

dispersed.

The central highlands have always been considered the "core" of the Palestinian peasantry. Most of the peasant villages are concentrated in this area. Out of the 598 villages recorded in the 1870s, 498 (83%) of them were located in the highlands, while only 100 (17%) were located in the lowlands. The area between Nablus and Bethlehem had the highest concentration of villages in all of Palestine - around 300 villages, constituting 50% of the total villages, were located in this area ('Alami, 1984: 14).

In general, villages in the central highlands were scattered and covered almost the entire area. On the one hand, the Nablus hills had numerous villages which were small both in number of population and the size of their land holdings. The area was characterized by a high density of villages with even distribution. The fertility of land, the availability of a number of springs and the favourable security conditions made it possible for large numbers of settlements to occupy relatively small pieces of land in close proximity. (The fertility of the land here could also support villages with large populations).

On the other extreme, the Hebron area was characterized by a low density of settlements, i.e., a small number of settlements unevenly distributed. Villages in this area were large both in number and population and land holdings. As for the large size of the population, it is probable that in times of insecurity the population of the peripheral areas settlements were forced to concentrate in strong defensible settlements (Amiran, 1953: 71). Continuous sedentarisation of Bedouin had also contributed to the increased size in population of southern villages. The village of Yatta, for example, was described by the Survey of Western Palestine in the 1870's as "a large village standing high on a ridge, built of stone, but some of the inhabitants live in tents". The aridity of land resulted in big land-holdings for each village. In order to have enough agricultural produce to meet the peasants' needs, villages had to own comparatively large pieces of land. All villages located on the southern and eastern slopes of the central