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**COLONIAL UNDER-DEVELOPMENT IN MANDATE
PALESTINE: BRITISH GOVERNANCE IN NABLUS, 1917 -
1936**

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Ph.D Thesis

University of Sussex

January 2020

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature.....

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Roger Edwin Higginson

D.Phil.

**COLONIAL UNDER-DEVELOPMENT IN MANDATE PALESTINE:
BRITISH GOVERNANCE IN NABLUS, 1917 - 1936**

Summary

This thesis considers the impact of the British Mandate on the town of Nablus from the end of World War I to the 1936 Arab Revolt. Starting with its role as a regional trading centre under the Ottomans, it goes on to consider the impact of the arrival of the British, combined with the challenges of natural disasters and the growth of Jewish enterprises along Palestine's Mediterranean littoral. The first two chapters establish the general political and economic features of British rule in Nablus, before the thesis looks at three specific case studies (chapters III – V). It examines in some depth British projects for the development of the urban water supply, the impact of the 1927 earthquake, and the relationship between the civil and military authorities during the first year of the Arab Revolt.

The research is designed to fill a gap in the existing historiography of Mandate Palestine, which has tended to focus either on the Jewish national home controversy, or on Jerusalem and the area of the coastal strip. This is a study of British policy at the local level, in a town located in the relatively neglected and marginalised area of the central hill district. At the same time, the thesis proposes this localized approach has wider implications for our view of British imperial history in the aftermath of World War I, arguing that a focus on such 'peripheries' of empire allows us to understand more closely the minimalist state that ruled over large swathes of colonial subject populations in this period. Its primary source material is composed of British Government records held at the National Archives in Kew, supplemented by a range of other sources, including French and Moroccan, used for the purposes of comparison between the British and French colonial systems.

The work concludes that Nablus was not a priority for the Mandatory Government, which was focused on the coastal strip, and in particular the port of Haifa, to the detriment of the smaller towns in Palestine's interior. Nablus was neglected, and ill-prepared for the growing competition from new Jewish enterprises. The city's hostile reaction to the Mandate reflects the perspective of locations which have become marginalised in relation to the dominant metropolitan centres of imperial power.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis examines the impact of the policies of the British Mandatory Government in Palestine on the town of Nablus during the first two decades following World War I (WWI). The primary location of source material has been the National Archives in Kew, and this has been supplemented by a range of sources both in the UK and abroad. Apart from the National Archives my main sources have been the Middle East Centre Archive, St. Antony's College, Oxford, and the British Library. The material to be found in the Church Missionary Archives at Birmingham University, and the Church of England Record Centre in Lambeth Palace Library, has proved helpful in fleshing out various vignettes of local life in Jabal Nablus. In similar fashion the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris has proved both a useful source of material on the political activities of some of the leading Nabulsi families, as well as on the activities of Marechal Lyautey in Morocco. In this respect it complemented the material held at the Bibliotheque Nationale du Maroc in Rabat. In the Palestinian territory itself, most of which today is the state of Israel, the Israel State Archives in Jerusalem have constituted very helpful material in the form of detailed records recovered from the former British Mandatory authorities covering certain aspects of the case studies discussed in chapter II of this thesis. Also in Jerusalem the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), has been an invaluable source of biographical information on the more famous and politically active Nabulsis at the time of the Mandate. Finally the Municipal Library in Nablus was very helpful in providing an insight into the political thinking of – inter alia- Izzat Darwaza, a member both of the Arab Executive Committee and also of one of the leading Nabulsi families.

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¹Naseer Arafat, *Nablus, City of Civilisations* (Cultural Heritage Enrichment Centre, Nablus, 2012).

Introductory Chapter

What caught my attention, when I was appointed inspector of education for the district of Samaria...was that the number of government buildings for schools had remained the same, from 1918 to 1945, as it was at the time of Ottoman rule. All expansion in the educational field was being carried out in rented buildings that had been built as houses, not schools. The faults of these buildings were that they had not sufficient room or playground space, air or light.....It is said that the Turks entered the country in 1517 on ox carts just as they left it in 1918 on ox carts. However, they left behind them in Nablus city four government school buildings, a municipal park, a town clock, and the National hospital. But you [British] have not built one room during 27 years, or from 1918 to this year 1945.¹

This thesis is a study of a neglected corner of the British empire in the traumatic aftermath of World War I. That corner was the city of Nablus and its surrounding hinterland. The primary focus is on the urban area, but it remains cognizant that the economic activity in that area was closely linked to the state of the adjacent rural economy on whose agricultural production it largely depended. It was an area that received little attention from the British imperial regime in Palestine, but nevertheless can tell us a great deal about the workings of empire in the interwar period. The research presents an original perspective on the history of British rule in Palestine, not only because it examines a part of the country that has largely been neglected in the historiography of the mandates, but also because it shines a spotlight on the workings of imperial rule in areas away from the major centres of colonial development, where in fact most of the population lived. By following the flow of communications between local government officials in Nablus, the High Commission in Jerusalem, and the Colonial Office and Treasury in London, the thesis contributes to a better understanding of the impact of the nexus between imperial policy-making and its local application.

The city of Nablus and its surrounding hinterland, collectively referred to in Arabic as *Jabal Nablus*, ('the Nablus mountain') has long constituted a major centre of trade and agricultural production, largely through the olive industry. In the 1920s and 30s, *Jabal Nablus* was the recipient of a form of British governance described in this thesis as *de minimis*.² This approach to local administration by the Mandatory power sought little more than to maintain the peace through the use of its intelligence and security services. Public services such as health, public works and education were largely

¹ Fadwa Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey, A Poet's Autobiography* (Graywolf Press, Minnesota, 1990), n18, 194-195

² This phrase is used throughout the thesis in the sense of 'carrying out the minimum possible, consistent with the obligations of a Mandatory power.' It is not used in the legal sense of 'de minimis non curat lex' or the law not dealing with trifles or insignificant details. See: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/de%20minimis%20non%20curat%20lex> For an example of how that legal concept is applied to EU State Aid requirements see: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/de-minimis-aid>

contracted out – in effect- by a reliance on those charitable institutions which had been functioning at the time of the arrival of the British, and on private British companies seeking to profit from Britain's colonial occupation of Palestine. The image conjured up by this form of government might also be described as 'benign neglect',³ notwithstanding the fact that the results of that neglect were anything but benign: the thesis argues that the cumulative effect of the process of marginalisation experienced by the town in the years after World War I was one of the contributing factors to Nablus playing a leading role in the 1936 Arab Revolt.

By focussing on this particular approach to colonial governance in this specified geographical area, the thesis reveals both the importance of location and a different story from that usually portrayed in studies on Mandate Palestine. My research on Jabal Nablus has revealed a city and its surrounding hinterland largely neglected by the British authorities in Jerusalem, focussed as they were on the development of the coastal strip and in particular the burgeoning port of Haifa. For the Nabulsi the mandatories had little more to offer than de minimis government, with a focus on intelligence gathering and security, while public services such as health and education were effectively outsourced to voluntary organisations.

The thesis also speaks to both early twentieth century and contemporary dichotomies of globalisation:⁴ the contrast between areas of relative stagnation –and populist politics- and thriving metropolitan centres, and the ways in which these dichotomies can become drivers of popular unrest. As studies elsewhere of imperial territories have revealed,⁵ the uneven distribution of resources by the metropolitan power "led some individuals and groups to move forward very rapidly, and others to stagnate or even regress."⁶ Relative to both Jerusalem as the new centre of imperial power and the burgeoning coastal strip, this region was neglected, and it was that sense of neglect which is reflected in the writings of Fadwa Tuqan,⁷ a native of Nablus, and one of Palestine's greatest modern poets, whose reflections on the mandate period are quoted above. She was expressing the view of many Nabulsi that the British had done virtually nothing for the town in comparison with that of the preceding Ottoman regime. When the British left, she emphasises, they left no trace of their presence in the city.⁸ The impact of that neglect on a community which had been a flourishing commercial and cultural regional centre under the Ottomans forms the central focus of this thesis.

³ In terms of British colonial development policy in general, this was not always the case. See Stephen Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy 1914 – 1940* (Frank Cass & Co, London, 1984), 288. "Not until the later 1930s did the restraint on colonial development policy begin to ease.....and the years of benign neglect increasingly condemned."

⁴ For a short discussion of the global history literature relevant to this thesis, see pages 19 –20 below

⁵ See E A Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa, The Politics of Economic Change 1919 – 1939* (Heinemann, London, 1973)

⁶ E A Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment* 20

⁷ See quote on page 1 above comparing the British and Ottoman contributions to Nablus, written in 1945

⁸ Fadwa Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, n18, 194-195

It speaks directly to a series of questions revealing different aspects of how the British empire worked at the local level. What were its priorities? What was it trying to achieve in a part of the world its officials considered to be unreceptive to Western modernity at best, and openly hostile at worst? What role –if any- did it want the Nabulsi to play in the new British order in the Middle East? These are some of the questions that this thesis addresses. By examining the interactions between the British and the Nabulsi during the first two decades after World War I, this study contributes to a better understanding of what Susan Pedersen has termed the period of ‘benevolent imperialism’ ushered in by the League of Nations.⁹ At a time when the rationale for empire was becoming ever more grounded in the justification of development, or what some cynical observers described as ‘better and brighter natives,’¹⁰ this research clearly illustrates that the extent of that development could differ very substantially even in territories as small as Palestine. The differences however were chronological as much as they were geographical. As a result of the Great Depression, the resources made available for development were significantly curtailed, and “appointments to the Colonial Service sank dramatically in 1931 and 1932, including massive falls in the numbers of medical, educational, agricultural and veterinary specialists recruited by colonial governments.”¹¹ As discussed in chapter I below¹² these were precisely the years when adverse weather conditions and a collapse in agricultural commodity prices were having a damaging impact on Jabal Nablus. The thesis consequently goes on to argue that a process of relative economic marginalisation, exacerbated by both these problems in the rural hinterland and a lack of effective support from the Mandatory authorities, created very real political tensions, made more acute by memories of better times under the ancien regime of the Ottoman Empire. That combination of discontent and nostalgia¹³ for a more stable past in Jabal Nablus¹⁴ provides a good explanation as to why this particular part of the mandated territory was a centre of opposition to British rule during the 1936-39 Arab revolt.

The thesis consequently opens up new perspectives on the Palestine Mandate, and argues that there were other important factors driving the opposition to the British

⁹ For a general discussion of the impact of the League of Nations see Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians, the League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford University Press 2015). For the reference to ‘benevolent imperialism’ see page 402

¹⁰ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians* 402

¹¹ Stephen Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy*, 228

¹² For more on the combined impact of the Great Depression and adverse weather conditions on the Jabal Nablus area, see pages 49 – 52 below on ‘The Rural Sector and Government Agriculture and Land Policy in Palestine’

¹³ That nostalgia is evident in the writings of Nabulsi authors. Sahar Khalifeh described Palestinian society as having “become an orphan after the Turks left.” Sahar Khalifeh, *Of Noble Origins* (American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 2012), 40

¹⁴ “As a single unit, Nablus and its hinterland constituted a discrete region known for centuries as the Jabal Nablus.” Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine, Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700 – 1900* (University of California Press, London, 1995), 2

which were not directly related to their Jewish National Home policy. These included the distressed state of agriculture in the years following the end of World War I in a country whose economy was almost wholly agrarian, the impact of natural disasters such as the 1927 earthquake, and the consequences of the way the British Government focussed its development resources and investments in what it considered priority geographical areas to the detriment of those it viewed as of only marginal importance. In so doing it combines the approaches of both global and local history, and employs the conceptual paradigms developed in particular by Salim Tamari in his seminal work on 'The Mountain Against the Sea',¹⁵ which contrasted the more rapidly developing coastal strip in Palestine during the early decades of the twentieth century with the relative stagnation of the central hill districts. The thesis also looks across different imperial spaces within the Palestinian territory, both for the purposes of comparison, and to consider the connections between them. In so doing, it draws in particular on the spatial distinctions employed by the French colonial administrator Marechal Lyautey, who classified different regions of Morocco according to whether or not they were of strategic importance in relation to French policy priorities, and consequently whether they were considered either as areas meriting investment and development, or left largely neglected.¹⁶

The key issue here is how choices were made in respect of priorities, and consequently how some geographical areas were prioritised over others. Overall, this approach provides a model which can usefully be applied to other parts of empire during the decades after World War I when development policies were increasingly being used as a justification for retaining control of colonial territories. One such justification in this respect was the provision of urban water supplies which is the subject of chapter III of the thesis. Such provision inevitably involved interaction with the natural environment. This has required me to engage with the wider historiography on colonial management of natural resources, and where appropriate the work undertaken on the British in Nablus makes reference to the empire in India, where control and development of water resources was an important theme impacting the relationship between government and governed. Natural disasters, which are the subject of chapter IV of the thesis can also be placed in the broader context of the nature of imperial engagement with the natural environment, and so the lessons drawn from the case study on Nablus can equally be applied to other imperial territories grappling with the effects of sudden and unanticipated natural phenomena. I have also used them as a comparative analytical tool to better understand the differences between British priority and non-priority areas in Mandate Palestine.

¹⁵ Salim Tamari, *The Mountain against the Sea, Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2009).

¹⁶ For a discussion of this concept of 'le Maroc utile' and 'le Maroc inutile', see William Hoisington, *Lyautey and the French Conquest of Morocco* (Macmillan Press, London 1995). See also pages 7 – 8 below.

The rest of this introductory chapter sets out to discuss the major themes, methodologies and historiographical debates with which this thesis engages. It sets out what the thesis is about, together with its main themes. I discuss first the ways in which Palestine can and should be considered within much wider historical frameworks that help us understand the traumatic transformations taking place in a city like Nablus in the early twentieth century. This is followed by a summary of the relevant secondary literature and how this thesis pushes that literature forward in new directions. It then explains what original contribution the research has made, and how it engages with the relevant existing historiography on the Jabal Nablus area and Mandate Palestine more generally: including British imperial history during the inter-war years. The chapter furthermore discusses the conceptual methodology used in the thesis to interpret the source material, as well as the nature of those sources themselves, and goes on to consider both the main sources employed and the rationale for their selection, together with their strengths and limitations.

Placing Nablus and Palestine in the bigger picture

I have made Nablus as a case study set in the wider context of British imperial history during the period following the end of World War I. Nablus is of particular interest because the relative isolation it suffered under the Mandate was in sharp contrast to the role it had played as an important regional cultural and commercial centre under the Ottomans. As a result, the impact of the Mandate was quite traumatic. In this respect its experience in the 1920s and 1930s can be characterised as passing through a ‘shatter zone’¹⁷ created by the disruptive transition from Ottoman to British rule after the traumas of World War I. This concept has been applied to the mainly East European territories bordering the established states and empires disrupted or destroyed by World War I, but is also relevant to those parts of the Middle East and North Africa where one of the main consequences of the war was the sudden imposition of European imperial powers. As the Nabulsi poet Fadwa Tuqan described it, she was born in 1917

“at a time when one world was in its death throes and another was about to be born. The Ottoman empire was breathing its last and allied armies were continuing to open the way for a new Western colonisation.”¹⁸

Shatter zones of course were not only areas of conflict and precipitate regime change, but also areas located on the borders between competing states or empires.¹⁹ As such, they were places where the ‘centre’ sought to impose its will on

¹⁷ This concept has been applied to the mainly East European territories bordering the established states and empires disrupted or destroyed by World War I. See Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz (Eds), *Shatterzone of Empires, Coexistence and Violence in the German, Hapsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2013).

¹⁸ Fadwa Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey* 15

¹⁹ Palestine marked the north-eastern edge of Britain’s newly acquired territory in the Middle East following the end of World War I, and bordered that of Lebanon and Syria which had fallen to France. For an analysis of

the 'periphery.' Following the end of World War II for example, Poland imagined itself in relation to Galicia as having "a civilising mission to the wild east."²⁰ It would be an exaggeration to suggest that the British harboured similar views about their relationship with Nablus, but it is at least implicit that elements of a 'civilising mission' towards a part of Palestine which they viewed not only as backward and conservative but also on the periphery of their priority locations along the coastal strip, did form part of the mandatory's approach.

Nablus was furthermore a shatter zone in the sense that following the ebb and flow of the military conflict between the British and Ottoman forces in 1917 and 1918, it suffered a precipitate and fundamental regime change. During some four hundred years of rule from Constantinople, the relationship between the imperial power and the Nabulsis was, in Foucauldian terms, largely characterised along the lines of a superstructure in relation to local power networks.²¹ The distribution of power across the Ottoman territories is important in giving us a better understanding of what the Nabulsis were accustomed to prior to World War I, and consequently the comparisons they would make in the event of regime change. Salim Tamari has argued that the notable families of the town enjoyed a fair degree of autonomy in relation to their rural hinterland, and were able to keep control of their agrarian revenues and use them as a foundation for their commercial activities.²² That relatively secure and privileged position was swept away by the arrival of the British, whose civilian mandatory administration was preceded by a military occupation: the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (OETA). Such forms of government are those of a sovereign political power whose presence could "be expressed as interdiction and exercised as repression."²³ Such repression had been experienced by the Nabulsis when exercised by Cemal Pasha during World War I, but they would have been unprepared for the use of military force by the British during the course of civilian rule during a period when the territory was not engaged in war.

In the closing decades of the Ottoman Empire the economy of the Jabal Nablus region was closely connected by trading links to cities such as Beirut and Damascus to its north, more so than to Jerusalem which was only 30 miles to its south. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries its position in the central uplands of Palestine had enabled it to develop as one of the leading trading entrepôts between what is today Lebanon and Syria to its north, and Jordan to its south and east – from where it purchased some of the ingredients used in the preparation of the soap for which it was famous. These trading links were disrupted by the transition from

Anglo-French rivalry in the region, see Remy Porte, 'Première Guerre Mondiale, de l'entente à la mésentente cordiale.' *Revue Historique*, October 2009, 875 – 896

²⁰ Bartov and Weitz, *Shatterzone of Empires* 9

²¹ Mitchell Dean, *Critical and Effective Histories, Foucault's methods and Historical Sociology* (Routledge, London, 1994), 155

²² Salim Tamari 'A Farical Moment ? Nabulsis Exceptionalism and the 1908 Ottoman Revolution'. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Issue 60, 2014

²³ Ibid

Ottoman to British rule, when the former *Bilad al-Sham*²⁴ was partitioned into British and French controlled territories, and the local Nabulsi economy became more directly exposed to developments within the new Palestinian national territory at a time when its historical links to the north were significantly weakened.²⁵ The focus of this thesis on the effects of geographical location, and its methodological approach, can be used elsewhere to improve our understanding of the workings of imperial governments in their dependent territories by linking research on particular urban areas to broader themes concerning the aims and objectives of empire at the local level. In this way 'micro studies' become more relevant to the broader generic themes of imperial history. Location is emphasised as a determining factor in informing local responses to larger scale developments at the national and regional level: which for this particular study fall within the context of British imperialism in the first half of the twentieth century. To the extent that a template for the study of neglected urban areas and their surrounding hinterlands has been developed in this thesis, it can now be deployed elsewhere in imperial and colonial territories. Within Palestine itself, possible candidates could include such locations as Gaza and Hebron. Jaffa and Jerusalem by contrast, as respectively rapidly expanding coastal towns and centres of political power, would not be candidates.

The relative neglect of Nablus and its slower growth and development compared to the coastal littoral of Palestine arose at least in part because it was not considered a priority area from a British perspective. To better understand this aspect of imperial rule the thesis makes use of Marechal Lyautey's concept of what was –and was not– 'useful' to the imperial power. Lyautey developed the distinction between territory that was 'utile' –useful– and 'inutile' – not useful– when governing Morocco after World War I, so as to distinguish those parts of the country which were of particular economic, military, or political importance to the metropolitan power from those which would require financial and military expenditure out of proportion to the likely return.²⁶ This thesis argues that Nablus and its surrounding agricultural area was not a priority²⁷ for the Mandatory administration which, constrained by the fiscal austerity

²⁴ "The term *Bilad al-Sham*.....describes the region limited in the north by the Taurus mountains, bordering in the east on the Syrian desert, stretching to Aqaba and the Sinai in the south, and opening in the west to the Mediterranean. The region does not constitute one political entity and did not do so under Ottoman rule. At the same time however it always constituted a geographical region distinct from Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Arabia and Egypt. But beyond this geographical situation.....a historical awareness of people within this region can be observed, which hints at the fact that the region was culturally, socially and historically more integrated in itself than related to neighbouring regions – and was considered as such from without." Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann (Eds), *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon* (Ergon Verlag Wurzburg, Beirut, 2004). 1

²⁵ For a discussion of the disruptive impact of the arrival of the European imperial powers after World War I see Sa'îd B Himadeh (Ed), *Economic Organisation of Palestine* (American Press, Beirut, 1938), 377: "Nablus is losing its economic importance due to changed transport conditions and trade routes. It no longer supplies Trans-Jordan and Samaria. The decrease in the volume of its soap exports has also reduced its trade."

²⁶ See William Hoisington, *Lyautey and the French Conquest of Morocco* (Macmillan Press, London 1995), 90

²⁷ There is no clear English language equivalent to 'utile' and 'inutile' in British Government reports and correspondence on Mandate Palestine, with the exception of occasional references to what were 'priorities' for policy makers.

of the 1920s and 1930s, effectively operated on a de minimis basis in the Jabal Nablus area, doing the least necessary to meet its obligations as a mandatory power.²⁸ Nablus was all but ignored while the (constrained) resources and investment at the disposal of the government were concentrated in such strategic priorities as the development of the port of Haifa.²⁹ That town's development "in the British imperial imagination in the 1920s and 1930s as the gateway to the Middle East"³⁰ contrasts with Sir Samuel O'Donnell's³¹ description of Nablus as "little more than an overgrown village"³² which was but one amongst a group of "small and for the most part stagnant towns."³³ Whether Nablus is viewed from the perspective of one of Lyautey's not useful territories, Salim Tamari's 'Mountain against the Sea', or the contemptuous descriptions of British colonial officials, the conceptual leitmotif is that of the core versus the periphery – with Nablus very much relegated to the periphery.

By examining British governance in action at the local level in a region far removed from the focal points of imperial power in Palestine, this study reveals the weaknesses in the British response to the deeply ingrained problems facing the territory in the aftermath of World War I, in particular the incapacity of the new Mandatory power to cope with the impact of war and natural disasters on a regional economy almost wholly dependent on agriculture. It failed both to reduce the perennial indebtedness of the *fellahin*, and to mitigate the impact of the recurring and adverse weather conditions and environmental problems facing the rural economy. These problems were compounded in the Jabal Nablus area by a significant weakening of its historical trading and cultural links with what is today Lebanon and Syria, and in particular Damascus, as a result of the impact of the Mandate. This in turn produced a feeling among Nabulsi that they were unable to face the combined challenges of the arrival of the British and the development of competition from Jewish businesses.

The thesis also provides firm evidence of how imperial power in the early twentieth century had to be negotiated and contested across the multiple layers of its administrative machinery. The research reveals the differing perspectives, interactions, and divergent agendas between government at the local level in Nablus, the Mandatory headquarters in Jerusalem, and the Colonial Office and

²⁸ "Ibrahim Snawbar, an educator born in Nablus in 1904, severely criticized the Mandate Government for building no public service buildings in the city during its administration." Naseer Arafat, *Nablus, City of Civilisations*, 59

²⁹ For a discussion of British Development priorities in Mandate Palestine, see Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress, Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905 – 1948* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 99-138

³⁰ Norris, *Land of Progress*, 109

³¹ A former senior civil servant in the Indian administration, commissioned in 1931 by Lord Passfield, Colonial Secretary, 'to examine and report on the financial and general organisation of the Palestine administration.' The report issued in July 1931, and a digitised copy is held at the Israel State Archives

³² O'Donnell report, 81, Israel State Archives

³³ Ibid, 33

Treasury in London. At the local level the District Administrators were primarily involved in intelligence gathering and avoiding the development of hostility to the Mandatory power. In Jerusalem the High Commissioner was primarily occupied with the development of the Jewish National Home policy and its associated vicissitudes: whereas in London the main priority was to constrain government expenditure on the Palestinian territory whilst ensuring that it remained an effective buffer against potential incursion from any hostile powers which might develop in the Middle East. These differing perspectives and priorities, and the information flows between the different locations, created tensions between the complexities of policy development and the need to respond to the challenge of events at the local level. The pace of those responses was very much dictated by perceptions in Jerusalem and London of what might cause reputational damage to the imperial power. We may contrast in this respect the rapid response to the 1927 earthquake which is the subject of chapter IV below with the long drawn out negotiations concerning the provision of an urban water supply which are analysed in chapter III. Government correspondence in the early 1930s indicates that the Treasury and Colonial Office in London were in no particular hurry to agree to the project on the grounds that there was a lack of local public demand for it from the Nabulsi.

The differences of perspective between London and local officials in Palestine no doubt in part arose because of their differing geographical locations. Nevertheless, even when in close physical proximity, such differences could arise from divergent sets of responsibilities at the operational level. One example of this is provided by the opposing views which arose between the civil and military authorities concerning the appropriate response to armed insurrection during the first phase of the Arab Revolt in 1936: with the military wanting a forceful response designed to deter future unrest, and the civil authority more mindful of the wider responsibilities of a mandatory power which should try to minimise the use of force in the interests of the longer term relationship between government and the local population. Other tensions were brought about as a result of the impact of fiscal constraints where the research on government reports written at the time reveals that spending decisions were influenced by considerations of the potential to achieve future savings. This was a factor informing the rationale for certain types of infrastructure development, where for example the provision of fresh water supplies was evaluated against public health benefits and an anticipated reduction in demand for medical services. Other factors informing investment levels in particular geographical areas included British perceptions of their relative importance to the imperial power along the lines of Lyautey's classifications noted above. One way of course to reduce the costs of imperial government is to co-opt the support of local elites, who had a much better understanding of the customs and culture of the indigenous population than the Mandatory officials who had recently arrived from the UK. They were consequently well placed to play the role of intermediary between the imperial power and those

who became subject to its administration. This theme is examined in the thesis,³⁴ together with the British penchant for maintaining existing class distinctions in their mode of imperial governance.³⁵

The machinery of government within Palestine was largely modelled on the colonial administration in India.³⁶ Headquartered in Jerusalem, the key figure below the High Commissioner, responsible for day to day operational decisions, was the Chief Secretary.³⁷ That post was the focal point both for dissemination of orders from the High Commissioner to the individual departments and districts, and advice to the High Commissioner on administrative and political issues.³⁸ Whereas departments such as Health and Public Works were located in the capital, the government also comprised a District Administration covering different geographical regions of Palestine.³⁹ Following a reorganisation in 1922 there were four districts, and Nablus was located in the Northern District, administered from Haifa.⁴⁰ Further modifications were made in 1927, reducing the number of districts from four to three, while at the same time creating four sub-districts in the Northern District. One of these was composed of Nablus, Jenin, and Tulkarm.⁴¹ We know from the archival records that apart from the soldiers and police located in the military barracks on the east side of Nablus,⁴² various officials of the Mandatory authority were also stationed in the town. The correspondence concerning the relocation of the municipal incinerator and slaughter house⁴³ indicates the presence of a Sanitary Engineer, Leslie Colhorn,⁴⁴ an Assistant District Commissioner for the Samaria Division,⁴⁵ and a Senior Medical Officer for Samaria and the Galilee.⁴⁶ The town also had its own Governor, F J M Bostlethwait, who in 1922 was seeking new accommodation for himself and “a senior official.”⁴⁷ The correspondence from the Governor indicates that site and

³⁴ See page 75 below

³⁵ For a discussion of this issue, see David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism. How the British Saw Their Empire* (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London), 2001

³⁶ For a thorough analysis of the structure of the Mandatory administration in Palestine, see the 1931 report of the O'Donnell Commission, a copy of which is held at the Israel State Archives

³⁷ O'Donnell report, 90, Israel State Archives

³⁸ Ibid, 97

³⁹ Ibid, 102

⁴⁰ Ibid, 103

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Letter of 16 September 1934 from the Northern District Commissioner to the Chief Secretary, Israel State Archives, *Municipal Services: Municipality Samaria District, Nablus/Shekhem* 119

⁴³ See pages 11 - 12 below

⁴⁴ See his report of 7 December 1935 held at the Israel State Archives in its *Municipal Services: Municipality Samaria District, Nablus/Shekhem* file 43

⁴⁵ *Municipal Services* 81: Letter of 19 April 1935 from the Director of Medical Services to the Chief Secretary

⁴⁶ Ibid. Both this and the A.D.C. post appear in the 'cc' list at the end of the letter, with their location given as Nablus

⁴⁷ Letter of 21 April 1922 from Governor Samaria in Nablus to President Government Buildings Committee, Jerusalem. Israel State Archives, *Official Residences / New Officials' Residences, Nablus / Shekhem* 202 - 204

building appraisals were carried out by James Brockbank, the District Engineer for Samaria, located in Nablus.⁴⁸

The presence of these government officials either in the town, or responsible for the provision of certain services in it enables us to build up a clearer picture of how Nablus was perceived by the Mandatory authorities, and how correspondence from or about Nablus was treated by the head office in Jerusalem, in particular by the office of the Chief Secretary where most of the operational decisions, including those concerned with resource allocation, were made. It is primarily on the basis of these exchanges that the leitmotif of this thesis – that Nablus was not a priority for the Mandatory authorities – is made. I am not however suggesting that it was completely neglected. Some of the correspondence concerning e.g. the Balata landing ground discussed below in chapter II⁴⁹ indicates that significant efforts were made to establish what constituted fair compensation to local farmers for the loss of the use of their land. Similar levels of detail were entered into by the Nablus engineer considering options for the relocation of the municipal abattoir and incinerator.⁵⁰ But what does become clear is that there was neglect in terms of resource allocation – and in particular developmental resources- compared with other parts of the territory, above all, Haifa. Furthermore, the correspondence and statements from the Mayor of Nablus and other members of the politically active ‘effendi’ class in the town indicates that they were well aware of the ways that they were becoming disadvantaged.⁵¹ This is why I conclude that the relative neglect suffered during the early years of the Mandate became an important contributory factor to Nablus becoming one of the main centres of the Arab Revolt in 1936.

Of almost equal significance was the cultural heritage of those in the central uplands of Palestine, which was a strong determinant of the way they experienced the events of the 1920s and 1930s. Jabal Nablus had been a provincial capital in its own right under the Ottomans,⁵² and the successive administrative reorganisations during the course of the Mandate were symptomatic of its decline in relation to the centre of government power. I would argue that these changes, and in particular the reduction of seven to four districts in 1922,⁵³ together with the creation of a Northern District administered from Haifa, reflected the strategic priorities of the Mandatory, with

⁴⁸ Letter of 16 July 1921 to Director of Public Works, Jerusalem from James Brockbank. Israel State Archives, *New Officials’ Residences, Nablus / Shekhem* 224

⁴⁹ See pages 82 – 83 below

⁵⁰ Report from the Sanitary Engineer in Nablus, 7 December 1935. Israel State Archives, *Municipal Services: Municipality Samaria District, Nablus/Shekhem* 43. See also page 12 below

⁵¹ See for example page 67 below, which discusses a petition from Nabulsi notables who described themselves as ‘weak’ in relation to the Jewish immigrants. See also a letter of September 1933 from Mayor Tuqan to the government in Jerusalem requesting “urgent measures” to alleviate the town’s economic depression. Israel State Archives, *Memorandum by the Municipality of Nablus*

⁵² Naseer Arafat, *Nablus City of Civilisations*, 46

⁵³ O’Donnell report, 102, Israel State Archives

its focus on developing this particular coastal port.⁵⁴ The central uplands of the interior, and the string of towns running north of Jerusalem, did not feature in those considerations.

At the district level of the administration the District Commissioner was the senior representative of the Mandatory authority, supported by an Assistant District Commissioner and a number of District Officers.⁵⁵ Their responsibilities included the maintenance of law and order, collection of tax revenues, and supervision of Municipalities and Local Councils.⁵⁶ Much of the time of the district administration was taken up with interactions with the Municipalities, which were obliged to submit their annual budget estimates to the District Commissioner for approval.⁵⁷ When the occupants of the military barracks in Nablus began complaining about the close proximity of the municipal waste incinerators and abattoir in September 1934,⁵⁸ it is possible to trace through the correspondence which subsequently arose the interactions between the Municipality, the district administration both in Nablus and Haifa, and the government headquarters in Jerusalem.⁵⁹ The picture that emerges from the request to relocate the incinerators and abattoir further away from the military barracks is one of thorough analysis and carefully considered proposals from the relevant local British officials, such as the engineer in Nablus. The actual decision making process however, and in particular that relating to permissions to incur expenditure, was both hierarchical and centralised on Jerusalem, with the Chief Secretary being the final arbiter of what was (or was not) to be done.⁶⁰ These themes are examined further in chapters III and IV of the thesis, dealing respectively with water and municipal services and the 1927 earthquake.

Finally, by gaining a better understanding of how the Mandatory authorities governed the Jabal Nablus at the local level, we are in turn able to gain insights on how Nabulsi society formulated its various responses to British imperial rule during the 1920s and 1930s, and the factors which were influencing those responses. Living conditions during this period were made especially difficult not only as a result of economic stagnation at a time of population growth, but also from the impact of natural disasters such as the 1927 earthquake, drought, infestations, and crop failures. This was of particular importance to a town whose fortunes were closely

⁵⁴ Norris, *Land of Progress*, 109: "Haifa's newfound importance as Britain's principal naval base in the Eastern Mediterranean and as a major exit point for the region's raw materials, positioned the city at the nexus of British planning in the wider region."

⁵⁵ O'Donnell report 103 – 104, Israel State Archives

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Ibid, 112

⁵⁸ There is no letter specifically from the military on this issue, but that of 16 September 1934 from the Northern District Commissioner to the Chief Secretary is the first in the correspondence on this subject, and mentions the incinerators and abattoir as being "undesirable from the point of view of the Troops and Police." Israel State Archives, *Municipal Services: Municipality Samaria District, Nablus/Shekhem* 119

⁵⁹ *Municipal Services: Municipality Samaria District, Nablus / Shekhem*, Israel State Archives

⁶⁰ Ibid

integrated with those of the rural area surrounding it, as most of its trade was in agricultural produce, and the soap production for which it was famous was closely dependent on the quality and quantity of oil from the local olive harvest.⁶¹ The economic stagnation resulting from the inability of the surrounding rural areas to develop sustainable increases in crop production meant that many Nabulsi migrated to other parts of Palestine in search of work. The feelings of resentment and despair created by the difficult economic conditions which were an important factor in contributing to the town's leading role in the Arab revolt were further exacerbated by its cultural heritage as a centre of commerce and culture under the Ottomans, and the nostalgia of its inhabitants for its former position prior to World War I. As David Bell pointed out in his response to the discussion on the future of global history –albeit in relation to the forces shaping the development of the French revolution- it is important to understand

“the cultural and intellectual factors that shaped the outlook of its actors – factors whose roots lie in large part in the *longue duree* of cultural and intellectual history.”⁶²

Engagement with the secondary literature

The purpose of this section is to discuss the trends in the existing historiography and the contributions this work makes to a more rounded and comprehensive understanding of those trends. There are four main areas to which the thesis makes a contribution: the local history of Nablus, the Palestine Mandate, imperial history, and global history. The thread that ties these strands of historiography together is the tension and dynamic between connecting and disconnecting forces. Under the Ottomans the strengthening of state control from the second half of the nineteenth century served both to better integrate the town into the imperial network of political power while at the same time somewhat loosening its relationship with other parts of Palestine as it developed closer trading links with such cities as Beirut and Damascus. Under the British by contrast those trading links were weakened by the imposition of new national borders, while within the Palestinian territory the town became more closely integrated with a Palestinian Arab economy which became increasingly separated from –and marginalised by- that being developed by the rapidly expanding Jewish immigrant community.

The modern history of Nablus itself has not been the subject of significant historical research, beyond the work of historians writing in Arabic for a largely local audience who do not generally examine the city within wider theoretical frameworks.⁶³ There is

⁶¹ For the importance of olive oil as a raw material for the Nabulsi economy, see Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*

⁶² Richard Drayton and David Motadel. ‘Discussion, the future of global history.’ *Journal of Global History* (2018) 13. 17

⁶³ See in this respect Ihsan Al-Nimr, *Tarikh Jabal Nablus wa al-Balqa’ (The History of Nablus and the Balqa’ Districts)* (Nablus, 1936 – 1961). Four volumes. Also:

one notable exception to this: Beshara Doumani's 'Rediscovering Palestine, Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700 – 1900'.⁶⁴ This is a regional case study covering the last two centuries of Ottoman rule which, as the author describes it, focuses on "the dynamics of provincial life in the vast Ottoman interior."⁶⁵ Doumani's essential hypothesis is that the history of provincial towns and cities in Ottoman Palestine has been largely ignored, with historians concentrating on the period after World War I, and implicitly writing off the preceding centuries as characterised by little more than stagnation and decay.⁶⁶ He goes on to argue that there was also a tacit supposition that any changes in society were simply imposed from above, casting the local population in the role of passive recipients.⁶⁷ By the use of local court records, judgements and private family papers⁶⁸ Doumani's work challenges these suppositions, illustrating both that the process of modernity was already underway before the arrival of Europeans bent on 'rediscovering' the Holy Land: and that the merchant and educated classes were active participants in their relations with the Ottoman government.

My own work examines the same geographical area in the early decades of the succeeding century, when an imperial power governed from Istanbul had been replaced by one governed from London. During the earlier period, Jabal Nablus had grown and flourished as a regional centre of commerce and culture, whereas during the period which is the subject of this thesis it suffered a sharp decline in the very differing circumstances pertaining after World War I. It consequently continues from Doumani's work in a chronological sense, albeit from the perspective of British archival source material containing the reports of the British Government officials who either worked there, or were involved in policy decisions in Jerusalem or London which had an impact on the Jabal Nablus region.

If the historiography on Nablus itself is limited, that on the Palestine Mandate as a whole is exceptionally large and extensive. It has also been overly influenced by the ongoing controversies surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since 1948, with much work oriented towards issues relating to the establishment of the Jewish national home during the years following the Balfour declaration. It is only in more recent decades, especially with the emergence of a new generation of Palestinian scholars, that there has been a conscious attempt to better understand the Mandate in terms of its impact on the indigenous Palestinian population, as opposed to the growth of the Jewish immigrant community.⁶⁹ This thesis, focused as it is on a town

Akram Al-Ramini, *Nablus fi al-qarn al-tasiashar (Nablus in the Nineteenth Century)* (Amman, 1977)

Mussallam Al-Hilu: *Qissatmadinat Nablus (The Story of the City of Nablus)* (Tunis, publication date unknown)

⁶⁴ Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*

⁶⁵ Ibid, xi

⁶⁶ Ibid, 6

⁶⁷ Ibid, 7

⁶⁸ Ibid, 9

⁶⁹ Apart from Beshara Doumani, mentioned above, these include – inter alia - Sahar Huneidi, Nur Masalha, May Seikaly, and Rosemary Sayigh

whose population was almost wholly Palestinian, should be set within the context of that particular trend.

In terms of the existing literature which is most relevant to this thesis, a leitmotif can be identified concerning developments which in one form or another led to different types of separation. At the level of the territory as a whole for example, Barbara Smith's work on the 'Roots of Separatism' charts the bifurcation of the Palestinian economy into separate Jewish and Palestinian economies.⁷⁰ Chapter I of this thesis however argues that apart from the growing separation between these two groups in the economic sphere, there was a further set of geographic disparities to take into account, the burgeoning urban areas and those parts of the economy which were stagnating. These divisions did not take the form of 'town versus country' but were rather localities consisting of combined urban and rural areas such as Jabal Nablus which were in relative decline in comparison with the more rapidly growing economy located along the coastal strip.

The theme of separation is also implicit in Jacob Norris's 'Land of Progress'⁷¹ which analyses the development (albeit not exclusively) of the port of Haifa during the 1920s and 1930s, which was a strategic priority for the British as the main conduit for the transport of oil from Mesopotamia to be conveyed via ship to Europe. It stands in contrast to the geographical area which is the subject of this thesis, where Nablus, far from being part of the 'land of progress' was its antithesis: a region of neglect. Nevertheless, conditions within regions are not completely homogeneous, and the distinctions between rich and poor remain, with differences between different socio-economic groups. This is the theme of May Seikaly's study of the port of Haifa,⁷² which examines "the steady change in the balance of power within the city between its Jewish and Arab communities in favour of the former."⁷³ As far as development policy was concerned, the town was anticipated to become "a showpiece of spectacular British projects"⁷⁴ so in this respect represented the very antithesis of that towards Nablus, where the Mandatory authorities allocated the minimum resources necessary, consistent with their obligations as a Mandatory power. This thesis consequently makes a contribution to the existing body of literature on Palestine during the 1920s and 1930s by examining an area which has been the subject of study in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but not the twentieth: and where, strikingly for the Mandate era, there was an almost complete absence of Jewish immigration.

Broadening out the picture to look at the history of empire more generally in the interwar years, British support for Zionist immigration can be placed in a wider

⁷⁰ Barbara Smith, *The Roots of Separatism in Palestine, British Economic Policy, 1920 – 1929* (I B Taurus & Co, London, 1993). 4: "this book will argue that British policy.....led to the bifurcation of Palestine's economy."

⁷¹ Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress*

⁷² May Seikaly, *Haifa, Transformation of an Arab Society, 1918-1939* (I B Taurus & Co, London, 1995)

⁷³ May Seikaly, *Haifa, Transformation* xiv

⁷⁴ Ibid, 9

picture of colonial development. The historiography on empire during the interwar years has analysed the changing ways that the British perceived their goals in the Middle East, and the role the region would play in relation to the imperial metropole. These themes are examined in James Renton's work on 'Britain and the invention of the Middle East',⁷⁵ and Stephen Constantine's work on British colonial development policy.⁷⁶ In both cases it is clear that there was a supposition on the part of the imperial power that its presence was beneficial to the local populace, with investment in infrastructure projects which would simultaneously create the conditions for economic growth and provide export sales for British firms. Chapter III of this thesis examines a concrete example of the latter, when a British company was contracted to build a water supply system in Nablus. The relationship of imperial power to subject population however was essentially paternal –when not hostile– with the justification for the mandate system being that the European metropole would prepare the territories under its control for eventual independence.⁷⁷

The contribution made by this thesis to the literature on the history of empire in the 1920s and 1930s is that it shows the limited extent of development and reconstruction projects in a specific location: the absence of any real participation by the indigenous population in the development process: and the almost complete failure of the imperial power to prepare that population to participate in (self) government. These phenomena were not of course unique to British imperial territories at this time. Historians of the French Empire have shown that a similar approach was taken in Algeria and Morocco, concentrating on areas considered of strategic or economic importance—including particular locations where mineral resources could be developed—and ignoring other parts of the territory.⁷⁸ The idea of priority and non-priority areas for development in Mandate Palestine is at least implicit in Jacob Norris's 'Land of Progress'⁷⁹ where the focus is on the exploitation of mineral deposits in the Dead Sea area and the development of the port of Haifa. That work did not set out however to make explicit comparisons between priority areas for British development in Palestine and the remainder of the territory. A comparison with contemporaneous developments in French colonial territories in the Maghreb is consequently helpful in understanding the impact of the British Mandate in terms of a mosaic in which some parts received significant attention and

⁷⁵ James Renton, 'Changing Languages of Empire & the Orient: Britain and the Invention of the Middle East, 1917 – 1918'. *The Historical Journal*, 50, No.3 (2007), 645-667

⁷⁶ Stephen Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy*

⁷⁷ For a discussion of the Mandate system, see Susan Pedersen's aptly titled *The Guardians, the League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the distinctions made between different parts of Morocco according to whether or not they were 'useful' to the French imperial metropolis, see Moshe Gershovich, *French Military Rule in Morocco, Colonialism and its Consequence* (Frank Cass, London, 2000), 113-116. For a discussion of the way the French colonial government in Algeria co-opted the most fertile agricultural land see Martin Evans, *Algeria, France's Undeclared War* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 34 – 38. This theme is also discussed in Alison Drew, *We are no longer in France. Communists in Colonial Algeria* (Manchester University Press, 2014)

⁷⁹ Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress*

investment, while others were relegated to the imperial backwaters – with Nablus constituting a leading example of the latter.

A study of Jabal Nablus at this time sheds light on the experiences of those who were living in the neglected regions. By taking a local perspective from a particular town it also creates a reference point from which the broader developments of the chosen time period can be measured. At this more specific level of granularity it becomes clear that the narrative of development which is clearly apparent from government documents and politicians' statements translated into very different sets of concrete actions at the level of specific locations. In the case of Palestine, a study of Nablus provides a counter-balance to the existing literature on such well-researched towns as Haifa, Jaffa, and Jerusalem.

As a study of a particular geographical area, and the impact of its location on the people who lived there, the thesis draws on the conceptual methodology employed by Fernand Braudel,⁸⁰ who argued that at any one time there is a centre of international trade, and that wealth and political power declined the further away you were from that centre.⁸¹ Under the Ottomans, power and wealth was concentrated in the imperial capital, Istanbul, and was disseminated via land routes across the Middle East and North Africa. Within that extensive, but contiguous territory, Nablus was able to flourish as a regional centre of culture and commerce: it was a nodal point within a wider matrix of government administration and economic activity. The arrival of the British however brought two fundamental changes to that structure. On the one hand the single territory under Ottoman control (albeit in varying degrees in different locations) was broken up into separate units administered by either the British or the French. On the other, an imperial administration which had functioned by a series of land routes was replaced by European empires whose territorial possessions were not contiguous with the centre, but joined by a series of sea routes. As a result, the main coastal ports tended to benefit from rapid economic growth as they developed as nodal points in the sea-based imperial communications and distribution networks. The interior by contrast became relatively disadvantaged.

Salim Tamari's 'Mountain against the Sea'⁸² draws on some of Braudel's ideas when he notes the more rapid development of the coastal plain under Mandate Palestine in relation to the central hill district running from Jenin in the north to Hebron in the south: with Jerusalem as an exception given that it was chosen by the British as their

⁸⁰ For his ideas on particular regions acting as centres of economic activity, see Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II*. Tome Premier (Librairie Armand Collin, Paris, 1966). For a discussion of how these centres move over time, and their impact on specific locations, see Fernand Braudel, *Afterthoughts on Material Civilisation and Capitalism* (John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1977)

⁸¹ Braudel, *Afterthoughts on Material Civilisation and Capitalism* 85. Similar ideas, albeit implicitly, are to be found in Bartov & Weitz, *Shatterzone* 7 in terms of the differences between those who live close to the borders of national territories and those living closer to their centres of political power

⁸² Salim Tamari, *The Mountain against the Sea, Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2009)

seat of government. The findings of my own research on Nablus are generally concordant with the Braudel / Tamari paradigms. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that I am in disagreement with Beshara Doumani's work, whose perspective "is critical of the coast / interior binary that pervades the historiography of the Eastern Mediterranean."⁸³ The reason for this is that the time period he chooses, of the 18th – 19th centuries, corresponds with the late Ottoman era when trading routes did not necessarily disadvantage locations in the interior: although during this period of course some coastal towns in North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean were growing as trading links with the maritime European powers strengthened.⁸⁴ The opposing but complementary perspectives of Doumani and Tamari reflect in particular the trajectory of Nablus, which grew to flourish under the land-based Ottomans during the 18th and 19th centuries, only to decline under the maritime power of the British during the Mandate.

During the 1920s and 1930s I argue that one of the reasons for opposition to the mandate was that the town's leading families had built up extensive links with such capitals as Cairo and Damascus, and were consequently well aware of political developments in the territories adjacent to Palestine. By the early decades of the twentieth century the basic transport and communications infrastructure of railways, telephone and telegraph had been established, with the result that information, newspapers, and people could travel easily and rapidly.⁸⁵ Nablus consequently provides a good example of some of the themes discussed in Alan Lester's work on place and space in British imperial history.⁸⁶ He has argued that spaces such as towns are in effect cross-roads where people, things and ideas pass through, to and from the inter-connected networks of which the town is a node.⁸⁷ Some places have power and influence, while others are marginalised.⁸⁸ Nablus can be seen as a nodal point in a network linking other towns in the Middle East, and a receptor for the ideas flowing from them. This concept is useful in explaining the combination of characteristics to be found in the town when under British control. On the one hand it was suffering relative economic decline within the Palestinian territory, while on the other its heritage of well-established communications with the leading cities in the region gave it a heightened awareness of its neighbours' attempts to break free from imperial rule, and the relative success in particular of Egypt and Iraq in doing so. This contrasted with the situation in Palestine where there was no indication that the Mandate was going to result in independence, and there was the additional

⁸³ Beshara Doumani, *Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean, a Social History* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 21

⁸⁴ When discussing economic developments in the mid-nineteenth century, Doumani noted that the Ottoman empire "became slowly enmeshed in the European economic orbit." Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, 128

⁸⁵ Bartov and Weitz, *Shatterzone of Empires* 6

⁸⁶ Robert Aldrich and Kirsten McKenzie (Eds), *The Routledge History of Western Empires* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon, 2014). Part VI, Imperial Spaces: Alan Lester

⁸⁷ Aldrich and McKenzie, *The Routledge History* 308 - 309

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 310

complication of the Jewish National Home policy. It was this combination of regional awareness and economic problems in its own part of the Palestinian territory which contributed to the development of Nablus as a centre of political opposition to the Mandate.

By the time the British arrived in Palestine it had become generally accepted that the main justification for governments to raise taxes and impose legal constraints on the people they govern was to improve their general wellbeing.⁸⁹ In assessing the Mandatory power's approach towards Nablus, and considering the responses to it, this thesis draws on the ideas of Michel Foucault, who argued that the responsibilities of the modern state

“required a health policy capable of reducing the infant mortality rate, preventing epidemics, and lowering the rates of endemic diseases, intervening to modify and impose norms on living conditions (whether in the matter of diet, housing, or town planning), and adequate medical facilities.”⁹⁰

Specifically as far as the British were concerned, the Mandate marked a period when governments were responding to public expectations concerning the provision of water supplies and health services. As Leopold Amery had argued, the medical and scientific discoveries showing the relationship between water supplies, sanitation, and healthcare undermined the 19th century ‘night-watchman’ concept of the state, and increasingly obliged it to engage in and develop the basic infrastructure of in particular urban communities.⁹¹ These concepts of the role and responsibilities of the state provide the context to chapter III below concerning the development of residential water supplies by the British in the 1930s.

By adopting this particular local perspective in relation to the nature and extent of state intervention, the thesis can be set in the context of recent debates on global history.⁹² These have focussed on how global history's tendency to concentrate on transnational flows of goods, information, and services between metropolitan centres of commerce and imperial power might have resulted in the neglect of other areas which were either remote or excluded from such centres. This critique however has in turn been refuted by the likes of Richard Drayton and David Motadel who argue that global history “is intertwined with the histories of the nation and the local, individuals, outsiders, and subalterns, and small and isolated places.”⁹³ Nablus falls

⁸⁹ Foucault has argued that this process of justifying the existence of the state in terms of its role in acting on behalf of the population as a whole began to emerge in the latter decades of the 18th century. See Michel Foucault, *Securite, Territoire, Population. Cours au College de France 1977 – 1978* (Gallimard Seuil, 2004), 44

⁹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the College de France, 1977 – 1978*. Edited by Michel Senellart (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009), 367

⁹¹ For a general discussion of this theme see L C A Knowles, *The Economic Development of the British Overseas Empire* (George Routledge & Sons, London 1924), Volume 1, 52

⁹² See in particular Jeremy Adelman's comment piece in *Aeon Essays*: ‘Is global history still possible, or has it had its moment?’ This should be read together with the response by Richard Drayton and David Motadel, ‘Discussion: the futures of global history’. *Journal of Global History* (2018) 13, 1-21

⁹³ Drayton and Motadel, ‘Discussion’ abstract

into this category, albeit in general terms, given the small size of Mandate Palestine: the town is only 44 miles from the burgeoning port of Haifa,⁹⁴ located on the coastal strip, which formed the centre of economic growth and development in the territory. By looking at the Jabal Nablus – a region relatively excluded from the new international trade flows which developed as a result of the British Mandate in Palestine – this thesis illustrates the importance of relatively isolated areas in deepening our understanding of the exercise of imperial power. This particular location is especially apposite in this respect, given that it had acted as a ‘nodal point’ in a network of regional commercial centres under the Ottomans, but subsequently lost that role with the arrival of the British. As a result, Nablus is a better candidate to analyse the effects of being marginalised than a town such as Hebron which had not passed through a recent period of pre-eminence.

In geographical terms, this is a study which has used colonial era government documents containing information focussed on a particular locality. As such it can reveal insights corresponding to the theme of ‘history from below’⁹⁵ given that its subject matter is that of a relatively marginalised group of people in relation to the mandate, and thus akin to such groups as women or the working class which have been brought into the mainstream of historical research following the ground-breaking work of E P Thompson in the 1960s and 1970s. It also contributes a small counter-balance to the “profound Eurocentricity of our discipline in the West.”⁹⁶ Although the source material is primarily British, the subject matter and analysis is very much concerned with the way the Nabulsis reacted to their new imperial masters, culminating in the town’s pivotal role in the 1936 Arab Revolt. It is telling in this respect that the National Archives in Kew contain documents and reports which set out in some detail the thoughts and grievances of the political class in Nablus on such issues as Ottoman rule, the impact of World War I, and the reasons for their opposition to the Jewish National Home policy. The archives are consequently a rich source of material not only on the British imperial perspective, but also on that of the people they ruled.

The thesis consequently provides examples relevant to the exchanges on global history which examine the relationship between transnational developments and specific, local events⁹⁷ - of either large or small-scale. David Bell has argued⁹⁸ that political insurrections are a product both of the forces which shape the context in which they take place and the factors specific to their location which shape the responses and behaviour of the participants. In the case of the French revolution the context was one of global trade and competition, but the development of the Terror

⁹⁴ <https://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/distances.html?n=2323>

⁹⁵ Drayton and Motadel, ‘Discussion’ 5

⁹⁶ Ibid, 9

⁹⁷ See in this respect ‘Words from David Bell’ in Drayton and Motadel, ‘Discussion’ 17

⁹⁸ David Bell, ‘Questioning the global turn: the case of the French Revolution’. *French Historical Studies*, 37, 1, 2014 1-24

also reflected specificities of French history.⁹⁹ An examination of the circumstances leading to Nablus playing a leading role in the 1936 Arab revolt against the British in Palestine is illustrative of a similar dynamic in the interactions between forces which were cross-cutting, and those which were specific to that group of people in a particular location – albeit on a much smaller scale. The context was that of relative decline in relation to the rapidly growing coastal strip, exacerbated by rural distress due to adverse weather conditions leading to a succession of poor harvests. The specificity by contrast was that of a cultural heritage developed over the preceding century when Nablus had been an important regional centre of culture and commerce. It was this awareness of what had been – and was now lost- which provided the psychological impetus for the Nabulsis to rise up against the British a little before other parts of the mandated territory had done so. This chronology is set out in some detail in the source material, which, together with the selected methodology, is the subject of the following section.

Methodology and Sources

As set out below, the main body of source material for this research consisted of British Government reports and correspondence between senior officials in Nablus, Jerusalem, and London. This material necessarily reflects the issues and preoccupations of those who were drafting and considering it, but various conceptual methodologies have been employed to both interpret the sources and place their subject matter in a broader context. Braudel has been especially helpful in this respect, as his ideas concerning the concentration of wealth and power in particular centres of commercial and political activity are useful in contrasting Haifa (a commercial centre) and Jerusalem (the headquarters of the Mandatory Government) with Nablus, left in relative isolation in the central uplands of Palestine. He is however also useful in the context of a broader geographical perspective given that in the early twentieth century Europe- and in particular northern and western Europe- was the closest centre of industrial and commercial activity with which the Middle East region engaged. The primary mode of transport between the two regions was by sea through the Mediterranean, and this had the effect of accelerating the growth of the leading Mediterranean ports – of which in Palestine Haifa and Jaffa were the main examples. Braudel's ideas on the influence of commercial and political centres of power both at a local level within a specific territory and at a larger regional level provide the conceptual underpinning to Salim Tamari's 'Mountain against the Sea,'¹⁰⁰ where he examines the more rapid growth of the coastal plain in Palestine in relation to the central uplands, and such towns as Hebron, Jenin, and Nablus.

Other dimensions to the impact of geographical location as a factor to take into consideration when analysing source material are to be found in Alan Lester's work

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰Salim Tamari, *The Mountain against the Sea*

on place and space in British imperial history. There is no shortage of evidence in the archives that Nablus was the centre of the 1936 Arab Revolt, with detailed accounts of the uprising available in the military reports. In my view however the accompanying analyses of the causes of the revolt do not contain sufficiently conclusive arguments. There is much about the opposition of the Nabulsis to the Jewish National Home policy, but no real attempt to answer why that issue should have exercised that part of Palestine more than, say, Haifa and Jaffa which were both far more directly affected by the impact of Jewish immigration than Nablus. Lester's work on the role of towns as nodes of communication in networks linking other towns in the Middle East comes as a useful reminder of the close trading and cultural links the educated Nabulsi families enjoyed with Beirut, Cairo, and Damascus. In these three towns they did business, got married, and sent their children to attend the universities there. As a result they arguably had a heightened awareness of political developments in the surrounding region, and the greater levels of success achieved by Egypt, Iraq, and Syria in gaining (degrees of) independence from their colonial masters. I have argued in this thesis that that awareness constituted one of the main reasons why Nablus led the Arab Revolt in Palestine.

Finally the ideas of Foucault have been useful in considering that part of the source material which deals with efforts by the British to improve the economic and living conditions of the Nabulsis discussed in chapters 2 and 3 below. His concepts concerning the justification for the powers of the modern state in terms of its capacity to improve the lot of the population it governs provides the context for appraising the source material.¹⁰¹ This provides the evidence of what was done. It does not however, except in the most general terms in the high level reports written by officials in Jerusalem on Palestine as a whole, attempt to give any real indication as to what extent particular initiatives succeeded in solving the problems they were designed to address. To take two examples from chapter II and III below - what was the impact of providing training and silk worms for the development of sericulture in some of the villages surrounding Nablus on the general state of poverty and indebtedness of the agricultural sector in this area ?- and what was the proportion of the urban population who were beneficiaries of the residential water supply project ? These questions are left unanswered by the sources, and I have argued that a combination of the relative neglect of the Jabal Nablus region by the Mandatory authorities, together with the inevitable budgetary constraints brought about by the Great Depression, created a situation of 'too little, too late', and may have inadvertently contributed to worsening the extent of the hostility against the British in this part of Palestine rather than ameliorating it.

¹⁰¹ This is not of course to overlook Foucault's observations on the role of state surveillance and control in creating the conditions necessary for improving the condition of the population it governed. For a discussion of the relationship between state control and development, see *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Edited by Graham Burchell, Collin Gordon, and Peter Miller (University of Chicago Press, 1991), Chapter 4: Governmentality by Michel Foucault

Overall, the research perspective is that of the British Government and its policies concerning both the maintenance of law and order and the infrastructure development which took place in many colonial territories during the early decades of the twentieth century.¹⁰² The analysis has chosen a relatively neglected area of the Palestinian territory which was not considered a priority for development. The focus is on policy, and what the government was trying to achieve at the local level in part of the central uplands of Palestine. Its orientation is towards the functioning of colonial government in an area set back and relatively isolated from both the capital of Jerusalem to its south, and the rapidly expanding economy along the coastal plain to its west. The focus of the primary source material has consequently been Mandatory Government reports and correspondence of senior officials¹⁰³ between Nablus, Jerusalem, and London – mainly the Colonial Office. It is for this reason that the National Archives in Kew have been the main location for source materials for the research. Analysis of this material has revealed tensions between officials in the three locations, and this is a theme which is examined in chapters III and V of the thesis, dealing respectively with the establishment of water supplies to the town and the tensions arising between the civil and military authorities on the occasion of the arrest of the Mayor during the first year of the Arab revolt.

Other sources have been chosen so as to build out a more rounded perspective of British – Nabulsi relations from that revealed by the government documents which form the core of the research. The Middle East Centre archive at St. Antony's College Oxford was an invaluable source of papers and information relating to senior Mandate Government officials, including the activities of police officers such as Raymond Cafferata. Material held in the Church Missionary archives at Birmingham University gave helpful insights into both conditions in the Missionary hospital in Nablus and the range of health problems faced by the inhabitants of the Jabal Nablus region. In Paris, the Institut du Monde Arabe has a range of French language monographs, not all of which are available in the UK. It also contains some primary source material not available in the National Archives in Kew: including a report on the state of Palestine drawn up by the 1925 Palestinian Arab Congress,¹⁰⁴ which was of particular use in understanding Palestinian perceptions of the state of the economy –including the rural economy- at the time. During the course of a fieldwork visit to Nablus made in October 2016 it was possible to consult at the municipal library a selection of works written by Izzat Darwaza, one of the town's leading cultural and political activists during the Mandate. Although written in his native Arabic, the extensive introduction is in English. Finally, during a visit to Rabat made

¹⁰² For a discussion of infrastructure development in Mandate Palestine, see Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress*

¹⁰³ Whose writings can collectively be classified as memoranda: "written communications that give directions and transmit information within bureaucratic structures." See Miriam Dobson & Benjamin Ziemann (Eds), *Reading Primary Sources, the interpretation of texts from 19th and 20th Century History* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2009), 123

¹⁰⁴ Report on the state of Palestine submitted to his Excellency the High Commissioner for Palestine by the Executive Committee of the Palestine Arab Congress on 13th October 1925, Institut Du Monde Arabe, Paris

in June 2018, the Bibliotheque Nationale du Maroc proved a useful source of material on Marechal Lyautey, whose ideas on the distinction between different parts of French colonial territories characterised according to their importance to the imperial capital I have used when considering British Government priorities in relation to different parts of Palestine: with in particular the contrast between the rapidly developing coastal strip and the relatively stagnating central uplands.

Various online sources were used during the course of the research, including the Israel State Archives and the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), both located in Jerusalem. Similar issues arose across the full range of source material utilised, whether in physical archives or online. These included gaps in narrative sequences, no doubt reflecting the precipitate departure of the British from the territory in 1948, and the loss of large amounts of material: a problem made more severe in the case of locations situated in what is now the West Bank, which has experienced the control of three different regimes since World War I, with military hostilities and the loss and disruption that entails at each point of regime change. As a result, it is possible to become aware of particular initiatives, such as for example house reconstruction after the 1927 earthquake, but not to know whether they were successfully implemented due to gaps in the archival records.

Naturally, particular reports reflected the interests of their authors to the detriment of a comprehensive or fully “objective” account of the workings of British colonial rule in Nablus. Local officials working in Nablus sought to portray their work in a positive light when making submissions to the High Commissioner’s office in Jerusalem, as did that office when reporting to London, with the usual and predictable complaints to Government Head Offices about the need for more resources. In some of the more sensitive areas, however, it was possible to deduce that particular individuals were less than forthright in their account of events when it was clear that they were trying to avoid blame for actions which were later condemned: as was the case with Raymond Cafferata in describing his role in the arrest of the Mayor of Nablus on behalf of the army which is discussed in chapter V below.

In general terms, however, the combination of reports specific to Nablus on such issues as the water supply project which is the subject of chapter III, and the 1927 earthquake in chapter IV, together with the various reports on the state of the Palestine economy, and the 1931 census, were sufficient to build up a reasonably comprehensive picture of how the British at the time *perceived* the problems to be addressed. Considered against the various petitions and complaints submitted by the Nabulsis there is evidence that in terms of the needs of the population and the economy there was no great divergence of perspective between governed and government. The problem, however, exacerbated during the years of the Great Depression, was a lack of sufficient resources to mitigate the harsh conditions suffered by the inhabitants of the Jabal Nablus during the years following the

ravages of World War I. What is unsurprisingly absent from the official record are any statements that this situation was made even more challenging by the fact the region was not a British priority for development. Nevertheless, this can be deduced from the differing levels of expenditure allocated to the different towns in Palestine, and indeed the significant differences in the volumes of source material relating to them which have survived.

Overview and Sequence of the Chapters

As set out above, the themes and issues addressed in this thesis are examined in its various chapters, but are not necessarily specific to a particular chapter. The chapter sequence itself is as follows:

Chapter I considers the wider economic developments in Palestine during this period which constitute the context in which the British: Nabulsi relationship developed. It draws on a combination of UK Government reports and correspondence, combined with secondary sources, to develop one of the key themes of the thesis: that Nablus was not developing at the same rate as either the capital, Jerusalem, or the towns of the coastal strip such as Haifa and Jaffa. As a result of relatively high levels of population growth, increasing more rapidly than the rate of new job creation, some members of the Jabal Nablus region moved elsewhere in Palestine in search of work. The advent of migration away from a region which had previously been a centre of cultural and economic activity under the Ottomans contributed to a sense of loss and isolation which became one of the contributory factors to the town's role as a leader of the Arab Revolt in 1936.

Chapter II focuses on the years immediately following World War I, and examines British perceptions of Nablus together with the way that they interacted with the city during that early period. Given that the subject of the thesis is the impact of the Mandate on this part of Palestine, the purpose of this chapter is to ascertain how the mandatory authorities viewed the city following their initial encounters with it: as those views would inevitably have an impact on the future relationship. Two aspects of British engagement are considered, namely surveillance of the town's political activities and government at the local level - which included the maintenance of law and order, education in the surrounding rural area, and public health. The nature of that engagement is illustrative of the exercise of de minimis government in a non-priority area where the primary policy objective appears to have been the avoidance of any form of civil or political disturbance on the one hand while on the other keeping public expenditure as low as possible, consistent with the responsibilities of a Mandatory power. This then introduces what is essentially the leitmotif of the whole thesis, namely that Nablus was not a priority for the British Mandate in Palestine, and as a result suffered from neglect relative to other urban areas.

Chapter III begins the process of looking at small scale case studies to demonstrate the wider themes discussed in the preceding chapters. This particular chapter examines in detail the way the Mandatory Government implemented a water supply project for those residential households able to purchase it in the city. As with the succeeding chapters, the choice of subject matter was informed by the availability of reports and correspondence in the National Archives which gave useful insights into the thinking of mandatory officials at the time, and revealed the tensions between those working in the city itself, their head office in Jerusalem, and the Colonial Office and Treasury in London. The arguments which developed as a result of problems with some of the pipes supplied for the project are revealing of the sensitivities felt by the British relating to the way they were perceived by the local population. They indicate anxieties concerning their capacity to create the basic infrastructure which is the pre-requisite for social and economic development - the very rationale used to justify their presence in Palestine.

Chapter IV considers an event which had a dramatic impact on Nablus, as it suffered much more damage than elsewhere in the territory: the 1927 earthquake. The Government response to this event, although speedy, clearly reflected both the financial constraints imposed by the Treasury and the fact that the town was not a priority for British policy makers in Palestine. The authorities acted on the basis of minimalist state intervention in terms of managing the consequences of the earthquake, on which a comprehensive report was written. Other source material, including contemporary newspaper cuttings, reveal that the mandatory administration benefitted from the evolving approaches to humanitarian relief, which became increasingly focussed on the needs of the recipients, and used philanthropic donations to provide for the immediate needs of those who had lost their homes. The Government in Jerusalem was quick to establish a relief fund and rely on private donations, including those from the Jewish diaspora in the USA, to provide the bulk of the finance to enable the clean-up operation. Its response to the earthquake was revealing of an early form of what today would be characterised as a Public Private Partnership (PPP), with the Government providing a small amount of 'seed corn' money and then effectively co-opting the much larger amounts of private donations to set up a disaster relief programme. It is nevertheless telling that funds to rebuild private houses damaged or destroyed by this natural disaster were provided in the form of loans rather than grants.

Chapter V examines a set of issues arising from a particular incident which took place during the autumn of the first year of the Arab Revolt in 1936. It involved the army, the police, and the Mayor, Suleiman Bey Tukan. His forced co-option by the army late one evening in September 1936, and the subsequent reaction to it, provide an opportunity to examine the differences of perspective between the civil administration and the military in Mandate Palestine, together with the tensions arising from them which is one of the key themes of this chapter. Within the broader context of colonial administration in the decades following World War I it goes on to

argue that to some extent the divergence of views between High Commissioner Wauchope and Lieut-General Dill finds a reflection in the differences of approach between Marechal Lyautey and his successors in Morocco towards nationalist insurgencies during the 1920s and 30s: namely do you use maximum force at the outset to crush an insurgency and prevent its development, or do you apply only the minimum necessary to restore order, taking into account the need to maintain future relations with groups who are currently resorting to armed insurrection ? These tensions between the civilian and military authorities were arguably exacerbated by the Government's *de minimis* approach to the Jabal Nablus. It was not making significant investments in the region, and so found it hard to offer anything other than forced repression in response to discontent - despite the fact that such repression risked further exacerbating the existing state of hostilities. It is appropriate for the chronological sequence considered in this thesis to conclude with the start of the Arab Revolt in 1936. That year marked the turning point towards a much more interventionist military policy designed to crush the revolt, which combined in the succeeding years with increasing state activity in the civil sphere as the government geared up for the start of World War II.

The Conclusion integrates the various themes of the thesis, based on location, development, and infrastructure. It argues that despite the small geographical size of Palestine there were significant differences between the growth and development of the region covering the central 'spine' of the interior hill district and that of the coastal plain. It goes on to assert that the Palestine Mandate did not take a monolithic approach to the territory under its control, and that there were significant differences between the levels of investment made in such coastal towns as Haifa and those which were not perceived as a priority in relation to British strategic objectives for the Middle East region. Finally it asserts the importance of history, culture, and perception as determining factors in the way local communities react to broader developments across territories of which they are part. In contemporary parlance this was a town of the interior which resented the growing influence and wealth of other parts of the country. As such, its predicament under the Mandate speaks to current themes of popular discontent amongst those who consider themselves denied the privileges of the metropolitan elites, and threatened by the consequences of large-scale immigration and globalisation.



Street scene in the Old Town of Nablus. Library of Congress Prints & Photographs online catalogue, retrieved on 8th August 20: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/mpc2010005874/PP/>

CHAPTER I

THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

There is no really lucrative industry in Palestine except the soap industry in Nablus. The prospects are very poor because of the non-existence of raw material, coal or oil in the land.¹

Introduction

The introductory chapter of this thesis has set out its main themes, the subject matter to be covered, and the interpretative paradigms used to analyse the primary source material. It is argued here that the geographical location of Nablus, set back as it is up in the hills away from the coastal plain, was an important factor in explaining its hostility to the development of European colonial influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. The extensive links of its leading families with such capitals as Cairo and Damascus, and their knowledge of political developments from Egypt to Iraq, served to reinforce that hostility, given the lack of any clear indication that Palestine had been placed on the path to independence. Nablus consequently provides a good example of some of the themes discussed in Alan Lester's work on place and space in British imperial history.² He has argued that spaces such as towns are in effect cross-roads where people, things and ideas pass through, to and from the inter-connected networks of which the town is a node.³ Some places have power and influence, while others are marginalised.⁴ Nablus can be seen as a nodal point in a network linking other towns in the Middle East, and a receptor for the ideas flowing from them. Within the Palestinian Mandated territory however it was becoming marginalised in relation to the more rapidly developing coastal plain.

With the introduction of British rule, powerful new economic forces were unleashed in the territory, leading to rapid growth in some urban areas, in contrast to relative stagnation in most rural areas. The 1931 census recorded a process of emigration from the Nablus area which it concluded implied a "comparative degeneration in the economic life of that town."⁵ Not only was the population moving within the country,

¹ Report on the State of Palestine submitted to His Excellency the High Commissioner for Palestine by the Executive Committee of the Palestine Arab Congress on 13th October 1925, 10. A copy is held at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris.

² Robert Aldrich and Kirsten McKenzie (Eds), *The Routledge History of Western Empires*. (Routledge, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon, 2014). Part VI, Imperial Spaces: Alan Lester

³ Aldrich and Kirsten, *The Routledge History* 308 - 309

⁴ Ibid, 310

⁵ E Mills, Superintendent of Census, *Census of Palestine 1931: Population of Villages, Towns and Administrative Areas* (Jerusalem, 1932), 29 A copy is held at the British Library.

but it was also growing,⁶ and more rapidly than the economy. These factors in the social development of the area combined to create tensions resulting from the growing receptiveness of the population to radical ideas in opposition to the Mandate: and these in turn contributed to political unrest.⁷

The purpose of this chapter is consequently to examine the impact of economic forces on the 'Jabal Nablus' region to ascertain their importance in explaining why this particular part of Palestine became a centre of opposition to the Mandatory authorities. It consequently speaks to the main theme of the thesis as a whole, namely that the conditions which developed during the first two decades of the Mandate resulted in the economic marginalisation of the Jabal Nablus region. Both chapters I and II have consciously taken a broader perspective of respectively economic issues and the operations of the Mandatory authorities so as to set the context for the specific case studies which are the subjects of chapters III – V. Starting with the Ottoman context, this chapter goes on to examine the economics of the inter-war years, combined with the impact of Jewish immigration, and the development of the electricity grid in Palestine. This is followed by an examination of the effects of population growth and the state of the rural sector. Having established the contours of this economic landscape, the chapter then turns to assess in detail British attempts to mitigate the declining economic situation of Jabal Nablus. It notes that overall these attempts can be characterised as 'too little, too late', whether that be the delay in imposing restrictions on the volume of cheap food imports from the Hauran which undercut prices for Nabulsi growers,⁸ or the amount of credit made available for indebted farmers to improve their agricultural yields. Within the context of Treasury budget restrictions the spending priorities of the Mandatory administration were focussed on infrastructure development –especially railways– and the maintenance of law and order. As far as Jabal Nablus was concerned, the British were inclined to see it as little more than a potential trouble-spot and source of opposition to Mandatory rule. Budget allocations for rural development programmes took second place to keeping the peace and heading off signs of political activism,⁹ and were consequently insufficient to make any significant impact on the effects of the Great Depression of 1927 – 1933.¹⁰ Finally, the chapter concludes with a consideration of how these various factors were perceived from the perspective of Nablus, and why they fuelled an arguably higher degree of political discontent than that experienced elsewhere in the territory. It identifies the main

⁶ Mills, *Census of Palestine* 157: Subsidiary Table No. IV. Proportion of children aged less than 10 to those aged 18 – 45. The proportion for Palestine as a whole was 77 : 100, with the highest ratio found in Nablus at 88 : 100. The lowest was in Tel Aviv at 43 : 100. These figures provide prima facie evidence of a post – World War I baby boom

⁷ See Henry Laurens, 'Nouveaux regards sur la question de Palestine.' *Revue d'Etudes Palestiniennes*, 2007, No.104. 3-28

⁸ Discussed on page 38 below

⁹ The Mandatory authorities were nevertheless aware that problems in the rural sector could contribute to political unrest: see pages 52-53 below

¹⁰ Discussed on page 50 below

reasons for doing so as being grounded in a perception that the town and its agricultural hinterland were in a state of decline relative to the rapid economic and population growth experienced along the coastal strip.

The research covered in this part of the thesis indicates that there is potential for qualification to certain aspects of the established historiography. In particular, Barbara Smith's seminal 'Roots of Separatism in Palestine'¹¹ which emphasises the economic divisions between the native Palestinian and immigrant Jewish communities. We need to further complicate this dichotomy by adding a different division created by British rule in Palestine: between the burgeoning urban areas and those parts of the economy which were stagnating. There is also clearly scope for further research on the impact on Palestinian society of the high rates of fertility of the Muslim Arab population which are set out in parts of Bernard Wasserstein's work:¹² as it is possible that one of the reasons that agricultural workers were leaving the Jabal Nablus area in search of work elsewhere was that their numbers were rising at a faster rate than could be absorbed by existing methods of agricultural cultivation.

Economics and demographics were clearly important contributory factors in the development of political opposition to the arrival of the British and their Jewish national home policy. At the local level however, as Chaim Weizmann described it:¹³

"one place in Palestine occupies a somewhat particular position, both in its attitude to Great Britain and to Zionist policy, that is Nablus. Nablus is very powerful economically. The prosperity of Nablus is based chiefly on the olive tree and the industry connected with the production of oil and soap."

He went on to say that the town feared the Zionists would build competing soap factories: and that "the feeling in Nablus against the Jews, unlike in other parts of Palestine, is of long standing. No Jew has lived in Nablus or the neighbouring towns of Tulkarm or Qalqilya for centuries"¹⁴ – although he attributed this in part to the animosity towards the Jews from the local Samaritan community. When the Jewish community attempted to open a school for Samaritans in the town of Nablus, they were met "with hostility and intimidation on the part of the Mayor and other notables."¹⁵ In 1925 the Times' special correspondent in Palestine reported that "a

¹¹ Barbara Smith, *The Roots of Separatism in Palestine, British Economic Policy, 1920 – 1929* (I B Taurus & Co, London, 1993)

¹² See in particular, Bernard Wasserstein, *Israelis and Palestinians, Why Do They Fight, Can They Stop ?* (Yale University Press, London, 2003), 20: "Following the census a further special enquiry was conducted in late 1931 on fertility patterns. These showed the extraordinary fecundity of the Palestinian population."

¹³ Letter of 02 February 1920 to Lord Curzon in Eastern Affairs, Further Correspondence Part IV, FO 406/43, held at the National Archives in Kew (henceforth referred to as 'TNA')

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Neil Caplan, *Palestine Jewry and the Arab Question* (Frank Cass and Co, London, 1978), 73

party of Jews, while passing through Nablus, in connection with the Samaritan sacrifice on Mount Gerizim, were stoned by Muslims.”¹⁶

Weizmann’s views and this incident, although helpful in setting the overall context for opposition to Jewish immigration, does not explain the varying degrees of such opposition between the different urban and rural communities across Palestine. To get a better understanding of the impact of British rule on these regional variations we need first to consider the economic situation during the closing years of the Ottoman regime at the turn of the twentieth century: as those who reacted to the establishment of the British mandate did so based on their perspective as Ottoman citizens.

The Ottoman Context and Current Paradigms of Interpretation

This section considers the pre-World War I status quo ante in comparison with the early years of the British mandate in terms of the contrasting hypotheses of Beshara Doumani and Selim Tamari on the importance of geographic location as a factor in economic development. Within that context it also considers the origins of the development of the electricity grid in Palestine and its impact on Nablus.

As Selim Tamari has argued in his seminal work, ‘The Mountain Against the Sea’, the period from the end of the nineteenth century up to World War I saw:

“the emergence of a cultural divide between mercantile coastal communities and mountain-dwelling smallholder peasants. This divide became more tangible precisely when the two regional economies became more capitalised and more integrated with European and Mediterranean trade networks, thus enhancing the cultures’ difference.”¹⁷

His hypothesis is that a new regional dichotomy was emerging between the more cosmopolitan coastal cities - which acted as commercial centres and developed as locations for urban Jewish migration - and those located in the central ‘spine’ of Palestine, such as Nablus, Safad, and Hebron, which were the seats of conservatism and traditional leadership.¹⁸

Beshara Doumani takes issue with some of this analysis, arguing that he is “critical of the coast / interior binary that pervades the historiography of the Eastern Mediterranean.”¹⁹ A synthesis has yet to emerge between these two hypotheses, but they are not necessarily as contradictory as they at first appear. On the one hand

¹⁶ ‘Jews stoned by Arabs at Nablus’. Article of 09 April 1925, *Times newspaper digital archive*

¹⁷ Salim Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea*, 1 It is interesting to note that some supporters of the Zionist project envisioned a similar geographical separation between the fertile coastal strip (to be reserved for the Jews) and the central uplands stretching East into Trans Jordan, to be reserved for the Arabs. Anthony Crossley made this case in a Parliamentary debate on Palestine in 1936. See *Hansard, Commons*, 24th March 1936, Volume 310, Col. 1094

¹⁸ Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea* 10

¹⁹ Beshara Doumani, *Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017), 21

there is no doubt that in the unique circumstances of the British Mandate in Palestine the development of the coastal strip, already gathering momentum prior to World War I, was accelerated by the continuous arrival of Jewish immigrants whose growing presence established the new town of Tel Aviv and was an important factor in the rapid growth of Haifa.²⁰ In terms of economic and population growth, it is clear that the 'sea' was outstripping the 'mountain' during the inter-war years.

Conversely, being located on the coastal plain was not per se a pre-requisite for economic development: Nablus under the Ottomans had been an important regional commercial centre, with a well-developed soap manufacturing sector selling both within 'Bilad al-Sham' and into Egypt.²¹ It was indeed socially and politically conservative,²² a tendency enhanced by the presence of "the shrine of al-Mujahid Mujirnad-Din al-Hanbali who was a leader in the Mamluk era"²³ and who created a school of Islam with a tendency towards austerity and conservatism.²⁴ Such piety and conservatism however had not inhibited the town's commercial development.

Cem Emrence has provided a variation on Tamari's geo-political classification of the territories of the Eastern Mediterranean, where he argues that the Ottomans, in developing their own contribution to modernity in the Middle East, distinguished between the coastal regions, the interior, and the 'frontiers' – essentially the desert areas inhabited by nomadic tribes which were only partially under Ottoman control.²⁵ He goes on to observe that "economic transformation strengthened mid-size market towns. The latter emerged as regional textile centres, sold manufactured products to the hinterland, traded with large 'caravan' cities, and established strong connections with burgeoning port towns of the coast."²⁶ This description fits well with the activities of Nablus in the late Ottoman period, and so adds weight to Doumani's contention that location in the 'interior' does not in itself preclude the development of thriving and influential communities.

Finally on the question of the differences between the coast and the interior, it is worth noting Cyrus Schayegh's observation that during the 19th Century the growth of the European empires weakened the power and influence of the Ottoman administration in Constantinople "and in a variety of ways starting with economic development, port cities like Beirut became the new locomotives of change, while the

²⁰ See Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress*, 102

²¹ See Beshara Doumani: *Rediscovering Palestine*, 71-72

²² The Nabulsi novelist Sahar Khalifeh described the town of her birth as "old and overwhelmed by worries." Sahar Khalifeh, *Of Noble Origins* (American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 2012), 250

²³ Naseer Arafat, *Nablus, City of Civilisations*, 196. See also page 211 on the bringing of the hairs of the Prophet from Istanbul to the Hanbali mosque in Nablus in 1914 by Haydar Tuqan: the mosque being used for special religious celebrations

²⁴ Pilgrimage to the Hanbali shrine in Nablus was primarily made by those in the town and surrounding agricultural area, together with religious scholars from further afield. See Arafat, *Nablus*, 196

²⁵ Cem Emrence, *Remapping the Ottoman Middle East: Modernity, Imperial Bureaucracy and the Islamic State* (I B Tauris, London, 2012), 2

²⁶ Emrence, *Remapping the Ottoman Middle East* 65

power of hinterland cities declined.”²⁷ This distinction is important, as it raises the question of relative, as opposed to absolute, decline for towns such as Nablus, which were clearly flourishing under the Ottomans, but not growing as fast as some of the port cities, such as Beirut.

We furthermore need to take into account that both economically and socially Nablus –or ‘little Damascus’ as it was known- was closely integrated into the ‘Greater Syria’ region, a fairly well-defined and culturally homogeneous geographical entity, bounded by the Anatolian mountains to the North, the Mediterranean to the West, and the Sinai and Arabian deserts to the South and East.²⁸ Within this region people born in different towns studied together in Ottoman state schools, mostly in Beirut and Istanbul, and some went on to work together as Ottoman civil servants, creating a network which facilitated the development of regional contacts.²⁹

Here then is a key factor in the differences between the coastal and inland towns as the Ottoman era was destroyed by World War I and the European colonial powers came to replace it in the Middle East. I would argue that for the port towns their growth path was relatively unimpeded by regime change, as they were able to continue their maritime trade via the Mediterranean. For those in the hinterland however this option had never been available as their trade routes were over land. The creation of new territorial borders between the Mandatory powers, and the inevitable restrictions on freedom of movement which they entailed, consequently had a disproportionate impact on towns such as Nablus³⁰ - where with the exception of its export trade in soap to Egypt, its economic and social orientation was very much to the territories to its north that had fallen under the control of the French.

This transition from Ottoman to Mandate rule saw a change in the dynamic between the processes of integration and fragmentation which had become apparent in the decades prior to World War I. During that period the forces of integration were represented by Ottoman attempts to tighten their control over the different regions of the Levant. By contrast the growing influence of the European colonial powers in the region served to loosen and re-orient the web of trading connections across the region.³¹ At the time, Nablus continued its role as a commercial centre for the Northern part of Palestine, serving both the smaller towns in that region and the itinerant Bedouin from the Jordan Valley. Its dominance in that role relied in part on

²⁷ Cyrus Schayegh (Ed.) *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880 – 1940* (I B Taurus & Co, London, 2015), 26

²⁸ Schayegh, *A Global Middle East* 27

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Yosef Castel, a Sephardic Jew and journalist living in Jerusalem, argued after the 1921 riots that it was important to give employment opportunities to the Arabs to reduce their hostility to the Zionists. See Neil Caplan, *Palestine Jewry and the Arab Question, 1917 – 1925* (London, Routledge, 1978), 102

³¹ For a discussion of these themes from the perspective of infrastructure and communication, see Thomas Philipp & Birgit Schaebler (Eds), *The Syrian Land: Processes of Integration and Fragmentation* (Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1998).

its geographical location, which straddled the terrain between the Jordan river to the east and the coastal plain to the west. Over time this allowed Nabulsi merchants to build up sufficient capital to develop a dominant position in different commercial sectors.³²

After World War I the forces of integration and fragmentation became more concentrated, in particular as far as Palestine was concerned. The fragmentation was reflected in the creation of new borders which had a negative impact on towns such as Nablus, with its long-established trading links beyond them. Internally by contrast the forces of integration were strengthened by the arrival of a Western imperial power which established a centralised government in a small territory only about twice the size of Lebanon. Developments along the coastal strip, accelerated by the arrival of Jewish immigrants intent on creating their national home, left Nablus feeling exposed to a new wave of competition with which it felt ill-prepared to cope at a time when its traditional trading links with the surrounding territories were growing weaker and more tenuous.

It is also possible that this feeling of being disadvantaged was reinforced by the development of the electricity grid in Palestine during the 1920s and 1930s, which started in the Jaffa / Tel Aviv area, and spread north up the coast to Haifa before it was extended to the towns in the central range of hills.³³ Jaffa was electrified in June 1923, as was Tel Aviv, both initially for the purposes of enabling street-lighting.³⁴ Once established in the towns, the availability of electricity was progressively taken up by households seeking power for their water pumps, and industry wanting a continuous source for its machinery.³⁵ During the development phase while the grid was being built out in the coastal towns, the advantages of being connected quickly became apparent to local shops and businesses which were no longer restricted to working during daylight hours.³⁶

In the absence of state subsidies however the deciding factor guiding the development of the grid was the capacity to pay for its supply by potential customers. With the exception of Jerusalem, electric power supply in Palestine was a monopoly concession granted by the Mandatory Government to the Jewish entrepreneur Pinchas Rutenberg.³⁷ Having established local generating capacity in Jaffa and Tel Aviv he then did the same in Haifa in 1925.³⁸ The attraction of the more affluent urban areas was that they contained a more profitable mix of commercial and

³² Gad Gilbar, *Economic and Social Consequences of the Opening of New Markets: the case of Nablus, 1870 – 1914*. Page 282 of Philipp & Schaebler, *The Syrian Land*

³³ On the issue of electrification, see Ronen Shamir, *Current Flow, the Electrification of Palestine* (Stanford University Press, 2013).

³⁴ Shamir, *Current Flow* 24

³⁵ Ibid, 22

³⁶ Ibid, 63

³⁷ Henry Laurens, *La Question de Palestine, Tome deuxième, 1922 – 1947 – Une Mission Sacre de Civilisation* (Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris, 2002), 120 -121

³⁸ Ibid.

residential customers whose regular payments for his services would provide the cash-flow to fund further expansion. As a result however, whether or not intended, it was by and large the Jewish immigrant communities who tended to be the beneficiaries.³⁹ In Haifa and Jaffa for example, out of more than twenty localities connected to the grid, only two, or 10%, were Arab.⁴⁰

As different towns were connected, such as Ramleh in the late 1920s⁴¹ and Nazareth in 1934,⁴² those Jewish agricultural settlements lying between them were given the opportunity to connect to the transmission wires: and unlike their Palestinian Arab neighbours their access to credit and investment capital meant that they had the wherewithal to do so.⁴³ The mid-1920s had seen a wave of Jewish immigrants from Poland keen to establish new methods of citrus cultivation, and willing and able to use electric power both for machinery and irrigation pumps.⁴⁴ By 1933 the amount of Kw.H sold for irrigation accounted for some 50% of total electricity sales,⁴⁵ due to the increasing use of electric pumps for agricultural irrigation purposes, as they were used to tap into sources of subterranean ground water.⁴⁶ As a result, in both urban and rural areas, the economic success of the Jewish national home project was closely identified with the development of the electricity grid.⁴⁷ Nablus was very much a passive observer of this development, as its town council had declined the possibility of being connected to an electricity supply generated by a Jewish entrepreneur.⁴⁸ The views of the municipality however were not necessarily representative of all the residents in the city, as in December 1934 a petition signed by a number of Nabulsis was submitted to the Assistant District Commissioner asking if the Palestine Electric Corporation could extend its services to the town.⁴⁹

The position of the town council nevertheless prevailed, and the fact that they did so suggests that there were reasons other than purely financial why electricity was by and large slower to expand into Arab communities than it was to Jewish ones. For Nablus in particular, with its reputation for opposition to Zionism,⁵⁰ the development of electric power in the coastal plain both exemplified its fears of foreign domination and its sense of having been placed in a trap: as without the power, it would be

³⁹ Shamir, *Current Flow* 72

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid, 74

⁴² Ibid, 75

⁴³ Ibid, 76

⁴⁴ Ibid, 77

⁴⁵ Ibid, 138

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ May Seikaly, *Haifa, Transformation of an Arab Society*, 87

⁴⁸ Fadwa Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, 64-65: "Electric lighting did not take over.....until the middle of 1957."

⁴⁹ 'Nablus wants electricity.' Article in *The Palestine Post* of 16 December 1934. It went on to assert that those leading the opposition to electrification were merchants fearful of losing their business in supplying the oil for the oil lamps in the town

⁵⁰ Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey* 70

harder either to increase the output from the agricultural sector in the surrounding villages,⁵¹ or to make its soap-based industrial sector more productive and competitive. The risk was of a downward spiral, whereby increasing isolation from Western technology and development led to greater relative marginalisation and weakness, which in turn nourished a growing hostility to the Mandatory Government and its policies. For Palestine as a whole, these growing differences in economic and investment capacity were creating an increasing divide between the Arab and Jewish population.⁵² It is within this context that it now becomes appropriate to examine in closer detail the effect of British rule on economic developments in Palestine during the 1920s and 1930s.

The Economics of the Inter-War Years, and the Impact of Britain's Jewish national home policy

This section considers the impact on Nablus of World War I, the post-war economic problems leading up to the Great Depression, and Jewish immigration. It also notes the (largely inadequate) response of the Mandatory authorities to the economic conditions of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the growth of Arab nationalism in the Jabal Nablus area and its hostility to Jewish land purchases.

World War I had left Palestine devastated, and on the brink of starvation. Ronald Storrs, appointed Military Governor of Jerusalem in December 1917, recalls in his memoirs how the population was close to starving, with only a few days' stocks of food: his priority being to establish immediate grain supplies from Egypt.⁵³ The historian Bernard Wasserstein paints an equally grim picture of Palestine at this time, describing it as a 'disaster zone' resulting from population loss, locust plagues, famine, and the virtual collapse of the peasant economy.⁵⁴ A report on the state of Palestine drawn up in 1925 went on at some length on the destruction brought about by the war, both of fields and livestock, and the destitute state of the population.⁵⁵

This, then, was the impoverished state of the country at the time of the arrival of the British, who arguably caused further shocks to the economic system by re-aligning what had been a regional trade orientation under the Ottomans: when the northern half of the territory, which formed part of the vilayet of Beirut, was integrated into the economies of what is today southern Lebanon, together with the Hauran region of

⁵¹ I have found no evidence of lobbying from those villages to be connected to the electricity grid: unsurprisingly, given that their lack of access to credit and investment capital meant that they would have been unable to pay for it.

⁵² Shamir, *Current Flow* 149. For a discussion of the impact of the electricity grid in Palestine on contributing to an increasing bifurcation of the Arab and Jewish economies, as well as Nabulsi opposition to it, see Frederik Meiton, 'Nation or Industry, the Non-Electrification of Nablus', *Jerusalem Quarterly* 80 (Winter 2019)

⁵³ Sir Ronald Storrs, *The Memoirs of Sir Ronald Storrs* (G P Putnam & Sons, New York, 1937), 301 - 302

⁵⁴ Bernard Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine, the Mandatory Government and the Arab-Jewish Conflict* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1991), 2

⁵⁵ Report on the State of Palestine submitted to His Excellency the High Commissioner for Palestine by the Executive Committee of the Palestine Arab Congress on 13th October 1925. 12 A copy is held at the Institut Du Monde Arabe in Paris.

Syria.⁵⁶ The southern half of Palestine by contrast, and its commercial centres in Gaza and Jaffa, was more oriented towards trade with Egypt and maritime exports to Europe. Together with this re-alignment, caused by the creation of separate British and French mandated territories carved out of the former Ottoman Empire, came the impact of the Great Depression and the powerful deflationary forces this unleashed, especially in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This led Palestinian farmers to make “increased demands for protection as world food prices tumbled.”⁵⁷ The Mandatory authorities had some sympathy with these demands, granting import tariffs on a range of crops, including barley, olives, rye, tomatoes, and wheat.⁵⁸

During the 1930s, the accelerating rate of Jewish immigration into Palestine caused by the rise of Nazism in Europe at least partially off-set the effects of the Great Depression. Between 1932 and 1936 Jewish immigration grew from a little under 9,000 to just under 30,000. That influx of skilled labour and the capital they brought with them triggered an economic boom bringing a 91% increase in revenue, a 61% rise in industrial production, a 130% growth in imports and 77% in exports, together with a 335% increase in electricity consumption.⁵⁹ However, the economic growth caused by immigration gave rise to a much greater increase in imports than it did in exports, especially as most of Palestine’s trade was in agricultural produce, and production costs in the Hauran, which produced similar crops to those cultivated in the Jabal Nablus area, tended to be lower than they were in Palestine.⁶⁰ The negative impact this was having on Palestinian farmers was acknowledged by the Mandatory authorities, who had permitted duty-free trade in agricultural produce between Palestine and Syria under the 1929 Customs Agreement. “In 1935 however a quota limit was agreed of 5,000 tons of hard wheat – i.e. the same type as grown in Palestine – per year from Syria and Lebanon.”⁶¹

The Government in Egypt was nevertheless generally more protectionist in its approach to agricultural production than the authorities in Palestine, who were guided by the British commitments to free trade which formed the basis of the League of Nations’ ‘Open Door’ policy for mandated territories.⁶² This difference had a significant impact on the levels of soap exports to Egypt, which was the largest export market for the olive-oil based soap manufactured in Nablus: and had enjoyed annual sales of up to £P 240,000 falling to £P 110,000 in 1931 and then £P 83,000

⁵⁶ See Roza El Eini, ‘Trade Agreements and the Continuation of Tariff Protection Policy in Mandate Palestine in the 1930s.’ *Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 34, No.1 (January 1998) 164

⁵⁷ El Eini, *Trade Agreements* 167

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ See Palestine Government Office of Statistics estimates that the cost of living in Syria in 1936 was 25% lower than that in Palestine. Palestine imported about four times more than it exported to Syria, and the Nablus Chamber of Commerce requested protection from Syrian imports for cereals, honey, fruit and vegetables: El Eini, *Trade Agreements* 177

⁶¹ El Eini, *Trade Agreements* 171

⁶² Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 18 & 233

in 1932 as the result of the imposition of Egyptian import duties.⁶³ This was unsurprisingly a bone of contention for the Nabulsi, for whom soap production was their most important industry. In September 1933 Mayor Tuqan wrote to the Mandatory authorities complaining that their business was in steady decline “because the Egyptian Government imposed high customs duty on soap.”⁶⁴ He went on to complain that:

“The importation of acid oils free of customs duty for soap manufacturing caused competition to the soap manufactured of olive oil in Nablus and as a result of this competition the soap manufacturers as well as the *fellah*, owner of the olive oil crop, were badly affected because the soap made of acid oil is being sold at a less price.”⁶⁵

Unfortunately for the Nabulsi the acid oils remained free of customs duty, and it was not until a trade agreement negotiated in 1936 that these tariffs were reduced.⁶⁶

As noted above, Jewish immigration into Palestine increased the demand for imported goods, although the immigrants themselves were mainly concentrated along the coastal strip from Jaffa, through Tulkarm to Haifa, and then North-East through Nazareth to Lake Tiberias: in the form of an inverted ‘L’ on the map.⁶⁷ Of importance to any consideration of its impact on the Jabal Nablus area was the fact that there was an almost complete absence of Jewish immigration and / or land purchase in that part of the country. As late as 1945, in a total land area of 1.5 Million dunums, Jewish immigrants owned only 15: by far the smallest number in any part of Palestine. Elsewhere they owned either tens or hundreds of thousands of dunums.⁶⁸ Whatever their impact on the Nabulsi, it was not that of direct physical proximity.

Opposition to Jewish immigration was not however based purely on economic considerations, but also included the clash of nationalist aspirations which had developed in both communities by the time of the mandate. In 1891 the Hebrew intellectual AhadHa’am had written:

‘we are accustomed to think of the Arabs as uncultured desert dwellers, a people similar to an ass, who see nothing and perceive nothing of what is going on around them. This is a grave error. The Arab, like all the Semites, is a clever and cunning man.....the Arabs, particularly the town dwellers, see and understand very well what we are doing and what we are aiming at, but they are quiet and pretend to know nothing, because they do not consider themselves threatened by our actions so far.....but if there should come a

⁶³ El Eini, *Trade Agreements* 172

⁶⁴ Memorandum by the Municipality of Nablus re-general improvements to the economic conditions in Nablus town, 01 September 1933, Israel State Archives

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ See page 53 below

⁶⁷ Dr. Salman Abu-Sitta, *Atlas of Palestine 1917 – 1966* (Palestine Land Society, London, 2010), 39, Map 2.9

⁶⁸ Abu-Sitta, *Atlas* 29, Table 2.9 on population composition and land ownership

day when the developing Jewish community begins to press upon the Arabs, they will not give up their positions easily.’⁶⁹

Prior to World War I the growth of Arab nationalism was developing in tandem with that of Turkish nationalism following the ‘Young Turk’ revolution of 1908, the same year that marked the development of organised land purchase and settlement activity by the Zionist movement.⁷⁰ As a result, in July 1913 Arab leaders tried to organise a convention in Nablus which would have brought together representatives of all the towns in Palestine, with a view to developing a co-ordinated opposition against the Zionist movement and the sale of land to Jews. In the event, the attempt failed and the convention never took place, but from that time on the transfer of land to Jews became one of the main issues in the mobilisation of the Arab national movement against Zionism and Jewish settlement.⁷¹ Events such as these indicate that the political culture of opposition to Jewish land purchases was well developed before both the Balfour declaration and its subsequent manifestation in the Jewish National Home project of the Mandatory government. The growth and extent of that opposition in the 1920s and 1930s can consequently be explained by the fact that it had already generated a certain momentum prior to the arrival of the British.

Specifically in the case of anti-immigrant sentiment in Nablus, it is possible that it was in part also aroused by local knowledge of some of the more contested cases of land sales for the purpose of Jewish settlement. One of these was the so-called Wadi Hawarith affair, involving land sales “in the area between the sea and the slopes of the Samarian hills.”⁷² As a public sale, this was advertised in the towns of Nablus and Tulkarm, and in May 1929 the Jewish National Fund purchased 30,718 dunams. An argument subsequently developed over how much land the seller actually owned himself, and what proportion of it could rightfully be claimed by those Arab farmers who had cultivated and improved it.⁷³ The lawyer representing the sellers in this dispute was Awni Abdul Hadi, a member of one of the leading families of land-owners in the Jabal Nablus area. In November 1929 the Nablus District Court issued a judgement in favour of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) granting it vacant possession of the land.⁷⁴ The JNF subsequently brought suit against the Palestinian farmers who were still cultivating there, and the case was heard at the Nablus District Court on 30 November 1929: which found in favour of the JNF.⁷⁵ An

⁶⁹ Quoted in Arie Avneri, *The Claim of Dispossession, Jewish Land Settlement and the Arabs, 1878 – 1948* (Hidekel Press, Tel Aviv, 1982), 110. Avneri was a member of the research staff of the Tabenkin Institute: <http://www.communa.org.il/icsa/index.php/the-kibbutz-institutes/yad-tabenkin> He went on to quote Naguib Azouri in ‘*Le Reveil de la Nation Arabe dans l’Asie Turque*’, Paris, 1905, who stated (page 5) that the growth of Arab and Jewish nationalism was developing simultaneously, and that they were bound to clash in Palestine.

⁷⁰ Avneri, *The Claim of Dispossession* 111

⁷¹ Ibid, 114

⁷² Ibid, 136

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Ibid, 138

⁷⁵ Ibid, 139

evacuation order subsequently issued in August 1930.⁷⁶ These court cases, and the involvement of the Abdul Hadi family in them, together with the fact that they dealt with the sensitive issue of the expulsion of tenant farmers from land purchased by the JNF must have had a significant impact on anti-Zionist sentiment in the Jabal Nablus area. As far as the *fellahin* were concerned, such sentiment may have been aggravated by the quiet but continual process of fragmentation and consolidation of Arab holdings which was occurring: on the one hand, lands were divided among heirs, while on the other, parcels sold because they were too small to support a household were purchased by other landowners who consequently increased the size of their own holdings.⁷⁷

The process of fragmentation was especially apparent in the central 'spine' of Palestine running up the middle of the country where the hilly terrain militated against the development of large-scale agricultural development. In the course of posing a question on the amount of land available in Palestine for cultivation by Jewish settlers, Lord Raglan made the observation that "considerable areas of the higher land, notably the districts of Nablus and Hebron, are closed to Jewish settlers."⁷⁸ It would be more accurate to observe that they were disinterested in settlement because of the nature of the terrain. The Jabal Nablus is located fairly close to the centre of these hilly uplands, where some have argued that the majority of cultivators never really improved their standard of living during the Mandate years, given the unequal distribution of holdings, their continued dependence on cereals, and the small size of their plots.⁷⁹

Other sources of dissatisfaction appear to have risen from Nablus's connections with Transjordan, where it purchased some of the ingredients used in soap production, notably in the area of al-Salt.⁸⁰ There was strong opposition in Nablus to the Zionist practice of giving money to Arabs in Transjordan to purchase land there which was then leased to the donor on favourable terms:⁸¹ a variation on the contemporary business practice of 'sale and leaseback'. The Nablus area was a centre of opposition to this practice, voiced in particular by Istiqlal party members there. According to British Government officials AkramZouaiter⁸² was able to generate opposition to the lease option during Friday prayers in Nablus in January and

⁷⁶ See the CO 733/190 file series in TNA for correspondence and papers relating to this case

⁷⁷ Charles Kamen, *Little Common Ground, Arab Agriculture and Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1920 – 1948* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 191

⁷⁸ *Hansard, Lords*, 20th May 1925, col. 419

⁷⁹ Kamen, *Little Common Ground* 256

⁸⁰ For a discussion on how Nabulsi merchants developed a local presence in the town of al-Salt after the Ottomans had established effective controls over the territory of what subsequently became Trans-Jordan, see Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire*. Transjordan 1850 – 1921 (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 95-98

⁸¹ Kenneth Stein, *The Land Question in Palestine, 1917 – 1939* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1984), 197

⁸² A founding member of the Istiqlal party. For a full biography, see his entry in the 'personalities' section of PASSIA: <http://passia.org/personalities/851>

February 1933 within three weeks of their being signed.⁸³ The sensitivity around land sales arose not only from hostility to Jewish immigrants who were unlikely to employ Arab labour once they had taken possession, but also because land ownership was symbolic of the privileges enjoyed by the Arab elite. Feeling themselves threatened by the arrival of the British, together with the growth of Jewish settlements, they were tempted to acquire capital via land sales as a way of compensating for their declining socio-economic status.⁸⁴

The negative impact of land sales on those who worked it without the protection of title to ownership was not of course unique to Palestine. On a broader perspective, global population was rising throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and Christopher Bayly has argued that pressures caused by population growth had an effect on depressing farmers' living standards. Paradoxically, the growth in their numbers had the effect of reducing their capacity to negotiate better working conditions given that there were always others available to replace them.⁸⁵ Amos Nadan has argued that specifically in Palestine the amount of available land was declining on a per capita basis as the population rose: and that this was not offset by comparable increases in either productivity or the numbers of livestock used. The reforms initiated by the Mandatory Government in terms of providing credit and services to improve agricultural yields were insufficient to effectively address these problems, which were not to be reduced until the war-time demands of the 1940s resulted in a rise in the prices of agricultural produce.⁸⁶

Some of these problems might have been at least partially mitigated if there had been a more effective process of knowledge transfer between the well-capitalised and intensive farms established by the Jewish immigrants, and the more traditional agricultural methods of the Palestinian Arabs. This however was noticeable by its absence. By contrast, the German Templar religious community which settled in the area of today's Tel Aviv, "was admired by the population at large and many of their agricultural and industrial innovations were adopted by others. For decades the Templars were a major force in the development of the Holy Land."⁸⁷ Unlike the Zionists they did not get involved in politics, and believed strongly in the separation of church and state. They were ready to employ Arab labour, albeit in the more junior and unskilled positions, many of whom "formed life-long relationships with the Templars, and were loyal and trustworthy."⁸⁸ Unfortunately this was not what characterised the relationship between most Palestinian Arabs and the Jewish

⁸³ FO 371/16926, TNA

⁸⁴ Stein, *The Land Question*, 69

⁸⁵ C A Bayly. *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780 – 1914, Global Connections and Comparisons* (Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2004), 411 - 412

⁸⁶ Rory Miller (Ed.) *Britain, Palestine and Empire: the Mandate Years* (Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, 2010), Chapter 5. Amos Nadan, No Holy Statistics in the Holy Land: The Fallacy of Growth in the Palestine Rural Economy, 1920s – 1930s, 101

⁸⁷ Helmut Glenk, *From Desert Sands to Golden Oranges: The History of the German Templer Settlement of Sarona in Palestine, 1871 -1947* (Trafford Publishing, Victoria, Canada, 2005), 3.

⁸⁸ Glenk, *From Desert Sands*, 159

immigrants, and the problems created by the determination of the latter to be self-sufficient, and not to integrate with the local economy was one of the main issues confronting the Mandatory Government. When considering the impact of Jewish immigration in Palestine the Royal Commission established to investigate the causes of the 1936 revolt noted that:

“the new immigrants brought with them a new idea. They were not going to merge themselves in the life of Palestine as they found it. They were going to make a distinct life of their own, to build up a Jewish society, and to make it the vehicle of a revival of Jewish culture. This new idea was known as Zionism.”⁸⁹

The work of that Commission built on earlier enquiries completed in 1930 following the 1929 riots: of which the Hope-Simpson report was orientated towards the facilitation of Jewish land settlement, and the French report concerned with mitigating the effects of dispossession, a great fear of the Mandatory authorities at the time. The Commission itself was of the view that in relation to the hill districts – such as Nablus- there was insufficient land, given current agricultural practices, to meet the needs of all the people living there. Officials at the time nevertheless worried that the *fellahin* would be tempted to sell what little land they had so as to alleviate their burden of debt.⁹⁰ Specifically in the hill districts however it should be added that due to the typically small size of the plots, such sales were more likely to have been made to Arab *effendi* than to Jewish immigrants. That said, it is revealing that claims for compensation from displaced Arabs which were accepted by the authorities as genuine came from Beisan, Haifa, Jaffa, Nazareth and Tulkarm, but none from Nablus.⁹¹ This absence both of claims for dispossession and of Jewish immigration in the Jabal Nablus area leads one to conclude that other causes must be identified for the problems of the people living and working there.

Rural and Urban Population Growth.

This section considers the evidence from censuses of Palestine that Nablus had a lower rate of population growth both in relation to the territory as a whole and in particular with respect to the rapidly developing coastal towns. There is furthermore evidence of migration from the Jabal Nablus to areas offering better employment opportunities, and I conclude that the primary cause of that migration was the depressed state of the agricultural sector. It is helpful to start the analysis with a comparison of population estimates in the years immediately preceding and following World War I.

⁸⁹ Palestine Royal Commission Report, July 1937, 13, paragraph 26. A copy is held at the British Library

⁹⁰Ibid, 263, paragraph 139

⁹¹ Letter of 08 October 1932 from High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies in CO 733/214/9, TNA

The Ottoman estimates for the Kaza (district) of Nablus gave its population as 76,794 in the years immediately prior to World War I.⁹² This declined by over 6% during the course of the war, when “the Ottoman Sanjak of Nablus seems to have suffered greater loss of population than other areas of Palestine, but all regions were affected.”⁹³ The Ottoman Kaza roughly approximates to the Nablus district of the mandate administration, so the pre- and post-war population figures can be used for comparative purposes. By the time of the British census of 1922, the population of the Nablus sub-district was 56,695⁹⁴ growing to 68,706 by the 1931 census.⁹⁵

This relatively low growth rate in the Nablus area differed markedly from that of the leading towns in Palestine, where Haifa, Jaffa, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv experienced rapid expansion. In Gaza, Hebron, and Nablus by contrast the growth was very much smaller.⁹⁶ As the mandate progressed, the rapid growth and development of the ‘big four’ Palestinian towns of Haifa, Jaffa, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv would have created the impression for the citizens of Nablus that their part of the country was stagnating and falling behind.⁹⁷ That relative decline would have contributed to a feeling of inferiority⁹⁸ which might go some way to explaining why the town was such a centre of opposition to the mandate and Jewish immigration, despite the fact that it was located in a region which experienced very little in the way of such immigration per se. At the level of the town itself, the lack of significant population growth –which would normally have been expected in the years following a war, especially of males- was even more apparent, with 15,947 recorded in 1922, rising to 17,189 in 1931.⁹⁹ That lack of growth, combined with the fact that there were somewhat less men than women recorded in these figures could be indicative of internal migration from this part of the country to other areas where high rates of population growth and the concomitant demand for goods and services were likely to have created

⁹² Justin Mc.Carthy, *The Population of Palestine: Population History and Statistics of the Late Ottoman Period and the Mandate* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1990), 53. Table A1-15. Population of Acre and Nablus Sanjaks, 1911-13

⁹³ Mc.Carthy, *The Population of Palestine* 27

⁹⁴ Ibid, 70, Table A3-9, Population by Sex, Religion, and Sub-district, 1922

⁹⁵ Ibid, 76, Table A3-13 Population by Religion, Sex, and Subdistrict, 1931

⁹⁶ Ibid, xxv Chart 3. The Growth of Population in Selected Cities, 1895 - 1944

⁹⁷ Proponents of the Zionist enterprise such as James de Rothschild M.P. were quick to ascribe the relative economic decline of such towns as Nablus and Hebron to the absence of any Jewish entrepreneurs developing businesses there. See *Hansard, Commons*, 19th June 1936, Volume 313, Col. 1378

⁹⁸ Sahar Khalifeh, *Of Noble Origins*. 30: “What was wrong with Nablus ? It was trash now ? Or was it because Nablus had gas lamps and Haifa had bulbs and electric lighting ? Was it because Nablus did not have a port and Haifa overlooked the sea ? Was it because Nablus had no foreigners, no Jews, and no dancers ?”

⁹⁹ Mc.Carthy, *The Population of Palestine* 82. Table A3-17. Inhabitants of Municipalities, 1922: and 159, Table A8-6, the same for 1931. The comparable figures for other towns are as follows:

Jerusalem: 62,578 to 90,503

Jaffa: 47,709 to 51,908

Haifa: 24,634 to 50,403

Gaza: 17,480 to 17,046

Tel Aviv: 1,000 to 46,101 (The 1922 entry of 1,000 is a notional figure taken from Chart 3 on page xxv)

employment opportunities.¹⁰⁰ We do know for example that some men moved from Nablus to work in Haifa.¹⁰¹ The background to this occurrence apparently originated in complaints to the British authorities from Jewish immigrants about the use of cheap Arab labour from the Hauran in Haifa docks. The Mandatory authorities then realised that by replacing the Hauranis with local Palestinian labour they could contribute towards reducing the levels of unemployment in Palestinian villages. The district administration in Nablus was consequently asked to send 200 workers from that area to Haifa in May 1937. In the event 1,200 volunteers came forward, but only 200 were employed.¹⁰² The Palestine Post described the general problem of unemployment in Nablus quite starkly,¹⁰³ noting that young workmen had left seeking employment in Jaffa and Haifa, returning home at the time of the general strike in 1936. By the end of that year, their savings had run out, and “they found themselves a burden on their town, where they could not find work.”¹⁰⁴

Notwithstanding such examples of migration to growing urban areas in search of work, Palestine nevertheless remained overwhelmingly rural in nature. In the Jabal Nablus region itself, the proportion was 72% rural in 1922, rising somewhat to 75% (the opposite to what might have been expected) in 1931.¹⁰⁵ The comparable figures for the country as a whole were 65% and 63%.¹⁰⁶ That little had changed in the ratio of rural to urban population as a whole is indicative that growth was concentrated in the small number of towns which were the primary hosts of Jewish immigration, offset by those other towns where the population growth was only marginal (e.g. Nablus) or declining (e.g. Gaza). The impact of those experiencing rapid growth (e.g. Haifa, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv) must have been greater on mandate Palestine than in Western Europe where the combined processes of industrialisation and urbanisation resulted in a more general movement of people from rural to urban areas across national territories.

Rural - urban migration, whether part of a general phenomenon, or more specific to particular areas, was not of course unique to Palestine. In Algeria at the turn of the twentieth century many of the inhabitants of the forested and rural areas migrated to coastal towns such as Bone (Annaba) in search of work. The difference there however was that the dearth of employment opportunities in those areas was caused

¹⁰⁰ Barnett Janner M.P., a supporter of the Zionist movement, attributed the lower levels of population increase in towns such as Hebron and Nablus, when compared with the coastal cities, as a result of the absence of “Jewish development” in that part of Palestine. See *Hansard, Commons*, 11th May 1934, volume 289, col. 1400

¹⁰¹ G Mansur, *The Arab Worker under Mandate Palestine* (Jerusalem, 1936), 11

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ ‘Business in Nablus at a Halt’, *Palestine Post*, 3rd October 1937

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Mc.Carthy, *The Population of Palestine* 155, Table A8.1 Urban and Rural Population by Sub-district, 1922 – 1931

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

primarily by encroachment upon them by the French colonial authorities,¹⁰⁷ and not so much by the meteorological and environmental problems or depressed commodity prices which were the primary drivers in mandate Palestine.

The geography and terrain of the Jabal Nablus area appear to have been one reason why the agricultural sector there would have difficulty in absorbing even small population increases. The town itself occupies a narrow valley open to the east and west, but closed on the other sides by steep mountains. Most of the slopes surrounding the town are barely cultivable. Their slopes and most of the higher uplands are very rocky with thin soils.¹⁰⁸ It should be noted however that by contrast the valley to the East of Nablus is very fertile, with many springs.¹⁰⁹ It is also likely that the 1927 earthquake, “that devastated mainly Nablus and other major Arab settlements in its vicinity”¹¹⁰ provided further impetus to seek opportunities elsewhere, notwithstanding the short-term demand that would have produced for building reconstruction. David Grossman was of the view that the aggregate impact of the various set-backs which impacted the rural sector in general and the Jabal Nablus area in particular in the late 1920s and early 1930s was to encourage the *fellahin* “to leave the village and join the workforce of unskilled labourers in the urban areas.”¹¹¹ From what we can deduce from the available population statistics, this is a plausible hypothesis: and the more so when we take into consideration his observation that “the population (of Palestine) rose from 1922–1946 by 114% while the farm-land.....increased by only 40%.”¹¹²

The most detailed source document available on population issues is the 1931 census,¹¹³ taken on 18th November of that year. The returns for Nablus show 16,483 Moslems, 533 Christians, 160 Samaritans, and 6 Jews.¹¹⁴ For the Jabal Nablus area as a whole, which included the town, its suburbs, and 98 surrounding villages, the corresponding figures were 67,314 Moslems, 1,214 Christians, and 10 Jews.¹¹⁵ Taken together, this gives an urban population of 17,189 together with a rural one of 51,301.¹¹⁶ This approximates to a little under 7% of the total population of Palestine at that time of 1,035,821.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁷ David Prochaska, *Fire on the Mountain: Resisting Colonialism in Algeria*, 249. This is chapter 10 of *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*, edited by Donald Crummey (James Currey, London, 1986).

¹⁰⁸ David Grossman, *Rural Arab Demography and Early Jewish Settlement in Palestine* (Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, 2011), 139

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 164

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Ibid, 177

¹¹³ *Census of Palestine 1931, Population of Villages, Towns, and Administrative Areas* by E. Mills, Superintendent of Census (Jerusalem, 1932). Copy held at the British Library.

¹¹⁴ *Census of Palestine* 63

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 66

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 2, Table 1 of Volume II of the census.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 2 (of Volume I)

As it recovered after the ravages of WWI, the population of Palestine grew steadily between the 1922 and 1931 censuses, but the growth was uneven between towns and districts. That for Nablus, at 22%, is the second smallest across the country as a whole, ahead only of Bethlehem at 18%. At the other end of the scale was Jaffa at 117%.¹¹⁸ Nablus was clearly a town that, relatively speaking, was slipping behind. A little over a quarter of its population was literate, and of those who were, most were men.¹¹⁹ Of those who were earning, 90% were men.¹²⁰ These figures give credence to the town's reputation as conservative and patriarchal.¹²¹ Clearly the authors of the census's report, whose structure appears to have been based on earlier work carried out in India,¹²² considered Nablus to be a bit of an oddity:

“only four towns have any likeness to urban centres as these are understood in Europe. These towns are Jerusalem, Jaffa, Tel Aviv and Haifa. Of the remainder, Nablus has a special claim to consideration on account of its parochial character in history, some of the social consequences of which are worth investigation.”¹²³

Of interest in relation to the issue of internal migration towards these ‘big four’ towns (as opposed to Jewish immigration from abroad) is the conclusion reached by the censurers that “the age distributions in the four towns and in Nablus in relation to the general age distribution for the whole country are significant.....they may generally be taken to indicate an immigration into the four towns of males between the ages of

¹¹⁸*Census of Palestine* Volume II, part 2, Table III: Whole of Palestine: + 44% (1,035,821 from 757,182)

Gaza.....+31% (This and succeeding entries are all Sub-Districts)

Beersheba.....+32%

Jaffa.....+117%

Ramle.....+38%

Hebron.....+ 23%

Bethlehem.....+ 18%

Jerusalem.....+ 45%

Jericho.....+ 181% (from a very low base, so not illustrative for comparative purposes)

Ramallah.....+ 30%

Tulkarm.....+ 33%

Nablus.....+ 22%

Jenin.....+ 24%

Nazareth.....+ 26%

Beisan.....+ 42%

Tiberias.....+ 30%

Haifa.....+ 69 %

Acre.....+ 27 %

¹¹⁹ Ibid, Table IX (A). 4,823 are given as literate, and 12,366 as illiterate. Of the literate, 3,529 males and 1,294 females. Of the illiterate, 4,958 males and 7,408 females

¹²⁰ Ibid, Table XVI, 315

¹²¹ Fadwa Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey* 13, (speaking of the time of her birth) “Father would not speak to mother for several days. In his view, wealth and sons were life's status symbols.”

¹²² *Census of Palestine* 1931 Volume I, part I, 6. The author acknowledges his debt of gratitude to Sir Edward Gait for his help and advice: he “was census Commissioner for India in 1911.”

¹²³ Ibid, 25, para 20.

15 and 40 years, *and an emigration from Nablus.*"¹²⁴ On the supposition that the main cause of migration in peace time is a quest for new employment opportunities,¹²⁵ they conclude that "the emigration from Nablus implies a comparative degeneration in the economic life of that town."¹²⁶ That the source problem can be attributed to the woes befalling the agricultural sector is illustrated by the fact that the dominant economic activity in the country was agricultural production, providing employment for more than half the population. This compared with 8.5% for England and Wales in 1921.¹²⁷ In mandate Palestine, those lacking employment opportunities in rural areas had few options other than to seek work in those towns which were growing.¹²⁸

This discussion of demographic issues in relation to the Jabal Nablus area supports the hypothesis that the early years of the British Mandate saw the gradual development of separate Jewish and Arab economies in Palestine.¹²⁹ It is however necessary to go further, as at the same time there was clearly developing another division, that between the rural and urban economies, or more specifically the urban economies of the most rapidly growing large towns in Palestine: Haifa, Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv. These of course were the towns with the largest concentrations of Jewish immigrants, so it is unsurprising that Palestinian hostility to them derived in part from the perspective of those who felt excluded from the more rapid development experienced in the capital and the coastal plain. The Mandatory authorities were not unaware of the tensions caused by this unequal rate of development across the territory, so it is worth considering their response.

The Rural Sector and Government Agricultural and Land Policy in Palestine

The purpose of this section is to briefly sketch the conditions in the rural sector during the 1920s and early 1930s so as to give a better feel for the problems that needed to be resolved. It notes the existence of otherwise unrelated phenomena which combined to produce a crisis for the rural community. These included erratic

¹²⁴ *Census of Palestine* 28, para 25. Emphasis added in the quote above.

¹²⁵ Supporters of the Zionist project such as Lord Snell had no doubt that the Arab population increased "in precisely those quarters of Palestine where the Jewish enterprise is most advanced." See *Hansard, Lords*, 27th June 1934, Volume 93, Col.178

¹²⁶ *Census of Palestine* 29. The authors go on to observe (page 30) that "there may have been some progress there, but the general development appears to be at a low rate compared with that in the four towns. The chances of absorption into economic life may be therefore smaller, and the young men are attracted towards localities where new activities give earnest of a way of life more prosperous, or more rapidly prosperous, than that before them in Nablus." Pages 50 and 51 set out the argument in support of migration from the 'central range' area –running North from Jerusalem to Jenin- as based on the fact that population growth was lower there than elsewhere in Palestine across the 1922 – 1931 period

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 283

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 284. It is telling in respect of the political vicissitudes at the time that "agriculture supports 64% of the Moslem population, 15% of the Jews, and nearly 18% of the Christians. The Moslem community is therefore the agricultural community, the proportion engaged in agriculture in the other two communities being far below the general proportion for the country as a whole." So agrarian Moslems were losing out (in their eyes) to urban Jewish immigrants

¹²⁹ See Barbara Smith, *The Roots of Separatism*, for which this is the central hypothesis

annual rainfall: the destruction of crops by locusts and mice: and a fall in market prices caused by the development of the Great Depression which contributed to increased import penetration of such commodities as wheat and barley.

The conditions in the rural sector are well documented in the annual reports of the Government of Palestine's Department of Agriculture, Forests, and Fisheries.¹³⁰ That for 1925 notes "the growing dependence of an agricultural territory on imported food supplies and, particularly, on foreign wheat, wheat-flour, barley and slaughter stock."¹³¹ In cash terms this meant that in 1924 "the value of imported wheat, barley and flour reached the figure of £E 300,000, while during the year 1925 no less than £E 550,000 has been spent on purchases abroad of the three commodities in question."¹³²

At least part of the territory's incapacity for self-sufficiency in food can be attributed to adverse meteorological and environmental conditions. The 1925 report observes that "bee-keeping has suffered a temporary set-back as a result of drought and a very poor flow of nectar. The abnormal frosts recorded early in the year also had a marked effect on honey plants."¹³³ By contrast, "the plague of field mice was somewhat abated by the cold winter of 1924-5 and the rodents were less in evidence than usual."¹³⁴ But most noticeable in the period covered by this report was the variability in rainfall levels, which together with temperatures would have been the most significant factors determining levels of agricultural produce in those parts of the country lacking in irrigation systems. The Jabal Nablus falls into this category, and records from the Nablus weather-station indicate that annual rainfall was far from constant. With an average of 526 mls, the actual precipitation was as follows:¹³⁵

1922 / 23 = 622

1923 / 24 = 585

1924 / 25 = 371

1925 / 26 = 544¹³⁶

1926 / 27 = 875¹³⁷

1927 / 28 = 454

1928 / 29 = 1,024

¹³⁰ Those from 1925 – 1932 have been bound in a single volume held at the British Library

¹³¹ *Government of Palestine Agriculture Report 1925*, British Library

¹³² *Ibid*

¹³³ *Ibid*, 14

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 15

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 61, Appendix LVII, Comparative statement of rainfall for the seasons (June-May) 1920/21 – 1924/25

¹³⁶ Taken from Appendix LI on page 65 of the *Government of Palestine Agriculture Report 1926*, British Library

¹³⁷ Figures for 1926/27 – 1929/30 taken from appendix 20 on page 101 of the *Government of Palestine Agriculture report 1927 – 1930*, British Library

1929 / 30 = 701

From the 1926 report we learn that “abnormally high temperatures and dessicating windsduring the critical stages of development in Spring limited the ultimate returns.”¹³⁸ The report goes on to compare the differences between the immigrant Jewish farmer using capital intensive methods to grow high value added crops –such as citrus fruit- and the Palestinian Arab *fellah* using a minimum of equipment and capital expenditure to produce basic commodity crops. “It is consequently held that the near future will see distinct systems of farming having reference to the peculiar economic and social conditions of the two communities.”¹³⁹

A composite report was produced for the years 1927 – 1930, of which the opening paragraph mentioned “a catastrophic collapse of values”, presumably reflecting the impact of the Great Depression. It also includes a section¹⁴⁰ on the field-mouse campaign of 1930 – 1931 where “the damage to crops by field mice in 1930, especially in Northern Palestine was of such magnitude as to necessitate a co-ordinated, large-scale campaign by the Dept. of Agriculture against the pest.” Field-mice however were not the only problem, as anti-locust campaigns were organised in 1928, 1929, and 1930.¹⁴¹

Finally the 1931 – 1932 report noted that “agricultural production.....has been severely handicapped by the poor rainfall of the last two seasons.”¹⁴² Mention is also made of the effects of imports of Cyprus potatoes swamping the market at “unremunerative prices” at the same time of the year that the home-grown crops in Palestine are being lifted.¹⁴³ The supply of olive oil, of critical importance for Nablus soap producers, must have been constrained by the below average rainfall that year, contributing to very low yields in the olive crop, which fell to around 20% of what would normally be expected. Further problems were caused by the partial failure of village water supplies in the hills and foot-hills.¹⁴⁴ Adding to the sense of pessimism informing this report, was “an unrelieved drought in November and December which extinguished the hopes engendered by the early rains. Large areas of winter crops died or failed to germinate.”¹⁴⁵

Taking these reports and the tables in their associated appendixes as a group, it is reasonable to conclude that commodity prices and meteorological factors had a far greater economic impact on the agricultural communities of the central highlands than Jewish immigration, which was mainly concentrated along the coastal strip. The vagaries of the climate, combined with such problems as locust and mice

¹³⁸Government of Palestine Agriculture Report 1926, 1, British Library

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰Government of Palestine Agriculture Report 1927 – 1930, 9, British Library

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 77

¹⁴²Government of Palestine Agriculture Report 1931 – 1932, para 3, British Library

¹⁴³Ibid, 22

¹⁴⁴Ibid, 17

¹⁴⁵Ibid

infestations, ensured that there was never a sufficiently long period of good annual crops to enable the *fellahin* to clear their debts. Their situation was further exacerbated by cheap imports of food staples from abroad at a time of declining world prices. This combination of factors indicates the importance of taking environmental factors into account when attempting to analyse the range of forces impacting on Mandate Palestine. As John McNeill has observed, extreme and unfavourable weather conditions, especially on agrarian societies, can bring “severe consequences for harvests, prices, and mortality.”¹⁴⁶ To the impact of the arrival of the British and their Jewish National Home policy must be added the environmental destruction caused by the ravages of World War I and the destructive impact of a capricious climate on the agricultural production on which Jabal Nablus ultimately depended. That impact, I would argue, was in fact exacerbated by the Mandatory Government’s relative neglect of the area in relation to the naturally more fertile coastal strip at a time when governments generally lacked the resources to significantly mitigate the potentially destructive impact of the natural environment.

To make matters worse for the Nabulsis, two agricultural economies were developing as the more self-contained Jewish settlements in the plains produced higher added-value products for the urban and export markets. The importance of imports of such basic staples as barley, flour, and wheat across the period 1923 – 1932 indicates that the native farmers were not reaping the benefits of rising demand due to urban growth in Palestine.¹⁴⁷ The estimates for 1927 – 1932 of crop production in barley, olives, and wheat furthermore indicate stagnant or declining local production.¹⁴⁸ The combination of these factors must have had a significantly onerous impact on the Jabal Nablus area, whose population –possibly

¹⁴⁶ J R McNeill, ‘Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History’. *History and Theory, Studies in the Philosophy of History*, Vol.42, Issue 4, December 2003, 10

¹⁴⁷ *Government of Palestine Agriculture Report 1931 – 1932*, British Library. Appendix 4: Imports and Exports of Flour, Wheat, and Barley (in metric tons):

Imports: 1923 1924 1925 1926 1927 1928 1929 1930 1931 1932

Wheat: 4,056 5,974 11,209 6,094 805 4,698 17,731 2,207 13,650 27,115

Barley: 10,050 2,204 6,681 5,633 - 14 1,677 17 11,041 13,903

Flour: 9,977 12,886 16,934 20,136 18,086 20,296 31,097 15,936 15,051 22,053

For flour and wheat in this period, imports substantially exceeded exports. For barley, imports exceeded exports, but only by a relatively small margin.

¹⁴⁸ *Government of Palestine Agriculture Report 1931 – 1932*, British Library. Appendix 1: **Estimated Production of Crops for the Years 1927 – 1932 (in metric tons)**

<u>1927</u>	<u>1928</u>	<u>1929</u>	<u>1930</u>	<u>1931</u>	<u>1932</u>
Wheat	99,406	65,288	87,873	87,339	79,650 51,073
Barley	44,524	46,697	46,240	60,071	41,200 24,300
Olives	20,551	2,635	15,500	2,993	33,906 6,559

unsurprisingly- was not growing as fast as other parts of Palestine. How the mandatory authorities responded to this set of issues it is now appropriate to address.

The Approach of the Mandatory Government towards the Jabal Nablus and the Nabulsi response

This section considers British priorities in relation to the rural sector, and the way these reflected fears concerning the development of a landless labouring population which might drift into the towns in search of work and become politically radicalised in the process. As a result, the emphasis appeared to have been more on improving the conditions of land tenure and minimising the possibility of evictions, rather than increasing agricultural yields per se. Politically active Nabulsis by contrast voiced their concerns about the challenges facing farmers in the central hill districts, where uneven land surfaces inhibited the adoption of mechanised farming practices and the indebted state of the *fellahin* meant that they were unable to invest in more intensive cultivation methods.

There is little doubt from the Palestine Royal Commission Report of July 1937, which drew on earlier reports produced in the wake of the 1929 riots, that the Mandatory authorities were well aware of the importance of agricultural land in Palestine.¹⁴⁹ There were nevertheless two important constraints on what they could do, either to alleviate the indebtedness of the *fellahin*, or to help increase or diversify agricultural production. The first were the general budgetary constraints imposed by the Treasury.¹⁵⁰ Within that context, the priorities for expenditure – apart from maintaining law and order – were for infrastructure development in the territory, with railways taking the lion's share.¹⁵¹ The second was that the responsibilities of the mandatory included the establishment of a Jewish national home, of which land purchase by Jewish immigrants was one of the key objectives. The rural economy was consequently viewed from the perspective of mitigating the effects of land dispossession which would be the logical consequence of land being purchased by immigrants who would then live on it and cultivate it for themselves.¹⁵²

In 1936 the mandatory authorities set out in a Memorandum on Agricultural Development and Settlement “the steps taken by the Palestine Government since 1930 to assist agricultural development and settlement”.¹⁵³ These included, variously, loans for the development of agriculture and hill villages, reductions in

¹⁴⁹ *Palestine Royal Commission Report*, July 1937, 263, British Library

¹⁵⁰ See e.g. CO 733 / 214 / 4, TNA, Agricultural Council Minutes of January 1932, which discuss, inter alia, fiscal constraints

¹⁵¹ CO 733 / 2, TNA, Schedule of expenditure for the 12 months ending March 1922. Railways received ££ 746,000, public security and prisons ££ 217,000 and agriculture & fisheries only ££ 49,000

¹⁵² See e.g. Sir John Hope Simpson, *Palestine Land Settlement, Urban Development and Immigration*, July 1930. Also Lewis French, *First Report on Agricultural Development and Land Settlement in Palestine* (Jerusalem, December 1931)

¹⁵³ CO 733 / 318 / 8, TNA, Agricultural Development and Settlement Memorandum by the Palestine Secretariat

rural property taxes, and funds for the development of water supplies. Horticultural stations for the dissemination of best practice had been established in nine areas, of which one in Nablus, which had also benefitted from a poultry station set up for the same purpose, and which provided breeding hens. The memorandum furthermore noted a trade agreement with Egypt, which had agreed to reduce the import duty on Nablus soap from £E 6,500 per ton to £E 5,000 per ton, as well as reducing the freight rate on the Egyptian state railways for the conveyance of olive oil (i.e. Nabulsi) soap.

Clearly efforts were made, albeit within the constraints of the limited resources available, to address some of the main problems besetting the agricultural sector. Nevertheless, the British limited their objectives in rural areas to the minimum they associated with responsible government. Priority was given to the maintenance of public order and the efficient collection of taxes. The expansion of services and development of the agricultural economy remained secondary to these main objectives.¹⁵⁴ It is unlikely that the efforts of the mandatory authority would have been effective in mitigating the shock of the Great Depression, “which had a severe impact on agriculture between 1927 and 1933.”¹⁵⁵ The concerns relating to agrarian problems reflected fears that unemployed *fellahin* moving off the land in search of work might become a source of instability. Mandatory officials were aware of the difficulties of developing an industrial base which could have provided alternative employment opportunities, and so attempted instead to keep them in the rural areas by ensuring a basic minimum of subsistence.¹⁵⁶

One effect of Jewish immigration into Palestine was to drive up the price of agricultural land as demand for it increased to create new settlements. This resulted in some of the smaller Arab landholders selling up to larger-scale *effendi* land-owners who were intent on increasing their holdings: “in one sub-district in the hilly tracts it is reported that in a decade no less than 30% of the land has passed from Arab peasants to Arab capitalists.”¹⁵⁷ The response of the Government was to consider the laws governing agricultural tenancies and to issue new ordinances designed to ensure that land-owners would leave their tenant farmers with sufficient land to support themselves and their families when selling part of their estates. The September 1920 Land Transfer Ordinance fell into this category, but was considered, together with further legislation passed in 1921, to be ineffective in

¹⁵⁴ Ylana Miller, *Government and Society in Rural Palestine 1920 – 1948* (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1985), 71

¹⁵⁵ Miller, *Government and Society* 80

¹⁵⁶ Johnson-Crosbie, *Report of Committee on the Economic Condition of Agriculturalists and the Fiscal Measures of Government in Relation Thereto* (Jerusalem, 1930) in CO 733/185/77072, TNA

¹⁵⁷ Lewis French, *First Report on Agricultural Development and Land Settlement in Palestine* (Jerusalem, 23rd December 1931), 19, para 70

preventing dispossession through land sales.¹⁵⁸ One reason was that landlords could simply pay their tenant farmers to leave prior to a sale.

The mandatory authorities were also constrained by the customs and laws which had developed over the generations of Ottoman rule: “colonial policies risked confrontation or irrelevance if they strayed unwarrantedly from processes rooted administratively in the Ottoman past or held in continuous social conditions”.¹⁵⁹ As noted above, they were also constrained by fears of the development of a landless- and rootless- class of labourers: with increasing anxiety over this issue, reinforced by the impact of the 1929 riots, making the idea of individual rights in land less and less attractive, as fears increased that those with such rights might sell off their small-holdings, become landless as a result, and subsequently engage in political agitation.¹⁶⁰

Overall it appears that little was achieved either in terms of mitigating the problems caused by extreme weather conditions and such natural disasters as locust attacks on the one hand, or the chronic indebtedness of the *fellahin* on the other. There is of course a legitimate argument that neither the issues relating to the natural environment, nor those related to indebtedness, inherited as they were from the Ottomans, could be laid at the door of Herbert Samuel and his successors following the establishment of the mandatory authority in July 1920. The Palestinians in general however, and the Nabulsi in particular, were dissatisfied with the British to the point of open hostility, so it is appropriate to examine why they took such an uncompromising stance.

In October 1925 the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Arab Congress submitted a report to the British High Commissioner.¹⁶¹ Members of that committee included Awni Abdul-Hadi, Izzat Darwaza, and Adel Zouaiter, all members of politically active families in Nablus.¹⁶² This thirty page document opens with comparisons between the Ottoman and British administrations, and complaints that Palestine was being prepared for the creation of a Jewish national home, rather than independence for the majority of people already living there.¹⁶³ It then gives an overview of what it describes as ‘the Economic Deadlock.’¹⁶⁴

“thanks to the undulated broken nature of the country the use of agricultural machinery is restricted to the two long plains extending along its Western and

¹⁵⁸ For a discussion of this issue, see Robert John & Sami Hadawi, *the Palestine Diary. Volume 1, 1914 – 1945* (Palestine Research Centre, Beirut, 1970), 220

¹⁵⁹ Martin Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies in Palestine, 1917 – 1936* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 6

¹⁶⁰ Bunton, *Colonial Land Policies* 204

¹⁶¹ Report on the State of Palestine submitted to His Excellency the High Commissioner for Palestine by the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Arab Congress on 13 October 1925. A copy is held at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris

¹⁶² See the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA): ‘personalities’ section: <http://passia.org/personalities>

¹⁶³ Report on the State of Palestine, 3, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 10

Eastern flanks. The main body which covers Hebron, Jerusalem, Nablus and a great part of the Northern District has to be torn open by the fingers of a set of hardy but poor men. The blessed olive trees that covered vast areas along these broken hills and which were the sources of wealth for a great number of their inhabitants, have sustained fearful havoc during the war with the natural consequence that the inhabitants thereof were greatly impoverished”.

In the committee’s view, the overriding priority of the new administration should be:

“to increase the productive output of the country. To attain this object, the sole real producer in Palestine should be materially assisted and encouraged and financially relieved. The camp of the Palestine farmer has been depleted during the war, his financial capabilities have been sapped of all vitality by the endless military acquisitions. He was repeatedly shifted from his home by the two combatants as the battlefield overlapped his village. His animal stock was brought to a very low ebb. Thus British occupation in 1917 found the country hungry and naked.”¹⁶⁵

It is interesting –and largely accurate at that time- to see the farmer being described as ‘the sole real producer’ in Palestine. From the description given of the ravages of war it becomes implicit that the members of the Executive Committee blamed the British for their war against the Ottomans, and Allenby’s military campaign leading to the battle of Megiddo for having ravaged Palestinian territory. They nevertheless go on to acknowledge the efforts of the military administration in making amends, noting that

“about £300,000 were distributed in the shape of cash, cattle and seed as loans payable in instalments with 6% interest against mortgage of immovable property. All debts due against him by the ex-Government and all tax arrears were cancelled. The villages that were vacated because of military exigencies were exempted that year from the land tax. Thus the smile of prosperity began to show itself on the face of the farmer.”¹⁶⁶

Such improvements however were nevertheless not destined to continue through the civilian administration established in 1920: as according to the committee, following the Jaffa Disturbances of 1921, the Zionist Organisation effectively prevented further provision of loans and assistance to Arab farmers.¹⁶⁷ This assertion is revealing, not necessarily for its accuracy, but in confirming the belief amongst the relatively small group of the politically active in Palestine that the decision by the British to permit the creation of a Jewish national home had pre-empted their capacity to make good on the ravages of war.

The paper goes on with various complaints about the previous High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, for prohibiting the exportation of local products in

¹⁶⁵ Report on the State of Palestine, 12, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris

¹⁶⁶ Ibid

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

1920,¹⁶⁸ liquidating the Ottoman Agricultural Bank and demanding settlement of accounts in 1921,¹⁶⁹ and enforcing an old Ottoman law in 1922 which stripped title to lands left uncultivated for three consecutive years.¹⁷⁰ The remainder of the paper covers a series of demands focussed on a reduction of the taxes levied on the agricultural sector, combined with an increase in the resources available to the Department of Agriculture.¹⁷¹

The authors were clearly aware of the situation in neighbouring countries, as they quoted tax rates in Egypt and Syria, which they claimed to be lower than those in Palestine.¹⁷² They go on to compare the farmers, obliged to offer up a percentage of their annual crops for tax purposes, with “the merchants who are mostly Jews, who give no more than custom duties which they instantly extort from the consumers who are mostly Arabs. In other words the poor producer is over-taxed while the fat intermediary is under-taxed.”¹⁷³ One detects here the image of the poor, innocent, worker of the land contrasted with the rich –and by implication corrupt and urban¹⁷⁴- merchant. This is of course hardly unique to Palestine. Other complaints include absentee landlords living in (greater) Syria who sell their lands to Jewish immigrants¹⁷⁵ - where it is interesting to note that the committee members shared the concerns of the British authorities: “when Jews purchase these lands the Arab tenants have to vacate them and as they can rarely do anything to gain a living besides farming, *they roam about, a permanent menace to Public Security.*”¹⁷⁶ This fear of social disorder is repeated in complaints about the spread of Bolshevism in the Jewish community, and the way support for it was spilling over to Arab workers in the port of Haifa.¹⁷⁷ It is revealing of the fears¹⁷⁸ clearly held by those at the top of the socio-economic hierarchy of Palestine at that time: and possibly goes some way to explaining why the demand which concluded the report was for “the establishment in Palestine of a National Constitutional Government in which the two communities, Arab and Jewish, will be represented in proportion to their numbers *as they existed before the war.*”¹⁷⁹

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 13

¹⁶⁹ Ibid

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 14

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 16

¹⁷² Ibid

¹⁷³ Ibid, 17

¹⁷⁴ Page 23 of the report complains that most of the Jewish immigrants settled in the towns, not the countryside

¹⁷⁵ Report on the State of Palestine, 25, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. The italics are mine.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 26

¹⁷⁸ Almost certainly exaggerated however. Arab labour unions in Mandate Palestine remained weak, and Marxist ideology had only a limited influence in them. For a general discussion of this topic see Jane Power, ‘Real Unions,’ Arab Organized Labour in British Palestine’. *Arab Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 20, No.1 (Winter 1998) 13-28

¹⁷⁹ Report on the State of Palestine, 30, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris. The italics are mine

Conclusion

The case submitted in the 1925 report of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Arab Congress articulated arguments which were oft repeated during the mandate. As Kenneth Stein has observed, for example, the politically sensitive issue of land sales contained an element of special pleading, given that such figures as Awni Abdul Hadi, whilst decrying them in public, were engaging in them in private:

“land ownership was the last surviving political prerogative for many of the Arab elite, whose privileges were slowly circumscribed by the British presence and Jewish settlement. Acquisition of capital via land sales became a vehicle for temporarily retaining one’s declining social and economic prominence.”¹⁸⁰

That statement, and the Executive Committee report, indicate the presence of deep-seated fears concerning the arrival of the British and the plans for a Jewish national home. Even if they did bring progress, it would not necessarily be for the benefit of the established elites in Palestine, and definitely not for areas such as the Jabal Nablus, relatively isolated in the central hills, and not a beneficiary of the rapid economic and population growth of the coastal strip. That that growth was brought by an undemocratic regime no doubt intensified the feelings of marginalisation. As C R Ashbee, a member of the British Town Planning Institute, and civic advisor to the City of Jerusalem –and staunch opponent of Zionism–put it: “you cannot govern well or wisely except by consent – and you cannot, unless you do it by force, govern against the will of 85% of the population.”¹⁸¹ During the 1920s and 1930s there was angry opposition to the dominance of the newly arrived colonial power, whose priority, as set out in the mandate, was the creation of a Jewish national home.¹⁸² This opposition was further fuelled by a perception that Jewish immigrants were granted preferential treatment: for example the mandatory authorities granted Jewish viticulturalists exemption from export duties, and protected them with tariffs on imported wines. By contrast it gave “no such effective assistance to the Arab farmer whose wheat and olive oil are beaten in local markets by foreign imported wheat, because they are not similarly protected.”¹⁸³ The impact of the Great Depression served to exacerbate this problem, as falling prices in global markets meant that surplus production elsewhere in the Middle East could be effectively dumped in Palestine at prices which undercut the local farming community. Jabal Nablus was particularly vulnerable in this respect, and the scale of the problems in its agricultural sector contributed to a growing perception of ‘them’ and ‘us’: the privileged and the

¹⁸⁰ Kenneth Stein, *The Land Question in Palestine, 1917 – 1939* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1984), 69

¹⁸¹ C R Ashbee, *A Palestine Notebook, 1918 – 1923* (William Heinemann, London, 1923), 206. He made this statement in July 1922, shortly before resigning his post and leaving Palestine

¹⁸² Article 2 of the mandate states that the UK was ‘responsible for placing the country under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home.’ See Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 359

¹⁸³ Report on the State of Palestine submitted to His Excellency the High Commissioner for Palestine by the Executive Committee of the Palestine Arab Congress on 13th October 1925, 17, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris

disadvantaged. The solution, especially amongst those politically active in Nablus, was “a well-guided, well-informed nationalist movement among the Arabs.”¹⁸⁴ The cumulative effects of the ravages of World War I, the impact of the arrival of the British, and the economic problems of the Great Depression combined to create a growing sense of nostalgia for what were perceived to have been better times under the Ottomans: nostalgia which in Jabal Nablus found expression as political opposition. As Vinita Damodaran has observed, “it can be argued that resistance may have been framed by memory of better times in a less despoiled setting.”¹⁸⁵ No doubt the policies and practices of the Mandatory authorities during the two decades after World War I will have done much to shape the perceptions of the indigenous population. It would have been clear to them that their town was not a priority for the Mandatory authority in the way that either the Dead Sea to the south-east or Haifa to the west clearly were.¹⁸⁶ When considering those priorities, it is worth bearing in mind that in one sense the British never chose to come to Palestine in quite the same way that their other imperial possessions came into being as a result of strategic and / or commercial interests. There were of course both in this particular territory, but it came under British control suddenly in 1918 as a result of military victory against the Turks. It was not a country like e.g. Tasmania whose climate was “comparable to that of the French Riviera”¹⁸⁷ and consequently an attractive location for UK nationals. The reasons for being there were essentially utilitarian, such as the exploitation of Dead Sea mineral deposits, or the transfer of Mesopotamian oil through the expanding port of Haifa. By contrast, the diverse range of problems suffered by Jabal Nablus which have been the subject of this chapter meant that there was nothing naturally attractive in that part of Palestine from a British perspective. No doubt this was a contributory factor in its relative neglect. But that is not to say that it was ignored completely. What they did there, and what that reveals about Mandatory policies and attitudes is the subject to which we turn in more detail in the succeeding chapter.

¹⁸⁴ Adnan Abu-Ghazaleh, *Palestinian Arab Cultural Nationalism, 1919 – 1960* (Amana Books, Vermont, 1991), 24. The author, a Professor of Middle East History at New York State University, comes from one of the leading families in Nablus

¹⁸⁵ Vinita Damodaran, Environment, Ethnicity & History in Chotanagpur, India, 1850 – 1970. *Environment and History*, Vol.3, No.3 (October 1997) 283

¹⁸⁶ Norris, *Land of Progress* 99

¹⁸⁷ Christina Folke Ax, Niels Brimnes, Niklas Thode Jensen, and Karen Oslund (Eds), *Cultivating the Colonies, Colonial States and their Environmental Legacies* (Ohio University Press, Athens, 2011), 11



Aerial Photograph of Nablus taken in September 1918, showing the town and surrounding countryside. Retrieved on 20 July 2018 from the old picture gallery of the Nablus Guide web-site: http://www.nablusguide.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=101&Itemid=70&lang=en

CHAPTER II

BRITISH ENGAGEMENT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN NABLUS FOLLOWING THE END OF WORLD WAR I

Introduction

Chapter I gave the macro-economic background to developments in Nablus during the 1920s and 1930s. It illustrated how the arrival of the British at the end of World War I and the development of the coastal strip in Palestine left the town and its surrounding hinterland relatively disadvantaged and isolated. This chapter will now look more specifically at how the British regime in Nablus functioned in the immediate aftermath of the war and during the early stages of the mandate. It will set out the preconceptions of Nablus that British colonial officials carried with them into their government of the town and how they went about imposing British authority at the local level. By providing a survey of the early stages of British rule in Nablus, the chapter establishes the essential foundation for the more detailed case studies examined in the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

Examining the early years of British rule in Nablus reveals a picture of British imperialism in Palestine that contrasts with much of the existing historiography. Nablus was not one of the rapidly expanding ‘big four’ towns of Haifa, Jaffa, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv. Nor did it experience any Jewish immigration into either its urban area or its immediate hinterland. As a result, British policy towards the Jabal Nablus was markedly different from the regime portrayed in most historical accounts of the mandate. Instead of a government fixated on implementing the Jewish national home policy or protecting its key imperial assets, we find a ‘de minimis’ type of engagement in which the British government seeks only to fulfil the minimum obligations of mandatory government.¹ To make a comparison with French colonial development policy as articulated by Marechal Lyautey,² Nablus fell into the category of ‘territoire inutile’³ - part of a colonised territory of no particular economic or political importance.⁴ Lyautey’s ideas, the way he characterised different territorial areas, and the use I have made of his concepts in relation to the Jabal Nablus are set out on pages 7 and 8 of the introductory chapter to this thesis. As such the Jabal Nablus contrasted with the rapidly growing coastal towns that witnessed a far more proactive style of colonial government.⁵

¹ For a discussion of those obligations see Susan Pederson, *The Guardians*, 130 - 134

² As set out in William Hoisington, *Lyautey and the French Conquest of Morocco* (Macmillan Press, London, 1995)

³ Hoisington, *Lyautey and the French Conquest* 90

⁴ Ibid

⁵ For a discussion in this respect of Haifa, see ‘the capital of British Palestine’ in Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress*, 99-102

Two aspects of British engagement with Nablus are examined in this chapter. Firstly the surveillance of the town's political activities as a means of controlling what was viewed as a potentially troublesome and rebellious population. Secondly, the more mundane workings of local governance, particularly in the fields of law and order, education and public health. The nature of that local regime betrays the extent to which Jabal Nablus was viewed as a non-priority area where the primary policy objective was the avoidance of any form of civil or political disturbance on the one hand, while on the other keeping public expenditure as low as possible, consistent with the responsibilities of a Mandatory power.⁶ The expenditure which was authorised, such as for the establishment of a sports facility in Nablus, was partially justified on the grounds that its expected contribution towards public health ought to result in a lowering of demand for medical facilities. Analysis of colonial government at the local level during this period contributes to a better understanding of how empires functioned in the 'shatter zones' described in the Introduction which characterised territories experiencing regime change at the close of World War I. In the Middle East, both the British and the French empires established their territorial priorities as the war drew to a close. For the former in Palestine, those priorities were concentrated along the coastal strip and in particular the port of Haifa. Nablus by contrast was left isolated and relatively neglected in the uplands of the interior.

The picture which emerges from this location in the central 'spine' of the Palestine hills is of an administration whose primary concern was to keep the peace and discourage the development of any political activities which could either generate or increase opposition to the British presence. In terms of resource allocation, already constrained by the economic conditions which developed after World War I, the town was governed with the minimum possible allocation of imperial resources, with education and health in particular largely left to those charitable and missionary bodies which had already established themselves there. Security and surveillance, by contrast, received more attention, with the British working through local elites in those cases where they could be co-opted, and monitoring and constraining their activities in those cases where they could not.⁷ Nablus to some extent was seen as being on the periphery of British interests in Palestine, focussed as they were on their Jerusalem headquarters, the development of the coastal strip, and the expansion of the port of Haifa. The relationship between the imperial power and the local population was consequently marked by a degree of suspicion towards a part of the territory considered as a potential centre of revolt and hostility.⁸

⁶ These responsibilities included 'well-being and development.' For a discussion of these concepts see Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 130-134

⁷ For a discussion of this process of co-option, monitoring and constraint, for which the archival sources are the monthly political reports held at the National Archives, see the section on pages 66–77 below concerning 'Political Surveillance.'

⁸ See page 5 of the introductory chapter of this thesis to set the broader context of this relationship in terms of imperial power exercised in 'shatter zones.'

The primary source material used for this chapter mainly derives from British Government files (both civilian and military) held at the National Archives, and also from similar material which eventually came to be held at the Israel State Archives (ISA). These archives have been extensively mined for documents relating to the administration of Nablus. The patterns and themes which emerge from them have then been used to build up a comprehensive picture of how Nablus was governed at the local level during the 1920s and 1930s. From specific examples to be found in the ISA it is clear that efforts were made by the colonial power to accommodate local sensitivities, and to provide fair compensation when land was co-opted for use by government authorities at the Balata landing ground for the Royal Air Force.⁹ Very thorough investigations were undertaken to ascertain the extent of the losses experienced by those who had been denied access to the land, suggesting a desire to avoid creating grievances amongst the local population which might subsequently develop into more widespread opposition to British rule. The tensions which became apparent shortly after their arrival made it clear that there was substantive opposition to the JNH policy, and so it was logical for the Mandatory administration to seek to avoid other points of contention. I will nevertheless argue at the end of this chapter that despite their efforts to 'keep the peace' at the local level, the macro-economic policies discussed in chapter I were to disadvantage Nablus vis-a-vis the developing coastal strip. The overall effect was a state of relative decline in the town, forming one of the main causes of its pivotal role in the 1936 Arab Revolt.

This chapter starts with reference to some of the main events which influenced British perceptions of Nablus, and then goes on to consider in detail what can be concluded about their approach from the monthly political reports held at the National Archives. It subsequently considers on a thematic basis interactions between officials at the District level in the Mandatory administration and members of the Nabulsi political class in the sectors of education, sport, and land-use. I finish the chapter by concluding that British efforts to avoid overt hostility at the local level during the early years of the mandate were by and large successful. The fact that this relative success was not replicated either at the national level or in respect of the overarching policy priorities of the Colonial Office¹⁰ in London is illustrative of the differing perceptions and priorities between the various tiers of colonial government in Palestine. At the local level, the District Administrators were primarily involved in intelligence gathering and avoiding the development of hostility to the Mandatory power. In Jerusalem the High Commissioner was primarily occupied with the development of the JNH policy and its associated vicissitudes: whereas in London the main priority was to constrain Government expenditure on the Palestinian territory¹¹ whilst ensuring that it remained an effective buffer against potential

⁹ See pages 82-83 below

¹⁰ As opposed to the Foreign Office, for which the Jewish National Home policy was less of a priority

¹¹ For a discussion of Britain's policy of 'imperialism on the cheap' during the post-WWI period see John Darwin, 'An Undeclared Empire, the British in the Middle East, 1918-1939', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, May 1999, Vol.27, Issue 2, 159-176

incursion from any hostile powers which might develop in the Near East.¹²Notwithstanding these differing perspectives, all those involved in policy making were operating within the Treasury's fiscal constraints, and these had a cascade effect from their point of inception in London, out to the Mandatory HQ in Jerusalem, and down to the local level in Nablus: where their effect was magnified by the need to respond to the impact of day to day events.

Nablus following the end of World War I

The purpose of this section is to outline British perceptions of Nablus at the close of World War I as an (impoverished) centre of opposition to Mandatory rule which had fallen into relative decline in relation to the rest of the Palestinian territory. This provides the vital context in which British governance of the town in the 1920s and early 1930s can then be analysed.

Following the end of World War I and the establishment of the British military administration in Palestine, the territory north of Jerusalem was deemed by the conquering British forces to be "a land of pitiable starvation, of adult emaciation, and grave infant mortality."¹³The priorities of the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration were consequently to re-establish a sense of normality after the turmoil of both the war and the natural disasters which came with it.¹⁴ These included the 1915 locust invasion and the 1916 drought.¹⁵In its capacity as a military government operating in occupied enemy territory, General Allenby's administration was obliged to maintain the status quo in the society it had come to occupy.¹⁶There were nevertheless examples at the local level of military governors being prepared to intervene in local practices in order to impose their own colonial belief systems. Nablus was a case in point where British nurses working in a hospital had previously been obliged to wear veils in the same way as local Muslim women.¹⁷ The military governor nevertheless issued orders that this should cease.¹⁸This conforms to wider British perceptions, prior to the establishment of the civil administration in 1920, that Nablus was a conservative town, hostile to foreigners in general, and Jews in

¹² For the strategic importance of Palestine in relation to the Suez canal, see *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 1920, Vol.136, Col 1516

¹³ A E Prince, 'Palestine in Transition from War to Peace', *Queen's Quarterly*, Vol. 28, 01 July 1920. 369 Queen's Quarterly was a publication of Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. The statement draws on the author's personal experience of reporting on Palestine at district level

¹⁴ For a discussion of the role of the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration following the arrival of British troops in Palestine see Sir Ronald Storrs, *The Memoirs of Sir Ronald Storrs* (G P Putnam's and Sons, New York, 1937), 307-317

¹⁵ Adnan Musallam, *Bethlehem in the British Era, 1917 – 1948* (Palestinian Conflict Resolution Centre, Bethlehem, 2002), 2

¹⁶ Storrs, *Memoirs* 312

¹⁷ The issue of veiling was a point of contention both between the British authorities and the Nabulsi, and the wider Muslim and Christian communities which they represented. For more examples of how religious and cultural differences gave rise to disputes, see pages 72 – 73 below

¹⁸ A E Prince, 'Palestine in Transition' 384

particular. These characteristics were attributed to its being “an old Turkish stronghold.”¹⁹

These early years of the British presence saw approaches which were carried over to the Mandate proper, and set the context for its relations with both the town and its surrounding area. The constraints on financial resources tended to result in various aspects of the territory’s infrastructure being repaired, rather than renewed, as was the case with roads.²⁰ Whereas under the Ottomans Nablus had been the centre of a ‘sanjak’ or administrative district,²¹ under the British it had no particular status in a Government structure where all power was centralised in Jerusalem.²² Furthermore, at the local level, members of the Municipal Council²³ were initially not elected but nominated by the military authorities pending the establishment of a civilian administration under the Mandate.²⁴ Choosing those through whom they considered they could most easily rule at the local level had a certain common-sense logic from the perspective of Jerusalem and London, but also created a structure which stifled any potential for initiatives from the local population. This in turn meant that there were no structures through which discontent could be expressed. This in turn contributed to the Mandatory authorities under-estimating the strength of opposition to their policies (in relation to the Jewish National Home) which was to lead to the Jabal Nablus area becoming the centre of the Arab Revolt in 1936. Finally there was the international dimension during this period, when some of the Nabulsi joined the Sharifian army, supporting King Faisal initially in Syria and subsequently in Iraq. That awareness of events in the surrounding region was a contributory factor in their hostility towards the British.²⁵

There was furthermore an element of uncertainty concerning the status of the new administration, and whether or not there was any scope to modify its policies. This was because there was a relatively long period between the end of military hostilities in Palestine in 1918 and the final confirmation of the British Mandate in 1923. As the British Government noted at the time,²⁶ it was not until the San Remo Conference in 1920 that the Palestine Mandate was assigned to the UK, with the actual terms of the draft mandate not being agreed by the Council of the League of Nations until July 1922. The implementation of the mandate was then further delayed until the

¹⁹Ibid

²⁰Ibid, 377

²¹ Farid Al-Salim, *Palestine and the Decline of the Ottoman Empire, Modernisation and the Path to Palestinian Statehood* (I B Taurus, London, 2015), 2

²² Elie Kedourie was of the view that British rule in Palestine was over-centralised, and that there was little scope for local initiatives. See Elie Kedourie, ‘Sir Herbert Samuel and the Government of Palestine’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol 5, No.1, January 1969 59

²³ The role of the Municipal Council is discussed further in chapter III below on pages 93-97

²⁴ Kedourie, ‘Sir Herbert Samuel’ 50

²⁵ For more on this consideration see page 77 below, and the discussion of Nabulsi support for the military victories of the Kemalists in the Anatolia region of Turkey during 1921 and 1922

²⁶ *PALESTINE & TRANSJORDAN ADMINISTRATION REPORTS 1918 – 1948*. Introduction to Volume 1 1918 – 1924 (Archive Editions, 1995)

conclusion of peace between the Allied Powers and Turkey. It was consequently not until September 1923, after the Treaty of Lausanne had become operative, that the Council of the League was able to officially endorse the beginning of Britain's Mandate over Palestine. British rule of course started with General Allenby's arrival in Jerusalem in December 1917,²⁷ and was followed by a civil administration in July 1920, but the extended nature of the international negotiations which legitimised the British presence meant that there was little incentive to attempt any fundamental changes in the territory during those early, formative years. Overall, the approach which best characterized the British Government in Palestine during the 1920s was one of maintaining law and order, and discouraging political activism on the part of the indigenous population.²⁸ As will be shown from what is revealed in the monthly political reports discussed below, the Mandatory authorities were reasonably successful in finding the right people to work with in Nablus, and so able to avoid the development of overt hostilities during this period. Also concordant with a desire to avoid unnecessary confrontation was the lack of any attempts to intervene in personal, religious, or social affairs²⁹ - as was often the case with the administration of British colonial territories,³⁰ where indirect rule was the favoured mode of government.³¹ Despite some notable exceptions, the new British regime generally avoided intervening in local customs and religious practice, and this was especially the case as far as the Muslim community – the overwhelming majority in Nablus³² - was concerned.³³

According to Adnan Abu-Ghazaleh, a historian and member of one of the leading families in Nablus, the town had played a role in the administration of late Ottoman Palestine out of all proportion to its size. This he attributes to the high levels of education of its citizens who travelled to both neighbouring countries and Europe to

²⁷ It was not until September 1918 that the British XXth Corps entered Nablus according to the papers of Field Marshall Lord Chetwode held at the Imperial War Museum

²⁸ Bernard Wasserstein was of the view that the British had "a certain disdain for the Palestine Arabs," combined with "a paternalistic conception of themselves as Platonic guardians entrusted with the duty of managing" their affairs. See Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine, The Mandatory Government and the Arab-Jewish conflict 1917 – 1929* (Basil Blackwell, 1991), 14

²⁹ For a discussion of these issues in relation to the legal system established by the Mandatory administration, see Robert Eisenman, *Islamic Law in Palestine and Israel, A History of the Survival of Tanzimat and Sharia in the British Mandate and the Jewish State* (Grave Distractions Publications, Nashville, 2015), 101

³⁰ There were of course exceptions. John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson have argued that the degree of British intervention in the social and political structures of overseas territories reflected what the Government in London considered necessary to protect British interests. See John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *The Economic History Review*, New Series Volume 6, No.1 (1953) 1-15). Specifically in the case of northern Nigeria Jonathan Reynolds has noted how the British did intervene to suppress or discourage Muslim groups at variance with the orthodoxy of the Masu Sarauta tribe through whom they had established indirect rule. See Jonathan Reynolds: 'Good and Bad Muslims, Islam and Indirect Rule in Northern Nigeria,' *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 34, No.3 (2001) 601-618

³¹ Nigeria under the Governorship of Sir Frederick Lugard is often cited as the classic example of indirect rule under the British Imperial system. See Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 108 - 109

³² The 1931 census of Palestine gave the composition of the Jabal Nablus area as 67,314 Muslims, 1,214 Christians, and 10 Jews

³³ Eisenman, *Islamic Law* 102

complete their university education.³⁴ That combination of travel and education led to an awareness of, and interest in, the cultural and political developments in the countries neighbouring Palestine, and in particular Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. It also contributed to the town's sense of self-reliance which, combined with its hostility to Zionism, led its Municipal Council to refuse electricity supplied by the Jewish Rutenberg project.³⁵ This jealously guarded sense of independence was reflected in active participation in political and social affairs. The atmosphere in the city led the Palestine Bulletin to assert that "Nablus daily proves that it possesses more power, life and continuous movement than Jerusalem."³⁶ The active exchange of political and social ideas meant that "every day Nablus has a new opinion."³⁷

Political Surveillance

A state of increasing mutual suspicion between the British and the Nabulsi during the course of the 1920s becomes apparent from an analysis of the monthly political reports which are to be found in the FO 608 and 141 series held at the National Archives. These reveal a British approach of de minimis intervention whilst prioritising the keeping of the peace. The purpose of this section is to examine some of those reports with a view to better understanding what they reveal of how the British managed and controlled the local population of the 'Jabal Nablus.'

Taking various events in chronological order, one of the first signs of Nabulsi hostility to draw the attention of the British authorities was the petition submitted to the Versailles Peace Conference by a group of Nabulsi notables. Despite the denial of any Palestinian representation at the conference itself, Versailles nevertheless offered a channel for the Nabulsi to articulate their views to the international community, and those views were clearly monitored by the British authorities. Part of the UK delegation's papers for that conference include a French translation of a petition from the politically active members of the town's population.³⁸ It was submitted on 14 February 1919, and the original was forwarded by Lieutenant-Colonel Dawnay, acting Chief Political Officer in the Egypt Expeditionary Force

³⁴ Adnan Abu-Ghazaleh, *Palestinian Arab Cultural Nationalism, 1919-1960* (Amana Books, Vermont, 1991), 19

³⁵ For more on this subject, see Fadwa Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, 64 -65: "Our town council had boycotted the Jewish Rutenburgh project, when the British Mandatory Government had, in the twenties, granted the contract for generating electricity to this company. The inhabitants of Nablus lit their houses with naphtha lamps until the beginning of the forties." That concession to Rutenburgh was granted in September 1921. See Barbara Smith, *The Roots of Separatism*, 119. Ronen Shamir, *Current Flow, the Electrification of Palestine* (Stanford University Press 2013) gives a general overview of the development of the electricity grid in the territory, and the way its concentration along the coastal strip contributed to economic growth there at the expense of such central 'spine' towns as Nablus. See in particular in this respect page 76: "The difference between connected and unconnected areas deepened as one moved eastward, further away from the relatively densely populated areas along the Mediterranean coast." For an analysis of the tendencies of communities living in upland hill districts to be both self-reliant and suspicious of outside influences, see Fernand Braudel, *La Mediterranee, l'Espace et l'Histoire* (Flammarion, 1985), 29-30

³⁶ 'Nablus is better than Jerusalem', *Palestine Bulletin*, 6th August 1931

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ FO 608/99, TNA. Petition from the inhabitants of Nablus against Zionist domination of Palestine

(EEF) to the Foreign Secretary.³⁹ He considered “that the sentiments expressed in this document are a fair indication of the views held by a large majority of the non-Jewish population of Palestine with regards to Zionism.”⁴⁰ The opening paragraphs merit some examination, as they provide an insight into the way the Nabulsi thought both of their town and themselves in relation to the difficult and uncertain era which followed the end of World War I. My own translation of the opening paragraph of the petition reads as follows:⁴¹

“We, the undersigned, Muslim and Christian, the inhabitants of the sub-district of Nablus, part of Arab Palestine, state both on our own behalf and that of our compatriots, that there is much discussion on the question of Palestine as a national home for the Jews: who will immigrate here and colonise it. However, the principles declared by President Wilson and approved by the Allied Powers reject the whole idea of the oppression of a weak people by a strong one:⁴² and as there is furthermore the issue of safeguarding the rights of the weakest, we protest against the claims of the Zionists in the strong hope that the Allies’ sense of justice will recognise our rights in the country, and uphold them”.

That Dawnay had forwarded the text to the Foreign Secretary indicates some concern both about the level of opposition in Palestine to the JNH policy and to the potential role of Nablus as a focal point of that opposition. At the same time, the substance of the text indicates that in 1919 opposition was being expressed more in terms of an appeal to rights of national self-determination than an indication of any future armed resistance.

Despite this evidence of significant opposition to their policies, the British authorities appear to have remained optimistic, at least throughout the early 1920s, that it would not inevitably lead to overt hostility. We consequently see the political report covering the August 1922 Nablus Congress⁴³ noting with approval that “the receptions at.....Nablus passed off without untoward incident and the speeches were of a

³⁹ FO 608/99, TNA

⁴⁰ Ibid. The covering docket went on to state that “The petition appeals against the handing over of Palestine to Jews, and states that Palestine was not the original land of the Jews: that Arab and Christian ties with Palestine are far closer: that the Jewish population at present in Palestine is a negligible fraction of the whole: that the Arabs dislike, and are disliked by, the Jews, and that in the final settlement Palestine should not be separated from Syria, to which it naturally belongs.”

⁴¹ The French original reads: “Nous, soussignes, musselmans et chretiens, des habitants de la sous-prefecture de Nablus, un district de la Palestine arabe, annoncons en notre propre nom et au nom de nos compatriots, qu’il circule un bruit incessant a propos de la questionne de la Palestine, un pays national pour les juifs. Il est dit aussi que les juifs immigront en Palestine, qu’ils coloniseront. Mais comme l’ideal declare par President Wilson et approuve par les puissances allies rejette toute idee d’oppression d’un people faible par un people fort et comme il y est surtout questionne de la sauvegarde des droits du plus faible, nous avons l’honneur, par la presente, de protester contre les dires des Sionistes avec le firme espoir que la justice des allies reconnaitra nos droits dans le pays et les approuveront.”

⁴² This did not mean in practice however that either imperialism or colonialism was about to come to an end. See Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians* 17-19

⁴³ FO 141/672, TNA, Monthly Political Reports on Palestine & Trans-Jordan, 1923 – 1925

moderate character.”⁴⁴ In the September political report,⁴⁵ when observing the celebrations in Nablus of Mustafa Kemal’s victories against the Greeks in Anatolia, the authorities concluded that they represent “a gesture of discontent with the present administration, and hatred of its Zionist colour”⁴⁶ rather than support for the Turkish regime per se. This evaluation provides clear evidence that the Mandatory Government was well aware of the strong opposition to its JNH policy, and it was this awareness that no doubt contributed towards its heightened sensitivity to any indications of political activism which might eventually lead to an organised revolt. This also explains why Nablus, with its reputation for opposing anything which it perceived as counter to its interests, was the subject of close and thorough monitoring. The expectation that overt opposition would be the norm rather than the exception is revealed clearly in the October political report,⁴⁷ which quotes the Governor of the Northern District in Palestine as being of the view that if everything was peaceful then this must purely be the result either of a lack of funds to support opposition campaigns, or of internal divisions amongst the activists.⁴⁸ This somewhat cynical view was reinforced by a visit to the villages of the Jenin sub-district which revealed no particular interest in politics, whereas in Nablus, by contrast, “political questions always attract attention.”⁴⁹

The town itself is then the subject of some detailed comment, following the arrest on 20 October 1922 of nine notables for their opposition to the census.⁵⁰ Crowds gathered as a result who then secured their release while they were being conveyed to the local prison despite the intervention of the British gendarmerie which caused “no serious injuries.”⁵¹ This implies that injuries of some sort were inflicted on the crowd, and that force was used.⁵² The notables concerned, however, apparently “voluntarily surrendered themselves soon after their rescue.”⁵³ Here then is evidence that the politically active members of Nabulsi society who were also members of the local socio-economic elite, imposed limits on the extent to which they were willing to defy British authority. This was no doubt because they had assets to lose either via sequestration by the authorities, or indeed as a result of a truly popular, and genuinely revolutionary uprising.

⁴⁴ FO 141/672, 1, TNA

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Held in FO 141/673/1, TNA

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid. Appendix A to the report indicates that opposition to the census was based at least in part on the fact that it would exclude all Palestinians who were not at home on the night of the census: and so by implication under-represent their true numbers

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² The use of force early in the Mandate by the police established a pattern that continued throughout the Mandate. In October 1933, during disturbances in Haifa and Nablus, the police first used baton charges, and then live fire. See *Hansard, Commons*, 7th November 1933, col. 29

⁵³ Ibid

This took place about mid-day on 27th October, and was followed later by disturbances in Haifa and Nablus. These disturbances were of a serious character and the police were subjected to frequent attacks including the use of fire-arms. After endeavours had been made to quell the riots by baton charges, the police were forced, in some cases, to fire before order could be restored.

Historians of the mandate have long since demonstrated the extent to which the British regime sought to exploit the hesitations of the Palestinian elites. As Bernard Wasserstein writes, the Mandatory authorities “regarded the land-owning class as a natural intermediary between government and governed.”⁵⁴ On a wider imperial level, historians such as David Cannadine have argued⁵⁵ that British colonial officials instinctively and either consciously or sub-consciously tried to replicate the hierarchical, monarchical society they were familiar with at home in the UK. They have gone on to assert that it was this hierarchy that was more important to them than distinguishing themselves from the ‘other’ that was the local population. In Cannadine’s analysis, the Middle Eastern territories which came under British control following the end of World War I were governed along similar lines to the princely Indian states⁵⁶ - with monarchies established and supported in Transjordan and Iraq. Although the distinctions between the imperial power and those over whom it ruled were not to be ignored in terms of their racial dimension, categories of social class were also an important factor determining the relations between British officials and those with whom they interacted. The process of government in mandate Palestine consequently became a series of interactions between those members of the British ‘establishment’ posted there and those at the apex of Palestinian society.

From the evidence we have, the relationship revealed by the interactions between the Mandatory authorities and the educated elite of Nabulsi public life would suggest that his hypothesis stands true at the local level in Nablus during the British Mandate: and also confirms that maintenance of the status quo was an important aspect of Government policy not only under the military administration of the ‘Occupied Enemy Territory Administration’ (OETA) South but also during the civil administration of High Commissioner Samuel and his successors. In the absence of a Hashemite monarchical intermediary the British sought to strengthen their hierarchical, class-based view of the world.

Following this incident the report goes on to note that the shops were shut in the town the following day, which was generally quiet with the exception of periodic congregations of “shouting boys”⁵⁷ who had to be dispersed by the police.⁵⁸ It also records that operations to confiscate arms “in certain villages of the Samaria

⁵⁴ Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine*, 15

⁵⁵ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism, How the British Saw Their Empire* (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 2001)

⁵⁶ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism* 71

⁵⁷ FO 141/673/1, TNA

⁵⁸ Ibid

District”⁵⁹ with concomitant allegations of police severity in the process, “made the temper of the people of Nablus none the better.”⁶⁰ This observation indicates that the Mandatory authorities were aware of the links between the urban area and the surrounding agricultural hinterland, and that events in the one would inevitably have repercussions in the other.

In the November 1922 political report⁶¹ mention is made of the fact that the Nablus branch of the Moslem-Christian society had published a statement concerning the issue of participation in elections to the proposed legislative assembly. It is revealing that what in other contexts would be considered a purely political activity is here characterised as potentially criminal: as the report goes on to note that the Criminal Investigation Department had been monitoring the contents of telegrams on this subject sent from Nablus to the Lausanne conference⁶² - and as a result were aware of the town’s support for a boycott of the elections. The contents of this political report are also revealing of British sensitivities concerning the impact of developments in Palestine on other Muslim communities elsewhere in the empire. It notes for example that the Executive Committee of the Arab Congress had invoked the support of the Central Khilafat Committee in Bombay, whilst informing their Indian counterparts “of the feeling of relief in Palestine at the Anatolian victories of the Turks.”⁶³ The text of the Nablus statement, running to four pages, is reproduced in full as an annex to the November 1922 political report, indicating that it was considered to be of some importance by the British authorities, who no doubt took careful note of the contents of its opening paragraph which asserted that the proposed constitution for Palestine had been imposed without democratic consent, and was consequently rejected “together with the Jewish National Home for which provisions were made in it.”⁶⁴

The report is furthermore indicative that the Mandatory authorities were aware not only of the importance of knowing about what their colonial subjects were thinking, but also what information networks they had access to and how they could leverage them to give themselves a greater degree of agency in relation to their colonial masters. In this particular case we have an example of shared views and opinions between Nablus and Bombay. This Indian location carried significance for the British, not only because of the central importance of the country to the empire as a whole, but due to the fact that the long-standing model of colonial governance developed there was subsequently used as a template for more recently acquired territories as

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ FO 141/673/1, 2, TNA

⁶¹ Held in FO 141/672, TNA, Monthly Political Reports on Palestine & Trans-Jordan, 1923 – 1925

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Ibid. For a discussion of the relationship between the Muslim community in India and their impact as a factor in British policy in the Middle East, see Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain, India, and the Arabs, 1914 – 1921* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971)

⁶⁴ FO 141/672, TNA, Monthly Political Reports on Palestine & Trans-Jordan, 1923 - 1925, para 1 of Appendix A. The statement itself was signed off by Hafiz Touqan, President of the Muslim-Christian Society, and a member of one of the leading Nabulsi families

in the Middle East.⁶⁵ Christopher Bayly has made the case⁶⁶ not only for the importance of 'native' communication systems as such, but also that a failure by the British to effectively monitor them contributed to their ignorance of the build up to the Indian mutiny, which consequently took them by surprise.⁶⁷ That lesson was unlikely to have been forgotten in Palestine, where some of the most senior officials serving there had previously had experience in India, including, for example, General Money, the first Military Governor of Occupied Enemy Territory Administration South.⁶⁸ Viewed in this broader context of colonial government, British suspicions of Jabal Nablus, their close monitoring of political activities, and their desire to suppress even small-scale demonstrations or incidents in case they developed into something more serious, become more readily comprehensible.

By the end of 1922, political activity in the Jabal Nablus disappears from the British archival trail. But it resurfaces in the political report of February 1923⁶⁹ which states that one of the speakers at a meeting in Jerusalem had informed their audience that special agents had been appointed in and around the town to oppose the elections to the proposed legislative assembly. This indicates that the Mandatory authorities must have been using paid informants to relay what was discussed at these meetings. The question of the elections is covered the following month, where the March report⁷⁰ distinguishes between those it characterised as "moderate elements"⁷¹ – that is, who would be willing to vote and so participate in the institutional structures the British were seeking to establish – and those who were intent on boycott. It was fear of the latter which led Suleiman Bay Tuqan⁷² to stand down as a candidate for the assembly on the grounds that "nomination would mean loss of all influence for good"⁷³ that men such as him possessed in their local communities. Here again we have evidence of the tensions and ambivalences that characterised the actions of the notables that were apparent in the incident of the arrests related in the October 1922 report.⁷⁴ In this report, the extent to which the notables might either oppose or co-operate with the British authorities was clearly constrained by considerations of what was acceptable behaviour as far as the local population was concerned. That the British were aware of these tensions, and reported on them, is unsurprising given the breadth of their accumulated experience in governing colonial territories by the 1920s, and also explains their sensitivity to

⁶⁵ See on this issue David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism* 71: "After the First World War the final extension of the British Empire took place in the Middle East.....Not surprisingly.....these.....kingdoms were explicitly conceived on the model of the Indian princely states."

⁶⁶ Christopher Bayly, *Empire and information: Intelligence gathering and social communication in India* (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

⁶⁷ Bayly, *Empire and information* 8

⁶⁸ Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine* 22

⁶⁹ In FO 141/673/1, TNA

⁷⁰ FO 141/673/1, TNA

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² A leading Nabulsi notable who was to be elected Mayor in 1925: see <http://passia.org/personalities/816>

⁷³ FO 141/673/1, TNA

⁷⁴ See page 68 above

more strident or armed forms of popular protest as they were well aware of its constraining influence on those members of society through whom they would normally exercise their rule. That sensitivity could account for the somewhat uncompromising approach taken towards those who were considered to be challenging the Mandatory Government's initiatives.

The April 1923 political report⁷⁵ noted that proceedings had been initiated against several individuals, including Izzat Darwaza of Nablus.⁷⁶ Born into a middle class family in the town in 1887, he had started work in the closing years of the Ottoman administration as a clerk in its Department of Telegraphic and Postal Services, rising to the position of Secretary-General of the General Postal Administration in Beirut at the time of World War I.⁷⁷ He was elected to represent Nablus at the 1921 and 1928 Palestinian National Congresses.⁷⁸ The case against Darwaza was that he (and others) had exerted "undue influence during the recent elections."⁷⁹ The arrest gave rise to a statement from the Arab Executive whose text was reproduced as an appendix to the report⁸⁰ and asserted that the people considered this action to be an attempt by the British to paralyse the Arab national movement.⁸¹ This had apparently led to meetings of solidarity in the town following the arrival of "a great crowd from all parts of Palestine."⁸² Here then was clear evidence to the British that Nablus was a centre of political opposition in the territory that required careful monitoring, and could not be trusted. The issue of elections to the proposed legislative assembly was raised in Parliament in May 1923, when Mr Peto M.P., asked the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr Ormsby-Gore, whether it was true that Haj Tewfik Hammad and six other notables of Nablus had been indicted for encouraging others not to vote in the election: and if so, what was the justification for this? The government's response was that arrests had been made, but on the grounds of intimidation as opposed to simply encouraging people not to vote.⁸³ Nablus may have been a neglected backwater in Palestine, but the actions of the British colonial administration there still gave rise to questions in Parliament.

The April 1923 political report went on to indicate the existence of tensions in the town that had nothing to do with the proposed legislative assembly. Reference was made⁸⁴ to a strike by staff at the girls' school in Nablus "owing to an alleged insult by a Christian teacher to the Moslem religion."⁸⁵ This led to the Governor for

⁷⁵ See para 7 of the report in FO 141/673/1, TNA

⁷⁶ For a biography of Darwaza, see his entry in the personalities section of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs: <http://passia.org/personalities/455>

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ para 7 of the April 1923 political report in FO 141/673/1, TNA

⁸⁰ Ibid. The style indicates that this had been translated from the Arabic

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Appendix A to the April 1923 political report in FO 141/673/1, TNA

⁸³ *Hansard, House of Commons*, 7th May 1923, column 1890

⁸⁴ para 25 of the April 1923 political report in FO 141/673/1, TNA

⁸⁵ Ibid

the Samaria region meeting with the local education committee together with the parents of several of the girls.⁸⁶ His presence nevertheless clearly failed to mollify the protestors who demanded that the Christian teachers be replaced by Moslems, and the school kept open on Sundays and Christian holidays.⁸⁷ Two months later the dispute remained unresolved, as we learn from the June political report that the Chief Secretary of the Education Department visited Nablus “with the object of settling the dispute.”⁸⁸ Clearly he did not succeed, as a Mandatory Government report on child marriage and education for Arab girls recorded that “in July 1923 Government was compelled to remove all Christian women teachers from Nablus.”⁸⁹ The way a relatively small incident could rapidly escalate into sustained and widespread opposition is indicative of the potentially volatile relations between the Nabulsi and the Mandatory authorities.

It would appear that the sensitivities concerning religion in Nablus arose at least in part from fears among the local population that Christian teachers would try to convert their children from Islam. Pere Jaussen,⁹⁰ a French Dominican Friar who had studied at the Biblical School of Jerusalem prior to WWI,⁹¹ describes an incident where a school and clinic run by the Sisters of St. Joseph faced accusations of trying to convert one of their former pupils who disappeared from the town and was subsequently found in a Syrian orphanage in Bethlehem. The young Muslim girl was later to assert that she had run away from home because of a conflict with her father.⁹² Ela Greenberg has argued⁹³ that this incident reflected fears of Nabulsi parents who felt that they had a lack of control over the way their children were educated in missionary schools. That evaluation however needs to be considered in relation to the facts of this particular incident. Jaussen clearly states that the girl who was the subject of accusations against the Sisters of Saint Joseph was 23 years old at the time she ran away from her father’s house,⁹⁴ and so no longer a pupil at the school. Despite going into great detail concerning the actions of the father which led to his daughter running away, the author does not offer any explicit explanation as to why the Sisters were subject to hostility even after the young lady had stated they

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ June 1923 political report, 7, para 22, in FO 141/673/1, TNA

⁸⁹ CO 733/277/11, TNA, Child Marriage, Education for Arab Girls (1935). The statement comes on page 8 of a memo on this subject attached to a letter of 03 January 1935 from High Commissioner Wauchope to Cunliffe-Lister, Colonial Secretary. The subject-matter covers both education and health issues

⁹⁰ Le Pere J-A Jaussen, a Professeur at the Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Francaise in Jerusalem, was of the view that the root cause of the hostility to the teachers was that they were Christian, and that it was ‘honteux pour eux de confier leurs filles a des maitresses chretiennes.’ (shameful for them –i.e. Nabulsi parents- to entrust their daughters to Christian teachers). See Le Pere J –A Jaussen, *Coutumes Palestiniennes, Naplouse et Son District* (Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1927), 49 n.1

⁹¹ *Coutumes Palestiniennes*, introduction

⁹² Ibid, 49. n.1

⁹³ Ela Greenberg, *Preparing the Mothers of Tomorrow, Education and Islam in Mandate Palestine* (University of Texas Press. Austin, 2010), 31

⁹⁴ Jaussen, *Coutumes* 49 n.1

were not involved in her disappearance. He does however set out at the beginning of the story that in 1917 the Nablus Municipality had attempted to take over their hospital (which preceded the opening of the school), and have the Sisters exiled as enemy aliens.⁹⁵ That they failed to do so was only due to the fact that the Ottoman military authorities at the time needed medical staff for their soldiers and co-opted their services.⁹⁶ If the incident of the alleged kidnapping is to be set in a broader context, then it is far more likely to be that of the strained relations with the local Municipality than that of local parents feeling they had no control over what happened in the school. It is telling in this respect that when the young lady was brought home from Bethlehem she was initially lodged in Nablus in the house of the politically influential Abdul Hadi family⁹⁷ which was active in its opposition to the colonial power.⁹⁸

There may indeed have been a feeling among Nabulsi parents that they lacked effective control over what their children were taught in missionary schools, but in this particular case there were clearly other considerations being brought to bear. The broader hypothesis of Greenberg's book however, alluded to in the title on 'Preparing the Mothers of Tomorrow' was that a growing sense of national identity in Palestine after WWI was accompanied by more emphasis on the importance of education, and in particular for girls, in developing the 'new nation.'⁹⁹ Ideally this meant Palestinian schools with local - and so in the case of Nablus, Muslim - teachers, and led to a degree of hostility to educational establishments from external sources which were perceived as 'colonial.'¹⁰⁰ This nevertheless created a dilemma, as it was the Christian schools which tended to be better endowed financially, and so had more resources to provide a better education than the local schools.¹⁰¹ Any tensions between the desire for self-sufficient development and a fear that this could not be achieved effectively without external support must have been exacerbated in a town which prior to the arrival of the British had received few European visitors and tended not to be tolerant of, or perceive a need to co-exist with, outsiders.¹⁰² There was consequently scope for mutual suspicion and miscomprehension between the overwhelmingly Muslim Nabulsis and representatives of the Christian faith in

⁹⁵ Jaussen, *Coutumes* 48 See also 251, which notes hostility on the part of the Mayor in 1910 towards 'ces francaises:' this increased with the outbreak of WWI (252) . Note also 319: "les Français donnent trop de liberte a la femme." (The French give too much freedom to their women)

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Ibid, 49

⁹⁸ For a biography of Awni Abdul Hadi, one of its leading members, see the Personalities section of the Palestine Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs: <http://passia.org/personalities/21>

⁹⁹ Greenberg, *Preparing the Mothers of Tomorrow*, 4. Similar themes are explored in Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and its 'new' Women, the Palestinian Women's Movement 1920 – 1948* (University of California Press, London, 2003)

¹⁰⁰ Greenberg. *Preparing the Mothers of Tomorrow* 1

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 13

¹⁰² On this point, see David Kushner, 'Zealous Towns in Nineteenth Century Palestine', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 3, No.3, July 1997 605

schools, hospitals, and government offices whose religion was closely identified with the European colonialists.

That did not mean however that the relationship was invariably hostile. For example, the political report for May 1923 indicates that in general the situation was calm, with nothing substantive to report from the Northern District that month.¹⁰³ In June Amin al Tamimi¹⁰⁴ was reported to have been asked by the Nablus Muslim-Christian Society to interview the Emir Abdullah in regard to the Hejaz treaty.¹⁰⁵ This indicates both the continuing linkages between the Nabulsi political class and Transjordan and the fact that the British authorities were monitoring them. Tamimi would have been of particular interest to the Mandatory authorities, given that he was the Nablus representative to the Higher Islamic Council, and was elected Deputy to its Chairman, Haj Amin Al-Husseini.¹⁰⁶ Also that month there was yet further evidence of Palestinian notables' reluctance to manifest overt opposition to British policies due to their fears of being stripped of their assets. The report's author claimed to have received assurances from Suleiman Bey Tuqan¹⁰⁷ that there would be no resolutions against paying taxes at the forthcoming sixth Palestinian Arab Congress due to the fact that land-owners participating in the event would be the first to suffer from any retaliatory action by the Government.¹⁰⁸ That Tuqan was willing to share such observations on his fellow notables is also indicative of the level of co-optation of local Nabulsi elites the British were able to achieve, and the degree of interaction between those elites and their social peers in the mandatory regime.

From their own perspective, there is evidence that those at the top of Nabulsi society preferred dialogue with the colonial regime to open confrontation as a means of realising their objectives. The September 1923 political report¹⁰⁹ noted that a loan of £200 was obtained from a bank against the signature of four notables in the town for the purpose of contributing to funds to send a Palestinian Arab delegation to London.¹¹⁰ Two months later a protest against the Balfour declaration was submitted to the District Governor by the Nablus Christian society,¹¹¹ but any further action in support of the protest –such as shop closures- was held in abeyance following the intervention of Adel Zouaiter, a member of one of the town's leading families.¹¹² Clearly the JNH policy was a sensitive issue, but Nablus's position within the British regional government hierarchy in Palestine was not. The February 1924 political

¹⁰³ Political Report for May 1923, in FO 141/673/1, TNA

¹⁰⁴ For a biographical note see <http://www.passia.org/personalities/788> Tamimi was the Nablus representative to the Higher Islamic Council

¹⁰⁵ Political Report for June 1923, 2, para 4, in FO 141/673/1, TNA

¹⁰⁶ See <http://www.passia.org/personalities/788> The monitoring of Tamimi by the British went on throughout the Mandate, and he was eventually arrested and exiled to Rhodesia, where he died in 1944

¹⁰⁷ For a biographical note see <http://www.passia.org/personalities/816>

¹⁰⁸ Political Report for June 1923, 8, para 30, in FO 141/673/1, TNA

¹⁰⁹ In FO 141/672, TNA

¹¹⁰ Ibid, para 4 of the report

¹¹¹ Political Report for November 1923 in FO 141/672, 3, TNA

¹¹² For a biography of Adel Zouaiter, see <http://www.passia.org/personalities/850>

report¹¹³ noted with some surprise the lack of adverse comment following a reorganisation which relegated the town from a District HQ to that of a Sub-District.¹¹⁴ This subdued reaction could be argued to be the logical consequence of a community being in opposition to the mandate per se, and so uninterested in its position relative to the administrative hierarchy of the colonial order. Conversely, on the British side the reorganisation is indicative that Nablus was not considered a priority, and that other parts of Northern Palestine, notably Haifa, were considered of greater importance.

Disinterest in the British administration was not however reflected in attitudes towards its own municipal affairs, as a year later it was reported that a new Municipal Council had begun to function in Nablus, notwithstanding opposition from members of the Arab Executive to nominations for Council members.¹¹⁵ I would argue that this development was generally consistent with an outlook that was either indifferent or hostile to authority at the national level –of whatever origin-, but put its own interests first at the local level, given the central role of a Municipal Council in enabling the effective administration of the town.

As stated earlier in this chapter,¹¹⁶ an overall picture consequentially emerges from these political reports of success on behalf of the Mandatory authorities in co-opting sufficient members from amongst the Nabulsi notables to govern effectively whilst at the same time avoiding overt hostilities. There were nevertheless underlying tensions arising from the town's emergence from relative isolation prior to WWI, and its support for the developing movement of Palestinian national politics. From a British perspective there was clearly suspicion of, and a rapid response to, containing any manifestations of hostile activity in public areas, with close monitoring of any political activity to ensure that it did not develop into more widespread opposition to the Mandate. The incidents with the school teachers are also indicative of religious sensitivities, not in the purely theological sense, but arising from a perception of Christianity as a possible tool of imperial control. The general approach of the British was for early pre-emptive action so that potential trouble could be 'nipped in the bud.' One may speculate on the extent to which such action may only have served to fuel the build-up of tensions which finally contributed to the 1936 Arab Revolt, given that 'zero tolerance' policies by the authorities meant that nothing was permitted which could have acted as a safety valve for the expression of popular discontent. Whether the appropriate response to dissent was draconian –as opposed to more calibrated- action was an issue which created real tensions between the civilian and military authorities during the 1936 – 1938 period, and which is considered in detail in chapter V of this thesis. At this point in the analysis however, and in the context of the importance of local affairs to the Nabulsi, it is appropriate

¹¹³ In FO 141/672, TNA

¹¹⁴ Ibid, para 2 of the report

¹¹⁵ Political Report, Northern District, February 1925, para 1, in FO 141/672, TNA

¹¹⁶ See page 65 above

to consider how the British inter-acted with them at the local level (as opposed to monitoring their activities for political or security purposes). This is the subject of the following section.

Local Governance

Whereas the policies of the Mandatory Government at Departmental level were initiated and developed in its Head Office in Jerusalem, their impact at the local level was experienced by the indigenous population in terms of what was implemented in their geographical area. The purpose of this section is to examine some specific activities, of which some documented in the Israel State Archives, to reveal what more can be learned of the British-Nabulsi relationship. On the theme of rural development, I conclude that the scale of the projects undertaken, whether or not well-intentioned, were insufficient to make any material impact on the size of the problems facing the agricultural sector in the rural hinterland in the surrounding area. If lack of resources was one of the factors militating against success in that sector it may also have been a consideration in the joint efforts between the British authorities and the local municipal council, where an analysis of the reports concerning proposals to build a sports and recreation ground reveal a perception that monies invested in such facilities would contribute to public health and so result in a lowering of demands for (and costs of) medical services provision. The overarching consideration nevertheless remained the maintenance of law and order and the prevention of any activities which might threaten to develop into concerted or organised opposition to British rule per se. An example in this respect is provided by the use of police in crowd dispersal following demonstrations which developed after a wedding reception.

The background to this incident is that Nablus, together with many other places in Palestine, had shown strong support for the Kemalists' military victories against the Greeks in Anatolia during 1921 and 1922.¹¹⁷ As a result of these feelings of sharing a Muslim culture with the Turks, as well as struggling against European powers, a wedding procession in Nablus during the autumn of 1922 was turned into a political demonstration, complete with Turkish flags and shouts of "down with Zionism, Great Britain, and the Balfour declaration."¹¹⁸ This provoked a hostile response from the British authorities who sent in a police contingent to disperse the crowd.¹¹⁹ Subsequent plans to decorate the town in honour of Turkish forces and to organise a religious celebration were then turned down by the local Mayor.¹²⁰ This event indicates both British sensitivities towards public manifestations of nationalist opposition to the colonial power, as well as (at that time) a degree of willingness by in this case the municipal authorities to co-operate with them against the wishes of

¹¹⁷ Awad Halabi, 'Liminal Loyalties, Ottomanism and Palestinian responses to the Turkish War of Independence, 1919 – 1922'. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Volume 41, No.3 (Spring 2012). 26

¹¹⁸ Halabi, *Liminal Loyalties* 29

¹¹⁹ Ibid

¹²⁰ Ibid

populist elements. The Mayor at that time was Shaikh Omar al Zouaiter, who it seemed generally tried to avoid confrontation with the Mandatory, given that in November of the following year he intervened to prevent the closure of shops in Nablus after a protest against the Balfour declaration which was submitted to the District Governor by the local branch of the Nablus-Christian Society.¹²¹

These events, and the reaction to them, further illustrate that there was an element of 'divide and rule' in the approach of the Mandatory authority, which sought to co-opt the support (or at least passive acquiescence) of members of the Nabulsi elite in their efforts to control the population as a whole. As Halabi described it:

“the urban and rural poor displayed solidarity with the Turks as fellow Muslims resisting European armies.....(while) the political elite responded in a more deliberate, expressly political manner as they pursued their own struggle with the British authorities.”¹²²

Apart from the maintenance of law and order and containment of possible uprisings, one of the main challenges facing the British administration in Palestine was the need to develop an economy which had been devastated by World War I and its accompanying natural disasters. This issue was examined in greater detail in chapter I of the thesis, but a specific project concerning the cultivation of silk worms in the agricultural districts surrounding Nablus is indicative of the extent to which resource constraints, exacerbated by priorities elsewhere in the territory – such as the development of the port of Haifa- meant that the positive impact of British intervention was insignificant in relation to the scale of the problem.

The context for the development of this project can be found in the annual reports of the Mandatory authority's Department of Education, which are revealing both of local conditions and of the British perspective on the indigenous population in Palestine: and of particular relevance to Jabal Nablus, where wealth was a function of land ownership and agricultural produce.¹²³ We can glean from these reports something of the way in which education and agricultural development (as well as public health) were linked in the minds of senior officials. The 1929 -30 annual report of the Education Department¹²⁴ indicated the presence of the Salahiya elementary school in Nablus, one of twelve in Palestine which also offered secondary education classes.¹²⁵ It also recorded the existence of the (private) An-Najah School.¹²⁶

These reports were unsurprisingly critical of the former Ottoman regime's educational provision, which had been largely confined to the instruction of boys in

¹²¹ FO 141 / 672, TNA, Monthly political reports on Palestine and Trans-Jordan, report for the month of November 1923

¹²² Halabi, *Liminal Loyalties* 23

¹²³ For a discussion of commercial practices there see Beshara Doumani, *Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean*, 234 – 238 (The Family Firm in Nablus)

¹²⁴ In CO 814/4, TNA

¹²⁵ Ibid

¹²⁶ Ibid

urban areas.¹²⁷ The lack of proper education facilities was perceived by the Mandatory authorities as one of the reasons for the depressed state of the agricultural sector. In a letter to the Colonial Secretary, Philip Cunliffe-Lister, High Commissioner Wauchope asserted that it was his:

“constant aim and endeavour to ameliorate the depressed condition of the Arab agricultural classes and I regard the expansion of rural education as one means but not the only one to that end.”¹²⁸

It would appear however that the Treasury was un-persuaded of the value of rural education, considering that experience in the remote rural area of India had shown it to be a waste of resources.¹²⁹ Within the constraints imposed by London there were nevertheless some efforts made in the field of technical education as part of an attempt to improve rural productivity. In the 1929 – 30 annual report of the Education Department for example there is a fairly detailed entry on the introduction of sericulture classes in the Hashimiya school in Nablus.¹³⁰ The report confirmed that the “importance of planting mulberry trees was widely emphasised”¹³¹ and that during the silk-worm breeding season “a course in theoretical and practical sericulture was given at Nablus to 26 teachers from various rural schools.”¹³² It goes on to note that a silk-reeling machine had been purchased from Syria and installed in the Aishiya girls’ school in Nablus.¹³³ The silk worms themselves were bred in the Khalidiya and Hashimiya boys’ schools in the town,¹³⁴ with the report concluding that “with assistance and organisation the development of this industry is a practical proposition.” As Roza El Eini has observed,¹³⁵ both the Departments of Agriculture and Education in Palestine were able to draw on an extensive network of technical knowledge developed elsewhere from other colonial territories.¹³⁶ The introduction of sericulture into Palestine should be placed in this context, as it represented a new activity in the territory with the potential for creating more added value than was the case with the traditional subsistence crops which were the staple of the agricultural sector at that time. They also tended to focus their available resources for technical education on the Arab rural sector, given that the Jewish population had their own agricultural institutions.¹³⁷

¹²⁷ CO 733/277/11, TNA, Letter of 03 January 1935 from High Commissioner Wauchope to Colonial Secretary Cunliffe-Lister

¹²⁸ CO 733/263/7, TNA, Letter of 19 May 1934 from Wauchope to Cunliffe-Lister, para 5

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ CO 814/4, TNA, Agriculture and Technical Education

¹³¹ Ibid

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ Ibid

¹³⁴ Ibid

¹³⁵ Roza El Eini, ‘British Agricultural-Educational Institutions in Mandate Palestine and their Impress on the Rural Landscape’. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 35, No.1, January 1999, 98-114

¹³⁶ El Eini, *British Agricultural-Educational Institutions*, 98

¹³⁷ Ibid, 99

There were wider reasons, however, for the thinking behind these agricultural initiatives. The Director of Education in Palestine during the 1920s was Humphrey Bowman, who had earlier held the same position in Iraq following the end of WWI, as well as in the Sudan prior to 1914.¹³⁸ In his memoirs he set out both the positive and negative reasons for wanting to keep the *fellahin* in productive occupations on the land.¹³⁹ On the one hand, like many of his contemporaries, he feared the urban unrest which could result from the migration into the towns of uneducated agricultural labourers¹⁴⁰ - one of the themes considered in chapter I on economic conditions in Palestine and their impact on Jabal Nablus. On the other, given the overwhelming dependence of the Palestinian economy on the agricultural sector, anything which could be achieved to improve its output would have a beneficial effect on reducing the poverty levels to be found in the rural areas.¹⁴¹ In his view there was a potentially virtuous circle to be achieved, starting with improved methods of cultivation, moving through increased prosperity, and so reducing indebtedness which was considered to be one of the main causes of crime.¹⁴²

This, then, is the broader perspective in which the attempts to develop sericulture should be understood. Nevertheless, because of the relative lack of available resources at the disposal of the Mandatory on the one hand, and the scale of the problems of rural poverty on the other, we must agree with Roza El Eini's conclusion that the efforts put into the development of agricultural projects such as these were insufficient to make any lasting impact on the rural Arab community.¹⁴³ That failure would have been of particular importance to Jabal Nablus, as the close links between the town and the countryside would mean that the urban population would have been well aware of the problems of their rural neighbours: and so the absence of any British 'success stories' there meant that there was nothing to mitigate their hostility to a colonial power which on the one hand was suspicious of them, and on the other was deeply resented for its JNH policy. As far as this part of the Palestinian territory was concerned the Mandatory's generally *de minimis* approach to engagement and investment meant that rural poverty was not effectively addressed:¹⁴⁴ and it is telling that the Arab Revolt, discussed in chapter V below, drew most of its active participants from the villages and countryside, not the towns. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, it is nevertheless worth noting that the deteriorating economic conditions in the UK during the 1920s meant that the Government had to contend with rural distress at home, and so was unlikely to have

¹³⁸ See Humphrey Bowman, *Middle East Window* (Longmans, Green & Co, London, 1942)

¹³⁹ Bowman *Middle East Window* 279

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*

¹⁴² *Ibid*

¹⁴³ El Eini, *British Agricultural-Educational Institutions*, 111

¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless it was not entirely absent. A horticultural station was established in Nablus consisting of an orchard and a nursery, growing and propagating fruit trees, almonds and olives. The staff working there comprised of three gardeners and three monthly labourers – all of whom were praised for their regular attendance to daily work during the 1936 Arab Revolt. See 'Nablus Annual Report 1936' at the Israel State Archives

sufficient resources available to effectively engage with the scale of the problems it faced in Palestine.¹⁴⁵

Resource constraints can be seen to be a factor in the thinking behind support for some types of project where the expenditure involved was anticipated to produce a reduction in demand for (expenditure on) other services in which the Government was a provider – albeit in the case of health where it was not an exclusive provider. An example of this can be seen later in the Mandate when in 1939 the Nablus Municipal Council proposed the purchase of a piece of land on the western side of Nablus which it wished to turn into a sports ground.¹⁴⁶ The money it would need for this purchase was derived from its rental income which the Mandatory authorities paid the municipality for the Watan hospital site.¹⁴⁷ In the terms of the lease governing the rental income it stated that the municipality could use the funds both to cover the hospital expenses of “poor persons of Nablus town”¹⁴⁸ and “other objects connected with the improvement of the health of the townspeople of Nablus.”¹⁴⁹ Given the Government’s clear support for the proposal to develop a sports ground¹⁵⁰ we have here an example of how British colonial regimes operating at the local level conceptualised sporting and recreational activities in terms of benefits to public health. In the absence of agreement from the local landowner, the council petitioned the High Commissioner for permission to allow a compulsory purchase order.¹⁵¹ The Assistant District Commissioner for the Samaria District considered the project a “very desirable one”¹⁵² on the grounds that the proposed plot was of sufficient size to accommodate a football ground, basketball and tennis courts and, “perhaps most important of all, a children’s play-ground.”¹⁵³ His letter to the Chief Secretary in Jerusalem concluded with the observation that the Senior Medical Officer in Nablus agreed with his recommendation.¹⁵⁴ We know from observations made at the time that e.g. tuberculosis was a serious problem in Mandate Palestine,¹⁵⁵ so it is interesting to see both officials lending their support to a proposal which would have helped Nabulsi adults and children to enjoy the fresh air and exercise which can reduce the risks of their succumbing to such a disease. Unfortunately the archival records do not indicate whether this project went ahead, but the available material is revealing of these perceived benefits between sport and health, with possibly a tacit

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion of the problems (both political and economic) at home in respect of agriculture, see John Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902 – 1940* (Longman, London, 1978), 162, & 177 - 178

¹⁴⁶ Israel State Archives, British Mandate collection –E, ref. 16613/6 Acquisition of land for Nablus sports ground 46 – 53.

¹⁴⁷ Israel State Archives, British Mandate collection 47

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 53

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 47

¹⁵¹ Ibid

¹⁵² Ibid

¹⁵³ Ibid

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 48

¹⁵⁵ See E.W.G. Masterman, *Hygiene and Disease in Palestine in Modern and in Biblical Times* (Palestine Exploration Fund, London, 1920), 16. Tuberculosis was the second largest cause of premature death after malaria

understanding that money spent on sport would contribute to improvements in public health, and so reductions in expenditure on the medical budget. It is also reflective of the way that the local representatives of the District administration were willing to support the Nablus Municipal Council in its bid for a compulsory purchase order from the Government in Jerusalem in cases where there was a shared perception that a particular proposal was in the public interest. That there are not more such examples in the archives might suggest that there were not many local council initiatives of this nature. Larger scale projects, due to their size and funding requirements, were necessarily the preserve of the Mandatory authority, and chapter III in this thesis will examine the largest infrastructure development undertaken by the British in Nablus, which was the provision of an urban water supply.

Resource constraints were clearly also a factor in the lease or purchase of land for Government use, in terms of ensuring that what was paid did not go beyond what was considered fair market value for a particular plot in its specific location. However, in the case of the Balata landing ground, the detailed correspondence which has survived suggests that the concept of fair value was applied to the land-owner / lessor as much as it was to the British lessee. This suggests that a careful evaluation had been carried out of how an appropriate price in relation to prevailing market conditions was likely to have avoided the creation of grievances on the part of displaced cultivators which might have become the source of more widespread opposition to British rule in the Jabal Nablus region.

In 1932 the Royal Air Force (RAF) planned to establish a landing ground to be available if necessary in the vicinity of the village of Balata.¹⁵⁶ Some years later, having located a suitable site to lease, it appears that the rental agreed had not been paid to the landlords.¹⁵⁷ The case had been the subject of arbitration concerning the appropriate rental value¹⁵⁸ and was also heard in the Land Court of Nablus.¹⁵⁹ One of the issues to be settled was that of water supply to the site, with the names of those supplying water from neighbouring villages, and an agreement on the hourly rate.¹⁶⁰ From a statement of evidence given by a British surveyor working in the Department of Lands and Surveys¹⁶¹ it is clear that careful and thorough calculations had been made concerning an appropriate rental for the site in relation to the agricultural produce foregone because it had been taken over by the RAF. A detailed estimate had been prepared by an Agricultural Officer in Jerusalem of the production costs and subsequent sales revenue accruing from the cultivation of both onions and wheat across a four year period as one of the inputs contributing to the estimate of fair value for the land.¹⁶² A local Nabulsi land-owner was also invited to be part of the

¹⁵⁶ See Israel State Archives, British Mandate Collection, Ref. 16644/2 Balata Landing Ground, Nablus Air Field

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 7, 10, and 13

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 18

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 25

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 33 & 34

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 37 -39

¹⁶² Ibid, 46 - 50

Board of Arbitration set up to establish the appropriate payments to be made to the landowners.¹⁶³ It is furthermore clear from related correspondence that the Government was willing to treat the land-owners “generously”¹⁶⁴ and to pay a higher rent during those periods when water was available for irrigation purposes.¹⁶⁵ As its Chief Agricultural Officer observed, the land in question was a significant portion of the total area owned by its proprietors, and so its use by the RAF would deprive them of the means of gaining a livelihood from agricultural production.¹⁶⁶ No doubt part of the reason for this extensive analysis was that the Government considered the original valuation to have been too high¹⁶⁷ but there is sufficient evidence in the extensive file on this subject¹⁶⁸ of genuine attempts to confirm fair value, and we know from the opening entries that the leases were eventually agreed.¹⁶⁹

Different concerns were apparent when the military started complaining in 1934 that the proximity of the municipal refuse incinerators, tannery, and abattoir to the Nablus barracks was leading to concerns regarding the health of the troops and police stationed there.¹⁷⁰ These facilities had originally been constructed in 1921 with the approval of the Mandatory authorities when a detachment of the Indian army was occupying the barracks.¹⁷¹ By the end of 1934 the Department of Health had identified a new site some distance from both the town and the barracks.¹⁷² The Nablus Municipal authority had no objection to the proposed relocation, but argued that it had insufficient funds to carry out the proposed relocation.¹⁷³ They argued that the slaughter house fees were already amongst the highest in Palestine and that it was not possible to increase them. “The depressive financial means of the tax payer”¹⁷⁴ furthermore meant that it was not feasible to either increase the rates, or to raise any loans for this purpose. Their argument was not however confined to financial constraints, as Mayor Suleiman went on to note that the existing site of the slaughter house was a former Ottoman state domain property which had been sold to the municipality for the purpose of erecting the incinerator, tannery, and slaughter house. The site itself had been chosen by the Department of Health, and approved by the Mandatory Government, so it was logical for the British to contribute towards the costs of relocation.

¹⁶³ Israel State Archives, British Mandate Collection 57 - 59

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 65

¹⁶⁵ Ibid 66

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 74

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 130

¹⁶⁸ There is a total of 145 pages of entries

¹⁶⁹ Israel State Archives, British Mandate Collection 1 - 6

¹⁷⁰ The correspondence on this case is to be found in *Municipal Services: Municipality Samaria District, Nablus / Shekhem*. Israel State Archives, 43 - 120

¹⁷¹ *Municipal Services*, 119. Letter of 16 September 1934 from Northern District Commissioner to Chief Secretary

¹⁷² Ibid, 105. Letter of 29 November 1934 from Northern District Commissioner to Chief Secretary

¹⁷³ Ibid, 76 Translation of a letter from Nablus Mayor Suleiman to District officer, Nablus in response to his of 2 April 1935

¹⁷⁴ Ibid

The extensive correspondence which was exchanged between September 1934 and December 1935 between the Chief Engineer in Nablus, the Northern District Commissioner in Haifa, and the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Secretary in Jerusalem indicates that there was no real dispute concerning the need for central government funding to enable the relocation. Unfortunately however, the archival records do not contain any definitive statements that such funding was forthcoming. Nevertheless, in a letter of 18th January 1935 from the Chief Secretary to the Northern District Commissioner¹⁷⁵ the former approved expenditure by the municipality of £P 430 for the purchase of the proposed new site, the cost of four new incinerators, the purchase of a motor refuse truck and the covering and cleaning of the existing site.¹⁷⁶ The approval did not however come with any firm commitment from Jerusalem to provide these funds. Instead it was suggested that that sum should be considered as a possible future grant-in-aid to the municipality depending on its financial condition.¹⁷⁷ This reluctance to make a firm commitment of government funds had clearly caused a degree of frustration in the military, as in his letter of 19 April 1935¹⁷⁸ to the Chief Secretary the Director of Medical Services asserted that he was constantly receiving complaints from the army and air force medical services concerning the swarms of flies surrounding the abattoir: and went on to claim¹⁷⁹ that he had even had a visit from the D.D.M.B. British Troops in Egypt on this matter. It would appear that conditions in Nablus were not a priority for the Mandatory authorities even when their own troops were vociferously complaining.

These cases at the level of local governance indicate the limitations imposed by resource constraints, combined with the efforts made by the British authorities at the local level to avoid confrontation with the Nabulsis in the course of their day to day administrative activities, and to make at least some attempts –however inadequate– to address the problems faced by the people of the Jabal Nablus area. The chronology of the correspondence nevertheless indicates that issues arising from Jabal Nablus were not considered a priority as far as Government HQ in Jerusalem was concerned. That the Northern District Commissioner had to wait until the 18th January 1935 for a response from the Chief Secretary to his letter of 29 November 1934 is indicative of this.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the impact of events during the early years following the arrival of the British on their perceptions of the Jabal Nablus area. It has then examined the political reports drawn up at the time for what they reveal about the

¹⁷⁵ *Municipal Services*, 99

¹⁷⁶ These details are set out in a letter of 29 November 1934 from the Northern District Commissioner to the Chief Secretary. That of 18 January 1935 is the response to it

¹⁷⁷ Letter of 18 January 1935 from Chief Secretary to Northern District Commissioner, para 3

¹⁷⁸ *Municipal Services* 81

¹⁷⁹ Letter of 19 April 1935 from Director of Medical Services to the Chief Secretary, para 2

Government's priorities in maintaining law and order and avoiding the development of opposition which could subsequently lead to more widespread disturbances if not properly handled at the point of inception. An examination of local governance in and around the town has revealed the limiting effects of resource constraints, while also acknowledging that the authorities were largely successful in monitoring the political activities of the local elites and suppressing any possibilities of popular resistance in Nablus.

It is unsurprising that the British were suspicious of Nablus as a potential site of resistance to colonial rule, and that they monitored its politically active elite families, given their widespread and active relations with Palestine's neighbouring territories in general, and the Hashemite dynasty in particular. This had a significant impact in framing the way they perceived the British mandate and reacted to it. It was furthermore an almost exclusively Muslim town, and as Weldon Matthews has noted:¹⁸⁰

"the political orientation of the city's 'ayan.....tended to face Damascus as much as Jerusalem....(its) nationalist leaders displayed a pronounced pan-Syrian nationalism mixed with an element of competitiveness with the Jerusalem politicians."

Taking into account that context, the chapter has focussed on the British perspective on the town, both in terms of its overriding policy towards Palestine, and from the perspective of specific interactions between officials and Nabulsi citizens at the Departmental and local level of the Mandatory administration. As stated above,¹⁸¹ there was a general absence of overt hostility between British officials and the Nabulsis in the course of their day to day interactions, so I conclude that hostility towards the Mandate in this part of Palestine was based on ideological opposition to the JNH policy, reinforced by the awareness of those in the Nablus political class of contemporaneous regional events, where other territories were achieving (a degree of) independence from their colonial masters. For this town in particular the opposition was reinforced by the fact that its population was overwhelmingly Muslim, and that prior to the arrival of the British it had not had as much experience as towns and cities like Jaffa and Jerusalem in dealing with Europeans. Apart from periodic arrivals of Christian missionaries who were treated with suspicion and considered to be the agents of the colonial powers, Nablus had largely been left untouched by western influence prior to World War I.

As far as the Mandatory authorities were concerned, those responsible for the maintenance of law and order, including the monitoring of political activism, held the Nabulsis in some suspicion as at least a potential centre of opposition and unrest. That negative perception at the national level of the Government based in Jerusalem

¹⁸⁰ Weldon Matthews, *Confronting an Empire, Constructing a Nation: Arab Nationalists and Popular Politics in Mandate Palestine* (I B Tauris. New York. 2006), 39

¹⁸¹ See page 75 above

may have been one of the reasons why the District Commissioner's staff in the northern district of Palestine were careful to avoid any actions which would have aroused Nabulsi opposition, as well as taking steps to reduce opposition when it occurred: with the decision to remove Christian women teachers from one of the local schools in 1923 being a case in point.¹⁸² Conversely however, due to the difficult economic conditions pertaining both in the UK and Palestine in the 1920s, and the concomitant Treasury imposed spending constraints, there was no real scope for increasing expenditure in this non-priority area, even if it was considered able to reduce the levels of latent hostility to the Mandatory authorities.

There is a further dimension which needs to be taken into consideration if Nabulsi opposition to the British is to be properly understood. The town was somewhat geographically remote in the Northern hills, both from the capital and from the coastal strip. It could be argued that this sense of relative isolation served to reinforce Nablus's orientation towards 'the interior', geographically speaking. As discussed in the introductory chapter to this thesis, Nablus had flourished in the nineteenth century as a nodal point in the network of power relations established by the (land-based) Ottoman empire, and was not primarily orientated towards the sea.¹⁸³ The Mandatory administration's priorities for Palestine were nevertheless concentrated on the coastal strip, and in particular on the town of Haifa.¹⁸⁴ I have argued in the preceding chapter that British macro-economic policies in Palestine disadvantaged the central 'spine' of the country where Nablus was located in relation to the more rapidly developing coastal strip. It was the relative decline which the Nabulsi suffered in comparison both with their former Ottoman status and in relation to the economic growth of the coastal towns, which was the root cause of their opposition. This is not to assert however that the town was entirely neglected by the Mandatory authorities, and the following chapter will examine the major infrastructure project they initiated there, which was the provision of an urban water-supply system.

¹⁸² See pages 72-73 above

¹⁸³ Introductory chapter, page 17

¹⁸⁴ For a general discussion of the importance of Haifa to British development policy see chapter 3 of Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress*. Chapter 3 is entitled 'City of the Future', Haifa, Capital of British Palestine'



Map of Nablus in the 1917 Edition of the Military Handbook on Palestine

CHAPTER III

EMASCULATING MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT IN MANDATE PALESTINE: THE CASE OF THE NABLUS WATER SYSTEM

Although other nations have had more imposing buildings and a greater display of political influence, none did so much as Britain for the sick poor of the land¹

Introduction

Chapter II focussed on the years immediately following World War I, and set out British perceptions of Nablus together with the way that they interacted with it at the local level. The analysis of that relationship revealed a Mandatory policy towards Jabal Nablus of 'de minimis' engagement, clearly illustrating that the area was not considered a priority for the government in Jerusalem, concentrating as it was on the rapidly developing coastal strip.² As a result, a picture emerged of the ongoing, day to day activities of government in an area where the main preoccupation was the maintenance of peace and stability.

This chapter by contrast, in similar fashion to the succeeding chapters IV and V of the thesis, embarks on a much more closely focussed and detailed case study or 'snapshot' of a specific event. Here it is a water supply project, while in chapter IV it is the 1927 earthquake, and in chapter V an incident between the Mayor of Nablus and the British military forces during the first year of the Arab Revolt in 1936. The purpose of such an approach in these chapters is to reveal at the local level the impact of the Mandatory government's policies towards the Jabal Nablus region which was discussed at a more macro level in chapter II. This contributes towards a better understanding of what a 'de minimis' approach meant in practical terms.

Within that context chapter III examines here the relationship between the British and the Nabulsis viewed through the lens of the one significant infrastructure project carried out in the town under the Mandate. This was the development of water supplies and sewerage disposal in the more affluent residential areas,³ following various ad hoc improvements which had been carried out during the 1920s. This gave rise to a large amount of correspondence in 1934 between Government officials 'on site,' the Mandatory HQ in Jerusalem, and the Colonial Office, Crown Agents and suppliers in the UK.⁴ It is consequently a rich source of material to analyse the dynamic between these various groups and determine the shifting contours of British rule over the city.

¹ E.W.G. Masterman, *Hygiene and Disease in Palestine in Modern and in Biblical Times* (Palestine Exploration Fund, London, 1920), x

² For a discussion in this respect of Haifa, 'the capital of British Palestine' see Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress*, 99-102

³ See the section on 'The New Nablus Water Supply Project' starting at page 98 below

⁴ See the section on 'Implementation Problems' starting at page 105 below

Water supplies also fell within the widening range of services offered by municipal councils in the closing decades of the Ottoman empire.⁵ The particular project which is the subject of this chapter provides a good illustration of the way that the British authorities under the Mandate effectively emasculated the powers of the councils together with the development of local democracy which had become apparent by the turn of the twentieth century.⁶ The formal position of the Government was that it was updating the structure of the old Ottoman system and clarifying and expanding the responsibilities of municipal authorities so that the populace could better understand the rationale for local taxation.⁷ Perhaps unsurprisingly its view of local administration prior to World War I tended towards the negative, with the Administrative Councils established by the Turkish authorities being described as “supplementing the somewhat untrustworthy services of a corrupt and inefficient body of public officers.”⁸ That there had been a certain flowering of civic pride and municipal development in the early years of the twentieth century was largely ignored. In Nablus itself for example there had been a municipal sewage project, and a clock tower to celebrate the first jubilee of Sultan Abd al-Hamid, together with the establishment of a public park and theatre in the Shuwaytira neighbourhood.⁹ Notwithstanding British perceptions of the differences between themselves and the former administration, some have argued that there was in fact a good deal of continuity in the sense that both regimes essentially used the organs of local government as a means of extending the reach of the colonial power.¹⁰

One of the justifications used by the British for constraining municipal autonomy was the need for fiscal restraint. It brought the system of local government under close budgetary control, justified in particular by reference to the Tel Aviv council, which was held to be spending beyond its means and so incurring debts that could ultimately fall to the national government in Jerusalem.¹¹ An analysis of the Nablus water supply project within the context of such fiscal considerations contributes to improving our understanding as to how the issue of development expenditure led to a tightening of national government control and reduced the scope for local initiatives. This led to the somewhat paradoxical situation whereby a policy of minimal government intervention by the Mandatory authorities in Jabal Nablus did

⁵ The councils themselves were created in 1863. For a discussion of their subsequent evolution see Farid Al-Salim, *Palestine and the Decline of the Ottoman Empire, Modernisation and the Path to Palestinian Statehood* (L B Taurus & Co, London, 2015) 195-196

⁶ Ibid

⁷ For an insight into how the British in the 1920s perceived the Ottoman system and considered what changes were necessary for their own purposes, see the Memo on Municipal Government in CO 733/134/3, TNA

⁸ Memo on Municipal Government page 4, para 5

⁹ Mahmoud Yazbak, ‘The Municipality of a Muslim Town, Nablus 1868 – 1914’. *Archiv Orientalni*, Vol.67, No.3, 1999, 359. Academia Publishing House, Prague.

¹⁰ See Usamah Shahwan, *Public Administration in Palestine Past and Present* (University Press of America, Oxford, 2003) xv. He argued that “the ideology of administration in this part of the world has been an ideology of domination rather than development” – under the Ottomans, the British, the Jordanians, and the Israelis

¹¹ Ibid. Covering note of 31st January 1927. For a discussion of the relationship between municipal and central government in Palestine, see pages 93 – 97 below

not translate into any potential to expand the degree of local autonomy. Quite the contrary, given that the responsibility for raising the initial capital cost for the water supply project was vested in the Mandatory Government in Jerusalem under conditions set down by the Treasury in London. These included an obligation on the local municipal authority to be responsible for the repayments.¹² In this respect the project reflected the *de minimis* or 'under-developed' approach which is the leitmotif of this thesis in characterising the British approach to Nablus. The several years that it took to negotiate a loan of £18,000 for the town's water supply can be contrasted with the £1 Million that had been made available for the development of Haifa and its surrounding hinterland in 1927.¹³

The provision of water supplies was furthermore a significant factor in thinking on colonial development during the early decades of the twentieth century. This was in part a response to rising expectations amongst the local populace, where "the literate, urban middle classes of Palestine demanded cleaner cities and more municipal services."¹⁴ Scholars such as Michelle Campos trace these expectations to the Young Turk revolution of 1908 which saw the dissemination of ideas concerning progress and development in society, including, but not restricted to, the reform of municipal government so that it better responded to the aspirations of the citizens it was responsible for serving.¹⁵ The evolving sense of civic pride during the decades immediately preceding World War I looked to the examples set by European cities, with their modern transport and communication systems as well as running water supplies.¹⁶

Running in parallel to these rising expectations was a move away from the classical free-market liberalism of the nineteenth century towards a view of imperial territories as constituting a single market for the sale of British goods and services, and so the rationale for their development along Western lines was that as their standard of living increased they would be able to purchase more from the UK, and so offset that country's domestic economic problems brought about by the Great Depression.¹⁷ The insistence by the Crown Agents that only British manufacturers of water supply pipes should be allowed to bid for the Nablus urban water and waste water project should be seen in the context of this new thinking concerning the rationale for colonial

¹² See the section below on 'The New Nablus Water Supply Project' starting at page 98

¹³ Norris, *Land of Progress*, 107

¹⁴ Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers, Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth Century Palestine* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2011) 172

¹⁵ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers* 172 – 182 on 'Municipal Modernity'

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Campos also sets out in these pages the development of calls for Jerusalem to be furnished with modern water supplies, an aspiration that was bedevilled by problems in raising the necessary capital, meaning that it was not until the arrival of the British after the end of World War I that a modern water supply would become available

¹⁷ For a flavour of this mode of thinking, see Leopold Amery's introduction to *A PLAN OF ACTION: Embodying a series of reports issued by the Research Committee of the Empire Economic Union and other papers* (Faber & Faber, London, 1932). See also Stephen Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy*, 301

development which emerged in the late 1920s.¹⁸ The issues raised in this particular chapter suggest that there may be potential for further research on the activities of British banks such as Barclays, and British pipe manufacturers such as Stantons in Palestine, the impact they had on local economic development, and their evolving relationship with the mandatory authorities.¹⁹ By the 1930s a system of imperial preferences was encouraging British exports into overseas colonial territories as a means of offsetting the reduced levels of demand in the domestic economy at the time of the Great Depression.²⁰ As far as Palestine was concerned, remittances in payment for goods purchased from the UK could be effected via Barclays Bank, which had been appointed as banker to the British Government in Palestine, and was considered the leading bank there.²¹ The generally favourable conditions pertaining in the territory, which was relatively unaffected by the global financial crisis of the early 1930s,²² made it an attractive location for infrastructure development. This goes some way to explaining the rivalry between the Stanton and Staveley pipe manufacturing companies,²³ both of whom saw Mandate Palestine as an important market for the sort of water supply projects which provided their major overseas business opportunities.

The rationale for expenditure on public health and scientific research in the colonies was also justified on the basis that increased living standards and economic development would lead to rising levels of demand and increased business opportunities for UK firms. This can be seen in the thinking behind the 1929 Colonial Development Act.²⁴ It is revealing that part of the case for improved water supplies in Nablus was based on the argument that better sanitation would lead to improvements in public health – and so by implication reduced demands for Government funded health services.²⁵ Furthermore, as the Mandate developed, and opposition to it was growing in Palestine during the 1930s, another strand became apparent in thinking on colonial development, namely that it should enable an improved state of well-being amongst the local population – although this was arguably more to provide a justification for retaining colonial territories than due to any altruism on the part of London policy makers.²⁶

¹⁸ For more on the disputes which broke out between the Crown Agents and the Mandatory Government in Jerusalem, see page 106 below

¹⁹ As Jacob Norris has noted, “the penetration of European investment and financial services industries into Palestine under British rule has thus far received scant attention from scholars, and there is a need for future research:” Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress*, 161

²⁰ Sarah Stockwell (Ed), *The British Empire, Themes and Perspectives* (Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2008) 121

²¹ A P S Clark, ‘Commerce, Industry & Banking’ in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 164, ‘Palestine, a Decade of Development’, (November 1932), 103

²² Clark, ‘Commerce, Industry & Banking’ 107

²³ See page 109 below

²⁴ Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy* 302: “the measure was symptomatic of an anxiety.....for the relief of a British economy in distress.”

²⁵ Letter of 09 March 1932 from Sir Arthur Wauchope, High Commissioner to the Colonial Secretary in CO 733/226/14, TNA

²⁶ Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy* 303

Water was a central element in questions concerning the extent of state intervention in society and the economy, both domestically in the UK, and also as far as its overseas possessions were concerned. As Leopold Amery had argued, the medical and scientific discoveries showing the relationship between water supplies, sanitation, and healthcare undermined the 19th Century 'night-watchman' concept of the state, and increasingly obliged it to engage in and develop the basic infrastructure of in particular urban communities.²⁷ These were not however the only reasons justifying state intervention in this sector. The large scale of water supply projects, the need to co-opt land for the development of reservoirs, and the development of a degree of regulation to ensure equitable supply across a multiplicity of private households all combined to make the central government the logical choice as overseer.²⁸

In Egypt and India by contrast the importance of water supplies was perceived more in terms of irrigation for a myriad of small scale farmers dependent either on the flooding of the Nile or the coming of the annual monsoon rains: and where if either did not recur as expected, then the resultant crop failure could lead to food shortages, famine, and political unrest.²⁹ In India for example the construction of canals enabled the cultivation of land that had hitherto not been used for crop production, while the building of railways then conveyed those crops to the growing population in the towns.³⁰ In Palestine by contrast irrigation of agricultural land was mainly an initiative of the Jewish settlers, and the role of the Mandatory Government in relation to railway infrastructure more focussed on enabling the export of Mesopotamian oil through the port of Haifa, with the capacity to convey agricultural produce a secondary consideration.³¹ As far as water was concerned the priority was very much the improvement of supplies to the urban population.³²

As such, the project which is the subject of this chapter relates to those broader themes of the thesis which consider, inter alia, the minimum necessary development investment in a non-priority area concordant with the Government's responsibilities as a mandatory power. It is also relevant to the issue of relations between the imperial power and the local notables through whom it attempted to govern, as the water supply was restricted to those residential households with the means to purchase it, and it was the leading families in Nablus, as opposed to the urban poor, who were the beneficiaries.

²⁷ For a general discussion of this theme see L C A Knowles, *The Economic Development of the British Overseas Empire* (George Routledge & Sons, London 1924), Volume 1, 52

²⁸ Knowles, *Economic Development* 52

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid, 382

³¹ For a discussion of the development of railways in Palestine, and their relationship to the port of Haifa, see Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress*, 110 - 116

³² See for example in relation to Jerusalem, Vincent Lemire, *La Soif De Jerusalem, Essai d'hydrohistoire (1840 – 1948)* (Publication de la Sorbonne, Paris, 2010)

Considering that focus, and in light of the fact that the new water supply system in Nablus was designed to serve only parts of the urban municipal area, it is appropriate to start our discussion of the Mandatory Government's impact on the development of the town's infrastructure with a brief overview of how local government was organised under the Mandate. This will be followed by a similar overview of water and sewerage in the Jabal Nablus to set the context for the new Nablus water supply project which is analysed in detail in the subsequent section. The project itself gave rise to various implementation problems, mainly relating to malfunctioning pipes, and these are considered from the perspective of what they reveal of the tensions between the different levels of the Mandatory Government from Nablus via Jerusalem to London. Finally the chapter goes on to consider the impact of the 1935 floods on Jabal Nablus and the government response to it. The conclusion then draws together the various themes to emerge from the issue of water supplies and their associated infrastructure.

District and Municipal Government in Palestine

Political and administrative power in mandate Palestine was concentrated in the High Commissioner's post in Jerusalem, and then exercised through a series of District and Assistant District Commissioners (DCs and ADCs), of which the former in Haifa, Jaffa, and Jerusalem.³³ In the Northern District, governed from Haifa, there were ADCs in Haifa, Nablus and Nazareth.³⁴ In the administrative machinery as a whole, Arabs and Jews were employed alongside UK nationals, although it was the latter who monopolised the senior positions where responsibility for administrative policy was vested.³⁵

No doubt part of the rationale for this was awareness of the controversial nature of the Jewish national home policy, although those in Jerusalem would on occasion play up the local political sensitivities when seeking to justify claims for increased resources from the Government in London. A letter from High Commissioner Wauchope is revealing in this respect:³⁶

“My.....experience of the disturbances of 1933 have convinced me.....that it would be most unwise to risk the hazard of understaffing the Districts in British officers.**Public security must be a factor of overriding importance in determining the question of the establishment of British officers in the Districts, in view of the unpopularity with a large section of the**

³³ For a discussion of District Administration in 1933 see CO 733/240/2, TNA

³⁴ CO 733/240/2, 6, note of 04 March 1933, TNA

³⁵ CO/733/259/6. Draft letter of 22 February 1934, para 2, TNA: “the Secretary of State.....concurs... that, while it is desirable to increase the number of Palestinians in the higher ranks of the service, such appointments must for some time be confined for the most part to vacancies in the technical departments and that, for the present, responsibility for the administrative and political affairs of government, in a general sense, must continue to be vested in British officers.”

³⁶ CO/733/259/6 3, para 3, TNA: letter of 12 February 1934 from High Commissioner Wauchope to Cunliffe-Lister, Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies

population of the policy which government has to pursue.”(Emphasis added)

Also revealing in the same letter are some of his policy priorities, where Wauchope asserts that he is “anxious by every possible means to ensure closer administration of the country and to bring about more intensive development of agriculture and improvement of conditions of health.” Important as these two sectors undoubtedly were – as was education – they were not priorities in terms of the financial allocations made within the total budget of £E2 Million for the Mandatory Government during 1926 – 1927.³⁷ Of 25 itemised areas of expenditure, the contents of the top ten showed that infrastructure and security were the priorities:

Police and Prisons.....	£E 306 Thousand (to nearest thousand)
Railways.....	£E 290
Transjordan Frontier Force.....	£E 166
Public Works Recurrent.....	£E 147
Miscellaneous.....	£E 122
Education.....	£E 114
Posts & Telegraphs.....	£E 106
District Admin.....	£E 95
Health.....	£E 89
Judicial Department.....	£E 68 ³⁸

Municipal Government of the urban areas by contrast was mainly locally funded, and broadly a continuation of the Ottoman system³⁹ established by the Vilayet Municipal Law of October 1877.⁴⁰ The budgets of the 22 municipalities in Palestine had to be approved by the District Commissioners, and there was a general expectation that they would only spend according to the money they could raise via taxes and licence fees in their area of jurisdiction.⁴¹ One of their principal sources of income was a tax ranging from 5% - 10% of the value of property, with that in Nablus being 7.5%. The

³⁷ Palestine Blue Book, 1926 – 1927. CO 821/1,TNA

³⁸ Excludes extraordinary expenditure of £E129 K on Public Works, £E 81 K on Railways, and £E 20 K on Posts & Telecommunications

³⁹ For a summary of that system in relation to Jerusalem see Yasemin Avci, Vincent Lemire & Falestin Naili, ‘Publishing Jerusalem’s Ottoman Municipal Archives (1892 – 1917)’. *Institute for Palestine Studies*, 2014, Issue 60, 110 (<http://www.palestine-studies.org/jq/fulltext/187215>)

⁴⁰ For a discussion on the history and operation of municipal government in Mandate Palestine see CO 821/2,TNA, Palestine Blue Book, 1927

⁴¹Ibid, 63

total income of the Nablus Municipality from all sources in 1927 was £P 5,612, a little higher than Acre (£P5,154) and a little lower than Nazareth (£P 6,809).⁴²

In 1926 the issue of Municipal Government was subject to a thorough appraisal by E Mills, the Assistant Chief Secretary at Government House Jerusalem.⁴³ A covering note to his sixty page report indicated that the drivers for that appraisal included the decision to revive the local councils, issues relating to the Tel Aviv council, and the recurrence of smallpox in Palestine.⁴⁴ That Municipal Government was viewed in the broader context of British colonial administration is evidenced by the views of the then High Commissioner, Lord Plumer, that the legal and administrative structure for Palestine should be based along the lines of the municipal laws in Ceylon, which he understood to be “the most suitable colonial model.”⁴⁵ It is also interesting to note Mills’ observation that women were allowed to vote in the local elections in Tel Aviv, and his recommendation that the franchise should be extended to them “where such extension is suitable.”⁴⁶ The extension of the franchise to women in the town may have been a contributory factor to Nabulsi opposition to Jewish immigration, if the leaders of the notable families –all male- perceived a threat to their political ascendancy by the example of female participation in Tel Aviv.⁴⁷

The preface to the report makes clear that consideration was being given to the relationship between central Government Departments and the local authorities, and was mindful of the structure established in the UK, where the urban population enjoyed “a certain freedom of action within the circumscription of the law.”⁴⁸ As far as elections of local representatives were concerned, this contrasted with the Ottoman system, where the selection of candidates for membership of the Administrative Councils was influenced by the central Government.⁴⁹ It is also interesting to note the reasons Mills gave for clarifying the powers and responsibilities of local councils, given his assertion that “it is essential that citizens should know to what extent restraint may be imposed upon their liberties by the local authority.”⁵⁰ Here then was the concept of constitutional government and citizens’ rights, albeit within the context of a Mandatory authority. Specific reference is subsequently made to the UK’s obligations in relation to the League of Nations,⁵¹ including those to assist the subject population along the path to independence. He nevertheless draws the conclusion

⁴² Palestine Blue Book, 1927, 67. No explanation is given as to why municipal revenues in Nablus were lower than in the much smaller town of Nazareth, but the disparity might be accounted for by the sale of licences to street stall holders catering to the needs of pilgrims visiting Christ’s place of birth

⁴³ *An Enquiry into Municipal Government in Palestine*, 16 December 1926 in CO 733/134/3, TNA

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 1A

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 3. Unfortunately no explanation was given in this file as to why Lord Plumer had been led to understand that Ceylon was the appropriate template

⁴⁶ *An Enquiry into Municipal Government*, Para 62 of the covering note

⁴⁷ For a discussion of how women were effectively marginalised, especially in terms of constraints on their economic independence, see Doumani, *Family Life*, 237

⁴⁸ *Enquiry into Municipal Government* 8

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 4

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 15

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 22 para 37

that because the responsibility is that of the UK as a member state of the League, then

“it appears to follow that all acts of local authorities constituted by election from the people must be subject to the scrutiny and approval of the central authority who alone is in the position to ensure that they are of such standard and quality as to command universal confidence.”⁵²

Local autonomy it would appear was constrained by administrative fiat from Jerusalem as and when the High Commissioner saw fit. With that caveat the Municipal Franchise Ordinance brought into existence elected municipalities in Palestine for the first time since the arrival of the British in 1917.⁵³

Their powers and responsibilities were designed to reflect those of the central Government Departments “as formulated and defined in Ordinances which also make a municipal council a sanitary authority, veterinary authority etc. when acting with the advice” of those Departments.⁵⁴ Here again we see that the model for local government in Palestine was influenced by the structures with which the administrators were familiar in the UK:⁵⁵ albeit with an acknowledgement that it would take time to develop expertise at the local level in such areas as education.⁵⁶ The Mandatory authority consequently maintained a high degree of control over municipal affairs. Under the Town Planning Ordinance the construction of roads and the erection of buildings was controlled by the Local Town Planning Commission in which the municipal representatives were a minority.⁵⁷ Under the Trades and Industries Ordinance the issue of all licences were subject to the approval of the Public Health Department and the Police, who had powers to impose conditions.⁵⁸

Alongside the municipalities was a parallel network of local offices of the central Government Departments.⁵⁹ Should the local councils have issues to raise with the Mandatory authorities they were discouraged from writing to the Head Office in Jerusalem, and referred to the local District Offices. This happened in September 1933 when Mayor Tuqan wrote to the officer administering the Government in Jerusalem asking for more financial support for the town and its soap industry.⁶⁰ Although the response was drafted there, it issued from the District Commissioner for

⁵² Ibid, Para 38

⁵³ Ibid, 32

⁵⁴ Ibid, 47

⁵⁵ As well as elsewhere in the colonies: see reference to Ceylon on page 95 above

⁵⁶ Enquiry into Municipal Government 48

⁵⁷ O'Donnell Commission report 112, Israel State Archives

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ *Enquiry into Municipal Government* 51 para 104: the work of the central government departments is “conducted through the local executive officers of departments and the District Commissioners. Each District now has an officer at the Headquarters of the District whose duty it is under the instructions of the District Commissioner to co-ordinate such approaches and to consolidate municipal activity by advice and criticism.”

⁶⁰ Memorandum by the Municipality of Nablus re- general improvements to the Economic conditions in Nablus town, 30 September 1933, Israel State Archives

the Northern District.⁶¹ This is unsurprising, given that government administration at District level was responsible for liaison between the central Departments based in Jerusalem and the local population, as well as having a responsibility of general oversight of the work of the local municipalities.⁶² The response itself was somewhat evasive concerning government support for the soap industry, noting that a report on its future was currently under consideration, and its recommendations were awaiting a decision by the High Commissioner.⁶³ The impression given was that one of the most important drivers of the Nabulsi economy was not considered a matter of great importance as far as the government in Jerusalem was concerned. One sector not covered in the Mayor's letter, but considered of particular importance by the British authorities, was that of water and sewerage, whose provision was challenging in the hilly terrain of the Jabal Nablus, and whose quality had a direct impact on the health of the population. It is to this sector which we now turn.

Water and Sewerage in the Jabal Nablus

Nablus lies towards the northern end of a ridge of hills stretching south through Jerusalem to Hebron. That location gives it a climate typical of hill districts, where rainfall is irregular, and often characterised by short but heavy downpours, with significant variations year on year.⁶⁴ As in most parts of the country there tends to be a concentration of rainfall in the winter months, with little, if any, precipitation during the summer.⁶⁵ The combination of these characteristics means that the storing and supply of fresh water,⁶⁶ as well as the treatment and disposal of waste water was an issue of significant importance for both the urban and agricultural communities.⁶⁷

In the early years of the Mandate work relating to water supplies tended to be carried out on an ad hoc basis and was typically related to work on specific buildings. For example, during the 1924 – 1925 financial year the Department of Public Works

⁶¹ Letter from Officer Administering the Government in Jerusalem of 17 January 1934, directing the District Commissioner, Northern District, to reply on his behalf. Israel State Archives: *Memorandum by the Municipality of Nablus re- general improvements to the Economic conditions in Nablus town*

⁶² Norman Bentwich, *Palestine* (Ernest Benn, London, 1934). 129

⁶³ Letter of 17 January 1934 from Chief Secretary to District Commissioner, Northern District. Israel State Archives: *Memorandum by the Municipality of Nablus re- general improvements to the Economic conditions in Nablus town*

⁶⁴ For a discussion of rainfall patterns in this part of Palestine see Vincent Lemire, *La Soif De Jerusalem*, 43

⁶⁵ See Masterman, *Hygiene and Disease in Palestine* 7: "The land as a whole is fairly well supplied with rain, **but the rainfall is very unequally distributed throughout the year, extending as it does over little more than 6 months.** January, February, December, and March are – in this order – the wettest months: there may be fairly heavy showers in October, November, April, and, exceptionally, even in May. It is very unusual for any rain to fall in June, July, August, - and, except quite at the end of the month- in September. **The amount of the rainfall is liable to considerable annual fluctuations and varies with the altitude.**" (Emphasis added)

⁶⁶ Masterman, *Hygiene and Disease in Palestine* 8: "In the highlands the springs, though not infrequent, are seldom copious, and in many parts the people of the land have from early historic times resorted to cisterns to store the rain, both for their domestic use and for their vineyards."

⁶⁷ For a discussion both of the inter-dependency of agricultural and urban water supplies, and of the political sensitivity of water within the context of the Jewish National Home project, see Robert Rook, 'An American in Palestine, Elwood Mead and Zionist water resource planning, 1923 – 1936'. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Volume 22, No. 1 (Winter 2000) 71 -89

improved the sanitation during the course of general repairs to Nablus hospital, which included the installation of a new pumping plant. It also made improvements to the latrines at the Health Department offices.⁶⁸ Upgrading the facilities at Nablus barracks by contrast involved the installation of a completely new system to replace a water supply which had previously been provided by prison labour carrying water carts to the barracks:

“A complete new water supply service has been installed. The water is pumped from the well at the British Gendarmerie barracks and conveyed by pipeline to the Police Barracks to supply cisterns of 1,000 gallons capacity. Distribution pipes from the supply tanks have been laid to the Inspector’s quarters, mens’ ablution sheds and horse trough.”⁶⁹

The sanitary aspect of water supply and sewerage was of course a matter of concern to the health authorities, and it is interesting to note the description of a new drainage scheme in Nablus which appears in the 1925 Annual Report of the Department of Health. This improved connections for many households to the existing sewerage network by reducing the amount of leakage, and ensuring that ventilation of the waste pipes was to the air outside the house, as opposed to formerly, when odours from the main sewers could pass up inside the house, so threatening the health of the householders.⁷⁰ Generally ad hoc improvements continued through the mid-1920s, with reference to an overhaul to the water supply at the Old Serai in Nablus appearing in the 1925 – 1926 report of the Department of Public Works.⁷¹

The New Nablus Water Supply Project

In that same report, however, reference is also made to the preparation of a scheme for a new water supply for the whole town.⁷² It was nevertheless some time in gestation, as six years later the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem was writing to the Colonial Office in London asking for supplementary funds to “improve the water supply at Nablus by the installation of a piped supply which will replace the present antiquated and insanitary system of transport on animals or by water carriers.”⁷³

It is interesting to note how the case was made for justifying these additional funds. The letter notes the rapid development of Nablus, albeit without stating the extent to which this is due to new building, expanded economic activity, population growth, or a combination of such factors. It nevertheless makes explicit “that the absence of

⁶⁸ CO 814/1, TNA, Public Works Department Administration Report, 01 April 1924 – 31 March 1925, 5,

⁶⁹ Ibid, 12

⁷⁰ CO 814/1, TNA, Annual Report of the Department of Health, 1925

⁷¹ CO 814/1, TNA, Annual Report of the Department of Public Works, 01 April 1925 – 31 March 1926, 4

⁷² Ibid, 16

⁷³ CO 733/209/16, TNA, Letter of 29 August 1931 from John Chancellor, High Commissioner, to J H Thomas PC MP, Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies

adequate supplies of water is now restricting further progress.”⁷⁴ The provision of clean and uncontaminated water is considered as ‘very desirable.’⁷⁵ John Chancellor, the then High Commissioner, goes on to note that there are readily available sources of such water from the local springs to be found in the vicinity of the town. This presence of local water sources meant that the provision of domestic water supplies in Nablus was essentially one of connection between point of source and point of consumption, a relatively easy task. Elsewhere in the Middle East the problems were more fundamental – as in the Gulf States, where Nelida Fuccaro has shown how the depletion of underground water reserves in Manama meant that new and deeper wells had to be sunk in an attempt to improve water supplies.⁷⁶ Further afield in parts of India, the question of water supplies from large rivers was addressed in terms of flood control.⁷⁷ Such attempts at environmental control were largely, but not completely absent in Jabal Nablus. As noted in page 106 below, part of the new Nablus water supply project involved laying pipes to connect two reservoirs on opposite sides of the valley in which Nablus is located. Reservoirs do of course constitute attempts to control and manage water flow so that it can more easily serve human requirements, but in this particular case they were already in place before the project got underway. What we have here is a proposal to make use of existing water supplies for the benefit of those Nabulsiis willing and able to pay for them: and who in the process would also have the advantage of improved drainage systems for waste water, together with the concomitant health improvements that such systems can bring about.

The estimated cost calculated by the Public Works Department of installing “a properly controlled pipe supply and distribution system”⁷⁸ is given as £P18,000, with an additional £P1,500 for drainage improvements.⁷⁹ It is revealing that the request for supplementary funding is broken down into these two elements, given that the size of the sum required for drainage is unlikely to have been of great interest to the Colonial Office. More likely this was a tactical ploy in requesting a sum total of £P 19,500 with the tacit implication that £P 18,000 was what the Government Office in Jerusalem would be happy to receive. Moreover, in keeping with the general understanding that the colonies should as far as possible be self-funding,⁸⁰ the letter made clear that the sum requested would be in the form of an interest bearing loan

⁷⁴ Ibid, para 2

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ See Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 138 - 139

⁷⁷ See Rohan D’Souza, *Drowned and Dammed, Colonial Capitalism and Flood Control in Eastern India* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006)

⁷⁸ CO 733/209/16, TNA, Letter of 29 August 1931 from John Chancellor, High Commissioner, to J H Thomas PC MP, Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies para 3

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ For a discussion of this aspect of colonial development see Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress*, 12: “The basic premise of government spending in Palestine, as elsewhere in the empire, was that a colony should be economically self-sufficient, and any investment in public welfare should come from revenues generated by the Palestine government rather than the British taxpayer.”

to be repaid in twelve years time. The capacity to do so would come from anticipated revenues from the levying of water rates based on the rental value of properties, and Chancellor asserted that 400 households had already signed up.⁸¹ Given that the population of the town was a little over 17,000 around this time⁸² it is reasonable to presume that these households were those of the wealthiest families.⁸³ One might go on to speculate that a critical mass of this number represented the minimum required to make the project viable, and from the estimates given of revenues rising from £P 2,310 in the first year of operation to £P 3,900 in the twelfth⁸⁴ that it was anticipated to build out the network to adjacent households over time.

Unanswered, however, is the question of what would happen to those households unable to afford the water rates. If we presume ten occupants per household, then around 4,000 people had signed up representing less than 25% of the urban population. That figure would presumably grow over time, but it does indicate that more than half of the people of Nablus could have been excluded from the new water supply scheme and obliged to make do with their existing water supplies. Large scale infrastructure developments of this nature have to proceed by stages, given the scale of investment and work which needs to be undertaken, but one is nevertheless left with the feeling that during those initial stages, where relatively small numbers of the population were beneficiaries of the new services, the effects on the larger numbers unable to afford them would have carried the risk of increasing feelings of marginalisation and exclusion.

Paragraph 5 in the letter moves on to the real reason for its despatch to London: namely that Barclays Bank had indicated their willingness to grant a loan to fund the project, secured on the anticipated revenues from the water rates, but conditional on a UK Government guarantee to underwrite the repayments. It is on the request for such a guarantee that the letter concludes.⁸⁵ Clearly the proposal had succeeded in generating some interest in Whitehall, as a note issued on 05 October 1931 from Downing Street in support of the High Commissioner, albeit with the caveat that "Barclays Bank may not now be willing, in the changed financial circumstances, to grant a loan of the amount required."⁸⁶

⁸¹ CO 733/209/16, TNA, Letter of 29 August 1931 from John Chancellor, High Commissioner, to J H Thomas PC MP, Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, Para 4

⁸² Justin Mc.Carthy, *The Population of Palestine: Population History and Statistics of the Late Ottoman Period and the Mandate* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1990), 159 Table A8-6. Inhabitants of Municipalities, 1931.

⁸³ For a discussion of how technology transfer during this period initially benefited the better off, see Daniel Headrick, *THE TENTACLES OF PROGRESS. Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850 – 1940* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 147. "Water supply and sewage disposal were first installed in the wealthier neighbourhoods and gradually spread to the poorer ones."

⁸⁴ CO 733/209/16, TNA, Letter of 29 August 1931 from John Chancellor, High Commissioner, to J H Thomas PC MP, Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, Para 4

⁸⁵ Ibid, Para 6

⁸⁶ This, and succeeding Whitehall internal correspondence is in file T 161/587/3, TNA

The response that came from the Treasury some three months later on the 19th November 1931 is revealing of the broader context of the Great Depression and the closer scrutiny of Government finances which was one of its results.⁸⁷ Clearly the Colonial Secretary did not have the authority to make such an undertaking on behalf of the Government, and had been obliged to pass Chancellor's request to the Treasury in view of the importance it attached to tight fiscal control in colonial administration, combined with a desire not to set precedents on the subject of loan guarantees for infrastructure development— including those selectively agreed for priority projects.⁸⁸ The Treasury response was unequivocal:

“there is clearly no urgency about the matter, and there appears to be no urgent public demand or health requirement which calls for a change in the methods of water supply.”⁸⁹

Its use of words is also revealing. ‘Urgency’ and ‘urgent’ are used in close proximity but without attempting to articulate from whose perspective the issue might be so: although its coupling with ‘public demand’ suggests that one of the criteria is the extent to which the colonial population wanted the development project in question. We might argue that that criterion sits rather oddly with the rationale for some of the main infrastructure developments in Mandate Palestine – such as the port of Haifa— where any ‘demand’ from the local population was negligible in relation to its strategic importance to the British Empire. This then leaves open the question as to whether part of the reason for the refusal to underwrite the loan was that the Government in London simply did not consider Nablus as a strategic priority within the broader context of British colonial development.

An internal memo in the Treasury,⁹⁰ drafted immediately prior to the formal response to the Colonial Secretary, suggests that this may in fact have been the case. In it, Nablus is described as “a small town, mostly of Arab population in the middle of Palestine.”⁹¹ Whereas it is accepted that piped water supplies are “essential”⁹² in Western towns, the note goes on to assert that although desirable, that is not the case “in an Arab village or small town.”⁹³ There are then some more conventional Treasury arguments brought to bear, including the observation that the Nablus Municipal Government already owed the Mandatory authority in Jerusalem £2,500 for sums it had earlier borrowed, and that implementation was expected of the O'Donnell-Brittain Commission's recommendation to increase local urban rates. This

⁸⁷ For a discussion of the economic and political turmoil in the UK during the 1929 – 1932 period see John Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902 – 1940* (Longman, London, 1978), 296 - 322

⁸⁸ Norris, *Land of Progress* 12. A £1 Million loan for the development of Haifa's harbour received a government-backed guarantee, no doubt in consideration of its importance as a port for the conveyance of Mesopotamian oil to the UK

⁸⁹ CO 733/209/16, TNA

⁹⁰ Addressed to a Mr Grieve on 19th November 1931 in the course of internal exchanges on the left hand tag of T 161 / 587 / 3, TNA

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

would mean that in Nablus a supplementary addition to fund the proposed water supply would add even more to the local tax burden, and as a result this could reduce the number of households electing to receive it, which in turn would reduce the level of estimated revenues from water supply and further weaken the financial position of the Municipality – possibly triggering a call on the requested Government guarantee.⁹⁴

These exchanges towards the end of 1931 continued for the next six months or so,⁹⁵ with the Colonial Office supporting the High Commissioner in Jerusalem, and the Treasury repeatedly pushing back on the grounds both of the risks involved and the precedent that would be set in providing a guarantee to a commercial bank. One of the reasons for the Treasury position was that the interest charged by in this case Barclays would be at a higher rate than the cost of borrowing if the Government was to raise the money for the project itself. Notwithstanding these continued objections, it is evident that the new High Commissioner, Sir Arthur Wauchope, had clearly drawn the right conclusions from the earlier exchanges when he decided to write again on the same subject in a letter of 09 March 1932 to the new Colonial Secretary, Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister.⁹⁶ No doubt mindful of the impact of the Great Depression both on the UK economy and Treasury thinking, he agreed that the financial situation was not propitious as far as the proposed scheme for a new water supply in Nablus was concerned. Although echoing his predecessor's opinion that the project was important, Wauchope argued that it merited continued consideration on the grounds of its potential contribution to public health, hinting, but not stating, that money spent on clean water supplies could mean money saved on healthcare.⁹⁷

By developing the case for the project along these lines the High Commissioner was staking out a position that was aligned to thinking at the time concerning the justification for colonial rule: namely its potential, via the use of experts, to improve the quality of life of the local population in ways which –by implication- they were unable to do themselves.⁹⁸ His approach was likely to have been more than simply a tactical consideration concerning how best to reduce Treasury opposition, as following his career in the colonial service, Chancellor was appointed in 1937 to the Colonial Development Advisory Committee.⁹⁹ Having decided how best to present his case for approval to incur expenditure for these purposes the High Commissioner went on to develop his argument, noting that the current method of water distribution in the town “makes it perhaps the most dangerous drinking supply in the whole country.”¹⁰⁰ This was because the water channels conveying the water to

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ CO 733/226/14, TNA

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ For a discussion of this concept in relation to Egypt, see Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts, Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (University of California Press, London, 2002)

⁹⁹ Stephen Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy*, 198

¹⁰⁰ CO 733/226/14, TNA

residential areas had fallen into disrepair, and, more importantly from a public health perspective, were in close proximity to the drainage and sewerage system which was in a similar state of disrepair.¹⁰¹ “The result is that the system is open to contamination at every point with sewage and by the time that it reaches the consumer is more dangerous than the dirtiest village well.”¹⁰² At this point in the letter the linkage to public health considerations (and their consequential cost) is made explicit, as Wauchope asserts that the incidence of typhoid and related intestinal diseases had been increasing both in the town itself and in the surrounding villages – which had a shared water supply to the extent that both sets of communities used the same sources of spring water. Evidence of the impact of those diseases was provided in terms of a ‘seriously high’¹⁰³ infant mortality rate: “especially between the ages of one and two years, the time when they are first introduced to the town’s contaminated supply as their chief source of water.”¹⁰⁴

Wauchope was probably correct to draw attention to high infant mortality rates, as he could have pointed at the time to the recently published 1931 census of Palestine which indicated that they were especially high for the Moslem population¹⁰⁵ - and Nablus was a predominately Muslim town. Those reporting to him who were resident there would also have been aware of the high proportion of children to that of the population as a whole: in Nablus the ratio of those aged less than 10 to those aged 18 - 45 was 88:100, the highest in Palestine.¹⁰⁶ It was consequently plausible to argue that contributory factors to the causes of diseases at which young children were at risk ought to have been a priority for Government intervention.

Wauchope then continued to build his case in terms of risk mitigation by stating that he had decided that construction work for the new water supply should be carried out by the Department of Public Works, which would be made responsible for ensuring that there were no cost overruns.¹⁰⁷ The operational phase would then be overseen by a Water Board whose membership represented an integration of local and national government interests, with the local mayor acting as chair, municipal counsellors, and medical and engineering representatives from the District Commissioner’s office.¹⁰⁸ This proposed structure provides a good example of what

¹⁰¹ On this point see also Masterman, *Hygiene and Disease in Palestine* 5: “The sanitary arrangements of all the towns are still extremely primitive. Drain traps are practically unknown, except in European houses and institutions. The ‘water closets’ are usually in close proximity to the front door, or the kitchen, or both: and the entrance to the main drain or cesspool, where there is often an accumulation of years, being quite untrapped, the effluvia is at times almost unbearable.”

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ *Census of Palestine 1931: Population of Villages, Towns, and Administrative Areas* By E. Mills, Superintendent of Census (Jerusalem, 1932), 158: Subsidiary Table No. V gave infant mortality rates for Moslems as ranging from 170 – 200 per 1,000 live births between 1925 and 1931

¹⁰⁶ *Census of Palestine 1931* 157 Subsidiary Table No. IV. The average figure for Palestine as a whole was 77:100, while the lowest (Tel Aviv) was 43:100

¹⁰⁷ CO 733/226/14, TNA

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

might be referred to today as 'joined up government.' Wauchope further proposed that separate accounts should be kept for the Water Supply Department, with any profits accruing which were not required for essential maintenance and improvement being reserved for the purposes of loan repayment. In today's parlance, water supply money was to be ring-fenced so as to provide assurances that it would not be used to cross-subsidise activities other than those for which it was originally allocated.

It is at this point in the letter that the High Commissioner then brought forward the proposal that he clearly thought was designed to allay Treasury fears about providing Government-backed guarantees (which would of course have to be entered as a liability in its accounts). He proposed that in the event that the requested guarantee was called in, that it would then become a preferential debt on the finances of the Municipal Council.¹⁰⁹ No explicit mention was made of what, if any, pressure had been brought to bear on the Nablus town council to accept this liability, but it is revealing that this statement is then followed by the observation that "it should be borne in mind that the annual estimates of the Municipality are approved by the District Commissioner."¹¹⁰ Here then is an example of how the network of District Commissioners' offices in Palestine, both representing and reporting to the Government in Jerusalem, effectively controlled the finances and activities of the local town hall.

Still on the subject of risk mitigation, Wauchope went on to consider the impact of possible variations in the rate of interest charged by the lender to finance the project – Barclays Bank. His solution to this problem was to propose extending the term of the loan so as to avoid any increase in the amount of annual repayments which might otherwise have resulted.¹¹¹ The closing point of his case is then made in the observation that the proposed funding method – a local bank loan in effect guaranteed by a local council- would not entail any capital expenditure as far as the Treasury in London was concerned.¹¹² This then was a much more sophisticated approach than that made the previous year when the project was initially proposed.

By the summer of 1932, however, it became clear that the Treasury's concerns over the Nablus project were at least in part driven by a desire that it should not be assessed in isolation, but within the broader context of other infrastructure projects in Palestine for which the Mandatory Government were considering the possibility of financial support from the Colonial Development Fund.¹¹³ Two of these were for water supply and drainage in Jerusalem, amounting to c.£515,000, and two for the same in Haifa (£320,000).¹¹⁴ In a memo of 22 July 1932¹¹⁵ Treasury officials

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ For this aspect of the discussions, see a memo from the Colonial Office of 11 July 1933 in CO 733/241/12, TNA

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ In date order on the left hand tag of T 161/587/3, TNA

indicated that for tactical reasons they might be minded to allow the Nablus project to proceed, albeit with certain caveats, if it could be used to strengthen its case for a comprehensive review of the other, much larger scale proposals being developed at the time. The Treasury Commissioners must have shared their view, as on 26 July 1932 they wrote to the Colonial Secretary¹¹⁶ informing him that the project could proceed, conditional to the Mandatory authority in Jerusalem supplying the loan to the Municipality of Nablus from its own financial surplus balances.

High Commissioner Wauchope was predictably unhappy with this stipulation, and the exchanges continued to the end of 1932, culminating in a letter from Jerusalem of 10 December 1932¹¹⁷ from his office which rather surprisingly stated that the manager of Barclays Bank Palestine branch “has now stated that the bank is prepared to make a loan of £P 20,000 to the Municipality of Nablus.....without the stipulation of a Government guarantee”. Given that the need for such a guarantee had been the main stumbling block which was the subject of correspondence between Jerusalem and London covering a period of almost 18 months, we can only surmise the extent to which Barclays had become more eager to do new business. The bank’s change of position regarding loan guarantees might have reflected the fact that the economy in general was recovering from the ravages of the Great Depression, or alternatively that it thought that a relatively small loan made in Nablus would improve its chances of more lucrative business elsewhere in either Palestine or other British controlled territories.

The Treasury was nevertheless quick to point out, in an internal note of inter-departmental exchanges of 21 December 1932,¹¹⁸ that even absent a formal Government guarantee, in practice should a local municipality default then the Mandatory authority (and by implication the Treasury itself) would be obliged to step in and prevent its becoming insolvent. It then went on to cite the examples of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, expressing the hope that a new Local Government Ordinance would provide effective controls against the municipalities taking on financial liabilities which they might not be capable of discharging unaided. It would have been ironic if Nablus, a centre of opposition to Jewish immigration and the National Home project, had been denied improvements in its water supply due to fears concerning financial risks which arose, inter alia, from the capacity of Tel Aviv to manage its municipal affairs unaided.

Implementation Problems

Some eighteen months later the Nablus water supply project again became the subject of exchanges between Jerusalem and the Whitehall Departments, when by July 1934 the contentious issue of financing had been replaced by arguments over the quality of pipes supplied via the Crown Agents for the project by the UK firm

¹¹⁶ See letter in date order on right hand tag of T 161/587/3, TNA

¹¹⁷ CO 733/226/14, TNA

¹¹⁸ Ibid

Stanton & Co.¹¹⁹ A memo of July 1934,¹²⁰ drafted by Mr Foot, the Assistant District Commissioner for Samaria at the request of the High Commissioner in Jerusalem, set out the problem, which centred on a consignment of defective 8 inch pipes. Ordered in January 1933, they arrived in Palestine in April, having previously been tested by the Crown Agents as meeting the required specifications, which included a capacity to sustain a pressure of 175 lbs per square inch. Further tests carried out in situ prior to laying revealed however that they burst at a pressure well below 100 lbs per square inch.¹²¹ Subsequent correspondence indicates that the specific purpose of the 8 inch pipes –as opposed to the smaller diameters used on this project- was to connect two reservoirs on opposite sides of the valley in which Nablus is located¹²² (between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim). Despite the fact that almost all of the other gauge pipes, totalling some 12 kms in length were found to work to specification, the strategic importance of the 8 inch pipes meant that their failure prevented completion of the project.¹²³

Foot's memo listed the consequences, which unsurprisingly included the extra expense incurred by efforts at repair (although Stanton had offered to install replacement pipes at their own cost)¹²⁴ and the financial losses resulting from the delay in getting the water supply scheme operational. In the circumstances such complaints are fairly predictable, but worthy of note at the end of his list is the observation of:

“a loss in public confidence which has certainly led to fewer people applying to have their houses connected to the distribution system.”¹²⁵

This is then followed by the assertion that:

“it will be difficult to remove from the minds of the Nablus Municipal Council and of the other inhabitants of Nablus the impression, which many of them feel bitterly, that the insistence of Government that only British pipes should be used has not been justified by results”¹²⁶

This statement merits some reflection. We know from other correspondence on the same file that some complaints had indeed been made by Italian suppliers about not being allowed to quote for the Nablus Water Supply project, but that should not have caused any one in Nablus to ‘feel bitterly’ unless they suspected that a British

¹¹⁹ For a discussion of ‘imperial preference’ in the supply of British goods to British-controlled territories overseas, see Barbara Smith, *The Roots of Separatism*, 20 – 25

¹²⁰ The memo is in chronological order in CO/733/267/7, TNA. It is dated ‘July’ but with no indication as to which day

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² See a letter of 26 August 1934 from Fawcett Pudsey, Director of Public Works in Palestine to the Crown Agents in CO/733/267/7, TNA

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ See letter of 29 April 1934 from the Managing Director of Stanton, Mr Bassan, to the Director of Public Works in Jerusalem in CO/733/267/7, TNA

¹²⁵ Memo of July 1934 in CO/733/267/7, TNA

¹²⁶ Ibid, para 5

supplier would have been significantly more expensive. More likely, this statement by Mr Foot, in his capacity as Assistant District Commissioner for Samaria, and so the most senior official directly involved with the project at operational level, reflected frustration that he had been made to look a fool in the eyes of the Nablus Municipality: a British official had promised British pipes to convey much needed clean, fresh water, but the moment they were put to the test, they had failed.

This in turn however raises the further question as to why should he feel so frustrated by this apparent loss of face? One possible answer of course is that he was the local representative of the Mandatory authority, and so responsible for meeting the leading members of Nabulsi society face-to-face: in a way that both the Head Office staff in Jerusalem and central Government officials in London were not. But to worry if you lose face indicates that you value the level of esteem in which others hold you, so I would argue that this memo holds *prima facie* evidence that at least some regional Government officials in the Mandate administration, far from seeing the Palestinians merely as 'colonial natives' did in fact consider them as having a certain importance, at least to the level of ensuring that British commitments towards them were fulfilled.

The memo continues with complaints about the Crown Agents through whom the pipes were sourced, chiefly to the effect that there was an inordinate delay of more than three months between placing the order and receiving the deliveries, and that it would have been much faster if it had been permissible to place orders direct with British firms.¹²⁷ A further bone of contention was that the price quoted through the Crown Agents included a premium for testing that the goods met the required specification, which in this particular case they had not.¹²⁸ The tone and subject matter of the text provides evidence of the frustration felt by officials working 'on the ground', who were constrained both by their Head Office in Jerusalem and the authorities in London from taking the initiative and dealing direct with potential suppliers. This then was the perspective of those at the bottom end of what was clearly a 'top-down' hierarchical Government system.

Annoyance with bursting pipes was not however confined to the District Commissioner's office in Samaria. When the Chief Secretary's office in Jerusalem forwarded Foot's memo to the Colonial Office in London on 02 August 1934, the covering letter¹²⁹ was of the opinion that:

"The whole business is little short of a scandal and is not calculated to advance British trade in this country or inspire confidence in the Crown Agents. It also reflects on the Palestine Government which insisted that only British pipes should be used. Had the breakdown occurred in the course of a more important work(though the importance of the Nablus scheme cannot be underrated) there is no doubt that it would have aroused bitter public criticism:

¹²⁷ Ibid, para 6

¹²⁸ Ibid, para 7

¹²⁹ In date order in CO/733/267/7, TNA

and you know how eagerly incidents of this kind are seized upon by our many detractors for the purpose of embarrassing the Government.”

The tone of the reaction portrayed in this paragraph goes beyond what would normally be expected for the failure of only one part of a consignment for a relatively small project. No doubt there was a degree of bad feeling in Jerusalem on the part of the officials there who had insisted on using the Crown Agents. It also reveals that from the perspective of Palestine’s capital, the town of Nablus was not considered a priority, although that in turn raises the question of what then was the underlying reason for such a sharp response. Furthermore the text reveals sensitivities in relation to ‘our many detractors’. Their identity is unfortunately not specified, but in the absence of a specific statement we can only surmise that this is a reference to those who were politically active in the Palestinian Arab community and who actively opposed the overarching imperative of British policy in the territory to establish a Jewish National Home. If so, then opposition on that issue meant that everything else the British did in Palestine was viewed through the same critical lens, eager to identify any weaknesses or failures which might indicate the possibility of frustrating the National Home policy.

That said, evidence of the underlying fears in Jerusalem surfaces in paragraph six of the letter¹³⁰ which notes that Stanton had not only contracted to supply its pipes to Nablus, but also for a Jerusalem water supply project, and was known to be interested in others. In the circumstances,

“the High Commissioner thinks a rap over the knuckles might now be timely and might save more trouble hereafter. Perhaps therefore the Secretary Of State might agree to signifying to the company his displeasure at the manner in which the contract was fulfilled and to taking the Crown Agents to task over their faulty inspection.”¹³¹

In other words here was a company active in infrastructure projects in Palestine, and the Mandatory Government did not want any more embarrassing incidents such as had occurred in Nablus. This was a plausible position to take, especially in view of the deteriorating relations between the authorities and the local population following the 1929 riots. The possibility however of switching to alternative suppliers is not alluded to, which is a little surprising, given that a letter of 17 August 1934¹³² from the Crown Agents in London, when responding to the criticisms raised by the High Commissioner’s office, pointed out that they had in fact recommended an alternative supplier, the Staveley company, whose steel pipes were more flexible, and less brittle than the iron pipes manufactured by Stanton. The Director of Public Works in Jerusalem had nevertheless insisted on Stanton pipes “with the result that we now see.”¹³³ If that was in fact the case the angry words emanating from Jerusalem were

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ CO/733/267/70, 6, para 3, TNA

¹³² In date order in CO/733/267/7, TNA

¹³³ Ibid, 2

the result of a predicament of their own making: they had apparently chosen the wrong supplier, and used an intermediary who had charged for, but not carried out, a sufficiently thorough test programme prior to the despatch of the consignment. We might consequently surmise that the letter from the High Commissioner's office represented at least in part an attempt to regain its credibility with its regional Government network of District Commissioners' offices which were obliged to act upon its instructions.

Apart from the Crown Agents, none of the Government offices in London became involved in the broken pipes issue, given that once the policy decision had been taken to agree to the project, and in particular how it was to be funded, the implementation phase was a matter for officials in Palestine, in particular the Department of Public Works. The exchanges which continued throughout the summer and into the autumn of 1934 largely involved Stanton, and its local representatives – a combination of an individual -Colonel Kisch-¹³⁴ and a company, Engineering Equipment Ltd, based in Jerusalem.¹³⁵ It is evident from this correspondence that Stanton was well established in the Palestine market, as in a letter of 06 September 1934¹³⁶ its Managing Director indicated that he had decided to despatch 300 of the offending 8 inch pipes to replace the defective ones in Nablus, and that in the event that they were not all required “we feel that this is a size which is much in demand, and they will be rapidly liquidated.”¹³⁷ It is also possible that this generosity in maintaining a high level of readily available stock in the local market was partly driven by a desire to maintain a competitive advantage over their commercial rival, Staveley, and its more flexible steel pipes. With infrastructure projects for the development of water supply and sewerage systems, once laid in the ground it could be many years before further business opportunities would arise for installing replacements.

Finally on 06 October 1934¹³⁸ the High Commissioner confirmed that half of the new stock despatched from the UK had been forwarded by rail to Nablus, while the other half had been stockpiled in Haifa: indicating the port's role as an entrepot for capital goods entering the Palestine market. But even then, some six months after the original problem had emerged, the issue clearly left a sense of anger and frustration in Jerusalem, as the letter concluded:

“I have arranged for all this information to be conveyed in detail to the Municipality in the hope that it will assuage their very natural and intense exasperation at the whole affair. But the damage has been done and no number of iron or steel pipes, nor payments of compensation, can now

¹³⁴ See letter of 06 September 1934 from Stanton Ironworks to Kisch on CO/733/267/7, TNA

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ Ibid

¹³⁷ Ibid

¹³⁸ Letter from High Commissioner Jerusalem to the Colonial Office in London on CO/733/267/7, TNA

remove the very bad impression that has been given of British manufacture.”¹³⁹

Given the chronology of events and the decisions taken by the Director of the Department of Public Works in relation to this project, it must nevertheless be a matter of conjecture as to whether the bad impression created related only to Stanton’s pipes, or also to the Government in Jerusalem. We can only conclude that the somewhat exaggerated and long-drawn out response to a problem that ought to have been contained locally by the British officials responsible for the ‘Jabal Nablus’ area was symptomatic of the wider tensions and controversies developing in Palestine at a time of accelerating Jewish immigration.¹⁴⁰ June 1934 saw the night of the long knives in Germany,¹⁴¹ and in August of that year Hitler declared himself Fuhrer following the death of Hindenburg.¹⁴² Events such as those in Germany were clearly having a significant impact on developments in Palestine, with growing tensions in the Holy Land reflecting contemporaneous struggles within the European continent.

The 1935 Floods¹⁴³

Water was still a topical subject in Nablus the following year, as correspondence of March 1935 from the Office of the Engineer in Charge of the Nablus District to the Director of Public Works in Jerusalem indicates that there was a serious flood in the town on 4 February 1935¹⁴⁴ which caused significant damage. This was due in part to the incapacity of the main drain to cope with the volume of water. As was usual in this type of situation the High Commissioner appointed a committee to investigate and then make recommendations as to what needed to be done to repair the damage, both to municipal property and to that of the town’s residents.

A letter of 23 February 1935¹⁴⁵ recorded what had presumably been their opening meeting, when it was noted that £P35 had already been spent on food and shelter for people who had been flooded out of their homes, together with £P400 to clear flooded houses and streets. This led the committee to recommend that a grant-in-aid should be made to the municipality to cover what was clearly unanticipated and unbudgeted expenditure. It went on to propose further sums recommended by a sub-committee composed of the Mayor, the Municipal Engineer, and a representative of the Public Works Department. They estimated that £P 2,000 would be required for

¹³⁹ Ibid

¹⁴⁰ In 1931 this was running at just over 4,000 per annum, but had risen to over 45,000 by 1934, peaking that decade at 66,427 in 1935. See <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-immigration-to-palestine-1919-1941>

¹⁴¹ Alan Bullock, *Hitler, a study in tyranny* (Pelican Books, Middlesex, 1962), 303

¹⁴² Bullock, *Hitler*, 310

¹⁴³ All the correspondence referred to in this section is contained in file Ob0717068059d97d (*Municipal Services: Municipality Samaria District Nablus, Shekhem*) at the Israel State Archives, 85 - 91

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 87

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

the reconstruction of the main drain in Nablus, £P755 for the repair of roads and drains, and £P400 for repairs to the water supply.

As far as the residents of the town were concerned, it was estimated that damage or destruction of household property amounted to £P3,666 and of commercial merchandise to £8,698. It is interesting to note that within these two figures the value of the destruction to property and merchandise “suffered by people who are very poor”¹⁴⁶ was separately evaluated as £P2,328 for household property, and £P1,753 for merchandise. These figures raise some interesting points. It is unsurprising that very poor people owned only 20% of the damaged merchandise, as one would not expect those engaged in any sort of commercial activity involving stock to be amongst the poorest in the community. Conversely, the fact that this group suffered 64% of the household property losses suggests that the living areas of the poor suffered disproportionately from those of the better off, who may have had houses on higher ground. If so, there may have been a degree of ‘noblesse oblige’ in Nablus, as the letter went on to note that the committee had already received £P 479 “from private sources for the assistance of flood sufferers,”¹⁴⁷ with the expectation of more to come.

Clearly concerns about the dispossessed poor were a matter of some importance to the committee, which came up with the proposal that the Mandatory authority should make a public statement to the effect that it would match the level of donations made by private individuals and organisations so as to double the funds available.¹⁴⁸ Unfortunately there is no further correspondence on the file to indicate what was the response of the High Commissioner in Jerusalem to either this proposal or a further one which drew on the experience gained from the 1927 earthquake (which is the subject of the following chapter). This arose from the fact that some of the houses damaged by the flood, although standing, might need to be subsequently demolished if inspections by structural engineers deemed them unsafe. We might speculate on this point that a flood which left a property standing but unsafe could indicate that the foundations and / or building materials used for the superstructure were of poor quality and liable to crumble in the event of significant exposure to water. This would be expected in cases of people of limited means understandably wanting a place to live, but unable to afford good quality construction.

The recommendation of the committee in these circumstances, where a property would need to be demolished, but where the inhabitants lacked the money to have a new one erected in its place, was that they should be allowed to make use of the spare land in the plot which had been originally set aside for those who had been displaced by the earthquake. It furthermore proposed that a sum of £P2000 should be made available in the form of building grants “of the same amounts as those

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 89

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

approved for the earthquake sufferers.¹⁴⁹ Clearly the 1927 earthquake, which will be examined in more detail in chapter IV below, had set a precedent that Government money should be made available for the purpose of disaster relief. Moving on to consideration of the effect of the flood on the outlying agricultural areas surrounding the town, the committee noted that a separate damage assessment was being made which would also take into account damage that had accrued to agricultural land elsewhere in the Samaria District.¹⁵⁰ That being the case we can deduce that there must have been unusually heavy rainfall in the North Eastern part of Palestine in February 1935, consistent with the pattern noted earlier in this chapter of hilly terrain being subject to sudden and sharp downfalls in the winter months.¹⁵¹ Indeed, the Palestine Post reported that the storm in Nablus “brought with it in 24 hours 150mm of rain.”¹⁵² Clearly the flood was a serious one, as the newspaper’s correspondent in the town reported that “in some cases ropes had to be tied around the bodies of people stranded in their houses, to rescue them from rooms turned into pools.”¹⁵³ Apart from the human dramas indoors, the flood also wrought havoc outside, and it is interesting to note that the cost of damage to gardens in the urban area was estimated at more than £P 6,000.¹⁵⁴ That is approaching twice the estimated cost of damage to household property, indicating that the gardens in question were not merely for the personal enjoyment of householders, but more likely to have had cultivated fruit and vegetables for commercial sale. This supposition is consistent with what is shown in photographs of the perimeter of the town during this period.¹⁵⁵

The letter ends with a plea to entirely rebuild the drainage system in Nablus, on the grounds that it had been “damaged beyond repair”¹⁵⁶ and needed replacing with one with proper outlets for sewage and storm water. It is signed off by Messrs Tukan (Mayor of Nablus), Foot (Assistant District Commissioner), Bigger (Senior Medical Officer), and Bushrui (District Officer), indicating both how the municipality worked together with local representatives of Palestine Government Departments through the regional District Commissioners’ network, and how there was a degree of participation by Palestinians alongside the British.

Conclusion

It is clear, in part from statements made in the more formal letters issuing from London, but more especially from the internal memos of the officials responsible for drafting them, that the town was not considered a priority for infrastructure development. While Haifa and Jerusalem took the lion’s share of the funds available,

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

¹⁵⁰ Ibid

¹⁵¹ See opening para on page 97 above of the section ‘Water and Sewerage in the Jabal Nablus’

¹⁵² ‘The Latest from Nablus.’ Article of 5 February 1935 in *The Palestine Post*

¹⁵³ Ibid

¹⁵⁴ *Municipal Services: Municipality Samaria District Nablus, Shekhem*, 89, Israel State Archives

¹⁵⁵ The photo at the end of this chapter on page 115 below gives some indication of this

¹⁵⁶ *Municipal Services: Municipality Samaria District Nablus, Shekhem*, 91, Israel State Archives

Nablus, despite its historical importance as a leading commercial and cultural centre under the Ottomans, was relegated somewhat to the margins. As a result, at least as far as piped water supplies were concerned, the scale of the project agreed to would mean that only around a quarter of the urban population would become beneficiaries, thus throwing the divisions between the affluent and the poor into sharper relief.

Notwithstanding its relative neglect by the mandatory power, the available evidence from the UK Government archives concerning the Nablus water project suggests that relations between the Palestinians in the Municipal Authority and the British in the Samaria District Commissioners' office were reasonably harmonious. It would appear that a similar relationship existed between the small group of elite families of notables and the much larger numbers of urban poor, where there is some evidence of charitable donations from the former to the latter at particular times of crisis such as the 1935 floods - with those who were able voluntarily donating money over and above their municipal tax obligations.

Conversely, there were also clearly tensions and constraints reflecting the broader context of political conditions in Palestine, which in turn were affected by the impact of both the Great Depression and the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s.¹⁵⁷ At the local level there is evidence of some frustration between the District Commissioner's Office and the Headquarters of the Mandatory Administration in Jerusalem, with those responsible for infrastructure project development chafing against what they considered to be inflexible constraints imposed upon them in how they could source the materials they required. Nevertheless, officials in both Nablus and Jerusalem also shared the same sense of frustration in relation to Treasury imposed conditions concerning the manner of project funding, where caution combined with the desire to avoid debt liabilities – even if only contingent on third party default - clearly reflected the severe constraints on the public finances in the UK at that time. It might be argued that that general approach to fiscal policy on behalf of the Treasury meant that the Municipality of Nablus had limitations imposed on its borrowing capacity due to what the authorities in London considered were profligate examples set by Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, for which repetitions elsewhere were to be avoided.

Also worth noting in the context of this particular infrastructure project is that it was initiated by Government in the form of what today would be known as a public-private partnership – commissioned and initially financed by the public sector, built by the private sector, and with the costs subsequently repaid by those consumers who benefitted from the resultant service. As Daniel Headrick has argued in 'the Tentacles of Progress',¹⁵⁸ this meant that the choice of which sector(s) to develop

¹⁵⁷ For a discussion of the impact of the rise of fascism in Europe on Palestine, see Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 366 – 373

¹⁵⁸ Headrick, 'The Tentacles of Progress' 380 "many enterprises, like harbours, irrigation works, telecoms networks, and botanical research stations, were largely public. In other words, the new economic activities

was essentially political and ‘top down,’ an initiative of the Mandatory authorities rather than a response to consumer demand. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the idea of development and its associated technology transfer was one of the main justifications for empire, going some way to explain the exaggerated reactions to the problem of the defective pipes in the Nablus water supply project.

These reactions must in part have reflected an awareness by the Mandatory authorities of Palestinian opposition to the overarching Jewish National Home policy. The internal correspondence of officials in Jerusalem suggests that awareness of that opposition led the British to become extremely sensitive to failures regarding the implementation of policies other than those related to the development of the Jewish National Home. This nevertheless suggests that if they had concerns about Palestinian perceptions of the quality of the Mandatory Government, then at least this would indicate that they held them in a certain esteem. These sensitivities may also have reflected the fact that all the important policy decisions were taken by British officials, so that if anything went wrong the responsibility was theirs alone.

Both the water supply project and the Mandatory Government’s response to the 1935 floods were examples of the ‘top down’ approach to development and rehabilitation which characterised British imperial rule. Decisions were taken at senior levels of the administration, and cascaded down through the hierarchy, with minimal involvement of the local population, whose role was little more than that of passive recipients. Although this approach was maintained in the response to the damage caused by the 1927 earthquake, the suddenness of that event, and the need it created for British officials, members of the armed forces, and local Nabulsi to work together in helping to dig the injured out of the rubble, did involve substantive interaction of a collaborative nature. It is to this which we turn in the succeeding chapter.

that arose in the colonies, and the transfers of technology that made them possible, were essentially political in nature.”



View of Nablus with Mount Ebal in the Background, July 1938

American Colony . Photo Dept, photographer. *Nablus & Ebal, July 13 & 14*. Nablus West Bank, 1938.
 July. Photograph retrieved from the Library of Congress at,
<https://www.loc.gov/item/mpc2010004639/PP/> on 22 March 2018.)

CHAPTER IV

THE 1927 EARTHQUAKE

The earth under me trembles, spinning wildly without axis.....The terrible earthquake in Nablus in 1927 had sown the seeds of constant fear of Ibrahim's death in my childish heart that clung so closely to him¹



Palestine events. The earthquake of 11 July, 1927. Blocked-up street in Nablus, choked by fallen houses which entombed many inhabitants

Photograph retrieved on 20 July 2019 from the Library of Congress:

<http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/matpc.03042/>

¹ Fadwa Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, 104. Ibrahim was the author's elder brother, mentor, and teacher during the early years of her development as a writer and poet

Introduction

Chapter III considered the development of water and sanitation supplies in Nablus, and what this core form of infrastructure revealed about relations between the local representatives of the Mandatory Government, their Headquarters in Jerusalem, and the Colonial Office and Treasury in London. The development of urban water supplies is both time-consuming and capital intensive, and the whole project, from inception to implementation, took several years. The cost and scale of the project necessarily entailed a high degree of planning across both the construction and operational phases.

Chapter IV by contrast will examine an unanticipated and unplanned for natural disaster to assess what can be concluded from the response of the Mandatory authorities, given that it made sufficient impact for the Government in London to be made aware. This was the earthquake of July 1927 which caused widespread damage across Palestine, with the most serious effects in the town of Nablus.² It reveals that the Government, partly no doubt due to financial constraints, operated on the basis of minimalist state intervention in terms of managing its consequences. The earthquake thus provides a further example of relative under development in the way funds were disbursed by the Mandatory authorities. Monies made available for reconstruction were used in the repair and renewal of government owned infrastructure, in particular the railways.³ Funds for rebuilding houses in Nablus damaged or destroyed by the earthquake were made available in the form of loans rather than grants.⁴ Furthermore, despite the extensive destruction suffered by the town – more than any other in Palestine- no attempts were made to initiate a programme of urban redevelopment.⁵ This neglect can be contrasted with the government's scheme to transform the municipal area of Haifa, drawn up in 1930.⁶

The chapter also examines how the mandatory authorities benefitted from the evolving approaches to humanitarian relief, which became increasingly focussed on the needs of the recipients, and used philanthropic donations to provide for the immediate needs of those who had lost their homes. Specifically in Palestine such relief tended to focus on the plight of minorities –such as Christians and Jews- considered to be most at risk by the colonial powers in relation to the Muslim Arab majority. This theme – and its implications- is examined in Keith Watenpaugh's work, 'Bread from Stones.'⁷ The Mandatory authorities were quick to establish a relief

² The effects of the earthquake, and the Government response to it, is the subject of CO 733/142/ 13, TNA

³ See page 131 below

⁴ See page 134 below

⁵ See page 135 below

⁶ Norris, *Land of Progress*, 137

⁷ Keith Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (University of California Press, 2015)

fund⁸ and rely on private donations, including those from the Jewish diaspora in the USA, to provide the bulk of the finance to enable the clean-up operation. The generosity of the donations speaks to the importance of Palestine as the location of the Jewish national home, but from the Mandatory authority's perspective the distribution of the donations had to be handled with a degree of sensitivity, given that the areas most affected by the earthquake were predominantly Arab. To better understand the response of the Government, and the way it made use of private donor networks both within the territory and abroad, it may be helpful to begin with a brief consideration of the response of imperial powers to natural disasters during the years following World War I.

Handling Natural Disasters

In the decade preceding 1927 the most significant natural disaster, albeit compounded by the vicissitudes of war, was the famine of 1915-16, initiated by the locust plague of 1915.⁹ The response to it was organised by a combination of Ottoman officials, Municipal Government, and private initiatives of local residents. In her work 'From Empire to Empire, Jerusalem between Ottoman and British rule', Abigail Jacobson¹⁰ argues that it was around this time that the longer –standing US humanitarian presence, typically represented by missionary bodies, was becoming more institutionalised so as to act as a vehicle capable of promoting American influence in Palestine, and supporting the evolving pro-Zionist stance of the US government. This chapter takes that insight forward by examining how the British Mandatory authority made use of disaster relief funds raised in the Jewish communities of the United States so that they could benefit the Arab communities which constituted the overwhelming majority of the population of the city of Nablus: as it was this location which suffered the most from the impact of the 1927 earthquake.

At the time of World War I the famine had its most severe impact on the poorest members of society, given their lack of food reserves, but coming as it did at a time of war, the effects were felt across society as a whole, and so there were strong practical incentives for its constituent elements to work together. This was also the case in the years immediately following the end of World War I in Palestine, which were characterised by severe levels of deprivation, and saw the development of many charitable organisations whose purpose was to alleviate the suffering of those most in need¹¹ on an ongoing basis. This contrasts somewhat with the earthquake, which in Nablus had a severe impact on those whose houses collapsed, but

⁸ Discussed at pages 130 – 132 below

⁹ For a graphic description of the impact of the famine in Jerusalem, see Selim Tamari, *Year of the Locust, A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past* (University of California Press, London, 2011), 51 - 57

¹⁰ Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire. Jerusalem Between Ottoman and British Rule* (Syracuse University Press, New York, 2011)

¹¹ Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and its 'new' Women, The Palestinian Women's Movement 1920 – 1948* (University of California Press, London, 2003), 107

otherwise did not inhibit agricultural production, given that it struck in the afternoon when most of the agricultural workers were out in their fields, and so able to continue working without sufficient disruption to have a negative impact on that year's harvest.¹² As a result, the imperative in the short term was to provide food and temporary shelter for the mainly poorer inhabitants of the town whose more flimsily constructed houses had suffered the most.¹³

Within the broader context of events in the Middle East following World War I, the main emphasis at the time was on humanitarian relief, with organisations such as the American Committee for Relief in the Near East attempting to reduce the scale of suffering caused by famine in the Levant and the mass killings and expulsions of the Armenians.¹⁴ In the case of the latter the readiness to help was not only a response to the scale of the suffering, but also a reflection of the fact that Western donors were more naturally sympathetic to a fellow Christian community in the Middle East region.¹⁵ There were however other dimensions to the Armenian killings that are important in any consideration of the evolution of humanitarian programmes during the first half of the twentieth century. Many of those who tried to help the communities who came under systematic attack from the Ottoman state in Anatolia in 1915 were Christian missionaries living and working there at the time. The methods that they used to gain international support to rescue the victims have been seen by some as the precursor to what later developed into the modern aid programmes of the latter half of the twentieth century.¹⁶ The justification for intervention was based on the helplessness of the victims. As many of the initial killings were of Armenian men, those who managed to escape to Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria tended to constitute large numbers of women and children.¹⁷

The women in particular were seen by the Protestant missionaries as "the key to religious change and social improvement."¹⁸ By implication the predominantly Muslim society of the Ottoman empire was seen as patriarchal and conservative, while the missionaries saw themselves as harbingers of European modernity, and thought that women in the local communities could be used as agents of development.¹⁹ Crises and emergencies such as the Armenian massacres provided the opportunity to instil 'Western values' on the hapless survivors – including training in the benefits of becoming self-reliant, as practiced in a Scottish mission's girls' school in Jaffa during the Mandate period.²⁰ In this respect, the impact of the 1927 earthquake on Nablus

¹² The earthquake is discussed in some depth in CO 733/142/13, TNA. The point about the agricultural workers in the fields is made on page 70 of that document, and the timing (15.00) on page 44

¹³ CO 733/142/13, TNA

¹⁴ Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones* 92

¹⁵ Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones* 165–166

¹⁶ See Nefissa Naguib & Inger Marie Okkenhaug (Eds), *Interpreting Welfare and relief in the Middle East* (Brill Publishing, Leiden, 2008), 6

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Nefissa and Inger, 'Interpreting Welfare' 6-7

is revealing not so much in terms of what the British Government authorities did to assist in the process of reconstruction, but rather in the way that this particular crisis was not exploited as an opportunity to influence the subsequent development of Nabulsi society. The surviving reports in the National Archives offer a good deal of information on the efforts made to meet short-term requirements²¹ but do not indicate that any resources were made available for the longer term needs of those families where the main or sole bread-winner may have perished. This is consistent with a generally 'de minimis' approach to government in Nablus by the Mandatory authorities which this thesis argues is its primary characteristic.

Nevertheless, that approach did at least leave space for local initiatives by religious organisations, where such Islamic social institutions as the Zakat committees typically provided educational, health, and employment opportunities.²² This contrasts somewhat with the approach taken by the Mandatory authorities in Palestine in relation to the earthquake, where humanitarian concerns per se appear to have taken second place to a concern to maintain law and order:

"The main police functions were quite clear. Namely to rescue people – preserve public order and confidence – prevent looting – keep prisoners secure – prevent food hoarding and assist the civil services with water, electricity and sewage."²³

It would appear that the supposition was that a sudden, albeit traumatic event would send a shock through society to which the appropriate response was essentially utilitarian, and focussed on the short term: the priority was to re-establish the status quo ante, and then to move on. As will be argued subsequently in this chapter, this was consistent with the British view of the Palestinian Arab population as being largely primitive, superstitious, and prone to panic.²⁴ The overriding consideration was consequently to get things back to normal as soon as possible. If this was the context of current thinking on the appropriate response to the earthquake, it is now appropriate to briefly consider the geological location of Palestine which explains its occurrence: as that which took place in 1927 was by no means the first.

Earthquakes in Palestine

The line running up the Dead Sea to the Galilee and beyond marks the presence of a geological fault between the tectonic plates of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western limit of the Asian continent. It is known to geologists as the Dead Sea Transform Fault, and earthquakes along this fault line have been recorded since biblical times.²⁵ The earthquake of 11 July 1927 was known as the Jericho

²¹ As set out in page 124 et seq. below

²² Nefissa Naguib and Inger Marie Okkenhaug (Eds), *Interpreting Welfare and Relief*, 208

²³ Edward Horne, *A Job Well Done (Being a History of the Palestine Police Force 1920 – 1948)* (The Book Guild, Sussex, 2003), 114

²⁴ Bailey Willis from Chicago university, an earthquake expert who was in Cairo at the time, considered the local people to be 'inspired by ignorance and superstition.' See CO 733/142/13, TNA

²⁵ Robert Yeats, *Active Faults of the World* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 264

earthquake, and had a magnitude of 6.2. Its epicentre was a few miles south of Jericho on the west bank of the Dead Sea.²⁶ According to an American earthquake expert who happened to be in Cairo at the time – from where he felt the tremors- it was “of moderate severity and very brief duration”.²⁷ After the initial tremor a second and more serious shock occurred two minutes later, which may have increased the casualty rate as people returned to their houses in the mistaken belief that it was safe to do so.²⁸ A second, smaller earthquake was experienced on 24 February 1928, with tremors causing light damage. According to a report made by the High Commissioner that day, “no loss of life and no serious damage to property resulted.”²⁹ A third and final ‘slight earthquake shock’ was experienced on 5th August 1928, with no damage resulting.³⁰

For the purpose of analysis in this chapter however the focus will be on the July 1927 earthquake, as the subsequent tremors did not produce any situations requiring Government intervention. Although the earthquakes in this region occurred on a fairly regular basis, they were not frequent in terms of human timescales, with the most recent occurrence being in 1837, or 90 years previously.³¹ As a result, the Palestinian territory was not a location where the population were in any way prepared for their occurrence in the same way as Japan is today. Whereas draughts, crop failures, and periodical locust attacks were an intermittent occurrence that the population had become accustomed to, earthquakes were sufficiently rare not to have left an enduring impression. As Libby Robin observed in her review of ‘Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses’³² such unexpected phenomena could only be managed in terms of the subsequent clearing-up operation, rather than by measures designed to mitigate their impact.³³ In the absence of any prepared responses at the local level it consequently fell to the Mandatory authorities to initiate the necessary actions in terms of damage assessment, reconstruction, and dealing with those who had been made homeless. The archival records on these responses are reasonably comprehensive, and can be examined in detail.

The Initial Response of the Mandatory Authorities

In keeping with their broader objectives in Mandate Palestine, the Government considered that its first priority was to establish the extent of any damage to its communications and transport infrastructure. According to the General Manager’s

²⁶ Yeats, *Active Faults* 297

²⁷ CO 733/142/13, TNA

²⁸ Geoffrey Powell, *PLUMER, The Soldier’s General* (Pen & Sword Military Classics, Barnsley, 2004), 314

²⁹ Telegramme from High Commissioner to Secretary of State for the Colonies in CO 733/153/5, TNA

³⁰ These are reported in the Palestine Register of Correspondence, CO 793/9, TNA, with corresponding entries in chronological order. They are also reported in CO 733/153/5, TNA

³¹ This is noted in the final page of the report made by the American earthquake expert who was in Cairo at the time, with the report itself held on CO 733/142/13, TNA

³² Libby Robin, Review of ‘Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies toward a Global Environmental History’ by Christoph Mauch and Christian Pfister. *Environmental History*, July 2010, Vol.15 No.3 552-554

³³ Robin, Review, 553

office of the Palestine Railways in Haifa it took only ten minutes from the timing of the earthquake to ascertain that telephone communications across the railway network were still intact.³⁴ It furthermore took only eight hours to complete the necessary reports confirming that railway tracks and bridges were unharmed, and to then resume normal service at 23.00 that same evening of 11th July 1927.³⁵ Clearly a premium was placed on getting the services up and running again as soon as possible, as those same reports indicated that several station buildings, including the one at Nablus, “were in varying degrees seriously shaken and cracked.”³⁶

Having ascertained that their communications and transport infrastructure was still basically intact, the next responsibility of the Mandatory authority was to inform the Government in London of the developing situation. One day after the earthquake, on 12th July, telegramme 115 from the High Commissioner’s office in Jerusalem to the Secretary of State for the Colonies was able to report that no UK or European nationals had been killed, and that the highest level of casualties had been experienced in Nablus (50 killed and 250 injured), followed by Lydda (30 killed and 70 injured). Elsewhere, casualties had been light.³⁷

The picture established from these records is consequently one of an efficient administration which within a period of 24 hours had been able to confirm that its capacity to function as a Government across the mandated territory had not been significantly impaired, and had also ascertained in which urban areas the most significant damage had occurred. It consequently had available the necessary information to enable a rapid response, presuming the resources were available to carry out the measures considered necessary. We can also conclude that the Government machine was not impeded in its capacities by the absence of both of its most senior staff, given that during that week in July both High Commissioner Plumer and Lieutenant-Colonel Symes, who was Acting High Commissioner at the time,³⁸ were out of the country. Symes was in Transjordan—which also suffered from the earthquake— and flew back to Palestine from Amman on the Wednesday morning (two days after it occurred), immediately undertaking visits to Lydda, Nablus, and Ramleh.³⁹

Both men were clearly aware of the political sensitivities arising from the destruction caused, which was typically concentrated in poorer areas where houses were made of low quality materials and more likely to collapse.⁴⁰ Fatalities consequently arose only amongst the native Arab population and not the colonial administrators. As a result the Mandatory authority was blamed for doing too little, too late by

³⁴ CO 733/142/13, TNA

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Powell, *PLUMER, The Soldier’s General* 315

demonstrators who had learned of Lord Plumer's planned visit to see for himself the extent of the damage in Nablus. In the event, he had no difficulty in the town itself, but did have to manoeuvre around a road block when en route up from Jerusalem.⁴¹ Once inside the town, Plumer was quick to praise the work of the police who had maintained long hours helping to dig people out of the rubble.⁴² Here then were representatives of the Government being seen to engage at the local level in an attempt to show that their actions were aligned with the concerns of the people they governed. How much they could do of course depended on the scale of resources at their disposal, and the degree of support which could be made available from the wider international community. That those working in Government House in Jerusalem were aware of these constraints and opportunities became apparent in the next stage of the response to the earthquake, after the initial damage assessment had been completed.

Contemporary newspaper reports painted a fairly grim picture as far as Nablus was concerned. The Palestine Bulletin⁴³ complained that one of the houses there collapsed when its correspondent was visiting the town to ascertain the local conditions.⁴⁴ It clearly made an impression, as a section in the article covering the impact of the earthquake across Palestine as a whole was entitled 'Nablus the Unfortunate'.⁴⁵ It claimed that half the houses in every street were in ruins, and gave a list of the most important buildings to have been either damaged or destroyed. These included two cigarette factories, a mosque, two schools, the Y.M.C.A. Centre, the Police barracks, the veterinary hospital and the old Government court.⁴⁶ These individual buildings apart, the Samaritan quarter in the old town was reportedly entirely destroyed,⁴⁷ and the community forced to live in tents⁴⁸ pending more permanent accommodation alternatives. According to an article in the Times newspaper,⁴⁹ by October 1927 preparations had been almost completed "*for providing dwellings for those rendered destitute by the earthquake.*"⁵⁰ It went on to

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² General Sir Charles Harington, *Plumer of Messines* (John Murray, London, 1935), 282

⁴³ *Palestine Bulletin*, 14 July 1927. The National Library of Israel describes the Bulletin, an English-language daily established in Jerusalem in 1932, as part of a Zionist-Jewish initiative. In 1950 its name was changed to *The Jerusalem Post* and it continues to be published under that name to this day. The newspaper's intended audience was English readers in Palestine and nearby regions -- British Mandate officials, local Jews and Arabs, Jewish readers abroad, tourists, and Christian pilgrims. Zionist institutions considered the newspaper one of the most effective means of exerting influence on the British authorities. The Post's first issue had a 1,200-copy run, but during its first year it achieved a daily circulation of close to 4,000 copies. Its circulation continued to grow, reaching a peak of 50,000 in 1944. On February 1948 the building housing the Post's editorial offices in Jerusalem was bombed. See <http://web.nli.org.il/sites/JPress/English/Pages/Palestine-Bulletin.aspx>

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ *Palestine Bulletin*, 19th July 1927

⁴⁸ *Palestine Bulletin*, 14th July 1927 reported that 'the Government has sent thousands of tents to Nablus for those rendered homeless.'

⁴⁹ 'Earthquake Sufferers in Palestine', article of 3rd October 1927, *Times newspaper digital archives*

⁵⁰ Ibid

assert that the local authorities in Nablus had “*approved the pattern of the huts which are being prepared.....for the homeless.*”⁵¹ We can only speculate to what extent the quality of these ‘huts’ became one of the reasons why the Samaritans eventually relocated to their current location at the top of Mount Gerizim.⁵²

Preparing For The Clearing Up Operation

The first substantive report to the Colonial Office in London was made by Symes on 15th July, four days after the earthquake.⁵³ It is revealing of what the Mandatory authorities considered to be their priorities, given that the first itemised statement on the damage caused, following the opening scene-setting paragraphs, was that an estimated £1,000 worth of damage was done to the railways: “but otherwise Government premises and property escaped lightly.”⁵⁴ At that time there was known to be only a single fatality as far as Government personnel were concerned, and this individual is described as “a Muslim schoolmistress from Nablus.”⁵⁵ The statement indicates that the indigenous population in Palestine was identified according to religious, as opposed to national, affiliation. Unsurprisingly the report aims to present the work of the authorities in Palestine in a positive light vis-a-vis the head office in London, as mention is made both of the “valuable services....rendered by the British Police detachment at Nablus”⁵⁶ and to the contribution made by private hospitals which had “rendered all possible assistance” in Jerusalem, Nablus, and Ramleh.⁵⁷ It is interesting in this respect to note that the comment about the role of the private hospitals comes in the same sentence as reference to the work of the Department of Health in organising emergency relief and medical services, and so implying that the Government was working together with private organisations in what today we might characterise as public-private schemes for the deliverance of public services. Efforts were also made to reassure the Colonial Office in London that the Mandatory authority, working at the national level, had engaged with the local and municipal bodies to ensure that “serious panic or disorder”⁵⁸ was averted.

Paragraph 6 of the report raises the question of fund raising to help meet the costs of reconstruction, noting the establishment of relief committees in each District in Palestine, an offer of assistance from Near East Relief,⁵⁹ and the creation of a Jewish Relief Fund aiming to obtain contributions from diaspora community members in the USA.⁶⁰ Specific mention is made of a gift of £5,000 from a donor in

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Naseer Arafat, Nablus, *City of Civilisations*, 217

⁵³ CO 733/142/13, TNA, Despatch 1081 of 15th July 1927

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ CO 733/142/13, TNA

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Near East Relief was formerly known as the American Committee for Relief in the Near East, discussed on page 119 above. See also Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 188

⁶⁰ CO 733/142/13 82, TNA, Despatch 1081 of 15th July 1927

New York to the Hadassah Medical Organisation that was to be distributed on a non-sectarian basis.⁶¹ As a result, Symes had written to the Area Officer at Nablus and the District Officer in Ramleh on how the money might be best disbursed for the purposes of reconstruction.⁶² The ground however was clearly being prepared, if not for an overt request for supplementary funds from London, then at least for setting out the case as to why they might become necessary: the report notes that advances had been authorised to the municipalities of Nablus and Ramleh to enable rebuilding programmes, and goes on to note that Symes anticipated “many further calls of a similar nature on Government funds.”⁶³ He was nevertheless clearly aware that the Treasury would expect all other funding avenues to have been exhausted before any supplementary money was made available from London, given that on the same day as the report issued from Jerusalem, the Official Gazette of the Government of Palestine advertised the creation of an Earthquake Relief Fund and invited subscriptions to it.⁶⁴

It must have been helpful in this respect that King George V had sent a message of sympathy which the reporting telegram from Jerusalem of 16th July confirmed was being published in the territory.⁶⁵ Two days later, an extraordinary edition of the Palestine Gazette, consisting only of its front page, conveyed the message from the king, and informed the reader that it had been sent by the Secretary of State (for the Colonies) “to His Excellency the Officer Administering the Government by His Majesty’s Command.”⁶⁶ No doubt this was the standard form of words used at the time, but the statement that the mandatory authority exercised power in the name of the monarch, as opposed to on behalf of a democratically elected parliament, is worthy of note in a territory which was characterised, *inter alia*, by an absence of representative institutions. The message of sympathy itself was short and to the point:

“I am deeply grieved to learn of the destruction and loss of life caused by the recent earthquake in Palestine and Trans-Jordan. Please convey assurances of my sympathy to all who have suffered. George R.”⁶⁷

What followed was revealing of the largely passive relationship the people of Palestine were presumed to have with the Government in Jerusalem, as the reader was informed that the king’s message “will be much appreciated by sufferers on whose behalf”⁶⁸ the High Commissioner had tendered “cordial and respectful

⁶¹ *The Palestine Bulletin* of 14 July 1927 identified the donor as Mr Nathan Strauss ‘a prominent New York philanthropist’ and reported that his donation was for ‘the feeding and care of earthquake sufferers without distinction of race or creed’

⁶² *Ibid*

⁶³ *Ibid*

⁶⁴ *The Palestine Bulletin*, 85

⁶⁵ *The Palestine Bulletin*, 87

⁶⁶ CO 742/4, TNA, Palestine Official Gazette 1927

⁶⁷ *Ibid*

⁶⁸ *Ibid*

thanks.”⁶⁹ Colonial subjects it would appear were not expected to express their own views, although clearly the dissemination of the message of sympathy must have contributed to expectations that tangible measures would be taken to aid the victims of the earthquake: as failure to do so would reduce it to empty words. Similar pressures must have been created by the interest taken in Parliament about what was being done, given that before the House rose for the summer recess Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy M.P. “asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies whether it is intended to make any grant for the alleviation of suffering and damage by the earthquake in Palestine ?”⁷⁰ The response from Mr Ormsby-Gore was that no request had been made from the Government in Palestine, and that the situation would be reviewed following the return of the High Commissioner to the territory.⁷¹ Clearly the authorities in London were not going to make any offers before formal requests were submitted for consideration. It becomes clear during the course of subsequent exchanges between the two M.Ps. that precedents had been set by—inter alia—St. Lucia, which had submitted a request for funding prior to receiving any supplementary grant.⁷² It also becomes clear from a later question posed by Colonel Wedgewood M.P. that when it came to Palestine, from the perspective of London humanitarian considerations were not necessarily to the fore: given that his interest was in “whether any historical monuments”⁷³ had been damaged – a point on which the Secretary of State was happily able to confirm in the negative, at least as far as “the more celebrated historical monuments”⁷⁴ were concerned.

Local Initiatives

Running in parallel with the national response directed from Jerusalem were various initiatives at the municipal and local level. The municipality of Jaffa nominated a committee for the relief of victims of the earthquake, and their initiative inspired that of Tel Aviv to do the same: as well as sending “large quantities of bread to the towns of Nablus, Ramleh, and Ludd.”⁷⁵ Similar donations of bread and other foodstuffs were made to Nablus by Jerusalem and Tulkarm, amongst others.⁷⁶ It would appear that the reason for this was that the bakeries in Nablus had either been destroyed, or were in the danger zone.⁷⁷ The Tel Aviv offer however went beyond food, with a proposal from the Maccabee organisation to send a group of some thirty volunteers to the town to assist the Government authorities in the clear-up operation.⁷⁸

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ *Hansard, Commons*, Volume 209, 18 – 29 July 1927, Column 1244

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ *Hansard, Commons*, column 1245

⁷⁵ *Palestine Bulletin*, 14th July 1927

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ As reported in the *Times* newspaper of 15th July 1927 in an article entitled ‘*The Palestine Earthquake, relief of Stricken Areas*’

⁷⁸ *Palestine Bulletin* of 15th July 1927

Similar offers came in from the Tel Aviv fire-brigade, the Hapoel labour sport organisation, and the Organisation of Architects and Engineers.⁷⁹ The response of the Mayor of Nablus was enthusiastic, asking that the volunteers should come over as soon as possible.⁸⁰ In the absence of firm documentary evidence it is difficult to conclude to what extent these offers of help from Tel Aviv were inspired by altruistic motives. The general separation in Mandate Palestine between the Arab and Jewish communities however, and the concentration of Jewish organisations almost exclusively on members of the 'Yishuv'⁸¹ would suggest that considerations relating to public relations may have been a factor. This might also explain why the response of the Mandatory authorities, represented by District Officer Babcock, was a good deal more measured than that of the Mayor of Nablus, putting off any outside help pending receipt of instructions from Jerusalem.⁸² His position was reflected by that of the District Commissioner at Jaffa, who declined a request to facilitate the transfer of volunteers by rail from Tel Aviv / Jaffa pending completion of a technical assessment of the damage suffered at Nablus.⁸³

Mention is not made of the Tel Aviv offer in Government documents held at the National Archives, so it is not possible to know with certainty whether only a natural caution was being exercised prior to the completion of an initial damage assessment, or whether other considerations pertained. These could have included fears about the reaction of townspeople in an overwhelmingly Muslim community to the presence of Jewish volunteers from the new town on the coast which epitomised more than anywhere else the new world of Zionist immigration to which the Nabulsis were so bitterly opposed. Given the tensions created by the Jewish national home policy, the Mandatory authorities may also have been reluctant to be seen to be accepting help from Tel Aviv, both because that might have created the expectation of some sort of quid pro quo in the future, and as it might reinforce the perceptions of those in the Palestinian Arab community that the British were too closely associated with the Jewish immigrants. As we saw in chapter III,⁸⁴ concerns had also begun to develop in the Treasury that some towns in Palestine, and in particular Tel Aviv, had been spending more than their municipal budgets and risked default, so officials in Jerusalem may have looked askance at offers of assistance from a municipality which they considered would be better off concentrating on the management of its own affairs. Whatever the reasoning, a decision was taken to refuse the offer of help on the grounds that sufficient workers had been provided by the Northern District Administration, and so there was no need for any more.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ For a discussion of the role of the Hadassah Medical Organisation in this respect, see Mira Katzburg-Yungman, *Hadassah, American Women Zionists and the Rebirth of Israel*. Chapter 1, Hadassah, 1912 -1933, Finding a Role, 11 – 33 (Liverpool University Press, 2012)

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ See Chapter III of this thesis, page105above

⁸⁵ *Palestine Bulletin* of 19th July 1927

The Use of Expert Opinion

Somewhat fortuitously an American academic expert on earthquakes from Stanford University,⁸⁶ Bailey Willis,⁸⁷ happened to be visiting Cairo in July 1927, and was asked by the High Commissioner in Jerusalem if he would come up and report on the situation.⁸⁸ As it becomes clear from the archival records that his views influenced the thinking and approach of the Mandatory authorities towards the clearing up phase, it is worth examining some of the language he used in his report. This was based on fieldwork carried out in Amman, Ludd, Nablus, Ramleh, and Salt.⁸⁹ The area of destruction ran from Amman in Transjordan to Ludd in Palestine on the east-west axis, and from Nablus to Hebron on the north-south axis with an overall shape corresponding to an ellipse.⁹⁰

Willis based his analysis of the impact of the quake, as far as damage to or destruction of buildings was concerned, on the nature of the terrain on which they had been built. This could range from stable, hard rock formations to soft, marshy ground.⁹¹ The less secure the base, the greater the damage which would be caused by an earthquake. In the specific case of Nablus he refers to investigations that had been carried out by Mr Babcock, the District Officer,⁹² whose work there was singled out for praise by the High Commissioner's office later in September.⁹³ The conclusion is interesting, as it refers to the effects of the earlier earthquake known to have occurred in 1837:

“In Nablus the most densely built up portion of the old city stands according to Mr Babcock, on fields and rubbish of old houses thrown down by a former earthquake. Being in the valley itself, this material is probably full of water at no great depth. It is a dangerous foundation. The zone were better cleared and planted to olive trees right through the town.”⁹⁴

More generally, Willis attributed the extent of the damage to poor quality building construction.⁹⁵ He was furthermore not the only person to do so, as when a paper issued from the general manager's office in Haifa on the state of the railway network following the earthquake, it contained the observation that the most serious damage had occurred to the older station buildings constructed by the Ottoman Turks, and that “from this the conclusion can be drawn that the bad materials built into these

⁸⁶ Despatch 1225 of 25 August 1927 from Government House Jerusalem in CO 733/142/13, TNA

⁸⁷ Bailey Willis, 1857-1949, was a renowned and much honoured geologist. For a short biography of his professional life see S S Visser, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. Vol. 39 No.4 (Dec. 1949) 291-292

⁸⁸ CO 733/142/13, TNA

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ CO 733/142/13, TNA

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Ibid

structures and the indifferent workmanship, contributed greatly to the damage suffered.”⁹⁶ Such disdain was also extended towards the Palestinian population, judging from Willis’s observation towards the end of his report that earthquakes were natural occurrences, not a mark of divine providence, which he recommended should be clearly explained to the locals so as to “offset the terror inspired by their ignorance and superstition.”⁹⁷ It is furthermore implicit, and in keeping with this attitude, that he thought the work of reconstruction, if not carried out by the British, should at least be supervised by them. When describing the standard procedure for dealing with buildings where the foundations have been damaged, and it becomes necessary to reinforce the superstructure, Willis comments somewhat acidly that “trained judgement, which the natives rarely have”⁹⁸ is required to ensure that the reinforcements are sufficiently robust to bear the weight of the building they must support. Care must of course be made in drawing general conclusions from his writings, but the fact that the report was forwarded in its entirety from Jerusalem to the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, Leopold Amery, and without any comment on its language, suggests that the occupants of Government House in Jerusalem broadly concurred with the language employed.⁹⁹

Corroborating evidence to these shared perceptions is provided in the covering note addressed to Amery. Symes set out as would be expected the measures taken by the Mandatory authority both in terms of relief measures for those who had lost their homes and demolition of houses no longer fit for human habitation. He then makes the interesting observation that not much money would be needed as an incentive to get people to rebuild in Transjordan, given that the people there are “generally simpler and more virile than in Palestine.”¹⁰⁰ In contrast with their hardier neighbours, the Palestinians it seems were considered weak, and easily frightened. One can only speculate to what extent these attitudes may have contributed to an under-estimation of the potential seriousness posed by the threat of the Arab Revolt in the succeeding decade. Nevertheless, the aftermath of the earthquake may have contributed to this generally negative perception of the Palestinians. The Times for example noted that “*at Nablus the able-bodied male population refused to assist the police in removing debris or to enter the devastated suk owing to fatalism or fright, and had to be compelled to do so after the police had worked without cessation for twelve hours.*”¹⁰¹

Nablus is given a whole paragraph in the covering note,¹⁰² more than any other town or area, and here again, the choice of language is revealing. It starts with basic factual information, to set the scene - informing that some 180 houses had either

⁹⁶ CO 733/142/13, TNA

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Despatch No. 1136 of 28 July 1927 from Jerusalem to SOS Colonies in CO 733/142/13, TNA

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ ‘The Palestine Earthquake: Relief of Stricken Areas’. *Times Digital Archives* article of 15th July 1927

¹⁰² CO 733/142/13, TNA

collapsed or become unsafe, and that most of them were in the old city centre. Between 3,000 and 4,000 people had in consequence been in receipt of (free) food rations. These numbers apart it is nevertheless the way they are described which is striking: “an almost completely derelict population, many of them diseased.”¹⁰³ Symes considered it ‘unthinkable’ that they should be allowed to rebuild ‘the rabbit warrens of masonry’¹⁰⁴ which they had previously inhabited. However, as the narrative proceeds, it becomes apparent that the general sense of negativity was being driven by financial considerations. First the reader is told that the displaced population in Nablus was composed of people who had previously lived ‘on the borderline of destitution’¹⁰⁵ and that consequently they lacked the means either to purchase or to rent newly built housing. As a result, building loans would not represent an appropriate response to their predicament. The only practical solution would be to relocate them to vacant land outside the town where temporary accommodation could be erected before the coming of winter. Even the most basic structures to accommodate a few thousand people would require significant –and hitherto unbudgeted- expenditure, and it is in this context that we should consider the establishment of the fund set up to enable it.

The Palestine Relief Fund

The Mandatory authorities moved quickly in their attempts to source voluntary contributions towards the cost of humanitarian relief. Within days of the earthquake the Official Gazette of the Government of Palestine was advertising an Earthquake Relief Fund, to which members of the public, both in Palestine and abroad, were invited to donate.¹⁰⁶ They were also in contact with the Jewish community, which was in the process of seeking the aid of the Jewish Distribution Committee of America.¹⁰⁷ These initiatives clearly paid dividends, as that same month a Mr Nathan Strauss of New York donated £5,000 to the Hadassah Medical Organisation towards the relief of suffering from the earthquake.¹⁰⁸

Examination of the Palestine ‘blue book’ of Government statistics for 1927 reveals that relief work had commenced in July of that year: was ongoing at the end of the year: and had cost a little over £8,000, defrayed upon the earthquake relief fund.¹⁰⁹ The Official Gazette of the same year indicates that by August 1927 plans were indeed about to be implemented for the construction of temporary accommodation “for certain persons rendered homeless.....in the town of Nablus.”¹¹⁰ The plans for the land on which the accommodation would be built were deposited at the District

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ A special edition of the Gazette was published for this purpose on 15 July 1927. See CO 742/4, TNA

¹⁰⁷ Despatch 1081 of 15 July 1927 from Government Office Jerusalem: see CO 733/142/13, TNA

¹⁰⁸ CO 733/142/13, TNA

¹⁰⁹ *Palestine Blue Book* 1927, CO 821/2 TNA

¹¹⁰ *Palestine Official Gazette* 1927, edition No. 193 of 16 August 1927, CO 742/4, TNA

Office there.¹¹¹ The fund itself had been established within days of the earthquake, and its governing board had their first meeting in the High Commissioner's office on 21st July, only eleven days after the event.¹¹² Clearly the Mandatory authorities were capable of moving rapidly when the situation demanded it. They were also sensible to the presentational advantages of co-opting members of Palestine's notable families: membership of the board included Awni Bey Abdul Hadi and Omar Saleh, both from Nablus.¹¹³ By the end of July an appeal had been made both in Palestine and abroad, which had succeeded in raising some £4,000 to complement the £5,000 donation made by Mr Nathan Strauss.¹¹⁴ By the end of the year the total sum had increased to over £21,000 and included donations from the Palestine Relief Committee in New York, private individuals in the United Kingdom, and employees of Departments in the Palestine Government.¹¹⁵ Given that the names of donors were published in the Gazettes' lists of donations it would appear that a degree of prestige pertained to those who contributed to disaster relief.¹¹⁶

As far as the Government of Palestine itself was concerned, most of the cost of the clearing up operation appears to have been borne from within existing budgetary resources, and supervised by the Department of Public Works.¹¹⁷ Various reporting telegrammes to London had noted damage to the railway,¹¹⁸ and by the autumn a request for £875 to repair damage to the Palestine railway network, together with £2,845 for the Hejaz railway was agreed in December 1927.¹¹⁹ The timing of this request appears to have coincided with what were then the final stages of what became the Palestine Loan Ordinance, signed off on 1st November 1927.¹²⁰ This however provided £4.5 Million, of which just over half for the railways, a little over £1 Million for ports and harbour construction, and the remainder for public buildings, telegraphs, and telephones.¹²¹

As far as the UK Government in London was concerned, the earthquake in Palestine was essentially a local issue to be addressed with local resources, so this goes some way to explaining why the authorities in Jerusalem put efforts into promoting the Palestine Relief Fund, as it represented the best chance of procuring monies for

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Despatch No. 1114 of 21st July 1927 from Symes to Amery in CO 733/142/13 TNA

¹¹³ CO 733/142/13, TNA

¹¹⁴ Despatch No. 1136 of 28th July 1927, Symes to Amery in CO 733/142/13, TNA

¹¹⁵ *Palestine Gazette* No. 201 of 16 December 1927 in CO 742/4, TNA

¹¹⁶ *Palestine Gazette* No. 192 of 01 August 1927 shows that contributions ranged from 500 mils to £P 848 from the Palestine Relief Committee in New York, and included staff in the Posts & Telegraph Department, Customs staff, and three donations from the staff of the District Inspector of Education at Jerusalem. Otherwise private individuals (mostly English) and various organisations.

¹¹⁷ Despatch No. 1114 of 21st July 1927 from Symes to Amery in CO 733/142/13, TNA

¹¹⁸ See Despatch 1081 of 15th July 1927 in CO 733/142/13, TNA. The original estimate for the cost of the damage was £1,000 but this rose subsequently

¹¹⁹ Despatch No. 1536 of 22 November 1927 from Government Office Jerusalem to SOS Colonies in CO 733/142/13, TNA

¹²⁰ CO 733/135/10, TNA

¹²¹ Ibid

the rehabilitation of the people affected, as opposed to the infrastructure which was clearly the Government's priority. Those efforts clearly bore fruit, as apart from the donations coming in from the UK and the USA, the registers of correspondence between Jerusalem and London note the arrival of monies from Hyderabad.¹²² They also note questions being raised about a £1,000 contribution for the repair of mosques, and whether the Supreme Moslem Council was capable of ensuring that the money was spent on its intended purpose.¹²³ The earthquake had clearly given rise to a range of financial flows designed for its mitigation. Palestine Government funds and private local donations were augmented by infrastructure loans and grants from the UK Government, and by private donations from the Christian, Jewish and Moslem communities from different countries across the world.

This international dimension was also apparent in the way the authorities in Jerusalem shared their own experiences of the earthquake, and sought to benefit from knowledge of such phenomena elsewhere. In April 1928, two months after the second, smaller earthquake struck Palestine, the British Embassy in Tokyo wrote to Sir Austen Chamberlain, the then Foreign Secretary, enclosing information on seismic activity in the Kwante district of Japan which had been provided by the Earthquake Damage Prevention Council of the Japanese Ministry of Education. The letter went on to note that copies were being sent to the British High Commission in New Zealand, "and to the Palestine Government from whom an enquiry with regard to earthquakes has recently been received by this Embassy."¹²⁴

The Impact of the Earthquake on Nablus

As already observed, the primary concern of the British authorities in both Jerusalem and London was to repair and maintain damaged infrastructure: although the 1927 report of the Department of Public Works indicates that work of this nature was also undertaken so as to provide relief from unemployment.¹²⁵ That Department also seconded two senior technical officers to the Municipality of Nablus "for several months after the earthquake in July"¹²⁶ indicating the severity of the damage there: with the only other town receiving secondees being Jerusalem.¹²⁷ Efforts were made to initiate repair work before the winter rains set in, and the priorities for Nablus and its municipality included the police offices and barracks, the Old Serai, and the Hashimyeh school.¹²⁸ Not all the emphasis however was on Government or Municipal buildings. Plans were drawn up by the Department of Public Works, in consultation with the Department of Health for basic housing structures consisting of a living room, kitchen, and toilet for those made homeless by the earthquake: with

¹²² CO 793/9, TNA. The donation was from the Niyam of Hyderabad

¹²³ Letter of 22 October 1927 in CO 793/7, TNA

¹²⁴ CO 733/142/13, TNA

¹²⁵ Department of Public Works Administration report for the period 01 April 1927 – 31 December 1927 in CO 814/2, TNA

¹²⁶ Ibid

¹²⁷ Ibid

¹²⁸ CO 814/2, TNA

land leased for their construction at the rate of ¼ dunam¹²⁹ per house.¹³⁰ The size of these plots clearly indicates that the new houses were located outside of the central urban area of Nablus.¹³¹ This is confirmed in the annual report for the Department of Health in 1927 which noted in its housing and town planning section “the construction of good residences outside the old town in replacement of those damaged or destroyed by the earthquake.”¹³² The following year’s report, taking a retrospective view, considered that some good had resulted from the destruction, noting that the health of those moved into temporary accommodation¹³³ had improved since their relocation from what the Department considered to be “overcrowded and unhealthy” conditions.¹³⁴

In terms, however, of relations between the British and the Palestinians, although there is clear evidence of collaboration both in the administration of the Palestine Relief Fund, and of the police working together with the local people in Nablus to extricate victims from the rubble, the overall relationship was still characterised by the same sort of ‘top down’ approach evident in the development of water infrastructure: it was the Mandatory authority, operating within the fiscal constraints imposed by London, which assessed the requirements and initiated the projects, with the local community acting as passive recipients. This may help explain why the 1927 earthquake and the subsequent reconstruction operation did not mark any particular improvement in the somewhat guarded and unsympathetic relationship between the British and the Nabulsis.¹³⁵

In the same way that the administration in Jerusalem was obliged to operate within constraints imposed by London, so the local Municipal Authority in Nablus was obliged to operate within the constraints imposed by the Mandatory Authority in Jerusalem. On 22nd August 1927 the Palestine Bulletin reported that the Mayor of Nablus had asked Lord Plumer for a loan of £ 150,000 to repair the earthquake damage, during the course of the High Commissioner’s visit to the town to ascertain how badly it had suffered.¹³⁶ Rebuilding loans were made available by the Mandatory

¹²⁹ A dunam was about 919 square metres in Palestine in 1927

¹³⁰ *Palestine Bulletin* 25 August 1927

¹³¹ They of course took time to build. As an interim measure, the Royal Air force placed tents and other relief supplies at the disposal of the relief organisations. See the ‘*Times*’ newspaper article of 15th July 1927, *The Palestine Earthquake, Relief of Stricken Areas*

¹³² Annual Report of the Department of Health for the year 1927 in CO 814/2, TNA

¹³³ A study undertaken by Dr Wael Abu Saleh on the earthquake in Nablus indicates that the locations for such temporary accommodation, consisting of tents, included the garden and orchard area that subsequently became the town’s main plaza: the area around the eastern gate to Nablus near ‘rijal al-‘amoud: and the area around the western gate, near the mill. I am indebted to Dr Kamal Jardaneh of Nablus for this information. A map of Nablus in the year before the earthquake is on the final page (141) of this chapter of the thesis, below

¹³⁴ Annual Report of the Department of Health for the year 1928 in CO 814/2, TNA

¹³⁵ As Henrietta Szold observed of the Palestinian Arabs in 1933, “people do not necessarily want to have good done to them by others.” See William Brinner and Moses Rischin (Eds), *Like All the Nations ? The Life and Legacy of Judah L Magnes* (State University of New York Press, 1987), 99

¹³⁶ *Palestine Bulletin*, 22nd August 1927

authorities,¹³⁷ with individual loans not to exceed £40 “to persons who can obtain two or more sound guarantors, but who cannot arrange an immediate mortgage on their land.”¹³⁸ £10,000 was made available for loans for this purpose to the Northern District, together with £5,000 for the Southern District and £5,000 for the Jerusalem Division.¹³⁹ The letter made clear that “only persons of integrity and means”¹⁴⁰ should be accepted as guarantors, so in practice the loans would be limited to the affluent and well-connected. Unsurprisingly this gave rise to complaints that not enough was being made available for rebuilding.¹⁴¹ The Arab Commission in Jerusalem, formed to protect the interests of the Arab earthquake sufferers, resolved to write and complain to the Permanent Mandates Commission at the League of Nations, as well as to Government and Parliament in the United Kingdom.¹⁴²

The Impact of Developments within the Department of Public Works

It is possible however that the lack of generosity in loan funding was the result not only of the overall fiscal constraints imposed by the Treasury, but also due to a re-orientation of the priorities within the Department of Public Works which held lead responsibility within the Government of Palestine for building programmes. That process saw changes in both the type of work carried out, and the geographical regions within the territory which were the primary beneficiaries of resource allocation. In terms of activities, the shift in focus was set out in the Department’s 1929 Annual Report, which noted “a marked change in (its) policy and activities.”¹⁴³ In essence, this change was away from a focus on developing the territory’s transportation infrastructure via the programme of road and bridge development which had characterised the first decade of the Mandate. Henceforth there was to be a greater emphasis on the construction of new buildings. The rationale for the latter was that hitherto the Government had been leasing existing buildings¹⁴⁴ which (by implication) were not considered fully fit for purpose, and where any improvements to them would accrue to the landlord, not to the Government. This situation is reflected in the 1926 Annual Report, which illustrates that the two largest single items of recurrent expenditure were on road and bridge maintenance, followed by rent for office accommodation.¹⁴⁵ It is also confirmed in a separate report on staffing levels which has references to “unsuitable rented buildings.....which are for the most part

¹³⁷ Letter of 6 December 1927 from the Chief Secretary, G B Symes, to District Commissioners, held at the Israel State Archives, and can be seen on page 192 of the document at:

<http://www.archives.gov.il/en/archives/#/Archive/0b071706800225ea/File/0b07170680e183dd>

¹³⁸ Ibid

¹³⁹ Ibid

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

¹⁴¹ As had been reported in the Palestine Bulletin of 3rd October 1927 under the heading ‘Arabs Dissatisfied with Earthquake Loan.’

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ CO 814/4, TNA, Department of Public Works Annual Report 1929

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ CO 814/2, TNA, Department of Public Works Annual Report 1926

in bad order, badly sited, and discreditable to Government.”¹⁴⁶ A picture is consequently built up from these reports that by the end of the 1920s a decision had been taken to improve the condition of the ‘Government estate’ via a programme of new, owner-occupied buildings. These would not only contribute to operational efficiency –and thus longer term cost savings- but also act as a tangible symbol of the British mandatory presence in Palestine.

These however were not the only changes taking place around that time, as the evidence makes it clear that the building programme was concentrated in some areas at the (relative) expense of others. The 1926 report for example lists about a hundred entries under ‘Public Works Extraordinary’.¹⁴⁷ Out of these, Nablus was designated for only two (related to improvements to the Government owned hospital, and the former Ottoman military barracks.)¹⁴⁸ Haifa by contrast was the beneficiary of ten, and Jaffa eight.¹⁴⁹ The organisational thinking around this time also appears to indicate a restructuring which would facilitate the concentration of resources in smaller, more discrete areas. In March 1928 Lord Plumer wrote to the Colonial Secretary proposing a reorganisation of the Department of Public Works so that instead of operating in simply a northern and southern district in Palestine it would henceforth cover “four independent districts.”¹⁵⁰ These would consist of a northern division with headquarters at Haifa: a Nablus division: a Jaffa-Gaza division: and a Jerusalem-Beersheba division.¹⁵¹ A possible interpretation of this proposed restructuring is that Nablus would benefit, given that henceforth it would have its own division instead of being part of a much larger northern district. The stated rationale for the changes however was that major projects such as the Rockefeller museum in Jerusalem, the Jaffa Post Office and Jaffa port development meant that more staff were needed at the headquarters drawing office in Jerusalem.¹⁵² None of those projects were in the northern half of Palestine, and a restructuring which split out Nablus from a new northern division based in Haifa would make it easier to concentrate the available funding for that part of the territory on port and industrial development in Haifa.

The colonial secretary Leopold Amery agreed to Lord Plumer’s proposals later that same month, albeit with some caveats concerning the grading of staff in the new structure.¹⁵³ This led Plumer to respond subsequently,¹⁵⁴ and part of the text is revealing of his priorities, given that he envisaged the possible need to divide the northern division into two smaller districts so that less senior grades of engineer would be required. Should that occur, he was of the view that class 2 engineers

¹⁴⁶ CO 733/165/7, TNA, Department of Public Works Reorganisation of Staff 1929

¹⁴⁷ CO 814/2, TNA, Department of Public Works Annual Report 1926

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

¹⁵⁰ CO 733/154/8, TNA, Department of Public Works, District Reorganisation, 1928

¹⁵¹ Ibid

¹⁵² Ibid

¹⁵³ Ibid. Letter of 23rd March 1928 from Secretary of State for the Colonies

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. Letter of 23rd July 1928 from High Commissioner, Jerusalem

would remain in charge of Haifa, Jaffa, and Jerusalem, while the more junior class 3 engineers would be appointed “to the less important posts at Nablus and Nazareth or Tiberias.”¹⁵⁵ Here then is a clear statement of how Nablus was viewed from the perspective of the Mandatory authority in Jerusalem: less important than the capital or leading coastal towns, and only on a par with the small towns of Nazareth and Tiberias which, notwithstanding the religious significance of the former, were both less populous, and of less economic importance than Nablus.¹⁵⁶

The somewhat dismissive view expressed by the High Commissioner is also reflected in decisions concerning the posting of one of the engineers in the Department of Public Works. The internal minutes on the district reorganisation file reveal that Mr G T Caryl, “was found unsuitable as an Assistant Engineer, and it was proposed to discontinue his services.”¹⁵⁷ It is nevertheless clear from the correspondence between Jerusalem and London¹⁵⁸ that Caryl had acted as the senior engineer in Nablus, pending his return to headquarters in Jerusalem as an Assistant Architect.¹⁵⁹ Taken together, the London-Jerusalem exchanges and the internal correspondence on file indicate that he was not considered an effective engineer, but was by contrast an acceptable architect. As a result he was ‘parked’ temporarily in Nablus while awaiting a suitable architectural post in Jerusalem. Clearly he would not have received that interim posting if the department had considered Nablus to hold the same importance as towns such as Haifa or Jaffa.

By 1929, the new High Commissioner had decided that he would indeed divide the new northern district into two.¹⁶⁰ His rationale for this was the large amount of work in the district, and the need to reorganise the Haifa office.¹⁶¹ This no doubt reflected the anticipated workload from urban infrastructural development alluded to later that year.¹⁶² Once again, the internal correspondence between officials in Jerusalem reveals the lower status accorded to Nablus, where it is presumed that the engineers there and in Nazareth will be grade 3 posts, while those in Haifa will be the higher grade 2.¹⁶³ All these developments of course came a year or two after the earthquake, but they are clearly indicative of the way the Government was thinking, and where its priorities for expenditure were located. Jerusalem and the coastal strip were to be the main beneficiaries of building programmes which marked the second phase of infrastructure development following that of the road-based transport

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, paragraph 2

¹⁵⁶ Nablus had a population of 17,189 at the time of the 1931 census, Nazareth 8,756, and Tiberias 8,601. See E Mills, *Census of Palestine*, vol. II, 16, Table V: Towns Classified by Population

¹⁵⁷ CO 733/154/8, TNA, Left hand tag papers. Minute of 17th March 1928

¹⁵⁸ Letter of 23rd July 1928 from High Commissioner, Jerusalem: para 3, in CO 733/154/8, TNA

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

¹⁶⁰ Letter of 3rd April 1929, Chancellor to Amery, in CO 733/171/5, TNA

¹⁶¹ Ibid

¹⁶² Letter of 25 October 1929 from High Commissioner to Lord Passfield, where references are made to –inter alia– electrification, town planning, and water supplies, in CO 733/171/5, TNA

¹⁶³ internal memo of 23 April 1929 in CO 733/171/5, TNA

network which had consumed much of the available budget during the first decade of the Mandate.

That network undoubtedly held the same potential to benefit Nablus as it did any other town in Palestine which was connected to it, but improved transportation links in themselves could not act as a substitute for the sort of economic programmes which would be necessary to develop an impoverished territory which had successively suffered the ravages of war, crop failure, and the 1927 earthquake. Nablus suffered greater material losses than anywhere else in Palestine in terms of buildings destroyed and lives lost, but there was no serious effort made by the Government to initiate a rebuilding and urban development programme in those parts of the old town which had borne the brunt of the damage. In this respect, the fate of the Samaritan community was symbolic: originally located in the south-western part of the old town,¹⁶⁴ rather than start anew in their existing location, the earthquake inspired them to move progressively out to the suburban areas and on up to their present location at the top of Mount Gerizim.¹⁶⁵ If crises bring opportunities they were not capitalised on as far as Nablus was concerned, which suffered only losses: of buildings, people, and economic activity.

Conclusion

The 1927 earthquake was a natural disaster to which the Mandatory authorities brought an essentially minimalist approach where the over-arching priority was to re-establish the status quo ante as far and as fast as possible. It was also revealing of prevailing attitudes concerning humanitarian aid and Palestine. It came at a time when both governments and emerging civil society organisations tended to favour and support those groups of people in countries other than their own where they had developed a relationship.¹⁶⁶ Some analyses of these developments have argued that this prioritised approach to which groups and places to focus on coincided with a parallel trend for governments to use humanitarian relief as an instrument of foreign policy.¹⁶⁷ The experience of Palestine, and in particular Nablus, in 1927 suggests that this argument needs to be qualified according to specific circumstances. What is striking about the response of the Mandatory authorities to the earthquake is that they used money donated by private individuals via the Earthquake Relief Fund they established, and only used their own budgeted funds for the repair and renovation of communications and transport infrastructure –i.e. their own assets. As noted on page 125 above, donations to the fund had reached £21,000 by the end of 1927, in contrast to only £875 of supplementary government funding for the railways: with the whole of the £4.5 Million Palestine Loan Ordinance agreed that November allocated for infrastructure development, not earthquake relief per se – certainly not in respect

¹⁶⁴ Naseer Arafat, Nablus, *City of Civilisations*, 217

¹⁶⁵ Ibid

¹⁶⁶ See Michael Barnett & Thomas Weiss (Eds), *Humanitarianism Contested: where angels fear to tread* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2011), 41

¹⁶⁷ Barnett & Weiss, *Humanitarianism Contested*, 42

of humanitarian relief. These figures suggest that the Mandatory authorities were not even leveraging or matching private sector donations: they were relying on them to provide the food and shelter required for those people who had been made homeless when their houses either collapsed altogether or became too badly damaged to safely return to.

What money was made available by the government for house building and reconstruction came in the form of loans: reference is made in one of the despatches from Jerusalem to London to “special credit facilities to individuals.”¹⁶⁸ Nowhere is there any mention of grants. Indeed, in correspondence between the Colonial Office and the Treasury, the latter agreed to the High Commissioner’s proposal that any loans made available for the purposes of house (re)building should be limited to £200 per application, charge interest of 6%, and be repayable within ten years.¹⁶⁹ The imposition of such conditions would suggest that only the better off would be likely to make use of such funding, given the relatively short repayment period, and the lack of concessionary interest rates. Those lacking the means to take up such loans would consequently be dependent on the humanitarian relief supplied by non-Government agencies.

On the issue of funding sources from what would today be described as Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), the timing of the earthquake was significant, as the late 1920s saw a change from the attitudes found in the years immediately following World War I, with its emphasis on “pro-Christian and pro-Western proselytising”¹⁷⁰ towards an approach whereby the donor was more willing to be guided by the priorities of the Government administering the territory in need of aid. This growing acceptance of local, recipient-led priorities must have made it easier for the Mandatory authorities to on the one hand launch their appeals via the Palestine Relief Fund, while on the other being able to maintain the initiative in how the funds were dispersed without having to worry that there would be too many ‘strings’ attached to the donations. The 1927 earthquake, and the response to it, consequently marks a shift from the approach towards the World War I disasters analysed in Keith Watenpaugh’s *‘Bread from Stones’* towards one which was becoming more secular and needs based, with less emphasis on the cultural or religious affiliations of the recipients.

Reflecting these developments, the Relief Fund established by the mandatory authorities enabled a conduit of finance to flow in from the United States, where many of the donors were Jewish, and moreover happy to donate simply to

¹⁶⁸ Despatch No.1114 of 21st July 1927, Symes to Amery, in CO 733/142/13, TNA

¹⁶⁹ Letter of 22 September 1927 from the Colonial Office to the Treasury and reply of 04 October 1927 in T 161/899/3, TNA. This correspondence is primarily about Government funding for earthquake relief in Transjordan, but notes that the request for authority to grant loans comes from Lord Plumer in his capacity as High Commissioner for Palestine and Transjordan, so it is reasonable to presume that the loan conditions applied to both territories

¹⁷⁰ Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 190

'Palestine.' Once transferred into the fund's bank account this nevertheless came under the full control of the Government of Palestine, creating the impression that this was quasi-Government money, not directly related to the national home project: and as such uncontroversial as far as the sensitivities of the Nabulsi community were concerned. By contrast, direct offers of aid coming from within Palestine, especially from the new town of Tel Aviv, and involving the physical presence of Jewish volunteers offering their labour, appear to have been considered unacceptable to a Government administration which was well aware of the controversies caused by its Jewish national home policy.

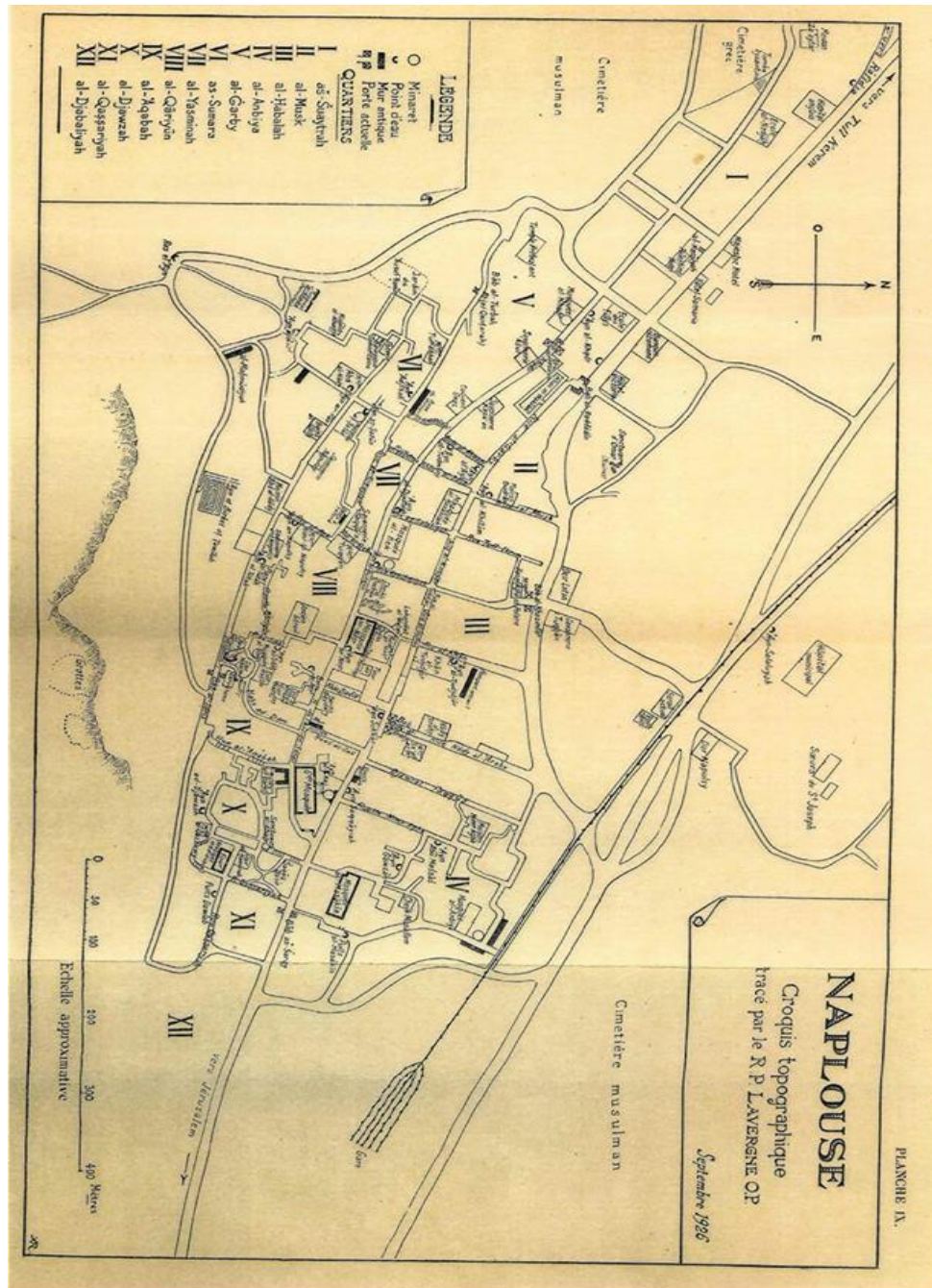
It is also clear from the records of the Department of Public Works that the earthquake came at a time when thinking on the priorities for expenditure was changing: with a move away from the transport infrastructure that had accounted for much of the Department's budget in the first years of the Mandate towards an expanding programme of public building in those towns where the Government wished to showcase its presence: in particular, Haifa and Jerusalem. Clearly Nablus did not rank highly in the hierarchy of priority locations, and the opportunity presented by the earthquake of creating a new urban development on the site of the ruined old town was passed over, although by default new suburban areas were created for those who were unable to return to their damaged or destroyed houses.

The findings of this chapter consequently reinforce the leitmotif of the thesis concerning the essentially *de minimis* character of the Mandatory authority's approach to the city. At the same time it reveals a specific aspect of that approach in terms of how privately funded philanthropic donations were used to plug the funding gaps which emerged in those geographical locations which were not considered priority development areas. With this in mind it is now appropriate to turn to another event specific to Nablus, which occurred some years later in 1936, the year of the Arab revolt: with a view to ascertaining whether the same 'hands off' approach was employed, not in the field of reconstruction, but in events concerning security and the maintenance of law and order. The incident concerned involved the *de facto* arrest of the Mayor of Nablus, not by the police, but by the military authorities, and so provides an opportunity to examine the relations between the civilian and military authorities within Mandate Palestine, albeit within the broader constraints imposed by the Government in London. This event, like the earthquake, made sufficient impact that it became the subject of questions raised in Parliament. It is to this which we now turn.



A house in Nablus after the earthquake

Photograph. Retrieved on 24 July 1919 from the Library of Congress,
<http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/matpc.03041/>



Map of the town of Nablus in 1926

This map is Plate IX at the back of Pere Jaussen, *Coutumes Palestiniennes, NAPLOUSE et son district* (Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1927)

CHAPTER V

RULING A CITY IN REVOLT: THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE ARREST OF THE MAYOR¹

Introduction

Chapter IV considered the impact of the 1927 earthquake on Nablus, and what this natural disaster, and the response to it, revealed about the attitude of the Mandatory Government towards the city, with its minimalist approach to Government intervention and reliance upon private sector donations to fund reconstruction. Chapter V examines a related but different set of issues arising from a particular incident which took place during the autumn of the first year of the Arab Revolt in 1936. It involved the army, the police, and the Mayor, Suleiman Bey Tuqan. A scion of one of the city's leading families, he was elected Mayor in 1925, a post he held until 1950.² His forced co-option by the army late one evening in September 1936, and the subsequent reaction to it, provide an opportunity to examine the differences of perspective between the civil administration and the military in Mandate Palestine, together with the tensions arising from them which is one of the key themes of this chapter. Within the broader context of colonial administration in the decades following World War I it goes on to argue that the divergence of views between High Commissioner Wauchope and Lieut-General Dill reflected broader shifts in colonial governance taking place in the 1920s and 30s, using French Morocco as a point of comparison.

The arrest of the Mayor in September 1936 took place at the end of the first phase of the Arab Revolt in Palestine, which had started in April that year as a protest against rising levels of Jewish immigration.³ Although the start of the revolt took the form of a nationwide strike,⁴ the beginning of armed insurrection can be traced to "an attack on 15 April 1936 on a convoy of taxis on the Nablusto Tulkarm road in which the assailants murdered two Jewish passengers."⁵ The Government's account to Parliament of this incident noted that it resulted in the murder of two Arabs by Jews north of Petah Tikvah two days later, with further clashes between Jews and Arabs between Jaffa and Tel Aviv in the succeeding days. Order was restored on the 20th April.⁶

¹ This incident took place in September 1936, when the Mayor was Suleiman Bey Tuqan

² For a biography of Tuqan, see PASSIA, <http://www.passia.org/personalities/816>

³ Laila Parsons, *The Commander, Fawzi Al-Qawuqji and the Fight for Arab Independence 1914 – 1948* (Saqi Books, London, 2017), 111-112

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Matthew Hughes, 'A Very British Affair? British Armed Forces and the Repression of the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-39'. *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Autumn 2009, Vol 87, 234

⁶ *Hansard, Commons*, 23rd April 1936, Volume 311, column 302

Following the arrival of British reinforcements in August 1936, together with a military offensive in September, the strike and related insurrection was called off in October.⁷ The arrival of the Peel Commission in November 1936 and its subsequent recommendation for partition triggered the second phase of the revolt in September 1937,⁸ which was then crushed decisively by the military⁹ and had come to an end by the outbreak of World War II.¹⁰ The constraints which had been imposed on the military by the High Commissioner in 1936¹¹ were lifted during the second phase of the revolt when they had a much freer hand.

As far as Jabal Nablus was concerned, the 1937 – 1939 period marked a decisive change from the earlier policy of minimal state intervention: for the military, police, and intelligence services the area was the subject of close and active engagement. This is the reason why the time period covered by this thesis from the early years following the end of World War I concludes with the start of the Arab revolt in 1936. The events of that year started a process which would lead to the end of the de minimis state policy as it crushed the revolt and then geared up for the much wider scale of hostilities caused by the outbreak of World War II. This chapter consequently traces the closing down of an era of colonial governance in Nablus and the beginning of a new one. That change marked a shift from a thinly spread, hands-off civilian regime to a far more repressive and militarised one. Such a change of emphasis from ‘benign neglect’ to active engagement mirrored a similar metamorphosis in colonial development policy more widely in the inter-war years, where an earlier emphasis on self-development and self-sufficiency was gradually replaced by the view that colonial development could become “a means of alleviating distress in Britain”¹² by using colonial territories as export markets for British manufactured goods. To achieve that objective however it was necessary to maintain at least a basic level of law and order so that normal commercial operations could continue unimpeded. I would argue that there are parallels here with the ‘Limited Raj’¹³ of the British in India, where a similar system of ‘governance on the cheap’ which ruled indirectly through influential members at the apex of the local social and political hierarchies was nevertheless backed up “by a monopoly of armed power”¹⁴ to be drawn upon if and when necessary. In both countries there was a tacit understanding with local elites that they would be left unencumbered to maintain their dominant social and economic position so long as the imperial power could pursue its economic interests.¹⁵

⁷ WO 191/88, TNA, a History of the Disturbances in Palestine, 1936 – 1939

⁸ Parsons, *The Commander* 136

⁹ WO 32/9401, TNA, Report of GOC British Forces in Palestine and Transjordan

¹⁰ Parsons, *The Commander* 136

¹¹ Discussed below on pages 157 -158

¹² Constantine, *The making of British Colonial Development Policy* 300

¹³ See Anand Yang, *The Limited Raj. Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793-1920* (University of California Press, London, 1989)

¹⁴ Yang, *The Limited Raj*, 229

¹⁵ Yang, *The Limited Raj*, 230

Specifically in the case of Palestine those interests were primarily focussed on maintaining an unrestricted flow of oil to the port of Haifa as the possibility of war with Germany became more apparent, and it is within the context of these broader imperial considerations that the means used for the suppression of the Arab Revolt should be considered. The tensions which developed between the civilian and military authorities which are discussed below¹⁶ arose because of the differing views between the two on the appropriate degree of force to be deployed to suppress the revolt. The civilian authorities, mindful of their need to govern indirectly by co-opting members of the leading Palestinian families, wanted to use the minimum amount of force necessary. This is consistent with their generally *de minimis* approach to governing Nablus which is the leitmotif of this thesis, but which as noted above came to an end after the initial phase of the revolt.

Methodologically, this chapter zooms in to examine a small-scale case study in order to uncover specific features of the shift from civilian to military rule in Nablus that would otherwise go unnoticed with a more macro scale approach. Following Tuqan's arrest, the authorities moved quickly to apologise for his treatment and so minimise the political damage which might have accrued as a result of the incident. It was not in their interests to weaken or sever the links between the mandatory government and the head of the local municipal authority, as to do so could have resulted in a need for more direct engagement by the central government headquartered in Jerusalem, and thus jeopardise their policy of *de minimis* rule. To the extent that this chapter deals with a local incident it maintains the approach taken in the three preceding chapters of analysing the actions of the mandatory government from the perspective of an individual city in Palestine and its surrounding hinterland. It also progresses the arguments of the preceding chapters by demonstrating that the civil authorities only intervene to the extent necessary to maintain law and order, and so avoid any developments which might cause it to become a centre of political opposition to the overarching policy objective of the creation of the Jewish National Home. That of course was precisely what did happen in 1936 and I would consequently argue that the neglect of Jabal Nablus during the earlier years of the Mandate was an important contributory factor in causing that part of Palestine to become the epicentre of the revolt. Given that this theme derives from the overall findings of the thesis as a whole, as opposed to the specifics of this particular chapter, it is developed in the concluding chapter which follows.

This chapter starts with a discussion of the relations between the police and the military before examining the arrest itself - as well as the strategic importance of the Nablus area from a military perspective during the first year of the Arab Revolt, together with the events which took place in the months prior to this incident. It then goes on to consider the response of the mayor to his arrest and the subsequent attempts at damage limitation by the Mandatory authorities once the incident became published in the local press and was subsequently raised in Parliament.

¹⁶ See the section on 'Attempts at Damage Limitation' on pages 153 – 159 below

Finally it draws some general conclusions on the relations between the civil and military authorities, as well as between both these arms of the British government and the local Nabulsi population. There were clearly tensions between the civil and military, notwithstanding the fact that the headquarters of the Mandatory authorities in Jerusalem worked to ensure that they did not become too apparent to the Government in London. The tensions themselves derived from differing perspectives on priorities, with the military more interested in shorter term requirements to suppress the revolt, and their civilian counterparts more mindful of the longer term importance of maintaining a working relationship with the leaders of the local population.

Nablus and the Arab Revolt: a British Military Perspective

The first time the British army encountered the Jabal Nablus region in the twentieth century was in 1918 when General Allenby was pushing the Ottoman army north prior to the battle of Megiddo.¹⁷ It was then that they discovered the challenging terrain of the steep hills surrounding the city, together with the strategic importance of the Jerusalem-Nablus road which was the only properly surfaced road capable of taking year-round vehicular traffic which ran north up the central 'spine' of Palestine.¹⁸ Following the war, Nablus was considered by the gendarmerie located there "as one of the most fanatically Moslem towns in the whole country, worse even than Hebron."¹⁹ Given that it was one of the main population centres of the central uplands of Palestine, it was well suited as a point from which to develop resistance, or revolt.²⁰ This perception was shared by the military authorities, whose information for Commanders stated in the general introduction to Palestine that the hilly country of the surrounding area was almost exclusively populated with Muslims, who were "dependent on the large town of Nablus."²¹ Local observers were also of the view that the urban population included relatively large numbers of young professionals (or *effendiyya*) who were unable to find employment with the Mandatory authorities, and manifested their disaffection by inciting violence amongst the slum-dwellers "lying behind the Great Bazaar."²² It is interesting to note here that the perceptions of the military reflected those of their civilian colleagues in government, some of whom had expressed concern about the lack of employment opportunities, and the negative effects that these could have on the maintenance of law and order.²³

¹⁷ Anthony Bruce, *The Last Crusade, the Palestine Campaign in the First World War* (Thistle Publishing, London, 2013), 298

¹⁸ D D Ogilvie, *Fighting on Three Fronts, a Black Watch Battalion in the Great War* (Pen & Sword Military, Barnsley, 2014), 98

¹⁹ Douglas Duff, *Bailing with a Teaspoon* (John Long, London, 1953) 43

²⁰ Duff, *Bailing* 45

²¹ WO 33/1436, TNA, Information for Commanders Reinforcing Troops: Introduction

²² Ibid

²³ See chapter II of this thesis, at page 80 above for the views of the then director of education, Humphrey Bowman, who feared the effect of unemployed *fellahin* migrating to the cities in search of work and then falling prey to radicalising agents provocateurs

Apart from the strategically important road connecting the city to Jerusalem to its south, there was also a rail link connecting it to Tulkarm to its west, and this posed a challenge to the military as the line crossed over a main road which, due to the nature of the terrain, offered no alternative routes in the event that the bridge over the crossing was blown.²⁴ A decision was consequently taken to destroy the bridge before it could be sabotaged, and it was blown up on 13th June 1936.²⁵ As the military authorities observed at the time, it also denied use of the railway to rebels in both Nablus and Tulkarm.²⁶ In September 1936 Lieutenant-General Dill was appointed senior military officer in Palestine, in anticipation of martial law being declared to put down the revolt.²⁷ His (geographical) strategic priorities were revealing, and there were only three of them: Haifa, Jerusalem, and the Jerusalem-Nablus main road.²⁸ The importance accorded to this key transport and communications artery into and out of Nablus was no doubt in part a reflection of the high level of guerrilla activity which took place in the surrounding hills. In his despatch of 30th October 1936, reporting on the general situation in Palestine, Dill observed that the main armed bands active in the revolt were operating in the Jenin-Nablus-Tulkarm triangle, and totalled about 200 men.²⁹ He went on to note that they showed no sign of dispersing – unlike other bands elsewhere in the territory – and decided that “steps would therefore have to be taken to disperse them by force.”³⁰

That same month had brought news that Fawzi Al Qawaqji, the self-styled ‘commander in chief of the Arab Revolt in Southern Syria,’³¹ was near Nablus.³² Military intelligence at the time had ascertained his preference for a village north of Nablus whose location facilitated the receipt of weapons both from Syria and from Trans-Jordan, while at the same time offering an escape route to the latter should one become necessary.³³ The attraction of the hilly country was that it was harder for both planes and soldiers to attack the rebels there than it was down on the more open country of the coastal plain.³⁴ In the introduction to the British military assessment of the Arab Revolt, the different types of terrain encountered across Palestine were classified on a ten point scale ranging from (1) ‘excellent going’ to (8) ‘rocky ground near Nablus’: (9) ‘a rocky hillside north of Nablus’: and (10) ‘a complete tank obstacle the Beidan gorge, East of Nablus.’³⁵ Clearly the Nablus area provided the most challenging terrain from the perspective of the Mandatory power,

²⁴ WO 191/70, TNA, Military Lessons of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine, 1936. 138

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ WO 32/4174, TNA, Command of Palestine Armed Forces. Army Council Instructions to Lieut-General J G Dill
¹⁷ Notwithstanding these instructions, High Commissioner Wauchope never formally authorized martial law

²⁸ WO 32/9401, TNA, Palestine Disturbances 1936. Report of G.O.C. British Forces in Palestine & Transjordan

²⁹ Palestine Disturbances 1936, 37, para 30

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Laila Parsons, *The Commander*, 122

³² WO 32/9401, TNA

³³ WO 191/70, TNA

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ WO 191/70, TNA

and so it is unsurprising that for this reason it was the favoured territory for an operational base as far as the leaders of the revolt were concerned.

The Role and Conduct of the Army and the Police

“Legally, British soldiers fighting internal insurgents conducted themselves as an aid to the civil power.”³⁶ This point was established, *inter alia*, in both the 1929 Manual of Military Law and the King’s Regulations, as re-issued in 1935 with a section on duties in aid of the civil power.³⁷ As stated above, by the autumn of 1936 the Government in London anticipated that it would be necessary to impose martial law in Palestine due to the state of unrest caused by the revolt. The responsibility for that decision however was vested in the High Commissioner, and Wauchope sought to avoid such a draconian step which he feared could have repercussions in other British controlled territories in the region, such as Egypt and Iraq. He was furthermore of the view –subsequently vindicated- that by October 1936 there was a good chance that the Arab Higher Committee would call off the strike which had generated the momentum for the revolt that Spring.³⁸ It was clear from the Lieut. General’s report on the 1936 ‘disturbances’ that he disagreed with the High Commissioner’s decision not to declare martial law, and considered that by failing to do so “an opportunity had been missed of re-establishing British authority.”³⁹

It would be wrong however to conclude that British forces at the time were overly restrained by the civil authorities, as a series of Orders in Council and Emergency Regulations passed in 1936 – 1937 gave them wide-ranging powers to search, detain, and impose collective punishment.⁴⁰ These orders and regulations created a situation where British actions hitherto considered unlawful became lawful.⁴¹ The 1936 Emergency Regulations for example vested powers in District Commissioners and subsequently military commanders to appropriate and demolish property “in accordance with the exigencies of the local situation.”⁴² In August 1936 the Palestine Post reported that Edward Keith-Roach, Northern District Commissioner, had imposed a collective fine of £P 5,000 on the inhabitants of the town of Nablus, using his powers under the Collective Fines Ordinances.⁴³ His reasons for doing so were revealing of British attitudes towards the Nabulsi, and can be found in the text of the

³⁶ Matthew Hughes, ‘A Very British Affair’ 237

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ WO 32/9401, TNA

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Hughes, ‘A Very British Affair’ 240. See also CO 742/13, TNA, *Palestine Official Gazette* for 1936. This lists, *inter alia*, Ordinance 57 of 1936 “to provide for the imposition of fines and other penalties on the inhabitants of certain places in certain circumstances:” The Firearms (Amendment) Ordinance of 16 July 1936 prohibited dealing in arms, ammunition, and explosive substances: and the Criminal Law (Seditious Offences) (Amendment) Ordinance concerning the issuing of warnings for crowd dispersal

⁴¹ Part II of Hughes’ article in the Winter 2009 edition of the *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Vol. 87, 372

⁴² FO 371/61938, TNA, The Arab Disturbances of 1936 and 1937 – 1939, punitive demolition of buildings

⁴³ ‘£P5,000 Collective Fine Imposed Upon Nablus’ *Palestine Post*, 14th August 1936

Order quoted in the Palestine Post article.⁴⁴It starts with a list of complaints concerning attacks in and around the town on British troops in the area for which he considered the Nabulsi to be responsible. The culminating reason however for imposing the fine was given as arising from the failure of the townspeople “to render any assistance to discover the offenders”⁴⁵ and subsequently conniving at their escape.⁴⁶ Clearly by the first year of the Arab Revolt there was an almost complete absence of trust and co-operation between the town and even the civil authorities.

It was against this background of growing and mutual hostility that “considerable reinforcements were drafted from Egypt until the beginning of August (1936) when eleven battalions were in the country.”⁴⁷According to the army’s own version of events, sufficient forces had arrived by September 1936 to persuade the Arab Higher Committee of the futility of continuing with armed conflict.⁴⁸Notwithstanding the increase in the number of soldiers in the territory, they did not operate as a self-contained unit, but operated in close liaison with the police force, which in Palestine shared many of the characteristics of a gendarmerie.⁴⁹ Many of the UK nationals were ex-servicemen who carried weapons,⁵⁰ were drilled by army sergeants, “and fought alongside the army under military command.”⁵¹ As a general rule, the British members of the police force operated mainly in the towns, in part due to their limited numbers, combined with a shortage of transport (and the concomitant supply difficulties) with which to convey them “to the chain of rural stations in the hills around Nablus.”⁵²That said, in general the job of interrogating suspects and prisoners was left to the police,⁵³ although their success in extracting useful information for the military was especially constrained in Jabal Nablus due to the level of opposition to the Government, and “the spell and virtual control of Fawzi.”⁵⁴

Despite this general separation of operational areas, with the army concentrating its offensives against the armed bands in the hills, the military records of the revolt maintained that the police “have always taken their lead from the army.”⁵⁵ The ‘lead’ in this context was not that to be found in a formal chain of command, but rather one where one group of men looked to another⁵⁶ due to a shared operational culture and experiences, reinforced by the fact that both groups were working together in an overseas territory. During the early days of the Arab revolt for example, the police in

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ WO 191/88, TNA, History of Disturbances in Palestine 1936 – 1939. See also WO 32/4174

⁴⁸ WO 191/88, TNA

⁴⁹ WO 191/90, TNA, The Development of the Palestine Police under Military Control

⁵⁰ These included Lewis guns, rifles, and revolvers. See WO 191/90, TNA

⁵¹ Hughes, ‘A Very British Affair’ 251

⁵² WO 191/70, TNA

⁵³ WO 191/75, TNA, Preliminary Notes on Lessons of the Palestine Rebellion, 1936 Section D: information from prisoners etc

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ WO 191/90, TNA

⁵⁶ Ibid

Nablus were assisted by the Seaforth Highlanders when facing a crowd throwing volleys of stones. They opened fire, killing two Arabs and wounding four others before order was restored.⁵⁷

Camaraderie apart, however, there were also more hard-headed reasons why the military took a close interest in the operations of the police, as they were aware of the growing number of attempts to steal guns from police stations during the second phase of the revolt in 1938.⁵⁸ There were suspicions that these thefts were tacitly facilitated by Arab policemen on guard duty in police stations, but the challenge to the army was that the theft of rifles and ammunition enabled an increase in the incidence of sniping by the rebels.⁵⁹ Because of this problem, responsibility for the police – and their weapons- was transferred to the army in September 1938.⁶⁰ While the case was being made for this transfer, ten examples were cited of thefts of police rifles and ammunition, of which the first in the list was an incident which took place on the night of 16th August 1938 at the Nablus police station.⁶¹ Following a request for entry by an Arab, a number of armed men ran inside, cut the telephone wires, and then made off with four rifles and a total of 924 rounds of ammunition.⁶²

Interestingly, the records of the civil administration in Palestine convey a more positive picture of the police, citing the general reliability of its Arab members.⁶³ The formal position set out by the Mandatory Government in Jerusalem was that the functions of the police and military followed a conventional pattern which by then was well established: the police were primarily responsible for the maintenance of law and order, and would only call on the services of the military when they were no longer able to contain a particular situation.⁶⁴ Military establishments were located across the territory, and there was an army barracks in Nablus.⁶⁵ As for the police themselves, there were twenty on foot, reinforced by ten mounted.⁶⁶ Some of those on foot were Palestinian Arabs with a reputation for being both reliable and efficient in conveying information on local conditions to their superiors.⁶⁷ During riots against Government policy which took place in Nablus in August 1931, when the police opened fire to disperse the crowd, both a British Corporal and a Palestinian Constable “were specially promoted to the rank of Sergeant and Corporal

⁵⁷ ‘Shooting in Palestine.’ Article of 25 May 1936, *Times newspaper digital archive*

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ WO 191/90, TNA

⁶¹ WO 191/90, TNA, Appendix D

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ See e.g. the CO 814 TNA series covering the annual Palestine Government reports

⁶⁴ This relationship is set out in AIR 5/1250, TNA, The Palestine and Transjordan Defence Scheme

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ These figures are given in tables at the end of Herbert Dowbiggen’s letter of 17 March 1930 to the High Commissioner in T 161/1029/2, TNA, Palestine & Transjordan: Exchequer Responsibility for Police and Defence. That letter summarises the recommendations made in his report on the organisation of the police in Palestine

⁶⁷ Edward Horne, *A Job Well Done* 144

respectively for their courageous conduct”.⁶⁸In the view of the Mandatory authorities, the British and Palestinian police worked well together, including on night duty in Nablus.⁶⁹

This difference in perspective is at least partially accounted for by the rising tensions between the Arabs and the British as the Mandate progressed, culminating in the start of the Arab revolt in 1936, at a time when Jewish immigration from Europe into Palestine was reaching its peak following Hitler’s consolidation of power in Germany.⁷⁰ Those tensions would have had a corrosive effect on the degree of trust between Arabs and the British, and it was only to be expected that the loyalty of Arab police officers would have been stretched to the limit once the army embarked on counter-insurgency operations in the villages and house-demolitions in the towns: within communities where the local police almost certainly had friends and family members. The obvious solution to this problem from a military perspective was to develop oversight, and eventually control, over the police force to minimise the risks of its armoury falling into rebel hands. To make the case to the civil authorities that such control was necessary, the military had to highlight the weaknesses and risks in the current system. It is possible to conclude the Government in Jerusalem was itself receptive to the idea of the need for reform as the revolt progressed, given its invitation to Sir Charles Tegart, with his extensive experience of policing in India, to advise on the structure and operations of the Palestine police during 1938 and 1939.⁷¹

Whereas the military authorities may have shared concerns with senior police officers about the reliability of Arab police constables during the revolt, amongst the more junior ranks of the British police attitudes were informed by a supposition that Europeans were superior to the colonised population. For Douglas Duff, who had served in both the army and the Palestine Police, “our attitude was that of Britons of the Diamond Jubilee era, to us all non-Europeans were ‘wogs’”.⁷²Such prejudices varied not only according to race, but also to religious affiliation. According to historians of the Black Watch Battalion, British forces discriminated in Mandate Palestine in similar ways to their later counter-insurgency operations in Malaya: “targeting the Muslim community while working with or treating leniently those perceived to be friendly – including Christians and Druze”.⁷³ Given that the Black Watch were posted to Nablus in the Spring of 1938,⁷⁴ it is unlikely that relations between the British and the local population became any more cordial: according to

⁶⁸ CO 814/5, TNA, Palestine Government Reports 1931, Police & Prisons

⁶⁹ CO 814/5, TNA

⁷⁰ For a discussion of this issue, see Nicholas Bethell, *The Palestine Triangle, the Struggle Between the British, the Jews and the Arabs 1935 – 48* (Andre Deutsch, London, 1979), 25

⁷¹ WO 191/90, TNA

⁷² Duff, *Bailing with a Teaspoon* 46

⁷³ Quoted in Hughes, ‘A Very British Affair’ part II 372

⁷⁴ Eric Linklater, *The Black Watch, The History of the Royal Highland Regiment* (Barrie & Jenkins, London, 1977), 175

Mathew Hughes, "Arab propaganda played on the fact that Scottish regiments were especially unpleasant."⁷⁵

According to British army reports of the history of the revolt, the steadily escalating campaign of violence during 1936 included sniping attacks from armed groups in the hills "both by day and by night."⁷⁶ During the week of 11th – 19th August reinforcements were brought up to Nablus from Cairo "for action against snipers in the rocky hillsides overlooking the camp."⁷⁷ In an attempt to combat the incidence of sniping, searchlights were also installed.⁷⁸ Nablus was problematic for the British as their military camp in the city was overlooked by steep hills with boulders providing cover for the snipers and making it hard to locate them.⁷⁹ The following week, British intelligence established that Fawzi Al-Quwaqji had entered Palestine across the river Jordan "and made for the Nablus hills."⁸⁰ His arrival might explain why the last week of August saw the army demolishing houses in the city, as well as walls and masonry on its outskirts both "as a punitive measure and to facilitate the operation of troops."⁸¹ On the 5th of September air reconnaissance sorties "detected forty one rebels constructing sangars on the hills outside Nablus"⁸² which were subsequently fired on, creating fifteen casualties.⁸³ Finally, on the 22nd September two howitzer batteries arrived from Egypt, one of which was placed in Nablus, where it was used to fire into the surrounding hills "very soon after arrival."⁸⁴ This build up of military force by the British over late summer – early autumn in Jabal Nablus provides a useful example at the local level of how developing military superiority by the Mandatory power succeeded in persuading the rebels to bring their armed uprising to an end by October 1936.⁸⁵

The Arrest of Suleiman Bey Tuganon 24th September 1936

The operational structures and issues discussed above, together with the events which took place in the Jabal Nablus area over the summer of 1936, provide the broader context for the specific incident concerning the arrest of the mayor: an occurrence which was both reported in the 'Telegraph' newspaper and also gave rise to exchanges of correspondence between representatives of the Government and Members of Parliament.⁸⁶ According to the report of the Assistant District

⁷⁵ Hughes, 'A Very British Affair' 367

⁷⁶ WO 191/88, TNA. However, the Weekly Resume of Disturbances in Palestine in AIR 23/633, TNA stated that sniping from the hills surrounding Nablus typically occurred around 21.00 in the evening

⁷⁷ WO 191/70, TNA

⁷⁸ AIR 23/633/ 4, TNA

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ WO 191/70, TNA

⁸¹ AIR 23/633, TNA

⁸² WO 191/70, TNA

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ See pages 145-146 above for a brief overview of the Arab revolt in Palestine

⁸⁶ CO 733/316/11, TNA covers the circumstances surrounding the arrest in some detail, as well as discussing the issue of house demolitions by the Mandatory authorities during the Arab Revolt

Commissioner (ADC) for the Samaria division of the Mandatory Government,⁸⁷ participants in the Arab Revolt had been shooting from the hills surrounding Nablus into the town centre during the evening of the 24th September 1936, with their targets including the headquarters of the military barracks, where a new Brigadier (Evetts) had taken over command earlier that same day.⁸⁸ Around 11.00.p.m. in the evening he asked Raymond Cafferata, the then Superintendent of Police in Nablus,⁸⁹ if he would request the Mayor to come over to Brigade HQ to discuss the sniping.⁹⁰ Unsurprisingly, given the lateness of the hour, he requested a police escort, which was provided, and subsequently arrived around 23.30.⁹¹ When Mayor Tuqan arrived, Evetts, speaking in Arabic, put it to him that he was responsible for law and order in the town, and should call a stop to the shooting. He then invited him to stay the night and had Tuqan escorted up on to the roof of the barracks, reasoning that the snipers would not shoot at a fellow Arab.⁹² Following telephone calls between Nablus and Jerusalem, orders were issued for his release, which were carried out before dawn.⁹³

The Response of the Mayor

The following day the Mayor submitted a complaint to the ADC. The Municipal Council subsequently met and threatened to resign en bloc, and demonstrations and protests were being prepared both in Nablus and the surrounding area.⁹⁴ The speed of these developments indicates that those holding municipal office were both well organised and capable of drawing on popular support against the Mandatory authorities at short notice. They also had a good understanding of the regional organisational structure of the Government, and what ought to have been the relationship between the police, military, and District Administration officials. It is interesting in this respect to note that when the Mayor met with the ADC on the 26th September, his chief complaint against Cafferata was not that he had followed the wishes of the Brigadier, but that he had done so without the authority of the District Administration.⁹⁵ The nature of that complaint suggests that Tuqan was aware of the instructions which had been issued in 1932 regarding relations between the District Administration and the police,⁹⁶ which required, inter alia, that the police “keep the Assistant District Commissioner or the District Officer informed of anything which

⁸⁷ Ibid. The report was dated 29 September 1936

⁸⁸ Evetts’ arrival in Nablus coincided with his appointment as commander of the 16th Infantry Brigade. On leaving Jerusalem to take up his post, he described Nablus as “a very nasty place” and declined to bring his wife with him. See Imperial War Museum archives, collections, Evetts, John Fullerton (oral history) reel 3 of 3

⁸⁹ Raymond Oswald Cafferata was transferred to the Nablus District on 05 September 1936, following his promotion to Deputy Superintendent of Police on 19 February 1936. He took charge of the District on 12 September 1936. See the Civil Service List 1937 (Government Printing Press, Jerusalem), 195

⁹⁰ CO 733/316/11, TNA

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Imperial War Museum archives, collections, Evetts, John Fullerton (oral history) reel 3 of 3.

⁹³ CO 733/316/11, TNA

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ CO 1073/261, TNA, Instructions regarding the relations between the District Administration and the Police

affects the good order of his District.”⁹⁷ That he understood the structure of the Mandatory administration, the way it was meant to work, and its relation with the military is a reflection of Tuqan’s experience in dealing with the British. In the early 1920s, prior to his election as Mayor of Nablus, he was a member of the Advisory Council, and in 1934 he co-founded the National Defence party.⁹⁸

Attempts at Damage Limitation

What had been an informal discussion between the ADC and the Mayor on 26th September was repeated with a more formal expression of regret for the way he had been treated by the Brigadier.⁹⁹ Suleiman Bey Tuqan subsequently withdrew his complaint against Cafferata, and the Municipality their threat to resign, but by that time the affair had become known to the press.¹⁰⁰ The fact that an incident that might otherwise have been known to only a small number of British and Palestinian officials subsequently reached a wider audience of newspaper readers might explain why some of the key players were anxious to create a favourable impression of themselves for posterity. Attached to the ADC’s report of what happened was one from Raymond Cafferata on his role.¹⁰¹ Although factually correct in terms of relating the sequence of events, he avoids stating that his instructions to his deputy to collect the Mayor were an order rather than a request. This is at variance with what was stated in the ADC’s report.¹⁰² Furthermore, when reporting on his arrival at the Mayor’s house Cafferata states explicitly that “there was no question of arrest”¹⁰³ and goes on to assert that his duty “was solely one of protection”¹⁰⁴ – from the dangers of travelling in the streets of Nablus so late at night. That the ADC was happy to enclose this report with his own, and not to comment on Cafferata’s failure to consult with the District Administration prior to carrying out the Brigadier’s request,¹⁰⁵ rather implies that the civil administration and the police were closing ranks in an attempt to ensure that any blame for the incident fell on the military’s newly arrived Brigadier. In one sense this was correct, as the military were clearly at fault in involving the police in circumstances where they were under attack, and where the response should have been for them alone. The situation was not analogous to one of civil disorder, where the police request military reinforcements to contain a situation which had deteriorated beyond their control.

⁹⁷ Ibid, para 4

⁹⁸ For a complete biography, see his entry in the ‘Personalities’ section of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA): <http://passia.org/personalities/816>

⁹⁹ CO 733/316/11, TNA

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Ibid. “At about 11.10 p.m. while Cafferata was at a meeting with the Brigadier he was asked to request the Mayor to come to Brigade HQ for an interview. Cafferata then instructed Nabih Nasir, the Assistant Superintendent of Police, by telephone, to get in touch with the Mayor. **Nabih appears to have suggested that the time was perhaps inappropriate but Cafferata told him it was ‘an order’.** (Emphasis added)

¹⁰³ CO 733/316/11, TNA

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Other than to observe at the end of his report that “he will be more careful in future.” See CO 733/316/11, TNA

The High Commissioner was himself clearly of the view that the military had been wrong in their actions, as when writing to Lieutenant-General Dill¹⁰⁶ he raised the issue “of the use of hostages for protective purposes.....compulsorily placed in positions of danger in order to protect the troops from sniping or other forms of attack.”¹⁰⁷ Dill’s response was polite, reassuring, and misleading. He asserted that the Mayor had been “given accommodation for the night on the flat roof of the house, and was not in any danger.”¹⁰⁸ There is no mention of the fact that the building he had been taken to was being sniped at, or that his ‘accommodation’ was adjacent to a machine gun post.¹⁰⁹ It is furthermore worth noting in this respect that when Brigadier Evetts was interviewed about his time in Palestine following his retirement, he stated clearly that he had “*held the Mayor of Nablus hostage to the Arabs’ good behaviour.*”¹¹⁰

Notwithstanding the position that the High Commissioner had taken with the military in Palestine, it became clear in subsequent correspondence with London that he wanted to play down the incident, and emphasize that it was now closed – noting that he had himself seen the Mayor’s brother, and would shortly be seeing the Mayor himself.¹¹¹ References were made to “the so-called arrest of the Mayor of Nablus”¹¹² and the newly arrived Brigadier Evetts described simply as “ill-advised to have detained the mayor under virtual arrest.”¹¹³ The incident, he was pleased to report, had been closed “with due explanation and expression of regrets to the Mayor from the Assistant District Commissioner.”¹¹⁴ Wauchope was also anxious to play down any criticism of Raymond Cafferata, the Superintendent of Police in Nablus, claiming that he had been placed in “a most difficult position”¹¹⁵ in being asked to carry out “what was practically an order from the Brigadier”.¹¹⁶ There is no discussion as to whether or not the Superintendent should have either challenged or turned down the Brigadier’s request in view of the former’s almost certainly better understanding of the political risks involved. It is also clear that the High Commissioner felt quite uncomfortable about the whole affair, given his observation that it was “most regrettable and would be most difficult to defend had the Mayor wished to make an

¹⁰⁶ Lieutenant –General J G Dill was General Officer Commanding Palestine from September 1936- September 1937. See Naomi Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand: British Rule in Palestine, 1917 – 1948* (John Murray, London, 1999), 272

¹⁰⁷ Letter of 08 October 1936 from High Commissioner Wauchope to Lieutenant-General Dill in CO 733/316/11 TNA

¹⁰⁸ Letter of 12 October 1936 from Dill to Wauchope in CO 733/316/11, TNA

¹⁰⁹ Report of 29 September 1936 concerning the arrest from Assistant District-Commissioner’s Office, Samaria Division in CO 733/316/11, TNA

¹¹⁰ Imperial War Museum archives, collections, Evetts, John Fullerton (oral history) reel 3 of 3

¹¹¹ Letter of 16th October 1936 from Wauchope to Parkinson in the Colonial Office in CO 733/316/11, TNA

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ Report of 29 September 1936 concerning the arrest from Assistant District-Commissioner’s Office, Samaria Division in CO 733/316/11, TNA

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Ibid

outcry in the press.”¹¹⁷ We might presume in these circumstances that the civil authorities would have pressed harder for admonition of the military to impress upon them the importance of avoiding any future repetition. That they did not might indicate that they felt dependent on them at a time of widespread unrest as the Arab Revolt developed. That the High Commissioner himself was seeing both the Mayor and his brother reflects a degree of vulnerability experienced by the Mandatory authority arising from its reliance on local notables to enable its policy of de minimis administration.

A desire by the Mandatory Government in Jerusalem not to be seen to be at odds with their military colleagues would have been a consideration when providing material to Ministers to respond to questions raised in Parliament. Two M.P.s, the Irish Peer Lord Winterton, and Mr Clifton-Brown, had indicated their intention to do so following a report of the arrest in the Daily Telegraph.¹¹⁸ These concerns would have been reinforced by the fact that some of the correspondence in London on the arrest was dealt with as if it was a related issue to that of house demolitions in Palestine, another matter of public attention during 1936. Wauchope’s letter of 16 October 1936 to the Colonial Office¹¹⁹ refers to letters “about the demolition of houses in Palestine and the so-called arrest of the Mayor of Nablus.”¹²⁰ The fact that a composite response issued from Jerusalem is indicative that the draft replies for the Minister to sign off in London would have covered both subjects together. That part of the response of the High Commissioner’s letter dealing with house demolitions is revealing, and worth quoting in full:

“It is the fact that no steps are taken by Government to provide accommodation for the inmates of houses which are demolished as a punitive measure. Surely it is not reasonable to expect Government thus to take the sting out of what is intended (and has, I believe, proved to be) a deterrent punishment of collective character ? But due notice is always given to the occupants of the houses selected for demolition, so that they can remove their household effects and foodstuffs, and my information confirms what Foot said that the occupants invariably find shelter with friends or relatives in the village.”¹²¹

Clearly Wauchope feels somewhat on the defensive about having to confirm that the Mandatory authorities did not offer any alternative accommodation to people whose houses the military had demolished. Having made the statement three lines of justification then follow, that they should not be mitigating what was designed to be a deterrent punishment, that prior notice was given to enable the people effected to gather their personal effects and food stores and that in practice they anyway

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ This is made clear in the first paragraph of the letter of 08 October 1936 from High Commissioner Wauchope to Lieutenant-General Dill in CO 733/316/11, TNA

¹¹⁹ CO 733/316/11, TNA

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Ibid

relocate to friends or relatives and do not finish up either destitute or homeless. The argument is then further reinforced in the succeeding paragraph, which contains both the observation that no complaints had been received about suffering caused by the lack of provision of alternative accommodation, and that across the mandated territory as a whole the total number of demolitions carried out had been around 100 “which in the circumstances cannot be regarded as excessive.”¹²² It may be concluded from all of these statements that the High Commissioner must have felt somewhat uncomfortable about the issue of house demolitions, which had been the subject of exchanges between Lord Winterton and the Colonial Secretary in September 1936, when the former had expressed the view that alternative accommodation should be found for those whose homes were demolished, as a matter of prestige for the Government.¹²³ Nevertheless, Wauchope was not critical of the military arm of Government for using what he believed to be an effective (if brutal) means of opposing the Arab revolt.

This then is the context in which the somewhat muted response to Brigadier Evetts’ indelicate treatment of the Mayor should be interpreted. Clearly at a time when armed rebellion was breaking out in Palestine, there were limits to how far the authorities in Jerusalem were prepared to criticise the high-handed actions of their military colleagues when they were dependent on them for the suppression of civil unrest. Once the necessary apologies had been made to Suleiman Bey Tuqan by first the Assistant District Commissioner and then the High Commissioner, and it had subsequently become clear that the aggrieved party did not wish to make any political capital out of the incident, the priority of the Mandatory Government became to treat the matter as closed as soon as it became practical to do so, while at the same time minimising its impact vis-a-vis third parties in both Palestine and the United Kingdom once the story had been published in the press.¹²⁴ The sooner it became possible to ‘move on’, the sooner the administration could return to the status quo ante, maintain its *de minimis* approach to Jabal Nablus, and operate at arms length through such local administrative structures as the municipal government – and its Mayor.

It is likely however that another reason for the High Commissioner wanting to draw a line under this particular incident was a desire not to allow it to exacerbate the tensions that were clearly developing between the civil and military authorities at that time. When Lieut-General Dill made his report on the 1936 ‘Palestine Disturbances’¹²⁵ he made the observation, in relation to points raised by Wauchope concerning the role of the garrison in Palestine, that there could be “no doubt that the

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Letter of 26 September 1936 from Lord Winterton to William Ormsby-Gore M.P. That letter also provides an example of house demolition and the arrest of the Mayor of Nablus being treated together in the same text. See CO 733/316/11, TNA

¹²⁴ The correspondence and reports in CO 733/316/11, TNA indicate that it was reported in both *The Times* and *the Telegraph*

¹²⁵ WO 32/9401, TNA, Palestine Disturbances 1936, Report of GOC British Forces in Palestine & Transjordan

task of meeting a fresh outbreak or organised rebellion is primary.”¹²⁶ This statement was then followed by the assertion that “the task of acting in aid of the Civil Power to quell disconnected riots is secondary.”¹²⁷ Although technically correct, this implies that how and where the military intervene during periods of civil disorder or insurrection is not to be constrained by the oversight of the civil authority to which it is ultimately responsible. Dill's difference of opinion with the High Commissioner concerning the use of martial law subsequently becomes clear in his report when he sets out the case for early and decisive intervention against the revolt, on the grounds that failure to do so will lead to the need for much larger military resources subsequently if the revolt is allowed to gather momentum.¹²⁸ This he opines was “the main lesson of the recent rebellion”¹²⁹ when in particular “a desire not to leave bitterness prevented the early declaration of Martial Law.”¹³⁰ Not content to confine himself to this statement, Dill went on to observe that in the event of a recurrence of the 1936 revolt, should the civil authorities persist in constraining the freedom of action of the military, “it would be the duty of any commander to resist.”¹³¹ He finally asserts on this issue that whereas he accepts a duty to seek advice from the High Commissioner on political issues, “the responsibility for all action taken must be unreservedly his.”¹³² This then was the crux of the matter: Dill saw himself as the decision-maker seeking advice from the High Commissioner rather than the commander of military forces at the disposal of the civil power, to be deployed in a manner consistent with that power's interpretation of the political constraints limiting the nature and scale of military intervention.

His interpretation of the events of 1936 seems to have been shared by others in the military. A report signed off in October 1936 by a Group Captain¹³³ argues in similar fashion that the Arab Higher Committee had successfully internationalised what had started as a local issue in Palestine,¹³⁴ that Haj Amin Husseini had become a public hero influential enough to cause trouble in future,¹³⁵ and that as a result of what happened there was now greater interest in Palestinian affairs in the Muslim world, and consequently a risk of greater criticism of British policy.¹³⁶

Taken together, these two reports on the first year of the revolt appear to raise some contradictions. On the one hand a case could be made for more draconian military action which would have decisively crushed the revolt and rendered further uprisings

¹²⁶ Ibid

¹²⁷ Ibid

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ Ibid

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ WO 191/73, TNA, Note on Proposals and Schemes for Restoration of Order under Military Control in Palestine, 1936

¹³⁴ Ibid

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ Ibid

unlikely, if the perspective taken was only focussed on Palestine, and did not take into account the wider considerations of reactions in the Middle East and beyond – especially India as far as the British were concerned. Conversely, for those who were aware of those wider possible ramifications, the logical position would have been to take a more circumspect approach, combining measured military action with diplomacy – the approach taken by Wauchope. The WO 191/73 report makes it clear that the military were indeed aware of the regional problems which could arise if the uprising in Palestine were mishandled. It is consequently a little puzzling that Lieut.-General Dill, in his capacity as General Officer Commanding in the territory, was not more sympathetic to the rationale for, and the approach taken, by the High Commissioner. He did after all have very wide-ranging powers at his disposal, albeit short of martial law, with the 1936 Emergency Regulations permitting the practice of house demolitions. These powers were not used sparingly, given that over the course of the revolt it was estimated that some 2,000 Palestinian Arab buildings were demolished.¹³⁷ From a purely military perspective the key issue here was the extent to which the use of a large amount of force early on in a conflict would create a situation whereby less force would be required subsequently – or vice versa. Questions such as these are relevant to issues concerning the appropriate level of resources to deploy in the course of civil government. If too little is disbursed during the early years of a new administration, does this risk precipitating levels of discontent which require significantly increased levels of resources in subsequent years? It is a leitmotif of this thesis that it does, which is why the neglect of Jabal Nablus during the 1920s became a contributory factor to its becoming an epicentre of the Arab Revolt in the 1930s.

Dill's tour of duty in Palestine came to an end one year later in September 1937,¹³⁸ and it is possible that the brevity of his posting was in part due to his differences of opinion with the High Commissioner, who had preferred a negotiated end to the 1936 rebellion, and had declined to authorise planned military action to apprehend Fawzi Al-Quwaqji in October of that year.¹³⁹ It is tempting to consider which of the two men had the more effective strategy for maintaining law and order in the mandated territory. History may have subsequently vindicated Dill, who had characterised the end of 1936 as an 'armed truce'¹⁴⁰ rather than a proper suppression of the revolt, which was to flare up again in 1937 with the murder of Mr Andrews, District Commissioner for the Galilee that September.¹⁴¹ The Mandatory Government subsequently acted decisively, outlawing the Arab Higher Committee, and arresting and deporting political activists. No doubt the assassination of a senior British Government official generated a political imperative to be seen to react robustly, and it is possible that the absence of high-profile British casualties in 1936

¹³⁷ FO 371/61938, TNA, Arab Disturbances of 1936 and 1937 – 1939 3, para 5(a) punitive demolition of buildings

¹³⁸ WO 32/9401, TNA

¹³⁹ Ibid

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

¹⁴¹ Ibid

was one of the reasons why Wauchope considered it justified to be relatively constrained in the use of force.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to evaluate the case study of the arrest of the mayor of Nablus in 1936 and ask what that tells us about the Mandatory Government's changing approach to administration at the local level in Jabal Nablus. A detailed examination of the arrest and the reaction that followed it has revealed tensions between the military and civil authorities. I would argue that these were in part due to the fact that the mayor was the senior local notable in charge of the municipal government, and that the civil authorities did not want anything to weaken his co-operation with the local representatives of the administration headquartered in Jerusalem. Had that happened then more resources would have been required, with a greater level of direct intervention. In the event, that was what did happen, not with the civil administration, but with the military during the second phase of the Arab Revolt starting in 1937, when a significantly increased level of resources were committed to ensure the definitive crushing of the revolt. The period of these first two years of the uprising consequently saw a transition from a 'hands-off' de minimis style of civilian government to fully engaged repression by the military. This chapter has brought out the tensions this shift produced both within the Mandate Government and between the British and the local Nabulsi population. These developments also explain the logic for this thesis, concentrating as it does on the early years of the Mandate, to conclude with the Arab Revolt and not continue further in its chronology to the changed conditions in Palestine during the late 1930s when the Government began to gear up for the outbreak of World War II.

As with the 1927 earthquake, the British response to the arrest of the Mayor displayed an essentially minimalist approach where the over-arching priority was to re-establish the status quo ante as far and as fast as possible. But just as attitudes towards the use of humanitarian relief at times of natural disaster were changing during the mandate years, so did the perception of the use of intelligence in the military and law enforcement fields. What had started as a marginal activity at the turn of the twentieth century, became of central importance to military operations.¹⁴² That being the case, it might be tempting to presume that the reason for Brigadier Evetts' insistence in demanding the presence of the Mayor of Nablus when he was under attack from snipers was that he wanted to apprise himself of local knowledge which would have been useful in hunting them down, the more so as he was able to converse with him in Arabic.¹⁴³ The way that Suleiman Bey was treated, both

¹⁴² For a general discussion of this theme see Polly Mohs, *Military Intelligence and the Arab Revolt, the first modern intelligence war* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2008). "Intelligence became the chief consideration in preparations for small wars. The possession of basic information on the enemy and terrain was emerging as an essential rather than optional priority." Mohs, *Military Intelligence* 6

¹⁴³ CO 733/316/11, TNA. The observation is made in Cafferata's report of the incident: "I escorted the Mayor to Brigade HQ and introduced him to the Brigadier *who then conversed with the Mayor in Arabic.*"

considering the abuse to which he was subjected¹⁴⁴ and his involuntary relocation to the roof of the military headquarters,¹⁴⁵ nevertheless indicates that this is not a plausible explanation. More likely it reflected the general deterioration in relations between those responsible for putting down the revolt and the local population.¹⁴⁶

Even as the Arab revolt flared up in 1936, relations between the Mandatory authorities and Nabulsi notables in positions of municipal responsibility had clearly not broken down, so it may be concluded that the latter considered there were some benefits from the British presence which made a degree of co-operation worthwhile. Despite their implacable opposition to the Jewish National Home policies of the Mandatory Government, the Nabulsi elites never wholly broke off relations with the British. The photograph at the end of this chapter is telling in this respect, as it shows Arab recruits to the British army in 1941: in the centre of Nablus, the city which above all symbolised resistance to foreign rule in Palestine.

The complexities of the Arab-British relationship were reflected in the somewhat convoluted dynamics between the Government in Jerusalem, its police force, and the military. Raymond Cafferata would have been within his rights to refuse the request of Brigadier Evetts to summon the Mayor so late at night, in the absence of permission from the local District Commissioner. It was only when it became clear that he had overstepped the mark that Cafferata omitted material facts in his report of the incident so as to show himself in a favourable light.

Unsurprisingly the Government in Jerusalem was anxious to avoid this incident causing a (public) rift between itself and the military forces in Palestine upon whom it depended for the suppression of the revolt. It was furthermore no doubt content that as far as Parliament and any other interested parties in the UK were concerned, the specific incident of the arrest of the Mayor tended to be treated in correspondence as a sub-set of the more general phenomena of house-demolitions, and the responsibility or otherwise of the Mandatory authorities for facilitating alternative accommodation for those who lost their homes as a result.

Nevertheless, the extensive correspondence and reports in the 'Air' and 'War Office' files indicate that there were real differences of perspective between the civil and military powers in Palestine. Some of those responsible for civil administration in the Middle East during the inter-war years saw service in different territories, including Sir Gilbert Clayton, who served as Chief Secretary in Palestine from 1923 – 1925, following earlier postings in Cairo, and before going on to represent the UK

¹⁴⁴ CO 733/316/11, TNA

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁴⁶ Sherman, *Mandate Days*, 102: "But as in Ireland previously, initial British bafflement and vacillation gave way ultimately to a clumsy brutality that further alienated the local population." Others go further, arguing that British brutality was as much cause as result of the 1936 revolt. See Matthew Kelly, *The Crime of Nationalism, Britain, Palestine, and Nation-Building on the Fringe of Empire* (University of California Press, 2017), 5

Government in Iraq.¹⁴⁷ Experiences such as those, combined with the constant flow of reporting telegrams between the region's capitals, would have increased awareness of how political developments or military activities in any one territory would have had an impact elsewhere in a region where all the inhabitants shared the same basic language, at a time when both newspapers and radio were increasing the awareness of events amongst the educated and politically active classes. It is consequently unsurprising that whereas on the one hand army officers' primary concern was simply to neutralise any threats to British authority, on the other those responsible for civilian government were only too aware that military action which could be portrayed as acts of untrammelled brutality could have repercussions both within the territory and outside. British colonial interests at the time stretched well beyond Palestine, and anything which might contribute to instability elsewhere in the Middle East, or, in extremis, amongst the Moslem population in India, was to be avoided.

These tensions between the civil and military authorities in 1936 are indicative of a wider trend among European colonial regimes facing uprisings from the local population in the Middle East and North Africa. In Morocco, similar differences of perspective arose between Marechal Lyautey in the 1920s and his successors who fought the Rif war. Lyautey certainly believed in the 'pacification' of the local population, but only to the extent that it subsequently became possible to work with them, develop infrastructure projects, and expand the economy – ideally to mutual benefit.¹⁴⁸ His successors however prioritised the military defeat of the rebels during the Rif insurgency, and were more concerned with victory than the longer term relations between the imperial power and the local population.¹⁴⁹ There are consequently parallels between the Rif war in Morocco and the second phase of the Arab Revolt in Palestine from 1938 – 1939, when the British significantly increased the military forces to be used in Palestine and definitively crushed the revolt: albeit under a different commander than Lieut.-General Dill.¹⁵⁰

This chapter has examined in some detail a specific incident in Nablus involving the civil and military powers and the Mayor. Analysis of that event has led to consideration of wider issues concerning relations between the military and the High Commissioner, British policy towards the Palestinian Arabs, and broader considerations involving British interests in the Middle East and the likely impact that events in Palestine could have on them. The Jabal Nablus area itself had a certain strategic importance to the Government in Jerusalem, given its location in the hilly

¹⁴⁷ For a biography of Clayton see Timothy Paris, *In Defence of Britain's Middle Eastern Empire, A Life of Sir Gilbert Clayton* (Sussex Academic Press, Eastbourne, 2016)

¹⁴⁸ For a general discussion of Lyautey's approach, see William Hoisington *Lyautey*, Preface vii + 18-19

¹⁴⁹ For a discussion of the Rif war and the changes in French Government policy towards the handling of insurgencies at that time, see Moshe Gershovich, *French Military Rule in Morocco*, 122 – 161. Chapter 5: The Rif War and the end of 'Pacification'

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion of the Arab Revolt from a British military perspective, see WO 191/88, TNA, History of the Disturbances in Palestine, 1936 – 1939

country towards the north of the territory, and relative proximity to both Transjordan and Syria with which its politically active families had developed well-established links, in particular with such cities as Damascus and Salt.¹⁵¹ From a purely military perspective it was not the most important centre of equipment, men, or operations: those were to be found in Haifa, Lydda, and Jerusalem.¹⁵² Nevertheless, it was home to a British military base¹⁵³ –at the receiving end of sniper fire- as well as a Royal Army Service Corp (R.A.S.C.) depot, a Military Transport (MT) workshop, and a NAAFI canteen.¹⁵⁴ No doubt the location of the depot and workshop reflected the city's transportation links, both by road to Jerusalem, and by rail to the Haifa-Beisan line and the coastal Haifa-Lydda-Gaza line,¹⁵⁵ thus facilitating the transportation of heavy equipment which had been brought in for servicing and repair.

Had relations between military personnel and the local population been less beset by mutual suspicion and cultural differences, the presence of the former might have offered potential for increased economic activity via the supply of goods and services, but the available evidence in the War Office records suggests that the military in Nablus operated very much as a self-contained group of units: the entry concerning the RAF emergency landing ground located two miles south-east of the city mentions only one hotel in Nablus for food and accommodation, but no other facilities suitable for UK personnel.¹⁵⁶ The city, unlike the new administrative capital under the Mandate, Jerusalem,¹⁵⁷ was not growing either in terms of population, or economically, and as has been argued in chapter I of this thesis, its relative economic decline¹⁵⁸ was one of the causes why Nablus became a centre of opposition to the Mandatory authorities and their policy of promoting the Jewish National Home.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵¹ For a discussion of the development of Nablus's regional networks in the 'Bilad Al-Sham' see Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, 1995

¹⁵² For a schematic setting out British military bases in Mandate Palestine see MPH 1/949, TNA, Maps relating to WO 191/70 on Lessons of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine, 1936

¹⁵³ MPH 1/949, TNA includes an organogram of the senior military structure in Palestine in 1936, with Brigadier Evetts, the officer who sent the Mayor up to the roof of his Nablus H.Q., as Commander of the 16th Infantry Brigade

¹⁵⁴ Ibid

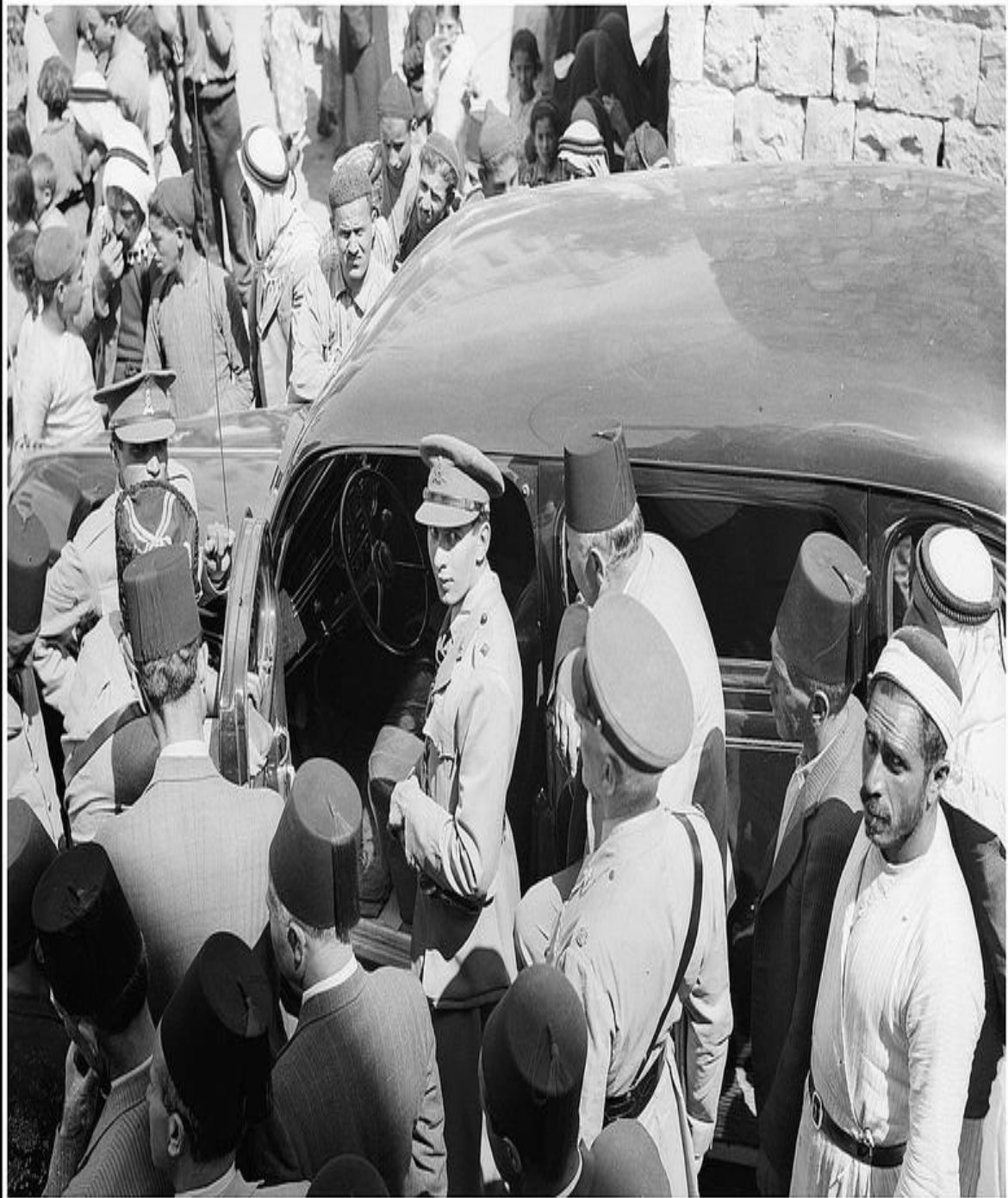
¹⁵⁵ MPH 1/949, TNA, Map 2. The connection to the Haifa-Beisan line was at Afula via Jenin, and to the coastal line at a railway junction to the west of Tulkarm. Nablus itself was a terminus

¹⁵⁶ AIR 10/1990, TNA, Index of Aerodrome & Landing Grounds in Palestine, March 1939

¹⁵⁷ For a discussion of the growth of Jerusalem, its absorption of some of its surrounding villages, and the political consequences of day labourers from the countryside seeking work there, see Rana Barakat, 'The Jerusalem Fella, Mandate Era Popular Politics', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 181, Vol. XLVI, No.1, Autumn 2016

¹⁵⁸ See Chapter I of this thesis, page 29: "The 1931 census identified emigration from the Nablus area which it concluded implied a "comparative degeneration in the economic life of that town."

¹⁵⁹ See Chapter I of this thesis: Conclusion



British Army Officers and Arab recruits in Nablus, Palestine - May 1941

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Matson (G. Eric and Edith) Photograph Collection. Photograph retrieved on 8th August 2019

CONCLUDING CHAPTER

“The road was at first a splendid one which took us up and down over several passes among the mountains of the Central Range, and made one realise how the centre of the country had been kept so much apart from the rest.”¹

“As a result of the building of highways and other improvements in means of transportation and communication, the commercial centres of the interior diminished greatly in importance while the importance of the main towns increased.”²

This thesis has examined British Mandatory policy towards the town of Nablus during the two decades following the end of World War I (WWI). In so doing, and in its capacity as a study of developments at the local level, it seeks to redress the balance of historiography which has tended to focus on Jerusalem and the coastal towns at the expense of those located in the central uplands.³ Part of this focus may be a reflection of official sources available –as far as the UK is concerned- in the National Archives. In the Colonial Office: Palestine Original Correspondence files there are 160 files on Jerusalem, 153 on Haifa, 63 on Jaffa, but only 8 on Nablus. If such volumes are indicative of British priorities, then clearly Nablus was not one of them.

It is a leitmotif of this thesis that the town’s relative decline under the Mandate, coupled with the difficulty it experienced in adjusting to its reduced status in comparison with its position under the Ottomans as a cultural and commercial centre, were key contributory factors in its role as initiator and leader of the 1936 Arab Revolt. However, before attempting any overall conclusions it may be helpful to briefly summarise its main findings.

The most important overarching themes to have emerged from the research include that of a ‘de minimis’ style of British colonial government, where the impact of scarce personnel resources was leveraged through the co-option of local elites. In geographical terms this produced a contrast between areas of relative stagnation that were subjected to this de minimis government, and more thriving metropolitan centres that experienced more proactive forms of imperial governance. Within that

¹ 06 April 1921 extract from a diary of a member of a delegation to Egypt and Palestine, describing their departure from Nablus in CMS/ACC 21 F4 VOL.C, Church Missionary Society Archives, Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham University

² Sa’id Himadeh (Ed), *The Economic Organisation of Palestine* (American University Press, Beirut, 1938), 376

³ A similar focus is apparent in studies of the late Ottoman period: see Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine*, 3. When speaking of the impact of the ‘integration narrative’ of European influence on Ottoman territories in the nineteenth century, Doumani observes that it “tends to relegate the interior regions of the Ottoman Empire, such as the Jabal Nablus, to the status of a periphery’s periphery.”

context Nablus is a case study set in the era of British imperial history during the period following the end of World War I. It is of particular interest because the relative isolation it suffered under the Mandate was in sharp contrast to the role it had played as an important regional cultural and commercial centre under the Ottomans. As a result, the impact of the Mandate was traumatic. In this respect its experience in the 1920s and 1930s can be characterised as passing through a 'shatter zone'⁴ created by the disruptive transition from Ottoman to British rule after the traumas of World War I. The sensitivities revealed by the research, and the general lack of rapport between the Nabulsis and the Mandatory authorities need to be interpreted against the traumatic background of that transition.

The tensions that arose were exacerbated by the relative economic decline of Jabal Nablus. Whereas the population of Jerusalem and the coastal towns was growing during the Mandate, that of Nablus was not. I have argued in chapter I that for the port towns their growth path was relatively unimpeded by regime change following World War I, as they were able to continue their maritime trade via the Mediterranean. For those in the hinterland however this option had never been available as their trade routes were over land. The creation of new territorial borders between the Mandatory powers, and the inevitable restrictions on freedom of movement which they entailed, consequently had a disproportionate impact on towns such as Nablus. Added to this was the subsequent impact of the Great Depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s, which unleashed powerful deflationary forces on such commodities as agricultural staples. This had a debilitating effect on the local economy of Nablus, and its agricultural hinterland. The combination of relative urban decline in comparison with the expanding coastal towns and the depression of agricultural prices in the Jabal Nablus created the impression for its citizens that their part of the country was stagnating and falling behind. That relative decline contributed to a feeling of inferiority⁵ and marginalisation which would go some way to explaining why the town was such a centre of opposition to the mandate and Jewish immigration, despite the fact that it was located in a region which experienced very little in the way of such immigration per se.

British perceptions of Nablus developed in the years immediately following World War I. In this respect the available primary source material has made it possible to analyse two aspects of British engagement, namely surveillance of the town's political activities and government at the local level - which included the maintenance of law and order, education in the surrounding rural area, and public health. The nature of that engagement is illustrative of the exercise of de minimis government in a non-priority area where the primary policy objective appears to have been the

⁴ This concept has been applied to the mainly East European territories bordering the established states and empires disrupted or destroyed by World War I. See Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz (Eds), *Shatterzone of Empires*. See also page 5 above in the Introductory chapter

⁵ See Sahar Khalifeh, *Of Noble Origins*, 30: "What was wrong with Nablus ? It was trash now ? Or was it because Nablus had gas lamps and Haifa had bulbs and electric lighting ? Was it because Nablus did not have a port and Haifa overlooked the sea ? Was it because Nablus had no foreigners, no Jews, and no dancers ?"

avoidance of any form of civil or political disturbance on the one hand while on the other keeping public expenditure as low as possible. This aspect of the research has generated what is essentially the leitmotif of the whole thesis, namely that Nablus was not a priority for the British Mandate in Palestine, and as a result suffered from neglect and marginalisation relative to other urban areas. British perceptions of the Nabulsi ranged from relative disinterest to outright suspicion of a town with a historical reputation for not welcoming external control.

An examination of the available evidence concerning the project in the early 1930s to create a water supply infrastructure in the town has revealed disputes not so much between the British and the Nabulsi, but rather between the various branches of Government, both in Palestine and in London. This is especially apparent in the arguments which arose over the quality of pipes supplied via the Crown Agents by the UK firm Stanton & Co,⁶ given that some of them burst. Unfortunately those that did were used to connect two reservoirs on opposite sides of the valley in which Nablus is located⁷ (between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim) and so this delayed completion of the project and gave a poor impression from a public relations perspective in relation to the local population.⁸ The resulting exchanges which subsequently developed between Government House in Jerusalem and the Colonial Office in London to what ought to have remained a local issue contained in the District Commissioner's office in Samaria suggests that tensions were rising in Palestine between the British and the Arabs at a time of accelerating Jewish immigration.⁹ I have argued in chapter III that the official correspondence of the time indicates that Nablus was not considered a priority for infrastructure development. While Haifa and Jerusalem took the lion's share of the funds available, Nablus was relegated somewhat to the margins, despite its historical importance as a leading commercial and cultural centre under the Ottomans.

A good body of archive material has survived concerning the 1927 earthquake, and the Government's response to it. This has revealed that the earthquake mainly impacted the poorer residents, whose houses were made of low quality materials and more likely to collapse.¹⁰ Fatalities consequently arose only amongst the native Arab population and not the colonial administrators. As a result the Mandatory authority was blamed for doing too little, too late and demonstrations broke out when the High Commissioner, Lord Plumer, visited to see for himself the extent of the damage. The source material has also revealed that the timing of the earthquake coincided with a period when the authorities in Jerusalem were in the process of

⁶ For a discussion of 'imperial preference' in the supply of British goods to British-controlled territories overseas, see Barbara Smith, *The Roots of Separatism*, 20 – 25

⁷ See the letter of 26 August 1934 from Fawcett Pudsey, Director of Public Works in Palestine to the Crown Agents in CO/733/267/7, TNA

⁸ Ibid, memo of July 1934

⁹ In 1931 this was running at just over 4,000 per annum, but had risen to over 45,000 by 1934, peaking that decade at 66,427 in 1935: see <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-immigration-to-palestine-1919-1941>

¹⁰ Geoffrey Powell, *PLUMER, The Soldier's General*, 315

renewing the Government estate and planning purpose-built structures in place of the rented accommodation then in use.¹¹ Earmarking funds for that purpose necessarily entailed constraints on other forms of expenditure. The 1926 Department of Public Works annual report also indicated that expenditure was being directed towards specific towns such as Haifa and Jaffa, where significantly more projects were planned than in Nablus.¹² That mode of thinking meant that by the time of the 1927 earthquake the response of the authorities was characterised by a somewhat minimalist approach designed to do no more than was necessary to mitigate the impact of the destruction. A leitmotif of this thesis is that Nablus lost out relative to other parts of Palestine during the decades following WWI, at a time when the whole territory was anyway under financial constraints imposed initially by the debts accrued as a result of the war, and subsequently by the impact of the Great Depression. At the time of the earthquake, the effects of these constraints were partially mitigated in relation to the damage caused by recourse to the humanitarian disaster relief funds which flowed in as a response – including those from the Jewish community in the New York area.

The final ‘snapshot’ of relations between the British and local Nabulsi society was well documented in British Government reports and correspondence at the time. This was the forced co-option by the army of Mayor Tuqan of Nablus during the first year of the Arab Revolt. The reaction to this incident provides an opportunity to examine the differences of perspective between the civil administration and the military in Mandate Palestine, together with the tensions arising from them. I have argued in chapter V that the arrest provides an insight into one of the consequences of a policy of minimalist state intervention, given the efforts made by the government to bring the incident to a conclusion as quickly as possible, and so avoid the need to allocate resources for managing any ‘fall out’. Following Tuqan’s apprehension, the authorities moved quickly to apologise for his treatment and so minimise the political damage which might have accrued as a result of the incident. However, whereas the civil power wanted the minimum use of force necessary to restore order, the priority of the military by contrast was to crush the revolt which developed that year, with a view to ensuring that it could not recur.¹³ During the second phase of the Arab revolt in 1938 – 1939, not only was the UK gearing up for war, but in Palestine the scale of military intervention in the revolt was significantly increased. That period consequently marked the end of the policy of essentially *laissez-faire* ‘de minimis’ government in Jabal Nablus that had characterised the 1920s and most of the 1930s.

¹¹CO 733/165/7, TNA, Department of Public Works Reorganisation of Staff 1929

¹² CO 814/2, TNA, Department of Public Works Annual Report 1926

¹³WO 32/9401, TNA, Palestine Disturbances 1936, Report of GOC British Forces in Palestine & Transjordan

Palestine as viewed from the perspective of Lyautey

A key frame of reference in helping me understand the workings of British rule in Nablus has been provided by a different imperial regime in the interwar MENA region: that of French-ruled Morocco, and particularly the policies of Marechal Hubert Lyautey. I have also argued that the tensions between the civil and military authorities in 1936 were to some extent reflected in similar differences of perspective between Marechal Lyautey in Morocco in the 1920s and his successors who fought the Rif war. As Resident-General of Morocco, Lyautey certainly believed in the 'pacification' of the local population, but only to the extent that it subsequently became possible to work with them, develop infrastructure projects, and expand the economy – ideally to mutual benefit.¹⁴ His successors however prioritised the military defeat of the rebels during the Rif insurgency, and were more concerned with victory than the longer term relations between the imperial power and the local population.¹⁵ There are consequently parallels between the Rif war in Morocco and the second phase of the Arab Revolt in Palestine from 1938 – 1939, when the British significantly increased the military forces to be used in Palestine and definitively crushed the revolt: albeit under a different commander than Lieut.-General Dill.¹⁶

These different approaches to dealing with insurrections in colonial territories depend on whether the primary objective was to maintain power and authority by means of superior military force, or whether it was to establish a sustainable working relationship with the indigenous population, backed up by the minimum use of force kept mostly in reserve. Lyautey himself however had views on how to govern colonies which could shed some light both on the approach taken by the British Mandatory authorities in Palestine as a whole and on Jabal Nablus in particular.

***Des Territoires 'Utiles' et 'Inutiles'*¹⁷**

Marechal Lyautey's concepts of which parts of Morocco were useful to France as opposed to those characterised as 'useless' were arguably a rationalisation of the resource constraints imposed by the French Government on the numbers of troops to be stationed in Morocco following the end of World War I.¹⁸ The essence of the idea however was simple: if the colonial power lacked the military resources to effectively control the whole of a colonised territory, then it had to decide on its priorities in terms of which parts of the territory were of greatest importance to its strategic interests. *Le Maroc utile* was consequently that part of the country which

¹⁴ For a general discussion of Lyautey's approach, see William Hoisington, *Lyautey*, preface vii + 18-19

¹⁵ For a discussion of the Rif war and the changes in French Government policy towards the handling of insurgencies at that time, see Moshe Gershovich, *French Military Rule in Morocco*, 122 – 161. Chapter 5: The Rif War and the end of 'Pacification'

¹⁶ For a discussion of the Arab Revolt from a British military perspective, see WO 191/88, TNA, History of the Disturbances in Palestine, 1936 - 1939

¹⁷ For an explanation of this concept, see William Hoisington, *Lyautey*, 90

¹⁸ The development of the concept of 'le Maroc utile' and 'le Maroc inutile', and the resource constraints which brought it about is discussed in chapter 4 of Moshe Gershovich, *French Military Rule*

held an evident economic, military, or political importance. *Le Maroc inutile* by contrast constituted any region where French effort required a financial and military expenditure out of proportion to the return.¹⁹ The emergence of the concept can be dated from French military defeat in the oasis of Tafilalet in 1918, situated in south-east Morocco, near the border with Algeria. Lyautey subsequently wrote the region off as being of no economic or strategic value from a French colonial perspective: and so part of *le Maroc inutile*.²⁰ Conversely, *le Maroc utile*:

“included all the regions that contained resources necessary for the economic development of Morocco and for its military and political stability, those indispensable for the country’s security and development”.²¹

The Application of the Concept to Mandate Palestine

Viewed from this perspective, ‘useful Palestine’ was the British Government’s headquarters in Jerusalem, the coastal ports, - in particular Haifa²² as the conduit for Iraqi oil to the Mediterranean - and the fertile coastal strip which constituted the embryonic Jewish national home. The latter was the main justification used by the British for their control of the territory.²³ By contrast, towns in the central highland chain, such as Hebron, Nablus, and Jenin, were not considered of particular importance. Although not necessarily ‘useless Palestine’ they were certainly not priorities: and as a result they were not growing and developing at the same rate. In the case of Nablus there was evidence of stagnation in terms of its municipal revenues, which grew only marginally between 1928, when they were £8,970, and 1936, when they were £9,290.²⁴ During the same period, Haifa’s revenues went from £26,000 - £111,000 and Tel Aviv’s from £78,000 - £447,000.²⁵ It is the relative difference between the priority areas and the largely neglected and marginalised hinterland which is important here, rather than low living standards in an absolute sense. When considering the conditions of destitution pertaining in Palestine at the time of the Arab revolt, George Stuart, Deputy Director of Medical Services, was of the view that “no distressed family visited could not be paralleled or even outmatched, in poverty, hunger, and dirt, by many inhabitants of the East End of most large English and Scottish towns.”²⁶ In contemporary American terms Jabal

¹⁹ Hoisington, *Lyautey* 90

²⁰ Gershovich, *French Military Rule* 111

²¹ Gershovich, *French Military Rule* 113

²² For a discussion of the strategic importance of Haifa to the British, see Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress*, 99. For a discussion of the similar importance of the port of Casablanca to the French in Morocco, see Daniel Rivet, *Lyautey et l’Institution du Protectorat Français au Maroc, 1912 – 1925* (Editions L’Harmattan, Paris, 1988), 132 - 133

²³ For a discussion of the importance of the Jewish national home concept to both British imperial interests in the Middle East and their ideas on how to develop Palestine, see Norris, *Land of Progress* 64-65

²⁴ CO 821/11, TNA, Blue Book of Statistics 1936, 114: Finances of Municipalities, Total Revenue and Expenditure, 1927 – 1936

²⁵ Ibid (figures rounded for illustrative purposes)

²⁶ George Stuart, Deputy Director of Medical Services, and W J E Philips, Senior Medical Officer, ‘Observations on the application of relief measures to certain areas, 31 December 1939.’ Quoted in Naomi Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 153

Nablus was akin to a 'rustbelt' zone, falling behind other regions in terms of economic growth, seeing its working age population seeking employment opportunities elsewhere, and becoming prone to populist political movements which disdained the affluence of more flourishing metropolitan elites better placed to exploit the opportunities of a more globalised economy.

Closing Remarks

This thesis is a study at the local level of a town which was arguably one of the great 'losers' from the British mandate in respect of its former role as a commercial and cultural centre under the Ottomans: notwithstanding the fact that many will argue that Palestine as a whole lost out as a result of the mandate, and the subsequent events of 1948.²⁷ It is precisely this point however which illustrates the relevance of studying the fate of Nablus during the early years of the British Mandate. What happened there in the 1920s and 1930s was a precursor of what was to happen to all the Palestinian communities following successively the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the Six Day war in June 1967, as they were progressively marginalised in the face of an increasingly powerful and growing Jewish community with a largely separate economy. Throughout the Mandate period the coastal strip, where most of the Jewish immigrants were located, developed into the dominant economic region of the territory as a whole. This economic dominance translated into political dominance during the war which broke out at the time of the British withdrawal. Henceforth the new state of Israel was to progressively extend its power and influence, first up to the 1949 armistice line, and subsequently into what is now the West Bank following the Jordanian withdrawal of 1967. The origins of that progressive development however can be traced back to the first two decades of the Mandate, and I would argue that what happened during those years set the scene for and enabled all of the subsequent developments: although this is not to suggest that the actual course of subsequent events became inevitable.

The research has revealed various themes relating to the devastation suffered by a primarily rural society as a result of World War I. These included the debilitating impact of droughts, infestations, and natural disasters such as the 1927 earthquake, as well as the legacy of an Ottoman past which made it difficult to cope with the many changes brought about by the advent of the mandate. As Pere Jaussen noted from his time spent in the city in the 1920s, the Nabulsis were well aware of the imperfections and weaknesses of the Ottoman regime, but they nevertheless missed it to an extent that he thought many Westerners found hard to appreciate.²⁸ In his view the real reason for this nostalgia was that the Ottomans were fellow Muslims

²⁷ "In the summer of 1948.....Palestinian social and cultural life was totally destroyed." Ilan Pappé, *The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian Dynasty, the Husaynis 1700-1948* (Saqi Books, London, 2010), 339

²⁸ Pere Jaussen, *Coutumes Palestiniennes*, 263. His French text reads: "J'ai entendu des Naplousiens s'exprimer librement sur l'ancien regime turc: ils en reconnaissent les imperfections, la faiblesse.....mais le regrettent. Et les motifs de cette mentalite sont sans doute plus forts et plus profonds que certains esprits occidentaux pourraient se l'imaginer."

and the Nabulsis saw the British as infidels whose authority they were unable to accept.²⁹

It has also revealed various tensions within the British Government. These were apparent between local District Commissioners and their Head Office in Jerusalem, as well as between Jerusalem and London, and between the military and civil authorities. The overall conclusion however is that even in quite a small national territory such as Palestine, generalized statements must be treated with caution, and qualified according to different localities. From a British perspective, some parts of the territory were considered more important than others, and received much greater investment. For the marginalised 'losers' by contrast, in respect of such investment, minimalist Government was the order of the day. From the Palestinian perspective, the way particular groups responded to the mandate was very much conditioned by their formative experiences under the Ottomans and their perception as to whether or not they were favored or disadvantaged in relation to the status quo ante. By taking these varying considerations into account it becomes easier to understand why Nablus became both birth place and symbol of the 1936 Arab revolt against the British and their Jewish national home policy, despite the fact that under the Mandate there were virtually no Jews in the area of the ancient city of Shechem.³⁰ It had been a regional commercial centre under the Ottomans with well established links to such cities as Damascus. Nearly all of this was lost following the successive shocks of World War I and the sudden regime change with the arrival of the British. Nablus had a well-established soap making industry at the turn of the twentieth century which went into a steep decline under the Mandate, partially due to the loss of export markets such as Egypt, and partially due to growing competition from new, and capital intensive, Jewish enterprises. Because of the difficulties of raising capital in a city closely integrated with an agricultural hinterland characterized by high degrees of indebtedness, the city was unable to compete and stagnated economically. It was the coming together of these destructive forces which created the conditions for revolt.

This thesis has hopefully contributed to a better understanding of how a steady process of marginalization, in a part of the Palestinian territory which was anyway relatively isolated in the central uplands, created the conditions which sparked the Arab revolt. For the way the Nabulsis saw the mandate, it may be fitting to conclude with a statement from Sahar Khalifeh, one of the leading authors to have emerged from the city during the second half of the twentieth century:

"Palestinian society still suffered from its disconnection from the world and from its history. It had become an orphan after the Turks left, with no support from any side.

²⁹ Jaussen, *Coutumes Palestiniennes* 264

³⁰ Excepting the Samaritan community

As a result, it had withdrawn to protect its foundations in the realm of women and traditions, and out of concern for a Jewish incursion and a western invasion.”³¹



KHALIFEH, SAHAR (1941-)³²

³¹ Sahar Khalifeh, *Of Noble Origins* (The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 40-41. Khalifeh was born in Nablus in 1941 and is the author of eight novels

³² This Image is taken from Sahar Khalifeh's entry in the 'Personalities' section of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA): <http://passia.org/personalities/192>

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