



# ASK Working Paper 28

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## **The Development of a Muslim City in Palestine: Gaza under the Mamluks**

ASK Working Paper, ISSN 2193-925X  
Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg  
History and Society during the  
Mamluk Era (1250-1517)  
Heussallee 18-24  
53113 Bonn  
Editors: Stephan Conermann/Bethany Walker

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# The Development of a Muslim City in Palestine: Gaza under the Mamluks

By Reuven Amitai

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Among his recent publications are:

- *Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260-1335)* (Brepols, 2013);
- co-edited with Michal Biran: *Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change: The Mongols and Their Eurasian Predecessors* (University of Hawaii Press, 2015);
- co-edited with Christoph Cluse: *Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean, 11th to 15th Centuries*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2017 [forthcoming]

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## The Development of a Muslim City in Palestine: Gaza under the Mamluks

### Abstract

Gaza emerged from the Crusading and Ayyubid periods as a small town of minor importance, particularly run down by incessant military activity in the area in the middle decades of the thirteenth century. Under the Mamluk Sultans from 1260 CE onward, the city regained much of its former importance, and perhaps, in some ways, reached new heights. It is described in Arabic and other sources as a prosperous center, not least due to it becoming the capital of a newly organized province around 1300. Other reasons behind these auspicious economic and demographic trends were the massive patronage of the Mamluk elite, a burgeoning agricultural hinterland and ongoing interregional trade. Probably the most important cause for the overall positive developments in the city and its surrounding countryside was the general sense of security provided by the Mamluk regime, including arrangements to keep local nomads (not only Bedouins, but also Kurds and Turkmans who immigrated to the area) under control and to integrate them into the local economy and administrative scheme. Gaza and its region also underwent a process of Islamization, encouraged by the Mamluk authorities. The city and its environs certainly took on a more Islamic appearance, due to construction of large and small buildings. There are increased Muslim religious activities of various kinds in mosques, *madrasas*, *zawiyas* and *maqams*. This may well indicate an increased Muslim population in the region, both in absolute and relative terms. Gaza can be seen as an example of such trends of Islamization in Palestine (and beyond) in the period between the end of Frankish rule and the coming of the Ottomans in 1516.

## The Development of a Muslim City in Palestine: Gaza under the Mamluks

### Introduction

Gaza emerged from the Crusading and Ayyubid periods as a small town of minor importance, particularly run down by incessant military activity in the area in the middle decades of the thirteenth century. Yet, under the Mamluk Sultans, the city regained much of its former importance, and perhaps, in some ways, reached new heights. It is described in Arabic and other sources as a prosperous center, not least due to it becoming the capital of a newly organized province around 1300. Other reasons behind these auspicious economic and demographic trends were the massive patronage of the Mamluk elite, a burgeoning agricultural hinterland and ongoing interregional trade that passed through it. Another important cause for the overall positive developments in the city and its surrounding countryside was the general sense of security provided by the Mamluk regime, including arrangements to keep local nomads (not only Bedouins, but also Kurds and Turkmans who immigrated to the area) under control and to integrate them into the local economy and administrative scheme. Gaza and its region also underwent a process of further Islamization, encouraged by the Mamluk authorities. The city and its environs certainly took on a more Islamic appearance, due to construction of large and small buildings. There are increased Muslim religious activities of various kinds in mosques, *madrasas*, *zawiyas* and *maqams*. Finally, there appears to have been an increased Muslim population in the region, both in absolute and relative terms. In short, Gaza and its hinterland were much more Muslim in different ways (landscape, activity and population) at the end of the Mamluk period than at its beginnings. Gaza can be seen as an example of such trends of Islamization in Palestine (and beyond) in the period between the end of Frankish rule here in 1192 and the coming of the Ottomans in 1516.<sup>1</sup>

This present paper is part of a larger project to examine different aspects of the history of the city and its countryside in the time of Mamluk rule (1260-1516 CE), and seeks to set out some of the general lines of this current wider research venture.<sup>2</sup> This “Gaza Project” is in turn a case study for an even larger research plan to look at the history of Palestine and the neighboring countries in the late medieval period, from the end of Frankish rule (1187 in some parts, and others in the years of 1265-91) to the coming of the Ottomans to the region. The long-term goal is to produce several case studies of different regions and themes to enable a fuller and more nuanced history of the country within a regional context.

A preliminary note might be made here regarding the title of this Working Paper. The use of the expression “Muslim City” in it does not mean that I am getting involved in the interesting and ongoing discussion among scholars about the nature of an Islamic city, or even whether one can be said to exist. My intention is rather to describe the emergence (or rather re-emergence) of an urban center that had a distinct Muslim character, certainly more so than in the preceding years: many construction projects of monumental religious buildings, both political-military and civilian elites of an unequivocally Muslim nature, and an apparently

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<sup>1</sup> This is a good opportunity to express my thanks to the Anne-Marie Schimmel Kolleg at Bonn University, and more specifically its directors, staff and fellows for all of the encouragement and assistance that I received during my two year research stay. I would like to particularly note my gratitude to the co-directors of the ASK, Prof. Stephan Conermann and Prof. Bethany Walker, for their advice and support. The atmosphere at the Kolleg was remarkable, and one could not ask for a better place to read, think and write. I am particularly grateful to my two officemates, each for one year, Prof. Jo van Steenberg and Prof. Nasser Rabbat, for good comradeship and stimulating discussions, not always about the Mamluks. Some of the ideas and data found in this paper were first presented in Amitai, “Islamization in the Southern Levant.”

<sup>2</sup> Since October 2016, this project has been supported by the Israel Science Foundation (Grant No. 1827/16).

growing Muslim population in the city and surrounding countryside. Islamic religion, Muslim culture and Muslims were clearly hegemonic here, and thus it was unequivocally a Muslim city in all aspects (although significant non-Muslim minority communities lived there; see below). This being said, perhaps this present article, as well as the envisioned wider monograph on Gaza, can serve as material for those scholars engaged in these deliberations on the “Islamic City.”<sup>3</sup>

## I. The Pre-Mamluk Background

We need not overly concern ourselves here with the history of Gaza from the middle of the second millennium BCE until the time of late Roman rule, the so-called Byzantine period. We should, however, already note its importance as a center of regional and even international trade.<sup>4</sup> In late Roman times, Gaza flourished as an economic and cultural center, and was well known for its school of rhetoric. By the end of the fifth century, Christianity was clearly the leading religion of the city and region, but there was also a significant Jewish community. The agricultural richness of the area – wheat, vineyards and other fruits – presages the Mamluk period.<sup>5</sup> In the Muslim tradition, Gaza had maintained trade with pre-Islamic Mecca, and the great grandfather of the prophet, Hāshim b. ‘Abd al-Manāf, is reported to have been buried there.<sup>6</sup> After the Muslim Arab occupation of the mid-630s, it is only rarely mentioned in the Arabic sources, reflecting, perhaps, declining fortunes and prominence; it seems to have suffered from fighting among Arab tribes at the end of the second *hijrī* century (i.e., early in the ninth century CE). The city, however, enjoyed some repute as the birthplace of the great jurist al-Shāfi‘ī, born there in 767. Yet writers of the tenth century note a city with some splendor and importance, having a large mosque, surrounded by a wide belt of agricultural land including vineyards. While Gaza and its surrounding appears to have become heavily Muslim relatively early in the Muslim period, a substantial Christian community continued, and it was the seat of a bishopric (as was nearby Ashkelon). A Jewish community still existed and there were Samaritans too.<sup>7</sup> Some indication of the state of the town in the early Fatimid period is given by al-Muqaddasī (d. 991), a native of the country:

Gaza is a large town lying on the high-road into Egypt, on the border of the desert. The city stands not far from the sea. There is here a beautiful mosque, also to be seen is the monument (*‘athr*) of the Caliph ‘Umar; further, this city was the birthplace of al-Shāfi‘ī, and it possesses the tomb of Hāshim ibn ‘Abd al-Manāf. Mīmās on the sea is a small fort connected to Gaza.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Some idea of this debate can be found in von Grunebaum, “The Structure of the Muslim Town,”; Abu Lughod, “The Islamic City”; Raymond, “Islamic City, Arab City”; Luz, *The Mamluk City in the Middle East*, esp. Part D; idem, “The ‘Islamic City’ Model. See also the important articles in the still very useful volume edited by Albert Hourani and Samuel Stern, *The Islamic City*.

<sup>4</sup> For this, see s.v. “Gaza,” *Der Neue Pauly*, 4:815; Avi-Yonah and Gibson, “Gaza,” 7:398-399.

<sup>5</sup> “Gaza,” *Der Neue Pauly*, 4:815; Avi-Yonah and Gibson, “Gaza,” 7:399. On Jews and Christians (and the decline of the pagan community) in Gaza in last centuries of Roman rule, see the recent comments of Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, pp. 218-221.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Iṣṭakhrī, *Kitāb masālik al-mamālik*, p. 113; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb ṣūrat al-arḍ*, p173. This is basically the same text. Both of these tenth century geographers note that in Gaza “[the later Caliph] ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb grew rich at the time of the Jāhiliya, for this place was a highway (*mustatiriq*) for the people of the Hijaz. Cf. translation in Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems*, p. 442.

<sup>7</sup> Sourdel, “Ghazza,” 2:1056; Levy-Rubin, “Changes in the Settlement Pattern of Palestine, pp. 164-171.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, p. 174; translation based on Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems*, pp. 442. Le Strange (*ibid.*, pp. 441-443) conveniently collected and translated a number of citations from Arabic sources regarding the city up to the fourteenth century. Mīmās is derived from the ancient name of Maioumas; Sourdel (“Ghazza,” 2:1056) refers to it as a port.

This apparent prosperity, however, did not last. William of Tyre (d. 1186), writing in the mid-twelfth century, describes a destroyed and abandoned city that the Franks took a century earlier:

Gaza, a very ancient city, lay about ten miles south of Ashkelon. It was now in ruins and entirely uninhabited. This same Gaza, a most ancient city, was one of the five cities of the Philistines. It was celebrated for its buildings, and many handsome churches and spacious houses of marble and large stones, though now in ruin, still gave splendid evidence of its ancient glory. Many reservoirs and wells of living water also still remained. It was built on a slight eminence and enclosed with its walls much widespread territory.<sup>9</sup>

When did this apparent economic and demographic decay, let alone destruction, take place? Was it a result from depredations of local Bedouins, perhaps chafing under Fatimid rule (or attempts to bring them under control)? Did it come about during the late eleventh century, during the quarter century or so of Turcoman and Seljuq dominance? There is a report that in around 1076 the Seljuq chieftain Atsiz massacred all the population of Gaza, after putting down a rebellion in Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> We might, however, doubt the totality of this killing and how this was connected to the trouble in Jerusalem is left unexplained. Possibly, it was caused by the fighting between Franks and Muslims in the area in the first half of the twelfth century, not far from the increasingly isolated Fatimid city of Ashkelon, only taken in 1153. Meron Benvenisti doubted whether the destroyed and deserted state of Gaza, as reported by William of Tyre, really reflects the nature of things in the period before the Frankish occupation of the area and the rehabilitation of the city. Otherwise, he wonders, how does one explain the appearance there of a large population so quickly in the early Frankish period?<sup>11</sup> We might thus imagine a depressed region in the decades leading up to the conquest of Ashkelon, due, *inter alia*, to fighting and unsettled conditions, but not a complete collapse of urban (and rural) life before the Frankish occupation of Gaza in 1149.<sup>12</sup>

A detailed discussion of the forty some years of Frankish rule in Gaza and the surrounding region, from 1149-50 to 1192, go beyond the confines of the present paper. I will note just a few key matters: In 1149-50, the Franks under their king Baldwin built a castle at the top of a low hill. Later a low, and evidently somewhat provisional, wall was built around a faubourg that surrounded the castle which was inhabited by local Christians, Muslims and even some Franks.<sup>13</sup> Control of the city was soon handed over to the Templars who administered it for the next few decades. We know virtually nothing of the agricultural settlement in the area, although there surely was activity of this type. No information is given about the nature of the rural population. Only with regard to Dārūm (later Dayr al-Balaḥ), a town to the south, is there a notice: a fort was built here by King Almalic in 1170. Although Gaza was attacked several times by Muslim forces (including twice by Saladin), it was never taken (although the faubourg was overrun once, and there was much killing of the local population). Yet, in the aftermath of the Muslim victory at Hattin in July 1187, the city

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<sup>9</sup> Guillaume de Tyr, *Chronique*, Book 17, ch. 12 (=vol. 2:775-776); translation from William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, tr. Babcock and Krey, 2:202; see also Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 1:208.

<sup>10</sup> Gil, p. 412 (section 605); Köhler, *Alliances and Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers*, p. 10. I am grateful to Dr. Shim'on Gat for bringing this incident to my attention.

<sup>11</sup> Benvenisti, *The Crusaders in the Holy Land*, p. 190.

<sup>12</sup> The city was neither taken nor occupied in 493-4/1100, soon after the conquest of Jerusalem (in 1099), as stated in Büsow, "Gaza."

<sup>13</sup> There were evidently no Jews in the city at this time. Around 1170, Benjamin of Tudela was in the area, travelling in Palestine, visiting Jewish sites and communities. He got only as far as Ashkelon, but went no further south, before turning north again. This indicates that there were probably no Jews in Gaza, and thus Benjamin did not bother travelling the extra few days to visit there. Ya'arī, *Masa'ot ereṣ isra'el*, p. 44; translation in Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, pp. 27-28.

surrendered to Saladin's forces after Ashkelon and Dārūm were taken. In 1191, during the Third Crusade, Gaza's fortifications were destroyed at the Sultan's order, along with those of Ashkelon. King Richard of England soon gained control over Gaza and repairs of the fortifications commenced. However, in the treaty of 1192, it was returned to the Muslims, after the Franks had destroyed the walls.<sup>14</sup>

There is little information on Gaza and its hinterland in the early Ayyubid period. Benvenisti writes: "The city was restored by the Moslems and became an administrative, military and commercial centre."<sup>15</sup> While we have little evidence for the state of Gaza city in the early Ayyubid period, this is a reasonable statement. The general lack of fighting in the immediate area and the seemingly competent Ayyubid rule surely enabled some amelioration of conditions. We are, however, lacking details. A generation or so later, the geographer Yāqūt (d. 1229), writes:

[Gaza] is a city on the edge of Syria on the way to Egypt. Between it and Ashkelon there is a difference of two Farsakhs or less. It is part of the Filasfīn district, west of Ashkelon.<sup>16</sup>

This is a fairly terse description, revealing hardly anything in the way of special features or prosperity, and can be compared to the detailed picture accounts presented in some of the Mamluk sources (see below), where local agricultural variety and plenty are noted. The mistaken location given to Gaza in relation to Ashkelon – "west" and not southwest – must say something about a not particularly important or famous city.<sup>17</sup> We have no idea what was the extent of construction in the city itself during the time of Ayyubid rule: only three inscriptions have come down to us from this period, epitaphs from 607/1211 and 626/1229 and a construction text from 1249.<sup>18</sup> This compares to 42 construction texts from the following Mamluk period, some 20 epitaphs and a few other types of texts (see below). True, the Mamluks ruled the city almost four times as long as their Ayyubid predecessors, but still the comparison appears to be a telling one of the relative extents of patronage and building between the two dynasties. We know of one inscription in the nearby countryside from the late Ayyubid period: a construction text of a mosque in Bayt Ḥānūn in 1239.<sup>19</sup> This compares to five known inscriptions from the Mamluk period, so a meaningful appraisal is not possible here.

Even this modest epigraphic evidence for building in the later Ayyubid period belies the difficulties that the city and surrounding areas endured in these years. For more than twenty years this region was the site of many battles and much movement of troops, along with horses and supply trains, and at times even large numbers of livestock. Here is a brief list of these events:

- 1239: The "Battle of Bayt Ḥānūn" took place between the Ayyubid forces from Egypt and Frankish forces under Count Henry of Bar; the former were victorious.<sup>20</sup>
- 1244: Battle of La Forbie (Hirbīyā) was a large and wide-ranging battle. On the one side were arrayed Frankish forces with Syrian Ayyubid allies, while on the other side stood the army of al-Salih Ayyub of Egypt, supported by a large force of

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<sup>14</sup> Benvenisti, *Crusaders in the Holy Land*, 189-190; Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, 1:208; Hugh Kennedy, *Crusader Castles*, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> Benvenisti, *Crusaders in the Holy Land*, 191.

<sup>16</sup> Yāqūt *Kitāb Mu'jam al-Buldān*, 3:799.

<sup>17</sup> Although when one looks at the map, one sees that Gaza is really to the south-south west of Ashkelon, so perhaps Yāqūt can be forgiven for this statement.

<sup>18</sup> *CIAP*, 4:50-53.

<sup>19</sup> *CIAP*, 2:98-104.

<sup>20</sup> Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, p. 261; Prawer, *Histoire du royaume latin*, 2:272-274.



Khwarazmian mercenaries, perhaps accompanied by families and livestock. The battle ended in a resounding victory by al-Salih Ayyub.<sup>21</sup>

- 1250-60: Much of this decade witnessed battles and skirmishing between Syrian Ayyubid forces and those of the new Mamluk state, and often Gaza was occupied for some time by one of them, and also armies of various sizes passed through it, staying for short times. Overall, Gaza remained under Syrian Ayyubid control, but most probably only in name, and there does not appear to have been any representative of one of the Syrian Ayyubid princes in place for a substantial length of time.<sup>22</sup>
- 1260: The first months of this year began with the concentration of troops and people fleeing the Mongols who had invaded northern Syria early, and whose advanced forces were soon in the Damascus region (with raiding and reconnaissance further south in Palestine and Transjordan). Many civilian refugees were to be found, along with Ayyubid princes and their entourages (and probably not insignificant numbers of troops), Kurdish tribesmen, and eventually Baybars and a group of his comrades from the Baḥrīya. Probably most of these people made their way to Egypt before the arrival of Mongol raiders in the early spring.<sup>23</sup>
- 1260: Probably in the late spring or early summer, a second Mongol force under Baydar (or Baydarā) was dispatched to Gaza to serve as an advance guard (*yazak*), keeping an eye on developments in Egypt.<sup>24</sup>
- 1260: Apparently in mid-August, the Mamluk vanguard under Baybars (sultan Quṭuz was following with the main army) came up to Gaza. There was evidently some fighting before the Mongol force under Baydar withdrew to the north. The entire Mamluk army soon arrived, and after a stopover of one day, continued along the coast to Acre.<sup>25</sup>
- 1260: After the Mamluk victory at ‘Ayn Jālūt over the Mongol army in Syria led by Kitbuqa, Quṭuz took control over most of the country up to the Euphrates, including Gaza and its environs. Subsequent developments will be the subject of the next sections.

Beyond the inscriptions noted above, we have no information on the state of Gaza and its agricultural hinterland during these two decades or so, but it seems a reasonable assumption that these were not auspicious times, from economic, demographic and cultural perspectives. The frequent movement of troops, horses, baggage trains, and civilians – let alone recurrent fighting – could not have helped the local economy or been a propitious time for demographic growth. Likely, the opposite was the case. This was the situation that the Mamluk authorities encountered when taking control of the town and its surrounding area.

## II. General Trends: Administration and Economy under the Mamluks

We have few details about exact measures adopted by the Mamluk authorities in Gaza and its surroundings in the period immediate after the repulsion of the Mongols from Syria and the establishment of Mamluk rule over most of the Muslim controlled sections of the country. Yet, some idea of developments can be gained from this short passage taken from the multi-volume geographical-historical work *al-A'lāq al-khaṭīrah fī dhikr umarā' al-shām wa-l-*

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<sup>21</sup> Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 275-276; Prawer, *Histoire du royaume latin*, 2:312-313; Berkovich, “The Battle of Forbie.”

<sup>22</sup> Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 309-333, 342; Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, pp. 6-30.

<sup>23</sup> Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 347-353; Amitai, “Mongol Raids into Palestine”; idem, *Mongols and Mamluks*, pp. 26-35.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

*jazīrah* by ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn Shaddād al-Ḥalabī (d. 1285), formerly a high official in Ayyubid Syria, who immigrated to Egypt just previous to the Mongol occupation of the country, working subsequently in the Mamluk bureaucracy.<sup>26</sup> In the section on Gaza, he writes:

When al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Sayf al-Dīn Quṭuz al-Mu‘izzī al-Turkī defeated the Mongols near ‘Ayn Jālūt, and the country was taken back, the inhabitants [of Gaza] returned to [Gaza] and it was built anew. In our time – when this book was composed – there are in it governors (*nuwwāb*) of our lord, the Sultan al-Malik al-Zāhir Rukn al-Dunyā wa-l-Dīn Baybars al-Ṣāliḥī – may God make his reign last forever, and bring his rule over the entire land!<sup>27</sup>

This clearly states that a sense of stability and security was brought about southwestern Palestine early on, and this continued on under Baybars (r. 1260-77), in many ways the real founder of the Mamluk Sultanate and certainly its great institutionalizer and his successors. “Governors” (*nuwwāb*, pl. of *nā’ib*) are mentioned here in a general way, but we have hardly any names of these officers from the reign of Baybars. Only under Qalawun (r. 1279-90) are these named in a more-or-less systematic manner.<sup>28</sup> As time went on, the actual area of the province became increasingly well defined, including large swaths of land along the coast and inland conquered by Baybars from the Franks (the remnants of Arsūf, Jaffa, and Caesarea and on the coast, Qāqūn to the north, but further inland, and Ramla, Ludd/Lōd and Bayt Jibrīl/Jibrīn to the northeast). The taking of Ṣafad from the Franks in 1266 laid the groundwork for Mamluk rule in the north of the country; the conquest of Acre in 1291 by Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil (r. 1290-93) put an end to Frankish rule (and inhabitants) in the country (and in Syria overall). Palestine was divided into three administrative units: 1) In the north was the *niyābah* or *mamlakah* – both of which can be translated as “province” in this context – of Ṣafad, including areas in modern-day southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights. 2) Jerusalem and the area more-or-less covered by the West Bank today were usually part of the Province of Damascus, but independent at times. 3) Gaza was the province in the southwest of the country: about two thirds up the coast to Haifa, and inland as far as Bayt Jibrīl. Generally Gaza answered directly to the sultan in Cairo, but at times was subordinate to the governor of Damascus; al-Qalqashandī notes that occasionally it was not controlled by a governor, but only an army commander.<sup>29</sup> In any case, these provincial borders were more probably intact, but as we will soon see, they could be flexible according to the needs and choices of the central about the year 1300.<sup>30</sup> (See map no. 1) This present study is not concerned with the entire province of Gaza, but only the city itself and its immediate agricultural hinterland, a radius of some 20-25 km from it, or the distance that one might travel comfortably in a day.

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<sup>26</sup> On this author, see Antrim, “Making Syria Mamluk,” pp. 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Shaddād al-Ḥalabī, ed. Dahan, p. 266.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Atā Allāh, *Niyābat ghazzah*, pp. 277-280.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā*, 12:214.

<sup>30</sup> Preliminary discussions of the administrative geography of Palestine under the Mamluks, basically critical translations/summaries of the relevant parts of the encyclopedias of al-‘Umarī (d. 1349) and al-Qalqashandī (d. 1322) (with the latter heavily indebted to the former), are found in Hartmann, “Politische Geographie des Mamlūkenreichs,” pp. 1-40, 477-511; 71, (1917), 429-430; Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *La Syrie à l’époque des Mamelouks*, pp. 173-179, 234-235; Nielson, “The Political Geography and Administration of Mamluk Palestine,” pp. 114-133. A detailed and analytical study of the administrative geography from the beginning to the end of Mamluk rule, taking into account Ayyubid precedents (and maybe Ottoman changes) is a desideratum. I should note that the boundaries between the provinces marked on Map 1 were neither immutable nor clearly defined, but those given here provide an idea of the influence of the provincial governors and where the rural districts paid their taxes. See below for one clear example of expanded provincial borders.

After several decades of Mamluk rule, we get a good idea of the state of the city in the following passage from the encyclopedia by Ibn Faḍlallāh al-ʿUmarī (d. 1349), *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*:

Gaza is a city between Egypt and Damascus. Hāshim ibn ʿAbd al-Manāf was buried there, and there al-Shāfiʿī was born. It is built of stone and plaster, its buildings are solid, on a high spot, at a distance of a mile from the Mediterranean Sea. It has good and pure water that is easy to digest, but it is not considered tasty. The drinking water of its inhabitants [originates] in wells, and it has reservoirs for rainwater, into which the winter rains run, although these are considered small. It has many fruits, of which grapes and figs are the best. It has colleges (*madāris*) and gravesites that adorn it. It is a respectable district, in which there are army units, Bedouins and Türkmen. It borders on its two sides the land and the sea, and it is near the Sinai desert (*tīh banī isrāʿīl*). To its south are agricultural and pasture lands, and it is a place of meeting between settled and nomadic people. Its sedentary people are tribesmen (*ʿushrān*) who have enmity between each other. Were it not for the fear of the government, the fire of battle would not abate there, and the sword would not be put back in the scabbard. No inhabitant would feel secure there and would not settle there, not in [the city] or outside it.<sup>31</sup>

This passage is worthy of further discussion, but first I will cite another text, more or less contemporary. Ibn Baṭṭūṭah (d. 1358-9), the famous traveler from the Muslim west, passed through Gaza in 1326. This is what was recorded in his *Riḥla*, or “Travelogue”:

From there [Qaṭyā in Egypt] we went to the town of Gaza, which is the first of the towns of Syria on the borders of Egypt, a place of spacious dimensions and much building (*kathīrat al-ʿimārah*), with fine bazaars. It contains numerous mosques, and there is no wall round it. There was formerly a fine congregational mosque in the town. The mosque in which the Friday service is now held there was built by the illustrious amir al-Jāwli; it is an elegant building of solid construction and its pulpit (*minbar*) is made of white marble. The *qāḍī* of Gaza was Badr al-Dīn of Salkhad in Ḥawrān, and the professor of its *madrassa* ʿAlam al-Dīn b. Sālim. The Sālim family are the notable inhabitants of this town, and one of them is Shams al-Dīn, the *qāḍī* of Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup>

We may note a few important matters that arise from the reading of these two passages. Firstly, the city of Gaza under the Mamluks was the focus of much building, due in part to the patronage of the political-military elite. The plethora of construction is both indicative of prosperity and contributed to it: we will return to this matter in the next section. Secondly, the city had good infrastructure, including markets and fresh water, from both wells and reservoirs. Water resources will be mentioned below, in the section on the agricultural hinterland, where the matter of the agricultural plenty of the region will also be reviewed.

A particularly important matter mentioned by al-ʿUmarī is that of relations with the local nomads. Early on, the Mamluks had brought the local Bedouin in line: Baybars had met in 1263 the leaders of these tribes – al-ʿĀbid, Jarm and Taʿlabah – and integrated them into the Mamluk political and military system,<sup>33</sup> and there is no reason to think that these arrangements were not in place well into the fourteenth century. These efforts by Baybars and his successors can be seen as part of the larger endeavor to control the nomads of Syria, both to make sure that they would not cause trouble, and might even contribute to Mamluk

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<sup>31</sup> Al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār*, ed. Sayyid, pp. 142-143.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *al-Riḥla*, ed. Defrémery and Sanguinetti, *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah*, 1:113-114. The translation is based on Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Ibn Baṭṭūṭa*, 1:73, but I have made some changes with his text.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-malik al-zāhir*, p. 149.

governance in the country and ongoing military efforts.<sup>34</sup> We will have more to say on the Bedouins and their possible sedentarization in the section on the countryside below. We may just note here that from this passage by al-‘Umarī, we see clearly how the firm hand of the Mamluk authorities played a significant role in bringing stability and prosperity to the whole region.

Related to this matter, but not to be confused with it, is the presence of nomads of other types in the vicinity of Gaza. These were Turcomans and Kurds, both recent arrivals in the neighborhood. The former – noted by al-‘Umarī – were refugees from Mongol controlled territory and were brought to the southern Palestinian coast by Baybars, who in 1263 was also arranging their affairs.<sup>35</sup> These Turcomans certainly persisted in their pastoral nomadic lifestyle for at least a few generations, although eventually settled down and were arabized.<sup>36</sup> Probably the same thing happened to the Kurds who also took up residence in this area, maybe some even before the end of the Ayyubid period. Both Turcomans and Kurds served as auxiliaries to the army of Gaza, as did the Bedouin.<sup>37</sup>

Ibn Baṭṭūṭah mentioned the work of a Mamluk officer named al-Jāwlī, referring to ‘Alam al-Dīn Ṣanjar al-Jāwlī<sup>38</sup> (d. 1344), a key governor of Gaza in the early reign of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn. This is what Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 1366) has to say about him in his biographical compendium:

[Sanjar al-Jāwlī] built (‘*ammara*) in Gaza an extremely gigantic bath, and a *madrassa*, and a mosque (*jāmi*) without parallel ... He is the one who turned Gaza into a city and urbanized it (*wa-huwa allādhī maddana ghazzah wa-maṣṣarahā*). He built (*banā*) a hospital in it, and there was endowed for it from al-Nāṣir Muḥammad a large *waqf*; the supervision of it was handed over to the governors of Gaza. He erected (‘*ammara*) in Gaza the hippodrome and the palace, and constructed (*banā*) a caravansaray (*khān*).<sup>39</sup>

Al-Jāwlī was governor of Gaza and extensive adjacent regions for most of the second decade of the fourteenth century (until his arrest in 720/1320), a pivotal time, as the town was transformed into a city, not just due to lots of monumental building, but most probably also to general urban expansion. The mosque that he constructed was also noted by Ibn Baṭṭūṭah, who states that it eclipsed the regularly congregational mosque of the city for a while.<sup>40</sup> The third sultanate of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was a time of much building throughout the Sultanate,<sup>41</sup> and such activity under al-Jāwlī’s aegis fits this overall pattern. The endowment for the hospital set up by the Sultan indicates how he himself was involved in this construction boom in a provincial capital. We should add that the area that al-Jāwlī controlled

<sup>34</sup> See Hiyari, “The Origins and Development of the Amirate of the Arabs,” pp. 509-524; Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, pp. 64-69; Franz, “Bedouin and States.”

<sup>35</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, *al-Rawḍ*, pp. 148-149. Under Baybars, thousands of Türkmens were settled along the coast from Gaza to Antioch; Ibn Shaddād al-Ḥalabī, *Ta’rīkh al-Malik al-Zāhir*, p. 335. For a discussion, see Amitai, *Mongols and Mamluks*, 69-70.

<sup>36</sup> For the larger picture of the Turcoman relocation to Syria, see Kellner-Heinkele, “The Turcomans and Bilād aš-Šām in the Mamluk Period,” pp. 169-180; Ashkenazi, *Les Turkmènes en Palestine*.

<sup>37</sup> In the diploma for the commander of the army of Gaza, Bedouins, Türkmens and Kurds are mentioned as part of the auxiliary forces in the region; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a’shā*, 12:218.

<sup>38</sup> This name is derived from the Turkish word, *çavli*, meaning “a (little) falcon” of some type. See: Sauvaget, “Noms et surnoms de Mamelouks,” p. 46; Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth Century Turkish*, 397 (root CBL), cf. p. 410 (*çagri*). For more on this name and how it was applied to this Sanjar, see Amitai, “Islamization in the Southern Levant,” note 52.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi’l-wafāyāt*, 15:483. See also *RCIA*, 4:86-87, and *passim*; ‘Aṭā Allāh, *Niyābat ghazza*, 280-283, for references to other biographies (apparently derived mostly from al-Ṣafadī’s work).

<sup>40</sup> For the foundation text of this mosque, not *in situ* (and in fact, in secondary usage in another mosque today), see *CIAP*, 4:84-88.

<sup>41</sup> See the comments of Meinecke, *Die Mamlukische Architektur in Ägypten und Syrien*, 1:58-59, and for the larger context: Ayalon, “The Expansion and Decline of Cairo,” pp. 13–20.

was much larger than the Gaza province as it was usually understood: according to al-Safadi: it included Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus, Qāqūn, Ludd and Ramla. The last three were indeed part of the “standard package,” but clearly Jerusalem and the areas to its north and south were not. This says something about the flexibility of provincial boundaries, and also, about al-Jāwli’s high position with the Sultan after the latter’s accession to the Sultanate for the third time.<sup>42</sup>

The continued prosperity of the city is seen in foreign travelers’ reports later in the fourteenth century. This is in spite of the Black Plague of the late 1340s and the ongoing political confusion and disorder that followed the four decades of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s death. The Italian traveler Giorgio Gucci, for instance, writes in 1384:

This Gaza is a big city and has many inhabitants, and it is believed to be as large and to have as many inhabitants and houses as the city of Alexandria, save that the city of Alexandria has beautiful houses and more beautiful streets and it is a civil city and a business place, while the city of Gaza is a rural city in regard to inhabitants and houses and everything. Indeed the country where the said city stands is beautiful, of good climate, with plenty of bread, good meat, chickens and eggs, and every kind of food, plenty and good; and there are Jews there. And since the country has plenty of grapes, they make wine, which they keep in glass jars, each holding a *mezzina*; and it is good wine. This city is one of the cities of the Philistines, and in this city abode Samson.<sup>43</sup>

This is clearly a prosperous city, or perceived as one by a visiting European Christian. There is no reason to doubt this data. Another interesting piece of information regards the existence of a Jewish community, about which we are hearing for the first time. This is confirmed by another traveler from Europe, this time from France, Sengneur (Ogier) d’Anglure (writing in 1395-6):

Gaza is an unwallled city and it is bigger than Jerusalem. In this city, Samson brought down the hall ... In this city there stands a house that is close to the street, and in it is the temple of the Jews ... Likewise, very near this house, on another street, a type of unbeliever is found, known as Samaritans.<sup>44</sup>

This information about local Jews is not a trivial matter, and not just for historians of the Jewish communities of the Mamluk Sultanate. We have seen above that there was, apparently, no Jewish community under the Franks. It is impossible to say whether one was founded during the Ayyubid period, but this is unlikely, surely in the last two decades of their rule that was characterized by a lack of stability and military challenges. It seems most likely that Jews immigrated to Gaza from elsewhere in Syria and Egypt – or even beyond – only during the time of the Mamluk Sultanate. These Jews – probably mostly merchants and craftsmen – were surely attracted by the ongoing prosperity under the Mamluks. This is another clear indication of the healthy economic situation enjoyed by the inhabitants of the Gaza City and probably in the surrounding countryside. Further information on the Jewish community a century later is seen in the account of the north Italian Meshüllem of Volterra, who reported ca. 1481:

Gaza [ʿAzza / עֶזְרָא] is called by the Moslems Gāzā [גַּזָּא].<sup>45</sup> It is a fine and prosperous place, and its fruits are very praiseworthy. Bread and good wine is to be found there, but

<sup>42</sup> Al-Safadī, *Wāfi*, 15:482. See *CIAP*, 4:86-87 for a biography of al-Jāwli. In the foundation text of his mosque in Gaza, he is referred to as the governor in the “coastal and mountainous districts” near Gaza; *CIAP*, 4:84.

<sup>43</sup> Bellorini and Hoade, *Visit to the Holy Places of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine and Syria in 1384*, p. 122. I have not been able to check the original text of this account.

<sup>44</sup> Ogier d’Anglure, *Le saint voyage de Jherusalem du seigneur d’Anglure*, pp. 42-43; cited in Luz, *The Mamluk City in the Middle East*, 97; translation of a longer passage in Braslavsky, “Yishūv ʿAzza,” pp. 133-136.

<sup>45</sup> I assume that Meshüllem was doing his best to replicate the Arabic Ghazzah as he heard it in Hebrew letters.

only Jews make wine. Gaza has a circumference of four miles and no walls. It is about six miles from the sea and situated in a valley and on a hill. It has a population as numerous as the sands of the sea, and there are about sixty Jewish householders, and four Samaritan householders, [and they enjoy the prosperity of the land. They have a small but pretty Synagogue, and vineyards and fields and houses. They had already begun to make the new wine] ... There are also four Samaritan householders who live on the hillside. At the top of the Judecca (Jewish quarter) is the house of Delilah in which Samson the hero lived, nearby it – about one-eighth of a mile beyond it at the top of the hill, also in Gaza, I saw a large courtyard (i.e., a large courtyard surrounded by building) that he had caused to fall by his strength. Those houses are still ruined and desolate, but to this very day it can be seen that the courtyard was very great.<sup>46</sup>

This positive picture of Gaza is briefly mentioned by Ovadiah of Bertinoro (while noting at greater length the good condition of the local Jewish community), written in 1488:

Gaza is the first town that we found on coming out of the wilderness, leading to the land of the Philistines. It is a large and beautiful city, of the same size as Jerusalem, but without walls for among all the places under Egyptian dominion, which now extends over the Palestine, the country of the Philistines and Syria, Alexandria and Aleppo alone are surrounded by walls. If the account of the Jews living there be correct, I saw in Gaza the ruins of the building that Samson pulled down on the Philistines.<sup>47</sup>

In order to dispel any thoughts that this rosy picture by Jewish travelers is due to the happy state of their local coreligionists, let us look at the report by the German Dominican Felix Fabri (d. 1502), describing his visit to the city in the early 1480s:

New Gaza [i.e., as compared to the Biblical city] at this day is a notable city of Palestine, twice as great as Jerusalem, populous and flourishing. In vulgar speech, it is a ditchful of butter, and all things needful for human are abundant and cheap there. There are so many palm-trees that the city seems to stand in a wood. Its houses are wretched, and built of mud, but its mosques and hot baths are exceed[ly] costly; it is not enclosed by a wall, but it has lofty towers within it. It is a seaside town, albeit does not stand on the seashore, but at a distance of one German mile therefrom ... many merchants dwell in Gaza, and very many cooks, and there is a wondrous mixture of nations. There are many Ethiopians, many Arabs, Egyptians, and Syrians, Indians, and Eastern Christians, but no Latins ...<sup>48</sup>

In this far from exhaustive survey (a more comprehensive one is planned), there are indications of continuing prosperity from the early Mamluk period into the late fifteenth century. The implications of this impression will be examined in the conclusion below.

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<sup>46</sup> Ya'arī, *Masa' Meshūllam mi-Volterra*, pp. 64-65. Cf. the translation Adler, *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts*, pp. 180-181, which is somewhat freely rendered. The passage in the square brackets is not in Ya'arī's Hebrew text; Adler also provides here the names of local Jewish notables, which are found later (p. 68) in this Hebrew text. There appears thus to be another version of this travelogue, but a discussion of this matter – and the establishment of an acceptable text – is beyond the present study.

<sup>47</sup> Ya'ari, p. 125; for translation, see Adler, *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages*, p. 232 (who omits part of the following text on the Jewish population).

<sup>48</sup> Felix Fabri, in Stewart, "Felix Fabri (ca. A.D. 1480-1483) vol II, part II," pp. 451-452. I was hitherto unable to look at the original text.

### III. A New Look at the Urban Fabric

We are fortunate to have the comprehensive and impressive study of Mohamed-Moain Sadek (Muḥammad-Muʿīn Ṣādiq) on the architecture of Gaza in the Mamluk period.<sup>49</sup> This work has already permitted a clear picture of the scope of Mamluk patronage and construction, now supplemented by the exhaustive treatment in volume 4 of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae* (henceforth referred to as *CIAP*) by Moshe Sharon.<sup>50</sup> This latter work is not just a presentation of the epigraphical evidence (text, translation and philological commentary, with a few references), but begins with a detailed historical and archeological discussion of each site (when possible), and is followed by a full historical commentary. The entire section on Gaza is preceded by a long historical survey of the entire city from ancient times up to the end of Ottoman rule in 1917; of course, here we are interested mainly in the Mamluk material. Taken together, these remarkable studies enable the historian and the historical geographer to investigate the development of the city over the quarter millennium of Mamluk rule. In the next section, we will see how the discussion of that surrounding countryside has been impacted by the “epigraphic revolution” brought on by Moshe Sharon in his *CIAP*.

At this point of my research, I am not ready to present a full discussion of trends in the development of the city and the role played by Mamluk patronage. Likewise, I still do not have a proper map ready showing the spots of these constructions and how these developed over the years of Mamluk rule. What I have done is to present in different ways the epigraphic evidence, thus enabling some initial analysis and tentative conclusions.

From the 256 years of Mamluk rule in al-Shām, (and thus of Gaza), we have 69 inscriptions from Gaza City. This compares favorably to Jerusalem with some 70, and overshadows Safad with some dozen extant inscriptions (exact numbers will become clear with the publication of future volumes of the *CIAP*). We should note, however, that from the beginning the spread and type of inscriptions in Gaza differ somewhat from those in Jerusalem. In the latter, the vast majority of inscriptions are devoted to individual projects, while – as will seen below – more than a quarter of the examples from Gaza are epitaphs, and also there is a certain bunching: 13 inscriptions are found at the Great Mosque. Still, we can note the impressive record of patronage – mostly from the Mamluk military-political elite – as seen in the following table:

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<sup>49</sup> Sadek, *Die mamlukische Architektur der Stadt Gaza*. An updated precis of this work is found in idem, “Gaza, art and architecture.”

<sup>50</sup> *CIAP*, vol. 4 (published in 2009), which is mostly devoted to Gaza.

Table 1: Breakdown of Mamluk-era inscriptions in Gaza by type

Type of Inscription	Numbers
Construction, reconstruction and repair <sup>51</sup>	42
Epitaphs <sup>52</sup>	19
Sultanic and Caliphal orders, not connected to construction <sup>53</sup>	4
<i>Waqf</i> texts <sup>54</sup>	2
<i>Qur'anic</i> texts <sup>55</sup>	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>

We see that almost two-thirds of the inscriptions are indeed devoted to construction and repair/reconstruction works, along with commemorating *waqfs* (properly *awqāf*, endowments) relating to a specific site. This is a clear record of remarkable patronage, especially when taken together with the actual buildings themselves, some of them on a grand scale.

The next step is to take the 42 inscriptions of the first category, and break them down further:

Table 2: Types of construction, reconstruction and *waqf* projects in Mamluk Gaza

Building	Number of Inscriptions
Great Mosque <sup>56</sup>	14
Jāmi' Ibn 'Uthmān <sup>57</sup>	6
Mosque of 'Alī b. Marwān <sup>58</sup>	3
Jāmi' of al-Jāwli <sup>59</sup>	1
Miscellaneous minor mosques <sup>60</sup>	10
<i>Zāwayas</i> (small Sufi lodges) <sup>61</sup>	3
<i>Madrasas</i> <sup>62</sup>	2
<i>Mazār</i> (tomb serving as focus for pilgrimage) <sup>63</sup>	1
<i>Ḥammām</i> (public bath) <sup>64</sup>	1
<i>Sabīl</i> (public fountain) <sup>65</sup>	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>

<sup>51</sup> See Table 2 for breakdown and references.

<sup>52</sup> *CIAP*, 4: nos. 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 28, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 47, 57, 63. For simplicity's sake, only the numbers of inscriptions are provided here and in the following notes, not page numbers.

<sup>53</sup> *CIAP*, 4: nos. 49, 58, 67 and 76.

<sup>54</sup> *CIAP*, 4: nos. 66, 82; cf. no. 52, which is connected to a series of construction texts, and no. 62, also part of a construction inscription.

<sup>55</sup> *CIAP*, 4: nos. 33, 73.

<sup>56</sup> *CIAP*, 4: nos. 13, 19, 20, 24, 25, 27, 31, 32, 34, 39, 46, 50, 70, 78.

<sup>57</sup> *CIAP*, 4: nos. 51, 52, 53, 55, 61, 64.

<sup>58</sup> *CIAP*, 4: nos. 29, 30, 60.

<sup>59</sup> *CIAP*, 4: no. 26. As noted above, this mosque is no longer standing, but its foundation inscription is extant.

<sup>60</sup> *CIAP*, 4: nos. 12, 43, 48, 54, 56, 65, 68, 69, 72, 77.

<sup>61</sup> *CIAP*, 4: nos. 14, 35, 75.

<sup>62</sup> *CIAP*, 4: nos. 62, 70; cf. no. 68, which is listed under miscellaneous mosques but mentions a *madrasa*. Another four *madrasas* are mentioned under in Gaza in this volume of *CIAP*.

<sup>63</sup> *CIAP*, 4: no. 11; several other *mazārs* are mentioned for Gaza in this volume of *CIAP*, but without foundation or reconstruction inscriptions.

<sup>64</sup> *CIAP*, 4: no. 56.

<sup>65</sup> *CIAP*, 4: no. 71.



The first thing that strikes the observer is that the construction is overwhelmingly of a clear religious nature (and one could claim that all the work is religious, if the *ḥammām* and *sabīl* are also seen as worthy pious constructions). The large amount of attention paid to the Great Friday Mosque (*jāmi‘*) certainly catches the eye, as well as that carrying the name of ‘Alī b. Marwān.<sup>66</sup> Ten other mosques have one inscription each; I have noted separately that one established by Sanjar al-Jāwli, both because of the identity of its patron and its role as central mosque of the city for a while (noted by Ibn Baṭṭūṭah above). The extant epigraphical evidence apparently does not fully convey Mamluk patronage and other building projects here. One clear class of this discrepancy is in the case of the *madrasas* (properly *madāris*, religious colleges): Hāṭim Maḥāmīd has identified nine *madrasas* from the Mamluk period from the literary sources,<sup>67</sup> compared to the smaller number revealed in the epigraphical record. Likewise, we find here only one inscription for a *ḥammām* (from 816/1413-4),<sup>68</sup> while we know about at least one earlier bathhouse, that built by Sanjar al-Jāwli (see the above passage by al-Ṣafadī), and Felix Fabri refers to such institutions in the plural.<sup>69</sup> Moshe Sharon has given a long list of now lost buildings in Gaza, admittedly not all from the Mamluk period.<sup>70</sup> In short, it is reasonable to suggest that there was somewhat more patronage and construction in the Mamluk period about which we have no extant epigraphic evidence.

Finally, it may be instructive to look at how the 42 construction/ reconstruction/ *waqf* inscriptions are broken down by chronology.

Table 3: Chronological spread of Mamluk construction inscriptions in Gaza

Years	Number of Inscriptions
1260-1309	8
1310-1341	10
1342-1400	9
1401-1460	8
1461-1516	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>

I have broken up the early Mamluk period (until 1341) in Syria into logical historical phases, while the later period is divided into segments of about 60 years each. In spite of these discrepancies in the length of the sub-periods, one can clearly see that there was building and patronage throughout the entire 256 years of Mamluk rule. One may note that the shortest period, the 31 years or so of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s third reign, has the most building; this particularly intensive time of construction has already been mentioned above. What is most important for our purposes in the present paper is to show that construction, repairs and other patronage were found throughout the entire Mamluk period, even if there were some variations in the intensity. This work and patronage continued to the end of this era, giving expression to relative prosperity at this time, and surely contributing to it.

<sup>66</sup> Sadek, *Die mamlukische Architektur der Stadt Gaza*, ch. 2, has a long discussion of the mosques of the city, with attention to seven of the “minor” mosques. Section 7.1 surveys the many mosques that are no longer extant.

<sup>67</sup> Mahamid, “The Construction of Islamic-Educational Institutions in Mamluk Gaza,” pp. 36-40. Sadek, *Die mamlukische Architektur*, ch. 3, notes two *madrasas*, but in section 7.2, lists seven more that have not survived.

<sup>68</sup> *CIAP*, 4:150-153.

<sup>69</sup> Sharon (*CIAP*, 4:149) has a short discussion of bathhouses in Gaza; see also Sadek, *Die mamlukische Architektur*, section 7.10.

<sup>70</sup> *CIAP*, 4:37-39.

#### IV. The Rural Hinterland

Any discussion of the countryside around Gaza is stymied by an almost total lack of information regarding conditions in the Frankish and Ayyubid periods. About the later we have one inscription (noted above) and some other bits of information (see below); the situation for the time of Frankish rule is even more disappointing. Outside of Dārūm (Dayr al-Balah) to the south of Gaza City we do not possess any information on Frankish rural settlement, and in fact Dārūm was more a town with fortifications than a village.<sup>71</sup> At this stage, it is thus impossible to make any comparisons between the rural situation in the Mamluk period and that in the periods preceding it.

Matters are much better for the first decades of Ottoman rule in the fifteenth century, as we have several population and tax registers for the Gaza province, providing us with the names of villages, the component population and tax figures. Four of the *defters* (932/1525-6, 940-5/1533-9, 955/1548, and 961-4/1553-7) have come down to us for Gaza, although probably only the first is relevant to our concerns here.<sup>72</sup> It is tempting to take the names of villages from that early survey and read them back into the Mamluk period, at least its later part. However, we will not assume that a village in the Ottoman register existed under the Mamluks unless we find explicit evidence for this from earlier sources. Luckily, we can put together a tentative settlement map for the Mamluk period, and this can provide the basis for some provisional conclusions for continuity into the time of Ottoman rule.

The basis of this tentative settlement map are two tables: the first (Table no. 4) gives the names of villages in the Gaza area as reflected in various literary sources. Most likely, as I continue my research, additional villages will come up and can be entered in this table. As noted above, a radius of 20-25 kms was drawn with Gaza City as the center, from the coast to the north around to the coast of the south. Settlements just beyond this radius were also included. This distance would have been what could have been covered reasonably in one day, and represents the immediate agricultural hinterland of Gaza City.

Fig. 4: Settlements in the Gaza area from textual evidence, from Ayyubid period to end of Mamluk rule

Village	Information	Source
Barbara	Near Ashkelon. There is the <i>mazār</i> of the Shaykh Yūsuf al-Barbarāwī	Mujīr al-Dīn, 2:148 <sup>73</sup>
Bayt Jirjā	Listed as Jarḥā: One of the villages of Ashkelon in the early 13th century. In an estate inventory from	Yāqūt, 2:56; <sup>74</sup> Little, <i>Catalogue</i> , 84 (no. 171) <sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Without going into the matter too deeply, we can refer to the fairly detailed map of Frankish settlement in Ellenblum, *Frankish Rural Settlement in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, p. xvii, which has no settlement marked in this area beyond Gaza City and Dārūm. Jonathan Riley-Smith (*The Knights Hospitaller in the Levant*, p. 34) has written that ca. 1169, the Templars had only a few estates around Gaza, while the Hospitallers had many to the south of the City; the basis of this statement is not clear to me.

<sup>72</sup> For these surveys in general, see: Lewis, "Studies in the Ottoman Archives – I,"; Cohen and Lewis, *Population and Revenue in the Towns of Palestine in the Sixteenth Century*; Hütteroth and Abdulfattah, *Historical Geography of Palestine, Transjordan and Southern Syria in the Late Sixteenth Century*; Hütteroth, *Palästina und Transjordanien im 16. Jahrhundert*. For the historical geography and economic history of early Ottoman Gaza and its region, I have found particularly useful Etkes, "Nomads and Droughts, Challenges to Middle Eastern Economic Development: The Case of Early Ottoman Gaza (1516-82)."

<sup>73</sup> Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns al-jalīl bi-ta'rīkh al-quds wa-l-khalīl*.

<sup>74</sup> An Ottoman inscription, from 1241/1825, is also found in this village; *CIAP*, 2:143-144.

<sup>75</sup> Little, *A Catalogue of the Islamic Documents from al-Ḥaram aš-Šarīf in Jerusalem*.

	Jerusalem in 797/1395, this village is listed as Bayt Kharja.	
Dayr Sunayd	A bridge is built there (“near Gaza”) during the reign of Baybars	Ibn Shaddād, <i>Taʿrīkh</i> , 352
Dārūm	The Bedouin tribe of Jarm was located nearby and near Gaza early in first half of 14th century. Also appears as a stop in Frankish itineraries from the Mamluk period.	Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, <i>Qabāʾil al-ʿArab</i> , 107; <sup>76</sup> Paviot, <i>Projets de Croisade</i> , 47. <sup>77</sup> As noted above, this settlement, more a town than a village was in existence in the Frankish and Ayyubid periods.
Dimrā	The Banū Jābir tribe lived near Dimrā in the first half of the 14th century.	Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, <i>Qabāʾil al-ʿArab</i> , 109
Hirbiyā	One of the villages of Ashkelon in early 13th century. Written here as Fibrbiyā. Site of important battle with Franks in 1244 (La Forbie).	Yāqūt, 3:867
Jabalīya	One of the villages of Ashkelon. Written as Ḥabla.	Yāqūt, 2:198-199 <sup>78</sup>
Kūfiya	The headman ( <i>rayyis</i> ) of this village, from the region of Gaza, is rewarded by Baybars.	Ibn Shaddād, <i>Taʿrīkh</i> , 293

The next table (Table no. 5) is based on inscriptions for the same area. The evidence is taken from the hitherto published volumes of the *CIAP*. Without a doubt, as further volumes appear, additional relevant inscription will become known. As we can see, two of the villages in Table no. 5 also appear in the previous Table.

Fig. 5: Inscriptions from the Countryside around Gaza  
(Late Ayyubid and Mamluk periods)

Village	Date	Description	Source
Bayt Ḥānūn	637/1239	Construction text of mosque to commemorate victory over Franks	<i>CIAP</i> , 2:98-104
Bayt Lāhiyā	897/1492	Epitaph of Muslim children (of the amir Aqbāy, died from plague that year).	<i>CIAP</i> , 2:149-151
Bayt Ṭimā	792/1390	Construction text of local mosque. Also Ottoman	<i>CIAP</i> , 2:158-160

<sup>76</sup> Al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār*, ed. Krawulsky.

<sup>77</sup> Paviot, *Projets de Croisade* (v. 1290 – v. 1330).

<sup>78</sup> Tal, *Ereṣ-Israʿel be-mekōrōt ʿaraviim*, p. 152, note, 232 makes this suggestion, but discusses other possible identification for the entry in Yāqūt.

		inscription from 1252/1836	
Burayr	2nd half 9th century/15th century	Part of construction text with blazon of dawādār	<i>CIAP</i> , 3: XLVII-L (Addenda and Corrigenda)
Dārūm (Dayr al- Balāḥ)	690/1290	Epitaph of a Mamluk, with a blazon.	<i>CIAP</i> , 3:11-19
Dimrā	676/1277	Construction text, perhaps from mosque (that may have been destroyed in WWI, and was in secondary usage in a newer, simpler mosque). 3 pieces now in Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem.	<i>CIAP</i> , 3:138-141
Majdal	700/1300	Inscription in mosque from Salār al-Manṣūrī	<i>CIAP</i> , 1:185-186 (no. 15); <i>RCEA</i> , 13:204 (no. 5099)
Ni‘ilyā	645?/1247-8	unclear	<i>CIAP</i> , 1:189 <sup>79</sup>

Taking this information together, the reader can be referred to Map no. 2. We note 14 different villages (or rather: 13 villages and one town, Dārūm) in this area, that can be broken down as follows:

- Six villages existed in the Ayyubid period. Four of these are not mentioned during Mamluk times, but are noted in Ottoman land registers of the sixteenth century.
- Twelve villages existed in the Mamluk period, of which two were also under the Ayyubids).
- Three locations are mentioned twice (Bayt Jirja and Hirbīyā), showing more clearly that these existed for some time. Dārūm, surely the largest settlement outside of Gaza city, is mentioned above three times, and without a doubt lasted the entire Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.
- All of these villages are mentioned in the Ottoman land registers of the sixteenth century.

We can draw, then, a tentative conclusion: Assuming that mention of the villages in epigraphy and the literary sources indicates long-term settlement, we can see that Gaza enjoys a robust local agricultural economy, which had already been indicated by some of the literary evidence presented above. We cannot compare it to the previous situation due to the lack of mentioning of any villages, but the early Ottoman period is certainly comparable. Ottoman settlement maps, as prepared by Hütteroth and Abdulfattah on the one hand and Etkes on the other, show a thicker matrix of settlement, but this may well be due to paucity of evidence for the Mamluk period: I fully expect further studies to reveal additional literary and epigraphic evidence for

<sup>79</sup> Here, M. Sharon only makes a passing reference to this inscription (as well as another from the Fatimid period), and refers us to the article “Ni‘ilyā” in a forthcoming volume of the *CIAP*. The village is also mentioned in an inscription 958/1551, as containing *waqf* property supporting a mosque in nearby Majdal (*CIAP*, 1:187-189 (no. 16).

settlement activity. In any case, we can see an apparent overall continuity between the Mamluk period and its successor in the realm of rural settlement in this particular area.<sup>80</sup>

As we have seen, Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī attributes much of the agricultural fortune of the area to the good relations with the local Bedouin, guaranteed *inter alia* by the firm hand of the authorities. He explicitly notes the presence of nearby pastoral nomads raising livestock. We learn from the passage that the region of Gaza is a frontier area with steppe and desert to its southwest and southeast, with mixed populations living in agricultural land. However, the real discovery in this passage is that at least some of the settled population is of tribal origins: they are *ʿushrān* (plural of *ʿashīra*). This may indicate a process of relatively recent sedentarization of Bedouins, perhaps with the encouragement and helping hand of the local government, with the backing of the authorities in Cairo and Damascus. On the other hand, this may not have been (only?) a recent phenomenon. Elsewhere in sections on the Arab tribes in *Masālik al-absār*, al-ʿUmarī notes that Gaza was one of the areas in the region where Bedouin tribes settled down early on in Islamic history.<sup>81</sup> In any event, this tribal population could be recalcitrant or worse, as seen in the first passage cited above by al-ʿUmarī, and the decisive role of a strong administration in keeping long term stability is noted.<sup>82</sup>

One final matter remains to be raised in the framework of this section of the countryside. We hear time and again in the Arabic and other sources about the agricultural richness of the area, and this spans almost the entire Mamluk period. Invariably, the information is about grapes, figs and other succulent fruits. I have no doubt that these were important crops, and they must have made life more pleasant; their value in trade with other regions was also surely considerable. But was there more? It seems highly unlikely that grains – wheat and barley – were not grown in the region, and actually were probably the mainstay of the agricultural economy. Certainly the climate is right for it: a long hot growing season and sufficient water.<sup>83</sup> However, wheat and barley are not as exciting as grapes and figs, and in the descriptions of the Arab writers, they were pushed aside. However, hints of a plethora of grains are indicated by Giorgio Gucci, who notes plentiful bread (see above) and also Meshūllam of Volterra notes this abundance. Surely, further research will reveal more explicit evidence for this aspect of the region’s economic life. We can note that at the end of the nineteenth century, the region of Gaza produced enormous quantities of barley of the highest quality, and this was exported to Great Britain to supply the burgeoning beer industry there.<sup>84</sup> There is nothing quite so dramatic under the Mamluks, but probably a good portion ended up in Damascus and Cairo (besides supporting the local military-political elite), and to cities like Jerusalem as *waqf* income.

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<sup>80</sup> The abandonment of this or that settlement between the two dates is not impossible, but given the lack of evidence – explicit or otherwise – to this effect, I suggest that our default position should be continuity of settlement.

<sup>81</sup> Al-ʿUmarī, *Qabāʾil al-ʿArab*, 154.

<sup>82</sup> Meshūllam of Volterra describes unsettled conditions with the bedouins (*arābō* אַרְאָבּוּ) between Gaza and Jerusalem/Hebron; according to him the governor (*Niʿepō* נִיִּפּוֹ < *nāʿib*) of Gaza was even defeated by them. Yaʿarī, *Masaʿ Meshūllam mi-Volterra*, 67-68; trans. in Alder, *Jewish Travellers*, 184-185. To the best of my knowledge, there is no confirmation in Arabic sources of the governor’s defeat. The stark conditions described by Meshūllam of the road to Jerusalem (“it is all desert”), also casts some doubts on this particular evidence.

<sup>83</sup> One report notes that the annual precipitation in the Gaza Strip today “varies from 450 mm/yr in the north to 200 mm/yr in the south.” “CLIMB: Climate Induced Changes on the Hydrology of the Mediterranean Basins.” Further discussion of this aspect necessitates examining the long-term climatic trends in the region, while also taking into account precipitation in the areas to the north and northeast, part of the hinterland of Gaza that are today in Israel. We can also mention here that 200 mm/yr is the minimal annual rainfall necessary for unirrigated wheat cultivation; see Curtis, “Wheat in the World/”

<sup>84</sup> Halevy, “Listōt (bīrah) me-ha-yam shel ʿazza.”

## Conclusions, Tentative and Otherwise

Under the Franks, Gaza City began to undergo a process of restoration, which was cut short by the defeat at Hattin in 1187 and subsequent events. During the time of Frankish Rule, Gaza played a minor but discernable strategic role in Frankish-Muslim military relations. There is yet virtually no information about its agricultural hinterland at this time. We also have little evidence for the state of the city and its environs during the time of Ayyubid rule, particularly in the first decades. In fact, the information that we have indicates a town of secondary or even tertiary stature. We have no explicit evidence for prosperity, but even if this was the case, conditions deteriorated from 1239 to 1260, a time of frequent war and movement of troops in the area, at times incessantly so.

The city and the surrounding region begin to recover under the early Mamluks. This trend gains in momentum in the early fourteenth century, not least since Gaza is the capital of a new Mamluk province (*niyābah / mamlakah*). This was a time of much patronage from the Mamluk elite. We see economic and demographic prosperity, along with cultural activity. The roles of sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the governor Sanjar al-Jāwli in the 1310s are particularly crucial in these developments. The authorities saw to the political stability in the region, generally keeping the local nomads under firm control. The city of Gaza has a substantial agricultural hinterland, and we have the names of more than a dozen villages, mostly to the north and northeast of Gaza City that also enjoy some affluence. The impression so far is of agricultural prosperity throughout the entire Mamluk period (which does not mean that there were no ups and downs). The interregional trade between Syria and Egypt passing through Gaza would have also contributed to the economic wellbeing of the city and the surrounding area, a topic that was not discussed in this paper but that will receive attention in the future.<sup>85</sup> One indication of ongoing prosperity is the establishment and continuation of a Jewish community. We have no idea yet from where these Jews arrived, and in what numbers, but their appearance and ongoing presence speaks of an auspicious economic situation, as Jews would have been attracted to a prosperous region, where their communal autonomy would have been respected.

In this paper I have not dealt with the question of religious conversion, i.e. Islamization, but I will touch upon it here. My hypothesis is that under the Mamluks we see in Gaza City and its countryside the development of a larger Muslim population in both relative and absolute terms, as we find apparently in other areas of Palestine (and elsewhere of al-Shām and Egypt) in the time of the Mamluk Sultanate.<sup>86</sup> We certainly have a more Islamic landscape, both urban and rural, as indicated by all of the construction projects mentioned above. Nimrod Luz has suggested that changing landscape may well be an indicator of a growing Muslim population.<sup>87</sup> This may have been due to migration (the immigration of Muslims and the emigration of Christians), actual conversion (of individuals and groups), and even a differential birthrate.<sup>88</sup> In a dialectical twist, the more Islamic landscape and ambience would have been conducive to further conversion. I intend to continue this line of research in my ongoing Mamluk Gaza project.

Another matter that did not receive attention in this paper is how the tentative picture of overall, continual prosperity fits in with larger economic and demographic trends. The

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<sup>85</sup> For now, see Map 1 in Cytryn-Silverman, *The Road Inns (Khāns) in Bilād al-Shām*, showing the network of caravanserais in Palestine, indicating a high volume of commercial traffic in the country, not the least via the region of Gaza.

<sup>86</sup> See Amitai, “Islamization in the Southern Levant after the End of Frankish Rule”; El-Leithy, “Sufis, Copts and the Politics of Piety.”

<sup>87</sup> Luz, “Aspects of Islamization of Space and Society in Mamluk Jerusalem and its Hinterland.” See also: Frenkel, “Baybars and the Sacred Geography of Bilād al-Shām.”

<sup>88</sup> These are matters broached in Amitai, “Islamization in the Southern Levant,” forthcoming.

fifteenth century has often been seen as a time of economic and demographic decline in Mamluk Syria (and Egypt for that matter).<sup>89</sup> Recent scholarship has begun to criticize this approach, at least in the area of international foreign trade.<sup>90</sup> I also look forward to trying to integrate the history of Gaza into the larger picture of Palestine and Syria, and at the same time perhaps contribute some insights to those working on the grand narrative of the area, including its economic history.

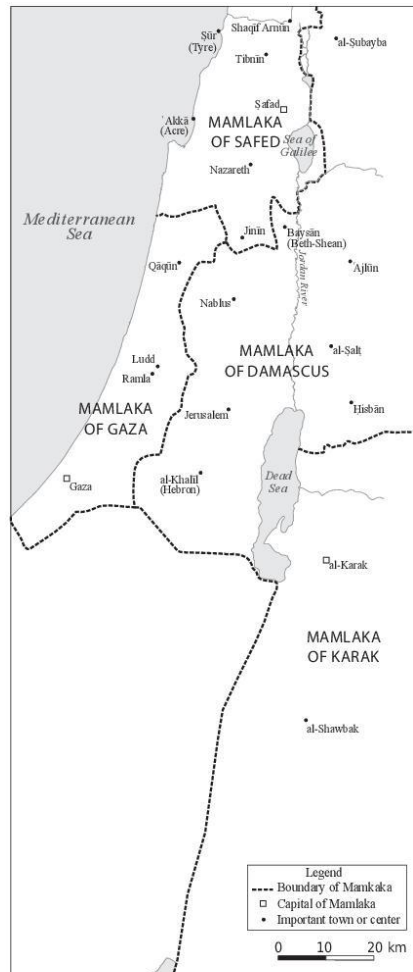
This paper, then, represents a report on some of the research done to date on the Mamluk Gaza project. Not all of the aspects that I have investigated have found expression here, but one thing is clear to me already. Gaza was a city of some importance in the Mamluk scheme of provincial government. It enjoyed overall prosperity during the more than a quarter millennium of Mamluk rule. Gaza was neither Cairo nor Damascus, nor Aleppo for that matter, but it could proudly hold its head with the second tier cities of the Sultanate in Syria: Hama, Homs, Tripoli, Karak and Safad.

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<sup>89</sup> One notable example is Ashtor, "The Venetian Supremacy in Levantine Trade."

<sup>90</sup> An important contribution is Apellàniz Ruiz de Galarreta, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne*.

# Maps



Map no 1





Map no 2

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