

RETHINKING URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS IN LATE OTTOMAN BILAD AL-SHAM: THE CASE OF GAZA

Johann Buessow and Yuval Ben-Bassat

Abstract | This chapter aims to provide a better understanding of the neighborhood as a crucial component of urban governance in late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria). Taking as a case study the neighborhoods of late Ottoman Gaza, it examines the extent to which Gaza's neighborhoods were social, administrative and political entities. In Gaza, a sizable part of the population was involved in two rival political factions that were based in neighborhoods at opposite ends of the city. While we have examined Gaza's factionalism elsewhere, the discussion here is embedded in an analysis of the city's morphology and its economic and social makeup. This approach helps to reveal the social characteristics of additional types of neighborhoods, beyond the official Ottoman administrative divisions. It also sheds light on the social background of additional types of political actors, beyond the political elite, such as *muhtars*, scribes, and *imams*. We show that Gaza was influenced by the flow of people and goods at the crossroads of two major caravan routes. A spread-out urban structure allowed kinship groups to settle in clusters. The nature of neighborhood boundaries was varied. Physically, they were permeable and allowed traffic to flow freely, including many city-dwelling peasants who commuted between the city and the rural area around it. Socially, as evidence on marriage relations suggests, there was a deep social rift between Gaza's two competing commercial and religious centers. This dual urban structure helped some elite families to build a viable opposition to the dominant political faction.

INTRODUCTION

The urban neighborhoods¹ of late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham have long had considerable importance in the formation of local identities as well as in scholarly debates. Local authors of chronicles and memoirs took a strong interest

in neighborhoods and often dealt in great detail with practical features and the emotional ties related to them.² These texts are important

* Authors' Note: We thank Sarah Buessow for her helpful remarks on an earlier version of this chapter.

1 The term neighborhood is often used interchangeably with "quarter." "Quarter," however, carries the historical baggage of Roman city planning with four quarters divided by a *cardo* and *decumanus*, so that the term is commonly associated with particularly rigid concepts of urban subdivision. In this chapter, we employ "neighborhood" as a generic term for all kinds of urban subdivisions, whereas we use "quarter" solely to refer to established concepts of quarters; e.g., the four quarters of Jerusalem's walled city as they are known today.

2 To name just a few writers from varied backgrounds, writing originally in Arabic and Hebrew, see Johann Buessow and Khaled Safi, *Damascus Affairs: Egyptian Rule in Syria through the Eyes of an Anonymous Damascene Chronicler, 1831–1841. Translation and Parallel Edition of Two Manuscripts* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2013); Gad Frumkin, *Derekh shofet bi-Yrushalayim* [The Life of a Judge in Jerusalem] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1954) [in Hebrew]; Salim Tamari and Issam Nassar (eds.), *al-Quds al-uthmaniyya fi l-mudhakkirat al-Jawhariyya: al-Kitab al-awwal min mudhakkirat al-musiqi Wasif Jawhariyya, 1904-1917* [Ottoman Jerusalem in the Jawhariyya Memoirs: The First Book of the Memoirs of the Musician Wasif Jawhariyya, 1904-1917] (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 2003) [in Arabic]; 'Uthman al-Tabba', *Ithaf al-aizza fi tarikh Ghazza* [Presenting the Notables in the History of Gaza], 4 vols., ed. 'Abd al-Latif Abu Hashim (Gaza: Maktabat al-Yaziji, 1999) [in Arabic]; Ya'aqov Yehoshua, *Shkhunot bi-Yrusha-*



primary sources for the social history of urban neighborhoods, a field that has attracted relatively little attention on the part of historians, but which has been explored in several case studies.³ Older scholarly debates often revolved about the validity of general paradigms in Middle Eastern urban studies, especially as concerns the “Islamic,” “Oriental,” or “Ottoman” city.⁴ More recently, historians seeking to understand “old regime” municipal organization in Bilad al-Sham during the pre-Tanzimat period have discussed neighborhoods as elements of urban governance.⁵

Neighborhoods are a global phenomenon and have been attested as spatial units of enduring importance as of the period of early urban civilization in Mesopotamia.⁶ As urban theorist Lewis Mumford noted, “[n]eighbourhoods, in some annoying, inchoate fashion exist wherever human beings congregate, in permanent family dwellings; and many of the functions of the city tend to be distributed naturally – that is, without any theoretical preoccupation or political direction – into neighbourhoods.”⁷ A recent practice-oriented definition of neighborhood specifies some of these functions:

A neighborhood is generally defined spatially as a specific geographic area

layim ha-yeshana [Neighborhoods in Old Jerusalem] (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass, 1971) [in Hebrew].

3 Case studies from Bilad al-Sham include Brigitte Marino, *Le faubourg du Midân à Damas à l'époque ottoman: Espace urbain, société et habitat, 1742-1830* (Damascus: Institut français d'études arabes de Damas, 1997); Hans Gebhardt, et al. *History, Space, and Social Conflict in Beirut: The Quarter of Zokak el-Blat* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2005); Johann Buessow, *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem, 1872-1908* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 138-194; Michelle Campos, “Mapping Urban ‘Mixing’ and Intercommunal Relations in Late Ottoman Jerusalem: A Neighborhood Study,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63/1 (2021), pp. 133-169.

4 For more on the debate on the “Oriental,” “Islamic,” “Arabic,” and “Ottoman” city paradigms, see the introduction to this volume.

5 For more on the scholarly debate, see the Introduction to this volume; Stefan Knost, *Die Organisation des religiösen Raums in Aleppo: Die Rolle der islamischen religiösen Stiftungen (auqāf) in der Gesellschaft einer Provinzhauptstadt des Osmanischen Reiches an der Wende zum 19. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2009).

6 See, for example, Elizabeth Stone, *Nippur Neighborhoods. Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 44 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1987).

7 Lewis Mumford, “The Neighborhood and the Neighborhood Unit,” *Town Planning Review* 24 (1954), p. 258.

and functionally as a set of social networks. Neighborhoods, then, are the spatial units in which face-to-face social interactions occur – the personal settings and situations where residents seek to realize common values, socialize youth, and maintain effective social control.⁸

This chapter examines neighborhoods in the functional sense as relatively self-contained social units that influence the ways in which residents think and act.⁹ In the pre-industrial world, most neighborhoods were social groupings that arose through social interactions among people living near one another or choosing to build homes and businesses in the same area. In this sense, they were functional units that facilitated the construction of social networks beyond the household level. In many urban traditions, basic municipal functions such as public security, cleaning and upkeep were – and still are – handled on the neighborhood level and not on that of centralized urban or state governments. In addition to social neighborhoods, most cities also had administrative districts that were used for purposes such as taxation and social control. Administrative districts typically grouped together several social neighborhoods.¹⁰

Thus, neighborhoods typically had two functions that were more or less pronounced in individual cases. On the one hand, they facilitated social networks; i.e., ties and exchanges between neighborhood residents, and on the other, top-down social control and col-

8 Amie Schuck and Dennis Rosenbaum, “Promoting Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods: What Research tells us about Intervention,” in Karen Fulbright-Anderson and Patricia Auspos (eds.), *Community Change: Theories, Practice, and Evidence* (Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, 2006), p. 62.

9 Ronald J. Johnston, articles “Neighbourhood,” “Neighbourhood Effect” and “Neighbourhood Unit,” in Ronald J. Johnston et al. (eds.), *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 4th ed. (London: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 540-541.

10 Janet L. Abu-Lughod, “The Islamic City: Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19/2 (1987), pp. 162-163; Abraham Marcus, “The Urban Experience: Neighborhood Life and Personal Privacy,” in idem, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 314-328; Knost, *Die Organisation des religiösen Raums in Aleppo*; Nora Lafi, *Esprit civique et organisation citadine dans l'Empire ottoman (XVe-XXe siècles)* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), p. 114.

lective efficacy that complied with laws and government policies. As a result, modernizing states in the 19th century that attempted to enlist the cooperation of urban populations came to see the neighborhood as a sort of two-edged sword, because social networks could lead to collective efficacy; i.e., mutual trust and solidarity combined with expectations for collective action as stipulated by the law and government policies, but they could also provide resources for political resistance and/or organized crime.¹¹

In late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham, the social makeup of neighborhoods differed widely. Certain neighborhoods were more administrative (Ott. Turk. *mahalle*, Ar. *mahalla*) whereas other neighborhoods were smaller sub-unites (in Arabic mostly *hara* or *zuqaq*).¹² Neighborhood populations often had some economic specialization or distinct subculture. For example, ethnically defined groups often preferred to live near each other. The same applied to specialized trades, such as craftspeople and merchants. In cities with a plurality of religions, neighborhood populations were often characterized by religious affiliation. Another factor contributing to neighborhood distinctiveness was in-migration from rural areas. This was a continuous process in pre-industrial cities, and migrants tended to move in with relatives and acquaintances from their hometowns.¹³ Importantly, the urban-rural relationship was mostly a two-way street, with urbanites maintaining close and often very profitable relations with their rural regions of origin.¹⁴

11 Our formulations build on the following analysis of violent crime in the city of Chicago during the 1990s: Christopher R. Browning, Seth L. Feinberg and Robert D. Dietz, "The Paradox of Social Organization: Networks, Collective Efficacy, and Violent Crime in Urban Neighborhoods," *Social Forces* 83/2 (2004), pp. 503–534. Betül Başaran made similar observations with regard to late-18th-century Istanbul. See Betül Başaran, *Selim III, Social Control and Policing in Istanbul at the End of the Eighteenth Century: Between Crisis and Order* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 296–297.

12 Marcus, "Urban Experience," pp. 314–315.

13 See, for example, Florian Riedler, "The Role of Labour Migration for the Urban Economy and Governance of Nineteenth Century Istanbul," in Ulrike Freitag und Nora Lafi (eds.), *Urban Governance under the Ottomans: Between Cosmopolitanism and Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 145–158.

14 Antoine Abdel Nour, *Introduction à l'histoire urbaine de la Syrie Ottomane (XVI-XVIIIe siècle)* (Beirut: Lebanese University, 1982), p. 127; Ulrike Freitag, Malte Fuhrmann,

As Abraham Marcus observed for the case of Aleppo, the desire to live close to members of one's peer group – defined by religion, ethnicity, occupation, or otherwise – interfered with other factors, such as proximity to one's place of work or the availability of affordable housing. The resulting pattern was clustering, a "tendency of groups to concentrate in particular parts of town rather than to occupy exclusive quarters."¹⁵ In other words, clusters of specific social categories provided neighborhoods with a distinctive character, but were almost never completely congruent with neighborhood boundaries. The neighborhoods that were most homogeneous were those that originated as new settlements established by particular groups. Over time, this homogeneity eroded through the complex dynamics of daily life,¹⁶ but names referring to the origins of such neighborhoods, such as "the Türkmen" or "the Jewish neighborhood," generally survived over long periods of time.¹⁷

This chapter focuses on late Ottoman Gaza as a case study of neighborhoods in the political life of a city in late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham. The first section presents a catalogue of features that are commonly discussed as characteristic of neighborhoods in Bilad al-Sham at the time, which serves as the backdrop for our case study. The second section examines the evidence for neighborhoods in Gaza based on the Ottoman census of 1905, alongside complementary evidence retrieved from archival materials, unpublished manuscripts, memoirs, aerial photos, and maps. Finally, we consider the implications of our case study for future works on urban neighborhoods.

NEIGHBORHOODS IN LATE OTTOMAN BILAD AL-SHAM

Neighborhoods are a key locus of contention in approaches to understanding the commonalities and particularities of Ottoman Middle East-

Nora Lafi, and Florian Riedler (eds.), *The City in the Ottoman Empire: Migration and the Making of Urban Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2011).

15 Marcus, "Urban Experience," p. 317.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*, p. 316.

ern cities. The debate includes discussions of both morphological and social features, which the older literature often grouped together in idealized categories based primarily on the study of the built environment and literary or juridical sources.

Arguments resting on the physical layout of cities often highlight the cul-de-sac as a prominent type of residential street, and neighborhoods made up of a small number of thoroughfares that could sometimes even be closed off by gates.¹⁸ It is argued that architectural design and urban planning were to a large extent shaped by the ideals of privacy and security, especially the privacy of the body and home.¹⁹ These arguments are interlinked with others that highlight political and cultural features, including the observation that the semi-public and intimate setting of the cul-de-sac facilitated social exchanges, especially for women.²⁰ Another frequently discussed phenomenon is clustering on the basis of kinship, religion, ethnicity, and wealth.²¹ Other assumptions consider that neighborhoods in the late Ottoman Empire were spaces of relatively high social connectedness²² and often also of identity, solidarity and local loyalties across family and economic divisions.²³ Enterprising notables (mediators between the imperial government and

sections of the local population) exerted patronage over specific neighborhoods and made them the cornerstones of their political careers, and, in the age of electoral politics, their electoral strongholds.²⁴

When combined with preconceptions about “Islamic” or “Middle Eastern culture,” such categories of idealized features easily led to very schematic accounts which portray the city as a conglomerate of village-like “quarters,”²⁵ thus leading to the ultimate characterization of a “compartmentalized” or “mosaic” society.²⁶ Even where culturalist assumptions are avoided, there is a strong bias in the scholarly literature on the urban history of Bilad al-Sham since practically all generalizations have been made on the basis of the two largest cities in the region, Damascus and Aleppo, and, more precisely, their central neighborhoods.

SAMPLE BIAS: DOMINANCE OF REGIONAL CAPITALS AND CITY CENTERS

For numerous authors, Damascus provided the classical example of neighborhood concepts in Bilad al-Sham, given its clear internal organization and longevity. The city was subdivided

18 Eugen Wirth, *Die orientalische Stadt im islamischen Vorderasien und Nordafrika*, 2 vols. (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2000), vol. 1, pp. 518–519.

19 Marcus, “Urban Experience,” p. 323; Abdel Nour, *Introduction*, p. 125.

20 Abu-Lughod, “The Islamic City,” p. 168; Lucienne Thys-Şenocak, “Space: Architecture, the Ottoman Empire,” *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 514–518.

21 Many neighborhoods had a mixed population, but there was a tendency for small-scale clustering. See T. H. Greenshields, “Quarters’ and Ethnicity,” in G. H. Blake and R. I. Lawless (eds.), *The Changing Middle Eastern City* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp. 120–140; Gudrun Krämer, *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 194–199; Abdel Nour, *Introduction*, p. 165.

22 Élise Massicard, “The Incomplete Civil Servant?, The Figure of the Neighbourhood Headman (Muhtar),” in Marc Aymes, Benjamin Gourisse und Élise Massicard (eds.), *Order and Compromise: Government Practices in Turkey from the Late Ottoman Empire to the Early 21st Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 276.

23 Charles L. Wilkins, *Forging Urban Solidarities: Ottoman Aleppo, 1640–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). Marcus, “Urban Experience,” p. 324; Abdel Nour, *Introduction*, pp. 167–168.

24 Albert Hourani, “Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables,” in William Polk and Richard Chambers (eds.), *Beginning of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 41–68. For a case study of early 20th-century Damascus, see Philip S. Khoury, “Abu Ali al-Kilawi: A Damascus Qabaday,” in Edmund Burke III and David N. Yaghoubian (eds.), *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 152–163.

25 Abdel Nour, *Introduction*, p. 155, rightfully criticizes Lapidus, Gibb and Bowen for having presented “the most schematic” accounts. See, for example, Hamilton Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West: A Study of the Impact of Western Civilization on Moslem Culture in the Near East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950–1957), vol. 1, p. 279; Ira Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 95.

26 Abdel Nour uses the term *société cloisonnée* (Abdel Nour, *Introduction*, p. 123). On the notion of mosaic society, see Johann Buessow and Astrid Meier, “Ottoman Corporatism, Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries: Beyond the State-Society Paradigm in Middle Eastern History,” in Bettina Gräf, Birgit Krawietz and Schirin Amir-Moazami (eds.), *Ways of Knowing Muslim Cultures and Societies: Studies in Honour of Gudrun Krämer* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 81–110.

into three levels. It had eight administrative boroughs (*athman*) that were each divided into more than a dozen neighborhoods (sg. *hara*, *mahalla*, *sayih*). These in turn were further divided into “sub-neighborhoods” (*dakhla* or *zuqaq*); i.e., clusters of buildings around a particular street that gave the sub-neighborhood its name.²⁷ However, this three-tier system in Damascus was in fact an exception. The neighborhood organization in Bilad al-Sham’s northern metropolis, Aleppo, was much more typical, with a two-tier system comprised of neighborhoods subdivided into multiple sub-neighborhoods.²⁸ With regard to neighborhood boundaries, authors studying other cases, such as Jerusalem or Hama, have noted a much greater fluidity than in Damascus.²⁹ In 19th-century Jerusalem, for instance, neighborhoods were not separated by walls and gates, nor were they religiously and ethnically segregated, despite tendencies toward clustering and segregation on the level of the house and immediate neighbors.³⁰ Only two main market streets are reported to have been sealed off by wooden gates at night until the 1870s.³¹

One type of neighborhood that has been widely neglected in the frequently cited studies on Ottoman cities is the suburb. Brigitte Marino’s detailed study on the Midan suburb of Damascus shows that this neighborhood was shaped to a considerable extent by its function as the stronghold of grain traders, who maintained independent ties with grain producers in the Hawran region and were able to harness their economic clout for political purposes.³² Suburbs were often difficult for the Ottoman government and the elite families in the city centers to control. During the 1830s, for ex-

ample, the Midan neighborhood became the main stronghold of anti-government rebels in Damascus.³³ Thus, special relations with rural groups and the presence of opposition forces account for many of Midan’s special features. Similar observations have been made with regard to the suburban Bab al-Nayrab neighborhood of Aleppo.³⁴ During the second half of the 19th century, suburbs of a new type emerged in many cities of Bilad al-Sham. These responded chiefly to the needs of urban businesses and wealthier households to escape the old walled and congested city centers. The neighborhoods of Zuqaq al-Blat in Beirut³⁵ and Shaykh Jarrah in Jerusalem³⁶ are two examples of this trend.

Another widespread type of suburban neighborhood consisted of small suburban settlements that formed an agglomeration in which the urban and rural social worlds intersected even more closely. These agglomerations were typically found in oasis settings, where favorable conditions allowed for intensive agriculture in the direct vicinity of the city, especially irrigated gardens and groves. In some locations, these gardens generated surplus income through export and the sale of goods to travelers, which, in turn, made some of their owners wealthy and sometimes encouraged migrant workers to settle there as well. Perhaps the oldest agglomeration in Ottoman Bilad al-Sham was the *Ghuta* (“basin”) region around Damascus, which existed since Antiquity. It owed its existence to the Barada and ‘Awaj rivers, advantageous water-table levels, and a system of irrigation channels that fanned out in the natural depression around

27 Abdel Nour, *Introduction*, pp. 158–160.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

29 For Jerusalem, see Salim Tamari, “Jerusalem’s Ottoman Modernity: The Times and Lives of Wasif Jawhariyyeh,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 9 (2000), p. 8; for Hama, James A. Reilly, *A Small Town in Syria: Ottoman Hama in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002).

30 Buessow, *Hamidian Palestine*, pp. 149–150; Campos, “Mapping Urban ‘Mixing.’”

31 Moshe Avraham Luncz, *Luah Erets Yisra’el* [Palestine Yearbook], vol. 15 (Jerusalem: The author, 1909), p. 10 [in Hebrew].

32 Brigitte Marino, *Le faubourg du Midān à Damas à l’époque ottoman: Espace urbain, société et habitat, 1742–1830* (Damascus: Institut français d’études arabes de Damas, 1997).

33 Johann Buessow, “Street Politics in Damascus: Kinship and other Social Categories as Bases of Political Action, 1830–1841,” *History of the Family* 16/2 (2011), pp. 108–25; Buessow and Safi, *Damascus Affairs*.

34 Feras Krimsti, *Die Unruhen von 1850 in Aleppo: Gewalt im urbanen Raum* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2014); see also Krimsti’s chapter in this volume.

35 Ralph Bodenstern, “The Making and Remaking of Zokak El-Blat: A History of the Urban Fabric,” in Hans Gebhardt et al., *History, Space, and Social Conflict in Beirut: The Quarter of Zokak el-Blat* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2005), pp. 35–107.

36 Shimon Landman, *Ahya’ ayan al-Quds kharij aswariha fi l-qarn al-tasi’ ashir* [The Neighborhoods of Jerusalem Extra Muros during the 19th Century] (Tel Aviv: Dar al-Nashr al-‘Arabi, 1984), pp. 32–46 [in Arabic]; Ruth Kark and Michal Oren-Nordheim, *Jerusalem and its Environs: Quarters, Neighborhoods, Villages, 1800–1848* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2001), pp. 122–125.

Damascus and provided water for dozens of villages.³⁷ Some of them gradually took on the characteristics of urban life, including mosques and bathhouses.³⁸ Water management and economic ties to Damascene markets linked the Ghuta villages or suburbs firmly to Damascus and its politics.³⁹

During the second half of the 19th century, villages and farmland expanded greatly. The port city of Jaffa is another, slightly different case in point.⁴⁰ From the beginning of the 19th century, large amounts of fallow but fertile lands and, later in the century, highly profitable export-oriented orange groves attracted migrants to settle in already existing villages and new settlements. These settlements of rural workers, often originating from Egypt, were called *saknat* (roughly: “settlements”) in local Arabic usage.⁴¹ Simultaneously, new suburbs enlarged the old walled city center along the coast. Some of the *saknat* merged with this new city center in the subsequent decades, such as Saknat al-Jabaliyya in the south, which became part of the ‘Ajami neighborhood, and, on the other side of town, a settlement known as the “Egyptian Colony” grew into the Manshiyya neighborhood.⁴² As early as 1910, the whole plain between Jaffa and the neighboring towns of Ramla and Lydda had been transformed into an agglomeration.⁴³ Haifa, Jaffa’s northern

competitor as a port city, was located in a different agricultural landscape, but its development was marked by the same phenomena: the founding of new suburbs by residents of the old city center as well as rural immigration and the forming of an agglomeration with rural settlements in the vicinity.⁴⁴

THE NEED TO TAKE CHANGING POLITICAL FRAMEWORKS INTO ACCOUNT: FROM THE OTTOMAN OLD REGIME PATCHWORK TO STANDARDIZATION

It is not only the diversity of neighborhood patterns that needs to be better understood, but also the dynamism of the political frameworks in which they were embedded. A recent scholarly debate on neighborhoods has revolved around the mechanisms of urban governance in the transition from the Ottoman old regime to the period of modern municipalities.⁴⁵ Nora Lafi details how, in the mid-19th century, Tunis neighborhood headmen in the city *intra muros* reported to a city headman (*shaykh al-madina*), while suburban neighborhoods had their own independent headmen.⁴⁶ Avner Wishnitzer and others have pointed to the centrality of neighborhoods for ensur-

37 For studies on the Ghuta, see Eugen Wirth, *Syrien: Eine geographische Landeskunde* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), pp. 403–406.

38 Astrid Meier, “Bathhouses in the Countryside of Ottoman Damascus: A Preliminary Enquiry,” in Marie-Françoise Boussac et al. (eds.), *25 siècles de bain collectif en Orient: Études urbaines* (Le Caire: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 2014), pp. 745–61.

39 Brigitte Marino and Astrid Meier, “L’eau à Damas et dans son environnement rural au xviii^e siècle,” *Bulletin d’Études Orientales* 61 (2012), pp. 363–428.

40 Evelin Dierauff, *Translating Late Ottoman Modernity in Palestine: Debates on Ethno-Confessional Relations and Identity in the Arab-Palestinian Newspaper Filastīn (1911–1914)* (Göttingen: VR unipress, 2020), pp. 117–153; Ruth Kark, *Jaffa: A City in Evolution, 1799–1917* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, Magnes Press, 1990).

41 E.g. Sakinat Abu Kabir, Sakinat Danayita. See Muhammad Salim al-Tarawina, *Qada’ Yafa fi l-ahd al-uthmani: Dirasa idariyya iqtisadiyya ijtimaiyya, 1281–1333h/1864–1914m* [The Subdistrict of Jaffa: An Administrative, Economic, and Social Study, 1281–1333h/1864–1914m] (Amman: Jordan Ministry of Culture, 2000) [in Arabic].

42 Dierauff, *Translating Late Ottoman Modernity*, pp. 147–148.

43 Buessow, *Hamidian Palestine*, p. 227. On the development of two suburbs in Lydda, see Tawfiq Da’adli’s chap-

ter in this volume.

44 Mahmoud Yazbak, *Haifa in the Late Ottoman Period, 1864–1914: A Muslim Town in Transition* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Naama Ben Ze’ev, “Ben kfar le-ir: Hayey mehagrim falestinim be-Heifa bi-tkufat ha-mandat [Between City and Countryside: Rural Palestinian Immigrants in Mandate Haifa]” (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University in the Negev, 2010) [in Hebrew].

45 For general information on this topic, see Nora Lafi (ed.), *Municipalités méditerranéennes: Les réformes urbaines ottomanes au miroir d’une histoire comparée (Moyen-Orient, Maghreb, Europe méridionale)*. ZMO Studien 21 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2005); idem, “The Ottoman Municipal Reforms between Old Regime and Modernity: Towards a New Interpretative Paradigm,” *First Eminönü International Symposium* (Istanbul: Eminönü Belediyesi, 2007), pp. 448–455. For an exemplary discussion of this transition in Jerusalem, see Yasemin Avcı and Vincent Lemire, “De la modernité administrative à la modernisation urbaine: Une réévaluation de la municipalité ottomane de Jérusalem (1867–1917),” in Nora Lafi (ed.), *Municipalités méditerranéennes*, p. 232.

46 Nora Lafi, “Les pouvoirs urbains à Tunis à la fin de l’époque ottomane: La persistance de l’ancien régime,” in Nora Lafi (ed.), *Municipalités méditerranéennes*, pp. 229–254.

ing the inhabitants safety in the city at night, which was implemented through institutions such as neighborhood watchmen, informal neighborhood detention facilities and neighborhood gates.⁴⁷ Stefan Knost, in a study of Aleppo, describes neighborhood endowments, which were typically referred to in Arabic as *waqf nuqud al-mahalla*, “cash *waqf* of a neighborhood,”⁴⁸ and were used to finance public utilities such as security and water management. These enabled neighborhood councils to hire personnel in charge of utilities which thus turned them into central institutions of governance on the neighborhood level. In addition, numerous studies of specific cities have shed light on characteristic features that defined certain neighborhoods. Charles Wilkins, who studied 17th-century Aleppo, examined neighborhood residents’ strategies, at both the personal and collective levels, to deal with the Ottoman state’s tax demands.⁴⁹ Linda Schatkowski Schilcher discussed the politicization of neighborhoods in 19th-century Damascus.⁵⁰ Buessow described the responsibilities and world of an Arab Orthodox neighborhood *muhtar* in Jerusalem around 1900.⁵¹

Whereas Antoine Abdel Nour in 1982 still stated that “[t]he internal life of the neighborhoods almost totally escapes us,”⁵² this field of study has made progress in concretizing earlier general assumptions about neighborhoods as political entities. Cem Behar’s micro-history of a small Istanbul neighborhood is perhaps the most important milestone to date.⁵³ Future

studies should aim to reconstruct the competences and activity profiles of neighborhood representatives, such as *shaykhs*, *muhtars*, *imams*, and other religious-administrative functionaries vis-à-vis the Ottoman state, aside from the notables who figure so prominently in the literature.⁵⁴

Research indicates that administration and politics on both levels typically revolved around the *shaykh al-hara*, the sub-neighborhood headman and/or the *imam* or other religious community leaders. These neighborhood representatives were backed by an assembly of elders and influential people. The competences of the *shaykh al-hara* and the religious community leaders on the sub-neighborhood level were apparently never formally defined until the 1830s, but they are frequently mentioned in Ottoman administrative correspondence and they certainly fulfilled a number of important functions, such as the collection of taxes, the financing of the city’s security forces, verification of water provision and street cleaning, and supervision of the night watchmen. Together with leading *‘ulama’*, the neighborhood headmen are known to have formed ad hoc assemblies to decide their city’s political fate in times of crisis. Further proof of their political importance comes from the fact that new rulers often took the trouble to replace them to guarantee their loyalty. The *shaykh*, *imam* and the neighborhood assembly were also able to deny residence in their sub-neighborhood to people they deemed undesirable.⁵⁵

In the 19th century, reforms implemented by the Ottoman state made the neighborhood an important element of its administration. This was codified in the Vilayet Law of 1864 and detailed in a number of subsequent laws.⁵⁶ These laws mainly defined two institutions: the *muhtar* and the council of elders. These were elected by “communities,” whether urban neighborhoods, villages, or ethno-religious communities. The institution of the *muhtarship*

47 See Avner Wishnitzer, “Eyes in the Dark: Nightlife and Visual Regimes in Late Ottoman Istanbul,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 2 (2017), pp. 245–261. For similar observations on Jerusalem, see Johann Buessow, “Ottoman Reform and Urban Government in the District of Jerusalem, 1867–1917,” in Ulrike Freitag and Nora Lafi (eds.), *Urban Governance under the Ottomans: Between Cosmopolitanism and Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 100.

48 Knost, *Die Organisation des religiösen Raums*, p. 217.

49 Wilkins, *Forging Urban Solidarities*.

50 Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, *Berliner Islamstudien* 2 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1985); see also Buessow and Safi, *Damascus Affairs*.

51 Buessow, *Hamidian Palestine*, pp. 168–192.

52 Abdel Nour, *Introduction*, p. 161.

53 Cem Behar, *A Neighborhood in Ottoman Istanbul: Fruit Vendors and Civil Servants in the Kasap Ilyas Mahalle* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003).

54 For a recent contribution, see Élise Massicard, “Incomplete Civil Servant?”

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 162–164. Interestingly, Abraham Marcus found that in 18th-century Aleppo, the term *imam* was used as a generic word for neighborhood headmen and that there were Christian headmen called “*imams*.” Marcus, “Urban Experience,” p. 325.

56 The following is based on George Young, *Corps de droit ottoman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905–1906), vol. 1.

(Turk. *muhtarlık*) was first created and tested in Istanbul in 1829, introduced in several provinces during the 1830s, and generalized by the Vilayet Law of 1864. *Imams* and other religious leaders were thereby relegated to second fiddle but maintained important functions.⁵⁷

According to the Vilayet Law, a given community of more than twenty houses was to have two *muhtars*. They were to be elected locally every year and be confirmed by the subdistrict governor (*kaymakam*).⁵⁸ Whenever these categories overlapped, there were several kinds of *muhtars* in one locality. For example, if a neighborhood was composed of Muslim and Greek Orthodox inhabitants, there were to be the *muhtars* of the neighborhood and *muhtars* representing the local Greek Orthodox. If a village was subdivided into separate neighborhoods and/or ethno-religious communities, each was represented by its own *muhtars*.⁵⁹ Their duties and competences were varied and far-reaching. They controlled the movement of citizens, issued certificates of good behavior, communicated new government laws and regulations, and helped with taxation, conscription, street cleaning, and account keeping on the neighborhood level. In particular, they communicated all kinds of information to the authorities.⁶⁰

Neighborhood or community *muhtars*' decision making was based on consultation with the council of elders (*ihtiyariye*) which was elected together with them. *Imams* and (unspecified) religious authorities of Christian

and Jewish communities were *ex officio* members of this council. The list of topics that the council of elders was entitled to deliberate on, including taxation, public health, and mediation in local conflicts, shows that the Ottoman lawmakers saw them as akin to a micro municipality.⁶¹

Alongside their administrative tasks, the council members were expected to guarantee safety and the protection of the honor and property of their community's inhabitants, for example, in delicate situations where Ottoman state agencies were in conflict with citizens of foreign powers. Thus, if there was no consular agent in the vicinity, three members of the council accompanied Ottoman officials when they entered the house of a foreign citizen. Similarly, they could act as mediators in disputes involving foreigners.⁶² They were also to provide checks and balances to guard against possible misconduct on the part of the headman. If the *muhtar* breached the rules, neighborhood inhabitants addressed *imams* and elders, who conveyed their complaints to the provincial government.⁶³ In municipal elections, *muhtars* were elected as members of the electoral commission (*encümen*).⁶⁴

This long list of the neighborhood headmen's qualifications and duties made them akin to civil servants at the lowest level of the administration. The *muhtarlık* was, however, a "hybrid and intermediary" institution,⁶⁵ since, at the same time, the headmen were also *representatives* of the neighborhood's inhabitants. Their authority did not rest on executive powers but rather on their local reputation and their ability to channel crucial information "upwards" to the government and "downwards" to the inhabitants. In cases of grievance, they were expected to voice the complaints of their constituencies or individual members.⁶⁶ Thus,

57 The most detailed summary on the state of the art in research on the *muhtarlık* to date is Massicard, "Incomplete Civil Servant?." The presentation of Ottoman laws in what follows is based on Young, *Corps de droit ottoman*, vol. 1.

58 Vilayet Law, articles 54–55, 62; Young, *Corps de droit*, vol. 1, p. 42. Communities of fewer than twenty houses only had one *muhtar*. Since a neighborhood was defined as consisting of a minimum of 50 houses (Vilayet Law, article 5; Young, *Corps de droit*, vol. 1, p. 67), neighborhoods were by definition to be headed by two *muhtars*. The process of electing members of the municipality (*belediye*) was also organized on the neighborhood level: electoral committees prepared lists of eligible candidates, which were posted on the doors of neighborhood mosques and other religious gathering places (Vilayet Law, article 23; Young, *Corps de droit*, vol. 1, p. 45).

59 Vilayet Law, articles 8 and 15; Young, *Corps de droit*, vol. 1, p. 84.

60 Vilayet Law, articles 8 and 15; Young, *Corps de droit*, vol. 1, p. 42; Massicard, "Incomplete Civil Servant?," pp. 260–262.

61 *Ibid.*

62 This is detailed in the law of 1868 that regulated the property rights of foreigners. See Protocole. 7 Sef. 1285 / 9 juin 1868. En vertu duquel les étrangers peuvent être admis à la jouissance du droit de propriété; Young, *Corps de droit*, vol. 1, p. 342.

63 Massicard, "Incomplete Civil Servant?," p. 260.

64 *Filastin*, 194, p. 3.

65 Massicard, "Incomplete Civil Servant?," p. 263.

66 A study of petitions sent from Ottoman Palestine to Istanbul in the last quarter of the 19th century shows that numerous petitions which were sent from the sub-district (*kaza*) of Gaza to Istanbul were also signed by *muhtars* of villages with respect to issues of mutual concern,

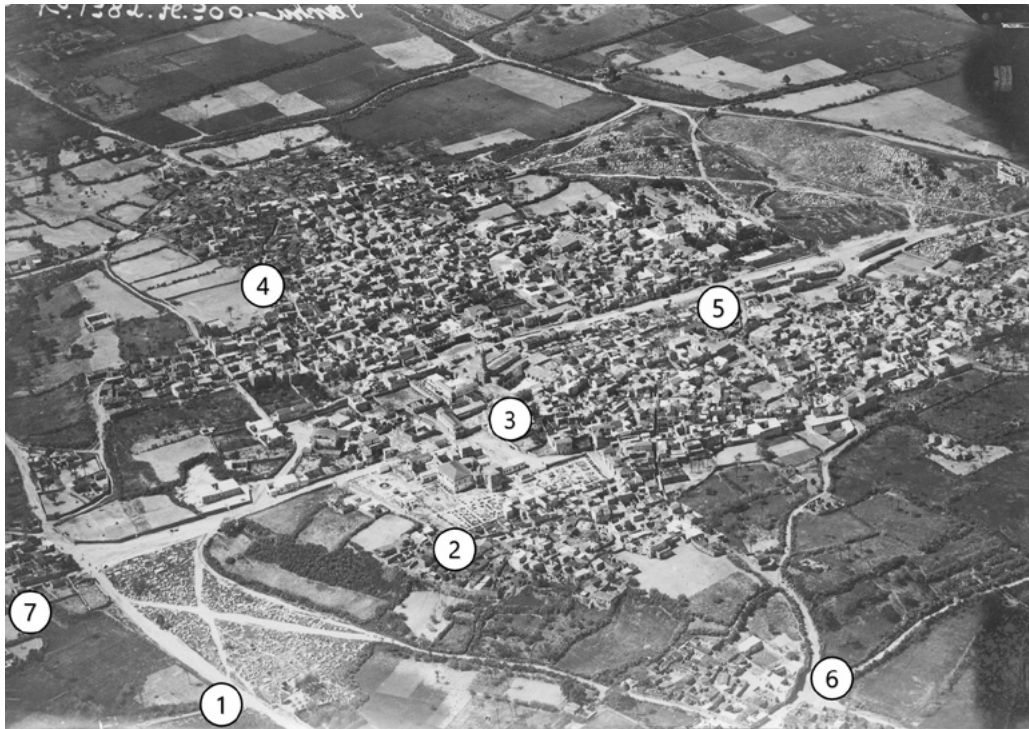


Figure 1: Gaza's Old City Center seen from the Northeast. Note the Cairo-Damascus road at the lower left (1). Situated front center is the Daraj neighborhood with the Government Compound (2) and the Grand Mosque (3), behind it is the Zaytun neighborhood (4). Between them, pointing towards the sea, lies Cemal (Jamal) Paşa Boulevard (5), which was built during World War I. Parts of two suburbs are visible in the lower half of the image: Tuffah (6) and Shaja'iyya/Turkuman (7). The image was taken around 1916, probably by the British Royal Air Force.

Source: Central Zionist Archive (CZA), PIC 65479.

starting from the 1860s, a patchwork of local customs in neighborhood governance gave way to standardized administrative procedures. By 1900, the state had insinuated itself into the most intimate sphere of the *hara*. At the same time, this transition was uneven and incomplete. Certain forms of old regime urban governance were still alive and partly accounted for local variations.

Given the diversity of neighborhoods over space and time, some specialists have called for modifications of the idealized types formulated by Antoine Abdel Nour, Eugen Wirth and others, while others have concluded that generalizations should be avoided altogether.⁶⁷ Our position is that idealized categories

are not the right place to initiate a study of neighborhoods, especially if the claims rest solely on partial evidence from architectural history and literary sources. Instead, we suggest a wider range of research questions that target crucial phenomena at the core of urban development, while maintaining comparisons between cities as a heuristic device. Future studies should strive to exploit the wealth of sources available today, especially archival and visual sources, and make use of the advantages of digital methods wherever this proves useful.⁶⁸ The following section takes the case of Gaza to revisit the classical arguments concerning neighborhoods in Bilad al-Sham and

such as taxes, lands, infrastructure, maladministration, conscription, and the like. Yuval Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan: Protests and Justice in Late Ottoman Palestine* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), chapter 4.

⁶⁷ The latter position is put forward in Ephem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters, *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul* (New York:

Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁶⁸ For a more detailed discussion of research methodologies in Ottoman urban studies, see Yuval Ben-Bassat and Johann Buessow, "Applying Digital Methods to the Urban History of the Modern Middle East: GIS Analysis of the Social Basis of Political Partisanship in Late Ottoman Gaza," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 63/4 (2020), pp. 505–554.

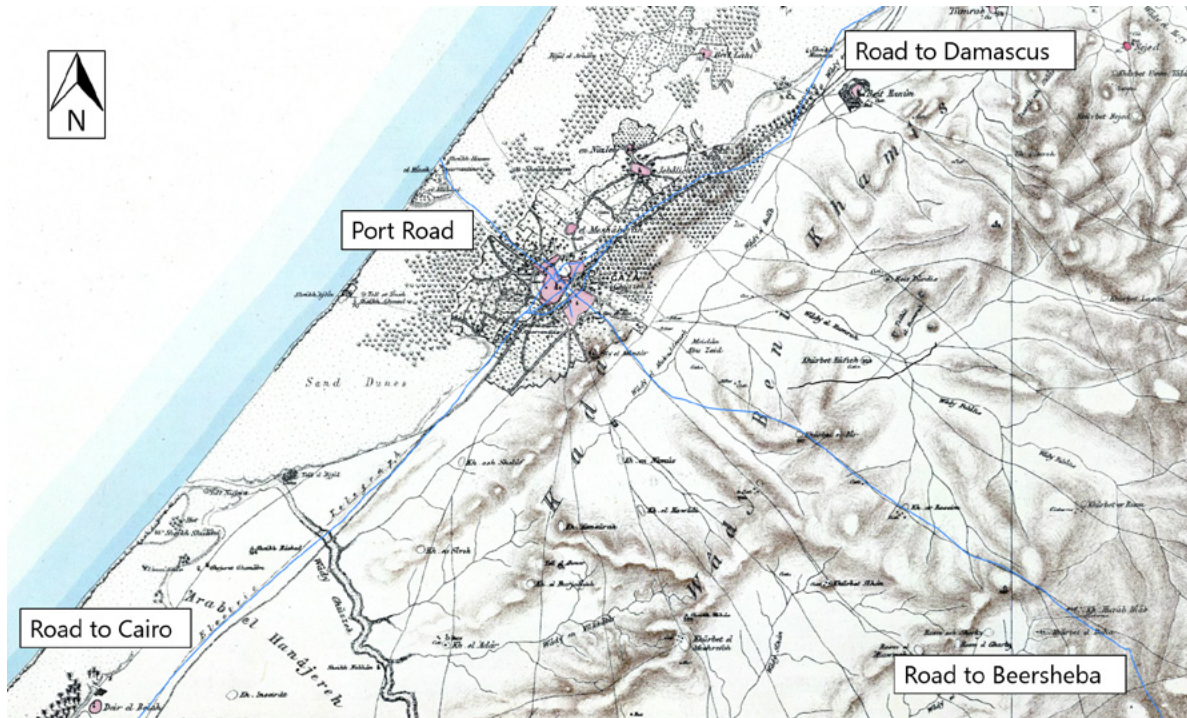


Figure 2: Gaza's Position at the Crossroads of Two Overland Roads. Note Gaza's insular position, its agricultural oasis and its symmetric layout around the crossroads.

Source: Based on the Palestine Exploration Fund, sheets 23–24, 1879 (surveyed and drawn under the supervision of Lieut. C.R. Conder and Lieut. H.H. Kitchener in May 1878).

discusses possible avenues for future comparative research.

GAZA'S NEIGHBORHOODS: URBAN MORPHOLOGY, ADMINISTRATION AND POLITICS

Gaza is still one of the major blanks on the historiographical map of late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham. From the little we know, many inhabitants of Gaza, members of the local elite as well as commoners, were involved in two rival coalitions, based in the two largest neighborhoods, at opposite ends of the city. Although we have examined Gaza's factionalism elsewhere, the discussion here is embedded in an analysis of the city's morphology and its economic and social makeup. An aerial photograph from the period of World War I provides a vivid depiction of Gaza's old city center (see Figure 1).

GAZA'S URBAN LAYOUT: A CITY OF FLOWS

Gaza's urban layout can largely be explained by the crossing of two roads used for commerce and travel. One was the main overland road (*tariq sultani*) between Cairo and Damascus. The other was a secondary road connecting the northern Negev and the Arabian Peninsula with the Mediterranean shore (see Figure 2).

Gaza's five main inner-city thoroughfares (referred to as *khatt*, *shari'*, or *tariq*, depending on the sources) ran largely parallel to these two roads and met in the city center near the government compound and the main overland road (see Figure 3). (1) The main continuous inner-city traffic artery connected the seaward end of Daraj with the inland tip of Shaja'iyya. At the seaward end, Gaza's Grand Market (al-Suq al-Kabir) also constituted the boundary between the Daraj and Zaytun neighborhoods. South of the main overland road, it continued as Shari' al-Hammam and Shari' Abu Sahmud.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ British Map of Gaza, 1928; the modern-day names

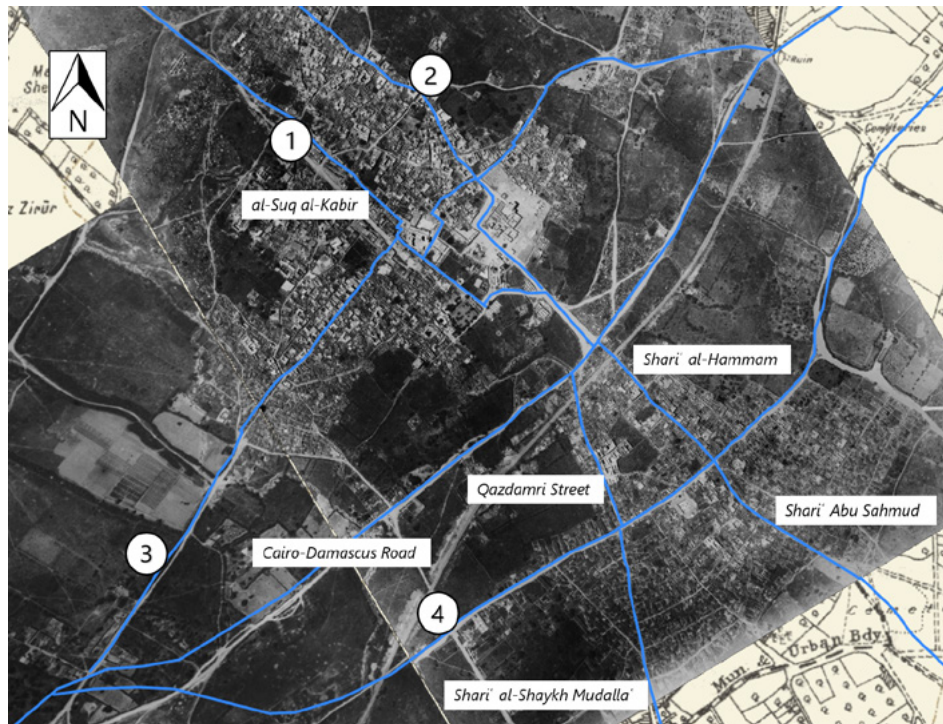


Figure 3: Gaza's Main Thoroughfares. The numbers refer to the description above. Source: Aerial photograph taken by the Bavarian Aerial Squadron on 28 May 1918, at 12:10 PM, Bavarian State Archive (BayHStA) BS-Palästina 463, Munich, Germany.

(2) The street parallel to it on the seaward side connected the Sayyid Hashim Mosque to the main overland road and was known by various names that related to landmarks and prominent families along the road.⁷⁰ (3) The street parallel to it on the inland side was Qazdamri Street in Shaja'iyya (named after the Taqizdamuri/Qazdamri Mosque) and continued as Shari' al-Shaykh al-Mudalla', from where it led to Gaza's landmark hill, Jabal al-Muntar.⁷¹ The

grid of thoroughfares was completed by two offshoots from the Cairo-Damascus road, which both constituted important commercial streets. (4) Looking from the Cairo end of the road, one fork went towards the sea, ran through the neighborhood of Zaytun, zig-zagged through the central business district in Daraj, and then continued through Tuffah neighborhood, after which it rejoined the main road. (5) Once again from the Cairo end of the main overland road, another fork branched in an inland direction and ran through the Shaja'iyya neighborhood, where it became the main commercial street of this part of town, Suq al-Shaja'iyya. It then passed through open fields to rejoin the Cairo-Damascus road.

Thus, Gaza's urban morphology was traffic-oriented. It seems likely that flows of people and goods along the main caravan route and between the city and its rural hinterland were the main rationale for the layout of its neighborhoods. In earlier periods, defense had been another decisive factor in the city's layout. Georg Gatt's map of 1888 indicates the outline of the old city walls, which encircled a much smaller and more compact city (see Figure 4). From the

are al-Wahda Street for the part running through Daraj and Baghdad Street for the part running through Shaja'iyya. Al-Wahda Street branches off west of the main Salah al-Din Road which runs north-south through the Gaza Strip and opens onto Nasser Street just before it ends at al-Shifa Hospital. See David Winter and John Matthews, *Israel Handbook: With the Palestinian Authority Areas* (Chicago, IL: Footprint Handbooks, 1998), p. 462.

⁷⁰ From north to south: Sibat al-Mufti (or alternatively: Harat al-Sayyid Hashim), Shaykh Faraj, Abu Ramadan, Dabuja, Saraya, Baladiyya and Abu l-'Azim Street. Sources: British map of Gaza, 1928; Salim 'Arafat al-Mubayyid, *al-Binayat al-athariyya al-islamiyya fi Ghazza wa-qitaiha* [The Historical Islamic Buildings in Gaza and its Region] (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-l-Kitab, 1987) pp. 327–328 [in Arabic].

⁷¹ Renamed al-Shawwa Street in the early 20th century (see British map of Gaza, 1928).

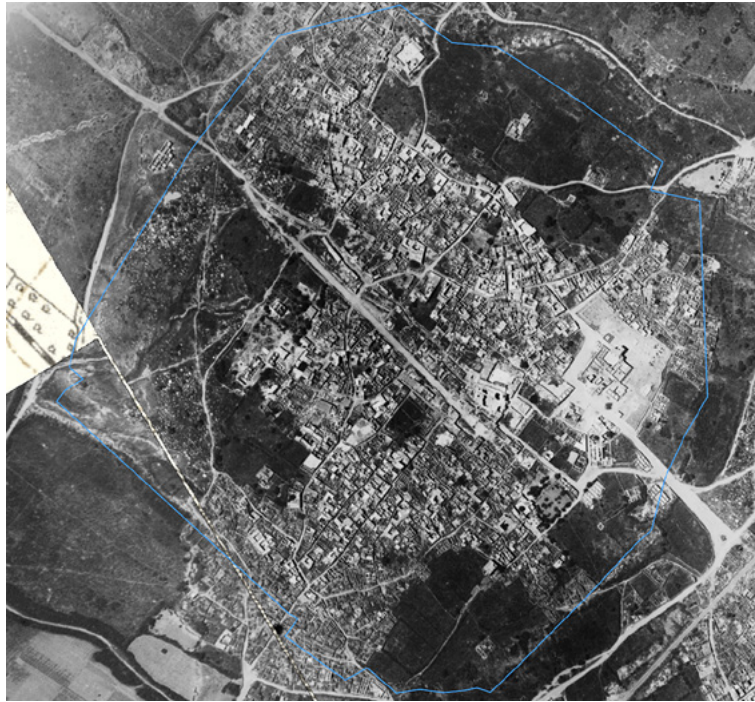


Figure 4: The Line of Gaza's Former Fortifications according to Gatt's Map of 1888 Projected onto an Aerial Photograph.

Source: Georg Gatt, "Legende zum Plane von Gaza," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 11 (1888), p. 150; image: BayHStA) BS-Palästina 463.

Mamluk period onwards, however, these walls had fallen into disuse and the city had spread out along the two traffic axes, developing into an urban agglomeration.

Since Gaza's population only grew at a moderate pace during the 19th century, reaching some 20,000–25,000 people around the turn of the century, the few peripheral or suburban neighborhoods that emerged typically developed along cul-de-sacs leading off the main thoroughfares. One example is Mashahira, a satellite settlement in the Tuffah neighborhood that was situated on the road to the village of Jabaliyya. Another example is the 'Awamid neighborhood (*Harat al-'Awamid*) at the entrance to Zaytun, whose modest beginnings are visible in aerial photographs from World War I. On the British map of 1931, however, 'Awamid appears as a full-fledged little suburb (Figure 5). A third case is Hillis: a peripheral sub-neighborhood of Shaja'iyya that was named after a large family of the same name (Figures 5 and 17).

Nevertheless, the urban sprawl was limited by the need to protect the surrounding fertile agricultural land. Data on occupations in the

Ottoman census suggest that the majority of the population in all neighborhoods earned their living from agriculture. In that sense, Gaza was as much a farm town as a merchant city, which made the boundaries between city and countryside fluid and permeable. The mudbrick architecture on the fringes of the city was hardly different from the villages of the rural hinterland.

Several thousand people must have commuted every day between their dwellings in the city and the gardens and fields in the hinterland where they worked. Many of these town-dwelling peasants were rural emigrants or the offspring of rural emigrants. This strongly suggests much closer cooperation between town-dwellers, peasants and Bedouins than in most other cities in the region. Bedouins were essential for the security of trade routes and farmlands in the region, and Gaza's merchants, artisans, and peasants could only thrive if they cooperated with them. City or neighborhood fortifications would not have been of much use and security had to be arranged through cooperation with the Bedouins.



Figure 5: The Rural *haras* of al-Awamid, Hillis, and Mashahira.
Sources: British map of Gaza, 1931, NLI, 2366965; BayH-StA, BS-Palästina 463.

VARYING NEIGHBORHOOD TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Depending on their specific perspectives, contemporaries report different numbers and names for Gaza's urban subdivisions. The local terminology for neighborhoods is documented in the volumes of the city's Shari'a court records available today, which cover the years 1857–1861 and mention seven neighborhoods (sg. *hara*).⁷² The local Muslim scholar 'Uthman al-Tabba' (1882–1951), whose manuscript on *Gaza Ithaf al-a'izza* dates to 1911, counted only four neighborhoods (sg. *mahalla*).⁷³ Another version emerges from a detailed report published in 1888 by the Austrian Catholic priest Georg Gatt (1843–1924), who cites a member of the municipal administration as his main in-

72 Abdul-Karim Rafeq [Abd al-Karim Rafiq], *Ghazza: Dirasa 'umraniyya wa-ijtimaiyya wa-iqtisadiyya min khilal al-watha'iq al-shariyya 1273–77/1857–61* [Gaza: A Demographic, Social, and Economic Study based on the Shari'a Court Records 1273–77/1857–61] (Damascus and Amman: N.P., 1980), pp. 12–13 [in Arabic].

73 Al-Tabba', *Ithaf*, vol. 2, pp. 94–99.

formant.⁷⁴ Although Gatt designates the same four main neighborhoods of Gaza, he also draws in five sub-neighborhoods, based on religious and ethnic identities. For example, the Daraj neighborhood is partly designated as Harat al-Muslimin and Harat Bani 'Amir on his map, and sections of Zaytun neighborhood are designated as Harat al-Nasara (the Christian quarter) and Harat al-Yahud (the Jewish quarter).⁷⁵

The image emerging from these sources is one of a flexible usage of names that was apparently informed by multiple local traditions and differing needs. Whereas, for example, Tabba' likely wanted to convey a coherent and memorable image of their city, the clerks in the Shari'a court noted finer spatial divisions that mattered in court cases; Gatt's sub-neighborhoods testify to his interest in religious and ethnic divisions in the city.

The 1905 Ottoman census officials translated this plurality of neighborhood terms into a strict two-tier system. They divided the city into only four neighborhoods (*mahalles*): Daraj, Zaytun, Tuffah, and Turkuman (better known as Shaja'iyya) (Figure 6). However, for administrative purposes, Shaja'iyya was subdivided into two parts: Turkuman, the central and wealthier part of the neighborhood, and Judayda, the neighborhood's northeast and poorer part.⁷⁶ Below the *mahalle* there were numerous sub-neighborhoods (sg. *zuqaq*, literally "street").⁷⁷ These blocks of houses apparently bordered on a specific thoroughfare.

74 Georg Gatt, "Legende zum Plane von Gaza," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 11 (1888), pp. 149–159.

75 When including these designations in his map, Gatt may have abstracted from local usage, or modelled them on Jerusalem, where he had previously resided. On Gatt, see Yuval Ben-Bassat and Johann Buessow, "Urban Factionalism in Late Ottoman Gaza, c. 1875–1914: Local Politics and Spatial Divisions," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61/4 (2018), pp. 633–634. On the conventions of ethno-religious quarter names in Jerusalem, see Buessow, *Hamidian Palestine*, pp. 165–166.

76 See, for example, the Gaza marriage register (ISA, Nufus, Reg. 279) and a petition signed by the neighborhood headmen of both Judayda and Turkuman (BOA, HR. MTV., 717/59, petition dated 14 Teşrinievvel 1311 [26 October 1895]).

77 The Ottoman census documents uniformly use the term *zuqaq* for streets or sub-neighborhoods in Gaza, while in other documents the terms *hara* and *shari'* are used as well.

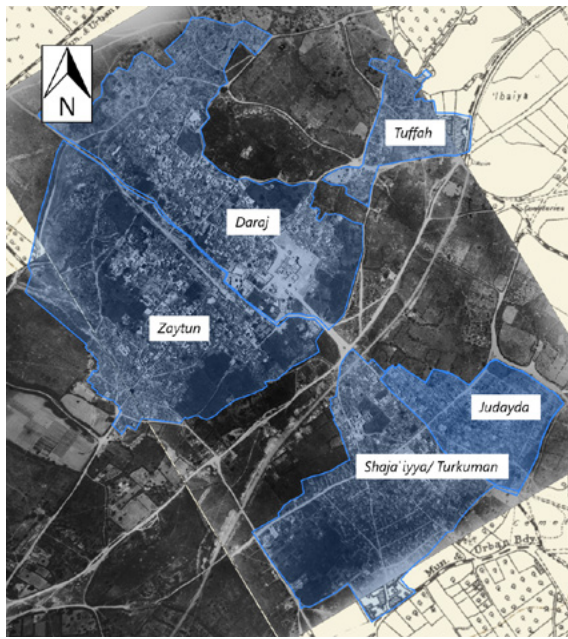


Figure 6: Gaza's Four Neighborhoods according to the Ottoman Census of 1905. Source: Aerial photo of Gaza taken in 1918 by the Bavarian Aerial Squadron, overlaid on a British map of Gaza, 1931.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FEATURES

Gaza's neighborhoods all contained a mixture of economic assets, such as shops, industries and gardens. Most of the wealth was concentrated in the central neighborhoods of Daraj and Zaytun. This was manifested in a repertoire of recurrent types of premises: trading firms (sg. *wikala*), trade centers (sg. *khan*), soap factories (sg. *masbana*), wells (sg. *saqiya*), and enclosed compounds or gardens (sg. *hakura*). Daraj and Zaytun also split the central market district in the old city center. The dividing line between the two neighborhoods ran through the middle of the Grand Market (*al-Suq al-Kabir*).

Most of the shops in the city markets belonged to the *waqf* endowments of the city's three Friday mosques: the Grand Mosque or 'U-mari Mosque (*al-Jami' al-Kabir al-Umari*) in the city's geographic center, next to the Government Compound, the Sayyid Hashim Mosque (*Jami' Sayyidina Hashim*) at the northern end of Daraj, and the Ibn 'Uthman Mosque (*Jami' Uthman Shihab al-Din*) in Shaja'iyya.⁷⁸ The mosques were

78 See evidence in the *waqf* registers (*Evkaf Defterleri*) in BOA, Ev. d., nr. 30710, 26 Şubat 1322 (11 March 1907), Gaza's *waqf* officer Halil to Jerusalem's Administrative Council.

therefore not only the most visible symbols of their neighborhood, but were financed by the business community who rented the shops belonging to them, and the *imams* and preachers (*khatibs*) employed by these mosques were most likely representatives of these interest groups. Large mansions (sg. *dar*) belonging to wealthy families, and religious establishments (mainly mosques and shrines, sg. *mazar*) were dotted over these central neighborhoods. In these mansions, the cultural ideal of privacy was realized in its purest form, whereas commoners mostly had to put up with confined living conditions and were less shielded from public gaze.

The Tuffah neighborhood, in contrast to Daraj and Zaytun, was a more rural suburb, with no major trading houses, or stately *dars*. More than one-half of the inhabitants in our sample whose professions were indicated were farmers or worked in agriculture.

The Shaja'iyya neighborhood was also more rural than the old city center, but it had two parts with markedly different profiles. The neighborhood's northern and central parts, including the Qazdamri area, the main market streets, and parts of Judayda, were characterized by a number of imposing stone houses and important institutions, notably the Ibn 'Uthman Mosque, including the many shops belonging to its endowment, and a public bath. All this made the northern part of Shaja'iyya a sort of an alternative city center, competing with the old center in Daraj and Zaytun. The southern and peripheral parts of Shaja'iyya, especially those along the outward roads to the northern Negev, were much poorer. They were often inhabited by rural emigrants where simple mudbrick houses predominated.

Did these social contrasts lead to differences in the reputation of neighborhoods and perhaps also to varying degrees of social distance and proximity? Were they 'social neighborhoods' that could serve as a focus of collective identities, or were they mere administrative entities? Marriages can be taken as a proxy for the intensity of social relations. We examined a sample of 100 marriages involving inhabitants of Gaza in a contemporary Ottoman marriage register.⁷⁹ In

79 Gaza marriage register, sample of 100 marriages registered between 1323/1907 and 1329/1913, ISA, Nü-

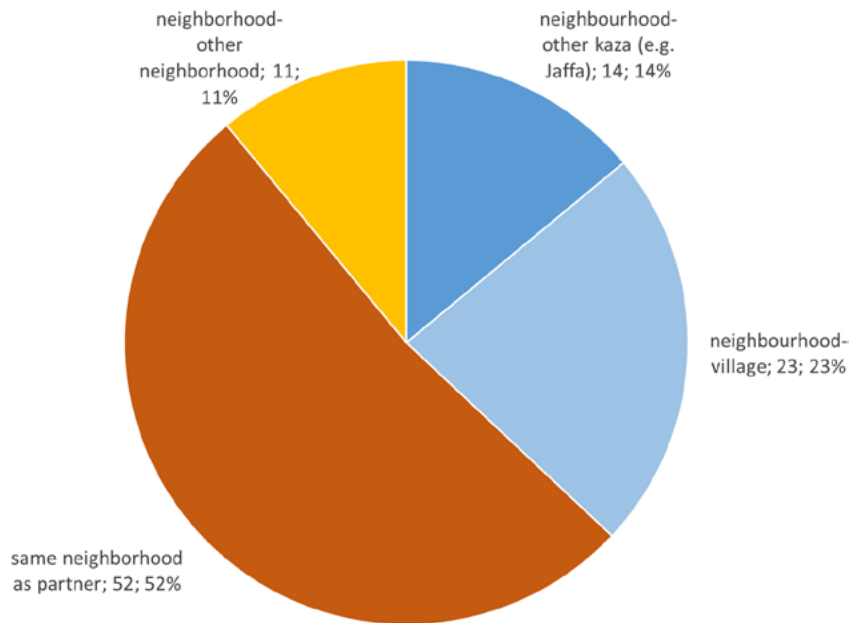


Figure 7: General Marriage Patterns in Late Ottoman Gaza.
Source: Sample of 100 cases from Marriage register (*münakahat mahsus vukuât defteri*) of Gaza 1908–1913, ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 279.

the register, we identified four categories of marriage relations: marriages in which both partners came from the same neighborhood (*mahalle*), marriages across neighborhood boundaries, marriages in which one partner originated from the city and the other from a village in the Gaza District, and, finally, marriages in which one partner came from Gaza and the other from another district (*kaza*) of the Ottoman Empire.

The distribution of these marriage types in our sample is surprisingly clear (Figure 7): by far the most marriages of Gazans (52%) were contracted with individuals from the same neighborhood. The second most common marriage pattern (23%) was between inhabitants of the city and the villages in the Gaza Subdistrict (*kaza*); i.e., in Gaza's agricultural hinterland. A smaller number of marriages (14%) were contracted with individuals from more remote locations, mostly from Jaffa and its *kaza*. The least common (11% of the cases) were cases of marriage within the city but *across* neighborhood boundaries. These numbers need to

be treated with some caution.⁸⁰ However, they suggest that Gaza's *mahalles* were social neighborhoods and not mere administrative entities. External relations, especially to the rural hinterland were very important, as well. Obviously, there were significantly fewer social relations across neighborhood boundaries than between residents of the same neighborhood and between neighborhoods and the rural hinterland.

Did the frequency of marriages, or social relations in general, differ between neighborhoods?⁸¹ The places where most people married within their own neighborhood were Daraj and Judayda (the eastern, poorer part of Shajaiyya) (Figure 8).

80 This topic needs further study based on a larger sample, and certain peculiarities in the census registers still need to be resolved. A control study of marriages in the basic census register (*esas defteri*) of the Zaytun neighborhood yielded similar results regarding the distribution of marriage types, with the exception that more marriages across neighborhood boundaries were registered (same neighborhood: 48%; other Gaza neighborhoods: 28%; villages of Gaza *kaza*: 12%; other *kazas* of the Ottoman Empire: 12%). Sample: 100 marriages recorded in the *esas defteri* of the Zaytun neighborhood, 1905–1917. ISA Nüfus, Reg. 261.

81 Based on 52 cases of marriages within the same neighborhood and the 11 cases of marriages across neighborhoods in our sample.

fus, Reg. 279. In our analysis, we excluded 6 cases of marriages involving members of the Greek Orthodox community, because their neighborhood of residence is not mentioned in the register.

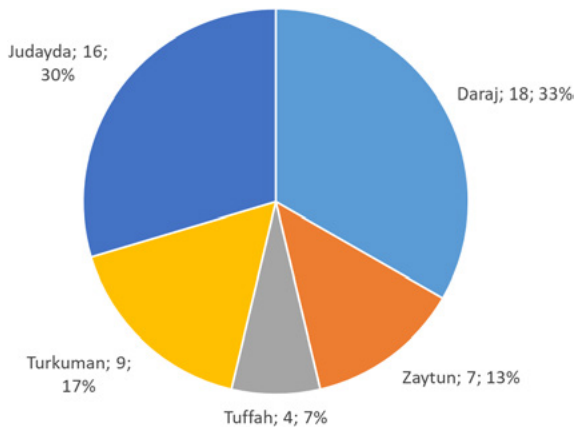


Figure 8: Marriages contracted between Individuals from the same Neighborhood.

Source: Sample of 54 cases from a Marriage register. ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 279.

Marriages contracted between inhabitants of *different* neighborhoods appear to have been influenced by cultural factors. As shown in Figure 9, there apparently were social boundaries in the city. There were no marriages between Daraj and Shaja'iyya (Turkuman and Judayda) or between Turkuman and Zaytun; more than one-half of the marriages between neighborhoods were connected to Shaja'iyya and about a third to Daraj. The only marriage that did not follow this pattern was one between individuals from Tuffah and Zaytun.

The overall image resulting from these marriage patterns is one of an urban society in which external relations were crucial to the rural hinterland, the city of Jaffa which was late Ottoman Palestine's main economic center, and more far-flung places. At the same time, people within the city tended to have their most important social ties within their own *mahalle*. Social ties across neighborhood boundaries were less common and were shaped by the duality of Daraj and Shaja'iyya. Apparently, there was not only a political but also a social cleavage between these two neighborhoods, alongside their competition as market centers.

As discussed above, Gaza's four *mahalles* each had a distinct social profile. However, there was much internal diversity. The wide variety of living conditions in sub-neighborhoods provide good examples of differences across four *haras*. We start with the Shaykh Ayyad area in the Daraj neighborhood (Figures 10 and 11).

SHAYKH 'AYYAD STREET (DARAJ NEIGHBORHOOD)

This small sub-neighborhood around a cul-de-sac was named after a Sufi Shaykh (*Zuqaq al-Shaykh 'Ayyad*), whose mausoleum formed a major landmark at its entrance. At its end towered Dar Abu Khadra, the huge residence of the landowner Isma'il Abu Khadra. Forty-seven inhabitants, including three other landowners and an accountant,⁸² lived in apartments around the courtyard of this impressive edifice, whose fortress-like walls and white cupolas are clearly visible on a contemporary aerial photograph (Figure 11).

The street was dominated by two large families. One was the Abu Khadras, most of whom lived in Dar Abu Khadra, next to other kin who lived in a separate smaller household. The second large family was the Turk family, who lived in seven households. The occupations mentioned for them – a merchant, a military officer, a veterinarian and a coffee seller – indicate a middle-class profile. Among the neighbors were people of more modest means, including two muleteers, a carpenter and a packer (*desteci*). On an aerial photograph (Figure 11), their small apartments look like a honeycomb between the mansions of the elite households and medium-sized houses that were probably inhabited by people like the Turk family. In total, the census lists 157 people who lived around this cul-de-sac, which was only about 40 meters long. This must have meant that most people, apart from the wealthiest, lived in very cramped conditions, with families sharing apartments built around communal facilities such as courtyards, wells, toilets, and stables.⁸³ In 1857, a member of the Abu Khadras bought two-thirds of a sesame mill and a residential building near their house, right at the entrance to Shaykh 'Ayyad Street, which made it even more "their" street. The remaining areas were jointly held by a Christian and a Muslim proprietor.⁸⁴

82 Our sample of the Ottoman census for the Shaykh 'Ayyad area includes 16 households. ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 253, p. 155. For more on the Abu Khadra family, see the chapter by Sarah Buessow in this volume.

83 For a description of living conditions in an inner-city house of Jerusalem, see al-Jawhariyya, *al-Quds al-uthmaniyya*, pp. 7–20, summarized in Buessow, *Hamidian Palestine*, p. 179.

84 Gaza *Sijill*, 25 Jumada al-Akhira 1273 [20 February 1857].

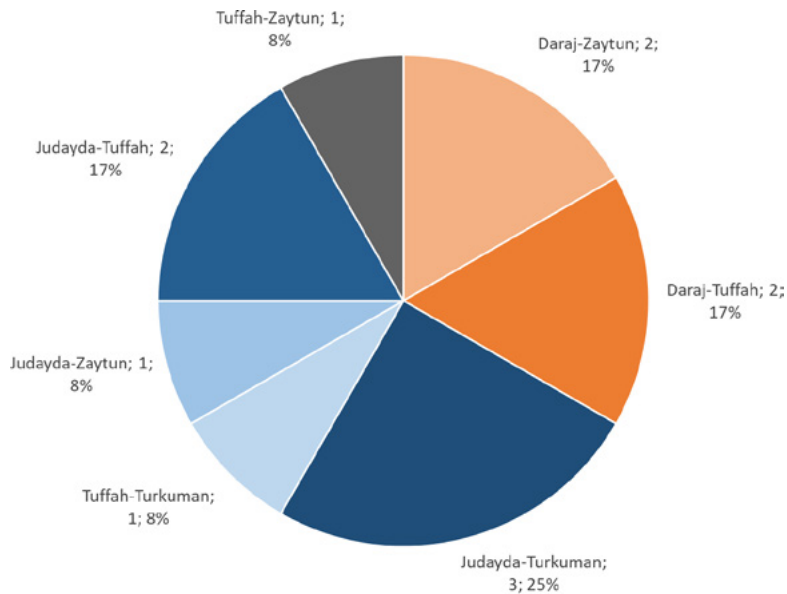


Figure 9: Marriages across Neighborhoods. Blue shading indicates marriages between individuals from Shaja'iyya, orange shading indicates marriages between individuals from Daraj. Source: Sample of 11 cases from ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 279 (Marriage register of Gaza, 1908–1913).

This situation was in many respects typical of an inner-city *hara* in Gaza at the time. With its high number of middle-class and elite households, Shaykh 'Ayyad can be regarded as an upmarket area of Gaza, but there was still a considerable degree of social mixing, with men of modest means living wall to wall with the rich and powerful. The case of the 1857 real estate sale noted above demonstrates that Christians and Muslims living in Gaza entered into business partnerships.⁸⁵ However, the Christian co-owner of the houses (whom we could not identify) probably lived in Zaytun, like all the non-Muslims we know of. Dar Abu Khadra is a clear example of wealthy households being mainly able to afford to live up to the cultural ideal of privacy. The concentration of the Abu Khadra and Turk families around the street testifies to the common tendency of residential clusters to form along kinship lines.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ On the political strategies of Gaza's elite families, see Sarah Buessow's chapter in this volume.

SHAYKH 'UTHMAN (ZAYTUN NEIGHBORHOOD)

Shaykh 'Uthman Street was located in the heart of the Zaytun neighborhood (Figures 12 and 13). In contrast to Shaykh 'Ayyad, it was rather large. Two main axes intersected in its center: Shaykh 'Uthman Street after which it was named, and Ra's al-Hara, the major east-west connection between the Cairo-Damascus road and the commercial center of Daraj. Shaykh 'Uthman Street connected the two parts of Gaza that formed the main centers of non-Muslim and foreign residents. At its southeastern end there was 'Ajami, home to a diverse population and the site of, *inter alia*, the Catholic parish established by the Austrian priest Georg Gatt (the author of Gaza's first published city map). At its northwestern end were the Katib al-Wilayat mosque, the Greek Orthodox church, and the large compound of the British Church Mission Society (CMS). Four smaller streets and several cul-de-sacs grouped around these two axes and provided quiet locations for a great number of grand urban mansions built by Christian and Muslim merchants (Figure 14).

In the available census records, 23 households are registered in this area. This only

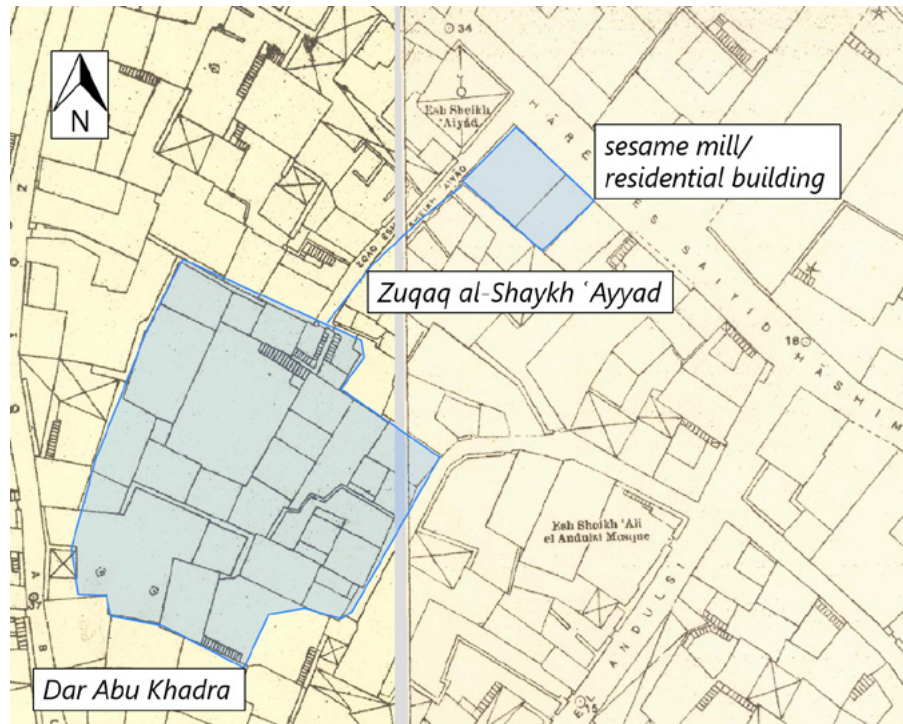


Figure 10: The Abu Khadra Family's Assets in Shaykh Ayyad Street.
Source: *Gaza Sijill*, p. 15; ISA, Nüfus; British map of Gaza, 1928, NLI, 2369509_01.

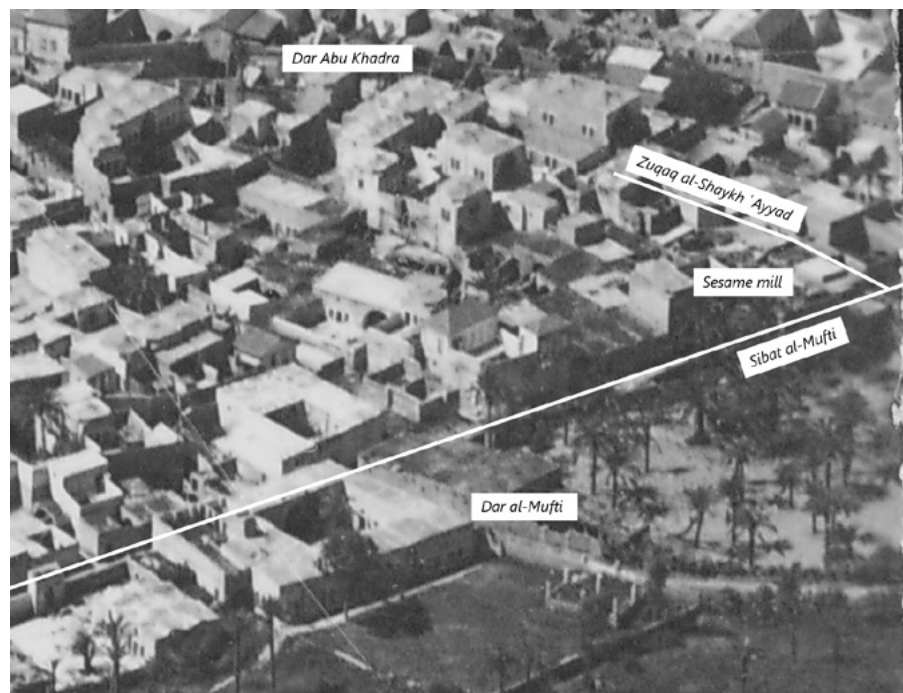


Figure 11: The Shaykh 'Ayyad Area with Dar Abu Khadra and Other Prominent Buildings, seen from the East. Note the two large mansions that belonged to the Husayni family, both known as *dar al-mufti*.
Source: *Gaza Sijill* 1858, p. 15; detail of aerial photograph c. 1916, CZA, PIC 65479.



Figure 12: The Shaykh 'Uthman Area in an Aerial Photograph. Source: Aerial photograph by the Bavarian Squadron (1918).

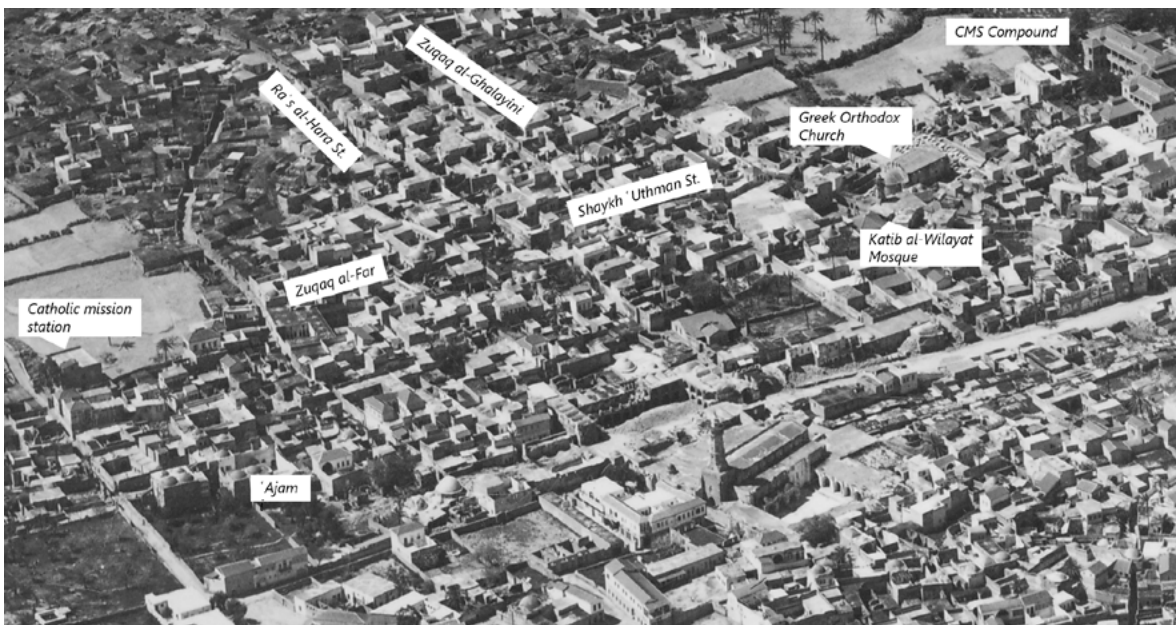


Figure 13: An Aerial Photo of Shaykh 'Uthman Area, looking West. Note the light stone houses in the central parts in contrast to the darker mud brick houses on the periphery. Source: Detail of aerial photograph c. 1916, CZA, PIC 65479.



Figure 14: The Shaykh 'Uthman Area with Prominent Buildings indicated by Georg Gatt (Himself a Resident of the Area). Note the *hakurat al-Latin* ("Latin Compound," i.e. Gatt's Catholic parish hall) at the bottom and the *hakurat al-Inkliz* ("British Compound," i.e., the CMS mission station) at the top of the image. The names Mas'ad, Turzi and Zarife (Zarifa) indicate residences of Christian families, whose census records could not be accessed for this study.

Source: Georg Gatt 1888.

provides a very incomplete picture of the neighborhood's social makeup, as the census lists for the sizable Christian population in the area are missing so we only have information about the Muslim inhabitants. The resulting image reveals phenomena already observed in Shaykh 'Ayyad, albeit on a larger scale. Two merchant families dominated the scene, the Fars and the Ghalayinis,⁸⁷ both with several extended households (most notably that of the merchant Hajj 'Ali al-Far with 55 members) and streets named after them (Figure 12). Again, we find the honeycomb-like structure of small apartment buildings around them, mostly inhabited by artisans, laborers, and grocers.

87 For more on the Ghalayini family, see al-Tabba', *Ithaf*, vol. 3, pp. 376–377.

RIFI STREET (TUFFAH NEIGHBORHOOD)

Rifi Street was the central part of the Tuffah neighborhood.⁸⁸ The census documents mention the area many times as a residential address, but it does not figure on any available map. The Tuffah neighborhood as a whole was organized around major thoroughfares on the northeastern outskirts of Gaza and lacked any major architectural landmark, commercial center or religious establishment, apart from several small mosques and *shaykhs'* tombs (Figures 15 and 16).

The majority of the working population (55%) registered in the Rifi Street area were peasants, alongside people employed in a large number of mostly unskilled occupations such as laborers, water carriers, and shopkeepers. Gaza's slaughterhouse (*maslakh*) was located at the eastern end of Rifi, near the intersection of all the main roads. Some enterprising members of the large and powerful Shawwa family worked as butchers nearby. Very few people in this neighborhood were listed as active in administration or scholarly work, except for the household of the Murad family of Muslim scholars and administrators. Three men from this family worked in Gaza's Shari'a court and one served as the director of the rural district (*nahiye re'isi*) of Faluja. Thus Rifi manifested the typical traits of agglomerations where urban and rural functions and lifestyles were closely intertwined.

HILLIS (SHAJA'IYYA NEIGHBORHOOD)

The Hillis Street sub-neighborhood (Figures 5 and 17), as we have seen above, was located on the southwestern fringes of Shaja'iyya.⁸⁹ Like other streets in the vicinity, Hillis had a planned layout with two rows of houses along a straight street. No house owner had the wherewithal, or the ambition, to live in the secluded environment of a cul-de-sac.

Almost all the inhabitants of Hillis registered in the census sheets were peasants (*çiftçi*). The only exceptions were two educated men registered as *hafiz*. What made this peripheral area somewhat famous was its large family known by the name of Hillis. The Gazan author

88 ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 267 and 268.

89 ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 242.

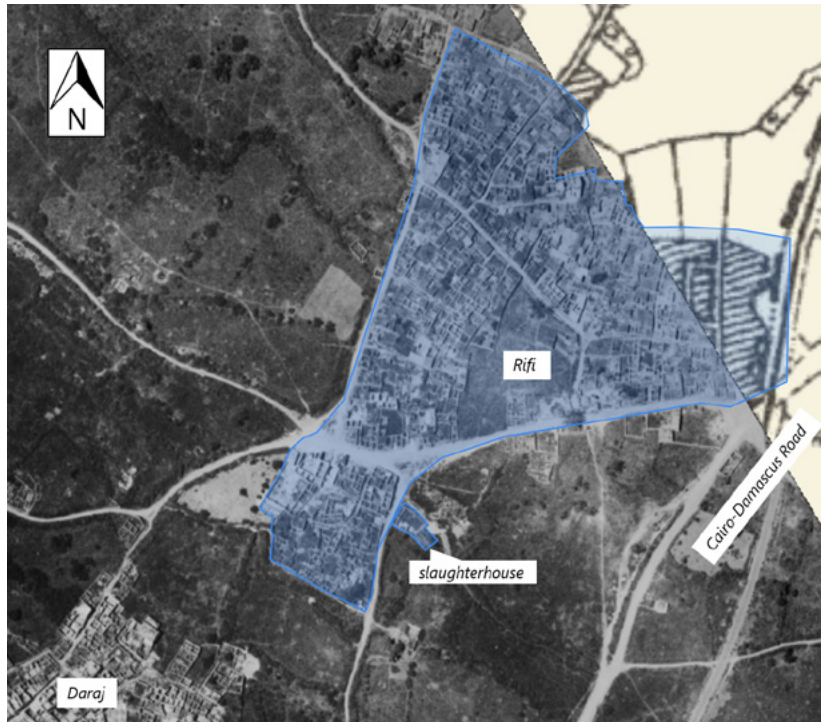


Figure 15: The Rifi Street Area, Tuffah Neighborhood.
 Source: Nüfus; aerial photograph by the Bavarian Squadron (1918); British map of 1931.



Figure 16: Aerial Photograph of what is probably the Rifi Street Area at the Western End of Tuffah, looking towards Daraj. The walls visible near the bottom of the photograph are the slaughterhouse.
 Source: Aerial photograph c. 1916, CZA, PIC 65479.



Figure 17: The Hillis Sub-neighborhood.
Source: British map of Gaza, 1928.

Ahmad Busaysu (c. 1825–1911), in an essay on Gaza’s population, makes highly negative comments about the “Awlad Hillis,” whom he describes as “lowly people” of Bedouin origin. Thus, apparently, this was a case of a community of rural emigrants who managed to settle en bloc on the outskirts of the city. They maintained their social cohesion throughout the 20th century and are considered to be a “clan” with its own political influence to this day.⁹⁰

Our survey of Gaza’s neighborhoods suggests that Gaza developed on the basis of the flows of people and goods at the crossroads of the two major caravan routes. Up to the Mamluk period, the city was confined to a low mound on the seaward side of the Cairo-Damascus road, surrounded by fortifications. The fortifications later became obsolete and suburbs of varying size developed along both routes – some were full-fledged *mahallas*, as in the cases of Shaja’iyya and Tuffah, and others were small village-like satellite *haras*, such as Mashahira and ‘Awamid. Two competing commercial and religious centers on either side of the main route – Daraj and Shaja’iyya – tried to capitalize on the opportunities offered by caravan trade and traffic. The fact that the inhabitants of Daraj and Shaja’iyya did not intermarry, at least according to our sample from the 1905 census, suggests that economic and political competition was deeply ingrained in social life.

90 For a report mentioning the Hillis “clan” as a major supporter of the Fatah party in Gaza, see Steven Erlanger, “2 Killed in Gaza Fight Between Clan and Hamas,” *The New York Times*, 20 October 2007, online <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/20/world/middleeast/20cnd-mideast.html> (accessed 6 September 2021). The article mentions that the “clan’s” compact settlement on the edge of Gaza city gives it strategic power.

In the following section, we turn to the administrative and political roles of Gaza’s neighborhoods. We first examine the evidence for the presence of Ottoman state functionaries according to the provisions of the Vilayet Law. Then, we consider the extent to which neighborhoods were political entities.

NEIGHBORHOOD REPRESENTATIVES AND ADMINISTRATORS

The administration of Gaza’s neighborhoods is not well-documented in our sources.⁹¹ We have no information on the practicalities of governance on the neighborhood level, such as registration procedures, rubbish collection, and the like. However, the available census registers note several individuals who were involved in neighborhood administration, and this can provide at least some idea of the social backgrounds of the neighborhood representatives. Three portraits are presented below.

THE MUHTARS OF SHAJA’IYYA AND ZAYTUN

As mentioned above, few qualifications were required to become a *muhtar*. Under Ottoman law, the main qualification was sufficient reading and writing skills to handle official correspondence – at least in Arabic and ideally also in Ottoman Turkish. Implicitly, in order to fulfill their duties, *muhtars* needed comprehensive local knowledge. As Élise Massicard observed, their main skill was their ability “to mobilise social interconnectedness,” as they were supposed “to recognise intruders but also to know ... the social and economic situation” of those they administered.⁹² In order to be elected, they needed a measure of social standing. The only *muhtar* we have been able

91 The volumes of Gaza’s *sijill* at our disposal (1857–1861) apparently do not contain any case in which a *muhtar* was involved. Numerous *muhtars* signed petitions, but mostly without their own names (e.g. BOA. HR.MTV, 717/59, petition dated 14 Teşrinievvel 1311 / 26 October 1895).

92 Massicard, “Incomplete Civil Servant?,” p. 276.

to trace in our sample of the 1905 Ottoman census is the neighborhood headman of Shaja'iyya (Turkuman), Ibrahim Misri al-Muzayni, who was born in Gaza 1836/7 and was registered as "head *muhtar* of the Turkuman neighborhood" (*Turkuman mahallesi muhtarbaşı*).⁹³ He lived in the Hillis Street area, on the southwestern fringes of Shaja'iyya. His household was a large one, comprising 24 people, including four married sons with their own nuclear families. Three of his sons were registered as peasants (*çiftçis*),⁹⁴ as was almost everyone in Hillis – the above-mentioned sub-neighborhood that was famous for the large family of the same name. The name "[al-]Misri" ("[the] Egyptian") suggests that one of his ancestors had come to Gaza as an emigrant from Egypt. This case of a peasant *muhtar* in a major urban neighborhood suggests that a high level of social prestige was not a precondition for this function, and also demonstrates that being a *çiftçi* in late Ottoman Gaza was not automatically equated with social marginalization or lack of education.

Just as the *muhtar* of Shajaiyya represented an important social category in his neighborhood, so did Hasan Burnu, a member of one of Gaza's well-known families, who is mentioned in a document of 1896 as the first *muhtar* of Zaytun. The 1905 census mentions ten households of the Burnu family in Zaytun (but unfortunately not Hasan Burnu's). Nearly all of them were merchants. The chronicler 'Uthman al-Tabba' also mentions Muslim scholars and Ottoman military officers who came from this family.⁹⁵ It is interesting to see that Hasan Burnu was openly political, as we find his signature on a strongly worded petition in favor of Gaza's Husayni family, calling their political rivals "corrupt" and the "lowest of people."⁹⁶

93 Shaja'iyya/Turkuman, Hillis Street (Shari' Abu Hillis), *mesken* 499, ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 242, p. 253. It is unusual that there were no other households of this family in the census registers. The precise meaning of the term "*muhtarbaşı*" is unclear. It may have been a synonym for "first *muhtar*" (*muhtar-ı evvel*).

94 *Ibid.* It is unusual to see that there were no other households of this family in the census registers.

95 Al-Tabba', *Ithaf*, vol. 3, p. 56.

96 BOA, HR.MTV, 718/93, p. 2, petition dated 21 Muharram 1314/2 July 1896.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD SCRIBE OF TUFFAH

'Abdallah Hamada (1844/5–1913/4) lived with his 12-person household in Tuffah and worked as a "neighborhood scribe" (*mahalle katibi*), probably as part of the Tuffah neighborhood administration. The term "neighborhood scribe" is interesting in itself, as this office is not mentioned in the Ottoman Vilayet Law.⁹⁷ The existence of this specialized position shows that neighborhood administration could be more elaborate than that prescribed in the general provisions. The scribe is likely to have written minutes of the meetings of the neighborhood *muhtar* and the council of elders and he was probably also in charge of account-keeping and producing other documents such as certificates and petitions when needed. This profile of a headperson, a council and a scribe is reminiscent of other urban institutions that worked in a similar way, such as the Shari'a court, the *waqf* administration, and the Municipal Council.

We do not know much about the scribe's family but the fact that his son Muhammad 'Ali (born in Gaza in 1304/1886–7) was registered as a student (*talebe-yi 'ulum*) suggests that education was very important in his household. Three other household heads of the Hamada family in the neighborhood were registered as peasants (*çiftçis*) and one as a fisherman or fishmonger (*balıkçı*). 'Abdallah Hamada's household thus appears to represent an upwardly mobile trend within a peasant family. Another family member in 'Abdallah's generation was a security guard (*bekçi*) and it would not seem too far-fetched to assume that he worked on behalf of the neighborhood administration and had obtained his job with some help from his relative, the *mahalle* scribe.

THE IMAM OF ZAYTUN

Imams, as mentioned above, had been involved in neighborhood governance in Ottoman cities for a long time and although the *muhtars* had

97 Even today, *muhtars* in the Republic of Turkey are not entitled to staff, a budget, or offices. *Muhtars* who delegate some of their work to assistants have to pay them from the administrative fees they receive. Massicard, "Incomplete Civil Servant?," pp. 268–269.

replaced them as the main neighborhood representatives, they were still *ex officio* members of the council of elders and thus were potentially influential personalities on the neighborhood level. The only *imam* in the sample of the 1905 Ottoman census we examined was Mahmud Sukayk (1846/7–1909/10), who belonged to a large prominent family in Zaytun and lived in the Ibn ‘Uthman area. He himself was a well-known figure of his time. Gaza’s chronicler, ‘Uthman al-Tabba‘ devoted some words of praise to him.⁹⁸ Mahmud Sukayk was openly political: in 1892 and again in 1895, we find him among the signatories of petitions in favor of the city’s controversial *mufti*, Muhammad Hanafi al-Husayni.⁹⁹

The Sukayk family had a tradition in learning and higher education that went back several generations, and several of Mahmud Sukayk’s older relatives were notable Muslim scholars.¹⁰⁰ The census registers show that others were merchants and shop owners. One of Mahmud Sukayk’s sons was a tax official (*vergi memuru*), and another was a watchmaker (*saatçi*). Exogamous marriages; i.e., marriages outside the extended family,¹⁰¹ seem to have played an important role in this family. It speaks for the wide range of Muhammad Sukayk’s social networks that the three wives in his household came from three different neighborhoods of Gaza: the household head’s wife came from Zaytun, the first son’s wife from Shaja’iyya and the second son’s wife from Daraj.¹⁰² All three women were from apparently modest, non-elite backgrounds. Thus, the social profile of Mahmud Sukayk’s household can be described as middle-class, educated, and well-connected both to the local population and to state administration. Whoever the *muhtar* of Zaytun was –

the above-mentioned Hasan Burnu or someone else – he had to reckon with the presence of a strong *imam*.

Thus overall, the three people involved in neighborhood administration that we were able to examine came from what we may cautiously define as Gaza’s middle classes. *Muhtar* Ibrahim Misri al-Muzayni, and neighborhood scribe ‘Abdallah Hamada, both came from upwardly mobile peasant families. In Hamada’s case, there are indications that a relative was employed in another neighborhood-related job, that of a watchman. *Muhtar* Hasan Burnu and *imam* Muhammad Sukayk, in contrast, came from thoroughly urban, wealthy, and well-connected families. Enterprising families built on these foundations to further their political agendas.

SPATIALIZED FACTIONALISM: GAZA’S NEIGHBORHOODS AS POWER BASES OF POLITICAL FACTIONS

As shown elsewhere,¹⁰³ Gaza’s neighborhoods became part and parcel of the severe factionalist struggle that decisively shaped that city’s public life from the 1870s onwards, and came to a head with Ottoman military intervention in 1898. In particular, the neighborhoods of Daraj and Shaja’iyya were major power bases for the leading families of the two main political alliances. Daraj was the stronghold of the Husayni family from at least the 1840s onwards. They were also known as the “Husayni al-Mufti” family, since the office of the *mufti* was the cornerstone of their power. Shaja’iyya became the power base of the Shawwa family, who, aided by their allies from the Busaysu family, eventually replaced the Husayni coalition as the dominant faction in the city.

Political polarization in Gaza was concomitant with spatial polarization along the north-west-southeast axis, with the Government and Municipal Compounds¹⁰⁴ in the middle. The leading families concretized their connection to Daraj and Shaja’iyya by maintaining stately mansions there and by exerting patronage

98 Al-Tabba‘, *Ithaf*, vol. 3, p. 231.

99 BOA, Y. MTV, 77/140, 10 Nisan 1309, 2 pages; HR. MTV, 717/8523, Cemaziyelahir 1313/11 December 1895.

100 *Ibid.*, pp. 224–231. For a highly favorable appraisal of Mahmud al-Sukayk (d. 1301/1883-4), see Ahmad Salim Busaysu, *Kashf al-niqab fi bayan ahwal ba‘d sukkan Ghazza wa-ba‘d nawahiha min al-‘arab* [Unveiling the Situation of some Inhabitants of Gaza and of some of the Bedouin Groups in its Surroundings], Arabic autograph manuscript, dated 29 Rajab 1315 AH / 24 December 1897, Gaza, Wizarat al-Awqaf, p. 67 [in Arabic].

101 On marriage patterns among Gaza’s elite households, see the chapter by Sarah Buessow in this volume.

102 Zaytun, Shaykh ‘Uthman Street, *mesken* 104, ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 261, p. 129 / PDF 66.

103 Ben-Bassat and Buessow, “Urban Factionalism.”

104 On Gaza’s Municipal Compound, see the chapter by Johann Buessow in this volume.

over certain mosques. In addition, main streets connecting these family assets with the Government and Municipality Compounds were styled as representative axes symbolizing the power of the Husayni and Shawwa families. While one was straightforwardly named Shawwa Street, the other was known as “Mufti’s Lane” (*Sibat al-Mufti*), in a subtle but nevertheless clear allusion to the Husayni “al-Mufti” family (see Figure 3).¹⁰⁵

From the middle of the 19th century onwards, the Shawwas, who later led the opposition to the Husaynis, built their own stronghold in Shaja’iyya, in a strategical location, next to Shaja’iyya’s market area, close to the Government and Municipal Compounds in the city center and at a distance from the other elite households. They were deeply rooted in Shaja’iyya’s business community and maintained close relations to the other leading elite family of the neighborhood, the Busaysus. This becomes clear from a list of *waqf* properties in Gaza from 1907. Numerous members of the Shawwa and Busaysu families are listed as tenants of shops in Shaja’iyya’s market that belonged to the *waqf* of the Ibn ‘Uthman Mosque.¹⁰⁶

Neighborhood headmen and members of neighborhood councils of elders took part in the factional struggle. For example, in 1895 we see a formidable array of neighborhood administrators sign a petition in support of the Shawwa faction, including first and second *muhtars* of Judayda, Turkuman and Zaytun, in addition to the Zaytun council of elders.¹⁰⁷ Such coalitions fluctuated, however. For example, Zaytun’s *muhtar* signed a petition in favor of the opposing Husayni faction less than a year later.¹⁰⁸ Even more importantly, the main prizes in the political competition were public offices on the city level, such as those of *mufti* and mayor. Therefore, neither faction entrenched themselves in particular areas of the city but were eager to recruit support from all neigh-

borhoods. As a result, Gaza’s spatialized factionalism did not lead to clearly drawn boundaries cutting through the city but rather to two poles at opposite ends with “neutral” spaces in between and around them.

The above analysis of Gaza’s urban layout and neighborhood structures helps elucidate the social and economic underpinnings of factionalism. The emergence of two competing market centers in Gaza was a rare, if not unique, development among cities in Bilad al-Sham. The pattern of social distance between Daraj and Shaja’iyya that we documented indirectly through marriage data in all likelihood preceded the development of the opposition faction under the leadership of the Shawwa family. In other words, economic and social polarization between the two market centers existed long before the Shawwa family politicized it and thereby managed to achieve an unprecedented turnaround in local politics.

CONCLUSION

Late Ottoman Gaza was not a fortified city like Damascus, Jerusalem, or the old center of Jaffa, but rather a city designed to accommodate steady streams of traffic as well as peasants travelling to and from their fields. Each of the city’s neighborhoods was well connected to the outside and, especially in the case of the four *mahalles*, it would have been impossible to install gates. The boundary between Daraj and Zaytun went right through the middle of *al-Suq al-Kabir*, the main market street, which means that both neighborhoods shared the crucial space of the market and its economic resources. Shaja’iyya and Tuffah were separated from these two central neighborhoods by vacant land, but they were nevertheless well connected to them by major thoroughfares. Very importantly, all neighborhoods had permeable boundaries with the agricultural hinterland. With its expanding suburbs dotted throughout the oasis, the city was on the way to becoming an agglomeration. In other words, Gaza thrived on flows of people and goods along the Cairo-Damascus road as well as between the city and the agricultural land around it. The city’s layout served these vital flows.

105 See Ben-Bassat and Buessow, “Applying Digital Methods.”

106 See BOA. Ev.d, nr. 30710, Gaza’s Evkaf Vekili Halil to Jerusalem’s Administrative Council, 26 Şubat 1322 [11 March 1907].

107 BOA. HR.MTV, 717/59, petition dated 14 Teşrinievvel 1311 / 26 October 1895. The telegraphic petition does not contain the names of these *muhtars*.

108 BOA. HR.MTV, 718/93, p. 2, petition dated 21 Muharrem 1314 / 2 July 1896.

At the same time, Gazans, like the inhabitants of other cities in the region, felt a need to draw social and physical boundaries on the levels of households, extended families, and ethno-religious communities. On the household level, the ideals of privacy and security could be best realized by the large elite households, who could afford to buy large plots and to shield them from the outside world with castle-like walls. The Abu Khadra mansion in the Shaykh 'Ayyad area is a case in point (Figure 11). This was much less obvious in poorer neighborhoods. The inhabitants of the Hillis sub-neighborhood, for example, lived in small modest houses built in rows along a straight street. Most houses probably had entrances from the thoroughfare (Figure 17).

In the absence of narrative sources and first-hand testimonies, it is difficult to determine to what extent sub-neighborhoods such as Shaykh 'Ayyad or Hillis were social neighborhoods in the sense that they were considered semi-private spaces as described by Abu-Lughod¹⁰⁹ that allowed women to move about more freely than elsewhere. Here, census data can help to some extent. In both cases, large families made up a considerable part of the neighborhood population: the Abu Khadras and Turks in Shaykh 'Ayyad and the Hillises in Hillis. It is likely that the members of these families maintained close relations across their street and sub-neighborhood. However, they did not form the majority of the local population in either area and they thus needed to get along with neighbors from other families. Thus there was a strong tendency towards clustering on the basis of kinship, but not to the extent of making the streets where they lived a kind of private domain.

The question of the degree to which there was religious and/or ethnic clustering in late Ottoman Gaza,¹¹⁰ is harder to answer, because the census registers for the city's Christian population are unavailable and the few entries for Jewish inhabitants do not mention the streets in which they lived. We have seen that a Christian and two Muslims co-owned a property in the Shaykh 'Ayyad area, and many more such cases

can be found in the court registers.¹¹¹ However, according to all available sources, all of Gaza's Christians, as well as the members of the small Jewish community, lived in the Zaytun neighborhood. We therefore assume that Christians and Jews owned property and did business across the entire city, but that religious clustering was the standard residential pattern. Rural emigrants seem to have settled predominantly in the outlying areas of Shaja'iyya.

Rich and poor households were generally mixed in the inner-city areas. There were some more upmarket streets such as Shaykh 'Ayyad and Shaykh 'Uthman, but, as we have seen, even in this case low-income households were interspersed between the mansions of the elite families. On the outskirts of the city, in Shaja'iyya, but also on the northern fringes of Daraj, there were large areas with only low-income households. In other words, the wealthy elites were not segregated from non-elite residents in the inner-city neighborhoods, but there were low-income neighborhoods in the city's periphery where non-elite residents lived among themselves. These differences are visible on the aerial photographs from the World War I period, where the light stone houses of the wealthy contrast with the darker colored mud brick dwellings of the poorer population.

Through the census records, we can form an impression of the social actors involved in neighborhood administration. Although the data are still patchy, we have reason to believe that neighborhoods played an important part in urban governance and that neighborhood administration in Gaza was highly institutionalized. The fact that there was a professional neighborhood scribe (*mahalle katibi*) in Tuffah underlines the importance of governance on the neighborhood level.

There is no doubt that Gaza's neighborhoods were spaces of relatively high social connectedness. However, just as with social exchanges, neighborhood identity and solidarity are hard to gauge in the absence of sources that would tell us more about the inner life of Gaza's neighborhoods. Data on marriages between neighborhoods point to a localist identity and selectivity of social ties across neighborhoods. On the other hand, what we know about

109 Abu-Lughod, "The Islamic City," p. 168.

110 To date, the most detailed description of religious and ethnic clustering in a location of late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham is Campos, "Mapping Urban 'Mixing'."

111 The best overview of Gaza's available Shari'a court registers is still Abdul-Karim Rafeq, *Ghazza*.

social networks and activities in the city points towards the existence of certain hotspots, but not to collective action on the level of the neighborhood. Research on collective petitions, for example, has shown that the initiators took care to enlist supporters from the entire city for their cause and not be confined to a particular sector.¹¹² Thus, factionalist tendencies were counterbalanced by the desire to speak for the entire city population.

Neighborhood structures played a highly important role in the politics of the urban elite households. The existence of an alternative economic and religious center in Shaja'iyya allowed enterprising members of the Shawwa family to relocate within the city and build up a territorial home base from which they could mount a serious challenge to the establishment faction in the old city center. However, as bitter as this factionalist rivalry was, it did not result in fixed boundaries, either visible or invisible, between segments of the city. Neither did it lead to territorialized political identities. Moreover, we do not know of neighborhood militias or strongmen like the famous *qabadays* of Damascus. Territorial bases and assets bound to a certain location served the local notables as a crucial component in their competition for political hegemony, but their politics were aimed at the city as a whole, and could work only through the flexible interplay of various actors and resources.

How typical were these patterns when viewed comparatively? Our findings on late Ottoman Gaza's neighborhoods is similar to many of the general patterns established by the recent empirical studies on late Ottoman urbanism and urban governance cited above. Bilad al-Sham is a convenient geographic framework

for comparison, but insights from the literature on other Ottoman locations are also instructive, especially concerning urban governance, and should not be overlooked. In our study, a spread-out and traffic-oriented urban layout, and permeable neighborhood boundaries, as well as the existence of two competing market centers, and spatialized factionalism, emerged as Gaza's main specificities. The most important factors that gave Gaza's neighborhoods their specific character were the city's location at the intersection of two trade routes, its dependence on trade and traffic flowing along these routes, and its close connection to the agricultural hinterland.

Thus Gaza can be imagined as a city of flows and networks, not as an ensemble of bounded neighborhood entities. Urban neighborhoods need to be taken seriously as units of urban governance, and governance on the neighborhood level needs to be studied more systematically in order for urban governance in the late Ottoman period to be fully understood. In the case of Gaza, for example, we need to know more about routine practices such as taxation, street cleaning, and the maintenance of security and public morals on the neighborhood level, in order to better capture how state and social order manifested themselves on the doorstep of city dwellers in this part of the Ottoman Empire. With regard to the relevance of urban subdivisions, the existence of social cleavages along neighborhood lines – as becomes transparent through marriage patterns – did not necessarily mean that neighborhood boundaries were tightly policed. Neighborhood boundaries were permeable and collective political action took place across a broad range of spatial levels, from the household to the wider world.

112 Ben-Bassat and Buessow, "Applying Digital Methods," p. 548.

SPATIALIZING URBAN HISTORY THROUGH GIS ANALYSIS OF MAPS AND AERIAL PHOTOS

In our ongoing study of late Ottoman Gaza, including for this chapter on the city's neighborhoods, we use a wide array of maps and aerial photos. Unlike most other cities in Bilad al-Sham during the time period examined in this book, we possess a detailed colored map of Gaza drawn in 1887 and published a year later by the Austrian Catholic priest Georg Gatt (1843–1924), who lived in Gaza in the 1880s.¹ Gatt moved to Gaza in 1879, where he founded a parish and a school and had first-hand knowledge of the city and its people. At the time the map was published, he had lived in Gaza for eight years and can therefore be regarded as a long-term resident of the city. Gatt's map, produced during the time of factionalist struggles in Gaza, is invaluable as it makes it possible to situate the buildings and reconstruct the layout of the city, and leads to insights unavailable from other sources. In particular, it provides information not only on the location of public buildings and city infrastructure but also on that of the households of leading Gazan families. It also details family assets and their clusters (e.g. houses, trading firms, mosques), the city's division into neighborhoods, the separation of Shaja'iyya from the other neighborhoods, the agricultural surroundings of Gaza, the remains of the old city fortifications, and the city's sprawling nature.

To the best of our knowledge, there are no extant Ottoman maps of Gaza dating back to the end of the 19th century, although the Ottoman government produced detailed maps of other cities in Greater Syria, Ottoman Palestine included. During the British Mandate, several accurate maps of Gaza and its region were prepared which can be used to extrapolate continuities and changes in the city's expansion with respect to the Ottoman era. The British produced

an accurate map of Gaza as early as 1917 when the region was still under Ottoman control, in preparation for their attack on the region.²

When we use maps as historical sources, we should interrogate them by the same principles of source criticism that we apply to textual evidence. To take the example of Gatt's map, a comparison with the work of other cartographers reveals that his map was probably based on a British map from 1843.³ A comparison with contemporary local writings shows that the way in which Gatt divided Gaza into neighborhoods diverges in some respects from local usage and betrays a tendency to highlight ethno-religious divisions within local society that was typical of much of the Orientalist scholarship of his generation. Biographical information is key to understanding another feature of this map: the information is densest around Gatt's personal residence and from there thins out as the distance increases. Outlying areas, such as the important suburb of Shaja'iyya, are represented in a very schematic way. In this respect, Gatt's map must thus be seen as a reflection of his own 'mental map' of the city.

In addition to maps, there are also very good aerial photos of Gaza from World War I. For instance, we possess high-resolution aerial photos of the region (on glass plates) taken by the Bavarian Squadron in 1918, after the British army had already captured Gaza. There are also good quality aerial photos taken by the British in preparation for their attack on Gaza in the Spring of 1917 and later in the Autumn of that year when they invaded southern Palestine.

In the framework of our project on late Ottoman Gaza we implemented GIS (Geo-

1 Georg Gatt, "Legende zum Plane von Gaza (herausgegeben von H. Guthe)," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 11 (1888), p. 150.

2 IAA, 6123107-032750_001_000020, "Gaza," 1:7,500, January 1917, Survey of Egypt.

3 Aldrich, "Special Reconnaissance [sic] of Gaza. The Villages of Harrat It Te Fear [Tuffah] and Sejaeah [Shaja'iyya], by Lieut. Aldrich R.E., engraved by B.R. Davies, published by John Weale," 1843. Source: National Library of Israel (NLI).

graphic Information System) technology to present some 15 digitized maps of the city from different periods, ranging from the 1880s to the 1940s, in addition to using aerial photos of the city from the World War I period. They were geo-rectified according to geodata provided by OpenStreetMap (OSM). In the GIS, maps and aerial photos take the form of layers that can be annotated and overlaid as a function of need. Together they form an interactive digital map, which is an important “add on” tool to the toolbox of urban history.

GIS make it possible to reframe data derived from written sources in new ways that lead to new insights with regard to the importance of space and place. For in-

stance, our work shows how Gaza’s two rivaling political factions drew support from a broad range of social categories representing all walks of life in Gaza and how political activity was not confined to a specific neighborhood. Our interactive map helps visualize social networks and points to hitherto neglected components of this rivalry, such as how the leading households of the two rival factions in Gaza’s elite built two strongholds in different neighborhoods of the city and used buildings and street names to communicate their social standing and political ambitions. GIS data also enable us to identify historically important sub-neighborhoods, some of which emerged as political hotspots.