

EGYPTIAN ÉMIGRÉS IN THE LEVANT OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

2nd Edition – Revised



1837. Encampment of Ibrahim Pasha Near Jaffa

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Egyptian Émigrés in the Levant of the 19th and 20th Centuries

Gideon M. Kressel and Reuven Aharoni

Is there empirical evidence supporting the surprising Ḥamas claim that a large part of the Palestinian Arabs are not indigenous to this area but rather immigrated from surrounding countries? On March 23, 2012, the Ḥamas minister of the interior and of national security, Fathi Ḥammad, slammed Egypt for not helping to prevent fuel shortages in the Gaza Strip. He then averred that Gaza deserved more brotherly assistance from Egypt, saying that “half of the Palestinians are Egyptian and the other half are Saudis.”¹

This dramatic assertion raises questions. Was Ḥammad simply overstating his people’s links to a country whose help he sought, or was he reporting something true, if largely unknown, about Palestinian roots?

The answer matters, because the statement marks perhaps the first time a prominent Palestinian leader openly departed from a well-entrenched mythology about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. According to that familiar picture, the conflict is one of natives against foreigners, indigenous peoples against immigrant-colonists. One side, the Israelis, come from elsewhere, a melting pot of many different origins, none of them local. The other side, in this myth, is entirely local, rooted in Palestine.

Such a simplistic black-and-white picture should, perhaps, never have been taken seriously. It took years of empirical study, though, to shatter the Israeli side of the myth, establishing that Israel is in fact made up of both immigrants and natives, new arrivals and people whose families have lived there for centuries. The Palestinian side of the picture – that they are a nation of entirely indigenous natives – remains far more entrenched in the popular imagination.

PAGE • 1

Ḥammad’s statement flies in the face of this monolithic image, claiming as he does that a significant number of Palestinians, too, immigrated from other states, notably Egypt. Castigating the current Egyptian regime for failing to aid Gaza, the Hamas minister stated:

Who are the Palestinians? We have many families called al-Masri, whose roots are Egyptian! They may be from Alexandria, from Cairo, from Dumietta, from the north, from Aswan, from Upper Egypt. We are Egyptians; we are Arabs. We are Muslims. We are part of you [in mainland Egypt]. Egyptians! Personally, half my family is Egyptian – and the other half are Saudis.

Since Ḥammad is a senior Ḥamas official, it might be assumed that his analysis is only relevant to Gaza, which is under its control. But the phenomenon of Palestinian families who trace their origins to Egypt is also well-known in West Bank cities like Tulkarem, Hebron, and Nablus. A demographic connection to the Saudis has also been discovered among other parts of the Palestinian Arab populations. Extensive research has also shown how Bedouin tribes in southern Israel originally came from the area of the Nejd and the Ḥijaz in what is today the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Similar research into the Bedouin tribes of the Galilee has traced their roots to western Iraq and the northern parts of the Syrian Desert.²

Among the families of urban notables in Jerusalem, such as the Husseinis, it was common to claim descent from the Prophet Muhammad or of Hussein, the son of the Fourth Caliph, Ali. This meant they traced their origins to Arabia in the seventh century.³

The Mythology of a Permanent Native Population

Significantly, Ḥammad's declaration flatly contradicts the repeated charge long made by Palestinian spokesmen that Israel usurped the territory where it was founded from an indigenous Arab population that had lived there for thousands of years. Moreover, it counters, if not completely shatters, the dichotomous depiction of the conflict as one pitting Jewish colonists against Palestinian natives. To advance this narrative, in the past Palestinian leaders like the prominent Yasser Arafat argued that the Palestinian Arabs could trace their origins to the ancient Jebusites.

Alternatively, Palestinian Authority textbooks in 2000 propounded a theme that the ancient Canaanites, from time immemorial, were Arabs and "were the first ones who happened to live and thrive in Palestine." In March 2012, Dr. 'Amer Ju'āra of Al-Najāḥ University in Nablus repeated an old Muslim claim that it was Mūsa (Moses) who guided Arab Muslims from Egypt to Palestine. Following Mūsa, as a matter of course, the other biblical heroes were also in fact Muslims.

Today these notions are not marginal. They have also reached beyond the Middle East and penetrated mainstream Western universities through academics like Columbia University's Professor Rashid Khalidi, who has asserted: "According to a number of historians and scholars, many of the Arabs of Jerusalem today, indeed the majority of Palestinian Arabs, are descendants of the ancient Jebusites and Canaanites."⁴

Yet this mythology about the Middle East does not take into account the huge role of migration in the historical development of the region as a whole and of Palestine in particular. Given the enormous population shifts tracked over millennia, it is extremely difficult to accept the assertion – often emphasized by anti-Israeli propagandists – that one group of people is exclusively the country's native and ancient one, instead of being but one of the many peoples that form Palestine's true inhabitants from time immemorial.

Our work adds elaboration to pioneer works covering the subject matter of Arab migrants to the Levant, including the flow of landless peasants and Bedouin from mainland Egypt eastward. Of these, of particular importance are works by E. Bromberger and Fred M. Gottheil.⁵ Unlike these scholarly studies drawn on statistical data assembled from archives, our work augments, in addition, anthropological knowledge reached by way of auditing stories of immigration told by immigrants and immigrants' descendents about moves of recent generations that brought them, their parents, or their elders to immigrate from their Middle Eastern lands of their birth to reach the Levant and Palestine, in particular.

Migration in the Modern History of the Middle East

The movement of Egyptians into the Levant was not a unique phenomenon. Instead it represented the norm in the region, when taking into account the succession of peoples who migrated across the Middle East over the centuries; there were many who regularly passed from Africa to Asia and vice versa. An immense amount of travel took place throughout the region, between east and west, north and south, before the signing of international agreements that defined national boundaries that restricted the migratory streams. Traces of prehistoric and of historic movement of peoples between Africa and Asia call for attention to what is largely unnoticed otherwise.

Some of the more dramatic population shifts in the history of the Middle East involved successive demographic eruptions of migrants who came out of central Arabia and moved into the Fertile Crescent.⁶ During the 17th century, there was the migration of the great Shammar tribe from the area of the Najd in central Arabia into what later became Iraq, where they became one of the most powerful tribal confederations.⁷ The Shammar and Anaza tribes moved into the Syrian desert from Arabia in the 17th and 18th centuries.⁸ There are estimates of a million members of the Shammar confederation living in Syria as well.⁹ In Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah's mother was a descendant of the Shammar, while in Iraq, after the fall of Saddam Hussein, interim president Ghazi al-Yawar came from the Iraqi Shammar.

The Middle East also witnessed cases of migration from outside the region to its heartland. The Circassians were another group of immigrants who reached the tribal Arab region from the North Caucasus during the 19th century. They escaped the Russian army's invasion of their district, finding shelter in the Ottomans' territory. The Ottomans settled them in the border areas of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in what is today Jordan. Descendants of the Circassians who arrived in the Amman area during the late 19th century were promoted to become senior officers in the armed forces of the Hashemite Kingdom and also served as ministers in the Jordanian cabinet. Circassian communities that settled at the same time on the west side of the Jordan Valley include the villages Kama and Reḥaniyya, now substantial villages, and the Circassians serve in the Israel Defense Forces.

Earlier, in the 14th century, Turkish slaves brought into the Middle East from the Caucasus by traders served under various Arab dynasties, and eventually established the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt. Thus it was common for peoples and tribes from completely different regions to enter Middle Eastern lands as a result of the mass migrations that took place. This is the broader context for the migration of Egyptians into the Levant in general and into Eretz Israel, in particular, in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Predictably, there will be those who think this study is motivated by political considerations. By proving that a significant portion of the Palestinian Arabs came from Egypt, it can be argued that the Palestinian Arabs as a whole lack a solid identity as a people or a connection to the territory they claim. That is not the purpose of our undertaking, nor do we believe such decisive claims follow from it. To the contrary: there is a substantial Palestinian Arab population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and a political solution for their future status needs to be reached in any case.

Overview

This work examines issues tied to the emigration of peasants (*falāḥīn*) and Bedouin from Egypt to the Levant in recent generations; the integration of Egyptian immigrants into the Arab population in various areas of Palestine; and the silence that surrounds the entire issue of Egyptian components of the population of Palestine in the Palestinian narrative and discourse. While this matter is not entirely hidden from sight, it has not been studied seriously to date.

This manuscript brings together oral records gathered by us along with written passages from primary sources and the research literature. We assemble data to estimate the weight of these immigrants within the present population of the State of Israel. We also consider their influence and impact in a host of domains – social, cultural, and economic. This was a laborious task because what is known about it in the public is greater than what is known about it in writing, and this immigration was ongoing, spanning a lengthy period. It began in 1829, the year when, as reported (Rustum, 1936), thousands of peasants fled from the forced labor imposed on them by Egypt's ruler Meḥmmet (Muḥammad) 'Alī Pasha and his armed forces.

Meḥmmet 'Alī, an Ottoman Turk of Albanian origin, ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1848. The modern era began with the French Campaign in Egypt and Syria (1798-1801) led by Napoleon, and continued with the reign of Meḥmmet 'Alī who encouraged development in the Nile Basin and, for some years (1831-1840), helped colonization and development of the Levant by Egypt's surplus population. Immigration from Egypt to the Levant, and to Palestine in particular, thus set a palpable seal on the countries that absorbed these waves of migration, a phenomenon that has not received the scholarly attention it deserves.

PAGE • 4

Each of us, the authors, has encountered information about lasting migrations of peoples coming from Egypt proper to the Levant and from West (the Maghreb) and East Africa via Egypt. We came upon this information in the course of geographical and anthropological studies of moves of Bedouin tribes in Israel (Kressel, 1975), and in charting the historiography of Bedouin-state relations in Egypt under Meḥmmet 'Alī (Aharoni, 2000). In 2003, following joint discussion of our findings, we embarked on the study at hand, whose findings are based on the combined data from 1975 and 2000, in addition to new information gathered for the study since 2000 by ourselves and other scholars.¹⁰ This included Hebrew sources archived in documents in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries. In addition, Arab families (in the Triangle, Wādi 'Ar'a, and the cities of Jaffa, Ramle, and Lod) who do not conceal their Egyptian origins were interviewed, and first- and second-generation offspring whose parents or grandparents came to Palestine were interviewed about their roots and what had transpired since their families' arrival in Palestine.

The stages in their travels and absorption in Eretz Israel (records put together by Kressel) were arrived at indirectly in the course of studying relationships and family trees among former Bedouin and former peasants in Arab neighborhoods of Ramle and Lod (1967-1970). When paternal ('*Ummūm*) and maternal (*Ikhwāl*) genealogy trees of their families had been charted, a clear pattern emerged: the farther back recollections of the past went, the more stories of immigration surfaced. It was found that all the older generations of these families had immigrated to Palestine in the past – one to three generations ago or in the more recent decades – most from Libya, Egypt, and Sudan (Kressel, 1970, 1975, 1982).

Recording these genealogies showed the utility of sharpening memories of the travels of emigrants on their way to Palestine, and within Palestine. While stories that were passed on from generation to generation are not a substitute for historical records, written documents, vintage photos, and recordings, such “oral histories” can point to trends or possible directions that help in understanding “peopling processes” in Palestine in modern times, and ethnic mergers that have taken place within contemporary Palestinian society in the not-so-distant past.

Fundamental facts about the influx from Egypt in modern times have not been studied and taught at Middle Eastern universities. Kressel learned about this issue from Professor David Ayalon (1960), who referred him to the documents collected by Asad Rustum (Rustum, 1936). Only interviews with descendents of immigrants gave us the impression that turned the scales, teaching the extent of the newcomers in the general population.

While Kressel began doing fieldwork among the Jawārish neighborhood of Ramle (1967), the rich source material gathered over decades by Yitzhak Ben-Zvi was published (1967), adding invaluable to the research literature on this subject. Reading Ben-Zvi’s work helped in anchoring testimonies gathered in neighborhoods in Ramle and Lod in the 1960s, which were also cross-referenced with testimony given by old-timers in Jewish settlements in the south, such as the founders of Gedera. These sources enabled the authors to map-out events coherently. From 1978, Kressel has continued to trace family lore, listening to and recording such recollections preserved among Negev Bedouin and among lineages (*ḥamā’il*) of Bedouin with Egyptian origins.¹¹ Oral traditions were easy to reach, while there was very little written material that could help validate these oral traditions of immigrants from Egypt and their descendants in the Negev.

PAGE • 5

Aharoni became aware of the high incidence of persons of Egyptian origins in the Negev and in Gaza during his work in government service and subsequently when he encountered relevant references while preparing his doctoral thesis at Tel Aviv University, when he scrutinized documents from the period of Meḥmmet ‘Alī in the Cairo archives of Dār al-Wathā’iq, Dār al-Kutub, and Dār al-Maḥfuzāt (Aharoni, 2000).

This study’s aim is to shed light on oral and written material gathered to date, and thus encourage other scholars to investigate this topic further and advance our understanding of this phenomenon. This manuscript begins with a brief survey of existing written evidence regarding the emigration of Bedouin and peasants from Egypt and the trail they left leading to Palestine. The body of the study presents testimonies and recollections of travels and annals of the first years in Palestine gathered in talks and interviews. Face-to-face meetings in homes enabled us to view first-hand early family photos of immigrants in their initial homes in various areas of Israel, when their descendants met with us to relate the stories offered here.

The evidence shows that such unsystematic and partial testimony can, nevertheless, paint a clear pattern and suggests the sheer scope of this migration and its social and demographic impact on the Arab inhabitants of Palestine and the Palestinian society down to this day. Based on the evidence presented, we raise (for the first time) several issues related to Egyptian émigrés and their settlement in Palestine that seem worthy of discussion – issues whose further study could potentially have great significance from a research perspective. Lastly, we seek to answer another cardinal

question: why was documentation or even mention of this migration process, which transformed so many Egyptians into Palestinians, so paltry in recent generations?

Pastoral Nomads: Migration between Egypt and the Levant in Historical Perspective

The pioneering scholarly work of ‘Āref al-‘Āref (1937) is devoted to the history of Negev populations. It adds to the literature of travelers who happened to pass through the Negev during the 18th or 19th century.¹² ‘Āref al-‘Āref’s writings include an entry about the great increase in the number of *Masārwe* – Egyptian-born immigrants. The author, who only rarely addresses the composition of tribal populations, apparently deems this noteworthy. In part, missing information about the lands of origin of migrants, or the history of peoples’ migrations, has been filled in by exploring the genealogy of families, a job left for historians or anthropologists.¹³ Viewing individual stories alone prevents the reader from viewing the process of population migration as a whole.

Historic movements of population from Asia to Africa or vice versa appear to sway like a pendulum. From a distance, however, such occurrences do not reveal whether those coming and going are the *same* people or whether they are different groups seeking a different place to live. Only a close-up examination that traces each movement separately on a historical lineal plane can reveal systematic divergences in the sociological character of those moving from place to place. Most intercontinental migrations since the Arab Conquest in the seventh century have been from Asia to Africa (Kressel, 2003, ch. 1). Groups of pastoral nomads (Bedouin) have migrated from Asia westward due to deprivation, and in general they tended not to return to their places of origin in the east, unless they were pushed out of Egypt.

PAGE • 6

Emigration from Africa via Egypt to Asia in modern times was, in general, the result of economic-political constraints for tribes that had lost the ability to demand tribute. Such tribute had gradually grown from being an additional source of livelihood (*hawa* – “protection” payments by peasants to Bedouin sheikhs) to being their main source of living, slowly replacing pastoral nomadic practices such as living wholly or mostly from livestock breeding as a family tradition for generations.

From the dawn of history, the region has experienced pastoral tribes passing through Palestine at irregular intervals (i.e., not as part of an annual grazing cycle). Every kingdom in the region – down to the very last of them before the Arab conquest, the Byzantine – stifled any move westward of potential émigrés. Only in the seventh century were the ruling regimes of the region defeated. The great invasion of Arab tribes streaming out from the Arabian Peninsula northward, eastward, and westward overpowered the ancient peasants’ kingdoms; waves of nomadic tribes overwhelmed the guarding units and broke through the defensive lines deployed to stem their advance.

For hundreds of years henceforth, the primary movement of migrating tribes passing through Palestine was from east to west. With the desertification of the Middle East over the past millennia, pastoral nomads searched the vicinity of villages on the verges of running water. Such nomads were forced to reorganize, and in particular to increasingly urbanize and become more or less rooted in a settled lifestyle. That is, they were forced to become more political and less ecological, with less

differentiation between the desert and the town (Eph'al 1982). Their movement into the Nile Valley was motivated more by a search for “easy marks” to extort for tribute and less by a search for grazing land for their herds. They went southward toward Upper Egypt (the Sa'id) and toward the Nile Delta and the villages at the heart of farming activities, which were suitable for extorting protection fees.

The weak central government did not harass these Bedouin,¹⁴ and since they did not have to engage in agriculture to make a living, they could live a relatively easy life. Some of the tribes even achieved a notable political autonomy, such as the Ḥawāra in Upper Egypt and the Ḥabā'iba in the Nile Delta (Aharoni 2000: 22). The Bedouin who came from the east settled alongside the villages in the Nile Valley and made a livelihood from *ḥawa* that they collected from the villagers, either on a private basis or as an “entitlement” that came with leasing land from the regime; on such land the farmers worked as “tenants at will.”

In the latter part of the 18th century the number of tribal chiefdoms and Bedouin in the capacity of a *beq* (*bay*, or *multazim*)¹⁵ grew, particularly in Upper Egypt and in the Delta region.¹⁶ To ease the burden on the villagers the Mamluk sultan 'Alī Bey al-Kabir, who ruled Egypt from 1760 to 1772, took military measures to curtail the power of the Bedouin sheikhs. Meḥmmet 'Alī continued this policy and brought about the expulsion of Bedouin tribes from the Nile Basin, chasing them back to the Arabian Peninsula and further eastward and northward.¹⁷

The Bedouin's allegiances shifted back and forth. They allied with whatever political entity seemed to hold the upper hand in terms of political organization and relative clout at the time – sometimes the Mamluk sultans or the Ottomans in Egypt, sometimes opposition forces seeking to undermine and weaken the regime. The Bedouin played each side against the other, accepting cash bribes for their support from both the regime and its opponents.¹⁸ It was the viceroys Meḥmmet 'Alī Pasha and Ibrāhīm Pasha (his adopted son) who liquidated the independence of the Ḥawāra sheikhs and their allies – the heads of the Mamluk Dynasty – in Cairo (1813). From this point onward, they recruited the tribe's mounted soldiers into their army for these leaders' many wars, until the tribe's name Ḥawāra became a synonym for irregular Bedouin cavalry.¹⁹ The sheikhs played an important role in recruiting members of their clans into military service; in return the pashas rewarded them with land grants, positions in regional administration, and first and foremost – permission to settle within the borders of Bilād al-Shām²⁰ (a province comprising Damascus, Syria, and Palestine).

Meḥmmet 'Alī showed much interest in the Shām province in the early stages of his career. He allowed the Bedouin of Egypt to settle along Darb al-Shām – the route that ran through northern Sinai, Al-'Arish, Gaza, and northward, so that they would engage in protecting this vital route and its vicinity from invading nomads' attacks. From 1807 to 1818, members of various factions of the al-Hanādi tribe, which originally migrated from Libya to western Egypt, appeared in the vicinity of Gaza. This included the al-Ḥāsi headed by Mūsā Aghā, who initially settled under the patronage of the al-Ḥajj Muḥammad Najā from the al-Barā'asa tribe who had come earlier from Egypt.²¹ Mūsā and afterward his son 'Akil Aghā and his followers allied themselves with the forces of Slimān Pasha, the governor of Sidon and his successor, Abdulla Pasha in Akko, to protect the roads and permanent settlements there against Bedouin marauders.

In 1828, additional lineages of the Hanādi Bedouin were brought in. The aim was for them to settle alongside and hence secure the Al-‘Arish route.²² In 1831, Ibrāhīm Pasha invaded Palestine with Egypt’s army. They advanced northward and reached Ottoman Turkey. A military observer of the period recognized the advantages of the pasha’s decision to mobilize twelve thousand Bedouin cavalry of the Ḥawāra for the war in Syria (al-Shām); it enabled ridding the interior of nomads who were harassing villagers and caravans.²³ In November of the same year, Bedouin from the al-Hanādi tribe were positioned among the forces that safeguarded the way between Nazareth and Tiberias and Marj Iben ‘Āmer (the Jezreel Valley).²⁴

In 1832, Ibrāhīm Pasha – who at the time was the head of Egyptian forces in the Levant – authorized another faction of the Hanādi to pull up stakes from the al-Sharqia province in Egypt and join the faction of the al-Ḥāsi already encamped northeast of Gaza (Aharoni, 2000: 236). The entrance of this tribe, which was loyal to Ibrāhīm Pasha, was aimed at protecting the route to al-Shām. It also included a plan to assign points of settlement for them along the way, thereby undermining the Sinai Bedouin’s hold on the area, and was in keeping with Egyptian efforts to establish central-government control over the Sinai routes.

The al-Taḥāwiya faction of the Hanādi migrated to Palestine as well.²⁵ The immigration of the Hanādi into Palestine continued. In 1836, the heads of the Hanādi petitioned the authorities to settle in the Gaza region. The answer was affirmative, and they were even given agricultural plots to cultivate. Ibrāhīm Pasha cited this in writing, reflecting the great importance he assigned to settling the Bedouin in this area.²⁶ Several families who are descendants of the al-Hanādi live to this day in the Bedouin neighborhoods of Shafa‘mer.²⁷

PAGE • 8

In stemming attacks by local Bedouin on settled areas, Ibrāhīm Pasha was assisted by factions of the al-Hanādi tribe who settled in the area of Hūjj (near Kibbutz Doroth today) and by the al-Ḥāsi faction of the al-Hanādi who settled at Tel al-Ḥāsi (adjacent to today’s Kibbutz Kfar Menaḥem).²⁸ Over the years in Palestine, the Ḥawāra Bedouin began to settle in the Sharon and further north, so that the area where they established themselves in the Ḥefer Valley came to be called Wādi Ḥawāret.²⁹

Over the years, as Bedouin tribes arrived from Egypt and other North African sedentary districts, they slowly began to make inroads into the Levant. This was the inadvertent consequence of Meḥmmet ‘Alī’s policy, not necessarily due to any initiative on his part for their sake, but because he deprived them of their main or next-to-main source of income and independence. Since their previous rule over the villagers had proved detrimental, the tribes arriving in the Levant sought methods of controlling and extorting the farming communities that would be “safe” for themselves. Tribal sheikhs then challenged Meḥmmet ‘Alī’s authority by undermining his initiatives for agricultural development, simply by harassing and impoverishing the villagers with radical extortion. This method caused the outbreak of blood feuds among tribes over “extortion territories,” that is, farming communities.

At first, because of a blood feud that began over extortion targets, these tribes were forced to leave Egypt and go into exile, largely westward. It was only at a later stage, beginning in 1829, that the influx of tribes from west to east increased significantly. During the 1830s, Egyptian military authorities increased the use of “their” Bedouin as warriors to protect their interests in the Levant.

Immigration of Peasants from Egypt to Palestine: Written References

In the past it was assumed that Egyptians, particularly Egyptian peasantry, did not like to settle abroad (Baer, 1973: 41; Ayubi, 1983: 431; Issawi, 1954: 59; Cleland, 1936: 52). This, however, does not mean there were no immigrants. Besides emigration from Egypt to the Levant during the reign of Meḥmmet ‘Alī, thousands of Egyptians immigrated to Iraq, Turkey, Greece, and even France during the First World War (Ayubi, 1983: 431).

From the 10th century until the Ottoman Conquest in 1516, the entire Levant including Eretz Israel had been under the rule of Fātimid, Ayyūbid, and Mameluke sultans³⁰ whose center was in Cairo. This situation eased the passage of populations between Egypt and the Levant. The balance of immigrants – on one side, Egyptian administrators, soldiers, and laborers who settled in the Levant; on the other, people who “went down” to Egypt because of famine and remained in Egypt – is not known. Yet it is clear that Egypt – the center of administration, the regional power, and a country that enjoyed relative prosperity that emanated from its stable agricultural base³¹ – was particularly attractive, and those who arrived in Egypt from the more arid regions to the east mixed with Egypt’s earlier inhabitants.

As the central government in Cairo under Meḥmmet ‘Alī gained power and its hold and authority over the inhabitants of Egypt grew stronger, this sparked a transformation in Egyptian emigration and immigration: the flow of immigrants stopped and the flow of émigrés grew. The first to leave or be removed were the Bedouin tribes, and in the course of the 19th century, landless peasants also began to leave. In its aspirations to develop modern agriculture, Meḥmmet ‘Alī’s regime began to restore ancient irrigation systems with forced labor – mostly, if not solely, involving poor peasants who were removed from their homes for these projects or who abandoned their homes and fields due to heavy taxation and the regime’s monopoly on agricultural produce.³² Consequently, beginning with the winter of 1829, large groups of Egyptian peasants left the Nile Valley and crossed the Sinai Peninsula on foot, headed for the Levant.³³

In a communiqué sent to Ma’mūr al-Diwān al-Ḥadivi on the eve of the Egyptian invasion of Bilād al-Shām, it was written that sheep herds had been confiscated from Bedouin from the Ma’ādha tribe since this “eased the flight of Egyptian peasants toward al-Shām.”³⁴

In 1831, more than six thousand peasants crossed the Egyptian border (Sabri, 1930: 131). From a handful of individuals who embarked on such travels during the 18th century, such uprooting was transformed into a mass act of revolt, and Meḥmmet ‘Alī’s regime indeed viewed the migrants as renegades who had taken flight. Since those leaving were needed as forced labor, the Egyptian ruler exchanged letters with the ruler of Sidon (sent to the latter’s residence in Akko) demanding that the latter send the escapees back to Egypt. The first to give the renegades his protection – and the primary recipient of the behest – was ‘Abdallah Pasha,³⁵ who in fact was pleased with the Egyptian peasants’ arrival and rejected the Egyptian ruler’s demand to repatriate them. His refusal, however, provided Ibrāhīm Pasha – Meḥmmet ‘Alī’s son and successor – with a pretext to embark on the conquest of the Levant.³⁶ Meḥmmet ‘Alī complained about ‘Abdallah Pasha’s refusal to top Ottoman Turk echelons in Istanbul, namely, the Sha‘ar Ha-‘elyon (Sublime Porte), who replied that as subjects

of the Ottoman Empire, the escapees had the right to settle anywhere they pleased (Sabri, 1930: 191).

The takeover of Bilād al-Shām (Syria and Palestine) by Egyptian expeditionary forces, who advanced as far as the Alexandrite region and the slopes of the Anatolia Plateau, did not precipitate the conscripts' return for forced labor (*suḥra*) to Egypt. Conversely, since Meḥmmet 'Alī aspired to further establish his hold on the Levant, he changed his tune and embarked on stimulating development projects in these newly conquered regions.³⁷ In contrast to his previous policy, Meḥmmet 'Alī encouraged further emigration from Egypt into the Levant to meet the needs for skilled workers in his development projects of farming and plantations.³⁸

From limited primary documents – mostly citations by travelers and contemporaries of the period – it seems that there were Bedouin who accompanied the movements of Egyptian peasantry, and who, even then, established the villages of the 'Assi confederation of tribes near Beit Govrin and Ghawārna and Arab al-Zubeīd in the Ḥula Valley, all of which are now part of Israel.³⁹ Egyptians also settled in the village of Muftaḥara in the Ḥula Valley (Barslavsky, 1964: 360).

The traveler Tristram claimed that inhabitants of one of the villages in the Beit She'an Valley were Egyptians as well, remarking that “Bedouin pressure them harshly” (Tristram, 1975 [1865]: 375). Peasants founded the village of Maser near Givat ha-Moreh (Jabal el Daḥi), and settled Bilād al-Heshel (literally *kfarei ha-rekhiva lelo reshut*, i.e., “villages of the district where riding was unauthorized”), in the unpopulated spaces in the southern coastal plain on the northwest side of the Gaza Strip.⁴⁰ These new villages included Jamāma, Kufḥa, Muḥarkah, Brīr, and Simsim. At the same time, the *Ufi* – slaves from Sudan brought by Ibrāhīm Pasha – were settled in Wādi Ḥawāret (the Ḥefer Valley, see Weitz, 1952: 111), and the Hanādi in Dalhemmiya and in Ubaidiyye in the Jordan Valley (Avneri, 1980: 14). At the same time, the urban neighborhoods (*sakanāt*) in Gaza, Ramle, and Jaffa were settled by Egyptian newcomers, as will be detailed later. The Egyptian settlers brought with them a primitive kind of wagons that filled up the countryside; a slinglike contraption stretched between two solid wooden wheels and was attached to an axle, and when they rotated, the “wagon” also turned around (Goodrich-Freer, 1924: 139).

PAGE • 10

Philip Baldensperger, a Jerusalem native (1856) who traveled about the country and studied its inhabitants, recorded what he had heard from them, contemporaries of his period:

In the wake of Ibrāhīm Pasha's soldiers came groups of merchants, peddlers and others. As a result, we find entire villages of Egyptians along the Philistine Plain – from the Egyptian River Wādi Al 'Arish to Jaffa – the descendants of those who came in 1831 who have yet to assimilate. A native-born peasant will never agree to give an Egyptian his pure – Palestinian – blooded daughter. “*Iḥnā Falāḥīn wa huma masryiin!*” (We are [local] peasants and they are Egyptians!) – he will say with scorn. The difference between the two “races” is too great to make marriage bonds between them. The Egyptians have Ethiopian facial features – some with broad slightly snubbed noses – and their skin-color is darker. The [Palestinian] peasant woman wears a white kerchief, but her face is exposed and her blue dress is made out of lighter color than the dark blue dresses of the Egyptian woman. The Egyptian women wear the *burqa*, hanging

from [i.e., just below] their foreheads and covering the nose, the mouth and the upper part of the cheeks, the chin and the neck – but leave the eyes and the forehead exposed. (Baldensperger, 1982 [1913]: 115)

Later on, interest on the part of the administration (or on the part of the chroniclers) waned. Among those settling in the Levant, in addition to Bedouin and peasants, were also soldiers and administrators who refused to return to Egypt and deserted. Records of attempts to hunt them down were found by Rustom. At the beginning of the 20th century, among them were Arab Damāira who Rustom states had been brought by the Ottoman sultan to drain the swamps at Ḥadera (Nadav, 1957: 51). Under British rule (1917-1948), Egyptian peasants came and were employed paving the Yavniel-Kinneret road, which bypassed the village of Lubia whose inhabitants harassed Jewish transport (Ever Hadani, 1947: 72).

There were also reports of 150 Egyptian sappers (*Haparrim*) whom a Belgian company brought to lay the track for the Jaffa-Jerusalem railroad (Nadav, 1957: 218). Some of these same Egyptians remained in Ḥadera. Tsvi Nadav wrote in his memoirs: “In Ḥadera we worked together with some twenty Arabs, most Negroes and Egyptians” (Nadav, 1957: 218). In general, new immigrants joined up with more seasoned immigrants from their country of origin who had already taken possession of unoccupied lands along the southern coastal plain and in the valleys, and this took place with the encouragement of the Ottomans and afterward the British, and above all – the Egyptian authorities. On the whole, the policy of Egypt’s regimes encouraged export of “surplus population.” This policy was designed to curtail the number of persons seeking plots for cultivation.⁴¹

Natural population growth was rapid in any case.⁴² It was accelerated with the introduction of industrial crops like cotton in the Nile Valley, the picking of which required child labor. However, because the amount of agricultural land was limited, the supply of cultivatable land was unable to keep up with demand.⁴³ Yet the real wave of émigrés was sparked by the burden of forced labor (the Arabic term for corvée is *suhra*) imposed on Egyptian peasants, a practice that forced many to engage in digging irrigation canals – that is, hard labor, along with the burden of taxes placed on their shoulders. Those living in the Nile Valley traditionally had enjoyed superior living conditions, and its population had been far denser than in surrounding, more arid, less hospitable regions. Emigration was fueled by the decline in the quality of life of Nile Valley peasants during the first decade of the 19th century, along with the renovations imposed by the viceroy’s administration. Villagers were forced to do maintenance work on the rundown parts of the Nile Basin’s irrigation system, on behalf of the new Mamlūk (plural for Mamālīk or “white slave” in medieval Egyptian history) regime.⁴⁴

Even the powers of the Ottoman rulers in Istanbul at that time were insufficient even to back up the attempts of the *Vāli* (governor) of Damascus to curb Bedouin attacks on Darb al-Shām (the caravan route between Egypt and Syria); local sheikhs maintained aggressive control over the hill regions along the road.⁴⁵ Hence, in the power vacuum, Meḥmmet ‘Alī was able to operate against these sheikhs one after the other without interference.

The peasants’ immigration into Palestine continued many years after the conclusion of the Egyptian conquest. The revolt of ‘Urābi Pasha and the conquest of Egypt by the British in 1882 led to the migration of additional Egyptian populations

into Palestine. As one contemporary news report from Palestine noted: “Many of the people come here from Egypt to wait until the danger passes.”⁴⁶ The return of immigrants back to Egypt had rarely occurred in the previous century. For landless peasant immigrants, the densely populated Nile Valley seemed unattractive as compared with the spacious Levant land of settlement.

The waves of newcomers in the early 1830s were partly recorded in writing, but not the influx of immigrants that followed and in fact intensified in the years to come – up to 1948. Factors impelling this flow were the constant population growth and government policy that allowed the “surplus” of people leave Egypt. One can only reconstruct to some extent, based on oral testimonies, what motivated the immigrants to leave Egypt; the nature of the journey; what they experienced upon arrival; and whether and how they maintained contact with their kin in Egypt. Such information is not to be found in written sources.

In the fall of 1965, Kressel began listening to stories of the offspring of the immigrants in the Lod and Ramle neighborhoods where they resided. They told what they had heard from their parents, who had crossed the Sinai on foot or on beasts of burden. The émigrés moved, for the most part, in large groups out of fear of being harassed by Bedouin tribes. Most chose to advance along the northern routes of the Sinai, from Egypt through Al-‘Arish, Rafax, and Khān Yūnis, and from there further north.⁴⁷

As the clout and independence of local sheikhs waned after the Ottomans’ return to Palestine in 1840, road security and travel conditions in general gradually improved. For small groups of several families on foot or mounted on animals, movement was now easier. With the Ottomans’ return the economic situation also improved almost overnight, further catalyzing immigration into Palestine. This was all the more so following amendment of the Ottoman administration (Tanzimāt)⁴⁸ and thanks to growing investments of foreign capital.⁴⁹ The race among Europe’s major national powers to buy land and construct buildings in the Holy Land paralleled the development work initiated by the Ottomans and their German allies to bolster their presence in the Levant. By the eve of the First World War, both investment and construction work had contributed to economic growth.

PAGE • 12

After the war, the growing British hold on the country eased passage of Egyptian émigrés because of the relative security prevailing on the roads.⁵⁰ In March 1926, the railroad from Egypt to Palestine was completed and many young people left by train to seek employment, that is, their fortune in Eretz Israel, sending for their families as soon as they established themselves economically. In light of British investment in the construction of military bases in the region in preparation for the Second World War, cheap Egyptian labor was welcomed. Another important factor was the waves of Jewish immigration to Mandate Palestine, and the capital that the Zionists brought with them to establish Jewish settlements, in turn creating jobs and demand for hired hands – particularly unskilled labor.⁵¹ During the Third and Fourth Jewish migrations (*aliyoth*), the standard of living in Palestine improved greatly, to a level several times over that in Egypt – a disparity that was also a factor in the migration eastward out of Egypt.⁵²

Under the British Mandate, during the 1920s and more so during the 1930s, along with the buildup of forces in anticipation of the outbreak of the Second World War, the coastal plain between Gaza and Jaffa, and the area between Gedera and Ness

Ziona, Ramle and Lod, became densely populated by immigrants from Egypt. This is confirmed by testimony before various British investigatory commissions – established, among other reasons, to determine the absorptive capacity of the country so that immigration policy could be formulated. As Moshe Shertok (Sharett) and David Werner testified before the Peel Commission: “There are Egyptians who are spread throughout Eretz-Israel, some of whom have made their sojourn permanent. There are also Bedouin from Sinai entering Eretz-Israel with their flocks every year, and some are here not just as nomads but are entering the labor market.”⁵³

There was considerable unemployment among local Arabs, and the Hope-Simpson Report criticized the growing employment of Egyptian laborers.⁵⁴ The survey of settlements in Eretz Israel that was submitted to the Anglo-American Committee stated:

In addition to these Syrian and Lebanese laborers who were brought to Palestine under official arrangements, inhabitants of neighboring countries, attracted by the high rates of wages offered for employment on military works, entered Palestine illegally in considerable numbers during the War. For example, in 1942, an Egyptian labor force was brought into southern Palestine by civilian contractors to work for the military forces without any agreement with the civil administration; these contractors were employed on the construction of camps and Air bases. No estimates are available of the numbers of foreign laborers who were so brought into the country by contractors or who further on entered individually in search of employment on military bases.

These illegal immigrants fall into two classes: (a) those employed directly by the War Department and the Royal Air Force. (b) Those working for contractors engaged on military or A.A.F. construction or in other civil employments.

PAGE•13

When unlawful, foreign workers, as those are discovered by the police, are repatriated. No precise figures of their number are available but a recent police estimate is as follows: —

(a)	Haifa and Jaffa ports	400
(b)	Haifa District (excluding Haifa port)	6,580
(c)	Galilee District	990
(d)	Lydda District	1,100
(e)	Samaria District	472
(f)	Gaza District	142
(g)	Jerusalem District	5
	Total	9,687

Measures taken to prevent illegal entry into Palestine can conveniently be described under two heads or routes; illegal immigration by sea and illegal immigration by land.

Additional information on the numbers of “foreigners,” laborers from elsewhere (not local), is lacking and the exact number of Egyptian laborers in Eretz Israel in the war years and their aftermath is not known. The statistics department of the Hebrew Federation of Labor carried out surveys from time to time and published estimates. Eliezer Be’eri, who gathered the data from various sources, claimed that in 1946 there were, on average, 2,046 Arab laborers employed in Jewish agricultural farms

annually, and 14.5 to 38.3 percent of them were Egyptians and Sudanese.⁵⁵ The department estimated that there were some twenty-four thousand foreign workers in the country, while government statistics in 1946 state fourteen thousand Lebanese and Egyptian workers. The tremendous upward shift in the economy from 1940 to 1945 was linked to Palestine's role as one of the British army's strategic bases, and Mandate Palestine's position from a logistic standpoint as a subordinate of British military headquarters in Egypt. Apparently that is why the British military authorities could move employees into Mandate Palestine without supervision and coordination with the Mandate authorities, and then were far from strict in returning such "temporary workers" to Egypt when work on the projects that brought them to Palestine was completed. One may surmise that many such "imports" simply melted into the Palestinian Arab community.

In a survey conducted in 1968 among more than two hundred Arab villages within the Green Line, geographer professor Moshe Braver of Tel Aviv University found traces of the same Egyptian immigrants from various periods. Braver held that most population growth in Arab villages in the southern coastal plain during the British Mandate period was, to a large extent, the result of immigration from neighboring countries, primarily those who came in the 1930s and 1940s (Braver, 1975: 20). He also said that when he studied the village of Beit Jirjā in 1941, he was surprised to find that it was more Egyptian than Palestinian in character. Many of the inhabitants, particularly the older generation, wore apparel typical of Egypt – *galabiyāt*. The people of Beit Jirjā told him that most of them were born in Egypt. Others came with the advancing British army toward the close of the First World War, and others crossed permeable borders (that is, infiltrated) into Eretz Israel later, joining their kin in Beit Jirjā and adjacent villages. In 1948, the village was destroyed and its inhabitants fled to the Gaza Strip. Egypt's authorities, as they still do, blocked the return of compatriots who had left Egypt. This policy encourages the exit of migrants since the country cannot afford the expedited natural growth of its native population.

Figure 1
Arab Villages Where the Inhabitants Were Primarily Egyptian Émigrés

Name of village	Population in 1922	Population in 1944	Percentage increase
Beit Jirjā	397	940	137
Julis	481	1,030	115
Zarnuqa	967	2,380	147
Khartiyah	1,037	2,240	116
Yibne	1,791	5,420	203
Kubebah	519	2,720	211
Qastina	406	890	119

Source: Braver (1975: 17).

The significant population increase that Braver presents could not by any measure be the result of natural population growth; it had to be the product of immigration from Egypt. Egyptian immigrants who arrived in Eretz Israel from 1922 to 1944 also settled in Beit Dajan, Jaljuliyya, Yehudiyya ('Abāsiyya), Yazūr, Sawālmah, Salameh, Saffariyya, Saqiyya, and Feja (Braver, 1975: 17).

A search for Egyptian labor implied a system of “earn then return” upon concluding the job abroad. In actuality, a massive trend occurred of families reuniting with the workman in his new place rather than the laborers returning to Egypt.

Oral Testimonies Regarding Settlement by Egyptians of Palestinian Lands

Upon their arrival in Eretz Israel, the newcomers went through Gaza and continued up the southern coastal plain. Most settled in plains and valleys that had previously been denuded of permanent settlements by Bedouin harassment and damage by Bedouin herds. During the period called “Rule of the Sheikhs,” the Palestinian villager population entrenched itself in the hill regions. That is, here as well Egyptian peasants came, but their numbers were much smaller.⁵⁶ Since records of the movement of immigrants, even in the areas where they settled down, are almost nonexistent, listening to family and tribal histories plays a special role in extracting and elucidating facts about this phenomenon. That is, one can partially reconstruct events by gathering and recording oral narratives. Recollection of migration stories “archived” in the memories of present generations, based on stories passed on within families as an oral tradition from their parents and grandparents, helped us form a fuller view of the process. A number of typical examples are enlightening.

PAGE • 15

I. Dimra

Dimra was a village on the northern border of Gaza. It had been built anew by Egyptian immigrants some sixty years earlier. Dimra's story was told (winter 1968) by Sa'id, the eldest of three brothers of the 'Ukāshah family, when Sa'id was forty-six years old:⁵⁷

Once we were peasants in Egypt. Before that, some say, we were Jews.⁵⁸ Afterwards we became *Aqwām* [independent sects] and afterwards we converted to Islam. Several generations [ago], we don't know exactly the date, the father of our grandfather [Abu Jidnā] went to Gaza and from there our grandfather went to Dimra. Dimra was destroyed in 1948. Its houses were mud huts and only the mosque was from stone. The village was small, maybe 700 souls. They [the inhabitants] would raise unirrigated grain crops and some fruit trees, and grazed cattle. There was a well for the entire village and a well with a motor for Abu Jadallah. He planted 50 dunam of citrus and raised vegetables. He would sell the produce to the kitchen of Kibbutz Yad Mordekhai and even reached as far as Kibbutz Doroth. He would take [agricultural produce] also from Dier Sneid, Najd, Barbra, Hudj and other villages and sell to them. He was like a brother to the Jews and the Yad Mordekhai *muchātr* arranged for us to return [from Gaza, after the inhabitants of Dimra were swept up with the wave of fleeing refugees] but only we three returned with our father. The others

were afraid and stayed in Jebālia. Dimra’s lands straddled the border with the Gaza Strip and on the Israeli side Kibbutz Erez was established.

This narrative (presented here in part) portrays a rural environment, where all the inhabitants were of peasant origin from the Nile Valley and only recently had taken possession of the southern coast, which they found empty of inhabitants. They established houses and at first eked out a living from unirrigated agriculture and raising cattle, until their situation improved, largely because of Jewish settlement in their vicinity. Kressel traced the earliest memories of those who were young boys in these villages and asked them how their childhood homes and the fields cultivated by their parents had looked. It became evident that they had successfully adapted building methods of “clay and bricks” customary in Egypt. On the other hand, the agricultural conditions were difficult for them, having been used to raising irrigated field crops in Egypt. Digging the well enabled the family to plant an orange grove that improved their economy.

II. Zarnūqa (Zarnūga)

Kressel notes: “At the beginning of the 1940s, when I was still a child, I visited the neighboring village of Zarnūqa from time to time with my parents – who were members of Kibbutz Givat Brenner, and with my teachers and members of my class. It was then that I first heard about events surrounding the beginnings of their village, several decades earlier – how the founding families, immigrants from Egypt, chose this place to settle. In 1987 we visited⁵⁹ the home of the Abu Aḥmad family, at the time inhabitants of the Jabālia refugee camp who lived in a spacious dwelling on the outskirts of Gaza City. In response to my describing my childhood visits to Zarnūqa and the stories we heard then, the family related the following:”

PAGE • 16

Indeed, it’s an oral tradition among the sons of our village that our grandparents [ajdādnā] came with their families by foot from Egypt. Their belongings were carried by a *nāqa* [she-camel], and thus they walked for days and maybe weeks, when suddenly the camel took off at a run [*sārat titmatar*] in no clear direction.⁶⁰ Of course they looked [for her and our belongings] and followed her tracks until they came to the place where she was beginning to give birth. At first they felt lost, since after the birth they couldn’t force her to continue and carry [their goods]. So they made her a temporary manger and waited and began thinking – “Where are we rushing to?” They looked around and decided that the place was uninhabited and suitable to make it their home. From here on, by means of this female camel, they understood that this was the Will of Allah, and there they unpacked their belongings, beginning to settle anew.

“The name they chose for their village, Zarnūqa, came from the word *Zarnūq* (pl. *zarāniq*), which means ‘water channel.’ One of the speakers offered the explanation that this was the name given to the she-camel [which they had found and taken with them upon leaving Egypt], since she was found grazing along an irrigation canal in the river valley. Not far to the west of Zarnūqa the villages Yibneh, Bashīt, and Kubebah were established and grew in size. The traveler Philip Baldensperger said in 1893 that the inhabitants of Zarnūqa,⁶¹ Kubeba, and the other villages in the south were Egyptians, and they differed from the other inhabitants and were labeled by local peasants *Masriyīn* (Baldensperger, 1893: 314). To the east and south of Zarnūqa ‘old ‘Aāqer’ and ‘new ‘Aāqer’ were established,⁶² Mghār and Shaḥme. The elders of

the Abu Aḥmad family remembered these villages, except for Shaḥme⁶³ that had been somewhat forgotten.”

III. Shaḥme

The name of the village of Shaḥme has all but been forgotten among the elders of the Jawāriḥ who lived in Gedera (some three kilometers away). Few had heard of it, and even after Aharoni and Kressel jogged memories by citing the village’s name, the elders could not elaborate or tell much about its inhabitants. A clearer memory of Shaḥme – described as a cluster of several tin shanties – emerged among members of Kibbutz Givat Brenner who cultivated lands not far from Shaḥme’s homes during the 1930s and were able to recall a few of Shaḥme’s inhabitants. In the fall of 1947, with the outbreak of the hostilities⁶⁴ leading to the 1948 war, Yosef Titlebaum, Givat Brenner’s mounted guard who patrolled the kibbutz’s fields, was murdered near this village. Older members of the kibbutz remember the village as a village-in-the-making, with a well that the inhabitants had dug by themselves and mud dwellings that they had constructed by themselves. Most were employed in construction, and subsequently in maintenance tasks in the British airbase at Tel Nof.⁶⁵

IV. Qatra and Mghār

Kressel collected a detailed history of Qatra and Mghār from elderly residents of the Jawāriḥ neighborhood of Ramle who, beginning in 1890 through 1947, were employed as mounted guards in the fields of Gedera. They told (1966) that among the multitude of Egyptians who came during the closing years of the Ottoman period and the beginning of British rule over Palestine were those who, in seeking a place to live, improvised living quarters in caves (*mghār*) on the sides of limestone slopes by closing off the entrances with mud bricks.

PAGE•17

On the eve of the outbreak of the First World War One could find them – the *Masārwa* – everywhere, ready to work at any labor, for wages that were cheaper than garbage. [description of ‘Amer Muḥammad Jarūshi, 1967]

Shalom Severdelov, a son of the founding members of the Bilu’im, the group who established Gedera, described (1968) to Kressel the impact of the newly arrived immigrants from Egypt in the vicinity of Gedera as recalled from the time he was a child:

Between us [veteran inhabitants of Gedera] and the Magharba [Arab immigrants from Libya who joined the Jewish settlers] and the neighboring Arabs of the area there was a cynical expression used: “*Eshrīn masārwa b’ashara qirsh al-yūm*” [Twenty Egyptians for ten *grush* a day]. In their place of birth [the Egyptians] had been accustomed to living in fear of the authorities, and when they came to us, before they emancipated themselves [from such cultural bonds of submission to a master], they didn’t request much for themselves, but slowly they learned. The kibbutzim [with their socialist philosophy of life] in the area, in their deference to their neighbors’ wretchedness, gave them *ḥutzpa* [impudence]. To gain the respect of the Arab-Muslim public, they [the Egyptians] were the first to play on religious and nationalist themes to arouse Arab [anti-Jewish] solidarity.⁶⁶

Sheikh ‘Amer Mḥammad Jarūshi, the watchman of Gedera’s fields, added in describing the difficulties he encountered in his job, which caused constant friction between the Gedera peasants and the dwellers of Mghār:

Formerly they [the newly arrived party] were Egyptian peasants and now they were impudent. Toward people like themselves [Egyptian peasants who arrived in Palestine before them, like the Qatra families], they had some respect (they didn’t steal). But toward the Jews, peasants of Gedera, they were cheeky: they weren’t bashful to steal; what did they care?

Most of them didn’t have plots of their own and since there wasn’t enough land around the village to provide livelihood for all, they plowed land for Qatra farmers, for wages; they hitched plows to donkeys and mules. When the British began building the Tel Nof airbase in 1926 the peasants from Mghār worked for them as construction workers. Then came additional waves of immigration, that reached Mghār in the days of the English, and these people set up dwelling places in limestone caves. There were already Egyptians living in caves, who had come several years earlier. The first to arrive established fences from branches and cactus [*subār*] barriers to close off the caves. Some exist to this day. And afterwards they built room after room from mud bricks they carried on beasts of burden from the area near the road below [at the foot of the hill]. There was no longer space for the peasants who continued to arrive, and therefore they built in the area adjoining the road, or alongside the tilled fields of Qatra and Gedera. They built walls of mud bricks and covered them with a roof of branches and mud. The first to arrive in Mghār already worked land in the vicinity and didn’t leave any new plots. The first to arrive got tired of the newcomers and called them *Masārwa*,’ as if they themselves didn’t come from *al-Maser*.

PAGE • 18

This testimony reflects ongoing pressures to emigrate and the initial submissive temper of newcomer immigrants, who subsequently exhibited daring and impudence toward more veteran Arab inhabitants and all the more so toward the Jewish settlements that treated them with empathy because of their poverty. One can observe the quick adaptive abilities that the Egyptian émigrés demonstrated – in altering building methods they were familiar with in the Nile Valley to conditions in a new environment. They quickly built huts from mud-and-straw bricks and made do with the minimum until their situation improved. The British army and the Jewish communities favored employing the Egyptians, and through diligence and a frugal lifestyle the immigrant peasants from Egypt were able to save and gradually improve their living conditions.

V. ‘Aqir al-Jadīda and ‘Aqir al-Qadīma

According to the testimony of Sālem Jarūshi – a narrative corroborated by the testimony of elder members of Kibbutz Givat Brenner – the established village that was situated adjacent to the Bilu’im’s settlement Mazkereth Batya was called ‘Aqir. At first there was ‘Aqir al-Qadīma, established by the earlier wave of Egyptian immigrants who joined the previous Arab peasantry in the vicinity; afterward (due to friction and disputes with the old-timers), these newcomers left and established homes for themselves west of the village. The newcomers were engaged as hired hands in the service of the British, and made a good living and were thus able to

build stone houses, in contrast to the mud dwellings of the established agricultural village. The old-timers had good working relationships with the neighboring Jewish farmers in 'Eqron, while the newcomers were beholden to the British military administration for maintenance and service work at Tel Nof airbase and not at all to the Jewish peasants.

VI. Ness Ziona – Wādi Ḥnīn

With the spread of citrus plantations after the First World War, Jewish peasants of Ness Ziona also began planting citrus groves, particularly after the success of the branch near Jaffa. Ami Zeitzov, the first grandson born in Ness Ziona, related to Aharoni (February 2004) that the success of the orchard groves, following the growing demand for citrus fruit, brought in its wake a flow of laborers from Egypt who came to work in the citrus harvest and summer irrigation.

These first groups of Egyptian workers arrived in the *moshava* Ness Ziona in the 1920s. They came under the protection of the landowner of Egyptian extraction, Abed al-Raḥmān Bey, the descendant of an elite family that arrived with the army of Ibrāhīm Pasha. The Bey's palace was situated on a hill on the outskirts of Ness Ziona and was built in a European-Oriental architectural style. The palace had been surrounded by a garden with peacocks and other ornamental species. The Egyptian laborers included groups from the Sa'idi stock (from Upper Egypt) and some from the Delta area. They built corrugated tin shacks for themselves at the foot of the hill. They worked as well in the groves of the Jews and gradually brought their families from Egypt to stay with them; all came so as to settle permanently – not as seasonal migrant workers.

PAGE•19

The British authorities preferred to turn a blind eye to this influx although they lacked entry documents. Palestinian Arabs from nearby villages viewed the wave of Egyptians as foreigners and of inferior stock. (These Palestinian Arabs lived in Wādi Ḥnīn, Sarafand al-Ḥarab, and “Arab Schboun,” a “suburb” of huts that grew up next to the Templars' community⁶⁷ of Spohn, built during the last decade of the 19th century. Schboun was one of these settlements, situated east of Ness Ziona and west of Ramle.) At first the local Arabs did not allow the Egyptians in their neighborhoods and did not intermarry with “those” of Egyptian émigré origin. The newly arrived Egyptians were not involved in anti-Zionist activity and did not fight against the Jewish community or take part in the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939; they continued to work for whoever provided them something to do. In addition, during the 1947-1948 hostilities they were the first to leave, ultimately ending up as refugees in Gaza.

Another source of information on the settlement of Egyptian immigrants in the Ness Ziona vicinity during these years is the correspondence left by members of the *moshava*. For instance, Yehuda Grazovsky wrote Yehoshua Eisenstadt (Barzilei) on December 18, 1889:

The Arab village of Sarafend that stood in ruins north of the moshava. “*Sarafend al-Ḥarāb*” is now a village of great dimensions. Many Bedouin and Egyptian families settled here. Many dozens of families were absorbed in Beit Dagon [Beit Dajān], in Yāzūr, in Safariyya, in Sarafend Al-‘Amār, in ‘Aqir al Qadima and in other places.⁶⁸

For a great number of Egyptian families arriving in Palestine, plans for making a living remained unclear. Although the available information shows that their numbers were ever-growing, there is no follow-up reporting on workers' attainment of jobs or where they dwelled. The Ottomans did not conduct population surveys. Although surveys were indeed conducted during the British Mandate, these did not bother distinguishing the number of veterans from the number of newly arriving Arabs.

At the same time, the 1939 White Paper restricted the number of Jewish "newcomers" to seventy-five thousand a year. This policy was designed to appease the Palestinian Arabs on the eve of the Second World War. Whereas waves of landless peasants entering from Egypt continued, unlimited and unabated, all along their route, illegal Jewish newcomers were arrested and sent back to the ports they had come from or detained in camps in other colonies of the British Crown, of which Cyprus turned out to be the major one.

VII. The Townships of Lod (Lydda) and Ramle

The years of the "Rule of the Sheikhs" (1760-1831) in the Levant were hard for the farming populations, especially residents of villages and townships such as Lod and Ramle. Because of their location in the coastal plain, the villages' fields and plantations were within easy reach of Bedouin flocks that caused extensive damage to crops; the local farmers were too weak to protect their fields from the Bedouin and their grazing herds. For several decades the *suq al-Barein*⁶⁹ on the outskirts of Ramle was the reason for such waves of destruction. As the flocks of camels, sheep, and goats descended on the marketplace they passed through surrounding tilled fields and plantations.

PAGE • 20

While the *suq al-Barein* was held no more than several times a year, this was enough to decimate the peasants' agricultural work along the route leading to it. The Ottomans' return in the mid-19th century led to the stemming of the stream of Bedouin and their flocks from the Negev into central Palestine. Thus, with the revival of farming and the general trend of economic development, demand for farmhands increased. That, in turn, accelerated the influx of landless Egyptian peasants to the Levant.

Large groups of émigrés began to arrive and settle in the environs of villages and towns. Among the newcomers were both Bedouin and farmers, who back home had found themselves unemployed and without a livelihood because of the lack of unoccupied land. Some settled between the villages of Na'āna and Sutariyya, and from there went to work as day laborers in the fields and orchards of their neighbors, or offered themselves as itinerant workers in the building trade.

Crowding in the towns' streets became burdensome. Old-timers in Arab Ramle recalled that people employed these immigrants in all sorts of jobs, but viewed them with contempt for their willingness to accept any kind of work and because the Egyptian immigrants picked through the garbage. Some old-timers even recalled the mocking songs they sang to jeer the Egyptians, for example: "*Baladi tanta wa-anā 'ayish fi al-awānta*" (My hometown is Tanta [a city on the eastern side of the Nile Delta] and I am living by virtue of a falsehood). Likewise Muḥammad Tāji, head of the Muslim Council in Ramle, spoke in 1968 about the

Egyptians from Gaza he saw again in town in growing numbers, following the opening of the border after the Six-Day War. Mr. M. Tāji commented with disdain: “*Gaza is Ifrikiya wa al-ghazazwe Ifrikeein* [Gaza belongs to Africa and the Gaza people are Africans]. In other words, they were not properly Palestinians in origin or Asian as we the senior citizens of town are. ‘*Ifriki*’ has returned to become a label of inferiority and derision.”

With the British authorities pretending ignorance about the new waves of *Masārwa* immigrants, many among the veteran Palestinian communities saw the “Englees” as accountable for their having to cope with the ongoing influx. In that period of 1939-1945, the war effort overshadowed England’s “guilt” that had originated with Lord Balfour’s endorsement of Zionism, promising England’s support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine.⁷⁰

VIII. Towns in Central Israel and in Wādi ‘Ara

Some 35 percent of the population of the “Arab Triangle” (Tirra, Teibe, Qalānsuwa) were descended from Egyptian immigrants, and the percentage of Egyptians in Wādi ‘Ara was even higher.⁷¹ The old-timers in these villages, who have historic roots deep in Palestine, went down to live in the plain area from their dwelling places in the mountains of Judea and Samaria. Previously, during the 19th century, they traditionally went down from their villages in the spring to work the fields and sow summer crops in the coastal plain. Only after the return of the Ottomans did they change this pattern and begin settling permanently, mainly along the coastal plain and in the valleys.

PAGE•21

In building homes, working the fields, and other rural labors, they were assisted by their families and by former Bedouin families who settled near them – diligent, cheap, but skilled laborers who originated in Egypt. Attorney Muḥammad Masārwa from Kufar Qara’ related to Aharoni that his family had preserved a family tree going back some 150 years. According to his testimony recorded by the authors,⁷² the founders of Yehudiyya, which grew to become a large village, had all arrived from Egypt, specifically from the city of ‘Abāssiya and its nearby communities in the Nile Delta. The villages in Wādi ‘Āra (Um al-Faḥem, ‘Ar‘ara, ‘Aāra, Kufer Qara’) and in the Triangle (Kufer Qāsem, Teibe, Qalānsuwa) include hundreds of families who originated in Egypt and came in the wake of the conquering army of Ibrāhīm Pasha. According to several local traditions, their forefathers were trained as camel drivers in the military and stayed after the retreat of the Egyptian forces.⁷³ Traces of patterns from those days, which occurred more than a century ago, were evident in the local councils’ elections in ‘Aār‘a and ‘Ar‘ara, the last of them in October 2003.⁷⁴ Subdivisions of ascription of family groups retained the common origin that united them.

IX. Arab Jaffa

The Ottomans’ return in the 1840s to Jaffa, which had been a negligible small township, created the momentum for Jaffa’s growth; the role the Egyptians played in this process is worthy of a serious study. According to the map of the Jaffa region made by the British Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF), there were Egyptian neighborhoods (singular *sakne*, plural *saknāt*) in most parts of the town. *Sakna*

Masriyye appears on the Bedford map from 1863 under the name “Egyptian Village”; it lay along the coast, from west of the ancient Muslim cemetery. *Saknāt* Abu Kabīr and Ḥammād are located north of the old city. *Saknet* al-Darwīsh is situated to the south.

These dwellings were all established by Egyptians who initially arrived with the army of Ibrāhīm Pasha, continuing until 1948. *Saknet* al-‘Abīd (literally “quarter of the slaves,” i.e., the black Africans), as its name indicates, was founded by the descendants of Sudanese slaves at the Egyptian delegation (Tolkovsky, 1926: 131). Tobler observed in his visit to Jaffa that southeast of the town area was a quarter of low mud dwellings occupied by Egyptians who had fled from persecution back home or who remained after the Egyptian expedition’s retreat. North of the town, he noted, was a village of Coptic Egyptians that was duly recorded on the British Admiralty’s map as an Egyptian settlement (the Bedford map, British Admiralty, and Tobler, 1853-1854: 615). At the close of 1880, Conrad Schick related that many homes had been built by Egyptian newcomers (Schick, 1880: 167-168).

A fully detailed report of the Egyptian *saknāt* is found in both the legend and the map itself, drawn by Th. Sandel; the map enumerates eleven such Egyptian neighborhoods: Rashīd, Sakhne, Sheikh Ibrāhīm, al-A‘jami, al-Jebalia, Darwīsh, al-Turk, Abu Kabīr, al-Ara’in, al-Dunyāt, and Sumeil. This map had been appended to an article, written by Schwarz published in the 1880 quarterly of the German Eretz Israel Exploratory Fund (Sandel, 1876: 129-131; 1880: 44-51, op. p. 44).⁷⁵ Old-time residents of Jaffa relate that Rashīd was an Egyptian fishing village on the Manshia beach, whose name came from the name of their village of origin, Rashīd, on the eastern stream of the Nile Delta.

PAGE • 22

The Shar‘i (Muslim jurisdiction) Court in Jaffa contains a wealth of information about the ethnic identity and geographical origins of the city’s population, and its records reflect the integration of Egyptian immigrants in local economic and social life. Egyptian immigrants are mentioned in court records under names that indicate their origins such as: Masri, Dumyāti, Sa‘idi, Jabāli, and others. For example, the records indicate that the street of the old public baths (*ḥut al-Ḥamām al-Kadīm*) had a large concentration of Egyptian immigrants. A representative sample of Sijil volumes (administrative protocols) from the years 1214-1215 (1799-1800), 1227-1228 (1812-1813), and 1241-1242 (1825-1826) revealed that in these years, annually on the average, thirty-seven grooms, thirty-nine brides, twenty-three legal guardians, and thirty-two witnesses came to court to conduct marriage agreements and were cited as Egyptians in the records.

Wilkins (1996: 96-99) examined Sijil volumes from three different periods at the outset of the 19th century and found that, broadly speaking, Egyptians preferred to invest in buying grazing land for planting orchards beyond the city, rather than purchasing houses and shops within the town. This finding explains, perhaps, the agricultural settlement of Egyptian immigrants in “satellite neighborhoods” (*saknāt*) surrounding Jaffa. It seems, however, that in the last analysis, after many years, the Egyptians were indeed absorbed among the local Arab population. As Phillip Baldensperger wrote after visiting Jaffa:

The population today, although it is primarily Arab, is represented by no less than twenty-five different peoples, most of them are Arab, Palestinians and Egyptians. The Negroes headed by the Sheikh al ‘Abīd live in general among

the Egyptians, although they originate in various Black African countries that are placed north of the equator. The black population is made up of slaves who fled their masters, or were emancipated under the law that freed slaves, or were among the pilgrims [to Mecca] who got stuck here and can't return to their countries of origin. The Egyptians live in neighborhoods called *saknāt* [sing. *Sakneh*] and although they (the first of them) are here approximately seventy years, they preserve their typical [Egyptian] apparel. (Baldensperger, 1893: 313)

At the beginning of the 20th century, Abu Kabīr was a neighborhood of Jaffa populated solely by Egyptians (Shimoni, 1947: 106). Its name is identical to that of the town of the inhabitants' origin. Further to the north, other Egyptian *saknāt* were founded – Faja, Jaljuliya, Em-Mlabes, Sumeil, Sheikh Muwanis, and Salame. The new inhabitants of these six villages began to cultivate the lands that were seasonally cultivated and seasonally forsaken (after collecting summer crops) by the inhabitants of the hilly regions in the east. Although the land belonged to these, they lacked the determination or the means to establish their ownership claim by keeping the Egyptians away. The Egyptians simply prevented the landowners from returning and working their fields (Ever Hadani, 1951).

At the Yarkon River near Petaḥ Tikva, the sheikh Ḥamd al-Masri “took possession” of a large parcel of land (Granovsky, 1949: 6). To the north of Jaffa there was also the village of Arab al-Jamussin; its inhabitants raised water buffalo (*jamūs*) like their ancestors in Egypt.⁷⁶ The Arab Abu Kisheq – who lived in the area between Jaffa, Herzliya, and Petaḥ Tikva – were, according to the oral tradition, also from Egypt (Ben-Zvi, 1936: 175).

PAGE•23

In a survey that Aharoni conducted among the small Egyptian lineages (*ḥamā'il*) living in Jaffa, he found several dozen of them who were aware of the tie of common origin that relates them. For decades, the elder of their joint community was called the ‘*Umdah* (as in the Egyptian villages). The members of this landsmen community had come one-by-one to Palestine, the most recent of them in the 1940s. The ‘*Umdah* Abu Muḥammad Ḥalāf, age 85, said (in February 2004):

I'm a peasant from the Delta area. I came in 1945 overland mounted on an animal, from the village Shib in Al-Qumm in the Manufiya district in the Delta area. I heard that a livelihood there [in Palestine] was plentiful and good and I decided to try [my luck]. I didn't travel by train out of apprehension that I would be caught and expelled back [to Egypt] because I didn't have entry documents. When I reached Qantara [the town on the eastern side of the Suez Canal] I met other Egyptians there whom I didn't know, and they were headed for Palestine. Together we arrived in Jaffa. I began to work in the citrus grove of a Jew, a resident of Rishon le-Zion. Not everyone succeeded like me. A few of them [my acquaintances] died in coffee houses [*bares*]. They didn't have any relative or close acquaintance [i.e., they didn't have a roof over their heads and they did not use their income constructively] and there were those who fell into alcohol and card-playing [i.e., gambling]. I'm one of those who settled-in here, and I brought a woman of Lebanese origin from 'Akko and we raised a family.

Once, those coming from Egypt tended to settle in open areas on the edges of the city, thus forming neighborhoods for themselves. Members of the Abu Dien lineage from a region in Upper Egypt not far from the Sudanese border, who live in a

“compound” of their own, meet to talk and drink coffee under the shaded area in the patio between the houses. Among themselves they differentiate between *sa’ideh* (those who came from Upper Egypt) and *falahīn* (those who came from Lower Egypt – the Delta area). Following the signing of the peace treaty with Egypt, they renewed family ties with their village of origin in the Sa’id region and went back for bride exchanges with their families of origin there.

Their “Egyptianness” is not apparent in any outward signs, neither food, apparel, nor manner of speech; it stemmed from a sense of affinity with an unfamiliar culture, “something in the blood.” The son-in-law of the ‘*Umdah* said that Egyptians know how to treat adults with respect and address them with the word “*ya-‘amm*.” The son of the ‘*Umdah* said that Egyptians recognize one another and feel closer to one another. However, not everyone belonging to the younger generation is aware or concerned about where his parents came from. “It’s a mistake that a father doesn’t tell his children from where he came or when he arrived.” The speaker said he did not have any preference in marriage, but viewed it as a marked advantage to marry a girl from a familiar Egyptian family. He said that the Egyptians in Jaffa got along well with one another and solved disagreements among themselves.

The impression is that there is a kind of Egyptian *esprit de corps* and a certain affection for Egyptian culture. There are young people who say they feel they are Egyptian, but they cannot say exactly how this is manifested. One said that he loves to travel to Egypt and visit family in the Suhāj region. He does not encounter any difficulties in his travels. After he visited his distant relatives he went to enjoy Cairo because he likes the city’s nightlife. Following the opening of the Israeli-Egyptian border, Jaffa Egyptians went to Egypt to find their relatives. The ‘*Umdah* went to the village of his birth, met with kin, and went to see the family lands. The standard of living did not appeal to him, but those who went to see Suhāj were positively impressed by the level of agriculture and the positive atmosphere regarding renewal of contacts with their distant relatives.

Preliminary Insights and Research Objectives

Should new research be embarked on, it should address social, economic, anthropological, and linguistic aspects of Egyptian immigration to Palestine. How were the Egyptian émigrés received, how did they acclimate, and how did their own cultural baggage and the local Palestinian culture affect them? There are differences between immigrants who came in waves and those who came one-by-one and were absorbed within the local population.⁷⁷ The latter were able, for the most part, to acclimate well, even to the point of forgetting their native tongue. On the other hand, immigrant groups bring with them and retain certain speech and behavioral patterns that establish insular community life and preserve certain cultural components from their country of origin. These are able to “survive” as a separate entity and even influence and diversify the local language and culture of absorbing societies.

The existence together of groups or subgroups speaking divergent “dialects” of one language, or of families who speak different languages with one another, is common in no small number of countries. This occurs, for example, in the hilly area of the Maghreb, where one encounters Berber-speaking communities including “dialects” of the Kabyle language while in the coastal areas the language of the Arab conqueror prevails. On the whole, Arabic is the more prevalent language and is employed by

all as their *lingua franca*.⁷⁸ What work methods, speech patterns, and vocabulary of village life in Egypt were copied and still can be found in Palestine?⁷⁹

We now briefly discuss the phenomenology of the immigration of peasants and Egyptian Bedouin to Palestine. We do so from two standpoints that may prove to be fertile soil for future studies of the Arabic language – vocabulary and dialectology – in historical perspective.

The first concerns the nomenclature common among the Arab population in Palestine today. The second concerns the agrarian relationships that developed in Palestine between landowners and tenant farmers, between old-timers and newcomers, and between Bedouin and peasants. These two facets are, of course, only one pair of components among several others that arise in the context of immigration from Egypt to Palestine. We present them here as “relics” of speech in the hope of inspiring further inquiry into the evolving language. There is room here to embark on a more systematic and thorough study of language change.

Nomenclature and Family Names

What can one learn from the nomenclature – from first names chosen for children at birth; from family and community names of arriving migrants that are founded on their previous districts of residence in foreign lands?⁸⁰ To what extent are divergences in names a proper indication of historical facts? Popular names ascribing to one’s ethnicity that are so typical of Egyptian émigrés to Palestine include al-Masri and Masārwa.⁸¹ Among Jaffa residents we heard a belief that whereas *Masriyīn* (people of Egypt) are those who live in Jaffa, the *Masārwa* live in the Triangle and Wādi ‘Arā. The Egyptians in Jaffa, it is said, do not belong to descendants of those Egyptian “deserters” who fled the army of Ibrāhīm Pasha or in the wake of his conquest. Instead they are “latecomers” who only arrived in the 20th century, until the late 1940s, during the British Mandate.

PAGE • 25

In village names that appear in family names, we found evidence that the immigrants came from various areas of Egypt. For example, in the southern coastal plain, in Wādi ‘Arā, and among the Negev Bedouin, those called Tantāwi (or Tamtāwi) hailed from the area of the city of Tantā in the Nile Delta. Those called Al-Qrenāwi hailed from the vicinity of the city of Qarīn in the eastern Delta. The name Abu Swess indicates hailing from the area of the Suez Canal. A Shalūfi (and in the plural Shalāifa) are those who came from the town of Shalūfa west of the canal. Damanhuri is one who came from the vicinity of the town of Damanhur in the Delta. A Banhi is one who arrived from the city of Banha. Kibriti is the name for those from the township of Kibrit in the al-Ḥarbiya district. A large group of these landmen came to Gaza in the late 1880s and then moved to ‘Aqaba, ultimately settling in the town where they established themselves economically and socially. They became notable members of the Jordanian administration.

The name Sa‘idiyīn, including the Khuwitāt tribe, indicates the area in Upper Egypt where they sojourned. Qatātwa is the name for those who camped in the area of Qatiya in the northwestern corner of the Sinai Peninsula. Tursinā and At-Tūri are those who came from the vicinity of Mount Sinai. Frequent in the names found among Jaffa families of Egyptian origin are, for example, Abu Ḥalāf, Abu Dien, Tuhāmi, Bandāri, and Khanūn, which are related to actual Egyptian districts or towns.

Among those in the Jawārish neighborhood of Ramle there is a prominence of families with the name Tarābelsia – from Tripolitania in Libya. Different names distinguish those of a Cyrenaica extraction. The title Mughrabi and in its plural form Maghārba distinguishes those who came from Egypt but whose original embarkation point was the West (i.e., “Maghreb”), which can be in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, or Morocco. Our notes include reports of distinguished Egyptian communities evolving in Jericho and Be’er Sheva.

Among the Negev Bedouin, Egyptian peasants were prominent from several standpoints. First and foremost, they had arrived in search of arable land and willingly took offers to be tenants. Introducing themselves as farmers, knowing something about cultivation (also of non-cultivated land), they changed their hosting society’s attitudes toward farming among the pastoral nomads who claimed possession of the land. Second, they did not dress like their hosts and were relatively light of skin color for which local Bedouin have a special nickname: such individuals were called “*Humrān*,” that is, reddish or flushed-faced, while the Bedouin who hail from the Arabian Peninsula call themselves *al-sumrān* – swarthy or dark-faced. Even though the Egyptian expeditionary force’s escapade ended in 1840, ‘*asāker Ibrāhīm Pāshā*’ had survived as a pejorative flung at those who originated in Egypt, along with the nickname ‘*qlā’iyya*’ alluding to the place where the Egyptian newcomers stopped for a rest after coming out from Egypt – the Khān Yūnis fortress which is called Qal’ah.

Another linguistic differentiation that marks families of Egyptian émigrés among Negev tribes is the addition of “Abu” to a personal name put together as their family name, such as Dār (house of) Abu Aḥmad, Abu Bāder, Abu Bāri, Abu Jāber, Abu Ja’far, Abu Hāni, Abu Jarād, Abu Zāid, Abu Mtīr, Abu Ḥamād, Abu Swēleḥ, Abu Sa’ad, Abu ‘Ābed, Abu ‘Āyāsh, Abu ‘Āmer, Abu Ghānem, Abu ‘Arār, Abu Sbēḥ, and so on.⁸² That is, “Abu” plus an abstract noun like Rabi’a (Spring) or entitlement like Jlidān⁸³ or Sa’lūq, which in fact are nicknames, better suit the Bedouin proper.

PAGE • 26

Agrarian Relationships

The culture of governance in Egypt during the 19th century was different from that prevailing in the Levant (or Bilād al-Shām). The work culture and the styles of living⁸⁴ such as patterns of dress, social array, diet, consumption patterns, and other areas of life in the Nile Valley were different from those in Palestine. Thousands of peasants, émigrés who were among the earliest to arrive in the 19th century, took possession of the southern coastal plain from Gaza northward, which at that time was relatively unpopulated.

The old-time populations in Palestine received the Egyptian newcomers with understandable lack of enthusiasm. Some of the lands in the southern coastal plain that the immigrants found “empty” had, in the past, been sown for winter grain crops. Villagers from the hill region to the east had been forced to abandon or neglect these lands because of the risk of destruction by Bedouin herds that were prevalent for decades during the “Rule of the Sheikhs.”

The Egyptians took what they found. After the fact, the Ottomans gave this de facto seizure of lands a de jure recognition, since the Egyptians were tilling *mawāt* plots (wasteland, marginal to an extent that there was no way to protect the crops from damage caused by Bedouin herds).⁸⁵ The Ottomans were interested

in expanding areas under cultivation, if not for their contribution to development then at least for the taxes the yields could afford. Hence they welcomed those who came and did not demand that they pay for the land.

Gradually, Egyptians, having muscled their way to the status of landowners, even began to sell land to the Jews. For example, the heirs of the Egyptian count Shadīd (a European title for a nobleman and a landowner) had sold two thousand dunams in the village of Miser (meaning “Egypt”) in the Lower Galilee.⁸⁶ David Hacoheh relates in his memoirs that Shadīd’s heirs negotiated to sell parcels of land in Haifa, and the discussions were carried out secretly out of fear that people from the Arab nationalist movement would intervene (Hacoheh 1974, 48). Rachel Danin, the daughter of Yehoshua Danin (the son of pioneer newcomers to Jerusalem from Poland in the 19th century, 1843-1924), wrote in her memoirs that her grandfather engaged in negotiations with an Egyptian landowner in Jerusalem over purchase of plots of land in the city (Alper, 1967: 20).

The Abu Ḥadra family that originated in Egypt mustered some thirty thousand dunams in the vicinity of both Gaza and Jaffa. On their arrival, initially their family settled in Gaza and became very prominent toward the end of the 19th century (Granovsky, 1949: 77).

There were immigrants of Egyptian peasant stock who arrived in Palestine in the closing years of the 19th century and onward but did not find work or land under tenancy arrangements, or other jobs in the rural sector of Palestine or in its slowly growing towns. Such Egyptians were encouraged and advised by Gaza merchants, who had business connections with Bedouin in the Eastern Negev, to move farther away from the seashore into the Be’er Sheva Valley where their Bedouin partners would welcome them and employ their skilled manpower.

PAGE•27

Thus initially, following their arrival at Khān Yūnis, the Egyptian peasants went on in search of work further north. Later when the need for farmhands in the north declined, a growing numbers of Egyptian peasants were directed eastward as a “default option,” where they encountered the Bedouin sheikhs in the vicinity of the newly founded Be’er Sheva.⁸⁷

Consequently, new markets opened up (from 1900 to 1910) for desert (dry) grains in Europe, especially for Negev barley that was in demand for beer production. Once Gaza merchants got involved in grain/fodder export projects, both Bedouin sheikhs and newly arrived Egyptian peasants in their areas became part of this export business. The merchants and sheikhs harnessed the immigrant peasants to do the elementary farming work; that is, plowing the virgin land, sowing, growing the crops, and harvesting, while they themselves reaped easy profits (see Marḥ, 1967).

The functions fulfilled by the Gaza merchants enabled them to serve as go-betweens and middlemen. In this respect, however, they were catalysts for the expansion of cultivated areas and growth in the size of herds in the eastern Negev. The “partners” were aware of the excellent labor force of Egyptian peasants at their disposal. Whether out of wretchedness and desperation or naiveté, the “greenhorns” helped the merchants and the sheikhs reap huge profits by selling their own labors cheaply. The reigning sheikhs of the Bedouin preferred to engage the Egyptian newcomers in a system of voluntary servitude or as sharecroppers.

Any future study examining the initial impact of Egyptian immigration on agrarian relationships in Palestine should address the following issues:

- The need for farmhands was felt in areas of arable fields along the coastal plain or the northern valleys, not in the desolate Negev. As for connecting the migrant peasants arriving from Egypt to tribal sheikhs in the Be'er Sheva Valley so as to push them to start to plow the barren land, this occurred thanks to an interest group: merchants from Gaza who found a channel to export dry barley and wheat to Europe. Negev cereals proved fitting for the beer production process; hence they were demanded in beer-consuming lands, not including the Middle Eastern countries. Hence, these merchants were the entrepreneurs who sought to expand the arable land east of Gaza for cereals production. They approached the sheikhs of tribes who traditionally used land for grazing, to urge Egyptian peasants (*fallāḥīn*) to plow parts of their tribes' *dīra* [tribal grazing lands], under their auspices. In return, a good deal (at least a third)⁸⁸ of the crop was their gain.
- What made these deals succeed was enabling the peasant newcomers to strike root among the herders (Bedouin), on their grazing lands, and later to own parcels of cultivable land. Although they lacked initial capital and possessed no political might, they could negotiate on their own behalf, pay the sheikhs and eventually own their lands.
- Did the Ottoman authorities and afterward the British ones bestow on them the right to do so, and if so, was this after the land was surveyed, the fields parceled out, and plots registered by the authorities? These questions were studied and answered in detail, focusing on the waves of Egyptians who came to the Negev beginning in the last decades of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century. (see Kressel et al., 1991)

PAGE • 28

Interviews were conducted with elderly persons who themselves had migrated from Egypt to Palestine and still remembered those early days, or with their children who recalled their elders' stories. It was found that many of the Egyptian peasants who arrived at the outskirts of Khān Yūnis in the last decade of the 19th century moved to the vicinity of Be'er Sheva on the advice of grain merchants from Gaza. The stories detail how tenant-farming relationships developed with the Bedouin sheikhs on *dīra* plots. The informants related how the grain merchants equipped them with work tools and paid them for the seed they purchased. The study uncovered the process that led to the tenant farmers buying the land from the owners who had initially rented it out to them: after years of laboring and saving, the Egyptians simply surpassed the Bedouin in arduous, productive work, in prudence in the use of capital, and hence in accumulating the savings needed to pay for land (Kressel, Ben-David, and Abu-Rabia, 1991). The Egyptian peasants' diligence paid off in the grudging respect they won from the Bedouin, but this also fueled jealousy and hostility that continues to this day – reflected in the saying among the Bedouin: “He [the *fellāḥ*] came to lend a hand and turned into a pharaoh” (*Ajānā 'awn wa-sār fara'oun*).⁸⁹ All this occurred under the new Ottoman umbrella that enabled it.

The Scarcity of Documentation

The scarcity of historical documentation on immigration of Egyptians to Palestine in the 19th and 20th centuries is strange, even incongruous. Particularly glaring is

the lack of written portrayals of people who crossed the Sinai desert on foot. Groups of wretched people migrating on foot or on beasts of burden, riding for days in the desert, have no parallel – and then arriving totally unexpected in the new place. Their first encounter with the new country and its residents occurred around “Al Qal‘ah” (the fortress at Khān Yūnis, from which the town’s name was derived). Local merchants who negotiated on their behalf told them of the compassion and kindness of neighboring Bedouin. As guests of a sheikh they begin cultivating the dry land around his home.

Summer crops, we were told, were tried first. Accustomed to growing irrigated crops along the Nile Basin, the newcomers had to adjust to the Negev climate and make a living from dry farming, in a region that suffers frequent droughts.

These conditions were arduous. But in light of what these immigrants had experienced in Egypt, they did not pick up and go back; instead they acclimatized and prudently built a new life. Using the small income they made allowed them, as tenants, in a good year of rain, to acquire the plots they had tilled and make them their own land. Yet no literary text is left to shed light on that process and all that they experienced. What enabled this process to be what it was? In seeking an explanation for the silence and lack of written documents, we came up with a number of plausible answers:

1. The Middle East “culture area” typically lacks a tradition of counting people and statistically monitoring in- and out-migrations. Absent are figures for population growth, for moves in or out of the lands during the 19th century. All this pertains to the information available on Egypt and Palestine in the period before Western colonialism.⁹⁰ In sharp contrast with other great migrations, such as those of the Irish or the Poles to the New World that took place during the same years, little has been retained in writing here. Other migrations were dated, documented, and studied both in the countries of origin and the countries of destination. Immigrants elsewhere left a rich body of family correspondence. There were items in the papers, reports of interviews with immigrants, articles analyzing the factors behind their move and their frame of mind in their new setting (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1958).

PAGE•29

For the great immigration of Egyptian peasants to the Levant there is only a handful of written documentation. The 1931 census of the Palestinian people carried out by the British Mandate administration is the first to provide data on people of Egyptian origin, and it seems that the officials who carried out this census underestimated the scope of the phenomenon. According to their sources there were approximately 4,000 persons in Palestine who were born in Egypt, including 2,315 Muslims, 705 Christians, and 958 Jews. Only 2,016 of these were found to be former Egyptian citizens.⁹¹

2. The increased exodus from Egypt interested the Egyptian rulers no less than avoiding the influx of foreigners into the overcrowded country. In general they responded only when individuals or groups left in protest or as part of an act of defiance, such as peasants who fled the burden of the oppressive *suhra* (forced labor) that Meħmmet ‘Alī’s regime imposed – much in the way the Egyptians chased the Children of Israel in their exodus from ancient Egypt. Generally, though, the Egyptian government only closely regulated entrance into the country. That was the case in the period of Joseph and his brothers, and the same holds in the modern period.

In the arid Middle East, Egypt's irrigated areas that promise prosperity stand out. Many from the arid parts of the region streamed to Egypt as well as Mesopotamia in light of the large river basins and the population density in these areas. Their respective authorities closely regulated entrance into these fertile areas and did not pay much attention to those leaving with no intention of return. Throughout history, Egypt's authorities have had to grapple with excess population. An instance can be seen in Egyptian policy toward the people of Gaza during the years of Egyptian rule (1948-1967) there. Egypt's governments took no steps to annex Gaza to Egypt; in other words, Egypt did not ease the return of its own émigrés. Even those citizens who left Egypt for Palestine during the Second World War were considered to have left Miser, their homeland, for good.⁹²

3. Egypt's ongoing problem of excess population is reflected in the short period (1958-1961) during which Egypt merged with Syria to create the United Arab Republic, part of the Egyptian quest for hegemony over the Arab world.⁹³ The merger would enable Egypt to send citizens to cultivate open lands in Syria and Iraq. Egyptian émigrés gaining citizenship in Syria and Iraq would empower Egypt and its leadership in the Middle East and bolster their own power at home, averting the risk of "population explosion." Thus the Egyptian governments sought to increase work emigration but to conceal the scope of a massive relocation of people so as not to generate opposition among host countries.⁹⁴ Sunni Iraq, at the same time, had welcomed the influx of Egyptians (all Sunni Muslims), which helped them stem or offset the demographic peril of a fast-growing Shi'ite majority in the country.
4. The exodus of Egyptians to Palestine was clearly evident to the Arabs of Palestine. Their appearance, their manners, and most of all their Arabic dialect revealed their foreign origins to the locals, but this was less evident to the Turks and not at all to the British. In contrast with Jewish immigrations that stood out as an influx of "foreigners," the Egyptian peasants quickly blended into the local human landscape.
5. Three factors influenced the mildness of Palestinian opposition to Egyptian immigrants:
 - The lack of a clear local cause or common interest in stopping the Egyptians from coming.
 - Egyptian peasants were viewed as a hardworking and therefore welcome group who should be bolstered compared to the influx of Bedouin, whether whole tribes or tribal elements, with the sheikhs' resulting hold over the rural population.
 - The Egyptians contributed to bolstering the "Arabness" of the country – first in competition with its Turkish rulers, then in helping to demographically counteract the Jewish and Christian immigrations.⁹⁵
6. The return of the Jews to the edges of Eyalet Damascus (Palestine, not including the Galilee and Haifa),⁹⁶ the emergence of a Zionist-Jewish community with a strong political dimension in the "center of the Arab world," and of Christians – communities, monasteries, and churches – demanding a part in the Holy Land, is a factor needing further elaboration. A sense of mortal danger or challenge to Arab hegemony prompted Muslim

religious leaders and intellectuals to suddenly “recall” Palestine (which thus far had been a backwater of little importance to Arabs) and pronounce that all the lands of the Muslim-Arab Conquest (*faḡay’a*, pl. *afyaā*) – including Palestine – were holy to Islam, and therefore must remain forever in the Umma’s hands. The flow of Egyptians into Palestine thus assumed an Islamic tinge, helping prevent other faiths from gaining any demographic prominence. Bolstering the Muslim community in Palestine through the influx of Egyptians, in the face of Christian activity and Jewish settlement, became a pan-Muslim religious interest. Therefore, even if these Egyptian migrants were not welcomed, their presence was not perceived as something forced on Palestinians by Egypt’s rulers.

7. In order to discern ethnographic, folkloristic, and linguistic elements within the population of the Levant and uncover the impact of immigrant populations, one needs an anthropological perspective and scholars trained in this discipline. One needs not only research money but also motivation to delve into this issue. Ethnology, however, occupies a minor role in the academic world of the Middle East (Shami, 1989). Among intellectual circles of the region’s academic institutions and most of the academic community of the region, there are few advocates of the pluralistic approach that is fundamental to the social sciences that accentuate scientific impartiality. In contrast, prevailing attitudes in the Middle East emphasize and pursue “solidarity among the lines” and “unity of purpose” (*weḡdat al-sāff* and *wahdat al-hadaḡ*).⁹⁷
8. Building a Palestinian nationhood requires social homogeneity; some believe that talking about domestic differences, or foreign elements that are part of the population, undermines solidarity. Since the Egyptian population is a very large component that, relatively speaking, only recently arrived in Palestine, recognition of this aspect of Palestinian society and its historical record would weaken the general and unified national narrative that asserts Palestinians are descendants of the Philistines – meaning that they are rooted in antiquity. That claim⁹⁸ allowed them to reach parity with the Jewish claims to Eretz Israel, based on history. Thus, it is a Palestinian interest to purge Arab advocacy and public discourse of any mention of the influx of Egyptians.
9. The Jewish research community, too, has shunned examining the movement of Arab populations into Palestine. There are scholars who have been intimidated by the huge Arab Middle Eastern majority just beyond Israel’s borders. Seeking to avoid, at any cost, exacerbating existing tensions, such scholars refrain from generating controversies and provoking anger among Arabs⁹⁹ by raising such a touchy subject – to such a point that this topic is patently ignored. Professors Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal have written a four-hundred-page book, *The Palestinian People: A History*, that traces their national movement back to the Egyptian invasion of Ottoman Palestine in 1831 under Meḡmmet ‘Alī. Yet with all its rich detail, the book says nothing about the Egyptian immigration that occurred with Meḡmmet ‘Alī’s campaign.¹⁰⁰
10. Another factor behind Jewish scholars’ avoidance of discussing the Egyptian immigration to the Levant is linked to a larger phenomenon: namely, the

growing hegemony of postmodern, multicultural, relativist perspectives in the academic community worldwide. Such a value-neutral perspective puts immigrants and longtime inhabitants on the same footing. This tendency is further strengthened by the popularity of the concept of “imagined communities” (after Benedict Anderson, 1983), which puts historical records and mythic narratives on the same footing. Where and why Arabs came to Palestine is viewed as immaterial. A further line of reasoning holds that Egyptians found shelter in the Levant just as Jews did in Palestine: “If Jewish immigrants are considered Israelis, why shouldn’t Egyptian immigrants be considered Palestinians, without dwelling on differences?”

The legitimacy of such research is also discouraged by misuse of new perspectives on otherness, cultural practices, versions of religion, and so forth. In an academic climate where “singling out immigrants” is branded as artificial and unwarranted, discriminatory and racist, and distorted when studies rest on documents or input from officialdom or the absorbing society rather than immigrants themselves, research on the Egyptians becomes nearly impossible. Moreover, any attempt by Jewish academics to break the Palestinian population down into component parts is branded not only as an outdated, “Orientalist” approach but also as a disingenuous endeavor – with covert, “purely political” motivations to fragmentize Palestinian unity (“divide and rule”) and undermine the legitimacy of the Palestinian liberation movement.

11. Last, some sectors of Israeli Jewish academics take the above arguments a step further, adopting unquestionably the Arab narrative that Palestine is and always was Arab – just like the entire Middle East. Jews, then, are an artificial colonialist stream who were once welcomed, then rudely turned on their hosts and grabbed their lands. Such an outlook puts any Jewish scholarship of Palestinian origins on a defensive footing, whether out of a sense of guilt or political correctness. Post-Zionist historians have obsessively adopted pro-Arab narratives without any critical examination or attempt to validate or cross-reference claims. Some of these narratives have effectively obstructed any attempt to examine social realities and separate social facts from mythology. A myth is a story whose primary purpose is not to entertain (e.g., fiction)¹⁰¹ but to bolster minds on matters that perplex them, hence diminishing tolerance for facts that do not ease one’s position and sociability in the hosting environment.

PAGE • 32

When a topic or research findings run counter to political correctness, such as the study of a significant number of Palestinian people who are descended from recent immigrant stock, the result is fierce opposition (and scant funding). When such research is carried out, it can expect to encounter attacks on its academic integrity; any discussion of this issue challenges assumptions about “Palestinianism” and hence undermines both cherished values and Palestinian political capital.¹⁰²

Conclusion and Epilogue

The marking anew of international borders between Egypt and Israel, an outcome of the 1948 war,¹⁰³ narrowed the passage from Egypt via the Sinai to the Levant. For the Egyptian labor force, for which finding jobs in Bilād al-Shām was a crucial pressure

valve, alternative crossings were needed. An impermeable borderline in the eastern Sinai amplified the problem of a “population explosion”¹⁰⁴ in Egypt proper, which did not subside, and needed alternative channels for the migration of labor¹⁰⁵ from Egypt eastward, if not westward as well.¹⁰⁶

In 1954, the new revolutionary regime in Egypt discussed encouraging emigration as a solution to excess population.¹⁰⁷ In 1958, with the establishment of the United Arab Republic, there was a plan to settle a thousand Egyptian farm families in Syria. The dismantling of the UAR led, however, to cancellation of the program.¹⁰⁸ In 1958, *Al-Aharām* wrote that the subcommittee of the Committee for Arab Affairs of the Egyptian National Council had recommended that emigration from Egypt be encouraged.¹⁰⁹ Although “export” of unemployed and excess population was not an official policy of the Egyptian government, this has been so unofficially and covertly and one witnesses an unending stream of outward-bound Egyptian citizens. In the 1950s, in every part of the country this unspoken but deliberate Egyptian emigration policy, designed to solve the problem of excess population, operated parallel to campaigns to lower the birthrate.

Beginning in the 1950s, Iraqi (Sunni) officialdom warmly welcomed any Arabs except Palestinians¹¹⁰ who were willing to uproot and settle in Iraq. This policy was meshed with a policy of encouraging higher fertility in Iraq: in 1974-1975 the government prohibited the use of contraceptives, primarily among the Sunni population. Those coming from Egypt were promised restitution for travel expenses, free housing, as well as six to eight *fadān* (about three thousand square meters) per family for private cultivation, for an unlimited time period. The Iraqi regime, in its efforts to increase the weight of the Sunni population compared to the Shi‘ite and Kurdish ones, continued its policy of *Sāmi Shawkat*, which as early as the 1930s called for settlement of thousands of Egyptians on uncultivated land in the Euphrates and Tigris Valley.¹¹¹

PAGE•33

From the late 1950s, a wave of peasant families emigrated from Egypt to Iraq. In 1983, the Iraqi authorities estimated that approximately 40 percent of all the Egyptians in their country were engaged in agriculture, 34 percent in services, and 22 percent in industry. In September 1980, it was estimated that a total of some 342,000 Egyptians had been absorbed in Iraq. The highest estimation was made by Dr. Cammillia Al-Solḥ, who in 1984 put the number of Egyptians at approximately 1,250,000. The conductors of the survey complained about the difficulty of accurately estimating the number of immigrants to Iraq, since Iraqi government policy allowed the entrance of workers (Sunni Arabs, that is) without work permits.¹¹² When the Egyptian immigrants from the village of Ḥālsa near Baghdād were asked if they were happy that they had changed their national ascription, most replied that they refrained from assimilating with the Iraqi people because Iraqi daughters were not circumcised (clitoridectomy) and because they still harbored hopes of returning one day to Egypt, their homeland.

It is perhaps surprising to discover that, like those Egyptians who immigrated to Iraq and to the Gulf states, in Palestine as well Egyptian immigrants’ descendants have not assimilated entirely into the local Arab population, and the fissure between them and the rest of the Palestinian population has not been erased. A sense of alienation, with expressions of a different identity toward “the newcomers,” is still common among long-timers. Bedouin in the Negev – and this is after one hundred years of living together – still use humiliating terms¹¹³ toward the Egyptian persons and lineages that are relatively prosperous compared to their immediate Bedouin neighbors.

When capital from major Western nations began to be invested in Palestine, fostering development in a host of areas, the Egyptian immigrant population reaped personal rewards from such development. In contrast, among the rural population of long-timers, development sparked protests against the West among those in the hill regions, who suddenly “remembered” that they had held lands in areas undergoing development, which in the meantime had fallen into the hands of cultivating Egyptian others.

Because of the demographic threat and talk of a population explosion, emigration trends from countries of origin, particularly Egypt, were perceived as a positive development. Alienation or disaffection toward the émigrés focused on those who sought to *return* to their countries of origin, even if their return was due to special circumstances. Egyptian policy, which was formulated in practice after Ibrāhīm Pasha’s conquests, locked the doors from Palestine to Egyptians who had migrated eastward. The Egyptian regime in Gaza from 1948 to 1967 blocked the path for thousands of its own citizens – shallowly rooted¹⁴ in Palestine and now uprooted refugees of the 1948 war. Special permits were needed to visit their homeland and families left behind. Visas for offspring to study at Egyptian universities were allocated very selectively and over-judicially.

One witnesses the movement of people out of Islamic countries to Christian countries, “voting with their feet,” seeking not only political or economic asylum but also cultural asylum from oppressive, tradition-bound societies. Likewise, were it not for Israeli scholars refraining from even raising this issue out of political correctness, one could offer the concept of easing congestion in Gaza by rehabilitating refugees in northern Sinai.

PAGE•34

When asked why he had come back to Israel so soon after a mere four-month visit to his place of birth, Abed al-Salām, who was the first person to establish contact between the inhabitants of Jawārish and their original community in Tripolitania, told his neighbors (a conversation to which Kressel was party): “I wanted to see people [and women] with unveiled faces. Over there all are covered, confined to close tribal circles.”

The material presented in this study was first collected in viewing the social array of Bedouin tribes. The context was current social and cultural issues of the Bedouin, without much regard to their history and to their tribes’ migration. Only after synchronizing, our focus came to include the diachronic dimensions of cross-desert migrations and the reasons that brought them about. We found that the travel route was generally the northern-Sinai one, and the reasons for the migration, as well as the social composition of these groups, generally the same.

This study reports what was observed and heard regarding the ongoing flow of Egyptians to the Levant, including Palestine, throughout the modern era. It emerged that there was a pattern and a phenomenon that needed to be addressed. Some of the blanks in oral testimony were filled in by written documentation that was subsequently uncovered. It is not too late to conduct more research on this topic – and it would be laudable if such scholars would emerge from *within* the Palestinian academic community. After all, their noteworthy origins and the travels and travails of their forefathers are part of their own historical heritage.

Time, however, is running out. Written documentation is scant, and it is important to salvage details archived in the collective memory of elder members of the community before it is too late.

In the meantime a narrative, without the benefit of disciplined historical research, has grown that views the Palestinian Arabs as the exclusive indigenous population of Palestine, with no regard for the non-Arab presence in the land. This narrative has two features: it ignores the important role of migration in fashioning the demographic makeup of Middle Eastern states; and it negates the historical connections of other peoples to the same territories. Nearly a century ago, local Palestinian Arab historians began to make the claim that Moses did not lead the Children of Israel to the Promised Land but, rather, guided Arab Muslims from Egypt to Palestine. This account of history, from their view, meant that other peoples had no claim to the territory and they were not required to share it.

The reiteration of this unfounded view back in 1943 led the great Hebrew poet Nathan Alterman to publish a poem in response, in his “Seventh Column” in the newspaper *Davar*,¹¹⁵ entitled:

*“Palestine is an Arab land.
Strangers have no share in it.”*

A clear night. Trees rustle
Their boughs in an airy whisper.
From above, stars of the Arab night
Sparkle over Arab land.

The night-stars twinkle and blink
Sowing their trembling light
Upon the quiet city, Al Quds,
Where dwelt King Daoud.

From there, they gaze
To the distant city, Al-Khalil,
Burial place of Father Ibrāhīm
Ibrāhīm who sired Ishāq.

From there, their sharp line of light
Hastens to color with radiance bright
The waters of Al-Urdūn river
Which Ya’qūb with his staff crossed over.

A clear night. With an airy wink
Night-stars sparkle as they must
Upon the Arab hills
Which Mūsa saw from afar.

[translated by Edward and Susann Codish]

Clearly, this intellectual struggle over historical truth has been going on for a long time. What is required is academic maturity and a willingness to leave behind political agendas and/or the politically correct that have disrupted historical, cultural, and anthropological research for more than a century. This is important not only in order to understand the genuine processes of the peopling of Palestine for posterity, but also in order to forecast demographic processes that will affect the future and to respond to them with creative solutions that can advance the region as a whole. A return to neo-positivistic scholarship, improving on what we already know from

the past,¹¹⁶ can illustrate the validity of hidden demographic processes and the way a “fertility race” has been an enduring component and an inherent undercurrent of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Egypt can play a positive role in the dialogue for a genuine peace if it encourages its scholars to remember Egypt’s native sons who participated in the long march of émigrés from Egypt. Those peasants and Bedouin who crossed the Sinai to the Levant over the last century are part of their own recent historical narrative and heritage; yet, up until now, these documents have been left to yellow in unexamined archives.

The last “enemy” of historical documentation is the mistaken postmodern assumption that scientific research can never be objective, and since we are all inherently biased there is no value to chronicling events. To date there still remain countless stories of immigration in the collective memory of the protagonists. Most stories have not been recorded for posterity, or narratives have been recorded but their voices have been hushed or sidelined as irrelevant – whether because of self-censorship, because historians have failed to recognize the narratives’ importance in time, or because the struggle over the land imposes a form of censorship.

Adamant positions about their right to the land, Palestine, were henceforth endorsed by the newly arrived Egyptian migrants. It resembles the attitudes of the veteran Arab residents of the land and of the arriving Jews with their historical claim. Muslims rely on the Islamic perception of *fay’ e* (pl. *afyā’a*), meaning a booty land conquered or otherwise gained by the Muslims that should, therefore, remain part of the Umma’s real estate for years to come.

PAGE•36

Despite the passing years, recollection of one’s country of origin is a widespread motif. The histories of immigrants who have arrived in Palestine from its neighboring Middle Eastern lands are largely stored in families’ memorials and are related on occasion to their offspring and friends.

Bifurcation; What Causes the Split among the Gaza Strip's Inhabitants?

The Gaza Strip: Last Visits

To follow the changes that have occurred in Gaza, the late professor Paul A. Hare and I visited the Gaza Strip several times, the last time being in 1989. In 1987, coming from the Desert Research Institute of Ben-Gurion University, I simply drove my car into the Gaza Strip. Then, there was no checkpoint to interrogate us about the reason for coming or going. In the morning we drove to the Djabaliya refugee camp in the middle of the Gaza Strip. In the afternoon, we left the Strip to return home to the Negev Highland. The work of fencing the Gaza Strip was completed in 1994, following domestic struggles that went on there.

In August 2005, the Gush Katif bloc of Israeli settlements at the southwestern end of the Gaza Strip was dismantled. The entire area came to be run by the local residents. Since then we have lost contact with our acquaintances in Gaza and could only learn about what was going on there from pursuing the news.

Back in 1987 there was hearsay about “petro-dollars” reaching the hands of UNRWA officials. Apparently, unknown Middle Eastern donors entered the picture in light of the growing difference in income between local employees and those who found jobs in Israel. There were surreptitious flows of funds coming in, but none of our informants knew for sure precisely where they came from or how it was used. Initially, no one knew for sure how the money was smuggled in or who was the first to accept it. But a sudden difference in the consumption habits of the civil administrators was clearly observed. At first, like their neighbors who earned money from working “across the Green Line” in Israel, they, too, could show new patterns of spending. Investment in building began to appear, including the trend of constructing high-rise apartment blocks.

PAGE • 37

During the 1990s, the diversity and amounts of money received from outside sources increased. As well as traditional UNRWA funding and other constant funds, different Middle Eastern contributors began to donate large sums of money, targeted to the administrative apparatus. Support for the residents of Gaza reached the dominant groups of civil servants: schoolteachers, policemen, health personnel, and religious functionaries, who were essentially the domestic leaders of the Strip prior to 1967. They needed this added financial backing due to the decline in support for their positions. Opening the Israeli border in 1967 had diminished their relative salaries and status, placing them below the growing echelon of entrepreneurs who found ways to work in Israel or with Israeli firms. UNRWA employees who dealt exclusively with the people in Gaza, in situ, were left behind.

Hence, the external capital arriving in Gaza turned out to be from two major sources. On the one hand, traditionally, there were the budgets paid by the *Wikalet al Ghouth* (UNRWA). On the other hand, there was money earned individually by independent workers in Israel or via trade with Israeli

firms offering salaries. As well, a considerable number of Gaza inhabitants found work in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates of the Arabian Gulf.

For example, based on 1987 data, the salary of high school teachers reached NIS 800-1,000 per month. The salary of construction workers, such as an iron-bender, stone-layer, builder, or plasterer, averaged NIS 280 a day. Therefore, 25 workdays a month provided NIS 7,000. At various construction sites, we found experienced professional Gaza builders employed as contractors or sub-contractors, leading groups of masons under them. Solel Boneh, a construction company founded by Israel's Federation of Labor, acknowledged their ability and helped them to succeed. They were compensated at standard Israeli rates.

Moreover, hundreds of Gaza traders would drive to Beit Romano in Tel Aviv every Sunday morning to purchase household commodities, foodstuffs, and the like, at wholesale prices. With this merchandise, they appeared on Sunday afternoons in West Bank towns such as Bethlehem, Ramallah, and east Jerusalem. On Monday evenings, many appeared at the Lod marketplace in Israel to serve customers on Tuesday. Wednesdays they moved to Ramle, Thursdays to Beersheba, and Fridays were found at the Ali Montar market, on the east side of Gaza City. Vans with cabins enabled them to sleep in their vehicles. At those marketplaces, toilets and running water were made available by the municipalities to enable the traders to spend days and nights at their workplace.

This setup last for 23 years. Objections by the Gaza establishment, facing the challenge of a rising echelon of entrepreneurial individuals, led to the end of this "private initiative." Thousands of demonstrators called for the freedom to find work, even if it was outside of Gaza, and called the establishment "bribed leaders," and "*Shia!*" (i.e., pocketing the Iranian [Shi'ite] petrodollars), but their protests were cut short by gunfire, with casualties numbering in the hundreds. Protest leaders were caught, bound in ropes, dragged to the top of water towers, and pushed down to their death as the mob cheered.

The attacks on the demonstrators did not reflect any objections to improving economy, but they did reflect objections toward "working for or working together with the [Israeli] foe." This was indeed a battle cry. It was not a socialist one as in fighting over "means of production" or better wages, but a Jihadist one, calling to liquidate rebelling subjugated folks (*ahel a[l]-dhimma*, i.e., Christian and Jewish peoples), whose holy writings were preserved by Islam, though on various humiliating conditions. Preparing for the future inter-creed war, as Muslims, they were forced to shrink their standard of living and the size and height of homes.

Iran donated petro-dollars to support a war attitude. The UNRWA establishment also sought to retain their social position and power. Despite growing poverty and stagnation all around, UNRWA defeated the challenge of the independent entrepreneurs. Wishing to subjugate those "rank and file" who excelled in working "abroad" (in Israel), they recalled the time of intra-Islamic unity vis-à-vis the "Palestinian Jews" of 1947-1948 and during the years that followed up to 1973.

Spreading the attitude of being at war with Israel helped overcome intra-tribal enmity. Ancient disagreements, however, returned when fighting Israel was relaxed. Returning to domestic squabbles cracked inter-tribal unity. On the one hand, it emphasized the instrumentality of a nearby foe, a scapegoat on whom to hang a surplus of inner rage. Since unleashing inner rage upon their comrades would mean an impending disaster, it was constructive to have an alternative target of hate. Liquidation of others occurs throughout the world, including in the Middle East. The trouble is that where tribal societies prevail, pluralism finds it hard to exist and grow.

The ancient *Salafi* battle in Karbala in 680 CE, immediately after the appearance of Islam, has resounded throughout Islamic history, which saw many battles. Maybe one side (the Sunnis) did not intend to pour salt on the historic wounds caused by this battle with their defeated rivals (the Shi'ites). But they did, reigniting the embers of this half-forgotten primeval war. Flames broke out and have been burning ever since in the Middle East. In more modern times, there was the defeat of the "Arab Spring," which was premature, hence doomed to fail. Close to the original setting of this war, first in Tunis (2012), it spread all throughout the region along with war.

Apart from the high number of casualties, the economic basis of the region's existence has been ruined. Wide areas of cultivated land have been forsaken and towns and residential areas have been ruined, displacing millions of helpless people who have fled. Most of the entities in the region that should have retained clear thinking and intervened to help the situation fell short of doing what they could have done. The bottom line is an urgent need for readjustment, to limit the impact of the tribal yoke.

PAGE • 39

Attempts to overcome this situation have recently been made by using the region's ancient strategy, meaning, harnessing huge tribal entities to fight together. The trouble is that when one of these fights comes to an end, there is a new need for a future one. A ceasefire reawakens the search for the next coming war – for unity's sake. Is this deliberate? Or is it an unconscious search for *shuhada* (martyrs) who will better serve the cause? This is not bizarre when casualties provide the needed headlines. Presenting funerals is good for reaching easily convinced, innocent minds, rather than talks on Palestine and lands considered Arab and Muslim since time immemorial. Who would believe, for example, that Omar Ibn Al Khatab, who passed by the Holy Temple in 632 before leading his army along the North African shore, reaching the Atlantic Ocean, would conquer the land ascribed to the *Umma* (believers in Islam) until the End of Days?

This version of Muslim history, regarding the ancient conquest of lands, wiped out previous historical accounts of these same lands. Earlier historic records did not count. Neither archeology of ancient sites, nor writings of historic importance, including those of the Bible, seemed to matter. The holiness of this narrative has been taken for granted since the arrival of Muslims in the area. It is seen as a well-acknowledged fact that did not justify concern. While no "board of history" has disqualified delving into the Bible, knowing it has no relevance made it clear that nothing in it implies any danger to the belief in Muslim primacy over Jerusalem. The "neutral" Bible has been

allowed to survive due to its being unfit to answer the question of whether Jews ever lived in Jerusalem, or were included among its gifted builders.

Not surprisingly, the recent decline in the Middle East has led to a return of the Salafist spirit. This is perhaps a mistake caused by a miscalculation of historical and cultural differences. During the 1970s, the West, led by the United States, mobilized Islamic volunteers to chase the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. Thousands of adventurist Muslim believers were mobilized, responding to this call. Armed, equipped, and guided by the U.S. military, after a few years of war the troops triumphed. They defeated the Soviet military machine, causing its retreat. A short time afterwards, the Soviet Union fell. This loosened its grip in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. All of these countries had a Muslim background prior to the Soviet Union, and most of their citizens were passive believers in Islam. By giving credit to a Jihad campaign, buttressed by the U.S. army, this signaled a Central Asian Islamic victory. Its success awakened an urge to exploit it, taking Jihad elsewhere. This led to a struggle as to whether a Shi'ite or a Sunni should lead the troops towards a successful Jihad.

The road leading from verbal debate to violence was short. Exchanges of fire soon took place, and an intra-creed war started. As of Summer 2018, this war has been rumbling on for a seventh year.

Jihad implies pleasing the Almighty by fighting and winning over others elsewhere. For committing the ultimate self-sacrifice, Jihadist fighters are promised an abundant sexual life in Heaven. Although present day media shows views of outer space, which questions the presence of skies, traditional, "better knowledge" has the last word. Where darkness rules, the power of gravity vanishes. There is no air to breathe, and logically there is no room for living beings. Nonetheless, it includes G-d and His supporting entourage who watch us from above. "You say there is no G-d at all?" I asked the Negev *sheikh* Freh al-'Asem. His answer was: "*Allah hu dhameerak*" i.e., G-d is your conscience, meaning that a person who doesn't have a conscience has no G-d.

In the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's ayatollahs disrupted many years of fruitful collaboration between royal Iran and the State of Israel. Reaching Iran on the road leading from Turkey in the late summer of 1962, I could see Israeli experts working in a wide variety of fields. For example, when there was an earthquake in the town of Qazvin in the fall of 1962, Israeli medical experts and equipment rushed to the site. A field hospital was built and managed by Israeli teams. Additionally, thousands of Iranians were treated at medical institutions in Israel. Farming experts enriched Iran's agriculture with milking cows and modern dairy installations. We met kibbutz experts helping to develop fishponds alongside rivers and introducing new species of farm products. Israeli experts also paved roads, built bridges, and constructed hydroelectric plants next to waterfalls. As well, at the oil refineries of Abadan, local guides showed us unique devices developed by Israeli engineers.

Since graduates of Qom, the center for teaching Shi'a Islam some 70 km. south of Tehran, took over the country, they have worked to take the leadership of the Islamic world away from their Sunni rivals. With this comes laying

the groundwork toward a coming Jihad. As these Islamists moved toward former-Muslim parts of the world, they felt that Israel was a suitable target to start with. For this reason, years of goodwill and collaboration with Israel abruptly came to a halt. The students of a belligerent creed, who toppled the Iranian monarchy, sought to turn their country's future backward in time.

Following 1,400 years of feeling like an underdog, repressed by the dominant Sunnis, Shi'ite Muslims found a positive common denominator: the rejection of Israel's right to exist. The chance of reuniting Islam's streams suddenly seemed clear. Gaza Sunnis, financed by Iran's Shi'ites, are sent to act as suicide volunteers (*Shuhada*). They try to break through the barbed wire of the border fence between Israel and Gaza. Due to a failure of memory, the Gaza Sunnis failed to recall that, after all, the fence was built to please them. It has been in their interest, first and foremost, to keep it open, notwithstanding the interest of the State of Israel.

Present-day Middle Eastern countries find it hard to step beyond their historical tribal ways. They can't even see that their tribes are destroying the structure of their countries. In view of present-day facts, and with concern for the future, perhaps it is time to confine the impact that paternal tribes have on Middle East politics, limiting their power and the frequency of wars. A sure way to do this would be to spread the concept of embracing as equal in importance all your blood relatives: those on your mother's side should be considered as equal to those on your father's side.

Another change is to create accountability for those on the lower rungs of the social ladder. In the hands of tribal elders (*sheikhs*), they are often led astray. In private hands, much depends on their individual preparation and frame of mind. There needs to be a lasting government, including the engagement of civil servants, elected parliament members, social institutions, educational facilities, erudite public figures, voluntary associations, and the like.

PAGE • 41

Moral thinking is, for most, an individual responsibility. "If I do wrong, G-d forbid, it could be infectious and encourage others to follow the evil track. The consequence of chaos would be my guilt, which should hurt my conscience." "*Awal a(l)-shar – shrarah*" (the first to enroll evil – [is] a fire spark). A more sensible logic would be: "beware to cast out sparks of fire, lest flames will come out of them and burn your dearest, yourself, and all you have."

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Notes

- * The first version of this research was presented on June 9, 1999, as part of a lecture by G. M. Kressel at the 23rd National Convention of the Israeli Oriental Society devoted to “Jews and Arabs in Eretz-Israel/Palestine: Social and Political Aspects.” A Hebrew version of this research was published in *Jama’ah* 12 (2004): 201-245.
- 1 Video: “ Hamas Minister of the Interior and of National Security Fathi Hammad Slams Egypt over Fuel Shortage in Gaza Strip, and Says: ‘Half of the Palestinians Are Egyptians and the Other Half Are Saudis,’” Al-Hekma TV (Egypt), March 23, 2012, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/3389.htm>.
 - 2 Joseph Ben-David and Amiram Gonen, “Negev Bedouin and Bedouin-Peasants in Process of Urbanization,” Jerusalem: Florsheimer Institute, 2001.
 - 3 Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 22.
 - 4 See Rashid Khalidi, “Jerusalem: A Concise History,” <http://web.archive.org/web/20041023165717/>, http://www.acj.org/resources/khalidi/c_history.htm.
 - 5 See E. Bromberger, “The Growth of the Population in Palestine,” *Population Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, June 1948, pp. 71-91, and Fred M. Gottheil’s essays: “Arab Immigration into Pre-State Israel: 1922-1931,” and “The Smoking Gun: Arab Immigration into Palestine; 1922-1931,” *Middle Eastern Quarterly*, Winter 2003, pp. 53-64.
 - 6 Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925 – Gregg International Reprint, 1968), p. 79.
 - 7 Ibid.
 - 8 Tabitha Petran, *Syria* (Washington, D.C.: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 43.
 - 9 Hassan Hassan, “Why Tribes Matter in Syria,” *Guardian*, July 25, 2012.
 - 10 See David Grossman, *The Arab Population and the Jewish Grasp in Eretz Israel by the End of the Ottoman Period and the British Mandate* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004), pp. 55-65 (Heb.)
 - 11 Negev Bedouin encampments are divided into two groupings: “pure” Bedouin and Bedouin families of Egyptian peasant origins. Al-‘Aref calls them “*Qurba*” (1937), who are indeed Egyptian immigrants who, he said, tilled fields that had previously been grazing lands – which they worked as tenant farmers of indigenous pastoral (i.e., “pure”) Bedouin. In this regard, see also Marḥ (1967).
 - 12 See, for example, the work of Alois Musil, a scholar of Bible and Oriental sciences who passed through the Negev on his research travels. Particularly telling in our context is A. Musil, *Arabia Petraea* (1907-1908), a travel journal and ethnographic description of his experiences in searching for the ancient roots of the Bible.
 - 13 Identification of Egyptians among the Bedouin population requires digging further into their social texture, behavior, and affinity. Small details that are not observable to an outsider elucidate the regions from which they arrived. For a pioneering study of the Egyptian peasants among the Negev Bedouin, see Marḥ (1967). The differences are generally apparent to local populations, who recognize one another’s origins in casual talk, vocabulary, and looks. Although attire is similar, skin color is a bit different.
For historical data that has value in understanding anthropology, including subgroupings in Negev Bedouin populations, see Ben-David and Gonen (2001); Kressel, Ben-David, and Abu-Rabia (1991). See also Kressel (1993, 2001); Kressel and Ben-David (1995, 1996).
 - 14 The clout enjoyed by the pastoral nomads compared to the village population (which is numerically superior several times over) rests on the nomads’ tribal organization and

organizational solidarity; see Kressel (1993).

- 15 Tax raising in the service of sultan, king, or emir.
- 16 Regarding the phenomenon – common over a period of hundreds of years – where Bedouin tribes made a living by extorting protection money (*hawa*) from tillers of the soil in the Nile Valley, see a host of sources quoted by Aharoni (2000). On a similar phenomenon in Iraqi river valleys, see Batatu (1978): 63-87; Black-Michaud (1986) discusses relations between the sheikhs of the Luri tribe and farmers in the Luristan Valley in Iran.
- 17 On the Egyptian regime’s growing interest in the Levant in the latter half of the 18th century, see Crecelius (1986). On pushing exploitive Bedouin out of their encampments at the outskirts of villages along the Nile and in the Nile Delta, see the chronology of Abed al-Rachman al-Jabarti (1879-1880).
- 18 Asian pastoral tribes even seized the reins of government in Egypt (the Hyksos Kingdom of “shepherd kings”) or procured an influential position in Egypt’s government hierarchy (Joseph Ben-Israel, his brothers, and their descendants) – two groups in antiquity who subsequently either returned to the Levant voluntarily or were pushed out by force. On Egypt’s ruling groups and their Bedouin subordinates before the time of Meḥmmet ‘Ali, see Aharoni (2000), part 3 (pp. 215 ff.). Tribes that obeyed his rule integrated into his army in fighting new Bedouin tribes who broke out of the east and sought to enter the Nile Basin, such as the Tyāhā, Trābeen, and other Ḥejāz tribes who were driven back to their land of origin.
- 19 See Aharoni (2000): 220 and 241, fn. 16 This is the source of confusion regarding the tribal ascription of the Ḥawāra and the Hanādi.
- 20 Dar al-Wathā’iq, Cairo, Dfitar 41, no. 664, 10 Dhu el-Ka’idah 1247/April 12, 1832; 13 Dho el-Higja 1247/15 May 1832.
- 21 Scholars have assigned different dates for the arrival of the al-Ḥāsi. See Aharoni (2000): 244, fn. 162.
- 22 Dar al-Wathā’iq, Daftar 741, no. 272, 21 Rabi’ al-Awal 1244/October 1828.
- 23 Report of Captain Aubry-Bailleul from July 1832, in Duin (1931): 261.
- 24 See Robinson, 1970 [1853]: 390; also Rustum (1936), document no. 30.
- 25 See Pin, 1980 [1878]: 259. He recalls Salameh Tachawi as the brother of Akel Ara’an al-Ha’si. This may be a familial (i.e., biological) relationship of two brothers, as is common in Bedouin society.
- 26 Correspondence sent by Ibrāhīm Pasha to Sa’ami Bey, cited in Rustum (1936), vol. 1, p. 158, document no. 4738, 27 Jumadi al-A’achra 1252/October 10, 1836.
- 27 They go today by the name al-Jalil, which reflects demographic processes of division and masking of origins – a process that typifies many tribal societies.
- 28 See Aharoni (2000): 235, 244, based on document no. 1778, 1790 3738, in Rustum (1936). Corroborated in the travel diary of Robinson 1970 [1853]: 47, who visited the site in 1838. The *tel* is named after the Hanad’i faction. The sparseness of tilled fields and the presence of fallow fields and abandoned villages along the southern coastal plain were the product of Bedouin encroachments on villages and villagers.
- 29 From the word *Chawa’ra*, which is a bastardization of *Hawara* where the letter H tends to be replaced with a guttural *Chet* in pronunciation of *Hawa’ra*, *Hana’di*, *Baraa’sa*, and so forth.
- 30 For research into primary sources regarding the Mamluk reign and its impact on agrarian relationships in Eretz Israel, see Holt (1966); Frenkel (1996).
- 31 Based on artificial irrigation with the waters of the Nile, not on natural precipitation.
- 32 For a comprehensive discussion of economic development in Egypt during the 19th century, and the agrarian policy of Meḥmmet ‘Ali including forced labor (corvée, *sukhra*) that he instituted, see Hershlag (1965): 91-92; Rivlin (1961); Gran (1979).
- 33 See Ben-Zvi (1967): 448. Ben-Zvi refers to some twelve thousand Egyptian peasants who invaded Palestine that year, but does not give a source for this statistic.
- 34 Al-Majlis Al-‘Ali to Ma’amûr al-Diwān al-Ḥadivi, 14 Jumādi al-Ulāa’ 1246/October 31, 1830. Dār al-Wathā’iq, Cairo, Diwān al-Ḥadivi, Daftar 759, no. 222.
- 35 The lack of any clear population centers or hubs of government that could provide protection for the escapees throughout the entire region from Rafah to Akko is evidenced in the political and economic circumstances prevailing in Eretz Israel at the time. Up until the second half of the 18th century, Palestine was split into two Ottoman administrative districts and not viewed as a geographical entity in itself. The Galilee and the northern valleys belonged to the Sidon sanjak, and all areas south of the northern valleys belonged to the Damascus sanjak, while for

a certain period Jerusalem and Gaza enjoyed autonomous administration. The governors (*Wali* pl.) of the sanjaks were appointed anew each year by the sultan, and what such “administrators” were able to extort from locals in the course of their governance was subsequently extorted from them in turn, upon their return to Istanbul.

The weakening of Ottoman Turk rule from Istanbul in the latter half of the 18th century was also reflected in a regime of sheikhdoms that developed in the area of the Negev Plateau, while the governors in the area of Akko shook off any obligations to the sultan in Istanbul and established their own tyrannous rule. This breakdown in government was accompanied by unabated attacks by Bedouin from Gaza throughout the southern coastal plain and northward, while already in the 1810s European pirates were disrupting maritime and overland commerce between Egypt and the Levant, exacting a terrible price economically, see Cohen (1973): pp. 152 ff.

- 36 The history of the travels of peasants from Egypt eastward can be extracted from documents of the Egyptian expeditionary force to Syria in 1831-1841. See the important work of the historian Asad Rustum (Rustum, 1936). For later replications regarding the descendants of immigrants from the Maghreb in the Mashreq, see Kressel (1975). Sabri holds that Abdallah Pasha in practice boosted Egyptian settlement in Eretz Israel (Sabri, 1930: 131).
- 37 For details of Egyptian investment in civil administration and economic development in the areas conquered in the Levant during 1831-1840, see Hoehter (1984); Shamir (1984).
- 38 The quality of farmers in the Levant (in Palestine in particular) as agricultural cultivators and as laborers was poor compared to farmers from the Nile Valley. The difference in work cultures of the two may have stemmed from divergent political realities and the nature of agrarian relationships in each country. Over many generations, whereas farmers in the Levant, particularly in the hill regions, were tenant farmers of local strongmen in a climate of political instability, the farmers in the Nile Valley enjoyed uninterrupted continuity and relative stability thanks to the power center in Cairo. See Finn (1923): 13-14.
- 39 On the Egyptian origins of Arb al-Zubid, see Avneri (1980), whose testimony rests on information provided by Yehoshua Palmon; see also Charizman (1958): 10; Braslavski (1964): 360.
- 40 In these areas the regime did not exercise its authority, and therefore they were more exposed to Bedouin plunder. See Braslavski (1947): 356-362.
- 41 Although emigration was not encouraged as official policy, because of economic pressures Egyptian authorities did not stop such traffic. On the distance between farmers and landowners in the Middle East and the system of renting plots to tenant farmers, see Bar (1971): 99-102.
- 42 Regarding the impact on fertility where competition to produce male offspring to raise one’s status within the family structure was at work, see Kressel (1992), ch. 9.
- 43 Acclimatization of industrial crops (primarily cotton) in the Nile Valley spurred birth rates because of the need for labor – including child labor for harvesting the cotton. See Bar (1960): 24-27. The “natural” development of land ownership according to inheritance laws led, in practice, to division of farm units among offspring, while effective agricultural units for industrial crops called for long furrows (not splitting fields into smaller units) and even combining fields to create larger units that could accommodate industrial crops, by uprooting the cacti hedges that delineated the borders of plots. See Bonne (1951); for additional details, see Hamad (1973).
- 44 On the ramifications of “*corvée des paysans*,” see Bonne (1951): 138, 192. In describing the reasons for flight from Mehmmed ‘Ali’s police, David Ayalon quotes Proverbs 15:17: “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.” Some hold that this exodus was systematic and organized and was carried out with the Egyptian government’s assistance for a clear political motive: increasing the population in the Levant that was loyal to Egyptian rule. See Abramovich and Gelfat (1944): 5.
- 45 Such local strongmen (*tkifim*) forged the phenomenon termed in the research literature as sheikhdoms (from the mid-18th century until the end of the Egyptian conquest in 1831). See Hed (Heyt) (1942); Cohen and Baer (1984).
- 46 *Hatzfira* newspaper, July 26, 1882.
- 47 After the first wave of immigrants took possession of the better soils along the coastal plain, those who followed from Khan Yunis migrated eastward to the western Negev and to the Be’er Sheva Valley in their search for work as sharecroppers among the Bedouin tribes. See Kressel, Ben-David, and Abu-Rabia (1991).
- 48 See Kressel and Ben-David (1995).

- 49 Regarding investment of foreign capital and its impact on the economy of Eretz Israel in the closing years of Ottoman rule, see Gross (2000), part 1.
- 50 Regarding the northern region of Sinai and the main route taken to Palestine, see Jarvis (1938). On measures taken by Egyptian rulers to encourage the settlement of the Bedouin of the Sinai Peninsula, see Bailey and Shmueli (1977).
- 51 For testimony regarding the economic realities in Eretz Israel at that time, and the struggle of Jewish immigrants for hegemony in the labor market (*kibosh ha-‘avoda*), see Gross (2000); Shapira (1977); Kolet (1967, 2001). For more on Jewish farmers seeking Egyptian laborers, see, e.g., Agnon (1968): 53.
- 52 For data on the recession of 1923 and the development of public sector budgets during the Third and Fourth aliyahs, see Gross (2000): 232-299.
- 53 See the Palestine Royal Commission, Great Britain, 1937. *Minutes of Evidence: Heard at Public Sessions*, London H. M. Stationery Office, pp. 90-92 (session No. 14, December 2, 1936). MICR.F-318, University of Haifa.
- 54 Government of Palestine, 1930, *Report on Immigration, Land Settlement and Development*, by Sir John Hope-Simpson (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1930), Cmd.3686, p. 138.
- 55 Data that Be’eri published in the *Alon le-Statistika ve-Informatzia Miktzoit* (Newsletter of Statistics and Professional Information) 1947 (4), published by the General Federation of Labor Statistics Department; see also Be’eri (1948).
- 56 Avneri (1980) found in the Nablus telephone book more than seventy instances of family members with the name al-Masri, testifying to Egyptian origins.
- 57 For the narrative in the context of the family’s settling down, see Kressel (1975): 197-199.
- 58 The point of departure as to their “Jewish roots” serves as an explanation for why their forefathers had emigrated from Egypt to Palestine – that is, the point of departure is mythical.
- 59 Together with Professor Paul Hare, on a peace mission.
- 60 If a female camel is not tied up, she will run some distance – sometimes several kilometers – before giving birth to her calf.
- 61 Dr. Yuval Ben Bassat exposed material from the Istanbul archives noting that Egyptian inhabitants complained to the Supreme Court in Istanbul about the new Jewish settlers from Rehovot who claimed they had bought empty land in a legal manner. The two groups seem to have arrived there at the end of the 19th century, but while the migrants from Egypt felt at once in an “Arab land,” at home, the Jewish immigrants paid for the barren land and started planting orange groves there. Ha’aretz, November 4, 2012.
- 62 Families who came earlier and families who came later did not get along, leading to the newcomers leaving and settling a distance of two kilometers to the west, along the main highway from Jaffa that runs through Rishon le-Zion (‘Ayun Qarah), Ness Ziona (Wādi Knin), and Rehovot and from there to Qatra and to Gaza and onward to Egypt.
- 63 The meaning of “*shaham*” is fat, and “*shachma*” is the fat of the hump of the camel; also used to designate the buttocks of an Egyptian Arab woman.
- 64 Following the United Nations General Assembly’s passage of the November 29, 1947, Partition Plan resolution that marked the first stages of the 1948 war.
- 65 Yossef Washitz wrote:
- In the coastal valley there are many descendants from Egypt who came in the first half of the 19th century in the wake of the armies of Meḥmmet ‘Ali. Entire neighborhoods (such as *saknāt* Abu Kabir in Jaffa) resembled the Egyptian original and in villages as well this root is exemplified in excessive business activity. Among the last generation that came there are skilled Egyptian laborers (in the railway and the post office); one can sense the marked differences in origin from the Arabs of Eretz Israel. (1947: 139)
- Washitz noted in his study that a village in the Nablus district (Burka) belonged to Arabs from Libya.
- 66 On an early Palestinian Arab narrative launched by the newly arrived inhabitants of Zarnuqa opposed to the new inhabitants of Rehovot in 1890, see Ben Bassat (2012).
- 67 The Templars were a German order of knights that founded settlements in Eretz Israel in the latter 19th and early 20th centuries.
- 68 Droyanov’s introduction (1932) 3: 66-67.
- 69 The Two Deserts *Suq* (i.e., the Syrian-Jordanian to the east, the Sinai to the west) was the largest market for herd animals in the Damascus Pashaliq (an administrative area that included both sides of the Jordan River). Sheep and goat herds and camels were gathered in the east and

driven to the largest market of the region, in Egypt. On the way they stopped at a smaller *suq*, and whatever livestock was not sold there was driven westward. As they passed over cultivated plots of farmers from Lod and Ramle, the livestock drivers inflicted considerable damage. One of the emergency measures taken by the Ottomans when they returned to the Levant was to move the Two Deserts *Suq* from the center of Palestine to its southern edges in Beer Sheva. For additional details, see Kressel and Ben-David (1995).

- 70 On November 2, 1917, British foreign secretary Arthur James Balfour wrote to the Jewish leader Lord Rothschild to assure him that his government supported the principle of providing a homeland for the Jews. The British hoped thereby to win more Jewish support for the Allies in the First World War. The Balfour Declaration became the basis for international support for the founding of the modern State of Israel. The letter was published a week later in *The Times of London*.
- 71 According to Dr. Mustafa Kabhā, a resident of the Triangle, oral testimony, June 1999.
- 72 Kressel, following a study in Jaljulia, fall 1973; Aharoni, according to informants in villages in the Triangle; Dr. Muḥamid ‘Akal and Ashraf Abu Zarka, ‘Ar‘ara (January 2004); Riad Kabha, Bart’a (December 2003).
- 73 Muhammed Mas’arwa in a discussion with Aharoni in 1985.
- 74 The Abu Zarka clan won the elections. This *ḥamula* served as the nucleus for a coalition of *Masārwa* families who organized themselves as an electoral bloc. The Abu Zarka clan defeated the Yunis *ḥamula* (which ascribed itself as a tribe of Ḥejaz origins). The Yunises had for many years headed the local government council. According to the testimony of inhabitants of the Wādi ‘Ara region, many of those of Egyptian origin can be recognized by their physical traits and by certain social, economic, and political characteristics. They are renowned for their business acumen and are less susceptible to militancy of the kind reflected in the “Um-al-Fachem narrative” of the northern faction of the Islamic Movement of Reid Salach (expressed in oral discourse with Ashraf Abu Zarqa, February 2000).
- 75 See the extensive discussion in Kark (1984): 60-61.
- 76 Today, the block circumscribed by the streets Arlosoroff, Ibn Gvirol, Jabotinsky, and Ben Sarok in Tel Aviv. Ben-Zvi claimed that they came from Wadi Chawarit. For additional testimony regarding their Egyptian origins, see Ben-Zvi (1936): 175.
- 77 On the matter of the *abed* (plural *abid*) – an individual who was kidnapped from his tribe in Sudan, sold into slavery to a sheikh in the Negev, and later assimilated into the population and culture of his master (*chaba’vo*), see Kressel (1976): 30-32; Ben-Zvi, Abu-Rabia, and Kressel (1988): 83-85.
- 78 On the events at Tizi-Ouzo, April 20, 2002, see Goodman (2002).
- 79 From the study by Haim Blanc, based on linguistic nuances in historic Baghdad, one learns that they remained distinct enough that such speech patterns could reveal whether speakers were Muslims, Christians, or Jews. See Blanc (1964).
- 80 See, e.g., Borg and Kressel (2001).
- 81 There are those who chose the name al-Misri or Masārwa, and there are those to whom the appellation stuck after others called them so in derision, as a mark of foreignness.
- 82 Our thanks to Eli ‘Atzmon for this piece of information, the product of his familiarity with the origins of Negev Bedouin and their families as a result of many years working with them.
- 83 See Alexander Borg and G. M. Kressel, “Personal Names, Surnames and Nicknames among the ‘Azazmeh Bedouin in the Negev Highlands: Anthropological and Linguistic Aspects,” *Archív Orientální* (1996) 63: 478-487.
- 84 See Baer (1982).
- 85 Land considered wasteland or “dead land” according to the Ottoman legal definitions of land from 1858. Such land was unsuitable for cultivation, or was not included in the agricultural land survey (*qadastar*).
- 86 Central Zionist Archives, KKL 5 Box 1345, portfolio, Kfar Moser: Land acquisition, document no. 1433.
- 87 Established in 1902, see Ben-Aryeh and Sapir (1979).
- 88 Three equal piles of grain were placed on the ground and the landowner had the right to collect one for himself.
- 89 See Ben-David and Gonen (2001).
- 90 Postcolonial scholars in the West attack their own countries for the “sin” of having taken censuses and kept records of peoples under colonial rule. Typical of this attitude is Professor

Roger Owen of Oxford, who in a lecture at Ben-Gurion University in the 1980s reproached the British for the population census they conducted in Egypt.

- 91 See Abramovich and Gelfat (1944): 5.
- 92 The proposal that émigrés from Egypt who today are inhabitants of Gaza be settled in Yamit – the Israeli settlement bloc that was evacuated as one of the stipulations of the peace treaty with Egypt – was rejected by Egyptian representatives at the Camp David peace talks in 1978, a rejection subsequently supported by Egyptian public opinion.
- 93 The three concentric spheres where Egypt was to play a leading role, according to Egyptian president Abdul al-Nasser, were the Arab, Islamic, and African spheres. Nasser’s regime encouraged this leadership role by dispatching Egyptian teachers and instructors to other Arab countries.
- 94 In preliminary Israeli-Egyptian talks in 1982 in preparation for signing the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, Egypt stood firm on its demand that the Brāzil neighborhood, built by Israel on the Egyptian side of Rafah for refugees and homeless among the Gazan population, be evacuated. During the years of Israeli administration in Gaza, the Egyptian and Palestinian sides of Rafah merged; the residents were identical in origin, most of them immigrants – either Bedouin or peasants – from the Nile Valley. Egypt uprooted the residents of Brāzil and sent them back over the international border into Gaza, repartitioning Rafah into its two former Mandatory components. Only a year after the signing of the peace treaty, this “turning back of the clock” was consummated in full.
- 95 Up until 1917 when Ottoman rule ended, there were two verified identities in the Levant – Arab and Turkish. The immigration from Egypt empowered the Arab identity and hence was welcomed. The Arabs of Palestine wanted to reduce the importance of the linguistic and cultural differences among themselves. The aspiration to “Arabize” the areas taken in the Arab Conquest of the seventh century was rekindled with the Egyptian conquest and gained momentum in the latter half of the 19th century. The fact that Meḥmmet ‘Alī and the heads of his army were Albanians and Turks did not dampen this aspiration.
- 96 See Cohen (1973).
- 97 These slogans – “closing ranks” and “unity of purpose” – were coined by President Nasser to narrow any differences within Egyptian society.
- 98 Part of a self-ascribed “national myth” that disregards the facts that the Philistines were an Aegean people and Arabs originate in the Arabian Peninsula.
- 99 Regarding the tendency to cater to Muslim public sentiment and opinion and distract “Western” publics from dark realities in relationships among peoples of the Middle East, such as the Arab conquest of the village of Khaybar, see Kressel (2001): 165-188.
- 100 Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).
- 101 Social facts according to Durkheim 1964 [1938], in keeping with standards of positivism as the guiding light for any academic scholarship.
- 102 Evidence of such is the difficulty encountered in publishing the article at hand, even in Hebrew. The first version was presented as a lecture by Kressel at a conference of the Israel Oriental Society in 1999, but the article itself was not published due to political correctness, although the lecture itself was ultimately reprinted in *Hamizrah He-Ḥadash* (41).
- 103 That is, closure and tight control of the Israeli-Egyptian border following the 1949 armistice agreement with Egypt. The armistice demarcated the line between Israel and Egyptian-controlled Gaza, concomitant with disengagement of Israeli and Egyptian forces, repositioned respectively along the international border between Mandate Palestine and Egypt.
- 104 This expression – which may astonish casual observers – describes but does not explain the phenomenon. It reflects a “fertility race” that fueled such rapid population growth.
- 105 The very term “global village” – recently coined in response to the globalization process – assumes a “borderless” world where national borders lose their importance and labor migrates from low-wage to high-wage markets.
- 106 The movement of Egyptian workers eastward was temporarily disrupted by the creation of the State of Israel’s “borders,” beginning with the outbreak of regional warfare in 1948. This movement continued, however, in the direction of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the Gulf states, and westward to Libya and farther west – or any place where capital had spurred development. Entrance to Arab states is relatively easy, while terms for immigration to Europe have been eased with the breakdown of borders within the European Union.
- 107 Quoting Goren (1954): 189.

- 108 *Al-Hyat*, January 21, 1958, quoting Harari (1959): 185.
- 109 *Al-Aharām*, January 14, 1958; quoting *ibid*.
- 110 This was stonewalled out of fear that, should Palestinian refugees be allowed to settle and become citizens of surrounding Arab countries, the Palestinian problem would disintegrate as a pan-Arab issue of honor.
- 111 Quoting Cammillia Al-Solḥ in Hopwood, Ishow, and Koszinowski (1993): 243.
- 112 For a broader discussion of labor immigration from Egypt eastward, see Feiler (1985): 23. The newspaper *Al-Tawāra*, April 19, 1976, carried the reply of Saddam Hussein to the question of registering the Egyptians who had been absorbed in Israel, saying they should not be seen as immigrants because they advanced Arab solidarity.
- 113 *Zari'a masria* (a term for a relatively large and light-colored donkey), *falachin*, *kla'ai'ya*, *Chumr'ai*, *Jundi Ibrāhīm* (Ibrāhīm's soldier), and so on.
- 114 Ancient Palestinian families, such as the villagers of the country's mountain districts, showed greater resilience and a wish to fight and stay where they were. Inhabitants of the newly created villages of the coastal plain were the first to surrender and quit.
- 115 This poem was published initially in 1943 in his "Seventh Column" in the newspaper *Davar*. See Natan Alterman (1948): 83.
- 116 The banner of reflexivity has not so much been designed to neutralize scholars as to distance them from learning about other people. Instead, lately the emphasis has been on self-awareness or "anthropo-analysis" before entering the selfhood of "others." This is meant to enhance precision in dealing with "others," knowing that errors about social orders that are different from ours stem from disregard for relativity. To be as impartial as possible implies removing inherent cultural biases, using the reflective lens of self-criticism. Candidates for fieldwork, then, first undergo self-criticism or "anthro-self-analysis."

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PAGE • 50

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Subject Index

A

Abu Zarka, clan, n. 72, n. 74
Africa, 3, 4, 6, 8, 21
Akko, port town north of Haifa, 7, 9, 23, n. 35
Albanians, 4, n. 95
Alexandria, 1
Al-Aharām, Egyptian newspaper, 33, n. 109
Al-'Arish, a Sinai town and a failing river stream, 7, 8, 12
Al-Bara'asa, tribe, 7
Al-Najāh University, 2
Al-Khalil = Hebron, 1, 35
'Aqir al-Jadīda and 'Aqir al-Qadīma, 18-19
Arabs
— Arabian Peninsula, 6-7, 26, n. 98
— Arab-Israeli conflict, 36
Asia, 3, 6, 21, n. 18
Aswan, 1

B

Bedouin sheikhs, 6-7, 27-28
British Mandate, 12, 14, 20, 25, n. 10, n. 94, n. 103
Byzantine era, 6

C

Cairo, 1, 5, 7, 9, 24, n. 20, n. 34, n. 38
Canaanites, 2
Christian countries, 34
Circassian immigrants to Jordan, 3
Columbia University, 2

D

Dimra, a new village, 15-16
Dīra, tribal grazing lands or space, 28

E

Egypt
— al-Sharqia province, 8
— Dumietta, 1
— Egyptians in Syria and Iraq, 30, 33
— Masārwe (Egyptians), 6, 17-18, 21, 25, n. 74, n. 81
— Nile Delta, 7, 20-22, 25, n. 17
— Nile Valley, 7, 9, 11-12, 16, 18, 26, n. 16, n. 38, n. 43, n. 94
— United Arab Republic, 30, 33

— Upper Egypt, 1, 7, 19, 23-25
Eretz Israel, 3, 4, 9, 12-15, 22, 31, n. 10, n. 30, n. 35-36, n. 49, n. 51, n. 65, n. 67,
Erez, kibbutz in the Western Negev, 16

F

Fallāḥīn (sing. Fallāḥ), peasants, 28
Family, relatives, Ḥamula pl. Ḥamail, n. 74
— Maternal (Ikhwāl), 4
— Paternal ('Ummūm), 4
Fattimid, Ayyubid, Mameluke Sultans, 9
Feja, a village founded on late 19th Century, 15
France, French, 4, 9

G

Gaza
— City, 16
— Strip, 1, 3, 10, 14, 16, n. 1
Gedera, Jewish settlement founded, 5, 12, 17-18
Greece, 9

H

Ḥabā'iba, tribe, 7
Ḥālsa, village near Baghdād, 33
Ḥamas, 1, n. 1
Hanādi, tribe, 7-8, 10, n. 19
— Al-Taḥawiya, faction, 8
Ḥawa = a protection fee paid by peasants to Bedouin sheikhs, 6-7, n. 16
Ḥawara, tribe, 7-8, n. 19, n. 29
Ḥefer Valley = Wādi Ḥawāret, 8
Hujj, Palestinian village near Kibbutz Doroḥ, 8

I

Iraq, Iraqi, 1, 3, 9, 30, 33, n. 6, n. 16, n. 106

J

Jabālia, refugees camp at the outskirts of Gaza, 16
Jaffa, 4, 10-13, 19
Jewish settlements, 21-25, 27, n. 62, n. 65
Jebusites, 2
Jezreel Valley, Marj Iben 'Amer, 8
Jordan, 3, 25
— Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 3
— River = Al-Urdūn, 35, n. 69

K

Kfar Menaḥem, kibbutz, 8
 Khān Yūnis, “Al Qal‘ah” (= fortress), a township in the Gaza Strip, 12, 26-29, n. 47

L

Levant, 1-4, 6, 8-12, 20, 26, 29, 31-32, 34, 36
 Libya, 4, 7, 17, 26, n. 65, n. 106
 Lod, 4-5, 12-13, 20, n. 69

M

Mamluk, Sultanate in Egypt, 3, 7, 11, n. 30
 Ma‘mūr al-Diwān al-Ḥadivi, 9, n. 34
 Mesopotamia, 30
 Mghār, a village founded along side Gedera, 16-18
 Middle East, 2-3, 5-6, 28-32, 35-36, n. 41, n. 99
 Multazim, tax collector, Beq (= Bay), 7

O

Ottoman Empire, 3, 10

P

Palestine, Palestinians
 — Gaza Strip, 1, 3, 10, 14, 16, n. 1
 — West Bank, 1
 — Descendants of the Philistines, 31, n. 98
 Peasants (Fallāḥīn), 28
 Post-Zionist, see Zionism

R

Ramle, a town founded by Arabs in the 9th century, 4, 5, 10, 12-13, 17, 19-20, 26, n. 69
 “Rule of the Sheikhs” (1770-1831), 15, 20, 26

S

Saffariyya, 15
 Salameh, a new village, 15
 Saqiyya, a new village, 15
 Saudi Arabia, Saudis, 1, 3, n. 37, n. 106
 Sawālmah, 15
 Sha‘ar Ha-‘elyon = Sublime Porte, 9
 Shafa‘mer, township in the Western Galilee, 8
 Sidon, a Lebanese town, 7, 9, n. 35

Sudan, 4, 10, 14, 22-23, n. 77
 Syria (Bilād al- Shām), 3-4, 7-8, 10-11, 30, 33, n. 8-9, n. 36

T

Tel al-Ḥasi, 8
 Tel Aviv University, 5, 14,
 Tripolitania, Libya, 26, 34
 Turkey, Turks, Turkish, 3, 8-9, 30, n. 95

U

United Arab Republic; see Egypt

W

War
 — 1948 War, 17, 32, 34, n. 64
 — First World War, 9, 12, 14, 17, 19, n. 70
 — Second World War, 12, 20, 30

Z

Zionism, 12, 21, 30
 — Post-Zionist, disbelieve in Zion’s future, 32

Name Index

A

Abraham = Ibrāhīm (Father), 35
— Ishāq, son of Ibrāhīm, 35
— Ya'qūb, son of Ishāq, 35
Abdullah, King of Jordan, 3
Abed al-Raḥmān Bey, 19
Abu Muḥammad Ḥalāf, a Palestinian, formerly an 'Umdah in Egypt, 23
Abu-Rabia, Professor 'Aref, 28, n. 13, n. 47, n. 77
Abu Ḥadra, family, 27
Aharoni, Dr. Reuven, 4-5, 7-8, 17, 19, 21, 23, n. 16, n. 18-19, n. 21, n. 28, n. 72-73
'Akil Aghā, 7
al-'Āref, 'Āref, governor, historian, 6, n. 11
al-Ḥajj Muḥammad Najā, from the Al-Barā'asa tribe, 7
al-Masri, Ḥamd, sheikh, 23
Al-Solḥ, Dr. Cammillia, 33, n. 111
'Ali Bey al-Kabir, ruled Egypt 1760 – 1772, 7
Alper, Rivka, 27
Alterman, Nathan, poet, 35, n. 115
'Amer Muḥammad Jarūshi, Sheikh, 17-18
Asad, Rustum; historian, 4-5, 11, n. 24, n. 26, n. 28, n. 36
Aubry-Bailleul, n. 23
Avneri, Aryeh L., 10, n. 39, n. 56
Ayalon, Professor David, 5, n. 44
Ayubi, Nazih, 9

B

Baer, Professor Gabriel, 9, n. 45, n. 84
Baldensperger, Philip, 10-11, 16, 22-23
Balfour, Lord Arthur James, 21, n. 70
Batatu, Hanna, historian, n. 16
Be'eri, Eliezer, historian, 13, n. 55
Ben-David, Joseph, social geographer, 28, n. 2, n. 13, n. 47-48, n. 69, n. 89
Ben-Zvi, Yitzhak, historian, 2nd president of Israel, 5, 23, n. 33, n. 76-77
Braslavski, Dr. Joseph, n. 39-40
Braver, Professor Moshe, Tel Aviv University, 14-15
Bromberger, E., 2, n. 5

C

Cleland, Wendel, 9

D

Daoud (David), King, 35

E

Eisenstadt, Yehoshua (Barzilei), 19
Eph'al, Professor Israel, 7
Ever Hadani, Sh., 11, 23

F

Frenkel, Joshua, historian, economist, n. 30

G

Ghazi al-Yawar, sheikh, 3
Gonen, Amiram, geographer, n. 2, n. 13, n. 89
Goodrich-Freer, A., 10
Goren, Asher, historian n., 107
Gottheil, Fred M., 2, n. 5
Gran, Peter, historian, n. 32
Grazovsky, Yehuda, 19
Grossman, David, geographer, n. 10

H

Ḥammad, Faṭḥi, Ḥamas leader, 1-2, n. 1
Hassan, Hassan, historian, 9
Hershlag, Zvi Yehuda, economist, historian, n. 32
Hoeḥter, Miriam, n. 37
Holt, P.M., historian, n. 30
Hussein, Saddam, n. 112

I

Ibrāhīm Pasha, adopted son of Meḥmet 'Ali, 7-10, 19, 21-22, 25-26, 34, n. 26
Issawi, Charles Philip, historian, 9

J

Jaḷjulia, Arab township, n. 72
Jarūshī Sālem, sheikh, 18
Ju'āra, Dr. 'Amer, Al-Najāḥ University, 2

K

Kabhā, Dr. Mustafa, n. 71
Khalidi, Professor Rashid, , Columbia University, 2, n. 4
Kimmerling, Professor Baruch, 31, n. 100
Kressel, Professor G. M., 4-6, 12, 16-17, 28, 34, n. 13-14, n. 36, n. 42, n. 47-48, n. 57, n. 69, n. 72, n. 77, n. 80, n. 83, n. 99, n. 102,

L

Longrigg, Stephen Hemsley, n. 6

M

Meḥmmet ‘Alī, Pasha, 4-5, 7-11, 29, 31,
n. 18, n. 32, n. 44, n. 65, n. 95

Migdal, Professor Joel S., 31, n. 100

Mūsa (Moses), the Prophet, 2, 35

Musil, Alois, n. 12

Muwanis, sheikh, 23

R

Rothschild, Lord Edmond de, n. 70

S

Shawkat, Sāmi, 33

T

Tāji, Muḥammad, activist of the ‘Muslim
Committee’ in Ramle, 20-21

Tel Nof, air base, 17-19

Thomas, W., 29

Tristrum, 10

U

‘Ukāshah, Sa’id, 15

W

Weitz, Yossef, 10

Y

Yunis ḥamula, n. 74

Z

Zeitsov, Ami, 19

Znaniecki, Florian, 29



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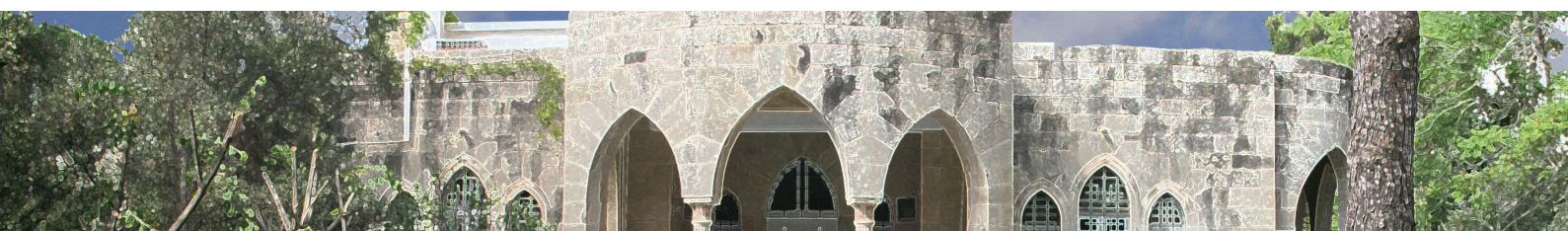
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Howard M. Weisband





1890. Constructing the Jaffa-Jerusalem railroad. Workers were brought in from Egypt, Sudan, and Algeria.

Is there empirical evidence supporting the surprising Hamas claim that a large part of the Palestinian Arabs are not indigenous to this area but rather immigrated from surrounding countries? On March 23, 2012, the Hamas minister of the interior and of national security, Fathi Hammad, slammed Egypt for not helping to prevent fuel shortages in the Gaza Strip. He then averred that Gaza deserved more brotherly assistance from Egypt, saying that “half of the Palestinians are Egyptian and the other half are Saudis.”

Was Hammad simply overstating his people’s links to a country whose help he sought, or was he reporting something true, if largely unknown, about Palestinian roots?

The answer matters, because the statement marks perhaps the first time a prominent Palestinian leader openly departed from a well-entrenched mythology about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. According to that familiar picture, the conflict is one of natives against foreigners, indigenous peoples against immigrant-colonists. One side, the Israelis, come from elsewhere, a melting pot of many different origins, none of them local. The other side, in this myth, is entirely local, rooted in Palestine.

