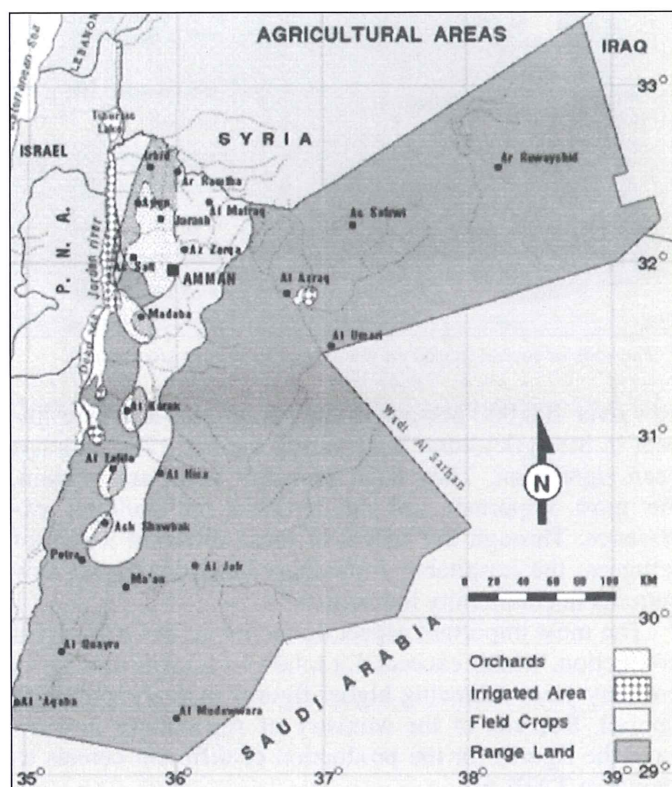


Cereal Production During the Nineteenth Century and its Effect on Transjordanian Life: A Short Study of Multiculturalism

The large number of ruin-sites that one still could see around in Jordan fifty years ago, were called, until recently, *al-khirāb* (singular *khirba*). They were the evidence of a rich agricultural record over the centuries. Fields around these *khirāb* or villages were tilled by the population to produce different types of cereals as well as olives, grapes, figs, and other fruits. Although these crops were the main source of income, economic welfare was also supported by pastoral activities that derived income from flocks of sheep and goats and herds of cattle. The nomads in the countryside owned herds of camels and horses. This simple coordination of sources of income allowed the Transjordanians, since time immemorial, to interact with other communities, especially the settled population in neighboring Palestine and the nomadic tribes of the south in al-Ḥijāz and of the east in Najd, both now parts of Saudi Arabia. They also interacted with the Bedouin tribes in Syria, Iraq and the tribes of Sinai who with the Bedouin tribes of Southern Palestine visited the area via the desolate terrain of Wādī 'Arabah, north of 'Aqaba. The map appearing FIG. 1 shows clearly Jordan's central position and its four neighbors: Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Palestine and Egypt.

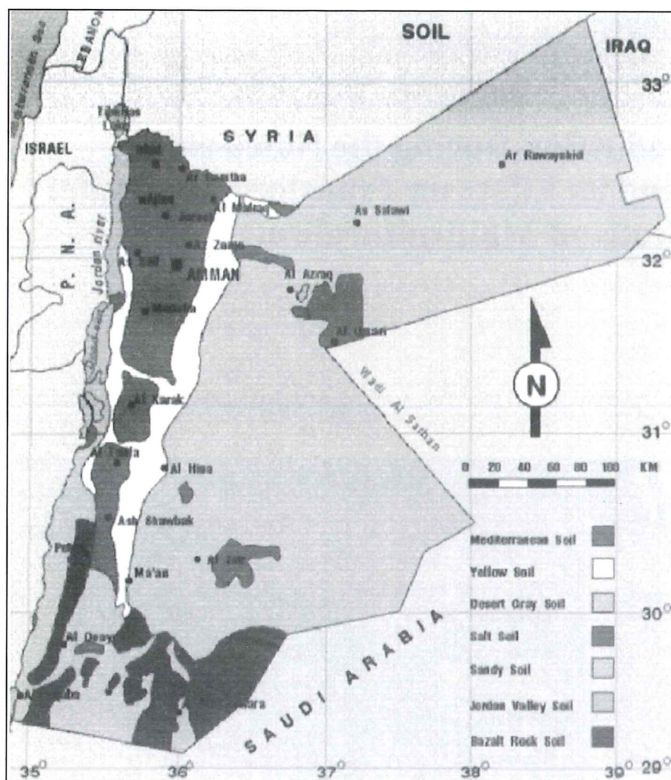
In their endeavors to maintain their existence on the land, the Transjordanians had on many occasions to fight or participate in fighting against invaders such as the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, Seljuk and Ottoman Turks. All through these periods of strife they managed to stay on the land and their main purpose was to cultivate the Gileadite – Ammonite – Moabite – Edomite stretch that extended between ar-Ramthā and Ma'ān. This productive stretch of Mediterranean Soil (FIG. 2) was the cereal bowl of Transjordan. Excavations by the "Madaba Plains Project" since it started in the early 1980's together with its extensive Regional survey have shown continuous agricultural activity since the Early Bronze Age (ca. 2500 BC until now). In the 1970's, the excavations by the joint American-Jordanian team have uncovered the famous stat-



1. Map of Jordan (based on www.tjgc.gov.jo/maps/agricultural-areas.html).

uettes of 'Ayn Ghazāl in an agricultural settlement dating back to around 7500 BC.

Likewise, when wars and instability in Transjordan induced people to migrate, wars in the areas around Transjordan induced people to come in as immigrants. The Transjordanians had a continuous inflow of nomads and waves of Turkomans, Kurds, Circassians, Chechens, Armenians, and Druze. The inflow of the Circassians and Chechens which started in 1879 by the Turks directing refugees leaving Bulgaria to settle in Transjordan was the most important of these waves. Jordan which replaced Transjordan on the 25 May 1946 (Independence Day) has



2. The soils of Jordan (based on www.rjgc.gov.jo/maps/soil.html).

now over 700,000 persons of the two groups and their impact in the agricultural field during the last 120 years has been significant. They have probably been, and remain, the most important link in Jordan's multicultural experience. Through the arrival of these different waves of refugees, the hospitable Jordanians have developed new patterns in community interaction.

The most important aspect of economic life was cereal production, which exceeded a total of 250,000 tons in an ordinary year, achieving higher figures in years with high rainfall. Records of the Ministry of Agriculture in 1939 gave the figures for the production of different cereals as shown in TABLE 1.

These figures refer to the year 1939 when the world was getting involved in the Second World War. Many Jordanian men were already seeking better wages through working with the allied forces being mobilized in Palestine and Transjordan. Forty years earlier such work opportunities were not open to the population and as people had to seek work, it is safely assumed that most of them directed their attention to agriculture. Most probably Transjordan was producing larger quantities of cereals in 1900 at a time when its population could not have been more than 250,000 people. Considering that the annual per capita consumption of cereals could not have been, even then, more than 200kgs, this adds up to 50,000 tons to which must be added an equal quantity for animal fodder

TABLE 1. The production of cereals in Transjordan in 1939 (Ministry of Agriculture).

Wheat	168,400 tons
Barley	98,300 tons
Millet	3,900 tons
Beans	1,500 tons
Lentils	9,800 tons
Chick Peas	4,800 tons
Others	3,740 tons
Total	290,440 tons

and seeds. In ordinary rainfall years this meant that Transjordan had between 120,000 and 150,000 tons of cereals to sell at the end of summer. The price received for these plus or minus 500kgs of cereals surplus per person was the backbone of the economic life in the country. At an average price of three to four piasters per *ṣā'* of 6kgs, the per capita income from this source varied between three and four Palestinian pounds which were equivalent to an equal amount of Sterling pounds, during the British Mandate between 1918-1948. Prior to these dates they would have been equal to about three gold pounds.

The economic activity that regulated living conditions in Transjordan during the 19th century was a continuous process that had a regular pattern. Since tractors, agricultural equipment and machinery became common only towards the mid-forties of the last century, the cereal production yearly cycle was confined over the years to human labor supported by animal power and time-old simple wooden and iron equipment. Farmers tilled the fields and prepared them for broadcasting between October and January when the seeds were cast by hand, until the start of March. Then followed the weeding of the fields when strange plants were removed. In mid-May the harvest of barley and some other cereals like vetches would start generally and by mid-June the real harvest started for wheat. This was hard labor and sometimes extended for up to 75 days. During that period the crop was transferred in bundles to the threshing ground or *baydar* and the process of extracting the seeds of the crop from the hay was continuously being carried out by the laborforce that was especially entrusted with this task. Normally the crop was ready for sale during the months of July and August and was sold unless the richer farmers and merchants wanted to store their crops to be sold at higher prices during the coming winter months of December and January.

Although this agricultural activity brought a good rate of multiculturalism through the relatively large number of agricultural workers who came in from Palestine, the Hawrān, and the northern part of al-Ḥijāz, another effective association between the Transjordanians and their neighbors was established during the summer months.

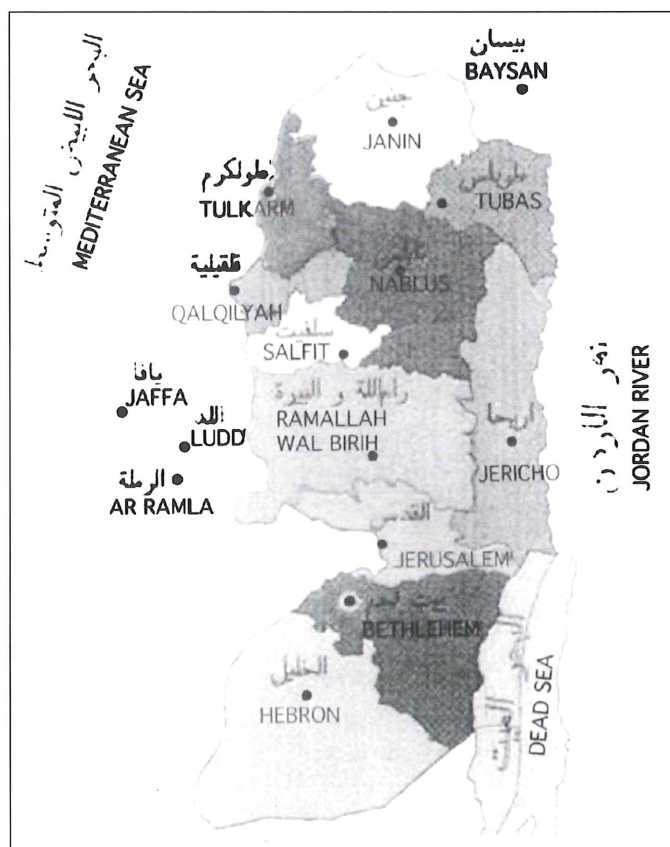
Bedouin tribes came from Iraq and Saudi Arabia to arrange the purchase of the commodity they needed most, namely wheat. As they were living in the Bādiya or the desert frontier, their only means to buy their required yearly supply was through acquiring it from farmers in Transjordan or the Ḥawrān. This brought in caravans of Ruala, and Wild 'Alī from the Syrian Bādiya, 'Inayza tribesmen from Northern Najd and al-Ḥijāz, Shammar tribesmen from Najd, 'Uqaylāt from the Bādiya, Htaym, Banī 'Aṭīyah, and Shararāt from Northern Ḥijāz and even Slayb from the area between Iraq and Kuwait. In some years Iraqi tribesmen such as Banī Tamim, Dhafir and Munṭafiq found it suitable to buy their requirements in Transjordan.

The direct contact between the Transjordanians and these Bedouin tribes did not eliminate the role of commerce and trade. From the west came cereal merchants of Jerusalem to as-Salt, 'Ammān and Mādabā. From al-Khalil/Hebron to al-Karak. From Nazareth, Ḥayfā and Baysān, to Irbid. They bought their requirements of wheat and other cereals and arranged for the transport of these quantities, because unlike the Bedouin buyers of the eastern and southern tribes, they had no caravans at their disposal. The cereals were carried by contractors who were specialized in road transport and had or hired the necessary camels, mules, and donkeys. As there were no roads, transport by carts was not possible and these contractors had to limit their activity to the use of transport animals. Between the years 1870 and 1925 this mode of transport was very common and certain tribes especially in the countryside around Jerusalem specialized in gathering 200 or 300 donkeys and use them for the transport of wheat at the rate of 100kgs per animal. However these facilities came to an end in 1925 when Palestine and Transjordan acquired a fleet of small trucks each of which could carry the load of 50 donkeys or 20 camels.

Activities of tradesmen and visit exchanges with time brought in intermarriage and change of residence. Amongst the more numerous clans in as-Salt at least four refer their descent to Bedouin tribes in Saudi Arabia. Many clans and families in the northern part of Transjordan likewise relate that their grandfathers were Bedouins who settled down a hundred years or so earlier. 'Ammān, which was resettled in 1879 when a group of Circassian refugees from Bulgaria were directed by the Ottomans to live in it, was to become a busy centre of commerce involving merchants from Damascus, Nāblus and Jerusalem. A good number of 'Ammān's leading families trace their origins to these cities. Settlement was also very apparent among the Bedouin tribes of the countryside. Many of them saw the benefits of raising crops and this led to the eastern side of the Transjordanian plateau being brought under cultivation in a more efficient way during the early years of the twentieth century.

Labor was the most important element in the bringing around of the multicultural society. Ploughmen who generally were employed on the basis of a *mraba'* agreement by which the labor force of any estate received one quarter of the crop as compensation for their labor during their employment between October of the agricultural year and the following September. At the start of the most modern phase of agricultural activity around 1860, these came from the different parts of Palestine especially Jabal Nāblus, Jabal al-Quds around Jerusalem and Jabal al-Khalil around Hebron. The map in FIG. 3 shows the three areas. The young men normally came seeking employment in groups and some of them during their stay got married to Transjordanian girls and never went back. They were the grandfathers of families that are now part of Jordan's social structure such as Al-'Aqrabāwī, Al-'Awartānī, Al-Nābulsi, Al-Qaysī, Al-Ṭūbāsī, Al-Baytāwī and Al-Ṭirāwī.

In the 1870's whole families of Egyptians came to avoid forced labor at the construction of the Suez Canal. They generally migrated from the eastern villages of Egypt via Gaza and its district. After few seasons in Transjordanian villages they settled down and started intermarriage with the Transjordanian clans. That is how we



3. The major cities of the West Bank of the Jordan (based on www.pnic.gov.ps/arabic/geography/state.html).

have now such names as Al-Maṣri, Al-Bilbaysī and Al-Sharqāwī. Generally the newcomers, at the start, lived together as communities in villages such as Nitl, Jalūl, Umm al-‘Amad, Zizya, and al-Yādūdah. In the year 1894, three clans amongst them managed to buy the fields around the ruined village of Saḥāb. They developed it into an important agricultural estate and with time they became completely integrated in the Transjordanian society. Since the 1950’s, the descendants of these three clans acquired electoral importance in proportion to their increasing numbers and they proudly claim, already for the last few years, a seat in Jordan’s parliament.

The development of agriculture during the nineteenth century and the new rewards it brought meant better economic performance and a higher quality of life. This change could not but leave its mark on the social life of the countryside involving the settled communities and the Bedouin encampments alike. The ancient identities by which community groups defined and represented themselves, were no more as rigid and fixed as they have been for many centuries. People were encouraged and became more willing to interact with other communities in accordance with a changed set of rules. Although still important, by 1900 Transjordan’s Bedouins were no more the masters, and farmers became recognized as an important part of society.

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