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Palestinian Commercial Networks in Transformation, 1750-1900

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Abstract

Just as in the eighteenth century cotton trade pulled Palestine's economy into the orbit of the world economy, so it also enabled Palestine, through its ruler *shaykh* Zahir al-`Umar, to instigate a process of urbanization. However, the Ottoman households that governed Galilee and Palestine's coastal areas did not help local merchants (*tujjar*) to develop inter-regional or intra-regional trade networks, as was the case in central Palestine. The disappearance of the main two obstacles to these networks—the dominant local leaders and the monopoly system—ushered in a new era in Palestine's trading and commercial history. Jaffa became Palestine's main transit port and gradually attracted wealthy merchants from far and wide. Besides their importing and exporting activities, these merchants invested heavily in citrus plantations, transforming the citrus fruit trade into Palestine's largest economic sector. Palestine's most powerful merchants played an important role as "the modern agents of change", as they did elsewhere in the Middle East. This development found expression in many aspects of their lifestyle: in the ornate architecture of their houses, in their patterns of consumption, and in their elevated living standards. These powerful merchants were also the first actors to import new technologies to Palestine, in order to develop their businesses. In short, this paper argued that the Palestinian entrepreneurial and mercantile classes, but not members of the old elite and the traditional leadership, emerged as models for imitation by society at large. In many respects, this shift in influence constituted a revolutionary change.

Keywords

Palestine, Zahir al-`Umar al-Zaydani, merchants (*tujjar*)

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Palestine witnessed two major economic booms: the cotton and citrus industries respectively. The cotton boom enabled the celebrated rulers of northern Palestine to invest large sums of money in the urbanization of the region. In the new urban centers of Acre, Nazareth, Haifa, and Tiberias, there emerged a new social stratum, consisting mainly of Muslim and Christian merchants and professionals.

As Palestine's cotton boom turned into a slump toward the end of the eighteenth century, the citrus industry in central Palestine was on the rise. The economic center of gravity accordingly shifted from Acre and northern Palestine to Jaffa, which grew into the main port city in central and southern Palestine.

The boom in the citrus industry and growth in orchards accelerated toward the mid-nineteenth century and accounted for some major changes in Palestinian society. Palestinian merchants and entrepreneurs with financial means made a major

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contribution to Palestine's economic development and helped to introduce new technologies to Palestinian society, thereby becoming the main agents of change. This change manifested itself in many fields, primarily in the adoption of European lifestyles, housing, and architecture, and in a rise in consumption and living standards. Palestinian merchants and entrepreneurs became models for imitation within Palestinian society at large. The commercial networks enabled the merchants and entrepreneurs to consolidate their position of social prominence, and also to play a major role in the political field.

THE COTTON BOOM

Europe's industrialization in the early eighteenth century was spearheaded by textile production, which fueled an increasing European demand for raw cotton (Owen 1981: 83-84). French imports of raw cotton from the ports of Acre and Sidon at the beginning of the eighteenth century stood at approximately 0.5m. Kg; by 1750 it had climbed to about 4m. Kg (Philipp 1990: 130). Acre was now the main center for the export of Palestinian cotton and the major port town on the Syrian coast. By the end of the eighteenth century, French demand for Palestinian raw cotton had increased still further, rising to more than 10m. Kg (Owen 1981: 7).

In the absence of a strong provincial or local authority in Palestine, French merchants resident in Acre who were anxious to secure their supply of raw cotton encountered no obstacles when they decided to invest directly in local cotton production. As early as the 1720s, it can be found that French merchants bought their cotton directly from the cotton-producing villages, where they paid village leaders (*shaykh*s) and peasants for cotton harvests one year in advance (Cohen 1973: 12). In order to gain sole purchasing rights to the cotton, French traders undertook to pay the state tax (*miri*) owed by the villagers directly to the province governor (*wali*) of Sidon. In view of the cotton, together with a steady rise in prices, the *shaykhs* of the cotton-growing areas became richer and thus more influential.

While the cotton trade was gradually transforming Palestine's economy, reorienting it toward cash crops and pulling it into the orbit of the world economy, a strong local *shaykh* emerged in Palestine's political arena. *Shaykh* Zahir al-`Umar al-Zaydani was a native of Galilee. He began his career in the 1720s as a minor tax collector, and during his long rule (1710-1775) he became the most powerful leader in Palestine. As a *shaykh* of a number of villages in northern Palestine, Zahir invested the huge profits he made from cultivating and trading in cotton in consolidating his military power and enlarging the area of land under his control. In 1735, he sought to take control of Palestine's most fertile valley, the Jezreel Valley (Marj Ibn `Amer), and the market town of Nazareth.

Large swathes of the valley and Nazareth had soon become part of Zahir's domain (Mu`ammar 1979: 62-65). Located above the hills of southern Galilee, Nazareth appears as a natural balcony overlooking the Marj Ibn `Amer. Zahir made the town his capital and residence. His next step came in the mid-1740s, when he captured Acre, the main port for cotton exports, which now became the seat of his rule. To protect Acre and prevent cotton smuggling to nearby Haifa, he also annexed Haifa to his realm, re-locating it to a spot more suitable for commerce. Zahir then felt powerful enough to act to deny European merchants direct access to Palestine's cotton. Hence he secured for himself the position of sole middleman between the French merchants and the cotton-growing villages in his domain (Joudah 1987: 127-134; Cohen 1973: 16) and monopolized cotton sales to foreign merchants. It is at this point that Zahir decided on the policy that may well have been the key to his long rule: he ploughed a large proportion of the profits he made through his monopoly back into the Palestinian economy. In this way, he helped to transform tiny villages and modest towns into burgeoning urban centers. Acre became an impressive fortress city, and Nazareth was transformed from a hamlet into a major market town. Tiberias acquired a comparable position in eastern Galilee, while Haifa was similarly propelled to prominence.

However, the areas of cotton cultivation had by now spread to regions beyond Zahir's dominion, namely the plains today called as the Jenin-Tulkarm-Qalqilya triangle. These areas were controlled by the Tuqans, a powerful family from Nablus, and Nabulsi merchants used the port of Jaffa, not Acre, to export cotton to European traders. To extend his monopoly, Zahir annexed the port of Jaffa to his realm in 1771 (Joudah 1987: 62; Sabbagh-al N.d.: 59; Mu`ammar 1979: 156; Volney 1788: 128-129).

The process of urbanization that Zahir set in motion went hand in hand with his policy of encouraging professionals from outside his domain to come to the newly-developing urban centers of Tiberias, Nazareth, Haifa, and Acre. Zahir's call was answered mainly by Christian artisans from Mount Lebanon, Syria, and Trans-Jordan. In response, Zahir freely granted these immigrants permission to build churches of various denominations. These new urban centers therefore emerged as multi-religious towns, with church spires and minarets piercing the skyline from afar. Muslim and Christian merchants and professionals peopled the towns' market-places, side by side.

However, the monopoly system enforced by Zahir and his successor, Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar, did not afford local merchants and entrepreneurs sufficient latitude to exploit the cotton boom. Local merchants in Acre were prevented from developing mercantile networks to bind the peasants of Galilee to the town's commercial community. While the peasants' surpluses were collected and transported to Acre through the monopoly system, the governor's tax collectors and apparatus also left little room for local trade networks to develop in Galilee. That Acre's commercial community was relatively new, and mostly made up of new immigrants, was another reason why locally-active commercial networks failed to develop, as they did in Nablus, for instance. Similarly, it took almost a century for the newly-established commercial community in Nazareth to create such a network. When it finally did, the economic fortunes of the rural areas in southern and eastern Galilee were tied to those of Nazareth's commercial community. It can be seen that this development prompted a series of profound changes in the social and political structure of Nazareth, but it would have to wait until the second half of the nineteenth century, when European economic interests penetrated Palestine's economy for a second time. For its part, the Ottoman government, through the Commercial Convention of 1838 and the Tanzimat, removed the local economic and political barriers to direct European trade with the local market.

As Palestine's cotton boom entered into a slump toward the end of the eighteenth century, the prominence of Acre also began to wane. The economic center of gravity gradually shifted toward Jaffa, which now became the main port city on Palestine's coast and served the import/export commerce of the affluent areas of Jabal Nablus, Jerusalem, Hebron, and Gaza.

NEGOTIATIONS, THE COVERT POWER OF THE MERCHANTS

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and Palestine caused great damage to Palestine's intra-regional and inter-regional trade. Intra-regionally, it spelled deep recession for the port of Jaffa, the only transit port in southern Palestine. Eventually, the material losses of the large mercantile communities in Jaffa, Nablus, and other areas of central and southern Palestine had a direct impact on the local and regional government treasuries. Unlike Nablus, Nazareth, and Acre, which had large rural hinterlands that supplied the treasury with taxes, Jaffa's rural surrounds were small, and the town's local treasury was dependent on taxes and customs collected from transit commerce. The bulk of this commerce ran between Cairo-Dimyat-Jaffa and Nablus. Palestinian merchants from the interior had representatives and warehouses in Jaffa, but also in Dimyat and Cairo.

As soon as an agreement was in place for the peaceful withdrawal of the French troops from Egypt, Muhammad Abu Maraq, the governor of Jaffa, who had joined the Ottoman armies in Egypt, informed the communities of merchants in Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus, and Gaza that:

> The times of disturbance are over, and times of joy and affluence are coming… The road to Egypt via Dimyat is safe… from now on you [can] resume your commercial activities through Jaffa port to Dimyat. We have ordered our Gumrukji [customs official] in Jaffa to give you all the attention and protection you need. He is ordered too to collect taxes and customs according to the old laws and customs… Bring your commerce to Jaffa and you will only be happy and safe. (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 2, 5 Ramadan 1220/28 February 1805: 144)

Aware of the fiscal advantages that would accrue to his treasury from the resumption of the intra-regional trade through the port of Jaffa, Abu Maraq spared no effort in encouraging merchants to resume their commercial activities through the port. For example, he dismissed high-ranking officials who did not cooperate fully with the merchant communities, as in the case of a certain Yasin Agha the Customs Official (*Gumrukji*), "Because he oppressed… did not protect… did not respect the merchants" (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 1, 29 Muharram 1216/12 May 1801: 34). "Protecting" and "respecting" the merchants became Abu Maraq's watchwords, appearing in almost every edict he issued to the public heads of Jaffa.

However, he failed to convince the Nabulsi merchants, who constituted the largest and wealthiest commercial community in Palestine, to resume all of their trading activities through the port. He sent special envoys to Nablus to entice them back, telling them, "[In the past] you were ordered to pay insurance levy and extra customs. [Now] these are abolished, and from now on, [you] do not pay any of these innovations" (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 1, 29 Muharram 1216/12 May 1801: 34). He added that:

> The ruined Abu Laja bridge [on the main road between Nablus and Jaffa] is under construction to secure safe passage of your camel caravans… and since your welfare is important to us, we have ordered our Gumrukji, the head of the port, and the customs clerks to allow your representatives in Jaffa to conduct all goods and products imported and exported by you. Your representatives are permitted to store these products themselves. (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 1, 29 Muharram 1216/12 May 1801: 34)

Abu Maraq took an even more significant step in declaring that: "Customs on all products sent to you or by you via Jaffa will enjoy a 10% reduction of the usual customs". Finally, he ordered that "all camel caravans sent to Jaffa by Nabulsi merchants [be] exempted from any tax when entering or leaving the town's gates" (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 2, 3 Shawwal 1219/5 November 1805: 206). Not surprisingly, these incentives achieved their goal and Nablus's merchants soon reinvigorated trade through Jaffa port.

The vital importance of the taxes and customs that the *tujjar* (merchants) paid to the treasury of the *wali* was clear to both sides. They served the *tujjar* as protection and insurance against the *wali*'s dominance, aggression, political authority, and powers of coercion. Until such time as positions of administrative and political authority became available to the *tujjar* class in the second half of the nineteenth century, when they became an essential component of the local government, merchants developed a strategy of negotiations to keep the political power of the governor at bay. This strategy soon gave the merchant community a potent means of wielding influence. The "rice incident" that took place in Jaffa port in 1801 is a classic example.

According to the Islamic court records (*Sijill*) of

Jaffa, the town's port served as Palestine's major transit route for rice imports from the Egyptian port of Dimyat. Until the Napoleonic invasion, merchants paid the local treasury a levy of three *qurushes* for each *irdabb*[1] of imported rice. The amounts levied under this item were designated by the local governor to supply the annual Hajj caravan with rice. A special envoy of the *wali* of Damascus, who was responsible for the Hajj caravan, would buy 350 *irdabbs* of rice from Jaffa merchants at the going market price. In 1801, the *wali* of Damascus sent orders to Jaffa's merchants to prepare themselves to supply the Hajj caravan with the usual 350 *irdabbs* of rice. In his request, the *wali* ignored "the difficult times and the economic recession" that Jaffa faced during the Napoleonic invasion and the French occupation of Egypt. In response, Jaffa's merchants showed little or no inclination to comply with the *wali*'s request. Instead, they began maneuvering between Abu Maraq, the powerful governor of Jaffa, and the *wali* of Damascus, and embarked on a long process of negotiations in order to alter the terms of a long and well-established tradition.

The scarcity of rice in Jaffa, created by the difficulties entailed by the transit trade with Egypt, had pushed prices up sharply. In this case, the annual customs levied on imported rice did not suffice to supply the *wali* with the quantity he had ordered. In the event, the merchants insisted on selling him the full quantity of rice he had requested for cash, at the contemporary market prices. In response, the *wali* sent envoys and letters proclaiming that he himself would come to Jaffa to punish the non-cooperative merchants. His threat had little effect. The merchants described the *wali*'s request to buy the rice at reduced prices as *bid`a* (literally: an innovation, with negative connotations), and even denied that Jaffa "traditionally supplied the Hajj caravan with rice", as the *wali* alleged (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 62, 23 Rajab 1216/29 November 1801: 50). In the meantime, until such time as they could obtain orders (*firman*s) from Istanbul abolishing the *bid`a*, the merchants simply left town and relocated to Nablus or Jerusalem. Strange as it may sound, this was, in fact, a form of a strike that halted all commercial activities in the port. As a gesture to the merchants, a sultanic *firman* abolished the rice tax altogether, and requested that they return to their homes and businesses in Jaffa, promising full protection for the public in general and the merchants in particular (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 62, 15 Sha`ban 1216/21 December 1801: 53). Though they were as yet no part of the political and administrative establishment, the outcome of the rice incident showed how powerful the *tujjar*, in fact, were. This power is laid barer still as they become part of the political establishment during the second half of the nineteenth century (Doumani 1995: 45-51, 189; Yazbak 1999: 342-348).

In the meantime, Palestine's trade centers were the subject of a process of redistribution, while Nablus and Acre had spearheaded Palestine's commercial activities throughout the eighteenth century, new commercial centers emerged during the nineteenth century that produced new commercial strata.

EMERGENCE OF NEW TRADE CENTERS, 1800-1830

After Jazzar's death in 1805, Acre managed to hold onto its political status as the capital of the *wilaya* (province) of Sidon until the beginning of the Egyptian occupation in 1830. However, all material indexes point to a gradual decrease in the town's transit trade, local commerce, and population during this period (Philipp 1986: 1-31, 2001: 114). The flourishing transit trade and monopoly of the cotton trade reached their peak toward the end of Jazzar's rule. European demand for Palestine's cotton gradually decreased thereafter, before dropping sharply in the late 1820s. This decline is clearly reflected in Acre's population, which fell from 40,000 during Jazzar's rule to less than 5,000 in the 1820s

(Philipp 1986: 23). Equally, Jazzar's successors saw no need to construct new commercial installations or *suq*s (markets) in the town. Jazzar's Khan al-`Umdan was the last trading facility to be built in Acre during the Ottoman period. As Acre's prominence gradually declined, the town remained confined within its walls up until almost the end of Ottoman rule.

The *tujjar* of Acre was the first to feel the change of winds. A few years after Jazzar death, Acre's leading merchants and entrepreneurs gradually relocated to Nazareth and Jaffa, both of which were in the ascendant. The heavy bombardment by the Egyptian forces in 1831 which prompted Acre's last major traders to move to the nearby port town of Haifa, sounded Acre's death knell.

The decline of the merchants' community in Acre was also connected to the harbor's topographical inability to accommodate large and modern ships. The construction of a deep-water harbor in Beirut, and the natural such harbor in nearby Haifa, soon excluded Acre from the running. No less important, the monopoly system implemented by Zahir and Jazzar did little to transform Acre's merchants, who dealt primarily with transit trade, into local entrepreneurs. The *tujjar* of Acre did not plough their profits back into local craft industries, such as soap and textile factories and sesame-presses, and left the town altogether at the first signs of recession. Their departure exposed their lack of roots and moral obligations toward the town. Here, they contrast sharply with the merchants of Nablus, who were locals with deep roots in the town's history, and played an essential role in preserving the fabric of their society. Over successive generations, Nablus' merchants developed what Doumani has called a "cultural capital" (Doumani 1995: 65), which often proved more important than its financial counterpart. As non-locals, however, the merchants of Acre never developed a "cultural capital" that could have cemented their ties with their local environment.

The Catafagos were an illustrative example of Acre's big merchants. A Latin Christian family claiming Greek origin moved to Acre from Aleppo during the last quarter of the eighteenth century (Rogan N.d.). While in Acre, Antoine Catafago established himself as a consular agent for several European countries. At a certain point he was recognized as Acre's foremost merchant. He relocated to Nazareth during the 1820s, a move that above all heralded the processes of change that were under way in these two towns. By the beginning of the ninteenth century Nazareth had become an important trade center, surrounded by expansive rural areas and dozens of villages. The governors of Acre paid close attention to Nazareth's role as the administrative and economic capital of southern Galilee and the Marj Ibn `Amer. In this context, Jazzar, and after him Sulayman Pasha, financed the construction of a mosque, established a *khan* (caravanserai), and supplied the town with a bureaucratic infrastructure. The *suq* area flourished rapidly and new *khan*s and large warehouses emerged to serve the town's growing merchant community.

The settlement of the Catafagos in Nazareth served as a catalyst for other entrepreneurs to migrate to the area. The Catafagos, who specialized in the export of a large range of goods, including soap, cotton, olive oil, sugar, food crops, and Lebanese silk, and in the transit of European fabrics, constructed large warehouses in Nazareth for storing these goods on their way to the port towns (*Sijiill* of Nazareth, 29 Rajab 1233/4 May 1818: 48; 22 Rabi' 1/7 December 1822: 78). Antoine Catafago also hired a large number of officials to assist him in running his large business and trade network. Until the late 1820s, the tax farming system (*iltizam*) was the preferred tool with which Antoine Catafago regulated his trading activities, especially with regard to cotton, olive oil, and wheat (Burckhardt 1822: 341; Philipp 2001: 167-169). Local merchants and other professionals, mostly Christians, served as his agents and middlemen in the many villages that were bestowed on him as tax farms. He was the *multazim* (tax farming) of 12 villages in the vicinity of Nazareth alone. Some of the officials hired by Catafago appear later among the big merchants of Nazareth, or as part of the town's leadership (*Sijill* of Nazareth, 22 Rabi' 1/5 December 1822: 78-79; Mansur 1924: 68; Ura-al 1936: 158, 193).

JAFFA (YAFA), THE RISING COMMERCIAL CENTER 1805-1830

While Acre was slowly losing its position of prominence, Jaffa was ascendant, and quickly became the main port city in southern and central Palestine. In the early nineteenth century, a wave merchants and entrepreneurs immigrated to Jaffa from Nablus, Gaza, Jerusalem, and Hebron. The process accelerated during the Egyptian occupation (1830-1840), and continued until the end of the Ottoman period and beyond.

The driving force behind these developments was the new governor of Jaffa (1805-1819), Muhammad Abu Nabbut. He had strong ambitions to become a *wali* (provence governor), and began investing his efforts in transforming the administrative status of Jaffa from the center of a *qada`* (sub-district) to the capital of a *wilaya*. Many of his building activities served to change the image of the town in this direction (Kana`an 1998). He also did much to pacify the Bedouin tribes in the area and to integrate them into the local economy, and made the *sanjaq*s (district) of Jaffa, Ramlah, Lud and Gaza safer places to live and invest in. He also initiated enormous construction projects in Jaffa itself, among them a new wall and moat surrounding the town, a new dock and a breakwater at the port, a castle, two great *sabil*s (public water fountains), a large mosque, a *madrasa* (school for religious studies), and a public library. He renovated the trading area and constructed a number of new *suqs*, a *saraya* (government palace), and scores of houses for his Mamluks (Kana`an 1998; *Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 2, 1 Dhu al-Hijja 1220/20 February 1806: 230; 15-19 Dhu al-Qi`da 1223/1-5 January 1809: 282-283).

Of course, he could only complete all of these projects because of the high revenues that flowed into Jaffa's treasury from the flourishing transit trade, and the growing prosperity that the town and the *sanjaq* were experiencing. The new image of Jaffa, and the stability, safety, and prominence it offered gradually transformed it from a transit port town into an economic entity with sizeable local resources that generated investments and profits. Entrepreneurs had discerned the potential of Jaffa by the late eighteenth century. Though the information about this period was scant, there were three soap factories and three sesame presses that were active in Jaffa during the 1780s (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 1, 22 Dhu al-Hijja 1214/17 May 1800: 21; Vol. 2, 1 Muharram 1216/14 May 1801: 31; 30 Shawwal 1247/2 April 1832: 179). These installations stopped working for a period after Napoleon's invasion, but were quickly reactivated thereafter, while two new soap factories were constructed in 1810 (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 3, 30 Muharram 1231-15 Sha`ban 1231/31 December-15 January 1815: 390-399). During this period, foreign countries began nominating consular agents in Jaffa to look after their growing interests in the town.

Though Jaffa's economy was on the rise, it did not admit newcomers to its higher social strata until the Egyptian occupation. Here too, it was Abu Nabbut who shaped the political, social, and financial elite of Jaffa. As a manumitted slave of Jazzar, Abu Nabbut was well acquainted with the prevailing social order in the capital of his former master (Ura-al 1936: 270). And when he became the *mutasallim* (governor) of Palestine's southern *sanjaqs*, Abu Nabbut emulated Jazzar, re-shaping the town's social hierarchy by establishing his own household, composed of Georgian, Bosnian and Albanian slaves. Having trained them to serve in the most critical administrative and military positions, he manumitted his Mamluks, who were thenceforth to be addressed with the highest social titles.

As they now held the highest-ranking administrative posts and had unrestricted access to all sources of power, the *ma`tuq*s (manumitted slaves) or Mamluks soon gained command of the town's trade and the *sanjaq*'s rural economy. The story of `Uthman Agha al-Bushnaq, "the Bosnian", illustrated how this new order worked (*Sijiill* of Jaffa, Vol. 5, 2 Shawwal 1240/29 June 1834: 122; Vol. 8, 16 Muharram 1245/14 July 1829: 136; Vol. 10, 15 Rabi' 1 1249/25 August 1833).

`Uthman Agha, a manumitted slave, served Abu Nabbut as a Bosnian paramilitary leader, as his *mutasallim* in Ramlah, and later as the *multazim* of several villages around Jaffa. He also simultaneously ran a large trade network that spanned the ports of Dimyat and Jaffa. He owned large warehouses in Dimyat and hired commercial agents to look after his trade interests in Egypt. In Jaffa, he invested large sums in buying up orchards (*bayyaras*), converting arable land into citrus plantations, and rented 10 fields of *miri* orchards (owned and ran by the state).

Orchards and citrus fruit were `Uthman Agha's main field of trade and a profitable investment, but consumed large amounts of capital before they began to turn a profit. Among other things, *bayyara*s required investment in large plots of land, and the establishment a system for drawing water, a large water reservoir and irrigation system. In addition, *bayyara*-owners needed to hire three to five *bayyari*s (orchard experts and workers) on a permanent basis. More workers were needed during the harvesting season. However, it was marketing that was, of course, essential to profits. The citrus fruits of Jaffa usually found their way to the markets of Egypt, where success depended upon the expertise of one's local agents and the proficiency of their commercial networks. Judging by `Uthman Agha's actions, the large profits he made prompted him to invest more and more in this business.

Though he was a part of the governmental apparatus, `Uthman Agha relied on local connections and relations to protect his large investments in orchards. The fruit fields were located by the `Uja river, far from Jaffa, in an area controlled by the Abu-Kishk, a powerful Bedouin tribe that ran the watermills situated along the river. `Uthman Agha therefore developed a business relationship with the heads of the tribe, by hiring their camels to transport his oranges from the orchards to the port, and hired some members of the tribe to guard his orchards (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 9, 28 R 1256: 70). To strengthen his connections with the tribe even further, he married one of the daughters of the tribe's head. This marriage connection was purely political and only meant to serve his trade and economic interests. He had no intention of giving his Bedouin wife a share of his wealth, as became clear when he sold off all his properties to his Bosnian wife some months before his death. Even the 75,000 *qurush* in cash that he left behind went to his Bosnian wife, as he had signed a document declaring that the money had been a loan given to him by her. When she left to Dimyat after his death and sold all the properties she had inherited, `Uthman Agha's trade network collapsed.

Unlike local Palestinian mercantile families, who relied on the economic and social support of the extended family for many generations, `Uthman Agha's trade network came to an end with his death because, being of Mamluk origin, he had no extended family or mature successors to continue his legacy. `Uthman Agha's fate is typical of many other Mamluks who took advantage of their status during the rule of the Mamluk household in Palestine (1775-1830).

Mamluk rule in Palestine was brought to an end in 1830, when the Egyptian armies occupied the country. Though short, the Egyptian occupation had far-reaching consequences for Palestinian society in general. It opened up the Egyptian markets more widely before Palestinian merchants, and encouraged and enhanced inter-regional trade. The heavy bombardment of the coastal town of Acre by the Egyptian cannons spelled the end of the town's glory days and its status as capital of the *Wilaya*. As we have already seen, Acre's wealthy merchants moved to the rising trading centers of Nazareth, Haifa and Jaffa.

In contrast to the devastation and massacres that the Napoleonic invasion left in its wake, the Egyptian occupation brought no harm to Jaffa's infrastructure or population. During this period (1830-1839), the flow of immigrants increased, and large numbers of Egyptian farmers joined others who were already living and working there. The high demand for agricultural labor in the expanding orchard fields attracted large numbers of Egyptian immigrants, who established new villages called *sakanat* in the area surrounding Jaffa. Fruit from the orchards soon became the main cash crop of Jaffa, and was exported to Egypt, Istanbul, and Anatolia.

As the citrus sector required substantial investment, almost all orchard owners were prosperous entrepreneurs. Besides Jaffa's traditional orchard owners, from the 1830s a large number of these entrepreneurs were drawn from the old Muslim merchant families of Nablus and Jerusalem, who established new branches of their businesses in Jaffa. Christian immigrants, mainly from Lebanon, also appeared on the scene and soon became major players in the sector. Although Jaffa's citrus fields extended over vast areas to the east, as far as Ramlah, the entrepreneurs themselves lived within Jaffa's walls, from where they also ran other businesses and traded in various goods. Unlike olive cultivation, for example, the irrigation systems used in citrus farming consume large sums of capital, as citrus trees need to be watered frequently during the area's seven months of summer (Franghia 1893: 2). Access to water is a vital need for citruses. In the Jaffa area, water was available all year round from two sources, namely the `Uja (Yarkon) river and a number of underground wells. In order to pump water from underground sources, a well (*beer*) was excavated in the field, at depths ranging from 3 to 20 meters. The well and the irrigation system included a device (*saqiya*) for drawing water that was driven by a camel and emptied the water into an irrigation pool. From here, the water was carried to a small hole around the trees through a system of conduits that covered the entire citrus grove. Obviously, setting up such a system and maintaining it throughout the year required large sums of money and many workers. One also had to permanently weed out wild grasses that could harm the trees.

Citrus groves were a cash crop designated for export to international markets. Because oranges have a much shorter shelf-life than soap or olive oil, the groves needed to be located near the port to allow for quick delivery from the field to the ship.

Available statistical data on the export of oranges from Jaffa from the 1850s onwards show that in 1856, the average annual yield was 20 million oranges (units) (PRO, FO, 78, Vol. 1419, Jaffa, May 17, 1856). In 1873, there were already 420 orange plantations around Jaffa with an annual yield of 33.3 million units. One sixth of that crop went to the local market in Palestine, while the rest was shipped to Egypt and Asia Minor (Parliamentary Papers, Vol. LXVII, Jerusalem, February 1874; Schölch 1993: 92). From 1875 onwards, Jaffa's oranges were also exported in significant quantities to Europe (France, Germany, Austria, and Russia). Long-distance trade with Europe took off when improvements were made to the packaging of the oranges, which were now exported in wooden boxes. But even then, only the egg-shaped, thick-skinned *shammuti* oranges were suitable for shipping long-distance, while the smaller, round *baladi* oranges were sold exclusively in the local and regional markets. In 1880, the total annual yield of Jaffa's citrus groves was 36 million units (Parliamentary Papers, Vol. XC, Beirut, March 1881). According to a report from 1881, the British Consul noted that orange groves were considered as the best capital investments (Parliamentary Papers, Vol. LXXI, Jaffa, May 1882; Thomson 1864: 519). In the early 1880s, American consular officials estimated the orange stock in the Jaffa area at about 500 groves, containing approximately 800,000 trees (Owen 1981: 178). Overall, it was calculated that the orange-grove area of Jaffa had quadrupled in size in three decades from 1850 to 1880 (Schölch 1993: 92).

As southern Palestine's only port city, and also the port that served Jerusalem, Jaffa was directly affected by both foreign trade and the flow of pilgrims. Thus the development of the town's port and of communications with Jerusalem was high on the agenda of Jaffa's merchant community, its local government, and foreign consuls and agents.

With the rapid growth in the turnover of goods in the 1870s and 1880s, a surge in the number of travelers, the construction of a new port facility in Jaffa became inevitable (Schölch 1993: 92). In 1864, a French association built a lighthouse and the Ottoman authorities undertook some improvements to the landing area (Parliamentary Papers, Vol. LXI, Jaffa, May 1864; PRO, FO, 78, Vol. 1834, Jaffa, November 9, 1864). However, these measures did not suffice. As the government failed to initiate any projects to improve the capacity and safety of the Jaffa port, several businessmen in the town joined forces to establish a new association, and in November 1875 they launched a small steam tug, purchased in Marseilles, for traffic between the landing area and ships lying in the roadstead. The investment was not profitable, however, and the association soon dissolved itself and sold the ship (Schölch 1993: 136).

As early as the 1850s, merchants from Jaffa and Jerusalem made frequent appeals to the local government to consider building a highway to connect the two towns (Gilbar 2003: 7-12).[2] As a first step in this direction, blockhouses with towers had been built in the 1850s on the way from Jaffa to Jerusalem at regular intervals to protect the travelers and the growing trade to and from Jaffa's port. In the 1860s, European entrepreneurs won concessions to construct the road, but failed to start work on it. In 1867, the Ottoman authorities now began constructing the road after a group of local businessmen brought heavy pressure to bear on the government, and it was completed in 1868 (PRO, FO, 78, Vol. 1991, Jerusalem, November 28, 1867; Parliamentary Papers, Vol. LXVIII, Jerusalem, January 1868). In 1875, the German Templars introduced a daily wagon service between Jaffa and Jerusalem. As in Haifa, the Templar entrepreneurs soon had competition from the local Arabs. In the 1880s, about 30-40 wagons regularly traveled on the road (Schölch 1993: 138). As early as the 1850s, European private entrepreneurs brought the idea of a rail connection between Jaffa to Jerusalem. However, this project was begun only in 1890.

Jaffa's economy was oriented primarily toward export and import trade and business with the pilgrims. In the 1850s, these activities gained in momentum, with Europeans, "Levantines" and local Christians taking the lead (PRO, FO, 78, Vol. 1419, Jaffa, May 17, 1856; Parliamentary Papers, Vol. LXXIV, Jaffa, February 1880). However, agricultural production in the town's immediate surroundings, especially the citrus plantations, and the handling of these products for export were also of great importance for Jaffa. This sector was entirely dominated by Muslim entrepreneurs until the 1850s. Thereafter it began to attract Christian immigrants, and during the 1890s Zionist settlers also started to invest in it. It was estimated that in the late 1870s, around 5,000 people were employed during the harvest seasons in the picking and packing of oranges alone (Parliamentary Papers, Vol. LXXIV, Jaffa, February 1880).

The cultivation and trade in citrus fruit allowed Jaffa to prosper and expand. While the city was still surrounded by a wall and a moat, and had just one entrance gate, in the 1850s wealthy merchants began building large villas in the citrus plantations surrounding the city, far from its walls. The government agreed to open a new gate in the walls in

1864. Five years later, part of the wall was torn down, and in 1874, the local government began to break down the city walls and fortifications and to sell off the stone. Shops and large warehouses were now built outside the confines of the old walls. In 1875, work started on paving a new and wide thoroughfare for the city, which became Jaffa's market street. Thus Jaffa, hitherto often described as an amphitheatre with its terraces and narrow alleys rising from the sea, underwent a rapid change in appearance within a few short years.

INVESTMENT IN THE ORANGE PLANTATIONS

Until 1880, the quantity and volume of exported oranges were measured in units. Reports featuring export indexes show sustained growth in the export of Jaffa's oranges. The value of exported oranges rose from 1 million *qurush* in the early 1850s to 8 million *qurush* in 1882. There was a corresponding increase in citrus plantations. Most of the new entrepreneurs who invested in citrus plantations from the late 1840s were Muslim and Christian newcomers, who moved to Jaffa from nearby Palestinian towns and from even farther away, notably Beirut and Damascus (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 11: 280-295; Vol. 28, 5 Dhu al-Qi`da 1283/11 March 1867; Vol. 38, 8 Sha`ban 1291/19 September 1874).

Investment in Jaffa oranges changed dramatically during the second half of the nineteenth century. The old citrus plantations that had served local and regional markets from the mid-eighteenth century were owned mainly by members of the Muslim elite *`ulama* and ruling classes (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 2, 1 Muharram 1216/14 May 1801: 31; Vol. 1, 15 Jumada al-Ula 1216/23 October 1801: 43, etc.). As a result of Islamic inheritance laws, large plantations suffered from fragmentation, which, combined with poor maintenance, gradually reduced productivity and profitability. *Sijill* cases involving the buying and selling of citrus groves during the first three decades of the nineteenth century clearly show that most transactions involved the sale of inherited fragments of plantations. From the issuance of the Land Law of 1585, however, the records indicate a clear trend of purchasing pieces of land that were then converted into citrus plantations. Generally speaking, the new plantations were larger than the older ones, and the new owners invested larger sums in them, resulting, for example, in the appearance of more than one irrigation system in a single field, which was not the case before the 1850s.

Unlike olive plantations, which were located in rural areas and owned by *fallahin* (local peasants), orange plantations were owned by urbanites, for whom they were a lucrative trade item. The main difference between owners of citrus plantations before and after the 1840s was that the old owners were not themselves merchants, and usually sold their fruit on to orange merchants. The new owners, on the other hand, were mostly merchants who administered the *bayyara* as part of their overall investment. However, to optimize their profits, both kinds of merchant required a sophisticated trading network, which started in the field itself, where an expert manager would look after the maintenance, picking, packing and packaging of the fruit in wooden boxes to protect it during its long-distance journey.

To prepare the products for marketing, there was need for reliable transportation of oranges from the field to the port, from which agents would accompany the fruit by ship to the export market. It was crucial to have a reliable agent who was acquainted with the local merchants, demand and prices. Furthermore, the whole process needed to be completed as quickly as possible to prevent the fruit from being damaged. To ensure quick delivery and sale, some orange merchants had a family member serving as agent in the local export market, who usually dealt with all other kinds of trade related to his family (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 38, 8 Sha`ban 1291/20 September 1874: 180; Vol.

28, 5 Dhu al-Hijja 1283/11 March 1867: 247; Vol. 11, 5 Shawwal 1250/4 February 1835: 104; 15 Shawwal 1255/22 December 1839: 379-383). Such agents took up residence in the port cities in Egypt or Anatolia. The agents generally preferred to sell the oranges to local merchants based on the port town, but there were also agents who transported the oranges themselves to Alexandria, Cairo, and Mansura in Egypt, and to Izmir and Istanbul, the larger markets for Jaffa oranges in Anatolia.

Upon their return to Jaffa, the agents would invest their profits in buying merchandise, in agreement with their partners in the town. Rice, coffee, and textiles were among the preferred items imported to Jaffa through these agents. In the absence of banks and bankers to transfer the cash safely, this action proved the most secure and most acceptable for Jaffa's merchants.

Instead of moving about with large sums of money, cash assignments (*hawalat*) were very popular in Jaffa and elsewhere, as they allowed the merchant, his agent or his partner, to transact business without significant risk (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 11, 27 Sha`ban 1237/19 May 1822: 322; Vol. 41, 26 Dhu al-Hijja 1291/3 February 1875: 27). This system required three people. For example, a merchant from Jaffa who exported oranges to Egypt through an agent would ask his agent to buy him textiles from a certain merchant in Cairo. In his letter, the Jaffa merchant would ask the Cairene merchant to collect the money from the merchant who would buy his oranges (*Sijill* of Jaffa, Vol. 3, 20 Ramadan 1228/16 September 1813: 22). This way of conducting large businesses was built on trust, first among the regional merchants, and also in the judicial system. These traditional cash assignments gradually disappeared when banking systems were introduced to Jaffa toward the end of the nineteenth century.

As they had the financial means, Arab merchants and entrepreneurs were the first ones to seek out and introduce new technologies to increase their profits and productivity. In doing so, they made a significant contribution to Palestine's economic development (Gross 1976: 111-125; Kark and Glass 1993). Modern irrigation systems were among the first new technologies to be adopted by owners of orange plantations, in the 1890s. Indeed, as early as 1890, it was reported that 60 steam engines were at work in Jaffa's fields (Karlinsky 2000: 125). Though costly, steam engines for pumping water were in a high demand after new markets opened up for Jaffa's oranges. The high demand and profitability of the sector in turn encouraged new entrepreneurs to invest in it. It is estimated that the citrus area around Jaffa rose from a total of 7,500 dunams in 1890 to 12,000 in 1904 and to over 30,000 dunams in 1914 (Karlinsky 2000: 125). The parallel rise in the number of orange crates exported from Jaffa was impressive: from 260,000 crates in 1895, to 500,000 crates in 1905, climbing to 1.5 million crates in 1913/14. Of these, 1.2 million crates, or 80%, came from the Arab groves, and the remainder from Templar and Jewish-owned groves (Franghia 1893; Aaronsohn 1925: 70-74).

NEW LIFESTYLES AND LIVING STANDARDS

The opening up of new markets and the growing capital of the merchants did not only affect their economic status, but also influenced many aspects of their lifestyles. The big local merchants, who were the main agents of change in Palestinian society, ushered in changes to the architecture of housing, and a rise in consumption and living standards (Fawaz 1983: 85-103). A glance at the warehouses, shops, houses, and streets that were constructed in the 1870s and 1880s, and were mostly owned by merchants, revealed much about the changes in the tastes of the time and the elevated standards of living. Similar changes in the new neighborhood of Nablus can be found, constructed by the town's wealthy merchants in the 1890s. The same phenomena occurred in Haifa, Nazareth and elsewhere. A common feature of all these places was the appearance of spacious new houses, with large balconies that were directly connected to the interior via large three-vaulted doors and windows. Built as second storeys above shops and warehouses, the balconies of these houses symbolized a revolutionary concept of living. Traditional domestic architecture functioned to conceal the dwellers from the gaze of strangers, and to protect the women of the family behind high walls. The new architectural design opened up the house to the streets and revealed the passersby to all members of the family as they sat on their balconies, or walked through the long corridors connecting the entrance door to the balcony. In short, the commercial community was the first group to revolutionize the concept of living inside the home, by transforming its residents from invisible to visible. The red tiles that capped the roofs of these new houses became an important feature of this "changing" lifestyle. Houses in this style appeared in Nazareth as early as 1853 (Rogers 1862: 152). Lewis al-Khalil, who exported agricultural products to France, was the first Nazarene merchant to travel to Marseille and import red tiles, as well as furniture. Merchant houses boasted sophisticated decorations on the living room walls and the ceilings. The fine paintings told stories of places they had visited. These innovations became a symbol of their status. The same features can be found in Haifa, in the houses of the al-Khalils, in Jaffa, in the houses of the Haykals, in Nablus, and also in al-Salt, in the house of the famous merchant Abu-Jabir.

A project initiated by the municipality of Nablus in 1890 is a good example of the new needs and tastes of the wealthy merchants. A new neighborhood, Shuwaytira, was built on the western part of Nablus in 1890. The first houses to be constructed there belonged to some of the town's leading merchants. As the land in this area was *miri* land, the government opposed the establishment of a neighborhood there. Nevertheless, big merchants began to appropriate the land and to turn it into private property. The municipal council, which included representatives of the merchant families, exerted pressures on the governor (*mutasarrif*) to back the project, alleging that "the building of private houses in this area, although it was *miri* land, provides significant profits for the municipal treasury because of the extra property tax, and it will solve problems of [population] density that beset the town" (Yazbak 1999: 356). Ultimately, the government lent its support to the project. The municipality also insisted that the width of the roads that ran through the new neighborhood was no less than eight meters at any single point. Thus, in place of the traditional narrow alleyways, the mercantile urban centers were characterized by their straight, wide roads flanked by shops on both sides. Naturally, the introduction of new administrative authorities like the municipal councils, which were largely administered by the merchants, were instrumental in planning new construction projects that radically transformed the city space.

At the turn of the niniteenth century, as new well-planned neighborhoods appeared outside the old walled towns, other novel features also appeared, such as public parks. One such park was built in Nablus. It boasted a pool and a fountain, and later a public theatre. In addition, roads in the new quarters were planted with ornamental trees, and municipal workers swept them clean daily.

Notes

1. An *irdabb* is a measure of capacity that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries equated to 182 liters, or approximately 133.7 kilograms of wheat.
2. In his comprehensive study on the Muslim big merchants, Gilbar (2003) concluded that the *tujjar* invested heavily in the development of transportation to promote exports.

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