In 1878, Lawrence Oliphant sought to solve the Eastern question and the Jewish question simultaneously. He was of a generation of Victorians whose confidence in the correctness of their own ideas and personal means empowered them to pursue their own solutions to the world's problems. Oliphant believed the only way to prevent European domination of the Ottoman Empire was to enhance its viability. Towards this end he proposed a colonization scheme in "one of those rich and unoccupied districts which abound in Turkey," a capitalist venture drawing European investment and Jewish settlers who would take Ottoman citizenship. Oliphant was received by Lord Salisbury, the British Prime Minister, and by the French Foreign Minister M. Waddington, lending credence to his somewhat fantastic plans.

Following his meetings with European officials, Oliphant set off for Ottoman domains. After a general tour encompassing Mount Lebanon, southern Syria and Palestine, Oliphant decided on the Balqa' district of Transjordan as the site for his project. His choice was determined by the region's agricultural, mineral and water resources, as well as by its low population and informal relations to land. His vision was summarized in his book, *The Land of Gilead*, in which he concluded that "the successful creation of a colony to the east of the Jordan, connected with the seacoast by a railway, would infallibly bring a stream of immigrants and a flow of capital into Western Palestine, under the influence of which it would speedily become one of the most productive and fertile provinces of the Turkish Empire."\(^1\)

The Ottoman government, intent on attracting immigrants and investment, at first took Oliphant's suggestions seriously. He was received in Istanbul by high state officials, and his plans were endorsed by three reform-minded ex-Grand Viziers.\(^2\) The Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Vükelâ*) was ordered by Sultan Abdülhamid II to compose a

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2 US Consul Wilson in Jerusalem claimed that Oliphant's project had the support of
draft concession for a company to undertake the settlement project, which they produced in thirty-three articles. Yet, in the end, the Sultan and his government lost their enthusiasm for Oliphant’s project. A colonization scheme settling European Jews in Ottoman domains was a formula for greater European intervention in Ottoman affairs, and a compact minority settled in one territory risked the sort of secessionist movement which had all but ended Ottoman rule in the Balkans.

No sooner had Oliphant left Istanbul than the first aliyah of Jewish immigrants began to arrive in Palestine in 1882. Baron Edmond de Rothschild, the wealthy financier who made the Jewish colonies of Palestine the focus of his philanthropy, sent one of his land purchase agents to Transjordan in 1889 in search of a “forest” and “fertile lands.” Protestant missionaries in Salt recorded that a Jewish family had moved to the town and was sending its children to the society’s school. The following year, the missionaries reported that “representatives of Jewish colonies” had passed through Salt. “Report says they are bent on coming East. . . . Jilaad [Gilead] is prospectively to be the site of a colony.” The focus on Gilead suggests the influence of Oliphant’s book, though no more came of this later Gilead project than had the earlier. The following year, the Jewish family slipped out of Protestant records as discreetly as it had entered. In the end, Rothschild’s only major land purchase east of the Jordan was in the Golan, to the north of the Yarmouk river. The Golan site was too distant from the other Jewish colonies and by 1914 its isolated settlers withdrew. Thereafter the land was leased to local sharecroppers, much as it had been before Rothschild’s time. Official inertia checked both Oliphant’s and Rothschild’s projects east of the Jordan river. One suspects that the government in Istanbul was more interested in Ottoman solutions to its frontier zones, and remained skeptical of European colonial proposals.

Until 1878 there was no perennially inhabited village between Salt and Karak. The chief obstacle to the development of villages was the Hayreddin, Midhat and Mahmut Nedim Pashas. NA, Jerusalem, Despatches, vol. 2, 8 October 1880.
7 Schama, Two Rothschilds, pp. 105–108.
extremely low population density of the Balqa’ and Karak districts. The governor then serving in Damascus was Tanzimat reformer and champion of the Ottoman constitution, Ahmed Şefik Midhat. One of Midhat Pasha’s first acts after assuming office was to draft a report on the sources of wealth to be exploited in Syria. Written in December 1878, Midhat Pasha set out the ambitious goal of doubling the province’s revenues. To do so, he laid particular emphasis on resettling “devastated areas” in order to open them to economic exploitation. Given such aims, Midhat Pasha would prove favorably inclined to any project to settle cultivators in the thinly inhabited Balqa’ plains – as he had been of Oliphant’s scheme.

Other Ottoman domains suffered the opposite problem, of a population density which exceeded the absorptive capacity of the land. Refugees flooding into Anatolia from the Balkans and the Caucasus in the later 1870s strained the government’s mechanisms for reception and absorption. Muslims who were loyal to the Ottoman state, the Circassians, Chechen and Türkmen refugees were ideal settlers to reinforce the Ottoman presence in the frontier zones of Syria. Their relocation set in motion enduring changes at the Transjordan frontier.

Circassian, Türkmen and Chechen colonies

The Circassians were first driven into Ottoman domains by the expansion of the Russian Empire into the Caucasus in the 1850s. What initially promised to be an orderly immigration of 40,000–50,000 Circassians, by agreement with Russia in 1860, proved a deluge of hundreds of thousands of refugees. For the most part, these refugees were first settled in the Ottoman Empire’s European territories, as loyal Muslim subjects among disaffected Christian communities prone to nationalist agitation. The Circassian refugees seem to have exacerbated tensions in the Balkans. Reports of wide-scale atrocities committed against Bulgarian Christians, in which the Circassians were implicated, provoked the first Balkan Crisis (1876) and, in due course, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. During the ensuing Russian occupation of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia, the Circassians were driven out of the Balkans. This expulsion was formalized in the Treaty of Berlin, the terms of which banned the Circassians from Turkey in Europe. At the


same time, new waves of immigrants flowed into Eastern Anatolia from the Caucasus and Turkmenistan to escape Russian rule. With diminished territorial resources and tens of thousands of refugees clogging the major towns and ports of Thrace, Macedonia and Anatolia, the Ottoman government turned crisis to advantage with a settlement program at the Syrian periphery. Once this orientation was decided, the Circassians were expedited by steamship from Kavalla, Salonica and Istanbul to the Syrian coast between February and August 1878. In all, some 25,000 Circassians were transported to southern Syria in the course of the year.

The care of the refugees while in transit, and the designation of their colonization sites, fell to the provincial government in Damascus and, for those settled in northern Syria, in Aleppo. The governor in Damascus levied four piasters of each taxpayer to fund the activities of the local immigration committees. These provided food and medicine for the Circassians who were housed in mosques and schools in the main towns while awaiting relocation. The conditions of their travel and accommodation were miserable, and many of the new immigrants died of disease or misadventure before ever reaching their destination. No record of the decision-making process behind the assignation of lands has yet been uncovered, though one look at a map suggests that the provincial Ottoman officials sought to create a network of villages to the east and south of Salt, in proximity to a regular water supply and the fertile grainlands of the Balqa'.

Village settlement occurred in two distinct waves. Between 1878 and 1884, three Circassian villages (Amman and Wadi Sir in the Balqa', Jarash in the Jabal ‘Ajlun district) and the Türkmen settlement at al-Ruman were founded. The Christian settlement in Madaba also dates to this period. Subsequent groups of immigrants were settled in these sites to reinforce the original communities and consolidate the new villages. The second wave, over the years 1901–1906, witnessed five new Circassian and Chechen villages (Na’ur, Zarqa’, Sukhna, Rusayfa and Suwaylih), which extended the network to the east of Amman.

encouraged by the laying of the Hijaz Railway. The Chechen are a
distinct Muslim ethnic group who emigrated to Ottoman domains
under much the same circumstances as the Circassians and reached the
Transjordan frontier between 1901 and 1906. Though different
peoples, speaking mutually incomprehensible languages, the Chechen
and Circassians collaborated in the founding of a number of villages.

The distribution of lands within a given settlement was concluded
among the settlers themselves. This is clear from surviving land records
from the founding of the Türkmen village of Ruman. Some 5,000
 dönüms of land in the ruined village of Ruman were awarded by the
provincial government to Türkmen refugees in December, 1884. The
land registry officer noted that the grant was “divided and distributed
among the Türkmen immigrants themselves” into fifty plots ranging
from 3 to 456 dönüms in size. These properties were equally distributed
among 211 men. Each man received three different types of property: a
1.5 dönüm plot near a perennial water source for irrigated crops; a 2 or
3 dönüm plot near the threshing grounds, probably for olive or fruit
orchards; and some 19 dönüms of rainfed grain lands. The Ottoman
land registry clerk from Nablus was left to formalize their distribution in
February 1886. The dates given in the Ottoman land register suggest
that the process, from government award of land, through communal
settlement and land distribution, could take fifteen months.

Amman was the first of the Circassian colonies. Lawrence Oliphant,
who visited Amman in 1879, spoke with the settlers three months after
their arrival. Of the initial colony of 500 Circassians only 150 had
chosen to remain; the others had left for more hospitable surround-
ings. Oliphant found those who chose to remain living in caves and the
galleries of the Roman amphitheater. Exposed to the elements with little
provision for sanitation, the settlers fell victim to typhoid, malaria and
measles. However, the initial community was reinforced by later
immigrants, reaching an estimated population of more than 1,000 by

13 The minutes of a council meeting of twenty-five heads of house in one Chechen
settlement dating to the founding of the village of Sukhna are held in the Department
of Documentation and National Archives, Amman, Private Papers 13/1, Bayan wa
tadhkara li-yawm al-ikhtilaf, 8 Sha’n 1322/18 October 1904.
14 DLR Salt, Register for al-Ruman, Subat 1301. The data from this register has been
summarized in Eugene Rogan, “Turkuman of al-Ruman: An Ottoman Settlement in
South-Eastern Syria,” Arab Historical Review for Ottoman Studies 1–2 (1990),
pp. 91–106.
15 Oliphant, The Land of Gilead, pp. 218–21. Lebedev, Inventory, p. 238 #540, report of
27 May 1879, records the cost of bread distributed among Circassians who had
returned from Tiberias and the Balqa’ to Acre.
16 Shauket Mufti, Heroes and Emperors in Circassian History (Beirut, 1972), p. 275;
The Circassians of Amman were initially quite isolated. The nearest Circassian colony was Qunaytra in the Golan Heights, some 100 kilometers to the northwest, founded in 1873. They had been settled "by the order of the Government," as Oliphant noted, on land expropriated for that purpose from the local tribes and townspeople, who, for lack of deeds or receipts for taxes paid, could establish no legal title to the land. Furthermore, they refused to pay the Bedouin a share of their harvests as *khuwa*, or protection payment. Nor did they pay taxes to the government—the terms of their grant specified that no taxes would be claimed for ten years. Seen as Ottoman beneficiaries, and thus as Ottoman agents, the Circassians encountered the active hostility of their Arab neighbors. Examples of Circassian vulnerability abound. Their flint-locks proved no match for the breech-loaded Remingtons of the Bani Sakhr in a confrontation in Jarash in 1887. Documentation survives of Bedouin attacks on Amman and Wadi Sir in May 1894 in which crops were damaged, trees uprooted and houses destroyed. A French traveler passed the blood smear where three Circassians had been killed in ambush between Madaba and Hisban by a group of Bedouin who "looked with disfavor on the Circassians’ colonies." A horse’s bridle in distinctive Circassian leatherwork was hung from a tree to mark the spot of the killing as a warning to others in the community.

Yet the new settlers were themselves feared by the local inhabitants. The Circassians were viewed by the natives of the region with a suspicion reserved for those who are alien and menacing. They spoke little or no Arabic, conversing among themselves in their native language and in Ottoman Turkish with officialdom. Their immediate neighbors attributed a number of murders to the Circassians. They also encountered the new settlers in uniform, as many Circassians were drawn into service with the Ottoman *jandarma.* In this capacity, the Circassians intervened in inter-tribal conflicts, punished tribal attacks on cultivation, and assisted in tax collection. Thus, while resented for settling on lands traditionally farmed by local people, and for their role as Ottoman

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19 MW 1/13, District Governor of Salt to *jandarma* headquarters in Amman, 9 Mayis 1310/22 May 1894; 5/12, Regional Governor to Mirza Bey, 7 Mayis 1310/20 May 1894.
21 CMS, G3 P/O 1897 #158 (Wilson, November 1897); ICR Salt vol. 1315–19 pp. 167–68 #131, 21 October 1900.
22 ICR Salt vol. 1315–19 p. 14 #22; p. 92 #3; vol. 7 pp. 175–77 #101; vol. 17 p. 63 #273.
agents, the Circassians were never deterred by the hostility of the Bedouin and townspeople of Salt. With the passing of time and the expansion of Circassian numbers, the settlers came to represent a regional power which the neighboring Bedouin tribes acknowledged through a series of alliances. Towards the end of the 1890s an alliance was struck between the Circassians and the Bani Sakhr tribe “to support one another in case of aggression from a third party.”

This alliance was instrumental in gaining Bani Sakhr mediation to resolve the conflict between the Circassians and the Balqawiyya confederation, variously dated between 1906 and 1910.

The extension of settlements under the Circassians, Chechen and Türkmen assured the new sedentary order in the Balqa’. From Amman, new roads fit for the immigrants’ ox-drawn carts linked the main settlement to a constellation of new villages. One road linked Jarash to the Türkmen village of Ruman and Salt and on to Amman; a second route linked Jarash to Amman, via the Chechen settlement of Suwaylih. Other roads radiated from Amman to Wadi al-Sir, to Na‘ur, and to Zarqa’, Sukhna and Rusayfa. In all, some 5,000 to 6,500 Circassian and Chechen settled in villages in the Balqa’ and Jarash by the first decade of the twentieth century.

**Christian settlements**

Shortly after the advent of direct Ottoman rule, Christians from the town of Salt began to resettle nearby villages abandoned over previous decades. To be accurate, the villages were never entirely abandoned, but had ceased to be inhabited on a year-round basis. Instead, farmers would inhabit the ruins of their former villages on a seasonal basis to cultivate their customary holdings, paying an agreed share of their harvests to the dominant tribe of the region. Following the Ottoman entry to Salt in 1867, these cultivators took advantage of the new state of security to spend longer periods on their lands, and rebuilding houses. It was thus not out of any persecution, but in response to a new

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opportunity, that a number of Christian families left Salt to establish themselves in al-Fuhays and al-Rumaymin. These two villages initially were subsumed under the civil administration of Salt, their residents still considered as residents of Salt.

Rumaymin (10 kilometers northeast of Salt) was visited by the French Catholic missionary Jean Morétain in July 1870, in the hope of converting its residents from the Greek to the Latin rite. The village was occupied by the Siyagh clan, who at that point spent half the year in Rumaymin and the winter months in Salt. The residents were embroiled in a major land dispute with the Bedouin in 1870, which they intended to take to the courts in Salt, relenting only out of fear of the expenses which the case might entail.27 Yet the village continued to grow and, with 150 residents, became the site of a Latin mission in 1875.28 In 1879, Rumaymin became the first village in the Balqa’ district to register its properties with the Ottoman land registry. In the earliest surviving register from the district of Salt, some twelve men of Rumaymin registered fifty-two small properties (ranging from 2 to 36 dönüms), thereby securing the villagers’ landholdings.29

In 1869, Fuhays (6 kilometers southeast of Salt) was no more than an encampment of sixteen tents inhabited three months of the year.30 By 1873, the Latin missionary Don Gatti reported 400 Christians living there in a letter to his superiors, claiming that the security provided by the Ottoman presence encouraged “a good number of those with property [to] settle there.”31 Gatti’s population figures were probably inflated to justify his proselytic efforts there. A Protestant missionary claimed that the village numbered some twenty-five to thirty houses in 1875.32 Fuhays was the second village to appear in the Ottoman land registry’s books, when seven small properties were registered in 1881.33

The circumstances surrounding the emigration of three Christian tribes from Karak to a new settlement in Madaba were far more divisive.34 Tensions between the ‘Uzayzat, a Christian clan that converted to Roman Catholicism in the mid-1870s, and their erstwhile allies, the ruling Majali family in Karak, prompted the Latin missionary to make inquiries with the regional governor in Nablus about the

27 LPJ, Jean Morétain, “Mémoires” (unpublished manuscript), pp. 485–89.
29 DLR, unbound register dated Tişrin-i sani 1295 (September–October 1879).
30 CMS, C M/O 36/1, Jamal, 7 January 1869.
31 LPJ, Salt, Gatti, 5 October 1873.
32 CMS, C M/O 38/9, Johnson, 17 December 1875.
33 DLR, unbound register dated Şubat 1296–Mart 1297 (March 1881).
possibility of settling the ‘Uzayzat somewhere in the Balqa’ district. The regional governor agreed in principle, and suggested such sites as Amman and Na‘ur, where Circassians were later to settle, and other sites in Bani Sakhr territory such as Umm al-‘Amad. The actual move was precipitated by a social crisis. In November 1879, a married woman of the Latin community was abducted by a Muslim man and taken off to the nearby village of Kathrabba. The resulting tensions were not in the first instance sectarian in nature. The Muslim Majali family gave their full support to the woman’s enraged relatives in demanding her return. Faced with force majeure, the woman’s abductors delivered her to the Majalis who, in turn, handed her over to the Catholic priests.

The Latin missionaries were faced with a judgment of Solomon. The Christians and Muslims of Karak were unanimous in demanding the death of the abducted woman both to redeem her family’s honor and to protect the other women of the community from similar abduction by making a terrible example of her. The two priests, Alexander Macagno and Paolo Bandoli, were faced with two options: “to save this woman and permit the ruin of our Christians; or to wash our hands of the whole affair in the interests of our people.” They chose the course of highest risk and smuggled the unfortunate woman to Jerusalem and later Nablus to protect her from her brother. Frustrated in his attempts to redeem his family’s honor with his sister’s blood, Ibrahim Tuwal turned next to attack the family of her abductor. He ambushed a group of the Sarayra outside of Karak in the Wadi Hasa and killed a number of their family members. The Sarayra now rallied their allies and applied pressure on the Majalis to withdraw their support from the Catholic clan of the ‘Uzayzat. In this new political configuration, the Latin missionaries panicked, fearing the imminent massacre of Karak’s Christians by the town’s Muslims.

It is impossible to judge the extent of the threat faced by the Christians of Karak in December 1879. What is certain is that the Latin missionaries were intervening in local affairs without a full grasp of the consequences of their actions. In response to the missionaries’ urgent appeals, the Latin Patriarch set in motion the plans to resettle the Christians of Karak in the Balqa. In other words, in lieu of resolving the conflict, the missionaries sought a permanent divide along sectarian lines in a town where alliances were struck on tribal or clan lines. The

35 Jaussen, Coutumes des Arabes, p. 423.
37 Jaussen, Coutumes des Arabes, pp. 433–40; Médebielle, Kérak, p. 50.
38 Médebielle, Kérak, p. 51.
result was a major exodus of Karaki Christians destined to establish the village of Madaba in 1880–81.

The Latin Patriarch, Mgr. Vicenzo Bracco (1873–89), approached the French consul in Jerusalem in his capacity as protector of the local Catholic community, to petition the central government for lands in the Balqa' on which to settle the Christians of Karak.39 While Ottoman officialdom entertained the petition, the missionary Paolo Bandoli, accompanied by three shaykhs of the ‘Uzayzat, surveyed the Balqa’ and decided on the ruined village of Madaba as the site for their settlement. In February 1880, the four men went to Nablus to request their chosen site from the regional governor; he authorized the Christians to begin farming the fields around Madaba while awaiting formal award of the site by the provincial government in Damascus. The governor at the time was Midhat Pasha who, as already noted, sought to double provincial revenues by resettling uninhabited lands. He was thus favorably disposed to the project of a Christian village at Madaba. Midhat Pasha laid the matter before the Provincial Administrative Council which gave conditional approval: “If true that the aforementioned village [Madaba] is deserted and contains no farmers with legal title,” they wrote, “then there is no harm in awarding it to the Latin emigrants from Karak” provided that the district authorities obtained binding guarantees that the settlers would not re-emigrate from Madaba.40 After a review of the land registers in Nablus revealed no title-holders recorded for Madaba, the officials in Nablus then sent orders to their subordinates in Salt for written confirmation that they had no record of usufruct holders in the proposed site.41

At this point, a claimant came forward: Sattam al-Fayiz, paramount shaykh of the powerful Bani Sakhr tribe. Sattam’s claims to Madaba were motivated by both tribal politics and the aim of preserving Bani Sakhr tribal domain (dira) against Ottoman settlements. The Majali shaykhs of Karak were significantly weakened by the emigration of the ‘Uzayzat, who were members of their Western Alliance. The Majalis turned to the Bani Sakhr to help pressure the Christians to return to Karak, and in pressing his claim, Sattam Fayiz was acting on behalf of the Majalis. He was also inspired to act against the Christians by their unwillingness to pay protection, or khueva. In the ‘Uzayzat’s telling of the story, Sattam sent a messenger to claim 100 loads of corn from the

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40 LPJ, Madaba, copy of orders from the Administrative Council in Damascus to the Regional Governor in Nablus #49, 29 March 1880.
41 LPJ, Madaba, copy of orders from the Deputy Regional Governor of the Balqa’ to the District Governor of Salt, 28 April 1880.
Christians after their first harvest. “One hundred loads of corn is not much for your shaykh,” the Christians of Madaba told the messenger, “but the ‘Uzayzat have no fodder. Let Sattam send one hundred loads of fodder, and he can claim his hundred loads of corn.” The messenger made sure he understood the terms correctly: the Christians refused to pay protection, but would barter with Sattam. In effect, the ‘Uzayzat were refusing to recognize Sattam’s claim to the lands of Madaba. That very night Sattam sent his messenger back to Madaba to order the Christians to return to Karak. “It is my land, it is my property, you will not live there.”

While attempting to intimidate the ‘Uzayzat, who were farming though not yet resident in Madaba, Sattam Fayiz pursued his claim in the government’s offices in Nablus. The ‘Uzayzat, however, were adept in the art of tribal politics. Before entering the Balqa’, the Christian clan negotiated a protection agreement with the Bani Hamida tribe, and from their provisional encampment in Dhiban they gained political recognition from the Bani Hamida through a “cousinship” (bin ‘amma) alliance. This conferred the status of a recognized tribe on the ‘Uzayzat, and the title of shaykh on the head of the clan, Salih al-Marar. It also meant that an attack on the ‘Uzayzat would provoke a retaliation by their “cousin-tribe” the Bani Hamida. Once in the Balqa’, Shaykh Salih Marar called on the leading tribes of the surrounding country to conclude bin ‘amma alliances with the ‘Adwan, the Bani Hasan and others. These moves prevented the Bani Sakhr Shaykh Sattam Fayiz from acting more forcefully against the new settlers in Madaba. He then concentrated his efforts on appealing against the Ottoman decision to settle the ‘Uzayzat on lands which he considered his own.

Sattam Fayiz’s claims were not received sympathetically by Midhat Pasha’s administration. In accordance with the 1858 Land Law, lands needed to be registered with the Ottoman authorities, with no lapse in either cultivation or payment of taxes for more than three years, to preserve legal title to land. Once he had assurances from Salt and Nablus that no legitimate title-holder could lay claim to Madaba, Midhat Pasha drafted a report to Nablus which at once confirmed the Christian settlers’ rights and set a precedent for future claims made by Bedouin for their customary holdings (dira). He noted receipt of a

43 On the protégé relationship (tanib), see Jaussen, Coutumes des Arabes, pp. 215–18; on the “cousinship” (bin ‘amma) alliance, ibid., pp. 149–62; on the politics of the ‘Uzayzat, ibid., p. 428.
petition from the Karaki Christians requesting confirmation of their rights to Madaba and its agricultural lands. He also noted Sattam Fayiz’s challenge to their request. He acknowledged that Sattam had formerly given the lands of Madaba over to sharecroppers for cultivation. However, Sattam Fayiz had failed to register his lands with the Ottoman authorities, had paid no taxes on them, and had created unstable living conditions for his tenant farmers which discouraged regular cultivation. “Supposing Sattam had usufruct rights to these lands,” Midhat Pasha wrote, “if they had long gone uncultivated and uninhabited his rights could not be enforced even if he were found with tapu deeds in hand... In our opinion, it is regrettable that those who cultivate do not remain [on their lands]. Thus,” Midhat Pasha instructed the regional governor in Nablus, “you should give as a categorical reply to Sattam Fayiz’s claims to these and any other lands that he has no right to lands not cultivated.”

In this instance, Midhat Pasha seemed less motivated by legalistic concerns than by demonstrating to the powerful tribes of the region that they risked losing lands held by customary rights unless these were registered with the government land offices, put under cultivation, and taxes regularly paid. Midhat concluded his orders to the regional governor in Nablus with an injunction to assure the security of the new settlement and to prevent the Bedouin from seeking to demand payments from the Christians of Madaba. Unlike the land grants awarded to the Circassians and Türkmen refugees, the settlers in Madaba were required to pay annual taxes on their land and harvests. The district governor was asked to obtain written guarantees from the heads of the Christian families that they would fulfill this obligation.

Some 35 kilometers to the south of Salt, and 25 kilometers from the nearest settlements of Amman and Wadi Sir, Madaba was now the southernmost settlement in the Balqa’. Assuring its security would prove a challenge to residents and Ottoman officials alike when the ‘Uzayzat and two Greek Orthodox clans settled permanently in Madaba in June 1881.

The Ottoman government achieved several aims through its policy of

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45 This is confirmed by H. B. Tristram’s account in *The Land of Moab* (New York, 1873), pp. 316-20, 333.
46 LPJ, Madaba, Midhat Pasha to the Regional Governor of the Balqa’, no. 280, 28 July 1880.
48 LPJ, Madaba, copy of the orders sent from the Regional Governor of Balqa’ to the Administrative Council of the district of Salt, no. 87, 24 August 1880.
establishing enduring settlements at the Transjordan frontier. These villages regenerated the productive capacity of the land. They served as bases for government administrative and security functions. They extended the road network and thus improved the region’s communications. The surviving documentation from Madaba demonstrates the leverage which land grants carved from tribal dira gave the government in imposing its land regime on the Bedouin in particular. As Midhat Pasha’s precedent-setting correspondence made clear, the only means to assure rights to land was by registration, cultivation, and payment of taxes. No coincidence, then, that the application of the Ottoman land regime established by the 1858 Law should be applied at the Transjordan frontier in the immediate aftermath of the creation of the first settlement colonies.

The application of the Ottoman Land Law

The Land Law of 1858 was one of the most important reforms of the Tanzimat era. Following centuries of unsystematic land records, and evolutions in the Ottoman land regime from timar to iltizam to malikâne, the state’s ability to extract its fiscal surplus was severely hindered by the vagaries of outdated books. The economic straits the Empire found itself in by the mid-nineteenth century called for a rationalization of the land regime. The Law fulfilled this task, bureaucratizing land tenure to maximize tax revenues. Judging by the expansion in ödür tithes collected over the years 1887–1910, from 426 million to 718 million piasters, the Law would seem to have been a success in this regard.49 Yet much of the standard scholarship has been predisposed to judge the Law as having failed.50 In Haim Gerber’s words, “conventional wisdom has it that the outcome of the land law was exactly the opposite of what was intended. Instead of bringing about the registration of land in the name of the smallholder, it resulted largely in the transfer of the lion’s share of arable lands to a few landed magnates.”51 It is argued that peasants registered “their” property in the name of urban patrons either out of fear of conscription and more taxation, or to assure the

50 See, for example, Doreen Warriner, Land and Poverty in the Middle East (London, 1948), and her “Land Tenure in the Fertile Crescent,” in Issawi, Economic History, pp. 72–78; Baer, “Evolution of Private Landownership,” ibid., pp. 79–90; Kemal Karpat, “The Land Regime, Social Structure, and Modernization in the Ottoman Empire,” in Polk and Chambers, Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East, pp. 86–90.
benevolent intervention of the town notable in the conduct of relations with the government, or out of sheer ignorance of the procedure of registration. While accepting that variations of these practices occurred in different parts of the Empire, they were not universal experiences; as we shall see, there is much in local documentary evidence to contradict these assertions.

A broader definition of the Law's goals yields a model which better withstands the test of archival evidence and suggests a more functional Ottoman land regime. The primary aim of the new land regime was to establish title and tax every piece of productive land in the Empire. In establishing title, the government created a one-to-one correspondence between a given property and the person responsible for paying its taxes. The documentary evidence would not suggest that the government had any ideological motives in the assignation of title. Rather, government officials seem to have adapted the application of the Law to the prevailing land order in any given part of the Empire. The essence of the Law in this view would be flexibility and would allow for significant differences in its application from one district to another. Thus, within the province of Syria some very different title-holders emerged from the application of the Law. This is well demonstrated by the different ways in which the Land Law was applied in the 'Ajlun and Balqa' districts, and the different title-holders which resulted.

The 'Ajlun district

The earliest land registrations began in 'Ajlun in 1876. By 1879, when British consular officials reported that land registration had been largely completed in the "settled districts" of Syria, the provincial authorities began work in the Hawran region in earnest with the formation of the Special Commission for the Lands of the Hawran. The Commission concluded a near-exhaustive registration of the 'Ajlun district between 1882 and 1887. Thereafter, officers of the tapu bureau, or land registry, went through the district to record the remaining houses, village plots and gardens previously overlooked.


53 Gerber argues for regional variations in the Law's application in his Social Origins, chapter 5.


55 Martha Mundy, "Shareholders and the State: Representing the Village in the Late 19th Century Land Registers of the Southern Hauran," in T.Philipp, ed., The Syrian Lands in the 18th and 19th Centuries (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 219–38; and "Qada' 'Ajlun in the
In ‘Ajlun, the peasant small shareholding was the standard unit of registration. Large holdings were the rare exception; only one village (Maru) was registered to a single family of religious shaykhs. The Land Law did not change land tenure practices; rather, Ottoman officials worked closely with the mukhtars, or village leaders, to translate local practices into terms compatible with the categories set out in the official form. This led to variations in the application of the land regime across the district of ‘Ajlun. Where the musha‘ system prevailed, in which a common plot of agricultural land was divided into sections that were redistributed annually among shareholders, individual title was defined as a fraction of the common plot. Thus, Salih Tall’s father “registered two of the forty-seven shares of the common lands of Irbid in his [and his] brothers’ names” in 1881.56 The fractions which resulted could prove cumbersome, such as one-third of a one-sixth share of a 230-dönüm plot, or one-eighth of a one-eighteenth share of a 10,512-dönüm plot.57 In the mountain regions of the district, individually held small plots were more common than musha‘, though some villages were composed of communally and individually held properties.58

There is no evidence in the ‘Ajlun registers of peasants signing away their lands to urban notables or tribal shaykhs out of fear of registration – another of the assumed shortcomings of the Land Law.59 Peasants certainly feared increased taxation and conscription, though this did not prevent them from registering their lands in their own names. Once the procedure had been conducted elsewhere, the cultivators of the ‘Ajlun district registered their properties in their own names, without recourse to other intermediaries than their mukhtars who explained those parts of the Law which they did not understand.60 Finally, the thoroughness of the Ottoman officials in recording the properties of the district suggests a degree of efficiency for which they are seldom credited.


56 Tall, p. 142.
57 These examples are drawn from title deeds from the village of Rasun, MW, File 10.
60 ADN, CCE: Damascus, 11 June 1892.
The Salt district

In the 'Ajlun district, with its productive villages and history of tax payment, the primary challenge facing the Ottoman land officials was the translation of local practice into a form recognized by Ottoman land law. The application of the Ottoman land regime to the district of Salt faced a different set of constraints. Land relations in the Balqa’ were dominated by the Bedouin tribes. Farmers from Salt who tilled grain lands at a distance from their town did so by agreement with the dominant tribe of that area and, while free of all fiscal obligations to the state, were obliged to give a share of their harvests to their tribal landlord as khuwa, or protection payments. With the extension of Ottoman rule, the governor in Salt prohibited the charging of khuwa in order to collect taxes for the treasury. This meant gaining the adherence not only of the district’s cultivators, but of the Bedouin tribes as well.

Ottoman efforts to gain Bedouin acceptance of the 1858 Land Law involved incentives and coercion. The transformation of communal domain (dira) to individual holdings and the potential for agricultural rents from such lands were strong incentives. Tribesmen were not averse to the notion of individual holdings. It has been argued that the ‘Abad tribe had distributed communal lands to individuals as early as the 1830s. Members of the Fayiz clan claim that the Bani Sakhr dira was distributed among individual members by Fandi Fayiz in the early 1870s. This is supported by a British traveler’s account from 1872, whose Bani Sakhr guide claimed “distinct personal, and not tribal, possession of the land” which he then had under cultivation. The ‘Adwan had divided their Jordan Valley lands by 1881, according to C. R. Conder who claimed their properties were “regularly owned, and ... marked out by boundaries.” These examples confirm the Bedouin’s acceptance of the principle of individual landholdings.

Confiscation of tribal dira for land-grant settlements served as a coercive means to achieve the same ends. As already noted, five land-grant colonies (Amman, Wadi Sir, Madaba, Jarash and Ruman) were carved out of the jealously preserved diras of the Balqawiyya, ‘Abbad, Bani Sakhr, ‘Adwan and Bani Hasan tribes between 1878 and 1884. Midhat Pasha’s rejection of Bani Sakhr Shaykh Sattam Fayiz’s petition

63 Tristram, Land of Moab, p. 333.
to recover his tribe’s lands in Madaba was a statement of official disregard for customary rights. The correlation between land-grant colonies and Bedouin acceptance of the state’s land regime is to be found in the oldest surviving land registers from the district of Salt, spanning the years 1879–85. The first register, completed in October 1879, followed the founding of Amman by about one year and established title to lands neighboring the Circassian colony claimed by the ‘Adwan and Balqawiyyya tribes. Similarly, the second register was drafted in March 1881, shortly after the foundation of Wadi Sir, and records lands of those tribes most affected by the founding of that village – the ‘Abbad, ‘Ajarma and ‘Adwan. All told, 390 properties were registered in the first two defters alone, totaling some 61,440 dönüm.

The lands were registered to the tribesmen under very favorable terms. By government orders of 1877, the tribesmen were spared the valuation tax (hare), set at 10 percent of the land’s estimated value at time of registration. Thus no taxes were assessed of the tribesmen, as had been of the Christians in Madaba. The only duties the tribesmen were asked to pay were the one piaster scribal fee and three piasters for the title deed. Furthermore, no restrictions on resale were placed on the Bedouin title-holders, as had been on the Circassians, Chechen and Türkmen land-grant settlers, who could not transfer title for a ten-year period. The tribesmen were free to sell their property, on the understanding that no claim could be made on land once its title had been sold. Significantly, these registers pre-date the opening of the land registration office in Salt in 1891–92, and were the work of a team of Tapu officials sent from Nablus. It thus seems a reasonable sequence of events to suggest that the government awarded land grants to establish colonies and, in response to the protests of the tribes affected, dispatched land registry officials to award title to tribesmen for their lands on favorable terms to encourage voluntary adherence to the state’s land regime.

The Bani Sakhr, the largest and most powerful of the tribes in the

65 DLR, unbound registers of Tişrin-i sani 1295/October 1879, 2 defters of Mart 1297/ March 1881, of Tişrin-i sani 1299/October 1883, and Şubat 1300/February 1885. See also Lewis, Nomads and Settlers, p. 131.
66 The register records title to over 200 properties measuring 25,000 dönüm total to members of the ‘Adwan; 50 properties measuring over 4,500 dönüm total to members of the ‘Ajarma; 123 properties measuring over 26,500 dönüm to the ‘Abbad; and three smaller properties measuring 780 dönüm total to members of the ‘Ajarma and Da’ja tribes.
67 The register recorded fourteen properties with a total surface area of 2,600 dönüm total to members of the ‘Abbad, seven properties with a total surface area of 2,200 dönüm total to members of the ‘Ajarma, and four small properties of 350 dönüm total surface area to members of the ‘Adwan.
district, petitioned the government for legal title to their lands after Midhat Pasha awarded the lands around Madaba to the Christian settlers from Karak.\textsuperscript{68} However, they seem not to have registered the bulk of their lands while pursuing claims to different lands farmed by the Madabans. Sattam Fayiz was determined to recover Madaba itself.\textsuperscript{69} The Zaban branch laid claim to the lands of Jalul.\textsuperscript{70} And Quftan al-Hamid tried to drive the Madabans off the lands of Taym.\textsuperscript{71} Judging from the correspondence, the government was deliberately vague in confirming the Christian villagers’ title to tribal lands. The state’s priorities lay in settling the Bedouin and getting them to put their lands to productive use. The settlement at Madaba could be used to achieve this end. Thus, in July 1888, the Latin missionary in Madaba wrote the Patriarch in Jerusalem to complain that Bani Sakhr Shaykh Minawir al-Zaban had returned from Damascus with authorization from the governor to register the disputed lands of Jalul in his name.\textsuperscript{72} In this instance the provincial government favored the Bedouin claim over that of the Madabans, presumably because the tribe had demonstrated its willingness to abide by Ottoman land law.

Wholesale registration of Bani Sakhr lands occurred in the 1890s. Unlike the ‘Adwan, ‘Abbad and Balqawiyya tribes, who registered small holdings to individual tribesmen,\textsuperscript{73} the Bani Sakhr concentrated holdings in the hands of their most powerful families. Thus, in 1897, the sons of Sattam Fayiz registered a total of 25,400 dönüms of arable land worth 86,600 piasters, and eleven houses worth 19,400 piasters in Um al-‘Amad, Qastal, Jiziya, Zubayir and Sufa.\textsuperscript{74} The sons of Sulayman Fayiz registered 6,000 dönüms in Laban and 10,000 dönüms in Tunayb; and the sons of Minawir Zaban registered nearly 14,000 dönüms in Jalul (at Madaba’s expense).\textsuperscript{75} The evidence would suggest that the Ottomans were not concerned with the size of holdings, leaving the details to

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\textsuperscript{68} Lewis, \textit{Nomads and Settlers}, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{LPJ}, Madaba, petition from residents of Madaba to Mgr. Bracco, 21 October 1885; Biever to Bracco, 1 July 1887 and 24 March 1888.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{LPJ}, Madaba, Biever to Bracco, 1 December 1886, 24 March 1888, 25 July 1888; Biever to Piavi, 14 January 1890.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{LPJ}, Madaba, Biever to Bracco, 15 December 1888, 14 January 1890.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{LPJ}, Madaba, Biever to Bracco, 25 July 1888. Jalul was registered to Minawir’s sons in the tapu bureau in 1892, and again in the Islamic courts of Salt in April 1904; ICR Salt vol. 7, pp. 183–84 #112.
\textsuperscript{73} The exception was the head shaykh of the ‘Adwan, ‘Ali al-Dhiyab, who registered twelve properties totaling some 2,400 dönüms in his own name.
\textsuperscript{74} DLR, Salt, vol. 3, \textit{Yoklama} register of \textit{Tişrin-i evvel} 1313/October 1897.
\textsuperscript{75} These figures were compiled from the \textit{Yoklama} registers of Salt 1313 (1897); of the Bani Sakhr 1313 (1897); and of Wadi Sir (1892) by Noufan Raja al-Hmoud Al-Swarieh, \textit{Amman wa jawariha khilal al-fatra 1864–1921} [Amman and its Region] (Amman, 1996), pp. 264–65.
the tribes to agree on among themselves. Thus, within the same district, smallholder Bedouin as well as largeholder Shaykhs such as have been documented in Ottoman Iraq resulted from land registration.\(^7^6\)

The documentary evidence supports a working hypothesis that the poorer, more sedentarized tribes, whose members drew a greater share of their subsistence from agriculture, tended to communal tenure of tribal properties. Their Shaykhs were less likely to hold vast, individual tracts of land because the tribesmen could ill afford such concentration. Such tribes would include the Bani Hamida, the Balqawiyya, the Bani Hasan and ‘Abbad – the very tribes whose members figure most frequently in the registration and sale of communally held lands. It is only among the wealthier, more powerful tribes that the Shaykhs accumulated vast individual holdings. The tribesmen of the Bani Sakhr, with their great herds, drew ample subsistence from pastoralism and preserved their disdain for agricultural pursuits. This freed their Shaykhs to register vast tracts of land without dissent from the rank-and-file, whose livelihood was not adversely affected so long as they enjoyed access to good pasturelands.

The significance of dira seems to have been undermined by the process of registration. Where tribal rights were formerly conterminous with tribal lands, now the Bedouin were willing to alienate parts of their domain to other tribes and villagers through the sale of their property.\(^7^7\)

Given that so much of the territory of the Balqa’ district was effectively Bedouin land, any agricultural unit which sought to expand beyond its confines had to buy the option from the Bedouin. When the residents of Madaba sought to expand, they bought the land from the ‘Adwan; when the Circassians in Na’ur went beyond their land grant, they too bought the land from the Bedouin.\(^7^8\) Furthermore, tribesmen who sought to assert a claim over tribal lands, after the initial registrations of the 1870s and 1880s, did so on Ottoman terms. Pasturelands which were not under cultivation were designated mahlul by the Ottoman authorities and were awarded to the Bedouin as land grants against their pledge to remit one-fifth of their harvests to the treasury. The Bedouin accession to the Ottoman land regime is quite striking in these cases, where the

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\(^7^7\) See, for example, ICR Salt, vol. 17, pp. 106–107 #2, 23 October 1911, in which a Bedouin of Jubur sold his share of a tribal property to a Bedouin of the Fuqaha; and in the same volume, p. 107 #3, 27 October 1911, in which a Bedouin of the ‘Ajarma sold three properties to members of the ‘Adwan tribe.

\(^7^8\) ICR Salt, vol. 17, pp. 88–89 #317, 4 October 1911, sale of 180 dönüms by the ‘Adwan to residents of Madaba; for Na’ur, see vol. 17, p. 104 #344, 23 October 1911.
tribesmen accepted the government’s definition of their customary holdings as “mahlul lands which were given to them by the Sublime Government through the tapu clerk of the district of Salt.” Their willingness to abide by Ottoman rules reflected changing realities in which lands under cultivation provided more revenues to title-holders than when left as pasturage. Evidence of this change may be found in the proliferation of Bedouin plantation villages.

*Tribal plantations*

Where large holdings prevailed, primarily to the south of Amman along the Hajj Road, a new system of agricultural organization emerged. The earliest example of a plantation in tribal lands was the Abu Jabir farm at Yaduda. Situated 12 kilometers south of Amman, Yaduda proved a profitable venture which no doubt influenced many tribesmen to consider turning their grazing lands to more lucrative uses. Salih and Ibrahim Abu Jabir were Christian merchants of Nablus who had conducted trade across the Jordan with a number of tribes. In the early 1860s they had settled in Salt and had entered into an agricultural venture with Rumayh Fayiz of the Bani Sakhr tribe on his lands at Khirbat Yaduda: “Ibrahim and Salih would till the land, pay all expenses and, after harvest, Rumayh would receive half the crop and retain half the cultivated land, while the Abu Jabirs would receive the other half of the crop and acquire the other half of the land.”

*Cultivators were hired from the Nablus and Jerusalem regions as sharecroppers and ploughmen on ten-month contracts. The grain of Yaduda found ready markets in neighboring cities, and the farm grew with its profits. By 1879, the Abu Jabirs reportedly had some sixty faddans under cultivation.*

The earliest receipts for grain sales from Yaduda are relatively late, dating to 1911. In that year, two of Salih Abu Jabir’s sons sold over 30,500 sa‘ (roughly 180,000 kilos) to merchants in Jerusalem, worth over 1,500 French gold pounds.

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79 ICR Salt, vol. 17, pp. 39–40 #229, 2 April 1911, in which sixty-three men and one woman of the Khadir branch of the Bani Sakhr registered lands from their own dira at Rajm al-Shami, some 25 kilometers southeast of Amman. See also DLR vol. 2, Dāimī register of Tīrīn-i sānī 1310 (November 1894), and vol. 3, Dāimī register of Kanun-i sānī 1312 (January 1911).


of the greater profits to be had from converting pasturelands to rain-fed grain cultivation.

Following the registration of Bedouin lands, numerous new settlements began to appear between Amman and Karak. The Salname (provincial yearbook) for Syria lists five Bedouin villages in the Balqa’ district in addition to Madaba and the Circassian settlements in 1900. Jaussen, writing in 1907, listed twenty plantations “belonging in large part to the Bani Sakhr” in the environs of Madaba which had been brought under cultivation over the previous ten years.83 Moving south of the Wadi Mujib, Jaussen noted the settlement of Qar’a granted to a community of fifteen Egyptian families by the Ottoman government, and over a dozen villages established by the Majalis and other Karaki clans.84 The process of land registration initiated by the Ottomans, combined with the threat posed by government land grants to colonists and the potential to reap substantial profits from agriculture, set in motion an adherence to Ottoman land law and led to a network of new settlements. These results entrenched Ottoman rule and enhanced the region’s fiscal potential.

Land registration by market forces

Before 1910, the Ottomans did not attempt a systematic registration of all the agricultural lands of the districts of Salt, Karak or Ma’an as they had in Jabal ‘Ajlun. The French Consul in Damascus claimed that this was out of respect for regional particularism: “The inhabitants of these...localities are too jealous of their privileges for one to dream of making them accept any innovation except by force.”85 Once Bedouin acceptance of the Ottoman land regime had been achieved, conditions favored the development of a real-estate market and the government was willing to allow market forces to drive the registration initiative in those districts. Thus, a tapu clerk was posted to keep a monthly record of all real-estate transactions and to issue title to those who could demonstrate a right of tenure. Up through 1890, land transactions in the Salt district were recorded through the Islamic court; starting in 1891, this function was assumed by the newly established tapu office.86

83 Jaussen, Coutumes des Arabes, pp. 243–44.
84 Jaussen, Coutumes des Arabes, pp. 244–45.
85 ADN, CCE: Damascus, 11 June 1892.
86 ICR Salt, vols. 1–3, which span the years 1882–90, are primarily dedicated to real-estate transactions and loans against landed collateral. Thereafter real-estate deeds disappear from the court registers for a number of years. When such deeds reappear, they always include a proviso appointing an agent to record the transaction with the tapu clerk. The first regular defter-i hakkane with monthly listings of registrations and
Registers were opened in the Karak district in 1900, and in the districts of Ma’an and Tafila in 1906. The shift was significant in effecting the bureaucratization of land: transactions conducted through the Islamic courts went untaxed, while those recorded by the tapu clerk were responsible to the fisc.

With the exception of land grants and voluntary registrations to protect lands from government expropriation, all of the lands registered in the districts of Salt, Karak, Tafila and Ma’an were entered into the state’s books through transactions. Two types of registers were kept: yoklama registers recorded the award of title, and daimi registers recorded transactions of registered lands. In order to sell an unregistered property, the vendor would first have to obtain title by registering the property in the yoklama and paying the relevant taxes and fees. Then the sale could be registered in the daimi and the new holder assessed the same taxes and fees a second time. Transactions not duly registered with the tapu clerk would not be recognized, and the property subject to confiscation. While the tapu bureau might not have obtained a complete registration of all economically active properties by this method, it was all the same a cost-efficient means to register and tax the real-estate market.

The expansion in the number of title-holders created a scarcity in land that encouraged farmers to negotiate access to uncultivated tribal lands, driving back the frontier of settlement. A group of Christians from Fuhays petitioned the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem for assistance to pay the registration fees on a plot of tribal land in 1883. “All of the farm lands have been taken by the Bedouin and the Circassians, and there is no place for us to farm with our families,” they wrote. They had been approached by a shaykh who offered them half his property if they would register it with the authorities and pay the taxes and fees to establish title. However, they did not have the means to pay, and sought the assistance of the Patriarch. The Patriarchate received a similar

transactions dates to 1891, and the first tapu katibi, Ibrahim Efendi Tahir, was listed in the Salname of 1302M (1892–93), p. 196.

87 Tarawna, Tarikh mantiqat al-Balqa’, p. 139; these dates correspond to the oldest surviving registers from Karak (Temmuz 1316), Ma’an and Tafila (both Kanun-i sani 1321).

88 Without official title, no legal claim could be brought before the Ottoman authorities. Thus, when an immigrant from Nablus bought a plot of land from two Saltis outside the tapu office and paid them the agreed price (267.5 piasters), he had no means to make the sellers yield the property; instead, he resorted to the moral suasion of the Islamic court, where the judge upheld his claim. ICR Salt vol. 17, p. 90 #3 (16 February 1911).

89 LPJ, Fuhays, petition from 27 Christians of Fuhays (n.d.), attached to letter dated 13 November 1883.
request fourteen years later, by which time the scarcity of land had led to intense competition for large plots. Seventeen petitioners from Salt sought 17,500 piasters from the Patriarch to establish a claim to a 10,000 dönüm plot of land by paying the back taxes due on the property. The land registry official had advised the Saltis to act quickly as there were a number of rival claimants to the land, including shaykhs of the Ruwala and the Bani Sakhr whose lands neighbored the property, and one shaykh of the Da’ja tribe who sought the property “to make up for the lands taken from him and given to the immigrants.” The Ottoman land regime was clearly working in the Balqa’ district. Fear of expropriation of lands for new settlers drove tribesmen to register their lands, and agricultural rents provided an incentive for cultivators and Bedouin alike to compete for access to new property, leading to an expansion of the area under cultivation.

Thus, to summarize the variegated application of the 1858 Land Law in Transjordan, a systematic registration recorded virtually all economically active properties in the ‘Ajlun district. Typically, title was awarded to cultivator smallholders, reflecting prevailing land practices in the established villages of the district. Further south, the award of prime farmland to refugee colonists set in motion a defensive registration of tribal lands in the Salt district. Thereafter, no attempt was made to conduct a region-wide registration. Instead, the Ottoman land registry diverted the active trade in land away from the Islamic courts and into the tapu bureau. The registration of properties in the districts of Salt, Karak, Tafila and Ma’an were left to market forces. Given the accelerating rate of transactions in land, both as collateral for loans and in outright sales, this random method led to an extensive registration of economically active properties. The Ottomans seemed to operate within the land practices which prevailed in the different regions, and so met little resistance to the application of their land regime. The benefits of the new system were measured in the increase in tax revenues which resulted from registration and the spread of cultivation.

Fiscal consequences of settlement

The earliest official tax estimates for Transjordan date to 1884 and were presented in support of the project to create a new province with its capital in Ma’an to reinforce southern Syria in the aftermath of the British occupation of Egypt. As these figures were presented to demonstrate the economic feasibility of such a project, they represent the most

90 LPJ, Salt, petition of 25 July 1897.
optimistic projections of what might be collected from the districts of Karak, Tafila and Salt.\textsuperscript{91} As so little of the resources of Karak and Tafila had been registered with government officials at that time, the document noted, the revenues estimated for those places would not be achieved for more than a decade. Total revenues from livestock and agricultural taxes were expected to yield 930,250 piasters from the Karak district, and 845,750 piasters from the Tafila district. The governor claimed that the district of Salt was capable of generating over 1.8 million piasters annually for the provincial treasury. However, the document noted that at the time of drafting only 500,000–600,000 piasters were actually registered for collection and that of this sum only two-thirds were actually collected, the remaining one-third irrevocably lost to the Bani Sakhr and other tribes. Thus, in 1884, the governor of Damascus envisioned raising some 3.7 million piasters from Transjordan (not including ‘Ajlun) in a decade’s time.

Tax collection fared better than expected. By the 1890s, it appears that the government had begun to apply the standard system of regular, incidental and extraordinary taxes to the Transjordan frontier – taxes on land, on agricultural production, and on animals, as well as incidentals such as the bedel-i asker for exemption from military service.\textsuperscript{92} Figures provided by geographer Vital Cuinet for the 1890s suggest that far higher revenues than predicted in 1884 were collected a decade later. His figures, which were based on Ottoman official figures consulted in the course of his study, represent the average of five years’ harvests (though he neglected to specify the years). He claimed that the öşür tithe on cereal production for the Karak region (including Salt, Karak, Tafila and Ma‘an) came to 14.4 million piasters. This figure represented over 16 percent of the grain tithe for the entire province of Syria, and was comparable to the 17 million piasters levied of the Hama region, though well below the 34.3 million piasters collected from the provincial granary of the Hawran region.\textsuperscript{93} Livestock taxes came to 30,000 piasters for camels and 525,000 piasters for goats and sheep, or a total of 555,000 piasters, representing some 8 percent of the total livestock taxes for the province which, given the importance of pastoralism in the

\textsuperscript{91} BBA, Y-A.Res 24/38, “Table of estimated annual miri land tax revenues and other duties to be collected from the areas of Salt, Karak, Tafila and Jiza, by locale,” n.d., included in file of documents dating to June/July 1884.


region's economy, seems quite a low figure.\footnote{Cuinet, \textit{Syrie, Liban et Palestine}, p. 350.} Cuinet's figures would suggest that the Ottoman presence at the Transjordan frontier had stimulated the local economy sufficiently to generate a taxable surplus which would appear not only to have covered the cost of administration, but to have made a contribution to the provincial treasury as well.

**Conclusion**

Ottoman rule was introduced to Transjordan through military campaigns and the creation of an administrative apparatus. It was secured by a process of colonization and land settlement. The success of the Ottoman land regime in Transjordan was to a great extent due to the flexibility with which the provisions of the 1858 Land Law were applied. The systematic registration of all agricultural lands in 'Ajlun, and the reliance on incentives and transactions to register the lands of the villagers and tribesmen of the Salt district, both achieved the desired ends of winning local acceptance of the Ottoman land regime and increasing tax receipts. As the area under cultivation expanded, so did government tax revenues. Indeed, by the 1890s it would seem that the districts of Transjordan were covering their own costs and contributing to the provincial treasury.

The districts of Karak and Ma'an lagged behind Salt in land registration. The later introduction of direct rule in 1893 meant that registration there lagged behind the northern districts by a decade or more. Perhaps more important, there were fewer waves of refugees to settle in Syria by the 1890s, and later waves of Circassians and Chechen tended to settle around Amman and its satellites. The only exception was the Türkmen settlement at Lajjun, between Qatrana and Karak. Consequently, the threat of expropriation did not hang over the tribesmen of Karak and Ma'an, and they were less motivated to register their lands as a result.

With a new level of security and rapid population growth, the lands to the east of the Jordan began to attract the attention of regional merchants, who saw 'Ajlun, the Balqa' and Karak as a new frontier of economic opportunity: markets for the sale of their goods, and a zone of production of goods which found ready markets in neighboring cities. Thus merchants followed the Ottomans across the Jordan, and through their activities linked the frontier zone to the regional economy in a process analogous to the administrative incorporation undertaken by the state.