

UC Berkeley

UC Berkeley Previously Published Works

Title

Ḥamāma: The historical geography of settlement continuity and change in Majdal 'Asqalan's hinterland, 1270–1750 CE

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1hr356xv>

Journal

Journal of Historical Geography, 82(49-65)

Authors

Marom, Roy
Taxel, Itamar

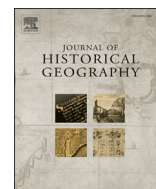
Publication Date

2023-09-01

DOI

10.1016/j.jhg.2023.08.003

Peer reviewed



Historical Geography at Large

Ḥamāma: The historical geography of settlement continuity and change in Majdal 'Asqalan's hinterland, 1270–1750 CE

Roy Marom ^{a, *}, Itamar Taxel ^b^a Department of History, University of California (Berkeley), 340 Stephens Hall, Berkeley CA 94720, USA^b Archaeological Research Department, Israel Antiquities Authority, P.O.B. 586, Jerusalem, 91004, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 May 2023

Received in revised form

17 August 2023

Accepted 18 August 2023

Keywords:

Settlement continuity

Islamic archaeology

Ottoman Palestine

Rural geography

Ḥamāma

Waqf

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the dialectics of settlement continuity and change in Palestine's southern coastal plain during the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods (1270–1750 CE). Using Ḥamāma, an Arab village in Majdal 'Asqalan's hinterland as a test-case, the paper introduces a new method of establishing settlement continuity — a major challenge in the study of the historical geography of late medieval and Ottoman Palestine, by showing continual presence of known village lineages. The paper presents an integrative, topic-oriented discussion of Ḥamāma's administration, demography, settlement geography, economy, religion, material culture and daily life, as evidenced by literary and archaeological evidence. The paper argues that nomadic economic and security pressures led to a major process of settlement abandonment around Majdal 'Asqalan, and the southern coastal plain in general, during the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. The population of abandoned villages moved to surviving settlements, while the lands of abandoned settlements continued to be cultivated by neighboring villages.

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

The historical geographies of the dialectics of settlement continuity and change in both their European and non-European contexts have been much discussed.¹ Despite this, and notwithstanding generations of scholarship on Arab settlement patterns in the Levant/Palestine, much uncertainty remains with regard to establishing settlement continuity in the region and systematically mapping settlement patterns, in part due to the very limited and fragmentary corpora of evidence known to them.² Indeed, despite their best efforts, the seminal works of key historical geographers of Israel/Palestine, trained primarily in the European historic-geographic tradition, regarded settlements as 'point-particles' on maps.³ This

manifested the limitations of their use of static physiographical considerations, biased travelers' reports and inaccurate maps for reconstructing settlement dynamics and land uses in a convincing, detailed way.

Recovering the dialectics of settlement continuity and change requires a bottom-up approach, focusing on the fine-grained fabrics of individual settlements and their multifaceted economic, administrative, demographic, social and political histories. Taking the historical geography of Ḥamāma, a former Arab village in Majdal 'Asqalan/al-Majdal's hinterland in Palestine's southern coastal plain during the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods (1270–1750 CE) (Fig. 1) as a case in point, the paper offers a new method for establishing settlement continuity and settlement patterns by showing continual presence of lineages, like the Abū 'Arqūb clan, in the village until the Arab-Israeli war of 1948–1949.⁴ During the war, Ḥamāma was depopulated, and was destroyed

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: mighemi@gmail.com (R. Marom).

¹ For example, see the recent survey of domestic aspects of this issue in Xiaokang Wang, Li Zhu, Jiang Li, Ni Zhang, Yue Tang, Yilin Sun, Honglin Wu and Chuang Cheng, 'Architectural Continuity Assessment of Rural Settlement Houses: A Systematic Literature Review', *Land* 12 (2023) 1399.

² Roy Marom, 'The Study of the Arab Countryside Throughout the Generations: The Arab Settlement in the Sharon Region as a Case Study', *The New East (Hamizrah Hahadash)* 62 (2023) 65–91 (Hebrew).

³ For example: David Grossman, *Expansion and Desertion: The Arab Village and its Offshoots in Ottoman Palestine* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1994), pp. 11–14 (Hebrew); David Grossman, *Rural Arab Demography and Early Jewish Settlement in Palestine: Distribution and Population Density During the Late Ottoman and Early Mandate Periods* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011); Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *The Making of Eretz Israel in the Modern Era: A Historical-Geographical Study (1799–1949)* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

⁴ This article follows the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies [IJMES] transliteration scheme for Arabic (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-file-manager/file/57d83390f6ea5a022234b400/TransChart.pdf>, last accessed 1 September 2023) as adapted for colloquial Palestinian Arabic pronunciation by the inclusion of the vowels/e/and/o/. Transliteration of foreign-language surnames and source titles followed the adapted MESAI transliteration scheme used throughout the article unless English spelling or title was published by authors. All dates are CE unless otherwise noted. A toponymic note: the Arabic name is rendered in the scholarship in various ways. The proper, nominative case rendition of the fushā (Classical Arabic) for of the village's name is Ḥamāma(tun), equal to the noun 'dove'.

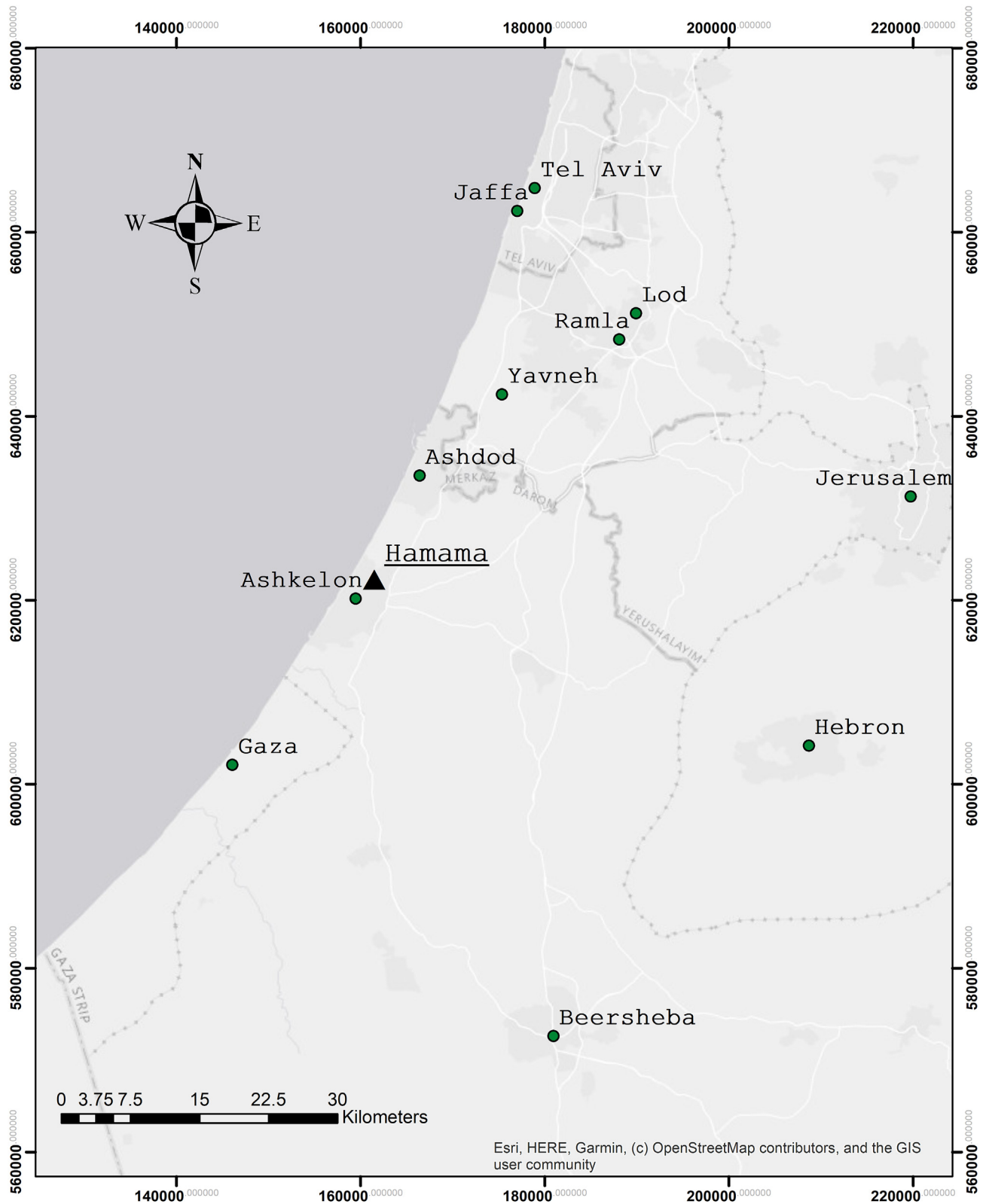


Fig. 1. Location map (map by Roy Marom).

shortly afterwards. Ḥamāma was then transformed into agricultural plantations. More recently, the site has been built over by a new residential neighbourhood of the nearby modern city of Ashkelon after the conduct of salvage excavations (see below).

First, using a wide array of written sources, accompanied with selected finds from the recent archaeological excavations at Ḥamāma, the paper demonstrates that a major process of settlement abandonment led to the concentration of remaining populations in

fewer villages and towns primarily out of security and economic pressures by nomads. Second, using a detailed comparative analysis of the sixteenth century distribution of villages, and late nineteenth–early twentieth-century village lands, this paper shows how land use and ownership continued in the now depopulated spaces: the former territory of such settlements was carved among surviving villages, and came to be used by their inhabitants.

We are aware that this historical geographic reading is partially based on methods and perspectives rarely utilized in traditional historical geography. However, in a time when cutting-edge research often requires interdisciplinary perspectives and innovative approaches, we hold that historical geography is no different. A fine-grained, micro-historical study can shed new light on broader historical geographic issues of larger importance and scope like settlement continuity, decline and abandonment; sedentary-nomadic relations; and the role of physical vs. human factors in shaping settlement patterns, and even what constitutes proper evidence for historic-geographic reconstruction. These questions aren't peculiar to Ḥamāma or Mamluk and Early Ottoman Palestine. Therefore, the same methods from history, ethnography, paleo-demography and archaeology that we applied in this paper might well serve researchers in other historical geographic contexts. In this paper, we accordingly call upon historical geographers of Palestine and the Levant, in particular, to make more use of the rich empirical body of evidence, either directly or in collaboration with Middle Eastern/Ottoman Studies scholars to the benefit of all those involved.

Historiography

Historical geographic studies by David Grossman and Avi Sasson focused on the physical characteristics of al-Majdal's region as part of Palestine's southern coastal plain. It is dominated by low, longitudinal ridges of sandstone, interspersed with light, well-drained soils that were suitable for field or plantation agriculture, while minimizing the formation of swamps and the related risks of malaria. The region of al-Majdal formed a passageway connecting Egypt and the Levant, precipitating bi-directional trade, conquest and population movements. Situated in the southern part of the Levantine coastal plain, the region of Ḥamāma and al-Majdal received fewer precipitation and was more exposed to the ravages of draught (and nomadic incursion from the desert) than more northerly regions. Moreover, during the Holocene, Nile sands carried by the Mediterranean gradually buried the agricultural land along the coast, damming local streams like Wādī al-Abṭaḥ in Ḥamāma and creating localized wetlands and seasonal ponds which restricted agriculture.⁵

The archaeological and historical study of Ottoman Palestine has focused for decades on the main urban centers of Safad, Haifa, Acre, Nablus, Jaffa, Jerusalem, and more recently, Gaza, Lydda and al-Ramla.⁶ However, no town or city can exist without an established hinterland.⁷ Today, there is a broader expansion of thinking about the urban beyond cities.⁸ In the Levant, there is a shift in scholarly

⁵ Avi Sasson, 'Historical Geography of the Palestine Southern Coastal Plain in the Late Ottoman Period — The Ashkelon Region as a Case Study', *Middle Eastern Studies* 55 (2019) 974; Grossman, *Desertion*, p. 156.

⁶ Andrew Petersen, *The Towns of Palestine under Muslim Rule, 600–1600* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005); Ramla: *City of Muslim Palestine, 715–1917: Studies in History, Archaeology and Architecture*, ed. by Andrew Petersen and Dennis Pringle (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2021); *From the Household to the Wider World: Local Perspectives on Urban Institutions in Late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham*, ed. by Yuval Ben-Bassat and Johann Buessow (Tübingen: Tübingen University Press, 2023).

⁷ Roy Marom, 'Lydda Sub-district: Lydda and Its Countryside During the Ottoman Period', *Lod Diospolis* 8 (2022) 103–136.

⁸ Will Glover, 'The Other Agrarian Urbanisation: Urbanism in the Village', *Urbanisation* 6 (2021) 35–48.

attention towards the countryside, expressed in a series of papers discussing selected Late Ottoman and British mandate villages.⁹ However, notwithstanding a few exceptions (such as Jindās and al-Lajjun), an integrative study of the rural sites of preceding periods in the history of the country, and in particular the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods, is still lacking.¹⁰ Thus, the rural history of Palestine's southern coastal plain during this time remains a conspicuous gap in the historical geography of the country.¹¹

In addition, many Palestinian village books deal directly, or indirectly, with Ḥamāma.¹² The prolific scholarship in Arabic stands in contrast to the limited research published in English and Hebrew. Foreign scholars made little use of the available native sources, discussing the village without reference to its territory, or examining the spatial distribution of settlements without exploring the historical *longue-durée* of individual sites.¹³

This historiographic survey shows how previous research was curtailed by the disciplinary nature of historical, geographical and archaeological research which limited the contribution of each field for an integrative account of the countryside. In taking note of these drawbacks, we chose to study Ḥamāma by treating the historical and archaeological evidence in an integrative manner. Therefore, we address the administration, demography and settlement, economy, religious life, and material culture and everyday life, on a topical, rather than chronological basis.

Sources and methods

This paper offers an integrative, interdisciplinary, topic-oriented account of the hinterland of Majdal 'Asqalān during the Mamluk

⁹ Tsvika Tsuk, Iosi Bordowicz, and Itamar Taxel, 'Majdal Yābā: The History and Material Culture of a Fortified Village in Late Ottoman-and British Mandate-Palestine', *Journal of Islamic Archaeology* 3 (2016) 37–88; Roy Marom, 'A Short History of Mulabbis (Petah Tikva, Israel)', *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 151 (2019) 134–145; Roy Marom, 'The village of Mullabes and Its Residents: Before the Establishment of Petah Tikva', *Cathedra* 176 (2020) 49–76 (Hebrew); Roy Marom, 'Al-Sheikh Muwannis: Transformations in the Arab Countryside Between the Mountainous Interior and the City of Jaffa, 1750–1848', *Cathedra* 183 (2023) 9–34 (Hebrew); Benjamin Saidel, Rachel Hallote, Tali Erickson-Gini, Bernard Schecter, and James W. Hardin, 'An Archaeological Survey of the Arab Village of Bureir: Perspectives on the Late Ottoman and British Mandate Period in Southern Israel', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 383 (2020) 141–173; Ido Wachtel, Shua Kisilevitz, Etan Ayalon, Hanan Drawshi, Nitzan Amitai-Preis, Yuval Gadot, and Amos Nadan, 'An Interdisciplinary Study of Qālūnya', in *The Mega Project at Motza (Moza)*, ed. by Hamoudi Khalaily, Amit Re'em, Jacob Vardi, and Ianir Milevski (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2020), pp. 381–405.

¹⁰ Roy Marom, 'Jindās: A History of Lydda's Rural Hinterland in the 15th to the 20th Centuries CE', *Lod, Lydda, Diospolis* 1 (2022) 1–31; Roy Marom, Yotam Tepper, and Matthew J. Adams, 'Lajjun: Forgotten Provincial Capital in Ottoman Palestine', *Levant* 52 (2023) 218–241.

¹¹ Compare the situation for the Late Ottoman period: Sasson, *Historical Geography*, pp. 974–1004.

¹² Sharif Kana'na and Rashshā al-Madani, *Majdal 'Asqalān* (Al-Qurā al-Filistīniya al-Mudammara 2) (Birzeit: Tawthiq al-Mujtama' al-Filastī; inī, 1986); Muṣṭafā Murād Al-Dabbāgh, *Bilādunā Filasṭīn*, II (Kafr Qara': Nūr, 1991); Khalīl Ibrāhīm Ḥassūne, *Ḥamāma ... 'Asqalān: Al-Jimāl wal-Rijāl* (Gaza: Dār al-Miqdād, 2002); 'Abd al-Ḥamid Al-Farānī, 'Qaryat Ḥamāma', in: *Awraq fī al-Ta'riḫ al-Shafawī al-Filistīnī* (Qurā Filistīniya Muhajjara 2) (Gaza: Badil, 2008), pp. 43–79; Nūfan Rajā Al-Swarieh, 'Gaza During the First Half of the Tenth Century (Hegira)/The First Half of the Sixteenth Century (A.D.) — Its Political Administration, Demography and System of Taxation (?) (Timar)', *Al-Majalla al-'Urdunniyya lil-Ta'riḫ wal-'Āthār* 2 (2008) 82–116 (Arabic); Nūfan Rajā Al-Swarieh, 'The Economic Life of Gaza District During the First Half of the Tenth Hijra Century/The 16th Century A.D.', *Al-Majalla al-'Urdunniyya lil-Ta'riḫ wal-'Āthār* 3 (2009) 33–73 (Arabic); 'Abd al-Karīm Elhassani, *Ḥattā La Nansā. Min Ḥamāma ilā Montreal*, (Cairo: Shams, 2011).

¹³ Grossman, *Expansion and Desertion*; Ariel Berman and Leticia Barda, *Archaeological Survey of Israel: Map of Nizzanim—West (87), Map of Nizzanim—East (88)* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2005); in contrast to Roy Marom, *Dispelling desolation: the expansion of Arab settlement in the Sharon Plain and the western part of Jabal Nablus, 1700–1948*, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Haifa, 2022), pp. 32–58; Marom, Al-Sheikh Muwannis, pp. 13–14.

and Early Ottoman periods by focusing on the micro-history of specific settlement — Ḥamāma — according to the methodology outlined below.

Most of the sources about Ḥamāma are written in Arabic. The primary evidence for reconstituting the demographic and economic geography of Palestine in the late Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods are sixteenth century Ottoman fiscal surveys documented in the *deftar-i mufaṣṣal*, the *sijills*, or shari'a court registers, as well as registers of religious endowment deeds.¹⁴ Michael Press was the first to systematically address the identification of Ottoman era sites mentioned in the 1596–1597 fiscal surveys.¹⁵

As for the archaeological evidence, methodical examination of Ḥamāma began with inspections of the Department of Antiquities of the British mandate government, whose inspectors documented various ancient remains and buildings, including the shrine of Ibrāhīm Abū 'Arqūb.¹⁶ Most of what is known of Ḥamāma's material culture and archaeology, however, comes from the 2017–2018 large-scale salvage excavations directed by Nir-Shimshon Paran and Itamar Taxel on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority before the construction of new residential neighborhoods. Few remains are visible today at Ḥamāma (Fig. 2), but the site's surface — especially the area of a low, wide hill, where the village nucleus existed — is saturated with various small finds, building stones and other architectural materials and elements. During the Arab-Israeli war of 1948–1949, much of the Palestinian countryside, including all villages in the southern coastal plain outside the Gaza Strip, were occupied and depopulated — an event known in Palestinian historiography as the Nakba. The proximity of the ancient remains to the surface, the post-1948 levelling of the village's buildings, the intensive cultivation of the area (including the planting of citrus orchards) and the digging of deep oxidation ponds severely disturbed the ancient remains and, in some places, led to their complete destruction.¹⁷

The excavation focused on two areas, labelled Areas C and D. Area C, located outside of the Arab village, in the plain to its east, included mainly remains and finds dating to the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods. Area D was situated on the northern slope of the hill, close to its summit, within the former village nucleus, and included strata dated to the Ottoman and British mandate periods (Fig. 3), with evidence of previous occupation.¹⁸ In Area D, the remains of four discerned structures, apparently residential buildings, were unearthed. All the buildings had stone-built walls which sometimes incorporated earlier (apparently Byzantine-period) building stones and other, fragmentary architectural elements. It is possible though that the buildings' walls were partially built of mudbricks, of which no visible remains were found.

The excavators recovered Mamluk- and Early Ottoman-period finds in all four buildings, though usually in disturbed or mixed contexts which also contained Late Ottoman- and/or British



Fig. 2. Ḥamāma: aerial view of the 2017–2018 excavation area and its immediate surroundings, looking west (photograph by Emil Aladjem [IAA]).

mandate-period objects, without living surfaces (Fig. 4). A similar phenomenon was discovered in excavation of contemporaneous structures in al-Majdal.¹⁹

The periodization of the paper begins with the regionally transformative event of Baybars' post-Crusader destruction of 'Asqālān, which irreversibly changed the settlement patterns in the region.²⁰ It includes nearly the whole of the Mamluk period, which begins with Qutuz's overthrow of the Ayyubid dynasty (1260 CE). The Ottoman period as a whole is well periodized, encapsulated between the 1517 CE Ottoman conquest of Mamluk Empire and the 1917–1918 British occupation of the Levant, and the fall of the Ottoman period. Chronologically, the transition between early and late parts of the Ottoman period (hereafter the Early and Late Ottoman periods) is not well defined. Many scholars place this period of transition in the eighteenth century, or before Napoleon's campaign to Egypt and the Levant (1798–1801), traditionally viewed as the beginning of the modern period in the Middle East.²¹ In this paper, we chose 1750 as an arbitrary cut-off point overlapping many of the processes which defined the beginning of the modern era, historiographically and archaeologically defined as the Late Ottoman period. 1750 marks the beginning of wider processes of cultural, economic and political change. Thus, the choice serves as a narratively coherent and empirically informative end point for our discussion of Early Ottoman Ḥamāma.

While the Ottoman conquest of the Mamluk Empire in 1517 CE had macro, long-term effects on the administration and governance of the Levant, it is not clear whether it had immediate effects on the day-to-day lives in the countryside.²² No

¹⁴ Wolf Dieter Hütteroth and Kamel Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography of Palestine, Transjordan and Southern Syria in the Late 16th Century* (Erlangen: Fränkische Geographische Ges, 1977); Muḥammad 'Isā Ṣālahiyya, *Sijil 'Arāqī 'Alwiyya (Ṣafad, Nablus, Ghazza wa-Qaḍā' al-Ramla): Ḥasab al-daftar raqam 312 ta'rikihi 964H/1556 AD* (Amman: Jāmi'at 'Ammān al-Ahliyya, 1999); Muḥammad 'Uthmān Al-Khaṭīb, *The Islamic Awqaf (Endowments) in Palestine During Mamluki Period (648–923H/1250–1517 A.D.)* (unpublished PhD thesis, Yarmūk University 2007) (Arabic).

¹⁵ Michael D. Press, 'Identification of Ottoman Sites', in *Ashkelon 5: The Land behind Ashkelon*, by Yaakov Huster (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), pp. 89–107.

¹⁶ Israel Antiquities Authority Archives, Scientific Inspection File P/Ḥammama/X.

¹⁷ For a preliminary report on the excavations, see Itamar Taxel, Nir Shimshon Paran, Elena Kogan-Zehavi, and Alexander Fraiberg, 'Ashqelon, Kh. Ḥammama', *Hadashot Arkheologiyot—Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 131 (2019), http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25584&mag_id=127 last accessed 1 April 2023.

¹⁸ Taxel et al., *Ashqelon, Kh. Ḥammama*.

¹⁹ Haim Mamalya, 'Ashqelon, Migdal Ashqelon', *Hadashot Arkheologiyot—Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 131 (2019), https://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=25513&mag_id=127 last accessed 1 August 2023.

²⁰ Huster, *Ashkelon* 5, pp. 57–58.

²¹ Dror Ze'evi, 'Back to Napoleon? Thoughts on the Beginning of the Modern Era in the Middle East', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 19 (2004) 73–94.

²² See Kate Raphael, 'Pastoralist Communities(?) and Villages: The Spatial Distribution of Mamluk Settlements in the Shephelah', *New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and Its Region* 14 (2021) 165–192; Bethany J. Walker, 'From Ceramics to Social Theory: Reflections of Mamluk Archaeology Study', *Mamlūk Studies Review* 14 (2010) 109–157; Bethany J. Walker, 'Early Ottoman/Late Islamic I/Post-Mamluk: What Are The Archaeological Traces of the 16th Century in Syria?', in *The Mamluk-Ottoman Transition. Continuity and Change in Egypt and Bilād al-Shām in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. by Stephan Conermann and Gül Şen (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2017), pp. 345–367.

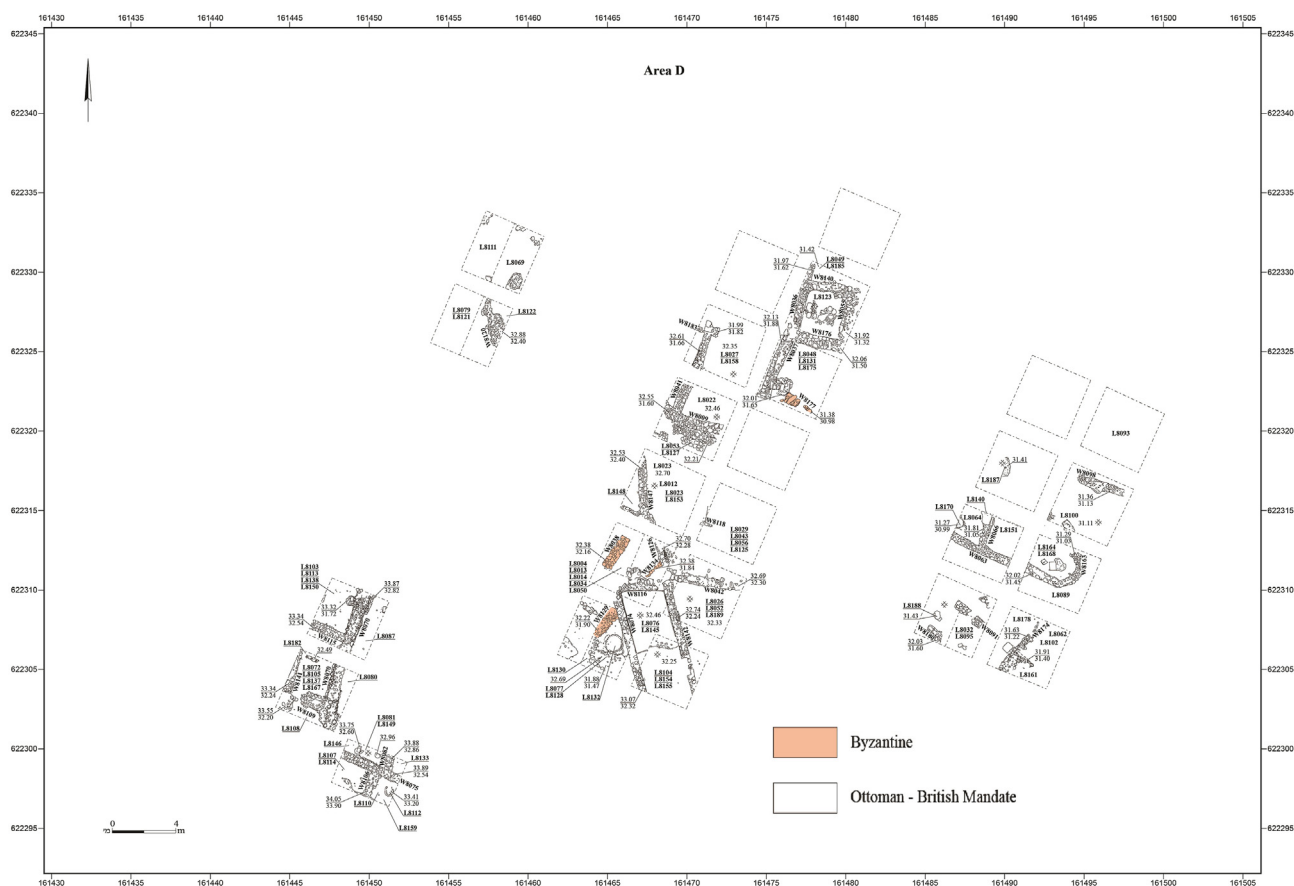


Fig. 3. Ḥamāma: plan of the 2017–2018 excavations in Area D (Elena Delerson [IAA]).

settlements were destroyed during the campaign of conquest;²³ existing endowments were preserved,²⁴ the peasantry (*fellahin*) continued to till the land, sow, harvest, thresh and pay taxes; commerce in the towns and villages continued as before.²⁵ In Ḥamāma, continual habitation is historically and archaeologically attested from the Mamluk period until the end of the British mandate period (1948). Therefore, as an exercise in reconceptualizing the Palestinian countryside during the period under discussion, and in consideration of the demographic continuities attested in the historical and archaeological evidence, we chose to analyze the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods here as one unit.

The pre-Mamluk history of Ḥamāma

The site of Ḥamāma has been inhabited since the Hellenistic period (fourth century BCE). Ḥamāma has commonly been identified with the settlement of Peleia/Palaia (meaning 'dove' in Greek), mentioned in Byzantine sources as situated near the city of Ascalon

(Tel Ashqelon). However, this identification is not conclusive, and it has been suggested to look for Peleia/Palaia closer to Ascalon.²⁶ Archaeological surveys conducted in the village and its vicinity discovered architectural remains and small finds from the Roman to the Early Islamic periods.²⁷ The 2017–2018 excavations at the site revealed further traces of a rural settlement dating to the Hellenistic, Roman and mainly Byzantine periods, including residential buildings and industrial winepresses.²⁸ This was part of a wider network of rural settlements in the southern coastal plain specializing in viticulture and the maritime exportation of fine wines.²⁹

The toponym 'Ḥamāma' might be an Early Islamic rendition of the Greek name with the same meaning.³⁰ Local traditions, however, claim that Ḥamāma's original name was Wādī al-Ḥimā ('the watercourse of the military encampment') after the popular belief

²³ Fazıl Bayat, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Arap Vilayetleri XVI. Yüzyılın İlk Yarısı* (Istanbul: Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2015), pp. 301–351.

²⁴ Mehmet Ipshirli and Muḥammad Dā'ud al-Tamīmī, *Awqāf wa-'Amlāk al-Muslimin fī Filastīn fī Alwiyat Ghazza, Nablus, 'Ajlūn, ḥasab al-Daftar Raqam 522 min Dafatir al-Taḥrīr al-'Uthmāniyya al-Mudawwana fī al-Qarn al-'Ashir al-Hijri*, (Istanbul: Markaz al-Abḥāth lil-Ta'rīkh wal-Funūn wal-thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1982); Şālahiya, *Sijil 'Arāḍi 'Alwiya*.

²⁵ Petersen, *The Towns of Palestine*.

²⁶ Gideon Fuks, *A City of Many Seas: Ashkelon during the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2001), p. 76 (Hebrew); Yoram Tsafrir, Leah Di Segni, and Judith Green, *Tabula Imperii Romani; Iudaea-Palaestina: Eretz Israel in the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Periods; Maps and Gazetteer* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), p. 200.

²⁷ Berman and Barda, *Archaeological Survey*, 66, Sites 148, 149.

²⁸ Taxel et al., *Ashqelon, Kh. Ḥammama*.

²⁹ Barbara L. Johnson and Lawrence E. Stager, 'Byzantine-Period Wine Jars and Their Distribution', in *Ashkelon 1: Introduction and Overview (1986–2006)*, ed. by Lawrence E. Stager, J. David Schloen, and Daniel M. Master (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), pp. 479–487.

³⁰ Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, (Washington D.C.: Center for Palestine Studies, 1992), p. 97.



Fig. 4. Ḥamāma: excavated sections of the western building showing late Mamluk/Early Ottoman (and some later) walls (photographs by Alexander Fraiberg [IAA]).

that the Muslim armies besieging 'Asqalān camped along the banks of the stream crossing the village.³¹ Ḥamāma may be identical with al-Ḥumayma, which the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Mālik b. Marwān granted to 'Alī b. 'Abdallah b. al-'Abbās in 98 AH/715 CE.³² Other Arab scholars tied the foundation of Ḥamāma with the arrival of the Farānī clan, a branch of the Quḍā'a clan from Medina, which supposedly settled first on the namesake Tell al-Farānī (Tel Poran) north of Ḥamāma.³³

In the late tenth century, Ḥamāma's region came under Fatimid control, and in 1099 CE the Crusaders defeated the Fatimids at 'Asqalān.³⁴ However, the Crusaders did not manage to take over

'Asqalān, which remained in Fatimid hands until 1153. The Crusaders retained control of 'Asqalān until 1187, when it was taken by Saladin. In 1191, he demolished the city, but later the Crusaders retook it and constructed a fort there. During this period, the area of Ḥamāma belonged to the Duchy of Ascalon. Church endowments and land deed, mention settlements in Azotum/Azdūd, Betheras/Bayt Darās, Zeophir/al-Sawāfir, Beze/Bazzā, Machoz/Maqqūs and Hebde/Ibdīs, while Ḥamāma itself is absent from the records (Fig. 5).³⁵ The Ayyubids retook 'Asqalān in 1247 and it continued to be inhabited until 1270.

Archaeologically speaking, the amount of pottery sherds and small finds that can be securely dated to the Crusader period is rather meagre. The Crusader-period, or thirteenth-century pottery includes a few imported glazed bowls from Cyprus (not illustrated) and northern Syrian (Port St. Symeon Ware; Fig. 6 item 1), suggesting trade and cultural contacts with Crusader Ascalon.³⁶ Numismatic evidence for this period is limited to an Ayyubid coin from the end of twelfth–thirteenth century.³⁷

The next sections of the paper present a topic-oriented discussion of Mamluk and Early Ottoman Ḥamāma's administration, demography, settlement history, economy, religious life, material culture and daily life, as evidenced by the literary and archaeological evidence.

Administration

During the time-period under discussion Ḥamāma's region experienced administrative continuity, being subordinate to al-Majdal and Gaza. While Palestinian ethnographers like 'Abd al-Manān al-Tiṭī often equated administrative persistence with long-term settlement continuity, this is generally not the case.³⁸ More detailed study of the same region revealed significant fluctuations in site habitation.³⁹ The District of Lajjun in northern Palestine provides a telling example, as it continued to exist well after its eponymous capital and many of its settlements became abandoned.⁴⁰ Indeed, despite the administrative continuity, al-Majdal's settlement system has undergone significant changes: settlement abatement and population consolidation.

Between 1250 CE and 1517 CE, Ḥamāma belonged to the Mamluk Empire, a sultanate ruled by slave soldier cliques of Turkic and Circassian descent. The Mamluks vanquished the remaining Crusader polities in the Levant. The Mamluk heartlands included Egypt and Greater Syria, and its domains encompassed at times also the Ḥijāz, Yemen and Cyprus. At a time before European circumnavigation of Africa and the colonization of the Americas, the Mamluks controlled the land trade routes between Europe, the

³⁵ Yehoshua Praver, 'Ascalon and the Ascalon Strip in Crusader Politics', *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* 4 (1956), 231–248 (Hebrew); Yehoshua Praver, 'The City and Duchy of Ascalon in the Crusader Period', *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* 5 (1958) 224–237 (Hebrew). For the sources themselves see *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani (MXCVII–MCCXCI)*, ed. by Reinhold Röhrich (Innsbruck: Libreria Academica Wagneriana, Oeniponti, 1893); Dennis Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³⁶ For equivalent ceramics from Ascalon, see Tracy Hoffman, *Ashkelon 8: The Islamic and Crusader Periods* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2019).

³⁷ The coins from the excavations were studied by Gabriela Bijovsky (Israel Antiquities Authority) and will be published in the final excavation report.

³⁸ 'Abd al-Manān al-Tiṭī, *Banū Ṣa'b wa-Sitānuhum fī Filasṭīn* (al-Ṭīra: missing publisher, 2008), pp. 3–11 and pp. 17–26.

³⁹ Grossman, *Desertion*, pp. 144–152; Marom, *Arab Countryside*.

⁴⁰ Marom et al., *Lajjun*, pp. 9–12.

³¹ Ḥassūne, *Ḥamāma*, pp. 66–67.

³² Ḥassūne, *Ḥamāma*, p. 61.

³³ Al-Farānī, *Qaryat Ḥamāma*, p. 48.

³⁴ Al-Dabbāgh, *Bilādunā Filasṭīn*, I, p. 244; Al-Farānī, *Qaryat Ḥamāma*.

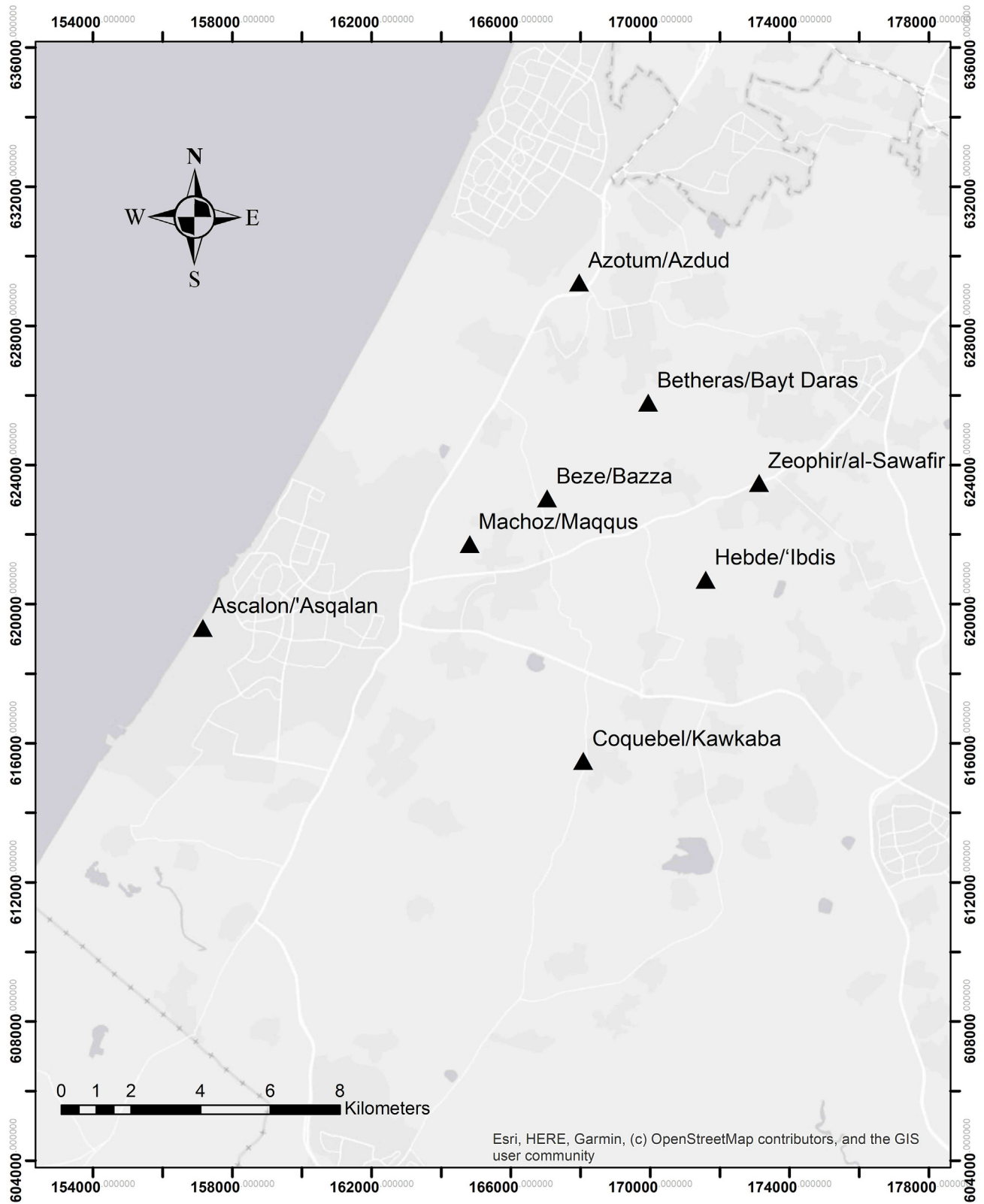


Fig. 5. The hinterland of al-Majdal c. 1200 CE, listing settlements recorded in Crusader sources (map by Roy Marom).



Fig. 6. Ḥamāma: selected pottery and smoking pipes of the Crusader (1), late Mamluk (2–4) and Early Ottoman (5–7) periods.

Mediterranean, India and China. During the fifteenth century, rural life suffered as internal conflicts weakened Mamluk rule.⁴¹

In 1270, Mamluk Sultan al-Zāhir Baybars demolished 'Asqalān and its harbor as part of a wider decision to destroy the Levantine coastal towns in order to forestall future Crusader invasions. This event irreversibly changed the settlement patterns in the region.⁴² As a substitute for 'Asqalān, Baybars established Majdal 'Asqalān, 3 km inland, and endowed it with a magnificent Friday Mosque, a marketplace and religious shrines.⁴³ The city of Gaza rose to become the new administrative center for the southern coastal plain. Gaza's district, termed 'kingdom' (Ara. *mamlaka*) in Mamluk administrative nomenclature, extended northwards along Palestine's coastland until the region of Qaysaria.⁴⁴ The Mamluk authorities sub-divided the district into administrative units called 'amal, pl. *a'māl*, mostly organized around major towns or villages. Al-Majdal and Ḥamāma belonged to the 'amal of Gaza.⁴⁵ During this period, key villages like Isdūd and the towns of Yibnā and al-Majdal along the Cairo–Damascus road served as centers for rural religious and economic life.⁴⁶

In 1517, the Mamluk Empire was conquered by the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire began as an ethnically Turkic frontier

military emirate in Anatolia in the fourteenth century, but over the next century it expanded into a vast multi-ethnic empire, including extensive territories in the Balkans. The conquest of the Mamluk Empire opened the gate for a massive Ottoman expansion across the Middle East and North Africa. The Empire fought on two fronts: against the Shiite Safavid Empire (Iran) in the east and Christian European powers in the west. The territorial expansion of the Empire and the Sultans' focus on frontier conflicts led to the rise of centrifugal forces within the Empire and destructive internal revolts which diminished the central government's control over the provinces.⁴⁷

During the Early Ottoman period, Ḥamāma belonged to the *Nāḥiya* (subdistrict) of Gaza, part of the *Sanjak* (District) of Gaza.⁴⁸ The District of Gaza, now known broadly in Arabic as Bilād Ghazza (the Land of Gaza) was reduced in size, with its northern part beyond Nahr al-'Awja/the Yarkon River attached to the new District of Nablus. The subdistrict of Gaza extended north until Nahr Rūbin/Wādī al-Ṣarār, which bordered the substantial sub-district of Ramla.⁴⁹

Despite being administratively subordinate to Gaza (much as Lydda was made subservient to neighboring al-Ramla), al-Majdal remained an important town, with markets, mosques, and at times, a shari'a court of law, and undoubtedly served Ḥamāma's administrative needs. Petersen wrote that 'the most notable [of Palestine's towns] is Majdal which had a population of 2795 (namely, ranked sixth) exceeding that of Ramla and nearly equaling Hebron. This impression of importance is confirmed [as] Majdal is ranked sixth ahead of Hebron [...] The range of taxes raised at Majdal also provide evidence for urban status,' however it was not administratively acknowledged as such because it was 'a relatively new settlement'.⁵⁰

Demography and settlement

Historical demography offers key evidence for establishing settlement continuity and understanding change in the settlement patterns. In this section, we will demonstrate our new method for establishing settlement continuity through unequivocal evidence for the continual residence of the Abū 'Arqūbs and other clans in Ḥamāma until its depopulation in 1948.

The scope of settlement decline and its causes around al-Majdal have not been fully explained. Based on his comparison of sixteenth-century fiscal registers, called *defters*, and nineteenth-century European cartographic and narrative sources, Grossman presented settlement around al-Majdal as 'broadly stable,' while acknowledging that 'between 1600 and 1860 CE, there was considerable desertion of settlement in the coastal strip and in areas near Gaza.'⁵¹ Grossman suggested climatic reasons for this change, which he left otherwise unexplained. Later, Sasson presented an image of linear process of settlement growth, being seemingly unaware of the settlement decline in the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries: 'The standing of the Majdal-Ashkelon area developed in a long process that began in the middle ages, continued during the Ottoman period and accelerated in the 1830s, during the period of the Egyptian conquest.'⁵²

⁴¹ Reuven Amitai and Stephan Conermann (eds.), *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History* (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019).

⁴² Huster, *Ashkelon* 5, pp. 57–58; Reuven Amitai, 'The Development of a Muslim City in Palestine: Gaza under the Mamluks. History and Society During the Mamluk Period (1250–1517)', in *Studies of the Annemarie Schimmel Institute for Advanced Study*, ed. by Stephan Conermann and Bethany J. Walker (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2021), pp. 163–195.

⁴³ Kanā'na and al-Madanī, *Majdal 'Asqalān*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Amitai, 'The development of a Muslim City', p. 189.

⁴⁵ Uri Tal, *Eretz Israel in Medieval Arabic Sources (634–1517): Selected Translations* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2014), p. 182 (Hebrew).

⁴⁶ Petersen, *The Towns of Palestine*, pp. 41–44.

⁴⁷ Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1999.

⁴⁸ Hütteroth and Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography*, p. 142.

⁴⁹ Amy Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence: An Imperial Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem* (New York: SUNY Press, 2002).

⁵⁰ Petersen, *The Towns of Palestine*, pp. 41–42.

⁵¹ Grossman, *Desertion*, pp. 156–157.

⁵² Sasson, *Historical Geography*, p. 1000.

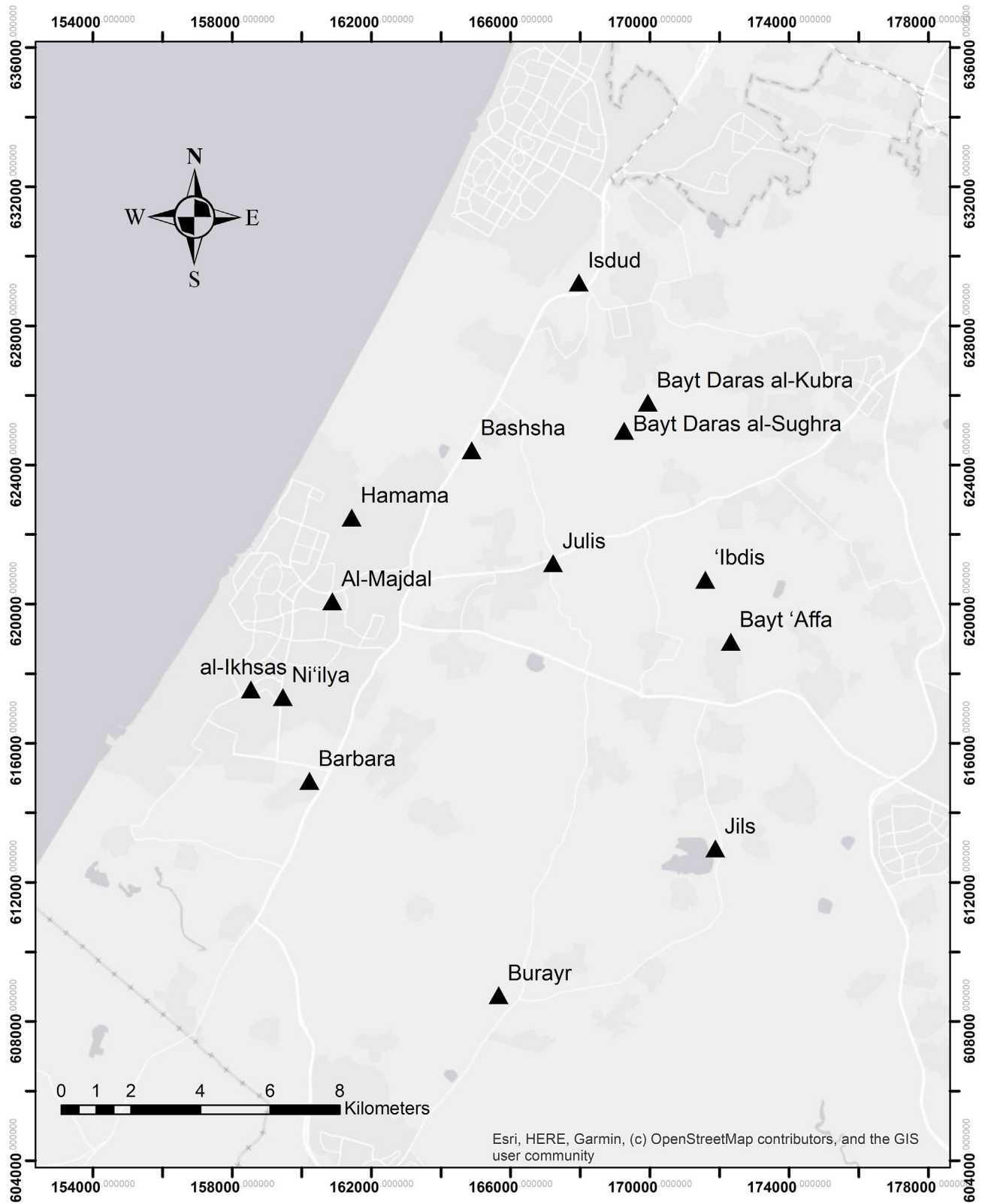


Fig. 7. The hinterland of al-Majdal c. 1475 CE, listing settlements recorded in Mamluk endowment deeds (map by Roy Marom).

In contrast to the Crusader, Ayyubid and Early Ottoman periods, there are no systematic sources documenting rural settlement around al-Majdal during the Mamluk period. Evidence has to be extrapolated from sporadic references in chronicles, and more importantly, from Ottoman copies and abstracts of Mamluk-era endowment deeds (Ara. *waqfiyat*). These copies are the main surviving, even if little used, sources of information about Palestine's countryside during the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries.⁵³ In addition to al-Majdal, Yibnā and Isdūd, endowment deeds mention Ḥamāma (see below), Ni'ilya, Barbara, Jils, 'Ibdīs, al-Ikhṣāṣ (dated 863 AH/1459 CE), Bayt Darās al-Ṣuḡhrā (same), Bashshā (dated 857 AH/1453–1454 CE), Burayr, Bayt 'Affā, Kaufakhā and Jūlis (the last four endowed by Qāyṭbāy for the benefit of his Jerusalem madrasa [religious school] in 877 AH/1472–1473 CE), and Barbara (dated 919 AH/1513–1514 CE) (Fig. 7).

Bilād Ghazza was one of Palestine's most demographically dense regions, second only to Bilād Ṣafad (the Galilee).⁵⁴ A comparison of the *defter-i muḩaṣṣal* of 1525–1527 and 1596–1597 CE demonstrates an impressive population growth, with the foundation of new villages and more than doubling of the average number of households in sites around Ḥamāma (see Table 1; Fig. 8).

Table 1
Population of sites near Ḥamāma in the sixteenth century, and later partition among surviving villages.⁵⁵

Inhabited site	1532–1534 defter	1596/7 defter	Land ownership during the British mandate
Ḥamāma	31 + 1	84	Ḥamāma
Al-Majdal	187 + 6	559	Al-Majdal
Isdūd	40 + 4	75	Isdūd
Bayt Darās	22	58	Bayt Darās
Jūlis	0	37	Jūlis
Al-Jōra	0	46	Al-Jōra
Ṣandaḩanna	0	12	Ḥamāma
Bazzā	11	50	Al-Majdal
'Ijīs al-Rās	30 + 5	46	Al-Majdal
Bardagha	0	11	Jūlis
Mi'ṣaba	11	44	Ḥamāma
Maqqūs	19	36	Al-Majdal
Al-Rasm ⁵⁶	?	?	Al-Jōra
Sāma	0	6	Bayt Ṭīma
Bayt Sam'an	0	8	Bayt Ṭīma
Irza	0	3	Bayt Ṭīma
Khārijat Isdūd	0	18	Isdūd?
Total	354	1093	

Of Ḥamāma's inhabitants in the Early Ottoman period, we know primarily of the Abū 'Arqūb clan. According to tradition, Ibrāhīm Abū 'Arqūb descended from the venerated *murābiṭ* (a Muslim resident of a border stronghold [*ribāṭ*]) 'Alī b. al-'Ulaym (d. 1082 CE), who was buried near Arsūf.⁵⁷ Ibrāhīm allegedly participated in the struggle to liberate the region of 'Asqalān from the Crusaders, fighting them with a camel's thighbone (Arabic: *'arqūb*) after his sword became blunt from prolonged fighting.

⁵³ Ipshirli and al-Tamimi, *Awqāf wa-'Amlāk*; Ṣālahiya, *Sijill 'Arāḩi 'Alwiya*.

⁵⁴ Hüttheroth and Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography*, pp. 42–44.

⁵⁵ The figure after (+) is the number of bachelors, as recorded in the 1525–1527 CE *defter*. For the total, every four bachelors were counted as one household.

⁵⁶ There are several places named 'Rasm' in the *defters*, making identification impossible.

⁵⁷ Charles Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches in Palestine During the Years 1873–1874* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1896), II, pp. 187–188; Hana Taragan, 'The Tomb of Sayyidnā 'Alī in Arsūf: The Story of a Holy Place', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 14 (2004) 83–102.

The claimed descendants of Abū 'Arqūb resided in Ḥamāma by 1654 CE, as confirmed by surviving references in Register No. 149 (Ara. *Sijil*) of Jerusalem's shari'a court (the more important *sijill* of Gaza being lost during the First World War; see Fig. 9).⁵⁸ Many descendants of Abū 'Arqūb eventually left the village to Dūrā (Hebron Subdistrict).⁵⁹ By the eighteenth century, some of them spread under the names of al-'Umarī and al-Massādīn in the hinterlands of 'Ajlūn, Jenin, Beisan and Tiberias, forming demographically significant communities.⁶⁰ Among those present in the 1654 shari'a court were also members of the Miqdād clan which also continued to live in Ḥamāma until 1948.⁶¹

Out of twenty-seven sites inhabited in the region of Majdal during the sixteenth century, only fifteen sites remained occupied in the Late Ottoman period (compare Figs. 7 and 8).⁶² The abandonment of rural settlements and demographic abatement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reflect a wider demographic shift within Palestine, and the Ottoman Empire at large.⁶³ Scholars describe this trend to a combination of encroachment by nomads, disease, over-taxation and environmental change.⁶⁴

It appears that nomadic pressures drove the process of settlement abandonment around Ḥamāma, as they did around Lydda.⁶⁵ The interactions between nomadic and settled populations is a recurrent theme in historical geography, and it has often been conceived as adversarial and destructive. In the Levant, the classical formulation of this perspective is A. Reifenberg's *Struggle Between the Desert and the Sown*.⁶⁶ Reifenberg equates cultivation with settlement and emphasizes the role of security and population growth over climatic factors in the expansion of settlement. More recent work has highlighted the dependence of nomads on settled populations for their survival. As specialized producers, nomads trade livestock products for grains. In the Early Ottoman-period context, D. Ze'evi explored the nomads' integrated roles in local society and economy; securing the desert routes, and especially the religiously and politically significant Hajj routes, and providing transport services to the state and its subjects.⁶⁷ However, despite attempts by the Ottoman state to coopt them through direct subsidies, nomads often continued to exert pressures on settled populations by contradictory uses of space (grazing/cultivation) and the exaction of tribute. H. Etkes analyzed the economics of the nomads' role in brigandage, destruction of crops, and state sanctioned extortion of 'protection' payments (Ara. *ḩimāya*) around Gaza in the sixteenth century. While not directly addressing

⁵⁸ Jerusalem *sijill* 149, p. 271.

⁵⁹ Al-Dabbāgh, *Bilādunā Filasṭīn*, I, p. 245; Ḥassūne, *Ḥamāma*, pp. 52–53.

⁶⁰ Khalil Al-'Omarī, 'Ashirat al-'Umariyya: 'Al al-'Umarī', *Al-Madina al-Akhhariyya* (newspaper), October 17, 2009; Palestinian Rural History Project (PRHP) interviews. For more on the PRHP see: The Palestinian Rural History Project (PRHP): Mission Statement (October 2022); DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.31021.77285.

⁶¹ Al-Dabbāgh, *Bilādunā Filasṭīn*, I, p. 245; Ḥassūne, *Ḥamāma*, pp. 202–204.

⁶² Press, Identification.

⁶³ For a systematic survey of abandonment based on European sources, see: Grossman, *Expansion and Desertion*; For recent discussions of specific cases in Palestine see: Marom, *Jindās*, pp. 13–14; Marom et al., *Lajjun*, pp. 227–229. For the Ottoman Empire, see: Leila Erder, 'The Measurement of Preindustrial Population Changes: The Ottoman Empire from the 15th to the 17th Century', *Middle Eastern Studies* 11 (1974) 284–301.

⁶⁴ Amnon Cohen, 'Ottoman Rule and the Re-emergence of the Coast of Palestine (17th–18th centuries)', *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 39 (Les Ottomans en Méditerranée—Navigation, diplomatie, commerce), 1985, 163–175; Oktay Özel, *The Collapse of Rural Order in Ottoman Anatolia: Amasya 1576–1643*, (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

⁶⁵ Marom, *Jindās*, pp. 13–14.

⁶⁶ Adolf Reifenberg, *The Struggle Between the Desert and the Sown: Rise and Fall of Agriculture in the Levant* (Jerusalem: The Jewish Agency, 1955).

⁶⁷ Dror Ze'evi, *An Ottoman Century: The District of Jerusalem in the 1600s* (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 92–114.

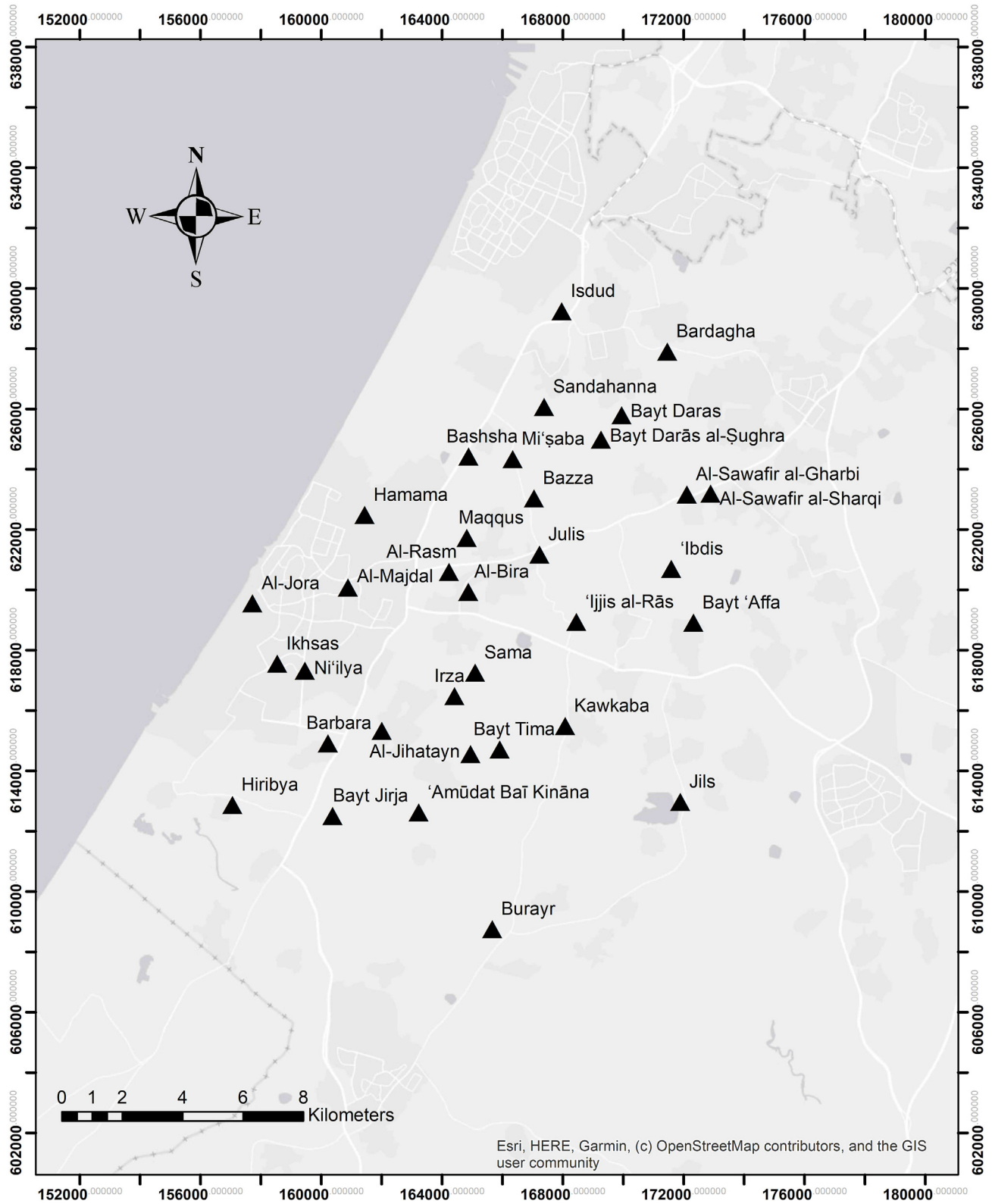


Fig. 8. The hinterland of al-Majdal in 1597 CE, as recorded in Ottoman fiscal surveys (map by Roy Marom).

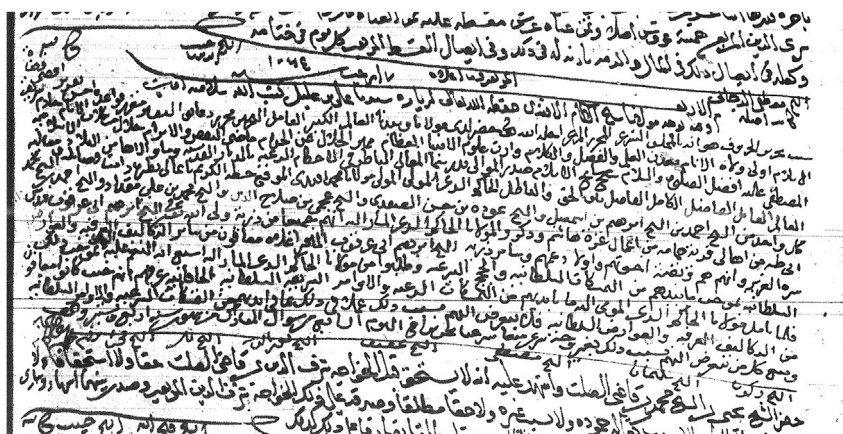


Fig. 9. Abū 'Arqūb's descendants petition the Jerusalem Shari'a court, 1654 CE.

changes in the settlement patterns, Etkes portrayed the process that eventually led to settlement abatement in the region.⁶⁸ British surveyor Charles Warren attested to the continued problem of nomadic raids and site abandonment well into the nineteenth century, noting how villagers are 'rendered homeless by raids from the south'.⁶⁹

With respect to land use, nomadic pressures reduced the population's ability to exploit lands far removed from their settlement, and led to the concentration of population in fewer, larger villages, which possessed more extensive territories. This phenomenon has long been recognized in Levantine frontier zones like trans-Jordan and Jabal al-Khalil/Hebron.⁷⁰

Economy

Economic factors are crucial for understanding changes in settlement patterns in light of changing production, taxation and subsistence patterns. In the case of Ḥamāma, records of Abū 'Arqūb's waqf provide additional evidence for settlement continuity until 1948.

During the Early Ottoman period, and probably also during the preceding Mamluk period, the District of Gaza was Palestine's most economically prosperous area after the District of Şafad.⁷¹ Like al-Majdal, Isdūd and Yibnā, Ḥamāma benefited from its location along the Damascus—Cairo route, the jugular vein of communication and commerce of the Mamluk Empire and Early Ottoman Levant. The imperially maintained *caravanserais*, like that in Isdūd, enabled officials, merchants and pilgrims to travel safely along the route.⁷²

As with most villages, subsistence farming formed the bulk of Ḥamāma's economy. Its inhabitants made a living by sowing winter crops like wheat and barley, summer crops like legumes and watermelons, and tending orchards of olives, fig, almonds and vines, and on livestock rearing. The agricultural means of production were indirectly regulated by the levying of taxes and duties in cash or in kind on certain goods at different rates for each village.⁷³ Most land

belonged to the ruler, with inhabited villages (sing. *qarya*) and agricultural parcels of land (sing. *mazra'a*) being divided among members of the ruling elite as sources of revenue in the form of land grants called *timārs* or *iqṭā's*. Waqf estates, like Ḥamāma, were governed also according to the testator's rules under shari'a law.⁷⁴ During the Early Ottoman period, Ḥamāma, as about a third of all fiscal units in the Gaza district, was also obliged to pay officially-recognized protection money to the nomadic tribes of the district.⁷⁵ The fixed rates or sums of tax imposed by tribes, agents of the state or of religious endowments were without relation to actual production. When making use of these sources as historical evidence, great care must therefore be taken as the sources do not mention the actual way in which revenues were assessed, and how the levy was actually implemented (procedures documented in the now lost court registers of al-Majdal and Gaza).

In 734 AH/1333–1334 CE, Aqbughā b. 'Abd Allāh endowed parts of the income of Ḥamāma and al-Majdal to the estate of his tomb-madrasa complex in Cairo.⁷⁶ The Ottoman confirmation of the title of endowment reads

Aqbughā b. 'Abd Allāh al-Awḥadiy [endowed] for his tomb (*turbatihi*) in defended Cairo and for reading from the great Qur'an, one part in fifteen of the village of Majdal [sic], which belongs to 'Asqalān, and one part in fifteen in the village of Ḥamāma which belongs to Gaza, and fourteen parts of the aforementioned village of al-Majdal and fourteen parts of the aforementioned village of Ḥamāma as waqf for his children and progeny. Moreover, after the end of his [male] line [of descendants], the revenues of the two aforementioned portions are to be spend for the poor and the two holy mosques. The endowment is dated to 734 AH, now in the hands of the descendants of the endower Muḥammad b. Shihāb al-Dīn and his sister Sitt al-'Aysh and Sitt al-Shām and Sa'd al-Mulūk and Muḥammad Yūnis and others.

⁶⁸ Haggay Etkes, *Legalizing Extortion: Protection Payments, Property Rights, Taxation, and Economic Growth in Ottoman Gaza* (Stanford: missing publisher, 2008).

⁶⁹ Charles Warren, 'The Plain of Philistia', *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, 3 (1871) 85.

⁷⁰ David H. Amiran, 'The Pattern of Settlement in Palestine', *Israel Exploration Journal*, 3 (1953) 192–209.

⁷¹ Hütteroth and Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography*, pp. 42–44.

⁷² Katia Cytryn-Silverman, *The Road Inns (Khāns) in Bilād al-Shām* (BAR International Series 2130) (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010).

⁷³ Hütteroth and Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography*, pp. 1–36; Etkes, *Legalizing Extortion*; Al-Swarieh, *Economic Life*.

⁷⁴ Oded Peri, 'Waqf and Ottoman Welfare Policy. The Poor Kitchen of Hasseki Sultan in Eighteenth-century Jerusalem', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 35 (1992) 167–186; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Egypt's Adjustment to Ottoman Rule: Institutions, Waqf and Architecture in Cairo* (16th and 17th Centuries), (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Amy Singer, 'The Countryside of Ramle in the Sixteenth Century: A Study of Villages with Computer Assistance', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 33 (1990) 51–79.

⁷⁵ Swarieh, *Economic life*; Etkes, *Legalizing Extortion*.

⁷⁶ Khalidi, *All That Remains*, p. 98; Andrew Petersen, *A Gazetteer of Buildings in Muslim Palestine* (British Academy Monographs in Archaeology 12), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 146.

Ḥamāma Village, belonging to Gaza. The waqf is divided into fifteen parts for a fixed revenue of 6,000 akçe,⁷⁷ of which the portion of the descendants is fourteen parts (3,750 [akçe]) and that of the tomb is one part (2,250 akçe).⁷⁸

Majdal Village. Total revenue of 6,000 akçe divided into fifteen parts, from which the portion of the descendants is fourteen parts (292,605 akçe) and that of the tomb is one part (2,075 akçe).⁷⁹

Ḥamāma also appears in a long list of endowments made to the two holy mosques (*al-ḥaramayn al-sharīfayn*) in Mecca and Medina, mentions Ḥamāma and neighboring villages⁸⁰

[...] al-Majdal six *qirāṭs*⁸¹ (12,500 akçe of income);

Barbara twelve *qirāṭs* (7,500 akçe of income);

Julis six *qirāṭs*;

Ḥamāma six *qirāṭs* (levy fixed at 1,500 akçe)

Al-Ghīyādiyya⁸² at one and eighth *qirāṭs* (112.5 akçe income)

An Emir called Sāṭī b. 'Abd Allah al-Mu'addib endowed three *qirāṭs* of al-Majdal's revenues (totaling 6250 akçe) and three *qirāṭs* of Ḥamāma's revenues (totaling 750 akçe), in addition to two *mazra'as*, to provide for a Dār al-Qurrā' (institute of religious instruction) in Damascus at an unspecified date.⁸³ Late Mamluk endowment deeds mention Balās (dated 857 AH/1453–1454 CE), endowed for a Circassian madrasa in Gaza⁸⁴; various plots of land in Asqalān, and *mazra'at* Irzā (Qāyṭbāy's endowment for his Jerusalem madrasa in 877 AH/1472–1473 CE).

Sometime in the late fifteenth/early sixteenth century the land between Isdūd and Wādī Sukrīr (Naḥal Lachish) came under his possession as the waqf of al-'Arqūbīya, which benefitted the Shrine and Mosque of Abū 'Arqūb, and some residents of Ḥamāma.⁸⁵ Gazan historian 'Uthmān al-Ṭabbā' (d. 1952 CE), reports to have seen an endowment deed of the Abū 'Arqūb Waqf, dedicated by Ibrāhīm's grandson, Šāleḥ b. Burhān al-Dīn Abū 'Arqūb in 999 AH/1591 CE to his grandfather's *zāwiya* in Ḥamāma.⁸⁶ By the British mandate period, this waqf also contained a land near Be'er Tuvia.⁸⁷

The claimed descendants of 'Abū 'Arqūb resided in Ḥamāma, enjoyed revenues from the family waqf in the Ottoman period. On August 21, 1654 CE, a group of them petitioned the Jerusalem shari'a court for an exemption from all of 'the traditional taxes and dues,' a privilege which they claimed was traditionally bestowed upon the descendants of Abū 'Arqūb (Fig. 9).⁸⁸ Probably, that the litigants made the two days' journey from Ḥamāma to Jerusalem in hope of achieving a result barred from them at the courts of al-Majdal and Gaza.

Regarding commercial networks during the Mamluk period, archaeological findings suggest that local villagers consumed local and imported goods. Among the Mamluk to very Early Ottoman period ceramics recovered during the excavations are local/regional monochrome lead glazed bowls, a Syrian soft-paste underglaze painted bowl (Fig. 6: 2) and North Italian *sgraffito* ware bowls (Fig. 6: 3, 4). These reflect trade with merchants from farther afield, perhaps from Gaza, al-Majdal or al-Ramla who travelled along the Cairo–Damascus road.⁸⁹ Similar finds were also documented in excavations of other Mamluk period village sites in the southern coastal plain like Gan Ha-Darom and Qaṭra (Gedera).⁹⁰ Also belonging to the discussed time-period are four Mamluk coins which are generally dated to the fourteenth–fifteenth century.

In contrast to the fragmentary evidence for economic activities during the Mamluk period, Ottoman *defters*, and especially the last *defter-i mufaṣṣal* of 1005 AH/1596–1597 CE, contain systematic statistics for the region of Ḥamāma (Fig. 8). Ḥamāmat Majdal, as the village was called then, was one of the Crown (*pādishā*) estates in the District of Gaza. It paid 500 akçe on occasional revenues and 300 akçe on goats and honey to the sultan, and another 6000 akçe to the waqf (presumably over other agricultural produce). A third of the 4350 akçe in taxes, went to a waqf and the rest as protection money to nomadic Arabs (*hiṣṣa-i 'arab*), collected by the holders of the *timār*.⁹¹

The numismatic evidence related to the Early Ottoman period includes ten coins from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, nine of which are of Ahmad I (1603–1617 CE), evidencing commercial activities and monetary economy partially conducted in cash (rather than in kind).⁹² The lack of 18th-century coins might be coincidental.

Ottoman era local and regional pottery recovered during the excavations include early variants of grey Gaza Ware vessels, a hallmark of Ottoman-era sites in Palestine, and crudely-paint decorated handmade jugs (Fig. 6: item 5), testifying to local trade with neighboring coastal production centers and perhaps local (in-site) manufacturing. In May 1575 CE, Aḥmad b. Ḥasan from Ḥamāma sold three *madds* (approximately 7.5 kgs) of sorghum to a resident of Lydda.⁹³

The process of settlement abatement and consolidation is reflected in the re-allocation of many independently-listed fiscal units of the sixteenth century among Ḥamāma and other surviving villages by the Late Ottoman period (Table 2). Thus, Ḥamāma's territory came to encompass some 41,366 metric dunams by the 1940s.⁹⁴

⁷⁷ All sums are given in *akçe*, a silver coin serving as the basic unit of accounting in the Ottoman Empire until the nineteenth century.

⁷⁸ The correct distribution of revenue figures should be 5600 and 400, respectively.

⁷⁹ Šālahīya, *Sijjil 'Arāḍī 'Alwiya*, p. 331.

⁸⁰ Šālahīya, *Sijjil 'Arāḍī 'Alwiya*, pp. 233–235.

⁸¹ A carat, that is one part in 24.

⁸² A *mazra'a* between Isdūd and Bayt Darās.

⁸³ Šālahīya, *Sijjil 'Arāḍī 'Alwiya*, p. 319.

⁸⁴ Ipshirli and al-Tamīmī, *Awqāf wa-'Amlāk*, p. 9.

⁸⁵ Ḥassūne, *Ḥamāma*, pp. 52–53.

⁸⁶ 'Uthmān Al-Ṭabbā', *Ithāf al-'A'izza fi Ta'rikh Gazza*, III (Gaza: Maktabat al-Yazīrī, 1999), p. 405.

⁸⁷ Palestine 1:20,000 series topo-cadastral, Sheet 12–12 (El Mesmiye El Kbīre), 1930.

⁸⁸ Jerusalem *sijill* 149, p. 271.

⁸⁹ For the role of Ramla as a distribution center for imported ceramics, see Edna J. Stern, 'Maritime Activity at Jaffa During the Mamluk and Early Ottoman Periods: The Ceramic Evidence from Ramla', in *In Centro: Collected Papers*, Vol. 1: *Motion, Movement and Mobility*, ed. by Guy D. Stiebel, Doron Ben-Ami, Amir Gorzalczany, Yotam Tepper, and Ido Koch (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2022), 93*–115*.

⁹⁰ Ayelet Dayan and Diego Barkan, 'Agricultural Settlement at Gan Ha-Darom in the Byzantine Period and Middle Ages: a Farmhouse or a Monastery?', in *Ashkelon: Landscape of Peace and Conflicts. Studies of the Southern Coastal Plain and the Judean Foothills*, ed. by Rafael Y. Lewis, Daniel Varga, and Avi Sasson (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2022), p. 215 (Hebrew). The pottery from the Israel Antiquities Authority 2017–2018 salvage excavations at Gedera (directed by Alla Nagorsky) was studied for the final publication by I. Taxel.

⁹¹ Hütteroth and Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography*, p. 142; Swarieh, *Economic life*, p. 51.

⁹² See Şevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁹³ Jerusalem *sijill* 45, p. 359.

⁹⁴ Government of Palestine, *A Survey of Palestine* (Jerusalem: Government Printer, 1946). One metric dunam equals 1000 m².

Table 2
Sixteenth century fiscal units within the Late Ottoman territory of Ḥamāma.

Place	1500s	1870
Ṣandaḥanna	mazra'a \ qarya	Ṣandaḥanna, agricultural land within Ḥamāma
Umm Iryāḥ	mazra'a	Umm Riyāḥ, agricultural land within Ḥamāma
Mi'ṣaba	qarya	Kh. Mi'ṣaba, agricultural land within Ḥamāma
'Ijjis Ḥāla	mazra'a	Kh. 'Ijjis Ḥāla, agricultural land within Ḥamāma
Bashsha	qarya	Kh. and Khōr Bashsha, enclave of al-Majdal within Ḥamāma
Muṣalla al-Sūs	mazra'a	Kh. Msalle within Ḥamāma
Umm Mhayl	mazra'a	El Mhayd, agricultural land within Ḥamāma [misreading of the defters]
Balās	mazra'a	Balās within Ḥamāma

Religious life

The residents of Ḥamāma, and the District of Gaza outside the cities of Gaza, al-Ramla and Lydda in general, were Sunni Muslims. 'Asqalān has attained an atmosphere of sacredness and became a site of pilgrimage since Early Islamic period, and these traditions persisted into the Mamluk and Ottoman periods.⁹⁵ Isdūd, Yibnā and al-Majdal along the *barīd* (post) road served as centers for rural religious life.⁹⁶ They hosted religious institutions like mosques and *maqāms* (shrines), built under Mamluk patronage and attended by preachers and *ṣūfi* acolytes.

The Shrine of Ibrāhīm Abū 'Arqūb served as the main village mosque, and its preservation under the Abū 'Arqūbs' care provides additional evidence for settlement continuity in Ḥamāma. Inspectors of the Department of Antiquities of the British mandate government noted that a marble slab (0.3 × 0.95 m) in the shrine's west wall bore a nine-line Arabic inscription mentioning the year 700 AH/1301 CE.⁹⁷ While the text of the inscription is otherwise unrecorded, Ibrāhīm Abū 'Arqūb is the ninth grandson of 'Alī b. al-'Ulaym (d. 474 AH/1082 CE), and this period probably represents the year of Abū 'Arqūb's death, a biographical detail commonly recorded in Islamic biographies and funerary inscriptions.

Gazan historian al-Ṭabbā' (d. 1952 CE), presents Ibrāhīm Abū 'Arqūb as a *ṣūfi mujāhid*. Al-Ṭabbā' described the *zāwiya* to the tombs of Abū 'Arqūb and his followers.⁹⁸ However, Abū 'Arqūb's shrine was a regional destination of pilgrimage centuries earlier. Muslim scholar 'Abd al-Ghānī Ismā'īl al-Nābulṣī (died in 1143 AH/1731 CE) relates the rites of pilgrimage (*ziyāra*), in his travelogue *Reality and Metaphor in the Journey to Greater Syria, Egypt and the Ḥijāz* (Ara. *al-Ḥaḳīqa wal-Majāz fī al-Rihla ilā Bilād al-Shām, Miṣr wal-Ḥijāz*). These were similar to the rights practiced throughout the Levant. Al-Nābulṣī arrived at Ḥamāma on the 26th day of Rabi' al-Awwal 1105 AH (around Friday, November 25, 1693 CE) (Fig. 10):

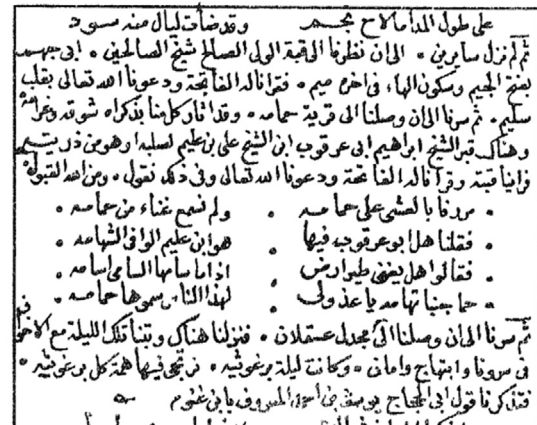


Fig. 10. Facsimile of Al-Nābulṣī account, 1693 CE.

worshipped Allāh [there]. These are our words and Allah's acceptance of them (*wa-fī dhālika naqūl, wa-min Allāh al-qubūl*)⁹⁹

In 1406 CE, the renowned preacher at the Al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf in Jerusalem, 'Badr al-Dīn' Aḥmad b. 'Abdallah al-Kinānī al-Shāfi'ī al-Ḥamāmī (d. 1465) was born in Ḥamāma.¹⁰⁰ He learned with scholars at Ḥamāma before moving to Gaza and thence to Ramla and Jerusalem; travelling between them and Damascus, Cairo and Medina.¹⁰¹ According to Mujīr al-Dīn al-Ḥanbalī, Badr al-Dīn also served as qadi of Jerusalem and Ramla.¹⁰² Badr al-Dīn's biography demonstrates the social mobility of people of merit in the religious and administrative capacities, characteristic of the Mamluk period. He was but one of a number of religious luminaries who either were natives of, or resided in, Ḥamāma.¹⁰³

Material culture and daily life

The main source for information about the material culture and daily life of Ḥamāma, as well as other villages in general, is archaeological exploration. Excavations can reveal physical traces of settlement destruction and abandonment, while datable, contextualized material culture artefacts hint at sites' chronology and use. Similarly, artefacts may indicate demographic, religious,

We did not stay in our camp [in Isdūd] because we noticed the dome of the righteous man, elder among the righteous (*illā an naẓarnā ilā al-walī al-ṣāliḥ Shaykh al- Ṣāliḥīn*), Abū Jahm [north of Ḥamāma]. We read unto him the *fātiḥa* prayer, and venerated Allāh there with all our heart.

Then we continued until we reached the village of Ḥamāma. Each one of us inclined by his own desire. Here is found the tomb of Sheikh Ibrāhīm Abū 'Arqūb, the son of Sheikh 'Alī b. 'Ulaym or of his descendants. We raised his dome [namely, amended it] and read unto him the *fātiḥa* prayer and

⁹⁵ Ghaleb Anabseh, 'The Sanctity of the City of 'Asqalan in the "Merits Literature" of Palestine: An Examination of Mamluk and Ottoman Sources', *Holy Land Studies*, 5 (2006) 187–198.

⁹⁶ Petersen, *The Towns of Palestine*, pp. 41–44.

⁹⁷ Israel Antiquities Authority Archives, Scientific Inspection File P/Ḥammama/X. No other inscription date to this period in the village.

⁹⁸ Al-Ṭabbā', *Itḥāf al-'Aizza*, II, p. 405.

⁹⁹ 'Abd al-Ghānī Al-Nābulṣī, *Al-Ḥaḳīqa wal-Majāz fī al-Rihla ilā Bilād al-Shām, Miṣr wal-Ḥijāz* (Missing place of publication: edition, 1986), pp. 149–151.

¹⁰⁰ Khalidi, *All That Remains*, p. 97.

¹⁰¹ Al-Dabbāgh, *Bilādunā Filasṭīn*, I, p. 244.

¹⁰² Mujīr al-Dīn Al- Ḥanbalī, *Al-Unus al-Jalīl*, II, pp. 334, 350 and 356.

¹⁰³ Elhassani, *Ḥattā La Nansā*, p. 71.

cultural and economic changes underpinning transformations in the settlement system.¹⁰⁴

Although excavations at Ḥamāma revealed only limited finds that can be attributed to the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods, they nonetheless offer significant insights into subjects, which are otherwise unaccounted for in the written record. The residential buildings discovered during the excavations constituted of rooms arranged around courtyard enclosures, called in Arabic *aḥwāsh* (sg. *ḥawsh*, coll. Ara. *ḥoṣh*), in which various daily activities like cooking and baking took place. *Aḥwāsh* served extended family units, reflecting the clan-based society of the written records. The archaeological record attests to continual habitation of these buildings between the fourteenth to sixteenth and the twentieth centuries, providing independent evidence for settlement continuity in agreement with the written records.

No evidence for the Mamluk and Early Ottoman village's water sources, including cisterns, was discovered. As in the better documented Later Ottoman period, village residents might have used artesian wells and utilized water from adjacent seasonal ponds for mud-brick production, watering livestock and irrigating summer crops.¹⁰⁵

In terms of material culture, the presence of imported glazed bowls of the late Mamluk-Early Ottoman period indicates social stratification, as some of the local inhabitants could afford the possession of relatively expensive table wares. At any rate, the great majority of crockery the village population used constituted of local wares originated in production centers located in the southern coastal plain, and perhaps also Jabal al-Khail/Hebron Hills to the east. Seventeenth–eighteenth century clay smoking pipes (Fig. 6: 6, 7) attest to an established leisure culture among the village population.¹⁰⁶ However, these ceramic finds are quantitatively inferior compared to the Late Ottoman and British mandate period ceramics from the same area of the village, which was — admittedly — one of the largest villages in the southern coastal plain.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrated the contribution of micro-examinations of written and archaeological evidence for illustrating settlement patterns and demographic change, as exemplified by the case of the Mamluk and Early Ottoman village of Ḥamāma in southern Palestine. Our point of departure was the gap in the records between the systematic account of the sixteenth century *defters* and nineteenth century surveys and censuses, which is a major, if not most critical problem, frustrating diachronic and synchronic reconstructions of Palestine's pre-nineteenth century historical geography.¹⁰⁷ In this paper we made first use, in this context, of shari'a court registers and titles of endowment in order to establish settlement continuity at Ḥamāma from the Mamluk period until 1948. These sources offer unique insights into the demographic make-up of an ancient community, allowing us to demonstrate lineage continuation, which suggests an



Fig. 11. Typical landscape around Ḥamāma: the site of Khirbat Ṣandaḥanna (photograph by Roy Marom, 2018).



Fig. 12. The ruins of Mi'saba (photograph by Roy Marom, 2018).

uninterrupted habitation. Ḥamāma was home to descendants of Abū 'Arqūb, and to families who hailed from deserted neighboring villages, such as Mi'saba (the absorption of displaced persons from abandoned villages is representative of the situation in the neighboring settlements, notably Isdūd and al-Majdal).¹⁰⁸ This is not a single case, as the same method proves settlement continuity in other villages, like Deir al-Sheikh¹⁰⁹ and Kaukab Abū al-Hajja'.¹¹⁰

Ḥamāma's region experienced a process of settlement abandonment and decline during the Early Ottoman period, which led to the concentration of the remaining population in few larger villages and towns. Thus, villages like Ṣandaḥanna (Fig. 11), Bazzā, 'Ijjis al-Rās, Bardagha, Mi'saba (Fig. 12), Maqqūs, Al-Rasm, Sāma, Bayt Sam'an and Irza became abandoned, and their territory was

¹⁰⁴ In the Ottoman context, see: Uzi Baram and Lynda Carroll (Eds), *A Historical Archaeology of the Ottoman Empire: Breaking New Ground* (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002).

¹⁰⁵ Ḥassūne, *Ḥamāma*, pp. 32–33.

¹⁰⁶ Uzi Baram, 'Entangled Objects from the Palestinian Past: Archaeological Perspectives for the Ottoman Period, 1500–1900', in *A Historical Archaeology of the Ottoman Empire: Breaking New Ground*, ed. by Uzi Baram and Lynda Carroll (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), pp. 137–159; Uzi Baram, 'Above and Beyond Ancient Mounds: The Archaeology of the Modern Periods in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean', in *International Handbook of Historical Archaeology*, ed. by Teresita Majewski and David Gaimster (New York: Springer, 2012), pp. 651–652.

¹⁰⁷ Grossman, *Expansion and Desertion*.

¹⁰⁸ Kanā'na and al-Madanī, *Majdal 'Asqalan*; Aḥmad Ḥasan Jūde, *Isdūd: Qal'at al-Janub al-Filisṭīnī. Dirāsa Ta'rikhiyya, Ijtima'iyya, Iqtisādiyya wa-Siyāsiyya* (Dalton, GA: Amazone Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁹ Al-Ḥanbali, *Al-Unus al-Jalil*, II, pp. 146–150; Khalidi, *All That Remains*, p. 288; Petersen, *A Gazetteer*, p. 136.

¹¹⁰ Sharif Kanā'na and Rashshā al-Madanī, *'Ayn Hawḍ (Al-Qurā al-Filisṭīniyya al-Mudammara 1) (Birzeit: Markaz Tawthiq al-Mujtama' al-Filast; inī, 1984)*, pp. 7–29. See the Abū al-Hajja's *waqfiyya*, dated 910 AH/1504–1505 CE in Ipshiri and al-Tamimi, *Awqāf wa-Amlāk*, p. 70, no. 49; Ṣalahiyya, *Sijil 'Arāḍi 'Alwiyya*, p. 125, no. 54.

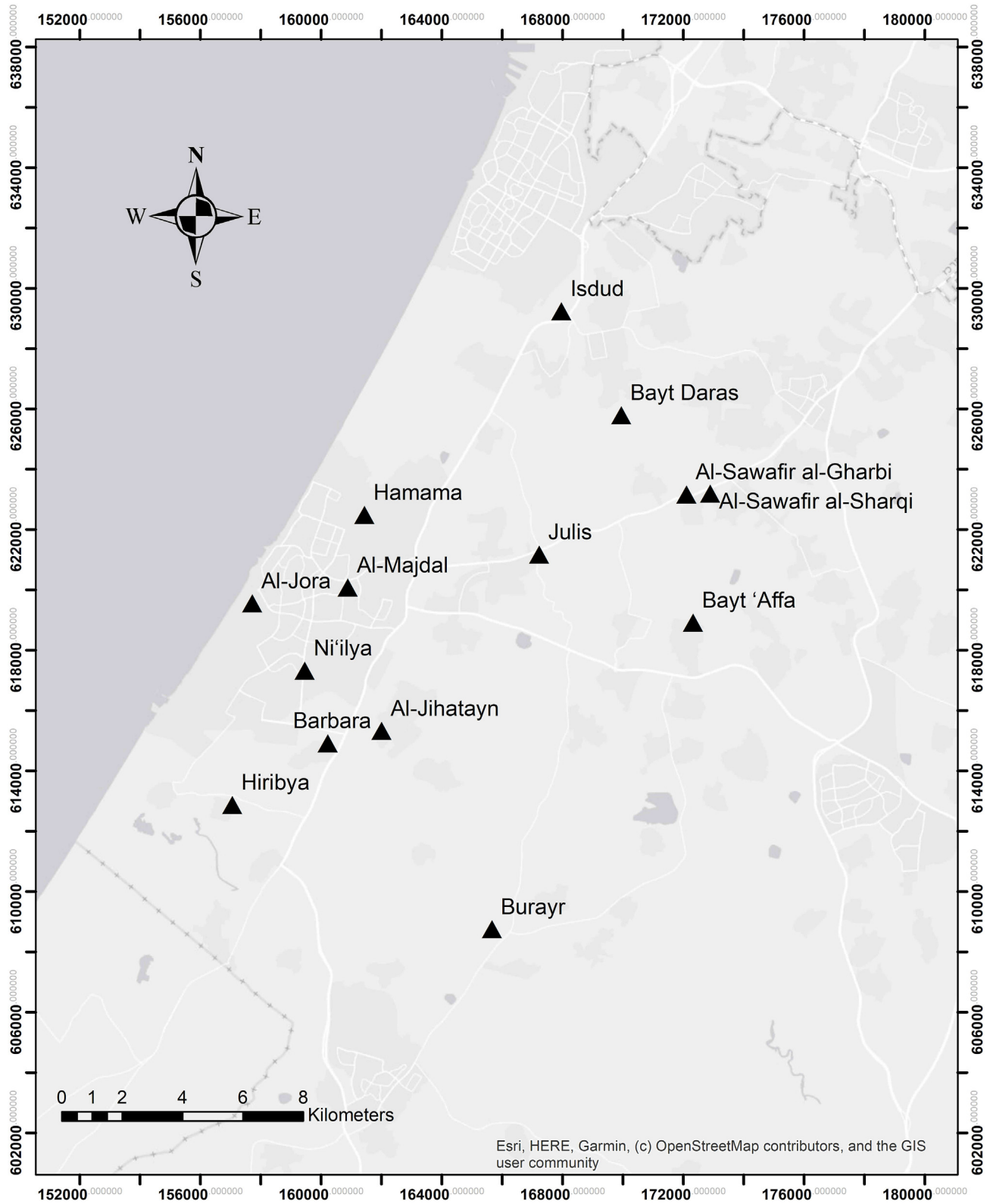


Fig. 13. The hinterland of al-Majdal c. 1750 CE, synthesized from al-Dabbāgh (1991), Grossman (1994), al-Ṭabba' (1996) and PHRP interviews (map by Roy Marom).

absorbed within the borders of surviving settlements like Ḥamāma, Al-Majdal, Isdūd, Bayt Darās, Al-Jōra and Bayt Tīma. As mentioned, previous historical geographers and historians did not address the full implications of these processes of settlement abatement. Rather than being left fallow, the territories of former villages remained under cultivation of adjacent villages. While our current knowledge (and documentation gap) cannot allow us to reconstruct the chronology of this process precisely, it was largely complete by the first Ottoman cadastral survey and land registration efforts in the 1860s–1870s.

The shrine of Abu 'Arqūb served as a religious, social and economic focal point for Ḥamāma's residents, and in particular for many generations of his geographically-dispersed and numerically-growing progeny (like the ancestor shrines of lineages originating in Deir al-Sheikh and Kaukab Abu al-Haija). What is clear, however, is that during the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods, Ḥamāma was but one village out of many in the hinterland of Majdal 'Asqalān. The process of settlement abandonment and population accretion which will turn Ḥamāma into one of the region's largest villages has not yet begun (Ḥamāma's history and archaeology in the Late Ottoman and British mandate periods will be discussed separately).

During the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods, tax revenues from Ḥamāma were dedicated to religious institutions in Syria, Egypt and the Ḥijāz. The rest of the village tax revenues belonged to a family endowment established by the *emir* which received the village as his personal estate. Ḥamāma was influenced by transformations in the density and distribution of neighboring settlements, primarily the destruction and abandonment of about half of all inhabited sites in the district of Gaza during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As previous scholarship suggested, this phenomenon reflects wider trends of general, though not a continuous, demographic decline in the Levant. Locally, population decline and settlement abandonment resulted

from mounting pressures of Bedouin raids and state sanctioned extortion of 'protection' payments on the rural population (Fig. 13). Ottoman attempts to coopt the Bedouins thus unsettled rural life in a once prosperous hinterland.

By the early nineteenth century, the initiative of the provincial Ottoman authorities and the influx of internal immigration from other regions of the Ottoman Empire, especially from Egypt, reversed this negative demographic trend.¹¹¹ The study shows that the decline in the number of inhabited sites benefitted surviving villages like Ḥamāma. The unsettled security situation led to a concentration of residents into larger villages, which then annexed adjacent depopulated areas (as evidenced by the Late Ottoman land ownership of formerly independent fiscal units documented in the *defter-i mufaṣṣal*).

Declaration of competing interest

This study has been partially financed by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA).

Acknowledgments

The paper is dedicated to the memory of 'Abed 'Ayesh al-Simsimawi, a kind man of profound insight. We wish to thank the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) for financially and technically supporting this study, and to Marina Shuisky (IAA) who prepared some of the illustrations that accompany this article. The research makes use of oral history interviews from the Palestinian Rural History Project (PRHP), conducted with the much-appreciated consideration and advice of Ḥamāma's former residents. Marom completed his research as a Fulbright postdoctoral fellow at UC Berkeley, which sits on the territory of xučyun (Huichin) Ohlone people of Alameda County, CA.

¹¹¹ Grossman, *Desertion*, pp. 156–158; Sasson, *Historical Geography*.