THE VILLAGE OF ḤESBÂN: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PRELIMINARY REPORT

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Ethnographic inquiries in the village of Ḥesbân were carried out on a larger scale during the 1974 season than during previous seasons (See LaBianca and LaBianca 1975:236).[2] The data upon which this report is based was gathered by the author and Asta Sakala LaBianca during the 1973 season and by Douglas Fuller and Shirley Finneman—with the author's supervision—during the 1974 season.[3] Principal informant/translators were Muhammed Said during the 1973 season and Barakat Abdel-Karim, Saud Daud, and Rima Hazboun during the 1974 season.[4] A research design stating the purpose, scope, and methods to be employed and outlining ten areas of specific investigation provided each of the investigators during the 1974 season with specific questions and goals for their work.

This report presents an overview of the physiography, demography, social organization, material culture, and economy of the village of Ḥesbân; its aim is to report in summary fashion what we have seen and heard during two summers of fieldwork in the village and to isolate problems requiring further study.

[1] The author gratefully acknowledges his indebtedness to Douglas Fuller and Shirley Finneman for the ethnographic information which their dedicated and skillful efforts produced during the summer of 1974. Other individuals whose assistance he appreciates are Adelma Downing for the transcription, editing, and typing of tapes; Patricia Crawford for preparing the map (Fig. 27) for publication; and, as always, Asta Sakala LaBianca for assistance with the editing and typing of this manuscript.

[2] For a statement of the rationale and conceptual framework which undergirds ethnographic research at Ḥesbân, see LaBianca 1976.

[3] "Long reports" by Douglas Fuller and Shirley Finneman are on file with the Heshbon Expedition records at Andrews University.

[4] With the exception of Rima Hazboun who came from the neighboring town of Madaba, the other informant/translators were residents of Ḥesbân.

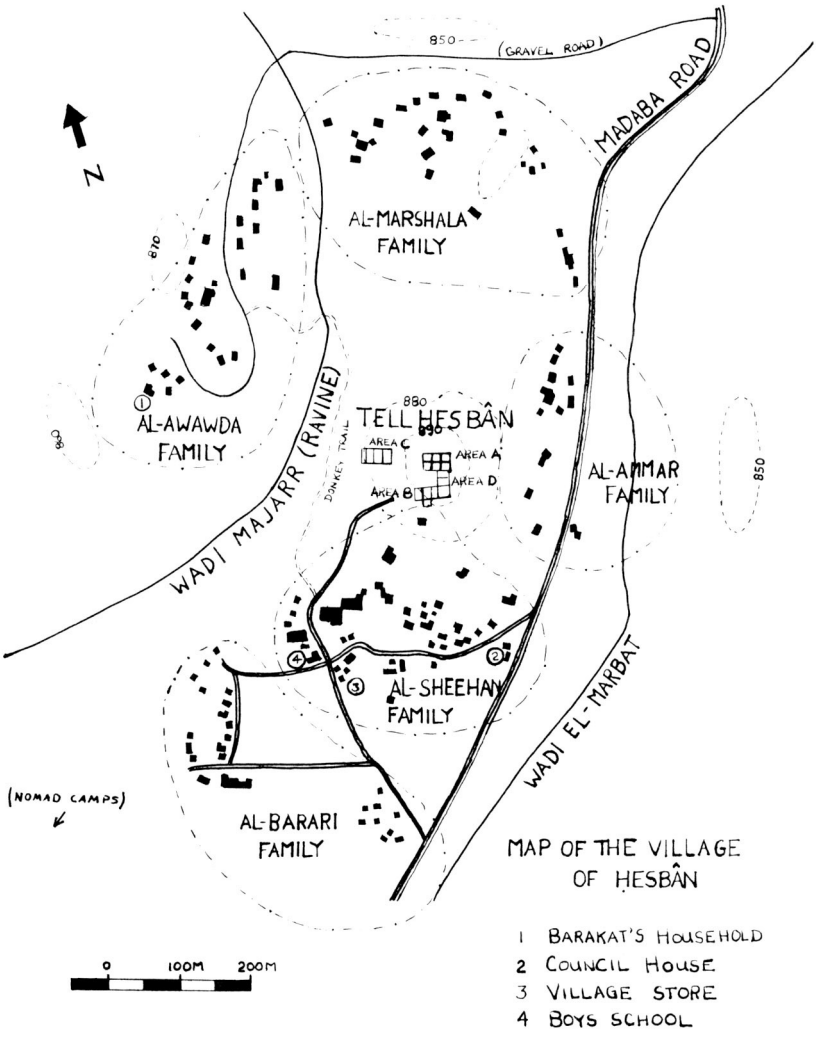

Fig. 27. Map of the Village of Ḥesbân. Mapping: Douglas Fuller; Cartography: Patricia Crawford.

Physiography

The village of Ḥesbân is situated on several small hills and along the expanse where the government-constructed "Madaba Road" is located.[5] As the map in Fig. 27 indicates, dwellings are clumped together north of the *tell* on the slopes west of the Wadi el-Majarr (the Al-Awawda family), along the east-west axis between Wadi el-Majarr and the "Madaba Road" (the Al-Marshala family), on the eastern slopes of the *tell* along the "Madaba Road" (the Al-Ammar family), on the southern slopes of the *tell* (the Al-Sheehan family), and extending southeast (the Al-Barari family), in each case west of the "Madaba Road." The rapid southwestward decline of the Wadi el-Majarr has the effect of physically separating the Al-Awawda family from the Al-Sheehan and Al-Barari families. Thus, though all of the settlements are connected by crude roads (which allow limited automobile travel) linked to the "Madaba Road," the steep ravine of the Wadi el-Majarr can be traversed only via winding and steep donkey trails.

Demography

The inhabitants of Ḥesbân can be classified as belonging to the rural sedentary population of Jordan. This class comprises 50.5% of the population of Jordan, the rest being either fully urban (43.9%) or scattered tent dwellers (5.6%) (see Fisher 1972).

An estimate of the population size of Ḥesbân can be obtained by multiplying the total number of dwellings, 127 (obtained from Fig. 27), by the mean size of households, 8.25 (obtained from Table 6). The result is 1048 persons. Villagers give varying estimates—800, 900, 1000, more than 1000—but until more reliable statistics are available, a population figure of approximately 1000 seems plausible.

Estimates based on observations of the village population and demographic data for the country of Jordan (Fisher 1972) can

[5] For a description of the natural environment of present-day Ḥesbân, see Bullard 1972; LaBianca 1973:8-19; Crawford and LaBianca 1976.

be tentatively stated relative to the population composition at Ḥesbân. The population appears to be a young one. Juveniles (aged 0-14) can be seen almost everywhere and they constitute nearly half of the hired workforce of the archaeological expedition. Statistics on the population of Jordan sustain this estimate: juveniles (aged 0-14) constitute 45.4% of the total population, the working population (15-59) constitutes 47.7%, and the elderly (60+) constitute only 6.9%.

In the country of Jordan as a whole, males outnumber females in most age cohorts (Fisher 1972:210). The situation at Ḥesbân is probably the reverse, however. This is because 80 males, or 8% of the estimated village population are serving in the armed forces of King Hussein. Fisher notes that Jordan has "a metropolitan primacy"—there is a male predominance in the largest towns, and Amman "has developed as the dominant town of the country by a considerable margin" (1972:212-213). This situation tends to affect the young males in smaller towns like Ḥesbân, since they are the more mobile sex (1972:213). The exact nature of the effect on Ḥesbân of Jordan's metropolitan primacy needs further investigation, however.

Though families of 7 to 8 children are the estimated norm for Jordan (Fisher 1972:214), this estimate is higher than the numbers yielded by Table 6; the average number of children per household at Ḥesbân is about 5.

The population at Ḥesbân is Moslem with no known exceptions. Although future verification is necessary, it seems reasonable to suppose that they are Sunni Moslems, since the large majority of Jordanians (81%) are Sunni Moslems (Fisher 1972:211).

The female population is employed in the traditional role of wives—keeping house, rearing children, gardening, and assisting with field crop cultivation; the occupations of the male population are more varied. Although the majority of males are still employed full or part time at agriculture, other occupations—such as construction work, hospital work, social service work, civil

service work– are pursued in neighboring towns by perhaps one dozen males from Ḥesbân. Army service and university studies at the University of Jordan in Amman are pursuits followed by perhaps 100 village males.

We know very little about the history of the population at Ḥesbân. Whenever I have asked about this, I have been told that "the big family" originally came from Saudi Arabia, about 100 years ago (some say even earlier). There is also agreement about the claim that the ancestors were tent-dwelling nomads.[6]

House-hold	*First Generation*	*Second Generation*	*Third G.*	*Size*	*Juve-niles*
H.1	1 married couple	3 sons, 1 daughter		6	(4)
H.2	1 married couple	5 sons, 1 daughter		8	(6)
H.3	1 married couple	2 married couples (sons and daughters-in-law)	5 sons, 1 daugh-ter	12	(6)
H.4	2 married couples (sons and daughters-in-law)	4 sons, 3 daughters; 1 son, 5 daughters		17	(13)
H.5	1 widow	2 married couples (sons and daughters-in-law) 2 unmarried sons	2 sons, 4 daugh-ters	13	(6)
H.6	1 man, 2 wives	4 children		7	(4)
H.7	1 widow	3 married couples (sons and daughters-in-law)	4 chil-dren	11	(4)
H.8	1 married couple	1 son, 5 daughters		8	(6)
H.9	1 married couple	4 children		6	(4)
H.10	1 married couple	1 daughter		3	(1)
H.11	1 married couple	1 daughter		3	(1)
H.12	2 unmarried brothers, deceased brother's widow	2 children		5	(2)
			Totals	99	(57)

Table 6. Composition of twelve households (abbreviated as H.) and number of juveniles in each. Generations refer to contemporaries, not necessarily peers.

[6] The physical anthropologist, W. Shanklin, has shown that "the majority of the Transjordanian Bedouins . . . show the same index curve as the Syrian desert Bedouins" (see Ariens Kappers 1934: 72). Shanklin's findings which were based on studies of "cephalic indecies of 53 Howeitat Bedouins" are of interest because they sustain the inference that sedentary rural populations in Transjordan were formerly nomads.

The village population is not exclusively constituted by members of the aforementioned five families. There are many villagers who, reportedly, do not belong to any of the local families. Living in one of the most conspicuously wealthy homes among the Al-Sheehan families is the government-appointed agronomist whose duty is to educate the villagers in improving their farming methods. Another family whose members have very dark skin, kinky hair, and negroid features may be of mixed African and Arab descent. It is possible to speculate that this family is of Egyptian origin as "the spread of the Egyptian population in Transjordania and Palestine" is attested to by both historians and physical anthropologists (Ariens Kappers 1934:73).

Social Organization

The principal social unit at Ḥesbân is the household. As illustrated in Table 6, households are constituted by a variety of persons who are related either consanguineously or by marriage. Although monogamous marriages predominate, polygyny occurs (as in H.6). In four instances married brothers live together in the same household (H.3, H.4, H.5, H.7). In three instances widows live with their married sons or brothers-in-law (H.5, H.7, H.12).[7] The estimated mean size of households—based on the data in Table 6—is 8.25 persons and the average number of juveniles per household is 4.75.

Households are always headed by an adult male, although not always the oldest.[8] The responsibility for the socialization of the youngest children is primarily the mother's. Socialization of the older children is shared by all members of the household and sometimes other relatives. Sex roles are taught early as boys

[7] This arrangement illustrates the response of kinsmen to relatives requiring social security. Social welfare at Ḥesbân is primarily the responsibility of kinsmen.

[8] Douglas Fuller reported one case where the youngest adult male in a household of three married brothers was the head. This situation can possibly be explained by the fact that the youngest male was the only one with a university education, and also, he was the school teacher at Ḥesbân, a position with considerable status.

are taught to help their fathers and girls their mothers. Schooling is available primarily for boys in the school for boys at Ḥesbân (see Fig. 27). Recently, however, also girls have been enrolled in schools, but their schooling is frequently interrupted by early marriages since girls tend to get married as soon as they reach puberty.

It is common practice among members of households to think of themselves as members of one or the other of the five patrilineal families at Ḥesbân (see Fig. 27). The strength of this arrangement is demonstrated each year when at the beginning of the archaeological excavations on the *tell* a representative from each of the families is responsible for negotiating labor contracts for all the male members of his family. Each of these individuals, called a "mukhtar," is paid a salary (which exceeds the salaries paid to other workers) in exchange for his services, which primarily amount to being present during excavations to ensure that "his men" are working and being treated fairly.

The mukhtar is selected by the members of "his family." Individuals chosen are usually selected on the basis of their acumen—intellectual and political, their ability to resolve conflicts, and their wealth and standing in the family. The mukhtar's principal role is as a member of the village council (see Fig. 27) where such matters as village security and crime, village dealings with the government and other "outsiders," inter-family conflicts, etc., are discussed and usually resolved.

Information about the size of each of the five families is still very tentative. However, counts of the number of dwellings shown on the map for each family yielded the following statistics: Al-Awawda, 24; Al-Marshala, 23; Al-Ammar, 14; Al-Sheehan, 41; Al-Barari, 25. It is noteworthy that statistics—obtained from the local tax-collector in 1973—about the number of households in the Al-Awawda and the Al-Barari families gave 28 for the former and 25 for the latter. The fair consistency between the tax collector's figures and those yielded by the map tends to support

the impression given by the map that family members dwell in close physical proximity to each other and on discrete family territory.[9]

The historical relationship of the five families to each other is said to be by descent from a common ancestor. Furthermore, Ḥesbân's "big family" (the "Al-Shuraigiin") is said to belong to a tribe, the Ajarma,[10] with members living in such neighboring towns as Na'ur, el-'Al, Salt, Madaba, and Amman. To date, however, no genealogies have been produced by the villagers to support this claim.

Material Culture

Most of the dwellings at Ḥesbân resemble each other in construction and design. The basic building materials are stone—mostly quarried locally, and cement—imported from Amman either as cement blocks or as powder. The typical Ḥesbân dwelling is usually constructed with only two 3 x 4 m. rooms. One room is used for guests and as a living room for the adult males; the other is used by the entire household, but especially by the women, as a place for cooking, eating, sleeping, and socializing. Variations from this pattern are the few two-story houses where the family lives on the top floor and the animals are kept on the bottom floor. Typically the dwellings have few, if any, windows and tend therefore to be somewhat dark inside. This situation is somewhat alleviated by the whitewashed walls and ceilings.

Furnishings vary considerably from dwelling to dwelling and

[9] The high figure given for the Al-Sheehan family needs to be qualified. The households in this area are reportedly among the youngest at Ḥesbân, the oldest being those of the Al-Awawda. It seems plausible to speculate that recent arrivals in the village—especially subsequent to the completion of the adjacent "Madaba Road" in 1968—would settle in the Al-Sheehan territory, and also the Al-Ammar territory, as these territories were settled by younger households, and hence less powerful ones.

[10] Peake Pasha (1958: 253) identifies the "Ajarmeh" as one of the tribes living northeast of the Dead Sea in his Tribal Map (No. 2) of the Kerak District. Unfortunately, no mention is made of this tribe elsewhere in his book.

are often an index of wealth. Typically, one encounters a combination of European-type chairs, tables, or beds, and Arabic strawmats, carpets, and decorations. The same is true for clothing; one encounters a mixture between the traditional garb and Western clothes. Typically, the young are more often seen wearing the latter.

Electricity is now available but rarely afforded. Hence refrigerators, electric sewing machines, electric lights, kitchen stoves, television sets, etc., can be found in the village, but only in isolated cases. An exception is the battery-run radio, which is heard everywhere. Plumbing, likewise, is available but rarely afforded; hence, most women still haul water from nearby cisterns.

The dwellings are usually surrounded by earthen yards varying in size depending on the amount of property owned. Stone or cement fences are used to enclose the yards and thus protect from exposure to child's play or roving animals. Only a few automobiles have been sighted in the village.

The agricultural implements employed at Ḥesbân range from crude hand plows to modern diesel-operated combines; such ancient implements as wooden-bladed hoes and picks, wooden and twine hand-sieves, and donkey-powered hand plows with wooden blades are employed by some while others use John Deere tractors, diesel combines, thrashers, and balers, engine-run rotatillers and cultivators, tractor-pull steel-bladed plows, wooden and steel pitchforks, steel hoes, picks, and sickles, and modern sprayers for insect control.

Economy

Cultivation of land and raising sheep and goat remain the principal economic enterprises at Ḥesbân. The large majority of the villagers are engaged full time in these enterprises which are the source of most of the villagers' dietary needs.

Land, most of which is located within a few kilometers of the village, is cultivated in various ways: 1) dry-land farming—

based on non-irrigated winter and summer crops such as wheat, barley, millet, maize, potatoes, lentils, beans, peas, and vetches; 2) gardening—based on the cultivation of tomatoes, watermelons, squash, and sometimes tobacco; and 3) fruit growing—including figs, olives, grapes, pears, and mangoes.[11]

Animal husbandry favors sheep and goat raising by a large margin, but includes the keeping of cows, horses, donkeys, camels, and poultry such as chickens, geese, and turkey.[12] Cats and dogs eek out their own existence in the village feeding on garbage and whatever else comes their way. Dogs are used mainly for protection and cats for rodent control. The contribution of hunting to the diet is insignificant as the wildlife of Jordan is seriously threatened by extinction (Mountfort 1964).

Although some of the land used for agriculture is owned by individual villagers, a large share of it—perhaps more than 50%—is owned by the wealthy Nabulsi family who do not now reside in the village, but who lease land to village farmers. Villagers who lease land return 50% of its yield to the Nabulsi estate at the end of each harvest.

Property inheritance is regulated by rules which favor the sons as is typical in the Moslem societies of the Middle East. Thus, although the wife and daughters of a deceased man may inherit a certain small portion of the property, the son(s) inherit the largest portion. In the end, they make the decisions as how to use theirs as well as the women's portions. It should be noted, however, that brothers sometimes fail to resolve the question of who should get what portion, and, as a result, they end up sharing the property and even sharing in the same household (see Table 6, H.3, H.4, H.5, H.7).

The extent to which the villagers participate in the market

[11] The extent to which wild herbs gathered in the surrounding fields by the women contribute to the diet is uncertain, but that they do contribute something is clear from our ethnographic data.

[12] The scope of this report does not permit an extensive account of the husbandry practices in the village. For more about this, see LaBianca 1973, 1975.

economy of Jordan and the Middle East is a question which can merely be tentatively answered. We have already noted that in addition to those serving in the army about one dozen males from the village are employed full time as wage-earners in government and private concerns outside the village.[13]

As there are no industries at Ḥesbân, the villagers are limited to the marketing of agricultural and other domestically produced products.

Crops which are sometimes grown for cash are melons, tobacco, sunflowers, tomatoes, cucumbers, and corn. Douglas Fuller reported that in the case of one farmer he knew, such crops were hauled to Amman for further shipment to Kuwait. It should be noted that there are no market places in Ḥesbân and that there is only one village store (see Fig. 27).

There are many situations where money is the principal or exclusive method of payment. For example, transportation from or to Ḥesbân from neighboring towns is via "service-taxi" which costs money. Modern utilities such as electricity and telephone service cost money. Visits to hospitals, clinics, and similar agencies in Amman and elsewhere for the ill or invalid—and sometimes for mothers who wish to deliver their first child in a hospital—cost money. The same is true of modern medications which are beginning to be used quite widely in the village. Peddlers who visit the village regularly with their assortment of household goods and similar wares are usually paid with money.

Finally, mention must be made of the sheep, goat, and camel-herding-nomads ("Bedouins") who appear with their tents on the hillsides or in the open fields southwest of the village (see Fig. 27), then disappear after short periods of time. These pastoralists, many of whom reportedly belong to a tribe called "Jahlin," are given grazing and watering privileges in exchange for their dairy products—leban (yogurt), curdled cheese, etc. They also pur-

[13] Another source of wage-labor for the villagers is the Andrews University Heshbon Expedition which has contributed about $10,000 in cash to the village each season of excavation in 1968, 1971, 1973, and 1974.

chase grain and other cultigens from the villagers. Further inquiries are needed to establish the impact of this arrangement on the village economy. This question and other stated and unstated questions raised in and by this report illustrate the kinds of questions that must be dealt with by future inquiries at Ḥesbân.

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