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Jordan: Towards the End of the Ottoman Empire 1841–1918

As far as the Ottoman Empire was concerned, the area of Trans-Jordan was a sort of a buffer zone between the settled area of Palestine and the desert areas of Arabia. Its special role emanated from the fact that, through it, passed the Syrian pilgrimage road (Darb al-Haj) which was traversed by pilgrims twice every year on their way to and from Mecca and Medina.

When the Egyptian army withdrew from geographic Syria in 1841, the Ottoman government again began to establish its military and civil control. Due to the difficulties they encountered, they were obliged to do that gradually, giving first priority to large cities and to heavily populated areas. Trans-Jordan therefore remained for some years without a government to direct its affairs. As a result, public security was negligible and incursions of powerful Bedouin tribes increased. People in cultivated and desert areas resorted to forming alliances among themselves which offered a higher degree of security and facilitated self defence.

Administrative organisation

The northern area of Trans-Jordan (the district of Ajloun) was the first to come under Ottoman administration. In 1851 the government decided to form a *kaza* out of that area, to be part of the Nablus district (*Mutasserrifieh*). A governor was installed in the town of Irbid. One reason for the establishment of the *kaza* of Ajloun was the fact that Bedouin aggression had reached such proportions that the inhabitants of one locality implored the protection of the state with the plea that they would be obliged to abandon their villages if the government did not come to their help. Soon after, the *Wali* of Damascus led a military expedition which, with the co-operation of the villagers, attacked the offending tribe. So many Bedouin were killed that the waters of Wadi al Arab, it was said, became red with blood[1].

The second area to come under government authority was the central district (Belqa) in 1868. It was decreed that it should become a *kaza* under the governor of Nablus. The town of Salt became the seat of the governor.

The southern area, which included Kerak and Ma'an, was placed under Nablus in name only. It remained without effective government until the autumn of 1893, when it was constituted as a *liwa* (district) under the *Wilayet* of Syria (Damascus). The leaders of Kerak welcomed the *Mutasserrif* who was accompanied by a military force, and requested him to declare a general amnesty for all crimes committed in their district before that date. The *Mutasserrif* agreed and allocated to them monthly stipends on condition that they form a committee to help in securing stability. The district was enlarged to include Ma'an, Salt, Tafileh, Tebuk and Medain Saleh.

These administrative arrangements did not include Aqaba, which remained under Egyptian control till 1892. When the Egyptians withdrew, Aqaba was attached to Medina. This small village became a centre of considerable activity during the time when the Ottoman government was suppressing the revolt in Yemen and Assir.

It should be noted, however, that the boundaries of these districts were not permanent. Ajloun was first attached to Nablus and later (1861) to Hauran. Salt was attached to Nablus and later (1893) to Kerak.

The pilgrims' road

After the Arab conquest of geographic Syria, Moslem pilgrims began to use this route. In earlier days, the road had passed by Kerak along the historical course known as the Kings' Highway. But during the Ottoman period the route moved eastwards to the edge of the desert, leaving the deep *wadis* to the west. This road passed by places which are well known today, such as Dera'a, Mafraq, Zerka, Amman and Ma'an.

The Ottoman Sultans always showed concern for the welfare and security of the pilgrims, as an indication of their sovereignty and authority. To ensure this, they constructed a series of small forts along the road, with one or more cisterns near each, so that pilgrims might rest and replenish their supplies of water.

The pilgrim caravan usually proceeded as one compact unit under the direction of a high official. With the help of a military force, that official—Amir al Haj—was responsible

[1] G. S. Chumacher, *Northern Ajloun*, 1889. F. G. Peake, *History of Trans-Jordan and its Tribes* (in Arabic), Jerusalem, 1934.

for the welfare and security of pilgrims. A special budget of about 100,000 gold sovereigns, was allocated annually to cover the expenses of the pilgrimage. A large part of this amount, up to 60,000 sovereigns, would go as stipends to the Sheikhs of the tribes which controlled both sides of the road. A considerable sum was expended as rent for camels hired to carry the *Amir al Haj* and his attendants, both military and civilian.

As an agreed policy, the government would pay stipends to the tribal Sheikhs. This system was warranted by the fact that it had no other means of completely controlling those tribes. The Sheikhs for their part undertook to guarantee public security, protect the pilgrims and ensure as far as possible that the cisterns were filled with rain water. As an additional precaution, small garrisons were installed in some of the forts. On the whole, the Bedouin fulfilled their part of the arrangement, but sometimes it happened that the government failed to pay the usual stipends. The tribes would then react by attacking the pilgrims or preventing their passage. On one occasion the *Amir al-Haj* defaulted, and the tribes responded by blocking the way and preventing the passage of pilgrims. The *Amir al-Haj* had no alternative but to pay the stipends for the two years.

Internal relations

Between 1841–1918 the population was broadly composed of two categories: the villagers who tilled land and raised cattle, and the nomads (Bedouin) who lived in tents, raised camels and frequently changed their place of residence. This division, however should not be applied too rigidly, because there were semi-nomadic tribes and semi-sedentary people. In the *kaza* of Kerak there were only three villages in 1893, and many of the inhabitants working as farmers were living in tents. In contrast, a considerable number of bedouin were not roaming nomads, but moved about with their tents within a certain area and made their living by raising camels and cattle and by farming the land.

The nature of social and economic life in the country inevitably led to antagonism between the Bedouin and villagers. Bedouin were in the first instance brought up as warriors, with the vast deserts as their domain, moving comparatively quickly on their camels nicknamed 'ships of the desert'. On the other hand villagers were essentially farmers, tied to permanent dwellings and land. They raised cattle which moved slowly and were inclined to keep peace in order to preserve their economy. They had little experience in fighting or mounting raids. The Bedouin were organised in tribes, each of which consisted of blood relatives and owed allegiance to one leader (the Sheikh). Thus a Bedouin tribe was similar to a military unit. In contrast, many of the villages consisted of farmers who were not necessarily relatives, who had their factions and who often did not always owe allegiance to one leader. Villagers were, on the whole, better off in matters of property and means of living. As a consequence, strong Bedouin tribes were tempted to raid farmers, in the same spirit as they raided each other. We must take into consideration that in those days tribes considered spoils taken in a raid as lawful and well deserved possessions. Acquiring such spoils was justified by established values and accepted traditions. It is related that the Bedouin leader, Audeh Abu Tayeh, considered such gains insignificant in comparison with the imposition of strong foreign powers on small nations and the consequent pillage of their wealth[2].

Villagers attempted to resist Bedouin raids, but without much success. The Bedouin would appear suddenly, seize the cattle herds of the villagers and drive them some distance into the desert before the villagers could muster their fighting men for pursuit. The Bedouin sometimes set their camels and horses to graze in corn fields as a sort of punishment to those villagers who refused to make terms with them. And what sort of terms? A portion of the grain, a certain amount of money and the right of entertainment. An example of the grasping Bedouin may be found in the habit of approaching a villager tilling his land and declaring to him: I am your partner in this land. The Bedouin would return later to the threshing floor demanding his share of the produce[3].

In the absence of a strong government able to curb Bedouin aggression, villagers were forced to accommodate Bedouin demands. In effect they paid a tax of grain, cattle or money. That tax was given a sugar coated name 'Khaweh', which is derived from the word 'brotherhood'. It was so because the Bedouin considered that that co-existence was of mutual benefit to both parties. Their view was that farmers needed the secuirty and peace which the Bedouins were able to offer. The Bedouin also considered that they had as much right to the land as the farmers. The tribe which obtained the 'Khaweh' from a village, took the responsibility of preventing other tribes from attacking that village and its property. In spite of all these arguments, the villagers considered the 'Khaweh' an unjustified imposition, affecting their sense of dignity and pride. Some villagers resented this tax of forced brotherhood so much that they moved to other areas, or contented themselves with farming a tract of land small enough only for their livelihood. Probably because of this uncertainty, villagers did not care to plant fruit trees which need continuing peaceful conditions.

This sort of uneasy relationship between farmers and Bedouin, existed in one way or another amongst the farmers themselves and also between the Bedouin. Tribes raided each other. The Adwan raided as far as Jerusalem and Jaffa in Palestine, while the Howeitat under Audeh Abu Tayeh raided as far as Hama and the Euphrates basin. An injured tribe bided its time to arm and equip its men and then raid the hostile tribe for revenge. In such warfare, small tribes found no alternative but to ally themselves to a strong tribe. Thus large and powerful alliances were formed. These alliances or federations bound Bedouin tribes as well as villagers together.

[2] Suleiman Mousa, *Portraits of Heroism* (in Arabic), Amman, 1968, p. 57.

[3] *Memoirs of Audeh Qussous* (in manuscript).

An example of this was the large federation of Belqa under the leadership of the Adwan tribe[4], and the federation of Kerak under the Majali family.

One must not, however, imagine that the Bedouin always had the upper hand in all regions and during the entire period in question. The Adwan tribe was the leading ally of the town of Salt and neighbouring villages. That alliance was to the advantage of both, and therefore no 'Khaweh' was extracted. Also the Bedouin could not penetrate the hilly areas of the north where the villagers were united and the rugged country was not suitable for raids. The Christian tribes of Madaba, who had strong family ties and were brought up with Bedouin traditions, defended themselves successfully against the powerful Beni Sakhr tribe. The same was true also of the Circassians who were themselves good warriors and therefore obliged the Bedouin to respect them.

Consideration should also be given to the fact that the Ottoman government endeavoured, by persuasion or threats, to curb Bedouin encroachments on the settled areas. Gradually villagers began to feel more confident. In the north, relations remained tense till 1921, when the villagers fought a battle with the Beni Sakhr and defeated them. It was the end of an epoch.

One must also mention the commercial relationship. The Bedouin sold animals and animal produce (butter, leben, wool, etc.) in the markets of villages and towns, and at the same time bought corn, barley, coffee, cloth, shoes and other commodities. Thus we should not overemphasise the effectiveness of *Khaweh* and Bedouin supremacy.

Relations between the inhabitants and the government

In general the Ottoman government failed to establish relations of mutual confidence with the inhabitants of its empire. That failure characterises the way it performed in Trans-Jordan and other Arab countries (of Asia) during four centuries. The ties of Islam offered a positive foundation, had the government endeavoured to build on them. But the government generally failed to carry out its responsibilities in the way of providing public security and public foundations such as schools, roads, clinics etc. The empire demanded that the inhabitants perform their duties towards it without performing its own duty towards them.

Mention has already been made of the concern of the Ottoman government for the security of pilgrims, and how it concluded agreements with tribal leaders neighbouring the *Haj* road. Those agreements fulfilled their purpose until the construction of the railway, when the officials concerned decided that they no longer needed the goodwill of the Bedouin. When the tribes learnt what was afoot, they protested and threatened to attack the line. In fact some attacks took place against a number of stations, with the Bedouin seizing weapons and ammunition and disappearing in the desert. The government realised then the necessity of continuing to pay the stipends.

The policy of the government towards the tribes was inconsistent. Sometimes, governors used force and hit hard, but at other times they used conciliatory methods and granted the leaders stipends and decorations. Changes of policy often depended on whether the government had sufficient troops to subdue this tribe or that. Governors sometimes resorted to deceit in order to arrest a Sheikh, throw him in prison and then haggle over his release. In certain cases they encouraged dissension among tribes, so that they fought each other and in consequence became more susceptible to government control. Whenever possible governors sought the help of a large tribe to subdue another dissenting tribe. After military garrisons were well established in the main towns (Irbid, Salt and Kerak), governors began to send out expeditions. Those expeditions surprised villages or encampments which were slack in paying taxes, arrested and imprisoned the men and succeeded in casting fear into the hearts of everyone. Thus it came about that a military force always accompanied tax collectors and census officials. This practice continued for some years after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.

Some governors did their best to win the loyalty of tribes so that they might help in establishing law and order in their areas. One of the Adwan Sheikhs was granted generous gifts when he sent the heads of two criminals to the governor of Nablus. But the evil methods of others destroyed the element of confidence between the two sides for many years to come. It happened once that a governor of Nablus invited a number of the Adwan Sheikhs to visit him. They accepted the invitation in good faith but were astonished when they were arrested on arrival and thrown into prison at Acre where they spent two years. Their leader's leg was broken in the scuffle.

Taxes were collected from villagers and Bedouin alike. There were frequent complaints that taxes were heavy and unwarranted given the poverty of the inhabitants. People paid taxes unwillingly because they were never convinced of the services rendered in return for them. One of the sorest complaints was the way in which taxes for agricultural produce were collected. This was undertaken by tax farmers who endeavoured to obtain as much as they could and were assisted by troops in carrying out their business. In consequence, farmers directed all their resentment against the government, the tax farmer and the troops, especially during years of drought.

Public security

The Ottoman government failed to establish in Trans-Jordan an adequate level of public security. Travelling on roads far from settled areas was full of danger, with the consequence that people travelled in armed groups. Foreign travellers toured the country under the protection of the Sheikhs of each district they visited. The Sheikh usually detailed one or more of his men to accompany and guide them. Sometimes governors detailed a soldier to do the job.

[4] This federation was virtually broken in Sept. 1923 when the Adwan and their allies attacked Amman, for political reasons, and were beaten back.

Governors worked within the structure of the existing social system. In both settled and desert regions society was composed of discreet units identified by the name of a tribe, a clan, or a family. Each unit contained its own administrative leadership. Members of each unit were guided by established values, traditions and habits. Those social units played a positive and important role in preserving public security, not only within their respective areas, but also with neighbouring tribes or sub-tribal units. Aggression against an individual meant aggression against the unit to which he belonged. Nevertheless people avoided travelling alone, or at night or unarmed. Of course anyone was free to take the risk, as Burkhardt did. Murder without a strong motive was very rare. But the possibility of resorting to arms was never far from a Bedouin's mind with the fear of suddenly meeting individuals from another hostile tribe. Consequently men were well armed, with each social unit prepared for the day when it might be called upon to defend itself.

Sheikhs assumed that they should receive a gift from foreign travellers who visited their part of the country. This arrangement was tacitly accepted by both sides. Sheikhs viewed such a 'present' as their lawful right in return for giving the traveller the protection and security he needed. Sheikhs were responsible for offering entertainment to guests including officials and strangers. Bearing this in mind we understand why the Majali Sheikhs did not permit the British traveller Gray Hill to pass through Kerak in 1887 until he had paid a certain amount of money. When Gray Hill said to Sheikh Saleh that he would complain to the British Consul in Jerusalem, Saleh replied that he did not care whether he complained to the Consul, to the Queen of England or to the Ottoman Sultan, because he alone was the king of Kerak[5]. When Captain Shakespeare travelled early in 1914 from Kuweit toward Trans-Jordan, he and his companions felt insecure until they reached the tents of Audeh Abu Tayeh. Audeh arranged for Shakespeare to proceed to Aqaba, but extracted a tax for protection and transport, considering it a lawful right.

In summing up it may be said that government measures to establish order were not always convincing. It never succeeded in persuading the inhabitants that its rule was to their benefit, or in winning their confidence. To the people it was a ruling structure imposed from above. There was no mutual understanding or trust. The government demanded obedience and loyalty, and protests were met with suppression. The general aim was to impress the inhabitants with the government's authority and power. As far as they were concerned, soldiers were the means of oppression, and they were looked upon as tools of tyranny and terror.

The Hejaz railway

The Hejaz railway was constructed along the pilgrimage road from Damascus to Medina. Work on the line began in Damascus in 1900, reached Amman in 1903, Ma'an in 1904 and Medina in 1908.

Bedouin tribes viewed this project with suspicion, thinking that government and pilgrims would no longer need to buy or hire their camels, and that stipends would no longer be paid to them. Workers were attacked at random. The government had to detail military units to protect workers and to resist Bedouin raids[6].

The railway served various ends: it helped to strengthen the authority of the Ottoman government, and it became important for religious, economic and military purposes. A telegraph line was extended alongside the railway, providing rapid communications between Syria and Arabia. Branch lines were extended to such centres as Irbid, Salt, Kerak and Aqaba.

For Trans-Jordan the railway and telegraph lines provided the first effective contact with Western ideas and technology. Jordanians were able for the first time to travel by mechanical transport, and to use the telegraph as a means of sending urgent messages.

The Suez Canal

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 dealt a hard economic blow to the Bedouin. Over-land trade routes between Syria, Iraq and Arabia decreased in importance. Merchandise could now be carried by ship from one port to another. This shift of trade-routes adversely affected the tribes which used camels to carry supplies in large convoys travelling between the main cities in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Hejaz and Nejd. Each year thousands of camels had been used for this purpose. Overland camel convoys then decreased annually, until after the First World War when they were superseded by heavy transport vehicles.

The Suez Canal also affected the Darb al-Haj. Pilgrims from Egypt and North Africa now boarded ships destined for Hejaz sea ports instead of travelling by the desert road through Sinai and Aqaba. A considerable number of pilgrims from Turkey went by sea also. This switch brought other changes, such as the suspension of the stipends paid to the Howeitat of Ibn Jad. Formerly tribes gave protection to Egyptian pilgrims passing through their area south-west of Ma'an. In 1898 they rebelled and declared that they wished to join Egypt rather than remain Ottoman citizens. As a result the government resumed the payment of stipends to them and to the Sheikhs of Bir al-Sabi[7].

The revolt of Kerak

There were direct and indirect reasons for the revolt of Kerak, but there is no doubt that the loss of confidence in the Ottoman government was the most important element in causing it.

[5] Gray Hill, *With the Bedouins* (T. Fisher, Unwin), London, 1890.

[6] M. Madi & S. Mousa, *History of Jordan in the 20th Century* (in Arabic), Amman, 1959, p. 14.

[7] Alois Musil, *The Northern Hejaz*, The American Geographical Society, New York, 1926.

In 1905 an incident occurred at Shobek which may be considered a prelude to the revolt of Kerak. The troops stationed in the Crusader castle requested the women of the village to carry water for them from the springs in the deep valley. The villagers protested to no avail. They then attacked the soldiery, drove them away and requested that no garrison be stationed at Shobek. The governor of Kerak, however, despatched a military force which subdued the rebels after killing a number of them.

Neither the government nor the people had learned the necessary lesson, and five years later a large scale clash occurred with considerable damage and loss to both sides.

The first step was taken by the government when it stopped payment of the stipends to the Sheikhs of Kerak. The second came when the *Wali* in Damascus refused to appoint Qadr al-Majali (Sheikh al-Mashayekh) Chief Sheik of Kerak, a member in the Administrative Council, in spite of the fact that he had obtained the majority of votes in the elections.

However, the principal reason which stirred the people of Kerak to revolt was the government announcement that it intended to enforce the law of compulsory military conscription and to collect the fire-arms in people's possession.

In the summer of 1910, the government despatched an expedition to Hauran and Jebel ed Druze which succeeded in subduing the inhabitants who had risen in rebellion against these measures. The commander of the expedition, General Sami al-Farouki, enforced the law of military conscription and soon afterwards despatched a part of his force to Kerak for the same purpose.

The people were very suspicious of government measures which included a census and registration of land and property. They had for years enjoyed internal independence, and it was loathsome to them to have such harsh measures imposed. They also feared that the conscripts (between the age of 20 and 45) would go to far away battlefields never to return.

The idea of revolt began to gain momentum. They found an able leader of considerable charisma in the person of Qadr al-Majali, who encouraged active resistance and took upon himself the responsibility of leading the revolt.

The revolt began on November 21, 1910. The Kerak leaders persuaded the governor to despatch a considerable number of troops to various parts of the district. Attacks were launched against the dispersed units, but the main rebel forces entered Kerak where they occupied the offices of the governor and other officials, burned all their papers and laid siege to the old crusader castle with the bulk of the garrison inside its walls.

The revolt spread throughout the district. Railway stations were attacked and set on fire. Tracks were torn off the line and telegraph wires were cut. Government offices in Ma'an and Tafileh were besieged. Many on both sides were killed and attrocities were committed.

Although the Ottoman authorities were taken by surprise, reinforcements were despatched immediately by train to the nearest station. The relieving column reached Kerak on December 1. Its arrival convinced the rebels that they could not oppose it successfully and they dispersed far away in rugged wadis. The relieving column released the besieged garrison and together they committed ugly acts of revenge and put to death many innocent people.

Military units combed the countryside searching for the rebels. Some time later ten persons were formally executed and the property of many more was confiscated. The Majalis were the main target of revenge, and Qadr al-Majali, who was in hiding, was ordered to pay half the heavy fine imposed on the rebels.

However, next year, after Italy's attack on Tripoli, the government rescinded some of its harsh measures. In 1912 a general amnesty was proclaimed and the government cancelled its previous provision for military conscription and confiscation of arms. Qadr came out from his hiding place, but in 1916 he was invited to visit Damascus where he suddenly died. It was widely believed that he was poisoned.

The Arab Revolt

The suppression of the Kerak revolt with utmost ruthlessness was a hard lesson for everyone in Trans-Jordan. Peace was restored in the country, and the government turned its attention to strengthening its authority. It seemed that the country would be under its control for many years to come.

However, less than four years later, hopes for a long term of peace were thwarted. The First World War started in the summer of 1914 and in November of that year the Ottoman Empire joined in the struggle on the side of Germany. With the war came general mobilisation and men of military age began to enlist in the armed forces. The Kerak district was still excluded. The government took a number of measures to support the war effort, including control of agricultural produce as well as all materials necessary for the army. Another measure taken was the construction of a railway branch line to the forest of Shobek to carry wood for trains instead of coal which was no longer available.

In the summer of 1916, people in Trans-Jordan began to hear the news that an Arab revolt had broken out in the Hejaz. Soon, messengers and disciples began to penetrate the desert announcing the dawn of a new day for the Arabs and calling on the people to rise against the Ottoman yoke.

We are not concerned here with the reasons for the revolt, but suffice it to say that the racial policy of the Committee of the Union and Progress (CUP) coupled with the attrocities committed by Jemal Pasha in Syria, was the direct cause.

Audeh Abu Tayeh, a well-known leader of the Howeitat tribe, was the first to answer the call for the revolt. In April 1917, Audeh went at the head of a number of warriors to the head quarters of the Amir Faisal at Wejh, swore loyalty and took upon himself to raise the standard in Trans-Jordan. Next month a small expedition left Wejh under the command of Sherif Nasir, accompanied by Audeh, Capt. T. E. Lawrence and a number of Syrian leaders. The expedition settled for some time in Wadi al-Sirhan and began to enlist volunteers.

When all was ready the expedition marched westwards early in June, crossed the railway line and defeated an Ottoman battalion to the west of Ma'an. On 6 July, 1917 Aqaba and the overlooking heights were in Arab hands.

Jordanians raised the Arab standard in Jordan. Soon afterwards the forces of the Amir Faisal and his brother the Amir Zaid moved from the Hejaz to Aqaba and from there began an advance northwards. Petra, Shobek and Tafileh were occupied, fierce battles were fought at Ma'an and along the railway from station to station. Jordanians, whether Bedouin or villagers, gathered round the Arab standard. Thousands of them carried arms in the cause of Arab freedom and many gave their lives for that cause. Arab forces played an important role in the final campaign against Ottoman armies in September 1918. The town of Dera'a was freed to be followed by Damascus on the morning of October 1, 1918. Trans-Jordan was a theatre of war for 16 months, during which time Arabs from Iraq, geographic Syria and Arabia fought for the attainment of a common aim. Such an achievement had not been possible for hundreds of years. The revolt as a supreme and united effort gave the Arabs a sense of national pride, which helped them later on to wage their struggle against British and French imperialism.

Epilogue

The connection between Trans-Jordan and the Ottoman state ended by the end of September 1918. There are, however, additional aspects of that relationship which are worth mentioning.

We have no reliable statistics for urban population, but my estimate is that it numbered something between 250,000 and 300,000. Salt was the largest town, with an estimated population of 10,000 in 1905, and 20,000 in 1914. Irbid and Kerak had something between 4,000 and 5,000 each. Amman, whose population now is about one million, was uninhabited until 1879 and had only 1,800 people in 1914.

Jordanian society continued to base its internal and external relationships on values, ideals and traditions emanating from the nature of the tribal structure which had prevailed in the country for thousands of years.

Animal wealth was the principal property of the people. Camels, sheep and other kinds of cattle were numbered in tens of thousands. A census, in reality a rough calculation, of 1919 showed that there were 235,000 sheep in the Kerak *kaza* alone. In 1928, ten years after the end of the Ottoman Empire, Trans-Jordan exported over 115,000 head of camels, sheep, goats and cattle. Travellers who visited the country during that period spoke of seeing thousands of cattle, sheep and goats and of camel herds numbering 10,000 each. A large number of these animals were sold in the markets of Jerusalem, Hebron and the coast towns of Palestine. Many camels were even sold in the markets of Egypt.

Grain came second to animals as the wealth of the country. In spite of the fact that farmers cultivated only 40 per cent of the land suitable for agriculture, considerable quantities of agricultural produce were in most years exported to Syria and Palestine. The districts of Kerak and Belqa supplied the district of Jerusalem with its need of corn and barley. Bedouin caravans came from the depth of the desert and the Hejaz to buy corn from Kerak.

Agriculture was not however confined to the villagers. Bedouin tribes who owned suitable land also engaged in cultivation. In this respect we may give an example of the Beni Sakhr, the Beni Hasan and the Adwan tribes. But because the Bedouin believed that manual work was beneath their social status as warriors, the farming of their lands was done by men who did not own land either in Trans-Jordan or Palestine, in return for one fourth of the produce.

As animals and agriculture were the main basis of the economy trade depended on selling surplus produce and buying coffee, rice, sugar, weapons and cloth. Merchants from Damascus and Palestine came to Bedouin encampments to sell their goods. The Bedouin also bought dates from Iraq and the oases of Arabia.

Beasts of burden were the only means of transport until the construction of the railway. During World War I and for some years before a few boats sailed in the Dead Sea carrying grain from Kerak to supply the Ottoman forces in Jericho and Nablus. When the Circassians came they brought with them carts drawn by oxen, which they used for transport between the villages. These were an innovation in the country.

Education was confined to elementary *Kuttabs* run by *Ulama* in towns and large villages. There were also a number of missionery schools. Later on the government established a few elementary schools. The number of students in the whole country could be estimated at between 2,000 and 3,000 with few females among them. One would not be very far from the truth if the percentage of illiteracy was estimated at 99 per cent.

Last but not least we must emphasize the fact that the inhabitants of the country were racially homogeneous: whether Bedouin or villagers, Moslems or Christians. All of them were Arabs, sharing the same language, values, traditions and ways of life. The country never experienced religious conflict, because at least 90 per cent of the people are Sunni Moslems. Arab Christians, who formed about 10 per cent of the population, have lived for centuries with their Moslem compatriots a life of complete harmony and understanding. Their relations were always 'extremely cordial and close'[8].

Trans-Jordan never experienced any ethnic problems. When the Circassians emigrated to the country in 1878, the ties of Islam united them with the original people and they were gradually assimilated.

There were no medical doctors in the country until the last two decades of the Ottoman period. In the last year of the Great War, there were five medical doctors in the country and that was the highest number that had ever been there before.

[8] Peter Gubser, *Politics and Change in Al-Kerak, Jordan* (Oxford University Press), London, 1973, p. 63.

Cultural awareness was negligible, and as a result valuable antiquities were commonly destroyed. The Ottoman government did not appreciate the historical value of antiquities. For example, the Sultan Abdul Hamid presented to the German Emperor the facade of the Mushatta palace, which was removed in 1904 to Berlin and was placed in the Pergamon Museum.

Trans-Jordan lost a great deal of forestry between 1880–1918. The Circassians cut thousands of trees in the area of Amman, the wood of which was sold in the markets of Jerusalem. During the Great War thousands of trees were cut for use as fuel in trains instead of coal.

This has been a brief description of conditions in Trans-Jordan during the later decades of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans contributed what they were able to contribute. When they joined Germany in the War, the fate of their Empire was sealed. The War ended with the victory of the Allies, among whom were the Arabs. For Trans-Jordan a chapter, four centuries old, was closed and a new chapter of history was opened.