



COMMENTS ON BEDOUIN FUNERAL RITES IN THE WRITINGS OF WESTERN TRAVELERS AND EXPLORERS FROM THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at discussing the Bedouin funeral rites mentioned by European travelers who visited Transjordan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; there was a focus on the inaccuracy of these accounts in referring to some particular funeral rites as being originally of Bedouins, also in generalizing them among all tribes. Such misinterpretation came from not considering the level of sedentarization of tribes, as well as cultural influences of urban and rural communities living in the same region. Two approaches were followed; the first was by interviewing members of a focus group, which was selected from a population that included clans still living a pure nomadic life, even after the sedentarization of Bedouins in the 1960's, the other approach was by exploring the history of sedentarization of tribes under discussion. Such approaches made it possible to distinguish the original nomadic funeral rites from those of settling groups in Transjordan.

KEYWORDS: Funeral Rites, Bedouin Tribes of Transjordan and Sinai, Orientalism, Exploration of Arabia, Sedentarization of Bedouins in Jordan

INTRODUCTION

Death was one of the aspects that were not extensively explained in the writings of western travelers who visited Arabia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, not even those of earlier periods of time. Since the 15th century, journeys of European merchants were in search for routes that would lead them to the Far East, where precious spices of India and silk of China were their target. Though, Arab merchants of that time were in control of this trade, thus fiercely competing with Europeans on the treasures of Far East (Ganeri & Mills, 2008). This competition had made Europeans differently perceive the Holy Bible other than being a source of religion and wisdom; some particular biblical texts were about the treasures of Arabia, such as those mentioning King Solomon trips to Sheba and Ophir, where Hiram's ships brought talents of gold, great cargoes of almugwood, spices and precious stones (1 Kings 10: 10-12). Such curiosity about Arabia made the writings of classical historians living in the period from 4th century B.C. to 2nd century A.D. of a great significance to travelers till the 17th century, since they gave details about the trade routes and goods of that region. Though, this was to change in the 18th century since the New Imperialism expansion of European powers started; consequently, finishing the Ottoman Empire (which was on the edge of collapse) was vital to control its territories (including Arabia). A new type of journeys emerged and was funded by European scientific societies; the main target was to gather information about the geography and people of Africa and Arabia (Qala'aji, 2004), good examples were the writings of Burckhardt (1831) and Musil (1928). By the end of the 19th century, explorers were sent to this region to provide the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs with information about the political situation of Arabia and its tribes. At that time, Germans began strengthening ties with Ottomans by training their armies and providing them with weapons, also building railroads. On the other hand, Britain supplied Arabia tribes with money and supported their armies with weapons to defeat Ottomans, who were allies of Germany in World War I. Of these explorers were Gertrude Bell and Lawrence of Arabia, who gave detailed demonstra-

tion on Bedouin tribes in the region including those of Transjordan, there was a particular focus on their locations, seasonal migrations, Ghazzu's (invasions), numbers of tents, religious beliefs, wasm (symbol of tribe), and water wells. Both explorers met Sheikhs of these tribes; with their fluent Arabic language and traditional respect, they made close relations with tribe members. A special attention was given to tribes in Transjordan and north of Hijaz for their significant role in the events of the Great Arab Revolt. The accounts of these explorers included details about tribes as Howaitat, Sukhur, 'Aniza, Ruwala, al-Shararat, and many others (Howell, 2006).

By looking at this brief history of exploring Arabia, it becomes clear that it was not unusual not to give death and funeral rites that much of attention by travelers; one reason might be the obvious simplicity seen in all Bedouin funeral rites of late 19th and early 20th centuries (which are explained in next sections of the paper), whether in preparing the dead body, digging and sealing the grave, or even the condolence ceremonies. Such simplicity unfortunately led to the scarcity in both the information given by travelers, as well as in having any standing graves remains since they usually take the form of a cairn (a pile of stones called rijm), such graves could easily disappear. The main focus of these trips was documenting valuable resources of the land and the social structures of its people, moreover, the history of sedentarization of Bedouin tribes was not clearly identified in the writing of most explorers; sedentarization is a factor that significantly affects burial practices of any group, according to Tainter (1978), the form of burial practices may be a reflection of the complexity of the society.

For the accounts of travelers that mentioned funeral rites, there had been an inaccuracy in interpreting some funeral rites as being originally of Bedouins, and in stating that they were practiced among all tribes; such inaccuracy came from ignoring both the extent of sedentarization, and cultural changes caused by interacting with urban and rural communities. This paper aims at shedding the light on such inaccuracy in the accounts of European explorers who visited Transjordan in the early 19th and late 20th centuries. Two approaches were followed: one was by

selecting a focus group, where its members were selected from clans still living a pure nomadic life; interviews focused on Bedouin funeral rites before and after sedentarization. The other approach was by exploring the history of sedentarization for the tribes mentioned in the writings under discussion; such approaches made it possible to distinguish the pure nomadic funeral rites from those originated by settling groups in Transjordan.

2. BEDOUIN FUNERAL RITES IN THE WRITINGS OF WESTERN TRAVELERS

The accounts of western travelers on Bedouin funeral rituals in Arabia were as follows:

Gertrude Bell

A significant feature that was mentioned in "Arabian Diaries" of Gertrude Bell (1913-1914) was the group of Bedouin Sheikhs' tombs; these were located near Umayyad Palaces in the Eastern Jordanian Badia (desert). These were mentioned as follows:

On December 23rd 1913, the caravan passed by Tell Firdas (south of Syria which is located on the way between Jabal Sais and Qasr Burqu, opposite to that tell was the tomb of Ibn Madi, who was a Sheikh of al- 'Isa tribe, at that spot his camel fell and killed him 20 years before. On December 30th 1913, Bell passed a memorial tomb to Mit'ab, who was killed in a ghazzu (invasion), and is buried to the east of Qasr al-Azraq. The tomb was all covered with women's hair bleached by sun. One of Bell's men (Nimran) said: "Shufti shughl al hareem? (See what women do? (, whenever they camp here, they come and mourn over the tomb, he died 5 or 6 years ago". Bell mentioned in the diaries of January 2nd 1914 that a group of Bedouins (mostly from Shararat tribe) and Druze were staying at Qasr al-Azraq during the winter. Next to this castle were the graves of Ruwalla tribe, who had a large camping ground nearby, they used architectural pieces such as capitals, engaged columns, and rounded stones of apses as tombstones (Plates 1 & 2). On January 20th 1914, Bell was studying and drawing Qasr Bayer, she mentioned that a cemetery was located to the north-east of the building, where a well (called the Snake Well) also existed, the cemetery included

a big tomb, which was of Sheikh Asad, one of the Sukhur tribe ancestors, when the members of this tribe camped around Qasr Bayer, they sacrificed a camel, green boughs were also put to cover the tomb, these were usually to be carried off by Ghazzu (invasion by other tribes).



Plate 1: One of the Roman carved stones used in Ruwalla tribe cemetery, the photo was taken in the area near Qasr al-Azraq (New Castle University Archive, Gertrude Bell Photos of 1913-1914 Trip: Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iraq)

On January 21st 1914, Bell went to look at the tomb of al Mara'i Abu Zaid, who came up with the Beni Hillal tribe out of Nejd the time they went on and conquered Tunis, the tomb took the shape of a 4 meters square.

Some interesting details were given about a tomb stone to the north of the Qasr, it had the mark of a snake's body and a sword cut. There was as a story in circulation at that time about a snake that fell from the sky on the head of Mara'i Abu Zaid at the same spot, when he then cut off his head with a sword. Bell mentioned also another grave inside the Qasr, the tombstone was marked with a wasm (marking) of Sherarat tribe, by which one of Bell's men could recognize that the dead man was from this tribe. He could also know that the man was killed, since a red cotton keffiyeh (head cover) and a bit of cotton clothing were thrown on the stones that covered the grave, these were steeped in blood. On January 26th 1914, the caravan reached camping grounds of al-Hwaitat in Tor al-Tubaiq (in

the NW of Saudi Arabia), the diaries of January 30th 1914 mentioned that Bell visited Sheikh Mohammad Ibn Dhailan in his tent, he talked to her about his work for the miri (a taxation system in the Ottoman period), and as a judge and lawmaker, he also mentioned that the forefather of Hwaitat was buried in Ma'an (south of Jordan). She mentioned an argument between the men in the tent, where a man from al-Jawf accused the Hwaitat of honoring their ancestor and praying to him more than to God, other men protested and said that Hwaitat believed that there was none sacred but God and Mohammad his Prophet, they also said that when men of the Sukhur visited the tomb of As'ad their ancestor in Wadi Bayir, they kept sacrificing animals, they knew it "was not the dead man who prevented their departure, but God". (Plate 5)

(Note: In the 1930's, a formal burial ceremony was held where gun shots were fired for honoring him) (The Gertrude Bell Project Website, Newcastle University. <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk>, June 1-30, 2012).



Plate 2: Roman carved stones used in Ruwalla tribe cemetery, one is a basket-shape capital and the other is a column base decorated with vine motif, these with cloths of the dead were topping a rijm (cairn), the photo was taken in the area near Qasr al-Azraq

(New Castle University Archive, Gertrude Bell Photos of 1913-1914 Trip: Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iraq)

Johann Ludwig Burckhardt

Burckhardt (1831, 100-101) stated in his book "Travels in Syria and the Holy Land" that when a Bedouin dies, he is to be immediately buried without a ceremony. Generally, if the camping

ground of the tribe is near a ruined village, the dead is to be buried there, but if the death was in the plain, then a pile of stones is put over the grave, this is to indicate it to people passing by, also to protect the body from predators. In regions of Hijaz, Red Sea coast, Southern Levant (Syria), and Egypt; the Arab tribes had their burial-grounds for their dead, these are to be within their territories, which are usually close to mountains or tells (hills) (Burckhardt, 1831, 280).

Burckhardt (1831, 100-101) stated that covering graves with women hair was one of the grief expressions practiced by Bedouins, that when a father dies, the children of both sexes cut off their tresses of hair to express grief, and female relatives gather in cries of lamentation. Bedouins are usually wrapped with abba, since linen was scarce, Burckhardt (1831, 280) mentioned that a Sheikh of the Omran tribe on the eastern gulf of the Red Sea constantly carried a winding-sheet with him, he wanted to be properly buried when he dies.

Burckhardt (1882, 475) gave a description on Bedouin tombs in Sinai; when he reached Wadi Khamyleh he found the campings of Sawaleha tribe and their cemetery. He mentioned that they carry their dead from several days distance to bury him in their burial-grounds. The cemetery included several rude tombs that take the shape of earth heaps covered with loose stones; there was also the tomb of Sheikh Hameed, a Bedouin saint whose tomb was distinguished since the Sawaleha tribe kept it always covered with fresh herbs. When Burckhardt reached the central summits of Mount Sinai, he passed by the tomb of Sheikh Saleh, which is also the name of the valley where it is located. The coffin of the Sheikh was deposited in a small rude stone building surrounded by a thin partition of wood, hung with embroidered green cloth. On the walls were the offerings of the Bedouins who visited this tomb; these were suspended silk tassels, handkerchiefs, ostrich eggs, camel halters, bridles, etc. This Sheikh was believed to be the forefather of the tribe of Sawaleha. Among the Bedouins, this tomb was the most revered spot in Sinai, next to the mountain of Moses; they used to kill a sheep in honor of the Sheikh. The tribes of the Towara had an annual

gathering where they remained encamped in the valley round the tomb for three days (1882, 489-490).

Max Oppenheim

Oppenheim mentioned in his book "Travel in the Land of Schummer and North of al-Jazireh", which documented his trip to that region in 1929, that Bedouins refuse to be buried in flat areas or valleys; they prefer highlands, so that the dead can see their tribes when they camp nearby, also to give tribe people the courage when they fight other tribes. According to him, females gather in cries of lamentation in his tent and other tents nearby, the Bedouin is to be buried in his cloths, washing his body was rarely done, then a shallow pit is dug as a burial, where a pile of stones is placed to protect the body from beasts, in some cases, wooden sticks were put standing between the stones to hang cloths of the dead. It was rare to see big cemeteries, individual graves were the most common, and in best cases few graves might be found together near old stone heaps (168-169).

Allois Musil

In his book "The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins", Musil described Bedouin graves as being shallow and marked with a pile of stones, just few people accompanied the gravedigger to the site; no formal graveside ceremony took place, only the family mourned at camp for three days (Musil, 1928, 670-71).

T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia)

In his book "Seven Pillars of Wisdom, Lawrence said: "Dark had fallen long before our caravan left Bair, after watering. We chiefs waited longer still while the Zebn got ready. Mifleh's preparations included a visit to Essad (As'ad), the supposed ancestor of the clan, in his be-decked tomb near Annad's grave. The Beni Sakhr were already settled enough to have dressed themselves in the Semitic village-superstitions of sacred places, holy trees, and funerary shrines. Sheikh Mifleh thought the occasion warranted his adding another head-cord

to the ragged collection looped round Essad's headstone, and characteristically asked us to provide the offering. I handed over one of my rich red-and-silk-silver Mecca ornaments, remarking that the virtue lay with the donor. The thrifty Mifleh pressed upon me one half penny in exchange, that he might plead purchase; and when I came past a few weeks later and saw that the gaud was gone, he cursed loudly in my hearing the sacrilege of some godless Sherari, who had robbed his ancestor. Turki would have told me more". (1935, 417) (Plate 5)

By looking through all these accounts, the funeral rites described as Bedouin in the writings of travelers during late 19th – early 20th centuries' can be summarized as follows:

- Individuals were usually buried in the spots where death occurred; this is different though when it comes to some Bedouin tribes in Sinai, where the dead was carried several days distance to the tribal cemetery.

- Bedouin tribes usually have their cemeteries close to their camping grounds.

- The graves in most times took the form of a stone pile called rijm (cairn), and a tombstone is to be placed at the head with having the wasm (tribe symbol) engraved on one of its sides.

- The absence of formal graveside ceremonies, only the family mourned at camp for few days with showing expressions of grieves as lamentations and cutting hair.

- The absence of any information about women funeral rites.

- Visiting the tombs of ancestors and saints, where sacrificing animals and giving offerings (e.g. head cords, silk tassels, and ostrich eggs) are to take place during the frequent visits by the tribe members, also green boughs are to be placed on the top of the grave.

- Preferring highlands or distinguished areas for burying the dead.

3. THE ORIGINS OF NOMADIC BURIAL PRACTICES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

The first evidence of nomadic groups' burials in Jordan dates back to the Early Bronze (EB) IV Age period; according to Yassine (1991), many of the cities in this period were abandoned, there was a prominent nomadic life where

people depended in their economy on pastoralism. Kenyon (1970) described the end of this period and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (MB) as the First Intermediate EB-MB Period, which resembled the First Intermediate Period of Egypt. The destruction witnessed in some sites as Jericho and Megiddo was interpreted to be caused by new comers, who settled in areas close to these sites but did not build a walled town for themselves. Based on the evidence from the tombs dated to that period, Kenyon concluded that such group was of nomads; some of these were single burials, which were different from group burials of Early Bronze Age (I-III). Other tombs were shaft tombs that contained disarticulated piles of bones, indicating that such nomadic groups practiced the habit of transferring bodies of those who died during the course of the seasonal migrations to tribal burying places. Moreover, Kenyon made emphasis on a type of shaft tomb identified as dagger tomb where weapons were found, suggesting then the presence of warriors of a tribal organization (identified by Kenyon as Amorites), this group had a nomadic life in semi-arid areas, while their neighbors (Canaanites) occupied agricultural lands. Another example came from Bab edh-Dhra', where shaft and chamber tombs were dominant, disarticulated skeletal remains formed a pile in the center of each chamber, skulls were usually placed to the left of the pile, while grave goods were around the edge of the chamber or to the right of the entrance (Schaub & Rast, 1981). Such finds were interpreted by some scholars as being the result of periodic visits to the site by non-sedentary groups, these used to transport their dead in a decomposed state (Schaub & Rast, 1981; Dever, 1987). Such interpretations were opposed by Palumbo (2008) who suggested that even sedentary communities practiced disarticulation of bones in burials. Other forms of tombs were also evident during EBIV period in Jordan; in the regions where the soft limestone is absent, tombs were located above the ground, and they took the forms of dolmens or cairns (similar to previously mentioned rijm), also tumulus which covered built structures. Dolmens were commonly found in northern areas, while cairns were a characteristic of the south; the later were

particularly connected to nomadic groups. Another burial type known as cist tomb appeared during the end of Late Bronze and Iron I Ages, this one was linked to nomads (Tubb, 1997; Kafafi, 2006), a good example comes from Wadi Fidan where circular pits of 1 m depth were dug as individual tombs, the bottom of each pit had a stone-lined cist grave, while the cist walls and capstones were made of hewn stones, then a thin layer of pise was put on the top of the capstones to seal the burial. The pit then was filled with sediment and was circled with cobbles to mark the grave. These graves were said to be of the Shasu nomads who settled in south of Jordan during this period (Levy et al., 2004). This type of graves continued to appear in the Neo Babylonian-Persian periods (Iron II-Iron III Ages), the cemetery of Tell el-Mazar included such type of graves that took the form of brick-lined pits (Yassine, 1984).

Unfortunately, there is a lack of information about nomadic funeral practices during the Classical and Islamic Periods; most probably graves took the form of cairns (rijms), these were also shrines for people who passed by, a common practice was putting a stone by anyone who visited the grave to give peace to the soul of the dead (Kareem, 2002). Clear evidences though come from the Ottoman Period where a distinctive type of individual grave was connected to Bedouins; that is the cairn appearing frequently in the north-eastern basalt desert of Jordan (Harra). According to Lancaster (1993), these consisted of a cairn flanked by two wings or stone walls with a height of 1 m, close to this grave is a stone platform for washing the body prior to burial. In some cases, a small mosque is constructed to the south of the grave; such burials were linked to a tribe known as Ahl al-Jabal. Another type was mentioned by McQuitty (2008), where tombs are built of well-dressed stones and have distinguished grave-markers, an example is a tomb dated to the end of the 19th century, and it belonged to a member of the 'Adwan tribe. The tomb is in a small cemetery to the northeast of Amman, and has a tombstone with inscribed symbols of crescent moon and star.

While very few tribal Bedouin cemeteries were excavated in Transjordan, such as the one

in Tell Hisban (Walker, 2001), several Bedouin tombs in Palestine were excavated and had studies published on them, these include Tell el-Hesi (Toombs, 1985), Tell Gat, Tell Nagila, Tell Gezer, Tell Zeror, and Caesarea Maritima (Walker, 2001). For Hisban, a tribal cemetery was uncovered; it contained about 100 individuals, and was dated to the late 19th century on the basis of coins. The cemetery is located at the highest point of the tell, the 'Adwan tribe which had a camping ground nearby (close to Ain Hisban), used to wash the deceased in the wadi or at one of the cisterns at the site, then the body is to be wrapped in a white linen shroud and immediately buried. It was noticed that the dead had all of their jewelry and objects buried with them, the immediate burial after death was done to avoid contact with the body, which explains the large amount of jewelry and funeral objects found as necklaces, bracelets, and rings.

The sedentarization of nomads during the second half of 20th century in the Middle East had its influence on Bedouin funeral rites and cemeteries. These were transformed from simple graves with two rocks at the head and foot of the interred to well-built structures with stones of carved inscriptions with Arabic calligraphy (Levy et. al., 2004).

4. THE CASE STUDY

In order to distinguish the burial practices of Bedouin tribes which lived a pure nomadic life till the mid of the 20th century (after which the sedentarization of Bedouins took place in the 1960's), a focus group was selected for this purpose; this group included individuals from the clans of Abu Tayeh, al-Nawasrah, and Abu Tqaiqa (which all descend from the well-known Howitat tribe). For the first two clans, most of their members are living in al-Jafr sub-district, which is a part of the Governorate of Ma'an; the population of al-Jafr consists, mainly, of the following clans: Abu Tayeh (mentioned as Tawayha in some studies), al-Dmaniyeh, and al-Nawasra. These clans still include mobilizing Bedouins who continuously move from north to south of the sub-district and vice-versa, they occasionally camp in Bayir (70 km to the northeast of al-Jafr). The third clan is in Theba and Tabouk

(in Saudi Arabia, 150 km south of al-Jafr); some of its members are still living a completely nomadic life. Interviews took place in May 2013, where the second author (also from Abu Tayeh clan and a grandson of one of its chiefs) gathered all the information regarding funeral practices before and after sedentarization. The questions of the interviews focused on the following aspects: tribal groups in the cemeteries of al-Jafr village (it was not possible to get details about cemeteries in the other location), practices followed in preparing and burying the dead, attending the funeral, expressions of grief and animal sacrifices.

Two cemeteries are located to the southeast of al-Jafr village; most of the graves are characterized by being dumped pits that are lined with a ring of cement bricks or rocks, these graves had tombstones at the head with names and date of death inscribed. Some pieces of the dead cloths (usually the Shmagh (head cover) and Iqal (head cord)) were found on these (Plate 3), a rite that is still practiced by some Bedouin tribes (such as Howaitat). Some graves (as the grave of Bkhait al-Darawsheh) (Plate 4) are distinguished for having the shape of a stepped structure of stones, also being painted with white, such practice is optional and is to be decided by the family of the dead.

Each of the two cemeteries is for a particular clan (both are from the Howaitat tribe); the southern cemetery belongs to Abu Tayeh clan and it is located near Qasr Ibn Dhailan (the tribe chief in the early 20th century). The other cemetery is of al-Darawsheh clan, it is located to north of al-Jafr village, and was sealed after burying the last individual (Majid al-Msayyib) there in 1990 (this individual was a television director who was buried in that cemetery on his request; the second author was one of those who attended the burial).

When asking about funeral ceremony practices, the focus group members emphasized that close relations among the clan members make the spread of death news very quick, men gather to immediately burry the body if death occurs during the daylight, if it takes place during the night, then the dead body will be covered with a shroud and people will gather nearby to drink coffee, the burial is to take place the next day.

Wrapping the body with a white shroud was only practiced fifteen or twenty years ago, the dead person was to be buried wearing his clothes and head cover. Just two decades ago, washing the dead body was practiced, since water was not always available. After burying the body, an animal sacrifice is made on the same day, this continues for the next two days, the dead relatives are invited to dinner, and another animal sacrifice is made on the third day by the dead relatives, this meal is called ('asha al mayet or the dinner of the dead). For those who have a good financial status, a camel would be sacrificed, while sheep becomes the choice of others who have less money. Usually, not less than ten sheep are sacrificed in such occasion, which usually lasts only for three days. For women, only very close relatives attend her burial, no funeral ceremony is to be held for her.

When asking the focus group about what western travelers mentioned regarding visits to graves by women to express grief and put cut hair, they all confirmed that such practice (at least in the traditions of Howitat of al-Jafr in the north down 500 km to Theba in the south) was and is still forbidden, women should not show any cries of lamentations, even during the funerary attended by men, it is rare to mention the dead or talk about him.

The focus group members were asked about other funeral aspects in the writings of European travelers; these were concerning: residing during winter in Desert Castles near which tribal cemeteries were located, sacrificing animals and giving offerings during the frequent visits of tribe members to the graves, visiting wellis (saints) and preferring highlands as locations for graves. The group members stated that such aspects are not practiced by the Bedouins in the south of Jordan and northwest of Hijaz (Howaitat of Tahama & Tabouk), who described themselves as real nomads, other tribes who sedentarized earlier are known for them as Ahl al-Deerah, who traditionally lived in the west and southwest of the City of Ma'an, consequently their practices are not to be interpreted as Bedouin in the full meaning of the word. They also stated that Bedouins in south of Jordan do not visit graves of relatives, nor those of saints (wellis). Before sedentarization, Bedouins used to

have temporary camping grounds, if a person dies there, then he would be buried in the same area and the tribe will have to look for another location for camping.



Plate 3: One of the old graves in al-Jafr village, the remains of rijm (pile of stones) and dead cloths are still seen (Collection of Prof. S. Abu Tayeh)



Plate 4: The grave of Bkhait al-Darawsheh in the cemetery of al-Jafr (south of Jordan), it takes the shape of a stepped structure with a tombstone at head (al-Hussein & Mahmoud, 2011).



Plate 5: The grave of Shaikh As'ad (the ancestor of al-Sukhur) in Bayir, the grave used to take the shape of a rijm, during later times a cement layer was put by tribe members for restoration, the grave is thought to be located in the spot where Shaikh As'ad was killed in the battle known as al-Tor between al-Sukhur and Howaitat (Collection of Prof. S. Abu Tayeh)

5. SEDENTARIZATION OF TRIBES IN JORDAN DURING THE LATE 19TH & EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

In order to understand differences in funeral practices among Bedouin tribes mentioned in the writings under discussion, it becomes important then to be acquainted with their movement and sedentarization, which both took place during the Ottoman Period (Map 1). A full explanation of such aspects is found in Oppenheim et. al. (1943), where the structure and life style of tribes were given for the regions of Iraq, Arabian Peninsula, Levant, Sinai, and Persia. For Transjordan, the plains in the east of this area take the shape of a triangle where its base is stretching from Aqaba to Jabal Tubaiq, while its other two sides are formed by the western highlands and Wadi es-Sirhan. Such plains were sufficient for providing pastoralizing areas for two big tribes during the Late Ottoman period; these were Sukhur (also known as Bani Sakhr) and Howaitat; the former had its summer camping grounds in Balqa and Houran, while the later was in al-Sharat (south western highlands). This was to change in the winter when Sukhur moved southwards so the Howaitat could navigate to the east. In the early Ottoman Period, the Sardiya and 'Amr tribes were occupying and navigating within these areas, while in the Mamluk Period, these were Bani Mahdi and Bani 'Oqba. The areas of Karak and Balqa were mainly settlement areas of small tribes who depended in their economy on pastoralism and cultivating crops (268).

According to Oppenheim et. al. (1943), the Sukhur tribe (which came originally from Hijaz), reached the eastern parts of Transjordan in the 17th century, after many conflicts with the Sardiyya and 'Adwan tribes in Balqa, they could control this area and reach Ajlun in the north (260). This situation was to continue till the 19th century when the Turks invaded Ajlun, the Sukhur then left the city and settled in Balqa, they could not resist the continuous invasions by the 'Anazah tribe, consequently they transformed to semi-nomadic life, while the 'Adwan tribe had a full sedentary life (263). By the end of the 19th century, they had the ownership of lands to the east of Balqa, which were cultivated by Palestinians (343).

For Howaitat, a significant change took place in the tribal structure by the end of the 19th century; when the Turks penetrated the southern parts of Transjordan after attacking Karak in 1894, Harb Abu Tayeh had his own tribal gathering which became the clan known as Abu Tayeh, after his death in 1904, he was succeeded by his son Rabi' as a chief of the clan, the latter died in 1907 and his brother 'Odeh became its chief (425). The navigation area of this group extended from Bayir in the north to Jabal Tubiq in the south. For the other clan of Howaitat known as Ibn Jazi, their area was from Wadi 'Araba in the west to Wadi Sirhan in the east, some of the clans of the Howaitat tribe continued in living a full nomadic life, these were mainly in the east of Transjordan and northeast of Hijaz.

By the time when the Emirate of Eastern Jordan was established in 1921, the conflicts between tribes were to take place (as in the past few centuries), the tribes in Transjordan were geographically categorized into 3 groups, these were Ahl al-Shamal (people of the north) who were the tribes of Houran and Sukhur, these had regular movements to the north during the summer, Ahl al-Balqa (people of Balqa) led by the 'Adwan tribe in Balqa, and Ahl-al-Qibly (people of the south) who were mainly of the Howaitat tribe, the later had relatives whose camping areas were in north of al-Hajiz, consequently the navigation of Howaitat of Transjordan was from north to south and vice-versa (267-268). The first two groups were known for their very close relations with urban and rural communities. At that time, the total population in Transjordan was 320,000, which was distributed as follows: 30,000 of Bedouins who are living full nomadism, 100,000 of Bedouins who were half nomads and 190,000 who were urbanized with full sedentarization. The later who were in cities besides the rural communities in south of Ajloun shared with Bedouins their daily life habits and tribal matters, marriage relations between these two groups had great influences on Bedouins, a significance influence was the visitation of holy trees and shrines (269-270). Visiting the tombs of saints was one of the preventive methods used by Bedouins against evil eye, and for cure from illness as well. The tradi-

tional Bedouin medicine included other methods as hanging amulets and charms on the body, writing verses from the Quran, taking vows, and following rules of behavior, religion and hygiene (Abu-Rabia, 2005). These tombs of saints (*welli*) were considered as sacred shrines (*mazar*) that have a supernatural power and sanctity to grant divine blessing, and to be cured from illness. These were usually connected with sacred trees, which exist near these tombs. It was believed that the spirit of the *welli* dwells in his grave or in a tree which is dedicated to him (Dafni, 2007). Muslim pilgrims frequently visited these shrines to seek blessings, and they were also considered as safe places to store valuable things by tribesmen (Conder, 1889).

For other tribes mentioned by travelers in writings under discussion, their sedentarization was as follows (Oppenheim et. al., 1943):

- al-'Isa: during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the main camping area of this tribe was in the south east of Jabal al-Druz; they were considered as part of Ahl al-Shamal (people of the north) whose camping grounds reached Wadi es-Sirhan (271).

- Sirhan: this was one of the strong tribes in south of Houran, till the beginning of the 20th century they lived a full nomadic life, after which they settled in three villages located between Dar'a and Mafraq. In 1925 they lost a big portion of their herds after being attacked by the Wahhabis; consequently their navigation was only during the winter in areas close to Wadi Sirhan (274).

- For the tribes in Sinai, the existence of old routes used by both the Christian pilgrims to reach Saint Katrina Monastery, and by Muslims while heading to Mecca, both had a significant influence on the life of Bedouin tribes through ages; escorting and transferring these pilgrims formed a vital source of economy for these tribes in addition to herding animals and planting lands close to oases (206). For the Towara tribe mentioned in Burckhardt (1831), it included the following clans: Sawalha, 'Aliqat, Mazinah and al-Jibaliyyah. The Towara tribe had only small herds of camels in the beginning of the 20th century; their economy depended mainly on palm oases (as the one in Wadi Firan), fishing, producing grounding stones, guarding the Chris-

tian monastery of Saint Katrina, also making wood coal and selling it in Cairo.

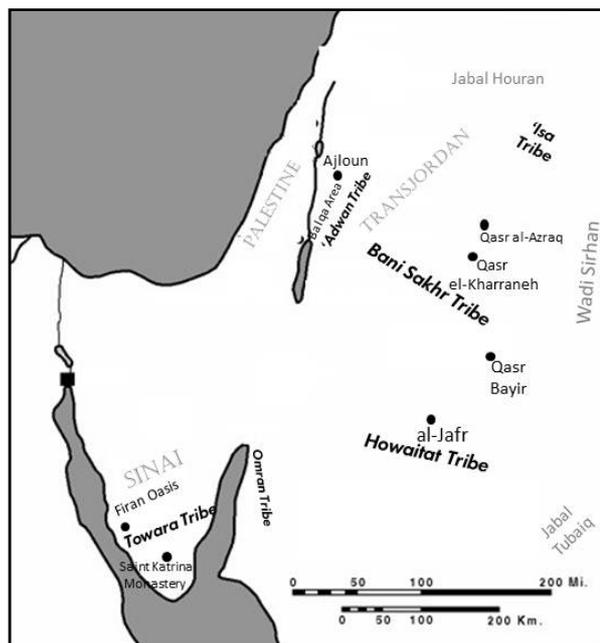
6. CONCLUSIONS

There was an obvious misinterpretation of some funeral rites in the writings of European travelers to Transjordan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whether by relating them to nomadic groups, or by generalizing them to be common among all tribes without considering geographical differences or extent of their sedentarization. Such misinterpretation was even witnessed in archaeology, as in the previously discussed example of Kenyon (1970), when a particular type of shaft tomb (dagger tomb) was linked to nomadic groups, since piles of disarticulated bones were found in these tombs, indicating then the habit of transferring bodies of those who died during the seasonal migrations. Such interpretation was rejected by Palumbo (2008) who stated that even sedentary communities practiced disarticulation of bones in burials. Such example indicates the significance of linking stages of sedentarization to funeral practices of any group.

By looking at both the information given by the focus group, and the history of sedentarization for the tribes under discussion; it can be concluded that the funeral rites to be considered as pure nomadic were burying individuals where they died, putting a pile of stones over the grave (*rijm*) with having the symbol of the tribe (*wasm*) engraved on a large stone nearby, absence of graveside ceremonies (particularly for women), and putting cloths of the dead on the top of the grave. Other funeral rites described by European travelers as being of Bedouins were most probably practiced by some tribes after their sedentarization; such rites included carrying the dead several days distance to tribal cemetery (as in the case of Sinai tribes), having cemeteries that are close to camping grounds (as in the case of Sukhur, 'Adwan and Sardiyya), and visiting the tombs of ancestors and saints, where sacrificing animals and giving offerings (e.g. green boughs, head cords, silk tassels, and ostrich eggs) took place during the frequent visits by the tribe members (as in the case of Towara and Sukhur). Such practices re-

quired a partial or full sedentarization; as clarified in the section that discussed the history of tribes in Transjordan and Sinai during the 19th and 20th centuries; these tribes had forms of economic activities that depended on sedentary life as cultivation, fishing, producing grinding stones, as well as guarding the religious places and trade routes. Moreover, some practices as visiting saints tombs and holy trees were originally of rural communities that had different types of relations (as marriage) with Bedouin tribes (as in the case of Ajloun rural communities and 'Adwan), indicating then a cultural influence on these groups, this was confirmed by Lawrence (1935), when he described the traditional visit of Sukhur to their ancestor (As'ad). Such rites were not practiced by the tribes that continued living a nomadic life (these actually partially sedentarized only after the 1960's), as in the case of Abu Tayeh, Nawasrah and Taqatqa clans (the focus group of this study). The main change that took place after sedentarization for these clans was having cemeteries close to the villages where some of their members lived, while other rites as burying the dead in his cloths, and topping the grave with a rijm were

continued to be practiced till the last two decades.



Map 1: A map showing the sites and approximate locations of tribes mentioned in the text, putting locations was based on the map of Oppenheim et. al. (1943), the blank map was retrieved from: <http://post.queensu.ca/~gunsinge/ClassicsHome/clst208/clst208Levant.jpg>

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