

Durham E-Theses

Tribesmen and the colonial encounter: Southern Tunisia during the French protectorate 1882 to 1940

Fozzard, Adrian

How to cite:

Fozzard, Adrian (1987) *Tribesmen and the colonial encounter: Southern Tunisia during the French protectorate 1882 to 1940*, Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/6764/>

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full Durham E-Theses policy](#) for further details.

VOLUME I

TRIBESMEN AND THE COLONIAL ENCOUNTER:
SOUTHERN TUNISIA DURING THE FRENCH PROTECTORATE
1882 TO 1940.

A dissertation submitted in satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Geography at Durham University

by

Adrian Fozzard

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author.
No quotation from it should be published without
his prior written consent and information derived
from it should be acknowledged.

1987



13.12.1987

ABSTRACT

Adrian Fozzard

Tribesmen and the colonial encounter:
Southern Tunisia during the French Protectorate
1882 to 1940

This thesis focuses on the region's tribes and the changes in their political economy brought about by the imposition of the colonial state and the penetration of capitalism. The tribesmen are not seen as pawns in a structural transformation but as active participants in the development of their own society.

During the Protectorate period a dual economy emerged, differentials of wealth increased, and many tribesmen were reduced to the position of insecure wage labourers. These processes had their roots in the pre-Protectorate economy but were precipitated by droughts, a growing population, the region's deteriorating terms and balance of trade, colonisation, the state's dismemberment of collective land and its exploitation of the tribal economy through taxation.

Despite the state's increasing intervention and control of tribal affairs the tribesmen continued to regard the state as an alien institution and were slow to participate in the new politics of Nationalism. Similarly, although growing differentials of wealth within the tribes strengthened the tribal political elite it did not allow them to escape from the factional politics of the Pre-Protectorate period. The state prevented its administrators emerging as a class independent from the tribe by electing them from within their community and by refusing to give them unequivocal support.

The colonial state and capitalism did not reconstruct the tribes' political economy according to a European model but interacted reflexively with existing and local structures to create a unique political economy that can only be understood through a detailed regional study.

CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	i
List of Appendices	iv
Notes	iv
List of Tables	iv
List of Maps	viii
List of Figures	viii
List of Illustrations	viii
Acknowledgements	x
Note on Transliteration and Glossary	xi

VOLUME I

CHAPTERS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. PRODUCTION.	8
2.1. Agriculture and Pastoralism before the Protectorate.	10
2.2. Agricultural Change during the Protectorate	28
2.3. Industry	48
2.4. Population	51
3. TRADE: FROM SUBSISTENCE TO DEPENDENCE	63
3.1. Trade before the Protectorate	64
3.2. Trade under the Protectorate	81
3.3. Control and Regulation: Trade and the State under the Protectorate	102
4. OWNERSHIP OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION.	112
4.1. Property and Wealth before the Protectorate	112
4.2. Property and Wealth during the Protectorate: Colonisation	127
4.3. Property and Wealth during the Protectorate: Changes within the Tribes	134
4.4. A Crisis of Capital	144
5. RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION.	154
5.1. Relations of Production before the Protectorate	154
5.2. Changing Relations of Production under the Protectorate	170
5.3. The Standard of Living	185
6. THE TRIBE AND THE STATE.	192
6.1. Bled el-Makhzen and Bled es-Siba: a valid dichotomy?	192

6.2. State and Tribe during the Protectorate: The Machinery of Repression	209
6.3. State and Tribe during the Protectorate: Control and Repression	220
6.4. State and Tribe during the Protectorate: Expropriator or Benefactor?	227
6.5. Tribe and State under the Protectorate: Resistance and Acquiescence.	236
7. TRIBAL SOCIETY.	255
7.1. Lineage and Social Groups.	256
7.2. Representational and Practical Kinship	265
7.3. The Lineage in Society: Friends, Enemies, and Factions.	278
7.4. The Social Tribesman and his Tools: Marriage.	286
7.5. The Social Tribesman and his Tools: Authority, Power, and Patronage.	292
7.6. Classes?	298
7.7. Bourgeoisie and Proletariat: A Changing Society during the Protectorate.	302
8. TRIBAL POLITICS	312
8.1. The Political Forum and Formal Offices of Authority	312
8.2. The Protectorate's Administrative Policy.	327
8.3. The Politicisation of the Cheikh.	339
8.4. The Administrative Dismemberment of the Tribe.	352
8.5. Nationalism: A New Political System?	359
9. CONCLUSION.	365

.....

VOLUME II

APPENDICES

		2
I.	Matmata: the Regional Balance of Trade and Production.	2
II.	Two Acts of Donation from Southern Tunisia.	5
III.	An Act of Habous from Southern Tunisia.	7
IV.	An Act of Mortgage from Southern Tunisia.	9
V.	An Index of Wealth.	10
VI.	A Seditious Song from Matmata (1914).	14
VII.	Acts of Election from Southern Tunisia.	16
VIII.	Acts about Patron and Client Tribes.	22
IX.	Divide and rule: relations between the tribes and their use by the French.	25
	9.1. Nomads and farmers.	25
	9.2. A Berber Republic.	38
	9.3. Inter-Tribal Conflict: a liability and an asset.	49

.....

NOTES

		67
Chapter 1		69
Chapter 2		70
Chapter 3		80
Chapter 4		95
Chapter 5		103
Chapter 6		109
Chapter 7		123
Chapter 8		132
Appendix IX		143

.....

LIST OF TABLES

2. 1.	The Climate of Southern Tunisia.	152
2. 2.	The Variability of Rainfall in Southern Tunisia.	153
2. 3.	The Growth of Olive Plantations in Southern Tunisia	154
2. 4.	The Expansion of Fig Cultivation in Southern Tunisia	154
2. 5.	The Expansion of Date Cultivation in Southern Tunisia	154
2. 6.	Animal Herds in Southern Tunisia (1886-1937).	155
2. 7.	Proportion of Sheep in the Sheep and Goat Herd.	157
2. 8.	Hunter-gathering in Southern Tunisia.	159
2. 9.	Amines appointed in Southern Tunisia (1886-1945).	160
2.10.	Irrigation and Wells in Southern Tunisia (1951).	161
2.11.	Wells Built following the Decrees of 25 January and 15 September 1897.	161
2.12.	The Number of Oil Presses in the South (1943).	161

2.13.	The Population of Southern Tunisia before the Protectorate.	162
2.14.	The Population of Southern Tunisia (1886-1936).	163
2.15.	Birth and Death Rates in Southern Tunisia.	163
2.16.	Age and Sex Distribution of Population by Caïdat.	164
2.17.	Age and Sex Distribution of the Population of Matmata by Cheikhat (1910).	165
2.18.	Age and Sex Distribution of the Population of Tataouine by Ethnic Group (1926).	165
2.19.	Medical Services in Southern Tunisia during the Protectorate.	166
2.20.	Jews and Immigrant Muslims in Southern Tunisia.	167
2.21.	Tripolitarians in Southern Tunisia.	167
3. 1.	Trade in Matmata (1886).	168
3. 2.	Trade in Matmata (1901).	168
3. 3.	Exports and Imports to and from Zarzis (1886).	169
3. 4.	Prices in Southern Tunisia (1886-1894).	170
3. 5.	Caravans in Southern Tunisia (1724-1911).	171
3. 6.	Annual Sales at Markets in the south (1896-1939)	172
3. 7.	Goods Sold in the Markets of the Territoires Militaires.	173
3. 8.	Animals slaughtered in Tunisia (1916-1931).	174
3. 9.	Contraband seized in Southern Tunisia during 1941.	175
3.10.	Contraband and Smugglers in Southern Tunisia (1903-1911)	175
3.11.	Movements in the Ports of Southern Tunisia (1906-1939).	176
3.12.	The Composition of Trade at Marca Ksiba (1922).	177
3.13.	Exports from Ben Gardane (1905-1907).	177
3.14.	The Caravan Trade between Southern Tunisia and Tripolitania (1915-1936).	177
3.15.	Prices in the Interior of Tripolitania (1912-1927)	178
3.16.	Price Changes in Tunisia (1926-1936).	178
4. 1.	The Distribution of Wealth between the ethnic groups of Southern Tunisia. The Mean Number of Animals held by Guarantors.	179
4. 2.	The Means of Landed Property held by Guarantors.	180
4. 3.	The Mean Value of Property in Francs held by Guarantors.	181
4. 4.	The Mean Wealth held by Guarantors using the Index of Wealth.	182
4. 5.	Goats and Sheep. Percentage Frequency Distribution Guarantors' Wealth by Ethnic Group.	183
4. 6.	Camels.	184
4. 7.	Horses.	185
4. 8.	Cattle.	186
4. 9.	Olives.	187
4.10.	Figs.	188
4.11.	Dates.	189
4.12.	Land.	190
4.13.	Djesser's.	191
4.14.	Sania's (Irrigated gardens).	

4.15.	Wealth in Francs.	192
4.16.	Standardised Wealth in Francs.	193
4.17.	Total Number of Fruit Trees.	194
4.18.	Wealth in Trees (Index of Wealth).	195
4.19.	Wealth in Animals (Index of Wealth).	196
4.20.	Total Wealth (Index of Wealth).	197
4.21.	The Proportion of Trees in Total Wealth (Index of Wealth).	198
4.22.	The Distribution of Wealth in the South (c.1886).	199
4.23.	The Distribution of Wealth in Southern Tunisia (1957).	200
4.24.	The Distribution of Wealth in Matmata (1954).	200
4.25.	The European Population in the Territoires Militaires.	201
4.26.	Colonists at Zarzis (1905).	202
4.27.	The Size distribution of European Estates in the Territoires Militaires (1897-1911).	202
4.28.	The Delimitation of Collective Lands before and after the Decree of 23 November 1918.	203
4.29.	The Creation of Habous during the Protectorate.	203
4.30.	Debtors and Creditors.	204
5. 1.	Variations in the Proportion of the Harvest received by Sharecroppers.	205
5. 2.	Herdowners and Herders in Southern Tunisia.	205
5. 3.	Employment of Muslims in the Territoires Militaires by Caïdat (1931-1936).	206
5. 4.	Employment in Southern Tunisia by Ethnic Group (c. 1930).	207
5. 5.	Employment of Jews in Southern Tunisia.	208
5. 6.	Workers in Southern Tunisia following a Survey of 1951.	209
	Definition of Categories.	210
5. 7.	Travailleurs Coloniales (1916-1918).	211
5. 8.	Specialist Professions of Southern Migrants.	211
5. 9.	Migrants from the Mountain communities (c. 1950).	212
5.10.	Transhumants from the Cercle of Médenine (1901-2).	213
5.11.	Numbers of Transhumants from the Circonscription of Tataouine (1936 to 1952).	214
5.12.	Family Budgets in Southern Tunisia (1938).	217
5.13.	Meals and Consumption in Southern Tunisia (c. 1940).	219
5.14.	Begging in Tunisia (1934-1939).	220
6. 1.	The Mahalla.	221
6. 2.	Garrisons in South East Tunisia (1882-1922).	221
6. 3.	Reinforcement of the Garrisons in the South during the Revolt of the Ouderna in 1915.	222
6. 4.	Casualties in the French and Tunisian Armies in the South (1914 to 1 April 1919).	223
6. 5.	The Distances of Surfaced and Unsurfaced Roads in Southern Tunisia (January 1943).	223
6. 6.	Conscription of Tunisians into the Tunisian Army (1888-1935).	224
6. 7.	Imprisonments imposed by the Authorities of	

	Southern Tunisia in the First Six Months of 1901.	224
6. 8.	Cases settled by the Caïds, Kahias, Khalifas Delegués and Présidents des Tribunaux Régionaux.	225
6. 9.	The Reform of Fiscal Legislation during the Protectorate.	226
6.10.	The Changing Fiscal burden of Southern Tunisia (1888 to 1929).	228
6.11.	Taxes Paid in the Cheikhat of Beni Barka (1929).	229
6.12.	Total Tax Paid by Circonscription (1894-1940).	229
6.13.	Government Expenditure and Receipts in Nefzaoua and Matmata.	230
6.14.	Dissidents from Southern Tunisia Residents in Tripolitania (1882-1893).	231
6.15.	The Place of Residence of Dissidents from Southern Tunisia in Tripolitania (May 1890).	232
6.16.	The Place of Residence of Dissidents from Southern Tunisia in Tripolitania (May 1893).	233
6.17.	The Number of Dissidents following the Revolt of the Ouderna.	234
7. 1.	The Genealogical Division of the Overghamma.	235
7. 2.	The Genealogical Division of the Oulad Chehida.	236
7. 3.	The family of Ali ben Medkour (Ahl el Kalaa).	240
7. 4.	Families and Political Office.	241
7. 5.	Lineages and Fractions in Southern Tunisia.	242
7. 6.	A Sian Douar (1911).	245
9. 1.	Client Tribes in Southern Tunisia and Eastern Tripolitania.	247
9. 2.	The Sahab Contract in Southern Tunisia.	248
9. 3.	Intertribal Soffs in Tunisia in the 19th Century.	249
9. 4.	A Census of the Berber Speaking Population (1922).	250

MAPS

1.	Southern Tunisia (A Topographic Map).	252
2.	The Tribes of Tunisia (c. 1890).	253
3.	Ksour, Kalâa, and Troglodyte Villages in Southern Tunisia	254
3.A.	Ksour and Kalâa in Djebel Abiodh.	255
4.	Ksar Médenine (c. 1912).	256
5.	The Growth of Markets Centres in the South.	257
6.	The Development of Landownership among the Matmata, Haouia, Djebalia and Ouderna.	258
7.	The Division of Collective Land among the Matmata, Djebalia, and Ouderna.	259
8.	Military Control of the South during the Protectorate.	260

FIGURES

2. 1.	The Area of Cereals Cultivated in the Territoires Militaires (1914 to 1933).	263
2. 2.	The Sheep Herd of Southern Tunisia (1915-1939).	264
2. 3.	The Goat Herd of Southern Tunisia (1915-1939).	265

2. 4.	The Camel Herd of Southern Tunisia (1915-1939).	266
2. 5.	Sheep and Goat Herds in two Cheikhats of Matmata (1919-1935).	267
2. 6.	Births and Deaths in Southern Tunisia (1913-1940)	268
3. 1.	Total sales at Médenine Market by Month (1896-1906)	269
3. 2.	Total sales at Médenine Market by Month (1930-1937)	270
3. 3.	Cereal Prices at Médenine Market (January, April, June and October 1908-1917).	271
3. 4.	Cereal Prices at Médenine Market (January, April, June and October 1928-1941).	272
4. 1.	Mortgages and Loans of Seed Grain from Mutual Assurance Societies	273
5. 1.	Retail Price Index for Tunisia (1914-1937).	274
6. 1.	Monthly Payment of Taxes in Matmata (1932-1936).	275
6. 2.	The Number of People Paying a Capitation tax in Southern Tunisia (1881-1940).	276

ILLUSTRATIONS

1.	A djesser. (Author, Matmata, 1985).	280
2.	A hammala. (Author, Matmata, 1985).	280
3.	The village of Sidi Salem, Matmata. (Author, Matmata, 1985).	281
4.	The village of Tamazredt, Matmata. (Author, Matmata, 1985).	281
5.	Kalâa Beni Aissa, Matmata. (Author, Matmata, 1985).	282
6.	Toujane, Matmata. (Author, 1985).	282
7.	Tribeswoman and child, Central Tunisia (?). (Postcard, before 1914, Musée de l'Homme, C.35-195-199).	283
8.	The Market, Houmt Souk, Djerba. (Postcard, Postmark 20 April 1908, Author's Collection).	284
9.	Tataouine. (Postcard, 1916, Author's Collection).	284
10.	Ksar Médenine. The Interior. (Postcard, Before 1914, Author's Collection).	285
11.	Chenini, Djebel Demmer. (Postcard, Postmark 30 July 1915, Author's Collection).	285
12.	A Chaamba Mounted on a Mehari. (Postcard, Postmark 2 February 1906, Author's Collection).	286
13.	Ksar Médenine. The Interior. (Taken by Dr. Carton, 1903, Musée de l'Homme, C.64-10122-173).	287
14.	Kalaa Kebira, Matmata. (Taken by M. Hamy, 1907, Musée de l'Homme, C.64-11360-173).	287
15.	A Campment in the Desert. (Postcard, 1916 (?), Author's Collection).	288
16.	A Bassour. (Postcard, Postmark 29 December 1905, Author's Collection).	288

SOURCES

I.	Archives.	290
II.	Government Publications.	294
III.	Bibliography.	296
	Unpublished Circulars and Monographs.	339
	Mémoires de C.H.E.A.M.	339
	Unpublished Theses.	340
	Articles in the Press.	340

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

My thanks first of all to my Supervisor Dr. Richard Lawless who has patiently awaited the completion of this work. His advice and help has been invaluable. My thanks also to Mr. David Brooks of the Anthropology Department at Durham who advised me on the more anthropological aspects of my research, and to Professor J.I. Clarke who bravely lent me his notes (which were excellent) and gave me an insight into the Tunisia he knew.

The Tunisians I have met through my work were models of kindness and generosity as well as brilliant scholars. Professor Hamouda Cherif of the History Department, Tunis University, deserves special mention. Without his help I would never have been able to carry out my research. The same is true of the historians I worked with in the Tunis archives from October 1984 to July 1985. They made it a pleasure to go to work. They helped me translate difficult passages, commented constructively on my ideas, and filled in much that I did not know. My thanks also to my European friends in Tunisia: Paola Jervis, Charlie Pierce, Ashley Seager, Susan Bird, Tony Thake, and Tony Walters, who made my research entertaining as well as productive.

I would also like to thank the librarians at the Oriental Library and Middle East Centre in Durham, Cambridge University Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Tunis, and the Institut Belles Lettres Arabes, Tunis, for their help and patience, and, last but not least, the archivists at the Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes, the archives of the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris, and the Archives Générales du Gouvernement Tunisien, Tunis.

Last of all my thanks to my parents who patiently proof read the final draft.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND GLOSSARY

Faced with a multitude of alternative transliterations in the the secondary literature I have chosen the form most commonly used in the French documents of the period. This differs pronunciation from English in that the ch should be pronounced as the sh in sheep and the dj as the j in jam. Macrons have not been used under the emphatic consonants s, d, t, and z, the letter 'ain has usually been omitted. Long vowels have been written as â, î, and ou, and the **hamza** has been omitted throughout. The letter 'ain has been written as an apostrophe. To avoid confusion plurals have been written as apostrophe s. Where the standard French spelling differs from these principles, for example the 'ain is often omitted, it has been preferred and the correct transliteration has only used in the glossary. Where place names or nouns have acquired accents in the French these have been retained.

All these practices are consistent with French transliteration current at the turn of the century. The intention is to provide a French not Arabic pronunciation. Although this may sound unfamiliar to the English reader it has the advantage of being consistent with the documents used and quoted, much of the secondary literature, and the place names on French maps.

To help the reader, the use of Arabic works in the text has been kept to a minimum. Those words that are used are written bold type on their first use in each chapter and a short definition is provided in brackets. The glossary provides a definition of those words used on more than one occasion.

Achaba	(Correctly 'Achaba) Access to tribal pastures usually following payment.
Achour	(Correctly 'Achour) Tax on cereal harvests assessed by arrea sowed.
'Adda	Protection money paid by a tribe or caravan.
'Agha el Oudjak	Commander of the auxiliaries.
'Aicha	Gruel made from barley and water.
Aman	(Correctly 'Aman) Government pardon.
'Amir el muminin	Commander of the faithful.
'Arbia	Cart.
Ardh el Arch	(Correctly 'Ardh el 'Arch) Tribal collective land.
Ardhaoui	(Correctly 'Ardhaoui) a drought resistant strain of barley.
Asabiya	Group feeling.
Ayan	(Correctly 'Aïan) Notable.
Bakhnoug	Shawl.
Bechara	Payment to a third person for the return of lost or stolen animals.
Bilad	Region or village.
Bled el-Makhzen	Land under government control.
Bled es-Siba	Land in dissidence.
Caïd	Highest official of local government.
Charaf	Honour.

Charia	Islamic law.
Chefaa	(Correctly chefa'a) Right of pre-emption of co-proprietors.
Cheikh	Government official in a fraction or a leader recognised by a fraction.
Chortia	Tribal or traditional legal code or a person appointed to administer this law.
Dahar	Back or Plateau (in this case the plateau west of the mountain belt).
Daya	Small solution depression.
Djebel	Mountain.
Djeffara	Plain (in this case the coastal plain).
Djemaa	(correctly Djema'a) Tribal council, assembly of adult males.
Djesser	Runoff watered garden.
Doulab	Ploughing group.
Driba	Global tax paid by tribes.
Fellaga	Bandit.
Flidji	Strip of cloth from which tent is assembled.
Garaa	(Correctly Gara'a) Large solution depression.
Ghar	Troglodyte dwelling.
Ghorfa	Granary in ksar.
Ghourbi	Temporary hut made of alfa grass and branches.
Hadji	Person who has gone on the pilgrimage to Mecca.
Haik	Coat.
Hammada	Rocky desert.
Hammala	Water carrying channel built on the slopes and leading into a djesser.
Houli	Cloak.
Iltizam	Tax farmer.
Istitan	Capitation tax that replaced the medjba in 1914.
Kalaa	(Correctly Kala'a) Fortress.
Kasba	Fort (usually small fortified stone built house).
Khalifa	Local government official subordinate to caïd or tribal leader recognised by several fractions.
Khammes	Sharecropper.
Khoss	Temporary hut made of alfa grass and branches.
Ksar	Fortified granary.
Machera	Harrow.
Machia	Area ploughed by a plough team in a day.
Ma'cera	Oil press.
Mahalla	Government expeditionary force.
Mahonnes	Shallow draft sailing boat.
Makhzen	Literally store house or granary but by extension government treasury, and from that government ally and police.

Marabout	Saint.
Medjba	Capitation tax.
Mehari	Riding camel.
Melk	Privately owned land.
Mi'ad	Tribal assembly.
Mogharsa	Labourer hired to develop land who shares the land at the end of contract.
Mokhzani	Member of Makhzen.
Molhag	Shepherd's assistant.
Nefra'a	Riot (usually at a market).
Orf	(Correctly 'orf) Tribal or traditional law.
Oukala	Urban lodging (usually a large house divided into rooms or small flats).
Qanoun	Tribal legal code or a tax on olive and date trees.
Rahina	A type of mortgage in which the creditor enjoys usufruct of property held as collateral.
Rizik	Personal property.
Tabbour	Drum.
Tabia	Earth embankment.
Teskeres	Export licence.
'Ulama	The learned and by extension the religious establishment.
Zerda	Collective pilgrimage to a saint's tomb.
Ziara	Personal village to a saint's tomb.
Zoghba	A small raiding party.

DECLARATION

This thesis is the product of author's research alone. No part of it has been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without his prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION.

This thesis is a study of economic and social change in South Eastern Tunisia during the first sixty years of the French Protectorate from 1881 to 1940. The study area comprises, in terms of the Protectorate's administrative units, the districts of Matmata, Médenine, Tataouine, Zarzis, and Ben Gardane. Geographically it includes the mountain belt and coastal plain south from the oasis of Arram to the Libyan border. The thesis examines the effect of the capitalist penetration and the colonial state on the tribal population of the region.

As a regional and period study the thesis breaks new ground' but the subject is not new. In recent years numerous studies have examined the colonial impact on other parts of the rural and tribal Maghreb and Middle East², and this thesis may be seen as a contribution to this genre. In its emphasis, however, this study, departs from previous work. Contemporary historical studies of the Maghreb have followed two traditions. Both have tended to produce monocausal explanations of social and economic change that stress either cultural or economic structures but not actors; they are histories without people. In contrast this thesis sees social and economic change as the result of a plurality of forces and the individual as an active participant in this transformation.

The first of these traditions has been termed 'Orientalist' but may also be seen as 'ethnographic'³. It has seen social and economic activity as part of a specifically Islamic or 'tribal' social and cultural order. Within this the individual is lost because his action reflects the prevailing mores and imperatives of the society within which he/she lives. Understanding and explanation become matters of typology, the individual has only to be classified within Coon's 'mosaic' of Middle Eastern culture for his action to be understood⁴. The 'mosaic' consists of discrete social units each



with their own social and economic structure and cultural tradition, each an integral society. Borders and contrasts are seen everywhere - urban/ rural, tribal/peasant, subsistence/commercial, state control/dissidence. There is little place for a middle ground. Internal and reflexive change is impossible and unnecessary since each of the structures is in equilibrium, either static or following a predictable and self controlled cycle. Recent history has been seen as the dissolution of the old order and its gradual replacement by European social, cultural, and economic forms. Change has been imposed by the colonial state and European capitalism from without. Again the interpretation stresses mutually exclusive and conflicting structures. The introduction of the new implies the replacement of the old. The individual is either a peasant or a proletarian. His status depends on forces which he has neither the means nor the desire to control.

The second analytical tradition may be termed 'Marxist' in the broadest sense⁵. This has replaced the culturally specific structures of 'Orientalist' with the global structures of the mode of production. Culture and society are subordinated to the prevailing economic relationships. So too is the individual. Individual identity and activity are to be understood in terms of fundamentally economic relationships, relationships to the means of production. A dichotomy is seen between the pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production. Social and economic relationships are determined by the society's place in either of these worlds. Change is imposed from without by the penetration of capitalism. Capitalism replaces the existing mode and relations of production with globally uniform and integrative economic structure. Social change follows suit. The process of change is both inevitable and unidirectional. Individuals have no part to play. They are too small to influence the mammoth events that surround them. They are carried along with the tide of change.

Both these approaches have elements of value and, to some extent, one may avoid their difficulties by a synthesis. However, both share the same weaknesses in that they stress the omnipotence of either social or economic structure and deny the

individual. A new analysis must broaden the base of explanation and provide the individual with his/her place.

In the early years of academic geography breadth of analysis was the key note of the discipline. For Vidal de la Blache the regional monograph provided a means of an integrative study of society and economy. He stresses the complexities of the interrelationships between society, economy, culture and environment and the unique whole which their interaction created. For him,

aucune indice, aucune nuance, même ne s'aurait passer inaperçue; chacune a sa valeur géographique, soit comme dépendance, soit comme facteur, dans l'ensemble qu'il s'agit de rendre sensible.⁶.

It is the approach that Braudel has advocated for historians and demonstrated with his seminal 'La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Epoque de Phillippe II'.

This study attempts to develop this regional approach as a means of understanding and explaining social and economic phenomena. This is not to isolate the 'region' as an entity but merely to use it as the focus of our attention. A complete study demands an understanding of the 'region's' relationship with the world beyond. Much of the subsequent study places the region in its broader national and international context as a means of explaining phenomena within its bounds. This is not, if one may trace a 'progression' from regional to systematic and then 'structural' geography, a retrogressive step. To focus on the region and its uniqueness is not to deny the influence, even predominance, of broader cultural or economic structures in the formation and transformation of the whole. It is only to stress that these structures are not omnipotent and that they are plural not singular. Society and economy are local and diverse not global and uniform. This diversity reflects not just a variety of influences, some local some global, but their particular combination.

The approach is also dynamic. The 'region' is always changing. This change may be imposed from the outside. Colonialism and European capitalism are prime examples. But these structures transform the existing regional character they do not obliterate it

and start again. Their influence is modified not just by a passive social and economic system but by social, economic, and environmental forces already active within the region which respond to the changing situation. The structures themselves may be transformed. They are not monoliths acting in single minded pursuit of some predetermined goal but responsive and reflexive. The local may influence the global. Change may also occur from within. Society and economy are active agencies not static forms. They develop as a response to changing conditions within the region. The action of one part of the 'system' influences another constantly, progressively, or by crossing thresholds, and so the whole is transformed. Society and economy develop internally by the response to and resolution of inconsistencies within their own structure.

This is not a celebration of uniqueness, but the purpose is explanation and understanding not the creation of laws. Generalisations and comparisons are often elucidating and are frequently developed and used in this study but it is not the intention of this thesis to develop a universal model of the colonial encounter.

And the individual? Vincent Berdoulay has argued that

the Vidalian concept of "*genre de vie*" [...] was understood to be a result of man's initiative and creative adaptation to his environment.⁶

Both the Orientalist and Marxist approaches to Maghrebian history, have lost this human agency. Derek Gregory has criticised 'Marxist' structuralism for its unidirectional determinism in which the individual becomes the passive tool of the developing capitalist economic system. The structure of production defines the individual and determines social action for its own teleological purpose. He argues instead that the individual is active, responsive, and reflexive. Following Giddens' theory of structuration he draws an analogy between the structure and the rules of a game which bind the player but do not determine the manner of play. The game itself reaffirms these rules (morality and the semantics of communication reaffirm social structure). Within the game the individual's style of play is his own choice and his success will depend on his ability

to manipulate the environment created by these rules for his own purposes. This is not just his understanding of those rules expressed by society - the morals and the laws - but his understanding of the potentialities of the entire system^s. Seddon, writing of Moroccan peasants, has described these rules as 'the structural determinants of their decisions', they include the environment, technological ability, and the particular political economy. For an understanding of social and economic life

it is important to consider the ways in which these elements are conceived by the individual concerned, the various consciousnesses through which the total environment is conceived and which serve as the immediate context for individual action.¹⁰

But structuration goes beyond this by giving the individual a part in the development of the rules:

the creative interactions between the players, conscious or otherwise, reconstitute or refashion the structures within which (and through which) they take place.¹¹

The sum of individual actions creates the structure and directs its development. The structure does not develop through its own infallible and omnipotent logic, it is the result of human agency. Not all these agents are conscious participants. Many are unaware of the larger whole to which their actions contribute. Similarly the resultant structure is not necessarily the intended product of its participants. Actions have unanticipated consequences. Lastly, some agents are more important than others. In the Tunisian context, the Resident General, with his influence over government policy, had far greater power to change the structure than the impoverished tribesman.

The quality of the sources set the limits to this approach for the historian. The historian cannot go beyond the sources and collect his own data to complete the picture of the society he studies. Our understanding is inevitably incomplete. This presents a particular problem at the level of the individual. For want of alternative documentation previous studies of Tunisian history have had to rely on government correspondence and tax registers. This has

forced them to look at the tribe from the outside and from there it becomes a monolith. The individual is subsumed by his community, and all trace of individual agency is lost. In establishing a *status quo ante* for this study the author has had the same problem. The most important sources are travellers reports, consular reports, and a few letters from local administrators of the Beylical regime. All these sources come from outside the tribe. The most plentiful documentation available from within the tribes are legal texts written by local notaries. They are standard formulae and so their scope is limited. From the early years of the Protectorate the volume of documentation increases markedly. French officers seconded to supervise the Tunisian administration in the South produced regular reports on social, economic, and political events within the tribal communities. Their reports are complemented by numerous 'academic' studies, often written by the French administrators. These officers, seen through their daily correspondence, become personalities but there are only fleeting glimpses of the tribesmen themselves.

For these reasons this study can only be an interpretation. Truth and fact are as elusive in understanding human motivation and action as they are in simplifying a complex reality. The documents the historian consults have been written by people with their own prejudices and stereotypes. They are also interpretations. Frequent quotations from the sources have been used to show the principal actors interpretations and purported motivations for the processes and events in which they participate. Verification is often impossible.

The historian must also contend with himself. His relationship with the sources is not passive but reactive¹². As he reads the texts his understanding develops and his choice of the relevant information changes. Even the order in which documents are read may modify his interpretation.

The organisation of the thesis reveals the author's belief that social structure is closely bound to the prevailing relations of production, a belief that is substantiated in the body of the thesis. Chapter Two examines the changing pattern and process of

production, Chapter Three the relationships between regional economies in the study area and the national and global economic system. Chapters Four and Five examine the relations of production. Chapter Six describes relationships between the tribe and the state. Chapters Seven and Eight show the influences of the economy and the state on the tribal social structure and political life. Finally, Chapter Nine examines relationships between the tribal communities. A brief conclusion synthesises the processes and consequences of social and economic transformation discussed in the text.

production, Chapter Three the relationships between regional economies in the study area and the national and global economic system. Chapters Four and Five examine the relations of production. Chapter Six describes relationships between the tribe and the state. Chapters Seven and Eight show the influences of the economy and the state on the tribal social structure and political life. A brief conclusion synthesises the processes and consequences of social and economic transformation discussed in terms of the regional methodology.

CHAPTER 2.

PRODUCTION.

Southern Tunisia is a harsh agricultural environment. In records kept since the end of the 19th century average annual rainfall has been less than 250 mm. throughout the region (see Table 1.1 and Map 1). The dampest areas are on the coast (Gabès 187 mm, Zarzis 206 mm., and Ben Gardane 186 mm.) and in the mountains (Matmata 231 mm.). Rainfall is lowest and least frequent in the plains (Médénine 144 mm. and Tataouine 123 mm.) and in the rain-shadow of the mountains (Kébili 89 mm.). On the edge of the Sahara rain might fall as infrequently as once in twenty five years. Virtually no rain falls between May and October, it is concentrated in the cold period between November and April much reducing its effectiveness for vegetation growth. Temperatures show marked diurnal, monthly, and annual extremes. The dominant winds from the west and south west are dry, cold in the winter and very hot in the summer. As a result rates of evaporation are high, particularly between May and October, and plants may be desiccated at any time of the year. Rainfall is unreliable both in its annual total and its distribution throughout the year. Table 2.2. shows that, on average, every ten years rainfall at Gabès will fall to 76 mm., Matmata to 78 mm., and Médénine to 64 mm. Years of high rainfall and low rainfall tend to come in runs of two, three, even six years. Rain frequently comes late (in November or December instead of October) and finishes early (March instead of April and May). When rain does fall it is extremely localised and very intense often causing local flooding¹.

Bois has detailed Tunisia's climatic record (based entirely on incidental accounts and surrogate measures) back into the Middle Ages. His evidence shows that Tunisia suffered repeated droughts during the 19th century. Some of these were isolated years of deficient rainfall others a series of poor years. Three of these droughts, 1829, 1843, and 1867, were particularly severe². It is

likely that Southern Tunisia (unfortunately there are no records referring specifically to the region), bordering the Sahara, suffered more frequently and severely than Tunisia as a whole. Of the more distant past Carton has suggested a gradual decline in precipitation since Roman times³. This may be true. Nicholson's study has placed Bois' evidence in the broader context of Saharan climate and used early meteorological data to examine trends within the historical period. In contrast to Bois, who saw the Tunisia's climate as relatively stable since the 10th century, she has tentatively suggested a damp period in the 16th century and a subsequent long term decline in rainfall. During the the late 18th and early 19th century there followed a period of slightly increased rainfall followed by a dry period from the 1830's to the 1870's. At the end of the nineteenth century the climate dampened temporarily before another dry period in the 1920's, 30's, and 40's⁴. Severe droughts may have followed the same pattern, infrequent during the eighteenth century becoming more frequent by the middle of the nineteenth century.

Soil conditions are equally hostile. Most of the lowlands are covered with skeletal soils over calcareous or gypsum duricrusts. Arable soils are limited to depressions. In the Dahar and Djeffara these depressions are either **daya** (solution depressions with fine colluvial soils up to five metres thick covering at most one or two hectares) or **garaa** (depressions of several square kilometres with alluvial soils tens of metres thick). Such depressions are usually the foci of endoreic drainage systems and after periodic floods are covered with several centimetres of alluvium and dampened to over a metre deep⁵. Repeated flooding and dessications encourage salt accumulation and many of these depressions are classified as **sebkha** (salt lakes). In the mountain zone skeletal soils are again the norm. Only in the depressions where the red loess soil **ard' el hamri** accumulates is cultivation possible⁶.

With the exception of the zones artesian water and associated oases in Nefzaoua, northern Aradh, and on the coast at Zarzis (see Map 1.) there are no permanent springs in the south large enough to sustain irrigation agriculture⁷. In winter and spring standing water

might be found in the **ghdir** (rock pools) of the **dahar** or even in the **daya** and **garaa**. Throughout the summer months the only available water is edaphic, stored in the shallow sediments of the depressions and **oued** (seasonal rivers), and is almost always brackish and often undrinkable⁸.

2.1. Agriculture before the Protectorate.

The tribes overcame this hostile environment through technology, economic diversity, mobility, and opportunism. Wells and watergathering structures provided drinking and irrigation water. Well adapted animal and crop species reduced the danger of lost herds and harvests following seasonal and long-term droughts. Exploitation of a wide range of resources (herding, arboriculture, cerealculture, and hunter-gathering) enabled the tribesman to provide most of his needs and guaranteed resources in all but the most extreme circumstances. Mobility allowed him to exploit the resources of a number of ecological niches (the mountains, the plains, and the desert itself) and escape the worst droughts, and by responding to changes in technology and market demand the tribesman could exploit previously unrecognised resources.

Since surface water was only available in the winter months the provision of water demanded a sophisticated technology. At Beni Aissa and Taoudjout in **Matmata** professional diggers cut wells tens of metres deep through solid rock to reach reliable water bearing strata⁹. These were, however, an expensive and by no means satisfactory solution. At Beni Aissa water had to be lifted eighty metres and was liable to stagnate and become poisonous. Deep wells were rarely sunk and were used only as a last resort. Wells dug into the shallow aquifers of an **oued** or large depressions were cheaper. Where local geology allowed large lenses of water to accumulate these wells (termed **bir**) were permanent, lined (usually with wood, rarely with stone), and several metres deep. More often the well was in shallow sediments and its yield smaller, irregular, and ephemeral. The shallowest wells (termed **tsmed**) might dry up after a matter of weeks. They were rarely lined or marked, and were prone to fill in or collapse¹⁰.

In the mountain zone an alternative resource, runoff, was exploited to fill cisterns. Most families owned several, usually dispersed on the slopes surrounding the village, to ensure a regular supply of drinking water in all but the most persistent droughts. They were kept locked to prevent theft, to prevent sand and light getting in, and to keep the water cool. French commentators were complimentary about cistern-water's taste, but it was far from clean and doctors considered it a frequent source of intestinal infection¹¹.

Although some of the more reliable wells in the oueds at Tataouine and Médenine were able to support small irrigated gardens¹², they were not of a scale comparable to the oases of Neftzaoua or Northern Arad. Without supplementary water agriculture was rainfed, a fact which limited the cultivable area, the choice of crops, the techniques that could be used, and the potential yields.

Barley was the most important cereal crop in the south. In most years it represented three quarters of the cereal harvest. It is more resilient to environmental stress than wheat, less demanding in terms of soil, more resistant to disease (rust in particular) and has a shorter growing season which allows the cultivator to sow later in the year and still avoid the dessicating summer¹³. Specialist grains resistant to drought (such as the *ardhaoui*) or salt enabled the range of the cereal to be extended well into the south. Wheat was, however, the preferred grain because its flour was of higher quality and could be used to make couscous. But cultivation was hazardous. Although the use of resilient hard wheat (*Triticum Durum*) and fast growing, drought and salt resistant varieties such as *argili* and *bidhi* lessened the risks of crop failure, wheat is more demanding of soil and water conditions and matures slowly. Wheat was only grown in the dampest depressions and in wet years. It rarely represented more than a quarter of the total cereal harvest and the further into the interior one went the less wheat was cultivated¹⁴. A third cereal, sorghum, was also grown in the oases of the south, but, because of its unpleasant taste and requirements of supplementary irrigation, it never rivalled wheat or

barley. It was rather a wheat and barley substitute^t planted in early summer after a poor cereal harvest in May and June¹⁵.

Ploughing depended on sufficient rainfall to dampen the soil and a wise cultivator would not sow before enough rain had fallen to support the seedling for several weeks. Rain of such quantity falls over only a small part of the south between October and January (the last month in which cereals may be planted and mature before the arrival of the desiccating sirocco in June). This ensured that the area cultivated was generally small. The extreme variability of rainfall, however, allowed the periodic use of even the driest areas and large fluctuations in the cultivable area (see Figure 2.1. for the variability of the area cultivated during the Protectorate (statistics from before the First World War are unavailable)).

Techniques of cereal cultivation responded to these limitations. The preparatory cultivation to encourage rain infiltration used in the north, was impracticable since none could tell where the rain would fall. Instead tribesmen waited until

le ciel se couvre de nuages [then] toutes les tribus envoient les cavaliers à la découverte pour reconnaître les limites des terrains mouillés et labourables. Au retour des cavaliers, tous les tribus se précipitent sans souvent prendre le temps de se faire suivre de leurs tentes, n'emmenant avec eux que les animaux de travail, les charrues, la semence nécessaire et quelques vivres et labourent avec une hâte febrile pendant les quelques jours qu'ils ont devant eux.¹⁶

The land was cleared with a *machera* (a type of harrow) and then ploughed and sown as quickly as possible. Speed was essential since the grain had to be planted before the soil dried out. The plough they used was ideal for these conditions. It was light, being made of wood and smaller than those of Northern Tunisia, and so easy to transport. It was a scratch plough with a shoe of burnt wood rather than metal and so needed less traction than a heavier instrument with a share making deep furrows and turning the soil. Although the shallowness of the furrow was criticised by contemporaries it was, in fact, an advantage. By scratching the surface the dessicated layer that protected the saturated soil below was relatively thin, but it was still effective. Deeply ploughed soil desiccated to

greater depth by the time of the harvest. Moreover the plough was cheap and so the tribesmen could afford several, potentially increasing the area sown. In 1915 when a plough cost 2 frs. and a metal shoe 1 frs tribesmen often had five or six of these instruments¹⁷.

Recognising the limitations of the soil and water conditions the grain was usually sown sparsely, at most two hundred kilograms per *mechia* (10-12 ha.). Since seed grain was the precious remainder of the previous year's harvest returns per unit sown were more important than returns per unit of land, and it was in this measure that their returns were usually recorded. Valensi has compiled statistics of yields from the pre-Protectorate period for Tunisia as a whole. Yields of barley, according to her statistics were, of 101 cases, 29 cases below 8:1, 49 between 8 and 12:1, and 23 above 12:1. For wheat of 98 cases 22 were below 8:1, 44 between 8 and 12:1, and 30 above 12:1¹⁸. Yields in Southern Tunisia were probably lower than these. Those quoted by French monthly reports tend to pick out the extreme cases, particularly the high yields. Of 26 reports detailing the yields of barley 8 were less than 8:1, 8 between 8 and 12:1, and ten above 12:1; of 22 references to wheat yields 4 were below 8:1, 3 between 8 and 12:1, and 15 over 12:1. What commentators stress is the very high yields in good years, some reports suggested as high as 60:1, even 140:1 for barley. The most reasonable estimates are lower, between 25 and 40:1. But these good years occurred only two years in ten, in three years out of ten the yield would be modest, in five years out of ten small, even deficient. Because of this average yields were relatively low, according to Lt. Lecoq's calculations only 6-7:1 for wheat and 8-9:1 for barley¹⁹.

Military reports describing the hazards of cereal cultivation in the period 1884-1940 show why it was high risk agriculture. In 15 out of the fifty six years the rains came as late as January so that the grain had little time to mature before the arrival of the *sirocco*. Even if the seed was sowed on schedule, in 7 out of the 56 years it was desiccated in the subsequent months and failed to germinate properly. Barley, which can undergo several cycles of desiccation and regeneration, is better at coping with this problem

than wheat. Droughts in January and February also desiccate the seedling (16/56 years), a problem aggravated by dry winds from the Sahara (10/56 years). Temperatures less than 0°C inhibited germination (5/56 years). Drought in April and May prevented the grain forming (17/56 years), and the sirocco sometimes arrived early (9/56 years). Occasionally rain rescued harvests that were thought lost (6/56 years) but late rain also carried with it a risk of rust (2/56 years).

Weather was not the only hazard. Locusts (*Schistocera peregrina* and *Stauronotus aroannus*), in swarms that could 'darken the sun'²⁰, frequently decimated the harvest (25/56 years). There were periods of locust infestation separated by respites throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century²¹. A similar pattern can be traced into the twentieth century using the military's reports, corresponding to a phasing of locust swarms in Africa as a whole. The worst affected areas were on the edge of the Sahara. Nefzaoua suffered from 18 out of the 25 plagues, Tataouine 16, Ben Gardane 6 and Zarzis only 5. There were also rodent plagues (4/56 years), which attacked harvests in the lowlying regions (and Matmata in 1950-1), and birds and indigenous insects were a ubiquitous problem.

Given the context of rainfed cereal culture increasing productivity and reducing yield variability were difficult. In the oases irrigation both stabilised and increased yields. The application of manure offset the problems of declining field fertility, and whilst the crop matured it might be tended. In the more distant ploughlands, on the other hand, there was no opportunity to prepare the ground or protect the crop. The tribesmen burned vegetation in preparation for the plough season²², a practice that would temporarily raise soil fertility and ease clearance, but apart from this the tribesmen completely neglected their crops. At harvest time many sought to protect their crops against other tribes and wandering herds, building small forts, *kasba*, for the purpose²³, but the plagues of rodents, birds, and insects that devastated the harvests were given a free hand. Outside the oases, manuring, weeding, and birdscaring were never practised.

Conditions for arboriculture were equally difficult. Although there were wild olives in Southern Tunisia the region was not ideal for oleiculture²⁴. The rainfall is often inadequate and droughts affect olive yields. Drought in April and May withers the flowers from which the fruit form. During the period 1884-1940 this occurred in 6 out of 56 years. In 16 out of the 56 years the trees had inadequate edaphic water due to limited rainfall in the early part of the year. As a result the fruit fell before it had matured. A dry summer alone, however, had little effect. There was even an olive harvest after the devastating drought of 1936. If there was too much rain in late summer, on the other hand, when the fruit matured it might rot (4/56 years) or become swelled with water much reducing its value. Many trees were damaged by disease and insects.

The area best suited to oleiculture is the coastal belt at Zarzis and the Dakhla Djerba. Here a clement climate and the prevalence of sandy soils without an impeding duricrust allows the maximum of edaphic water storage throughout the summer months when the fruit matures. In 1882 plantations were already well established (see Table 2.4.). Further inland thinner soils combined with the harsher climate limited plantations to the damper depressions.

There was a second zone of olive cultivation in the mountain belt. Rainfall was greater here and more reliable than on the plains, and in valleys the loessal soils, though high in clay and therefore prone to desiccation, were thick and fertile. More important the steep stoney valley sides and the high runoff they generated lent themselves to management. A *tabia* (barrier of earth), usually faced with stone, was built across the valley floor. (During a survey in Matmata in 1985 the largest example the author found was 80 metres in length and nine metres high. Most were smaller, ten to fifteen metres in length and and three or four metres high, depending on the valley's gradient and width (See Plate 1)). Soil was carried from the slopes and downstream to fill in behind the barrier and provide a cultivable surface. The cultivable area was usually less than one hectare. A *hammala* (runoff channel) led runoff from the surrounding slopes onto the *djesser* (garden) behind the *tabia* (see Plate 2). Here the thick soil retained water throughout

year providing a favourable micro-environment for cultivation²⁵. These constructions represented a considerable investment of labour. The S.E.R.E.S.S.A. report of 1958 calculated that a tabia 31 metres long and two metres high required 180m³ of earth, a further 480 m³ for the garden behind, and large stones were often moved long distances to line the overflow and the downstream side of the tabia. The whole task amounted to one hundred and eighty man days²⁶.

French archaeologists speculated that these djessour were a Roman innovation ²⁷. This is unlikely. Similar terrace systems have been described in arid regions throughout the world and since the technology is relatively simple it is more than likely that it was developed independently and indigenously. The earliest constructions may even pre-date Phoenician times²⁸.

Although the documentary evidence is unable to support a precise delimitation of the area covered by these djessers, it is clear that they were well established throughout the mountain zone. A survey in 1886 claimed that 'presque tous les ravins sont cultivés' from the Djebel Matmata to the Djebel Demmer²⁹. Philebert and Jamais testified to the apparant fertility and luxuriance of the vegetation in the Djebel Haouia, a consequence of the terraced agriculture³⁰. At the time of the occupation the mountain zone was already an important olive growing region (see Table 2.4.), in the words of Colonel Le Boeuf 'une veritable patrie de l'olivier'³¹. There were areas of lesser or greater concentration (the density of development declined away from the mountain villages, and fell off sharply over the crest of the mountains into the rain shadowed dahar) but the fundamental distinction remained between mountain and plain.

Whether there was any change in the cultivated area is difficult to assess. To the south of Douiret only 'les traces de culture demeurent intactes sous formes des digues étagées dans tous les ravins et enfin quelque oliviers dix ou quinze fois séculaires, témoin de la prospérité passée'³². But when these olives were abandoned is unknown. Some commentators believed that the cultivated area was in decline but Ellafi, drawing on documents from

the mid-nineteenth century, concludes that the djesser's were in fact expanding downstream towards the plain³³. Whatever the trend, neither expansion or decline were dramatic.

Techniques of cultivation again responded to the necessities of the harsh environment. Resistant species, such as the *zerrazi* and *chemlali*, dominated (forming 90% and 10% of the forest in Matmata). The high quality but sensitive *tefaa* was rare (0.3% of trees in Matmata)³⁴. Young trees were protected from the excesses of the summer drought by frequent watering, at considerable cost of labour since the water had to be carried by hand from cisterns on the surrounding slopes. Otherwise there was little attempt to tend the trees in either the mountain or coastal zones. French commentators complained that the trees were neglected, the cutting of old growth to foster fruition was not practised in the south as it was in the Sahel, there was no preparatory cultivation with a *machera* before the rains to reduce evaporation, the olives were harvested by beating the branches so damaging the fruit and the tree, a large proportion of the trees were diseased and underproducing (a consequence of beating the trees), and that the trees were planted too close together and irregularly even where flat land allowed regularly spaced plantations.

Inadequate cultivation was partly a result of ignorance. Some of the endemic diseases were simply unrecognised by the tribesmen, while practices such as pruning were regarded as harmful. But the neglect also reflects the economic realities of cultivation in a region where there were limited marginal returns to labour. Yields in Southern Tunisia were lower than those in the Sahel and did not warrant the intensive practices of the north.

Large numbers of fig trees were also cultivated outside the oases, particularly in the mountains (see Table 2.5.). They are more resilient to drought and disease than olives but are still susceptible to severe summer drought and the sirocco which can damage the harvest (as it did in 8 out of 56 years between 1884 and 1940) or kill the younger trees. The fruit, maturing in summer, is also prone to locust damage (5/56 years). Nevertheless yields are more dependable than those of the olive. The fruit is sweet,

nutritious, and easily preservable, and was a popular food in the mountain region. Even the fastidious French considered the fruits excellent³⁵.

Dates cultivated outside the oases were, on the other hand, both low yielding and of inferior quality. The best dates are grown, according to the local proverb, 'with their feet in the clouds and their heads in hell'. They require constantly high temperatures and a large amount of water. The mountain and coastal zones are too mild and lack adequate irrigation. Most of the harvest was fed to animals, only the poor or drought stricken ate the fruit themselves. Levainville suggests that in Matmata the palms were grown not so much for their harvest but for the shade the trees provided³⁶. Nevertheless there were substantial numbers of date palms throughout the south at the time of the occupation (see Table 2.6.).

Less important than these staples were a number of other fruit trees (the pomegranate, almond, and pistachio, even some vines) that added variety to the diet. Unfortunately their numbers go unrecorded but, since they were rarely referred to in the lists of property available from the early years of the Protectorate, they are unlikely to have been an important part of the economy.

In the oases some four hundred plant species were cultivated, including vegetables, fruits, herbs and industrial crops (henna and madder for dyes, hemp for ropes)³⁷. Elsewhere aridity limited the range of crops. Nevertheless vegetables and some industrial crops were grown outside the oases. At Médénine, Metameur, and Tataouine water was drawn from wells in the oued to irrigate gardens of vegetables. Although contemporaries reported a lack of vegetables in the mountain zone they could be grown in the dampest area of the djesser near the tabia with occasional irrigations of cistern-water³⁸. Outside the oases tobacco was the most important industrial crop, but it was of poor quality and the yields were low³⁹.

Animal herding in Southern Tunisia suffers from the same environmental limitations as agriculture. Local conditions of rainfall, drainage, and soil reduce pasture quality and quantity. In the mountain zone, where rainfall is higher than on the surrounding plains, and in those depressions and oueds that have the

benefit of periodic floods and deep soil, pasture is slightly better than on the surrounding plains. But, as a rule, vegetation density and species diversity decrease with decreasing rainfall, and the proportion of xerophytes increase inland. During the summer months most of the annual grasses and herbaceous plants die off leaving only the woody shrubs. Pasture quality can also vary markedly from year to year⁴⁰. Late autumn rains and low winter temperatures reduce vegetation growth. An early summer drought and desiccating winds can dry out the pastures as early as April leaving a long wait until the next rains.

Animal carrying capacities are lower than northern Tunisia. According to surveys conducted in the 1950's the coastal region can support one sheep per seven hectares, the mountains one per five hectares, and the dahar one per nine hectares. In Central Tunisia these carrying capacities rise to one sheep per five hectares and in the Tell one per two hectares⁴¹. Carrying capacities vary according the herd species. Sheep use pasture inefficiently, selecting a few species and leaving the remainder. Goats consume less and are less fastidious. Consequently carrying capacities are higher. Camels consume more but are still less fastidious than goats, eating, by choice, halophytes and thorny bushes that sheep reject.

Accessibility is as important in determining pasture use as its productivity. In summer sheep need watering everyday and so the herds are tied to reliable wells. In winter if there has been rain they may survive out at pasture for four or five days, but even then their range is restricted by their speed. Goats are faster and can survive longer without water but they were usually herded with sheep. Consequently pastures more than fifteen or twenty kilometres from a reliable water source are beyond their range. Although pasture's carrying capacity for camels is only one fifth that of sheep, they can use pastures in the **hammada** (rocky desert) and **erg** (sandy desert) unavailable to sheep and goats because of their speed of movement, resilience to desiccation, and ability to eat almost anything⁴².

By far the largest herds in Southern Tunisia were those of sheep and goats (see Table 2.6.). These animals provided milk (half a litre per female for three months after weaning) a valuable source of protein and fat, drunk fresh or preserved as melted butter and **jebbna** (cheese). Both sheep and goats provided meat but that of the sheep was the most esteemed, particularly its fat tail, and its carcass weighed about twenty kilograms as opposed to the twelve of the goat. Goat skins provided the leather for water bags and other containers. So important were these utensils that goats were killed for their skins more often than for their meat. Sheep were sheared in April, any later in the year and the fleece would be soiled by sweat and dust. The wool was not cut as a whole fleece but according to a classification of wool quality by part of the body. The best was fine enough for clothing. Goats hair, weather proof and stronger than wool, was coarse and so relegated to the manufacture of cheaper textiles, **gharaa** (bags) and **flidjis** (tent cloths)⁴³.

Sheep, although their products were more esteemed, are less resilient than goats. They consume more water and need it twice as frequently. If these needs are not met they quickly lose weight and cease to lactate. Goats also reproduce more frequently. They have their first kid at 18 months instead of 2 yrs, in good conditions they can have two litters per year, about 20% of the females are sterile rather 25%, they produce double the number of twins, and the level of kid mortality is slightly lower than that of lambs. In a good year a goat herd could double in size whereas a sheep herd would increase by one and half at most. For these reasons goats usually outnumbered sheep in the herds (see Table 2.7.). A herder who had sheep alone was taking a greater risk than one who maintained a mixture or a predominance of goats.

Statistics of individual herd sizes are unavailable but those of **caïdats** and **cheikhats** during the Protectorate period indicate that both sheep and goat herd size fluctuated markedly (see Figures 2.2. to 2.5.). The most common cause of death was pasture failing during the summer drought. Monthly reports from the Protectorate period identify 16 such occasions in 56 years. In 1917 25% of the herd died during the summer drought at Tataouine⁴⁴. Drought might

also strike in spring or winter (12/56 years). At such times the young are particularly¹ affected and on two occasions the season's herd growth was destroyed. Cold winters (14/56 years) caused many animals to die of exposure (goats were particularly sensitive and so were usually kept in their owners tent during the worst weather). During the cold and dry winter of 1946/7 herd losses were 50% in Nefzaoua, and rain and cold killed 30% of Tataouine's herd in November 1922. Disease could also have devastating effect. 40% of the herd was lost to ovine tuberculosis at Ghomrassen in three months in 1927⁴⁵.

Camels were the third most important animal herded in the south (see Table 2.6.). They were a source of meat (though the slaughter of camels for this purpose was uncommon), milk (between three and four kilograms per day but only consumed fresh), and hair (for coarse textiles). For most tribesmen, however, the camel was most valuable as a beast of burden. Draught camels, by preference geldings and bulls of heavy build, can carry loads of 150 kilograms over tens of kilometres, 300 kilograms over shorter distances, and pull ploughs. There was no comparable source of animal power available, and most families owned at least one camel for their agricultural work. *Mehari*, or riding camels, were rarer. They are of a lighter build and considerably faster, but cannot be used for agricultural work. The best of these animals were bred in the Sahara (those of the oasis tribes and the djeffara were neither as fast nor as stable in dunes) but their soft feet prevented them crossing the rocky soils of the region. Consequently the *mehari* was rare outside the Saharan region.

Where camels were kept as domestic animals the herd size fluctuated little. Out at pasture the camel's mobility and resilience ensured the population considerably more stability than that of the goat or sheep. During local droughts the herds could simply be moved to new pastures. Stored fat allowed camels to avoid the stress of temporary pasture and water shortages. Longer and more widespread drought could, however, precipitate sharp declines in the camel population. Three occasions stand out in the Protectorate period: 1908, 1922, and 1936 (see Figure 2.4.). Although there was

considerable loss of pasture it was more common for the camels to die of thirst than starvation. One account describes how their corpses piled up beside the dry wells⁴⁶. Endemic disease also played its part in controlling herd growth. In January 1935 10% of the herd was lost among the Od.Debbab because of an unidentified disease⁴⁷. Yet despite occasionally heavy losses the camel was most dependable as well as the most valuable herding animal in the south.

Herding practices in Southern Tunisia were labour intensive. Shepherds, usually with a young assistant, tended herds of at most two hundred and camel herders fifty head at most, all of which they could recognise. To ensure adequate pastures the herd was frequently moved in winter and spring. Pregnant females and their young lambs were detached for close supervision and weaning, the ill and broken limbed for cure. In early summer all but between two and five of the young males were sold, those that remained would provide the future rams. All the young females were retained⁴⁸. Bourde's criticisms that the herds were neglected, that no selection was imposed upon the herd, and that the slaughter of female sheep as late as their seventh year was inefficient⁴⁹ fail to understand the importance of a high reproductive rate in maintaining herd size and productivity in a variable environment. Selection and sales of young females had to be sacrificed if the herder was to rebuild his herd after the catastrophic losses of poor years. Of course there were limitations as shepherds were unable to recognise and treat many of the diseases that the animals suffered. Nor were they able to supplement the pastures with forage. In drought years, if the shepherd was unable to find a reserve of pasture the herds just died.

The essence of the herding strategy was mobility. In good years movement was restricted to the plains, if he were a Touazine or Ouderna, or Dahar, if he were a Matmata, Haouia, or Djebalia. This local transhumance was sufficient to find pastures throughout the year. In droughts, however, the herds moved north of the chotts as far as the Tell. Herders combined forming small campments for mutual self protection (see Table 5.10.) and rented pastures from the northern tribes. During droughts in the north the flow reversed,

northern and central tribes sent their herds south⁵⁰. This migration was essential the herds survival.

A smaller number of cattle, horses, donkeys and mules (see Table 2.6.) enjoyed greater security and stability. They grazed but had their feed supplemented with fodder for much of the year. The cows, small in stature by European standards, provided milk (only 2.5 litres per day) rather than meat (according to McGill with the same taste and texture as that of Highland cattle) or labour. Immobile and intolerant of the extreme heat these cattle were limited to the oases and the mountain zone where the required water and supplementary feeds were available⁵¹.

Horses, on the other hand, although similarly demanding of water and fodder, were more common among the nomads than the sedentary communities. Their role was not economic (camels provided the tribesmen's transport needs) but that of a status symbol which enjoyed a special place in nomadic culture

Avec son cheval l'arabe commerce et voyage, il surveille
ses nombreux troupeaux, il brille aux combats, aux noces,
aux fêtes de ses marabouts: il fait l'amour, il fait la
guerre.⁵²

Those that owned horses treated them as treasured possessions. The animals were carefully bred and of such high quality that Dumas and Chevarrier both suggested buying them for the French cavalry⁵³. But owning a horse demanded considerable sacrifices of the tribesmen, and it remained an aspiration for many. In the mountains and among the poor the horse was uncommon. Their transport needs were met by donkeys or mules, sturdy and reliable beasts, as Pelissier discovered, more competent than horses on the stony mountain paths⁵⁴. Unlike the herds these domestic animals were protected from the climate's inclemencies and show little variation in population. In the worst years a tribesman might sell his horse or cow but he could not afford to let it die.

Hunter-gathering supplemented agriculture and herding. Table 2.8. provides a list of wild plants eaten in Southern Tunisia. The list is probably incomplete (Gaast describes 27 seeds, 19 leaves, 16 fruits and 12 roots gathered as food and medicine by the Adjer⁵⁵)

but it does suggest the breadth of plant resources used. Most were emergency foods used in times of drought but others, such as the truffles, were much sought after as delicacies or medicines⁵⁶. Other plants were exploited for artisanal purposes. Alfa was the most prominent of these. In Matmata and Haouia a considerable industry was established in weaving mats and baskets out of the grass. Wood and brush were gathered as fuel, *thuya* used to make tar, and *retem*, *tarta*, and *jeddari* used to make charcoal⁵⁷.

At the time of the French occupation there were still ostriches, gazelles, antelope, mouflon, and wild boar in the south⁵⁸. These were hunted for their meat, skins, and feathers. It is probable that their flesh was as important in the diet as that of domestic animals. Tijani describes how in the 13th century gazelles were hunted with a net, and a carving at Ksar Segdel probably illustrates this⁵⁹. More recently guns were used, doubtless much increasing the efficiency of the hunt. Ostriches, however, (a small flock of which survived in Southern Tunisia until 1888⁶⁰), continued to be hunted by chase. The prize was not just the meat, or the feathers (which were taken off with the skin) but its 'grease', probably a secretion of the preening gland, which provided a valuable ointment. For fear of spilling this grease the ostrich was never shot but chased until it was exhausted and then garotted⁶¹. Even locusts were eaten (only *Schistocera peregrina*, *Stauronautus arocannus* was considered poisonous). The adults were boiled in salt water and dried and the eggs were stored in sealed containers for consumption in winter⁶².

How did the tribesmen combine these resources? French writers describe four discrete production strategies each associated with a particular *genre de vie*. The first (seen at Zarzis, in Aradh, and in Nefzaoua) was an oasis economy based entirely on irrigation agriculture where dates were the principal product with some cereals and fruit trees. The populations were sedentary and village based and their year rotated around their agricultural work. The second was a mountain economy dominated by arboriculture (seen in the Djebels Matmata, Demmer, and Abiodh). Olives and figs were the

major crops, seconded by dates, with some cereal culture and animal husbandry. Again the population lived in villages and its agricultural calendar was based on the cultivation and harvesting of tree crops. The third was an economy of pastoral nomadism (seen among the Touazine, some fractions of the Khezour, and the Gherib and Adhara in Nefzaoua). This consisted of sheep and goat husbandry but also, among the Rebaia (Touazine) and the nomads of Nefzaoua, camels, with some cereal cultivation. The *genre de vie* was dominated by the needs of the herds, with frequent displacements in search of new pastures. The population was peripatetic and tent dwelling. Only in the summer when the pastures were dry and the herds had to be brought near the reliable wells could they erect more substantial accommodation, a **khoss** or **gourbi** (a temporary hut of branches and alfa grass). The fourth and last of all, was a semi-nomadic economy in which arboriculture and animal husbandry both figured prominently (practised by the Haouia fractions of the Khezour, the Ouderna, the Merazigue, Beni Zid, and Od. Yacoub in Nefzaoua, and the Hazem, Aleya, and Hammerna in Northern Aradh). The tribesmen displaced with their herds in the spring in search of pasture but returned during the summer months to maintain and harvest their tree crops, among which figs were particularly important. In this way part of the year was spent under tents and part of the year in or near their mountain granaries and villages (Haouia and Ouderna) or oasis villages (in Aradh and Nefzaoua)⁶³. The general validity of such a model cannot be doubted but it remains to be said that the four economies and *genres de vie* were by no means as discrete as the typology would have us believe.

Statistics of the number of trees and animals in the various ethnic groups (see Table 4.22. and 2.3. to 2.6.) and evidence from the lists of guarantors detailing the property of individuals (see Tables 4.1 to 4.21.) confirm the distinctions between mountain farmer and nomad. But they also demonstrate that these distinctions were not absolute but of degree. Far from producing only those commodities in which they had a comparative advantage, most communities and individuals used a mixture a resources that provided

most of their subsistence needs and gave greater stability to their production in a variable environment.

Sedentary communities, as well as the nomads, maintained herds of sheep and goats. Even the poorest among them had a few animals. Likewise the mountain farmers kept camels, not as herd animals (rarely did any household own more than two, and they were usually fed rather than pastured) but as beasts of labour for ploughing and transport (see Table 2.6. and 4.1. and 4.6.). Some kept cattle for milk. Animals were an important part of the mountain economy, they represented a substantial capital. As a rule their agricultural calendar was dominated by the needs of their trees and their herds took second place. Mountain tribesmen did, however, displace to find pastures for their herds. Marty describes how, in 1907,

Les Matmata, quoique sédentaires, quittent en grande partie leurs villages en commencement de l'été et vont paître leurs troupeaux dans le Dahar à la proximité des points d'eau. Les femmes et les enfants accompagnant le maître et c'est ainsi que pendant plusieurs mois les sédentaires deviennent vrais nomades. Les villages sont désertes, mais les plaines du Dahar se peuplent et l'on rencontre dans une chevauchée d'une journée à travers les pâturages une douzaine de petits douars de deux ou trois tentes.⁶⁴

and a report of 1886 describes a similar migration among the Douiret

En hiver, la majeure partie des habitants quitte le gasseur pour s'en aller faire paître dans les environs de Djebel Toumila les troupeaux considérables.⁶⁵

Those that did not go out to pasture themselves hired shepherds or sent their herds with patrons from nomadic tribes. These herders took the animals to distant pastures, returning the milk producing part of the herd to the owner in the spring and the whole herd in early April for shearing.

Nomads, as well as the sedentary communities, owned trees in the oases. At Zarzis, for example, there were olive trees and date palms owned by individuals of the Oulad Khalifa and Oulad Hamed⁶⁶. Unfortunately there are no statistics that enable one to assess the importance or dispersion of land and tree ownership within the tribe. More than likely it was less widespread than the ownership of

herds among the sedentary communities. Nevertheless arboriculture provided a stabilising influence on their economy. Allegro's letter suggests, however, that although the nomads owned trees in the oases they took little part in their cultivation. They might arrive to supervise the harvest but otherwise agricultural work was left to the native oasis dwellers.

Thus, although most accounts have described the multiple resource (mixed livestock-arboriculture-cerealculture) economy as a distinct type, expressed in a semi-nomadic *genre de vie*, it was in fact the type that prevailed within the south. The semi-nomads distinguished themselves not as unique in combining agriculture and animal husbandry but by the balance between these resources in production and their agricultural calendar. Most semi-nomads owned substantial herds of sheep and goats with which they spent the winter and spring months. Following the olive harvest in the mountain and the date harvest in the oases, they migrated to the pastures. In summer they returned to their plantations to carry out essential agricultural work and harvesting. Within this framework there were variations. Although the fractions of the Ouderna owned fruit trees in the Djebel Abiodh and Djebel Demmer these were few in number, far less important in their economy than fruit trees were to the Haouia. The Ouderna neglected their plantations. They prided themselves on their herds and concentrated their efforts on pastoralism rather than agriculture⁶⁷.

The tribesmen's *genre de vie* and resource balance were not entirely determined by membership of a particular community. Within each community, the lists of guarantors suggest there was considerable variation in the balance of animal and arboreal resources between families (Table 4.18. summarises the relative importance of animal and tree capital from lists of guarantors in terms of an index of wealth (see Appendix V)). Each family followed a way of life that suited its own needs and production strategy. If necessary they diverged from the communities norm. In the semi-nomadic fractions accounts describe the communities dividing at different times of the year. Those with large herds followed them

out to pasture, those with large gardens remained near their plantations to carry out repair work.

Besides recognising the weakness of distinctions between the production strategies pursued by the communities of Southern Tunisia one may also describe a common link between the economies: cereal culture. In each of the economies cereal cultivation played an important, but, in the absence of statistics, unquantifiable part. Although the mountain cultivators may have consumed large amounts of olive oil and may have lived off figs alone during the summer, cereals were their staple⁶⁹. It was much the same in the nomad encampments. Contemporaries pointed to animal products as the sole component of their diet, but in reality the largest part was provided by barley⁷⁰. Both the nomads and sedentaries cultivated large areas of cereals in good years, often travelling tens of kilometres to find appropriate ploughlands at the time of the first rains (October to January) and during the early summer their activities were focused on the harvesting, transport, and storage of grain.

Distinctions between the three economies are further blurred by the realisation that agriculture and pastoralism are 'mutually supportive and interdependent parts of a single system'⁷¹. Each sector supplied essential products in a predominantly subsistence mode of production. Animals were tools in agriculture and agricultural products, straw in particular, supplemented the summer pastures for the herds. Moreover, diversity was the essence of stability. Since none of the resources were dependable a combination increased the chances of an income in any one year. A specialist might produce more in the long term but he could not expect an income every year. He would have to store or borrow to survive the bad years.

2.2. Agricultural change during the Protectorate.

Most assessments of Southern Tunisia's economic potential in the early years of the Protectorate were extremely pessimistic. Duveyrier, a respected and well informed traveller, claimed that

agriculture was impossible outside the oases⁷¹. A view reiterated by Joly, writing in the early twentieth century,

Le pays sera-t-il jamais riche et prospère? Je ne crois pas; malgré la fertilité relative de certaines parties de la Jefara, les conditions imposées par la nature sont trop rigoureuses.⁷²

For some the only possibility of development was the exploitation of the regions supposed mineral wealth. In Central Tunisia Thomas' discovery of phosphates was quickly followed by the construction of railways linking the mines at Redjef (established in 1899), Metlaoui (1899), and Moularès (1905) to coast, and in their wake came colonisation. The success of this pattern of development spurred the 'Syndicat d'études Sud Tunisiennes' to propose similar policy in the south⁷³. In 1909 the claimed discovery of substantial phosphate deposits in Tripolitania⁷⁴ led the colonial press to anticipate similar discoveries in the south. But a subsequent geological survey was disappointing - no phosphates, no nitrates, and no ores, and so no mining industry⁷⁵. The discovery of bromide salts in the Sebkh el Melha near Zarzis and their exploitation by a Paris based company from 1913 proved small consolation. During the First World War production rapidly expanded (bromine was a constituent of 'Mustard Gas' and so important to the French war effort) but in the early 1920's American competition forced the mines to close⁷⁶. From that date hopes of a mining economy ended, development had to be through agriculture⁷⁷.

Water, the French believed, was the key to any agricultural development. In Southern Algeria wells had been drilled into artesian aquifers with considerable success, and in the early 1880's commentators suggested that the same technology might be used in Tunisia⁷⁸. The concession of 2,000 ha. north of Gabes to the 'Société de l'Oued Mellah' (an enterprise fronted by F. de Lesseps) in 1885 provided an opportunity for the technology to be tested. Ignoring the technical, managerial, and financial disasters the Oued Mellah scheme suffered, contemporaries regarded the project as a great success and enthusiastically proposed similar wells elsewhere in the south⁷⁹.

The first was sunk at Zarzis in 1890. Drilling and the preparation of the 60 ha. for irrigation was finished in 1895. A syndicate of proprietors (103 in 1896) was established, five of whom, chosen by the Prime Minister, were to administer the irrigation under the close supervision of the Service. The cost of the well, 54,000 frs., was initially borne by the government but once the Syndicate was established the land owners were required to buy their concessions over a period of twenty five years with a substantial down payment within the first six months. It was an organisation that provided the model for future developments within the region (codified by the decree of 24 May 1920). A second well was completed at Zarzis in 1897. Thereafter development speeded up. More drilling platforms were imported (in 1895 there were only three in the whole of Tunisia) and by the turn of the century drilling was underway simultaneously in the north of Aradh and Nefzaoua. The number of wells and the irrigated area expanded markedly in the following decades (see Table 2.10.).

There were technical limitations. Most of the aquifers in the south were saline and the water quality limited the range and productivity of the crops. Saline water also corroded the well casings. Water yields fell off markedly in the first few years, so low at Zarzis' first well that the cultivated area had to be reduced in 1903. Some wells were complete failures. Of twenty six drilled in Nefzaoua only sixteen were brought into cultivation⁸⁰. Nevertheless, irrigation allowed considerably higher yields for both arboriculture, market gardening, and cereals.

But the large scale technical solutions favoured by the Protectorate government (artesian wells in the south and dams in the north⁸¹) had little impact on the tribal economy. The vast majority of tribesmen in the south continued to be excluded from irrigation agriculture. Millet admitted that the purpose of these wells was to encourage colonisation as much as indigenous development. This was why the irrigated perimeter was incorporated into the State Domain. As state property it could more easily be distributed to Europeans⁸². By placing the first two wells at Zarzis the government

hoped to encourage colonisation. An examination of the surviving lists of concessionaires for these wells reveals that Europeans bought 8% of the irrigated area at Zarzis. By 1908, the Europeans had bought land off poorer natives and their share of the cultivable area had risen to 19% of the whole. True not controlling interests, but ownership out of proportion with their part of the total population. The growth of European control was paralleled by a concentration of property in the hands of the wealthy Tunisians. By 1916 the number of concessionaires at the two wells had fallen by 17.3%²³.

Development was also localised. Only Nefzaoua, Northern Aradh and Zarzis had suitable aquifers. In the djeffara the only irrigation project was at Sidi Makhlouf (syndicate established by decree of 18 January 1917) where there was already an oasis. Irrigation, therefore, was not extended throughout the south but remained tied to traditional regions and there benefitted the colonists and the wealthy more than tribe as whole.

Despite the claims of infertility and aridity by French commentators there was a massive growth in the number of fruit trees throughout the south following the French occupation (see Table 2.3. to 2.5.). Bourde's report of 1893 on the cultivation of the olive tree in Central Tunisia, had recognised the potential of the semi-arid regions, and encouraged olive plantations. By the turn of the century commentators were beginning to realise that the region's future lay in rainfed arboriculture²⁴.

Most dramatic was the expansion of cultivation in the coastal zone. Here the favoured climatic conditions encouraged large European plantations beside those of the native Accara. In Matmata and the remainder of the mountain zone there was a similar expansion of cultivation. Joly described how 'l'ère d'extension des jardins tend s'accroître, et ce dans un façon prodigieuse'²⁵. The government encouraged this development. The growth of olive plantations, they argued, not only developed the local economy, but forced the nomads to settle and gave the government greater control of their economy.

Nurseries at the Bureaux of the Service gave free olive shrubs to the tribesmen. Monthly reports record the distribution of 3,000

olive shrubs in February 1907 at Matmata; 1,500 in January 1914; 2,000 in January 1929. The construction of new djessers¹ was also encouraged. There were no direct subsidies, but prizes were awarded to the best developments. The intention was to encourage the tribesmen and through competition raise the status of cultivation²⁵.

It was the 1920's that saw the fastest development. The economy was booming and the prices for agricultural produce were relatively high. The decree of 23 November 1918 and the subsequent privatisation of collective land on condition of arboreal development gave olive plantation a further encouragement (see Chapter 4). Depressions that had formerly been irregularly cultivated with cereals became plantations, and olive trees spread further and further out into the plain.

Not all these developments were carried out with the care the government would have wished. The tabia built downstream, for instance, were not faced with stone in the same way as those higher in the mountains. Furthermore, although some tribesmen did repair their djesser's after devastating floods, there were frequent complaints about their dilapidated appearance²⁷. The provisions of the 1918 decree and the distribution of free olive shrubs encouraged tribesmen to neglect their plantations. Many cultivated marginal land just so that they could claim ownership. A large proportion of the olives planted never reached maturity, neglected, they died in the first drought²⁸.

Olives dominated these new plantations (see Table 2.3. to 2.5., 4.2., and 4.9. to 4.11.). On the coast the olive became a virtual monoculture. This was not without its dangers. Diseases spread far more easily where olive plantations were not broken up by other trees. In 1907 the fly *Dacus oleae* ravaged the plantations at Zarzis reducing yields by one third. By the 1920's Ben Gardane, which had originally been free of these problems, was also affected. Monocultures were also susceptible to economic crises. When the price of olive oil plummeted in the late 1920's (see Chapter 3) many plantation owners were ruined. But the government regarded monoculture as an essential specialisation in the development of modern agriculture and encouraged plantations.

It was only in the interior, where olive trees produced low quality fruit irregularly, that figs and dates continued to be important: at Ben Gardane, for instance, a new agricultural centre established among the Touazine, figs predominated, and they continued to do so among the Haouia and Matmata (see Tables 2.3. to 2.5., 4.2. and 4.9. to 4.11.).

The government also sought to transform the techniques of cultivation. Traditional practices such as the beating of olive trees were to be stopped, and European techniques introduced (the preparatory tillage of the soil, the proper spacing of the trees, the pruning of trees, and the use of fertilisers, fungicides, and insecticides). Since this would increase yields it was thought change could be induced simply by example

le colon qui introduit avec lui toutes les méthodes de culture moderne est un vivant exemple pour la fellah qui pouvant juger de ses propres yeux les différences de rendement obtenus.²⁹

Nursery gardens managed by the military were to substitute for the colonists in the interior³⁰. New techniques, such as tree pruning, were demonstrated by experts on tours of the region³¹. Agricultural amines were appointed within the tribes (see Table 2.8.) to supervise the introduction of new plants, techniques, and machinery within their community. Those that adopted European techniques were held up as exemplars, with public prize givings and awards. Only in a few cases was it thought sufficiently important or urgent to legislate. The decree of 15 December 1896, for example, empowered government officials to fine individuals who harvested olives by beating the trees. Agricultural techniques, the government expected, would be transformed largely voluntarily.

Techniques did change but not at the same pace or with the same ease throughout the south. At Zarzis most of the cultivators adopted European techniques at an early date. The Sfaxian spacing of olives was predominant by the 1920's, preparatory cultivations became common, and pruning, a practice already making headway before the war, was standard by the 1930's. Some of the wealthiest plantation owners even imported professional olive pruners from

Sfax at great expense⁹². Modernisation did not, however, reach the same levels as among the colonists. The fellah did not have the means to purchase insecticides, fertilisers or machinery. Nevertheless the military describe these plantation owners' enthusiasm for new technology and techniques. An enthusiasm stirred by commercialisation, and the consequent drive for higher yields.

In the mountain zone, on the other hand, there was resistance. Traditions, the military argued, were stronger here and as a result 'rien peut être tenté du profitable dans la région de Matmata, avant qu'elle soit ouverte aux régions avoisantes'⁹³. The introduction of novel techniques was an uphill struggle

les méthodes de culture pratiquées par l'indigène de Matmata, emportées aux traditions les plus empiriques, maintenues en honneur par la force du préjugé, ont été longuement, patiemment combattues par les officiers.⁹⁴

Impatient, the military tried to force the tribes to change their ways. In 1905, for example, a Sfaxian toured the south demonstrating olive pruning. A resident of Tamezredt, claiming to represent his community, complained that the practice was harmful to the trees. Another at Guermezza made the same objections, explaining that what was good for olives by the sea was not necessarily good for olives in the mountains. Both were arrested and imprisoned as trouble makers⁹⁵.

Change could not, however, be imposed. By the 1930's two forms of olive cultivation prevailed. The one with pretensions to modernity on the coast where olives were cultivated as a cash crop. The other in the interior still dominated by traditional practice.

Cereal cultivation underwent a similar process of expansion and technological change. Despite the occupation of many of the cereal lands by plantations, the cultivation of ploughlands on the Tripolitanian border, the increasing population and numbers of draught animals, and the availability of seed grain from the government all combined to allow an erratic expansion of the cultivated area. Cultivation remained opportunistic and extensive, limited to those areas with appropriate soil moisture conditions, and consequently fluctuated markedly from year to year (see Figure

2.1.). In drought years (such as 1920) no cereals were sown at all. Barley, the lower value but more reliable crop, remained the most important cereal but Figure 2.1. shows that area under wheat did increase.

Colonists practised a completely different type of cereal culture from the tribesmen, based on the American 'dry farming' model. This enabled them to cultivate the same plot year after year by combining deep and frequent ploughing (which they thought maximised infiltration and minimised evaporation), with bare fallows (to allow the soil to rest), and chemical fertilisers (to restore fertility). With a judicious choice of soils (sandy loams preferred) and field site (basins ideal) it was thought even the driest areas might be cultivated on a permanent basis. Commentators believed that even in Southern Tunisia yields were higher and more reliable using these methods than the traditional shallow ploughing, and that by cultivating wheat the increased investment could be covered⁹⁶. To encourage these practices among the native farmers (and to provide an indirect subsidy for the colon cereal farmers) the decree of 31 March 1888 introduced a discount of 90% for farmers using the European deep plough, and distributed European ploughs gratuitously⁹⁷.

In 1920 the Department of Economic Affairs went further. It proposed a tax of 0.10 frs. per hectare on land that remained fallow for more than three years. The intention was bring the 'dead lands' into cultivation, increase their frequency of use, and intensify production methods⁹⁸. There was uproar. To the Nationalist press the proposal was simply a means of freeing land for colonisation. The Service pointed out that, since the cultivable area depended on localised rainfall, it would be impossible to calculate the area of 'cultivable land' in the south⁹⁹. More important, while the colonial lobby firmly supported the measure (such a tax would not affect them because they cultivated all their lands anyway), the Tunisian section of the Consultative Conference argued that most native farmers could not afford to introduce such intensive methods of cultivation¹⁰⁰. This was true. American dry farming, demanded a tractor (deep ploughing was impossible with animals) and

fertilisers. No Southern Tunisian could afford these expenses. Faced with such opposition the government abandoned the projected decree.

Without the compulsion of the decree it is not surprising that intensive dry farming never caught on among the tribal populations. This is not to say that cultivation did not become more intensive. At Zarzis the complete division of collective lands forced the Accara to cultivate the same plots year after year. Similarly the growing population and expansion of plantations onto the damper areas of the djeffara meant that the remaining plots were cultivated more and more frequently. With the delimitation of lands by the decree of 23 November 1918 many of the Touazine and Ouderna began to cultivate cereals annually on the lands they had been granted. Intensive cultivation true enough, but without the technology and chemical inputs needed to sustain high yields.

The only successful new technology and techniques were those that could be used within the context of traditional agricultural and the tribesmen's limited capital. Thus while the deep plough went unused the vine plough (a lighter shallower plough), also distributed gratuitously by the military, was quickly adopted. By 1938 there 17,000 of them in use among the Touazine, and by the 1950's they had largely replaced the traditional wooden plough in the south¹⁰¹. Besides being more efficient than its wooden counterpart (its weight and the metal share made it easier to cut a furrow) it was light enough to be transported the long distances to the ploughlands and be pulled by animals. Similarly attempts to introduce soft wheat into the south failed because it could not be used in the traditional diet and, although it was of a higher value, it was hazardous to cultivate. Hybrid species of barley and hard wheat (bred by the Service Botanique after 1913), on the other hand, were easily incorporated into traditional agriculture through the government's loans of seed grain without any added risk to the farmers, and so were successful and popular¹⁰².

Although the government portrayed the tribesmen as unco-operative towards attempts to improve agriculture, they gained the tribesmen's support where the measures were demonstrably to their advantage. Pest control, for example, could mobilise thousands. When

locust swarms were reported working parties from the nearest cheikhats gathered to eradicate the insects. In the early years they crushed the swarms as best they could or gathered them into bags. By the turn of the century there were new techniques - channelling the swarms into pits with cotton barriers and then burning them with petrol¹⁰³. Telegraphic communication greatly facilitated interception and allowed working parties to prepare for the flights. Yet despite their considerable achievements (by the 1940's swarms rarely entered Northern Tunisia) the south continued to suffer intermittent plagues.

The same was true of the rodents in the djeffara. In 1890 the military had recognised that rodents devastated some of the best harvests but had felt impotent against the plague¹⁰⁴. In the following years the Department of Agriculture believed the problem to be getting worse, and pointed to the elimination of the zorille (*Ictonyx striatus*) as its cause. In 1905 the government tried to use a commercial poison and an imported virus but with little success. But when the military offered the tribesmen 0.025 frs. for each rodent killed the rodent population suddenly declined; 70% of the rodents were eliminated in some areas. In the following years poisons were distributed free to the tribesmen and rewards increased. The tribesmen learned to overcome the plagues but there were still repeated explosions of the rodent population throughout the period¹⁰⁵.

Tribal agriculture also remained traditional in its choice of crops. Cotton (encouraged by the military because of its success in Egypt and Sudan) introduced to Zarzis in 1911, was abandoned within a year. Despite a good harvest and high prices no Tunisian cultivators could be persuaded to adopt the crop¹⁰⁶. On the other hand crops that could easily be cultivated and consumed or marketed within the framework of traditional economy and economic relations were successful. Fruit trees distributed by the Service's nurseries allowed the tribesmen to increase the number and variety of species cultivated in the south without any change in their methods of cultivation. Similarly market gardening in the oases of the south expanded rapidly with the growth of urban markets to the north¹⁰⁷.

Notably successful was the cultivation of tobacco. A crop that had long been cultivated in the south until the imposition of the monopoly, many were familiar with the practices of cultivation. Unfortunately the crop was banned in 1924, and though many continued to grow the crop illegally, production must have declined significantly^{10a}.

The same contrast between the traditional and the modern can be seen in the pastoral sector. The number of herd animals increased spasmodically during the Protectorate period (see Table 2.6.). This was possible because improved water supplies enabled the tribes to increase stocking levels and made distant pastures more accessible. The decree of 15 September 1897 allowed tribesmen to propose a new well or cistern. The government would then provide half the cost of the construction materials. As a result the number of shallow wells and runoff fed cisterns increased markedly in the early years of the century as they spread further and further out into the pastures (see Table 2.11.). By 1950, 175 wells and 46 cisterns had been built in the cercle of Tataouine alone^{10b}. More reliable, deeper wells were also drilled, at far greater expense, near the villages, for example at Matmata, or in the dahar (Bir Pistor and Djenien).

These measures alleviated but did not eliminate the problem of drought. Figures 2.2. to 2.5. show that animal populations declined markedly during the droughts of 1924 and 1936. In these years there were shortages of water for both the herds and the tribesmen (in 1936 lorries had to be used to transport drinking water to Matmata¹¹⁰). Animals still died of thirst.

Increasingly, however, the problem of water shortage was overtaken by the shortage of pasture. As the herds increased the available pastures declined. Many of the better pastures were occupied by plantations and cereals. According to Moreau

il convient de renoncer à l'établissement de la propriété privative dans toute la zone de nomadisme au sud et l'est de Douz. Sous prétexte qu'on laboure une fois les vingt ans certaines terres de parcours, Merazigues et Adaras ont demandé, dans le cadre du décret tunisien du 23 novembre 1918, le bornage et la constitution en propriété privative de certaines zones, en particulier la vaste cuvette du Traifa qui contient des paturage excellentes. De telles

demandes sont à rejeter dans l'intérêt général; il faut maintenir une tenure du sol très large, ne pas morceller les zones de parcours, ne point créer au milieu d'elles des enclaves systématiquement interdite, sources des chicanes, et laisser à l'ensemble des tribus la jouissance d'entendues qui ont d'autant plus de chances d'être arrosées qu'elles sont plus vastes.'''

In years with high rainfall the loss of pasture was not a problem but in poor years those that remained were quickly exhausted. In response the shepherds often sacrificed the years herd growth by killing the lambs to save exhausting their mothers, or sold first the young and then the mature animals as the drought intensified, often at ridiculously low prices'''. In 1924 (a particularly severe drought) the price of sheep had fallen to one quarter that of the previous year as early as April and, later in the summer, some animals were so weak that no one would buy them '''. Precious domestic animals were the next to go. Without fodder and with imported straw steadily increasing in price these animals would starve and so horses, cows, mules, even camels were taken to the market and sold for whatever the owner could get.

The worst affected herds

appartiennent à des petits propriétaires qui, sans ressources, n'ont pu les confier aux bergers, se rendent dans le Dahar et les ont gardés auprès les centres de estivage.'''

Even if the wells held out the herds, crowded into the surrounding pastures, would starve to death. As the animals weakened shepherds were unable to move them on and had to watch them die'''. At Ben Gardane during the drought of 1936 one report describes the carcasses piled up around wells still full of water'''. Officers asked the government to intervene and to provide forage for the animals. In 1924 some straw was sent south, but not enough. Then in 1936 the Department of Economic Affairs offered no assistance at all since 'les dépenses totales à envisager à cet effect dépasseraient la valeur du cheptel à sauver'''. As a result some tribesmen lost their whole herd, others most of their animals. Across the south almost half the herd of sheep and goats died off in 1936 (see Figures 2.2 to 2.5.). By the 1950's the government realised that

without a transformation of herding practice the only solution was to slow down herd growth and so reduce the pressure on the pastures¹¹⁸.

The lack of pastures was a national not a local problem. As areas of pasture in northern and central Tunisia were brought under the plough and herds increased in these regions fewer and fewer pastures were available to the southern herds in the drought years. The herder's escape route was gradually closed. By 1924 the Contrôles Civils in the Centre and Tell began to turn down requests for *achaba* on the grounds that there was no pasture available¹¹⁹. Without acceptance by a Contrôle Civil transhumants had to remain in the south. Many simply defied the government

le passage clandestin leur semble préférable au déperissement de leur cheptel malgré tous les risques de saisie et d'amende qui l'accompagnent.¹²⁰

For those who managed to get permission to pasture in the north the price of *achaba* gradually increased. As a result the poorest herdowners were excluded

L'an passé quelques rares troupeaux Touazines avaient quitté Ben Gardane pour le Nord de Régence. Ils appartenaient à des éleveurs aisés ayant des moyens de louer des terrains de parcours et de transporter par camion leurs animaux¹²¹

Lorries were increasingly necessary (even the *Matmata* had begun to hire them¹²²) because the search for pastures had become a race for the limited reserves available. The poor who went on foot arrived too late and many of their animals, weakened by inadequate food and water, perished on the long walk north¹²³.

Drought was not the only problem. Disease still devastated herds of sheep, goats, and camels. An epidemic of ovine small pox, for example, destroyed some 3,000 sheep in *Matmata* in 1935¹²⁴. Although the government tried to quarantine infected herds, shepherds were unwilling or unable to identify the diseases and notify the government. Infection was contained while they were out at pasture but the congregation of animals at wells provided every opportunity for the diseases to spread. Vaccines were available for

some of the diseases (ovine tuberculosis, for instance) but the herders did not have the money to buy them. Military veterinary officers visited the south but they paid little attention to the tribesmen's herds.

French agriculturalists believed that the weaknesses of native herding practices could be overcome by the use of more intensive herding techniques. The colonists' animals were given fodder and shelter, unknown to the native herds. Long displacements in search of pasture were kept to a minimum. Pastures were improved and fodder crops cultivated. The native animals were also rejected. The camel's place was taken by machinery and the guebli sheep and goat were replaced by imported fine tailed sheep (the gharbi from Algeria, the Crau, Escurial, and Côte d'Or Merinos herded in Australia) which produced less fatty meat more suitable to European tastes, with a carcass 10 kg. heavier than its native counterpart, and finer wool with a heavier fleece¹²⁶.

The government sought to extend the colonists' herding methods to the native population. For age crops, the cactus in particular, were encouraged¹²⁶. The elimination of the fat tailed sheep was early set as a target, because, to quote Bourde's report to the Résident Général, while 'les éleveurs persisteront à produire le mouton à gros queue, [...] l'élevage est sans avenir en Tunisie il restera borné à la satisfaction des besoins locaux'¹²⁷. To this end a decree of 19 March 1893 provided for the subsidised sale of rams of approved breeds, and prizes were given to Tunisians who adopted European herding techniques. The restrictions imposed upon the recipients of these rams (the total abandonment of guebli sheep), however, ensured that few Tunisians took the opportunity to introduce new blood to their herd. Moreover, fine tailed sheep were unsuited to the harsh environment of the south. To have abandoned the guebli would have put an end to transhumance and forced the tribesmen to buy fodder. Tribesmen could not afford this. Anyway, the guebli's meat was preferred by Tunisians and if they could not be exported to Europe they could find a ready market within Tunisia. Consequently the guebli remained the sole species raised in the south as late as the 1950's¹²⁸.

The only significant change in herding practice was an increase in the proportion of sheep within the herd reflecting the significantly higher price of these animals (see Table 2.6. and 2.7.). But goats were not abandoned. They too could be sold and represented less of a risk. Similarly, commercialisation and the growing needs of agriculture and transport ensured that there were still substantial camel herds. (The camels' place was not yet taken by the internal combustion engine).

The two pastoral economies, the one native and extensive the other European and intensive, were not entirely discrete. Northern merchants, Europeans among them, bought herds in the markets of the south for sale as meat in the north. These animals were cheap but generally low quality, and the merchants had to 'fatten them up before slaughter'¹²⁸. In this way traditional extensive pastoralism fed into the intensive practices of their European neighbours. Tribesmen also introduced intensive pastoral techniques where they could be incorporated into the traditional herding practices. The most important of these was improved breeding provided by the introduction of high quality of livestock and the establishment of studbooks. Stallions were brought to Tataouine and Ben Gardane every year from 1900 and studbooks set up to improve the quality of horses first, and then, from 1913, camels¹²⁹. There was some opposition at Ben Gardane, but this was ruthlessly suppressed¹³⁰, otherwise the stud books were a great success. Competitions and prizes for the best animal were set up, and were notably better attended than the competitions for agricultural work, perhaps encouraged by the 500 frs. awarded to the winner, perhaps by the greater esteem which herding continued to enjoy among the nomadic communities.

There was a comparable expansion of production in the hunter gathering economy, most conspicuously in the gathering of alfa. Throughout the Protectorate period alfa was the South's most important export. Production varied with the prevailing economic conditions, expanding in times of drought, declining in good years when there was alternative less arduous employment. In drought years

it was one of the few resources available to the poor. During the drought of 1924, for example, production doubled as compared to 1923. When the situation at Matmata deteriorated again in 1926

Une partie de la population a quitté pour les grandes villes de l'intérieur l'autre partie s'emploie à la récolte de l'alfa qu'elle vend à Gabes et à Mareth.¹³²

By the 1930's it had become an essential part of the tribal economy, 'le seule ressource pour écarter le spectre de famine'¹³³. There was also an overall trend of increasing production as tribesmen were marginalised within the economy. In an 'average' year, Marty calculated in 1907, some 500 tonnes were exported from Matmata¹³⁴. In 1940, by no means a bad year, this had increased to 865 tonnes¹³⁵. The government encouraged increased production 'dans le but de venir en aide aux population particulièrement éprouvés'¹³⁶.

But increasing production also aggravated the competition between the tribes. As alfa's importance increased so did the tribesmen's determination to protect their resources. Fights multiplied in the steppes and guards were placed on the largest stands to ensure that the reserves were not stolen by neighbouring tribes¹³⁶.

The amount of hunting also increased, not just by growing numbers of tribesmen but also by tourist safaris. As a result the ostrich, wild boar, mouflon, gazelle and antelope were eliminated from the djeffara and had retreated into the dahar and the erg before the turn of the century¹³⁶. Only in the case of the ostrich was any attempt made to increase production by farming, and this, despite the optimistic support it enjoyed from the administration, failed¹³⁹.

Increasing production had its toll on the environment. As early as the decree of 11 August 1887 defined an annual a rest period to protect alfa from over exploitation. The military complained that the tribesmen took little notice of restrictions and in drought years (such as 1924) the government itself waived the prohibition to allow the tribesmen a source of revenue. As a result alfa reserves gradually declined. In Central Tunisia the reduction in reserves began to have its toll on production by the 1930's putting more

pressure on the steppes in the south. By the 1940's the government was concerned that they too would decline¹⁴⁰.

In the mountains the need for firewood and the voracious appetite of the goat had long since eradicated the forest of Aleppo pines that had once covered the slopes¹⁴¹. Despois, writing of Tripolitania in the early 1930's, identified a contemporary decline in the number of edible species and vegetation cover, and a consequent increase in aeolian and hydraulic soil erosion close to the villages and wells. A result, he explained, of overgrazing¹⁴². Although there is little contemporary evidence (environmental degradation was not recognised as an important problem before the 1930's) overpasture and the extension of agriculture into marginal regions must have entailed similar changes in Tunisia. On the plains at Ben Gardane for instance, the new agricultural centre had to be protected from encroaching sand dunes as early as 1911¹⁴³. During the 1920's the Water and Forestry Service planted trees along the major roads to protect them from moving sand. Small re-forestation projects were advanced in the mountains. But these were palliative measures. They did nothing to overcome the fundamental problem over intensive landuse.

How widespread the process of desertification was and how much land it affected is impossible to estimate for the period before 1940. A recent study of the process in Southern Tunisia by Floret and Potanier, however, estimates that 25% of the south has suffered desertification from the beginning of the century to the 1970's¹⁴⁴.

Drought aggravated the problems of overcultivation and overpasture. Drought slowed down vegetation growth and the stabilisation of disturbed soil. It also forced herders to increase their stock levels around wells and left ploughlands bare to the wind. Although Flöhn has suggested that there was no significant change in climate in the first two thirds of this century¹⁴⁵, the region did suffer a sequence of lengthy and intense droughts. The worst of these 1923-1927, 1933-1938, and 1946-1949 correspond with the period when economic conditions forced the tribesmen to increase production. Environmental degradation entailed lower productivity and so advanced the the tribes' impoverishment. Lower productivity

encouraged more intensive agricultural and pastoral use of marginal land and so the cycle continued. In the following chapters, which will stress the social and economic forces of change, the importance of drought and environmental degradation should not be forgotten.

Economic change also affected the tribesmen's production strategies and *genres-de-vie*. (For statistics on the changing composition of resources in Southern Tunisia see the aggregate statistics in 2.3 to 2.6, the averages of the guarantors' property in 4.1. to 4.4. and the distribution of wealth between guarantors 4.5. to 4.21.). Among the mountain tribes (Matmata, Demmer, and Abiodh) the growth of plantations and herds had entailed little change in production techniques, likewise production strategies and *genres-de-vie* remained largely unchanged. The emphasis remained on arboriculture and, though the number and size of herds undoubtedly increased (for aggregate statistics see Table 2.6., and the herds of individual guarantors see Tables 4.1. and 4.5. and 4.6.), they remained of secondary importance. Indeed among the Matmata the lists of guarantors point to a steady decline in the proportion of herds in total wealth (see Table 4.21.). Displacements became uncommon. Rather than herd themselves the sedentary communities increasingly hired shepherds from nomadic fractions to pasture their animals.

Among the semi-nomads, on the other hand, the balance of the economy shifted. Although herds were still the principal component of their wealth and transhumance continued to feature in their way of life, new plantations of fruit trees (olives in particular) became more important in their economy. It was a gradual change, identified in the early years of the century but accelerated following the decree of 23 November 1918. Nevertheless, most of these semi-nomads continued to own fewer trees than their sedentary neighbours. Many continued to own none at all (see Tables 4.2., 4.9. to 4.11., 4.17. and 4.18., and 4.21.). Prost's detailed breakdown of the ownership of capital among the Ouderna reveals that this growth of arboriculture varied considerably between the fractions. Fractions generally characterised as proud herders and nomads, such as the Od. Chehida and Od. Debbab, still held back from agriculture¹⁴⁴. Others may have owned fewer trees per capita than

the sedentary communities but there were still a few individuals whose plantations were comparable to those of wealthiest sedentary (see Tables 4.9. to 4.11., 4.17. and 4.18., and 4.21.). Among the Haouia, for whom arboriculture had always been important, statistics from the lists of guarantors point to a growing importance of arboreal wealth. Statistics from the period 1921-1930 show trees to have been a larger part of their total wealth than further north in Matmata.

Contemporaries remarked a gradual change in the semi-nomads' economy and way of life

L'amour de la vie sédentaire s'accentura; et si ce genre de vie ne devient jamais entièrement possible, du moins les indigènes apprécient mieux le prix de leurs plantations; ils en prendront plus de soin, les laisseront moins à l'abandon.¹⁴⁷

This was reflected in a change in the pattern of settlement. From the early 1890's both the Ouderna and Haouia began to build ksars¹ in the plains nearer their ploughlands and the plantations (see Map 3.)¹⁴⁸. Beside these granaries were an increasing number of isolated houses. A few of these semi-nomads (though no statistics are available) were, evidently, moving towards a sedentary way of life spending more time with their crops and less with their animals.

There was also a move towards arboriculture among the Touazaine nomads. Although it was only in 1900 that the Touazaine abandoned their 'scornful indifference' to the agricultural centre at Ben Gardane, by 1903 they owned the majority of the concessions. In the following years, particularly after the decree of 23 November 1918 allowed private ownership to be extended into the fertile depressions of the djeffara, increasing numbers of nomads planted fruit trees. Again the scale of investment varied considerably between fractions and individuals. The Od. Khalifa and Od. Hamed took little part in the developments at Ben Gardane whilst many Nebahna established large plantations. As early as the second decade of the 20th century the lists of guarantors reveal a few individuals with hundreds of trees. But most had none at all (see Table 4.2., 4.9. to 4.11., 4.17. and 4.18., and 4.21.). For most of the Touazaine

herding continued to represent their most important, if not their sole resource. Even those that developed plantations did not entirely abandon their herds. Arboriculture was, therefore, incorporated into the nomadic way of life. Those with trees became semi-nomads. In the summer months they built gourbi in their plantations harvested and cultivated their trees. The rest of the year they camped in the pastures. There was little or no sedentarisation. They built ghorfa at Ben Gardane to store their grain and olives but no houses. The only houses at Ben Gardane (besides those of the Touazine employed by the government) belonged to visiting merchants¹⁴⁹.

On the coast the expansion of arboriculture altered the production strategy in a different way. Although many tribesmen continued to own small herds and cultivate cereals, and a few owned considerable herds, the balance of production moved towards the plantation agriculture of the neighbouring European plantations. Some had no resources but their plantations, but for the majority trees represented more than 75% of their wealth (see Tables 4.1. to 4.4., and 4.9. to 4.11., 4.17. and 4.18., and 4.21.). The complete dismemberment of collective land ownership (see Chapter 4.) and the massive increase in the area of plantations ensured that few pastures and ploughlands were left. Moreover, the growing commercialisation of arboriculture among the Accara encouraged a move towards the monoculture practiced by the Europeans. A process that would not stand the Accara in good stead when the market for olive oil collapsed.

Outside the coastal zone diversity and flexibility remained the essence of the tribesman's response to his environment. Indeed the expansion of arboriculture among the nomads and semi-nomads notably broadened their resource base. For the poor the growth of alfa harvesting represented another resource available in the worst conditions. For many, however, the environmental and economic crises of the 1920's and 30's forced them to turn to resources outside the south and outside the local and tribal economies - to migration as labourers in the north.

2.3. Production: Industry.

Although agriculture dominated the tribal economy, secondary production played an important role in supplying domestic needs and generating some income from trade. Each household was a reservoir of productive skills. Men made their own tools, paints and building materials, wove baskets and mats out of alfa grass, and cured goatskins for water, oil, butter, and cheese. The women were potters, working without a wheel, but firing and decorating their work with abstract patterns. They spun using a weight, less often a wheel, and they dyed their wool using local herbs and minerals. Coarse textiles, the *flidj*, long and narrow strips of cloth from which the tent was assembled, and bags, were woven on the horizontal loom from the durable and water resistant hairs of the goat and camel. Finer textiles, the *houli* worn by men, the women's *bakhnoug* (shawl), and blankets were made from wool, woven on a vertical loom set, in Matmata and the other mountain villages, in a room built for that purpose. Production was small scale and subsistence orientated, the technology was simple and cheap, and there was little specialisation or division of labour beyond the sexual division of tasks within the family¹⁵⁰.

Only one production technology was beyond the means and competence of a single family. This was the *ma'acera*, or olive press: comprising a large animal powered mill stone which crushed the olives, and a winch driven lever press which pressed out the oil. Olives could be crushed in less than one tenth of the time taken to press them, and so, to increase productivity, two presses were often built next to one grinding stone. Its form had little changed since Roman times¹⁵¹. It was more productive and efficient (in terms of yields of oil per unit of olives) than the alternative hand press and so in the mountain villages, each of which had at least one such press, the 'mechanical press' largely replaced the hand pressing of olives.

Unlike most of the other technologies the olive press' scale implied commercialisation. Families brought their olives as and when they needed oil, paying one eighth of the product to use the press. Since presses were expensive to build (in 1911 a press was valued at

4,000 frs.) families often combined to build them. Of the twenty four oil presses described in acts of guarantors only two were owned by only one family, the remainder were held in varying degrees of co-propriety. The press was not a factory. Production was small scale and controlled by the needs of the local community. The owner or owners of the press were primarily farmers and herders, the press simply supplemented their income. There was no specialisation and no division of labour.

'Nous sommes encore', wrote Mzali in the early 20th century, 'à l'atelier individuel du moyen âge'⁵². Each stage of the production process was completed by the artisan. Take, for example, the manufacture of a burnous: the wool was taken from the family's herd and then spun, dyed, and woven by the same woman. This time consuming process could have been shortened by a specialised division of labour and the application of labour saving machinery. Spinning acted as a brake on production as it did in 18th century England. A large number of hands could be temporarily mobilised within the family and through mutual aid⁵³, but there was no permanent division of labour. In the city each stage of the production process was performed by a specialised guild. Within the prevailing domestic mode of production, however, each family sought to fulfill its own needs. Specialisation was an anathema. As for labour saving machinery the tribesmen had neither the competence nor capital, even the spinning wheel was rare.

There was little specialisation within the tribe. At el Hamma (a centre of the Beni Zid) in 1884, for instance, there were four potters, six masons, two blacksmiths, four gunsmiths, four jewellers, two dyers, two saddlers, one traditional doctor and seven barbers⁵⁴. Of these only the potters and barbers were of local origin. The other specialists came from neighbouring tribes or the urban centres. Some communities developed reputations for certain skills, men from Oudref, for example, dug wells, those from Fessato and Yffren built *ghorfa* (grain silos), and Jews and Sfaxians were blacksmiths, carpenters, and jewellers. Builders and well diggers were hired for specific projects the carpenters and blacksmiths went

on regular tours of the south in search of work⁵⁶. None of them were integrated into the communities where they worked.

The Protectorate did nothing to encourage the development of this native artisanat. Economic conditions became more hostile to native products as their place in the local economy was subverted by imported industrial products (see Chapter 3). Textiles were the worst affected and by the 1940's the amount of commercialised manufacture was in decline⁵⁶. The skills only survived because much of the produce continued to furnish domestic demand. There was little opportunity for intensification because the artisan continued to work within a domestic mode of production. No household had the capital to invest in new machinery and to have done so would have implied a transformation of the mode and relations of production. Quality would be sacrificed to quantity (mechanically produced thread, for example, was much inferior to that produced by hand), production would become entirely commercial, a specialist labour force would have to be maintained. In short the artisanat would have to become industry and the domestic mode of production the factory.

Only the urban merchants had the capital to invest in the new technologies. In 1918, for instance, the first spinning machine was installed in Djerba and by the 1930's there were some mechanical looms. Workshops became larger, and the artisans employees. Artisans did not welcome these changes. Many, like Luddites, opposed the introduction of new machinery⁵⁷. Ultimately, however, urban artisanat suffered more than its rural counterpart. Competition eliminated urban manufacture since it was commercially orientated. Rural artisanat simply returned to its traditional place of auto-consumption.

Within the south new technology did have some success, not in manufacturing, but in the processing of olive oil. In 1901 European colonists established a modern mechanised oil press at Zarzis. It was both more efficient and more productive than traditional presses and so was quickly adopted by wealthier Accara and Djerban plantation owners. By 1910 there were five mechanised presses at Zarzis, by 1943 seventeen and only four animal powered. Most of the smaller plantation owners paid in kind to use mechanised presses

because they were more efficient and quicker than the traditional presses. Inland, however, the new technology was less successful. Most tribesmen lacked the capital to make such investments. They certainly could not afford to do so, as a military report dated 1920 points out, while the economy continued to be subsistence orientated. Eventually the new technology was introduced by local co-operatives at Ben Gardane (1925), Matmata (1926, only four co-proprietors), and Médenine (1928). But the traditional technology continued to dominate (see Table 2.12.). Nor did the introduction of new technology necessarily mark a transformation in the type of production. Olives pressed in the new machines continued to be prepared by fermentation in the traditional manner. A practice that made the oil unmarketable outside the region¹⁵⁸.

Again one sees a dual economy emerging. One part dominated by the European and, to a lesser extent, urban industrialists, characterised by its commercial orientation, large scale and poor quality production, and use of new and expensive technology. The other predominately rural characterised by the persistence of a subsistence orientation, high quality but small scale production, and the use of traditional and cheap technology. Native production was marginalised rather than incorporated within the world economy.

2.4. Population.

Attempts to assess the size of Southern Tunisia's population before the French occupation are thwarted by the absence of any systematic census until 1921. Both Pellissier and von Maltzen made estimates (see Table 2.13.) but, even though Pellissier considered his statistics to be 'très voisins à la vérité'¹⁵⁹, these are little more than guesses. Ganiage, on the other hand, has calculated the population on the basis of medjba (capitation tax) registers dating from around the year 1860. These registers (theoretically) enumerate males above puberty, and so by multiplying this statistic by an appropriate coefficient he has been able to estimate the total population¹⁶⁰.

This method has its limitations. First of all it is clear that those males paying the medjba were only a proportion of the total

male population; the ill, the indigent, and government or religious officials were exempted. On the basis of two 'complete' registers, both from northern Tunisia, Ganiage assumes that the ratio of those exempted to those who actually paid the tax was approximately one to one. Whether such a statistic can be used throughout the Regence, given the diversity of political and economic conditions that prevailed, must be open to question. In the case of the nomadic communities of Southern Tunisia this problem is aggravated by the peculiar tax regime, the *driba*, they enjoyed. Communities paid the *driba* as a global sum calculated on the basis of so many heads of *medjba*, but the figure considerably underestimated the total male population of the community. In these communities the *medjba* roll cannot adequately reflect the total population. There is also the problem of an adequate multiplier. Ganiage makes the assumption that the total number of tax payers represents one quarter of the total population. Unfortunately evidence of family composition before the Protectorate is lacking and a critical evaluation of such an assumption is impossible.

Ganiage estimates that there were between 10,000 and 11,000 *Matmata* and *Djebalia*, and about 25,000 *Ouerghamma* in 1860 (see Table 2.13.). These estimates are, however, considerably lower than back projections from 1921 census data based on Gallagher's population growth model¹⁶¹, and estimates made by French officers in the first years of the occupation. These alternatives are not infallible. Gallagher provides no empirical evidence to support her population growth model, and the statistics collected by the French in the early years of the Protectorate are probably inaccurate. Officers, like the travellers before them, were unable to make a visual estimation of total population and must have relied on local informants. Well aware that such statistics might be used to prepare tax registers the officers were probably misinformed. How their informants assessed the population, if they were telling the truth, is unclear. The inaccuracy of deceit was probably compounded by the inaccuracy of ignorance. For these reasons none of these estimates can be accepted with confidence, they may only be taken as approximations.

Estimates of population trends suffer from the same dearth of reliable evidence. Several historians have attempted to provide a dynamic element to population studies with a variety of surrogates and estimates of total population. Despois, for instance, has suggested that the numerous ruined villages in the Djebel Nefousa implies a significantly higher population total at some time in the past¹⁶². Since there are abandoned villages between Douiret and Dehibat¹⁶³, this argument could be extended to Southern Tunisia. Unfortunately the relationship between village abandonment and depopulation is not as clear as Despois would have us believe. Since he presents no evidence that dates these settlements, and none is available from comparable sites in Southern Tunisia, it is impossible to tell whether the supposed depopulation was a recent (18th or 19th century?) event or in the more distant past. Perhaps they correspond to the period of dramatic population decline Talbi identifies at the end of the Middle Ages¹⁶⁴. Nor does his evidence demonstrate that the remaining and abandoned village sites were occupied synchronously rather than serially. The available historical evidence, for example, suggests that although some of these village sites were abandoned in the recent past, Dehibat, for instance, in the early 18th century, the population has remained within the region¹⁶⁵. In this case abandonment was a result of redistribution rather than absolute depopulation.

Historians have used circumstantial demographic evidence. Sebag, Ganiage, and Valensi all point to consistently high natality as the background of Tunisia's demographic history. Ganiage describes 55% of the population in Cap Bon in 1860 as under twenty years of age, and Valensi 62.8% at Porto Farina, 50% for the Ousselatiya, and 50.7% at Hammamet in 1862¹⁶⁶. Conditions did encourage high fertility. Women were traditionally married young, widows were remarried, and infertility was reason enough for divorce. Men took pride in a large family and there were economic advantages to be gained from having many children. In the prevailing domestic mode of production children could begin to work when very young and in old age a family was the best security for both men and women.

There were, however, controls on fertility. High brideprices ensured that men often married relatively late and contraception, abortion and infanticide may have restrained fertility in marriage. Polygamy, while not as prevalent as the popular image would have us believe, may also have served to depress the birth rate¹⁶⁷. Irons, writing of the Yomüt Turkoman, has argued that brideprice and temporary sexual abstinence allowed these tribesmen to regulate their fertility in tune with their environmental and economic conditions (in the same way that animal populations control their birth rate)¹⁶⁸. There may be some truth to this claim. Perhaps individuals delayed marriage in drought years since they could not afford the brideprice, or aborted and murdered their children. How much affect this control would have on long term population trends is difficult to assess.

Where the historians differ is in the scale of mortality. Ganiage, although he recognised a background of relatively high mortality and the severity of periodic epidemics and famines, argued that Tunisia in both the 18th and the 19th centuries 'voyait s'accroître la population de ses campagnes grâce à une natalité exubérante'¹⁶⁹. Gallagher suggests that epidemics may have caused a decline in population in the late 18th century but by the mid-19th century the trend had returned to population growth. Sebag and Valensi, on the other hand, have suggested that although Tunisia enjoyed a period of population growth in the eighteenth century by the 19th century the frequency and severity of epidemics and droughts ensured that 'la population tunisienne, loin d'être en voie d'expansion vers 1860, est en phase de régression'¹⁷⁰. A pattern of growth and decline which, as Valensi points out, neighbouring Algeria also followed. More recently still Chérif, drawing attention to the population statistics for several of Central Tunisian tribes in 1727/8 and 1860, has cast doubt on the assumed growth of Tunisia's population during the eighteenth century¹⁷¹. Perhaps population was relatively stable over this period. In truth it is impossible to come to a conclusion. It is a subject that requires considerably more research.

While these historians may dispute Tunisia's population growth or decline all agree that periodic demographic crises either influenced or determined the basic trend. Documentary evidence from urban Tunisia, including mortality statistics, certainly indicates that in the short term epidemic disease greatly increased death rates. Nor was disease an urban phenomenon. Valensi shows that even the isolated south did not escape the plague epidemics of the late 18th or cholera in the 19th century¹⁷². Espina, the French vice-consul at Sfax, describes how the European traders were forced to flee the cholera epidemic at Gabès in July 1850¹⁷³. Again in 1867 an out break of **Bou Chellal**, probably cholera, ravaged the south, decimating the Traifa¹⁷⁴. But the historian, whilst recognising the high mortality during these epidemics, should not lose sight of high mortality in normal conditions. The quality of diet and standard of cleanliness and health care were poor at the best of times. Many of the fatal diseases were endemic. French officers described how, on their arrival in the south, they found cases of dysentery (particularly important as a cause of death among children and prevalent during the summer), hepatitis, ophthalmia, syphilis, typhus, and smallpox throughout the south. In the oases there were further problems with malaria (at Gabes and in the Nefzaoua particularly) and bilharzia¹⁷⁵. This may have been enough to control population growth without the intervention of major epidemics. Furthermore, a recent study by Cotts-Watkins and Menken has demonstrated that greatly enhanced mortality of such a demographic crisis could easily be absorbed within a few years by quite modest rates of population growth and that the significance of demographic crises on long term trends of population has been much exaggerated¹⁷⁶. To some extent, the historian's fascination with such events may reflect their prominence in the historical record against a background of unrecorded deaths and illness as much as their purported role as, in Sebag and Valensi's work at least, the driving force of a declining population in the nineteenth century.

The extension of taxation into the south during the 1890's allowed the French to make more accurate assessments of population size (see Table 2.14.). Not all these sources were completely

reliable. Many of the cheikhs were reluctant to provide information about their communities. In 1889 when the Secretariat attempted to gather economic and demographic information many of the cheikhs spoiled, failed to complete or simply did not return their forms¹⁷⁷. Besides there were logistical difficulties, particularly in the nomadic communities where

la dispersion des groupes formant cette confédération [the Ouerghamma] leur éloignement et l'incapacité des cheikhs sont tels qu'il est actuellement impossible de recueillir tout renseignement sérieux.¹⁷⁸

Nevertheless these documents provide a reliable estimate of the total population.

The compulsory registration of births and deaths from 7 November 1912 (applied to Northern Tunisia by decree of 28 December 1908) was the first step in the collection of expressly demographic data. Faithfully recorded by the military (see Figure 2.6.) these statistics provide a trace of the south's population growth during the later Protectorate period. There are likely to have been omissions (a song recorded at Matmata in 1914 reveals that the tribesmen resented the obligation to inform the military of such personal affairs (see Appendix VI)) but how many it is impossible to say. Since heavy fines were imposed on the recalcitrants it is unlikely that they would significantly alter the trend.

It was only in 1921 that government made its first census of the native population. The census was not, however, as great a departure from the earlier documents as one might expect. In the south most of the officers pleaded that the dispersion and illiteracy of the tribes rendered impractical the intended method of gathering the data: the distribution of the census forms to each household for completion on the specified date. Instead a list of heads of households was compiled based on the istitan registers and the number and sex of their dependents were filled in by the cheikh and his notables. It was a procedure that took approximately three or four days as opposed to the simultaneous enumeration of the census elsewhere in the Regence¹⁷⁹. More important the lists would miss individuals who had avoided registration for taxes, and the

composition of households would be based on memory. It is unlikely therefore that the enumerations were complete.

On the basis of these imperfect statistics one may trace a substantial growth in the population of the south during the Protectorate (see Table 2.14.). A comparison of the 1921 and 1936 censuses suggests a growth rate of 1.71% per year between these dates (a cumulative percentage increase over the period as a whole). A statistic that compares reasonably well with growth rates derived from the birth and deaths for the Territoires Militaires as a whole (Table 2.15.). The rate of growth increased slightly from 1.65% per year from 1921-26 to 1.76% per year from 1931-36. These growth rates were well above the national average of 1.36% per year between 1921 and 1936. Indeed they were higher than the growth rates for any other region¹⁰⁰.

The effect of migration on these statistics is difficult to assess. No statistics are available for the period before 1936 but Lepidi has calculated that 18,900 people emigrated from the south between 1936 and 1946, 1% of the population in 1936. This pattern of emigration was seen throughout Central and Southern Tunisia. Most of the migrants ended up in the cities, and Tunis in particular. Between 1936 and 1946 the agglomeration gained 180,300 migrants; a 107.8% increase on its 1936 population¹⁰¹. How many of these emigrants became permanent residents in the north is unknown. Secondary evidence suggests that most of those from the south returned after a year or more (see Chapter 5). There were considerably fewer immigrants to the south. Tables 2.20. and 2.21. show a small but growing population of Tripolitaniens (a small proportion of whom were long term residents) and an even smaller and declining population Sudanese.

Births exceeded deaths in the south every year from 1914 to 1940 (Figure 2.6.). Transformation of these absolute statistics into birth and death rates, by dividing by the census data (birth statistics from the year before and the year after the census have also been used in order to reduce the effect fluctuations in the number of births and deaths), reveals no clear trend during the Protectorate period (see Table 2.15.). There was certainly no

significant decline in birth rates such as one might expect if the region experienced a 'demographic transition'.

A consequence of the high birth rate was the high proportion of children under eighteen in the population (see Tables 2.16. to 2.18.). Again there is no apparant decline in this proportion over the period. Indeed a comparison of statistics from Matmata in 1910 with those from the 1920's and 1930's suggests that the proportion of children in the total population actually increased.

The social and economic conditions that had encouraged a high birth rate in the past remained unchanged. Tunisians continued to favour large families, partly, as Clarke points out, because of social mores¹⁸², but also because the persistence of the domestic mode of production meant that a large family continued to be an economic asset. Djemai's survey at Taoudjout reveals that a family of six or more children was still the ideal as late as 1968¹⁸³. There is no evidence of the spread of new techniques of birth control. One case of abortion is recorded, but there are no means of discovering how common this practice was. It may be significant that this case was associated with claims of marital infidelity. Otherwise tribesmen appear to have been ignorant of means of preventing conception. That, at least, is Djemai's conclusion from his interviews at Taoujdout. This is not to say that fertility went unchecked during the Protectorate. Traditional controls on fertility, the payment of bridewealth, for instance, and polygamy, though rare and probably in decline, continued. But the tribesmen lacked the means to impose a radical control of fertility even if they had wished to do so.

Male emigration, which could be expected to have reduced fertility seems to have had no impact. An enumeration at Matmata in 1910, for instance, reveals that at Toujane where women outnumbered men two to one and Zeraoua where the proportion was ten to nine (presumably because of outmigration) the proportion of children in the total population seems slightly higher than in surrounding communities (see Table 2.16.). This is equally true of the Djebalia in the 1926 census. Women outnumbered men three to four but the proportion of children in these communities was slightly higher than

among neighbouring communities where migration was less important (see Table 2.17.). The high proportion of children reflects the reduced adult population in these communities rather than any positive effect of outmigration on the birth rate. Nevertheless it implies that outmigration, at that date, had little impact on population growth.

Commentators have ascribed Tunisia's population growth to a declining death rate brought about by improvements in nutrition and health care¹⁸⁴. As in Algeria and Morocco medical officers, dispensaries, and hospitals were attached to the S.R. from an early date (see Table 2.19.) as a means of winning over the tribesmen¹⁸⁵. The most important of their achievements was the control of epidemic disease. Medical officers imposed massive vaccination campaigns against small pox, typhus, and cholera (see Table 2.19.a.). In 1940 16,448 were vaccinated against typhus in Matmata alone¹⁸⁶. When epidemics broke out rigid quarantines were imposed. During a typhus epidemic in 1937, for example, some six hundred victims were isolated in two enclosed camps guarded by soldiers¹⁸⁷. A circular of 10 December 1902 obliged cheikhs to notify the Service of cases of epidemic diseases. Those who failed to do so faced revocation or heavy fines¹⁸⁸. Recognising the migrants' role in transmitting disease (malaria, plague, typhus, typhoid and cholera in particular) medical checks and delousing were organised in Central and Northern Tunisia. Medical officers were given the power to arrest or return migrants to their place of origin. Within the south campaigns against endemic disease were organised. There was a constant battle against malaria. Irrigation channels were cleaned, stagnant water filled in and covered with petrol.

The lists of statistics and measures instituted by the government are certainly impressive and it would be unreasonable to suggest that they had no effect at all. Qualification is, nevertheless, necessary. Death rate statistics show no dramatic decline during the period (see Table 2.15. and Figure 2.6.). Moreover, as Colonel Chavanne pointed out, the death rate among Europeans and Jews in the South was half that of native Muslims¹⁸⁹. Death rates among native children were particularly high. Prost

claimed, in 1950, that almost 50% of children died within the first ten years of life, and the SERESSA report suggests about one third of children died before five years during the late 1940's⁹⁰.

Despite the government's massive vaccination campaigns and quarantine measures there were successive epidemics of smallpox, typhus, typhoid, bubonic and pneumonic plague, and malaria. On most occasions prompt action by the government ensured that the infection was isolated and eradicated with only a minimal loss of life⁹¹. Nevertheless casualties could be high. In 1917 eighty one people died from an epidemic of measles that was confined to the village of Toujane⁹². Some epidemics could not be controlled. Throughout the 1930's the number of cases of typhus and the region affected steadily grew. In 1942 the epidemic claimed people 12,443 throughout the Regence.

Likewise chronic ill health prevailed despite the growing number of medical consultations (see Table 2.19.b.). A survey of children at Tataouine in 1935 revealed that 40% suffered from granular conjunctivitis, 34% from dysentery, 29% from malaria, 12% from hepatitis, 9% from tuberculosis, and 8% from various skin diseases (there was even one case of leprosy). Syphilis was similarly endemic and in the oasis of el Oudiane in Aradh 86% of males suffered from bilharzia⁹³. Problems of health care were exacerbated by malnutrition. The deteriorating economic circumstances and droughts of the 1930's in particular deprived many tribesmen of the means to find an adequate diet and malnutrition made the tribesmen more susceptible to infections of small pox, typhus, and measles⁹⁴. The absolute number of deaths increased markedly during the droughts of 1924 and 1936 (see Figure 2.6.). Health education was unheard of. Traditional nursing and cooking practices continued to propagate disease. It had to wait till after independence for an adequate health service to be initiated and death rates, among the young especially, to fall significantly.

The medical service's failure was partly a result of inadequate facilities (in 1936 there was one hospital bed per 4,952 people in the south), a fault members of the Service recognised. But even if

there had been adequate finance there were significant barriers to cross. Tripolitania continued to act as a reservoir of infection and the close relationship between the two regions ensured the repeated communication of disease: plague epidemics during the 1920's, the cholera epidemic of 1893, and epidemics of typhus throughout the period¹⁹⁵. Within the south itself the French repeatedly bemoaned the lack of basic concepts of personal hygiene and health care among the population. They also complained that the tribesmen were largely indifferent to the services they provided. Boujadi describes the attitude considered typical by the French

en cas de maladie, la résignation remplace le médecin trop souvent impuissant et qui, malgré toute sa science, ne vous apporte, comme soulagement, que le nom de leur maladie dont vous allez mourir.¹⁹⁶

It should also be said that the French frightened off the tribesmen. With their determination to improve conditions and their paternalistic attitudes combined in a dictatorial manner the military transformed health care from a service to an obligation. Vaccination, for example, was forced on the tribesmen. Doctors usually arrived with an escort of *makhzen* and the villagers lined up for their injections. A decree of 5 May 1922 provided the military with the *de jure* powers they already enjoyed *de facto* to arrest and fine those who refused or evaded the vaccinations. Inevitably tribesmen resented the infringement on their privacy, particularly in the forced vaccination of women, and the indignity of such procedures. Opposition was organised, women were smuggled away and hidden, letters of complaint sent to the government or the papers¹⁹⁷. The military made no attempt to understand their point of view, as far as they were troublemakers and were treated as such.

The tribesman's alienation from medicine was exacerbated by its monopolisation by the French. Traditional doctors, the *toubib*, were eliminated¹⁹⁸, and no native medical staff were trained to replace them. Medicine involved alien concepts and methods and was imposed by foreigners. It is not surprising, therefore, that French doctors encountered indifference and even opposition to their work.

Population growth placed a heavy burden on the local economy. Either production increased or standards of living for the whole would deteriorate. For Bennoune, writing of Algeria, "there is no doubt that the increase in the population resulted in the immiseration of successive generations of the peasantry"¹³⁹. Population growth entails the division of land in inheritance, the reduction of the cultivable area per capita, impoverishment, and a growing destitution of the tribesman forcing them to work outside the family as labourers. But population growth may not always be detrimental to the domestic economy. White's study of colonial Java indicates that the availability of employment could facilitate, even encourage high fertility and population growth. A large family could remain an asset since children who could not be employed in the domestic agricultural economy could bring money in from outside through their labour²⁰⁰.

It would be too simplistic to assume a purely unidirectional relationship between economic change and population dynamics. There is a body of literature that demonstrates the importance of population growth as driving force of economic change: the intensification and commercialisation of agriculture and the exploitation of new resources. Here is not the place to examine in detail either of these theses. It is sufficient to recognise the validity of both. As the following chapters will demonstrate population growth was only one among a number of forces encouraging economic and social change in the region during the Protectorate period.

CHAPTER 3.

TRADE: FROM SUBSISTENCE TO DEPENDENCY.

Roger Owen has characterised the Middle Eastern economy during the early 19th century with one word - stagnant. He goes on to show how the economy was transformed during the following century, and brought into the modern world. According to his analysis this transformation was the product of three forces: the growth of the state, an increasing population, and the expansion of trade with industrialised Europe'. Of these, links with the European economy were the most important

the driving force or group of forces behind the restructuring of Middle Eastern economic life [he writes] can be shown to have come from Europe and the world economy.²

It is an essentially 'Orientalist' argument - the static and decadent Orient transformed by the dynamic and industrious West.

This chapter examines the effect of trade on the native economy by focusing on the relationship between trading partners and escaping from the economic history of statistics alone. In doing so breaks away from an analysis that assigns the tribal economy a passive role. It contradicts Owen's view of an inflexible and stagnant native economy, and stresses the role of native traders, indigenous capitalism, and the state in the development of trading relationships. It examines trade as a reflexive process of interaction between traders and mediating institutions and individuals, and so personalises the structures. Although it may be true that the structures, in particular the structure of European and nascent native capitalism, were overwhelming it would be wrong to assume that the native economy did not respond and by its response participate in its own development.

3.1. Trade before the Protectorate.

The domestic production unit that formed the basis of the tribal economy was geared to an ideal of self sufficiency. Families could produce most of their needs: not just food, but clothing, shelter, tools, and artefacts. But domestic self sufficiency was not complete. Production fluctuated and needs changed. Some of this excess demand could be supplied from within the community, by reciprocal loans or exchange. But there was also an imbalance between needs and supply that reflected inter-tribal and inter-regional differences in the distribution of resources. Although each of the tribal groups produced its own grain, dates, olives, and animals (see Chapter 2) the quality and quantity of these products was by no means equal throughout the south. Three economies can be distinguished: the first, an oasis economy producing an annual surplus of dates, of much better quality than could be grown without irrigation, supplemented by specialist crops, such as tobacco, henna, and madder; the second a mountain economy producing a surplus of olives, and olive oil which, made from fermented olives was much esteemed by the tribes of the south, supplemented by figs, almonds, and, to some extent, animal products; the third, a plains economy, with a surplus of cereals and animal products.

There was a frequent exchange of produce between these economies. Many of these exchanges were not expressed and so are not identifiable in terms of trade, exchanges between patron and client tribes, for instance (see Chapter 9). Others were conducted between members of neighbouring tribes and, since they produced no clear flows of men or goods, went largely unrecorded³. Only the caravans of the more distant trading partners are mentioned in the documents and travellers accounts. They describe a web of flows criss crossing the south, inter-connecting the regional economies.

Although caravans may have traded spontaneously with the communities they met, these flows focused on regional market places (see Map 5). The market at Djara (one of Gabès' three villages) - although dismissed by Rebillet ('du point du vue commercial on peut dire que l'importance de Gabès est actuellement nulle'⁴) - was one of the south's most important centres of exchange. It attracted

tribesmen from Matmata the Beni Zid, the oases of Aradh, and as far south as the Haouia and Demmer⁵. Another was at Houmt Souk on the island of Djerba, with a catchment area including the Touazine, Haouia, and Accara⁶. In these locations the neutrality between potentially hostile tribal groups was guaranteed by the authority of the state⁷. The security the government enforced was a necessary condition for trade. But government control also had its disadvantages. With the support of a garrison the **amine**, market officers, could regulate the coming and going of individuals. He could also intervene in market procedures. He set prices, regulated the quality of goods sold, collected market and customs taxes, and ensured that contraband and illegal goods were not sold.

To avoid these controls and charges some markets (for example, Médenine's weekly market, the largest in the south⁸, and the market at Zarzis⁹) took place beyond the region of direct government control. As Benet and, more recently, Eickelman have described of Morocco, these 'dissident markets' were associated with the tomb of a revered **marabout** (saint) whose spiritual authority, rather than the state's garrisons, guaranteed neutrality¹⁰. This is not to deny a temporal authority. Descendants of the marabout enforced a market law which maintained order and discipline. Their authority was sanctioned by consensus as well as God. Neutrality and order were in everybody's interests. Occasionally this peace was broken, for these were, in Benet's terms, 'explosive markets'. Hostility between individuals at the market place could erupt from the smallest quarrel to a **nefra'a** (a riot) in which many were murdered and stalls were plundered. Two such events are recorded at Médenine. One in 1892 another in 1909. On both occasions peace was only restored by the intervention of the marabouts, the government was powerless¹¹.

The maraboutic family probably, though there is no record, gathered taxes from those attending the market and fines from those that stole, cheated, embezzled or broke the peace. For them the market was a valuable source of revenue. But there were few restrictions on what was sold or prices. Free trade was the rule.

Within Tunisia, as across the whole of the Maghreb, the principal motors of trade were the caravans between the Tell, the

Steppe, and the Oases. Each region produced a surplus that mirrored the regional economies within the south: the Tell cereals, the Steppe animals, and the Oases dates. The Fraichich, Hammama, Souassi, Mehedba, Od. Ayar, and Zeghama, moved south to the hub, the oases of the Djerid, Nefzaoua and the Souf during the date harvest in October and November¹². The tribes of the south also participated. Caravans from the Touazine, Ouderna, and Djebalia, travelled north to exchange cereals, animals, and, in the case of the Djebalia, oil against dates¹³. Cereals also figured prominently in the trade. In years when the plains tribes had a good harvest caravans arrived from the north and from Tripoli, trading dates from Zaouia, oil from the Djebel, and animals from the eastern Djeffara against the Ouerghamma's harvest. The markets at Médenine, Gabes and Zarzis were very busy. When the cereal harvest was bad the direction of the flow reversed. Caravans from the Ouerghamma went north to Gafsa, Sfax, Kairouan, even Béja and east to Zouara and Tripoli, to trade animals against grain, and Djebalia went to exchange their oil¹⁴. The Tuareg from the Sahara, and the Souafa from the oases west of Nefzaoua, were also involved in the web of commerce, exchanging dates, tobacco, animals and skins against grain and oil¹⁵. The Accara on the coast traded dried fish and olive oil against cereals at Médenine and Zarzis¹⁶.

Trade also responded to regional specialisations in artisanat. The Souf and Djerid, for example, had a reputation for fine textiles and exported numerous blankets, *haik* (coats), and *houli* (cloaks). The town of Kairouan produced high quality carpets (Brunn discovered an example in the house of the Khalifa of Matmata on his visit¹⁷). Djerba also had a reputation for fine textiles, shawls were its speciality, as well as a flourishing trade in water containers¹⁸. In the south textiles were crude. There were, nevertheless, local specialisations in manufactures and style. Burnouses, haiks, and blankets from Matmata were readily distinguishable by their colour, and superior quality from those of Médenine, Douiret, or Nefzaoua¹⁹.

These regional 'industries' also encouraged flows of raw materials. The most clearly defined was Djerba's wool trade. The tribes of the Djeffara regularly sold wool at the market of Houmt

Souk²¹. Much of this wool was processed and spun before sale to increase its value (at Gabès a fleece weighing up to ten kilograms sold for 3 francs, spun it was worth sixteen²⁰). The poorest families did piece work spinning yarn from fleeces provided by peddlers. In this way the tribes were drawn into a regional division of labour.

Not all artisanal production was destined for sale. Djerba was commercially orientated but in the south many of the products would not or could not be sold outside the community. In Matmata, for instance, the shawls that women invested so much labour in producing were never sold. Only the poorer quality houllis, burnous, and ouerzra were commercialised, the better quality products were retained for domestic use.

Most of this trade was conducted by direct exchange²². In this way the benefit of the exchange was immediately realisable in its purpose, consumption. It was a flexible system. Rates of exchange were not, as Benet and Bernard have suggested, stable, based on predetermined equivalencies, but variable, responding to the shortages and excesses of each commodity, both within the local market and regionally²³. Monetisation was restrained. Firstly because it added an unnecessary complication to the process of exchange. Secondly because coinage, particularly reliable coinage (due to repeated devaluations of the Tunisian piastre), was rare in Tunisia²⁴. Where money was used its value was intrinsic. The Maria Thérèse Dollar, with its milled edges and regular quality of silver, was much the favoured coin. Beside it were a range of other currencies of various dates and origins, including the contemporary piastre, each with its own valuation, often very different from that on the face of the coin, depending on the quantity and quality of the precious metals they contained.

Even so the use of money in trade by tribesmen was by no means unusual. Caravans arrived at markets in the south from Tripolitania, the Sahara, and the north without goods to exchange. In November 1887, for example, such caravans spent 50,000 piastres on grain²⁵. This added an extra flexibility to trade and opened the way to speculative buying and selling. Rates of exchange and prices varied

greatly from market to market within the region (see Table 3.4. and 3.5.). Prices in the interior, particularly in the far south at Ghadames, were persistently higher than on the coast or at Médénine. To take advantage of the potential profits frequent caravans, particularly from Douiret, took animals, grain, oil, and butter south, sometimes with profits greater than 100%²⁶.

How much was exchanged or commercialised remains a vexed question. Quantitative data is sparse and unreliable. Moreover, given the variability of agricultural production and hence the available surplus for exchange, statistics from a single year may well be misleading. There were statistics advanced by commentators in the early years of the Protectorate but these must be applied with caution to the pre-Protectorate period. Moreover they only refer to isolated products: Cpt. Lecoq, for instance, suggests that Matmata exported one quarter of its figs in a good year, and some 80,000 litres of oil²⁷.

Only two studies attempted to calculate the total exports and imports of a community. The first was Lt. Bétirac's tribal report, 'Tribu des Matmata', which, on the basis of assumptions of productivity and consumption (see Appendix I), calculated the tribes' 'balance of trade' (see Table 3.1.). Although the contribution of artisanat, figs, and dates to exports is ignored Lt. Bétirac demonstrates the importance of olive oil and a surprisingly large revenue from animal sales in Matmata's trade. Menouillard's study (also based on assumptions of productivity) published in 1901, is more detailed and comprehensive (see Table 3.2.). It largely substantiates Lt. Bétirac's calculations. Olive oil was again by far the most important product in trade, and then artisanat, animal sales, and figs respectively. He also provides an estimate of proportion of production commercialised. Exports of olive oil, he calculates, correspond to two thirds of total production, while the sale of figs, and textiles lag well behind domestic consumption, and cereals and dates were hardly sold at all. Commercialisation, in Matmata at least, was dominated by a single specialist product²⁸.

Lt. Bétirac's report also estimates Matmata's expenditures. As might be expected the imports were dominated by wheat and barley,

presumably exchanged against the region's surplus of oil. The largest single expenditure, however, was on taxes to the government. These were well over half the total expenditure. Moreover the balance between expenditure and revenue, according to Bétirac's calculations at least, are fairly close. This suggests that much of the commercialisation was directed specifically at providing the revenue for the immediate needs of the community and the demands of the government.

Taxation stimulated surplus production and, where the taxes were paid in cash, commercialisation. So much is confirmed by the tribes' response to the tax demands in the early years of the Protectorate. In early 1883, when the government first demanded taxes, sales at the markets suddenly increased as the Touazine and Ouderna brought their animals for sale²⁹.

Trade was not, however, the tribes' prerogative. The profits possible through exchange encouraged professional merchants. Most of the merchants came from the towns in the north, the Ibadite community on Djerba, and the Jewish community throughout the Regence. They attended the markets on the coast and at Médenine, buying cereals, animals, and artisanat, which they could sell at a profit in the cities of the north. Richardson describes how boats waited at Djerba to take the grain they purchased to Tunis³⁰.

These merchants were only temporary residents in the region. They travelled south after the cereal or olive harvests and returned shortly afterwards. The region was considered too turbulent and hazardous for permanent residence. Merchants were frequently attacked and robbed. A petition from four merchants at Médenine dated 1881, trapped in the Ksar by hostile tribesmen, amply demonstrates the hazards of trade³¹. Only at the coast did one find a permanent merchant community, at Gabès and Djerba under the protection of the government.

The traders resident in these coastal ports had agents or partners in the interior and neighbouring Provinces. Families were often divided, with relatives in several towns, forming a reliable trading network throughout the Regence and beyond. Prax, for example, describes the personal links attaching Jewish merchants in

the Souf with markets in surrounding regions³², and links between Gabès and Tebessa were channelled entirely through the twelve families of Algerian Jews living at Gabès³³. In much the same way there were large communities from Ghadames in Tunis, Tripoli, and the Central Sahara organising trade between these towns³⁴, and communities from Sfax and Djerba in the interior, even in the Algerian market towns³⁵. Successful business families such as the Terri at Ghadames were those with the widest links, with representatives in the largest number of markets, as well as those with the greatest capital.

Money was the usual medium of the merchant's trade. Documents reveal that merchants carried large sums in cash to make their purchases. A Sfaxien, for example, was robbed of 1,500 piastres on his way to Médenine to purchase sheep³⁶, and a caravan, travelling from Sfax to Tebessa, was robbed of 40,050 francs³⁷. But merchants also imported goods into the south for sale or exchange. According to one account 'éttofes de coton, des vêtements de femme, des chaussures, des souria (chemises), et des chechia [hats manufactured in Tunis]' formed the staple of their sales³⁸.

Unlike the Moroccan Atlas, where Fogg claims that trade was restricted to the market place³⁹, these merchants had outlets throughout the south. Jewish merchants rented granaries as shops and set up stalls at Metameur for the period of the market⁴⁰. Others had temporary shops in the villages. At Oudref there were three shops owned by Jews, others in the oases of Nefzaoua, and more still in Matmata where

dans chaque village on trouve deux juifs. Ils n'habitent pas toute l'année chez les Matmata. Mais ils y viennent à l'époque fixe et pour un mois ou deux seulement.⁴¹

Besides the shops there were peddlers. Among the Hazem, for instance, 'les plus riche achètent une pécule de colporteur et vont particulièrement à Bône et dans la Province de Constantine'⁴², others came from the North and even Kabylie to ply their trade in the south⁴³. They bought as well as sold. High quality artisanat was particularly favoured. They placed orders in the villages through which they travelled for piece work which they collected later and

•

paid for in kind or cash. They went everywhere. No village or tribe in the south was, as Hamrouni suggested of the high Tell, a closed economy⁴⁴.

Merchants also linked the south to the wider Mediterranean and world economies. Djerban merchants in cities along the coast as far afield as Cairo imported the products of the south, both manufactures and grain, as they had since the Middle Ages⁴⁵. They were alive to a profit, buying grain in the south, Sicily, even France, to sell it as far away as Benghazi⁴⁶.

The south's most important trading partners were, however, outside the Middle East. Malta, with its role as a chandling station for Britain's Mediterranean fleet during the 19th century, required animals for slaughter and milk, and substantial imports of grain. Travellers' reports from the first decade of the nineteenth century reveal that the Djerba, like neighbouring ports in Tunisia and Tripoli, exported animals from the interior and grain too, when the harvest permitted⁴⁷. Olive oil was another major export, though the quality was much criticised by Europeans

toutes les huiles [writes Pellissier] [...] ne sont, de reste, guère bonnes que pour la fabrique. Celle que l'on regarde dans le pays comme comestible est en réalité, exécration et fait soulever l'estomac le plus robuste qui n'y est pas accoutumé.⁴⁸

The oil from southern Tunisia was worst of all. But it was cheap and so could always find a buyer. Native artisanat also entered international trade: Djerba's shawls, and blankets from the Djerid and the mountains were very popular⁴⁹.

Some of these products found their way to Europe, the textiles, grain and oil (used to manufacture soap), but it was only after 1870 that there was substantial direct trade with Europe. In 1870 British merchants, Perry Bury Ltd. from Liverpool, began to buy alfa grass at Sousse and Sfax. In 1874 they made their first visit to Gabès. Prices were relatively high and so tribesmen were encouraged trade. As exports increased and became regular, alfa harvesting rapidly assumed an important role in the tribal economy, especially in times of drought⁵⁰.

New markets were opened (at Skhira and Gourine in 1876, Bou Ghara, Zarzis, and Zarat in 1877 from where the alfa was transhipped by *mahonnes* (a shallow draft sailing vessel) to Sfax for export on British ships) and tribesmen from further and further into the interior participated. By the 1880's all the fractions of the *Querghamma* regularly sold alfa or exchanged it against barley at markets on the coast, and a report of 1884 was able to affirm that 'halfa constitue un des principaux produits d'exportation'. Five hundred tons were exported from Gabès per month during the summer and three hundred and fifty per month during the rest of the year⁵¹.

The customs record for Zarzis in 1886 (see Table 3.3.) gives some insight into the export trade, dominated in this case by trade and by sales of olive oil, barley, and local textiles. Such statistics are not available for the other ports of the south, not even for one year and so the actual scale of the export trade is impossible to assess. Statistics have been suggested for Tunisia as a whole, but these reflect the trade through the main ports, La Goulette in particular. Southern Tunisia has been ignored. Nor would trade through the main ports accurately reflect the total trade since, according to Ganiage, half or two thirds of the total was contraband ⁵².

The customs register for Zarzis also indicates the type of goods imported into the South (Table 3.3.), mainly manufactures, ironmongery, and cereals. The statistics also suggest that the balance of trade was against the port, a situation characteristic of Tunisia as a whole.

At a national level cotton was the most important import and most of it came from Britain, via Malta. In fact British manufactures dominated Tunisia's international trade. To some extent this reflected a price differential, British products undercut competitors, and the marketing of British products, which were carefully designed so as to suit native tastes⁵³. But Britain's advantage also came from its close association with Malta. Unlike their European competitors, Maltese merchants could profit from a return cargo of animals and cereals from the south and so barter their imports against products from within the tribes. This enabled

the tribesmen to buy imports from the Maltese without exhausting their precious reserves of money. The Maltese were also more intrepid than their competitors. They ignored government restrictions and paid few taxes. Much of their trade was contraband⁵⁴.

In the north the Maltese smugglers landed their contraband on the beaches in secret. In the south such precautions were unnecessary. Guns and powder were landed in daylight and transported openly to the market at Médénine, and from there into the Sahara and Algeria. The scale of the trade was substantial. Tissot suggested that 600 quintaux of powder passed on to Algeria alone in 1852, and Mattei described caravans of 50 quintaux⁵⁵. Revolts in Algeria and the French advance into the Sahara fuelled this trade. But the contraband did not consist of guns alone. In much the same way the Maltese landed tobacco thereby avoiding the heavy duties imposed by the government⁵⁶, and embarked animals and cereals when their export was forbidden by the government⁵⁷.

Like their native counterparts few European traders were permanent residents in the south. The main European communities were in Tunis and Sfax from where merchants would travel south to attend the market at Gabès. There was a small European community on the island of Djerba, comprising mostly Italians and Maltese and Greek sponge fishers, but none on the mainland of the south. By the 1850's, however, the nucleus of a European community had formed at Gabès. Mattei, of Italian origins, a resident of Djerba whose family had long lived at Sfax, became French Consul in 1853 but only a seasonal resident. The community itself remained dependent on neighbouring Djerba, sheltering there from the cholera in 1850 and the revolt in 1864⁵⁸. It was only with the appointment of Sicard as consul in 1862, when Mattei moved north to Sfax to replace his father-in-law Espina, that Gabès had a permanent French representative. Only Mattei and later Chevarrier are recorded as having travelled further into the south, away from the markets⁵⁹. Most of the traders were content to remain at the coast. Their sole function was to organise the imports and exports, trade in the

interior remained, Mattei stressed, firmly in the hands of native merchants.

Jews played a prominent role as intermediaries between the international commerce and the tribes of the interior⁶⁰. Some of these merchants were employed by European merchants. The brothers Eliaou and Brahim Cohen, for example, managed the alfa market at Gourine on behalf of William Golèa, himself agent of Perry Bury Ltd.⁶¹. Others were partners. European merchants provided the capital, either as cash or, more often, as imported merchandise, the local merchants sold the goods and shared the profits⁶². Alternatively the European lent the merchant capital. The French Consul at Tripoli described the procedure in the context of the trans-Saharan trade

A l'époque de la saison la plus propice à des voyages les conducteurs des caravans qui sont en même temps des spéculateurs se présentent chez les différents négociants importateurs de Tripoli et font choix des marchandises dont l'écoulement est facile dans les contrées de l'Afrique Centrale. Le prix d'achat de ces marchandises n'est presque jamais acquitté au comptant, mais l'aquéreur s'en déclare le débiteur en souscrivant l'obligation de rembourser le vendeur au retour de voyage soit en argent comptant soit en denrées des mêmes contrées.⁶³

These relationships made the native trader dependent on his European patron, since, although he organised the trade, he lacked the capital to finance it himself. Native traders were, in Richardson's words, 'men of straw' ⁶⁴.

The association between European and native traders went beyond commerce. The most favoured agents were granted the status of *protégé*, which gave them immunity from taxation and consular protection. Martel lists thirty one such *protégés* at Gabes in 1881 (4 British, 4 Spanish, 5 Italian, and 18 French)⁶⁵. Many were connected to their native colleagues socially. Some Europeans, the French Vice Consul Sicard for instance, married into the local trading community, and some rose to prominence among the native traders. M. Pariente, an Italian Jew living at Homut Souk, was not only a prominent trader but also the Italian Consul, the Agent of the Financial Commission, and Grand Rabbi of the Synagogue⁶⁶.

The native traders, whether Jew, Djerbien, Sfaxien, or less frequently of local origins, were an essential link in international trade because they alone carried imports into the interior. Imported goods were a staple of the return trade from the coastal ports and cities. As early as 1816 Dr. Louis Frank described how caravans from Tunis travelling inland 'ne constituent qu'en quelques articles importés à Tunis, tant en denrées coloniales qu'en objets manufacturés en Europe'⁶⁷. By the middle of the century this penetration was already well advanced. Tissot visiting Central Tunisia in 1857 wrote that 'j'ai été frappé de la quantité de marchandises anglaises qui encombre les marchés du Djerid, débarqués à Gabès et à Sfax'⁶⁸. British cotton was particularly successful. Likewise the tribesmen began to develop a taste for tobacco, tea and sugar, only important parts of their diet and customary hospitality after the middle of the century⁶⁹. One Resident General explained to the French Ministry of Commerce the secrets of commercial success in Tunisia

Comme renseignements généraux s'appliquant à tous articles d'importation, je puis dire qu'ici le bon marché est tout; on le préfère à la bonne qualité; qu'il est indispensable de faire un long crédit à l'acheteur, les étrangers font souvent six mois; lorsqu'il s'agit d'un article donnant lieu depuis longtemps à un commerce suivi (les tissus, par exemple), il est indispensable au producteur de copier servilement les modèles vendus couramment sur le marché.⁷⁰

It was easy for European manufacturers to undercut native competitors with factory products. Moreover, by offering credit, European traders attracted native merchants with limited capital resources. Local manufacturers were unable to offer such generous terms⁷¹.

Many of these imported goods competed directly with local goods rather than creating markets of their own. Manufacturers in Europe tailored their products to suit the taste of their market,

Pour les adapter aux goûts et aux habitudes de la population, les Anglais imitent les couvertures de Djerba et les tapis de Kairouan. Les Italiens font de même pour les meubles et les faïences. Ainsi, les produits tunisiens sont-ils, dans la Régence, détrônés par des produits de provenance étrangère.⁷²

As a result import penetration entailed import substitution and a decline of local artisanat. The case of the chechia and its replacement by cheaper, and poorer quality factory products is probably the best recorded and most extreme example⁷³, but by the time of the French occupation native textiles were also beginning to be affected.

But the links between the south and Mediterranean economy were not simply through manufactured goods. In times of famine the south also imported grain, from Tripoli along the coast and Sicily. For this reason access to the ports and markets of the south was essential to the tribes of the interior. In 1872, for example, the Touazine were forced to make peace with the Nouail so that they could get access to the coastal markets⁷⁴. Again in 1881, a year of poor harvests in the south, Mattei and Féraud advised the French military to blockade the coast in the south and so starve out the rebels⁷⁵. The blockade must take some of the credit for the submissions later that year.

Southern Tunisia was linked not just to its near neighbours and the Mediterranean but also to the distant interior of Africa. Since medieval times traders from Gabès and Djerba, and most of North Africa's other major ports, had undertaken trade across the Sahara. In those early years the trade was dominated by gold, supplemented by slaves, salts, and leather goods. Historians argue that the revenues of this trade supported the urban dynasties of the medieval period⁷⁶. By the 18th and 19th centuries, however, the composition of this trade had changed. Slaves became the single most important commodity with gold, salts, filali (leather goods), ostrich feathers and ivory figuring less prominently⁷⁷. All of these were luxury goods, and so were destined for urban markets or export. Renault, analysing the slave trade to Tripoli during the 18th century estimates that at least 50% of the slaves brought to the city were re-exported to Turkey and the Levant⁷⁸. A similar proportion is probable for Tunis. Ostrich feathers and ivory were, likewise, mostly re-exported to Europe. For these reasons, although some travellers record Gabès, Djerba and the Djerid as alternative

starting points, these inland towns and minor ports were more likely to have been staging posts than commercial centres⁷³.

The trade's export orientation encouraged European finance, an iniquitous situation in the eyes of the British government eager to abolish slavery. Nevertheless the use of imported goods, primarily cottons and ironmongery, ensured that European manufactures penetrated far into Central Africa⁸⁰. Most of the merchants engaged by the Europeans were specialists, usually recruited from Ghadames, a staging post on the caravan routes from both Tunis and Tripoli with close relationships with the Saharan tribes⁸¹.

Although the trade route was ancient the commerce was still innovative. New demands stimulated new commerce. During the 1840's, for instance, the Maltese trader Silva initiated a trade in bees' wax in the 1830's and indigo in the 1840's, commodities that were formerly unknown⁸². But dependence on the wider Mediterranean economy also made the trans-saharan trade sensitive to changing demand. During the Napoleonic Wars fighting in the Mediterranean temporarily reduced the demand for ostrich feathers. The Greek War of Independence in the Eastern Mediterranean had the same effect on the demand for slaves. Prices fell and with them the scale of the trade⁸³.

Besides these fluctuations one may also trace a gradual decline in Tunis' part of the Saharan trade from the beginning of the 19th century (see Table 3.5.a.). By the 1860's Tunisian caravans no longer participated in the trade. Tripoli, in contrast, continued to flourish⁸⁴. This is not to say that Tunisia was entirely isolated from trade with the interior by the middle of the century. On the contrary

Tunis aura toujours une assez forte partie de la commerce de l'intérieur, parceque cette Régence a des produits speciaux avec lesquels les autres nations ne peuvent entrer en concurrence, et qui sont très-recherchés de presque tous les peuples de l'Afrique du Nord.⁸⁵

Gradually, however, these imports, mainly Tunisia's distinctive chechia, were substituted by cheaper European manufactures and the remaining trade sent by ship from Tunis to Tripoli and thence to

Ghadames⁸⁶. A lesser trade persisted within the south, caravans from Gabès continued to import a few Saharan goods, but the local commerce in agricultural products was more substantial⁸⁷.

Explanations for the decline in this trade may be seen as a microcosm of the problems facing trade and traders in Tunisia as a whole. First of all, there were difficulties of communication. Within Tunisia there were no roads. Everything had to be carried by animal, and consequently costs of transport were high⁸⁸. As Kraïem points out, this inhibited trade

Pendant la période où la route est praticable, le transport des céréales nécessitait des dépenses si grandes que le prix de vente du produit n'était pas en mesure de recouvrer les frais de transport. Ainsi l'orge des régions céréalières riches n'était transporté dans les ports, ni dans les marchés du royaume à cause du prix de transport.⁸⁹

by land and sea the south was isolated. Routes were tracks linking wells⁹⁰, and there were no harbours at the ports. Duveyrier and later writers dismissed the 'port' at Gabès where ships had to land their cargoes by lighter onto the beach, and Djerba was no better served by Houmt Souk and Adjim. Legitimate international trade focused on the ports in the north to which the south was connected by smaller coasters and a bimonthly packet boat⁹¹.

In the case of the trans-Saharan trade the poverty of communications within the Regence was compounded by distance. The route from Tripoli to Ghadames was shorter by two or three days than the alternative route to the small town of Gabès, and almost a week less than to Tunis. It was a problem that, ultimately, affected the whole trans-Saharan trade. Competition from the river borne traffic in West Africa began to erode the profits of the trans-Saharan commerce as early as the 1850's in much the same way as the Middle Eastern caravans suffered from the opening of the India sea routes in the 17th century⁹².

Problems of communication were aggravated by insecurity. Caravans were frequently attacked by bandits or tribesmen. For this reason merchants were usually armed and preferred to travel in large groups, *gafla*. But large caravans were not immune. Even the *rakeb*,

the enormous hadj caravan numbering hundreds even thousands of travellers, was occasionally attacked⁹³. Some caravans sought to avoid such dangers by taking long detours around areas with a reputation for banditry. But this was not always possible. The usual solution was to pay protection money, 'adda. For a fixed payment a tribe would guide a caravan, defend it against attackers, and even provide the transport on a particular stretch of the journey. The route between the oases of Aradh and Ghadames was served by the Ouerghamma, and the route from Ghadames south by the Tuareg. Caravans that denied these tribes their revenues invited attack. But, contemporaries remarked, the costs of such protection were sometimes prohibitive. Overtaxing the caravans killed the goose that laid the golden egg. Moreover protection could not guarantee security. Tension between the Ouerghamma and their neighbours both in Tripoli and the Sahara encouraged raiding, which, all too often, affected the caravan traffic. Insecurity in the south of the Regence in the 1850's and 1860's, effectively closed the route from Gabès to Ghadames, forcing the caravans further east. In the following decades the continued hostility between the Ouerghamma, the Tuareg, and the Chaamba meant that the trade could not be rebuilt⁹⁴.

The Beylical government also regarded trade as a source of revenue. European commentators complained that they ruthlessly exploited commerce through the *mahasoulat* (market tax), monopolies sold to the highest bidder, *teskeres* (export licences which had to be bought from the government), and customs duties. From the early years of the 19th century the government's intervention and the degree of exploitation steadily increased. By the 1830's the government had become the sole intermediary between the world and local economies. Tariffs were increased, licences extended to an ever wider range of goods, and new monopolies were established⁹⁵. These measures were unpopular both at home and abroad. In 1839, for instance, the imposition of a tobacco monopoly brought a revolt in the south (where the tribes cultivated tobacco as a cash crop) and objections from the French Consul⁹⁶.

This regulation was not for financial purposes alone. The government also introduced temporary export controls to prevent the

export of vital commodities during droughts: cereals (for example 1805, 1842, 1870, and 1877-1880) and animals (1846 and 1872)⁹⁷. Again restrictions were unpopular. The European Consuls ensured that current teskeres remained valid and secured delays so that purchases could be effected before the ban was imposed. Tribesmen resorted to smuggling.

Saharan traders faced the same problems of government interference. Until 1840 caravans from the Sahara enjoyed immunity from taxation. Ahmed Bey withdrew this privilege, setting up customs outside Tunis to tax the caravans entering and leaving the city. Although other cities and ports were still exempted, contemporaries argued that the new taxes materially affected the profitability of the Tunis trade route⁹⁸. The weight of taxation suffered by the Tunis route was further increased by taxes at Ghadames, imposed by the Turks for the sole purpose of monopolising the Saharan trade for Tripoli⁹⁹.

It was the abolition of slavery, however, that contemporaries regarded as the death blow to the Saharan trade. The closure of the slave market at Tunis and the imposition of a ban on exports in August 1841 followed, in January 1846, by a total abolition of slavery in Tunisia ensured that, although slaves continued to be smuggled into the Regence, the market could no longer absorb the numbers involved in a legitimate commerce. At that time slaves formed a staple of the trade, indeed, Richardson claimed in 1845, 'no other commerce will pay, but that of slaves', and so Tunis was abandoned in favour of Tripoli as the caravan terminus¹⁰⁰.

Whatever measures the Beys introduced, whether for the good of the country or his own coffers, speculators at home and abroad conspired against them. Higher taxes and trade restrictions played directly into the hands of the Maltese with their lucrative contraband trade. The persistence of this untaxed trade not only undermined but rendered counter productive government attempts to impose trade controls¹⁰¹. In the south, with miles of beaches and virtually no policing, it is most unlikely that any of the tribes actually paid export taxes. Those that were caught incurred no

penalty. It is probable that, as the French consuls claimed, Tunisian officials were in collusion with the smugglers whose wealth and influence (their ranks may have included prominent members of the legitimate trading community) ensured them, if not complete freedom of action then at least some immunity from prosecution¹⁰².

Access to the interior through the contraband trade did not satisfy the European governments. They wished to strip Tunisia of its legislative protection and open the country to free trade for their nationals. The political and economic crises faced by the Beys in the middle of the century enabled them to force the issue. France had, with the treaty of 1830, secured the abolition of monopolies and trading privileges, and in subsequent treaties both Britain (1863 and 1875) and Italy (1868) managed to limit government taxes to a 3% import tax (later raised to 5%)¹⁰³. By these means Tunisia became an open market for the European trader and his manufactures.

3.2. Trade under the Protectorate.

During the Protectorate the pattern of trade in Southern Tunisia was transformed by the increasing penetration of international trade, the development of native capitalism, and the growing intervention of the state. The remainder of this chapter examines these processes and their effects on the relationships between trading partners rather than just as statistical examination of the composition and balance of trade ¹⁰⁴. In doing so it demonstrates how trade contributed to the region's impoverishment.

Time honoured patterns of trade within the south were not immediately overthrown during Protectorate. At the turn of the century and into 1920's and 30's caravans continued to connect the different economic regions exchanging dates, olive oil, animals, and cereals. Throughout the period, however, the frequency of such internal caravans declined¹⁰⁵.

Restrictions on movement discouraged tribesmen from participating in the long distance trade. From 1887 tribesmen had to apply for a travel permit (bearing the signature of the caid and an Officer of the Service, which defined the purpose of travel, the

destination, and period of validity) if he travelled outside his caïdat¹⁰⁶.

Furthermore, the development of local markets made long distance trade unnecessary. To some extent these markets arose spontaneously, with the improved security of the south and the influx of merchants from the north, such as that in the Oued Tataouine (Djebel Abiodh)¹⁰⁷. To encourage these and extend the network throughout the region the military built *souk's* (market places) with shops surrounding a central square on green field sites at Tataouine (one hundred shops, 1891), Ben Gardane (one hundred shops, 1895), and Matmata (thirty shops, 1916). Older markets were refurbished. A new souk of sixty five shops was built at Médenine, for instance, by demolishing a large part of the ksar (see Map 3)¹⁰⁸. By securing temporary exemptions from the *mahouslat* and customs duties paid elsewhere in the Regence the military sought to encourage their use¹⁰⁹. Local competition was eliminated by banning sales from shops in the distant ksour and villages. At a meeting in July 1892 of the 'Khalifas des Ouderna, cheikhs et les notables des tribus et les commerçants de Souk de l'Oued Tataouine', 'Il était passé comme condition qu'aucune marchandise, ni animaux d'aucune espèce ni denrées ni quoiqu'il soit ne serait vendue en dehors du marché'¹¹⁰.

There were difficulties. A young French opportunist, Carette, (backed (it may sound bizarre) by the editor of a French anarchistic newspaper) and his native partner, who claimed that his shop at Douiret had been forcefully closed by the Khalifa, tried to open a shop at Chenini in defiance of the ban. The military intervened, closed the shop, confiscated the goods, and arrested Carette when he objected¹¹¹. The Resident General intervened in favour of free trade. The closure of the shops in the ksour was, after all, a major inconvenience for the tribesmen who, as the Governor of Aradh put it, had to travel 25 km. to buy a box of matches¹¹². The ban lifted, however, an exodus of the merchants began. To compound the market's difficulties the Department of Finances wanted to impose market taxes¹¹³. Leclerc complained

il me paraît d'autant plus urgent de régler définitivement cette question que le marché de Tataouine, après avoir pris peu de temps un développement inattendu, traverse l'heure actuelle une crise assez grave. En effet une partie des négociants qui, lors de la création de marché avaient abandonné les boutiques qu'ils possèdent dans les ksours pour installer à Tataouine, ont quitté ce village et retournent dans leurs anciens boutiques dans les ksours.¹¹⁴

In such circumstances, he argued, it would be better to maintain the markets exemption. He argued in vain.

Despite the loss of its privileges, and the departure of many of the merchants to their shops in the ksars, the market survived. Indeed by the turn of the century Tataouine market thrived (see Table 3.6). It became a focus for local trade, feeding rather than competing with shops spread throughout the circonscription. It was a pattern repeated in all the other markets: both sales and market frequency increased throughout the period¹¹⁵. By the 1920's each of the markets had emerged as a centre of its own regional economy (see Map 5)¹¹⁶. Even Matmata's Monday and Thursday market, despite its comparatively late start (1910) and having to compete with the region's traditionally strong links with Gabès, carved out its own niche (see Table 3.6.).

These were first and foremost local markets. As Lt. Devaux observed of Matmata, 'il est surtout fréquenté par les habitants du territoire et par les Merazigues [from neighbouring Nefzaoua] qui viennent s'y approvisionner d'huile, et vendre des troupeaux, des toisons et du beurre'¹¹⁷. Their localisation was demonstrated by the persistent price differentials between them. At Matmata, for instance, the price of olive oil was consistently 10% to 15% lower than at the neighbouring market of Médenine, and at Zarzis lower still¹¹⁸. At Ben Gardane the price of sheep and goats in May and June was as much as 20% lower than at Tataouine¹¹⁹. Each market was saturated by local produce and there was little movement between them.

The markets in the far south (Ben Gardane, Tataouine, and Médenine) were further bolstered by their function as entrepôts for an extensive Saharan and Tripolitanian hinterland. Commerce between

the Algerian Sahara and Tunisia was primarily a transit trade of imported colonial goods through Gabès by Algerian carriers with Algerian capital, and as such was largely divorced from the Tunisian economy¹²⁰. The Tripolitanian trade on the other hand, although it did include the re-export of imported commodities, was dominated by the exchange of indigenous products. In times of drought the Tripolitanian tribes attended the markets in the south to buy cereals and oil, financed by the sale of Saharan goods, livestock, and wool¹²¹. A caravan from Ghadames arriving in January 1895 was typical, comprising thirty eight camels and ten drivers, and carrying some Saharan goods and a considerable sum in cash it returned with 4,500 kg of barley, 1,800 kg of wheat and 320 kg of oil¹²². Occasionally, with good harvests in the Tripolitanian djeffara, the flow was reversed. In September 1907 some 125,000 frs. worth of Tripolitanian cereals were sold on the market place of Ben Gardane¹²³. Prices were considerably higher in Tripolitania, particularly in the south at Ghadames, and so large profits could be made. A caravan from Douiret in 1896 sold its butter, oil, and cereals at Ghadames with a gain of 131%¹²⁴. Turkish authorities tried to redirect the trade towards their own markets by imposing a substantial customs levy in 1898. But this had little effect. Caravans simply bypassed the customs offices¹²⁵.

With the Italian invasion in 1911 the military feared that this profitable trade would end. But, by their failure to occupy the interior the Italians actually increased the Tripolitanian tribes dependence on the Tunisian markets. Sales and prices rocketted throughout the south¹²⁶. Beside this legitimate commerce flourished a contraband trade in arms. In August 1911 armaments were discovered in the ship 'Odessa' at Sfax and two other ships were caught with forty tons of guns and ammunition off the coast of Southern Tunisia¹²⁷. How many guns reached the rebels is unclear but it is to be suspected that most of their needs were met through Tunisia.

Meanwhile, Italian troops, confined to the narrow coastal strip, were also dependent on supplies from Tunisia. Agents of the Italian government, often Italian Jews resident in Tunisia, bought

food and animals in all the major ports. By October 1912 Cdt. Roux calculated that 28% of Tunisia's sheep had been exported. The sale of camels, not just for the south but as far north as Kairouan and Sousse, reached such an extent that the government, fearing a depletion of the herd, banned exports of all but the infertile and tired camels over ten years old. Needless to say the ban on exports only encouraged smuggling.

On the eve of the First World War the Italian government succeeded in occupying the interior and immediately set about developing its own market network. Direct cross border trade with Tunisia was forbidden¹²⁸. Although the Tripolitanian markets proved a great success they were in fact only an extension of the Tunisian market system. Most of the goods sold in the Tripolitanian markets were transhipped from Southern Tunisia, not Tripoli's own ports¹²⁹. The First World War again severed the links between the Tripolitanian ports and the interior and forced the Tripolitanian tribes to buy their supplies from their Tunisian neighbours. Areas under Italian (now allied) control continued to attend the markets in Tunisia but caravans to rebel areas were banned. Nevertheless as prices, and so potential profits, rose in the interior (see Table 3.15.), smugglers from Tunisia stepped in to supply many of the regions needs¹³⁰. The traffic continued, largely uncontrolled after the end of the war, until the collapse of the Tripolitanian revolt. As late as 1924 the Ghadames and the Djebel Nefousa received all its food from Tunisia¹³¹.

With the reconquest of the interior the Italians sought once again to reduce the region's dependence on Tunisia's markets. Traffic between Ghadames and Tunisia was stopped and cross border trade confiscated. In April 1923 they actually closed the border to prevent Tripolita^{nian} tribes attending the markets in Tunisia with their herds¹³². Within two years, however, the Italians realised that it was impossible to isolate Tripolitania. The region could not produce enough grain to feed its native population or the Italian army of occupation. French Intelligence reports reveal that a substantial trade in cereals, ^{was} organised by merchants from as far afield as Benghazi¹³³. In preparation for war, moreover, the

Italians imported camels from Tunisia, 3,000 a year by 1934, most of these from the south¹³⁴. Colonial manufactures were cheaper in Tunisia than Tripoli, and further swelled the trade. To pay for these goods the Tripolitani exported their wool, sheep, and goats to Ben Gardane, and cereals in good years. Economically Eastern Tripoli remained closely attached to Tunisia (see Table 3.14. for the scale of the caravan trade).

Caravans could usually cross the Tripolitanian border to trade legally, but customs duties were high and there were restrictions on the type of exports. For these reasons many preferred to risk smuggling. The scale of this contraband traffic was prodigious. In the course of 1941 the makhzen seized some 4 million francs worth of contrabande (mostly colonial produce (see Table 3.9.))¹³⁵. This can only have been a fraction of the total. As the Khalifalik of the Touazine pointed out, with thirty four makhzen patrolling the border, less than one in a hundred caravans could be intercepted¹³⁶. For some Tunisian tribes smuggling became a way of life: 'le Khalifalik de Touazine' a French report claimed 'vit de la contrabande'¹³⁷. The trade was largely small scale, usually one or two camel loads (see Table 3.10.), but the military were convinced that prominent tribesmen and merchants organised and financed a large part of the commerce. The cheikh of the Nebahna was suspected of financing a caravan of fifty camels¹³⁸. Another report describes how agents were sent to buy camels in Northern and Central Tunisia for export across the border¹³⁹. Tribesmen from elsewhere in the south, from Matmata, Haouia, even Gafsa participated. For many smuggling was a valuable supplement to their income. For a limited capital and a certain risk the tribesman could make a handsome profit.

If tribesmen continued to pursue an active cross-border traffic their participation in trade within the Regence gradually declined. Their place in legitimate interregional commerce was taken over by specialist merchants. Tribesmen were marginalised within the commercial world.

In the mid-1880's merchants, fearing attack by dissidents and bandits, were still nervous of the south¹⁴⁰. With the region's

occupation such fears disappeared and by the early 1890's merchants had returned not just to Médenine but further inland, into Nefzaoua and the Djebel Abiodh. These merchants, primarily Djerbans and Gabensians, played a prominent part in the commerce of the new markets from the moment they were set up. Of the twenty two merchants named on the act limiting commerce to the market place of Tataouine, sixteen were Jews from Djerba and Gabès, eight of the Arabs from Djerba, four from Gabès, four of unspecified origins and only six local (one Chenini, two Douiri, one Djellidet, and two Adjerda)¹⁴¹. Similarly at Ben Gardane of the one hundred shops occupied in 1897, ninety two belonged to Djerbans and Accara, only eight to native Touazine¹⁴².

At this early date few of these merchants were permanent residents in the south. They arrived at harvest time and in May for the animal sales, opened their shops and returned to Djerba or the north after a couple of months. It was only at the turn of the century that a few of these merchants settled in the south. They formed the nucleus of the small 'urban' populations, including a large proportion of Jews and Europeans, in the market towns and administrative centres of the south (see Table 2.20. on the numbers of Jews, Table 4.25. on the distribution of the European population, and Table 5.5. on the Jews employment)¹⁴³. The majority, however, remained seasonal residents. A report of May 1909, for instance, records the arrival of numerous merchants from Sfax, Monastir, and Tunis at the time of the animal sales and shearing¹⁴⁴. By 1919 there was a seasonal shortage of shops at Médenine¹⁴⁵. Besides the merchants there were a large number of peddlers, often of Kabylie origins, buying and selling smaller, cheaper goods. They were an essential link to the remote communities and campments of the south. Local tribesmen took little part in the trade. Only a few enterprising Accara, Djebalia, or Djelidet, owned shops or worked as peddlers and merchants. Inter-regional trade was monopolised by businessmen from the northern and coastal towns.

Improved communications within the south facilitated the penetration of Northern merchants and the emergence of regional markets. For the military roads were, as well as a corner stone of

their control of the region, a prerequisite of development¹⁴⁶. Immediately on the occupation of the south they embarked on a campaign of road construction that linked all the market centres to the coast with surfaced roads by the turn of the century (see Table 6.5.). Improved roads allowed the 'arbia (wheeled, often tyred, carts) to take over from the camel, and by the 1930's lorries were beginning to appear in the region¹⁴⁷.

Communications between the south and the north were, however, slower to develop. It was only in 1916 that the extension of the railway to Gabès relieved the south's isolation by land. Until that date virtually all communication was by coaster, either by mahonnes or by the steam package boat of the Co. Transatlantique, which called every ten days at Gabès, Djerba, and, later Zarzis, on the route between Tripoli and Tunis¹⁴⁸. Plans to develop Bou Ghara as the 'Bizerte of the South' were advanced, but the furthest they ever went was the construction of a jetty in 1911¹⁴⁹. Plans for Gabès were equally ambitious. In 1905 the 'Syndicat d'études Sud Tunisiennes' examined possibilities of a privately financed deep water harbour. But when the Syndicate's assumptions about the hinterland's mineral wealth proved to be mistaken the plans foundered¹⁵⁰. It was only after the war that rubble breakwaters were added and the harbour dredged, but even then large boats still had to anchor offshore. Elsewhere in the south minor improvements were made to harbour facilities, jetties, warehouses, and dredging of some of the shallower approaches. There was no investment in large engineering projects. The regions growing trade, therefore, continued to be in the hands of the shallow draught mahonnes (see Table 3.11.)¹⁵¹.

Traffic from the south was fuelled by the growing demands of the urban centres. Whilst trade in the pre-Protectorate period was largely between rural regional economies, during the Protectorate the needs of Tunisia's increasingly populous and affluent cities came to dominate the flow of agricultural products. Demand for meat grew rapidly with the increasing income of the urban middle class. Beef consumption rose 84% between 1906 and 1912, and mutton by 48%¹⁵². Merchants from the north scoured the country for herds, and

by the turn of the century Ben Gardane had become a centre for purchasing animals and Zarzis for exporting them north by boat: 1,500 head went north in May 1904, 1,405 in April 1905, 2,000 in March 1907¹⁵³. By 1910 some 20,000 sheep and goats were sold every year at Tataouine¹⁵⁴. Table 3.8. shows that the number of animals slaughtered continued to increase after the war. In March 1922 65,000 animals were purchased by merchants from the north, and 7,000 of these went through Zarzis¹⁵⁵.

The demand for oil and cereals doubled between 1881 and 1929¹⁵⁶. Again the south was drawn into the trade: in June and July 1910, for example, 95,000 kg. of olive oil was exported from Zarzis to the north of the Regence¹⁵⁷. By 1900 Gabès had emerged as a centre producing spring vegetables for the urban markets¹⁵⁸. Even forage, a rare enough commodity in the south, went north¹⁵⁹. The urban centres' market weight, indeed the weight of Tunis alone, had, by the turn of the century, completely transformed the pattern of the south's commerce.

The south was also exploited as a source of industrial raw materials. Wool, for example, was much in demand for Tunisia's artisanat. Djerba alone consumed about half the national wool production¹⁶⁰. Shortages developed and prices increased. By 1920 a fleece selling for 1½ francs before the war cost 20 francs, 28 frs in some parts of the south. In 1920 competition was so fierce that brokers offered advances to herd owners to ensure their supplies¹⁶¹.

These processes played into the hands of the urban merchants. Whilst prices were high the tribesmen were happy to sell to merchants from the north and abandon their traditional role as producer-traders. They brought their goods to the local market but rarely went beyond. Unfamiliar with the urban markets, without the connections to secure a good price, it is unlikely that tribesmen could have participated in this new commerce even if they had so wished. The result was that the professional merchants secured greater profits at the expense of the tribesman. Prices for native produce were notably higher in the cities and at the ports than in the local markets - according to Liauzu some 40% higher - and it was

the merchant not the producer who gained the advantage of this differential¹⁶².

Initially the South's links with the world economy were indirect, through native merchants and via the major ports rather than by direct exchanges between European traders and the tribes. But gradually Europeans, like their counterparts from the Northern cities, began to move into the south and exploit the region as a source of raw materials and a market.

Alfa continued to dominate the region's export trade throughout the Protectorate period¹⁶³, but new products were also found. Local *ardhaoui* barley, for example, became particularly important from the 1890's. Violard ascribed this trade to Lt. de Pontbriand, who, recognising that the high gluten content of the grain made it ideal for brewing sent samples to the breweries of Britain and France in 1897, whereupon their agents arrived in the following year¹⁶⁴. The story is apocryphal. Ships from England, Scotland and France exported 350, 414, and 189 tonnes of barley respectively from Gabès as early as 1890. In the same year a Jewish merchant at Gabès bought up 10,000 tonnes of barley and wheat for export to an undeclared European destination¹⁶⁵. By 1892 English shipping companies were regular attendants at the summer markets of Zarzis, sending agents inland to the market at Ben Gardane from September 1898¹⁶⁶. By the first decades of the twentieth century grain was regularly exported to England, France (Dunkirk and Marseilles), Rotterdam, and Hamburg (see Table 3.13.). Their purchases were substantial, often amounting to thousands of tonnes¹⁶⁷. Then in the early 1920's the first sheep were exported direct to France¹⁶⁸. At about the same period Europeans began to buy wool and olive oil.

Statistics of market sales during the Protectorate period confirm that increasing amounts of agricultural produce were commercialised by the tribesmen (see Tables 3.6. and 3.7.). Only the Accara and Djerbans, however, produced solely for export. For the remainder of the tribes commercialisation was tacked on to an essentially subsistence economy. Surpluses were sold, but as in Matmata, 'qu'en petites quantités et au fur et à mesure de leurs besoins d'argent'¹⁶⁹. Most of the southern tribesmen, to quote Cpt.

Ponthier de Chamaillard, 'subsistent sur eux-mêmes selon une formule d'existence patriarcale tout à fait en marge des conditions économiques nouvelles du monde moderne'¹⁷⁰. There was little production for sale. Agricultural products served local tastes and ignored those of potential markets. The *guebli* sheep that predominated in the south virtually ruled out exports¹⁷¹. Much the same was true of olive oil. European markets required oils without taste¹⁷², but the southern tribes continued to ferment their olives before pressing, and so their oil was 'impropres au consommation européen'¹⁷³. It is significant that it was only at Zarzis that efforts were made to produce the type of pure and tasteless olive oil suitable for urban and European markets but less favoured within the region.

The tribes' failure to fully embrace the market economy implies some reluctance on their part. To some extent it is true, the tribesmen were reluctant salesmen and participation in the market economy was partly forced upon them. Fiscal responsibilities imposed by the state, as elsewhere in North Africa¹⁷⁴, required some commercialisation. As early as 1882 the taxes demanded from the newly submitted tribes filled the market at Djerba with wheat, barley, and wool¹⁷⁵. After 1892 the obligation to pay taxes in cash and the growing number and burden of these taxes regularly forced tribesmen to sell a large proportion of their produce. At Matmata annual tax payments averaged 53% of annual market sales from 1932 to 1936. Both the monthly records of market sales and the tax returns show marked peaks after the main harvests: cereals in June and July and then olives from November to February (See Figures 3.1. and 3.2., and 5.1.). The relative importance of the two peaks varied, according to the price or the quantity of the harvest. In 1893, for example, the Service reported that with the price of barley high 'les indigènes n'en vendent que pour payer leurs impôts'¹⁷⁶. In 1923, on the other hand, the failure of the cereal harvests obliged tribesmen to sell olives to pay their tax arrears¹⁷⁷. Similarly a report of March 1923 describes how 'l'opération de recouvrement [of taxes] demandera un certain temps

car l'argent est toujours rares et beaucoup d'indigènes ne peuvent payer qu'après avoir vendu des ovins et caprins engraisés'¹⁷⁸.

Because the Department of Finances insisted on prompt payment immediately following the harvest (when they knew that the money was available) it forced the tribesmen to sell their crops when the prices were temporarily, but markedly, low (see Figures 3.3. and 3.4.). A delegation from the village of Ghomrassen complained, in April 1922, that they had sold their olive harvest at extremely low prices to pay their taxes when they would have done better to stock the oil'¹⁷⁹.

By underwriting the Bey's debts and the Tunisian currency, and fixing exchange rates between the Tunisian and French currencies, the Protectorate restored confidence in money as a means of exchange and capital accumulation'¹⁸¹. The penetration of Northern and European merchants and the fiscality of the state further ensured that a large proportion of the South's trade was monetarised. This is not to say that direct exchange between producers, even traders, was entirely abandoned. On the contrary Marty, writing in 1907, stressed that most of Matmata's trade was 'troc', and even later writers pointed to the persistence of direct exchange'¹⁸². Many merchants preferred to exchange their products. In Nefzaoua, for instance, the local population 'cèdent [ces] tissus aux juifs de Gabès qui chaque année viennent passer plusieurs mois dans le pays. Ils reçoivent en échange des produits manufacturées'¹⁸³. But with money increasingly the medium of exchange in the south's markets the tribesmen were forced to sell their own produce to pay for the necessities of life: cereals, oil, figs, and meat. During drought years such as 1898, when grain was imported, money was essential'¹⁸⁴.

Besides these necessities money gave access to a panoply of imported manufactured and processed goods. Although the regions share of national imports remained small relative to its proportion of the total population, the absolute amount of imports increased steadily. Sugar, tea, and coffee, were the staple of these imports, averaging 19% of the total for the period up to 1910 and 23.2% from 1911 to 1940, and formed a substantial proportion of market sales (see Table 3.7.). Nationally the consumption of tea increased

tenfold in the period 1917 to 1926¹⁸⁵. By the 1920's tea addiction had become the scourge of rural areas, 'comparable', explains Marty, 'à l'alcoolisme en autre régions'¹⁸⁶. At Zarzis, Cpt. Fourches explained that its consumption was so excessive that it exhausted the income of the poorest khammes¹⁸⁷. Sugar also began to figure prominently in the diet and imports quadrupled between 1911 and 1929. Cotton was also important, accounting for just over 7% of total imports at Gabes in the period up to 1910, 6.5% from 1911 to 1940, and a similar proportion of the sales on the markets (see Table 3.7.). The range of imports gradually broadened. Candles, ironmongery, and imported food stuffs, tinned goods in particular, began to take their place beside local products in the shops. A claim for compensation by a shopkeeper at Ksar Maned in 1916, lists 20 boxes of candles, 210 tins of tomato purée, 5 bolts of white cotton, 3 bolts of coloured cotton, various items of ironmongery amounting to 120 frs. and unspecified quantities of tea, sugar, and coffee valued at 325 frs.¹⁸⁸. Consumption of European manufactures, from tools to make up and clothing, gradually increased.

While this commercialisation, this penetration by international trade was interpreted by French commentators as a facet of the region's development, in reality the relationship between the local and the world economy was unequal and, consequently, detrimental. The south's agricultural products were generally considered inferior to those produced in the north. Alfa pulled in the south was, for instance, considerably shorter than that pulled in the Steppes, a deficiency reflected in its lower price: in 1917 35 frs. per tonne at Gabes as opposed to 65 frs. at Sousse¹⁸⁹. Exactly the same problem was faced by the oil producers of Zarzis, whose olives produced a strong tasting and hence poor quality oil, and by the herd owners whose fleeces had weak fibres and were often filled with sand. Prices were notably lower in the South than elsewhere in the Regence¹⁹⁰.

Problems of quality were compounded by competition. The centres of agricultural production were based firmly in the north, cereals in the Tell, olives in the Sahel, and animals in the Steppe. Competition from within the Regence was aggravated by competition

without. As early as 1895 a study of Tunisia's commerce complained of the detrimental effects of competition from Argentina and Australia on the sales of wool and livestock¹⁹¹. Cereals also suffered from distant competitors, North America and Russia in particular. In the case of olive oil competition came not just from other olive oil producers (Italy, France, and Spain expanded their olive production at the same time as Tunisia) but from other vegetable fats¹⁹². Similarly alfa grass suffered competition from alternative sources in North Africa, Algeria and Tripoli, and wood pulp substitutes from Scandinavia and North America¹⁹³.

Competition between producers gave the merchants considerable power. The alfa market provides an extreme, but illuminating example. At the time of the French occupation there was no competition at all. On 12 June 1881 the French merchant Dupleiss was awarded a concession, an effective monopoly of the alfa trade that included most of the alfa region both north and south of the Chotts. In April 1882 this concession was bought from Dupleiss by the Franco-British Esparato Fibre Co.¹⁹⁴. The effect of this concession, was to exclude the local merchants from the trade, keep the price artificially low, and so reduce the tribes' alfa sales¹⁹⁵. To both the rival merchants and the Protectorate the monopoly was an anathema. A decree of 24 December 1885 redefined the concession to exclude the area south of the Chotts. Ultimately the concessionaires were found to be in breach of contract, having failed to export a minimum of 10,000 tons per year over the period 1884-1886, and the concession was revoked with the decree of 13 July 1887¹⁹⁶.

A return to free trade did not, however, prove a panacea. British companies continued to dominate the trade, accounting for 93% of all alfa exports in 1899, a position which they retained throughout the Protectorate period¹⁹⁷. There were only six trading companies each of which had demarcated its own source region so that, locally, they were monopsonists. Cpt. Fourches noted that there was usually only one buyer at Médenine's alfa market at a time¹⁹⁸. To both the government and the tribesmen this was a conspiracy of powerful business interests against the weak:

les rapports entre cueilleurs et acheteurs ont été caractérisés de tout temps par un état d'infériorité flagrant des producteurs vis à vis des maisons acheteurs. Il en résulte des abus, des injustices dont le total pèse lourdement sur l'usager isolé sans réaction de défense possible envers le faisceau des intérêts adverses, solidement constituée.¹⁹⁹

Without competition the brokers were able to offer artificially low prices and lay every possible cost against the harvester. Alfa, for example, had to be dried before export and so lost approximately 30% of its weight. Allowance was made for this when the grass was bought from the tribesmen by a discount. It was a procedure that, given the prevailing illiteracy and ⁿinnumera cy, lent itself to fraud²⁰⁰.

The alfa buyers built their depots on the the coast. As a result the tribesmen were forced to transport the grass tens of kilometres (before the discounting procedure). A petition from Matmata describes how the tribesmen walked four or five days to attend the market²⁰¹. Another report dating from 1951 describes how in the mountains of Douiret many of the poor had to carry loads of a hundred kilograms or more on the their backs up to sixty kilometres to reach a depot. Briand concludes that the opening of depots further in the interior could only be to their advantage, since, as the tribesmen explained, 'ils préfèrent les prix moins élevés de longs et pénibles déplacements qui par perte de temps qu'ils entraînent, diminuaient le volume de leur cueillette et par la même leur gain effectif'²⁰². The exporters were, however, unco-operative. When in the 1930's the markets were eventually established (see Map 5) it was with government sponsorship rather than the assistance of the companies, and purchases at the markets were made by brokers not the companies agents. Since these brokers took a proportion of the profits and charged for their transport costs the prices they offered were significantly lower than at the companies depots.

The balance between the merchants and producers might have been redressed. The Service of Economic Affairs suggested that a cartel of the tribes controlling alfa production could force up prices and secure better conditions of sale²⁰³. Unfortunately the same report

was rather pessimistic about the practicalities of such co-operation and no attempt was made to co-ordinate the communities. The tribes interests were best served by a booming economy where demand for their products was greater than could be met. Then, as in the case of the wool market of 1920, not only did prices rise but the merchants were forced to offer advances to secure their supplies.

By the late 1920's, however, conditions in the local market were overshadowed by global conditions of supply and demand. Even before the First World War the Tunisian economy was susceptible to the fluctuations of world trade²⁰⁴. The price of alfa fell from 200 frs. at the time of the occupation to 85 frs. in 1900, and even further, to c.60 frs. in 1917²⁰⁵. Cereal, olive oil, meat, and wool prices also fell in the early years of the century but rose again after the First World War²⁰⁶. After a short boom period of high commodity prices in the early 1920's another downswing began with catastrophic effect.

For Tunisia the 'crash' of 1929 began in the mid-1920's with an accelerating decline in agricultural prices: between 1926 and 1935 the price of hard wheat fell 60%, animals 40%, and olive oil 55% (see Table 3.16.)²⁰⁷. The fall in market prices and the consequent fall in revenue was disastrous for many Tunisians. Those that had invested in plantations and herds in order to take advantage of the flourishing trade of the early 1920's found themselves undermined - without the income to repay their creditors. Most of these commercial investments were on the coast at Zarzis and at Ben Gardane. Here, Chef du Battalion Filio argued, in hindsight, the olive plantations had expanded too hastily, taking advantage of the boom conditions of the early 1920's many investors had contracted massive debts which they hoped to pay off with sales to European merchants²⁰⁸. A report from Zarzis dated May 1932 shows that this was impossible

Le marché tunisien étant saturé et les acheteurs européens, et en particuliers italiens, s'étant adressés à l'Espagne, à la Grèce, à la Turquie pour s'approvisionner, les ventes vers étrangers sont dès plus problématiques. La prochaine récolte s'annonçant, tout au moins à Zarzis, comme devant être excellente, il importe, dès maintenant, de rechercher la possibilité de trouver de

nouveaux débouchés si l'on ne veut pas acculer à la faillite des oleiculteurs.²⁰⁹

Some tried to stock their fruit but most were so desperate for money that they preferred to sell at a loss²¹⁰.

Unfortunately there are no statistics to describe how many of these tribesmen found themselves arraigned before courts for bankruptcy. Among the colons, at a national level, Liauzu has demonstrated that the number of bankruptcies rose steadily: 65 1916-1920; 729 1921-1925; 2,018 1926-1930; and 3,541 1931-1935. A similar pattern may be inferred for the native Tunisian farmers. Contemporaries describe how many of the smaller proprietors were forced to sell their property to liberate their debts. The fall in oil prices had, however, induced a fall in the price of the olivettes themselves, in some cases Filio suggests, to less than half their original value. As a result many debtors found themselves totally impoverished.

Inland, tribesmen depended on market sales of their agricultural produce and alfa to pay their taxes, buy cereals, oil, other necessities, and the few imported commodities they consumed. With the falling price of agricultural products they had to market still greater proportions of their production to meet their essential expenses. But the problems were not just those of prices, at times there was great difficulty finding a buyer at all. During the summer of 1929, for instance, alfa merchants simply stopped buying alfa, and again in 1931 the devaluation of the pound sterling made sales of alfa plummet²¹¹. Poor harvests exacerbated the problem. Many tribesmen simply had nothing to sell, and were forced to spend whatever money they had on food, usually at inflated prices (see the effect of the drought in 1936 on cereal prices in Figure 3.4.). In these circumstances the government allowed arrears to accumulate, but ultimately called in its credits forcing the tribesmen into debt.

Import penetration compounded the region's economic problems. Not only did the quantity of imports increase but the terms of trade deteriorated. Up to the First World War, according to Taieb's calculations, Tunisia's terms of trade improved (if the proceeds of

the mining industry are ignored). In Southern Tunisia this rise will have been partly offset by the falling price of alfa, by far the most important of the regions exports. After the war, however, the terms of trade worsened. The stable or slightly increasing prices of some of the regions' exports (cereals and animal products) were undermined by the fall in the price of alfa and the rising price of imports²¹². By 1921 a Service report argued

il est désirable de voir s'accroître la baisse des produits manufacturés afin qu'éleveurs et cultivateurs dont les produits ont baissé dans les fortes proportions ne soient trop désavantagés.²¹³

According to their calculations a length of cotton that had cost the equivalent of one sheep in 1916, cost two or more by 1921. The crisis of 1929 continued the trend. Import prices fell across the board (by 1935 sugar was at 27% of its 1928 price) but by less than the prices of agricultural exports. Tunisia as a whole, Driss' study suggests, suffered a 16.3% deterioration in its terms of trade in the period 1930-39²¹⁴.

The consequence of the growing number of imports, the weakness of the export trade, and the worsening terms of trade was a persistent national trade deficit. This was also true of the south. The average annual balance for Gabès over the period 1885-1911 was a deficit of 434,265 frs per year, and if Djerba, which enjoyed a positive balance for the period, is added the average annual deficit for the south was 328,411 frs. per year²¹⁵. Although Driss' study lacks Martel's detailed breakdown, it is clear that the south's trade deficit continued to grow after the First World War, averaging 893,546 frs. during the period 1920-29 and 673,451 frs. from 1930 to 1939²¹⁶. Market sale statistics also indicate a growing trade deficit. Shop sales (although not specifically identified as imports), imported textiles, and colonial goods represent almost half the region's market sales by 1936 (see Table 3.7.).

How was a persistent trade deficit financed? To some extent the answer must lie in hidden revenues. Not all the goods imported into Tunisia or sold on Tunisian markets were consumed locally, there was a considerable re-export trade. There was also a substantial revenue

from internal trade. Then again there were the revenues from outmigrants and seasonal labourers. Obviously a realistic balance of monetary flows in and out of the region is impossible to construct.

Incidental evidence does, however, suggest that part of the regional trade deficit was financed by *déthéaurisation*, by stripping the south of its capital, and by local impoverishment. In times of need sales of jewellery, for instance, increased markedly. During the Libyan war many of the Tripolita^{nian} tribes resorted to direct exchanges, jewellery for food and goods, and some smugglers returning from the region had thousands of francs worth of silver and gold²¹⁷. More often than not, however, the jewellery, sometimes even land, provided the capital upon which a loan was advanced. Shopkeepers allowed their customers to purchase on credit and charged high rates of interest. When the customer could no longer pay his debt the creditor demanded payment and seized his surety (see Chapter 4).

Perhaps the most extreme example of impoverishment through the growth of imports, is the case of the tea addiction. Dinguizli describes the lengths to which the addict would sink to satisfy his craving

Un caïd dut intervenir contre un chef de famille nombreuse parce qu'un soir d'un hiver rigoureux et glacial det indigène, acculé à la nécessité de satisfaire cette funeste passion, vendit la seule couverture de bonne laine chaude qui l'abritât des interpéries, lui, sa femme, et ses pauvres petits pour la plupart malingres et rachitiques.²¹⁸

Cpt. Fourches claimed that many at Zarzis had contracted substantial debts to finance their habit, from the wealthy to the poorest khammes²¹⁹. In this way imports drained the south of its capital.

Trade affected the very structure of the indigenous economy. An element of this was the gradual commercialisation of production. A process which, although much advanced during the Protectorate period, was still incomplete at its end. More pervasive was the substitution of native by imported products, and the consequent weakening and even elimination of native artisanal production. Cotton

and other imported factory made textiles and clothes were the worst culprits. Zawadowski has traced the stages of this process: the first, relegation of the more elaborate traditional dress to ceremonial occasions; the second, replacement of items of clothing by imports (in Tunisia the shirt, waistcoat, and later trousers); thirdly the abandonment of traditional dress apart from the *chechia*, traditional hat; and lastly, a stage which Zawadowski claimed was virtually unknown in the early 1940's, the complete abandonment of traditional dress²²⁰. By the 1930's the south had reached the second stage of substitution, urban areas the third.

Whilst rural artisanat remained trapped in the domestic mode of production it could not compete for its markets or its raw materials. High wool prices in the 1920's were reflected in the price of the textile products. Shortages developed and many families were unable to purchase the wool they needed to produce their textiles. In early 1920 wool prices rose so high in Nefzaoua that local textile manufacture temporarily stopped²²¹. Reports by the Service confirm that by the 1930's very few local textiles were sold in any of the mountain circonscriptions²²², and by the First World War sales of imported textiles exceeded those of local manufacture in the markets of the south (see Table 3.7.). Traditional export markets were also lost. Haiks, for example, were squeezed out of the Egyptian market place by European competition²²³. The war in Libya gave the industry a temporary reprieve. Cheap woven goods found a ready market among the rebel camps and sales momentarily increased²²⁴, but after the war the decline set in once again.

Not all traditional textiles suffered equally. Specialised manufactures, such as the *flidj* and *ghara*, had no European substitutes, and came to dominate the market sales of traditional textiles in the south. Likewise higher quality produce survived competition from the low quality factory cloths. During the early years of the 20th century Djerban merchants continued to import woven goods into the south. Much of this cloth was re-exported from Tataouine and Ben Gardane into Tripolitania²²⁵. So profitable was the Tripolitanian trade that many weavers from the island worked at these markets seasonally. By 1906 there were 102 weaving workshops

at Ben Gardane employing, according to Le Boeuf's estimate some 750 people²²⁶. During the 1920's although most of the weavers on the mainland were forced out of business, on the island the industry actually increased its production²²⁷. Many on the mainland, even as far afield as the mountain communities, served Djerba's growth spinning thread by hand.

Similarly while native pottery was abandoned in favour of cheaper and better quality cooking utensils, Djerba's specialist potteries thrived. They produced earthenware pitchers which, by the evaporation from their surface, allowed their contents to remain cool. Until the refrigerator's arrival this product was secure²²⁸.

Although the processes of import penetration and the substitution of native artisanat were encouraged by the Tunisian's preference for or 'seduction by' European manufactures, there were those who sought to protect their interests, to resist the underdevelopment of the economy. At the feast of Aid el Kebir in 1926 the notables of Zarzis took an oath not to drink tea. The boycott rapidly spread throughout the south. Within a month tea merchants at Tataouine, Médenine, and Ben Gardane complained of lost profits. Eventually the Service intervened to protect their interests. They arrested the ringleaders and the boycott came to an end²²⁹. Despite its limited life the boycott demonstrates the strength of public opinion. Opinion directed, it must be admitted, against the most pernicious of the regions imports, tea, but nevertheless against the merchants.

In the following decade the condition of Tunisia's native industries became an issue in the nationalist campaign. Habib Bourguiba and even the moderate newspaper el-Zohra castigated the Protectorate for its failure to protect Tunisia's native industries²³⁰. In 1934 the chechia manufacturers attempted to politicise national dress as a rejection of the Protectorate and the unequal trading relationships it represented²³¹. Boycotts and campaigns such as these could not, however, resist the economic reality of European industry's competitive advantage.



3.3. Control and regulation: Trade and the State under the Protectorate.

Jules Ferry, speaking in 1885, justified the occupation of Tunisia as a search for 'débouchés pour nos industries, nos exportations, nos capitaux'²³². Legislation in subsequent years did precisely this - opened up Tunisia as a source of raw materials and a market for manufactures. Monopolies were eliminated. Customs duties on agricultural exports (cereals, wool, dates, animal products and oil) and *ad valorem* taxes on imported manufactured goods were substantially reduced. Legislation in 1890, 1904, and 1928 effectively bound the Tunisian economy to France and privileged French products and merchants above their European and Tunisian competitors. France did not reciprocate, tariffs for Tunisian imports to France were usually higher than for French imports to Tunisia²³³. In this way the Protectorate enabled, nay encouraged, the rape of the Tunisian economy.

Trade, contemporaries argued, was a necessary condition as well as a consequence of economic development. The market network and improved communications were a cornerstone of the military's development policy²³⁴. In the same spirit they organised trading events. The annual camel fair at Douz, for example, first held in 1909 and since that date a regular event²³⁵. The military also encouraged commerce in specific products²³⁶. Exhibits of local artisanat and agricultural goods were regularly sent by officers to trade fairs in Africa and Europe²³⁷. Nancy and Deambrogio lobbied their superiors to find an outlet for Nefzaoua's textile 'industry', proposing that the uniforms for the Mixed Companies of the Tunisian army should be manufactured there rather than in Algeria²³⁸.

The military's determination to develop the Trans-Saharan trade became a veritable obsession. For Rebillet and many of his contemporaries the economic future of the south was inextricably linked to its role as its terminus²³⁹. There were political motives as well. The Trans-Saharan trade would unite the French African Empire and protection of the trade would justify their occupation of the region. But the French deceived themselves. They believed the commerce far more substantial than it really was. At the time of the

occupation the Trans-Saharan trade was already suffering from West African competition and the falling demand for Saharan products. Most of the commodities were low value leather goods and textiles (see Table 3.5.b.). French expansion into the Sahara had, moreover, pushed the trade routes ever further east to Benghazi, and by the turn of the century much of the remaining trade was firmly in the hands of the Senoussi²⁴⁰.

André Martel has described in detail the failure of French attempts to secure Tunisia a role in this commerce and the growing awareness of its economic insignificance in the years before the Italian occupation of Libya²⁴¹. With the Italian occupation, however, hopes for an economic trade were rekindled. Caravans arrived from Ghadames in 1912 and were seen to be the harbingers of a renewed trade²⁴². When this did not materialise the government sponsored Mohammed Allane to take a caravan of mixed manufactured goods, tea, coffee, and sugar worth 44,500 frs. into the interior and escorted him as far as Djanet. But this too was a failure. Allane returned after the war claiming that his caravan had been attacked and ransacked by Touareg on the return journey²⁴³.

It was only after the war that the government admitted the passing of the caravan era. Goods could easily be transported by railway from the south, the market for ostrich feathers was in decline, and the trade in slaves and ivory was now banned by international agreement²⁴⁴. Nevertheless, interest persisted²⁴⁵. When, in 1925, the military received reports that the Italians had succeeded in reviving the trade routes in Libya the government resolved to make a further attempt²⁴⁶. Although aware that the Trans-Saharan trade could never regain its former importance the French government regarded Italian participation in the trade a threat to their influence in the region. If there was to be some trade it would be better if it went through French rather than Italian territory. Mohammed Allane was again recruited to send a caravan south. This time 10,000 packets of cigarettes (a testimony to how perceptions of the trade had changed) on credit from the government and his profits guaranteed. It was another failure.

Allane returned to report the absence of any possible trading advantage and the government abandoned hope of any trade at all²⁴⁷.

Reports continued to argue that Italians were having some success with government sponsored caravans but they are scarcely credible²⁴⁸. Nevertheless officers continued to dream of a revival. In 1929 officers at Kebili organised a caravan to a Saharan trade fare at Tamanrasset in 1930. They could find no volunteers among the local trading community (merchants were not blinded by the romance of the caravans like the military) and had to second makhzen to work as conductors²⁴⁹. Well into the 1930's the arrival of a caravan, even a few camels, from the Sahara received a special mention in the Service's reports. It was an episode of Saharan history they would not forget.

Trade was, however, more than a development issue or an opportunity for the officers to indulge in their frontier fantasies. It was a means of control and a central part of their strategy of domination. At the time of the invasion the military recognised that inadequate supervision of the south, its markets and caravan routes enabled the rebels to re-equip. Féraud, the French consul at Tripoli, reported that Jews, Maltese, and Italian merchants in Tripoli openly sold guns to the dissident tribesmen²⁵⁰. Boats even landed arms at Tunisian ports²⁵¹. A Maltese, Eduardo Rossi featured prominently in this trade. At one point, Féraud would have us believe, he offered to sell Ali ben Khalifa 10,000 repeater rifles²⁵². Nor would this seem to have been an empty offer. Other reports indicate that ships landed as much as 700 barrels of gunpowder at one time, and that there were some 8,000 Snider rifles in Tripolitania²⁵³.

Arms smuggling did not stop with the return of the dissidents. Substantial amounts of gunpowder continued to be landed on the Tripolitanian coast in the 1890's and early 1900's. In one shipment to Zouara in 1905 2,000 guns each with 200 cartridges were landed from a Greek vessel²⁵⁴. A year later a merchant in Zouara, Abdallah ben Chaabane, reputed to have become fabulously rich through his smuggling, landed a further 2,000 guns and 200 barrels of powder²⁵⁵. Other smugglers brazenly landed their contraband on Tunisia's

coast. The reports indicate that many of these armaments were sold to Tunisian tribes but many went further afield to Algeria even Morocco²⁵⁶. After the First World War the flow of guns increased again as the Mausers supplied by the Turkish and German governments to the Tripolitanian rebels found their way onto Tunisian markets²⁵⁷. The fact that the Tunisian tribes were kept well armed by this trade was a source of constant irritation to the military. There were regular patrols along the border, cheikhs were given authority to conduct searches, and employees of the Direction des Monopoles sent into the interior, but all no avail. To have stopped smuggling, one government report explained, the French needed to build a wall along the border (as the Italians did in Cyrenaica)²⁵⁸.

It was not for the sake of gun running alone that the military wished to control trade, legitimate commerce was also of strategic value. As early as 1882 the French recognised that control of trade would provide an economic sanction against the tribes. To pursue this strategy they had occupied Djerba, Gabes, and Zarzis, well south of their main defensive line, reasoning that with the markets closed the rebels would soon be starved into submission²⁵⁹. Later when the military occupied the south Médenine was chosen as the main garrison point precisely because of its market functions²⁶⁰. New markets were established at Tataouine, Ben Gardane, Matmata, and Dehibat where the Bureaux could supervise them directly. Only in the late 1930's and 40's did they consider markets in more remote locations. In the light of this policy the military's insistence that transactions should take place at markets rather than in villages and campments scattered throughout the circonscription may be better understood. Leclerc argued that to allow freedom of commerce would mean that trade 'échapperont notre action et notre surveillance'²⁶¹.

On the other side of the coin control of commerce gave the government access to essential raw materials. During the First World War the government introduced restrictions on the export of grain, wool, animals, and oil²⁶². Then, by compulsory purchases, they diverted wheat, barley, wool, and live animals to the war effort. The scale of the intervention was prodigious. In June 1918 the

commission purchased 5,146 kg. of wool at Matmata alone, and in August of the same year 390,000 frs. worth of cereals were exported through Zarzis by the government²⁶³. These purchases took little account of local needs. Wool that would have been used for local artisanat was diverted for industrial use and traditional industries, during both World Wars came to a virtual stand still²⁶⁴. Attempts were made to circumvent the restrictions. Smuggling thrived and merchants from the north and Djerba sent their purchases north as parcels to avoid confiscation. But only a minority escaped²⁶⁵.

Control of the markets made sense from an economic point of view as well. To be successful trade had to have a secure environment and stable conditions. The quality of produce and procedures of trade had to be regulated to ensure that merchants would return. In 1907, for example, the Chambre Mixte du Sud (a semi-governmental body representing colonial and commercial interests) complained that native farmers put stones and sand in cereals and wool to defraud buyers. Four years later a government inquiry confirmed their accusations and the government promulgated the decree of 8 November 1911 which required sampling in the market place to ensure quality²⁶⁶.

The Service had neither the means nor the authority to supervise these procedures in person. They administered the markets as they did the remainder of tribal life, indirectly through local officials *amines*. These officials controlled market procedure (verified weights), sales, and prices (determined an acceptable range of prices at which goods of a defined quantity and quality could be sold) and collected market taxes from which their income was derived. They had existed in the northern and coastal markets before the Protectorate. The Protectorate merely extended their authority into the formerly independent and newly established markets of the interior (see Table 2.9).

Candidates were chosen from among the merchant community. Of the 31 *amines* appointed to supervise the markets of Tataouine, Médenine, Zarzis and Ben Gardane between the occupation and 1954, 24 were from outside the region, only 7 were local tribesmen. All of them were prominent merchants. Although the *amine* was supposed to

guard the interests of both merchants and their customers the merchants control of market administration put the balance of power in their favour.

Selection by a vote among merchants politicised the amines appointment in much the same way it did cheikh's (see Chapter 9). Factions and interest groups competed for office and elections were preceded by vicious slur campaigns in which rivals branded each other liars, cheats, and userers in letters to the Service and the Prime Minister²⁶⁷.

In the early years one of the most powerful interest groups was headed by local administrators. Cannon has shown how, in Northern Tunisia during the 1880's and 90's, the amines could only impose their authority by recourse to other executive powers: the *cadi*, the *caïd*, and the *cheikh*²⁶⁸. In Southern Tunisia this problem was accentuated by the military's policy of incorporating formerly informal markets where administrators had performed many of the amine's functions. Tataouine market, for example, was administered by the *cadhi* until 1892²⁶⁹, and at Matmata the *caïd* opposed the appointment of an amine on the grounds that it was a job he had performed satisfactorily for several years²⁷⁰. To protect their interests some of these officials sought to install their own candidates as amines. At Tatahouine in 1898, for instance, the *khalifa* proposed the appointment of a shop keeper²⁷¹. In this case the candidate was unsuccessful, but the *caïd* at Médenine was able to secure the appointment of his secretary against the wishes of much of the merchant community²⁷².

The merchant community itself might include a multiplicity of conflicting interests and factions. In the south the merchants' diverse ethnic origins (Jews from Gabes and Djerba, Muslims from Gabes, Sfax and Djerba, local tribesmen, and Europeans) can only have encouraged factionalism.

Factionalism made it difficult for amines to impose their authority a problem aggravated by the inadequate demarcation of responsibilities and prerogatives. Each market applied different rules, regulations, and taxes, and as the markets developed new functions were added (public abattoirs, corn exchanges, and shops)

all of which made for conflicting responsibilities. Nor were all the amines active in the markets appointed officially, by an amra el-bey. At Kebili, for instance, an investigation revealed that after his appointment the amine had put his job out to tender and farmed the revenues of the market²⁷³. Payne claims that in 1899 Tatahouine market was controlled by a total of sixteen amines, only two of whom were appointed by the government²⁷⁴. The remainder were either tax farmers, appointed deputies, or rival amines chosen by the merchants themselves.

By the First World War, however, the government recognised the amine as the sole administrator responsible for the markets, and a circular was sent to all caïds warning them not to encroach on the amines specialist functions²⁷⁵. At the same time the government sought to transform the amine into a civil servant. Abuses, such as the tax farming practised at Kebili, were stamped out. Standardised market procedures were gradually introduced to ease supervision. By the 1920's the amines were well established as officials, dependent on, and certainly responsible to, the central government.

Close supervision of the markets allowed the government to collect market taxes. The military, however, regarded these taxes as a hinderance to free trade and the success of their market places. Leclerc argued that

pour qu'une semblable entreprise puisse réussir, il est indispensable qu'elle ne rencontre aucune entrave au point de vue soit des droits de douane, soit des mahouslats et que le marché que l'on se propose de créer soit affranchi de tous droits de ce genre, au moins de début.²⁷⁶

Worse still customs and market taxes encouraged tribesmen to evade government control. In 1894 the military went so far as to advocate the complete abolition of market taxes and customs duties throughout the south²⁷⁷. The Department of Finances would not countenance this immunity and insisted that the amines primary function was to gather taxes, which were, forthwith, imposed. For the military, however, the amines remained administrators not tax collectors.

The officers' attitudes were essentially paternalistic. They regarded tribesmen as ignorant and naïve, and the merchants, often

Jews, ruthless and greedy. Supervision was essential to protect the interests of one from the other and keep the peace²⁷⁸. Central to this policy was the control of market prices. Sales of most local manufactures and essential consumer items were to be set within acceptable limits by the amine. This *mercuriale* was not static, it was intended to reflect variations in demand and supply, but only within reason. The small size of many of the markets in the south enabled merchants to co-operate in order to manipulate prices. According to the caïd of Matmata, the amines were appointed 'pour mettre en frein l'avidité toujours accroissent des accapereurs'²⁷⁹. In times of crisis, as during the two World Wars or the droughts of the 1920's and 1930's strict price controls were introduced in an attempt to protect the poor. During the drought of 1936, for example,

les cours des denrées de première nécessité tendant à s'élever insensiblement. En ce qui concerne l'orge, une surveillance sévère des transactions a permis à stabiliser les cours à 90frs le qx et pour l'orge ardhaoui et 81frs pour l'orge de Maroc.²⁸⁰

Amines were also supposed to prevent speculative buying, stocking and reselling²⁸¹.

Tight control was not always possible. Much of the trade went on behind the amine's back, and merchants could pay substantial bribes to encourage the amine to turn a blind eye²⁸². Moreover, without the authority to force merchants to sell their stockpiles, the amines were virtually powerless in the fight against speculation²⁸³. At the alfa markets, where the discounting procedures were abused to exploit the tribesmen, the amines were supposed to supervise weighing procedures. To protect the tribesmen's interests the government markedly increased the number of specialist markets in the 1930's (see Map 5) and thereby the area covered by their supervisors²⁸⁴. But this did not stop the fraud, amines often worked in collusion with their merchant colleagues²⁸⁵.

Military intervention on the market place did not just affect native merchants, it also regulated the south's export trade. In 1920, for example, when the purchases of wool by Europeans forced

the price beyond the means of local textile workers the military banned exports of that commodity from the south²⁸⁶. Exports required a permit. In times of famine these permits were refused to maintain local stocks of grain and animals²⁸⁷. These restrictions were particularly irksome to European traders who complained that the military discouraged Europeans trading in the region. In particular they resented the impositions of the amine - the payment of a measuring tax and of market duties and prohibition of sales outside the market place. Several disputes between European traders, the amines, and the military authorities are recorded²⁸⁸.

The military's protective attitude towards the tribesmen and native economy was only a palliative. In practice the government's attitude towards trade was permissive. The elimination of trade barriers had far more significant than the temporary restrictions on exports a worried officer might impose. An amine might prevent a merchant cheating a tribesman but this was of minor importance when the whole price structure was weighted against the latter. Market management did little to protect the native. More often than not it was organised by the merchants for the merchants. And so the state abetted the tribesman's impoverishment.

Conclusion.

At one level one may describe the development of trading relationships in Southern Tunisia as part of a global process of capitalist development. A process in which the European capitalist takes the leading role

The need of a constantly expanding market for its product chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. [...] All old-established national industries have been destroyed and are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industrialists that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones: industries whose products are consumed not only at home, but in every

quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes.

[...] The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate.²⁸⁹

This is true. But the detailed regional study shows a complexity which this generalisation obscures. International capitalism fostered the growth of and worked beside a growing native capitalism. The colonial state also played a significant part in the transformation of trading relationships. This transformation was essentially the subordination of the tribal economy, manifested first of all in the changing pattern of trade. Trade flows were directed towards the cities and exports rather than other rural communities. This had its dangers. The economy was now subject to the competition and swings of demand. Secondly the tribesman was reduced to a producer, no longer participating in trade. Commerce was monopolised and manipulated by those outside the tribal economy whether merchants from nearby Djerba, more distant Tunis, or Europe.

CHAPTER 4.

THE OWNERSHIP OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION.

In 'Capital' Marx argues that

the expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil is the basis of the whole process [of the development of capitalism]. The history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs.¹.

In Britain, he claims, this expropriation has taken the classic form. Chapter 27 of 'Capital' traces the growth of private property, the elimination of communal land, the growth of the large estates, and the eventual depopulation of these estates as the salient stages of this process. This chapter shows how, during the Protectorate, Southern Tunisia underwent the sequence of events with the same consequences.

4.1. Property and Wealth before the Protectorate.

In Southern Tunisia there were two forms of land ownership, 'ard el 'arch (collective land) and melk (private property). Commentators have explained this distinction as a response to climate and insecurity. Behnke, in a recent study of the Cyrenaican Bedouin, has argued that the more stable a productive resource the more exclusive is ownership and right of use. The same was true of Southern Tunisia before the Protectorate. Proprietorial rights on infrequently cultivable lands were ill defined and rested with the highest levels of the tribal segmentary group, access is virtually unrestricted². Cdt. Donau has explained the influence of insecurity as 'la nécessité de s'unir pour lutter'³, to quote Pauphilet

la localisation des terres collectives fait apparaître aussi ce régime comme une défense contre d'autres dangers que ceux de climat. La plaine est ouverte aux incursions des étrangers, aux turbulences des voisins. [...] Contre

cette insécurité le système collectif est aussi une sorte d'assurance, puisqu'il intéresse le groupe entier à la défense de la moindre parcelle.⁴

The resultant pattern was one of ill defined property rights and unrestricted access in the Dahar and in the far south along the Oued Mogta where rainfall was unreliable and there was a constant threat of raids by the Tripolitanian tribes. Here 'la possession de terre était fort précaire'⁵. Proprietorial rights were pre-emptive: the first shepherd to arrive at the well, the first plough team at the damp depression. For this reason when it rained over a ploughland speed was essential. There would be numerous competitors seeking to reach the lands first to make their claim⁶. The same was true of the ephemeral wells. Under these conditions the distribution of land and water was open to dispute and there were frequent fights sometimes escalating into wholesale riots⁷.

North of the Mogta nearer the ksars and villages of the Djebalia, where the ploughlands and wells were more reliable and the threat of raiding declined, the well watered depressions and lined wells were recognised as the property of particular fractions whose names they occasionally took. These were, in the terminology of French writers, the 'ancient lands', lands which had been used by the tribes consistently for generations, in contrast to the more distant and less regularly used 'new lands'⁸. Over the years persistent cultivation established rights of ownership, some of which were recorded and explicitly defined on acts written by notaries⁹. Every year the lands were divided among the productive units, but rarely so that a family would use the same plot in consecutive years. The rainfall was too erratic to permanently divide the plots. Moreover defence was still a consideration. The plough teams usually worked in a *doulab* (group) for mutual protection¹⁰. Permanent defences were built

Les Querghamma [...] protègent même encore bien des points, par des petits redoutes en pierres seches, leurs récoltes et paturages.¹¹

These were small *kasba* (forts) whose 'murs étaient percés des sortes de meurtrières permettant à la fois de voir et de tirer'¹².

Still further north and in some of the most reliable depressions, fractions had divided the collective property between the comprising lineages. Acts record such divisions in the 18th century, others more recently. Pauphillet, for example, ascribes the division of Bahirat Cheikh Saïd to the 1870's, a period, he claims, of 'relative security'¹³. In this case the land was divided among the lineages equally, regardless of their size. This was not always the case. Land might also be divided according to the size of the fraction or the number of ploughteams they owned¹⁴.

The pattern these plots formed on the land is unknown. Perhaps it was a contiguous unit, perhaps not. Within these defined areas the land continued to be divided among the productive units, the households, each year. Landownership was not personalised it was still communal, though the landowning group might be as small as twenty or thirty families.

In much of northern Aradh, in the water spreading zones at the base of the mountains, and surrounding the oases, where the land was more reliable and (because of the distance from surrounding tribes and proximity to settlements and ksars) more secure, private not collective landownership predominated. Rebillet, writing in 1886, describes how in Southern Tunisia

le terrain y est divisée en lots, par des bandes laissés à dessein, sans culture. Les propriétaires possèdent des actes réguliers de vente ou de succession.¹⁵

Dumas' detailed study of the status of collective land in the region in 1911 confirms as much. He records the words of the tribesmen he consulted. For Si Mohamed Khalifa, khalifa of Aradh, 'ici la propriété privative existe seule', likewise for the cheikh of Telboulbou, an oasis in Aradh,

il ya des titres pour tous nos terres, quelle que soit leur nature, quelle que soit la catégorie il a plus au comité de les ranger et chaque paracelle a sa propriétaire connu [...] Tout est approprié.¹⁶

A few of these titles appear in the archives delimiting plots precisely by the watersheds, and defining the family or individual proprietor (see Appendices II and III). At the division of 3,000 ha.

between the fractions of the Ouderna in 1933, for example, 29 acts of private ownership were presented by the Od. Debbab (23 from before 1882, the oldest 1724), 55 by the Od. Chehida (26 pre-1882, the oldest 1645), 4 by the Deghaghra (2 pre-1882, the oldest 1762), and the Djellidat 9 acts (all post-1882)¹⁷. Some were products of the division of collective lands between the productive units, others derived from a gradual recognition of a family's proprietary rights over lands they cultivated regularly. Some, Desmé de Chavigny suggested, were created for the price of a bribe to the cadhi¹⁸.

Many plots became private property following their development. Under Islamic law, as described by the French colonialist Georges Rectenwald, the tribal lands under intermittent cultivation or pasture were 'dead lands'. Private ownership could be established by 'bringing them to life', a process he defines with a quote from the Tunisian jurist Cheikh Mohammed Ennifer, 'dont l'opinion n'est pas à dédaigner':

La vivification d'une terre consiste où à la pouvoir d'eau soit en y creusant un puits soit en captant une sources; ou d'y élever un construction; ou à y créer une plantation ou à en extraire de la pierre à en planir et à en niveler la surface ou à en faire l'emprise d'une terres de culture. Mais la paturage, le creusement de puits pour abreuver les bêtes, l'établissement d'une clôture ne constituaient pas à proprement parler une vivification.¹⁹

Privatisation by development depended on the extension of agriculture. Even without such investment, Rectenwald goes on to explain, evidence of occupation and cultivation over ten years or more, without contestation, was enough to guarantee rights of ownership.

In Southern Tunisia, where these principles were tacitly if not explicitly accepted, the result was a rash of private plots spread among collective lands, usually close to the mountains or near the oases, in depressions, associated with water retention and gathering technologies, and supporting perennial and resistant tree crops. Some of these, the acts of ownership suggest, were of considerable

antiquity but developments were taking place at the time of the French occupation.

It was in the mountain zone and the oases that private landownership predominated (see Map 6). To quote a French report, 'la sentiment de propriété individuelle est très développé chez les Matmatas et montagnards'²⁰. A djesser built across a valley floor secured a regular harvest from olive, fig, date and other fruit trees. Similarly the cisterns each family built on the valley slopes, with their attendant water gathering channels, provided a reliable source of water. All these resources, the product of human labour as much as the natural advantages of the mountains' high rainfall and runoff, were private property. But even here the practice of collective ownership was not entirely lost. The uncultivated lands and the runoff contributing area, formally private property, remained, by tradition, open pasture.

The opportunities of further development in these favoured mountainous areas were, however, limited. The extension of ownership to the catchment area prevented construction upstream of, or on the slopes adjacent to, existing djesser's. New djesser's and cisterns could only be built downstream of existing constructions. It is a principle that has its parallels in the Islamic water law for irrigation and similar technologies elsewhere in the Middle East²¹. Although the same laws and traditions limited the use of water by landowners upstream to an inundation approximately up to the ankle (the height of the overflow above the field), constructions downstream received less and less water, and, as a result, were less and less efficient. Similarly most of the valleys close to the village or ksour were occupied at an early date²². New djesser's had to be built further and further away. This was not necessarily a disadvantage. By dispersing his land the proprietor increased the chances of receiving adequate rainfall on one of his plots. Nevertheless this dismemberment entailed a tiresome journey to and fro²³.

The availability of lands for pasture, cereal cultivation, and, to a lesser extent, arboriculture, outside the mountain zone at least, had a significant effect on the individuals choice of

production strategy and consequently the form, extent, and inequalities of capital accumulation. Where land was held collectively the accumulation of productive capital within the domestic production unit focused on trees, plough teams, and animals. According to Zghall

La véritable richesse en milieu rural n'était pas mesurée en espace appropriée mais en espace ensemencé, en arbres plantés, en attelages, en têtes du bétail. La vraie démarcation est entre ceux qui possèdent et ce qui ne possèdent point non le sol mais l'attelage de labour.²⁴

Animals, trees, and cereals were both the means of production and the product. Their accumulation became the means of reproduction of capital and the mark of wealth. Animals and trees formed the staple of the lists of guarantors. Land was not mentioned in these lists of personal property until the twentieth century. Even in the mountains where cultivable land was the product of labour these early lists rarely quote the number of djesser's, and never the area of land appropriated.

In terms of the distribution of the means of production among the population the effect of collective land ownership was ambiguous. The accessibility of pastures and ploughlands gave every tribesman the opportunity for capital accumulation and the generation of income. Certainly inquests by French officers, verifying the status of indigents seeking exemption from the medjba, reveal that all but the very poorest in Matmata owned a few sheep and goats, animals that secured some income and essential products. A plough team, owned or rented, allowed every individual to cultivate some cereals.

On the other hand the structure of collective ownership was inherently inegalitarian. As Dumas and, later, Pauphillet pointed out the annual or definitive division of collective plough lands often used the logic of the segmentary system (see Chapter 7) rather than the size of lineages to apportion land. Consequently the amount of land available per capita varied considerably between lineages²⁵. The diversity of methods of division described in the documents and by commentators suggest that the procedures differed from

fraction to fraction and from year to year, often being the subject of discussion not to say dispute between their rival advocates. A division on the basis of the logic of segmentation, the number of plough teams, or on a first come first serve basis, would each be to the advantage of different groups.

This inequality might even extend to the level of the individual. Valensi's account of the distribution of landed property among the tribes in the North, for whom cereal cultivation was a significant resource, illustrates the inequality of access to ploughlands²⁶. This was less true of pastures where unrestricted access was the rule. Even so, where regular wells were scarce their ownership and control enabled a fraction, even an individual, to effectively monopolise the surrounding pastures.

Even if all tribesmen enjoyed equal access to collective resources, opportunities for income generation and the accumulation of capital still favoured the wealthy. The ability to use collective land depended on a minimum amount of capital. Those without a ploughteam could not cultivate cereals and without a herd access to pastures meant nothing. As Buisson points out

Le petit exploitant n'ayant pas les moyens de financer le constituion ou reconstitution (après les années de disette) d'un troupeau important ne pourra pas bénéficier [...] des avantages d'une structure juridiquement collective.²⁷

If the poor could not realise the benefits of collective land the rich certainly could. Labour, seed, and the number of ploughteams available, not land, restricted the area they cultivated. Likewise the size of their herds was limited only by their capital not the availability of pastures. Much the same was true of the 'right' of appropriation by development. Only the rich had enough capital to finance substantial new plantations and secure general recognition of their personal property.

To what extent these opportunities were exploited by the wealthy is impossible to say. French commentators, admittedly not disinterested reporters, were in no doubt: the wealthy notables were

gradually appropriating the better plots of collective land as their private property²⁸.

Thus, although collective landownership may have protected the poorer tribesman it also permitted, even encouraged the accumulation of private property, the means of production, by the wealthy. It was the form and structure of private property, however, and the means of alienation and transfer, that determined the manner and scale of accumulation and the differentiation of wealth within tribal society.

Barth suggests that although the accumulation of wealth as animal rather than landed property allowed the individual to enjoy faster rates of capital growth and, in an economy where animals and animal products were marketable, a considerable income, such capital was fundamentally unstable since herds were liable to large and unpredictable losses from drought, disease, and cold²⁹. Evidence from Southern Tunisia confirms this to be the case (see Chapter 2.1.). Instability added an element of risk to the accumulation of capital in this form, a risk that was avoided by investment in land.

How this instability affected the distribution of wealth within the community has been a matter of debate. Black, on the basis of his Luri studies, has argued that random losses tend, in the long term, to eliminate inequalities in herd size. Irons has, on the other hand, pointed to persistent differentials of wealth in herd owning tribes and suggests that losses among the wealthier herd owners are proportionately less in times of crisis than their poorer neighbours. The larger the herd the greater the chance that a core would survive a crisis from which herd strength could be rebuilt³⁰. More recently Bradburd has actually examined the process of herd regeneration after crises with data from Yorük (taken from Irons' field notes) and Komanchi pastoralists. In contrast to the untested hypotheses of the earlier studies, he has been able to confirm that,

Random fluctuations in herd gain and loss over time is not likely to lead to a long term equilibrium of wealth among households but, on the contrary, may be expected to lead to significant differentials in wealth.³¹

Larger herds were insulated from crisis because larger numbers survived for rebuilding. Besides the wealthy herdowner could afford to employ a shepherd to take his animals to the best pastures or to the north in drought years, he might even be able to afford forage. He was, as a result, less likely to suffer losses during a drought.

Land ownership avoids this kind of risk entirely. Nevertheless the integrity of landed capital may be threatened - threatened from within, by inheritance. Islamic inheritance law awarded each son an equal and daughters a half share of their fathers property, and so dispersed accumulated capital at his death³². Herd wealth although managed as a single unit by the father usually comprised the private property of all family members³³. Children were given animals at birth and more at circumcision³⁴. When sons married it was common practice for a father to donate part of his herd, usually regarded as that son's inheritance, to help him maintain his new family. At a man's death his children and wife would reclaim their personal property and the remaining part of the herd was divided between those children who had not already received a donation. In this way herd wealth tended to be ephemeral³⁵. This is not to say that inequalities disappeared over the long term. Children of a substantial herdowner benefitted from the process of dismemberment more than their poorer neighbours. A man with only thirty animals could not pass on a viable self-sustaining herd to his children, a man with two hundred animals could.

Land and arboreal wealth was slightly more durable. After a man's death some effort was made to preserve the integrity of the land owning unit. Women were disinherited from landed property, either by a gift of animals (see Appendix II), a promise of maintenance, an act of donation ignoring their rights, or, most frequently, an act of habous (see Appendix III). In this way land could not be alienated by marriage³⁶. Co-propriet^t associations between sons ensured that landed capital survived death. Biographical Notices from the Protectorate period show some 34% of individuals to have been wholly and another 3% partly in co-propriet^t associations, and a survey by Jemai in Taoudjout in 1968 shows the figure to have been higher at 44%³⁷. But

these associations were also ephemeral. By the third generation the interests of the partners diverged and quarrels caused the property to be divided. In the Notices only 3% of the co-proprietors were cousins or more distant relations. Further north in the Sahel, where land and trees were more valuable and agriculture market orientated, Memmi suggests the proportion of co-proprietors was only 17.5%. There land was often divided immediately on the owners death³⁸.

Only through the institution of an act of habous was the productive capital in the form of land or trees, theoretically, able to preserve its integrity over a longer period. A form of mortmain, the habous preserved the unity of an inheritance for all male descendants equally, the property resorting to a religious institution or charitable service only with the failure of the direct male line. Since the descendants enjoyed usufruct of the property it could not be sold or divided. An exchange with a property of similar value was permissible but was often impracticable, and so the land was effectively immobilised³⁹.

In reality, however, the tribesmen did not always respect the obligations of entailment. Where Islamic law was in force, the French later claimed, procedures such as the enzel (a perpetual lease) allowed the land to be sold, and in tribal areas habous was treated as a legal convenience

il est à rémaquer que beaucoup de familles des Ouderna tiennent en réserve des actes des habous qui ne empêchent généralement pas de laisser le commerce les biens qui en fait l'objet, le but poursuivi par le constituant étant avant tout l'exclusion des filles.⁴⁰

Sale could, moreover, be justified in terms of Islamic law since 'le bénéficiaire du habous avait le droit de vendre en cas de force majeure, c'est à dire de pauvreté ou de changement de domicile'⁴¹.

The issue of co-propriety is, however, misleading. Even though land might be held in co-propriety domestic units within the association continued to pursue their own production strategies, dividing the land's produce and responsibilities between them in shares that reflected their inheritance rights within Islamic law. It was for this very reason that co-proprietorial relationships

tended to dissolve. Where property was not divided it soon suffered from indivision. French accounts of land ownership in Algeria describe the extreme indivision suffered by lands in habous or co-propriety in which shares were one part of a thousand. The same could also occur in Tunisia⁴². In a growing population the co-proprietors quickly proliferated: an inquest into the ownership of some property at Kirchaou revealed that the ownership had broadened from four sons to sixty two inheritors in just over sixty years⁴³. For the individual revenues and responsibilities became so reduced that they ceased to take any part in the cultivation of such property. In practice the land was generally divided before the proportions became too small to warrant cultivation. If Islamic law was rigidly applied then the abandonment of land because of extreme indivision and the fragmentation of revenues and responsibilities was inevitable.

Just as the principles of inheritance are important in determining the persistence of accumulated capital the structure of the property market place affects the individual's ability to accumulate capital. The market for animals was very active. This allowed the wealthy herder to supplement his herd growth with purchased animals, and so increase the rate and scale of accumulation. Colonial commentators have tended to argue that land was, in contrast, immobile. Rebillet, for instance, claimed there was no property market at all: 'c'est là [the mountain zone's trees and djessour] une richesse invariable qui se transmet par l'héritage, qui ne s'augmente pas, la vente et l'achat étant nuls'⁴⁴. This was an exaggeration. Writing for a predominantly colonial audience, Rebillet and his contemporaries were emphasising a common complaint of the early colonists, the difficulty of finding land to buy. Their accounts were neither disinterested nor dispassionate.

In fact acts of notaries reveal that during the 18th and 19th centuries there were sales of both land and trees in Southern Tunisia. How frequent these sales were is, nevertheless, unclear. No complete record of sales (as one might expect to find in a notary's register) has been found. It is important, therefore, that the

recognition that sales did take place should be qualified by the admission that there were limitations to the market.

French accounts stressed the importance of restrictive institutions of land ownership, such as the public habous (habous held by the entail, usually a religious institution), in limiting the mobility of land. These were less important in the south than in the north, the region with which the colonial literature was most concerned. Certainly there were not the huge areas of public habous that covered much of Central Tunisia⁴⁵. The mosques and zaouia were, rather, served by scattered plots and trees, and very few of these⁴⁶. Nor, with tribal law paramount, could the cadi's enforce the restrictions on private habous that would keep it out of the land market.

Co-proprietty was a far more important restraint on land sales. First of all the right of *chafa'a* (pre-emptive purchase of shares of land outside the collectivity or, in its most extreme form, the extension of the same prerogative to neighbouring land owners) effectively protected the integrity of the family as a landowning unit whilst land remained in co-proprietty⁴⁷. Secondly the decision to sell or mortgage co-proprietty demanded the unanimous approval of all the co-proprietors. This cannot have been an easy task.

If the land market was immobile as the colonial commentators suggest this immobility must have arisen from far more fundamental limitations within the economy than simply the institutions of landownership. The predominance of subsistence agriculture, the limited penetration of commercialisation, and consequently the limited opportunities for the reproduction of capital and motivation for investment must have played a part. Without a market in which the product of labour could be transformed the marginal returns of investment and labour declined rapidly after the subsistence requirements of the domestic unit had been met. The benefits of capital and labour investment realised in the form of increased income and consumption, must be set against the opportunity cost of more easily realised benefit of inactivity, leisure. A subsistence orientation discouraged investment and capital accumulation. According to the SERESSA report ten olive trees, fifteen figs, and

fifteen date palms could guarantee the needs of a large family for the year. Above this limit the cultivator was producing for sale.

Labour acted as a further restraint on investment. A family of five could comfortably develop and harvest a plantation of 100 trees. Any more than this and the cultivator would have to hire supplementary labour. Similarly in the pastoral sector, one man and an assistant could herd a maximum of 200 head. Any larger and a shepherd would have to be hired. If the tribesmen cultivated trees and cereals as well as herding sheep and goats, as most did, the level of accumulation at which he would have to hire labour would be notably diminished. Hired labour was expensive (sharecroppers took one fifth of the harvest, **mogharsa** (land developers) took half the land, and shepherds up to one tenth of the herd growth) and so, for the medium scale producer, its marginal returns were low. Increased investment in productive resources might even be a drain on a family's income.

Futhermore the returns on investment could be slow to materialise. Sheep and goats produced milk and wool from their first year, their returns could be realised quickly, but olive trees came to fruition at the tenth year and reached full production at twenty. Although new plantations could be built on collective land without charge, the investment in labour was considerable. The land would have to be cleared, water retaining barriers and directing channels would have to be built, and the trees planted and regularly watered during the first years of their life. All this would have to be done without any hope of a return for ten or fifteen years. For these reasons investment was discouraged, systematic accumulation was undeveloped, and disparities in the ownership of the means of production (land, trees, and animals) limited.

Djerba and, to a lesser extent, the Accara provide an illuminating contrast. In their commercially orientated economy the benefits of capital accumulation and large scale production were more easily realised. This encouraged investment in agriculture and the extension of plantations. The value of land was further increased by the population pressure on the island. By the time of the occupation virtually all the cultivable land had been

appropriated. To satisfy the needs of both subsistence and investment the Djerbans had begun to purchase and develop lands on the mainland. The peninsula of Hassi Djerbi was, for instance, largely the property of Djerbans at the time of the French occupation and in their search for land Djerbans had bought property as far afield as Zouara⁴⁸. Their developments were, however, confined to the coast. Further north at Sfax the scale of development was considerably greater. Prince Pückler-Muskau, noted in 1837 that

As far as the eye can reach, Sfax appears to be surrounded by gardens, the number of which, as I afterwards ascertained from official reports, reaches the almost incredible number of fifty thousand.⁴⁹

Commercialisation had encouraged considerable investment and development in agriculture not just by the farmers themselves but also by urban merchants. The tribal areas lacked both the source and the cause of this investment.

Valensi, Cherif, and Memmi have drawn up detailed profiles of the distribution of property for Northern Tunisia, the Sahel and the South's oases⁵⁰. Such profiles cannot be constructed for the tribes in the south because these communities did not pay the taxes on agricultural capital and production whose registers record this type of information. Reports on the tribes written before 1889 provide statistics, admittedly of dubious quality, for the fractions as a whole from which per capita statistics can be culled. These statistics point to a relatively low level of capital accumulation in the pastoral sector (see Table 4.22.). They only contain statistics on the number of trees cultivated for the Matmata and Accara. Statistics which point to the Accra's plantation wealth.

For the early period of the Protectorate (1887-1900) the Biographical Notices and Lists of Guarantors of candidates for government office provide incomplete details (not all property is necessarily included, for example, none of the notices actually lists the number of trees) on a few individuals within the South. These individuals were, it should be stressed, exceptional since candidates and their guarantors were drawn from among the wealthiest

tribesmen. As such they may give an indication of the distribution of wealth within the community. In comparison with the wealthiest individuals in the Sahelian communities they were only middle ranking peasants. The largest proprietor owned only seventeen djessers (see Table 4.13. (other forms of landed property are unavailable on these lists for this period)). If one generously assumes five olive trees per djesser this points to a plantation of only one hundred and five trees, a fraction of the thousands of trees in the largest estates Valensi describes at Msaken and Memmi at Ksar Hellal⁵¹. But despite his limited wealth this proprietor was notably wealthier than his neighbours whose modal property holding was only 4-5 djesser's (and by extension 20-25 trees). Valensi's study of the oasis of Gabès points to a similar concentration of property in the hands of small proprietors with clear disparities in the distribution of wealth, but disparities of a restrained scale⁵². In the distribution of herds (see Tables 4.1., and 4.5. to 4.8.) modal categories were also relatively low 11-20 sheep and goats and 2 camels (see also Table 4.22.) but the range was wider, 2 individuals (6.1%) had over 100 sheep and goats one had 14 camels. One individual that stands out is El Hadj el Rebbai ben Ahmed of the Touazine whose herd of thirty camels and 300 sheep and goats was considerably larger than any other. This, General Leclerc noted, 'constitue un fortune pour le pays'⁵³.

The use of documents listing property holders to draw up distributions of wealth within a community hides the propertyless. By comparing the lists of names on capitation tax registers with those of proprietors and records of the number of indigents both Valensi's and Memmi's studies have revealed that this propertyless group represented at least 10% of the population of the Sahel and Northern Tunisia. Unfortunately this type of data is not available for the South during the Pre-Protectorate period. Nevertheless, inquests into the exemption of tribesmen from the medjba as indigents conducted by French officers allow one to estimate the number of indigents during period 1889 to 1909 in Matmata and the Djebel Demmer (the only communities that paid the medjba at that early date). These inquests, it should be stressed, did not provide

complete lists of those exempted but only of those whose exemption from the tax was the subject of denunciations. Nor did the status of indigents correspond directly with the propertyless, it was only sub-population. Exemptions were only accorded to the poor whose age or ill health made it impossible for them to support themselves⁵⁴. The statistics available, therefore, underestimate the proportion of landless individuals in the total population quite considerably. They do however demonstrate the existence of such a group. An inquest from Tamazredt dated 1908, for instance, classifies nine indigents out of forty four men exempted by the sheikh. At Toujane in 1905 thirty two were exempted⁵⁵. In both cases they represent less than 5% of the total population, but on the basis of this statistic a far larger proportion of tribesmen without property may be inferred. Whether this was the same within the pastoral sector is unclear, even the limited data presented above is not available. Indirect measures such as the available labour in this group could infer that indigents did exist, to suggest what proportion could only be a guess.

4.2. Property and Wealth during the Protectorate: Colonisation.

The Protectorate sought to transform the structures of land ownership to facilitate colonisation. Colonisation was a 'condition nécessaire de notre maintien de Tunisie', an instrument of control throughout the Regence, a means of overcoming the numerical preponderance of the native. It also affirmed French sovereignty against rival powers. For Millet, speaking at Chalons-sur-Marne, colonisation was a patriotic duty⁵⁶. He wanted to see French citizens outnumbering the numerically preponderant Italians and spread throughout the Regence⁵⁷. The American homestead was the ideal, a small French farmer cultivating the land beside the native⁵⁸.

The native population would benefit. 'Le colon qui introduit avec lui toutes les méthodes de culture moderne est un vivant exemple pour le fellah'⁵⁹ and for M. Decker David, whose study of native agriculture was commissioned by the government, colonisation appears was a veritable precondition of native development⁶⁰.

Colonisation, contemporaries stressed, was not a replacement of Tunisians by Europeans but an association between them. Le Boeuf explains

L'association de l'exploitation indigène et de la colonisation européenne s'entr'aidant réciproquement résoudrait bien de problèmes de la mise en valeur du pays. Il manque à l'indigène l'expérience agricole, et les capitaux qui lui permettraient d'augmenter considérablement le rendement de ses terres, incomplètement utilisées. L'européen a besoin de bras pour la culture de terrain, pour ensemer des céréales et de pâturages pour faire de l'élevage. La co-operation de l'élément indigène et du colon peut, en donnant à chacun ce qui il manque augmenter les revenus des deux.⁶¹

To encourage colonisation the Protectorate invested substantial sums in public works and land clearance. It also sought to remove obstacles such as the lack of land for colonial estates.

Solutions to the problem of landownership were not, however, to be brutal as they had been in Algeria, with massive sequestrations of rebel properties and the imposition of European civil law⁶². On the contrary a French Foreign Minister stressed that if colonisation was to be a success

c'est par voie d'infiltration progressive; c'est en évitant tout ce qui pourrait reverter de près ou loin le caractère d'un éviction de ceux qui avaient antérieurement la possession ou les profits du sol.⁶³

Colonisation was to progress within, and under the cover of, 'Islamic' law.

The land problem was solved by the elimination or evasion of institutions and laws that inhibited land mobility. Habous was identified as a particular problem and over the following years it became the target of a campaign of redefinition and evasion that resulted in its gradual dismemberment. Unable to eliminate the institution entirely (the solution adopted in Algeria with the decree of 1844 and proposed by the Commission de Colonisation in 1903⁶⁴) the government resorted to covert means. First of all it was villified as the cause of agriculture's ruin in the colonial press, and then, under the cover of quotations of Islamic legal texts or recourse to Tunisian customary law, means of evading the

restrictions on alienation were introduced (the sale through enzel (a form of perpetual rent after an initial price had been decided by public auction) by the Decrees of 1st July (Article 63), 18th August, and 21 October 1885; exchange under the Decree of 31 January 1898; the authorisation of the Djemaia (government body managing public habous) to cede 2,000 ha. per year to the Domaine for distribution to colonists by the Decree of 13th November 1898; the reduction of the number of payments of rent from perpetuity to twenty by the Decree of 2 January 1905; and with the Decree of 12th April 1913 the extension of enzel to the occupants of all habous, public or private, in the hope that the regularisation of their rights would be followed by their alienation to the European community⁶⁵). The effect of this legislation was to open much of the habous lands to colonisation and, while Tunisians were not specifically excluded, in the following decades nearly 60% of all the habous lands alienated passed into European hands⁶⁶.

There were other targets. The Decree of 1st July 1885 sought to establish a system of land registration that would define the limits and ownership of individual plots and so avoid the contestations (such as the notorious Enfida case involving the right of chefa'a) and insecurities of land ownership to which early colonists had fallen prey. The act would have facilitated the transfer of property rights from the native to the colonial population, but the response from native Tunisians was poor. By 1914 only 5,405 had registered their property⁶⁷.

The extension of the State Domain provided a means of directly transferring land from Tunisian to European ownership. Originally including only the Bey's estates, henchirs, concentrated in the Tell, the category was successively extended to incorporate the forests (decree of 4th April 1890), then to the Bey's donations (such as the 'Sialine lands' surrounding Sfax with the decree of 8 February 1892), and eventually all uncultivated lands without proprietors (decree of 15th January 1896). The decree of 1st December 1897 actually allowed the government to buy estates for redevelopment and sale at favourable rates to French colons⁶⁸.

As the pace of colonisation increased in the mid 1890's both the government and speculators turned their attention to the large areas of tribal land in Central and Southern Tunisia. The decree of 15th January 1896 had already established the State's ownership of these lands but this did not resolve the problem of tribal rights to ancestral lands. At Sfax the definition of the Sialine lands had ignored the rights of the Methellit tribesmen who were evicted in favour of European and Sfaxian landowners. The purchase of 65,000 ha. north of Kairouan by the 'Société Civile Tabia el Houbéira', managed by Baldio Couitéas, had threatened 10,000 Jlass and Souassi tribesmen with dispossession. A public outcry followed, whipped up by the liberal press, and the government had to re-examine the issue of tribal rights.

There was a sense of urgency in their deliberations since 'la colonisation ne pourra se porter dans les régions du centre et du sud tant que la question des terres collectives n'y aura pas été réglée'⁶⁹. It was not simply a matter of protecting the tribesmen, 'les esprits simples', or foolish Europeans such as the Comte de Hédonville who might find themselves swindled with false documents⁷⁰, but one of accommodating colonisation. As Resident General Millet explained to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Ce sont les réserves futures de la colonisation, de même pour les terres oliviers du sud. Il serait entièrement regrettable que, faute de précautions prises en temps utile, elles vissent à tomber entre les mains de spéculateurs de toutes nationalités, à double détriment de la population indigène et de nos futurs colons. Si dans quelques années lorsque des voies de pénétration auront rendus le centre accessible, le développement économique du pays amène dans ces régions l'introduction de l'élément européen et l'acquisition d'une partie du sol par nos compatriotes, au moins faut il que l'état preside à cette répartition du sol, qu'il la dirige, et qu'il ait tout pouvoir pour maintenir aux indigènes toutes les terres nécessaires à leur subsistence⁷¹

There was no question in their minds that the tribes could afford to lose some of these lands. Allegro, a respected expert on tribal affairs, had said as much as early as 1892

avec l'éclosion de la vie sédentaire disparaître forcément peu à peu le besoin d'avoir des grands terrains

actuellement incultes et ne demandent pourtant qu'a produire pourrant être mis en culture en étant livrés à la colonisation.⁷²

The Decree of 14th January 1901 went some way towards a solution. Commissions were established to delimit the areas of collective land. The state reiterated its ultimate ownership of the lands and accorded the tribes rights of use but, by subsequent judgements, effectively prevented the communities from defending or, alternatively, alienating those 'rights' by denying their legal personality. The judgement of the Tribunal Mixte, Sfax, 18 June 1904 allowed the state to appropriate these lands for colonisation or mining without reference to or compensation for the tribesmen⁷³. Where collective rights were recognised the land was paralysed, only the state could secure its privatisation for development, otherwise it had to remain collective and relegated to occasional cereal production.

Legislation enabled colonisation and the transfer of landownership from Tunisians to Europeans. It was not an even process. Colonisation was concentrated in the north of Tunisia, the Medjerda valley, the Tell, and the Sahel, and it is in these regions that historians have documented the process of dispossession⁷⁴. Southern Tunisia was, in contrast, largely ignored by colonists. Early reports dismissed the region. In the interior there was little water, communications were poor, and the colonists feared for their safety surrounded by 'fanatical' tribesmen. Edouard Blanc argued

qu'au point de vue de l'agriculture et de la végétation, ce qui intéresse directement la colonisation, toutes ces contrées sont absolument déshéritées.⁷⁵

Moreover, the Protectorate, while encouraging the colonisation of the far south, was slow to invest in its development. In 1902 Resident General Pichon admitted that the region south of Sousse-Kairouan had been entirely neglected by the government⁷⁶.

The military, moreover, were actively hostile to colonisation. Officers found the colonists insubordinate and repeatedly engaged in tiresome confrontations with the local population. They also saw the extension of colonisation as a threat to their control of the

region⁷⁷. Accordingly, while there was no explicitly anti-colonisation policy, officers were unco-operative towards potential colonists. Local representatives castigated the officers for their indifference at the 'Chambres de Commerce et d'Agriculture du Sud' and in the Consultative Conference⁷⁸. Nor did officers alleviate the colonists' fears of insecurity, the *raison d'être* of military administration, maintaining controls on movement in the south until 1910, and continuing to discourage European travellers as late as the 1920's⁷⁹.

Besides these administrative problems the colonists in the south faced an acute shortage of land. As the Djemaia explained to potential colonists in 1906, there were no large estates to distribute in the far south⁸⁰. Melk properties lacked precise definition and so drew colonists into lengthy and acrimonious ownership disputes⁸¹.

Only one development was attempted in the interior. In 1920 500 ha. of domainal land near Kebili was ceded to M. Le Pont, a war veteran. It was only in 1925, however, when the title for this property was transferred to the 'La Société Commerciale et Agricole du Sud Tunisien', that drilling for the artesian well began. (M. le Pont was expelled from the south as an undesirable). Yielding 400 l/minute the well supported a date plantation and held out the prospects of success, but, although the company survived the following decades it did not flourish. By 1949 it had only developed 130 ha. of the concession and admitted financial difficulties⁸².

Zarzis on the coast was far more successful. The first colons arrived in 1897 and by 1905 there were already eight French or naturalised colonists and five other foreign nationals (see Table 4.26.). There were never many of them (thirteen European landowners in 1921) it was a region of large plantations not homestead colonisation (see Table 4.27.). By 1905 the concentration of investment was already evident: the two largest land owners M. Pellet, who invested one hundred thousand francs in land in his first three years at Zarzis, and M. Patiente already dominated the European land holdings⁸³. Their estates also dominated those of their Tunisian neighbours. Indeed they dominated whole cheikhats. In

1905, for instance, 90% of the land in the cheikhate of Hassi Djerbi was owned by M. Pariente⁸⁴. By 1921 the two largest land owners, the 'Société Franco-Tunisienne' and the 'Société Sidi-Chemmakh', owned 12,000 ha. of olive plantations and 1,000ha. ha. of almonds and figs between them. Of the 40,000 ha. of plantations at that date Europeans owned just under half⁸⁵.

For the most part the expansion of these large estates was piece meal, through the purchase of the contiguous plots (occasionally, Douib and the documents suggest, following intimidation of their owners) and by the development of concessions on the terres collectives⁸⁶. At Zarzis there were no henchirs or habous to form the nucleus of an estate, and the expansion of the colonial plantations depended from the first on the elimination of the native proprietor.

In the same way as the Protectorate 'opened up' the cultivable land in the south it opened up the pastures to colonists. It was an early complaint of the colonial lobby that they could not gain access to the pastures in the collective lands, pastures which, they claimed, were understocked by as much as one quarter⁸⁷. This was untrue. Europeans and investors from Tunis and Sfax maintained 'commercial herds' in the south under the care of local shepherds⁸⁸. During the first decades of the Protectorate as the market for animals and security in the south improved the number of these herds increased markedly. The only restriction was that these commercial herds should not go too close to the border where they might be stolen by Tripolitanian raiders. Nothing was done to protect the South's pastures, which were under pressure by the 1920's, for the tribesmen of the region⁸⁹.

What the government would not allow was a concession of collective lands so that a colonial venture could set up a ranch. This would exclude the tribesmen from their traditional pastures⁹⁰. As it was, the tribes, suffered indirectly from the incremental deterioration of collective pastures brought about by each extra herd in the region. There is reason to believe, moreover, that the commercial herders suffered less from this 'Tragedy of the Commons' than the tribesmen. They could move on when pastures deteriorated

and during the droughts they could afford to maintain their herds on imported straw when the tribesmen could not.

These processes inevitably brought opposition from local residents. Individuals refused to sell their land to colonists, others were pressurised not to. M. Pellet once even faced an enraged mob (his description) when he tried to occupy a plot he had purchased⁹¹. The Europeans exasperated their neighbours. They isolated their plantations with ditches and so neglected the tradition of open pasture. M. Pellet became involved in usury - a profitable but much resented trade. Worst of all, they were arrogant and interfering. Colonisation created a terrible tension within the local community.

This was equally true of Tunisia as a whole. Tunisian intellectuals and liberal Europeans recognised the damage colonisation did to the Tunisian fellah, with its enforced dispossession and subjection to wage labour. Colonisation became a central issue in the Nationalist movement from its inception⁹².

4.3. Property and Wealth under the Protectorate: Changes within the Tribes.

The changes in the Tunisian economy and legislation (legislation introduced by the Protectorate for the purposes of encouraging colonisation) also had effects within the Tunisian community. From the earliest years of the occupation interest in land ownership increased. General Leclerc noted that at Zarzis (the centre of expanding olive plantations) in 1895 'on remarque chez les propriétaires de les parcelles une tendance marquée à regulariser des droits de propriété déjà existants'⁹³. In an increasingly legalistic society the assertion of landownership was only possible with written evidence, and as land became more valuable individuals were compelled to establish and define their rights of propriety in regular acts⁹⁴.

At the same time private property became more personalised. Traditional practices of informal indivision and habous did not disappear, but the number of acts of habous registered by notaries did decline (see Table 4.29.). It is significant that Zarzis saw the

lowest number of habous created in each period. Families turned to acts of donation to exclude their daughters in order to avoid the complications of inalienability the act of habous now entailed (the cadhi's appointed by the government interpreted the acts of habous literally).

This was as true of communities as it was of families. Out in the collective lands the various fractions and lineages sought to regularise and define their rights to large areas of plough land. Millet described this as 'un état possessif inaccoutumé', 'la conséquence naturelle de la sécurité que nous avons créée'⁹⁵. Many delimitations were bitter. Despite the arbitration offered by the officers each dispute, indeed each autumn, brought a fresh round of fights, murders, and riots between herders and plough teams⁹⁶. The military's solution to the persistent problem of public order these disputes presented was to race ahead with delimitations as one of their highest priorities. Indeed so fast did they proceed that by 1940 the delimitations were almost complete (see Table 4.28.)⁹⁷.

All too often speed was won at the price of an imposed solution, where the underlying cause of dispute was never actually resolved and continued to flare up over the following years⁹⁸. Moreover, because delimitations were definitive communities fought tooth and claw to protect their rights. By the 1930's it was common for them to invest considerable sums in the services of a lawyer to present their case in appeals against unfavourable delimitations.

Once the decree of delimitation had been promulgated the borders between tribal lands were marked out by piles of stones. Each community, formerly able to cultivate across the whole djeffara, was now restricted to particular areas (see Map 7). As a result the individual was often forced to cultivate in far from ideal conditions unless he could find and afford to pay achaba in neighbouring and better watered lands⁹⁹.

It was much the same with pastures. Although Résident Général Millet confirmed the principle of open pasture¹⁰⁰, some areas of pasture were even reserved for certain communities, such as that in the extreme south west of the djeffara for the fractions of the Od. Slim (principally the Od. Chehida and Od. Debbab). Moreover, the

definition of collective rights to particular wells by the decrets of 25th January and 15th September 1897 isolated these wells and the surrounding pastures from neighbouring communities. Herders found themselves confined to the limited area where they could get free access to water from communal wells.

The delimitation of collective land was paralleled by the expansion of plantations as individuals sought to establish melk rights to the most productive plots (see Map 6). Mattei had identified this process among the Metelith on the outskirts of Sfax in the early 1890's¹⁰¹. In southern Tunisia the plantations spread inland from the coast and down the valleys from the mountains onto the plain and the former collective lands. Joly described and ventured to explain the process in 1909

Aujourd'hui grâce au régime de paix et de la sécurité que l'administration française fait régner dans le pays, l'ère d'extension des barrages et des jardins tend s'accroître, et ce, dans un façon prodigieuse.¹⁰²

French commentators applauded the extension of private at the expense of collective property because for them 'la propriété du sol est la condition indispensable du progrès'¹⁰³. Only under private property was the individual willing to invest in the land and so develop from a pastoralist to a farmer.

The process was, they claimed, inevitable. Mattei, who had lived in Sfax some forty years, argued that the Metelith 'ont toujours cherchés à devenir sédentaires et propriétaires'¹⁰⁴ and for a later commentator private landownership was a 'disposition naturelle' held in check by the region's previous insecurity¹⁰⁵.

These developments were illicit. Nevertheless, in the absence of adequate legislation the military, eager to establish an agricultural centre among the Touazine at Ben Gardane, participated in the process. They delimited 76 ha. of land in a damp depression and offered concessions on condition of development, without waiting for the land's legal incorporation into the state domain. Initially the Touazine showed only an 'scornful indifference' to this government sponsored intrusion but by 1903 they held the majority of the concessions and future development was assured¹⁰⁶. Encouraged by

this success the military proposed similar developments in Nefzaoua where the concessions could be focused on an artesian well¹⁰⁷. Yet although this method might circumvent the problem of appropriation on a small scale it could not be readily applied to the large areas of collective land.

There were reservations about the process of unplanned 'privatisation'. Investigations into the activities of Amor ben Abd el Malek (a notable of the Od. Yacoub), convinced the military of the need for tighter controls, to quote Cpt. Miquel

pour arrêter ou annuler les transactions illicites, pour empêcher l'accaprement des parcelles les meilleurs et les plus étendues par les puissants de la tribu des Od. Yacoub et leurs amis des tribus voisines.¹⁰⁸

Some of the developers were, moreover, strangers to the fractions whose lands they occupied. Around Sfax, Albi Roget (Députée of Haute-Marne), investigating the plight of the Metelith tribesmen in the early 1890's, showed that Sfaxian developers planted trees and established acts of ownership to areas where they had no legitimate right, so excluding the tribesmen¹⁰⁹. This was equally true of the area around Zarzis. The Accara and Djerbans, communities with a tradition of commercial olive cultivation, were quicker to occupy the best lands than the Touazine. They, for example, were the first concessionaires at Ben Gardane and would have continued to dominate the plantations there if the military had not restricted the number of their plots. Others bought plots at ridiculously low prices, or squatted on the Touazine's collective lands planting a few fruit trees to substantiate their claims of ownership. Many of these developments were, by their very nature, spurious, pre-emptive and speculative.

The Decree of 23rd November 1918 offered a solution to these problems. It recognised the ultimate authority of the state as expressed in the Local Tutelary Council, comprising the local Service officer (as president), the caïd or khalifa, the cadi and two other notables who supervised the administration of collective lands, but devolved the authority upon the collectivity itself as represented by its Council of Notables. The decree provided allowed

this Council to divide part of the collective lands among the households for development (defined in this case by the plantation of sixteen fruit trees per hectare). To ensure that the lands actually were developed the Council appointed an amine to examine the area six years after the division. If the plots reached the required standard the owner received an act of ownership, if not they were returned to collective ownership. The plots were to be divided equally and then, to ensure that the wealthy and influential did not monopolise the best lands, distributed by lottery to each household. To prevent their alienation outside the fraction those who wished to sell or mortgage their lands were required to have the approval of the Tutellary Council.

Unfortunately, the number of plots that were developed under the act is not recorded in the available documents. The statistics of bornage quoted in Table 4.28. include areas remaining under collective ownership besides those plots divided for development. Prost, however, claims that almost half of the lands in the caïdat of Tataouine were distributed under the act¹¹⁰. On the coast at Zarzis, where the plantations expanded rapidly, the process was almost complete by the 1940's¹¹¹. Marty suggests that a large proportion of the olives planted after the turn of the century were a product of the process of privatisation of formerly collective land¹¹². Privatisation, it would therefore seem, progressed rapidly and on an enormous scale.

It is significant that although the act provided for the Council of Notables to reject proposals for division, in the rush for lands none of the cheikhats are recorded as having done so. On the one occasion when an individual did object to the dismemberment of the collective lands, a cheikh of the Mouensa at Zarzis, he is presented in the report as the exception acting against the wishes of his community¹¹³.

But the fact that the privatisation of collective land progressed without opposition may not reflect its universal acceptance. It is clear that for the influential and wealthy few privatisation presented opportunities for capital accumulation, for the remainder it meant only the loss of the most productive

collective pastures and ploughlands. Without any sense of group identity and excluded from the new and powerful administration of the Council of Notables such a group was impotent. Illiterate it was also mute. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that if they did oppose the dismemberment of collective property their opposition goes unrecorded.

Whatever its designs (a review of the procedures in 1925 suggests that the regulation was intended as a means of controlling 'monopolisation'¹⁴), in practice the decree could not overcome the fundamental and underlying inequalities reproduced in and exacerbated by the process of development. The decree accommodated even encouraged the process of privatisation by plantation, yet it did not bring it under control. Pre-emptive developments were encouraged by the decree's protection of existing landowners. Development, far from being the planned process envisaged by the decree, became a rush for the better plots¹⁵. Many of the plantations were extended into marginal areas where their productivity could not be assured and the yearly ploughing precipitated desertification (see Chapter 2).

Measures taken to inhibit the process of 'monopolisation' did not succeed. First of all the poorer tribesmen were not always able to take advantage of the opportunities for development. As Donau explained in concluding a detailed report on development in the south: 'Il ne faut pas oublier en effet que les travailleurs ne possèdent pour débouter d'autre capital que leurs bras'¹⁶. A point reaffirmed in a post-Protectorate study

faut il avoir les moyens de cultiver et lors de la sédentarisation, n'ont pu le faire sur des surfaces suffisantes que ceux disposaient déjà des moyens importants. Ce produit une sorte de colonisation interne au sein du système collectif. Comme le signale un diction sfaxien "l'olivier est un culture des riches avec les pauvres pour le servir".¹⁷

Poorer tribesmen did not have the funds to support themselves over the long period between plantation and fruition, and many were forced to sell their plots. A government report observed

Il arrive fréquemment que les propriétaires de parcelles de terres collectives se croient autorisés à vendre leurs parcelles aussitôt après le bornage et l'allotissement aient été effectués régulièrement et homologues par décret.¹¹⁸

Nor were these processes limited to the newly privatised collective lands. The small landowner whose lands had been held as private property for generations was equally susceptible to the monopolising power of the wealthy few. Indivision reduced many of these older plots in size and families could no longer support themselves on their produce alone. Many were forced to sell up to pay debts or simply provide for their families.

A detailed study of the effects of privatisation in Central Tunisia by Bessis *et al.* goes some way to substantiating these assertions. They describe a reduction in the area of pastures to just over one quarter of the total area of delimited collective lands and their restriction to uncultivable lands on the slopes of mountains. (The area reserved as pastures for the Ouderna in the delimitation of the caïdat of Tataouine was also in the mountains and the uncultivable part of the Dahar). They also show that the privatisation of these lands was not the ordered process that the government would have us believe:

Aucun souci d'égalitarisme, aucune règle successorale stricte, aucune disposition coranique ou coutumière, n'ont présidé au partage et à l'appropriation primaire du sol; celle-ci s'est effectuée de facto, à l'initiative de certaines familles ou des certains individus, selon leurs force et moyens, selon leurs besoins et inclination.¹¹⁹

The decree of 30 December 1935 (based on the decree of 23 November 1918) merely legalised illicit occupation of the soil. Privatisation also allowed the wealthy and powerful to extend their control to the properties of their poorer neighbours. As division through inheritance reduced the cultivable area available to each family many of the smaller land owners were forced to sell up their properties and these were absorbed by the larger estates. Similarly many of the poor were unable to afford the investments necessary to maintain their property and were forced out of ownership. Differentials of wealth were accentuated not removed¹²⁰.

The growing preponderance of the wealthy within the tribe was accompanied by penetration of individuals from outside. The tendency for Djerbans to acquire land on the mainland continued. Some were bought, others the product of development (though markedly less so after the decret of 1918 restricted access to individuals outside the community), and many were guarantees on debts to Djerban usurers. Unfortunately there is no catalogue of the lands they held at Zarzis (the most important area of Djerban colonisation) but a catalogue of Djerban property in the circonscription of Médénine dated 1946 (including the Dakhla el-Mekhalba, an area of minor plantation in the 1920's and 30's) reveals a number of Djerban plantations on the mainland. Sixty four properties are described. Only seven of these were shops or buildings, and two of these were at Dakhla, the remainder were plantations (34 properties), undeveloped lands (17), and lands held in co-proprietty with a local resident (7). The plantations were small, averaging 90 trees, the largest being only 420 trees (of which 250 were olives), smaller than those of Accara plantation owners on the coast, nevertheless they do indicate some penetration¹²¹.

Djerbans were not the only people to take advantage of the opportunities for investment. The Accara's expansion into the interior, such as at Ben Gardane, is probably the most numerically important example, but it was a phenomenon seen among other communities. Individuals from Matmata, for instance, owned irrigated lands in the oases of Nefzaoua and el Hamma¹²². Social barriers to capital accumulation were gradually, though not yet entirely, eroded.

The development of fruit plantations throughout the south brought about a significant increase in the per capita wealth during the first four decades of the 20th century. This wealth was not distributed evenly among the communities of the south. The Accara were by far the wealthiest. Evidence from the lists of guarantors (some of the wealthiest members of these communities) clearly illustrates this. In the Tables detailing the average and the distribution of Standardised Wealth in Francs and the Index of Wealth (Tables 4.3. and 4.15. and 4.16.) for each period the Accara

are clearly identified as the wealthiest community in the south. The same is true of the Index of Wealth (described in Appendix 5) (see Tables 4.4. and 4.20). Of the 105 guarantors in the period 1931-40 over 25% had more than 601 trees (see Table 4.17) most of them held as olives (see Tables 4.2. and 4.9. to 4.11.). Their capital held as livestock, on the other hand, was notably smaller than any other community in the south (see Tables 4.1. and 4.4., 4.5. to 4.8., and 4.19.). But animals were only a small part of their wealth (Table 4.4. and 4.21.).

Distinctions between the remainder of the communities (those of the interior) are less marked. The Matmata, the Haouia, and the Djebalia were the next wealthiest (See Tables 4.3. and 4.4., 4.15. and 4.16., and 4.20.). They too had a substantial capital in trees though significantly lower than that of the Accara. Their largest plantations were dwarfed by the largest on the coast (see Tables 4.2. and 4.4., 4.9. to 4.11., and 4.17. and 4.18.). The Ouderna and the Touazine were the poorest of them all. They owned fewer trees than their sedentary neighbours. Their largest plantations were, however, comparable to their mountain dwelling neighbours. Indeed the statistics for the period 1931-1940 show the Touazine as the second wealthiest community in the south. This is so because the thirty eight individuals described by these statistics all owned substantial plantations at Ben Gardane. As such they are not representative of their community. The distribution of arboreal wealth (see Table 4.2. and 4.4., 4.9. to 4.11., and 4.17. and 4.18.) in preceeding and subsequent periods shows that tree ownership was limited to a minority.

No clear temporal pattern emerges except in the distribution of guarantors' wealth by categories. In each community the proportion of animals in total wealth had declined by the end of the period (4.21.).

Within each of the populations of guarantors the distribution of wealth follows the same bell shaped distribution (see Tables 4.15. to 4.20.). A mass of medium proprietors and a few exceptionally wealthy and poorer individuals. It is a pattern evident not only in the Index of Wealth but in most of the

categories of property (see Tables 4.5. to 4.14.). A pattern that is confirmed by two studies conducted after the Second World War (see Tables 4.23. and 4.24.). (Among the Accara it is the exceptional wealth of the community that disturbs this distribution, since a large proportion of these tribesmen were in the largest category of wealth. Similarly Prost's categories of tree ownership among the Matmata (see Table 4.24.) hide the bell shaped distribution of wealth in Matmata in the 1950's because a large number of tribesmen were included in the highest category). No clear trend is discernable from this data. It is impossible to say whether there was a growing differentiation of wealth within these communities.

It should be remembered, however, that the guarantors were not a sample of the whole population but individuals drawn from among the wealthiest members of their community. Statistical evidence of the poorest tribesmen's wealth is lacking. Lists of indigents recorded in tax inquests were not found in the archives for the period after 1910. Occasionally officers reported individual cases but without comprehensive lists no conclusions can be drawn. Nevertheless incidental evidence does suggest a trend - a growing number of individuals without the means to support their own families and so forced into employment (see Chapter 5). This does not necessarily imply dispossession. With growing fiscal obligations and the series of droughts of the 1930's many became temporary labourers even though they owned land. It may be suggested, however, that the process of division through inheritance and the lack of adequate capital to develop or purchase new lands reduced a growing number of tribesmen to the position of small scale cultivators without the means to sustain their families without a supplementary income. The dissolution of collective property aggravated their situation. They could no longer cultivate opportunistically but depended on their lands alone. If these were limited so was their income. Even among the middle rank of tribesmen there could be difficulties. Development demanded capital and there was little available.

4.4. A crisis of capital.

Access to capital was essential to the tribesmen both for investment and to tide them over in times of crisis. Within the pre-Protectorate economy these needs were usually met by recourse to reserves within the community. Capital was only borrowed outside the community in extraordinary circumstances. This limited the availability of credit but protected the tribes from exploitation through debt. Under the Protectorate although internal sources of capital continued to be exploited, more and more of the tribesmen were forced by a combination of deteriorating trade conditions, the fiscal demands of the government, and crises of the environment, to borrow from outside. As a result many were entrained in the downward spiral of debt, debtbondage and dispossession.

Anthropological evidence suggests that many of the tribesmen's credit needs could be met through mutual aid. Expensive festivities such as a wedding or circumcision feast were financed largely by loans of food or money from close agnates which would eventually be reciprocated¹²³. In much the same way a family finding itself in temporary need, as must often have happened after poor harvest, could borrow food and money. Such loans were informal, they generated no legal paperwork and have consequently gone largely unrecorded in the archives. The sums available for these exchanges are likely to have been small. Few would lend large amounts of money without security. Moreover informal exchange is likely to have been unreliable. In drought years when everyone suffered few could afford to be generous to their relatives and friends.

Larger credits were usually provided as some form of partnership in which the debt was repayed by a partition of the capital after development (as in the mogharsi or in some forms of shepherding contracts (see Chapter 5)). Alternatively where capital was used to purchase draught animals the debt could be repaid by service.

Where the money was lent for an unspecified purpose, perhaps for investment, perhaps to cover some immediate financial need, the usual form was a mortgage. These mortgages were loans of a specific sum against a property, usually a fruit tree, occasionally part of

one, more rarely a group of trees or a djesser (a translation of a mortgage is provided in Appendix IV). Whilst the property was mortgaged the harvest belonged to the creditor, though the debtor continued to tend the trees. Since the debt was repayed at its face value, the harvest was effectively the creditor's interest. The duration of the mortgage was sometimes specified, as in the example given, sometimes not. Some of the acts presented to the Sequestration Committees in 1915 were of some antiquity, one dating from 1868 another from 1894. In such cases the debtor repossessed his property when he paid back the debt. To ensure that the creditor enjoyed the profit of several harvests it was possible to specify a minimum period of indebtedment. The debtor might be allowed to repay the debt by increments, sharing a proportion of the harvest as he paid back the debt. Mortgage contracts clearly allowed considerable flexibility in formulating the relationship between creditor and debtor.

The money that could be realised by such mortgages was determined by the value of the collateral and so was limited. Of the five acts dating from the pre-Protectorate period the highest value was one of 160 piastres the others were all less than one hundred (average 73.4 piastres, lowest 58 piastres). Similarly the collateral of an isolated fruit tree would be unlikely to attract a distant creditor. All the mortgages described from the pre-Protectorate period were between individuals from the same fraction. This may not always have been the case. Mortgages described from the early years of the Protectorate reveal credits between individuals of neighbouring fractions, between Djellidet and Od. Debbab, between Rebaïa and Od. Chehida, but none are from individuals outside the tribal world¹²⁴.

Nevertheless, capital was available from outside the tribe. Wealthy urbanites, Jews, and Europeans were closely involved in the finance of trade into the interior and certainly had the capital to engage debts with the tribesmen. Contemporaries identified money-lenders among these communities, especially among the Jews¹²⁵. In the Sahel these money lenders were important sources of credit, and indebtedment was already far advanced by the early nineteenth century.

Following Zarrouk's suppression of the revolt of 1864 and the massive increase in fiscal demands and fines levied by the state this process was intensified, many Sahelians were ruined and dispossessed¹²⁶.

Credit relationships were unlikely to have been so well developed in the south. Goldberg's studies of Tripolitanian Jewery show that Jews may indeed have been involved in money lending in the interior, but only indirectly, by providing credit for their customers, and only trusted customers at that. There is no suggestion or evidence that they were a source of large credits¹²⁷. The southern economy was very different from that of the Sahel. Tribesmen who commercialised only a limited amount of their produce did not have close relationships with traders like their Sahelian counterparts. Nor, without commercialisation, was there the opportunity to make substantial investment for profit. Lastly the tribesmen did not bear the fiscal burden that weighed so heavily on the small peasant.

It is significant that the only evidence of endebtment to a European merchant is associated with an occasion when the tribes were forced to pay extraordinarily high taxes. In 1840 Paolo Tapia, an Italian merchant and Vice-Consul for the Austro-Hungarian government at Djerba, lent 83,060 piastres to various communities in Neftzaoua pressed by the government for the payment of heavy fines and tax arrears following the revolt against the tobacco monopoly. It was a situation comparable to the endebtment suffered by the Sahel after 1864. The difference was that the government could not enforce repayment in the south. Even though the validity of these loans was recognised by the Beylical government on four subsequent occasions the debts were still outstanding in 1886¹²⁸. To invest in the south was evidently a considerable risk.

Conditions after the French occupation were markedly different. French law would now guarantee loans in the region: capital was secure. At the same time the demand for capital rose markedly. The extension of olive plantations led many tribesmen to overextend themselves financially¹²⁹. It was a scenario Saurin's 'Manuel de

l'emigrant en Tunisie' warned against - the immobilisation of capital in land so that insufficient money was left to maintain the family until the trees matured¹³⁰. At Zarzis where the Accara established large plantations this was a problem by the mid 1920's. By the 1930's it had reached epidemic proportions¹³¹. The problems of indebtedment were exacerbated by the collapse in agricultural prices in the 1930's, droughts and the variability of agricultural productivity, which reduced the tribesmen's effective income. The government's growing fiscal demands had the same effect. Pressurised by the cheikh and caïd some tribesmen contracted debts in order to pay their tax arrears¹³².

To some extent these needs continued to be financed by traditional means, mutual aid for instance. Lists of properties sequestered among the Od. Chehida following the revolt of the Ouderna describe a network of 117 mortgages contracted between 1890 and 1915 within (87 or 74%) and between fractions (30 or 26%). But such mortgages could provide only small sums. The largest of those recorded was only 480 frs. and their average value a mere 122.5 frs.. Moreover, in times of crisis it is likely that whole communities not just isolated individuals found their credit squeezed. As a result the tribesmen were forced to turn to the capitalists within and without the tribe.

It was common practice for shop keepers to sell on credit. Petit's description of shopkeeper's methods in Algeria is as true of Southern Tunisia. The tribesmen

signe le billet à ordre qui par les mots «Valeur reçue en espèces» cache la véritable cause de l'obligation. Au principal de la dette en a ajouté des intérêts arrières calculés à un taux prohibitif, des frais de timbre, sans oublier les intérêts pour l'année à venir qui sont toujours payables en avance. [Then] Lorsqu'elle représente une somme appréciable que le prêteur estime ne pas devoir dépasser celui-ci consolide son titre par une inscription hypothécaire.¹³³

By these means the tribesman found his very capital threatened.

More often than not the moneylender would not lend without some collateral. For small sums this collateral was often jewellery. In Matmata, for instance, the military describe how during the drought

of 1938 'beaucoup des femmes apportent [...] leurs bijoux aux juifs de Matmata qui leurs consentent des prêts de taux extrêmement dérisives'¹³⁴. Alternatively credit was granted *sellem* (against the future harvest) a common method in the Sahel and on the coast at Zarzis. The debtor was given a sum of perhaps half the value of his harvest and when it matured handed it over to his creditor. For larger sums, however, the creditor usually demanded deeds to property as his collateral (Table 4.30. suggests the size of the credits available). The growth of private and personal land ownership thereby facilitated the process of indebtedment. In Zarzis it was common practice for these deeds to be held *rahina*, so that the creditor, whilst still receiving interest for his loan, enjoyed use of his collateral and might even rent it back to his debtor¹³⁵.

It was the interest rate, however, that ensured the debtor's ruin. Where there was no collateral the Contrôleur Civil of Djerba described rates of 120% per year as normal. With collateral commentators have described rates of: between 24 and 60% (Djerba, 1930), 75% (Zarzis, 1921), 125% (Sfax, 1931), 30-60% (Teboursouk, 1931), 90% (Zarzis, 1926), and 135% (Gabes, 1931)¹³⁶. Even at the lower rates of interest debts could quickly get out of control. Lt. Scoffoni quotes the case of two brothers in Matmata who borrowed 12,000 frs. from money lenders in 1925, and whose debt had grown to 70,000 frs. by 1929¹³⁷.

In desperation debtors were forced to sell off their capital to pay for their debts, all too often selling their property to their creditor at much reduced prices. In the case described by Lt. Scoffoni the debtors sold some 300,000 frs worth of land and animals for a mere 88,300 frs. ¹³⁸. The debtor could no longer shelter in dissidence. The government rigorously imposed the law and those were unable to pay their debts were ejected by bailiffs¹³⁹. With their credits guaranteed by the law the usurers were prepared to advance large sums and might charge high interest rates with impunity. For many, Lt. Fourches suggested, the dispossession of the landowner not the income from interest payments was the purpose of granting the loan and the larger the debt the easier that was to achieve.

In the popular press and many of the contemporary reports Jews figure prominently among the usurers. The evidence from the personnel files tends to substantiate these accusations, half the creditors identified in the south were Jews from Zarzis, Djerba, and Gabes (see also Table 4.30.). But Europeans were also involved. M. Pellet lent money to Accara tribesmen and a report from Gabès suggested that garrison officers were active usurers. The Arab newspaper el-Zohra suggested that the Jews were often just fronts for European capitalists¹⁴⁰. Beside them, however, were native Muslims - often merchants from Djerba and Zarzis, but some even from within the tribal communities. A candidate for office among the Zorgane was, for example, branded a usurer on account of the 4,000 frs. he had as credits¹⁴¹. Peddlers were also involved. They sold goods on credit and lent small sums to their customers taking acts of property ownership as their collateral¹⁴². It was the Jews and the Europeans, however, that had the largest sums available for credit. Haouati Fenech a Jew of Zarzis, for instance, had over 100,000 francs in credits to some 118 Accara in the 1930¹⁴³.

Although the archives provide cases of indebtedness from all periods of the Protectorate the sudden growth of concern in the early 1930's, seems to suggest that it became a particular problem with the depression, a view that has been substantiated by Nourredine's study of the Sahel¹⁴⁴. At this time the combination of poor harvests, the declining revenue from sales of agricultural products and the growing fiscal demands of the government forced many to find credit with the usurers. Similarly although cases of usury are recorded from every part of the south it seems to have been a particular problem on the coast at Zarzis. Here many Accara had established large plantations in the boom years of the 1920's. Many had been forced to engage debts to maintain themselves and pay for their investment and when prices fell in the early 1930's they could no longer maintain payments. Chef du Battalion Filio reported a rash of sales and property transfers in late 1931 and early 1932¹⁴⁵.

As the hold of usurers on the rural economy grew during this period so did the tribesmen's resentment. Among Jews and Europeans

it was accepted though disliked, among fellow Muslims it was immoral and unjust, a crime against the religious injunction¹⁴⁸. Worse still it was a crime protected by the law. A study from Eastern Algeria, quoting a tribesmen, reported the sense of bitterness

Les Français ne sont pas logiques. Nous avons été, de tout temps, victimes des usuriers. mais autrefois, nous reprennons de vive force en quelques jours, ce qui nous avait été volé en une génération. Nous le savions, les usuriers aussi. La partie était égale. Aujourd'hui on nous interdit de reprendre par la force, mais on ne fait rien parler vous empêcher d'être victimes. La partie n'est pas égale.¹⁴⁹

True enough the tribesmen did occasionally try and get even. In 1930 a thief who stole Haouati Fenech's register containing the lists of all his creditors became a popular hero¹⁴⁹. But aside from such acts of vengeance there was nothing the tribesman could do. Although some Europeans simply dismissed the problem by blaming the natives themselves

Les causes principales de les pratiques me paraissant résider en premier lieu dans la psychologie de l'indigène qui emprunte à n'importe quel taux et achète n'importe quoi à n'importe quel prix pourvu qu'on ne lui demande aucune somme au comptant.¹⁵⁰

the real cause of the problem was the lack of any alternative source of capital for the tribesmen in need.

The government did attempt to introduce credit facilities that would compete with usurers but they were underfinanced and inappropriate for the tribesmen's credit needs. Whilst the government established and subsidised credit facilities for colonisation in the 1880's and 1890's no comparable services were introduced for the Tunisians. It is true that the government did provide loans of seed grain in 1896 and 1897, loans that were to be repaid within a year at an interest rate of 6% per year, and that Millet began to plan a regular distribution of seed grain (as was already the practise in Algeria) in 1898¹⁵¹. But in 1902 and 1905 these loans amounted to only 39,000 frs. well below region's needs¹⁵².

The government's solution was to establish prudential associations (Sociétés Indigènes de Prévoyance, de Prêt, de Secours, et de Mutualité) by the decree of 20 April 1907. These were not to be financed by a government subsidy (although a loan of 500,000 frs. was provided by the government to get them going) but by the tribesmen who paid a supplement on the capitation tax. In order to ensure their success the decree of 31 December 1909 made membership of such an association obligatory and changed the finance from a voluntary contribution to a compulsory supplement on the tax.

These loans immediately became an important source of credit for the tribes. They saved the tribesmen from the usurers when buying seed for the following year's crops. Although detailed serial statistics for the south are unavailable it is clear that most of the cheikhats participated in the scheme and that the loans could, on occasion be substantial. In 1922, for example, the circonscription of Médenine borrowed 795 qx. of wheat 2,126 qx. of barley, Ben Gardane 1,411 qx. and 2,613 qx. and Zarzis 400 qx. and 800 qx.¹⁵³. National statistics (see Figure 4.1.) show that the number of loans varied considerably from year to year. After a good harvest or if the rains fell late few applications were made¹⁵⁴. Conversely after a poor year or if substantial rain fell in the early part of the year many took advantage of the loans.

The organisation of these loans did not, however, facilitate their use. Requests for loans of seed had to be sent in well before the beginning of the agricultural year. Even so, the seed often arrived after the first rains, too late for their proper use. By forcing the tribesmen to apply for loans at this early date the government forced them to take a risk on the year's agricultural potential. The rich might be willing to hazard a debt which they could not repay out of that year's harvest, but the poor could not. It was for this reason, a report from Médenine reveals, that the rich alone were able to make regular use of the facility¹⁵⁵. The government, moreover, began to restrict the loans. In 1927 a circular insisted that the tribesmen provide the receipt of the animal tax to show their collateral, if they could not they were required to find two guarantors. The very poor were thereby

excluded¹⁵⁶. Worst of all, the loans were based on prices of grain before the harvest, but the tribesmen had to pay back their debts immediately after it when the prices were notably lower (see Figures 3.3. and 3.4.). As a result individuals had to sell much of their harvest to pay their debts.

Nor did the loans of seed grain address the problem of long term credit. The decree of 26 January 1912 allowed the prudential associations to provide mortgages as a means of increasing investment in native agriculture¹⁵⁷. These were to be up to 60% of the value of the collateral and charge interests of 6% on land that had been delimited and 8% where not. They were not an immediate success because the demands for collateral were originally too rigorous and the credits available too small. They peaked in the 1930 at 16,331,830 frs. (only a fraction of the sum available for loans of grain) (see Figure 4.1.). In 1933, with the budget overstretched, the government stopped providing mortgages altogether.

Unfortunately statistics are not available to describe how many of these loans went to the south, but if contemporary reports are accurate the proportion would be small. Lt. Fourches, writing in 1926, argued that it was virtually impossible to secure such a mortgage at Zarzis¹⁵⁸. The acts held by landowners in the south were often inadequate, there were shortages of credit within the associations, and besides the organisations were so bureaucratic that few tribesmen could afford to wait the course of their decision¹⁵⁹.

Nor did the credits offered by the government solve the problems of the very worst off. They needed food not seed. Loans to provide subsistence were provided in drought years from 1913, and rose to a maximum of 6,629,818 frs. in 1925 for Tunisia as a whole. There were those in the government that opposed such advances on principle, they claimed that loans for food discouraged the natives from working for their living and should be strictly controlled¹⁶⁰. As it was the available money met only fraction of the demand in drought years¹⁶¹. Tribesmen having to purchase food to live were still forced into debts with their shopkeepers.

The greatest weakness in the government's credit facility was the lack of capital. Without massive government subsidy, such as the nationalists considered it was the government's duty to provide, the credits were simply inadequate to meet the demands of the native population. As a result the crisis of capital deepened in the 1930's. In 1941 Général Wegard's commission claimed that the problems of usury were as great then as they were in the early 1930's, when they had first claimed the government's attention¹⁶².

Conclusion.

The changing pattern of property ownership, a move from collective and corporate to private and personal property, commercialisation, the growing demands of the colonial state, and the shortage of capital within the native economy allowed and encouraged the accumulation of capital by both Europeans and Tunisians. The other side of this accumulation was the poorer tribesman's impoverishment and dispossession. It was this process that Marx saw as the basis of the transformation in the relations of production and the development of capitalism

when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled onto the labour-market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians. ¹⁶³

But, as the following chapter will demonstrate, the expropriation of land was only one among a number of factors that reduced the tribesmen to a labourer.

CHAPTER 5.

RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

This chapter examines the changing relationship between capital and labour during the Protectorate period, and its implications for the tribesman. The relationship is examined through changes in forms of employment and contract as well as the numbers of employees. It is not just an examination of economic relationships between factors of production, it extends to the basis of social life, how economic power is used. In doing so it contrasts and traces the transition between two very different political economies. The first pre-capitalist, in which economic power was articulated through essentially patron-client relationships and the second capitalist, in which economic power was divorced from social relationships by the distinction between capital and labour. For Marx, writing of the development of capitalism from European Feudalism and the urban guilds, these were two discrete worlds

The economic structure of capitalist society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter set free the elements of the former.'

In Southern Tunisia these two worlds co-existed and, temporarily, co-operated.

5.1. Relations of Production before the Protectorate.

At the time of the French occupation the tribal economy operated within a predominantly domestic mode of production. Production was managed, accomplished, and the product of labour consumed within the framework of the family unit. Relations of production, in this context, reflected the social division of labour and control of its product on the basis of sex and age. This apportioned work and management responsibilities unequally. Women

did most of the work but had little control over the products of their labour. They were 'exploited' by the men².

Women performed all domestic tasks. This was an exhausting requirement:

Elle doit chaque matin, aller chercher l'eau, traire la vache et les chèvres, conduire la vache à pâturage, nettoyer la maison, moudre le grain [by hand], faire la galette, préparer le repas. Et, de le nouveau, l'après-midi, aller prendre de l'eau, conduire le bétail aux champs, préparer la galette et le repas du soir.³

Women also produced the majority of their domestic utensils; and wove clothes and other textiles. Men never shared this work. Women, on the other hand, were frequently required to help in agriculture, the male domain. One traveller remarked that 'les femmes font tous les travaux pénibles, ce sont elles qui labourent et qui font la moisson'⁴. During the Protectorate it was a standing (but incredible) joke that the poorer farmers harnessed their wives beside their camels to plough⁵. Women could not participate in all male tasks. There were taboos against women sowing or planting trees⁶, and women were considered too incompetent to plough. Indeed women were thought too inadequate to carry out most agricultural tasks without some male supervision. The division of labour was clear: women provided unskilled labour, men the skilled labour and management.

Just as men supervised women's agricultural work, men also controlled the means of production. Women owned property (jewellery, animals, sometimes even land) but this was incorporated into and managed with the property of the head of household⁷. The products of female labour were also managed by the males of the household. Fogg describes how, in Morocco, women controlled the marketing and enjoyed the revenues from eggs and smaller items of artisanat. They could, he infers, dispose of this income as they wished⁸. This may also have been true of Tunisia. It is clear, however, that the larger items of artisanat were marketed by men⁹. If this was the case they are likely to have managed the revenue they generated.

Although women were alienated from the means of production and the products of their labour they were not necessarily excluded from

its benefits. A woman's clothing and jewellery reflected her husband's standing. For this reason men were encouraged to spend money on their wives. In a predominantly subsistence mode of production, however, it is not control of income, and hence access to luxury products, but leisure that signifies control of the product of labour. Here men looked after the animals, cultivated the soil, produced a limited range of agricultural tools, but managed to reserve a relatively large proportion of time for leisure. Women, on the other hand, worked constantly. 'Ce qui frappe lorsqu'on entre dans un village Nefzaoua [or elsewhere in the south] c'est le contraste entre l'extrême activité des femmes et l'oisiveté quasi totale des hommes'¹⁰.

Children also contributed to the family's work load. They were employed at an early age, helping first with domestic tasks, then agricultural work, eventually herding¹¹. At puberty the sexual division of labour was enforced, girls worked in the house and boys worked beside their father. From this point the young man worked towards the target of economic and social independence achieved by marriage and the accumulation of capital to support a family. Since most sons were dependent on donations from their father to achieve this goal it would be inaccurate to describe their relationship with their father as one of simple exploitation. Emmanuel Terray comes to the same conclusion in the case of the relationship between the elder and the junior in Guro society.

To sum up [he writes], the elder certainly appropriates a portion of the surplus produced by the juniors, but he uses it mainly to obtain wives for the same juniors and thus gives them the opportunity for emancipation.¹²

It is tempting to see the young woman, on the other hand, as a drudge, working for her family with little hope of escape. Her position was defined by the brideprice her family received from her future husband - a payment for the services they lost.

Not all families could be self sufficient in labour. At the beginning of the family cycle when children were small and near the end when children left, household units often suffered shortages. There were also a range of tasks that required more hands than even

the largest family could supply, the construction of a house or djesser for example¹³. At these times and for these tasks the family called on close agnates and friends for help.

For a large project the public crier would announce the details of what was to be done, what the volunteers should bring, and where and when they should meet. Then, as Dr. Carton describes of building a house in Nefzaoua,

Au jour fixé, 40, 50, 60 hommes se trouvent réunis au point indiqué. Quelques-uns ont amené des ânes ou des chameaux pour transporter l'eau et les briques nécessaires. Le propriétaire a loué pour la circonstance deux maçons se que les autres aideront et quelques musiciens. Ce sont les seuls personnages que l'on rétribue. Les autres auront, pour salaire, un plat de couscous chaque soir, des quartiers de mouton, mangés en un festin quand tout sera fini.

Dès que tout ce monde est réuni, les maçons se mettent à l'oeuvre, les musiciens jouent de leurs instruments, fifres dont ils tirent des sons aigus, tambourins qu'ils frappent avec frénésie.

Quant aux autres, ils travaillent suivent leurs goûts et leurs aptitudes, les uns gâchant le mortier, les autres apportant des pierres ou construisant le mur avec les maçons. Et tout ce monde se précipite, riant, chantant, courant et se bouscoulant. Quand l'un est las d'avoir gâché, il va rejoindre un autre qui porte les briques, lequel pour se reposer va se mêler aux chanteurs. Il y a, en effet, un groupe qui chantant ou plutôt, qui crient à tue-tête. Ce sont ces artistes qui règlent l'allure des travailleurs.¹⁴

The essence of this mutual aid was reciprocity rather than remuneration¹⁵. Individuals might vie in the generosity with which they entertained their assistants but repayment was only in kind.

Mutual aid was a way of life. Accounts from Southern Tunisia and elsewhere in North Africa reveal mutual aid in every agricultural task, the ploughing group, harvesting, threshing the grain, transporting it to the ksar, harvesting olives, searching for a lost animal, involving not only labour but the loan of animals and tools. Women also co-operated, sharing the irksome tasks of the household, collecting water and grinding grain, they would stand in for each other if they were ill or pregnant, and even share the work involved in artisanat, the spinning of wool for a burnous or a

bakhnoug, for instance. Although their groups might be less formally constituted (there was no communal meal to reward the participants) the obligation to reciprocate was just as strong.

It was a flexible system that enabled the family to complete all the tasks necessary to survive. Yet even with its complex web of debts and credits the system was sensitive to exploitation. Some individuals were able to build up substantial debts, men with young families, for example, and some, such as widows, without any hope of repayment, but the individual who was seen to take more than he or she contributed was identified as anti-social and shunned. There was a powerful sanction to co-operate.

Mutual aid was incorporated within the domestic mode of production. Individuals may have performed tasks in groups but the products of their labour were private property. Mutual aid supplemented domestic labour it did not define a distinct production unit. True most mutual aid relationships were between members of the same lineage, but the groups that co-operated were not rigidly defined or immutable. In no sense was there a 'lineage mode of production'.

Families with a persistent shortage of labour, particularly where this shortage was demand led (through a wish to build more djessers, to keep a larger herd, to plant more trees, or, for the very wealthiest, to increase the amount of leisure time), could not expect the continued assistance of their neighbours and relatives. Nor, given the obligations that such help would establish, would they have wished to use their assistance. In these circumstances the solution was to employ labour from outside the family.

There were four main types of labour available. The first slave labour, was, if it had ever been important in the south, in decline at the time of the French occupation; the second labour contracted for a long period, a year sometimes more; the third temporary labour hired as and when the need arose; and last of all labour shared with capital through co-propietorial associations. The type of labour the employer sought depended largely on the skills he required, but also on the capital available.

The labourer's origins also varied. There were those who came from the propertyless poor, those who had almost enough to live on but who supplemented their income by labouring, those who were forced to labour at a point in their lifecycle, and, last of all, the professionals whose labour and skill was, like the labourer, their only resource. For each group the opportunities and conditions offered by work differed according to the type of contract on which they were engaged.

At one extreme was the absolute control and complete expropriation suffered by the slave. Although slavery was abolished in Tunisia by Ahmed Bey as early as 1846 reports by the British consul suggested that the slave trade, and, presumably, slave ownership, continued. In 1861 Henry Wood told Lord Russell that he had evidence of 'the clandestine trade in slaves carried out between the Central Africa and this Regency through the Wirghamma Arab tribe'. An accusation repeated ten years later¹⁶. The truth of these claims was demonstrated after the French occupation by the discovery of slaves in bondage, some of them mere children, both in the capital and the Provinces. By 1890 some 107 slaves had been liberated and, government reports admitted, there were still considerably more in the towns and, according to unsubstantiated reports in 'La Dépêche Tunisienne', the far south¹⁷.

Most of the slaves liberated after the French occupation were household servants, and more than half of them were women. This was usually the case in North Africa, and throughout the Middle East, where slaves were expensive, primarily an urban phenomenon and so rarely used as agricultural labourers. The slave was more a symbol of wealth than a means of production. Certainly there was no plantation system as there was in the West Indies.

In the south, however, the distinction between domestic servant and labourer seems to have been blurred, with the same individual fulfilling both tasks. Travellers' reports indicate that the negro slaves did work in the fields, indeed reports from Nefzaoua, Ghadames and the Central Saharan oases suggest that the slaves did much of the labouring work in these regions¹⁸. Whether this was also the case in the less intensive agricultural and pastoral economy of

the tribes outside the oases is unclear. Among the Saharan Tuareg slaves did perform many of the agricultural and herding tasks beside their masters'¹⁹. Similarly tradition in Matmata claims that at one time slaves did much of the agricultural work, but there is no documentary evidence of slave labouring outside the oases²⁰.

After manumission many **chouachine** (freed slaves), remained with their former 'masters'. Some were compelled, some were tricked by tales of pressganging and arrest in the cities, others stayed by choice where they were guaranteed a job and a living²¹. Brunn pointed out that in Matmata most of the negroes were associated with a family, often as servants or, to use his term, retainers, their accomodation and food provided by their employer/master²². A detailed account of a Sian douar (see Table 7.6.), for example, shows a forty year old chouachine resident in his employers tent.

Most of those chouachine who were not employed within the family were still reduced to a dependent position. Like other tribesmen without property of their own they were forced to find work as labourers. Some of these were engaged as **khammes** (sharecroppers). Because the khammes was remunerated with a fifth share of the harvest he was forced to contract debts with his employer to feed his family throughout the year. The debt was crucial to the employer since it effectively bound the khammes. Often the employer provided supplementary loans (to tide the khammes over between contracts, for example) and set exorbitant rates of interest on these, compounding the khammes' endebtment. If there was a good harvest the khammes might be able to liberate his debts but would have to find a new contract to maintain himself for the coming year. If the harvest was bad his debts went unpaid and collected interest.

The decree of 14th April 1874 did nothing to protect the khammes against this endebtment and ensured that once trapped he became, to use Zaucho's expression, 'un serf à perpétuité'²³. Although each contract began in September and finished after the harvest, at which point the khammes was free to seek a new employer, Articles 27 and 30 obliged those still in debt to renew their

contract. Worse still, article 32 ensured that the khammes, could never escape his condition by decreeing that

le khammes ne peut abandonner son état qu'en devenant agriculteur lui-même, et s'il lui est impossible de le devenir et qu'il quitte son état pour entreprendre un autre métier ou simplement pour rester oisif, etc., le caïd l'obligera à renouveler son contrat avec l'agriculteur chez lequel il servait ou à exercer son métier chez un autre.²⁴

The same act defined the khammes' responsibilities generously in favour of the employer, making him carry out 'tous travaux hiver et été', and the maintain the tools and animals as well as cultivate. The contract became 'an obligation as an entire person not simply as a worker'²⁵, and he could be called on to perform any task however menial. The decree also regulated payment so that deductions for tax and animal feed were made before division of the harvest into the appropriate shares (Article 26). The government further recognised and reinforced the khammes dependence by making the employer responsible for his khammes' taxes. These were added with interest to the khammes' burden of debt for repayment at harvest time.

In practice, however, the khammes was neither so constrained or exploited as the decree of 1874 would suggest. Much of the legislation remained a dead letter (Van Krieken found only two references to judicial proceedings enforcing the infamous article 32 in his review of the documents from the pre-Protectorate period). Relations between the khammes and his employer were more often regulated by traditional law. This allowed greater flexibility. Remuneration, for example, fixed at one fifth of the harvest by the decree, varied according to the region, crop, and the khammes' capital contribution. In regions where the yields were low, harvests unreliable, and the crops low value the khammes' proportion of the harvest increased. In the north, Rectenwald claimed, the khammes might receive as little as 1/10th of the net harvest. In the south, outside the oases, the proportion was 1/3rd. For the best quality *degla nour* (dates), the proportion fell to as little as 1/12th (see Table 5.1.). Those who provided their own seed, animals, tools,

received added increments of the harvest, sometimes amounting to half the total. For the individual with some resources of his own, therefore, the status of khammes was far more favourable. For those who had nothing but the strength of their arms the constraints were difficult to avoid.

Most of the khammes recorded in the documents were chouachines, Tripolitarians, or from tribes other than where they worked. An inquest at Tamazredt dated 1909 lists fourteen, all of whom came from outside the community (6 Haouia, 3 Dehibat, 3 Merazigue and 2 Tripolitarians). None of them had any property of their own²⁶. Tribesmen probably preferred to find demeaning employment outside their home community. It is also significant that all fourteen of these recorded in the inquest were young (the oldest was 28 and youngest 17) and unmarried. They were, most probably, trying to earn enough money to establish a home of their own. This might imply that, in the tribal context at least, the prospects of the khammes were not as bleak as the 1874 decree would have us believe - they had the opportunity to escape indebtedness. It is, however, premature to jump to such a conclusion on the basis of fourteen individuals and unfortunately there is no other documentation to substantiate this hypothesis.

The Tell, was the zone of sharecropping *par excellence*. There land was predominantly private property. The estates were large and a large proportion of the landowners absentees. For them sharecroppers, who could do much of the agricultural work without supervision, were ideal. In the south (outside the oases), by contrast, most of the cereals were grown in the collective lands and there were no large estates. Consequently the khammes was rare. Most of the documentary references to khammes are from the mountain region and Zarzis. These were the two regions of private land ownership and sedentary/plantation agriculture. But even there few tribesmen had the capital to warrant or sustain a full time employee. Nor was there such a shortage of land and excess of labour in the south, as there was in the Tell and the oases, that would compel tribesmen to accept such conditions. For all but the poorest there were alternatives.

The shepherd or camel herder enjoyed greater freedom, greater status, and greater opportunities. He was bound to his employer by a verbal contract not debt bondage. Contracts were made for a period of one year, beginning and ending with the shearing in April and early May. The herd owner gave the shepherd a coat, a shirt, a pair of shoes, and his food for the year (50 kg of barley per 25 animals (which, boiled in water, would form the staple of his diet), some figs and olive oil). The shepherd supplemented his diet with milk and cheese from the herd. When the herdowner visited the pastures he fed and lodged his shepherd. The herdowner also paid the expenses of the herd itself, achaba for instance, and shared the cost of a *molhag* (young boy acting as the shepherds assistant). At the end of the year the shepherd chose one lamb or kid per twenty five animals in his care. In a large herd of two hundred and fifty animals this could amount to quite a considerable sum. What is more the payment was guaranteed whatever the growth of the herd and was quite distinct from the payments at the beginning of the year, they were not an advance but part of his income.

For a camel herder the situation was very much the same. He was provided with food, sometimes at the beginning of the year sometimes at regular intervals, but no clothing since, unlike the shepherd, he travelled with his family. Throughout the year they had exclusive use of the products of the herd. His remuneration was, again, one young camel for each twenty five adults he guarded.

There were local refinements on the basic principle of this contract. Some sedentary communities, for example, precisely defined the proportion of the animal products taken by the shepherd²⁷. Other contracts differed in principle. Maurin suggested that some shepherds, particularly in Algeria, may have taken their food and clothing, even the value of the herd, as an advance which would bind them in the same manner as *khammes*. He and Berger-Vachon also describe a contract in which the remuneration of the shepherd was a proportion of the growth of the herd, and so was not guaranteed, again more favoured in the north and Algeria than Southern Tunisia. Lastly there was a simple payment of a fixed sum per animal, more common among the camel herders than the shepherds²⁸.

Shepherds and camel herders were specialist labour with a keen knowledge of the needs and weaknesses of their animals. Their work was lonely and demanding. Although shepherds were sometimes hired from within the community, even among the sedentaries, most preferred to hire specialists. Even among the semi-nomads and nomads shepherds were often hired from outside the community as two lists of herds crossing the Tripolitanian border in 1894 demonstrate (see Table 5.2.).

Perhaps shepherds were reluctant to find employment within their own fraction. It may also be that there were advantages to hiring an outsider. For the mountain communities a shepherd from neighbouring plains tribes assured them access to pastures, and so the Djebalia hired shepherds among the Ouderna and the Matmata among the Beni Zid and Merazigue²⁹. Certain fractions had, moreover, acquired reputations as specialists. The Rebaïa were commonly regarded as the best camel herders and dominated the profession. The Dehibat and Aouin were similarly esteemed as shepherds³⁰.

Shepherds, despite their specialist skills, did not form a professional class. They were still employees drawn from among the poorer members of those communities that practised the trade. Those records that survive of the shepherds identify them as propertyless or poor, and predominantly young³¹. For them herding provided a means of earning the capital to pay a brideprice and establish their own household. One finds, for instance, that a family of Ciane with only thirty sheep and goats of their own, had two sons employed as shepherds among the Beni Zid³². The inquest from Tamazredt already quoted similarly describes eight shepherds (5 Merazigue and 3 Dehibat) aged between nineteen and twenty five. Again none of them had any property of their own³³.

The prospects of advancement as a shepherd were, certainly, greater than those of the khammes. The shepherd might eventually form a herd of his own. It would, however, be a lengthy process. If a shepherd managed a large herd of two hundred and fifty animals and did not sell any of his capital he would own fifty head in five years, one hundred and thirty if one assumes a herd growth rate of 50%. Unfortunately there is no evidence to test such a hypothesis.

There are no documents that trace the life of such an employee. The existence of older shepherds with families of their own does suggest, however, that not all were able to shake off the role as employees (though some of these may have been forced into employment through the loss of their own herds)³⁴.

For the employer a shepherd or a khammes offered a substantial increase in the amount of available labour. But they were expensive. Each year one fifth or one third of the cereal harvest was lost, or in the case of a shepherd 5-10% of the herd growth. Many lacked the capital to make such a sacrifice. Herdowners usually had too few animals to warrant the employment of a shepherd. A solution was found in a system of payment in kind (usually cereals, figs, and oil) per head, otherwise the shepherd might combine herds from different herdowners, receiving payment from each in proportion to the number animals they contributed³⁵. In agriculture the problem was not so much the need for permanent labour as one expects on a large estate but seasonal shortages at ploughing and harvesting.

This need was met by the agricultural labourer, the *adjir*. These individuals, and their families, could be hired from day to day or task to task. They were usually paid in kind and were fed by their employer but were rarely given accommodation³⁶. Individuals wandered throughout the south in search of, and in large measure living off, this work. Many of them came from the Chouachine fraction of the Ghebenten³⁷. Others remained within their own community, presumably finding jobs between intermittent bouts of unemployment. Their numbers are impossible to assess. An enquiry into a tax fraud at GuerMESSa in 1897 provides some details, but, since it lists only those individuals implicated in the fraud, they are incomplete. On a *medjba* register of 259 adult males, eight (3%) were inscribed as day labourers. Only half of these were resident in the village³⁸.

Beside those dependent solely on day labouring for their income were a potentially larger group for whom temporary agricultural work overcame a deficiency in resources regularly, because of their

position within the lifecycle, or as a response to financial crises. They were supplemented by migrants from outside the region, from Tripolitania and the Saharan oases. When there was a Saharan drought (as in 1892) many arrived, in other years there were few³⁹.

An alternative to employment was co-proprietty in which shortages of labour, and capital, could be overcome by sharing the costs and work of production and development. A poor individual could form an association with a wealthier man, the one providing the labour and the other the capital, but both sharing the product. A draught animal could be purchased wholly or in large part by the 'capitalist' and the labourer provided the costs of maintenance. At ploughtime the labourer would have the use of the animal and would remunerate the 'capitalist' by ploughing some of his fields or, more often, paying the capitalist a proportion of the harvest, one sixth or one fifth⁴⁰. Thus one finds Sliman ben Saïd ben Moussa a cheikh of Guermessa with a total of eight camels in co-proprietty, only two of which were in association with Guermessi. The remainder were among the Haouia and the Ghomrassen and cannot have been used by the cheikh⁴¹. Alternatively the poorer individual could borrow a camel to do his ploughing and repay its owner with a share of the harvest⁴². In much the same way the 'capitalist' might provide half or more of the capital for a herd the maintenance and shepherding of which was left to the labourer. During this period the labourer consumed the products of the herd and, at a stated time, the herd was divided equally between them⁴³.

The principle of equal division was also used in **mogharsa** contract. A landowner wishing to develop a plot would contract with a labourer to clear the land, build a tabia or djesser and plant trees. The labourer received only a small advance and defrayed all the costs of development. Then, at the moment of fruition, the land and trees were divided equally between owner and the labourer and the association was dissolved⁴⁴. The labourer could not depend on the land as a source of income for at least the first decade and yields remained low, if he planted olives, well into the second. An independent income was, therefore, essential for the mogharsi. Despite this limitation, and the mistaken belief held by the

colonial writers that it was restricted to the region of Sfax, the contract was popular in the south and probably accounted for much of the development of the region, particularly the spreading olive plantations around Zarzis, at the time of the French occupation⁴⁵.

In theory the mogharsa contract enabled the mogharsi to develop his own capital, but in practice many may have been unable to do so. Many mogharsi lacked the means to sustain their family while they waited for their trees to mature and were forced to contract debts, usually with their co-proprietor. When the contract was dissolved the mogharsi had to sell some or all of his share of the property to liberate the debt and was forced to engage in yet another contract. For those without capital of their own the ideal of the independent cultivation was lost to the reality of a persistent debt-bondage.

For the landowner the weakness of the mogharsi system was its inability to provide a permanent source of labour. There was no means of avoiding this problem in Southern Tunisia at the time, the landowner was ultimately and intimately involved in the management of his resources. Rents allowed the landowner to exploit the land indirectly in the North⁴⁶, but no such system existed in the south. Although the principle of achaba, the payment of a rent on collective land, was well established there was no organised market for renting land. The one example available, an act dated 1754, is deceptive. The contract was merely a recognition of landownership without an attempt to expropriate the surplus product through rent⁴⁷. The south lacked the large estates and absenteeism that required indirect methods of cultivation. While there were those who could buy themselves increments of leisure by supplementing their own labour with that purchased outside, none had a sufficient estate to divorce himself entirely from the productive process.

For the poor opportunities for employment were not limited to the south. That shepherds and khammes were imported from the Provinces to the east and south Tunisia has already been alluded to above. But Southern Tunisia also exported labour. Every year tribesmen, labourers by profession or landowners seeking to supplement their income, moved north to work temporarily in the Sahel or the Tell where the harvests, beginning later, did not

conflict with the requirements of agriculture in the south. At the end of the harvest they returned south. A report of 1893 explains how the people of Menchia in Nefzaoua

chaque année vont, pendant une période de trois à quatre mois, s'employer aux travaux agricoles dans le nord de la Régence et se créant ainsi des ressources suffisantes.⁴⁸

It was a pattern followed by tribesmen throughout the South

A l'époque des moissons les habitants de la vaste région montagneuse qui s'étend du Nefzaoua à la Tripolitaine remontant vers le nord et vont offrir leurs services jusqu'à la plaine du Bône. Ils ne font pas moins de vingt jours de marche pour gagner quinze ou vingt francs qu'ils emportent presque intacts au pays.⁴⁹

There is no statistical evidence that might allow one to assess the numbers involved. It is clear, however, that the numbers were variable. During droughts their ranks swelled, in years of good harvests they shrank.

The cities, not just in Tunisia, as far afield as Algeria and Tripoli, also benefitted from immigrant labour. In contrast to the agricultural labour, originating almost entirely among the nomadic communities, those that worked in the cities were mostly Djebalia⁵⁰. Each village had a virtual monopoly on a profession, or a part of the town from which they sold their services, which it jealously guarded (see Table 5.8.). Most worked as salesmen, a few as labourers, or provided specialist services (the Chenini, for instance, were cooks)⁵¹. Whilst the migrants from the nomadic communities were short term residents in the north, the Djebalia seem to have spent years away from their villages. A report from Guermeza dated 1896 shows how twenty six migrants had been away an average of one year and nine months and the longest three and half years. Another report of much later date, 1911, shows how thirty four Beni-Aissa had spent an average of one year and six months at Tunis, with two individuals having been away for five years. In both communities there were a few who, resident away from their cheikhat so long, had been inscribed on the city's tax registers⁵². Nevertheless, secondary sources assure us, none of these villagers became permanent residents of the city. All of them eventually

returned to their village to marry and work within their community. Many returned annually to carry out agricultural work and participate in the summer religious festivals and weddings. In their absence their families depended partly on remittances the migrant sent home, and partly on the product of the land, cultivated by their wives, neighbours, or sharecroppers. On their return their savings were invested in marriage, land, and animals. Migration was simply an extension of the village economy and employment in the north a means of achieving economic independence.

Substantial numbers were involved. Blanchet visiting the Djebel Demmer in the mid 1890's suggested that almost 1/4 of the adult male population was resident in Tunis⁵³. The inquest at Guermessa confirmed as much, 133 adults from that village were resident in Tunis or other towns in the north (Souk el Arba, Sousse, Sfax, and Bizerte), over half the adult males in the village⁵⁴. 'C'est surtout dans l'emigration qu'ils puisent des ressources' Fallot claimed of the villages of the Djebel Demmer⁵⁵. Elsewhere the proportions seem to have been lower. The inquest at Beni Aissa dated 1911 suggests (the list may not be complete) between ten and twenty percent of the population, and a military report describes the migrants at Chenini as 'quelques uns d'entre-eux'⁵⁶. These numbers may have varied from year to year, many more going north during droughts than after good harvests.

Employment in this period was, for those with a modicum of funds, a means of achieving economic independence. The sharecropper who could afford to provide his own seed and provisions for the year, or the mogharsi who could invest money for as long as two decades before reaping the benefits, profited from their employment. The very poor could not. For the khammes trapped in his debtbondage, the day worker eeking out a living between jobs, even the shepherd trying to amass a herd of his own from his yearly income, there was little prospect of escape from employment and servitude. Relations of production were balanced not so much in favour of the wealthy as against the poor.

But if the relations of production did not elevate them from their dependent status, their relationship with their employer,

expressed in the personal terms of patron-client and reflected in their total social position, provided them with the means of living and some security. In this pre-capitalist mode of production relations of employment implied responsibilities and obligations beyond those expressed in the contract. If the khammes owed obligations to his employer as a 'whole person' the employer was responsible for his employee. That the government collected taxes from the khammes through his employer indicates the reciprocity of the relationship. There was a moral obligation for the employer to ensure that his employee/retainer did not starve. Debtbondage may imply a perpetual servitude but it also implies the employers obligation to throw good money after bad, to lend to the khammes with the realisation that the debt could never be repaid. In this sense they were better off than the day labourer, nobody felt any obligation to look after them.

5.2. Changing Relations of Production under the Protectorate.

French commentators described the policy of the Protectorate as a 'politique d'association' between Tunisian labour and French capital. The weakness of the Tunisian economy was ascribed, in part, to a lack of capital and management skills. This was to be remedied by importing French colonists. They, in turn, would lack labour and so would employ Tunisians who could learn new techniques whilst gaining a much needed income. Both would benefit⁵⁷. However laudable their intentions the practice of colonisation and economic change during the Protectorate was to reduce many Tunisians to a deplorable condition of insecure dependency.

During the first decades of the Protectorate the demand for labour, and consequently its price, rose. Colonists complained about the shortages and that the established forms of contract were expensive and unsuited to their needs⁵⁸. A khammes, for example, could only be engaged after the colonist had liberated all his debts. Shepherds and mogharsi demanded larger advances from colonists than they did from Tunisian employers⁵⁹. At Sfax the cost of a mogharsi in 1900 (the size of the advance and the supplementary payments) had doubled since Bourde's report in 1893⁶⁰. Even the day

labourers were up to one quarter more expensive for the colonists to hire⁶¹. At harvest time the problems were particularly grave. An article in the *Dépeche Coloniale* in 1911, for example, claimed that the daily rates for harvesters had risen two and a half times since the occupation to 2.5 francs per day⁶².

Although the demands on the labour market were greater in the north (where the colonial estates were concentrated) the south did not escape the shortages. A report on *main d'oeuvre* at Zarzis in 1920 explained that since 1913 the real price of labour had doubled at least. This had only reduced the labour supply since, the harvesters, working to supplement their income, 'cesse tout travail de que ce minimum est atteint' and now worked only seventeen days in the month rather than twenty two as they had in 1913. Worse most of the labourers arrived in Zarzis only after their own agricultural work was complete so that

De plus en plus il devient difficile d'exécuter les travaux en période utile. Quelquefois, les années de bonne récolte dans les territoires voisins cette *main d'oeuvre* manque du bon moment. [...] Pour le cercle de Zarzis la crise se traduit [...] malgré l'extension des exploitations agricoles, [en] un rendement inférieure à celui de 1913.⁶³

To some extent the problems of the north and the plantations on the coast were alleviated by drawing on the South and the interior as a reserve. It was a process encouraged by the higher wages in the north and the growing poverty and proportion of landless in the south. As the Commandant at Kebili explained

Des raisons de pauperisme qui dérivent les unes du pays lui même, les autres de l'imprévoyance de l'inhabitant, ont crée - depuis l'occupation française - un courant qui conduit, chaque année vers les pays situées au Nord, la partie la plus misérable de la population.⁶⁴

The same factors enabled the north to draw on previously untapped sources, communities that had in the past ignored or looked down upon the opportunities of seasonal work. Captain Maquart describes the tentative beginnings of this migration at the turn of the century among the Haouia, a few families from the Djebah and Djouama, working during the winter at Djerba, Gabès, and el Hamma.

In the following years the numbers participating gradually increased, until in the 1930's almost half the adult males of these cheikhats took part in the winter migration of olive harvesters⁶⁵. Gradually the practice of migration spread throughout the south.

As in the past the number of migrants varied from year to year. Whilst the harvests were good few went north, and those that did were largely drawn from the landless poor. In drought years many landed proprietors went north to make up for the loss of revenue and capital from ruined harvests and decimated herds. The failure of rains in the winter of 1912, for instance, saw the distribution of 2,000 travel permits in Tataouine alone⁶⁶. During the 1920's 30's and 40's the pulse of migration, high in drought years such as 1936 otherwise relatively low, can be easily seen (see Table 5.11.). Although the colonists resented, even feared, these migrants, they wished them controlled and directed to the areas where they were most needed; not stopped. They were far too important a source of agricultural labour for such an extreme solution (see Appendix IX).

Nor was the demand for labour growing in the agricultural sector alone. The same combination of push (the growing proportion of landless and need for revenues to pay taxes) and pull (the higher wages in the cities) factors encouraged increasing numbers of Djebalia to migrate north. Most of these continued to work in the traditional specialisations, but, as the numbers of migrants in the towns increased they were forced into new occupations and to new towns. Jemai has modelled the process of diversification on the basis of data from Matmata⁶⁷. He points to the migrants' gradual dispersion. With the market saturated in Tunis the migrant baker was forced to penetrate new areas, Medjez el Bab, Béja, Le Kef, and Bizerte. Gradually, as the migrants learnt new skills, high wages in other professions drew them away from their traditional occupations. It was a slow process. The migrants were still concentrated in traditional professions as late as the 1960's. Nevertheless the tentative beginnings of a new diversification can be seen.

Ultimately attention was turned to the even better paid employment opportunities offered by France⁶⁸. It was a process initiated by the government. With conscription draining French

industry and agriculture during the First World War the government called on the colonies to make up the labour shortage⁶⁹. A circular of October 1915 asked caïds to investigate the potential for exporting labour either to the industries in Northern Tunisia or France⁷⁰. These Colonial Workers were to be volunteers, employed on six months and one year contracts, their living expenses paid by the government and earning a small wage. Naturally the government preferred to employ those with technical or factory experience and their first recruits (1,000 men sent over in May 1916) were Tunisoises. Beside them, however, were almost 100 workers from Matmata⁷¹. Thereafter the government regularly recruited from the South. Matmata and the Nefzaoua (traditionally areas of temporary migration) were the most important source (see Table 5.7.) but the net was gradually spread wider and eventually included volunteers from all over the south. In Matmata the volunteers were supplemented by conscripts rejected by the army (see Table 6.6.).

With experience of France and new skills learnt as a soldier or factory worker these migrants could escape the traditional occupations of the migrant labourer. France continued to invite immigrants from the colonies after the war but, although many Algerians took advantage of the opportunities, few Tunisians responded. The only statistics from Southern Tunisia, gathered by Jemai in the two villages of Taoujoudt and Zeraoua, indicate that only a handful of migrants returned to France before the 1950's⁷². The explanation lies partly in the difficulties Tunisians encountered in emigrating, partly in their reluctance to migrate so far from their villages (most migrants in Tunis could and did return to their homes once a year), and partly in their experience in France during the war. In contrast to the Service's claims that the Colonial Workers were well received in France, the Ministry of Colonies painted a very different picture of racial harassment and violence, attacks on immigrants even riots directed against them⁷³. Faced with this hostility it is not surprising that few wanted to return.

The growth of Tunisia's economy and high wages had, in fact, made Tunisia a net importer not exporter of labour before the First

World War⁷⁴. Tripolitarians regularly crossed the border attracted by the high wages. Some came from as far afield as Fezzan. Most were poor and many were negroes (hence the epithet 'soudanaises' indiscriminately applied to these labourers). During droughts large numbers arrived. The Contrôleur Civil of Kairouan, for example, described how Central Tunisia was 'envahie par un grand nombre de nègres venant de Tripoli' during the Saharan drought of 1892⁷⁵. These were men, Leclerc explained, who 'préfèrent s'expatrier et chercher gagner leur existence plutôt que de contracter des dettes qu'entraînent la vente des [leurs] propriétés'⁷⁶.

Some of the Contrôleurs and even the Resident General considered this 'population flottante' a threat, 'soustraires non seulement à l'impôt mais à toute surveillance et à toute réglementation'⁷⁷. Others recognised the 'migrants' economic importance and encouraged the flow. The Secretary General wrote, as he discouraged a Contrôleur from expelling one such immigrant,

Il faut bien s'en garder à mon avis, car la main d'oeuvre soudanaise est fort appréciée en Tunisie elle y est utile et elle y deviendra nécessaire.⁷⁸

The colonial press supported immigration both as a solution to the shortage of labour and as a 'balance' to the growing Italian population. Hare brained suggestions were made, ironically enough by the Anti-Slavery Society, to import labourers direct from the Soudan by means of a Trans-Saharan railway⁷⁹. When the Turco-Italian war broke out and Tripolitanian refugees began to flood into Tunisia the colonial newspapers heralded their arrival as at least a temporary solution to Tunisia's labour shortage⁸⁰.

The mines at Metlaoui, Redyef, Moulares and M'Dilla also came to depend on Tripolitarians, Soudanaise and Kabylie labourers (there were 1,594 Tripolitarians working at the mines in 1912, by 1936 this number had risen to 2,500⁸¹). Others worked on the railways and in the cities⁸². Following the war Tripoli's poor economic situation and the rigorous suppression of the Tripolitanian revolt encouraged still more migrants. By 1926 there were over twenty thousand Tripolita^{nians} in Tunisia, five years later nearly thirty thousand.

Only a small proportion of these immigrants lived permanently in the south (see Tables 2.20. and 2.21.). Many of the refugees that had originally settled there were resettled in the north for fear of political infiltration and border incidents⁸³. Of those that remained the largest group lived on the coast at Zarzis where they could find employment in the olive plantations.

Tripolitanian harvesters soon became as essential to the south as to the north. So much so that periodic declines in the flow of labour across the border affected both the speed that the harvest could be gathered and the hiring charges. A report by the Service dated 1907 explains how

Les Tripolitains qui jusqu'ici venaient s'employer chaque année chez les Touazines et chez les Ouderna pour la durée de la moisson ont dû pour la plupart rester dans la Vilayet où ils ont été retenus par l'abondance des récoltes; il en est résulté pour nos gens une augmentation très sensible du prix de la main de oeuvre.⁸⁴

Immigrant labour became an essential addition to the economy by the 1920's.

Relations of production, in the period up to the First World War, were still dominated by the traditional contractual forms. The colonialist literature demonstrated that these contracts were cheaper and offered greater security to the employer than wage labourers⁸⁵. Because of their importance among the colonial population nothing was done to ameliorate the conditions or avoid the debt bondage suffered by the khammes, despite the criticisms of Tunisian Nationalists and liberal Europeans⁸⁶. If anything their situation deteriorated. The colonists regarded the khammes as lazy and sponsored legislation to constrain them to work and bind them even more firmly to their employers⁸⁷. Worse still the colonists interpreted their responsibilities to their employees literally. They did not, for example, provide them with food during the winter months. The rates the khammes received and the advance from their employer may have been higher than with a neighbouring Tunisian but they received nothing else and their obligations to the employer were rigorously enforced.

Even so the colonists were dissatisfied with the responsibilities the contract implied, such as the payment of their employees taxes²⁸, and the inflexibility of a contract that ran throughout the agricultural year. It was much the same with the mogharsa contract. Although popular as a means of providing labour for olive plantations throughout the south (Lakhdar suggests they account for two thirds of plantations in Tunisia²⁹) the division of plots at fruition and the dismemberment it entailed were undesirable for the colon wishing to establish large plantations.

Gradually the colonists turned away from pre-capitalist relations of production in favour of wage labour, a more flexible form of contract which would allow the landowner to employ labourers as and when they were needed. Victor Mottes' study of the cereal producing region of Medjez el Bab in the north of Tunisia reveals a gradual substitution of wage labour for the traditional khammes from the early years of the 20th century³⁰. This was equally true of the colonists in the South, at Zarzis almost all the permanent employees of the European plantations, according to the 1929 survey 230 individuals, were wage labourers³¹. Similarly Poncet's survey of 6,400 ha. of colonial plantations at Zarzis in the 1950's suggested that as few as 6% of the labourers were khammes³².

For contemporaries this was, to use Victor Mottes' phrase, a 'liberation' of the khammes³³. True there were advantages: the labourer was no longer bound to their employer, they were paid in cash, and were paid at weekly sometimes daily intervals and so escaped the unscrupulous money lender. In practice, however, the wage labourer subsisted under very different and not necessarily better relations of production than his neighbour bound by more traditional contracts.

The colonist directed his labourers; told them what to do, when and how. As a result European agricultural techniques and technologies were more rapidly imposed. The work load of the labourer increased markedly, so that 'l'ajir qui a passé deux ou trois ans au service du colon tombe malade, ou bien va s'engager comme khammes chez un de ses co-religionnaires'³⁴. European working

practices were also introduced, signing on and off, a working schedule dominated by the clock and a rigorous and unfair discipline

Une raison pour laquelle les indigènes répugnent à travailler chez le colon, c'est la crainte des amendes et des retenus. Quand l'ouvrier vient à la fin du mois, toucher sa paye et qu'on lui dit que, tel jour, il est arrivé en retard à la ferme; que tel autre, il a cassé un fouet, il a peine à comprendre que ces menus faits prenant aux yeux du patron une si grande importance, alors que, si à certains jours, on le retient une de plus le soir pour achever un travail pressé, il ne songe pas à réclamer un supplément de salaire.⁹⁵

Most important, however, the labourer lost his security. In the past the bonds of khammes implied a broader social responsibility to the labourer than the regular payment of his wages, this responsibility disappeared.

Much of the impetus for the adoption of wage labour was the colonists' wish to maintain a relatively small permanent work force and supplement this with seasonal labourers. This was easy in the South's olive plantations which required only few permanent workers to harrow the land in the spring and summer months whilst the trees were pruned by itinerant professionals. In two cheikhats at Zarzis with substantial European plantations, Od. M'hamed and Od. Bou Ali the proportions of day labourers reached 38% and 13% respectively. Only harvesting required large numbers of labourers. At Zarzis nearly a thousand seasonal harvesters were hired beside the 230 permanent workers in the colons' olive plantations in the 1930's⁹⁶. According to Poncet's survey the proportion was somewhat less but even so some 53% of labour was seasonal⁹⁷.

Mechanisation (the introduction of the tractor after the First World War) reinforced this trend, by reducing the the need for permanent workers. Its extension in the South was, however, slow. By 1949 Poncet records only 634 horse power between seven European proprietors. The SERESSA report, written seven years later, counted only fifty three tractors in the whole of the South. None were owned by Tunisians⁹⁸. It was in the Tell that mechanisation had its greatest impact. Even in the busiest years the colon could now rely on a few seasonal labourers to do his ploughing, there was no need

to maintain a large workforce throughout the year. As a result more and more agricultural workers became dependent on seasonal work, with an itinerant life style, moving between areas as the crops ripened or as it became time to sow, and periodic unemployment it entailed. This impoverished the native labourer. It is no coincidence that a report of 1923 should describe the cheikhat of Od. M'hamed as one of the poorest in the south - of 412 individuals eligible by age and health to pay the istitan only 170 could afford to do so. This was the cheikhat with the highest proportion (38%) of wage labourers in the south²³.

Among the wealthier Tunisians' plantations the same pattern was repeated. They too found wage labour more convenient than the long term contract of the khammes and seasonal labour more economic than maintaining a substantial labour force throughout the year. There was no mechanisation (not even the wealthiest Tunisians had that much capital in the inter-war years) but even so the change to wage labouring advanced rapidly.

Statistics are difficult to come by. The census data for 1931 and 1936 puts all agricultural workers apart from day labourers in the same category (Table 5.3.). More than likely it underestimates their number since many day labourers may have owned some land. A further difficulty is the resolution of this data. Census data was collated by caïdat and thereby ignores the distinctions within each circonscription. An undated survey taken at some point in the 1930's found in the archives (broken down into the same categories as the census statistics and so probably a preparatory survey for one of them) does allow a more detailed analysis by cheikhat and economic region (Table 5.4.). Lastly Professor Clarke's notes include a survey dated 1951 with a more detailed breakdown of the agricultural labour force, but again its source is unknown. From these statistics, however, one can trace the the outlines of the employment structure at the end of our period (Table 5.6.). The highest proportion of wage labourers were found in the urban areas, the oases, and the areas of of expanding olive plantations on the European model at Zarzis. By 1936 wage labourers represented 47% of the work force in Nefzaoua. The undated survey from the 1930's

reveals that 8% of the work force at Zarzis were day labourers, and the 1951 survey shows the proportion to have been 5% of those permanently employed. Both are notably higher proportions than any other circonscription in the south. Outside the oases and the coastal belt the process was less advanced. By 1936 the proportion of day labourers had risen to 4% at Matmata and (in the undated survey) to 2.6% among the Ouderna. Statistics from 1951 claim, however, that wage labourers represented less than 1% of the workforce in Matmata but 12.5% among the Djebalia and 10.8% among the Ouderna.

Since the census data puts all agricultural workers apart from day labourers in the same category it is impossible to assess the proportion of traditional contracts that survived in the south. The 1951 survey does, however, provide details of the number of khammes in each region. These statistics confirm the substitution of khammes by wage labour at Zarzis where they had fallen to less than 1% of the workforce. Inland, however, the khammes was still important: one third of the permanent workforce at Matmata, 39% in Nefzaoua, 3.6% among the Ouderna, 6.6% among the Djebalia, and 2.6% among the Touazine. In both Matmata and Nefzaoua they were more numerous than the day labourers. There is no statistical evidence for the number of mogharsi's but incidental reports suggest that the contract played an important part in the development of plantations in the plains between the wars¹⁰⁰.

Parallel to the growth of wage labouring in the plantations was a growth of seasonal and temporary employment throughout the south, usually associated with migration within the region or to the north. The vast majority of these workers are lost in the category of agricultural workers used in the employment census. They were not an easily identifiable sub-category since, as the 1920's and 30's wore on, more and more families and fractions, formerly of independent means, came to depend on labouring to maintain their families. Most were temporary workers who used labouring to supplement their income from their own property¹⁰¹. The 1951 survey provides some details of the employment of these seasonal labourers within the south. Most

worked at Zarzis in the plantations where seasonal labour represented almost half the total employment. At Nefzaoua and Matmata, both areas with substantial numbers of fruit trees, they represented one fifth and one sixth of the total workforce respectively (see Table 5.6.).

Instrumental in the the growth of this seasonal workforce were the environmental and economic crises of the late 1920's and the 1930's. Poor harvests had traditionally played their part in swelling the flow of migrants, now this was reinforced by the low prices of agricultural products in the good years. The fellah or tribesman never had a chance to recoup his losses and was forced to work as a labourer to feed his family and pay his taxes. As Maquart's description of the gradual growth of migration in the Haouia economy suggests, more and more communities became involved in the annual flows, the Touazine, for example, also reluctant labourers, were, by the 1930's, drawn into the stream¹⁰². Expectations of higher wages and better chance of employment led them north as well as east to Zarzis and Djerba. Statistics of the numbers involved are incomplete (even though the government closely policed the migrants, provided each with a travel permit, and spot checks revealed 90% of migrants carried the correct documentation¹⁰³). Nevertheless those statistics available for the south do outline the variability of this migrant flow (see Table 5.11.). From the 1920's successive droughts brought more migrants to the north, culminating in the massive movements of the late 1940's. Even Zarzis, with its own plantations, contributed to the flow. A report dated 1926 reveals that each year one to two hundred of the poorest labourers travelled to Sfax to participate in the olive harvest after it had finished in the south, and in drought years their numbers swelled to 1,200 to 1,500 individuals¹⁰⁴.

The numbers of migrants from the Djebalia, almost entirely to work in the cities, also increased. Two surveys of migration after the Second World War, the first in 1949 by Prost and the second in the early 1950's by Clarke, suggest that in some mountain communities as many as three quarters of the adult males participated (see Table 5.9.). Prost is, however, at pains to point

that the conditions in 1949 were extraordinary. The drought had persisted for three years and the economy was still weak, following the depression and then the war. The numbers involved in the migration of 1949 were, consequently, far greater than had been experienced in the past, particularly among the nomadic and semi nomadic communities. However misleading these statistics are if applied to the conditions of the 1930's they underline a trend towards the increasing dependence of not just the poor but the population as a whole on their labour as their most productive and reliable resource.

For Prost 'l'économie de la région est aujourd'hui fondée autant sur les profits de l'emigration vers le nord que l'exploitation du sol'¹⁰⁵. Large sums were remitted by these labourers to their families by postal orders (32,000 frs. to Kebili in July 1917 from the Colonial Workers alone'¹⁰⁶). By the 1940's migrants' remittances represented half the annual income of families in some villages in Matmata (see Table 5.9.). Prost argued that the migrants continued to invest these revenues in agriculture, that they enabled them 'd'y accélérer la mise en valeur de son sol'¹⁰⁷. His own evidence on the scale of these remittances and the use of postal orders, however, indicates that the remittances were, increasingly, devoted to the maintenance of the population rather than the accumulation of capital. Inquests by officers into the thefts of postal orders serve to demonstrate that some families were entirely dependent upon the remittances of migrants in the north'¹⁰⁸. Lt. Scoffoni was in no doubt that the growth of the market at Matmata could be attributed to the money sent back by young men working in Tunis'¹⁰⁹. For the post Independence period, studies assure us that virtually none of the remittances were invested, nearly all the money was consumed in current expenditure'¹¹⁰.

Outmigration competed for labour that could be employed in agriculture, and, as a result, agriculture suffered. During the war, when conscription and the recruitment of Colonial Workers significantly reduced the number of young men in the south, reports identified shortages of man power in Matmata and Nefzaoua. During the 1920's and 30's these shortages became a recurrent problem'¹¹¹.

As men turned away from agriculture to work as migrants women were forced to take over more and more of their responsibilities. This was possible in the harvesting of olives, but social taboos still prevented women from ploughing and sowing. Besides the ploughlands were too distant to be cultivated by women alone. As a result, although oleiculture survived in these communities, cerealculture suffered.

Despite the economic upheavals that wage labouring entailed the domestic mode of production was unaffected. Migration and wage labouring were incorporated into the family budget like any other resource. Where women and children migrated with their husbands and fathers they worked beside them as harvesters. The family, seeking economic self sufficiency, worked itself mercilessly. In this sense it was integrated within the new capitalist relations of production. Even where wives and families remained at home they enjoyed no liberation from their traditionally subservient position. Related males, brothers, fathers and even sons, retained control over female labour by mandate. It is significant that husbands sent their postal orders not to their wives but to a close male relative who controlled its expenditure¹¹².

Beyond the family B'dir and Djemai have suggested that as migration increased, wage labouring and differential incomes dissolved social solidarity and mutual aid relationships became more difficult to sustain¹¹³. Reports dating from the early 1940's would have us believe that

Depuis quelques années, beaucoup d'indigènes n'entretiennent pas convenablement leurs barrages, ne les réparent pas après les pluies et ont perdu l'ancien habitude de s'associer pour les travaux souvent excédant les possibilités d'un seul.¹¹⁴

This may have been true to some extent (see Chapter 8) but mutual aid proved remarkably resilient¹¹⁵. In the summer months most migrants returned from the cities, and friends and close relatives associated to build their houses and repair their djess&r's as they had in the past.

The tribesman's growing dependence on income from labouring in the cities and farms of the north and the plantations on the coast put them very much at the mercy of this external economy. But this economy was not dependable. As more and more tribesmen became labourers the demand for labour was actually declining. The introduction of combine harvesters after the First World War did much to undermine the demand for seasonal labour. A situation aggravated by falling agricultural prices, bankruptcies, and drought. In 1936 Contrôles Civiles in the Tell rejected the applications of migrants on the grounds that there was no work available¹¹⁶.

The corollaries of the rising supply and falling demand for migrant labour were unemployment for the many and decliningⁿⁱ wages for the few. In the late 1930's the wages of the seasonal labourer were still only four or five francs per day. Most were paid in kind, with proportions as small as 1/30th of the harvest divided between them¹¹⁷. So desperate had the migrants become that they fought over the scraps of the harvest and the work available

il y a des incidents [wrote the C.C. of Medjez el Bab] entre les transhumants et les fellahs en ce qui concerne la glanage qui revient suivant la coutume aux femmes des ouvriers permanentes des agriculteurs; aussi que pour l'embauchage des moissonneurs.¹¹⁸

By the 1930's security reports identified unemployment among migrants the droughts as a major problem¹¹⁹. After the Second World War the problem persisted. A report complained in January 1946

La cueillette des oliviers étant actuellement terminée, les nomades ne trouvent plus des moyens d'existence se livrent à des multiples vols.¹²⁰

A decree of 25 July 1923 allowed the judiciary to commit vagabonds to prison for six weeks and broadened the definition to include those not actively begging as the decree of 23 January 1902 had stipulated. Ultimately the decree of 3 April 1939 allowed the police to dictate a person's place of residence and move or evict individuals without reason. Auxiliary constables were appointed to enforce the legislation¹²¹. Each year thousands were arrested as

beggars (see Table 5.14.), most of them between December and May, between the olive and cereal harvests, when there was little work available. The government wary of the threat they posed to security closely controlled their movements and tried to intercept those without employment and the appropriate travelling papers. The government hired lorries and put them in cattle trucks on the trains to speed their return. In 1935 2,000 were sent back to their place of origin, 1,500 in 1936, 5,000 in 1938 and 10,000 in 1940¹²². How many of those turned away came from the south it is difficult to say. Migration was a phenomenon that affected the whole of rural Tunisia.

Many of those who could not find work in the rural areas turned to the cities. Tunis faced an influx of destitute tribesmen. Shanty towns sprung up on the outskirts of the city. Tribesmen squatted on any available land. Few of these could find work and turned to begging, working as porters and labourers, selling matches, cigarettes, anything they could afford to maintain themselves. In 1937 there were 1,800 of these street sellers in Tunis. Tunoises complained about the competition ruining their own trade¹²³. Communities with a long tradition of migration to Tunis found themselves under cut by these desperate newcomers. In 1936 the Douiret at Tunis petitioned the government to ask for a reduction in their taxes because they could not find a living as salesmen or labourers in the city¹²⁴. Many were forced to live on charity alone. The government set up soup kitchens where the desperate could get some bread and a watery gruel. In April 1937 they were distributing 25,000 loaves per day.

The government, its budget stretched by poor tax returns, resented the expense. It also feared the poverty stricken tribesmen could be a source of disorder in the capital¹²⁵. To prevent migrants reaching Tunis a ring of security posts was established around the city. Police made random raids into rundown boarding houses in the city centre arresting those without permits, fining them and sending them home¹²⁶.

A Commission was established to solve the problem. Its second report reveals the government's increasingly belligerent attitude

Ils sont attirés vers le capitale par l'attrait du pain, de la mendicité, voire de la prostitution. Il convient de supprimer ces attraits pour résoudre la difficulté. On a débordé cherché à les éloigner de Tunis par la persuasion, en mettant à leur disposition des moyens transport pour regagner leur pays d'origine. On a également élaboré une législation frappant des propriétaires qui donnent asile à des nomades. Devant l'échec de cette tentative et l'inutilité des dispositions juridiques, on est bien obligé de songer à recourir à la contrainte.

As a sop to the liberal press which decried the government's treatment of these migrants

Il semble que le refoulement pourrait être présenté comme une mesure de protection sanitaire de hygiène dans lesquelles vivent les nomades créant un risque considérable d'épidémie.¹²⁷

The following year rations were cut at the soup kitchens and the number of migrants sent back doubled but the problem would not go away. The bidonvilles persisted.

With the increasing dependence of tribesmen on wage labour and seasonal employment the tribal economy reached its nadir. It was a process initiated by the concentration of property in the hands of the colonial plantations and the wealthy tribesmen but accelerated by the combined influences of government expropriation through taxation, the region's trade deficit, and the droughts of the 1920's and 1930's, all of which forced the tribesmen to find employment to supplement his meagre income. It was unfortunate that just as the need for employment grew its supply declined and vast numbers were forced into impoverished unemployment.

5.3. The Standard of Living.

Commentators' descriptions of the tribesmen's standard of living during the early years of the Protectorate are impressionistic rather than scientific. They paint a picture of miserable poverty and disease. All were appalled by the monotony and poor quality of the diet, the dirt and squalor in which the tribesmen lived, and their limited material wealth. General Philbert explained that

La lutte pour la vie est très rude dans ces montagnes, et ces deux fractions des Ouerghamma [the Haouia and Khezour] sont extrêmement pauvres.¹²⁸

Captain Varloud elaborated

Les indigènes sont très misérables. Le couscous est à peu près inconnu. Ils se nourrissent d'une espèce de farine noire délayé avec l'huile à l'aspect répugnant; pendant trois ou quatre mois de l'année ils vivent exclusivement de figues qui paraît-il, sont excellentes par ici, en fin le lait des troupeaux est un grand secours.¹²⁹

Whether tribesmen sank as low as starvation goes unrecorded. Nor can one assess how general this poverty was. It is to be suspected that the wealthier tribesmen ate more regularly and better quality food than their poorer neighbours. They could probably afford some wheat as well as barley, meat, and better quality oil. Brunn recalled dining with the Khalifa of Matmata in the mid-1890's

the meal consisted of soups with lumps of meat lightly peppered, a stew chicken, an enormous dish of kuskus made of barley meal with goat's flesh, and finally honey and bread. This last made of barley meal, dry but well flavoured.¹³⁰

One cannot presume that the Khalifa ate like this everyday but nevertheless this meal is a stark contrast to Varloud's description of the tribesmen's diet.

Brunn also notes that the Khalifa lived in some luxury. His guest room, for instance, had thick carpets from Kairouan. Nevertheless, when one compares this to Demeersman's inventory of an urban notable's goods in the early 19th century it pales into insignificance¹³¹. Lesser homes in Matmata, Brunn notes, were barren. Nomads had even less property. Since they had to regularly transport their homes possessions were an anathema. Most had low expectations of material comfort. A mentality which some of the Europeans admired. Boujadi, for example, raises the undemanding and uncomplaining tribesmen to the status of a noble savage

La question de alimentation? elle est assurée par les quelques têtes de bétail qui possèdent les plus misérables. Le vêtement? problème bien simple; un gaudoura et burnous. En été on fait avec le burnous un seul tour autour de corps: il fait si chaud! à l'automne deux tours;

en hiver en cas de froid on l'enrobe en entier autour du buste... La question logement n'existe car par Allah la plaine est vaste. [...] Oui, certes, des sauvages, que ne tourmente pas le souci du lendemain ont sur nous l'avantage d'une plus grande tranquillité morale.¹³²

During the Protectorate the social distance between the colonists and the tribesmen kept most blissfully unaware of the tribesman's condition. A few commentators made general observations but it is Aouda's surveys of five families from Southern Tunisia (see Table 5.12.), Marty's surveys of diet (see Table 5.13.), and Bouquet's, Burnet's and Prost's more general studies of nutrition in the South that indicate their true situation at the end of the period¹³³.

Barley remained the staple. Usually it was eaten as 'aich (mixed with water as a tasteless gruel), or as zoumitta (mixed with oil or melted butter) among the wealthier families, sometimes as unleavened bread. Wheat, which made the best couscous, was reserved for the wealthy. Fruits were eaten in season. In the mountains figs were still almost the sole food eaten in the second half of the summer. Dates were eaten in autumn¹³⁴. Olive oil was used in cooking throughout the year. Consumption varied from 30g to 100g per person per week depending on resources. If the family owned a herd milk was an important resource in spring.

Meat was rarely eaten. Only the wealthy could afford to by good quality sheep, goat, camel, or beef flesh. Poorer tribesmen bought offal and that irregularly (see Table 5.12.). Vegetables were also consumed infrequently, unless they could be gathered. Cultivated vegetables were expensive. Pepper and salt were important. They gave the monotonous food taste. Malnourishment prevailed. Most children lacked the proteins and vitamins for healthy growth. Many were also undernourished. The poorest ate only two meals per day one of which was usually just bread or bread and fruit. Only the wealthy could afford three cooked meals (see Table 5.13.).

Prost calculated the dietary requirements per individual per year to be 25 litres of olive oil, 300 kg. of cereals, 50 kg. of dates or figs, 7.5 kg. of meat, 100 litres of milk, and 20 kg. of sugar. According to his estimates (for that they can only be) one

third of the population of the Caïdat of Tataouine lacked even this, one third had sufficient, and one third more. The proportions receiving an adequate diet, he suggested, were were probably slightly higher among the nomads than among the Djebalia because the nomads had easier access to their herds and the milk they produced¹³⁵.

The tribesmen's condition varied from year to year. After a poor harvest they often had to purchase their food. In these years prices were high (see cereal prices from 1936 to 1939 in Figure 3.4.). In 1921 the price of barley rose to 100 frs. a quintal at Zarzis and so many of those without ready sources of cash were forced to sell off their jewellery some even their land to feed their families¹³⁶. The year before in Tataouine with barley at 75 frs. per quintal many of the Djebalia had been forced to find employment in the north¹³⁷. During the most persistent droughts the poorest were driven to begging to sustain themselves¹³⁸. In June 1936 the commanding officer at Ben Gardane sent a desperate report to the government saying that 'la plupart des Touazine vont mourir de faim'¹³⁹. It was the same throughout the south. Even at Zarzis Cpt. Thevet estimated half the population was threatened by starvation¹⁴⁰.

Government sponsored charitable camps were set up to provide the basic subsistence needs. Rations were calculated on the basis of a diet of 250 kg of cereals and 10 litres of olive per year. This was inadequate to sustain an active population, and it is likely that many received even less. Officers constantly complained that they had not enough grain to distribute. The government simply could not cope. By November 1936 it was feeding 14,000 people in the caïdat of Médenine alone¹⁴¹. This was at least one tenth of the population. The luckiest 350 of these were employed on government sponsored construction projects. They received a small income and larger rations¹⁴². It was only after the war, however, that the government made available substantial credits to keep the starving tribesmen employed¹⁴³. By that time the government must have feared that the appalling conditions in the south would hasten recruitment among anti-government bandits. Even so the support was small scale.

In February 1948, for example, only 1,347 people were employed by the government in the circonscription of Tataouine out of a total population of 50,000¹⁴⁴. During the drought 1954, on the very eve of Independence, only 10% of the population of the south received any form of government assistance¹⁴⁵. It was not enough¹⁴⁶.

How many succumbed to the droughts of the 1920's and 1930's it is impossible to say. Reports noted that some did die of starvation but offer no statistics¹⁴⁷. A glance at the number of recorded deaths (see Figure 2.6.) corroborates their evidence with notable peaks in the number of deaths during the most devastating droughts (1924, 1926-7, and 1936-8). Clearly there were those who lacked the means to survive these crises.

Evidence of the tribesmen's material wealth is even more difficult to come by than evidence for their nutrition. Isolated references to the tribesmen's property are available in the documents but there are no complete inventories. Most of these references are to local products and utensils rather than luxury or decorative items. The only inventory available, Ginestous' list of goods in a nomad's tent compiled in the 1950's, reveals that all the goods served a practical purpose¹⁴⁸. To what extent this was as true of the homes of sedentary tribesmen by the end of our period can only be speculated.

It is unclear whether the tribesmen suffered a declining standard during the Protectorate. Life was difficult even impossible for some but this had been so before the Protectorate. It is probable that many were forced into this marginal position by the combined forces of taxation, indebtedment, and the droughts of the 1930's. But it is impossible to suggest what proportion of the population were so affected. What is clear is the disparity between the native and the colonial population. This European minority imported its ^cacquisitive and materialist lifestyle into Tunisia and many of the imports of manufactured goods supplied a market of colonists exclusively. Although the limited colonisation of the south may have hidden the contrast from the tribes of the south it was not lost on the Nationalists. Bourguiba evokes the sheer

injustice of the situation in an article written in 1931 following a visit to a shantytown on the outskirts of Tunis

A Tunis, même sous la porte Sidi-Abdallah, des familles entières, hommes, femmes, enfants, sont parqués pêle mèle et vivent là dans cet abri de fortune, du fruit de la mendicité. A quelques pas de là sur le bord de la route, une publicité tapageuse, sous forme d'une panneau-réclamé étincilent, affirme que <<Frigidaire est indispensable à la vie>>!. Contraste frappant et douloureux entre la population indigène manquant du nécessaire et une colonie étrangère riche, puissante, prospère, incapable de se passer superflu.¹⁴⁹

It is this contrast that should form the basis of our understanding of the economic, social, and political relationships within Tunisia during the Protectorate not any claim that conditions had improved from pre-Protectorate times.

Conclusion.

Pre-capitalist relations of production were largely internal to the domestic unit of production. Labour hired from without was incorporated within this social group, and contracts bound the employer and employee socially as well as economically. Employer and employee were patron and client. Capitalism broke these bonds and reduced the labourer to a disposable factor of production. As Marx describes this process may be interpreted in two ways

The immediate producer, the worker, could dispose of his own labour only after he had ceased to be bound to the soil, and ceased to be the slave or serf of another person. To become a free seller of labour-power, who carries his commodity wherever he can find a market for it, he must have escaped from the regime of the guilds, their rules for apprentices and journeymen, and their restrictive labour regulations. Hence the historical movement which changes the producers into wage-labourers appears, on the one hand, as their emancipation from serfdom and the fetters of the guilds, and it is this aspect of the movement which exists alone for our bourgeois historians. But, on the other hand, these newly freed men became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of their own means of production, and all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements.¹⁵⁰

For colonists the replacement of traditional contracts was a liberation of the labourer from debt bondage. For the Nationalists, however, the process only replaced debt bondage with wage slavery and insecurity. It was, however, an incomplete process. Domestic modes and pre-capitalist relations of production persisted throughout much of the south. In the case of those relations outside the family this may be understood as a relict, protected by the limited extension of capitalism. But the persistence of the domestic mode of production itself is a testimony to that institution's flexibility, its ability to work within and for capitalism.

CHAPTER 6

THE TRIBE AND THE STATE

6.1 Bled el-Makhzen and Bled es-Siba: a valid dichotomy?

The traditional view of relationships between the tribe and the state in pre-colonial Morocco, and by extension the pre-colonial Maghreb, has been that of a spatial dichotomy between the **bled el-makhzen** (land of government control) and the **bled es-siba** (land of dissidence). Within this model the dynamic of Moroccan history has been the state's attempt to submit and exploit by taxation the dissident fringe to the government held core¹. Refinements have suggested that the dichotomy may be graduated by a third zone partly or irregularly under government control with the implication that the boundary of the bled el-makhzen was not constant but fluctuated according to the relative power of the dissidents and the state. Few, however, have examined the implicit assumptions of the model: the state's ambition to control rural and tribal areas, the tribes' automatic rejection of this authority, and the approximate balance of the rival powers. If one does examine these assumptions the model becomes not only a gross simplification but an inaccurate portrayal of the relationship between the tribe and state.

Tunisia's Beys reigned, they did not govern. The ruling class was of Turkish and mameluke descent, it scarcely concealed its contempt for native Tunisians, and considered the tribes no better than savages². They had no interest in administration, their principle concerns were security and the collection of tax revenues.

Rural areas had provided most of these revenues since the 17th century. By the mid-18th century they provided about 60% of the total government budget³. 75% of taxes were levied on the Sahel and the North. During the 19th century the weight of this taxation increased to cover the Beys' growing expenditure and debts. By 1841 Richardson claimed that the peasants 'craignent de semer parcequ'ils savent qu'ils perdont tout, en dîmes, impôts et monopoles'⁴. For Valensi this was 'une fiscalité dévorante'

Progressivement, tous les secteurs de l'activité rurale ont été couverts par la marée des impôts. La préférence pour les fermes - l'octroi, les revenus des monopoles, sont affermés - mode de perception qui fait parvenir au bey de l'argent frais en anticipant sur les recettes, autorise les abus, interdit tout contrôle, alourdit sans fin la charge des sujets.⁵

The demands of Ahmed Bey's Nizami army were just as onerous. Agricultural decline in the Regence was

entirely attributable to the oppressive and ubiquitous manners adopted by the government in levying the dues, and at the same time the withdrawal of so many able bodied men to form a large standing army which the Bey has no means of supporting.⁶

The cities did not escape but they certainly paid less dearly than the rural population. Almost all the taxes were based on agricultural capital (the **qanoun** on olives and dates), production (the **achour** on cereals), or the trade of agricultural products (the tobacco monopoly)⁷. Even the **medjba** (capitation tax introduced by M'hamed Bey in 1856; the single most important source of government revenue, providing 9,700,000 piastres out of a total budget of 22,950,000⁸) specifically exempted the largest towns.

To avoid the expense of a bureaucracy the Beys sold each of the monopolies and caïdats to an **iltizam** (tax farmer). It was a system open to abuse. Caïds sought the largest possible return for their investment and were not always scrupulous in their methods. Ali bin Khalifa, for instance, having bought the tax concession in Aradh for 750,000 piastres in 1869 demanded a total of 3,177,600 piastres from the circonscription. Knowing that he would not be the caïd the following year he registered the taxes for two years ahead and extorted the money from the tribes⁹. Distant from central government the caïd was effectively 'un pouvoir absolue dans son arrondissement'¹⁰. Beys rarely intervened in their affairs. Nor did the caïds intervene in their circonscriptions. Most were appointed from outside the caïdat, 'de peur qu'il se favorisait ses proches et qu'il se consolidât ainsi ses proches'¹¹. Many were of Turkish or mamluke descent, closely associated with or members of the ruling

dynasty. They had little interest in or knowledge of their subjects, and their subjects, in turn, resented and disobeyed them¹².

Despite these limitations the caïds could provide an effective local administration as they had under Hammuda Pasha (1782-1814). Hammuda insisted that caïds were permanent residents of their caïdat. He closely controlled their affairs and their choice of deputies. Hammuda was, however, exceptional. In later years some of the controls were maintained. Kheredine (Prime Minister from 1874 to 1877) 'renovated' the local administration by increasing the caïds' accountability: those who became the subject of frequent complaints were revoked or not allowed to repurchase their office, and the government frequently intervened in local affairs to redress the wrongs they committed¹³. In general, however, subsequent Beys allowed the quality of their caïds and the services they provided to deteriorate. By the time of the French occupation few resided in their circonscription

[ils] demeurent complètement étrangers aux affaires de leur caïdat et ne considèrent leurs fonctions que comme une source des revenus.¹⁴

The caïd of Aradh, usually a wealthy and influential mamluke, only resided at Gabès for three months a year. For the other nine months the caïdat was administered by the khalifa, his deputy¹⁵. The khalifas gathered the taxes and informed the caïd about events in the circonscription. They were usually of local origins, but all too often they were also tax farmers. In a system where the caïds bought their offices for a year at a time, rarely served in the same post for consecutive years, and remained distant from their caïdats, it was the khalifa who provided the local administration. Yet khalifas were neither appointed by, or responsible to the Bey.

There was no effective and permanent military presence in the provinces. The Tunisian army was small (3,000 men in the late 1860's), poorly organised, and stationed, for the most part, in the capital (half) and the Sahel (one quarter)¹⁶. In Aradh there were one hundred **zouaves** (infantry of Kabylie origins) at Gabès¹⁷, fifty troops at el-Hamma whose cannon were unserviceable, and a small post at Borj el-Biban whose guards, in the opinion of a visiting French

officer, were only a threat to their servants'¹⁸. The forts built by Ahmed Bey at Bir Zoumit and Zarzis were empty and in poor repair. There were officially 262 *spahis* (mounted gendarmes) at Gabès in 1873, but they were undermanned and underequipped'¹⁹.

A caïd who remained in his criconscription was, therefore, alone and isolated. If he lost the co-operation or incurred the wrath of the tribes his safety might depend on flight

Si Rachid Caya de l'Aradh, a été, dernièrement, obligé de décamper pendant la nuit du pays des Ouerghammas, ne se croyant plus la surété au milieu des tribus qui sont de plus en plus irrités des arasies [sic] qu'on leur fait subir, au nom d'un amra-bey arbitrairement interprété et qui sont trop bien munis journellement de poudre maltaise pour ne pas tenter de la resistance.²⁰

Government revenues were not secured by a local administration reinforced by garrisons, but by an annual *mahalla* (military expedition). This comprised a core of regular troops, sometimes artillery, with a dependant 'nuée de valets conduisent inombrables bagages'²¹ supported by an irregular militia from the *makhzen* tribes (see Table 6.1.) (on the *makhzen* see Appendix IX)²². It travelled west to the Kroumir in summer and south to the Djerid winter and so encompassed most of the Regence. Rarely, however, did an expedition go beyond Gabès. In years when the army travelled abroad (1877-8), there was trouble in the north (1864), or the government lacked the revenues to mount a substantial expedition the military restricted their operations to Central Tunisia.

As a display of force the *mahalla* was often enough to secure the payment of taxes. The tribes visited the camp and paid their dues²³. Contemporaries, however, insisted that the expedition was a necessity because 'les habitants ne paieront aucun tribut si le Bey n'allait l'exiger par force'²⁴. On occasion the tribes did put up more than a token resistance. In 1852 and 1866 the military fought and won pitched battles²⁵. Hostages were seized as surety, recalcitrants tortured, and the expedition collected fines for opposition and arrears as well as the usual tax revenues²⁶. In 1856 Sidi Sadok's expedition to the Djerid seized double the usual revenue because of the 'exactions and vigorous measures he has

employed, which conduct has caused great discontent in the southern provinces'²⁷. On top of this must be added gains of the soldiers' plunder and raiding²⁸.

In terms of a balance between costs and revenues it seems most unlikely that the mahalla barely covered its budget as Brown has suggested²⁹. His evidence, two registers one containing the mahalla's expenditures and the other its receipts, probably does not cover all the tax payments made during the mahalla. Some of the revenues will have been paid to and registered with the caïds who travelled with the expedition. Moreover, the statistics Brown quotes are considerably smaller than those provided by contemporary estimates and, he admits, Professor Cherif working on documents from an earlier period found that the mahalla did make a substantial profit³⁰.

Not all the mahalla were militarily conclusive. First of all the government had to catch the taxpayers. This was not easy where the nomads 'se refugiaient [en Tripoli] toutes les fois qu'elle sont quelque chose à craindre de la part de l'autorité'³¹. Only in the 1870's were the neighbouring governments able to co-ordinate their expeditions and so trap the tribes of the far south³². Nor were the tribes that remained easy to confront. Aradh was inaccessible. Rebillet showed (in an intelligence report on the possibilities of a military expedition to Ghadames) that the watering points were so few and unreliable that any expedition would have to take its own water. Campaigns were only possible in the winter when temperatures were low and there were areas of surface water and fodder for the baggage train³³. Many of the tribes took refuge in the mountains. These were, to borrow Tully's gothic description, 'defended by fortresses of craggy rocks and frightful precipices, rendered inaccessible by nature'³⁴. French military reports confirmed that a few men could 'tenir longtemps une colonne en échec en défendant les approches des citernes et des défiles'³⁵. The tribes, moreover, were tried and well equipped fighters, with access to the most up to date weaponry through Maltese and Greek gun runners (see Chapter 3).

There was a record of tribal military successes against government expeditions. The mahalla's of 1840 and 1844 were defeated and forced back to Gabès³⁶. Again in 1856

in consequence of the armed opposition of some of the tribes inhabiting the mountainous districts to pay the new impots [sic], as lately established, the bey of the camp was obliged to suspend his operations until he should receive reinforcements of two thousand nizami and some artillery.³⁷

Even heavily reinforced General Rachid had to abandon the campaign³⁸. Perhaps most humiliating was the defeat of General Otsman at Haddege in an attempt to levy taxes and a war contribution on the Beni Zid who had taken refuge in Matmata. Suprised at night his column was massacred and the survivors, forced to flee without their artillery, baggage, and the General's expensively adorned tent³⁹.

Contemporary travellers considered the balance of government victory and defeat so much in favour of the Southern tribes as to render them virtually independent. Bruce, travelling through the region in the late 18th century argued that the Ouerghamma 'pay no acknowledgement to any sovereign'⁴⁰ and Pellissier, a reliable informant, claimed that 'les Ouderna du Sud sont complètement soustraires de fait à la gouvernement Tunisienne'⁴¹. It was an interpretation that the Protectorate propogated since it reflected the image of a weak and incompetent Beylical regime that had been used to justify the invasion. One Resident General explained to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, without the least evidence, that the tribes of the south had not paid taxes since the defeat of Otsman's col umn in 1868, and since that date the government had feared to enter the south⁴². With less exaggeration but no more accuracy Rebillet claimed that taxes in the south were only collected every five years and that even on these rare occasions the nomad tribes usually managed to evade their obligation⁴³.

The perceived independence of the tribes stood in stark contrast to the direct and oppressive government control of the settled agricultural regions. For some contemporaries this reflected

the centralisation of the Beylical government. Pellisier explains

il est vrai que la force du gouvernement central va toujours en s'affaiblissement du centre à la circonférence dans les pays où elle est tout entière dans les mains d'un seul homme.⁴⁴

The Bey did concentrate executive power in his own hands and his influence and interests were inevitably closer rather than further from the capital. For Cherif 'il est un fait universellement admis: dans un état de type ancien, l'autorité se dégrade vers le périphérie'. He suggests a parallel with the Moroccan dichotomy of bled es-siba/bled el-makhzen but distinguishes three zones. The first, close to the cities, was under direct government control both because of the state's military and administrative apparatus and because of this region's dependence on sedentary agriculture. The second, a zone where the tribes lived by their own customs from day to day but paid their taxes regularly and were subject to intermittent government intervention. Lastly, the periphery of the Regence and those mountainous areas (he includes the Djebel Matmata) which were too distant or too inaccessible for the Bey to impose his authority and where the tribes, although theoretically his subjects, enjoyed *de facto* independence, rarely paying taxes or suffering government intervention⁴⁵. The Bey had not the means (militarily, administratively or economically) to control populations whose way of life, military abilities, and very distance from settled areas made them difficult to subject.

The periphery's ability to preserve its independence was, however, exaggerated. While mahalla were occasionally defeated most were military and fiscal successes. Van Krieken's recent study of the mahalla registers for the period 1860 to 1880 demonstrates that even during a period generally considered as one of declining central government power the tribes continued to pay their taxes, with the possible exception of the Khroumir: 'Les Wirghimma' he confidently asserts 'n'échappaient pas au paiement plus ou moins régulier de la majba et des autres impôts'⁴⁶.

Direct military intervention was not, moreover, the only means of coercion available to the state. Carvajol de Marmol described the

tribes' independence in Southern Tunisia and Eastern Tripoli during the 17th century but admitted 'ils payent quelquefois tribut aux Turcs, parcequ'ils trafiquent en l'Ile des Gelles [Djerba], et en d'autres lieux de la côte, où les Turcs sont maîtres'⁴⁷. When the tribes refused to co-operate with the government the markets could be closed, as in 1864 and 1881, and the tribes starved, of luxuries if not sustenance, into submission.

The government's intention was not to control a precisely defined territory by force of arms. Territorial sovereignty was only important to the state in those areas of the Regence which produced rich revenues from agriculture or commerce. Restricted areas that could easily be defined and defended. Beyond these agricultural regions and commercial/urban centres territorial definition was an anathema. Frontiers between Tunisia and Tripoli or Algeria were not defined. French historians claimed in later years that delimitations had been made in the 18th and 19th centuries, but none were ever substantiated⁴⁸. Indeed a document presented by the Turkish delegation in 1893, purporting to be the text of a delimitation agreed by Hammuda Bey in 1804, proved to be a crude forgery⁴⁹. On the frontiers only the population centres which could generate tax revenue were worthy of occupation. Ghadames, as an important caravan centre on the routes to Tunis and Tripoli, was labelled as Turkish territory from 1843, subject to a Turkish governor and garrison, and paid taxes to Tripoli. The surrounding desert was ignored⁵⁰. Similarly, the arrival of Ottoman troops at Zarzis in 1844 caused little stir at court, the area was of little value to the state and could not support a garrison. The Bey's only concern was the threat that the column posed to Djerba an island 'si commerçante et si riche'⁵¹.

The government did not wish to impose its direct rule outside the core areas which generated the most part of the government's revenue, among the tribes and communities on the ill defined periphery of the Regence. To have done so, if it were possible, would have been far too expensive. The Turkish experience in Tripolitania demonstrated that any attempt to establish direct administration through centrally appointed officials would lead to

local opposition. There intermittent civil war persisted from 1835 until the principal rebel leader, Ghouma died in 1858. Even then the tribesmen's complaints, civil disobedience, banditism, and open rebellion forced the Turks to maintain garrisons throughout the region⁵². In purely financial terms the South could not justify this type of occupation.

Instead the Beys preferred to allow the tribes a considerable autonomy. Caïds, appointed by the Bey collected taxes, delegated khalifa and cheikhs within the tribes to gather these revenues, but otherwise did not interfere. Questions of justice, elsewhere a prerogative of the state, were administered within the tribe. The bey el-mahalla held court on his travels⁵³, and Kheredine attempted to extend the religious tribunals' jurisdiction into tribal areas, but neither of these measures were forced upon the tribes⁵⁴. The cadhis at Médenine and the Djebel Abiodh, appointed in 1874, were largely ignored by the tribes who continued to use the **qanoun** (traditional legal code) in the regulation of all legal matters.

To Europeans the Beys appeared callously indifferent to events within the tribes. Thomas Reade remarked on Ahmed Bey's lack of interest in news of fighting between the Beni Zid and the Ouerghamma. He appears rather shocked that the government should leave its citizens to sort out their differences, even by recourse to violence, without the intervention of the government⁵⁵.

There were limits. Tribal warring across the Tripolita^{nian} border was a constant embarrassment to the Beys, and at times of poor relations with the Turkish government, threatened to embroil Tunisia with the Porte. While the Bey might be indifferent to fighting within Tunisia he could not ignore fights with his neighbours. Frequent deputations were sent to the tribes to try and discourage conflict, arbitrations were attempted, and the Bey even sent expeditions to enforce peace among the tribes⁵⁶.

Autonomy was, furthermore, conditional. The Beys did not intervene in tribal affairs as long as they paid their taxes, essential to the Beylical budget, recognised the government's sovereignty, and did nothing to threaten the stability of the regime. The fiscal demands were limited. None of the Southern

tribes, outside the oases of Gabès and Aradh, paid the taxes on agricultural capital or production. Outside the oases the tribes paid only the mejba. Records of these taxes have been studied in detail by Ganiage who reveals that minute enumerations of all the tribes of the south, excluding, it would seem, the Od. Bou Zid of the Touazine, were made in the early 1860's⁵⁷. French reports dating from the Protectorate suggest, however, that only the sedentary communities paid the mejba as a personal tax. The nomadic fractions usually paid a global sum based on the same principles as the mejba, but which amounted to a far smaller sum per capita. As Thomas Reade points out, it had 'been customary from time immemorial for this district to pay a stipulated some of money in lieu of all taxes'. Various figures have been suggested for the amount paid by the Querghamma, varying by a factor of two or more and none of them substantiated⁵⁸.

Payments probably did vary from year to year depending on the government's ability or determination to enforce taxation, and the tribes' inclination to resist. If the tribes proved intransigent the Bey might accept a lesser payment to save himself trouble. The 18th century chronicler Youssef provides an example

Ayant appris, en quittant Kairouan, que les Beni Zid et les Querghamma refusaient de se soumettre, Ali-Bey marcha contre eux à la tête de l'élite de ses cavaliers. A son approche ils prirent fuite vers le désert et lui échappèrent; mais ses goums razzièrent leurs troupeaux. Il leur envoya des émissaires portant son chapelet, pour leur proposer l'amane avec l'assurance qu'ils n'auraient à payer que les redevances régulièrement dues.

Ils répondirent aux émissaires qu'ils n'avaient pas d'argent, mais qu'ils pouvaient offrir leurs chameaux en échange. Ali-Bey ayant consenti ils envoyèrent tous ceux de leurs chameaux qui étaient vieux, malades ou incapables de travailleur; le prince les accepta tels qu'ils étaient et leur fit mettre sa marque.⁵⁹

Taxes served a second purpose: they affirmed the link between the tribes and the Bey. They were, to use a term popular among the European travellers, tribute⁶⁰. As personal taxes the driba and medjba were admirably suited to this purpose. Bachrouch, the historian of 17th century Tunisia, observes

en frappant surtout les personnes et dans une moindre mesure les revenus et biens, l'impôt a valeur de tribut dont la signification initiale est celle d'un acte de soumission et d'allégeance.⁶¹

When tribes refused to pay or openly defied the government the Beys acted quickly, though not always successfully, with military force to reassert their authority. In 1839 the government established a tobacco monopoly. The tribes in the south refused to pay. Although it was summer the Bey sent a column, 'imprudently' in the opinion of the British consul, to force them. It failed⁶². Again in 1856 when the Beni Zid refused to pay the new medjba a mahalla was sent to the south. An increase in the medjba in 1869, also rejected by the Beni Zid, led to further military intervention⁶³.

By forcing the tribes to pay their taxes the government reasserted and demonstrated its authority. By taking punitive measures it sought to discourage further resistance. In 1635, for example, the Turks levelled the rebellious town of el Hamma⁶⁴. The Oussalatia, rebels against the Bey in 1728, had their villages and trees destroyed and were then forceably dispersed about the Regence⁶⁵. During the 19th century the government continued to suppress opposition brutally. The village of Kebili, in Nefzaoua, which had sheltered rebels in 1857 was sold, its people evicted and sent to Cap Bon. They returned a year later but were forced to buy back their village⁶⁶. In the same year the Beni Zid paid heavy reparations and surrendered hostages as surety for their future good conduct⁶⁷. After the rebellion of 1864 fines, tax arrears, hostages, recruits drained the rebel tribes and Sahelian villages⁶⁸.

Both the speed and strength of the government's reaction to tribal dissidence contradict Brown's picture of an isolationist state where

geographical factors eased the burden of government. Since the strongholds of mountaineers and nomads were in the outlying areas to the west and the south, weaker governments could survive simply by containing them there, or at worst by folding back toward the eastern coastal plain (the Sahil), the environs of Tunis, and the peninsula of Cap Bon.⁶⁹

and so

Tribal revolts were never crushed whatever the cost. Rather the government disciplined recalcitrant tribes when existing resources permitted. Otherwise, the government bided its time, relying on the weapons of bribery, economic reprisal (e.g., denial of access to market areas) and divide-and-rule tactics (incitement of neighbouring tribes against the offender) to create new circumstances the re-establishment of control.⁷⁰

The Beys allowed the tribes autonomy, they had neither the means nor the need to enforce direct administration, but they would not allow them independence. Although they renounced all but the most indirect administration of tribal affairs they did not turn their backs on these communities. Divisions between the tribes were exploited through the recruitment of *makhzen* tribes and the balancing of one community against another (see Appendix IX). They bound the tribal elite to the regime by grants of land and public office. In this way military intervention became the extreme of a range of policies by which the Beys assured the continued loyalty of the tribes.

This was important because the Beys could not shut themselves up in their coastal fortress. First of all the cities and the coastal regions were not divorced economically from the tribal hinterlands as he suggests. Secondly the tribes were not a spent political force. Tribes play the central role in Ibn Khaldun's *Muqadimah*. Superior military ability and *asabiya* (group feeling), enabled the tribes to occupy the urban centres and establish dynasties. Urban life, however, weakened the tribesmen as soldiers and created rifts where before there was solidarity. Eventually the dynasty would collapse under the attack of another tribe and so the cycle would continue⁷¹.

Historians point to the Ottoman occupation as breaking this pattern. Brown, for example, asserts that

Since the establishment of the Hafsids in the thirteenth century, no force of nomads or mountaineers from within has overthrown a dynasty and created another, or even played a crucial role in political changes.⁷²

Hess has described how the advent of the musket and cannon at the time of the Ottoman invasion gave the professional and well

equipped army the advantage. Tribes could no longer play an important role in the political process⁷³.

If this was true in the 16th and 17th centuries it was certainly not by the late 19th. The tribes were well equipped and their military competence had been demonstrated in several engagements. The army, moreover, was scarcely 3,000 strong and garrisoned throughout the Sahel and North. A tribal makhzen was essential to the Bey if he was to guard the regime against rebels. So much was demonstrated during the dynastic crisis of the 18th century when tribes did much of the fighting. It is significant that when Mohamed el-Adel, a cousin of the Bey, rose in revolt in 1867 it was to the tribes, the Khroumir, that he turned for his support. Civil war was only averted by the rebels' timely submission⁷⁴. Individual tribes might have little influence on 'national' politics; the Ouerghamma, for instance,

incontestiblement la plus puissante [tribu] de la Regence est toutefois trop éloignée et divisée entre elle pour jouer un rôle sérieux et continu dans les affaires intérieures du pays.⁷⁵

But united they were still a force to be reckoned with, as the revolt of 1864 clearly demonstrated. At one point government control stretched at most sixty kilometres from the capital. With a garrison of only one battalion Tunis itself was open to attack. But the attack never came. As the rebels fell out with each other and returned for their harvests the Bey was able to reassert his authority and the crisis passed⁷⁶. Again in 1881 after the Bey had abandoned resistance against the French the tribes continued with some success. On both occasions, however, the tribes' effectiveness as a military force was marred by the rivalries and dissensions between them. The tribes quarrelled, refused to act corporately, deserted, and eventually fought each other. They were divisions that the Beylical government aggravated and exploited through the makhzen tribes. To abandon such a policy would have been fool hardy if not fatal. The government could not afford to alienate all the tribes and so allow them to combine.

The assumption that the tribesmen sought to evade the authority of the state is implicit in the bled el-makhzen/bled es-siba dichotomy. It was an assumption inherited from earlier writers who believed that

les hordes indomptées qui n'habitent que les lieux inaccessibles [...] préfèrent l'indépendance et la misère à un genre de vie plus tranquille, et dont ils ne pourroient jouir qu'on soumettant comme les autres, à la despotisme des Turcs.⁷⁷

They argued that the tribes rejected any claim of authority made by the state. But documents from the tribes to the Bey reveal that this was not the case. The tribes sometimes requested the Beys' intervention with the Tripolitanian government or over problems of taxation. This was a *de facto* admission of his sovereignty. More significantly the Bey was often referred to as the 'amir el-muminin (commander of the faithful) suggesting a moral, if not real, authority⁷⁸.

There was an element of convenience in this admission of sovereignty. The 'subject' could claim the intervention or the protection of the Bey. In Souf this was clearly the motive. Rather than suffer occupation by the French the oasis declared itself part of Tunisia. The Bey, after all, was far too distant to intervene effectively in local affairs⁷⁹. But sovereignty did present demands, the most important of which was the payment of tribute.

Early accounts claimed that 'les habitants ne paieront aucun tribut, si le Bey n'allaient l'exiger par la force'⁸⁰ and that 'les peuples vagabonds et sans domicile fixe ne paieront rien s'ils n'y étaient contraints par la force'⁸¹. For Pellissier and Thomas MacGill, the Glaswegian merchant, it was a question of honour, as well as financial self interest, that they resist every tax gathering expedition⁸². Their accounts passed, without criticism^{ci}, into the popular imagination, finding expression in, for example, Delacroix's 1863 painting 'La perception de l'impôt arabe'⁸³, and thence into the bled el-makhzen/bled es-siba model⁸⁴.

Unfortunately no attempt has yet been made to examine the truth of this now stereotyped opposition. To do so will demand a thorough

examination of the correspondence of the mahalla. But even before this task is undertaken there is some evidence to suggest that not all the tribes opposed tax collection. Sir Grenville Temple, for example, admits that many of the tribes visited the mahalla and deposited their taxes without coercion⁸⁶. The timing of the tribal revolts also suggests that the tribes admitted the government's right to and paid, if somewhat reluctantly, a certain level of taxation. Mattei, French Consular Agent at Sfax, describes the Ouerghamma's attitude to taxation:

La tribu des Ouerghamma, limitrophe de Tripoli, relevent d'Arad, veut bien payer à Si Hayder la taxe personnelle de dix piastres, mais refuse de payer les frais de guerre que S.A. a imposés à ses populations. Si Hayder sera bien obligé de contenter de ce qui ils veulent bien lui donner, car le gouvernement n'a jamais pu soumettre cette tribu et certainement ce sera jamais Si Hayder avec le quelque hommes qu'il a qui fera ce prodige de valeur.⁸⁶

They admitted the principle of taxation, a tribute but no more, and they rebelled only when the government attempted to increase or multiply the forms of taxation. The monopoly on tobacco brought armed opposition from the tribes because, as Thomas Reade described at the time, the south willingly paid their global tax but would pay no more, and, he added, 'similar outbreaks to this have frequently occurred from the same cause'⁸⁷. The introduction of the mejba in 1856 led to another revolt. As Richard Wood noted, 'this resistance is attributed to an apprehension that the government intends to levy, besides the Poll tax of three Tunisian piastres per month, the old impots for which it was substituted'⁸⁸. When the medjba was doubled in 1864 the Beni Zid, offered to pay the 36 piastres per capita of the old tax, and so admitted the principle of taxation, but refused to pay the increase⁸⁹. Tribal resistance was not directed at the principle of taxation, but at the acceptable level.

In much the same way the tribes appear to have admitted the Bey's right to appoint local officials. The tribes, however, judged these officials in terms of acceptable standards of behaviour and methods of administration. Those that fell below these standards,

such as Ali bin Khalifa, became the subject of complaints to the Bey and opposition within the tribes⁹⁰.

The tribes also accepted some level of government intervention in their affairs, usually in the capacity of an arbitrator. In their dealings with the Tripolitanian government the tribes often used the Bey as both protector and intermediary⁹¹. The Bey might also settle disputes between tribes. In 1759, for example, Ali-Bey arbitrated and eventually judged a land dispute between the Hamerna and Accara⁹².

But there were limits to how much interference they would accept. The appointment of a cadhi at Médénine in 1874 was unpopular among the tribes because they feared that the government would intervene in their internal affairs. They sent a petition asking for his recall and threatened to emigrate if he continued to interfere⁹³.

Why were the tribes willing to pay a certain level of taxation and accept some intervention from the Beys? There was certainly no concept of 'nationality' that bound the tribes to the Bey⁹⁴. The use of the term 'amir el muminin in correspondence may reflect some religious motivation. As commander of the faithful the Bey did have a right to claim specified revenues from the tribes and their association with the Bey in this capacity provided an important and visible link with orthodox Islam. There was also the benefit of protection. It should be pointed out, however, that by avoiding confrontation on the principle of sovereignty tribes could regulate the degree of government intervention. Both sides gained from a situation where in return for taxes (substantial in absolute terms but low per capita and compared to payments by other communities) and the recognition of government sovereignty the tribes were able to regulate their own affairs and the government was spared the expense of administration. There seems some truth in Blaquiere's assertion that the tribes 'only pay the tribute to avoid greater evils'⁹⁵: the evil of government intervention. Confrontation occurred only when the state attempted to interrupt the status quo, usually by increasing the demands for taxes, forced upon the Beys their multiplying debts, or occasionally by some attempt to introduce more

direct control of tribal life. Sometimes the government was able to impose the tax increase or the administrative measure, sometimes it was not. In neither case did the government alter the fundamental principle of tribal autonomy.

This was not an isolationist policy. The tribes did not cut themselves off from the government. Government control of the main market centres and the Tell, important to the tribes in drought years as a source of grain and employment (see Chapter 3), compelled them to achieve some kind of *modus vivendi* and a relationship which guarded their autonomy was to be preferred. Because the state was an important political force the tribes had to have a sophisticated understanding of events at court and in the cities, the tribes could not simply close their eyes, or, as anthropologists tend to suggest, regard the state as monolith.

In the 18th century the tribes played an important part in the quarrel between Hussein Pasha and his nephew Ali. Tribal groups sought to manipulate the political situation at court for their own benefit and the relationships established at this date, or before, continued to have a particular significance in the appointment of makhzen tribes and the creation of tribal resistance during the 19th century.

The tribes' understanding of court politics went beyond the identification of dynastic groups it extended to individuals and their policies. In 1864 the tribes did not simply demand the return to former levels of taxation they also called for the revocation of the unpopular Minister Khaznadar whose policies had been far more interventionist and repressive than the tribes approved⁹⁶.

It is clear that the tribes and the state did not, as historians have suggested, live two separate political spheres. Rather relations with the tribes were as important to the state as those with a foreign power or dynastic rival, and the state was as much a part of the tribe's political world as a neighbouring fraction.

6.2. State and Tribe during the Protectorate: The machinery of repression.

The occupation of Tunisia in 1881 did not immediately transform the relationship between the tribe and the state in the South. Following the defeat of the rebel tribes at Kairouan in October 1881 and the relief of the beleaguered French garrison at Gabès in late November, when the collapse of rebel opposition seemed imminent, the army stopped short of a total occupation of Tunisia. The military drew a line across the country from Gabès to the Algerian border. To the north the Protectorate immediately set about establishing the machinery of government control: garrisons, communications, roads, and a closely supervised local administration. To the south, Cambon wrote in hindsight

notre politique avec les Ouerghammas devait nécessairement se rapprocher beaucoup de celle suivie à leur égard auparavant par le Gouvernement Tunisien.⁹⁷

The tribes continued to enjoy considerable autonomy and the government did not even attempt to gather taxes from the nomadic communities. At the time the Protectorate felt it had good reason for this isolationist policy. After five years both the military and the civil authorities were determined on more direct control.

Initially the military believed that a garrison at Gabès could effectively isolate Southern Tunisia from the North. The Chott el-Djerid was, they were encouraged to believe by travellers accounts, virtually impassable⁹⁸. North-south movement was confined to a narrow corridor, fifteen kilometres wide at Gabès. Given the limited size of the occupation force (most of the troops were repatriated immediately after the occupation) the military were reluctant to occupy a region inhabited by reputedly troublesome tribes, and isolation appeared a more cost effective means of securing the north than occupation⁹⁹.

But the inadequacy of this barrier soon became apparent. Razzias easily crossed the Chotts to raid into Central Tunisia and by 1886 Rebillet confirmed that it could be crossed at any point ten months out of the year. Nor was the garrison at Gabès sufficient to

close the corridor. So swift were the raiders that they could pass through before the army was alerted¹⁰⁰.

Cambon and Allegro encouraged the military to establish posts in the south to provide information, to intercept raiding parties, to deprive the rebel tribes of a Tunisian base, and tentatively introduce the beginnings of government control¹⁰¹. Posts were established in the south at Ksar Metameur and, temporarily, at Zarzis. The military, however, believed they could pacify, submit, and control the tribes of the south without a permanent military presence. Zarzis, originally seen as essential to the control of the south as one of the region's major ports, was abandoned by the garrison in March 1883 as 'trop excentrique' leaving only the telegraph office and a Bureau of the Service des Renseignements¹⁰². From that date, until the establishment of an annexe at Douz in 1885 and the occupation of the south in 1889, the Service de Renseignements Poste and garrison of the 6^{me} Compagnie Mixte at Metameur were the sole representatives of the Protectorate in the region. Their purpose was simply to 'show the flag'. The authority of the Protectorate, the generals argued, could be imposed by less costly means.

Borrowing from their experience in Algeria the Division of Occupation suggested

toute la région comprise au sud de Gabès doit être le pays de colonnes, et qu'on la réduira toujours par l'action des mobiles sans y établir des jalons stables.¹⁰³

Their purpose was

faire le plus de mal possible aux intérêts des tribus insoumises en brûlant les récoltes, en coupant les arbres, en razziant le bétail, en détruisant les villages. On compte ainsi, par terreur et la famine, amener les populations au composition.¹⁰⁴

In spring 1882 three columns entered the South hoping to force a confrontation with the dissidents. General Jamais considered these measures 'plutôt une menace qu'une exécution'¹⁰⁵, he believed he could intimidate the rebels into submission. He was wrong. By the time he reached the mountain strongholds the rebels had disappeared

and, in vindictive frustration, he burned their harvests, cut their fruit trees, and blew up their villages. Ksour were pillaged and the tribal goum encouraged to razzia the rebels' herds¹⁰⁶.

Despite their ferocity the columns were only a qualified success. Some tribes did submit, pay their taxes, and give up hostages as surety for their fidelity¹⁰⁷. But once the columns had returned north these tribes immediately re-entered negotiations with the rebels¹⁰⁸. Those who did not submit retreated east. Indeed the threat posed by the raids from the tribal auxiliaries encouraged most of the remaining dissidents to move into Tripolitania, a consequence Cambon deplored since it inevitably increased the Turks' influence among them¹⁰⁹. The columns could not advance fast enough to confront the mobile tribesmen. For most of the year the south was inaccessible. French soldiers could not fight in the summer heat, nor were there enough reliable wells in the south to support a column after April or May. Even in winter the military had to carry water supplies and the baggage animals were forced to forage in the pools at the bottom of seasonal rivers.

Most crippling, however, was the restriction on movement imposed through fear of encroaching on Tripolitanian territory, and thereby precipitating conflict with the Turks and the ever watchful Italians¹¹¹. From March 1882 the military were restricted to the west bank of the Oued Fessi¹¹². A column crossing the Oued Fessi in November 1883 was ordered to return immediately¹¹³. This effectively put the whole area between the Oueds Fessi and Mogta outside government control and allowed the dissidents to filter back, to mount raids into the north, and to cultivate and pasture their lands.

On both sides of the O. Fessi the Protectorate depended on the co-operation of the tribal elite to exercise authority. Allegro, as Governor of Aradh, did not administer, he negotiated with tribes through their djemâa and influential khalifas. Even when the Haouia, Ouderna, and Touazine were appointed as makhzen tribes the government continued to respect, and confirmed, the traditional authority of the djemâa and their own leaders¹¹⁴. This policy soon presented problems because these leaders pursued their own interests

rather than the government's, and they were either unable or unwilling to impose their authority. Taxes were not collected, the tribes stood outside the law, worst of all raids into Tripolitania threatened to escalate into a major frontier incident'¹⁵.

Eventually a clash between an Ouderna raiding party and Turkish troops in 1887 forced the Protectorate to adopt a policy of direct control. In March and April 1886 Allegro, returning from leave in Paris to discover the south in a state of open dissidence, toured the region. His reports to the Resident General advised that the present policies 'au lieu d'assurer la paix sur la frontière y portent le désordre' and reasserted the need for a military occupation of the region'¹⁶.

By this time opinions had changed among the military. In 1886 Rebillet, the commanding officer at Metameur, published a report criticising the policy of indirect rule and suggesting that the submission of the Ouerghamma, the establishment of a network of military posts throughout the south, the selection of an effective force of auxiliaries by abandoning the tribal makhzen in favour of one based on individual recruits, and the appointment of loyal administrators within the tribes were essential to bring security to the south and remove the persistent threat of tribal rebellion'¹⁷. With Boulanger's replacement as commander of the Division of Occupation by Dionne in 1886 intervention became government policy'¹⁸.

But Cambon and the Ministry of War feared that a sudden occupation of the region would only increase the number of dissidents. 'Il sera inutile d'en venir à ces extrémités dont le résultat le plus certain serait de faire le vide dans une contrée aujourd'hui habitée'¹⁹. General Saint-Marc, commander-in-chief in 1887, also advocated a cautious approach and a gradual imposition of government authority'²⁰. And so it was only in 1889 that posts were established at Médenine (moved from Metameur) and Douiret (later moved to Tataouine) to supplement those already at Zarzis and Douz. (A proposed post at Djemila was a temporarily postponed because of Turkish opposition). This occupation marked a turning point, it allowed the state to control the tribes.

Central to the new policy was the threat of violence. The occupation of the south had asserted the state's military superiority over the tribes. This superiority was to be maintained by a permanent garrison. Gabès remained the main military base but troops were also dispersed throughout the south in small garrisons (see Table 6.2. and Map 8). Initially few preparations were made for their defence: the buildings were spread about without a curtain wall and at Tataouine the camp was overlooked by the heights on either side of the valley¹²¹. The intention was to withdraw the garrisons and cut the south off at Gabès if a European war or a local revolt threatened.

This policy was unacceptable to Rebillet. He argued that crises might arise so suddenly that evacuation would be impossible. Moreover, recalling the damaging consequences of General Vernier's untidy retreat in 1883, he suggested that the evacuation of the south at the first sign of trouble would give a poor impression of the French military. Control of the south depended on a commitment to the regions defence.

The solution was a compromise. Improvements were made in the military hardware, the camp at Tataouine was moved to Ksar Deghaghra, a more defensible position, and small redoubts were built to shelter the garrisons at Médenine, Tataouine, Zarzis, Matmata, Remada, and Dehibat, but the permanent garrisons in the south remained small. The basic strategy remained one of concentration at Gabès from where rapid deployment might support smaller garrisons in time of trouble. As in the Roman system, to which contemporaries drew frequent analogies, communications rather than fortifications were the core of the defensive hardware¹²². Road construction accounted for almost one third of the total cost of occupying the south in 1889¹²³. In the following years the extension and maintenance of the road network was a high priority in the work of the Service as they sought to gain ready access to every part of the south¹²⁴.

Information flows were improved by the introduction of telecommunications. In 1889 the garrisons in the south were extremely isolated, Metameur received telegraphs a full two days

after the post at Zarzis. This was too slow for the effective deployment of troops and at Rebillet's insistence an optical telecommunications system was established linking the posts to the garrison at Gabès, replaced by telegraph in the 1890's and telephone in the 1900's. Together the telecommunications and road network allowed the military to deploy troops to suppress the revolt of the Ouderna within a matter of days¹²⁵.

In the early 1890's the government continued to restrict the military to the area north of the Oued Fessi¹²⁶. For Rebillet this was a dangerous limitation because it allowed the tribes to escape direct government control¹²⁷. It was only after the failure of diplomatic attempts to define the border in 1893, however, that the military was able to persuade Resident General Millet to allow occupation of the south by the *makhzen*¹²⁸. The military were still not allowed within three kilometres of the putative border and only as far Djenien in the Dahar¹²⁹. Nevertheless *makhzen* posts were established along the length of the frontier (Ben Gardane 1893, Dehibat 1894, and Mecheded Salah 1895) supported French garrisons at Tataouine and Ben Gardane. By 1900 the Protectorate's occupation of the djeffara was a *fait accompli* and attention turned towards the Dahar. Well before the border delimitation of 1911 the problem of territorial sovereignty had been resolved and the French military had a liberty of action throughout the south.

The extension of the area under Tunisian control during the 1890's, while it gave the military liberty of action, exacerbated communications problems in the south. On the eve of the First World War Le Boeuf voiced his concern that the posts in the far south (Fort Pervinquière, Djenien, and Bir Pistor) were too isolated to be adequately defended¹³⁰. During the war this proved to be the case. All of the Saharan posts were abandoned and the Post at Dehibat was temporarily moved to Remada¹³¹.

Moreover, the south was isolated from the remainder of Tunisia. Large numbers of troops, munitions and supplies had to be transported south in late 1915 to support operations against the rebels but the port of Gabès was inadequate for these demands and there were no suitable land communications. In response the railway

was extended south from Sfax in 1916 and the harbour improved with breakwaters. As tensions with fascist Italy increased during the 1920's isolated garrisons were reinforced, and the military hardware improved but the principle of defence through deployment remained unchanged.

Whatever its limitations the French military machine was formidable. It was a power that the military sought to impress upon the tribes. In 1903 the French President toured Tunisia. Notables, cheikhs and higher officials were brought north to Sfax for a 'durbar', to be displayed and to see:

A la suite de le voyage on pu constater l'impression considerable produite sur l'esprit de ces indigènes par les manifestations bien apparantes de notre puissance et de notre civilisation, dont ils ont été temoins à Sfax. Les récits qu'ils n'ont pas manqué de faire à leur retour, à leurs contribuables sur la superiorité de nos moyens d'action, ont en d'autant plus d'effet que nos tribus du sud sont rarement en contact avec les populations européens et fréquentent jamais les grandes centres. Ces récits ont provoqué une tendance plus encore au respect envers la nation protectrice.¹³²

French victory in the First World War, defeating the tribal revolt, the Turks and the Germans, demonstrated French might.

The military was, however, the ultimate sanction not the means of government control. It was a threat that enabled the state to impose its authority on the tribes. The basis of this control was the Tunisian administration imposed in the years following the occupation (see Chapter 8). It is significant that within a month of the occupation the first moves were made to introduce the administrative structure already current in the the north. Mohamed el Aouini, Khalifa of Neffat, was dispatched to the region to supervise the election of cheikhs. Most of those elected already held office and so the elections did not transform the administration. The 'amra el bey each cheikh received, did, however, identify them as the Bey's representatives. In the following years cheikhs became, in theory at least, functionaries, representatives of and responsible to the state. They were more than tax collectors,

a tool of repression in themselves, with powers to arrest, imprison, and fine.

Beside the local government responsible to the Prime Minister the another administration was imposed by the Protectorate, the Service de Renseignements (from 1907 Service des Affaires Indigènes). Bureaux were built in the centre of each tribal group at Médénine (originally (1883) at Metameur moved 1888), Tataouine (originally (1888) at Douiret moved 1890), Kebili (originally (1885) at Douz moved 1890), Zarzis (1888), Ben Gardane (1893), and Matmata (1897) (see Map 8). These were not fortresses. On the contrary the Bureaux and the officers' living quarters were completely undefended and, in the early years at least, distant from reinforcements. One officer described the isolation as being ship wrecked in the desert¹³³.

In the spirit of Britain's District Officer the Service de Renseignements Officer was expected to live among the tribesmen, to speak their language, to understand their customs and to know the personalities and politics of leading tribesmen. He was to provide the intelligence on which the Protectorate's security depended¹³⁴. Their functions were, however, broader than just the collection of information and compilation of reports. The Decree of 10th June 1882 gave officers the authority to impose limited fines and terms of imprisonment 's'il constate que quelqu'un fait de la résistance ou opposition aux pouvoirs dont il est investi' or 'pour réprimer les actes d'insubordination et les infractions de l'ordre et de police' a broad mandate that covered most crime. The Decrees of 4th May 1900 and 31st December 1921 gave officers *de jure* investigative authority on behalf of French and Tunisian judiciaries, powers which, in practice, they already enjoyed. Officers acted as policeman, prosecutor, jury, and judge. As one officer described, he worked with 'la balance de Thémis d'une main, le revolver dans l'autre'¹³⁵.

Officers were not, however, to undertake acts of administration themselves or punish the Tunisian administrators directly

l'administration du pays et l'exercice de justice appartient au gouvernement beyical; les commandants territoriaux n'auront pas d'autorité directe sur les fonctionnaires et magistrats tunisiennes qui sont les

agents du Bey et relevent immédiatement à lui [...] En ce qui concerne les fonctionnaires n'ont pas à les blamer, à les réprimander, à les punir, mais ils doivent rendre compte de leurs fautes au commandement de la subdivision à laquelle ils appartient et lui soumettre les propositions en vue de faire punir ou révoquer un chef indigène infidèle, coupable, ou prévaricateur.¹³⁶

In reality, however, the officers controlled the administration. They verified the Tunisian officials' tax registers and supervised their correspondence with central government. They could influence the appointment and punishment, even revocation of Tunisian officials. They also intervened directly in administrative affairs. A report originating from the Central Bureau of the Service candidly admitted 'les officiers fait presque les fonctions des caïds'¹³⁷. By 1894 the Resident General recognised that the military had monopolised authority within the south

l'autorité militaire n'admet plus le pouvoir civil à intervenir en Territoire hors du contrôle que par son intermédiaire, et par pouvoir civil il faut entendre en plus particulièrement l'administration indigène.¹³⁸

It was a monopoly that both undermined the authority of the Tunisian administration and alienated the tribe from the state because the reigns of government power lay outside the community.

Despite the Service's control of the administration and ability to intervene in tribal affairs delegation remained the essence of its role. The Service simply did not have enough personnel to administer the south directly or closely supervise the native cheikhs and khalifas. Much of the time the Bureaux were undermanned. New recruits were discouraged by the damage secondment from garrison forces did to their career. After several years in the Service officers generally returned to the regular army and so lack of numbers was compounded by a dearth of skilled and experienced personnel. The introduction of a course for new officers could not make up their loss¹³⁹. Moreover staff frequently changed post as they became more senior. Just as an officer was getting to know one area he would be moved to another. 'Toutes les fois que je vais dans une poste militaire' complained Millet 'j'y vois une figure nouvelle'¹⁴⁰. The First World War only exacerbated these problems.

Officers preferred active service to administrative work and, faced with a mass exodus of staff, the Resident General had to refuse all transfers. After the war better conditions and the romance of the Moroccan service attracted recruits at Tunisia's expense. From 1919 the Service was always at least two officers short and as early as 1920 the military were forced to close the Annexes at Bir Kecira and Remada⁴¹.

Undermanning forced the Service to rely heavily for its information and control of distant areas on the makhzen. Transformed by the Reglement du Makhzen of April 1888 the tribal makhzen became a 'troupe régulière'. Recruited individually among the tribes of the south and salaried, though still accorded the traditional tax exemptions, the new makhzen was a professional service. No longer just auxiliaries, the 1888 Rules '[les] chargés d'assurer la police et la sécurité du pays [...] Ils constituent une sorte de gendarmerie indigène'⁴². They investigated crimes, arrested suspects, and supported the cheikhs as they gathered taxes from recalcitrant tribesmen⁴³. They were an arm of the administration and an essential tool in its enforcement. They were not, however, under the command of the cheikhs or caïds, even though the Tunisian government paid their salaries, they were commanded directly by the French military hierarchy.

The makhzen's function was, moreover, dual. Although the 1888 Rules ordered that they 'ne doit être appelé à combattre que dans les circonstances tout à fait exceptionnelles', the intention was from the first to use them as military auxiliaries. 'Le makhzen doit être progressivement militarisé', wrote Rebillet in 1889⁴⁴. Their armament originally only a repeater rifle was increased to include a sword and revolver. They wore a uniform, were subject to a military style hierarchy, received a pension in the same way as soldiers, and enjoyed the same medical services. From the first they were given military responsibilities. They were frontier guards, intercepting raiding parties and pushing back Tripolitarians who crossed the border without the appropriate papers. Posts were established along the border's length and regular patrols crossed the region. Whilst the border question remained unsettled the makhzen remained the only

means of government control in the southern Dahar and Djefara. In time of war or rebellion the intention was that the makhzen would provide intelligence, act as guides and perhaps even conduct guerilla operations. They were, in short, an extension of the army.

Officers were, however, both unable and reluctant to entirely devolve their police responsibilities upon the makhzen. Initially only forty five makhzen were appointed, though the decree allowed for eighty, and thereafter the numbers steadily increased reaching a peak of over 500 after the Second World War (see Table 6.2.). Nevertheless, the makhzen were overstretched in their responsibilities. Frontier patrols absorbed most of the manpower and supporting the administration often had to take second place.

More important, the military never quite trusted their auxiliaries. Although they were recruited as individuals the force never escaped its tribal identity. Postes were usually dominated by makhzen recruited locally. As a result officers suspected them of partiality, an accusation which was sometimes well founded¹⁴⁵. Movement between posts and the employment of Algerians were seen as solutions to these problems but tribal animosities and the unwillingness of both tribesmen and makhzen to accept the authority of an outsider made this impracticable¹⁴⁶.

Nor were officers ever convinced of their loyalty to the state. The fact that eight makhzen joined the revolt of the Ouderna in 1915 confirmed their worst suspicions. Close control was kept of the makhzen's armaments. They were provided with the minimum of ammunition and had to account for every bullet they used. Despite their military responsibilities they were never trained to use artillery or machine guns.

Power, expressed in the military superiority of the state and the apparatus of control and repression, was the basis of the Protectorate's occupation of the south. But might was impotent without information and intelligence was the Service's principal function from the start. Forgemol's circular of July 1882 defined their responsibility to keep the government informed of political events, identify any potentially rebellious individuals or groups, keep dossiers on the tribal notables, religious orders, and

Réunir sur les tribus de cercle des documents historiques permettent de connaître leur origine, leurs relations, les contingents que chacune d'elle peut mettre sur pied à un moment donné pour ou contre nous, le nombre de têtes de somme dont ils disposent, l'importance de leurs approvisionnements en céréales, les implantations de silos le montant des impôts qu'elles paient au trésor.¹⁴⁷

Every month they had to produce a report

relatent les faits survenus pendant le mois écoulé et contenant en outre des renseignements relatifs à la sécurité des routes, aux mouvements des nomades, à l'esprit des populations à l'état des troupeaux et de l'agriculture.¹⁴⁸

The cheikhs and caïds were also expected to provide regular reports about the events and individuals within their tribe and were revoked if they were found to be unco-operative. As the range of taxes and administrative controls increased so did the amount of information the government gathered. All of which contributed to government control and its ability to exploit the native economy.

Beside these official structures of surveillance the military employed spies and encouraged informants¹⁴⁹. Anthropologists also played a part. Much of the early social science research was closely bound up with the needs of the colonial administration. French officers were encouraged to write monographs that would improve their understanding of their charges, and professional ethnologists made a similar contribution whether they intended it or not¹⁵⁰.

6.3. State and Tribe during the Protectorate: Control and Repression.

Although the Protectorate intended to impose its authority on the tribes gradually, effective government demanded the immediate imposition of controls and restrictions. Whilst the nomadic tribes left their cereals beyond the O. Fessi, for example, the military saw that they would be able to leave into dissidence with impunity. Until the *retba* (buried silos) in the ploughlands were accessible,

the military insisted that they kept their grain near French garrisons'⁵¹. Fears of raiding, smuggling, and banditry led to controls on movement. From 1887 tribesmen could not travel beyond their caïdat without a travel permit giving their destination, purpose of journey, and a period of validity'⁵². Although the government hesitated to disarm the tribes the decree of 20 July 1896 compelled the licensing of firearms, followed by the decree of 16 December 1915 which imposed a heavy tax. Aminees were appointed to supervise agriculture, industry, and the market place. Price controls were introduced, with limitations on when and where goods could be sold. Permits, issued at the discretion of the Service, were required for shops and cafés. Increasingly the state intervened in, controlled, even managed the economy.

The imposition of the government's legal code extended government control into the very heart of the tribe. Growing numbers were arraigned before the courts and disciplined by government officials (see Tables 6.7. and 6.8.). Criminal law, began to determine the acceptable relations between individuals. Feuding, for example, could no longer resort to the same extremes of violence as it had in the past. Not even the family had immunity from government intervention. The decree of 7 November 1912 extended the registration of births and deaths to the south, the makhzen or cheikh could violate to arrest or search, and the decree of 5 May 1922 allowed the forced vaccination of married and unmarried women. By the turn of the century the state was a very real force in tribal life.

Regulation and intervention were, however, only one side of the government's policy of control. Its other face was the extreme repression of insubordination and opposition. For the military the pacification, as they regarded their occupation, and subsequent security depended not just on a display of superior force but a willingness to use it. Failure to repress opposition, they argued, would be interpreted as an admission of weakness. Lt. Colonel Donau, for example, sought the imprisonment of an unco-operative cheikh because otherwise 'les chefs des tribus pourraient faire douter leurs administrés de notre pouvoir de répression'⁵³.

To be admonitory, exemplary, and coercive repression had to be severe. Officers pressed for the heaviest sentences, even for apparantly trivial crimes and acts of opposition. In 1899 five Touazine notables were exiled in the north for an indefinite period and another eleven condemned to varying terms of imprisonment for an 'acte d'opposition aux chefs indigènes investis de l'autorité dans sa tribu, et pour entraver l'exécution des ordres de Gouvernement Tunisien'. Their crime was to have discouraged fellow tribesmen from participating in a voluntary studbook scheme¹⁵⁴.

Nor were they concerned with innocence and guilt. Against a junior officer's complaints that the sequestration of dissident property hurt the rebel's family more than the rebel Colonel Foucher replied

Toute atténuation à cette mesure, toute concession faite en faveur de la femme, des enfants, qu'elle soit dictée par un sentiment d'humanité ou le souci de ne pas augmenter le nombre des miséreux, va à l'encontre du but poursuivi. En faisant fléchir la règle le séquestre et la vente des biens se réduisent à une sorte d'amende dont la quotité devrait être déterminés pour chaque cas selon le degré de culpabilité et aussi selon la situation de famille et des ressources de sequestré. Au contraire l'application stricte de la mesure ferme la porte à toute interprétation et semble de nature à produire d'autant plus d'effet qu'elle frappe plus fort.¹⁵⁵

As if opposition were a contagious infection the military sought to isolate its opponents. The decree of 25th October 1897 allowed the Service to confine those under suspicion of subversion to their village or home. Trouble makers could be imprisoned or exiled without breaking any law. Dissidents were deprived of their property so that, Leclerc explains, 'nous pourrions les considéra comme ayant renoncé d'une façon définitive à leur nationalité'¹⁵⁶.

The government, moreover, had to appear omnipotent. To prove that dissidents could not escape the law sequestrations were imposed in the 1890's and again in 1915

le séquestre et la vente des biens est une mesure essentiellement brutale imposé par la raison d'état pour sa sécurité, elle n'est inscrite dans aucun code. Elle est destiné à frapper fort, à ruiner le criminel qu'elle atteint et à lui signifier que s'il été impossible de

l'apprehender en personne pour le punir de son crime on le rejette définitivement d'un pays envers lesquels il a été traître et on lui enlève les moyens d'y vivre.¹⁵⁷

If the criminal or rebel could not be identified the military preferred to impose an indiscriminate collective punishment rather than no punishment at all. In 1889 they had made the notables of each fraction responsible for crimes committed by unidentifiable members of the community¹⁵⁸. Following the tribal revolt the military suggested the sequestration of the Ouderna's collective lands, using the same procedures as employed in Algeria in 1845. The Resident General demurred at the prospect of large scale evictions¹⁵⁹. But again in the 1920's, Cpt. Cosson, trying to control banditry and suspecting that villagers in the mountains were supplying them food and shelter, imposed illegal collective fines¹⁶⁰.

Tribesmen were expected to maintain a respectful deference to the Protectorate's representatives. Every Bastille Day, cheikhs visited the Bureau to formally 'proteste de leur entier dévouement à la nation protectrice et à ses représentants'¹⁶¹. The slightest disrespect was construed as insubordination or sedition. One colonist claimed 'les incarcérations s'opèrent journellement pour défaut de salut aux officiers de la part des indigènes ou pour motifs plus futiles encore'¹⁶². Reports reveal the cases of a tribesman imprisoned for whistling whilst an officer spoke and a cheikh fined for refusing an officer suitable hospitality¹⁶³. Nor would the military brook criticism. A drunken cheikh who insulted the French and decried the occupation was forced to make a public apology before his revocation¹⁶⁴. Personal criticism of officers entailed imprisonment¹⁶⁵. Propaganda, even spreading rumour, against the Protectorate was punished. A reservist in Matmata was sentenced to two months imprisonment and 200 frs. fine for possessing a picture of a wounded French soldier, a singer to six months imprisonment and a fine of 500 frs. for criticising the military and inciting a djihad (holy war)¹⁶⁶. Any mention or representation of Muslims killing or fighting Europeans was banned as an incitement to murder¹⁶⁶. Whatever his crime, refusal to obey an order, to pay

taxes, or avoidance of conscription, the tribesman could be arraigned on charges on sedition and rebellion.

This repression seems harsh and ruthless. For contemporaries, however, the reality was clothed in a legitimising ideology. The occupation of the south was, from their point of view, for the general good. It was a return to the halcyon days of the 'Pax Romana'. Occupation became pacification, and repression the maintenance of order. To quote from Cdt. Le Boeuf's obituary

Avant l'occupation française les tribus au sud de Gabès étaient soumises comme sociétés primitives à loi du plus fort. Trop loin des pouvoirs réguliers pour avoir recours à leur protection. [...] Quelques années ont suffi à nos officiers des A.I. pour reculer jusqu'aux abords du Sahara la vie civilisée, pour faire regner dans leurs cercles l'ordre, l'obéissance aux lois, le respect des biens et des personnes.¹⁶⁷

Most tribesmen, they claimed, appreciated the order that the Protectorate had brought. Macquart, an S.A.I. officer, describes

Combien de fois, au cours de tournées dans le pays, les officiers du Service n'ont-ils entendu des vieillards leur dire: "Avant que vous arriviez ici, il fallait être armé pour aller labourer nos terres. Nous vivions dans nos ksour pour pouvoir constamment nous défendre et nous y entassions toutes les provisions. Maintenant, vois toi-même, nous construisons des ghorfa isolées, nos troupeaux passent isolés dans le Dahar, et nos femmes vont seules depuis longtemps chercher l'eau au puits et à la citerne".¹⁶⁸

The tribes, they argued, appreciated the benefits of an efficient administration, government services, and controls imposed for the common good (such as vaccination). Officers envisaged their administration as government by consensus.

Since the majority supported the Protectorate, tacitly if not explicitly, those who rejected its authority were 'deviants', and since the government acted for the common good a crime against the state became a reprehensible crime against society meriting the severest punishment. The imprisonment of Touazine notables after the 'studbook affair' was explained in precisely these terms

Ce mouvement était dû à l'action de quelques notables intriguants de la tribu qui usent leur influence pour

pousser des indigènes à résister à toute mesure prise dans l'intérêt général du pays.¹⁶⁹

Surveillance and control, by virtue of the same argument, were necessary to protect the majority against the criminal minority and to help the government provide the services from which all the tribes benefitted. Repression was a social necessity. Acceptable to most Europeans and some Tunisians as the better of two evils, enforced order or anarchy.

Repression was, moreover, the European's emotional response to their situation in Tunisia. Officers stationed in Southern Tunisia and colonists with farms in the bled were, and felt, very isolated. To them a tribal uprising, and their massacre, was a continual and terrible threat. There were four major rebellions in Algeria between 1840 and 1881, and colons saw little reason for Tunisia to be different. Attacks on Europeans by armed mobs, leading to three deaths at Kasserine and Thala in 1906, riots at Metlaoui in 1907, and at Bab Aleoua (Tunis) in 1911 confirmed their worst fears. Their almost hysterical reaction, led by the colonial press, was to resist any liberalisation of the political regime, demand yet greater repression, the maintenance of a substantial military presence, and the provision of arms for their own defence in the bled¹⁷⁰.

There were limits as to how far the government would go. To impose certain obligations on the tribes would be more trouble than it was worth. Corvées were difficult to organise and, in 1892, had led to riots at Médenine¹⁷¹. By the turn of the century the military preferred to add a supplement to the medjba rather than use forced labour. They were equally pragmatic about the imposition of recruitment. In 1893 the Accara had threatened to go into dissidence if the Commission enforced the measure. The military relented. They were allowed exemptions on the payment of a reduced replacement cost¹⁷². In Matmata, however, a demonstration followed by a riot in which tribesmen shot at French troops disinclined the military to lenience. No concessions were made but the Resident General opposed any attempt to extend recruitment to the rest of the south. The decree of 23 March 1899 formally exempted the Territoires Militaires, including Zarzis but excluding Matmata, from the

obligation of recruitment. In 1913 the Resident General explained to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that to introduce recruitment into the south would cause a rebellion¹⁷². When war was declared a decree of 23 September 1914 set up a *goum* (a militia) for all men between twenty and forty but there was still no attempt to extend recruitment to the region. Even on the eve of the Second World War the government preferred to avoid the risk of a major confrontation.

Resident Generals were reluctant to repress opposition. Severity, they feared, far from securing the authority of the Protectorate might encourage the tribes of the south to depart into dissidence or worse, rise in revolt. Millet criticised the military over the Touazine studbook affair because

dans la conduite tenue par les Officiers de la Service des Renseignements envers les Touazines, l'effort me paraissait hors de proportion avec le résultat d'obtenir: en effet, nous avons intérêt à ce que ces tribus restent tranquilles et n'émigrent pas en Tripolitaine.¹⁷³

To compel co-operation with voluntary projects, he went on, 'provoque inutilement des actes de mutinerie'. Collective fines and sequestrations, the civil authorities advised, entailed the same defiance of the government by alienating loyal tribesmen and giving them a common cause with rebels and criminals¹⁷⁴. The military, they suggested, should interpret the law more literally and apply it less rigorously.

These problems were compounded where the military had authority over French citizens. Criticisms of the 'régime de sabre' imposed by the Bureaux Arabes in Algeria resurfaced¹⁷⁵, indeed some were quick to draw parallels between the two administrations

L'administration qui, en Tunisie, a pris le nom de Bureaux de Renseignements, n'est qu'une réminiscence des anciens Bureaux Arabes militaires de l'Algérie. Le sabre et cravache y sont considérée comme les meilleurs instruments de colonisation: quant au colon, c'est l'ennemi.¹⁷⁶

Colonists characterised the officers as megalomaniacs intent on preserving their absolute authority. An authority which 'les

messieurs n'usent qu'au gré de leurs caprices et non dans l'intérêt général'¹⁷⁷.

To avoid conflict between the civil and military authorities the Resident Generals tried to 'remettre au plus tôt l'administration des territoires pacifiés à la Contrôle Civil'¹⁷⁸. Established in 1884 the Contrôleurs Civils had the same responsibilities and powers as the Service but, as civilians, were direct subordinates of the Resident General. By 1889 they supervised all Tunisia north of the Chotts. As colonisation spread to the south, Gabes became a Contrôl Civil in 1895, and Zarzis too was under threat. The 'Chambre Mixte du Sud' was eager to see this small European community removed from military administration'¹⁷⁹. Had the Resident General been unable to secure direct control of the Service in 1906 this would inevitably have followed. As it was the transfer of the Service to the Residence General preserved the military administration in the field.

6.4. The State and the Tribe under the Protectorate: Expropriator or Benefactor?

The state's ruinous exploitation of the Tunisian economy by taxation was a frequent criticism levelled at the Beylical government by apologists of the Protectorate. Both French and Tunisian commentators expressed hopes that the new regime would reduce the government's fiscal demands'¹⁸⁰. They were to be disappointed. Determined that the cost of the Protectorate should not fall to the French taxpayer and that the Regence should honour its debts (rescheduled with French creditors in 1884) the Protectorate made only one concession. Following Forgemol's recommendation demands for arrears, amounting to twelve years of taxes in the case of the Kroumirs, were abandoned. Otherwise the levels of taxation were maintained'¹⁸¹. Recognising the role taxes played in expressing the sovereignty of the state the military insisted that the tribes should pay them as an act of submission, and revenues began to come in as the French columns traversed Central and Southern Tunisia in late 1882 and 1883'¹⁸². But, in contrast to the former regime, the Protectorate also set about

establishing an administration to ensure the regular payment of fiscal revenues.

Initially the south's privileged regime was to continue. The decree of 15 October 1884, guaranteed the tax exemption of the makhzen tribes. Even in 1888, when the tribal makhzen was suppressed and the decree of 27 July provided for the introduction of the mejba to the Ouderna, Touazine, Accara and Khezour, the Resident General was still reluctant to impose the tax because, he argued,

leurs services de guerre nous sont toujours nécessaires,
et par suite, il est équitable et prudent de ne pas
supprimer trop rapidement leurs privilèges au manière
d'impôt.¹⁸³

Instead of regularising their position, as Allegro advised, he reimposed the driba, a global tax that considerably reduced their fiscal obligation (see Table 6.10.). Some of the maraboutic (saintly) fractions and lineages (the Djellidet among the Ouderna and Zemama at Matmata) continued to enjoy the complete tax exemptions granted them by the decrees of former Beys. Even the sedentary communities of the Khezour and the Djebel Demmer paid a reduced mejba, twenty five instead of forty piastres. The whole south was, furthermore, still exempted from the taxes on agricultural production.

Privileges were, however, only the temporary expedient of a nervous government. The intention was always to integrate the south into Northern Tunisia's fiscal regime and eliminate the privileges enjoyed by the region's tribes. This was, however, a slow process. The Djellidet had their privileges rescinded as a punitive measure in 1895¹⁸⁴, but it was only in 1905 that legislation revoked all maraboutic tax exemption¹⁸⁵. Successive reductions of the mejba in 1892, 1909 and 1912 still maintained a lower level of payment in the Territoires Militaires (see Table 6.9.). The relative importance of this tax relief did decline, by 1912 the south paid 12 frs as opposed to the north's 15 frs, but the principle remained. Similarly the nomadic fractions continued to pay the driba instead of the medjba. In 1889 General Saint-Marc had asked the newly appointed cheikhs to begin capitation registers, and in 1891 Leclerc and

Millet agreed that, to lessen the resistance to a change to the mejba, the nomadic tribes should be granted a third, even lower level of the capitation tax¹⁸⁶. It was only with the medjbas replacement by the istitan in 1914, however, that the south's privileged capitation tax regime came to an end.

Gradually the south's exemptions from a range of taxes on agricultural production and capital were eliminated (see Table 6.9. and 6.10.). First, in 1909, the achour (a tax payable on cereal production) was introduced to the south. In 1918 a new animal tax on sheep, goats, camels, horses and cattle, was applied throughout the Regence. Then in 1924 the qanoun (a tax on olive trees and date palms of productive age divided into categories by productive value) was extended to Médenine and in 1929 to Matmata, followed by the mradjas (a tax on fruit trees) in 1926. The extension of these taxes was planned well in advance. Only Nefzaoua and Zarzis had paid the qanoun in 1889. The last tree census dated from 1872-4. A decree of 22 January 1894 led to a new census in these areas followed by a census throughout the south in 1900. It was only in 1924, however, that the first payments were made¹⁸⁷.

The weight of this increasing range of taxation on the tribes is difficult to assess. Regional taxation statistics were not published in Tunisia, nor are any available in the archives, except as annual aggregates. These aggregates do suggest, however, an increase in the tribes' absolute and per capita fiscal burden, particularly in the period after the First World War when the new agricultural taxes were imposed (see Table 6.10. and 6.12.). But more important than the total amount taken from the region in determining the weight of taxation upon the tribes was its distribution within the community and the manner of collection.

Whilst the mejba, a capitation tax striking each subject equally, represented more than half the government's fiscal revenue¹⁸⁸, the taxation remained essentially non-progressive. Chenel demonstrates how a khammes with an income of 150 frs per year in 1910 must have spent at least ten percent of his income on his taxes¹⁸⁹. Evidence from tax inquests suggests that the situation was probably worse. In some cases the mejba may have represented nearer

thirty percent of the poorer tribesman's calculable income. Only the indigent were exempted - and then only following a rigorous investigation of their circumstances¹⁹⁰. For the wealthier tribesmen, on the other hand, with an income of hundreds and even thousands of francs, the medjba's twelve francs was unimportant. Nor was the burden of the tax spread throughout the Regence. Tunisians living in the seven largest towns and the European community enjoyed exemptions from the medjba. As a result rural Tunisians continued to provide the greatest part of the government's revenue.

For these reasons both French and Tunisian critics attacked the medjba as and 'unjust tax'¹⁹¹. Reforms were suggested. As early as 1882 the military had advised, as others would later, that the medjba should be collected at different rates to protect the poor and realistically tax the wealthy, in much the same way as the lezma was organised in Kabylie¹⁹². The Department of Finances opposed this reform because it would complicate the assessment procedure. Nor would the Department agree with the more radical suggestion that the capitation tax should be entirely abandoned. It was, after all, by far the largest part of the Tunisian budget. Instead critics were appeased by successive reductions in the tax rate (see Table 6.9.). Eventually the decree of 30 December 1914 replaced the medjba with the istitan. But this did not transform the tax structure. Despite its change in name and reduced rate, the istitan was still a capitation tax. Its range was increased to include the urban population and those tribes that had formerly paid the driba but Europeans were still excluded. They vociferously refused to 'subsidise' Tunisians by sharing some of the burden of the tax's replacement¹⁹³. It was only in 1937, with the introduction of a proportional income tax, that Europeans were forced to contribute to the Tunisian budget through a direct tax. The capitation tax still provided one eighth of the government's fiscal income, and supplementary subscriptions in 1921 and 1929 ensured that its value remained high enough to weigh heavily on the poor.

During the debate on the future of the medjba the Department of Finances had insisted that a reduction in the revenue from the capitation tax should be compensated by increases in the value or

range of other taxes'⁹⁴. As a result the mejba's reduction by the decree of 31 December 1909 was accompanied by the extension of the achour to Southern Tunisia. This was a move towards progressive taxation. By 1929 the capitation tax accounted for only half to one quarter of the total tax paid in the south, the remainder being provided by taxes on agricultural capital and production (see Table 6.10 and 6.11.). But the structure of the taxes imposed ensured that the poor tribesmen continued to bear, if not the greatest weight, then at least the greatest burden of taxation.

The achour, for example, was levied as a flat rate per area sown, assessed in terms of the *mechia* (a regionally variable measure of land that could be ploughed in a day (standardised as ten hectares by the decree of 31 December 1910)), and so taxed the small farmer at the same rate as the large. Attempts were made to allow for the lower productivity of the south. The level of the achour was set at half that in the north and a partial discount was permitted where the harvest was less than six hectolitres per hectare. But even so, contemporaries argued, tribesmen paid higher taxes per unit of grain harvested than their counterparts in the north or the European community. It was only in 1936 that the government replaced the achour with a tax based on the volume of cereals harvested'⁹⁵. The qanoun was more flexible in that it allowed the amine to assess the productivity of a date palm or olive and set the tree in an appropriate taxation category. At the lower end of the scale, however, there was little differentiation between the categories. As a result both the plantations on the coast and the isolated trees in the interior paid the same tax.

It was the method of collection, however, that made life most difficult for the poorer tribesman. Initially the Protectorate, as the Beylical government before it, accepted the payment of taxes in kind. This was convenient for tribesmen who did not commercialise their produce. But following the decree of 10 August 1896 both the medjba, the driba and the agricultural taxes had to be paid in cash. Corvées which the government had demanded of the tribesmen since the occupation and formalised by the decree of 12 April 1897 (a maximum of four days per year for all men between 18 and 55 years), were

suppressed by the decree of 14 June 1902 replaced by an extra three francs on the medjba.

This monetarisation of taxation forced tribesmen to commercialise some of their produce. But, since taxes were collected immediately after the harvest, the tribesmen were forced to sell their harvest at the most disadvantageous rates (Figure 6.1. shows how taxes were usually paid immediately after the cereal and olive harvests in Matmata. Figures 3.3. and 3.4. show how the price was always lower at this time). Even the conversion of the achour into a cash payment could work against the cultivator. The conversion rates of the payments in kind were set on the eve of the harvest when prices were high. Consequently when prices fell immediately after the harvest the tribesmen had to sell more than the two hectolitres per mechia that the tax represented to acquit themselves. Plummeting agricultural prices in the 1930's aggravated the situation. Taxation, although its monetary value might have remained stable, absorbed an increasing proportion of the tribesman's harvests.

Taxation, moreover, was relentless. In good year and bad the fiscal obligation of the tribesman was much the same. The medjba/istitan, qanoun, mradjas, and animal tax remained constant whatever the yield. Only the achour was a tax on agricultural production, and even this was inflexible. Once the fellah had sowed his seed and the yield had been assessed he was only entitled to a discount where he could show the amine that the harvest had been destroyed by natural causes, or where the yield was less than six hectolitres per hectare. Not an easy task where cultivated plots were spread over thousands of square kilometres. As the Prime Minister admitted when the achour was finally replaced by a tax on absolute yields in 1936

Les récoltes déficitaires des dernières années ont confirmé le bien fondé de la revendication à la suite des différences constatés entre le rendement de la récolte et son estimation au moment des emblavures.¹⁹⁶

The Department of Finances, eager to avoid budget deficits, insisted on the prompt and regular payment of taxes even in drought

years and the height of the depression¹⁹⁷. They tried to make the payments easier, allowing for four instalments of the mejba/istitan in the register and following a poor harvest the payment might be deferred for a year, but rarely more. Deferral was the cheikhs responsibility and if he was thought to be too lenient, or if his returns fell below the average of the caïdat, he faced a fine even revocation¹⁹⁸. Cheikhs were, as a result, understandably reluctant to award delays.

To add sanction to the cheikh's authority, decrees of 10 January 1885 and 13 July 1899 empowered him to imprison recalcitrant taxpayers and seize property double the value of the debt to the state¹⁹⁹. More direct force might also be applied. Cheikhs could call on the makhzen even the military for support²⁰⁰. Complaints of threats, brutality and violence were not uncommon, for example,

Les cheikhs et les caïds [wrote a deputation from Central Tunisia] sur l'ordre de Direction des Finances, croyons nous, employent la violence pour obtenir le recouvrement des impôts des indigènes malheureux, nous faisons appel à votre justice pour ramener dans le droit chemin ceux qui s'en détournent.²⁰¹

Terrified, some taxpayers contracted debts with ruthless creditors rather than refuse the cheikh. Others watched as the state sequestered and sold their property to acquit their debts. For the poor the state was a ruthless creditor. In 1929 there were 23 sequestrations for non payment of tax arrears in the caïdat of Medenine alone. And this was before agricultural prices reached their nadir²⁰².

Officers were often sympathetic towards the tribesmen's economic difficulties. Captain Macquart, for instance, petitioned the Department of Finances in 1937 to defer or abandon taxes for that year²⁰³. He petitioned in vain. Stretched by poor tax returns the Department sent circulars asking Officers to enforce payment and fine cheikhs and caïds whose returns were unacceptably low. The Department callously compounded the suffering of the tribal poor.

For the Protectorate taxation was justifiable as a means of supporting government expenditure. Unlike its Beylical predecessor, the Protectorate regime initiated a range of public works and

services funded by central government. This was the face of the regime that the Protectorate wished to project: the state as benefactor. Booklets published in 1931 by each of the government Departments and the Service Bureaux to commemorate fifty years of the Protectorate, listed their achievements in terms of roads, markets, wells, schools, hospitals, mutual assurance societies, new techniques in agriculture, and above all peace.

It is not the intention here to disparage the achievement or the impact to these services on the tribes. On the contrary the first part of this thesis demonstrates that the state did much to alleviate their material condition. But the relationship between the state and the tribes is understood better if 'l'oeuvre Français' is seen in the context of government expenditure as a whole and one examines critically the intentions and the implementation of its public works.

Within the constraints of a persistent budget surplus the money available for government investment and services was limited. Because this was budget controlled by the Resident General and the European dominated Consultative Conference this surplus was directed to the needs of commercial and agricultural colonisation rather than the native community. Areas without colonisation, or where colonisation was not anticipated, received little government expenditure. In the South expenditure was never more than a fraction of receipts. Colonel Donau calculated the budgets for the posts of Nefzaoua and Matmata in 1900 and found that less than half the taxes collected were spent in the region and the greatest part of this expenditure was on the administration and police (see Table 6.13.)²⁰⁴. Bégassière estimated in 1904 that, for the Territoires Militaires as a whole, only 90,000 of the 400,000 frs. of taxes were returned to the region²⁰⁵. Violard subtracted the costs of administration and calculated that only 25,000 frs were spent on public works and services, only one sixteenth of the total taxation²⁰⁶. In 1906 the Tunisian government took over the expense of the Service and so reduced the money available for 'development'. Pervinquière estimated that by 1910 the proportion spent on development was as little as one twentieth of the revenue²⁰⁷.

This neglect was apparent at the level of individual departments. In 1897 the Department of Public Works candidly admitted that 'à part l'aménagement de quelque puits, les crédits du budget Tunisien ont été presque intégralement employés au dehors des régions qu'ils habitent'²⁰⁸. Investment in roads, ports, railways, wells, and government buildings lagged well behind that in the north. Education, health services, and subsistence grants were available but both the quality and the quantity were inadequate. The south, like the rest of rural Tunisia, had far fewer medical facilities and personnel than the capital²⁰⁹. Aid was only grudgingly given. Successive Residents Generals were reluctant to provide capital for investment or services that would benefit the tribes or Tunisians alone. They preferred projects funded in part or entirety by local capital. In developing wells in the south, for example, the Résident Général invoked the decree of 31 January 1887, obliging the tribes who requested the construction to estimate the cost, pay half themselves and manage the project. Similarly the Mutual Assurance Societies were funded by a supplementary charge on the medjba. Labour from the corvées and Charitable Camps subsidised major construction projects: roads, wells, and even forts. Even the costs of administration were deferred to the tribesmen by the decrees of 24 December 1921 and 28 December 1929.

Government expenditure in the south reflected the needs of the military and the European residents not the local tribesmen. The Service controlled the government purse and although officers were expected to take an interest in the development issues a report from 1904 makes clear their priorities when asking for increased funding

Ce serait enfin mettre à sa portée des ressources suffisantes, tant pour améliorer la situation économique du territoire de Commandement, que pour pousser activement l'achèvement de son programme concernant les besoins de l'occupation militaire du sud, c'est à dire la construction des routes, des refuges, des installations du Service, la création des points d'eau sur les lignes d'étapes, etc.²¹⁰

The Service also favoured the region's small European community. In 1933 the Tunisian newspaper *al-Zohra* contrasted the condition of the European cantonment and the Tunisian town at Médenine. The former new, clean, the roads repaired and well lit, the latter in disrepair, filthy, and dark²¹¹. Projects such as the wells drilled at Zarzis in the 1890's were intended to encourage colonisation as much as the native economy²¹². Development took second place. It was left to the officer's discretion. The military lacked any overall plan for investment in development comparable to their plan for military hardware. Investment was piecemeal, small scale, and limited.

There were those that criticised the government's neglect of the south and the region's fiscal burden. Begassière and the military complained that more money should be made available; Violard and Pervinquière that the level of taxation should be reduced²¹³. Their arguments were, however, discounted by the Department of Finances as a 'bizarre conception de l'organisation gouvernementale'. Du Bourdieu, the Director of Finances, explained that to return to each region the income it generated would be to negate the state. Besides, he argued, Southern Tunisia benefited from the well being of the country as a whole²¹⁴. He seems to have had no conception of a regional policy - no idea that to redistribute income from the wealthier north to the poor south might lessen the disparities of services and wealth between these regions. Instead the government exacerbated regional inequalities by draining the south to invest in the north, and social inequalities by draining the Tunisian to subsidise the wealthy colonists. By these means the state contributed to the south's poverty and nascent underdevelopment.

6.5. Tribe and State under the Protectorate: Resistance and Acquiescence.

Writing from the viewpoint of an independant Tunisia historians have emphasised the tribes opposition to the Protectorate. The documents themselves lend credence to such an interpretation. Officers were obsessed with security. Resistance or opposition was

dealt with in great detail while everyday acts of administration successfully applied receive little attention. For the same documentary reasons historians have focused on the overt and often violent acts of opposition perpetrated by groups rather than individuals. Acts of resistance by isolated individuals have largely been ignored. The historian should also be wary of ascribing causes. In hindsight it is all too easy to see the politics of the Nationalist movement as motivating the individual. A critical examination of tribal resistance reveals that acts of opposition had a variety of motivations just as it had a variety of expressions.

While the Beylical government submitted to the French invasion without resistance the tribes, from May 1881, fought determinedly to oppose the French occupation, firstly of Sfax, then Kairouan, and eventually the centre and south of the Regence. Against superior armament the tribes had little chance in open combat. After the fall of Kairouan in October 1881 they were forced to retreat into the far south and, threatened by the French columns, crossed over into Tripoli as refugees²¹⁶.

How many took part in this resistance and how many subsequently fled to Tripolitania is impossible to assess accurately. Contemporary estimates were compiled for political purposes and vary wildly. An article in the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Djaouayb* of June 1882, for example, which sought to demonstrate the strength of local opposition claimed there were as many as 231,267 refugees, clearly an exaggeration (the claim that there were 50,000 dissidents from Matmata shows the figure to be a fabrication)²¹⁶. The French, on the other hand sought to play down the extent of the rebellion. In June 1882 Féraud, the French consul at Tripoli, suggested that the number of refugees was as few as 30,000 (see Table 6.14.)²¹⁷. The most realistic statistic, 120,000, was quoted by Féraud in October 1884. It is still only an estimate but since it was based on the number of refugees that had returned in the previous years it seems to be the most reliable²¹⁸. If the figure is accurate, one in ten of Tunisia's population became dissidents in 1881.

For French commentators the tribal revolt was merely an excuse for murder and pillage. It was a manifestation of the anarchy that

had prevailed in Tunisia under the Beylical regime²²⁰. For rebels themselves the motivation was expressed in religious terms, as a *djihad* (holy war)²¹⁹. Ali bin Khalifa, a prominent figure in the tribal revolt, uses precisely these terms when exhorting the tribes: 'menez la guerre sainte. En vous y engagent corps, âme, et biens'²²¹. Participation in the revolt became a religious obligation and collaboration or submission a sin

tout musulman sectateur de notre prophète doit se réunir à vous, et tout homme qui s'amera aux ennemis de Dieu, les Français, laissez qu'on pille.²²²

There is some truth to both these points of view. From the earliest point of the rebellion the tribes refused to pay their taxes to the Beylical government²²³. On the other hand the tribesmen invoked god as they charged the French columns²²⁴. Self defence also played a part. At the Sbeitla *mi'ad* (meeting of rebel leaders) for instance, the protection of territory became the primary concern of the rebel tribes²²⁵. Their land was, after all, essential to their survival, and perhaps the tribes feared for their independence²²⁶.

Widespread tribal resistance should not be interpreted as tribal unity. Each community continued to act on its own account and in its own interests. Raiding, for example, was not co-ordinated but opportunistic and usually small scale²²⁷. No leader emerged as a single authority as Abd el Qader had in Algeria²²⁸. The French military and the Turks considered Ali ben Khalifa such a figure, but in practice he had little authority (see Chapter 7). To the soff, Bachia he was unacceptable as a Neffati (see Appendix IX). His ruthless suppression of the Beni Zid in 1869 had also made him many personal enemies. Even within his own soff other leaders were jealous of their own authority. Besides, there were fundamental differences of interest between the tribes. Some had been closely associated with the Beylical regime through their status as *makhzen* (the Drid for example Djlass). They stood to lose most from a change of government and were the most prominent advocates of the revolt. They were the most numerous and persistent of the refugees in Tripoli (see Table 6.14. to 6.16.).

This was equally true of individuals. Those who, by their association with the Beylical regime, had become wealthy and powerful were the regimes most loyal and aggressive defenders. Karoui has categorised all the rebels identified in Féraud's correspondence, 68 in total: 6 caïds, 13 cheikhs, 9 khalifas, 19 unspecified 'notables', 3 merchants, 5 officers, 2 religious officials, and 11 relatives of cheikhs and caïds²²⁹. All were closely associated with the former regime. For them the revolt was self preservation.

In the early months of the revolt these former officials still respected the Bey's authority and property. Ali bin Khalifa, himself a former caïd of the Neffat, condemned those tribesmen that used the disorder as an opportunity to attack the Bey's herds

Je suis profondément mécontent. Et je te dis franchement que ce n'est pas dans ce but que les gens se sont soulevés, mais uniquement pour défendre la religion. C'est pourquoi je ne tolère pas ces attitudes.²³⁰

By mid 1881, however, the Bey's failure to support, indeed his willingness to condemn the rebels brought a change in heart. Many felt betrayed: a song dating from 1914 described how the Bey had 'sold them like vegetables' (see Appendix VI). They rejected his sovereignty, attacked officials who would not support the revolt, and ransacked his property. This was not, however, a rejection of the state. The rebel leaders invoked the authority and protection of the Sublime Porte the spiritual and political head of Islam. At one level his authority legitimised their opposition to the Bey, at another it offered a potential ally against the new regime. They sought a return to the *status quo*. The re-establishment of a state in which they would continue to hold prominent office. In dissidence the Porte's military support became their great hope, a subject of rumour, and constant disappointment²³¹.

The soff Bachia had less reason to defend the Beylical government. They too joined the revolt at an early date but, in contrast to the Hassina, used it as an opportunity to attack the Bey's property, to refuse their taxes, and rid themselves of the vestiges of government control. When they were directly threatened

by French columns they abandoned the revolt. In December 1881 they began to submit and few passed into dissidence (see Appendix IX).

As refugees the resolve of the rebel tribes soon crumbled. Few among them had saved their property and as early as February 1882

la ville [Tripoli] est pleine des émigrés tunisiens ayant épuisé leurs ressources, vendu ce qu'ils possédaient et aujourd'hui mendiant par les rues. [...] Quant aux émigrés de la frontière, Ali ben Khalifa et quelques autres notabilités qui en abandonnant leurs pays ont réussi à sauver une partie de leur fortune, ils envoient en permanence les convois de chameaux au marché de Tripoli pour se revitailler aussi bien en vivres qu'en munitions.²³²

Sales of stolen herds supplemented their income, many turned to harvesting alfa, and the Turks, eager to keep the dissidents from returning, provided them with some charity²³³. But conditions were appalling and deteriorated that summer

les renseignements que je recois de l'intérieur me démontrer en effet la population émigré dans un état lamentable qui ne peut durer, les puits ont été vidés, les sources sont insuffisantes, les pâturages dévorés.²³⁴

The following winter, the cold and epidemics of typhus devastated the camps. The next year was worse. Féraud later estimated that 5,000 refugees died in the winter of 1883-4²³⁵. By 1885 the rebels had lost nine tenths of their herds and starvation was imminent²³⁶.

At an early date the refugees had lost the good will of their hosts. 'Ce sont des rixes journaliers avec les propriétaires du sol', fights over pasture and ploughlands, thefts and raids, in Tripoli as well as the bled²³⁷. For Resim Pasha, the Turkish governor of Tripoli, the dissidents were a constant threat to security within the Province, and their raids into Tunisia risked a confrontation with France. As early as March 1882 he sought to regulate their activities, promulgating a decree restricting the sale of stolen property in Tripoli's markets, then, in 1884, he made them pay taxes, and enforced his authority with Turkish troops. Eventually he sought to eliminate the threat by forcing their resettlement in Central Libya²³⁸.

Even before conditions had deteriorated that far the dissident leaders had entered negotiations with Féraud for *aman* (pardon). The Protectorate, embarrassed by the dissidents persistence, offered generous terms. Féraud at Tripoli and Allegro at Gabès both gave safe conducts and pardons indiscriminately. Free transport was available for those who wished to return by sea, including provision for a limited number of animals²³⁹. Prominent dissident leaders could negotiate even more favourable conditions. Mohamed ben Salah Khalifa, for example, arranged an exemption from the war tax paid by other dissidents on their return, freedom to live where he chose, and 400,000 frs compensation for loss of property for his uncle Ali ben Khalifa²⁴⁰. Ben Khalifa never took up the offer but most of the other dissident leaders did.

A trickle of returning refugees began in February 1882. It gradually swelled as prominent dissidents and their followers received pardon and crossed the border, encouraged by the realisation that the Turks would not intervene on their behalf, the deteriorating conditions in Tripoli, and the repeated threats by the Protectorate to adopt an stricter policy towards the rebels. The majority of the remaining dissidents left after Ali bin Khalifa's death in November 1884 and by September 1885 Boulanger felt able to assert that 'la question des dissidents peut être considérée aujourd'hui comme a peu près complètement résolue'²⁴¹. Only 1,080 tents, up to 5,000 souls, remained in July 1886, and most of these were from the South.

The Od. Khalifa and Od. Hamed (Touazine) evaded Vernier's column in 1883 and passed into dissidence. They were followed by Médenine and, with the occupation of the south, a handful of the Ouderna (see Table 6.14. to 6.16.). Dissidence was not as great a sacrifice for these tribes as it was for those from the north. They still had access to tribal pastures and ploughlands and the Ouderna, who had clients in the Djebel Nefousa, could easily find shelter across the border. One by one these individuals took *aman* but successive attempts to negotiate their return as a group failed²⁴². Only in 1888 with the Pacha taking an increasingly hostile line, the imposition of taxation in 1887 and, in the

following year, their ejection from Tripoli, and pressurised by the French occupation of their pastures, did the majority of the Touazine dissidents offer their submission²⁴³. In the following decade the Vali's policy of forced resettlement in Central Libya encouraged many more to return. By 1893 the number of dissidents had fallen to 256 and in 1894 201²⁴⁴. Thereafter submissions were rare. At the turn of the century most of those that remained had established a new life for themselves in Tripolitania, some were prosperous and, though maintaining a Tunisian identity, most had integrated with communities across the border²⁴⁵.

In contrast to the opposition towards the invasion of Tunisia the occupation of the the south in 1889 passed without incident. Opposition had been discussed and agreed at a mi'ad in 1887, but nothing materialised²⁴⁶. This does not imply complete acquiescence. On the contrary the tribes expressed a willingness to resist the French. France was, after all, to use the words of Britain's Consul in Tunis, 'a detested European and Christian power'²⁴⁷, and resistance a religious duty²⁴⁸.

At a more practical level the tribes resented government interference in their affairs. As early as 1889 a report from Médenine remarked that

Mécontentes de se voir impuissantes à arrêter notre intrusion dans leurs affaires par moyen de nos maghzen, les tribus frontières sont arrivés à un état d'irritabilité extrême.²⁴⁹

They particularly objected to the fiscal obligations imposed by the new government. A song from Matmata reveals that tribesmen saw themselves exploited and impoverished by taxation (see Appendix VI). Rumours that further exactions or restrictions would be imposed were rife. The threat of conscription aroused a particular concern among the tribes. In 1935 the Service assembled the goums of Southern Tunisia for a parade before. For some reason (the military later blamed Nationalists) the rumour spread that the parade was being used to recruit regular soldiers. Suddenly the goumiers broke ranks and fled, trampling the Senegalese soldiers that tried to cut them off²⁵⁰. Other rumours, by their very absurdity, reflect the

tribesman's inability to comprehend the new government's intentions. Bourgoïn, for instance, reported, in evident astonishment, that many in Matmata believed the government was to forcibly tattoo every woman in the south²⁵¹. Suspicious, even the most innocuous of the government's actions might take on a sinister complexion. A tendency aggravated by the Protectorate's determination to impose rather than to persuade²⁵². The French ignored the tribesmen's cultural and religious susceptibilities²⁵³. Vaccination campaigns, for example, 'well meaning' though they might be to the French, insulted and alienated the tribesman by defying the religious injunctions on the inviolability of the home and women²⁵⁴. Small wonder that the tribesmen disliked the Protectorate regime.

The French could not understand. To them it was ingratitude. 'Malgré la belle oeuvre accomplie par les Officiers des Affaires Indigènes', wrote Cpt. Maquart, 'le montagnard Haouïa reste encore méfiant vis-à-vis de l'autorité française'²⁵⁵.

Despite their resentment and the justifications available within their religion, the tribes' response to the government from the late 1880's was to shy away from confrontation. The tribesmen often attempted to dissuade the government from pursuing a course of action by complaints and sending deputations to the Bureau, even Tunis. They made frequent requests for reduced taxation and sought assurances that the amount of taxation would not be increased²⁵⁶. On occasion they even mounted demonstrations. At Matmata, for instance, Millet was 'hooted', to use Drumond-Hay's expression, by his audience when he announced the extension of recruitment to the caïdat²⁵⁷. But rarely did this escalate to resistance.

When there was resistance it was usually passive. Tribesmen refused or simply neglected to comply with government instructions. Despite the military's insistence that grain should be stored at Médenine, near the French garrison, the Touazine continued use their retba near the frontier. In 1889 some fractions failed to elect new cheikhs as the Governor of Aradh had ordered²⁵⁸. Cheikhs, even caïds, collaborated in this evasion of government authority. Tribal life was kept private and free of government intervention by a conspiracy of silence. Crimes went unreported, to be settled, in

secret, by the djemâa following the traditional procedures²⁶³. To avoid taxation cheikhs prevaricated and neglected their tax registers and census statistics. A cheikh of the Aouin refused to provide a list of adult males for the mejba²⁶⁴. Nor could the information they provided be trusted. 'Naturellement ils nous trempent, et dans la plus large mesure', explained one officer²⁶⁵. Lists of animals, trees or the area sowed were frequently underestimated for an individual or a community. Even the achour, a tax assessed by a committee rather than a cheikh, was not exempt from fraudulent practise²⁶⁶.

On occasion whole communities became involved. Demands for labourers to build the bordj at Ben Gardane were simply ignored by the Touazine and their cheikhs²⁶⁷. At Toujane the whole village, conspired to avoid the conscription of sixteen young men

Le cheikh apprenant la venue d'un officier et soupçonnant quelque chose, réunit un miad de nuit qui précéda son arrivée. Dans ce miad, il fut décidé que des indigènes de trente à trente cinq ans répondent à l'appel du nom des jeunes gens que l'officier demandent à voir en dehors de ceux régulièrement inscrits sur la liste fourni par la cheikh.²⁶⁸

Even the children were involved, verifying, when asked by the officer the mens' names, the answers of their elders. In 1924 when the government attempted to impose the decree of 5 May 1922 empowering them to vaccinate women and children against the wishes of their husbands the villagers of Nefzaoua refused, and, to forestall the Service enforcing the measure, hid their wives, presenting negresses in their place²⁶⁹. Tribesmen might even solicit support among neighbouring fractions. At the turn of the century several fractions of the Touazine, driven by famine, refused to pay their taxes until their condition improved, and to strengthen their cause sent envoys to recruit the Ouderna to their protest²⁷⁰.

If violence was threatened the tribesmen more often fled than fought. They crossed the border into Tripolitania to avoid arrest (fearing the government's repression of even the most trivial crimes), conscription, or creditors²⁷¹. Their kin often collaborated, even cheikhs would cover their flight and warn them

of imminent arrest. There was very little the government could do. Whilst the Turks refused to recognise the Protectorate, extradition was impossible and although an agreement was reached in 1898 allowing the expulsion of serious criminals it remained a dead letter until 1911. Prominent raiders were expelled but lesser dissidents were conveniently lost in the local population²⁶⁸.

Whole communities considered the possibility of flight. When the Accara were subjected to recruitment in 1893 a *djemâa* assembled at which 'on agita même la question de passer en Tripolitaine'²⁶⁹. Many would have gone if the Service had not taken preventative measures. Certainly four years later, in 1897, one hundred tents from Matmata and thirty five Haouia took flight when recruitment was imposed there²⁷⁰. Flight was, after all, a voice for disaffection as well as a means of escape. Ageron, describing the dramatic 'exodus from Tlemcen' in 1911, argued that 'l'Hijra - l'emigration pour la foi - devenait de plus en plus une arme politique, l'ultimo ratio d'un peuple privé des moyens légaux de se faire entendre'²⁷¹. It was the same in Tunisia. Dissidence was a sanction, a threat, available to an otherwise powerless and silenced population. The village of Sedra, for example, objecting to the appointment of a cheikh from Tazardanet in 1920 made clear to the service their plans to leave in dissidence, just as the Djellidet had used their dissidence in 1897 to object to the authority of the khalifa, and the Matmata and Haouia to the imposition of recruitment²⁷².

It was the tribes' most effective weapon. It was also a means of recovering independence. Boyer has explained the flight of the Algerian tribe the Djeramna not simply as an escape from retribution after a tribal revolt but as a search for independence from government authority²⁷³. Officers saw the same motivation in Southern Tunisia. When twenty tents of the Od. Chehida crossed into Tripolitania in 1897, they explained that it was 'surtout pour recouvrir leur liberté d'action'²⁷⁴.

Although evasion and escape were most prominent among the tribesmen's responses, confrontation, even violence were not abandoned as political tools. Tribesmen continued to express their relationship with the government in confrontational terms. Salem ben

el Hadj Belgacem ben Mohammed's song 'Je pleure et mes larmes tombent goutte à goutte; je souffre de l'abandon de Zouara' reflects this sentiment in announcing 'la révolte [qui] chasse les autorités qui s'y trouvent' and alluding to the djihad

Celui qui a trouvé la mort pendant la guerre sainte est certain au jour du Jugement dernier d'avoir un compte favorable. Dieu lui a permis d'accomplir sa part d'actions qui lui permettront d'obtenir les bienfaits de la vie future.²⁷⁵

Images of the Muslim killing the European, although banned by the Protectorate, proliferated. Posters, imported handkerchiefs, and the picture of a wounded French soldier prisoner of the Germans all became weapons of anti-French propaganda. So strong was the feeling against the French, Johnston the British consul suggested, that tribes would rise up and massacre the French at the first chance²⁷⁶. Rumour constantly envisaged opportunities. In the early years news of a Turkish invasion force, in 1911 the defeat of Italy and in 1914 the defeat of France all presaged the demise of the Protectorate²⁷⁷.

The government's unwanted and unaccustomed intervention in tribal affairs also encouraged spontaneous and violent outbursts. A drunk cheikh publicly villified the Protectorate²⁷⁸. Others, as individuals or small groups, spontaneously resisted government authority with violence: a refusal to pay taxes, resisting arrest or a search, or the seizure of the herds for trespass²⁷⁹. These were, in the Service's estimation, criminal acts, but they may also be interpreted as acts of defiance. Tribesmen who resisted the agents of the Protectorate, the Service or the makhzen, with a gun became folk heroes. They were symbols and expressions of a sense of opposition and resistance felt by the community as a whole, and, at the same time, a salve for the conscience of the inactive.

For the fellaga (bandits) who raided herds and robbed travellers in the south resistance to the state was a way of life. In the 1880's many lived within their community (Mohamed el-Aïb among the Haouia and the family el-Kardi among the Oulad Khalifa Touazine²⁸⁰) despite their reputations as bandits. In Tripolitania they continued to do so into the 20th century. The Ghoddi family

among the Sian, for example, and Dhiaf among the Nouail figured prominently in French complaints about cross border raiding in the period up to 1910²⁸¹. In Tunisia, however, the state's growing intervention in tribal affairs forced bandits into dissidence. Increasingly, as Sainte-Marie describes in the Kabylie, the fellaga became and were recruited among outlaws. Most of those recorded had fled French justice after crimes of vengeance, or to avoid conscription (after the First World War there were also deserters from the army), endebtement, and poverty. In 1919 there were above twenty in the mountain zone alone²⁸².

Although they lived on the fringe of society they achieved a certain notoriety, even popularity for their daring exploits. In 1932 a bandit gang killed the cheikh of Ghomrassen. The cheikh was an unpopular man in the village and his murder seems to have been generally applauded. They were even more delighted by the theft of the cheikh's safe and tax registers²⁸³. As Dejeux describes in the Aurès, the fellaga became a *bandit d'honneur*, a latter day Robin Hood or Dick Turpin: discriminating in their targets and the use of violence, attacking the rich and the representatives of the state with a particular panache²⁸⁴. As the S.R. were aware their very defiance was enough to enhance their reputation, and 'notre apparente impuissance incitent la population à leur manifester une secrète estime'²⁸⁵. They certainly had their friends and accomplices among the tribes. Bandits sheltered in the mountain villages and received supplies while they hid in the Dahar²⁸⁶. Furthermore the popular opposition to Vali's arrest of the bandit Mansour el-Houch in 1889, on the grounds that his raids against the French were the duty of a good Muslim, suggests the bandit's role as a *mudjahid* (a fighter for god)²⁸⁷.

Not all the bandits attained this public acclamation. Some were regarded as common criminals, bandits for their personal gain. The rewards were considerable. The two Ghoddi brothers, for example, made 8,300 frs in seven years from their raids across the border²⁸⁸. Tribesmen feared these criminals. Remote fields were abandoned rather than risk the journey to and fro, shepherds camped in groups

to avoid attack, and troubled cheikhats formed posses to hunt them out²⁸⁹.

The distinctions between the good and the bad cannot have been precise. Bandits were often participants in the soff quarrels of each cheikhat, and the definition of the criminal and the bandit d'honneur must have depended on one's relationship to the victim and the culprit.

Although evasion and peaceful protest were the norm not a year, scarcely a month, went by without some incident of opposition, some clash between the tribesmen and the state. Most of these were the acts of individuals or small groups and did not escalate into a wider rebellion. For the military, however, a tribal revolt remained a persistent threat, they saw the seed of a wider revolt in every act of opposition. In 1897, for example, there was a riot at Matmata when the military tried to enforce recruitment. Millet claimed

Nous ne nous trouvions donc plus devant une insoumission
mais bien devant un commencement de rébellion qu'il
fallait absolument empêcher de s'étendre.²⁹⁰

Callija, the British consular agent at Gabes, reported thousands of tribesmen in open insurrection²⁹¹. Both exaggerated. In reality some fifty tribesmen had fired on the Recruitment Commission and a platoon of the Battalion d'Afrique and had then fled into the mountains. Within days of the incident two squadrons of spahis had reinforced the infantry and calm had returned. However much the tribesmen resented conscription most were not prepared to risk an open confrontation with the government to maintain their privileged status.

In 1915, however, the situation was very different. Italy's defeat by the tribes in Tripolitania and France's inability to defeat Germany may have suggested that resistance to the Protectorate was not entirely futile. Many of the tribesmen, as Salem ben Mohamed's song suggests, made common cause with their Tripolitanian neighbours' fate²⁹². Of course not everyone felt the same way, indeed many more tribesmen joined the Italian army, attracted by the higher wages, than the Turkish, and after Turkey's abandonment of the Province interest subsided. By June 1915,

however, the French were already concerned that the revolt in Tripolitania would spread to southern Tunisia. German and Turkish agents, landed on the Tripolitanian coast by submarine, encouraged the tribesmen with propoganda and Pan-Islamic ideals, but little material support²⁹³. Then in July 1915 the military reported

Un changement sensible dans l'attitude de nos tribus, changement provoqué par l'appel à la guerre saint lancée par les Turcs, que par les reçits des Tripolitaines fréquentant nos marchés rapportant les succes des rebelles, leur organisation, le prestige du chef Senoussi, la résolution d'attaquer prochainement la Tunisie.²⁹⁴

That month nearly three hundred tribesmen from the south crossed the border to join Khalifa ben Asker's rebel army. Then in September the Ouderna rose in revolt. In the following months hundreds of Ouderna tribesmen combined to attack French posts in the south, waving green banners, beating on drums, and cheered on by the you-you's of thousands of women spectators²⁹⁵.

Envoys were sent among the Beni Zid, Touazine and Djebalia to encourage their participation, and, if we are to believe subsequent French enquiries, were welcomed²⁹⁶. But the French reoccupied the south and forced the rebels into dissidence before any of these communities joined the revolt. Had General Boyer's column been defeated or Dehibat and Oum Souigh fallen to the rebels, the revolt might have spread. It is significant that in October 1917, after the Ouderna's defeat, the Beni Zid still corresponded with the Turkish authorities and the Ouderna dissidents. The military managed to forestall an uprising by arresting the khalifa, cheikhs and notables and dispatching regular troops to el Hamma, but only just²⁹⁷.

The revolt did not encompass the whole of the Ouderna. As Table 6.17. demonstrates the Od. Slim, and the Od. Chehida in particular, were by far the most important of the rebel fractions. Within these fractions there were still individuals who remained loyal to the Protectorate. A group, one might tentatively suggest, that was sufficiently associated with the status quo or convinced of France's military superiority to oppose the rebellion. They were the first targets of the revolt. Their ghorfa were ransacked and the herds stolen²⁹⁸.

Whatever unity there was among the rebels soon disappeared. As early as November 1915 there were requests for *aman*²⁹⁹. Conditions soon became intolerable for those that had taken refuge in Tripolitania. By mid 1916 they were selling their animals to purchase grain, and, with the Djebel in a state of siege 'à Nalout il règne la misère [...] les gens n'ont que des figues à manger. Ils ne peuvent s'approvoiser nullepart', prices soared and the rebels could not buy food (see Table 3.15.)³⁰⁰. Meanwhile the net was closing in: the Italians moving inland from the coast, Nalout was bombarded weekly from the air, and, in contrast to the hesitation of 1882, measures were taken immediately to secure the sequestration and sale of dissidents' property. By the end of the war only a small number of irreconcilables remained in Tripoli, many of whom were excluded from the government's offers of *aman* by their prominence in the revolt, the crimes they had subsequently committed, or their desertion from the *makhzen* or regular forces. Others, who failed to take advantage of the government's clemency found themselves definitively alienated from the Regence, their property sold and their nationality taken away. The revolt was effectively at an end.

It is unlikely that this revolt could have encompassed the Nation or even the tribes as a whole. In Tripolitania and Cyrenaica the cheikh Senoussi managed to unite the disparate tribes in a single cause. His religious status enabled him to transcend tribal barriers. There were lodges in Southern Tunisia and the bond of loyalty to a shared religious leader may have been influential in encouraging the Ouderna to revolt and providing the means of co-ordinating their action with the Tripolitanians. Further north, however, the influence of the Senoussi declined markedly. There the *zaouia* could not overcome the barriers between the tribes.

Nor did any other tribal leader emerge. The Ouderna revolt seems bereft of influential figures. When the rebels passed into dissidence they were subsumed within Khalifa ben Asker's army and, though they camped together, they lost their Tunisian military identity. Moreover, the rebels' interests seem parochial. They sought to eject the military from the south but had no clear purpose after that. Later French reports claimed that the Nationalist Jeunes

Tunisiens had corresponded with the Ouderna and Beni Zid leaders in order to co-ordinate a wider uprising, but there was no evidence³⁰¹. The accusation was more an attempt to discredit the Nationalists than describe the revolt.

Social barriers between the tribe and the city prevented any unity of action as they had in the nineteenth century. Even if the ideology of Pan-Islam and holy-war bridged these social barriers in Morocco as Burke has suggested³⁰², it did not Tunisia. There was little common ground to link the Jeunes Tunisiens and the tribes of the south. The Nationalists despised the tribes and sought to reform rather than abandon the Protectorate. The tribes, on the other hand, lacked a Nationalist sentiment and sought to release themselves from the state. They made no display of Nationalist ideology. Indeed if their intention was to rid themselves of the state's authority they were in conflict with the Nationalist's policies.

Thereafter opposition to the Protectorate continued in its less spectacular forms, evasion, less frequently escape, and least frequently of all individual acts of violence. Perhaps the tribes saw few opportunities for revolt. Khalifa ben Asker's defeat by France and Italy convincingly demonstrated the Europeans' military superiority. In the 1920's the state's grip on the region increased, to forestall another revolt and the threatened Italian invasion. Even the mobilisation in 1939 and France's complete defeat by Germany in 1940 the tribes remained loyal, and at the height of the post war struggle for independence the conflict between the Nationalists and the state amounted to nothing more than an intensification of the banditism of the 1920's. Confrontation, *en masse* at least, was abandoned as a political tool.

Dissidence, resistance, and conflict were, however, the extraordinary expression of tribe-state relationships. The individual's and the tribes' survival was guaranteed not by resistance but by acquiescence. Most tribesmen came to accept the government's intervention in their daily lives and the demands it made upon them because they had to. Resistance to taxation, for instance, focused not on the principle of whether to pay or not, so

much was admitted, but on the question of what was an acceptable or reasonable amount. A report of 1899, for instance, remarks

les indigènes sans proteste contre la principe des prestations ont fait remarquer qu'à cette époque de l'année ils trouvent difficilement les sources nécessaires pour se librer.³⁰³

Each new tax or tax increase brought forth a howl of protest and a spate of evasive measures, false enumerations, and omissions. After a couple of years, though resentment and evasion might persist, the majority paid without hesitation. It was much the same with other measures. In Matmata there were always complaints about conscription and conspiracies to avoid registration, but during World War I when the number of conscripts increased and many died, there were few who refused or opposed the call to arms.

Opposition, moreover, was often directed into the legitimate channels established by the Protectorate: the administration through the cheikh, a plaint to the Prime Minister, or the Resident General. Even the law courts became a means of resistance. When in 1945 the Od. M'hamed (Accara) sought to avoid their integration into the cheikhat of the Zaouïa they did not threaten to go into dissidence, or demonstrate, they hired a lawyer to fight the government in the courts³⁰⁴. The success of such procedures must have reduced the willingness, if not the need, for recourse to dissidence and conflict.

The relationship between the tribe the state was further complicated by the provision of new services. Although the tribes received less from the state than they spent and government investment in the south may be interpreted as a palliative, the tribesmen did receive real benefits from the government. The tribes, moreover, recognised the state's ability to improve their material condition and turned to the government for help. In 1891, for example,

les notables des Touazines viennent de demander l'exécution d'un forage artésien sur la territoire situé près de la Sebkha el Maida où ils possèdent des vastes terrains qu'il serait facile d'irriguer.³⁰⁵

Following the decree of 1897 almost monthly requests were made for government sponsorship to build wells. In times of famine the tribes turned to the government for assistance. During the droughts of the 1920's and 1930's tribesmen requested and received government loans and emergency aid. The state became a potential resource. Co-operation was the price of enjoying these benefits. For this reason communities were hesitant to incur the Service's displeasure or hostility. Following the 'revolt' of the goum in 1935 the Haouia's participation markedly increased. A circumstance the Service explained as an attempt to regain the Protectorate's favour after their revolt³⁰⁶.

Nationalists expressed the relationship between the state and the individual in an ideology of citizenship. Thaalbi's "La Tunisie martyre, ses revendications", the Destour Party's manifesto, comprehensively lists the civil, political and welfare rights of the citizen, while recognising the supremacy of the law and the citizen's financial and moral responsibilities towards the state³⁰⁷. The tribes evince no such ideology. They were reluctant contributors to the budget and resented the state's intervention in their affairs. They did not conceive government sponsorship and aid as their right. Their requests for financial help, whether for investment or food in the desperate conditions of a drought, were expressed as supplications not a just reclamation³⁰⁸. In part this reflects the Service's attitude. As far as the officers were concerned government expenditure was an act of generosity not an obligation. The tribes should be grateful for what they received and demand no more.

It also illustrates a fundamental difference between the tribes and the Nationalist movement. Nationalist politics focused on the control of the state. For the tribes the state, dominated by Tunisians or the French, was outside their political world and outside their control. If the tribes of the south did conceive of themselves as Tunisians, and so much may be doubted, that identity was subordinated to more parochial loyalties and interest groups (see Chapter 8). The tribesman was excluded from the developing ideology of citizenship, in which the state was seen as institution

permitting political self expression and to which the citizen was bound by reciprocal obligations. The tribesman's attitudes towards the state remained largely unchanged.

CHAPTER 7

TRIBAL SOCIETY.

Recent historical studies of tribal society in Tunisia have focused on the tribe rather than the tribesman¹. Individuals have been ignored. Social and political life has been considered as the relationship between social groups rather than between people. To some extent such an interpretation is the product of the documentary sources available. In the past these documents have originated from outside the tribe not within (tax returns, correspondence with the state, and travellers reports have been particularly favoured). As a result social groups of whatever size are seen monolithically.

A new interpretation of tribal society, therefore, depends on new material. This is provided by the state's intervention in tribal affairs from the early years of the occupation. Unlike the period before the Protectorate this intervention penetrated tribal society to its basic unit, the individual. True most of the documents were written by French administrators and so are tainted by their conceptions and understanding of tribal life. Conceptions that determined not just their analysis but also their collection of data and information. True most of the information was collected for the purpose of control. A purpose that made their inquiries necessarily superficial and incomplete. Nevertheless bearing in mind these limitations the administrative documentation provides a wealth of information that is not available for earlier periods.

Besides, the tribesmen themselves begin to contribute documents during this period. Although many of these documents were written for the legal purposes or the needs of colonial administration they still provide an insight into the tribesmens' conceptions of their own social organisation. There are also a range of unsolicited letters (complaints, requests, or justifications) which reveal the society in the tribesmens' own terms.

These documents provide the basis of an interpretation of social organisation from the point of view of the individual rather than the representational, definitional, or practical groups of which he might form a part. The structures of social organisation are not, however, ignored but examined as the ideological and practical social world within which the individual acts. The purpose of this chapter is to examine whether these structures underwent a fundamental change during the Protectorate, and the consequences of such a change for the individual.

7.1. Lineage and Social Groups.

The identification of an individual is the key to understanding his relationship to the wider society. In Southern Tunisia, as elsewhere in North Africa, identification was genealogical, through patrilineal descent². Within his community each individual was unambiguously identified by the use of patronyms to the second degree: thus Ahmed ben (son of) Khalifa ben (son of) Mohamed. Occasionally a 'nickname' might slip in, often a personal reference (sghir, short, for example) or a title (hadji, cheikh, or sidi) but such references usually supplemented, or took the role of, rather than replaced the patronymic.

Outside the community of his immediate relations, however, a short name chain might be ambiguous. To avoid confusion the individual was defined by, to use Hildred Geertz's term, his *patronymic association*³. This was a group of agnates related through an eponymous ancestor whose name provided a convenient identificational label. The choice of the relevant patronymic association was contextual. Thus within the fraction of the Oulad Chehida an individual might be called Khalifa ben Ahmed el Ouafi to distinguish him from Khalifa ben Ahmed el-Khelouj. In the broader context of the tribe the name of the fraction provided the identifying label. Both individuals became Khalifa ben Ahmed el Chehidi to distinguish from an Debbabi or a Quetoffi.

Such patronymic associations provided a shorthand and conceptual label for a patronymic name chain rather than eliminating the chain itself. Descent was still the measure of the man. 'Ancient

descent is the nexus of all notions of honour', writes Abu Zahra of a Sahelian village⁴, and individuals prided themselves in recounting their genealogy, their pedigree. Not every ancestor was remembered, only those from the more recent past and those who had achieved a position of status in their lifetime as cheikh, hadji, or sidi. Descent from such individuals conveyed status. Without a genealogy, on the other hand, an individual's value was assumed to be low. Immigrants whose origins were unknown were generally considered murderers and thieves.

It is important to distinguish between the identification and the definitional understanding of genealogy. Identification was possible by the use of a single line of descent, a sequence of patronyms. Definition, on the other hand, required a complete knowledge of the genealogy in order to describe the relationship between the comprising elements and individuals.

It is difficult to demonstrate this knowledge from the documentary evidence. The only genealogies collected in the period are those recorded by the French in the tribal reports and the travelogues⁵. Most of these reports combine local accounts of tribal genealogy and history with the written sources of the great Arab historians, frequently quoting from de Slane's French translation of Ibn Khaldun⁶. Since commentators attempted to reconcile the sources it is impossible to disentangle the two threads. Nor is it possible to tell whether the genealogies were common knowledge in the community. None of the reports give the name of their informant, but, following their brief⁷, it seems likely that most of them relied on cheikhs and elders. Perhaps this knowledge was the preserve of an intellectual elite.

Evidence from contemporary anthropological research is contradictory. Anthropologists working in Morocco and Libya⁸ have argued that all tribesmen are able to construct complex tribal genealogies, similar to those shown in Figure 7.1 (linking the fractions of the Ouerghamma), Figure 7.2 (linking the families within a fraction of the Ouerghamma, the Oulad Chehida), and Figure 7.3. (linking members of a family). Such genealogies enabled the tribesman to define his relationship with other individuals by

reference to mutual eponymous ancestors. As he ascended the genealogy ever wider and more distant groups of relatives would be defined, until, eventually, he encompassed the tribe as a whole.

Dale F. Eickelman's research on the Moroccan city of Boujad and the surrounding rural/tribal population, and Hildred Geertz's study of Seifrou³, suggest, on the other hand, that most individuals were unable to produce a coherent genealogy beyond the limits necessary for their personal identification. They could not, for example, define, in genealogical terms, the relationships between different patronymic associations.

This contradictory anthropological evidence is not entirely irreconcilable. An examination of the detail and the structure of the genealogies available reveals that lineage represented rather than defined social relationships. Lineage was an ideology not an accurate historical record.

Despite the frequent use of written records for legal purposes in Southern Tunisia none of the tribes kept any systematic documentation of their history or genealogy. All such information formed part of a flourishing, though inaccurate, oral tradition. Time, in this record, was not linear but compressed as Valensi describes:

Le passé se découpe...en trois mouvements: un temps vif au commencement, avec la vie de fondateur et de ses premiers descendants; un andante par la suite; un allegro staccato pour les dernières décennies.¹⁰

Details of chronology were soon lost or distorted as accounts of the last years of independent Tunisia in the tribal reports reveal. Over longer periods only the salient events were remembered, the migration of the tribe to its present emplacement, an important *razzia* (raid), or a devastating epidemic¹¹.

The genealogies show a similar chronological distortion. In Gellner's words they were 'occamist', recent ancestors, father and grandfather, were faithfully recorded but the more distant were often forgotten or ignored. Only the notable ancestors were recalled, those who had held a position of status in their lifetime or who had built a reputation recorded in stories that made their

names memorable. This selection meant that the genealogy could cover the time from its origin to the present in six or seven generations. An impossibility if they were to be taken literally.

Nor did the oral tradition faithfully record the substance of past events. History was recited as poetry¹², a form which encouraged elaboration and falsification. Moreover, only the details of personal interest to the raconteur were recalled, distorting the events described and ignoring those unfavourable to his ancestors. It is not surprising, therefore, that detailed assessments of the contents of these oral histories have found them lacking veracity¹³.

Unfortunately no such assessments are possible for the genealogies since contemporary documentary sources make no allusion to the genealogies themselves. Nor can genealogies be compared for the same tribe at the same date. Anthropologists have, however, pointed to marked inconsistencies of detail and structure elsewhere in North Africa that were probably duplicated in the South.

Ignorance, inaccuracy, and inconsistency were not a problem but a convenience. In a society where social groups were defined by and represented in terms of lineage and descent, as we see in the patronymic associations, modification of the genealogy provided a means of incorporating change generated by the system itself and by the external factors without recourse to another means of social definition. Peters, in a study of the Bedouin of Cyrenaica, demonstrates that such changes were made by manipulating the genealogy at a 'point of ambiguity' around the fifth generation¹⁴. At this point ancestors may have been added or replaced so that the differential or absolute growth of the lineages did not lead to the proliferation of ancestors throughout or at any one point in the genealogy. A lineage whose members had increased could be elevated in the genealogy by the omission of earlier ancestors so that the patronymic associations of comparable size were given structurally equivalent positions. Lineages that declined could be absorbed or fused within a higher patronymic association and those that died out simply erased from the genealogy. Similarly the genealogy could be manipulated to describe fission, the division of one lineage into two or more, or scission, the division and emigration of part of a

lineage, by the creation of new patronymic associations with the addition of definitional ancestors at the bottom of the genealogy. Even relocations may have been possible, particularly among the lower levels where individuals might move from group to group.

In the absence of a sequence of genealogies these processes cannot be demonstrated directly. Valensi has, however, used surrogate data, identified social groups of Djlass tribesmen in tax registers for the period 1724 to 1884, to illustrate process in Central Tunisia¹⁵. The same method has been used to establish the genealogies of the fractions, and illustrate the limited changes in their relationship during the Protectorate period, in Table 7.5. Such analysis does, it should be stressed, depend on the not unreasonable assumption (given that they are often called *oulad*, sons of, or *drari*, family of) that the social groups were genealogically and not otherwise defined.

The genealogy also incorporated immigrants who joined the fraction. Gellner suggests, on the basis of his research in Morocco, that migration was discouraged and that the number of male immigrants in any fraction was less than 10%, with even fewer than this remaining in the tribe¹⁶. This figure is far too small. In Southern Tunisia a man could easily move to a new tribe or fraction by finding a patron with whom he could camp¹⁷. Many immigrants were employed as specialist workers or labourers (see Chapter 5), others arrived to find sanctuary with a new tribe. Murderers, forced to hide from vengeance, are frequently recorded in the documents¹⁸.

There were large numbers of Tripolitarians in Southern Tunisia (See Table 2.20. and 2.21.). Some of these came as individuals, others with their families, and in times of economic or political crisis whole campments arrived. Of course not all of these remained long enough to be incorporated into a new community. Most left when their contracts ended or the cause of flight had gone, but a few stayed (see Table 2.21.). For them assimilation was a gradual process, usually marked by marriage into the fraction. Immigrants and their descendants might continue to be identified as such generations after their arrival. Usually they formed a lineage of their own, identified by the name of their community of origin, the

Terama or the Agherba lineages, for example, in the genealogy of the Oulad Chehida (Table 7.2.). These immigrant lineages formed a substantial proportion of many communities. Hart claims over 40% of lineages among the Aith Waryghar in Morocco were descended from 'strangers' and similar proportions were not uncommon in Southern Tunisia¹⁹.

Manipulation was probably not a conscious process. Genealogies were only referred to in order to describe or explain existing social groups, if these groups had been created by some other process than patrilineal descent, explanation and representation would still have to be made in terms of the prevailing ideology. Hildred Geertz's description of interviews at Sefrou corroborates this. Respondants did not begin with a genealogy from which they could explain relationships, but created the genealogy piecemeal in order to define the relationships between recognised social groups and individuals²⁰.

To what extent tribesmen were aware that the idiom of patrilineal descent was an ideology, a manner of thinking rather than a representation of empirical relationships, is unclear. Certainly their use of the idiom had its limits. The recognition of the immigrant status of some lineages implies that relationships between these groups were regarded as structural rather than as actual lines of descent. Indeed in Zmertén (Matmata) and Douiret the Dehibat, who arrived some time in the late 18th or early 19th century, continued to identify themselves as discrete from the neighbours, with a parallel but distinct social organisation²¹. Moreover, while relationships within the lower level and hence smaller patronymic associations were always expressed in terms of patrilineal descent in higher level and larger patronymic associations the use of the terminology often lapsed. Although the Arab historians created genealogies for the Berber tribes comparable to, and ultimately related to, those of Arabs, the communities of Djebel Matmata and Djebel Demmer could produce none²². These communities occasionally referred to themselves in territorial rather than patrilineal terms, by the use of the word *bilad* (village or area of land) rather than 'arch which implies a relationship

defined in terms of descent. Such geographical definition ignores genealogical relationships. A comparable situation has been described by Jamous among the Guelaia tribes of Morocco. There the tribesmen conceived the relationship between communities 'as if' they were brothers, aware that the terminology was being applied to effectively discrete territorial units²³.

In recent years the relationship between these patrilineally defined social groups has been described by 'segmentary lineage theory'²⁴. In the words of Ernest Gellner, one of the theory's foremost exponents in North Africa:

the idea underlying the theory is that the functions of maintaining cohesion, social control, some degree of 'law and order', which otherwise depend on specialised agencies with sanctions at their disposal can be performed with tolerable efficiency, simply by the 'balancing' and 'opposition' of constituent groups. Cohesion is maintained not by agencies of coercion at home, but by a threat from outside; hence at every level of size for which there is an 'at home' there must be a corresponding 'outside'.²⁵

Middleton and Tait point out the theory does not demand that the social groups be formed by patrilineal descent, though in North Africa, following the evidence of the genealogies, this has generally been assumed to be the case²⁶. Whatever their composition the groups must be arranged in

A 'tree-like' structure: groups to which a person can belong are arranged in a system such that starting from the largest group, there is within it a set of mutually exclusive sub-groups, and each of these similarly has a set of sub-groups, and so on, until one arrives at the ultimate atoms, be they families or individuals.²⁷

In North Africa these groups and sub-groups correspond to the patronymic associations of agnates identified at each level of the genealogy. Their cohesion is based, as the model describes, on their opposition to other groups at the same level of segmentation (structural distance from the 'present' of the genealogy) motivated by the 'fear of aggression by others' and the desire to remain independent from potentially dominating rivals. Much of the time such groups are latent, awaiting conflict to mobilise the alliances between sub-groups defined by the patrilineal descent model. But

opposition also 'encourages the pervasive tension, and hostility, that is so essential to the maintenance of group cohesion and boundaries'²⁸.

These tribesmen are not men but machines²⁹. Political life for the individual is limited to segmentation and opposition in pre-arranged alliances with agnates. There is no choice of political partnerships since the structure of segmentation makes social groups mutually exclusive.

Stability within the society depends on a balance of power between the groups at every level. An imbalance would enable a more powerful group to assert its authority over others at the same level of segmentation. Segmentation and opposition would be replaced by domination. This balancing of different groups is not perfect, however:

Segmentary systems tend towards an internal equilibrium, which, it cannot be too strongly stated, is seldom achieved or long maintained. However, neither are gross imbalances in the power of given units within the system long tolerated. Other units will regroup and coalesce to offset or wear down any undue power accumulation on the part of others.³⁰

Fear of such imbalances of power, on which group cohesion depended, could only be maintained if domination was occasionally threatened.

Manipulation of the genealogy has been seen as a means of maintaining this balance in the face of the differential growth of the segments³¹. Change could be absorbed without altering social structure and so

sous l'apparence d'une grande fluidité, le système manifeste une stabilité et une rigidité considérable, par son aptitude à intégrer la mobilité et même l'échec dans les principes de son fonctionnement normal.³²

The stability of the system described by the segmentary lineage theorists has been one of the features of the model attractive to historians. Faced with poor documentary evidence for rural areas of the Maghreb a model which describes a stable but dynamic social order, endorsed by most contemporary anthropologists, provides a useful tool for the historian to fill an empty past. And so it has

been used not just to describe the Maghreb of the 18th and 19th centuries, but for periods as remote as the time of Herodotus³³.

Moreover the theory corresponds with the ideology of lineage expressed by the tribesmen, and is, therefore, endorsed by one of the few historical sources available. Not only does the structure of the genealogy used to define social groups mirror that of the idealised segmentary lineage model, but tribesmen also spoke in terms of segmentary opposition. The much quoted maxim 'Myself against my brothers, my brothers and I against my cousins, my cousins, my brothers and I against the world' reflects just this principle of cohesion through conflict.

It is important, however, to make the distinction between ideology and action. The first may influence, but does not determine the second. As the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, a model based on segmentary opposition alone cannot explain either the composition or relationship of social groups in Southern Tunisian tribal society.

Gellner admits as much. In his Moroccan study he states that the model advanced was of a 'pure' segmentary society and qualifies its application by the caveat that 'segmentary systems are seldom if ever pure'³⁴. Gellner clearly recognises, but does not examine, the distinction between ideology and action, representation and reality. The model, he points out, is a simplification of both the structure and the process of tribal politics. Nevertheless, it is capable of accounting for much of what may be seen:

Nothing would be more erroneous than to see the tribesmen enslaved in thought and deed to their clans, unable to weigh the consequences or to act independently. But, it would be equally wrong to disregard the ordered hierarchy of tribal groups as some kind of decorative elaboration, without weight when the moment of political decision comes. The segmentary organisation displays a set of alignments, ratified not merely by custom, sentiment and ritual, but more weightily by shared interests which provide the base lines for alliances and enmities, for aid and hostility, when conflict arises. Calculation, feeling, new interests, diplomatic ingenuity, may at times cause the final alignments to depart at some points: but the initial and fairly strong presumption is that the allegiances of tribe and clan will be honoured, and that

other inducements must have been operative if they were not honoured.³⁵

If we are to understand tribal society it is the differences between ideology and action, representation and reality, that we must examine.

7.2. Representational and Practical Kinship.

Essential to our understanding of political, social, and economic life in the tribes is the distinction between representational and practical groups. As Bourdieu describes:

representational kinship is nothing other than the groups self presentation and the most theatrical presentation it gives of itself when acting in accordance with that self image. By contrast practical groups exist only through and for the particular functions in pursuance of which they have been effectively mobilised.³⁶

Such a distinction is ignored by the segmentary lineage theory which only recognises the groups as represented and defined by the genealogy. In the model, group cohesion derives from what Barth describes as a 'Durkheimian conception of group solidarity' where 'solidarity derives from likeness', reinforced by the fear of the outside³⁷. Moreover the model describes each level of segmentation as being comparable in structure and function (a feature termed 'monadism' by Gellner), and the individual as much a part of the higher level of segmentation, and hence the larger group, as the lower level and smaller groups. As the need arises the individual may act as part of a group at any level of segmentation, and none is any more important in his life than another. Gellner recognises this to be mistaken

in reality, the operations and functions of various sizes, at different levels of the segmentary system, is inevitably very different. The lowest groups are concerned with daily life, the next with balance of power in a village, the village with preservation of its territory and fields ³⁸

Moreover the strength of bonds that unite the group also differ at every level of segmentation. Group solidarity derives not only from its identity and ideology of descent from an eponymous ancestor but

ancestor but also from what Bourdieu describes as a 'shared material and symbolic patrimony'³⁹. A patrimony which had to be managed and protected collectively. Far from being equal at every level of segmentation this shared patrimony was concentrated at the lower levels in the smaller groups. As a result social relationships were myopic, focused on the family and the lineage, rather than flexible, encompassing the tribe as a whole.

The family (a father, his wives, and children) was the building block of tribal society. It was a durable property owning and economic group. Most men and women, and even children, owned some *rizik* (private property) - animals, jewelry, tents, and valuable clothing - donated at rites of passage: birth, circumcision, marriage, and childbirth. This property was difficult to distinguish from that of the head of household who rarely marked his donations with a certified legal document⁴⁰. Moreover, the head of household managed all the family's resources as a single unit, whoever the owner.

Even after children had married and established their own households collective management could continue. A detailed study of a Sian *douar* (encampment) (see Table 7.6.) shows a father and his married sons living in separate tents, but with all their animals still enumerated under the father's name. This was as true of land as animals. Notices Biographiques, detailing the landed property held by candidates for administrative office during the Protectorate, reveal that 18% of adults (all of whom were married), remained financially dependent on property held by their father. Sequestrations of rebel Ouderna put the figure slightly higher at 23%. Given the relative maturity of these groups the proportion is likely to have been higher in the population as a whole.

The head of household's death did not dissolve the economic association of the family. Brothers usually divided and herded the animals they inherited separately. But it was rare for them to divide their landed inheritance immediately. The 67% co-propriety between brothers recorded in the lists of sequestration, is probably unrealistically high (rebels' families were encouraged to register their land as co-propriety to avoid its sale at auction, and much

land actually cultivated and even registered separately was probably described as 'undivided') nevertheless, the 34% of total co-propriety and 3% partial co-propriety recorded among candidates in the Notices Biographiques demonstrates that the phenomenon was by no means unusual.

Co-propriety was protected by law and custom. The right of **chefaa** (pre-emption) could prevent the alienation of land from the collectivity by sale⁴¹. Similarly the disinheritance of females effectively prevented alienation through inheritance (see Chapter 4). As co-proprietors, individuals shared both the harvest of the land and the responsibility for, and the labour and financial costs of maintenance and cultivation. The relationship was not rigid. If individuals preferred to ignore their obligations an agreement was often made by which that person received only a part of the produce as rent⁴². Over a long period, however, as divisions of interest arose, as relations were soured by disagreements and quarrels, most co-proprietors divided their patrimony in the proportions established by traditional and Islamic law. By the third generation, co-propriety was rare. Only 3% of candidates in the Notices Biographiques held land in co-propriety with cousins.

But even after the division of co-propriety the economic association of close agnates continued. Agnates helped each other with loans of labour and capital. Usually informal exchanges that go unrecorded. Some combined their herds to hire a shepherd, or formed **doulab**, combined plough teams for mutual assistance and protection. Others made associations of capital. The sequestration lists reveal a complex web of loans arranged between agnates in times of financial need⁴³. Co-residence reinforced this spirit of mutual aid and support. Most douar comprised close agnates⁴⁴, and co-residence was the rule in the sedentary fractions. There is no evidence available for the **ghar** (troglodyte dwelling) in Matmata, but among the Ouderna the **ghorfa** (grain silos) of close agnates were usually contiguous⁴⁵.

The symbolic patrimony of **charaf** (honour) shared by brothers and close agnates also secured group cohesion. In contrast to self esteem, honour was the collective patrimony of all members of a

patronymic association since it derived not from personal attributes but from the status of the whole lineage. However, as Bourdieu explains in his seminal study of honour in Kabylie society, 'honour is lived rather than clearly conceived'⁴⁶. It defies definition or explanation. Nor did the officers of the Service attempt any understanding. Inquests frequently classified murders and attacks as 'crimes of honour' but made no attempt to describe or explain what they meant by this catch-all definition. Honour and all that it entailed were elements of the unfathomable oriental mind. With these limitations on the sources honour can only be seen in the most simplistic terms of violation and revenge.

Most of the violations of honour recorded were associated with attacks on women, but violence towards men, threats, and insults were also interpreted in this way. The onus was on quick and appropriate revenge. Dishonour remained 'virtual as long as the possibility of riposte remains, but it becomes more and more real the longer vengeance is delayed'⁴⁷. Responsibility for the act of vengeance lay with a close male agnate. In the case of a seduction at Tamazredt in 1901, the seducer was murdered in the courtyard of the mosque by the girl's cousin, in the absence of a brother, only two days after the crime⁴⁸. Similarly, although the preferred target of vengeance was the individual who had inflicted the shame, he was not always readily accessible. Murderers often fled, and though they might be followed and killed in their sanctuary, this was discouraged by the danger of alienating their protector⁴⁹. Often the victim's family directed their vengeance against any male from the criminal's family. Vengeance, therefore, presented the family or more extended group of agnates, as a group both in the responsibility for the act and responsibility for the crime.

Vengeance was not always exacted following crimes of manslaughter, wounding, or murder. An arbitrator might persuade the victim's agnates to accept *dia* (blood money)⁵⁰. This was not just a payment between the criminal and the victim's close dependants but involved the wider kingroup, all of whom participated in the decision, shared the responsibility and compensation. Agnates generally contributed to and received *dia* in proportion to their

genealogical distance from the perpetrator or the victim. In this way *dia* served to reaffirm and define the agnatic group with a public demonstration of mutual support and public recognition of mutual loss.

Ritual fulfilled the same role. Rites of passage were marked by ceremonies and feasts attended and supported by the extended agnatic group. The highlight of the social calendar, these events provided an opportunity for the agnatic group to meet and demonstrate their unity⁵¹.

Bonds between close agnates were not sustained by self interest alone. Besides personal benefits there were also expectations and obligations between kin sanctioned by public opinion and in some cases law. There was, in short, a morality of kinship. Co-residence was, for example, expected of close agnates. 'There are practical benefits of having close neighbours', Asad writes of the Kabbashish, 'and it is morally right that these neighbours should be close kin'⁵². Equally close agnates were expected to sustain each other in time of need, participate in the social/ritual life of the group, and defend its symbolic and material patrimony. Family solidarity was assumed in custom. Brothers, for instance, were appointed each others guardians and called upon to pay each others taxes⁵³. Failure to fulfill these obligations led to public censure, loss of esteem, and even hostility.

Beyond the family, social relationships became less intense. Nevertheless, larger social groups did exist, their unity sustained by bonds of practical association and a shared patrimony as well as the purely representational bonds of genealogy. Without these bonds social relationships and groups were determined by convenience and consequently ephemeral.

The *douar* was such a group. As a camping unit it existed solely to fulfill the needs of association for defence and mutual support in the pastures. True these campments generally comprised a core of close agnates. The most detailed account of a *douar* provided by the documents, a petition from a Sian encampment seeking refuge in Tunisia in 1911 summarised in Table 7.6., demonstrates this to have been the case. Nevertheless, clients, a son-in-law of the cheikh,

and individuals whose relationship is unclear are seen in the same encampment⁵⁴. Furthermore douar were unstable. There was a seasonal rhythm to their composition. During the summer, the herds concentrated around the regular wells or returned to the ksour or the oases and the campments numbered hundreds, even thousands of tents. During the winter months, on the other hand, when herds were able to escape the confines of the watering points, douar were normally small and scattered about the pastures. Individuals could join by mutual agreement, and depart if and when they pleased.

Unfortunately no sequential documentary evidence is available but Pelligra's study of an Algerian desert campment over a period of four years demonstrates the almost monthly changes in composition as tents (including those of the core agnatic group) joined and departed for ritual events (marriages in particular), employment, or simply following disagreements⁵⁵. Inevitably co-residence encouraged relationships between families in the same douar; mutual aid, employment contracts, even marriage, but these discouraged rather than prevented the disintegration of the campment.

Larger social groups that shared a material and symbolic patrimony were far more stable. The lineage was the most important of these. Defined in terms of genealogy among the nomads and semi-nomads, 'aila, and by a combination of genealogy and territorial identity, fariq, in the sedentary communities; the lineage comprised an extended group of agnates identified by an eponymous ancestor. The lineage was, to some extent, defined contextually, by the frequency of social relationships between closer agnates. These lineages were usually in structurally comparable positions within the genealogy. They formed well defined and frequently expressed social groups. The number and size of these lineages varied considerably between communities as Table 7.5. demonstrates. Some communities comprised as few as three defined groups others as many as eleven.

The sense of corporate identity, derived from genealogical definition and the sense of 'opposition' to other lineages within the fraction, was reinforced by the lineage's shared material and symbolic patrimony, and its role as a ritual, social, and economic

group. Most lineages owned wells and cisterns, built at communal expense, providing reserves of water in dry years, and land (as habous, in private ownership, or, more often, by tradition) that was divided among the comprising households for cultivation every year. In this way membership of a lineage conferred practical benefits. It also encouraged relations between members of the lineage since this patrimony had to be managed and defended. Seasonal overpasture, for example, was prevented by the reservation of areas of pasture around the wells for the summer months. Likewise violent confrontations were common between lineages defending their ploughlands in October and November, or their wells in the summer months. Initially only a few shepherds or plough teams were involved, but they sent to their kinsmen for reinforcements and fights quickly escalated into brawls with hundreds of participants⁵⁶.

Although honour was defined relatively and an individual would not feel compelled to revenge the murder of a distant cousin as he would that of his brother, he could not entirely divorce himself from the standing of the wider patronymic group. To ignore a slight would ultimately reflect on the lineage as a whole. For this reason affairs of honour often came to involve distantly related individuals. A notable example is case of murder at Tamazredt (Matmata), which, the French report would have us believe, involved a conspiracy of the murderers brothers, uncles, second cousins and still more distantly related individuals of the same lineage⁵⁷.

The lineage was also an important ritual and social group. Abu Zahra, in his study of a Sahelian village, has argued that participation in ritual rites of passage was the most important expression of solidarity in the kin group⁵⁸. Nevertheless there were other social and economic associations between more distant relatives, Carton's description of mutual aid in Nefzaoua, and the range of debt chains within the fractions of the Ouderna make it clear that the wider agnatic group within the lineage provided practical economic support⁵⁹. As in the family these relationships were not simply a matter of convenience. There was also a sense of obligation that linked more distant agnates in the same morality of kinship. True the obligation was not as strong as to assist a

distant relative as it was a close family member but it was still there, supported by the same moral sanctions.

Lineage co-residence encouraged such relationships. Among nomadic and semi-nomadic communities douar usually comprised members of the same lineage. In the detailed account of the Sian douar described in Table 7.6., for example, all the households were identified as el-Cheradi (Sian)⁶⁰. In the sedentary communities this co-residence was built into the morphology of the village or ksar. Each lineage occupied a discrete and introverted *fariq* (quarter). Each had its own watering point and meeting place, and the boundary between one and the other was clearly demarcated, by a track, a stretch of open land, by a gorge at Toujane (Matmata), in the villages of the Djebel Demmer where troglodyte dwellings were built around spurs, by their position on the slope or in a valley, or, in the semi nomads' ksour, by a narrow entrance into an enclosed courtyard. For women this co-residence implied virtual segregation. The structure of each quarter was such that women could move within it without being seen from outside, they were protected. Their social life focused on the lineage's watering point and associations of mutual aid were largely restricted to other women in that quarter. For men co-residence did not imply segregation, but it still reinforced the kinship structure⁶¹.

In many ways the lineage may be seen as an extended family, though it was more durable. Over a long period, however, composition did change, as Valensi's description of the changing names of lineages within the Djlass over the period 1724 to 1884 demonstrates. During the period of the Protectorate, however, there were relatively few of such changes. By and large the same lineages are identified by commentators and documents throughout the seventy year period (see Table 7.5.). In this sense the lineage was more realistically a corporate group than the family since its identity persisted despite the death of its members.

It is, however, a wider social group, the fraction, that may be seen as the integral community of Southern Tunisia. An assertion that should be qualified by the admission that social relationships

and the sense of corporate identity declined rapidly outside the lineage group.

Varying in size from less than a hundred to nearly a thousand adult males, from two to eleven lineages (see Table 7.5.), the fraction is comparable to the village unit of Northern Tunisia. In the nomadic and semi-nomadic communities the fraction was described as **qabil** or **arch**, terms that implied definition by descent. Some of the fractions were identified by their eponymous ancestor, and described themselves as **oulad**, sons of, this ancestor (see Table 7.5.). In many of the sedentary communities, however, the sense of territory seems to have been far more important than descent. Certainly the term **bilad** implies a territorial rather than genealogical definition of the group. Indeed Menouillard's study of oral histories in Matmata reveal that several of the communities lacked an identifiable eponymous ancestor. Their names were those of the villages in which they lived not those of ancestors⁶². Moreover, most of the fractions, including those that espoused the patrilineal ideology, comprised one or more 'immigrant' lineages which effectively stood outside the genealogy. The fraction, therefore, lacked the representational and definitional coherence of the smaller social groups.

Nevertheless the fractions were durable social groups. The only changes during the Protectorate were those that resulted from administrative re-organisation within the south. Moreover, fractions, or at least synonymous social groups, can be traced not just over the past century but into the distant historical past. This is particularly true of the sedentary communities whose territorial identification inevitably encouraged nominal continuity. Ghomrassen, for example, is referred to in Tijani's travelogue of the 14th century⁶³.

Like the lineage or the family, the fraction shared a common material and symbolic patrimony. It held land and water resources in the distant pastures and ploughlands for common use. Resources which, like the lineage, they managed and defended in common. There were also questions of honour. An attack or insult by a member of another fraction could mobilise the community as a whole. In 1901,

for example, the murder of an Od. Khalifa (Touazine) shepherd by an Od. M'hamid (Accara) herder following a dispute at a well, brought members of fractions into conflict in a brawl of, according to the makhzen's report, several hundred people⁶⁴.

The fraction was also a ritual group. It was not uncommon for weddings to be attended by the wider community, although active participation was usually restricted to the lineage group. The *zerda* (annual pilgrimage to a marabouts tomb) on the other hand, was a ritual that encompassed the fraction as a whole. In the summer, when the nomads and semi-nomads were concentrated about the regular watering points, or in late autumn after the olive harvest among the sedentary communities, the fractions congregated about their saints tomb, often the tomb of their eponymous ancestor. While the ostensible purpose of these pilgrimages was religious they also served to bring the fraction together. They provided an opportunity for relationships, ignored in much of the year, to be reaffirmed and new relationships to be established. The *zerda* was, for this reason, often a 'marriage fair' at which partners were exchanged. But the *zerda* was more than a get together. The rituals of the festival, culminating in the division of a slaughtered cow between the lineages, expressed symbolically the unity of the community⁶⁵. Refusal to participate in such festivities was an extraordinary act, a symbolic declaration of hostility within the community⁶⁶.

It is difficult to judge how frequent less formal relations between the members of different lineages were. True the fractions may be described as co-residential. Douar usually comprised families from the same community, and nomads and semi-nomads usually occupied their own ksar. Where these were contiguous, as at Médenine (see Map 4), each fraction's ksar was introverted and clearly demarcated from that of its neighbours. The opportunities for social relations were rare, however. For most of the year the campments were small and dispersed, only in summer did they camp together. Even at this time each lineage camped on its own, close by but not with the rest of the fraction. Although massive campments of a thousand tents have been described in the documents⁶⁷, there were few wells in the south that could support such numbers.

Nor were social relations necessarily easier in the mountain villages. Each lineage lived within itself. To some extent the religious life compensated for this. Every Friday the whole community prayed together at the mosque (though only in the villages), and there were annual pilgrimages but to what extent this encouraged frequent social relations is unclear. Certainly the web of debts linking the sequestered rebels confirms that relationships such as mutual aid did extend into the wider community. But the number of such exchanges was extremely restrained. Only 9% of the total number of debts crossed from one lineage to another.

Unity from within, however tenuous, was reinforced by opposition from without. Fractions clearly saw themselves in opposition to one another. There was another element, the state. Individual families and lineages within the fraction were recognised by the state in their correspondence, but they dealt with these communities, whether in collecting taxes or in their more 'diplomatic' relations, monolithically. And so the fractions usually responded. This is not to accord the pre-Protectorate state a formative role in the definition of social groups (although this power was to arise under the Protectorate (see Chapter 8)). Relations with the state simply reinforced the identity of the pre-existing community.

Wider social groups were recognised beyond the fraction. Among the nomads and semi-nomads this 'tribal' group and 'confederation', termed, variously, *qabil*, *gsim*, and *najâa*, was again defined and identified in terms of patrilineal descent. Indeed descent from the saint Sidi Moussa and his seven companions or brothers theoretically linked most of the nomadic and semi-nomadic fractions of Southern Tunisia through five related tribes (the Ouderna, the Touazine, the Khezour, the Haouia, and the Accara) into one large confederation, the *Overghamma* (see Table 7.1.). Among the sedentary communities, on the other hand, the sense of larger community was less developed. The use of the term *bilad* to define and place names to identify the various communities deprived them of any representational unity. In *Matmata* there was a vague sense of tribal identity, perhaps derived from a purported genealogical relationship perhaps from a purely

territorial solidarity⁶⁸. Further south in the Djebel Demmer any genealogical relationship was emphatically denied, and, without ancestors to bridge the gaps, the villages were proud and protective of their mutual independence⁶⁹.

Even where the tribe or confederation was a representational reality it is difficult to identify them as functioning social groups. There was the sense of a shared symbolic patrimony but this was diffuse and ill defined. Responsibility for its defence could not mobilise the group as whole. The tribe's material patrimony was similarly ill defined. As Chapter 4 demonstrates the definition of landownership was related to the reliability of the resource. Only the most unreliable and infrequently used resources were 'owned' at the level of the tribe or confederation. Nor can their 'ownership' be understood in terms of legal and certified rights. 'Ownership', in this case, really means control by force. Exclusive use depended on the ability to prevent cultivation by rival tribes. Because ownership was legitimised by force a precise definition of the boundary between the tribal 'territories' was impossible, and peripheral plots frequently changed hands. Precise definition was impractical.

Nor did the tribe or confederation appear to have had any social or ritual role. The tribal 'territory' was not managed by the group. Cultivation was opportunistic, by the first group to arrive at the dampened plot. There was no formal division of the cultivable area. Unlike the fraction there was no ritual event which affirmed the group's unity. Even where several fractions shared the same saint's tomb they made their pilgrimages on separate days⁷⁰. While relations of mutual aid were not impossible between fractions were not impossible they were rare. Only six (1.7%) rebel debts went beyond the fraction none beyond the tribe. Again the tribes were only loosely co-residential. True the ksour of the Touazine were grouped together at Médénine and some of the Ouderna shared the same ksour in the Djebel Abiodh but in these agglomerations each fraction was discrete, their ghorfa were built within a separate courtyard (see Map 4). Co-residence was an impossibility since no

watering point in the south could even temporarily sustain such numbers.

Gellner admits that the highest levels of segmentation had little functional purpose. For him they were latent and dispositional⁷¹. They were social groups that were mobilised only to oppose a threat from outside. But how often did the fractions combine to protect their territory, or in defence against a threat from outside? Rarely. There is no record of conflict between tribes in the sense of united military expeditions, though on occasion members of several fractions might combine to form a raiding party. Only once do we find the Ouderna combining to oppose the neighbouring Sian and Nouail in 1892, and this was at the instigation of the French military⁷². Nor were the tribes always willing to act corporately before the state. In his account of the Aith Waryaghar of Morocco, Hart describes three occasions on which that tribe combined to act as a single community. On each occasion the tribe opposed the state, and individual fractions forgot their differences to combine against the mutual threat⁷³. A similar situation may be described at Matmata, where military opposition to the government in 1840, 1856, and 1868 appears to have united the otherwise disparate and discrete communities⁷⁴. Otherwise the fractions preferred to deal with the state independently. In the early 1880's, for example, when Allegro sought to recruit the Haouia, Ouderna, and Touazine as tribal auxiliaries, he did not treat with them as units but with their comprising fractions⁷⁵.

In practice the fractions co-operated and combined militarily and diplomatically only so long as it suited their interests. This became apparent in their varied responses to the French occupation. At Toujane, in Matmata, resistance continued long after the remainder of the 'tribe' had submitted. That fraction considered its loyalty to the Ouderna, who were also in dissidence, more important than to its neighbours⁷⁶. Similarly the Od. Khalifa and Od. Hamed of the Touazine persisted in their opposition to the French for years after the other fractions of the Touazine had submitted.

The upper levels of the genealogically defined social structure existed only in the realm of ideology. This is not to say that they

had no significance. Ideology and perceived social groups were important in directing social action, but they did not determine it. Much the same can be said of every level of social organisation. Although by describing families, lineages, and fractions as social groups one gives the impression of corporate bodies encompassing social relationships the reality was far more flexible. In the documents the terms that define these groups, *arch*, *fariq*, and *qabil*, are used almost interchangeably. These identified rather than determined social groups. As need arose the individual or group could alter and redefine their position within the overall structure. A family could leave its lineage, behaving and defining itself as a lineage on its own account, similarly a lineage could set itself up as a discrete fraction. It is for this very reason that an understanding of tribal society must focus on relationships within the smaller social groups.

7.3. The Lineage in Society: Friends, Enemies, and Factions.

Within the fraction political life was dominated by the relationship between the lineages. In the prevailing ideology this relationship was expressed in terms of a structural equality based on their relative position in the genealogy. Equality was reaffirmed at ritual events and, ideally, in the management of the collective's property. At the *zerda*, for example, the meat of the slaughtered cow was divided with scrupulous equality among the comprising lineages. Each was portion weighed and its quality assessed in a public ceremony⁷⁷. The division of the collective ploughlands often followed the same procedure. Structurally equivalent lineages received the same area and quality of land⁷⁸.

For segmentary lineage theory the equality, and consequent balance, of the segments was a necessary precondition for the system's stability. It is clear, however, that this equality was illusory. Far from being comparable, the size of structurally equivalent lineages often varied considerably (see Table 7.2. (the size of lineages at the third level of segmentation) and Table 7.5.). Tribesmen recognised this inequality, and, whilst they might keep silent at events of only a symbolic importance, would object if

they stood to lose from the procedures of division. Disputes were frequent in the ploughlands. Larger lineages rejected the principle of structural equivalence and sought to divide the land according to size or the number of ploughteams. As Boris points out the solution was often a compromise. An admission of the ideal of equality between lineages qualified by a need for equality between individuals⁷⁹.

A compromise of the principles of segmentation was not, however, only a temporary expedient. The imbalance between lineages threatened the stability of the fraction at all times. In a society where confrontation could quickly escalate into conflict numbers gave an important advantage. To avoid domination smaller lineages had to find allies.

Fractions comprised more than two structurally equivalent lineages at every level of segmentation (see Tables 7.2. and 7.5.). In this context opposition could not have been the automatic and structural relationship implied. Without the opposing group determined by the structure of lineage the individual or group was able, or forced, to select friends and enemies among several groups at the same level in pursuit of its own best interests. Social groups, termed factions here, emerge that cannot readily be defined by the ideology of lineage alone.

French documents and commentators refer to these factions as *soff*, borrowing the term directly from their experience of Kabylie in Algeria. Unlike the relationship of kinsmen and lineage, factions were informal political associations which produced little and preserved less documentary material. Almost all our knowledge of this association is derived from the Protectorate, and the organisation of factions before this period must be inferred from the documents covering the early years of the French occupation. Unfortunately it was at precisely this period that the influence of the Algerian experience would have been the strongest, with the majority of officers seconded directly from the *Bureaux Arabes*⁸⁰.

Fortunately the clear contradiction in these accounts between the explanatory descriptions of *soff* and the bare details of factional organisation guide our analysis. The former was derived

from and occasionally cited the work of Hanoteau and Letournaux on the Kabylie. This described *soff* as a political alliance cutting across allegiances of lineage, to form an alternative and competing social group whose members were associated by bonds other than those of kinship. These alliances were not limited to one fraction, but cut all the communities of the Kabylie into two rival and opposing camps, with representatives of each in every community⁶¹. A similar system of alliances termed *leff* was later described by Montagne (who was greatly influenced by Hanoteau and Letournaux) in Morocco. There, he traces a stable pattern of alliances, a sort of 'political chequerboard in two colours' across the whole High Atlas⁶².

More recent research has been critical of this 'classical' interpretation of *soff* and *leff*. Studies by Berque, Gellner, and Hart have all rejected Montagne's 'chequer board' of alliances linking tribesmen in widely scattered communities⁶³. They have not, however, abandoned the idea of alliances within and between tribes. A distinction is made between a faction or alliance as a social group in itself (the traditional view *soff*), and a faction as a product of alliances between social groups. Rather than point to widespread and permanent patterns of alliances, Gellner, Hart, and more recently Seddon, in Morocco and Favret in Kabylie, stress the localisation, ephemerality and the opportunism of these associations, which, like other purely practical groups, were often mobilised for a specific purpose following which they were abandoned⁶⁴. It is this interpretation that best fits with the evidence available from Southern Tunisia.

Here alliances were ratified without the formality of a written document (at least none have survived or been recorded in the secondary sources) and perhaps without even the sworn oath, ceremonial meal, or sacrifice described by Hart⁶⁵. In many cases it is probable that no explicit statement of alliance was made until, ultimately, conflict between factions forced groups to show their colours. Lineages could jump from one camp to another as suited their interests. In Zraoua the Oulad Saken alternately supported the Oulad Abdallah and the Oulad Aissa in disputes throughout the

period²⁶. Such behaviour, as Lt. du Breuil de Pontbriand notes was not despised

Chaque individu pris à part n'est nullement attaché pour toujours à un soiff donné et que faisant toujours partie d'un de ces groupements dont il épouse les intérêts et les haines; il peut toutes les fois que son intérêt l'y pousse, et non pour cela qu'il soit le moins dument déconsidéré, passer au camp opposé et lutter contre ses premiers alliés. Soiff berbère représente qu'une association temporaire quant à ces partisans, l'association ayant implemment pour but l'intérêt individuel des membres du groupement, et non l'intérêt général de l'association.²⁷

Some were even able to preserve their neutrality, standing apart from the conflict of other lineages, or joining one party or another when it suited them.

These factions were not independent of the lineage structure. In most of the accounts the factions were alliances of lineages²⁸. Nevertheless, individuals and groups could and did form alliances apart from their agnates creating a contradiction of loyalties between faction and lineage. These contradictions arose for economic, political or simply personal reasons. One report, for example, refers to a split within a lineage at Guermessa (Djebel Demmer)²⁹. Another describes rival groups at Tamazredt (Matmata), as the Od. Mehaia and Mezama

entre ces deux groupements, flotte la famille des Ghiran, actuellement scindé en deux, les Drari Zekri qui fait cause commun avec les Mehaia et les Mamnon partisans du cheikh.³⁰

In each case, the split lineage, which, it should be pointed out, did not cross families but divided the lineage into opposing groups of agnates, was the exception not the rule.

Although there was no limit to the number of factions within any particular community the documentary evidence suggests that in a conflict situation the factions tended to combine, excluding the neutrals, to form two opposing groups³¹. Barth has described this process among the Swat Pathans and argues that it is inevitable in multi-party conflict. In game theory, he claims, the same pattern emerges: two opponents with a possible third neutral³². These

opposing camps were not permanent. Factional cohesion derived from mutual self interest and partners are chosen strategically⁹³, when conditions changed so would the allies. Lineages combining in one conflict might well be contestants in another.

Group cohesion in these factions did not arise internally. Factions did not share a material or symbolic patrimony like the groups defined by lineage. They owned no land or water and shared no honourable descent. Their unity was achieved like the cohesion of lineages in segmentary lineage theory, by the threat of outside, by opposition, by conflict, and by the subsequent internalisation of practical relationships.

Factions in Southern Tunisia were characterised by persistent internal hostility and conflict. Conflicts at a personal level quickly escalated to higher levels of segmentation and larger groups as individuals called on their agnates for support. Where individuals belonged to different lineages conflict could escalate to oppose groups, who, by calling on other lineages for support, might ultimately involve the whole community.

There were many opportunities for such conflicts. The annual division of collective land, the use of wells in the distant pastures or in years of drought, or questions of honour, were all recorded as causes of open violence between lineages and their allies⁹⁴. To a certain extent these conflicts were the result of random clashes of interest between practical groups. Peace could usually be restored following arbitration. In an affair of honour an appropriate act of vengeance would end the immediate cause of conflict even if it did not entirely seal the rift between parties. In Favret's terminology, the act of vengeance completed a Maussian cycle of credits and debts begun by an act of violence or an attack on honour⁹⁵. Within a group such as the fraction or lineage, *dia* enabled hostile groups to reach a settlement and return to the status quo without the polarisation of the community.

But cycles of vengeance were rarely closed immediately. Potential dishonour encouraged the quick repayment of such debts but there were often practical difficulties. As has already been described the murderer could flee, and though he might be followed

and murdered in his refuge, or vengeance exacted on a close agnate, the victims agnates often contented themselves with his effective exile, taking vengeance if he returned without their consent. At Toujane (Matmata) an exile returning after almost twenty years was murdered by relatives of the victim⁹⁶. In this way the relationship of tension and debt between both groups could perpetuate for decades.

Where an attempt was made, usually at the instigation of a murderer's agnates, to resolve the hostility created by such a crime through the payment of dia, normal relations were still delayed. The victims agnates always put up a token resistance to accepting dia, so demonstrating their willingness to exact vengeance. Moreover, whilst the value of the payment was established within certain limits the exact sum, the manner, and timing of payment were a matter of lengthy discussion. Once agreement was reached there was no lump sum but a sequence of payments, each of which was preceded by further negotiations⁹⁷. As a result relations between potentially hostile groups were maintained for a number of years after a murder through negotiation. Eventually the hostility came to an end and normal, though not necessarily friendly, relations were restored.

Favret also demonstrates that an act of vengeance could provoke a proliferation of new cycles: a blood feud between extended kin groups. Despite the sequential action both she, Peters, and Hart stress that each of the cycles of crime and vengeance were regarded as complete⁹⁸. It is also true, as Peters points out, that the manner as well as the act of vengeance itself, might provoke the beginning of a new cycle, and so ensure the perpetuation and escalation of violence between groups⁹⁹. At Ghomrassen a murder in August 1909 was followed by an act of vengeance two days later. Four more murders followed that November. Two years later violence broke out again in a riot in the village in which three died, followed, a week later by yet another murder¹⁰⁰.

Acts of violence were, however, only the extreme manifestation of the continuing rancour between groups. Animosity was more often expressed in verbal harassment and insults. An amusing example is provided by a letter sent to a cheikh in 1918

Louange à Dieu!

Chien! Cochon! Sauvage! tu verras si tu n'es pas revoqué. J'ai écrit une contre toi au Secrétaire du Gouvernement et, s'il plait Dieu, nous ne verrons plus ta figure, vaurien, pédéraste passif qui mange l'argent des gens. Je suis allé t'exposer une réclamation que tu m'as dit de te donner de l'argent.

Salut de ton ennemi dans cette vie et dans la vie future, celui qui a forniqué ta femme sous la *squifa*, s'il plait Dieu je te forniqué ainsi que ta fille, cette agnelle.¹⁰¹

They could also be vicious. Following the murder of a member of the Bou Kesra (Oulad Debbab) family in the tribal revolt of 1916, for example, the victim's agnates sent a

lettre anonyme qui a contribué à la mise sous séquestre des biens du rebelle, n'aspirent qu'à entrer, par voie d'achat régulière, en la propriété dans le plus grand nombre des immeubles qui doivent être mis en vente aux échères publiques. À ce moment tous les moyens seront employés pour de nouvelles chicanes et de nouveaux procès.¹⁰²

Nor did enemies shrink from more violent harassment - fights and muggings were common¹⁰³.

Anonymity was unusual. Individuals rejoiced in and celebrated an opportunity to 'get back at' an enemy, and signed their complaints or, as above, sent the enemy a letter informing him of their machinations. There was often a formal declaration of hostilities. The annual zerda, for example, provided an opportunity for dissenting lineages to demonstrate their objections to another group in public. It was not uncommon for one group to refuse to attend, and on one occasion at Médenine the zerda ended in a brawl between hostile factions¹⁰⁴.

Once an enmity existed the groups were predisposed to quarrel and fight over issues, such as the annual division of ploughland, that, in the normal course of events, would be settled by arbitration. Often the original cause of the quarrel was so remote as to be forgotten or was accorded to distant and legendary crimes or acts of treachery. Valensi makes the distinction between 'occasional' alliances and oppositions between groups and those that are 'hereditary' or 'structural', based on distant events or

expressed and justified, by a uterinal relationship in the genealogy¹⁰⁵. It is in this sense that Peters writes that 'the feud knows no beginning and it has no end', it becomes, at least in the living memory, a permanent feature of the group¹⁰⁶. Yet whatever its origins the enmity was always made 'real' by events within living memory. This constant reaffirmation ensured the persistence of hostility between groups over generations. At Zeraoua, for instance, fights between the Od. Aissa and Od. Abdallah in 1916, 1923, 1936, 1944, and 1948 stand out against the constant rancour between the lineages¹⁰⁷.

To some extent these hostilities redefined the social world. As Evans-Pritchard describes of the Nuer: 'corporate life is incompatible with a state of feud'¹⁰⁸. Hostility between factions prevented communal activity or rendered it a source of conflict rather than unity. Where the division occurred in a group which had daily significance, such as the lineage, where co-residence and co-propriety brought enemies into frequent contact and communal activity depended on their co-operation hostility and the group could not co-exist. Individuals distanced from the quarrelling parties, or complete outsiders might try and arbitrate. If this failed it was usual for one of the groups to secede by forming a lineage of its own or by joining another¹⁰⁹. At the level of the fraction on the other hand, hostile lineages could persist because there were few occasions when they were required to act as a group. The most important such occasion was the division of communal land and this, as has been described, was usually accompanied by quarrels and fighting.

Practical relationships were internalised within the soff. Tribesmen explicitly state their opposition to marriage, for example, outside their faction¹¹⁰. From the lists of sequestration it is also possible to demonstrate that webs of debt were confined within the faction and it is probable, though unrecorded in the documents, that other forms of mutual aid were similarly restrained.

Because feuding groups were predisposed to opposition. This prevented the choice of alliance between groups becoming a 'free for all'. Certain groups would not, in the short term, combine. To what

extent groups were predisposed to alliance in the same way is less clear. No traditional alliances, substantiated by legend and stories, are recorded. Alliance appears to have been a more flexible relationship than animosity, changing direction to suit a temporary interest. Though alliance sometimes encouraged individuals to regard an attack on their friends as an attack on themselves, there was no patrimony, material or symbolic. Social relations were internalised because of refusal to cross boundaries defined by feuding and traditional enmities. Relations between groups resulted from rather than caused the alliance.

7.4. The Social Tribesman and his Tools.

Up to this point the individual has been ignored, or at least subsumed within the groups defined by lineage and feuding. This suits the segmentary model where, to quote Valensi, 'l'individu n'existe pas; il est inséparable d'une collectivité'''. To some extent this is fair, the prevailing ideology of lineage denied the political individual and the morality of kinship as well as his own self interest compelled the individual to behave as a group member. It is, however, worth quoting Eickelman's rejection of this essentially reductionist point of view

social structure in Morocco, both urban and rural/tribal, is based upon ordered relationships not of groups of persons, but of persons. Moroccans do not conceive of the social order as consisting of groups in structured relationships. Emphasis is placed on managing personal networks of dyadic relationships.¹¹²

Within this framework personal politics becomes the focus of study rather than political groups.

Although kinship was important in determining social relationships it would be a mistake to regard the individual as entirely confined within this structure or to see kinship as the only significant social relationship. Within the structure of lineage the individual was able to act politically, pursuing his personal strategies and self interest within a range of tools, among which marriage and patronage featured beside of those of kinship. These were not representational (both are ignored by the ideology of

lineage) but practical associations supported by their own benefits and obligations. Groups formed by such relationships could and did cut across the lineage structure. Furthermore these associations were entered voluntarily (in contrast an individual could not choose his family) and so provided the individual with tools to pursue his personal strategy.

To be an effective social tool marriage had to create a bond between families. Although this was denied by the ideology of lineage the manner in which marriages were publicised, with a feast, music, and celebrations attended by an extended group of agnates suggests their importance. In fact marriage was the most important rite in terms of symbolism, cost, and length, and the most public celebration of an individual's life¹³. It was so important that families would borrow from their agnates and sell their property to finance the celebrations¹⁴. The scale and lavishness of the celebrations became matters of honour and rivalry.

Nor could families abandon their daughters after marriage as the Danish traveller Brunn suggests¹⁵. On the contrary to act as a bond the affinal relationship had to be permanent and constantly reaffirmed. Although a woman became the responsibility and a member of her husband's lineage after her marriage, she retained strong links with her agnates. Married daughters continued to participate in the economy and society of their paternal home through mutual aid. Tools, labour, and money were borrowed by daughters setting up their own homes, and returned in kind when needed by the paternal household. Where the two families camped separately visits were possible. Furthermore, if the daughter was widowed or divorced she could return to her paternal home to be supported by her parents, or, following their death, her brothers¹⁶.

The bond was carried into the next generation. Just as the relationship between a son, his father and his 'amm (father's brother) were characterised by formality, that between a nephew and his khal (mother's brother) was close, affectionate, and supportive. Men turned to their maternal uncle for advice, financial help, or to intervene with their agnates if they became estranged¹⁷.

Marriage also created bonds between affines. At one level this was because marriage created obligations and affines may be seen as debtors and creditors. Solidarity and mutual aid were expected and, while not as strongly as in close agnatic relations, carried the sanction of public opinion¹¹⁹. While uxorial residence was not the norm, it was not unheard of in camping groups and an example is provided in the detailed account of a Sian douar (see Table 7.6.). In such circumstances the son-in-law became a client, a dependant, of the affinal group. At another level it may be said that marriages encouraged social relationships because this was their purpose. Marriages were planned to create relationships and affines used every opportunity to take advantage of them.

Despite the evident importance of marriage, segmentary lineage theorists have largely ignored the role of affinal relationships in tribal social life. This reflects the dominant ideology of patrilineal descent. Women and relationships through women suffered from a referential anonymity in tribal society. Very rarely are women mentioned in the documents. Even in the Biographical Notices where the form specifically asked for the name of the candidate's wife this information was provided in only 37% of cases (213 out of 584 Notices). It was impolite to talk of women, indeed 'men seem to act as if women do not exist'. Besides it was irrelevant. Women, in line with the dominant ideology, played no part in defining social groups¹²⁰.

Affinal relationships have also been ignored because anthropologists believed that endogamy rendered affinal relationships redundant. Where marriage was largely within the lineage structure, the argument goes, it compliments rather than distorts the genealogically defined social structure. Murphy and Kasdan's comments on the most extreme form of this endogamy, parallel cousin marriage, are relevant to the effects of endogamy in general:

parallel cousin marriage contributes to the extreme fission of agnatic lines in Arab society, and, through inter marriage, encysts the patrilineal segments. Under these circumstances integration of larger social units is accomplished vertically, through genealogical reckoning to common ancestors, and not horizontally through affinal bonds.¹²⁰

Evidence from Southern Tunisia confirms that endogamy was indeed the predominant form of marriage. The marriage of parallel cousins, *bent el 'amm* (father's brother's daughter) accounts for 26% of all marriages described in the Sequestration reports and 8% in the Biographical Notices. Within the lineage these rates of endogamy rise to 54% and 48%, within the fraction to 73% and 85%. Moreover, given the relatively high status of these individuals, these statistics may underestimate the proportion of endogamous marriages in the total population.

There were variations. Endogamy is limited by the availability of suitable marriage partners within the fraction and in small fractions the level of exogamy probably increased¹²¹. Communities that distinguished themselves by race (distinctions between Arab and Berber in Matmata), wealth, or status from their neighbours avoided exogamy by tradition¹²². Chelod has, on the basis of studies in Yemen, suggested a further distinction between the nomad and the sedentary. The nomad, he argues, seeking to preserve the integrity of the patrilineage encourages endogamy, the sedentary in contrast defined endogamy in broader terms within the village as a whole¹²³. Unfortunately there is inadequate evidence from Southern Tunisia to test such a hypothesis.

A note of caution should, however, be introduced before one analyses the purpose of the different marital forms. Although marriage was a tool in an individual's life strategy, creating links that could be mobilised for economic, social, or political purposes, it is difficult even impossible to assess the intention of a marriage from its form alone. Following copious examples Bourdieu concludes

Marriages which are identical as regards genealogy alone may have different, and even opposite, meanings and functions, depending on the strategies in which they are involved.¹²⁴

Nor should one assume that marriage was the product of one strategy alone. Fathers might claim authority over their sons and daughters in the choice of marriage partners but in reality their voice was only one among the many of those involved. Mothers, children, and

even close agnates were not without influence in the choice of a partner and a satisfactory understanding of marriage choices must take their views into consideration'²⁵. Unfortunately documents cannot provide such information we are left to infer the advantages to the principal participants.

Endogamy was not an obligation compelled by rights to brides'²⁶. There was, however, an expectation that a girl would be married among her close agnates and a parallel cousin was the popular ideal. To reject a close agnate in preference of a non-relative was to risk alienating the agnatic group. More positively, endogamy, or more specifically parallel cousin marriage, was a 'delayed exchange' in which 'the father receives political allegiance in his lifetime from his brother's son for the daughter which he gives him'. In this way endogamy reaffirmed the bonds within the group, so 'solidifying the minimal lineage as a corporate group in factional struggle'²⁷. Endogamy, therefore, played an important role in maintaining the social group. There were financial advantages as well. Brideprices were significantly lower inside the fraction '²⁸. Endogamy also allowed the family continued access to their daughters labour, an important asset from the mother's point of view, and the daughter continued access to the parental home and the emotional and financial support it provided'²⁹.

Exogamy contrasts with the prevailing endogamous marriage in both its purpose and practice. It was in every way an extraordinary form of marriage. Firstly, it was rare (only 27% of marriages in the Sequestration reports and 15% of those in the Notices Biographiques were outside the fraction). Secondly, it was outside the realm of practical relationships. Whilst endogamy allowed the affinal bonds to be manipulated on a day to day basis, marriages outside the fraction could not. Exogamy performed a more symbolic and representational role, ratifying and personifying an alliance. This is not to say that exogamous marriages could not have a practical side. Peters shows how, in Cyrenaica, pastoralists used marriage to gain access to pastures in disparate ecological zones'³⁰. Perhaps exogamous marriage was used in the same way in Southern Tunisia. Thirdly, an exogamous marriage might have significance well beyond

the family group. A marriage between families in different lineages or fractions could symbolise and personify, an alliance between whole fractions. This was implicit in the celebration of the marriage. At Haddège, for example, Khalifa Sassi Fattouch's son's marriage to the cheikh of the Oulad Sliman's daughter in 1892 was attended by two thousand people. Not just from these two villages but from all over Matmata. Likewise it was only fitting that the celebrations should be opulent and expensive¹³¹. Fourthly, because of its political purpose and role the choice of marriage partner was important. Too important to be left to women, and so in contrast to the ordinary endogamous marriage women played little part either the decision making or marriage arrangements. Lastly, because of its political functions and the cost, the brideprice and the cost of the extravagant celebrations, exogamy was only appropriate and only possible for the influential and wealthy within the fraction.

For the individual the exogamous marriage was an opportunity to display wealth and influence. It also allowed him to gain influence and power through the role of middle man. There was, however, an opportunity cost and an element of risk. A marriage outside the fraction sacrificed one within. Moreover, the position of middle man was only beneficial as long as the two communities continued to co-operate. If relations soured, the middle man might find himself in an intolerable position, caught between his allegiances and because of his alliance, facing the distrust of the group he chose to support¹³².

Because parents used their children to further their own political interests the use of marriage was not a once off gamble. Cuisinier's detailed analysis of marriage patterns among a fraction of the Drid of Central Tunisia shows how within a family one child was married to a close agate to secure group unity while another was married outside to create new alliances¹³³. In this sense marriage was a flexible political tool. It was, however, more flexible for some than others. The range of alliances available to the wealthy and honoured was considerably broader than that available to the poor.

But marriage was also a trap. Alliances concluded in youth bound affines for life. Theoretically divorce enabled an individual to abandon a potentially embarrassing affinal alliance. But despite the apparent ease with which a divorce could be concluded only four cases are recorded in the documents, and in Jemai's study of the village of Taoujoudt (Matmata) only eleven in the period 1928 to 1969 (less than 1% of all marriages). Divorce strained the relations between affines since, by association, it dishonoured the wife's agnates. It was, therefore to be avoided in all but the most extreme circumstances¹³⁴.

Polygamy also allowed an individual to broaden his affinal alliances throughout his life. But polygamy was expensive. Lavainville noted that in Matmata the husband had to provide a separate home for each wife and this was clearly beyond the means of all but the most wealthy¹³⁵. For this reason only eight cases of bigamy were recorded on the Notices Biographiques, six in the lists of Sequestration. Only Sassi Fattouch had three wives.

7.5. The Political Individual and his Tools: Authority, Power, and Patronage.

Although marriage contradicted the ideology of lineage by establishing relationships through affinal rather than agnatic bonds it was still a relationship between equal partners. Egalitarianism was as much a part of the ideology of lineage as the notion of descent from an eponymous ancestor. French writers hastened to condemn the 'Arab' as a proud individual, temperamental and even violent in the face of insult and recognising no man his superior. The individual took pride in his independence and resented any imposition¹³⁶. Among the nomads, according to Rebillet this

se traduisent par une fierté, une indépendance d'allure, une liberté de langage qui s'exercent à notre égard, et ont souvent été pris par nous de l'insolence et rebellion.¹³⁷

Equality was embodied in most communal activities, the division of meat after a communal sacrifice, the division of land within the lineage, and, as will be seen later, in the principle of decision by

consensus. But, in the face of this ideology of equality unequal relationships of authority and power did exist, and were recognised, at every level of corporate association.

Unequal relationships derived from recognised differences in status. Age, in particular, conferred a position of respect, expressed through deference and more visible privileges and ritual duties on communal occasions. Louis' ethnography of the tribes of Southern Tunisia illustrates the elders' particular rôle as a store of received knowledge, tribal histories, genealogies, and stories, and the codes of correct behaviour¹³⁸. To what extent age conferred authority obviously depended on the individual, preference was given to sagacity rather than seniority. But wisdom was associated with age and youth excluded an individual from influence¹³⁹.

Personality and reputation also conferred esteem and authority. A reputation for knowledge and education gave a man's opinion weight, and a reputation for skill at arms made him a natural choice to lead a razzia. Personal qualities, dishonesty, violent temper, weakness, and dependence on close family support were frequently referred to in anonymous complaints. Likewise letters of support identified individuals as honest and reliable. Although truth of their contents must be doubted, such letters serve to demonstrate the intimacy of these communities. Everybody was known, everybody had a past, and everybody had a reputation whether good or bad.

Although age, personality, and reputation were important in conferring respect and authority, personal attributes were less significant than descent, and hence inherited position. Studies of the 'ulama, religious establishment of orthodox Islam, and urban, particularly court, life in Tunisia have demonstrated the importance of inherited status in the differentiation of the community¹⁴⁰. Following the egalitarian ideology of the tribesmen and the segmentary lineage model it has been generally assumed that such distinctions did not exist within the tribes. However, Hammuda Cherif has shown, with 17th and 18th century fiscal documents from Northern Tunisia, that, on the contrary

A l'intérieur du groupe tribal, certains lignages prenaient une importance particulière, par suite de la proximité plus grande de l'ancêtre éponyme, d'une quelconque fonction guerrière, religieuse ou économique, accaparée par certaines familles, ou tout simplement par un hasard de l'histoire.¹⁴¹

Pre-eminent lineages or families were apparent in many of the fractions of Southern Tunisia. A few of the more prominent examples are the family Bou Ajila among the Od. Chehida, Abdellatif among the Od. Debbab, Nadji among the Nebahna, Louafi among the Zelliten (both Touazine), and Leffat at Douirat. Their political superiority and dominance, it will be shown in Chapter 8, was most evident in their monopolisation of the formal offices of authority, in particular the post of cheikh, and their informal positions at the head of rival soff. They were positions rationalised in the genealogy by claims of direct descent from the founder of the tribe¹⁴², but it was power that legitimised and made real this traditional authority.

Wealth was the basis of this power. It has been generally, but wrongly assumed that differences of wealth in tribal North African, particularly nomadic, communities were both small and ephemeral¹⁴³. Chapter 4 demonstrates the inaccuracy of this assumption. There were differences in wealth within the fractions. These differences were important because economic capital could be transformed into political capital.

Conspicuous wealth did, in itself, confer status. Wealth was displayed: the rich rode horses rather than mules, carried a modern rifle, and wore expensive clothes made with imported, and preferably silken, cloth, his wife, if not wives, were also richly adorned, even bedezined in expensive clothes and jewellery¹⁴⁴. They scorned physical, particularly agricultural, work. They gave generous hospitality, receiving visitors but rarely visiting others. Their public celebrations surpassed all others in scale and extravagance.

Wealth could also be transformed into political capital through marriage and affinal relationships. Not only did the wealthy have an opportunity to conclude a larger number of marriages through polygamy, but wealth also allowed them to conclude the more advantageous alliances. Although a man might marry a woman of

inferior wealth and status, such a *mésalliance* was rare for a woman. The brideprice a wealthy family could ask was considerably greater than one of their lesser neighbours. Furthermore only the wealthy could afford the cost and risks of exogamy. A web of intermarriages between the wealthy families can be seen in the Notice Biographiques and lists of Sequestration: the Bou Adjila linked to the Abd el Latief, the Nadji to the Louafi¹⁴⁵. These alliances conferred esteem in themselves and gave these families the influential role as middle men. An expensive marriage could be a good political investment.

The wealthy and influential might also multiply their political relationships by assuming the position of patron. Unlike marriage, patronage was an unequal relationship, based on a sense of obligation and dependency. As such the patron-client relationship might provide a more reliable political tool than an affinal relationship based on temporary mutual interest.

Mottabedeh's study of the politics of early Islam has shown how the patron's investment in his protégés career created a 'loyalty of benefit' based on a sense of *chakir* (gratitude)¹⁴⁶. This sense of obligation is comparable to that established by participation in mutual aid, but here the client recognised that he may never be able to return his obligation in its original form and requests the exchange as a favour or gift. The objects of such an exchange were often trivial, a loan of money or an animal, or the intercedence of the influential patron in a quarrel, and the relationships informal and private. They generated no documentary evidence, it was enough that the client, and perhaps the wider public were aware of the obligation.

Those relationships which were recorded describe only loans of money and animals in contractual terms without reference to a formal patron-client bond. Cheikh Sliman bin Moussa of Guermessa, for instance, had eight camels in association with various individuals of his, and a neighbouring fraction. He had little need of them himself, since he owned four on his own account and, though the associations may be interpreted as an investment (the traditional practice in such associations was to provide the co-owner with a half share of the harvest) the loan of capital may also be seen as

an act of patronage creating an obligation on the part of the client'⁴⁷.

The example of Sliman bin Moussa is not unique, similar loans of capital to establish co-proprietty of land, trees, and herds can be illustrated in most of the fractions of the south. These associations were governed by specific contracts that defined the responsibilities and returns to both investors according to their investment (see Chapter 5). In form the relationship between the associates may be indistinguishable from that between equal partners, but in reality the relationship will depend on the ability of each to find alternative partners, easier for a man with money than one with only his labour, and the dependence of each partner on the products of the association.

Wealth guaranteed economic independence. Many tribesmen, however, were forced by their poverty into dependence on a patron. Those who were able to secure an association of capital were the most privileged, but many were forced to become employees. The khammes is the most extreme manifestation of this relationship. Not simply a labourer the employer had the broadest possible command over his khammes' services. 'The contract of the khammes', Hamzaoui explains, 'is an obligation as an entire person not simply as a worker'⁴⁸. Within the law the khammes was virtually inseparable from his employer.

Given the total and humiliating dependence of the khammes on his employer it is not ^rsurprising that most tribesmen eschewed the contract. This was equally true of employment contracts in general. The preferred relationship was an association which disguised the dependence of the employee in terms of a partnership. Those tribesmen forced to accept such lowly positions preferred to leave their fraction and seek employment elsewhere, thus we find the Tripolitanian khammes in Matmata, or among the Ouderna, or the Od. Hamed shepherd among the Nouail.

Just as the acceptance of client status might be a humiliating experience for the proud tribesmen, patronage conveyed status, and patrons were by no means adverse to conspicuously displaying their power and influence. The protection of travellers, merchants, or an

individual seeking shelter from another fraction provided such an opportunity. Influential visitors were lavishly entertained by hosts displaying their wealth to their guest and their fellows. The guest was himself a prominent part of this display, since by extending his protection over a stranger, particularly a representative of an influential body such as another tribe or the government, the host demonstrated his importance in the world at large. At the same time the host displayed the tribe to his guest and so demonstrated, to the stranger, his influence within the community¹⁴⁹.

It should not be assumed that patronage existed only outside the kinship groups. On the contrary patronage like marriage provided a means of reinforcing the bonds of kinship. Moreover where disparities of wealth occurred within a family or even a lineage there was an expectation that the well off would help the poor. Those that refused to share the benefits of their success might alienate their agnates¹⁵⁰.

The significance of relationships outside kinship lies in their provision of social and political opportunities for the individual. In essence they allowed the individual to build up a following, a personal faction. The core of these factions remained the kin group but beyond it were a range of personal allies through marriage, obligation, or more formal patron-client bonds. The leader's relationship with this faction was not, it should be stressed as a group, the faction had no corporate identity or reality except as expressed through the leader, relationships were personal and dyadic. Consequently they cannot be simply defined. Barth describes the situation in the case of similar factional organisation among the Swat Pathans

The authority of a chief depends on the mandate he is able to wrest from each of his followers individually. This differs vastly in relation to his different followers. While he has - and many chiefs apparently utilize - the authority to command those who are completely dependant on him to make their daughters and wives available to him, he is unable to even criticise in public his near-equals among his following.¹⁵¹

Because the faction was centred around the individual it was ephemeral. In the short term rival leaders competed for the tribesmens' allegiance. To maintain his followers the leader had to constantly reaffirm the relationships of dependency and obligation. This demanded a continual expenditure on gifts, hospitality, loans, and employees. Failure to maintain these bonds, even among agantes, might allow a rival to capture their allegiance. The leader also had to demonstrate his authority within the community as a whole. He had to live in a style commensurate with his status. If he could not he would lose esteem and his followers would desert. Over a longer period the death of a leader dissolved the bonds that united his following. True the core of this group in the lineage or the factions of allied lineages remained intact and a new leader would emerge among them but the personal and dyadic bonds that united the leader to his more distant agnates and unrelated agantes could not be passed on. His son or another close agnate might be able to maintain some of these relationships but he had to recreate the faction for himself and mould it to his own purpose and interest.

These personal and ephemeral groups formed the basis of political life in the community, as the following chapter will demonstrate. They were the parties of tribal politics. This is not to deny the importance lineage and factional structures had within the political system. Personal factions were built around and acted within the limitations of them, but the relationships of political and social life were at the level of the individual not the group.

7.6. Classes?

Studies of pre-colonial North Africa have demonstrated both a structure and a sense of class relationships within urban society¹⁵². Whether the differences in economic and social capital described in 'tribal' or 'segmentary societies' warrant such a definition has encouraged considerable debate¹⁵³. In Southern Tunisia it is true one may distinguish differences of status, between men and women, between the young and the old, between owners and workers, and between leaders and followers. These distinctions have encouraged Henia to identify a rural/tribal 'aristocracy'¹⁵⁴.

That this 'aristocracy' constituted a class in itself for itself must, however, be doubted.

Leadership depended on wealth and high status, and poverty precluded influence, but wealth and status were not sufficient conditions for leadership. Leaders depended on the support of others. While they might compel some, their clients, they had to persuade most. Their power was consequently circumscribed and dependant. Nor can they be distinguished outside the prevailing ideology of the lineage structure. Their status arose within the kinship structure and not from a completely independent social or economic standing.

It is also unlikely that the notables were a class for themselves. The leaders may have identified themselves as **ayan**, notables, they may even have distinguished themselves from the '**amma**, the people, (though no such reference is found in the documents) but there is no evidence that they considered themselves or purposefully acted as a class with mutual self interests. The prevailing ideology remained patrilineal descent and social groups and relations were conceived in these terms. There were relations but not associations between the notables. Wealthier high status tribesmen preferentially married into other wealthy high status families forming links across the lineage structure but their primary allegiance and most social relationships remained within their kin group. Likewise in politics they depended on their kin for support and advanced their interests. Alliances between notables entailed alliances between kingroups.

Nor can one identify a tribal proletariat at the other end of the social spectrum. Many of the poorer tribesmen were not entirely without capital, they owned a few sheep and goats and, if they owned no land of their own, could at least plough collective lands. It is misleading to describe these workers as a proletariat. This class must be alienated from the means of production both in ownership, identity, and aspiration:

It is not enough [writes Marx] that the conditions of labour are concentrated at one pole of society in the shape of capital, while at the other pole are grouped masses of men who have nothing to sell but their labour-

power. Nor is it enough that they are compelled to sell themselves voluntarily. The advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self evident natural laws.¹⁵⁵

Only the khammes was truly alienated from the means of production. Hamzaoui has, however, demonstrated that despite his condition the khammes did not see himself as exploited or his employer as 'directly responsible for his poverty'. Instead the khammes explained his condition in terms of a fatalistic dependence on the weather. In Hamzaoui's words 'nature plays a mystifying role in the khammes' mind, providing a screen on to which he projects the relations of production to which he is subject'¹⁵⁶. Rather than resenting his employer the khammes felt a solidarity that may be explained by the close social relationship between the employer and employee, a relationship which extended economic responsibilities to the more diffuse bond between patron and client. Solidarity between the tribal poor was impossible while economic relationships were socialised in terms of patronage, whilst the worker identified and was identified with his employer.

If the employee was isolated by his client relationship with his employer this isolation was compounded by ethnic distinctions. Many of those employed as labourers, shepherds, or khammes came from outside the fraction, retained their ethnic identity and returned to their own community at the end of their contract. For these workers the social implications of economic dependency were mitigated by their distance from the community in which they worked. Some workers from within the community explained and justified their dependency by their racial identity as **chouachine** (freed slaves and by extension all negroes).

Although North African slaves enjoyed far better conditions and greater legal protection than under comparable European law they were still oppressed and despised¹⁵⁷. The abolition of slavery did little to alleviate their condition. After manumission many negroes were forced to remain with their former masters, through lack of alternative employment. A large proportion, particularly in the oases, became khammes and were bound by debts, others household

servants, or day labourers'⁵². In the Sian douar described in Table 7.6. one finds a forty year old chouachine living in his employers tent with no property of his own.

Not all the chouachine were so disadvantaged. Louis suggests that it was tradition for the master to present his slaves with some animal and landed property on their manumission'⁵³. Documents confirm that there were land and animal owners among the chouachine and that some had independent households, even before the abolition of slavery. One case of disputed landownership involving a freed slave dates from as early as 1834'⁵⁰. The evidence does suggest, however, that the scale of property ownership was restrained'⁵¹, and there is no indication of how widespread landownership was.

Economically there may have been little to distinguish the chouachine from the remainder of the tribal poor but socially and culturally they were readily identified and distanced. Despised for their past and present status, there was little exogamy. A man might take a chouachine bride, more often as a second wife than a first, but no one would allow their daughter to marry a negro. They were isolated in their own communities. At Tunis and Ghadames, where there were substantial negro populations, the chouachine inhabited distinct quarters, appointed their own representatives, and were segregated in their social and political life'⁵². Among the Chenini, Douiret, Ghebenten and Od. Yacoub the chouachine had distinct lineages'⁵³. To what extent they shared an ideology of patrilineal descent is unclear but these lineages did encapsulate their political life. In the larger community they had no political role. They may have attended council meetings but do not appear on lists of notables. Although, after generations in North Africa, few choaachine spoke West African languages and all adopted Islam they were not entirely assimilated. The West African cultural influence on their music, stories, and religion was strong'⁵⁴. For the chouachine, therefore, the relations of class were mystified by racial definition and identity.

7.7. Bourgeoisie and Proletariat: A Changing Society during the Protectorate?

Ronald Pirson traces the growth of class divisions, a class ideology, and a consequent decline in kinship and the ideology of patrilineal descent during the Protectorate period:

La sédentarisation, l'évolution économique, l'urbanisation ont rassemblé des populations parfois hétérogènes, réorganisé les rivalités et les solidarités en fonction de finalités étrangères à la vie pastorale ou guerrière. Dès lors, cette organisation tribale s'est déstructurée et restructurée suivant un schéma nouveau où une hiérarchie de classes sociales a tendance à substituer à l'organisation tribale classique.¹⁶⁵

The causes of this restructuring were both administrative and economic. The government, Pirson writes, 'a cherché à briser la structure tribale par le regroupement et la sédentarisation'¹⁶⁶, the atomisation of tribal society into smaller corporate units and the imposition of a new administrative order. Relations of production were transformed. Collective property was abolished, according to Rezig, 'a death blow to tribal organisation'¹⁶⁷, disparities of wealth increased, tribesmen were reduced to labourers, and the state, capitalist enterprises, and emigration emerged as sources of employment outside the tribal structure. The consequences were the alienation of the individual from his kingroup through his pursuit of economic and social advancement and a changing orientation of group identities and activity in accordance with the new relations of production, a class differentiation between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

That these processes were active in Southern Tunisia cannot be doubted, but their efficacy must. The purpose, means and limitations of administrative changes in tribal organisation are discussed in detail in the following chapter. It is sufficient to note here that while social organisation crumbled at the highest levels of tribe and confederation (where they had never been particularly strong) the identity and importance of lower levels of the tribal structure were reinforced.

The impact of capitalism on the relations of production and the social structure has also been considerably overestimated. The delimitation of collective land and the growth of private landownership, for instance, did not entirely eliminate the collective patrimony of the lineage or fraction. Goguyer argued in 1948 that the decree of 23 November 1918

a produit une désagregation au profit de la fraction, de la famille, et finalement, de l'individu, les intérêts particuliers se développent au detriment de l'intérêt général.¹⁶⁸

The extent of this partition was, however, less in the interior than on the coast. Moreover the decree reinforced rather than abolished collective ownership and management in those lands that remained collective property. In the face of piecemeal occupation by wealthy and influential individuals the decree established a Council of Notables to protect and manage the lands in the interests of all.

Dispossession, impoverishment, and the growth of seasonal labouring were features of economic change in the south, particularly on the coastal belt (see Chapter 4), but this did not create a rural proletariat. Relations of production for a large proportion of the poor continued to be articulated through traditional contract forms. Many of those forced to seek employment were not entirely dispossessed. Wage labouring was simply a temporary expedient. They were, in Poncet's words symptoms of a 'prolétarianisation partielle'¹⁶⁹.

Nor did employment outside the tribal economy, on the colonialist enterprises at Zarzis and in Northern Tunisia entail a complete transformation of social relations. True the seasonal worker was hired for his labour alone, no social responsibilities were implied by the contract. Nevertheless the migrants travelled and worked as douar, with their families and friends, though they were paid separately they were usually hired together¹⁷⁰. In this way seasonal labouring was integrated within the domestic mode of production, the traditional camping group, and the mutual aid practised in tribal society.

Numerous studies have pointed to the role of urbanisation in the disintegration of tribal society and the growth of a proletariat¹⁷¹. Urban centres in Southern Tunisia had no such effect. First of all, they were too small. By 1936 the largest town in the south, Zarzis, was still less than 10,000 people and most of its residents were employed in agriculture. Secondly, with the exception of Zarzis, the towns were imposed on the south, they did not grow out of the local economy. A large proportion of the residents, more than half at Tataouine and Médenine, were Jews and Europeans, and many of the Muslims came from the north or Djerba rather than the south. Thirdly, employment in these towns was predominantly commercial, service (transport, restaurants, and hotels) and administrative. There were few 'industrial' occupations and certainly no industrial enterprises. At Ben Gardane where Djerbans set up weaving workshops, the largest had only six looms¹⁷². Artisan²al production inhibited rather than encouraged proletarianisation. Workers were isolated by competition and the atomisation of the workplace. Lastly, those tribesmen that did move to the urban centres remained closely associated with and took an active part in their kingroup. The persistence of ethnic identities and association inhibited the formation of any urban or class consciousness. Social and political groups within the towns continued to be defined on tribal and ethnic lines, and relations between these groups were more often hostile than co-operative¹⁷³.

Much the same was true of those tribesmen who worked in the larger urban centres of the north. For the communities of the Djebel Matmata and Djebel Demmer urban employment was not a recent phenomenon. Migrants followed a well established path (see Chapter 5). During the Protectorate period the scale of this emigration undoubtedly increased, particularly in drought years and in the 1930's, and began to attract tribesmen from new communities. But it did not amount to 'urbanisation'. Few tribesmen became permanent residents in the north (see Table 5.9.), even fewer married northerners¹⁷⁴. The village or fraction remained the centre of their social and economic world, indeed emigration to the city may be seen simply as an extension of the tribal economy. Almost all their

earnings were repatriated, in cash, by postal order, or through luxury goods which could be sold for a profit on their return. They lived frugally and worked long hours to save as much as possible. Most stayed in the north one or two years rarely more than five or six. Once they had earned enough to buy land, to get married, or pay off debts they returned home. They might re-emigrate several years later if faced with a pressing financial need but ultimately they returned to the south, to work on their land.

Even whilst the migrants were in the north they maintained close links with the village community. Many returned home during the summer months for the marriage season and to do essential agricultural work¹⁷⁵. They were kept informed about events at home by the continuous flow of migrants to and from the community. Whilst they were in Tunis they continued to participate in village politics. In Matmata 41% (39 out of 96) of complaints concerning events within the villages were sent from Tunis¹⁷⁶. It was only after Independence, when families accompanied the immigrants, permanent homes were established, and returns to the village became less and less frequent, that the bonds between the migrant and his home weakened.

Within the city the migrants lived and worked apart from the urbanites, among their kinsmen. Each fraction performed specialised tasks, and novice migrants arriving in the city found employment with close agnates¹⁷⁷. There was some geographical and occupational diversification during the Protectorate period but these processes were, however, slow to take effect. As late as the 1960's ethnic specialisations were still well demarcated and by far the largest part of the migrants continued to go to Tunis. Virtually none of the Southern migrants were employed in the factory work one associates with the process of proletarianisation¹⁷⁸.

Residential and social segregation inhibited the growth of a trans-ethnic class identity. Most migrants lived in *oukala* (large houses or former *fondouk* (merchant's hotels) divided into small rooms) in the *medina*, the old city. As elsewhere in North Africa migrants from the same community lived in the same part of town, even shared the same residence, the Matmati in one *oukala* the Douiri

in another. Rents were high, the fabric and services of the buildings inadequate. Conditions of overcrowding and sanitation were appalling, since, to save money emigrants from the the same lineage or fraction shared five or six to a room ¹⁷⁹. More experienced migrants might move away, usually sharing an apartment with members of the same community, but for them the oukala still

jouent le rôle de centre de regroupement où l'on vient dès l'arrivée en ville, où l'on dépose ses modestes bagages, où l'on revient régulièrement chercher des nouvelles du pays.¹⁸⁰

The immigrant community seems to have acted as a microcosm of the village: 'rivalries and alliances in the one were mirrored in the other. In 1941, for example, tension between rival factions of the Zraoua flared up in a riot at Bab Souika (Tunis), in which two immigrants lost their lives¹⁸¹. Social life rarely went beyond the bounds of the transposed village community.

Proletarianisation did not occur among the Djebalia in the cities because their urban life was an extension of their village community. Among less experienced migrants, those working within industry rather than the artisanat or self employment, or those travelling longer distances in smaller groups, social dislocation was more likely. During the droughts and economic crisis of the 1930's many (exactly how many is unknown) tribesmen migrated north to Tunis and the other cities in a desperate search for employment and food (see Chapter 4). Without resources and unfamiliar with the urban environment these 'economic refugees' gravitated to the growing shanty towns, on the outskirts of the city. A study of one such settlement, Djebel Lahmar, established outside Tunis in the late 1940's, reveals terrible conditions of unemployment, poverty, and a descent into criminality, prostitution, and mendicancy¹⁸². Harrison, in his study of Tripoli's shantytowns, claimed that these conditions encouraged the dissolution of 'tribal organisation', even family structures, among migrants¹⁸³. Clarke saw the same transformation in Tunisia

Ties with the homeland are soon lost in the tightly packed native quarters of the cities, and although the

nomad retains his family pride, his visits home become more infrequent with the passing of the years.¹⁸⁴

The process was slow. Dardel and Klibi point out that, in the early 1940's at least, many tribesmen migrated to the cities for the summer only, returning south in the winter to plough or harvest. Within the shantytowns there was a tendency for the migrants of the same origins to congregate. Mutual aid remained an important force in group identity, and if their situation denied them a shared material patrimony their symbolic patrimony, honour, remained intact. Social structures were not dissolved. The migrants' economic situation was, however, radically changed. Individuals and families eked out a living as best they could through odd jobs, begging, and crime. But this marginalisation prevented proletarianisation. There were no formal relationships and no identity of mutual interest to support an identity of class.

Nor did proletarian identity necessarily develop where relations of production united a labour force in evidently unequal and exploited relationship with capital and capitalists. The phosphate mines at Metlaoui, Redyef and M'dilla (the only large scale industrial communities in Tunisia during the Protectorate) provide an interesting example of the persistence of ethnic identities in the context of capitalist relations of production. Conditions of employment were appalling, dangerous, unsanitary, and poorly paid, yet a proletarian solidarity and identity was slow to develop¹⁸⁵. The management of these mines carefully selected employees from a variety of ethnic origins, Kabylie, Tripolitania, and Fezzan, besides seasonally employed Tunisians largely from the surrounding caïdat of Gafsa (few were employed from Southern Tunisia¹⁸⁶). These ethnic groups were segregated at the workplace and in shantytowns where they lived. Ethnic rivalries were exacerbated by different rates of pay and a rapid turnover of personnel. As a result, Dougi explains,

malgré la communauté des intérêts matériels ils demeurent prisonniers des divisions sociales et raciales intérieures à leur installation à la mine.¹⁸⁷

Before the First World War ethnic divisions and rivalries were so intense that fights between them were common. It was only in the 1930's, when the ethnic divisions within the workplace were less rigorous and the workers took longer contracts at the mines, that class identity cristalised and found expression in the Trade Unions.

The dislocation of kinship bonds might also be expected among migrants to France, but in practice the organisation of this migration ensured a persitence of 'traditional' relationships at the expense of a potential proletarianisation. Colonial workers sent from Southern Tunisia to France during the First World War (see Chapter 4) were not allowed to integrate with their host community. First, they were despised and rejected by the French, secondly, following violence between the immigrants and their hosts, the government segregated the colonial workers in dormitories and restricted their movement¹⁸⁸. Nor did the immigrant wish to assimilate. After the war when the restrictions on the immigrants were removed they continued to live apart and their social life centred around cafés managed by fellow immigrants. Studies of Algerian migrants in France demonstrate a pattern of migration and migrant life that mirrored of the migrants in Tunis. Once one individual had found work abroad he was followed by his kin, who worked, lived, and socialised together. The same close links with the village of origin were maintained. The largest part of their income was repatriated and the migrants themselves returned as frequently as possible. Migration to France was simply another extension of the village economy. The relatively small scale of Southern Tunisian migration to France at this date must have forced a broadening of social relationships beyond the village but the principles of familial and ethnic co-residence and co-operation were still the basis of their social and economic life¹⁸⁹. To see the migrant reduced to a proletarian in a French factory would clearly be a mistake.

It is equally difficult to identify a bourgeoisie. Disparities of wealth may have increased but the new plantation owners were a minority, geographically concentrated at Zarzis and Ben Gardane. Beside their European neighbours their wealth was insignificant.

True their increased wealth enabled them to rise in and manipulate the social structure to their advantage (through patronage and marriage), but it was insufficient for them to escape its limitations and obligations. A study of the Od. Sidi Ali ben Aoun (Hammama) in the early 1950's has argued that a sense of class may be identified in the differing orientations of the wealthy and the poor; the former increasingly looking outside the community in their social and economic relationships, the later still confined within the tribal group. It also suggests a growing dependence of the poor upon the rich¹⁹⁰. To conclude from this social definition by class is premature. The wealthy had always orientated towards the outside world and maintained dependants among the tribal poor. The same study admits that the relations between the rich and the poor were not simply economic, that 'ces rapports sont tous en réalité du type patron-client'¹⁹¹. This suggests that social relations continued to be articulated by traditional structures of lineage and patronage rather than a stratified class system.

Nor did the civil service and the professions provide vehicles of embourgeoisement. In the rural areas neither the government nor the professions were important employers (see Tables 5.3., 5.4. and 5.6.). Central government departments employed Europeans by preference. Tunisians were relegated to the most menial tasks¹⁹². In local government they played a more prominent part, but these officials were appointed from within their communities and, as the following chapter demonstrates, were unable to extricate themselves from parochial politics. The few permanent administrative posts in the south, secretarial and office work, were usually held by Jews since they alone had the necessary skills (see Table 5.5)¹⁹³. The same was true of the professions. Few tribesmen were educated in the government schools. How many of those that received a primary qualification went on to further education is unknown. The handful of students recorded in the documents all went to the Zitouna Mosque where they received a religious rather than technical and professional education. Most of the professionals in the south were, consequently, employees of the religious establishments. The

technical, legal, and medical professions were dominated by Europeans, Jews, and Northerners. Tribesmen were excluded.

It was the commercial classes, Marty suggests, that formed the real bourgeoisie of the south¹³⁴. But they too represented only a small part of the population. Moreover, just under half the merchants in the south were Jews, and of the the Muslims the majority came from the north or from Djerba. If embourgeoisement did occur it was limited to only a small part of the population and is unlikely to have occurred as a radical and complete process.

Although 'traditional' social relationships, groups, and ideologies persisted in Southern Tunisia, tribal society did not go unchanged. Increasing wealth, Temevin explains with regard to the Beni Bouzerte of Northern Tunisia, 'produit le chacun pour soi, entraine des jalousies, creuse les inégalités'¹³⁵. The opportunities for personal advancement distracted the individual from communal responsibilities and encouraged self sufficiency. Society moved towards 'une vie autre que communautaire, plus personnelle que collective dans sa signification sociologique'¹³⁶. Co-operation and mutual aid between distant kin declined, as Lt. Mollet's pointed out in Matmata¹³⁷. Co-operative and social relationships became myopic, focused on the family and close kin. The wider social group was relegated to ritual occasions. This was not a uniform process. Among the sedentary communities (who had benefitted most from economic change) atomisation was furthest advanced

Quant aux nomades leur structure sociale semble encore moins se prêter à une scission des classes. En effet, l'élément de base reste chez eux la famille, à l'encontre de ce qui se produisait chez les sédentaires où de plus en plus l'individu pense et agit isolément en dehors de son milieu d'origine. C'est pourquoi les nomades restent encore solidaires à l'intérieur d'une même tribu, ou d'une même fraction et partout, devraient être moins perméables à [...] une division de la société en classes sociales.¹³⁸

Classes, we have seen, are an unrealistic assessment of the changes in tribal society. Disparities of wealth did, however, increasingly divide the community into what Marty has termed 'couches sociales juxtaposées'¹³⁹. With greater wealth the tribal

'elite' were better able to dominate the political and social life of their communities. To do so they used the tools of patronage, marriage, informal alliance, and, most important, kinship. Factionalism and conflict within the community increased. It was, however, a factionalism of lineage not class. Of course increasing disparities of wealth and the decline of communal responsibility may have encouraged some resentment of the rich by the poor, but as yet this did not develop into class identity, solidarity, or, still less, conflict.

CHAPTER 8.

TRIBAL POLITICS.

At every level of corporate activity political life was focused on the institutions of group management. This is not to say that politics occurred only within, or with reference to these institutions. On the contrary, every corporate or interpersonal relationship was political. Nevertheless those institutions that determined corporate policy naturally became the focus of confrontation, and positions of authority within these institutions became the goal of the ambitious tribal politician. This chapter examines how the tribesman attained these positions and the limitations to this authority, and how the intervention of the Colonial State modified the political forum.

8.1. The Political Forum and Formal Offices of Authority.

Within the family the father 'ruled with a hand of iron'. His authority was sanctioned by religion, the popular morality, and his ability to disinherit his children if he wished'. Young runaways, who, having crossed into Tripolitania, were interviewed by the S.R., bear testimony to the unquestioning obedience their fathers' demanded². Nor did a home and family of his own grant a son autonomy. It was assumed that a mature man would obey or at least listen to his father.

In the wider community, however, the individual was proud and protective of his independence. Even if he could not impose his views he wished to be consulted. Political institutions were, as a result, superficially democratic.

In the douar decisions important to the group - where to camp, when to move on, whether to combine with another camp - were made collectively. There was no formal political institution, the co-residence and small size of the douar rendered that unnecessary. Discussion was informal and decisions usually made by consensus.

Those who disagreed or whose interests diverged from the majority could simply leave the camping group. A cheikh, chosen from among the elder, and more influential members of the camp, managed the group's day to day affairs and acted as intermediary with the outside world. His personal status, enhanced by the honour of being chosen cheikh, might confer influence but he could not command. If individuals disagreed the group would simply dissolve³.

In contrast the permanence of fractions and lineages as corporate groups enabled and encouraged an institutionalisation of communal decision making and political life in the *mi'ad* or *djemâa* (gathering of adult males). It is at the level of the fraction that the *djemâa* is most often referred to in the documents, partly because it was at this level of corporate activity that the government, the source of our documentation, interfered in tribal affairs, but also because it was in this corporate group that the most important management and political decisions were made.

The *djemâa* effectively governed 'toutes affaires intérieures'⁴, It managed collective property, determined the choice of migration routes, and, most important, mediated between the fraction, other fractions, and the state. It also provided a forum for discussion, arbitration, and the resolution of disputes between individuals and groups without violence⁵). It was not a court. It did not attempt to establish guilt. This was decided by oath swearing at the *marabouts* tomb, as a legal document from Southern Tunisia explains

L'auteur présumé d'un vol, qui nie, devra être déféré au serment et fera valider son serment par deux parents honnêtement connus. Dans le cas où l'auteur présumé ne trouverait personne pour valider son serment, l'accusateur sera tenu à son tour de jurer pour donner plus de poids à son accusation, et s'il refuse il sera condamné à une amende d'une brebis.⁶

Alternatively

L'individu qui fait parler la poudre, comme disent les indigènes, remet à chaque inculpé une boulette de papier sur laquelle il a tracé quelques signes, successivement les boulettes sont jetées dans le feu. Si le papier brûle sans fuser, l'indigène qui en était détenteur est innocent, si, au contraire le papier fuse comme la poudre le détenteur est coupable.⁷

The djemâa simply imposed a sentence on the criminal following the **orf** (traditional non-Islamic law) and its **chortia** or **qanoun** (legal code). The only example of such a qanoun available from Southern Tunisia, recorded by Deambrogio, indicates that, as elsewhere in North Africa, the djemâa imposed fines paid into a communal fund or, in the extreme case of murder, banishment⁸.

The djemâa was not a formal institution in the sense of a parliament. There was no regular meeting. Assemblies were called as and when the need for discussion arose. There was neither schedule nor permanent meeting place. 'No-man's land', a point between the quarters in a village, or a marabout's tomb, was usually chosen. Participants strove to achieve a consensus by lengthy, and frequently animated, discussion

Habitués aux interminables discussions de la djemaa à laquelle tout adulte prend part, ils ne comprenant pas la nécessité d'obéir à une mesure qu'ils n'ont pas longuement discuté.⁹

[...] à Toujane , il y a quelquechose d'analogue à l'esprit donnent des myads des Ouerghamma, si fractieux, qui se sont particulièrement d'intrigués par la violence de leur langage ou par l'opposition mènent toute la bonde.¹⁰

Decision by consensus provided every member of the assembly with the opportunity to voice his opposition to the opinions and projects of rivals. Differences of interest and opinion demanded reconciliation.

If djemâa saw hot discussion it was not, as some of its French detractors suggested, disorderly. Brawling and physical violence were severely punished by the qanoun. Often the discussion was only symbolic. The individual opposed an issue so that he might be won over, thereby asserting his independence from the proponent, and preserving his honour. It was this apparently pointless discussion that infuriated commentators.

French accounts of the djemâa were, like so much of their understanding of Tunisia, influenced by their experience of Algeria and the descriptions of that country in anthropological literature. According to this tradition the djemâa was a democratic institution,

an assembly of all adult males, akin to the classical republican senate, from which some even believed it to be derived¹¹.

Commentators have argued that most if not all the adult males attended the *djemâa*¹². Documentary evidence, however, leads one to question this assertion. Acts of notary giving the electors of cheikhs within fractions from 1887 to the end of the 19th century detail the active part of, if not the whole, the *djemâa* (examples of these documents are provided in Appendix VII). These demonstrate that the number of participants was sometimes significantly smaller than the number of males in the population.

Of the forty nine acts from this period only eighteen name more than 75% of the males paying taxes, thirteen between 50% and 74%, seven between 25% and 49%, and eleven below 25%. In four of the cases below 25% and two of the cases between 25% and 49% the small number of electors may be ascribed to a mistaken interpretation of the act of election. These documents, and that presented as an example in Henia's study of the Djerid, combine the act of election with the list of the cheikh's financial guarantors. These acts may not, therefore, be a list of electors but a particular group of the cheikh's sponsors¹³. The remainder are, however, accompanied by separate lists of guarantors and so probably do represent all the electors.

To assume that those omitted on these lists were the young or foreigners, cannot reasonably account for figures below 40 or even 50% of the total adult male population. If one argues that a list of electors does not necessarily account for all those at a meeting, the problem of why some were able to elect, or at least to affix their names to the act of election, and some were not, remains. This problem is compounded by the use of the terms *kbar* and *ayan* to distinguish the members of the *djemâa*. It is a matter of debate how these terms should be interpreted. Valensi argues that *kbar* is a term used to distinguish age, and concludes that the *djemâa* was a council of the senior men within the fraction. 'S'agit-il d'une démocratie?' she writes 'Plutôt de gérontocratie'¹⁴. Contemporary accounts and more recent anthropological work throughout North Africa tend to confirm that political life was dominated by the

elders'¹⁵. Nevertheless the term *kbar* is notably absent in documents from within the tribes (it was used only three times in the forty nine acts). It is the term *ayan* meaning notable, and so implying some social distinction of wealth and status, that is used by the notaries in both the acts of election and incidental letters. The implication is that the *djemâa* comprised only the more important individuals within the community. A distinction which may also be understood from the term *kbar*, which may be interpreted as 'great' or 'important' as well as old.

In some of the acts the names of high status families predominate. The Bouajila among the Od. Chehida, Lemloun at Tamazredt or Dada at Toudjane, each had more than one representative on the lists from their fractions. At Douirat 35 out of 83 individuals had identifiable (within three generations) relatives in the *djemâa*, and 37% of the membership was shared between 14 families'¹⁶.

How these notables came to comprise the *djemâa* is suggested by Vinogradov's account of the Beni Mtir in Morocco. Although all were men 'theoretically' allowed to attend, the *djemâa* usually comprised ten or more respected individuals acting as the representatives or delegates of their kinsmen:

An *akhtar n jmat* (or as they call him an *ajemmaï*, one who is a member of the *jmaa*) was neither elected nor appointed to his position. He was there 'naturally', because of the sum total of all the rôles he played in his community which made him a natural and informal leader and spokesman for the group.'¹⁷

Henia, in his study of the Djerid, confers

Ces notables ne sont autres que les sayh [cheikhs] dont l'opinion publique de leurs ars [arch] respectifs a consacré la prééminence. D'ailleurs dans les registres fiscaux, les scribes utilisent indistinctement les notions <<Rgal kbar>> et <<Masayih>> (pl. de sayh) pour désigner le conseil de grands ou de notables.'¹⁸

The explanation is reminiscent of Ibn Khaldun's argument that those individuals who possess the greatest *asabiya* (group feeling) naturally rose to positions of leadership within the tribe'¹⁹. Henia

points out, however, that the authority of these notables was not based on consensus alone

Ils forment la plus haute <<aristocratie>> locale qui par ses pouvoirs économiques, ses responsabilités administratives, fiscales et politiques, domine incontestablement toutes les autres couches sociales de la région.²⁰

Some confirmation of practice of delegation is provided by an act from Douirat which, unlike other acts, details the electors' lineages. All six lineages were represented, the number of ayan varying from 8 to 23, depending on the size of the lineage (when ranked the larger lineages provide the most ayan but the number is not directly proportional to the size of the lineage)²¹. Since more than one individual attended from each lineage it might be concluded that these ayan were 'representatives' from smaller groups at lower levels of segmentation. Even in those acts with a marked concentration of influential families, the remainder (in 37 cases more than 75%) of the notables came from families without another 'representative'. The larger the djemâa the wider the range of names and, presumably, the smaller the kingroup represented, until at the extreme every nuclear family had a member in attendance.

The range of sizes (nine to two hundred and forty seven) and proportions (16% to 88%) of the total adult male population attending these djemâa demonstrates the flexibility of the institution. Even in consecutive elections the djemâa usually varied in size²². In these circumstances the influential families could not be guarantee their numerical predominance. Their authority, however, derived not from their monopoly of the djemâa, but from their personal status and political connections, through alliance, marriage, and patronage. Although many might attend the djemâa, few would speak, and fewer still were listened to. The older members of the community dominated proceedings, and younger participants maintained a respectful silence²³.

At the higher level of the qabil, tribe, a similar institution also termed the djemâa or mi'ad is described in the documentary sources. It is, however, poorly documented compared to the djemâa

within the fraction. Deambrogio's translation of a qanoun suggests that, at least among the Haouia, the djemâa of the qabil decided, recorded, and possibly administered tribal law²⁴. Unfortunately there is no corroborating evidence. The only time that this institution is referred to is as an intermediary between the 'tribe' and the state. Govenor Allegro, for example, negotiated with the djemâa of the Haouia, the Ouderna, and the Touazine in his attempts to recall these communities from dissidence and secure their appointment as makhzen. Contemporary reports also record these assemblies on the eve of the French occupation of the south²⁵. It seems likely that, since these corporate groups had limited functions, this was the djemâa's main role. Commentators use the terms elder and notable to describe its members, but how many such notables there were goes unrecorded. It may be inferred, however, from the mobility of a djemâa which travelled to Gabès for meetings with Govenor Allegro, that it was relatively small (these meetings may of course have been only delegations from a larger institution)²⁶.

Henia's study of a similar assembly in Djerid does little to elucidate its composition and workings. He assumes, as we are forced to, that the djemâa of the tribe comprised representatives of the component fractions and lineages. These representatives were more than likely drawn from the among the wealthier and more influential families, but, although participation of such figures as Dho ben Dho of the Haouia, Salem ben Bouajila of the Od. Chehida, and Ahmed ben Abd el Latif of the Od. Debbab in meetings with Allegro suggests this was the case, there is no comprehensive evidence available²⁷.

As the community's political forum the djemâa reflected its conflicts, rivalries and alliances. Amongst the most influential families these rivalries went beyond temporary political advantage, of a land dispute or a matter of honour, to, ultimately, the domination of the community. It was a rivalry reflected in the competition between the influential for the formal positions of authority, cheikh within the fraction and khalifa within the tribe.

Not all cheikhs or khalifas achieved their position through competition with rival candidates, nor were all cheikhs in a

position to dominate the other members of the djemâa. Before the Protectorate the government appointed 'cheikhs' and 'khalifas' to collect taxes within those fractions which paid the mejba rather than the driba. Such officials were neither respected nor popular

Les cheikhs et les khalifas n'ont aucune autorité; leur rôle se borne à celui d'intermédiaires entre les tribus et le gouvernement dans les rares relations qui existent entre eux et celui des collecteurs d'impôts. Ils sont loin d'être choisis parmi les plus influents, ils sont pris parmi ceux qui ont voyagé en dehors de leur pays et qui sont allés à Djerba, Sousse, et Sfax pour commercer. ...Comme collecteurs d'impôts la considération dont ils jouissent parmi leurs frères est du genre peu relevé de celle qu'on admet nos campagnes pour les porteurs de contrainte.²⁸

Indeed they were so detested that when the Beni Zid revolted in 1867 eight of their 'cheikhs' were murdered²⁹.

The **cheikh el orf**, on the other hand, was chosen by the fraction to administer tribal law. Since this law was rarely written, his principle function was to memorise its contents. When consulted his status was that of an expert before a tribunal rather than a judge. Occasionally he might also collect the fines imposed, but Rebillet claims that this was more often the responsibility of a younger man entitled the **cheikh el-chortia** also chosen by the djemâa, and his **naib** (assistant). It was not position of power. Although the post was usually inherited within a particular lineage, or even within a particular family, named el orf, the choice of the individual remained with the djemâa. 'C'est le myad qui les surveille, leur donne les ordres, les pun it et les révoque'³⁰.

It is on the wider function of the **cheikh el qabil** (cheikh of the tribe) that the political rivalries of the community was focused. The function, authority and power of this cheikh seems to have varied considerably between individuals and fractions. Writing of the Djerid, Henia contrasts djemâas controlled by an oligarchy or college of notables and those dominated by a lineage, a family, or an individual³¹. The same contrasts can be seen in the South.

Details of how these cheikhs were appointed are unclear. Studies in Morocco demonstrate that the cheikh came to office

through a formal election³². This may have been the case in southern Tunisia, certainly it was the procedure advocated by the Protectorate, but within the prevailing spirit of decision by consensus, the cheikh is more likely to have been a candidate accepted by the djemâa as a whole. Individuals disliked or distrusted by rival lineages or factions, were discounted until a suitable candidate was accepted. Such a procedure is illustrated by the course of an election at Toujane (Matmata)

les habitants de Toujane, après avoir essayé vainement de se mettre d'accord sur la candidature d'un autre indigène ont élu Mohamed ben Redjeb.³³

Over a longer period many Moroccan tribes rotated the office among the lineages, and so prevented its monopolisation by a single group³⁴. The tribes of Southern Tunisia demonstrate no formal procedure of this kind, though an informal rotation may well have been the product of consensus.

In some fractions the cheikh's position was usually inherited by a lineage 'close to the founder of the tribe'. Among the marabout (saintly) fractions this was the rule. At Beni Barka, for instance, the family Berkhaoui had held office from the 1740's to the early years of the Protectorate, and among the Hazem the family Bairat had 'always' been cheikhs³⁵. Even where families did not have a long tradition of office, it was not uncommon for son to follow father. Nevertheless descent did not give a right to office. Within a family succession was not by primogeniture but might pass from father to a younger son or even collaterally, and though office might pass often within a family the appointment of the cheikh was still made by the djemâa.

Personal status was as also important in the selection of the cheikh. At least symbolically, the cheikh was the most important individual in his tribe. He represented his fraction in the outside world. The office conferred status, but also demanded that the cheikh should be of suitable standing in his own right. Most appointments were made from among the more senior, and thus wiser and more respected tribesmen. As Valensi points out the term cheikh implies old age, and most cheikhs were among the older members of

their community³⁶. Wealth was also important, the cheikh was expected to provide hospitality to visiting functionaries, provide help and support to his fellow tribesmen, and to live in a manner commensurate with such status. As Louis points out the cheikh was expected to have the largest tent in his fraction, an expectation of grandeur probably extended to clothing and a horse³⁷.

Cheikhs did have influence. They were asked to arbitrate in disputes, to make decisions affecting the group (for example, to divide collective land³⁸), and act as intermediary with other fractions and the state. But these responsibilities did not give the cheikh power to impose his authority on the djemâa or other members of the fraction. If it chose the djemâa could reject the cheikh's suggestions. It could simply deny his authority if he acted without consultation, or in opposition to their wishes. If the worst came to the worst, as Rebillet claimed and the experience of the early years of the Protectorate demonstrated, a cheikh who lost the confidence or the support of his community was easily removed from office³⁹.

Without an incontestable principle of succession and mandate the cheikh's appointment, authority, and survival were reduced to a matter of personal influence and power. Weak individuals might be appointed as compromise candidates and remain in office by avoiding confrontation with rival factions. Others might secure appointment through the strength of their kin groups, alliances, and wealth. By successfully intervening in the affairs of the fraction and opposing his rivals in the djemâa the cheikh could then increase his status and reaffirm his position. A recent study of the position of cheikhs in Yemeni tribes by Dresch illustrates just this point. Cheikhs who frequently and successfully arbitrated disputes, gained influence, authority, and power within their factions, becoming 'strong leaders', while those who did not sank into relative obscurity.

The power [Dresch explains] which a shaykh may have over groups of tribesmen is not conferred on him by his position. He must constantly intervene in their affairs and intervene successfully.⁴⁰

Whatever respect or influence a cheikh might earn, to retain his position in the face of a rival he had to translate this into political support, support which was also secured through patronage, alliances, and the kinship system. Without support a cheikh could always be revoked, and replaced with a more popular (powerful) rival.

Despite the apparent insecurity of their office, it was not uncommon for cheikhs to continue in their position for decades. In some cases this might reflect the cheikh's political impotence, his personal standing, or his successful manipulation of the rivalries and oppositions within the fraction. For others survival reflected real power. Montagne, writing of Morocco⁴¹, describes how ambitious individuals emerged as political leaders of their community through the manipulation of kingroups and alliances, and the ruthless suppression of rivals (including murder)⁴². Once in a position of authority the amghar could extort taxes from the fraction to finance his auxiliaries while patronising his own kin to retain their support. Then he could turn his attention to neighbouring communities. In its most extreme form, the Great Caïds of Southern Morocco, the amghar commanded many of the surrounding fractions and used the revenues, not only for his personal aggrandizement, but also to secure his power base over a wide area through patronage and repression.

Although one cannot identify anything equivalent to the wealth, authority, and power exercised by the Great Caïds of Morocco⁴³ political inequalities did exist and were exploited in Southern Tunisia. Pellissier, a reliable and well informed traveller, described the organisation of the Ouderna in 1846 not as a 'democracy' but as 'une forme monarchique', ruled by 'Bou Hadjelah [Bou Adjila] ben Salem'⁴⁴. Thirty years later Chevarrier ascribed Bouajila's son, Salem bou Adjila, a similar pre-eminence among the Ouderna, a position that he still held when the French arrived⁴⁵. The Bou Adjila family was the the senior lineage of the Od. Chehida. It was also wealthy. These qualities had initially brought them to power. Once in office the cheikh collected contributions among the different families and lineages for communal expenditures: the

repair or construction of communal wells, communal sacrifices, and fines. They also appointed assistants *naib*, to help gather revenues and keep order. Montagne interpreted the abuse of these revenues and this authority to be the first stage in the emergence of an *amghar*⁴⁶. Collective revenues could be used to extend client networks and assistants to repress objectors and rivals. Nor did cheikhs shun such activities. Reibell, for instance, described Dho ben Dho of the Haouia in the early 1880's as

un homme fort intelligent, qui s'est créé une autorité incontestable sur les gens de sa tribu, mais qui en abuse à la manière d'un saratape [...] ⁴⁷

The revenues and support a cheikh might gain from within his fraction could be supplemented from without. Cheikhs and khalifa took part of the booty from their tribesmens' razzias. In the unstable period before the occupation of the south the French military suspected that the khalifas actively encouraged these raids for their personal gain⁴⁸. Trade could also be exploited through protection money paid by caravans. In Southern Tunisia with the main caravan route running north from Ghadames to Gabès, the Ouderna, lying astride the route in the Djebel Abiodh and with their influence extending to Ghadames, were in an ideal position to control and milk the route⁴⁹. It is difficult to tell who actually received this money. An act dated 1828 suggests that 'adda, and other client revenues, were paid directly to the cheikhs (see Appendix VIII). Since the cheikh assumed responsibility for his clients and his guests he probably did the same for caravans and so received the protection money in person.

Cheikhs could also draw on the material and financial support of the state. Mason's study of the Anguila oasis in Eastern Libya in the early nineteenth century, illustrates the manner in which even the intermittent intervention of a military state in support of a local cheikh could elevate him to the position of a tribal 'strong man'⁵⁰. Closer to the study area there is the example of Ahmed ben Belgassem ben Hamadi. Originally cheikh at Kebili, an oasis in Nefzaoua, ben Hamadi used government troops to force taxes from his fraction and surrounding oases. Taking a large share of these

revenues, ben Hamadi became wealthy, built himself a large house, employed servants and guards from outside the tribe, and surrounded himself with clients dependent on his income. He ruled as a tyrant. His relatives and allies were appointed cheikhs of the other fractions in the Nefzaoua, and opposition violently suppressed by his henchmen (usually from the Overghamma). Should their numbers be insufficient, ben Hamadi called on the garrisons of government troops at Gabès or Tozeur. The government was willing to support an official who regularly paid his tax revenues, and so he survived until the early years of the Protectorate⁵¹. Ali bin Khalifa's career as Khalifa of the Neffat and subsequently Khalifa of Aradh parallels ben Hamadi's in Nefzaoua⁵². Further south, however, a cheikh could not guarantee the successful intervention of the Tunisian government, and so the government was not a dependable ally. Only with the Protectorate did the state become an important influence on tribal politics.

At a time of crisis an individual might emerge as a leader or an influential figure across the barriers of lineage by consensus. An early example is provided by the case of Ghouma, leader of the rebellion against the Turks in Tripolitania whose flight to Matmata in 1856 either coincided with or precipitated a revolt in Southern Tunisia⁵³. Better documented and of a larger scale was the rebellion of the tribes following the occupation of Tunisia. Ali ben Khalifa's position as leader of the tribal revolt until his death illustrates the potential of command for the capable individual, but more forcefully it illustrates the limitations of authority without power, not just between tribes but equally for the leader within a fraction.

Ali ben Khalifa, former khalifa of Aradh and, at the time, caïd of the Neffat, emerged as leader of the tribal revolt during the siege of Sfax in July 1881. It was not the leadership of a general. Ben Khalifa could not order, he had to persuade the other tribesmen at lengthy and argumentative meetings of the tribal leaders and notables⁵⁴. At times other leaders rejected his authority and he had to court their support,

Ces jours derniers Ali ben Khalifa a envoyé des cavaliers à ces derniers [the notables of the Jlass, Hammama, and Wirghammal] les invitent à lui parler; mais tous d'un commun accord, ils ont refusé un rendez-vous. Ben Khalifa est donc obligé d'aller lui même les trouver et sous la tente d'Ahmed ben Youssef [caïd of the Hammamal] qu'a en lieu l'assemblée.⁵⁶

The cause of this dissent, it was stated, was an argument over Ben Khalifa's levy on the proceeds of razzias by all the rebels, but Féraud, French Consul at Tripoli, recognised a more fundamental source of discontent: the jealousy encouraged by the preferential treatment of Ben Khalifa by the Turkish authorities and their public recognition of his leadership of the rebellion. The Ferik and the mayor of Tripoli had received most of the tribal leaders in state, yet correspondence to and from Constantinople largely ignored their contribution and, until his death, referred to Ben Khalifa as the sole leader of the revolt.

Ben Khalifa tried to use his position as intermediary to assert his authority and his wealth to impress and win over the other leaders with lavish entertainments at a time of famine among his tribesmen, but to no avail⁵⁶. Resenting his airs and proud of their independence the rebel tribesmen and, in particular, the prominent members of the other tribes, rejected his authority and from mid-1882 followed an increasingly independent line⁵⁷.

To some extent any individual attempting to assert his authority would have met this opposition, but Ali ben Khalifa was also handicapped by his past. Before the Protectorate he had bought and exploited the Khalifalik of Aradh with such greed that many of the tribes had broken out in revolt. Subsequently he took a conspicuous part in suppressing the revolt⁵⁸, thereby creating many personal enemies. It is significant that those fractions that had suffered most under his authority in the past, such as the Beni Zid, were the first to reject his authority in 1882⁵⁹.

Without the support of an omnipotent state a cheikh's power was unstable. He had to retain his supporters in the face of rivals, not only from other lineages or factions but also from within his

family. Although details are unavailable from before the Protectorate the 'palace politics' of fraternal rivalries and jealousies in the struggle for power within a cheikhly lineage are clearly described by Asad's study of the Kabbashish Arabs⁶⁰, and in the detailed accounts of struggle for office after 1889 (see Table 7.4.).

Alternatively power might be lost, not to a rival individual, but to the djemâa, tired of the authority, incompetence, or abuse of an individual. Montagne's description of the process is unnecessarily dramatic in spirit but in essence correct,

Revolts are quick to break out, and when they do take place the cantons revive their former councils of notables without difficulty and return to the ideal of ordered anarchy well known to their ancestors almost as soon as they are released from the grip of their overlord.⁶¹

The revolt against a cheikh need not be violent, it was sufficient the djemâa, no longer confident in the cheikh, withdrew their tacit support.

Over a longer period such difficulties were accentuated. The power base cheikh enjoyed through his personal esteem was lost to his family with his death⁶², and his personal wealth was divided among his children. The family, moreover, united under an influential cheikh, might be reduced to factional squabbles after his death. While the cheikh's family was weakened by its internal dissensions a rival could gather supporters to replace it in office.

A pattern of unstable tribal leadership emerges comparable to Ibn Khaldun's dynasties, where leading families emerge, but have only a natural life span like individuals, and decline as they lose their unity⁶³. In his study of the Swat Pathans Barth argues that such processes give the political system a fundamental balance 'maintained by a process of growth and ultimate fission of the groups led by single leaders, accompanied by defections from one bloc to another'⁶⁴. Alternatively, as in Montagne's analysis, the powerful individual was replaced by 'the ideal of ordered anarchy', an egalitarian distribution of power among the tribesmen. Both represent, to quote Gellner, 'a permanently oscillating system', in

which cheikhs, and cheikhly families rose and fell within an unchanging structure⁶⁵. Power, in this context, was relative, and distributed unevenly among the tribesmen, not absolute. The rise of a particular family or individual was never enough to remove them from the political world of the tribe. Without recourse to forces external to the tribal system, a leader or leading family could always be replaced by a more powerful rival or through dissention within their faction.

But within the tribes there was also considerable continuity of tribal leadership, not just in the case where an individual family succeeded in monopolising cheikhly office and real power for generations rather than years, but in the monopolisation of the formal political system by a political and economic elite.

8.2. The Protectorate's Administrative Policy.

Algeria's colonial status allowed the Bureaux Arabes considerable freedom in the conduct of the administration. Cheikhs were retained, and continued to fulfill administrative roles, but the officers of the Bureaux were encouraged to intervene and control local administration in detail⁶⁶.

Under the terms of the Protectorate such direct administration was impossible. The Tunisian administration was retained and the Service de Renseignements was limited to a supervisory role. Under no circumstances were Officers to intervene in matters of administration, nor could it directly discipline Tunisian administrators⁶⁷. In practice this ideal was often ignored. Most of the officers had experience of Algeria and balked at the restrictions of the Protectorate. But whatever the practice of officers in the field it remained the principle of the Protectorate that Tunisians administered their own local government. Officers who blatantly intervened in its affairs were reprimanded, and the Resident General repeatedly sent circulars defining the purpose and legal position of Service⁶⁸.

Before 1889, however, there was no administration in the south. The area was not occupied by the Protectorate and relations with the tribes were more diplomatic than administrative. Allegro, as Governor

of Aradh and representative of the Tunisian government, was officially the sole communicant with the tribes, and his sporadic correspondence reveals that, in the years before 1886 at least, the government dealt almost entirely with the communities through their djemâas⁶⁹.

With the occupation of the south in 1889 the Residence General attempted to establish control over the region by introducing the forms of administration already current in the north. Following the practice of the pre-Protectorate government the local administration was based on cheikhs within every fraction acting as intermediaries with the central government. Although primarily responsible for gathering taxes, the cheikh was also expected to administer corvées, organise recruitment for the Tunisian army, police his fraction, and keep the government informed about local events through regular reports. His reward as was not a salary, as was the usual case in central government, but a 5% cut on the tax revenues he gathered. Yet despite this telling distinction the French considered the cheikh in every way the counterpart of and comparable to the civil servants of the central administration. To the French the cheikh was, from the day of his employment, a bureaucrat⁷⁰.

To provide local officials through the central administration would have been impractical (from the point of recruiting staff willing to work in foreign fractions, the acceptance of outsiders, and the ability of foreigners to work efficiently in an unfamiliar community) and so the Protectorate continued to appoint its cheikhs from within the fractions. From the outset, the procedure for selection placed the responsibility on the djemâa. Allegro's representative, the Khalifa of the Neffat, organised elections in early 1889⁷¹. The names of the chosen candidates were then submitted to the Tunisian government for approval, appointment, and confirmation by an 'amra el-bey (letter of appointment signed by the Bey).

Little attention was paid to the procedures of election. The Prime Minister's Bureau preferred there to be three candidates but this was not always possible, and the rule was often waived⁷². There was no specification as to how the election was to be managed. In

some fractions a show of hands was used, in others the electors presented themselves to a notary to have their votes registered, while at Toujane the merits of rival candidates were debated until a consensus was reached⁷³. Nor, initially, was the number of electors important. Some candidates were, as we have seen, appointed with acts of election registering as few as 13% of the adult male population of the fraction.

As early as 1890, however, the administration began to insist on more representative elections. On receiving the act of election for Ali ben Mohammed Leffat of Douirat in which only forty five votes were recorded from 357 tax payers, the Prime Minister informed Allegro that

comme les règles administratives exigent l'obtention de la majorité des vœux votants dans l'élection des cheikhs un ordre est donné par lequel vous êtes invité à convoquer de nouveau les dits fraction à un autre candidat.⁷⁴

In this case General Swiney intervened and secured Leffat's appointment without re-election by arguing that no objections had been received to his candidature⁷⁵. On other occasions the government compelled a new election⁷⁶. This 'democratisation' of the election was not carried to extremes. General Saint-Marc's excuse of is illuminating in this respect

Le nombre des voix qu'il a obtenus lors de son élection n'est pas considérable, mais il est suffisant pour donner les garants à l'état. Il import, du reste de se montrer moins exigeant à cet égard, dans le sud, que dans les autres fractions vivent plus groupés et se réunissent plus foulement pour procéder aux élections.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, by the turn of the century acts of election were expected to list at least three quarters of the total male population .

Although these procedures encouraged the appointment of local officials familiar with the community they administered, they did not produce ideal administrators. None of the cheikhs had administrative training and yet they were expected to prepare complicated tax registers and informative reports. Indeed the majority did not even have the most basic skill of a bureaucrat:

literacy. The Biographical Notices of cheikhs appointed throughout the Protectorate period suggest that only 36% (93 out of 259) could read and write Arabic⁷⁶. Still fewer, 16 out of 259 cheikhs, spoke French.

Problems also arose from the cheikh's status. Some were not from influential families, could not assert their authority, and became, to use Captain Risler's words, 'un jouet entre les mains de leurs administrés'⁷⁸. The measure of their influence used by the Service was their ability to enforce the payment of taxes. Those whose tax returns fell below the average of the caïdat or too often resorted to the makhzen to help gather their taxes, were regarded as weak and incompetent by the officers⁸⁰.

Some cheikhs willfully opposed the government's interests in favour of those of their fellow tribesmen. Cheikhs refused, for example, to provide information that might help produce tax registers: list of the population of the fraction or the number of animals or trees⁸¹. Others omitted information on crimes that might encourage government intervention in their local affairs from their reports⁸². Occasionally the cheikhs actively opposed the government. On the imposition of recruitment at Matmata, for example, cheikhs deceived the recruitment commission about the number eligible for recruitment⁸³. One even went so far as to publicly disparage the Protectorate⁸⁴.

Many were criticised for indifference to their duties, or laziness. Few cheikhs carried out all their duties. Sometimes they even refused to do so. A report describes how the cheikh of the Aoun Allah of the Touazine replied 'Je suis cheikh pour recouvrir l'impôt non pas pour proceder à des enquêtes', when asked to examine some cases of theft in his circonscription⁸⁵.

Officers also complained of dishonesty and venality. Cheikhs frequently omitted some or all of their own herds or trees from the tax registers, and their family from the medjba and recruitment lists⁸⁶. Similar omissions were also granted to other members of the fraction for a small fee, even if it was only the 5% cut that the cheikh would normally receive from the state⁸⁷. Cheikhs also left names off their medjba registers and put the money into their own

pockets⁸⁸. They also embezzled loans of seed and collective funds⁸⁹. The extent of fraudulent practice was extraordinary: 36% of all cheikhs appointed had some evidence of corruption for personal or familial gain against their record. Others must have escaped detection.

Public appointment could also cover private crime. Several cheikhs were found to be involved in banditry or smuggling rackets, either as a sleeping partner receiving bribes for his silence or actively organising and participating⁹⁰.

Clearly, effective administration depended on the exercise of some punitive control on the activities of these officials. But the Service could not discipline the cheikhs directly, it had no direct authority over officials appointed by an 'amra el-bey⁹¹'. Officers had to advise the government who would then impose suitable punishments. Nine times out of ten the government was less severe than the military recommended. Perhaps out of frustration, officers occasionally attempted to circumvent the lengthy official procedures by imposing fines in the field, even though, if discovered these illegal measures were usually rescinded⁹². Nevertheless, negligent or dishonest cheikhs were fined significant sums, up to half a years income⁹³.

More serious crime or repeated dishonesty, was usually followed by revocation. The Service was not reluctant to use either sanction. Sixty five of the 259 cheikhs in Southern Tunisia were revoked and a further 6 were forcibly retired (16 revoked or retired because of negligence, 26 because of fraud, and 10 because of acts of rebellion). It was a pattern seen throughout the Regence. A 1927 report observed 'qu'en territoire Contrôle Civil le huitième environ des cheikhs est annuellement mis en disgrâce'⁹⁴.

Unfortunately punitive measures against cheikhs detracted from the administration's reputation while it did not improve the personnel. Ideally the military wanted to select the cheikhs and so direct the formation of the local administration. From an early date the military were aware that their appointment procedures were unsuited to their needs. As Rebillet explained on his appointment as Commandant Supérieur des Territoires Militaires du Sud in 1889

Ils [the cheikhs] sont désignés par le vote de leur citoyens; ils sont acquis à la tribu et nous ne pouvons pas les compter comme auxiliaires.⁹⁶

A successful administration and control over the tribes, depended on substituting French favourites for the tribes' own partisans.

Officially the only tool available to the Service was the power to veto candidates they considered inappropriate. Their estimation was based on a 'Biographical Notice' provided by the caïd, which detailed 'leur conduite, leur situation de fortune, leur instruction, et leur intelligence'⁹⁶, and their personal knowledge of the candidates. The officer's reports submitted after the selection of candidates by the djemâa, indicated reasons why certain candidates should not be appointed, their youth and lack of experience, their poverty, their involvement in political intrigue within the fraction, or reasons why they should be 'absolument écartée' (a criminal record, known anti-French politics, or the existence of such views within his close family). An order of preference was usually submitted by the officer but the Prime Minister's Bureau usually gave it less consideration than the veto of specific candidates. As Perkins concludes in his study of this issue

The officer's opinions usually carried sufficient weight to block the installation of men he deemed unfit, although he could not always place personal favourites in the jobs.⁹⁷

Officers could, however, guarantee the desired result if they intervened in the election procedure. Candidates were encouraged or discouraged and, as an anonymous complaint from Ben Gardane suggests⁹⁸, the djemâa was intimidated. Alternatively officers subjected the results of the election to their prior before sending them on to the Prime Minister's office. These procedures were, a furious Resident General explained, illegal

Il semble de résulter de la dernière communication télégraphique du Caid des Ouerghamma au il serait d'usage, tout au moins à Médenine, de soumettre sur place les élections de cheikhs à l'avis préalable du Bureau des A.I. Une pareille procédure si elle était suivi, serait en contradiction avec les principes du régime du Protectorat

et aurait le grave inconvénient de mettre directement en jeu la responsabilité et l'autorité des officiers chefs de poste. Leur rôle comme celui des C.C. est de renseigner la Résidence Générale sur la valeur des candidats proposés et de laisser au P.M. la responsabilité entière de leur acceptation ou de leur refus.⁹⁹

To what extent the officers used these illegal procedures to gain the appointment of preferred candidates it is impossible to say. It is clear, however, that they had considerably more success in the selection of their favourites than Perkins would have us believe.

A circular of 31st January 1905, gave the government further control of the selection procedure, by insisting that the candidates for election should be proposed by the caïd¹⁰⁰. The caïd usually visited the fraction before an election, met the djemâa and chose appropriate candidates, rejecting those whose candidature would be unwelcome to the military, while pressuring others to stand for election¹⁰¹. The same circular also provided the ultimate control on the selection procedure: authority for the caïd to propose the cheikh without recourse to an election. Indeed a letter from the Prime Minister, dated November 1906, indicates that proposition without an election was the preferred procedure, and that cheikhs 'ne peuvent être élus par leurs co-religionnaires que pour les motifs mentionnés dans la dite circulaire et après autorisation préalable du gouvernement'¹⁰². Within the south, however, this measure was not applied. Although the caïd approved the candidates before the election, the election itself remained an essential part of the selection procedure.

The military used these selection procedures to appoint wealthy candidates. The poor, or those crippled by debts, were rejected because the Department of Finances argued that poorer cheikhs could not provide the necessary guarantees for the tax revenues they administered, and were apt to steal from the government¹⁰³. The young were discouraged, they were too easily influenced, 'obligés à suivre les notables avancés en âge' and 'hors d'état d'exercer un mandat quelconque'¹⁰⁴. Members of the tribal élite, 'les grandes familles' the 'riches et influentes', whose personal authority would

enable them to impose administrative measures on their charges, were the ideal candidates¹⁰⁵.

Most of the Biographical Notices gave details of the candidates family origin, indicating his status and relationship with other families in the fraction. Candidates from prominent families were usually given priority in the officer's report and were subsequently elected and appointed cheikh: the Nadjî among the Nebahna, the Djerizi among the Od. Khalifa, the Louafi among the Zelliten, the Bouadjila among the Od. Chehida, the Abd el Latif among the Od. Debbab, the Leffat at Douirat, and the el-Hiba at Accara to name only a few.

Extending throughout the duration of the Protectorate, this policy encouraged the succession of the post within the same family, often from father to son (see Table 7.4.). A study of the cheikhs' Biographical Notices, reveals that of all 259 appointments 122 can be identified as having at least one relative as cheikh, 87 had father son relationships and 24 grandfather, father, son. In some fractions the post was entirely monopolised by one family, the family Bouadjila, for example, in the Oulad Chehida. More often members of two or three rival families were elected one after another.

The French had no objection to this pattern. They were content to see sons take over their father's functions while he was ill, absent, or immediately after his death without any formal invitation or appointment by the government¹⁰⁶. Permanent appointment after the cheikh's death or retirement was encouraged. Close relatives were thought to be experienced and were familiar to both the caïd and the Bureau.

Occasionally officers might feel confident enough to move away from the predominance of these families

Si dans les temps passé on était obligé de respecter les susceptibilités des grandes familles il n'est pas ainsi maintenant, il y a lieu de mettre en tête des fractions de gens dont l'honorabilité est suffisamment établie.¹⁰⁷

But in practice the administration both needed their influence and their support. Consequently most officers were hesitant to break the

candidate in Matmata explains, 's'erait à mon avis une erreur politique qui nous aliénerait une famille nombreuse et influente'¹⁰⁸.

The predominance of the great families and the frequent inheritance of office reflects the Protectorate's attempts to achieve continuity in local administration and to establish a discrete bureaucratic group or class within the tribal context. They sought a class that was loyal to the Protectorate, efficient, and dependable. As early as 1886 Rebillet suggested that the relationship between these families and the administration should be formalised by the compulsory education of their children at the Sadiki school in Tunis, beside the children of Tunisia's urban elite. A modern education, he argued, would not only make them more competent administrators but would also cement their bonds to the government, perhaps at the expense of tribal loyalties'¹⁰⁹. Nothing was done. Then in 1912 Alapetite referred back to the problem

Les grandes familles indigènes ne prennent pas soin de former leurs enfants en vue de recueillir l'autorité moral qu'elles avaient hérité de leurs aïeux. Il en résulte que le choix des nouveaux chefs indigènes devient difficile. En vue de remédier à cette situation il importe que l'administration local se préoccupe de la préparation des futurs collaborateurs indigènes.¹¹⁰

As a result cheikhs and caïds were encouraged to send their children to schools established in the south, some resented the imposition, but most obliged. It did set them apart. Their children were almost the only Muslims at these schools'¹¹¹.

The government also fostered the development of a bureaucracy by advancing competent and loyal administrators. The post of kahia was introduced in 1912 for just this purpose, to give the junior administrator a stepping stone into the higher ranks. Makhzen were encouraged to retire into administrative functions (eight cheikhs in the south were former moghzani). The government also awarded medals, such as the Nishan Istiqar, and pensions to long serving officials to encourage loyalty'¹¹². Local administrators were treated with a respect commensurate with their status by the Service'¹¹³, and

respect was enforced among the tribesmen¹¹⁴, so elevating the status of government employment from its low level under the Beys.

Creating a bureaucracy was, however, an uphill struggle. It was difficult to attract the right type of candidate. In some cases the government could not attract any candidates at all. One sixth of cheikhats in the Contrôle Civil were 'dépourvues des titulaires d'une manière à peu près permanente' in 1927¹¹⁵. In the Territoires Militaires the problem was not so extreme, but nevertheless in several cheikhats the Service recorded problems in finding the three candidates required for an election, and in two instances could not attract any¹¹⁶.

Unlike Algeria where, Von Sivers points out, fiscal revenues allowed the government officials to compete in wealth with the established tribal elite Tunisia's cheikhs and caïds did not become rich¹¹⁷. 18% (47 out of 256) of the cheikhs appointed required some government subsidy on top of their share of tax revenues for maintenance and expenses. The cheikh of the Temara (101 tax payers), for example, received an income of 60-80 frs per year from his cheikhly functions in 1911¹¹⁸. A cheikhat quadruple the size would generate 300 frs at most, not a substantial income considering the cheikhs secretarial expenses, and the amount of work the job involved. The introduction of new taxes after the First World War gave them considerably more work but little more revenue. Lt. Scoffoni in 1931, and Admiral Estiva (the Vichy Resident General) in 1942, both explained the Service's lack of success in attracting cheikhs to fill posts in Matmata by drawing attention to the poor pay these officials received¹¹⁹.

The cheikh's close collaboration with the government and the French and his pre-occupation with tax collection did nothing to popularise the official's position. Those who did their job too well were resented

Le chef indigène est un de ceux qui renseigne le mieux sur tout ce qui se passe dans sa fraction. Ainsi n'est il pas étonnant qu'il se soit attiré la haine de beaucoup de ses contribuables.¹²⁰

One candidate abandoned his application when threatened with disinheritance by his father¹²¹. Five duly appointed cheikhs resigned¹²². Several tribesmen were elected but refused to take up their post¹²³. Could they too have succumbed to public opinion, or was it, as the French assumed, simply a problem of inadequate incomes for their officials?

Nevertheless the cheikh could turn his appointment to his advantage. Cheikhs had considerable powers and access to considerable sums of government money. Simply by performing his duties the cheikh increased both his personal esteem and influence. Traditionally the village cheikh received contributions from his fraction, and, although the government abolished these privileges, they continued to receive 'presents'¹²⁴. Where he chose to abuse his position the cheikh might enrich himself, reinforce his position with alliances, dominate his fraction and terrorize his rivals and enemies. They could turn most of their duties to their personal profit. An inquest into the affairs of Sliman ben Moussa of Guermessa in 1895, shows how, when the tribe paid only the mejba as tax, he was able to embezzle 760 francs in two years¹²⁵. They could also exploit their charges' labour, by using corvées intended for road works to repair their cisterns or djesser's, and for harvesting, though this too was illegal¹²⁶.

Their responsibilities also gave them political capital. As the government's fiscal agent the cheikh drew up the registers and enforced payment of the taxes. Delays were discretionary¹²⁷, and so could be used as a form of patronage. This is not to count the political potential of illegal omissions and under assessment. Likewise the cheikh could turn a blind eye to the criminal activity of his charges, not just smuggling, but murder, rape, and theft, so protecting his 'clients' from the state¹²⁸.

The same tools could be turned against personal enemies and political rivals. They could be forced to pay their taxes on time, with the threat of sequestration if they did not, charged higher taxes than they should have paid, charged for services that should have been free, and fined and imprisoned on trumped up charges¹²⁹. Those that voiced opposition could be silenced. Supported by the

makhzen searches, arrests, beatings (sometimes in front women to add further shame), and imprisonment could be delivered to the guilty and the innocent in the name of law and order¹³⁰. A complaint from Matmata illustrates if not the reality then at least the mentality of repression

Il [the cheikh] a installé une prison chez lui et quand il veut se venger d'une personne il l'incarcère dans cette prison, sous un faux prétexte, et ne relâche que contre un versant de 5 francs.¹³¹

Zghall quotes another example from Central Tunisia, vividly recalled by an adult from his childhood,

Un jour Ounais [the family's shepherd] disparaît sans donner aucune explication. Le cheikh de l'époque se présenta chez moi avec onze cavaliers. Il accusa mon père d'avoir assassiné le jeune berger Ounais.

Je me rappelle bien comment mon père et mon oncle étaient garottés sous les yeux des femmes. Le cheikh et les cavaliers égorgèrent deux de nos brebis et obligèrent les femmes à leur préparer le couscous. Ils prennent aussi notre provision d'orge pour la donner à leurs chevaux.

Ce cheikh ammena mon père et mon oncle à Sidi Nasr Allah. Mais mon père s'échappa au cours de voyage.

Quelques jours après, le cheikh est venu voir ma mère et enleva de notre troupeau un chameau et dix brebis.¹³²

Such maltreatment was not rare. Of the eighty five accusations of abuse of power recorded in the archives, fifty three were found to have some foundation.

The cheikh's power and consequent authority derived from his position as intermediary with the government. As the degree of government intervention increased, so did the cheikh's importance within his community. Not only did the cheikh control the flow of money between the community and the state, he controlled the flow of information. The state communicated with the tribes through the cheikh. Conversely the cheikh informed the government about tribal affairs. Officers stayed with the cheikhs on their occasional (theoretically monthly) tours, and depended on the cheikhs reports for information during most of the year. The cheikh was, consequently, in an ideal position to select the information available to both parties to suit his own best interests.

The political potential of this 'middle man' role between tribe and state has been described throughout the Middle East, most notably in studies by Salzman and Asad¹³³. In its most extreme form the 'middle man' may enjoy unrivalled authority in the tribe, backed up by his own supporters and the financial and repressive powers of a modern state. In Morocco the Great Caïds of the south, in particular the Glaoui family, are an example of the excesses to which power might be taken¹³⁴. In Southern Tunisia, although abuses, embezzlement, extortion, and repression, were apparent, the cheikh's scale of operations in a cheikhat of several hundred souls gave less opportunity than for Glaoui administering tens of thousands of people.

The French were willing to turn a blind eye to some of these abuses, since the maintenance of the tribal elite presented considerable advantages to the occupying power. Powerful cheikhs, undisputed masters in their fraction, were able to collect taxes promptly and enforce administrative measures. The succession of members of the same family gave continuity to the administration, and encouraged the formation of an administrative class loyal to the government and competent in their administrative duties. In time the use of disciplinary action and the revocation of the dishonest could curb the abuses.

There is no doubt that the French could have created such a stable administrative class in Tunisia, providing its local administrators and a source of support to the French government. The success of both Britain and France elsewhere in the Middle East, Syria and Iraq for example, demonstrates the viability of such a policy¹³⁵. That the Protectorate failed to do so in Southern Tunisia must to a large extent be attributed to the Protectorate's failure to take a logical step: appoint its local officials and support them unequivocally against their charges. By failing to do so the cheikh remained a tribal politician in an administrator's burnous.

8.3. The Politicisation of the Cheikh.

By refusing to appoint the cheikh directly from a list of candidates proposed by the caïd, as the Circular of 31st January

1905 suggested, the administration obliged cheikhs to canvass, even curry favour, of their future charges, and allowed factional rivalries to play a large part in their selection.

Even before their election the government forced its future administrators to court supporters. Candidates had to provide a list of guarantors whose property, listed on an act, could be used to cover their debts to the state if they embezzled the tax revenues. This was usually only a precaution, no attempt to realise these guarantees is described in the documents, but to the tribesmen this was a very real threat. When the Service began an inquest into a cheikh's financial affairs it was not uncommon for his guarantors try and to recant their obligation¹³⁵. By signing their name to a list of guarantors, therefore, the guarantor believed he was making an act of political support and potential self sacrifice.

The government was particular about the number and status of these candidates. Ten guarantors were required. Fewer might be accepted if the cheikhat was small, but those that could not satisfy the Department of Finances' requirements would not be appointed. Nor could they be picked indiscriminately. Following early problems with cheikhs listing insolvents as guarantors, the Department insisted that they should be only 'les gens notairement aisés'¹³⁶. Most candidates called on close agnates to provide this financial support, but in none of the lists of guarantors do identifiable agnates account for more than four of the guarantors. The remainder may have been from the same lineage. In the sixteen acts where there is such evidence, guarantors from outside the lineage were exceptional, an average of one per list. Perhaps they were the candidate's affines - it is impossible to tell. Whoever provided their support, it was an act which created a obligation for the cheikh.

Although the circular of 31st January 1905 provided the caïd with the opportunity to impose his own choice as a candidate¹³⁷, most of the candidates were put forward and supported by rival factions within the community. As Chapter 7 describes these factions might mirror the division of the the community into different lineages, each presenting a candidate of their own¹³⁸, polarise the

lineages into two opposing groups of lineages'³⁹, or cut across the lineage structure with members of the same lineage supporting rival candidates'⁴⁰. On occasion a candidate might lose the support of his agnates to a rival from another lineage. Figure 7.4. illustrates how cheikhly office at Douiret and among the Od. Chehida became the subject of competition between members of the same family. One can imagine the 'palace politics' behind the scenes setting cousin against cousin, brother against brother.

Competition between rivals was intense. The procedure described at Toujane, where the candidate was chosen by consensus so excluding those too closely associated with rival factions, was abandoned. Instead candidates were chosen by a majority vote in a public election, whether by a show of hands or inscription of votes on a register, and from the 1930's officers included the votes received by each candidate in their reports'⁴¹. Since the successful candidate required a majority, the aspirant was compelled to canvass votes. Where the community was polarised, it was simple - one faction would vote against its rivals. But the political forum was usually more complex and the support of some had to be bought or intimidated. Inevitably the cheikhs selected by this electoral system were 'partisans du soff', elected by a faction to serve that faction's interests.

Officers attempted to discourage these rivalries. At Kebili the Chef de Bureau assembled the djemâa and

leur explique que le choix de nouveau cheikh ne pourrait être interprété par aucun des partis comme un triomphe, que la seule signification serait la réconciliation de toutes les familles du cheikhat autour d'un homme unanimement estimé et étranger aux luttes passés.⁴²

The Service rejected candidates who were too closely involved in factional politics'⁴³. Occasionally 'un des rares notables demeures à ce jour en dehors des luttes des soffs' might be elected'⁴⁴, but the procedure did not encourage their selection. Candidates had to find supporters, a personal faction, to secure enough votes.

It should be added that unanimously elected cheikhs were not necessarily an advantage to the government. In some fractions the

djemâa chose its representative without the formal procedures of the government, where, as at Beni Barka, the post was traditionally filled by one family, and advanced only one candidate at the time of election. These cheikhs were merely fronts without the ability or the inclination to oppose the djemâa which remained the main authority within the community'¹⁴⁵.

Once elected, the government's failure to unequivocally support the cheikh against the opposition of rival institutions, groups and individuals ensured his continued participation in factional politics. Rebillet recognised that whilst the djemâa continued to function the cheikh would be faced with a rival authority within the community. His preference for administration through the cheikhs was clear. 'L'autorité du myâd ' he argued 'est trop impersonnelle et manque de moyens d'action prompts et énergétiques', without a single decision maker the society degenerated into 'un état anarchique'. The solution, he believed lay 'en défendant la réunion de myâd, en forçant le chef à faire acte d'autorité absolue'¹⁴⁶.

Initially, however, the djemâa was neither forbidden nor controlled, and the experience of these years demonstrated to the Service the dangers that institution presented to their authority and that of the cheikhs in the South. The djemâa provided a forum where opposition to the Protectorate could be discussed openly. Reibell, who attended a gathering of the Haouia in 1886, described how 'on a comploté ouvertement de ne pas payer l'impôt et de s'en aller au côté de la Tripolitaine'¹⁴⁷. In the 1890's the djemâas at Zarzis and Matmata had conspired to oppose conscription'¹⁴⁸. The djemâa, moreover, could have considerable authority over the cheikh. Not only did the cheikhs consult them on administrative and political issues, and quote its support as their mandate'¹⁴⁹, but those who did not show the notables enough respect, or went against their interest found themselves openly criticised and opposed'¹⁵⁰, betrayed to the administration, even asked to resign'¹⁵¹.

Early attempts to suppress the djemâa were handicapped by the Résident Général's refusal to abandon a traditional institution. This, he explained, would be 'en contradiction formelle avec l'esprit du Protectorat, qui traite chaque groupe de populations selon ses

coutumes et sa tradition'¹⁵². Nevertheless the djemâa was gradually robbed of its functions, and consequently its authority. Relations with the government were monopolised by the cheikh. Tribal law was replaced by the **charia** (religious law), administered by religious officials, Tribunals, and the punitive authority of the Service (see Table 6.7. and 6.8.). Lastly the management of collective property and collective revenues passed to the cheikh through his control of revenues from the government.

Eventually with the definition of the tribal lands by the Decree of 23rd November 1918, the djemâa was reconstituted as a more formal institution, the Council of Notables, with its composition defined by the Decree

Le nombre de membres de ce Conseil, qui devra toujours être impair, est fixé par le Chef de Bureau ou d'Annexe des Affaires Indigènes sur l'avis du cheikh ou des cheikhs intéressés, de façon que, suivant l'importance de la collectivité, chaque fraction, sous-fraction, ou famille soit représentée.

La désignation des membres du Conseil des notables se fera de la façon suivant:

Chaque fraction, sous-fraction ou famille, admise à avoir des représentants au sein du Conseil propose par voie d'élection, pour chacun des représentants, une liste de trois noms, sur laquelle ne peuvent être portés ni anciens fonctionnaires publics ou assimilés, révoqués de leurs fonctions ni des personnes ayant subi une ou plusieurs condamnations pour délits de droit commun; sur ces listes le caïd, le kahia ou le khalifa à compétence étendue choisit les membres du Conseil des Notables.¹⁵³

Although the Decree specifies that the choice of these notables fell to local Tunisian officials, their decisions were not made alone. The catalogue of the archives of the Residence General in Tunis, includes numerous dossiers on the Notables appointed under this Decree. An examination of several of these files reveals that the Service exercised the same powers of veto as they did in the nomination of cheikhs. This allowed the Service to control the Council's composition. To know to what extent it exercised this control, and to what extent such control provided a means of determining the Council's policy must, however, await a complete examination of this source'¹⁵⁴.

The government intended the reformed Council of Notables to take over those functions which remained to the djemâa in 1918: the management of collective property and revenues and the election of the cheikh. To what extent it did so is unclear. In Algeria the djemâa survived French attempts to replace it with more formal, easily controlled institutions. Likewise in Southern Tunisia, the Council of Notables did not eliminate the djemâa, but simply drove it underground. From the early years of the Protectorate the djemâa had become experienced in secret meetings, at night and in remote places, so as to avoid military interference. These secret djemâas were a persistent source of rebellion and instability in the region¹⁵⁵. Jean Mühl describes the situation in Nefzaoua,

Sans avoir conservé l'importance qu'elle avait jadis, on peut donc dire que la Djemâa est toujours un organisme bien vivant et qui peut encore beaucoup pour la bonne marche des affaires et la tranquillité du cheikhat.

Mais ce n'est là qu'un aspect officiel des choses, c'est à dire un aspect quelque peu artificiel. Souvent en effet, on assiste à l'éclosion, à côté de la djemâa officielle, d'une djemâa occulte. À el Gola, cette djemâa occulte existe et prend souvent le contre-pied des avis de la djemâa officielle.¹⁵⁶

How much influence this secret djemâa had on tribal affairs is impossible to tell with the available evidence. It is sufficient to note that this institution, outside government control, existed and if it could not enforce its will on the cheikh it did at least provide a forum for opposition to the government and its representative.

The government's reluctance to impose a duly elected cheikh on the community further weakened his authority and forced him to seek allies. Individuals who refused to accept the cheikh's authority might be arrested by the caïd or by the cheikh himself¹⁵⁷, but the Service would not force an unpopular cheikh on an unwilling community. In 1922, for instance, Ahmed ben Mohammed Sghir's election as cheikh of Acheches (Matmata) provoked demonstrations by a rival faction. Cpt. Sol advised

Il semble que dans les circonstances politiques actuelles on ne puisse imposer aucun cheikh à un fraction un candidat rencontrent un aussi forte opposition.¹⁵⁸

A view reiterated by his superior in terms of a more general policy

Il importe que les chefs indigènes soient acceptés sinon avec satisfaction, du moins avec indifférence par la majorité de leurs contribuables.¹⁵⁹

Nor would the government exert its authority if an incumbent lost the support of his fraction. A cheikh that was 'cordialement détesté par la majorité de ses administrés'¹⁶⁰ was encouraged to resign. Where opposition interfered with the normal running of the cheikhat the government promptly retired or revoked the cheikh and held new elections¹⁶¹.

Recognising the limits of the government's support rivals and enemies organised opposition to secure the unwanted cheikhs revocation and replacement. Demonstrations against cheikhs and the refusal to pay taxes became tools in factional politics. In 1908 among the Od. Azrak (Ouderna), for instance,

Aux demandes de collecteur régulier ils ont répondu qu'ils ne pouvaient pas encore s'acquitter pendant que trois d'entre eux [...] procédaient secrètement au recouvrement de l'impôt sur la désignation de la djemâa et sans aucun mandat de cheikh.¹⁶²

As a result the cheikh was forced to retire.

Anonymous or signed complaints were equally effective. There are 416 of these letters in the cheikhs' personnel files in Tunisian archives. This underestimates the total sent because the archives of the Residence General include many not duplicated in Tunis¹⁶³. An unpopular cheikh could be the subject of repeated attacks. At Acheches fifteen complaints were sent in one year¹⁶⁴. Most (287) accuse the cheikh of some type of tax fraud, the remainder denounced his brutality (85), his involvement in criminal activities (24), sexual assaults, or his immorality, the list virtually endless and complaints usually made several accusations. Half of them were slanderous. Only 209 were found to have any basis in fact, and many of these exaggerated the cheikh's crimes¹⁶⁵. An inquest at Matmata describes the manner in which such accusations were framed,

On sentait l'influence d'une réunion où tous les esprits étaient montés et où on avait décidé de se plaindre avant même de savoir sur quoi serait basée la réclamation.¹⁶⁶

If any evidence of a crime was available, it would be exposed, if not it could be manufactured. A packet of contraband gun powder hidden or thrown into the cheikh's home might condemn him as a smuggler¹⁶⁷. Lack of evidence did not discourage an accusation. The plaint's purpose could be served simply by pointing the finger and creating suspicion.

Had the government ignored these accusations there is no doubt that most would have stopped, but the government did not. Rather than supporting its officials, the administration considered their loyalty and honesty suspect. They investigated 342 (82%) of the plaints. Most investigations produced little or no evidence of anything serious; negligence, favouritism, but little crime. Yet even following an investigation the government remained suspicious. A letter from Blondel, Delegué to General Saint-Marc, stressed that though an investigation might exonerate a cheikh, his innocence was not demonstrated, since evidence might have been destroyed and potential informants intimidated¹⁶⁸. Plaints, even where demonstrably false, were kept in the cheikhs file as if to permanently mark his copy book.

Investigations could embarrass and inconvenience a cheikh. They were often suspended and their charges interviewed about their activities¹⁶⁹. This undermined their authority. If too many plaints were received the Service considered retiring the cheikh whether or not the accusations were proven. An unpopular cheikh was just too much trouble.

Where the cheikh was found guilty he was usually fined, sometimes hundreds of francs, but more serious offences entailed his revocation. Punishment of tax frauds was particularly severe and just suspicion of treason was enough to secure revocation¹⁷⁰.

In order to encourage continuity of administration, particularly in difficult or rebellious fractions, the officers might be persuaded to overlook the misdemeanors of an otherwise successful cheikh. Bouadjila of the Od. Chehida, for example, was fined for embezzlement that would have secured a lesser man's revocation¹⁷¹. Likewise competent tax collectors might be excused the occasional fraudulent indiscretion or the use of undue force to

maintain returns'⁷². But lenience was unusual. Corrupt cheikhs were ruthlessly revoked to protect the administration's reputation, as the following letter explains,

il est impossible de maintenir le cheikh des Gherib à la tête de son fraction sans nuire au prestige qui s'attache à ses fonctions considérées en elles mêmes.⁷³

The government was aware that its wish to 'clean up' the administration was being used by the tribesmen in their own factional politics and that investigations themselves had a detrimental effect on the administration's prestige. Millet advised restraint in the pursuit of the corrupt

Si votre devoir est de contrôler par tous les moyens qui vous sont offerts les actes des fonctionnaires indigènes de votre circonscription, vous devez cependant éviter de faire le jeu des fauteurs de troubles en multipliant sans nécessité les investigations sur la conduite des représentants de l'autorité.

D'autre part lorsque vous trouvez en presence d'imputations vagues, impossibles à vérifier ou invraisemblables, vous ne devez pas manquer de rechercher les causes de l'état d'ésprit revelé par les plaintes, et de nous assurer par la comparaison des pieces si elles n'emmenent pas de groupes d'opposants contre lesquels il y aurait lieu de prendre des mesures d'ordre.⁷⁴

The government also tried to discourage slanderous accusations, with fines, and prison sentences, for those who composed or conspired to write them. Officers, frustrated by pointless investigations, ensured that those caught received heavy fines and even terms of imprisonment⁷⁵. But whilst the complaint could be used to good effect, as is demonstrated by the fact that all but ten of the revocations of cheikhs during the Protectorate were initiated or encouraged by such denunciations, it remained a valuable tool.

The cheikh's responsibilities encouraged this type of vindictive denunciation. Cheikhs made personal enemies by carrying out their duties and vengeance motivated many of the political campaigns. In 1926, to quote a scenario with parallels in many reports, two brothers of the Djellidet were arrested and imprisoned for eight days by the cheikh for their part in a brawl. A year later

they began a campaign of slanderous complaints, denouncing him for tax frauds'⁷⁶.

Other complaints can be understood in terms of competition for the benefits of office. Competition between factions at the time of election was followed by the political struggles between a cheikh and his charges while in office. One faction supported the cheikh, another, out of office, opposed him. Frequently the leader of the campaign of denunciations or disobedience was a revoked cheikh hoping to depose his rival and replace him with a favoured candidate from within the same faction'⁷⁷. Alternatively the leader might be rival candidate hoping to precipitate his opponents downfall so that he could step into his place'⁷⁸.

Faced with this factional opposition the cheikh was obliged to strengthen his own party, using the powers of patronage at his disposal to attract and maintain allies. Even close agnates' loyalty could only be assured with the generous distribution of the benefits of office. In this way corruption became a political necessity, and the cheikh able to stand outside the factional competition an exception. It was a problem the Service recognised

Pour bien faire et ne méconter personne, pour conserver la sympathie des soiffs amis et ménager les susceptibilités du clan ennemi il faudrait être très malin et presque parfait.¹⁷⁹

Factional politics were further intensified by the government's refusal to maintain the cheikhats' ethnic integrity. In 1889 many of the cheikhats had fewer than 100 taxpayers. In the sedentary communities of the Djebel Matmata and the Djebel Demmer each lineage or fariq had its own cheikh rather than each fraction or village. This was an administrative inconvenience, an unnecessary duplication of personnel, which meant that cheikhs were unable to support themselves on the 5% of the tax revenues they gathered. Plans were laid for the reorganisation of these smaller cheikhats, by their amalgamation or inclusion in larger neighbouring administrative units'⁸⁰. Initially, however, with the election and appointment of the cheikhs in 1889, no attempt was made to impose any comprehensive reorganisation. Rather, amalgamations occurred opportunistically as

these cheikhs died or were revoked. It was, nevertheless, a process that generated considerable opposition.

Part of the problem was the government's policy of amalgamation by subsuming the vacant cheikhat into the surviving cheikh's circonscription without a fresh election. At Toujane in 1894, for example, Mohamed ben Hadj Mohamed ben Dada, originally one of four cheikhs in that community, was appointed cheikh of the whole fraction following the death of the other three. Furious at the loss of their independence the other lineages denied the new cheikh's authority and complained to the Prime Minister, forcing Allegro to explain that .

la titulaire actuel s'il a été autrefois soumis à l'élection pour sa fraction en a été dispensé pour les nouvelles ordres placées sous ses ordres. En réalité la majorité de ses administrés ne lui a pas accordé ses suffrages et c'est cette majorité qui réclame aujourd'hui le droit de les exprimer.¹⁸¹

Unfortunately the government had already appointed the cheikhs and a retrospective election was impossible¹⁸².

Opposition to the process of amalgamation also reflected the longer term problem of the distribution of power in the fraction. Formerly each lineage had administered itself, but with the appointment of a single cheikh to administer the fraction as a whole, each lineage competed to gain the dominant position identified with the cheikh's office, a situation demonstrated in the subsequent elections and factional struggles within these cheikhats. As Cpt. Miquel admitted

La tribu de Beni Zelten est composée de quatre fractions, souvent rivaux. Chacun d'elles voudrait que le nouveau cheikh soit pris parmi les siens, et il y aura des plaintes quiconque est nommé.¹⁸³

Subsequent administrative reorganisations further intensified the factional problems by entirely ignoring the ethnic identity of the original cheikhats. It was a policy Resident General Alapetite explained as a 'transformation des cheikhs ethniques en cheikhs territoriaux'¹⁸⁴. Among sedentary fractions this policy was pursued by uniting small contiguous cheikhats, or by attaching a small

cheikhat to a larger neighbour. The resistance to such amalgamations of fractions was as, if not more, fierce than that of lineages forced to combine. At Zarzis the Od. M'hamed went so far as to hire a lawyer to resist the government's decision to combine them with the Zaouia¹⁸⁵. Officers recognised the problems that might arise from an unpopular union, and discouraged an amalgamation of Chenini and Guermessa proposed (on financial grounds) by the Department of Finances in 1912¹⁸⁶. When three years later these cheikhats were combined, the internal fighting between the communities culminated in the resignation of the cheikh in 1919. A Guermessi, he complained that the Chenini made so much trouble for him (there were six complaints in the seven years of his office) that the job was not worth the trouble¹⁸⁷. The government admitted its error and the union was dissolved.

Where these cheikhats continued as amalgamations, factional infighting intensified. In Matmata, for example, the conflict between the fractions Zraoua and Taoudjout, combined in 1897, continued throughout the Protectorate. Each community presented separate candidates for the post, and Zraoua, the larger community, almost invariably won. Taoudjout's only hope was to encourage divisions within their larger neighbour, and this they achieved with some success. Hostility was manifested in other ways. In particular in a fight over a well which though owned by Taoudjout the people of Zraoua claimed to enjoy right of use by virtue of their administrative union. Normally the Taoudjouti allowed the abuse to pass off, the well, after all, was about 90 metres deep, and so rarely used. But in drought years, when the well became the only reliable source of water, the conflict of interests came to the fore in violent clashes¹⁸⁸.

Amalgamations and reorganisations were conducted for largely administrative reasons and took local views or communities of interest into little consideration. The smaller sedentary communities of the Djebel Demmer, for example, had formerly been attached to nomadic fractions. But for political reasons connected with a pro-Berber policy (see Appendix IX), the government chose to separate them into discrete sedentary cheikhats. In line with this

policy the fractions of Tazardanet and Sedra were combined to form a single cheikhat. The two fractions fought between themselves, but, more important, by this amalgamation they lost the advantageous access to grazing rights they had enjoyed in their union with the nomadic fractions. With the election of a cheikh from Tazardanet in 1919 matters reached a head. The Sedra threatened to go into dissidence if the unwelcome cheikh was forced upon them, and both communities asked to be reattached to their former associates, the nomadic fractions. In the end, 'pour éviter toute nouvelle discussion, il faut donner satisfaction à leur désir', and the cheikhat was dissolved¹⁸⁹.

Besides uniting the cheikhats into territorially contiguous units the government sought to define the administration and jurisdiction in territorial terms¹⁹⁰. It was a dream. Sedentary communities could be defined by locality but, despite some sedentarisation, the nomads and semi-nomads retained their traditional ways of life, and the territorial definitions imposed on the map by the end of the Protectorate appear to have had little administrative use or made little sense.

Re-organisation of the administrative units sought to reform the cheikhat in terms of an ideal: large enough to support its cheikh without subsidies, small enough for the cheikh to know his charges. Cheikhats that were too small were amalgamated and those that were too large (such as Ghomrassen and Djellidet¹⁹¹) were divided. Somewhere between five hundred and a thousand tax payers seems to have been most acceptable. The ideal was also defined territorially, and contained a homogenous population sharing the same genre de vie without any divisions of interest. It was an ideal based on the administrative realities of Metropolitan France rather than those of tribal Southern Tunisia.

The Service prevented the cheikhs emerging as bureaucrats by trapping them in the political intrigues of their cheikhats. It also undermined their prestige and authority by interfering in their affairs. Correspondence between cheikhs and central government passed through the Bureau. Every month the officers reviewed the cheikhs' fiscal returns as a check against corruption and to ensure

the prompt payment of taxes. Officers were visibly suspicious of the cheikhs loyalty and honesty and they maintained a network of paid informers so that they could know what was going on. Nor, as has already been pointed out, were they above direct intervention in the administration. In their capacity as supervisors officers dominated many of the administrative committees, the Tutelary Council, for example, that supervised the delimitation and distribution of collective land and the local Mutual Assurance society. Their authority as police enabled them to intervene directly in the tribesmen's affairs. The tribesmen were aware of and used the Service's power, admittedly indirectly, to punish and revoke the cheikh. To them the Service was the real power behind the administration. This diminished the cheikh's authority and encouraged tribesmen to bypass his office. Officers were asked directly to intercede with the government in matters of administration. Unless the cheikh was a recognised favourite his position might count for nothing besides an ambitious and interventionist officer.

To leave a discussion of the administration at this point would, however, be misleading. There were cheikhs who had successful careers, actively participating in the administration, bridging the gap between the state and the tribe, and still remaining popular. Although the average length of a cheikh's tenure during the Protectorate was 5.3 years, some lasted twenty five or thirty, eventually retiring or dying in office. The loss of these officials, who remained honest, fair, and efficient was mourned by both the government and the tribesmen⁹².

8.4. The Administrative Dismemberment of the Tribe.

The amalgamation of contiguous cheikhats and the reorganisation of the administration in territorial rather than ethnic units reflects one aspect of a more general policy: the dissolution of the tribe.

For the Protectorate, as for the Husseinite dynasty before it, the tribes presented a threat. Militarily they had been the only effective opposition to the occupation. Politically they were a

source of rival loyalties to the state. Economically they prevented the development and colonisation of large areas of collective land.

In Algeria anti-tribal feeling was scarcely concealed. Bernard and Lacroix, for example, quote an eminent Algerian colonial publicist Jules Duval (b.1813-d.1870)

les famille indigènes ont droit à notre protection; la tribu, forme accidentale et périssable obstacle à l'appropriation et à la culture du sol, base du pouvoir et des chefs, nos seuls ennemis, la tribu doit transformer ou disparaître.¹⁹³

Policy reflected these sentiments. The Algerian government reduced the tribes into smaller, discrete communities through the *Senatus-Consulte* of 1863. This, to quote Rey-Goldzeiguer's neologism, "douarised" Algeria's tribes by reducing the basic administrative unit to a local territorially defined community, the elimination of the upper levels of tribal organisation in the administration, the dissolution of collective property, and the monopolisation of the responsibility for relations between communities in the hands of the state¹⁹⁴. Although the Protectorate was limited in its ability to carry out such reforms by its commitment to Tunisia's native institutions and no explicit statement of an anti-tribal policy was made, its administrative reforms paralleled those in Algeria.

Initially the Protectorate treated with the tribes as a whole, through their *djemâa* and *khalifa*. With direct control of these tribes impossible until the military occupation of the south these institutions and individuals were given formal authority through the decrees establishing the tribal *makhzen* in 1884¹⁹⁵. Drawn from the wealthy and influential families of the tribes, Salem Bouajila among the Ouderna, Dho bin Dho among the Haouia, and the family Nadji among the Touazine, the military expected these *khalifa* to provide 'faithful auxiliaries'. By 1886 the military were clearly discouraged by their disloyalty, incompetence, and laziness, and complained that they were 'obligés de [les] tolérer faute de mieux'¹⁹⁶.

Despite the military's evident dissatisfaction these *khalifas* were not replaced immediately on the occupation of the south. While

the cheikhs within the fractions were subjected to an election and reappointment, the khalifas, of whom the military had been so critical, were confirmed in their positions. The prominence of their families made them indispensable even if the individuals fell below the ideals of the administration. Amor ben Nadji, for example, was appointed khalifa of the Touazine because, although 'il manque du physique de prestige personnel [...] il a hérité sans conteste de l'influence réelle et considérable qu'exerçait chez les Touazines son frère Si Hassen ben Nadji auquel il a succédé'¹⁹⁷. If incompetence, corruption, and disloyalty resulted from this policy, the military were prepared to put up with it as a temporary expedient.

S'il existe dans les tribus les éléments meilleurs [Rebillet explained] il y a lieu de les garder pour les temps meilleurs, ils arrivent à l'heure et, profitent des leçons reçues par les autres, seront aptes à nous rendre alors de bons services.¹⁹⁸

The problems were not just those of personnel. Khalifas enjoyed considerable power. They were the direct superiors of cheikhs within the administration and could investigate their affairs as well as give orders. They supervised the collection of taxes within their circonscription, maintained order, as well as performing a range of administrative duties beyond the competence of the cheikhs. Whilst their income was assessed like the cheikh's on the basis of a 5% share of the mejba returns, the khalifa's responsibility for several cheikhats generated far greater revenues¹⁹⁹. They enjoyed considerable opportunities for the abuse of power. Like the cheikhs, they embezzled government funds and took bribes, harassed their enemies with imprisonment and fines and sought to secure the appointment of their partisans to cheikhats by interfering in elections²⁰⁰.

For these reasons the post was attractive to an aspiring tribal politician and, even though the khalifa was appointed directly by the government, without an election, the office became a subject of competition and rivalry. Campaigns of complaints and insubordination were used by rival candidates and factions to secure appointment or

to oust opponents. Even their direct subordinates, the cheikhs, tiring of a khalifa's intervention in their affairs might conspire and campaign against them²⁰¹. The khalifa's authority over discrete cheikhats ensured that competition would be particularly acrimonious. A problem exacerbated by the systematic rationalisation of the administration. Khalifats without dependent cheikhats (such as the khalifat of Douiret) were eliminated and then the remainder were amalgamated into larger administrative units. By 1902 the original six khalifats in the Annexe of Tataouine were reduced to two²⁰². This increased the khalifas' administrative authority and income, making the post all the more attractive. It also increased the number of subordinate cheikhs and consequently the competition and factionalism the appointment generated.

The establishment of three Caïdats in Southern Tunisia Matmata, Ouderna, and Ouerghamma in 1895 continued the policy of amalgamation. At that time the administrative hierarchy within the south was truncated. The Governor of Aradh, General Allegro, was the direct superior of the khalifas. With the deterioration of relations between the military and Allegro the appointment of caïds, each directly responsible to the government, provided a means of breaking Allegro's hegemony. Influential local tribesmen were selected to head the local administration: Rehouma bin el-Hiba for the Ouerghamma, Salem Bouajila for the Ouderna, and Sassi Fattouch for the Matmata. This decision soon proved a mistake. Among the Ouderna in particular, Bouadjila's appointment aroused his rivals' jealousy. They tried to oppose the Chehidi's intervention in their affairs and refused to recognise his authority²⁰³. Bou Ajila's partisan manner and corruption ensured that the relationship between the caïd and his subordinates became even more embittered²⁰⁴. In Matmata Sassi Fattouch was no better. He was implicated as a ring leader of the riots that preceded the imposition of recruitment²⁰⁵. After less than two years in office the caïd of Matmata was revoked and the caïd of the Ouderna retired.

From this point the government turned towards a policy of recruiting the highest officials from outside the tribes they were to administer. This contradicted the Protectorate's declared policy

that 'les caïds sont choisis parmi les notables influents de la tribu'²⁰⁶. The military claimed a caïd from within the community could not assert his authority over all the fractions²⁰⁷. At Tataouine a similar argument was used by the military to abandon the caïdat of Ouderna altogether. A source of competition among the fractions, each of the major families believing they had the greatest right to hold the office, no one could be appointed from within the tribe, and unlike Matamata, a caïd from outside the community could not be supported on the revenues of the few communities which, at that time, paid the mejba. The only solution was to appoint local khalifas and subsume the former caïdat into the caïdat of the Querghamma²⁰⁸.

The appointment of outsiders to the higher administrative posts within the south was not without its problems. It was difficult to recruit and retain suitably qualified administrators. Some complained of the isolation of tribal life, others of the unhealthy climate or the accomodation²⁰⁹, and most were dissatisfied with the relatively small incomes these posts generated²¹⁰. There were frequent requests for transfers. Tribesmen resented officials from outside and were unco-operative. And the caïds, unfamiliar with local conditions, personalities, the rival and conflicting factions, and with geographically large circonscriptions, found it difficult to impose their authority. They were forced to depend on their subordinates for information and advice. The khalifas, consequently, enjoyed greater independence and authority than elsewhere in the Régence

Les khalifas des T.M.S. ont une compétence étendue et leur siège est le même que celui des officiers chefs d'annexe chargés du contrôle de leurs actes administratifs et par intermédiaire de qui leur parviennent toutes instructions du caïd. Ce dernier n'a donc sur eux qu'une action indirect, et n'encourt par contre aucune responsabilité du fait de gestion.²¹¹

Recognising their extended responsibilities and their importance as figures of influence next to the caïds the military continued to appoint the khalifas from among the established families. From the early years of the 20th century administrative

and legal training, not an integrated course, but specific 'stages' sometimes of several weeks duration, were arranged by the government to prepare those appointed for their duties²¹². Then in 1912 the first step towards the re-establishment of the local elite in top rank of the administration was made by the creation of the posts of kahia, at Tataouine and Zarzis. Subsequently, in 1925, Tataouine was, once again, made a caïdat, and by 1930 all the caïdats in the south were filled by local tribesmen. But by this date the administrators had changed significantly.

The second generation of caïds was very different from the first. Although they continued to be drawn from the influential families, the names Bouadjila, Nadji, Leffat, Taïeb, and Abdellatif stand out in particular, family status was not enough to guarantee appointment. The prospective administrator was also expected to have administrative experience and be of proven loyalty. The two most successful administrators from the south Ahmed ben Belgasem Leffat (1913 Khalifa of Zarzis, 1929 Caïd of Matmata, and 1935 Caïd of Ouerghamma) and Ahmed ben Abd el Krim ben Taïeb (1922 Khalifa of Touazine, 1935 Caïd of Ouderna, and 1941 Caïd of Ouerghamma) were both of prominent families and climbed a hierarchy which moved them to positions of higher responsibility, income, and status over decades. An administrative career was a long term commitment to a very different political environment than that within the tribe. Success and survival depended more on assessment by the government and by the Service than factional politics. It would be wrong to assume that participation in the administration destroyed any tribal identity in these administrators. Ahmed ben Belgasem's derogatory comparison of the Accara with his own Djebalia shows that they were still ethnically conscious²¹³. Yet whatever their tribal loyalties these khalifas and caïds also identified with the administration, on which they depended in large measure for their authority, status and income.

The government carefully avoided a descent into factionalism by rarely appointing caïds from the southern tribes to positions of authority above their own tribesmen. The exceptions to this rule were individuals (such as Leffat, Taïeb, and Bouadjila) whose

loyalty was assured. In Matmata, a small caïdat with a reputation of factional infighting, no attempt was made to appoint from within the community. Because the caïd came from outside and the tribesmen themselves had no control over his appointment he became detached from tribal politics. The tribe itself then ceased to have any political reality. Caïds from outside still found favourites and were not above corruption and patronage but none became sufficiently entangled to warrant revocation²¹⁴.

The tribal identity of the upper levels of the administration, was further weakened by the territorial redefinition and delimitation of the caïdats. This was largely complete by the turn of the century. The names were changed to the caïdats of Médenine, Tataouine, and Matmata, somewhat later, in 1925, but well before that the caïdats had become a territorial rather than an ethnic reality. Boundaries between the caïdats were not simply marked on the maps, they were marked on the ground by piles of stone. From 1887 movement outside the caïdat of origin required permit de circulation endorsed by the caïd and by the Service²¹⁵. Those without suitable papers were arrested and sent back. The intention of these permits was to control the movement of tribesmen around the Regence, but the rigid application of the principle effectively isolated the caïdats so that those wishing to pasture or plough outside their circonscription had first to secure permission of the administration. As a result delimitations became an important issue rather than a purely administrative procedure. A delimitation between the caïdat of Nefzaoua and Ouerghamma in 1899 led to confrontations between the Haouia and the Od. Yacoub over access to Bir Sultane, and between the Douiret and Merazigue over more southerly pastures²¹⁶. Fifteen years later the delimitation between Matmata and Médenine was preceded by demonstrations and fights²¹⁷.

Besides rejecting a tribal definition of the administration's higher levels the Protectorate undermined tribalism by administrative atomisation. Caïds and khalifas did not replace cheikhs²¹⁸, their principle functions were to oversee the administration at lower levels, to check the tax registers and investigate complaints²¹⁹. Caïds and khalifas delegated most of the

administration to the cheikhs, they stayed in their offices, rarely touring their circonscription. Without an administrative role the tribe atrophied during the Protectorate, concentrating social and political life in the cheikhat.

8.5. Nationalism: A New Political System?

In the early years of the Protectorate the tribes appear to have been largely indifferent to political events beyond Southern Tunisia. Of such important events as the Algeciras Conference in 1906

Les chefs indigènes eux mêmes paraissant s'être entièrement désintéressés de ces débats dont le sens et l'importance leur ont également échappé.²²⁰

Although the Italian invasion of Tripolitania precipitated an immediate and violent reaction, in which several Italians at Zarzis were attacked²²¹, interest in this soon faded. There were a few who joined the Turkish army, only 45 volunteers and most of these came from Tunis, Cap Bon, Sousse and Sfax not the South²²². By 1913 high wages not ideologies attracted tribesmen to Tripolitania, not as volunteers for their co-religionists, but as mercenaries in the well paid Italian army²²³.

Nor did the migrants in Tunis take a particularly active part in the nascent nationalism in the city. Only 20 out 827 (2.4%) people arrested at the Bab Alleoua demonstration in Tunis on 7 November 1911 were from the South²²⁴. It seems likely that most of these were observers rather than active participants. Certainly the police files of those returned to the south make no reference to Nationalist politics. They were simply an undesirable element in a congested city at a time of political tension²²⁵.

The tribes were little concerned about such events. Although the tribal revolt in Southern Tunisia in 1915, was depicted as part of a nationwide Nationalist conspiracy²²⁶, its inspiration and extent were parochial. There is no evidence that the rebels even contacted the nationalists. After the war little changed. In the early 1920's there were only 15 subscriptions to Destourian

newspapers in the region and between twenty and thirty members of the party²²⁷.

At that time the Nationalists made no attempt to attract rural Tunisians. Party membership and leadership was almost entirely urban or Sahelian. The political ideology espoused by the Jeunes Tunisiens was modernist and ridiculed the tribesmen for their backwardness and superstition. Their manifesto advocated an improvement in rural conditions but was too ideological and abstract to be popular²²⁸. A criticism that was equally true of 'La Tunisie Martyre', the manifesto of the Destour party published in 1919²²⁹. Articles attacking the military administration of the region were published in Arabic newspapers and the liberal European press²³⁰, but they were a general criticism of the Protectorate not the expression of a specifically rural or tribal policy.

Politicisation was inhibited by the isolation of the south, and the military intended to keep it that way. Since newspapers were the most important method of disseminating ideas and information the Protectorate kept a close eye on both the publication of the Nationalist journals and their distribution. In Southern Tunisia where most tribesmen could not read, the cafés where those that could, read aloud for an audience, were an important link in the supply of information. Recognising this the military kept them under close control

il semble inutile d'augmenter le nombre de cafés dans lesquels les indigènes vont perdre leur temps et tenir des manières de réunions dans lesquelles l'autorité est assez souvent critiquée. Ainsi la requête des gens d'Hassi Djerbi [near Zarzis] ne sauraient être accueillie.²³¹

The pass laws provided a control on the movement of known Nationalists, and their meetings and plays were banned.

The government also sought to forestall the Nationalists political aspirations by providing representation in Central government. But, although a representative from the South was appointed to attend the Consultative Conference in 1907 and when the Grand Council was established in 1922 this number was raised to two, native representation was merely pretence. The Council's

authority was limited to approving the budget, it could not examine political or constitutional issues. Nor, within this limited mandate, did the native members of the council have much power. They were out numbered forty four to eighteen by the Europeans. The government moreover, excluded the troublesome new urban elite by appointing puppets from the rural areas²³². Candidates for election carefully vetted by the government, and representatives from the South were appointed. Without exception they were chosen from among administrators or senior non-commissioned officers in the makhzen. Not suprisingly they made no contribution to political life. On occasion they seem almost sycophantic in their wish to please the French. The first delegate to the Consultative Conference from the South, for example, suggested that tribesmen could be employed as irregulars in the occupation of Morocco²³³. Those even suspected of disloyalty were quickly replaced. One delegate, a former makhzen Bach Chouach, implicated in a revolt of the goum in 1935, was dismissed without any inquiry²³⁴.

It was only in the early 1930's that the Nationalists began to have success in the south. 'Cells' were formed at Gabès and in the oases of Aradh, at Mareth. From here they began to recruit support in the Territoires Militaires, and by the early 1930's the military could identify Nationalists in Matmata and Médenine²³⁵. In Tunis the migrants from Douiret also had cell, discrete from that of the native Tunisoises but following the same Nationalist ideology²³⁶. The Confédération Générale Tunisienne de Travail (C.G.T.T.), also found recruits in the south, largely in the oasis communities of Aradh and Nefzaoua²³⁷. By 1936 these Nationalist groups began to take an active part in oppositon to the government. Merchants arrived from Ksar Hellal, a centre of Neo-Destourien politics, to organise demonstrations and strikes²³⁸. There was a spate of Nationalist activity in 1937: a strike among government labourers at Zarzis, calls for the abolition of military control from Matmata, and cellules formed at Toudja and Tamazredt²³⁹. The military intervened, closed down the cells and stopped meetings and demonstrations²⁴⁰. But the activities did not stop. It was after the war, however, that the Nationalists in the south came to prominence,

when *fellaga* (bandits) from the southern tribes formed terrorist groups that attacked the military until independence was finally granted²⁴¹.

The impression is of rising tide of Nationalist feelings in the south culminating in the terrorist activities of the early 1950's. It would be wrong to deny that there was considerable anti-French feeling in the south or that Nationalist politics were not advocated by any of the tribesmen. It should, however, be pointed out that the south was, compared to the cities and the Sahel, relatively quiet. A document of the Deuxième Bureau dated 1938 records that 'les Territoires du Sud continuant à rester indifférent à l'agitation politique'²⁴². Furthermore, a more detailed investigation, placing these Nationalist groups in their local context suggests that ideologies and patriotism were not the only motivations behind the Nationalist activities. Such a study is, unfortunately, hampered by restrictions on the archives of the Neo-Destour party and the personnel files kept by the Residence General which prevent a clear identification of party membership. Nevertheless, one can arrive at some preliminary conclusions on the basis of incidental sources.

Nationalism provided a means of opposition against the government's representative, the cheikh, as much as against the French themselves. The Nationalist press could be used to vilify personal enemies and political opponents²⁴³. At Zraoua *fellaga* made the personal nature of the Nationalist conflict more apparent by trying to kidnap the cheikh with the collusion of the rival faction²⁴³. Cpt. Faurie's study of the *fellaga* from Nefzaoua helps substantiate this interpretation. In his opinion political rivalry was an important motivation behind the Nationalist struggle in the south,

les fellagas ont lutté ici pour débarrasser le pays de chefs au pouvoir, sous entendre pour les remplacer par l'opposition, sources de tous les maux.²⁴⁴

The fact that only five out of the forty one *fellaga*s from Nefzaoua were members of the Neo-Destour party substantiates their lack of ideological commitment to the Nationalist movement. A similar polarisation is suggested at a national scale by de Montety's study

of the Neo-Destour, which he demonstrates was dominated by members of Tunisia's 'new elite' excluded from power by the French and the old Destour party²⁴⁵.

The Nationalist movement was attractive to those out of office since it provided an opportunity to replace those currently in power and gain access to the now substantial revenues of central and local government. To what extent the traditional elite, and in particular those who held office, opposed the Nationalist movement or the Neo-Destour party is less clear. None of the cheikhs in office appear to have been members of the party but then again they did not betray the Nationalists in their midst or co-operate too enthusiastically with military attempts to root out the bandits.

Studies of Nationalist politics in Morocco by Waterbury and, more recently, Joffé have pointed to a wider support for the Protectorate, or at least suspicion of the Nationalist movement, than that of the administrative and notables' families alone. They point to the growing numbers of small and medium landowners, as Morocco's *kulak* class. Little threatened by colonisation (at least initially), and protected by the regime these *kulaks* were essentially conservative. Although they may not have directly opposed the Nationalists in defence of the regime they were slow to give them their support, and, as Joffé describes, only did so when the Protectorate's end was imminent²⁴⁶. The existence of a similar 'class' in parts of Southern Tunisia may be implied by the processes of development during the Protectorate. Their political attitudes remain undocumented, but reluctance to see any change in the regime that brought their good fortune may be assumed, at least until they saw both who was to be the victor in the conflict and how the victor intended to deal with their kind. It is an assumption which is substantiated by the evidence of Cpt. Faurie's report. In Nefzaoua at least, he shows most of the fellaga were drawn almost entirely from among the poor. Twenty four out of forty one (59%) of the fellagas 'ne possedaient absolument rien, ni en propre, ni en famille', the wealthiest of the remaining seventeen were too poor to act as guarantors on an act of election. Desperate poverty probably encouraged these individuals to take up arms against the

regime. Equally revealing is Faurie's contention that beyond these few the population remained apathetic, at least until October 1954 when the momentum of the Nationalist movement began to increase and the eventual fall of the Protectorate became inevitable²⁴⁷.

Conclusion.

Political life in the fractions of Southern Tunisia underwent little change during the Protectorate. New tools were added to the armoury of the tribal politician, and the stakes in the competition rose, but the fundamental instability of power remained. Admittedly some individuals and families found favour with the Protectorate administration and retained office throughout their lifetimes and the life of the Protectorate. Even in this case, however, there was little change in the political order for these families were, without exception, members of a tribal elite which had held positions of authority and respect before the Protectorate. In most fractions continuity of administration was sacrificed to the unrealistic ideal of the detached administrator. As a result factionalism was encouraged and continued as the basis of tribal politics to which other ideologies and interests were subservient.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Three forces run through each of these chapters. The first is capitalism. This is not an institution but an economic process and an ideology. As a process capitalism transformed the relations of production in Southern Tunisia from outside. Trade provided opportunities for commercialisation and so encouraged increasing production while, at the same time, crippling the native economy through competition. As an ideology capitalism transformed tribal society from within. The germs of a spirit of self interest were sowed. A changing pattern of the distribution of wealth encouraged a transformation of the economic relationship between the poor and the wealthy. Ultimately economic relationships found expression in the tribes social and political life.

The second is the colonial state. It too worked from outside the tribe. Often the state collaborated with capitalism encouraging its penetration. But the state was also an institution with its own interests and goals. Through its need for revenues, reaped through ever higher taxes, the state facilitated the capitalist penetration. For its self preservation the state intervened in tribal life and sought to manipulate the power structures of tribal society.

The last is the economic and social structure of the tribes themselves. To some extent this transformed itself from within. The potential for capitalism, disparities of wealth and political power already existed at the beginning of our period. During the Protectorate, however, this potential was given impetus from without. A growing population, the demands of the state, and the opportunities and demands of capitalism encouraged economic change within the tribes. Economic change and the state's intervention in tribal life directed the political and social expression of the changing relations of production. But the tribes' political-economy also reveals a considerable continuity and resistance to change. The impact of forces acting from without and within did not overthrow

the pre-existing political economy but allowed it to participate in its own transformation.

It is not these forces, however, that form the subject of this thesis but the tribal society and economy which they affected. This totality cannot be understood if these forces are seen as pre-determined and discrete. The structures of capitalism and the colonial state existed outside the the context of this particular study area and these broader influences determined in part their impact on the study area. The economic crisis of the 1930's had its origins in the whole complex of international trade. Similarly the policies of the colonial state reflect the purposes of European governments and the colonial experience elsewhere (particularly in Algeria). But both these forces reacted reflexively to the experience and local context of Southern Tunisia and this local context was created by the interaction of all these forces. Consequently the pattern of social and economic transformation takes a local character seen not only in differences between Southern Tunisia and other regions of the world but in differences within the study area, and within communities.

This does not deny the validity of generalisations about the processes of capitalist development and colonialism. Parallels can be seen not only elsewhere in Tunisia but elsewhere in Africa. But the regional approach allows the historian to see how these processes affected the tribesmen and how they participated in the process of underdevelopment and the politics of social and economic transformation.

