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The Bedouin Market: the axis around which Beer-Sheva developed in the British Mandatory Period

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Introduction

Our research began (1982) with a study of the importance of the market in the economy of the Bedouin. Our attention was subsequently diverted to a study of the history of this market in the development of Be'er Sheva. Remarks of Bedouin elders as to what the market had meant to their fathers at the beginning of this century are contained in our essay of 1996.¹ The present essay is devoted to the development of commercial life in Be'er Sheva and the Negev following the conquest by the British in 1918. The contribution of our research stems from careful attention to reminiscences and oral traditions concerning the past² and not from the discovery of previously-unnoticed documents. We asked the Bedouin elders to tell us whatever they could remember about those distant times and then completed the picture from written testimony.³

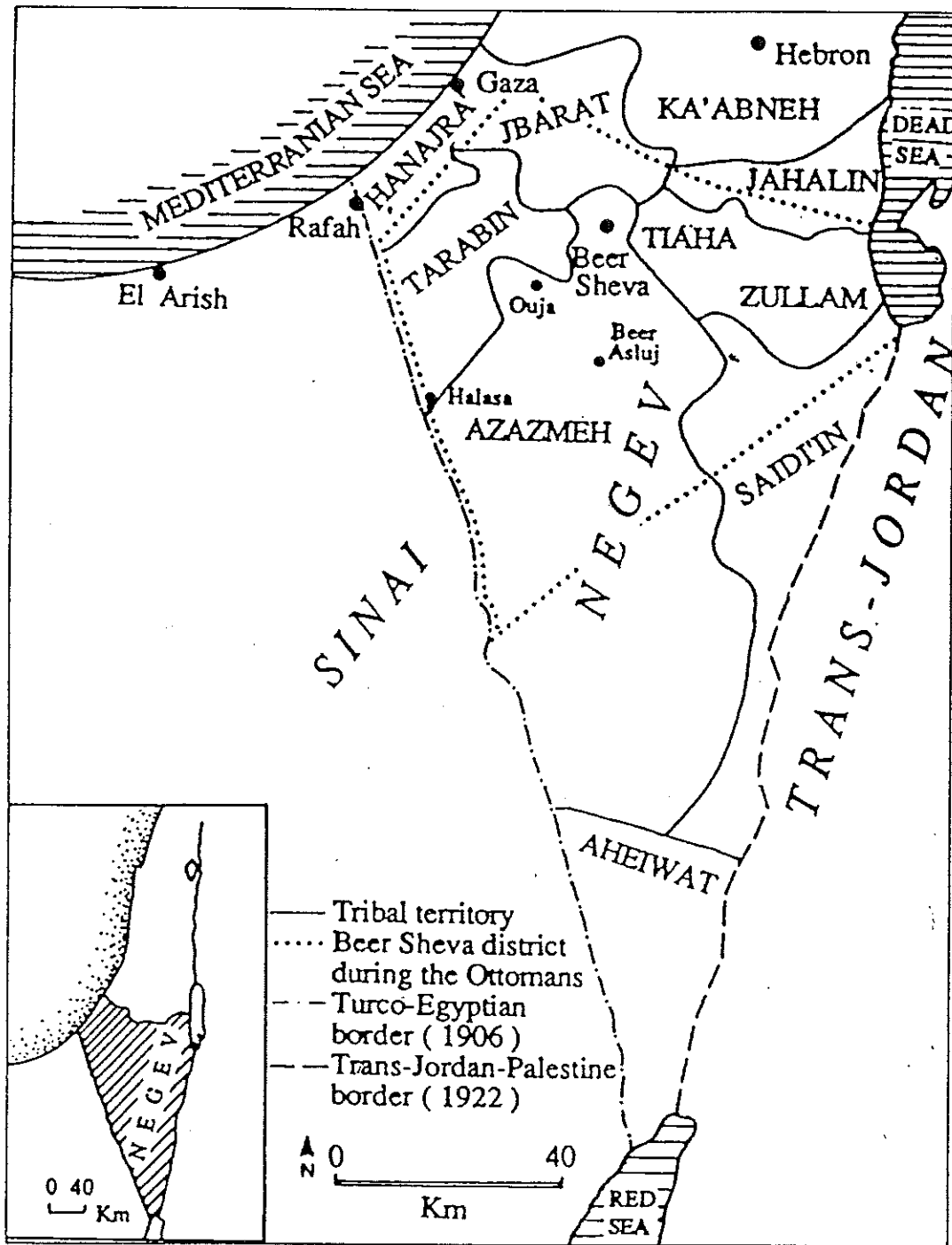
The rise of Be'er-Sheva

There was no permanent population in the central Negev following the destruction of Byzantine Be'er-Sheva until 1902, when the Ottomans renewed permanent settlement and founded present-day

Be'er Sheva as the main city of the district. The site was chosen for the following reasons: existence of ancient wells; administrative considerations – the wish to control the Bedouin population),⁴ and the topography – the ancient road to Egypt passed through the site, by-passing the dunes of Khalasa to the east and south. The Ottomans, perhaps, also took into consideration the upcoming delineation of the border with Egypt, concluded in 1906. However, a very important factor that researchers usually do not note influenced the choice of the city's location. This was the prominence of the area as a commercial center, which emerged during the last decades of the 19th century.

Before the end of the 19th century, the towns of Jaffa and Lod had been the centers for trade between the Bedouin and the town and village populations. Therefore, herds had to be driven through the cultivated areas of the Coastal Plain. When the Ottomans returned with renewed strength to the Levant (1841), they gradually brought the „rule of the Sheikhs“ to an end and encouraged agriculture by keeping the Bedouin and their herds away from fields and orchards in the center of the country. Under these new circumstances, the Bedouin kept their northward penetrations to the North to a

Fig. 1



minimum. The residents of the towns then sought contact with Bedouin in the south, and the wells in the area became a focal point for the barter trade between the Bedouin and the residents of the Coastal Plain and hill country. Merchants were able to travel safely thanks to the enforcement of security on the roads. Thus, the authorities, who

wanted to take part in these transactions, situated its posts so that it would be able to supervise the trade. Indirectly, the return of the Ottomans led to the sifting of the center of trade with the Bedouin to Be'er Sheva, i.e., away from the farming zone, and, as it consolidated there, it was followed by the founding of the city alongside the market.⁵

Old-style government with new technology

Livestock breeding never provided for all of the Bedouin's needs, and they had to depend on the goodwill of their neighbors, the settled residents, or on reciprocal relationships with them. From earliest times, governments of states bordering the desert had hired Bedouin to serve in escorts and garrisons that guarded the routes of the convoys through the desert, as well as for other similar services.⁶ The optimal condition for conducting such deals was when a government was strong – but not too strong – thereby requiring cooperation of the Bedouin, but not being at their mercy. The visible symbols of government (for example, police stations set up within tribal areas) were viewed by the Bedouin in a positive light. These were the mark of force necessary for averting tribal wars, which was to the Bedouin's benefit.

In the years preceding World War II, the British needed „quiet“ in the desert to the rear of their positions while they were preoccupied with fortifying their forces and building up their strength, all-the-more-so during the long war years. In contrast to the period of Ottoman rule, which is engraved upon the memory of the Negev Bedouin with the mark of four particularly bad years (the years of WWI), the period of British rule is remembered as being particularly good, except for the last five years. This was constantly emphasized later on in Bedouin dealings with Israeli authorities.⁷

During most of the Mandatory period, the Negev was at the periphery of British activity. The Be'er-Sheva sub-district was then part of the Gaza District, and although Be'er Sheva was a district city, second in size to Gaza City, little official development was carried out.

The population grew nevertheless: from 2,356 in 1922 to 6,490 in 1948.⁸ During the Mandate, the dynamics of development were influenced by the prosperity of commercial life. The city grew because it became the place for tribesmen to conduct trade and social and political exchanges. Many Bedouin encamped on Be'er Sheva's outskirts.

The British let the Bedouin maintain their culture, as long as they did not harm permanent settlements or the traffic passing through the desert area. The Bedouin recall that contact with Government representatives was expressed in mutual compliments and visits, participation in ceremonies, as well as during meetings between officers and officials of the administration and the Sheikhs. These contacts resulted in an increased presence of Bedouin in Gaza and Be'er-Sheva. The British Government was sensible enough to recruit Bedouin to the Special Police, the *Hajjana* (camel-riders), who maintained the network of police stations in the desert and patrolled the areas between them.⁹

The British, aware of the social organization of the Negev Bedouin, appointed the sons of sheikhs to be officers and commanders of the *Hajjana*. The preferential attitude shown to the Bedouin was reflected in the separate patrol units in the British police; as a rule the Bedouin were recruited to the *Hajjana* and rode camels, while the peasant policemen (termed *Sawari*) rode horses.¹⁰ The service conditions of the Bedouin were better than those of the *fallahin* (peasants). A monthly income for those in the police helped raise the standard of living for hundreds of families. This service also provided with Bedouin with instruction in modern warfare (they were trained in the use of automatic weapons), and in communications – they learned to operate wireless sets, and, thus, exchange of information

between Bedouin encampments was improved. In order to prevent either favoritism or strife, the British constantly rotated Bedouin personnel among police stations in various tribal areas. The deployment of the camps were as follows: In the west (from the south): 'Awja Al-Hafir, Bir 'Asluj, Al-Khalasa (a temporary station) and Al-'Imara (to the west of Ofaqim). In the center (from the south): Tel Al-Milh, Bir Zabala (Al-Huzayyal). In the east (from the south): Um-Rashrash, 'Ein Husub, Kurnub, Ras-Zweira,¹¹

The *Hajjana* stations were set up in the 1920s, immediately after the British entered the country. The Al-Huzayyal station was built only in 1942, at the same time as the construction of schools in tribal centers. British officers were in command of the stations and command posts, while a Bedouin (usually), and sometimes a peasant (*shawish*, i.e., sergeant) was responsible for the Bedouin forces. Abu-Hamed, who served in the Mandatory Police, recalls that Bedouin were appointed to the position of station sergeant, among them 'Abd As-Salam Al-'Atauneh (who was also the first of the Bedouin sergeants at the Al-Huzayyal station); Daud Al-'Akili, Salameh Abu Al-tum and Suleiman Al-'Atauneh. The deployment of the police posts was intended to serve both the interests of the Bedouin and the goals of the British Government, as Abu-Hamed tells us:

In 1945, when I served at Al-Khalasa, the herds of the Al-'Azazmeh encroached on the cultivated lands of Ar-Riati (peasants of Syrian descent who were attached to Al-'Azazmeh as merchants and as tillers of land, and who developed dry-land farming near Al-Khalasa) and destroyed part of the crop. Upon the orders of the English, I arrested Sheikh Salameh Ibn-Sa'id and a number of

sheikhs from the tribe. According to the procedures, they could be held for seven days before trial and no pleadings or character witnesses were of any avail, nor did the *jaha* (delegation of dignitaries) from the tribe help in the effort to free the detainees; and they were forced (by the British) to compensate the Riati for the damages inflicted upon their fields, and only then were they released.

This story shows that: 1. Government backing was given to the police stations and that the latter were subject to the standing orders of the mandatory authorities. 2. The Government intervened in an apparently internal tribal matter in order to protect agriculture. 3. Bedouin accustomed litigation in inter-tribal affairs (which was part of their tradition) made use of new legal options and filed complaints in the tribal court in Be'er-Sheva, according to governmental procedures

The British continued the tradition of the tribes' court in Be'er-Sheva, *Mahkamat Al-'Ashair*, where, during Ottoman rule, judges presided who mixed a familiarity with their own judicial tradition with knowledge of state law. The court during the Mandate was named The Council of the Tribes (*Majlis Al-'Ashair*) and the sheikhs were expected to know the procedures of the mandatory rule. Prominent among the judges mentioned by the Bedouin were: Sheikh Freih Abu-Middin, Jadu' Al-A'asam, Hussein Abu-Sitta, 'Id Ibn-Rafi', Hajj Salman Abu-Rabi'a, Salman Al-Huzayyal and others. The *Majlis Al-'Ashair* was headed by one of the sheikhs appointed by the British. The Council served as a sort of *shiqq* (pl. *shquq*, meeting place of men, a separate area within the tent) of tribal heads with some 90 members (in 1945), which represented the number of tribes living in the Negev.

The British gave the sheikhs extensive powers with regard to laws that were basically traditional in nature. Their deliberations were preserved in the minutes. The first recorder for the Majlis Al-'Ashair was not Bedouin, but a man of urban origin, Muhammad Al-Ghazali Al-Sajja. As the proportion of the Bedouin living in Be'er-Sheva declined in favor of the more urbanized peasants from Gaza and Mt. Hebron, the wide representation Bedouin had enjoyed in the first seventeen years of the city (1918-1935) also declined. The Turkish policy of encouraging the urbanization of the Bedouin was changed by the British, who saw no reason to prefer Bedouin over peasants as residents of in the city.

Most Bedouin showed no particular interest in the municipal administration and, as a rule, lacked the qualities needed to be clerks. Those clerks who were none-the-less recruited from among the tribes devoted most of their attention to inter-tribal relationships and the traditional way of life in their tribes. For example, the influence of the Zullam tribe began to spread in Be'er-Sheva region through Sheikh Al-Hajj Salman Ibn-Khalil Abu-Rabi'a only at the end of the Ottoman rule. Previously, the tribe was smaller and less cohesive, but the Zullam tribal segments united around the its war against the peasants of Yatta, after which these sheikhs were presented to the authorities and acknowledged by them as the tribe's leaders. On the basis of familiarity with the relative strengths of the Bedouin tribes, the British authorities encouraged the Zullam in their climb up the tribal hierarchy, consolidating the prime ranks of the strongest tribes. The senior leader was 'Id Salem Abu-Rabi'a, then well-known for his contacts with the Zionist Movement (Levontin, 1924: 58-60).¹²

Hajj Salman Abu-Rabi'a earned such special status and was renown as a

prominent leader and intellectual (in the 1920s). To this day it is recalled that he had a special bond of friendship with a British officer called „Mister Faradi“, who imposed special tasks on him to preserve security, as well as peace, among the tribes camped along the trade routes from the Negev to Transjordan, from the northern Negev through the Arava, and from Aqaba to Hijjaz. Hajj Salman urged the British to build many police stations and to recruit Bedouin for the mounted police. At the same time, he also urged the sons of the sheikhs and their relatives to enlist in the Police. Salem Abu-Rabi'a called the first recruits *Awlad Nashama*, the valiant, brave ones, because they were the first to bring honor to members of their tribe and to Hajj Salman. The mounted police helped to ease the tensions between the tribes, but did not apparently manage to attain total security for those using the roads. This situation remained until the end of the British Mandate in 1948. It is related that a certain customs officer, called Abu-Bandi of Mt. Hebron, had relatives who were frequently attacked by the robber gang of Al-Ashkiye) which hijacked the pack animals and caused much loss of life on treks along the axes leading from Transjordan to Palestine.¹³ Liquidation of the gang contributed to security on the 'Arava Road and encouraged trading in the Be'er-Sheva market. Trade with Transjordan had formerly been restricted to camel imports but, from 1928 on, the Transjordan livestock merchants also began to bring sheep to Be'er-Sheva. From this moment, the Be'er Sheva market was nicknamed 'Atabat Riziq (Threshold of Livelihood), since it was no longer just a local market, but an international business center.

Economic development activities

From the mid-1930s, parallel with the accelerated development of the road system in the Negev, the British began restoration of ancient water systems. According to Braslavski's evidence:

Apart from the use of the wells of the coastal valley, the British dug a number of new wells or repaired and cleaned out wells that had been destroyed or filled in with dirt and stones by the Turkish army on its withdrawal northwards. At Khalasa, for example, the English repaired two destroyed wells, cleaning them to a depth of 11-13 meters and set pumps on them that raised 20.430 (cubic) meters of water an hour.

(Braslavski: 138)

The British encouraged intensive agriculture by digging wells. At the same time they took over salt mining (at Mt. Sodom) and tobacco growing (the *Hishi* type) (ibid.) and prohibited the Bedouin from engaging in these occupations, which had afforded them another source of income. With the decline in the value of camels – from 50-80 Turkish pounds at the time of World War I to 2-4 pounds after the WWI – the Bedouin increasingly engaged in agriculture to provide an alternative to the income from livestock sales (ibid.). Local livestock values declined even further with the increase in importation of livestock from the Eastern Transjordan to be sold at the Be'er-Sheva market. (This peaked in the 1940s.) Other factors encouraging the expansion of agriculture in the Negev in the period of the British Mandate were:

a. Establishment of a land tribunal that defended the rights of land purchasers against Bedouin attempts to reclaim the land. (These were mainly merchants from Gaza who leased the land they had purchased from Bedouin to peasants from Egypt.) The tribunal also protected

the Bedouin from being dispossessed by speculators and lessees from Gaza, who tried to extract plots from them by deceit. The authorities showed they were interested in improving agriculture and this increased the sense of security and allowed the land market in Be'er-Sheva to develop (ibid., 142).

b. During World War II, importation of food by sea was dangerous and expensive; therefore, the British actively encouraged maximum expansion of the cultivated area in the Negev by setting up stations for tractors they purchased and offered for hire to the Bedouin. Gradually, some Bedouin purchased tractors, and agents for the use of mechanical equipment, most of them of peasant origin, entered into partnerships (*shirk*) with the Bedouin. The „tent and the tractor“ (ibid., 154) became part of the agricultural scenery of the Negev.

c. The development and commercialization of Be'er-Sheva raised the Bedouin's standard of living. Once they experienced consumer luxuries, the Bedouin were prepared to produce more for the market and even to sell part of their lands to acquire cash:

The commercial sense and the chase after profits led, to a large extent, to the economic welfare in the country and the greater demand for agricultural produce. Gaza, Khan Yunis and Be'er-Sheva became buying and selling centers for the barley of the Negev and other grains that were transported northwards.

Braslavski (ibid., 253-4).

Trade also developed in sheep manure, wool, furs, etc., with a number of sites in the Negev serving as storage areas for accumulation of materials that were to be transported to Be'er-Sheva and to the commercial centers of the north (ibid.). In other words, a regional commercial system came into being – spear-headed by Be'er-Sheva. As merchandise

was transferred from hand-to-hand on its way from the Bedouin encampments to the markets of the north, prices rose. There is evidence that a number of sheikhs became supply contractors to the British army. They mainly provided animals for meat to the „Government Agency“ (of the Still Brothers), which was the intermediary between the army and the sheikhs (*ibid.*). In order to win a sympathetic rear front, the British then granted the Bedouin freedom of movement, at the expense of the villages of the northern Negev. The Bedouin interpreted this as freedom, and they still describe how their herds could roam unrestricted by the government. Such license – which endangered the sown lands to the north – had previously been limited by the Ottomans (as it is today in Israel). Although freedom of pasture reduces the costs of livestock breeding (eliminating the need to purchase hay during the dry summer season), if not stringently supervised, grazing herds can cause serious damage to the outskirts of the sown (Reifenberg 1955; Nelson 1973).

The Mandatory authorities needed Bedouin manpower before and during World War II and therefore developed job opportunities for them, which also served to win Bedouin friendship. The special (tribal) social structure of the Bedouin made them easy to work with, i.e., once the sheikh was befriended, all his followers were also on one's side. The paving of roads in the Negev at that time served a double purpose – that of offering relief work to members of the tribes and to advance the search for natural resources. A large part of the money that flowed into the region for development purposes found its way into the pockets of Bedouin contractors and laborers. Among the tribal elders, Sheikh Salameh Ibn-Sa'id of the 'Azazmeh, a road contractor, was

known for his wealth.¹⁴ Money was diverted in the final resort to pay for the Bedouins' work, thus providing them with cash. This led to the expansion of commerce in the Be'er-Sheva market. The comfortable climate, together with government investment, contributed to strengthening the relationships between Bedouin and the new residents of Be'er-Sheva. Abu-Jadu'a related (in 1985, at 80 years old) that the residents of Be'er-Sheva adopted many Bedouin customs for the sake of business contacts, particularly those relating to hospitality. „They learned to slaughter animals for Bedouin guests, something they had not been used to doing in their home settlements (mainly in Gaza), thus helping the Bedouin to feel more comfortable in the city.“ The Bedouin recall their acquaintances and their business partners from among the inhabitants of Be'er-Sheva (the overwhelming majority of whom fled back to the Gaza Strip and Jordan during the War of 1948).

The Bedouin residents of Be'er-Sheva, who were mainly sheikhs and tribal leaders, adopted a special way of life. Most of them, it is related, did not move their families into the city, but created the impression that they had settled there. Some married peasant women or women from the (Gazan urban) 'Azazmeh segment, in addition to their Bedouin wives. These other women would live permanently in the Be'er-Sheva houses purchased by the Bedouin. Many Bedouin hired housekeepers, who would bring their families with them to live in the Be'er-Sheva houses. The Bedouin developed businesses in their houses, and the housekeepers served as trustees for their property. An example is Sheikh Abu-Yahya and a partner from the Abu-Sirhan tribe, who took a female housekeeper from Gaza, from the Al-Baz family. She lived in Be'er Sheva with her family and managed a prosperous shop

for the Sheikh. These Bedouin did not deviate from the conventions of their society with respect to what was expected of their Bedouin wives – their Bedouin wives continued to live traditional lives outside of the town. A Bedouin's house in Be'er-Sheva served the socio-political needs of its owner. The town house, as the tent in the open spaces, was used by the sheikhs as a place to meet with other men from the tribe, as well as with their business partners (reported by Abu-Ghanem, born 1910).

Encouragement of the Bedouin economy

Now engaged in agriculture, Bedouin had to look for additional means of income to offset years when produce was limited due to inconsistency in rain distribution, inferior conditions for storage and the need to set aside water during wet years in preparation for drought. With the founding of the market in Be'er-Sheva, conditions were improved for storing stocks in regular shops so that there would be enough for sowing after years of repeated drought. Institutionalization of wheat imports by the Mandatory Government helped create trust – there was no longer any need for hoarding. In addition, during drought, the Government let the Bedouin migrate with their herds (while carefully monitoring their movement) to areas with plentiful pasture when grass in the meager Negev pasture became depleted. This encouraged the cultivation of cash crops (mainly barley, rather than wheat) and the sale of surplus lambs after a rainy year. Commerce in the Be'er-Sheva market grew, to a certain extent in proportion to the availability of pasture lands in the eastern Transjordan (which, too, fell under British domain). Such an

arrangement was achieved thanks to the contacts of Hajj Salman Abu-Rabi'a with the Mandatory authorities (oral report, Al-Mahasna, 1985). Revenues of the livestock branch did not equal those from crop produce – but they were relatively stable and insured an adequate cash flow for survival purposes. For the peasants, drought years were fatal, but the Bedouin who could migrate preserved their income-producing „property“. No famines were recalled after the 1930s. Prosperity reached its climax in 1939, the year World War II began. Over time, the Bedouin producer learned how to adapt to the requirements of a market economy.

Through the provision of cereals, the British brought about a change in the Bedouin patterns of consumption. The elders of the Al-A'asam describe the change in patterns of bread consumption. Bread from wheat was baked throughout the Negev.¹⁵ When the Bedouin note that they ate bread made from barley flour, it was a sign that wheat had been in short supply. In years of serious drought or when grain diseases harmed the crop,¹⁶ the Mandatory Government came to the aid of the Bedouin by distributing Australian barley. It is recalled that this barley often arrived so moldy that even the sheep had difficulty eating it.

The Negev Bedouin had to deal with two types of drought:

1. *Local Drought* – that harmed certain parts of the Negev, but not others. The damage was lessened by purchasing in the Be'er Sheva shops wheat and fodder grown by Bedouin who had been blessed that year with excess crops. Another solution was to migrate with the herds and join the work-force in rural settlements to the north. Until the 1930s and particularly during the early 1940s, the Bedouin of the Negev tried their hand at wage-earning jobs in Jewish kib-

butzim in the northern Negev and at Jewish moshavot in the lowlands and Judean hills. Muhammad Suleiman (born 1937) recalls the winter migration of 1946, when he and his father's herd passed among the Arab villages of the Jerusalem hills and encamped for a considerable time between the village of Kolonia and Jewish Motza. In such a year, the livestock breeders tried to sell off most of their herd, retaining only the young females. They knew they could increase the herd to desirable dimensions by purchasing more ewes at the Be'er-Sheva market. Through the importation of sheep from eastern Transjordan, the merchants were able to control the supply of livestock for sale at each location.

2. *General Drought* – that struck the country and the neighboring lands. Of course in this case, migrating to the center and north of the country did not help. In 1927, when there was an unbearable drought, the authorities transported Negev Bedouin sheep in railway carriages to pasture land in Ghor¹⁷ in the Beit She'an Valley. Several Bedouin migrated that year even further to the eastern Transjordan or to northern Sinai, searching for perennial vegetation. Before the British had formulated ways to quickly deliver crops in times of severe drought, such a shortage was also felt in the shops of Be'er-Sheva. It is recalled that the Bedouin were forced to pasture their herds on the slopes of streams, as far as Al-Busaira, south-east of the Dead Sea. Muhammad Abu-Hamed relates that in 1927, a convoy of a few score of camels (most belonging to the Qla'iyah¹⁸ families in 'Arad Valley) left for Al-Busaira. The travails of the trip were very difficult and, in order to authenticate this, he presented his uncle as an example – the man had fallen ill on the trip that summer becoming deaf; he managed to return home only by a miracle.

The ruling power can soften the effect of drought. Once the supply of grain through the market became regularized and reliable (after 1927), most Bedouin preferred to sell, rather than store, their crop, reserving only a small amount of grain for baking and for sowing. The Bedouin felt that if times were bad and cash was needed, they could always sell off some land to peasants who continued to migrate to the Negev from Egypt in increasing numbers. Trust in the British provider grew, initially among the Bedouin and later among their peasant tenants. The peasants – whose right to live in the Negev was dependent on the good will of the Bedouin – tried to continuously till as much land as possible; they stored much of the produce in *matamir* (underground store rooms). Experienced in agriculture, they were more aware than the Bedouin of the advantage in timing the sale of grain so that the best prices – according to the season of the year – could be obtained. The peasants, who had more grain to sell than the Bedouin, were a moderating influence on the market and prevented wild fluctuations. The Bedouin thought about his share in the harvest – according to the *shirk* system, and not about saving. The peasants, in contrast, did not rush to spend their money on consumer articles. One interviewee from the Qla'iyah tribes explained the approach of the peasant as follows:

„The red one¹⁹ was diligent and therefore purchased a sufficient quantity of land from the Bedouin to sow a little barley; in exchange for its surpluses to purchase a plot and so settle at a fixed spot so as not to be nomadic.

The following peasant sayings describe their mindset: „*Qaddak minn yaddak*“ (Your expenditures are from your own hand, i.e., depend upon yourself) and „*Illī b'yishqa b'yilqa*“ (He who makes an

effort will have food to eat). The peasant was hard-working while the Bedouin, by comparison, was lazy. A peasant saying goes: „*Al-faqar minn mathani ar-r'kab*“ (Poverty is to be found among those with bended knee), i.e., those who spend the day sitting and doing nothing. The Bedouin livestock breeder provided for his flock but would not till his land, leaving this for the peasants to do, not without some trepidation. There is a Bedouin saying, „*It'imni alyum wa-adhbahni bukra*“ (Feed me today and kill me tomorrow). Muhammad An-Nassassra, head of a lineage of peasant origin, relates that after his Bedouin neighbors of the Abu-Rabi'a tribe ran out of grain during the 1946 famine²⁰, they took over the *mantara* (grain store) of the Abu-'Ajaj peasant families and distributed all the barley among themselves.

The Bedouin used to tease the peasants about conventions of hospitality (although the peasants to some extent, were better off because they economized). The Bedouin said,

We would kill a sheep for our guests; our peasant neighbor would serve bread – The Bedouin would keep within reach, in his home, *rubtan* or *rabayie* (bound sheep ready to be slaughtered or to be given as a gift for slaughtering),²¹ and would bless food by saying, „*Al-laham wajed*“ (There is [always] meat). The peasant, on the other hand, would keep grain and say, „A person with two surplus portions of wheat would keep them until a guest chanced by so as not to be considered a miserly host.

Interestingly, the peasants began to adopt some aspects of Bedouin hospitality, and instead of only offering agricultural produce and pastries to guests, they began slaughtering sheep and provided meat. The Bedouin, on the other hand, began to economize and served their guests bread, together with the meat.

The peasant was willing to engage in any type of work and undertook the total burden of tilling the Bedouin plots as *harrath* (ploughman) and *hassad* (reaper), as *nattar* (keeping the grain in the *mantara*), as well as as *ra'i* (hired shepherd). When the Negev Bedouin could not provide work, the peasant (who was accustomed to working for a wage) would find employment at the Jewish moshavot in the south and center of the country. Through „outside work“, the peasants brought cash into their encampments and made loans available to Bedouin when needed. If a peasant's savings accrued to a sufficient amount over the years, he would purchase a plot of land from the Bedouin, and subsequently, adopt a genealogical tree as though he, too, were of Bedouin origin (see Marx 1967, Chapters 6 & 7). Muhammad An-Nassassra, whose grandfather and father had bought their lands from the Bedouin of Qur'an, relates, „The peasants did the work and made the money by Jewish farmers in the north. They used to work by day and by night and also on festivals.“ Therefore, in order not to have to stay far from home, some of them would bring their families to the north. Wages for daytime work were (in 1936) a „shilling“ (5 qurush) and if they worked at night they were paid double: *bariza* (10 qurush). Many would be employed to manually irrigate the orchards.

The peasants' marriage patterns and the number of their children were also influenced by the type of work they did. Since they engaged in manual work and could be assisted by members of the family, their families were particularly large. The Bedouin attached political importance to clan size,²² and were, therefore, jealous and suspicious of the peasant. Sheikh Isma'il Abu-H'med (aged 85 in 1988) recalls that the Bedouin in the past would provoke peasants in public about this point. For example,

when the peasants drew water from the well at Tel Al-Milh, the Bedouin would taunt them singing, „*Ya dhabiht Al-Q'la'i labra minn al-w'ja'i*“ (Kill a Q'la'i and be relieved of your pains). The increasing migration of peasants from Egypt during the period of the British Mandate,²³ the high birth rate of this group, in addition to their economic talents, were cause for the Bedouin patrons to hate the Q'la'i. Peasants who bought plots of land from their Bedouin patrons claimed that the price was double that asked from Jewish buyers.

The Bedouin transition from livestock breeding to a more agricultural way of life and from a subsistence economy to a market economy was the result of growing dependence on government agencies. This could not have happened without the city of Be'er-Sheva, which became more and more important as the capital of the Negev, due to the development of the public institutions. Investment by the Mandatory Government attracted private investment as well. For example, when the city's water requirements for drinking and watering gardens grew, no less than 20 wells were dug and diesel pumps installed. Bedouin sheikhs were among those who invested in intensive farming near the city and who cultivated green patches by irrigation.²⁴ To this day, the two wells of Suleiman Abu-Ghalyun are remembered – although he did not cultivate his land himself, but employed a peasant named As-Safadi to do so. The sheikhs' wells were named after themselves: Bir Abu-'Aliyhan, Bir Al-Maddani, Bir Ibn-Said, Bir Abu-kaff, Bir Ibn Jkheidim, and so on.

Resources were invested in agriculture from the end of the 1920s and not in further development of the livestock economy. Development of an 'international' livestock market, employing

the new railroad to transport herds from the eastern desert areas, reduced the value of the livestock in the weekly market of Be'er-Sheva. As the influx of Bedouin tribes and Egyptian peasants increased, the population in areas surrounding the city became denser. It became more difficult to obtain pasture for all; Bedouin abandoned their herds or reduced the number of their sheep to 50 and camels to 3-10.

During the previous Turkish period, too, Northern Sinai, the Negev and east Transjordan were under the jurisdiction of one governmental center, and there was no apparent obstacle to the development of a regional market. Turkish control, however, was loose and, in absence of a firm and tyrannical hand, the Bedouin robbers upset the commercial order. In contrast, the British imposed security in transport and business, which was necessary for trade between the newly-formed states in the area. As an elderly Bedouin put it, „In the days of the British, the market expanded two deserts and became a market of the two seas: the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.“ The reference was, of course, to the Be'er-Sheva market.

Coins that were legal tender

The rule of the British in Egypt, Sudan, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and south-west Asia for the first time permitted transit of goods from the Far East to the eastern desert and the Negev, with transfer further westwards and northwards to the cities of Europe. Moreover, the British Empire set standard weights and measures, as well as conversion rates for currencies, and could enforce compliance. This increased trust in the trading procedures. The Turkish, Eryp-

tian, Saudi, and Palestinian lira, the Transjordanian dinar and the British pound were used. In contrast, during the Ottoman Empire except for the period of the capitalization agreements at the end of the 19th century when a considerable body of rights, concessions and privileges had been granted by the Ottomans to European traders, there was a multiplicity of currencies from the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere, and conversion rates varied. This discouraged cash purchases – barter became the main method of trade. (Also the population in the border areas of the Empire had little ready cash and so relied on barter, too.)²⁵ The elders of the Bedouin tribes recall exchanges of sheep for weapons, as well as for seeds. Adept merchants gained experience at moving livestock, mainly camels, long distances. Stock not sold in the Be'er-Sheva market, was taken to Gaza, Jaffa and Egypt and sold there. In Egypt, then as now, there was a strong demand for camel meat. This preference was relatively rare among the Bedouin,²⁶ and helped preserve the value of the camel in the Negev, although its importance as a work animal, a beast of burden and use in transportation declined.

The livestock trade: merchants and timing

Herds could pasture farther into the arid areas if the rains in the Negev fell in November (the beginning of the rainy period), leaving pools in the wadis in which grass grew. Livestock deals for the Bedouin herd were undertaken between May and October (the period of no rainfall), when it was necessary to return from the desert to the edge of settled lands where water was available. During the dry season, danger to animals en route from disease and flashfloods was

less than during the rainy season. The trip, a new practice, could take 5-6 months, and the herd was treated the whole way as though it were a pasturing migration. Between June and August, the market was flooded with animals from the east and it was not worthwhile for the Negev Bedouin to sell their animals. As Ghanem Abu-Ghanem said: „The she-goat became pregnant and gave birth during the trip.“ (Previously, pregnant animals would not be taken on treks.) Between November and April, the Negev Bedouin actively engaged in the animal trade. The weekly market in Be'er-Sheva was smaller and the trading turnover was much less in the winter, but activity in the animal market never ceased, as Abu-Ghanem put it, „The market is the basis for the existence of the town and the Bedouin.“

Since first decade of British rule, the feeling of security on the roads had increased. This had an immediate impact on the camel traders and from the end of the 1920s, as the security became consolidated, trade in sheep increased, too. (Sheep were more vulnerable to attacks by bandits.) The Bedouin specialized in the camel trade while merchants of peasant origin specialized in sheep. Elders from the Be'er-Sheva valley note the 'Aqilat, members of the Nujaidat (Abu-Tayah) tribes and the Huwaitat (Ibn-Jazi) as being in control of this trade. It was said about their sheikhs, „The nobility was for them“, implying that among the Bedouin, making a living from camels still endowed the highest status. These Bedouin traders are usually described as „*Ahel al-frag as-sumur*“ (owners of the black carriers) – the reference being to those black double bags, woven of goat's hair for equipment and provisions, that were carried on either side of the camels' saddles.²⁷ The experts in commerce and sheep were the residents of Ma'an in Transjordan. The most famous of them

were known by the name of Qum Al-Kabriti or Al-Kabarta. They used to visit the Bedouin encampments in the eastern desert at the beginning of the spring months to buy livestock. After they had collected a large herd, they would move westwards, first of all to the market in Be'er-Sheva. They preferred Be'er-Sheva to any other market because of its location on the direct highway to Egypt. Buyers for sheep were not sold in Be'er-Sheva could be found on the eastern periphery of the Egyptian Delta region.

After the British began to purchase grain from the Negev Bedouin, the Bedouin possessed money in previously unknown quantities. New forms of trade developed – merchandise for merchandise, intermingled with purchasing merchandise for money and merchandise for services (labor). An example is the 'Aqilat, members of a Transjordanian tribe and known camel-traders who also were stonemasons who specialized in cutting cisterns from rocks. They would take work tools and explosives for cutting rock when they went to trade livestock. Hajj Ismail Abu-Hmed recalls that in 1928, after a number of years of serious drought (there was no pasture grass for the herds), everyone hurried to sell their camels. This resulted in flooding the livestock market with camels from Arabia. The 'Aqilat had no choice but to sell camels at a loss – 2.50 instead of 5.00 Palestine pounds a head. Camels in the Negev were had at bargain prices. It is recounted that that year was known as the „year of digging and quarrying“, because the 'Aqilat who now could not make a living from trade in camels were stuck in the Negev and had to offer their services to the Bedouin. They excavated storerooms and reservoirs and cleaned out old cisterns (*h'rab*). It is related that work-groups from the 'Aqilat continued to dig and cut stone until the end of the 1930s. The money the British paid the

Bedouin for infrastructure work was invested, for the first time in modern history, in renovation of ancient water storage systems. Renowned contractors, whose names are still remembered, were: Ibn-S'des and Ibn-Tweirib.

The local folklore has documented the impressions of the 'Aqilat in their dual role as vendors of camels and as contractors in a song, as recalled by Hajj Ismail Abu-Hmed.

The Negev man asks Ibn S'des, „What do you say, O Ibn S'des about the district [the residents] of Gaza? And what do you tell of the district [the residents] of Be'er-Sheva?“ Ibn S'des replies, „I will say this: Be'er-Sheva, would that you be plagued by drought. Would that that star [above it] would fall [because] a start has not been made on sacrificing for us from the fattened sheep. Ibn S'des and his camp will seek work, and Ibn Tweirib [another group of workers from the east] did not find anyone to pour them coffee. If, nevertheless, [someone serves], by the time the coffee-pot reaches you, your eye will be asquint [from looking across at the cooking utensils] when you look at it. They will serve you a little loaf [of bread], half made of chaff. That would satisfy a dog by meager expenses.

The poem documents the hardship felt among livestock breeders in the whole area after four consecutive drought years (1926-29), when everyone tried dispose of their animals. The shortage of pasture and of locally-grown grain forced the Bedouin to spend their savings to purchase imported barley for flour and livestock feed. The song hints that the townspeople and those camped in the outskirts of the town were miserly, having lost their good qualities and forgotten all about hospitality. It does not forgive such behavior, even though they,

too, were apparently down to their last loaf of bread. Since the economic situation in Be'er-Sheva was somewhat better than areas on its periphery, it was expected that the landlord sheikhs would take care of their less fortunate employees.

Because of the investments of the British and the Zionist Movement (in particular), the disposable income of the residents of „Palestine-Land of Israel“ increased in comparison to that in neighboring countries. As a consequence, migration to Be'er Sheva increased, with the livestock traders as a catalyst. The harm from the drought years was considerable worse for the residents of the Hijaz region, and the testimony of Muhammed An-Nassasra, whose father hosted migrants from the territory of the Bili tribe after a year of drought at the beginning of the 1940s can be believed. The guests testified that the drought and the famine in the Hijaz had forced them to move to the Negev, with the intention of selling their entire herd there, because no buyers could be found in Transjordan and Saudi Arabia, i.e., the standard of living had reached a low. Bedouin from the east came as beggars, with nothing, except for the *J'rab al-laban* (skins for butter storage).²⁸ It was then harvest time in the Kuseifa area, and the new arrivals asked to be employed in return for a little wheat. The hosts also noted that these newcomers did not know how to pluck the spikes of grain by hand (*qla'a*), as was customarily done with the short-stalked crops of the Negev. The Bedouin mocked the immigrants saying they did not know „where the grains hide in the spike“. The Bedouin taught them the following rhyme as a harvest song: „The beneficial part of the wheat/barley is in its head [the spike] so don't look for it in its bottom“ [the stalk]).

Organization of the livestock trade

The *modus operandi* of sheep traders differed from that of camel-merchants. The sheep trader (*tajer*) did not raise the animals he sold, but only accompanied the breeders to markets and conducted the bargaining. The camel merchants undertook all the aspects themselves. The *tajer* hired professionals to care for the sheep herd. They were called „*makrawiyin*“. It was understood that they were „*ru'yan wa-khaddamin*“ (shepherds and servants), and they had to lead the herd and care for it as though they had engaged in its breeding. They also had to serve the merchants during the trip, mainly to prepare their meals. The monthly wage of a *karawi* in the years 1928-1930 was two Palestine shillings a month, considered a reasonable amount. Abu-Ghanem explains, „Ten qrush sufficed to feed and clothe you.“ By way of example: a rotel (3 kgs) of sugar cost 2.5 qrush; a rotel of coffee was 7 qrush, and a set of clothes, including the *thob* (robe), *kibir* (dress), and *mandil* (head covering), cost 15 qrush.

Some Negev Bedouin were sharp traders; the best known were from the Jarawin clan of the Tarabin tribe, such as Ayesh Abu-Yahya, M'himmid Abu-kheisha and 'Id Abu-S'beitan, who specialized in the camel trade. Others were members of the Qudeirat tribes, who specialized in sheep trading. Several personally went to the east desert to purchase surpluses of livestock and bring them to the Be'er-Sheva market. From the testimony of Sheikh Suleiman Al-'Ukbi (a livestock trader), they had an advantage over the foreign livestock merchant. The merchants from the east always came in the summer and in large groups – when the market was flooded. Therefore, they had

to sell in quantity and lower their price to maintain a reasonable revenue. The local trader, on the other hand, would keep his animals and wait for increased demand after the merchants from the eastern desert had left or before they arrived (mainly in the autumn and winter), thus obtaining better prices.

Abu-Ghanem remembers that merchants who bought camels in the east for three g'neh (Egyptian pounds) sold them in Be'er-Sheva for six g'neh. Livestock traders from the Negev in their travels east passed among the M'azeh and Rwala confederations of tribes, under the patronage of the heads of these tribes. (Otherwise, they would have had no chance of escaping from the bandits who were members of those same tribes.) Ghanem Abu-Ghanem describes how, when the Negev merchants reached the Jordan River (known as: *Ash-shari'a* i.e., line of the water flow), they would declare their purpose of entry: „I am entering under the patronage of Mithkal Al-Fayez“, or „These being the names of those who gave their patronage to the traders from the Negev.“ Traders without patronage endangered their lives. Patronage was essential because, according to Abu-Ghanem, the „ghazu“ (bandits) roamed the eastern desert until the end of the 1940s.

Descriptions of the Be'er-Sheva market and its activity in the 1930s

Our informants provided conflicting information regarding the day of the week the weekly market was held. Several of the tribal elders, all in their seventies or eighties, such as Ghanem Abu-Ghanem and Salem Yusuf Abu Rabi'a, said Monday was the day, while others recall that it was on Wednesdays. There is agree-

ment as to the location of the market since it did not change during and after the period of the Turks. The market was always located on the open space to the south-east of the city's houses, under the open sky. The area was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence so that purchasers of livestock could not evade payment of the sales' tax. (To this day there are Bedouin who call the livestock market *karantila* [quarantine].) The fence had one opening for arrivals, where *jumruk al-halal* (business customs on the animals) was charged. Customs policemen were in charge of the collection.

The animals were taxed by counting the vendors' herds when they entered the quarantine. At this stage, nothing was paid. But whoever left, paid the tax upon exit: one qirsh per head of camel and *ta'arifeh* (0.5 qirsh) per head of sheep sold. The purchase of a camel was confirmed by a special authorization termed „*al-baj*“ (marking=authorization) that the *m'bawwej* (giver of the authorization) handed to the purchaser so that he would not be accused at any time of having stolen the animal. *Jamal m'bawwej* (a camel marker) operated only in the market and this, therefore, was a good reason to buy a camel in the market, rather than in the open spaces.

The phrase „*As-suq mawkaf minn al-khof*“ (The market stands because of the sense of fear) was coined about the camel market. This was true for the following reasons:

1. When livestock theft is commonplace, one cannot be sure that a camel purchased was not previously stolen. If this is found to be the case, the person would be incriminated and the camel confiscated. An unscrupulous vendor might after would claim that the camel, still branded with the seal of his tribe, was his, even receiving payment.

2. The market was an exterritorial site and relatively neutral with respect to

power struggles between tribes. The tribe, however, could extract economic concessions. For example, the custom of *al-tibiddi* (right of first refusal) enabled agnatic relatives of the vendor to buy his camels (and other things) from him at a cheap price, before he offered them to strangers. A situation could therefore arise where, after the purchase of a camel, a relative of the vendor would appear and take the camel from the purchaser, claiming *tibiddi*.

To address these problems and maintain objectivity of commerce, at the end of the 1930s the role of *samsar* (mediator) was instituted in the market. The mediator had two roles: a) finding buyers for merchandise, and b) conducting negotiations for the sale on behalf of the Bedouin vendor, while urging the parties to conclude the deal early. This would increase the mediator's turnover and profits and serve the interests of both vendor and purchaser, since it was necessary to conclude the sale early in the day so that the animals would not go without food or water for a long time. (Market logistics did not allow feeding and watering on site.) The role of the mediator became established despite the displeasure of the Bedouin who refused to publically acknowledge that he was necessary. Looking back, Ghanem Abu-Ghanem says, „The mediator acted out of a paucity of religious faith“, and explains his determination in that he would push into affairs that were not his when there really was no need for him; rather like a parasite to whose agency the parties agreed only because they feared his cursing tongue.

Salem Abu-Rabi'a testifies that at the market, vendors from Transjordan met the large livestock buyers from various locations in the Land of Israel. The best known of them were from Lod, Ramleh, Gaza, and Al-Faluja. The vendors tried to arrive in Be'er-Sheva the day before

the market so that they could enter the enclosure early the next morning. They slept alongside their animals, while the buyers from the country and from Egypt would sleep in (inns).²⁹

British profits from the livestock market

From Bedouin testimony, it can be concluded that the British also imposed a tax called *al-'ushur* (the tithe). The assessment of the value of the herds and collection of the tax was termed *'adad al-'anz* (counting of the goat). Hussein Al-M'tairat relates, „Each year a convey would come to us with a sheikh who was responsible for the collection [of the animals]. The time of the census was in the spring or in April.“

Preceding the visit, a *mufattesh* (inspector) was sent to the encampment, and he would prepare the livestock for the visit of the assessor (*al-'addad*) and would determine the date of the census. From that moment, the information quickly spread and herd owners would spirit away part of their herds to distant places in order to evade payment of the taxes, but they would keep home at least the *harratha* (a female camel for the harvest); otherwise their ruse would have been obvious. The inspector would assume that the household would have one female camel to use during the harvest³⁰ At the beginning of the 1940s, the annual animal taxes were: the tax (*dharibat*) on a goat or sheep – one shilling (= 5 qurush); the tax on a milch camel – a shilling; the tax on a female ploughing camel – two shillings.

The differences in the amount of tax were explained in that the milch camel provides a basic foodstuff for daily subsistence and, when its produce is not sold, it is not worth a ploughing camel, which can be considered as a means of

production, i.e., generating income. It is surprising to find that the tax on a female camel is the same as that for a goat, because the actual value of a female camel was 15 to 20 times greater. The explanation is that camel breeding was viewed as a means of basic subsistence, while herd breeding was considered a commercial, rather than a subsistence, investment. The taxes were paid in cash immediately, unless „you proved that you had no cash with you“. In this case, a tolerant attitude was likely and payment could be postponed for one or two markets, i.e., until you turned your animals [into cash] for payment of the tax. Instead of saying that the tax collector waited for one or two weeks, they said that he waited „one or two markets“, from which one may conclude that the weeks were measured by market days.

The commercial season for grain crops

The grain crop market was originally seasonal and flourished in the summer, after the harvest and the threshing (in years when there was something to harvest). But from the 1930s, imported grains and stored grains were traded year round, following a gradual improvement in the storage facilities. Unlike the livestock market that was held in one open area, grain commerce took place in shops within the town and in the open plazas in the summer in the eastern street of the town. Trade in grains was intermingled with all sorts of commercial activity in the shops, but we found Bedouin who claim that the eastern street was a special entity unto itself, which is why it was nicknamed *suq al-hubub* (the grain market). It gained much prominence during the *waqt al-hubub* or the *fatrat al-hubub* (the period of the greatest trade in grains), between June

and October. During these months, the entrances to town took on a different appearance. Particularly on the Hebron-Be'er-Sheva road, piles of grains (*salayeb*) rose up to an impressive height. Mreihil Abu-kaff recalls the location of the *salayeb* on a ridge (*quz*) *Al-Malta'a* on the Hebron road (to the north of the present Makhteshim plant). The small jute (*khavish*) tents pitched by merchants to provide overnight accommodation dotted the road for two to three kilometers. Hills of grain purchased from the Bedouin were piled up next to the tents.

The storage of the grain from the fields in Be'er Sheva was in the interest, so it is explained, of both groups of producers: the poor who tilled small plots with their own hands and a number of rich people who cultivated hundreds of dunams, with the help of mechanical tools. The average farmer, who planted one to two hundred dunams, did not sell his produce. It was better for him to take his crop to the mill to be ground for his own use. Hassan Al-M'teirah testifies that, „Only those who owed money sold.“ The land tycoons, who were always producers of surpluses and were large suppliers to the grain market, included lessees and purchasers of lands from Gaza and Hebron. They also established small businesses in Be'er-Sheva. To this day, the names are recalled of Al-B'sisu and Halil Abu-Shakku (both from Gaza), and the grain merchants from the Mount Hebron area, particularly from the village lineages qum An-Najjer, qum Abu-Dahud and qum Abu-Hadid. Each of them had a shop in Be'er-Sheva. A Christian merchant called Izhak is also remembered, as is a Jew called *Khawaja Musa*, all of whom competed for purchase of grains from the Bedouin and, subsequently, for the leasing and purchase of their lands. Marahil Abu-kaff relates about *Khawaja Musa*³¹

„*Khawaja Musa* was a property own-

er, with a house and large yard. He was a resident of the town (*watani*) and owned a flour mill and place to sleep (*manam*) for anyone who wanted. He was like a Bedouin. At his mill there were some 15 grinding machines (*babur*, pl. *bawabir*). In the course of time, there were Bedouin who left all the other mills and preferred to do business with the Jew. I myself slept by him, but the moment the Disturbances (*harakat*) started (1929) in the region, he sold his mill and properties to Al-B'sisu, and left."

Hassan Al-M'teirat testifies to the sale of grain surpluses and, subsequently, some of the lands to these merchants or their agents and peasant tenant-farmers, through "enticement" – financial loans or claims of non-repayment and a lien on real estate. A trader from Be'er-Sheva once came to him and offered him a loan, using pressure accompanied by inducement: „Here's money. Be blessed'. He opens his pocket to me, and I, of course, take and fill my stomach, because he wanted the land."

As described, the creation and increasing Bedouin debt took advantage of the Bedouin's limitations in: a) understanding the productive potential of the land that, for him, was primarily a pasture area, b) understanding that the matter of financial debt could be incriminating in court, and c) understanding enticement and the danger for those who were greedy for consumer assets.³²

Salem Abu Rabi'a draws a comparison between townspeople, the Qla'iya peasants and the Bedouin: „The peasants bought our [the Bedouin] lands mainly because they were more diligent than we were and understood what could be produced from the soil. The merchants, on the other hand, did not intend to cultivate." Hussein Al-M'tairat tells about the differences in attitude to agriculture which was cause for land

changing hands, that derived from the Bedouin's character, „A lazy person (*kassuh*) sits with the coffee pots while the camels (*al-bill*) eat the grain (*al-habb*)..” Pasture lands that became cultivated lands could more easily change owners and, as a rule, were concentrated in the hands of increasingly fewer persons of means. Harvesting by tractor could speed up the purchase of lands. However, the purchase of the equipment, available to the rich, reached the Negev only in the 1940s and did have much effect³³. The average producer worked only part of his land and, mindful of the possibility of drought, was careful not to sow his entire „savings" if seeds. When the expenditures were divided up between the landowner (the Bedouin), the merchant and the tiller, according to partnership agreements (*shirk*), the trend was to invest in and expand the cultivated area. In the event of natural disasters, the yield for the landowner was less as was that of the merchant-partner, who purchased the grain for sowing. The peasant who paid with the sweat of his brow could not be compensated for the loss of income from his labor.

The Bedouin did not possess the organizational skills to hire ploughmen for plots larger than 100-200 dunams. The efandi merchant, on the other hand, was capable of leasing (from the Bedouin) and tilling (by hiring peasants) of thousands of dunams. The natural grain production unit in the Negev remained „minor" (10-20 dunams of arid land on average). The total area under cultivation grew during the British Mandate, but remained dependent on the quantity of rains. It also was influenced by demand, as well as by the flow of external credit. Abu-Ghanem describes his household economy in the production of grain, as follows, „Anyone who achieved a crop of three tons of wheat or

barley felt rich, sat back and enjoyed life." One ton was enough for baking bread through the year; one ton was kept for sowing the following season, and the third ton was used as rations, as necessary, either to be kept for another year (for baking bread) or for sale if there were not any choice.

Nineteen forty-two was an abundant year, with large grain crops. It is recalled as *sanat at-twan* (the year of the tons). Sheikh Suleiman Al-'Ukbi (85) explains (in 1989) the meaning of the expression with some emphasis that, prior to that year, the Bedouin had not been aware of the unit of weight called a „ton“. They had always used a *quntar* (300 kgs.), one-hundredth of which was the *rotel* (3 kgs.). The *quntar* was, therefore, the largest unit of weight that was known in the market.³⁴ The summer of 1942 is recalled by Hamlan Al-Maddani (aged 80, in 1990) as „a year in which no earth could be seen because of the areas of grain (wheat and barley) that were put out to dry.“ The Bedouin of the 'Arad Valley brought their surplus grains to a collection point at Tel Al-Mileh. Sheikh Hassan Salem Abu-Rabi'a organized the site, as a representative of the Mandatory Government. The Government then purchased the crop surpluses from the productive Bedouin in bulk, for the benefit of the war effort. The crop was taken in trucks via Be'er-Sheva to the port of Haifa.

Sheikh Suleiman claims that the sale of surpluses to the Government was not voluntary, but that the Bedouin were forced into it. To emphasize his words, he relates that just prior to the beginning of the harvest, the authorities appointed assessors who were termed *m'khamnin* (valuers). The two that he recalls in this job were Mhimmid Qabu'a (of the Zullam confederation) and Muhammad Al-'Ukbi (sub-tribe of the Qudeirat). Each assessor was sent to value the crops

of the tribal group to which he did not belong, so as to encourage strictness and to prevent evasion.

Export of the grain crops

Most of the crop of the good years was exported from the Negev and sold as dry varieties that, apparently, gave bread a special taste. Drying the grains allowed them to be stored for many years. Some of the grain was bought and stored by the shop-owners in Be'er-Sheva – for sale as seed in the autumn and to bakery-owners in the winter. The Bedouin remember that they returned to buy seeds from the same merchants to whom they had sold the wheat. This occurred when re-sowing was required when the stalks of the first seasonal sowing (*al-wasem* or *al-'afir*) withered, due to an early rain (in October) followed by no rain until January. Some of the crop retained by the Be'er-Sheva merchants was intended for retail sale at a high price in seasons of short supply. The Bedouin also learned to sell some of their grain stored in the *matamir* to the merchants during the winter and spring seasons. Hussein Al-M'teirah testifies that if he sold a *quntar* of wheat for 30-40 qurush in the summer, in the winter or spring he would receive one Palestine Pound, i.e., two-and-a-half times as much. Abu-Ghanem testifies to taking advantage of the price difference in grain between Be'er-Sheva and Bethlehem, Gaza and Al-Faluja in the 1940s. Peasants (among the Bedouin) with initiative would transport north on a beast of burden up to a *quntar* of grain, where they would obtain 80 qurush for it in the early summer. This difference was meaningful. As an example: the monthly wage of a ploughman (*harrath*) and his camel, who worked from sunrise to sunset, was then 2.5 qurush; the price of a sheep was 0.7 Pal-

estine Pounds and that of a goat 0.5 Palestine Pounds.

In the distant markets, a grain vendor had no trouble finding buyers. Every town had a *rak'ah* (site of the grain market), and the sign pointing to the *rak'ah* made things easier for the Bedouin who might have had difficulty in locating grain merchants. Only towards the end of the Mandatory period did a number of grain merchants emerge from within Bedouin society. The tribal elders explain this saying, „The Bedouin did not hurry to become a merchant because he viewed trade as humiliating.“ The prominent grain merchants among the Negev Bedouin were Al-Hajj Salameh Ibn Sa'id of the 'Azazmeh tribe and 'Amer As-sane', the brother of Hajj Ibrahim As-sane'. It was said that most of the sheikhs engaged in the grain trade, but camouflaged their activity by operating through others. Thus, for example, Sheikh Suleiman Abu-Rabi'a employed his younger brother, Hammad, in commerce. (Hammad became a sheikh after the establishment of the State of Israel.) Sheikh Suleiman Al-'Ukbi testifies that he, himself, engaged surreptitiously in the grain trade towards the end of the Mandatory period.

Shops and peddlers

Thanks to the continually-growing purchasing power of the Bedouin, commerce in goods developed and became more varied. After supply of the initial commodities, service branches also developed. In the wake of the khans (inns) and hotels, restaurants and coffee-shops sprang up, serving mainly those who had come from afar, amongst them the Bedouin. From the mid-1930s, a hospital, police station, telegraph office, and courts operated in Be'er-Sheva. At the same time, not less than 50 regular shops

could be counted in the town, most in the facades of residential buildings along the main street. There were also 10 flour mills, most belonging to Gaza residents, as well as six inns, the largest of which were Khan Al-faar, Khan Muhammad Al-Fransawi and Khan Umm-Jreir (a Gaza woman).

It is recalled that there were several shops for metal and wood products, the largest belonging to Al-Bitar (of Gaza), where one bought ploughs and *jrun* (mortars and pestles for coffee and condiments). The shop of Abu-Kamel is remembered as the place where one bought items of moveable furniture. Among the coffee-shops, the prestigious one of Abu 'Adel is recalled, where the sheikhs and government people used to meet. From the beginning of the 1940s, transportation services were added for the convenience of the residents. Two people from Hebron, called Hussein Abu-Da'as and Abu-Haddana, rented out trucks and taxis (*taxiat*). Towards the end of the Mandate, shops selling consumer items and luxury goods (such as colored cloth for women, some produced in Al-Majdal, now Ashkelon) were opened. More expensive cloth was imported from Damascus, copper vessels from Damascus and Kuwait; sugar was imported from Europe and Egypt and dates from Iraq by camel convoys. The famous Al-M'dammam variety was particularly liked by the Bedouin. Sweets such as *halkum* or 'Ein Aj-jamal (large, round sweets that changed color) were brought from Hebron and Gaza.

Radio began to be in demand among the Bedouin already in 1940. Sheikh Suleiman Al-'Ukbi tells that his brother, Ibrahim, was the first in the Negev to buy a radio receiver, and he brought it into the „*shiqq*“ (guests room) of the family. This radio worked on a car battery, which was taken to Be'er-Sheva for recharging. Migrant peddlers began to

visit the Bedouin encampments, with their goods on backs of mules or driving small carts harnessed to mules, most of them from the Mount Hebron area. They would move around the encampments and offer their goods or and take special orders to be supplied on their next visit.

Summary

The growing need for mutton and cereal production in Mandatory Palestine spurred the demand for cheap, skilled labor for agricultural and construction work, as well as for services. This paved the way for immigration from Egypt to Palestine, with the Negev as the first stop. Movement was facilitated when both counties came under British rule. Security provided by forces deployed in the deserts of Transjordan and Sinai, as well as the completion of the trans-Sinai railway in 1926, lead to increased trade in livestock, with Be'er-Sheva at its center. Moreover, the British government, itself, was a large purchaser of local grains and livestock.

All of the afore-mentioned accelerated cultivation of the arid lands, despite the meteorological risks. Tribesmen from the East and landless peasants from Egypt migrated to the Negev to engage in agriculture. As crop production rose, the need for commercial frameworks increased – leading to an increase in Beer-Sheva's population. Elsewhere, barter trade might have been a preliminary condition for the appearance of money and expansion its use,³⁵ but in this case, the money came from outside sources – the British – and its appearance stimulated expansion of trade. The increase in disposable income attracted merchants to Be'er-Sheva from two older towns in the region, Gaza and Hebron. The reciprocal search for a meeting-place between producers and

buyers encouraged the growth of Be'er-Sheva. The standard of living of Bedouin in Be'er-Sheva and the surroundings rose in comparison with the Bedouin of the neighboring regions. As the economic gulf widened, signs of class strata appeared.

Jealousy-hostility between the classes developed on a smaller scale in farming areas than in regions of the Middle East where oil was discovered. The basic difference was that fate was kind to a relatively large number of families. Land and share cropping deals enriched many, as opposed to the few who became wealthy in the oil-producing areas from the sale of oil concessions. A sociological explanation for this is as follows: production of oil did not require the collaboration of local partners as did cereal grain production. The Bedouin had the land, the peasant – the agricultural skills, the town merchants – the capital, but none had the connections required to reach European markets – the British did. However, after victory over the Germans in Al-'Almain (November 1942), the British reduced their investments in the area. The year 1946 was particularly arid; and the British did not provide supplemental imported grain as in previous dry years. The transition after WWII from a war to a peace economy in Europe adversely affected the Negev Bedouin. Both the concentration of tribesmen beginning in the 1920s and the ultimate dispersion of many tribes during 1946-1947 were the result of Britain's interest in befriending the region leading from the east to the Suez Canal.

We started by telling about the market day from its special social aspects and about the significance of the development of a city with the market as its focal point. The prominent characteristic of the historic Be'er-Sheva market – the meeting place between breeders of livestock with purchasers of animals

(mainly for meat), furs and wool, has become less important as the years passed, and the weekly market is today known for other outstanding features. However, livestock trading still takes place and after selling their sheep, we find the Bedouin, money in hand, at the stores and booths where food, clothing and household articles, were sold. To this day, from first light until mid-morning the Bedouin sell; from 10 a.m. until the afternoon, they are busy buying.

Notes

- 1) "The Bedouin Market – Corner Stone for the Founding of Beersheba: Bedouin Traditions about the Development of Their Capital", *Cathedra* 77, 1994 (Hebrew) and *Nomadic People* 34: 1996. Also see Al-'Arif 1934.
- (2) As to anthropology's peculiar function, see Gellner 1988: 295.
- (3) The important written sources upon which we relied were Al-'Arif's, *Tarikh Bir As-Sab'a wa-Qabailha* 1933. The work is also known in the Hebrew translation of Menachem Kapeliuk by the name *Toldot Be'er-Sheva Ushvateyha* 1937; Breslavsky 1946; the research contained in Y. Grados and A. Stern (eds.) 1979 (of particular importance is the article by Ben-Arye, Y. and Sapir, S. "The Beginning of Be'er-Sheva at the end of the Ottoman Period", pp. 55-68); M. Naor (ed.) 1985 (particularly interesting for us were the articles of Gal-Peer, pp. 30-48, and Biger, pp. 49-58).
- (4) Regarding the problem that the Bedouin constituted for the Ottoman ruler of the country at that time and the desire to settle them, see Baer 1964: 120-136; Sharon 1964: 21-23.
- (5) As to anthropology's peculiar function, see Gellner 1988: 295.
- (6) See Eph'al 1982: 93-94 (passim), and also the review of this volume, G.M. Kressel (1991) *The New East* Vol 32.
- (7) The historical memory of the Bedouin is full of comparisons between the styles of governing of the Turks, the British and the Israelis. Such comparisons are still being made as a matter of rule when referring to issues still unsettled, such as land ownership and land uses, that were more convenient for them in the period of the British Mandate.
- (8) See Biger 1985, 53.
- (9) The British built 9 police stations in the Negev. The police fort (Tigart) in Be'er-Sheva itself was the last to be built, in 1942. See Biger, *ibid*, 54.
- (10) *Al-Mahasna*, December 18, 1985. According to Sasson Bar-Zvi, the two sons of Sheikh Salman Al-Huzayyil, Salameh and Sultan, were horsemen of the Sawari.
- (11) See Bar-Zvi 1973, 27.
- (12) Al-Hajj formed a special friendship with a "Mister Bell", who asked him to undertake special missions with Ibn-Ghazi (head of the Huweitat tribe in Transjordan) and also with Amir Al-Baharain. Both episodes are interesting per se. At the beginning of the British period, the Abu-Rabi'a confined their contacts and activity in Be'er-Sheva, in favor of external missions that were imposed upon them, as Ahmad Abu-Hamed puts it: "The Rabi'at put their hand on more remote regions."
- (13) Once, in 1928, on a patrol with the participation of Mister Faradi and Hajj Salman to Um-Rashrash (today Eilat), they met up with this gang and obliterated it. Before killing the robbers, they saw a slaughter they had perpetrated on travelers of a caravan that crossed the 'Arava.
- (14) Reports *Al-Mahasna*, aged 75, December 1985
- (15) The local barley goes for the stock and export.
- (16) In 1946, the import of wheat lessened and a disease that the Bedouin

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termed *Hamra Talaq* (spreading redness) attacked the crop just as it was ripening and the whole harvest was destroyed.

(17) The land stretching along the banks of the Jordan River.

(18) Peasants from Egypt who had settled among the Bedouin and tilled their lands according to tenancy arrangements. See the issue of the Hajjarra against the Tayyahha, Kressel, Ben David and Kh. Abu Rabi'a, 1991, 31-32.

(19) The Bedouin used to call the peasants from Egypt, whose skin color was a bit lighter than theirs, „*humran*“ (reddish). They referred to themselves, according to their skin color, as *sumran* (swarthy).

(20) In the years following the end of World War II, British investments overseas dwindled radically. Under the Labour Government, most of the investments were transferred to rebuilding ruins in the British Isles.

(21) They were also called „*Sutur al-bait*“ (Hiding or obviating the shame of the house).

(22) See Kressel 1992: Ch. 9.

(23) The railway leading from Cairo via Isma'iliya to Gaza was completed and opened for traffic in 1926, easing the emigration from Egypt eastwards.

(24) They all termed these green patches *bayyarat* (singular: *bayyara*), which is the term used for the orchards along the coastal plain.

(25) cf. Helms, 1969.

(26) The Arab residents of Palestine did not develop a special liking for consumption of camel meat, and it was forbidden for the Jews; although the camel has a cloven-footed and chews the cud; it does not part the hoof. Among the Bedouin in the Negev and the Judean Desert, the slaughtering of camels is very rare and they provide today wool and milk (apart from sales to the residents of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for meat) Camel wool (*wabar*) is

soft and pleasant to the touch, and camel milk is nourishing, tasty and, according to the Bedouin, has health-giving qualities.

(27) In accordance with tradition, the camel herders (*jammaliya*) enjoyed the ability to control the desert roads, and also a special prestige, in comparison to sheep and goat herders, who usually stayed close to the fringes of the permanently settled areas. The literature has already considered this issue at length (see Baer, 1973, 137-156).

(28) In the absence of agricultural products for purchase, the main food of the Bedouin, when on their own, was the milk of the livestock and its preserved products.

(29) Board and lodging was offered to people at a khan, together with safe stalls and fodder for their riding animals. The *baj*, a paper document signed by the *m'barwwej*, arranged this, for it determined that the sale of the camel was final and inalienable. If the animal were found to have been stolen, the vendor was liable for his offense; presentation of the *baj* in court enabled him to be sued for the return of his money to the purchaser.

(30) The male camel is not as good for harvesting or for any other work task as is the female.

(31) The reference is to Moshe Gordon, the son of Batya Gordon, owner of the flour mill in Be'er-Sheva, who was appointed by the British to the position of *mukhtar* of the Jewish community in the town. Members of the family left the town in August 1929 (see Gradus and Stern 1979, 94). Old Be'er-Sheva has a small street called „Street of the Mukhtar“, in memory of Moshe Gordon (according to Sasson Bar-Zvi).

(32) As to legal and social problems between lessee and lessor, mortgagee and possessor of land and between landowner and neighbor that arose between

the Negev Bedouin from the start of privatization of the tribal territories, see Kressel, Ben-David and Abu-Rabi'a, *ibid.*, 35 ff. Also see Bar-Zvi, 1991: 146.

(33) See Kressel, Ben David and Abu-Rabi'a *ibid.*: 34.

(34) Calculated according to a full load (*himil*) of the camel, the strongest animal that the Bedouin had.

(35) Compare Humphrey 1991.

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Résumé

A partir de 1918 les liens qui existaient entre les Bedouins du Néguev, les paysans d'origine égyptienne et les négociants urbains furent soumis à l'influence des Britanniques, grâce auxquels les forces du marché entrèrent en jeu. Pendant qu'ils se préparaient pour la deuxième guerre mondiale et afin d'assurer un approvisionnement constant en grain et en viande de leurs troupes, les Anglais se comportèrent en amis dans la région qui menait au canal de Suez. Les pasteurs Bedu reçurent des terrains qu'ils utilisèrent comme pâturages, mais il leur manquait les connaissances étendues des paysans. Ni ces derniers, ni eux-mêmes ne possédaient le financement nécessaire au développement de l'agriculture; ce financement leur fut apporté en partie par les commerçants des villes. Les Anglais fournirent le reste – sans oublier les moyens d'empêcher pillage et de compenser les risques de sécheresse – et contribuèrent ainsi à ce que le surplus atteigne les marchés européens.

Resumen

Después de 1918, los nexos que unían a los beduinos del Negev con campesinos de extracción egipcia y comerciantes urbanos han sido influenciados por los británicos, al poner éstos en juego las fuerzas locales del mercado. En el marco de su preparación para la Segunda Guerra Mundial, los británicos apoyaron el área que lleva al Canal de Suez, con la finalidad de asegurar una provisión constante de carne y granos para sus tropas. Los beduinos disponían de las tierras de pastoreo que necesitaban, pero requerían de los conocimientos sobre el cultivo de plantas de los campesinos. Sin embargo, ambos no tenían suficientes granos para desarrollar la agricultura; granos, que los comerciantes urbanos solo podían proveer en parte. Los británicos los proveyeron entonces de granos, además de los medios para prevenir saqueos y amortiguar los riesgos de sequías. Así han hecho posibles excesos de producción para los mercados europeos.

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