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John Lewis Burckhardt

Excerpt

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ACCOUNT
OF
THE BEDOUINS.

CLASSIFICATION OF BEDOUIN TRIBES THAT
INHABIT THE SYRIAN DESERT.

THOSE tribes may be classed under two different heads: some who in spring and summer approach the cultivated parts of Syria, and quit them towards winter; and others who remain the whole year in the vicinity of the cultivated tracts. The first are the tribe of *Aeneze*; the latter are numerous tribes comprehended under the appellations of *Ahl el Shemál* and *Arab el Kebly*.

The *Aenezes* are the most powerful Arab

nation in the vicinity of Syria, and, if we add to them their brethren in Nedjd, may be reckoned one of the most considerable bodies of Bedouins in the Arabian deserts. The Aenezes who live in the northern part of Arabia, generally take up their winter quarters in the *Hammad* desert, or the plain between the *Hauran* and *Heet*, a position on the Euphrates. The Hammad is without any springs; but in winter time the water collects there in deep grounds, and the shrubs and plants of the desert afford pasture to the Arab's cattle. The Aenezes have likewise been known to pass the Euphrates and encamp in Irak Arabi, and near Baghdad. In spring they approach the frontiers of Syria, and form a line of encampment extending from near Aleppo to eight days' journey to the south of Damascus. Their principal residence, however, during that time is the Hauran and its neighbourhood, where they encamp near and among the villages; while in the more northern country, towards Homs and Hamah, they mostly keep at a certain distance from the inhabited grounds. In these parts they spend the whole summer

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seeking pasture and water, purchase in autumn their winter provision of wheat and barley, and return after the first rains into the interior of the desert.

Their great strength has enabled them to levy a yearly tribute on most of the villages near the eastern limits of Syria. It is above fifteen years since all the Aenezes have been converted to the Wahaby faith. The profits which they derived from the pilgrim caravans to Mekka, have until now kept them on good terms with the Turkish governors, and even induced them to withhold the customary tribute paid to the Wahaby chief. But it is to be presumed, that if the Hadj do not soon regain its ancient splendour, they will again become tributary to the Wahaby, and in company with him, hereafter, lay waste the open country of Syria. The northern Aenezes, of whom alone I speak here, are divided into four principal bodies: *Woud Aly*, *el Hesse*, *el Raualla*, and *el Besher*.

I. *Woud Aly*. These generally have their winter quarters on the Hadj road as far as Kalaat Zerka. Their sheikh is named *el*

Teyar: he occupies the first rank among their chiefs, and is therefore styled *Abou el Aeneze*, or “Father of the Aenezes.” The *Would Aly* are subdivided into five tribes.

1. *El Meshadeká*, comprising the *Arab el Teyár*, the great sheikh’s own tribe, *el Merreykhat*, *el Lahhawein*.

2. *El Meshattá*, whose sheikh, *Dhouhy Ibn Esmeyr*, is at this moment the most powerful of the Aeneze chiefs, although inferior to the *Teyár* in rank. He derives his influence from an intimate connexion with the Pasha of Damascus, to whom he was in the habit of furnishing every year a vast number of camels for the pilgrim caravan. He seldom encamps, even in winter time, farther than eight or ten days’ journey from Damascus. In his tent Yusuf Páshá took refuge after his flight from Damascus in 1810.

The larger tribes of the *Meshattá* are—*el Auadh*, wholly composed of the large family and relations of the Esmeyrs; *el Teyour*, *el Ateyfat*, *el Mekeybel*.

3. *El Hammamede*, — principally on the Mekka road, as far as *Maan*. They have two

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chiefs, originally of the same family, *Salem el Edda* and *Embarek el Edda*.

4. *El Djedaleme*, comprising two principal tribes, *el Kereynat* and *el Tourshat*, all at present following the fortunes of Ibn Es-meyr.

5. *El Tolouhh*. All the chief tribes of Would Aly are entitled to the *szourra* or tribute from the hadjis or pilgrims on their passage through the desert; the amount is noted in the account-books of the Pasha of Damascus, or the *Emír el Hadj*, and in those of the *Kheznedar* (or treasurer) at Constantinople: but the *szourra* increases on every passage as the Pasha pleases to tax the different skeikhs; a privilege he freely indulges for his own profit, bargaining with the Arabs for horses, camels, and sheep. The Toulouhh are the only tribe that receive their *szourra* at once from Constantinople.

II. *El Hesseune*—not so numerous as the other three great tribes of the Aeneze; they consist of two considerable tribes.

1. *El Hesseune*, properly so called: their sheikh, *Mehanna*, usually encamps in the desert eastward of the route from Damascus

to Homs. The Hesseenne are proverbial for bravery, generosity, and hospitality. Their tribes are, *el Shemsy*, the noblest of the Hesseenne, (a Shemsy Arab is said to possess all the virtues of a Nomade,) *el Keddaba*, *el Aueymer*, *el Refáshe*, *el Meheynat*, *el Hedjadj*, *el Sheraabe*.

2. *El Messaliekh*, who follow the banners of Mehanna, and are generally regarded as mercenaries, and who, though superior in numbers to the Hesseenne, join them in all their expeditions only to partake of the chief's liberality. Their tribes are, *el Lehhetemy*, *Beni Reshoud*, called also *Beni Taleyhan*, *el Belsán*, and *el Semmelek*.

The *el Hesseenne* are said to have once formed but a single tribe; they then divided under two brothers. Both the Hesseenne and the Messaliekh take a tribute from the Basra and Baghdad caravan, which passes the desert on its way to Aleppo or Damascus; it amounts to about three shillings per camel load: they likewise take tribute from the villages on that road.

III. *El Raualla*—also called *el Djelaes*—a powerful tribe possessing more horses than

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any other of the Aeneze. In 1809 they defeated a body of six thousand men sent against them by the Pasha of Baghdad. They generally occupy the desert from Djebel Shammar towards the Djof, and thence towards the southern vicinity of the Hauran; but they frequently encamp between the Tigris and Euphrates. Like the other Aenezes, they had for many years refused the customary tribute to the Wahaby chief whose religion they had embraced: their courageous opposition to the Pasha of Baghdad caused a reconciliation between them and Ibn Saoud. In July 1810 they accompanied the Wahabys into the Hauran, and led Ibn Saoud to the most wealthy villages. The Raualla every spring pay a visit to the tribe of Ibn Esmeyr, to obtain, through his interference, permission from the Pasha that they may purchase in his territory wheat and barley. The Djelaes are not entitled either to the szourra from the Hadj, or to any tribute from the Baghdad and Basra caravans. Their principal tribes are, *el Souáleme*, *el Abdelle*, *Ferdja*, *el Belaaysh*, *el Be-*

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dour, Ibn Auydje, el Zerák, Sahhan, Hedjlis, Deraye.

IV. *El Beshher*, the most numerous of the Aeneze tribes. Their great chief is *Ibn Haddál*, who encamps with his tribe in the Nedjd, where most of the Beshher tribe have taken up their abode. Ibn Haddál is at the same time one of the principal men at the court of Derayeh, if so may be styled the seat of Ibn Saoud. The Beshher about fifty years ago began to claim passage-money from the Baghdad and Basra caravans; the Hesseenne had received such toll from time immemorial. The Beshher are divided into the following powerful tribes—*el Fedhaan, Ibn Imhyd, Ibn Ghebein*, (who conducted me to Palmyra in 1810,) *Ibn Kay Shysh, Ibn Ghedhzour, el Zebaa*. In my way from Hamah to Tedmor, I found all the watering-places occupied by Arabs of this tribe: the greater part of them are in Nedjd; *el Mauaydje, el Metarcfe*, whose brethren are likewise in Nedjd; *el Seleymát, el Hossenny*, (not to be mistaken for the Hesseenne,) *el Medheyán*. Thus far extends my knowledge of the greater *Aeneze*

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tribes. To detail all their minor branches or *towayefs*, would be to give an index of all their families, every large family with its relations constituting a small tribe in itself. It is difficult to ascertain the numbers of each tribe, from a prejudice which forbids them to count the horsemen; as they believe, like the eastern merchants, that whoever knows the exact amount of his wealth may soon expect to lose part of it. From some Damascus pedlars, who had passed their whole lives among the Bedouins, I learned particulars which induce me to state the force of the Aeneze tribes above mentioned, (their brethren in Nedjd not included,) at about ten thousand horsemen, and perhaps ninety or one hundred thousand camel-riders; a number rather over than under rated. The whole northern Aeneze nation may be estimated at from three hundred to three hundred and fifty thousand souls, spread over a country of at least forty thousand square miles.

Ahl el Shemál.

The Arabs so called, or the “Northern Nations,” are those tribes who encamp during the whole year among the villages of Eastern Syria, partly in the once cultivated desert from Hauran towards Palmyra northward as far as Sokhne, a village five days from Aleppo on the Baghdad road. They inhabit the *Ardh el Shemál* or northern tract, while the Kebly and Nedjd Arabs generally reside in the more southern plains of Arabia. They never venture to the great Eastern desert. In proportion to their tents they have more horses, but fewer camels, than the Aenezes. Beginning from the north we may reckon,

1. The tribe of *el Maualy*, near Aleppo and Hamah: their emir or sheikh receives an annual sum from the governor of Aleppo, for which he protects the villages of the Pashalik against the other Arab tribes. They have about four hundred horsemen; they are reckoned treacherous and faithless. The father of their present chief, Mohammed el