

Agriculture and Population Movement in East Jordan during the Nineteenth Century

East Jordan fell like all the other parts of Greater Syria—Bilad Al Sham—to the Ottoman Sultan Selim after his victory over the Mamluk Sultan Qansuh Al Ghory at the battle of Marj Dabiq on August 24, 1516¹. This was the start of an era that extended for four hundred years, during which Bilad Al Sham was to feel the effects of successes and failures of the Ottoman Sultanate. Stability, security and the welfare of the people in our area became directly influenced by the wise decisions or blunders made in Istanbul or Damascus. Important events such as the defeat of the Ottoman armies at the gates of Vienna on September 12, 1683² and on the Russian Front marked the start of the fall of military power, followed by a general decline in settlement density and economic prosperity of the country³. The frontiers of settlement in Bilad Al Sham meanwhile were being pushed westwards by the bedouin incursions of the tribal confederations of the Shammar and Anneze from the south, whose original country Najd was then passing through the earlier phase of the Wahabi Movement⁴. The Egyptian occupation of Syria between 1831 and 1841 meant quite a change as a result of more modern administration⁵, whilst the Crimean War fifteen years afterwards brought, as a result of the Treaty of Paris and Ottoman contact with European thinking and techniques, a revival of central authority and the introduction of a more modern and effective administration. The defeat at Plevna in 1877⁶, being the disastrous ending to an unfortunate campaign, resulted in a big Circassian migration into Syria as a whole. The Ottoman administration had to give more attention to stability and agricultural development⁷ and our

area became a test-ground for the settler's and fallahin's new advance into the Eastern provinces bordering on the desert⁸.

It will be useful, at this stage, to submit some information about the land and its people during the last decade of the sixteenth century when the first comprehensive Ottoman registers were compiled in 1005/H, AD 1596/97. The source is the Daftari Muffasal Jadid (detailed new registers) as analysed by Hutteroth and Abdul Fattah in their valuable work *Historical Geography of Palestine, Transjordan and Southern Syria in the late 16th Century*. East Jordan then was wholly contained in the Mir Liwa of Ajlun, in the south-eastern part of the Mir Liwa of Hauran and the Sanjaq of Kerak, and Shawbak. It is to be noted that the area was enjoying relative stability under the able administration of the Al Ghazzawi clan, still prominent in the Ghor, who were charged by the Sultan 'To control the Bedouins, maintain law and order, protect the pilgrims and receive them on their return Journey'^{8a}.

The data reveals that the population in East Jordan was then about 51,000, at a time when Hauran proper had about 75,000 and Palestine nearly 207,000. The territory north of Zerka River had 192 settled villages and around 19,000 people, amongst whom no taxed-bedouins are mentioned. The yearly tax amounted to 853,884 Akjes—a silver coin equivalent then to one-fourtieth of a Golden Pound. The area south of the Zerka River had 48 settled villages and around 21,000 people. In addition, the two Nahiyas of Salt and Shawbak had a population of around 11,000 taxed bedouins living in 33 encampments. Both the settled and bedouin populations in the southern part paid a total of 849,833 Akjes in yearly taxes. No settlement in the whole area had the status or size of a town while villages were small for the most part. Only five had more than 500 inhabitants and Ajlun was the biggest, with a population of around 1,900. Market places were few, with three in the north, Ajlun, Irbid and Hebras,

¹ Mohamad Farid Bey, *Tarikh ad-Doola al-Aliya al-Othmaniyeh (History of the Ottoman Empire)* Beirut, 1977. (In arabic)

² *ibid.* ³ *ibid.*

⁴ 'The expansion and contraction of Bedouins in Bilad Al Sham'. Paper presented by Dr Down Chatty at the 2nd International Conference on the History of Bilad Al Sham, Damascus, 27 Nov.—3 Dec., 1978; *Proceedings*, vol 1, pp. 403–13.

⁵ Asad Rustum, *Al Mahfoodhat Al Malkieh Al Masrieh*, (5 vols.), Beirut; American Press, 1940–52. (In arabic).

⁶ G. Schumacher, *The Jaulân*, London; Richard Bentley & Sons, 1888.

⁷ 'Some historical and methodological considerations concerning social stratification in the Middle East' by Kemal Karpet, in *Beginnings of modernization in the Middle East, the 19th century* Ed. by W. R. Polk and R. Chambers, Univ. Chicago Press, 1968.

⁸ 'Migrations to Syria in the late 19th century.' Paper presented by Prof Emel Dogramaci at the 2nd International Conference on the History of Bilad Al Sham, Damascus, 27 Nov.—3 Dec., 1978.

^{8a} Mohamed Adnan Bakhit, *The Ottoman Province of Damascus in the 16th century*, Beirut: Librairie du Liban, June 1982.

and two in the south, Salt and Kerak. Ma'an could claim that same position during the Haj season every year.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was unfortunately no Daftari Muffasal Jadid, as the Empire was already in a state of decline with practically all its military forces either fighting among themselves or withdrawn to support the wars elsewhere⁹. The different districts with a smaller population were being run by the local chiefs, who were continuously fighting amongst themselves and with the bedouin tribes around them. The southern tribes began again to move northwards, and travel books start mentioning the Beni Sakhr grazing their herds in Galilee and exacting tribute from the Saltieh as well as Tiberius. Likewise we hear of the Hajjaya, Anneze and the Shammar making incursions into the Balqa whilst the Sardieh, Beni Sakhr of the north and the Anneze were already asserting their presence in the southern Hauran and the Ajlun area, and exacting Khawa from the settled population. These travel books fortunately give us a good record of affairs and conditions at the start of the 19th Century, and one that deserves special attention is the book *'Travels in Syria and the Holy Land'* by John Lewis Burckhardt who visited East Jordan in 1812. The information he provides is, most of the time, comprehensive and definitely very interesting.

The total settled population of the whole area is about 20,000 of which nearly 9,000 live in 51 villages in the northern part and around 11,000 in 12 villages in the southern part.

It is important to note that the more mountainous the countryside the smaller the villages were, whilst the more open the countryside the larger the villages, definitely for protection. The bedouins are not described in detail, and only settled bedouins who resided in the western side of the country and the Ghor are mentioned. Their number could not have exceeded 7,000 in all including Al Bashatweh, Al Ghawarneh, Al Ghneimat, Al Hamaide, the bedouins of the Ghor and the Layathneh. The Adwan and Ben Sakhr are not mentioned nor are their different allies. There is no mention of any taxes being paid, not even to the Wahabi Ibn Saud who seems to have received declarations of loyalty from all the tribes south of Al Mojib River. All the castles on the Syrian Hadj route from Fedhein (present Ma'raq) to Medina were deserted with the exception of Ma'an which continued to be the market place of the Hadj Caravan. During Burckhardt's visit there was no Hadj, as the Holy places were occupied by the Wahabis. All the settled population had to pay the Khawa or tribute, to the Anneze in Remtha, to the Beni Sakhr, Sardieh and Sirhan in Southern Hauran and Ajlun, to Beni Sakhr and the Adwan in the Balqa and the Ghor (Jordan Valley) and to Al Hajjaya and Al Howeytat from Kerak southwards. The largest settlements were Salt, Kerak and Tafyle with the last having over 600 families. But as the Ottomans did not have any governmental set-up in the region,

every district was being run by its local chiefs and therefore there was little security in the countryside.

Agricultural produce during the early 19th century was practically the same as at the end of the sixteenth. Wheat, barley and lentils were the main winter crops whilst olives, grapes and fruits were the summer crops. However it is to be noted that changing trends in industry dictated certain new procedures in the area. To meet the demand of the Jerusalem tanneries, the Saltieh started to care for the shrubs and collect annually over 500 camel-loads of Summach leaves, whilst they found it expedient to deal with the Beni Sakhr transit trade of some 3,000 camel-loads of soda ash, known as Al Qeli or Oshnan, which was needed by the soap factories in Nablus. In the Souf and Ajlun areas, the growing demand for gunpowder induced the population to start its production in a primitive manner which served the purpose of the people.

More study will have to be made of the available material but we know that agriculture during the early part of the 19th Century in East Jordan was a completely individualistic venture. The system forced the head of the family and possibly his brother or son to be the actual ploughman. To till the land, a Feddan, or a pair of oxen was used. Many a time oxen were hard to get and a cow and a donkey were used or even two donkeys. Very few families indeed could engage a hand on a yearly contract, called Mraaba'a, in which case the ploughman was called Harath, meaning he who tills the land or Mrabi'i, he who receives a quarter of the crop produced in one year. The area tilled by a Feddan was also given the same name and was that which a pair of oxen could till during the ploughing season between November and January; this was generally around 100 Dounums or 10 Hectares. Since however fields were left fallow for one year or more, a Feddan's area was actually over 200 Dounums or 20 Hectares. The seeds required were around 10 kgs. per Dounum on average, and therefore one ton of wheat or eight E'Dool was needed per annum for one Feddan. E'Dool is the plural of Edel which was a strong bag used by farmers and generally made from woollen carpeting, woven usually in the household by the farmer's wife or daughter. Crops varied from area to area, but in good years twenty to the measure was normal, and the farmer therefore collected some twenty tons to which was added whatever summer crops were produced.

This system continued until the twentieth century all over the area with the exception of the Balqa plains, where towards 1870 an agricultural venture became more organized and started to be a large-scale operation. This was Yadudeh a Khirbet, south of Amman where up to 100 harathin in winter and over 200 additional hands in summer could be busy working fields in an area of 24,000 Dounums or 2,400 Hectares¹⁰. By then, labour must have become more abundant since these harathin were allotted, as a group, one fifth of the crop after deduction of the tenth or Miri Title tax. The drop, from the quarter share which was given when the name

⁹ The mutiny of the Janissaries and the wars in Serbia and Hedjaz, and later the Greek War of Independence.

¹⁰ Laurence Oliphant, *The Land of Gilead*, Edinburgh, 1880.

Mrabi'i was originally used, to the fifth share must have come about gradually as the agricultural system was developed by the new landlords.

An example of this refinement was the granting of certain fringe benefits to the married harathin or Mrabi'eh in contrast with bachelors who were given only food and shelter by the household. These benefits included eight Sa'as of wheat monthly (Sa'a is the local measure and in our area its contents are about six kgs.), one of onions, half of salt, a quantity of oil or butter and whenever available some olives. Quantities of lentils and chickpeas were given on loan and were deducted from the harath's share when the crop was collected. Some vegetables in summer were also given. Unmarried harathin would receive the same rations if they chose to live with their family or relatives, but they could still sleep in the caverns or stables, which were generally warmer in winter than ordinary dwellings, and on the Baider or threshing grounds in summer where high straw stacks provided a more comfortable substitute for a farmer's mattress. Married harathin were either allocated a cavern, a room, or were helped during summer to build a room and yard by using stone and mud mixed with tiben or crushed hay, to give the plaster a more adhesive nature. All harathin, whether married or single, were party to this yearly contract which started some time around the end of October and ended the moment all crops were placed in the stores, sometime around mid September, and generally termed Khalas Al Baider. Each of them was entitled to Kufieh and Akal, a shirt and a pair of pants (Sirwal), two pairs of boots, a sickle and a hourah, which is a leather apron worn by harathin during harvest time. Courtesy and generosity by the landlord was expected and generally forthcoming. A Man-ouha or goat in milk was allocated to every harath's family for a fresh milk supply and a reasonable quantity of tobacco, called Hishi or Hasan Baki, was given if it was produced on the farm, to every one of those amongst the labour force who smoked. If clothing was damaged or lost, during work the landlord normally provided replacements.

The farms that provided single harathin with food developed a system called Baileek, probably a Turkish word that applied to army household arrangements. This meant that a woman, called an Izbieh, was employed on a yearly contract—the going price being between 750 kgs. and one ton of wheat for that period, and her duties were to bake Taboun or Shrak bread and cook for the men. One Izbieh generally served 20 persons and in most cases they were widows in their forties who either had no family or had young children to raise.

Crops were, as now, of two varieties—those seeded in winter, mid November to mid February and called Shatawi or winter crops, and those seeded in spring, March to April, and called Saifi or summer crops. In the Ghor, or Jordan Valley, the few farming communities managed to gather crops mainly of barley by mid May and move them to the plateau to avoid malaria infections. In the Shafa areas—the plateau—wheat, lentils, chickpeas and barley were the main winter crops, whilst summer crops included sesame, sorgum, vetches and Al

Magathi or vegetable plots. Generally farmers consumed most of their own produce, storing in Kwaras (huge pottery jars) and in the larger farms in dry wells, the required quantities of Bdhar (seeds) and Mooneh (stores for bread making). Generally the stores were sufficient for two or three years' requirements as a safeguard against the bad years, known as Sineen Al Mahl. Whatever surplus they had was bartered with neighbours or sold to visiting nomads. The crops were of different varieties and every Nahiya or district had some of its own. Therefore we hear of wheat varieties such as Haurani, Nawawi and Durzi in the north, Haitieh in Al Ghor, Saltieh in the middle area and Red Karakieh and Safra Ma'an in the south. For barley we hear of Al-Khashabi in Al Ghor and of Al-Arabi, Assaifi, Al Baladi and El Qunari in the other districts.

All these crops however were good food for locusts when waves flew over East Jordan from the Badieh or desert. They were also frequently attacked by agricultural pests such as powdery mildew, rust of all sorts, covered or loose smut, seporia, and the northerly hard wind (Rih Esh Shamaly), all of which caused failures of crops in varying degrees and therefore migration. Droughts, followed by locusts, were the major causes for population movement especially when a certain area was hit for a few consecutive years, as seems to happen every now and then. In a study prepared by Dr Alexander Schölch of the University of Essen, a stretch of twenty years is mentioned as follows¹¹:-

1859-60	Drought and no crops harvested.
1865-66	Locusts
1873	A bad crop year.
1876	A medium crop year.
1877	A very bad crop year.
1878	An excellent crop year.
1879	Locusts and drought together.
1880	Very little rainfall and a bad crop year.

So one can safely say that during the period of twenty years, eight years or 40% were bad crop years. 1877 and 1879 stood out as the worst years in living memory.

The settled population during these days of mere existence was regularly encountering changes that were directly connected to their living conditions. Shawbak, just at the turn of the century lost over twenty families who settled in Ramallah¹². Salt a few years later, as a result of strife and conscription in Northern Palestine, received a wave of immigrants from Nazareth and Acre leaving us with families carrying the names Nasrawi, Akkawi, Jammal, Qubain and El Far.

In the Irbid area the same wave brought the grandfathers¹³

¹¹ 'Economic development in Palestine'. Paper presented by Dr Alexander Schölch at the 2nd International Conference on the History of Bilad Al Sham, Damascus, 27 Nov.-3 Dec., 1978.

¹² J. L. Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*, London: John Murray, 1822; J. S. Buckingham, *Travels among the Arab tribes*, London, Longman 1825.

¹³ Canon As'ad Mansour, *History of Nazareth* (In Arabic) Cairo: dar Al-Hilal Press, 1924.

of many families including those of the large group still known as Al Gharaybeh or those who came from the west¹⁴. When the Egyptian army ruled Syria between 1831 and 1841 a new wave of family Egyptian names appeared such as Bilbeisi, Fayoumi, Iskandarani, Saidi and Masri. Nevertheless agricultural activity remained minimal due to general instability in the countryside. In the north it was only in 1851 that the appointment of a Governor in Ajlun took place, and some stability followed¹⁵. In the middle and the south the effects of the Egyptian presence in both Kerak and Salt during the thirties, when Ibrahim Pasha in 1250 H crushed the Palestinian revolt in Nablus, was still being felt. Ibrahim, to capture Qasim Al Ahmad and his fellow Palestinian leaders, attacked Kerak where they had taken refuge, and later followed them to Salt, destroying both places¹⁶. This campaign definitely removed whatever there was of local government in the two areas and it was therefore not until the sixties that agriculture started its movement eastwards. Probably it was at this time that the Saltieh and their neighbours saw fit to redistribute the lands amongst themselves. Chronicles relate that the Adwan got one third, Abbad one third and the people of Salt one third. Just after the arrangement, strife in northern Palestine and the seeking of better opportunities forced many Nablusi families to immigrate and settle in Salt, where for forty years they were still known as Al Gharaba, the Westerners. Although some of them bought lands later and became farmers none ever got a share from the original third allotted to Salt.

Although the northern parts of Ajlun and Irbid were gradually developing agriculturally with a population that was basically settled with small farmer landlords farming and living in villages, the Belqa and the Kerak districts had to wait some twenty years, and this development definitely owed much to the far sightedness of a Sheikh of the Beni Sakhr, Sattam Ibn Fendi Al Fayez, born about 1825, who saw the possibilities of agricultural development in the late sixties and started acquiring land¹⁷. His system was a simple one, as the story goes. He, being unable to obtain more land from his father who also had twelve other sons, Sattam directed his attention to his brothers-in-law the Adwan. Sheikh Ali Dhiab, brother of Sattam's wife, gave him freedom to till what he could of the Adwan lands in the plains around Madaba. Sattam welcomed that opportunity, took two witnesses and in one day visited the Khrab—ruined villages of Umm Al Amad, Zabayer, Zizia, Zouezia, Um Rumaneh, Manja, Jaloul, Houarah, Umm Qusier and Dulialeh.

He would place a few stones in a pile on the highest site, fire a shot in the air and declare the village his¹⁸. At about the same time another Sheikh of the Beni Sakhr, Rumaih Abu Junaib, made an agreement with a Salti, Saleh Abujaber, to till the lands of two Khirbas—the ruined villages Tuneib and Yadudeh. The venture was very successful¹⁹ and by 1870 Yadudeh was a prosperous large farm that was to become an example of the Khirab farms which sprang up within the following thirty years between Amman and Madaba. All were owned by people of Salt.

The area acquired by Sattam must have been originally over 250,000 Dounums or 25,000 Hectares and he later gave some of it to his brothers and other chiefs of the Beni Sakhr. To till these lands he encouraged farmers from Palestine and from the settled tribes to come and live under his protection. This development encouraged the Adwan clans and Saltieh to venture in the lands around Amman, and some of their clans were already established at the Amman Citadel by 1880, and the Assaf, Sukar and Lozieen were at Swaileh, Tla'a Al Ali and Jubeiha.

In the Belqa area which had for generations acquired fame as 'Like the Belqa ye shall not find' or the unequalled, 'Mithl Al Belqa Ma Tilqa'²⁰, agriculture was at last gaining ground and it is around this time that the Palestinian village names start to be heard, after being given to farmer groups who came from there. To mention some, there were the Karioti, Boureini, Kiswani, Awartani, Akrabawi, Ibwanini, Sinjlawi and Wazani. People who came from Hauran generally were called Haurani irrespective of their family name or village. In Salt the names were Nablusi, Khalili, Nasrawi, Jenini, Safadi etc.

The agricultural system during these two or three decades before 1880 was a simple and practical one. Farmers went out in October and November to plough their fields after which the seeds were broadcast. During the few days or weeks this operation required, they lived in caverns, as their numbers were not sufficient, if they lived in tents, to offer them protection against the attacks of marauding tribesmen, especially those coming from the Kerak area where conditions were still difficult²¹. Once the farmers completed their winter mission they all returned to their homes in Salt. At around the end of May they would again return to these fields with their families, the harvest was completed and the crop carried on mules and donkeys to the town. This way of life was however not to continue as the country witnessed two successive and important waves of new settlers who came to stay on the land.

The first took place in 1878 when the first group of Circassians arrived in Amman as refugees from the European

¹⁴F. G. Peake, *Transjordan and its tribes*, Jerusalem: Islamic Orphanage Press, 1934 (in Arabic); and Univ. Miami Press, 1958, (in English).

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ Asad Rustum, *Syrian political papers during the Egyptian rule*; and *Ibrahim Pasha's campaign in Syria*, by an anonymous writer, edited by Ahmad Ghassan Sapano (Damascus: Dar Qutaibeh, n. d.), relates that the destruction of Kerak and Salt was complete, and that Christian clans of Kerak were given two villages in the Hauran.

¹⁷ *The Land of Moab* by H. B. Tristram (London: John Murray, 1873) mentions that Sattam had previously visited Cairo and Alexandria when he travelled in a railway train.

¹⁸ Yousef Shwaihat, *Al Uzeizat in Madaba*, Amman: Arab Army Press, n.d.

¹⁹ Norman N. Lewis, 'The frontier of settlement in Syria 1800–1950' in *Economic History of the Middle East 1800–1914*, Ed. C. Issawi, Chicago, 1974.

²⁰ J. L. Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*, London, 1822.

²¹ *The Land of Moab* by H. B. Tristram (*op. cit.* 17) related that 'Moab itself is absolutely destitute of supplies, even of corn, and only kid and game could be counted as procurable on the spot.'

domain of the Ottoman Empire, The Romalli²². The second was that of three tribes of Christian Arabs who left Kerak in 1879 and settled in Madaba three years later²³. These two waves had a real impact on life in general and agriculture in particular in our area, especially as both groups were immigrants and were intent on settling down even if they had to fight for the land.

The Circassians never came in large numbers by today's standards. Laurence Oliphant states that in 1880 Amman had only 150 of them, the other 350 who originally arrived with them having left. As farmers they were hard working and law abiding citizens. Probably they were the first to introduce the wheel into our area²⁴ with their picturesque bamboo-box carts that continued to be an attraction in Amman until the early 1940s. The Ottoman government through its administration in Salt, Hauran and Damascus gave them every assistance and support, and even years after the arrival of the first group, lands were allocated for the settlement of the new arrivals and their cousins the Chechen. Lands became theirs also in Wadi Esseir, Naour, Swaileh, Ruseifah, Zerqa and Sukhneh. Additional fields were bought from the owners at the then ruling price of one half to one gold pound per dounum of good agricultural land. Distribution of the Miri lands allotted to them has not yet been documented, but chronicles mention that sometime during the nineties an arrangement was reached between the heads of their tribes the Qabartai and Shabsough, whereby every family of four was allotted a Feddan or about 200 dounums. At a later date Mirza Pasha volunteered or probably was directed by the authorities, as he was already a member of the Ottoman administration, to re-distribute the fields of Amman amongst the old settlers and the newcomers—Al Muhajereen. The year in which this took place is not definite but there are indications that it was in the early years of this century. Other than the carts, the Circassians brought new agricultural techniques and tools and definitely improved the, until then, neglected breeding of cattle. However it is certain that they did not develop any new crops²⁵.

The Madaba settlers were composed of three tribes, the Uzeizat 62 men, the Karadsheh 44 men, and the Ma'ayeh 45 men. It is on record that they left Kerak in two movements in 1878 and 1879 and that in the winter of 1881/82 they broke the fields at Madaba, meaning in Arabic ploughing them for the first time after centuries of being left fallow as pastures. They planted Sorgum, and the rains were so heavy that the crop turned out to be plentiful indeed. The Sorgum was so high that a mounted horseman was completely covered when

he ventured in the fields²⁶. I personally remember a similar occasion when as a child in the late thirties I saw such a field but I do not believe such excellent crops are with us any more.

Like the Circassians who had fights with their neighbours, the people of Madaba had fights with theirs. Understandably they had to deal with Sheikh Sattam, who by then had become Sheikh Al Mashaikh, paramount chief of the Beni Sakhr after the death of his father Fendi. He kindly interfered when his clansman Eid Al Rudieni lodged a claim to Madaba as being his share of the tribe's lands. By giving him Khirbet Dlieleh from his own lands, Sattam solved a difficult problem. But when he, a few months later at harvest time demanded the Khawa, Madaba's new owners declined his request and a feud developed between the two. The Ottoman administration found it necessary to intervene, and after lengthy negotiations and some fights Sattam was placated and received in 1884 the sum of 300 gold pounds as the full and final price for Madaba from the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, who was deeply interested in the welfare of his new community of Catholics. Sattam appreciated the courage of his new neighbours and although he remained a pleasant host whenever they visited him or frequented with their flocks the pastures of the Beni Sakhr, he nevertheless never set foot in Madaba again, probably as a confirmation or sign of his displeasure. It can be safely assumed that Sattam's love for order and stability, manifested by his acceptance of the Ottoman post of Governor of Giza, the district south east of Amman, had a lot to do with this restraint. It also helped the administration to collect the taxes from all settlers east of Salt, not excepting bedouin tribes who paid Al Adat, that is, tax on their camel herds, to the Governor of Salt during a yearly rendezvous held at Al Hummar, a few kilometers west of Amman²⁷.

Tax collection was the main occupation of the Ottomans at the turn of the century and stability was viewed from that angle²⁸. As we have seen, Ajlun and Irbid were well controlled from the mid fifties, whilst Salt gradually started paying taxes after the first Governor assumed his responsibilities in 1867²⁹. But Kerak was still free under the Majali leadership and this did not suit Governmental policy or design. Therefore a military expedition advanced against Kerak in 1892 under the command of Hussein Hilmi Pasha who became first Governor and started collecting taxes from even the most outlying tribes. Agriculture followed stability and the eastern districts of Kerak were to witness something similar to the events which took place in the Irbid district in the 1860s and the Belqa in the 1870s.

In the same period, a group of the descendants of Egyptian soldiers who stayed in Gaza after the withdrawal of Ibrahim Pasha migrated to Jordan, and in 1892 a delegation visited

²² Shawkat Mufti, *Heroes and Emperors in Circassian History*, (in Arabic), Jerusalem: Andalus library, 1962.

²³ *Coutumes des Arabes au pays de Moab*, p. Antonin Jaussen (Paris, 1948); *Al Uzeizat in Madaba*, Yousef Shwaihat, *op. cit.* (18).

²⁴ Mary Eliza Rogers, *Domestic life in Palestine*, London, 1863.

²⁵ The Circassians are not mentioned by Selah Merrill, author of *East of the Jordan*, (New York, 1881), who met Saltieh fallahin during his visit on 22nd April 1876.

²⁶ Yousef Shwaihat, *Al Uzeizat in Madaba*, *op. cit.* (18).

²⁷ *ibid.*; and Salnama of Damascus, 1881.

²⁸ Mohd. Jamil Bayhum, *The Missing Link in Arab history*,

²⁹ Munib al Mahdi, *Jordan in the 20th century*, Amman, 1959; Akram A. S. Aramini, *Nablus in the 19th century*, M. A. thesis, Amman, 1977; and Pierre Médébielle, *Salt, Histoire d'une Mission*, Jerusalem: Imp. du Patriarche, 1955.

Othman Pasha, the Governor in Damascus, and asked for land. He granted them Sahab and Housing plots in Zizia³⁰. Agriculture, after a few centuries, became once more, the main occupation of the Jordanians.

Finally, any study of agriculture and population movement in East Jordan will be incomplete if it does not pay sufficient attention to the line that has been the boundary between the Desert and the Sown for so many centuries. That line has been known amongst people in this area as Khatt Shabib or the Line of Shabib. Fortunately Qasr Shabib at Zerka is still standing, to attest to the historical facts related to this man's name. He was Al Amir Shabib Ibn Jarir Al Ukaili, who after being Governor of Ma'ara in northern Syria assumed the Sheikdom of Al Balqa and the south down to Ma'an, and built his fort in Zerqa. Being ambitious, he raided the bedouin tribes in their winter grounds at Assamawah on the Euphrates and returned with great booty. His fame being so established, he bid for the takeover of Damascus from the Governor of the Ikshidis of Egypt. Thereupon he advanced against it in the year 970 with 10,000 men, and after entering it through one of the gates he had a fatal mishap when his horse stumbled in a canal. His death led to the dispersal of his troops, and his name now is only remembered through his castle, the Khatt and a famous poem by the celebrated Arab poet Al-Muttanabi³¹.

A study of this line was carried out in the year 1945 by Sir Alec Kirkbride, then British Resident in Amman, who surveyed the Khatt, first on horseback and later from a plane, and he ascertained that it ends in the south at a point that is 3 kms. east from Abu Allasan on the Ma'an-Aqaba Road, where the altitude is 1,600 meters. Unfortunately he did not have enough time to discover where it ends in the north. Judging by chronicles, I am inclined to say now that it extends from that point northwards across Ras Naqaba to a point 5 kms. west of Uddruh, to Qalat Al Hassa to a point 15 kms. west of Qatrana, to 5 kms. west of Mushatta, to Zerka and then its northern end west of Mafraq.

The whole length of this Khatt is nearly 300 kms. and it marks the area of sufficient rain. All the fields that lie to the west of it receive an average of 200 millimeters of rainfall, which is deemed sufficient to raise a crop. The areas lying to

the east of the Khatt are only suitable as pastureland since the 100 or so millimeters of rainfall will not be sufficient for farming. In this area the Mean Annual or relative humidity is 50 per cent whilst the Mean Annual daily temperature varies between 14 °C for the high altitudes, 16 °C for the plateau and 18 °C for the ranges.

This Khatt is not an imaginary line as some used to think. Sir Alec found that it was actually a barrier of crude large rocks that has been built in one line on the face of the ground with these rocks standing in line every four or five meters. At cross roads there were also circular lines of the same construction and the Khatt followed the contours of the areas in which it was built. Since it did not give any impression of its being a line of defence against raids, Sir Alec came to the conclusion that it was a boundary line where the perpendicular rocks standing in it could be seen from a distance. He strongly believes that it marked, during the time of its building, the tenth century, the barrier between the agricultural lands owned by the farming population and the pasturelands that were at the disposal of the nomads. The fact that it actually runs in line with the rainfall averages of the years 1937 to 1945 induced Sir Alec further to give weight to the chronicles and stories of the farmers. He concluded that the fights resulting from differences over ownership in these disputed areas must have been so dangerous that the authority was forced to undertake its building in spite of the great effort and cost involved³².

The area of East Jordan has been since the start of history the contact line between the desert and the agricultural areas. This line has always been contested by the people on both sides. Population movement generally occurred across it from the east and this always brought instability and devastation of the settled areas. The story of the East Jordanians has been one of hardship but it has been also one of perseverance and sharing. The transformation of the bedouins into settled fallahin has been progressing all the time in this area, and the Jordanians seem to have succeeded many times in the past to enjoy the fruits of their endeavours. The second half of the nineteenth century has been one amongst many periods when peaceful coexistence, following periods of instability and hardship, was at long last achieved.

³⁰ F. G. Peake, *Transjordan and its tribes*, op. cit. (14).

³¹ *Diwan Abi Attayeb al-Muttanabi*, edited by Abdul Wahab Azzam, Cairo, 1944.

³² 'Khatt Shabib in Transjordan', article by Sir Alec Kirkbride in *Foreigners in our lands* (in Arabic) by Mahmoud Al-Abidi, Amman, 1974.