

“Guardians” of the Road:

Abu Ghush Family in the Jerusalem Mountains during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

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The village of Abu Ghush, which is revealed in all of its beauty to those traveling along the mountain roads towards Jerusalem, is among the few Arab villages that have survived in the region that extends from Bab al-Wad to the environs of Jerusalem.¹

Villages such as ‘Imwas, Bayt Nuba, Yalu, Dayr Ayub, Latrun, Bayt Mahsir, Suba, Lifta, and Dayr Yasin have ceased to exist, some of them since the 1948 war and some after the 1967 war. For the moment it seems as though this village is determined to continue guarding the historical road that links Jaffa to the Holy City. The question of the survival of this village, in spite of its strategic location, is not the concern of this article. However, it seems it is not simply by chance, but due to the ability of its leaders to maneuver during periods of crisis and upheaval as they have done over the course of generations. A study of the distribution and location of the settlements over the history of Palestine shows that villagers were, in most cases, apprehensive about settling on main traffic routes. They knew that building a settlement on such a route was liable to incur catastrophe during times of struggle and warfare. Exceptions to this general rule are settlements that, from the very start, were founded by their leaders at key points or on strategic routes in accordance with the demand of the authorities. A number of families fulfilled this function during the Ottoman period, such as the Turabay family which settled in the area of the valley of Marj Ibn ‘Amir (Jezreel Valley) and guarded the crossroads that linked Syria with Egypt through Khan al-Tujjar. From there the trade route divided, with one road going towards Megiddo and the coastal plain,

and the other to Samaria and Jerusalem. This gave the family the title of “Amirs of the Two Roads.”²

The story of the ‘Asadi family in the village of Dayr al-‘Asad in the Galilee represents another example as reflected in the research of Aharon Layish. According to him, the Ottoman Sultan Selim I adopted the intentional policy of “colonization and Islamization” in this area as well. For example, in the village of Dayr al-Bi‘ani in the valley of *nahiya* (subdistrict) al-Shaghur, he settled the Sufi shaykh Muhammad ‘Asadi, together with many of his followers, in his desire to strengthen the Muslim character of that region, in addition to guarding the road that linked Acre with Safad.³

Other prominent families were the Radwan family in the Gaza district, and the Farukh family that alternately ruled the districts of Nablus and Jerusalem. These families, which bequeathed their ruling authority to their descendants and reached the peak of their powers in the seventeenth century, fulfilled important functions in preserving order and security in their districts, and participated in the convoy and safety of the Muslim pilgrimage caravans to Mecca.⁴

The system of relations between the central government and the ruling families was complex. On the one hand, the families needed the authorization and legitimacy of the government, which entailed the renewal of the appointment every year in an official *firman* (mandate) from Istanbul. On the other hand, the ability of the government to enforce its authority over them changed in accordance with circumstances. With the degree of power possessed by the governors of the Damascus and Sidon provinces, it appears that Palestine was subordinate to them in the administrative sense. When the provinces were ruled by strong governors, the influence of the notable families was lessened, and when the governors were weak, the power of these families increased and reliance upon them for collecting taxes and providing security grew greater.

The eighteenth century was characterized, more than previous ones, with the growth of local powers and governors. This was the result of the weakening of the central government, the decline of the system of military feudalism, and the strengthening of the social and political elite system. According to this system, the *multazim* who stood at the head of the sanjaks were appointed by the authorities to collect taxes and to preserve the security of their provinces. In time, this function became the main leverage for the installation of local powers. In some of the regions in Palestine, a new generation of local families emerged which inherited their power from the Abu Ghush, Turabay, and ‘Asadi families. Some of them were urban families such as the Tuqan family which controlled the Nablus area and supplanted the Farukh family. And some were village families such as the Jarrar family which controlled the area of Jenin and Northern Samaria and filled the gap left by the Turabay family. The Zaydan family in the Galilee rose after the decline in the status of the M‘ani dynasty in Lebanon.⁵ As for the family of Abu Ghush to the west of the Jerusalem mountains, it appears that it continued to fulfill its function as in the past, and even established itself more strongly because of the declining powers of the central government.⁶

It is interesting that the attention in research dealing with the history of the dominant families and local powers was directed more towards the families in the region of Jabal

Nablus. The picture that arises from these studies is that the families of this region succeeded in maneuvering and preserving their autonomy vis-à-vis the government. Donald Quataert, who researched the relations between the center and the periphery, regarded the region of Jabal Nablus as a classic example for understanding the abilities of those families to maneuver between their desire to maintain internal autonomy and their relations with the central government.⁷ The research of Beshara Doumani on the city of Nablus also reached similar conclusions, although Doumani focused more on economic sources and economic power as a vital tool in preserving the relative autonomy of this region.⁸

The information in hand about these village families is not identical in extent to those that exist for the urban families. Most sources therefore dealt with the urban population, in addition to the fact that among the villagers there was no tradition of records or documentation of the range found in cities, if at all. Nevertheless, we do find a few researchers and historians, such as ‘Izzat Darwaza and Ihsan Nimr, who dealt with the families and personalities of the villages who fulfilled an important function before the beginning of the reforms and modernization towards the middle of the nineteenth century. From these sources it appears that in the region of Jerusalem, a number of village families became prominent. Three strong and important ones are Abu Ghush, Samhan, and Barghuti.⁹ What is common to all of them is that they were the families of village shaykhs who fulfilled various functions such as managing the affairs of the nahiyat. Or, as in the case of the Abu Ghush family, in addition to managing the nahiya of Bani Malik they also had a security function in accompanying traveller and pilgrimage caravans, and were responsible for the safety of the traffic route from the area of the coastal plain through Bab al-Wad up to Jerusalem. This article examines the history of this family and its vital role in securing the most important axis for European pilgrims to the Holy Land, and will attempt to answer the following four questions:

- What are the origins of the Abu Ghush family and when did it become an important factor in the mountains of Jerusalem?
- What functions did it fulfill with regard to securing pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and how did European pilgrims regard the role of the family in the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century?
- Why did a conflict break out between the family and the Egyptian government in 1834, and what implications did this have on its status?
- What were the changes that occurred in the status of this family towards the end of Ottoman rule?

The Origin of the Family

There exist several versions concerning the origins of the Abu Ghush family. Manna, Rubin, and Scholch claim that its origin is Circassian, and that the family arrived in Palestine at the beginning of Ottoman rule with Sultan Selim I in 1516.¹⁰ It is almost

certain that the family began to show prominence even then. At first, they settled in the villages of ‘Imwas, Bayt Liqya, and ‘Ajanjul at the meeting point between the mountains of Jerusalem and the coastal plain. Later on, as we shall see, they settled in the village of Qaryat al-‘Anab (Abu Ghush today), and controlled the nahiya of Bani Malik to the west of Jerusalem.¹¹

James Finn, the British consul in Jerusalem during the years 1845–63, also referred to the family and its origins. He said that their faces were light-colored, which could be attributed to their Circassian origins, and he added that the Abu Ghush tribe originated in certain Circassian Mamluks who accompanied Sultan Selim to Jerusalem in 1516.¹² William Lynch, who explored Palestine and especially the area of the Dead Sea in the nineteenth century and met one of the shaykhs of this family, also noted: “This sheikh was of a light complexion, with a European-looking [sic] and wearing a red moustache.”¹³

It does not seem to be by chance that the family has recently affiliated themselves with their Caucasian origins and even received generous support from Chechnya to build a large mosque in the village, dedicated in 2014 and named for the president of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadirov. On the other hand, some family members insist that their origin is Arab. According to them, their forefathers left Yemen for Egypt, and from there they arrived in Palestine. Even then the leaders were of the “Yemeni Arab” faction, that is to say, belonging to the southern Arabs. This is to differentiate them from the “Qaysi Arabs,” or the northern Arabs. According to their version, Sultan Sulayman the Magnificent, the son of Selim I, was the one who imposed upon them the role of guarding the road to Jerusalem, and even granted a firman in this connection. It seems that this version of the family is correct, since Sultan Sulayman was known to have contributed greatly to the development of Palestine and especially the construction of the walls of Jerusalem, in addition to building a number of khans and securing the transport routes and trade convoys between Syria and Egypt. They were known then by the name of Abu Ghuth, that is to say, providers of assistance, and in time the name was corrupted into Abu Ghush.¹⁴

In reference to the stages of their installation and expansion, Finn noted that the family members took control over the village of Bayt Liqya at the mouth of Wadi Salman which leads towards the coastal plain. During a long period of time they multiplied, and imposed their authority on the neighboring district.¹⁵ Later on they struggled against the Bani ‘Amar who had settled between ‘Imwas and Ras Karkar, and defeated them, taking land and demanding taxes from them, which led to conflicts and wars between them. At a certain stage a pact was made between the people of Bayt Liqya and the Bani ‘Amar, which forced the Abu Ghush clan to transfer to a region among the mountains, to the villages of Qalunya and Suba. There they settled and later took control over the village of Qaryat al-‘Anab. According to Finn: “The next event in their history was their invasion of Kiryat al-‘Anab, and their settlement in the village and its lands, from which they expelled a family called Bakhakhra.”¹⁶

Ben-Dov says that the village of Qaryat al-‘Anab had existed since the Mamluk period in the fifteenth century, and that there was an ancient khan in that location. Its name is mentioned in the records of the waqf of al-Madrassa al-Hasaniya in Jerusalem.



Figure 1. Reproduced in Mary Rogers, “The Church and the Village,” in *Haye Yom Yom Be Eretz Israel* [Domestic Life in Palestine] (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1984), 19.

According to him, half of the income of the village was earmarked for that madrasa. Ben-Dov bases himself on a long list of testimonies by travelers from the beginning of the fifteenth century until the eighteenth century. From these testimonies it appears that the village was small, and that the spring inside it was not suitably maintained. In addition, he refers in detail to the reports about the imposition of fees charged for the passage of pilgrims, sometimes done in a violent manner.¹⁷

Apparently, the establishment of the Abu Ghush family in the village of Qaryat al-‘Anab, instead of the Bakhakhra family,

on the main road near the spring, gave them a central position especially regarding the security of convoys of pilgrims. The importance of this location is mentioned by Finn:

They dwell on the high road from Jaffa to Jerusalem at a distance of three hours from the latter, at a place that commands a long view of the approach of travelers and pilgrims, since the road passes at a rifle range from the houses. Among them is an abandoned Christian church that still stands with its small and beautiful windows that can be used as embrasures for shooting. The village is undoubtedly built in a nice and attractive way, the cultivation of the mountains around it is of extraordinary quality, and superior to all others along that route as though the place excels in quietude and peacefulness.¹⁸

In this connection, Glass, who researched the subject of land purchases in the village from the end of the nineteenth century until 1948, noted that the style of building in the village was congested, the houses crowded together and divided into blocks. The dense construction with courtyards created a village that was extremely fortified and protected from external attacks.¹⁹

In view of the above, it may be summed up that the family members most probably had already settled in the area since the beginning of the Ottoman period, and that their settlement in this area was accompanied by struggles with families who had been living there before them. At first they settled in the area of the villages of Bayt Liqya and ‘Imwas, and later on they moved to the village of Qiryat al-‘Anab, and made it their bastion. It is difficult to determine with certainty when this occurred. Rehav Rubin notes that this may have been after the middle of the seventeenth century when Shaykh Isma‘il al-‘Inbawi (d. 1689) received the family members in his village, or at most in the early eighteenth century, and in time they became the majority and the dominant power.²⁰ As we have seen – and apparently the family settlement in a strategic place

on the pilgrims' route between Jaffa and Jerusalem was not coincidental – the Ottoman sultan understood the importance of this axis, and decided to settle a strong and loyal family there.

The Family's Role in Securing Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century

As mentioned above, the beginning of the establishment of the family in Palestine most probably occurred during the reign of Sultan Selim I and his son Sultan Sulayman. However, the sources mention that Shaykh 'Issa Muhammad Abu Ghush, who gained prominence in the mid-eighteenth century, was the one who created a significant transformation in the status of the family until his death at the end of the eighteenth century.²¹ We do not have in hand much information about Shaykh 'Issa, but apparently he established the hold of the family over the village and over the nahiya of Bani Malik, and he became the most prominent village shaykh on the important route linking Jaffa with Jerusalem. The traveler Mariti described the place in 1767 as a large village (“grosso villaggio”).²²

After the death of Shaykh 'Issa, his four sons became prominent: Othman, Ibrahim, Jabir, and 'Abd al-Rahman. Othman, the eldest son, inherited from his father, but he ruled for a relatively short period until his death (presumably in 1811, although according to another version in 1818) when the leadership passed to his brother Ibrahim. During his rule he was forced to deal with the French invasions in 1799, and with the demands of the Ottoman government to recruit forces to fight against the French forces in Egypt. Perhaps this background may explain the meeting between him and the British admiral Sir Sidney Smith who assisted in defeating the French forces that besieged Acre. In addition, in 1811 he hosted the traveler Lady Hester Louis Stanhope who described the importance of the location of the village. In contrast with many other travelers, she specifically noted with praise his attitude towards her and the warm reception he conducted in her honor. She writes that: “Abu Ghush received us with courtesy, slaughtered a sheep for us, gave fodder for our animals and supplied all our needs . . . his four wives cooked the food for us with their own hands.”²³

In addition to their agricultural work, trading in salt which they bought from the Bedouins, and being the multazim shaykhs of the Bani Malik nahiya,²⁴ the main role of the family was the security of the strategic traffic route that ran from the coastal plain through Bab al-Wad and up to Jerusalem. Among other things, this included escorting the caravans of pilgrims and travelers to Jerusalem and back again.²⁵ It is interesting that most sources clearly stated that the family collected the transit fees without giving these escort services, or that it was only partially given. For them it was sufficient that all those living in the region knew that Abu Ghush was responsible for the safety of the travelers in this area – and that anyone who dared to attack the pilgrims or the caravans would find himself in conflict with them. In exchange for this service that

was sometimes given directly, but mostly indirectly, they would charge transit fees or “ghafir” tax, as they called it.²⁶

Rabbi Hayim Yosef Azulai, who traveled from Jerusalem to Jaffa in 1764, complained about the behavior of the family leaders to charge a transit fee, and sharply denounced this practice.²⁷ In 1829, Rabbi Ya’akov Elyashar described the journey of Jewish pilgrims between Jaffa and Jerusalem as follows: “And towards evening as they were approaching Jerusalem . . . they paid the sheikh of Abu Ghush, head of the village of Qiryat al-‘Inab . . . a fixed tax for each person.”²⁸

Ben-Dov states that the charging of a transit fee was customary even before the appearance of the Abu Ghush family, but it perfected the method and increased the fee. He writes: “The ‘sheikh’ used to stop the caravans going up to Jerusalem and coming down from it, and take his share . . . testimonies of the travelers about the amount they had to pay for the transit fee differ from time to time, but it seems that in most cases it was not especially large. One thing did not change, it was not wise to avoid payment.”²⁹

In this connection, Finn maintains that in view of the weakness and incapacity of the government, the family members charged a fee from those going to the holy places, just as the Bedouin shaykhs did in their desert encampments. The Turkish governors could not, and perhaps did not want to, stop this custom. But after the Egyptian invasion in 1831, this was immediately ended, and an Egyptian military force ensured the safety of the road.³⁰ However, it is interesting that Finn does not mention the fact that it was the authorities who appointed the family and also helped them settle there in order to secure the pilgrimage route.

Mary Eliza Rogers visited the place in 1855 and noted that the village houses were fortified (see figure 1); according to her, the village looked rich and prosperous, and the village shaykh tended to show great kindness to the Frank (European) travelers passing through his village.³¹

As for the method for carrying out the task of security and charging the fee, it appears that the family recruited a significant military force. It is difficult to determine with certainty the size of the force that the family set up, but apparently they could recruit hundreds of fighters when needed.³² Hence, the task of escorting and maintaining security required some expense, a background against which the collection of the fee can be understood rather than, as some sources claimed, that it was a transit fee without justification.

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, the position of the family became even more established thanks to Shaykh Ibrahim, the son of Shaykh ‘Issa. Ibrahim gained prominence during the period of the Sidon province governor, Sulayman Pasha (1804–19). Suleiman invited him to Acre, heaped praises on him, and gave him presents in addition to the title of “shaykh of all shaykhs in the land of al-Quds.” At that time, Ibrahim and his brothers bought a house in the Ras al-‘Amud neighborhood of Jerusalem.³³ Manna noted that Abdulla Pasha, the successor of Sulayman in the province (1819–32), treated him in the same way, especially during the period of revolt that broke out in the Jerusalem region during the years 1824–26. Abdulla was forced to keep close ties with Ibrahim in order to allow his forces to pass safely to Jerusalem.³⁴



Figure 2. Kfar Abu Ghush. Reproduced in Charles William Wilson, *Picturesque Palestine, Sinai, and Egypt*, vol. 1 (London: Forgotten Books, 2010), 199.

The historians Darwaza and Barguthi assert that the people of Abu Ghush, especially during the rule of Ibrahim and his brother Jabir, were not satisfied with control over the nahiyah of the Bani Maillk. They succeeded in expanding their influence to nearby nahiyat which aroused many conflicts, even at this early stage, with the Samhan family, who were the leaders of the Qaysi clan in the region.³⁵ This family was named for its first leader Shaykh Samhan who was the shaykh of the Bani Harith nahiyah. Nimr states that the Samhan family was one of the leading village families during the second half of the eighteenth century. It controlled the northern part of the Jerusalem mountains, and there were a few families under its protection. From the Ottoman decrees it appears that its name was always mentioned together with the Abu Ghush family.³⁶ Manna also noted that the Samhan family was one of the leading village families in the second half of the eighteenth century. Like other strong families, they built a number of control centers in the villages under their protection. They built their large palace in the village of Ras Karkar which was known as Ras Ibn Samhan.³⁷ Nimr writes that he visited this palace in the 1970s, and that it was strongly fortified. In its external walls a number of shooting embrasures were built in addition to courtyards, warehouses, stables for horses, and a large entrance over which the name of the family and the date of construction was engraved.³⁸

In summary, it may be said that the Abu Ghush family made a substantial contribution to escorting convoys of pilgrims who had arrived in the Holy Land, and the family collected security and guarding fees from those pilgrims. This was done with the consent of the authorities. Although the collection of the fee drew criticism from some of the immigrants, the family provided the immigrants with a great deal of security, and it seems that without the protection of the family it was difficult to make a safe pilgrimage. It may be said also that since the end of the eighteenth century, and during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the Abu Ghush family reached the peak of its power. This was thanks to the leadership of Shaykh Ibrahim. The aspirations of the family for expansion and control caused conflicts with their rivals in the Qaysi clan, and especially with the Samhan family. Apparently even the authorities, and especially

the governors of Sidon, Sulayman and Abdulla Pasha, were interested in maintaining good relations with them. This situation changed completely with the beginning of Egyptian rule over Palestine.

The Family during Egyptian Rule, 1831–40: Shaykhs Ibrahim and Jabir Abu Ghush in the Eye of the Storm

It may be said that during the period of Egyptian rule (1831–40) a new period opened in the history of Palestine in general, and in the status of the Abu Ghush in particular.³⁹ Although this rule did not last long, it caused the beginning of a change that gradually extended through time and continued even after the rule ended. In his desire to establish central rule, Ibrahim Pasha adopted a new policy which was expressed in a long series of steps and innovations – such as the collection of weapons, mandatory recruitment into the army, the imposition of forced labor, and direct collection of taxes – alongside many other changes in the administrative system, and allocation and status of the ruling families in the country.⁴⁰

With regard to the Abu Ghush family, after the entry of the forces of Ibrahim Pasha into Palestine, its leader, Ibrahim, accepted the new rulers and expressed his absolute loyalty to them. However, when the new Egyptian policy was carried out their relations changed for the worse. The Egyptians were interested in gaining the acquiescence of the European powers for their actions in Syria and Palestine, and presented their rule as one that gave equal rights to all the inhabitants and communities regardless of religious affiliation. One of the testing points was their attitude towards the members of the Jewish and Christian faith, especially in the holy city of Jerusalem.

As mentioned earlier, the charging of transit fees from pilgrims caused constant grievances among them and from the countries from which they came. The members of the Abu Ghush family were accused of taking advantage of the pilgrims, of charging fees above what was permitted, of exploitation and the like. The Egyptians forbade the charging of these fees and cancelled this practice entirely. These measures and others caused a growing resentment among the family members and their followers, which may help to explain why Shaykh Ibrahim and his brother Shaykh Jabir joined the revolt that broke out in 1834 against Egyptian rule.⁴¹

Abu ‘Izz al-Din notes that the very fact that the Abu Ghush family was part of the coalition that opposed Egyptian rule and its decrees gave it a considerable degree of power. This was because the family was acclaimed for its daring, strength, and leadership throughout the region that extended between Jaffa and Jerusalem.⁴² Manna also referred to the bitter battles that the family conducted against the Egyptian forces, especially the battle against the cavalry forces under the command of Yusuf Agha during which the Egyptians lost fifty-two fighters in addition to a large number of wounded. As a result, and because of the need to leave the road to Jerusalem open, Ibrahim Pasha was

forced to lead a large force of about ten thousand fighters which set out from Jaffa in June 1834 on the way to Jerusalem. Only after much effort did he succeed in thrusting his way to the city and removing the siege that the rebels had laid on his forces in the citadel. Naturally, the Abu Ghush family had no chance against such a great general as Ibrahim, who eventually arrested the heads of the family, Ibrahim and Jabir.⁴³

In spite of the Egyptian achievement in suppressing the revolt, they used the method of the stick and the carrot. In order to neutralize the Abu Ghush family, they came to an agreement with it, released the two shaykhs, and even granted them some benefits, including the appointment of Shaykh Jabir as the mutasalim of the Jerusalem district in the summer of 1834. The appointment of a village shaykh, however important he might be, to the position of governor of the Jerusalem district, was an important change in the status of the family, although short-lived. In 1835, after order had returned and the revolt in the rest of the country was suppressed, the Egyptians no longer needed the services of the family. It seems also that Jabir was evicted on 27 July 1835 because of dissatisfaction with his conduct.⁴⁴ Jabir tried to regain his position and addressed a number of letters to Muhammad 'Ali, the governor of Egypt, in which he noted that he was left without a source of livelihood, and that his economic situation had deteriorated. As a gesture of good will, the authorities granted him a monthly income with a commitment from him not to act against them.

The missionaries Edward Robinson and Eli Smith briefly referred to the family during the period of Egyptian rule when they were visiting Jerusalem in April 1838. After what they called their positive meeting with the mufti of the city, they met Shaykh Jabir, who was according to them already an older man.⁴⁵

When the Egyptians withdrew from Palestine and the Ottoman army advanced in the year 1840, the family joined the forces that began to harass the retreating Egyptian army with the hope that the Ottomans would restore their former status. But at that time the elderly Shaykh Jabir was exhausted by wars and struggles and, with his death in 1842, leadership was transferred to another generation of the family led by Mustafa Abu Ghush, the son of Shaykh Ibrahim.

The Family during the Reform Period: Mustafa Abu Ghush, the Last of the Strong Shaykhs

With the restoration of Ottoman rule in Palestine in 1840, the wave of changes and reforms continued to advance. The Ottomans wanted to take advantage of the new situation that had been created in order to strengthen their hold over the country. They acted in setting up more centralized rule, unlike their decentralized rule that had characterized the period before the Egyptian conquest.⁴⁶ From now onwards, Jerusalem and its surroundings, as other parts of Palestine, entered into a period of significant transformation in various spheres, especially in those of administration and society. For example, the administrative structure that Ibrahim Pasha had erected was cancelled.⁴⁷ In 1864 a provincial law was enacted that reinforced the process of centralization by the Ottoman regime in Palestine,

and changed once again its administrative divisions. Syria now contained only two provinces – Syria and Halab, and the district of Jerusalem became part of the province of Syria, which now had a new name, the “Province of Damascus.”⁴⁸

In 1872, the district of Jerusalem was separated from the province of Syria and became a *mutasarifiya* which included the subdistricts of Jerusalem, Gaza, Jaffa, and Hebron. Two years later, in 1874, the authorities decided to take an unprecedented step according to which Jerusalem and its district became directly subordinate to the Sublime Porte in Istanbul, in recognition of the increasing importance of the city.

As for the Abu Ghush family, immediately after the Egyptian withdrawal, it tried to regain the power status it previously held. This time, it was under the leadership of Mustafa Abu Ghush who headed it until his death in 1864.⁴⁹ These attempts encountered the opposition of the authorities and aroused a fierce struggle between them and their rivals of long ago, the members of the Samhan family and the leaders of the Qaysi clan. The height of the struggle was reached in 1843 when two heads of the Samhan family were murdered by the men of Abu Ghush.⁵⁰

This serious incident and others aroused the anger of the authorities, and this time they were not prepared to agree to the restoration of the former status quo. In 1846 the Ottomans sent a large military force under the command of Muhammad Kubrusli Pasha to put an end to these struggles and to restore order to the districts of Jerusalem and Ramallah. Kubrusli arrested Mustafa Pasha together with other leaders of both rival clans, and exiled them for a short period to Cyprus, and later to Beirut.⁵¹ Only in 1953 were they permitted to return to their estates.⁵²

Ilan Pappé noted that Mustafa Abu Ghush requested the assistance of the Husaynis after the deterioration in their relations with the Samhan family, since the Husaynis also belonged to the Yemeni faction. Omar Effendi Husayni, the head of the Husayni family at that time, was afraid of close ties with him, but his son, Muhammad ‘Ali, who was charmed by Abu Ghush and his courage, tightened his ties with him even though the authorities were not pleased with this.⁵³ According to Pappé, the Abu Ghush family both charmed and aroused a certain apprehension in the Husayni family.⁵⁴

An additional testimony to the signs of decline in the status of the family is given by the American naval officer, William Lynch, who headed a research expedition to the Dead Sea in 1848. While he was on his way from Jerusalem to Jaffa, he passed through the village and met the brother of Mustafa Abu Ghush. Lynch described what happened in the following words:

Wednesday, May 24 descended the ravine . . . by the village of Kuryet el-Enab. [W]hen passing the village, the Sheikh with the evident purpose of levying tribute, came out and forbade us to leave through his territory, but paid no attention to the terrible Abu Ghush (father of lies) he rode within forty or fifty yards of the interpreter . . . and called in an imperious tone ‘talon’ (interpreter, come here) . . . the sheikh at length went up to him and demanded by what right we attempted to pass through his territory, stating no one could do so without his permission, the firman was shown

to him. After reading it, he said that it mentioned nothing about surveying the road, and that one thousand armed men could not pass against his will. We told him that he had better consent then, for we had the sanction of his superiors and were not [to] be bullied . . . the sheikh is brother to the celebrated Abu Ghush . . . [who] was sent not long to Constantinople.⁵⁵

Finn referred in his book to the story of the American expedition and, according to him, Haj Yusuf Abu Ghush was the one who had wanted to charge a transit fee. Finn mentioned that Haj Yusuf was infuriated by the fact the Americans were assisted by a Bedouin as a guide and not by the members of the family.⁵⁶

Victor Guérin, who visited the village in 1889, referred more to the style of the buildings and described them in this way:

The houses of the village look as though they were laid in rows above rows on the sides of the hill, most of them belonging to the many-branched Abu Ghush family that had once cast its terror over passersby. The head of the family today lives in a large residence built on the rock which is called al-Burj. His ruling powers were very restricted a few years ago, yet it still extends over a few villages . . . The road has now become safe, and ever since he was released from imprisonment he receives passing travelers in his territory with courtesy and respect in contrast to previous extortion.⁵⁷

This testimony by Guérin confirms what was said earlier about the decline in the status of the family during the second half of the nineteenth century. After the Crimean War, the Ottoman government conducted a policy of greater centralization and decided to entirely eliminate the rule of local powers. The reforms they carried out weakened those families even more. When, in 1864, Mustafa Abu Ghush, the last great leader of the family, passed away his death symbolized the closing of the circle of family activities in the strategic route between the port city of Jaffa and Jerusalem. A beautiful building built on his grave is visible to anyone who visits the village cemetery.⁵⁸

Conclusion

This article examined the status and role of the Abu Ghush family, a leading rural family in the Jerusalem region, during the period of Ottoman rule, especially the role of the family in escorting and securing convoys, and collecting transit fees from European pilgrims to the Holy City. From the discussion in the article, a number of main points can be listed.

The first point is that the case of the Abu Ghush family and its role in securing the important traffic route which leads to Jerusalem was not unique and exceptional. We saw that this was the accepted Ottoman practice that began to be applied immediately after the conquest of Sultan Selim I in the sixteenth century to other regions as well.

Such was the case of the Turabay families and the security of the main crossroads of the sea and land routes near Mount Tabor; of the ‘Asadi family and its location on the main road linking Acre and Safad in the Galilee; and of the Radwan family and its role in securing the traffic routes in the southern region from Gaza to Egypt. However, the Abu Ghush were more prominent than the other families in this role, and were mentioned repeatedly in a large number of sources because they controlled an important and central axis that led to the Holy City, and was especially important for European pilgrims.

The article showed that the family carried out its task of security in an active manner. This was accompanied by the charging of security and transit fees for European pilgrims and travelers in coordination with the heads of the various churches and monasteries in Jerusalem, which did not have much choice in the matter. However, in the course of time, and especially in the eighteenth century, this guardianship became a kind of exclusive monopoly over the road from Bab al-Wad to the west of the Jerusalem mountains up to the city walls. Whoever traveled along this way, whether European pilgrims or travelers, was charged a transit fee which the family insisted on calling *ghafir*, that is to say, security. It seems that this security was not always provided *de facto* by guards and attendants, but was carried out by the fact that all the villages in the Jerusalem region knew that this was the route and territory under the control of the Abu Ghush family, and that everyone who passed through it, especially pilgrims, were under their protection and must not be touched. This practice seemed to the pilgrims to be a kind of unjust extortion.

But it is important to mention that similar payments were also made to the Bedouin tribes in Jordan by the caravans of pilgrims to Mecca. The governors of the provinces of Damascus who accompanied the caravan of tens of thousands of pilgrims had no choice but to pay large sums to the leaders of these tribes in order to pass through their territory in safety. The money intended for this purpose was called the *surra* or the package money, and if the tribal leaders were not satisfied they would attack the pilgrims.

The third point is that the article showed how this situation changed with the beginning of Egyptian rule in 1831. The authorities decided to cancel the charging of transit fees, causing a harsh reaction from the Abu Ghush family which joined the revolt of 1834. However, this revolt was crushed with a heavy hand by Ibrahim Pasha and his forces. Egyptian rule, the revolt, the suppression, and the exile of the family heads constituted a turning point in its history. Even the Ottoman government, which returned to power in Palestine in 1840, was not prepared to restore the situation to its previous state. The beginnings of reforms forced them to make it clear to Abu Ghush that ensuring security and safety was the responsibility of the state. Although this was not an easy matter and did not end in one day, beginning with the late 1850s there are almost no reports about the charging of transit fees for travelers along the route, even for those passing through Qaryat al-‘Anab, the family stronghold. On the contrary, and as Glass and Guérin have noted, an interesting process began of land acquisition by Jews and Europeans particularly in the village area which had been a bastion for the rejection of foreigners. Christian groups bought land around the village. Christians regarded Qaryat al-‘Anab as associated with Kiryat Ye’arim, the place where the Ark of

the Covenant had been temporarily kept, and the place where Jesus had appeared after his resurrection.⁵⁹ In the village today which lives peacefully with its surroundings there is a beautiful church and monastery, and the many pilgrims who visit it are received with warmth and without any charge.

Finally, it is important to note that the survival of the village of Abu Ghosh in the past and during the 1948 war was not coincidental. It seems that the village leaders knew how to maneuver in difficult times, and did not hesitate to negotiate and reach understandings with the Zionist forces during the 1948 war. In contrast, this war severely affected most of the villages in the area west of Jerusalem located along the road connecting Jaffa and Tel Aviv with Jerusalem.

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Endnotes

- 1 In Arabic, the valley is called Wadi ‘Ali, and its entrance is called Bab al-Wad ‘Ali (gate of the ravine of ‘Ali). It is a very narrow valley and, according to Victor Guérin, sufficient for “a handful of people of adamant decision to be capable of holding off an army.” See Victor Guérin, *Tior Giografi, Histori Viarkhiologi shel Erets Yisrael* [Geographical, Historical and Archaeological Description of Palestine], vol. 1: *Judaea* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1982), 44.
- 2 Adel Manna, *Tarikh Filastin fi awakhir al-‘ahd al-‘Uthmani, 1700–1918* (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-dirasat al-Filastiniyya, 1999), 11–20.
- 3 Aharon Layish, “Hikdesh Vihitnahlot Dervishim Bi Arets Yesrael” [Waqf and Sufi Settlement in Eretz-Israel at the Early Ottoman Period], *Cathedra*, 35 (1985): 25–26.
- 4 Manna, *Tarikh Filastin*, 9–15.
- 5 For further details on the character of the Ottoman government in Palestine in the eighteenth century, see Amnon Cohen, *Palestine in the 18th Century: Patterns of Government and Administration* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), 1–7; David Kushner, *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period: Political Social and Economic Transformation* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1986).
- 6 The area of the nahiya parallels that of the subdistrict today, and according to the Ottoman administrative divisions, districts or sanjaks were divided into nahiyat.
- 7 Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 105–8.
- 8 Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
- 9 James Finn, *Stirring Times: Records from Jerusalem Consular Records from 1853 to 1856* (London: Kegan Paul, 1878), 195, 204.
- 10 Adel Manna, *A‘lam Filastin fi awakhir al-‘ahd al-‘Uthmani (1800–1918)* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1997), 31; Rehav Rubin, *Siborim Shisibro le Hiharim: Nof Tarboti Bihalof Hazman* [Stories Told by the Mountains: Cultural Landscape through Time] (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2018), 137; Alexander Scholch, *Palestine in Transformation, 1856–1882: Studies in Social, Economic, and Political Development* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993), 81–83; Joel Ben-Dov, *Abu Ghush* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2003), 97.

- 11 Fa'iz Abu Firda, *al-Quds: mudunuha wa quraha* [Jerusalem: Its Cities and Villages] (Amman: Dar al-Jalil, 1991), 52.
- 12 Finn, *Stirring Times*, 129.
- 13 William Francis Lynch, *Narrative of the United States Expedition to the River Jordan and the Dead Sea* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850), 434.
- 14 The version of the Abu Ghush family is mentioned twice in the website of the family and in the Abu Ghush local council, online at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Ghosh (accessed 20 May 2019).
- 15 Finn, *Stirring Times*, 209.
- 16 Finn, *Stirring Times*, 140–1; Rubin, *Siborim Shisibro*, 138; Ben-Dov, *Abu Ghush*, 98.
- 17 Ben-Dov, *Abu Ghush*, 88–94.
- 18 Finn, *Stirring Times*, 309; Rubin, *Siborim Shisibro*, 140–1.
- 19 Joseph Glass, “Land Purchases and Land Use in the Area of Abu-Ghosh (1873–1948),” *Cathedra* 62 (1991): 110.
- 20 Rubin, *Siborim Shisibro*, 140–3.
- 21 *Sijillat al-mahkama al-shariyya* [The Sijill of Jerusalem Shari‘a Court], 262, 110 (25 February 1781).
- 22 Rubin, *Siborim Shisibro*, 140–3; Ben-Dov, *Abu Ghush*, 98–9; G. Mariti, *Viaggi per l’isola di Cipro per la Storia e Palestina* (Lucca: 1769), vol. 3, 34; Charles Maryon, *Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope: Forming the Completion of Her Memoirs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), vol. 1, 205–6.
- 23 Manna, *A’lam Filastin*, 31; Ben-Dov, *Abu Ghush*, 107–8.
- 24 This nahiya included twenty-three villages.
- 25 Manna, *A’lam Filastin*, 31.
- 26 We do not have details about the size of the amounts that were charged, but Michael Ish Shalom notes, for example, that a Jerusalem Jew paid the amount of ten liras a year for the transit fee. Michael Ish Shalom, *Mas’ai Notsreem Li Erits Yisrael* [Travels of Christians to Eretz Israel] (Tel Aviv: Am Oven, 1965), 635.
- 27 Avraham Yaari, *Ms’ aot Erits Yisrael shel ‘Aolim Yihudim* [Travels of the Land of Israel by Jewish Immigrants] (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1976), 377.
- 28 Yaari, *Travels*, 25.
- 29 Ben-Dov, *Abu Ghush*, 104.
- 30 Finn, *Stirring Times*, 141.
- 31 Mary Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine* (London: Kegan Paul, 1989), 35–36; first published in 1862. Also available online at archive.org/details/domesticlifeinp01rogegoog/page/n10 (accessed 20 May 2019).
- 32 Finn, *Stirring Times*, 228.
- 33 ‘Umar Barghuthi, *Tarikh Filastin* (Jerusalem: Matb‘at Bayt al-Maqdis, 1923), 168–263. *Sijillat*, 291, 128 (27 April 1808).
- 34 Manna, *A’lam Filastin*, 32; Khalid Muhammad Safi, *al-Hukm al-Masri fi Filastin, 1831–1840*, (Beirut: *Muassat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniya*, 2010), 29.
- 35 Muhammad ‘Izzat Darwaza, *al-‘Arab wa al-‘uruba fi hiqbat al-taghallub al-turki* [The Arabs and Arabism in the Period of Turkish Domination] (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Asriya, 1981), vol. 2, 14; Bargouthi, *Tarikh Filastin*, 263–8. Among the families under their control or influence they note the Bani Hassan in Malha, the ‘Iraqat families in Abu Dis, the Kur’an in Birah, the Khatib in Bayt Ikxa, the Badawna in Bayt Dabwan, and the Baytuni in Baytunia, and others.
- 36 Ihsan al-Nimr, *Tarikh Jabal Nablus wa al-Balqa* (Nablus: Jami’at al-‘ummal al-matabi’ al-ta’awuniyya, 1975), vol. 1, 167–8.
- 37 Miriam Hoexter, “The Role of the Qays and Yaman Factions in Local Political Divisions: Jabal Nablus Compared with the Judean Hills in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,” *Asian and African Studies* 9 (1973): 284; Elias Hadad, “Political Parties in Syria and Palestine – Qaisi and Yemeni,” *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 1 (1921): 209–14.
- 38 Nimr, *Tarikh Jabal Nablus*, 167–8.
- 39 Shimon Shamir, “Matai Hithila H’at Hahadasha Bi Erits Esrail” [When did the New Period in the History of Eretz Israel Begin?], *Cathedra* 40 (1981): 139–58.
- 40 For detail on the system of administration during the period of Egyptian rule, see Yitzhak Hoffman, “The Administration of Syria and Palestine Under Egyptian Rule (1831–1840),” in Moshe Ma’oz, ed., *Studies on Palestine During the Ottoman Period* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 311–33.

- 41 Ben-Dov, *Abu Ghush*, 111; Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 50; Manna, *Tarikh Filastin*, 142–150.
- 42 Sulayman Abu ‘Izz al-Din, *Ibrahim Pasha fi Suriyya* (Beirut: al-Matb‘a al-‘Almiya, 1929), 169–75; Safi, *al-Hukm al-Masri fi Filastine* 235.
- 43 Safi, *al-Hukm al-Masri fi Filastine* 244–8; Manna, *Tarikh Filastin*, 144.
- 44 Manna, *Tarikh Filastin*, 152; Manna, *A‘lam Filastin*, 34.
- 45 Edward Robinson and Eli Smith, *Biblical Researches in Palestine and the Adjacent Regions: A Journal of Travels in the Years 1838 and 1852* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), vol. 1, 247.
- 46 Moshe Ma‘oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine 1840-1861: The Impact of the Tanzimat on Politics and Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 21–43. ‘Awad ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, *al-Idara al-‘Uthmaniyya fi wilayat Suriyya*, 1864–1914 [Ottoman Administration in the Province of Syria, 1864–1914] (Cairo: Dar al-ma‘arif, 1969), 63–75; Bahjat Sabri, “Liwa al-Quds, 1840–1873” [The District of Jerusalem, 1840–1873], in *al-Mu‘tamar al-dawli al-thalith li-tarikh bilad al-Sham – Filastin* [Third International Conference on the History of the Levant – Palestine] (Amman: University of Jordan, 1983), vol. 1, 13–18; Ziyad Madani, *Madinat al-Quds wa jiwaruha fi awakhir al-‘ahd al-‘Uthmani*, 1831–1918/1246–1336 [The City of Jerusalem and Its Surroundings at the End of the Ottoman Era, 1831–1918/1246–1336 hijri] (Amman: al-Maktaba al-Watani, 2004), 23.
- 47 Adel Manna, “Was Jerusalem the capital of Late Ottoman Palestine?” in eds. Issam Nassar and Salim Tamari, *Pilgrims, Lepers and Stuffed Cabbage* (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2005), 62–78.
- 48 Sabri, “Liwa al-Quds,” 14.
- 49 Darwaza, *al-‘Arab wa al-‘Aruba*, 16; Manna, *A‘lam Filastin*, 38–39.
- 50 Finn, *Stirring Times*, 341.
- 51 Ilan Pappé, *Atsolat Harits: Mishbahat al-Hoseni* [Aristocracy of the Land: The Husayni Family Political Biography] (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2002), 88; Yair Hirschfeld, “Some Findings on Prussian and Ottoman Policies in Palestine During the 1840s Based on Writings of Dr. Gustav E. Schultz, the First Prussian Vice-Council to Jerusalem 1842–1851,” in *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period: Political, Social, and Economic Transformation*, ed. David Kushner (Leiden: Brill), 270; and Finn, *Stirring Times*, 228.
- 52 Rubin, *Siborim Shisibro*, 147. It is important to note that Pappé states that Mustafa returned to his village in 1851, while Finn says he returned only in 1853.
- 53 Pappé, *Atsolat Harits*, 89.
- 54 Pappé, *Atsolat Harits*, 52.
- 55 Lynch, *Narrative of the U.S. Expedition*, 433–4.
- 56 Finn, *Stirring Times*, 341.
- 57 Guérin, *Description of Palestine*, 47.
- 58 Rubin, *Siborim Shisibro*, 148–9.
- 59 Glass, “Land Purchases,” 111; Haim Goren, “Hamosdot Hanotsrem Bi Abu Ghush B’ at Hhadasha” [Christian Institutions in Abu-Ghosh in Modern Times], *Cathedra*, 62 (1991): 81–106.