

# Commission on Nomadic Peoples

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Nomadic Peoples, Number 36/37, 1995

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# The Bedouin market – Corner stone for the founding of Be'er-Sheva: Bedouin traditions about the development of the Negev capital in the Ottoman period

*G.M. Kressel and J. Ben-David*

## Introduction

Why was Be'er-Sheva not rebuilt before the beginning of the 20th century? From the time of the Moslem conquest until 1902, for 1,250 years, there was no permanent settlement here. Geographers who asked this question (Ben-Aryeh and Sapir, 1979) did not answer it. Instead they enumerated political and administrative reasons for the Ottomans having built the town, specifically at that point in time<sup>1</sup>, as though the result had been thought out in advance<sup>2</sup>. A study of the history of the Bedouin market in Be'er-Sheva even prior to the construction of the town, permits a counter thesis to be presented which indeed accepts that the Ottomans had an impact on the revival of the town, but that at the first stage, contrary to the version of the geographers, this impact was only indirect. Restoration of the Turkish force in the country indirectly led to the establishment of the Bedouin market alongside the wells and ruins of ancient Be'er-Sheva, and justified, in the second phase, the establishment of government institutions and, subsequently and gradually, of residential homes also. With the return of the Ottomans in 1840, a government centre

was established in the country that was stronger<sup>3</sup> than anything since the Byzantine defeat. It was this that re-instituted the patronage of the sheikhs over the desert regions and resulted in the demise of the barter trade between the Bedouin and the permanent settlements in the cities of the central parts of the country. The market was automatically moved south, away from the agricultural areas and, having found itself a new focal point in Be'er-Sheva, it attracted the government assessors and tax collectors. Only then were investments made to turn the town first into a centre of civil administration and service and then also into a crossroads for trade. The desire to tax economic transactions contracted in the settlement that was taking shape, rather than political considerations, spurred the Ottomans on to develop Be'er-Sheva.

Market day in Be'er-Sheva, known as the Bedouin Market, is an institution that has existed since before the town was founded. We chose this market for anthropological field work, and from the end of 1981 to spring 1986, we spent time there each week. We have continued to follow up on what is happening in the market with less frequent visits since autumn 1987 until now. A market area is

not easy for anthropological research, as the tools required for its study are not similar to those used for research of a village community or a closed institution. We thus had to adapt traditional research methods to these conditions<sup>4</sup>. In addition, in order to reconstruct the historical dimension of what we saw, we interviewed several of the elders among the Bedouin population and asked them to describe, as best they remembered, the market of their youth.

### Trade between shepherds-*cum*-watchmen and farmers

Since the beginning of the Neolithic Revolution, an agricultural economy and one based on animal-breeding have existed side-by-side in the Middle East and have influenced each other (Bar-Yosef and Khazanov 1992). From the earliest times, farmers and shepherds have exchanged produce of the field for animal products; the barter between them was sometimes voluntary, but sometimes forced on at least one of the parties. The annals of this barter reflect a struggle in which each party attempted to impose its terms on the other. As a rule, when the shepherds were strong in dictating their terms, they would pour into the markets of the permanent settlements. The farmers, on the other hand, did not transport their produce into the depths of the desert lands, to the environments of the shepherds. It was only when urban centres were established in rural areas, with leaders who ordered their armies to repel the invading herds, that the sedentists were able to dictate terms for barter with the Bedouin and control the movements of the latter. Entry of Bedouin into settled areas was then restricted, and the trading posts were moved out to the edge of the desert. This basic asymmetry (Kressel

1993) in the contacts between peasants and Bedouin had a number of causes: a) In most cases the Bedouin depended more on the products of the peasants than the latter did on Bedouin products. The barter trade between them focused, therefore, on the most essential items that each side lacked. Since animals were also bred in the villages for milk and meat (albeit at great expense in comparison with the herds of the desert-lands), there were periods when the Bedouin herd products were not included in the complementary and most essential framework for the peasant. The peasant then withdrew from this trade. The Bedouin accepted this with resentment mixed with jealousy, and the peasant was afraid of the former making himself a nuisance. b) The standard of living of the Bedouin consumers was low in comparison with the peasants', their relatively small population, dispersed encampments and conditional consideration of rights of possession, did not entice the approach of peddlers into deep desert lands. Bedouin searching for consumer goods were drawn to the proximity of the permanent settlements, while the peasants kept away from the Bedouin quarters (Ibn Khaldun 1958, Vol. 1, Ch. II). c) The motives and strength of the Bedouin to harm the peasants were greater than those of the peasant to cause damage to the Bedouin. The state guarantee required for the security of the peasants was not required to ensure the protection of the Bedouin. The Bedouin hand that ruled and plundered along the desert roadways at times when the state was weak, also reached the "king's highways" within the settled country. d) The Bedouin had an advantage in transportation, in that they could bring their store (camels and herds, walking merchandise, hence *mawashi*) to their customers' doorsteps. The peasant had an advantage in that his address was permanent.

If he wanted to sell his agricultural produce to the Bedouin, he would have to take it to them, although their home was each time set up somewhere else. e) Since the parties to the transactions differed in their attitudes, and the bartering conventions between them were based on a shaky foundation<sup>5</sup>, a third party was needed to formulate rules for trade between them, and to maintain procedures in the markets where they mixed with each other. When the civil authority was not strong enough to ensure enforcement of the barter rules, the peasant did not endanger himself by traveling to the desert. When the civil authority was strong, it became a party to the transactions between the peasant and the Bedouin; it collected taxes and imposed upon them services on its behalf. When weak, it used to lease out policing of the markets and the roads leading to them. Mounted Bedouin were natural candidates for this role. Being themselves the element of danger, they might have been looked upon (by the sedentaries) like "the wolves caring for the flock"<sup>6</sup>.

In instances where the ruler lacked the strength to collect part of the tax due to him from the supervisors who operated on his behalf, most of the tax would remain with them. From the mid-18th century onwards, the heads of the Bedouin tribes moved from policing on behalf of the Ottoman Government in desert border areas, and from accompanying convoys on the desert roadways to *de facto* control of extensive regions of the whole Levant (Maoz 1968; Cohen 1973). In the history of the Middle East, this period is known under the term "Rule of the Sheikhs". Bedouin tribes now controlled commercial life in the country (Bailey 1980, 1985, 1990). Their presence was considerable in the urban markets and the roads leading there. The large bartering centres for the Negev Bedouin were the coastal towns of Gaza and Jaffa,

the cities of the mountain region, Hebron and Jerusalem and, in particular, Lod and Ramleh which were situated mid-way between Jaffa and Jerusalem. The Bedouin called the Lod market *Suq al-barren*, i.e., Market of the Two Wildernesses; the Syrian in the East and that of Sinai in the West. The Egyptian conquest of the Levant (1831-1840) and the period following their withdrawal back into Egypt, did not change much, but in the later decades of the 19th century, strengthened by backing from the European powers, the Ottomans once again enforced their rule over the Land of Israel. This was the turning point. When the market took shape in Be'er-Sheva, replacing that of the Lod and Ramleh conurbations, it also received the name of *Suq al-barren*.

### The spread of dry farming in the Negev

When the income of the tribes from, for example, the extortion of *khawa* (or *khuwa*) and the *ghafar* (Patronage and Roads Tax – raised from farm-holders and peripatetic salesmen) declined, they were forced to extract more from the ever-decreasing pasture lands. Increasing the size of the herds was out of question, since their move northwards (for summer pasturing) was gradually restricted by villagers who came with the backing of the authorities, from the high lowlands (between Palestine's Coastal Shore and the Judain Mountains) and from Egypt to till lands in the semi-desert plains. The logical alternative that developed then, and rapidly so, was to use the tribal pasture land (the *direh*) for dry farming. Capital was required for revival of agriculture in the Be'er-Sheva Valley, and it began to be obtained from the sale of barley to Europe. Crop traders now

came from Gaza and southern Mount Hebron to lease the pasture lands. The farmers employed for the task were landless peasants from the Nile Valley or the Nile Delta, who were accepted as serfs<sup>7</sup>. The authorities were not slow in arriving and getting involved in the deals, even when this was uncalled for. It was only when they came into the picture that expansion of the cultivated areas became possible, usually not for new crops, but mainly for wheat and barley<sup>8</sup>. Development of agriculture in the Negev is very different from that in villages of the region. Villagers elsewhere produced mainly for themselves, traded only in surpluses and, consequently, had difficulty in changing over to cash crops. For the peasants among the Bedouin, cash crops became a priority. This was made possible by a combination of capital injected from outside (grain exporters who came from the town), landowners without know-how, and work habits essential for farming (the Negev Bedouin). A skilled labor force, passive and making do with a little (miserable peasants from Egypt<sup>9</sup>, who continued to arrive the whole time), made the deal feasible. The authorities who desired the development of transactions that could be taxed, which were the guarantors for the transactions, who would not have been connected were it not for their guarantee (Kressel *et al.* 1991).

### Institutionalization of the livestock and grain markets in Be'er-Sheva

With the expansion of the transactions, the need arose for institutionalization of the times and places for the meetings. The feeling of increasing safety on the roads made possible for the first time the movement of peddlers (initially) and

subsequently livestock and land buyers from the cities into the depth of the Bedouin areas. The Be'er-Sheva market developed as though of itself and the Government was not slow in supervising it. The building of the *Saraya* (administration) was one of the first buildings in the town. By constructing it, the Turks signaled their desire for development of a permanent settlement and the building did indeed invite private construction to follow. Merchants from Gaza and Hebron and their environs, who made the trip for a day or two of business at the site of the wells, began to erect buildings, to make their stay alongside the market more comfortable. Prior to its completion (1903)<sup>10</sup>, the representatives of the Ottoman Government had located themselves in tents that the Bedouin made available to them alongside the wells. According to oral testimony, without any delay, even before completion of the administration building, when they were still living in a tent that the sheikh of al-'Azazma, Hassan al-Malta'a<sup>11</sup>, had built for them, they began to collect their taxes from those coming to the place. They reached as far as the adjoining winter crop areas and, immediately upon their arrival, they introduced the land tax (*dharibat hbal*) for which the tillers of the soil were liable, and the herd tax (*al-'ushur 'ala al-halal*) that applied to the herds that were encamped not far from the site of the wells. Perhaps not surprisingly, it was these actions that signaled to the population the seriousness of Turkish intentions to remain this time.

Before the opening of the Suez Canal to shipping (1869), the Ottomans had an interest in the land bridge to it. However, they made a start on laying the railway, with the aid of the Germans, their allies then, just before the outbreak of the First World War. The railway to Egypt, that had been planned to bypass the sands of Halutzah to the south and east, was any-

way set to go via Be'er-Sheva. Topographical considerations again explained, now as always, that the site of the wells on the most convenient route into Egypt was the natural location for growth of a town<sup>12</sup>. According to 'Arif al-'Arif, in 1902 the town had 300 inhabitants and, in 1911, 800 (1934: 32).

### The Bedouin market as the cornerstone for the founding of Be'er-Sheva

The following, therefore, contributed to the founding of Be'er-Sheva, by order of importance: A. Transfer of the livestock trading centers from the markets of the towns in the center of the country to the south. Consolidation of the site of the wells as a location for transactions continued from the time that the movement of the Bedouin herds was restricted in the cultivated areas. B. The opening of foreign markets for the grains of the Negev and, thus, investment capital that was essential for the development of the agriculture. C. Expansion of dry farming in the Negev and, with it, the markets for land and grain, in addition to the trade in livestock, for which the site of the wells was a center. This development derived from the reduction in pasture land as the arable land expanded and the movement of the herds for summer pasturing in the valleys of the Lowlands and the North was restricted. The Bedouin sought to produce more from the little area that was available to them. D. The introduction of skilled, rigid and cheap manpower, namely the miserable peasants from Egypt, who cultivated the grain crops under the patronage of the Negev tribes. E. The desire of the Ottoman authorities to exercise control and taxation of transactions in the Negev, as well as their interest in a presence along the road

to Suez, following the cutting of the canal, motivating them to establish for themselves a governmental center there.

The chain of events began with the restoration of the Ottoman administration in Palestine; the Turkish force helped ending the rule of the Sheikhs and restricted the presence of their herds in rural centres and urban conurbations. The pushing of the Bedouin into areas on the edge of the desert, with suspension of the *iltizam* arrangements, the *khawa* and the *ghafar*, left them with a choice of moving to locations not yet reached by the hand of the central government, or of making do for the time being with livestock economics, in an agriculturally-marginal area, while awaiting new development projects that the Turks were to initiate and a growth in the supply of jobs that were not dependent on the livestock economy. The economic activity that formed around Be'er-Sheva then was an outcome (rather than a premeditated act) of the return of the Turks in considerable strength. Formation of the regional market encouraged continued development momentum. Then came the investments by the Turks in establishment of the institutions of civil administration and military bases as well as investments in conquering the roads to and from the market.

Be'er-Sheva has grown and is surprising in the lines of the orthogonal outline, that are exceptional in Middle Eastern scenery. Its conception was, apparently, as a western town and it is known that German architects and planners participated in its construction. The inhabitants did not have a say on planning issues but this does not mean that they arrived only after construction of the town<sup>13</sup>. In this case, the inhabitants (the Bedouin) and their economic infrastructure were the basis for construction of the public buildings and housing but, since they lived in tents and had no preferences (as resi-

dents of the older cities in the region) for urbanization, the builders could lay (straight) lines for the town such as the area had not known since the Byzantines left.

### The wells and their place in the new history

The Well of Abraham, on the bank of Nahal Be'er-Sheva to the north, was a focus for livestock trade before and after the settlement took shape alongside. The Bedouin name<sup>14</sup> for the place then was *Suq al-waqef* (The Standing Market)<sup>15</sup>, for which there are three possible explanations;

- a. *Waqef* (standing) because buyer and seller stand facing each other, and no one kneels (*m'karbez*) as usual in trading valuables or sits as in the shops in towns.
- b. *Waqef* because the bartering is over merchandise (i.e., livestock) that is standing on its feet, not resting or lying down as it changes hands.
- c. In the course of time, another explanation of the name was added, namely because the prices in this market were standing or frozen, not in the sense of being unchanging but because livestock values were relatively fixed in contradistinction to money, the value of which varies. Bedouin usually attach fixed cash values to livestock.

The construction of Be'er-Sheva began from *Suq al-waqef*, and its importance is shown by the fact that it was surrounded by buildings yet remained an "open market", i.e., it continued to function as previously, which testifies to the unique role reserved for it as a meeting-place for two population groups of different yet complementary economics. Until recently, goods were bartered for goods or for

services instead of or alongside monetary transactions.

The Be'er-Sheva market is remembered for having brought to the threshold of the encampments peddlers selling consumer and luxury items, who expressed the culture of the permanent settlement and thereby constituted a challenge to Bedouin culture. Old men and women are pleased to specify, when asked, what impressive articles they had known in their childhood. Foods (mainly sweets)<sup>16</sup>, haberdashery items, mirrors and combs have an important place in the list. Their purchase was for cash and becoming habitualized to their consumption changed the customs of the market in that barter trade decreased and buying and selling for money increased. Animals were sold and the proceeds quickly exchanged into consumer items. Abu Hamed (aged about 75)<sup>17</sup> explains the attraction to the growing town, in addition to the hunger for consumer items, in the curiosity to see the construction. They came not only to sell and to buy but to stand and wonder at the sight of the building work in the town: *liann tal'at minn al-fadhwa* (because it rose out of nothing). Despite the sense of recoil from the Turkish administration that they termed *hukuma zalma* (Government of oppression)<sup>18</sup>, their attachment to the town grew and, without noticing it, their identity became associated with its name: *sirna badu as-sabe* (that is, "We've become the Bedouin of Be'er-Sheva") or "the Bedouin of the Negev"<sup>19</sup>.

After use of the force of arms to put down the wars of the tribes<sup>20</sup>, the Turks took a more lenient approach. In 1901, they proclaimed in Gaza and in Hebron the establishment of Be'er-Sheva, offered the heads of the tribes a free dunam of land in the town although they collected a Turkish Pound from others for a dunam. The sheikhs wanted to be closer to the Government representatives, for

their benefit and for the benefit of members of their tribe. The other Bedouin were not persuaded to live in the town, wanting the luxuries of the town, its commerce, its facilities, but nothing more.

The first to become urbanized, therefore, were those who traded with Bedouin from Gaza and the Hebron mountains, sheikhs and Government officials. The Sheikhs 'Ali al-'Atauneh and Muhammad as-San'e<sup>21</sup> testify that the town was controlled by the Bedouin although they were a minority among the Gazans and Hebroni inhabitants, this being when the tent-dwellers of the immediate vicinity and some who came from further afield and who filled the streets when they came to visit, were also counted. Upon completion of the first buildings in 1906, a ceremony, to which the Turks gave a religious character, was held proclaiming Be'er-Sheva as a town. The Great Mosque was dedicated then, and a classroom for religious studies for Bedouin children. The first and subsequent mayors – until the beginning of the 1930s<sup>22</sup> – were appointed by the authorities from among the heads of the tribes. In this way, they sought to bring the Bedouin closer to them.

We rescued (1985) very early testimony about the Be'er-Sheva market from Isma'il Abu-Hmed (then aged about 90), a resident of Kuseifa to the end of his days. According to him, he came to the wells with his father to water camels. He recalled three wells near each other without any sign of a building next to them<sup>23</sup>, with one of them being under the control of Ibn 'Irfan, an Azazmeh sheikh. Sheikh Sulayman al-'Uqbi<sup>24</sup>, a resident of Hura, gives the testimony of his father, according to which the beginnings of the town were earlier than otherwise thought<sup>25</sup>. According to him, 1874 should be seen as the beginnings of Be'er-Sheva, when a Turkish force arrived at the site of the wells. Since then it was visited by ped-

dlers from Gaza, on set days each week, and the Bedouin used to come to meet them. Abu-Jad'u al-'Azzami recalled (in 1986) how, around the Well of Abraham (*Bir Ibrahim al-khalil*), thick bush vegetation<sup>26</sup> developed, providing fodder for the camels, while their owners engaged in trade. Choice of the site was influenced by the wells being on a road junction of the Gaza-Jaffa, Hebron-Jerusalem and Eilat-Egypt *via* Sinai routes. Abu-Jad'u confirms that the settlement of the Turks alongside the wells derived from their desire to control the Bedouin, which they did by setting up a series of police stations; a ranking Turkish official, Al-Batrakh Qua'id al-'Aam, established "Qal'at Fteis"<sup>27</sup>, the first in the string of police forts. Sheikh Hassan al-Malta'a went there to persuade Al-Batrakh to establish a policing unit near the water wells of Be'er-Sheva also. According to Sulayman al-'Uqbi, the dating of Be'er-Sheva as a town should be from that moment, i.e., from the time that the policing unit was established or the beginning of the building of the *Saraya*, by Kaimakam Muhammad Bec 'Abd-al-Hadi in 1897. Once the building was up and ready, the flow of Gazan merchants, whose safety the government guaranteed, increased.

### The mosque alongside the market

The mixture of a mosque established close to a market or of a market developing alongside a mosque to encourage visitors to come from afar for secular and religious affairs at the same opportunity is common in our region<sup>28</sup>. The Bedouin elders recall that the initiator of the Be'er-Sheva mosque was a merchant called al-Bitar, who collected donations from the merchants of the town and some from the



sheikhs. The little that the Bedouin contributed symbolized a willing partnership in establishment of the town, since establishment of Be'er-Sheva symbolized revocation of the political autonomy, also in the desert areas, that they had enjoyed since the end of the Byzantine rule" (Eilat 1971: 41-50). The Bedouin relate as though they had taken an active role in the actual construction of the mosque (not only in collection of contributions for it). According to Sulayman al-'Uqbi, they engaged in laying of the foundations, with al-Bitar, even before he applied for a license for it from the authorities. One day, the Kaimakam passed by and noticed that foundations were being laid for a building that he did not know about (although he was the person who had to approve the construction work). He asked the meaning of the work and was told that Al-Bitar was building a mosque here, and that this was open and known to everyone. al-Bitar was summoned before the Kaimakam and explained that, for the present, only the wall surrounding the mosque was being built. The Kaimakam, from a famous family of builders in Istanbul, ruled that "If the fence that is being constructed first has to testify to the quality of the mosque that will go up, it is better to take the work away from you (and away from your Bedouin assistants). I command that the fence, that to me appears like a donkey pen, be destroyed immediately". And the Governor added that the mosque had to serve the Bedouin and for that reason they should be involved in the construction process; as though he were speaking on their behalf.

Al-Bitar recognized that his act was imprudent and that he was going to lose his investment. So he began to beat his head. The venerables of the population understood that the Kaimakam was looking for an excuse to revoke their initiative so that he would be able to at-

tribute construction of the mosque to himself, to earn praise and divine grace. They advised al-Bitar, therefore, to ask for the help of 'Ali Hassan Ibn-'Attayah<sup>29</sup>. Sheikh 'Ali referred al-Bitar to Sheikh Hammad As-Suffi, a friend of the Turks, but asked him not to reveal that he had sent him (lest the question arise as to why he had not applied to him directly). Hammad As-Suffi was persuaded that the only thing that could have any impact on the Kaimakam was to make him aware that the Turks had designated Be'er-Sheva for the Bedouin, and that the peasants, among them al-Bitar, were in effect appended inhabitants. Sheikh Hammad As-Suffi, together with Sheikh al-'Atauneh applied to the Kaimakam and sought to underline that the mosque that was being erected was for the Bedouin. The latter agreed, on condition that they donated more of their money, on the understanding that this would be the best way to bring them to settling in Be'er-Sheva. Sheikh Sulayman al-'Uqbi tells: "Without delay, the Kaimakam took *Daftar al-'ashair* (the Book of the Tribes) in which were inscribed the rules of *Illizam al-'ushur* (collection of the tithe taxes) and, then and there, set a building construction tax for each tribe, pro rata to its size<sup>30</sup>. The Kaimakam took advantage of this opportunity to force the sheikhs to move their tents to the town and thus serve as an example to members of their tribes. According to him: "These will be the surest worshippers in the mosque, that it won't remain empty" (ibid.). And, indeed, the first sheikhs who built their homes in the town were Sheikh Hammad As-Suffi and Sheikh 'Ali al-'Atauneh, both of whom had an influence on the Turkish governor. The Bedouin did not come en masse to live in the town, but the town increasingly filled their many needs.

Hajj Abu-Taha, known for his great age and excellent memory, recalls the

occasion of the mosque's dedication. All the sheikhs were present, each having been asked to bring with him a sheep for slaughter. They stood in the yard of the mosque, with the sheep in a row facing forwards in front of them, each sheep with a slaughterer. Then one of the sheep escaped from his slaughterer and a black man who was among the invited guests caught the sheep, pulled it to the ground and slaughtered with his bare hands. The Turkish Kaimakam commented on that: *A'uzu billah minn ash-shitan ar-rajim, hadi 'atbatin suda wala yuhkum fiha illa illi yazlem* (Return to God from Satan; this occasion is black and no-one will rule it other than a tyrant.) After the opening of the mosque, the Kaimakam proclaimed the sale of building plots for the Bedouin. He stated different prices for each of the three planned streets. A plot in the middle street was the most expensive; one Turkish pound was charged for it. In the parallel street to the east, the plot was sold for half a pound and to the west for a quarter of a pound. Sheikh 'Ali Ibn-'Attyiah paid 4 Turkish pounds for 4 plots, which is perhaps why he merited being appointed the first mayor. At the plot sale, it is recalled that Sheikh Hammad As-Suffi declared: *Ana bididi b'rub'a juni, ib'idni 'inn al-filh* (I am interested in a plot that costs a quarter of a pound in order to keep away from the peasantry), intimating Sheikh al-'Atauneh<sup>31</sup>, whose parenthood was of peasant origin. The Kaimakam ignored the sting in what he had said, marched over to Sheikh 'Ali Ibn-'Attyiah, took him by the shoulders and congratulated him: *Fal-tahya, brawu 'alayk*. The Kaimakam circumvented the provocateur by praising the man who had had the courage to be the first of the yea-sayers. Because he had been among the first of the Bedouin to jump in, some attribute to him the founding of modern Be'er-Sheva. After the Sheikhs 'Ali and Hammad As-

Suffi, Sheikh Muhammed as-San'e<sup>32</sup> purchased a building plot on which he erected a number of houses and a bakery. His houses became a permanent hostel for members of the Qudeirat. Sheikh Freih abu-Middin behaved in like manner and, in addition to his home, built a *khan* (inn) for those staying over in the town.

### The mayoralty from the Bedouin point of view

According to other testimony<sup>33</sup>, Sheikh Hammad As-Suffi was appointed first mayor, and was followed by Sheikh 'Ali al-'Atauneh and Freih abu-Middin. As has been explained, the Bedouin mayors did not stay long in their high office because they did not realize the practical value, apart from the honor, that had befallen them. When they saw that they were required to manage, and the management became complex, they conceded the honor and waived the role. "Peasants" then came to serve as mayors, the most prominent being of the Gazan families of Taj and Sha'ath, who won the position in appointment-elections<sup>34</sup>. Many Bedouin came to live in Be'er-Sheva, funnily enough when its mayors were peasants, i.e., tribally-neutral individuals who were not a party to the tribal wars. This teaches us about identification of the town with the tribe heading it. Sulayman al-'Uqbi testifies that he rented an apartment in the town in 1932 and it was there that his sons ('Ali, Nuri and Anwar) were born, because he had wanted them to study in Be'er-Sheva. From his rented apartment, he conducted trade in grain of his family and other members of his tribe. His testimony proves how the Bedouin imitated the foreigners who traded in the town in, for example, land, crops and sheep. As the

number of Bedouin merchants and their weight among the merchants of Be'er-Sheva grew, the town was called 'Aasimat al-Badu (Capital of the Bedouin). Without really noticing it, the Bedouin of the surroundings were then called: 'Arab as-Sab'a or Badu as-Sab'a. The Bedouin elders have some milestones that they note in the formation of Be'er-Sheva, such as establishment of the police post (1896) in the tent of Hassan al-Malta'a; the beginning (1897) of the construction of the Saraya; the beginning of the construction of the mosque (1897); the dedication of the mosque and the Saraya (1903); and the beginning of the construction of the sheikhs' residences (1911). These events are discussed without the connection being made between them and whoever was mayor at the time. They deal more with the anecdotal than infrastructure data such as building of the highway or dramatic events such as the first train, etc.

For example, Salem Abu-Rabi'ah teaches us (1911) that there had been no street lighting to the end of the Turkish period. The British placed street lights on poles in the three main streets. Each evening, a man would climb up, fill them with paraffin and light them. Among the wonders of the new town, the new bread bakery made a strong impression on the Bedouin visitor. 'Allian al-Mahasne relates how his father had shown him this wonder: *F'ssuq fi mathana, bihuttu fiha qamh wa-min ghad b'yitl'a khubz* (In the market there is a milling machine, at one side of which is laid wheat and bread comes out the other)<sup>35</sup>. The "town" bread (called in Turkish *qusmat*) was dry and eaten after "dunking" in tea or soup. Since it was dry and lasted two-three weeks, it was bought as provisions for long journeys.

### Attitude of the Ottomans to the market

Salem Abu-Rabi'ah has a childhood memory of the appearance of the town when it had only three buildings: the Saraya, the mosque and the school for the children of the sheikhs. At the site where the weekly market was held stood a number of *bawayek* (clay buildings) that the *ghazazweh* (merchants from Gaza) erected for storage or merchandise. Only at the time of the British did the foreigners (formerly the Gazans, the Hebronis and the Jews) transfer their trade to shops. Abu-Hmed explains (1985) that the government worked to defend the chances of Bedouin opening their own shops; that is, it delayed the transfer of businesses to the shops so that the Bedouin (who lacked preparation for opening shops) would not lag behind in relation to the foreigners. The Turks believed that nothing would tie the Bedouin to the town more than ownership of a shop. So long as they traded in open markets at random, they would lack the peg to hold them there. Abu-Jaddu' al-'Azzami explains (1986): *Al-balad hadhi Sahra, yom ibtimhil wa-riziqha qalil, ma bitkaffi la-ahalha wa-a-nas kanu ibyirhalu* (This area is desert, and at the time of a drought, it is hard to make a living so the inhabitants migrate.) The Turks assessed that the chance of Be'er-Sheva to tie the Bedouin to it depended on the development of commerce. Therefore, in order to add jobs, they planned it as a commercial center. The richer the trade and variety of goods, they reasoned, so would the Bedouin find there all their needs and would spare themselves the journey to distant markets. On this note, one should understand the development effort, as Abu-Ghanem says: *As-suq 'amar al-balad* (The market founded the town). Sheikh Sulayman al-'Uqbi strengthens this perception that

took root in the Bedouin consciousness, in that, when they went to the town for whatever reason, they would say: *Ana biddi as-Suq* (I want to go to the market).

In the shops, trade was conducted throughout the week, but the tradition of a market day – institutionalized in 1896 – persisted. According to the testimony of Ahmad Abu-Hamed, the Lod market (held on Mondays) was to be replaced by the new Be'er-Sheva market. At first it was held on a Wednesday<sup>36</sup> and then changed to Friday after dedication of the mosque – so that market-goers would also attend Friday prayers. In the 19th century, the largest market visited by the Bedouin was in Gaza on Fridays. The intention was that they stop visiting both there and the Lod market, even for religious purposes. The Be'er-Sheva market that began on Fridays was changed, after its consolidation, to Sundays. Over the years, its regular day was repeatedly changed. The Ottomans preferred Wednesdays, Fridays and finally Thursdays as market day.

According to the testimony, the location of the weekly market was gradually moved from alongside the wells to an open space between the cemetery and the Well of Abraham. At that time, *Suq al-waqef* was split into parts: *Suq al-aghnam* (the livestock market) and *Suq aj-j'mal* (the camel market), with a third area where merchants<sup>37</sup> exhibited their wares on the ground. With time, the sale of consumer items moved to the town's pavements and in front of the institutionalized shops. The seasonal trade in grain and goods took place in every street, throughout the week, but greatly increased on market day. Salesmen, peddlers and shopkeepers tried to adapt their merchandise to Bedouin taste – each wanted to be the first to “help” the Bedouin spend cash received from the sale of livestock, and many came to the open market to do this. The community

elders recall market days as a mass event. According to one: “Buyers and sellers came from the whole of the world that God had created”, because it drew to itself members of tribes from the Eastern Desert (Syria, Transjordan and North Saudia) and the Western (the Negev, Sinai and Egypt).

### Taxation in the Negev in the Ottoman period

The Turks did not collect taxes from the residents of the town, but from the vendors in the market. Not much is remembered about this<sup>38</sup>. On the other hand, the government did impose manufacturing and income taxes that are well-remembered: 1. *Dharibat hbal*, a land tax that was collected each year by an assessor called *al-mhassel* from those who tilled the soil. Since the government appointed a permanent assessor for each tribe (but not a member of the same tribe), the number of assessors moving around the area was large. The tax was collected according to *daftar al-hbal*<sup>39</sup>: each autumn every plot that had been actually sown was noted in the records, thus making it difficult to avoid paying taxes at harvest time. 2. *al-'ushur 'ala al-halal* (the tithe on the livestock) was estimated and collected by assessors who moved through the open areas each spring, after the lambing season. Thus, the authorities did not have to levy a livestock tax at the Be'er-Sheva market. If animals were brought to market from the Eastern Desert, livestock tax was then imposed on sheep, goats and camels by the Turks. With respect to the camels, a distinction was made between those intended for slaughter for which the breeder had to pay, and the females defined as *harrathat* (plowers)<sup>40</sup>, for which no tax was charged (because of their importance for tilling the soil). The

taxable females were called *shamsanat* (open to the sun), because, as a rule, they were left to pasture outside.

The importance of the market became more and more prominent as the Ottoman Empire increasingly experienced budgetary difficulties, and the Sublime Porte (ministerial department of the Grand Visier) failed to transfer monies to remote areas. The garrisons were then forced provide their needs from those under their control. It was relatively easy to collect taxes from institutionalized taxpayers, shop-keepers, but much more difficult from traders in the open market. As the economic situation of the Ottoman Empire worsened, the Turks became more stringent with the Bedouin. The former's rationale was while they had made it possible for the Bedouin to have a higher standard of living, the Bedouin were ungrateful, and it was impossible to get anything from them. When the Turks were not able to extract any more from the town's merchants, they tried to do so from the Bedouin, who benefitted from the town's markets but were not institutionalized as part of its commercial life. The weakening of the Empire and its shame at the level of international relations hardened the heart of the Turks and detracted from the generosity they had shown to the Bedouin in the first decade of the 20th century. Tax-collecting soldiers who were sent to the encampments to confiscate crops after the harvest are remembered for their cruelty. In the latter part of the WWI, defeated and humiliated, the soldiers tortured Bedouin who concealed their harvest. When they discovered concealed silos, they confiscated everything they found without leaving a thing. In the summer of 1916, the troops flooded the fields of the Negev; platoons of soldiers were stationed alongside the threshing-floors awaiting conclusion of the work. They attained a pinnacle of evil just before their withdrawal, before the

English arrived. Hussein al-Muteirat describes (1988) how they heaped up the various types of crop and burned what they were unable to carry. *Sawwu thalath 'anaber: Qamh, sha'ir wa-dura, wa-a-da'il ad'aku hatta ma ahhad ya'ish minha* (They piled up three storehouses, for wheat, barley and sorghum [to take with them] and what remained they burned so that no-one would live from them.) It is natural that the sights of the last days of Turkish rule left a special, dominant impression in the minds of the Bedouin. Salem Abu-Rabi'ah remembers the Turkish soldiers, worn-out and in ragged uniforms, giving rise to fear and pity. When they came to confiscate crops in the field, they would search the sacks to ensure that they contained only seed (lest they be tricked and straw be placed in the lower part). When bread was baked in their honor, they demanded that, before the baking, the *sajj* (the metal baking tray) be washed and scrubbed lest dust be laid on it. In the same way, they required that the *dhabiha* (the sacrifice) be slaughtered in their sight lest they be fed a faulted animal. In their suspiciousness, they did not agree that the meat be cooked in a pot, as the Bedouin prepare it, but demanded that it be fried in the *sajj* intended for baking. They watched with extra caution over the fodder for their horses; since the horses were fed where they were tied, there was some suspicion that they might be poisoned and so the soldiers did not leave them. The Bedouin did not remain indifferent. According to Hussein al-Muteirat, on moon-lit nights during the threshing season (June-July), the field-owners would await a moment of lack of alertness on the part of the soldiers. They would then load camels with the crops and rush them to caves in the hills so as to assure themselves bread for the winter.

The Turks lacked manpower for policing (since they had sent soldiers out into

the fields) and, according to the testimony of Marahil Abu-Kaff (1990), when a murder took place, for example, the police did not intervene but placed the responsibility for capture of the murderer on his *khamisa* (blood relatives). In more serious cases *mafraza* (camel-riding platoons of soldiers) would be sent to position themselves near the tents of the tribe to which the offense was attributed and they would not leave until the offender (or someone else who was handed over to take the punishment) was handed over to them. For the whole of that time, the family was responsible for providing all the needs of the platoon, that sometimes comprised ten policemen, including fodder for their animals. The undernourished soldiers had no pity on the Bedouin property (herd), and demanded that animals be slaughtered for them, sometimes twice a day. When the culprit was handed over to them, he was sent to Jerusalem for trial *wa-minn miyat al-masjun, laww ma yatl'a bass wahad* (Of a hundred prisoners, only one emerged alive). It was better for a person to die than to fall into the hands of the police, as is said: *Yatih f-al-nar wala f-as-sijin* (Let him fall into the inferno and not into prison). The disrespect for the Bedouin led to their treason against the Turks and this accelerated the collapse of the Turks in the face of the British. Sheikh Isma'il explains: *Lola Khanu al-Badu, Turkiah ma n'kassarat* (If the Bedouin had not betrayed the Turks they would not have broken), and attributes to the Bedouin greater strength than they had. It is known that the Turks conscripted a Bedouin force that was sent to meet the British in Sinai and that did not do its duty. While still on the way to Suez and before reaching the battle-field, it broke ranks (Al-Arif 1934: 201-2). When they gave up on their trust in the Bedouin conscripts, the Turks replaced them with policemen and soldiers from the "Sa'idi"

platoons (dark-skinned men from Upper Egypt), whom they ordered to stimulate trade. Their presence was immediately felt as tyrannical inspectors over those coming to market and working in the fields.

### The livestock market and its characteristics

Bedouin who talk about the livestock market in its better days are inclined to ignore the trade in sheep and concentrate on that in camels. In those days, each person would bring some of his camels, when they wanted to realize an asset or exchange a camel for some other asset. Wholesalers would buy up the camels in the market and, as a rule, there would be agents, retail merchants, between the breeders and the wholesalers and so the animals would change hands at least twice. Those with whom we spoke had an explanation: *al-badawi mush saheb tujara* (Bedouin are not friends of commerce). On arrival at the market, the Bedouin had to sharpen their wits and be familiar with prices, lest they lose out, but bargaining over prices was not to their taste so they looked for others to do it for them. The currencies in use (*al-'imla*) in those days were: *lira-dhahab* (gold pound) *al-gineh* (Egyptian pound) *al-kaba* (a term that we were unable to identify) *al-bishlik* (a small coin, part of a pound). Because of the remoteness of the place and a permanent shortage of coins, barter trade was very common; as they recall, the Bedouin bartered as a rule livestock for merchandise; some of the livestock traders arrived with assistants carrying clothing, various vessels, including weapons and other consumer items. While the merchant cared for the animals he had bought, his assistant would offer goods for barter. Merchants who were

not dependent on livestock trading came from Gaza, Hebron, Ramleh and Lod.

The larger camel traders came from the Eastern Desert and a few from the Western. Prominent among these two groups were: 1. Members of the al-'Akilat tribe (merchants from 'Akili in Nejd), who journeyed on purchasing missions between the encampments of the northern Arabian Peninsula. The camels that they bought led in the trains going west, first to Be'er-Sheva and from there, with what they had not managed to sell, to the markets of Gaza, Khan Yunis and Rafah. Camels that were not sold at these settlements were taken by the Khatatrah, the most famous of the merchants crossing the Sinai Desert to Egypt. If the Khatatrah did not arrive, the 'Akilat would themselves continue on the trip to Egypt. 2. Members of the Negev and East Sinai tribes, the Tarabin and the Jarawin traveled on their camel buying trips as far as the 'Arava and edge of the Edom Mountains. The most important breeding grounds for camels was and remains the Arabian Desert, while the most important destination for the sale of camels (for meat) was and remains the large Egyptian market. The specialization trends in trade that developed rapidly from the return of the Ottomans favored special tribal groupings. How members of certain tribes came to be selected we do not know. The Bedouin elders emphasize, for example, that the Tayaha tribes have never produced any real merchants. Their relative advantage, which was in the sphere of livestock breeding (from the time of the Ottoman return) developed also toward crop growing; they were thus excellent at production rather than trade, and the attempt to retrieve details from their past that might explain why their development was different in comparison with that of the Tarabin tribes, their allies in the past (Bailey, 1980:

39-47; 1985; Stewart 1991) provides no answers.

For the weekly livestock market, the merchants would gather in the early morning hours. Toward noon, they would all disperse. Marahil Abu-Kaff, who observed the market in his youth, explains that then as now the market did not last more than a few hours. *Ba'd arba', khmas sa'at bikun as-suq mkhallas* (After 4-5 hours, it was all over), because livestock could not be held for a long time without drinking. The sheep and camels were driven to the open space before sun-rise, so as not to exhaust them, and were taken away before the heat of the day. Toward the end of the Ottoman period, the price of a camel underwent severe fluctuations up and down. Camels were needed as a means of transport and haulage for the Turks' war effort more than they were required for their meat. At the height of the war, the price of camel went as high as 17 gold pounds, an enticing price, and the Bedouin sold most of their camels. As might be expected, their inclination to speed up the breeding of camels grew at the expense of their field crops, added to which the government confiscated a considerable part of the harvest without paying for it. For camels, on the other hand, it paid and, if not, they could be easily sped away. Subsequently, they stopped buying camels, and the price nose-dived.

Indirectly, the Bedouin were compensated for the damage that the Turks inflicted on them in those difficult years - as the result of an unexpected development. When they withdrew in the face of the British army from the East Sinai fronts, many of the Turks threw away their personal weapons after hiding the bolts of the rifles in the sand (lest the Bedouin attack them from the rear in revenge, using their own weapons). Along the withdrawal routes, the Bedouin col-

lected tens of thousands of bolt-less rifles that they sold to merchants who sold them to Sharif Hussein who paid for them in gold pounds. For weeks, camel trains laden with weapons passed the Bedouin encampments in the Negev en route to Transjordan. In summer 1917, after a period of exhausting freeze, the movement in the area grew again, the demand for camels increased and the Negev Bedouin found a ready income from the sale of camels and from the sale of weaponry. The consolidation of dry farming, as an important ancillary branch, alongside and in addition to pasturing, has an impact on the composition of the Bedouin herd. Initially, camel breeding was dominant with goats in second place, ahead of sheep. Sheep entered the Bedouin economy later and were influenced by the arrival of intensive farming to the Be'er-Sheva Valley. For agriculture, sheep were preferable to goats, more suited for regularly located pasturing (more difficult for migration) and of less harm to crops. At the same time, because of its better taste, the demand for mutton was greater and so developed with the institutionalization of the weekly market day tradition. The more the market day became institutionalized, merchants from the settled Arab population of the country purchased sheep directly (without recourse to intermediaries) from the Bedouin and camel breeding in the Negev decreased<sup>41</sup>. The rate of breeding sheep rose at the expense of camel and goat breeding. The Bedouin elders in the Be'er-Sheva Valley testify that, with the departure of the Ottomans, the composition of their herds was one-third each camels, goats and sheep. Only in the Negev Highlands, by the 'Azazmeh tribe, did goats and camels remain the main herd. The tribes of the Zullam confederation in the eastern Be'er-Sheva Valley led the move from

camel breeding to that of sheep and goats. The sheep-breeders were also later joined by the Bedouin of the Eastern Desert. The import of cheap sheep flocks from the Arabian Peninsula and North Saudia began in the second decade of the 20th century and increased in the British period. The cheap, imported sheep then competed against the flocks of the Negev Bedouin, who were forced to adapt their sheep sales to the autumn and winter and to times when flocks were not brought from the East, and the prices grew.

### The crop market

The growth of winter crops developed in the Be'er-Sheva Valley hand in hand with the development of the town, to which the growers brought their grain for sale. Cash was paid for the grain and, from this point of view, the trade accelerated the transition to a monetary economy. In the last decade of the 19th century, under Ottoman patronage, the merchants of Gaza, Ramleh and Lod brought the trade in crops forward to the open area around the site of the wells and, immediately the first streets were erected, they opened places of business in them. In contradistinction to the livestock market that functioned intensively just one morning a week throughout the year, the grain market was seasonal and lasted throughout the week. The trade in grain began at the height of the harvest season (*ayyam al-haside*) and ended a short time before closure of the threshing floors (*kharabet aj-jurun*). In contradistinction to the livestock that was traded in Be'er-Sheva, most of which was imported from outside Palestine, most of the grain was locally produced and intended for export. Livestock trade was, it is true, effected by the climate but it continued without in-



terruption. The trade in grain took place only after rainy years. The Bedouin elders denote several rainy years with the picturesque expression: "A year of grain mountains" (*sanat salayeb qamh wa-salayeb sh'ir*) on the town pavements.

In contradistinction to the livestock merchants, most of whom were Bedouin, the grain merchants were mainly peasants and townsfolk. There were also some Jews among them. The peasants who lived among the Bedouin<sup>42</sup>, who grew the crops, brought their share and that of the Bedouin in the crop to the town and, beside large piles of grain (*'ala as-salayeb*) met the urban merchants, *al-madaniyeh*. The Bedouin did not want to appear to be involved in commerce and agricultural matters. The peasant, on the other hand, was not available and/or skilled as a salesman and so left the task to the professionals to do for him. Initially, many trading specialists appeared in the town, with the grain passing from one to another and increasing in price on its way to being exported. Subsequently, a number of large merchants from the cities of the center of the country ousted the smaller traders, with representatives on their behalf working among the Bedouin. In good years, they bought crops before they were harvested. Because of the vagaries of the Negev climate, the merchants were not inclined to finance inputs (mainly seeds) for the work of the peasant nor to buy fields before the harvest (*dhaman*) but, from the start of the harvest, representatives of the merchants visited the fields and competed with each other in offering a better price<sup>43</sup>.

The Bedouin could attend the animal market when they needed cash, adjusting his sales to the right occasion (when meat prices rose). In the grain market, bargaining power was limited. Sheikh Isma'il Abu-Hmed (1985) testifies to that when he explains: "The sharp and dis-

honest merchants worked mercilessly because the Bedouin were subject to their favors. They would use bar scales (*al-mizan*) and, when they weighed the crop, they would press (unseen) with their foot on the weights, thus detracting from the price due to the vendor. They used to cheat and were unafraid of God (*bighushshu wa-ma bikhafu Allah*). The expectation for cash that was felt at the end of the harvest season diminished the farmer's ability to bargain and demand the full value for his merchandise. Sheikh Isma'il Abu-Hmed brings home the state of affairs according to which the Bedouin and their peasant tenant-farmers waged between them a war of cultures and economy, with each party in turn seeking revenge for the attacks of the other. The peasants were paid by the Bedouin in the sphere of marketing of the agricultural produce by increasing their receipts beyond what had been agreed between them. Relatively speaking, it was easy for them to cheat in matters of grain crops because, in this area, the Bedouin lacked experience and pretensions. They also lacked the tribal cohesiveness that they had as shepherds and livestock traders. When selling field crops that the peasant tenant-farmer had sown and harvested for him, the Bedouin was alone, without the backing of members of his tribe. Since the agreements over the sale of field crops were accompanied by the issue of receipts, the illiteracy that characterized the Bedouin then<sup>44</sup>, detracted from their ability to control what was happening. The motivation to learn was higher among the tenant-farmers than among the Bedouin themselves and for this reason, and because they were not torn by tribal loyalties as were the Bedouin, they were taken on as representatives of the locals in the supervisory mechanisms in the markets. Sheikh Abu-Hmed testifies about himself that he learned, in the Turkish period, in a school for the sons of

## Deployment of Open Markets in the South in 1911

Town	Weekly market days	Main activity by	The goods
Be'er-Sheva	Saturday-Sunday	Bedouin and peasants	Emphasis on livestock and crops
Rafah	Tuesday	Bedouin and peasants	Emphasis on agricultural products
Gaza	Friday	Bedouin and peasants	Emphasis on livestock and crops
Al-Falujja	Wednesday-Thursday	Mainly peasants	Emphasis on agricultural products

Bedouin notables in Be'er-Sheva despite his inferior origin as a *Qala'i* (with a peasant background from Egypt and, later, from the vicinity of Khan Yunis). He thus earned a semi-official post on behalf of the Government. He was an assistant for members of the tribes who were required to appear before the institutions and were unable to express themselves clearly. He would first speak with them, record a memorandum and requests and afterwards accompany them to each office, to the police and to the court. Those with jobs like his carried a leather document case (*'alikat hukuma*) that the Turkish officials gave them. The case contained papers and a copying pencil (that had to be wetted with saliva in order to write). *Saheb al-'Alika*, the man with the case around his neck, merited the same respect as a policeman; in his presence, one had to stop smoking and stand submissively. In his contacts with peasants, he would push them around, with demands for gifts and food for himself and the animal that he was riding, demands that matched the attitude of the Bedouin to the peasants at the time of the *iltizam*. In his contacts with the Bedouin, he was biased against them. "I behaved that way because I knew that thereby I was rewarding them for their attitude toward me (as a person of peasant origin), when the opportunity arose for them to abuse me. For in those days *al-umma kanat 'ala-rahmat-Allah* (the nation was in need of divine mercy), with everyone trying to arrange affairs with everyone".

The building of the power of the Axis States in the first decade of this Century

accelerated the technological changes and the development of the Negev. When motor-operated water pumps were installed at the important wells, the Turks raised from them (Braslavsky 1946: 121) enough water for the people, for 20,000 camels a day apart from some irrigated farms. Between 1903 and 1912, the town grew rapidly; the number of its shops increased from 12 to 50 and more<sup>45</sup>, most being for the sale of food, wooden utensils, clothes and cloth, and the town did not yet have its own tailor and shoemaker. At the time, house apartments were leased or built mainly for storage of large piles of grain collected from the Bedouin in order to send them via Gaza to the inner cities of the country or abroad (*ibid.*).

## Important secondary products that were traded in the market

At the beginning of the decade, the Bedouin still reached Jaffa, Ramleh and Lod, where they could find all the consumer items they needed. Toward the end of the first decade of this Century, there was a system of markets spread over the south of the country (see also Braslavsky 1946: 292, 349, 397) in such a way that businesses did not have to move northwards. Following the sale of the livestock and grain, trade also developed in the secondary products of the Bedouin economy; after the threshing, the straw and the stubble were also sold. After the sheep-shearing, the wool was

sold. Carts traveled to Be'er-Sheva from the area of the center *via* Gaza and from the Judean Mountains *via* Hebron to purchase sacks of fodder that were cheaper than elsewhere in the country. The Egyptian tenant-farmers taught the Bedouin land-owners that even the sheep dung had a price<sup>46</sup>, and, with the sacks of grain and straw, the merchants also took bags of sheep dung. Goats' hair, that was sheared at the same time as the sheep, was not sold *per se* but only after processing into tenting (*shuqqa*, pl. *shqaq*). By the nature of things, the buyers of this product came from among the Bedouin. For a dividing strip between the sections of the tent (*ma'nad*), woven from the wool of sheep and camels and for carpets (*f'rashat*)<sup>47</sup>, whose artistic value is greater than that of the *sh'qaq*, which are also made by the women, there was found to be a keen external demand. The sale of these articles at the weekly market day, together with wool and thread that were also hand-woven, were added over the years. The Bedouin elders testify that the articles that sold most, that were preferred by the foreign visitors, were of the *ma'nad* type and carpets woven from camels' hair. Carpets woven from the wool of sheep were not yet common in the Negev and tourists did not start coming until the time of the State of Israel.

There were not, nor are there to this day, sales of milk products from the livestock, which are found in the encampments, particularly in the spring. We put the question as to why there had been no trade in these. Those we asked gave three main reasons for Bedouin butter and cheese (*samen* and *'afiq*) not having been included in commerce and trade in the Ottoman period: the first reason is clearly shown in the evidence of Marahil Abu-Kaff, who says: *kull wahad 'indu kifaitu* (each person has for his own needs). That is, there are no buyers for milk products.

There were no customers for this merchandise apart from the Bedouin, and they produce all that they need without a surplus. The Bedouin household treated milk as a closed economy; it took a little for the consumption of members of the household and left the rest for the young of the animals. The second reason is contained in the presentation of the question: How is it that for the milk of the herd no purchaser was found outside Bedouin society? Their herd was intended mainly for meat (not milk) and, if it were able to produce surpluses of milk, this milk would have no advantage in comparison with that supplied by the villagers' cows. Furthermore, the Bedouin lacked the tools and conditions for processing and keeping the milk, of the sort available to the peasants. The third reason is that there were cultural inhibitions preventing the sale of milk products, as one of the sheikhs put it: *Hadhik al-muddah; al-tujjara f-al-samen wa-f-al-'afik - 'aib* (Such is the fashion - trading in *samen* and *'afik* is an embarrassment). Surplus *'afik* was kept for the summer and, at most, for hospitality to guests.

The nutritional habits of the Bedouin have changed since the beginning of this Century. Gradually, thanks to the contact with villagers, and as a result of the import to the Be'er-Sheva market of products they had not known, they enriched their basket of foodstuffs. Marahil Abu-Kaff describes what they ate before the English came, thus: "*Al-'ishe kanat kwaysah, wa-ma-fi ju', b'nakil khubz sha'ir wa-binghammis b'laban; wa-a-tabikh qamh, binsubb 'aleh samen*" (Living was good and there was no hunger. We ate barley bread and dipped it in leben. The pot contained wheat over which sheep's butter was poured.) Since the spread of farming, the menu was varied with grain products. Nevertheless, for the whole of

the Turkish period, the menu did not include fruit and vegetables. The Bedouin knew of their existence only from contacts with neighbors who lived in the villages and towns. According to the testimony of Abu-'Adissan: "Until the time of the English, there were no potatoes, no tomatoes, no cucumbers and no sweets". The fruits that were the first to appear in the markets of Be'er-Sheva were sycamores, brought from Jibalya, fig-roles and dried dates. At first, the Bedouin bought only a hand-full or two of these fruits, to show them to members of their households as a curiosity. Immediate attention was gained in the encampments by the large pieces of soap and other haberdashery items.

The consumer products of the Bedouin became more varied as their income increased and the prices fell in the town's markets. With the arrival of the English, standard commodities of the Bedouin shopkeepers included, according to them: *wakiten kahwe, nuss ratel 'ajweh wa-sukkar; wa-as-sukkar kan mahajen* (two ounces of coffee, half a pound of date roll and sugar; and the sugar was sold in blocks. Others added to the list of foodstuffs rice and *halkum* (a sweet). Some recall the items of apparel for which the market created a demand, such as the long dress (*al-kibir*) and the head-covering (*mandil* or *kuffia*) that were in effect then part of the fashion. We found elders who recall the market in the context of essential work tools that they purchased there, mainly tools made of wood, such as pitchforks, ploughs and seed sprinklers (for winnowing and strewing after threshing) and metal tools, such as shears for clipping the sheep, plough blades, daggers, metalwork for carts, pegs for tents and so on. Others recall in particular cooking utensils, pots, kettles and frying-pans, copper utensils for preparation of coffee imported from

Damascus (*shammiat*) or Kuwait (*kuwait-iyat*); *aj-jurun* (mortar and pestle of oak wood *butum*) that was brought from Al-Karak, a town in Jordan, etc.

A further commodity in the trade of which the market encouraged the peasants among the Bedouin was fine wood for heating; the branches that were collected from the wadis or cut from the slopes of Mt. Hebron now had buyers. The *'adhba, talh* (acacia), the *ratam* (broom-tree) and the *tariba* gained immediate interest. The Ottomans were themselves a customer for wood, as heating material and as raw material for development work such as paving of roads and laying of the railroad.

### Causal connections in the development of Be'er-Sheva: summary

The security of person and property enforced by the Ottomans during their penetration and consolidation in the Negev made it possible to sow fields and guard them until harvest-time, without the herds using them for pasture. The demand for the grain of the Negev in the markets of Europe changed the way of thinking and attitude to land uses, spurred the Bedouin into leasing plots for tilling in the hope of enjoying part of the crop, by prior agreement with the lessees. The penetration of land-less peasants from Egypt (mainly) and from the villages of the Hebron Hills to the Be'er-Sheva Valley, seeking cultivable areas for leasing, made available a passive workforce with the requisite skills for agriculture in an arid zone. The attitude of the peasants to resolution of the problems of the profession was not disturbed by cultural obstacles such as those that disturbed the Bedouin. The Egyptian peasants who had difficulties in raising credit for seed, who were not trained in trading

field crops, rapidly adopted skills that had not been known previously in the Negev. The development of Be'er-Sheva, with commerce at its focal point, helped mobilize means that the Government neither could nor wanted to give. The Ottomans thus avoided the havoc wrought by the Bedouin herds overrunning settled regions, to the mutual benefit of both parties but of themselves in first place.

Consolidation of dry farming as an important ancillary branch alongside and in addition to pasturing had an impact on composition of the Bedouin herd; from breeding camels and goats in the main, sheep-breeding was also introduced. The introduction of sheep into the Bedouin economy was influenced by the introduction of extensive farming to the Be'er-Sheva Valley. More than the goat, the sheep is suitable for a mixed agricultural economy and for confined pasturing. More than the camel, the sheep, sold for household consumption, was suitable for marketing to the evolving semi-urban population of the central regions.

As shown, continuing urbanization and the holding of market days, each time in a different town, became institutionalized as a new tradition at which traveling, specialist, traders turned up, dividing the week as they moved from town to town. Underlying the business was livestock and later grain crops, with all sorts of consumer items following.

## Notes

(1) That is, the desire of the Ottomans to influence, in this way, the marking of the border with Egypt (1906), their desire to enforce tax collection from the Bedouin or to avert renewal of tribal wars, etc. According to Braslavsky (1946: 237), the Turks sought to astound the Bedouin

with construction of large public buildings for law enforcement.

(2) Prominent among the factors for construction of Be'er-Sheva (Glueck 1959) was the desire of the ruler, Abed el-Hamid, to settle the Bedouin throughout his empire, as though he had opted to start with the tribes of the Negev and Eastern Sinai that were encamped alongside the road to Egypt. The plan to settle them at a fixed location was intended to improve the control over them (see Ben-Aryeh 1977: 1-40).

(3) The means of rule, including weapons and means of transport of a quality better than had ever been in use here, minimized the relative advantage of the Bedouin tribes *vis-à-vis* permanent settlements (cf. Scholch 1984).

(4) Specialization in the types and prices of merchandise; decoding the special communications for impersonal and irregular social intercourse between people entrusted with various cultural traditions; identification of complex game rules involving state law (for matters of customs, income and value added taxes and production quotas, etc.), municipal law (payments of fees and fines), laws of supply and demand and laws of the underworld.

(5) The relations of the Bedouin and the permanent settlements were characterized by suspicion and lack of trust, that derived from the temporary character of the contacts between them and from the substantial differences in the laws and customs that were common in each of these two groups.

(6) Although wrong-doers, they were preferable, from the point of view of the government, for the role, on the assumption that they would not never cut off the branch upon which they were sitting. Sheikh 'Amer Jaurshi formulated this rule to me, as follows: When the Bedouin had control over the peasants, it was known that *La yashb'a a dhib wa' la yafna*

*al-ghanam* (The wolf will not eat to the full and the flock will not come to an end).

(7) Palestinian peasants were not the first to ask for cultivable plots in the Negev, either because they were used to tilling less arid areas than the lands of the Negev and made do with their own plots, particularly from the time they were no longer troubled by Bedouin, or because they could not get over their memories of the past and the fear that remained in their hearts from forced cooperation with Bedouin in the days of the Rule of the Sheikhs.

(8) Renewal of farming in the South and the Negev, after generations during which the Bedouin and their herds had disturbed the farming regime there, was not dictated by farmers. The growth of barley, for example, the distribution of which in the latter part of the 19th century exceeded even that of wheat, was not essential nor particularly worthwhile for the nutrition of the population or the Bedouin animal economy. It was influenced by the good price that barley obtained from the beer industry in Europe.

(9) The beginnings of the mass migration of miserable peasants from Egypt to the Levant was in 1829 and is documented since it constituted a cause for the conquest of the Levant by the Egyptian army in 1831 – as it were to bring back those who had left (fled) to the forced labor that was then introduced by the regime of Muhammad 'Ali in Egypt. Those who did not find shelter and a plot to till in one of the villages tried their luck among the Bedouin tribes. In contradistinction to the farmers of the country who were afraid of deals with the Bedouin of the Negev, those who came from Egypt were freer in making arrangements with a minimum of prior stipulation (cf. Rustum 1936).

(10) See Ben-Arieh and Sapir 1979: 59.

(11) The 'Azazma who were defeated in

their last wars (1890 on, see Bailey 1980) with the Tarabin sought in this way the proximity of the Government and its support. At first, a police base was set up for guarding the water wells. Sheikh Hassan al-Malta'a, the head of the confederation of 'Azazma tribes, complained that the Tarabin confederation was scheming to take his well, the Well of Abraham. According to Hajj Khalil al-Asad (aged about 80, the interview took place in 1986), the son of the chief of the al-Asad tribe at the beginning of the Century, Hassan al-Malta'a's tent was pitched (1896) alongside the well and was made available to the Turks who used it as an office and meeting-place. Around this tent, the Turks pitched further tents, so that it looked like the administrative center, until dedication of the *Saraya* in 1905-6 (Bar Zvi 1977). In order to develop the surroundings of their center, the Turks purchased a large land area around the wells. In 1901, this area was registered in the Tapu according to a royal decree determining that it was designated for erection of a town called *Bir as-sab'e* (Be'er-Sheva).

(12) The first train arrived in Be'er-Sheva in 1915 and from Be'er-Sheva to 'Awja al-Hafir it arrived in summer 1916. The *Dicobil*, a narrow track for a mule-drawn carriage, was laid in the section between 'Awja and al-'Arish.

(13) The example that is given of development towns in Israel, where the accommodation was planned before the arrival of the inhabitants and before there was any economic infrastructure, permits the error of thinking that this was also the case with Be'er-Sheva at its inception.

(14) According to Sheikh Al-'Uqbi.

(15) *Suq al-waqef* and not *Al-suq al-waqe*. On use of this ancient and special linguistic form, see Borg 1989.

(16) "A child's eye does not forget," testify the elders of the Tamatwah, men in

their sixties, inhabitants of the Negev mountains, who knew the market in the Thirties. "We saw there piles of *jummez* (sycamore), *zebib* (raisins) and *tamar* (dried dates), *Qutin* (dried figs. i.e., rolls of dried figs)..."

(17) The interview with him took place in December 1985.

(18) See Braslavsky (1946) about the beating of sheikhs with palm branches by Rustom Pasha, head of the Punishments Mission to the Be'er-Sheva area in 1890. The Bedouin did not welcome the Turkish yoke willingly. At first, there were attempts at rebellion and attacks against the gendarmes. In 1903, there was an initiative by a group of Bedouin headed by Sheikh Salem Abu-Rabi'a to rebel against the Turks with the aid of Jews (Levontin 1924: 8-60). At that time, however, the war between the Tarabin and the Azazmeh came to an end and since the defeated Azazmeh sought the protection of the Turks and supported them, this initiative faded.

(19) Vilnay (1946: 404) claims that the importance of Be'er-Sheva is proven because, immediately it was established, the inhabitants of the Negev were identified as 'Arab as-sab'a (the Arabs of Be'er-Sheva).

(20) See Bailey 1980; Sheikhs of the tribes that had fought each other were hanged by the government.

(21) Both of the Tiyaha confederation of tribes whose fathers were among the first to take a dunam in the city.

(22) At the beginning of the Thirties, at British inspiration, the mayoralty went in elections to Hajj al-din Sha'ath, who originated from Gaza. He followed Hussein Abu-Kaff, the last Bedouin to serve in the position. In 1946, a renewed attempt was made on the part of the Bedouin to take the mayoralty. In the elections, the Chief Sheikh of the Azazmeh, Salameh Ibn-Sa'id, submitted his candidacy. He was not elected but

reached the position of Deputy Mayor. (23) Cf. here also the Notes of Musil (1907) who passed by the site in May 1897 and reported on three flowing wells as being all that there was to see then.

(24) He was about 80 years old when he was interviewed in 1987.

(25) As befitting a son of a sheikh, he received his education at the School for the Sons of Bedouin Sheikhs that was founded in Be'er-Sheva, in 1921. He also studied at the school of the Al-Huzziel tribe at Khirbet Zabaleh.

(26) About the wild bush vegetation beside Be'er-Sheva it is related that one day a convoy of camels from the Al-jassass or Az-zir tribe, a Yemenite tribe belonging to the Bani-murra, arrived at the site. With the convoy was a man called Kleib Az-zir of the Az-zir family. It is told that in the 18th and 19th centuries it ruled the whole area, from the Sharon to Beirut. Kleib has a brother called Salem. Kleib's wife, who was in an advanced stage of pregnancy, was with the same convoy. As the Bedouin put it: *Al-mara idha b'tishtihi shai, wa hi hamel, lazem tajib ilha* (when a pregnant woman wants something, one has to get it for her). The woman asked her husband for a drink of lioness' milk and Kleib asked his brother to fulfill his sister-in-law's request, because Salem was known to be a courageous hero and the assumption was that he would be able to obtain milk from a lioness. It was also known that Kleib's wife hated her brother-in-law, Salem, because he was more virile (masculine) than her husband, and she had only asked for lioness' milk in order to get rid of him once and for all. Salem immediately presented himself before his brother and promised to fulfill his request "because you are my older brother and I am to fulfill your instructions". Salem mounted a donkey and rode to the Well of Abraham, where he tied it up, took the water skins from the donkey's back and went down to the

water in the well. While he was at the bottom of the well, a lioness came and devoured the donkey and, her stomach being heavy, she lay down to rest beside the well. When Salem came up from the well, he met the sleeping lioness, for that had been his intention in tying up the donkey next to the well. Salem overcame the lioness, placed a muzzle on her mouth of the sort used for beasts of burden and riding, put the water skins over her bag and began walking to the encampment, as the Bedouin saying goes: *minn aakal 'ayar al-'arab, ella yashil al-qrab* (whoever preys on a Bedouin's beast of burden will have to carry the water skins in its stead). When Kleib's wife saw her brother-in-law, Salem, from a distance, she was astounded at the sight and asked him: "Is that you, Salem? May the devil take you." And Salem answered her: "Yes, it is I. I have brought what you requested and even more. Not only the milk, but the whole lioness." In relation to the Az-zir tribe it is further told that it was strong, with roots going back to the Jahillyia period. Those who are familiar with the annals of the Az-zir tribe are the people of the village of Jisr az-zarka, who had cultivated lands in the Sharon that had belonged to the Az-zir tribe before 1948; according to them, the Az-zir tribe had come to Palestine from the Yemen 250 years ago. On their way, they passed through the Negev, at the site of Be'er-Sheva, leaving after them a reputation of courageousness. From the point of view of the Bedouin in the then conditions, to be alive was enough to be considered heroic (we are told that this legend is ancient and matches a number of places).

(27) Or, in its popular name Al-Qal'ah Al-Gharbbiyah (the Western Fortress), the remains of which are near Ofakim.

(28) Cf. Baer 1960: 215-219; Geertz 1979; Lapidus 1984.

(29) His grandson, Musa, currently serves as sheikh.

(30) According to Abu Ghanem (recorded in 1991): *Turkyieh banat aj-jame' bimal al-'arab* (The Turkish regime built the mosque with Bedouin funds). According to Sheikh Sulayman al-'Uqbi, construction of the mosque began in 1894 but its dedication was only eight years later. Al-'Arif testifies that it was the Turks who built the mosque, without noting the source of the funds required for the purpose (ibid 248).

(31) This is evidence for the traditional hatreds among the tribes and explains why they were reluctant to be urbanized side by side.

(32) Then chief of the Qudeirat tribe and father of Ibrahim and 'Abd al-Karim, who are remembered by many Bedouin to this day.

(33) Of Abu-Hamed (recorded in 1985) when he was about 75 years old.

(34) The last elected-appointed mayor was Shafiq Ibn Mushtaha, also a Gazan, in 1947. During his term, the IDF took the town.

(35) Much toil was involved in preparation of bread at home; the woman had to winnow grain, grind it, knead the dough and bake – hence the wonderment.

(36) Ben-Aryeh & Sapir, relying on the Journal *Hashkafa* (Issue XXVIII-XXIX, 1906 p. 59), report that Wednesday was market day.

(37) Peddlers, coming from outside at market time and spreading out merchandise (whence the term *basta*, pl. *bssat*, i.e., spreading out of merchandise on the ground for sale) alongside the trading points for livestock and grain, challenge the town's shop people to come also and offer cheap merchandise. This is a feature that is repeated in the Be'er-Sheva market to this day.

(38) We asked our acquaintances, the elders of the Bedouin community, what the levy had been called and whether they recalled how much was collected from each merchant, but they were un-



able to specify. This is perhaps because there were no shopkeepers among them. (39) A record book of the plots and their tillers. The measurements were made using ropes [*h'bal*], whence the name of the book.

(40) Females can be trained for ploughing and bearing burdens, which is not the case with male camels.

(41) Moreover, camels are bought for multi-participant celebrations or by urban butchers who sell the meat by the pound. A 4-5 year old camel weighs 700 kgs. and yields up to 300 kgs. of meat. A young camel of 2 years weighs 400 kgs. and provides about 200 kgs. of meat. A mature sheep of 40 kgs. gives 15 kgs. of meat. The marketing of camels depends on the development of urban centers and on networks for wholesale trade. Sheep are bought for household consumption at minor as well as major family occasions and are, therefore, prior to the growth of urban society, suitable for the retail trade.

(42) About the Egyptian peasants who came to the Negev seeking tenancy arrangements; plots of irrigated land for grain crops according to an arrangement for dividing the produce between them and the Bedouin owners after the harvest, see Marx 1967. See also Kressel, Ben David and Abu-Rabi'a 1991.

(43) It is told about a Jew called Rabinowitz who, two years before the First World War, lived in Gaza and dealt in trade with the Arabs of the vicinity (i.e., the Bedouin), from whom he purchased the barley crop, then the main product of the southern part of the country, and sent it for production of beer in England (Tidhar 1965: 6-7). According to this source, the system of food controls on behalf of the Government enriched the Bedouin sewers of barley since, in return for crops mixed with much soil they received excessive prices (Tidhar 1947, p. 59).

(44) Even at the time of the British Mandate, no more than two people could be found among the Zullam tribes who could read and write well. These two were Suleiman Kabu'ah and Salameh abu-'Aayadeh, and, because of this knowledge of theirs, they were entitled *al-khatib* (the preacher).

(45) On the basis of the testimony of Prof. Sheinfeld, in Braslavsky (1946: 232).

(46) The Bedouin use camel dung (*ba'ar*) and donkey dung (*sunni*) for heating. Sheep dung is also used but it is more difficult to sell it because it is mixed with earth.

(47) For the different parts of the tent and the mode of their preparation by the women, see Musil 1928: ch. 4; Havakuk 1986.

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## Acknowledgements

We were helped in this work by the Truman Institute of the Hebrew University and, particularly, by the Blaustein Institute for Desert Research of Ben-Gurion University. Our thanks are proffered to them both.

## Résumé

Cet article traite de la datation de la reconstruction de la ville de Beer Sheva, la capitale du Néguev, en Israël. A l'encontre des géographes, qui croient que les Ottomans ont construit cette ville, poussés par leur désir de renforcer leur mainmise sur les territoires menant au canal de Suez, nous montrons que l'impulse dynamique venait de l'importance croissante du marché dans l'économie bédouine. Les traditions orales des Bédouins attestent leur dépendance croissante, à la fin du "Régime des Sheikhs", des marchés comme lieux d'échanges de produits animaux ainsi que des produits apportés par les populations sédentaires.

## Resumen

El artículo trata sobre la datación de la reconstrucción de la ciudad de Beer Sheva, la capital del Negev, Israel. A diferencia de geógrafos que piensan que los otomanes han construido Beer Sheva como parte de su deseo de reforzar su área de influencia que se extendía hacia el canal de Suez. Nuestro trabajo intenta mostrar que el impulso dinámico vino de la creciente importancia de los lugares de ferias de la economía de los beduines. La tradición oral de los beduines relaciona la creciente dependencia de las ferias para el intercambio de productos animales por bienes provenientes de grupos sedentarios con el fin de la "legislación de los jeques".

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