

STRUCTURAL PORTRAITS OF ELITE HOUSEHOLDS IN GAZA, C. 1900: STRATEGIES AND PATTERNS OF COOPERATION

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Abstract | Throughout the Ottoman period, elite households and elite families were central figures in Middle Eastern urban politics; however, these entities were shaped in different ways as a function of time and place. Thanks to the exceptional source of documentation constituted by the Ottoman census of 1905, information on these households and families can be reconstructed for the city of Gaza at the end of the Ottoman period at finer granularity than ever before. This chapter examines the strategies implemented by established elite families in late Ottoman Gaza as they endeavored to preserve their power and influence. It does not focus on their economic or political activities or the narratives produced about them, but rather on their most private sphere; i.e., social relations within the household and between households, which show how members collaborated with each other to further their shared interests. Hierarchical, cooperative and diverging patterns of relationships within a whole family or a family branch emerge from this analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the Ottoman period, elite households and elite families were central figures in urban politics in the Middle East, especially in the region of Bilad al-Sham. However, these entities were shaped in different ways as a function of region and period.¹ Thanks to the exceptional source of documentation constituted by the Ottoman census data of 1905 and the relational database developed for its analysis, these

households and families for the city of Gaza at the end of the Ottoman period can be reconstructed in greater detail than ever before (see the text box on the census as a source for historical studies).² The census provides a snapshot of households as they were registered by Ottoman census officials between April and July of 1905, with updates until World War I. These entries have a certain amount of historical depth because they include information on the relatives of the heads of households listed, such as their names and their place of origin. Since most individuals' family names are recorded, this provides a starting point for an analysis of kinship

¹ For case studies of Cairo, see Jane Hathaway, *The Politics and Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); for Aleppo, see Margaret L. Meriwether, *The Kin Who Count: Family and Society in Ottoman Aleppo, 1770-1840* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999); for Palestinian towns, see Dror Ze'evi, *An Ottoman Century: The District of Jerusalem in the 1600s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); for Damascus, see Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1985).

² This chapter is based on data collected within the framework of the "Gaza during the Late Ottoman Period" research project hosted by the Universities of Haifa, Tübingen, and Bochum, through funding awarded by the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development (GIF 1226) from 2016 to 2018. The "Gaza Historical Database," hosted by the University of Bochum, is available online at <https://gaza.ub.rub.de/gaza> (accessed 27 February 2021).



relationships between members of different households.

These data on extended families were compared and contrasted with information from the voluminous contemporary encyclopedia of Gaza by 'Uthman al-Tabba' (1882–1950).³ Tabba' was a scholar from Gaza and was educated at Al-Azhar College in Cairo. Upon his return to Gaza in 1902, he began compiling his encyclopedia, which resulted in two manuscript volumes that were completed around 1912.⁴ The print version of Tabba's work comprises four volumes, two of which are of interest here. One is made up of family genealogies and short histories of the most prestigious and powerful local families. The other contains biographies of the most prominent members of these families, in particular scholars and merchants. Tabba's portrayals of families and personalities should however be read with caution, since they are highly stylized, and present the city and his fellow townspeople in a positive light. Although showcasing models of virtue and commercial success, he occasionally hints at competition and conflicts between local families. He also indirectly points at economic strategies, for example when he notes that a given merchant had exceptionally good relations with the Bedouins in the surrounding region.⁵

A close reading of the 1905 Ottoman census and Tabba's prosopographical information provides a rich evidentiary basis on families and households in Gaza, and especially on the local elite. Nevertheless, these sources fail to adequately cover crucial information such as the economic assets and the political strategies of the families involved. Therefore, they should be complemented by other sources that are of major importance in research on the social history of urban societies in Bilad al-Sham such as

Shari'a court records,⁶ business contracts,⁷ family archives, diaries and memoirs.⁸ These kinds of sources so far have not been found for Gaza during this period. An advantage of using only a limited number of sources in my study is that this may lead to transparent and controllable hypotheses, which should be tested against other source material in the future.⁹

This chapter does not focus on the economic or political activities of these families, but rather on the social relations within these households and across households in one family. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which household members interacted to further their shared interests.¹⁰ This analysis reveals three main types of collaboration within a whole family or a family branch, which are classified into hierarchical, cooperative and diverging patterns, as discussed below.

A household is defined here as a residential unit, which could range from a single room within a larger architectural complex to

6 The only known Shari'a court records from Gaza cover 1857–1861. They are analyzed in 'Abdul-Karim Rafeq, *Ghazza: Dirasa 'umraniyya wa-ijtima'iyya wa-iqtisadiyya min khilal al-watha'iq al-shari'iyya 1273-1277/1857-1861* [Gaza: A Demographic, Social, and Economic Study based on the Shari'a Court Records 1273-77/1857-61] (Damascus and Amman: n.p., 1980) [in Arabic].

7 For a study of business contracts as a window onto the political economy, social networks and power relations in the highlands of late Ottoman Palestine, see Beshara Doumani, "The Salam Contract and Urban-Rural Relations in Ottoman Palestine," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 62/4 (2006), pp. 901–924.

8 For examples of recent studies building on the skillful use of these types of sources, see Christian Sassmannshausen, "Educated with Distinction: Educational Decisions and Girls' Schooling in Late Ottoman Syria," *JESHO* 62 (2019), pp. 222–256; idem "Eating Up: Food Consumption and Social Status in Late Ottoman Greater Syria," in Kirill Dmitriev, Julia Hauser and Bilal Orfali (eds.), *Insatiable Appetite: Food as Cultural Signifier in the Middle East and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 27–49.

9 Recently, more than one hundred Arabic-language petitions from Gaza to the imperial government in Istanbul, dating from the 1890s to the World War I, have been identified in the Ottoman Archives. A first perusal has shown that many of them address subjects that are highly relevant in the present context, such as questions of family identity, social status and qualifications for administrative posts. However, the analysis of this corpus is beyond the scope of this article.

10 For the political strategies of the families mentioned in this chapter; namely the Shawwa, Husayni, Abu Khadra and Saqallah, see Yuval Ben-Bassat and Johann Buessow, "Urban Factionalism in Late Ottoman Gaza, c. 1875–1914: Local Politics and Spatial Divisions," *JESHO* 61/1 (2018), pp. 606–649.

3 'Uthman al-Tabba', *Ithaf al-a'izza fi tarikh Ghazza* [Presenting the notables in the history of Gaza], ed. 'Abd al-Latif Abu Hashim (Gaza: Maktabat al-Jaziji, 1999) [in Arabic].

4 Yuval Ben-Bassat and Johann Buessow, "Applying Digital Methods to the Study of a Late Ottoman City: A Social and Spatial Analysis of Political Partisanship in Gaza," *JESHO* 63/4 (2020), p. 519. After completing his manuscript, Tabba' added additional information on several topics during subsequent years, e.g. on events during World War I.

5 Johann Buessow, *Hamidian Palestine: Politics and Society in the District of Jerusalem, 1872–1908* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 298–299.

a mansion, a *dar*, and the inhabitants of this residential unit. In Gaza, members of households were generally related by kinship or marriage, or in some cases, by master-servant relationships. In Gaza, unlike records for other cities such as Damascus, Nablus, or Cairo, only one person was registered as the head of a household.¹¹

To better understand how interactions between heads of households maximized their joint success and the ways in which decision-makers within a family used households and individual members to foster and preserve their reputation, wealth and power, the sources here are examined to respond to two key questions: Who lived in a household and what kind of functions did individual household members fulfill for the household or family collective? What was the nature of the collaboration between households, or branches of one family? I also examine whether marriage practices can yield insights into the concretization of reputation or wealth and ways of maintaining them.

More generally, this study aims to contribute to the literature by achieving greater terminological precision. “Elite families,” or “notable families,” are mentioned as central actors in local chronicles as well as in scholarly accounts of the history of late Ottoman Bilad al-Sham.¹²

11 For an analysis of household structures based on administrative documents, see for Damascus Tomoki Okawara, “Size and Structure of Damascus Households in the Late Ottoman Period as Compared with Istanbul Households,” in Beshara Doumani (ed.), *Family History in the Middle East: Household, Property, and Gender* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 51–75; for Nablus Beshara Doumani, *Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); for Cairo Philippe Fargues, “Family and Household in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Cairo,” in Beshara Doumani (ed.), *Family History in the Middle East: Household, Property, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 23–50.

12 Schatkowski Schilcher, *Families in Politics*; Margaret L. Meriwether, in her study on notables in 18th century Aleppo, also writes about “notable families,” though stating that for some leading figures, there was cooperation between brothers and that wealth was not distributed equally across households or families. See Meriwether, *Kin Who Count*, pp. 42, 45. Meriwether also notes that “[t]he fact that individuals were descended from a common ancestor and shared certain genes only mattered if the individuals involved believed that it mattered” (p. 52). She continues: “Wealth [including inheritance, SB], belonged to and was controlled by individuals, not by lineage” (p. 53). Meriwether also describes households as political units within notable families (p. 87).

On closer inspection, these great political families of the region rarely acted as a collective, and only a few individuals within these families were actually notables as defined by Albert Hourani; i.e., intermediaries¹³ between the central government and specific segments of the local population. I thus suggest disentangling elite family, elite household and notables analytically by clarifying their respective functions in a given setting. This can help sensitize both readers and researchers to the extent of social diversity within specific families and caution against treating families as monolithic macro-actors.

In the following, I do not discuss cases of individual notables as intermediaries between the imperial government and local society, but rather the behavior of elite households within the city Gaza through structural portraits of their households at a specific point in time. This was made possible through access to a set of Ottoman census data from 1905 (1321 according to the official Ottoman or *Rumi* calendar) which has only recently become widely accessible.¹⁴ Below, I focus on five selected categories of information derived from the census: family relations, occupation, education, sources of income, and marriage patterns.

A good example of information that can be gleaned from the census is the register of the family of ‘Uthman al-Tabba’, the author of the monograph on the Gaza’s history and its prominent men and families, that is one of the most important sources for this place and period.¹⁵ He was born in Gaza in 1882 and died there in 1950. He was registered in the 1905

13 Albert Hourani, “Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables,” in William Polk and Richard Chambers (eds.), *Beginning of Modernization in the Middle East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 48.

14 ISA, Nüfus (Ottoman population registers). See Michelle Campos, “Placing Jerusalem in the History of Jerusalem: The Ottoman Census (Sicil-i Nüfus) as a Historical Source,” in Angelos Dalachanis and Vincent Lemire (eds.), *Ordinary Jerusalem, 1840–1940: Opening New Archives, Revisiting a Global City* (Leiden: Brill, 2018). The census records have recently been digitized by the Israeli State Archives and have been available online since 2016. The analysis of the data was facilitated by the construction of a database for the 1905 census of Gaza in the framework of the project “Gaza during the Late Ottoman Period.” See “Gaza Historical Database,” online at <https://gaza.ub.rub.de/gaza> (accessed 19 March 2021).

15 Tabba’, *Ithaf*.

census, when he was about 22 years old.¹⁶ A brief examination of the household he lived in can provide a first impression of the internal structure of a wealthy household in Gaza. According to the census register, ‘Uthman al-Tabba’ lived in the household of his brother Muhammad, a merchant, in the central neighborhood of Daraj. The household was multi-family, which meant in this case that four brothers lived in one dwelling together with their nuclear families and other family members such as their mother (Ott. Turk. *valide*). The household consisted of 20 members in total, which was quite large in comparison to the average household in Gaza, which numbered about 7 members.¹⁷ In the census register, he was listed as “Shaykh ‘Uthman Efendi.” The titles *shaykh* and *efendi* characterize him as an honorable and educated man. His occupation was registered in Ottoman Turkish as “one of the scholars” (*‘ulema’dan*). In contrast, his three brothers who were living in the same household had no scholarly credentials, but worked as merchants. This composition of different occupations within one household, at first glance and from a modern perspective, may not seem relevant. However, as shown below, given Gaza’s characteristics and the role elite households played within the city, it is pertinent indeed.

Historically, the economic and political dominance of elite households was a highly important feature of the societies in Bilad al-Sham from the Islamic middle period onward, and probably even before.¹⁸ In the Mamluk Sultanate, such households were not necessarily confined to one physical dwelling, in that household members could be spread throughout the Mamluk domains. In Ottoman Bilad al-Sham, the notion of the importance of a household as a political unit emerged during the 17th century at the latest, concurrently with the rise of most of the successful local elite

families such as the ‘Azms in Damascus¹⁹ and the Al Ridwan in Gaza.²⁰ Some of these families comprised households with more than one hundred members.²¹ However, in contrast to the households in the current study, these households did not live in only one dwelling, and were not based on kin alone; rather, most of these households were a mixture of households based on blood relations and patronage. Household heads were important figures in the military and the bureaucracy and were also able to protect their household members and clients by the sword.²²

In the framework of this chapter, the term ‘elite families’ refers to local families that enjoyed both social prestige and political influence, mostly thanks to a broad portfolio of assets, including state and religious offices, religious authority, scholarly reputation, commercial enterprises, and landholding.²³ In analytical terms, their assets can be conceptualized as different types of what Jörg Gertel termed “resources,” building on Bourdieu’s notion of types of capital and Anthony Giddens’s concept of resources.²⁴ Gertel distinguishes between four kinds of resources: (1) allocative resources, which are linked to property rights (e.g. land, fruit trees, dependent workforce); (2) monetary resources, which consist of more or less readily available cash (e.g. savings, loans); (3) incorporated resources, which are related to the person himself and his or her body (e.g.

16 ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 266, p. 115.

17 This number was calculated from the database in which we entered all the available inhabitants of Gaza based on the Ottoman Census.

18 On Mamluk elite households, see Koby Yosef, “Usages of Kinship Terminology during the Mamluk Sultanate and the Notion of the ‘Mamluk Family,’” in Yuval Ben-Bassat (ed.), *Developing Perspectives in Mamluk History* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 16-74.

19 See Thomas Philipp, “al-‘Az̄m family,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* THREE.

20 Ze’evi, *Ottoman Century*, pp. 39–41.

21 See Ehud Toledano, “An Empire of Many Households: The Case of Ottoman Enslavement,” in Laura Culbertson (ed.), *Slaves and Households in the Near East: Papers from the Oriental Institute Seminar; Held at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 5-6 March 2010* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2011), pp. 92–93.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Ehud Toledano calls this group the “Ottoman local elites”. See Ehud Toledano, “The Emergence of Ottoman-Local Elites (1700–1900): A Framework for Research,” in Moshe Ma’oz and Ilan Pappé (eds.), *Middle Eastern Politics and Ideas: A History from Within* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997), pp. 145-162.

24 See Jörg Gertel, “Mobility and Insecurity: The Significance of Resources,” in Jörg Gertel, and Info Breuer (eds.), *Pastoral Morocco: Globalizing Scapes of Mobility and Insecurity* (Wiesbaden: Reichert 2007). This terminology was also used by Johann Buessow to discuss local elites in late Ottoman Palestine. See Buessow, *Hamidian Palestine*, pp. 326–327, pp. 11-30.

health, education); (4) institutional resources, which consist of the ties between the person and those related to him or her (e.g. families, households, social networks).

Money and land ownership played a major role in becoming and remaining important in 19th-century Gaza (and in other places). However, the family, or at least some households, needed first to organize itself in terms of *institutional* and *incorporated resources*. One of the key indicators of *institutional resources* was family background (however, as we shall see, it was no guarantee of success in itself). In the census, indicators of family background are family names, which are provided for individuals who married into a family. The birthplace and family background of wives who married into the households are both provided by the census and give further information as to whether there was a preference for endogamous or exogamous marriages. To better understand *incorporated resources*, titles and information on education provide hints about the social status of individual members of the household. Except for occasional titles recorded for women, the sources only provide this type of information for males. Information on occupation is suggestive of social status, sources of income and fields of social activity in which the family or household were active.

In 19th-century Gaza, several dozen elite households struggled for power and dominance in specific arenas: the religious sphere (holding religious and educational positions and above all the position of *mufti*) and the administrative-political sphere (civil servants of the municipality, holding the position of mayor). One of Gaza's main characteristics at the time was the exceptionally high degree of political polarization between opposing factions that formed around certain leading families. As of the middle of the 19th century, one camp was led by the Husayni family, who were challenged by successive coalitions of opposing families. From the mid-1890s, the opposition camp was led by the Shawwa family. As early as 1870s, the political struggle revolved around the position of *mufti*; from the 1890s the focus of attention shifted towards control of the city's municipality. Gaza's factionalism also took on a spatial dimension, when the two leading family households built strongholds in different

parts of the city. The Husaynis invested in the Sayyid Hashim Mosque in Daraj, at the north-western end of the city, and in large houses in its surroundings. The Shawwas created a stronghold in the southeastern neighborhood of Shaja'iyya, where they built a large mansion and also patronized a local mosque, and, more importantly, teamed up with Shaykh Ahmad Busaysu, who was an influential Muslim scholar and preacher (*khatib*) at Shaja'iyya's Friday mosque. In 1898, with support of the Ottoman central government and in particular the governor of Jerusalem, Mehmed Tevfik Bey, the Shawwa faction accomplished a major reversal and ended the longstanding dominance of the Husayni faction.²⁵

At the turn of the 20th century, roughly ten Muslim families were regarded as elite families by their contemporaries: Abu Khadra, Abu Sha'ban, 'Alami, Burnu, Busaysu, Ghalayini, Ghusayn, Husayni, Saqallah, and Shawwa.²⁶ Below, I provide structural portraits of four of these families: Husayni, Abu Khadra, Saqallah and Shawwa.

FAMILY, HOUSEHOLD AND INDIVIDUAL

In general, Gaza's elite families were constituted by a group of men and women who shared the same family name, claimed descent from a common ancestor and were linked by consanguine relationships through the male line (patrilineal lineage). Contemporary Arab authors have used the terms *'a'ila*, and *hamula* interchangeably to denote this concept of family.²⁷

The relevance of the "family" entity varied from case to case. A successful household or, more often, successful household groups, or what are termed here "brother groups," acted individually without necessarily invoking the

25 See Ben-Bassat and Buessow, "Urban Factionalism."

26 See Ahmad Salim Busaysu, *Kashf al-niqab fi bayan ahwal bad sukkan Ghazza wa-bad nawahiha min al-arab* [Unveiling the Situation of some Inhabitants of Gaza and of some of the Bedouin Groups in its Surroundings], Arabic autograph manuscript, dated 29 Rajab 1315 AH / 24 December 1897, Gaza, Wizarat al-Awqaf [in Arabic]; Georg Gatt, "Plan von Gaza. Gezeichnet 1887," *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 2 (1888), p. 150; Tabba', *Ithaf*.

27 Buessow, *Hamidian Palestine*, p. 7.

family as a superior entity. At least in the case of Gaza's elites, *family*, was more of a theoretical than a practical category.

Individuals used membership to make claims to having a particularly noble genealogy (*nasab*), but in the sources under discussion, these were apparently not a framework for political action. It was the family *branch*, and within it the *household*, that was of prime political and economic importance, and specific resources within these households needed to be maintained or configured to remain successful. If this failed, the status and political influence of the household was in danger. Other households belonging to the same family could form part of these strategic considerations to varying degrees, but the sources provide no indication that the family as a whole was evoked in this context. Petitions analyzed by Yuval Ben-Bassat and Johann Buessow show that in the context of Gaza's factionalism, all households belonging to a specific family, usually supported one political camp, but there are also cases in which members of one family sided with opposing factions simultaneously.²⁸

Therefore, the term "elite family," does not refer here to the totality of family members but rather solely to several individuals within one household or several households belonging to a family who worked together to increase the power and prestige linked to the family name.

Political individuals were, in local Arabic usage, referred to as *a'yan*, which can be translated as "notables." Notables were not by definition linked to powerful families and households. As Gudrun Krämer observed, "it was possible for an individual to be acknowledged as a notable on the strength of his individual achievements."²⁹ However, in Gaza around 1900, elite households were the primary framework within which local *a'yan* acted, and all the elite households in the city were linked to a well-known family.

A VARIETY OF HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURES

As discussed in socio-historical studies on families in Damascus by Tomoki Okawara,³⁰ on Cairo by Philippe Fargues,³¹ and on Istanbul by Alan Duben and Cem Behar,³² household and family structures in the late Ottoman Middle East were characterized by their diversity. Among the factors associated with various types of households and families were religion (especially the permissibility of polygyny according to Islamic law), wealth, particular family and local traditions, spatial constraints (e.g. the type of houses prevalent in a certain city) but also political ambitions. Each city described in the literature so far had its own characteristics that formed this structure and *inter alia* influenced the size of households.

For Gaza, there were four main types of households: (1) single households; that is, a household consisting of only one person; (2) nuclear households that consisted of a male married household head, his wife and, if given, one or more children, but could also consist of a widow and her children, or a brother and his siblings; (3) extended households; i.e., a nuclear family with one or more added family members such as the mother of the household head (*valide*), brother, sister, daughter-in-law, etc.; and (4) multiple family households that consisted of two or more nuclear families living together in one household. Usually, these were the nuclear families of the sons or the brothers of the household head - or a late household head -, often in addition to the *valide*, unmarried sisters, and sometimes also children of deceased brothers and other relatives. Typically, the households in Gaza consisted of family members related either by blood or by marriage. This contrasts with Damascus, for example, where there were households consisting of members with no blood or marriage ties. Okawara suggested that these individuals were registered as one household, although

28 Ben-Bassat and Buessow, "Urban Factionalism."

29 Gudrun Krämer, *History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 93.

30 Okawara, "Size and Structure of Damascus Households."

31 Fargues, "Family and Household."

32 Alan Duben and Cem Behar, *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family, and Fertility, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

they resided in several dwellings.³³ In rare cases, domestics also formed part of the household. In the Gaza census, a handful of people were registered as domestics, considerably fewer than in the district capital of Jerusalem, and some lived in the same household as their masters.³⁴ Households whose heads were sons of the same father often closely cooperated with each other as “brother groups.” There might be also households within one family, whose household heads did not have the same father but were cousins. In either case, these households often formed interest groups to achieve a specific aim.

STRUCTURAL PORTRAITS: INDIVIDUAL HOUSEHOLD STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES

One important corollary of household cooperation was spatial clustering. The Husayni, Abu Khadra, and Saqallah families all resided in the neighborhood of Daraj, the oldest part of Gaza and the seat of its administrative institutions. There were five Husayni households registered in the year 1905, all in the vicinity of the Hashim Mosque. The registers contain also five Abu Khadra households that were clustered (with one exception) in Shaykh ‘Ali al-Andalusi and Shaykh ‘Ayyad streets, two main streets in Daraj, and eight Saqallah households around the Grand Mosque (*al-Jami‘ al-Kabir al-Umari*). According to the census, the Shawwa family consisted of the impressive total of 26 households that were spread over two different neighborhoods, Tuffah and Shaja‘iyya, or more precisely two streets: Rifi Street in Tuffah (5 households) and Qazdamri Street in Shaja‘iyya (21 households). This has to do with their history: in the mid-19th century, part of the Shawwa family moved from Tuffah to Shaja‘iyya for a variety of reasons. The clustering of house-

holds belonging to one family might have been part of what Ben-Bassat and Buessow called “spatialized factionalism.”³⁵ However, the positions of the families’ dwellings were also related to distinctions within certain families and between their households. This is most obvious in the case of the Shawwas but probably also held true for the Saqallahs. The next section presents profiles of the four families, and an interpretation of their respective strategies and resources.

THE HUSAYNIS

For a lengthy period of time, several personalities in the Husayni family held powerful positions in Gaza, especially that of the Hanafi *mufti*. The muftiship of Gaza was considered particularly important to this city.³⁶ Members of other powerful households tried to dislodge the Husaynis from this position regularly but without lasting success. The Husaynis had an extraordinary network that included Sufis, scholars, and intellectuals throughout the Arab provinces, as well as connections to the inner circles of the Porte, and their leaders can be described as notables in Hourani’s sense *par excellence*.³⁷ In the 1850s, with the support of Sultan Abdülmecid (1823–1861), the Husaynis under the leadership of Ahmad Muhyi al-Din al-Husayni (1808/9–1878) renovated the Sayyid Hashim Mosque, the burial place of Gaza’s most revered Muslim saint, the great-grandfather of the Prophet. Their dwellings were situated in the vicinity of the mosque, and they welcomed pilgrims to this site.

The five households of the Husayni family in the 1905 census registers belonged to three patrilineal groups; i.e., groups of offspring of three different fathers. Two consisted of stand-alone households. The third patrilineal group consisted of three households, each led by a brother; i.e., these three households formed a “brother group.” The father of this brother group was the aforementioned Ahmad Muhyi

33 Okawara, “Size and Structure of Damascus Households,” pp. 59–61.

34 ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 260, p. 83; Reg. 265, p. 3; Reg. 266, p. 163; for more on domestics in Gaza and their biographies extrapolated from the register, see Sarah Buessow and Johann Buessow, “Domestic Servants and Slaves in Late Ottoman Palestine after the Abolition of Slavery: Considerations on Semantics and Agency,” in Gül Sen and Stefan Conermann (eds.), *Slaves and Slave Agency in the Ottoman Empire* (Goettingen: Bonn University Press at V & R Unipress, 2020), pp. 373–433.

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

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 615, 620–621, 636. Although it remains somewhat unclear why it was such a contested position, some practical reasons are likely to have been involved beyond its associated high social status and religious authority.

37 Hourani, “Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables.”

al-Din al-Husayni, an Azhar graduate who held most important religious positions, including that of *kadi* and *mufti*.³⁸

All five Husayni households drew on the same economic and educational resources; namely, traditional Islamic education and the acquisition of skills in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish that prepared them for an administrative career. All the Husayni household heads, as well as the other male household members bore the title of *efendi*, which marked their social status as part of the educated elite. In fact, every household had at least one member who pursued a religious or administrative career. There are no indications that they owned much land.

Four households stand out: the above-mentioned brother groups, the sons of Ahmad Muhyi al-Din, and the stand-alone household of Ahmad 'Arif, who was the son of Hanafi Efendi and the grandson of Ahmad Muhyi al-Din. All of their household heads and sons were involved in Gaza's urban politics.³⁹

All five Husayni households preferred exogamous marriages with families of similar educational backgrounds and social status outside Gaza.⁴⁰ Most of the women marrying into the family came from well-known Muslim Palestinian families such as the 'Alami al-Dawudis and the Khalidis of Jerusalem, the Tajjis of Ramla, and even the very famous Husaynis of Jerusalem (with whom the Gaza Husaynis were probably only related by marriage, not by blood). According to the census records, there were two marriages to Turkish families that apparently took place when some members of the Husayni family were in exile in Ankara.⁴¹ Among the older generation, there were also several marriages to women

of Circassian origin. The last one registered in the census dated from the 1880s or 1890s.⁴² This is reminiscent of the marriage patterns of the Ottoman elite, and it is quite possible that members of the Gazan elite wanted to imitate the court in Istanbul.⁴³

This marriage pattern appears to have been part of a family strategy in that Husayni households only accepted very few local people into their intimate sphere. This conduct as well as their consistent choice of marriage partners from the very same educational background may have been a conscious act of *differentiation* from the inhabitants of Gaza. Since the Husayni households apparently did not have much land that had to stay "in the family," this strategy could have strengthened their cultural capital by maintaining marriage relationships with well-known educated families without putting the family business at risk.

Thus, overall, the Husaynis almost exclusively focused on traditional education, as can be seen in their titles and occupations as well as their marriage practices. The probable strategy behind this may well have been the wish to reproduce future office holders. Its downside, however, was that the Husaynis did not look for alternative fields of influence beyond religious and administrative offices. This was a weak point, especially around 1900, when, in the face of economic and political upheaval, other families and households diversified their resources.⁴⁴

THE ABU KHADRAS

Households of the Abu Khadra family formed part of successive political factions that worked against the predominant position of the Husaynis. They resided mainly in Daraj, although many also had a second home base in Jaffa.⁴⁵

38 *Ibid.*, p. 621.

39 The household head of the other stand-alone household, Salih Efendi, was not a political figure. He was the son of Muhammad Tahir, a third cousin of Ahmad Muhyi al-Din, and worked as a scribe. See Tabba', *Ithaf*, vol. 3, p. 110, for the family tree of the Husaynis.

40 Two exceptions to this rule are marriage ties with the al-Sa'idi and 'Alami families in Gaza.

41 Jawiyya Khanim, born 1301/1883-4 in Ankara, her father's name is given as Ahmad Efendi. The lack of a family name in this case hints at a Turkish background, since family names were much rarer among the Turkish-speaking population. Another Turkish woman who married into a Gazan family was Khadija Khanim, born in Ma-rash in 1306/1888-9; her father's name is given as Ahmad Agha. ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 252, p. 83; Reg. 260, p. 207.

42 Fakhima Khanim, born 1291/1874 in Circassia. Father: Salih Efendi; Reg. 252, p. 83.

43 See, for instance, the register of eight leading government officials in Jerusalem and their households, ca. 1880, transcribed in Buessow, *Hamidian Palestine*, pp. 401-402.

44 It may be that "a religious position could still be an important family asset in Gaza around 1900" (see Ben-Bassat and Buessow, "Urban Factionalism," p. 630). However, the concentration on only this one area of influence could have been risky in times of rapid economic and political change, as in Gaza at the turn of the 20th century.

45 Tabba', *Ithaf*, vol. 3, pp. 20-21.

The most striking feature of this family is that there was one very large household (henceforth referred to as A), consisting of 47 members, and four relatively small households (referred to as B, C, D, E; see Figure 1). The large household A was headed by Isma'il Abu Khadra, who bore the titles of *efendi* and *rifatlu*.⁴⁶ He was the son of Khalil Efendi Abu Khadra, a wealthy merchant. Isma'il's brother Ramadan did not found a household of his own after their father's death, but lived with his nuclear family in Isma'il's household. The other smaller households B, C, D and E, were all stand-alone-patrilineal groups. Households A and B lived on Shaykh 'Ayyad Street, the others in Shaykh 'Ali al-Andalusi Street nearby.

The second feature that set household A apart, aside from its size, was the age of the household head. Isma'il, who was born in 1278/1861–2, was in his forties at the time the census was taken, whereas the other four household heads were only between 15 and 30 years of age. One can assume that this very large household had the greatest authority within the Abu Khadra family. Except for the household head of household B, all the household heads owned real estate, and their main source of income was landownership in and around Gaza. Salim, the head of household B, however, held the important administrative position of *ma'arif re'isi*, Director of School Education in Gaza, which had previously been held by members of the Husayni family.⁴⁷

Education must thus have been important for the Abu Khadras, but, in contrast to the Husaynis, their focus was on modern secular rather than religious education. In fact, the sources do not mention the religious positions or educational backgrounds of the members of this family. Thus, their influence in the area of secular education was an institutional resource that supplemented their allocative and monetary resources, which were the main drivers of their influence.

A and B, which were probably the most influential households, resided next to each other on Shaykh 'Ayyad Street. The other three households were located in Shaykh 'Ali al-Andalusi Street, and two of them were neighbors: Yusuf Nimr Abu Khadra, a real estate owner,

born in 1885,⁴⁸ and 'Ali, also a real estate owner born in the same year.⁴⁹ However, it is impossible to say to what extent they formed agentive groups at the time, since they were too young. Two of them were 19 to 20 years old; the youngest household head was As'ad, who was 15 or 16 years old, and still a pupil or apprentice (*şagırd*).⁵⁰

Although the Abu Khadra family cooperated politically with other families of Gaza, they preferred to marry endogamously. In the extraordinarily large household of Isma'il (A), his daughters married the sons of his late brother, who lived with them in their household after his death (*bint-'amm* marriages).⁵¹ In contrast, there were only three exogamous marriages in the generation of the mothers of the household heads, which might be due to the fact that the wealth of the family was still accumulating. Among Gaza's economic elite, the Abu Khadras were newcomers, and their endogamous marriages were a likely response to the challenge of keeping the immovable wealth in the family, or more precisely, the household.

THE SAQALLAHS

In 1905, the year of the census, the political heyday of the Saqallahs was already over. It had lasted over two generations, beginning with Hajj Ahmad Saqallah al-Khalili, who immigrated from Hebron to Gaza, and continued with two of his sons, Muhammad (d. 1896) and Mustafa (d. 1896/7). Both had died about ten years before the census was taken.⁵² Mustafa was a *waqf* superintendent (*nazir*). Muhammad graduated from Al-Azhar College in Cairo, but ventured into entrepreneurship, with a focus on trade and moneylending. He was a *mufti* in the 1870s, a position he was awarded as the main representative of the opposition to the Husayni family.

The 1905 census indicates two branches to this family. Branch A consisted of five house-

48 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

50 ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 252, p. 203.

51 See Meriwether, *Kin who Count*, p. 135 for *bint-'amm* marriages in Aleppo.

52 For their role in Gaza's political factionalism, see Ben-Bassat and Buessow, "Urban Factionalism."

46 ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 253, p. 155.

47 For Salim's entry, see ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 253, p. 161.

holds, led by five sons of Mustafa Efendi, the *waqf* superintendent. Branch B consisted of three households and was led by the sons of As'ad, a deceased son of Mustafa (henceforth referred to as A and B; see also Figure 3).⁵³ The clustering in specific streets in Daraj goes hand in hand with the two brother groups. Brother group A, the households of the sons of Mustafa, resided on Hammam al-Suq Street (Dar al-Saqallah); brother group B, the households of the sons of As'ad and the grandsons of Mustafa, lived on Hillis Street. Only two household heads, both from group A, bore a title: one was an *efendi*, the other a *sayyid*.⁵⁴ The fact that only two of the five were addressed with a title suggests a certain loss of social status, and, probably also a lower level of education for the descendants of Khalil Saqallah. In fact, for group A, there are no entries on the occupation or education with the exception of one household head, who, unlike his brothers, did not live on Hammam al-Suq Street, but somewhat farther away on Jami' al-Kabir Street. His name was Salih. He was born in 1291/1874–5 and was married to one wife with whom he had eight children. His occupation was indicated as *'amele*, a simple worker.⁵⁵ It is unclear why his professional background differed so much from that of his relatives.

The professions of the other brother group B are quite exceptional. One brother was a shoemaker,⁵⁶ three others were *makinist*, which can be translated as “mechanic” or “engine driver.”⁵⁷ We do not know what the occupation of “*makinist*” entailed or what salary they could earn. We can assume that, by local standards, it was less prestigious than positions in the administrative or scholarly hierarchy. However, it was certainly a modern profession and indicated an innovative orientation.

Group B also tended to distance itself from the other family branch; i.e., the households of their uncles, in terms of marriage. Group A made both endogamous and local matches, as

well as exogamous matches with women from other localities, mainly Jaffa. Group B preferred exogamous and trans-regional matches, including Beirut, Jerusalem, Haifa, and Jaffa. The household of Hafiz Saqallah, a *makinist* born in 1289/1872–3, had 21 members in total, including the nuclear families of his brothers. The wives of his brothers came from Jerusalem, Beirut, and Jaffa. Since the occupations of Hafiz's brothers are not indicated, we do not know what they did for a living.⁵⁸ The two wives of the other *makinist*, 'Abd al-Hayy, came from Jaffa and Jerusalem and their children were born there.⁵⁹

There was apparently a strong connection between Hafiz's and 'Abd al-Hayy's occupations and their marriage choices. It seems reasonable to assume that it was their profession as mechanics or engine drivers that encouraged them to marry women from large urban centers across Bilad al-Sham. Choosing wives from well-known cities was surely also a demonstration of a kind of modernity, in that the mobile young men of the family could choose freely between offers and were less restrained by social obligations than other elite households in Gaza. This behavior contrasts sharply with most marriages in Gaza, which were of a local or regional nature. Typically, women from villages belonging to the *kaza* of Gaza married into families who resided in the city.

THE SHAWWAS

The Shawwas were the newcomers *par excellence* to the political field of Gaza during the 19th century. Everything began with Khalil al-Shawwa (1818–1884), a butcher (*qassab*) from Tuffah. The family name “Shawwa,” which is often translated as “meat griller,” seems to be related to his profession. Khalil al-Shawwa eventually became the head of Gaza's butchers' guild and decided to move to the Shaja'iyya neighborhood. He was also involved in tax farming and land dealings, through which he acquired considerable wealth.⁶⁰ His son Muhammad Abu 'Ali (d. 1904–5) became the mayor of Gaza in the late 1890s and was succeeded by

53 See the (incomplete) family tree in Tabba', *Ithaf*, vol. 3, p. 223. Tabba' only mentions 'Ali as son of As'ad. In fact, he had more than ten, in the three households of branch B.

54 ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 252, p. 103; No. 260, p. 125.

55 ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 260, p. 177.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 65.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

60 For Khalil, see Tabba', *Ithaf*, vol. 3, p. 251.

his son (and Khalil's grandson) Sa'id al-Shawwa (1868/9–1930).⁶¹

In the census, 26 Shawwa family households are registered. Five were still located in Tuffah, the family's former home base, whereas 21 households resided in Shaja'iyya. The latter belonged to seven patrilineal groups: A, B, C, D, E, F, G. In contrast to the other elite households, they all resided on Qazdamri Street, which unsurprisingly later became known as "Shawwa Street." The same is true for the Shawwas in Tuffah. The five Shawwa households in the area, H, I, J, K, L, were all patrilineal groups and resided on one street or sub-neighborhood, on Rifi Street.

Within the Shawwa family, like the Saqallah family, there was diverging development, which was presumably hastened by the move of one family branch to Shaja'iyya. Many household heads of the branch living in Shaja'iyya held titles such as *efendi*, *shaykh*, or *sayyid*. The Shawwa household heads of Tuffah had no titles. This may hint at their lack of education and social standing. Another facet of this differentiation is their marriage practices. The Shawwas of Tuffah showed a very strong local orientation: they married almost exclusively exogamously and very locally, since daughters of neighbors were among their wives. By contrast, the Shawwas of Shaja'iyya, who must have owned a sizable amount of land (there were at least five real estate owners in the Shaja'iyya branch) preferred endogamous marriages, complemented by exogamous relations with a few well-known families of Gaza – especially the Busaysus and Ghalayinis – and some from Jaffa and Ramla. It is hard to say whether there were any marriages to the Shawwas in Tuffah, since proper names in the family were recurrent.

The strong local focus of the Shawwa family overall can be gauged by their birthplaces: out of 160 members in total, only 11 (i.e., 7%) were not born in Gaza. The occupations of the two Shawwa branches are also striking. We have no information on three Shawwa households in Tuffah, but the household heads of the other two households in this neighborhood were

still in the butchery business.⁶² The Shawwas in Shaja'iyya, on the other hand, had a broad portfolio that covered a variety of different occupations from merchant to moneylender, from real estate owner to scholar, and individuals with an advanced religious education.⁶³ One of the latter, Shaykh Hasan, even studied at the prestigious Al-Azhar College in Cairo and later worked as a teacher.⁶⁴

Two brother groups of the Shawwas, A and B, are illustrative of a particularly astute strategy: the diversification of different occupations among the brothers (see Figure 2). This provided them with a broad portfolio of resources and the ability to respond to changing circumstances. Group A consisted of three households: A1, led by 'Ali Efendi, A2, led by Kamil Efendi, and A3, led by Sa'id Efendi.⁶⁵ We do not have any entries for Kamil concerning his source of income, but 'Ali was a moneylender and Sa'id was a real estate broker and later became the mayor of Gaza. Moneylending and landownership were often associated, especially during the 19th century, since both were important sources of wealth for Gaza's leading families. This can be seen as a kind of patrilineal family business, where the various occupations were distributed between the households of this brother group.

Brother group B even more strongly resembles a multisector company with complementary businesses. It was made up of eight households, and for five household heads we have entries concerning their source of income. Two household heads, Salih Efendi and Muhammad Sa'id Efendi, were real estate brokers; one, Taha, was a barley merchant, and

62 ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 267, p. 162. According to Ben-Basat and Buessow, "the profession of butcher is not mentioned for any of those [Shawwas in Tuffah] household members," but this needs to be corrected. See Ben-Basat and Buessow, "Urban Factionalism," p. 637, fn. 135.

63 See the household of 'Abd al-Mutallib, who himself was a scholar as well as two of his sons; another was a scribe, the fourth still in school. ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 265, p. 161.

64 Tabba', *Ithaf*, vol. 4, pp. 425–434.

65 For 'Ali Efendi, see ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 265, p. 3 (Arabic page number). For Sa'id Efendi, see *ibid.*, p. 5 (Arabic page number). For Kamil, see *ibid.*, p. 3 (Arabic page number). The family tree based on the census diverges slightly from the family trees indicated in Tabba', *Ithaf*, vol. 3, p. 256. In the family tree that was drawn by the editor of the volume based on hand-written notes, Kamil and 'Ali appear to have been nephews of Sa'id.

61 For his household, see ISA, Nüfus, Reg. No. 265, p. 3. A biography appears in Tabba', *Ithaf*, vol. 4, pp. 435–447.

one, Rabah, a spice merchant.⁶⁶ These four occupations cover a variety of commercial specializations. Landed property and the barley trade were especially profitable during this period. There was one household head who did not work in this sector, 'Abd al-Mutallib Efendi (d. 1335/1916–17), a Muslim religious scholar. His three sons had a religious and administrative education.⁶⁷ Religious education appears to have been an entirely new area for the business-orientated Shawwas during the last decades of the 19th century – an area dominated by the Husaynis, who relied exclusively on religious education as a resource. Thus the Shawwas may have been trying to challenge the position of the *mufti* by presenting alternatives to the Husaynis.⁶⁸

COMPARATIVE OBSERVATIONS

This closer inspection of four Gazan elite families based on data from the Ottoman census confirms that in most cases it is more accurate to refer to elite *households* than “elite families” when it comes to questions of nobility, influence, and wealth. In most cases, only several household heads of a family achieved elite status whereas others seem to have led the lives of commoners. Only the Husaynis, which consisted of just five households in total, all clustered around the Hashim Mosque, can be called an “elite family” in the full sense, with high standing for each household since they all had household heads with higher religious education (all of whom bore titles and were generally on good terms with the imperial government).

Certain strategies might have contributed to these elite households' gains and maintained their powerful standing. The first is residen-

tial clustering with other family members.⁶⁹ Many households of commoner families preferred to live close to each other as well, but elite households turned entire sub-neighborhoods (*haras*) or even whole neighborhoods (*mahallas*) into political strongholds, where they built alliances or “factions.” Ben-Bassat and Buessow call this nexus between urban politics and urban development “spatialized factionalism” or “spatialized urban politics.”⁷⁰ The Husayni family, for example, lived in the Sayyiduna Hashim (Our Lord Hashim) neighborhood, which was their territory after the reconstruction of the local mosque in the 1850s. The Abu Khadras resided in the nearby *haras* of Shaykh 'Ayyad and Shaykh 'Ali al-Andalusi. The Shawwa households of Shaja'iyya were clustered in Qazdamri Street, where they built elegant homes and renovated a mosque as an architectural symbol of their stronghold and their service to the local Muslim community. Together with the elite households of the Busaysu family, who apparently clustered around the Ibn 'Uthman congregational mosque,⁷¹ they exerted their influence throughout Shaja'iyya.

Family members who did not belong to the elite households of their family, such as the Shawwa households in Tuffah or the poor workers from al-Jami' al-Kabir-Street who belonged to the Saqallah family, often lived apart from their successful relatives. Most likely they did not have much in common with the latter other than the shared family name.

Another pattern has to do with education and occupation. Two main types emerged: professional specializations, as represented by the

66 For Salih, see ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 265, p. 9; for Taha, see *ibid.*, p. 153, and for Rabah, see *ibid.*, p. 203. For Muhammad Sa'id, see Reg. 249, p. 71.

67 ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 265, p. 161 (Arabic page numbers). A short note is provided in Tabba', *Ithaf*, vol. 3, p. 253.

68 See also Ben-Bassat and Buessow, “Urban Factionalism,” p. 630.

69 See also Meriwether, who observed that elite households of the same family branch in Aleppo were spread out in different quarters of the city, probably because it was difficult to find a house in the quarters the family branch preferred. However, she also notes that the leading figures of some families lived in a totally different quarter from the others. Meriwether, *Kin who Count*, pp. 82–83, 93.

70 See Ben-Bassat and Buessow, “Urban Factionalism,” pp. 606, 613.

71 Unfortunately, the available census registers do not contain entries for any of the Busaysus households. Tabba's biography of Shaykh Ahmad Busaysu (*Ithaf*, vol. 4, pp. 296–309) and his portrait of the family (*ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 52–55) contain detailed information. A British map of 1928 identifies a street parallel to the Ibn 'Uthman Mosque as “Bseiso Street” (NLI, 2369509_01, Palestine. Department of Lands and Surveys, Map “Gaza,” 1:1,000, Plan 4, Gaza Town Surveys. Jaffa: Survey of Palestine, 1928).

Husaynis, who were all scholars-cum-administrators, or generalists with a preference for a broad range of occupations, as for example in the Shawwa households in the Shaja'iyya neighborhood. Whether a family followed the professional specialist or the generalist approach appears to have been a crucial factor in the evolution of the household's fortune over the course of the 19th century and beyond. Whereas the Husaynis concentrated on specific religious and administrative positions alone, similar to what Philip S. Khoury described for Damascus as an "aristocracy of service,"⁷² the Shawwas of Shaja'iyya tried to cover as much territory as they could. This strategy may have helped them cope with the changes and challenges in administrative, religious, and commercial life and at the same time made them appealing potential partners for possible alliances; e.g., within political factions or with Ottoman officials.

The distribution of a wide spectrum of occupations was found in one brother group (as in the case of the Shawwas), or across several brother groups of one family (as in the case of the Abu Khadras). As noted with regard to European nobility, the most important challenge for elite households was to retain their power in rapidly changing political and economic circumstances.⁷³ For newcomers in particular, this was not easy. Whereas the Husaynis had been strong and well established for decades, this was not the case for the Saqallahs. The households of the Saqallah family lost their influence over just one generation. As the education and occupations listed for them reveal, they could not compete with the other elite households.

Another pattern concerns marriages. Whether households followed exogamous or endogamous marriage patterns seems to have depended primarily on their main sources of income. Men from commoner households in Gaza married women either from the city or from villages in the surrounding regions. Among the elite, the Husaynis were attentive

to similar educational backgrounds. Thus, they preferred marriage partners from educated families outside Gaza, which provided the additional advantage of potentially valuable social connections. The same held true to a large extent for the branch of the Saqallah family that had an education but probably not much material wealth. Both the Husaynis and the Saqallahs chose women from important Palestinian cities over women from villages around Gaza, as the commoner inhabitants normally did when not marrying local women. The wealthy but politically unimportant branch of the Saqallah, on the other hand, opted for exogamous as well as endogamous matches. Again, the desire to keep landed wealth within the family is likely to have been the reason for this strategy. The nexus between real estate and endogamous marriages was the most patent in the cases of the Shawwa households of Shaja'iyya as well as the Abu Khadras. On the other hand, the Shawwas of Tuffah preferred exogamous marriages.

Few of the elite households surveyed here intermarried with members of other elite families in Gaza. This might have been a way to avoid dependency on other strong local families and thereby remain capable of collective action should the family's interests be threatened by others. Especially with regard to the Gaza elites' penchant to enter into coalitions with changing partners, this strategy provided more freedom of movement to find allies, since there were no obligations between them based on marriage ties. An exception to the rule were the Shawwa and Busaysu families, who were linked by a long-standing alliance. One of the pillars of this alliance was the marriage of Khalil al-Shawwa's sister to Hajj Ahmad Busaysu (d. 1870), probably around 1820.⁷⁴ Their son, Shaykh Ahmad Salim Busaysu (born c. 1825), became a noted scholar and was appointed *imam*, *khatib* and teacher at the Ibn 'Uthman mosque in 1296/1878–9. Later, the alliance was preserved when Shaykh Ahmad Busaysu became the teacher of 'Abd al-Mutallib al-Shawwa (b. 1850/51), who later pursued a religious career himself.⁷⁵

72 Philip S. Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus 1860–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 11.

73 See, for example, Rudolf Braun, "Konzeptionelle Bemerkungen zum Obenbleiben: Adel im 19. Jahrhundert," in Hans-Ulrich Wehler (ed.), *Europäischer Adel 1750–1950* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990).

74 Busaysu, *Kashf al-niqab*, ch. 2, p. 44.

75 Tabba', *Ithaf*, vol. 4, p. 299.

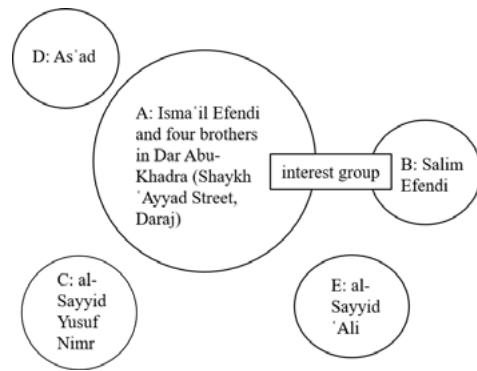


Figure 1: Hierarchical Household Constellation, the Example of the Abu Khadra Family.

PATTERNS OF ELITE HOUSEHOLD INTERACTIONS

The success of individuals, households, and families belonging to Gaza's elite depended to a large measure on their ability to act together when needed. The model below depicts the ways in which elite households of one family could interact with each other. Based on the observations detailed above, my analysis reveals three patterns of interaction: (1) a hierarchical type (2) a cooperative type or (3) a divergent pattern where different family branches could also develop in different directions.

(1) THE HIERARCHICAL PATTERN

The Abu Khadra and Husayni elite households can be represented by a gravitational model (see Fig. 1). In both families, there were dominant households around which the other households more or less revolved, like moons around a planet. However, in case of need, the dominant households could coalesce into interest groups with brother or patrilineal groups from the same family.

In the Abu Khadra family, for example, the large multi-family household of estate owner Isma'il (A) was the dominant household. Three small households headed by young men seem unimportant (C, D and E). The household of Salim (B), however, might have played an important complementary role as regards the fortunes of the Abu Khadras, since Salim managed to acquire the important administrative position of Gaza's *ma'arif re'isi*, Director of School

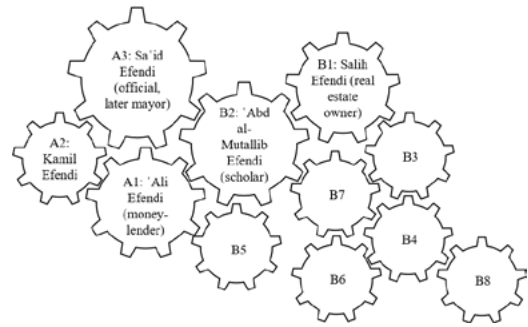


Figure 2: Cooperative Household Constellation: The Example of the Shawwa Family's Households in Shaja'iyya, 1905.

Education. Both households could form an interest group by combining their different resources (money and influence in the socio-academic sector). However, given the fact that household A was of such enormous importance simply by its sheer size as well as by the presence of the Dar Abu Khadra (Abu Khadra Mansion), it is likely that Isma'il had the greatest say in the family.

(2) THE COOPERATIVE PATTERN

In the case of the Shawwas in Shaja'iyya, there was a cooperative pattern. The interplay of their elite households is best described as a "cog wheel model," in which the households of the brother groups were closely intertwined (see Fig. 2).

The 21 households of the Shawwas in Shaja'iyya belonged to seven brother groups. Brother groups A and B represent a specific strategy; i.e., the spread of economic, educational and institutional resources among the brothers in order to gain political power. If necessary, they could join forces with other Shawwa households.

Brother groups appear to have been the level at which most collaborations took place. However, their cooperation could be enlarged to encompass other households belonging to the same family. Thus, brother groups and other households belonging to the family could form interest groups that worked together and combined their resources when confronted with external challenges. The larger the family and the more strategically important fields its members could cover, the better their chances for successful collaboration.

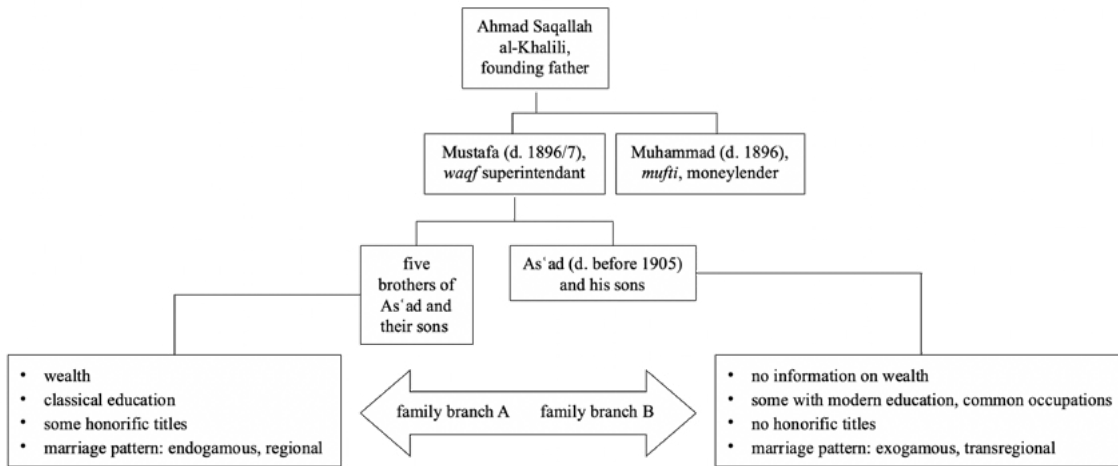


Figure 3: The Diverging Household Constellation, the Example of the Saqallah Family.

(3) THE DIVERGING PATTERN

In the case of the Saqallahs, it is obvious from their choice of occupation and education, as well as from their marriage patterns, that the family evolved into two different branches that no longer had much in common. Each of them appeared to want to distinguish itself from the other branch. Figure 3 charts the divergence of a family, resulting in different branches with different characteristics.

Note that both branches had the same grandfather, so the divergence emerged within one generation, with one branch (A) remaining wealthy but politically unimportant and leaving the other (B) without any notable economic or institutional resources. This is similar to the Shawwa branches of Tuffah and Shaja'iyya, that developed in divergent directions in terms of occupation, education, and marriage practices. There are two crucial differences between the two families, however. Whereas the “commoner” branch of the Saqallah family experienced social decline compared to the status of their grandfather, the Shawwas of Tuffah remained true to the family’s origins and at least some of them had considerable economic assets.⁷⁶ In addition, the respective sizes of both families need to

be taken into account. The Shawwas’ plentiful offspring and commercial success in Shaja'iyya provided them with a “critical mass” that allowed them to engage in a variety of activities and resources, whereas the “elite” branch of the Saqallahs remained relatively small and lacked institutional resources of the sort the Shawwa family could tap.

CONCLUSION

Rapidly changing political and economic circumstances as well as competition within different interest groups made it necessary for Gaza’s elite households around 1900 to engage in as many fields as possible to gain and maintain power and influence. Some, as in the case of the Husaynis, did not react effectively enough to the challenges of the time to be able to compete with rivalling households. Others, such as the Saqallahs, lacked adequate size to build a strong family network. Combining a wide variety of resources within a household seems to have been a key condition for success. Alternatively, a household could work together with other household groups to cover more ground.

The Ottoman census provides a wealth of empirical detail about the social relations between Gaza households, while Tabba’s contemporary encyclopedia helps concatenate these multiple data. However, other important questions about economic and power strategies within households cannot be answered from

76 A ‘Shawwa Square’ (Sahat al-Shawwa) and a restaurant named ‘Rami al-Shawwa’ (Mat’am Rami al-Shawwa) both existed in 2021 in Tuffah, which points to the continued prominence of the Shawwas in this part of the city. See Open Street Map (<https://www.openstreetmap.org/relation/1473938#map=19/31.50437/34.46688>, accessed 19 March 2021).

the census records themselves. For a fuller picture, access to memoirs, inheritance or financial documents or other sources would reveal more details about the intimate strategies of these and other households.

With this caveat in mind, what broader insights drawn from the Gazan example can be applied to research on the urban history of Bilad al-Sham? First, in late Ottoman Gaza, as a rule, there were no “notable” or “elite families” as *social actors*. Instead, there were elite *households* and *individuals*, who acted as notables. Second, Gaza’s households represent a type of household that came to dominate the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire as of the 18th century. Unlike the “political-military household” of Ottoman governors,⁷⁷ the Gazan elite household was a social formation in which three elements intersected closely. The first was the “family,” or more precisely, the paternal lineage, which bound the household to a larger social group. Second came the household itself, which had one or more nuclear families at its core. Very few household members were not direct relatives of these nuclear families. The third element was the

physical residence or *dar*. Whereas “political households” of the Ottoman local elite could be distributed over several buildings, the *dars* of Gaza were the place of residence of the entire household and a direct expression of its size and standing.

Individual households cooperated within specific groups, mostly “brother groups,” whose household heads were sons of the same father. These brother groups appear to have been the most influential and successful collective actors in local politics. Within brother groups or groups of interest, there were two patterns: the hierarchical and the cooperative. Maintaining power was at least as hard as achieving it, and institutional and incorporated resources were as important as allocative or monetary resources. It was crucial to be able to adapt to constantly changing situations and never neglect status-preserving measures, such as education. Such neglect could culminate in a speedy fall from the elite to the status of a commoner household, while the next generation was already waiting for their chance to build new household groups.

77 For more on this household type, see the chapter by Mahmoud Yazbak in this volume.

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THE OTTOMAN CENSUS OF 1905 AS A UNIQUE WINDOW ON URBAN HOUSEHOLDS

The Ottoman census records of 1905 (1321 according to the Ottoman *Rumi* calendar) are a valuable source of data on Ottoman society at the turn of the 20th century. So far, comprehensive sets of census registers are only available for the Palestinian regions; i.e., for most cities, towns, and villages in the districts of Jerusalem, Acre, and Nablus.¹ Single record books are also accessible for Damascus and have been analyzed by Okawara in 2003. Since 2016, the Israel State Archive (ISA) has provided free online access to digitized records from late Ottoman Palestine.

In contrast to previous rosters that were mainly designed to facilitate military service and taxation of the male population, the 1905 census recorded not only men, but also women and children, birthplaces, and sometimes also information on education and occupation. This makes it possible to trace features of social life, culture, and politics that are not reflected in other sources. Figure 1 shows a sample page of a census register.

People living in a dwelling together were registered according to a unit called a *mesken*, which for convenience we translate as “household.” In the strict sense of the word, it meant a physical structure, a dwelling. Each entry in the census sheet was compiled in relation to one person, usually a man, who was registered first and whom

we call the “household head.” In the Ottoman census regulations (*Nüfus Nizamnamesi*) of 1902, the household head was called the *müdür*, “director,” which highlights the assumed dominant status of the household head. Each *mesken* was attributed a number (like a house number) by officials to determine its address, which was painted on the entrance to the dwelling.

It is not clear how the order of *meskens* was determined. In the census registers, the entries proceed chronologically from *mesken* to *mesken*, but the street names differ in between, which suggests that houses were not numbered in sequence as we would expect in most cities today. Therefore, the house numbering system is hard to decipher, but the neighborhood a certain household was located in can be identified, and at times specific houses and locations can be determined from maps or aerial photos.

The Gaza Historical Database, which was set up with the backing of the Digital Humanities Centers at the Universities of Tübingen and Bochum is designed to integrate this body of rich but heterogeneous sources.² This online database stores information on people and places in Gaza and enables many types of analyses that are formulated as interactive queries. Interactive digital maps can be used to pinpoint historical locations and establish the spatial relations between them.

1 See Buessow, *Hamidian Palestine*, pp. 19–26; Campos, “Placing Jerusalemites;” Yonatan Pagis, *Mifqade ha-ukhlusin ha-othmaniyim be-Eretz Yisra’el 1875–1918* [The Ottoman Population Censuses of the Land of Israel, 1875–1918] (Jerusalem: Achva Press, 1997).

2 <https://gaza.ub.rub.de/gaza> (accessed on 27 February 2021).

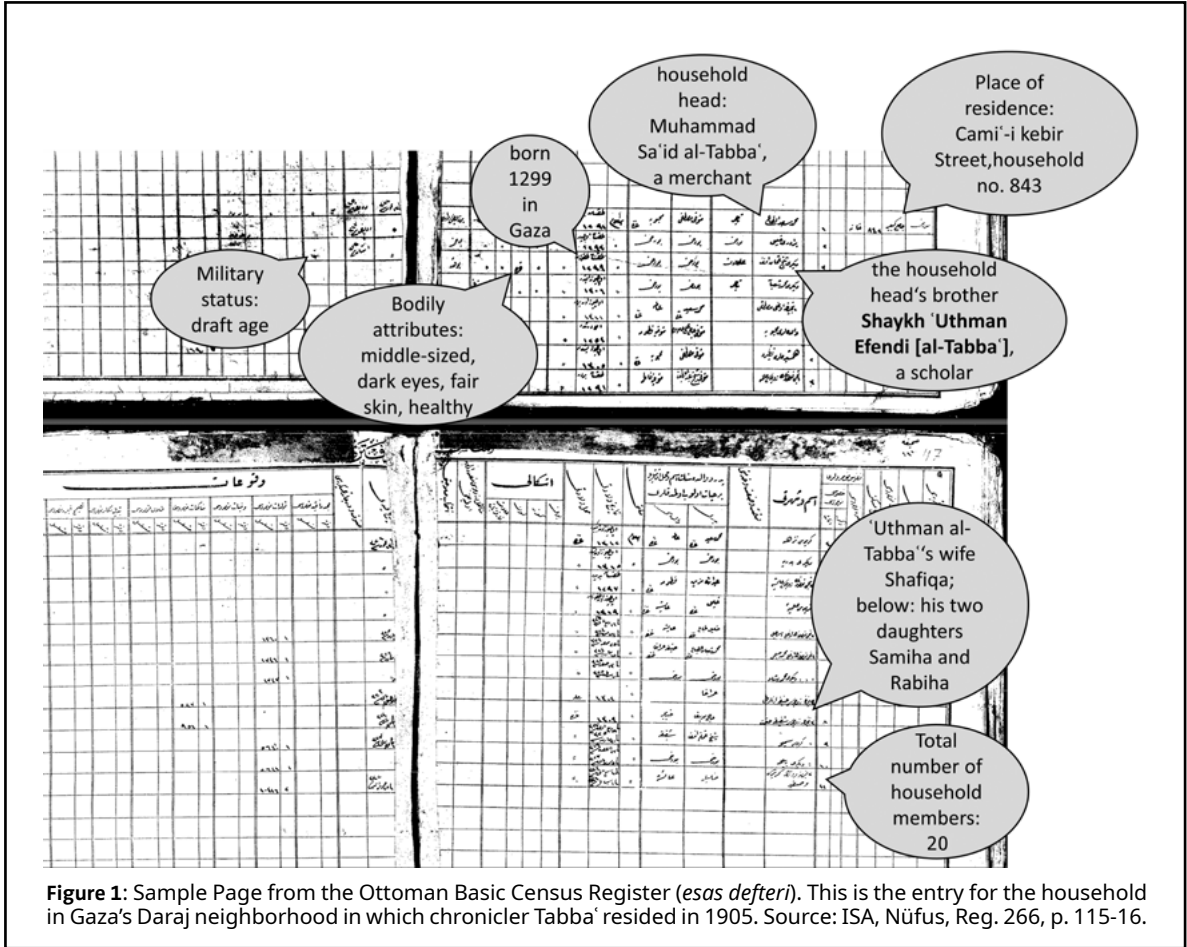


Figure 1: Sample Page from the Ottoman Basic Census Register (*esas defteri*). This is the entry for the household in Gaza's Daraj neighborhood in which chronicler Tabba' resided in 1905. Source: ISA, Nüfus, Reg. 266, p. 115-16.