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## Bedouin Society in the Sinai Peninsula

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## **Bedouin Society in the Sinai Peninsula**

MASAKI HORIUCHI  
*Hiroshima City University*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this paper, I outline the current living condition and social organization of the Bedouin living in the southern part of the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula, and attempt to provide an understanding of the significance of their migratory movements by analyzing their folktales that relate to tribal history and tribal origin, and their personal life histories. In addition, I also touch on the subject of their religious belief in holy men and its role as a mechanism for providing concrete substance to the fluid Bedouin society.

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### **1. THE BEDOUIN AND THE SINAI PENINSULA**

In terms of administration, the Sinai Peninsula is divided into two parts - Southern Sinai and Northern Sinai. The geography of the two regions is in contrast; Northern Sinai is a desert plateau that is mainly limestone, while Southern Sinai is mostly covered by steep mountains of reddish-brown granite. The residents of Northern Sinai have a deep relationship with neighboring Delta region of Egypt to the west, and the regions from the Negev desert to Palestine to the East. In contrast, the residents of Southern Sinai have strong links to the Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia and Upper Egypt. So the scope of social network of Northern and Southern Sinai is different. This paper deals with Southern Sinai.

The Sinai Peninsula was occupied by Israel from the end of the Six-day War in 1967 until its return to Egypt in 1982, a total of 15 years. Since Israel returned it to Egypt, the Egyptian government has actively promoted a settlement policy. There are now many Egyptian employees working at oil, mining and construction companies in the Sinai in addition to administrators, policemen and military personnel, all coming from Egypt. These 'Egyptians' and the native residents of the Sinai, namely the Bedouin, have very different languages, customs and mentality.

Under the regulations of the Provincial Governor, the Bedouin are not subject to Egyptian civil law but to their own tribal law (known as '*urf*'), and come under the jurisdiction of the Tribal Affairs Department of the Province via the tribal organization.

The term 'Bedouin' refers to the 'native tribal residents' of Southern Sinai (as distinct from those people coming from mainland Egypt), and its meaning is not restricted within 'nomad' as it is sometimes translated. In practice, the Bedouin are not just nomads but are engaged in a diverse range of occupations that include inshore fishing, construction (houses and wells), primary school teaching, and taxi and truck driving. Others are employed in the oil and mining industries, and some operate cafés and small retail businesses.

A person is a 'Bedouin' as long as he/she belongs to a tribe, and membership of the same tribe overrides differences in occupation. In addition, considering the ease and frequency with which the Bedouin change their occupations, the idea that a given occupation should be a defining characteristic does not really make sense. The fundamental factor of Bedouin existence is their identification with a tribe, and for this reason, the terms '*rahḥāl*', or more generally, '*arab*' are used to refer to those Bedouin who are nomads.

In recent times, a tendency to promote an image of the Bedouin as nomads has become noticeable in the tourism industry. A number of touristic spots were set up in the coastal areas to the south of the Peninsula during the period under Israeli occupation. These have deluxe hotels, restaurants and nightclubs as well as facilities that cater for marine sports such as diving and boating. They attract many tourists from Europe and Israel. Most of these establishments are operated by Egyptians, and the Bedouin, who are usually engaged in selling Bedouin food and clothing, run some of the cheaper restaurants and souvenir shops aiming at younger tourists. There are also Bedouin villages on the coast, which provide accommodation for young visitors in simple huts. Short inland camel trips, packaged as 'Bedouin Tours', are available there. And groups of Bedouin appear in the hotels and nightclubs with their song and dance. All of these activities are marketing the 'Bedouin as nomads' and the Bedouin themselves are employed in their planning and execution. The worldwide phenomenon of "the invention of tradition" is evident here, and tourism can now be counted among the occupations that Bedouin engage in.

## **2. TRIBE**

### **2-1. The current inhabitation pattern**

13 tribes coexist in Southern Sinai. While various tribes tend to live together in roughly fixed geographical ranges, the territories are not exclusive. More generally, a mixture of tribes will live together in the same region. Before explaining this situation in detail, I would like to give an outline of the makeup of typical dwellings and villages.

### 2-1-1. The form of dwellings and villages

Each region of the Peninsula has a core town, surrounded by many satellite villages. There are also small settlements scattered around nearby springs, wells and wadi (dry ravines).

Two or three families of nomads may join up and pitch their tents in a corner of a ravine. A larger group will establish a community of up to several tens of families arranged in a semi-circle or a line, living in tents or small shacks constructed from brick or lumber. A short distance away, they build a simple community house (*maq'ad*) for holding community meetings, for use as a gathering place for men in the evening and for receiving guests. In more permanent villages, the house is constructed from concrete or stone, and may have vegetable gardens. There are also examples of completely permanent villages with their own cemeteries and mosques.

However, on a frequent basis, people living in permanent villages will take their sheep off to the mountains. And in reverse, nomads will suddenly set up residence in a shanty or tent on the outskirts of a town and start working in the town or in the coastal fishing industry. Or fishermen will return to tent life. For this reason, differences in the form of dwellings and villages do not necessarily indicate a uni-directional change in the occupation of its residents.

### 2-1-2. The residential pattern by district

There are eight towns in Southern Sinai and the government authority endeavors to follow the movement of the Bedouin via the regional blocks (districts) with these towns. These towns are also reference points of geographical and social unity for the Bedouin themselves. With one exception, the towns are all located on the coast.

In order down the coast from the north west of the Peninsula, they are Ra's el Sudr, Abu Zunima, Abu Rudeis and El Tur (the provincial capital), with Sharm el Sheikh at the southern tip, and in order up the eastern coast from the south are Dahab and Nuweibia. The one town, not on the coast, is St. Catherine, which is located at the foot of Mt. Moses (Mt. Sinai) in the center of the Peninsula (see Fig. 1).

There are 13 tribes in Southern Sinai. The names of tribes are as follows, in order of estimated population: Mzeyna, Tarabin, 'Alayqat, Huwaytat, Jibali, Awlad Sa'id, Qararsha, Lahiwat, Jarajra, Badara, Hamada, Sawalha and Beni Wasil. In addition to these, I also heard the names Mas'udi and 'Awarma, but there is a possibility that these may be subsections of other tribes, and as of the present, I have not been able to establish whether they are independent tribes or not.

Now I shall show the patterns of co-habitation of tribes in each district. As for the Ra's el Sudr district, 'Alayqat, Tarabin, Jarajra, Huwaytat, Lahiwat and Mzeyna tribes live in the urban part, while in the rural parts (hereafter "the rural parts" refers to surrounding satellite villages and settlements in the mountains), the Qararsha and Badara are present in addition to these six, making a total of eight tribes. The data, which was collected personally by Dr. Nur (former Director of the

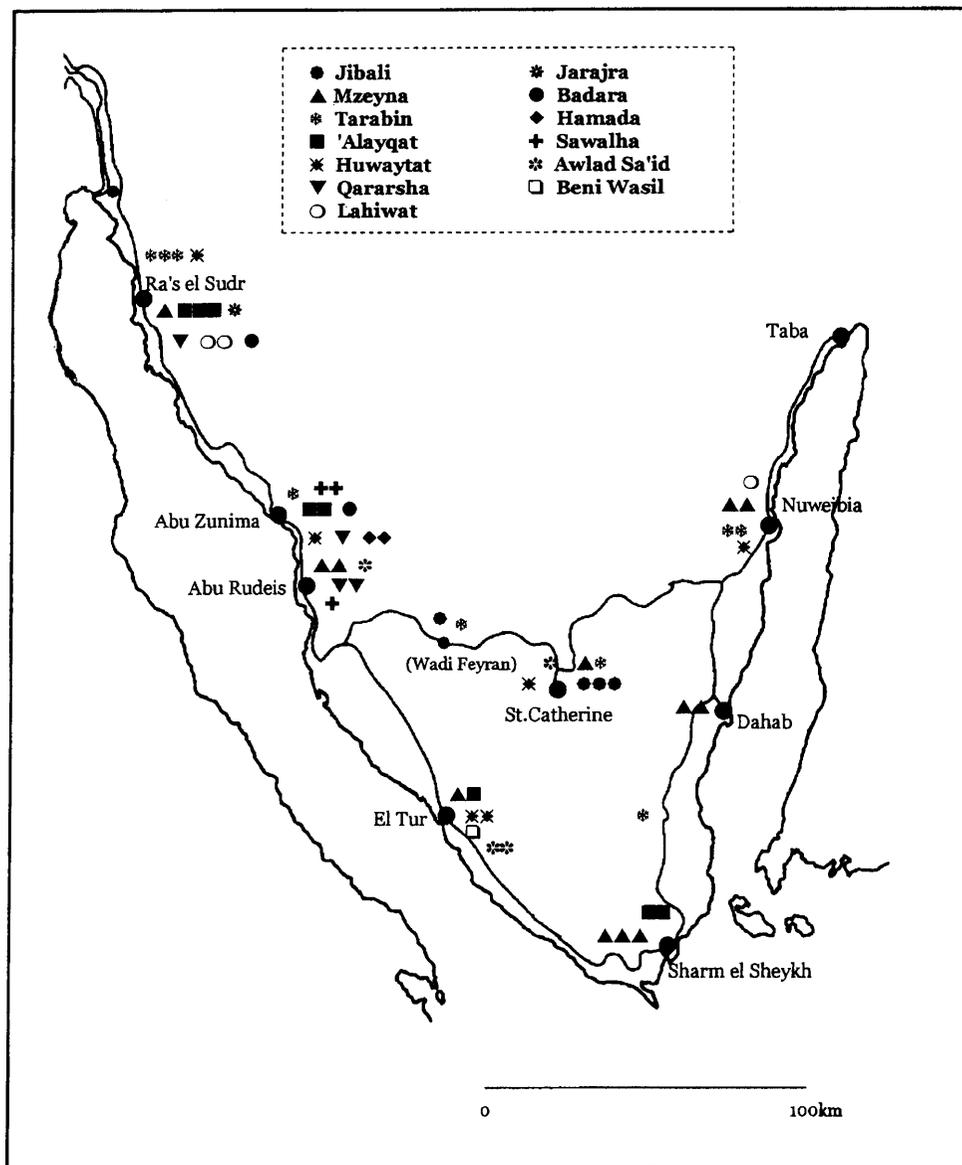


Fig. 1 Tribal map of Southern Sinai

Tribal Affairs Department of the Province), places the number of tribe members living in the urban area at 1682, and the number living in rural parts at 6381. (Hereafter, all population figures presented are based on the information kindly offered by Dr. Nur. It is not census data. The data was collected by him through conversation with various tribal chiefs, so it is difficult to say how accurately they correspond to the actual population figures. No census of the Bedouin has been conducted as of the present. )

According to information I picked up locally by myself, there are 21 settlements in the rural part of the Ra's el Sudr district, and of these, 10 villages are comprised of members of a single tribe, five villages are comprised of two tribes, three of three tribes, and three of four or more tribes. Here in the rural parts, just as in the urban area, there are people from plural tribes living together.

In the following explanation I will just touch on the main characteristics of the other districts. For the tribal makeup of the urban and rural districts and their population, refer to Table 1, and for the tribal composition of the rural settlements, refer to Table 2.

**Table 1** Tribes and their total population in every district

District	Urban part	Population	Rural part	Population
Ra's el Sudr	'Alayqat, Tarabin, Jarajra, Lahiwat, Huwaytat, Mzeyna.	1,682	'Alayqat, Tarabin, Qararsha, Jarajra, Lahiwat, Huwaytat, Mzeyna, Badara.	6,381
Abu Zunima	'Alayqat, Sawalha, Badara, Hamada.	578	'Alayqat, Hamada, Qararsha, Sawalha, Mzeyna.	3,788
Abu Rudeis	Qararsha, Sawalha.	3,197	Qararsha, Sawalha, Huwaytat, Mzeyna, AwladSa'id, Tarabin, Jibali.	3,727
El Tur	?, BeniWasil.	5,768	'Alayqat, Mzeyna, BeniWasil, AwladSa'id, Huwaytat.	2,468
Sharm el Sheykh	?	1,043	Mzeyna, Tarabin, 'Alayqat.	571
Dahab	?	174	Mzeyna.	1,582
Nuweibia	?	215	Mzeyna, Tarabin, Huwaytat, Lahiwat.	1,762
St.Catherine	Jibali, AwladSa'id, Tarabin.	412	Jibali, Tarabin, AwladSa'id, Mzeyna.	5,244
<b>Total</b>		<b>13,069</b>		<b>25,523</b>

**Table 2** District pattern of tribal co-habitation in a village

<b>District</b>	<b>1 tribe</b>	<b>2 tribes</b>	<b>3 tribes</b>	<b>4 or more</b>	<b>Total</b>
Ra's el Sudr	10	5	3	3	21
Abu Zunima	6	7	2	2	17
Abu Rudeis	6	1	2	2	11
El Tur	14	4	2	0	20
Sharm el Sheykh	10	7	0	0	17
Dahab	12	0	0	0	12
Nuweibia	11	6	0	0	17
St.Catherine	18	4	0	0	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>137</b>

The town of Abu Zunima has only recently been developed around a manganese-mining factory, and accordingly, the number of tribe members in the town is small at just 578. In contrast, 3788 tribe members live in the rural districts.

Abu Rudeis has an offshore oil field, and development of the town has centered on facilities related to oil drilling. For this reason there are many military personnel and people related to these facilities living there. There are few Bedouin. Just two tribes have settled on the outskirts of the town, the Qararsha and the Sawalha. However, the rural areas have a long history, and one, Wadi Feyran, is the largest oasis in Southern Sinai. It has a considerable population and the largest number of cohabiting tribes (seven).

El Tur is the capital town of Southern Sinai, and as it is the location of the local government, there are many "Egyptians" living there. There are also more Bedouins living there than in any other town in Southern Sinai. The tribal makeup of these Bedouin is still not clear, but they are probably mainly made up of members of five tribes that live in the rural parts. However, because El Tur is a center for administration, commerce and the fishing industry, there are probably people from many other tribes as well.

The town of Sharm el Sheikh is situated at the southern tip of the Peninsula, and was for a long time nothing more than a small fishing village. However, during the period under Israeli occupation, tourism centered on marine sports at the nearby Cape Muhammad was developed, and since that time the town has expanded rapidly. The number of Bedouin engaged in work related to tourism has increased, but originally this district had the smallest population of Bedouin.

Dahab has followed the same path as Sharm el Sheikh, but does not match it for size. However, many Bedouin live in the rural areas, and it is an unusual Sinai district in that all of the rural settlements are comprised only of one tribe (Mzeyna) members. However, as with the other districts, this is not because it is exclusionary, and forbids entry by others. Recently it is notable that Mzeyna are coexisting with other tribes who have come in pursuit of work in the tourism and transportation business.

Nuweibia serves as a transportation relay town for Israeli tourists on their way to Dahab and Sharm el Sheikh, and it is also developing as the largest port on the east coast of the Peninsula. Its importance is increasing as a gateway for goods and people from the countries of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel that surround Aqaba Bay. The town is made up of people from the large Mzeyna and Tarabin tribes. The area north of the town is inhabited mostly by Tarabin, and the area south of the town is predominated by Mzeyna.

The town of St. Catherine is different in character to the other towns. It is situated at the foot of Mt. Moses in the middle of the Sinai Peninsula, and its main feature is the religious importance of Greek Orthodoxy represented by St. Catherine's Monastery. The construction of the monastery is thought to have begun in the 6th century, but the origin of its construction can be traced back even further. The important fact, with respect to its relationship with the present inhabitants, is that the 6th century Byzantine emperor Justinianus sent a battalion of Greeks and their families to protect the monastery from attack by the Bedouin. Their descendants are the Jibali tribe that comprises almost all the Bedouin in this district today. Naturally, they were originally of the Greek Orthodox faith, but converted to Islam in modern times, and joined the ranks of the Bedouin. Almost all the Jibali live in the St. Catherine district, and very few live elsewhere.

It is important to note that St. Catherine is also a holy place for Muslims. The Sinai Bedouin as a whole regard St. Catherine's Monastery as their symbolic center of their living world. This will become clearer when I touch upon their folktales later. With the recent construction of roads, many Christian pilgrims and tourists have begun to visit the area, and the tourism industry has become an important business for the local Bedouin.

### 2-1-3. The residential pattern by tribe

As can be seen from tables 1 and 2, many tribes have crossed district boundaries and live over a wide area. At this point, I would like to discuss the residential pattern by tribe. Refer to Table 3.

First I will discuss the special example of the Jibali. Most of the Jibali villages (hamlets and settlements) are in the districts of St. Catherine and Abu Rudeis, although in Abu Rudeis there are just two villages, so almost all the villages are in the St. Catherine district. Of the 22 villages in the St. Catherine district, 18 are made up of a single tribe, and 13 of these are Jibali. If the villages where they cohabit with other tribes are included, there are 16 Jibali villages in the St. Catherine district. From these figures, it is evident that the habitation range of the Jibali is considerably concentrated.

The tribe with the most extensive range of habitation is the Mzeyna, who live in all eight districts. Their strongholds are in the three districts of Sharm el Sheikh, Dahab and Nuweibia in the southeast part of the Peninsula, where there are 17, 12 and 10 Mzeyna villages respectively. In addition, there are 2 Mzeyna villages in Ra's el Sudr, 5 in Abu Rudeis, 5 in Abu Zunima, 2 in El Tur and 6 in St. Catherine.

**Table 3** Tribal pattern of co-habitation in a village (and settlement)

<b>Tribe</b>	<b>1 tribe</b>	<b>2 tribes</b>	<b>3 tribes</b>	<b>4 or more</b>	<b>Total</b>
Jibali	13	3	1	1	18
Mzeyna	31	18	7	3	59
Tarabin	9	15	2	2	28
'Alayqat	5	12	5	5	27
Huwaytat	6	5	2	2	15
Qararsha	4	5	4	4	17
Lahiwat	3	3	0	3	9
Jarajra	2	0	0	2	4
Badara	1	0	0	1	2
Hamada	0	4	1	2	7
Sawalha	3	3	0	4	10
Awlad Sa'id	10	6	1	1	18
Beni Wasil	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>215</b>

Of the 59 Mzeyna villages across the Sinai Peninsula, 31 are made up exclusively of members of the Mzeyna tribe.

Like the Mzeyna, the Tarabin tribe has an extensive range of habitation, and is scattered across 6 districts. Among these, the highest concentrations of Tarabin are in the districts of Ra's el Sudr and Nuweibia.

As the Tarabin tribe is also spread from Northern Sinai to Palestine, these districts in Southern Sinai correspond to their southernmost reach. With regard to the make-up of the Tarabin villages, the number in which they coexist with other tribes exceeds the number of exclusively Tarabin villages, so the habitation model can be regarded as being of the widely dispersed, coexistence type.

The 'Alayqat tribe is spread across 4 districts, but centered on Ra's el Sudr and Abu Zunima in the northern part of the west coast. Generally speaking, the tribes that predominately live on the west coast mostly have small population. For example, the Qararsha are concentrated in Abu Zunima and Abu Rudeis, while the Jarajra are in Ra's el Sudr only. However, the Jarajra also live in the neighboring city of Suez and the city of Isma'iliya in the north. In addition to these, the Badara live in Ra's el Sudr only, the Hamada live in Abu Zunima only, the Sawalha live in Abu Zunima and Abu Rudeis, and the Lahiwat are in Ra's el Sudr. Accordingly, the northern part of west coast can be said to be occupied by small tribes living together.

On the other hand, the southern part of the same west coast in the vicinity of the capital El Tur is the stronghold of other groups of tribes. One of these is the Huwaytat, which has a mother group across Aqaba Bay in the Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia. Given that the contact between the two groups is still strong, the Huwaytat of Southern Sinai can be considered as a branch of the Hijaz group.

Other tribes whose stronghold is El Tur are the Awlad Sa'id and Beni Wasil.

The Awlad Sa'id mostly live in El Tur, but some have moved across the mountains to St. Catherine. The Beni Wasil population is small, but together with the Hamada, it is said to be the oldest tribe in Southern Sinai, and the legitimacy of this claim is generally acknowledged by many people. At present, they are concentrated in the village of Jubayl on the southern outskirts of El Tur, and work in the coastal fishing industry.

## 2-2. Tribal organization

The tribes in Southern Sinai basically have a patrilineal segmentary structure. However, as the total population of all 13 tribes is just 38,000, the number of segment levels is small. Even the Mzeyna, which is thought to have the largest population of all of the tribes, has just three segment levels. Tribes such as the Beni Wasil and Lahiwat, which have extremely small population, are simply known by family (*beyt*) names, and there is no awareness of segments within the tribe (the Beni Wasil tribe is comprised of about 50 families, and the Lahiwat of about 25).

The actual organization of segments differs considerably depending on the tribe. In the case of the Mzeyna, the smallest unit is a family, which is known as a '*beyt*'. *Beyt* is normally headed by the oldest male member, and is comprised of sons and grandsons, though the actual scope is fluid. Female membership is also obscure. Sometimes a wife who has married into a man's family is treated as a member of his *beyt*, but sometimes woman who has married out of the family is treated as a member of her original *beyt*. In other words, '*beyt*' does not strictly follow either the 'kinship principle' or the 'residence principle'.

The *beyt*, or basic unit, is characterized by this kind of vagueness. When 20 or 30 *beyt* units gather together, they form a segment that is one level higher. However at this level, each segment is called by its proper name, and there is no general term used to indicate a group at the segment level. For this reason, I will refer to such a group as a '2nd-level segment'. When three to five 2nd-level segments gather together they form a 1st-level segment. They are also called by their proper names, and no general term exists for them. The Mzeyna tribe has 8 groups that correspond to 1st-level segment, and when these 8 1st-level segments assemble, they make up the entire Mzeyna tribe. As such, in the case of the Mzeyna, there are 4 levels: the tribe as a whole, the 1st and 2nd segment levels, and the basic *beyt* unit.

In the case of the 'Alayqat (with regard to those members in the vicinity of Ra's el Sudr only), the entire tribe is made up of 8 1st-level segmentary units, and these are further divided into a number of groups known as '*aila*'. An '*aila*' is made up of a number of *beyt* (families), so it probably corresponds to the 2nd-level segment of the Mzeyna. The number of '*aila*' that make up the 1st-level segments varies, the numbers being 1, 2, 2, 2, 3, 6, 6 and 7. Taking into consideration the imbalance in these numbers, the lack of permissible general terms for indicating segment levels and the large number of 1st-level segment groups, it is possible to interpret the segmentary composition of the 'Alayqat tribe as being nothing more

than an expression of the real attribution of lineages to the tribe, rather than an expression of the ideal internal political relationships between the groups as has sometimes been claimed in anthropological textbooks.

This fact is more clearly indicated in the case of the Awlad Sa'id tribe. The Awlad Sa'id is divided into 7 groups, each called by their proper name. The groups are respectively made up of 30, 35, 70, 50, 65, 20 and 50 *beyt*. Whether the word '*beyt*' has the same meaning as when it is used in the case of the Mzeyna, or whether it corresponds to the '*aila*' of the 'Alayqat is unclear. However, in either case, these 7 groups indicate lineality. To obtain a balance of the political scale between groups, the first and second groups of 30 and 35 *beyt*, and the fifth and sixth groups of 65 and 20 *beyt* are combined, though these combinations do not have names. Therefore, apart from the 7 groups that indicate lineality, the Awlad Sa'id tribe has 5 political 1st-level segment groups.

Now I will take a simple look at the condition of segments of the other tribes. In the case of the Jibali tribe, only 4 1st-level segment groups are known, and the *beyt* come directly under these. The Tarabin tribe has 10 1st-level segment groups only, and 2 of them live in Palestine and Egypt respectively. As I touched on briefly earlier, the Tarabin are spread widely over the north, so it is possible that there are different segments there. The Huwaytat tribe has just 4 1st-level segment groups, while the Qararsha tribe has two 1st-level segment groups which are divided into 3 and 5 2nd-level segment groups. I have not obtained sufficient information to comment on the Jarajra and Badara tribes. The Hamada and Sawalha tribes each have 4 1st-level segment groups.

As I mentioned earlier, there is no general term used to refer to the segment levels, but some people refer to the 1st-level segments as "*rub*" and the 2nd-level segments as "*khums*". These terms mean one quarter and one fifth respectively, but their application is not widely adopted. As there are not four groups called *rub*' or five groups called *khums*, it is certain that these are not literal expressions, and it is possible that, depending on the circumstances, these expressions imply segmentary structure in general.

### **2-3. Tribal chief**

#### **2-3-1. The plural chief system**

The chief of a tribe is called '*shaykh al-qabīla*'. Small tribes such as the Lahiwat, Jarajra and Hamada have just one chief, but the larger tribes have several. The largest tribe, the Mzeyna, has eight, the Tarabin tribe three, and the 'Alayqat five. In cases such as these, there is no one chief who represents the entire tribe, and the power of the chiefs is basically equal.

The allocation of jurisdictional authority to the chief corresponds to the region in which he lives. In the case of the Mzeyna, whose members live right across Southern Sinai, there are tribal chiefs in seven of the towns, with the exception of Abu Zunima. Among them, the town of Dahab, which has a large part of the Mzeyna population, has two chiefs.

In general, each chief has jurisdiction over his tribe's people living in his district. In districts where there are many members of the tribe, there are two or three chiefs, and in districts where there are few, it is often the case that a chief of a neighboring district has jurisdiction over the tribe members.

Accordingly, although as a general principle the members of a tribe in a certain district come under the jurisdiction of the tribal chief of that district, the relationship between the chief and the members of the tribe is not one like leader-subordinate. The role of the chief is ultimately that of an adviser. Because of this, occasions arise where there is disagreement with regard to the understanding of the jurisdictional relationship between tribal chiefs and tribe members. On occasion, a chief may regard a village as being under his jurisdiction, while tribe members in the village regard themselves as being under the jurisdiction of the chief of a neighboring district.

Also, the principle of jurisdiction in use is not always clear-cut. Sometimes the 'locality principle' is applied, while on other occasions the 'kinship principle' is applied. For example, the Qararsha tribe has two tribal chiefs, one living in Abu Zunima and the other in Abu Rudeis. Their authority is allocated according to district, but the two districts are next to each other, and, in practice, each of the two chiefs has been allocated one of the two 1st-level segments. In other words, the kinship principle, as expressed by the segment structure of the tribe, has priority over allocation of jurisdiction by district. This can be found with other tribes as well, and a chief who is closely related but lives far away may have precedence over a distantly related chief who lives nearby.

This type of vagueness in the jurisdiction system is unavoidable when the actual living conditions of the tribes are considered. Given the degree to which the members of tribes move around, jurisdiction based on the locality principle alone cannot keep pace with the flow of people. And as it is not uncommon for the members of one tribe to live hundreds of kilometers apart, the kinship principle alone is also insufficient. Therefore, by flexibly applying the two principles, and maintaining close contact and cooperation between chiefs in the various districts, it becomes possible to overcome this vagueness. In modern times, the telephone can be used to exchange information over long distances, and even if telephones are not available, tribal chiefs can communicate and cooperate via an oral circuit that is jokingly referred to by tribe members as '*Telephone Baqraj*'.

A *baqraj* is a coffee pot, and in this case it refers to a café. People moving from town to town will generally drop by a café, ideally one run by a member of their own tribe. Anyhow, it is a simple matter to meet up with members of their tribe, and exchange messages from friends and relatives, recent news, and, on occasion, they entrust money. In other words, these cafés function as a kind of combination of post office, telephone exchange and bank, and so are referred to as '*Telephone Baqraj*' for this reason. Recently, gas stations also function as 'telephone exchanges' in a similar fashion. Taxi and truck drivers, as well as traveling tribesmen, sometimes function as telephone-lines themselves.

### 2-3-2. The role of a tribal chief

The tribal chief has the following six main roles.

#### (1) Dispute mediation and complaint consultation

If a problem arises between people under the jurisdiction of a tribal chief, the chief will listen to both sides and work to resolve the issue smoothly. If negotiation with another tribe or government authorities is required, the chief will act as the conduit. However, the chief's role is nothing more than an advisory one, and he has no authority to make a decision on the matter.

#### (2) Application of tribal law (*'urf*)

If a dispute cannot be resolved smoothly, the tribal chief will assemble the persons involved and open a court according to tribal law. As I mentioned earlier, it is recognized that the Bedouin are not subject to Egyptian civil law, but must follow their own tribal law. Accordingly, in the case of serious disputes, the chief will conduct a tribal court in an attempt to resolve the problem. The location of the court is always the community house in the village of the people concerned, or in the home of the chief. The people in attendance will include the tribe chief, a number of elders of those concerned (the number will vary depending on the nature and scale of the case). And because of the importance placed on Islamic law recently, judges (*qāḍī*) from the nearest town may also be invited. The reason for inviting the *qāḍī* is that tribal law has recently been codified, and the circumstances may require reading and writing skills.

#### (3) External negotiations and information dissemination

Tribesmen are legally under the indirect jurisdiction of the local government (Bureau of Tribal Affairs), via the tribal chiefs. In other words, a chief acts as an intermediary between the members of his tribal and the government, and serves as an agent in the case that a member of the tribe wishes to apply for some kind of registration or license. Conversely, when the government wishes to make an announcement or pass down an order to the tribe, they go through the tribal chief. As the Bedouin have been involved in a variety of occupations in recent years, there are many cases in which they require permits and official certificates. The chief provides information with regard to the relevant official procedures, and on occasion, may carry out a procedure in lieu of a member of his tribe. The chief also acts as a representative for tribe members with regard to problems relating to working conditions and salary, in the case that they are working in factories or on construction sites.

#### (4) Assemblies of elders and tribal festivals

Special assemblies of elders are held when serious problems arise, or when national or provincial elections are held. However, as I mentioned earlier, in the case of large tribes, there are multiple chiefs, so these assemblies are used to discuss problems relating to their own district. The attendees depend on the nature of the problem, but, in general, representatives of villages and representatives from the kin group such as *beyt* or *'aila* will be present. These assemblies are normally held at the home of a tribe chief. The meeting is not necessarily conducted in a systematic

fashion with all in attendance, and, over a period of several days, attendees may come and go. At first glance, it may appear to be just a rambling discussion around the hearth used for making coffee.

On the other hand, the opportunity for most tribesmen to meet as a group is the tribal festival held in summer, although participation is completely a matter of free choice. As it is impossible for all members of a tribe to gather in one place, the festival is held in several different locations on different days in many cases. Normally, the festival is held at the shrine of the holy man of each tribe. Livestock are sacrificed, and there is communal eating, dancing and singing. The tribe chief sets the date for the festival and is responsible for notifying other tribal members. These tribal festivals are known as 'zuwāra', and I will touch on them again in the final chapter.

#### (5) Employment and employment mediation

Because of their role in conducting negotiations with the outsiders, most tribal chiefs have more information at their disposal than the other members of the tribe. For this reason, when there are tribesmen looking for work, they actively provide introductions and make inquiries at places where work seems likely to be available. Some tribal chiefs have their own offices and shops, and, in such cases, they may even provide employment themselves. On the other hand, if, for example, a request for workers arrives from a factory, the fishing industry or a hotel, the chief will use his own devices to assemble people to meet the request.

#### (6) Standing surety for tribesmen

If a member of his tribe is detained by the police for some reason, the tribal chief will stand surety and make efforts to obtain release.

### 2-3-3. Two kinds of chief

There are two kinds of chief. The first is the traditional one, chosen by the tribe members, while the second is a chief appointed by the government. The former is chosen on occasions such as tribe meetings and festivals, and the selection is based on factors such as age, character, dependability, wealth, family size and range of information network. The period of office is not fixed, and although in many cases a new chief will be selected upon the retirement or death of an acting chief, there are also occasions when it is possible to leave the position vacant for a short period, or when the number of chiefs is increased by the election of a new additional one. In any case, the position is filled following a natural process of consensus among the tribe members, and it seems that a person who builds an impressive record of achievement will eventually be accepted for the position of chief.

In contrast, chiefs appointed by the government have a fixed period of office, and are even paid a stipend. The Bureau of Public Order (*Idārat al-Markazīyat al-Amni*) of the government issues a certificate of identification. Government-appointed chiefs should serve as a liaison between the tribe and the government, but, in practice, may not actually have the trust of all members of the tribe.

#### 2-3-4. The interface between tribes and the central government

In addition to these two kinds of chief, there is a special chief in Southern Sinai, who acts as a representative for all the 13 tribes with respect to the government. Normally, the tribe members communicate with the central government via the tribe chief, and the central government communicates with the tribes via the head of the Department of Tribal Affairs in the Province. However, there is also a special chief known as *shaykh al-mashāykh* (chief among chiefs), who can directly contact the central government in Cairo without passing through the local government. This position is currently held by one of the chiefs of the Sawalha tribe.

Alternatively, a tribesman can also participate directly in government by being elected as a member of Parliament. Southern Sinai is divided into two electoral districts, one representative being elected for the region from Ra's el Sudr to Abu Rudeis, and another for that from El Tur to Nuweibia. So it is possible for the Bedouin to send two tribe members to the national Parliament.

### 3. BEDOUIN MIGRATION

#### 3-1. Memory of migration and facts of migration

Investigating the detailed migration patterns of the people of Southern Sinai is quite difficult, given the diversification of their occupations and areas of habitation in modern times. Even for the nomadic people, it has been difficult for them to lead a purely nomadic life, because large livestock like camels or large numbers of sheep require a lot of water. In Southern Sinai, the land is mountainous, water is scarce, and there are many tribes living together in a small area. Thus, the nomads must keep small herds of goats that are well adapted to the poor conditions of the desert. For this reason, it becomes difficult to discover the typical migration patterns of the nomads. I will leave this issue as a subject for future investigation.

On the other hand, by conducting a number of detailed case studies, it should be possible to discover how the Bedouin themselves see their migratory movements and how they remember the migration process. I will call the Bedouin's own thinking regarding their migration as 'memory of migration', and I look into this as a separate issue from the 'facts of migration'.

#### 3-2. Tribal history as collective memory

It is convenient to split this 'memory of migration' into 'tribal history', which is the collective memory of processes that a tribe has undergone to arrive at the present situation, and 'personal history', which is formed by the personal memory of individual life. First I will look at tribal history.

When you ask tribesmen about their tribal history, they will almost inevitably preface their remarks by telling you to read 'the book'. That is the '*History of the Sinai*' by Na'um Shuqair<sup>1)</sup>, which was published at the beginning of this century. It is a large work with over 700 pages, and covers the topography, flora, fauna and climate of the Sinai Peninsula, and goes into detail about Bedouin language,

religion, agriculture, craftsmanship, commerce and law. It also follows the historical changes of the tribes over the ages. However, I do not think that just the fact that this 'encyclopedia' is a detailed work of labor is enough to earn such trust and eminence among the Bedouin. There are two important points to note regarding it.

The first point is that the author's account is based on ancient documents kept in St. Catherine's Monastery. These are valuable heirlooms, and are not allowed out. The second point is the fact that the monastery itself published this work. The reason why the Bedouin hold Shuqair's book in such high regard is that all of the Bedouin on the Sinai Peninsula see St. Catherine's Monastery as an institution to provide their identity and as the source that legitimizes their existence. From the perspective of the Bedouin, the fact that the work is based on documents preserved in the monastery places its reliability beyond doubt.

If we were aiming at the 'reconstruction of objective history', we would have problems concerning textual critique of the author's sources. And doubt regarding the way he used these sources may remain. However, here I must give credit to the fact that this work is not thought of as being just a book. It has earned unconditional and widespread trust as a kind of 'charter'. Despite the high probability that few Bedouin have actually read it, they believe that their history is chronicled in this work. This belief is very important for us when we look for their style of recognition of their history. The authenticity of the book's contents and people's degree of understanding of the content are not issues here. Because an external 'charter' exists, which can correct their own knowledge if it is wrong, it is possible for all tribes to dodge the ultimate responsibility with respect to their own history. This fact is extremely useful when many tribes must gather and live together, the reason being that the 'charter' neutralizes knowledge gaps between tribes and individuals, and has a symbolic effect that serves to unite the entire Southern Sinai.

In addition to this book, each tribe has its own 'tribal history' that has been passed down orally. This 'tribal history' is contained in tales called '*guṣṣa*', which are narrated to the tribe members by the chiefs and elders when the tribe has an opportunity to assemble. The *guṣṣa* themselves are diverse in terms of content. They include tales of love and war of the Bedouin who lived in Saudi Arabia long ago, tales about heroes in the desert, right up to tales tinged with the tangibility of World War I and the recent wars against Israel. Buried among them are tales that refer to the origin and history of the tribe. I have selected a few examples among the *guṣṣa* that I have collected, and will introduce them below.

A former chief of the Tarabin who lives in Sharm el Sheikh preceded tales of his own tribe by touching on the early situation in the Sinai as a whole.

"The Jibali and Tihi<sup>2</sup>) tribes have lived in Sinai since long ago, longer than any of the other tribes. Next came the Beni Wasil from Saudi Arabia riding

on 40 donkeys, and they spread out over all parts of Sinai. In the process, everywhere they went they clashed with the Jibali who preceded them. Then after, the 'Anayza tribe, that had split off from the Harbi<sup>3)</sup> tribe, came from Saudi Arabia, and subsequently the current seven families (*'aila*) of the Mzeyna tribe split off from them. The Sawalha tribe then came and fought 'the greatest and the last war' against the 'Alayqat."

Even in this brief tale, I can find out a number of problems. For example, the 'Anayza tribe did not split off from the Harbi, but was an independent tribe, spreading out of Hijaz over the borders with Jordan, Syria and Iraq. Also, the number of first level segments of the Mzeyna tribe is actually eight. In addition to these errors, there are many other contradictions and deficiencies. This example includes the sudden appearance of the 'Alayqat tribe whose history is not mentioned at all, and the lack of reference to the Hamada tribe which is said to be as old as the Jibali tribe. With regard to the Hamada in particular, they have been living on the Sinai Peninsula since before the time of Moses, according to the *guṣṣa* of the 'Alayqat chief currently living in Ra's el Sudr. With the exception of the Hamada and the Jibali that came after them, all the other tribes are now said to have originated in Saudi Arabia. Both of the *gussa* are in agreement on the point that the first tribe which left Saudi Arabia coming to the Sinai Peninsula was the Beni Wasil, but the tales do not agree on many other important points.

However, it may be a mistake to expect agreement and consistency from tales like these. We should rather take notice of the choice of tribal names, personal names and place names that appear in the stories. If we can understand whatever subject matter the tale is made up of, and what that subject matter is related to, then it will be possible for us to infer the direction in which the story is heading.

In the Tarabin *guṣṣa* above, the reason why the Tihi and the Jibali are proclaimed to be the original tribes, while the Hamada are ignored, is probably that the Tihi are important as being outsiders with respect to 'us, the 13 tribes', and the Jibali, with their Greek origin, as being outsiders with respect to 'us, the 12 tribes of Arab origin'. Also, the detailed references to the Mzeyna tribe stem from the strong consciousness of it being a rival tribe. Further, I think that the mention of a big tribe currently existing in Saudi Arabia as a mother-tribe of the Mzeyna derives from the fact that the speaker's consciousness is directed toward the present Saudi Arabia (the Hijaz area to be precise), and, also, that the information from that area normally arrives on a frequent basis. There is no smoke without fire. The possibility of an irrelevant incident being raised in *guṣṣa* is extremely slight. Taking this viewpoint, the proper nouns in the tales are important to us by themselves. The logic that connects these nouns, and auxiliary information such as sequences of events, quantities of units and so on, may be said to be secondary issues.

Continuing the above *guṣṣa*, the speaker next talks of the origin of his own tribe, the Tarabin.

“The Tarabin tribe originally came out of the Beni ‘Ataye tribe.<sup>4)</sup> The Hasbar are descendants of the Beni ‘Ataye, and they lived in Wadi Trayba. This is why we are called Tarabin.<sup>5)</sup> The Hasbar split into the Washish and Rami. The Mi’ish were the descendants of the Washish, and they split into the Sulaym and Huzayj. The children of the Sulaym are the ‘Aryda, and the children of the Huzayj are the Fararja.<sup>6)</sup>”

Here also, the speaker states that his own tribe originated from a big tribe that currently exists in the Hijaz region. Though the tradition of claiming ancestry in the Hijaz region is not limited to the Sinai Peninsula, but is a commonplace pattern seen widely throughout the whole Arab world, the linking of one’s own tribe to one that actually exists is a characteristic of Southern Sinai, where the living areas are geographically close to Hijaz and interchange of people is also intimate. However, with the blithe appearance in this story of the name Wadi Trayba, which is a place name that is difficult to corroborate, this tale can already be said to have merged into the realm of myth.

In any case, discourse with regard to their own genealogy is generally conducted in this manner by all tribes, though naturally the content will differ depending on the speaker. Also, correspondence between names of individuals and groups, actual place names and chronological sequences is normally ignored. As an example, the chief of the Jarajra, who lives in Ra’s el Sudr, told me the following story.

“The ancestor of my people, the Jarajra, was Mas’udi, and he had four children [names omitted]. One of them, Dugaymi, had a child called Gatur, and he had a child called Jarrar. This is the origin of the name of our Jarajra tribe.”

The man who related this story does not know when and where the people lived. With the exception of the fact that the first Mas’udi was in Saudi Arabia, he completely disregards times and places. But his recollection of the route by which the tribe came is kept in mind vaguely. After leaving Saudi Arabia, the Jarajra are supposed to have moved to Zagazig (lower Egypt) via El’Arish (a city on the Mediterranean coast in the north of the Sinai Peninsula), and then to have proceeded south to the Sinai Peninsula. In any case, correspondence with the ancestral names mentioned is completely disregarded in this recollection.

On occasion, these genealogical tales include elements that suggest relationship between the tribes. For example, see the next quote from a chief of the ‘Alayqat.

“Our original ancestor was Abu Talib, the uncle of the prophet. His descendant, ‘Alawi, lived in a Wadi near Taif. This is our direct ancestry.”

'Alawi is a collective noun that indicates the descendants of 'Ali, who was the son of Abu Talib and was, at the same time, the adopted son-in-law of the prophet. It is not made clear whether what is indicated in the story is this kind of general category or a definite name of some person or a tribal name. However, this is probably sufficient to give legitimacy to the claim that they carry the prophet's bloodline. More important than this is the point that those 'noble' ancestors of theirs lived in 'Taif'. Taif is a plateau city to the east of Mecca, and at present it is an important city on the highway that links Jedda and Riyadh. It is also a deluxe summer retreat where members of the Royal Family and the cabinet have lodges. Taif was originally the land of the Harbi tribe. Therefore, the seemingly trivial comment about living in Taif actually suggests that there was a close connection between the 'Alayqat and the Harbi. While it is not clear whether the 'Alayqat was a branch of the Harbi tribe or whether it was simply an alliance relationship in which the 'Alayqat tribe led a parasitic existence, it is possible to imagine that there was a close bond between the two tribes.

Returning to the Sinai Peninsula, we find one tribe that acknowledges direct ancestral link with the Harbi. It is the Mzeyna. The following quote comes from an elderly member of the Mzeyna living in El Tur.

“The Mzeyna and the 'Alayqat have the same roots.”

There is a connection between the hint of 'Taif' that appeared in the 'Alayqat *guṣṣa* above and this *guṣṣa* from the old Mzeyna tribesman. The place name 'Taif' is the hint that leads to the discovery of a link between these two apparently unconnected *gussa*, and they mutually reinforce the fact that the Mzeyna and the 'Alayqat had a long term tradition of alliance.

The alliance relationship between these two tribes is also confirmed by some other *guṣṣa*, which also indicate which tribes had an antagonistic relationship with the Mzeyna-'Alayqat league. Those *guṣṣa* deal with one specific story, that was quoted earlier at the end of the Tarabin *guṣṣa*, where it was mentioned that the 'Alayqat and Sawalha fought the greatest and the last war in their history. A variety of versions of this story were passed down among many of the tribes. Here is a summary of the 'Alayqat chief's version.

“A long time ago, the Beni Wasil and the Hamada lived on the Sinai Peninsula. The Jibali lived in a mountainous desert near St. Catherine's Monastery, which is located at the center of the Peninsula. The Sawalha, 'Alayqat, Mzeyna, Qararsha, Awlad Sa'id and other tribes lived in the Arabian Peninsula, and there was bilateral trade in goods between the Sinai and Arabia. At a certain time, a number of tribes left the Arabian Peninsula. They split up - some headed to Al Gusair (El Qusair on the west coast of the Red Sea), and the rest came to the Sinai and settled in St. Catherine. All of the tribes that came to the Sinai Peninsula entered their names in St.

Catherine's Monastery registry book, and so, even now, you can find out all about the tribes that came to the Sinai by visiting the monastery. My tribe, the 'Alayqat, also lived near the monastery at first, but after a while we pitched our tents near Suez and engaged in trade with the Hijaz. At that time, there appeared to be no tribes other than the 'Alayqat in the region, so we did not arm ourselves.

Actually, however, a strong tribe called the Sawalha were there, and they were well armed and had a lot of war loot. They began to move about a week after our tribe left. They robbed clean everyone whom they found on the way, and killed anyone who offered resistance. After my tribe (the 'Alayqat) arrived at El Tur, the Sawalha came, and a war started between the two tribes. The 'Alayqat had no weapons and the Sawalha were fully armed, so the result was obvious. When defeat was approaching for the 'Alayqat, the Mzeyna tribe volunteered assistance. After fierce fighting, the Sawalha emerged completely victorious. And just six men of the 'Alayqat and seven of the Mzeyna were left alive. However, there was a branch of 'Alayqat living in Qalyubia (Egypt), and when they heard of this, they headed to the Sinai Peninsula to engage the enemies of their comrades. Three surviving men of the Mzeyna tribe met this group on their way, and joined forces with them to go and destroy the Sawalha.

The Sawalha were then at a place called Watiya in St. Catherine. The group waited until they were asleep, then attacked from both flanks. They won a great victory and looted the Sawalha possessions. After this, the elders of the Sawalha and 'Alayqat met in St. Catherine and formed a peace agreement, and from that time to the present, there has been peace and goodwill between the two tribes."

What is clear from this *guṣṣa* is that the Sawalha were opposed to the 'Alayqat - Mzeyna league. Comparing this to other *guṣṣa*, we find that the Sawalha tribe were in alliance with the Qararsha and Awlad Sa'id. This is how the grouping arrangements of the 13 tribes of Southern Sinai have been passed down to the tribe members as 'tribal history' (or collective memory) via the *guṣṣa*.

Redundant though the discovery is, the war story introduced above also shows the fact that St. Catherine is the symbolic center for politics and culture of all the tribes.

### 3-3. Personal history

Migration is also remembered as a personal image through the experience of the individual and the people around him. This is my implication with the term 'personal history', and by making use of it, I have been able to obtain a concrete image of the routes and range of movements of the people from recent times up to the present. Here also, in the same way as for tribal history, the names of the people and places that appear take on importance. Starting with a simple example,

let us look at my investigation into the 40-year-old Huwaytat man who served as my driver and guide.

His grandfather was a camel nomad near Muwaylih (a Red Sea coastal town in the Hijaz district) in Saudi Arabia, but eventually moved to El Tur. He then went into the mountains, traveling to sell his camels. When my guide was younger himself, he went to Umm Lajj (a fishing village also on the Red Sea coast). He also said that he had been to Mecca to sell fish, but had not done a Hajj (pilgrimage). In addition, he told me that he has also been to San'a (Yemen) and Ethiopia. Recently, he worked for a short period at a provincial office in El Tur, then bought a car by himself and became a taxi driver.

There is little sense in investigating the veracity of this story. And this applies to life histories in general. The world formed by the place names that appear in the story is the important thing. Firstly, Muwaylih is a small fishing village inhabited by members of the Huwaytat tribe. It is quite accessible from the Sinai Peninsula and can be reached by small fishing boat. The territory of the Huwaytat tribe extends from Aqaba Bay to the Red Sea along the northwest coast of the Hijaz district, in other words, the opposing shores of the Sinai Peninsula. And people frequently come and go. Accordingly, this place (Muwaylih) can be seen as being a part of the scope of daily life.

When I talked with him and some other members of the Huwaytat tribe, a topic once came up of a tribal chief who assisted me in my field research over twenty years ago in Muwaylih and the surrounding villages. By the concrete situational evidence, I was able to establish that this was clearly a person that they knew. With regard to Muwaylih and the fishing villages that surround it, it can probably be said that the region was connected with Sinai through the accumulation of the actual and constant personal relationships.

Next, he mentioned Umm Lajj and Mecca. I have no means to determine whether or not he actually went there. The former is a prominent port on the north shore of the Red Sea, and Mecca needs no introduction. It is clear that San'a and Ethiopia (it seems very likely that Ethiopia in this case is Djibouti) are also parts of the Red Sea world. When showing his own world, the geographical range that comes up is the Red Sea. He made no mention of Northern Sinai or Egypt, which are much closer in terms of geographical distance. And this man's world is constituted of camels, fish, boats and cars. His mention of going to Saudi Arabia to sell fish and shellfish is something like what I heard frequently from other people. It is probably accurate to say that the life world of these people is opened to the Red Sea through maritime activities.

I will now introduce another example. This man was 50 years old at the time and worked as a ship carpentry foreman in El Tur. He told me that his grandfather once lived in Saudi Arabia, then crossed over to Sudan, and his descendants migrated to Luxor (upper Egypt). He himself was born and brought up in El Tur,

but worked as a ship carpenter in Suez when he was young.

In this man's case, his world is also the Red Sea. But instead of the east coast, he mentions Sudan and Upper Egypt, which are on the west coast. Even now, many people come from Upper Egypt to Southern Sinai to work for oil and mining companies. And this migration of people between Southern Sinai and Sudan and Upper Egypt is realistically reflected in the individual histories of many people. By collecting and studying more personal histories in the future, I hope to be able to further clarify the migration patterns of the people in Southern Sinai.

#### 4. TRIBE AND HOLY MEN

It should be clear by now that the tribe members have frequently migrated both as groups and as individuals. In this section, I would like to put some thought into the shrines of holy men that exist in all districts of the Sinai Peninsula. Their role can be supposed as a means of resisting the frequent migratory movements of the people, in other words, as a necessary measure to keep people within a certain "tribe".

The holy men are made up of '*Nabi*' (prophet) and people simply referred to as '*Sheykh*'. The reason why I treat prophets and *Sheykh* in the same category is that the ritual activity and the participation pattern in the ritual is almost the same for both.

##### 4-1. Pan-tribal holy men

I will now refer to holy men who have exceeded tribal boundaries and gained widespread trust as pan-tribal holy men. Almost all of these are prophets. Among them, Moses has particular importance. Needless to say, the Sinai Peninsula was Moses' land. Though St. Catherine, as I have already explained, is the symbolic center of the Bedouin world, it was also originally associated with Moses. Close to the monastery is a rock called the "Cow of Moses", and there is a "Spring of Moses" in another place, and a "Hot Spring of Moses" in yet another. There is a place called *Der el 'Arbain* (Monastery of 40 Men) in a valley close to the monastery, a valley which is said to have once been walked by Moses. In previous times, the Bedouin were said to have gathered there on Sundays to make sacrifices and read the Quran. Also, near the monastery is the shrine of his younger brother, the prophet Harun. This shrine is run by the Jibali tribe, and many Bedouin from all tribes still visit it even today.

Places associated with prophets other than Moses are scattered across the Peninsula. Many of these prophets are anonymous. The origin and history of the shrines, in particular those along the coast, is unclear, and they are described simply as prophets' shrines. There is a certain shared myth concerning them. According to this myth, there were once 44 prophets who came to the Sinai Peninsula over the south sea. These 44 prophets landed at Cape Muhammad at the southern tip of the Peninsula. They split up and headed north up the coast looking for St. Catherine.

Some of the shrines remaining all over the Peninsula are said to be the shrines of these prophets. It is said that there was once a shrine called “Maqam Sheykh Ibrahim” on top of the rocky cusp at the cape where they landed, and it appears that, until some decades ago, all the Sinai tribes would gather there and perform sacrifices. The number of participants later dwindled, and it is said that the shrine was completely destroyed during the Israeli occupation, although the truth about this is unclear. Today, the only remaining thing is a lookout with a telescope.

#### **4-2. Tribal holy men**

The vast majority of holy men are linked to specific tribes. The holy men are divided into those whose origin is unclear and those whose origin is known. The most famous example of the former group is a prophet Nabi Salih. His shrine is in the St. Catherine district and is mainly visited by people from the Sawalha, Qararsha and Awlad Sa'id. Sheykh Faranja in the desert near St. Catherine is a famous shrine visited by the Mzeyna tribe, and his origin is also unclear. In addition to these, there are many other shrines in the Sinai Peninsula that have unclear origin and history, but that are associated with specific tribes.

With regard to visits by tribe members to shrines, the origin of which is known, in some cases the holy man is their direct ancestor, while in other cases he is an ancestor of some other tribe. Sheykh 'Abdullah, whose shrine is located in a place called Wadi Ghayb, is an ancestor of the Mzeyna tribe, and this shrine is only visited by people from that tribe. The following legend exists about this holy man.

At one time, the Sheykh came to the place where the shrine stands now. He was tired and fell asleep. While he was sleeping, an old man with a beard appeared in a dream. The old man demanded to know who he was. He replied that he was one close to God. Then the old man pointed nearby and said, “These are yours!” When the Sheykh looked he saw a large herd of sheep. Until that time he had been a poor man, but after this became wealthy and had many descendants. They became the Mzeyna tribe.

This is a so-called “origin myth” of the tribe and so it can probably be said that the Sheykh, whose shrine they visit, is the founder of their own tribe. This is a typical example in which the holy man is an ancestor of the tribe.

There are also cases where the members of a branch of a tribe visit their own ancestor's shrine. Sheykh Abu Shabib, whose shrine is in Wadi Feyran, is an ancestor of the Dagashat section of the Qararsha tribe, and only the Dagashat members make visits to him and conduct festivals for him, while other members of the Qararsha tribe do not take part. Similarly, Sheykh 'Uqlay, whose shrine is in the Abu Zunima district, is the holy man exclusively of the Zumlain section of the 'Alayqat tribe.

On the other hand, there are cases where a holy man is visited even though it is known that he originated from another tribe. At Wadi Sahaw, where the Hamada

tribe holds its festival, the shrines of three holy men are adjacent to each other. The main holy man, Sheykh Khashshash, is thought to be probably of the Jibali tribe. And there is even a legend woven about this fact. There are other examples of the irrelevance of the origin of the holy man. He may have originated from another tribe.

#### **4-3. Visit to shrine and tribal festival**

The relationship between tribe members and their holy men becomes clear in the social domains of visit to shrine and shrine management. The distinction between a group visit (*zuwāra*) made by a tribal unit and a private visit (*nadhr*) has particular importance in this context.

Tribe members can, as they see fit, make a private visit to any shrine at any time, regardless of tribal boundaries. Normally, they offer candles, aromatic grasses and coins at the tomb in the shrine, and they may also slaughter a chicken or a goat as an offering to the holy man, depending on the nature of their prayer and their economic conditions.

However, in the case of *zuwāra* (we may call it a festival), there are limits with regard to time and qualification for participation. A great many *zuwāra* are concentrated in the summer period. One reason for this is that schools, companies and government offices have holidays in summer. In addition, a large number of people travel long distance to gather together at the festival. They naturally have no choice but to camp out, and this is practical only in the summer season. Because of the heat, the people avoid activity during the day time, and at night they sing and dance. To allow the night to be spent without lighting, a full moon is usually preferred for the opening day of the festival. Accordingly, *zuwāra* are concentrated in the weeks with full moon from July to September.

The exact date for *zuwāra* is determined by the tribal chief after consultation with the other tribal elders. However, as a death in a family of a prominent member of the tribe may result in a postponement, the date is not fixed until the last minute. When it is finally decided, it is relayed to the other members of the tribe via the "Telephone Baqraj" that I mentioned earlier. People begin to gather on the day before the opening, or on the opening day itself, and big families set up tents, while smaller ones sleep in cars or on blankets under shady trees. Recently, people have been banding together and coming deep into the mountains by pickup truck, but there are also those who come by camel or on foot.

There seems to be a variety of events conducted at *zuwāra* festival, and the most important element is livestock sacrifice (*zabīḥ*) and the sharing and communal eating of the meat. This element is common to all *zuwāra* festivals. Once, I was present at the Hamada tribe's *zuwāra*. At it, all the male participants gathered in one place in the evening, shared bread and meat, and held "maq'ad" (or tribe assembly). When night arrived, they formed facing rows and performed a singing dance called "dahḥīya" almost until dawn.

#### 4-4. Location of shrines of holy men

In towns and villages, the shrines of holy men are often located at the outskirts. In areas along the coast, the shrines are often built with the back facing the mountains inland. On the other hand, in wadi and deserts, where there are no dwellings, shrines are built on the inclined faces of mountains and valleys rather than on mountain peaks or riverbeds.

Occasionally, the location will be the same as that of a cemetery for common tribespeople. There are two cases with regard to the connection between shrines and cemeteries. In the first case, a person died and was buried in a regular cemetery. This person was later appraised in some aspect and a structure was built on top of the grave, which then became a shrine. In the second case, common people were buried near a shrine in order to receive the 'protection' of the holy man. In either case, the end result is that many shrines are surrounded by a common cemetery.

#### 4-5. Tentative conclusion

In North Africa and Maghreb, belief in holy men is almost always connected with Sufism (Islamic mysticism). However, in Southern Sinai, absolutely no relationship with Sufism is seen. Is there no problem in superimposing the belief in holy men in the Middle East unconditionally onto Sufism? In general, the fundamental requirements for holy men in a migratory society will be the function of an anchor of group maintenance, regardless to tribe, village community and professional guild. I would like to consider this point with respect to Southern Sinai.

Even though Southern Sinai is a tribal society, the tribes coexist in the same areas as I have already pointed out, and geographical and social migration by individuals is considerably frequent. Under these fluid conditions, in order to maintain the substance of the social framework, that is the 'tribe', it is necessary to have a 'fixed point' that allows a tribe to appear physically before people's eyes, or in other words, to have places where migrating people gather. In many countries, periodical markets serve this function, but these are lacking in Southern Sinai. The tribal court can also perform the same function, but in Southern Sinai this is only a gathering of the people concerned with the court, and is not open to the tribe members as a whole. At one time, intertribal war may also have been a good opportunity for a gathering, but these will probably be impossible. In principle, the only opportunity that all of the tribe members can come together is the *zuwāra* for this district. Because the main purpose of *zuwāra* is to bring people together, it can essentially be held anywhere.

There is an example which realistically points this out. The largest *zuwāra* of the Mzeyna tribe is known as "the *zuwāra* of Hazba". And it is held in the month of Safar. Hazba is the name of a place in a valley along the road that joins Dahab and Nuweibia. Two wadi merge here, and it is nothing more than a monotonous dry riverbed. There is no holy shrine as seen in other places where *zuwāra* are held,

and it is not associated with any legends or the like. The only thing that can be said of the place is that the Mzeyna have been holding their *zuwāra* there since long ago. They gather, sacrifice livestock, eat together, and then disperse. If this example is considered as the prototype model for *zuwāra*, then the word *zuwāra* should not be translated as 'pilgrimage', 'saint's festival' and 'summer festival', but rather simply as 'coming together', or in other words, 'gathering'.

The *zuwāra* of Hazba faithfully exemplifies the true meaning of 'coming together' because the location is simply a certain place that was chosen for gathering. Another possible fixed place is a cemetery, which, of course, is geographically permanent. Looked at over a slightly longer time span, the towns and villages where people pass their lives are not permanent, and will someday disappear. Cemeteries, on the other hand, are permanent fixtures as long as they are marked somehow.

The reason that some shrines have been chosen as sites for *zuwāra* is probably because they serve this function. Even though the shrine of a prophet has a coffin, there is no body inside it, or at least this is what is thought. Accordingly, strictly speaking, the shrine of a prophet is not a grave. It is a mark for people to gather at.

However, the shrines of holy men are surrounded by the graves of the common Bedouin. In addition to the function of serving as a gathering place and marked fixture, another reason that a shrine is thought to be a suitable place for *zuwāra* is that it is the permanent home of the dead, and the dead are immobile members of the tribe. When a tribe describes its foundations in terms of genealogy, its members don't just consider the tribe to consist of those who are currently alive - naturally they include the tribal ancestors as well. In order to include these ancestors in the 'tribal meeting', the cemetery is the most convenient and appropriate choice of venue, and the shrines of the founding ancestors of the tribe (or sub-tribe) best satisfy all those conditions.

Following this line of thought, it is possible to say that a holy man is nothing other than a "fixed point", which is required to give substance to the obscure tribal network. In more general terms, in a fluid society where people are continually migrating, this "fixed point" exists as a symbol that effectively maintains the group boundary. My tentative conclusion is that it is probably possible to view the social essence of the belief in holy men from this perspective.

## NOTES

- 1) Na'um Shuqair Bey 1916, *Tarikh al-Sinā'i*. Matbaat al-Maarif. Cairo. (Reprint, 1985 Athens.)
- 2) Tihī refers to the people living on the vast Tih hill range that extends from the center of the Peninsula to the north. They are distinct from the northern and the southern tribes.
- 3) The Harbi is a large tribe in Saudi Arabia, whose members live in a belt area that extends from the surroundings of Jedda, Mecca and Medina to the eastern edge of the Nafud desert. See the tribal map (Fig. 2), which is based on the results of my field research from 1973 to 1974 in the Hijāz district. The 'Anayza tribe also live in the Hijāz district.

- 4) The Beni 'Ataye is also a tribe in the Hġjāz district (see Fig. 2).
- 5) Wadi Trayba is said to be in the Hġjāz district, but both the speaker and myself are unclear about the exact place.
- 6) As is often the case, there is no distinction between personal names and group names for the nouns that appear here. With regard to the 'Arayda and Fararja at the end, both were described as second level segments of the current Tarabin tribe, but confirmation is pending.

Table 4 Major indices of tribe

Tribe	Place of Residence*	Tribal segments	Number of shrine	Chief (Sheykh)
Jibali	16(St.Catherine) 2(Abu Rudeis)	4(1 <sup>st</sup> )	2	2 in St.Catherine
Mzeyna	2(Ra's el Sudr) 5(Abu Rudeis) 5(Abu Zunima) 2(El Tur) 17(Sharm el Sheykh) 12(Dahab) 10(Nuweibia) 6(St.Catherine)	8(1 <sup>st</sup> ) 7(2 <sup>nd</sup> )	5	1 in Ra's el Sudr 1 in Abu Rudeis 1 in El Tur 1 in Sharm el Sheykh 2 in Dahab 1 in Nuweibia 1 in St.Catherine
Tarabin	12(Ra's el Sudr) 1(Abu Zunima) 1(Abu Rudeis) 2(Sharm el Sheykh) 10(Nuweibia) 2(St.Catherine)	2 or 10(1 <sup>st</sup> )	2	1 in Nuweibia 1 in St.Catherine 1 in Ra's el Sudr
'Alayqat	11(Ra's el Sudr) 9(Abu Zunima) 2(El Tur) 5(Sharm el Sheykh)	8(1 <sup>st</sup> )	5	1 in Ra's el Sudr 3 in Abu Zunima 1 in El Tur
Huwaytat	1(Ra's el Sudr) 3(Abu Rudeis) 10(El Tur) 1(Nuweibia)	4(1 <sup>st</sup> )	1	1 in Ra's el Sudr 2 in El Tur 1 in Nuweibia
Qararsha	2(Ra's el Sudr) 6(Abu Zunima) 9(Abu Rudeis)	2(1 <sup>st</sup> ) 8(2 <sup>nd</sup> )	5	1 in Abu Rudeis (W.Feyran) 1 in Abu Rudeis
Lahiwat	7(Ra's el Sudr) 2(Nuweibia)	25(1 <sup>st</sup> )	3	1 in Ra's el Sudr
Jarajra	4(Ra's el Sudr)	6(1 <sup>st</sup> ) 25(2 <sup>nd</sup> )	5	1 in Ra's el Sudr
Badara	2(Ra's el Sudr)	?	2	1 in Ra's el Sudr
Hamada	7(Abu Zunima)	7(1 <sup>st</sup> )	4	1 in Abu Zunima
Sawalha	6(Abu Zunima) 4(Abu Rudeis)	4(1 <sup>st</sup> )	7	1 in Abu Rudeis 1 in El Tur 1 in ?
Awlad Sa'id	2(Abu Rudeis) 12(El Tur) 4(St.Catherine)	4(1 <sup>st</sup> ) 7(2 <sup>nd</sup> )	2	1 in El Tur 1 in St.Catherine
Beni Wasil	1(El Tur)	2(?)	5	1 in El Tur

\*Number of villages and settlements

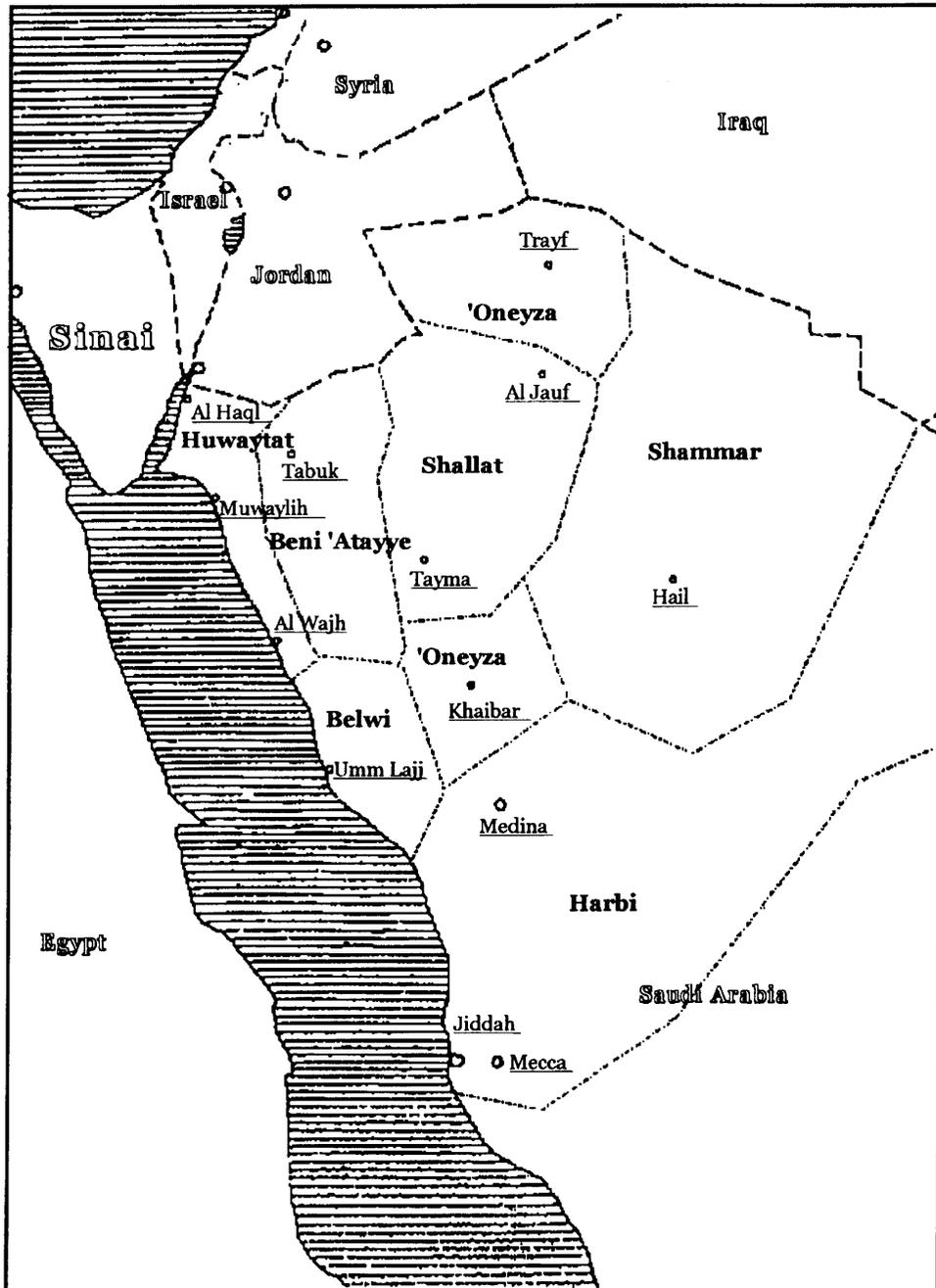


Fig. 2 Tribal map of Northern Hijaz

