AUFSÄTZE / ARTICLES

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Ottoman Frontier Expansion in Hawran

Abstract

This study aims to explore the transformation of Hawran following its incorporation into the Damascus province as a sanjak in 1864 within the context of Ottoman frontier expansion. The integration of Hawran into the heart of the Ottoman Empire can be attributed to a set of interconnected factors. First, in the encouraging atmosphere created by infrastructural initiatives and the sedentarization of nomads, the merchants, who were rather integrated into international markets in cities such as Mosul, Damascus, and Nablus, extended their trading activities to the newly established regions. This dynamic created a mutually beneficial relationship between the Ottoman government and these merchants concerning the frontier regions. As the traditional patronage system proved inadequate for this trade, Hawrani peasants directly engaged as business partners with the newly prosperous Damascene merchants. Particularly noteworthy was the establishment of enduring trading alliances between Druze sheikhs and these affluent merchants, which gradually evolved into significant socio-cultural associations.

Key words: Frontiers, Hawran, Late Ottoman Empire, Tanzimat

1. Introduction

Before the 19th century, Hawran, one of the frontier regions of the province of Damascus,[1] was the subject of official correspondence almost only when it came to supplying pilgrims with the necessary grain or ensuring the safety of the pilgrimage route.[2] Towards the end of the century, however, the same region seemed to preoccupy the Ottoman central bureaucracy to a great extent. One after another, land disputes, concerns about the security of the region, conflicts among the inhabitants of Hawran, conditions in the regional prisons, the situation of teachers in schools, and the

1 Hawran did not have a specific administrative name before the 19th century. While in earlier documents the word *serhad* is used, which is directly equivalent to 'frontier,' relatively late texts usually refer to it as a subdistrict. In other contemporary texts, it is also referred to as kaza or liva. BOA A. {DVNSMHM.d., 1–131, 13 September 1554; BOA AE.SMHD.I., 188–14625, 21 July 1734; BOA TS.MA.e 958–83, 3 February 1738.

2 For example, in December 1700 it was written to Jerusalem that the bandit of Hawran, who had attacked the pilgrims, should be prevented from receiving food from the inhabitants of Hawran. BOA A. {DVNS MHM.d. 111–1640, 21 December 1700; In December 1706, the governor of Adana, Mustafa Pasha, was asked to send soldiers to the region to prevent the Hawran bandits from taking grain supplies from the region and to ensure the safe return of the pilgrim convoy. BOA A. {DVNSMHM.d. 115–740. 16 December 1706.

amount of grain exported from the region were the subject of the correspondence of Ottoman officials.[3]

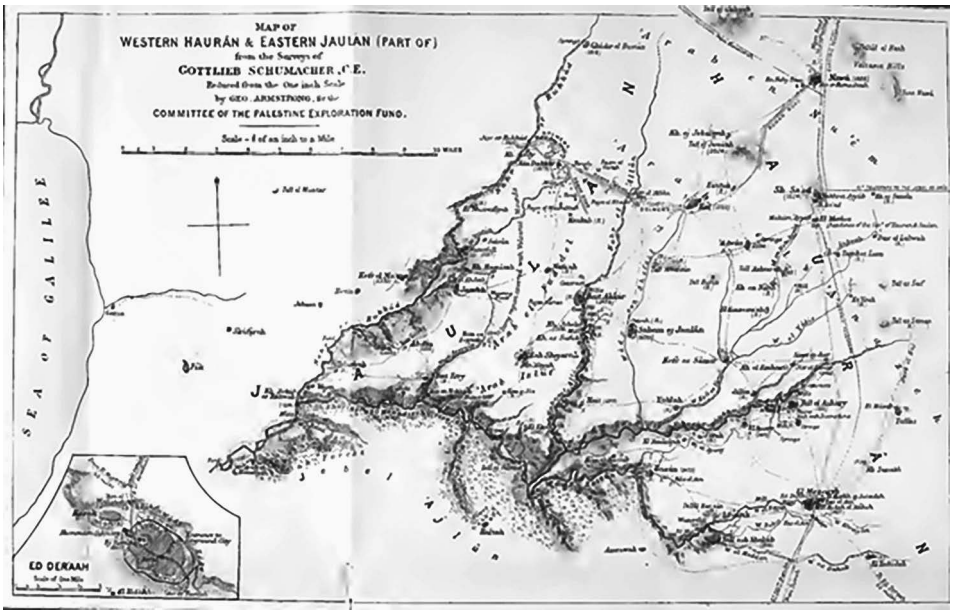
As in the Ottoman documents, the name Hawran was probably increasingly heard in the urban centers of Damascus province. For what happened in Hawran, especially the agricultural boom in the second half of the century, also changed these urban centers. That's why, when the French traveler Adélaïde Sargenton Galichon visited the suburbs of Maydan in 1905, which lie outside the city walls of Damascus and extend south to the direction of Hawran, she encountered a very dynamic life. In addition to coffee houses, there were numerous grain shops in the neighborhood where Hawran planters discussed the prices of their crops with merchants.[4] Those grain merchants of Maydan Galichon met were not from the large landowning families of Damascus, nor did they have deep-rooted ties to the government. They built their trade networks by focusing on direct trade relations rather than the old patronage system.[5] In this sense, they dealt directly with the Hawrani cultivators as their suppliers. The relationship between the Hawrani cultivators and the Damascene merchants began as a long-term business partnership, creating new social and political ties between these two regions of Ottoman Syria.[6]

This paper attempts to examine the transformation of Hawran, briefly described above, since its annexation to the province of Damascus as a sanjak in 1864 in the context of Ottoman frontier expansion. For this purpose, extensive literature on Ottoman Arab lands was consulted. Hawran with its various aspects has been the subject of numerous studies on Ottoman Damascus, Transjordan, and Palestine. However, individual studies dealing with Hawran in this context are limited to a few short articles. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to usefully combine the existing approaches to Ottoman frontier expansion in the literature in light of Ottoman archival documents on the specific case of Hawran.

In addition to secondary literature and Ottoman archival documents, travel literature, which is abundant, can also be a useful group of sources. In the late 19th century, many travelers visited the Ottoman province of Damascus, including those seeking adventure in the 'exotic' East with explicit Orientalist motivations, archaeologists, European officials and missionaries, and investors engaged in building infrastructure in the region.[7] One of the most important travel accounts is *Across the Jordan*, in which Gottlieb Schumacher, an archaeologist and civil engineer from a missionary family based in Haifa, reports on the survey he conducted in the Hawran in 1866 on behalf of the *Palestine Exploration Fund*.[8] The book contains very detailed information

3 BOA Y.A. HUS. 226–30, 13 June 1889; BOA DH. ŞFR 214–117, 21 September 1897; BOA DH.TMIK.S., 69–42, 12 Auguste 1907; BOA MF.MKT. 147–80, 11 August 1892.
4 Galichon 1905, 41; Provence 2005, 35.
5 Provence 2005, 8.
6 *ibid*., 150.
7 Lenzen 2003, 5–12.
8 Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) is an organization founded in 1865 by a group of academics and missionaries to conduct research in the Levant under the patronage of Queen Victoria. Retrieved from https://www.pef.org.uk/about/history/ (last accessed 10 October 2023)

Figure 1. Map of Hawran, from the Surveys of Gottlieb Schumacher

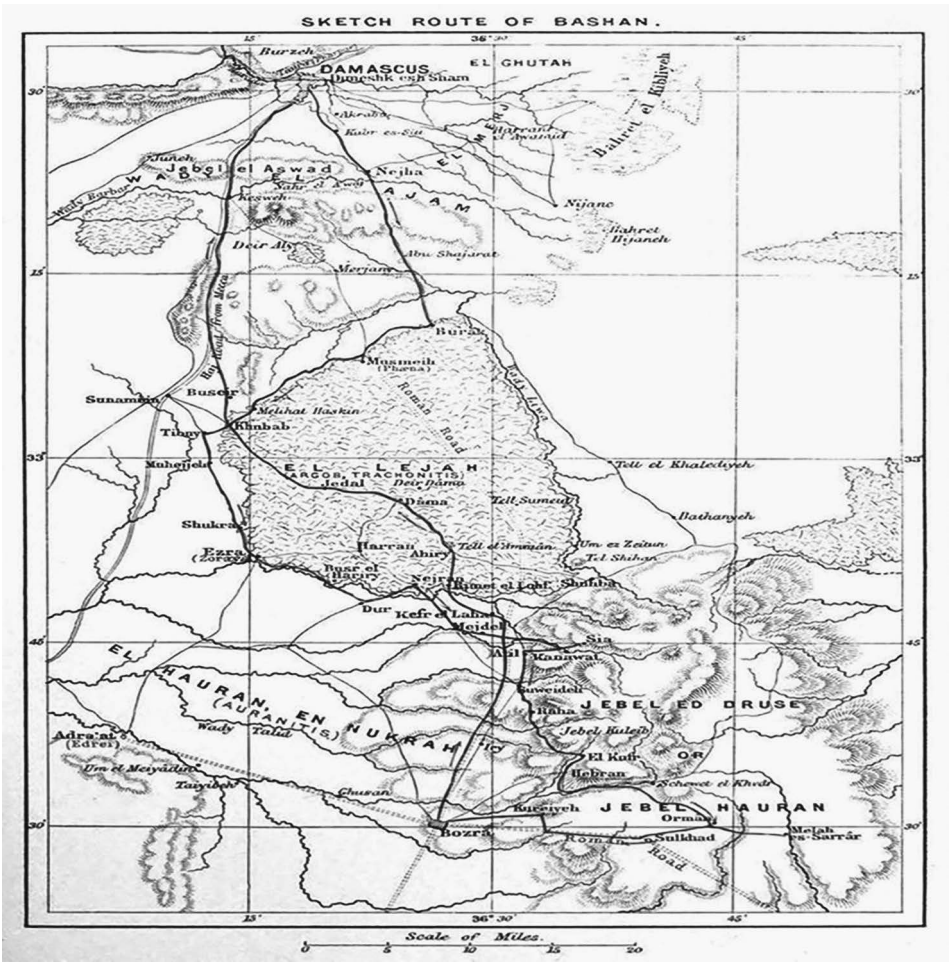


about the geography and archaeological heritage of the region and is accompanied by numerous illustrations.[9]

Sketches and maps from the 19th century show the Hauran as a basaltic region south of Damascus that forms a natural barrier between Syria and Transjordan. It stretches about 100 kilometers from north to south and 75 kilometers from east to west. Its eastern boundary is formed by the volcanic massif of Jabal Druse, while the Lajah plateau lies to its north. Bordering these geographical features is the fertile Hauran plain, also known as al-Nukra, which is the central geographical feature of the area.[10] The geographical division of the region not only shapes its physical landscape, but also has a major influence on its administrative structures, economic activities and demographic composition of the population. The inhabitants of the Hauran plain were predominantly Christian and Muslim villagers who were mainly engaged in agriculture. Within each village there were social hierarchies, with leadership roles often assumed by one or more families based on criteria such as wealth, family connections and productivity. Thus, in the 19th century, families such as the Mikdats and Hariris of Bosra became prominent figures in the social fabric of the plain, exerting considerable influence and authority.[11]

9 Schumacher 1866. Other important travel accounts: Bell 1987; Galichon 1905; Ewing 1907.
10 Schilcher 1991, 167; Abu Hassan 2017, 2.
11 Schilcher 1981, 163.

Figure 2. A map of Hawran, provided by https://ancientneareast.tripod.com/Hauran.html



The second population group living in the region were the Druze, who migrated to Jabal Hauran from Lebanon mainly in the 18th and 19th centuries, with the number of Druze increasing in the Druze population. While the Druze community consolidated their presence in the region, culminating in giving the mountain its name, their growing influence also led to a new dimension of instability.[12] In stark contrast to the seemingly tranquil administration in the lowlands, the Druze population of Hauran found itself subject to the rule of a contentious leadership. A considerable number of established Druze families maintained kinship ties with their counterparts in Leba-

12 Sourdel 2024.

non, creating a network through which they could obtain military support in times of conflict. By 1860, the Druze community in the Hauran recognized the Hamdan clan in particular as its most important leader. However, the influx of migrants and the resulting conflicts in the 1860s led to a decline in Hamdan dominance and ushered in the rise of the Atrash clan. At times, the Druze community maintained a differentiated network of relationships, characterized by both conflict and alliances, not only with various socio-political groups in the region, but also with each other.[13]

Another permanent but nomadic population in the region were the Bedouins. This nomadic group, numbering around 100,000 people, stayed in the Hawran plain from spring to the beginning of fall. During this time, they grazed their livestock and traded animals and meat with the villagers for their own consumption. In addition, the pilgrimage season offered the Bedouins a lucrative opportunity to earn an income. During this time, Bedouin communities gathered in Hawran and set up camps to provide essential services such as road maintenance, supplies, logistical support and security for the pilgrimage convoys, thus benefiting from the commercial prospects of this endeavor. Towards the end of the 19th century, the *Wuld Ali* and the *Ruwalla* emerged as the two most active Bedouin tribes in the Hawran region and played an important role in its socio-economic landscape. Traditionally, the *Wuld Ali* were those appointed by the central government to oversee the pilgrimage system. Given their status as outsiders, the *Ruwalla* were naturally inclined to disrupt the operations of the *Wuld Ali* or others who worked with them, especially in lean harvest years when food supplies were strained.[14]

The rivalry between the two tribes was exacerbated by a group of chieftains from Damascus, the so-called *Agawat*, who exercised considerable influence in Hawran and along the pilgrimage route in the region. The local chieftains from Damascus enjoyed economic and political privileges in Hawran, where they provided important services such as policing the area and supporting the pilgrimage caravans with their small contingents of horsemen. In order to maintain their advantageous position, the *Agawat* had to act as effective mediators between the various sedentary and nomadic groups and the foreign units operating in Hawran. Fearing possible alliances between the Bedouin, the Druze and the inhabitants of the plains against their interests, the *Agawat* tried to legitimize their role as mediators by inciting the Bedouin population against each other. In particular, Ahmad Agha al-Yusuf, the patriarch of the Kurdish Yusuf family, became one of the leading local chieftains in the second half of the 19th century. He used his influence along the pilgrimage route and acquired a considerable private fortune through land acquisition and cattle breeding in Hawran.[15] Although Ahmed Agha el-Yusuf held a prominent position, there were numerous influential local chieftains who resided in Damascus and exercised considerable political influence in the city who were similar to him. These personalities included Rasul Agha, Shamdin Agha, Ahmad Agha Buzu, Muhammad Agha Ajilyaqin and Haulu Agha

13 Sourdel 2024.
14 Schilcher 1981, 165; Lewis 2000, 34.
15 *ibid*., 162.

al-ʿAbid. The administrative and economic upheavals led to the formation of factions within the *Agawats*. In particular, disagreements arose between the faction led by Yusuf, which was characterized by its close ties to the city's elite and its regular representation on the local administrative council, with Yusuf himself residing in the northern part of the city. Yusuf himself lived in the northern part of the city. In contrast, the Abids, who lived in the area of Maydan – a southern suburb – maintained more diverse social and economic relations with the inhabitants of Hawran.[16]

The emergence of these factions and novel alliances can be traced back to the changes in trade dynamics and Ottoman reform initiatives to integrate the region into the imperial core – developments that took place simultaneously in the same period. From the mid-19th century, Hawran experienced a significant increase in agricultural productivity that exceeded local demand. According to Schiller's research, the population of Hawran required 100,000 tons of grain in 1900, while the average annual grain production of Hawran was 250,000 tons. Consequently, an estimated surplus of about 150,000 tons of grain per year was available for export. As will be explained in the following sections, aided by growing infrastructural opportunities, Hawran grain found its way to emerging urban centers such as Damascus and Jerusalem, as well as to emerging Mediterranean port cities such as Accra, Haifa, and Beirut, and even began to penetrate overseas markets, particularly the United Kingdom, France, and Italy. Between 1862 and 1869, for example, an average of 5,000 to 10,000 tons of grain were shipped annually from the Syrian coast to Britain alone. The burgeoning grain industry in Hawran also became an important cornerstone of the Ottomans' growing military and administrative presence in the region.[17]

Thus, the incorporation of Hawran into the broader imperial context and its simultaneous expansion into the global capitalist market triggered significant economic and administrative changes. This change not only disrupted the conventional power dynamics between the aforementioned actors, but also facilitated the emergence of new socio-cultural ties. This article therefore examines the transformation processes brought about by land ownership, property relations and socio-cultural dynamics in the Hawran region in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It attempts to depict the intricate interplay of political, economic, legal and social factors that underpinned the integration of Hawran into the Ottoman center.

2. Approaches on Ottoman Frontier Expansion in Arab Lands

The initial works dealing with the late Ottoman frontiers are mostly under the influence of the modernization paradigm. According to this paradigm, the increasing loss of territory and power vis-à-vis the European states prompted Ottoman sultans and statesmen to undertake a series of reform initiatives beginning in the late 18th century to strengthen its central rule in frontiers. The process, which began during the reign

16 *ibid*., 163.
17 Schilcher 1991, 169–70.

of Abdulhamid I with the European style of the army, gained momentum with the more determined military and administrative reforms during the time of Mahmud II. The *Gülhane Imperial Edict*, promulgated in 1839 and announcing a comprehensive reform program, is considered the turning point of the modernization period known as the Tanzimat Era.[18]

The centralization policy associated with the Tanzimat Era and its components, such as infrastructure initiatives, the increasing military, administrative and cultural presence of the center in remote areas, belong to the context of frontier expansion. In his book on Ottoman expansion in Transjordan, Eugene Rogan explains this process as a transition from a *despotic power* to an *infrastructural power*. Following Michael Mann, Rogan describes *infrastructural power* as 'the ability to create and store records, the standardization of coins, weights, and measures to facilitate commercialization, and rapid communication for the transfer of people, goods, and information.' Accordingly, the Ottoman government's expansion on the frontiers beginning in 1867 aimed to strengthen the state apparatus in these regions and ensure such standardization throughout the empire. Eventually, the modern institutions introduced by the Tanzimat state were accepted by the locals, and the presence of the central government was consolidated.[19] In addition to administrative regulations, another focus of this approach is on the technology that facilitated the Ottoman government's penetration of the frontiers. Thus, in another article, Rogan notes that the connection of Hawran to the other centers of the province via telegraph lines enabled the economic and administrative unification sought by the government.[20]

It is certain that the Ottoman central government wanted to expand its rule in frontiers with its infrastructure. In the document that mentions that in June 1879 it was decided to build a tram line between Hawran and Damascus with the technology used in European cities such as London and Paris, it is said that this line would be beneficial not only for trade and transportation but also for discipline and administration in the region. Moreover, after realizing the benefits of this tram line, another tram line could be built from the coast to Damascus with a connection from Hawran to Acre.[21] However, the same document reads as follows 'this project will be realized through the participation of local capital.' This statement can be interpreted to mean that the state was aware of the existing local demand for a railroad system in Syria. In fact, in 1869, some Damascene elites visited the British consul to discuss the possibility of building a railroad.[22] Thus, contrary to what the modernization paradigm suggests, technological and infrastructural developments in the frontier regions were not realized solely through the will and initiative of the state. The central government often responded to the demands that existed in the region.

18 Shaw and Shaw 1985.
19 Rogan 2000, 3.
20 Rogan 1998, 115.
21 BOA İ.MMS 62/2932, 11 June 1879.
22 Bonine 1998, 59.

One approach that incorporates local elements into Ottoman frontier expansion and modern state formation in the Middle East is the 'negotiating state' approach that gives Talha Çiçek's recent book its name. With the proclamation of the Tanzimat, the Ottoman government embarked on a series of imperial projects to strengthen state control and authority over the nomads, particularly in the Arab provincial and frontier regions. Çiçek examines the changing relationship between the Ottoman central government and the nomads as part of this project in the 1840s. In his view, this was not a one-sided power relationship that the state was able to impose, but a 'constant, complicated, and fluid negotiation' between the nomads and the center.[23] Çiçek's approach is comprehensive in that it allows us to see the agencies of the center and the locals simultaneously.

Another group of studies that revise the state-centric approach is those dealing with the reception of the new units and the new regulations introduced after the Tanzimat by the local elements in the Ottoman provinces and frontiers. These studies show how tribal elites and other nomads actually adapted quickly to the Tanzimat ordinances, sometimes manipulating the inadequacies of the regulations, sometimes taking the lead in new institutions and using these regulations to their advantage, and while doing all this, they even legitimized the new institutions.[24] The works of Nora Barakat are very insightful in this regard. For example, in her article on Bedouins in Salt, Barakat revises the widely accepted image of the Bedouins as 'marginal or rebellious' parties against Ottoman centralization. By focusing on the fact that Bedouins sold animals in official markets, that they went to court to claim their rights to their stolen animals under the new central regulations, and that they fought for the new bureaucratic titles (*muhtar* of the *aşiret*), she shows how local nomads legitimized the new administrative system and also benefited from it.[25]

The most important development that reshaped Bedouin interaction with the central administrative apparatus was the introduction of a direct link between sedentary agricultural production and property rights through the passage of the Land Code of 1858. At the same time, groups that were not engaged in productive activities were excluded from the ideal model of modern administration, making this change even more pronounced. The passing of the Title Deed Regulation in 1859 and the Provincial Administration Regulations of 1864 and 1871 emphasized the clear focus on sedentary village communities and shaped taxation policy and property regulations accordingly.[26] Under these regulations, large tracts of land in frontier regions such as Hawran, Balqa and Hama were classified as unused land and subsequently sold at public auction. The land sales were primarily aimed at local urban investors under the premise that such transactions would strengthen the authority of the central administration and not benefit peasant producers. Contemporary files from the Court of First Instance in the city of Homs in northern Syria show numerous cases in which

23 Çiçek 2021.
24 Barakat 2015b, 101–19; Barakat 2019, 374–404; Dolbee 2022, 129–58.
25 Barakat 2015a, 105–34.
26 Barakat 2023, 15–6, 79.

farmers challenged decisions by land administrators (registry officials) who claimed ownership of land within their jurisdiction and subsequently transferred it to other actors, mainly influential merchant capitalists.[27]

As a result of these developments, the Bedouin began a new kind of struggle for resources and political representation within their newly defined administrative status. Bedouin leaders began to organize their communities through a variety of resistance tactics, using their acquired political influence and strategies honed through their interactions with the state apparatus. Chief among these activities were methods such as offering bribes to high-ranking officials and mimicking mechanisms of tax collection and distribution. The *mukhtars,* or village heads, primarily utilized the political and social networks they cultivated within the urban bureaucracy and the alliances they formed with urban merchants. In the 1870s and 1880s, both merchants and Ottoman officials viewed Bedouin communities as middlemen for surplus agricultural produce. Consequently, permanent debt relationships were created between urban merchant capitalists and Bedouin groups through credit agreements. The Sharia courts, subordinate to the merchant families, continued the long-standing practice of recognizing Bedouins as primary holders of alienable rights to agricultural land in the hinterland – a tradition that predated the establishment of a permanent regional government. As a result, much of the litigation in the 1880s revolved around disputes over the ownership of rainfed lands, with the Bedouin often acting as sellers or mortgagers of the property.[28]

Relatedly, another approach particularly highlights the importance of trade and merchants' agency in the Ottoman frontier expansion. According to this approach, merchants benefited from Ottoman frontier expansion and acted as a catalyst for frontier integration into the center. This is the grain trade specifically from Hawran and Balqa. Under the influence of push factors such as Europe's increasing demand for wheat during the Crimean War and Ottoman settlement efforts, Syrian and Palestinian merchants built a trade network between the province's frontiers and urban centers and European cities via the ports. Schiller characterizes this network as a rural, informal cartel that is strengthened by the support of merchants from Damascus and the local government.[29] Of particular interest is the emergence of these merchants, who did not come from the established elite families of Damascus, but rose to become a new economic and later political class through the grain trade facilitated by Hawran.[30] In urban level, the involvement of elite Damascus families in the Hawran cartel was fertile ground for the blossoming of Arab nationalism between the two regions in the 19th and 20th centuries. Micheal Province's study of the Syrian uprising of 1925 offers valuable insights into this dynamic. He examines the origins of the uprising and the development of Arab nationalism during the Ottoman era, arguing that trade relations created a cultural and social link between Damascus and Hawran. This per-

27 Barakat 2023, 181.
28 *ibid*., 125.
29 Schilcher 1991, 171.
30 Hamed-Troyansky 2017, 605–23.

spective emphasizes the importance of viewing Arab nationalism through the lens of economic interdependence.[31] Moreover, given the expansive imperial ambitions of the Ottoman Empire, this trade network facilitated its efforts to forestall European intervention in the region and maintain nominal control over the area.[32]

Nevertheless, two important points should be noted before attributing a central position to trade in the context of frontier expansion. Firstly, these new elites lacked the old elite's ties to the central government and the image of having held administrative positions over the years. Soon after, these newly rich merchants assumed functions in administrative units, so their power did not derive exclusively from their economic activities. Secondly, after the opening of the Suez Canal, the demand for Hawrani wheat decreased drastically.[33] With the falling prices, Syrian merchants suffered great losses. However, this does not seem to have slowed down the settlement, infrastructural progress, and urban changes in frontiers. Thus, the emphasis on trade to the neglect of other factors does not provide a comprehensive understanding of Ottoman frontier expansion.

This study claims that all three approaches described above are applicable to the Hawran case. Therefore, the developments since the transformation of Hawran into a sanjak in 1864 to 1914 are discussed considering the increasing military and administrative presence of the center on the frontier, the economic expansion of Damascene merchants into the newly developed frontier areas, and the reception by the locals. However, no chronological order or causality is suggested between these three dimensions; rather, they are assumed to be interlocking structures that produced each other.

3. Hawran in the First Half of the 19th Century

'Where our feet trod stretched the wide plain of Hawran. Divided on the east by the blue of the Druze Mountains, the plain gave the impression of a dark green lake with fields of wheat, lentils, and clover. Some sawed-out sections revealed the red soil with various shades.'[34] The descriptions of the Hawran plain by other travelers who visited the region are very similar to the account cited above by the French traveler who passed through the region in 1905. 'Where the soft soil of the desert ends,' begins the volcanic mountain of Hawran, and beyond it stretches a vast and fertile plain bordered by a rocky plateau called Lajah.[35] The villages on the western slopes of the

31 Provence 2000.
32 Schilcher 1991, 172.
33 Hamed-Troyansky 2017, 610.
34 Galichon 1905, 7.
35 Abu Hassan 2017, 2; Bell 1987, 70: Another traveler, who visited the region, describes her entry into Hawran as follows: 'After an hour or two of travel, the character of the country changed completely: the soft soil of the desert came to an end, and the volcanic rocks of the Hauran began. We rode for some time up a gulley of lava, left the last of the Hassaniyyeh tents in a little open space between some mounds, and found ourselves on the edge of a plain that stretched to the foot of the Jebel Druze in an unbroken expanse,

Jabal and on the western and southern sides of El Lajah were inhabited in the early 19th century by some Druze immigrants or by Muslim, Greek Orthodox, or Catholic Christians. The inhabitants of the central plain were mostly farmers (*fellahin*). The local nomadic tribes such as *Bani Sakhr*, *Wuld Ali*, and *Ruwalah*, another important element of the region, moved to the plain every spring to graze their animals and satisfy their other needs.[36]

Although the basalt soil of the region was very fertile, at the beginning of the 19th century the area was sparsely populated and most of the land was uncultivated. Tax-paying villagers, who were predominantly Christian Arabs, also had to pay *khuwwa (*protection money) to the Bedouins. They also suffered from time to time from Bedouin raids and looting and conflicts between the tribes. According to Norman Lewis, these conditions caused many Hawranis, especially in the south near the Bedouins, to leave the area before the 19th century.[37] However, the sparse settlement of agricultural areas may be due to certain historical processes in the Mediterranean region since the 16th century. According to Faruk Tabak, the shift of the Mediterranean from the plains to the hills was a consequence of the changes that the world economy underwent since the 16th century. The maritime trade in the Mediterranean, controlled by Venetian merchants, became less important, while the sugar and cotton trade shifted to the West and the grain trade to the North. In this process, the Mediterranean had to subordinate itself to the world economy controlled by Amsterdam.[38]

In any case, Hawran's uncultivated lands attracted the attention of Ottoman officials even in the pre-Tanzimat period. A document dated October 1731 states that Hawran, which was located on the pilgrimage route and served as a warehouse for Damascus, had to be reconstructed, but its inhabitants migrated to other places.[39] Situations that threatened the agricultural production and settlement in the 'fertile' lands of Hawran, were more and more concerning Ottoman central officials from 1840 onwards. Unlike the previous period, administrative regulations and military sanctions began to be envisaged. For instance, in July 1846, it was announced that a district governor's office would be established in a place two hours away from Ajlun to ensure the continuity of agricultural production. Because, despite its very fertile and productive soils, Hawran was endangered by the constraints of Bedouin bandits. On the orders of the appointed district governor, a sufficient number of soldiers would be sent. These soldiers and the district governor were tasked with protecting the region from bandits (Bedouin tribes), especially during the harvest season.[40]

completely deserted, almost devoid of vegetation and strewn with black volcanic stones. It has been said that the borders of the desert are like a rocky shore on which the sailor who navigates deep waters with; success may yet be wrecked when he attempts to bring his ship to port.'

36 Lewis 1987, 76.
37 Lewis 2000, 35.
38 Karahasanoğlu 2013, 399–409.
39 BOA C.DH. 8/376, 26 October 1731.
40 BOA A.} MKT. MVL. 2/48, 29 July 1846.

The two most important tribes in the region were the *Wuld Ali* and *Ruwalla* tribes, both branches of the *Anizah*. These tribes spent the winter in the desert and come north to Hawran in the spring to search for water, sell their crops, and graze their animals.[41] The Bedouin tribes, who also provided security for the Ottoman government on the pilgrimage route in the region, were far from direct intervention by the center until the 19th century. However, the central government's goals of effective taxation and frontier expansion, which were extensions of the Tanzimat reforms, entailed measures to expand direct administration in Hawran by the Ottoman center. This meant changes in the position of Bedouin tribes in the region and in the course of relations with the Ottoman Empire.[42] Although the Bedouins were not necessarily opposed to Tanzimat reforms, they hindered agricultural production through their depredations and posed an obstacle to effective taxation through the *khuwwa* they levied on peasants.[43]

Hawran, the 'granary of the Syrian province,' was already of great importance to the region under the previous Ottoman rule. Therefore, the government's first objective was to ensure the continuity of agricultural production in the region. Thus, one of the first steps was to deny the nomadic tribes access to the agricultural areas and subject them to the desert region. Second, steps were taken to abolish the *khuwwa* practice. The abolition of *khuwwa* would not only facilitate the peasants' taxation but also prevent the alliance between the peasants and the Bedouins against the Ottoman reforms (recruitment of soldiers, etc.) and thus the rebellions. For in response to the Ottoman government's attempts to recruit them, the peasants fled to the Bedouin areas, where they were hardly persecuted by the Ottoman authorities. It was not until 1862 that the government succeeded in ensuring the effectiveness of the new administrative units, thwarting the *khuwwa* and establishing itself as the sole authority for tax collection.[44]

The tribes' work on the pilgrimage route and their need for the Hawran grasslands forced the tribes to agree with the government to abolish the *khuwwa*. The tribes lost significant revenue as a result of the ban on the *khuwwa*, but this is not enough to say that they were victims of Ottoman centralization efforts. Many recent studies have shown that the Bedouins were not marginalized in the face of the applications of the Tanzimat state. Rather, they legitimized and benefited from the new administrative system. In this sense, Nora Barakat demonstrates how quickly the Bedouins adapted to the new regulations on animals as property by selling their animals in official markets and asserting their rights to the stolen animals according to the new central regulations.[45] Moreover, the government took advantage of intertribal tensions and cooperated with the stronger tribe in its new initiatives; in other words, it negotiated. As a result of the negotiations, the *Anizah* tribes supported Ottoman expansion efforts

41 Lewis 2000, 34.
42 Çiçek 2021, 132–3.
43 *ibid*., 136.
44 *ibid*., 143.
45 Barakat 2015a, 105–34.

in Ajlun and Balqa. From this partnership, they expected to protect their power from other emerging tribes and to benefit economically from this expansion.[46]

Another group that the Ottoman center had to take into consideration when it expanded its direct rule in the frontier areas, was the Druze, who began to settle in Jabal Hawran. The first significant Druze immigration to Hawran took place in 1711, and the Atrash family, which would later become the most influential family in Jabal, also left Lebanon at the end of the 18th century. However, the settlement of large Druze groups in Jabal did not begin until the 1860s.[47]

The Druze, who along with the Maronite Christians were the predominant group in Mount Lebanon, lost their power to the Maronites after the increasing Franco-British penetration of the region. A series of bloody conflicts between the two groups resulted in Mount Lebanon becoming increasingly uninhabitable for the Druze.[48] As a result, a large number of Druze left Mount Lebanon and settled in groups in Jabal Hawran, where the state intervention is much less, and political conditions led the Druze community to enjoy a great deal of independence. In a relatively short time, the Druze, 'the masters of Jabal,' which was later named after them, also became the 'masters of the Hawran plain,' as again Norman Lewis calls it, with the new economic relationships and enterprises they established.[49] And its relations with the Ottoman central administration and other elements in the region, and later with European interventions, became an important factor in determining the course and quality of Ottoman frontier expansion in the late 19th century.

All in all, when Hawran was incorporated into the Syrian province as sanjak in 1864, the main actors in the region were: peasants who lived in the town and tried to resist the advance of the Druze, Ottoman centralization, and Bedouin raids at the same time; the *Anizah* and other nomadic tribes who continued their power struggles even among themselves; and the Druze who fled Lebanon and settled in Jabal Hawran and in time began to interfere in the economic and political life of the region; and the administrators and officials of the Ottoman government who tried to expand their power in this frontier.

4. Merchants' Frontier: Hawran in the second half of the 19th century

Following the success of the Ottoman central government over the local tribes, the region became the subject of intense centralization efforts and at the same time underwent profound socioeconomic changes.[50] This rapid change in the 1860s was largely the result of increased agricultural production in the region and increased demand for these products in local and world markets. One of the most important factors

46 Çiçek 2021, 149–58.
47 Lewis 1987, 78–80.
48 Rodogno 2015, 96–8.
49 Provence 2005, 34.
50 Çiçek 2021, 158.

that encouraged agriculture was the increased military and administrative presence of the Ottomans in the region, which provided security and protected the *fellahin* from Bedouin raids, and the resulting settlement of the *fellahin*.[51] It is safe to claim that the Ottoman government considered administrative and military measures as a whole. The document ordering the construction of a government building and barracks at Suveyde/Hawran in 1890 emphasized that military and administrative precautions are interrelated.[52]

The second factor was the infrastructure measures (railroad, tramway, telegraph) implemented by the Ottoman government as part of the frontier expansion in the region.[53] In the second half of the 19th century, the Ottoman central government seemed to be concerned about the fact that Hawran, the agricultural storehouse of the province, was not connected with other regions. For example, one document noted with regret that Hawran, famous for its fertile soils, was only eighteen hours from Damascus and the coast, but that in the absence of suitable roads, goods were transported on camels and other animals. And the transport was very expensive – up to half of the goods.[54]

As a result, in a short time, the city was included in the railroad network, which began to spread well in the region. Soon after the construction of the line between Beirut and Damascus in 1863, Sanjak of Hawran was connected by a tramway network with the important centers of the province as well as with the cities in the eastern Mediterranean. In May 1890, a concession was submitted for the construction of a railroad line between Hawran, Damascus, and Acre.[55] As a result of all this construction, in 1895 Hawran had a railroad connection with Damascus and Beirut, and thus a port on the Mediterranean coast.[56] A decade later, the city was also connected to the Hejaz railroad. Between 1908 and 1914, most of the goods carried in the wagons of the Hejaz Railway consisted of Hawran wheat, which was transported on the Hafia-Dara line.[57] Similarly, the first telegraph line in Syria was established in the late 1860s, running from Aleppo to Busra Eski Sham, a district of Hawran. The telegraph network in Syria was expanded so that by 1875 it covered 'Tire, Nablus, Muzayrib in Hawran, Jabala (near Tripoli) and Juniyya on the Lebanese coast, Batriin, Dayr al-Qamar, Zahla and Bikfayya in the Lebanese mountains.'[58]

After Hawran and Damascus were connected, large quantities of Hawran grain poured into the Damascus market as transportation prices fell. In addition, European demand for Hawran wheat increased after the Crimean War. Although cheaper grain volumes circulating with the opening of the Suez Canal reduced demand for Hawran

51 Lewis 2000, 39.
52 BOA Y.PRK. UM 18/1, 17 August 1890.
53 Lewis 2000, 39.
54 BOA İ.MMS 62/2932, 11 June 1879.
55 BOA İ.MMS. 112/ 4798, 14 May 1890.
56 Abu Hassan 2017, 39.
57 Bonine 1998, 64.
58 Rogan 1998, 115.

wheat for a time, European exports continued.[59] Gottlieb Schumacher, who visited Hawran in 1885, reported that the ports of Acre and Haifa exported 'an average of 100,000 to 120,000 tons of grain per year' to the various European countries, especially France and Italy, during the last twelve years. Almost all the exported grain was transported from Hawran to these port cities.[60] The wheat from Hawran was also transported to Anatolia via the ports of Acre and Mersin. In August 1887 it was written that since the collection of *aşar tax* in kind could not be contracted out in Adana Province, it was decided to bring the grain needed for seeds from Hawran.[61] In the following days, it was investigated how many grains from the harvest of Hawran could be bought for the province of Adana and how much the transport would cost.[62] Finally, it was found that the purchased grain could be transported from the port of Acre to the port of Mersin by a steamship [*vapurla*] for two *guruş* and by a sailing ship [*yelken gemisiyle*] for sixty *paras*.[63]

Those who controlled this market were usually the merchants of Damascus or the urban centers of Palestine such as Nablus. Since the 1860s, a group of agricultural investors and merchants from these cities had come to the Syrian frontier of the Ottoman Empire in search of fertile land and to take advantage of the newly opened business opportunities.[64] The cheap grain of Hawran attracted merchants from neighboring urban centers who sold it with great profit in Damascus, Jerusalem, and Nablus.[65] Urban merchants who exported the agricultural products they bought from regions like Hawran to the European market soon became money lenders, which was actually part of their control over agricultural land and agricultural production.[66] Consequently, the Damascene merchants became part of Hawran, and Ottoman officials in Hawran were now responsible for considering the interests of these merchants as well. In June 1909, Damascene merchants who reported that their trade goods had been stolen in Busra Eski Sham, a town in the Sanjak of Hawran, during the Druze raids on the town two months earlier, demanded the return and delivery of their goods.[67]

The agricultural export boom of 1869 was accompanied by increased immigration to the region.[68] Between 1873 and 1906, thousands of Circassian families were settled in the sanjaks of the Syrian province, including Hawran, Hama, and Damascus. Upon their arrival, Caucasian refugees swiftly established their own villages, with Amman, founded by the Circassians, emerging as a prominent urban center. By the twilight of

59 Hamed-Troyansky 2017, 610.
60 Schumacher 1886, 23.
61 BOA MV 21/77, 18 July 1887.
62 BOA Y.PRK.KOM. 5/17, 4 August 1887.
63 BOA Y.PRK.KOM. 5/18, 5 August 1887.
64 Barakat 2015a, 105.
65 Hamed-Troyansky 2017, 610.
66 Yazbak 1998, 274.
67 BOA DH.MKT. 2830/44, 3 June 1909.
68 Provence 2005, 34.

Ottoman rule, Transjordan was home to between 5,000 and 6,500 North Caucasian *muhacirs* (immigrants*).* The resettlement of Circassian *muhacirs*, perceived as an integral facet of the Ottoman government's agrarian expansion on the frontiers, played a pivotal role in catalyzing the economic integration of towns like Hawran.[69] First and foremost, Circassians brought with them their goods, talents, etc. They also attracted other settlers and brought economic diversity to the region to increase. The resettlement of *muhacirs* soon increased the interest of merchants from Damascus, Nablus, and Salt in the region. In particular, the combination of the real estate acquired by the Circassians, who took advantage of the favorable conditions, and the capital of the merchants from this urban center-and the trading activities between the two groups contributed to trade and urban development in general.[70]

However, the settlement of Circassian immigrants also led to tensions, particularly with regard to the allocation of land. The willingness of the provincial government to allocate land to the newcomers, which was traditionally inhabited by nomadic communities, led to disagreements between Bedouins and newcomers. Nomadic and semi-nomadic groups saw the immigrants as agents of the Ottoman government who were supposed to colonize their ancestral lands. In regions such as Damascus and Aleppo, the Bedouin suffered significant land losses amounting to millions of hectares to the immigrants, as they were unable to meet their tax obligations or provide proof of ownership to claim their property rights. As a result, land disputes between immigrants and Bedouins increased throughout the Levant. In the Raʾs al-ʿAyn region in north-eastern Syria, conflicts broke out between Chechens and Karabulaks and two tribal groups, Shammar and Anaza. There were also clashes in the Aleppo region between Chechens and Karabulaks against Circassians from Manbij and Abu Sultan and against Bedouins belonging to the *Beni Saʿid* tribe. There were also clashes between Circassians from Hanasir and the *Shammar* and *Anaza* tribes.[71]

The Druze, whose influence and territory extended from the Jabal Druze region to the Hawran plain, also benefited from this growing agricultural economy.[72] In the 1860s and 1870s, the Druze *sheikhs* also participated in agricultural cartels. The fact that the Druze gained such power through the grain trade sometimes caused concern in the center. For instance, in 1910, the commander Sami Pasha wrote that it had been found that the Druze, who 'transport the grain by train to Damascus,' imported weapons and ammunition with the money they earned from this trade. For this reason, he said, it was appropriate to closely control the transportation of grain from the region and to keep those belonging to the Druze who had caused so much damage to the state [*Devleti bunca zarara uğratan Dürzilerin*] in the hands of the local government.[73]

In addition, they also grew in sectors related to agribusiness. such as the steam mill industry. Grain mills became an important part of Hawran's economy. By the 1880s,

69 Hamed-Troyansky 2017, 607.
70 *ibid*., 606.
71 Hamed-Troyansky 2024, 142.
72 Schilcher 1998, 101.
73 BOA DH.SYS. 28/1, 6 September 1910.

hundreds of mills were operating in the city, and this industry was largely in the hands of the Druze.[74] Gertrude Bell, who visited the region, also remarks that the economic interests of the Druze were centered on the mills, noting the following,

> The turbulent mountain people, however, have turned to other things than war with the Ottomans, and among the most important are the steam mills that grind the grain of Salkhad and a few other villages. One man who owns a steam mill has made it his business to maintain the existing order. He has built it at considerable expense and does not want it to be destroyed by an invading Turkish army and his capital wasted. On the contrary, he hopes to make money from it, and his restless energies find a new and profitable outlet in this direction.[75]

Bell's observation is understandable given the autonomous administration of the Druze *sheikhs* in Jabal and their profitable relations with various parties in the region. In particular, Ismail al-Atrash, the first famous leader of the Atrash family, managed to change the entire balance of power in Hawran in his favor. First of all, he had the Bedouins under his control. Whereas in the past the Druze paid *khuwwa* to the Bedouin, now the Bedouin paid the Druze *sheikh*s in exchange for water and pasture. The Druze *sheikh*s had also established important trade relations with the newly emerging Damascene merchant families but avoided deep cooperation with the notables, who owed their existence to their long-standing partnership with the Ottoman bureaucracy, in order to prevent any possible threat to their autonomous life in Jabal Hawran. The connections went beyond the economic aspect and led to a sociocultural rapprochement between Druze and new Damascene merchants, most of whom came from the *Maydan* quarter.[76]

At the end of the century, as the influence of the Ottoman center in Hawran grew, many *sheikh*s of Atrash, especially in the Suwayda region near the sanjak center, accepted Ottoman rule. The impact of the central government's negotiation-based policy was significant in this regard. Since military sanctions did not produce the result the government wanted, the government decided to 'improve' the Druze with soft measures (*Tedabir-i Hasene*) In 1888, it was explicitly stated that extraordinary efforts were made to prevent sending troops. For such a situation would have nullified all the steps and efforts that had been made up to that time with the *tedabir-i hüsna*. Since it was already becoming apparent how advantageous this policy was, 'the Druze, who had long been involved in banditry, visited the commander of the barracks in the village.'[77]

Nevertheless, the *kaimmakams* (district governors) appointed by the Ottomans from outside still met with local resistance. It should be kept in mind, however, that the Druze *sheikhs* proposed one of their own as the administrative head of the central government in the region - in fact, Shibli Al-Atrash, who was the head of the family

74 Abu Hassan 2017, 78, 82.
75 Bell 1987, 87.
76 Provence 2015, 34–5.
77 BOA Y.PRK. UM 12/3, 2 May 1888.

in the 1890s, succeeded in being appointed governor of Jabal by the Ottoman government. A document dated October 1894 ordered the appointment of one of the Druze sheikhs, Shibli Al-Atrash, as district governor (*kaimmakam*), referring to the desire to preserve the peace achieved in Jabal Hawran.[78]

One of the factors that prompted the central government to negotiate, apart from its perceived effectiveness, was the fear that the various factions in Hawran might ally themselves against the government. In the 1860s, the inhabitants of the Hawran Plain, acting in various roles as wage laborers, tenants, sharecroppers, and producers, and dominated by a cartel as the century progressed, began to voice their grievances against the local authorities.[79] As a consequent, the times that seemed most appropriate for the implementation of the imperial projects were mainly when there were disagreements between the Druze and other elements. In 1888, the tax increases in Hawran were withdrawn because the inhabitants of the villages of Hawran intended to ally themselves with the people of Jabal Druze and al- Lejah.[80] The medals that were sent to the Hawran and Druze sheikhs by the central government were the most symbolic indicators of this negotiation-based relationship between the state and locals. For example, like many others, Hawran Sheikh Mehmed Gilan was honored with a fifth degree *Mecidiye* medal in 1909 for his loyalty to the government.[81]

Conclusion

By the end of the 19th century, Hawran, a frontier of Ottoman Syria, was connected to other parts of the province by a telegraph and railroad network and had established close ties with Damascus and other urban centers. The economic integration made possible by the Hawrani grain trade had also led to socio-cultural links between Hawranis and Damascenes. Likewise, there was a direct relationship between the central government and the Sanjak of Hawran. The grievances of Hawran residents were more frequently on the central government's agenda, and their reactions were taken into account when new regulations were implemented.

The eventual integration of Hawran into the interior of the empire was the result of three interconnected factors. The search for resources and manpower needed to implement the Tanzimat reforms drew the Ottoman government's attention to the frontier regions such as Iraq, southern Syria, and Jordan. Eventually, the central government initiated several projects to unify its rule in these areas. Damascene merchants took advantage of the growing infrastructure and secure environment created by the administrative and military presence of the Ottoman Empire and expanded their activities to the newly opened frontiers. They established extensive trade networks by exporting Hawran grain. Since the old patronage system was no longer sufficient for this trade,

78 BOA Y.PRK.UM 30/89, 18 October 1894.
79 Schilcher 1991, 173; Schilcher 1981.
80 BOA MV. 40/62, 5 March 1889.
81 BOA DH. MUI. 22–2/43, 1 November 1909.

Hawrani cultivators became direct business partners of the new wealthy Damascene merchants. In particular, Druze sheikhs and these new wealthy merchants established long-term trading partnerships that soon developed into a socio-cultural association.

Thus, Ottoman frontier expansion, which was contemporaneous with the empires of the time, was not a process solely due to the initiatives of the central government. Rather, the central bureaucracy frequently responded to demands and changed its policies according to the reactions. In this sense, recent studies of Bedouins and Druze have shown that the locals were not exclusively victims or losers of these policies. However, these studies need to be complemented by further research focusing on the Hawrani peasants (*fellahin*).

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