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THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF SYRIAN SOCIETY:

AN INTERPRETIVE ESSAY

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
GENERAL INTRODUCTION: SCOPE OF STUDY	1
Part I Ecological, Historical and Religious Characteristics of the Syrian Arab Republic.	
A. Ecological Characteristics	4
B. Ecological Trilogy	7
1. tribal sector	7
2. village sector	9
3. urban sector	10
C. Historical Characteristics	11
D. Religious Characteristics	27
Part II Social Organization	38
A. Family Organization: Individual versus Group	39
B. Structure of the Family	41
C. Marriage and Divorce	45
D. Male and Female Roles	52
E. Belief Systems and Values	54
1. attitudes towards women	55
2. concepts of honour and shame	56
3. hospitality and hostility: egotism and conformity	58
F. Economic Organization	63
1. urban areas	63
2. rural areas	67
3. pastoral areas	72

	Page
Part III Conclusion: Substantive Issues and Recommendations	85
A. Cultural Gaps	87
1. inter-national cultural gaps	87
2. intra-national cultural gaps	88
B. Agrarian Land Use	92
1. agricultural production	92
2. agricultural support structures	94
C. Rural Sector of Syrian Society	97
1. rural-urban migration	97
2. resettlement of populations	101
D. Water	103
1. precepts regarding water appropriation	105
2. current situation	107
E. Health administration	108
F. Future Social Research	115
ANNOTATED REFERENCES	118

iii

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

E.C.W.A.	Economic Commission for Western Asia
F.A.O.	Food and Agricultural Organization
I.L.O.	International Labour Organization
U.N.	United Nations
U.N.D.P.	United Nations Development Program
U.N.E.S.C.O.	United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization
U.N.E.S.O.B.	United Nations Economic and Social Office in Beirut
W.H.O.	World Health Organization

14

## LIST OF MAPS

	Page
1. General map of Syria	3
2. Geographical Units	5
3. Tribal areas and proposed water projects	93

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Tribal genealogy of the Aneza Confederation	21
2. Minority communities of Syria	28
3. Land use in Syria	70
4. Estimated livestock in Syria (1963-1976)	80
5. Length of roads (1943-1976)	98
6. Health table (1976)	109
7. W.H.O. Health Table, 1971	113
8. Syria Syncrisis Health Table, 1972	114

V

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION: SCOPE OF STUDY

Neither the processes nor the prospects of modernization in the Middle East are well understood. This region, in particular the Syrian Arab Republic, has been less explored than any other major developing area of the world. Recent socio-economic studies of Syria and her population are minimal and the available statistical information is spotty, being detailed within some fields and entirely lacking in others. Furthermore, these statistics appear at times to reflect ideal rather than real situations. If development planning in Syria is to be based on a firm and sound foundation, then basic and indepth sociological and anthropological fieldwork must be undertaken in order to generate the necessary background information.

This essay is a preliminary attempt to assess the socio-cultural situation in Syria today. It should not be looked upon as an initial analysis of new raw data. Rather, it should be seen as an "interpretive" essay based upon: a limited number of field studies conducted during the 1940's and 1950's; several field trips to agricultural and pastoral regions of Syria; two years field experience in the Syria-Lebanon pastoral zones; and indepth interviews with government administrators in selected ministries so as to better evaluate and assess their published statistical

abstracts and reports. (i.e. Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, Ministry of the Euphrates Dam, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Communications and the General Union of Women).

This essay is composed of three parts. Part I is a general introduction to Syria, briefly focussing on important ecological, historical and religious considerations which have given shape to the population and to its distribution throughout the country as urban, agricultural and pastoral sectors. Part II is a general analysis of the social organization which characterizes the Syrian population. It is based primarily on studies conducted before the rapid changes which have occurred over the past two decades. It is thus a purely "interpretive" effort, taking into account recent work conducted among neighboring populations in Lebanon and Jordan and personal observation. Part III, the conclusion, attempts to factor out and discuss leading substantive issues which need to be carefully considered for planning and implementing development projects for Syria and her people.

2A

PART I

Ecological, Historical, and  
Religious Characteristics  
of the Syrian Arab Republic

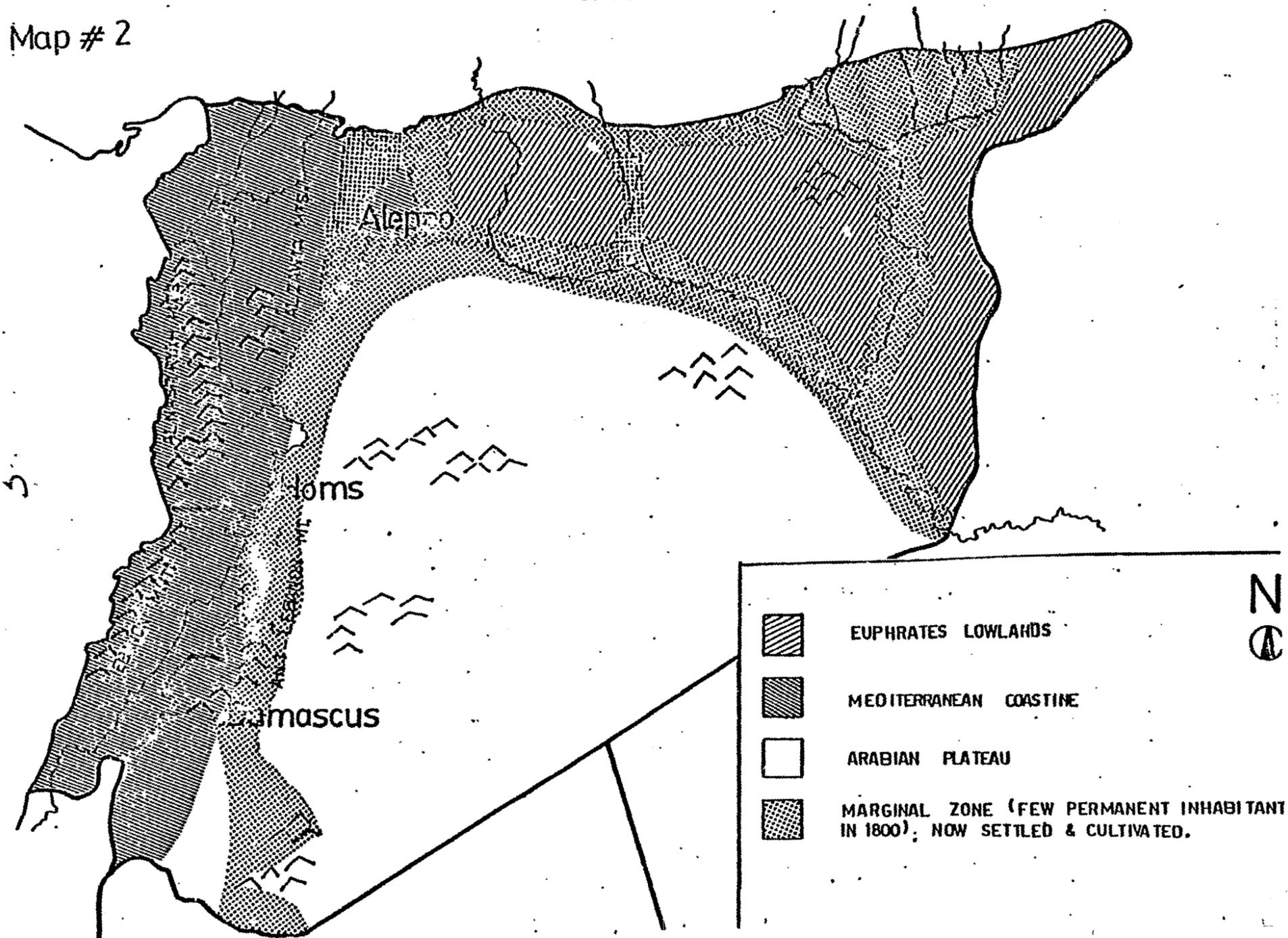


A. ECOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Syria's borders with Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, drawn by the Mandatory powers that partitioned the area at the close of World War I, are largely artificial and do not coincide with natural geographic limits (Versailles Agreement following the Sykes Picot treaty of May 1916). Two important distinct geographic units (see Map No. 2) cut vertically through modern Syria. The first unit is the Mediterranean Coastline and the second is the Arabian Plateau. The relative extent of arid land in comparison to cultivated land within these two geographic units leaves the impression that a very small percentage of the total surface area of Syria can be used for agricultural pursuits. Furthermore, the border areas of these two units have fluctuated considerably in relation to each other with the historical expansions and retreats of pastoral and agricultural populations.

The Mediterranean coastal zone - with a narrow, double mountain belt - is predominantly agricultural and stretches south from the Turkish border to Lebanon. The Al-Nasayriyah mountains parallel the coast. Before reaching the Lebanese border, and the Anti-Lebanon

Map # 2



Mountains, the Al-Nasayriyah range terminates, leaving a corridor which for centuries has been a trade and invasion route from the coast to the interior. Eastward, paralleling the Al-Nasayriyah range is the Al-Zawiyah range. These two ranges are separated by a fertile irrigated trench, the Al-Ghab depression.

Bordering this Mediterranean Coastline is the northern part of the Arabian Plateau (Nejd, Nefud or Northern Steppe land). This area is generally called the Badia or Badiat-ish-Sham (Syrian Desert) and extends just east of Aleppo and the edge of the Middle Euphrates as far south as Aqaba. Within the Badia, only a small part is actually arid desert called the Hamad. The major part is more or less a semi-arid region where, though water is scarce, sub-surface water is accessible by deep wells. Winter rains provide a seasonal vegetation cover for herds, which is fully utilized by pastoral populations. With the exception of a few oases, there exists no more effective means of utilizing these semi-arid seasonal pastures.

The border zone between the Arabian Plateau and the Mediterranean Coastline can support either agricultural activities or pastoral ones. This frontier zone has undergone considerable fluctuations through-

cut history. The expansion of agriculture or pastoralism has always been related to the authority of central governments. When central authority is weak, the pastoral tribes conquer the land, pushing the agricultural communities to migrate to urban centers. When central authority is strong, agriculture is able to expand into the area, forcing the tribes to make payments to the government or retreat into the Badia.

B. ECOLOGICAL TRILOGY

The population of the Syrian Arab Republic is very much a part of the general culture prevailing in the Middle East. This general culture can be described as a delicately balanced, complicated cultural adaptation consisting of three mutually dependent types of communities: the city, the village and the tribe. Each of these communities has a distinctive life mode, operates in a different setting and contributes to the support of the other two sectors, and thereby to the maintenance of the total society.

1. tribal sector

In Syria, Bedouin pastoral tribes make up about 12% of the rural population and are dispersed throughout the Badia. The 1960 Bedouin census esti-

mates reach approximately 211,600, while recent estimates in 1978 place the figure closer to 450,000. The Bedouin in Syria are primarily sheep-raising tribes who migrate annually in search for pasture for their herds. Some of these tribes - those belonging to the Aneza Confederation of tribes generally move west into the Syrian portion of the Badia in early spring, remaining until early fall before returning to their traditional winter pasture areas deep in the Badia. Other Bedouin tribes, in particular the Mawali and the Haddiddiin move their herds out into the Badia in early fall returning to their traditional areas, generally frontier zone villages, in early spring.

where  
is "deep"  
in Badia?

No pastoral group is entirely self-sufficient and the Bedouin tribes of Syria are no exception. They are tied in relations of interdependence and reciprocity to sedentary communities in adjacent areas. The pastoral adaptation presupposes the presence of sedentary communities and access to their products. As a pastoral economy cannot stand alone, it must have access to agricultural products in order to remain viable.

There are several traditional means utilized by pastoralists to guarantee that grain and other sedentary products are accessible to them. A community may, if

its tribal land is close enough to or within the margin of rainfed cultivation sow and harvest crops. More commonly though, a community will collect rental payments from tenants on its oases or agricultural land in the form of crops.

At one time, khuwa (tribute) was exacted from sedentary farmers generally in the form of crops in return for protection from ghazu (raids) by their tribe or others in the surrounding area. This tribute-raid relationship was a simple business proposition whereby the pastoralists received a needed product (grain) and the farmers gained a scarce service (security). In principle, it was not very different from a more widespread relationship whereby animal products were exchanged for dates and grain. Although these activities can be regarded as 'secondary' ones, they were at one time essential for the continued well-being of the pastoral mode of life. In turn, the village and urban communities depended heavily on the pastoralists for their supplies of dairy products, sheep meat and wool.

## 2. village sector

The majority of the population of Syria is characterized by its close attachment literally and figuratively to the land. The rural sector of the

population, approximately 57% of the total population, is very unevenly distributed in a large number of small villages throughout the countryside. Medium size settlements are scarcely found. In the Mediterranean Coastline village density is high, whether perched at the top of mountains, in valleys, or along the coast itself. These populations generally have good access to the major cities. Here, terracing, arboriculture and small landholdings are characteristic features. Villages along the border of the Arabian Plateau, in the Jezirah and in the Badia, are isolated and widely dispersed. Roads are few and contacts with the cities are limited. Here, agricultural rotation, with large areas left fallow, grain growing and relatively large land-holdings are common.

### 3. urban sector

The principal cities of Syria are strung along on the border area of the Arabian Plateau and the Mediterranean Coastline. They are traditional centers of government, trade and culture. Damascus, the capital, is the country's largest city (official 1978 population estimate 1,936,567). In addition to being an administrative center, Damascus is also a major market for the numerous villages that ring the city as well as a

seasonal market (in the Midan quarter) for Bedouin trade. Aleppo, the second largest city (population 762,636), lies in the center of a large fertile region. It is the country's greatest industrial and commercial center. Its suq, extending fifteen miles through a labyrinth of covered alleyways serves as a market center for local agricultural and pastoral products as well. Homs, a provincial center (population 317,642) is the third largest industrial town situated between Aleppo and Damascus. Here again, the town serves as a major center of trade for local agricultural and pastoral products. These urban market centers still attest to the continuation of the traditional ecological trilogy, though tremendous changes have taken place in each of these sectors over the past two decades.

C. HISTORICAL CHARACTERISTICS: the mosaic of peoples

The first anthropologist to specialize on the Middle East, Carlton Coon, used the term 'mosaic of peoples' to describe Middle Eastern society. Perhaps for no other country of the Middle East is this term more fitting than for Syria. Distinctions of language, region, religion and way of life cross-cut Syrian society, producing a large number of separate communities, each marked by strong internal loyalty and solidarity. The ethnic

and religious minorities which amount to somewhat more than 15%, form geographically compact and psychologically significant communities that function as distinct social spheres and dominate specific regions of the country.

"Contrast" is not merely the cement of Syrian society, but indeed it is highly and positively effective as such. It is the primacy of component over composite which is important. What matters here is the lived contrast or distinctiveness of each component.

The development of this mosaic of social communities in Syria has distinct historical and politico-religious roots. Syria, has from the earliest period of recorded history been inhabited by a large Semitic population and has continuously been invaded by successive waves of other Semitic and non-Semitic peoples. These invasions, as well as the particular Syrian terrain, have largely determined the physical locations and 'world views' of the plural socio-cultural entities that make up the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Canaanites and the Phoenicians entered the area in the 3rd millenium B.C., the Aramaeans in the 2nd. Around 1700 B.C., the Amorites held sway. Around 1600 B.C., Egypt invaded the region from the south. During the 15th and 14th c. the Hittites invaded from the north,

while the Assyrian kingdom pressed from the east. At the same time the Aramaeans, a nomadic people from Northern Arabia began establishing their hold over northern and central Syria. By the end of the 11th c. B.C. they had established their kingdom in Damascus. Around 700 B.C. Assyrians moving from the north conquered the Aramaeans.

Semitic rule ended with the coming of the Persians, who established their headquarters in Damascus. They were in turn conquered by Alexander the Great in 333 B.C. Replacing the Greeks, the Roman emperors inherited already thriving cities and rich agricultural regions.

Neither the Greeks nor the Romans were able to rule without conflicts with native rulers. The Greeks had to deal with the Nabateans who had established a string of caravan city states (Petra in Jordan and Busra in the Hauran are outstanding examples). The Romans had to face the Palmyrians. Their capital, Palmyra, was the principal stop-over of the caravan route from Homs to the Euphrates.

In 324 A.D., the Emperor Constantine moved his capital from Rome to Byzantium. From there, Byzantians ruled Syria. At this point in history, a political situation, in many ways similar to that which prevailed

in the 18th and 20th c. A.D., was dominant. Three 'super-powers' to the east, the Persian (Zoroastrian Sassanians), to the north, the Byzantian (Christian Romans), and in the extreme south the Himyar (Yemenite, shortly to convert to Judaism) struggled with each other to assert their dominance in the Arabian peninsula.

The Arab population in the interior (Northern Arabian Plateau) during their period was chiefly composed of pastoral tribes and settled oases farmers. Surrounded by the three strong civilizations they became auxiliaries and clients of these states and often conducted raids on the behalf of their patrons. The Arab Lakhmid tribes were clients of the Persians. The Byzantian clients were the Ghassanids; Christian Arabs from whom many Syrians now trace their descent. And the Himyar clients were the tribes of Kinda.

Over the next three centuries, these and other non-allied tribes began to remove themselves from the always uncertain association with the foreign powers and move into the orbit of the sedentary oases of the Hijaz (especially Mecca). By the end of the 6th c. A.D. the Hijaz had grown, undisturbed by the 'super-powers' who were preoccupied with their own 'cold-war', into a major religious and commercial center.

In 603-628, the last great international war between the Byzantian and Persian Sassanian Empires took place leaving both forces badly depleted. The power of Mecca blossomed and between 622-632, Mohammed, an Arab of that city, set up a religiously organized society which shortly thereafter expanded over much of the Arabian Peninsula and eventually replaced the Sassanian and Byzantian powers.

The seventh century Islamic invasions into Syria and other regions were initially made possible by the enfeebled condition of the Byzantian and Persian empires. For several centuries thereafter, Sunni-Moslem Arab rule was dominant in the area (with non-Moslem, but Arab communities thriving as 'protected people'). By the 11th c., disintegration had set in and a Turkish people (from the East), the Seljuks, moved into the region re-establishing Sunni-Moslem rule over the area (1063, Alp Arslan). Shortly thereafter, the Frankish Crusaders moved into the region from the north defeating the Seljuks and setting up four feudal Latin States, Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli, and Jerusalem. Eventually, these non-Arab, non-Moslem states faced a new Moslem force. The Arab 'petty States' in Syria coalesced under the guidance of another Turkish peoples (the Kurd,

Zangi, his son Nur-id-Din and his grand-nephew Salah-id-Din) to form a united Moslem front to oppose the Crusaders. After the battle of Acre, a peace settlement was concluded (1192) leaving only a coastal strip under the control of the Crusaders.

In 1240, another invasion from the east occurred, this time it was the Mongols led by Hulagu Khan (1258) who sacked Baghdad, Aleppo, and Damascus. This force was finally repulsed by the Mamluks (mainly captured Turks, Kurds, Mongols, exiles, refugees who had become incorporated into the Moslem military and ruling society). Foremost among the Mamluks was Baybar, who united Egypt and Syria and contained the Mongol attack. One century later in 1387, another Mongol invasion occurred, directed by Timur (Tamerlane) who captured Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Baalbak and Damascus.

With the devastation of Timur, anarchy prevailed in the region accompanied by droughts, plagues and famines. The agricultural countryside was deserted. At this point an invasion or expansion of Bedouin tribes took place into the lower Euphrates and Mediterranean Coastline, resulting in mass rural migrations to the major urban centers.

By the early 16th c., with the re-conquest of the

region by the Sunni-Moslem Seljuk or Othmani Turks (Sultan Selim I 1517), Syria again experienced a period of prosperity and an expansion of agriculture into the border zone between the Mediterranean Coastline and the Arabian plateau. With this agricultural expansion, a number of Bedouin tribes were pushed back deeper into the Northern Arabian Plateau leaving the Mawali and Haddiddin sheep-raising tribes as the sole pastoral groups in the Syrian Badia.

By the mid-17th c. Ottoman military presence in the desert border areas (which had provided security for the agrarian population) was withdrawn - particularly in the area between Damascus and Homs - in order to support Mohammed IV's (1648-1687) war against Austria (Hourani, 1946:24). The Ottoman defeat outside of Vienna in 1683 was a turning point for the Arab provinces. With much of its military presence drawn out of the Middle East, its authority in outlying provinces grew weaker, especially on the fringes of the Badia. Here again, villages were abandoned, and fertile plains were turned to waste land. During this period, plagues and famine again occurred killing as many as two million people (Nutting, 1964:215).

Volney, a traveller in the region during the 1780's remarked that as a result of misgovernment, great parts

of the provinces were wasted and although 3200 villages were registered in government records, less than 400 could be found by the tax collector. "The traveller meets with nothing but houses in ruin, cisterns rendered useless and fields abandoned. Those who cultivate them are fled" (Volny, 1787: 377-379). Burckhart also describes numerous deserted villages in the Hauran and Golan (Burckhart, 1822).

With the power and effectiveness of the Ottoman Empire greatly reduced, numerous Bedouin tribes from the Nejd began to drift northward following traditional routes. This expansion was to continue for nearly 150 years, pushing the frontiers of pastoralism west through the borders of the Mediterranean Coastline.

The initial impetus behind the first phase of the Bedouin expansion was not fully understood. Perhaps the Nejd was experiencing drought or overpopulation (Burckhart, 1831; Weulersse, 1946:64). Moreover the emptiness of the Syrian Badia (except for the Mawali, and the Haddiddiin) at this time and the almost absolute lack of government authority in the region must have been a strong inducement for the tribes.

The second phase of the Bedouin 'invasion' was a direct reaction against the growing strength of an

Map 3 should be  
here

important "Unitarian" or Wahhabi reform movement in the Nejd. Some Bedouin tribes refused to submit to the exigencies of the government which had been formed by Ibn Saud under the banner of the Wahhabis. At the end of the 17th c., the "noble" camel-raising Shammar Confederacy of tribes invaded the region of Damascus. Unable to penetrate they turned towards Palmyra (Tudmur) and finally the Homs-Hama region. There they were resisted by the Mawali (a sheep-raising tribe of "noble origin")\* The Shammar then turned east to the Euphrates region (Oppenheim, 1939).

At the beginning of the 18th c., the first tribes of the "noble" camel-raising Aneza Confederation arrived and attempted to penetrate the region around Damascus. Unsuccessful in this, they turned to the Karyatin-Nebeck region. The Hassanna, one of the Aneza tribes, stopped in the region of Homs, while the Fed'aan, another Aneza tribe, continued north to Hama. These two tribes then allied themselves with the Mawali and pushed the Shammar further across the Euphrates into the Jezirah.

\*"Noble" is a term used to describe the Bedouin tribes that trace their apical ancestor back to Qais and Yemen (or Adnan and Kohtan, the older term), the two 'brothers' believed to have founded the Arab race. Implicit in this genealogy was the assumption that 'noble tribes' raise camels. 'Common tribes' referred to groups whose origins were unknown, and who generally raised sheep and served as clients to the 'noble' tribes.

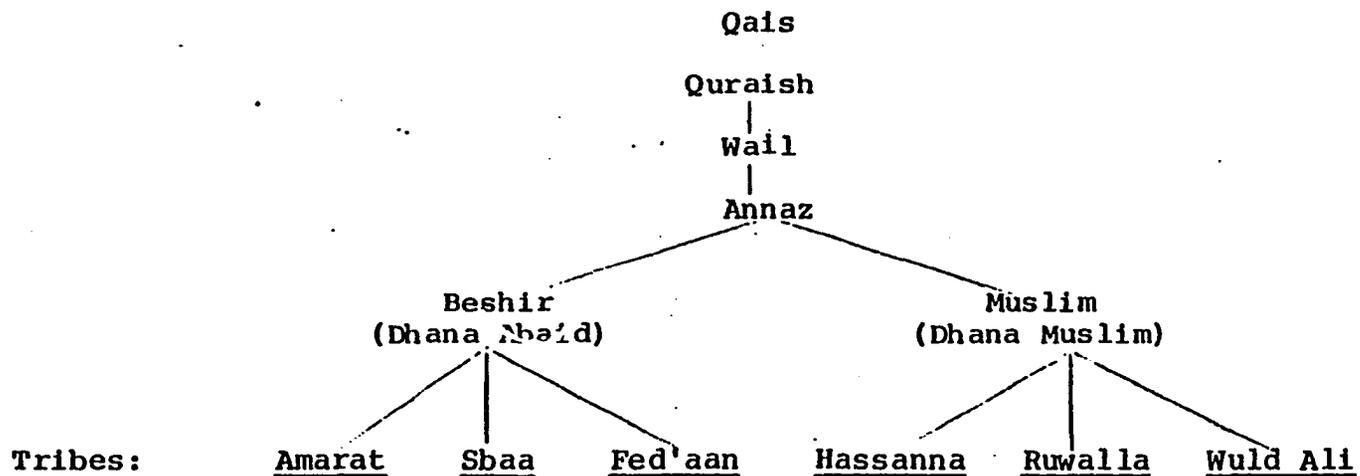
By the early 19th c., the Aneza tribes had established themselves firmly in the Badia of Syria. But their expansion into the Steppe and border zones of the Mediterranean Coastline were marked by strife, feud and war which affected the entire region. Once the Aneza tribes had pushed the Shammar across the Euphrates, they began to fight among themselves for dividing the newly conquered pasture lands. Aside from the Al-Hassanna who stopped in the Homs region, new Aneza tribes followed. These included the Sbaa, the Wuld Ali, some Amarat and lastly the Ruwalla (see figure No. 1).

These inter-tribal wars, particularly in the 1860-1870's greatly disturbed the security of the region. Bedouin institutions such as ghazu (raids) and khuwa (tribute) changed in nature. In the Syrian Badia, as the tribes attempted to establish their hegemony over a region, they had to deal with the settled populations as well. Ghazu lost its traditional characteristic of 'sport' or 'game' and assumed an almost desperate nature among the tribes and settlements in the region. Khuwa which was collected in greater quantities no longer represented the 'guarantee of security' as it had in the Nejd (see Bell, 1907:66).

The tribal struggle over pasture rights, water

Figure 1

ANEZA CONFEDERATION OF TRIBES



Source: Handbook of Nomads, Semi-Nomads, Semi-Sedentary, and Sedentary Tribes of Syria, G.S.I., Headquarters, 9th Army, 1942. London

rights, and influence on the border zone between the Arabian Plateau and the Mediterranean Coastline from Aleppo to the Hauran constituted a serious disruptive element in the Ottoman government's hold over the region. A period of reform was initiated (under Abdul Hamid II), and new methods were attempted in order to restore Ottoman military authority and thus initiate a period of greater safety and economic benefit for cultivators.

Small forts and police stations began to be established along the borders of marginal cultivated lands as far as Deir-ez-Zor. The Ottoman then initiated a policy which would encourage the tribes to exterminate themselves. Tribal feuds were instigated by Ottoman agents, and Turkish troops with modern arms were lent to one side or another. The most striking example of this policy was the last major battle among the tribes of the Aneza Confederacy. In 1875, Sattem Sha'laan of the Ruwalla hired Turkish troops to fight the Sbaa who were thereby overwhelmingly defeated (it was a case of rifles against lances).

Agricultural expansion was actively sponsored by the Ottoman. Colonization by indigenous peasants and landowners as well as immigrants was encouraged. Turkish

soldiers armed with Winchesters and breech loading Sniders manned new border garrisons, giving the agriculturalists the security they needed to increase in numbers and strength.

The most aggressive of these new settlers were the Circassians fleeing from the Russian occupation of the Caucasus. After 1870, Circassian villages sprang up near the desert border from the northern frontiers as far south as Amman. They occupied and cultivated land, while acting as an effective buffer against the Bedouin (they were also widely spread in the Hauran region).

The Druze, always effective in protecting their villages, pushed the frontiers of settlement further back. Efforts in Lebanon by Emir Beshir to break their power in south-central Lebanon resulted in a migration of the Druze to the Jabal Druze, Suweida and Leja area around 1860. There they established and maintained themselves in the face of opposition from the Bedouin tribes (i.e., Ruwala, Al-Fadl, Ahl-il-Jabal). Kurdish and Christian settlements were also founded in this area.

In the area of Hama and Salamiyah, new settlements pushing out into the very edge of the desert were formed by Alawite and peasant communities. Peasants in other regions, the Hauran, Homs, Hama and Aleppo districts began to return and reclaim their former villages. The

sheep-raising Bedouin tribes in the area were thus 'evicted', settled or surrounded by agricultural communities.

At the same time, some tribal settlements were taking place, especially in the area of Aleppo. Examples include several hundred Wulda tents, some Haddiddin and some of the Mawali. Very rarely did a whole tribe settle. Some sections combined pastoralism with agriculture.

The Ottoman government began to assist settlers by granting special privileges and tax remissions. Vast areas which had recently been secured by Ottoman military rule near the frontier were declared state domain and settlers on these lands were granted special terms. Thus, the most recent pastoral expansion or invasion into the marginal agricultural areas of the late 17th and 18th c. began to be pushed back east by the agricultural 'Eastward Movement' of the late 19th c. and early 20th c.

With the Versailles settlements after World War I dividing "Greater Syria" into numerous mandate territories, new immigrations of minorities took place. (In their Mandate, the French sought to increase their strength by following a policy of 'divide and rule'. Thus they explicitly supported all religious minorities

thereby weakening any Arab nationalist movement).

France created the predominantly Christian country of Lebanon by uniting the old Ottoman Province of Mount Lebanon with the coastal cities of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon and Tyre, and the predominantly Moslem plain of the Beqaa valley. Even today a number of families in the Beqaa valley have strong family and economic ties with Damascus.

The rest of Syria was divided into five semi-dependent parts accentuating religious differences and cultivating regional as against national sentiment, (e.g. the Jabal Druze, Aleppo, Latakia, Damascus and Alexandretta.) The Druze were given a separate administration in the Jabal Druze. The northern coastal region and the Jabal Al-Nasayriyah (with a concentration of Syria's largest religious minority, the Alawites) were united into the state of Latakia. Further north, the district of Alexandretta (Hatay, Turkey), with a sizeable Turkish minority, was given a separate government. Aleppo and Damascus were later united into one province (1925), and the Bedouin in the Jezirah were encouraged to set up their own nation supervised by the Contrôle Bedouin - a special French unit administering all Bedouin affairs.

Under the French, Syria became a refuge for persecuted groups in neighboring countries. After the 'still birth' of the treaty of Sèvres in 1920 emigration of Kurdish communities from Iraq and Turkey into Syria occurred (between 1924-1938). With the cession of Cilicia to Turkey, thousands of Armenians sought refuge in Syria. With the installation of a Maronite oriented state in Lebanon, the emigration of the Druze families from Lebanon into the Jabal Druze increased. Assyrians, under attack in Iraq in 1933 emigrated to Syria as well. Mass migrations of tribes were also occurring. In 1921, after the Aneza Ibn Saud's (Saudi Arabia) success in spreading Wahhabi rule and defeating the Shammar of Hail, 5000 tents left the Nejd and took refuge in the Jezirah.

The reception and resettlement, especially of Armenians, Kurds, and later Assyrians and Catholic Christian refugees was a fundamental concern of the French Mandatory Power. Refugees were collected from all the Mandate territory and systematically resettled in separate communities along the borders of cultivated land in the Jezirah. The Armenians, in particular, were resettled in special farming villages. The Assyrians were relocated in eastern Syria in twenty villages along the Khabur River. Other Armenians were

resettled in major cities so that by 1937, 43,000 were resettled in Aleppo, 8,000 in Damascus and several hundreds in Homs and Hama.

D. RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS

The mosaic or plural socio-cultural make-up of Syrian society is derived not only from the extensive history of invasions, conquests, emigrations and immigrations of conquering or refugee populations; it is also derived from the very nature of Islam as a religion and way of life and from Islam's attitude toward other religious communities (see Figure No. 2).

Islam, in addition to being a system of religious beliefs and practices, is an all encompassing way of life. It recognizes no distinctions between 'church' and 'state'. Religious and secular life merge as do religious and secular law.

For a Moslem all social life must take place within a religious community. Thus, the religious group in Syria (and any Moslem country) has an importance in daily life far exceeding that found in the West. An important tenet of Islam was the conversion of the "infidel" to the true faith. However, the "People of the Book", the Christians and Jews whose religions formed the historical basis of Islam were specifically exempted.

Adapted  
from:

MIDDLE EAST REVIEW FALL 1976

Ethic and Religious Comments of The  
Syrian Arab Republic

Estimated population (mid-1975): 7,350,000

Community	Size	% of total population	Religion	Language	Occupation	Region
1. Alawites	500-600,000 (1968)	11.5	Islamic sect	Arabic	Military officers but majority poor farmers	Mountain of Alawites in northwestern part of Syria Also in district of Lataqiyah
2. Armenians	175,000 (1968) est. 170,000	n.a.	Monophysite, Armenian Orthodox and Uniate Catholic	Armenian	Traders, small-industry, crafts	75% in Aleppo
3. Bedouin	n.a.	2-3	Sunni Muslim	Arabic		
4. Assyrians + Chaldeans	est. 30-55,000 (1968)	n.a.	Nestorian Christians + branch of Assyrian church	Syriac	Engage in small scale agriculture	Khabur
5. Circassians	20-25,000 (1968)	n.a.	Sunni Muslims	Circassians; increasingly Arabic speaking	peasants	Southwestern Hawran

Community	Size	% of total population	Religion	Language	Occupation	Region
6. Druze	120-150,000 (1968) est. 200,000	3+	Offshoots of Isma'ilyya sect	Arabic	Mountain peasants	Jabal-al-Druz, Suwayda
7. Greek Catholics	65,000 (1968)	n.a.	Greek Catholic (follow Byzantine rite)	Greek Arabic	n.a.	n.a.
8. Greek Orthodox	200,000 (1968)	n.a.	Greek Orthodox	Syriac liturgy	n.a.	n.a.
9. Isma'lis	50,000 (1968)	n.a.	Offshoot of Shi'i Muslims	Arabic	peasants	Hama province south of Salamiya
10. Jews	3,000 (1968)	n.a.	Judaism	Arabic; Hebrew is liturgical language	Peddlers, shopkeepers, money-changers, artisans	Damascus (300), Aleppo (1,200), Qamishly (300)
11. Kurds	400,000 (1968)	7	Sunni Moslem	Kurdish	unskilled laborers, supervisors, foremen (used as front-line forces in 1973 war. Now on Iraqi border)	Northeast border - have been uprooted and deprived of citizenship status and rights
12. Latins	5,000 (1968)		Roman Catholic	Arabic	n.a.	n.a.
13. Maronites	20,000 (1968)		Eastern Christian	Syriac liturgy, Arabic	n.a.	n.a.

Community	Size	% of total population	Religion	Language	Occupation	Region
14. Palestinians	PLO figure is 155,000 (1975)		Sunni Muslim	Arabic	n.a. some in administration, army	n.a.
15. Protestants	15,000 (1968)	n.a.	all denominations	Arabic	n.a.	n.a.
16. Shi'ites (Mutawalis)	15,000 (1968)	n.a.	Shi'ite Muslims	Arabic	n.a.	Aleppo, Homs
17. Sunnis	4,500,000 (1971) 90% Arabs and 10% Kurds	70	Sunni Muslim	Arabic	all types	majority in all but two provinces
18. Syrian Catholics + Syrian Orthodox (Jacobites)	95,000 (1968)	n.a.	Uniate Church and Monophysite Christians	Syriac and Arabic	n.a.	n.a.
19. Turcomans	60,000 (1965)	n.a.	Sunni Moslems	Turkic	Semi-nomadic herdsmen and settled agriculturalists	n.a.
20. Yazidis	3,000 (1968)	n.a.	Offshoot of Islam	Kurdish dialect; use Arabic in religious rites	n.a.	Aleppo, Jazirah

These people were to be permitted to continue in their religious beliefs and practices so long as they did not proselytize or otherwise interfere with the practice of Islam.

During the Ottoman period, Syrian society was organized around the concept of the milla or millet (autonomous religious community). The non-Moslem ahl-il-kitaab or "People of the Book" who lived in areas of Moslem occupation were called Dhimmis. They were required to pay taxes to the government. In return, they were allowed to govern themselves according to their own religious law (e.g., birth, education, marriage, death, inheritance), and in their own cultural spheres. These communities, excluded from the jurisdiction of Islamic law, were remarkably distinct, each following its own customs, wearing its own particular dress, and often forming the total population of a rural district or urban quarter. For example, the Christians who represent about 8% of the population and antedate Islam in Syria by centuries, have not been converted and their existence has been tolerated by their Moslem neighbors.

Within Islam itself there are a number of splinter groups that form semi-autonomous religious communities. After the Prophet's death in 632 A.D., he was succeeded

as leader by four orthodox Caliphs all chosen by a general consensus of the community. The Islamic community split over the issue of the selection of the 5th Caliph. A few favored succession through the hereditary line of the 4th Caliph, Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law, Ali. The majority felt that the new leader should be chosen consensually by the community at large as had been the case earlier. During Ali's five year reign, he was recognized as fourth Caliph by most of the Islamic community. Upon his death, Muawiyah, the Umayyad governor of Syria, who had earlier challenged Ali's right to the Caliphate, was proclaimed Caliph in Damascus, founding the Umayyad Caliphate. The main body of the Islamic community accepted him and his successors. They came to be referred to as Sunnis, those who follow the Sunna (the way of the Prophet).

The followers of Ali, Shiat Ali, later simply called Shiites, refused to recognize Muawiyah and withdrew from the larger community, establishing their own spiritual leadership. This was the first major division of the Islamic community.

Shiism later split into a number of sub-divisions, each developing historically from the disputes over the succession of Imams who for Shiites are men chosen by God.

Shiites  
1. Twelvers  
2. Seveners (Ismailis)  
3. Alawites

The main body of Shiism is the Twelvers who recognize a succession of twelve Imams, the last who disappeared in 878 A.D. and is expected to return as the Mahdi, to institute his divine rule on earth. The Twelvers make up some 40,000 Shiites most of who live in the Aleppo and Homs area.

Two other Shiite offshoots in Syria are those of the Ismailis (the Seveners) who dispute the identity of the seventh Imam and whose visible Imam continues the succession to the present day and the Alawites, who diefy Ali as the incarnation of God.

Ismailis in Syria gained notoriety during the Crusades when, as a mystical society called the Hashashiins (the Assassins), they harassed both the Crusaders and Salah-id-diin by conducting numerous assassinations. The community continues to the present day recognizing the Aga Khan as its head. Originally clustered in the Latakia province, most of the Syrian Ismailis have re-settled south of Salamiyah (after a land grant from the Sultan Abdul Hamid II 1876-1909).

The Alawites or Nusayris, Syria's largest minority,, live mainly in the Latakia province, where they form over 60% of the population. The Alawites are believed to be descended from people who lived in the region at the time of Alexander the Great. After hundreds of

years of Ismaili influence, the Alawites moved into the orbit of Islam. In common with Ismaili Shiites, Alawites believe in a system of divine incarnation. Unlike the Ismailis, Alawites regard Ali as the incarnation of God.

One sect of the Shiites, the Fatimids, established themselves in Egypt (11th-12th c.). Under the Caliph Abu Ali Mansur (996-1021) persecution of non-Moslems reached its height as he advanced north against Syria destroying churches and driving Christians into the mountains. Hakim claimed to be divine and it was (in south-west Syria), in the secluded valleys of Mt. Hermon in Syria, that his followers found tribesmen to adopt his religion. These people were the ancestors of the present day Druze.

Considering the ecological, historical and religious realities described above, it is easy to understand why a 'refuge or peril' outlook is a prominent characteristic of the diverse communities that make up the Syrian population. Protection from invasion or persecution and refuge on the one hand and reaffirmation of their distinctive community nature on the other hand characterizes the physical density and structure of many of these communities whether in the countryside or in urban centers.

The mountainous terrain along the coast has long protected the development of autonomous and heretical religious groups. Here, one found walled towns. And villages, in so far as that was possible, were perched on hilltops, even though this sometimes put them some distance from water resources. While it remains true that a town or village had to have a water source and a defensible position to guarantee its foundation and continued existence, it is clear, even from a glance at a detailed map of the country, that the water source was often sacrificed for the sake of defense. The Alawayite mountains are a good example, where until late in the 19th c. considerations of defense make it imperative for the towns to have walls - a matter which of necessity limited the area of expansion and forced people to have narrow lanes, often covered by vaults.

In the open plains of Syria along the borders of the Arabian plateau, small villages were protected, either by the homogeneity and extent of their community in the region or by their very isolation. Often this form of defense was not sufficient, leaving the community no recourse except the abandonment of the village and mass migration to cities in the face of external threat or uncommon hardship.

In the past, as well as today, when there have been massive movements of rural populations to the city, the result was, often, one of urban groups that did not lose their fierce tribal loyalties on settling in the city. Rather, they preserved the habits of social organization more appropriate to agricultural or pastoral life (Lapidus, 1970:199). In urban centers, each community formed a neighborhood or harah (quarter) based on linguistic, ethnic or religious identity. Jews, Christians, Moslems, ethnic groups, Arabs, Kurds and others lived separately. Among the Sunni Moslems majority affiliation to one of the schools of law, tribal ties or common village origin drew people together into a quarter. In times of danger or unrest the quarters organized their own defense, setting up barricades and gates and in extremes, in later Ottoman times, were even walled off from one another. They were not, however, isolated ghettos, but adjacent streets and districts of the city.

\* ✓ Socially, the loyalties of city people were and still are less attached to the city than to their immediate neighborhood community where refuge could be found in the face of numerous perils. Even a cursory walk through the old quarters of Damascus reveals how intense these neighborhood (harah) loyalties are. Here, the cleanli-

ness of a street, interrupted by a garbage heap, indicates the border between two harahs - a 'no-man's' zone. And children, rather than be admonished not to "cross the street" as in the West, are told not to leave the harah.

The Ottoman and later French Mandate authorities treated each ethnic, linguistic and religious community as a distinct social entity. Thus, the mosaic of peoples that made up the Syrian population until World War II was very much a kaleidoscope of components. That which tied the components concerned in a common bond was the necessary re-affirmation of the identity or distinctiveness of each unit. At independence, legislation was passed abolishing laws which treated these communities as distinct social entities (e.g. abolition of tribal laws, 1950). But legislation does not change social behavior (a number of these laws were later abrogated). And even given new political and economic realities, one generation is not long enough to change patterns of social organization developed over centuries to deal with ecological and historical realities. It is just these realities which must be kept in mind in order to better understand Syrian society today.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Despite the distinctiveness of the components of Syrian society (i.e. the ethnic, religious and linguistic communities as well as the separate sectors of its ecological trilogy) there are threads holding the separate units together as a composite whole. These are the fundamental patterns of behavior that have developed over centuries in response to common historical and ecological constraints.

Once these basic patterns, common to all elements of Syrian society, are understood, the variations that make for a "cultural mosaic" can be tackled on a case by case basis as the need arises. (To attempt to factor out the differences rather than understand the basics at this point would not only be premature, but also completely "beyond the scope of this essay".)

As with any society, the fundamental unit of organization in Syrian society is the family. An understanding of patterns of behavior at this level can provide for general grasp of cultural attitudes and world views. These, in turn, impinge not only on the behavior of the individual in Syrian society, but also upon the success or failure

of any development projects which directly or indirectly affect the Syrian population.

A. Family Organization: Individual versus Group

Considering the variety of Syrian society, how can we speak of THE Syrian family? To do so is to ignore certain differences between urban and rural areas, modern businessmen and unskilled labourers, university graduates and illiterates and, of course, Moslem and Christians. Yet one can profitably discuss the Moslem family (85% of the Syrian population) in general, despite these differences because it displays certain patterns common throughout the Syrian population as a whole. This is the result of the prevailing influence of common ecological and historical factors as well as Islam and its prescriptions for family life. Furthermore one must also consider the strength of tradition in the Arab world, and the confinement thus far of profound social change to the wealthier and more educated classes in the cities.

In this respect, Dr. Kazem Daghestani, a Syrian sociologist, has managed to describe a pattern of family life in Syria. His work, though conducted in the 1930's is quite illuminating especially when evaluated with the

numerous recent studies of adjacent communities in Jordan and Lebanon. (Daghestani, 1932).

Within all of Syria's communities, life centers around the family. The individual's loyalty to his family is nearly absolute and generally overrides all other obligations. Except in more Westernized urban circles, the individual's standing as a social being depends on his family background. To ask a Syrian where he is from usually draws a response not of geographical region, but of family origin. The individual's attitude, his loyalty to his kin group, his obligations and rights in the life of community as well as his political and social attachments are vividly illustrated in this widespread Arab saying:

I against my brothers  
I and my brothers against my cousins  
I and my brothers and my cousins against the world

In the West, it is the individual who can act and accomplish tasks alone, whereas [in Syrian society, activity requires the support of a group - generally the kin group in economic, social and political affairs.] Alone there is peril while as a group there is support and refuge. In this vein, one should note the concept of 'amoral familism' first coined by Banfield in describing a northern Mediterranean society. In much the same way,

Syrians employed in modern bureaucratic positions find great difficulty in attaining 'western' impersonal impartiality. This western concept conflicts with the deeply held traditional value of family solidarity.

*How so the  
reflect it in  
the decision-making.*

[Similarly there is no ingrained feeling of duty towards a job, an employer, or even a friend.] The Arab saying quoted above attests to the widespread conviction that the only reliable people are one's kinsmen. Thus, an office holder tends to select his kinsmen as fellow workers not only because of a sense of responsibility for them, but also because of the feeling of trust between them. Commercial establishments are largely family operations staffed by cousins or nephews of the owner. And cooperation among traditional and some modern business firms may be determined by the presence or absence of kinship ties between the heads of firms. There is no basis for a close relationship except kinship.

#### B. Structure of the family

The structure of the Arab family, Moslem or Christian is basically the same as that of the Western family but the former has changed less. As in the West, descent is reckoned through the males, and the father is the head of the family; the Arab father, however, exercises

greater authority. The Arab family is an extended one. The household generally consists of a man, his wife, his unmarried sons and daughters, his married sons, wives and children. Among the urban, educated classes, however, the married couples usually set up their own household, forming the 'conjugal' or 'nuclear' family including only husband and wife and children. Though no reliable information is available, there appears to be a tendency for these 'nuclear' families to set up households in close proximity to the groom's father's household. Studies conducted in Beirut by Dr. F. Khuri indicate that there, even among the educated classes, kin units though composed of nuclear families tended to occupy the same or adjacent modern building complexes.

In a Syrian community family solidarity is highly valued and consequently so too is the obedience of children. In the three generation household, it is the senior generation which is in charge, the father is the head of the home and the mother is the supervisor of the household. Even in the more recently developed two generation household, obedience is still stressed and grown children are respectful and obedient to parents into adulthood whether living in the same household or not. In fact it is not uncommon for men in their thirties

or forties to show subservience to their elders. Very often the Westerner mistakenly expects the most "educated" or "westernized" individual in a family to be the decision-maker, where in fact it is the elder who holds that special role.

Individual families form larger units (minimal lineages) based on patrilineal descent from a common ancestor. In cities, villages, and in tribes, these units are the basic organizing divisions. They maintain a corporate identity in tribal and village affairs. In urban centers they often constitute residential neighborhoods or quarters. These [minimal lineages are recognized by the names of their founding ancestor and are called Beits.] In tribal society (e.g. the Bedouin, the Druze, the Alawite<sup>2</sup>, the Kurds, the Turkman) these Beits or minimal lineages form the basis for wider forms of economic, social and political organizations - the gabila (tribe). For example, among the Bedouin tribes, a number of lineages claiming descent from a more distant ancestor are drawn together to form a fakhad (maximal lineage) with a fakhad leader (sheikh). These leaders are then linked directly to the head of the gabila, sometimes called Sheikh or Emir. The gabila, fakhad, the Beit and the extended family thus forms an organiza-

tion based on a real or 'fictive' series of overlapping kin groups descended from one apical ancestor.

The most significant independent unit within the tribal kinship system is the khamseh, a group of patrilineal male relatives, which identifies itself by its blood relationship to a direct forebear (i.e. through the grandfather = ego, brothers, father, uncles, and uncles' sons form a khamseh unit).] It is within this unit, especially in the past when cases of homicide-vengeance were common, that security needs were highly significant. Outside this unit, the individual's possessions, his family and his very life were or could be exposed to danger. Within this unit, there was safety. These blood ties were the basis of actual cooperation and mutual aid in danger. Even today this unit is operative especially among some Bedouin, Druze, Kurdish, and Alawite communities.

Blood ties were and to some extent still are important in urban centers as well as among tribal communities. [Many quarters in Syrian cities were formed around kin groups.] In Damascus, until recently, whole harahs were owned by a family (e.g. Azem, Halbouni, Midani, Qudsi, Mahani, Quwatli). In Homs, up to the late 1950's, the Bab-Houd quarter was the home of the

Atasi. Other families, like the Sibai, the Duroubi, the Jandali, and the Jundi all had their own residential areas. In each quarter, social and economic activities were very intense among the kin group. The same situation held true for Aleppo where the Kayali, Shuweihneh, Mahhouk, Beck families formed important residential, social, economic and political units.

### C. Marriage and Divorce

Daghestani's observations about Syrian Moslem marriage may also be applied generally to the country as a whole. Marriage is very much a union between two families, not two individuals. [Ideally one should marry within his lineage.] Parallel cousins, or the children of two brothers are considered the most appropriate mates. This is particularly true among the Bedouin, where the ibn amm (son of father's brother) or bint amm (daughter of father's brother) marriages are frequent. In other regions, particularly in villages throughout the country, the ibn amm has first priority to marry the bint amm. Occasionally special arrangements must be made by a girl's other suitor to release her from this obligation. In the major urban centers, however, the custom is breaking down especially among the middle classes. Often

the wealthy marry within their family to keep property holdings within the lineage while the poor do so to lower the bride-wealth (mahr) made by a man to the bride and her family. In Syria, husband and wife usually call each other ibn ammi or bint ammi (son or daughter of my father's brother) even though they may not be so related.

Marriage between first cousins is common among the Druze, Kurds and Turkoman. It is forbidden among the Circassian and Christian. Even so, those groups that forbid marriage of first cousins encourage the marriage of more distant cousins, and thereby generally preserve a lineage endogamy. Marriage is thus viewed as a practical bond between families and often has political and economic overtones even among the poorer people.

Though still permitted, polygamy is declining, especially in cities but also in villages and among pastoral tribes. The rising level of education of both men and women, economic changes, legal changes, and new moral and religious ideas are bringing forth a society in which polygamy has become increasingly anachronistic, although recently a number of such marriages have been contracted among the educated, urban wealthy sector. Moreover, most polygamy today is accounted for by men

with two wives only. Among the Bedouin, most cases of polygamy are ones where the first wife proved barren, and rather than divorce her, a second wife was taken to bear children.

The rules of divorce in Syrian Arab Moslem society have until recently been governed exclusively by the Koran (ch. 2 verses 226-38) which like the Old Testament, gives only men the right to dissolve a marriage. The husband until recently dissolved the marriage merely by saying to his wife three times in the presence of witnesses "I divorce you". In so doing, he was required to complete the mahr (bride-price payment) he had not paid at the time of the marriage. A divorced wife returned to her father's family and usually found little difficulty in marrying again.

In fact, [a married woman's ties with her own parental kinsmen are never weakened.] As a wife, she is expected to support her husband and his family. But as a daughter, she maintains the moral support of her father and brothers. Often she will put their interests before those of her husband. Furthermore, her father's household always remains open to her and in case of a dispute with her husband, she may return to her father's house (a frequent occurrence in urban, rural and tribal areas).

Traditionally a woman could obtain a divorce from her husband only by going to a religious court and demanding that the judge require the husband to divorce her.

More recently, women have taken to writing specific terms in their marriage contracts regarding their right to divorce or their husband's right to take additional wives. Also, the institution of mahr required to conclude a marriage contract, of which 2/3 are held by the groom to be transferred to the bride in case of death or divorce, serves to act as a brake against hasty divorce. In Bedouin society, today, 40,000-50,000 S.P. is not uncommon, nor is that an unusually high figure in some urban centers.

On December 31, 1975, new Syrian legislation concerning marriage, divorce and child custody was passed.

Legislation No. 34 decrees that:

1. divorce initiated by the husband must be presented to the court. The court then imposes a one month period of waiting during which time a reconciliation is to be attempted. At the end of that period, the judge decides whether or not to grant a divorce;
2. second wives can only be taken with the consent of the court. Just cause, such as barrenness

or sickness of the first wife must be proven as well as the husband's ability to support both wives equally;

3. divorce initiated by the wife must also be presented to the court. Again a one month period for attempted reconciliation is mandatory. After this waiting period, the judge determines whether to grant the divorce and whether all or part of the mahr then goes to the wife;
4. divorce with children: Children remain with the mother, supported by the father until male children reach ten years of age and female children reach eleven years of age, at which time they return to the paternal family. If the father or Wali (the grandfather or uncle) is determined to be unfit by the court, then the children remain with the mother until the female children marry and the male children become of legal age (18 years). Should the divorced woman remarry, then the children are placed in the custody of the maternal grandmother if she is able to care for them, otherwise they are placed in the custody of the

paternal grandmother, the sister of the mother, the sister of the mother's mother and so on down the line of kinship.

Though there have been a number of legal changes to protect the rights of women, such legislation, though based on new public attitudes, usually takes a long time to reach the traditional communities where older customs prevail.

Inheritance and succession in Syrian society are handled in much the same manner as descent. Important property holdings and positions of leadership are passed down within the lineage patrilaterally, from one male paternal kinsman to another. Inheritance of all forms of property among Moslems is governed by the detailed rules set forth in the Koran (ch. 4 verse 12). [A Moslem may in his will freely dispose of only 1/3 of his property, the remainder must be distributed in accordance with Koranic prescriptions.] Sons inherit equally and each one twice as much as a daughter. A daughter who is an only child inherits half the property. A wife inherits a quarter, if there are no children, but only an eighth if there are children to share the legacy. In general a woman when holding title to land, passes it on to her brothers to control, in exchange for the security

they provide her in time of need. [In the past these detailed inheritance rules often led to extreme fragmentation of land holdings. It will be interesting to see to what extent the agrarian land reform laws of the 1960's will affect this traditional process of fragmentation.]

The high value Syrians place on family solidarity, the respect and obedience accorded family elders, the strong bonds for mutual self-help and cooperation within a tight group of kinsmen are traditional patterns of association still very prevalent among most of the various communities which make up the Syrian population. The family still serves as a form of elementary social security. It provides welfare assistance to its members, refuge to its women (e.g. repudiated, divorced), and a home for its elderly. Educational opportunities by agnatic sponsorship (khamseh) of its promising youth is quite common, especially among the Druze and the Kurds. Employment opportunities through its wide kinship and wastah network are common throughout the population. The family in Syrian society today still maintains a united front in the face of external danger or peril.

D. Male and Female Roles

The roles of men and women in Syria can best be described as dichotomous in nature. There is a public and a private world. The public, formal world is very much the stage for men, while the private, informal world is the stage for women. Caution should be used however as the boundaries between these two spheres do not always fall into Western categories of public/private, where the home or house of the nuclear family is the private sphere and everything else becomes public domain.

*what does this mean in terms of kinship?*

In Syrian society, the 'private' sphere encompasses not only the extended family household, but does at times include the family neighborhood in cities and sections of villages in rural areas or as among the Bedouin an entire camping area. The critical point is the presence or absence of "strangers". For example, among the Bedouin, the women's "private" sphere extends over the entire camp where only kin are present. The appearance of a "stranger" closes up the sphere, so that to the stranger, it appears as though women are not present or secluded in another section of the tent or camp. Frequent visitors, such as itinerant traders or merchants are often addressed in kinship terms like

"akhi" or "ammi", and temporarily brought into the fold of the private sphere and thereby do not interfere with the regular flow of women's daily work.

In the public sphere, male and female worlds are strictly separated. Men and women seek friendship, amusement and entertainment with their own sex. Contact between the two sexes takes place primarily within the private sphere of the home or neighborhood. This, however, should not be taken to mean that the women's contribution to the economic, social or political well-being of the kin group and family is inferior to men's. In rural and tribal areas, women contribute equally on a complementary basis to the group well-being. Roles are strictly divided and there is very little cross-over of duties. In agricultural areas, women carry out at least half, if not more, of the burden of agricultural work in the fields as well as in the homes. [In pastoral societies, women own and have financial responsibility for the home (the tent). In addition they milk the herds of sheep and goat daily, while the men who own the flocks are responsible for herding them.] In urban centers, where women have been traditionally more secluded, their present role is difficult to assess. No recent studies of any value are available, but the high level of female

presence in the urban labour force, government offices, police force, army as well as their high enrollment in secondary schools and universities indicate that profound changes are taking place in the urban society.

In fact, the General Union of Women in 1978 had established 653 units throughout the country to assist women in entering the work force through vocational training, child-care centers and literacy programs. To what extent they are operational and utilized by women in rural areas remains to be studied. However all these programs focus on tasks which "relieve" women from household responsibilities. Programs which actively train women in non-household activities and skills, in improved agricultural and 'light' industrial skills could also be considered in the future. The traditional idea of the subservient and secluded woman must be re-examined, especially if women's role in National Development is to be fully exploited.

#### E. Belief System and Values

What kind of person is the Syrian? To the social scientist such a question is exasperating. As one begins to think of statements that can be made, more and more qualifications follow. Having taken a very

brief look at some of the socio-historical forces in Syria, I will try to deal with a limited number of concepts which appear to be prevalent in Syria. I take it for granted that no one expects a summary statement to describe all Syrians in all their individuality. What I shall attempt to do is to delineate a group of traits encompassed by the Syrians in their variety, a kind of modal point which they approximate in varying degrees. What I shall try to describe has many ecological and historical sources, such as the Bedouin values that permeate Syrian society, as well as Islam and the claims on the religious system itself.

1. attitudes towards women

Traditionally women are viewed as weaker than men in all aspects and therefore in need of protection particularly from other men. This attitude is associated with Islam but does not necessarily flow from it. Islamic doctrine does not require such a relationship between the sexes; but what matters is what one argues from Islamic doctrine. In recent years male and female Moslem advocates of women's emancipation have turned to Islamic doctrine to buttress their position of female emancipation just as the defenders of female seclusion have appealed to doctrine to prevent changes. Moslem women

have recently taken up the issue arguing basically that Islam far from enforcing female subordination actually raised the status of women from its pre-Islamic pagan level. The major points are:

- (1) the veiling of women antedates Islam;
- (2) Islam permits women to retain their names after marriage, to dispose of property without the mediation of husband or guardian, to be themselves guardians over minor children, to follow any trade or profession without the husband's approval;
- (3) Islam gave women inheritance rights they had not earlier enjoyed;
- (4) Islam did not introduce polygamy but limited it, and protected women to some extent from the abuses of the man's right to divorce (Husseini, 1953;440-50).

De Jure all this is true, but de facto women in traditional Islamic societies have not assumed all these rights. However [there is nothing in Islamic doctrine which cannot be reasonably interpreted today to support the trends towards the emancipation of women.] Nor should there be any great difficulty in implementing programs for further integrating women into the work force as long as the total society is involved.

## 2. concepts of honour and shame

The attitude towards women in the plural socio-cultural Syrian society springs very much from two re-

lated concepts which are the constant pre-occupation of individuals in any smallscale, exclusive society where face to face personal as opposed to anonymous relations are of paramount importance. Honour or sharaf which is inherited from the family has to be constantly asserted and vindicated. Thus, a man's share of honour is largely determined by his own behavior and the behavior of his kinsmen, particularly his near agnatic kin. Sharaf can thus be described as "honour" which is acquired either by personal achievement or through belonging to a certain kin-group (family). In this sense sharaf can be subject to increase or decrease, to development or deterioration according to the conduct of the person and his kin. For women of a kin group or family, there is an exclusive term for their honour, Ird - a rather difficult term to translate - used only in connection with female chastity, prudence and continence. Women, thus, can and do play a conspicuous role in determining the honour of a family and lineage in a unique and decisive way that cannot be ignored or minimized. Ird differs from sharaf in that sharaf can be acquired or augmented through right behavior and achievement, whereas Ird can only be lost by the 'misconduct' of the woman. And once lost, it cannot be regained." Thus in many

*Sharafa*

*Ahmed  
Abou-Zaid*

penalty for  
of sins

respects the total honour of a family depends largely on the Ird of their women. Consequently the conduct of women is expected to be circumspect, modest, decorous and their virtue above reproach. [The slightest rumour of a woman's 'misconduct' could irreparably destroy the honour of the family.] Thus, female virginity before marriage and sexual purity afterwards are essential to the maintenance of family honour. [The institution of seclusion and veiling can thus be seen as an attempt to preserve family honour,] especially in highly populated areas full of non-kinsmen. [Veiling is not practiced in villages or tribes] where severe rules for the behavior of one sex towards another are universally respected and deviants seriously punished. At one time, in towns and cities it was considered a sign of elevated status to keep women secluded and veiled (the veil representing an extension of the private sphere within the public domain). By the late 1970's veiling was not generally practiced, except by some older women in a few communities and in more traditional urban centers as Hama, Homs and Aleppo.

3. hospitality and hostility: egotism and conformity

The Syrian seems to hold two major contradictory impulses: egotism and conformity. The first takes the

form of extreme self assertion before others. The second takes the form of obedience to certain group norms. There are two possible explanations for this paradox. Individual rivalry is itself engendered by the values of the group (e.g. the family, the lineage, the tribe, religious or national group to which the individual owes allegiance). Each of these groups has a fierce sense of self-identity and of difference from others [but no one of them is able to command enough loyalty to preclude the hostility of the smaller groups within it.] Dr. Jamil Salibi points to some interesting aspects of the Syrian's individualism as it relates to civic order. The individuals ask "the government to plant their deserts with figs and olives, to make wells gush forth, to revive the land for them and to guarantee their livelihood. But whenever they are called upon to work in cooperation, they object and each one prefers to do the work individually...as though any system imposed from outside must be inherently chaotic because it must be composed of the incompatible inclinations, desires and interests of individuals" (Saliba, 1968).

What happens when two exaggerated egos meet? They either clash or find some mode of accommodation. These are the extremes of Syrian interpersonal relations:

excessive hostility alternating with excessive politeness. Politeness and hospitality are Bedouin virtues Arabs extolled long before the rise of Islam. In the desert, hospitality comes about as a means of overcoming the individual's helplessness in a harsh environment. The extension of hospitality to a traveller implies reciprocal treatment of him at some later time. In villages and cities, a different function has come to be added to this pattern of behavior. Here (it serves to <sup>hospitality</sup> control the tendency of the ever-present hostility to burst into violence.) Exaggerated hospitality and politeness are reactions to exaggerated hostility, at least in part.

Syrian life is filled with interpersonal rivalry, tribal feuds in the Badia, family and village feuds in settled areas, and intergroup hostility in urban areas. [Politeness is a means of maintaining enough distance to prevent aggressive tendencies from becoming actual.] Hospitality and generosity are means of demonstrating friendliness while warding off expected aggression. Such measures as excessive politeness (a form of avoidance) or hospitality (a form of ingratiation in a situation where intimacy cannot be avoided) appear at times to be absolutely necessary if social life is to be maintained.

[ Interpersonal relations seem to be largely directed at avoiding or covering up the slightest tendency towards expressions of difference.] There are few formal mechanisms for serious discussions of opposing beliefs without a display of intense animosity; except among a few highly educated members of one elite group or another. Here in fact, one should note how difficult it sometimes is to assess the Syrian official's reaction to project proposals. Very often a mildly positive or neutral stand is taken rather than a negative one until there is no longer any option but to disagree.

A corollary attitude of hostility, suspicion, perhaps very much a heritage of centuries of arbitrary rule by native and foreign predators has cultivated among the population as a whole a fear of revealing personal facts. (The whole tenor of society is one which encourages self esteem and personal worth on the one hand while on the other hand discourages the public display of possessions.) In the private sphere these become the essence of hospitality. While openness and friendliness are valued, suspicion is never dissipated. A popular saying collected by Burckhart, but still relevant today, tells of one who says in reply to an offer for something, that his sack is not big enough to hold it. The advice is precisely the opposite of that given in

knowledge  
of  
self?  
rely?

the maxim popular in the West "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth". The Syrian feels that a gift is just what one ought to question, and the terse parable implies that an apparently selfless donor is not to be trusted.

Furthermore, Syrians do not like to give information about themselves to strangers including government officials. Place of birth, age, occupation, parents, wives, and children all are felt to be private matters in an original meaning of the word. Such facts are part of one's person, and to display them is not only to invite gossip, facilitate taxation or military conscription but also to expose oneself to the evil eye - the hostile attitudes that are believed to infest the very atmosphere.

Incidentally, this attitude is in part responsible for the well-known unreliability of statistical information in the Middle East. Most individuals cannot comprehend a census, for example, purely for its own sake. An ulterior motive must lie behind it. If taxation is suspected, the enumeration is ridiculously low; but if there is rumour of rationing, it is just as ridiculously high.

Hostility and suspicion directed towards those outside the family group gives a special character to

cooperation in Syrian society. In the West, conscious, institutionalized cooperation among individuals and groups entirely unrelated to one another has become familiar in the last century or so. But cooperation in the Middle East is still largely a family affair and little of it is found outside the blood group, community or village. ] The long tradition of separate enclaves based on religion, ethnic group, nationality, and occupation reinforced by separate residences and business quarters, has largely confined cooperative endeavours within each of these units rather than between them. { Cooperation is not a conscious effort of distinct groups to come together for mutual benefit, but simply the result of each individual playing his part as a member of a family or other group. There is not yet sufficient trust to extend cooperation beyond these long-standing 'in-groups'. ] Even the recent government agrarian cooperative efforts have taken this cultural attitude into consideration. { At present, cooperatives composed of related members are far more successful than those composed of non-related members. }

## F. ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

### 1. urban areas

Compared to many other developing nations Syria is heavily urban; approximately 46% of the population in

1974 lived in cities (UN Demographic Yearbook, 1974). This percentage is increasing rapidly due in part to a very high rate of rural-urban migration. Comparisons of the percentage of the population which was urban in 1960 (26.4%) and 1968 (31.3%) indicate just how rapid this growth is (UN Demographic Year Book, 1963, 1969, 1975). Furthermore this migration is primarily from small villages, not medium sized settlements, and is oriented towards the southern region of the country. In addition, it is estimated that 70% of this urban population now lives in the Aleppo and Damascus district. However it is likely that now there will shortly be a trend towards the eastern region near the Euphrates Dam.

The social and economic organization of the Syrian city in the late 1970's seems to be in a state of transition. The traditional city, built around a small religious, commercial wealthy land-owning elite, is rapidly being undermined by political, economic and technological changes. [However a definitive structure based on secular education, technology, and class alignments has yet to coalesce.] Much of the traditional value system remains in tact, although admiration for modern values and techniques is expressed.

In the older Syrian cities (i.e. Aleppo and Damascus)

✓ an understanding of the physical form of the city involves the relationship between social and economic organization and spatial patterns. Generally speaking, these cities can be divided into the parts that were economic areas, sugs (markets) and social areas, harahs (residential quarters). This is not to say that no one resided in the markets or that no marketing was carried out in the residential quarters. Rather, some districts were primarily residential and others primarily commercial and centers of public life. In the residential quarters, the preserve of women, children and families, the emphasis on privacy and security was most pronounced. Here were the gates which could be locked at night, the cul-de-sacs which opened into a house or compound of houses, the high windowless blank walls, and a complete lack of public spaces. Here suspicion attached most strongly to strangers.

In the market areas of the city, not only commercial, but religious and political life were concentrated and intertwined. The sugs had shops, workrooms, storerooms, mosques and schools. Prayers, learning, public consultations and adjudication were not highly specialized activities segregated in special centers. They were part of the everyday life of the working population and

bourgeoisie. The scholar who worked part-time as a merchant or craftsman was near his teacher. The artisan who prayed regularly had his mosque at hand. The merchant who served as a notary found a judge in the immediate vicinity. Thus, the physical facilities were juxtaposed to permit easy movement from one to another. In a social sense, the sugs also permitted the integration of various levels - economic, religious and political activities. This permitted the bringing together of various elements of urban society that could not be accomplished in the closed religious or ethnic residential quarters.

As the new 'western' sections and suburbs, with their more spacious and modern residences were constructed, many of the better off families of the various quarters moved there. In these new areas, residential quarters were based on economic considerations rather than religion or ethnic ones. As a consequence an estrangement between the tradition-minded masses and the modern-oriented new middle class has developed not only in Damascus but also in Homs, Aleppo and to some extent Hama. An additional factor to consider in the breakdown of the old quarters is the tremendous influx of rural migrants and the resulting

enormous demand for housing. Many parts of the old city are now over-taxed by the new population and public services as water, electricity, and garbage disposal need to be improved if the existing systems are not to collapse. Thus it is primarily the traditional Islamic cities of Syria in contrast to the more recently developed ones (e.g. Latakia, Tartous, Deir-ez-Zor, Suweida) that are facing critical problems of massive slums, inadequate water supply, poor sewage and waste disposal systems, pollution and congestion.

## 2. rural areas

By the mid-1970's, the effects of the agrarian changes of the late 1950's and 1960's on the organization of rural society were not entirely clear. However the disappearance of the urban absentee landlord that traditionally had been an important figure in the life of some villages and the redistribution of land among some peasants has undoubtedly changed rural society. [This aspect of Syrian society must be a first priority for basic research if rural development is to continue to be an important item in Syrian national development.]

Traditionally few Syrian villages were self-sufficient economic or social units. Generally they depended upon the city for various services and many villages came into

the orbit of the nearest town or city. This dependency has increased in recent years, with the development of modern public transport. Today, the peasants visit the cities with increasing frequency for marketing, medical care, entertainment, and other requirements that cannot be obtained in the countryside. In addition, an increased number of village youths attend urban schools. Many remain after graduation or migrate to one of the oil Gulf States in search of lucrative employment.

It is difficult to generalize about the economic organization of all Syrian villages. However, two patterns can be factored out. On the coast where rainfall is regular, small farmers operate successfully without much external aid. In the interior, on the other hand, where water supply is much less reliable, the small landowner can easily be ruined by the region's periodic droughts. It appears as though without extensive external support only large enterprises stand a reasonable chance of success. For this reason perhaps, the peasant of the interior is especially dependent on financing from the cities either on an informal basis by urban elements or on government agricultural cooperative banks.

Ragga province was once a major absentee-landlord/share-cropping region of Syria prior to the agrarian land

reform and is now a major focus of interest on the part of the national government. About 70% of the area is considered semi-arid, the remaining 30% is considered suitable for growing wheat and barley. This region, which combines agriculture with animal husbandry, is to a great extent representative of the type of agricultural community which will attract a great deal of the attention of development planners. The population of the province itself is approximately 26% pastoral, composed of a number of tribes whose primary occupation is animal husbandry, with agriculture a secondary occupation during the seasons of the year when they do not migrate with their herds. The rest of the population is made up of settled agricultural communities, many of Bedouin origin, who primarily practice irrigated agriculture, giving secondary attention to animal husbandry.

Approximately 59% of the total area of the province is used for pasture while 39% of the land is considered arable. Less than half of this arable land is actually cultivated, and only 7% of this cultivated land is irrigated. This breakdown is a basic characteristic of land use patterns in Syria as a whole (see Figure No. 3).

Most of the land of the province is privately owned (776,100 hectares are owned by individuals). Following

Figure 3

LAND USE IN SYRIA

LAND UTILIZATION: PASTURE LAND & LAND UNDER CROP	
Pasture	8631
Under crop	3700
Irrigated	516
Non-irrigated	3184

*what unit?*

Source: Adapted from Statistical Abstract, 1977; Office of the Prime Minister, Central Bureau of Statistics, Syrian Arab Republic

the implementation of the Agrarian Reform Law, 169,000 hectares were transferred from absentee landlords to small tenant farmers. [Only 10,900 hectares are state property.] Yet production, per hectare, in the province is perhaps the lowest in Syria after the Suweida province. There are 57 agricultural cooperative societies in the province with a total membership of 3,813. Their members own a total of 27,000 hectares. [Membership in these cooperatives is largely based on kinship or common village origin.] Production per hectare for the cooperative system appears to be about twice that of non-cooperative members.

Animal husbandry, however, is considered as one of the most important economic activities of the rural population. Farmers own over 490,000 head of sheep, but produce annually only 19,000 tons of milk. Within the province, the average size of private farms is about 6 hectares. Though leadership in the local communities is still based on traditional patterns, each community has a government appointed mukhtar. Even today, these government officials must elicit the support of the communities' traditional leaders (the elders) in order to settle all community affairs.

Most of the rural communities in Raqqa province face

the problem of low agricultural production. This can probably be attributed partially to the [fragmentation of land holdings especially in irrigated regions.] In addition as there exists no system of agricultural extension service, most of the farmers have not become familiar with modern agricultural practices. Prior to the Agrarian Reform Laws, most of these farmers were tenants who simply raised the traditional crops for the landlord. Today, these farmers need to be assisted through some form of extension - in not only improving their farming methods, but also in taking efficient control of the actual marketing potentials and opportunities.

Raqqa province is rich in agricultural as well as pasture land. Yet the agricultural resources are not fully utilized and soil fertility is deteriorating due to limited use of fertilizers. Pastoral production is also very low due, in part, to the shortage of dry fodder and veterinary services. Fragmentation of landholdings as well as lack of marketing facilities also seems to be discouraging individuals from improving methods of production.

### 3. pastoral areas

The pastoral sector of the Syrian economy has been

almost entirely overlooked both by governmental administrators as well as development experts, except as an auxiliary activity in agricultural regions. It would be shortsighted indeed not to closely examine this largely ignored sector of the Syrian economy from the inside (i.e. populations whose primary economic activity is animal husbandry). As discussion of the pastoral sector involves approaching the agricultural sector from an "outside" view (i.e. as an auxiliary to systems of animal husbandry) this discussion will be intentionally long and detailed. Furthermore, there is little doubt that this sector, in particular as it impinges on Range Management, will very shortly become a major development concern of the national government and a number of International Development Agencies (other than F.A.O. and the World Bank).

In the past two decades, tremendous changes have taken place in each sector of the Syrian 'ecological trilogy'. In the pastoral sector, emigration and sedentarization is occurring. This phenomenon is regarded by national administrators as a 'recent' change and a sign of the deterioration of the pastoral way of life. What national administrators regard as a 'recent' change is in fact erroneous. Emigration and sedentarization through extremes of wealth or poverty have always

existed among pastoral populations. They are traditional devices by which the core of the pastoral group remains demographically in balance with the land and the herd.

However, truly recent changes are occurring. Perhaps the most far-reaching development originated during the Inter-War mandate with the establishment of a regional infrastructure. Originally intended as an aid to military control of the area, a system of roads begun by the French was to dramatically affect the pastoralists' total organization. Camels, the major economic wealth of many Bedouin, were increasingly rendered obsolete as new systems of transportation became operative. In addition, as the mandate powers consolidated their hold over the region, the khuwa-ghazu (tribute-raid) relationship whereby the Bedouin had previously guaranteed themselves access to agricultural produce, began to die. The viability of the pastoral economy depended then on the development of new channels of access to agricultural produce. The new and improved network of roads permitted a greater degree of trade between pastoralists and sedentary communities -- with the roadways serving as long market places.

In the past twenty years, sheep, the traditional herding animal of the 'common' Bedouin tribes, have

gradually replaced camels as the herding animals of the 'noble' tribes. This general pattern, motivated by underlying economic considerations, is widespread throughout the region, particularly in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria. And the traditional dichotomy between 'noble' and 'common' tribes is being undermined by this crossing of specializations. Now [the poorer tribes continue to herd camels, while the richer 'noble' tribes herd sheep] deep into the Badia with the help of modern technological equipment such as the half-ton truck and camion which permit greater range and mobility in terms of grazing access, camping sites and water resources. The Bedouin's recent emphasis on sheep as the principal grazing animal and their accompanying shift from camel, as beast of burden, to truck represents a modernizing form of pastoralism wherein new relations with sedentary communities are expressed in heavier trade and closer symbiosis in cultivation. This modernizing mode of life follows two patterns:

1. Tribal units, in the steppeland (Badia), who traditionally raised camels, have begun increasingly to raise sheep instead. The rapid decline in the camel market, as well as the increased range of movement permitted by the

truck, in large measure accounts for this shift. These former camel raising tribal units can now raise sheep in larger numbers for increased marketing and in areas never before possible. The truck is now used to bring water for the herds, as well as to transport the herds to distant pastures or markets.

2. Tribal units on the fringes of cultivated land or in marginal areas of cultivated ranges have begun to emphasize particular aspects of their livestock production (i.e. milk production). The truck is used here to bring feed to the herds, as well as to transport the herds to distant pastures or markets.

Among the Syrian Bedouin tribes, such as the Ruwalla, Sbaa, Fed'aan, the Al-Hassanna and the Al-Fadl, the recent adoption of the truck as a means of transportation has been instrumental in not only expanding their traditional economic spheres, but also in opening new economic horizons.

With the introduction of the truck and the concomitant reduction in migration activities, household labour activities have begun to take on a market orientation. Butter once only sold sporadically along migration routes, has ceased to be produced. Instead, women have begun

to direct more attention to the milking of sheep and goat for daily sales to urban dairy companies. Marketing of lambs and older sheep has also become better regulated. With increased mobility, the pastoralists can now search for the best market condition before selling their produce. Direct trade and contractual agreements with businessmen, relatively large landowners and villagers, is today replacing the Bedouin traditional economic pattern of exclusive reliance on middlemen for marketing of pastoral products and avoidance of main market centers (Chatty, 1976). These new relations have yielded large incomes for many individuals which are today often being invested in new activities in the commercial and particularly the transport sector of the regional economy. Over the last 10-15 years, these tribes have been able to develop a viable and highly profitable economic system which integrates pastoralism with agriculture and is mobilized by the truck.

It is evident that the truck greatly facilitates the commercialization of sheep raising. It carries feed supplements (like sorghum, beetroot, corn) out to the herds. And returns the fattened sheep to markets in good condition for sale. The truck also provides for

easy and continuous relations between the village and the tribal encampment, permitting many Bedouin families to undertake secondary work activity in urban or village centers near their tribal grazing areas.

The very rapidity with which the truck is replacing camel-transport among the Bedouin of Syria is becoming a threat to the long-term well-being of the viability of this way of life. In the past, range usufruct depended upon two factors: first, up to two or three weeks were required to move from one pasture area to another. Today, with the truck, several days may suffice. [This mobility has in the past few years led to increased over-grazing and growing dessication of the range lands.] Second, the seizure of tribal territory and its transformation into 'state-land' has removed the tribal leaders from the protective and regulative role they once fulfilled in the pastoral community. In addition, the truck transport of sheep and wood from the interior rangeland for sale in market centers is rapidly magnifying the menace of overgrazing of the desert steppe. And finally as the demand for meat and dairy products increases in towns and villages, larger and larger flocks of sheep are being raised by the Bedouin along these mechanized lines to meet market demands.

Animal husbandry is an important part of the agricultural sector of the Syrian economy (see Figure No. 4) and accounts for approximately 35% of the nation's agricultural output. The rapid deterioration of the rangeland has been recognized by development experts as an urgent problem to be tackled immediately. Fortunately, government administrators over the last few years have begun to recognize the truck as a mixed blessing. Following the failure of most of the earlier attempts to sedentarize pastoralists and transform them into farmers, the Syrian government has begun to reassess its priorities and to search for better ways to reach its goal of integrating these groups into the nation-state, while preserving their way of life and ecological niche. The government has cautiously begun to develop programs which more effectively integrate the pastoral populations into the regional economy. It has also initiated plans to optimize the output of the desert steppe in the only manner it can be used - for grazing.

In 1959, during a series of drought years where over 2 million sheep died, Syria endeavored to develop its range and sheep resources on a sound scientific basis by setting up the Wadi Al-Aziib Range Research Station. This was followed in 1964 by a World Food

Figure 4

ESTIMATED LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION IN SYRIA, 1963-76

Livestock		1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1976
Numbers <sup>1/</sup> :									
Sheep.....		4,297	4,524	5,075	5,422	5,569	5,938	6,096	6,490
Goats.....		487	790	818	832	757	743	761	956
Cattle.....		451	465	508	526	468	499	516	574
Camels.....		18	18	17	16	13	12	12	7.3
Horses, mules, and donkeys...		337	331	324	331	365	361	372	334
Poultry.....		3,737	4,675	4,090	4,599	3,734	4,246	3,586	
Products <sup>2/</sup> :									
Milk.....		594,100	594,100	661,400	665,800	571,000	604,100	576,500	665,000
Clarified butter (ghee).....		12,310	14,193	16,898	17,018	11,565	12,650	11,129	9,180
Butter.....		2,724	1,906	2,308	1,985	2,172	2,140	2,004	1,083
Cheese.....		52,570	31,282	34,052	35,691	31,999	32,980	30,221	34,550
Wool.....		5,186	6,131	7,266	6,227	7,361	7,108	8,764	6,560
Hair <sup>3/</sup> .....		441	572	540	553	433	834	498	459
Eggs <sup>3/</sup> .....		286	293	306	222	212	313	354	700

<sup>1/</sup> In thousands

<sup>2/</sup> In tons: amount used for consumption as meat not reported

<sup>3/</sup> In millions

Source: Adapted from Syria, Office of Prime Minister, Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract, 1965 + 1976, Damascus, 1966 + 1977.

Program project for the Stabilization and Development of Nomadic Sheep Husbandry. However, this project did not affect the situation of the pastoralists in the Syrian Badia. A major defect of the initial measures introduced to control grazing practices was that, while pastures were demarcated into special grazing districts, no attempt was made to understand the Bedouin way of life so as to organize them and their herds into groups which would facilitate the introduction of control measures.

During this period, Dr. Omar Draz, F.A.O. Range Management specialist, indicated that the rapid deterioration of the rangeland was due mostly to factors beyond the control of the people who are always held to blame (i.e. the Bedouin). Instability of life, and lack of property rights were, according to Dr. Draz, the real causes of overgrazing and the misuse of resources. Traditional rights of land use, previously claimed by most tribes on certain range sites, had been revoked by the government shortly after independence. This opened the gate for the destructive system of free, uncontrolled grazing. In numerous reports to the government and to international agencies concerned with rangeland deterioration, he emphasized the importance of

studying the human factor in relation to land use, land tenure, numbers of grazing animals and the importance of recommendations that are acceptable to the affected people. Furthermore, Dr. Draz stressed that if development programs were not in harmony with the customs and ways of life of these pastoral peoples, then the whole rangeland development scheme would fail, just as the sedentarization projects of a decade earlier had failed.

Dr. Draz's main concern was to find a way to acquire Bedouin cooperation in solving some of their own problems. He devoted his attention to studying the traditional Bedouin system of graze management known as Hema. Perhaps the oldest effective range conservation system known, it is still maintained under different names in many countries of the Middle East (Mahmia, Marah, Koze). Originally, Hema, in Islam, dealt with the system of setting up fodder reserves for the preservation of the "strength of the Islamic community". Dr. Draz's suggestion was that if the former grazing rights of the Bedouin tribes were restored to them, a marked regeneration of the rangeland would take place. Thus, the prevailing destructive attitude towards the range as a no-man's land open for free grazing by the first

flocks to arrive would be transformed into a constructive one based on controlled grazing. Such organization within modern cooperatives (replacing the traditional tribal system) could in addition give more opportunity for government welfare assistance and eliminate many of the social, educational and health problems of these people.

Rangeland donated by the government as Hema centers formed the bases for the first eight Hema cooperatives established in Syria in 1969-1972. Their tremendous success paved the way for the extension of this system to cover more than 1.5 million hectares of steppe land with a total of twenty-two cooperatives by the end of 1976.

Sheep fattening cooperatives were also set up on an experimental basis to work as a buffer to minimize losses in dry years, to limit the increase in sheep population and to reduce grazing pressure; and indirectly to stimulate fodder crop production and the establishment of marketing facilities. In 1968 the first fattening cooperative was started with 68 members. By 1976, there were a total of 48 sheep fattening stations with a total of 3,178 members who operated the dry lot fattening yards.

Expansion of ploughing and grain production in

the heart of the Syrian steppe region during the last fifty years has also served to destroy the vegetation of the most productive part of this large area. Introduction of mechanical equipment, instability of the social and economic situation and the increased need for grain has accelerated this progress. In 1973, the Syrian parliament endorsed a legislative decree for Prohibition of Ploughing and cultivation of range-lands within the steppe region and in 1975-76 more than 150,000 tons of wheat and barley were confiscated through the enforcement of this law.

The revival of the Hema system and its successful introduction in the form of cooperatives has made it possible to stimulate a series of constructive activities. The organization of Bedouins in range and sheep cooperatives has made it possible to expand several services to their communities including credit facilities, veterinary services, schools, etc.

This program is a good example of what can be accomplished through careful planning between the Syrian government and other organizations for large scale development of the semi-arid lands, as well as the stabilization and development of pastoral sheep husbandry on the Badia. However, a great deal more work needs to be done if these programs are to continue to succeed.

## SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Modernization or Development has been described by some anthropologists as a long-run continuous process of new, improved and diversified activities and technology with the individual's ever-deepening and widening interaction within the national economy and society. These processes appear to be occurring to some extent among the populations that make up the Syrian Arab Republic. Syria's traditionally closed, encapsulated, ethnic and religious communities are in a state of transition which, given continued prosperity, will eventually lead to more active inter-community participation on a national level. However, indepth socio-economic studies of the Syrian population are almost entirely lacking. And the available statistical information is often misleading and conflicting.

After World War II, American anthropological research in Syria was relatively unrestricted and generally free of the colonial association which often stigmatized British and French research in Africa and other regions. During this period, a number of useful studies were completed by American anthropologists namely L. Sweet (1960) and A. Horton (1961). That situation was

dramatically reversed in the second half of the 1950's when all American social scientists were asked to leave the country. Only in the past two to three years has there been a relaxing of former attitudes toward American social science research. And a small number of pre-doctoral social-science students are now in various stages of completing their field studies. In the next few years, the results of their research should become available. A few social studies by European or American trained Syrians do exist (e.g. Akhras, 1972; Basha, 1965; Ismail, 1975; Al-Yafi, 1978). Many of these studies are uneven in quality and are commented on briefly in the annotated reference.

There do exist a number of excellent studies put out by different International Agencies. Though these studies are well known to development professionals, it is worthwhile to briefly enumerate them. The UNESOB papers (1970, 1971) are excellent studies on various development problems, especially Development Planning and Social Objectives in Syria. The UNESCO report Population Dynamics and Educational Development in Svria: Analysis and Perspectives (1975) is a particularly detailed and well thought out study of education issues in the country. The U.S. government's Svria Synchrisis (Weismann, 1977)

and Traditional Health Care in the Middle East (Pillsbury, 1978) combined make a good reference for health issues in Syria. Thus Health, Education, and Population dynamics will not be dealt with as separate substantive issues. However one aspect of Health planning will be discussed briefly as it impinges on administrative problems of development common to many of the ministries in the government.

In the author's opinion, the following issues are matters which have been either largely ignored or insufficiently considered by development professionals when dealing with the Syrian population.

A. Cultural Gaps

1. inter national cultural gaps

A great deal of the literature on social change stresses the concept "resistance to change" in particular when discussing agrarian or pastoral communities (see Awad, (1970) UNESOB, 1970; UNESCO, 1961, 1962, 1963; F.A.O. (1972). It is my feeling that the notion that people tend to resist change rather than accept change is a special bias of the 'Western' scientist. When resistance is in fact evident, it is a symptom of a condition which threatens basic securities, rather than a constant element in traditional societies. Man is basically a rational

being; he will resist what he perceives to be against his basic welfare and accept what he comprehends as beneficial for him. In other words, resistance is an indication that the population under consideration does not view the proposed change as being in their interest, though it may be in the interest of the 'modernizing agent'. Examples of this sort of bias abound in Syria whether in discussion of: the resistance of Syrian Bedouin to follow government plans for their permanent settlement, preferring to migrate seasonally with their herds; the resistance of Syrian farmers to effectively use government sponsored modern farms or credit cooperatives, preferring to rely upon kin and village networks of assistance and credit; the resistance of urban dwellers to follow modern government urban plans, preferring to build in places and ways reminiscent of traditional city spatial organization (cul-de-sacs, separation of residential from market areas, etc.). Although well known to development professionals, it is important to reiterate that this Western bias must be carefully examined whenever 'Syrians' resistance to change' is under discussion.

2. intra national cultural gaps

The attitudes described above are closely related to another phenomenon, the cultural gap that often exists

between the modernizing elements of a population and the traditional sector. Take for example the common urban attitude that Syrian farmers are backward, uncooperative, resistant to government efforts to assist them, etc. Often these attitudes are based on actual experiences where government workers sent out to deal with the rural population faced actual communications gaps. The words are understood, but the ideas are not 'translated' into terms the rural population can comprehend.

So often the handful of government officials who actually get into the villages, including census enumerators, are peculiarly unequipped to coordinate their activities with the peasant mentality. By position and point of view they cannot or will not reduce their work to the terms the peasant can understand. The result is that the government agent in contact with the peasant serves neither the peasant nor the government.

The attitude in regards to the "problem" of pastoral tribes in Syria is one in which an overall solution is propounded for settling of tribes, meaning transforming the man who lives upon the products of the herd, into a settled, cultivator of the soil (Awad, 1970; UNESOB, 1970). The key point of this attitude is the 'anxiety' of many administrators that pastoralism is a mode of life that

is a hold-over from an irrational past and therefore lacking 'modern' rational administration and responsible use of the world's resources. This attitude reflects the cultural and value gap between many administrators and the pastoral people within Syria.

Too often in the development process, social plans and schemes fail or meet with limited success. The poor performance of these schemes is generally blamed on the population's traditional resistance to change. In many cases, however, the actual difficulty is on the part of the national planners who:

- (1) fail to consider the social customs, requirements and needs of the population itself;
- (2) fail to translate national plans into terms that the target population can understand.

If programs were introduced through acceptable 'innovators' or local mediators who could bridge the gap between the two spheres, chances of success could be increased. It is here that properly trained social scientists as well as their appropriate local counterparts (the mediators) should be closely connected to all stages of social development programs.

These particular points are implicitly brought out

in Barbara Pillsbury's study on traditional health practices in Syria. After a period of difficulty, an elementary hygiene program based on Western germ theory was initiated among some of Syria's rural communities. What was required, however, was that the Syrian health workers (mediators) ["translate" germ theory to terms the rural community could understand] - traditional concepts of jinns.

Along these lines careful consideration should be given to numerous small-scale sequential development schemes, rather than large broad-based projects. The knowledge of the success of an initial pilot project in one village, such as a public drinking water system, would spread rapidly and generate enthusiasm and receptivity through a region. If social development projects are planned so that each project commences with one or two experimental efforts, that can be followed by a large scale program as enthusiasm develops, success is much more likely than if broad-based, regional programs are initiated all at once. In such cases resistance is likely to be quite high. A good example of the 'small-scale' yet potentially large project is the effort that is now being conducted by the U.S. Feed Grain Council to increase meat production from sheep. Initially working only with two private grain, sheep and dairy cow farmers,

? where  
was

their success has generated a great deal of enthusiasm. Farmers throughout the region have begun to approach the representative of the Council for similar assistance. Thus, the technology and services which the Grain Council is attempting to introduce holds promise of great success in Syria's agricultural and pastoral zones (the border of the Arabian Plateau discussed in Part I).

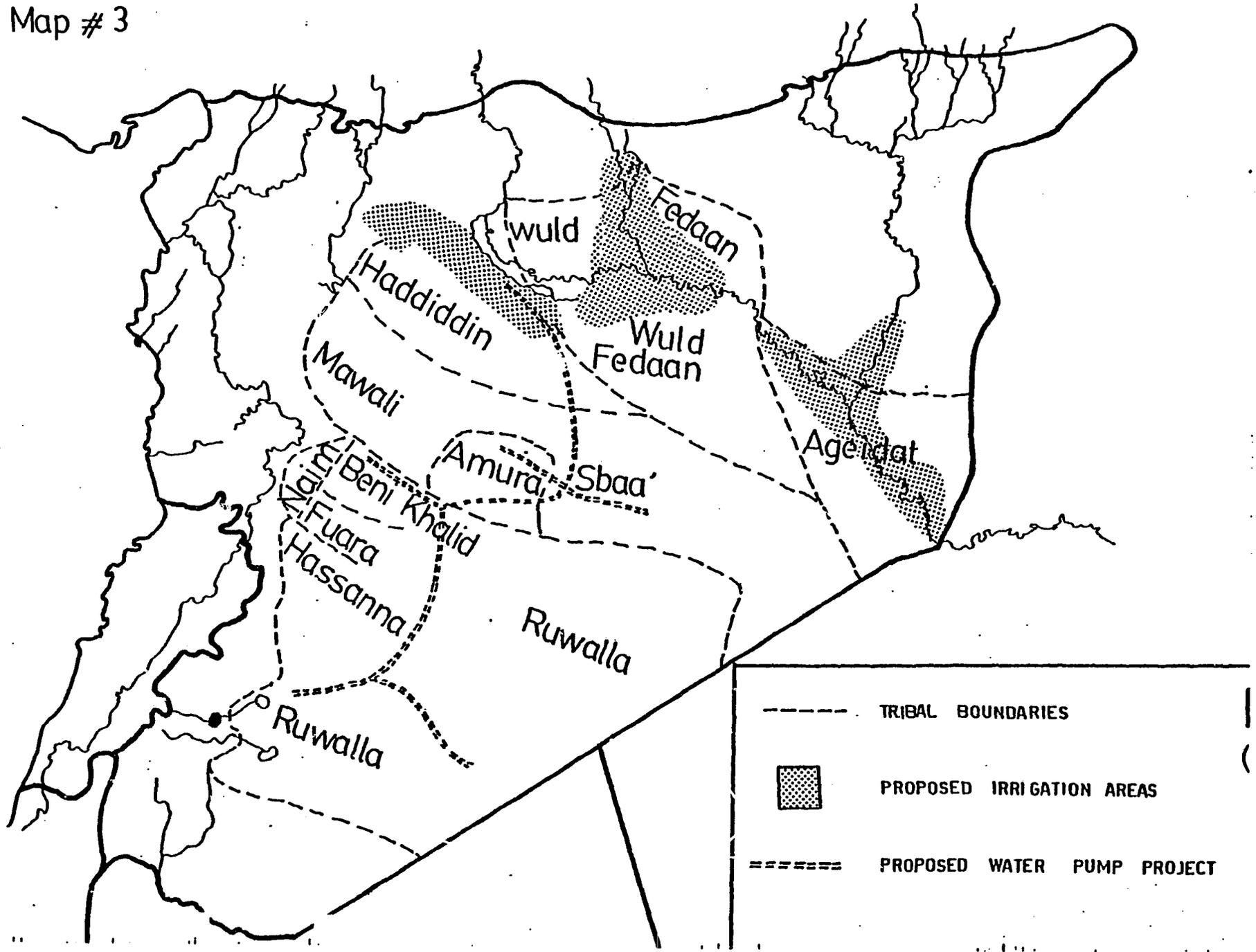
B. Agrarian Land Use

1. agricultural production

Syria's major natural resource is its agricultural land. Less than half the country is considered suitable for cultivation and possibly half of that area could be adaptable to irrigation and flood control with the full implementation of the Euphrates Dam project. The expansion of the amount of irrigated land will be of great significance to the economy (see Map No. 3). With the virtual completion in 1969 of the expropriation and redistribution program approximately 3.7 million acres, roughly one-sixth of the cultivable land at the time, had been expropriated from 4,185 land owners. Only about 1.4 million acres of land in 1,418 villages has been distributed to 39,650 farm families and roughly 50,000 acres has been organized into state farms. Undistributed

TRIBAL AREAS AND PROPOSED WATER DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS  
Map # 3

-93-



land has been rented to farmers at low rates.

The general impact of this land reform has recently been evaluated on the basis of whether agricultural output increased or decreased following the land reform adoption and implementation (Askari, 1977). In testing this approach, the output of major crops in Syria was analyzed. Post reform responsiveness was compared with that of earlier periods and with that of cultivators in two neighboring countries - Jordan and Lebanon - which underwent little reform. Though the results of land reform in Syria seem at first mixed when measured in price elasticity terms, the period since Reform has seen a shift indicating greater market responsiveness on the part of the Syrian peasant. With the completion of the Euphrates Dam project and with the steady use of machinery and fertilizers, Syria may again serve as a major grain producer and exporter in an area of chronic deficits, "as its cultivators promise a favorable response to market influences" (Askari, 1977:444).

## 2. Agricultural support structures

Askari's positive picture of the future development of Syria's agricultural sector rests, however, upon the premise that basic support structures are or

will be made available to the rural population. Yet in the course of a number of field trips to government research and cooperative stations in the pastoral steppe regions and to the agricultural farm areas of the Raqqa province, the author found that the agricultural support structures were minimal or entirely lacking. Furthermore, the local population, fully aware of these deficiencies very succinctly requested that a number of measures be carried out either by the national government, international agencies or private foreign businesses (e.g. U.S. Grain Food Council). Their basic demands were that:

- (a) Basic welfare services such as a comprehensive literacy program, the provision of drinking water and electricity be extended to all rural communities. Of all these services, a literacy program was universally regarded as most vital. Each rural community spokesman had a suggestion as to how this should be carried out. Some suggested setting up a school as part of existing cooperatives. Others simply asked for teachers, adding that they would build the necessary school houses and a teacher's home. In the winter villages of the pastoral populations, a similar

request was often made. Here it was simply for a teacher for the five months of each year that they were 'in residence' in their villages.

- (b) A plan be set up for extending cooperatives rather than State farms to all rural villages. These cooperatives should include marketing and credit facilities, agricultural demonstration services, as well as general extension services to develop production (e.g. promotion of the application of crop rotation, seed and fertilizer information, as well as information for increasing milk and meat production).
- (c) Animal husbandry assistance be made by: the provision of veterinary services and training facilities for machine milk processing; the construction of storage silos for supplemental animal feed; the digging of wells for provision of water for sheep and goat, increasing the number of dams for general water accumulation, as well as improving the roads between the permanent Bedouin winter villages and other centers.

At this point it is worthwhile to stress the well known fact that an adequate national infrastructure is, perhaps,

the most pervasive variable in the development process (i.e. transportation) and should be given high planning priority. The shift from semi-subsistence to market oriented forms of agriculture are closely related to trends in the real cost of transportation. Extension and development of these services can only improve and strengthen the rate of growth of other aspects of national development.

The truck, airplane and pipeline have already completely transformed networks and market relationships throughout the country. Given the nature of Syria's traditional society, the small community enclaves separated and cut off from one another, an efficient and extensive system of transportation and communication can not only help to strengthen the nation's economy but can also serve as a tool to strengthen the heterogeneous communities' sense of a national identity.

However, the high frequency of the demand for better roads and general communication services by the rural population, makes it appear as though not enough national attention has been directed at this vital development variable (see Figure No. 5).

### C. Rural Sector of Syrian Society

#### 1. rural-urban migration

Syria's potential agricultural con-

Figure 5

Length of Roads (kilometers)

	Total	Leveled	Paved non-asphalt	Asphalted
1943	5740	3126	1174	1440
1965	9192	2179	1099	5914
1976	16339	2263	2025	12051

Source: Adapted from Statistical Abstract, 1977, Office of the Prime Minister, Central Bureau of Statistics, Syrian Arab Republic

tribution to the region should not overshadow one of the most critical problems facing Syria today, its excessive rural-urban migration, particularly as Syria's urban centers are not able to adequately absorb the populations nor guarantee them secure training or employment in the industrial sector which remains small. Future Development Planning should give high priority to ways and means of retaining a maximum amount of the labour force in the countryside even though it be technologically redundant to the developing agricultural sector.

The essential proposition is that a sound development policy needs to be based on an explicit recognition of two quite distinct rural sectors:

a 'modernizing' or commercial farming sector

a 'transitional' or surplus population-supporting sector

The commercial farming sector, perhaps including only a small proportion of the entire farming population, would essentially be engaged in the production of a surplus of farm commodities to exchange for both consumption and production goods in the non-farm sector. The transitional or surplus population-supporting sector, the majority of the rural population, would essentially

contribute to the interim support of any rural population that could not immediately be absorbed either by commercial farming or its urban-industrial counterpart.

Special attention to all ways and means of improving the efficiency of the transitional sector with respect to its unique surplus population-supporting role is quite critical. What is called for is a program that not only holds the line against the excessive rural-urban migration, which is straining Syria's major cities, but also provides greater degrees of security and hope to the people concerned and especially to the younger generation (see W. Owen, 1972).

It is difficult to determine to what extent rural migration to the cities is activated by push factors (i.e. the deteriorating conditions or sluggishness of agricultural production in rural areas) or pull factors (i.e. increasing employment opportunities) in urban areas. A variety of factors are probably at root. However, an alarming element that needs to be considered in terms of the urban areas is the very weak rate of absorption of urban values. Unless the rural migrant succeeds in securing a more or less permanent source of income, he is likely to delay the severance of his ties with the village and to continue to rely on traditional

sources of security provided by his family or tribe. The persistence of this kind of interdependence tends to encourage the rural migrants on arriving in the city to settle in clusters of their own, and in turn, help to perpetuate their village customs and to strengthen their resistance to the urban way of life. In such cases, the assimilation of the rural migrants by the urban ways of life is not merely a matter of time. The desired assimilation depends not only on time, but also on the nature of the urbanization itself. Syrian cities may not simply be in a stage of transition to the western model of city-life, but rather exhibiting peculiar features of their own. These features may very well continue to exist so long as this pattern of urbanization persists (lack of permanent or secure sources of income). Far from being assimilated, the rural migrants may actually come to dominate the city, their way of life becoming paramount and with the city's cultural and political life merely trying to accommodate to their taste.

## 2. resettlement of populations

Syria's major development project focuses on the Euphrates Dam irrigation schemes and may later include

a program for carrying water through the Syrian Badia. Both these efforts will entail massive resettlement projects. Some resettlement has already taken place along the northern border with Turkey, but this project carries many political overtones, and need not be discussed here. However, numerous other resettlement schemes will be required in the near future. Their success depends very much upon the approach which is taken by the planning agency (i.e. small scale versus large scale endeavours). It would be in the interest of the Syrian government as well as any development agency to give careful consideration to the populations that are going to be affected, both in the Jezirah and within the Badia. Careful sociological studies of these populations now will greatly facilitate planning for their resettlement over the next five to ten years. Here, at least, there is time to prepare complete background material for the inevitable resettlement that is going to be required in the coming years. There is little question that a number of international development agencies will be asked to assist in these schemes, but probably only once the national government has decided the time is propitious to actually move these communities.

D. Water

Syria is basically a semi-arid land except for the humid Mediterranean coastal strip. East of that strip lies a semi-arid steppe zone (Badia) extending over three fifths of the country, where rainfall averages less than ten inches per year. In the arid Hamad of the southeast, annual precipitation falls below four inches. Fortunately, the country has a number of waterways, the Euphrates (80% of the country's water resource), the Orontes and the Barada, as well as a relatively high water table in the Badia (in comparison with other arid regions of the world). For centuries, the farming population has depended upon irrigation and underground water sources. In the Badia wells, water lifts, ganats (underground water channels) and surface conduits (like that between Salamiyah and Palmyra) have been the bases of existence.

The problem in Syria is not so much the scarcity of water but rather the distribution of water - especially to the Northern Arabian Plateau region. Inevitably, national development planning in the coming years will have to concern itself seriously with ways of distributing water to the numerous villages scattered throughout this region. The issue of bringing water to villages which at present have no safe drinking water, may appear to be a straight-

forward one. However, caution should be exercised and careful consideration should be made, along with the physical and ecological determinants, of the composition and structure of these "often" rigidly and intricately organized social communities. The placement of public water sites in villages should be carefully studied, case by case, for each community so as to ensure that the population has equal access to the water.

In addition, careful study should be made of the generally accepted rules and regulations of the Shari'a (Islamic law) regarding water rights (e.g. ownership titles, right of thirst, irrigation rights, laws of Harim, cleaning of canals, inspection and surveillance of water, etc.). It should be kept in mind that over and above these religious customs and practices, local usages as well as government decrees have established other rules and regulations for the ownership, sale, purchase, rental, supervision and jurisdiction of water - all of which are strictly observed.

Customs governing water ownership in semi-arid zones are dominated by the fact that in desert areas, water constitutes the main object of real property. As water becomes scarcer, the land proportionally becomes an accessory to it, contrary to what is the case in European

legislation. In such areas, the land itself is of secondary importance, its only value being derived from its productivity, which, in turn, depends on the irrigation rights attached to it. As water becomes more scarce, it becomes more essential to soil fertility and gradually develops into an object of ownership independent of the land.

1. precepts regarding water appropriation

The Prophet Mohammed declared that water, pasture and fire should be the common entitlement of all Moslems, and to prevent any attempt to appropriate water he prohibited the selling of it. These provisions were the origin of all subsequent water jurisprudence. The different schools of Islam then sought to adapt these principles to the new local exigencies arising from more complex situations. Various interpretations are found concerning, for example:

(a) the right of thirst

There is the juridical right to take water to quench one's thirst or to water one's animals. In the case of wells or water points dug for public benefit, this water should be available to all; in case of scarcity, animals may be watered

only after man has drawn his share

In the case of wells dug by Bedouin, they have exclusive rights for the entire length of their stay. After their departure the wells become public property.. The rule of 'first come, first served' then prevails.

(b) Irrigation rights

Right of irrigation is the right to employ water for watering land, trees and plants. Private rights may be subject to appropriation.

Irrigation canals are the joint property of the individuals who built them and they alone are entitled to exercise the right of irrigation.

(c) Wells

The digger of a well, whether on his own land or unoccupied land becomes the owner of the well water as soon as he has completed the digging. The owner of the well is the sole beneficiary of the right of irrigation and is not required to supply water to irrigate other lands.

2. current situation

Codification of Moslem water rights took place during the Ottoman period and became known as the Mejelle Code (consisting of sixteen books and 1,851 articles). In Syria after independence, new laws, while recognizing the provisions of the Mejelle Code, the principles of the Shari'a, and local customs, were promulgated to develop further a centralized water control.

Thus improvement of water systems in Syria must be treated not simply as a technical matter, but as a highly complex social one. Legal as well as sociological background studies for each water project must be made, particularly in consideration of the cultural mosaic of Syrian society.

It is perhaps premature to introduce here a discussion of the recently initiated debates in government circles regarding a project to carry water from the Euphrates across the desert. If this project materializes (see Map No. 3) then a great deal of technical and in particular sociological background analysis will be required in order to see the project carried through successfully. As it now stands, this scheme could revolutionize Syria's agricultural potential as well as completely transform the population in the area (in

the main pastoral Bedouin). It is a project that would involve massive resettlement of populations, as well as intensive training and technical assistance on an international level.

E. Health Administration

*(Says virtually nothing re. situation; no comment re. attitudes towards health; no reason for section.)*

The issue of health in Syria has been well covered in a number of recent studies. However, as the problems of health planning and administration mirror similar statistical, logistical and manpower difficulties in other sectors of the Syrian government concerned with national development, further discussion is warranted. A study of the Ministry of Health's Annual Statistical Report (1976) shows a steady rise in the number of doctors, hospitals, urban and rural health centers and dispensaries (see Figure No. 6). Yet indepth discussions with responsible individuals within the Ministry indicate that health and health related services have deteriorated markedly over the last decade. In part, this can be explained by the low priority which health programs receive in the formulation of national development plans and in the apparent preference for a large private sector which delivers three fourths of all health services. Furthermore, the lack of a well-

Figure 6

HEALTH TABLE

	Average No. of persons per physician	Average No. of persons per pharmacist
1968	4088	9536
1976	2690	5948

	No. of nurses	No. of clinics and health clinics
1968	1031	320
1976	1531	296

Hospitals	
Average number of persons per bed	
1968	957
1976	996

	Clinics					
	Maternal and Child Care	T.B.	Malaria	Bilharziasis	Rural Health	Centers for essential services
1968	53	3	14	3	7	-
1976	16	12	13	7	-	210*

\* clinics related to the Ministry of Health

Source: Adapted from Statistical Abstract, 1977; Office of the Prime Minister, Central Bureau of Statistics, Syrian Arab Republic

developed planning capability within the Ministry of Health has weakened the position of the Ministry in the competition for limited government funds.

A number of other factors can also be considered to account for the deterioration of Syria's health condition. In the urban sector, the rapid rural-urban migration of the last decade has intensified a whole series of problems. Overcrowded housing, overtaxed water and sewage systems, overburdened social services and health facilities are common conditions in Syria's major urban areas. In both rural and urban areas poor sanitary conditions and inadequate housing contribute to a high incidence of infectious, intestinal and upper respiratory disease. In the rural sector, people continue to be subjected to centuries-old health problems such as trachoma, schistosomiasis, and tuberculosis. Seeking the help of a 'western' trained doctor continues to be regarded by many as a last resort with the hospital as the last step before the grave.

In addition, the health education system is directed primarily to the training of physicians and the construction of hospitals. Auxiliary medical personnel is almost non-existent. And the physical and human resources of

the health sector are concentrated in the urban areas and the western part of the country. In fact, the resistance of trained medical personnel to relocate and serve rural areas is so great, that the Ministry of Health has recently resorted to hiring doctors from India who are willing to practice in the countryside. At present, forty Indian doctors have been hired.

Since independence, different types of rural health services have developed such as dispensaries, rural hospitals, maternal and child care health centers. These services were developed without a great deal of coordination. Moreover, they were often understaffed and unevenly distributed. In 1958, the government initiated a "Rural Health Unit" with W.H.O. assistance to demonstrate the development of an integrated, comprehensive rural health service program. By 1966 the W.H.O. staff had successfully completed their assignment and considerable progress in rural health services continued for a number of years under this unit. Haran El-Awamid, a Damascus province, became the main rural health demonstration and training center in the country. Here, survey work on health, living conditions, medical care and a comprehensive program of preventive services and training of health personnel, as well as short-term modern public

health courses for traditional healers and midwives were carried out. At present, this center is reportedly no longer operating as anything more than a dispensary. And officials within the Ministry express a great deal of scepticism over the likely success of ongoing international development assistance.

The great gulf which so often exists between 'real' and 'ideal' situations is clearly evident when examining Syria's rural health services. While in 1970 there were seven rural health centers operating throughout Syria, informed sources state that the number has not increased. However, a comparison between figures No. 7 and 8 indicate that there has been a remarkable increase. In fact, only the names of rural dispensaries have been changed, to "Rural Health Centers".

Syria urgently needs to re-develop its national and rural health services. In particular, a major reallocation of health facilities and personnel is going to be necessary if the rapidly growing population of the Euphrates River Basin is to be adequately served. Such a program could well be based on a revived version of the "Rural Health Unit", Syria 0016, W.H.O. project which proved so successful during its brief life span.

Figure 7

WHO: EMBRD/71/1232

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

Country Brief - Health Sector

DISPENSARIES, MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH AND RURAL HEALTH CENTERS IN THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC IN OPERATION IN SEPTEMBER 1970

Governorates	Dispensaries		Maternal and Child Health		Rural Health Centers
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	
1. Damascus	17	23	10	7	1
2. Aleppo	6	24	3	2	1
3. Homs	3	14	2	4	-
4. Hamah	6	10	2	3	1
5. Latakia	3	6	1	4	1
6. Adleb	1	15	1	3	-
7. Tartous	2	10	2	2	-
8. Raqqa	3	7	1	-	-
9. Hasakah	3	11	1	-	-
10. Deraa	5	9	1	3	1
11. Suweida	4	10	1	-	1
12. Konaitera	5	2	-	-	-
13. Deir-ez-Zor	4	8	1	-	1
Total	62	149	26	28	7

Figure 8

Health Centers and Dispensaries by Mohafazat  
1972

Syria Syncrisis

Office of International Health, Division of  
Program Analysis 1977, Julie Weissmann

	Ministry of Health		Private
	Dispensaries	Health Centers	Dispensaries
Damascus	6	43	14
Aleppo	11	23	13
Lattakia	7	9	2
Homs	17	10	3
Hama	17	8	1
Al Hasakeh	10	4	-
Deir-ez-Zor	3	12	-
Dar'a	-	19	1
Al Sweida	5	11	-
Idleb	17	2	-
Al Rakka	-	14	-
Tartous	11	2	-
Quneitra	10	1	-
<u>Total</u>	114	158	34

Source: Annual Statistical Report 1972, Syrian Ministry of Health

F. Future social research

In Syria today, social science research is not a primary concern. Universities are places for teaching not for research. The only social research institute that the author is aware of in Damascus received its official charter from the Prime Minister's Office in June, 1978 and has yet to undertake any research projects. It is, in fact, unlikely to be able to do so, due to manpower shortages within the next one or two years. And even then its first few projects will probably be in response to particular requests from the Prime Minister's Office itself.

Given the scarcity of socio-cultural data available and the very great need for sound social development planning in Syria, it is strongly recommended that A.I.D. develop a plan of action which includes:

- (a) a short-term, state-side library project for an indepth study of the Syrian population.

A large number of secondary sources on Syria do exist, particularly in French and German. These, on the whole, were unavailable to the author in Damascus. However, state-side access to these sources should not be difficult.

(b) a long term sociological or anthropological research program based in Syria which over a period of one or more years would be responsible for generating data of a socio-cultural nature on the Syrian population.

(i) Such a project could be administered on a contract/grant basis with one of the many Middle East Studies Centers at American Universities. In this case, a one-two year grant could be initiated whereby a Middle Eastern anthropologist or sociologist would be charged with conducting an indepth study of Syria. As a minimum, four assistants or graduates should be incorporated into the project so as to focus on each of the four major divisions of Syria:

South - Druze community  
Coast - Alawite community  
Steppe - Agro-pastoral community  
Urban complex - Aleppo, Homs and  
Damascus

(ii) Alternatively, A.I.D. could consider setting up a social research and evaluation division in its Syrian mission. Initially such a division would focus

its efforts primarily on the generation of reliable and up-to-date socio-cultural data throughout the country, and secondarily on whatever social soundness analysis of proposed small scale projects was required. Such a division would require one permanent sociologist or anthropologist and four to six assistants, preferably local hires, representing each of the four major cultural segments of the Syrian population. Setting up a social research and evaluation division within its own mission would, in the long term, be more beneficial for A.I.D. than continuously contracting out to new individuals for research and social soundness analysis. The familiarity, expertise and accessibility which such a division could develop vis-a-vis the Syrian population could not be matched by individual expert hires on short-term bases.

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