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Invisible Peasants, Marauding Nomads: Taxation, Tribalism, and Rebellion in Mamluk Egypt*

Right from the outset of Mamluk rule, the Arab tribes of Egypt stand out as the most persistent internal threat to the regime. The Egyptian tribesmen were the only group in the Mamluk domains that was openly and repeatedly contesting the legitimacy of Mamluk authority, and the only group that was ready to resort to armed resistance. In 650/1252–53, in what appears to be a direct response to the Mamluk seizure of power, an Arab uprising engulfed large parts of the Egyptian countryside. Led by the *sharīf* of the tribe of the Jaʿāfirah, Ḥiṣn al-Dīn ibn Taghlab, the Arabs mobilized a force of 12,000 cavalrymen and prevented the collection of the agricultural taxes. Ḥiṣn al-Dīn scorned the rule of al-Muʿizz Aybak and the government of the Turkish slaves; rather, he claimed, the Arab tribes *(ʿurbān)* were the true owners of the land.[1] Over the following century, the Arab tribes mounted two more general revolts. In 698/1298–99 the Arab tribes of Upper and Middle Egypt staged a rebellion that lasted for three years until its brutal repression by a Mamluk expeditionary force.[2] In 749/1349, following the first outbreak of

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*I would like to thank Abraham L. Udovitch, Adam Sabra, Lennart Sundelin, and the participants in the University of Chicago Conference on Mamluk Studies for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I would also like to thank Tamer el-Leithy for his insightful comments and suggestions at various stages.

[1]For medieval sources, see Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār: Qabāʾil al-ʿArab fī al-Qarnayn al-Sābiʿ wa-al-Thāmin al-Hijrīyayn,* ed. Dorothea Krawulsky (Beirut, 1986), 161; Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Maʿrifat al-Duwal wa-al-Mulūk,* ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafá Ziyādah and Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ ʿĀshūr (Cairo, 1934–72), 1:386 ff.; idem, *Al-Bayān wa-al-Iʿrāb ʿammā bi-Arḍ Miṣr min al-ʿArab* (Cairo, 1961), 37–38; Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-Jumān fī Tārīkh Ahl al-Zamān: ʿAṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk,* ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo, 1987–), 1:107–8; Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshá fī Ṣināʿat al-Inshāʾ* (Cairo, 1913–18), 4:68. For modern accounts, see, among others, Jean-Claude Garcin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Égypte médiévale: Qūṣ* (Cairo, 1976), 183–90, 372–74; Abdel Hamid Saleh, "Les relations entre les Mamluks et les Bédouins d'Egypte," *Annali: Istituto Orientale di Napoli* (n.s. 30) 40 (1980): 365–93; idem, "Quelques remarques sur les Bédouins d'Égypte au Moyen Âge," *Studia Islamica* 48 (1978): 60; Sato Tsugitaka, *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam* (Leiden, 1997), 95; Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate, 1250–1382* (London, 1986), 27. Note that the reading Taghlab, as found in the critical edition of al-ʿUmarī, is preferred over the reading Thaʿlab found in later works.

[2]Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 1:914, 920; Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn*

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DOI: 10.6082/M1F769P7. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1F769P7)

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the Black Death, most of the Arab tribes of Upper Egypt were again engaged in a loosely organized rebellion centered on the regions of Assiut and Qūṣ. This uprising was only quelled in 754/1354.[3]

Interpretations of the Arab resistance to Mamluk rule differ, mainly with regard to the matter of the relationship between the tribesmen and the peasants. A. N. Poliak emphasized the agricultural nature of the Arab rebellions and the close alliance between the Arabs and the peasants. For Poliak, the bedouins of the Nile were halfway on the road to sedentarization, living in hamlets around the villages but retaining their privilege of armed service to the state.[4] More recently, Abdel Hamid Saleh has gone even further in allying the bedouins with the peasants. The bedouin tribesmen who migrated to the Nile valley were allowed to cultivate the land, and thus became ″peasants (*fallāḥ*s) of bedouin origin,″ distinguished by their tribal ethics and the solidarity of the tribe. When fighting against the Mamluk authorities they formed a close alliance with the general Egyptian population, with whom they had common cause.[5]

Jean-Claude Garcin, on the other hand, emphasized the fundamental conflict between the bedouin and the peasant. According to his interpretation, which is grounded in his detailed and much-praised study of the city of Qūṣ, the causes of Arab resistance to the Mamluks should be sought in the eternal struggle between Qaysī and Yamanī tribes. The Qaysī tribes of Upper Egypt, such as the Banū Hilāl and Banū Kanz, lived alongside the settled population of the southern regions, while Yamanī tribes, such as the Juhaynah, ʻArak, and Balī lived further to the north. Garcin suggests that the revolts were predominantly based in the regions occupied by Yamanī tribes, while the Mamluk authorities, like their Ayyubid predecessors, allied with the Qaysī tribes. But from the second half of the fourteenth century, when the bedouin Yamanī tribes were incorporated into the Mamluk state machinery, their true colors became apparent. When the bedouin leaders became major *iqṭāʻ* holders, their repression and exploitation of the peasantry was no better, and perhaps worse, than that of the Mamluk amirs.[6]

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al-Adab (Cairo, 1923–), 30:333; al-ʻAynī, *ʻIqd al-Jumān,* 4:174–77; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1929–72), 8:149–53. See also Saleh, ″Les relations,″ 369 ff.; Garcin, *Qūṣ,* 374–76.

[3]Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 2:770, 820, 839, 859, 896, 908–20. See also Saleh, ″Les relations,″ 378–79; Garcin, *Qūṣ,* 381–84.

[4]A. N. Poliak, ″Les revoltes populaires en Égypte à l′époque des Mamelouks et leur causes économiques,″ *Revue des études islamiques* 8 (1934): 251–73.

[5]Saleh, ″Quelques remarques,″ *Studia Islamica* 48 (1978): 45–70. Similarly, Sato believes that the life-style of the *ʻurbān* varied from cattle-breeding to agriculture (*State and Rural Society,* 95).

[6]Jean-Claude Garcin, ″Note sur les rapports entre Bédouins et fellahs á l′époque Mamluke,″ *Annales islamologiques* 14 (1978): 147–63; Garcin, *Qūṣ,* 362–84.

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DOI: 10.6082/M1F769P7. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1F769P7)

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All three interpretations, I would argue, suffer from a common and misleading association of tribal identity with pastoral nomadism, whether past or present. The assumption that the Arab tribes are, or were in the recent past, pastoral nomads partly stems from semantic imprecision. Poliak, Saleh, and Garcin all refer to the rebelling tribesmen as bedouins, but the term most commonly used in the Mamluk sources is *'urbān,* a non-classical plural form of *'arab.*[7] The word *'arab* (Arab) in itself did not mean pastoral nomadism. As defined by the lexicographer al-Azharī (d. 370/980), who is invariably cited in Mamluk dictionaries, the *'arab* are all those descended from the Arabs, whatever their way of life may be. Arabs who live in settled communities, in cities or in villages, are still Arabs, even if they do not speak eloquent Arabic. Likewise, the Companions of the Prophet were Arabs, even though they lived in sedentary communities. The *a'rāb,* on the other hand, is a Quranic term for a sub-category of Arabs who live in the open country and migrate for the purpose of grazing their herds. Al-Azharī is keen to emphasize that not all Arabs but only the *a'rāb,* the pastoral nomads, can be equated with the *badw* (bedouin).[8]

Even the term *badw* could refer, in certain contexts, to rural communities that were not necessarily transhumant, as is demonstrated by Ibn Khaldūn's dichotomy of the *badw* and the *ḥaḍar.* At the beginning of the chapter on *badawī* civilization, Ibn Khaldūn defines *badw* as "those who either live from cultivation of the land *(al-falḥ)* or those who make their living by raising livestock." Both groups are by necessity *badw,* because both need space for their feddans of fields or pasturage for their herds.[9] It is true that Ibn Khaldūn later shifts his attention to the nomadic tribesmen, and his account of the devastation caused by the invasion of the Banū Hilāl to North Africa is often seen as an epitome of the antagonism between the desert and the sown in Islamic history.[10] But, as established by many a Khaldūnian interpreter, Ibn Khaldūn singles out the pastoral nomads because he considers them to be the simplest, the most elementary, and the purest form of *badawī* civilization.[11] On account of their simplicity and remoteness, the camel-herding

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[7]Reinhart Pieter Anne Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes* (Leiden, 1881), 2:108.

[8]Muḥammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Beirut, 1955–56), 1:586; Shihāb al-Dīn al-Fayyūmī, *Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr* (Cairo, 1312), 2:22. Cited also in al-Qalqashandī, *Qalā'id al-Jumān fī Ta'rīf Qabā'il 'Arab al-Zamān,* ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī (Cairo, 1963), 12; and idem, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Ma'rifat Ansāb al-'Arab* (Beirut, 1980), 18. See also Edward W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1863–93), 5:1993.

[9]'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn* (Beirut, n.d.), 132.

[10]E. F. Gautier, *Le passé de l'Afrique du nord: les siécles obscures* (Paris, 1952); Bernard Lewis, "The Decolonization of History," in Lewis, *Islam in History: Ideas, Men and Events in the Middle East* (London, 1973), 43–48.

[11]Peter Von Sivers, "Back to Nature: the Agrarian Foundations of Society according to Ibn

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nomads are able to preserve the purest Arabic speech and purest lineages, which also means that their group solidarity *(ʿaṣabīyah)* is the strongest. They are nonetheless only a sub-category within the larger group of *badw,* a group that includes peasants and nomads, cultivators and herdsmen. Rendering Ibn Khaldūn's *badw* as "bedouin" is therefore somewhat misleading. As Muhsin Mahdi notes, the reduction of the Khaldūnian *badw* to "nomadic" can lead to serious misunderstanding of Ibn Khaldūn's thought.[12]

The dissociation of tribalism and bedouin identity from pastoral nomadism finds its corollary in attempts by anthropologists to come to terms with the often confusing ethnographic accounts of Middle Eastern tribes. In Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman, the Yemen, and Morocco, and in many other places in the Middle East, tribesmen are for the most part settled cultivators. While most tribes have both nomadic and settled components, major tribal groups in these countries are—and were in any part of their known history—settled cultivators with little or no inclination towards pastoral nomadism. While tribes share some common features, like a segmentary lineage system and ideals of political autonomy, a tribal identity specifies little, if anything, about systems of production.[13] Even a bedouin identity cannot be simply equated with camel-herding or pastoralism. Bedouins are, almost always, Muslim Arabic speakers, and, for the most part, are organized along tribal lines. But the bedouins can live by more than one strategy.[14] In modern Jordan, for example, very few of the large bedouin groups are, or were in the recent past,

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Khaldun," *Arabica* 27 (1980): 68–91, esp. 70–71. See also Fuad Baali, *Society, State and Urbanism: Ibn Khaldun's Sociological Thought* (New York, 1988), 95–102; Mohamed Talbi, *Ibn Khaldun et l'histoire* (Tunis, 1973), 64–72; Aziz al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn in Modern Scholarship: a Study in Orientalism* (London, 1981), 208–15; Steven C. Caton, "Anthropological Theories of Tribe and State Formation in the Middle East: Ideology and the Semiotics of Power," in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East,* ed. Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (London, 1991), 74–108. Robert Irwin also notes that while the opposition between nomad and sedentary is central to Ibn Khaldūn's thought, his *badawī* civilization includes both bedouin and peasants ("Toynbee and Ibn Khaldūn," *Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 3 [1997]: 461–79).

[12]Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History: a Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture* (London, 1957), 193.

[13]Dale Eickelman, *The Middle East and Central Asia: an Anthropological Approach,* 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ, 1998), 45–46, 105–21; Richard Tapper, "Anthropologists, Historians and Tribespeople on Tribe and State Formation in the Middle East," in *Tribes and State Formation,* 48–68.

[14]Martha Mundy and Basim Musallam, "Introduction," in *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East*, ed. Mundy and Musallam (Cambridge, 2000), 1; Eickelman, *The Middle East and Central Asia*, 64–65; idem, "Being Bedouin: Nomads and Tribes in the Arab Social Imagination," in Joseph Ginat and Anatoly M. Khazanov, *Changing Nomads in a Changing World* (Brighton, 1998), 38–49.

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DOI: 10.6082/M1F769P7. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1F769P7)

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pastoralists or nomads. The decisive elements of their bedouin identity—that which makes them *badw*—are rather their memory of a lineage associated with a distant nomadic past, and their adherence to ideologies of equality and autonomy.[15]

I would contend here that a clear distinction between pastoral nomadism as an economic option, tribalism as a form of social organization, and bedouin-ness as a cultural identity allows for a richer interpretation of the resistance of the *ʻurbān* to Mamluk rule. Such a conceptual distinction also makes it possible to distill much more precisely the meaning of tribal identity in the medieval Egyptian countryside, and to place the tribes right at the center—rather than at the margins—of Egyptian history. Moreover, it also sheds a much-needed light on the process of conversion and Islamization outside of the urban centers. In order to do that, we need to re-visit al-Nābulusī's *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm,* the most detailed account of a rural province that has reached us from medieval Islamic Egypt. Al-Nābulusī visited the Fayyum only a decade before the outbreak of the first Arab rebellion against the Mamluks, and I would argue that what al-Nābulusī saw in the 1240s can be generalized for other parts of Middle and Upper Egypt. The tribes of the Fayyum, seen through the eyes of al-Nābulusī, are crucial for a proper interpretation of the Arab revolts in the century that followed.

The account of the province of the Fayyum written by the Ayyubid official Abū ʻUthmān al-Nābulusī, entitled *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm wa-Bilādihi,* is the most detailed cadastral survey to have survived from medieval Egypt.[16] In the words of Stephen Humphreys, it is "as close as we will ever get to an official tax register for

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[15]Tariq Tell, "The Politics of Rural Policy in East Jordan, 1920–1989," in *The Transformation of Nomadic Society*, 90–98; Andrew J. Shryock, "Popular Genealogical Nationalism: History Writing and Identity among the Balqa Tribes of Jordan," *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 37, no. 2 (1995): 325–57.

[16]Abū ʻUthmān al-Nābulusī, *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm wa-Bilādihi (Description du Faiyoum),* ed. B. Moritz (Cairo, 1898; repr., Beirut, 1974). George Salmon, "Répertoire géographique de la province du Fayyoûm d'aprés le Kitâb Târîkh al-Fayyoûm d'an-Naboûlsi," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 1 (1901): 29–77, provides a brief summary for each village. For a discussion of tax obligations, see Claude Cahen, "Le régime des impôts dans le Fayyūm Ayyūbide," *Arabica* 3 (1958): 8–30 (reprinted in idem, *Makhzūmiyyāt* [Leiden, 1977]). On production and irrigation, see Sato, *State and Rural Society,* 215–24; I. König, "Die Oase al-Fayyum nach ʻUthmān ibn Ibrahim an-Nabulusi: ein Beitrage zur Wirtchaftsgeschichte Aegyptens um die Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts n. chr.," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischer Wissenschaft* 10 (1996): 190–253. For a useful recent summary, see G. Keenan, "Fayyum Agriculture at the End of the Ayyubid Era: Nabulsi's *Survey*," in *Agriculture in Egypt: From Pharaonic to Modern Times,* ed. Alan K. Bowman and Eugene Rogan, Proceedings of the British Academy 96 (Oxford, 1999), 287–99.

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DOI: 10.6082/M1F769P7. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1F769P7)

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Mamluk Egypt."[17] Al-Nābulusī, dispatched to the Fayyum in 641/1243 by al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb with instructions to report on the fiscal conditions of the province, was a prominent official in the Ayyubid bureaucracy. He wrote at least two other works concerned with the proper administration of the finances of Egypt. One is a staunchly anti-*dhimmī* text, appropriately called *Tajrīd Sayf al-Himmah li-Istikhrāj Mā fī Dhimmat al-Dhimmah,* in which he argues against the employment of Copts in the state's bureaucracy.[18] In another treatise, *Luma' al-Qawānīn al-Muḍī'ah fī Dawāwīn al-Diyār al-Miṣrīyah,* al-Nābulusī exposes abuse and incompetence in the administration. In this work al-Nābulusī comes across as an extremely pedantic and experienced civil servant, who is wholly and totally committed to the increase of the government's revenue.[19] It is against this perceived incompetence that al-Nābulusī set out to write *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm* as an exemplary model of a cadastral survey, paying very careful attention to the minute details of agricultural production.

Tārīkh al-Fayyūm is divided into nine introductory chapters dealing with the geography, history, and demography of the Fayyum, followed by the main body of the treatise, the cadastral survey itself. The survey begins with a description of the provincial capital, Madīnat al-Fayyūm, which is then followed by entries for more than one hundred villages. For each village, al-Nābulusī starts by indicating the size of the village and the state of its habitation, its geographical location, its inhabitants, its sources of water, the names of the *iqṭā'* holders, and the local mosques, churches, and monasteries. The fiscal part of the entry is a list of the actual taxes levied on the village, divided into taxes in cash and taxes in kind. The taxes in kind are expressed in *irdabb*s, mostly of wheat and barley, but sometimes also of legumes. The taxes in cash were levied on all other taxable agricultural products, such as livestock and cash crops, including flax, cotton, sesame, indigo, vegetables, and fruits. This category of taxes in cash also included the poll-tax levied on non-Muslims, specifically the Coptic population, a fiscal feature that enables us to estimate the number of Copts residing in each village.

In an introductory chapter, entitled "on the inhabitants of the Fayyum and their division into *badw* and *ḥaḍar,*" al-Nābulusī divides the population of the Fayyum

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[17] R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton, 1991), 174.

[18] Claude Cahen, "Histoires coptes d'un cadi médiéval," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 59 (1960): 133–50. See also Brian Catlos, "To Catch a Spy: The Case of Zayn ad-Dīn and ibn Dukhân," *Medieval Encounters* 2 (1996): 99–113.

[19] Claude Cahen, "Quelques aspects de l'administration égyptienne médiévale vus par un de ses fonctionnaires," *Bulletin de la faculté des letters de Strasbourg* 26 (1947–48): 98–118; English translation by C. A. Owens, "Scandal in the Egyptian Treasury: A Portion of the *Luma' al-qawānīn* of Ibrāhīm al-Nābulusī," with an introduction by C. C. Torrey, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14 (1955): 70–80.

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DOI: 10.6082/M1F769P7. (https://doi.org/10.6082/M1F769P7)

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into the familiar Khaldūnian categories. In the beginning of the chapter al-Nābulusī writes:

> When I was given orders to survey the region of the Fayyum, I went from village to village and acquainted myself with its inhabitants. I would have even made a census, but for my fear that they would notice [me doing so]. I have found the majority of the people to be Arab *(aktharu ahlihā al-'arab),* divided into sections and tribes *(al-afḥādh wa-al-shu'ūb).* As for the *ḥaḍar,* there are very few of them, residing in no more than two or three villages. These few *ḥaḍar* communities are under the protection of the Arabs. In return, the Arabs take a fee from the revenue of their allotted portions *(rizaqihim)*[20] or hold rights to part of their lands, and the Arabs treat [the *ḥaḍar*] in a humiliating manner. The Arabs belong to three tribal confederacies *(uṣūl),* which are the Banū Kilāb, Banū 'Ajlān, and the al-Lawāthīyīn. I will now list their dwelling places, excluding [the tribes] who seek pasture at the time of a drought and those who come there to transport the harvest.[21]

In this key chapter, al-Nābulusī informs us that almost the entire population of the Fayyum consisted of Arab tribesmen, which he also describes as *badw,* or bedouin. The only exceptions were a few *ḥaḍar* communities, who were under the domination of the Arab tribes. Al-Nābulusī goes on to list around one hundred villages—that is practically all the villages in the province—organized by their tribal affiliation. All these villages were populated by *badw,* with the exception of only three villages in which the population was *ḥaḍar* and the *badw* were only the guardsmen *(khufarā').*[22] The list corroborates al-Nābulusī's general statement about the predominance of the *badw,* and shows that the population of the Fayyum was indeed dominated by three tribal groups. First in importance were the Banū Kilāb, then the Banū 'Ajlān, and then—much smaller—the Lawāthah, a Berber tribe. The Banū Kilāb dominated in the central, south, and west; the Banū 'Ajlān in the east and the north; while the Lawāthah dwelt in villages along the Lāhūn gap.[23]

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[20]On the meaning of *rizqah* in the Mamluk period, see N. Michel, "Les *rizaq iḥbāsīyah,* terres agricoles en mainmorte dans l'Égypte mamelouke et ottomane: Étude sur les *Dafātir al-Aḥbās* ottomans," *Annales islamologiques* 30 (1996): 105–98.

[21]Al-Nābulusī, *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm,* 12–13.

[22]These were the village of Munsha'at Awlād 'Arafah and the village of Bājah, both guarded by the Banū 'Āmīr of the Banū Kilāb, and the village of Minyat al-Usquf (al-Nābulusī, *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm,* 13, ll. 18–19).

[23]See summary in Keenan, "Fayyum Agriculture," 292.

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The predominance of the Banū Kilāb in the Fayyum is also attested in a treatise on Arab tribal genealogy written by Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥamdānī (d. after 680/1281), a work that has reached us through al-ʻUmarī and al-Qalqashandī.[24]

In order to understand the meaning of Arab tribal identity in the Fayyum, let us take a closer look at the village of Saylah, one village out of the hundred-odd *badw* villages described by al-Nābulusī.[25] According to him, Saylah was a medium-size village at the eastern edge of the province, three hours ride from Madīnat al-Fayyūm. He notes that, like most other villages in the province, the inhabitants of Saylah mainly cultivated cereals—wheat, barley, and broad beans *(fūl)*. The reliance of the village on grain production is borne out by its list of taxes. At the top of the list were the taxes on grain, levied in kind. They amounted to 2,500 *irdabb*s, a third of which was to be paid in wheat and the remaining two-thirds in barley. Assuming an average tax rate of 2.5 *irdabb*s per feddan, as reported by Ibn al-Mammātī,[26] we can estimate that the villagers of Saylah cultivated at least 1,000 feddans of cereals.[27] The monetary value of these taxes was also substantial: given normal prices, 2,500 *irdabb*s of grain were worth tens of thousands of dirhams.[28] All the other taxes paid by the villagers of Saylah pale in comparison. They owed only around 730 dirhams for their herds of livestock, which included 600 head of sheep, goats, a few cows, and one solitary ox. In addition, ten non-Muslim men who lived in the village owed twenty dinars as their poll-tax.

Saylah was a cereal-growing community, a typical village in al-Nābulusī's Fayyum. All the taxes on livestock, chicken, and fodder, even including the miscellaneous fees paid to local officials, were nothing but small change compared to the tax on grain. This was a settled community, and its fields were probably

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[24]Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʻUmarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār,* 157; al-Qalqashandī, *Qalā'id,* 117, 124, 126. In another work al-Qalqashandī mentions only the Banū ʻAwf as residing in the Fayyum (*Nihāyat al-Arab*, 343), and they are also mentioned by al-ʻUmarī as inhabiting the province (*Masālik al-Abṣār,* 164–65). See full discussion in Saleh, "Les migrations bédouines en Égypte au Moyen Âge," *Annali: Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 41 (1981): 23.

[25]Al–Nābulusī, *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm,* 114–16. For Saylah, see also Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Armanī, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries Attributed to Abû Sâlih, the Armenian,* trans. Basil Thomas Alfred Evetts (Oxford, 1895), 209.

[26]*Kitāb Qawānīn al-Dawāwīn,* ed. A. S. Atiyya (Cairo, 1943), 259.

[27]According to later cadastral surveys, the villagers of Saylah cultivated more than 1,000 feddans. Ibn Duqmāq puts it at 4,573 feddans (Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad Ibn Duqmāq [d. 1407], *Al-Intiṣār li-Wāsiṭat ʻIqd al-Amṣar,* ed. Karl Vollers [Cairo, 1893], 5:9), and Ibn al-Jīʻān at 3,609 feddans (*Kitāb al-Tuḥfah al-Sanīyah bi-Asmā' al-Bilād al-Miṣrīyah* [Cairo, 1974], 155). See also Heinz Halm, *Ägypten nach den mamlukischen Lehensregistern* (Wiesbaden, 1979–82), 1:269.

[28]According to al-ʻUmarī, in the first half of the fourteenth century, and under normal circumstances, an *irdabb* of grain fetched 10–15 dirhams (cited in Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam* [Cambridge, 2000], 120).

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marked with fences *(judrān),* as were the fields of other villages in the province.[29] While it is possible that some migrated seasonally with the herds, the community as a whole was not transhumant. It was quite different from the *muntaji'ūn,* the nomadic herdsmen, mentioned by al-Nābulusī as being taxed only for their livestock.[30] And yet, like almost all the villages in al-Nābulusī 's Fayyum, Saylah was inhabited by a tribal group. Al-Nābulusī says that the villagers of Saylah belonged to the Banū Zur'ah, a section of the Banū 'Ajlān.[31]

Like Saylah, almost all the cereal-growing villages of the Fayyum were inhabited by *badw,* or Arab, tribal groups. Each village is identified with a section of a tribe in a plain and straightforward manner, and this identification is repeated twice, once in the fifth chapter on the inhabitants of the province and then again in the individual entries for each village. There is nothing to suggest that the Arab tribes lived around the villages, maintaining a half-sedentary way of life, as suggested by Poliak.[32] The Arab tribes provided armed protection to the few *ḥaḍar* villages, but, given the demographic predominance of the Arabs, this was the exception rather than the rule, contrary to the purely military role ascribed to them by Cahen.[33] Moreover, there is nothing to suggest that these were tribes in the process of becoming settled. Al-Nābulusī is quite keen to note the disappearance of villages and the founding of new ones, but says nothing about recent settlement of nomadic tribesmen. It is not that the *badw* came to resemble the peasants; rather, in al-Nābulusī's Fayyum, the *badw* was a category that included both peasants and nomads—the vast majority of the inhabitants of the province.

The demographic predominance of the Arab tribesmen meant that even the handful of *ḥaḍar* rural settlements were under the influence of the Arabs. The hamlet of Munsha'at Awlād 'Arafah was populated by Christian *ḥaḍar,* but guarded by the Banū 'Āmir, a section of the Banū Kilāb.[34] Similarly, the majority of the inhabitants of the village of Abū Kisā were *ḥaḍar,* but a minority belonged to the

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[29]The village of Fānū was so close to the village of Naqalīfah that the fence *(jidār)* of the former was in the lands of the latter (al-Nābulusī, *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm,* 31). Similarly, the fence of al-Malālīyah was in the lands of another village (ibid., 133). When the lands of a village were without a fence, al-Nābulusī saw it as a sign of an abandoned village (ibid., 87).

[30]See examples in al-Nābulusī, *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm,* 55, 88.

[31]The published text has Banū Kilāb, but this is a mistake, perhaps on the part of the editor. Compare al-Nābulusī, *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm,* 14, l. 3.

[32]Poliak, "Les revoltes populaires," 257.

[33]Claude Cahen states that protection fees *(rasm al-khafārah)* were paid to the bedouin for not pillaging the villages ("Le régime des impôts," 19). He does not clarify that this could have been the case only in the few non-Arab villages.

[34]Al-Nābulusī, *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm,*13, l. 18.

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Banū Jawwāb of the Banū Kilāb, who likewise assumed the role of guardsmen.[35] The small town of Bamūyah, boasting of a regional market and a variety of tradesmen, was mainly inhabited by *ḥaḍar*. But three sections of the Banū ʻAjlān shared the responsibility of protecting it.[36]

The difference between the *badw* and the *ḥaḍar* becomes clearer when we consider the village of Minyat al-Usquf as an example of a *ḥaḍarī* village. Minyat al-Usquf was a small village not far from the province's capital.[37] Perennial irrigation allowed the village houses to be surrounded by orchards and gardens. The village produced a great variety of fruits, such as, among others, apricots, grapes, lemons, and pomegranates. The population consisted of Christian *ḥaḍar*, including 56 adult men subject to the poll-tax. Their protection was in the hands of the Banū Zurʻah.[38] The entire tax assessment of the village was in cash rather than in grains, as the village held no arable land. The total tax assessment was around 230 dinars. The major part of this sum, 216 dinars, was levied on the village's orchards, and the remaining taxes were paid on the village's palm-trees and dye-house. In addition, the village had to pay 112 dinars in poll-tax, at the standard rate of 2 dinars per every adult non-Muslim male.

One major difference between the *badw* and the *ḥaḍar* villages lay in their agricultural produce and irrigation method. The village of Minyat al-Usquf mainly cultivated cash-crops and was therefore dependent on perennial irrigation, while the *badw* village of Saylah grew cereals and was dependent on seasonal inundation. The villagers of Minyat al-Usquf, like the other predominantly *ḥaḍar* villages in the Fayyum, did not cultivate wheat or barley at all, but only cash-crops, especially vegetables, fruits, and sugar-cane. The correlation between the *badw* villages and cereal growing may suggest that tribal social organization was linked to the organization of cereal cultivation, and, especially, to the local irrigation system.[39] In cereal-growing villages, the amount of arable land was subject to drastic annual fluctuations, and the peasants may have looked for ways of sharing the risk of a low Nile level. As late as the eighteenth century, cereal-growing villagers in

[35]Ibid., 46, ll. 17–18. The village is listed as one of the settlements of the Banū Jawwāb (ibid., 13, l. 7).

[36]Ibid., 69, ll. 11–12.

[37]Ibid., 145–46.

[38]Ibid., 145, l. 22. But in another place al-Nābulusī states that it is the Banū Rabīʻah who are the guardsmen of the village (ibid., 13, l. 18). This may be a copying or editing mistake.

[39]On the possible correlation between tribal segmentation and collective land management, see Scott Atran, "Hamula organization and *mashāʻ* tenure in Palestine," *Man* 26 (1986). Alternatively, it has been argued that tribal segmentation emerges when the irrigation system is local and not based on one large waterway (Thomas F. Glick, *From Muslim Fortress to Christian Castle: Social and Cultural Change in Medieval Spain* [Manchester, 1995]).

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Upper Egypt redistributed the village lands annually, according to the tillage rights of individual households or clans, with the aim of equalizing the effects of a bad harvest.[40] Indeed, according to an anecdote told by al-Nābulusī, the lands of the village of Saylah were redistributed periodically among the cultivators.[41] In the *ḥaḍar* villages that relied on perennial irrigation such collective management of production would not have been necessary.

The second major difference was that the inhabitants of Minyat al-Usquf were predominantly Christians while the *badw* villagers of Saylah were predominantly Muslim. All in all, 1,142 adult non-Muslim men were registered as living in the province of the Fayyum.[42] Of these, about half lived in eight predominantly Christian *ḥaḍar* villages, which accounted for less than 10% of the total number of villages in the province.[43] The Christian *ḥaḍar* inhabitants of these villages were the only people in rural Fayyum without tribal affiliation or claim to Arab genealogy, the only ones excluded from the otherwise all-encompassing *badw* identity. In addition, about five hundred Christian men liable for the poll-tax were unevenly spread among the far more numerous *badw* villages, at an average of about five per village. In Saylah, for example, ten adult non-Muslim men and their families lived in the midst of the Muslim *badw* majority.

Unlike the *ḥaḍarī*s, the *badw* had the right to bear arms, a privilege obviously reserved to Muslims. Some of the Arab tribesmen must have been armed during peacetime, since we are told that Arab tribesmen guarded, and possibly harassed, the few Christian *ḥaḍar* villages.[44] Al-Nābulusī also tells us that the Arab tribes of

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[40]Kenneth Cuno, *The Pasha's Peasants: Land, Society, and Economy in Lower Egypt, 1740–1858* (Cambridge, 1992), 66; idem, "Origins of Private Ownership of Land in Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980): 246. Poliak has already suggested that village lands were periodically redistributed in the Mamluk period, but on rather slim evidence ("Some Notes on the Feudal System of the Mamluks," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* [1937]: 104–5).

[41]Al-Nābulusī relates, in the context of an anecdote about a locality in Saylah allegedly blessed by the Prophet Jacob, that "whenever this plot of land falls in someone's field through distribution *(bi-al-qismah),* the yield of the field increases by 100 *irdabb*s" (*Tārīkh al-Fayyūm,* 114). I take this sentence to mean that the same plot of land rotated between different cultivators according to some form of a periodic draw.

[42]But about a quarter of these 1,142 non-Muslim men were regarded as absentees *(nā'ūn),* that is, men who left their original village and now dwelled in another village, either in the Fayyum or in another province. On this fiscal category of absentees, see also al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab,* 8:244.

[43]Apart from the five villages already mentioned (Abū Kisā, Bājah, Bamūyah, Minyat al-Usquf, and Munsha'at Awlād 'Arafah), other predominantly Christian and *ḥaḍar* villages were Dimashqyan al-Baṣal, Sinnūris and Dhāt al-Ṣafā'.

[44]Qalāwūn's memorandum to Kitbughā, dated 679/1281, specifically prohibits the *'urbān* from carrying weapons of any kind when traveling from village to village (Sato, *State and Rural*

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the Fayyum were required to provide 400 cavalry for royal campaigns, forces that were naturally aligned according to tribal lines.[45] Again, it should be emphasized that the Arab tribesmen of the Fayyum lived, for the most part, in settled communities. Al-Nābulusī´s fundamental dichotomy of *badw* and *ḥaḍar* is not between nomads and settled cultivators, not between the desert and the sown, but rather between Muslim tribesmen and non-Muslims. It therefore follows that the right to carry arms and to participate in royal campaigns was not confined to nomads, but was associated with the Islamic and *badw* identity of the rural population of the Fayyum.[46]

Al-Nābulusī´s dichotomy of Christian *ḥaḍar* and Muslim *badw* meant that not only were all the *badw* Muslims, but, more surprisingly, all the Muslims were *badw*—a demographic situation which could not have been purely the result of settlement by nomadic tribes coming from the Arabian Peninsula. According to medieval Islamic historiography, the Arab tribes that participated in the Muslim conquests spread all over the Islamic world, from the lands of the Turks to Andalusia and West Africa.[47] The tribesmen of the Banū Kilāb, the dominant tribe in the Fayyum, were supposedly the descendants of a small clan that lived in the outskirts of Medina. Some of them had migrated to Egypt in the early second/eighth century, and others to Syria.[48] We are also told that the remoteness of the Fayyum laid it open to raids by Arab and Berber tribes, and that the associated phenomenon of the sedentarization of nomads has been recurrent in the province up to modern times.[49] But if we are to believe that the entire Muslim population of al-Nābulusī´s Fayyum was indeed descended from the Arab tribes that migrated from the Arabian Peninsula, we must wonder about the fate of the indigenous population. We are not dealing here with one single village in which the nomads have chased away

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Society, 113, citing Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt,* ed. C. Zurayq [Beirut, 1936–42], 7:196–200). But such a prohibition suggests that it was not uncommon for Arab tribesmen to travel armed.

[45]Al-Nābulusī, *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm,* 177–78. Sato assumes that the Arabs were required to provide these troops in return for an *iqṭā‘* (*State and Rural Society,* 53), but there is no specific mention of such an *iqṭā‘* in al-Nābulusī´s text.

[46]As Talal Asad reminds us, there is no reason to think that nomads would always be militarily more powerful than sedentary populations. The history of Islam abounds with examples of sedentary populations dominating over nomadic groups, starting with the early Islamic community itself (Talal Asad, "The Bedouin as a Military Force: Notes on Some Aspects of Power Relations between Nomads and Sedentaries in Historical Perspective," in *The Desert and the Sown: Nomads in the Wider Society,* ed. Cynthia Nelson [Berkeley, 1973], 61–71).

[47]See, for example, al-Qalqashandī, *Qalā'id,* 19.

[48]Ibid., 117. In his other treatise on tribal genealogies al-Qalqashandī is not certain whether the Aleppine Banū Kilāb have the same ancestry as Egyptian tribes of the same name (*Nihāyat al-Arab,* 365).

[49]P. M. Holt, "Al-Fayyūm," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed., 2:872–73.

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the original cultivators, or with nomads settling on the margins of the cultivated areas, but rather with an entire province. A massive settlement of nomads should have been a cataclysmic event, on the scale of the Hilalian invasion of North Africa. Strangely enough, the process in which a small tribal group came to represent the vast majority in the Fayyum has not left any historical record of violent dispossession or mass exodus.[50]

The only plausible explanation for the concurrent Islamization and bedouinization of the province of Fayyum is that conversion to Islam was accompanied by the assumption of a bedouin tribal identity. Al-Nābulusī actually tells us that the *badw* Muslim villages stood at the same sites as the formerly Christian villages. Even if some villages on the edges of the Fayyum were deserted in late antiquity, the province as a whole was never abandoned by its cultivators.[51] The *badw* Muslim village of Saylah was located in precisely the same place in which the Christian village of Saylah, a center of Coptic Christianity, used to stand.[52] According to al-Nābulusī, as many as forty churches used to serve the village of Saylah alone, although only one church and one monastery remained when he surveyed the village. In fact, remains of the Christian past were everywhere evident in the *badw* Muslim villages of the Fayyum.[53] Therefore, it seems likely that the Christian cultivators gradually took over, not only the Muslim religion and Arabic language of the conquerors, but also their tribal social organization and *badw* identity.[54] We must therefore conclude that most of the villagers of the

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[50]See also the remarks of Saleh, who has made an earnest attempt to chronicle the migrations of the Arab tribes to Egypt, but concludes that in most cases the history of their settlement remains obscure ("Les migrations").

[51]On the desertion of villages in the Fayyum in late Antiquity, see Keenan, "Fayyum Agriculture," 288, and the sources cited there. For models linking sedentarization of Arab tribes with Islamization, see Nehemia Levtzion, "Towards a Comparative Study of Islamization," in *Conversion to Islam,* ed. idem (London, 1979), 1–23; and more recently, in the context of Crusader Palestine, Roni Ellenblum, *Frankish Rural Settlement in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge, 1998), 263–68. For criticisms of this approach, see remarks by Tarif Khalidi, "Tribal Settlement in Early Medieval Palestine," in *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East,* ed. idem (Beirut, 1984), 181–89; Jeremy Johns, "The *Longue Durée*: State and Settlement Strategies in Southern Transjordan Across the Islamic Centuries," in *Village, Steppe and State: The Social Origins of Modern Jordan,* ed. Eugene L. Rogan and Tariq Tell (London, 1994), 1–31.

[52]On Saylah as one of the centers of the Coptic Church in the Fayyum, see Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Armanī, *Churches and Monasteries,* 209.

[53]Also noted by Sato, *State and Rural Society,* 182.

[54]The process of conversion in early Islamic Fayyum is the subject of a current Ph.D. thesis entitled "Arabization and Islamization in the Countryside of Early Medieval Egypt: The Fayyum District, 640–1036," by Lennart Sundelin at Princeton University. I am grateful to Lennart for sharing with me his preliminary results.

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Fayyum were holding on to an identity derived from a fictitious account of their ancestry. It is crucial for our understanding of tribal identity in the Mamluk period, and for our perception of Arab resistance to Mamluk authority, that the nomadic past claimed by the Arab tribesmen was imagined, not real.

In the year 701/1301, as the contemporary Mamluk chronicler and bureaucrat al-Nuwayrī tells us, the harm caused by the *ʻurbān* of Upper Egypt had reached unacceptable levels:

> They resorted to highway robbery, and imposed on the merchants and the artisans in Assiut and Manafalūṭ a tax similar to the *jāliyah* [the common term for the poll-tax imposed on non-Muslims]. They defied the authority of the local governors, and prevented the payment of the agricultural *kharāj* taxes. Their leaders called themselves by the names of [the Mamluk] amirs, one calling himself Baybars and another calling himself Sallār. They armed themselves and released all prisoners incarcerated in jails. Seeing that, the amirs called upon the qadis and the jurists, and asked their opinion on the permissibility of waging battle against [the *ʻurbān*], and the [jurists] gave a *fatwá* to that effect.[55]

The Arab revolt, according to al-Nuwayrī´s account, was about reversing the relations of power between city and countryside. On the one hand, the rebels prevented the payment of agricultural taxes, while on the other hand they siphoned back part of the income made by the local representatives of urban wealth, the merchants and the artisans. The revolt attempted to establish a local autonomous government ruled by tribal leaders who bore the titles of the Mamluk amirs, a mirror image of the central government in Cairo. But it was a topsy-turvy government, one in which the merchants and the artisans pay their taxes to the local population. Not incidentally, perhaps, the taxes imposed by this rebel government had a markedly religious connotation, as if non-Arabs were not true Muslims.[56]

The subsequent brutal suppression by the Mamluk forces leaves us in no doubt regarding the mass participation of peasants in this revolt. After thousands

[55]Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab,* 30:333, cited in al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 1:920.

[56]Similarly, in al-ʻAynī´s account of the revolt of Ibn Taghlab, the rebels are supposed to have collected a tax resembling the *jizyah* (the legal term for the poll-tax) from several provinces in Upper Egypt (al-ʻAynī, *ʻIqd al-Jumān,* 1:107).

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of Arabs were put to the sword, al-Nuwayrī reports that the Mamluk forces took 1,600 Arab captives, who were all cultivators of the land *(la-hum filāḥāt wa-zurū')*.[57] The booty was immense, including a substantial amount of agricultural products, such as oil taken from the local presses, and thousands of cows and oxen. Reportedly, the Mamluk armies could not find buyers for the enormous amounts of grain *(ghilāl)* they obtained during the suppression of the revolt. But when the troops returned north, they found the land empty:

> The troops made their way back on 16 Rajab (18 March 1302). [They found that] the land had become desolate, and one could walk and encounter no one on his way, or dwell in a village and see only women and small children. Then they decided to release the prisoners and let them go back, in order to sustain the land *(li-ḥifẓ al-bilād)*.[58] That year, an unusually large portion of Upper Egypt was sown, followed by a harvest so bountiful it could not be counted.[59]

Like the Arab tribesmen of the Fayyum, the majority of Arab rebels were peasants. Following the repression of the Arab revolt, the same Arab tribesmen who participated in the revolt, and who were killed or captured by the Mamluks, were now needed to cultivate the land. This passage has been noted by both Poliak and Saleh, who took it either as a sign of the close alliance between the peasants and the bedouins, or as an indication of the increasing settlement of the nomads. Even Garcin, who is generally keen to distinguish between the peasants and the bedouin, is bewildered by a revolt that evokes images of a French peasant *jacquerie*.[60] But in light of what we know of the Arab tribesmen of the Fayyum, the peasant participation in the revolt should not surprise us. If, as in the Fayyum, the vast majority of the Muslim peasantry had an Arab tribal identity, then their participation in an Arab revolt makes sense: the Arab revolts had an agricultural nature, as well as a peasant mass participation, simply because the Muslim peasants of Upper Egypt *were* Arabs.

All the large Arab revolts of the first Mamluk century had a predominantly agricultural nature. The first Arab revolt of 650/1252–53, erupting only seven

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[57] Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab,* 30:334, cited in al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 1:922; Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Nujūm,* 8:153; a slightly different wording in al-'Aynī, *'Iqd al-Jumān,* 4:176.

[58] Al-'Aynī, citing al-Yūsufī, has "li-ḥifẓ al-zirā'āt wa-al-sawāqī wa-ghayruhā" (*'Iqd al-Jumān,* 4:177).

[59] Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 1:922, l. 14.

[60] Garcin, "Note sur les rapports," 150.

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years after al-Nābulusī's survey, engulfed the entire Egyptian countryside, including the Arab tribes of the Fayyum. In this first revolt, as well as in the subsequent ones, the entrepots of grain levied as taxes and destined for Cairo were always targeted. Poliak also points out that the revolts were based in the Nile valley. The nomadic tribes of the desert, on the other hand, are never mentioned as taking part in the revolts.[61] Occasionally, Mamluk sources even appear to use the terms *fallāḥūn* and *'urbān* interchangeably. Thus, after the suppression of the revolt of Ibn al-Aḥdab in 754/1354, the amir Shaykhū is reported to have severed the head of any peasant who pronounced the letter *qāf* in the manner of the Arabs, and went on to kill many *'urbān* and *fallāḥūn*. Later that year, Ibn Iyās tells us, the sultan decreed that no *fallāḥ* should ride a horse or carry a weapon.[62] Similarly, during the suppression of the 701/1301 revolt, a punitive mission led by Sunqur al-A'sar confiscated all the horses of the *fallāḥ*s and the *badw*. According to al-Nuwayrī, the result of this punitive mission was that the *fallāḥ*s were subjugated, and handed over the *kharāj* taxes.[63]

But it would be wrong to equate the Arab tribesmen with a sedentary life-style in the same way as it is wrong to equate them with a nomadic life-style. Both nomads and peasants participated in the revolts, and both were considered to have had an Arab *badw* identity. It is likely that those Arab tribesmen who protected the roads and provided horses for the royal post *(barīd)* were predominantly nomadic.[64] The lists of booty captured by the Mamluk armies during the consecutive suppressions of the Arab revolts suggest that some of the rebels subsisted on animal husbandry, and in particular on camel-herding. Even after the revolt of 701/1301, for which the Mamluk sources most explicitly indicate mass peasant participation, we are told that the Mamluk army confiscated 80,000 head of cattle, 4,000 horses, and 33,000 camels.[65] The involvement of the nomads in the revolts does not exclude the involvement of peasants; these were Arab rebellions, undertaken by Muslim peasants and nomads who subscribed to an Arab tribal identity.

This Arab identity is best captured by the word *'urbān,* a term that distinguished the Arab tribes of Mamluk Egypt and Syria from the pure Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula. Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī (d. 749/1349), who devoted a long chapter to

[61]Poliak, "Les revoltes populaires," 259.

[62]Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr fī Waqā'i' al-Duhūr,* ed. M. Muṣṭafá, H. Roemer, and H. Ritter (Cairo and Wiesbaden, 1960–63), 1:550–51.

[63]Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 1:914.

[64]See, among other sources, Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār,* 69; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 3:454, 4:211, 13:198; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab,* 8:201; Sato, *State and Rural Society,* 95, 98; Saleh, "Les relations."

[65]Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk,* 1:922.

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the Arab tribes in his geographical work *Masālik al-Abṣār,* makes a consistent distinction between the original *'arab,* or Arabs, and the contemporary Arab tribes, "the *'urbān* found in our time."[66] In al-'Umarī's view, the *'urbān* are those who claim Arab descent and who subscribe to the values of the nomadic life-style, even if they no longer practice it.[67] While al-'Umarī eulogizes the nomadic way of life,[68] he nonetheless acknowledges that many Syrian tribes have settled down. These tribes, he says, were originally Arab but are no longer so, as they became *ḥaḍarī*s, settled people who cultivate agriculture.[69] The list that follows is organized by localities, each locality with its tribal inhabitants. Among the places mentioned are the cities of Gaza, Hebron, Jerusalem, Nablus, 'Ajlān, Adhru'āt, Ḥimṣ, Ḥamāh and Shayzar. By the end of the long list, which al-'Umarī admits to be incomplete, it is clear that much of the Syrian peasantry claimed Arab origins.[70]

In Egypt, according to al-'Umarī, almost all the *'urbān* were settled cultivators. The Banū al-Zubayr, who dwelled in the province of al-Bahnasā, are described as submissive artisans and peasants.[71] The five sections of the Banū Sa'd of the Judhām mostly practiced agriculture and husbandry. The Banū 'Abd al-Ẓāhir were a lineage of scribes.[72] In his administrative work *Al-Ta'rīf,* al-'Umarī claims that only the Arabs of the western province of al-Buḥayrah have the true traits and mores of Arabs, because these tribes were truly nomadic and traveled as far as al-Qayrawān and Gabes. He also singles out the Arabs of the province of al-Sharqīyah as having special status in the eyes of the sultan.[73] In these two provinces of Lower Egypt, in which the land is more suitable for grazing than for intensive agriculture, the Arab tribes undertook the defense of their own districts, unlike the other provinces, where the *'urbān* were only responsible for maintaining the roads.[74] But the rest of the Arab tribes are not held in great respect, because:

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[66]This distinction was apparently drawn from al-Ḥamdānī's thirteenth-century treatise, now lost (Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār,* 71, 157).

[67]Ibid., 69.

[68]Ibid., 35, 124–36.

[69]"Wa-bi-al-Shām min ṣalībat al-'arab qad kharajū bi-hā 'an ḥukm al-'arab wa-ṣārū bi-hā ahl ḥāḍirah sākinah wa-'ummār diyār kaṭinah" (ibid., 154).

[70]Ibid., 154–55. On the diversity of bedouin economy in Syria see also Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ,* ed. J. H. Kramers (Paris, 1964), 222.

[71]Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār,* 160–62. Also in al-Maqrīzī, *Bayān,* 41; al-Qalqashandī, *Qalā'id,* 148.

[72]Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār,* 174; al-Maqrīzī, *Bayān,* 23. The chronicler and bureaucrat Ibn 'Abd al-Ẓāhir belonged to this lineage.

[73]Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, *Al-Ta'rīf bi-al-Muṣṭalaḥ al-Sharīf* (Cairo, 1312), 70; cited in al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 7:160. See also Saleh, "Les relations," 367.

[74]Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab,* 8:201; al-Maqrīzī, *Bayān,* 44. See also Sato, *State and Rural*

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> They [the Arab tribes of Egypt] are sedentary people who sow their lands, who do not travel between the highlands and the plains or between Syria and Iraq, as they do in the Arabian peninsula, and who do not venture beyond the limits of their fences.[75]

While al-ʿUmarī noticed the discrepancy between the reality of the sedentary subsistence on the one hand and the Arab genealogy on the other, he nonetheless considered the Arab peasantry as part of the *ʿurbān*. Like the word *muslimān,* distinguishing between recent converts and ″true″ Muslims, the term *ʿurbān* served to distinguish between the pure Arabs of the legendary past and the mundane contemporary existence of Arab tribesmen, who did not necessarily live up to the notions of true Arab-ness.[76] The sedentary life of the Arab tribesmen of the Fayyum was therefore not an exception, but rather the rule in most Egyptian provinces along the Nile valley. Al-ʿUmarī′s account suggests that it was particularly so in Upper and Middle Egypt, the centers of the great Arab revolts. Al-Nābulusī′s tax records for the *badw* cereal-growers of the Fayyum are thus in complete accordance with the mass participation of peasants in the revolts, and are further corroborated by the explicit authority of al-ʿUmarī, our main contemporary source concerning the Mamluk *ʿurbān.*

If the Fayyum was indeed representative of Middle and Upper Egypt in general, this would imply not only that most *ʿurbān* were peasants, but also that the vast majority of the peasants were *ʿurbān.* As we recall, in al-Nābulusī′s Fayyum all the Muslim peasants were also members of an Arab tribe. Modern scholars have always assumed that the Arab tribes lived as a minority amongst a sea of Egyptian peasants, or *fallāḥūn*. But, as Sato noted in his study of Mamluk rural society, the term *fallāḥ* is seldom used in Mamluk sources of this period.[77] In administrative works, including *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm,* the peasants are usually called *muzāriʿūn,* a fiscal and legal category derived from the *muzāraʿah,* the standard share-cropping

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Society, 98; Saleh, ″Les migrations,″ 14.

[75]″. . . li-mā kānū ahl ḥāḍirah wa-zarʿ laysa minhum man yunjidu wa-lā yuthimu wa-lā yuʿriqu wa-lā yushʾamu wa-lā yakhrijūna ʿan ḥudūd al-judrān″ (Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Al-Taʿrīf,* 70; cited in al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 7:160).

[76]The term *ʿurbān* would appear to have some derogatory connotation, as suggested by Garcin (*Qūṣ,* 362). On the use of the term *muslimān* in the Mamluk period, see Bernadette Martel-Thoumian, ″Le converti à travers quelques écrits historiques du IXe/XVe siècle,″ in *Proceedings of the Eighteenth Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants*: *Law, Christianity and Modernism in Islamic Society,* ed. U. Vermeulen and J. M. F. Van Reeth (Leuven, 1998), 171–84. I owe this reference to Tamer el-Leithy.

[77]Sato, *State and Rural Society,* 185.

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contract in Islamic law. In the chronicles, the term *fallāḥ* is almost never used, except with regard to irrigation works,[78] and, as mentioned above, in association with the term *'urbān.* The Arab identity of the Egyptian peasant can provide a simple explanation for the mysterious silence of the Mamluk sources regarding the *fallāḥ:* the term *muzāri'* defined the peasant's fiscal obligations, the term *fallāḥ* defined his professional activity of cultivating the land, and the term *'urbān* defined his social tribal allegiance and his political agency. The three terms referred to different aspects of the life of the Arab peasantry of Egypt.

However, as with al-Nābulusī's Fayyum, if most of the Egyptian peasants were *'urbān,* it is historically impossible that all were the offspring of the Arab conquerors. In works devoted to tribal genealogy, medieval writers such as al-'Umarī explained the *badw* character of the Egyptian peasant by the settling down of nomadic tribes coming from the Arabian Peninsula. But works of tribal genealogy were compiled with a purpose. Al-'Umarī was interested in highlighting the lineage of his own tribe, and devoted a treatise, now lost, to extolling its virtues. He is very sympathetic to the tribes, glorifying their role in the defense of the Mamluk domains from foreign enemies. His account is as close as we get to the Arab tribesmen's view of themselves, an exercise in propaganda in which genealogical claims play a major role.[79] It would therefore be a mistake to read his text for what it is not. Al-'Umarī's tribal genealogies, in which a seemingly endless reservoir of Arab tribes are constantly migrating and settling down in the Egyptian countryside, hold little historical value. Such tribal histories, which invariably include the migration of distant ancestors to the site of the current settlement, are still found in peasant communities of the Middle East. The tribal histories of Tunisian village communities, for example, would have us believe that the country was first inhabited in the fifteenth century. Therefore, as Lucette Valensi points out, "genealogy reveals itself not as an account of the past, but as an allegory of the present, a translation of political, religious and matrimonial practices."[80]

The claim to Arab descent by the Muslim villagers of Upper and Middle Egypt must be understood as an attempt to negotiate the present rather than as a

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[78] Ibid., 224–25, 230, and the sources cited there. See, for example, al-Maqrīzī's account of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's public works of 723/1323, when the amirs were ordered to bring the *fallāḥ*s of their lands to help in the construction of a dike (*Kitāb al-Mawā'iẓ wa-al-I'tibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār al-Ma'rūf bi-al-Khiṭaṭ al-Maqrīzīyah,* ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr [Beirut, 1998], 3:294).

[79] On the pro-Arab inclination of al-'Umarī, see Dorothea Krawulsky, "Introduction," in al-'Umarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār,* 29, 59–60.

[80] Lucette Valensi, *Tunisian Peasants in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,* trans. B. Archer (Cambridge and Paris, 1985), 57. See also E. Peters, "The Proliferation of Segments in the Lineage of the Bedouin of Cyrenaica," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institut*e 90 (1960): 29–53.

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factual narrative of the past, a move that has many parallels in medieval Islam. Michael Brett suggests that the Banū Hilāl invasion of North Africa was not a real event, but a myth perpetuated by sedentary Banū Hilāl tribesmen to establish themselves as a class of warriors, part of the elite and not of the commoners. He concludes that the Banū Hilāl epos emerged as an attempt to "modify the realities of the past in order to meet the exigencies of the present."[81] Even more pertinent are the attempts of fourteenth-century North African Berber converts to produce Muslim genealogies that extended to earlier dates than those of their conversion.[82] Last but not least, claims of sharifian descent going back to the Prophet Muḥammad were likewise a means of securing material and social privileges. Medieval Muslim societies made some attempts to regulate the genealogical claims to Prophetic descent, most notably through the institution of *niqābat al-ashrāf,* but they were not always successful. At least one fourteenth-century *naqīb al-ashrāf* was found guilty of selling the entitlement to sharifian status in return for bribes, and there are quite a few other examples from Islamic history.[83]

A claim to bedouin identity and lineage provided the villagers of Mamluk Egypt with a language of rights—both to the land and to its dominant religion. Rather then being viewed as the descendants of Coptic converts, the *badw* identity meant a pride of place within the Muslim community. And rather than being regarded as lowly tax-paying peasants, the claim to an Arab descent was also a claim to the values of an imaginary nomadic past, in particular to the independence and the equality of the nomadic tribe. By adopting an ideology of lineage or of bedouin-ness, the rural communities found a sense of superiority in Islam and nostalgia for the autonomy of a nomadic past. The tribal genealogies preserved in the work of al-ʿUmarī, and later reproduced by al-Maqrīzī and al-Qalqashandī, were the product of a purposeful attempt to re-align local identity within the dominant culture.

Moreover, bedouin-ness was also an empowering ideology that could nourish armed resistance. The claim to Arab descent and nomadic past may also be a means of justifying revolt against the state and its tax-collectors. In our *badw* village of Saylah, where a significant proportion of the crops would have been taken away by royal officials like al-Nābulusī, a revolt led by the *sharīf* Ḥiṣn

[81]Michael Brett, "The Way of the Nomad," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 58 (1995): 265. Brett does not, however, doubt the claims of the Banū Hilāl to a nomadic past.

[82]Maya Shatzmiller, "Une source méconnu de l'histoire des Bérbèrs : Le *Kitab al-ansab li-abi Hayyan*," *Arabica* 30 (1983), esp. 73–80, and idem, "Le mythe d'origine bèrbere—aspects historiographiques et sociaux," *Revue de l'occident musulman* 35 (1983): 145–55. I owe these references to Tamer el-Leithy.

[83]Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-Ghumr bi-Abnāʾ al-ʿUmr* (Beirut, 1967–75), 1:39. See also C. van Arendonk- [W. A. Graham], "Sharīf," *EI*^{2}, 9:329–37.

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al-Dīn ibn Taghlab would have made an impact. Resistance to taxation and to the local bureaucracy would have found an outlet through the *sharīf*'s alleged descent from the Prophet, the local community's pride in its Arab lineage, and its adherence to the bedouin ideal of autonomy. Set against a Mamluk elite composed of newcomers both to Egypt and to Islam, the *sharīf* evoked the value of lineage as well as the rights of the indigenous communities. As we remember, scorning the rule of the Turkish slaves, Ḥiṣn al-Dīn claimed that the Arab tribes were "the true owners of the land."

In *Tārīkh al-Fayyūm wa-Bilādihi*, al-Nābulusī provides us with a singular eye-witness account of social and economic life in a medieval Egyptian province; we should listen to him very carefully. In particular, al-Nābulusī divides the population of the Fayyum into the Khaldūnian categories of *badw* and *ḥaḍar,* and tells us that almost the entire population of the Fayyum was *badw*. From the fiscal part of his survey we learn that the *badw* tribesmen lived, for the most part, in sedentary cereal-growing villages, which were dependent on seasonal inundation. The few *ḥaḍar* villages, on the other hand, cultivated cash-crops and were dependent on perennial irrigation. Moreover, the inhabitants of the *ḥaḍarī* villages were predominantly Christians while the *badw* villages were predominantly Muslim. Al-Nābulusī's dichotomy of Christian *ḥaḍar* and Muslim *badw* meant that not only were all the *badw* Muslims, but, more surprisingly, all the Muslims were *badw*. I have argued that the only plausible explanation for this demographic situation is that conversion to Islam by the indigenous Christian population was accompanied by the assumption of a *badw* tribal identity.

Like the Arab tribesmen of the Fayyum, the majority of the tribesmen who took part in the large Arab revolts of the Mamluk period were peasants. Moreover, it seems that, as in the Fayyum, most of the Muslim peasantry in the Egyptian countryside had an Arab tribal identity. This Arab identity is best captured by the term *ʿurbān,* which was meant to distinguish the Mamluk tribesmen from the truly Arab tribes of the Arabian Peninsula. Unlike the original Arabs, most of the *ʿurbān* lived a sedentary existence, but still claimed Arab descent and subscribed to the values of the nomadic life-style. These claims, transmitted to us in several genealogical works composed in the Mamluk period, hold very little historical value. It is quite impossible that a large portion of the Egyptian peasantry were the descendants of a few tribal clans who arrived following the Muslim conquest. Rather, the claim to Arab descent by the Muslim inhabitants of rural Egypt must be understood as an attempt to negotiate the present. Bedouin-ness, that is the memories of an (invented) nomadic past of independence and the pride in an (alleged) lineage in Islam, was an ideological antidote to the lowly status of the

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bulk of the cereal-growing Egyptian peasantry. And when the opportunity was ripe, it was also a rallying cry for revolt.

The findings of this article are limited to the first century of Mamluk rule in Egypt. Arguably, by limiting my discussion to this early period, I have ignored the wealth of historical evidence regarding the increasing political influence of the tribes in the fifteenth century. In particular, I have not discussed the fifteenth-century reports of bedouin violence towards the peasantry, especially in Lower Egypt.[84] I would argue, however, that the outbreak of the plague in the middle of the fourteenth century is an appropriate cut-off point for a study of the rural communities of Egypt. The Black Death brought about radical demographic, economic, and social changes to Egyptian rural society, changes whose nature we are just beginning to understand. The tribesmen of al-Nābulusī's Fayyum inhabited a world very different from that of their descendants two centuries later. Since Arab and bedouin identities were not fixed or natural, but rather assumed and cultural, the definition of bedouin-ness must have shifted through the ages. Undoubtedly, there is still detailed research to be done on the place of the Arab tribesmen in Mamluk society. But this research must acknowledge that the Arab tribes represented a significant portion of the Egyptian population, if not an outright majority; and that they should be at the center, rather than at the margins, of Mamluk historiography.

[84]For a summary, see Jean-Claude Garcin, "The Regime of the Circassian Mamlūks," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 1, *Islamic Egypt, 640–1517*, ed. Carl Petry (Cambridge and New York, 1998), 290–317.

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