

Bedouin Settlement in Late Ottoman and British Mandatory Palestine: Influence on the Cultural and Environmental Landscape, 1870-1948

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Abstract

During the late Ottoman and British Mandatory periods the cultural and environmental landscape of Palestine changed dramatically. This was reflected in both urban development and rural settlement patterns. In the last decades of Ottoman rule much of the newly settled rural low country of Palestine, including the coastal plain and Jordan valley, was strongly influenced by Bedouin tribes, who were living in various states of mobile pastoralism. By the end of the British Mandate the majority of the Bedouin, with the exception of those living in the Negev in Southern Palestine, had become sedentary in one form or another. The Bedouin actively built about 60 new villages and dispersed settlements, comprising several thousand houses. The Mandate authorities estimated the population of these Bedouin villages to be 27,500 in 1945. Our paper examines who the inhabitants of these Bedouin villages were, tracing them from their nomadic and pastoral origins in the late Ottoman period to their final sedentarization under the British Mandate. We examine how Mandatory land policies and Jewish land purchases created legal and demographic pressures for sedentarization. In shedding light on these intertwined topics we illustrate the increasingly limited role the Bedouin played in the rural landscape due to constraints placed upon them and show how, as a result, their settlement was part of a change in the environment in the period.

Introduction and Background of the Bedouin of Palestine

Bedouin are integral to the fabric of the Middle East and North Africa. However, over the last 150 years their power and the extent of territory under their de facto control have been curtailed by state authorities. This paper examines state policies towards nomadic and sedentarizing Bedouin in late Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine, with an emphasis on how the Bedouin place in the landscape was viewed and altered over time, affected both by external and internal determinants. The notion of “Bedouin” has, over the years, denoted both a nomadic way of life, and a group identity, which in many cases persists even among Bedouin who reside in urban environments today.¹ We examine those Bedouin tribes who practiced a nomadic pastoral lifestyle at the end of the 19th century, and trace changes in their location, extent and place in the cultural landscape of the country.² Specifically, we trace tribes of Bedouin who appear on census material, in archival sources and on period maps.

The dynamic and historical relationship between nomads, tribes and the state is one that has attracted scholars from numerous disciplines,³ resulting in a number of anthropological, historical and geographical studies.⁴ The environmental history of Palestine in the period discussed has received only modest attention.⁵ While nomads and tribes are generally seen as antithetic to *the state* in the Middle East, the Bedouin are viewed both as a traditional outsider and as a national forbearer.⁶

After the Arab invasion of the 7th century various Bedouin tribes dominated the plains and valleys of Palestine, and there is a vigorous scholarly debate regarding the degree to which they were responsible for altering, negatively, the environment in which they lived.⁷ The Bedouin areas were also those most affected by the constantly expanding and shifting sand dunes, and the swamps.⁸ They resided in an environment that was sparse in human habitation; Ruth Kark and Noam Levin write that during the Mamluk period in the 13th to the 16th centuries, “the decline of the coastal towns and settlements paved the way for Bedouins to spread periodically into the coastal plain and valleys.”⁹ Some scholars have challenged or provided greater nuance to this view of Middle East environmental decline, either by ascribing it to a colonial perception that

that land needed to be ‘saved’ from its current rulers, or by arguing that the decline was environmentally determined.¹⁰ Diana Davis, in examining North Africa, notes that a view of a ruined environment was “constructed during the French colonial period which blamed local North Africans, especially pastoralists, for the deforestation and desertification of what was erroneously believed to have been a fertile, forested landscape in antiquity.”¹¹ Competing views by non-Bedouin over how the landscape *should* look and how the environment *should* be managed would substantially alter the Bedouin dominance of the landscape and their lifestyle between 1800 and 1948.

The Bedouin greatly fascinated European researchers and explorers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their origins and tribal history inspired much debate and investigation. The Bedouin themselves generally had oral histories of their tribal origins stretching back hundreds or thousands of years and including grand migrations throughout the region. In the Baysan valley, for instance, the Arab al-Sakr (عرب الصقر, unrelated to the similarly named tribe in Jordan)¹² claimed to originate from the Hijaz or Najd in Arabia, and the Ghazawiyya tribe traced their lineage to the Misl al-Jizel tribes from the Houran (Hauran).¹³

Non-Bedouin scholars and researchers have long showed an interest in the history of the Bedouin. The major Bedouin tribes of the Negev, Gaza and southern Shephelah (Judean Hills piedmont) regions had diverse histories, and researchers Eliahu Epstein, Gideon Kressel and Clinton Bailey have traced some of their origins to the period of Napoleon’s invasion of 1799. The locations of the various Bedouin tribes were shown on maps in the nineteenth century and writers have labored in diverse ways to estimate the size of the various Bedouin tribes in the region since the late eighteenth century.¹⁴ Wolf-Dieter Hütteroth and Kamal Abdulfattah’s groundbreaking historical-geographical study of Palestine at the end of the sixteenth century, soon after the advent of Ottoman rule, provides a map of the Bedouin tribes in the period.¹⁵ According to their research the specific tribes described at the end of the sixteenth century in southern Palestine no longer existed, at least by name or in their former groupings, in the area in the nineteenth century. In central and northern Palestine, their study, based on the detailed Ottoman tax lists of 1596, found 43 nomadic tribes, some of Turkish and Kurdish origin.¹⁶ They concluded that “the existence of powerful nomadic tribes became the dominant factor in

determining the stability of rural settlement areas [and] loss of central [governmental] power enabled the nomadic tribes to intensify their raids on settled areas” in the years following 1596.¹⁷

The result can be found in the British Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) map of 1880, which at its time was the most detailed survey and map of the country, done by officers of the Royal Engineers in 1871-1877.¹⁸ The map, which was printed in color on 26 sheets at a scale of 1:63,360, marked Bedouin tribes in a special font and placed them astride the parts of the country in which the surveyors had found them prevalent. It showed approximately 67 Bedouin tribes within the borders of what became Mandatory Palestine. It also reveals that the areas dominated by the Bedouin had increased, with the result that the rural environment was less settled and less cultivated than it had been 400 years before.¹⁹

The Ottoman Empire’s Bedouin Policy

In this section we examine the last years of the Ottoman Empire and the policies and processes that affected the rural landscape’s Bedouin inhabitants. We show how the Bedouin went from being dominant players in the rural environment to a marginalized group. We examine the major processes that affected the Bedouin: the extension of government power and changes affecting land ownership in the period.

The Ottoman Empire was flexible in its policies towards local groups, placing a high priority on internal stability rather than homogeneity. Mitigating strife between clans and groups in order to keep the settled population at peace and the environment agriculturally productive was a primary goal. The Empire’s policy was often haphazard and at times coercive. One common feature was an interest in settling the pastoral Bedouin tribes. Notable efforts were made in the seventeenth century, and revived in the nineteenth.²⁰

These efforts were not always benign, and the authorities and contemporary writers saw them as a contest between the nomads and the state. In 1863 British scholar Henry B. Tristram recalled that “a few years ago the whole Ghor [Jordan valley] was in the hands of the fellaheen, and much of it cultivated for corn. Now the whole of it is in the hands of the Bedouin, who eschew all agriculture...with the Bedouin come lawlessness and the uprooting of all Turkish [sic] authority.”²¹ The former observation about the extent of the Bedouin was based on personal experience, comparing his first travels in 1858 to those in 1863.

The Ottoman empire viewed the Bedouins as a threat to the state's control, but until the late 19th century they were unable to come up with a solution to the problem. One governor complained that "on many occasions they abused the trust that the state placed in them. They stole state money, and they unlawfully seized public property, thus they enriched themselves at the expense of the peasantry and the state."²² The Ottomans sent expeditions to punish Bedouin in Jordan who had harassed Hajj caravans in 1867.²³ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the policy of Sultan Abdülhamid II aimed to control the Bedouin in order to increase security and government income and fight desertification in the Empire, including in Transjordan and Palestine. Toward this end he attempted, through his agents, to establish settlements of Bedouin or place loyal Muslim immigrants from the Balkans and the Caucasus in areas dominated by nomads. In Palestine the two areas which attracted the Sultan's attention were the Negev Desert and the Jordan Valley, apparently because they were unsettled and appeared to be almost devoid of state control.²⁴ Yasemin Avci relates that "the government began to use sophisticated means and tactics in order to secure control and encourage the integration of the Bedouin element in the empire."²⁵ The regime attempted, with no real success, to pacify the Negev Bedouin forcefully between 1870 and 1891, with at least four expeditions mounted against them.²⁶ The correspondence of the Ottoman governors of Jerusalem Ahmed Duzdar (1838-1863), Rauf Pasha (governor 1876-1888) and Ali Ekrem Bey (governor 1906-8) illustrate the zeal with which they undertook to control and suppress the Bedouin.²⁷ One letter details how the Bedouin abused "the trust that the state placed in them. They stole state money, and they unlawfully seized public property, thus they enriched themselves at the expense of the peasantry and the state."²⁸ Furthermore the governor complains that "the bloody skirmishes between the different clans caused a state of desperate poverty and disorder in the region, and a dramatic decrease in the government's revenue."²⁹ To remedy the lack of state power and what they viewed as theft of government resources, urban administrative centers, Baysan in the north and Beersheba in the south, were established in 1900 as part of the ongoing policy of extending government control.

A few other secondary accounts exist of attempts made by the Empire to settle officials and Bedouin in the Negev. One author has argued that the Ottomans attempted to settle Bedouin along the Wadi Besor in the Negev, although little evidence could be found on maps or in the sources that these settlements were successful.³⁰ Auja al Hafir was built as a second

administrative center on the Sultan's privately-owned land on the Negev's border with British Egypt (a border established in 1906).³¹ It was founded around 1906 but few settlers came and it existed primarily as a border post and military base.³² At Asluj, site of a *makam* (holy shrine) for Sheikh al-Asam and a substantial well (Bir Asluj), the Ottomans built a railway bridge, several buildings and a mosque. At Fatish, near modern day Ofakim, the Ottomans built a fort attributed to the year 1894.³³ These various settlement projects undertaken by the Ottomans in the Negev remain obscure and have, unfortunately, not received much scholarly attention.

In other areas where the Bedouin were powerful³⁴, such as the Sharon plain and Baysan valley, villages were settled by foreigners perceived by the empire as more loyal and reliable, such as Bosnians, Circassians, and Egyptians.

Contemporary accounts relate what was meted out to the Bedouin. Claude R. Conder, one of the heads of the Palestine Exploration Fund survey and mapping enterprise in the 1870s, believed that the result of the Empire's increased power was that "on the whole, however, the settled people seem to be gaining ground...the Bedawin [sic] are mere shadows of their forefathers."³⁵ While Conder's other views on the Bedouin, whom he regarded as "immensely superior to the [Arab] peasantry in politeness and quietness," should be seen as reflecting personal bias, this observation on their relative power is in line with the Ottoman documents and other accounts from the period.³⁶

A second policy which caused changes to the nomadic environment and landscape was the private acquisition of large swathes of state land by Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1909) and absentee landowners (*effendis*) from Palestine and elsewhere in the Middle East. During the privatization process they brought tenants to cultivate their newly acquired lands. This was a result of the Ottoman Land Code of 1858 which defined landholdings and categories precisely, abolished the system of tax farming, and consolidated and retrieved the state's rights to state land. After the law was issued almost all the land in Palestine, apart from private property in the towns, was defined as state land of different categories.³⁷

The sultan accumulated some 832,222 metric dunams (1 dunam=1000 square meters³⁸), or around 3 percent of the total area of what later became Mandatory Palestine, as privately owned land.³⁹ Much of this land was viewed as of marginal economic value, and tended to be inhabited

by Bedouin tribes. This was true around Baysan, the Sharon plain, Jericho and on the borders of the Negev.⁴⁰ He enacted a policy of settling non-Bedouin on some of the private lands he acquired, such as at Farwana in the Baysan valley, Caeseria (founded 1878) on the coast, and at Kaufakha and Muharraqa on the borders of the Negev. His policy began a trend, which continued after his abdication, of converting desert and deserted lands to new agricultural uses. His lands reverted to the Ottoman state after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.⁴¹

An example of the long term effects on the environment which began in the Ottoman period is what befell the Kabara swamp, in the Sharon plain. It was part of a private sultanic estate where a local Bedouin tribe known as the Ghawarina ('people of the lower area/valley') lived in non-permanent dwellings among the reeds. Some related that they came to Palestine as slaves from Egypt in the nineteenth century.⁴² The environment of the reeds they found in Palestine was similar to the one that had existed in the Nile valley, and they would have been used to the malaria then prevalent in the swamp. A neighbouring tribe was called 'Arab Nufayt and was described in 1880 as "Nefeiya [sic] or club-bearing Arabs who roam in the marshes and oak woods."⁴³ All of the people in this area were nomadic or semi-nomadic, some of whom raised buffaloes. One report from 1925 gave the population of Ghawarina as 79 families and of the Kabara swamp as 13 families who "lived in tent encampments."⁴⁴

In 1914 the Jewish Colonization Association (J.C.A), was granted a concession by the Ottoman government of over 25,510 dunams of Kabara swamp land. One of the main targets was to dry and develop the swamps, which accounted for 6,000 dunams. The actual draining of the swamp was completed only in the 1920s, after the Mandate authorities recognized the Ottoman concession. Prior to the Mandate the J.C.A. also bought about 3,000 dunams, which were later provided to the local Bedouin, who lived on this land and constructed the new village of Jisr al-Zarqa ('Bridge over the Zarqa'), which exists today.⁴⁵

Arab effendis and, subsequently, other Jewish organizations were also active in purchasing lands that Bedouin used, leading to environmental changes, such as increased cultivation, the foundation of new settlements, and changes in the Bedouin's lifestyle. This was true in the Baysan valley where the Abdul Hadi family from Jenin acquired several tracts in Ashrafiya and Tell Shauk, and also in the northern part of the Ghor al Faria which abuts the Jordan valley.⁴⁶ In the area of Wadi Hawarith in the Sharon between 1869 and 1894, Antuan Bishara al-Tayan, a

Lebanese Maronite, purchased 30,826 dunams of lands where the small Hawarith Bedouin tribe lived along the Wadi Hawarith.⁴⁷ In 1929 these lands were sold to the Jewish National Fund. The Sursuk family of Lebanon purchased much of the Jezreel valley, including lands occupied by Bedouin tribes there.⁴⁸ Environmental change, resulting from these purchases and the consequent introduction of modern agriculture and increased cultivation of the land, is revealed in the British Palestine Royal Commission's 'Cultivation Zones' map of 1937, which shows the plains and valleys, which had previously not been generally cultivated, to have reached a level of cultivation equal to that of the hill country.⁴⁹

Long term environmental effects were also inaugurated in the Huleh valley, a major wetland, among the Ghawarina tribe (the tribe, although different, had the same name as the one in the Kabara swamps). The history of the Huleh valley, the draining of the wetland and the major environmental changes that took place there, as well as its place in the historical ethos of the Zionist movement, have been thoroughly documented by others, such as Itzhak Zifrin and most recently Sandra Sufian.⁵⁰ These developments were part of the much larger environmental changes which saw the draining of swamps across Palestine during the Mandate.⁵¹ The resulting concentration of the Ghawarina in fourteen or more villages, and the change wrought on their lifestyle, has only been briefly touched upon by researchers, Yehuda Karmon foremost among them.⁵² We have attempted to bring together the relevant sources to sketch a picture of the changes in patterns of settlement by this tribe.

Although the Ghawarina were considered a tribe, they were in fact a mixture of individuals belonging to different ethnic groups, and had a "high degree of sedenterization."⁵³ Many of them had had arrived in the 1830s when they came as immigrants, deserters or slaves connected to the decade-long Egyptian occupation of the country.⁵⁴ The Huleh Ghawarina, who altogether numbered around 3,000 individuals in 1906 (part swamp dwellers and part not), engaged in very limited draining of the swamp and in slashing and burning of its papyrus reeds. They lived in tents made of "bamboo poles, and in winter of cloth woven from goat hair."⁵⁵

The result of the government concessions which were given to Arab effendis and Jews from 1877, and which called on them to drain the swamp, was that 1,500 of the Ghawarina were given 15,000 dunams of the 52,000 dunam swamp to live on.⁵⁶ The final long term result, by the end of the British Mandate, was that the tribe settled permanently in 14 villages and built houses of

stone and metal in the much altered, drier landscape which became festooned with roads and small villages. One of these villages was named Zawiya. It was carved out of the center of the swamp between the Jordan and a stream named Zawiya in an area the PEF had described as “a dense mass of reeds...quite impenetrable, except for a short distance then only by Arabs and buffaloes.”⁵⁷ In 1931 the Mandatory census takers found 141 houses and 590 residents. By 1945 there were an estimated 760 people in the village.⁵⁸ Aerial photos show the desiccated surroundings and the simple, newly constructed homes.⁵⁹

The last forty years of Ottoman rule witnessed a revolution in state and bureaucratic power, combined with the extension of new technologies like the railroad, which were revolutionary changes and had an immediate and long term effect on the Bedouin. The partial retreat of the Bedouin, which paralleled these processes of settlement, was also connected with the changes in the Ottoman regime beginning in the nineteenth century.⁶⁰ The extension of new laws, such as the 1858 Land Law, and the personal involvement of the Sultan in settling outsiders in the midst of the Bedouin were important changes in Ottoman policy that affected the environment of Palestine.

Changes in the Rural Environment among the Bedouin of Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period

The Bedouin themselves played little role in the major environmental changes that were set in place by new policies; they continued to interact with the landscape and their neighbors as before. For them a new life in permanent villages circumscribed by lands they did not own was not one which offered promise, power or profit. In the Huleh, Sharon, and Baysan valley, they were witnesses to the purchase and transformation by outsiders of lands they occupied. Those who acquired these lands sought to develop them as an investment, or settled upon them, or received concessions to transform the environment. They viewed the Bedouin as a nuisance, as a group whose lifestyle had to be curtailed or changed in order for the landscape to suit their new endeavors. (Figure 1: Stages of development of Palestine Landscape 1800-1914).

In some cases the Bedouin did build new settlements. The initial impact of new Bedouin settlement on the landscape was modest. Despite being minimal the new settlements constructed or inhabited by Bedouin tribes represent a change in the rural environment's map of human

settlement. Eight Bedouin villages and hamlets founded after 1870 were recorded in the Mandate's 1922 census, conducted soon after the Ottomans lost Palestine. The same census noted 77 "tribal areas", defined as areas where tribal members and nomadism were dominant. Only three of the eight new Bedouin villages (Umm Ajra, Ghazzawiya and Shuna) built in the late Ottoman period were constructed on lands belonging to the Sultan in Baysan and the Galilee. Shuna was not actually a Bedouin village but what the PEF called "a modern Arab building of basaltic stone, used probably as a barn, as the name implies."⁶¹ The Arab al Sayyad and Qudayrat pitched their tents near the building and used it for storage and protection⁶², which was a common Bedouin practice and one found at other locations, such as at Qulat (castle) Jiddin. The Mandate census takers of 1922 found a total of 83 residents at Shuna, whom they assumed were permanently living there.

Sedentary members of Bedouin tribes in the Baysan valley also lived on land previously owned by the Sultan. These included members of the extensive Ghazzawiya tribe and Khuneizer, Safa and Umm Ajra sub-tribes of the Sakr. The only other tribe that was found to be sedentary in the 1922 census was the Baniha tribe living at Mansi in the Jezreel valley. They re-inhabited the ruined village of Mansi, bordering the huge Lebanese Sursuq family landholdings in the Jezreel valley. A few years later the Nagnaghiya settled a few kilometers distant at Tell al Aghbariya. (Figure 2: Map of Distribution of Newly established Bedouin villages in the Late Ottoman period).

The census takers also found a Bedouin village at al-Nabi (the prophet) Rubin as well. Nabi Rubin, one of the great shrines of Palestine, was built in the dunes around the river Rubin. It became the focus of a huge annual pilgrimage and was frequented by the Arab Sutariyeh (Suteriyeh) tribe.⁶³ In 1922 the Mandate authorities recorded 120 residents at the site, members of a tribe they mistakenly called "Nabi Rubin," and 400 members of a tribe called "Sutariyeh".⁶⁴ In the 1870s the PEF had also found two Bedouin tribes, the formerly mentioned Sutariyeh and a second which they labelled "Tiuriyeh". The tribes at Nabi Rubin continued a largely semi-nomadic way of life through the end of the Mandate.

We know, unfortunately, very little about what the Bedouin themselves thought about the changes going on around them in the Ottoman period. Several Bedouin poems written down over the years refer to views of the government and foreigners. The Ottomans "had the reputation of

being severe; government by bayonet (*hukm be-sanja*) is still a common phrase to describe the period.”⁶⁵ One poem recited in the 1970s presents a typical view of what the Bedouin viewed as intrusion in their landscape by government and others. They hoped that the intrusions would be temporary, speaking of “the Lord who lets strangers go back to their land, like the waves he lets roll to and fro.”⁶⁶

From scholarly research, period maps, censuses and Ottoman, Jewish and European sources we know that the cultural map of Palestine underwent major changes. German Christians, Arabs and Jews established 140 new rural settlements in the period 1880-1922.⁶⁷ Many of these new settlements bordered on or were in the midst of regions used as grazing areas or inhabited by the Bedouin tribes. The few Bedouin settlements were thus part of a larger pattern of the expansion of the total population of Palestine from the small core area to peripheral regions.⁶⁸

The Mandate Bureaucracy and the Bedouin

In this section we examine the British colonial view of the nomadic Bedouin and the way the Mandate bureaucracy and laws favored settled groups above pastoral nomads. We illustrate that the resulting Bedouin sedentarization had a limited effect on the rural landscape, but one which should be acknowledged.

The British came to Palestine with cultural preconceptions which should have prejudiced them *in favor* of the Bedouin. Numerous British subjects, some writing for the PEF, such as William Jenning-Bramley, had become familiar with the Bedouin.⁶⁹ There is a difference between the quality of material provided on the Bedouin by British travelers, and more serious scholars, such as those who actively engaged in research and surveying. Claude R. Conder and to a lesser extent Bramley fit into the latter category. Conder captured the feelings of many when he wrote in the 1890s that “the Bedawin [sic] are immensely superior to the [Arab] peasantry in politeness and quietness...life in the country of the [nomadic] Arab is really nearer civilization, than that among the villagers, and nothing is a greater error than to speak of the Bedawin as savages.”⁷⁰ But the romance and judgments of the nineteenth-century British, evoked by men like Lawrence of Arabia, gave way to the experience of the twentieth century colonial officers, who viewed the Bedouin more as ‘wild’ and less as “superior...nearer civilization.”

The Mandate's policy regarding the Bedouin tribes of Palestine was often of an ad-hoc nature. Various scholars have tended to ignore this in debates about the overall implications of Mandatory policies for maintaining the rights of Arabs and others.⁷¹ Most of the recent studies that have examined individual cases of the Mandate's dealings with local issues have either argued that the solution to one problem represented the policy in general, or have been unable to explain what the Mandate's policy was.

Roza I.M. El-Eini's 2006 study of the Mandate's policy and the landscape in Palestine concluded that "the British exhibited strong attitudes about their imagined 'ideal' for Palestine, as shown in their town and rural, agriculture, forestry, land and partition plans...British imperial rule had a profound impact on Palestine's landscape."⁷² Palestine became "marked by icons of British rule" such as ports and military bases, railways and agricultural stations. El-Eini views the regime's impact on the Bedouin as "more often psychological than actual during the Mandate when considered against the Forests Department's limited strength and the Land Courts' sympathy for the Bedouins."⁷³

The Mandate authorities found it difficult to fit the Bedouin into their system of governance. A relatively simple administrative function, such as taking a census of the Bedouin population, posed widespread problems to the authorities. The 1922 and 1931 censuses used different methods to enumerate the Bedouin, and both were forced to estimate the nomadic population of the Negev due to fact that the Bedouin refused to cooperate with the census takers.⁷⁴

This was partly a result of the administrative division of the country. At the highest level were the three districts: northern, central (Jerusalem) and southern; and below them the 18 sub-districts. Each sub-district was divided into village units and municipalities with mutually exclusive boundaries as per the Palestine Order-in-Council of 1922.⁷⁵ The Bedouin tribes did not fare well under this system. In 1933 the District Officer of Tiberias wrote that "I agree that Talhum (Capernaum) should be scheduled as the village entity. But, I believe that for administrative purposes 'Arab es Samakiya [a Bedouin tribe] should also be scheduled as a Tribe because these Arabs are tent dwellers and they may not be always residing in the lands of Talhum."⁷⁶ The Commissioner of Lands was under the impression that Arab es Samakiya were the "cultivators or owners" (he did not know which), of Talhum.⁷⁷ In some cases however the village unit was named after the tribe, as at Manara, where the authorities noted in 1933 that

“those who populate this area are a mixture of Arabs from different tribes. They are sometimes called Arab El Manara. They do not own the land.”⁷⁸

In another letter from 1934, the Commissioner of Lands informed the Chief Secretary that there were eight apparently nomadic Bedouin tribes in the Tiberias Sub-district, all of which were described as cultivating the lands of other owners, such as in Ghweir Abu Shusha, Mughar and Nuqeib (which was founded by a formerly nomadic Bedouin tribe in the late 19th century).⁷⁹

There was a clear Mandatory discrimination against the nomadic Bedouin. Thus the Arab Hanadi who lived in the area of the un-populated village unit called “Dalhamiya” were said to be only the “cultivators” of the Dalhamiya effendi, since “the village of Dalhamiya has disappeared and Jewish colonies have taken its place.” The authorities did not recognize the Hanadi as having any rights to ownership in the land at Dalhamiya.

The discrimination against the Bedouin was inherent in the system, and did not necessarily come from capriciousness by the local officials. The Assistant District Commissioner of Nablus wrote in 1941 that “my proposals on the constitution of villages [official list of villages] have always been based on the existing social and administrative conditions in each case.”⁸⁰ He discriminated in favor of the larger villages, at the expense of the Bedouin and hamlets, due to the “various difficulties and intrigues” inherent in recognizing them as separate village entities with the right to elect their own mukhtars (village headmen).⁸¹

In the end the local authorities, settlement offices, district officers and others, were confounded by their own regime’s intentions. In 1933 the Commissioner of Lands sent out a long memo to his district officers noting that “in the course of the fiscal survey which is being carried out in the country to replace the [Ottoman] tithes [system] with a rural property tax, it has been ascertained that the list of villages...is neither correct nor comprehensible.” He listed the problems:

“villages must be treated as territorial units of a sub-district and so must tribes... The Arab Turkman [sic] tribe may be a roving tribe without any land, or a tribe who have a definite area of the country which may belong to them. In the former case they are of no interest for land tax purposes but in the latter case they will have to be indicated topographically.”

He also gave the example of the Arab Masaid, a tribe which he said should have its own administrative area inside the Ghor al Faria, an area which might include some of the extensive state lands in the Ghor. He also noted that,

“while land in each sub-district must [underline in original] be included in the fiscal survey...it would of course not follow that because a parcel of land, such as sand dunes, is shown within a particular ‘village’ boundary that the sand dunes are necessarily in the ownership of the village.”⁸²

While this correspondence deals mostly with concepts of ownership, rather than environment and landscape, the latter was influenced by the Mandatory government’s inability to find good solutions to fit the Bedouin within their bureaucratic framework. Finding itself unable to place the nomads in a fiscal or administrative system, the result was that the Bedouin also came to be seen as a general nuisance in the landscape, a group that operated outside the bureaucracy and should be coerced back into it. The Bedouin lost out in this system because they did not fit the regime’s neatly scripted view of how the landscape should be organized, with villages as the primary point of taxation and administration.

As with the Ottomans, the Mandate reverted to coercion. Regulations such as the Bedouin Control Ordinance of 1942 were intended to provide “the administration with special powers of control of nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes with the object of persuading them towards a more settled way of life.”⁸³ The sweeping powers of the Ordinance allowed the District Commissioner to direct those deemed nomadic “to go to, or not go to, or to remain in any specified area.”⁸⁴ The primary reasons for the ordinance were security, prevention of Bedouin raiding, control of “illicit grazing,” and eviction of Bedouin from lands they did not own.⁸⁵

The Mandate’s dealings with the Bedouin had two aspects. On the one hand there was confusion, which militated in the Bedouin’s favor, allowing them to maintain their lifestyle. But confusion also led to disputes, court cases and the enactment of ordinances targeting the Bedouin as a nuisance for maintaining a nomadic way of life.

The two aspects are best revealed in the differing policies in the Baysan valley and the Negev.⁸⁶ The Baysan sub-district, 40% of whose population consisted of Bedouin and much of whose lowlands had been previously owned by the Sultan, attracted the attention of Palestine’s first

High Commissioner, Herbert Samuel. The result of his investigation was the Mandatory government's Ghor-Mudawarra Land Agreement (GMLA).⁸⁷ This agreement, signed in November 1921 between the government and Bedouin tribes in the region, saw 179,545 dunams earmarked for transfer to Bedouin in three tribal areas.⁸⁸ However, the long term consequences were not what the government originally intended. It took years to process the individual land transfers, and many of those who received land subsequently sold it to Arab effendis or Jewish organizations such as the Jewish National Fund.⁸⁹ The Bedouin became tenants, or became nomadic once again and migrated to new locales in the area. As a result there was an environmental impact on the rural landscape; the Bedouin built several small villages and the agreement, intended to provide the Bedouin with land, resulted in the mass transfer of much of the valley's land to outsiders who began ambitious cultivation and settlement projects.

By contrast, in the Negev events transpired very differently. The Beersheba sub-district was unique in Palestine. Many Mandatory ordinances and policies were not extended to it, including land settlement, which would have included the survey of individual parcels and demarcation of state lands.⁹⁰ The district's main population was composed of nomadic Bedouin tribes. Several poems collected over the years and published by Bailey reveal that the Negev Bedouin complained bitterly at British taxation and Zionist land purchases. One notes that the government "wall surrounds all the land we've been [on]. Already they're taxing our land everywhere, even figs, watermelon."⁹¹ Another reveals "a poet's anger over the sale of Bedouin land for Jewish settlement."⁹²

Mandate policy was always of an ad-hoc nature here. An official's letter dated 25 November 1944 complained that "the tribal units in Beersheba sub-district as at present defined are difficult to adapt to the framework of the Village Administration Ordinance."⁹³ An unsigned 26 August 1946 report by the District Commissioner for Beersheba noted for the Jabarat tribe, "all the subdivisions of this tribe are confusing and unnecessary."

Because of this confusion, the Mandatory officials never carried out an accurate census of the Bedouin tribes of the Negev, and for the most part left them to their own devices. The sub-district was therefore unique in the lack of Bedouin sedentarization. While there is evidence that several sub-tribes, such as the Wheidi (Wuhaidat Tarabin) became sedenterized in the period, for the most part the Negev Bedouin did not.⁹⁴ A few Negev Bedouin also settled in the new towns

of Beersheba and Auja al-Hafir, and in Asluj, Khalasa, Imara, in the latter cases mostly as associates of the police posts at those places.

In the Beersheba district the result of Mandatory policy and the lack of demographic pressures was that the Bedouin role in the landscape remained largely unchanged. In the Baysan region the opposite occurred, as the role of outsiders, such as the Sultan, the government, Arab effendis and Jewish land purchasers resulted in large scale environmental changes.⁹⁵ Mandatory policy reflected both its own organic decisions and outside pressures that forced it to act. In Baysan the policy was robust and it was coupled with outside pressures. By contrast in the Negev it was the opposite; there were few outsiders and the policy was one of abandonment of the area.

New Bedouin villages founded 1931-1945

In other sub-districts the results were different than those in Beersheba and Baysan. Due to demographic pressures and government policy, the Bedouin created numerous new settlements. In the Gaza sub-district the only permanent Bedouin settlement was the Arab Sukreir which lived in two large multi-family houses near a wadi and well that shared the name of the tribe. Around Ramla in central Palestine three Bedouin tribes settled at Bir Salim (Arab Abu Zeid), Mikhazin (al Wuhaydat) and Abu al Fadl (Sutariyeh). The most pronounced of these settlements was Abu al Fadl near a road that led from the giant British military base at Sarafand to Ramla. Most of their settlement took place between 1929 and 1942.

In the area stretching northwest of Jericho three settlements (Auja, Duyuk and Nueima) were established by Bedouin at springs. In the Jaffa sub-district four tribes (Abu Kishk, Jammassin (buffalo raisers), Muwaylih/Malaha, Sawalima) built settlements. All of them were settled along the Nahr Auja (Yarkon).

One major tribe, the Hawarith, lived in the Tulkarm sub-district (See above). Rashid Khalidi relates that two ruins in this sub-district were also inhabited by Bedouin.⁹⁶ At Kh. Majdal he claims that a ruin “attracted the Bedouin” and at Zadabida he notes that “the Bedouin tribe of al-Nusayrat were the ones who first founded the village.”⁹⁷ Neither of these assertions was borne out by our research. At least part of the Nusayrat tribe in the Census of 1931 was listed as living in Kefar Zibad, an Arab village in the foothills of the Tulkarm sub-district that had around 1,500 people in 1945.⁹⁸ Kh. Zababida, according to the Mandate maps revised in 1943, does not appear

to have had sedentary Bedouin living in it and is listed as having no population in the Mandate's Censuses and *Village Statistics*. Kh. Majdal, a more interesting case, was a large ruin next to a sheikh's tomb. Tombs were frequently places of Bedouin sedenterization, however it too appears deserted on the Mandate maps and has no population on the *Village Statistics*.

In the Nablus sub-district only the Ghor al Faria, a former land holding of the Sultan, attracted Bedouin sedentarization. In the Haifa sub-district three tribes settled in the Jezreel valley (Baniha/Mansi, Naghnaghiya and Abu Zureik), while in the area around Ceaseria, the Arab Fuqara, Zahrat Dumayri, Nufayt (Nufiat) and other nomads living at Barrat (dunes) Qisarya were listed by the Mandate as having established settlements. In the area around Mount Tabor, in the Nazareth sub-district, the Shibli tribe constructed a few houses in the period and the Mandate moved Bedouin to Umm al Ghanem.⁹⁹ In the Acre sub-district a number of ruins (Kh. Suwwana, Kh. Jiddin, Kh. Iriddin, Kammana) in the upper Galilee were inhabited by six small Bedouin tribes.

In the Tiberias sub-district, besides the previously mentioned Bedouin village of Manara, the Bedouin tribes Samakiya, Mawasi and Wuhayb settled two dispersed villages near the Sea of Galilee. Just northeast of them the Arab Esh Shamalina/Abu Zeina also settled on the Sea of Galilee as well. North of them, on the bluffs overlooking the Jordan a large number of Bedouin settled several sites in villages called Tuba, Zanghariya, Kirad al Ghanama, Kirad al Baqqara, Jubb Yosef and Husseinia.

In the Huleh valley, previously mentioned, the Ghawarina constructed a number of villages in the swamps. At the Mallaha springs the Arab Zubayd was one of these swamp dwelling tribes who built a small village in the area, which can clearly be seen in period photographs, with traditional thatched reed huts side by side with modern homes constructed of sheet metal and stone or mud-bricks. (Figure 3: Aerial Photo of Mallaha, 1948).

The Mandate transferred or attempted to relocate several tribes, such as the Hawarith Bedouin of the Plain of Sharon (563 of whom were moved to the Baysan valley), the Arab Subiah (to Kafr Misr), Mount Carmel's Suwaitat, and the Arab Saayidah of Qira wa Qamun (to Umm al Ghanem).¹⁰⁰ These efforts, usually framed as helping "landless Arabs" resulted in the creation of several new Bedouin villages as well.

Bedouin villages tended to be constructed of poor local materials and the settlements resembled the way in which they normally pitched their tents, in a dispersed manner, with areas for animals and extended families to live close to one another. Construction materials used by the poorer families reflected their surroundings: in the Huleh usually reeds, but in other places stone taken from ancient ruins, or the ruins themselves, were used.

The estimated population of the new Bedouin villages in 1945 was 27,844, living in more than 2,000 dwellings, mostly in central and northern Palestine. This represented only a limited contribution, around 2.8% of the total population.¹⁰¹ However, the concentration of the Bedouin into villages was a fundamental change on the use of the rural landscape, which went from being dominated by Bedouin, their grazing habits and nomadic culture, and which included raids and migration, to a landscape with intensive agriculture, controls on grazing and a “fluid inventory” of land.¹⁰² The constriction of the Bedouin was part of an intermediate stage in the passage of land ownership, especially in the plains and valleys where the Bedouin lived, into the hands of Jewish organizations.

The extent of the land owned by these Bedouin at any one time is not clear from the sources. It is also not clear to what degree the concentration of the Bedouin in settled villages resulted in a decrease in grazing and an increase in cultivation. There was an intensification of agriculture and an introduction of new crops and technology during the Mandate.¹⁰³ Areas formerly dominated by Bedouin were sold to Arab effendis and Jewish cooperatives. However, the total number of goats and sheep grazing on the land does not seem to have substantially changed from 1926 to 1943, the first and last year the Mandatory government counted them.¹⁰⁴ The Mandate wanted to change grazing practices, “from extensive to intensive” but enumerations “were inaccurate” and “illegal grazing continued to be widely practiced.”¹⁰⁵ The exact degree to which traditional Bedouin activities, such as pasturing animals, was altered is not clear, but it is obvious that Bedouin ceased, for all intents and purposes, to play a major role in the rural areas, and their ability to migrate from place to place and graze their animals as they pleased was significantly curtailed. (Figure 4: Map of newly established Bedouin Villages, 1945).

Conclusions

Up until the last quarter of the 19th century the Bedouin controlled and influenced a large portion of Palestine. They were particularly powerful in the coastal plain, the Negev desert, the Rift valley and other low lying areas where they dominated the rural landscape and were able to influence both state policies and the presence of outside groups. However, changes in the Ottoman land law, the penetration of the country by outside groups, modernization of agriculture, the use of the Ottoman and Mandatory states' policing powers, and the extension of new technologies curtailed greatly the presence and influence of the Bedouin.

Transformations of the environment by humans, brought about especially by the introduction of new technologies, led to the destruction of forests. At the same time, Christian and Jewish settlers from Europe brought with them changes to the cultural landscapes of the plains and valleys, and established growing cities.¹⁰⁶ Increasing security brought with it a radical change in rural Arab settlement patterns in the period.¹⁰⁷ Alongside this was the creation of sixty villages by Bedouin in Late Ottoman and Mandate Palestine. The Bedouin villages were founded predominantly in places that became part of Israel in 1948. The reason for this is that Jewish land purchases and Bedouin settlement took place during the same period and in the same low lying areas, which formed part of the "fluid inventory" of land.¹⁰⁸ Jewish Zionist purchasing organizations, in general, purchased lands in the low country of Palestine where Arab settlement, in the form of nucleated villages, was relatively sparse but where the Bedouin were predominant.

The Bedouin settlement took place amidst demographic pressures, technological changes, administrative coercion and loss of the ability to practice a traditional nomadic lifestyle on lands that they did not legally own. In some cases this process was slower, such as in the Negev, or faster, such as in Baysan, where the government allocated lands to the Bedouin, but in all parts of Palestine the process was generally unidirectional. The Bedouin practice of seasonal movements with their animals was brought to a virtual halt in all areas outside the Negev, and even there it was extremely curtailed. Bedouin raiding and tribal conflicts involving battles, common among some tribes in the 19th century, ended completely during the British Mandate. For instance, the last Bedouin *ghazzu* (raids) were recorded in the 1920s.¹⁰⁹

The Bedouin contributed to change by founding villages and actively competing for land. The British saw the nomads as a problem in their administrative framework, even as some officials worked with the best intentions to defend Bedouin land claims. Therefore, the Bedouin role in the cultural landscape and environment was thus irreversibly changed in the years under consideration and their importance in that landscape mostly ignored. However, the foundation of new villages by the Bedouin left a permanent mark in places and continues to be an unrecognized part of the fabric of Palestine's modern history.

List of Figures:

Figure 1: Stages of development of Palestine Landscape 1800-1914.

Source: Ruth Kark, 'The Introduction of Modern Technology into the Holy Land (1800-1914)', in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, ed. Thomas E. Levy, London: Leicester, 1998, pp. 525-540.

Figure 2: Map of distribution of newly established Bedouin villages in the late Ottoman period.

Source: Seth J. Frantzman, PhD thesis, Hebrew University, submitted 2010.

Figure 3: Aerial Photo of Mallaha, 1948.

Source: Mount Scopus aerial photo archive, PS8 5024, 2 January, 1945.

Figure 4: Map of newly established Bedouin Villages, 1945.

Source: Seth J. Frantzman, PhD thesis, Hebrew University, submitted 2010.

Notes:

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- ⁶⁶ Bailey, *Bedouin Poetry*, 236, recited by Awda Ijmea al Ajrab of the Muzena tribe of Sinai in 1972.
- ⁶⁷ For recent examination of the new Arab villages, see Seth J. Frantzman, 'The Arab Settlement of Late Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine: New Village Formation and Settlement Fixation', 1871-1948, PhD dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, approved December 2010.

- ⁶⁸ Kark, 'Landownership'.
- ⁶⁹ William Jennings-Bramley, 'The Bedouin of the Sinaitic Peninsula', PEFQst. (1906), 106 and (1907), 281; Charles Warren, "Notes on Arabia Petraea and the Country Lying between Egypt and Palestine," PEFQ (1887), 44.
- ⁷⁰ Claude Conder, *Tent Work in Palestine*, London: A. P Watt, 1895, 216.
- ⁷¹ For an excellent account of its administrative production see Roza I.M el Eini, *Mandated Landscape: British Imperial Rule in Palestine, 1929–1948*, London: Routledge, 2006; Ghazi Falah, *The role of the British Administration in the sedenterization of the Bedouin Tribes in Northern Palestine: 1918-1948*, Occasional Papers Series no. 17 (1983), Durham: University of Durham, 1983, 45; Martin Bunton, 'Demarcating the British Colonial State: Land Settlement in the Palestinian *Jiftlik*, Villages of Sajad and Qazaza,' in Owen (ed.), *New Perspectives*, 121-160; Martin Bunton, 'Progressive Civilizations and Deep Rooted Traditions: Land Laws, Development and British Rule in Palestine in the 1920s', in Gregory Blue, Martin Bunton and Ralph Crozier (eds.), *Colonialism and the Modern World*, New York: M.E Sharpe, 2002, 145-166; Forman and Kedar, 'Colonialism, Colonization, and Land Law'.
- ⁷² El-Eini, *Mandated Landscape*, 448, 454.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 226.
- ⁷⁴ Barron, *Census*; E. Mills, *Census of Palestine 1931*, Jerusalem: Government of Palestine, 1931, Sub-District Ramla.
- ⁷⁵ Chief Secretary, 19 September 1936, ISA RG22/3547/M28.
- ⁷⁶ District Officer to ADC, 14 December 1933, Tiberias Constitution of Villages, ISA RG22/3547/M28.
- ⁷⁷ Commissioner of Lands, 18 April 1933, Tiberias Constitution of Villages, ISA RG22/3547/M28.
- ⁷⁸ District Commissioner, 14 April 1933, Tiberias Constitution of Villages, ISA RG22/3547/M28.
- ⁷⁹ 23 October 1934, Chief Secretary, Tiberias Constitution of Villages, ISA RG22/3547/M28.
- ⁸⁰ ADC to Director of Land Settlement, 15 April, 1941, ISA RG22/3547/LS28(11).
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁸² Commissioner of Lands, 17 March 1933, Tiberias Constitution of Villages, ISA RG22/3547/M28.
- ⁸³ Falah, *Role*, p. 38; Galilee District Commissioner to Jerusalem District Commissioner, 17 August, 1945.
- ⁸⁴ Bedouin Control Ordinance, 1942, No. 18 of 1942, Government of Palestine.
- ⁸⁵ Chief Secretary, 7 February, 1947, ISA RG2/ Y58/42.
- ⁸⁶ 'Ruth Kark and Seth Frantzman, 'Bedouin, Abdul Hamid II, British Land settlement and Zionism: The Baysan valley and sub-district 1831 -1948' in *Israel Studies* 15, no. 2 (Summer 2010), 49-79; Ruth Kark and Seth Frantzman, 'The Negev: Land, settlement, the Bedouin and Ottoman and British policy 1871-1948' submitted to *British Journal of Middle East Studies*.
- ⁸⁷ Gavish, *A Survey*, 119; Kenneth W. Stein, *The Land Question in Palestine, 1917-1939*, Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1984, 14, 61–4.
- ⁸⁸ "Land Settlement in 1932," *Palestine Post*, annual report by A. Abramson, Commissioner of Lands, 20 April 1933, ISA, 223599/5.
- ⁸⁹ Kark and Frantzman, 'Bedouin', 79; Avneri, *The Claim of Dispossession*, 167–8.
- ⁹⁰ 6/9/ 1934, ISA RG23 /3559/7M.
- ⁹¹ Bailey, *Bedouin Poetry*, 359.
- ⁹² Bailey, *Bedouin Poetry*, 400.
- ⁹³ 25/11/1944, ISA RG23/3559/7M.
- ⁹⁴ Fayezi Dariwsh Wheidi on behalf of the Wheidi tribe, Beersheba v. Assistant District Commissioner, District Commissioner, Attorney General, High Court no. 50 of 1944, *Palestine Law Reports*, vol. 11, Jerusalem: Government Printers, 1944, p. 198..
- ⁹⁵ Kark and Frantzman, 'Bedouin', 79.
- ⁹⁶ Khalidi, *All*; Khalidi writes that "It was established on an archeological site that contained the remains of the crusader village of Megedallum...next to the well lay the tomb of a Shaykh Abdullah, whom the villagers revered", 556. The British 1:20,000 map from 1932 shows the tomb and a large building which the PEF had described as a "large ruin" Conder and Kitchener, *Memoirs*, pg. 202, Vol. II, map 11. There do not appear to have been any Bedouin settled at the site.
- ⁹⁷ Khalidi, *All*, 556, 566.
- ⁹⁸ *Census of Palestine 1931; Village Statistics 1945*.
- ⁹⁹ Mount Scopus aerial photo archive, PS8 5024, 2 January, 1945.
- ¹⁰⁰ Kark, 'Land Purchase'; Falah, *Role*, 24-35; Avneri, *The Claim of Dispossession*, 146; CZA S25/File 9835.
- ¹⁰¹ *Village Statistics 1945*. The total rural population was 950,000 in 1945.

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- ¹⁰² Kark, 'Changing', 357–384.
¹⁰³ El-Eini, *Mandated Landscape*, 177.
¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.
¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*
¹⁰⁶ Kark and Levin, 'Environment'.
¹⁰⁷ Frantzman, 'Arab settlement'.
¹⁰⁸ Kark, 'Changing', 357–384.