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# 13

## Gaza in the Frankish and Ayyubid Periods: the Run-up to 1260 CE

*Reuven Amitai*

This present chapter is part of an ongoing larger study on the history of Gaza and the surrounding countryside in the late Middle Ages, with an emphasis on the Mamluk period.<sup>1</sup> My interest in late medieval Gaza was piqued while leafing through the then recently published Volume 4 of Moshe Sharon's *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palestinae (CIAP)*,<sup>2</sup> which is largely devoted to Gaza City. I was struck by the large number of Mamluk-era inscriptions, almost seventy, which is similar to the quantity that we find in Jerusalem from the same period. The corpus of Mamluk epigraphy of Gaza is a little different from that of Jerusalem, mainly in the fact that many of the inscriptions in the former are devoted to a few important projects (particularly thirteen in the Great Mosque, originally a Crusader church), while in Jerusalem, the inscriptions are generally each devoted to one construction project.<sup>3</sup>

This large corpus of extant Mamluk inscriptions in Gaza, early on the provincial capital for south-west Palestine, along with much of the coast, is clear evidence of large-scale patronage in the city by the military-political elite, hinting at not insignificant cultural and intellectual activity there. This impression has been confirmed by my subsequent researches into the quarter millennium of the city's history under the Mamluks, showing also demographic and economic prosperity throughout this period. This view has been further strengthened by the examination of the history of the city's agricultural hinterland, where a few interesting Mamluk (and Ayyubid; see below) inscriptions have been found, and we can also postulate a thriving rural sector.<sup>4</sup> In short, Gaza and its environs under the Mamluks seem to have been a vibrant place in many respects.

While some important preliminary studies on Mamluk-era Gaza and its immediate hinterland have been published, notably by ‘Ata Allah and Sadek,<sup>5</sup> we lack a comprehensive and up-to-date monographic study. It is thus with some relish that I have embarked on my own study of Mamluk-era Gaza. To this end, one must look back over the earlier centuries to the region’s history, in order to provide background, to examine long-term trends and to have a point of reference for the Mamluk era. For the time since the advent of Muslim rule in the 630s up to the end of the eleventh century, we have a long section of the still useful classic work by ‘Arif al-‘Arif’s from 1943, although this surely needs to be updated and expanded.<sup>6</sup> For the early decades of the twelfth century, there are just brief mentions (see below). However, matters improve for the almost four and a half decades of Frankish rule (from 1149 to 1193, with a brief hiatus towards the end), as we have some information about construction in the city of Gaza, presented and analysed by Meron Benvenisti<sup>7</sup> and Denys Pringle,<sup>8</sup> both adding concise historical backgrounds; these are very good starts. Nothing comparable is found in the research literature for the time of Ayyubid rule (1193–1260), although the *CIAP* contains a few rural and urban inscriptions. Of course, Gaza frequently appears in passing in the many modern histories of the Crusades<sup>9</sup> and the few about the Ayyubids,<sup>10</sup> but from these one does not get a coherent picture of the city and its surroundings during these times.

The lack of a benchmark for later developments in the rural hinterland is especially acute for the Frankish period. This is clearly seen from a quick look at a couple of modern maps. The first is taken from the 1956 *Atlas of Israel*, which contains a significant historical section.<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, this volume has a very detailed sheet devoted to the Crusaders, prepared under the direction of the late Joshua Prawer and his then assistant Meron Benvenisti. As can be easily seen in Map 1, there is not much in the immediate region of Gaza, with the exception of the city itself and Darom (Darum, today Dayr al-Balah), about 15km to its south. Look at the section of the map to the more distant north and east (Map 2): lots of settlements, big and small, are marked. These include six settlements that can be considered to the very north of Gaza’s countryside in the Mamluk period, in the area of Wadi al-Hasi, but were actually part of the seignury of Ascalon in the time

of Frankish occupation.<sup>12</sup> We have no specific information of anything closer to Gaza City in the time of its occupation by the Franks.

Some forty years later Ronnie Ellenblum published a map of the cities, towns and villages in his pioneering book on rural settlement in Palestine under Frankish rule (Map 3).<sup>13</sup> Ellenblum's attention in that study was drawn mainly to the area north of Jerusalem and the Galilee, and thus it should not surprise us to see that the region of Gaza still appears to be sparsely settled; in fact, he omitted some of the villages noted in the *Atlas of Israel*.

I am, of course, not suggesting on the basis of the maps in these two volumes that the immediate rural hinterland of Gaza did not contain villages during the time of Frankish rule, but that rather we have yet to find information about them. This makes a useful comparison with the Ayyubid–Mamluk periods, for which we have the names of some dozen settlements, impossible at this time.

Our knowledge of the city of Gaza in the Ayyubid period is generally not much better. Gaza and its environs come up frequently in the sources, mostly as a stopover for armies moving between Egypt and Syria, and as the occasional battlefield. Meron Benvenisti has written regarding the period after Frankish rule: 'The city was restored by the Moslems and became an administrative, military and commercial centre.'<sup>14</sup> This seems true, but it is very general, and perhaps refers more to the Mamluk than the Ayyubid period.

This present chapter – on the immediate pre-Mamluk history of Gaza and its environs, that is, for the Frankish and Ayyubid periods – thus comes to fill in some of this lacuna in modern scholarly literature. It is intended as a prelude to the study of the history of Mamluk Gaza, but also has some significance in its own right, as the city and its environs were an important frontier area over more than a century and a half, from about 1100 to 1260. The last year, by the way, is significant for Gaza and the larger region: it is the end of formal Ayyubid rule, there was a short Mongol occupation, and it is the commencement of a new era, when Gaza becomes part of the expanding Mamluk state.

From the middle of the second millennium BCE until the time of late Roman (or Byzantine) rule, Gaza was significant as a centre of regional and even international trade. In late Roman times, Gaza flourished economically and

was also an important cultural centre, famous for its school of rhetoric. By the end of the fifth century, Christianity was clearly the leading religion of the city and region, but there was also a significant Jewish community. The agricultural richness of the area – wheat, grapes and other fruits – presages the Mamluk period.<sup>15</sup> In the Muslim tradition, pre-Islamic Mecca had conducted trade with Roman Gaza: the great-grandfather of the Prophet, Hashim b. ‘Abd al-Manaf, is said to have been buried there, and the future caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khattab (r. 634–44) ‘grew rich at the time of the Jahiliyya, for this place was a highway (*mustatriq*) for the people of the Hijaz’.<sup>16</sup>

After the Muslim Arab occupation of the mid-630s, it is only rarely mentioned in the Arabic sources, perhaps reflecting declining fortunes and prominence; it seems to have suffered from fighting among Arab tribes at the end of the second *hijri* century (that is, early in the ninth century CE).<sup>17</sup> While Gaza and the surrounding area appear to have become heavily Muslim relatively early in the Muslim period, a substantial Christian community continued, and it was the seat of a bishopric (as was nearby Ascalon). A Jewish community still existed and there were Samaritans too.<sup>18</sup> The Arabic geographers writing in the later tenth century describe a city of some grandeur (or at least size). Thus, al-Muqaddasi (d. 991), a native of Jerusalem writes:

Gaza is a large town lying on the main road (*jadda*) into Egypt, on the border of the desert. The city stands not far from the sea. In it is a beautiful mosque, and there ‘Umar b. al-Khattab grew rich. [Further, this city was] the birthplace of al-Shafi‘i, and [there is] the tomb of Hashim b. ‘Abd Manaf.<sup>19</sup>

It may be that this and the parallel passages in other contemporary geographical works reflect an earlier period. On the other hand, it may be that Gaza City and its countryside – in spite of not infrequent fighting in the area and the recurrent movement of troops – enjoyed some prosperity. Be that as it may, the Fatimid conquest of the country from about 970 was not a smooth process, having to deal with the Qarmatis on the one hand and local Bedouin tribal groups on the other.<sup>20</sup> Things apparently got worse with the influx of Turcomans into the country in the 1070s, more-or-less under Seljuq authority: around 1076, there is a report that the Seljuq chieftain Atsiz massacred all the population of Gaza, after putting down a rebellion in Jerusalem.<sup>21</sup> It is doubtful that indeed everyone was killed (and it is unclear how this was

connected to the trouble in Jerusalem), but surely there was much disruption at this time, extensive damage, and many lost their lives.

The coming of the Crusaders to the country at the end of the eleventh century probably did not lead to an improvement, especially since over the decades there were to be much fighting and movement of troops in the area as the Franks tried to take Ascalon, still controlled by the Fatimids. Meron Benvenisti correctly described Gaza as a key link in the ongoing Fatimid effort to keep supplying Ascalon.<sup>22</sup> These were not the circumstances for a thriving city and countryside. Yet, we can assume that at least some of the city's inhabitants as well as many of the local peasants remained. A modicum of regular agriculture must have been maintained in the area in spite of the unsettled conditions.<sup>23</sup>

This would belie the evidence of William of Tyre (d. 1186), who describes that in 1149, the Franks took a city that was 'in ruins and entirely uninhabited'.<sup>24</sup> Benvenisti also had his doubts, since within a few years the city was populated and these were probably not all new inhabitants.<sup>25</sup> We might assume that indeed that the inhabitants got out of the way before the entrance of the conquering Franks, but many soon returned when things calmed down. The population was surely augmented by newcomers from various communities – Franks, Arabic-speaking Christians and perhaps even Muslims. The later Arab bureaucrat and writer Ibn Shaddad al-Halabi (d. 1285) notes that in the year AH 544 (1149–50) the Franks 'rebuilt (*ammaru*, implying also repopulation) Gaza near [Ascalon], settling people in it, and providing foot soldiers and horsemen for it'.<sup>26</sup> After taking Gaza in 1149 the Franks set about fortifying the city (or perhaps, refortifying it). William of Tyre says that this was 'so that Ascalon might be hemmed in on the south just as it was on the north and east by the fortresses they had built there'.<sup>27</sup> Some historical memory was also preserved – or invented – for the city. Thus, William writes:

Gaza was a very ancient city and had been one of the five cities of Philistia. It was celebrated for its building, and abundant proof of its ancient excellence was manifest in the churches and spacious dwelling houses, albeit destroyed, in the marble and large stones, and in the multitude of cisterns, wells and running waters.<sup>28</sup>

Whatever the situation, in the winter of 1149–50, the Franks under King Baldwin III set about building a castle on a hill. It should be remembered that the use of the word ‘hill’ is relative: the hills in the Gaza area are low affairs, rising above a generally flat or gently rolling plain. However, William of Tyre then tells us that the king did not have enough men to fortify the entire hill-top and thus had to be content with a smaller castle; no attempt was made to repair the town walls. The castle, along with the town, was handed over to the Templars, along ‘with all the adjacent district’.<sup>29</sup> This aspect will be discussed later in the chapter. The Fatimid defenders of Ascalon clearly understood the dangerous implications of this new Frankish stronghold to their south. Thus, they soon launched an attack against it, perhaps with reinforcements from Nur al-Din Mahmud b. Zengi, ruler of Damascus and Aleppo. This Muslim force was beaten back, and we learn that the brother of the famous Usama b. Munqidh was killed in the fighting.<sup>30</sup> In 1154 Ascalon was finally taken by the Franks, and Gaza would serve as a jumping-off point for campaigns to Egypt, especially in the 1160s.<sup>31</sup>

The town was soon enjoying some prosperity and growth. The Muslim geographer al-Idrisi, writing in Sicily as early as 1154, informs us that:

Between Ascalon and Gaza there is a distance of some twenty miles, [Gaza] is today populous [and] in the hands of the Greeks [al-Rum!, referring actually to the Franks]. The port [of Gaza] is called Tida (or Tayda).<sup>32</sup>

By 1170, according to William of Tyre, civilian residents had settled in the area around the hill with the castle, and these quarters, a veritable faubourg, was fortified with some walls and gates. In the mid-1170s it is described as large as Aascalon, with walls to match. This description is probably exaggerated, but it gives some sense of the town’s expansion and overall prosperity.<sup>33</sup> According to John of Ibelin (d. 1266), Gaza (Gaudres) also hosted a burghess court, another sign of a relatively large population; however, some scholars take this statement with a grain of salt, not the least since this author also claims that Gaza was subservient in some way to Blanchegarde (Tell al-Safi), about 25km east of Ascalon.<sup>34</sup> Benvenisti suggests that the inhabitants of the new quarters were mostly Muslims and eastern Christians, and just a few Franks,<sup>35</sup> a reasonable supposition, but not more than that. Gaza was the home to at least one Greek church, named after St Porhyrius, and was the

centre of a Greek bishopric that extended at least to Beit Guvrin (Bayt Jubril/Bayt Jubrin).<sup>36</sup>

We know hardly anything of the rural area near the town itself, although as noted above, to the north of Gaza, in what was then the seignury of Ascalon, we have the names of six villages, as follows (from west to east):<sup>37</sup>

Table 13.1 Six villages in the seignury of Ascalon.

<i>Frankish name</i>	<i>Arabic name</i>	<i>First evidence for existence in the post-Frankish period</i>
Algie	al-Jiyya	In sixteenth-century Ottoman registers <sup>a</sup>
Semsem	Simsim/Sumsum	In sixteenth-century Ottoman registers
Amouhade	[Khirbat] al-'Amuda	In sixteenth-century Ottoman registers <sup>b</sup>
Heleiqat	Hulayqat	On Palestine Exploration Fund map from 1880 <sup>c</sup>
Saarethe	[Khirbat] Sha'ariyya	In sixteenth-century Ottoman registers
Malaques	Malakis / Umm Lakis	Mentioned in Mamluk period <sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> See Hütteroth and Abdulfattah, 1977. The section on the region of Gaza is found on 142–151.

<sup>b</sup> This site is about 4km east of Bayt Jirja (itself some 15km north of Gaza City, for which there is evidence of existence in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods; Amitai, 2017, 20–21; see Khalidi, 1992, 88.

<sup>c</sup> Condor, et al., 1881–9. For the map see: <<https://amudan.co.uk>> (PEF layer) (last accessed 25 September 2017).

<sup>d</sup> See al-'Umari, 1998, 247. For the usage of Umm Lakis, see Blakely and Huster, 2016, 39. From the current transcription by the Franks, the form Malaqis must have been in use in Frankish times.

Important as this evidence is, it only tells us something about an area that later might be considered the northern reaches of the rural hinterland of Mamluk Gaza. What about further to the south? The late Jonathan Riley-Smith had stated in a general way that there were some Templar estates around Gaza City. He did not provide details, since he hardly had any (and neither do we).<sup>38</sup> The only settlement, really a town of some size, around Gaza was Darom (Arabic Darum, later Dayr al-Balah), some 15km south of the city. It was there at Darom that King Almaric built a castle with four towers (one especially large) in 1170.<sup>39</sup> This same year it was besieged by Saladin, still just the Fatimid vizier of Egypt, and not yet an independent ruler. A Frankish relieving force under the king arrived from the direction of

Gaza, but Saladin did not succeed in drawing the Franks, who maintained formation, into a battle, so he turned and set upon Gaza. The population of the faubourg tried to flee to the citadel, but they were not allowed in by its commander; having no alternative, they tried their best to defend the town. After fierce fighting, the Muslims broke in, and there followed much killing of townspeople, destruction and looting. Among the defenders were sixty-five young Franks from al-Bira (Magna Mahomeria), north of Jerusalem. These reportedly fought courageously, and most were killed.<sup>40</sup> While we have no direct evidence of this, we can suppose that after the withdrawal of the Muslim army, repairs were made to the fortifications and the local population achieved some return to normalcy.

Saladin was back in force in 1177, but his initial attacks on the town were repulsed by the Templars, reinforced by the Frankish king. From here the Muslim army went on to Gezer (Montgisart), near Ramla, where they were defeated.<sup>41</sup> In 1182 Muslim forces from Egypt attacked Darom and Gaza, as part of a wide-ranging offensive in Syria. Most of the Frankish armies were in the north, but the local Templars put up a good show, repulsing the Muslims.<sup>42</sup> For their part, the Franks did not just sit in south-west Palestine, waiting to be attacked yet again by Saladin or one of his commanders. Thus, in 1181 an army of unknown provenance launched a raid against al-'Arish further south, and then continued all the way to Tinnis (or Tanis) in the eastern Nile Delta, where they seized some merchant ships.<sup>43</sup> This was a dynamic situation and neither side had primacy yet in this specific region nor in the southern Levant as a whole. Nobody could have predicted the big changes in store after 4 July 1187.

In mid-August 1187, after his great victory at Hittin, Saladin arrived in south-west Palestine, soon taking Ascalon and Darom. Gaza initially resisted, but in September surrendered in order to obtain the release of the Templar Grand Master, Gerard of Rideford. During the Third Crusade, as the battling armies of Richard and Saladin drew towards the south, the latter ordered in September 1191 the destruction of the fortifications of several cities, most famously Ascalon, but also Gaza (but not Darom). Six months later Richard arrived at the scene, repairing the castle of Gaza and returning it to the Templars. This was, however, not a long-term arrangement: Gaza remained outside Frankish control in the peace treaty of 1192 between the Sultan and

the English king, and this was the end of Frankish control of Gaza the town and its region.<sup>44</sup>

How might we sum up this period of forty plus years of Frankish rule of Gaza? We see that in spite of frequent fighting in the area and its position as a frontier town, some prosperity is indicated by immigration to the city. This shows the potential for economic growth when the situation would become more stable, as we will see in the Mamluk era. The Frankish Church of St John (note that this was a church, not a cathedral) would survive the change of regime, eventually becoming the Great Mosque of Gaza under the Mamluks (and most probably already before that, under the Ayyubids). Although many changes and additions were made to it over the generations by Muslim patrons, much of its original character was left intact. In the fighting between British and Ottoman troops in World War I, it was severally damaged.<sup>45</sup> Regarding the archeological legacy of Gaza in the Frankish period, Denys Pringle writes:

Little is known of the topography of Crusader Gaza, apart from the location of two surviving churches ... Walls surrounding the tell were excavated in the 1920s, but provided no evidence of medieval construction ... The location of the Templars' castle is unknown. Most of the surviving medieval buildings date from the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, when Gaza rose to prominence as an important staging post on the main road between Cairo and Damascus.<sup>46</sup>

What can we say about the new Ayyubid order in Gaza and its environs? Benvenisti tersely writes: 'The city was restored by the Moslems and became an administrative, military and commercial centre.'<sup>47</sup> This is most probably true as far as it goes, but certainly we would want more details; as suggested above, perhaps this statement is more appropriate for the Mamluk than the Ayyubid period. The sources that we have put little social and economic meat onto the bones of the political and administrative history of Gaza and its hinterland under Ayyubid rule.

Once Muslim rule was finalised over the area and Richard and his cohorts left the country, Ayyubid administration could begin in earnest. Saladin managed to appoint his *mamluk* 'Alam al-Din Qaysar as the governor

(*wali*) of southern Palestine (from Gaza, Darom and Ascalon in the west to Hebron in the east), as part of his reorganisation of much of Syria.<sup>48</sup> This was an important precedent; both the larger swathe of territory and the more prescribed area around Gaza were to be ruled by trusted commanders, not members of the Ayyubid family, as in Baniyas, Baalbek and Bosra, let alone Karak. It is not that Gaza and the adjacent lands were not significant enough to warrant an Ayyubid prince, but rather perhaps the sultan thought that it would be best if this strategically important area would be run by someone personally loyal to him.

The relative quiet and security that characterised the region in the years after Saladin's death, along with a renewed regular trade between Egypt and Syria through Gaza, surely contributed to some prosperity in country and town. However, Gaza seems to have been a modest place and did not figure prominently in larger concerns. Thus Yaqut (d. 1229), writing in the early thirteenth century, describes the city thus:

[Gaza] is a city on the edge of Syria on the way to Egypt. Between it and Ascalon there is a difference of two *farsakhs* or less. It is part of the Filastin district, west [*sic*, should be 'south' or 'south-west'] of Ascalon.

This short depiction does not mitigate against a view of growth and prosperity, but it suggests nothing in its favour either. The fact that we have only two extant construction inscriptions from Gaza City (1247 and 1249) and two from nearby villages (Bayt Hanun, 1239; Ni'ilya, evidently from 1247–8), indicates limited (and relatively late) patronage, and thus modest prosperity.<sup>49</sup> One notes their relatively late dates. The Syrian historical geographer Ibn Shaddad al-Halabi, writing in early Mamluk times, provides a quick rendition of the Ayyubid princes who ruled this city. Almost all did so from far away, mainly from Cairo and Damascus. The governors were invariably commanders, whose names are not given.<sup>50</sup> We have no indication that the fortifications of Gaza and Darom were repaired in any substantial way during these decades.

Yet, no matter what the state of Gaza City and its rural hinterland in the first third or so of the thirteenth century, it is clear that the situation deteriorated in subsequent decades. In a nutshell, Gaza and its surroundings were the focus of much movement of armies, their frequent long-term stays

and some fighting on a big scale. This situation would continue until 1260, and certainly had a negative impact on the region's economy, agriculture, demography and overall quality of life. Already in August 1228 al-Kamil Muhammad, ruler of Egypt, led his army towards Palestine, camping at Tall al-'Ajul, south of Gaza, remaining there most of the time for many months (into 1229) and conducting the business of state.<sup>51</sup> There were other movements of troops through and in the area, but this really begins in earnest during the second reign of al-Salih Ayyub (1240–9).

Even before, in November 1239, a Crusader force under Count Henry II of Bar was 'cut to pieces' near Gaza by an advanced force sent by al-'Adil II b. al-Kamil, then ruler of Egypt (although not for long; by June 1240 he was replaced by his older brother al-Salih Ayyub).<sup>52</sup> In the summer of 1240, the leading figure among the Franks, Thibault of Champagne, concluded a treaty with al-Salih Isma'il, Ayyubid ruler of Damascus, resulting inter alia in Ascalon and the district of Gaza being ceded to the Franks. Frankish forces advanced to the environs of Gaza, to counter al-Salih Ayyub's army that had moved south of the city. No fighting, however, occurred at this time.<sup>53</sup>

The next event of relevance was the famous battle of 17–18 October 1244, where Frankish and Damascene forces were defeated at La Forbie, or Hiribiyya (sometimes mistakenly vocalised as Harbiyya). This is not the place to discuss this battle,<sup>54</sup> but it should be noted that a large number of troops with their horses and baggage trains were in the area for some time. Most important may have been the Khwarazmian mercenaries, numbering some 10,000 horsemen, along with families, horses (surely more than one per soldier) and maybe herds. Even without the livestock, this was a tremendous logistical burden on the region, and certainly did no good for local agriculture. The Khwarazmian troops would have had no compunction in grazing their horses on farmland. These were surely tough times for the peasants.

Two years later, in 1246, another army of al-Salih Ayyub was in Gaza, this time in preparation for a conflict with the now rebellious Khwarazmians.<sup>55</sup> With this sultan's death in 1249, and the subsequent *coup d'état* by the officers leading to the establishment of a Mamluk state in Egypt, a new phase commenced in Gaza's history. The town became the southern boundary of the Syrian Ayyubid state, ruled by al-Nasir Yusuf, and he soon used it as a

jumping-off point for a campaign to eliminate Mamluk rule in Cairo and return Egypt to Ayyubid rule.<sup>56</sup> We need not trace all the military comings and goings through Gaza in the 1250s, let alone long stays of armies there, in the framework of the struggles between the nascent Mamluk state and the Ayyubids, as well as inner-Mamluk struggles and internal Ayyubid ones. This has been handily rendered and analysed by Stephen Humphreys in his book *From Saladin to the Mongols*.<sup>57</sup> I would like, however, to retell some of the highlights of the *annus mirabilis* of 1260 for Gaza in more detail.

The year begins with a growing concentration of various refugees from Syria – and perhaps beyond – fleeing from the Mongols who invaded northern Syria in force at the beginning of the year – although preliminary raids had commenced before. Many of these refugees were soldiers, with or without families, but certainly with horses and beasts of burden. One thinks of the Shahrazuriyya Kurds, assorted Ayyubid officers and troopers, the occasional Ayyubid prince with his entourage and then Baybars, probably with several hundred comrades from the Bahriyya regiment. Probably by mid-spring most of these had moved on to Egypt. By then, Mongol raiders were in the neighbourhood. In fact, through the summer an advanced Mongol force under an officer named Baydar (or Baydara) was there to keep an eye on developments in Egypt. It was this force that fought briefly with the Mamluk advanced guard under Baybars in August 1260, before withdrawing or being forced back. This was followed by the main Mamluk army's arrival under Sultan Qutuz, which after a short stop moved north, leading to the victory over the Mongols at 'Ayn Jalut in northern Palestine on 3 September 1260.<sup>58</sup>

The events of 1260 were the crescendo of more than two decades of military activities in the region of Gaza; this surely had a decidedly detrimental effect on the economy and demography of this region. Perhaps an indication of the poor state of the area and its lack of importance, at least from a Frankish point of view, is this map from one of the manuscripts of Matthew of Paris's *History* from around 1250 (see Map 4). From Damietta in the Nile Delta to Ascalon we have no settlements marked on the coast. Gaza (here 'Gazre') is found, but it is far inland. The location of Gaza so distant from the coast seems to indicate that it was also far from the consciousness of the Franks at this time (or at least this particular Frank), perhaps also indicating its relative unimportance in the political and economic scheme of things.<sup>59</sup>

It is not a surprise that after driving the Mongols from Syria after the victory at ‘Ayn Jalut, the Mamluk authorities found Gaza a desolate city and region. Matters, however, were about to change: thus, Ibn Shaddad al-Halabi, writing in the 1270s, reports:

When al-Malik al-Muzaffar Sayf al-Din Qutuz al-Mu‘izzi al-Turki defeated the Mongols near ‘Ayn Jalut, and the country was taken back, the inhabitants [of Gaza] returned to [the city] and it was built anew. In our time – when this book was composed – there are in it governors of our lord, the Sultan, al-Malik al-Zahir Rukn al-Dunya wa’l-Din Baybars al-Salihi – may God make his reign last forever, and bring his rule over the entire land!<sup>60</sup>

Some seventy years later we have a description of a thriving city and countryside, from the encyclopedia *Masalik al-absar* by Ibn Fadl Allah al-‘Umari (d. 1349):

Gaza is a city between Egypt and Damascus. Hashim b. ‘Abd al-Manaf was buried there, and there al-Shafi‘i was born. It is built of stone and plaster, its buildings are solid, on a high spot, at a distance of a mile from the Mediterranean Sea. It has good and pure water that is easy to digest, but it is not considered tasty. The drinking water of its inhabitants [originates] in wells, and it has reservoirs for rainwater, into the winter rains run, although these are considered small. It has many fruits, of which grapes and figs are the best. It has colleges (*madaris*) and grave sites that adorn it. It is a respectable district, in which there are army units, Bedouins and Turcomans. It borders on its two sides the land and the sea, and it is near the Sinai desert. To its south are agricultural and pasture lands, and it is a place of meeting between settled and nomadic people.<sup>61</sup>

In short, we see that the thriving city and countryside in the early fourteenth century contrasts with the apparently much less auspicious situation in the early thirteenth century, which only got worse by the mid-century before the Mamluks decisively took over.

What can we draw from all this? Firstly, research into the history of a particular region contributes to the better understanding of a larger territory, in

this case the southern Levant and perhaps even Syria as a whole. More specifically, the examination of the more restricted area helps us to see the wider dynamics of Muslim–Frankish relations in a larger region. While there were times of quiet in the almost forty-five years of Frankish domination, there is no evidence of an ongoing *modus vivendi* between Franks and Muslims, certainly among the military–political élites, which has been suggested as a leitmotif for political and military relations for the Levant in this period.<sup>62</sup> In this particular corner of Palestine, it was an ongoing contest lasting for almost half a century, not an example of a *de facto* rapprochement.

Secondly, I think that we can say that for the common people, certainly in the countryside, it was not business as usual as the princes and kings fought their wars with (mostly) professional soldiers. The movement of armies and their clashes certainly impacted on the countryside and its inhabitants, and it was clearly not for the better. From the arrival of the Franks in the country until the establishment of stable Mamluk rule more than 150 years later, the local inhabitants surely paid the price for the frontier status of Gaza and its hinterland.

Thirdly, a study of Gaza in the Frankish and Ayyubid periods helps us better understand the subsequent quarter millennium of Mamluk rule. While we unfortunately lack many details (especially regarding the rural sector), we now have at least a partial basis of comparison to discuss more effectively the development of the city and countryside under the relatively firm hand of the Mamluk sultans and their governors.

Finally, I can suggest that we should aim to put Gaza and its hinterland into the mainstream of regional and wider history in the Middle Ages. While relatively small and unimportant at times, it was never off (literally) the beaten track. On occasion, it plays a role of some significance in the larger scheme of things, and certainly can serve as an illuminating example for larger trends, as I hope to show for the Mamluk period.<sup>63</sup> By studying places like Gaza, we will better understand matters in the centre, as well as the larger picture.

## Notes

1. The research and writing of this chapter was sponsored by the Israel Science Foundation (ISF, grant no. 1827/16), but the groundwork for it was laid while I was previously a fellow at the Anne-Marie Schimmel Kolleg at the University

of Bonn in Germany. This is an opportunity to thank the directors, staff and fellows of the Kolleg for their support and encouragement. Preliminary results of the study have now been published as Reuven Amitai, 'The Development of a Muslim City in Palestine: Gaza under the Mamluks', ASK Working Paper 28, Bonn: Anna-Marie Schimmel Kolleg, August 2017, available at <<https://www.mamluk.uni-bonn.de/publications/ask-wp-28-reuven-amitai.pdf>> (last accessed 26 June 2019). I would like also to thank Kate Raphael, with whom I have been discussing matters related to late medieval Gaza since 2014.

2. This volume was published at Leiden 2009. Since the publication of Volume One in 1997, seven volumes of this series have appeared and several more are now in preparation.
3. For an initial analysis of the epigraphy of Mamluk Gaza, see Amitai, 2017, 12–14. The spread and nature of inscriptions in Mamluk Jerusalem will become clear with the forthcoming publication of relevant volumes of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palestinae (CIAP)*.
4. Amitai, 2017, 15–17. The countryside around Gaza is now the subject of a study by Kate Raphael, under the aegis of the ISF funded project noted above in note 1.
5. See 'Ata Allah, 1986; Sadek, 1991. See also the preliminary notes in the section on Gaza in *CIAP*, and throughout the section, as well as al-'Arif, 1943, 140–167.
6. Al-'Arif, 1943, 112–127. One can note the general comments in both the second and third editions of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, by Dominique Sourdel and Johann Büssow respectively (see below for details), and also the many *en passant* remarks by Gil, 1992; 'Athamina, 2000.
7. Benevisti, 1970, 189–194.
8. Pringle, 2008–10, 1: 194–196 ('Dair al-Balah'), 208–219 ('Gaza').
9. For example, Prawer, 1970.
10. Most importantly, Humphreys, 1977.
11. *Atlas of Israel*, 1956. The map of the Crusader period is 12/IX.
12. These are villages are (from west to east): Algje, Semsem, Amouhade, Heleiqat, Saarethe and Malaques; see Map 2 for their locations. The basis for their inclusion in this map is Prawer, 1958, 234–237 [Hebrew] (see especially the map on 236. See also the map in Riley-Smith, 1967, 481. I will discuss these settlements in further detail (with their Arabic names) below.
13. Ellenblum, 1998, xviii.
14. Benvenisti, 1970, 191.
15. See Leisten, 1996–2003, 4: 815; Avi-Yonah and Gibson, 'Gaza,' *Encyclopaedia*

- Judaica*, 7: 398–399. See Abulafia, 2012, 218–221 for some discussion on Jews and Christians, as well as the decline of the pagan community, in Gaza during the last centuries of Roman rule.
16. Al-Istakhri, 1927, 58; Ibn Hawqal, 1938, 172. The text in these two works is almost the same, and has much similarity to that of al-Muqaddasi, cited below. Cf. Le Strange, 1890, 442.
  17. Sourdel, ‘Ghazza’, *EP*<sup>2</sup>. Sourdel writes that ‘its port was Mimas, the ancient Maioumas mentioned as early as the third century BC, the site of which corresponds with the modern al-Mina’.
  18. Levy-Rubin, 2011, 164–171.
  19. Al-Muqaddasi, 1906, 174. André Miquel was correct in reading ايسر (became rich) instead of ائير (monument), which was read by the editor. This is clearly seen when comparing this text to that of Ibn Hawqal and al-Istakhri cited above; tr. Miquel, 1963, 203 and n. 236. The mistaken reading is the basis for the erroneous translations in Le Strange, 1890, 442; and Collins, 1994, 157–158.
  20. Gil, 1992, 316–429, reviews events in Palestine and neighbouring areas, putting them into the wider regional context. Gaza is hardly mentioned at all in these sections. On p. 395, he writes: ‘Apparently, one of the results of the uprising [of Bedouins against the Fatimids] was that the Jews who lived in villages or small towns were forced to find refuge in the cities, as is evident from the version: “from your brethren, the community of Gaza and those who fled to it” found in the signature of a letter from this community to the Fustat court.’ This is interesting evidence, but frustratingly brief and unique.
  21. *Ibid.*, 412 (section 605). I am grateful to Dr Shimon Gat for bringing this incident to my attention.
  22. Benvenisti, 1970, 190. For ongoing Frankish efforts to take Ashkelon, see: Prawer, 1970, 1: 328–330, 406–411. Büssow (‘Gaza’, *EP*<sup>3</sup>, online edition, available at: <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_27380](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27380)> (last accessed 31 August 2017)) writes: ‘When the Crusaders conquered Gaza in 493–4/1100, they reportedly entered an empty town; its entire population appears to have fled after receiving news of the massacres perpetrated during the conquest of Jerusalem.’ This is not correct: as we will see, the Franks took over Gaza only several decades later, and the matter of the massacre in Jerusalem in July 1099 would thus not have been relevant. See below for the question whether the city was indeed empty.
  23. There is hardly any mention of the city in the Arabic sources for this first half

- of the twelfth century, that is, before Frankish rule was established in this part of the country. Thus, Ibn al-Athir only notes Gaza once in passing during these years; Ibn al-Athir, 1965–7, X: 666; tr. Richards, 2006–8, 1: 285. The chronicle by Ibn al-Qalanisi, 1908 only mentions some events concerning the city in the late 1140s and 1150s; cf. tr. Gibb, 1932.
24. William of Tyre, 1986, LIII and LIIIa, Book 17, ch. 12; William of Tyre, tr. Babcock and Krey, 1943, II: 202; see also Pringle 2008–10, 1: 208.
  25. Benvenisti, 1970, 190.
  26. ‘Izz al-Din b. Shaddad, 1963, 260.
  27. William of Tyre, loc. cit. (original text and translation as in note 24 above).
  28. *Ibid.*; cited in Pringle 2008–10, 1: 208.
  29. William of Tyre, loc. cit; cited in Pringle 2008–10, 1: 208, along with other sources; see also Kennedy, 1994, 31; Prawer, 1980, 106–107. This hill would be the higher ground in the centre of the pre-modern city, where the Ottoman Serai (‘palace’ or administrative centre) was later erected.
  30. Usama b. Munqidh, 1424/2003, 72–73. Usama b. Munqidh, tr. Cobb, 2008, 26; cf. tr. Hitti, 1987, 42. Usama himself had been dispatched from Egypt to Nur al-Din to bring help to Ashkelon in the aftermath of the Frankish activities in Gaza. Returning from Damascus with a not insignificant force (860 horse-men), Usama saw much fighting in the area. After four months he returned to Egypt; presumably the Zengid expeditionary force remained and was part of the above described attack in which Usama’s brother, ‘Izz al-Dawla Abu’ l-Hasan ‘Ali, was killed. Usama b. Munqidh, 1424/2003, 63–73; tr. Cobb, 2008, 18–26; tr. Hitti, 1987, 34–42. This account is summarised by ‘Izz al-Din b. Shaddad, 1963, 260–261.
  31. Beyer, 1950, 175: ‘Nach dem Falle des letzteren [that is, Ashkelon, R.A.] (1153) hat Gaza dem König Amalrich I. von Jerusalem als Stützpunkt für seine ägyptischen Unternehmungen gedient.’ For more on these campaigns, see: Prawer, 1970, 1: 427–441.
  32. Al-Idrisi, 1970–84, 4: 356; cf. translation in Le Strange, 1890, 442. Benvenisti, 1970, 190, notes that the name Tida/Taida is derived from the Greek Anthredon.
  33. ‘The construction of the fortress and the capture of Ascalon four years later seem to have brought about a revival in Gaza’s fortunes.’ Pringle, 2008–10, 1: 208; see also Benvenisti, 1970, 190. Prawer, 1980, 107, describes this process as similar to other developing towns in Europe at this time: ‘Around the fortress a new settlement blossoms. Desirable permanent elements are attracted: ordinary people seeking a measure of security, farmers possibly from the vicinity, but

also traders and artisans to supply the needs of the castle, the new settlement and neighboring villages. To protect themselves, the newcomers built, by their own effort, a second wall around the fortress, which enclosed the castle and the homes of the new settlement. This wall, equipped with gates and towers, was low and weak, but succeeded affording a measure of security from assault.’ All of these modern accounts go back to William of Tyre, 17: 12 (cited above) and 20: 20 (ed. Huygens, 1986, 937–939; tr. Babcock and Krey, 1943, 373–375). His contemporary, Theodoric (fl. 1169–74), mentions Gaza twice in passing without too much comment: (1) ‘Ten miles [sic] from Hebron to the north, and on the shore of the Great Sea is Gaza, now called ‘Gazara’, in which Samson did many miracles, and one night took its doors away. Eight miles from Gaza the well-defended city of Ascalon is situated on the short of the Great Sea. These cities had been located in Palestine or the Land of the Philistines.’ (2) ‘After this you reach first Gaza or Gazara, and the well-defended city of Ascalon, all of which have been mentioned above. These are all the cities along the coast, and all of them are large and have walls.’ Theodoric, 1976, 40–41, 51 (chs XXXVI and LI); tr. Wilkinson, with Hill and Ryan, 1988, 307, 314.

34. John of Ibelin, tr. Edbury, 1997, 194. The problematic nature of this evidence is dealt with in *ibid.*, 159–161. See also Ellenblum, 1989, 104–105.
35. Benvenisti, 1970, 190.
36. The Greek bishopric centred in Gaza is noted in *ibid.*, 194; however, Pringle, 2008–10, 1: 216, appears not to accept this, hinting that Beit Guvrin was the more important centre. Cf. al-‘Arif, 1943, 132, for a confused rendition of ecclesiastical events in Beit Guvrin, mistakenly placed in Gaza. See Pringle, 2008–10, 1: 216–219, for a detailed description of the church.
37. The basis for this evidence is a list of villages (which extends further east) provided in a contract in 1256–7, between John of Ibelin, count of Jaffa and Ashkelon, and the Hospitallers, in which these thirteen villages were transferred to the John to the Order. Of course, this was almost completely theoretical, since the villages in question were at the time most probably not under the control of this or that Frankish authority. One also wonders if their mention here means their actual existence in the 1250s or harks back to a period of firmer Frankish rule. Paoli, 1733, reprint 2011, 150. This part of the document was analyzed by Praver, 1958, 234–237; and exhaustively by Blakely and Huster, 2016, 35–53. I am not convinced their suggestion that Elroiheib is Hiihiyya (site of the famous battle in 1244, known also as La Forbie), to west of Amouhade. The phonetics of this identification are very far-fetched, and this was

- a well-known site, which surely would have received a better transliteration than this. I agree, however, that previous attempts to identify the site with an Arab name have been unsuccessful.
38. Riley-Smith, 2012, 34; Riley-Smith, 1967, 73. Cf. Beyer, 1950, 175: 'Die Stadt und das umliegende Land war also keine Herrschaft, auch kein Teil einer solchen, sondern ein den Templern anvertrautes königliches Gebiet, das wohl auch in kirchlicher Hinsicht dem Templern unterstand.' Cf. William of Tyre's statement, cited in note 29.
  39. Kennedy, 1994, 31; Prawer, 1980, 107–109, provides a detailed discussion, and notes that part of the purpose was 'to establish political and economic hegemony which would carry with it the right to collect taxes from the agricultural settlements in the area [about which we have neither details nor names] and duties from caravans plodding northward from Egypt on the *Via maris*, which crossed the Frankish border.' Al-'Arif, 1943, 130, suggests that Darom was militarily more important than Gaza itself, at least as a forward position vis-à-vis Egypt.
  40. Lyons and Jackson, 1982, 42–43; Eddé, 2011, 45–46, 187; Benvenisti, 1970, 191; Pringle, 2008–10, 1: 208.
  41. Lyons and Jackson, 1982, 122–123; Benvenisti, 1970, 191; Prawer 1970, 1: 550–553.
  42. Lyons and Jackson, 1982, 170; Benvenisti, 1970, 191; Prawer, 1970, 1: 604–605.
  43. Ehrenkreutz, 1972; Eddé, 2011, 188; cf. Prawer, 1970, 1: 611.
  44. Benvenisti, 1970, 191; Pringle, 2008–10, 1: 208; Lyons and Jackson, 1982, 272–273; Eddé, 2011, 268–269; cf. Prawer, 1970, 1: 668; 2: 83, 93. On the continued standing of Darom as a fortified town see Stubbs, 1864, 280–281, 330, 352–356; see also tr. Nicholson 1997, 261. For its resistance to Richard and its later capture by him, see *ibid.*, 298–299, 316–319.
  45. Benvenisti, 1970, 194; for details of the Church, see Pringle, 2008–10, 1: 208–216.
  46. Pringle, 2008–10, 1: 208. From another study by this author, we see that there are no extant secular buildings in Gaza or in its immediate rural hinterland; Pringle, 1997.
  47. Benvenisti, 1970, 191.
  48. Humphreys, 1977, 79.
  49. *CIAP*, 1: 189 (Ni'ilya, where it is mentioned in passing; a separate entry will appear in a later volume of *CIAP*); 2: 98–104 (Bayt Hanun; see below, note 57); 4: 52–55 (nos 6–7, for Gaza City). There are also two Muslim epitaphs from

- the city from around this time; *ibid.*, 4: 55–57. Yaqut notes three villages in the vicinity of Gaza City; Amitai, 2017, 15–16.
50. Ibn Shaddad, 1963, 265–266. For more on this, see Humphreys, 1997, 206, 241, 244, 254.
  51. Humphreys, 1997, 195–206. Tell al-‘Ajul is an archeological mound, located at the mouth of Wadi Ghazza, just south of the city of Gaza.
  52. *Ibid.*, 261 (from which this quote is taken); Praver, 1970, 2: 272–274. Lower, 2005, ch. 9, esp. 167–171; Jackson, 1987, 37–40. A senior Muslim commander had a mosque built in Bayt Hanun after the battle, called Jami‘ al-Nasr (Mosque of Victory), with an informative inscription, now lost; *CIAP*, 2: 98–104, including an account of the battle and its aftermath. See also al-‘Arif, 1943, 133, n. 1.
  53. Humphreys 1997, 268–269; Lower, 2005, 173–174. There is some question of Gaza City’s fate at this time: Humphreys notes that the city itself was not turned over to the Franks, while Jackson, 1987, 58, suggests otherwise. In any case, there is no indication that the Franks actually occupied the city and may have only had a symbolic presence to its north. Jackson, 1987, 46–56 provides information on the frequent presence and movement of armies in the area until the battle of La Forbie in 1244.
  54. Humphreys 1997, 274–276; Praver 1970, 312–313; Berkovich, 2011, 9–44. For more on the Khwarazmians in the environs of Gaza, see Humphreys, 1997, 284.
  55. Humphreys, 2007, 285.
  56. *Ibid.*, 311, 315.
  57. *Ibid.*, 311–358. See also Irwin, 1986, 26–30.
  58. For these events, see Humphreys 1997, 347–358; Amitai-Preiss 1995, ch. 2.
  59. I am grateful to Dr Mordechai Lewy, who brought this map to my attention, explaining its cartographic peculiarities. He notes (in a personal communication on 15 September 2017) that ‘Gazre’ appears a little far from the coast because Matthew erased the original coastline, putting it closer to the edge of the parchment, in order to gain more space for copying the map (from an anonymous source); he forgot to reposition Gaza on the new coastline. To my mind, this confirms my suggestion that in the earlier part of the thirteenth century, Gaza did not figure highly in the consciousness of the Franks.
  60. ‘Izz al-Din b. Shaddad, 1963, 266.
  61. Al-‘Umari, 1984, 142–143.
  62. See the interesting and detailed work by Köhler, 2013. I hope to prepare in the near future a more considered response to this thought-provoking study.
  63. Some comments to this effect are already made in Amitai, 2017, 19–20.