

Chapter Two

An Agrarian Society Factionalized

The peasantry of Palestine have their factions and family alliances, which serve either to divide or to bind them together, independently of Turkish supremacy

James Finn, Stirring Times, 1878:226

It is the opinion of competent judges that the modern fellaheen or Arabic speaking peasants of Palestine are descendants of the pagan tribes which dwelt there, before the Israelite invasion, and have clung to the soil ever since, being submerged but never destroyed by each successive wave of conquest which has swept over the land.

Frazer, Folklore of the Old Testament, (1918, I:17)

Until the dislocation of Palestinian society in 1948 land was the source of livelihood and wealth for the vast majority of its inhabitants. Its peasantry were legendary in their tenacity and survival instincts against the heavy odds of constant indebtedness, poor soil, tax farmers, and foreign rule. "They clung to the soil...being submerged but never destroyed by each successive wave of conquest which has swept over the land"--Frazer (1918, I:19), almost a century ago, poetically expressed their condition.

Towards the end of Ottoman rule, the Palestinian village, seemingly immobile, had gone through important transformation which affected its physical characteristics as well as its relations with the holders of power in the cities. The turn of the century heralded the harnessing of nomadic raids