

The Tribe as a Unit of Subsistence: Nomadic Pastoralism in the Middle East

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Among Middle Eastern pastoral nomads some "tribes" can best be described as "units of subsistence": they exploit an area providing multiannual subsistence. Tribesmen sometimes control this area; more usually they control part of it and share the rest with other nomads and with settled people. Small corporate groups afford the tribesman security and, through genealogical links, mediate his formal membership of the tribe. The unit of subsistence is articulated mainly by networks of institutionalized relationships. Corporate groups join forces only for defense, and then their alliances cut across tribal lines. Under external pressure the unit of subsistence may develop formal leadership and a small standing militia. This administrative setup is in the literature often associated with the corporate groups and called "tribe." While coexisting with a unit of subsistence, this "tribe" is not necessarily identical with it in area or population. [ecology, genealogies, Middle East, pastoral nomads, tribe]

THE TRIBE is among the most frequently used terms in anthropology, and its definitions abound.¹ Some anthropologists have concluded that they could dispense with definitions; others feel that the term serves no useful purpose and should be abandoned.² Yet Fried's (1968) and Dole's (1968) surveys of the literature reveal only two dominant themes in the definitions: the tribe is usually treated both as a cultural and linguistic unit, and as a kind of political unit. Both themes can be traced back to Morgan (1877:102-103). To judge from the contributions to the symposium *Essays on the Problem of Tribe* (Helm 1968), nearly a century of anthropological research has had a limited impact on the definitions. Most of the participants in the symposium still define the tribe in cultural and political terms, some of them stressing one and some the other aspect, hardly ever coming down unequivocally on one side. There also appears to be a consensus among most writers, here and elsewhere, that the tribe is, among other things, a not too centralized political organization that controls a territory, and perhaps other resources as well.³ Even Fried (1968) and Colson (1968), who seem to dismiss old definitions and to advocate a new one, are no exception to the rule. Their claim that tribes are "the products of processes stimulated by the appearance of relatively highly organized societies amidst other societies which are organized more simply" (Fried 1968:15, and similarly Colson 1968:202) brings them squarely into the camp of anthropologists who define the tribe as a type of political organization; they only believe that the tribe, as they use the concept, did not exist before the colonial regimes came on the scene.

Some of the scholars who wrote on the problem, among them Morgan, added several criteria to those of cultural and political unity; a human aggregate had to fulfill these before it could qualify as a tribe. One example is Southall (1970:28) who defines the tribe as "a whole society, with a high degree of self-sufficiency at a near subsistence level, based on a relatively simple technology, without writing or literature. . . with its own distinctive language, culture and sense of identity. . . [and] tribal religion." This definition makes so many demands that it is unlikely to fit many real social entities. It is noteworthy for its

emphasis on economic autarky, and it is in this direction that I wish to move. I do not intend to do away with existing definitions. I wish rather to draw attention to a facet of social organization found among nomadic pastoralists in the Middle East to whom the epithet "tribal societies" is usually applied, which I believe has not been clearly identified hitherto. A comparative study of these societies (Marx 1973) showed that they had subsistence units, areas they traversed in annual movement cycles. To part of this area at least they had undisputed access—and this constituted their "territory"—even while it occasionally could be used by others as well. These entities had a political organization, but did not necessarily have corporate groups corresponding to their territory or a leadership. These units could not only be identified by anthropologists, they were also recognized by their members. They did not always employ specific terms to identify the territorial units; instead, they often used the terms for corporate descent groups, such as *ashirah*, *fand*, or *qabilah*. People who tend to view their society as a homologous series of agnatic descent groups could be expected not to make an exception in this case. These units are, however, named after male or female ancestors.

To put the argument in a nutshell, I contend that, at least for the nomadic pastoralists of the Middle East, the tribe can be viewed as a unit of subsistence. It refers both to a defined "territory" controlled by the tribesmen, and to additional areas used by them for subsistence. These "areas of subsistence" are not necessarily used exclusively by members of the tribe, and some areas may actually be controlled by others. The exploitation of pasture and water in an area of subsistence requires a complex system of regulation extending from end to end. This is achieved in many cases by multiple close-knit networks of personal relationships that are coextensive with the territory controlled by tribesmen, and not so much by sets of corporate groups which have too often been viewed as the organizational backbone of the tribe. Whether a tribe is a corporate unit and possesses a central leadership or not are questions of intrinsic interest, but these should not obscure the fundamental point, that tribes can function in the absence of these political institutions. In this sense, Southall's (1970:29) claim that "no tribal society which has lost its political autonomy can continue to be a tribal society in the full sense" is incorrect and may be misleading. I shall show that an overall corporate organization and central leadership are likely to develop when a tribe comes under the influence of neighboring polities.

More to the point is Southall's argument that economic alternatives are the tribe's ruin. Where secure employment is found outside the pastoral field, the maintenance of boundaries and control over access to territory becomes less important, and this may ultimately lead to a reorganization of tribesmen in other frameworks. Even economic alternatives found in the tribal territory result in the disruption of the tribe.

THE ECOLOGY OF PASTORAL NOMADISM

When discussing pastoral nomads, one does well to remember that the breeding of animals is not always the sole, or even the main, occupation of the nomads. Such people as the Negev Bedouin obtain a larger part of their livelihood from cultivation than from herding. Salzman (1971:186) is right in arguing that "the economies of most peoples are not based upon a single resource but rather upon multiple resources; this is just as true of so-called pastoral nomads." As long as the economic alternatives are insecure, and pastoralism serves as the economic base, these people are justly called pastoral nomads, even when in most years they obtain a relatively small part of their income from herds. The Negev Bedouin could not survive without their herds, because of frequent crop failures. These "pastoralists," moreover, take great pride in their herds and often regard them as the principal economic branch and as the mainstay of their culture and, incidentally, sometimes transmit this belief to the unsuspecting anthropologist.

The frequently heard assertion that nomadic pastoralism is an adaptation to an inclement environment should be qualified, for there is considerable ecological variety in the areas frequented by nomads. The soils in many parts of the Middle East, one authority assures us, "are relatively well supplied with nutrient elements other than nitrogen. . . The physical characteristics. . . are not of the best. Neither are they the worst possible" (Clawson et al. 1971:12). Where there is, in addition, an adequate supply of water and political conditions are favorable, the land could support a sedentary population capable of exploiting the resources more intensively than pastoralists. Only where water is seasonally in short supply does pastoral nomadism become inevitable.

One of the characteristics of the nomad's habitat is the rather sharp division of the year into rainy and dry seasons. In the rainy season the abundant supply of water often allows some of the nomads to cultivate land and stay for several months in one site, perhaps even to construct permanent dwellings (like the wealthier members of nomadic tribes in Southern Sinai), while others continue to move. This specialization may temporarily separate the members of a family, as among the Kababish (Asad 1970); the extreme example is probably that of the Turkana of East Africa whose households are for most of the year divided between two homesteads, one of which keeps the cattle and the other the camels and goats (Gulliver 1955). Or it may temporarily separate the households of a group, some of whom may opt for staying on their cultivated land and entrust their herds to households who decide to move with their animals, or to hired herdsmen, as among Bedouin of the Negev. In the dry season all these people revert to the nomadic way of life. Pastoralism thus requires its practitioners to become nomadic mainly during much of the dry season. People move in search of water. When the water reserves are exhausted in one place, they move to another site, usually in a fairly regular annual cycle, which may alter quite radically during droughts.

Most of these areas do not lack pasture during ordinary years. As the population grows and the herds increase—and sometimes this process is accompanied by an expansion of the settled population, which in itself causes a further decrease in pasture areas—the pasture also becomes a scarce commodity. Such changes are liable to end the nomadic way of life, since the continuous coordination of two scarce factors of production, neither of which has a substitute, is beyond the capability of the nomad. Even in regions which usually supply all the nomad's needs, such situations may occasionally arise and cause a crisis. Musil describes such a situation which caused the Rwala great consternation: "Hmar avowed that he had no memory of any such egregiously unfavorable season in thirty years. Where pasturage was abundant, water was absent, and where there was water, there was no pasturage" (1927:110).⁴

Shortage of water is due to inadequate rainfall and the many fluctuations therein. The pastoral nomad needs a minimal amount of rain even in areas of winter pastures and certainly in summer grazing grounds. The claim that he lives in almost arid zones ignores the basic fact that the whole area of his wanderings—and not only the region considered to be his undisputed tribal territory—must be regarded as one unit of living space. The data assembled in Table 1 indicate that in the nomad areas the annual average amount of rainfall does not drop below 100 mm. (4 in.) approximately and that nomad areas may include enclaves which are unquestionably suited for farming. An average annual precipitation of 900 mm. (36 in.), as reported for the Baqara, is however unusual. The most favorably endowed areas, such as this one, are likely to attract permanent settlement, and the nomads may have to relinquish direct control of them. Even the powerful Rwala enter settled country at the outskirts of Damascus toward the end of summer. At that time they are most susceptible to government demands. Today it is generally accepted that an average annual rainfall in excess of 250-400 mm. (10-12 in.) is a precondition for growing grain on a regular basis, unless specially favorable climatic, morphological, or soil conditions obtain. Regions

where rainfall is low but does not fall below 100 mm. (4 in.) per year can be cultivated on condition that there are water resources which are not directly dependent on rain, or can provide a living to men engaged in a combination of economic branches, e.g., cultivation, grazing, and hunting and who, by so doing, reduce the risk of becoming the victims of local droughts. Regions where rainfall is less than 100 mm. (4 in.) per year cannot support cultivators, and their inhabitants become entirely dependent on pastoralism. As the spring vegetation lasts for a short period, sometimes only a few weeks, they can be exploited economically only when they form part of a larger territory also comprising areas blessed with more abundant rainfalls.

TABLE 1. AVERAGE ANNUAL RAINFALL IN SOME NOMAD REGIONS
(IN MILLIMETERS)

Tribe/Region	Country	Dry Season Pastures	Rainy Season Pastures
Cyrenaica	Libya	200	50-100
Kababish	Sudan	200+	100
Zullam	Israel	200-400	100-200
Basseri	Iran	250	250
Baqara	Sudan	900	450

Sources:

Cyrenaica:	Evans-Pritchard (1949:30-32).
Kababish:	Asad (1970:13).
Zullam:	Marx (1967:20-21).
Basseri:	Barth (1961:3).
Baqara:	Cunnison (1966:13).

These norms may be modified by additional ecological factors such as the quality of the soil, the proximity to wells and roads, and the availability of other sources of income, all of which influence the possibilities of practical utilization of any particular region. Modern technology can, of course, overcome natural disadvantages, and erect a permanent settlement on a site where rainfall is sparse.

An annual rainfall of 100-200 mm. (4-8 in.), in the climatic conditions of the Middle East, not only moistens the soil in pastures and fills water holes and wells, but will also, in the "normally" dry years (those without severe drought), cover the temporary deficits in water than can result from irregularity of anticipated rain. This irregularity comprises annual fluctuations in quantity of rain, variations in distribution of rains during the season and in the intensity of each shower, constant differences in quantities of rainfall in various parts of the region caused, for instance, by its topography, and also the varying geographic distribution of rain from season to season. For example, in the Zullam region of the eastern Beersheva plain, average annual rainfall fluctuates between 200 mm. (8 in.) in the west and 120 mm. (4.8 in.) in the southeast, over a distance of only 35 km. (21.7 mi.). Annual fluctuations in rainfall are striking: the maximum registered in Beersheva was 336 mm. (13.44 in.) in 1933-34 and the minimum, 40 mm. (1.6 in.), in 1962-63. Even a year in which a normal quantity of rain falls can end in drought. This happened in the year 1960-61 in the Negev, when 185 mm. (7.4 in.) were measured; after the first rains in November, there was a pause for six weeks during which none of the autumn sowing germinated. In the

months of January and February there occurred heavy showers. As much impervious rock is found near the surface, most of the water ran off into the wadis and was not absorbed in the soil. Following these rains many Bedouin sowed their land a second time, but in March scorching east winds caused the second sowing to wither. Many Bedouin harvested only straw and no grain in that year.

Every year there are showers which cover areas of a few square kilometers and leave adjacent areas dry. One never knows where these rains will produce good pasture and where they will fill the waterholes.

In other regions, too, rainfall poses severe problems for the nomad. Musil describes how the seasonal fluctuations and the geographic distribution of rain make the life of the Bedouin difficult (1928:8-16) and force the Rwala tribe to operate an intelligence network to keep the sheikh informed on the state of pasture (e.g., Musil 1927:110). Doughty notes that a guest among the Bedouin is safe from the questions of those assembled in the tent until after he finishes the meal "... yet after some little discoursing between them as of the rain this year and the pasture, they may each commonly come to guess the other's tribe" (1937:624).⁵ Apparently these Bedouin have a keen interest in information on the distribution of rainfall, if questions about rain and pasture precede those on personal matters.

Another means by which nomads overcome the difficulties of coordinating their scarce resources is by conserving their late summer water supply and the adjacent pasture. They try to delay their advance on these last critical reserves as long as they can. This rule is respected by all the tribesmen so that only in late summer their herds and households slowly converge on the main well centers, and even then they try to keep the herds at a distance and bring them to the wells only for watering (Asad 1970:22; Musil 1927:351-353).

The main method by which the Middle Eastern nomad attempts to reduce the effects of irregular rainfall is by occupying a territory sufficiently large to partly cancel out the influence of geographic distribution and annual and seasonal fluctuation of rainfall and which will include areas with a regular supply of water. In such a territory he will find pasture and water for his herds throughout the seasons of the year and will even reserve an area to which he can retreat in the last hard days of summer. On principle, the extent of the tribal territory could be determined by the needs of one or several households and their herds. A larger population would not necessarily require more territory, for the extent of its migration would be governed by the same multiannual climatic patterns. A large population might only require more water and pasture in each locality covered in the annual migration.

The range of movements varies. In the Negev, the Bedouin range up to 60 km. (37.2 mi.), in Libya up to 100 km. (62 mi.). The Rwala appear to be the most widely ranging tribe, as they move up to 800 km. (496 mi.). The territory is not always large, for often a small area will supply all the resources needed by its nomadic population. The Jahalin and Ta'amrah tribes of the Judean desert usually range less than 20 km. (12.4 mi.) in their annual migration.

Middle Eastern pastoral nomadism is oriented to a market economy. Surplus animals are regularly exchanged for foodstuffs, clothing, etc. The pastoralist seeks to increase his herd; the more animals he sells, the better off he is. Therefore, he keeps the herd united and under his control. Baxter (1975) points out that this pattern contrasts with that practiced among East African pastoralists who subsist almost entirely from their herds and do not exchange animals for other products. There is no point in increasing their herds beyond an optimum size. They "split their herds and flocks and disperse them in different places, with different herdsmen... it is exceptional for animals to be individually owned" (1975:214). Dependence on markets, and thus on settled populations, is a characteristic of Middle Eastern nomads that has far-reaching consequences for their society.

CONTROL OF PASTURES AND LEADERSHIP

The Bedouin tribes of the Negev directly control only a part of their pastures, since the better areas have been settled in recent generations. The tribes of Libya and the Rwala control almost the whole range of their pastures. In order to overcome extreme fluctuations of rainfall, they were compelled to form big organizations which were strong enough to retain control over areas, parts of which were suitable for agricultural settlement. The occupation and protection of such a territory often requires an organization comprising a large number of men. Bedouin tribes in Libya fluctuate in size between 6,000 and 30,000; the Rwala confederation in the Syrian desert number 35,000 persons and some 350,000 camels.⁶ At the other extreme, the Jahalin tribe numbers less than 1,000. The 'Azazmah, a typical Negev tribe, had, up to 1948, 12,000 members. The Zullam tribe comprises about 5,000 members.

It might be argued that peoples such as the Rwala are political entities which over centuries occupied different territories. I concede that there is historical continuity, but would claim that the need to secure pasture and water during numerous seasons determined the size of the territory and the social organization of the people who adopted Wadi Sirhan as their habitat. There were, of course, Rwala before the tribe established itself in the Wadi Sirhan. It is known that they previously lived in northern Arabia together with other tribes of the 'Aneze Arabs and Doughty found even in his days tribesmen who remembered that they had in the past lived in the neighborhood of Khaibar (1937:377). It is probable that they moved to the new territory in the mid-18th century and drove before them the Mawali tribe (Oppenheim 1939-1968:I, 68-70; Ma'oz 1968:137). However, as sociologists we are not so much concerned with this proven historical continuity. The Rwala in the neighborhood of Khaibar lived in ecological conditions different from those of the Wadi Sirhan and the new area required a different kind of social organization and influenced every aspect of their culture. We know that even the historical traditions and genealogy of the tribe changed under the influence of their migration.⁷ The new Rwala tribe was a continuation of the old one in name only; climate and pasture, neighboring tribes, and governments were the factors that dictated to these men, who found their livelihood in the Wadi Sirhan, the form and scope of their political organization and the size of the territory which they were compelled to control. Membership in this organization gave each tribesman a formally equal right—that could not always be realized under equal conditions—to exploit the pasture and the water sources of the whole area.

That the tribe is mainly a territorial ecological organization becomes evident from the fact that it does not necessarily have a leader. The tribe or confederation is usually named after an ancestor, and this seems to imply unity and leadership. But then one realizes that often it has no acknowledged paramount chief and possesses no territorial center or locality in which the leaders of subunits could assemble. Unity exists primarily in the consciousness of its members to whom it is self-evident that their livelihood depends on their gaining free access to pastures, and whose networks of personal relationships often help them achieve this end. Whenever necessary, a number of leaders of the autonomous political groups—but rarely all of them—meet to discuss arrangements for grazing and coordinating exploitation of water sources. They often succeed in reaching agreement, but occasionally they also fail to agree, and then tribesmen rely only on their relationships.

One frequently finds that certain pastures are used by several tribes, each of which considers them to be in its territory. Jaussen, for example, reports that in the Kerak region during the summer a number of tribes pasture their herds together (1908:117). Each tribe retains the privilege of first access in the event of shortage; whether it is capable of safeguarding this right is a different question, and as Jaussen puts it: "the pastures are open to all the nomads, with a certain priority right to the tribe in whose territory they happen to be" (1908:240).

When observers of Bedouin and other pastoral societies define the tribal confederation as "a loose association of tribes" (see, for example, Shimoni 1947:13),⁸ they usually refer to a territorial unit such as described above. Such a unit may under certain circumstances develop political leadership and organs of government and the history of the Arabian Peninsula provides numerous examples of ephemeral Bedouin states which crumbled as rapidly as they appeared. When leadership arises in the tribe, its scope is very quickly likely to expand beyond the organization of pasture and water. Out of a desire to guarantee the tribe's livelihood, the leadership will attempt to gain control over other resources that are used by its members, such as supervision of transport routes and the caravan traffic, and of the market towns in which the nomads exchange their animals and produce for the products of the settlers and trade goods. In due course the leadership of the tribe moves to the occupied town, which then becomes the capital of a small kingdom (Rosenfeld 1965:79-85).

The need for pasture and water alone never brought about the rise of a strong tribal leadership, and certainly not the formation of a Bedouin state. The economic advantage of permanent and guaranteed control over territory does not weigh in Bedouin eyes against the burdens imposed by a central authority in the form of compulsory military service⁹ and payment of taxes. Doughty shows that although the annual tax collected by Ibn Rashid amounted only to "... eight or nine shillings for every household yet the free-born, forlorn and predatory Bedu grimly fret their hearts under these small burdens; the emir's custom is ever untimely, the exaction, they think, of a stronger and plain tyranny" (1937:394). Doughty immediately goes on to explain why the Bedouin are nevertheless ready to accept the burden of the ruler: "Yet yielding this tribute they become of the prince's federation and are sheltered from all hostility of the Aarab in front" (1937:394). So under the pressures of hostile neighbors, the Bedouin are compelled to seek the patronage of a ruler or to create for themselves a political association that can match that of their enemies. The source of these pressures is not in the Bedouin tribes, but in the permanent settlement, since only it can maintain comparatively large regular military forces. When the rulers or neighbors exerted constant military or administrative pressure on any group of tribes, they compelled it to organize within a large framework and brought about the development of aggressive leadership. This was necessary both for negotiation with the powers that be and for defense against attack.¹⁰

The tribesmen knew, of course, that it was beyond their power to match the government's military forces, but they could by these means prevent harassments and small punitive actions. The authorities had to realize that only serious military operations could take on the Bedouin. Whenever a Bedouin tribe instituted a more powerful tribal government, this brought about a chain reaction since it placed its neighbors in the position of having to make the awkward choice between creating another perhaps even stronger organization to combat the aggressive neighbor, joining other large tribes or seeking the protection of the government authorities. Whichever it was to be, the tribe merged in a bigger and stronger political framework.

This was the process undergone by the Rwala confederation in the 19th century due to pressure of the Ottoman authorities in Damascus on the one hand and the kingdom of Ibn Rashid in Hail on the other. The Rwala tribes range over the Wadi Sirhan, and thus at various times entered the sphere of influence of both rulers. Toward the end of the summer, they approached Damascus and were open to pressures from its ruler, whilst in the spring they reached the southern limits of their wanderings, Jauf and Taima, where they came under the influence of Ibn Rashid. In order to protect their independence the Rwala were compelled to join forces, thereby making the sheikhs of the Sha'alan family their leaders. Because of their seasonal dependence on the two rulers, the Rwala did not usually come down in support of either side, but kept up constant negotiations and intrigues with both.

These historical developments are illustrated by the history of Jauf. Musil records that "from about 1820 to 1853 the inhabitants of al-Gowf were tributary to the Rwala. Then the

oasis was seized by Talal eben Rašid" (1927:553). When the house of Ibn Rashid rose to power and, amongst other exploits, brought Jauf under their sway, they forced the Rwala to build up more concentrated power in order to protect their grazing grounds against encroachments. Therefore, we are told at about the same time that the Sha'alan family became the acknowledged leaders of all the Rwala tribes who until then had spent as much time fighting each other as fighting other groups (Musil 1928:57-58).

Even then the Sha'alan did not rule the Rwala, but became a focus of communication between their constituent tribes. They could coordinate migrations and other joint activities and, with the support of other leaders, could recruit forces for limited short-term military exploits. They owned up to a few dozen armed black slaves, but they never sought to establish a standing army and permanent control over territory beyond their grazing requirements. Even the two attempts of the Rwala to gain control of Jauf, the one in 1870 and the second in 1909, were not carried out on the initiative of the Rwala chiefs but, in the opinion of Philby (1955:228, 251), at the instigation of the Ottoman authorities. In the opinion of Musil, the second attempt was due to the private initiative of the Rwala chief's son.¹

The same phenomenon recurs, on a more modest scale, in the Negev. Here the Israeli military government confined the tribesmen to a closed area for the greater part of the year and all the inhabitants of the area became dependent on the economic resources available in it. The Bedouin remained subject to "indirect rule" by the chiefs of administrative "tribes," just as they had been under Ottoman and British rule. These chiefs were at one and the same time the heads of a coalition of small corporations of landowning tribesmen who jointly controlled part of the tribe's cultivable land, and representatives of government. Because many government activities were channeled through the chiefs, they became powerful leaders. The edge of this political organization was directed both against the government, to prevent it from encroaching on Bedouin land, and against the "peasants," landless Bedouin who earned a living as sharecroppers. Every peasant depended for his livelihood on the Bedouin landowners and knew that if he established strong political groups, this could not improve his economic lot. Nevertheless, the peasants were organized in minimal political groups similar to those of the Bedouin, since by doing so they could prevent unnecessary annoyances and react to Bedouin provocations (Marx 1967:77-80, 206-209).

Although in one respect there is a parallel between the Bedouin of the Negev and the tribes of North Arabia, they differ greatly in other matters. The ecological conditions of the Negev do not require such a large territorial organization as the Syrian desert and North Arabia. Furthermore, the territorial organization of the Negev Bedouin only extends over part of the regions which supply them with pasture and water. It covers the spring pasture on the desert hills east and southeast of Beersheva and the early summer pasture in the Beersheva plain. Thus the Zullam tribe secured access to all the pastures in the hills east of the Beersheva plain and down to the cliffs overlooking the Dead Sea. All its members and, in normal times, members of other tribes as well, have equal rights to exploit these grazing grounds. At the beginning of summer the flocks pass through the harvested fields of their owners and graze on the stubble left on them. Thence they continue westwards to the stubble fields of villages. They graze on vacant state land or on areas belonging to the Western Negev settlements and sometimes continue northwards up to the Ramleh area. Bedouin do not consider these latter areas part of their rightful territory. Their own territory is in the eastern Negev, and home is there. In the literature these territorial organizations, such as Zullam, Qderat, and Hkuk, are called tribal groups. The Bedouin have no generic term for them and refer to them by name. While regarding them as encompassing descent groups, Bedouin are aware that they refer to territory. In other cases, the term *qabila* (confederation of tribes) is used, as by the Jahalin or the Ta'amrah of the Judean desert.

Outside their territory, these Bedouin use pastures only by sufferance or against payment.

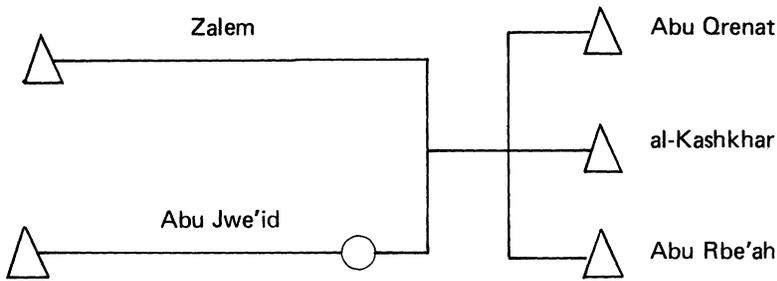
The term *dira* (area of migration) refers to the total pasture area traversed by their herds in an ordinary year. Some tribes, like the Mutair of Northern Arabia, seem to control the full extent of their *dira* (Dickson 1951:47). The *dira* of most tribes includes areas they do not control. The Basseri and other Iranian tribes use the term *il-rah* in a similar fashion: "each tribe. . . has both its traditional route and schedule which it follows in its yearly migrations" (Barth 1960:3). Barth shows that different tribes lay claim to the same areas at various times of the year. The authority of government is the tribe's main assurance that each year it will be able to move over the same ground and that other occupants vacate it when the time comes. Yet the Basseri seem to have territory they can call their own, namely the mountainous region near the Kuh-i-Bul, used exclusively by them as summer pasture (Barth 1960:5). Without such territory they could maintain a measure of cohesion only by becoming an "administered tribe," ruled either by government or a powerful chief. The territorial organization permits the nomads to cope with most of the ordinary annual and seasonal fluctuations in water and pasture, but does not protect them from the more serious fluctuations. Pastures shared with neighboring tribes can help, up to a point. Genealogical connections between neighboring tribes indicate, among other things, that each group expects to use the other's pastures. However, such "kin relationships" between the tribes do not always stand the test of the harsh reality of a drought year, and even less do they oblige the relatives to go to war together, as some scholars had assumed in the past.

REFLECTION OF TRIBAL ORGANIZATION IN GENEALOGIES

Both the relation to the land and the political organization are reflected in the traditions and genealogies of the pastoral nomads in the Middle East. They conceptualize the territorial organizations as a kind of political group whose membership is based on agnatic descent. They usually relate how a named forefather acquired rights to the area of land which they occupy. Members of the tribe inherited these rights through their fathers who were the lineal descendants of this ancestor. Since according to custom (which incidentally, contradicts *shari'ah*, the official Moslem law) sons inherit the lands and flocks of their father, this is unassailable evidence, in their eyes, of their territorial rights. Patrilineal descent and the ideological connection between eponyms, whether male or female, and the ownership of land are common to all the pastoral nomads.

Thus, the Zullam tribesmen use genealogies to support their claims to the territory. The tribesmen explain that their eponym came some 200 years ago from northern Arabia to the Negev and settled in its eastern part which was then uninhabited. This ancestor was called Zalem and his four sons are the ancestors of the four subtribes. According to one version of the genealogy, Zalem married Abu Jwe'id's daughter, and through this marriage his descendants acquired their right to the land (see Figure 1). That Zalem, in variance with Bedouin custom, acquired his right to the land through a woman was explained by a member of the Abu Jwe'id subtribe thus: when Zalem arrived in the country, he found it occupied by the ancestor of the Abu Jwe'id, married his (only) daughter, and through her acquired his right to the land. Thus the Bedouin explained to his own satisfaction the tribe's ownership of the area as a result of their descent from a female ancestor.

The origin of the Beni Sakhr (also called Dahamsheh) tribe of Jordan is similar in various points to the genealogy of the Zullam. A man named Dahamsh found an abandoned baby in the desert, brought him up and gave him his daughter in marriage. The four sons born from this union are regarded as the ancestors of the Beni Sakhr tribe (Jaussen 1908:107). Apparently they too did not inherit their land from their eponym and rights of ownership came to them only through their mother, the daughter of the original owner of the land. The Beni Sakhr are divided into three groups each headed by a sheikh. There is no supreme



Note: I have replaced the traditional names of the ancestors by the names of the subtribes as used today.

Fig. 1. Genealogy of the Zullam subtribes (Abu Rbe'ah version)

sheikh for the whole tribe and the subtribes even war with each other (Jaussen 1908:114). The territory is considered to belong to the tribe and every tribesman has equal rights of access to it.

Arab nomadic pastoralists usually emphasize patriliney in descent groups and political associations. Therefore the question why some tribes should claim descent from a woman has intrigued several ethnographers. Robertson Smith, writing in 1885, cites numerous cases among early Arabian tribes, and notes that "there is no tribe with a female eponym in which the main groups have not male eponyms" (1903:37). He objects to Nöldeke's suggestion that female eponyms represent tribal unities, as collective terms in Arabic are constantly feminine (Smith 1903:31). For him the female eponym could mean only one thing: she was a survival from ancient matriarchal times. Instances of female eponyms are found to this day, and several of them are more pronounced than those of the Zullam and Beni Sakhr (for instance, Murray 1935:245-246, 307). The best documented example is that of Sa'ada, the female eponym of the nine noble landowning Bedouin tribes of Cyrenaica. According to Peters, "descent from Sa'ada. . . in theory gives a man rights to land in Cyrenaica, and his genealogical position in a particular group gives him rights in a particular strip of territory, but not in all" (1968:175). Peters believes that the female name is "used to show a greater notion of cohesion than the mere use of male names, and the significance of a female name placed at the apex of the Cyrenaican genealogy is that it is the symbol of full brother unity at the highest political level" (1960:29). Peters rightly links the eponym to the Bedouin's conception of ecological divisions, but does not explain why the eponyms at the apex of the genealogy are sometimes males and sometimes females. I suggest that the difference refers to specific types of organization at this level. Women stand at the apex of genealogies wherever tribesmen control their area of subsistence, but without a corresponding corporate organization and leadership. The eponym remains female as long as this is the case, but when the tribesmen develop leadership and corporateness the eponym becomes a male (see note 7). This is connected to the fact that the pastoralists recruit members to their corporate groups by agnatic descent, so that male ancestors five or six generations removed always become organizational foci of groups and define their membership. A male eponym thus signifies a combination of agnatic descent groups at tribal level. A comprehensive relationship between all tribesmen, in the absence of a corporate bond between them, is shown in the descent idiom of the genealogies as a female link: the line of descent is unbroken, but it is not corporate. Descent from the tribe's mother signifies the right of each tribesman to exploit pasture and water throughout the extent of tribal territory. That a female link signifies access to distant pastures is part of the nomad's everyday experience. In

several of the societies examined, men seek to marry wives from groups controlling pastures, and expect to camp with their affines seasonally. The female eponym is a generalized female link, and conveys to a Bedouin that wherever the genealogical connection is recognized, he may expect to obtain access to pasture he does not actually control. It is therefore to be expected that wherever affinal ties are not used for obtaining pasture, no female eponym will appear at the apex of the tribal genealogy, even where there is no corporate organization at this level. Southern Sinai is a case in point. It is divided up among autonomous tribes, but its Bedouin inhabitants consider it as one big pasture, to be equally shared by all. Rain falls so irregularly and haphazardly in the peninsula that individuals cannot think of marital links as keys to pasture. Therefore, while in our terms Southern Sinai is one subsistence area, the tribes are not linked through a female eponym. In Murray's words, "all the Arabs living in the true Sinai peninsula . . . are a confederation of tribes, . . . united not by blood relationship, but merely by a community of interest" (1935:256). The tribesmen do not claim to be descended of a common eponym, male or female.

When a group considers some neighboring groups to be genealogically closer to it than others, this may indicate either that these groups are linked by joint interests over and above proximity and common use of territory, or that the topographical boundaries between them are not as clearly demarcated as those with other groups. Thus, while each of the three big Zullam subtribes usually conceptualizes the others as descendants of their eponym, they consider the Abu Rqaiq subtribe, which borders on all three of them, as nonrelated members of the same tribal confederation, Tiaha. While the Zullam tribesmen intermarry a great deal, they do not contract marriages with Abu Rqaiq tribesmen. The genealogical conception reflects a situation where the Zullam tribesmen jointly control extensive spring pasture in the hilly eastern part of the territory, and can effectively bar the Abu Rqaiq tribesmen to their west from entering this pasture. As a rule, the Abu Rqaiq herds use the Zullam spring pastures on equal terms, and only when there has been too little rain and the vegetation is scanty are they not welcome in the hilly area. The Zullam can get nothing in return, and cannot even use the pasture in Abu Rqaiq territory when their herds move westward in summer: the stubble fields there cannot even satisfy the hunger of the Abu Rqaiq herds, and all the herds wander further westward and out of Bedouin territory to seek pasture in the settled districts. All the Zullam need of the Abu Rqaiq is good neighborly relations. The relationship is not conceptualized as kinship.

All Bedouin groups claim to be descended of the male or female eponym of the tribe. Bedouin are unable to give the names of the ancestors intervening between the eponym and their living and recently deceased kin. They are never certain whether they are direct descendants of the eponym and how many generations have passed since his time. In this manner all the groups of landowning Bedouin in a tribe, whether they be large or small, and even those whose origin may be outside the group, may claim descent from the eponym and thus assert their right to the land.

The Kababish present an interesting contrast to the Cyrenaican Bedouin. They do not control their pastures, and they are directly administered by government. "Land is owned by government and pastures are free to all" (Asad 1970:31). Each citizen, be he a Kababish or not, may freely use the pastures for "although the Kababish are divided into a number of named clans these do not possess any rights to territorial resources" (Asad 1970:13). The situation with regard to water is similar. The permanent wells have become public property, and rights of access are held by individuals and not by whole sections or subsections. Tribal custom (as administered by local courts and recognized by the rural council authorities) insists that all established users are equally entitled to water, and that no prerogatives are held by "original owners" (Asad 1970:27). The formal appellation of "tribe" has been retained only because government treats the Kababish as an administrative unit, and has appointed the former tribe's leading family as tax collectors. Prominent men from the larger

patronymic groups act as the chiefs' representatives for taxation purposes. As there is no corporate organization at the level of the tribe, elaborate agnatic genealogies are considered unimportant and rarely remembered. In answer to the anthropologist's questions on the subject, young men would almost invariably reply: "I can tell you the names of my mother's kin and my father's mother's kin, but I cannot tell you the names of our distant ancestors. Our elders never bother to tell us who they are" (Asad 1970:106). This is one end of a continuum, at the other end of which stand the Libyan Bedouin who are "proud to the point of boastfulness of their genealogical knowledge, and . . . wherever the anthropologist travelled the first request he had to comply with was to take down a large proportion of a tribal genealogy" (Peters 1960:40). It appears that pastoral nomads who are in full control of territory and capable of defending it, like the Libyan Sa'adi tribes, show detailed genealogical knowledge that explains their territorial and political divisions and relations with their neighbors. Pastoral nomads who have lost control over their territory and whose tribes are no longer corporately organized, like the Kababish of the Sudan, have no need for tribal genealogies. In between these extremes, range groups like the Abu Sa'aluk "peasants" whose corporate organization has been set up in response to external pressures but who do not control territory. The genealogies mirror various characteristics in the territorial and political organization. One of these was discussed in detail: a female eponym at the apex of a tribal genealogy indicates that while tribesmen claim rights to pasture in an area of subsistence, they have not established a corporate organization and leadership over the whole area.

EFFICIENT USE OF PASTURE AND WATER

Client Populations

Half the Bedouin population of the Negev consists of groups which either own little or no agricultural land. These people are considered by the landowning Bedouin to be, paradoxically, "peasants" (*fallahin*). The peasants do not claim descent from a named ancestor who settled in the tribal area, although membership of their groups is based on common origin. For example, the Abu Sa'aluk peasants contend that *Sa'aluk*, "The Beggar," was the nickname of an ancestor, whose real name has been forgotten, who dwelt in their country of origin, Morocco. Some of Sa'aluk's descendants migrated through Egypt to the Gaza area, and reached the Zullam around 1910. The first settlers in the Negev "were six men who were brothers and cousins to each other" and who bought a little farm land in the region (Marx 1967:114). The Abu Sa'aluk who live in the Zullam area thus have no common ancestor to link them up with the tribal genealogy. They are not incorporated in the tribe, and have no claims on pastures. As the number of peasants is so large, Bedouin are aware of their potential power. They keep them subjected by separating each peasant group from others, and do not permit them to infiltrate their ranks through intermarriage. No affinal ties give them access to pasture.

The nomadic population of Cyrenaica is also divided into aristocratic, landowning Bedouin, and clients with no right to land and water, who use these resources only with the permission of their owners. This Bedouin population was decimated during 20 years of war against the Italian conqueror and all the aristocratic Bedouin tribes needed reinforcements in order to exploit their territory. Each aristocratic Bedouin group therefore attempted to draw in clients, both in order to exploit the resources and to prevent encroachment by larger groups of aristocrats. Nevertheless, they did not want to grant the clients ownership rights on the resources and therefore did not admit them into their agnatic political groups.

The landless clients formed between 10% and 16% of the Bedouin population (Peters 1968:169), and where they were not concentrated in large pockets the aristocratic Bedouin were not afraid of the clients ever being able to unite against them. They, therefore, did not

prevent marriages with the clients. On the contrary, Bedouin gave their daughters to clients in order to bind them. They permitted their clients-kinsmen the use of cultivatable land and water but, in the opinion of Peters, the kinship never became membership in the corporate organization that held the rights on the territory. Each and every year the clients were obliged to renew their agreement for the use of agricultural land and water (there was never a shortage of pasture) and when resources became scarce some of them were made to leave (Peters 1968:175, 186).

Networks of Personal Relationships vs. Segmentary Organization

Nomadic pastoralists often view their tribes as organizations that secure and hold the territory necessary for their livelihood. They protect it both against the invader from outside and against the tenants or clients from within who may attempt to gain control of the land. The tribesmen form a kind of military organization: it comprises a large number of small corporate groups capable in time of need of coalescing in a predetermined manner into larger units. At the head of each unit stands a leader. The members of each small group live and migrate at no great distance from each other, and consider themselves to be agnates, even if they cannot trace the relationship. Members of this group believe that they are the descendants of a common ancestor. The ancestor is integrated in a genealogy that serves them as a rough guide to their potential amalgamation into larger groups, according to the (disputable) logic that two neighbors living in adjacent areas with similar ecological characteristics have common interests. The common interest is translated into the idiom of kinship; agnation unites the members of the smaller corporate groups. This solidarity is also expected of the relations between groups linked in a larger framework and, accordingly, the ancestors of these groups are represented as agnates of each other.

This native view of tribal organization seems to embody many of the characteristics of a segmentary political system, as expounded by Evans-Pritchard (1940:142-144). When applied to real life, this model of the social organization of pastoral nomads runs into difficulties. The corporate groups control land. If they join forces only in emergencies, they should only at such times be able to help members to use the pastures of other groups. Is a member of a corporate group in peacetime restricted to land controlled by his own group? This appears most likely, for in "normal" periods, when no external enemy threatens, groups are free to engage in internal disputes. Then they combine and fight each other, and do so not necessarily according to the genealogical scheme, but rather according to the governing interest of the moment. Disputes may disrupt free movement of herdsmen, and they may occasionally lead to bloodshed. A conversation held between Musil and one of the leaders of the Rwala shows how far matters can go: the sheikh told him, "The Fed'an are unbelievers to us, hence we fight them." When Musil reminded him that the Fid'an were of the same origin as the Rwala and that both of them were of 'Aneze stock, the sheikh replied, "I know that they are related to us through blood and faith, but they have deceived us, hence they are worse than all the foreigners and Christians and we are in holy war against them" (Musil 1927:426).

Bedouin usually represent their society as a series of discrete and disputing groups, separated by clearly demarcated boundaries, and torn by violent conflicts and by the relentless pursuit of blood revenge. It may be difficult to understand how Bedouin belonging to the various groups are capable of jointly managing and exploiting pasture and water sources. This is difficult enough even when there is political coordination. There is evidence that the Sha'alan, the well-known chiefly family of the Rwala confederation, could not prevent banditry even between the subtribes under their supervision.¹² Such supreme sheikhs cannot overcome the discord since they do not have tools of control apart from the

agnatic units and maintain only minute military forces of their own. The situation should be even worse in tribal confederations which do not have a senior sheikh.

How can units which are constantly at such odds as these divide between them pasture and water in an equal and fair manner, and permit members of rival groups to live side by side? This is a problem with which most of the descriptions of nomadic society have not dealt. Many of the authors were not even aware of the existence of such a problem. Only Sweet points out that "though it is logical to suppose that freedom of access to adequate pasturage is a condition of tribal life, how this is regulated within the tribal structure of north Arabian Bedouin society has not been fully understood" (Sweet 1965:136). We lack detailed information on this subject on all but two Bedouin societies: the Zullam tribe in the Negev and the tribes of camel breeders in Libya. We know how the land is divided in these societies both in ordinary years and tranquil periods and in drought years, when the area becomes insufficient for all the population and their flocks. Normally, pasture areas are not divided permanently between the various groups, but in practice the strong groups that are settled in proximity to these lands control access to them. Other Bedouin are entitled to use the pasture areas when there is sufficient grazing. When grazing is restricted, access is given to Bedouin from the outside only through marital relationships which were established especially for this purpose. These marriages create a close-knit network of contacts spread all over the tribal territory.

In both the Bedouin societies there is an "inferior" sector which bears the brunt of the suffering caused by drought or increase in population and flocks. These are the "peasants" in the Negev or the "clients" in Libya who do not have a share in the land and are not absorbed in the tribal military organization and who can therefore be driven off when resources become tight. The distinction between the owners of land and the landless is essential for the understanding of many pastoral societies.

A detailed examination of these and other phenomena shows that the corporate organization based on quasi-agnation is only part of the structure of pastoral nomad society. It is just the aspect it wishes to present to the world: that of a warrior society. The nomad, steeped all his life in this ideology, sincerely believes that this is the real essence of his society and that the other aspects are coincidental, atypical, or exceptional. While he is capable of interpreting various aspects of his society in an entirely objective fashion, he possesses only one model, or conception, of his total society, namely that of a segmentary political organization. Therefore, for him, all economic marriage links are private arrangements and every agreement with a tenant or a client is made only in order to give him a personal economic benefit. It is surprising that only in recent years scholars began to understand the part played by marriage links and by clients in nomadic society.

Among the Negev Bedouin, each marriage serves the interest of a small group of real agnates, including brothers and cousins, who together decide how to match their sons and daughters. Since the weight of whole groups stands behind these marriages, they are stable, and the number of divorces is infinitesimal.¹³ Intimate and frequent contacts are maintained particularly between the two men closest to the woman: her husband and her brother (or her father), both of whom are responsible for her, although in different ways. The woman frequently visits her family of origin, sometimes for several weeks, and during such long visits the husband comes to visit her. The members of the family of origin, on their part, return these visits. The woman provides a link between the two groups, carries information and requests in both directions, and cares for the continuing relationship. The heads of the Zullam subtribes are connected through marriage. Even when the chiefs quarrel over their particular or subtribal interests, their wives keep up regular contacts with their families of origin and do not cease the exchange of visits. Occasionally the husbands accompany their wives on these visits and then it becomes clear that the heads of disputing groups are in-laws who treat each other with respect and friendship.¹⁴ They can, therefore, informally discuss and settle affairs concerning the tribe as a whole.

Even more impressive is the fact that practically all marriages of tribesmen are contracted inside the common territory. All the 130 marriages between Bedouin of the subtribe of Abu Jwe'id of which I possess details were effected in the Zullam region. Some of these marriages took place within the subtribe, and others with other Zullam subtribes. Only three women married Bedouin of a neighboring tribe, and the three husbands permanently resided among the Zullam. All the marriages were contracted between Bedouin, and I did not hear of any matches between Bedouin and peasant sharecroppers; thus all the matches created links between landowners. All these marriages serve the various interests of the parties as individual groups. These close-knit links permit the Zullam to jointly exploit the pasture and water to be found in the territory under their control and also serve them in the pursuit of other interests. In tranquil times, these connections play an important part in daily life. However, the Bedouin also attach considerable importance to the interests of their groups. Therefore, they do not exploit all the marriages in order to create economic contacts, but use a number of them for the maintenance of political connections within the corporate groups and between the groups. The overall result of these marriages was the creation of a network of kinship relationships which is spread over all the Bedouin groups of the tribes and through this means only the Zullam became a "tribe" capable of cooperating economically and politically.

The Bedouin of Cyrenaica, similarly to the Zullam, spread a network of marital relationship over the whole territory. Members of agnatic groups systematically married into other groups. But they skipped over adjacent groups with resources similar to their own and preferred to marry into more distant groups and ecologically differentiated areas (Peters 1967:274). These Bedouin also created marriage links with residents of the oases to complement their food supply (Peters 1967:280). The efforts of individuals and of sections of agnates to secure access to economic resources of various types here too produced the network of kinship relations covering the width and breadth of the Bedouin territory and making for contacts between the members of all the political groups.

In this context marital links must be viewed as channels of communication between interested parties, through which they can cooperate, carry on arguments and settle them. Where older agnates control the marriages of young members of their groups, usually assisted by their control over the group's or household's property, as well as enforcing strict premarital sexual abstention for both sexes and particularly for women, the links are mainly, but not exclusively, those of kinship and marriage. But there are also links institutionalized as friendship and brotherhood, and in some societies these may predominate. Among the Marri Baluch, for instance, marriages are not stable, and permanent economic and political links between men are established as formal "friendships." The men thus linked address each other as *bradir* (brother), and fully trust each other (Pehrson 1966:16).

The military organization of pastoral nomads is based on small agnatic groups, capable, in time of need, of uniting with other groups, for short-term and mostly small-scale military exploits. In ordinary times, this capacity to unite and fight is enough to deter would-be invaders of their territory. Consequently, there are long periods of respite during which the nomad looks after his own business, which, in any case, is exhausting enough. It leaves him little time for corporate political activity and all he does in this respect is to stay close to his agnates, the members of his minimal group. Each small group establishes links, usually through intermarriage, with other groups with whom its own movements intersect at various times. These links break down the discreteness of agnatic groups.

The nomad is loath to allocate much of his limited resources to a powerful leadership that would coordinate the activities of various groups and always be ready to deal with invaders. Sometimes a tribe has no permanent leader and the constituent groups may even be constantly at odds with each other. When that is the case, practical control over the area and coordination between groups moving about in it is achieved by an extensive network of personal links that operates at various levels: the links established between small groups of

agnates, the personal marriage links between the leaders of the larger political groups, the communications borne by strangers residing in the tribal territory and, last but not least, the personal economic links that almost every nomad maintains with affines and cognates in other parts of the territory; all these contribute to the creation of a network of relationships spread out over the tribal territory and almost coextensive with it. These relationships still serve tribesmen when moving in the area of subsistence.

The tribe is then the cumulative end result of the efforts made by individuals and small corporate groups to enlist the cooperation of others, in order to cope with problems of pasture, water, and self-defense.

CONCLUSIONS

This essay adds another definition of tribe to the many already available. I believe that the insights provided by a comparative study of pastoral nomads in the Middle East warrant a new definition: the tribe is a social aggregate of pastoral nomads who jointly exploit an area providing subsistence over numerous seasons. This is not another variation on the two major themes underlying most existing definitions which treat the tribe either as cultural and linguistic unit, or as political unit. Nor does it supersede other definitions. The various definitions refer to different entities, which may exist side by side, and each of which may be activated in particular situations. Thus an administrative "tribe" may be superimposed on a unit of subsistence. The administrative tribe may be larger or smaller than the unit of subsistence, both in population and in area. The term tribe is freely used by both natives and external observers to designate all these entities, and often other ones as well.

The conception of tribe as a unit of subsistence is not new. Ethologists routinely examine the "range" and "territoriality" of animals, and ethnologists, the environmental adaptations and movement cycles of hunters, gatherers, and pastoral nomads. I have argued here that there has been some misapprehension of the nature of these units. Many anthropologists believe that the nomadic pastoral tribe can be depicted primarily as a set of coordinated corporate groups with at least rudimentary leadership. I found that such a description is better suited to the administrative units through which states control "tribal" populations, or to tribes which establish themselves as a polity in response to pressures exerted by states. But even there the model fits reality only imperfectly. Tribes as "units of subsistence" often comprise thousands of members, yet do not necessarily establish a corporate polity or possess institutionalized leadership.

The extent of an "area of subsistence" is largely determined by the pastoral requirements of its population over a number of seasons. Tribesmen strive to control most of their area of subsistence, but that does not always appear to be feasible, especially because pastoralists require some areas that are suitable for permanent settlement, over which they compete with other, often more powerful populations. Therefore, a distinction must be made between "territory," the area actually controlled by the tribe, and "area of subsistence," the area it exploits economically.

The tribe is a kind of political organization, in the sense that it controls territory and permits members access to the resources in its various parts. This is achieved largely through personal networks of relationships. The sum total of these relationships is practically coextensive with the tribe's territory, but also remains useful when tribesmen move into pastures outside it. The networks formally consist of marriage links, close kinship ties, and institutionalized friendship or similar ties.

Each tribesman is also a member of one small corporate agnatic descent group. The group does two things for the member. First, it stands behind him in time of need, and may employ force to support his rights, including access to pasture and water. Second, it mediates his membership of the tribe. Tribal genealogies are one way in which tribesmen

conceptualize their rights to exploit their territorial resources. Through his membership in a descent group a man is incorporated in a genealogy that comprises all the "legitimate" inhabitants of the territory, and thus becomes a shareholder in the pasture and water directly controlled by the tribe.

The corporate descent groups do not coalesce or fuse into larger groups. Even where several such groups collaborate, they do not do so on the predetermined lines indicated by the political models of the tribesmen (and anthropologists). While the ancestors in the lower reaches of the tribal genealogies (those five to six generations removed) refer to corporate descent groups, the upper ones usually stand for territorial divisions. This is to say that in the societies examined no segmentary political organization could be discovered.

The prevalent conception of the tribe as primarily a homologous series of ever more inclusive corporate groups each of which is led by a chief may have been reinforced by the fact that most anthropologists have worked in "simple" societies incorporated in states. The administrative units through which native populations were governed by "indirect rule" were dubbed tribes, and a hierarchy of chiefs was installed to facilitate control. The administrative order was superimposed on a presumed hierarchical segmentary political organization. The suspicion that the tribe in this sense could be "a White man's creation of convenience for talking about Indians, negotiating with them, administering them" was first raised by Kroeber (1955:313) and Manners (1957), and later stated more categorically by Fried (1968) and Colson (1968). My material confirms this argument, but goes further by suggesting that the tribe as a unit of subsistence exists apart from the administrative "tribe."

The above conclusions may only apply to the pastoral nomads of the Middle East. But I tentatively suggest that they could be relevant to the study of pastoral nomads elsewhere, as well as hunting and gathering peoples, perhaps even slash-and-burn horticulturists; in short, any simple economy whose basic natural resources are distributed in a manner requiring the inhabitants to move about in a regular pattern.

NOTES

Acknowledgments. This paper began life as an essay on the ecology and politics of nomadic pastoralists in the Middle East. It was presented at the colloquia on Arab society held at the Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation in 1971 (Marx 1973). Since then it has undergone several revisions, as a result of which it became increasingly concerned with the problem of tribe. I gratefully acknowledge the useful suggestions made, at various stages, by Moshe Braver, Shlomo Deshen, Yitzchak Eilat, Eliahu Eilat (Epstein), Marvin Harris, David Kaplan, Emrys Peters, and Richard Werbner.

¹The various definitions of tribe have been adequately treated in Helm (1968), and it would serve no useful purpose to cover the same ground once more.

²Middleton and Tait's (1958) "Introduction" to *Tribes without Rulers* does not define the tribe. In Middleton's own contribution to the volume, the Lugbara tribe is described as having in the past been "a territorially distinct unit. In the center were the settlements, surrounded by farms and grazing areas" (1958:208). Perhaps he viewed the tribe as a relatively autarchic subsistence unit, as I do. Murdock's (1949) analytical scheme does not accord the tribe as an important place. "Tribe" is used interchangeably with "society," and is never defined. Colson (1968:201) argues that "we use the term [tribe] in many ways for many different phenomena and for many different purposes. In the face of such massive disagreement, we might agree to discard the term, especially since it seems largely irrelevant to the kinds of problems we are currently prepared to tackle." Similarly, Godelier (1973).

³Sahlins (1968:vii-viii) gives about equal weight to culture, territory, and political organization. While he defines the tribe as "a body of people of common derivation and custom, in possession and control of their own extensive territory," and emphasizes that "its several communities are not united under a sovereign governing authority," he also presents it as a type of polity halfway between the band and the state.

⁴A romanticized account of such a crisis can be found in Raswan (1936:85 ff.). Spurred on by the sight of their starving camels, the Rwala Bedouin invaded the territory of a neighboring tribal group, and in the resulting fighting numerous lives were lost.

⁵ Doughty (1937:II, 662) illustrates the many fluctuations and irregularity of the rains. See also Asad (1970:13).

⁶ Raswan (1936:20) refers to 7,000 tents. Oppenheim (1939-1968:I, 120-122) mentions 4,630 tents. If we accept Oppenheim's estimate that an average of seven persons live in each tent (1939-1968:I, 12), we arrive at 32,410 souls.

⁷ Bacon (1958:125) has charted the changes in the genealogy of the Rwala over the course of 100 years by comparing the information collected by Burckhardt (1830), Doughty (1937, first published 1888), and Ashkenazi (1938).

⁸ Müller (1931:200-202) gives his own interpretation of the loose coordination of the tribe: in his opinion the whole political organization of the Bedouin is based on kinship relations. As genealogical distance between groups increases, the contact between tribesmen gets weaker. Only at the level of the tribe does this process cease "and only due to the personal authority of the sheikh at its head." Müller does not realize that he refers to territorial and political groups described in an idiom of kinship. Nor does he touch on the fact that the subtribe is for the most part the largest political unit, whilst the tribe is often only a territorial unit. On the other hand, Bacon (1958:127) clearly perceived that "the genealogical segments larger than the tribe do not operate as political units." It is interesting to note that *Notes and Queries in Anthropology* (1951:136) recognizes the possibility that "there may be no supreme tribal authority," although it defines the tribe as a political group.

⁹ Rosenfeld (1965:176-182) cites sources showing that the Bedouin cooperated, sometimes involuntarily, in the military ventures of Ibn Rashid: some of them served in lieu of payment of tax.

¹⁰ I take issue here with Sahlins (1968:37) who, following Krader (and, incidentally, Durkheim) argues that "degrees of political integration [of pastoral nomads] vary directly with population density, thus ultimately with the natural abundance of water and pasture." The Rwala Bedouin, to be discussed below, live in a poorly endowed environment. Their spatial density is low, and yet they developed some degree of political concentration in response to political pressures from outside. Abundance of material resources and density of population do affect political concentration, but their weight differs from case to case. Fried's (1968:15) previously cited argument that militant tribes "may well be the product of processes stimulated by the appearance of relatively highly organized societies" is closer to the mark.

¹¹ We possess a detailed description of the first abortive attempt of the Rwala to take control in Euting (1896:I, 131-134); and of the second attempt, which gave the Rwala control of Jauf for a few years up to 1922, in Musil (1927:162 ff.). According to Musil, in this case some of the leaders of the divided house of Rashid invited the Rwala to take Jauf. Even then the Rwala sheikh opposed his son's occupation of the settlement.

¹² Musil (1927:24-25) tells how he was robbed by members of a clan "attached" to the Sha'alan. When he complained that he was a member of the household of the sheikhs, the robbers were not at all impressed, even though they did believe him.

¹³ This holds true even though in the Negev, as elsewhere in Islam, the argument can be heard that there is nothing easier than divorce, since it is enough for the husband to pronounce the formula of divorce in order to cast off his wife. This contention contributed to the mistaken view, even held by some scholars, that the rate of divorce in Arab society is high, as in Patai (1969:105-106).

¹⁴ Musil (1927:22) records the sheikh of the Rwala tribe as saying to the heads of the 'Amarat, another tribe of 'Aneze Bedouin, "We as the chiefs of our tribes are enemies but as men we are the best of friends." I suggest, though I cannot find documentation for this in the literature, that marital connections existed between the two families of sheikhs, as is common among the great sheikhs. Thus, for example, there has been a connection for generations between the heads of Rwala and the heads of Fid'an confederation (see Oppenheim 1939-1968:I, 103; Raswan 1936:88).

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