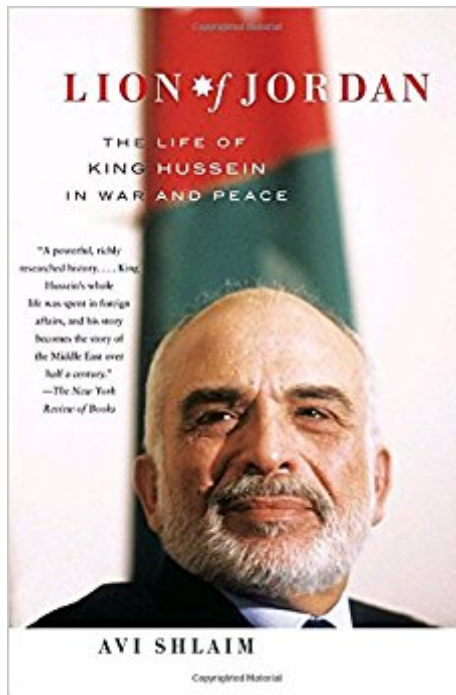




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Lion Of Jordan: The Life Of King Hussein In War And Peace



Synopsis

The first major account of the life of an extraordinary soldier and statesman, King Hussein of Jordan. Throughout his long reign (1953–1999), Hussein remained a dominant figure in Middle Eastern politics and a consistent proponent of peace with Israel. For over forty years he walked a tightrope between Palestinians and Arab radicals on the one hand and Israel on the other. Avi Shlaim reveals that Hussein initiated a secret dialogue with Israel in 1963 and spent hundreds of hours in talks with countless Israeli officials. Shlaim expertly reconstructs this dialogue from previously untapped records and first-hand accounts, significantly rewriting the history of the Middle East over the past fifty years and shedding light on the far-reaching impact of Hussein's leadership.

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Customer Reviews

Ruler of a weak country surrounded by stronger powers in the cutthroat environs of the Middle East, financially dependent on foreign sponsors, precariously riding herd on the nationalist ambitions of Jordan's Palestinian majority, Hussein eked out a long reign (1953–1999) through very unleonine policies of caution and restraint. Historian Shlaim (*War and Peace in the Middle East*) finds much to admire in his subject's character and statecraft. Hussein was an autocrat, the author allows, but a benign one, whose resolute crackdown on Palestinian extremists in the 1970 civil war was necessary to save Jordan from chaos. Much of the book is taken up with a detailed chronicle of the Middle East peace process, centering on Hussein's decadeslong negotiations, both secret and

open, with Israel; in Shlaim's telling, Israel comes off badly, and Hussein emerges as the embodiment of Arab moderation, his sincere initiatives stymied by the alleged intransigence and perfidy of Israeli leaders who preferred land to peace. Shlaim's stinging critique of Israel might stir controversy, but his comprehensive, nuanced account of Hussein's life illuminates the tragic complexities of Middle East politics. Photos. (Sept. 9) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The late King Hussein of Jordan was the favorite Arab ruler of both Israeli and other Western leaders, often referred to affectionately as the PLK (plucky little king). Professor Shlaim has written a massive, engrossing, and provocative biography of Hussein that is likely to engender controversy, because it is not a balanced work. Shlaim is a strong admirer of Hussein, and he is highly critical of most Israeli politicians, particularly in their dealings with Hussein. Still, this isn't a hagiography; Shlaim views Hussein as a man constantly forced to reconcile his primary goal, the preservation of the Hashemite dynasty, with the aims of Arab—particularly Palestinian—nationalists. This tension led to his disastrous decision to intervene in the Six Day War and the loss of the West Bank to Israel. The core of the book examines Hussein's frequent meetings with Israelis after that war, as he sought peace at great personal risk. Hussein is described as flexible and willing to compromise, while Israelis are seen as rigid and consistently devoted to territorial expansion. This is a revealing, important work, but Shlaim's analyses of these negotiations will be hotly debated. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Hussein's life was principled on the premise that " King Hussein was fundamentally and structurally a client king ...for all practical purposes the Hashemite legacy inherited from his grandfather was one of continuing dependence on the West." P.154His wide recognition, acclaim and complexity were due to " the principle of balancing applied at all levels: the inter -Arab, the regional, (domestic) and the global...this meant balancing between Arab and conservatives and Arab radicals, between the Arab world on the one hand and Israel on the other, and the global level between the West and the Soviet bloc...The survival of the Hashemite dynastic interests were paramount (and) the guiding principle behind his foreign policy, the key to constant shifts and maneuvers , to all the alliances and realignments " P.212With these two elements as the deciding factors in Hussein's life, Avi Shlaim delivers a superb biography that is well written, researched, revealing, passionate and to a great extent objective.Regardless if one agrees or not with the King's inherited role, he was able to save

his dynasty and country. Although King Hussein's life revolved on the previously mentioned principles, not all of the King's actions can be aligned with those principles if one takes a simplistic view of those actions without serious reflection and reading between the lines. Avi Shlaim does an excellent job on analyzing the King and his actions from the day he reached the throne until the last moments on his deathbed. For example, when Iraq invaded Kuwait, the King sided with Iraq, which is contradictory to King's "balancing principle." However, after reading the author's analysis and the foreign/domestic challenges facing the King, the King through careful policies and outstanding foresight was able to save his country and dynasty from Iraq, Israel and from domestic upheavals. Even though the King had a "special" relationship with Israel for many reasons, which are explored in the book, the King realized the only way to have the support of Washington was through Israel. This is revealed when King Hussein gave Bush I a memo that stated in part, in his (the king's) judgment the Arab-Israeli conflict was not a foreign policy for the US but rather a domestic US issue due to the domestic influences in the US on the issue. P 478 Although not comprehensible to the King, this an obstacle to peace in the region. Another example is when President Clinton at the request of King Hussein was unable to sway congress to forgive Jordan's debt to the US. Clinton in turn asked for the help of Rabin. "Yes Mr. President," replied Rabin slowly we will do our best. To the Jordanians present at this brief exchange provided a remarkable demonstration of the political clout wielded by Israel and its friends on Capitol Hill" p 545 During the peace negotiations with Israel, King Hussein was very calculating with extreme foresight, Unlike Arafat who in my judgment was incompetent to lead his people's cause and prone to miscalculation and countless poor judgments before and after the peace treaty. To Israel's satisfaction, Arafat committed a huge blunder by going behind the King's back to negotiate with Israel a separate peace treaty with Israel. King Hussein, in his correct judgment believed the agreement Arafat reached with Israel was vague, imprecise, and that substantive issues (Jerusalem, borders, refugees) were not addressed in the accord but left for future negotiations. "No one with any sense would sign a treaty first and discuss its technical clauses afterwards." P 533 King Hussein told Rabin when he asked the King to follow in the footsteps of the Peace treaty reached with the PLO. These are some of the examples, perhaps not the most important, but nevertheless revealing on why I thought this an outstanding book on the life of King Hussein.

I preferred the bio of Queen Noor to get a feel for the king's life, personality, diplomatic efforts, and Near Eastern problems. The Near East has, for past 80 years, been a total mess and impossible for one man to solve. Read this book only if you are really, really into Near East politics.

A truly extraordinary account of every detail of King Hussein's lifelong quest for a place for his kingdom at the table of respected nations of the world - primarily by pushing for peace in his region at any cost (most often through secret contact with his Israeli nemeses). He was not without errors in this quest, and he benefitted personally (\$\$) probably more than he should have, but this is the story of an exceptional person on an extraordinary journey who regularly showed more character than either his Israeli or American counterparts. This is the striking aspect of the book -- the lack of good faith (or even honesty) on the part of the leaders of Israel and USA. It makes an American with an open mind a little uncomfortable with the actions of our leaders - congressional, but also presidents. BUT, the book is as detailed as it could be and focuses on the quest, the policies, and the political experience of this fine man, this amazing king.

While history is, on one level, facts, there are always different perspectives from which those facts are viewed. It is worthwhile reading many perspectives to gain a better understanding of events. This book portrays the late King Hussein's quest for peace and his desire to preserve the Hashemite dynasty. It follows his life from a young boy who witnesses the horrific murder of his beloved grandfather, to his own death after a long reign on the throne of Jordan. I was interested in reading of familiar events from a different perspective than the one I got from the media in South Africa when they were taking place. However, there were times when I found the writing style difficult to follow and there was a sense of ploughing my way through the book in parts. If I had not already been fascinated by the land and people of Jordan I may well not have finished the book; although it was well worth reading right to the end.

Remembering the love of the Jordanians for their leader, this book relates many of the triumphs of his time as King of Jordan. He accepted hundreds/thousands of Palestinian refugees from their homeland in Palestine/Israel when the Israeli govt relieved them of their right to live in their own land.

Love this story knowing how much this king suffered to keep this kingdom up

The book is a master-piece and must be read by every Jordanian!! It is a detailed description of not only the life of the late King Hussein, but also a description of the history and politics of Jordan since its early establishment in 1921. Although the book tends to advocate that the late king was a victim

to Israeli, PLO and other states' intransigence (and thus the book is accused of not being objective) but it nevertheless quotes some incidents which reflect the late king's mis-judgements and flaws during his reign. I was pleasantly surprised at how accurate and real the author describes the tense relationship between the Jordanians and the Palestinians either in the West Bank or in Jordan itself. The mere description of this made reading the book a real and vivid experience for me, as opposed to the numerous literature that I have read on the subject which give the impression that the author is nothing but a mere observer or a reporter who does not have a real understanding of the true situation on the ground. The book is written as a tribute to the late king Hussein, who was truly a very well respected figure in and outside Jordan, and is expected to highlight his positive achievements. It is up to the reader to search other books on either Israel, the PLO, or other states to reach the desired balance.

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