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The Uses of Kinship for Political Ends by Local Descent Groups in Jordan

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Abstract

Kinship is an important dimension of politics throughout the Middle East and, specifically, in Jordan. At the level of face-to-face negotiations, three kinds of kinship (common descent, affinity, ritual kinship) are invoked in Jordan to garner support from an actor's kin and create political ties. At the level of large-scale organizations – such as tribes – appeals are made to kinship norms to mobilize members of each organization and enhance group solidarity. At the macroscopic level of national politics, rhetoric about the "national family" is used to try to pacify groups who have lost political battles or who are politically marginal to the decision-making process. Analysis of politics at all three levels can be improved by paying careful attention to kinship.

Introduction

Some twenty years ago, Middle East anthropologist Richard Antoun pointed out that, in Jordan, "the domain of kinship cannot be separated from the domain of politics either at the behavioral or the symbolic-cognitive level." His remarks were the culmination of over thirty years of detailed ethnographic research in a northern Jordanian village, during which he wrote numerous case studies that showed the importance of kinship for political action (Antoun 2000:460). Andrew Shryock and Sally Howell, writing at the same time, also emphasized that recurring images of political relations and metaphors about politics in Jordan are drawn from the domain of familial relations (Shryock and Howell 2001). For anthropologists of the Middle East, this is still common knowledge. Several non-anthropologists have also applied these insights in studies of Jordanian legal institutions (cf. Gao 2015, Petersohn 2015). Unfortunately, many anthropologists working outside of the Middle East overlooked the importance of kinship for political action during the first decade of this century, when ethnographic studies of kinship and politics in other

world areas were in decline. This paper aims to contribute to the revival of interest in the relationship between kinship and politics among anthropologists by providing some brief case studies of this relationship in Jordan.

Before presenting the ethnographic data, however, I should explain what I mean by "kinship" in the Middle Eastern context. In most Arabic-speaking societies, in particular, "kinship" consists of three kinds of relationships: 1) social ties based on shared notions of descent from a common ancestor; 2) social ties based on marriage – or, as anthropologists express it, on affinity; and 3) social ties created through ritual. For all three types of kinship, collective representations (such as kinship terminology and the rules for behavior that people are expected to follow in their dealings with kin) are invoked by individuals to justify and explain their treatment of kin. They also refer to kinship norms in order to elicit or demand the kinds of behavior from others that they believe they are entitled to as kin. Because a political agent can invoke kinship to elicit political action from others, kinship cannot be excluded from the analysis of political power. No doubt most scholars doing research on Middle Eastern societies would agree with this statement in general. My point in making it, however, is to insist on the relevance of all three dimensions of kinship: descent, affinity, and ritual kinship (see Magnarella 1973). In fact, most of the scholarship about kinship and politics in the Middle East – especially the literature about "tribes" – focuses on descent. In this paper I will present evidence that affinity and ritual kinship also have political significance.

I would also like to distinguish among three levels of political analysis: the microscopic level, what I will call the organizational level, and the macroscopic level. I will argue that cultural anthropology is best equipped to document and analyze the political side of kinship at the microscopic level. Scholars in other disciplines are better equipped to study kinship and political action at the organizational and macroscopic levels.

The Microscopic Level

Kinship politics at the microscopic level is carried out by means of face-to-face interactions (or, in this digital age, through one-on-one conversations via e-mail or other social media). The interlocutors in such conversations consider themselves kin. I would argue that cultural anthropologists are best equipped methodologically for the microscopic analysis of kinship and politics. Anthropological research methods – participant observation, structured interviews, and so on – are well designed for collecting data about face-to-face interactions. The three case studies that I will present provide illustrations of kinship politics at the microscopic level.

The Level of Large-Scale Political Organizations

At a higher level – the level of a large-scale political organization – conversations are conducted in a wider discursive arena, in which appeals to kinship are recognized as metaphorical rather than real. This is also the level at which the leaders of "tribes" – rather than the leaders of the

smaller kin groups commonly called clans, lineages, families, and households – are active.[1] As a Middle East historian notes:

> Tribes occupy a middle ground in scale, comparable to political parties, labor syndicates, and social media collectives…. [T]his sense that the Middle Eastern tribe occupies an intermediate scale and position among forms of association is important for defining the modern tribe's scope as well as its relationship to both persons and states (Samin 2021:473).

Data about the rise of the third Saudi state in the early twentieth century illustrate this level of kinship politics well.

In 1901, northern Arabia was embroiled in an armed conflict between two centers of power: the city of Kuwait, which was dominated by the Āl Ṣabāḥ tribe, and the city of Ḥāʾil, the seat of the ruling Āl Rashīd tribe. At the time, the man who later founded the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, ʿAbd-al-ʿAzīz ibn ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Āl Saʿūd, was a client of Kuwait. He resided in Kuwait with his extended family under Kuwaiti protection. He and forty men from his close relatives volunteered to fight the enemies of Kuwait. With only forty camels and thirty rifles, they left Kuwait and set out to confront the foe. On his way to battle, he collected additional troops from neighboring tribes, such as the Āl Murrah, the Subayʿ, and the Suhūl. He also tried to recruit soldiers from the ʿUjmān (who lived south of Kuwait in the al-Aḥsāʾ region). Although the political leaders (*al-ruʾasāʾ*) of the ʿUjmān tribe "hesitated" (*taraddad*), many of the rank and file members (*al-ʿāmmah*) joined ibn Saʿūd's campaign. He then attacked tribes belonging to the Qaḥṭān and Muṭayr tribal confederations, who were allies of Kuwait's enemy. By plundering their herds, he acquired more mounts and attracted more troops, so that by the summer of 1901 he had increased the size of his force to 1,500 camels and 600 horsemen (al-Rīḥānī 1970:114-15, 117, 121-22).

Although it is customary to portray the tribes mentioned in this account as bodies of kinsmen, they are as much political organizations – with political hierarchies of leaders and followers and the weapons and troops needed to wage war – as they are descent groups. They are comparable in size and organization to Ibn Saʿūd's army which, like the tribes, included many hundreds of men but which was not based on common descent.

The soldiers belonging to his army, which conquered much of the Arabian Peninsula in the 1920s and created the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, called each other *ikhwān*, "brothers" (Andreotti 2013; Bocco and Tell 1994:108, 110-11; Kostiner 1985). This was not because they thought that they were real kin but because they believed in the politico-religious ideology of the

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[1] By putting the word "tribes" in scare-quotes here, I am expressing my unease with its lack of precision and my reluctance to use it as an analytical term. As Nora Barakat has recently said, the word "tribe" has been used to lump together many kinds of descent groups that differ with respect to their size, their control over or use of land, and their political relationships with Middle Eastern states (see Barakat 2021:438; see also Shryock 2021:513). It is beyond the scope of this paper to review the many debates in the anthropological literature about the meaning of "tribe." For my purposes, a Jordanian "tribe" is a comparatively large patrilineal descent group that has some degree of political stratification, so that a recognized office holder such as a "shaykh" or "elder" has the right to represent the group to outsiders, has the ability to help resolve internal conflicts, and has the authority to issue orders during times of crisis, when conflict with outsiders takes place.

nascent Saudi state. By calling each other "brothers," they invoked this ideology to outweigh the real inter-tribal tensions that could lead to divisions among them.

Invoking kinship at the organizational level is a metaphor, according to which the norms for kin are regarded as an ideal to be striven for, not as the real basis of social relations. Data about this metaphor can be found in the discourse carried out by members of the organization and in organizational documents and pronouncements. Metaphorically, the members of the organization address each other as if they were kin, even though they also recognize that this metaphor is a collective fiction.

Similar efforts to extend the norms for kin and apply them to the members of an organization are attested cross-culturally. They are found not only in political or military organizations; sometimes criminal organizations also invoke the metaphor of kinship. In early twentieth-century China, for instance, organized networks of brothels existed in large cities such as Shanghai. When young girls were pawned or sold to a brothel, they became members of this network. Essentially abandoned by their real kin, the girls used kinship terms to address the madams who controlled, guarded, and protected them. When police raided the brothels and tried to arrest the girls working there, they often clung to their madams, crying "Don't take me away from my 'mama'" (Hershatter 1991:274). A similar extension of kinship norms has been described for a very different kind of organization: an informal support network for the families of police working in a Midwestern town in the United States. The members of this network are expected to deal with each other "as family" – to the point where the obligation to support network members sometimes takes precedence over obligations to real kin. Pamela Frese has coined the felicitous phrase "organizational fictives" to describe the organization's members (Frese 2021). Although it is not the goal of this paper to systematically document the use of "fictive kinship" for consolidating ties among the members of organizations cross-culturally, these examples show the analytical utility of linking "fictive kinship" to organizations.

The Macroscopic Level

At the macroscopic level, at which large organizations representing thousands or millions of people compete for political power, kinship imagery is often used by the victors as an instrument of persuasion, to try to prevent the losers in political struggles from attempting to sabotage or destroy the entire political system. Thus, messages about kinship at the macroscopic level are intended to pacify elements of society and render them passive. This contrasts with messaging at the organizational level, at which the leaders of an organization try to mobilize its members.

In Jordan, political relationships at the macroscopic level have their roots in the events of the eighteenth century, if not earlier. To clarify the context in which the macroscopic level of Jordanian politics has developed, I will supply some historical background.

The Jordanian state is the heir to the Ottoman Empire. Like most Middle Eastern states of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman system consisted of a ruling dynasty whose direct authority did not reach far beyond its seat of power, Istanbul. The dynasty's power was constrained by relative economic scarcity and by restrictions imposed by European powers. The Ottomans were primarily concerned with the task of extracting revenue from local populations. To collect taxes, they sometimes formed alliances with local power brokers and sometimes sent troops to seize property by force. Regardless, they were an alien and distant elite that had only a weak connec-

tion with local political organizations and local kinship groups (Rogan 1999:3; Zubaida 1993:122-23).

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Ottomans implemented a series of reforms to improve their ability to collect revenue in frontier zones such as Jordan. At first, they attempted to impose the empire's authority on local political organizations by force, but this attempt failed. The next attempt, starting in 1871, involved expanding their bureaucracy, granting privileges to local merchants and leaders in order to co-opt them, instituting elections for positions on local administrative councils in which local leaders could compete, and building schools and mosques to foster loyalty to the Ottoman sultan among local communities (Rogan 1999:4-6, 9-11, 14). The main aim of the new, empire-financed school system was "to produce a population which was obedient, but also trained into espousing the values of the [empire's] centre" (Deringil 1998:93-94).

The scope of the macroscopic level shrank dramatically after World War I, with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The fragments of the empire were replaced by the Mandate system in Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria. Jordan fell under the British Mandate. Its administrators installed King ʿAbdallah I of the Hashemite dynasty of western Arabia as the first regent of Jordan. ʿAbdallah faced tribal resistance to centralized rule and depended on British support to subdue local leaders (cf. Tell 2013, chapters four and five). After the 1948 war between the Zionist movement and the colonial Arab armies, ʿAbdallah's realm unexpectedly broadened. He managed to annex the West Bank, justifying this by claiming to be defending Jerusalem and providing a haven for Palestinians displaced by the war (Nanes 2010:165-67).

It was at this juncture that kinship entered the rhetoric of the Hashemite monarchy. The new state was described as "one Jordanian family, with Jordanian and Palestinian branches," headed by their father, the king. This rhetoric continued after the death of ʿAbdallah I and the succession to the throne by King Hussein. Images suggesting the king's role as father of the larger Jordanian family became a regular part of television programming (Brand 1995:50). In his address to the public a few months before the elections of November 1993, King Hussein emphasized his certainty that the new government would be "for the homeland and for all members of the one Jordanian family without any discrimination" (al-Sharah 1997:279, 316, fn. 9). This kinship rhetoric has been only partially successful in pacifying opponents to the monarchy, however. As Brand notes, "[f]or all the regime's efforts, the hybrid identity has been embraced by only a limited sector of the population" (Brand 1995:50-52).

Another illustration of this discourse at the macroscopic level in Jordan can be found in Andrew Shryock's account of a dinner that he attended in the 1990s at the home of a prominent Jordanian political figure: Muḥammad ibn Mājid al-ʿAdwān. Speaking about the relationship during the 1930s between his father, Mājid, and the late King ʿAbdallah of Jordan, Muḥammad stressed that the two men had been "like brothers." He asserted that there was never any ill will between them, despite the intense struggle for power between their two descent groups (the ʿAdwān tribe and the Hashemite family) during the founding years of the Kingdom of Jordan. This "brotherhood" metaphor was used to reject any assertions that the ʿAdwān tribe was now subordinate to the royal family while affirming the closeness of the ʿAdwān tribe's leaders to the source of real power in Hashemite Jordan (Shyrock and Howell 2001:253-55).

Messages at the macroscopic level often appear in print and in broadcast discourses between those in control of the state and those who are out of power. When these messages include tropes about kinship, they are often intended to persuade millions of people that they are "related," even though these people have no direct contact with each other and are, at most, members of "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983).

In Jordan, discourse at the macroscopic level often focuses on the relationship between the royal family, on the one hand, and the elite families who act as intermediaries between the court and the general population. As Shryock and Howell note, the Hashemite court "built a political system that … addresses … and depends on these houses in fundamental ways …." Elite families are "targets of incentive, punishment, and reward" in that their members can either be recruited to public office or deprived of power (Shryock and Howell 2001:266).

Although politics at the macroscropic level in Jordan has been influenced by European models – since, after all, the very notion of a Jordanian monarchy was imported by the British – the Jordanian political system is by no means a replica of a European system. It has been shaped by the specifics of Jordanian society (see Zubaida 1993:123). In contrast to the model of a kingdom that prevailed of medieval Europe – according to which the heads of noble families served as intermediaries between the king and the *lands* which they controlled – in Jordan, elite families mediate between the court and the various *descent groups* (large and small) with which they are affiliated. Whereas in Europe the monarchy ideally united the various geographical components of a kingdom, in Jordan the monarchy is expected to unite its families. Consequently, the national discourse of Jordan compares the country to an extended family, from which no Jordanians are excluded (however marginal they may be politically).

In the remainder of this paper, I will present three case studies of the political use of kinship in Jordan at the microscopic level. Readers should bear in mind, however, that actions at the microscopic level are informed by and influenced by appeals to kinship made by actors at the two higher levels of political organization that I have sketched out in the previous paragraphs. What is more, actions taken in the past at higher levels of organization continue to impact contemporary politics at lower levels. For instance, the foundation for the election politics discussed in Case Study One, below, was created by the Ottoman administration in the nineteenth century when it established elections for local administrative councils. Case Studies Two and Three, which deal with events that occurred before World War I, were shaped even more strongly by the macroscopic politics of the Ottoman Empire that were ongoing at that time.

CASE STUDY ONE: Local Descent Groups and Politics at the Microscopic Level

My first case study – based on data about the town of Kufrinjah (at 32° 17' 51" N, 035° 42' 08" E) in northern Jordan – demonstrates the importance of local descent groups for voting behavior in local and national elections.

Kufrinjah is a large town in the center of a second-order administrative district (*liwā'*) with a population of some 30,000 people (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajloun_Governorate). It is situated in a hilly agricultural zone, some 5 kilometers southwest of the city of ʿAjlūn (see Map Two, p. xxiv in Rogan and Tell 1994; al-Jālūdī and Bakhīt 1992:86). It lies to the south of Wādi al-ʿArīs, which descends westward into the Jordan Valley. It is now
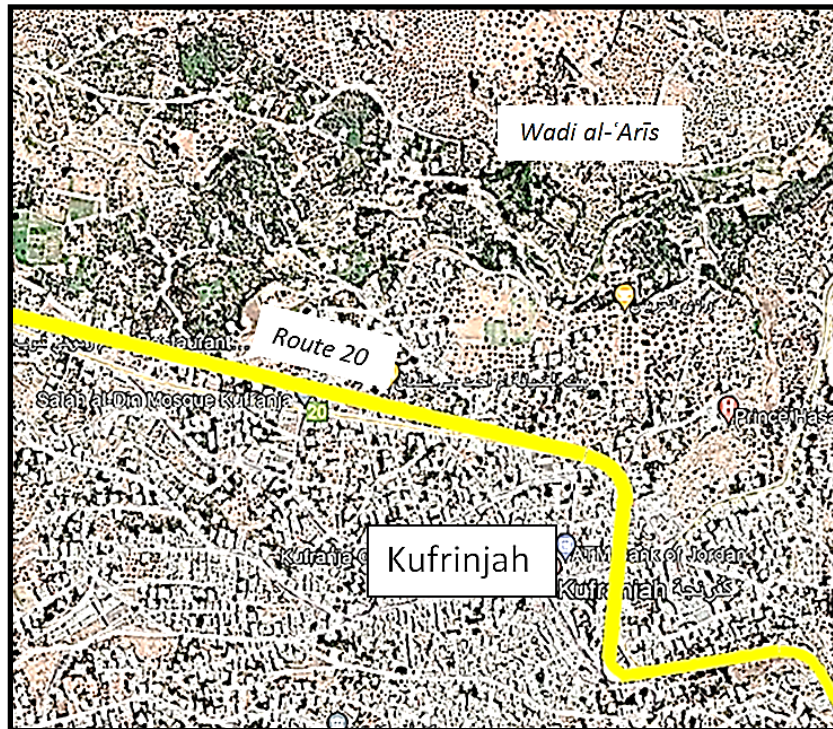
Figure 1: Location and topography of the town of Kufrinjah (after image from Google Earth).

bisected by a major highway, Jordan's Route 20, which connects the town to the other population centers of the region. Blessed with the highest annual rainfall in Jordan (see LeBigre et al. 1985:35) and protected from Bedouin incursions by its hilly terrain and deep valleys, the area around Kufrinjah and ʿAjlūn is well-suited for agriculture. It has supported a dense population of sedentary agriculturalists for centuries.

In the nineteenth century the district of ʿAjlūn was covered by a network of mountain villages that were grouped into eight "communes" (*nawāḥī*). Each commune (*nāḥiyah*) was governed by a local leader (*zaʿīm*), who acquired and kept his position through the support of his own local descent group (*ʿashīrah*), the support he could obtain from local allied groups, and the occasional support of outside powers. Until the 1860s the most important external powers were the Bedouin tribes to the north and east of the area; the Ottoman administration was distant and seldom intervened in local affairs except to collect taxes.

The town of Kufrinjah itself was the seat of power for the al-Furayḥāt descent group, which – in the words of a modern historian – ruled it "with full autonomy." The al-Furayḥāt began their rise to power in 1761, when they seized control of Kufrinjah, and grew in strength in 1825, when they and their allies managed to expel the Banī Ṣakhr Bedouin from the city of ʿAjlūn. It was said that the al-Furayḥāt could mobilize a force of 1,400 fighters in an emergency, drawing on their sedentary and Bedouin allies. This state of affairs lasted until 1867, when the Ottomans decided to assert their authority and install both troops and an administrative apparatus in ʿAjlūn. Although the al-Furayḥāt tribe tried once to rebel against Ottoman rule, their resistance

was crushed by a military expedition against them in 1877. The Ottoman commander of the expedition threatened to utterly destroy the al-Furayḥāt, but they were saved from complete ruin by the intercession of other local notables.

Perhaps the most important impact of the reassertion of Ottoman rule was the application of a new land law in 1882. Its goals were to grant title for each specific piece of land to a title holder and thus identify with precision the person responsible for paying taxes on the products of the land (al-Jālūdī and Bakhīt 1992:71; Muhaydāt 1990:117-18; Rogan 1999:21, 23, 24, 48-49, 51-52, 82-83). By expanding the scope of Ottoman administration, the land law brought local cultivators into close contact with government officials. Furthermore, the recently-installed officials took their responsibility to maintain law and order seriously. For example, they pursued local criminals in Kufrinjah and either exiled them from the area or imprisoned them (al-Jālūdī and Bakhīt 1992:23, 43-44). Henceforth, local people depended on these officials to obtain title to their lands and, in some cases, to obtain justice. Previously, the traditional local leaders had guaranteed the application of traditional law.

As a result of these changes, the political power of local leaders in Kufrinjah and ʿAjlūn declined (Rogan 1999:180). This did not mean that the local ruling families and tribes lost all influence, but it did mean that the local playing field was leveled; other local families and tribes had greater chances of competing with them. Furthermore, new arenas of completion were opened by the establishment of local administrative councils. Some of the seats on ʿAjlūn's administrative council were filled by appointment but other seats were filled by election (Rogan 1999:12). The dominant descent groups were quick to nominate their leaders as candidates. Starting in 1872, several members of the ruling al-Furayḥāt tribe were elected to the council, including Ḥasan Afandī Barakāt (elected in 1880, 1887, 1893, and 1896) and Dirghām al-ʿAbbās. The latter managed to transform his seat on the council into something resembling a hereditary office; his son Ibrāhīm Afandī al-Dirghām was elected to it after he himself retired, and after that another son, Khuzāʿī al-Dirghām, was elected (al-Jālūdī and Bakhīt 1992:27-28).

The history of competition among local descent groups set the stage for the elections of the twentieth century. Anyone running for elected office in Kufrinjah now must deal with the fact that the town is tribally organized. That is to say, all of its residents belong to local patrilineal descent groups or "tribes" (*ashāʾir*), which probably range in size from a few dozen members to more than one thousand.

My main source of data about these groups is my own field research in Kufrinjah in 1992 and 1993. To prepare for data collection there, I drew a rough sketch map of Kufrinjah that showed the primary road, Route 20, and the many secondary roads that meander through the town and that follow the steep inclines of its many hills and slopes (see Figure 2; Route 20 is highlighted in yellow).

I found thirty-three local descent groups in Kufrinjah. They are (in Arabic alphabetical order): Abū-ʿUbaylah, al-Buʿārāt, al-Ja*b*āliyah, al-Ḥiṣān, al-Khaṭāṭibah, al-Khaṭīb, al-Dabābisah, al-Rashāyidah, al-Zaʿāmiṭah, al-Shuwayāt, al-Shuwayṭir, al-Shuḥrūrī, al-Ṣabbāgh, al-Ṣalāḥāt, al-ʿUrayqāt, al-ʿAsāsilah, al-ʿAnānibah, al-ʿAnānizah, al-Ghurayzāt, al-Ghazawī, al-Furayḥāt, al-Qaʿāqiʿah, al-Mārdīnī, al-Madanī, al-Maṣāriwah, al-Naqārishah, al-Nawāṭīr, al-Hazāyimah, Āl ʿAbdallah, Banī Salmān, Banī Shaʿbān, Banī Naṣr, and Ṭashṭūsh (see also al-ʿAbbādī 1987:230;
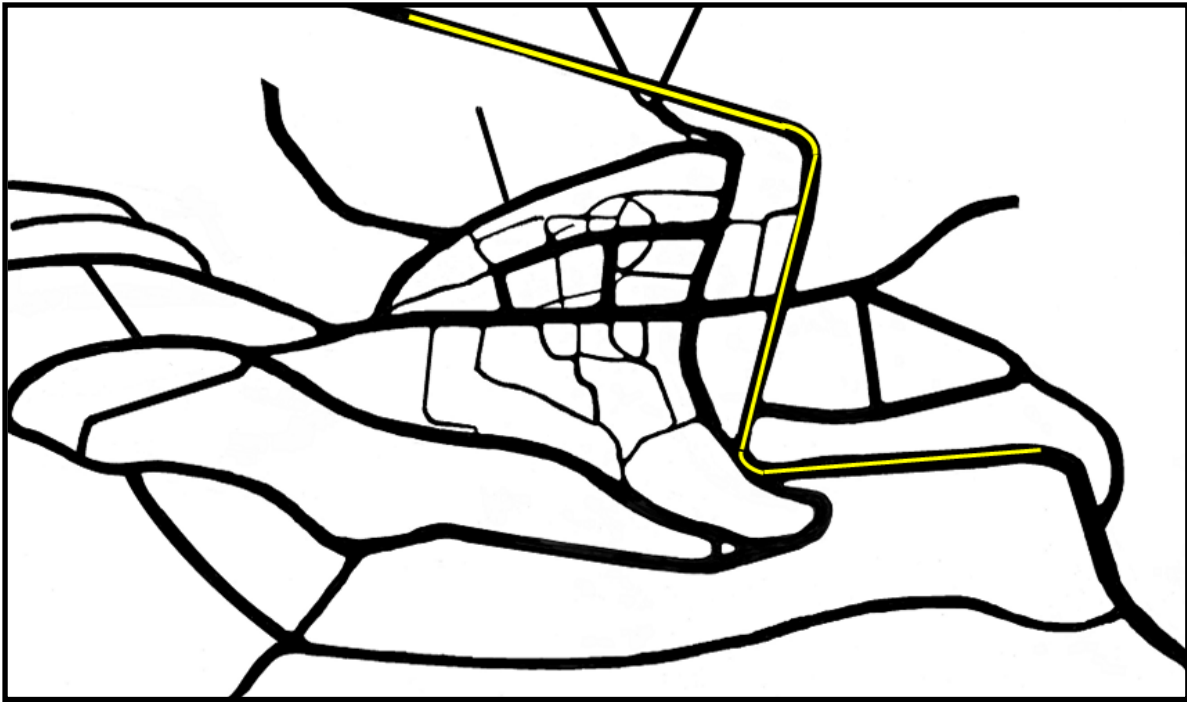
Figure 2: Sketch map of roads in Kufrinjah, 1993.

Muhaydāt 1990:31, 37, 99, 106-07, 113-18, 124, 313). The reader will recognize the name of one of them – the al-Furayḥāt – as the rulers of the town during the nineteenth century. The al-Furayḥāt are still important but their influence is not uncontested.

Each of these local tribes has the ability to act as a unified social group, at least for short periods and for the achievement of identified common goals. One reason why they have this ability is that each tribe's members tend to reside close to each other. Living in close proximity makes it easier for tribe members to communicate with each other quickly and continuously. This facilitates coordination and the sharing of information. Due to the shortage of residential space in the town, not all tribes have this advantage. The households of the comparatively small al-ʿAsāsi-lah tribe, for instance, are rather scattered. But the members of the larger tribes tend to live side-by-side in residential clusters (see Figure 3).

Because the map in Figure 3 is not to scale, it does not represent a precise model of the town in every detail. In a more accurate model, the relative sizes of the residences and the streets would be adjusted, which would bring about the re-positioning of some houses. Furthermore, the map does not show the many non-residential structures – privately-owned stores, government buildings, schools, barber shops, beauty parlors, mosques, cemeteries, and so on – that are also to be found in Kufrinjah. Because I conducted this research by myself, I did not have the ability to carry out a complete household survey of the entire town; for this, a large research team would have been required. Consequently, many houses in the southern portion of Kufrinjah have been left out. Finally, my coding of each house according to the descent group affiliation of its senior male has a patrilineal bias. The ideal residential map would display the affiliations of both the senior male and the senior female members of each household. Such a map would display useful
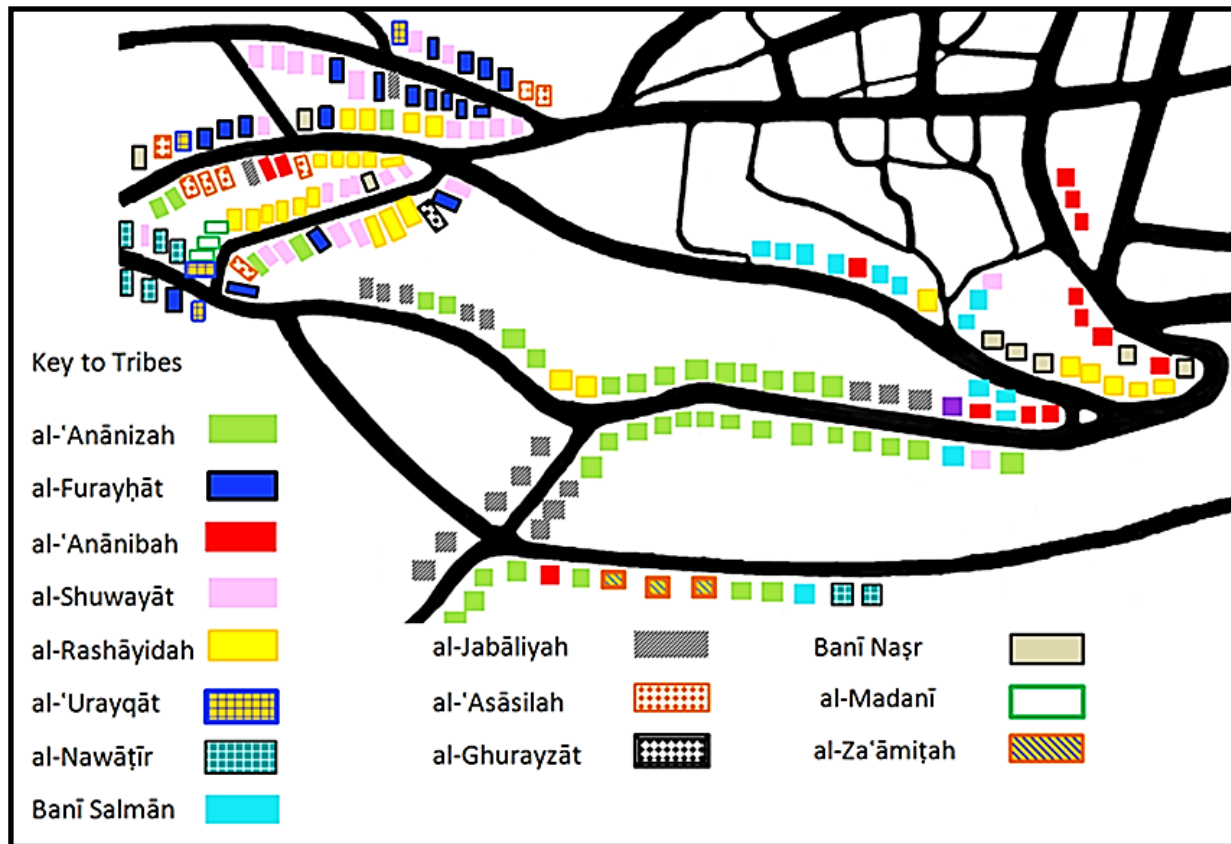
Figure 3: Residential distribution of tribes in southern portion of Kufrinjah.

information about descent group exogamy at the microscopic level. Whatever its shortcomings, the map does reveal some residential patterns. For instance, it shows the tendency for the members of the larger tribes (such as the Banī Salmān, the al-ʿAnānizah, the al-ʿAnānibah, and the al-Furayḥāt) to form residential clusters.

The power and solidarity of the largest local descent groups was tested during the 1993 Parliamentary elections in Jordan. Three seats for ʿAjlūn District were up for election, and a member of one of Kufrinjah's prominent descent groups, the al-ʿAnānibah, declared himself a candidate for one seat. The candidate, Dr. Ahmad ʿAnnāb, had won a seat in Parliament in the 1989 election with 5,280 votes (al-Sharah 1997:306, 308) and felt that he had a good chance of winning again. He had one advantage: he belonged to a large and politically unified tribe. As an analyst of the 1993 elections has observed:

> The winners…were those who were able to secure the backing of their tribes and tribal allies. The size of the candidate's tribe, the ability of the tribe to close its ranks behind its candidate, and its financial clout, were all factors …. (Amawi 1994:23).

However, even if all eligible members of his descent group cast their votes for Dr. ʿAnnāb, this would not be enough to give him victory. He also needed the support of other voters, both in Kufrinjah and in the other towns and villages of the district. He had little hope of attract-

Table 1: Approximate Numbers of Eligible Voters
Belonging to Large Tribes in Kufrinjah in 1993

Rank	Tribe	Voters
1	al-Furayḥāt	1,000
2	al-ʿAnānibah	800
3	al-Khaṭāṭibah	750
4	Banī Salmān + al-Maṣāriwah	700
5	al-Shuwayāt	600
6	al-Rashāyidah	600
7	al-ʿAsāsilah	520
8	al-Ghurayzāt	400
9	Banī Naṣr	400
10	Ṭashtūsh	100
11	al-ʿAnānizah + al-Nawāṭīr	100

ing the support of the al-Furayḥāt tribe, who as the former rulers of Kufrinjah were the rivals of his tribe. Consequently, he campaigned for the support of other voters in the region.

Another arena of competition among candidates was the local election for seats on Kufrinjah's Municipality Council. Nine seats were up for election, and each tribe had to decide which candidates it favored. Since each tribe occupied a particular section of the residential space of the town, its needs and requests often had much to do with improving the infrastructure near the homes of its members. If a road needed repair, if runoff from winter rains was a problem, or if the absence of a medical clinic, elementary school, or pharmacy created hardships for a particular locality, the tribe residing in that locality made these problems known. The candidate would promise to try to address them in exchange for the tribe's electoral support.

As I learned from conversations with other voters in Kufrinjah, it was not only the large tribes who were politically unified. The other tribes were unified, also, and planned to vote as blocs. This enabled even a small tribe to negotiate as a unit with each candidate. One man gave me his estimates of the number of eligible voters that the larger tribes could mobilize. He noted that some of the smaller tribes were expected to vote together and said that their voters should be counted together. His estimates are shown in Table 1.

When the election drew near, each large tribe asked to meet with the candidate in its guest house (*maḍāfah*). This guest house is collectively owned and maintained; the members of the tribe that owns it use the *maḍāfah* for important events such as weddings, funerals, and meet-

ings to resolve conflicts through informal negotiation. In 1993 only the largest four tribes – plus, according to one person, the al-Qaʿāqiʿah tribe – had such guest houses. During the election season they used them for debating the merits of the candidates for office. Thus, the tribe's *maḍāfah* was an important site where face-to-face negotiations over what candidates the tribe should support took place.

As election day approached, rumors about what was said in each of the *maḍāfah*s swirled across the town. I heard tales about arguments and angry disagreements among the members of one tribe which threatened to split its ranks. I asked one man whose relative was a candidate whether these arguments would undermine tribal solidarity. He said, "No. In the end, most members of the tribe will vote in accord with the tribe's consensus, except for a very small number who are *shādhīn ʿan qarāyib-hum* (deviating from their close kin)." His use of the term *shādhīn*, "deviants," was an indicator of the strong rhetorical sanctions available to local people for punishing tribe members who do not obey descent group decisions. The same term was used for describing sexual perversity; it was not a quality that anyone in Kufrinjah wanted to be associated with.

In these electoral contests, there was no question of voters acting as isolated individuals and casting their votes for the parties whose policies or ideologies that they approved of. Instead, they responded to appeals for discipline from their kin and voted as members of tribal blocs. This did not mean that they voted only for candidates who belonged to their own descent groups. Many local descent groups were too small and powerless to field candidates of their own. Rather, they voted for the candidate who had been chosen collectively by their group, after considerable debate and internal negotiation.

It should be noted that tribal voting blocs had a greater impact on the results of the 1993 election than they had in previous elections. This was due to a change in the country's election law that was made in August, 1993, just three months before the election. That is to say, changes made at the macroscopic level of national politics filtered down to the microscopic level of individual voter behavior.

Prior to 1993, Jordan had what is called a Block Vote system. Under this system, the country was divided into twelve electoral constituencies, and each constituency was represented by several seats in Parliament. The city of Amman, for instance, was allocated 5 Muslim seats, 1 Christian seat, and 1 Circassian seat. The candidates for the Muslim seats had to be Muslims but their supporters, of course, could have other religious affiliations or, in some cases, no religious affiliation at all. Thus, a voter in Amman could cast 7 votes. The effect of this system was that citizens could cast some of their votes for candidates who they thought would provide them with goods and services while, at the same time, casting the remainder of their votes for other candidates with whom they shared common ideological orientations. As one analyst put it, the Block Vote system allowed them to "vote both their interests and their hearts" (Baaklini et al. 1999:150; see also Amawi 1994:17 and al-Sharah 1997:130-133).

In 1993, however, the voting system was changed to a Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system. This gave only one vote to every voter, even if he resided in a location – such as Amman – that elected seven representatives to Parliament. As Barwig notes, the "one vote" system "exerted significant psychological effects on voting behavior." Because each citizen had only one vote, he was less willing than before to "waste" it on an ideological candidate who

could not deliver concrete goods to local voters. As a result, voters' calculus shifted in the direction of patronage politics (Barwig 2010:82-83, 88-89; al-Sharah 1997:175-76, 280-285, 289-90, 291, 300, 308, 314).

Jordan is not the only Arab country in which tribal voting blocs are active during elections. They are also important forces in Algeria, Bahrain, and Kuwait (see Beaugrand 2016; Hachemaoui 2012; Salih 2011). No doubt the presence of tribal voting blocs in these elections tends to inhibit the formation of Western-style political parties with formal policy agendas. In Jordan, it is difficult for political parties to recruit members whose loyalty is based purely on ideology or policy preferences rather than on kinship. This does not mean, however, that a kinship-based voting bloc has no policy preferences of its own and is not a competent or informed political player. As Najwa Adra has noted, tribal communities often form the kind of "civil society" that political scientists regard as ideal (Adra 2016:302, 310-12, 319, 321-325; Adra 2021:496).

Eleanor Gao, a political scientist who has done research on tribes in Jordan, points out that one of the positive aspects of tribal politics in Jordan is that candidates for election are forced to "compete for the votes of members outside of their specific identity group." Political competition of this kind improves the provision of public goods to local communities. Such public goods include infrastructure maintenance (Gao 2016:1375, 1390). Her findings apply to my first case study. Other scholars also have documented the competition for votes among the tribes of other localities, such as the south Jordanian town of Karak (Gubser 1973:169-71) and the western Jordanian village of Diyyat (Layne 1994:39, 115-17). The point is: whether one regards kinship-based voting blocs favorably or not, they are an important presence in Jordan that cannot be ignored.

CASE STUDY TWO: Affinity, Alliance, and the Creation of a "Tribe": the Banī Ḥasan

The second case study – a description of the Banī Ḥasan descent group of northern Jordan – demonstrates the importance of affinity for the creation and reproduction of a political organization: the Banī Ḥasan "tribe."

The Banī Ḥasan (literally, "children of Ḥasan") of northern Jordan frankly admit that common descent was only a small part of the political and social relationships that initially bound the members of the tribe together and contributed to its creation. They recognize that their tribe has actually incorporated many client groups and allies who were not descended from the tribe's eponymous ancestor. Here is what a Jordanian historian has to say about them:

> The Banī Ḥasan are a Bedouin tribe that has become sedentary. Their places of residence are in the vicinity of Jarash in the lands that they till and cultivate. In his book, [*Nihāyat] al-irb [fī maʿrifat qabāʾil al-ʿarab*, the historian] al-Qalqashandī said that they were a branch of the Banī ʿUdhrah tribe, descended from Qaḥṭān. Two of its clans, the al-Mashāqibah and the al-ʿUmūsh, are clans that are affiliated via a recorded genealogy to Ḥasan, but the other clans are related through alliance [*ḥilf*], not kinship [*qurābah*].
>
> Ḥasan, the ancestor of the tribe, migrated from [the town of] Tarabah, in the Ḥijāz, and stopped in the village of ʿIfrā in one of the districts near [the city of] al-Ṭafīlah. This was where Ḥarḥash, the ancestor of the al-Ḥarāḥishah clan, was camped. Ḥasan fathered two children, ʿA-mash – the father of the ʿUmūsh clan – and Mishqab – the father of the al-Mashāqibah clan. ʿA-

mash married the daughter of Ḥarḥash. After a while they left the village of ʿIfrā and went to live in al-Mafraq …. Then they migrated along the al-Zarqāʾ River, looking for water and pasture [for their livestock]. They reached the area of ʿAjlūn [in northern Jordan]. Then the al-Khawālidah clans – who had been residing in the village of ʿAymah, near [the city of] al-Ṭafīlah – attached themselves to them. Thus, the four clans [the al-Mashāqibah, the al-ʿUmūsh, the al-Ḥarāḥishah, and the al-Khawālidah] were united and were called the Banī Ḥasan. The al-Zuyūd clans were camped along the al-Zarqāʾ River and they joined the Banī Ḥasan, also. They all married among themselves. After a while, the al-Khazāʿilah clans reached the al-Zarqāʾ River, having come from Iraq. They joined the Banī Ḥasan, too. Thus, the Banī Ḥasan were made of six clans: al-Mashāqibah, the al-ʿUmūsh, the al-Ḥarāḥishah, the al-Khawālidah, the al-Khazāʿilah, and the al-Zuyūd (Muhaydāt 1990:275-276; translation from Arabic by author; see also Peake n.d.:332-35).

As it turns out, this social formation is even more heterogeneous than it appears at first glance, for some of the attached peripheral groups acquired affines and clients of their own. Four additional foreign lineages are attached to the al-Ḥarāḥishah group by marriage; they are called Ballūṭ al-Faqīr, Abū-ʿAklīk, al-Dalābīḥ, and al-Zabūn. One other client group, called the al-Kufayrī, is attached to the al-Khazāʿilah, while seven other client groups are attached to the al-Zuyūd. They client groups are called al-Nawāṣirah, al-Bukūr, al-Janādah, Abū-Jābir, Ibn Muʿallā, al-Ghuwayriyīn, and al-Shudayfāt (Muhaydāt 1990:276-278, 281; see also Peake n.d.:332-35).

The multiple historical origins of the Banī Ḥasan tribe are traceable in many domains. For instance, the features of the dialects that were originally spoken by the different components of the Banī Ḥasan, before they were merged to form the tribe, persist. One member of the tribe, who is a specialist in Arabic linguistics, notes that "each sub-group of the Bani Ḥasan…has some linguistic features that are different from [the features of] other sub-groups" (Al Huneety 2015:3, fn. 2).

The "family-tree" model of tribes that is frequently given for large descent groups clearly does not fit the Banī Ḥasan case. Its members do not claim to be descended from a common ancestor. To represent the relationships between the core elements of the tribe and the peripheral clans that are attached to them by marriage, alliance, and patron/client ties, a concentric model is more informative and more accurate (see Figure 4).

What is more, after they were a recognized "tribe," the Banī Ḥasan imposed a secondary division of this whole collection of clans and lineages and theoretically sorted them into two "parties": the Banī Hulayl party (consisting of the al-Ḥarāḥishah, al-Khazāʿilah, and the al-Khawālidah) and the al-Thubatah/al-Subatah party (consisting of al-Mashāqibah, the al-ʿUmūsh, and the al-Zuyūd) (Muhaydāt 1990:276; Peake n.d.:333; al-Wāʾilī 2002:179). The brief description in the written sources does not explain what purpose this secondary division served. All that we can see is that it united the core elements of the tribe with one of the peripheral elements (the al-Zuyūd) in opposition to all of the other peripheral elements. Perhaps the goal was to reduce the significance of the core-periphery distinction by cutting across it.

This combination of 18 clans and lineages that were not related by common descent became a powerful fighting force. In 1867, it contributed troops to a military campaign led by the Ottoman governor against the Bedouin of west-central Jordan (Rogan 1999:49). Based on their contribution to state security, the Banī Ḥasan enjoyed good relations with the Ottoman authorities (Mundy 1994:66, n. 39). In 1882, when the Banī Ḥasan showed interest in abandoning no-
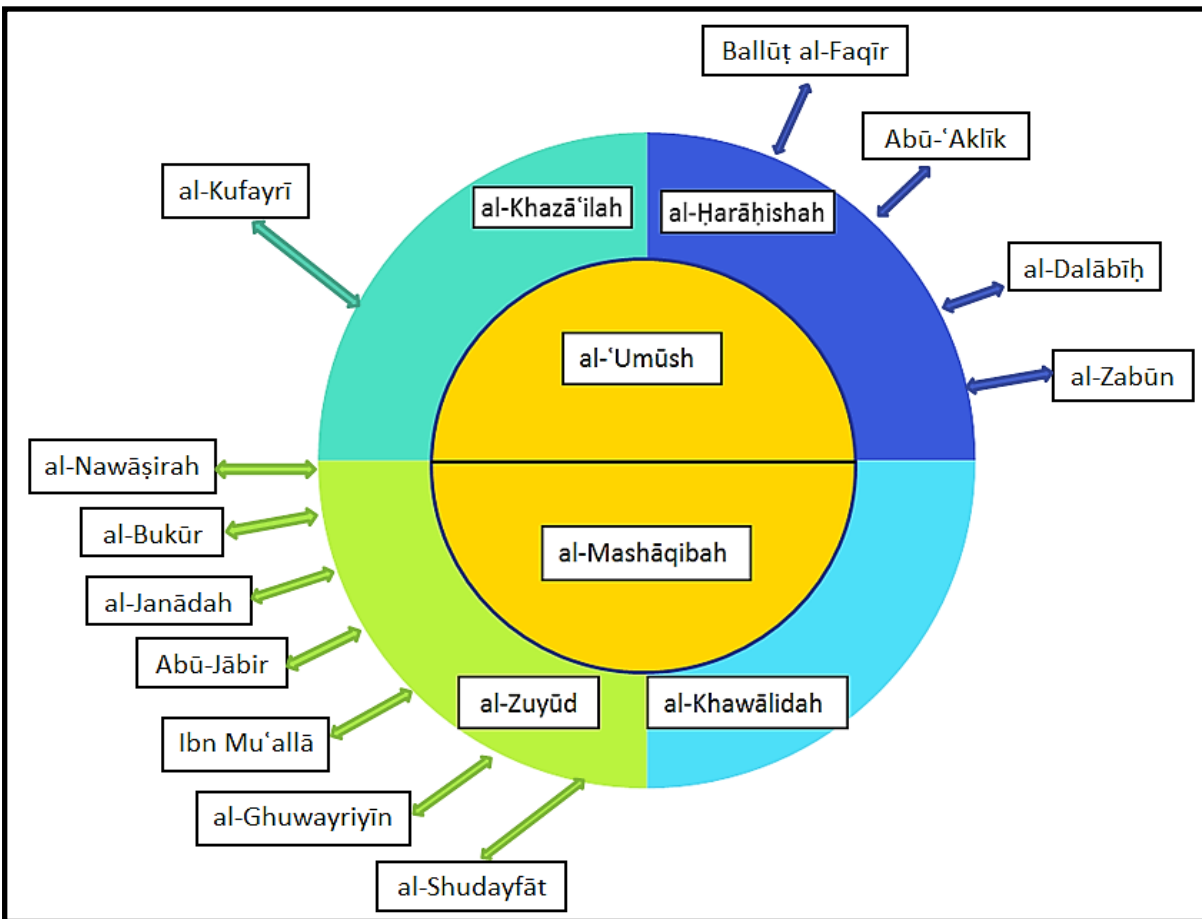
Figure 4: Model of the Banī Ḥasan Tribe of Jordan.

madic pastoralism, the authorities granted them permission to register vacant agricultural lands in their name. No exact figures about their military capabilities are available for the nineteenth century, but in 1900 their fighting strength was estimated at 8,000 men (al-Jālūdī and Bakhīt 1992:52, 50).

Viewed from the macroscopic and organizational levels, the Banī Ḥasan appears to be a tribe like any other. It can act as a unified collectivity and can deal as a unit with governments. But at the microscopic level, the ties of affinity and patronage that actually constitute this social formation become visible.

The lesson to be drawn from this case is that descent is not the only organizing principle underlying the tribe in Jordan. In fact, most tribes probably include elements that were attached to its core descent lines by marriage or alliance. Although they might not be as heterogeneous with respect to their patrilineal origins as the Banī Ḥasan are, most other tribes also include "foreign" groups whose membership in the tribe is based on marriage and alliance, not common descent. This point has often been made by researchers investigating Arab descent groups elsewhere (Bonte 2003; Chelhod 1969:82, 89; Conte 1987; Conte 2003; Conte and Walentowitz 2009; Leder 2015; Young 2019).

An additional illustration of the political use of marriage can be found in the south Jordanian town of Mādabā. Chatelard has documented in some detail the importance of marriage for creating and sustaining political organization in this town. Using marriage records for the period from 1920 to 1960, Chatelard has traced the marriages among the three founding tribes of Mādabā – the al-ʿUzayzāt, the al-Karādishah, and the al-Maʿāyiʿah – and the marriages between them and later immigrants to the town. These tribes are Christian and do not marry Muslims. She found the following patterns: 1) all three founding tribes tended to marry endogamously; 2) the al-Karādishah, to the extent that they married exogamously, took women either from the al-Maʿāyiʿah or from other Christian groups who were more recent immigrants (and who were collectively known as *aghrāb*, "strangers.") These included the al-Ladādiwah tribe (immigrants from the Palestinian town of Lydd); 3) the al-Maʿāyiʿah took women from all other Orthodox Christian clans who had immigrated to Mādabā except for the al-Ladādiwah. They gave women to both al-Ladādiwah and the al-Karādishah; 4) the al-ʿUzayzāt exchanged no women with other Jordanian Catholics but sometimes contracted exchange marriages with immigrant Lebanese groups (Armenians and Maronites) (Chatelard 2000:71-74, 147-56). In general, marriage was used to attach new immigrant groups to the founding tribes of the town. The pattern of marriage relationships also reflected and reproduced the local political hierarchy among the tribes. The al-ʿUzayzāt stood at the apex of this local hierarchy and provided leadership for the other two founding tribes, the al-Karādishah, and the al-Maʿāyiʿah (al-ʿUzayzī 1984, volume 4:165-69).

One might ask: how did these groups become the "founding tribes" of the town of Mādabā in the first place? As it turns out, they succeeded in acquiring the town and its valuable agricultural lands through their shrewd use of another form of kinship: ritual kinship.

CASE STUDY THREE: Ritual Kinship and Local Patron-Client Relationships

My third case study examines patron-client relationships in southern Jordan. During the nineteenth century, all local descent groups in the region around the city of Karak were members of a network of patron-client relationships that was dominated by the powerful Majālī tribe. Most of the clients were sedentary cultivators or merchants who were vulnerable to raids carried out by local Bedouin groups. To protect itself, each client group made a payment of agricultural produce and livestock to its patron to pay for the patron's protection. A kinship idiom served as the basis for the name of this payment; it was called *khūwah* or *khāwah*, "brotherliness" (Bocco and Tell 1994:108, 110-11). However, the patron groups never regarded the subordinate clients as "brothers"; quite the contrary. Since many of the patron groups were themselves Bedouin who had the capacity to attack and raid the sedentary cultivators, many writers have viewed this institution as a protection racket (Bocco and Tell 1994:108; Gubser 1973:16, 52, 61, 65, 70, 81, 101; Rogan 1999:38-39).

One dissatisfied client group, however, managed to extricate itself from this protection racket. This group was the al-ʿUzayzāt tribe, which at the time was residing to the west of Karak (see Figure 5).

In 1879 a conflict arose between them and a Muslim tribe, the al-Ṣarāyirah, which was also a member of the network. One of the al-Ṣarāyirah abducted a woman from the al-ʿUzayzāt tribe, thus defiling the honor (*ʿirḍ*) of the al-ʿUzayzāt. The al-ʿUzayzāt demanded that their pa-
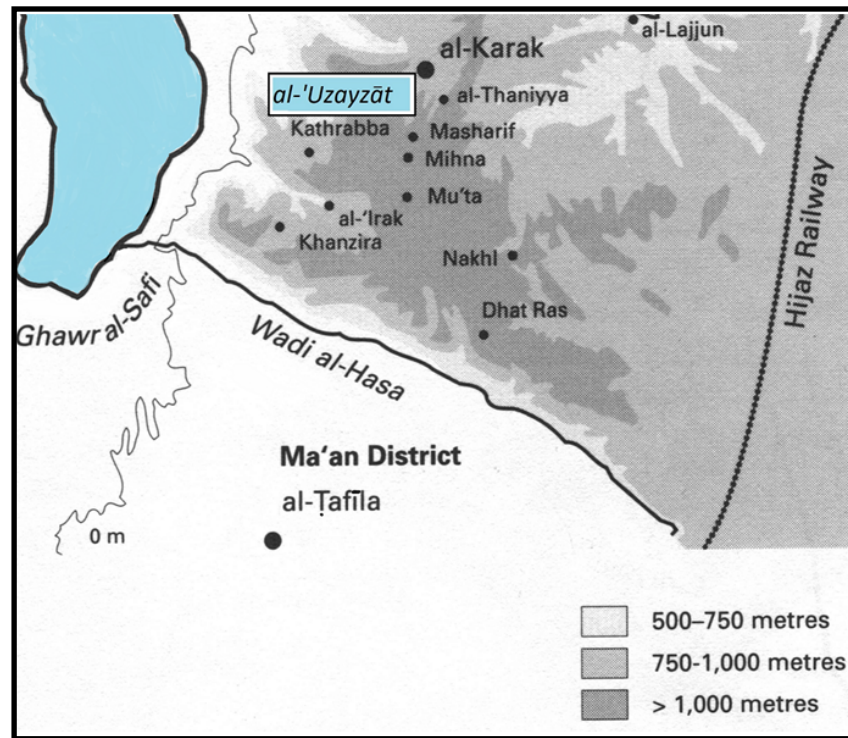
Figure 5: Location of the al-ʿUzayzāt Tribe in 1879. (Map after Rogan and Tell 1994:xxvi).

trons, the Majālī tribe, force the al-Ṣarāyirah to release her. The Majālīs did manage to have the woman released. However, knowing that her close kin would have to make an example of her and would execute her for allowing their honor to be violated, the Majālīs made a mistake: rather than surrendering her to her brother, they sent her to a church run by European Catholic missionaries, who in turn smuggled her out of the country. The Muslim Majālīs may have saved the woman's life, but they frustrated and enraged their Christian clients. The al-ʿUzayzāt attacked and killed some men of the al-Ṣarāyirah, transforming a purely local, limited conflict about honor into a dangerous sectarian conflict between the Christian members of the entire network and its Muslim members.[2]

Under these circumstances the al-ʿUzayzāt, who were also angry about the expense of the protection money that they had to pay, decided to leave Karak. But where could they go? There was vacant agricultural land to the north, near the abandoned village of Mādabā. This land, how-

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[2] Peter Gubser offers a different interpretation of these events. He stresses the impact of interventions by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem; see Gubser 1973:18. From my perspective, these interventions are better analyzed as elements at the macroscopic level, at which the colonial ambitions of France – pressed by the Catholic fathers in Jerusalem – came into conflict with the colonial policies of both England and the Ottoman Empire. My focus here is at the microscopic level, at which Jordanian actors met face-to-face and invoked locally-salient norms and cultural understandings. Although I do not deny that international politics influenced local events, as an anthropologist I have chosen to focus on interpersonal interactions rather than on the clash of empires.

ever, was near the territory of the powerful Banī Ṣakhr tribe, which might attack them. Furthermore, their erstwhile patrons, the Majālīs, would not willingly allow their clients to depart. To leave their present location and gain access to land elsewhere, the al-ʿUzayzāt would need protectors.
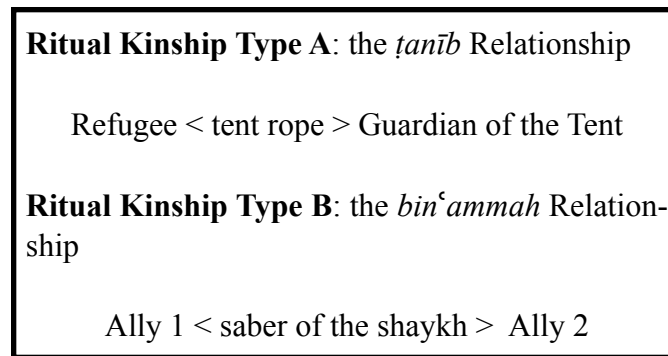
One of the senior men of the al-ʿUzayzāt, Ṣāliḥ al-Ṣawāliḥaḥ, approached the Banī Ḥamīdah tribe, which lived near Mādabā (Jaussen 1908:427). He asked the shaykh of the Banī Ḥamīdah, Sālim Abū-Rubayḥah, to accept him as a ritual kinsman. The ritual that he used to do this was simple: he walked to the tent where the shaykh of the Banī Ḥamīdah lived, grasped a tent rope (ṭanb), and made a public appeal, asking to become a ṭanīb, that is, a refugee under the protection of the tent (see al-ʿUzayzī 1984, volume 3:94) and, by extension, under the protection of the shaykh himself and the entire Banī Ḥamīdah tribe. The shaykh granted his request with the ritual formula *ibshir bi-il-ʿizz wa-ṭīb al-manzil* ("Trust in the good news about the power and good will of the house."). The Banī Ḥamīdah were enemies of the Majālīs and would benefit from the acquisition of their clients (Jaussen 1908:215-218).

Once he was under their protection, Ṣāliḥ al-Ṣawāliḥaḥ gained visibility as a shaykh of the al-ʿUzayzāt and also acquired the ability to move unmolested through the Banī Ḥamīdah's territory. This enabled him to visit the shaykhs of other, neighboring tribes who were on good terms with the Banī Ḥamīdah – such as the ʿAdwān and Banī Ḥasan – and establish another kind of ritual kinship relationship with them. This was the *binʿammah* relationship (Jaussen 1908:428).

The name for this kind of ritual kinship, *binʿammah*, is derived from a kinship term used among consanguineal kin: *ibn-ʿammī*, "son of my father's brother." But it is not a relationship of common descent. It is established through a ritual which was described in detail by an ethnographer, Antonin Jaussen, in 1908:

> Once two tribes have decided, after long discussions in every camp, to contract the *binʿammah* alliance, their two chiefs, each accompanied by the principal members of his tribe, agree to meet at the tent of a great shaykh [who will act as a witness]. Gravely draped in the ample and modest *ʿabāyah* [cloak] which gives the Bedouin's walk an air of majesty, they advance and place themselves, not without a certain grace, on the various colored carpets prepared for the occasion. After the customary salutations are exchanged with a solemnity which, however, does not reach affectation, they wait some twenty minutes in silence. [*This means that they do not respond to the shaykh's customary offerings of coffee and other forms of hospitality; note by author.*] Should not coffee first and foremost be brewed and tasted? The old shaykh, with flaming eyes, draws from its scabbard a saber with a golden hilt and a sharp edge. With a rapid movement he places it on the ground, between the interested parties, who have instinctively approached and grouped together in a sort of crown, around the instrument of domination. It is on this sign of power that they will extend their right hands and solemnly swear, by Allah and by his prophet, that they contract the covenant of *binʿammah* and that henceforth they will commit neither *bawq* [criminal aggression and duplicity; see al-Bustānī 1983:61; Wehr 1976:83] nor treachery, and will treat each other as kin (Jaussen 1908:149; translation from French by the author).

As Jaussen notes, this form of ritual kinship "is conceived of as a kind of offensive and defensive alliance" but is more than a short-term political arrangement. Once contracted, it can only be cancelled in exceptional circumstances. It is a bond that persists, even if conflicts develop between the parties that the ritual has brought together. It is similar to the relationship between good neighbors, and in fact it cannot be contracted between descent groups that live far

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Ritual Kinship Type A: the *ṭanīb* Relationship

Refugee < tent rope > Guardian of the Tent

Ritual Kinship Type B: the *binʿammah* Relationship

Ally 1 < saber of the shaykh > Ally 2

</div>

Figure 6: Abstract properties of ritual kinship: Sacralized objects mediate between partners.

apart from each other or who have a long history of conflict and war (Jaussen 1908:150-152; see also Gubser 1973:60-61).

The ritual character of both the *ṭanīb* relationship of protection and the *binʿammah* relationship of alliance is derived from the sacrosanct qualities of two objects: the tent rope (*ṭanb*) of a shaykh's tent and the sabre (*sayf*) of a shaykh (see Figure 6). Both acquire their ritual power from their close association with the shaykh's person. The tent rope is an extension of the shaykh's tent, a shelter whose inhabitants he protects. In colloquial Arabic, he is the "guardian of the tent" (*raʿy il-bayt*), and whoever enters his tent comes under his protection (see Young 2007). The saber is a symbol of the shaykh's military might and, as Jaussen says, an instrument of domination. Neither object may be touched without the shaykh's permission. When a refugee touches the tent rope he is ritually transformed into the protected client of the shaykh. When two unrelated men touch his saber and swear oaths on it in the presence of the shaykh, they are transformed into ritual kin.

The consequences of establishing these ritual kinship ties were significant. By establishing *binʿammah* with the ʿAdwān, with the Banī Ḥasan, and also with the various sub-branches of the Banī Ḥamīdah themselves (Jaussen 1908:427; Rogan 1999:80), the al-ʿUzayzāt tribe and the two other Christian tribes that were affiliated with it (see Case Study Two, above) managed to extricate themselves from the alliance network in Karak and from the domination of the Majālīs. Having ritual kinsmen in the area near Mādabā (Jaussen 1908:427) allowed them to leave Karak and join a competing alliance network in another location.

The importance of ritual kinship for political action by tribe members is not unique to modern Jordan. In the Yemen of the fourteenth century A.D., for instance, the rights and obligations stemming from ritual kinship relationships were codified in detail in tribal customary law. Several kinds of ties – such as protection (*dhimām*), clientage (*jār*), the relationship of an escort (*rafīq*) with his fellow-travelers, and the relationship of a guest (*ḍayf*) with his host – were described in written documents, along with the various sanctions that were imposed on tribe members who violated the obligations associated with these ties (Varisco 2021).

Some specialists in the Middle East might take issue with my claim that ritual kinship is politically important, arguing that ritual ties of the kinds mentioned above are too rare to be con-

sequential. It is true that establishing the *binʿammah* relationship described in the al-ʿUzayzāt case is not frequent. However, it is just one variety of ritual kinship that is used for political purposes. For another example: Christian groups in Jordan establish ritual godparenthood relationships by inviting an adult from one family to sponsor the baptism of another family's child. In such cases the substance that mediates the ritual relationship is the sacred oil or *mayrūn* (cf. Wehr 1976:933) that is applied to the child during the baptism. It mediates the link between the parents of the child and the child's godparents and makes them kin (Firām 1993:52-57).

Both the *binʿammah* relationship and godparenthood belong to a wider set of kinship ties that El Guindi has characterized as "kinship based on sponsorship" (El Guindi 2012:548). In the Arab world, sponsored kinship includes a relationship that has been variously identified as "nursing siblingship" or "suckling" (El Guindi 2020). Nursing siblingship can be especially useful for creating politically beneficial ties between groups that cannot create alliance by means of marriage. During a recent visit to Jordan, I heard news that a Christian family in the northern town of al-Ḥuṣn had used nursing siblingship to reinforce its close relationship with a neighboring Muslim family. Because Muslims and Christians in Jordan do not intermarry, a marriage alliance was not an option. However, creating a nursing siblingship bond made it possible to bring the families closer together.

I was not in Jordan long enough to confirm this rumor but I believe it to be credible. A similar nursing siblingship link between a Christian family residing in Damascus and a Syrian Muslim family is well documented. Harold R. P. Dickson, Britain's political agent in Kuwait during the 1920s, was raised in Damascus. During his childhood he was nursed by a woman from the al-Masāribah section of the al-Subaʿah tribe of the ʿAnazah tribal confederacy of southern Syria and northern Arabia. He thus could claim "milk brotherhood" with Shaykh Mijwal of the al-Subaʿah. Shaykh Mijwal had already married Lady Digby, a woman from the British aristocracy, and had built a house for her in Damascus. He was well-disposed to reinforce this marriage link by means of sponsored kinship with the child of another British aristocrat (Dickson 1949:7, 24; Dickson 1956:87-88; al-Wāʾilī 2002:774, 2101).

Other forms of ritual kinship exist in other parts of the Middle East that are also used to complement marriage ties and extend an individual's personal and political networks. Magnarella reports that, in eastern Turkey, the ritual of circumcising a boy provides the occasion for creating kinship ties between the boy's parents and the sponsors of the ritual. Such ritual ties are known to link families of different ethnicities (for instance, Turks and Kurds) and of different religious affiliations (Muslims and Christians). Thus, in eastern Turkey, like in Jordan, sponsored kinship supplements kinship ties based on common descent and marriage (Magnarella 1973).

Without further research on all the varieties of sponsored kinship – including the ritual kinship of Case Three, above, the other varieties documented for Jordan, Turkey, and Yemen, and the nursing siblingship attested throughout the Arab world – we cannot say how frequent or how politically significant sponsored kinship is.

Conclusions

This paper adds data to a growing body of research by Middle East ethnographers that demonstrates that Middle Eastern "tribes" are not purely the products of descent or biological reproduc-

tion. That is, they are not in fact organized along strictly genealogical lines, even though their members sometimes use a genealogical idiom to describe them. Common descent from a male ancestor is only one feature of these tribes; other organizing principles may be common residence or contractual ties (see Adra 2021:493-496), affinity (see Conte 1991), and sponsored kinship (see El Guindi 2012, 2020).

Although tribes seem to be coherent political units at the organizational level, especially in the context of their dealings with states (see Alon 2021 for a discussion of tribe-state relations in Jordan and Weiner 2022 for an analysis of kinship and state formation in the Arab Gulf), this coherence can be compromised when the state itself becomes fragmented (see Dukhan 2014, 2021). In fact, the ability of a tribe's members to act in concert with each other politically arises from face-to-face negotiations and agreements, from marriage ties found among the tribe's component families, and from sponsored or ritual kinship bonds. All of these relationships are fashioned, used, and sustained at the microscopic level. This is the level at which ethnographic research excels.

For the past fifty years, when ethnographers of the Middle East have examined the nexus between kinship and politics, they have tended to look for political actions that were initiated by descent groups. However, two of my case studies show that relationships based on affinity and ritual kinship can also be important factors in politics. A recent study of kinship and politics in Pakistan (Lyon 2019) has demonstrated the importance of affinity for political relationships there. It behooves scholars of politics in the Middle East, therefore, to look for affinity and ritual kinship as well as descent when analyzing political action.

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