

The Impact of Circassian Culture on the Urban Growth of Wadi Al-Sir District in Amman City

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أثر الثقافة الشركسية على النمو العمراني لمنطقة وادي السير في عمان

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Abstract

During the nineteenth century, Circassian immigration had posed an important factor that affected the urbanization of Wadi Al-Sir in Jordan and its development from living in caves and heritage ruins, to its founding as a small Circassian village ending up with expanding into a district. Circassians adapted the local environment successfully to transform the area into a vital urban space that fulfilled people's needs. This paper aims to investigate the impact of migrating cultures on the urban growth of Jordan. It highlights the first migrating people to Jordan from The Caucasus (The Circassians) and studies their impact on the urban growth of Wadi Al-Sir, where they first settled and adapted different methods to cope with the new place and add new inputs to the urban fabric of the region. A descriptive and analytical approach was used in this paper. A comparison between Circassian architecture in Caucasus and Jordan is carried out in this research as well. A number of conclusions clarify the role of Circassians upon Wadi Al-Sir architecture.

Keywords: Caucasus, Circassian, City Identity, Immigration, Urbanization, Wadi Al-Sir.

الملخص

خلال القرن التاسع عشر، شكلت الهجرة الشركسية عاملاً هاماً أثر على النمو الحضري في الأردن، من العيش في الكهوف والآثار التراثية، إلى تأسيسها كقرية شركسية صغيرة انتهى بالتوسع في المناطق. نجح الشركس في التكيف مع البيئة المحلية وتحويل المنطقة إلى مساحة حضرية حيوية تلبي احتياجات السكان. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى التحقيق في تأثير الثقافات المهاجرة على عملية النمو الحضري في الأردن. بالإضافة إلى تسليط الضوء على أحد أوائل المهاجرين إلى الأردن (الشركسي) من القوقاز، ودراسة تأثيرهم على النمو الحضري لوادي السير حيث استقروا في البداية، والأساليب المختلفة التي تم تكييفها للتعامل مع المكان الجديد، وإضافة مدخلات جديدة للنسيج الحضري للمنطقة أيضاً. تم استخدام المنهج الوصفي والتحليلي في هذه الورقة؛ بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تم إجراء مقارنة بين العمارة الشركسية في القوقاز والأردن. هذا البحث يوضح عدداً من الاستنتاجات حول دور الشركسية في العمارة في وادي السير.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القوقاز، الشركس، هوية المدينة، الهجرة، التحضر، وادي السير.

Introduction:

Jordan has witnessed many migrations from different places such as Circassian, Chechen, Armenian, Palestinian, Iraqi, and Syrian since the 19th century until recent times. Jordan was affected by these migrating cultures, and went through different stages of development through time, which led to producing a distinctive urban fabric.

One of the oldest, migrating people to Jordan were the Circassian immigrants. The Circassians are a group of people who used to live in the North Caucasus before they were forced to migrate and leave their homeland because of the expansionist wars waged by the Russian Empire in the region and a long conflict with the Ottoman Empire lasting for more than a hundred years. This led to the migration of about 50,000 Circassian to the Ottoman Empire during the 1850s. These settled in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt (Shami, 2009, p. 145).

The first immigration of Circassians from Caucasus began in 1850 (Shawash, 2003), then they continued migrating gradually between 1864 and 1878. They moved in three phases; the first Circassian group arrived to Amman in 1878. The Ottomans supported the Circassians and assigned lands for Circassian settlers close to regular water sources and grain fields. Rogan (1999, p.73) mentioned that “between 1878 and 1884, three Circassian villages were founded in areas of modern Jordan: in Amman (1878) and Wadi Al-Sir (1880), then in the Balqa, Jerash, and Jabal Ajlun, in (1884)”.

Circassians applied their culture into urban life in Wadi-Al Sir and contributed to improving the architectural, urban value in Amman. They added new concepts into vernacular architecture and construction as well as in handcraft and farming skills, which were reflected positively on the architecture, construction and urban growth of the city of Amman (Shawash, 2003).

Much of Amman’s urban growth came from immigrants into the city introducing new types of architectural buildings that reflected the transit cultures. As quoted, “The city, its architecture, its urban spaces and its resulting morphology, is a cultural manifestation of the society that produces it” (Al-Rifa i, 1996, p. 131-140).

The urban growth process of Amman went through different levels of transformations, starting from small villages in the valleys (1887-1900) by the Circassians in Wadi Al-Sir, then expanding towards the mountain tops (1900-1920) by the Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian immigrants. New Settlements and distinctive patterns of building took place up the slopes as well as a pedestrian system of long and narrow stairs climbing up the mountains. Occupying the mountain tops (1920-1948), this phase represents somehow a steady urban growth. The city of the planners, (1948-1970) reflected an important phase in Amman’s history due to the arrival of the professional planners, and architects who introduced visions of the “Modern city”. Streets and land lots were planned; land lots became regular and strict building regulations were imposed. For architecture and building types, a shift from the traditional Central Hall Types towards modern houses became evident and new types of modest low-rise apartment buildings began to emerge. The circles of Amman reflect the 1970-to present rapid growth of the city. (Rifai, 1996, p. 131-140).

Aim of the study:

Circassians highly contributed to shaping Wadi Al-Sir district, which began with a small Circassian village ending up as a large district. They transferred their culture, traditions and building knowledge from their homeland to their new place in Jordan (Wadi Al-Sir). Circassian migration represents an important phase in the city’s evolution (Architecture and Urban Planning). This paper aims to highlight the role of Circassian culture in terms of architecture and urban planning evolution of Wadi Al-Sir.

This paper aims also to:

1. Study the urban development process of Wadi Al-Sir through time.
2. Identify the architectural elements of the Circassian settlements (villages, houses), analyze their planning criteria, and compare them with the architectural dwellings in Caucasus.
3. Study the impact of migrated cultures (Circassian) in urban growth of Wadi Al-sir.

Methodology:

Migration, (internal or international) is the demographic process that links rural to urban areas, generating the growth of cities; moreover, it is the force driving the growth of urbanization and bringing opportunities and challenges to cities. Since the beginnings of the 20th century, the population in Amman has increased rapidly due to the migrations. Abu Ayash (1977) quoted in his writings “No city in the world has grown at the same rate of growth as Amman.” Urbanization resulting from immigrations affects all sizes of settlements from small villages to towns to cities, leading up to the growth of cities, which have high density of people.

This study is a qualitative (descriptive and analytical) one. It required deep scanning work and observations of selected districts and personal interviews with Circassian individuals ranging from 50-80 years old, who are concerned with the Circassian culture. Moreover, it involved reviewing writings related to Circassian culture in general and the Circassian history in Wadi Al-Sir in particular. An Urban analysis of Wadi Al-Sir was conducted to understand the architectural, urban development process, which started from small Circassian village to the current situation now. All data were collected, documented and analyzed into results that identify buildings and urban space typologies, which were built by the Circassians. Then these buildings were compared with the architectural features of the buildings in Caucasus in order to understand how Circassians affected the urban planning growth of Wadi Al-Sir.

Study area:

Amman in context: The capital of Jordan is located on the north-west of Jordan as shown within the fig (1) with an area of (1.680 km). Amman consists of a series of steep hills (seven Hills). The morphology of Amman incised intermittent valleys, which have resulted in a hilly landscape (each hill is locally termed “jebel”) and deep valleys coupled with steep valley-side slopes (Farhan; Al-Shawarmeh, 2019). At the end of the 19th century, the Circassian immigrants were settled there by the Ottoman Empire in 1878. The first municipal council established in 1909.

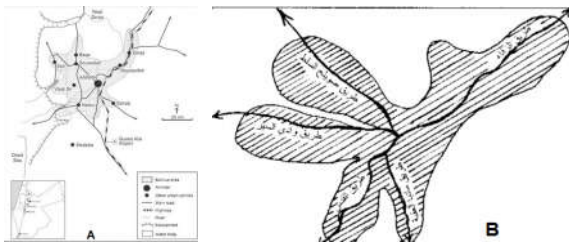


Figure 1, (a): Amman: general location map adapted and revised from Lavergne (2004), source: Lavergne (2004). (b): the expansion directions of Amman city. source: (Abu Ayyash, 1982).

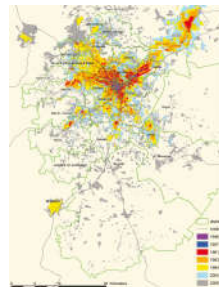


Figure2: Extraction from lands image 1961.1983,1994 and 2005 by the royal Jordanian geographical Center for IFPO,2009. for 1946 and 1957: Map of Amman extension by the RJGC published in 1983. For, Greater Amman Master plan

Wadi Al-Sir in context:

Wadi Al-Sir is one of the oldest residential districts in Greater Amman area. It is located to the west of Amman with an area of 39 km, and has two main parts: the first is a green flat plain called (Al Bayader) and the other is the valley covered with oak trees. Wadi Al-Sir has many natural water resources, which is considered as a good place to irrigate the Bedouins and the surroundings there (fig 1). As mentioned before, in 1878 the Circassians started to settle in Amman. The first transit group lived in the ruins of heritage places and the caves in Amman at that time. Later, The Ottomans supported the Circassian people strongly and offered facilities for them, provided that they protect the Ottomans' properties. In 1880, a second group of Circassians moved to Wadi Al-Sir for its distinctive nature, where they established their settlements, and initiated their life. (Lewis, 1987).



Figure 3: (a) map of Greater Amman and its districts. (b) Map of Wadi Al-Sir district with its two part the valley and the flat plains. (c): zoom in image of study area (the old Circassian village) Source: (GIA), google map 2020.

When they first came to Wadi Al-Sir, conflicts with the Bedouins forced the Circassians to build protected settlements. Only 25 Circassian families came to Wadi Al-Sir in 1880; the area was only a watering place for the Bedouins who lived in the surroundings and their animals. The Ottomans regarded the nomadic tribes in Wadi Al-Sir as an obstruction to ‘regular cultivation and direct administration’ (Rogan, 1994, p.33), so they assigned lands for Circassians in Wadi AL-Sir to protect their Colonial boundaries and revive the area. The Circassians recalled their knowledge and tried to adapt to the area despite the fact that the environment was different from that of Caucasus (Mackey, 1979).

Discussion:

Circassians introduced the concept of village in Jordan (fig 3, 4). The first village was built in Wadi Al-Sir in 1890s; it represented a new urban fabric to the area at that time. Circassians are conservative people, they have preserved their heritage and identity until the recent days. Takiung into consideration the environmental and geographic differences, they benefited from the existing resources and combined them with their culture and methods of constructions and technologies, thus creating a village that fulfilled the people’s needs and added a new value to urban life there.



Figure 4: official British image of Wadi Al-Sir when they enter the area in 1917. Source: Dawood Omar Dawood.

In 1858, Ottomans introduced a land ownership system, called Miri system, related to possession of usufruct. According to this system, the ownership of agricultural lands is retained by the Ottoman government, but people can use these lands and benefit from them, provided they pay taxes. Between 1882 and 1887, the Ottoman government turned all the communal land that were under the control of Bedouins into private ownerships.

According to Amman court documents, Circassian people used to work in farming, breeding, and trading. Later the Ottomans employed some of them in administrative services, like collecting taxes, and in the military and police. Sultan Abd al Hameed assigned the western lands to Circassians with tax exemption, so they might protect the Ottoman boundaries and improve agricultural production.

Circassians built the first village in Wadi Al-Sir according to their background. It has a “grid pattern” plan. In accordance with the lands allocated to them by the Ottomans, the village consisted of different types of buildings (residential, commercial, educational and religious) that satisfied their needs as shown in fig (4, 5, 6). They built a mosque in the center of the village, surrounded by residential buildings within specific rectangular or square sites (fig 6). Streets were constructed as well; two types of streets were formed; one of them was Commercial Street and the other perpendicular was residential. By 1893, “the Circassians had built their houses, and nearly all were surrounded by a yard enclosed by a wall of stone” (Hamarnah, 1996). As mentioned before, the agricultural lands were distributed to the Circassians by the Ottoman government to be their source of livelihood.



Figure 5: (a) Aerial view of Circassian Village of Wadi Al-Sir Trans-Jordan 1st May 1918, The Ottomans assigned lands for Circassian settlers close to regular water sources and grain fields

(b) Aerial view showing the development of Circassian Village of Wadi Al-Sir (2020) from small village to city. Source: Circassian Association, and Rosy Janeb, www.mapbox.com

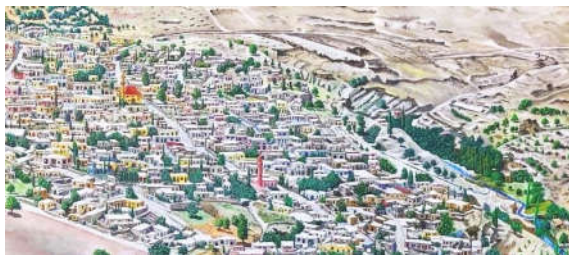


Figure 6: East view of the Circassian village with its main commercial street and its mosques. The layout of the village was linear organized (grid). Source: Circassian Association, appropriated by the researches 2020



Figure 7: West view of the Circassian Village in Wadi Al-Sir. Source: history of Jordan.com

In 1880, only 25 Circassian families came to Wadi Al-Sir; then, more families joined them in different phases: 36 families, 53 families, 42 families and finally 10 Tatar families, which led up to increasing the population and expanding the village. In 1933, the Circassian population became 2000 (Mackey, 1970). As shown in Fig (5, 6) the village expanded horizontally toward the south, east and west.

According to the elderly who were interviewed, the lands were distributed equally to the families: each family got four donums; but some rich Circassians could buy more lands and get bigger amounts. Moreover, the Circassian village in Wadi Al-Sir was almost a copy of its original counterpart in the Caucasus, which reflected how attached these people were to their culture, and how Circassian culture integrated with local culture in Wadi Al-Sir.

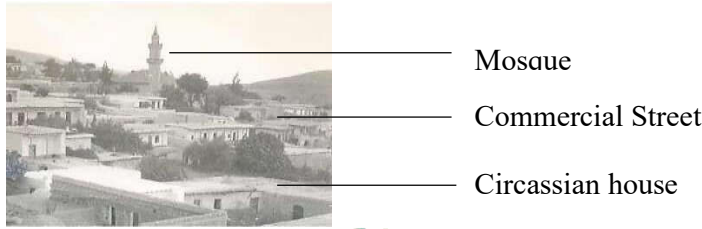


Figure 8: Image shows the mosque in the middle of the village in 1914. Source: history of Jordan.com / Appropriated by the researchers 2020

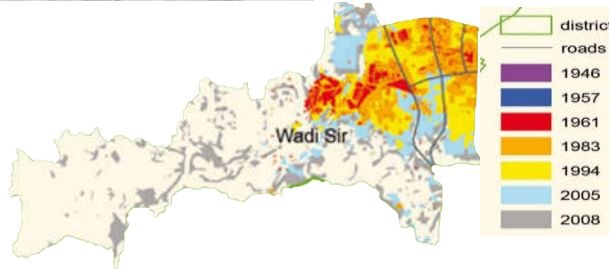


Figure 9: Extraction from lands image 1961.1983,1994 and 2005 by the royal Jordanian geographical Center for IFPO, 2009. For 1946 and 1957: Map of Wadi Al-Sir extension by the RJGC published in 1983. For, Greater Amman Master plan (appropriated by the researches 2020)

That Circassians were eager to preserve their culture, skills and construction knowledge is clearly shown in their settlements, which were connected to forests. Circassians settled in areas with access to water, surrounding mountains and trees, as they used to live in their homeland. They also brought with them the “know how” for making Circassian carriages (Jaimoukha, 1998).

Starting from larger urban scale, the Circassian village in Wadi Al-Sir was characterized by:

1. Grid pattern layout, small communities; their life revolved around the small community of the village, before they began to expand.
2. Semi Attached houses with very well defensive aspects.
3. Secret passageway between houses for defensive issue.
4. The village included a mosque, school, and commercial market (souqe).
5. The village contained different types of buildings (residential, commercial, religious and educational), street networks were constructed, including one main commercial street and the others were residential.
6. Circassian established orchards and vineyards, took care of pastures for their livestock, and built many mills. (Ibzak, 2007).

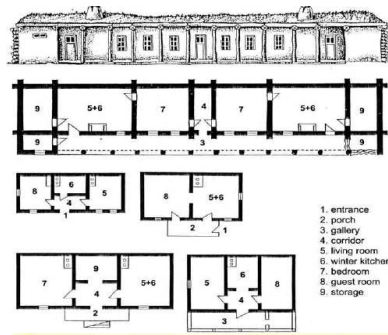


Figure 10: typical plans of Circassian houses in Caucasus. Source Elias, 1995, after Kubishev, 1982, *Dwellings and Villages of the Caucasus Nations*, p.103 (in Russian)



Figure 11 (a, b): image shows types of houses of Circassian in Caucasus. Source: adygaunion.com

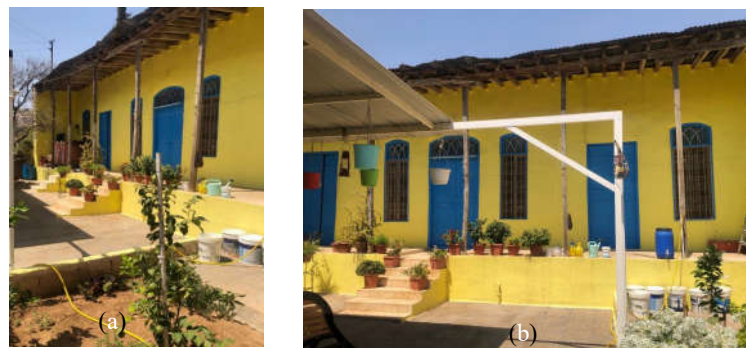


Figure 12 (a, b): Circassian house in Wadi Al-Sir (Gutta Residence), showing the flat roof, wooden porch. Source: image was taken and appropriated by the researchers 2020

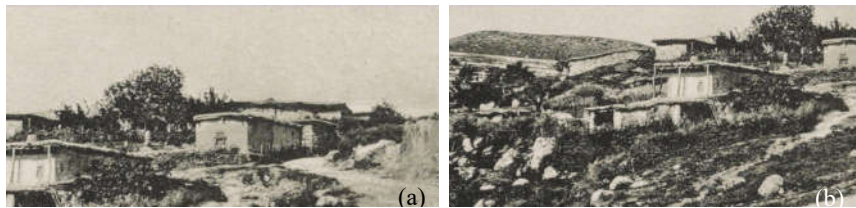


Figure 13(a, b): Images of the old Circassian houses in Wadi Al-Sir in 1900, showing the simple method of construction (mud) and formation. Source: The Circassian Association/Appropriated by the researchers 2020.

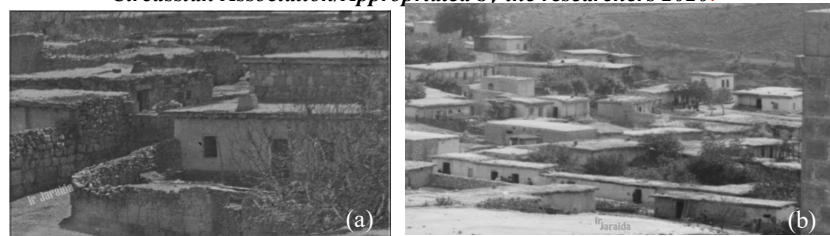


Figure 14 (a, b): Images of the prototype of old Circassian houses in the village in Wadi Al-Sir in 1910. Source: History of Jordan.com /Appropriated by the researchers 2020.

The Circassians respected the environment they lived in and used its natural resources wisely to build their houses, as seen in figures 12 to 14. The Circassian house features the following:

1. A rectangular shape layout, which is the commonly used layout
2. The high entrance door
3. Some of them have inner court, windows were directed to inside courtyard, and no windows were on the exterior walls for privacy and a frontal courtyard too
4. Most of their buildings were one floor buildings
5. The living room was higher than the courtyard in about 50 cm
6. There was a guest room unconnected directly with the rest of the houserooms.
7. There were a detached place for their pets and the kitchen
8. A place to collect rainwater for their use
9. The porch is the main part of the Circassian house; it displays the building systems and the woodworking skills (Shawash, 2003) as shown in (fig from 7 to 12).

The Circassian settlements planning, buildings and construction methods were different from that of Jordanian settlements. The construction details can be listed as:

1. The used construction material were sun dried mudbrick and cane. Later, they used stone as they moved to areas rich with stones in Jordan, Palestine, and Syria.
2. They used tapered roof made of cane and wooden pillars and that was for environmental need in their cold area, but they replaced it with flat roof in Wadi Al-Sir.
3. Some of the house roofs were colored with red or green color.
4. Ceiling was carried on wooden beams of a size that is found only with much difficulty (Shawash, 2003).
5. They introduced the concept of the fireplace and chimney in the house (Shawash. J 2003).

There are two types of buildings in Wadi Al-Sir, the first one is made of mud and later developed using the local material (stone). One of the Circassian buildings belongs to Abida Family; an interview was made with one of the Abida family members to obtain a historical background of the house. The Residence was built in 1890, it was considered later as a palace for Prince Abdullah the First: figures (13, 14, and 15). The house was a two-floor one with front and back yards and two entrances (front and back). The house is constructed on the three-bay system that included main central hall with two rooms on each side with interior height of 4 meters, long thin and heigh openings. A semi-detached kitchen and a bathroom were developed on the side of the house. Figures 16 and 17 show the floor tiling of the bedroom and sitting area, and the wood beams of the ceiling.



Figure 15: sketch of Abida House plan (not to scale), shows the layout of the house and interior spaces. Source: the researches 2020



Figure 16: Image of Abida House, shows the two entrances of the house, two types of stone were used in construction too. Source: captured and appropriated by the researches 2020



Figure 17 image shows the main entrance of the house with its thin, height openings and the other image shows another semi-detached mass which was the kitchen and bathroom. Source: captured and appropriated by the researches 2020



Figure 18: image shows the ceiling of the house, which become later the typical Jordanian traditional architecture. Source: captured and appropriated by the researches 2020

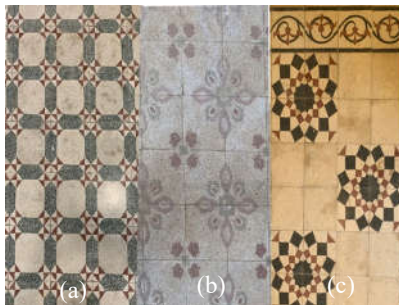
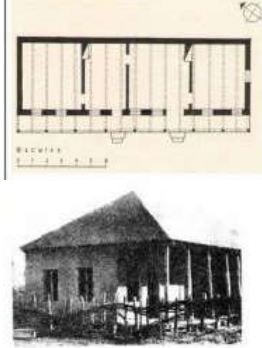



Figure 19: images showing the tiling pattern of the house. Bed room tilling pattern. The front balcony tilling pattern Setting area tilling pattern. Source: captured and appropriated by the researches 2020

The following table summarizes the evolution of the urban pattern of the Circassian architecture:

Table 1: a table comparison between building typology of Circassian house in Caucasus and Wadi Al-Sir, source: the researches 2020

	Circassian in Caucasus (wuna)	Circassian in Wadi Al-Sir (new addition)
Structural system	Mud brick walls, cane roof, wooden beams	Mud and clay, They used stone in walls , I steel beams
House Layout	Rectangular, square layout shape with porch.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rectangular, layout shape with porch, which were converted into balcony. - Three bay house layout. - Archetype of the gallery house.
Roof	Tapered shape of hatch	Flat shape and mud brick.
Spatial arrangement	Linear arrangement of functionally space	Linear arrangement of functionally space
Context	Individual units with court yard and small gardens	Semi Attached unites with court yard and small gardens
Image	 <p>Figure 20: A sample of Old Circassian House Design in the Circassian heritage village in Wadi Al-Sir. Source: Circassian Association</p>	 <p>Figure 20 : Circassian house in the Caucasus with rectangular layout Source: The Atlas of the People of the West Caucasus</p>

Comparison with the original Caucasus village shows similarity between it and the Circassian Wadi Al-Sir in building designs: The Circassians applied the same method of planning and construction in all the places they moved to, such as Jerash and Naur.

Later, due to the successive immigration waves to Jordan, Circassians were much integrated with other cultures and the Circassian architecture style started to disappear, due to the impact of the vernacular architecture and modern style in Jordan. Now it is hard to distinguish between the Circassian house and any other house, they all have the same language.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Over the past years, Circassians played an essential role in forming the new identity of Amman and Wadi Al-Sir. Although the nature of Wadi Al-Sir was different from their original lands in the Caucasus, Circassians succeeded in adapting to the place; they used their knowledge, techniques, and methods of construction to develop the vernacular architecture and introduce new types of settlements, which led to establishing a vital urban place, and securing urban growth in the area. Houses, shops, schools and mosques introduced new concepts to the urban life through their village planning patterns. They also were affected by the local environment components in Wadi Al-Sir as local materials came to be used and mixed with configurations of Circassian culture.

Circassians played an important role in developing the area and creating new types of urban life, which were organized and well defined.

1. The main reason for the growth of Wadi Al-Sir was the migration to it of the Circassians: they Used their culture and construction knowledge to create a livable place out of it.
2. The historical development of Wadi Al-Sir and the integration of cultures in it have clear impact on the urban morphology of the area and allowed it to hold distinctive Architectural legacies.
3. Circassian migrates had a clearly positive impact on Wadi Al-Sir in terms of architecture and urban planning development, through importing new concepts in Jordanian urban life, which led up to developing the urban pattern in Wadi Al-Sir. As mentioned before, the concept of village was first introduced in Wadi Al-Sir to fulfill the maximum needs of the people, new types of building were built too (educational and commercial); moreover, due to the presence of Circassian immigrants, Wadi Al-Sir was transformed into an attractive, distinctive and vital urban place, which attracted the surrounding people to live in it. Now, a large district is expanding widely through time.
4. A road network used to link the villages together. A major road linked Wadi Al-Sir with Amman and Circassian carts, which reflected the urban development of Wadi Al-Sir, formed the first step to link the villages in the Amman area with each other.
5. Circassians succeeded in preserving their culture by utilizing it and sharing it with the Jordanians.
6. The Circassian migration was the main factor in the urbanization of Wadi Al-Sir and in its growth to become now one of the main parts of Amman with a high population density.

Reviving an urban place depends on a deep understanding of the nature of the place and of people's needs and on well-planned strategies and well-chosen appropriate methods of construction. All that needs to be based on a cultural base more than investment approach.

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