



## CHAPTER IV

### RURAL HABITAT IN THE NILE DELTA

Before discussing the factors affecting the rural habitat we should differentiate between the two main types of rural settlement: the village and the 'ezba' hamlet. It must be appreciated that although the English terms 'village' and 'hamlet' are used in this thesis as being the nearest equivalents to the arabic terms 'village' and 'ezba' the connotations of the latter are somewhat different to their English counterparts in terms of size and function.

According to the Report of the Committee on Land Utilization in Rural Areas published in 1942, 'any grouping of over 1,500 people' is defined as a town, 'any grouping of less than about 20 houses makes a hamlet rather than a village'. 'A village then is a compact grouping of anything between 100 and 1,500 people.

This basis cannot be strictly applied in the Nile Delta. A village may contain anything from a few hundred to several thousand inhabitants. Some, in fact, such as Shatanouf which is specially examined in this thesis, might perhaps be better termed 'country towns' wherever the 'village' population exceeds, 5,000 and a main market is associated with it. The 'ezba' contain anything from five persons to 500 inhabitants. In the 'ezba' the houses are usually occupied, by tenant farm workers and are in the form of 'tied' houses whereas in the village almost all the houses are owner-occupied.

#### Historical Background:

In the pre-dynastic period, Egyptian society was learning to live in unity along the borders of the Nile. In striving to harness the Nile the early communities which established themselves along its banks soon developed the art of living in a closely knit form which still characterizes Egyptian rural society down to the present day.

The seasonal flood of the river was a source of common danger, because it meant irregular inundation of all the land. To be able to settle in a village above the flooded plains, it was necessary for those early settlers to build up a large artificial mound of earth in order to set up the houses on its crest.

It was impossible for any small group or family to content itself with a small isolated mound on which to erect its house; for such a small mound would have been easily swept away by the flood. Thus it was essential for the early settlers to live in large village communities where numbers of families had to co-operate and live together. <sup>(1)</sup>

The same danger helped the erection of large and high banks all along the sides of the river. Neighbouring villages had to co-operate in the erection of these high banks as well as in guarding them during the flood season. This meant not only the initiation of co-operative efforts, but also the organization of the work and the growth of a system of regional as well as local administration.

Another factor in the development of community life in early Egypt was the necessity to regulate the flow of water from the Nile for irrigation. This meant the control of the waters of the river and the division of the plain land of the Delta into what is called irrigation basins. It was necessary to build large banks round each of these basins and to dig large canals to lead the water from the river to the basins. The development of basins and the digging of canals were in themselves a great unifying factor.

The Egyptian village, in general, has long been considered as a reflection of its surroundings. The village location, its architecture and building materials are dictated mainly by the water, transport and relations to cultivated land.

It is often difficult to follow the history of the development of an Egyptian village. The past is still buried underneath the present. The building material is responsible for this fact. It was always an easy task to pull down an old building of mud bricks and to rebuild a new one on the same site. That is why the site of most of the villages is now at a higher level than that of the village when it was first built.

There is a great probability that the present plan does not differ much from that which existed thousands of years ago, except in the outskirts. The

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(1) Dr. Husain, S., *Egypt: A historical Synopsis* - Ministry of Education, Cairo 1956. page 7.



ation occurred as a result of increase in population and the deterioration of the social structure of the families as well as an inclination on the part of the individual to seek a more independent life. This has caused a movement from the inside to the outside of the village either along its ring road or even further out.

Every village has its own history which is only enshrined in the traditions of the existing families, and is embodied in tales of their origins and other traditions, their speech, dress and beliefs. It is almost impossible to get written documents or material evidence except in a few cases where some archaeological or architectural discoveries have been found in the vicinity of the settlement.

In Ancient Egypt villages were built on the edge of the desert to save every inch of the land for cultivation. They were also built on the banks of the river, canal, or lakes. In other cases they were built in a central position with respect to the cultivated land. It is now sometimes difficult to recognize these factors at the present time due to increases in the extent of the cultivated area and changes in the land holding system.

The yearly flooding of the Nile during the ages and the precipitation of the river's silt which caused a considerable raising of the level of the land, has covered the remains of the past. Excavations could only be carried on by destroying the present villages which are built on the top of the old ones.

#### Rural Settlement Pattern in the Delta:

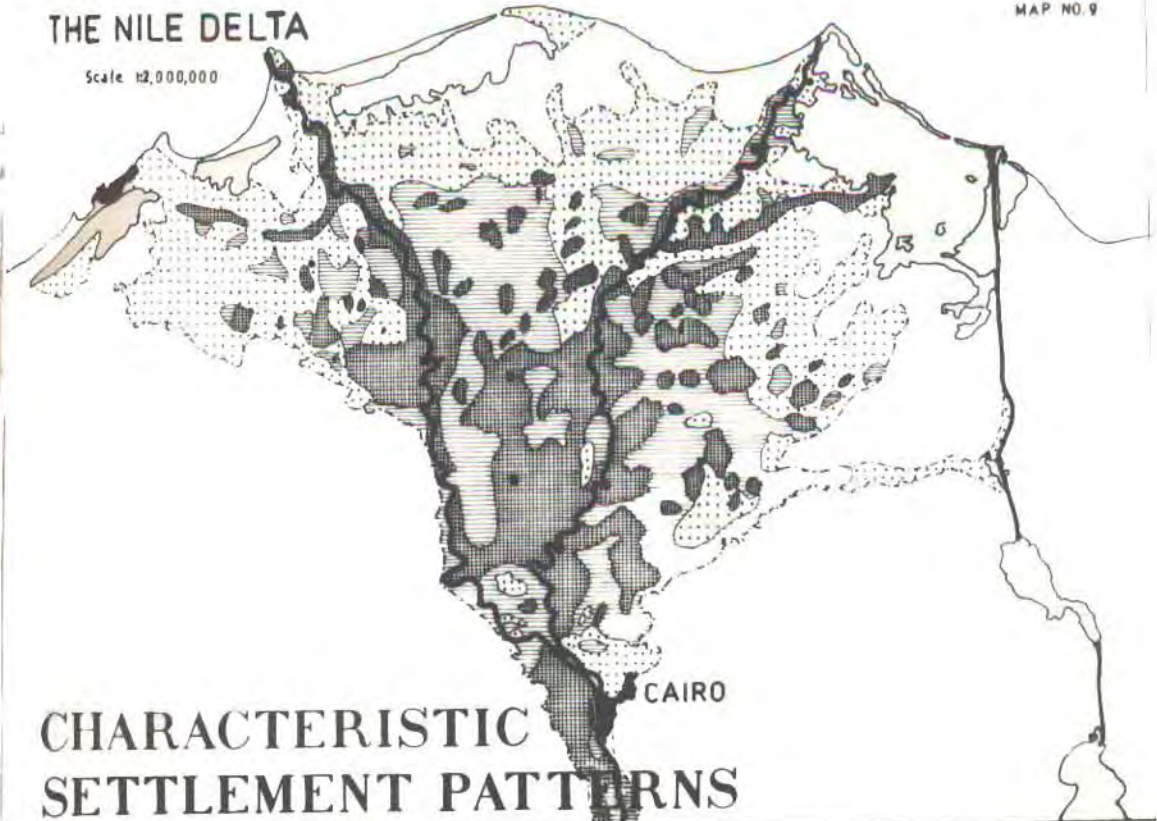
The physical character of the surface of the Nile Delta has had a great effect on the distribution of rural settlements. In the southern and central parts of the Delta the villages are close together and many are large in size in terms of population, whereas they become more widely scattered and generally smaller in population as one moves into the northern sector of the Delta where the number of hamlets rather than villages characterizes the settlement pattern. (See map no. 9)

The type of settlement in every <sup>area</sup> year is affected, to a large extent by the form of social and economic life dictated by the type and fertility of the land in each area. In the middle and the south of the Delta we find larger settlements

# THE NILE DELTA





MAP NO. 9

Scale 1:2,000,000



## CHARACTERISTIC SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

CAIRO

-  CONCENTRATIONS OF LARGE VILLAGES.
-  AREAS OF LARGE VILLAGES SURROUDED BY NUMEROUS HAMLETS.
-  DISPERSED SETTLEMENTS IN SMALLER GROUPS AND HAMLETS.
-  LIMITS OF CULTIVATED LAND.



with houses of more than one storey, very fertile fields, and comparatively more enlightened peasants. (See map no. 10) In the north, east and west we find the fortress type of settlement more widely dispersed on the cultivated land. The houses are mostly of one floor and the peasants are less enlightened as they have not much contact with the large towns because of the poor communications. (See map no. 11 and 12) In these areas the fellah is very much attached to his land even in the physical sense and as a result there is a larger proportion of hamlets than exists in the middle or south of the Delta.<sup>(1)</sup> In the extreme north, east and west, the rural settlements are more dispersed and the houses are more separated into small groups or even single houses. (See map no. 13) Another phenomenon is that the size of the house itself gets smaller, perhaps because the fellah does not live a stable life in these remote areas as he is always exposed to severe climatic disasters, and handicapped by the lack of irrigation water and the low fertility of the land. Even the building materials vary slightly as more bricks are used in the northern part because of the excessive demand in the low lands.

The rural settlements in the Nile Delta have been given different names according to their size, siting system of administration or management. They begin with the Kafre (a larger village), Qariya (village), Tell (a village built on a raised site), Mehallet (place), and Ezba (hamlet).

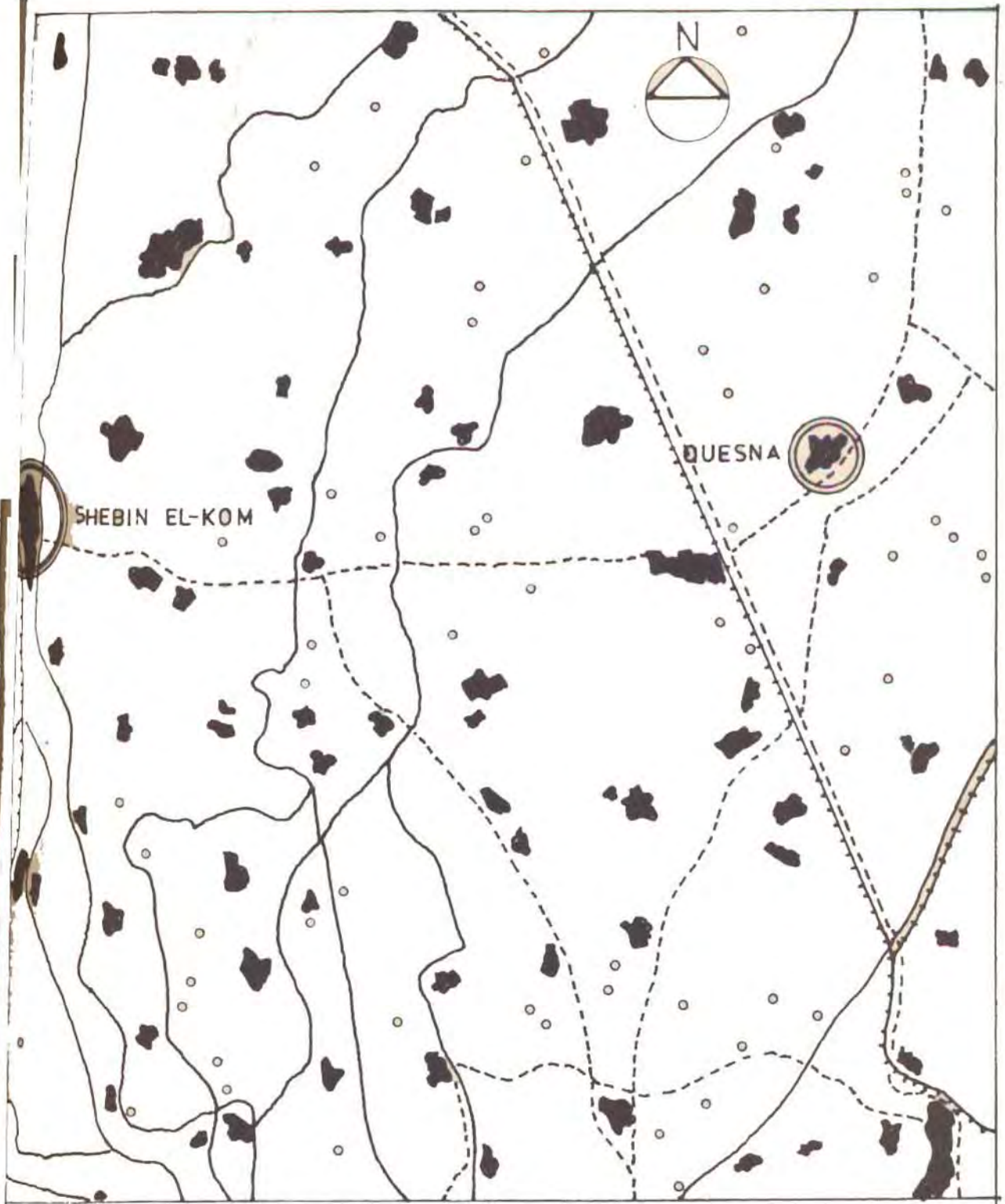
On the borders of the cultivated land of the Delta the nomads and the bedouins live in tents and straw huts.

The attached map no. (9) (2) shows the distribution of the different types of rural settlement pattern to be found in different parts of the Nile Delta. The other maps illustrate the typical rural settlement patterns in four different areas in the Delta, differentiating the towns, large villages, villages and hamlets. Plans of the different types of rural settlement are shown later on (figures 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8)

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(1) Lusach, J.K. 'L'Habitat Rural en Egypt', E. Schindler, Cairo 1935.

(2) Lusach, J.K. 'L'Habitat Rural en Egypt', E. Schindler, Cairo 1935.



**A SETTLEMENT PATTERN: CENTRE OF THE DELTA**

KEY

- Main Roads
- Main Canals
- ⋯ Railways

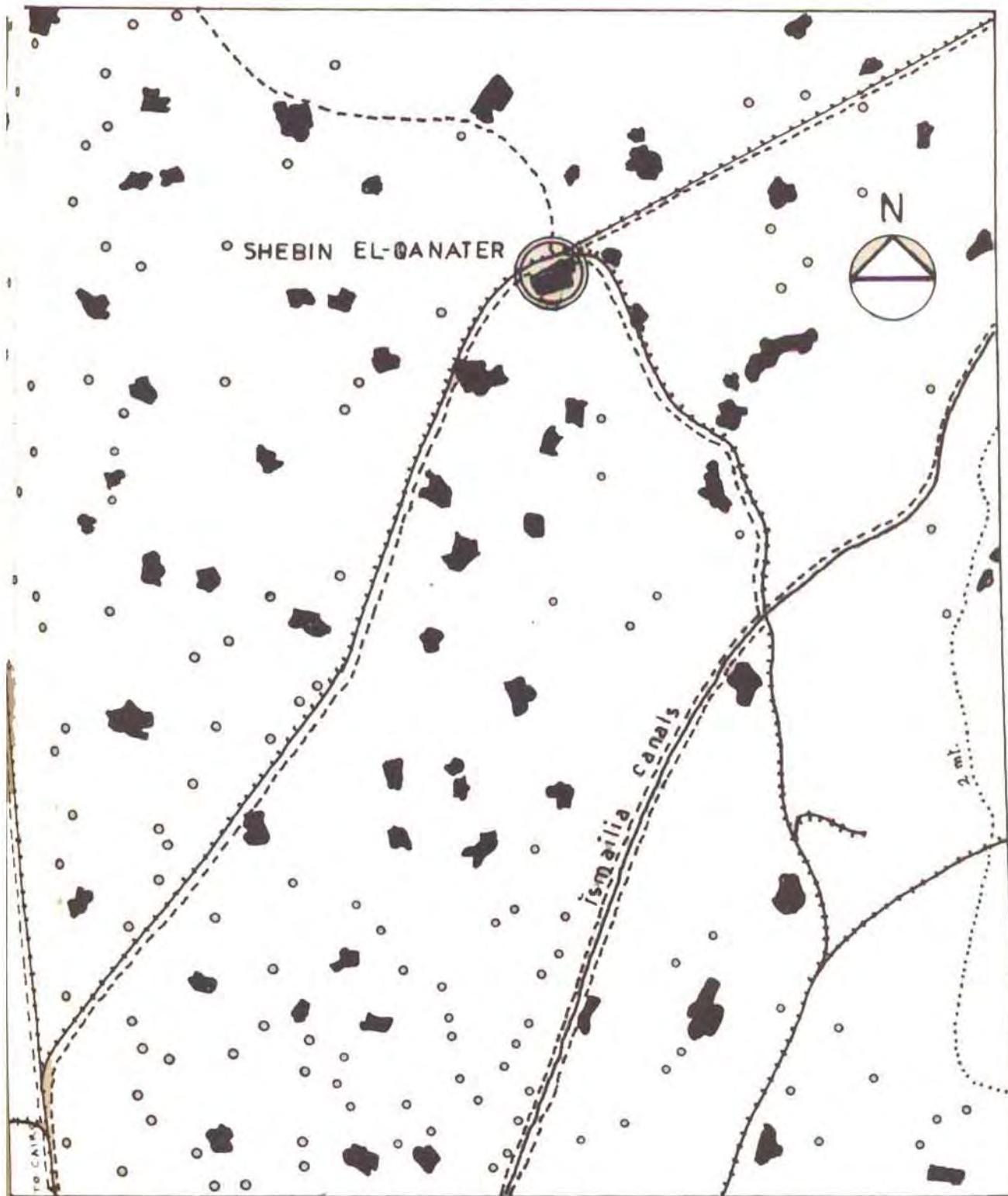
MENUFIYA

- Large Villages
- Hamlets

Scale 1:100,000

MAP NO. 10



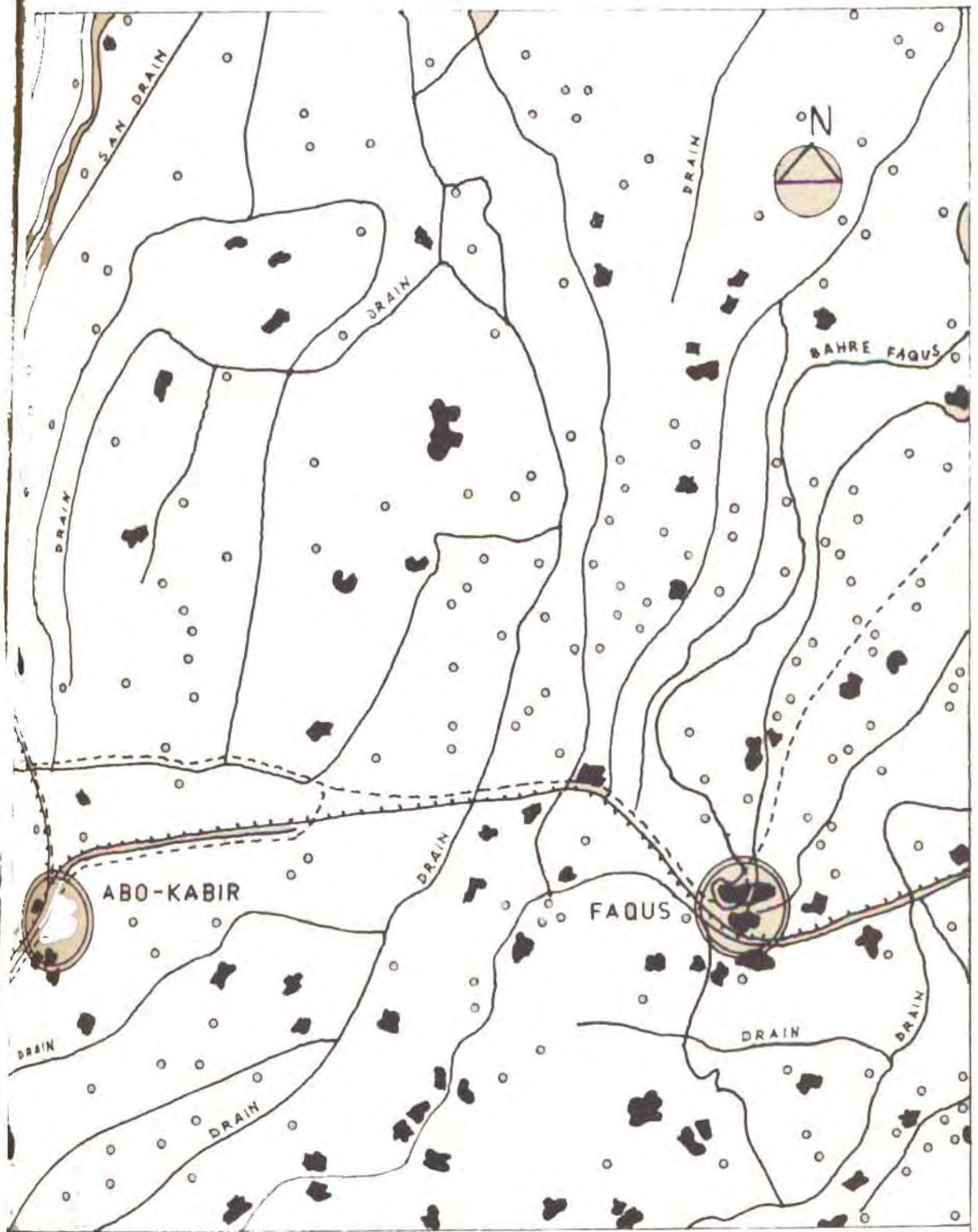


**B** SETTLEMENT PATTERN: S-EAST OF THE DELTA

KEY		NORTH OF CAIRO	Scale 1:100,000
-----	Main Roads	.....	Contour Lines
—————	Main Canals	■	Large Villages
——+——	Railways	○	Hamlets

MAP NO.11





**C SETTLEMENT PATTERN : N-EAST OF THE DELTA**

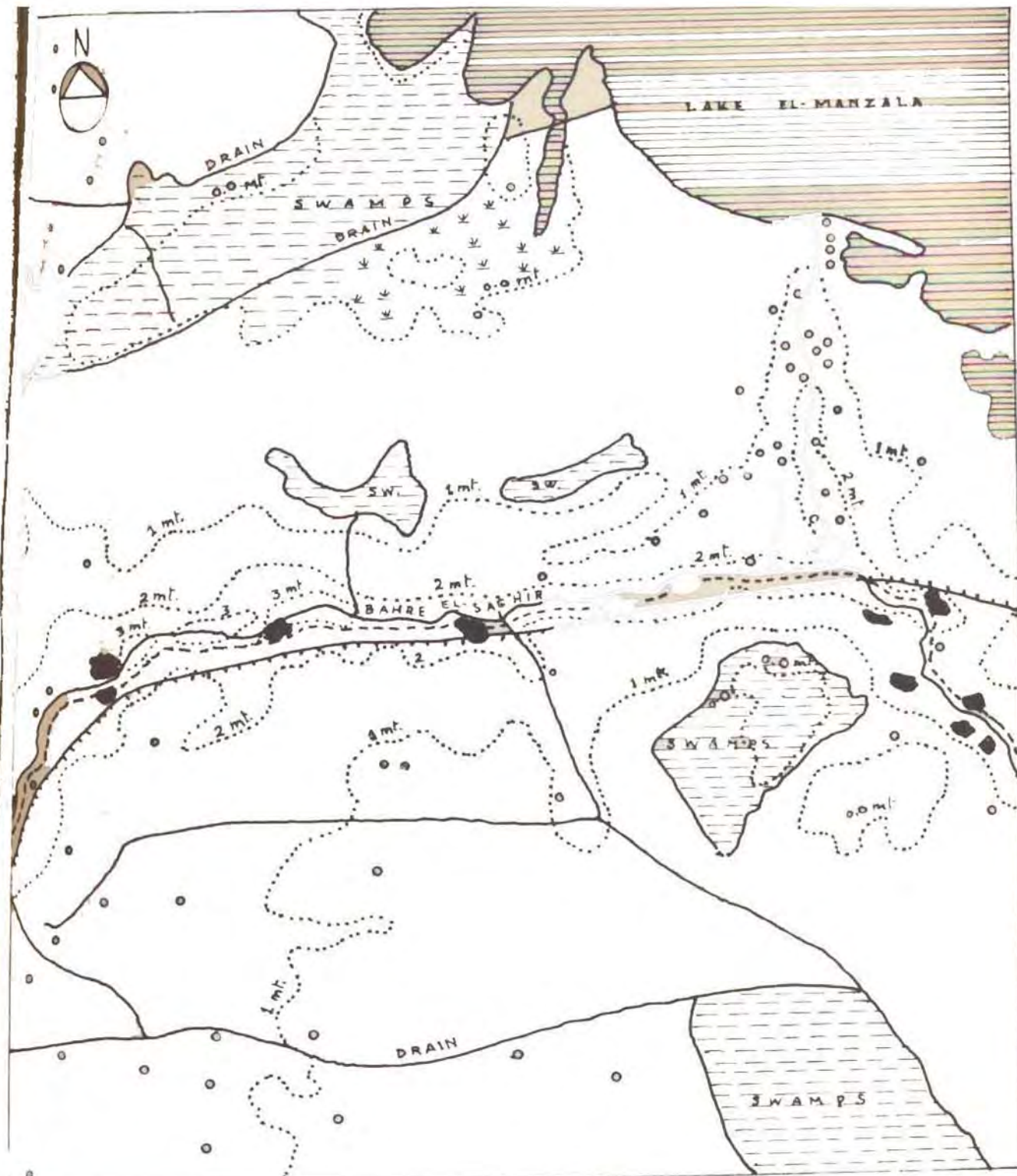
KEY

FAQUS, SHARQIYA, Scale 1:100,000

- Main Roads
- Main Canals & Drains
- Railways

- Large Villages
- Hamlets

MAP NO.12



# SETTLEMENT PATTERN: NORTH OF THE DELTA

KEY

- - - Main Roads
- Main Canals & Drains
- ▬ Railways

DAQAHLIYA Scale 1:100,000

- ⋯ Contour Lines
- Large Villages
- Hamlets

MAP NO.13





FIG. 4 A circular type Country Town

TAHAWAI





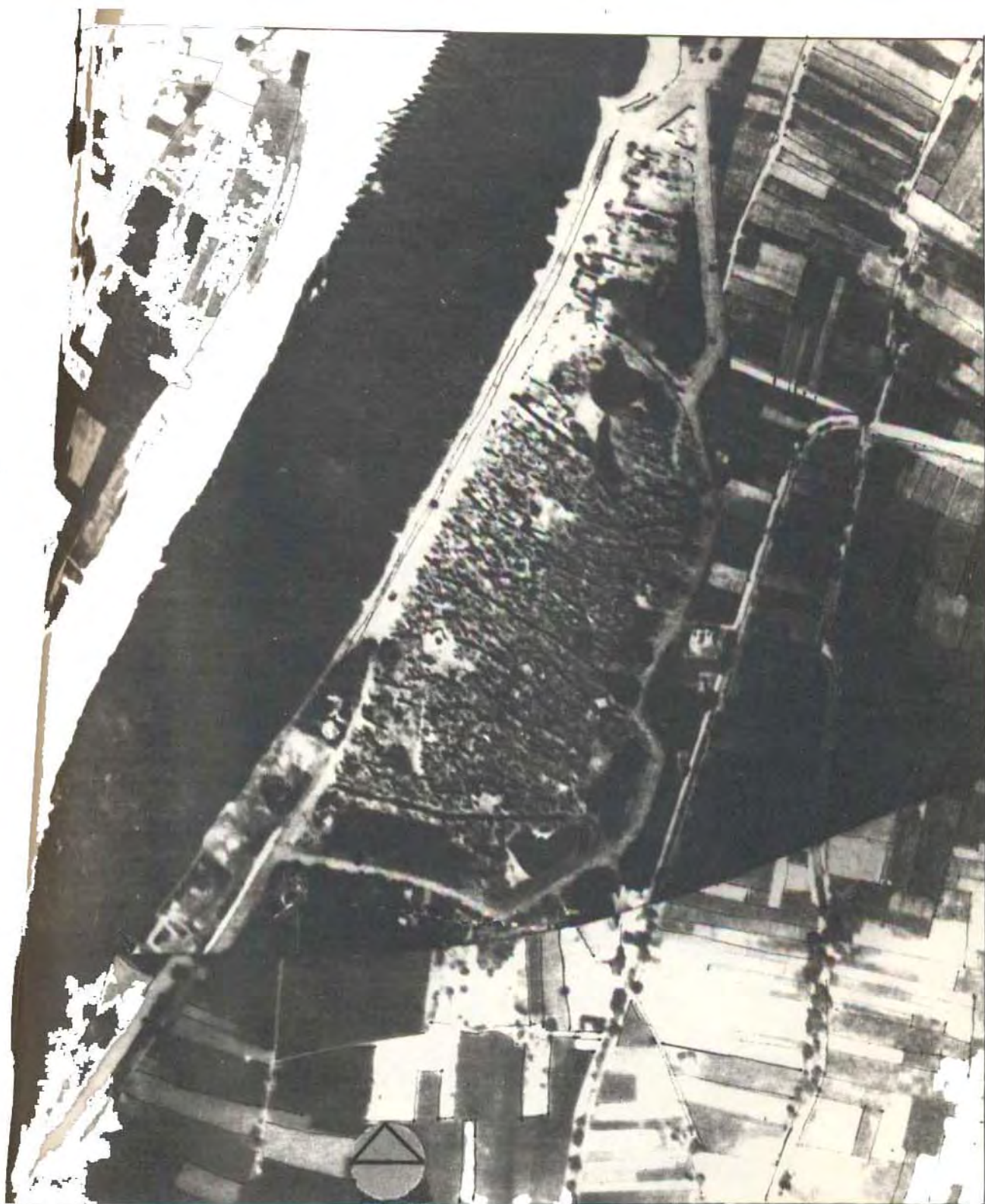


FIG.5 A road-side linear Country Town

**GIREIS**







FIG 6 A small village

KAFR EL-GHAREIB





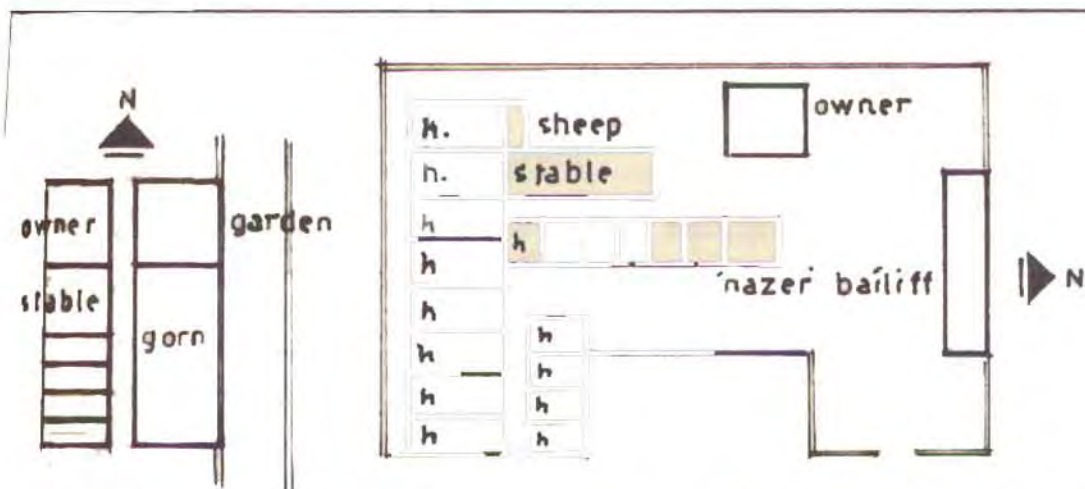


Two seperally developed but adjoining villages

EL-INGIB FIG. 7



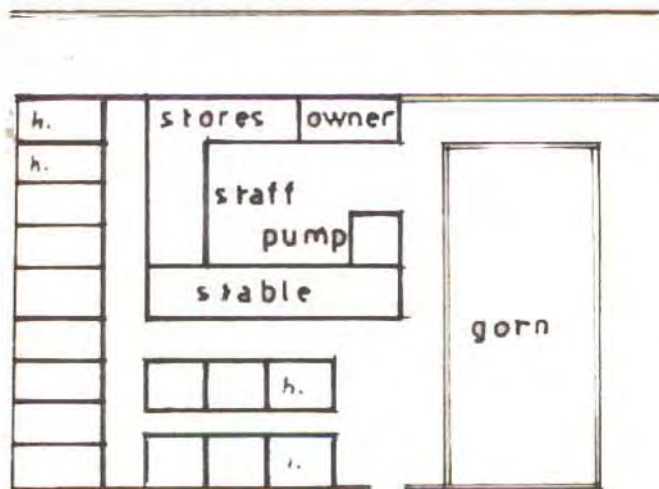




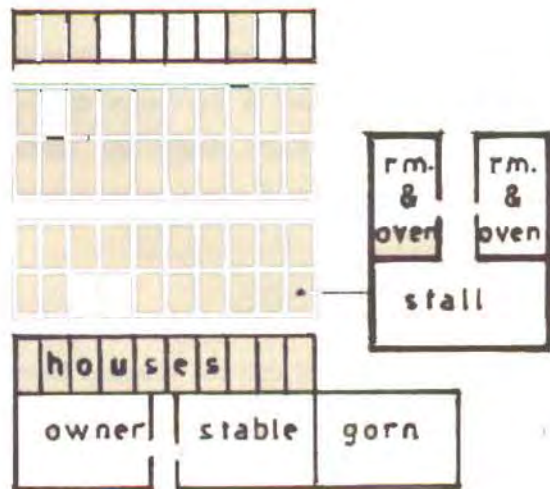
EZ. A. HAFEZ



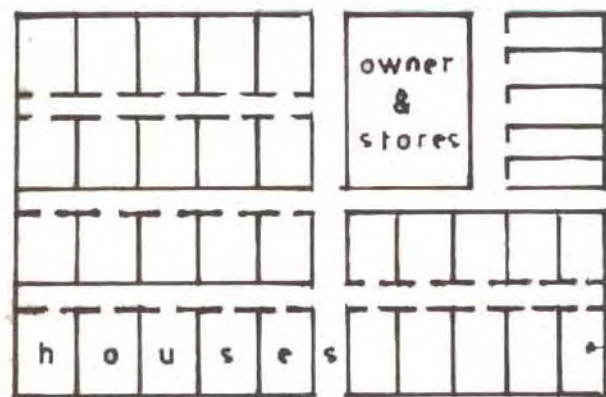
EZ. ZUELF AKAR, EL-BARRANIA, 240 feddan



EZ. M. FARID, SHATANOUF, 215 f.



EZ. A EL-ELA, EL-GHANNAMIA  
328 feddan



mosque

EZ. TALAAT EL-BAHARIA, GREIS, 450 feddan

## FARM BUILDINGS 'ezabs'



## Factors affecting the Rural Habitat

Luzach<sup>(1)</sup> put the following factors as mainly responsible for the physical, social and economic structure of the village:-

- a. The physical or natural factors including water, relief and soil
- b. The historical and social factors.
- c. The influence of the prevailing agrarian economy.

### 1. Physical Factors

For drinking purposes canal water is generally preferred and so the irrigation channels have always been the focus of settlement.

Irrigation and domestic purposes are still important elements in rural life. Moreover, water channels, though by no means all, are used as a means of transport. Indirectly, the main canals or drains, together with the main roads which quite often run parallel to them, have always been strong attraction to settlers by virtue of their convenience.

### 2. Historical and Social Factors

The historical factor is reflected in the traditional inherited agglomeration pattern of settlement. But it must be noted here that this inherited pattern has remained as it was, although some of the main factors which were responsible for its initial creation may have either disappeared or ceased to be operative factors: for example many of the former entrance gates to the old villages are preserved only as place names.

The social conditions are, on the one hand, the outcome of the economic conditions, and on the other hand they spring from the strong family bonds and the strong sense of clan preservation which encourages families in the one clan to cling together in their own sector of the village. Married sons usually live in the family house or not far from it. This tendency is responsible for the family quarters which exist almost in every village.

### 3. Economic Factors

The main economic factor is concerned with the land holding system where

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(1) Luzach, J.K. 'L'Habitat Rural en Egypt', E. Schindler, Cairo 1935.



A great majority of holdings are less than one feddan and only a negligible minority can be described as large holders. Consequently agglomeration is the main feature of the pattern of settlement.

A second factor is the form of land use. The needs of a small farmer are very limited and his small house usually provides adequate space. A larger farmer on the other hand, needs more space for himself and his farm labour. An 'Esha' (hamlet) is essential for a large farm.

The area of the village is reduced to a minimum in order to keep the cultivated area as large as possible.

Some distinction may be made between villages according to their relative importance as market places or their relation to the big towns and lines of communication.

#### i. Security Factors

The security factor is of considerable importance in determining the pattern of settlement. Protection against flood-water, thefts, arson and cattle poisoning is of great importance. In a community where maldistribution of wealth prevails, temptation is very great. This was responsible for the government's action forbidding isolated settlements unless security is provided by nominating special guards (ghafir)

The security factor is also one which was and still is responsible for the present compact plan of the central part of the village with its narrow lanes and its old district gates which were once closed after 'El-Esha' (evening) when all the animals had been brought back from the fields and the Fellaheen had said their last prayers of the day at the mosques. In spite of the increasing security measures in the countryside, we still hear of many dreadful murders and robberies. The rural social life also compels all women in the village at home after sunset except on special occasions, and on these occasions a woman must be accompanied by a male member of the family. Even though there are now no gates to close there is still a similar change in the social life of the village after the last prayers at 'El-Esha'. Street lighting also had its bearing on security. This problem has been partially solved by hanging kerosene lamps at the corners of



main street, but these are not efficient. The feeling of fear of the darkness exists in rural areas, especially near the open fields when the maize or other crops is high and offers cover to the wrong-doer.

In any replanning scheme these factors, as well as the more obvious ones, require consideration, particularly when contemplating any partial dispersal of the village community in connection with any proposed consolidation of land holdings. However, it is to be hoped that education and economic progress will help to ease this problem.

### The Village Plan

There are two types of village plan:-

- a. The 'fort-like plan of the circular village where the ring road controls the features of the plan and serves as the main thoroughfare of the village. Along the ring road most of the shops and the cafés are situated. The ring road also differentiates between the past and the present development of the village plan. (See fig. 4 of the Country Town of Tahawai in the Markaz Ashmoun)
- b. The road or canal-side village. In this case the village plan grows along the road or the canal sides. The road is the main thoroughfare of this type of village along which all the shops and other activities are found. (See fig. 5 of Gireis village in Markaz Ashmoun)

The 'fort-like' plan is the most common. It reflects the lack of security in times more dangerous than the present. The main characteristics of the village plan can best be seen from the air. The main features are the irregularity of the plan, the compactness of its older parts within the ring road, the narrowness and tortuous nature of the streets and lanes, the lack of open space within the village, apart from the 'gorns' or threshing floors, and the haphazard setting of the uncontrolled building which has occurred in the newer parts, outside the ring road. (See map no. 14, fig no. 10).

The similarity between the villages is striking. The only differences are in some few details. All the villages were built for the same purpose and all



**M. GUWEDA**

scale 1:5000

A TYPICAL SMALL VILLAGE OF 865 inhabitants  
AND TYPICAL LAND FRAGMENTATION.





A hamlet near  
Kafr El-Sheikh



House in a hamlet  
in Beheira Prov.

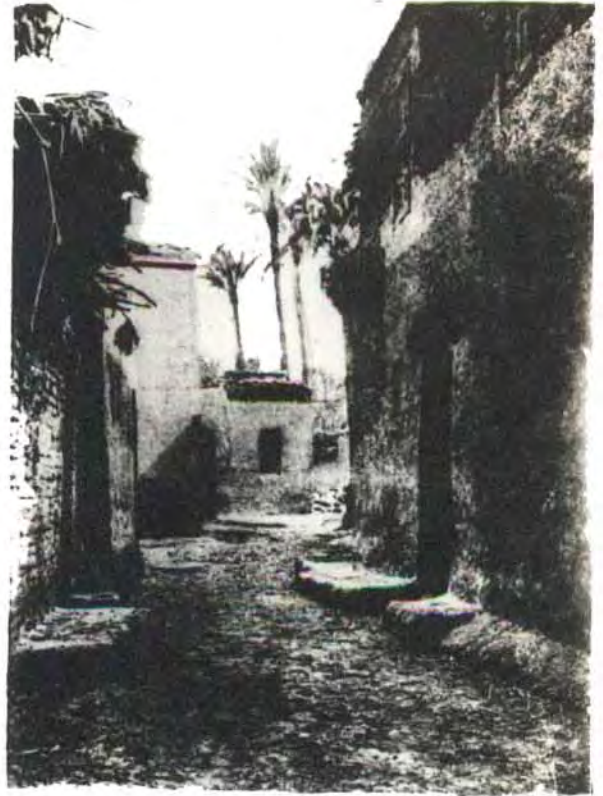


Nomad settlement  
in Sharqiya Prov.





typical village lane



A typical village street



typical country town street



affected by the same environment. ( See figures 6 and 7)

connected with the plan of the village is its division into a number of quarters according to the number of big families in the village. This division is reflected in the village governing body of the 'Omda' (the mayor) and his assistants (Mushaikh-el-Balad) who generally come from the quarters of the largest families in the village.

#### The 'Ezba' or Hamlet Plan:

The 'ezba' which takes the form of a hamlet, is separated from the village and belonging to the estate owner and provides living quarters for the estate workers. This arrangement which is less than a century old was legally recognised in 1913 and the legislation regarding this form of development was modified slightly in 1933. Under this legislation no 'ezba' can be established on any estate without the consent and the approval of the Provincial Council, for the law is still valid which forbids, 'the building by whosoever it may be, of any cluster of dwelling upon cultivated land outside the recognised village area'.

There are now more than 15,000 'ezbas' in Egypt, most of them depend, administratively, on the village from which they sprang. There are 4,000 villages distributed all over the country; about 3,000 of them are in the Nile Delta.

The 'ezba' generally includes labourers' houses, the landlord's house, stables and stores. It also includes a mosque, a 'mandara' or a common hall and a 'gorn' (See figure 8 and map no. 15)

Dr. N.S. Nasr<sup>(1)</sup> classified the 'ezba' into two types:-

1. The main type is the 'defensive type' In this type, stores and stables are surrounded by labourers' houses. This feature is seen not only in the main form of the plan of the ezba, but also in the plan of the house of the farm worker. If the workers have their own animals, their stables must never be located at the back

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(1) Nasr, N.S. Agricultural Geography in the Delta, Cairo 1953

Its back is on the outside road or faces a field.

The second type of 'ezba' is the economical type where lack of space is mainly responsible for the form of the plan.

The owner's house always occupies the northern end of the 'ezba'. The 'ezba' in many cases is surrounded by a high wall for security and easy control of the labourers exactly as in the case of the Ancient Egyptian village at Amarna. The built-up area covered by the 'ezba' ranges between one and three feddans. The total area allotted to the 'ezba' ranges between 50 and 500 feddans or more. In the siting of these hamlets more account appears to have been taken of the means of communication and transport than in the case of the villages.

### Model Villages

Model villages have been built but their number is very small. Mohammed Ali over a century ago established some model villages each containing 180 houses, 169 of which were for the Fellaheen. Each dwelling consisted of two rooms and a yard. The experiment failed as the tenants modified the houses to suit their needs.

Nevertheless, after a twenty-year interval, a fair number of landowners built some villages of cell-like dwellings of burnt bricks for the Fellaheen of their 'ezbas'.

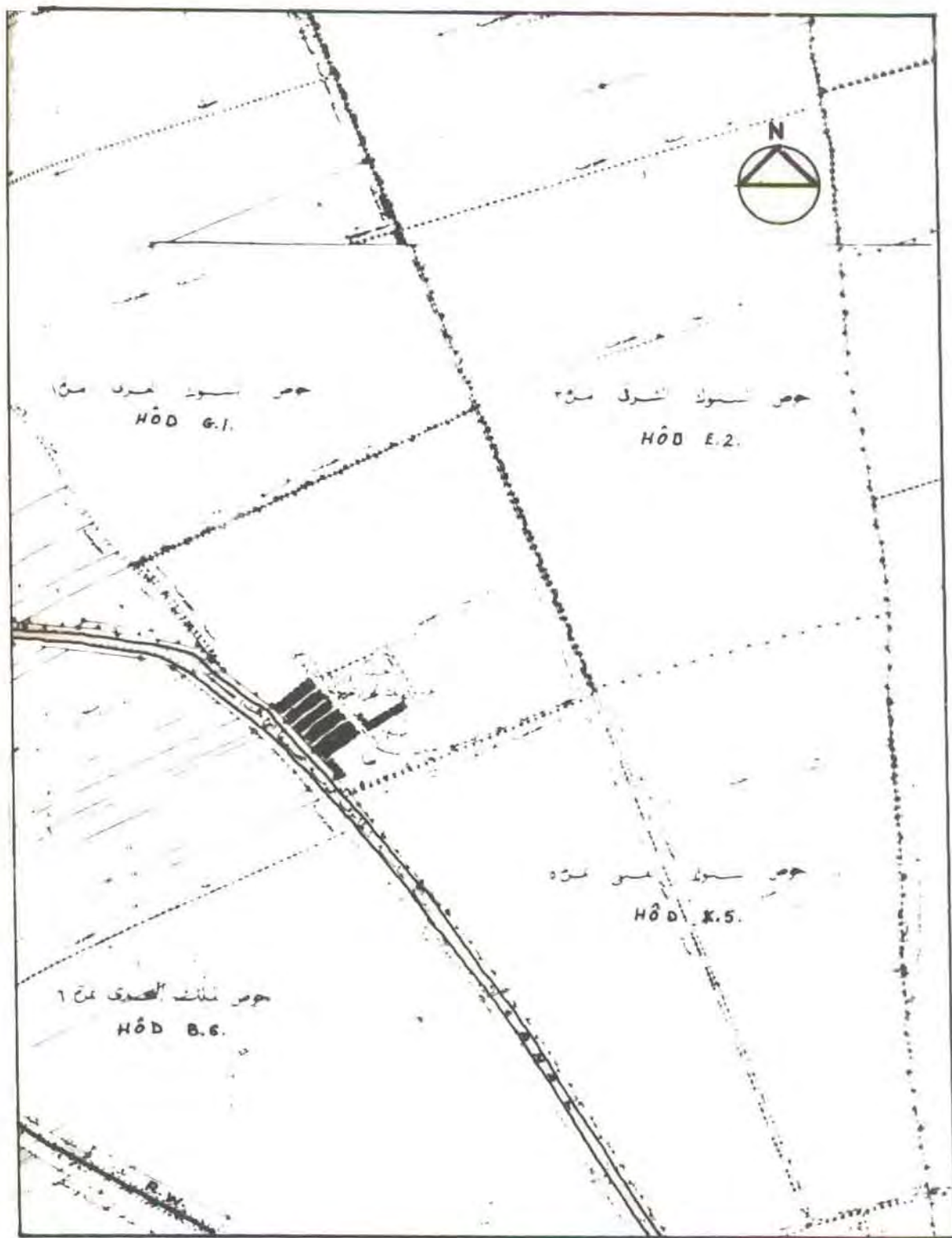
The most interesting achievement, however, is that of Bahtem, built by the National Agricultural Society in 1934 and in which full attention was given to the fellah's needs and his mode of life. This was an expensive experiment costing about ££ 10,000.

In 1935 the Society laid a new experiment before the landowners, by building twenty houses of different kinds in blocks of four. In this case a house measured 30' x 35' made of mud bricks and cost ££ 35 was used, as compared with the type of house used in the earlier scheme which cost ££ 125.

Sometime later the Government, for its part, proposed to build a model village in each province, but the plan never materialised.

Other 'model' villages were built such as Kafre-Saad, El-Faroniya on the





**EZ. EL-GAZZAR** A TYPICAL HAMLET OF 107 inhabitants  
 scale 1: 5000 AND LARGE HOLDINGS' DIVISIONS.

'Nag's Estates and another completely new was built at Quorna near Luxor as a replacement for an existing village which had to be removed for excavation. Most of these villages were built in the form of 'ezbas' for housing labourers. Altogether the number of 'model' villages was insignificant when compared with the vast number, about 4,000 of the old decrepit villages.

A five-year plan was suggested for rebuilding the 4,000 villages of Egypt at an estimated cost of £E 30,000,000. This sum appears both moderate and feasible. The plan, however, was abandoned because of the heavy liabilities incurred under the London Treaty of 1936.

### Housing Conditions:

From the extensive housing research carried out by the Village Planning Section of the Architectural Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs in the year 1953 for three different types of village, one can gain a reasonable idea of housing conditions prevailing in the average Egyptian village.

This research was carried out in three villages, different in size and different in locations. The first is Sangarg in the province of Menoufia, in the middle of the Delta, with a population of 7,500 inhabitants, 1,085 houses and built on 35.98 acres with 1,915 acres of agricultural land holdings.

The second is Nagua-el-Karrah in the province of Aswan in the extreme south of Egypt. It has a population of 1,846 inhabitants and 378 houses built on 7.25 acres. The whole area of the village holdings is 900 acres. *(iddam)*

The third is Al-Rubamaia in the province of Sharkia in the east of the Delta. It has a population of 901 persons and 205 houses built on 5.79 acres. The whole area of the village holdings is 401 acres. *(iddam)*

The range of the development of housing is nearly the same for the three villages. About 75% of the village houses are of one floor except in the third village where the ratio is nearer 50%

About 50% of the houses of the two villages of the Delta are of two-rooms or less, while this percentage rises to more than 80% in the village of Upper Egypt. Those houses which have six rooms or more form about 15% of the whole number of houses in the villages of the Delta, while those in Upper Egypt form



ix: 4%.

The statistics also show that less than 20% of the population are living in conditions allowing a ratio of 1 person per room while some 30% are accommodated on the ratio of 2 persons per room. The largest proportion of the people are packed at ratios of three, four, five or even six persons to one room. These figures represent the poor standard of housing in which the Fellaheen live and reveal the great need for their rehabilitation and for providing them with adequate accommodation.

From the accommodation point of view, the statistics show that over 70% of the houses have got a 'forn' - earth stove, and about 60% have got a 'seriba', while houses with sanitary accommodation, i.e. W.C., bath or a lavatory form an insignificant percentage of the total.

The annual income of the person, which more or less determines or affects the housing conditions of the family, varies from one district to another. 60% or even more of the Fellaheen of the Delta have an annual income of less than £20 per person, while this percentage rises to 95% in the province of Matruh.

From these figures and from personal observation village houses can be classified into three categories.

1. Houses of markedly sub-standard which should really be classified as uninhabitable - they form the great bulk of the village houses and should certainly be demolished as quickly as possible. These houses are mostly occupied by a very low income group (less than £20 a year), and it is these people who are most severely affected by the miserable living conditions (See figures 4 and 11)

The removal of this group to new sites or to new houses in the development process could be a relatively easy task. The occupants can make use of official 'self-help' schemes with the technical aid and financial help of the Government or the other financial institutions and co-operative societies.

2. Houses of a larger size, occupied by large families with a stable way of life, and a long tradition concerning the occupation of a particular site and associated social and family connections, causing related families to cluster close to each other. These houses are mostly of two floors, built of mud bricks, wooden beams, reed and mortar for roofing, and perhaps burnt bricks for



A poor farmer's house  
(Tadla - Morocco)



A middle class farmer's house  
(Tadla village - Morocco)



A typical village scene



the foundations. Most of them have primitive sanitary equipment including a pump and an earth-closet. Some of these houses are built inside the core of the village enclosed by the ring road. Others are newly built outside the ring road. (See figure 11.)

The removal of these families to new houses is open to question, especially if the new site is away from the old one or outside the relatives' district. These people cannot be forced to move to new houses, if we care about the villagers' feelings and their co-operation in the development plan, which is a matter of basic importance. Some rehabilitation of the areas which these houses now occupy might however be given consideration in the second stage of any redevelopment scheme.

3. Houses of reasonable standard, built of burnt bricks with cement or earth mortar. These houses are usually built outside the ring road or even on the fringes of the village, forming extensions to the village proper. Some of these houses are occupied and owned by large families of a moderate annual income, who have left their old and large houses, influenced by grown-up and educated sons who often are married and living with the family in the same house. Some of the sons may work in the village or nearby town as teachers or merchants - but not as farmers. This is often the case where the village is only a short travelling distance from a town. In other cases where the town is well away from the village the son may use his family house at week-ends and in the summer holidays.

These houses are very few in number. Their numbers vary according to the situation of the village with respect to the town, the nearer the village to the town the more we find of these houses; but generally speaking, their number is limited. These houses should be given careful consideration when arranging any new extension of the village, since they could well form the nucleus of resited family groupings designed to retain the traditional atmosphere of the large family quarter.

They should not be left isolated but should gradually be joined by new houses occupied by relatives.

This will need very careful study when putting a new village plan into action. Since the occupants of these houses fall within the group of 'family-farm' owners consequently if they are to be affected by any consolidation scheme

It should be taken to ensure that any new consolidated holding allotted to any one of these owners should be conveniently sited in relation to the house he occupies.

In the case of the 'ezba' we usually have two categories of houses. The first comprises of the land-lords' houses, stores and stables. The second comprises the houses owned by the land-lord but occupied by the Fellahs as laborers or tenants of his land. <sup>The latter</sup> their houses in most cases are sub-standard.

The reconstruction of the 'ezba' housing is of a less difficult nature than that of the village, both from the planning and the economic points of view.