

THE LANDS OF AS-SIRR AFFAIR IN 1914: ITS REFLECTION IN THE CONTEMPORARY PALESTINIAN ARABIC PERIODICAL PRESS¹

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This article explores the endeavour to purchase a large tract called “the lands of as-Sirr” (Arab. *arāḍī as-Sirr*) by two prominent Gazans *al-Ḥājj* Saʿīd Effendi ash-Shawwā and Aḥmad ʿArif Effendi al-Ḥusaynī. These lands were located in the recently established sub-district of Beersheba (Arab. Biʿr as-Sabʿ). The ʿAzāzima and Tarābīn tribes attempted unsuccessfully to regain the ownership of the lands after these had been previously temporarily seized by the government. Their return to them was conditioned upon reaching an agreement between the tribes on the division of the lands. In the summer of 1914 the sons of the two above-mentioned Gazan notables offered the Bedouins to arrange with the authorities the return of the lands into their possession in exchange for their subsequent sale for a heavily discounted price. It was rumoured at the time that they intended to sell these lands to the Zionists. In the contemporary Palestinian Arabic press (the newspapers *Filasṭīn* from Jaffa and *al-Karmal*² from Haifa) this matter was extensively discussed and the notables were criticized for their lack of patriotism and for acting as middlemen for the Zionists. Furthermore, the editor-in-chief of *Filasṭīn*, Yūsuf al-ʿIsā, scolded the notables for taking advantage of the vulnerability of the poverty-stricken Bedouins.

Key words: Bedouins, Beersheba, *Filasṭīn*, *al-Karmal*, the lands of as-Sirr, Najīb Naṣṣār, Yūsuf al-ʿIsā

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² I am using the literary name *al-Karmal* instead of the more commonly used *al-Karmil*.

The Situation in Southern Palestine at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

For various reasons (among them the presence of coastal sand dunes, swamps and a prevalence of malaria, Bedouin raids and lack of security) until the mid-19th century most of the settlements in Palestine were located in the mountainous areas, whereas in the fertile lowlands on the coast and in the valleys the Bedouin tribes held sway. It was only in the second half of the 19th century that the situation began to change. The centralizing efforts of the government which began in earnest in the context of the reforms of the Tanzīmāt era (1839 – 1876)³ had a significant impact in Palestine⁴ as the authorities exerted efforts to pacify and settle the Bedouins (their recruitment for the military and taxation were other major goals of the government). Moreover, this led to settlement of the peasants in the fertile lowlands (Baysān Valley, Marj ibn ʿĀmir Valley, Shārūn Plain, etc.). At the same time, following the promulgation of the Ottoman Land Code in 1858, the Ottoman Empire including Palestine was opened to land speculation, with far-reaching consequences.⁵ Only a very small part of the Bedouin lands in the Negev region was registered during the Ottoman era (according to Kenneth Stein, about 50 km²).⁶

The Negev region which comprises about half of the area of Palestine⁷ was inhabited almost exclusively by various Bedouin tribes. Most of it had arid and semi-arid character, but it also contained fertile areas which had strong agricultural potential when the rainfall was plentiful. The most fertile lands were located to the north and west of Beersheba. In the regions which received more than 300 mm of rainfall per year wheat was planted; in those with 200–300 mm both wheat and barley were raised. The areas to the south of Beersheba

³ For a discussion of the Tanzīmāt reforms, see HANIOĞLU, M. Şükrü. *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*. pp. 72–108.

⁴ By Palestine I mean the *sanjaqs* of ʿAkkā and Nābulus and the Jerusalem *mutaşarrıfıya*.

⁵ KARK, R., FRANTZMAN, S. J. The Negev: Land, Settlement, the Bedouin and Ottoman and British Policy 1871 – 1948. In *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 39:1, p. 55; KARK, R., LEVIN, N. The Environment in Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period. In ORENSTAIN, D., TAL, A., MILLER, C. *Between Ruin and Restoration: An Environmental History of Israel*. pp. 15–16.

⁶ This historian also describes reasons for the Bedouins' refusal to register their lands. STEIN, K. W. *The Land Question in Palestine, 1917 – 1939*, p. 22.

⁷ The Beersheba district covered 12,577 km² during the Mandate period. ABU SITTA, S. *Atlas of Palestine 1917 – 1966*, Table 2.10, p. 52.

with 100–200 mm of rainfall were suitable for barley.⁸ At the time of the Ottoman conquest there existed some villages in the area of the future sub-district (Arab. *qaḍā'*⁹) of Beersheba. However, they had all disappeared by the nineteenth century, when the southernmost inhabited village was aḍ-Ḍāhirīya in the Judean hills.¹⁰ Nonetheless, during the 19th century the Bedouin lifestyle was being transformed as they had to find new sources of livelihood (especially after the Suez Canal was opened in 1869) and they increasingly engaged in land cultivation and the production of crops. The Bedouins in the sub-district of Beersheba had been drawn into the global economy and by the end of the 19th century, barley produced in the region had become an important cash crop, being exported by sea via the port of Gaza mostly to cater to breweries in the United Kingdom.¹¹ In *A Survey of Palestine* prepared in 1945/1946 it was estimated that more than 2,000 km² had been intermittently cultivated in the Negev and therefore their ownership could be claimed by private individuals.¹² Salman Abu Sitta gives a much higher size of cultivable and cultivated land in the Negev in 1948 – 4,900 km² and 3,500 km² respectively.¹³

Until the late 19th century, the government chiefly employed military means in its dealings with the tribes. In the years 1870 – 1891 several military expeditions took place but did not succeed in pacifying the Bedouins.¹⁴ However, towards the end of the 19th century the authorities started to utilize other methods in order to integrate the Bedouins socially, economically and politically and gain their loyalty. A major measure adopted in this regard was the decision to found the town of Beersheba taken in the form of an imperial

⁸ ABU SITTA, S. *Atlas of Palestine 1917 – 1966*, Table 2.23, p. 53.

⁹ *Qadā'* [sub-district]. From the 1860s, the Ottoman Empire was divided into a hierarchical set of administrative units, the largest being province [Arab. *wilāya*], followed by district [Arab. *sanjaq, liwā'*], sub-district [Arab. *qaḍā', qā'immaqāmīya*], county [Arab. *nāḥīya*] and village [Arab. *qarya*].

¹⁰ KARK, R., FRANTZMAN, S. J. The Negev: Land, Settlement, the Bedouin and Ottoman and British Policy 1871 – 1948. In *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 39:1, p. 55.

¹¹ BÜSSOW, J. *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem 1872 – 1908*, p. 273.

¹² *A Survey of Palestine: Prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the Information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry*. Volume 1, p. 257.

¹³ ABU SITTA, S. *Atlas of Palestine 1917 – 1966*, Table 2.23, p. 53.

¹⁴ FRANTZMAN, S. J., KARK, R. Bedouin Settlement in Late Ottoman and British Mandatory Palestine: Influence on the Cultural and Environmental Landscape, 1870 – 1948. In *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 2011, No. 1, p. 5.

edict in 1899.¹⁵ Apart from strategic security reasons, arising from the close proximity to the British-controlled Sinai, it was thought that tighter control of the region would result in increased revenues. Furthermore, the tribes were under the sway of the notables from Gaza and it was expected that the administrative separation of Beersheba could sever this connection. Yasemin Avci summarizes the late nineteenth-century situation pertinently: “The dependency of the Southern Negev on the Gaza sub-district brought no benefit to the state, but rather it served only to intensify the land disputes among the Bedouins. They were often subjected to the corrupt practices of the urban notables who dominated the administrative council and courts in Gaza.”¹⁶ Moreover, the connection to the tribes in Beersheba was one of the major sources of strength for the notables of Gaza. Therefore, severing this link also helped to diminish the power and independence of the Gazan notables which the Ottoman government at the turn of the 20th century made vigorous effort to achieve.¹⁷

Conflicts between various Bedouin tribes and tribal confederations in southern Palestine occurred frequently and led to bloody cycles of violence. In 1845, the governor of Jerusalem Mehmed Emin Kibrıslı (1845 – 1847) reported their consequences in the following words: “The bloody skirmishes between the different clans caused a state of desperate poverty and disorder in the region, and a dramatic decrease in government revenue.”¹⁸ In 1877 a series of clashes

¹⁵ At the same time Baysān was established as the administrative center in northern Palestine in an area which was also mostly inhabited by the Bedouins. FRANTZMAN, S. J., KARK R. Beduin Settlement in Late Ottoman and British Mandatory Palestine: Influence on the Cultural and Environmental Landscape, 1870 – 1948. In *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 2011, No. 1, pp. 5–6.

¹⁶ AVCI, Y. The Application of *Tanzimat* in the Desert: The Bedouins and the Creation of a New Town in Southern Palestine (1860 – 1914). In *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 6, p. 973.

¹⁷ Another method employed by the Ottoman government was sending the unbending notables to exile, usually to a place of their choice for a limited period of time. However, by the end of the 19th century the government’s treatment had become more severe and in 1898 three prominent members of the al-Ḥusaynī family from Gaza were deported to Anatolia where they stayed until 1902. In addition, the position of the Ḥanafī *mufī* of Gaza held by the members of the al-Ḥusaynī family remained unfilled until after the Young Turk Revolution. BÜSSOW, J. *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem 1872 – 1908*, pp. 292, 300–301.

¹⁸ AVCI, Y. The Application of *Tanzimat* in the Desert: The Bedouins and the Creation of a New Town in Southern Palestine (1860 – 1914). In *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 6, p. 971. In 1906 the taxes raised in the *qaḍā*’ of Beersheba amounted to about ten per cent of the state’s income from the *mutaşarrıfıya*. *Ibid.*, p. 973.

took place over some land near Hebron between two tribal alliances of the Tarābīn and Tiyāha (the latter were supported by the peasants and inhabitants of Hebron).¹⁹ A long-standing feud concerning land occurred between the tribes °Azāzima and Tiyāhā which by 1888 was already about half-a-century old. In 1907 another aged conflict between Ḥullām Bedouins (part of Tiyāhā) and the villagers of Yaṭa²⁰ over an area called Masfara was temporarily solved by adding them to the State Lands. Both parties were reportedly content with this solution.²¹

In the Late Ottoman Period southern Palestine was inhabited by the following tribal confederations: Aḥaywāt, °Azāzima, Ḥanājira, Jabārāt, Tarābīn, Tiyāhā, Sa°īdīyūn and Jahhālūn.²² In order to prevent further conflicts between tribes the government delimited the borders between them in 1891.²³ The number of the Bedouin in the sub-district of Beersheba was difficult to ascertain due to their mobility, lack of permanent settlements and resistance to taxation and military conscription. According to Justin McCarthy there were 32,000 Bedouins in the Negev in 1880 and 55,000 in 1914.²⁴ In the census of 1922 they

¹⁹ BÜSSOW, J. *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem 1872 – 1908*, p. 201.

²⁰ The village of Yaṭa lies 14 kilometres to the south of Hebron; SHARRĀB, Muḥammad Muḥammad Ḥasan. *Mu°jam buldān Filasṭīn* [Lexicon of Palestinian Towns], p. 731. In 1901 the villagers of Yaṭa (Yaṭṭā) were involved in another clash with the Bedouins. BÜSSOW, J. *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem 1872 – 1908*, p. 202.

²¹ AVCI, Y. The Application of *Tanzimat* in the Desert: The Bedouins and the Creation of a New Town in Southern Palestine (1860 – 1914). In *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 6, p. 974.

²² AMARA, A. The Negev Land Question: Between Denial and Recognition. In *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 2013, Vol. 42, No. 4, p. 29.

²³ ABU SITTA, S. *The Denied Inheritance: Palestinian Land Ownership in Beer Sheba*, pp. 5–6 [cit. 16 December 2017]. Available from <http://www.plands.org/getattachment/d9fa12d6-510a-4a82-ae46-929c5b1a3ce3/the-denied-inheritance>. For the map of tribal boundaries, see KARK, R., FRANTZMAN, S. J. The Negev: Land, Settlement, the Bedouin and Ottoman and British Policy 1871 – 1948. In *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 39:1, p. 57.

²⁴ MCCARTHY, J. *The Population of Palestine: Population History and Statistics of the Late Ottoman Period and the Mandate*, p. 35.

numbered 72,898 individuals,²⁵ however the later census of 1931 arrived at a much lower number of 47,981.²⁶

In order to end feuds between the tribes inhabiting the Negev it was necessary to establish state authority. The first practical steps to set up administrative structures in the newly-constituted sub-district of Beersheba (Arab. Bi'r as-Sab^c) were taken in 1900 – 1901 with the appointment of its first *qā'immaqām* (governor) and the building of a government house in the new administrative centre, the town of Beersheba. 2,000 dūnums²⁷ of land needed for the new town were purchased from the ^cAzāzima shaykhs. By 1914 the town of Beersheba already had about 1,000 inhabitants. The administrative council (Arab. *majlis al-idāra*) of the sub-district served as a means to incorporate tribal shaykhs into the local government. Instead of four elected members as decreed by Provincial Law, it contained five, so that shaykhs of all important local tribes were integrated into the administration.²⁸ Along Beersheba, there were other settlements established after the turn of the century in the sub-district, ^cAwjā' al-Ḥafīr on the borders with Sinai; Kaufakha and al-Muḥarraqa on Sultan Abdūlhamid II's private estates and seasonal settlements al-Jamāma, Ḥamāma and Sukharit.²⁹

In the later years of Sultan Abdūlhamid II's rule the authorities exerted efforts to win the loyalty of the Bedouins in southern Palestine. The Ottoman governor of Jerusalem Ali Ekrem Bey³⁰ went to Beersheba at the end of spring

²⁵ BARRON, J. B. *Palestine: Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1922*, Table II.

²⁶ MILLS, E. *Census of Palestine 1931: Population of Villages, Towns and Administrative Areas*, p. 1.

²⁷ One Ottoman dūnum corresponds to 919,3 square metres. During the subsequent Mandate period this unit was transformed into metric dūnum (1,000 m²).

²⁸ AVCI, Y. The Application of *Tanzimat* in the Desert: The Bedouins and the Creation of a New Town in Southern Palestine (1860 – 1914). In *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 6, pp. 969–977. An article in *Filasṭīn* mentions that only four shaykhs were members of the administrative council of the sub-district of Beersheba [“arba^cat a^cḏā' min ^curbān at-Tiyāhā wa aṭ-Ṭarābīn, wa al-^cAzāzima wa al-Jabarāt”]. This would mean that either the information published in the newspaper is incorrect or the number of elected members of the administrative council had been lowered and the shaykh of the Ḥanājira had been removed by 1914. Arāḏī as-Sirr fī Bi'r as-Sab^c [The Lands of as-Sirr in Beersheba]. In *Filasṭīn*, 11 July 1914, 335–38, p. 5.

²⁹ KARK, R, FRANTZMAN, S. J. The Negev: Land, Settlement, the Bedouin and Ottoman and British Policy 1871 –1948. In *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 39:1, pp. 56–58.

³⁰ Ali Ekrem Bey served as the governor of Jerusalem for one and a half years (1906 – 1908) and his tenure came to an end following the Young Turk Revolution. For

of 1907 not only to collect taxes, but also to show the state's interest and respect towards the tribes in order to gain their loyalty.³¹ The next year the *mutaṣarrif* again undertook the visit to the southern regions and delivered a speech in Beersheba in which he promised to the Bedouins multifaceted support from the government. Furthermore, another indication of the keen and growing attention paid to this region and its inhabitants by the government is the fact that in 1908 the status of the *qā'immaqām* of Beersheba was elevated to the position of assistant governor (Arab. *mutaṣarrif mu'āwin*). Moreover a new sub-district of 'Awjā' al-Ḥafir and a new county of Mulayḥa were constituted.³²

Private Arabic Periodical Press in Palestine

The history of private Arabic periodical press in Palestine only began after the Young Turk Revolution of July 1908. In the following years about three dozen Arabic newspapers and journals were founded in the cities of Jerusalem, Jaffa and Haifa. Many of the periodicals did not last long, like *al-Aṣma'ī* of which only eleven issues were printed.³³ Among the most long-lived were *al-Quds* (1908 – 1914), established in Jerusalem by Jurjī Ḥabīb Ḥanānyā, *al-Karmal* (1908 – 1914), published in Haifa by Najīb al-Khūrī Naṣṣār and *Filasṭīn* (1911 – 1914). The last was owned and managed by 'Isā al-'Isā (1878 – 1850) and its editor-in-chief was his cousin Yūsuf al-'Isā (1870/1874 – 1948). *Filasṭīn*, which was printed in Jaffa, was a major Arabic newspaper of the Jerusalem *mutaṣarrifiya* while *al-Karmal* was the most important Arabic periodical in the

a detailed description of his term of office in the Jerusalem *mutaṣarrifiya*, see KUSHNER, D. Ali Ekrem Bey, Governor of Jerusalem, 1906 – 1908. In *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 1996, Vol. 28, pp. 349–362.

³¹ Due to drought the taxes imposed on the Bedouins of the sub-district were reduced by half compared with the previous year. BLECH, E. C. *Mutessarif's tour in his Province*. FO 195/2255, 19 June 1907, No. 19. It is important to note that in 1906 as a result of the "Aqaba Crisis" the border running from Rafah to al-'Aqaba was established between the Ottoman Empire and British controlled Egypt. HALEVY, D. Marginal Diplomacy: Alexander Knesevich and the Consular Agency in Gaza, 1905 – 1914. In *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 2017, No. 70, pp. 85–87.

³² BLECH, E. C. *Kaimmakamlik of Beersheba*. FO 195/2287, 12 March 1908, No. 14; BLECH, E. C., *Administrative Changes in Southern Districts*. FO 195/2287, 20 May 1908, No. 30.

³³ YEHOSHUA, Ya'qūb. *Tārīkh aṣ-ṣaḥāfa al-'Arabīya fī Filasṭīn fī al-'ahd al-'Uthmānī (1908 – 1918)* [The History of the Arabic Press in Palestine in the Ottoman Era (1908 – 1918)], pp. 86–88.

northern part of Palestine, the *sanjaq* of °Akkā, which was included in the Beirut province. Both were published twice a week on four pages.³⁴ However, many issues of the periodicals from the Late Ottoman Period have been lost. *Filasṭīn* and *al-Karmal* belong to the more completely preserved newspapers, even though many issues of both of them are not extant.³⁵ There was a marked difference between the editors of *al-Karmal* and *Filasṭīn* as to their acquaintance with Palestinian countryside. Najīb Naṣṣār³⁶ (1862 – 1948) was familiar with the situation in rural areas both from his work in the agriculture and his acting as a broker for the Jewish Colonization Association.³⁷ In contrast, at the beginning of their publishing of *Filasṭīn*, the al-°Isā cousins were not very well informed about the circumstances in the countryside and only gradually became acquainted with them.³⁸ This is corroborated by their cooperation with the Zionist agronomist Menashe Meirovitch who in the years 1911 – 1912 published in *Filasṭīn*, under the pseudonym of Abū Ibrahīm, a series of seventeen articles on the situation in Palestinian villages.³⁹

³⁴ From 17 June 1914 *Filasṭīn* was enlarged to six pages.

³⁵ In the case of *Filasṭīn* the issues 1–50 from the first half of 1911 and the last 22 issues (346–49–367–70) published from mid-August until the end of October 1914 are missing.

³⁶ For more details on Naṣṣār's life, journalistic and anti-Zionist activities in the pre-WWI period, see QĀSIMĪYA, Khayrīya. Najīb Naṣṣār fī jarīdatihī al-Karmal (1909–1914): Aḥad ruwwād munāḥaḍat aṣ-Ṣahyūnīya [Najīb Naṣṣār in his Newspaper *al-Karmal*: One of the Pioneers of Anti-Zionist Resistance]. In *Shu'ūn filasṭīnīya*, 1973, No. 23, pp. 101–123; BEŠKA, E. Anti-Zionist Journalistic Works of Najīb al-Khūrī Naṣṣār in the Newspaper *al-Karmal* in 1914. In *Asian and African Studies*, 2011, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 167–193.

³⁷ QĀSIMĪYA, Khayrīya. Najīb Naṣṣār fī jarīdatihī al-Karmal (1909 – 1914): Aḥad ruwwād munāḥaḍat aṣ-Ṣahyūnīya [Najīb Naṣṣār in his Newspaper *al-Karmal*: One of the Pioneers of Anti-Zionist Resistance]. In *Shu'ūn filasṭīnīya*, 1973, No. 23, p. 103; MANDEL, N. J. *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I*, p. 85.

³⁸ BEŠKA, E. *From Ambivalence to Hostility: The Arabic Newspaper Filasṭīn and Zionism, 1911–1914*, p. 44.

³⁹ For a thorough analysis of their partnership, see DOLBEE, S., HAZKANI, Sh. “Impossible is not Ottoman”: Menashe Meirovitch, ‘Isa al-‘Isa, and Imperial Citizenship in Palestine. In *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2015, Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 241–262; DOLBEE, S., HAZKANI, Sh. Unlikely Identities: Abu Ibrahim and the Politics of Possibility in Late Ottoman Palestine. In *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 2015, No. 63/64, pp. 24–39.

***Filasṭīn*'s Discussion of the Lands of as-Sirr Affair**

The alleged Zionist endeavour to purchase the lands of as-Sirr [Arab. *arāḍī as-Sirr*] was the last such case extensively discussed in the second half of 1914 in the extant issues of *Filasṭīn*⁴⁰ and *al-Karmal*.⁴¹ The lands of as-Sirr covered a considerable area of 30,000–35,000 Ottoman dūnums and their soil was very fertile. They were located to the southeast of the newly established town of Beersheba.⁴² According to the article in *Filasṭīn* their value was estimated at

⁴⁰ To the best of my *knowledge* the issue 345–48 published on 15 August 1914 is the last extant issue of *Filasṭīn*.

⁴¹ The last extant issue of *al-Karmal* is 453 and was published on 7 August 1914.

⁴² I have consulted various sources which concur in locating the lands of as-Sirr in the close vicinity of the town of Beersheba to the southeast of it. They are shown in the map produced by Salman Abu Sitta of the Palestine Land Society which depicts the situation in the Beersheba sub-district in 1948. It locates the lands of as-Sirr (“Es Sirr”) a few kilometres to the southeast of Beersheba [cit. 16 December 2017]. Available from <http://www.plands.org/en/maps-atlases/maps/gaza-beer-sheba-1948>. Beit Eshel colony was established on the lands of as-Sirr in 1943 (KARK, R. *Pioneering Jewish Settlement in the Negev, 1880 – 1948*, p. 44; email communication with Salman Abu Sitta, 2 January 2018) and the Emeq Sara Industrial Zone is now located in that area (email communication with Emanuel Marx, 30 October 2017 and Ben Fargeon, 19 December 2017). At present, there is an unrecognized Bedouin village that bears the same name “Assir” on the southern edge of Beersheba, see “Map of the Unrecognized Arab Bedouin Villages in the Negev” prepared by Sa'id Abu Sammur [cit. 16 December 2017]. Available from, http://www.neohasid.org/i/unrecognized_villages_map.JPG. It is rendered as “A Ser” in other texts, e.g. YIFTACHEL, O., BARUCH, N., ABU SAMMUR, S., et. al. *Alternative Master Plan for the Unrecognized Bedouin Villages in the Negev*, pp. 31, 38, 43 [cit. 16 December 2017]. Available from <http://bimkom.org/eng/wp-content/uploads/Bedouin-Negev-Alternative-Master-Plan.pdf>. Kark and Frantzman discuss a case from the Mandate period concerning a 30-dūnum plot named “Maukeh El Jisr” (likely a misspelling of Arabic “*Mawqīʿ al-jisr*”, transl. “The place of the bridge”) which was considered part of the lands of as-Sirr. A map of the area sketched in 1928 indicates that the lands of as-Sirr were situated to the south of the town of Beersheba. Although the map shows that the *Mawqīʿ al-jisr* was located to the east of Beersheba, a careful studying of the map reveals that the orientation of the map is wrong, because Wādī as-Sab^c is situated to the south of Beersheba (not to the east) and the road to ʿAwjāʾ al-Ḥafīr runs to the south and not to the east as depicted on the map. The name of the plot *Mawqīʿ al-jisr* was likely given because it was located close to the bridge over Wādī as-Sab^c on the road to ʿAwjāʾ al-Ḥafīr. The map is included in KARK, R., FRANTZMAN, S. J. *The Negev: Land, Settlement, the Bedouin and Ottoman and British Policy 1871 – 1948*. In *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 39:1, p. 68. The owner of the plot was “Sulaiman El Suidany of the Muhamedein (or Hamdin) Azazme”. *Ibid.*, p. 67. The Muḥammadīyūn were among the tribes claiming

50,000–70,000 Ottoman liras. When the editors of *Filasṭīn* heard about the intended sale of these lands they became suspicious that the Zionists might be behind it, contacted the agents of the newspaper in Gaza and Beersheba, and asked them to provide them with additional details on this matter.

In the first article dedicated to this affair the editors sketch a brief history of the region. The classification of the lands of as-Sirr according to the article had been *matrūka*.⁴³ At the end of the 19th century, the ʿAzāzima tribe started to cultivate these lands and after a couple of years *al-Ḥājj* Ḥasan Abū Shabāb, a chief of the Tarābīn,⁴⁴ began to till a small part (500 Ottoman dūnams) of the lands of as-Sirr. One year later, a bloody conflict between these two tribes ensued claiming many lives. It lasted until the establishment of the new sub-district of Beersheba.⁴⁵ As the administrative council of the newly constituted sub-district was unable solve the dispute, it passed it to the administrative council of the Jerusalem *mutaṣarrifīya*. Arbiters were appointed and they allotted an overwhelming majority of the lands of as-Sirr to the ʿAzāzima tribe and only 500 dūnams to the shaykh of the Tarābīn tribe. This took place during the tenure of the *mutaṣarrif* Kāzīm Bey [Kazım Mehmed Cevad (1901 – 1902)]. Neither side accepted this result which led the administrative council of the Jerusalem *mutaṣarrifīya* to temporarily seize the land (Arab. *ḍabt al-arḍ*). The tribes reportedly accepted the solution and did not complain in the following

the lands of as-Sirr in 1914 and were allocated 2 out of 24 *qīrāts* (8,33 per cent of the total). Arāḍī as-Sirr [The Lands of as-Sirr]. In *Filasṭīn*, 18 July 1914, 337–40, pp. 1–2. There are also other more distant areas to the southeast of Beersheba that bear the same name “es Sirr” and “Qasr es Sirr”, see the above-mentioned map prepared by Salman Abu Sitta.

⁴³ This seems to be incorrect, since *matrūka* were lands which were inalienable and for which the obtaining of title deeds was not possible. The more likely classification of these lands would be *mawāt* (Turk. *mewat*). *The Ottoman Land Code*, 1892, pp. 6, 48–53, 327. There were five main categories of land according to the Ottoman Land Code, *mulk*, *mīrī*, *mawqūfa*, *matrūka* and *mawāt*, see *Ibid.*, pp. 1–7.

⁴⁴ In *Filasṭīn* the name of the tribe is transcribed differently as “aṭ-Ṭarābīn”.

⁴⁵ This would suggest that the formation of the new sub-district might have been prompted by the conflict pertaining to the lands of as-Sirr. Furthermore, it also corroborates the importance of the establishment of the sub-district and its administrative centre for the pacification of the tribes in the region. ʿAref Abu-Rabīʿa’s description of a conflict between the Tarābīn and ʿAzāzima seems to support this argument. He maintains that after the ʿAzāzima had been chased to the south by the Tarābīn in 1887, the chief of the Muḥammadīyūn Ḥasan al-Malṭʿa turned to both the local and central authorities for help. ABU-RABIʿA, ʿAref. *Bedouin Century: Education and Development among the Negev Tribes in the Twentieth Century*, p. 8.

years.⁴⁶ Another change took place when these lands were classified as *miri* in 1910. At that time a register of all *miri* lands in the Beersheba sub-district had been prepared. Later, during *mutaşarrif* Jawdat Bey's [Cevdet Bey (1911 – 1912)] tenure the Zionists showed interest in acquiring these land.⁴⁷ Reportedly, a deal was struck between them and the *mutaşarrif* and the price was set at 65,000 Ottoman liras. Out of this amount only a meagre sum of 5,000 Ottoman liras was to be paid to the Bedouin owners with the rest going to the pockets of the governor, officials and middlemen. The lands were to be divided anew with 75 per cent going to the °Azāzima and 25 per cent to the Tarābīn. Shaykhs of both tribes consented to the sale and it was only prevented because the son of *al-Ḥājj* Ḥasan Abū Shabāb of the Tarābīn insisted that the 25 per cent did not belong to the tribe, but to his late father as private property. Therefore, the administrative council of the sub-district could not approve the transaction and return the lands to their previous owners. Moreover, the *mutaşarrif* was removed so the status of the land remained unchanged [*taht idārat al-ḥukūma* (“under the government’s administration”)]. *Filasṭīn*'s editors reported that they had informed the incumbent *mutaşarrif* about this affair.⁴⁸ No doubt they did so in order to influence his position *vis-à-vis* this issue.

Both the historical roots of this case and the reluctance of the authorities to solve this issue are corroborated by a dispatch from the spring of 1913 authored by the British consul in Jerusalem P.J.C. McGregor. In it he reports about disgruntlement amongst the tribes in the Beersheba sub-district. Furthermore, he

⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that this approach was also used a few years later by the government in the above-mentioned dispute pertaining to the lands of Masfara.

⁴⁷ °Abdallāh Khalaf from Gaza mentioned in October 1911 that the Zionists wanted to buy Bedouin lands in the Beersheba sub-district. Baḍā'ī° ghayrinā: Ilā jarīdat Filasṭīn al-gharrā' [What Others Have to Say: To the Honorable Newspaper *Filasṭīn*]. In *Filasṭīn*, 28 October 1911, 81, p. 2. According to Kark, Zionist interest in the Negev region is of earlier date. Reportedly, the Ottoman governor of Jerusalem offered the Zionist leader Menachem Ussishkin half-a-million dūnum of land there in 1903. With regard to the as-Sirr lands, the Zionists began to show interest in them in 1909. One year later the Palestine Office of the Zionist Organization sent an expedition to the Beersheba sub-district to explore possibilities for settlement. However, the only Jewish settlement established in the Negev during the Ottoman era was Ruhama (1911), located about 30 km to the north from Beersheba. KARK, R. *Pioneering Jewish Settlement in the Negev, 1880 – 1948*, p. 44; KARK, R. Jewish frontier settlement in the Negev, 1880 – 1948: Perception and Realization. In *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1981, Volume 17, Issue 3, pp. 337–339.

⁴⁸ Arāḍī as-Sirr fī Bi'r as-Sab° [The Lands of as-Sirr in Beersheba]. In *Filasṭīn*, 11 July 1914, 335–38, p. 5.

details that a shaykh from the Tarābīn tribe had been recently abused by the Gendarmarie:

This tribe has an old grievance against the Government which took possession some ten years ago of certain lands regarding which a dispute had arisen among two sections of the tribe promising to return them as soon as the parties should have become reconciled, with the proviso that the tithe and one-third of the produce should be levied in the meantime for the benefit of the Treasury. An agreement was recently arrived at and the Beduins asked that their full rights of ownership should be recognized as of old; but the Authorities at Jerusalem refused to do so notwithstanding the urgent representations of the present Kaimmakam.⁴⁹ Gendarmes were accordingly sent to collect the produce as usual and, on finding the Sheikh recalcitrant, they proceeded to beat him and use the customary methods of intimidation.⁵⁰

The editors soon received new information about the affair, but because of a lack of space they had to postpone publishing it until the next issue.⁵¹ These additional details were sent by the correspondent from Beersheba and those concerning the present situation were published in the newspaper. According to his report, the tribes had repeatedly complained to the *qā'immaqām* in order to regain possession of the lands. The *qā'immaqām* proposed to the *mutašarrif*, to form a special commission from among the tribal shaykhs who would confirm the rightful owners of the lands of as-Sirr. In response, the *mutašarrif* sent the mayor of Gaza *al-Hājj Sa'īd Effendī ash-Shawwā*⁵² to Beersheba and he identified the owners. The lands were divided into 24 *qīrāṭs* of which 4 1/2 were allotted to the Tarābīn, 17 1/2 to the Mas'ūdīyūn, Farrāhūn and Sawākhina and 2 to the Muḥammadīyūn (the latter four tribes belonged to the 'Azāzima

⁴⁹ The governor of the sub-district (Arab. *qā'immaqām*). At that time Maḥmūd Nadīm Bey was the *qā'immaqām* of Beersheba.

⁵⁰ MCGREGOR P. J. C. *Dissatisfaction among Beduins in Beersheba district*. FO 195/2452/1153, 14 March 1913, No. 20.

⁵¹ Arādī as-Sirr [The Lands of as-Sirr]. In *Filasīn*, 15 July 1914, 336–39, p. 5.

⁵² Sa'īd Effendī ash-Shawwā had been the mayor of Gaza since 1906. For a brief account of the ash-Shawwā family history, see BÜSSOW, J. *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem 1872 – 1908*, pp. 293–296. The British consul in Jerusalem wrote in a report that “the President of the [Gaza] municipality [...] is a notoriously corrupt official”. SATOW, H. E. *Visit to Gaza*. FO 195/2377, 23 October 1911, No. 73.

confederation).⁵³ Two agents, the sons of *al-Ḥājj* Saʿīd Effendi ash-Shawwā and Aḥmad ʿĀrif Effendi al-Ḥusaynī,⁵⁴ were thereafter commissioned to regain the property for the tribes. The agents were subsequently to buy the lands of as-Sirr for 6,000 Ottoman liras from the Bedouins as had been agreed beforehand. Not all tribes had agreed to this settlement as “the Tarābīn and Muḥammadīyūn refused to grant the power of attorney” [“*aṭ-Ṭarābīn wa al-Muḥammadīyīn imtanaʿū ʿan at-tawkīl*”].⁵⁵ The correspondent contends that the reason why the Bedouins agreed to the sale is their abject poverty.⁵⁶

Saʿīd Effendi ash-Shawwā came to Jaffa in mid-July and confirmed to the editors his desire to buy part of the lands of as-Sirr, but assured them that he does not intend to sell the property to the Zionists: “I have promised and declared on the pages of newspapers that I will not sell a foot of land from my lands to the Zionists as long as I am alive and I repeat it to you now orally, and I swear by my honour and my religion that the Zionists will not acquire one foot of my lands as long as I am still living, even if they paid me the weight of its soil in gold.”⁵⁷ At around the same time, reassuring information got to the editors’ ears. A reliable source conveyed to them that the government would prevent the transfer of the lands of as-Sirr into Jewish hands “in order not to open the door for the entry of the Zionists into the sub-district of Beersheba”.⁵⁸

In the editorial discussed below, Yūsuf al-ʿĪsā forcefully stood up for the weak, oppressed, exploited and unjustly treated.⁵⁹ It is possible to liken this text to the editorial *The Disgrace of the Twentieth Century* he had written the previous year.⁶⁰ Both can be seen as evidence of his strong moral compass.

⁵³ For the names of the sub-tribes and clans (Arabic *ʿashīra*, plural *ʿashāʿir*) of the Bedouin tribes, their numbers and land ownership in 1945, see ABU SITTA, S. *Atlas of Palestine 1917 – 1966*, Table 2.10, p. 37.

⁵⁴ Aḥmad ʿĀrif Effendi al-Ḥusaynī was the Ḥanafī *muftī* of Gaza from 1909 and a member of the Ottoman parliament in 1912 – 1914. For a brief description of the history of the Gazan branch of the al-Ḥusaynī family, see BÜSSOW, J. *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem 1872 – 1908*, pp. 286–293.

⁵⁵ Arāḍī as-Sirr [The Lands of as-Sirr]. In *Filasṭīn*, 18 July 1914, 337–40, p. 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁹ AL-ʿĪSĀ, Yūsuf. Arāḍī as-Sirr – aw – Kitāb Allāh wa kitāb al-Walīd [The Lands of as-Sirr – and – The Book of God and the Book of al-Walīd]. In *Filasṭīn*, 22 July 1914, 338–41, p. 1.

⁶⁰ AL-ʿĪSĀ, Yūsuf. Maʿarrat al-qarn al-ʿishrīn [The Disgrace of the Twentieth Century]. In *Filasṭīn*, 25 October 1913, 283–80, p. 1. For an analysis of *Filasṭīn*’s treatment of the Beilis affair, see BEŠKA, E. “The Disgrace of the Twentieth Century”: The Beilis Affair in *Filasṭīn* Newspaper. In *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 2016, No. 66, pp. 99–108.

Yūsuf al-ʿĪsā begins his article by quoting a supposed saying of Aristotle that God’s law takes precedence, followed by law of the ruler and then law of money. Thereafter, he continues saying that until now they only published in *Filasṭīn* information they had received, but did not express their opinions, however, now he feels that it is necessary to do so. “Now, it has become our duty to say a few words on the subject because it is a strange case [*li annahu gharīb fī bābihi*] and it has many aspects about which the mind cannot feel reassured and find rest.”⁶¹ Yūsuf al-ʿĪsā in the piece also portrays an event from the Umayyad era concerning a plot of land belonging to a Christian man which had been appropriated by ʿAbbās ibn al-Walīd, who claimed that he had been given the land by his father, the previous Caliph al-Walīd I (705 – 715). This Christian asked the incumbent Caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbdalʿazīz (ʿUmar II, 717 – 720) to arbitrate on the issue and the ruler decreed that God’s law takes precedence over the law of the former ruler al-Walīd and commanded ʿAbbās to return the land. Thereafter, Yūsuf al-ʿĪsā analyses the situation concerning the lands of as-Sirr in the following manner. When taking both Aristotle and ʿUmar ibn ʿAbdalʿazīz into account it is clear that in this case the third law had been applied – the law of money. God’s law would require the return of the lands to the Bedouins, who number several thousand persons as it is their inheritance from their ancestors and they need it to provide for themselves and their children. For the law of the ruler to prevail these lands would have to stay in the hands of the government. Regarding the third law he says: “The law of money [*nāmūs ad-dīnār*] wants to take advantage of the problems surrounding these lands and the abasing poverty and powerlessness and cowardice of the Bedouin face to face with the government and to buy them [the lands of as-Sirr] for a few thousand dīnārs which do not equal half of a quarter of their value.”⁶² The editor-in-chief emphasizes that it is the duty of the government to return the lands to their rightful owners and not prevent them from gaining their rights by putting obstacles in their way.

Yūsuf al-ʿĪsā concludes his editorial with a moral appeal directed first at the buyers and then at the authorities: “Those who want to buy land for themselves, we are not able to deny them their right to do that because God permitted selling and buying, but we do not want to be said about them that they have profited from problems or that they have fished in troubled waters or that they have concluded the sale with some men from the two tribes forgetting that the owners

⁶¹ AL-ʿĪSĀ, Yūsuf. Arāḍī as-Sirr – aw – Kitāb Allāh wa kitāb al-Walīd [The Lands of as-Sirr – and – The Book of God and the Book of al-Walīd]. In *Filasṭīn*, 22 July 1914, 338–41, p. 1.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

of the lands are counted in thousands.”⁶³ Thereafter, he addresses the government with the following words: “Following God’s law and the voice of conscience requires handing over of the lands to those miserable Bedouins without damage or fine.”⁶⁴

At the end of July the newspaper published a confirmation that the land allotted to the ʿAzāzima had been sold to ʿĀdil Effendi ash-Shawwā and Muṣṭafā Effendi al-Ḥusaynī for 6,000 French liras.⁶⁵ Reportedly, the sellers had already officially received one third of the amount, however, it is more likely that they had not collected the money, as the 2,000 liras were agreed as remuneration for the services of the agents who helped them to regain their property.⁶⁶

The two concerned notables sent a telegram to *al-Karmal* and the text was reprinted in *Filasṭīn*. Saʿīd Effendi ash-Shawwā and Aḥmad ʿĀrif Effendi al-Ḥusaynī denied in it any intention to sell the lands to the Zionists. On the contrary, they emphasized “[...] we oppose everyone who had sold a foot of soil to others than the people of the homeland [*ahl al-waṭan*]. By acquiring the lands of as-Sirr we seek to counteract those who want to broker them to the Zionists [...]”.⁶⁷

The attempt to acquire the lands of as-Sirr by Saʿīd Effendi ash-Shawwā and Aḥmad ʿĀrif Effendi al-Ḥusaynī through their sons has to be put in the context of the legal landscape following the promulgation of the Ottoman Land Code in 1858. In the subsequent half-century large areas of land came into private possession of various individuals. Sultan Abdülhamid II acquired during his long reign more than 800 km² of land in Palestine and diverse absentee landowners another 1,000 km² including in regions inhabited by the Bedouins. Foreign organizations were also active in this regard, the most prominent among them were the German Templers and various Jewish associations and companies.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Since the article from 18 July 1914 explicitly mentions that both the Tarābīn and Muḥammadīyūn “refused to grant the power of attorney”, it is likely that only 17,5 *qīrāṭs* (73 per cent of the lands of as-Sirr) were sold to the Gazan notables. Arāḍī as-Sirr [The Lands of as-Sirr]. In *Filasṭīn*, 18 July 1914, 337–40, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Biʿr as-Sabʿ – li wakīlinā: Arāḍī as-Sirr. [Beersheba – By Our Agent: The Lands of as-Sirr]. In *Filasṭīn*, 25 July 1914, 339–42, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Arāḍī as-Sirr. [The Lands of as-Sirr]. In *Filasṭīn*, 8 August 1914, 343–46, p. 5.

⁶⁸ FRANTZMAN, S. J., KARK, R. Bedouin Settlement in Late Ottoman and British Mandatory Palestine: Influence on the Cultural and Environmental Landscape, 1870 – 1948. In *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 2011, No. 1, pp. 6–8. Only from 1913 were corporations allowed to register property under their names. KARK, R. Mamlūk and

The treatment of this subject in *Filasṭīn* manifests the sensitivity of its editors to the oppression of the Palestinian lower classes (not only peasants but also Bedouins). One of the measures they have taken in order to improve the situation of the peasants was their short-lived endeavour of sending issues of their newspaper to the villages of the Jaffa sub-district, free of charge, which they had started and also abandoned the previous year. It seems that the al-ʿĪsā cousins commenced this practice because they perceived that the peasants and Bedouins were susceptible to deceptions and were losing their properties because they lacked both the necessary education and the awareness of their rights.⁶⁹

Al-Karmal's Treatment of the Lands of as-Sirr Affair

Three days after the first article on the lands of as-Sirr appeared in *Filasṭīn* on 11 July 1914, it was referred to and summarized in *al-Karmal*. The speedy publication is a clear manifestation of the keen interest of *al-Karmal's* editor-in-chief in this subject. At the end of the column Najīb Naṣṣār appealed to the Palestinian youth to “create public opinion” and mobilize in order to prevent such cases from happening.⁷⁰ The creation of public opinion and pinning of hopes on the youth were recurrent themes in Naṣṣār's articles from this period (in mid-1914).⁷¹ At the end of July 1914 *al-Karmal* republished another article from *Filasṭīn*. Again, the editor-in-chief turned to the young generation and specifically the youth from the two notable families al-Husaynī and ash-Shawwā in Gaza to either deny the intention of their kinsmen to sell the lands of as-Sirr to the Zionists, or to fight against it.⁷² In the subsequent issue Naṣṣār, once more, urgently appealed to the young generation: “Here, oh, youth, assert your existence and compel the leaders of your homeland to respect your future, honour, life, glory and hopes[!]”⁷³ Thereafter he turned to the youth of the ash-

Ottoman Cadastral Surveys and Early Mapping of Landed Properties in Palestine. In *Agricultural History*, 1997, Vol. 71, No. 1, p. 64.

⁶⁹ For more information on this undertaking, see BEŠKA, E. *From Ambivalence to Hostility: The Arabic Newspaper Filasṭīn and Zionism, 1911–1914*, pp. 19–20, 79–80.

⁷⁰ Arāḍī as-Sirr [The Lands of as-Sirr]. In *al-Karmal*, 14 July 1914, 446, p. 3.

⁷¹ BEŠKA, E. Anti-Zionist Journalistic Works of Najīb al-Khūrī Naṣṣār in the Newspaper *al-Karmal* in 1914. In *Asian and African Studies*, 2011, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 180–190.

⁷² Aʿyān Ghazza wa aṣ-ṣahyūnīya [The Gazan Notables and Zionism]. In *al-Karmal*, 28 July 1914, 450, pp. 3–4.

⁷³ NAṢṢĀR, Najīb al-Khūrī. Yā shabībat Filasṭīn uthbutī wujūdaki [Oh, Youth of Palestine, Assert Your Existence]. In *al-Karmal*, 31 July 1914, 451, pp. 1–2.

Shawwā and al-Ḥusaynī families: “We know that there are more than eighty young educated people in Gaza and no doubt among them are many sons of the ash-Shawwā and al-Ḥusaynī [families]. If all those are not able to persuade two persons to abandon trading in the homeland [...] then what is the worth of this youth [...]?”⁷⁴ The last paragraph contains a very strong appeal: “Oh, youth [...] if you are not able to prevent your fathers from selling your homeland, then the least you can do is to protest against them, wash your hands from their deeds and leave their houses [...] It is better for you to be poor and honorable than to eat the bread of treason, the bread of selling the country to the holders of political aspirations against you and your Arab Ottoman country.”⁷⁵

One week later the newspaper printed the text of two telegrams sent from Gaza (the first of them was reprinted in *Filasṭīn* and is mentioned above) both of which emphasized the good intentions of Saʿīd Effendi ash-Shawwā and Aḥmad ʿĀrif Effendi al-Ḥusaynī and criticized the editor-in-chief of *al-Karmal* for publishing unfounded reports. Najīb Naṣṣār expressed his satisfaction with the content of the telegrams in an attached comment and in his defense he noted that he had based his writings on articles from *Filasṭīn*. In contrast to Yūsuf al-ʿĪsā, he did not deal with the moral aspects of the purchase from the impoverished Bedouins.⁷⁶

The lands of as-Sirr affair was the last subject in connection with Zionism that was extensively discussed in the extant issues of *Filasṭīn* and *al-Karmal*. If the report from *Filasṭīn*'s Beersheba correspondent is correct then most of those lands that were allocated to the ʿAzāzima ended up in the hands of the ash-Shawwā and al-Ḥusaynī families, and those belonging to the Tarābīn and Muḥammadīyūn (of the ʿAzāzima) either returned into their hands or were kept by the government.⁷⁷ Given the complicated status of the lands of as-Sirr until the summer of 1914 and the government's assertion in July 1914 that it would not approve any land sales to the Jews in the sub-district of Beersheba,⁷⁸ it is highly unlikely that some plots in as-Sirr could have been sold to the Zionists

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ al-Waṭanīya aṣ-ṣādiqa [The Genuine Patriotism]. In *al-Karmal*, 7 August 1914, 453, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Bi'r as-Sabʿ – li wakīlinā: Arāḍī as-Sirr [Beersheba – By Our Agent: The Lands of as-Sirr]. In *Filasṭīn*, 25 July 1914, 339–42, p. 2. The claim of ownership of a plot in the lands of as-Sirr by a member of the Muḥammadīyūn tribe has already been mentioned in ref. 42; KARK, R., FRANTZMAN, S. J. The Negev: Land, Settlement, the Bedouin and Ottoman and British Policy 1871 – 1948. In *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 39:1, pp. 67–68.

⁷⁸ Arāḍī as-Sirr [The Lands of as-Sirr]. In *Filasṭīn*, 18 July 1914, 337–40, p. 5.

during the Ottoman era. However, during the subsequent decades under the British Mandate several plots ended up in Jewish hands. According to a map of as-Sirr lands (from Ruth Kark's book) which depicts land ownership in that area in the 1930s, a number of tracts were bought by various Jewish individuals and in 1943 the settlement of Beit Eshel was established on these lands.⁷⁹

This case sheds more light on the radically changed attitude of the government towards the Bedouins after the Young Turk Revolution. The lands of as-Sirr affair suggests that in the Second Ottoman Constitutional Period the interest of the central government in the matters of the Beersheba sub-district in general and the wellbeing of the Bedouins in particular decreased significantly. Similarly, the governments following the Young Turk Revolution did not continue to share the strategic vision of Sultan Abdülhamid II, and did not follow his policy with regard to his private estates as they repeatedly endeavored to sell them.⁸⁰ It seems that again the influence of the Gazan notables over the Bedouins in the Beersheba sub-district was reestablished. All this amounted to the negation of the main reasons behind the establishment of the Beersheba sub-district.

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⁷⁹ KARK, R. *Pioneering Jewish Settlement in the Negev, 1880 – 1948*, pp. 44, 50.

⁸⁰ For more details on this issue, see BEŠKA, E. *From Ambivalence to Hostility: The Arabic Newspaper Filasṭīn and Zionism, 1911–1914*. p. 87; FISCHER, R. S., KARK, R. Sultan Abdülhamid II and Palestine: Private Lands and Imperial Policy. In *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 2008, No. 39, pp. 154–156.

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