

CHAPTER ONE

PATTERNS OF SETTLEMENTS IN RURAL PALESTINE

This chapter discusses patterns of rural settlements in nineteenth century Palestine. Factors which, at one point or another, determined the dispersion of Arab settlements in the different parts of Palestine will be examined. The general features of central highland villages, i.e., setting of villages, interaction between villages, size of villages, land holdings, relations of agricultural production and cropping arrangements, are looked at closely in order to discover characteristics which seem to have been common to highland villages.

The period under discussion, nineteenth century Palestine, is of interest to us because it preceded the transformation of Palestinian rural society from a relatively autarkic, inwardly-oriented society, to one which was at least partially integrated into the world's economy. Traditional patterns were still unchanged by western influence. Later, this influence tended to shatter the society's fundamental identity, and resulted in the decline of the traditional social order and the crystallisation of new social forms of existence.

However, any attempt to reconstruct the picture of nineteenth century rural Palestinian society and settlements is faced with two major problems: 1) The rapid rate of change in the physical environment that has taken place in the last 100 years; 2) the lack of systematic information on the conditions of settlements prior to the Survey of Western Palestine, conducted by the Palestine Exploration Fund in the 1870s, and the limited sources of information on the social and economic conditions of rural settlements during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The drastic changes that took place in the last hundred years are best demonstrated by a comparison of the 1875 map of the Survey and that of today (Fig.1.1 and 1.2). This radical transformation in the physical environment has been a reflection of unusual political, social and demographic changes. The colonisation of Palestine by