

**Anthropology in Jordan –
A New Phenomenon in the Twentieth
Century?**

Inaugural-Dissertation

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**I dedicate this book to the memory of my father Tayel, my
mother Amneh, and my brother Sultan.**

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Preface

This thesis represents a continuing interest in the development of anthropological study and teaching within academic institutions at all levels of instruction primarily, although not exclusively, in the Arab-Islamic countries. According to F. Husayn (1982 and 1988), A. Ahmed (1987/88), D. Eickelman (1989), L. Abu Lughod (1989), S. Shami (1989), M. Gilsenan (1990), R. Tapper, (1996), S. Knudsen (2004), and K. Lange (2005), anthropology in the Middle East went through a life-and-death cycle. This due, in a large part, to (a) the historical development of anthropology as a "Western" discipline, (b) the conflict between monotheism and evolution theory (Darwinism) and materialism, and (c) the nature of relation between the "First" and the "Third" Worlds. Although various factors have contributed to the low level of communication and cross fertilization between the "Occident" and the "Orient", few Muslim and Arab scholars sought to solve these problems by creating the so-called "Arabic" and "Islamic" anthropology. However, the ability of these new indigenous trends to transcend its established boundaries has been questioned in Western and non-Western academic circles. Given their ideological "embodiment" these attempts have prompted more questions than answers; notably with respect to their methodological approaches were the Quran (and Sunnah) has been their main source. As a consequence, none of these alternative concepts have proved successful as of yet. Nevertheless, what is needed most at this moment is a preliminary discussion of what a better understanding of anthropology means, and what is the best way to integrate this concept into the Arab-Islamic universities.

Inspired by Prof. Martin's publications ("Zwei Alte Geschichten: Vergleichende historisch-anthropologische Betrachtungen zu Griechenland und Rom", in *Saeculum*, vol. 48, 1997, 1-20; "Aktuelle Fragen der historischen Erforschung der spätmittelalterlichen und neuzeitlichen islamischen Welt", in idem (ed.): *Deutsche Historie und die Geschichte der Ökumene (Saeculum 40/1989,2)*, pp. 161-165; *Spätantike und Völkerwanderung*. Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001 (Oldenbourg-Grundriß der Geschichte.4) and his humanist concept of anthropology as an essential way of understanding our human nature and culture, I was fortunate to know much about both while studying this field at Feiburg University. In his unique ways, Professor Martin taught us as students much about the history of the *humanum* and about philosophy. Under his supervision, studying historical anthropology at Freiburg University became a challenging and wide-ranging intellectual discipline. A discipline which not only explains to us the human past but also helps us to understand the predicament and future prospects of our species on this planet. This, in turn, helped us as graduate anthropologists to appreciate and understand how to work in harmony with the public.

A better understanding of anthropology in Jordan has smoothed the path for this field to develop and grow. Without doubt, this concept began to flourish more than before after the establishment of the I.A.A. at YU in 1984. This thesis covers a large number of topics under the banner of “a better” and “much better understating of anthropology,” with the aim of making anthropology in Jordan an example to be followed by interested Arab and Islamic universities in this particular field. Thus, its practice will be explored to give an impetus to scholars willing to profit from this experience, commencing with the different factors that have aided Jordanian society in overcoming the previous obstacles facing anthropology in this Arab country. This, in turn, might help the interested policy makers, planners and educators in the Arab and Islamic countries to avoid the problems Jordan had with introducing anthropology as an academic discipline.

This thesis represents a continuing interest in the development of anthropological study and teaching within academic institutions at all levels of instruction primarily, although not exclusively, in the Arab-Islamic countries. Taking these basics as a point of departure to write this thesis, I could, additionally, benefit from my previous experiences as a student of and participant in the DA, as well as of my later studies in U.S.A. and Germany. As a result, I was able to observe the problems facing anthropology in Arab and Muslim countries as an “insider” and an “outsider”. To avoid the “insider/outsider” dichotomy I assumed the position of “third eye” analyzer while examining the historical documents, official and non-offical reports, books and scientific articles, not only by the words but also by their authors’ motives; not only regarding the specific case in study but also the general social, political, and economic environment in which it occurred. Analyzing and Interpretative methods were employed in this study. As the German sociologist Max Weber remarks, “Ethnographers, anthropologists, and cultural experts must put themselves into the subject of inquiry especially when they wish to translate them into a written text.” I used this principle into practice while writing this book because it provides opportunities for both emotional and intellectual connections to the meanings of the resource. However, it is the effect of the product as whole that is the measure of its success.

Abstract

The purpose of this study is twofold: to outline the most prominent of the problems facing anthropology in the Arab-Islamic countries (Middle East in particular) and to suggest a solution for them by exploring the development of anthropology in Jordan as an example from within the region. Colonialism, Darwinism, Orientalism, and the rise of an Arabic and Islamic anthropology have been widely seen as obstacles to flourish anthropology in this region. Several scholarly works have rightfully treated these issues, but my concern here is to analyze the emergence of anthropology as a scientific field in Jordan, where in 1984 an Institute of Archeology and Anthropology was established at YU of Irbid to teach Social-cultural Anthropology at the graduate level. What distinguishes this Institute, however, is the manner in which Physical Anthropology M.A. program is taught there since 1990. It is no secret that evolution theory is part of physical anthropology and that neither evolution theory nor physical anthropology are favorable subjects to be integrated into the higher educational systems of the Arab world. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask for the various factors (political, economical, social – religious as well as educational) which enabled such a process and acceptance in Jordan. Linked to the analysis and comment on these factors is the hope that the Jordanian experiment might become a paradigm for other Arab and Muslim countries, and thereby eventually pave the way for the institutionalization of anthropology in the region. The basis of this investigation is a representative corpus of primary (archival sources, official reports, documents, and statistics) and secondary sources (books, articles, newspapers, and websites). The study adopts the historical context, analytical and interpretative method to approach the variables which helped the academic circles in Jordan to better integrate the field of anthropology in its higher educational system. This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter covers the greatest difficulties with respect to anthropology in the Middle East, as well as the needs of this study and its methodology. Jordan in the historical and ethnographic context forms the subject matter of the second chapter. Other topics dealt with in this chapter are: (a) the transformation of Transjordan's nomadic society into a relatively modern one; (b) Jordan in transition and the concept of sedentarization, and (c) the current anthropological studies about the social structure in settled communities. The third chapter briefly outlines the history of modern Jordan (1921-2005), its people and society, and notably the development of education and archeology in Jordan. How the educational system and archaeological research in Jordan contributed to the emergence of anthropology in this country is also discussed in this chapter. The fourth chapter will answer the following questions: What are the main features of anthropology in Jordan? What does 'better understanding of anthropology' mean? Why does Physical Anthropology lag behind in Arab universities? The last chapter will sum up the results of the thesis and includes recommendations for the future. The study reaches the conclusion that a promising indigenous

anthropology should take into consideration the historical context of the emergence of both, Western and Islamic/Arabic anthropology. This 'contextualization' will provide the basis of a critical assessment and positive comparison of both concepts. A further conclusion confirms that the Jordanian experiment with anthropology differs from former anthropological studies not so much with respect to the selected research topics, but in the way, the field studies are organized and practiced.

**Zusammenfassung in deutscher Sprache (zur Dissertation von Osama Tayel Hasan GHARIBEH:
Anthropologie in Jordanien – Ein neues Phänomen im 20. Jh.?)**

Das Ziel der vorliegenden Studie ist zweierlei: zum einen die größten Probleme, mit denen Anthropologie in arabisch-islamischen Ländern (vor allem im Mittleren Osten) konfrontiert ist, zu umreißen, zum anderen eine Lösung derselben vorzuschlagen, indem die Entwicklung des Faches in Jordanien als ein Beispiel dargestellt wird, das aus der Region selbst hervorgegangen ist. Kolonialismus, Darwinismus und Orientalismus und das Aufkommen einer „arabischen“ und „islamischen Anthropologie“ sind weithin als Hindernisse für die Förderung der Anthropologie in der Region betrachtet worden. Diese „Störfaktoren“ wurden bereits in einigen Studien umfassend behandelt. Das Hauptinteresse dieser Dissertation gilt demgegenüber der Entstehung der Anthropologie als wissenschaftlicher Disziplin in Jordanien, wo im Jahre 1984 an der Yarmouk Universität zu Irbid ein Institut für Archäologie und Anthropologie etabliert wurde, um Sozialanthropologie als Master-Studiengang anzubieten. Darüber hinaus wurde im Jahre 1990 am selben Institut ein Master-Programm in Physischer (Biologischer) Anthropologie eingeführt– eine Einzigartigkeit im Vorderen Orient bis zum jetzigen Zeitpunkt. Es ist kein Geheimnis, dass sowohl die Evolutionstheorie als auch die mit ihr verbundene Physische Anthropologie Themen sind, die kaum an Einrichtungen für Höhere Bildung in der arabischen Welt gelehrt werden. Deshalb scheint es berechtigt, nach den verschiedenen Faktoren (politisch, ökonomisch, sozial – religiös wie bildungspolitisch) zu fragen, welche eine solche Entwicklung in Jordanien ermöglicht haben und die notwendige öffentliche Akzeptanz dafür geschaffen haben. Mit der Analyse und dem Kommentar dieser Faktoren verbindet sich die Hoffnung, dass das jordanische Experiment ein Modell für andere arabische und muslimische Staaten und damit letztlich der Weg für eine Institutionalisierung der Disziplin in der Region geebnet werde. Die Untersuchung basiert auf einer repräsentativen Auswahl von Primär- (Archivmaterial, offizielle Berichte, Dokumente und Statistiken) und Sekundärquellen (Bücher, Artikel in Fachzeitschriften und Sammelbänden, Pressemitteilungen, Webseiten). Die Studie bedient sich einer historisch-kontextuellen, analytisch-interpretativen Methode, um die Variablen zu erschließen, welche den akademischen Kreisen in Jordanien es schließlich ermöglichten, das Fach Anthropologie leichter in das Hochschulsystem zu integrieren. Die Dissertation ist in fünf Kapitel gegliedert. Das erste Kapitel befasst sich mit den Schwierigkeiten, denen das Fach Anthropologie am meisten im Mittleren Osten ausgesetzt ist, zudem mit der Notwendigkeit der Studie und ihrem methodischen Ansatz. Jordanien im historischen und ethnographischen Kontext bildet den Gegenstand des zweiten Kapitels. Weitere Themen, die in diesem Kapitel behandelt werden, betreffen (a) die Umwandlung der (vornehmlich) nomadischen Gesellschaft Transjordanien in eine relativ moderne, (b) Jordanien im Übergang und das Konzept der Sesshaftwerdung und (c) neuere anthropologische Studien zur Sozialstruktur

in dörflichen und städtischen Siedlungen. Das dritte Kapitel bietet einen knappen Überblick zur modernen Geschichte Jordaniens (1921-2005), zu den naturräumlichen, sozialen und politischen Gegebenheiten sowie insbesondere zur Entwicklung des Bildungssystems und der Archäologie im Lande. Unter anderem wird in diesem Abschnitt der Frage nachgegangen, in welcher Weise das Bildungssystem und die archäologische Forschung dazu beigetragen haben, Einführung des Faches Anthropologie an der Hochschule zu befördern. Das vierte Kapitel geht der Beantwortung der folgenden Fragen nach: Welches sind die Hauptcharakteristika des Faches Anthropologie in Jordanien? Was bedeutet „ein besseres Verständnis der Anthropologie“? Wie ist der marginalisierte Status der Physischen Anthropologie an arabischen Universitäten zu erklären? Das abschließende fünfte Kapitel fasst die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung zusammen und beinhaltet Empfehlungen für die Zukunft. Die Dissertation kommt zu dem Ergebnis, dass eine vielversprechende „indigene Anthropologie“ den historischen Kontext sowohl der Entstehung der „westlichen“ als auch der „islamischen/arabischen“ Anthropologie berücksichtigen sollte. Erst auf der Basis einer solchen „Kontextualisierung“ kann die kritische Bewertung und der positive Vergleich zwischen beiden Konzepten gelingen. Ein weiteres Resultat der Studie stellt heraus, dass der Unterschied des jordanischen Experiments mit Anthropologie zu früheren anthropologischen Untersuchungen weniger auf der Auswahl der behandelten Themen zu suchen ist, sondern eher eine Frage der Organisation und Durchführung der Feldstudien ist.

List of Abbreviations

AJISS = American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences

C.O. = Colonial Office

DA = The Department of Anthropology at Yarmouk University of Jordan

EI² = The Encyclopedia of Islam, new edition

DOA = The Department of Antiquities

DOS = Department of Statistics (Jordan)

F.A.A. = The Faculty of Archeology and Anthropology

I.A.A. = The Institute of Archeology and Anthropology

IAF = Islamic Action Front (Jordan)

Jordan = The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

MB = Muslim Brotherhood, Muslim Brethren

NGO = Non-governmental Organization

OE = The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World

P.R.O. = Public Record Office

RIFS = Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, Amman

T.J. = Transjordan

T.J.O.G. = Transjordan Official Gazette

YU = Yarmouk University of Jordan

Notes on Transliteration

The fact that we find different ways of writing Arabic words and names in the Western publications I used for this study, has induced me to keep the system of transliterating Arabic terms and proper names as simple as possible. Basically I follow the system adapted by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. The main exceptions of the system are: (1) common English forms such as Cairo, Amman, Koran, etc.; (2) transliteration of the definite article as "l-" instead of "al-" after the vocalic endings; (3) diacritical marks for the long vowels, the aspirated and emphatic consonants are omitted; (4) family names of Arab scholars, who mainly publish in English, or belong(ed) to the DA staff, have been written in the form adhered to by the family itself. An example is my own family name which technically speaking should have been al-Gharayiba; Gharibeh was retained since it has been in use for the last hundred years; (5) sometimes geographical names have been applied according to the *Index Gazetteer* and the maps published by the Department of Lands and Surveys of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. This exception especially refers to the excavation sites surveyed by the DA and the DOA.

