

## **Amongst the Fellaheen of Upper Egypt.**

**The Summer-Crop, EL QAIDY<sup>1)</sup>.**

Captain M. H. Davidsen.

From the agricultural life in Upper Egypt, I shall tell about the summer-crop, which is connected with the warmest season of the year — May, June, July and August. The summer-crop is therefore called in Arabic EL QAIDY, pronounced eggaiḍy and derived from qaid, that means, »summerheat«.

The cultivation of the summer-crop is not only a hot, but also a hard field work, because it takes place in the period of the lowest height of the Nile, so that all the water to the irrigation of the cultivated lands has to be drawn up from the underground by means of the water-wheel, in Arabic called El SÂQIJEH. One sâqijeh can irrigate four to five feddâns, and a feddân is about 4200 square metres or somewhat more than 1 acre. All the poor amongst the Fellaheen charge themselves with this hard work, even in case of not being owners of any land. In that case they rent the land for the qaiḍy-season and cultivate, as a cooperative farming, this »foreign ground«, in Arabic called ARḌ MIN BARRA. As a rule, four partners make a contract for the cultivating of four feddâns.

Already six or seven weeks before the increasing summer-heat they start the preparations. First of all they have to collect marling, in Arabic SEBÂKH, from the ancient ruins or from the mountains near the border of the desert, and to transport the sebâkh to a place close to the feddâns, for instance near the sâqijeh. The sebâkh is put into bags and carried the long way by donkeys. To avoid the burning sun in the middle of the day this transport of sebâkh takes place not only in the morning, but chiefly in the night in moonlight.

Further they have to make the long palm-ropes for the water-wheel

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and to engage some potters, charging daily wages, to form the many water-jars to be tied to the vertical wheel of the *sâqijeh*. And with the village's carpenter, EN NAGGÂR, they have to arrange the refitting of the wood-work of the water-wheel and his keeping it serviceable during *el qaidy*.

To draw the *sâqijeh* they need three camels or three oxen or three pairs of cows, which take turns and change day and night after about two hour's work. The time of changing is indicated in the day by a



Fig. 1. FELLAH-VILLAGE. Covering an area of about 10 acres and containing more than 4 000 inhabitants together with the domestic animals.  
The verdant fields surrounded by walls of clay and mud.

primitive sun-dial called *‘ALQEH*, and in the night by the position of some wellknown stars, especially the position of the Great Bear and of the Pleiades. The driver behind the beasts at the *sâqijeh* is a boy, called EL GÂZIR, whose monotone songs, praising Allah or the Prophet, constantly fill the air.

After all these preparations the tillage of the field can begin.

If some of the *feddâns* are much too dry and sun-burnt, the Fellaheen give them water from the *sâqijeh*, and thereafter they prepare the soil by means of the plough, EL MEĤARÂT, and of the mattock, EL FÂS or EL TURÊJEH; then they plane the surface ground with the big wooden shovel, EL MASÛK, and divide the whole field into

small basins, ḤÔḌ, about 2 metres square and surrounded by low walls, DIRBÂS, made of the shoved mould and about 10 cm high and 20 cm broad. In some of these walls they arrange water-pipes, GEDAWWEL, and others of the walls are to be used as foot-path.

Then the Fellâh cuts with his fâs in every ḥôḍ small holes, BÔRAH, about 15—20 cm in diameter, and puts into every hole 4 or 5 seeds of Doorrah — sorghum vulgare — and pushes with his foot some earth into the bôrah to cover the seeds, whereafter he leaves to the



Fig. 2. INSIDE THE EZBEH. Cottage for the spring in the open field, constructed of doorrah-stalks tied together, and only in the corner a small place covered with a roof as room for the night. The furniture is made of clay and mud mixed with dung from camels and donkeys.

From the left: Big cover for milk-pails. — Poultry-house carrying a square box for clothes and precious things. — Fellaah-woman. — Entrance to the sleeping room and in front of it: The oven, the most important part of the EZEH. — Pigeon-house. — On the floor water-jar, fleshpot, baskets etc.

young man, called EL ḤOWWÂL, who leads and distributes the water from the sâqijeh, to open the gedawwel and let the water fill up the ḥôḍ. EL ḤOWWÂL understands to take advantage of the slightest difference in the level and thereby get the water distributed to all the basins. He is the man »at the head of the water«: QIDDÂM EL MÔYAH.

After 5 days the green sprouts are to be seen, and 10 days after

the seed the Fellâh gives the young plants the second water. The irrigation of the four feddâns takes nearly 10 days, and every tenth day the plants require water — and they get it, because the water-wheel is always working.

After still 10 days the Fellâh crushes with the fâs the clods and hoes the earth round every plant and gives it the first sebâkh and the third water. This process is called EL LUGMEH EŞŞURAJJEREH = »the small bit«.



Fig. 3. The FIRST SEBAKH.

About a month after the first sebâkh the Fellâh repeats the same process and gives every plant the second sebâkh and thereafter the water. This process is called EL LUGMEH EL KEBÎREH = »the big bit«.

From now on no more sebâkh, only water every tenth day, and 60 days after the second sebâkh the summer-crop el qaiḍy is ripe for the harvest — and the song from the sâqijeh dies out.

When the work of the sâqijeh has finished, and if this long period of more than 100 days has been without accident for men, beasts and sâqijeh, the partners have, the last night at the sâqijeh, a solemn meal, EL KEFARÎJEH, where they praise Allah, thank God for the gracious protection and ask for a rich yield of the summer-crop.

The dishes are various delicacies prepared of the finest flour and milk, and cooked by steam, EL MOBAWAKHÎJEH.

A few days after the kefarijeh, the reap of the doorrah goes on.

The doorrah to be reaped stands upon the ground like a tall lighted wax-candle, about 2 metres high; the stalk is like a bamboo and called BÔŞ. On the top of the bôş sits the full doorrah-cluster like the flame of a candle and therefore also called EL QANDÎL.

Making use of the sickle with the toothed edge, EL MINGAL, the



Fig. 4 THRASHING BY OXEN AND DONKEYS. The animals are muzzled.

men cut off the doorrah-stem near the ground and throw it aside in a heap. Boys and girls, charging as daily wages a basket full of qandils, cut the qandil from the bôş and put it into a basket, the contents of the basket are put into bags and the filled bags are carried on donkeys to an open place, EL MUŞTAḤ, where the qandils are spread out in order to be dried in the sun. A few days after, the doorrah can be thrashed by thrashing-sled or by oxen or by flails of long palm-ribs.

When the doorrah has been thrashed, cleaned and collected in small heaps on the muştaḤ, the solemn measuring of the summer-crop can take place. To do that the partners choose a special man, EL ME<sup>c</sup>ABBER, who ought to be estimated as an honest, trust-

worthy and pious person, so that he can do the measuring with »blessed« hands, BI BÂRAKEH. As a unit of measuring he uses the Egyptian meter, called KEHLEH, a wooden vessel holding about a third part of an English bushel.

The measuring takes place in the cool night and begins with the ceremonious meal called 'ASHEH EL MUŞTAḤ, »the dinner of the thrashing-place«. Every one of the partners brings about 20 loaves, and having performed their prayer, they put a loaf into every one of the small doorrah-heaps to give blessing. Silent and with solemnity they sit down for the dinner. One of them says: »In the name of God, oh, people of the grace«. He repeats these words twice more, and then the others give the answer: »Oh Lord, give us the food to-night, multiply for us the corn«. Then they eat the supper in silence; the dish is usually a soup of lentils, in Arabic °ADAS.

After the meal the ME<sup>c</sup>ABBER begins his work. He has a string over his shoulder and under his arm, and for every hundred Kehleh, he ties a knot. Both the me<sup>c</sup>abber and the assistants, who carry from him the measured corn and put it together in one heap, keep silence in order not to disturb the thoughts of the me<sup>c</sup>abber. When all the corn has been measured, they push out one hundred kehleh to special payment and divide the rest into thirteen equal portions; such a portion is called RÂGIL and is »A man's part«.

The hundred kehleh shall be divided as follows:

EL GÂZIR, the driver of the sâqijeh.....	24	kehleh
EN NAGGÂR, the carpenter.....	12	—
EL ME <sup>c</sup> ABBER, the measurer.....	4	—
EL BILÂD, the land or the rented feddâns, 12 kehleh each, in all	48	—
EL DELÂL, the man who has to measure the land after flood (Comment 1).....	1	—
EL MURASIL, the village's washer of the dead people (Comment 1)	1	—
EL KHATÎB, the sheik of the mosque.....	1	—
EL MIZAJIN, the village's barber and haircutter (comment 1)	1	—
SHEIKH EL GHAFAR, the chief of the village's watchmen (Comment 1).....	1	—
KEHLET EL °ABÂRAH, one kehleh for the use of the bridge (Comment 2).....	1	—
EL GÛR, the people who draw out the stubbles (Comment 3)	6	—
		100 kehleh

Comment 1: He has at every summer-crop the opportunity to get from every working sâqijeh one kehleh as emolument.

Comment 2: If the flood comes before the work on the summer-crop has finished, so that the transport has to pass a bridge over a trench, the owner of the bridge gets one kehleh.

Comment 3: The feddâns have to be cleaned of all stubbles before the flood comes, and 2 or 3 day-labourers do that work puring 3 or 2 days.

The thirteen RÂGIL have to be divided as follows:

ARBA <sup>c</sup> A NUBÂRA, the four partners, one râgil to each, in all...	4 Râgil
SITTE BAQARAT, the six cows drawing the sâqijeh, one râgil for each, in all.....	6 —
(for a camel or an ox is pâid 2 râgil).	
EL HOWWÂL, the man at the head of the water, one râgil.....	1 —
ŞÂHIB EL <sup>c</sup> EDDEH, the owner of the wood-work, one râgil.....	1 —
RÂGIL EL <sup>c</sup> ËN, the owner of the well, one râgil.....	1 —
	13 Râgil

The wood-work has to be removed from the well and secured before the flood comes, and sometimes the owner of the wood-work, EL<sup>c</sup>EDDEH, is not the same as the owner of the well.

The quantity of a râgil depends upon the quality of the soil and may vary from 20 to 35 kehleh or more. For the transport of the doorrah from the thrashing-place the Fellâh makes use of a woollen sack called NAQÎŞEH (plur. NAQÂÎŞ). Such a sack holds seven kehleh, and the result of the crop is always mentioned as so and so many naqâîş, never as so and so many kehleh per râgil. Four naqâîş, as a man's part is an average crop, 5 naqâîş is a good crop, but 3 naqâîş is considered as a poor result of more than 4 months' hard and hot work. Nevertheless, the hard-working Fellâh is a pious and modest man, contented with little, and he always thanks God for His grace.