

## Dubai's Glamorous New Consort: HRH Princess Haya al-Hussein of Jordan

Contributed by Dr. Janice Seto  
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Royal watchers around the globe are always welcoming of a little extra glamour to the scene: Denmark has the classical beauty that is Princess Mary. Holland has the always friendly Princess Maxima, while Norway and Belgium have respectively embraced Princesses Mette-Marit and Mathilde. And the UK and Commonwealth? Well, the Windsors (lacking the style of Diana) aren't as glamorous as they once were, but royal fans are proud of the dignified and hard-working Sophie. However, if the excitable media are to be believed, the British Royal Family's own version of 'It-girl' glamour is, erm...Camilla?!

We can but hope that Prince William will make the girl he loves a bona fida Princess as Kate Middleton would obviously add some much needed sparkle to the House of Windsor!

However, Dubai, the oil-rich member of the United Arab Emirates, has no such concerns as this week saw the emergence of a new Consort, the beautiful and talented sister of King Abdullah II of Jordan, Princess Haya.

Janice Seto, a regular and very welcome contributor to The Royalist, tells us the story of the young lady who could well follow Europe's new family of Princesses in becoming the latest royal cover-girl.

It is not even mid-month but January 2006 looks like a busy one in the Royal world! Already we have two christenings of future sovereigns to look forward to: Saturday will see the baptism of Princess Leonor of Spain, daughter of Felipe and his surprise choice of consort, Princess Letizia, the divorced former newscaster. A week later, Denmark will celebrate the christening of their unnamed Prince, the son and heir of Crown Prince Frederik and his popular Tasmanian-born wife, Crown Princess Mary.

Meanwhile, in the UK Prince William has joined his brother Harry by entering the military whilst, on the other side of the world, Crown Princess Masako of Japan is finally reappearing after an extended bout of depression and seclusion from the outside world.

But whilst all these events receive much coverage, with magazines throughout the world paying heed to the latest fashions and goings-on inside these high-profile monarchies, the introduction of a new royal on the scene has gone just a little unnoticed, for now at least.

Following the shock announcement of the death in Australia last week of the reigning Emir, Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid al Maktoum, the world has been reading about the new occupant to the throne of Dubai, the late Emir's brother.

The death of Al Makhtoum has catapulted another intelligent, beautiful Princess into the spotlight in the form of the new Emir's consort, the striking HRH Princess Haya bint Al Hussein, half-sister of King Abdullah II of Jordan.

Unlike native-born Dubai and UAE royal women, who tend to stay in the background, this new consort has been taking her place in the public eye since her marriage in the royal palace in Amman, Jordan, to the 57-year-old new Emir, the wealthy HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, on April 10th 2004.

Princess Haya bint Al-Hussein of Jordan is both an accomplished sportswoman and a smart cookie. In the former, she follows the UK's Princess Royal and Greek-shipping heiress Athina Rousell Onassis in choosing a vocation where merit truly counts. In the latter, she graduated from Oxford in PPE (Politics, Philosophy, Economics).

Although the Jordanian royal family are far from poor, they have nothing like the petro-dollar wealth of their counterpart royals in the Gulf States.

Haya's union with Al Maktoum was a perfect match for the 29-year old Princess Haya. The young royal — who has competed in the equestrian world full-time, training around the globe in such places as France, Ireland, and Germany — truly married well when she wed the energetic scion of the horse-mad Al Maktoum family. Word has it the couple kept meeting up at horse events all over Europe, the Prince wooing his love with a steady flow of poetry from his own hand.

Unlike the rather tragic Crown Princess Masako of Japan, there is no pressure on Haya to provide an heir to Sheikh Mohammed as he apparently has adult children from his first wife, Sheikha Hind, a distant cousin. Although she is known for her good works, Sheikha Hind conforms to the Emirati people's expectation of the role of women, an expectation which primarily sees them staying very much in the shadows.

The flipside to freedom from childbearing for Princess Haya is the need to build relations with her stepchildren, as well as adjusting to a new home. Internet blogs reflect some whispering about the family reserving their judgment on this foreigner. Haya would perhaps be wise to keep her head down as remember, one of her stepdaughters won four gold medals at a Gulf states karate tournament!

Still, it's nothing like the situation Liliane Baels encountered when her secret marriage to King Leopold III of the Belgians came to light during the WWII German occupation! Like Camilla today, Lilian was expected to live in the shadows of the King's beautiful, hugely popular first wife, Queen Astrid, who (like Diana) died in a car crash at a tragically young age.

Death has also cast an unwelcome shadow over the life of Princess Haya. The glamorous young royal is deserving of the peace and stability we hope she has now discovered, her having suffered great unhappiness in her childhood.

Haya was barely three when her mother, only 29, was killed in a helicopter crash as she returned from a tour of Jordanian hospitals. It was the tragic end to a true love match — Queen Alia used to don an 'I love King Hussein' t-shirt at home. Indeed, such was his desire to have her at his side that King Hussein married Alia Toukan only one day after his divorce from his second wife, the Briton Antoinette Gardner (HRH Princess Muna, mother of the present King Abdullah, Haya's half-brother).

The daughter of Jordanian diplomats, Queen Alia had a cosmopolitan upbringing in the UK, US, Italy, and Egypt, and was the only one of Hussein's four wives to be born Arab and Muslim.

With her younger brother, Prince Ali, and adopted sister, Abir Muhaisen, orphaned in a plane crash, Haya spent her childhood in Amman, living in a separate palace from her father and his fourth wife, an American of Swedish/Lebanese Arab descent, Lisa Halaby, popularly known as Queen Noor.

Like the children of so many wealthy dynasties, Haya attended English boarding schools from the age of 11, after which she studied at Oxford University. As you can see from Haya's official website, she is the image of her mother. But it isn't only her looks that she has inherited, for Haya has long resolved to commemorate her mother's good works via a documentary and continued support of the late Queen's works in Jordan.

Jordanians may have embraced their new Queens — Noor and Rania respectively — but, almost thirty years after her tragic death, millions continue to fly into the capital city of Amman via the 'Queen Alia International Airport', a testimony to the respect earned by Haya's late mother.

With her husband's accession to the throne, Princess Haya will likely now spend more time in Dubai. As consort, and continuing in her role as UN World Food Program Goodwill Ambassador, we may see more of her, especially if she lets stand her candidacy for the presidency of the International Equestrian Federation.

We await to discover the extent of her popularity in the April elections! Whether or not she wins, this is surely one royal lady we will be seeing a great deal more of in newspapers and magazines around the world in the months and years ahead.

Please feel welcome to offer your opinions on this and any other royal story by visiting our Royal Forum or via our Comments section below.