



Dr. Rachel Hart

University of Haifa

Scholarship Recipient in 2003

Dubnow Institute, Leipzig

Email: hart_at_013.net

Recent Publications:

Agudot. REEH European Journal of Hebrew Studies.14.2009.

Terres. REEH European Journal of Hebrew Studies.14.2009.

The Relation of the Jewish Community to the Arab

Community in Jaffa and Tel Aviv, 1881-1930

The dissertation is concerned with the Jewish community's socioeconomic, cultural and political attitudes towards the Arab community in Jaffa and Tel Aviv between 1881 and 1930. It focuses on the Jewish community (Yishuv) as the main topic, with the Arab

community as a secondary topic. One of the reasons for this emphasis is the unfortunate destruction of the Jaffa Municipality archives by fire and the loss of additional archival materials during the Jewish occupation of Jaffa in April 1948. This focus is predominantly shared by the available literature on the history of the Jewish settlement in Palestine.

The period between 1881 and 1930 was a significant one in the history of the Jewish community in Jaffa, and in the relationship between it and the Arab community in Jaffa and Tel Aviv. The dissertation breaks this period into four sub-periods:

1881-1905: In the history of the Yishuv this is the First Immigration Period (Aliyah Rishona), signifying the very beginning of Zionist settlement in Palestine under the Ottoman rule.

1906-1914: In the history of the Yishuv this is the Second Immigration Period (Aliyah Shniya) (1904-1914), beginning with the establishment of the Jewish neighborhood Ahuzat Bayit and ending with the outbreak of World War I that would spell the end of Ottoman rule in Palestine.

1915-1923: In the history of the Yishuv this is the Third Immigration Period (Aliyah Shlishit) of 1919-1923. This period covers the First World War (1914-1918) and ends after the Arab Riots of 1921. It marks the beginning of Tel-Aviv's accelerated development on the one hand, and the process of its breakup with Jaffa on the other. Politically speaking, it marks the beginning of British rule in Palestine.

1924-1930: In the history of the Yishuv, this is the Fourth Immigration Period (Aliyah Revi'it). This period ends after Arab Riots of 1929, which led to the almost complete disconnection of Tel Aviv from Jaffa. Politically, it this is the period of the British Mandate of Palestine. Jews were living in Jaffa already at the first half of the 19th century. In

1888 and 1890, the two first formally Jewish neighborhoods were founded: Neve Zedeq and Neve Shalom, providing a new demographic dimension to the Jewish community in Jaffa. Many of these neighborhoods' residents were Ottoman subjects, members of the old Jewish community in Palestine. They mingled with the local Arabs, spoke their language and adopted some of their customs, including clothing. With the advent of the First Immigration Period, Jewish merchants from Turkey and North Africa joined the growing community. Their social and commercial relations with their Arab neighbors were correct, and they even cooperated in their effort to protect their economic rights in their dealings with the Ottoman authorities. The Arabs in Palestine played an important role in the assimilation of the new Jewish immigrants – albeit unintentionally – by building houses and stores occupied by the latter. Given these facts, it would be perfectly justified to call this period the Golden Age of Jewish-Arab coexistence in Palestine, despite early signs of economic competition between the communities.

Signs of Arab opposition to the Zionist aspiration of creating a Jewish Homeland in Palestine based on historical and religious attachments could already be identified in the 1880's. They claimed that Palestine was sacred Islamic territory, and that Muslims have exclusive rights thereto. Indeed, the struggle over Palestine grew more severe following the Young Turk Revolution in 1908.

The Jewish immigrations to Palestine introduced new social groups and ideological attitudes seeking to change the status quo. The mostly European immigrants wanted to run their lives according to Western habits and ideas. Some of them were nationals of

European powers, with special privileges protected by these countries' representatives in

Palestine, and were thus relatively independent of the local Ottoman bureaucracy. Quite a few immigrants also had considerable assets or sourced of income abroad, and therefore did not really need to maintain frequent contacts with the local Arabs.

Nevertheless, the Second Immigration Period caused a housing shortage among the Jewish residents of Jaffa. The high rents and poor sanitary conditions also made life difficult for the new immigrants. In order to find a solution for this problem, an assembly of Jews was convened on July 5, 1906 in the Yeshurun Club, at the behest of Akiva Arye Weiss, whereupon it was decided to found the Homebuilders in Jaffa Association – later renamed Ahuzat Bayit (literally, "Home Estate") – with the objective of building a modern Jewish residential quarter near Jaffa that would be independent of the Arab town. This new neighborhood would later become the future Tel Aviv.

During the first immigration periods, Jews maintained daily contacts with Arabs. Arab workers were employed by Jews, and Jews shopped in Arab stores and lived as tenants in Arab homes. Sometimes it seemed that the two communities manage to coexist despite profound religious, political, cultural and socioeconomic differences. In time, these differences deepened the rift between the communities, substituting suspicion and hatred for peaceful coexistence. This process was not helped by the alienated attitude of the Ottoman regime towards the local population, and matters came to a head in the bloody riots in Jaffa in the Purim Holiday of 1908, following the Young Turk Revolution. These riots increased the local threat against the Jewish community in Jaffa. Another factor which deepened discord between the two communities was the campaign led by immigrants of the Second Period to "take over labor" (Kibbush Ha'avoda), although many Arabs could still find jobs in the Jewish communities. The gradual growth of the Jewish society in Palestine was thus viewed in increasingly negative terms by the Arabs, not least because of a third factor – the new lifestyle imported by the immigrants, which many Arabs perceived as provocative, if not a cultural threat.

The new Jewish neighborhood of Tel Aviv was nothing like the old style of mixed residence the Arabs had become used to. They viewed Tel Aviv as a competitive district threatening Jaffa's demographic, cultural, economic and national preeminence in Palestine. Together

with the continued growth of the Jewish community in Jaffa, the establishment of the new Jewish neighborhood exacerbated tensions and hostilities, which gained in force with the awakening of Arab nationalism in Palestine.

The Arab Riots of 1908, 1921, 1924 and 1929, which took place in Jaffa and the surrounding area, deepened the rift between Jewish Tel Aviv and Arab Jaffa. Naturally, peaceful, mutually beneficial contacts between the two communities were most intensive in the mixed neighborhoods along the ethnic divide. These were also the places where

inter-community strife reached crisis levels. However, the increased geographic separation meant that Tel Aviv residents had to contact local Arabs only for business purposes. Indeed, at first, the new neighborhood was completely dependent on Arab suppliers and merchants. However, following the Arab Riots and Economic Boycott, the Jews in Tel Aviv found other arrangements. During the Third and Fourth Immigration Periods, the Jewish population of Tel Aviv grew considerably, also due to Jews moving there from Jaffa. The Jewish community in Jaffa became ever smaller, turning the ancient town into a commercial center of gradually decreasing importance for the Jewish population.

The dissertation examines the relationships between the two communities in Jaffa, at a time when it was perhaps the most important center of cultural and political life of both the Arab and Jewish inhabitants of Palestine. It looks into the nature and dynamics of Jewish-Arab relations in Jaffa from the socioeconomic, cultural, political, and security perspectives. In doing so, it attempts to pinpoint the dualistic nature of neighborly relations between two increasingly hostile ethnic groups within a single city (Jaffa) and between two cities (Jaffa and Tel Aviv) within the framework of a relationship between two peoples competing for and later fighting over Palestine. It examines the duality in the socioeconomic and cultural relations between the two communities and the dynamics of its development.

The study focuses on the question of Jewish-Arab coexistence in Jaffa. It questions how well the Jewish immigrants managed to integrate in the lives of the Arab city dwellers, and also whether there was any wish to do so, whether due to their ideological commitment to an increasingly isolationist Zionist movement or to a gradually developing reality of competition and hostility in Jaffa and in Palestine as a whole.