INTRODUCTION

The modern history of Jordan is the story of the creation of a state and the attempt to mould a political community that would render allegiance to that state, and it forms the subject matter of this book. Arguably such stories are never completed, though in Jordan's case the first is considerably more advanced, some hundred years after its commencement, than the second. The existence of Amman as an economic and political power centre, and the elaboration of a formal set of sophisticated structures and processes, can, at one level, make the Jordanian state seem a convincing entity. However, a turbulent region, the relative strength of its neighbours, lingering concerns about its own economic viability (not least its habitual reliance on external rents) and an informal political culture sometimes at odds with the trappings of the modern state give one pause for thought. As for the creation of a political community, there are more, perhaps many more, chapters to be written in the story. The task of reconciling Palestinian and Transjordanian, Islamist and liberal, the tribal and the post-tribal among others continues to challenge the Jordanian body politic.

There have been three broad phases in the state-building project in Jordan. The first spans the period from the post-First World War settlement to the post-Second World War settlement. The riddle it addressed was how to forge a modern state from what was a dusty, underpopulated, underdeveloped and impoverished periphery. The project was essentially an external, neo-colonial one, led by a small band of British officials on the ground and the dependent administrative elite they introduced from outside. Increasingly, people from the new entity

of Transjordan were drawn into the project. However, this gentle venture, characterised as it was by a growing partnership between the British, the Hashemites and local leaderships, was plunged into a precarious uncertainty with the emergence of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

The second phase spans the end of the 1940s through to the beginning of the 1970s. This turbulent period was one that was not without its opportunities, as the determined Hashemite pursuit of viability through territorial expansion demonstrates; the West Bank was consequently acquired in 1950. Nevertheless, the storms of 1950s Nasserism and the viciousness of Israeli cross-border retaliation against non-state actors were to expose the vulnerabilities of the new state, and the West Bank was subsequently lost in the 1967 war. In the end, only retrenchment behind a national security state saved Hashemite Jordan in the late 1950s and the early 1970s. The state survived, but against virtually all expectations.

The third phase spans the early 1970s through to the late 1980s. It was indisputably the era of oil, and, in Jordan's case, the secondary benefits of oil wealth recycled in the form of Arab aid and remittances. With monarch and state acting as the conduits for the distribution of much of this rent, both appeared to grow stronger, with public institutions, administrative and economic, proliferating. However, declining income in the 1980s left both increasingly exposed, with the amassing of foreign debt postponing what became the economic crash landing of the late 1980s.

It was at this point that a new stage of state-building began. But how to characterise it? The fourth phase as the period of liberalisation and democratic reform foundered in 1993, as King Hussein prepared to make a historic peace with Israel; the fourth phase as participation in supra-state cooperation and integration, Shimon Peres' 'new Middle East', foundered with the collapse of comprehensive Arab–Israeli peacemaking in 2000. What this fourth phase will look like is simply too early to tell.

The threefold staged project of state building was to some extent mirrored by three distinct attempts to turn the people in Jordan into a Jordanian political community. The first came with the incorporation of the social-cum-spatial periphery into the physical and normative domain of the state. By the 1930s this cause was progressing well, but based on what one might call a two-way colonisation. Jordan remained a British colonial possession under the thin guise of the

League of Nations mandate system, but increasingly it was the political culture of the people in Jordan that coloured the nature and *modus operandi* of state politics. Though hardly yet a Jordanian nation-state, by 1946 it could be claimed that there now existed a kingdom incorporating a Jordanian state nation.

For the political community project the late 1940s were even more profoundly disruptive than for that of state building. Onto a predominantly tribal, stable, rural and marginal population in Transjordan was grafted a people ('the Palestinians') who were more differentiated economically and socially, but who were also better educated, had been more prosperous and were now, in large part, damaged – that is to say, psychologically if not physically – and materially dispossessed. New cleavages emerged: between political and economic elites from the two banks; between the rural and the urban; between Amman and Jerusalem as potentially competing centres of gravity. Tension was exacerbated by growing impoverishment, the spread of radical ideas and a static governing elite. But in spite of fluctuating tensions the diverging tendencies in terms of political community were ameliorated – ironically – by two, very different, ideas. On the one hand, it could be claimed that the people in Jordan were one people, based on a common Arab and predominantly Muslim identity (Caucasian and Christian *millet*s respectively notwithstanding); at the same time, the subjective viability of Jordan was aided by the existence within one state of two lands (the East and West Banks), within which the aspirations and identities of the two peoples did at least have some room to breathe, thereby facilitating mutual coexistence.

Consequently, the third and much more problematic phase, aimed at reconciling the notion of political community, came after 1967, or more specifically after it became clear that there would be no speedy restoration of the West Bank. Jordan now became one land, the territory of the East Bank, but with a population that was increasingly Transjordanian – or, after the transformation of the PLO, Palestinian – with a consequent marginalisation of overarching political identities. A bloody conflict for the political soul of the remaining territory took place in 1970 and 1971, though the expulsion of the armed units of the PLO and the consequent oil-induced prosperity soothed the rawness of conflicting identity and interests. But in spite of the outcome of the Jordanian civil war it remained the case that a substantial part of the (notably urban) population of the country was Palestinian. A de

facto arrangement whereby Palestinians dominated the private sector, Transjordanians the public sector, and politeness otherwise prevailed, began to unravel in the late 1980s to mid-1990s. An increasingly impoverished state, a formal peace treaty with Israel, regional recession and growing unemployment have created a sense of injustice on all sides, and the language of ethnic politics no longer lies securely under wraps. Once again social cohesion and political stability in Jordan cannot be taken for granted.

If the period spanning the existence of these state and political community-building projects forms the historical focus of this book, its point of departure comes several decades before that. In order to understand the dynamics of the modern state in Jordan one must understand the social dynamics that existed prior to the state's creation. In addition, one must understand earlier experiences of politics and state building – in the Jordanian case the extension of Ottoman authority into the area from the 1860s onwards. Too often in the past commentators and scholars have begun the story of Jordan with the British and the Hashemites, ignoring both the Ottoman experience and indeed the people of Jordan.