HISTORICAL PROFILES / Jordan

Syrian pilgrimage route

By the 16th century all the territories bound to Islam were gathered under the authority of a religious and political chief, the Ottoman sultan. For almost 400 years Jordan was part of the Ottoman Empire, the most powerful state known in the Islamic world since the time of the early Arab Caliphate. Often the Ottomans provided good government to areas that had previously suffered from chaos and dislocation. At the beginning, the main interest of the Ottomans in the territories to the east of the River Jordan lay in the fact that these lands were the most convenient land link with the holy sanctuaries of Islam in Mecca and Medina. Along the pilgrimage route fortresses to guard the route and caravanserais were built to facilitate the journey of pilgrims to the most holy places of Islam.



Qatrana Fortress

Hegira 937 / AD 1531

Qatrana, Jordan



Dhab'a Fortress

Hegira early 10th century / AD 16th century

Dhab'a, Jordan



Mudawwara

Hegira 1142–5 / AD 1730–33

Mudawwara, Jordan

Hijaz Railway

A significant strategic shift happened in the second half of the 19th century as a result of the severe competition of the colonial powers for the control of maritime trade with the Far East. By 1882 the British were in control of both maritime trade routes with the Far East (the Suez Canal and the Arab-Persian Gulf). The Ottomans, along with the Germans, came up with the idea of building a railway to connect Istanbul with Taba on the Red Sea as an alternative to the Suez Canal. Merchandise could come by ships to Aqaba and from there it could be transported to the eastern Mediterranean ports and to Istanbul itself. This is where the idea of the Hijaz Railway originated. The quest for the trade of the Red Sea brought a sharp rise in interest in this crucial area of the Middle East.



Aqaba Fortress

Hegira 920 / AD 1515–hegira 996 / AD 1585

Aqaba, Jordan

The Great Arab Revolt

Increasing political and economic pressure from the Western colonial powers during the 19th century contributed to the administrative breakdown of the Ottoman Empire and to its economic decline. Consequently the quality of Ottoman rule began to deteriorate. Distant regions seceded to form independent states and they started to challenge the legitimacy of the sultans. This was accentuated by the coming of the

“Young Turks” to power in 1908 whose nationalistic policies aroused Arab fears and resentment. On 9 June 1916 the Grand Sharif of Mecca, Husayn ibn ‘Ali, encouraged by the UK, declared the Great Arab Revolt against the Turks in exchange for British support of the independence of the Arab countries in western Asia (Greater Syria and Iraq) and the creation of an Arab kingdom with Sharif Husayn as the king of the Arabs.



The Great Arab Revolt Plaza

Aqaba, Jordan