Abstract
This essay explores the emergence of a middle class in a small town in the Palestinian highlands at the turn of the twentieth century, a class that was of a different order and character than that developing in the cities. The article traces the emergence of an embryonic middle class in the town of Ramallah at the turn of the twentieth century in several factors that came together at particular moments, one reinforcing the other. A confluence of forces, namely engagement with missionary institutions through education; involvement in the pilgrim trade; and emigration to the United States produced a social world that was largely parochial. Paradoxically but not surprisingly, the diasporic experience, instead of leaving cosmopolitan effects, nurtured a certain parochialism.

The research for this essay is based in large part on family and individual life histories pieced together from diverse sources including interviews and local histories and genealogies, both published and unpublished; papers in the Ramallah Municipality archive; diaries and memoirs (published and unpublished) by Palestinians, British colonial administrators, and European and American travelers and missionaries passing through Ramallah at different periods; photographs of people and places; architectural records; and newspaper advertisements and articles, among other sources.

By focusing on a peripheral and marginal town at a critical historical juncture, the essay hopes to contribute to the writing of a fuller and more inclusive social history of urban transformations in Palestine. The essay is part of a larger project by the author on the social history of Ramallah.

Keywords
Urban social history; middle class lives; small towns; middle class.
Recent scholarship on the Palestinian urban middle class at the turn of the twentieth century and particularly during the British Mandate has celebrated the cosmopolitanism, hybridity, and modernity of the coastal cities and Jerusalem, recording the emergence of modern classes, institutions, spaces, and dispositions and sensibilities. In the past two decades or so, writings on late Ottoman and Mandate Palestine have focused on modern spaces, modern personas, and modern lifestyles. These works, based on diaries, memoirs, personal papers, photographs, and other kinds of primary sources, have contributed a great deal to illuminating the lives and times of the Palestinian bourgeois and middle classes.¹

The loss of Palestine’s coastal cities and the Palestinian suburbs of Jerusalem after the Nakba is a recurring theme in the literature on urban Palestine; the parochialism and conservatism of the central highland towns has been juxtaposed against the cosmopolitanism of Jaffa, Haifa, and Jerusalem in the pre-1948 period. Salim Tamari has noted the suspicion with which the smallholding highland peasantry viewed the “alien” culture of the coastal cities; they were suspicious of urban-based elites, as well as of the secular culture of the “decadent metropole.”²

This essay concerns itself with Ramallah, one of those small highland towns, and explores the emergence of a peasantry-turned-middle class (very similar to the petit-bourgeoisie of smaller towns in the larger region) that was of a different order and character than that in the cities. The social history of small inland towns in late Ottoman Palestine has yet to be written in full, even though we have local histories written by native sons and a few daughters, as well as a few scholarly studies.³

Context-specific yet contextualized social histories of towns are an opportunity for assessing broad generalizations about the process of urban transformation in Palestine as a whole and for uncovering unique economic, social, and political dynamics that governed each town’s history, including interaction with the Zionist colonial project. Some of the smaller towns in Palestine provide an opportunity to observe urban growth as a process that characterized not only the major cities but also locations on the periphery usually not considered important in the urbanizing process. It is hoped that this profile of a peripheral and marginal town at a critical historic juncture can contribute to the writing of a fuller and more inclusive social history of urban transformation in Palestine.

Ramallah, in the central highlands of Palestine, entered the twentieth century as a small predominantly Christian town with an economy still dominated by olive, fig, and grape cultivation, but also home to craftspeople engaged in the production of domestic commodities and working as builders, stonemasons, potters, and weavers. One hundred years later, it has sprung to prominence as the seat of the Palestinian Authority, displaying many of the attributes of contemporary cities, albeit in miniature. Ramallah has become the new urban center for Palestinians living in the occupied Palestinian territory. A new middle class and its lifestyle have become the defining features of the town today and the subject of much scholarly and public discussion.

This development is new, however. Ramallah’s rise to prominence is a product of more recent developments, primarily the designation of Ramallah as the seat of the
Palestinian Authority in the West Bank since the early 1990s, followed by waves of migration from other parts of the West Bank, and the relocation to the city of many Palestinian and international institutions.

For much of its history in the past one hundred years, Ramallah was a small town with a small-town ambience and sensibilities. In the smaller towns like Ramallah at the turn of the century, the embryonic middle class was of a different nature than the new upper and middle classes of Jaffa, Haifa, and Jerusalem. Their members lived a largely parochial existence, and had a less grandiose and self-aware sense of their mission and place in society. They were not public intellectuals who aspired to such a role, nor were they individuals of great educational or professional achievement or ambition. They constituted a diverse second-tier social group that included middling to well-to-do farmers, merchants and small traders, landowners, some professionals, and a range of functionaries with daily contact with churches, the government and its agencies, and a variety of other institutions of the Ottoman state and later the British Mandate bureaucracy. Some were émigrés who would return home from time to time. Only a few members can be said to be of the same pedigree as the Mandate-era privileged “men of capital” and “women of thrift” Sherene Seikaly has written about. Neither were they part of the nouveaux riches produced by emigration, individuals “deeply enmeshed in the very process of bourgeois cultural production,” as described by Jacob Norris, writing about Bethlehem. Further yet, the majority were not part of the cultural and political elite that has been celebrated in several works; they had little affinity with public intellectuals and reformers like Khalil Sakakini, Najib Nassar, Bulus Shehadeh (himself a son of Ramallah), ‘Isa al-‘Isa, and others at the turn of the century.

What poses a challenge to capturing a sense of the lives and livelihoods of the nascent middle class of turn-of-the-century Ramallah is that the vast majority of these individuals did not leave behind memoirs or personal papers. This research is based in large part on family and individual life histories pieced together from diverse sources including interviews, local histories, newspapers, and genealogies, both published and unpublished. I was also fortunate to have access to the Ramallah Municipality archive, where various kinds of documents from the period 1912 until the 1930s were consulted. Not surprisingly, among the most valuable published sources are Naseeb Shaheen’s two-volume work consisting of photographs and commentary, *A Pictorial History of Ramallah*, which provides a window into livelihoods and sensibilities in turn-of-the century Ramallah. I have also drawn upon an assemblage of other sources consisting of diaries, autobiographies, and memoirs (published and unpublished) by Palestinians, British colonial administrators, and European and American travelers and missionaries passing through Ramallah at different periods; photographs of people and places; architectural records; and newspaper advertisements and articles, among other sources.

The emergence of an embryonic middle class in Ramallah at the turn of the twentieth century can be located in several factors that came together at particular moments, one reinforcing the other. A confluence of forces – namely engagement with missionary
institutions through education; involvement in the pilgrim trade – and emigration to the United States produced a social world that was largely parochial. Paradoxically but not surprisingly, the diasporic experience, instead of leaving cosmopolitan effects, nurtured a certain parochialism. For the majority of the early emigrants, the ambition was to contribute to their families back home and raise their own families that worked together to make a decent living. The acquisition of land, whether for building homes or for expanding their agricultural holdings in the homeland was a paramount preoccupation both for the families that stayed behind and for those who lived in the United States. It is indeed remarkable how the early émigrés endured the hardship of travel by sea, often returning to Ramallah several times, with great resolve and tenacity. They had little involvement in public causes, whether in the United States or in Palestine, that not being relevant to the world that they inhabited.

I begin with a very brief overview of the modalities and material origins of social differentiation in this rather small peasant community in the closing days of Ottoman rule.

The considerable literature on transformations in the political economy of Palestine has established that by the middle of the nineteenth century, Palestine’s peasants, artisans, merchants and the social and political elite were being increasingly brought into the expanding capitalist economic transformations of the region. The land reforms introduced by the Ottomans after the middle of the nineteenth century ushered in the creation of large landed properties due to peasants’ inability or reluctance to claim title to the land that they worked. Local rural potentates (shaykhs), urban notables, and the emerging commercial bourgeoisie of the coastal towns and Jerusalem acquired agricultural land either by purchase or because of peasant indebtedness.7

In Jabal al-Quds, (the region which included Ramallah) rural shaykhs had ruled the different subdistricts or nahiyas before the Ottoman reforms. Ramallah was part of the network of villages ruled by the mashyakha of Bani Harith al-Shamaliyya, with its seat in the “throne village” of Ibn Samhan, later known as Ras Karkar.8 During the late Ottoman period, most of Ramallah’s dealings in matters of payment of taxes and adjudication of disputes were carried out with the Ibn Samhan shaykhs. For most of the nineteenth century, the land cultivated by the people of Ramallah was included in the vast waqf lands of Jabal al-Quds attached to the al-Haram al-Ibrahimi in Hebron.9 Other villages in the Jabal al-Quds area, such as Bethlehem and Bayt Jala, were also part of this same waqf holding.

The hama’il (kinship groups; s., hamula) of Ramallah, except for one, the Shaqara, were affiliated to the Qays faction. Local histories of Ramallah show that its political leadership and the village as a whole were active participants in the Qays-Yaman struggles that often ensued, and were involved in several conflicts and power struggles between the two factions over the course of the nineteenth century. In fact, another Christian village in the vicinity, Bir Zayt, was likewise an active participant in the factional struggles; Musa bin Nasir, in his local history of his village, provides vivid recollections of the Qays-Yaman conflict involving several villages in the area, including Ramallah.10
The Qays-Yaman factional coalitions that were mobilized in inter-village conflicts among rival shaykhdoms and their clients in the nineteenth century did not appear to have any notable material effects in terms of the emerging class stratification of later decades; in the Ramallah region, the Qays factions were headed by the powerful Ibn Samhan shaykhs in Ras Karkar. The Shaqara hamula’s Yaman “patrons” were the Abu Ghosh shaykhs based in the village of ‘Anab (Abu Ghosh today) in the Jerusalem area. It has been noted in one of the local histories that Qays families who purchased land outside Ramallah did so from Qaysi villages such as al-Bireh and Surda, while the lone Yamani hamula bought land in nearby Yamani villages such as Baytunya and ‘AynQinya.\textsuperscript{11}

The Greek Orthodox church was prominently present in local politics and in the life of the community in general; in times of strife and struggle with other villages and within the town itself, church officials and the patriarch in Jerusalem often played an intermediary role with the Ottoman authorities in Jerusalem, and with the shaykhs of other villages and nahiyas.\textsuperscript{12} It should also be noted that the Jerusalem Patriarchate routinely received petitions from individuals and groups in Ramallah to intervene in a variety of matters, ranging from the quality of education, to the moral character of local priests, to disputes about money and land, assessment of ‘ushr taxes (agrarian tithe) due, and prison conditions.\textsuperscript{13}
Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Jerusalem elite acquired land in the traditional territory of the local shaykhs of Jabal al-Quds. Members of the Husayni, Nammari, Nashashibi, Dajani, and ‘Alami families acquired land in Jabal al-Quds villages and indeed also in many far-flung corners of Palestine such as in the coastal plain, Jaffa and Jericho. The rural shaykhs also engaged in the same practices.¹⁴

However, many villages in the Jabal al-Quds area escaped the loss of their land to the Jerusalem notables. Johann Büssow offers an explanation: in Jabal al-Quds there were not enough agents to collect village taxes, “indicating a remarkable reluctance on the part of the elites in Jerusalem, and even more in Hebron, to invest in the lands on their own doorstep.”¹⁵ He attributes this to the rugged terrain, the strengths of
the village shaykhs, their tribal organization, and the strong bargaining position of the peasants, in view of the restraining of tax farmers’ practices by the Jerusalem administrative council as a result of peasant protests of maltreatment by tax farmers.  

Ramallah was one such locality in Jabal al-Quds. There is no evidence of Ramallah town lands having been acquired by the urban elite or the rural shaykhs for that matter. Village land remained in local hands and was divided among the different hama’il. The villages closest to Ramallah where land was acquired by Jerusalem families were ‘Ayn Sinya and ‘Ajjul, where the Husaynis had acquired much of the villages’ land. Further away were the villages of Dayr al-Sudan in which the Husaynis owned land, and Umm Safa, Kobar, and Burham, where the Nashashibis had acquired land. Elihu Grant, the American missionary who headed the Quaker school in Ramallah from 1901 to 1904, notes that it was commonly thought that the Husaynis’ intercession made it possible for the Jerusalem-Nablus carriage road to pass by ‘Ayn Sinya.

Sometime in the late nineteenth century, a social differentiation with some consequence was present. Local Ramallah historians Khalil Abu-Rayya and Azeez Shaheen have noted two main kinship groups (hama’il) constituting the town early in the twentieth century: the Hadada and the Hama’il groups. Abu-Rayya describes the Hadada as merchants and craftsmen and the Hama’il as those “who remained fallahin;” they were always at odds with one another, exemplified in a big tosha (altercation) of 1905. How did this internal social differentiation originate? Abu-Rayya asks why, in view of the fact that the Hadada were only one of the five original hama’il, they came to be pitted against the other four? He locates this in the increase in the numbers of the Hadada with time, approximating the numbers of all the other hama’il combined; this, he opines, led to the Hadada’s attempts to become the ruling hamula. Furthermore, since the lands historically allotted to them were not sufficient, they sought other occupations such as trading, weaving, shoemaking and building

At first sight, an examination of the biographies and some life stories of Hadada personalities appears to bear out the point about diversification of occupations. This is particularly true of the Sharaqa hamula, who produced weavers, pilgrim guides, moneylenders, and shopkeepers. Three brothers for whom we have biographical information reflect this diversity of economic pursuits. Mansur Muhawiyya had a shop in the village of Bayt ‘Ur, spoke Greek from his work experience in Jaffa, and sold his grapes in Jerusalem in the early 1900s. His two brothers Shahin and Nasrallah were weavers; Shahin hired laborers, and was a moneylender later. The histories of the Harb, Jabir, and Hishmeh families also support this diversification of occupations among the Hadada; municipality records from the end of the Ottoman period reveal a variety of occupations such as suppliers of fuel and other municipal services.

On closer examination, the diversity of occupations was witnessed among both groups. Some Ramallah men worked in Jerusalem as stonemasons and domestic workers, and in church institutions. For example, some men from the Ghanayim family (of the Hama’il) were known as builders of church properties in Jerusalem. In 1914, several Ramallah residents were relieved from paying the werko (property)

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tax and are listed in municipality records as pursuing various manual occupations in Jerusalem. In a memoir written for his children in the United States, Hanna Batih (born 1904), describes how his mother, in addition to being a domestic worker in Jerusalem, traveled regularly to her native Ramallah to bring grapes for sale in Jerusalem. The marketing of fruit in Jerusalem seems to have continued for several decades; the son of a major landowning family recalls his trips to Jerusalem to sell grapes as late as the early 1960s, even though he was a university student at the time and rather embarrassed about doing this kind of work.

We note there was much internal differentiation within each of the two kinship groups, although it is not clear what was the basis of the main social division and the conflicts that ensued. Was it land ownership? The Hama’îl clans (the so-called “fallahin”) had large landholdings (the Batih, Ziyada, and Faramand families). On the other hand, several large landowners can be found on the other side of the divide, among the Hadada. These are the Qasis, Jabir, and Harb families.

It might be appropriate to comment here on the designation “fallahin.” It applied particularly to those families who were still, at the turn of the century, actively involved in agriculture as overseers as well as participants in the annual harvest and the social practices surrounding it. To this day, these families take pride in their traditional “love of the land,” in presumable contrast to those who sold their land, abandoned agriculture, or did not have any land to speak of. But they were not necessarily peasants as we understand the term.

More importantly, there is evidence to suggest that the Hadada were more likely to pursue educational paths that led to social mobility of another kind. More Hadada young men, after completing basic primary education at missionary or local church schools in Ramallah or Jerusalem, attended the Protestant-run English College in Jerusalem, followed by either the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut (renamed the American University of Beirut in 1920), or colleges in the United States. The Jerusalem Law Classes after 1920 was another prestigious institution that some joined. The relation between education and confessional affiliation was important: the Hadada appear to have converted to Protestantism in larger numbers than the Hama’îl, who remained attached to the established churches in the town. In particular, all of the Quaker converts were from the Hadada, particularly from the Sharaqa hamula. Finally, emigration to the United States seems to have been more pronounced among the Hadada families, with a few notable exceptions. The key material effect of emigration was the investment of money earned in the United States in real estate and land, both inside Ramallah and in the surrounding countryside. The building of modern homes in Ramallah was a notable development as well.

Since the Hadada were more likely to have pursued higher levels of education, it is not surprising that almost all of the Ramallah men who became part of the community of public intellectuals active in forums in Jaffa and Jerusalem in the 1920s and after were from the Hadada, and from the Yusif and ‘Awwad hama’îl in particular. Some of them relocated to Jaffa, Haifa, and other cities to work in legal professions or in the Mandate bureaucracy. Examples are from the Shehadeh, Harb, Balat, Shatara, and
Salah families. The vast majority of Ramallah men and women were not similarly inclined, however.

Another intriguing feature of the Hadada–Hama’il divide demands explanation. Why were families who migrated to Ramallah from areas to the east and north in the late eighteenth century (after the original migration of the Haddadin) “adopted” by the Hadada hama’il and became part of them, while the Hama’il incorporated none? Was it the fact that these migrants came with urban, non-agricultural trades and were more easily claimed and absorbed by the Hadada and not the “peasant” Hama’il?

Several sources mention the acquisition of land in surrounding villages by Ramallah families. Grant noted, as early as 1901, that significant amounts of land were purchased by Ramallah families in a dozen or more surrounding villages such as ‘Ayn Qinya, Mikhmas, Baytuniya, and Dayr Dibwan, ostensibly for the purpose of grain farming, since the village lands themselves consisted of “choice grape vineyards and orchards of figs and olives.”

He also notes land and olive groves owned in the outskirts of Ramallah by the well-to-do Faramand family. Social differentiation was further spurred by the purchase by some families of lands in the vicinity of Ramallah; Abu-Rayya mentions land in al-Bireh, Surda, Abu Qash, al-Mazra’a al-Qibliyya, neighboring Baytunia, Rafat, and ‘Ayn Qinya.

Significantly, by the early 1920s, capital accumulated through emigration to the United States was used to purchase agricultural land (mostly citrus groves) in Jaffa and areas on the coast, as well as in Tulkarm and Bisan. The practice of buying land in surrounding villages continued, and well into the twentieth century; one family is known to have bought land from less fortunate relatives, thus amassing large land holdings; a similar trend has been observed for the twin town of al-Bireh by Abdul Jawad.

We have the story of a father and son of a landowning family of the Hama’il (“fallahin”) group that illustrates this: Salim Sam’an Ziada (born in approximately 1884) emigrated to the United States around 1900 and worked as a peddler (the proverbial tajir shanta) for about fifteen years before returning, having been a moneylender to villagers, as well as trading in livestock before his emigration. He spent several years trying to collect the loans his father had given to villagers with the money he had sent from the United States. He often took land or cattle in return. He also purchased land for the family in nearby villages such as Biddu, ‘Ayn Qinya, ‘Iraq al-Sudan, Judayra, Ras Karkar and many other villages. According to Salim Ziada’s grandson, his grandfather had land before emigrating, but money from America made possible many of the subsequent land purchases.

Was this land used for growing commercial crops, and did these landowners market their produce to major commercial enterprises in Jaffa, such as soap factories? For example, did they themselves become merchants involved in the olive oil trade, thus expanding their material resources? The educator Khalil Totah mentions in his diaries that Ramallah merchants supplied Jaffa soap manufacturers with olive oil. Were the returning émigrés with their newly accumulated wealth involved in the olive oil trade? We have an intriguing insight into this issue in a recent doctoral dissertation;
Jeffrey Reger has found a reference in the writings of an American deputy consul in the early years of the twentieth century to remittances from the United States having been invested by Ramallah émigrés and others in nearby villages for speculation in what Reger calls an “olive oil futures market.” The oil was bought in the year of plenty when the olive harvest was robust (given the prevailing alternating seasons of good and poor harvests), stored in underground cisterns, and kept over to sell during the poor year.35

Only detailed family histories can give us a satisfactory answer. Grant noted that Ramallah businessmen traveled to surrounding villages to procure raisins for export by a German firm. The raisins were taken by camelback to Jaffa. Women wage laborers prepared the raisins for export.36

Missionaries, Education, and the Pilgrim Trade

Protestant missionary interest in Palestine dates to the early nineteenth century. In 1850, the Ottoman government legalized the conversion of Christian Ottoman subjects to Protestantism37 thus opening the door to more robust conversions, notwithstanding the hostility from the Greek Orthodox and Catholic churches, opposition that broke out in violence on several occasions throughout the period under consideration. In 1852, a petition signed by 194 men in Ramallah was sent to the Ottoman authorities asking for their community to be recognized and removed from Greek Orthodox church auspices.38

Samuel Gobat, who was Bishop of Jerusalem from 1846 to 1879, established several schools in Jerusalem and other cities. The notable Bishop Gobat’s School, or Madrasat Sahyün as it was known among Palestinians (due to its location on Mount Zion), was established in Jerusalem in 1847 as a free boarding and day school for the children of converts.39 A Gobat school was opened in Ramallah in 1850.40 The Church Missionary Society (CMS), in turn, took upon itself the expansion of schools: by 1882, there were thirty-five schools with 1,635 pupils in Palestine.41

Other missionaries were active in Palestine and provided services in education and welfare work in addition to the CMS: they included Germans, Americans, Scots, and the Quakers in Ramallah.42 There were other, more modest, schools in Ramallah at the time, notably the school operated by the Greek Orthodox Church since the early 1700s and the school run by the Catholic (Latin) Church after 1850.

The early Quakers in Ramallah included “Bible women” and teachers. Some of them were Lebanese, and worked in the various Quaker schools in Ramallah and the surrounding countryside (in Jifna, ‘Ayn ‘Arik, Tayba, and al-Bireh). Several young women from Ramallah joined the emerging cadre of teachers and missionaries attached to Quaker institutions; women such as Ni‘ma Abu Shahla, Martha Totah, Wadi‘a Shatara, and Maryam Shatara were among the earliest groups of women teachers. Several male teachers and other functionaries and professionals from Mount Lebanon, Jaffa, and Jerusalem were also important fixtures in the Quaker community in Ramallah.43
Local histories have often noted that the presence of the Quaker Mission in Ramallah spurred emigration through education of Ramallah boys, most critically knowledge of the English language. This prevailing view of the singular impact of the Quaker presence in Ramallah must be moderated. The emigration urge was gaining steam in the neighboring village of al-Bireh as well; as early as 1909, several al-Bireh residents emigrated to the United States without the benefit of a Friends education or contacts with Quaker networks. Saleh Abdul Jawad, who has studied the impact of the emigration of Birawis to the United States on land ownership and the rise of a new local leadership, notes that the first emigrants left in 1909, a few years before the First World War. However, the help of people who knew English was probably crucial in the early years of emigration from al-Bireh, and it may have been Quaker contacts in the United States that some Friends teachers and employees used to assist emigration by Birawis.

Undoubtedly, engagement with Christian institutions in Jerusalem, particularly schools, was instrumental; several Jerusalem schools stand out in the late nineteenth century for boys and young men in Ramallah: Gobat’s Madrasat Sahyun; the Schneller school and orphanage, established in 1860; St. George’s School (run by Anglicans, known as Mutran), established in 1898–89; the Catholic Collège des Frères, established in 1876; and the Maslaba school, established in 1855 for theological studies.

Many persons who were to become appendages to the pilgrim trade or government functionaries, or craftsmen, skilled laborers, and service workers of different kinds were beneficiaries of the educational opportunities offered at these schools. In his Annual Letter in 1877, Bishop Gobat claimed that his Madrasat Sahyun was successful “in raising many poor and neglected children to good positions in society.” Abdul Latif Tibawi, a historian of this period, considers this a fair claim to make, noting that up to this time, the school had produced one catechist, fifteen schoolmasters, most of them employed in missionary schools, a number of dragomans and tourist guides, and a few who began businesses on their own.

It is relevant to discuss the incentives for conversion to Protestantism as a means of social mobility. There is a derogatory characterization of the Protestant church in Ramallah as “the shilling church” (knisat al-shilin) during the Mandate period, whereby churchgoers were allegedly paid a shilling to attend Sunday services. More seriously, the material incentives provided by the Protestant churches might have been important. Tibawi has suggested that in the mid-nineteenth century and at the height of the strife between the Greek Orthodox church and Gobat, the former’s poor laity, who were housed in church property, could be threatened with eviction if they showed disloyalty to the church, but the Protestants were willing to help such people. However, Tibawi observes that “many were not victims at all; they were unscrupulous opportunists who tried to milk the two cows at the same time,” noting that similar experiences had been recorded in Syria and Lebanon by American missionaries. Protestant schools of the Church Missionary Society used inducements such as board and clothing to students, salaries for teachers, and medical relief. There is other supporting evidence of the material assistance the Protestant mission offered to converts during Gobat’s time.
Many of Ramallah’s boys and young men who later became lawyers, judges, publishers, merchants, and public servants in the Mandate bureaucracy studied at these schools. However, and crucially, they pursued a kind of further education that was not taken up by most of the graduates of the Jerusalem schools mentioned above, or at the schools in Ramallah operated by the local churches. While the majority made do with a basic education at the Sahyyn school or in the Ramallah schools, this group enrolled in the English College (formerly named the Young Men’s College, run by the Church Missionary Society), and a few of them went on to study at the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut. A few went directly to the United States for further study. Anis Sayigh, a graduate of the Sahyyn school, reminisces in his memoirs that it was a “popular” (sha’bi) rather than an “aristocratic” institution like St. George’s School.

It was a small group of young men, mostly from the Hadada, as was noted earlier, who pursued further study. They formed the nucleus for a modernist and less parochial middle class that would expand in the 1920s and 1930s. One can mention the lawyer George Sa‘; the physician Bulus Salah; Sulayman Ishaq; Fu’ad and Farid Shatara; Bulus, Nicola, and Salim Shehadeh; Nasif Harb; Sa’dallah Qasis; Ibrahim Ka’ibni; Mughannam Mughannam; Sam’an Da’ud (Balat); Khalil Totah; and Jiryis Mansur. There is no similar sizeable group among the Hama’il during the earlier part of the twentieth century.

‘Umar al-Salih al-Barghuthi, a member of a shaykhly family who became a prominent lawyer, writer, and politician during the Mandate, recalls in his memoir that boys in Jerusalem where he was sent to school from his village of Dayr Ghassana in the early 1900s mocked him for the haughty demeanor he put on in their presence. A boy asked him once: why do you want to go to school? So you can become a turjman suyyah (tourist guide)? This episode that al-Barghuthi chooses to highlight encapsulates the essence of the difference in dispositions between an aspirant to membership in a modernist middle class – for which al-Barghuthi was materially and politically well-endowed despite his rural upbringing – and possibly the majority of the boys in Jerusalem schools, who did not necessarily aspire to a life better than that of an interpreter and guide for tourists and pilgrims.

A turjman, or dragoman, as he was called in the burgeoning English-language travel literature, was a standard fixture of tours in the late Ottoman period in the area encompassing modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Egypt. The dragoman, more than a mere translator or tour guide, was expected to speak a foreign language, be resourceful, able to deal with brigands, thieves, and beggars, and to be an all-around fixer. The basic fluency in English that the foreign-run schools in Jerusalem (and Ramallah as well, by the 1860’s) seemed to have been the medium for a genre of Palestinian service worker, attached either to missionary institutions or to the pilgrim trade. Travel guides from the period 1840 to the early twentieth century, such as those published by Baedeker and Thomas Cook, give expositions on the politics of dragomen.

Ramallah had its share of dragomans. Two, Ya'qub Hishmeh and his son Shukri, shone among dragomans, and were recommended in several travel guides of the
period. Two decades before Ramallah became a tourist destination for summer vacationers from Palestine and surrounding regions, Ramallah and the Hishmehs were noted in Western travel literature and the writings of missionaries and pilgrims. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Ya’qub Hishmeh and his son Shukri’s hotel makes its appearance in travel guides and accounts published by pilgrims, biblical scholars, and tourists.51

Ya’qub Hishmeh was a classic case: he began his career as a guide to Charles Sandreckzi, a missionary sent to Jerusalem by the Church Missionary Society in the mid-1850s.52 Sandreckzi later supervised CMS missionary activities in the Ramallah area53 and it is likely that Hishmeh continued his relationship with him. He at least visited the village of Bir Zayt and met with a disgruntled Catholic Musa bin Nasir, who later converted to the Anglican church.54 Ya’qub and his brother Salim Hishmeh, who were raised as Greek Orthodox Christians, became among the first members of the Jerusalem Protestant community in the mid-1850s. A list of members of the Jerusalem group of Protestants in 1874-75 shows that six of the sixteen, including Ya’qub Hishmeh, became Anglicans while at the Gobat School.55

Ya’qub Hishmeh also served as dragoman to Quaker missionaries Eli and Sybil Jones on their visit to Palestine in 1869. He probably became a Quaker in 187756 and stayed in the service of the Quaker Mission in Ramallah for seventeen years, helping establish several schools in Ramallah and the surrounding villages.57 He left the Quakers in 1885 after a bitter dispute which ended in a Jerusalem court rejecting his claim of ownership of some of the Friends Mission property he had lived in and managed for the Friends.58

The Hishmeh family were indeed mavericks, and not all of them stayed in Ramallah. The stories I recount below illustrate another route taken by Ramallah men who chose to associate themselves with missionaries and the pilgrim trade. They were not inclined to modern cosmopolitan values and had little affinity to the urban middle class and the literati who were emerging at the time. Instead, they cultivated a particular segment of the pilgrim market through performing Oriental personas that they thought would further their interests. Most of their entrepreneurial ventures involved missionaries or the pilgrim trade, in one way or the other.

Ya’qub’s brother Salim Hishmeh ventured abroad and embarked on unusual journeys to different parts of the world. Critically, Salim also studied at the Bishop Gobat School in Jerusalem, and also entered the travel business, but on a much grander scale than his brother Ya’qub. While still quite young, Salim became the interpreter for the American journalist and adventurer Henry Morton Stanley on his famous expedition to central Africa in 1871 in search of Dr. Livingstone. Stanley’s biographer provides a rare portrait of Salim that he culled from Stanley’s autobiography and other sources. He notes that by the 1880’s [Salim] had freed himself from his identification simply as Stanley’s interpreter and had begun to create for himself a new identity – part fact, part fiction – in which he began describing himself, not merely
as “the first discoverer of Dr. Livingstone,” but also as “Chief of the Moabites.”

Salim used the new designation with further embellishments in 1882 in an American town, where he visited the home of a Quaker entrepreneur and friend of the Quaker missionaries for whom his brother Ya’qub had worked as a guide in 1869. The next year, we find Salim in Scotland, using the designations “sheik” and “Arab Chief” when he gave a talk about his African adventures at a Presbyterian church in Scotland in 1883.

Salim’s evangelist nephew Jiryis adopted a similar persona as a “sheik” while on tours in the United States. Jiryis Hanna Hishmeh (born 1866) seems to have made up for the relatively ordinary life of his father Hanna, who had settled in the United States and was reputed to have helped Ramallah men establish themselves as peddlers upon arrival in America. Jiryis’s route to social mobility was similar to that of his uncles, again apparently tied to work with foreign missionaries. He was educated in Jerusalem and Lebanon according to American media reports from 1920; Jiryis had accompanied General William Booth, the flamboyant and charismatic Salvation Army preacher and evangelist, during his visit to Palestine in 1905. Earlier, in 1882, Jiryis is said to have converted to the Salvation Army faith in Port Said after he heard a service delivered by Salvation Army Commissioner Frederick Booth-Tucker, who was on his way to India.

Jiryis eventually became a reverend and a captain in the Salvation Army serving in Palestine, India, and the United States. In Jaffa, he was reportedly successful in converting Jews to Christianity. He is said to have baptized entire families in the Mediterranean Sea. He was buried in Ramallah in 1946.

Jiryis’s brother As‘ad Hishmeh, born in approximately 1876, lived a much less colorful life, and his adventures seem to have been rather limited. As‘ad Hishmeh was a jawish (tax collector) at the municipality as early as 1913, according to Ramallah Municipality records. After his retirement, and in keeping with the Hishmeh entrepreneurial spirit, As‘ad moved to Jericho to establish a successful winter resort motel in the late 1940s.

The ‘Audeh family tells another but similar story. Yusif ‘Audeh, one of the first Quaker converts in Ramallah, was said to have operated, with his brother Ilyas, a travel service in Ramallah for a short period prior to the First World War. One of the al-Bireh stories that Abdel Jawad relates is about Yusif ‘Audeh’s role in the emigration of al-Bireh men: he was accused of having sponsored the first organized “migrants’ smuggling network that transported men from Ramallah and al-Bireh, and who the women of al-Bireh often cursed in their sad songs about their husbands and sons who never returned.”

Studying the life trajectory of Yusif ‘Audeh, we can say that Yusif’s knowledge of English was probably a rare asset at the time. Yusif, whose brother Ilyas was the first mayor of Ramallah, became a prosperous man, establishing an “Oriental Bazaar” in a Welsh town under the name of “Audi the Arab Sheik” in the 1890s. He also worked
as a travel guide and tour manager in Palestine for Western pilgrims and tourists, in
addition to his frequent trips to the United States, where he gave a series of lectures in
1903 as “Sheik Joseph Audi.”

Yusif was enterprising. He had made the acquaintance of a number of American
ministers and biblical scholars, one of them a university president, while they were on
tour in Palestine. Several of them hosted ‘Audeh at their churches between 1902 and
1905 for talks on Palestine. Interestingly, he is described in some newspaper reports
as having come to America to interest wealthy Americans in a hospital project in
Ramallah. He is described variously as “a cultured Arabian guide” and a wealthy
businessman, and is said to have appeared in “Bedouin” robes and lectured on
domestic life in Palestine, among other topics.

Yusif supplied the St. Louis World Fair in 1904 with items from the ‘Umar bin al-
Khattab Mosque and was in charge of the life-size replica of the Church of the Holy
Sepulcher erected in “the City of Jerusalem” exhibition at the fair. It was the largest
concession at the fair and was visited by thousands of people. An advertisement in
a St. Louis newspaper reflects a grand act of self-invention (and other-invention),
resplendent with a photo of “Joseph the Eloquent” in full regalia, including a sword
attached to his belt. His people is described as “the Indians of the Orient,” living in
tents in the deserts of Northern Syria.

Yusif’s brother Ilyas, who stayed in Ramallah throughout his life and was the mayor
from its founding until 1921 (his family ran the fashionable Grand Hotel), was also
closely connected with the Quakers early in his life. He studied at the Friends school
in Brummana, Lebanon, to which he was sent by the Friends Mission in Ramallah.
He translated for the Quakers, and was also Clerk of the Friends Meeting in Ramallah.
In 1887, he was “under teacher” at the Friends Boys School.

Ilyas married Emily Armuni, a Lebanese, who had been sent to Ramallah to teach
at the mission girls’ school there. She was listed as a “bible teacher” in a Quaker
report for 1891. She proved to be an able businesswoman as well, and bought land
for investment along with her sister Nabiha, who married Hanna Hishmeh from
Ramallah. This was the same Hanna Hishmeh who had settled in New York; he seems
to have been a fixer for many new immigrants from Ramallah. Nabiha later emigrated
to the United States.

Ilyas was able to draw on his brother Yusif’s wealth to invest in real estate, buying
land and building homes in Ramallah. He never emigrated to the United States, but
he sent his daughters there just before the First World War with his brother Yusif in
the company of a group of American Quakers being evacuated from Palestine by the
U.S. government.

The life trajectories of such people have rarely been studied or considered in works
on the social history of the Palestinian middle class. Based on life stories of a number
of such personalities, it is possible to argue that there were people who by their sheer
determination, hard work, and stubborn ambitiousness fashioned new futures for
themselves and the generations that came after them. They and their children, whether
they were emigrants to the United States, never left Palestine, or returned to live in
Ramallah after a period of life in the United States, did not have lofty intellectual or political aspirations. The life stories of these individuals show how life projects and trajectories of members of a new middle class were neither uniform nor were single-mindedly aimed at the kind of conscious modernity and cosmopolitanism that characterized the early pioneers of the urban middle class of this generation, people like Sakakini, Shehadeh, or Totah, among many others. Neither did they have much affinity with the contemporaneous class that Watenpaugh has identified in Eastern Mediterranean cities: a middle class defined by the way it asserted its modernity, by its declaration of the intent to be part of the production of knowledge and culture for society at large.74

**Emigration and the Constitution of a Middle Class**

Emigration, when it was not for the purpose of higher education by those who had received post-secondary education in Jerusalem or even Ramallah, tended to have a parochializing effect; it produced individuals who did not incline to public careers or the fashioning of modern personas in the Palestinian or American public spheres. But this effect was not uniform; at one extreme, it allowed the emergence of enterprising “Christian” entrepreneurs who performed identities as “Orientals” both abroad and at home, as we have seen. At the other extreme were the vast majority who became integrated into the American business world; their periodic visits to their hometown did not leave any durable modernizing traces, apart from the modern homes that they built.

Jacob Norris charts the effects of the emigration of merchants from small market towns in the hilly interior of Palestine after the middle of the nineteenth century; he shows that with time, these émigrés, who had amassed considerable capital, returned to their towns and villages as nouveaux riches, challenging the established urban elite.75 In the case of Bethlehem, merchants began to market Christian devotional objects abroad independently after the middle of the nineteenth century.76 They also began to travel to Europe and Latin and Central America in search for markets for their goods. Through this global circulation, they returned as shapers rather than mere recipients of new forms of bourgeois culture; as Norris puts it, “they were deeply enmeshed in the very process of bourgeois cultural production.”77

This pattern was unique to Bethlehem, however, and cannot be generalized to the rest of the market towns of the Palestinian highlands. First, the émigrés that Norris focuses upon were merchants, albeit of modest means at first, whereas the majority of the Ramallah émigrés were not merchants and not of great means. They were, at best, modest landowners with a rudimentary education but much ambition. Second, Bethlehem had been involved in commercial networks that could be exploited, networks that had already swept up many of the town’s merchants in international circuits in Europe and in Latin America. Third, emigration to Latin or Central America or Europe was different from emigration to the United States, which was the
destination of Ramallah men and later families. The first Ramallah emigrants were in the main working class peddlers in the American context, not merchants dealing with commodities that had the prospect of expansion with a lot of hard work. Sulayman Jacir or Nakhleh Kattan of Bethlehem might have been nouveaux riches in the eyes of the Jerusalem or Jaffa elite, but the early emigrants of Ramallah and al-Bireh (the latter studied by Abdul Jawad) were of another social and cultural order altogether. In the more modest and less pretentious Ramallah, there was no burning desire to outshine the urban landowning and mercantile class or to emerge as cultural trendsetters. This picture was to change somewhat in later decades, however.

The impact of emigration to the United States (often followed by periodic or frequent visits home or permanent return to Ramallah during the early period under examination here) has been considerable. Writing about Mount Lebanon, Akram Khater concludes that “without the history of emigrants [to the United States], we are left with a sorely incomplete narrative about the making of “modern” Lebanon.” Much in the same way, the trajectory of Ramallah’s journey from village to town was bound largely to the emigration of its sons and some daughters, beginning in the early years of the twentieth century and continuing for several decades.

Despite important similarities between Lebanese and Palestinian emigration to the United States, it is not clear that Ramallah’s returned emigrants assumed, like those of Mount Lebanon, that they were “the future.” In Ramallah, there was a difference between those who emigrated for the purpose of study and those (the vast majority) who went in search of bettering their own and their families’ material conditions. They were of simple means and simple aspirations. They helped one another in the United States, where most of them started out single lives as peddlers in rural and urban communities. The sheer stamina, hard work, and endurance of these early migrants paid off, and the lure of America became irresistible; before long there was a growing community of Ramallah families in the United States.

That emigration to America was a key contributor to the eventual emergence of a middle class in Ramallah is without doubt. Whether through investments in the town by actual returnees or through sending money to family members in Ramallah, the impact of emigration was palpable, and seems to have been well in place by 1905. During the First World War, many emigrants were trapped either in the United States or in Ramallah for the duration of the war, when no travel was possible. After the war, the pace of emigration accelerated. Among the early emigrants to the United States (before the First World War) who became well-to-do businessmen while keeping their ties to Ramallah were Aziz Shahin, Yusif Dirbas, the Zaru brothers (hoteliers), ‘Isa and Jamil al-Batih, Ibrahim ‘Isa Salim, and some members of the Harb family. The 1920s and 1930s ushered in a new era in Ramallah’s history. While this paper does not focus on this period, it will be useful to discuss, however briefly, some features of Ramallah during the Mandate in order to highlight transformations as well as continuities in middle class lives and livelihoods.

By the 1920s, emigrants’ remittances were instrumental in the expanding wealth of their families, and this was often translated into the building of modern stone houses,
the setting up of businesses, investment in the education of children and siblings in Ramallah, and the acquisition of property in the form of agricultural land and farms in the coastal areas near Jaffa, Bisan, Jericho, Tulkarm and in Ramallah area villages, as noted before, and investments in real estate in Jerusalem. One example is the remarkable journey of Ibrahim ‘Isa Salim (born around 1891) of Dar Ibrahim (one of the “fallahin” hama’il). It is a journey of hard work in the United States, including service in the U.S. army. It is also a tale of fierce determination to return to Ramallah so he could invest in land and real estate not only in Ramallah but also in Jaffa and Jerusalem.

On a purely physical level, the postwar period of 1920 to 1930 saw a veritable explosion of building in Ramallah, reflecting new lifestyles. A qualitative change in building styles – away from the typical peasant dwelling – was ushered in, a trend that continued for many years. More generally, residences built after the First World War in Ramallah were influenced by building styles popular in Jerusalem, particularly the sculptured arches and crowned columns. Notably, the building of new homes outside the old town core was implicated in the breakup of ahwash, the traditional residential units that housed families of the same hamula in close proximity. This material development must have had wider-reaching social consequences concerning lifestyles, redefinitions of the meaning of neighborhood and its social obligations, and the like.

By the early 1920s, several Ramallah men returned with medical and other professional degrees from the United States and the American University in Beirut. The most well-known are Salim Salama, Khalil Totah, Hanna Khalaf, Jiryis Mansur, Mughannam Mughannam, Fu’ad Shatara, and Salim and Nicola Shehadeh. Several of them took up posts in the British Mandate government and in institutions such as schools, as well as in the professions. These individuals’ aspirations went beyond improving their families’ material conditions. They aspired to live lives as professionals and public figures, but they were a distinct minority, and it is not clear that we can even count them among the emigrants, the majority of whom did not emigrate or travel for higher education. They were also a minority in another sense, in that their social universe was not restricted to Ramallah but rather extended beyond.

The reputation of Ramallah as a summer resort for urban Palestinians was on its way to being established by the early 1900s. The Bellevue Locanda was opened in Ramallah as early as 1902 by Ya‘qub and Shukri Hismeh, the father and son team engaged in the pilgrimage trade. In 1907, a European traveler described the hotel as having visitors from Jerusalem and Egypt in the summers. Khalil Totah, a Ramallah Quaker and later principal of the Friends schools in the town for many years, notes in his 1905 diaries that Ramallah was a summer resort with a respectable hotel and rooms for rent in the town. Totah mentions the special attraction of Ramallah to teachers, presumably from other Palestinian cities and towns, who spent the summer there doing “nothing profitable [in the] evenings [–] they are hilarious, playing games, chatting, and having a good time.” This was probably anathema to Ramallah’s prevailing peasant sensibilities, not to mention the ascetic culture of the Quaker missionaries.
to whom Totah’s and his family’s fate was attached. Ramallah as a site for summer holidays for the Jaffa elite and resident foreigners is also mentioned in Yusif al-Hakim’s memoir for the year 1910.87

Advertisements for the Bellevue Locanda in Ramallah in the newspaper Falastin beginning in the summer of 1911 (the paper began publication that year) and throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century are revealing of the sensibilities and concerns to which the hotel catered. A 1912 advertisement in Falastin promised the known health benefits of Ramallah air, as well as all sorts of sports facilities.88 What the hotel was introducing to Palestine at the dawn of the twentieth century was what was already known as mountain resorting (istiya‘), developed in the Lebanese mountains in the middle of the nineteenth century. This discourse of healthy mountain air was part of the idea of leisure as a legitimate pastime, available to those with means to indulge in it.

During the Mandate, Ramallah was offered the opportunity to become part of the summer resort industry in earnest through the enterprising spirit of some of its homeowners who began to rent out rooms and entire homes to visitors; Ramallah municipality records note a number of homes rented to summer visitors in the period after the 1920s. More sophisticated hotels were built later in the 1920s, once running water became available. Cooks, waiters, and a range of workers began to make their appearance.

Figure 3. An advertisement for Bellevue Hotel Ramallah, 1911, in Falastin, 15 July 1911.
But there was still a great deal to be learned by what some considered to be the unpolished citizens of Ramallah. An editorial in *Mir’at al-Sharq* in 1926\(^89\) laments the lack of realization among Ramallah homeowners of the need of summer vacationers for accommodations that came with basic furniture; it advises them to invest in simple amenities, especially since Ramallah had the potential to become the premier holiday resort in the region, due to the turbulence in Lebanon and Syria preventing travel to resorts there.

Although many think that Ramallah’s heyday as a center for tourism and leisure was during Jordanian rule in the 1960s – when the town became well-known as a summer resort catering to the Palestinian urban middle class, Palestinians in Jordan, and Arabs elsewhere, including the Gulf – Ramallah’s resort reputation was cemented much earlier, in the early 1920s. *Falastin* and other newspapers ran advertisements for dances and other events at Ramallah hotels throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Municipality revenue from leisure-related activities spiked sharply in the 1930s. Its reputation continued until the Nakba brought an end to the revelry.

Robust advertisements for “casinos,”\(^90\) dances, and musical performances appeared in the English-language *Palestine Post*, shortly after the paper began publishing in 1933. A few Jewish musicians, entertainers, and bands were also featured; one managed the Kit-Kat Casino at the Harb Palace Hotel.\(^91\) In 1938, at the height of the Arab revolt, the Grand Hotel under the ‘Audeh family’s management placed an advertisement in *Falastin* claiming that “peace and security prevail in Ramallah; all claims to the contrary are fabrications.”\(^92\) This was at a time when the revolt was inching closer to Ramallah, which had in fact witnessed a confrontation in the previous month. A month after the advertisement, battles with the British had moved into Ramallah itself, including the campus of the Friends Boys School.\(^93\) Rebel leaders led hundreds of fighters into the town. By mid-September, the courts, the post office, and telephone lines were shut down. Later in the month, al-Bireh was bombed. In fact, throughout 1938–39 the British launched a campaign of repression through executions (including of a Ramallah militant, George al-Sa‘, for whom a street is named today), arrests, bombings, curfews, restriction on travel, and other measures.

We may say that today’s “Ramallah bubble” or “Green Zone” phenomenon has an uncanny resemblance to the Ramallah bubble of the 1930s and 1940s of the past century, but with a crucial difference. Today, most members of the new middle class or aspirants to membership in it and who partake so exuberantly of this middle class ambience, especially in cafes, fitness centers, restaurants, and malls, live in the city itself. They have settled in Ramallah during waves of migration that continue to this day, and are claiming the city for themselves. In times past, however, Ramallah was the playground of others from another milieu, those from the coast and Jerusalem until 1948, and then from Jerusalem, Jordan, and the Arab world during Jordanian rule.

Despite this, it cannot be denied that there were some elements in Ramallah society who, beginning in the early 1920s, were meticulous devotees of all things “modern,” or to be more exact, European and Western. These people, like some members of the
‘Audeh hotelier family, or the owner-managers of the Harb Palace Hotel, no doubt had a “modernist agenda,” a life-mission of being and appearing modern. But this should not be taken to constitute a societal, political, or intellectual project. “Being modern,” whether that was operating or frequenting hotels or being a smart dresser, or a member of the Masons, or pursuing a teaching or civil service job, was not necessarily cast in the lofty discourse of public intellectuals or political activists. The influence of a handful of Lebanese women, who one can assume had some business savvy, is palpable. Zahiyya Mirhij, the Lebanese daughter-in-law of Yusif ‘Audeh (who had settled in Wales) and her husband Hanna, owners of the Ramallah Grand Hotel, catered receptions for visiting dignitaries at municipality expense. Later, her renowned daughter ‘Aida ‘Audeh continued in her mother’s footsteps. The daughters of Yusif’s brother Ilyas and his Lebanese wife Emily also became, in different ways, part of the “modern” scene in Ramallah in subsequent years.

It is quite likely that the Palestinian clients of the Lebanese mountain resorts in the 1930s and 1940s who Andrea Stanton writes about in an engaging essay were much the same group of people who frequented Ramallah’s resorts during the same summers. At a dance held for over two hundred guests at the Harb Palace Hotel in July 1933, the following are among the attendees: the wife of Hanna Salah, the Jaffa city engineer (originally from Ramallah); Hasan Shukri, mayor of Haifa; the lawyer Hasan Sidqi Dajani; the inspector of courts; and the mayor of Jerusalem. There is little evidence, with a few exceptions, that the families of Ramallah partook in any major way in the revelry in the hotels and casinos in the town, other than as landlords, bystanders, and service workers. The Jaffa newspaper Mir’at al-Sharq, whose publisher was from a Ramallah family, not only ran advertisements for Ramallah hotels but also featured promotional articles about summer resort facilities throughout the 1920s and 1930s. An event at the Harb Palace Hotel in 1929 was attended by five hundred people, including high-ranking British officials, foreign consuls, and families from Egypt.

The considerable scholarly literature on tourism and leisure at the turn of the twentieth century in Bilad al-Sham is almost entirely written with a focus on the lives and sensibilities of the bourgeois and aspiring middle classes who were clients of establishments such as hotels and summer resorts. We know very little about the lives of those who served those clients, the invisible and nameless villagers who rented their homes to the coastal bourgeoisie and serviced their needs.

Once the summer visitors left, Ramallah reverted to its dull parochial existence. The writer Raja Shehadeh, who grew up in Ramallah in the 1950s and 1960s but whose family, originally from Ramallah, had lived in Jaffa before 1948, relates his childhood memories:

Jaffa, I was told, was the bride of the sea, and Ramallah did not even have a sea. Jaffa was a pearl, a diamond-studded lantern arising from the water, and Ramallah was a drab, cold, backward village where nothing ever happened … Ramallah was not Jaffa. There was no sea; it was just
not the place. The place was over there, in the unreachable world of the imagination, the world that was evoked by the words of my elders as they yearned and described, reminisced, dreamed, and remembered.\(^\text{101}\)

Figure 4. Advertisement for “Grand Hotel Ramallah: Reduced Rates on the Occasion of the Current Situation,” August 1938, in Falastin, 4 August 1938.
In her autobiographical novel, Ramallah native Yasmin Zahran describes Jaffa summer visitors sometime in the mid-1940s thus:

Our village had become a summer resort overnight. The wealthy and Westernized [mutafarnija] class from the cities came to spend the summer. This demolished the boundaries of our village and our familiar world. The streets would fill with haughty women whose appearance aroused contradictory feelings; a feeling of superiority toward the city, but also a sense of inferiority in the face of their wealth and lifestyle and clothing and accents … the word urbanite [madani] carried with it [for us] scorn and contempt, just as the word peasant [fallah] meant to them brutishness and backwardness.102

The class dynamics are unmistakable, and are part of the untold history of Ramallah. These dynamics are fluid and change with time, and just as they manifested themselves in this form in the middle of the past century, so they are in full view today, in the opening decades of the twenty-first. The same applies to the fallahi-madani divide, an existential condition that may not have presented itself with as much urgency in the larger cities in Palestine. The transition from fallahi to madani in Ramallah in subsequent decades might seem to have occurred effortlessly, but it was not a linear journey or one without problems. The issue is relevant again today, when the majority of Ramallah’s residents have roots in villages in different parts of Palestine. The full story must be told, especially for the period after the 1950s, when the social universe of Ramallah was irrevocably transformed as a result of the Nakba and its aftermath.

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Endnotes

1 Some of these are works by Salim Tamari, Rochelle Davis, Issam Nassar, Sherene Seikaly, Jacob Norris, and Andrea Stanton.

2 Salim Tamari, “From Emma Bovary to Hasan al-Banna: Small Towns and Social Control,” in Salim Tamari, Mountain Against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture (University of California Press, 2009), 44.


5 Norris, “Return Migration,” 71.


7 Alexander Scholch, “European Penetration and the Economic Development in Palestine, 1856–82,” in Roger Owen, ed., Studies in the Economic and Social History of Palestine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Oxford: Oxford University, 1982), 21–23. There is voluminous literature, ranging from scholarly works to field reports written by explorers and various officials, including Zionist functionaries, on the social and economic consequences of the Ottoman reforms.


10 Musa bin Nasir, Tariikh Bir Zayt, unpublished manuscript, 1904, 37, online at (fada.birzeit.edu) bit.ly/3gsG2Ju (accessed 27 August 2020).


12 Several accounts of the intermediary role played by the church are found in local histories of Ramallah and the surrounding region. See Abu-Rayya, Ramallah Qadiman, 25–26; Yusif Qaddura, Tariikh Madinat Ramallah, 2nd ed. [A History of the City of Ramallah] (Amman: Rafidi Printers, 1999), 27, 32–33, 36–37; Fathi Ahmad, Tariikh al-Rif al-Filastini fi al-‘Ahd al-‘Uthmani: Mantiqat Bani Zayd Kanamuthaj [A History of the Palestinian Countryside in the Ottoman Era: the Bani Zayd Area as a Model] (Ramallah: Nasa Center, 1992), 168–69; Aziz Shahin, Jiryis Qaddura, and other local historians have noted good relations between the church and the authorities in Jerusalem. See Qaddura, Tariikh Madinat Ramallah, 37.

13 These petitions, dating from the middle of the nineteenth century and after, can be found in the archive of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem (AEPI), accessible through the Open Jerusalem Project, online at openjerusalem.org/database (accessed 12 July 2020).

14 Ahmad has given several examples of
shaykhs who had laid claim to land outside their purview: the Abu-Ghosh, Sahwayl, and Baraghitha had acquired land in many far-flung areas as part of their tax collecting benefits. See Ahmad, *Tarikh*, 52, 159–60.


16 Büssow, *Hamidian Palestine*.


18 Ahmad, *Tarikh*, 53.


20 Grant, *The People of Palestine*, 223.


22 Abu-Rayya, *Ramallah*, 21. Elihu Grant reported on village social groups (calling them “tribes”) in the opening years of the twentieth century, mentioning the Hadada-Hama’il division quite along the lines described by Abu-Rayya. See Grant, *The People of Palestine*, 51–52. It is not clear why one of the kinship groups (hama’il) was given the name Hama’il, since both the Hama’il and the Hadada were considered hama’il. The tosheh referred to in the traditional lore was a violent altercation involving many individuals, including women.


25 Ramallah Municipal Council decisions 109, 114, and 115 for the year 1914.

26 “Baba Hanna, A Remembrance in Words and Pictures,” Lil’ Hanoon Productions, 2004 (no longer available online; accessed in 2011). This is a memorial to Hanna Batih written in English by his “family and friends.”

27 Interview with the son of a prominent landowning family who later became a university professor.

28 There are some exceptions; some men from the Hama’il converted for reasons having to do with marriage to Protestant women.


30 Grant, *The People of Palestine*, 192, 199.

31 Grant, *The People of Palestine*, 214.


41 Tibawi, *British Interests*, 225. The Bishop Gobat School was taken over by the CMS in later years; see Tibawi, *British Interests*, 159–60.
46 Interview with the son of a prominent Greek Orthodox family of the Hama’il.
A local history of Ramallah mentions the purchase of land in Jaffa, Tulkarm, Bisan, and in east Jordan as well. See Qaddura, *Tarikh Madinat Ramallah*, 117.

Interview with Salim Salim, the son of Ibrahim Salim, 24 April 2011, in Ramallah.

The volume by al-Ju’beh and Bshara, *Ramallah*, traces these developments in great detail.

Al-Ju’beh and Bshara, *Ramallah*, 228.

For a description of the ahwash, see al-Ju’beh and Bshara, *Ramallah*, 20–22.


Ricks, *Turbulent Times*, 110–11.


*Falastin*, 5 June 1912.

*Mir’at al-Sharq*, 15 May 1926.

It does not appear that what were called “casinos” in this period engaged in gambling; their activities were described as mostly dancing and music.

*Palestine Post*, 7 June 1933.

*Falastin*, 4 August 1938.

Ricks, *Turbulent Times*, 231.

Ramallah municipal council minutes, decisions taken several times in 1927, 1932 and 1933. Al-Ju’ba and Bshara, *Ramallah*, provides an intimate history of the hotel and the family’s women, 190–203.

Two of them, Anisa and Najla, later worked in the Mandate government and had many escapades. See Audi, *From Ramallah*.


*Palestine Post*, 24 July 1933.

John Berger must have been told this when he visited Ramallah many years later: “Long ago, in another life, before the nakba, Ramallah was, for the well-off, a town of leisure and ease, a place to retreat to from nearby Jerusalem during the hot summers, a resort.” See John Berger, “A Moment in Ramallah,” *London Review of Books*, 25, no. 14 (24 July 2003): 21.

*Mir’at al-Sharq*, 2 July 1929.

The only exception is a sociological study of the mountain village of Brummana in Lebanon, exploring the village’s experience of *istiyaq* as it was developing into a major summer resort, and an essay about Bhamdoun. See Richard Alouche, *Évolution d’un centre de villégiature au Liban (Brummana)* (Dar El-Machreq éditeurs, 1970); Kamal Salibi, “Bhamdoun: Historical Portrait of a Lebanese Mountain Village,” (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1997).
