

WILEY

American Geographical Society

Types of Native Life in Tripolitania

Author(s): Jean Despois

Source: *Geographical Review*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Jul., 1945), pp. 352-367

Published by: American Geographical Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/211325>

Accessed: 30-06-2016 16:01 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Wiley, American Geographical Society are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Geographical Review*

TYPES OF NATIVE LIFE IN TRIPOLITANIA*

JEAN DESPOIS

BETWEEN Morocco, facing the Atlantic, and the Suez Canal the various regions of North Africa are differentiated by the preponderant action of the Mediterranean or the Saharan climate. The former predominates only in the region of the Atlas that the natives of Algeria and Tunisia call the Tell and a thousand kilometers to the east, in the extreme northern part of Cyrenaica, on the plateau of the Jebel Akhdar, the Green Mountain. Elsewhere the Saharan influence prevails, as much on the shores of the Gulf of Sidra, in Marmarica, and in northern Egypt as on the steppes of French North Africa. It is to this steppeland, where sedentary life is possible only locally by careful use of the water, surface and underground, and the region otherwise is devoted to more or less nomadic pastoral life, that Tripolitania belongs.

The landscapes of Tripolitania¹ are everywhere suggestive of the near-by Sahara. First, strung along the seacoast, between lagoons and the white or buff sands of the dunes, are palm-bright, village-dotted oases, from which rises the ceaseless creaking of the pulleys in thousands of wells.

Immediately behind spread the plains of the Jefara, sandy steppes with stunted vegetation.² The waters that trickle over low rocky or pebbly hillocks run into muddy depressions called *garaa* or *bahira*, or, when they are salty, *sebkha*. Here and there are dune massifs, one of which lies at the very doors of Tripoli.

The Jefara is bounded on the south by the bare, rocky cliff of the Jebel, The Mountain, its edge serrated by wadies. At Garian the Jebel is more than 800 meters in height; westward, in the Jebel Nefusa, it falls to 600 meters, and northeastward it dissolves into hills in the Msellata country. Its structure, the small clusters of palms around the springs, and the bareness of the slopes on first sight evoke the Saharan landscape. But when one climbs

* This article was dispatched in the fall of 1943 and received by the Society in February, 1945; because of such delays in communication it has not been possible to submit a translation of the manuscript to the author.—EDIT. NOTE.

¹ On the country as a whole see H. W. Ahlmann: *La Libye septentrionale*, *Geografiska Annaler*, Vol. 10, 1928, pp. 1-118 (Italian translation, "La Libia settentrionale," *Governo della Cirenaica, Servizio Studi, Rapporti e Monografie Coloniali*, Ser. 3, No. 1, Bengasi, 1930); Angelo Piccioli: *La nuova Italia d'oltremare*, 2 vols., Milan, Rome, Verona, 1933, Vol. 1; Jean Despois: *La colonisation italienne en Libye*, Paris, 1935, Part I. (The English-speaking reader will find helpful "A Handbook of Libya," compiled by the Geographical Section of the Naval Intelligence Division, Naval Staff, Admiralty [I. D. 1162], London, 1920.—EDIT. NOTE.)

² This is a degraded steppe with *Asphodelus microcarpus*, *Imperata cylindrica*, *Artemisia campestris*, and, locally, *Zizyphus lotus*.

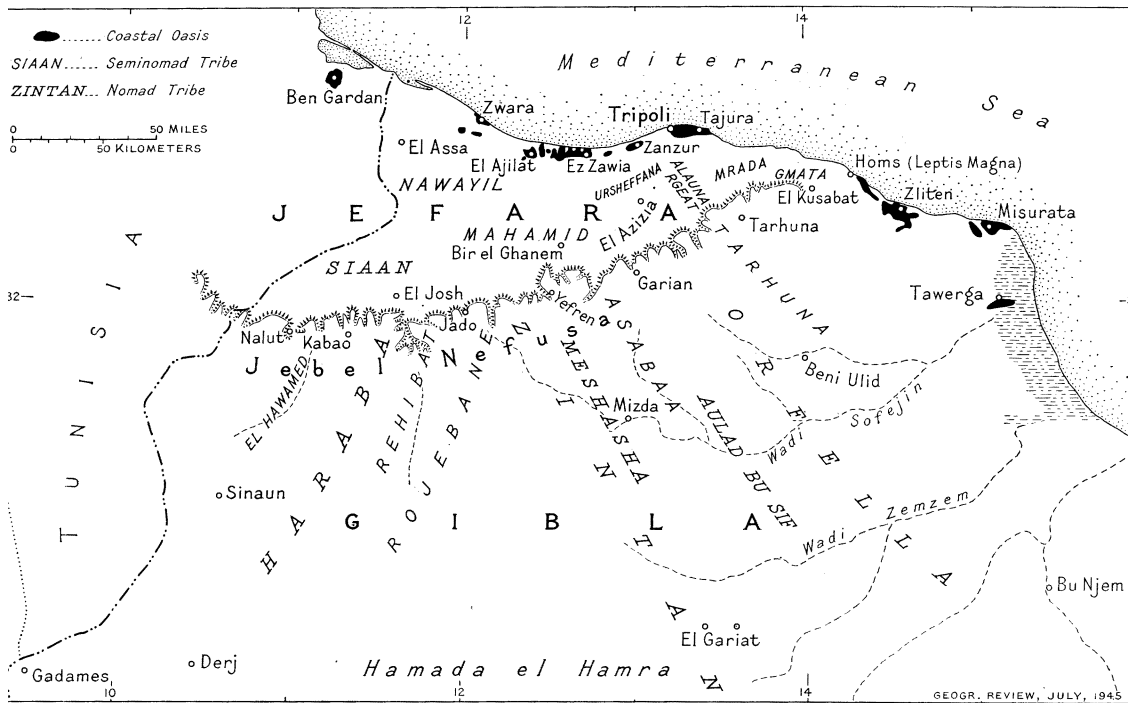


FIG. 1—Map of Tripolitania showing the main regional divisions and tribal distribution. Scale approximately 1 : 4,250,000.

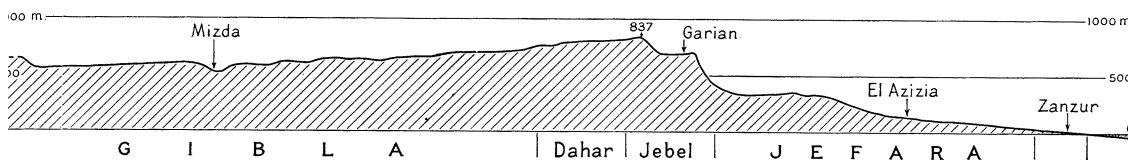


FIG. 2—Section across Tripolitania from north to south. The vertical scale is exaggerated about 20 times.

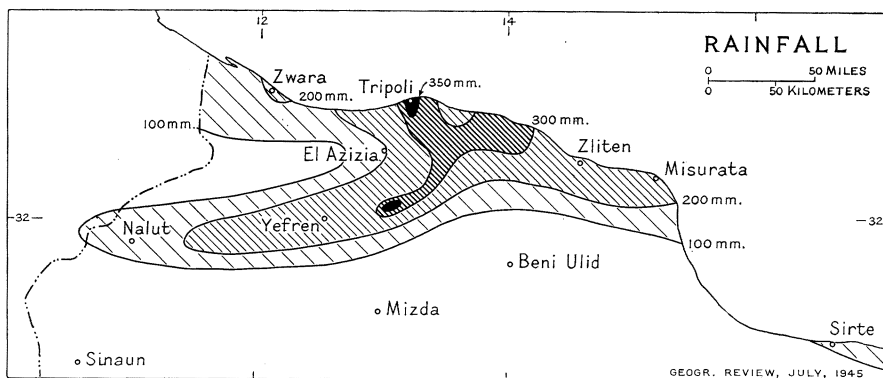


FIG. 3—Rainfall map of Tripolitania, after a map in A. Fàntoli: Elementi preliminari della pluviometria libica, *L'Agricoltura Coloniale*, Vol. 33, 1939, pp. 1-27; map facing p. 4.

its slopes and arrives on the Dahar (the back), the presence of Mediterranean plants and the practice of dry farming indicate that the altitude and exposure give a new vigor to the maritime influence.

But these influences diminish rapidly toward the south. From the Dahar one passes imperceptibly into the Gibla (the south country), a plateau of



FIG. 4—Remains of quays in the Roman city of Leptis Magna (present-day Homs).

desertic steppes where the alfa grass rapidly disappears. The plateau descends gradually to the foot of the arid Hamada el Hamra, the red desert, and to the far-off basin of the Fezzan. Broad wadi valleys “sunk in a death trance,” evidences of a Quaternary hydrography oriented toward the Gulf of Sidra, furrow the Gibla, a region already distinctly Saharan. Then one arrives in the Fezzan.

At first glance the conditions of life in Tripolitania seem to be unfavorable. Rains are rare: only the seacoast, the extreme eastern part of the Jefara, and the central and eastern parts of the Jebel receive more than 200 millimeters of water a year, a very low figure; nowhere is there as much as 400 millimeters. Moreover, these rains are seasonal, falling from October to March, and extremely irregular. Evaporation is considerable; the heat, slightly milder on the Jebel and along the seaboard, is torrid in summer.

However, the lightness of most of the soils of the coastal region, of the Jefara, and even of the Dahar permits the absorption and conservation of almost all the rain water, so that under obvious limitations dry farming can be carried on, at least for certain trees like the olive, almost everywhere where the average annual rainfall is more than 200 or 250 millimeters. Moreover, in the sands of the coast and the northern plain the phreatic surface is at a fairly shallow depth and the water fairly abundant and often of

good quality; the springs that rise on the flanks and at the foot of the Jebel, rather poor in quality on the whole, are at least very numerous.³

An agricultural life limited to dry farming and irrigation is therefore possible locally in the vast steppes otherwise condemned to a nomadic pastoralism. But it demands a certain technique and effort, and it requires a



FIG. 5—View over a village in the oasis of Misurata.

political setup strong enough to keep the nomadic tribes within bounds and restrain their predatory instincts.

THE HISTORICAL FACTORS

It would seem that before Italian colonization, except probably in Roman times, no systematic effort was made to develop agriculture in Tripolitania. Although subjected to Mediterranean agricultural civilization since the days of Carthage, western Libya was never anything but a maritime façade, a country of emporiums and ports, the trade of which was fed by merchandise from the Sudan as much as, if not more than, by the products of the country itself—chiefly oil from the hinterland of Leptis Magna in antiquity, products of stock farming in the following centuries. Sabrata, Oea (Tripoli), and Leptis Magna especially, whose grandiose ruins recall a brilliant past, and later Tripoli, their sole heir, were the starting points of the trans-Saharan trails that, through Gadames and the Fezzan, reached black Africa.

It was not until after the Arab conquests in the seventh century and the invasions of the nomadic Mohammedans in the eleventh that Libya became

³ Modern technique has enabled the Italians to tap deeper and more abundant aquifers, notably one some 15 to 20 meters below ground-water level.

not only an invasion route toward the Maghreb (the country of the setting sun) but at the same time a military, political, and religious route cutting across the economic routes. But, of even graver consequence, it also became, or rebecame, after the decline of the Roman peace, a country in which most of the tribes were nomadic and independent, dangerous to the agriculturists, forcing them back to the coast, constantly menacing and subjugating their oases, compelling some to take refuge on the steep ridges and in the ravines of the Jebel. Tripoli, a Turkish city since the sixteenth century, has remained more or less alien to its hinterland peopled by hostile tribes. The gains from privateering in the Mediterranean had for a long time been greater than the decreasing profits of trans-Saharan trade and the export of a few local products.

The Italians were able, in twenty years of effort, to get control over, and in many instances to break up, the nomadic tribes that had long been masters of the country, and to begin a rational and modern development of a region that had been practically left to itself.

VILLAGERS OF THE COASTAL OASES

The coastal oases⁴ were not only refuges for agricultural life in the regions where underground water was available at no great depth; they were also asylums for the populations pushed back from the steppes. These oases, scattered from Zwara to Tripoli by way of El Ajilat, Sorman, Ez Zawia, and Zanzur, and from Tripoli to Misurata by way of Tajura and Es Sahel and Zliten, could be considerably enlarged: their rather small area represents a kind of equilibrium between the force of expansion of the nomads and the force of resistance of the agricultural population.

The coastal oases are watered by thousands of wells, which reach the ground-water layer at five to fifteen meters. Under the light shade of scattered palms grain is grown, particularly barley. Close to the wells are a few fruit trees and small vegetable gardens save where the water contains harmful salts, as it does at Zwara and Misurata. The dates, ripened in a climate too cool and too humid, are of inferior quality and do not keep well. Orchards and market gardens are enclosed by embankments of beaten earth, often planted with a hedge of Barbary fig (*Opuntia ficus-indica*). The denser the population, the more broken up are private and family properties.

The resources of these scattered oases, where the water laboriously

⁴ The documentation of this article goes back to investigations made in the field during a long stay in 1933; it has been revised recently. See especially E. de Agostini: *Le popolazioni della Tripolitania*, 2 vols., Tripoli, 1917.

drawn from the wells is always insufficient, do not meet the needs of the inhabitants. They must sow the surrounding steppe, especially the wadi beds and the zones of convergence of running streams. Also, they commonly possess, privately or by families, the lands contiguous to the oasis, whereas those farther away are rather vaguely divided among groups of several families. These lands also serve as pastures for the few sheep and goats owned by the people of the oasis. They have thus been able, in spite of the danger of the nomad, serious only in times of trouble or great distress, to annex to their economy a strip of steppe 10 to 30 kilometers wide, which is also open to the flocks of neighboring tribes.

But plowing and harvesting, like watching the flocks, entail displacement of a part of the population of the oases and the use of tents. Thus arises a whole range of types of life, from the purely sedentary to the semi-nomadic.

The Beldi, which may be translated the "true villager," hardly ever leaves the oasis. He lives by cultivating the garden and a few supplementary resources: small crafts, some trade, sometimes a little fishing. Only the men go into the steppe to cultivate a plot of barley. Often the plowing and harvesting are done by a share cropper at a quarter rate or *rebaa*. The few animals owned by the family are entrusted to a shepherd.

Many people, while living in the oasis where they own and cultivate a garden, attach more importance to the growing of cereals, which they carry on themselves in the steppe, departing twice a year, for a few days under the tent. In the spring, when the sheep and goats are in milk, virtually the entire family follows the animals, living under the tent from January to April, leaving only one or two men, sometimes only a gardener, to take care of the little property in the oasis.

A few are real seminomads; they are owners of palms or even of a garden, but they keep a *métayer* there. They prefer to live under the tent, following the small migrations of their flocks and getting back near the cultivated land at the time of the plowing and harvesting. They are, in fact, strangers to the oasis; they are Arbi (nomadic Arabs) as truly as the seminomads of the steppe.

Between the Beldi and the Arbi, the sedentary villager and the seminomad, all types of transition are found. One or another predominates according to the abundance and quality of the water: the villagers, for instance, predominate in the vast Tripoli-Tajura oasis, where the water is sweet and not very deep, and especially where the growth of Tripoli to a large city has encouraged sedentation.



FIG. 6—A village in the oasis of Tripoli.



FIG. 7—Wells and crops in the oasis of Tajura, east of Tripoli.



FIG. 8—El Jehesh, a village in the eastern part of the Jebel Nefusa.



FIG. 9—Fortified granaries, *gasr*, partly in ruins, at Wazzen near the Tunisian boundary.

Except for the seminomads, the rural folk all live in houses. These are of the Oriental urban type, consisting of long rooms flat-roofed or vaulted around an interior court, and show little adaptation to the farm economy. The houses, sometimes isolated in gardens, are generally grouped in hamlets rather than in real agglomerations. The inhabitants feel themselves sufficiently protected against the nomads by the trees and the garden enclosures

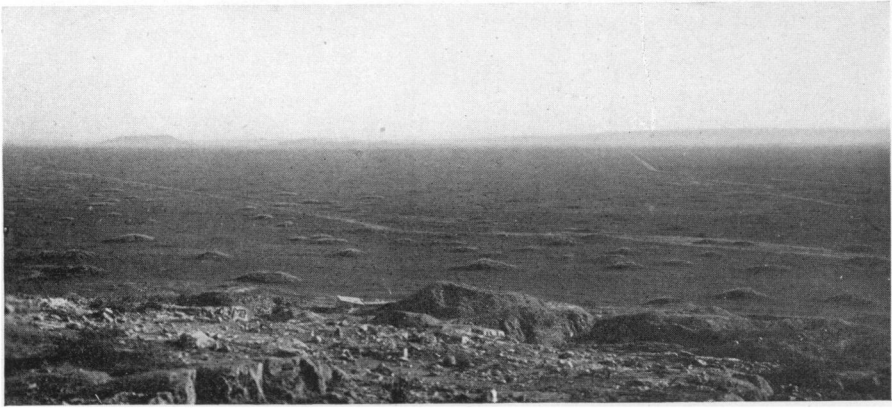


FIG. 10—The Jefara southeast of El Azizia; jujube (*Zizyphus lotus*) steppe.

without the necessity of crowding their houses together. The hamlets are dispersed in the oasis, more or less distant from its center, where are the principal mosque, the shops, and the market place.

The varied origins of the population still find frequent expression in the grouping of the houses and lands. The most ancient families, which also are the most sedentary, are scattered here and there in the heart of the oasis; such are the descendants of the Turkish soldiers and officials—the Kulurhli. The Jews, who make their living with small handicrafts and trade, are massed together in the center, in a special quarter called *hara*. Many of the groups originally from the steppe but attached to the oasis for generations still show a certain cohesion, occupying individual hamlets, set amidst their gardens; the most recently settled groups are often the most excentric.

Tripoli alone, on the border of the principal oasis, has attained the dignity of a city. But this is due more to outside causes than to the local economy; it has long been a port and a capital. Its recent rapid growth is due to Italian domination. But, on the whole, this domination has been more or less deleterious to the inhabitants of the coastal oases. Concessions granted to the Italian colonists encircle the oases; they were formerly plowed lands and pasturage. To withstand complete economic asphyxiation, the natives

have had to work for the colonists or on the numerous projects started by the Italians for the construction of roads and public buildings.

SEMINOMADISM AND SEDENTATION IN THE JEFARA

The tribes of the Jefara, formerly feared by the people of the oases, have always led a predominantly pastoral and nomadic life. Improvement in

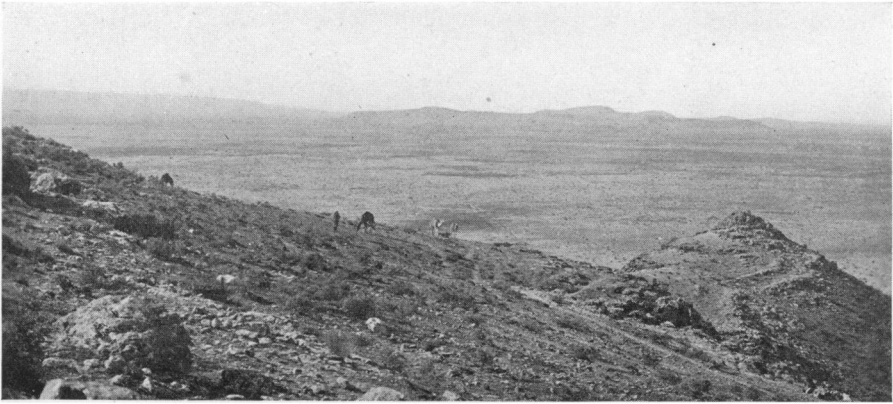


FIG. 11—Contact of the Jefara and the Jebel Garian (left) seen from an elevation in the Jefara.

natural conditions from west to east and the Italian ascendancy in the eastern regions have, however, produced two main variants in this existence.

The tribes of the west have remained nomadic. They have gathering points near the principal watering places; there are the cemeteries, the granaries, and sometimes modest olive, fig, and palm plots cultivated by a share cropper. The Nawayil gather around a hundred or more wells at El Assa, the Siaan near the fifteen little piedmont wells of El Josh, and the Mahamid beside the two abundant wells of Bir el Ghanem.

The various divisions have their grainlands in the depressions and especially in the distributary zones of the wadies from the Jebel. They never sow more than a part, according to the rains and the floods: it is both an extensive and an itinerant cultivation. They live principally by grazing, notably the Siaan, and follow their flocks of sheep and goats. Their movements are not in any way regular or seasonal; beasts and men go to the spot where it has rained, where pasturage is the least dry and the least exhausted. The groups normally have their own pasturelands, but they easily go from one to another, and, if necessary, to the lands of a neighboring tribe by paying grazing rights.

The Siaan, Nawayil, and Mahamid peoples therefore always live in tents, dispersed in small groups. Except for the Siaan, they are classed as

seminomadic rather than nomadic, because of the relative importance of cultivation and the small orbit of the displacements. They move about less than formerly and have lost their past power. The suzerainty that the Siaan and the Mahamid and the Warghamma of southern Tunisia formerly imposed on most of the population of the Jebel exists now only as a memory. But Italian domination has changed little their type of life adapted to the pre-desertic steppes.



FIG. 12—Looking over the hills of the inner border of the Jefara to the Jebel Nefusa in the Nałut region.

The tribes of the eastern Jefara, on the other hand, the Urshefana, the Rgeat, the Alauna, the Mrada, and the Gmata, occupying the less dry steppes, have suffered from the effects of Italian colonization. Formerly they lived much like their neighbors to the west but planted more cereals and moved about less. A considerable part of their lands has been confiscated for the benefit of Italian colonists. Some have been converted into agricultural laborers; others, confined to limited areas, have increased plowing at the expense of pastures. Furthermore, they are gradually settling on former collective lands, tending to private ownership of the plots, plots that they cultivate almost every year in spite of the poor results. Many have left the tents for thatched huts called *gurbi*.⁵ The social organization

⁵ On the *gurbi* see, for instance, Jules Blache: Modes of Life in the Moroccan Countryside, *Geogr. Rev.*, Vol. 11, 1921, pp. 477-502, especially p. 479; and Augustin Bernard: *Afrique septentrionale et occidentale*, Part I (*Géographie Universelle*, Vol. 11, Part 1), Paris, 1937, p. 90.

is crumbling; it is no longer the tribal division that is the social cell, as it still is in the west, but the little family group. The idea of the tribe, crystallized by the demands of war, has been practically forgotten.

THE VILLAGERS OF THE JEBEL

Rising above the plain, the rocky ranges of the Jebel, cut by numerous ravines and uniting in the south in a vast plateau, the Dahar, support numer-



FIG. 13—Troglodyte dwellings at Nalut.

ous villages.⁶ In this mountainous milieu, a little more watered and temperate than the plains, peoples have maintained themselves or have taken refuge. Springs, stream water carefully conserved, dry farming in the regions with sufficient rainfall make of the Jebel a country of tree crops: modest clusters of palms crowd around the springs; numerous small fig trees mount the valleys and scale the slopes of crumbling terraces; olives line the vales or dot the plateau.

But there is very little space for cereal crops, and the talus-covered slopes of the ravines afford only pasturage for goats. However, the people of the mountain have annexed for themselves the southern border of the Jefara, the Dahar, and even vast parts of the Gibla. The piedmont of the Jebel,

⁶ Società Italiana per lo Studio della Libia: *La Missione Franchetti in Tripolitania: Il Gebel*, Florence and Milan, 1914; Jean Despois: *Le Djebel Nefousa*, Paris, 1935.

where the floodwater of the wadies spreads out, is fairly regularly planted with barley and wheat, and its numerous watering places supply the flocks during the summer. The Dahar, locally used for the cultivation of cereals, is mostly a winter and spring pasturage extending into the Gibla.

This economic association of several different types of regions leads the mountain population, though almost entirely village dwellers, to a semi-nomadic life. Plowing, harvesting, and watching over the animals forces at least some of the people to live temporarily in tents—often the whole family when the flocks are in milk.

The aspect of the villages expresses both this mobility and the former insecurity. Sometimes the houses are crowded at the far end of a rocky range or on a height; sometimes they are molelike troglodytic habitations, as easy to make as they are difficult to destroy. Numerous villages in the western half (Jebel Nefusa) are, or were, dominated by a *gasr*, a fortified aggregate of individual granaries where each family kept its provisions under the care of a guardian. Lacking a fortified storehouse, the mountain people construct a vaulted storehouse over their main living room. The village, often practically empty for part of the year, is as much a depository as a living center.

But there are differences, some of them considerable, in the types of life of the various peoples of the Jebel.

The true Jebalia (mountain people)—this name, however, is given by the tribes of the plains to all the inhabitants of the Jebel without distinction—are agriculturists and, above all, arboriculturists, as much in the west, where olive and fig trees have to be watered, as in the center and in the east, where they flourish under dry cultivation. The Jebalia are peasants for whom pastoral activities are secondary. They never stray far from their villages, even in the spring, because they do not feel safe in the steppe among the pastoral people, and, moreover, they must return frequently to care for their trees. The real Nefusa live thus: the heretical Berber-speaking Ibadites of Nalut, Kabao, and Yefren; the inhabitants of the Jebel Garian, almost all of whom reside in curious troglodytic villages and who own beautiful olive groves; the villagers of the hills of Msellata (in the region of Kusabat), who are hardly true mountain people and whose rather pleasant villages, scattered among vast olive groves, remind one of the coast.

These agriculturists have always had for enemies not only the tribes of the plains but also their neighbors, also seminomads, the Hawamed, Haraba, Rehibat, Rojeban, Zintan, Asabaa, and Tarhuna, many of whom, originally from the steppes, have insinuated themselves into the mountains, and who

are pastoralists much more than agriculturists. Except for the Asabaa and the Tarhuna, who have no dwellings but tents, they also have villages, but these are empty for months at a time; the few trees around them are half abandoned. Winter and spring are spent under a tent with the flocks. They do not fear to wander deep into the Gibla, whose watering places and pastures are known to them.

Italian colonization has disturbed the life of the people in the central and eastern regions, where lands, although planted with old olive trees, have passed into the hands of Italians. But it has put an end to the hostility between the Jebalia and the seminomads and has built a solid confining wall around the formerly dreaded nomads of the Gibla.

NOMADS OF THE GIBLA

The sparse inhabitants of the desertic steppes of the Gibla, and of the Orfella, which extends them to the east, are true Saharans. They are made up of some Haraba and Zintan, the Meshasha, and the Aulad bu Sif—the Orfella in the east.⁷

Their economy and their movements are connected with the existence of the vast valleys of the Wadies Sofejin and Zemzem and their tributaries, which experience floods as sudden as they are rare and in which the underflow water is never very deep. Whereas the immense plateaus that incline toward the Hamada el Hamra and the Gulf of Sidra only support a few pastures after the rains, the valleys retain a little moisture, and the flocks of sheep, goats, and camels always find, even in summer, something to graze. Lands below the junction of the wadies that are the least poor in floods are planted with barley. The Zintan also have palms and a few gardens in the mediocre oases of Derj, Mizda, the two El Gariat, and in the valley of the Wadi es Shiyati (Fezzan); but they themselves do not cultivate them. The Orfella have a few poor orchards in the Wadi Beni Ulid, with the help of relatively numerous wells, and at Bu Njem. Only the Meshasha are exclusively pastoralists and provide all the neighboring tribes with shepherds, notably the tribes of the Jebel. Finally, these nomads have always organized camel caravans to transport dates from the oases of the Wadi es Shiyati and Jofra toward the markets of the Jebel and the eastern seacoast, to be exchanged for grain, sugar, and tea.

The stopping places and the zones of movement of the various divisions

⁷ A. Belardinelli: La Ghibla, *Governo della Tripolitania, Ufficio Studi, Studi e Monografie Coloniali*, No. 3, Tripoli, 1935, pp. 46-70; G. Bauer: Notizie sulla regione di Orfella, *Governo della Tripolitania, Ufficio Studi, Boll. Geogr.*, No. 3, 1932, pp. 33-51, reference on pp. 42-44.

are intermingled to some extent. But each has a fixed spot: an important well or group of wells, beside which are the cemeteries, the saints' tombs, sometimes a few granaries and gardens of sorts. They gather here for certain festivals and return near by at seedtime and harvest.

The movements of the flocks and the family groups that follow under the tent do not obey any seasonal rhythm but only the contingency of the rains: almost any place becomes pastureland if there have been good rains and a well is not too far distant. The Haraba go as far as the borders of Gadames, the Zintan as far as the Hamada el Hamra and the Wadi es Shiyati, the Orfella to the Gulf of Sidra and the outskirts of Jofra. But summer brings animals and people back to the large wadies. Only a few Orfella—of the Jemamla—have some sort of fixed dwelling places on the banks of the Wadi Beni Ulid; but they occupy them only for a few months, and a number are completely abandoned. None of the other nomads have any dwelling except a tent.⁸

TRIPOLITANIA AND TUNISIA COMPARED

The types of life of the Tripolitanian natives reflect the poorness and dryness of their country, its steppelike or desertic nature. Everywhere water is sought with avidity, as much by the inhabitants of the seacoast and the villagers of the Jebel as by the pastoralists of the Jefara and the Gibla.

What is lacking in Tripolitania is the equivalent of the Tell of Algeria and Tunisia or the Green Mountain of Cyrenaica—a region of Mediterranean types of farming where there is some assurance of a harvest and pasture for the flocks.

The Tripolitanians have never thought of seeking aid from the Green Mountain of Cyrenaica, too far distant, beyond the vast desertic steppes of the Gulf of Sidra. In past centuries there has never been anything in common between Cyrenaica, which lived in the orbit of the Greco-Oriental world, and Tripolitania, whose destiny was tied to that of the Maghreb and the Tunisian capitals, Carthage, Kairouan, and Tunis in turn, before it became a Turkish province.

The Tunisian Tell has always attracted the populations of the various regions of Tripolitania. The movement has never ceased since the invasions of the eleventh century and since the Solaim tribes, settled at first in western Libya, little by little emigrated to Tunisia in the twelfth and thirteenth cen-

⁸ "Nomenclature et répartition des tribus de Tunisie," Chalons-sur-Saône, 1900; Jeân Despois: *La Tunisie orientale: Sahel et Basse steppe* (Publ. Faculté des Lettres d'Alger, Ser. 2, Vol. 13), Paris, 1940, Part 2, Chapters 4 and 5.

turies. By tribes, by large or small groups, or individually, Tripolitani-ans have constantly been coming to dwell among, and mingle with, the Tunisians. There are few Tunisian tribes that do not have, or have not had, their Trabelsia (Tripolitani-ans). Sometimes they are indistinguishable except for their name or the traditions they have retained; sometimes they form more or less homogeneous groups; sometimes they are still regarded as foreigners.

After the establishment of the French protectorate in Tunisia (1881) many more Tripolitani-ans came, individually or in small groups, to work on construction projects or in the mines, particularly in the region of Gafsa; several of them were engaged as guards, land clearers, or shepherds. A certain number returned home; others stayed. During the Italian conquests of Tripolitania in 1911-1914 and 1922-1924 several thousand of them took refuge in Tunisia, where many have remained.

The plains of Morocco, the Algerian-Tunisian Tell, and the Green Mountain of Cyrenaica have always been, for the population of the mountains, the steppes, or the deserts bounding them on the south, regions of temporary or permanent migration and often zones of transhumance and nomadism in the summer. Nothing similar exists in Tripolitania, where the steppes extend to the sea. It is in neighboring Tunisia, and especially in its Tell, that for centuries the Tripolitani-ans have found an indispensable refuge from drought and oppression, a shelter from poverty and death.