



# Historical

# FEATURES

## The Hijaz- Palestine Railway and the Development of Haifa

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Locomotives captured from the Ottomans lined up in the sidings at Haifa Station. *Source: The Hejaz Railway.*

Connecting the holy sites in the Hijaz to Istanbul via railway was a project that came to light during the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Abdel Hamid II. He sought to demonstrate his strength and power practically by applying the concept of a greater Islamic community to a series of projects within the Ottoman Empire. He thus announced the Hijaz railway project as facilitation for Muslim pilgrims travelling to the Hijaz.

Sultan Abdel Hamid II was well versed in the tools of propaganda and media available at that time. He exploited those tools to present this railway project as an important symbol in confronting Europe and its influence in the Middle East, a region that was still largely subordinate, directly or otherwise, to the authority of the Ottoman Empire.

Sultan Abdel Hamid II's need for a railway, like his prior need for telegraph lines, was that they would allow him to tighten his grip on distant Ottoman states far from the centre of his rule in Istanbul, and to send



The Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II was to be the driving force behind the building of the railway. Source: *The Hejaz Railway*.

military forces should a rebellion or revolution need quelling. Yet he also needed a railway to emphasize his role as the guardian of Islam, both as a religion and culture, through his concern for the movement of pilgrims to the Holy *Kaaba* in Mecca and all other holy sites of Islam located in the Hijaz.

Work commenced on the railway in September 1900 (the anniversary of the Sultan's ascension to the throne of the Ottoman Empire) between Damascus and Dar'a in the Levant's southern steppes. The project came to a close in September 1908 with the opening of the Medina train station. During this period, a secondary line was built between Dar'a in Syria and Haifa on the Mediterranean coast. This railway line was officially opened on 15 October 1905.

The Ottoman government viewed Haifa as the Hijaz railway's optimal access point to the sea due to the city's strategic location granting it advantages over other coastal cities. It was deemed preferable to Akko, whose status and role were in decline.

The decision to make Haifa the railway's outlet to the Mediterranean Sea required extending a secondary line from Dar'a in Syria to Haifa in Palestine for a total length of 161 kilometres. The extension of this line was not only meant to enable the delivery of the materials and equipment necessary to construct the Hijaz railway, but also to facilitate the transport of Muslim pilgrims via the Haifa Port to the Hijaz. In addition, the secondary line from Dar'a to Haifa formed a superior route for the transport of the crops and products of the Houran province in Syria to Europe via the Haifa Port. This province was rich in all varieties of grains. In addition, Palestinian exports to Europe, particularly citrus, were on the rise around this time.<sup>1</sup>

Transport through Haifa Port thus increased—the amount of goods imported and exported via the port multiplied. With the extension of the Hijaz railway to Haifa, the city was connected to Damascus and the regions of Houran and eastern Jordan, among others, turning it into a bona fide port city. The crops of these regions, particularly grains, were exported via Haifa while European and American goods and products needed by the regions were imported.

Prior to this development, exports and imports had been transported via the Beirut port and an extremely difficult mountain road connecting it to Syria. The Damascus-Dar'a-

Haifa, line, in contrast, mainly passed through level areas. Another advantage provided by the Haifa port was that it allowed the Ottoman government to fulfil its wish to rid itself of the French monopoly over the Beirut-Damascus line, which controlled commercial shipping and transport.<sup>2</sup>

A further contribution to the rising status of Haifa was the Turkish government's decision to build the administrative headquarters of the Hijaz railway in Haifa. Maintenance workshops for the trains were built close to the general administration buildings, most of which remain standing to this day.

The Hijaz railway project played a prominent role in the development of Haifa from several perspectives. The following is an outline of the most significant developments.

## **Population Increase**

The introduction of the railway contributed to driving internal migration (within Palestine and the neighbouring regions) to Haifa in search of work, which increased the city's population. Many historians and researchers who have studied the late Ottoman period believe that numerous factors played a role in the development and flourishing of Haifa; the railway's share among those factors was definitely significant.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth pointing out that the population increase in Haifa came not only at the hands of the labourers who arrived to work for the railway, but also those who came to work in other agencies in the city that had a direct or indirect relationship to the railway. The German deputy consul in Haifa, Keller, indicated in 1903 that the city was witnessing a large population increase as a result of the railway extension project. Various statistics have shown the population of Haifa in 1800 at approximately 1,000, in 1860 to have reached about 3,000, and by 1880 risen to approximately 6,000.<sup>4</sup> By 1905, the year the railway between Dar'a and Haifa was opened, Haifa's population had reached approximately 15,000. By 1914, its population had risen to 23,000.

During the period from 1903 to 1908, the railway project was considered the largest source of employment in Haifa.<sup>5</sup> Construction of the railway provided employment opportunities for hundreds of employees, labourers, and engineers who settled in the city and contributed to its population increase.<sup>6</sup> The records of the Islamic court in Haifa make reference to a Tawfiq bin Shaaban from the Siwas state employed by the Hijazi railway in Haifa; a Mahmoud Azmi, a clerk for the Hijazi railway from Istanbul, and a Hamza bin Ma'shuq Al Jerksi from al-Qanitra, employed also by the railway.<sup>7</sup> These are samples of immigrants from Turkey and Syria who travelled to Haifa to live and work. They generally worked as employees in the various administrative offices such as the railway department, the military department and the local police department. As for those who emigrated from Syrian cities, most were employed as instructors in Haifa's government schools.<sup>8</sup>

As for Haifa's population increase during the late Ottoman period, it rose by 1.76 percent among Muslims, a rate higher than the annual average increase for Muslim residents of Palestine, which was 0.5 percent. This increase was the result of immigration to Haifa and not a natural rise in the birth rate alone. As for Christian residents, their population rose between 1905 and 1909 by 3.3 percent, 1.5 percent of which was natural growth and the rest of which was the result of immigration to Haifa.<sup>9</sup> Between 1903 and 1912, i.e. beginning with the arrival of the railway to Haifa, the city's population grew by 6.6 percent.<sup>10</sup> In the first British census of 1922, Haifa's population was calculated at approximately 24,600. On the eve of WWI, in 1914, its population was approximately 20,000.

It is clear that the rapid increase in the city's population in comparison to the other three coastal Palestinian cities (Jaffa, Akko, and Gaza) was an indication of a bright future awaiting Haifa, most significantly on economic terms in which it made indisputable gain.<sup>11</sup>

## **The Development of Haifa Port**

The port in Haifa grew unsuitable for the transportation and commercial activities the railway imposed on it, and thus the Haifa municipality and other concerned authorities decided to construct a new one. The Ottoman Sultan charged the German architect Meissner Pasha<sup>12</sup> with planning the port and overseeing its works with the goal of transforming it into a port superior to that of Beirut, which was used by the French train company with exclusivity rights over the Damascus-Mizyrib line that competed with the Dar'a-Haifa line.

After considering the task, Meissner Pasha came to the conclusion that the general administration of the Hijaz railway would not be able to extend the line to Haifa and construct a port at the same time. All it could do, he determined, was to expand the extant port to aid the safe docking of ships. Thus a special dockyard was built near the end of the railway, costing approximately a million Turkish liras.<sup>13</sup> Haifa's old port, which had been built by the Austrian company Luweid, was still available for the use of steam ships in addition to the new dockyard built by the railway administration to the east to house ships and the offloading of freight. Travellers could disembark at this dockyard even during storms and strong winds because it was much more secure and safe than the old one.<sup>14</sup> A final Turkish attempt was made to construct a large port in Haifa in 1914, once again through the railway administration, but the breakout of WWI and the Turkish government's preoccupation with war efforts, ascription and fighting put an end to this aspiration.

Extension of the Dar'a-Haifa line required massive quantities of construction materials and equipment. Each kilometre of the railway on this line exceeded the general cost of each kilometre of the Damascus-Medina line, due to the difficulty of some of the regions it traversed on the way to Haifa. Some believe that the costs of extending the

line to Haifa exceeded that of other lines by more than 40 percent. And thus Haifa Port was a source of employment for the massive numbers of labourers who worked at unloading the shipments designated for the railway extension.

The materials that were unloaded at Haifa Port for the railway's construction included steel rails produced in Belgium weighing up to 16,000 tons annually, and stone coal that in 1906 weighed approximately 30,000 tons. Trains and carriages produced in various European countries were also unloaded at the port to be used on the railway.

All of these materials and goods related to the railway arrived via the Haifa Port, yet they were not restricted to use on the Dar'a-Haifa line. In actuality, materials and other necessities required to complete the line from Dar'a to Medina were also brought in through Haifa Port.

The port's facilities, including docking, unloading, storage, and shipment, provided numerous employment opportunities to Haifa's population and its new immigrants arriving from all over Palestine and neighbouring regions. Other employment indirectly connected to the port including providing foodstuffs and meals to the ships, as well as paper, ropes and other necessities. During that period in particular, Haifa was known as the "mother of work" due to its being the city most successful in supplying work for its residents.<sup>15</sup> The railway played a central role in redirecting commerce from Akko to Haifa, which led to an increase in Haifa's tariff revenues (and a decline in Akko's).<sup>16</sup>

At the beginning of the British mandate period in Palestine, the British strategic decision to construct a modern port in Haifa stemmed from purely colonialist considerations without addressing any local interests in Palestine. What the British government and its military leaders took into consideration was the presence of the railway at the port and the city's location, particularly its coast and dockyards.

The British government's decision to construct a port in Haifa was one of the primary motives for a large population influx as immigrants sought to make a living in Haifa's shops, factories and other various outlets.<sup>17</sup>

## **Economic Development**

The economic sector developed significantly following the extension of the railway between Dar'a and Haifa. In addition to the Turkish government's decision to make Haifa the general headquarters of its Hijaz railway, the railway itself and the port provided many employment opportunities. At the same time, merchants were able to benefit from these two important economic institutions due to the commercial activity they brought to the city and the successful building of a trade network with grain merchants in southern Syria's Houran province to export their crops via Haifa Port. Until the extension of the Dar'a-Haifa line, Akko had been the primary beneficiary



Pilgrims on the long train journey south would sometimes stop to pray by the side of the line. *Source: The Hejaz Railway.*

of Houran's crops, a large proportion of which had been exported via Akko Port and another percentage through Beirut Port, which was reached via the Beirut-Damascus-Mizyarib railway line.

This transformation, so beneficial to Haifa, took place in 1905 when the Dar'a-Haifa railway was opened. The transport of crops from Houran to Haifa was simplified by the railway services that delivered products to the port where they were packed and exported to determined destinations, particularly Europe. The Turkish authorities doubled the length of the Haifa port to enable it to absorb the large commercial ships arriving there. Yet the Turks did not complete their work—that was done by the English after they occupied Haifa and the rest of Palestine at the end of WWI.<sup>18</sup>

Various economic subsidiaries related to the port and railway, known as “complimentary services”, also flourished. These included, for example, construction and small commercial shops within the city such as groceries, cloth and furniture outlets, restaurants, small hotels, and the like.

Haifa welcomed thousands of Muslim pilgrims who arrived at the port and then travelled on the railway to Dar'a and then on to the holy sites in the Hijaz to perform their pilgrimage rites. They would stay in Haifa for only a few days, but the city's

commercial and service interests benefited greatly from their presence. In actuality, transit activity in Haifa played a significant role in activating the city's commercial flow, whether by those heading to the Hijaz or those returning from it.

The change in Haifa's economic performance left its mark on both the productive and consumptive behaviour of rural areas in inner Palestine. This can be traced back to the Hijaz railway, which played a prominent role in commercial transport between Europe and the Palestinian coast and then inner Palestine.<sup>19</sup>

The presence of the railway and port encouraged a number of investors to establish small factories (or workshops, to be more precise) for the local production of sweets, clothing, and wooden products. A series of agreements and official contracts were signed to supply the railway with many of the materials it needed. Nasrallah bin Salim al-Khoury was contracted to supply coal needed to run its steam trains.<sup>20</sup> In 1915, the Habayb family, which owned woods near Kafr Qar' village, won the largest bid for wood to supply the Hijaz railway.<sup>21</sup>

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Haifa was able to attract merchants from the Galilee and the areas of Nablus and Houran. One of the motivating factors for their move was the Dar'a-Haifa railway. It is indisputable that the development of the Turkish port and the extension of the railway to Haifa led to a transformation of traditional economic activity (dominated by the feudal system) to a modern economic model based on mutual export and import. The dominant traditional economic structure in Palestine was thus gradually, and sometimes rapidly, replaced with a more developed and progressive economic model.<sup>22</sup>

The report of al-Tamimi and Bajhat stated the following:

*In Haifa, there are 37 industrial buildings, including 10 grinders, 16 steam engines to draw water from wells, an ice plant, 7 wood factories, 4 olive oil factories and a cotton factory. The Germans established a grape juice plant and the Jews established a soap factory, but these two establishments have closed down recently.*<sup>23</sup>

Prior to extension of the railway to the city, Haifa Port had been a small facility for fishermen and a few small commercial ships. Its development was noticeable but slow in comparison to the other changes that took place in the city. When the railway extension was completed, the development of the port fell into line with the economic and social demands forced by the new status quo. Without the railway's demand for economic and service facilities, the port would not have otherwise provided these services.

The following chart was provided by al-Tamimi and Bahjat to illustrate the rising tariff income at the port:<sup>24</sup>

Haifa Port's income (in Turkish lira)	Year (Hijra, Islamic Year)
305,830	1310
547,000	1315
572,000	1320
4,300,000	1328
5,000,000	1329

When Turkish rule ended in Palestine and the rest of the Arab countries, the Arab Syrian government led by Emir Faisal bin Sherif Hussein immediately saw to the declaration of the importance of Haifa Port in supporting the Syrian economy and ensuring the flow of transport between all Syrian territory, and, in following, the development of Haifa itself. Al-‘Asima newspaper (the official newspaper of the Arab Syrian government) wrote the following in its issue number 47, year 1, Damascus: Monday 8 Dhu al-Qaeda 1337 H, 4 August 1919.

### *The new Haifa Port and future projects in Syria*

*Greater Palestine is in dire need of a good port. Currently it has none other than the three dilapidated ports of Jaffa, Akko and Haifa. Haifa Port was not well known in the past, but nature has made it the largest port for southern Syria and the lands of fertile wheat in eastern Jordan (al-Shari'a). They have recently finished extending a wide railway from Al Qantara to Haifa and a narrower one from Haifa to Damascus that connects to the Hijaz railway in Dar'a. The grand railway that will connect Egypt and Africa to all corners of Europe and Asia will not traverse Damascus but rather will pass through Haifa, northwest to Mt. Harmoun (Jebel al-Sheikh), and yet the line between Haifa and Damascus is superb for transport and much more so than the Beirut-Damascus line. The railway between Haifa and Damascus transports the wheat of Houran, an area that will be one of the greatest producers of wheat in the future. It is unlikely that the Damascus-Beirut line will compete with it, for the Beirut line is not strong enough to carry trains whose freight exceeds 40 tons, whereas the freight of one train alone on the Damascus-Haifa line weighs 300 tons.*

*In following, it appears that Haifa will be the centre for Palestine's railway and that political considerations may further increase its importance[...].*

*As for the new port, its construction must be contracted to a first-class company as Palestine is not striving to make losses. The future of Haifa, in terms of its competition with Beirut, hangs on the construction of a port of the most modern style that is fit for the docking of large steamships and with enough wharfs with storage space and the necessary equipment to transport goods and crops to and from steamships quickly and easily. The railway must be very near to the wharfs so that the same mistake that was made in Beirut will not be repeated [...].*

*As for Haifa, it is situated in a central location in territory stretching to Beirut in the north. A considerable quantity of goods were shipped prior to the war from Medina and Damascus via Haifa[...]. The number of tourists who passed through it was estimated at 40,000 annually, most of them Americans, Brits, and Germans. Prior to the war, it's most important exports were grain, carob bean, fruit and wool.<sup>25</sup>*

It is clear that this vision was based on facts the previous Turkish government had also noted, proven by its extension of the Hijazi railway to Haifa as an important sea outlet and the importance given to improving the state of the port. Yet WWI imposed new realities that decreed the future of the Arab government of Syria led by King Faisal bin Sherif Hussein. This government did not last for long; it and Faisal's monarchic rule of Syria were deposed of by the French in the battle of Mision in 1920.

The railway between Damascus and Dar'a and Dar'a and Haifa had been under the administration of this government, while the British and French armies deployed throughout the Fertile Crescent regions in accordance with the interests agreed upon by their two states. These interests included the division of the Ottoman Empire's territory as provided for in the Sykes-Picot agreement and then the resolutions of the San Rimo convention, which affirmed French mandate of Syria and Lebanon and British mandate of Palestine, eastern Jordan and Iraq.

## **Construction Development**

Haifa was the site of vigorous construction activity starting in the late nineteenth century. Many influences were the cause of this, most prominently the arrival of the German Templars who settled there and in other locations in Palestine, as well as the arrival of some European travellers to live and work in Haifa. The extension

and operation of the Dar'a-Haifa line played a primary role in invigorating the city's construction activity as an outcome of the immigration of labourers employed in the railway's various establishments. Investors from Lebanon, Syria and Palestine built factories and shops in the city, and it thus expanded to the north from the eastern station (the Hijaz railway station). This area was dotted with towering mansions, gardens, and commercial stores.<sup>26</sup>

The number of European consuls in the city increased, such as the deputy German consul and the Belgian, English and French consuls. The development of the city led to an increase in their numbers, and in turn an increase in the number of Europeans in the city. They constructed buildings for themselves and opened exchange banks and other services for themselves and local residents. Haifa also began to attract Jewish immigrants who, at first, settled in the Jewish quarter in the eastern section of the city near the Hijaz railway station. They later began to build and strengthen their economy.

Construction expansion initially took place over a rectangular area stretching from the eastern section of the city—i.e. from the train station west, or until Zeitoun street (now Allenby street) and the Zoura' area (Carmel station). Most residents of the western section of the city were Christians, since they had previously come from the church quarter in the western part of old walled Haifa (the city built by Dahir al-'Umr from 1761-1763 and walled from the Mediterranean in the north to al-Borj street in the south and from Jaffa street in the west to the Hamam al-Pasha area in the east). Most residents of the eastern section of the city were Muslims, as they had previously lived in the eastern quarter of the old walled city.

During the British mandate period, construction expansion moved towards the foothills across from the new port (i.e. the present port) that the English built in the early 1930s. New buildings cropped up south of the Carmel foothills and up to the mountain's peak, in a southwest direction.<sup>27</sup> European Christian missionary groups showed increasing interest in investing in Haifa through the construction of education, health and social institutions such as hospitals and schools.<sup>28</sup>

The municipality's income increased through the construction activity in the city and the fees and taxes imposed for building licenses and permits. This income began to rise after the Hijaz railway began to operate in Haifa and the number of immigrants to the city increased.<sup>29</sup>

The economic prosperity Haifa achieved due to the extension of the railway and development of the port enticed the immigration of merchants and owners of capital from Lebanon, Syria, and even Egypt and Europe. These wealthy immigrants left their mark through architectural style: "Grandiose homes with numerous rooms and consisting of two or three floors were built with polished stone and surrounded by gardens on the eastern and western slopes of Mt. Carmel."<sup>30</sup>

The development in construction also included internal road networks in Haifa.

The public works department undertook forging these roads in accordance with the city planning law (during the British Mandate period). It focused on constructing a remarkable road network within commercial centres at the heart of the city and around it, particularly following construction of the port. This facilitated traffic in its area and around the main train station (the new station on al-Muluk street west of the new commercial area in Haifa).<sup>31</sup>

## **Development of Tourism**

A noticeable improvement in the tourism sector took place as Haifa enjoyed the introduction of two important economic establishments in the late Ottoman period—the railway and the port. The movement of tourists to the Holy Land increased, particularly coming from Europe, and Muslim pilgrims visited Haifa after their arrival by train on their way to the holy sites of the Hijaz. The British travel agency Thomas Cook and Sons, opened offices in Haifa and other large Palestinian cities and advertised a program that included train travel from Haifa to Samekh and a trip around Lake Tiberias, taking in the Christian holy sites in Tiberias and Kafr Nahom, and then continuing on to Damascus.<sup>32</sup> The trips and tours of this agency enjoyed great demand among European tourists who found them to meet both their travel and entertainment needs.

It is indisputable that European tourists who travelled to Palestine via Haifa Port benefited from the various services provided by the city. The city thus flourished commercially, including the hotel and other services provided to meet the needs of tourists. Naturally this required a steady increase in the construction of hotels, residences, restaurants, nightclubs, markets, theatres, cinemas, amusements, parks and other facilities for tourism and recreation. Some Haifa families rented rooms to tourists and visitors, bringing in extra income to support family economies.

## **Improvement of the Administrative Agency**

The administrative agencies of Haifa absorbed increasing numbers of employees in the period following the commencement of the Hijaz railway extension and until WWI. The railway project and later the port development project necessitated a continual increase in the size of government staff in order to deal with the official transactions related to those two projects and their offshoot agencies, commercial stores, and health, postal, sewage and industrial services.

*The increasing number of employees following the establishment of the Beirut state resulted in new institutions in the Haifa district such as the transportation committee and the cultural affairs committee ...etc. The number of employees in the municipality also increased as a result of*

*new posts such as that of doctor, inspector and engineer...etc. As for the other leap in the number of those employed in the administrations, it took place in 1905, when the trains began to run in Haifa. The number of employees in the city's administration totalled 75, thus a 25 percent increase (not including the railway workers). This employment rise was a result of the population's increasing use of the local administration's services and an effort to improve those services.*<sup>33</sup>

Yet Haifa was not able to meet the employment needs of the administrative agency with its own residents due to the population's lack of experience and the urgency with which employees were required to run administrative affairs. The government thus brought in administrative employees to fill this need. The acting German consul Keller noted early on in a report of his (from 1903) that employment in the railway was attracting new elements to the city, not only from Palestine but also from surrounding countries.<sup>34</sup>

## **Further Development during the British Mandate Period**

On the eve of WWI and during the war, Haifa took on a prominent position in British strategic military planning. The general chief of staff of the British armed forces viewed the British army's control of Haifa as guaranteeing the connection of Palestine to Egypt via extension of the railway from al-Qantara (in Egypt) to Haifa, and of Palestine to eastern Jordan and the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq via the Hijaz railway.

These British ambitions were materialized in the 1916 Sykes-Pico agreement between the British and French governments. This agreement clearly reflected the British insistence on making Haifa among the areas under British colonial rule in the Middle Eastern region for the protection of the Suez Canal and the oil wells in the Gulf area and India, the largest British colony.

The significance of Haifa's location in British strategic planning stemmed from the opportunity it afforded Britain to control Haifa, Akko, Marj ibn Amer, and the Carmel mountain chain. This patch of land formed a barrier protecting against French ambitions in Palestine, which would threaten British interests in the immediate area and neighbouring regions.

In actuality, Haifa did not have great importance in the military operations of the final year of WWI due to its old port being unsuitable for the docking of ships. The British leadership thus halted sending forces to the city and the troops of General Allenby turned to Damascus via the Wadi 'Ara road and Tiberias. Haifa fell on 23 September 1918 following a simple military operation and one week later was followed by Damascus.<sup>35</sup>

Directly following the end of WWI, Haifa resumed its place of priority in the British strategic vision, and all of the top-ranking British leaders in the Middle East were based in Haifa. The Egyptian platoon was transferred to it in October 1918, which allowed the English to control the entire regions of Syria, Palestine, and eastern Jordan. Haifa's importance increased unexpectedly following the extension of the railway south. The English extended a railway from Egypt of 145.5 cm, the international standard, and trains arrived to Lod from al-Qantara in Egypt and then continued to Qalqilia, Qanun, al-Khdeira, and Atlit. On 23 December 1918, this line reached Haifa.

Connecting Haifa to the coastal railway resulted in directly connecting it to Egypt, as well as Damascus via the Hijaz railway, Jerusalem via the line between Jaffa and Jerusalem, and Aleppo and Istanbul via the Hijaz railway. Thus Haifa became a railway crossroads of utmost importance in the Middle East, and the mandate government made it its administrative headquarters for the railway.<sup>36</sup>

Haifa underwent many developments in terms of demography, society and the economy. Researcher Mai Seikaly believes that Haifa is a prime model for studying the kinds of transformations that took place among its Arab populace.

*It had all the characteristics specific to other major cities while no other had all the advantages of Haifa. Like Jerusalem, Haifa became a centre for administrative activity and employees, particularly for the railway and port. It also became an industrial centre, like Tel Aviv. Moreover, it became a commercial centre, just like all the other Palestinian cities.*<sup>37</sup>

During the British mandate period, the railway sector was considered one of the major employers, with approximately 7,500 workers and employees.

The mandate government placed three major projects on its ladder of priorities for the development of Haifa—development of the railway system, port, and oil refinery plants. These projects played a central role in the economic flourishing of the city and everything related to it, including construction, British Mandate administration, municipality services, increasing land area allowed for construction, forging roads, and building institutions, restaurants, cafés and the like.

Haifa became a powerful draw for hundreds of Arab, European, and Jewish investors. The Jewish Agency and Jewish immigration institutions concentrated their efforts on encouraging Jewish immigration to Haifa with the goal of benefiting from the city's economic, industrial, commercial and transportation infrastructure. The Palestine railway provided a direct connection with Egypt and the Hijaz railway provided a connection to Syria and eastern Jordan. The railway was considered the backbone of Palestinian transportation on which the British mandate government depended,

particularly in the 1930s and 40s and especially during WWII. The railway offered extremely important services to the British war efforts in the Middle East.

Construction of the new Haifa Port that opened in 1932 and the construction of oil refinery plants near Haifa were the most prominent markers of the city's development, including its increase in population and services and a greater need of the railway in order to transport travellers, workers, and goods. The Dar'a-Haifa railway played a considerable role in these developments and the transformation of Haifa's economic, demographic, and social circumstances.<sup>38</sup>

Haifa's strategic status further rose after an oil pipeline was extended in 1934 from Kirkuk in Iraq to Haifa Bay where the refineries were located. The Hijaz railway transported pipes and other equipment necessary for construction of the oil pipeline.

The presence of railways leading in all directions, a modern port, and oil refinery plants all in one city led the British military administration to send its battleships to Haifa Port to be fuelled as well as to meet all their other needs. Yet the British planners did not extend the railway from Haifa to Iraq because there was no need to following the speedy expansion of good and easy road networks between Palestine and eastern Jordan all the way to Iraq. The rising number of cars and trucks decreased the need for trains in this area.<sup>39</sup>

Haifa's economic facilities, in particular the railway and port, increased the amount of commercial transaction taking place in both directions—export and import. “Haifa surpassed Jaffa as a primary port, particularly after it established for itself the secondary role of being a regional centre for transit commerce” (i.e. transportation of commerce from outside Palestine to inner Syria and Iraq).<sup>40</sup>

Haifa eventually stopped concentrating on Houran grains for its regional imports due to a decline in their quality and variety, and began in the 1930s to focus on the supply of citrus following a general strike in Palestine during 1936 and 1937. Citrus was sent to Haifa Port rather than Jaffa Port, whose workers joined the strike concomitantly, thus creating an obstacle to the export of citrus.

The English realized the shortcomings of the Hijaz railway, particularly its narrow breadth (105 cm) and inability to transport large quantities of goods. They did not, therefore, develop it by purchasing new trains and carriages for example. The role of this railway was limited to transporting material and equipment for the electricity generation plant in al-Baqura (Naharim) on the Jordan River after Benhas Rotenberg won exclusivity rights to produce electric energy. This railway also transported pipes for the oil pipeline extension from Iraq to Haifa. As for travellers, they were few on this line, and over time travellers on their way to Damascus decreased despite the railway administration continuing to run trains from Haifa to Dar'a and then Damascus.

To organize the railway workers, a union for railway, telephone and telegraph workers was established. The General Union for Hebrew Workers (Histadut) attempted to penetrate this workers union<sup>41</sup> and thus many of them dropped out and joined the Palestinian Arab Workers Association, which was led in the 1940s by Sami Taha. This association provided free services for its members and gained considerable status in the arena of political activity, to the degree that it began to form a challenge to the Supreme Islamic Council in Jerusalem, which was under the influence of its president, Mufti Haj Amin Husseini. Sami Taha was assassinated in September 1947 as a result of this challenge and contestation.<sup>42</sup>

In 1946, the Palestine railway workers union declared a strike after the general administration ignored its demands for improved wages and work conditions and increased legal rights. The strike included trains and maintenance workshops and halted the movement of trains for four consecutive days. The railway general director had no other choice than to contact the Palestinian Arab Workers Association for negotiations. A delegation headed by the association's secretary general Sami Taha and including members of the railway workers union administration board met him, and after a long and difficult discussion the general administration agreed to all of the syndicate's demands, including raising wages and providing health insurance and worker's compensation.<sup>43</sup> The wage increase agreed upon was to equal the permanent wage increase of Jewish workers, a victory the Histadut had worked hard for. The wages of Jewish workers had surpassed that of Arabs by a third to a full double.<sup>44</sup>

Histadut and other Zionist institutions attempted to wrest away work from the hands of Arabs and pass it over to Jews, including in the railway sector. Zionist pressure succeeded in forcing the mandate administration to gradually reduce the number of Egyptian workers on the railway and partly replace them with Jewish workers.<sup>45</sup> This resulted in a shortage of work opportunities for Arabs in Haifa who began to face waves of unemployment due to the Jewish control of capital in pivotal economic projects in the city starting in the late 1930s, and increasingly so in the 1940s. The mayor of Haifa, Shabti Levy, contributed to the entrenchment of Jewish domination of the economy and administration of Haifa's affairs. Levy became mayor in 1940 following the death of Hassan Shukry, who had been the mayor during WWII. He assumed office without the holding of elections because of the state of emergency imposed on the city, and because Jews had succeeded in imposing their control over most of the administrative departments and offices in the municipality and government institutions.

There is no doubt that the continually deepening differences between wages and benefits for Arab as opposed to Jewish workers in Haifa contributed to an increased Arab-national political awareness of the need for the organization of workers and confrontation with the Histadut movement. The Histadut strove to appear as though it was playing a neutral role in easing the animosity between Arabs and Jews, as it indeed appeared at first glance. But it later became clear that Histadut was working to silence the anger of Arab workers by concluding a truce, the appearance of

friendliness and rallying together, while actually realizing accomplishments for its Jewish members.

Naturally, these economic differences had social and political ramifications, and created increased distance between Arabs and Jews. Further adding to this were the segregated living quarters and lifestyles of the two societies, for the Arabs and the Jews lived in their own separate areas. Each national group was intent on providing all of the services it needed, in addition to private institutions offering most education and health services. The two groups never met except for economic concerns, commerce, and some cases related to municipality services and other official services provided by government departments and offices.

## Conclusion

The Hijaz railway and Palestine railway (during the British mandate period) played a pioneering role in providing the elements required for the development of Haifa from a small town to a large city, enjoying all the advantages of an increased population and in turn, increased services.

The rapid transformation Haifa underwent affected its economy and that of the villages surrounding it. These area villages provided a labour force for the various sectors related to the railway and port, and also provided the city with various foodstuffs. Haifa thus developed into a central city of northern Palestine, whose prominent status and future development enabled it to attract significant political, social, and cultural activity, all of which deserve future research.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Approximately half a million crates of citrus were exported annually between 1903 and 1911. See, Benyamin Yaffee. *Diyokana shel Eretz Yisrael*. [Portrait of the Land of Israel] (Tel Aviv: Dafir/Karta, 1983) 152. (In Hebrew)

<sup>2</sup> Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh. *Our Land, Palestine*, Vol. 7, edition copied from the original of 1964, 532. (in Arabic).

<sup>3</sup> On the development of Haifa and the contribution of the railway see, e.g., Alex Karmel. *The History of Haifa in the Age of the Turks* (Jerusalem: Yad Ishaq ben Tsvi, 1977) 149, 150. (In Hebrew; there is an Arabic translation). Zuheir Ghanayem, *The Akko Brigade in the Age of the Ottoman Tanzimat, 1864-1918*. (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1999) 235. (in Arabic)

<sup>4</sup> See the chart provided by Adel Manna' in his book, *The History of Palestine in the late Ottoman*

*Period, 1700-1918 (A New Reading)*. (Beirut: The Institute of Palestine Studies, 1999) 209. (in Arabic)

<sup>5</sup> Karmel, 156.

<sup>6</sup> Ghanayem, 235. Citation from the records of the Haifa Islamic court, sh.141, s.9, S.88, n.811, 23 Dhu al-Qaeda 1332 H./13 October 1914.

<sup>7</sup> Ghanayem, 235. Citation from the records of the Haifa Islamic court, sh.141, s.6, S.66, n.217, 7 Rabi' al-Thani 1327 H./28 April 1909.

<sup>8</sup> Mahmoud Yuzbek. *Administrative Systems and Social Structures in Haifa in the Late Ottoman Period (1870-1914)* (Nazareth: Da'irat al-Thaqafa, 1994) 226. (in Arabic)

<sup>9</sup> Yuzbek, 15. Yuzbek believes that the Jews did not leave the city, as is indicated by the salanameh between 1906 and 1909 during which their numbers decreased. Haifa attracted many

Jewish immigrants due to its many employment opportunities, particularly those connected to the railway. The railway remained the primary draw for a population increase in Haifa until the beginning of WWI, 162.

<sup>10</sup> Yuzbek, 177.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Kark. "The Rise and Decline of Coastal Towns in Palestine", in G. Gilbar (ed.). *Ottoman Palestine, 1800-1914* (Leiden: Brill, 1990) 72-3.

<sup>12</sup>The German-born Heinrich August Meissner lived from 1863-1940. He studied Turkish and engineering at Dresden University in Germany and lived in the Ottoman Empire for nearly 50 years. He participated in the extension of dozens of railways in different areas of the Ottoman Empire, as well as the planning and construction of buildings and industrial installations related to those railways. In appreciation of his efforts, the Ottoman Sultan bestowed him the title of Pasha. For more on his role in the railways see: Walter Pinhas Pick. "Meissner Pasha and the construction of railways in Palestine and neighboring countries", in G. Gilbar (ed.). *Ottoman Palestine, 1800-1914* (Leiden: Brill, 1990) 179-218.

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Rafiq al-Tamimi and Muhammad Bahjat, *Beirut State*, southern section, part one, third edition, published by Dar Lahad Khatir, Beirut, 1987. 232. (in Arabic)

<sup>14</sup> Karmel, 154.

<sup>15</sup> Karmel, 157. Mai Seikaly. *Arab Haifa, 1918-1939. Social and Economic Development* (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1997) 38. (in Arabic)

<sup>16</sup> Akko's revenue dropped. It was 747,000 piasters in 1323 H., then 583,000 piasters in 1324 H., and a year later dropped to 459,000 piasters. From 1328-1329 H., it did not exceed 100,000 piasters. See Muhammad Rafiq Al Tamimi and Muhammad Bahjat, *Beirut State*, southern section, part one. pp. 232-233. (in Arabic)

<sup>17</sup> Gideon Bieger. "The strategic view of Haifa in the eyes of the British administration" in *Haifa and its Development, 1918-1948*, Mordechai Na'ur and Youssi ben Artsi (eds) (Jerusalem: Yad Ishaq ben Tsvi, 1989) 66. (in Hebrew)

<sup>18</sup> Benyamin Yaffee, 144.

<sup>19</sup> Kark, 77.

<sup>20</sup> Ghanayem. 236. Citation from the records of the Haifa Islamic court, sh. 1, s.1, S.123, n.188, 4 Rabi' al-Awal 1335 H./29 December 1916.

<sup>21</sup> Yuzbek, 282. Citation from the records of the Haifa Islamic court, 1334 H./1915. pg. 19, number 19.

<sup>22</sup> Kark, 80.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Tamimi, 233.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Citation from *The Hashemite Documents: The Hijaz Railway*. Muhammad Adnan al-Bakhit et al (eds) (Amman: Aal Al Beit University, 1996) vol. 8, section 2, 56-58.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Tamimi and Bahjat, 233.

<sup>27</sup> For more on building expansion during this period see: Seikaly, 38. Al-Dabbagh, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Menna', 220.

<sup>29</sup> Yuzbek, 127.

<sup>30</sup> Yuzbek, 295-296.

<sup>31</sup> Seikaly, 89.

<sup>32</sup> Illan Balkof. *Railroads in Palestine, The Past, Present and Future*. (Haifa: Israeli Railroad Company, 1982) 26. (in Hebrew)

<sup>33</sup> Yuzbek, 78.

<sup>34</sup> Seikaly, 34.

<sup>35</sup> Bieger, 62. He notes that there was a great deal of information on the strategic importance of Haifa in the military reports of British intelligence and that this information was provided in several confidential military reports for the sole use of English officers. This information included the number of homes, schools, hospitals, quarters, shops, churches, mosques and so on, in order to provide a complete picture of Haifa in preparation for its occupation and control.

<sup>36</sup> Bieger, 64.

<sup>37</sup> Seikaly, 17.

<sup>38</sup> Seikaly, 97.

<sup>39</sup> Bieger, 60.

<sup>40</sup> Seikaly, 128.

<sup>41</sup> Read more on the Arab Palestinian workers movement in Haifa, particularly attempts by Histadut to penetrate it in Ahmed Hussein al-Yamani, *The Arab Palestinian Workers Association in Haifa*. First edition (Damascus: Dar Kanaan, 1993) pg. 75. (In Arabic)

<sup>42</sup> Al-Yamani, Sami Taha's assistant and one of the activists of this organization, analyzes the assassination of Sami Taha in *Ibid.*, 186-188.

<sup>43</sup> For details on this strike see Al-Yamani, 180-182.

<sup>44</sup> Seikaly, 173.

<sup>45</sup> Seikaly, 171.