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John Lewis Burckhardt

Excerpt

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ACCOUNT  
OF  
THE BEDOUINS.

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ADDITIONS TO THE CLASSIFICATION OF  
BEDOUIN TRIBES.

A CONSIDERABLE portion of the *Wold Aly* tribe reside above *Khaibar*, in the Southern Desert of Arabia.

The tribe of *el Hesse*.—Their chief is named *Mehanna*, having been born in the “low-grounds,” so called in the Desert, between *Tedmor* and *Anah*. Those low grounds, which are denominated “wádys,” and of which the Bedouins distinguish eight as the principal in this direction, are the pasturing places of all the great Aeneze tribes in winter

time, and extend for a distance of five days' journies from west to east. Wady Hauran, which has been mentioned in a preceding account of this Desert, forms a part of those wadys. During the last century this ground was the continual scene of conflict between the Mowaly Arabs, who were then very powerful, but at present inhabit the desert about Aleppo, and the Beni Khaled tribe from Basra. On those grounds both tribes were accustomed to meet in winter, and contend for the right of pasture.

*The Djelás, or el Rowalla.*

This third branch of the great Aeneze nation is not properly named Rowalla, but *Djelás*, and these are divided into two principal tribes.

1. *El Rowalla* (a name which should not be applied to the whole branch) : their minor tribes are *el Ktaysán*, *el Doghama*, *el Feregge*, and *el Naszyr*.

2. The *Omhallef*, whose sheikh is *el Maadjel*.—To these belong the tribes of *Abdelle*, *Fersha*, *el Bedour*, and *el Sowaleme*.

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Most of the great Aeneze tribes, as I have already remarked, are entitled to passage-money from the Syrian hadj, or pilgrim caravan. Thus, for instance, the El Ahseune take a yearly *surra* or tribute of fifty purses (or about one thousand pounds), dividing it among a number of their individuals. A *surra* to the same amount is taken by the Wold Aly. The Fedán, who at present are one of the strongest Aeneze tribes, receive nothing from the pilgrims.

The Djelás were, in former times, perpetually wandering about Nedjd. They are known in Syria principally, since the battle which they fought with the Baghdad troops in the year 1809, upon a piece of ground formed into a corner or angle by the river Euphrates and the Khabour, opposite to Rahaba. Having taken several small guns and some tents, they carried them to Derafeh, the capital. About five hundred horses which became their property as plunder, they sold to Asyr Arabs of Yemen. Those Djelás are the most wild and warlike tribe of the Desert between Syria and Basra. By their great numbers and strength, they have lat-

terly been enabled to extort tribute from many Syrian villages.

*The Beshar, or Bisher.*

These divide themselves into two great branches.

1. The *Tana Mádjed* Arabs, to whom belong, as minor tribes, the *Fedán* and the *Sebaa*.

2. The *Selga* Arabs. Of these the greater part occupy the district of *el Hassa* on the Persian Gulf, belonging to the Wahabys. Of those Selgas there are three ramifications, the *Medheyán*, *Metarafe*, and the considerable tribe called *Oulád Soleymán*. The Selga sheikh is Ibn Haddal, a strenuous supporter of the Wahabys. He was present in almost every battle fought from the year 1812 to 1815 in Hedjaz against the army of Mohammed Aly; and it was chiefly through his exertions that Tousoun Pasha was kept completely in check on his progress in spring, 1815, from Medinah towards Kasym.

The *Fedan* Arabs have latterly become

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very powerful, and defeated the Hesseune under Mehanna in many encounters on the Syrian frontier.

The *Oulad Soleymán* are descendants from the ancient tribe of *Djaafere*, which is now almost extinct. Another small tribe claiming descent also from *Djaafere* is named *Owádje*. These people generally encamp with the Wold Aly in Hauran, and occupy above two hundred tents; they do not belong to the nation of the Aenezes. Of these *Djaafere*, a part went over to Egypt at the time of the Muselman conquest; their descendants are now settled on the western banks of the Nile in Upper Egypt, among the numerous villages between Esna and Assouán. It may be remarked as an extraordinary circumstance, that the women descended from this tribe of *Djaafere* are celebrated both in Egypt and Arabia for their frequent production of twins. The usual dwelling-place of the *Oulad Soleyman* is on the vicinity of Khaibar; they constitute a very strong and warlike tribe, occupying about five thousand tents.

The Sebaa Arabs, who at present live on the Syrian frontiers, had their residences for-

merly in Nedjd. They left that country about twelve years ago, that they might be less exposed to the extortions of the Wahaby chief.

*Ahl el Shemál.*

This denomination is used by the Syrian Arabs only with relation to their own position. Among the Arabs of Hedjáz, the whole Aeneze tribe is classed among the *Ahl el Shemál*, or “northern nations.” The great ancestor of the Aenezes was *Wayl*, and his descendants, the Beni Wayl, are known in historical records as the contemporaries and the enemies of Mohammed. Not much more than one hundred and twenty years have now elapsed since the Aenezes came from Khaibar and Nedjd into Syria. For the extraordinary increase of this numerous nation and their great abundance of cattle, the Bedouins account in the following manner. They relate that Wayl, their illustrious forefather, by some fortunate chance happened to ascertain the exact moment of the *Leilet*

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*el Kader* (the twenty-fifth or twenty-seventh night of the fast Ramadhan), when the Almighty is always disposed to comply with the prayers of mortals. Wayl, placing his hands on certain parts of his she-camel and of his own person, implored the divine blessing, with respect to those objects which he touched : his prayers were favourably heard ; he was blest with a numerous family of sons and daughters ; and his people became rich in a multiplicity of camels. This story is related and firmly believed by every person of the Aeneze tribe.

*El Mowaly*.—The celebrated sheikh of this tribe, *El Gendj*, one of the bravest men in Syria, was treacherously killed by the Pasha of Aleppo in his own *harám*, in the year 1813 ; and his son, a boy of sixteen, invested with the office of guardian of the Desert of Aleppo. They were formerly sole masters of the open country about Aleppo and Hamah, and were entitled to a considerable *surra*, or annual tribute, from the hadj of pilgrims passing through their territory. Of these advantages they have been dispossessed by the Aenezes,

and are now reduced to small numbers, and very limited extent of patrimony.

The *Fehely* Arabs of Damascus are certain tribes who labour under the imputation of being persons of bad faith ; and in general it is found that this unfavourable opinion, which all the Bedouins entertain respecting them, is but too justly applicable to numerous individuals among them. They endeavour to extenuate their faults by an exercise of hospitality. Thus in Syria, the Mowalys and Fehelys are notorious for treachery ; but, on the other hand, are celebrated for treating their guests with a profusion of victuals. The Fehelys, in particular, are despised, because they do not scruple to steal from the tents of their friends.

The *Howeytát* derive their origin from the ancient tribe of *Beni Atye* ; from whom likewise are descended the *Heywát* (also entitled *Leheywát*), the *Terabein*, the *Maazy* (in the desert between Suez and Cosseir), and the *Tyaha*. Those Arab tribes dwelling on the eastern gulf of the Red Sea, generally receive their supplies of provisions from the



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country about Khalyl. Should the harvest in Syria not have been abundant, those Arabs travel a journey of fourteen or fifteen days to Cairo, and there furnish themselves with the necessary stock of corn.

The *Omran*, although connected by alliance with the *Howeytát*, do not in fact belong to them, but form a distinct tribe in themselves. They inhabit the mountains between Akaba and Moeyleh, on the eastern coast of the Red Sea. The *Omran* are a strong tribe of very independent spirit. Their frequent depredations render them objects of terror to the pilgrims proceeding to Mekka, who are under the necessity of passing through their territory. At the time when Mohammed Aly, Pasha of Egypt, had reduced all other Bedouins on the Egyptian hadj road to complete subjection, the *Omran* still proved obstinate. In the year 1814 they attacked and plundered a detachment of Turkish cavalry near Akaba; and in 1815 they pillaged the whole advanced corps of the Syrian pilgrim caravan, on their return from Medinah to Damascus. Among their principal tribes are the *Hadnán*.

The *Debour* and *Bedoul* are tribes that reside in the vicinity of the Akaba; they are in alliance with the tribes of Omran and Howeytat: in the same quarter also dwell the *Seyayhe*.

Among the Arabs of Khalyl, or Hebron, are, *el Tyáha*—whose principal tribe is called *el Hekouk*—the *Terabein*—who conduct the caravans from Ghaza and Hebron to Suez; of their tribes one is the *Azazeme*—the *Wahydy* (or *Wahydát*), among whose tribes are the *Oulad el Fokora*. There is also a small tribe about Ghaza and Hebron, called *Reteymát*, and another, the *Khanasera*. These Arabs of Ghaza and Khalyl repair in spring time to the borders of the canals on the river Nile, in the Sherkieh, where they pasture their cattle on the fine herbage produced by the inundation.

*The Arabs of Tor, or Towara.*

These inhabit the peninsula of Sinai, and are divided into three branches—the *Sowaleha*, *Mezeyne*, and *Aleygat*.