

## **Chapter 4**

### **Desert, Village and Town**

#### **A Unified Social Structure**

In the first decades of Ottoman rule, the heyday of the empire's power in Arabic-speaking lands, signs of weakness began to show in the old guard of elite soldiers. Janissaries and *sipahis*, not so long ago the terror of armies across Europe and Asia, became cumbersome fighting units, unwilling to adapt to changing circumstances. Their ranks swelled with people who bought titles and commissions with very little training or fighting experience. They threatened the sultan and his government with ever-growing demands for wages, yet repeatedly failed in the battlefield. Their weakness created a military and political void in the center and the provinces, which was rapidly filled up by other coalitions of power. <sup>1</sup> These subsequent structures of military power, their meaning for society and culture, and the form they assumed in the district of Jerusalem, will be dealt with in this chapter.

#### **A Changing of the Guard**

Still considered an elite fighting unit at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the janissaries are frequently mentioned in the records of *shari'a* courts. In most cases, however, this mention has nothing to do with their military duties or with problems arising from these duties. Throughout the century janissaries were seldom used in combat missions in the province. The collective image that emerges from the sources is one of a social group with very few military obligations, yet formally considered

part of the governing elite, well entrenched in the social and commercial life of the district, and enjoying a wide range of economic privileges.

Many of the janissaries mentioned in the records bear Muslim names, and quite a few possess a second or third generation of such names, clearly not of the limited set given to non-Muslims who embraced Islam. Sometimes their fathers were also mentioned as janissaries or local notables. It is evident that they were not a product of the sultanic system of acquisition and training, nor were they brought up in the parallel system based on the purchase of slaves, which was sponsored by the *ümera* in their local courts. Military training was apparently not a prerequisite for joining the ranks. <sup>2</sup>

A record from the year 1636 (1045), one of many dealing with janissaries in the *sijills* of Nabulus and Jerusalem, illustrates clearly the status of some janissaries in Jerusalem in the first half of the century:

On 9 Dhu al-Qa'da 1045, the *sayyid* Salih and his brother, Sayyid Muhammad, sons of the artisan (*mu'allim*) Mahmud ibn Ilyas, arrived in court. These two gentlemen of the janissaries in the citadel of Jerusalem (*min al-sada al-yinkishariyya bi-qal'at al-quds*) brought their complaint before the qadi. Up to this day, they said, they or their forefathers were never asked to pay special impositions (*al-takalif al-'urfiyya*)<sup>3</sup> for producing wooden latticework (*sha'ara*), but now the governor's representatives harass them and demand that they pay these impositions.

Upon hearing their complaint, the qadi decided to examine the matter in depth, and consulted with several Muslim notables who were well acquainted with the two brothers and their circumstances. These notables supported the brothers' claim, and affirmed that government taxes were never imposed on them or on their father. They were exempted on two counts, the notables added: their commissions in the janissary corps, and their poverty (*wa-likawnihima bayna yinkishariyyat qal'at al-Quds al-sharif wa-lifaqrihima*). Following the inquiry the judge ruled in favor of the brothers, and instructed all those persecuting them to stop demanding special impositions, either for production of latticework or for any other reason. The verdict was duly inscribed in the *sijill*.

This portrayal of the janissaries is remote from the image of the institution in its classical period, when janissary units were a symbol of imperial power, recruited and trained in the center. It is also a far cry from the *ümera-mamluk* form of socialization into the governing elite. The two janissary brothers are referred to as *sayyids*, a title usually reserved for descendants of the prophet, but in this period sometimes used as a

general honorific. Their father was a known member of the urban community, a *mu'allim* (an accomplished artisan or artist), and a janissary himself. The two sons, registered as janissaries in the citadel, remained in the old family business of latticework.

Records like this also bear witness to the many tax exemption privileges enjoyed by the janissaries, which made the commission so lucrative. These privileges were not always based on law. In special cases, when the janissaries themselves were manual laborers and were not engaged in trade or financial brokerage, other conditions, like proof of economic necessity, were necessary for tax exemption. Most janissaries did not have a regular fixed income, and being one did not determine economic status. If estates and property registered in cases involving inheritance disputes are any indication, however, poverty was not a widespread problem among janissaries and they were usually well off. Many among them possessed lands and large households. <sup>4</sup>

Some janissaries may have served as bodyguards for governors, members of their entourage, tax collectors, policemen, and even as garrison soldiers in fortresses along main routes. It seems very unlikely, though, that such soldiers could be mobilized and sent off to wars or punitive expeditions. Fighting against well-equipped European armies, or against battle-hardened bedouin tribes in harsh desert conditions, was not the sort of task to be entrusted to artisans and merchants. They could not be depended upon as fighting forces in the battlefield.

*Sipahis*, the other elite fighting force, were in a similar predicament, though the institution still retained much of its past prestige. Cavalry officers commanded respect, and some still turned up in the provinces now and then, presenting sultanic decrees awarding them *timars*. But by and large the imperial source for professional *sipahis* seemed to dwindle, and in the second half of the seventeenth century it was no more than a trickle.<sup>5</sup> Instead, fiefs were sometimes allocated to the sons of Ottoman vezirs and other notables in the center. Thus, in 1595, the holder of the large fief (*zeamet*) in the village of Dammun on Mount Carmel was the son of the Ottoman vezir Khalil Pasha. In 1657 the son of Anatolia's chief military qadi (*kazasker*) held the *zeamet* of Bayt Sahur near Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> Slaves brought up as *mamluks* in the houses of provincial *ümera* were another source of manpower for the *sipahi* corps. Upon manumission many of them received a *timar* and a commission in the force. In Damascus, the provincial governor was authorized to allocate small fiefs to *sipahis*, thus strengthening ties of loyalty and clientage with *ümera* in the province. Larger estates were obtained from Istanbul.<sup>7</sup> Many, perhaps the majority of *sipahis* in the districts of Jerusalem and Nabulus, were sons or grandsons of local timariots. When called upon to give testimony or answer

in court, their lineage presented to the qadi often included the father's name and rank in the *sipahi* corps. frequently the *sipahi*'s family—his sisters, brothers, children or uncles—would also be mentioned.

One incident, in which a *sipahi* was murdered by villagers in the vicinity of Jerusalem, may serve to illustrate the state of the institution:

On the morning of 5 Jumada al-Akhira 1079 (10 November 1668) a group of *sipahis* arrived in court. Among them were Sheikh Abu Bakr ibn Khalil and Hajj Muhammad ibn 'Iwad. They notified the qadi that Sayyid Khalil ibn Sheikh Yusuf the *sipahi* was found dead in the village of Khirbat al-Lawz, which is part of his *timar*. They claimed that unknown persons from the village killed him and dumped his body in a water cistern.

A team of investigation was sent to the village. The body of the dead *sipahi* was found, bearing marks of violence. The two *sipahis* who reported the murder turned out to be the victim's uncle, Abu Bakr, and his maternal brother, Hajj Muhammad Bey ibn 'Iwad al-Ma'arri. They told the team investigating the case that the victim, Sayyid Khalil, spent the night at the house of a certain family in the village. The murderers captured him there, tied him up and killed him. His personal effects, including his money and his sword, were all stolen.<sup>8</sup>

The affair went on for a while, until the assassins were seized and executed. Meanwhile another case was brought to court: a controversy about the possessions of the victim, and his legal heirs. Among those claiming the right to inherit were his mother, 'Aisha *khatun* bint Sheikh 'Ali al-'Azma, his sister, Khadija *khatun* bint Yusuf, his maternal brother, Hajj Muhammad Bey ibn 'Iwad, and his paternal uncle Bakri (formerly mentioned as Abu Bakr) ibn Khalil. In due course the relatives agreed on the way to divide the property and possessions.

Another dispute concerned the now vacant *timar*. Hajj Muhammad Bey received his brother's vacated *timar* by imperial decree, but here an unforeseen problem arose. The same *timar* was also allotted to another *sipahi*, 'Abd al-Karim Aga ibn Mustafa, by the provincial governor in Damascus, who apparently assumed that reallocating the *timar* was within his powers. Another prolonged legal debate seemed to be in store for the family, but to everyone's relief and to the reader's surprise, a compromise was reached out of court. 'Abd al-Karim Aga and Hajj Muhammad Bey, the two contestants over the small *timar*, decided that the fief should be divided between them. Each one will receive an equal share, paying 1,100 *ghurosh* of tribute a year. The unusual arrangement received the qadi's blessing.

This affair tells us a great deal about *sipahis* and *timar* holders in the period. Sayyid Khalil, the victim, was neither a product of the *devsirme* system or a parallel imperial institution. Nor was he the *mamluk* of a local amir. His family hardly fits the classical *sipahi* mould. As in the case of the janissaries, it is difficult to determine whether the victim's title "*sayyid*" implied descent from an *ashraf* family. This was not a common title for *sipahis* in earlier times. The father's title of sheikh was also rare among *sipahis*, certainly in the first generation. Several other family members, like the paternal uncle, Abu Bakr, were also referred to as *sipahis*. The father married 'Aisha, a local woman who had a son from a previous (or later) marriage. This son was also a *sipahi*, even though his father's name and his *nisba* suggest that he was also of local descent. At least four members of the family, then, carried the title of *sipahi* in the same district. They inherited from each other, and transferred their *timars* to other family members, with what amounted to an almost automatic approval of the authorities. Other records imply that this approval was obtained in many cases by sending gifts to certain officials in Istanbul.

The affair ended with another highly unconventional arrangement. The *timar* in question was divided into two mini-*timars*, yielding a very small income. This arrangement, perhaps more than any other part of the story, bears witness to the fact that *timars* and *sipahi* duties were by that time meaningless from a military point of view. The former sanctity of this institution, upon which an entire Ottoman standing army was based, had become a lucrative source of income, to be rearranged and divided almost arbitrarily. <sup>10</sup>

Transfer of *timars* to next of kin is relatively frequent in the *sijills* and in Ottoman sources. In several cases minor sons of *sipahis* received their father's *timar*, while still under the supervision of a legal guardian. In such cases *fatawa* and legal opinions enjoin that the minor *sipahis* should arm and train replacements to take their place on the battlefield. This appears, however, to have been an old legal mechanism which served as a fig-leaf to cover what was in fact an attempt to privatize and bequeath land. In other cases *sipahis* leased their *timars* to the highest bidder, and evaded the added task of maintaining law and order in the villages assigned to them. <sup>11</sup>

In the districts of Palestine *timar*-holders were frequently exempted from duty in imperial campaigns. Instead, they were required to perform several security tasks in the area. Pilgrims on their way to visit holy shrines in Jerusalem, Hebron and Nabi Musa were entitled to be accompanied by *sipahis* to protect them. Evliya Çelebi, who visited Jerusalem in the 1670s recounts that the *sipahis* in Jerusalem are not required to participate in imperial campaigns, and that their sole duty is to accompany the

pilgrims and travelers. But as records in the *sijill* and the Ottoman archives suggest, this was not always the case. From time to time orders were sent to *sipahis* requiring them to join the Ottoman army on its way to war. They would usually decline, claiming that they were needed back home. More often they were asked to pay a sort of ransom (*bedel*, *badal* in Arabic) in lieu of participation, which they would grudgingly do.<sup>12</sup> In short, *sipahis* maintained their titles, their privileges and the pomp of dress and sword brandishing, but lacked experience in war.<sup>13</sup>

Sultans, vezirs and provincial governors soon realized they could no longer rely on the janissaries and *sipahis*. Instead they began to train and give precedence to other forces, known as *sekban*, *sarica* or *levend*, (*sakban*, *sarija* or *lawand* in Arabic), based mainly on armed villagers. At first they were recruited on an ad hoc basis for one campaign and then dismissed, but later on they developed into regular army units. *Sekban* (sometimes called *sakmaniyya* in Arabic,) were part of the governor's retinue in Jerusalem. Other units, known as the *yerliyya* (local) forces were modelled after the janissaries and competed with them in the provinces.

In the southern and Western regions of the province of Damascus, the most important military force at the time was undoubtedly the bedouin. In one capacity or another bedouin seem to have participated in almost every skirmish and battle. Their role in the service of Ottoman governors is often played down or ignored altogether.<sup>14</sup> If we are to understand the importance of the bedouin in politics and society, we must now turn to a discussion of the reasons for this neglect.

### ***Desert and Sown—The Paradigm***

The enmity between the desert and the sown has been described countless times in literary epics: nomads lead their lives in harsh desert climes, where food and water are scarce and where the heat (or cold, at nights and in winters) is oppressive. On the other side, where water is abundant and the earth fertile, they encounter villagers or townsmen, who guard their possessions jealously and try to push the nomads back into the desert. The envious nomads stare hungrily at the riches of the land, and when an opportunity presents itself, pounce on the sedentary settlements, pillaging and looting.

A wider conceptual framework for the same idea was offered by the famous fourteenth-century Maghribi historian Ibn Khaldun. Living on the northern rim of the North-African Sahara desert, Ibn Khaldun held clear views on the subject. The war between the desert and the sown, he said, was the center of human history. Both nomads and sedentary societies are "natural" societies. Their way of life is dictated by economic

necessity. Pasture, the basis of nomad economy, requires enormous tracts of land, thus forcing the nomads to migrate often and lead a spartan life. In time economic conditions improve for some of them, and they are no longer satisfied with their way of life. Finally they settle down, building their own villages and towns. Nomads are therefore the source of all civilization, but as they acquire the habits of civilization they soften and become spoiled, losing their team spirit, the *'asabiyya* which enabled them to survive in the desert. Other nomads do not follow this pattern, however. Although their ability to adapt to desert life is impressive, they seek to improve their lot by attacking sedentary civilizations. Such onslaughts, repeated in an eternal vicious circle, result in the total destruction of civilization. <sup>15</sup>

Thus, in Ibn Khaldun's masterpiece, and in many other works, a line of demarcation is drawn between the desert and the cultivated areas. An almost tangible border, sometimes moving into the desert, as "civilization" infringes on nomad realms, at other times biting into the perimeter of towns and villages. This reasoning has influenced many modern works on the Middle East, which tend to ignore relationships between nomads and sedentary populations that do not correspond to this mould. When facts crop up to challenge this view, they are often ignored, or explained away as exceptions to the rule. The misconception about the ways nomad and sedentary populations coexist and cooperate leads to distorted views of society and politics in many historical contexts.

Complex relations existed between sedentary and pastoral cultures in Palestine throughout its history. The coastal plain and the mountain ranges in this area form a narrow strip of fertile, arable land, surrounded by deserts: Sinai, the Negev, the Judean desert and the Syrian desert. In times of draught the desert invades areas habitually cultivated, while a long stretch of rainy seasons may widen the settled zone considerably. In many respects the whole area is a desert periphery from ancient history to modern times.

Descriptions of the enmity between bedouin and sedentary populations in this area abound especially in Ottomanist research. One of the most comprehensive research works on the early years of Ottoman rule is Uriel Heyd's *Ottoman Documents on Palestine*, based on a collection of sultanic decrees from the famous Mühimme Defterleri collection in the Ottoman archives in Istanbul.<sup>16</sup> These decrees often discuss bedouin insurrection and insubordination. They appear to have been a constant menace which the government saw as one of its main concerns in the region. From time to time wars erupted between forces stationed in the area and the bedouin.<sup>17</sup> There are frequent reports of bedouin tribes equipped with state-of-the-art firearms, revolting against Ottoman rule. Decrees often

encourage governors to fight these rebels, or to impose economic sanctions upon them in the hope of making them submit to authority. <sup>18</sup> Other methods included the taking of hostages, and sometimes even the forced deportation of clans or whole tribes.<sup>19</sup> The Ottoman government, says Heyd, saw the bedouin as a threat and a nuisance, and often inflicted cruel punishment upon them. Here there were no misgivings or remorse of the kind that sometimes accompanied punitive expeditions against troublesome villagers. The war was prolonged and bitter. Being accustomed to desert conditions, sometimes better equipped, and enjoying access to intelligence information about expected raids, the enemy often had an edge over government forces.<sup>20</sup>

In his study on the bedouin in Palestine in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Moshe Sharon endorses Heyd's conclusions. Basing his argument on Arabic chronicles and descriptions provided by European travelers, Sharon adds a flavor of terror: raids on trade caravans and pilgrims, and highwaymen demanding ransom. Here too inhabitants of the desert and the sown are presented as enemies locked in mortal combat. Ottoman governments saw their main duty in the region as protecting the sedentary population from bedouin invasion, and safeguarding the passage of pilgrims to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Just like their predecessors, the Mamluks, they failed in this task. the reasons for their failure, maintains Sharon, were their military weakness, a dwindling civilian population too insecure to defend itself, and the growing power of their foes, the bedouin.<sup>21</sup>

The Ottomans tried to cope with the problem, Sharon says, by moving villagers to sparsely populated regions. Some were promised tax deductions in return for resettlement in border areas, others were deported by decree (*sürgün*). These measures, however, were never carried out properly, and the villagers seldom settled in their designated areas. Another method often used was an attempt to buy off bedouin sheikhs and notables by paying them sums of money, and at times by trying to integrate them into the Ottoman governing system. But the central government was weak, and could not impose its will upon potential bedouin allies.

In several cases tribes and clans were integrated into the Ottoman system. One prominent example is the integration of the Turabay family, a clan of the Bani Haritha tribe, which claimed descent from the famous Tayyi' tribe of the Arabian desert.<sup>22</sup> Such attempts were only partly successful. For a long time Turabay relations with the Ottomans fluctuated between cooperation and rebellion. In 1677, when their tribe, the Bani Haritha, moved eastward to the area of 'Ajlun and the Jordan valley, they were deposed as governors of Lajjun, and an Ottoman officer was appointed



in their place. In the end, he concludes, the Turabays were just another example of the Ottoman provincial administration caving in to bedouin pressure.<sup>23</sup>

A study by 'Adil Manna' supports the conclusions arrived at by Heyd and Sharon. In an essay on the Farrukh governors of Jerusalem and their relations with the bedouin, Manna' describes the weakness of the central government and its inability to restrain rebellious bedouin: "The relative improvement brought about by the Ottoman government's curtailment of bedouin activity in the first half of the sixteenth century, petered out towards its end. The situation once more resembled the state of affairs which characterized the last years of Mamluk rule in the region."<sup>24</sup> The only ones who were able to check the disastrous bedouin raids were the Farrukh governors, and they did so only by eventually joining forces with them to raid and plunder villages entrusted to their care.<sup>25</sup>

Manna' has used another source, one that was seldom used before. His was the first research concerning bedouin to have used the *sijill*. The records he uses include firmans from Istanbul, letters from the provincial governor in Damascus, and descriptions of events in and around Jerusalem. These records elucidate the volatile relationship between the Farrukhs, the bedouin and the fallahin in the district. A relationship which could best be described as a combination of treachery and cruelty, where yesterday's allies are today's victims. Ties between the bedouin and the governors were always at the expense of the settled population. The local provincial elite, claims Manna' (referring mainly to the governor Muhammad ibn Farrukh), betrayed their duty of protecting the populace, and allied themselves instead with the ruthless nomads.<sup>26</sup>

The works of Heyd, Sharon and Manna' enhance and reproduce well known stereotypes of the bedouin. Nowadays many scholars tend to accept this view and to incorporate it in their studies as a well-documented historical fact. Thus, Haim Gerber, in his book on the social origins of the modern Middle East, can write that "The problem of nomads in Syria and Palestine under Ottoman rule is well known and needs little elaboration. The vacuum left by the weakening of the government after the sixteenth century (if not before) was a function of the fact that the great bulk of the coastal plain was a roaming ground for bedouin tribes, and was almost totally devoid of permanent villages."<sup>27</sup> In such basic textbooks the facts have already become assumptions that "need little elaboration," and upon which other theories can safely be constructed.

This insistence on the basic stereotype continues even when there are clear contradictions in the sources. These are already evident in Heyd's work. A decree dated 1552 quoted by Heyd claims that the crux of the problem is the close-knit commercial relationship, centered mainly on

sheep and wool, between the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the bedouin, as well as the friendly ties between bedouin and *timar* holders, who tip them off about expected punitive raids against them. The firman instructs the Beylerbey in Damascus to punish the rebellious bedouins, to arrest the treacherous timariots, seize their households and families, and send them over to Istanbul. <sup>28</sup>

Another decree of the same year imposes economic sanctions on bedouin tribes, but in discussing the state of affairs prior to the rebellion, the decree conveys a sense of very active commercial ties with the nomads. In the past, it says, such sanctions were the only way to force the bedouin to reach a settlement with the Ottoman authorities. Another firman, dated 1584, describes the hazardous road in the area of Ramle in the district of Gaza, where bedouin highway robbers attack innocent travelers. The solution it suggests, however, is the appointment of a *bedouin* sheikh who holds a *timar* in the vicinity to keep an eye on the road. <sup>29</sup>

Such contradictions are also visible in Sharon's essay. The appointment of bedouin notables like the Turabayts to the high-ranking post of district governor is outstanding in itself. It cannot be seen merely as the result of bedouin pressure brought to bear on the Ottoman government. After all, over a century of Turabay rule, usually loyal to the government in Istanbul, must have been built on a stronger foundation. But there are other indications as well. Sharon writes of the cooperation between villagers and bedouin against other such groups; payment of fixed salaries (*surra*) to bedouin sheikhs on the *hajj* route; and even of an incident where seven thousand soldiers were required to protect a munitions caravan to Jarash and 'Ajlun, but an agreement with the bedouin made it possible to send the caravan through with no military escort whatsoever. <sup>30</sup>

Manna' casts his bedouin in a double role. At the beginning of the century, when Farrukh Bey was governor of Jerusalem, they threatened the peaceful existence of the district, and organized daring raids against him. But when his son, Muhammad, became governor in the 1620s, they suddenly turned out to be his closest allies. The bedouin's actions are described as disruptive both when they fight against the provincial government, and when they join forces with it to exploit the *reaya*.

One of the reasons for the persistence of the "desert and sown" paradigm, even when so many contradictions crop up, is the kind of sources used to lay the foundations of modern research on Ottoman Palestine. The centrality of Mühimme Defterleri decrees in Heyd's book is misleading. These are very reliable sources for Ottoman high politics, and reflect to a large extent what bureaucrats in the center thought about affairs in the province. But this is also their greatest single weakness. In

the seventeenth century, Istanbul was a distant capital. Local politics in a faraway district seemed petty and meaningless. Communications were at best haphazard. Istanbul bureaucrats lacked insight into the affairs of the district, and in most cases described the situation in vague phrases, seldom seeing more than the one-sided picture presented to them in a letter or a petition. Another distortion is created when all the firmans concerning a small region over a period of seventy years are collected under subject headings. Each of the subjects dealt with in the book was brought to the attention of Istanbul mandarins once or twice a decade at best. Grouping them together creates an artificial sense of importance and urgency.

From Istanbul's vantage point the bedouin were indeed a problem. They threatened trade routes, raided *hajj* caravans and too often acted independently, clearly defying Ottoman sovereignty. The sultan and his vezirs were bothered by the growing challenge to their authority, but did not care about other aspects of the relationship with the bedouin. To obtain a better understanding of the situation in the district, one should attempt to read between the lines, and to amplify dim reflections of this distant reality.

The two sources used by Sharon—chronicles and travelers' accounts—present a different bias. Travelers, many of them pilgrims, are sometimes accused of falsifying reports, or copying from predecessors in order to embellish their narrative. In the matter of bedouin, however, another problem looms even larger. Their understanding of local society and culture was at best superficial. In most cases they did not know whether the menacing individual facing them and demanding money was a bedouin thug, a villager, or even a soldier fulfilling his duty. Local chroniclers knew much more, of course, about the local scene, and in most cases present a balanced, well-informed view of affairs. Indeed, most of the contradicting information in Sharon's article was derived from such sources. But the writers of historical chronicles saw their duty as recording great deeds for future generations. While extraordinary bedouin raids and punitive expeditions against them automatically fell into this category, the slow rhythm of everyday life was not deemed worthy of special record in a chronicle.

*Sijills*, the main source added by Manna', shed a new light on the matter. Being a quasi-official record of events, trials, business transactions, and government affairs, they reflect another sort of relationship. The governor's special relationship with the bedouin, as it emerges from these records, forms the basis of Manna's argument. Yet the paradigm is so powerful that it embraces even these exceptions. Ibn Farrukh's alliance with the bedouin is described as an aberration, a deviation from the

expected code of conduct. A reexamination of these and other records reveals another side of the picture, and suggests a new way of looking at the role of the bedouin in the politics, culture and economy of the district. Rather than a dichotomy between the desert and the sown, we can now propose a more complex representation, in which bedouin were as much a part of society in the districts of Palestine as villagers or town-dwellers.

### **Bedouin Defending the Realm**

Bedouin participated as soldiers and commanders in the armed forces of all local governors in the seventeenth century. This was the rule rather than the exception. They were incorporated into the military establishment in various ways. Sometimes they were soldiers in army units or in governors' entourages. In other cases a contract was signed between local officials and a certain tribe to employ all, or part of its members, as an allied defense force. Some of these contracts were fairly stable and long-term, while others were signed only when special needs arose. In yet another variety, bedouin clans were entrusted with the defense of a road or a strategic point in their own vicinity.

The beginnings of this system can be traced back to the early days of Ottoman rule, when the territory known as Lajjun (later to become a formal *sanjaq*) was entrusted to the Turabay family. As Heyd shows in his book, this was not an unprecedented or isolated incident in the region. In the year 1584, for instance, the fief given to the bedouin sheikh Abu al-'Uways, was enlarged from a *timar* yielding 17,000 *akçe*, to a *zeamet* of 20,000 *akçe*, in return for which he was to guard the stretch of coastal road leading northward to Ra's al-'Ayn (Rosh Ha-'Ayin). In a later firman, dated 1585, the district governor was ordered to entrust the defense of another stretch of road, this time to the north of Ra's al-'Ayn, to a clan of the Bani Jayyus tribe. Other districts in the province of Damascus were assigned to bedouin sheikhs, like the Ibn Furaykhs, who controlled the northern regions of Trans-Jordan for several decades. The Ottomans were quite content to entrust defense tasks, *timars*, and even whole districts, to bedouin sheikhs. [31](#)

This system was improved and articulated during the seventeenth century. In 1693 a certain *amir al-hajj*, 'Assaf Pasha (not to be confused with 'Assaf Pasha ibn Farrukh), presented a petition to the sultan. Ever since the offices of sheikh (*seyhlik*) of Gaza and Damascus were taken away from Sheikh Kulayb and sheikh Walid and given to others, he claimed, troubles never ceased. The new people were incapable of defending the road properly, and as a result the pilgrims and travelers were constantly

harassed. He pleaded with the government in Istanbul to restore the two sheikhs to their old appointments. A decree addressed to the vezir Mustafa Pasha, the governor of the province, instructed him to look into the matter. If, as 'Assaf Pasha said, the two sheikhs were more adept in keeping the bedouins at bay, under discipline and control, and if they were capable of protecting the *hajj* pilgrims better than others, they should be reappointed to their former positions. If, however, the *ümera* are expected to do a better job, then they should be the ones to be appointed. Mustafa Pasha was ordered to report back his conclusions and the course of action he had chosen. <sup>32</sup>

As this firman demonstrates, in the course of the seventeenth century the provincial government had already created formal titles, and probably formal salaries for sheikhs appointed to guard the *hajj* route. The Ottoman attitude, as emerges from this and other documents, was entirely pragmatic. The only criterion to be taken into consideration is the ability to perform the task. Another method of securing the cooperation and loyalty of bedouin sheikhs was payment of money from the *surra*. Such yearly tributes, begun in the sixteenth century, became part of the administration's budgeted expenses a century later. When, in 1689, the payment was late, several bedouin tribes attacked the *hajj* caravan. An imperial decree sent to the governor of Damascus instructs him to pay the money promptly, and in future to avoid renegeing on such agreements. <sup>33</sup>

Bedouin were not employed exclusively as stationary defense forces in a delimited area. They were frequently used as mercenary forces in the governor's personal guard or in his provincial cavalry. They were used to collect taxes and levies from the villages, and to protect caravans and officials against assault. A record in the Jerusalem *sijill* demonstrates the role of bedouin troops in such circumstances:

In the month of Shawwal 1024 (1615) a representative of the provincial governor of Damascus, named Husayn aga, arrived in court. He brought with him a white leather pouch containing 1,000 *ghurosh* and bearing the seal of the *vali*, Muhammad Pasha. The money was intended for the district governor of Jerusalem, and was accompanied by a letter which Husayn Aga read aloud in court: "We have sent you a thousand *ghurosh* for the purchase of cement, mortar and other building materials," wrote the *vali*. "You are to take these materials and set out to repair the castles of Dhat Hajj, Qal'at Haydar and Qal'at Tabuk on the *hajj* route."

The governor of Jerusalem, Muhammad Bey, was summoned and asked to take possession of the leather pouch and the letter, but refused to execute the orders. He claimed that a short time prior to

this date he received two imperial decrees instructing him to repair the city walls, and it would be impossible for him to embark on another task of this magnitude.

To support his claim the governor invited many of the city's notables. Among them were the Shafi'i *mufti* Sheikh Ishaq, *naqib al-ashraf* Sayyid 'Abd al-Qadir al-Wafa'i al-Husayni, the *imam* of the Sakhra (the Dome of the Rock) Sheikh 'Ali Nur al-Din and his colleague the *imam* Sheikh Abu al-Fath, as well as a group of *zu'ama'* (holders of *zeamets*) *sipahis* and *mustahfizan* (local garrison forces) stationed in Jerusalem. In response to the governor's question they all answered that such a request was never made before. The inhabitants of Jerusalem, they claimed, were exempt from special impositions ever since the Ottoman conquest, and were living in conditions of extreme poverty. There were no camels strong enough to carry the building materials over such a long, sparsely populated distance, and anyway, all the camels in the district were weak and ailing as a result of the long draught years.

Furthermore, they declared, even had we been able to organize such a caravan and send the materials, we would have failed in our mission, *because the bedouin ('urban) of the district of Jerusalem cannot go into these regions. For there is enmity between them and the bedouin who reside there. (Wa-'inna 'urban liwa' al-Quds al-sharif la yastati'un al-dukhul ila tilka al-aradi lima baynahum wa-bayna 'urbaniha min al-'adawa.)*

In light of these arguments the district governor, Muhammad Bey, refused to accept the sealed money pouch, and the messenger, Husayn aga, refused to return it to Damascus. It was therefore decided to deposit it in the city's citadel, until the *vali* in Damascus decided what was to be done. The commander of the citadel (*dizdar*) Muhammad aga "Bosna" was then brought to court, and the pouch was entrusted to his safekeeping.<sup>34</sup>

This record provides a glimpse of the extent to which the governors of Jerusalem relied on their contacts with the bedouin, and the importance of the latter's services. It can be safely assumed that the district governor and the notables made up a series of excuses to explain why they could not execute the order: the governor was instructed by a higher authority to repair the city walls; the inhabitants were always exempt from such impositions (clearly the sum was not sufficient to pay for the whole project); the camels were too feeble after years of draught... Still, these had to be reasonable excuses, of the kind that might convince the governor in Damascus and his emissary in Jerusalem to look for another scapegoat.

The provincial governor probably knew the extent of the draught and the state of the camels, just as he was well aware of the use of bedouin as soldiers and camel drivers, and of their internal disputes. It appears, therefore, that the claim that such a trip would be impossible because of the animosity between "our" bedouin and the inhabitants of these regions was a plausible and convincing reason. The fact that it was brought up in the presence of cavalry and infantry officers only emphasizes their incompetence in such situations. The tensions, feuds and alliances between bedouin tribes have thus become an integral part of the province's politics.

The reliance on bedouin armies is made plain in the series of battles against Fakhr al-Din in the early 1620s. The Lebanese chronicler Ahmad al-Khalidi describes a battle between the forces of Fakhr al-Din on the one hand, and the joint forces of the Turabays, Farrukhs and Ridwans on the other, waged on the banks of the 'Awja (Yarkon) river. Defeated in the first round, Fakhr al-Din's forces were now retreating northward along the sea shore. At some point they were attacked at dawn by some 2,000 men. The horsemen of Turabay (bedouins themselves) and Farrukh were joined by their bedouin allies of 'Arab al-'A'id, 'Arab Ghazza (a general reference to several tribes in the vicinity of Gaza) and others. All along that day bedouin forces dogged the *amir's* army, and he suffered many casualties and was forced to flee. <sup>35</sup>

The use of bedouin forces was not limited to the first half of the century, or to the rule of the dynasties. They appear in several other events along the century. In 1689, for instance, they accompanied the governor on a mission to the port town of Jaffa. This is how the incident was described by a member of the small community of French traders who resided in Ramle and conducted trade through the port of Jaffa:

On Tuesday three pirate ships entered Jaffa harbor. Upon arrival they fired some 200 shells at the harbor and the warehouses. The terrified inhabitants pleaded with the governor to come to their rescue, and *he arrived with about 2,000 bedouin*, accompanied by some inhabitants of Ramle. When the force was deployed at the top of a hill, the pirates fired once again and killed four soldiers. The governor's troops returned fire but were unable to force the pirates to retreat. At that stage the pasha decided to summon the French merchants and the priests in Ramle, and to send them as a delegation to the pirates, demanding that they cease fire. Meanwhile the pirates decided to retreat, and when the French delegation arrived they were already some ten miles offshore. When the incident was over, the enraged

inhabitants of Jaffa wanted to take revenge upon the merchants, but the governor and his troops defended them.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike other Western travelers and pilgrims, weathered French traders who had been doing business for years with local authorities knew how to tell a bedouin from an Ottoman soldier. They did not express surprise or astonishment at the sight of such a large bedouin contingent escorting the governor, and regarded it as the natural course of affairs. Thus, throughout the seventeenth century bedouin operated as a military force in the service of district governors in Jerusalem and in neighboring districts. They were employed both as stationary forces charged with guarding roads and borders, and as a highly mobile and efficient cavalry, equipped with firearms, fighting battles and escorting caravans. In the course of the century they may have acquired an official, or semi-official standing in the Ottoman administration.

### **An Integrated Economy**

The economy of the district in the early Ottoman period was based mainly on agriculture, and on the manufacture of several industrial products. Cash crops in one form or another constituted a major part of the agriculture. Most of the produce was intended for internal consumption, although a slowly growing share was exported to Europe by French, Venetian, Dutch and English merchants.<sup>37</sup> Communities of European traders were established in the coastal towns. More ships frequented the harbors of Acre and Jaffa, especially in the second half of the century. Side by side with the cash-crop economy, many villagers carried on subsistence-level agriculture, sometimes based on barter. Imports were mostly luxury items: coffee, tobacco, spices, paper, special cloth, firearms and foreign currency.<sup>38</sup>

Local produce included mainly wheat and barley; cotton in a variety of forms—unprocessed, carded, combed, spun, and woven in several ways; olive trees which provided a range of products from olives and olive oil to soap and finished olive wood craftwork; cattle and sheep raised for milk, meat, hides and wool; the many fruit trees cultivated in the mountainous regions of Safad, Nablus and Jerusalem.

The role of bedouin in the local economy is known mainly in its consumer aspects. Bedouin needed the markets of towns and villages in order to buy agricultural products, firearms, leatherware, ironware and clothes. Many imperial decrees deal with the attempt to break the spirit of rebellious tribes by imposing sanctions. The 1552 decree presented by Heyd describes the success of such sanctions in breaking a revolt of the Turabay and the Thawba clans. The villagers were warned not to sell



arrows, bows, horseshoes, nails, food or clothing to members of these tribes. Their compliance with the decree forced the rebels to cease their revolt and seek accommodation with the authorities. In many other cases, however, the sanctions were not so successful, and trade with the bedouin went on. In his book on the Jewish community in Jerusalem, Amnon Cohen recounts that Jewish merchants of the city used to trade with the bedouin. In several cases in the sixteenth century such merchants were caught and put on trial, but, as Cohen adds, the incidents we know about may be seen as indications of spheres of commerce and economic relations too widespread for the authorities to control effectively. <sup>39</sup>

In the course of the century such issues continue to preoccupy the Ottoman central government from time to time. In a decree sent to Damascus in 1692 the governor is warned against the sale of weapons, lead (for bullets) and clothes to bedouin in a state of rebellion (*isyân üzere olan urban-i eskiya*.) It was also forbidden to buy things plundered by tribesmen from pilgrims on their way to Mecca. In 1706 a decree sent to the governor of Jerusalem, Ibrahim Pasha, informing him that villagers on the road from Jerusalem to Nabi Musa and to Wadi Zarqa' are selling arms and ammunition to rebellious bedouins (*itaatten huruc eden eskiya*.) The governor was instructed to fight against them and prevent the continued supply of arms. These decrees and many others clearly separate between "obedient" tribes and rebellious ones, who decided to shake off Ottoman rule.<sup>40</sup> (This separation, as we shall see later, was crucial for understanding the socio-ecological system that united bedouin and sedentary populations).

Bedouin contribution to the economy, however, involved much more than buying arms and munitions. For one thing, bedouin were the main source of supply of cattle, sheep and their produce. They also provided camels and horses for transportation. livestock was raised in pasture land in the desert, and in draught periods, or as summer approached, increasingly close to villages on the desert's edge, where villagers also raised their cattle and sheep. The need to share pasture was the source of much friction between the bedouin and the villagers, but it also created a special sort of relationship between shepherds on both sides. Village shepherds needed the goodwill and protection of the bedouin, who in turn needed the markets of villages and towns to sell their produce and buy munitions. The shepherd community, sometimes referred to as *al-baqqara*, used to mediate and help defuse crisis situations.<sup>41</sup>

One domain in which the bedouin were considered unparalleled experts was the breeding and training of racehorses. Arabian mares of noble stock were a rare and expensive commodity. Many members of the governing elite and the local notable elite, including *sipahis*, janissaries, ulema and merchants, bought horses and mares from the bedouin, and frequently left

them to be trained and cared for by the breeder. A special relationship evolved between the owners and the trainers, sometimes reflected in records of trials involving a breach of agreement. One record in the *sijill*, dated 1615, refers to several aspects of such a relationship:

On 23 Shawwal 1024 a suit was filed by Khudawardi (Hudaverdi) ibn Ya'qub, the *turjuman* (translator, negotiator) of the Armenian community in Jerusalem, against Samariyya ibn 'Amr, of the tribe of 'Arab al-Ja'ila, who [according to the suit] laid his hand upon a bright-colored thoroughbred filly, in which the plaintiff had a share. The plaintiff declared that another share, a quarter of the said filly, was owned by Hajj Da'ud ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, and the remaining quarter by Khalil ibn Ahmad, a Janissary in the city's citadel. In his suit the plaintiff demanded his share, allegedly unlawfully appropriated by the defendant.

The bedouin defendant replied that the share in question was given to him by Hajj Da'ud as payment for the care, training and fodder of the filly, as is customary among horse breeders (*arbab al-khayl*). In response the plaintiff brought several witnesses who supported his claim of ownership. In light of the evidence, the qadi ruled in favor of the plaintiff, and instructed the defendant, Samariyya ibn 'Amr, to transfer his share, half of the ownership, to the plaintiff.

[42](#)

The strange partnership between a Christian with a Turkish name, a local notable, a janissary, and a bedouin, does not concern us here, although it poses some interesting questions. Neither do questions pertaining to the use of the filly and the way it was being shared. The thing that is most striking, perhaps, is the ongoing relationship between a group of city dignitaries and members of a bedouin tribe. The fact that the young mare was left at the bedouin encampment outside the city walls required the conclusion of complex and costly agreements, and necessitated a great deal of stability and mutual trust. It appears from the document that such deals were common and provided solutions for expected problems "as is customary among horse breeders." In addition to the economic aspects of such transactions, they must have involved an unusual social dimension. Since Bedouin trainers kept the horses, members of the elite had to leave the city and visit the horse at the trainer's encampment.

Camels were also raised by tribesmen. In an arid land they provided the best, and sometimes the only effective means of transportation. The persistent involvement of Ottoman authorities in matters concerning the supply of camels for the *hajj* caravan, and the squabbles between province officials over the right to ride one during the long trip to Mecca, emphasize their importance. Correspondence between the center and the provinces

alludes to the constant tribulations in Istanbul and Damascus between the wish to rent many camels in order to allow the officers and officials a comfortable ride, and the high cost of these vehicles. In a decree sent to the governor of Damascus in 1637, the problems are clearly defined:

A petition was sent to my palace [lit., "my threshold of felicity"] by the guards stationed at the citadel in Damascus. Ever since the Ottoman conquest [the petitioners wrote] each year a task force is appointed to defend and maintain the forts on the Hajj route: twenty-six soldiers, two *cebecis* (arms and armor experts,) six *'arabacis* (carriage drivers) and a carpenter. Apart from their expenses and the camels they are allocated in accordance with the *defters*, they were also accustomed to be given five additional camels for the people of the armory (*cebehane*). In the last few years some of the distinguished officials, including the *kâtip* (secretary) of the janissaries, the *mukabeleci* (administrative clerk), the *bas çavus* (janissary commander) and the *serdar* (commander), were not allocated camels for the Hajj. As a result [these officials took possession of the camels intended for the armory and] the armory people are forced to walk on foot or ride in the carriages. This state of affairs causes much disorder and difficulty. The decree instructs the governor to allocate a camel to each member of the convoy, including five to the armory, and to refrain from obstructing them in their duties. <sup>43</sup>

The problem was not limited to the military and government spheres alone. Pilgrims on their way to the *hajj* were just as anxious to rent camels to transport them and their munitions. As the *hajj* period approached, and the pilgrims assembled, bedouin camel drivers also appeared at the gates of Damascus, Jerusalem and other cities. Soon they were all concluding deals, renting camels and presenting their drivers. Many women, fearing they would be unable to withstand the rigors of the road to Mecca on foot, rented a camel and a driver, or sometimes shared one with other pilgrims. In most cases the camels were supposed to carry water and munitions on the long and arduous way to the holy shrines. Prices ran high. In the middle of the seventeenth century a sum of 85 *ghurosh* was paid for "half a camel" to be shared by two pilgrims.<sup>44</sup> The high sums that pilgrims were willing to pay were an enticement for fraud, and an Ottoman decree of 1690 criticizes the practice and its outcome:

When pilgrims gather in Damascus, camel-renters arrive and promise them a regal trip to Mecca, for which they demand payment in advance. When the deal is concluded they bring old, weak and sick camels. The pilgrims are obliged to carry large quantities of expensive

food and water not just for themselves, but also for the camel and its driver. They are often forced to seek loans from the city's merchants. Along the road they throw away part of the munitions in order to lighten the camel's load, and as their journey comes to its end they are left miserable and bitter. <sup>45</sup>

Yet, despite the central importance of camels and horses as vehicles and status symbols, the main role of the bedouin in the local economy lay elsewhere. Bedouin tribes had a central role in one of the most widespread and lucrative industries in Palestine—the production of soap.

Soap, and the alkaline ashes needed to produce it, were a substantial part of local exports since the beginning of the century. The quantities exported rose considerably in the course of the century. According to records in Marseilles' Chamber of Commerce, the quantity of soap and ashes exported from Jaffa rose sevenfold between 1615 and 1636. The same was true in the other ports of Palestine. "In Gaza," wrote a merchant who visited the country in 1655, "the greatest trade is in sope and lining cloth." Another traveler, who visited Jaffa in 1669, claims that ashes for the production of soap, along with cotton, are its major exports. In the course of the 1670s a battle for the rights to acquire and export soap was waged between the French traders in Acre and those in the Lebanese port of Sayda (Sidon). Ashes continued to be a major item of export well into the eighteenth century. <sup>46</sup>

In the production of soap cooperation between townsmen, villagers and nomads was crucial. Soap was manufactured from a mixture of olive oil, limewater and alkaline ashes (from the Arabic word *al-qali*) obtained by burning desert wormwood bushes. Villagers supplied olive oil, and bedouin supplied the ashes. In the sixteenth century merchants used to venture into the desert to obtain ashes, but in the following century supply routes were maintained, and the tribesmen themselves delivered loads of alkaline ashes to the manufacturers. Large camel caravans frequently visited the city of Jerusalem unloading sacks of ash, and probably stocking up on other commodities. In his book about the history of Nabulus and the Balqa' area, Ihsan al-Nimr mentions caravans of up to a thousand camels carrying qali from the desert to the cities of Nabulus and Jerusalem. <sup>47</sup>

These essential components were brought by the villagers and the bedouin to special workshops in the city, where all the ingredients were compounded and soap was manufactured by a long process of cooking, pouring into moulds, cutting and drying. Such workshops were owned and operated for the most part by notables and members of the governing elite. Periods of strife between the tribes and the city were liable to cause considerable financial damage to these owners, who enjoyed most of the

added value of the finished product. Notables in the city therefore had a vested interest in maintaining good relations with the bedouin. <sup>48</sup> Soap manufacturing also entailed financial gains for bedouin and villagers. It appears to have propelled power struggles in which villagers and bedouin tribes cooperated against other similar groups. A series of records in the Jerusalem *sijill* from the beginning of the century describes such an incident and its aftermath:

On 11 Dhu al-Hijja 1032 (1623) the *kethüda* (deputy) of Jerusalem's governor arrived in court. He reported to the qadi the events of a violent incident which took place on the way from Jerusalem to the Jordan valley: Members of the obedient Balaqina tribe (*Arab al-Balaqina al-ta'i'in*) who bring *samnah* (clarified butter), sheep and ashes to the city of Jerusalem, brought a large shipment of ashes and sold it in town. On their way back east they were attacked by villagers and other tribesmen near the village of al-'Azariyya.

In the battle that ensued two of the [Balaqina] tribesmen were killed, as well as a large number of camels. The *kethüda* requested that the court conduct an inquiry into the incident. With the qadi's consent an officer of the court was appointed and dispatched to the scene along with the *kethüda* and his team. Inside the village the team found the bodies of two people, and thirteen dead camels. They conducted an investigation and found out that the Balaqina had been attacked by the tribes of 'Arab al-Ka'abina, 'Arab al-Ramtahat(?) 'Arab Zubaydallah, and 'Arab Haytham al-Bagharitha, along with villagers from Tur, al-'Isawiyya, 'Ayn Silwan, Dayr al-sadd, Bayt Sahur, Sur Bahir, Dayr Abu Thawr, Abu Dis, Dayr Bani Sa'id and Bayt Lahm (Bethlehem), as well as the group of shepherds (*ta'ifat al-baqqara*). The Balaqina retreated in the direction of the main road leading to the Jordan valley. Sixteen of the camels, pushed to the edge of the road, tumbled each other into the creek below. Thirteen died and the other three are kept, injured, at the village. Among the dead camels the villagers found the bodies of two Balaqina tribesmen. Two of the assailants were also killed.<sup>49</sup>

In the style and custom of *sijill* investigations, there is no attempt to clarify the motives and explain the causes which brought about this lethal incident. Motivation and cause were apparently irrelevant to the description and adjudication of criminal cases. These were always dealt with on the basis of events alone. On the other hand, the reasons were probably so obvious to the qadi and his people that no further discussion was needed. It may have been sparked by jealousy and resentment of the Balaqinas' good relations with the city, or of their monopoly of the trade

in ashes. But there may have been other reasons. 1623 was a drought year, and the shortage of water caused tensions inside and outside the city. In any case it should be noted that the culprits who attacked the Balaqina caravan included both bedouin and villagers, who cooperated in what seems like a carefully planned and concerted ambush. The court saw the Balaqinas and their alignment as its allies, and the rest, including the villagers, as the offenders who should be punished and forced to compensate the victims. [50](#)

From the background given in the record we learn that tribesmen used to bring quantities of alkaline ashes, as well as sheep and milk products to the city. These products were carried by large camel convoys, attested to by the number of camels killed in the incident, and by the very long list of villages and tribes who took part in the attack. The convoys were allowed to enter the city and sell their produce to prospective buyers. The document bears witness to the economic importance of the bedouin in the district, and to the complexity of social ties between the sedentary population and the nomadic tribes.

### **One Social System?**

Borders delineating geographic zones are sometimes imaginary. Even when the border separates two political entities, and its definition serves a clear purpose—blocking the enemy, collecting taxes, recruiting soldiers—it is not always clearly defined. In many cases the border is a vast middle area where a unique culture is created. All the more so when the border is said to define a society, a culture, or a climatic zone.

In his classic work on the Mediterranean in the era of Philip II, Fernand Braudel sets out to classify the shores of the Mediterranean according to their landscape and their climate, assuming that each landscape and climate leads to the development of a different culture. The sea itself, its coasts, the plains, the hills, and the mountains around it, all gave rise to different kinds of societies in premodern history. Great civilizations usually evolved between the coastal plains and the mountains, where the climate was moderate and transportation simple. In these areas it was easier to create structures of discipline and hierarchy. In the mountains, on the other hand, where inhabitants tended to protect their independence jealously, the hold of "civilization" was always precarious. Sea shores and plains were prone to be flooded or swamped, but when their inhabitants managed to control and direct the water flow, they soon became rich agricultural societies. The sea itself, and the islands in it, also generated a particular culture of fishermen and sailors. [51](#)

Braudel also discusses the nomadic cultures typical of considerable parts of the Mediterranean basin. Nomads, he says, are a mountain culture by nature, moving in yearly cycles between the mountains and the sea. Their mobility and the effortless manner in which they cross climatic borders should not blur the distinct features of the nomads as a separate society different from the others. Braudel agrees with Ibn Khaldun that nomadic culture, and especially that of the desert nomads, the bedouin, is opposed to that of other sedentary cultures. It is "the clash between two economies, civilizations, societies and arts of living." [52](#)

Though sometimes general and inaccurate, Braudel's definitions may help us pinpoint the main differences between Mediterranean societies. Yet they might also obfuscate distinctions and divert our attention from other forms of Mediterranean social culture. These are perhaps more prominent along the southern and eastern shores of the sea, where lines of demarcation between landscapes are not so clear. In Palestine, for instance, the mountains are relatively small in size and height. In the south the desert merges with the coast. What sort of cultures would develop here? Do Braudelian categories apply, or should other categories be determined? In short, are we to describe nomads and sedentary populations as two different societies, or as part of one social structure?

Dale Eickelman, focusing on relations between nomads and sedentary populations from an anthropological point of view, refers mainly to the proximity and mutual reliance of nomad and settled societies on the periphery of the desert. He stresses the importance of this reliance to the actual existence of the nomads. According to Eickelman, in no historical period can nomads be regarded as an autonomous society:

Both in recent decades and in earlier historical periods, the political and social relations of pastoral groups with the peasant settlements, towns and states that are on the periphery of zones of intense pastoral activity have been as important for their livelihood as pastoralism itself... Pastoral agriculture and trade activities are part of a single economic system articulated by various forms of social and political domination.[53](#)

From the source material presented above, however, we can draw the further conclusion that at certain points in time the dependence of towns and villages on the nomads was no less crucial to their own existence and well-being. The two groups, or, should we say, three—nomads, villagers and townsmen—needed each other, and their interdependence is a key element in understanding their economy, their politics, and even their culture. These communities were not divided by a boundary. The border

surrounded climatic and geographic divides, transforming them into the focal point of a unique social experiment.

Early functionalistic theories would describe society as a body within which members cooperate to form a functioning entity. A later version would regard the attainment of complete integration as an almost impossible task, which societies might strive toward, but seldom reach. If we accept these premises, then the district of Jerusalem in the Ottoman period may certainly be defined as one society in the way it adapted to its ecological and economic surroundings, and in its ability to attain its political goals. <sup>54</sup>

For other schools of thought the only valid definitions of a society are economic: "We take the defining characteristic of a social system," says Immanuel Wallerstein, "to be the existence within it of a division of labor, such that the various sectors or areas within are dependent upon economic exchange with others for the smooth and continuous provisioning of the needs of the area. Such economic exchange can clearly exist without a common political structure and even more obviously without sharing the same culture." <sup>55</sup>

Such a definition would regard the district of Jerusalem as an almost perfect social system. Admittedly, the district paid a tribute to the imperial center (or, in other words, the division of labor stretched beyond its borders) and was not an entirely self-sufficient economy. But in practical terms most of the economic surplus flowed back into the local economy, in what may be termed "short taxation cycles" (see Chapter 6). It may be claimed therefore that an almost full division of labor—and hence an entire social system integrating bedouin, villagers and townsmen—existed within the district's borders.

But was this society merely a well-rounded economic structure? Was it just a politically effective group of people? In functionalist terminology we may ask to what extent can it be considered one society in terms of its *integration*—the willingness of its members to cooperate with each other—and in terms of its *latency*—the internal "programming" of individuals to willingly join and fulfill roles in society? Adherents of yet another approach would put the question differently: Was there any form of coherent *discourse* between subgroups? Did they use the same set of signs and symbols? Did they intermarry? Did they refer to the same set of social norms? <sup>56</sup>

Source material pertaining to these questions is scarce. In most cases we do not possess what Clifford Geertz would call a "thick description" of this society. There are no reports of discussions between individuals, and relatively few descriptions of its levels of contact. It is almost impossible, for instance, to assess the attitude of the bedouin towards sedentary



groups, and even the way bedouin were regarded by townsmen and villagers is hard to gauge. We can only point out a few facts which are relevant to this quest. <sup>57</sup>

Through descriptions of bedouin activity in the military and economic spheres, we can draw some conclusions about their attachment to local society. Army service brought them closer to the governing elite. Control of fiefs, ranging from the smallest *timars* to entire *sanjaqs*, was considered by some bedouin sheikhs a recognition of their status as part of the elite. From descriptions of the Turabay court in Lajjun, it appears that they embraced some traditional Ottoman status symbols—scribes, secretaries, eunuchs, music bands and perhaps even Ottoman dress. They bound themselves to other governing families through marriage, and probably saw themselves as part of a ruling elite with shared interests which overshadowed their identity as bedouins. <sup>58</sup>

Other townsmen, belonging to the local notable elite, met and associated with bedouin under different circumstances: active and widespread commercial relations, transportation needs, and a shared interest in horses and equestrian sports. In the lower echelons of society it is even more difficult to trace the evidence of a common sociocultural system. In the *sijill* there are few records of marriage between bedouin and others, but this in itself does not mean that no such marriages took place. Most of the marriage contracts outside the city walls were not registered in the *sijill*. Another significant indication of bedouin cultural impact on town dwellers may be the popular custom of parading the bride and her dowry on decorated camels prior to the wedding banquet. <sup>59</sup>

Other points of contact were religious and legal institutions. From time to time bedouin arrived in town to obtain *afatwa* or a ruling in matters that concerned them. Muhibbi claims that the good relations between bedouin tribes and the governors of Gaza in the seventeenth century stemmed in part from their respect and admiration for the *mufti* Khayr al-Din al-Ramli. In other cases tribesmen were summoned to court, or came there of their own free will to file a complaint. The *sijill* records several instances in which bedouin were summoned as defendants, or asked to give testimony. Some of those summoned actually arrived and presented their case. This would suggest the existence of constant channels of communication between the court and the tribes around the city. It also implies a willingness on the part of the bedouin to accept the court's authority and to see it as an arbitrator and peace-maker. <sup>60</sup>

The fact that bedouin were often summoned by name, or sued as private people, suggests that they were seen by local authorities as individuals. When crimes were committed, there was an attempt to apprehend the culprits themselves. At least in some cases only the perpetrators of a crime

were punished, and not the whole tribe. The image of the nomad in the mind of city dwellers was apparently not monolithic and stereotypic. It reflected a recognition that the nomadic world was more complex and varied.

On the other side of the equation, bedouin and villagers cooperated in resisting authority, and in raids on caravans, other villages, or other bedouin tribes. Such raids were seldom perpetrated by bands of thieves or marauders joined on an individual basis. In most cases a village joined forces with a bedouin clan or tribe. At times the gang was headed by a charismatic leader, leading it from raid to raid. At other times forces were joined for a single raid upon enemies, like the raid on the Balaqina. Some of these alliances of villages and tribes may have originated in the Qaysi-Yamani dispute, which split the Palestinian and Lebanese countryside in later centuries, but there is no mention of such a motivation in the *sijill* and little in other contemporary sources. <sup>61</sup>

The district of Jerusalem and its surroundings at the time may be described as being comprised of several zones or tiers. There was an inner zone of permanent towns and villages along the watershed line and westward to the coastal plain. Another unstable sedentary zone traced the periphery of the desert, which fluctuated in times of drought between pastoral and agricultural activities;<sup>62</sup> A third zone, included "obedient" tribes; and a fourth, made up of other tribes, some of them rebellious. Clearly this last division, between obedient and rebellious tribes, originated in the Ottoman center, and was much more volatile and uncertain than the others. Obedient tribes rebelled from time to time, while tribes in a state of insurrection were appeased and incorporated.

Social interaction existed between all four zones. A particularly strong bond tied together the second and third tiers—villages on the desert's edge and bedouin tribes residing in proximity—based on their common livelihood, and perhaps on a myth of common ancestry. There may have been some genuine family relations and past migrations from village to tribe and vice versa, although we have no evidence to support such assumptions. Military service and economic activities connected towns in the first zone to tribes in the third and fourth zones.

The social system drawing nomads and settled populations together was therefore deep and multilayered. Social relations ranged from the local Ottoman governing elite, even at the level of district governors, to the lowest echelons of society in remote villages and tribes. Aside from the crucial importance of bedouin to the economy, and from their role in political affairs, a meaningful sociocultural relationship bound together bedouin, villagers and townsmen in the district of Jerusalem. This relationship found expression both on the establishment side of the political

system, and in its resistant opposition. All contributed to the creation of a single discursive structure.

It is harder to say whether this was a constant state of affairs, or whether, on the contrary, the seventeenth century was a unique period in history that does not resemble other periods. There is hardly any doubt that parts of this unified social system existed in earlier and later centuries. Other elements are distinctive of this time and place. It may be worthwhile to point out the historical context, the unique features of the seventeenth century that reinforced such a social system.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman conquest introduced the massive use of firearms, almost unknown before. Until that time bedouin tribes, like their Mamluk overlords, relied heavily on lances, swords, bows and arrows. Due to their use of firearms, Ottoman forces defeated their Mamluk rivals with ease, and managed to instill fear and discipline among the bedouins. In the following years, however, bedouin tribesmen mastered the use of guns. Soon guns became commonplace and the bedouin excelled at the new type of warfare. Victory, so easily attained by the Ottomans at the beginning of the century, became a bitter continuous struggle a few decades later, in which bedouin frequently had the upper hand. Ottoman governments, realizing the dangers inherent in the situation, tried in vain to block channels of arms supply. The situation was exacerbated by the growing incompetence of *sipahis* and the janissaries, and by the gradual withdrawal of the Ottoman government from provincial affairs.

Local governors had to choose between two options: a costly, perhaps futile war against the beoduin, and finding a *modus vivendi* with them to maintain the peace. They chose a third: Some bedouin tribes were incorporated into the system, while others were branded rebels. Thus the governors sometimes took over existing feuds between warring tribes, and found themselves involved, not always willingly, in internal bedouin affairs. In general, however, this policy allowed the local government considerable room for action, and provided the district of Jerusalem and adjacent districts with a measure of security.

Several generations of local rulers, most of them scions or *mamloks* of former governors in the region created a stable relationship with the bedouin, based on payments of money, alliances and marriage. For the governing elite ties with the neighbors in the desert also meant considerable profits accruing from trade, and from lower spending on security. As long as they stayed in power, they did not prohibit ties between bedouin and other social groups. On the contrary, allying themselves with the nomads, they enhanced social and cultural norms already in existence in society. The process of integration was accelerated by a decentralized

system of government at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Local governors soon filled the void left by the central government, and were free to pursue their policy of rapprochement with some of the bedouin.

This tendency was reversed towards the end of the century, when the government in Istanbul decided to enforce central rule upon the provinces. A first step on the way to resume control of the empire was the destruction of local dynasties and their replacement by appointed governors. At this stage ties may have been severed, or at least damaged, between the new governors and tribal sheikhs. The Turabays and other bedouin dynasties were eliminated, and there was no one to bridge the widening gaps.

Economic and social relations were somewhat more stable, but they too were endangered by political realities. At the turn of the century ties between sedentary and nomad populations were weak and unstable. Still, the relatively short period of central dictate did not cut all ties, and another cycle of decentralized rule brought the two components of local society closer together once again. The rise to power of bedouin leaders like Zahir al-'Umar, who ruled most of Palestine several decades later, can thus be seen in a different light. It was not another incident demonstrating the extent of bedouin encroachment on the sedentary regions of Palestine previously held by the Ottomans, but rather a continuation of a long-term phenomenon in the political and social life of the region: the bedouin were part of society, and played a pivotal role in all spheres of life. With the rise of Zahir al-'Umar, foundations were laid for a new cycle of integration. <sup>63</sup>