

Figure 1.10 illustrates the percentage of villages deserted between the end of the sixteenth and the end of the nineteenth centuries. We notice that the peripheral strip and areas under Bedouin control had a high percentage (26% - 50%) of deserted areas, while the highlands had only 9% deserted villages. Amiran demonstrates that while the proportion of uninhabited to inhabited sites in Palestine in 1922 was 2.6:1, it was 5.9:1 in the Shephela (western slopes of the Hebron mountains):

"The Shephela has more than three times as many abandoned sites as the average area of Palestine" (Amiran, 1953; p. 207) .

The size of villages and village land holdings in the peripheral strip was much larger than that of villages in the interior of settled areas. The average of the village population in 1922 in the Hebron areas was 1118; compared to 449 persons in the Nablus area (Barron, 1923: 4).

The largest five villages in the country -Tubas, Dura, Yatta, es-Samu, and ed-Dhahirieh- were located along the southern and eastern frontiers. These villages were the largest in both area and population (Amiran, 1953: 7).

The word khirab (pl. of khirbeh) refers to both abandoned ancient sites and temporary settlements. Khirab in the context of this work refers to temporary settlements. Unlike the permanent peasant villages which had a compact and close layout, the khirab had widely spaced houses. They varied in size from watchman towers to small villages, though most were made up of a few mud huts.

The majority of khirab were populated only during agricultural seasons, harvest and sowing times. Very often fields were distant from their villages. As a result, villagers were more likely to spend the night in their fields, and hence they built humble mud or stone houses (kusor, manatir or 'amarat) in which they retreated for a few days. These structures were also used to store agricultural products. Not all khirab remained as seasonal settlements. Many developed into permanent settlements or even into big villages if