DERELICT STRUCTURES

The Ottoman Saraya: All That Did Not Remain

Khaldun Bshara

In Palestine, seventeen buildings were known as *saraya*, meaning castle, palace, or government building or headquarters.[1] Dhahir al-'Umar al-Zaydani, the Ottoman governor from the Galilee, along with his brothers and sons, built seven of these saraya in the second half of the eighteenth century.[2] The other ten headquarters were built by local rulers in Gaza, Acre, and Jaffa, or by the central Ottoman government between the early eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Radwan family built their saraya, known as Dar al-Sa'ada,[3] in Gaza to enforce their authority over southern Palestine, to deter attacks by Bedouin tribes on the city of Gaza and its port – Palestine's southern gateway to Mediterranean trade – and to guarantee safe passage for Christian pilgrims on their way to St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai. In Acre, Sulayman Pasha and his successor 'Abdallah Pasha ordered the construction of two headquarters.[4] In Jaffa, Muhammad Agha Abu al-Nabbut, Jaffa's governor assigned by Sulayman Pasha, built the old saraya of Jaffa.[5]

The remaining six saraya were constructed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century on the orders of Ottoman sultans, especially during the rule of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II, in order to assert the authority and power of the central government over its distant territories. The new saraya of Jaffa was most probably constructed between 1890 and 1897 to crown the list and cap a series of constructions or adaptations that reflected the centralization tendencies of the post-Tanzimat Ottoman state.[6] The Ottoman saraya served as focal points in conflicts and struggles, both during and after the Ottoman period.

Architecturally, the saraya not only

conveyed central power and status, but also served public functions. The saraya buildings usually consisted of two floors and a basement. The lower levels were used to incarcerate men and women, separately, and also included bathrooms, stables, and possibly military barracks. The upper levels usually housed government departments and a mosque for prayers. Entrances to the saraya are characterized with the decorative arches, inscriptions, and recessed doorways to allow for guards' seating (*maksala*).[7]

Spacious courtyards occupied the center of the saraya. These were used for gatherings and official celebrations of special occasions.[8] Colonnades (*riwaq*) are distinct elements of the saraya courtyards. These usually overlook the courtyards from the first floor and were mainly used as a covered space for circulation where status and symbolic power were manifested in the size and the level of decoration of the columns and columns' capitals. The stairs in the saraya would normally have a monumental, dramatic arrangement where two stair branches met at a single landing on the first floor, or met mid way, with the two branches combining and continuing up to reach the first floor level. Circular windows (*rozana*), simple and flat or decorated, are found in many sarayas, especially those with high vaults, constituting not only decorative elements but also providing fine screens of natural lighting.[9]

This essay builds on a re-reading of Shukri Arraf's book *al-Saraya*, published by Riwaq in 2016;[10] research in Matson Collection of the Library of Congress for the early photography that covered these buildings and their vicinities; and field visits to saraya buildings all over Palestine. It sheds light on "all that did not remain"[11] of the physical structures of regional government headquarters from the mid- and the late Ottoman era in Palestine, including the destroyed saraya of Bethlehem, Jaffa, and Haifa. It nevertheless acknowledges that the socio-cultural-political meanings and functions of the remaining saraya have been long lost. The remaining saraya are either abandoned or utilized for some purpose other than that for which they were originally conceived. This essay poses a methodological question about studying architecture that is missing from the landscape and talking about events that are missing from historical records, and suggests that indirect entry points, such as early photography, can be of great help.

The Bethlehem Saraya

The Bethlehem saraya was constructed in 1873 at the northwestern edge of present-day Manger Square. On 14 September 1938, during the Great Palestinian Revolt (1936–1939), Palestinian activists and revolutionaries burned down the saraya and the post office of Bethlehem (see figures 1–4). The British authorities demolished the building in 1942 to build a new police station on the same spot.[12] The new building was rectangular with a tower-like corner at the east-southern edge, similar to the Tegart forts of the British era (see figure 5). The police station remained until the late 1990s, when the Palestinian Authority decided to remove and replace the building with the Peace Center (see figure 6). The excavations for the foundations revealed the presence of early Bethlehem town ruins, which are partially present at the lower level of the Peace Center, which serves as a

Figure 1. Saraya Bethlehem plaza, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Figure 2. Saraya Bethlehem with military presence in the plaza, 1933, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Figure 3. Saraya Bethlehem, 1933, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Figure 4. Saraya Bethlehem, 1933, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Figure 5. Bethlehem police station and plaza after 1942, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

museum. The Bethlehem saraya, however, disappeared totally from the landscape of the town.

Early photographs and postcards of the Nativity area reveal the vibrant social life of the saraya and Manger Square in its vicinity. They show a grand building constructed with well-cut stone and consisting of a basement and two floors with a red roof. A low stone wall with an iron grill and a grand entrance led to a small garden with pine and cedar trees. Stairs occupied the left side of the façade and the main entrance to the ground floor occupied center space in the main façade

Figure 6. The 1999 Peace Center.

Figure 7. Saraya Bethlehem, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
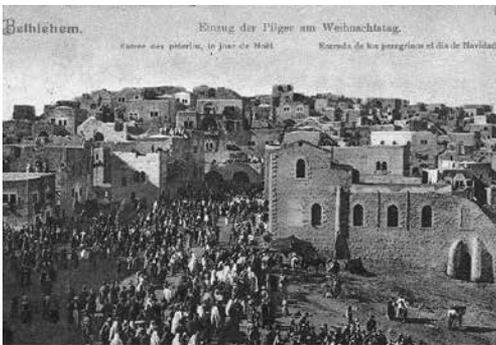

Figure 8. Saraya Bethlehem in an historic postcard. Author's collection.

Figure 9. Saraya Bethlehem and its plaza, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Figure 10. Saraya Bethlehem and its plaza, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Figure 11. Saraya Bethlehem and its plaza, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

(see figure 7). What also appears from early photography of the area is a market place that was enmeshed in social and cultural space. Pilgrims mingle with local inhabitants. Merchants spread their goods at Manger Square (see figure 8). Later, cars and buses parked in front of the saraya and people dressed in different styles wandered about the plaza (see figures 9–11).

The Haifa Saraya

Shaykh Dhahir al-'Umar seized control of Haifa in the second half of the eighteenth century, after a dispute with the chieftains of Mount Carmel. Dhahir's intervention in Haifa began during the reign of As'ad Pasha al-'Azm of Sidon. As'ad Pasha ordered Dhahir to take over Haifa as it lacked defensive means. Later, Dhahir obtained permission from the Ottoman sultan to fortify Haifa. The sultan granted him permission and provided him with cannons, which were situated in the tower, north of the current Haifa municipality location.[13]

Before Dhahir's interventions, the area in which the saraya was located in Haifa was known as al-Qishla neighborhood or Old Haifa. Dhahir secretly ordered his soldiers to demolish the old site of Haifa and to fill the harbor nearby with large stones. Located at the turn of the coastal road leading to al-Tira and al-Tantura, Dhahir believed that Old Haifa was exposed to enemies and that its harbor, located some distance from the enclosed gulf, was not suitable for ships disembarking. Therefore, in 1758, Dhahir ordered the construction of the new harbor. He chose a location about three kilometers from the previous harbor, where the width of the coast between the sea and Mount Carmel was about eight hundred meters. The new harbor was called *al-'amara al-jadida* (the new edifice) and was later known as New Haifa, stretching from al-Khamra Square west to the eastern gate (Acre Gate) near the King Faysal monument, east of al-Istiqlal Mosque. The use of the term *al-'amara al-jadida* in reference to the site continued until 1806.[14]

The construction of the new Haifa at this narrow passage enabled Dhahir to control the movement and therefore the area between Jaffa and his seat in Acre.[15] Dhahir fortified *al-'amara* with stone walls and three towers along the seaside. The walls of *al-'amara* formed a trapezoid, one side of which was about four hundred paces. The *'amara* area was about twenty dunams (twenty thousand square meters), its walls were seventy-five centimeters thick and four and a half meters tall, and its towers were equipped with cannons[61]. Dhahir also constructed a small fishing harbor. Nearby, he constructed a fortress that served as the customs headquarters, later known as "dar al-saraya." The saraya was used as administrative and political center.

The Haifa saraya was made up of two floors and a basement. While the basement floor was used as the town's prison, the upper floors were used as offices for employees who managed the town affairs and its various facilities such as customs, financial management, and the municipality. In front of the saraya, there was a relatively large plaza that stretched until the Jurayna Mosque (the Great Mosque of Haifa) and the clock tower, which was constructed later. The plaza was the center of life and events within the walled city, where

Haifa's inhabitants met and visitors from the surrounding villages gathered.[17]

During the Egyptian rule of Palestine (1831–1840), Ibrahim Pasha undertook renovation of dar al-saraya, and during the British Mandate era, the saraya was used as the administration center, until the British built another building opposite the current Haifa municipality building. The saraya was home to the city's governor, who headed the judicial council comprised of representatives of the city and the neighboring villages. The council held its sessions in the saraya.[18]

In 1949, Israel decided to implement a project called *Shikamona*, under which the Arab city ought to be demolished, with the exception of places of worship, to construct new buildings and to widen the road that connected the city's lower east side with its western neighborhoods. Shabtai Levy, Haifa's mayor at the time, decided to destroy the saraya and Abba Hushi, who went on to become mayor of the city, supervised the demolition.[19] A public park was constructed on parts of the saraya land before it was, in turn, destroyed to make room for the central post office building. In 2002, the mayor of Haifa and the Israeli government decided to establish the government and administration offices building known as the Sail Tower on the site where the saraya and the plaza associated with it once stood. Today, the street near the site still bears the name Saraya Street,[20] but the Haifa saraya has totally disappeared from the city space. With new roads and massive construction, the cultural landscape dramatically changed to conceal a past that was emblematic not only of the spatial body of the city, but also on the Palestinian body politic of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Old photographs of the area reveal a town turning into a cosmopolitan city that speaks to commerce in terms of mobility of goods and people, through the harbor or the nearby railway station. The most intriguing images of the saraya area are those of masses receiving the body of King Faysal of Iraq, who died in Europe, on its way back to Iraq on 14 September 1933. One of these images shows what is now the main road and the second-hand market plaza (*suq al-'utaq*) in front of the Grand (al-Jurayna) Mosque of Haifa, with its clock tower constructed in 1899 (see figure 12). In the upper right-hand corner of the image, behind the Grand Mosque, there is a massive rectangular building, where a contemporary bluish Haifa post office building (Sphinx) stands today (see figure 13); this is, according to Arraf's description, the Haifa saraya, the fortress where customs and city offices were once located. This suggests that the Grand Mosque and the plaza in front of it are still within or at the edge of the parameters of the new city space (*al-'amara al-jadida*). The Jurayna Mosque's eastern wall could be the wall described by Arraf as the one with towers equipped with cannons.[21] The wall was most probably incorporated within the structure of the mosque, constructed later. This theory is supported by the presence of huge tower-like buttresses supporting the eastern walls of the mosque. These buttresses are not structurally needed to support the vaults of the mosque and therefore could have predated the mosque and served defensive purposes (see figures 12 and 13).

From the same image of the funeral of King Faysal, one notices that Mount Carmel was empty of construction. Men dressed both in traditional and modern attire, wearing traditional head covers, turbans, tarbushes, or western hats; women were absent from the public space. The Jurayna Mosque used to have a simple short minaret alongside

the Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II Clock Tower of 1899. Electricity towers were present in the plaza – houses around the plaza were connected to the electric grid in 1933. Cars and a police convoy proceeded along the since-enlarged street. All the buildings apart from the Jurayna Mosque, most notably the four-story building with three-arch salon overlooking the Mediterranean, were leveled and replaced by the Sail Tower skyscraper in 2002 (see figure 14).

Figure 12. Saraya Haifa area receiving King Faysal's body, 1933, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

The Jaffa Saraya

The eighteenth century was a difficult one for Jaffa. By 1763, there were more than four hundred houses in Jaffa surrounded by a wall, but in 1775, 'Ali Bey's closest companion and most trusted general Muhammed Abu al-Dahab massacred many of Jaffa's inhabitants.[22] Again, upon Napoleon's invasion in 1799, the French army massacred at least six thousand soldiers and civilians.[23] The nineteenth century was kinder than its predecessor. Jaffa blossomed during the days of Ottoman governor Muhammad Agha Abu Nabbut (1807–1818), and during the Egyptian rule (1831–1840), when a number of suburbs were constructed. In 1892, after the opening of the Suez Canal, a railway line was extended between Jaffa and Jerusalem. In 1901, a clock tower was constructed to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II's reign over the Ottoman Empire. In 1909, the town of Tel Aviv was established to the north of Jaffa.

The British occupied Jaffa in 1917. During the British Mandate era, the city expanded and the number of its inhabitants rose from almost thirty-two thousand people in 1917 to almost one hundred

Figure 13. The Phoenix building, Haifa, 2016, Riwaq archive, courtesy Khaldun Bshara.

Figure 14. Sail Tower, Haifa, 2016, Riwaq archive, courtesy Khaldun Bshara.

Figure 15. Saraya Jaffa, April 2016, Riwaq archive, courtesy Khaldun Bshara.

Figure 17. Saraya Jaffa, April 2016, Riwaq archive, courtesy Khaldun Bshara.

Figure 16. Saraya Jaffa plaza, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Figure 18. The Jaffa saraya, 1925, photograph by Frank Scholten.

Figure 19. The Jaffa saraya, 1925, photograph by Frank Scholten.

thousand in 1948 (including about thirty thousand Jews). With the end of the Mandate and the withdrawal of the British, Jaffa fell to Zionist military forces and was occupied on 13 May 1948. Only 3,600 of its Arab population remained in the town and were relocated to the 'Ajami neighborhood, while Jewish immigrants were housed in the rest of the city. In 1950, Israel declared the annexation of Jaffa into the municipality of "Tel Aviv–Yafo."[24]

Two buildings in Jaffa are known as saraya. Abu Nabbut constructed the first building. The building functioned as headquarters for the Ottoman army and was later turned into

Figure 20. Jamal Pasha addresses the masses from the Jaffa saraya in the early twentieth century.

Figure 22. The 1933 demonstrations in Jaffa, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Figure 21. The 1933 demonstrations in Jaffa, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Figure 23. The 1933 demonstrations in Jaffa, from the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

a soap factory – the largest in Palestine – belonging to Hanna Dawud Damiani (see figure 15).[25] The building hosted the government departments offices in the early nineteenth century, and remained as such until the government departments were relocated to the new saraya at al-Qishla around Clock Tower Square (Saraya Square) (see figure 16).[26] The new saraya was constructed after the demolition of the city walls to allow for urban expansion. Constructed in neo-classical style, the saraya testifies to the European influences on Oriental architecture and was meant to showcase the modernization of the Ottoman Empire (see figure 17). The restored remains of the saraya façade reflect the excellence of building techniques and material including the majestic stairs leading to highly decorated front façade,

Figure 24. Saraya Jaffa, April 2016, Riwaq archive, courtesy Khaldun Bshara.

with four huge columns raised on massive rectangular bases and ending with classical (ionic) capitals carrying an architrave with four circular medallions matching pointed finales at the roof level (see figures 18 and 19). Composed of three floors, the saraya served as the seat of the Ottoman governor, and continued to serve as the courthouse during the British Mandate era.

The saraya and the plaza also witnessed the emergence of space as integral part to the public sphere, where mass political mobilization took place. Saraya Square, being central to the city and located close to the Grand Mosque, became a key location for political rallies and gatherings (see figure 20). The 27 October 1933 demonstrations against the British authorities were among the most celebrated political gatherings in Palestine (see figures 21–23).[27] The saraya also served as the headquarters of the Arab National Committee of Jaffa, before it was turned into the headquarters of the social services department of Jaffa, and remained as such until Sunday, 4 January 1948, when two Jewish paramilitary car bombs (attributed to the Lehi militia) rocked the city of Jaffa. The first targeted the saraya building and the second Barclays Bank, resulting in the death and injury of a large number of civilians.[28] Al-Qishla was used as a police station after the occupation of the city in 1948 and later the Tel Aviv–Jaffa municipality restored the façade of the saraya, but what remained after the bombing and the restoration does not convey any of the grandeur of the original building, nor of the life that surrounded it (see figure 24).[29]

All That Did Not Remain: Rewriting Narratives

Public architecture is almost always a representation of state power and usually conceals the contradictions behind its production – that is, efforts to control space, goods, and bodies.[30] The saraya localized central power in the form of built structures and walls and thus mirrored the governing regime. The state channeled its power to its subjects through pre-identified bureaus and bureaucrats.

Missing from the urban escapes of Bethlehem, Haifa, and Jaffa, the saraya edifices that disappeared gain particular significance and lend us insight into notions of power and resistance. They force us to look into other material and immaterial cultures to capture the history, politics, and social and economic life around such important edifices. For example, photographs that show heavy armor in the vicinity of Bethlehem saraya and barbed wire fences in front of the Jaffa saraya indicate that the saraya are sites of power and thus should convey the message not only through majestic architecture but also through machine guns and manpower. The way people, men and women, dressed "from head to toe" and moved in the spaces around the saraya convey a sense of significant ethnic, religious, or class diversity. The association of the saraya with a market place in Bethlehem, with the customs in Haifa, or with the main commercial plaza in Jaffa points to the coexistence of social, economical, and political spheres within the same space. This integration of spheres would be sacrificed during the British Mandate era as the colonial authorities distanced their headquarters from residential and commercial areas

while investing in street networks and transportation to overcome the distance.[31]

This modest contribution shows the possibility inherent in early photography to add to the debate about Palestine's past events missing from historical records and its material culture missing from the landscapes. Early photography offers a mosaic of socio-cultural-economic-political life around the saraya that cannot be overshadowed by the representations of power that these buildings aspired to achieve. And in a way, "all that did not remain" calls into existence rich debate about absence that is very much felt in the cityscapes. The "emptiness" calls for opening the possibility to see beyond the missing walls and vaults. What is this space? In what time is this space? What was before and what came after? Who was here before? What architecture can these ruins bring to life?

It is true that material culture is an important element, where memory can be located and collective practices embodied; yet the fourteen saraya that survived destruction – abandoned, left to decay, or adapted for new functions – are the concrete witness to asymmetries and representations of power, and to the deliberate erasure of particular subjects' potentialities and dreams about modernity, the public sphere, and new forms of architecture.

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Endnotes

1   Also known as *seray*, *sarai*, *seray*, or *saray*, the term *saray* is Turkish and comes from the Persian word *sarāy*, meaning palace. In Arabic, the term *sariyya* is the singular of *saraya* and refers to a military unit or brigade. Shukri Arraf, *al-Saraya: Government Headquarters in Palestine during the Ottoman Era* (Ramallah: Riwaq, 2016), iii.

2   Between 1750 and 1775, Dhahir adapted the castle of Acre into a *saraya*, and constructed the headquarters in Nazareth and Haifa. His brother Sa'd built the *saraya* of Dayr Hanna and its castle, and his son Salibi built the *saraya* of Tiberias. 'Ali, Zaydani's son, built the *saraya* of Safad, and another son, 'Uthman, built the *saraya* and castle at Shifa 'Amr (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 12–14).

3   The Radwan family built their saraya, known as Dar al-Sa'ada in 1710 (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 11).

4   Sulayman Pasha took the tower of the Acre castle as his saraya early nineteenth century, more particularly between the years 1804 and 1818, his reign over the seat of Acre (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 14). 'Abdallah Pasha, who reigned over Acre from 1818 to 1831, constructed several buildings, one of which was his saraya to the north of al-Majadla Mosque (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 14).

5   Ottoman governor Muhammad Agha Abu Nabbut (1807–1818) built Jaffa's old saraya in 1810 (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 14).

6   Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 17.

7   Arraf, *al-Saraya*, iii–v.

8   While some courtyards are small such as the courtyards in Jaffa old saraya and Tulkarm saraya, other courtyards are huge such as the saraya of Acre, Dayr Hannah, Shifa'Amr (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, iv).

9   Arraf, *al-Saraya*, iii–v.

10 Arraf, *al-Saraya*.

11 This is in reference to the encyclopedic work *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, ed. Walid Khalidi (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992). While *All That Remains* brings to life hundreds of depopulated Palestinian villages through extensive research about their socio-economic and cultural life, "all that did not remain" refers to – and seeks to make visible – not only architecture that has disappeared from urban space, but also the lost socio-economic and cultural life around the saraya still standing.

12 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 25.

13 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 45.

14 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 48–49.

15 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 49.
16 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 49.
17 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 53.
18 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 53.
19 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 53.
20 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 53.
21 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 49.
22 'Ali Bey al-Kabir (1728–8 May 1773) was the leader of Egypt. He rose to prominence in 1768, when he rebelled against his Ottoman superiors.
23 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 177.
24 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 177, 180.
25 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 180.
26 Al-Qishla was used as a police station after the occupation of the city in 1948. Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 181.
27 In 1933, the Palestinians decided to declare a general strike against the British Mandate government that had allowed large numbers of Jews to immigrate and settle in Palestine. The political elite of Palestine held a national conference to consider the matter in Jaffa on 26 March 1933. Between five hundred and six hundred delegates attended the conference from all Palestinian cities. The conference decided that the Mandate government in Palestine was the main enemy of the Arab people, and therefore ought to be boycotted. The Executive Committee called for a general strike throughout Palestinian cities on Friday, 3 October 1933, and called for weekly demonstrations in particular Palestinian city after Friday prayers to express their disapproval and discontent about the unjust policy pursued by the British authorities. The most dangerous of those demonstrations was the one in Jaffa after Friday prayers on 27 October 1933. Palestinians gathered from around the country to participate in this demonstration, which started at the Grand Mosque of Jaffa. The British Mandate authorities mobilized armed men and cavalry, and erected barbed wire fences in front of the saraya and the Grand Mosque to prevent the demonstration from taking place (Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 181–83).
28 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 182–89.
29 Arraf, *al-Saraya*, 191.
30 I am following the lead of Henri Lefebvre who argues that space signifies power and prohibitions and commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures. Lefebvre claims that it is important to see beyond space, because even in the most obvious architectural forms, such as monumental buildings, there are relations of production and power relations concealed behind the construction. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991[1974]), 138–140.
31 I refer especially to the construction of *al-muqata'at or al-'amara* – the British police headquarters – known as Tegart buildings (named after the British police advisor who envisioned their architecture) during the 1936–1939 Revolt. The British constructed these headquarters at some distance from urban and rural centers. The headquarters of Nablus, Jenin, Hebron, Ramallah, al-Dhahirriyya, al-Far'a, Dayr Qaddis, Rantis, Bani Zayd al-Gharbiyya, and al-Taybeh are good examples.