rules made up by the civil court.¹¹⁶ This is similar to the dhimma and millet systems. Adoption is, for example, forbidden in Jordan. Inheritance rules are based on the sharī'ah as well,¹¹⁷ since the different Christian denominations in Jordan haven't been able to reach a consensus on this and some other legislations.¹¹⁸

The Law that is applied by the Greek Orthodox Church is based on the Byzantine Law of the 6th century. However, this Law does not provide answers to all issues, for example the previously mentioned material issue of inheritance. Matters of personal status also fall under these laws. Three main issues come forth out of this situation. First there is the issue of inheritance. The sharī'ah-based inheritance law is perceived as unjust towards females from a Christian point of view. This is especially a problem for Christian parents that only have daughters.¹¹⁹ However, it is possible for a father to give a part of his belongings or land to his daughter during his lifetime, and brothers are also able to gift (a part of) their inheritance to their sisters.¹²⁰ Another issue is that of the civil Christian marriages that take place in other countries. These marriages are often recognized by the departments of Passports and of Civil Status, but not by the Church Tribunals.¹²¹ A third issue is what is known as 'conversion of convenience', a term mainly used for Christian fathers who decide to convert to Islam to avoid maintenance payments to his wife and children,¹²² since it is not necessary to pay maintenance money to wives who follow another religion. The wife can therefore regain her right to the financial support by converting to Islam as well.¹²³ The children do not have a choice and become Muslim by default of their father's conversion, even if they are adults. This can be problematic in several occasions, for example when one of the daughters was engaged to a Christian when this happened.¹²⁴ Another example of conversion of convenience is when poor Christians convert to Islam for economic reasons. It is not permitted to convert from Islam to Christianity, but the opposite is welcomed.¹²⁵ Muslims that do wish to convert to Christianity could do so in secret, without

¹¹¹ SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.245-275.

¹¹² USDOS, *Jordan*, p.7.

¹¹³ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR (USDOS: DRL), *International Religious Freedom Report 2013: Jordan*,

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222297> (accessed 10.05.2015), p.1.

¹¹⁴ E.g. religious messages are present on many of the stop signs and other public places.

¹¹⁵ USDOS: DRL, *International Religious Freedom Report 2013*, p.1, 4.

¹¹⁶ SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.245-275.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ KHOURY, *Legal Status*, p.24.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.237-239.

¹²¹ KHOURY, *Legal Status*, p.24.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.24-25.

¹²³ SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.238-241.

¹²⁴ KHOURY, *Legal Status*, p.24-25.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.25.

changing the religion they officially belong to.¹²⁶ If they get caught they could be asked to appear in front of the shari‘ah court, with the possible punishment of losing their civil rights. Such cases of apostasy have been recorded over the last decade.¹²⁷ Judges of these cases have annulled the so-called apostates’ marriages, transferred child custody to the other parent, deprived them of many civil rights, and taken away their religious identity.¹²⁸ Apart from legal consequences, Muslims who have converted to other faiths are also vulnerable to societal discrimination and to the threat of mental and physical abuse, mainly by their families and by government officials.¹²⁹ Converts have also reported security service personnel refusing to give them documents needed for job applications, and telling employers to fire them.¹³⁰ Some converts don’t see another way then to depart the country for good.^{131,132}

In conclusion it can be said that in general Jordan tries to ensure the safety, wellbeing and equality of Christians. Converts to Christianity however do not get the same treatment. Christians might not face official discrimination in Jordan,¹³³ but the complete equality of Christians and Muslims in Jordan has not yet been achieved.¹³⁴

¹²⁶ SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.239.

¹²⁷ USDOS, *Jordan*, p.1.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.8.

¹³¹ USDOS, *Jordan*, p.9.

¹³² Interview with Bassam Shahatit, Amman, 07.04.2015.

¹³³ VELA, J., *Jordan: The safe haven for Christians fleeing ISIL*, in *The National*, 14.02.2015, <http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/jordan-the-safe-haven-for-christians-fleeing-isil#full> (accessed 06.05.2015).

¹³⁴ SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.209.

CHAPTER III. CURRENT SITUATION OF JORDAN'S CHRISTIANS: EQUALITY AND SAFETY

1. Experiences of equality and safety

We have now seen that Christians play an important role in Jordan, and that equality between Muslims and Christians is an important goal, which is held back by the importance that is given to the *sharī'ah*.

When talking to Christians in Jordan, different answers were given to the question whether they felt like they were equal to Muslims. They usually started by saying yes, and then some of them added 'but', giving some examples of ways in which they weren't equal. Most of these examples were already mentioned in this article, like the fact that they can't apply for all jobs. Another example that was given is that not all employers respect the fact that they are allowed to take their Christian Holidays, stating that those employers forced them to come to work. This was contrasted with the Muslims at these companies, who did get their Holidays. Some of the respondents stated that their situation had actually improved over the last five years, in contrast to what one might expect considering the issues with Christians in the other countries of the Middle East. Changes in the Law, such as the addition of Easter as a holiday for Christians, have been made over the last years, enforcing the equality of Christians and Muslims in Jordan¹³⁵, and the respondents noticed this. One of the respondents however added that he/she didn't think that the government really thought of Christians as equal to Muslims, and that the measures taken in favour of Christians were just an attempt to make the situation look better than it is. The daily social relationships between Muslims and Christians do not seem to have changed substantially. These relationships differ depending on the area in Jordan or even the neighbourhood in a big city like Amman.

The problematic situation of Christians in the surrounding countries did influence the situation of at least a part of the Christian population in Jordan. Differences between Christians and Muslims seem to have increased. One respondent stated that Christians started defining themselves by their religion since the start of the war in Iraq in 2003, as a result of the threat of violence against them. They felt like they needed to defend this part of their identity, which was taken for granted before. Two respondents clearly stated that the differences between Christians and Muslims have increased visibly over the last ten years.

It is difficult to find numbers on the amount of Christians that have left Jordan for security reasons. It seems like there are indeed Christians who feel unsafe in Jordan, they fear that what happened in Iraq might happen to them too.¹³⁶ However, this group of Christians, the ones who actually consider leaving, seems to be very small. Reverent Bassam Shahatit, who recently has conducted interviews with local Christians, argued that only 4 to 5 out of 300 families stated that they were afraid for their safety.¹³⁷ This seems to confirm the public and medial assessment of the problem. As, for example, journalist Justin Vela writes: "Though Christians consider themselves safe in Jordan, there is an undercurrent of uncertainty as extremists wreak havoc in neighbouring countries."¹³⁸

During my own interviews, a split between two groups was noticeable: half of the respondents would clearly state that there were no issues with Christians in Jordan, that they felt fully safe there, and that they would never leave their country. The other respondents however did show some doubt. One interviewee showed to be actively worried. This respondent stated that he/she didn't feel safe going to church, fearing that an attack might happen. Another respondent said that it crossed his/her mind that something might happen, but that this was not something he/she was actively thinking about. According to this group of respondents the feeling

¹³⁵ SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.193-195.

¹³⁶ Interview with Bassam Shahatit, Amman, 07.04.2015.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ VELA, *Jordan*.

of unsafety started with the war in Iraq over ten years ago, and was further aided by the current events in Syria and Iraq. They emphasized that if this kind of violence could happen there, it could happen in Jordan as well. Some of the respondents stated that some Christians might be afraid, but that this was the same for the Muslim community. Others did emphasize that they were more at risk than the Muslims. One respondent stated the Christians had more reasons to be afraid because the Muslims share their (talking about ISIL) culture, while they (the Christians) didn't.

The execution of the Jordanian pilot by ISIL¹³⁹ is often mentioned as a game changer in respect to the situation of Jordan's Christians.¹⁴⁰ This is the case on two levels. Firstly, this led to Jordan playing a more active role in the opposition against ISIL. This means that Jordanians, and especially minorities such as the Christian communities, are more at risk to become a target of militants who want to create instability, which is something they seem to be aware of.¹⁴¹ On the other hand, this event seems to have had a big influence on the public opinion concerning ISIL.¹⁴² Different sources indicate that support for this group was being felt in Jordan prior to this incident¹⁴³, which made some Christians anxious about their safety. ISIL is known for its violent treatment of what they consider to be non-believers, and Jordanian Christians might thus fear that supporters of ISIL in Jordan could harm them. The condemnation of the murder, and the rapid decrease of public support for ISIL that followed the collective shock caused by this act of violence thus reassured Christians in their feeling of being safe within Jordanian society. The emphasis put on religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence by official authorities in Jordan, might be a further factor that limits public support for ISIL, in comparison to other countries.¹⁴⁴

In conclusion, it can be stated that most of the Christians in Jordan feel relatively safe, more than what can be assumed based on newspaper articles talking about the region. Some of them seem to be weighing their options, but they will probably only leave when they really don't see any other option,¹⁴⁵ in contrast to preventive migration. Christians that feel unsafe seem to be a minority. The next question is thus: why would Christians in Jordan be safer than Christians in the surrounding countries?

2. Factors contributing to the emigration of Christians

The Christian communities in the Middle East have been diminishing since the 19th century, and Christian-tolerant Jordan was no exception to that rule. Christians mainly emigrated for economic reasons and to reunite with family abroad.¹⁴⁶ Since the beginning of the 21st century the process got accelerated because of social and political evolvments in the region. Fears for the extinction of Christians in the Middle East have been voiced. Christians and Muslims alike are now dealing with growing Islamic radicalisation, which has gained followers as a consequence of a fast process of globalization, of socio-economical problems such as unemployment and poverty, but also as a reaction to the lack of democracy and human rights.¹⁴⁷ This has gotten even more visible over the last five to ten years, during which the Middle East saw a wave of sectarian violence. Christians who leave Jordan now are listing reasons such as the fear due to anti-Christian violence, increased religious extremism, political pressure, and instability, next to possible economic reasons. In Jordan Christians also leave when they want to

¹³⁹ See appendix 7.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Bassam Shahatit, Amman, 07.04.2015.

¹⁴¹ VELA, *Jordan*.

¹⁴² This is something that came forth out of conversation I had with local Christians. It was also confirmed during my interview with Bassam Shahatit.

¹⁴³ VELA, *Jordan*.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ SABBAGH-GARGOUR, *Jordan*.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

marry someone they are not allowed to marry based on religious reasons,¹⁴⁸ or when they get in trouble for wanting to or having converted to Christianity.¹⁴⁹

3. Factors supporting Christians' stay in Jordan

Despite the issues they might face, the majority of Christians in Jordan seems to prefer staying in their country. They often don't feel that the problems Christians face in the rest of the area are applicable to them.

'Because the King and God protect us' was one of the answers given to me when asked why they still felt safe in Jordan. Some religious Christians believe that God has a special plan for Jordan. Of course it is clear that this religious belief can attribute to the community's feeling of safety, but this is not a factor that will be discussed further in this article. The role of the King and the rest of the royal family, however, will be examined further below. A different factor is that in Jordan, people do not primarily identify with their religion, but rather with where they are from. The main differences in Jordan seem to be between Jordanians and Palestinians, not between Muslims and Christians.¹⁵⁰ This is a consequence of the importance of tribal culture in Jordan and of the politics of the Middle East. This makes that religion is less of an issue than in other countries. The one respondent that stated to be afraid about a possible attack on a church stated at the same time stated that one factor which did improve his/her feeling of safety is the fact that the government has increased its protection of Christian places of worship.

A. The royal family and Christian-Muslim dialogue

The King of Jordan is considered to be a protector of Christians, enhancing their feeling of safety, equality and belonging.¹⁵¹ Pope Benedict XVI, among others, praised Abdullah II for his role in promoting interfaith dialogue, and in his role in strengthening the ties between Christians and Muslims.¹⁵² Abdullah has expressed his support for Christians on numerous occasions. During a conference on the challenges facing Arab Christians held in Amman in 2013 he declared that it was a Muslim duty to protect the Middle Eastern Christian. He emphasized the important role that Christian Arabs have played in building the Arab society, and the fact that Christians populated the region before Muslims. The conference was organized by another member of the Jordan Royal Family, namely Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, who is Jordan's Chief Advisor for Religious and Cultural Affairs.¹⁵³ Last March, during a visit to Strasbourg, Abdullah addressed the European Parliament with the same message¹⁵⁴: "Jordan is a Muslim country, with a deeply-rooted Christian community. Together, the Jordanian people make up an indivisible society, friends and partners in building our country".¹⁵⁵ He also stated that an attack

¹⁴⁸ IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD OF CANADA, *Jordan: Situation and treatment of Christians; state protection and support services [JOR104151.E]*, 01.08.2012, https://www.ecoi.net/local_link/225116/332746_en.html (accessed 12.05.2015).

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Bassam Shahatit, Amman, 07.04.2015.

¹⁵⁰ VELA, *Jordan*

¹⁵¹ SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.193-195.

¹⁵² ISMAIL, *Jordan*.

¹⁵³ *Jordan's King Abdullah Invokes 'Duty' to Protect Mideast Christians*, in *JNS.org*, 04.09.2013, <http://www.jns.org/news-briefs/2013/9/4/jordans-king-abdullah-invokes-duty-to-protect-mideast-christians#.VU0WZ9Ptmko> (accessed 08.05.2015).

¹⁵⁴ A. COHEN, *King Abdullah II tells European Parliament religious coexistence combats extremism*, in *The Jerusalem Post*, 10.03.2015, <http://jordantimes.com/be-proud-becomes-twitter-trend-after-kings-address-to-nation> (accessed 08.05.2015).

¹⁵⁵ A. COHEN, *King Abdullah II tells European Parliament religious coexistence combats extremism*, in *The Jerusalem Post*, 10.03.2015, <http://jordantimes.com/be-proud-becomes-twitter-trend-after-kings-address-to-nation>, paragraph 1 (accessed 08.05.2015).

against Christians is an offense against humanity and Islam.¹⁵⁶ The King often attends Christian ceremonies such as Christmas, often accompanied by members of his family.^{157,158} An important program that was set up on the initiative of the King in 2004, is the Amman Message.¹⁵⁹ The aim of this message was to provide a consensus on what Islam, and what it is not. The general idea of this message is that Islam is a peaceful and tolerant religion.

The previously mentioned Prince Ghazi played an important role for the drafting of this message.¹⁶⁰ He was also an essential contributor to a letter called ‘A Common Word Between Us and You’¹⁶¹ in 2007, which was addressed to Christian leaders.¹⁶² This document focuses on the similarities between Christianity and Islam, and was based on the two great commandments of ‘Love of God’ and ‘Love of the Neighbor’.¹⁶³ The goal of this initiative is to increase peace and cooperation between both religions. Prince Ghazi is the coordinator of the initiative.¹⁶⁴ The Common Word initiative has gotten support by hundreds of Muslim and Christian scholars worldwide.¹⁶⁵ The initiative led to historic meetings, conferences, and projects about dialogue. It also led to the King’s suggestion of the World Interfaith Harmony Week in 2010.¹⁶⁶ The aim of this program was to encourage harmony between people of the same and different faiths.¹⁶⁷ On a personal level, it is also said that many of the King’s close friends descend from Arab Christian tribes. The King’s mother was a British Christian who converted to Islam after marriage to the late King Hussein.¹⁶⁸

Another important member of the Royal Family who is concerned with interfaith dialogue is Prince El Hassan bin Talal, who has been internationally renowned for his work on interfaith dialogue for over four decades. He is also the chairman of RIIFS, which also played an important role in promoting the previously mentioned Amman Message.¹⁶⁹ He also wrote a book called *Christianity in the Arab World*.¹⁷⁰

The Royal Family is thus clearly an important player for Christian-Muslim dialogue in Jordan. This is not new, as Abdullah II is following in the footsteps of the previous Kings regarding this issue. The Hashemites have always had a strong bond with Jordan’s Christians.¹⁷¹ The violence against Christians in the surrounding countries over the last decade caused increased efforts by the Jordanian government and King in the field of interreligious dialogue. The cooperation between Muslims and Christians, and between different Christian denominations, has increased due to the extra emphasis on dialogue. Examples of this are

¹⁵⁶ COHEN, *King Abdullah II*.

¹⁵⁷ *King, Crown Prince offer best wishes to Christians on Christmas, New Year* in *King Abdullah II Official Website*, 24.12.2014, http://kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en_US/news/view/id/12019/videoDisplay/1.html (accessed 09.05.2015).

¹⁵⁸ *King attend Christmas, New Year celebration in Madaba*, in *King Abdullah II Official Website*, 23.09.2013, http://kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en_US/news/view/id/11323/videoDisplay/1.html (accessed 08.05.2015).

¹⁵⁹ *The Amman Message: Summary*, in *The Official Website of the Amman Message*, <http://ammanmessage.com/index.php?lang=en> (accessed 08.05.2015).

¹⁶⁰ *How It Began*, in *World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIFHW)*, <http://worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com/about-us/how-it-began/> (accessed 8.05.2015).

¹⁶¹ The full letter can be read on <http://www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document/>.

¹⁶² *Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal*, in *Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs*, <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/people/ghazi-bin-muhammad-bin-talal> (accessed 08.05.2015).

¹⁶³ *How It Began*, in *WIFHW*.

¹⁶⁴ *Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal*, in *Berkeley Center*.

¹⁶⁵ *A Common Word*, in *A Common Word*, <http://www.acommonword.com/> (accessed 09.05.2015).

¹⁶⁶ *How It Began*, in *WIFHW*.

¹⁶⁷ *Our Aims & Objectives*, in *World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIFHW)*, <http://worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com/about-us/our-aims-objectives/> (accessed 09.05.2015).

¹⁶⁸ SABBAGH-GARGOUR, *Jordan*.

¹⁶⁹ *About RIIFS*, in *The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS)*, <http://www.riifs.org/about-riifs.html> (accessed 09.05.2015).

¹⁷⁰ See http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/book12_his.html for more information on this book.

¹⁷¹ CHESNOT, Interview with MEYER.

initiatives to provide information of Christianity in Muslim schools and universities, and programs providing students with the opportunities to visit Mosques and Churches.¹⁷²

It is crucial to support dialogue and cooperation, especially under the current threats of extremism and terrorism.¹⁷³ Despite being a rather moderate country¹⁷⁴, Jordan has been facing a general rise of extremism, and is considered to be the second biggest supplier of foreign fighters to ISIL. Public support for the group is still present,¹⁷⁵ even if this support did decrease after the previously mentioned killing of the pilot.¹⁷⁶

The Jordanian King publically supports the Christians in Jordan, and most Christians seem to support him as well.¹⁷⁷ The Hashemite dynasty and the Jordanian Christians have always had a strong bond of mutual trust.¹⁷⁸ The King needs the support of Christians. A big part of the power and legitimacy of the dynasty is based on the Jordanian tribes,¹⁷⁹ and Christian tribes are a part of this. Jordan is a country of refugees,¹⁸⁰ and the King thus needs all the support he can get from 'native Jordanians'.

Another factor is the so-called Arab Spring that started in 2011. Other than in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Libya, Jordan only faced small-scaled protests that were not directly targeting the fall of the regime. However, because of these big revolutions, Jordanians were reminded that they live in an authoritarian regime in which the people have very little power. Voices about gaining more rights started to be heard. This is something people from different religious groups might support. Christians however, seeing what happened to Christian communities around them, tend to be more careful. We can assume that they might want change as well, but we can expect that they wouldn't go as far as to change Jordan's leadership, fearing for Islamist leadership that might change their lives for the worse. A democracy might turn against them,¹⁸¹ and their fate under a new leader is unknown.¹⁸² The fear that revolutionary movements will give rise to unstable regimes under the influence of extremists is cited to be one of the reasons for Christians to leave the region.¹⁸³ Christian tribes thus have a higher probability of staying loyal to the Kingdom. It is clear that the King and Christians need each other's support.

B. Tribal-based identity

Jordan's population is very diverse; its Arab majority is being divided into partially overlapping groupings based on national, cultural, societal, economical and religious grounds.¹⁸⁴ There is also a small minority of non-Arabs, namely Circassians and Armenians, which both make out around one per cent of the population.¹⁸⁵ Amongst all these differences, religion

¹⁷² SHAHATIT, *I diritti*, p.146.

¹⁷³ P. L. DE RAUCOURT, *En Jordanie et au Liban, la lutte pour la coexistence entre Chrétiens et Musulmans*, in *L'Oeuvre d'Orient*, 05.03.2015, <http://www.oeuvre-orient.fr/2015/03/05/en-jordanie-la-lutte-pour-la-coexistence-entre-chretiens-et-musulmans/> (accessed 19.05.2015).

¹⁷⁴ CHESNOT, Interview with MEYER.

¹⁷⁵ M. ABI-HABIB & S. MA'AYEH, *Jordan Divided Over U.S.-Led Fight. Opposition Grows to Government's Participation in Airstrikes on Islamic State After Pilot is Captured*, in *Wall Street Journal, Eastern edition*, 02.02.2015, p.A7.

¹⁷⁶ Numbers on the decrease of this support are not yet available.

¹⁷⁷ CHESNOT, Interview with MEYER.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ M. A. AL OUDAT & A. ALSHBOUL, "Jordan First": *Tribalism, Nationalism and Legitimacy of Power in Jordan*, in *Intellectual Discourse on Middle East Affairs* 18:1 (2010) 65-96, p.72.

¹⁸⁰ CHESNOT, Interview with MEYER.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² DAGHER, S., *An 'Arab Winter' Chills Christians*, in *Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition*, 05.12.2011, p. A1.

¹⁸³ *Winter for Arab Christians?*, in *The Christian Century* 128: 23 (2011)

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-10/winter-arab-christians> (accessed 11.05.2015).

¹⁸⁴ AL OUDAT & ALSHBOUL, "Jordan", p.74.

¹⁸⁵ CIA, *The World Factbook: Jordan*.

appears to have moved to the background.¹⁸⁶ This was also mentioned during my interviews: descent is more important than religion.

This is primary true on a national level, but the region or city is also important. Companies often prefer to hire someone from a different religion, but coming from the same city, than the other way around.¹⁸⁷ It is often possible to know where people are from based on their last names. It was interesting to notice that the people who mention being from a certain city have sometimes never lived there. I believe that the importance given to one's city of descent is a result of the tribal¹⁸⁸ system. Tribalism is, until today, the bedrock of Jordan society.¹⁸⁹

The reason for this fact can be found in Jordan's modern history. Jordan was created with support of the European powers after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and was never a separate political entity before this event. The new country therefore needed to proclaim and maintain a national identity.¹⁹⁰ This process was hindered by both the undecidedness of the British Mandate for the area of Transjordan, and by the ambition of Abdullah, the Emir who later became first King of Transjordan, to found a pan-Arab nation.¹⁹¹ Abdullah I later distanced himself from the nationalist group and focused himself on the consolidation of his rule in Transjordan. He now had to face two challenges: he had to form this area into a political unit and establish the social legitimacy of his reign.¹⁹² However, the daily life in Jordan had long been regulated based on one's belonging to villages and tribes,¹⁹³ and these tribes strongly disliked central authority. Abdullah also had to face confrontations with Bedouins and peasants. It was this essential that a supratribal structure was established. The Emir stressed the tribal and Islamic identity of Transjordan.¹⁹⁴ A second supratribal structure, next to the King, was the Arab Army. This army was able to incorporate the tribes into the state structure.¹⁹⁵ Tribes have traditionally supported the Hashemite monarchy, and the King's social legitimacy is based on traditional claims of kinship, his religion, and his historical performance. His connections to Sharif Hussein¹⁹⁶ and to the prophet Mohammad¹⁹⁷ support all three of these claims.¹⁹⁸

In 1946 Transjordan, which soon became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, formally gained independence. Hussein, Abdullah's grandson, now had to work on the creation of a sense of history and nationality in order to support Jordan as a new nation-state.¹⁹⁹ The kings of Jordan had thus given up on their pan-Arab aspirations, but this was not the case for their dreams of uniting the East Bank with the West Bank. At first, the nationalism of Transjordan thus included the Palestinians. When this idea was let go, a new Jordanian national identity needed to be developed, and the influx of Palestinians helped to create this. However, the regime had to incorporate Palestinian refugees in the meantime.²⁰⁰ The relationship between Jordan and

¹⁸⁶ VELA, *Jordan*.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Bassam Shahatit, Amman, 07.04.2015.

¹⁸⁸ It is important to note that belonging to a tribe is not the same as being a Bedouin or a nomad.

¹⁸⁹ VELA, *Jordan*.

¹⁹⁰ AL OUDAT & ALSHBOUL, "*Jordan*", p.66.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.66-67.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p.68.

¹⁹³ P. MAGGIOLI, *Arabi cristiani di Transgiordania. Spazi Politici e cultura tribale (1841-1922)*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2011, p.90.

¹⁹⁴ AL OUDAT & ALSHBOUL, "*Jordan*", p.68-69.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.60.

¹⁹⁶ Leader of the Great Arab Revolt against the Ottomans in 1916.

¹⁹⁷ L. L. LAYNE, *The Dialogics of Tribal Self-Representation in Jordan*, in *American Ethnologist* 16 :1 (1989), 24-39, p.24.

¹⁹⁸ An example to show how important these claims are to the legitimacy can be found on the website of King Hussein, namely on the page which describes his brother Prince El Hassan bin Talal, in the first two paragraphs:

http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/prince_hassan.html.

¹⁹⁹ R. SATLOFF, *Troubles on the East Bank: Challenges to the domestic stability of Jordan*, New York, Praeger, 1986, p.60 in AL OUDAT & ALSHBOUL, "*Jordan*", p.70.

²⁰⁰ AL OUDAT & ALSHBOUL, "*Jordan*", p.73-74.

Palestine was influential to the process of separation between the Jordanian national and the Palestinian identity.²⁰¹ The tribal aspect was crucial here, since this differentiates Jordan from Palestine, which traditionally had a more settled population.²⁰² The Gulf War in 1991 caused a demographic and socio-economic crisis, which heightened divisive trends. The idea of a possible new influx of Palestinians since the second Intifada in 2001 created anxiety among Jordanians. Israel was a proponent of the idea of Jordan as the homeland for Palestinians. The security of the regime was also endangered by the public opposition to its peace treaty with Israel from 1994. A liberalisation process was seen as the solution for the divisiveness. A nation-building campaign, 'Jordan First', was thus set up in order to promote the idea of equal citizenship.²⁰³ This new national slogan was used as an instrument for modernisation.²⁰⁴ The current King of Jordan, Abdullah II, has started a similar campaign this year, after the death of the pilot. The new slogan can be translated as 'Be proud, you are Jordanian' and is very present in the public sphere in Jordan, where it appeared on banners and flags after having been a part of a speech of the King.²⁰⁵ This message of unity is important for Jordan during these times where the surrounding countries are so divided.²⁰⁶

It is thus clear that tribalism plays an important role in Jordan, and that Jordanian nationalism is based on tribal identity. This stands in contrast to nationalism in other Arab countries,²⁰⁷ where other factors, such as religion, often play a bigger role.

C. State based security

Another reason for Jordan's Christians to feel safe is the fact that the security forces protect them. Over the last decade the Jordanian government has increased the presence of security officers outside of churches,²⁰⁸ in order to try to protect the Christians after threats against Christian communities in the region.²⁰⁹ Providing security for Christians is of course a part of the King's discourse on inclusiveness of Jordan to Christians. The power to appoint the head of the army and the General Intelligence Directorate (Jordan's intelligence services, GID) has also been righted to Abdullah since last August, which shows that the King has a big influence on the Jordanian security services.²¹⁰ However, the need for security in Jordan goes further than this.

Jordan is as a 'buffer state' in the Middle East, a safe place that is crucial for receiving refugees from other countries. Its regional security and stability are its most valuable qualities.²¹¹ The Kingdom therefore relies on several institutions, namely the armed forces, the national police and GID, to ensure this safety. Jordan's armed forces are very well trained, better than in the rest of the region. They are also considered to be amongst the most efficient and capable. The GID has ties to the CIA and MI6.²¹² Jordan receives military support from the US.²¹³ Jordan is the host

²⁰¹ AL OUDAT & ALSHBOUL, "Jordan", p.77.

²⁰² LAYNE, *The Dialogics*, p.24.

²⁰³ AL OUDAT & ALSHBOUL, "Jordan", p.81-82.

²⁰⁴ AL OUDAT & ALSHBOUL, "Jordan", p.87.

²⁰⁵ JOUCKA, 'Be proud' becomes Twitter trend after King's address to nation, in *The Jordan Times*, 04.03.2015, <http://jordantimes.com/be-proud-becomes-twitter-trend-after-kings-address-to-nation> (accessed 07.05.2015).

²⁰⁶ VELA, *Jordan*.

²⁰⁷ AL OUDAT & ALSHBOUL, "Jordan", p.65.

²⁰⁸ USDOS, *Jordan*, p.8.

²⁰⁹ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR (USDOS: DRL), *International Religious Freedom Report 2012: Jordan*,

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=208396> (accessed 10.05.2015).

²¹⁰ S. BARAKAT & A. LEBER, *Fortress Jordan: Putting the Money to Work*, Doha (Qatar), Brookings Doha Center, 2015, p.10.

²¹¹ BARAKAT & LEBER, *Fortress*, p.1.

²¹² R. R. CURTIS, *Security dilemmas and the 'security state' question in Jordan*, 29.12.2014, <http://pomeps.org/2014/12/29/security-dilemmas-and-the-security-state-question-in-jordan/> (accessed 10.05.2015).

of millions of refugees, which is by some seen as a burden to the country,²¹⁴ but which is also a reason for them to get financial support by other countries, support that Jordan could not live without. If Jordan were to lose its status as a safe haven, it would also lose this support.²¹⁵ The protection of Jordan's minorities is thus crucial for not only the minorities themselves, but also to ensure the benevolence of Jordan's donors.

To conclude, it can thus be said that, despite the fact that the Jordanian government might have ulterior motives, the Christian communities in Jordan can count on their government doing whatever they can to protect them.

²¹³ J. WARRICK, *Jordan emerges as key CIA counterterrorism ally*, 04.01.2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/03/AR2010010302063_2.html (accessed 10.05.2015).

²¹⁴ BARAKAT & LEBER, *Fortress*, p.4.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.1.

CONCLUSION

Christianity has deep roots in Jordan. It has been present for around 2000 years, during which it saw big changes. Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan, and Christianity was the majority religion until the 16th century. Eastern and Western Christians soon grew apart, and Jordan's Christians today belong to many different denominations. The arrival of Islam was challenging to Christians, but they were usually treated well. According to Islam, Christians are *ahl al-Kitāb*, thanks to which they got protection under the *dhimma* system. The Crusades were mainly important for two reasons. Firstly, they showed the definite split between the East and West, a separation that included their Christians. Secondly, and probably even more importantly, the Crusades are important because of they influenced the public opinion of the East concerning the West. Until today the close association of "the West", Christianity, and the Crusades remains a dominant narrative. Eastern Christians can wrongfully be seen as a part of this association. The Ottoman Empire built on the traditional Islamic *dhimma* system to create their *millet* system, under which Christians had autonomy and were protected, with certain restrictions. The Ottoman Empire can be seen as an early model for religious pluralism. During the *tanzīmāt* the Empire started to make the shift from a religion-based system to one based on citizenship. The First World War brought an end to the Empire, leaving the Middle East to be divided among the Western colonial powers. This proved to have a negative influence on most of the Christian communities in the region.

Over the last century Christians in Jordan have made up between 4 and 10 per cent of the population.²¹⁶ Today this number has dropped to 2,2 per cent. Reasons for this are mainly the same natural reasons, such as lower birth rates and economical migration, as in the surrounding countries. Part of the current decline might be due to safety reasons. Jordan's Christians play an important role in their country, and are well represented. Jordan grants full rights to all of its citizens. Muslims and Christians have their own religious courts that handle family issues. The fact that some rules have a religious basis result in a persistence of different treatment of Christians and Muslims and prevents full equality. Still, it can be perceived that that Jordan's Christians have it relatively good. Jordan is located in the middle of a fragile region, surrounded by sectarian violence. Jordan's economy is vulnerable, constituting a further risk of instability and social tension. Especially against the backdrop of the Arab Spring that also tangled Jordan, demands to political, economic, and social reform are still being voiced all over the country. Furthermore, religious extremism seems to be on its rise. Jordan's Christians thus have reasons for being afraid that the fate of their neighbours might be theirs soon. Some Christians seem to have this fear. They seem to be aware that there are certain risks. Most of them however only feel this fear passively, in the back of their mind. The people who are actively afraid and ready to leave seem to be a minority. The reason for this might be that Jordan is different from its neighbours. The King of Jordan respects and needs his Christians. Much effort is put into interreligious dialogue, and Christians get more and more rights. The King still enjoys public support. Christians also enjoy heavy protection by the state. Another important factor is Jordan's notion of nationalism. Jordan has a very diverse population, consisting of different descents and religions. Among these differences religion seems to have become the less important one.

In conclusion, it can be stated that Christians in Jordan are a well-integrated and respected group. They might have reasons to feel insecure about their future, but they also have reasons to feel safe. This does not, however, mean that everything is perfect the way it is. Jordan has been making progress in the right direction, but it also still has discriminative rules, for example concerning conversion and marriages. Jordan is putting more emphasis on interreligious

²¹⁶ VALOGNES, *Vie*, p.614.

dialogue, a trend that should be continued in the future. Jordan should also make changes in its educational system. Jordan's Muslims should get more information on Christianity and on Jordan's Christians. It is important that any current prejudices disappear and that both groups respect and acknowledge one another. The dialogue between Christians and Muslims needs to reach all levels of Jordan's population. Jordan, now more than ever, needs to be united against today's threats.

APPENDICES

1. Word List

Ahl al-kitāb: Arabic for ‘people of the book’. The term refers to Jews and Christians as people who adhere a religion that possesses a divine book. Some schools consider Zoroastrians to belong to this group as well.²¹⁷

Dhimma: See Appendix 3.

Fatwā: a formal legal opinion given by a *Muftī*, an Islamic legal authority. Fatwās are answers to question posed by individuals or judges. The Muftīs are supposed to base themselves on the Qur’ān, the Ḥadīth, and on knowledge of precedents and exegesis.²¹⁸ Today fatwās can also be issued online through websites.²¹⁹

Jizya: a tax that had to be paid by non-Muslims living under Muslim rule. The tax had to be paid by all adult males, and the amount depended on their income (making a distinction between the affluent, the intermediate, and the needy). The blind, the handicapped, and the unemployed weren’t obligated to pay. The punishment for not paying was prison.²²⁰

Majlis, Majālis: council. In the context of this article it means religions councils, where members from different religious groups were invited to discuss their faith.

Millet: Turkish for ‘religious community’ or ‘people’. This was how autonomous self-governing religious communities were called in the Ottoman Empire. The millets were based on religion, and the leader of the millet was also the religious leader. He was thus responsible for the taxes and for maintaining internal security. The millets were also responsible for social and administrative functions.²²¹

Sharī‘ah: literally translated as ‘the path leading to the watering place’, is the Islamic law. It was systemized during the 8th and 9th century and is considered to be a guide that leads Muslims rightfully in this world while helping them achieve divine favour in the afterlife.²²²

Tanzīmāt: Turkish for ‘reorganization’. The word stands for a series of reforms that were carried out in the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century under the sultans Abdūlmecid I and Abdūlaziz. European ideas inspired the reformations, which were meant to make fundamental changes in the Empire, namely to make the Empire more like the modern European states, away from the theocratic principles the Empire was then based on.²²³

²¹⁷ FRIEDMANN, *Dhimma*.

²¹⁸ *Mufti*, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2007) <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/396091/mufti#ref290219> (accessed 14.05.2015).

²¹⁹ Examples of websites where you can do so are: <http://fatwaonline.org/ask.php> <http://www.askimam.org/> <http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/>.

²²⁰ FRIEDMANN, *Dhimma*.

²²¹ *Millet*, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2010) <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/382871/millet> (accessed 14.05.2015).

²²² N. J. COULSON, *Sharī‘ah*, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2014) <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/538793/Shariah> (accessed 14.05.2015).

²²³ *Tanzimat*, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2014) <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/582884/Tanzimat> (accessed 14.05.2015).

Wazīr: title of the chief minister during the Abbasid Caliphate. During the Ottoman period the title ‘Grand wazīr’ was used to indicate the chief minister, who had ‘*Dome wazīrs*’ working for him. The title of Wazīr was later granted to high officials and provincial governors.²²⁴

²²⁴ *Vizier*, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2014) <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/631485/vizier> (accessed 24.05.2015).

2. Christian population at the beginning of the Arab Caliphate (in thousands)

Region	Total Population	Christians
Arabia	1,000	100
Syria	4,000	3,960
Mesopotamia	9,100	9,009
Egypt	2,700	2,637
Total	16,800	15,742

Source: Y. COURBAGE, & P. FARGUES, *Christians and Jews under Islam*. Translated by J. MABRO, New York, I.B. Tauris & Co, 1998, p. 26.

3. Dhimma

Dhimma is Arabic for obligation or treaty. The term is used for the obligation of the Muslims, mainly the leaders, to protect to the non-Muslim communities under their rule. These religious communities were then named ‘protected people’, *ahl al-dhimma* or *dhimmīs*. The protection entailed that dhimmīs were allowed to practice their religion if they paid a special tax, called *jizya*, recognized the loftiness of Islam, and lived according to the rules set by the Islamic government, which varied over time. Some of the rules and right that were probably always in place were that insulting Islam and apostasy were forbidden, just as proselytizing. Christians could keep their places of worship, but they did not always have the right to build new ones.²²⁵ Christian women were allowed to marry Muslim men, but this was not the case for Christian men and Muslim women. The concept originally only included Jews and Christians, but was broadened after the seventh conquest in order to keep up with the Muslim conquests.

The sources on this issue are often contradictory. It is reported that Muhammad stated that it was not allowed to harm someone who has a treaty with the Muslims, but other sources show harsh statements towards the behaviour of Muslims towards dhimmīs.²²⁶ Practical rules applied depending on the era, like dress codes and architectural norms for religious buildings.^{227,228} They were usually allowed to make restorations to existing churches, while not being allowed to build new ones.²²⁹

Dhimmīs often had important positions under Arab or Islamic rule. During the first centuries their linguistic and administrative skills were needed in order for the government to function, since the language of the administration was only changed to Arabic after the eight century.²³⁰ They continued to play an important role after the Arabisation of the administration. Christians often worked as official translators, and it was even possible to rise to governor or to become *wazīr*, the second highest position in the state.²³¹

²²⁵ C. CAHEN, *Dhimma*, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (2012)

http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.kuleuven.ezproxy.kuleuven.be/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/dhimma-SIM_1823?s.num=1&s.q=dhimma (accessed 08.05.2015).

²²⁶ FRIEDMANN, *Dhimma*.

²²⁷ CAHEN, *Dhimma*.

²²⁸ FRIEDMANN, *Dhimma*.

²²⁹ SALIBA, *Christians*, p.4-11.

²³⁰ M. SIRRY, *The public role of Dhimmīs during ‘Abbāsīd times*, in *Bulletin of SOAS* 74:2 (2011) 187-204, doi:10.1017/S0041977X11000024, p.191.

²³¹ SALIBA, *Christians*, p.4-11.

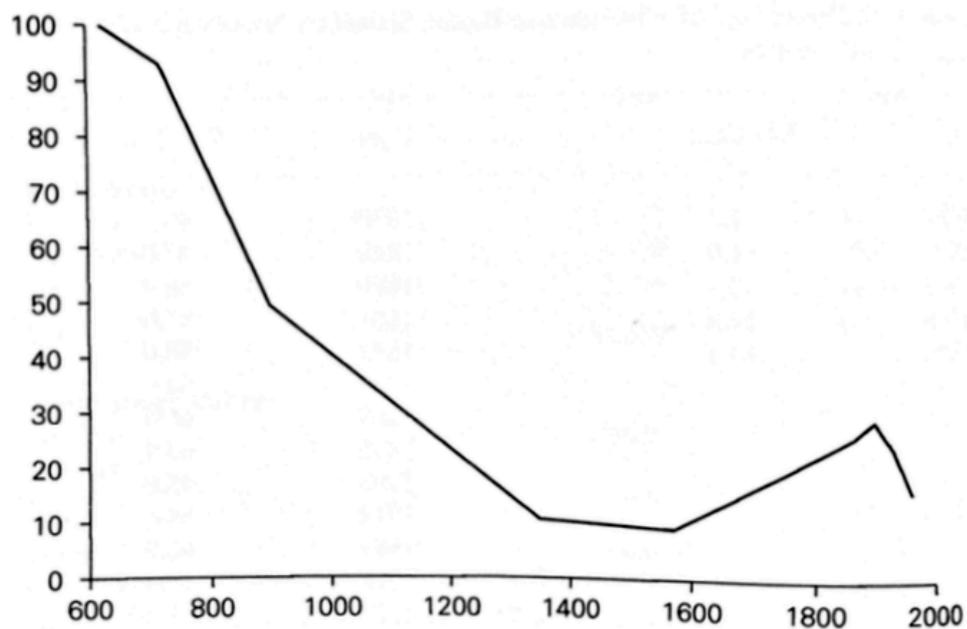
4. Percentage of non-Muslims in Turkey, 1071 to 2000



Source: Y. COURBAGE & P. FARGUES, *Christians and Jews under Islam*. Translated by J. MABRO, New York, I.B. Tauris & Co, 1998, p.129.

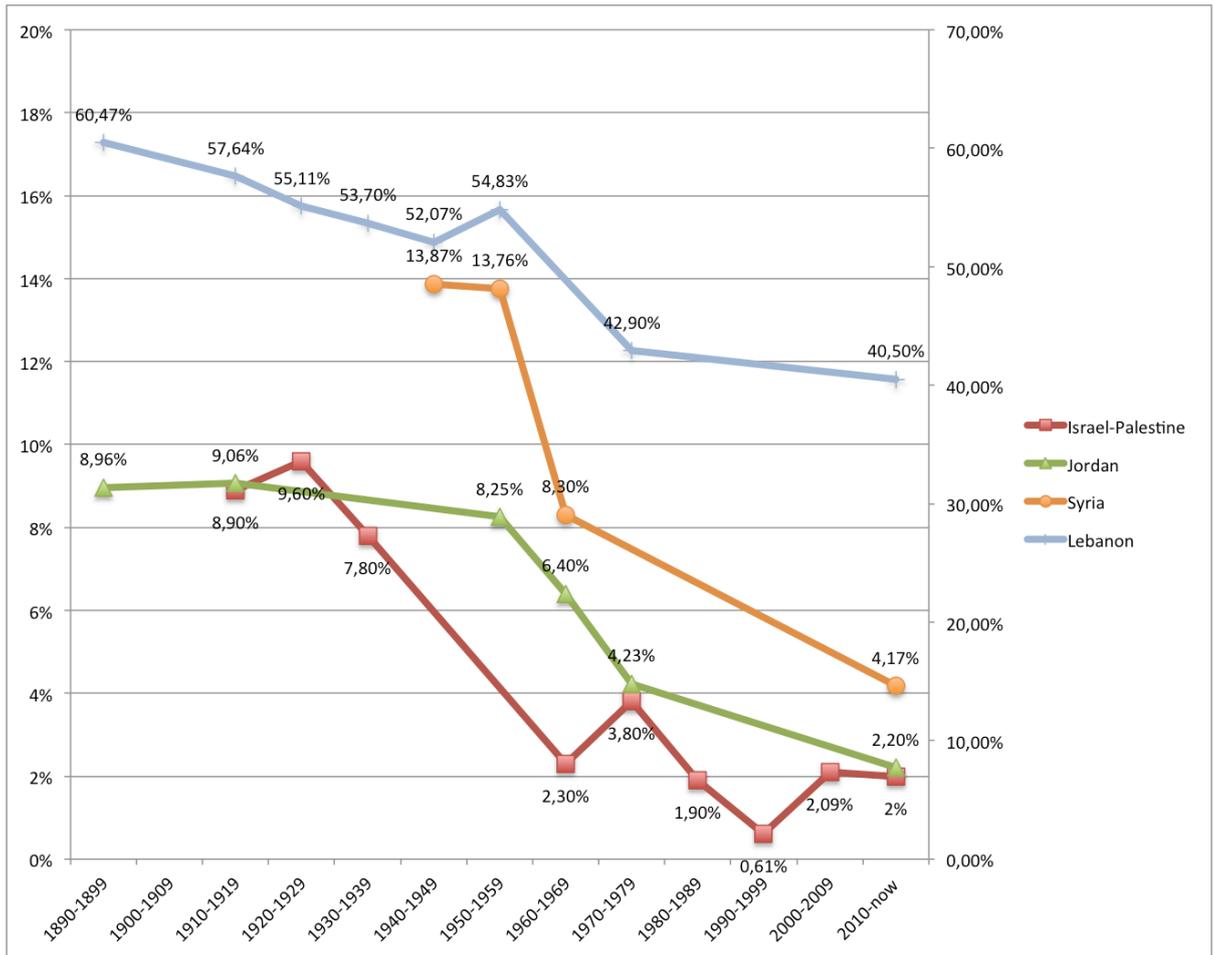
5. Historical overview of Christians in the Levant

5A: *Percentage of Christians in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, from the Hijra to 2000.*



Source: Y. COURBAGE & P. FARGUES, *Christians and Jews under Islam*. Translated by J. MABRO, New York, I.B. Tauris & Co, 1998, p.90.

5B: Historical overview of Christians in the Levant: 19th-21st century



Sources: WORLD RELIGION DATABASE (www.worldreligiondatabase.org), Y. COURBAGE & P. FARGUES, *Christians and Jews under Islam*. Translated by J. MABRO, New York, I.B. Tauris & Co, 1998, p.198. & CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, *The World Factbook*.²³²

²³² This graph is indicative. Different sources often give different numbers for the amount of Christians present at a certain time. The numbers given by Valognes in his book *La Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient* for example differ from what can be seen here. The countries current borders are used.

6. Fertile Crescent: Population by Religion and Province, 1914

Country	Wilaya	Caza/Sanjak	Muslims	Christians	Jews	Total
Jordan	Damascus	Kerak (s)	123,179	13,016	0	136,195
		Ajlun (c)	66,023	8,205	0	74,228
			57,156	4,811	0	61,967
West Bank–Gaza	Beirut	Nablus (s)	354,838	36,504	19,183	410,525
		Jerusalem	151,552	2,982	29	154,563
			70,270	32,461	18,190	120,921
			55,720	3	721	56,444
		Gaza (c)	77,296	1,058	243	78,597
Israel	Beirut	Acre (s)	160,643	32,952	12,488	206,083
		Jerusalem	97,885	25,609	10,383	133,877
			62,758	7,343	2,105	72,206
Lebanon	Beirut	Beirut (s)	364,413	502,101	4,647	871,161
		Tripoli (c)	145,484	63,819	4,568	213,871
			50,004	17,293	72	67,369
	Damascus	Akkar (c)	19,920	21,968	0	41,888
		Hasbaya (c)	9,405	5,843	6	15,254
		Raschaya (c)	5,490	4139	0	9,629
		Ba'albek (c)	18,667	6,429	1	25,097
		Beqa'a (c)	19,113	10,226	0	29,339
	Mount-Lebanon (Ohannes Samneh)		96,330	372,384	0	468,714

Source: Y. COURBAGE & P. FARGUES, *Christians and Jews under Islam*. Translated by J. MABRO, New York, I.B. Tauris & Co, 1998, p. 85.

7. The killing of Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh

On Wednesday the 24th of December 2014 a Jordanian pilot, Lt. Moaz al-Kasasbeh, was captured by ISIL after his plane crashed in northeast Syria.²³³ Moaz al-Kasasbeh was the first member of the international coalition who got captured by extremists. He belonged to a politically influential tribe, whose support is crucial for the King.²³⁴

Jordan had been participating in the U.S.-lead coalition against ISIL for a couple of months when this happened.²³⁵ The public opinion however was very divided on this issue. Polls showed that only a small majority of Jordanians supported their country's role in the coalition, while 40 per cent of the population viewed ISIL as a legitimate Sunni resistance movement.²³⁶ Different sources state that between 1400 and 2200²³⁷ Jordanians are fighting with extremist groups in Syria. ISIL threatening to kill Moaz led to growing opposition against Jordan's participation.²³⁸

ISIL entered in negotiations with Jordan and stated to be willing to free the pilot, and a Japanese journalist²³⁹, in exchange for the release of Sajida al-Rishawi²⁴⁰, who was sentenced to death²⁴¹ in Jordan for having participated in the bombings of three hotels in Amman in 2005, which killed around 60 people. The Jordanian government asked proof of life before making the exchange.²⁴² On the third of February it came to light that the pilot had already been killed, when ISIL made a video public in which could be seen how he was burned in a cage. It was the first time that ISIL publicized the killing of an Arab Muslim this way.²⁴³ By killing the pilot in such a violent way, the public did not turn on Jordan's participation in the fight against ISIL, but on the contrary led to a sense of revulsion shared by all the different sects and ethnic groups in the Middle East. ISIL now faced anger and disgust from all possible parties, including Sunni and Shiite scholars, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Syrian government and al-Qaeda fighters. With one vicious murder ISIL thus united the majority of the region against them.²⁴⁴ In the video ISIL also issued threats directed at other fighter pilots flying for the coalition, which shows that the goal was to make Jordan leave the coalition. The opposite however happened, with Jordan now stepping up its involvement with the support of its people.²⁴⁵ Public opinion towards ISIL shifted, with less people considering it to be a Sunni Islamic movement, as these statements from articles by Abi-Habib, Ma'ayeh and Barnes and by Bradley, Ma'ayeh and Fitch show: 'They are not Muslims, because in Islam you don't burn people'²⁴⁶ and 'he was sacrificed by this backward

²³³ N. BULOS & M. HENNESSY-FISKE, *Militants capture Jordanian pilot, Islamic State says it shot down the F-16 over Syria, the U.S. insists evidence shows the group did not*, in *Los Angeles Times*, 25.12.2014, p.A3.

²³⁴ R. NORDLAND & R. KADRI, *Tribal Loyalties Drive Jordan's Effort to Free Pilot*, in *The New York Times*, 01.02.2015, p.A6.

²³⁵ R. NORDLAND & A. BARNARD, *Militants' Killing of Jordanian Pilot Unites the Arab World in Anger*, in *The New York Times*, 05.02.2015, p.A11.

²³⁶ L. TAYLOR, *How pilot's capture threatens Jordan's position in Islamic State fight*, in *The Christian Science Monitor*, 26.12.2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1640502487?accountid=17215> (accessed 11.05.2015), p.1.

²³⁷ O. ASHOUR, *How can Jordan aid the fight against Islamic State?*, in *BBC News*, 10.02.2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31208815> (accessed 18.05.2015).

²³⁸ ABI-HABIB & MA'AYEH, *Jordan* p.A7.

²³⁹ R. NORDLAND & R. KADRI, *Jordan Lets Islamic State's Deadline for a Prisoner Exchange Pass* in *The New York Times*, 29.01.2015, p.A10.

²⁴⁰ ABI-HABIB & MA'AYEH, *Jordan*, p.A7.

²⁴¹ NORDLAND & KADRI, *Jordan*.

²⁴² ABI-HABIB & MA'AYEH, *Jordan*, p.A7.

²⁴³ M. NOUR & S. MA'AYEH, *Pilot's Killing Brings Rage, Revenge*, in *Wall Street Journal, Eastern edition*, 05.02.2015, p.A14.

²⁴⁴ NORDLAND & BARNARD, *Militants' Killing*.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ M. ABI-HABIB, S. MA'AYEH & J. E. BARNES, *Militants Slay Jordanian Pilot. Obama, King Abdullah Vow to Retaliate, Video Purports to Show Captive Burned Alive*, in *Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition*, 04.02.2015, p.A1.

group that has nothing to do with Islam'.²⁴⁷ This incident has had a big influence on the public opinion on ISIL in Jordan.

²⁴⁷ M. BRADLEY, S. SUHA & A. FITCH, *Jordan Launches New Strikes on Islamic State. Warplanes Attack the Group's Syrian Positions in Retaliation for the Militants' Killing of a Captured Air Force Pilot*, in *Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition*, 06.02.2015, p.A6.

