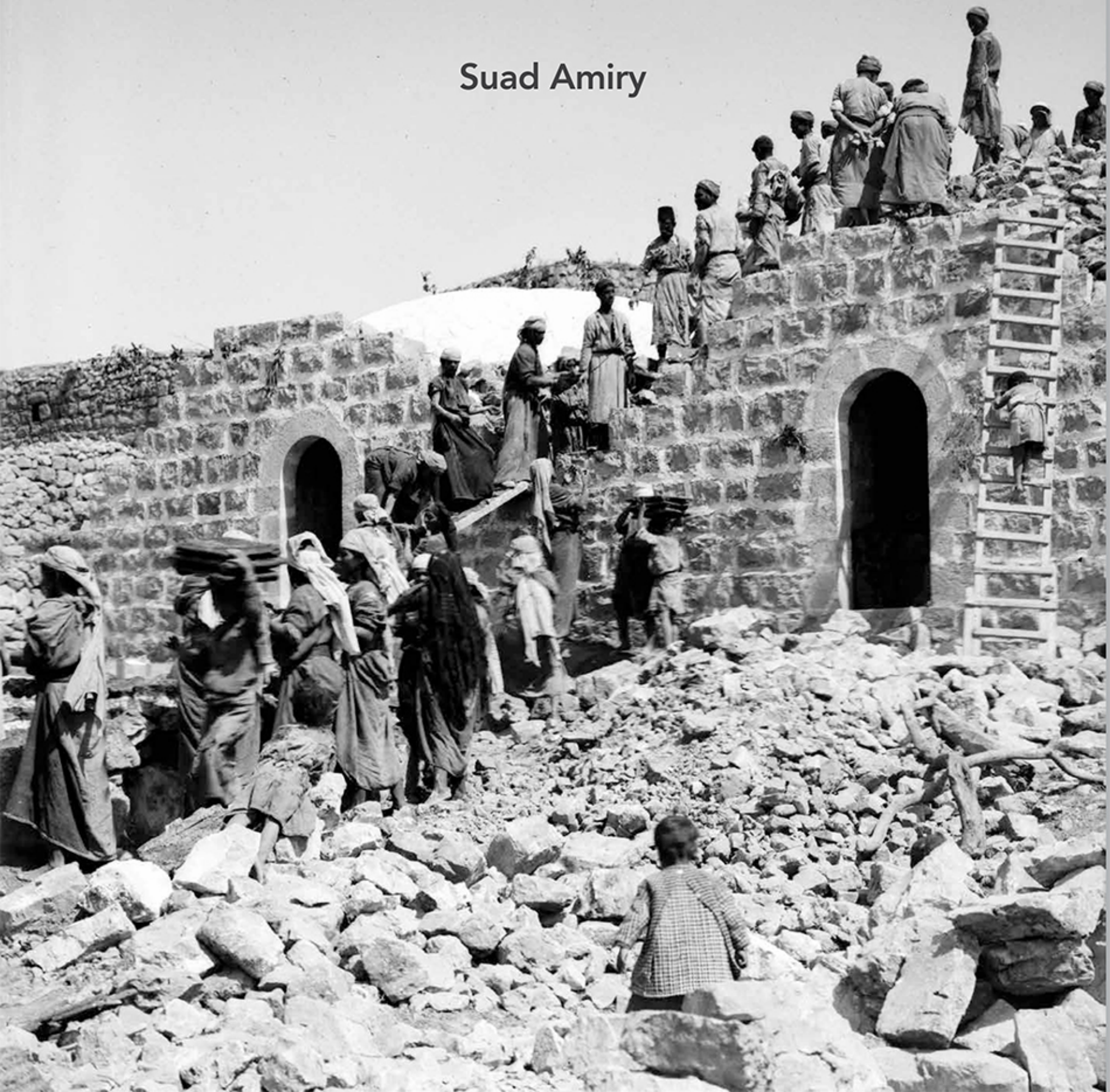


Peasant Architecture in Palestine

Space, Kinship and Gender

Suad Amiry



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Peasant Architecture in Palestine

Suad Amiry

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Sit Mariam from the village of 'Abwein with embroidery dress and head dress (1982)

Chapter One

PATTERNS OF SETTLEMENT IN 19TH CENTURY RURAL PALESTINE

Patterns of settlement are determined by several factors. In order to identify those factors common to villages in the central highlands of Palestine in the nineteenth century, general features, including their sizes and settings, landholding, relations of agricultural production, cropping arrangements and inter-village relations, are examined here.

Nineteenth century Palestine preceded the transformation of Palestinian rural society from a relatively autarkic, inwardly-oriented society to one that was at least partially integrated into the world economy. Western influence, which was later to shatter the society's fundamental identity, was yet to challenge the traditional social order.

Any attempt to reconstruct the picture of nineteenth century rural Palestinian society and settlements is hampered by the rapid rate of change in the physical environment over the last 100 years, the lack of systematic information on the conditions of settlements prior to the *Survey of Western Palestine* conducted by the Palestine Exploration Fund in the 1870s, and the limited sources of information on the social and economic conditions of rural settlements during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A comparison of the 1875 Survey map with that of today (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2) clearly illustrates the radical transformation in the physical environment during the last hundred years. This transformation was largely determined by the political, social and demographic changes caused by Turkish and, more importantly, British rule in Palestine. Easily the most crucial factor, however, was and remains the impact of continuous Jewish colonial settlement since 1882. These factors, which have resulted in changes to the physical surface in some areas and in regions such as the coastal plain where almost all features of nineteenth century Arab Palestine have been erased, may be categorised by time period as follows:

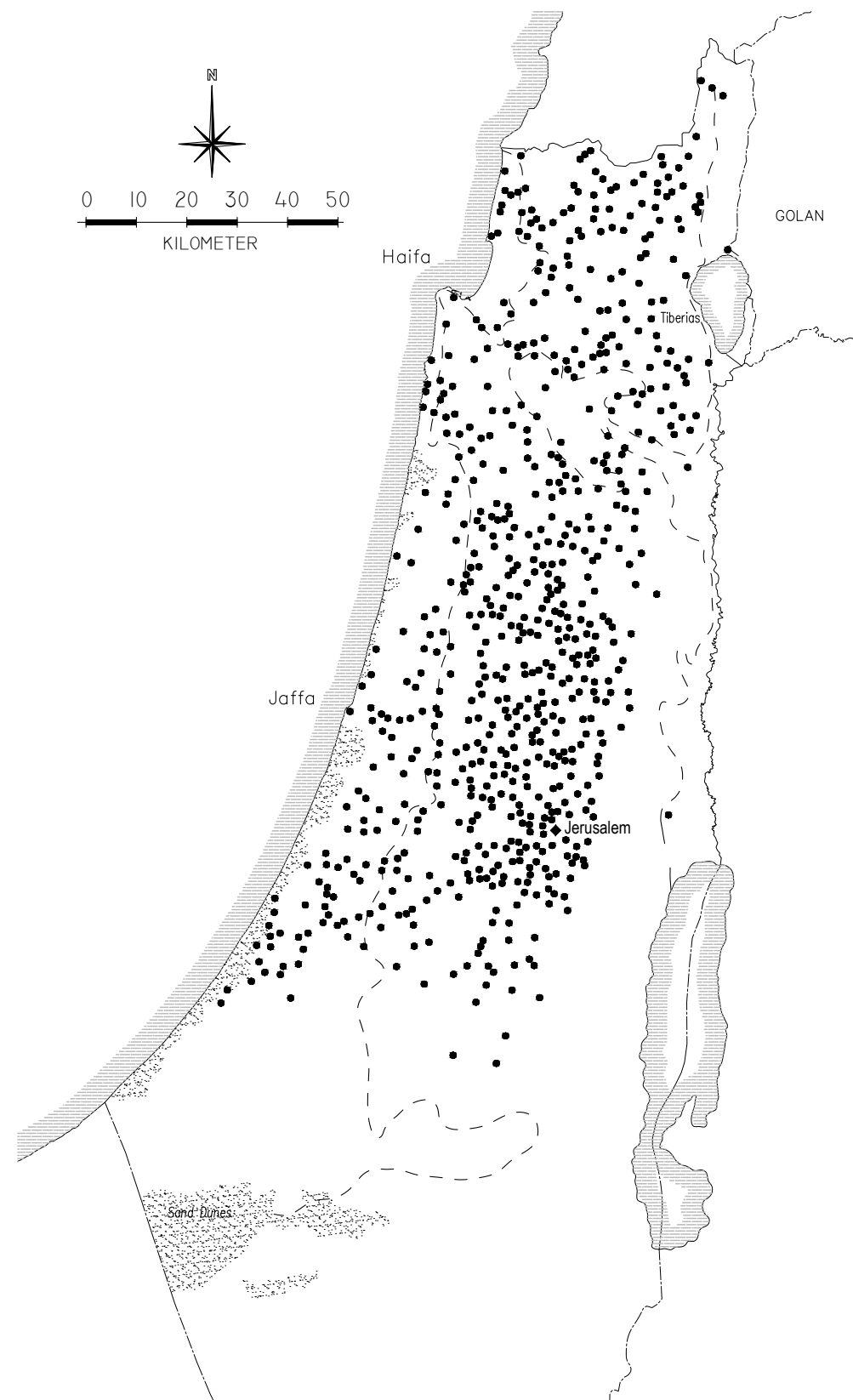
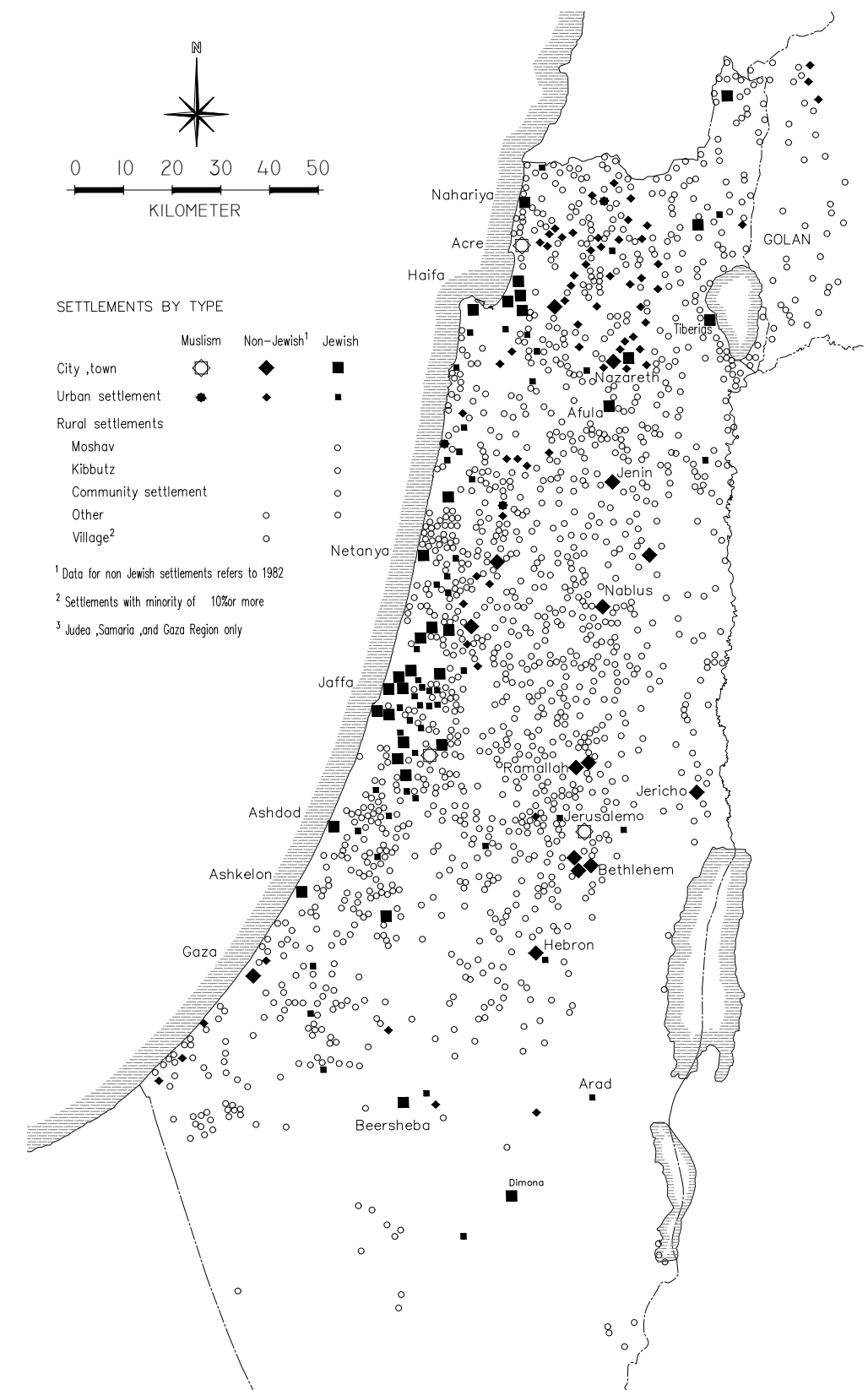


Fig. 1.1: Settlements in 1875 according to the Survey of Western Palestine.

Fig. 1.2: Dispersion of settlements, 1983. Source: Atlas of Israel, Survey of Israel, Jerusalem (1985).



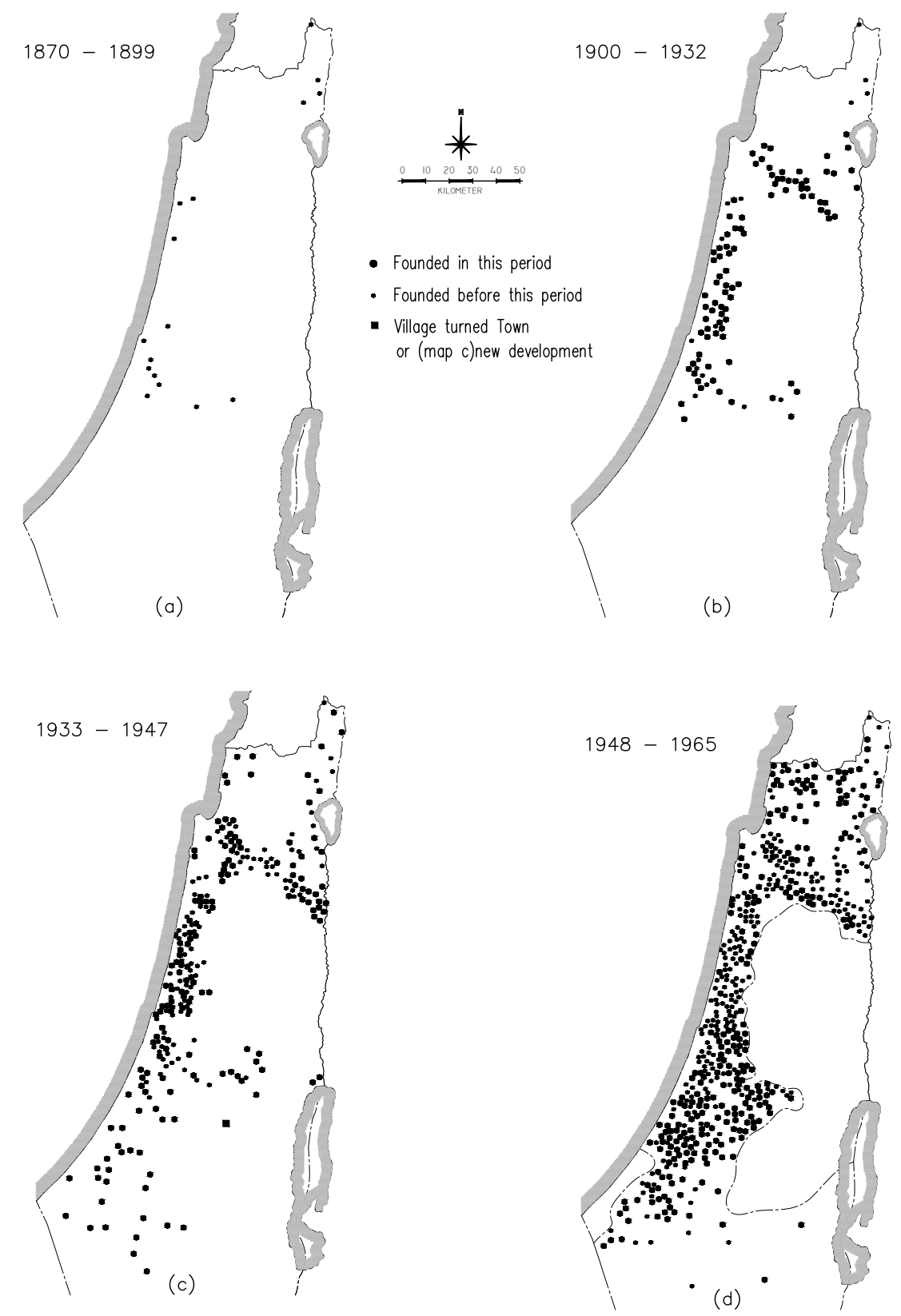
1882 onwards: Zionist colonial settlement in Palestine (Fig. 1.3)*;
1900 onwards: The prevailing government's ability to control the Bedouin community and hence, the curbing of Bedouin raids on villages. The consequent relative security of peasants encouraged the spread of sedentary settlements into formerly Bedouin domains;
1917-48: Rapid growth of Zionist settlements and a general westward movement of important urban centres, and of both the Arab and Jewish rural population;⁵
1948-52: The establishment of the Jewish State of Israel and the growth of Israeli Jewish settlements. Eastward flight of Palestinian refugees and a decline in Arab urban and rural settlements. The eradication of approximately 420 Arab villages inside the state of Israel (Fig. 1.4);
1952-67: More Jewish settlement in Israel, urbanisation and growth of eastern urban centres. An increase in the number of Arab villages in the West Bank and Gaza Strip;⁶ and the appearance of 19 refugee camps in the West Bank and seven camps in the Gaza Strip (Fig. 1.5);
1967-1993: The establishment of Jewish colonial settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, occupied by Israel since June 1967 (Fig.1.6).

Nineteenth century Palestine⁶ contained three types of human settlements: towns, villages and nomadic encampments. While town dwellers (*ahl-il-mudun*) combined their mercantile-artisan base with subsidiary agricultural activities, village dwellers were primarily *fallahin* (literally tillers) whose livelihood was based on cultivation. Palestinian Bedouin were semi-nomads who, although depending primarily on grazing and animal husbandry, also practised seasonal cultivation. The origins and contemporary realities of these townspeople, peasants and Bedouin overlapped considerably. For example, the semi-feudal Jarrar family of the town of Nablus traced their origins to the peasants

* At the time of publishing this manuscript many events have taken place in Palestine since 1986:
1993: The signing of the Oslo Agreement between the PLO and the State of Israel establishing the quasi-autonomous Palestinian National Authority.
2005: Israeli unilateral disengagement/withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.
2012: General Assembly votes to accord Palestine 'non-member observer state' status in United Nations.

5. Migdal, 1980:2-3.
6. Efrat, 1977:99.

Fig. 1.3: Stages in growth of Jewish settlements in Palestine. Source: E. Orni and E. Efrat (1980).



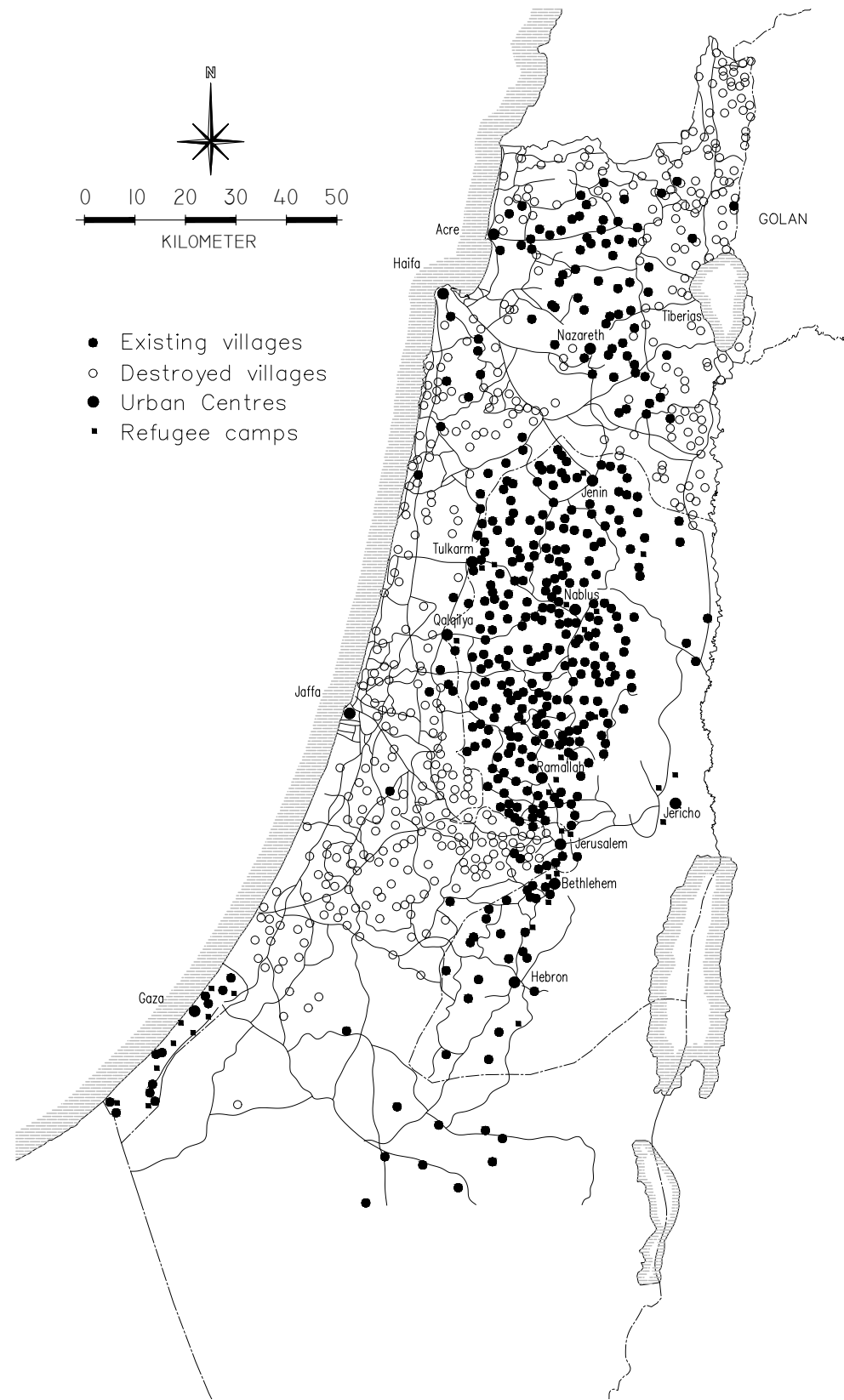
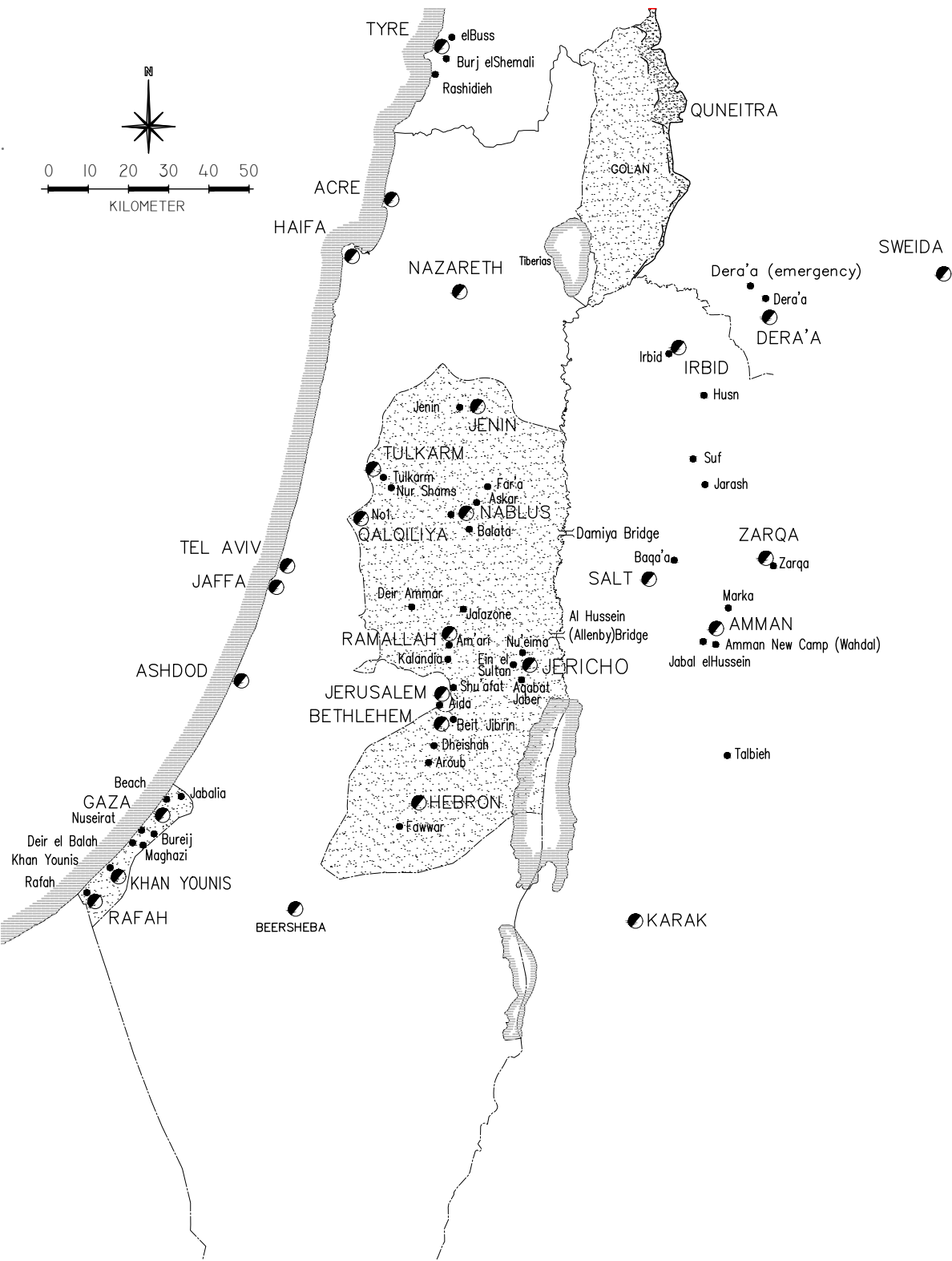


Fig. 1.4: Arab villages destroyed between 1948-1952. Source: Abdulfattah (1983).

Fig. 1.5: Location of Palestinian refugee camps. Source: Map of UNRWA's areas, UNRWA H.Q. Vienna (1984).



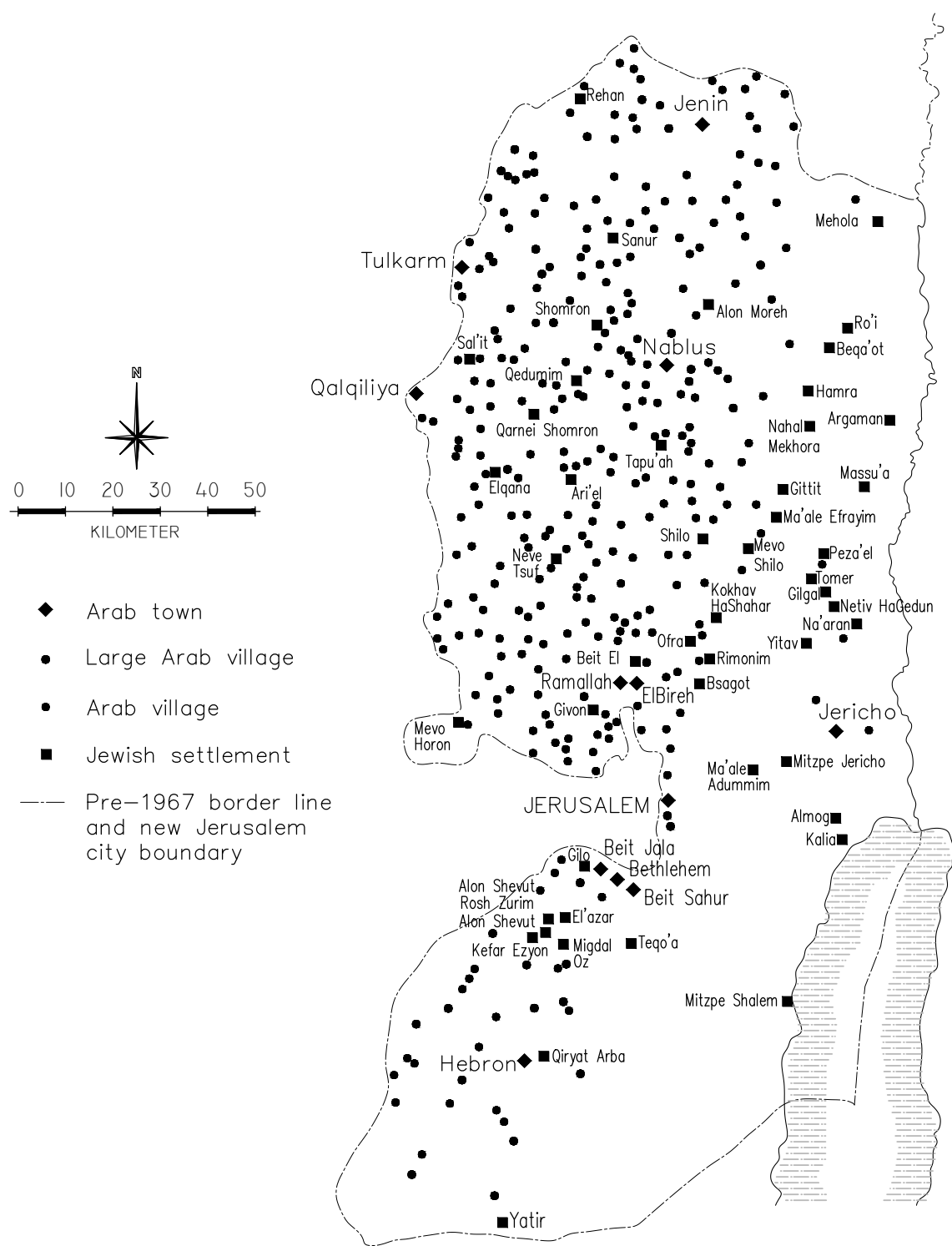


Fig. 1.6: Jewish settlements on the West Bank established since 1967. Source: E. Orni and E. Efrat (1980).

of Sanur within living memory, while the peasant inhabitants of Adh-Dhahriyeh and Samu' (villages in the Hebron mountains) continued to lead a semi-nomadic existence for several decades into the twentieth century.

Patterns of human settlement in the different geographical parts of Palestine were generally affected by:

1. The life pattern (sedentary or semi-nomadic) of the inhabitants.
2. The relationship of communities to each other.
3. The socio-economic ordering, religion and norms of these communities.
4. The physical limitations imposed upon the inhabitants: the aridity of the southern slopes of the Hebron mountains, for example, encouraged the dispersion of villages.
5. The degree and nature of exposure to external forces: for example the exposure of coastal villages to foreign invasions resulting in cycles of destruction and expansion.

Factors such as general conditions of security and interaction between the different communities of nomads, peasants and urban dwellers affected the expansion, contraction or destruction of areas of settlement. They were also crucial in determining the formation and siting of individual settlements.

The Bedouin and sedentary Arab communities of 19th century Palestine differed fundamentally in their patterns of life, in the economic basis of their subsistence, and in terms of the type and patterns of settlement in which they resided. While the Bedouin community lived a semi-nomadic existence, tended to occupy the more arid areas of Palestine, and had a more temporary and mobile type of settlement based on nomadic tent encampments, the stable sedentary community consisted primarily of peasants occupying about six hundred autonomous villages on the coastal plain and, mostly, in the highlands. The sedentary urban and semi-urban population occupied about ten towns in the lowlands and the highlands. It is convenient to divide Palestine into three areas based on the communities' pattern of social organisation and their type of settlement:

Seminomadic areas: The Naqab desert (core of the Bedouin), the southern desert, the Jordan Valley, Marj ibn ‘Amir Valley, the Hula, Bisan and Haifa sub-district, western parts of the central plain and lower Galilee (Fig. 1.7.).

Sedentary areas: The coastal plain, the peasant highlands (the Galilee, Nablus, Jerusalem and Hebron mountains) and the town of Jericho in the Jordan Valley.

Peripheral semi-nomadic and sedentary areas: These were juxtapositions of lowland-highland areas: the southern, western and northern slopes of the central highlands, the southern slopes of lower Galilee and the Hula Valley (after 1835), and the Haifa sub-district.

Since the focus here is on sedentary rural settlements, semi-nomadic and peripheral areas are discussed only insofar as Bedouin communities influenced sedentary rural settlements.

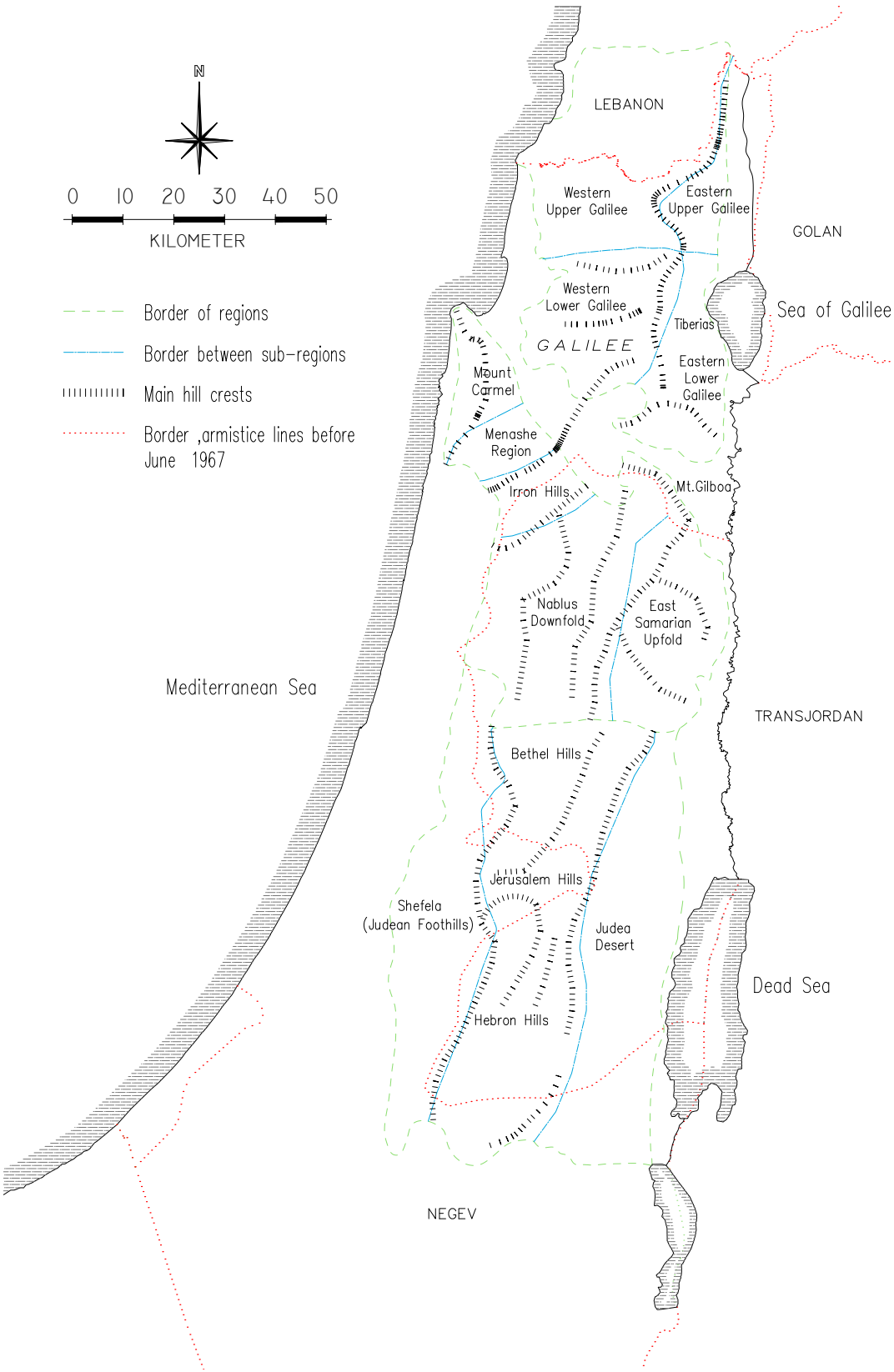
The Influence of the Bedouin-Peasant Relationship on Settlement Patterns

Even though the Bedouin in Palestine have always been a relatively small proportion of the total population: 7% in 1922,⁷ 6.4% in 1931,⁸ and 1% in 1961,⁹ one should not underestimate their influence on the history of sedentary settlements up to the turn of 20th century. Unlike the Bedouin in Syria and Arabia who tended to roam with their herds over large areas, the Bedouin of Palestine had a base to which they always returned. Areas of influence and control were very well defined among the Bedouin tribes. The Naqab area was inhabited by three tribes: Tayayyha, Al-‘Azazmeh and the Tarabin. Each had complete sovereignty and control over a specific area to pass through. Travellers or members of other tribes had to pay a protection tax (*khuewweh*) to the sheikh. Bedouin tribes in other sub-districts were relatively small, less powerful groups.¹⁰

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, very few Bedouin in Palestine were purely nomadic.¹¹ Although Bedouin still depended considerably on pastoral land for their goat and sheep herds, they also cultivated crops such as barley, wheat and sesame. Their cultivation method was to move from one land parcel to another: once the parcel was exhausted, they moved on and used another. They did not use fertilisers or crop

7. Barron, 1923:4.
8. Miles, 1933:330.
9. Mushav, 1956:265-380 and Amiran, 1963:247.
10. Barron, 1923:37.
11. Graham-Brown, 1980:84.

Fig. 1.7: Natural sub-regions of the highlands.
Source: E. Orni and E. Efrat (1980).



rotation. The different ways of life of Bedouin society and that of the *fallahin* in their fundamental economic and social organisation, meant there was little or no conflict over the same resources such as land and water. The two communities tended to occupy different geographic areas, which Conder in *Tent Work in Palestine* describes:

...the narrow peninsula of cultivated hills in which the settled population lives is surrounded by a broad sea of desert, over which the Arab (i.e. Bedouin) delights to roam.¹²

Arid and semiarid environments suited a seminomadic lifestyle with relatively high mobility. The Naqab desert was ideal in that it was large and dry and therefore, unlike wetter often swampy areas, not malaria-prone. Bedouin encampments of *beit ish-sha'ar* (goat-hair tents) were usually expansive, with each tent or group of tents set 200 to 300 metres apart.¹³ Unlike the *fallah* villages, they were never on a hill but always concealed in the mountain foothills to protect themselves from wind and the raids of other Bedouin tribes. The desert was a symbol of freedom to the Bedouin. They found city walls and compact, densely clustered village houses stifling. Testimony to Bedouin contempt for the sedentary peasant lifestyle is borne by the numerous failed attempts by various central governments to settle them.

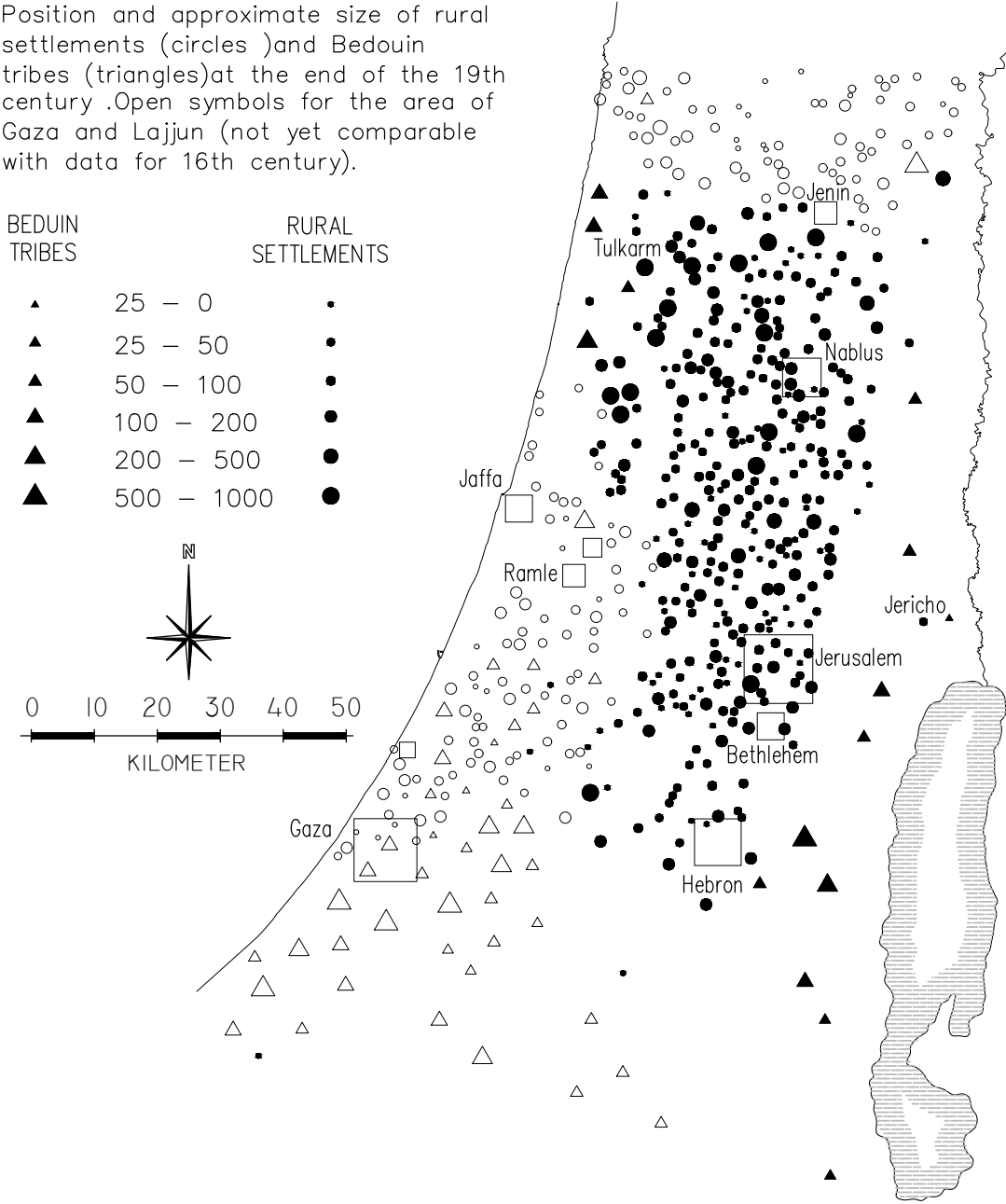
The *fallahin*, on the other hand, trusted the mountain environment with its relatively fertile land, plentiful water and protected settings that encouraged a continuous and stable community. The mountains also provided protection from the exactions of the central regime, unlike the more exposed coastal plain.

Figure 1.8 highlights the well-defined geographical separation between nomadic encampments and the peasant villages at the end of the nineteenth century. Most of the encounters between the two groups took place in the fertile area between the two ecological zones, i.e. between the mountain foothills and the plains. This fertile 'peripheral' land, which acted as a buffer zone, created a continuous tension between the two, a tension that could become overtly hostile. Most of these areas are about 150 metres above sea level and contain some of the country's most fertile land. The *fallahin*, used to having to cultivate small, rocky and mostly steep parcels, saw good potential in this flat, easily workable land. The Bedouin also saw in these peripheral areas, when they were cultivated by the *fallahin*, an additional asset: an easy target for raids (*ghazu*). The main purpose of the *ghazu* was to acquire the agricultural crops of the *fallah*, and the Bedouin were careful to avoid fighting and provoke pointless blood

12. Conder, 1878:271.

13. Conder, 1878:275.

Fig. 1.8: Location of nomadic encampments and peasant communities at the end of the 19th century. Source: Hutteroth (1975).



feuds. (*Tha'r*, or blood feud, is obligatory for relatives of the slain to the fifth degree of kinship).¹⁴ The *ghazu* was therefore not necessarily an organised military attack, but rather an act of theft. A few Bedouin would creep into the fields of the *fallahin* and try to steal agricultural produce or animals and disappear unnoticed. Of course, they were

14. Parkes, 1949:142.

not always successful and disputes did arise. There were also major attacks undertaken by the Bedouin against villages or even towns such as the Bedouin attacks on Hebron, Nablus and Jerusalem in the 1840s.¹⁵

The pattern and frequency of raids depended on several factors. The provision of security by the central government was a key element, as were geographic proximity, protective alliances forged by the *fallahin* and climatic conditions. Hardship caused by vulnerability to extreme climatic conditions, such as droughts, made Bedouin sporadic cultivation almost impossible and raids more frequent.

In the absence of government control and authority, the *fallahin* often resorted to alliances with different groups to protect themselves from Bedouin raids. We know of alliances between different villages, between village and powerful urban centre, and with influential urban notables. In some cases, especially around Jerusalem, villagers took refuge within the city walls. *Fallahin* frequently sought security through alliance with the enemy. Villages in the Bethlehem area allied themselves with the Ta'amrah Bedouin tribe, as did the peasants of the Jordan Valley. In such cases, the *fallahin* often paid annual dues (*khuewweh*) in exchange for protection. In other instances, the *fallahin* were protected and allowed to cultivate tracts of lands that were under Bedouin control.

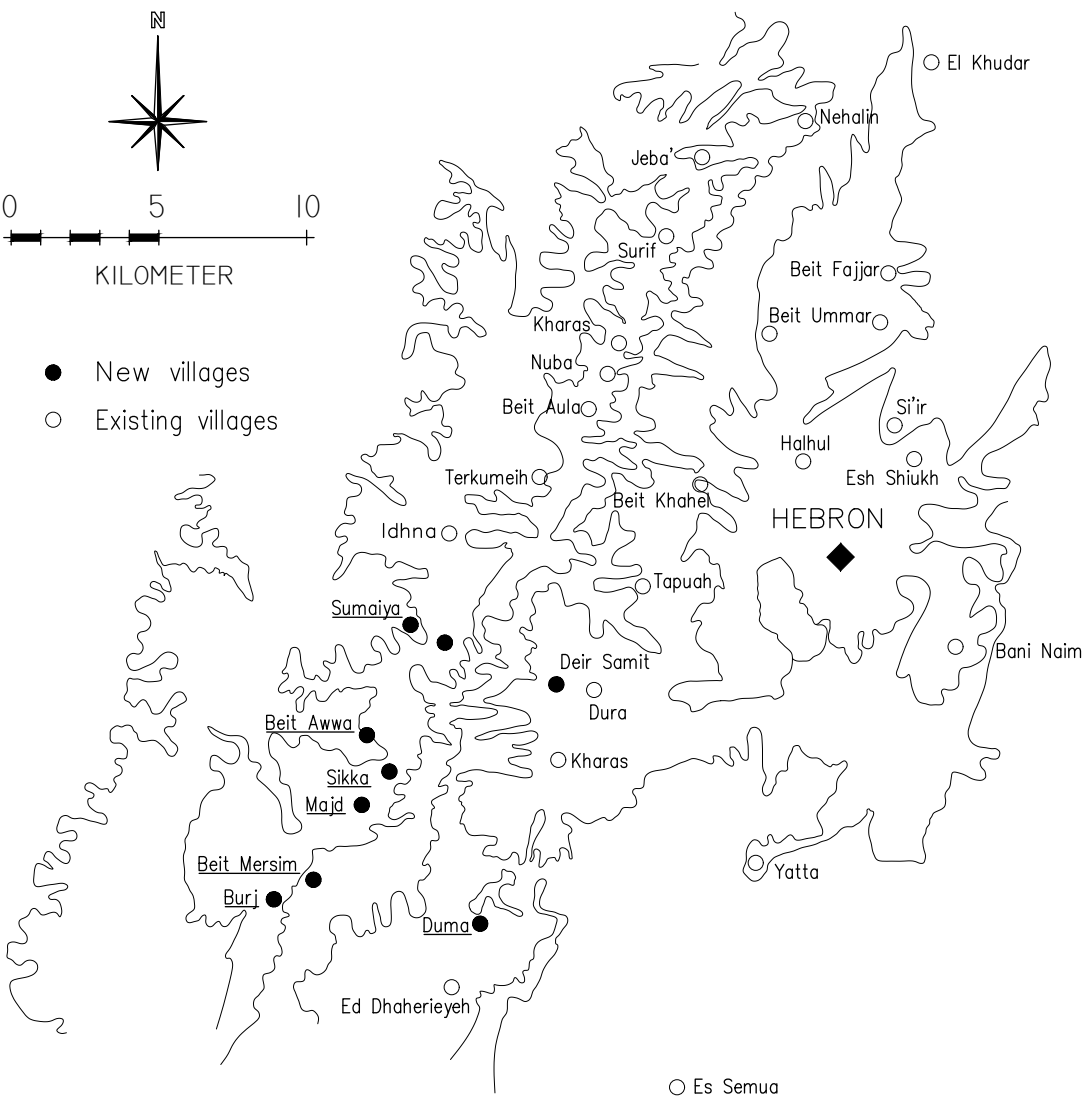
Obviously, the proximity to Bedouin encampments had a significant influence on the pattern of sedentary settlements. Sedentary settlements in the 'peripheral strips' most affected by Bedouin raids were characterised by:

- Oscillation of the borders of the settled areas
- A high percentage of abandoned villages and other sites
- A large number of temporary or secondary settlements
- Smaller populations and land areas than villages bordering the peripheral zones.

Examples of oscillating borders in peripheral zones are those of the Hula Valley and the western slopes of the Hebron Mountains. In the case of the western slopes of the Hebron Mountains it is arguable that, with no other factor evident, the threat of Bedouin raids was the only limit to the southern and western expansion of sedentary settlements. Figure 1.9 shows how the majority of new settlements in the Hebron Mountains occurred on the western and southern slopes. In the Hula Valley it is not

15. Parkes, 1949:142.

Fig. 1.9: Expansion of villages in the Hebron Mountains between 1875 and today. New villages. Sketched by the author.



clear whether it was the threat of Bedouin raids or the presence of malarial swamps that prevented the establishment of primary sedentary settlements in the valley. In 1806 Seetzen described the Hula Valley as a Bedouin domain of the Bani Fadel and Nu'aim tribes.¹⁶ The Bedouin occupied the Hula Valley during the winter, planted corn, and raised and grazed their herds. In summer they would move to the Golan Heights, thus enabling the peasants to come down from the hills to grow their summer crops. Often the *fallahin* built small hamlets or temporary settlements, which they deserted once the Bedouin returned:

16. Karmon, 1953:7.

The wave of nomadic life is constantly lapping against the mountains of the *Fallahin*. This wave has its ebbs and flows which, even in the last five years, has been very marked.¹⁷

Between the end of the sixteenth and the end of the nineteenth centuries, the peripheral strip and areas under Bedouin control had a high percentage (26%-50%) of deserted areas while only 9% of highland villages were deserted (Figure 1.10). Amiran demonstrates that while the proportion of uninhabited to inhabited sites in Palestine in 1922 was 2.6:1, it was 5.9:1 in the Shephela (western slopes of the Hebron Mountains):

The Shephela has more than three times as many abandoned sites as the average area of Palestine.¹⁸

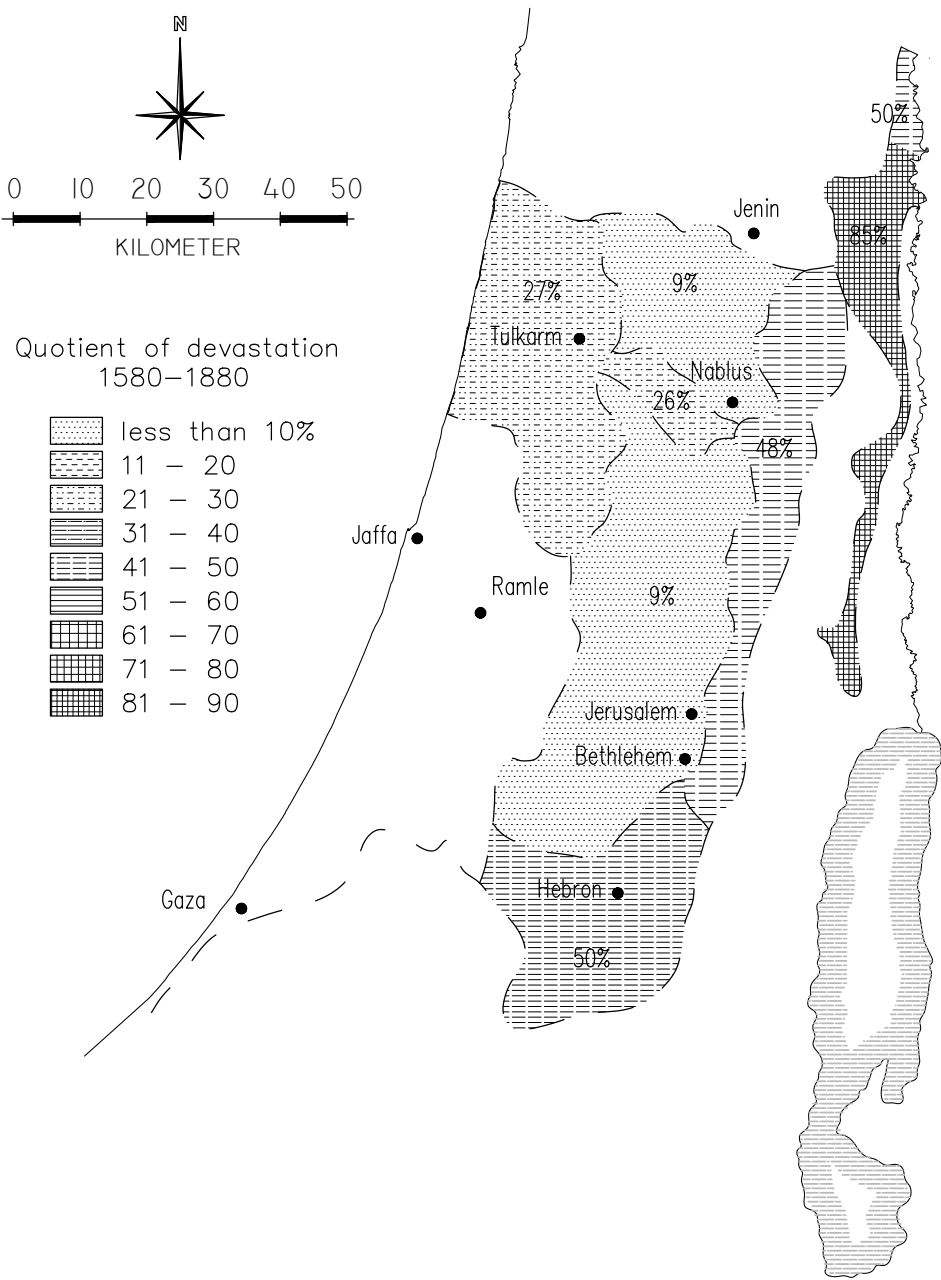
The villages and village landholdings bordering the peripheral strips were much larger than those in the interior of settled areas: in 1922 the average village population was 1,118 in the Hebron area compared to 449 in the Nablus area.¹⁹

The largest five villages in the country, in both area and population (Tubas, Dura, Yatta, Samu’ and Adh-Dhahriyeh), were all along the southern and eastern frontiers.²⁰

The word *khirab* (pl. of *khirbeh*) refers to both abandoned ancient sites and temporary settlements. *Khirab* here refers only to temporary settlements. Unlike the compact permanent peasant villages, the *khirab* had widely spaced houses. They varied in size from watchman towers to small villages, though most were made up of a few mud huts. The majority of *khirab* were populated only during agricultural seasons, harvest and sowing times. With fields often far from their villages, villagers were likely to spend the night in their fields and built humble mud or stone houses to which they retreated for a few days at a time; these were also used to store agricultural products. Not all *khirab* remained as seasonal settlements. Many developed into permanent settlements and even, if security conditions permitted, into large villages. Sometimes the *khirab* were inhabited by watchmen or shepherds who brought their families to live with them, thus establishing permanent settlements. In other cases, one or two families, or a clan in a mother village, would leave the village to settle permanently in the *khirbeh*. This split from the mother village could be caused by village disputes such as when *Khirbet Abu Falah* in the Ramallah district was established as a permanent

17. Conder, 1878:271.
18. Amiran, 1953:207.
19. Barron, 1923:4.
20. Amiran, 1953:7.

Fig.1.10: Percentage of abandoned villages between the end of the 16th century and end of the 19th century. Source: Hutteroth (1975).



village following the abandonment of the mother village of il-Mazra’a ish-Sharkiyyeh by the Jaradat and Shuman clans.²¹

21. Mukhtar of Abu Falah, interview: 1982.

Relations between the satellite and mother villages varied. In some cases the *khirbeh*, although gradually becoming more independent, remained as a satellite with strong ties to its mother village. In cases where the permanent settlement of the *khirbeh* was a result of family or clan disputes, the *khirbeh* tended to break all relations with the mother village, electing its own headman (*mukhtar*) and having its own lands, which had to be agreed upon with the mother village, either peacefully or, as in the case of Khirbet Abu Falah, through dispute.

In general, as security conditions deteriorated, the *khirab*, especially those in the peripheral areas, were deserted. Mountain peasants who had their *khirab* on the plains tended to retreat to their mountain settlements. Plains peasants also took refuge in mountainous areas, but still maintained contact with their fields on the plains.

Bedouin influence on the peasant community varied at different times but in general, as security conditions improved, Bedouin autonomy, and hence influence, decreased. In most parts of Palestine, the Ottoman government's authority was hardly felt until well into the second half of the nineteenth century. Security provisions were minimal and the Bedouin, who considered themselves as 'lords of the land', did not recognise any authority except that of the sheikh. Migdal notes that in 1852 "there were only 976 Ottoman soldiers in what today constitutes the West Bank and only 160 of them stood ready for immediate use by the Ottoman ruler (Pasha)."²² This was, however, a far safer period than the eighteenth century, which had witnessed a severe deterioration in public security. During its last fifty years, the Ottoman government improved security conditions by improving communication systems; roads and railways, controlling inter-village wars and weakening private armies. The government's bid to control the Bedouin community included the dispatch of Turkish soldiers to attack the Bedouin tribes residing in the Marj ibn 'Amir Valley in 1870 and, in an attempt to regulate the Naqab desert tribes, the re-establishment of the city of Bir is-Sabe' in 1900.

The momentous changes in Palestine from the latter part of the nineteenth century undermined Bedouin society economically and socially to the point that by the middle of this century, the strength and influence it had enjoyed for hundreds of years, including over peasant settlements, had all but disappeared.

22. Migdal, 1980:9.

Lowland versus Highland Settlements

The social-historical, topographical and climatic differences between the highlands and lowlands of Palestine, especially the coastal plain, produced distinct characteristics of sedentary settlements.

Until the beginning of 20th century, general conditions in most of the coastal plains did not favour stable and continuous settlement. Unlike settlements in the mountainous areas, those on the coast were frequently threatened with destruction and/or desertion. Recurrent and severe epidemics encouraged by lowland swamps killed many,²³ while sand dunes made the area between Jaffa and the southern coastal borders uninhabitable (Fig. 1.1). At the same time, the exposed settlements along the coastal plain were vulnerable to internal and external conflicts and wars. Most foreign invading armies have passed through the coastal plain, but few through the highlands. These armies often wreaked considerable destruction in lowland settlements. In 332 BC Alexander the Great completely destroyed settlements on the coastal plain and, in a deliberate policy of destruction aimed at ending European influence, Mamluk rulers did the same in AD 1291.

In spite of such challenges, the many attractions of living on the coastal plains led to an expansion of settlements there during peacetime and with the general improvement in security conditions. The lowlands included some of the most fertile land in Palestine, such as Marj ibn 'Amir Valley. They were not only the route for military forces, but also of commercial routes, particularly along the Via Maris: the coastal highway, and enjoyed a much stronger economy than in the highlands.

Unlike the mountain settlements, which changed very little before the nineteenth century, the coastal plain had always been characterised by considerable fluctuations in population, the size of its settled area, and the role, number and importance of its settlements.

On comparing towns in each area, Amiran found that of a total of eight towns in the plains, only four maintained their status, two having ceased to exist and two having shrunk to villages. In contrast, "mountain towns have existed without interruption, though fluctuating in importance and number of population."²⁴

While villages in the highlands were scattered and covered almost the entire area (Fig. 1.11), villages in the lowlands were concentrated mainly on the southern coastal plain

23. Baldensberger, 1913:22.

24. Amiran, 1953:192.

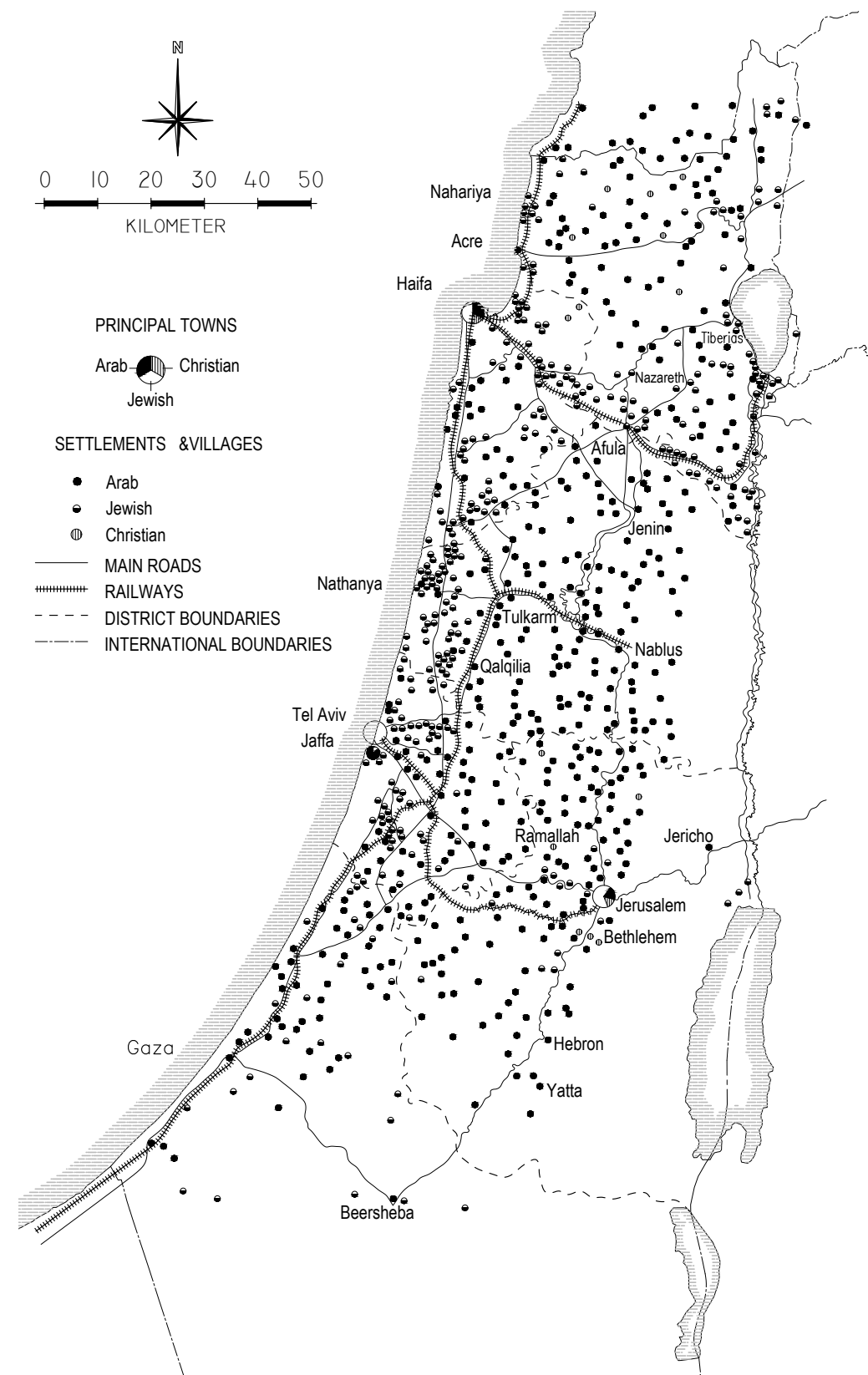


Fig.1.11: Village dispersion in the highlands and coastal plains. Note village-town-road relationships. Source: Kendall and Baruth (1949).

(the Jerusalem-Jaffa-Gaza triangle) along major roads and around major towns. This concentration may be explained by the fact that the area had always been an important trading centre, and by the presence of government authorities, which limited Bedouin attacks. The area was also attractive because, with the risk of enforced desertion due to floods or other threats to the villagers' security, it was relatively easy to resettle and re-cultivate as it dried up faster and tended to deteriorate less than the central or northern parts of the coastal plain.

Chief among a number of other factors contributing to the concentration of coastal villages around the Jerusalem-Jaffa-Gaza triangle, as well as around other urban centres such as Acre, were the early existence of lowland landlords, the formation of large landed estates, the use of extensive farming and the development of the citrus fruit industry. Whereas coastal peasants were thus subjugated to landlords and urban notables, the majority of highland villages, with the possible exception of those around Nablus, enjoyed substantial rural autonomy from their townships. The spatial relationship between villages, towns and roads tells us a great deal about the differences in relations between peasants and town dwellers in the highlands and coastal areas, and about comparative security conditions.

The main urban centres in Palestine occupied two major axes. The first group, located along the coastal highway, was, from south to north: Gaza, 'Asqalan, Jaffa, Haifa and Acre. Villages were either on or close to the main coastal road and, as noted above, concentrated around major towns. In the highlands, the town-road relationship was similar but village-road or village-town relationships were very different. As can be seen in Figure 1.11, the major highland road north from Bir is-Saba' passed through all the towns of Hebron, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, il-Bireh, Nablus, Jenin and Nazareth. It is notable that this highway, which stretched the length of the country, had only five villages located along it: Adh Dhahriyeh, 'Ein Sina, Huwwarah, Balatah and Deir Sharaf. (Villages or small towns like Halhul, Beit Jala, Shu'fat and Silat ed-Dahir only grew towards the main road during the 20th century.) This striking phenomenon of the villages keeping away from the main road can be explained by the following:

1. Mountain villages were more or less self-sufficient with a majority of smallholders living on subsistence agriculture. Most had their own crafts: women made and embroidered their own dresses, made household utensils (mud bins, pots, dishes,

- jars, etc.) and wove rugs and baskets. This gave the village substantial autonomy and made its contacts with town occasional or seasonal;
2. Their seclusion from main roads protected mountain villages from invading armies and government authorities, represented by its tax collectors, while the absence of Bedouin threats reduced dependency on the government or town notables who provided security for coastal plain villages.

Settlements of the Central Highlands

The rest of this chapter focuses on the central part of the highlands in order to trace in more detail the different factors that have influenced the dispersion of villages within this region.

The central section of the hill region in Palestine comprises the Hebron, Jerusalem and Nablus hills. In general, the barren hills of Hebron and Jerusalem are simple and compact. The top of the Jerusalem hills is a compact upfold, hardly disturbed by faults. The Hebron Mountains are narrow with a flat plateau. The southern parts of this mountain range are dry, and the eastern slopes are extremely steep and arid. The western slopes are more fertile than those of the south and east.

The Nablus hills are morphologically more diverse. Many branch and rift valleys dissect the mountain blocks. Internal basins isolate the different mountain ridges. All of these valleys and basins are fertile, and the eastern slopes in this area are not pronouncedly arid. Owing to the broken nature of the Nablus hills, moisture-bearing sea winds coming from the west reach the eastern fold. The western slopes are low foothills broken by valleys that connect the central parts of the hills with the coastal plain. Unlike the Hebron and Jerusalem hills that have relatively few springs, the Nablus hills have many.

The following observations suggest that the nature of the terrain was one of the factors that determined the way in which villages dispersed.

The central highlands have always been considered the ‘core’ of the Palestinian peasantry and most peasant villages are concentrated in this area. Of the 598 villages recorded in the 1870s, 498 (83%) were in the highlands and 100 (17%) in the lowlands. The area between Nablus and Bethlehem, with around 300 or 50% of the total, had the country’s highest concentration of villages.²⁵

25. ‘Alami, 1984:14.

In general, villages in the central highlands were scattered and covered almost the entire area. The Nablus hills had a high density of evenly distributed villages with small populations and landholdings. The fertility of the land, the several springs and the favourable security conditions made it possible for large numbers of settlements to occupy relatively small pieces of land in close proximity. The fertile land here could also support villages with large populations.

The Hebron area, on the other hand, was characterised by a low density of unevenly distributed settlements with large populations and landholdings. The scarcity of springs encouraged the wide dispersion of settlements, while the large populations probably enhanced the defensibility of those in peripheral areas.²⁶ Continuous sedentarisation of the Bedouin also contributed to the increased population of southern villages. The village of Yatta, for example, was described by the *Survey of Western Palestine* in the 1870s as “a large village standing high on a ridge, built of stone, but some of the inhabitants live in tents.” Aridity meant that, to meet agricultural needs, villages had to own comparatively large pieces of land. All villages on the dry southern and eastern slopes of the central highlands had large landholdings (Fig. 1.12). Nearly all the villages that functioned as the centres of sheikhdoms, i.e. throne villages such as ‘Arrabeh, Ya’bbad, Dura, Beit-Jibrin and Abu-Ghosh, were relatively large.

The availability of relatively fertile land seems to be the primary factor in shaping the different patterns of village distribution, that is, the tendency to cluster along longitudinal axes as in the case of the Hebron hills, or to encircle a fertile basin as in the case of the Sanur and ‘Arrabeh plain in the Nablus area. The general tendency of villagers was to avoid settling on fertile land and to locate principally on the edges of plateaux and basins (Figs 1.13 and 1.9). The pattern of village distribution in the Hebron hills (Fig. 1.9) clearly illustrates a concentration of settlements on the mountain plateau. 14 out of the 32 villages listed by the *Survey of Western Palestine* in 1881 were on the mountain crest. Notice that only the two towns of Hebron and Halhul were located in the centre of the plateau, with all villages on its extremities.

Figure 1.13 shows how, as a consequence of the attempt to utilise every inch of fertile land, the vast majority of the villages of the Jarrar domain were on the southern and eastern boundaries of the Sanur Valley. This pattern of settlement, on the extremities of fertile basins, plains or plateaux, is more obvious in areas of extensive fertile land than in cases of hilltops and slopes where agricultural lands are small and the relationship between village location and fields less evident.

26. Amiran, 1953:71.

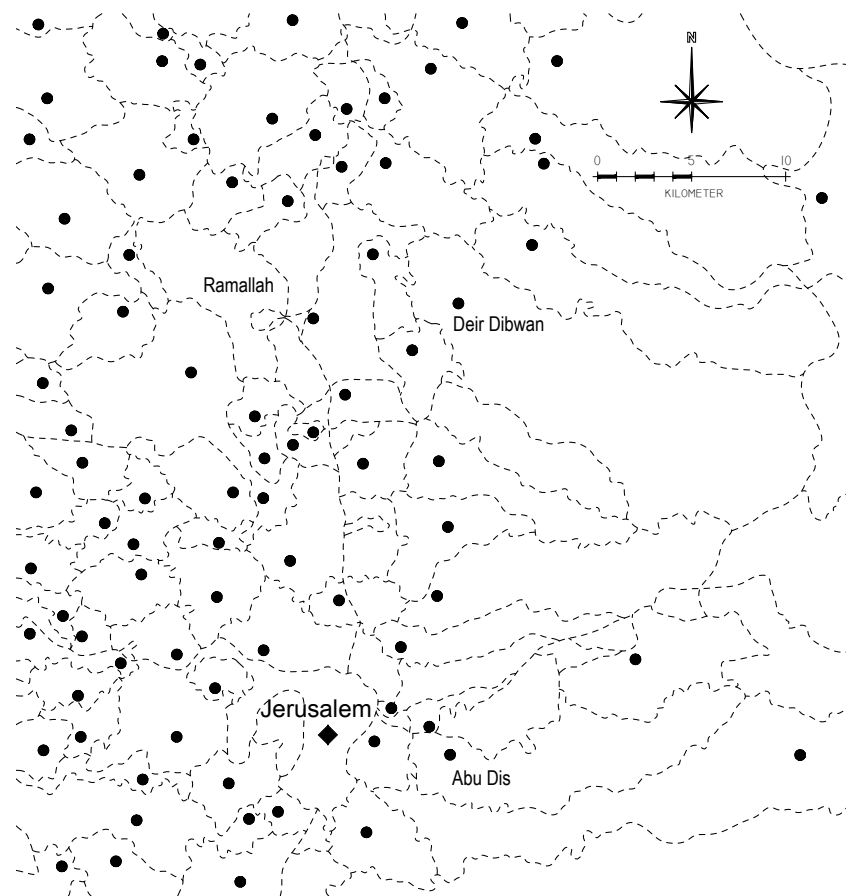


Fig.1.12: Villages located on the eastern extremities of the highlands had large landholdings. Source: D. H. K. Ami.

The central highlands are surrounded by two arid zones. This had a distinct impact on village distribution and the size of village landholdings (Fig. 1.12). The aridity and steepness of the eastern slopes, descending towards the southern desert and the Jordan rift, obviously limited the eastward expansion of sedentary settlements. This is clearly the case on the eastern slopes of the Hebron hills where the settlements of Bani Na'im, ish-Shuyyukh, Sa'ir and Beit Fajjar were all within five kilometres of the mountain's crest.

In the Nablus area, where agricultural land spread further east (Wadi il-Far'ah and Ghor Bisan), eastern settlements such as Tammun, Tiasir, Bardalah and Khurbet Qawun extended further east than those in the Hebron or Jerusalem Mountains. On the eastern slopes, there were no settlements due to the arid and sparsely vegetated land (annual rainfall is 100 - 300mm and springs are scarce). Further south, with the penetration of the Naqab Desert, the number of sedentary settlements decreased and there were no permanent settlements on the southern slopes south of Samu' and Adh Dhahriyeh.

Defence has been cited by many scholars as one of the most, if not the most, crucial factors determining the 'elevated' location of villages in the Central Highlands. Amiran, for example, claimed that security took precedence over any other consideration. This was illustrated by noting that many villages in the Jerusalem hills were built a hundred or more metres away from the spring in order to secure a strategic location.²⁷

Efrat similarly claimed that villages in the Nablus Hills "are located on hilltops, domes and ridges dominating the surrounding countryside and offering a good strategic position."²⁸

Wilson, in *Peasant Life in the Holy Land*, wrote:

The sites of these ancient towns and villages were largely determined by physical conditions, such as a position easily defended or the proximity of an abandoned water supply.²⁹

The extent to which defensibility took precedence over other considerations in the location of highland villages is debatable. Based on data given by the *Survey of Western Palestine*,³⁰ I surveyed 325 of a total of 372 named villages (not all village

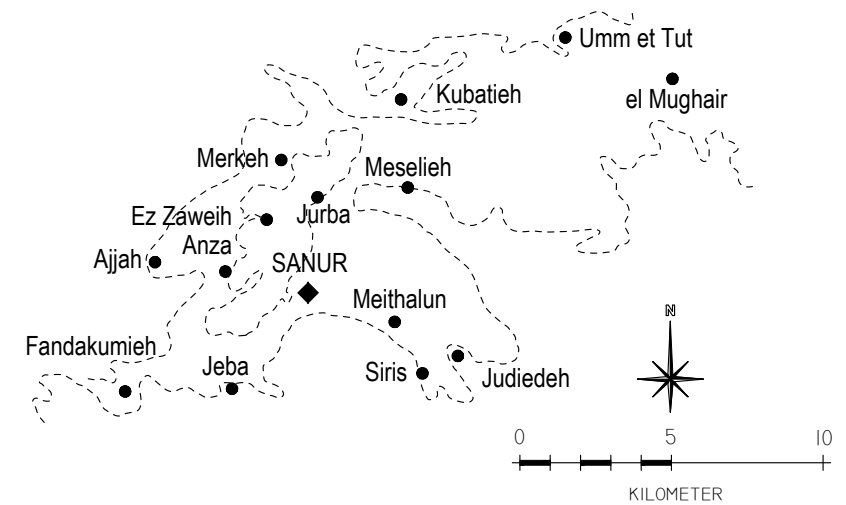


Fig.1.13: Jarrar villages on the basin extremities.

27. Amiran, 1953:203.
 28. Efrat, 1977:99.
 29. Wilson, 1906:57.
 30. Conder and Kitchener, 1881.

locations or elevations were given by the Survey). All these villages belong to Central Highland sheikhdoms. In general, the villages of these sheikhdoms are more than 150 metres above sea level, but substantial numbers are located on the western slopes and low coastal plains.

Of the 126 villages in the Hebron area and the Jerusalem hills tabulated by the author, 76 (60%) are located on hilltops, 25 (20%) on mountain slopes and 25 (20%) on low ground. Of the 199 villages surveyed in the Nablus hills, 57 (28%) are on hilltops, 67 (37%) on mountain slopes and 75 (38%) on low ground.

Villages in the two geographic areas have different patterns of location: those in the Hebron area and the Jerusalem hills have a higher percentage of villages on top of mountains than those in the Nablus area. Considering the physical structure of the former (hardly disturbed by faults), and bearing in mind that the southern areas of the Hebron Mountains were ‘peripheral areas’, the explanation for such patterns of location seems clear. As noted above, the threat of Bedouin raids affected only the expansion and location of those villages in the peripheral zones. The central highland area was relatively protected from the threat of outside enemies.

The one internal threat that might have had an impact on the siting of some highland villages was that of ‘inter-village’ wars. The incessant wars between the two rival *fallahin* factions of *Qais* and *Yemen* is seen here as a factor that influenced the location of power centres or throne villages (*Qura al-Karasi*).

The defence of any village should be looked at in the wider context of its sheikhdom. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, the central highland area was divided into 21 sheikhdoms, each consisting of a number of villages ranging from a minimum of six in the Bitawi sheikhdom (Nablus area), to a maximum of 56 in the bilad Harith ish-Shamali (Jenin area). The centres of power and wealth of each sheikhdom were the throne villages, the sheikhs of which were often the tax farmers (*multazimin*) of the sheikhdom.

The security of each village depended on the power of its sheikhdom and was the responsibility of the sheikhdom army under the rule of its chief sheikh (*sheikh in-nahyeh*). It was therefore crucial for throne villages to have a defensible strategic site.

Using field data and the *Survey of Western Palestine*, the author studied the locations of the 24 throne villages. Some sheikhdoms had more than one throne village because two villages in the same sheikhdom, such as the two villages of Deir Ghassaneh and ‘Abwein in the Bani Zaid sheikhdom, competed for power and tax-farming rights. 19 throne villages (80%) are on top of hills or ridges.

Except for the throne village of Sanur, none of the highland villages had a surrounding wall. The absence of perimeter walls or other elements of fortification, such as watchtowers, ditches or fortresses, implies that, with the exception of throne villages, defence did not take precedence over other considerations in the location or siting of highland villages. It was the security of agricultural fields rather than the security of the village itself that was crucial.³¹

31. Canaan, 1932:228.