Title

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Ḥamāma: The Palestinian Countryside in Bloom (1750–1948)

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Dedicated to the Memory of Harb 'Abd al-Qadir Abu Sayf, Ḥamāma Resident and witness to days gone by (1936–1921)

Abstract: This article explores the history of Hamama, an Arab village in the Gaza Sub-District during the Late Ottoman and British Mandate period c. 1750–1948 CE, combining the often-disparate fields of Ottoman/Levantine archaeology and Ottoman/Palestinian history for tracing its rise from an ordinary village into the Sub-District's third largest settlement. Ethnographic sources and historical evidence testify that the village of Hamama had been inhabited continuously from the Mamluk period until 1948. The paper uses the case of Hamama to argue that the detailed history of specific villages and towns cannot be reconstructed out of a synchronous (specific point-in-time) reading of the sources without considering the influence of previous stages in their socioeconomic development. Using a vast array of primary sources and archaeological materials, this study explores the interaction between local topography and existing social fabrics with broader transformative processes on the regional and trans-regional levels. It shows how the region of Hamama underwent a significant economic growth and settlement expansion. In the 1860s, local administrative re-structuring took hold as part of the implementation of the tanzimat reforms at the district level. The establishment of the "quarter system"—the division of village land between the groups of families—led to considerable economic development, which was evident in village land uses by the early 20th century. Later, British town plans and building permits testify to the involvement of the colonial administration in the architectural and spatial planning of the Arab countryside. These were local manifestations of globalization and the modernization efforts of the Ottoman Empire and later the British Mandate.

Keywords: Ḥamāma, Palestinians, Ottoman Palestine, British Mandate, rural history, globalization, migration studies

Introduction

Ḥamāma was an Arab-Palestinian village in the Gaza Sub-District, situated between the village of Isdūd and the town of al-Majdal in the southern Palestinian coastal plain (Figures 1, 2). In time, Ḥamāma became the third largest village in the district, after Gaza and al-Majdal, and its well documented history reflects wider processes of transformation under Ottoman and British Mandate rule that allowed the pre-1948 Palestinian countryside to prosper and bloom until the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, and the subsequent depopulation of the region (Morris 2004, 461–472). The present paper deals with the social, demographic, and economic

history of Ḥamāma in the Late Ottoman and British Mandate periods (19th to early 20th centuries).

Fig. 1

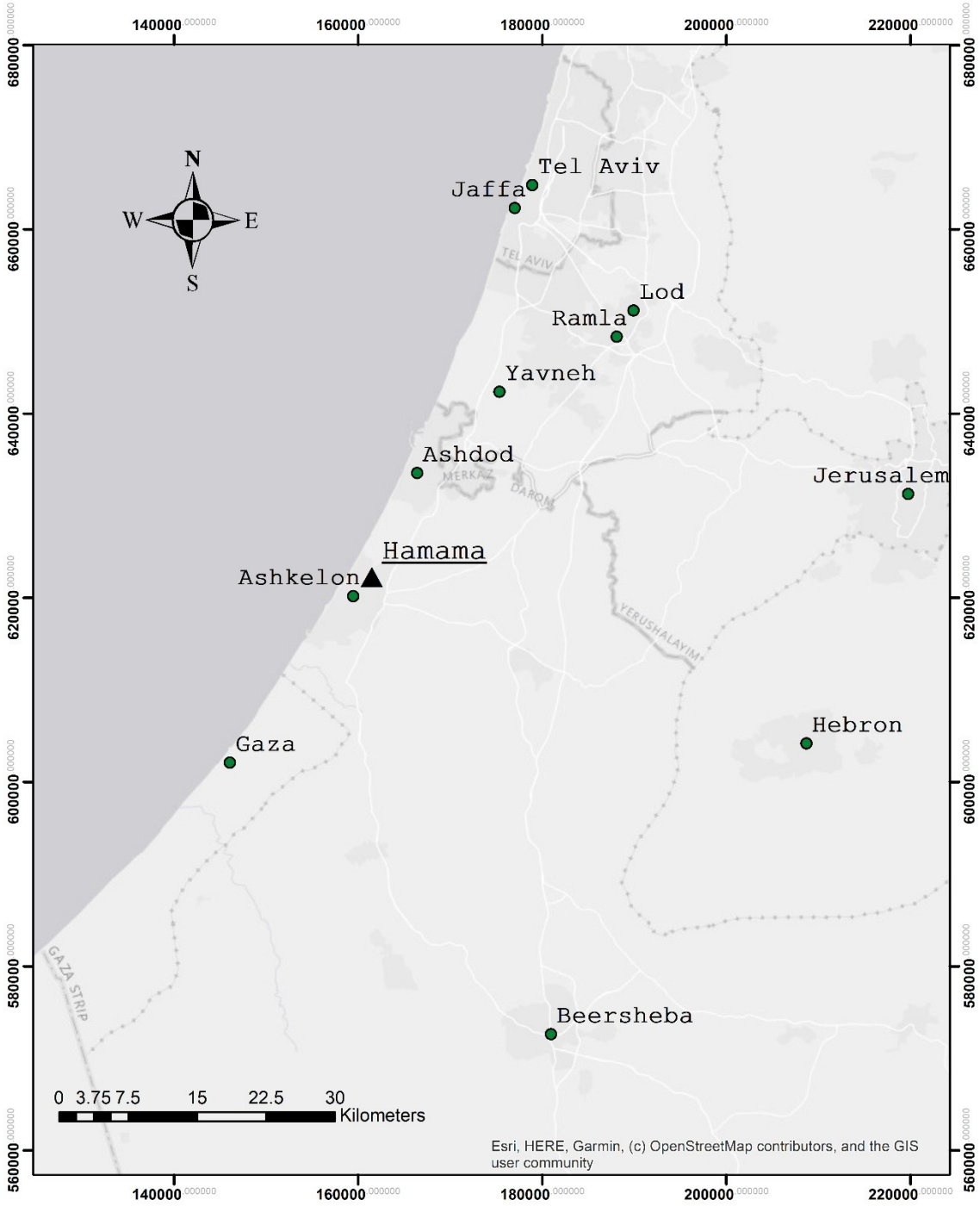


Fig. 2

During the 18th century, the Levant began experiencing economic integration with Europe and state-building processes under local strongmen, which although failed, led to the reconstitution of major cities and towns like Acre, Jaffa, Haifa, Tiberias and Nazareth (Philipp 1990; Doumani 1995; Nasrallah 2012; Yazbak 2013a; 2013b). The 19th and 20th centuries too, were a tumultuous era in the history of the Levant. Demographic growth, transnational migration, economic globalization, administrative reform, social change, the rise of nationalism(s), increasing European penetration and colonization, improvements in communications and travel, and the expansion of educational institutions, literacy and the press, all interacted with the region's existing socio-economic, cultural and political fabric (Schölch 1993; Büssow 2011). These changes have been extensively discussed in their urban contexts (e.g., Petersen and Pringle 2021; Ben-Bassat and Buessow 2022), but less so in their rural settings (LeVine 2005; Hanssen 2005; Carmel 2011; Yazbak 2018). Today, there is a shift in scholarly attention towards the countryside, expressed in a series of papers discussing selected Late Ottoman and British Mandate villages (Tsuk, Bordowicz and Taxel 2016; Taxel 2017; Marom 2019; 2020a; 2023a; Saidel et al. 2020; Wachtel et al. 2020). Notwithstanding this development, for lack of proper and full use of the available evidence, the rural history of Palestine's southern coastal plain remains a conspicuous gap in the historical geography of the country (Sasson 2019). This paper seeks to address this disparity and contribute to this emergent field of inquiry by exploring the fine-grain history of Ḥamāma, and its transformation from a village into Gaza Sub-District's third largest settlement.

The present study shows the interaction between local topography and existing social fabrics with broader transformative processes such as Ottoman reform, economic integration and globalization, developments in transportation, communication and energy resources (Barak 2020), transnational migration and European colonial domination of the Mashriq, including Palestine and the Levant. Methodologically, we argue that the detailed history of specific villages and towns cannot be reconstructed out of a synchronous (specific point-in-time) reading of the sources without considering the influence of previous stages in their socio-economic development (cf. Marom et al. 2023; in press). We demonstrated this point in a previous paper about Mamluk and Early Ottoman Ḥamāma, where we used long-term diachronic perspective in order to establish settlement continuity in Ḥamāma by showing presence of the same linages over several centuries (Marom and Taxel 2023).

Empirically, our main argument is that Ḥamāma, and more broadly the southern coastal plain, experienced a long-ranging process of economic development, social transformation and settlement expansion under the influence of local and global factors, namely the globalization and modernization efforts of the Ottoman state. This process preceded the Zionist settlement, and had penetrated the countryside to a wider extent than previously thought (Schölch 1993; Doumani 1995; Büssow 2011).

Methodological Considerations

The paper belongs to the genre of local history, describing a well-defined space (Ḥamāma and its neighboring villages) within the broader historical context of Late Ottoman and British Mandate southern Palestine (Hey 1996; Marom 2008; Beckett 2013). Using a wide selection of written, cartographical and oral sources in Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, English and Hebrew, Ḥamāma's well documented micro-history materializes wider transformations in Palestine's southern coastal plain during Late Ottoman and British Mandate periods.

This study is the product of a historical-archaeological cooperation initiated by Itamar Taxel and Nir-Shimson Paran, who in 2017–2018 carried out the first archaeological excavations at the site on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), prior to the construction of a new neighborhood in Ashkelon (for a preliminary report on the excavations, see Taxel et al. 2019). The project included simultaneous excavations at two additional sites – Tel Poran/Tall al-Farānī and Khirbat Khaur el-Bayk (excavation Areas A and B, respectively; for their preliminary reports, see Taxel, Paran and Weiss 2020; Taxel, Paran and Weissbein 2020). The intention of the historical intervention was to provide temporal context and interpretive meaning to the archaeological remains.

Inspections carried out at the village of Ḥamāma between 1928 and 1947 on behalf of the Mandatory Department of Antiquities documented various ancient remains and buildings, including the mosques of Sheikh Ḥāmed and Ibrāhīm Abū 'Arqūb and ancient (Roman- and/or Byzantine-period) architectural elements found nearby, such as marble and granite columns and a marble Corinthian capital. Mandatory archaeologists also reported on a marble slab (0.3×0.95 m) on the western wall of the mosque of Ibrāhīm Abū 'Arqūb which bore a nine-line Arabic inscription, now lost, dated 700 AH/1301 AD, whose text is otherwise unrecorded (IAA Archives, scientific inspection files P/Ḥammama/X; see also Petersen 2001, 146). Surveys conducted in the village and its vicinity after 1948 identified architectural remains and collected finds from the Roman to the Early Islamic and Mamluk periods (Berman and Barda 2004, 66, Sites 148, 149). The southwest fringes of the village overlapped an ancient site, Tall el-Mishqāfa, whose original area became less noticeable as the village expanded toward it. Today, the surface of the site is littered with different minor findings, masonry, and other architectural elements, particularly in the vicinity of a low, broad hill where the village's nucleus formerly stood. The ancient ruins were severely disturbed and, in some cases, completely destroyed as a result of their close proximity to the surface, the post-1948 leveling of the village, the intensive cultivation of the area for citrus orchards, and the digging of deep oxidation ponds.

The Taxel-Paran excavation focused on two areas, labelled Areas C and D. Area C (ca. 2500 m^2), located outside of the Arab village, in the plain to its east, comprised of habitation strata dating to the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods. Some of the Byzantine-period remains were dismantled for reuse during the Late Ottoman and/or British Mandate period. The second area, Area D (ca. 650 m^2), on the northern slope of the hill within the former village nucleus, included strata dated to the Byzantine and late Mamluk/Early Ottoman, but primarily to the Late Ottoman and British Mandate periods (Figures 3, 4). The archaeological record and material culture findings help concretize and make visible the trends known primarily through historical and ethnographic sources about diverse issues like trade, agriculture, village planning, land use, commodity consumption, and cultural tastes (Baram and Carroll 2002).

Fig. 3

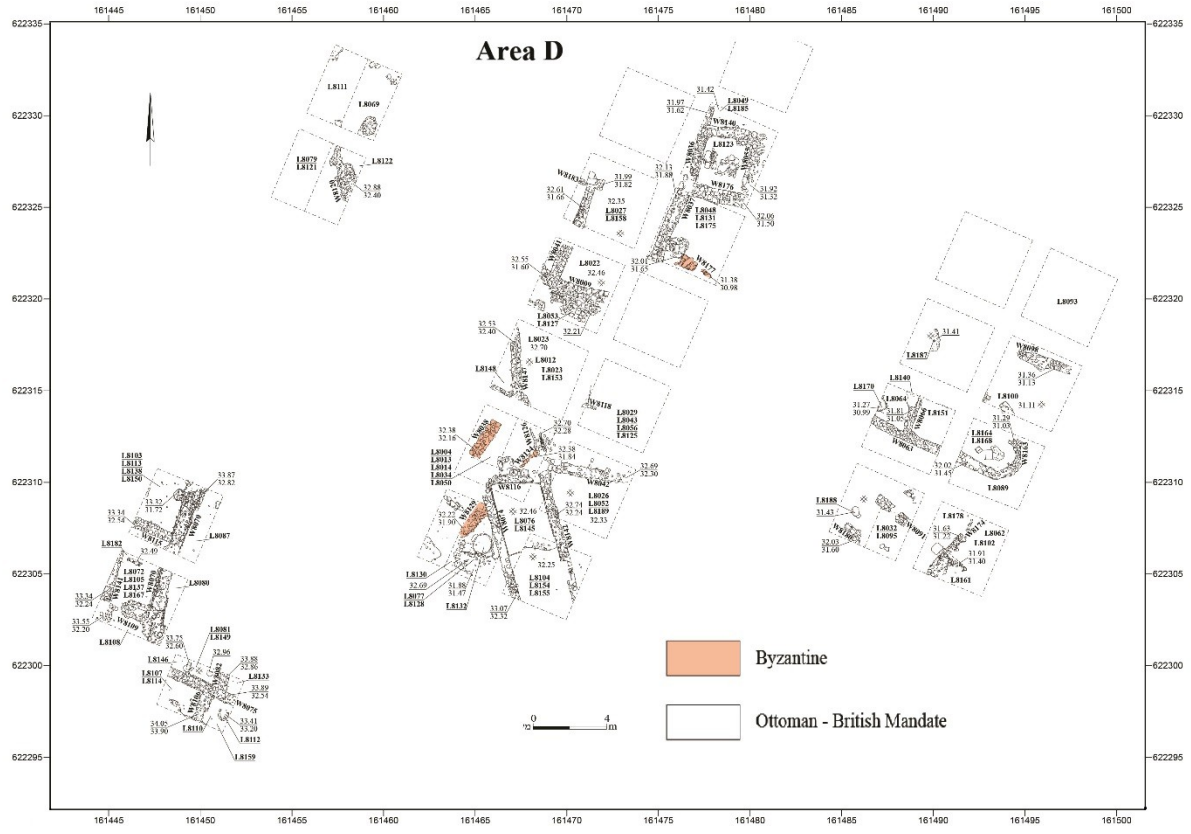


Fig. 4

Some notes are required regarding the temporality of the paper. The Ottoman period in the Levant is defined as the time between the Ottoman takeover of the Mamluk Empire in 1516 and the Ottoman Empire's demise in 1917/1918. This time-period is commonly divided into the Early and Late Ottoman periods. However, the transition between the two is not well defined. Many scholars date it to the 18th century, or before Napoleon's foray to Egypt and the Levant (1798–1801), which is widely regarded as the start of the modern Middle East (Ze'evi 2004). This study follows the periodization established in our previous paper about Mamluk and Early Ottoman Ḥamāma (Marom and Taxel 2023, 52–53). Accordingly, it sets 1750 as an arbitrary cut-off point overlapping many of the processes that constituted the beginning of the modern era, historiographically and archaeologically designated what is loosely termed as the Late Ottoman period. This choice is thus a narratively coherent and informative time to begin our study.

The prevailing separation of discussions of the Late Ottoman and British Mandate period represents an artificial break in the history of the countryside that analytically overshadows the social, demographic, economic, cultural, and local-political continuities, attested in historical and archaeological evidence of the Late Ottoman and British Mandate periods. In this paper we chose to analyze both periods as a single unit. This decision is supported, in part, by the growing scholarly understanding of the interbellum Middle East as a post-Ottoman space, with firm and long-lasting roots in Ottoman socio-cultural, demographic and administrative legacies (Mikhail and Philliou 2012; Busse 2020; Schlaepfer, Bourmaud and Hassan 2020). In archaeological studies, this development is

evident independently in a line of archaeological work that transcends the Ottoman/British Mandate divide (cf. Saidel and Erickson-Gini 2021).

In our paper, we discuss the administration, demography and settlement, economy material culture and everyday life, on a topical, rather than chronological basis. We have also taken note of disciplinary character of historical, geographical, and archaeological studies, which limited the contribution of each subject to an integrated description of the Palestinian countryside in previous studies. Therefore, in studying Ḥamāma, we evaluated the historical and archaeological evidence together.

The final, technical publication of the stratigraphy and small finds will be published in full as part of the final excavation report.

Ḥamāma's Early History

The site of Ḥamāma has been inhabited since the Hellenistic period (4th century BC), with continuous settlement in the Roman, Byzantine and Early Islamic periods (as late as the 9th or 10th century). During the Mamluk and Early Ottoman periods (late 13th–mid-18th centuries; work in progress by the authors), Ḥamāma was one of many villages around Majdal ʻAsqalān. The village was associated with the figure of Ibrāhīm Abū ʻArqūb, a *mujāhid* and descendant of ʻUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, venerated in Islam as the second Rightly Guided Caliph and companion of the Prophet Muḥammad. The Shrine of Abū ʻArqūb, Ibrāhīm's perpetuated burial place, was established ca. 1300, and served as a religious, social and economic heart of Ḥamāma. It retained importance for a far-flung network of Abū ʻArqūb's purported descendants around al-Ramla, Hebron, ʻAjlun in northern Jordan, Jenin, Beisan and Tiberias. Administratively, Ḥamāma belonged to the District of Gaza, and was dependent on the neighboring town of Majdal ʻAsqalān for services.

Shariʻa court records and endowment deeds show that Ḥamāma was continuously inhabited since at least the middle of the 16th century. During the 17th century, about half of all inhabited sites in the District of Gaza became abandoned due to over-taxation and nomadic pressures. This phenomenon reflects wider trends of an overall, though not temporally continuous and spatially homogeneous population decline in the Levant during this period. The decline in the number of inhabited sites benefitted surviving villages like Ḥamāma, which absorbed many of the displaced people and annexed their adjoining, now emptied, territories (Marom and Taxel 2023).

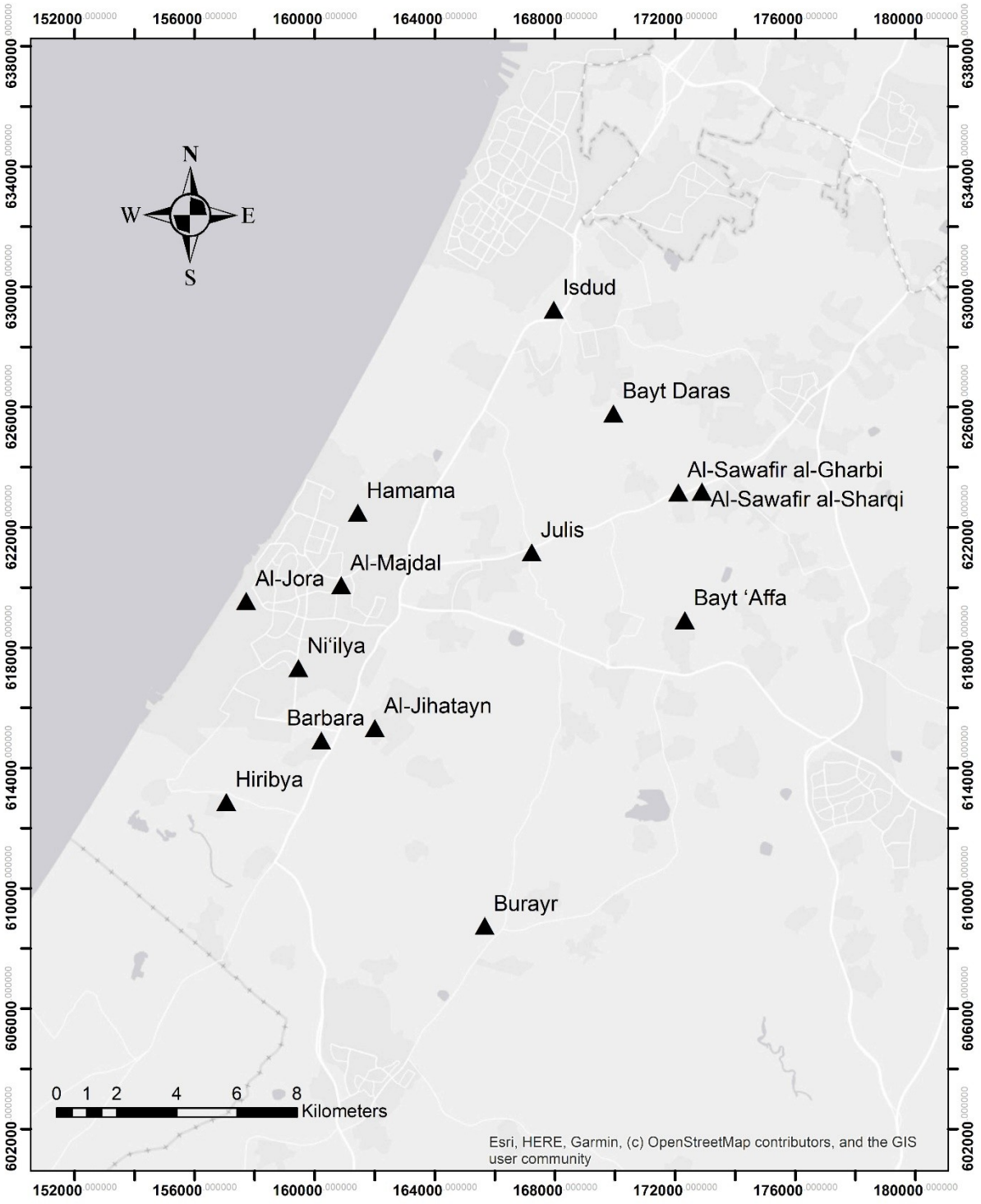
Administration

During the Late Ottoman period, Ḥamāma was part of the ʻAsqalān or al-Majdal nāḥiye of the district of Gaza. It grew to become one of the largest and most prosperous villages in the district (Grossman 2004, 239). During the 18th and 19th centuries, the village was probably governed by an Elders Council (*majlis ikhtiyāriya*) and village shaykh. Following the Ottoman land reforms of 1858 and vilayet law of 1864, Ḥamāma was divided into five quarters (*rubeʻ*; pl. *ʾarbāʻ*), each with its own *mukhtār* (village head) who oversaw its affairs and tended to the communal guesthouse (*manzūl*, or *maḍāfe*). The lands of Ḥamāma were divided among its residents (see below). In the 1930s, British authorities established a village council to oversee local affairs alongside the mukhtārs.

Demography

As mentioned above, during the 17th and 18th centuries, settlement in the southern coastal plain, including around Ḥamāma, declined, with many settlements being abandoned and residents moving to neighboring villages (see Figure 5; Marom and Taxel 2023). By the turn of the 19th century, this trend was reversed, with settlement expansion and sedentarization of nomads occurring throughout southern Palestine (Grossman 1994, 158–62). External migrations, primarily from Egypt, coupled with improved transportation and security conditions and land reform resulted in the restoration of long-deserted villages with the active participation and encouragement of the Ottoman provincial administration. However, it appears that no villages have been repopulated within the lands of Ḥamāma.

Fig. 5



According to oral history, the arrival of Egyptian families in Ḥamāma (see Sasson and Marom 2022, 276–278) was a gradual and continuous process, with three noticeable waves of settlement: the first occurring during Ibrāhīm Pasha's campaign (1831–1840), the second following the construction of Suez Canal (1859–1869; Warren 1871, 90) and the last after the First World War. An examination of the origin stories of these Egyptian families shows that the majority originated from the eastern part of the Delta in and around Muḥāfaẓat al-

Sharqiyya (Ḥassūna 2002, 125–140). The Egyptian immigrants formed a considerable but still marginal group in many villages. The established residents of village often denied them ownership a portion of village lands, which made them dependent on, and subservient to, these families. More often than not, the Egyptians were divided among existing power structures within the village, or formed an ostracized group of their own, reinforced by endogamous marriage within the group. Many Egyptian immigrants had relatives in other villages in Palestine. These findings concur with those of Gideon Kressel and Reuven Aharoni, Avi Sasson and Roy Marom in their works on Egyptian emigration to the Levant (Kressel and Aharoni 2004; 2013; Sasson and Marom 2022; Marom 2023b, 91, 94–95).

Following the Ottoman Vilayet Law of 1864, Ḥamāma's residents were divided into five quarters, formed around the main clans and smaller families under their protection (Elhassani 2011, 72) (see Table 1). The lands of Ḥamāma were divided among its quarters (see below).

Table 1.

The quarter	**Ḥāmūla (=clan)**	**Dependents' reported places of origin**
Al-Miqdādiya	Miqdādī (al-Irāq>Hauran)[1]	Faranī (Tall al-Farānī), Abū 'Arqūb clan, Gaza, al-Majdal
Al-Kalālbe	Kullāb (descendants of Abū 'Arqub)	Dūrā al-Khalīl, Khān Yūnes,
	Al-'Omarī (descendants of 'Omar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, Transjordan)	
	Riḍwān (Hijāz1>Transjordan> Giza, Egypt>Al-Majdal)	
'Awaḍ	'Awaḍ (al-Ḥijāz> al-Ẓāhiriyya near Hebron)	
	Ḥarb (Gaza)	
	Azzām (Beit Dagan)	
	Daḥlān (Hijāz)	Gaza
Al-Shuwwām and al-Ṣuqūr	Al-Shuwwām (Aleppo)	
	Al-Ṣaqr ('Arab al-Samārāt who settled on village land)	Al-'Arīsh, Sinai;
The Egyptians \ Al-Falatiyya (i.e. "the separated")	Al-Khawāja (al-Ḥijāz>Al-'Adaliyya and al-Qrein in al-Sharqiyya)	Al-Maḥalla al-Kubrā in al-Sharqiyya
	Abū Sulṭān (Tall al-Sulṭān in Al-Sharqiyya)	Al-'Azīziyya in Al-Zaqāzīq

[1] The sign (>) indicates the direction of previous movements of population prior to their arrival in Ḥamāma.

	ʻAbd al-Bārī (Al-Sharqiyya)	Egypt>Zeita al-Khalīl (near Hebron); Harbīṭ in al-Sharqiyya; Al-Zaqāzīq; al-Ramla (Israel); Al-Maḥalla al-Kubrā in al-Sharqiyya; Beit ʻIṭṭāb, Egypt; al-Qurayn in al-Sharqiyya

The history of the village during this period is embodied in the biographies of local strongman (*zaʻīm*) ʻAlī Abū Ṣaqr (d. before 1873) and of social reformer and *mukhtar* (appointed village head) Ḥusayn al-Hubbāsh Miqdād. In cooperation with the Ottoman authorities, ʻAlī Abū Ṣaqr put an end to nomadic raids on Jūlis, Ḥamāma and al-Majdal, and liberated their residents from paying protection money to the Bedouins (Al-Dabbāgh 1991, 246). His contemporary, Ḥusayn al-Hubbāsh Miqdād, granted the disenfranchised Egyptian residents of the village their own portion of village lands within the quarter system. Later on, a blood feud between the grandsons of ʻAlī Abū Ṣaqr and members of the Abū ʻArqūb clan, resulted in ʻAlī Abū Ṣaqr's assassination. Most of the Abū ʻArqūb clan was exiled from the village, with the majority of its members settling in Dūrā near Hebron. Clermont-Ganneau (1896) noted the veneration of Abū ʻArqūb in Dūrā in 1873, hinting that the of the assassination of ʻAlī Abū Ṣaqr, and the subsequent exiling of Abū ʻArqūb clan had already taken place.

In 1871/2 the Ottoman Empire conducted a census in the regions of Acre, Nablus and Jerusalem. The official yearbook (*sālnāmeh*) of the *velāyet* of Syria gives the population of Ḥamāma as comprised of 291 *hane* (households), within the *nāḥiye* of al-Majdal that belonged administratively to the district of Gaza (Grossman 2004, 239). The German orientalist Martin Hartmann republished the figures for Ḥamāma and its neighboring villages (Hartmann 1883, 131). The Swiss orientalist Albert Socin, however, gave the population as 635 males residing in 193 houses in his discussion of the population of the autonomous province of Jerusalem (Socin 1879, 154). Those figures show that Ḥamāma was a large village of similar size to Isdūd, smaller than the town of al-Majdal but larger than other neighboring hamlets (see Table 2; Figure 6). Ottoman lists of residents are preserved in different *nüfus defter-i*s available for consultation at the Israel State Archives.

The devastation of Gaza during the First World War (1917), and its delayed reconstruction resulted in a transfer of capital and population from it to the surrounding countryside (Halevy 2015). The British census of 1922 recorded Ḥamāma as having a population of 2731 inhabitants, consisting of 2722 Muslims and nine Orthodox Christians (the latter were descendants of the Orthodox Greek antiquities' trader mentioned by Warren [Warren 1871]). By the 1931 census the population had increased to 3405 residents: 3401 Muslims and four Christians, residing in 865 houses. In 1945, Ḥamāma's population was assessed as comprising of 5070: 5000 Muslims, ten Christians and sixty Jews (Table 2; Figure 7). Ḥamāma's demographic expansion happened concurrently with improved sanitation and health measures taken by British health authorities after the construction of army camps near Ḥamāma.

Table 2.

Village	**1525–**	**1596/7**	**1871/1872**	**1922**	**1931**	**1945**

	1527					**(est.)**
Ḥamāma (Arabs)[2]	31+1	84	291	2731	3405	5010
Al-Majdal	187+6	559	655	5097	6397	9910
Isdūd (Arabs)	40+4	75	331	2566	3140	4620
Beit Darās	22	58	101	1670	1804	2750
Jūlis		37	56	481	682	1030
Al-Jōra		46	109	1326	1754	2420

Fig. 6

[2] During the British Mandate, Jews established settlements on lands that were previously owned by Ḥamāma and Isdūd. British authorities counted Jews in the total number of residents. In order to give the figure for the Arab villages, their numbers were subtracted from the figures presented here (for example, sixty residents of Nitsanim, established in 1943 on Ḥamāma's village lands).

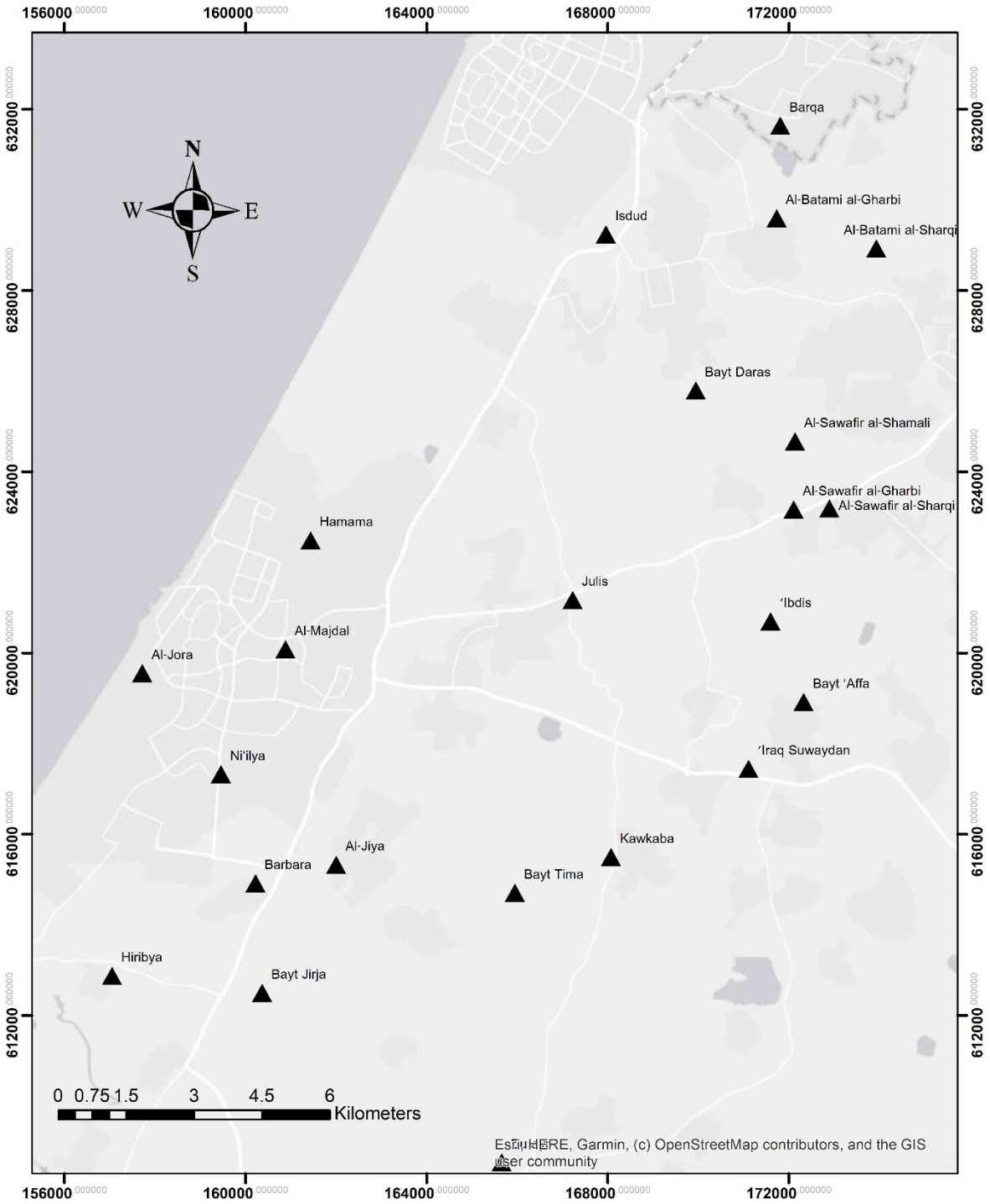
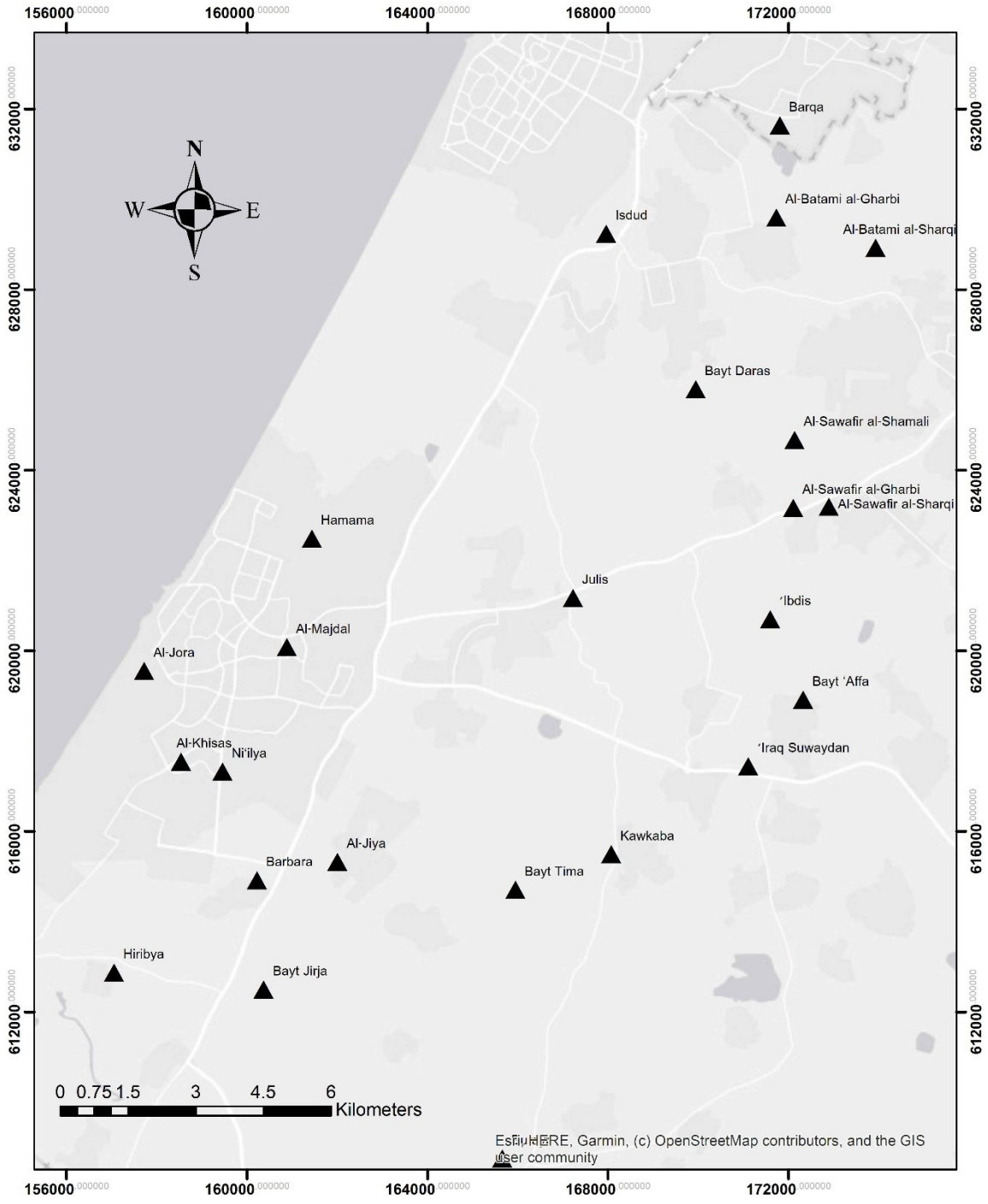


Fig. 7



Economy

Most residents of Ḥamāma earned their livelihood from agriculture, focused on field crops like wheat and barley, sesame and watermelons, and also olive oil and other olive-derived products. The private gardens surrounding Ḥamāma were a valuable source of income and subsidence for the local populace. When Dutch seafarer and explorer Charles van de Velde made a visit to Ḥamāma in April 1851, he commented on its "extensive gardens and

orchards" (Van de Velde 1854, 177). In 1857, Tobler noted Ḥamāma's position "in a very fertile area where the vine also thrives" (1859, 32). Guérin noticed that the waters of the village well were raised using a water wheel. "The gardens of Ḥamāma," Guérin maintained, "are of the greatest fertility. Separated by hedges of gigantic cactus, they are planted with olive trees, fig, pomegranate, mulberry and apricot trees. Here and there rose slender palm trees and big sycamores" (Guérin 1869, 129). Ḥamāma was later visited by members of the Survey of Western Palestine, who noted olive gardens surrounding it (Conder and Kitchener 1882, 406; *Map of Western Palestine*, 1:63,360, Palestine Exploration Fund, Sheet XVI [1878–1879]), but otherwise left it out of the *Memoirs*.

During the 2017–2018 excavations, many iron implements attesting to the village's diverse agriculture and the traditional agricultural cycle were recovered: an *'abwa*, a blunt device designated for cleaning the ploughshare during plowing (Figure 8: 1), a narrow hoe head for tilling small parcels of land, perhaps vegetable gardens (Figure 8: 2), a sickle for harvesting grains (Figure 8: 3), and a serrated blade of a wooden threshing board (*lawḥ al-dirās*), for use in the village's threshing floors (Figure 8: 4). Some tools were used in the village's vineyards and plantations, like a tool for cutting narrow branches at the plantations (Figure 8: 5) and an axe head for chopping wood (Figure 8: 6).

Fig. 8

Other residents engaged in cottage industries like weaving and carpentry. Since the 19th century, some residents also benefitted from the lucrative antiquities trade. Charles Warren of the Royal Engineers, for example, who passed through Ḥamāma during his June 1867 survey of the "plain of Philistia" on behalf of Palestine Exploration Fund, met a Greek Orthodox Christian antiquities dealer residing in the village (Warren 1871, 89). Charles Clermont-Ganneau toured Ḥamāma in 1873, purchasing various Roman antiquities (Clermont-Ganneau 1896, 2, 188–190).

During the British Mandate period, the residents of Ḥamāma enjoyed a varied economic basis of production. Agriculture retained its place as the main sector in the local economy. The growing of cereals for domestic subsistence remained the main land use in the village. Olive oil also remained an important plantation crop, with ten oil presses active in the village, amounting to 50% of all such facilities in the Gaza Sub-District. (Estimation & Acquisition of the Olive Oil Crop 1st Jacket, Israel State Archives, file M-10/859).

Residents of Ḥamāma invested large sums of capital in the digging of twenty artesian wells on village land. The new water supply allowed for the intensification of the agricultural sector both for citrus cultivation (for export), and for growing vegetables (that catered for the expanding demand for fresh produce in urban markets and British Army camps during the Second World War). Ḥamāma's peasants benefited from easy access to the markets via the Palestine Railroad line, and the Gaza–Jaffa paved road, which both passed within village lands. Others worked as fishermen, or operated cottage industries for the manufacture of ropes and weaved baskets.

Alongside agriculture, livestock farming formed an important source of revenue for the village (Ḥassūna 2002, 33). The meadows of al-Ḥarīrīye, the seasonal pools and the wetlands adjacent to Wādī al-'Abṭaḥ (cf. Ḥassūna 2002, 8) offered prime pasturage to herds of sheep, goats and camels, which were more numerous than their counterparts in neighboring al-Majdal and Isdūd (for spatio-historical analysis of the wetlands, see Levin, Elron and Gasith 2009). This stands in contrast to the larger numbers of poultry raised in Isdūd and Beit Darās (see Table 3, cf. Israel State Archives, file M-10/859). Traditionally, the rearing of poultry formed a part of the essential livestock industries for Arab domestic consumption. The industrial scale of fowl rearing in neighboring Isdūd and Beit Darās might have catered for the needs of adjacent Allied Army camps. These data correspond well with the faunal remains from the 2017–2018 excavations, as studied by Lee Perry-Gal (IAA), who found that cattle constitute the majority of the finds from Area D (located within the village), with the lowest ratios belonging to chicken.

It should further be noted that no pigs were raised in the vicinity of Ḥamāma, reflecting important religious taboos in Islam (and Judaism) with the exception of two dozen pigs raised for the consumption of Allied soldiers in Beit Darās. It appears that donkeys continued to play the central role in animal-powered locomotion, being still supplemented by camels in the capacity of carrying larger loads (a role in which it was replaced by motorized locomotion in the northern parts of the county by this time). The use of horses, mules and donkeys is evidenced by the recovery of Levantine style (Figure 8: 7) and Western style (Figure 8: 8) horseshoes during excavations.

Table 3.

Village	**Cattle**	**Sheep over 1 year**	**Goats over 1 year**	**Camels**	**Horses**	**Mules**	**Donkeys**	**Fowls**	**Pigeons**	**Pigs**	**Total land (du.s)**
Ḥamāma	405	310	172	228	11	9	567	2963	454	0	41366
Al-Majdal	354	168	170	65	17	39	447	2966	808	0	42334
Isdūd	480	117	50	169	18	21	328	5970	3079	0	47871
Beit Darās	653	489	103	35	10	18	299	6307	2454	23	15896
Jūlis	278	346	138	35	5	14	114	1010	776	0	13584

Al-Jōra	115	7	92	47	7	1	130	970	227	0	12224
total	2285	1437	725	351	68	102	1885	20186	7798	0	173275

External sources of income, previously of only secondary importance, became more essential as the village population increased. Army camps formed a staple source of revenue for the local populace (cf. Marom 2020b), as did the busy textile factories of al-Majdal (Ṣālḥa 1999), and the Palestine Railway corps. The town of al-Majdal provided employment, education and trade opportunities to the residents of the village without needing to move their place of residence (Elhassani 2011, 71).

The existence of a monetary transactions is demonstrated by numismatic findings from the recent excavations (studied by Gabriela Bijovsky, IAA), which include issues of Mahmud II (1808–1839), Abdulmejid (1839–1861) and Mohammed V (1909–1918), and a British Mandate coin from 1939. Another possible evidence for trade is reflected by the discovery, in a Mandate-period context, of a copper alloy bottled-shaped commercial weight (4.3 cm height, 3 cm base diameter, 233.01 gr; Figure 8: 9). According to the Late Ottoman weighting system, this weight is a little less than 1 "southern" *ūqiyyah*, assumed to be equal to 240.0 to 240.40 gr (Holland 1986, 909; Nevo 1995, 101; 2001, 45). The discrepancy between the present weight to the *ūqiyyah* standards can be explained by damage—intentional or unintentional—caused to the weight during its time in use and by subsequent weathering processes.

Land Use

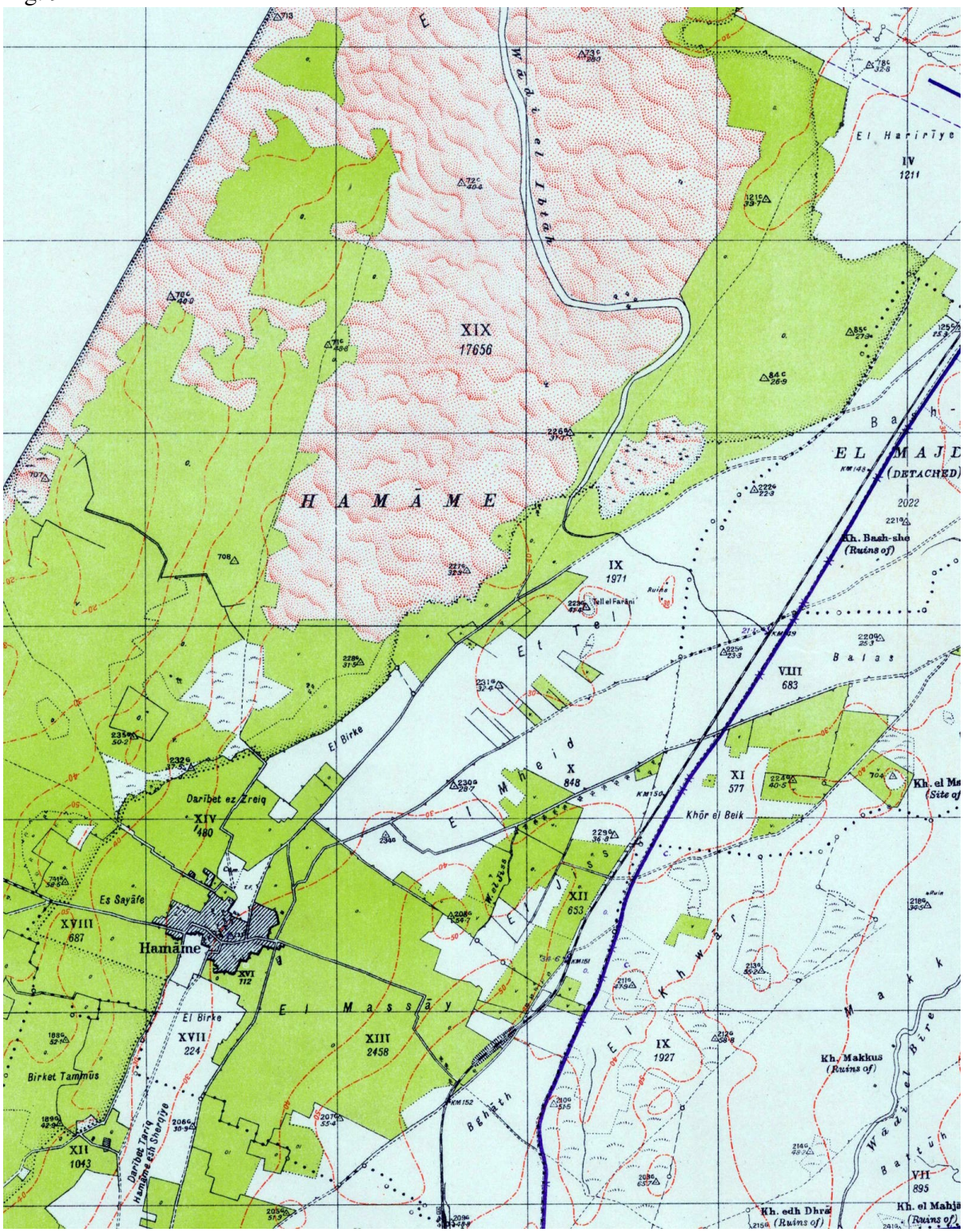
Ḥamāma represents a typical example of land use in the Palestinian countryside, reflecting rural agrarian life (see below). The private gardens surrounding Ḥamāma one of its recurring features mentioned in European travelers' accounts.

As in most villages in the country, all agricultural lands outside the immediate surrounding of Ḥamāma proper were held in common as *mushā'*, allocated annually or bi-annually between the different households in the village (Al-Farānī 2008: 61). This procedure discouraged investments into improving existing agricultural lands, or increasing the area of marginal lands (wetlands, dunes) under cultivation. Following the Ottoman land reforms of 1858, which allowed the registration of private titles to *mīrī* land, the elders of Ḥamāma divided its common lands among the five quarters (*rube'*; pl. *'arbā'*) of the village. Residents invested the surplus capital created by the abolishment of the ḥ*imāye* during 'Alī Abū Ṣaqr rule in improving the newly partitioned village lands.

The most prominent example of land improvement is offered by the lands situated along the coastline and in the vicinity of the Wādī al-'Abṭaḥ (Naḥal Evtaḥ) estuary, which were legally classed as sandy 'wastelands' (*mawāt* lands) belonging to the state (Figure 2). During the Late Ottoman period, these regions came under extensive cultivation. The high aquifer water table facilitated the digging of shallow depressions in the sand down to the layer overlaying the groundwater while allowing the irrigation of olives, fruit trees and vegetables. Field surveys and oral evidence show that this method, known as *mawāṣī*, resulted in small continuous patches of sunken gardens (Tsoar and Zohar 1985; Roskin and Taxel 2021; Figure 9). According to a local legend, some shepherds eating salad discovered

that leftover tomato seeds germinated into large plants bearing bountiful yields. Many villagers claimed possession over the wastelands by way of enclosure, and they became official owners during the land settlement operations in 1927/8. *Mawāṣī* agriculture thus enabled the exploitation of previously uncultivable marginal lands by traditional means for winter and summer crops (Ḥassūna 2002, 33, 39; Elhassani 2011, 18). Similar agricultural patterns were common in the region between Al-'Arīsh and Yibna, and may have been practiced already in earlier times (Huster 2015, 9; Fischer and Taxel 2021).

Fig. 9



Thomas Cook's *Tourist Handbook for Palestine and Syria* of 1891 mentions Ḥamāma's "orange-groves and well-cultivated gardens" (Cook 1891, 384). It is the first record of citrus fruit cultivation in Ḥamāma, but it remains unsupported by other sources of the period. In 1894, the Swiss theologian Lucien Gautier described Ḥamāma as a large

village, while taking note more of the textile industry and market of al-Majdal (Gautier 1898, 103–104).

Following the 1927/8 land settlement operations, all land in Ḥamāma was partitioned among individual owners (*mafrūz*) (Table 4). Topo-cadastral maps and aerial photography allow us to reconstruct the agricultural pattern of the village fields During the British Mandate Period: vineyards surround the village and the eastern fringes of the sand dunes. A strip of cultivated fields for cereals exploited the loess plains and the *ḥamrā* (red loam) hills in the eastern part of the village lands (including *mazraʿa*s and deserted villages annexed to Ḥamāma). In the southern parts of the sand dunes, to the south of Wādī al-Abṭaḥ and in the lower areas to the north, there were gardens irrigated by the *mawāṣī* technique. A rural property valuation map shows that residents were able to achieve upwards of 80% cultivation of "vineyards and scattered fig trees" in those marginal lands (Map of Hamāme & El Majdal [Det.], Gaza Sub-Dist., 1:10,000, July 1932). A strip of land along the coast and on the margins of the dunes allowed for extensive planting of olives, figs, sycamores, apricots, dates and other fruit trees.

Table 4.

Village	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Ḥamāma	26855	1693	12818	41366
Al-Majdal	n/a	n/a	n/a	42334
Isdūd	32905	2487	12479	47871
Beit Darās	15896	0	461	16357
Jūlis	13225	0	359	13584
Al-Jōra	10705	0	1519	12224
Total	72731	2487	14818	173736

According to the date shown in Table 5, Ḥamāma's built-up area in 1945 was only about 12.40% of the stated built-up area of al-Majdal. In addition, Ḥamāma's citrus cultivation was substantially smaller than that of al-Majdal (40%) and Isdūd (50%). Finally, there is a noticeable discrepancy between the area marked as vineyards and olive groves on contemporary maps, and the area reported in the Village Statistics of 1945. It is possible that land registered as 'plantation' (an area planted with fruit trees) in earlier property tax registers was reclassified as land used for the cultivation of cereal.

Table 5.

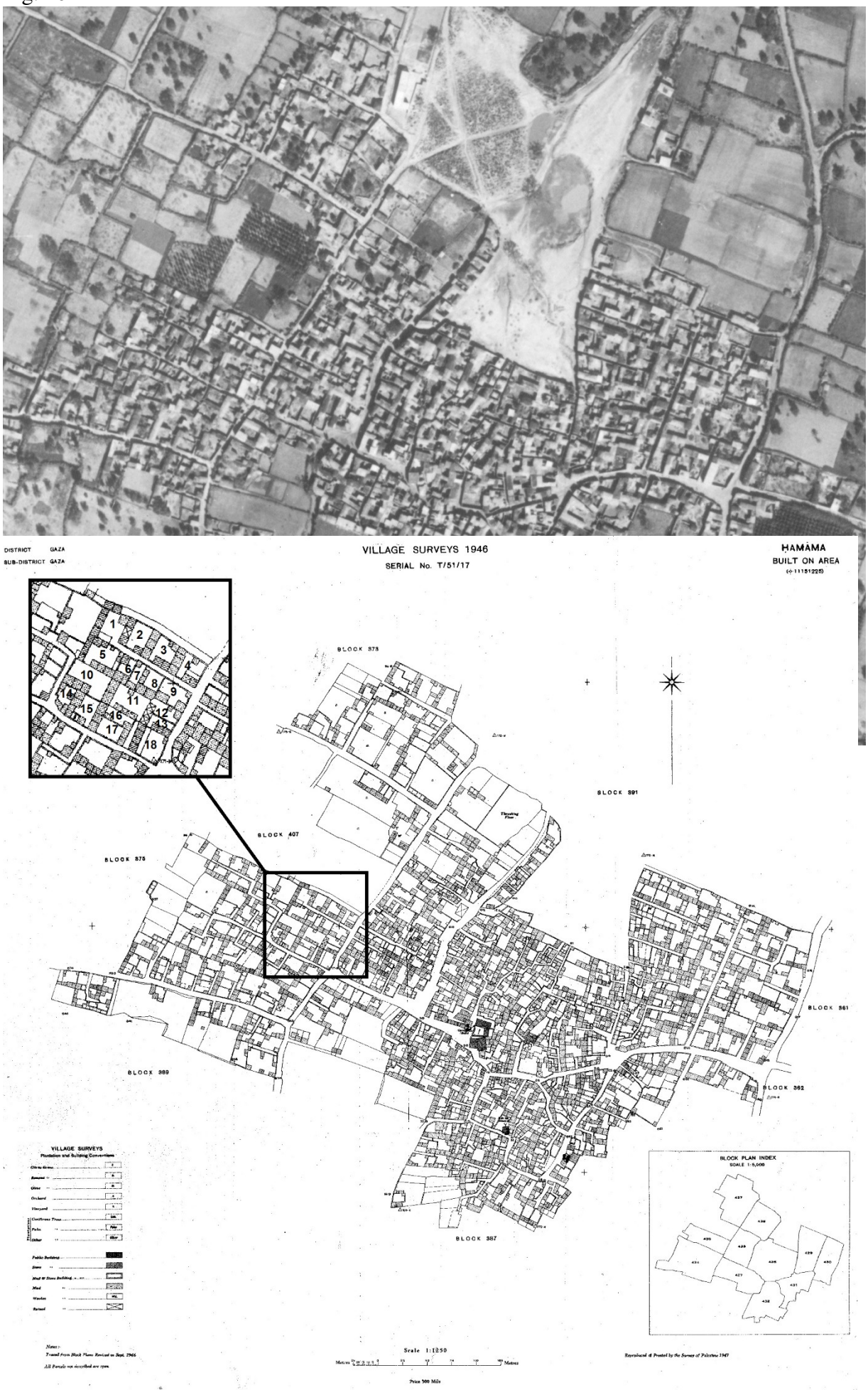
Village	**Built up**	**Non-**	**Cultivable**	**Cereal**	**Irrigated and**	**Citrus Fruits**

		cultivable			Plantation	
Ḥamāma	167	6494	33012	27726	4325	961
Ḥamāma (Jew. Sett.)	0	0	1693	1164	134	395
Al-Majdal	1346	1629	40705	35442	2886	2377
Isdūd	131	12374	32879	22636	8322	1921
Isdūd (Jew. Sett.)	0	0	2487	1126	5	1356
Beit Darās	88	527	15742	14438	472	832
Jūlis	30	460	13094	10803	931	1360
Al-Jōra	45	1535	10644	2965	7198	481
Total	1807	38234	135041	116300	24273	9683

Village Planning

During the Late Ottoman and British Mandate periods, Ḥamāma was a typical village with semi planned structure, distinguishing private (residential) and public (communal spaces) (Figures 10, 11). The village nucleus, east of the stream, encompassed neighborhoods (*ḥārāt*), clustered according to clan structure/social figurations for defense purposes. Each neighborhood was partitioned into residential courts (*aḥwāsh*, sing. *ḥawsh*) of a roughly similar size based on extended households with living units dispersed around the courts (Ḥamāma: Built On Area, Village Surveys 1946 Serial No. T/51/17, 1:1250). In Figure 11, one neighborhood in the western – newer part of the village, west of the stream, is highlighted. Although built to a uniform, spacious plan, this part of the village mirrors the architectural arrangements of the older eastern section of Ḥamāma (Figure 10). The highlighted quarter, with its 18 *aḥwāsh* numbered consecutively, shows evidence for secondary partitions of existing courtyards. Some *aḥwāsh,* such as nos. 12, 13, 16 and 17, reflect the inter- and intra- generational fragmentation or budding of households, perhaps due to polygamy or inheritance issues (cf. Ḥassūna 2002). As in the succeeding period, buildings were primarily built of adobe on stone foundations, and repaired on a yearly basis, while the village mosque and other public buildings were constructed from stone (ibid.). Public spaces included the village squares next to the mosque, the threshing flours (*bayādir*), roads and cemetery (*maqbara*), belonging to the community as a whole (Goadby and Doukhan 1935, 52–59). Legally, the built-up area consisted of private property (*mulk*) (Goadby and Doukhan 1935, 37–43; Ḥamāma, Village Surveys 1946 Serial No. T/51/17, 1:1250).

Fig. 10



and the platform were coated with white plaster, and the remaining (lower) part of the room, the *qā'a*, in front of the doorway, had a beaten earth floor (Figure 12). This is the area which stabled the household animals and other "dirty" activities took place (see Canaan 1933, 59, figs. 7, 8 [who termed the lower section also *al-rāwieh*]; Hirschfeld 1995, 117, 132; Fuchs 1998, 158, figs. 2: b, 3: b).

Fig. 12

As mentioned above, a belt of plantations (*kurūm*) and vegetable gardens (*ḥawākir*) surrounded the built-up areas, and they were held in mixed private and state (*mīrī*) ownership (Goadby and Doukhan 1935, 17–36). With more residents, more workforce was available to till the land and tend to larger, farther and exceedingly more difficult marginal lands to cultivate. Beyond this belt extended the vast state-owned land, village held territory, which was primarily composed of arable (*muftalaḥ*) and uncultivable (*'uṭl*) land held in common by the community as *musha'*, with possession of individual parcels rotated between village residents on a bi-annual basis (Atran 1986).

As reflected by the archaeological record and historical sources, during the British Mandate period the increased income per capita led to a wave of housing redevelopment in the village, including the incorporation—within existing structures—of modern building materials such as concrete in the construction of thresholds (Figure 13) and floors (Figure 14). Concrete introduced into common use in Palestine only in the 1910s, and primarily in the British Mandate period. The excavations revealed a single fireproof ceramic brick produced by the Marangaki & Zerefos factory in the Rod el-Farag neighborhood in Cairo during the 1930s and 1940s (Figure 15). An advertisement of this factory published in a brochure of the Cairo Royal Opera House from 1944 indicates that Marangaki & Zerefos Ceramic Industries are "Purveyors of the British Army and Egyptian Government" and that their products include "Firebricks and refractory material of any shape and size of best quality" (see at https://lovetheatreprogrammes.co.uk/product/1944-royal-opera-house-cairo). It is therefore

allowed to suggest that the discussed brick was part of a British army shipment of building materials for military construction in Palestine, perhaps during the Second World War. The circumstances of its arrival to Ḥamāma, however, are unclear; perhaps it was dismantled from an abandoned military structure sometime in the 1940s.

Fig. 13

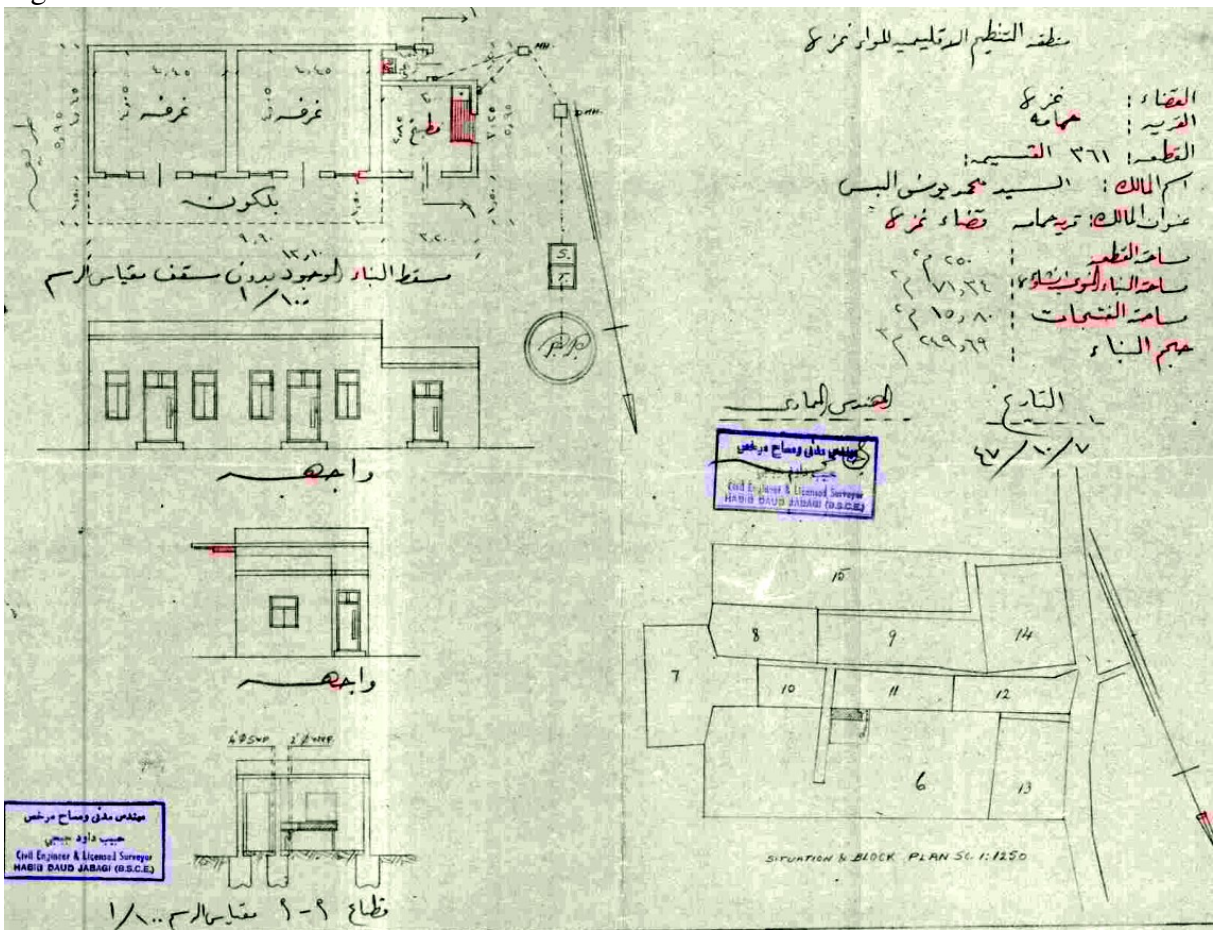
Fig. 14

Fig. 15

British Mandate Ḥamāma was characterized by pre-planned new neighborhoods built around the old village nucleus, with crisscrossed lanes separating new residential quarters. British authorities required residents to issue building permits, accompanied by detailed architectural plans, measurements, and information about land ownership. Dozens of such permits are preserved in the ISA (for example, ISA, file M-17/5177). One fine example is provided by Muḥammad Yūsef al-Bass' application for the construction of a residential building of stone in 1947 (see Figure 16). Permits were also required for the construction of agricultural buildings, as 'Alī Aḥmed Shḥāde's application for the construction of well-house for irrigation in 1947 (ISA, file M–1/4238). The bureaucratic nature of such files testifies about the involvement of the colonial administration in the architectural and spatial planning of the Arab countryside during this period.

In 1921, a primary school for boys was established, complemented by a school for girls built in 1947 (al-Dabbāgh 1991, 245). In the 1940s, British authorities paved the road leading to the village in order to facilitate year-round motorized access (ISA, file M-19/560). Survey of the built areas of the village was carried out in 1945, as part of a wider project to map Palestine's villages concomitantly with the Village Statistics 1946. The map and accompanying aerial photographs (Figsures 10, 11) show that even as late as the 1940s, the majority of the houses in the village were constructed of adobe.

Fig. 16



Material Culture and Daily Life

The archaeological record offers direct and tangible evidence for the material culture and daily life of the Palestinian countryside. The artifactual evidence from the 2017–2018 Ḥamāma excavations is a case in point.

Ceramics, ubiquitous and affordable, were the most common category of everyday items used by Ḥamāma's population until the offend of British Mandate times. The vast majority of the pottery discovered in the excavations belongs to the Grey Gaza Ware family (as the large bowl shown in Figure 17: 1). Indeed, these grey-colored ceramics are a hallmark of the Ottoman period in the southern Levant. Gaza Ware was mass produced in Gaza, Rafah, al-'Arish and al-Faluja since the beginning of the Ottoman period, and it is commonly found as far as the Galilee and Transjordan (see Israel and Saidel 2021; Taxel, forthcoming).

In contrast to these locally produced wares, imported ceramics are very rare in Ḥamāma's Late Ottoman- and British Mandate-period strata. These ceramics include Ottoman Çanakkale Ware and Didymoteicho Ware (Figure 17: 2, 3) glazed bowls from western Turkey (Vroom 2005, 180–183, 186–187), a Turkish or Greek Marbled Ware glazed bowl (Figure 17: 4; Kontogiannis 2015; Vroom 2005, 165), European (and perhaps Japanese) porcelain coffee cups, such as a one decorated with a "bird's foot" pattern (Figure 17: 5; cf. Otte and Priestman 2022, 253–254, fig. 9), and a European glazed stoneware jar. This dearth of imports is noteworthy, and suggests preference for locally-made wares. Given the relative

prosperity of Ḥamāma's population in Late Ottoman and British Mandate times, some households could certainly afford expensive imported vessels. Furthermore, other rural settlements have yielded larger quantities of imported table wares from the eastern Mediterranean, Europe and even from the Far East (see, e.g., Boas 2000; Tsuk, Bordowicz and Taxel 2016). In contrast, however, there are also other examples of villages with modest amounts of imported ceramics (e.g., Gophna, Taxel and Feldstein 2007). At present, we could not determine whether Ḥamāma's patterns of use of locally produced vs. imported wares was due to the site's geographical location, the socio-economic fabric of the excavated part(s) of the village, or the local population's preferences or scale of openness towards "foreign" commodities (for a thorough discussion on the subject, including regarding Ḥamāma, see Taxel 2023).

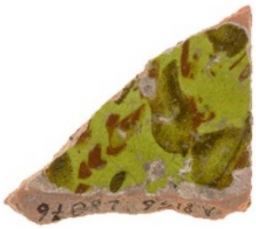
Fig. 17

1

0 10

2

3



4

5

0 4

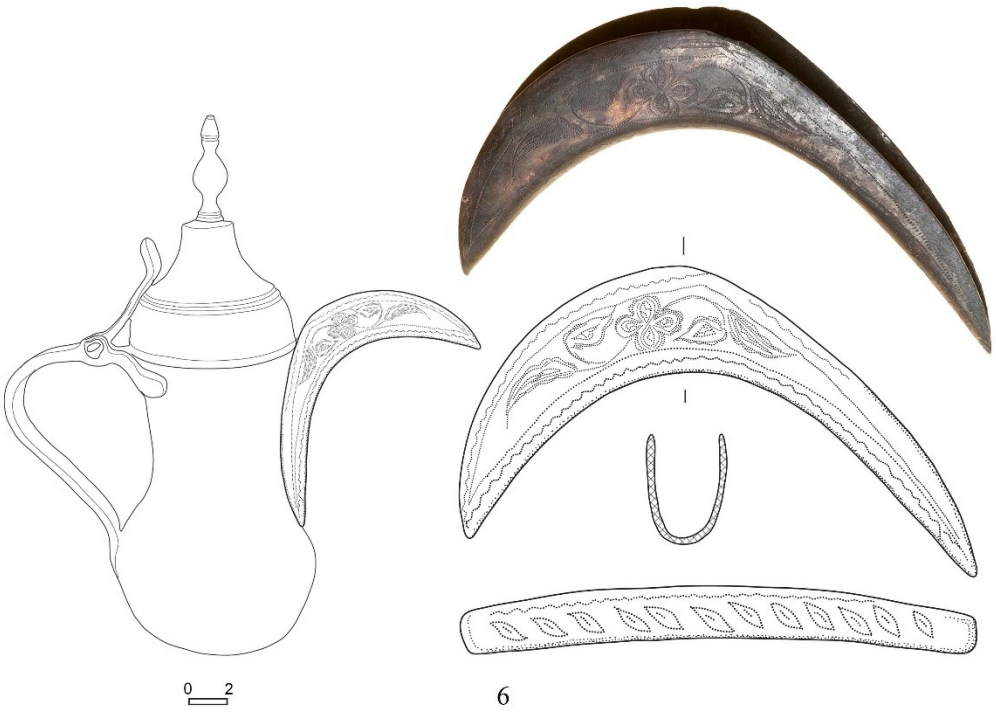
6

0 10

Fig. 18

1 2 3

4 5



0 2

6

0 4

Nevertheless, other finds retrieved in the excavations do indicate for some measures of material modernization. For instance, a fragmentary glass hurricane lamp, apparently a European import, is evidence for the introduction of kerosene fueled lighting to daily use in the 1880s (cf. Tsuk, Bordowicz and Taxel 2016, 72, fig. 42: 6–8). Other noteworthy glass objects are a few intact inkwells, perhaps also of European manufacturing, which provide evidence for literacy and literate activities among some residents (as studied by Tamar Winter from the IAA). An object that can be associated with some mechanization of labor in the village economy under British Mandate rule is a disk-shaped synthetic whetstone (Figure 17: 6).

Material evidence for other aspects of everyday life in the village includes more than a dozen clay smoking pipes of types dated to various stages between the 18th and early 20th centuries, most of which are of local/regional origin (Figure 18: 1–3) and one is an import from the Tophane quarter workshops in Istanbul (Figure 18: 4), as well as a water-pipe charcoal-burner which was also imported from Istanbul (Figure 18: 5), and a copper-alloy spout of a coffeepot (Arabic: *dalleh*) decorated with fine vegetal motifs made by puncturing using a hammer and a pointed chisel (Figure 18: 6). Smoking and coffee drinking (also evidenced by the above-mentioned porcelain coffee cups) were two often-combined activities which are commonly associated with leisure culture across the Ottoman Empire, since the late 16th century (see Baram 2002); the fact that the Ḥamāma's excavations revealed also some 17th- and 18th-century smoking pipes (work in progress by the authors) attests to cultural continuity in daily habits, which is nonetheless representative of the Levantine countryside as a whole.

Conclusion

In this paper, we explored the rise of Ḥamāma during the Late Ottoman and British Mandate period from a modest village into one of southern Palestine's largest settlements. The paper presented a longer, more detailed historical-archaeological examination of a Palestinian village than had been attempted for any Palestinian village in the south of the country before (for villages in other parts of the country, see Marom 2020a; 2023a; Marom et al. 2023 and in press). Combined with a fine-grained, topic-oriented reading of the sources, a wider spatial lens and consideration for transregional and global economic, political and technological transformations, we were able to trace the interactions between local trajectories and broad transformative processes that led the Palestinian countryside before 1948 to prosper, and indeed—to bloom.

Ethnographic sources, historical evidence and archaeological finds testify that the village of Ḥamāma had been inhabited, apparently continuously, from the Mamluk period until 1948 (see also Marom and Taxel 2023). The village was home to families who hailed from deserted neighboring villages, such as Mi'ṣabe, while long established residents, such as the Abū 'Arqūb family, left the village. Syria, Egypt and the highlands of Hebron were the main areas of origin for the population. There is also evidence for the sedentarization of nomadic groups like the Farānī clan, supposed founders of the village, and members of the Al-Ṣaqr clan. The families' stories of origin, recorded by Palestinian educators and historians, tell of ties of kin and bonds of marriages with residents of nearby towns and villages such as Gaza, al-Majdal, al-Jiyya, and Isdūd. This demographic landscape is representative of the

situation in the neighboring settlements, notably Isdūd and al-Majdal (Kanā'na and al-Madanī 1986; Jūda 2015).

In the second half of the 19th century, local administrative reforms were carried out in tandem with the implementation of the *tanzimat* reforms at the district level. For example, the appointment of village headmen (*mukhātīr*) per the Vilayet Laws, and the establishment of the "quarter system"—the division of village land between the groups of families under pressure to register ownership over communal lands in accordance with the Ottoman Land Codes—led to considerable economic development, which was evident in village land uses by the early 20th century. Alongside wider use of traditional agricultural practices, like *mawāṣī* irrigation, Palestine integrated into the world economy. This integration led to the availability of modern, mass produced, efficient products in the countryside. Ḥamāma's residents began to exploit new technologies such as diesel engines, motorized transportation by road and railways, and the growing demand for new agricultural crops to diversify and enrich the local economy. Later, British town plans and building permits testify to the involvement of the colonial administration in the architectural and spatial planning of the Arab countryside. Thus, Ḥamāma became the largest village in the Gaza Sub-District, second only to al-Majdal and Gaza in importance.

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Figure and table captions:
Fig. 1. Location map.
Fig. 2. Ḥamāma: village territory, ca. 1940 (Roy Marom).
Fig. 3. Ḥamāma: plan of the 2017–2018 excavations in Area D (Elena Delerson [IAA]).
Fig. 4. Ḥamāma: aerial view of the 2017—2018 excavation area, looking west (photograph by Emil Aladjem [IAA]).
Fig. 5. Map of rural settlement around Ḥamāma (1750).
Fig. 6. Map of rural settlement around Ḥamāma (1870).
Fig. 7. Map of Arab rural settlement around Ḥamāma (1945).
Fig. 8. Ḥamāma: selected objects from the Late Ottoman and British Mandate periods: iron agricultural and animal husbandry implements (1–8); commercial weight (9) (photos: Clara Amit, IAA).
Fig. 9. Agricultural plots around Ḥamāma. The green areas to the west of the village, within the sand dune strip, are *mawāṣī* plots which enabled the expansion of agriculture into sandy wastelands (detail from 1:20,000 Series Topo-cadastral Sheet 11-12 [Hamāme], provisional, Survey of Palestine, drawn and printed at the Survey office, Jaffa, October 1930).
Fig. 10. Aerial photograph of Ḥamāma, showing the dense building fabric (1945).
Fig. 11. British Village Survey map of Ḥamāma's built-up area (1946)
Fig. 12. Ḥamāma: remains of a Late Ottoman-/British Mandate-period room in the southern building.
Fig. 13. Ḥamāma: remains of a Late Ottoman-/British Mandate-period room with a 20th century cement floor in the eastern building.

Fig. 14. Ḥamāma: remains of a British Mandate-period concrete floor in the southern building.
Fig. 15. Ḥamāma: 1930s–1940s ceramic brick imported from Cairo (photo: Clara Amit, IAA).
Fig. 16. Architectural plan accompanying Al-Bass' request for building permit, Ḥamāma, 1947 (improved copy of original, ISA M-28/4282).
Fig. 17. Ḥamāma: selected pottery from the Late Ottoman and British Mandate periods (1–5); British Mandate-period whetstone (6) (photos: Clara Amit, IAA).
Fig. 18. Ḥamāma: selected objects from the Late Ottoman and British Mandate periods: smoking pipes (1–4); water-pipe charcoal-burner (5); copper-alloy coffeepot spout and a reconstruction of the complete vessel (6) (photos: Clara Amit, IAA).

Table 1. The division of local families within Ḥamāma's quarter system (summarized from Ḥassūna 2002).
Table 2. Population counts of Ḥamāma and its neighboring villages. Figures before 1922 represent the number of households.
Table 3. The number of livestock by kind according to the animal enumeration of 1943.
Table 4. Land ownership (according to the Village Statistics, 1946).
Table 5. Land usage (according to the Village Statistics, 1946).