

## Changes in Pastoral Society in Syria and Resource Management

### Part 3: Pastoralism combined with use of post-harvest farmland

In Hasakah Prefecture, the history of agricultural development is very short. We have already mentioned in the previous volumes of AAI News that until the start of agricultural development, there were vast rangelands utilized by pastoralists.<sup>1</sup> We also mentioned that the recent tendency for the pastoralists to become sedentary farmers happened as a process of changing land use. The characteristics of agricultural development in Hasakah are; 1) it was done on a massive scale in an area with few farmers, and 2) many commercial financiers in urban areas such as Aleppo with large machinery started agribusiness at the same time as an investment.<sup>2</sup>

Agricultural development in Hasakah started with barley and wheat productions as the first stage. The subsequent second phase was cotton and Hasakah is now one of the most important granaries of Syria, and is greatly contributing to the regional and national economy as a production center of industrial crops. However, during the time of dramatic change of land use and living environment of modern times, how did pastoralists deal with ecological resources and adapt to the changes? One choice was to part with most of the livestock and make farming the main livelihood, and there were indeed many people who made this choice. Nonetheless, in the Abd al Aziz Mountains, the Baqqara al Jabal people made a different choice. They practiced easy farming and became half-sedentary, but also continued with livestock rearing moving seasonally as before. It is easy to imagine that the main problem of the Baqqara al Jabal at that time was how they would deal with insufficient grazing as the grassland size diminished dramatically due to agricultural development in the plains. Still, for them, there was a new type of rangeland available in front of their eyes, such as post-harvest land of barley and cotton. They took in this new fodder positively and flexibly and beautifully adapted to the change from rangeland to farming land with qualitative and quantitative changes of surrounding environment. Their adaptation involved retention of the traditional and mobile lifestyle, and transition to a new level of livestock management skillfully introducing untapped and unexplored resources.

As above, in the large current of the time such as agricultural development and settling down of farming communities, the Baqqara al Jabal established a new way of livestock farming based on seasonal pastoralism the the Abd al Aziz mountains combined with use of post-harvest farmland. They established a pattern of moving to plains from summer to autumn when grazing is scarce. In contrast, the the Abd al Aziz mountains became important grazing resources in spring for non-Baqqara al Jabal people who have a large number of livestock in the plains.



Barley harvesting using large combine



Grazing in post-harvest barley



Irrigation work in a wheat field  
by a young pastoralist

<sup>1</sup> There were repeated attacks by pastoralists, which led to the decline and abandonment of villages. As so called “bedouinization” progressed, there were some centuries of low sedentary population in Jazira which includes the present Hasakah prefecture. (Wolf-Dieter Hütteroth, 1992). It was only in 1950-60 that the Jazira’s population started increasing.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Amin. S. 1976.