

Structural Changes and Urban Layout in Acre during the Crusader Period and its Aftermath in the Ottoman Period

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In one of his most recent articles, the Crusader researcher and archeologist Adrian Boas surveyed the street structure of Acre during the medieval period, portraying it as a labyrinth of streets and alleys, quarters and buildings close to each other, forming a complicated, dense urban structure.¹ This study joined another article written by the same researcher regarding the structure of the Crusader cities, particularly the cities of Jerusalem and Acre.² These joined the collection of studies written by the leading Crusader archaeologist Denys Pringle on the religious structures and urban design of the city of Acre during the Crusader period.³

The history of Acre in the Middle Ages, with its dense urban structure, seems to have intrigued many scholars. It was the main port city of the Crusader Kingdom, a trade center, a focal point for pilgrim transit and a site for battles against its Muslim enemies.⁴ These issues have been touched upon by archaeological discoveries, which have enriched the information available to us in recent decades about the urban structure of the city, its streets and environs, and the surrounding area.⁵

The Crusader city survived until 1291, the year of the occupation of Acre by the Mamluks. At that time most of its buildings were destroyed, its large wall damaged and the town left mostly empty, except for a few inhabitants who had settled among its ruins.⁶

Nevertheless, over the centuries the city ruins served as a basis for its expansion and fortification during the tenure of the Muslim ruler of the Galilee, Zāhir al-'Umar in the mid-18th century (governor of the Galilee in 1745-1775).⁷

¹ Boas, "Streets of Frankish Acre," 21-24.

² Boas, "Reflections on Urban Landscapes in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem," 247-53.

³ Pringle, *Churches of Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem Acre: vol. IV, The Cities of Acre and Tyre*,; Idem, "Churches of Crusader Acre: Destruction and Detection," 111-32.

⁴ Regarding the history of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and the importance of the city of Acre during the Crusader Period (1104-1291), see Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, vol. 3; Prawer, *Histoire du Royaume Latin de Jérusalem*; Richard, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*.

⁵ On some of the important archaeological excavations made in Acre in recent years, see Hartal, "Excavations of the Courthouse Site at 'Akko," 109-11; Stern, "La Commanderie de l'Ordre des Hospitaliers à Acre," 53-60.

⁶ Benvenisti, *The Crusaders in the Holy Land*, 78-113.

⁷ Philipp, *Acre. The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian City, 1730-1831*, 12-16; Cohen, *Palestine in the 18th Century*, 7-19, 30-52.

Zāhir al-'Umar and his successor Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzār rehabilitated the city of Acre and established its new structures in a limited area between new walls only partially covering the area the city had occupied during the glory period it had known under Crusader rule. Most of the ruined buildings located outside the walls served as stone quarries for the construction of the city, its new walls and houses. Religious buildings and mosques added to the city's new boundaries, such as a citadel on the remains of the Hospitaller compound (The Military Order of St. John), and Khāns for merchants and travelers, such as Khān al-Shawārada, and other residential houses that adorned Acre with its narrow outline.⁸

In the first half of the 19th century, due to the destructive results of the prolonged fighting near the city walls beginning with the siege of the French army with their leader Napoleon in 1799, the city walls were damaged, and its surrounding area changed. During that time, this area enjoyed immense construction of barricades and an expansion of the moat in front of the walls on its northern and eastern sides.⁹

This all continued until the bombardment of the city in 1840 following the fighting of the British army and their allies against the Muslim rebels controlling that part of the Western Galilee. At the same time, in 1840, a massive barrage of shells hit the eastern part of the city, causing a fire which destroyed many buildings and killed hundreds of civilians.¹⁰ The city of Acre never recovered from this immense destruction, and its declining position was exacerbated by the rising position of the city of Haifa and its port, thus causing a major decline in its economic, demographic and administrative status.¹¹

All this remained true until the end of Ottoman rule at the beginning of the 20th century, when a new design for Acre outside the city walls was planned by the German engineer Gotlib Schumacher, a member of the Christian Templar community in Haifa, and an American consul. Schumacher was a highly diversified engineer, cartographer and architect. In 1885 he was appointed district engineer for Acre by the Ottoman authorities. Schumacher drew a new master plan for Acre in 1909, an ambitious plan of an orthogonal model, with horizontal and vertical network of streets, designed to make the city suitable for modern times.¹² This plan became a focal change in the urban design history of the city of Acre.

In this article, I review the exposure of the city of Acre during the Crusader period, its urban structure, its streets and buildings, with particular emphasis on the sections leading to its periphery. All these are examined with reference to the new master plan prepared in the early 20th century, at the end of the Ottoman rule.

I attempt to determine whether urban connections have been formed between parts of the old medieval city and the new one, as well as whether the structure of the city had been preserved and historical continuity kept in the structure of its medieval streets. These and other topics linking the Crusader period in the Middle Ages to the modern era may also help to comprehend the planning system of new cities established alongside their ancient counterparts, as well as the planning frameworks and the reciprocal relations that existed among those urban patterns.

As noted before, one of the glory periods of the city of Acre was in the middle ages under Crusader rule in the Kingdom established in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean between the years 1099-1291. Acre was first conquered by the

⁸ Al-Sabbagh, *Zāhir al-'Umar al-Zaydām*, 50-58; Philipp, *Acre*, 25-28.

⁹ Gichon, "East meets West 1789-1801, The Encounter and its consequences," 238-43; Philipp, *Acre*, 18; Dichter, *Maps of Acre*, 151-52.

¹⁰ Kegan, *Palestine and Transjordan Naval Intelligence Division*, 112-14.

¹¹ Carmel, *Ottoman Haifa*, 133-57; Yazbak, *Haifa in the Late Ottoman Period*, 189-99.

¹² Kark, *American Consuls in the Holy Land 1832-1914*, 119-125.

Christians from its Fatimid defenders in 1104, and served as a central port for pilgrims and merchants, secondary only to the Kingdom's capital, the holy city of Jerusalem.¹³

After the fall of most territories in the Latin Kingdom in the Battle of Hattin in July 1187, Acre became a focal place for the fighting and Crusader conquest attempts until July 1191, when the city was occupied by the Christians.¹⁴ For the next century, until 1291, Acre was the de-facto capital of the Crusader Kingdom. The city became the center of pilgrimage and the place of the seat of the Crusader nobility and its central institutions, the headquarters of the military orders, the Church institutions and the Italian Communes, until its fall to the Mamluk army in May 1291.¹⁵

At that time, during the 13th century, the city of Acre grew and developed within a dense warren of streets, alleys, gates, vaults, markets and churches. The ancient city maps, such as the Vesconte Map and the Veneto Map from the beginning of the 14th century, described the intricate and unbroken structure of its streets. The entrances to the city were marked by its main gates, such as St. Nicholas gate in the eastern wall and the gates of St. Antony and St. Lazarus in the northern wall. From the gates, streets led in a curved, nonlinear structure to the city's main structures: the Royal Palace, the churches, the military orders' headquarters and the Italian quarters located at the heart of the city.¹⁶

The city was large and surrounded by thick, dense walls. Its construction was interwoven with different height arches and vaults, courtyards, domes and towers, with no open spaces or gardens. It seems that throughout the city, there was hardly any unused space for construction.¹⁷

One can learn from the medieval deeds and acquisitions of land and urban properties about several central streets connecting the sites with the city suburbs. Such was, for example, Via Publica, which led from the city citadel to the port, and Vicus Balnei S. Johannis, which ran parallel to the buildings of the Hospitaller compound in the middle of the city, leading to the quarter of Montmusard located in the city's northern section. This suburb was developed to reach the northern wall of Acre in the 12th century, and expanded greatly after the end of the Third Crusade with the large incursion of new settlers from the inland Kingdom's territories.¹⁸ Other streets ran through the eastern part of the city, such as Vicus S. Leonard, Ruga S. Nicolai and Ruga S. Samuelis, passing close to the German quarter and leading to the gate of Saint Nicholas, connecting the city to the eastern parts of the Galilee.¹⁹

Acre became the symbol of Crusader power in its Latin Kingdom, therefore it was reasonable to assume that this was one of the reasons for its massive Muslim destruction in the late Middle Ages. The Mamluk rule sought to prevent an invasion by another Crusade and Christian military rule, leaving the city in ruins.²⁰ Little is known about the structure of the city of Acre during the rule of the Mamluks and following it, in the early days of the Ottoman rule of Syria. This is mainly evidenced

¹³ Ehrlich, "Urban Landscape Development in Twelfth Century Acre," 262-72.

¹⁴ Stickel, *Der Fall von Akkon*, 68-80; The 'Templar of Tyre', no. 489-509; Little, "The Fall of 'Akkā in 690/1291: The Muslim Version," 166-77.

¹⁵ Jacoby, "Crusader Acre in the Thirteenth Century," 18-39.

¹⁶ Praver, "Historical Maps of Acre," 178-82; Dichter, *Orders and Churches of Crusader Acre*; Pringle, "The Churches of Crusader Acre: Destruction and Detection," 116-17.

¹⁷ Jacoby, "Aspects of Everyday Life in Frankish Acre," 78-79.

¹⁸ Jacoby, "Montmusard, Suburb of Crusader Acre," 208-13.

¹⁹ Pringle, "Town Defences in the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem," 81-84; Boas, "Streets of Frankish Acre," 28-32.

²⁰ Atiya, "The Crusade in the Fourteenth Century," 3-7.

by Christian travelers who reported several magnificent buildings that stood in their desolation and alongside them the ruins of other buildings.²¹

In the 1750s the depiction of destruction changed with the seizure of power in the Galilee and the northern Mediterranean coastal strip by the Bedouin ruler Zāhir al-'Umar. The Muslim leader began to fortify several settlements in his territories: Tiberias, Deir Hanna, Shfar'am and even Acre - the naval gateway to the eastern Mediterranean basin.²² The area enclosed was considerably smaller than the 13th century city had been. Zāhir al-'Umar dismantled the city ruins on the eastern side, close to the 'tell' (mound) of ancient Acre (Le Touron), located in the eastern area where the Crusader city had been. This area spread more than 800 m. from the present-day wall, a site that had been heavily destroyed with the Mamluk invasion in May 1291. With all these operations the Muslim leader tried to provide stones for building the new walls of Acre.²³

Another site that was destroyed and whose stones were taken for the inner-city structures was the Crusader quarter of Montmusard, located in the northern part of Acre, on the seashore some 800 m. north of the present-day wall. This area contained remains of Crusader structures, streets, churches and residential houses, as well as large buildings such as the Hospitaller Lodging place (Auberge), all completely destroyed. Its remains were used to build the city walls and houses in the heart of the city, as well as for rebuilding a small area near the harbor in the southern area of Acre.²⁴

Inside the city many ruins and basements of the medieval buildings were left undamaged, but a rise in sea level since the 13th century made it necessary in certain parts of Acre to be artificially filled with sand and stones to provide a solid foundation for the new structures that were constructed upon them. These structures were partly discovered and published in the survey done in 1959-1962, under the direction of the head of the Old City Planning Office, Alex Kesten.²⁵

Another stage in the topographical research in Acre took place in 1997, when Benjamin Z. Kedar published his study about the city's distribution after examining post-medieval maps and urban plans from Napoleon's siege (1799) until the First World War and the British Mandate period in the first half of the 20th century. Kedar's research indicated that Acre in the 13th century was larger than the area inside the present city walls.²⁶

The last major development in the urban structure took place in the late Ottoman period, at the beginning of the 20th century. It was clear that the city would not grow and change within its narrow walls, considering the complicated range of buildings and alleys. Therefore, it was necessary to expand its boundaries beyond the outline of the walls into the open space surrounding the city.

At that time the old cities in Jaffa and Haifa began to grow, partly due to European settlers' activities (such as the Germans, members of the Templar

²¹ De Bruyn, *Reyzen...doorde vemeerdste Deelen von Klein Asien, die eylanden Scio, Rhodus, Cyprus enz. Mitsgaders de voornaamste steden von Aegypten, Syrien en Palestine*; Pococke, *Description of the East and Some Other Countries*; Hasselquist, *Voyages and Travels in the Levant in the Years 1749-1752*; Jollifer, *Reise in Palastina, Syrien and Agypten in Jahre 1817*.

²² Joudah, *Revolt in Palestine in the Eighteenth Century*, 46-56; Cohen, *Palestine in the 18th Century*, 128-37.

²³ Philipp, "Social Structure and Political Power in Acre 1740-1830," 162-66; Idem, *Acre*, 18-21.

²⁴ Makhoul and Johns, *Guide to Acre*, 67; Boas, "A Rediscovered Market Street in Frankish Acre," 181-85.

²⁵ Kesten, *Acre: The Old City: Survey and Planning*; Goldmann, "The Hospice of the Knights of St. John in Akko," 182-89.

²⁶ Kedar, "The Outer Walls of Frankish Acre," 157-80.

communities), which led to a change in the planning trends of the settlements in Palestine.²⁷

In this context, it is possible to note the establishment of the city of Be'er Sheva, established in the Negev desert region in 1900. This city served as an administrative and military center in the southern region of Palestine, and was planned in a unique orthogonal manner.²⁸

The establishment of the new Ottoman cities and the structural changes that took place in the old cities at the end of the Ottoman period led the Turkish regime to initiate a new master plan in other parts of Palestine as well.²⁹ In the case of Acre, the Turkish walls were not dismantled and remained in situ, but several entrances were breached, leading to the areas where the expansion of the city was planned, in its northern and eastern sections.³⁰

The Turkish authorities turned to the German engineer, a resident of Haifa, Gottlieb Schumacher, who worked extensively to prepare engineering and demographic plans, together with several archaeological surveys, in the Galilee and other parts of northern Palestine. He also made urban plans, as in the case of Acre. The outline of his plan from 1909 preserved the complex internal character of the Old City of Acre, and added residential sections outside the walls of the old city, on the northern and eastern sides, which did not damage the existing fabric of the old city.³¹

The new plan brought a modern planning model to the city of Acre, sketching its outer streets with an orthogonal grid model, allowing for clear and controlled urban expansion in a city whose density had not allowed it to develop in the past. The plan is unique in using a grid model, which outlined rectangles of 150 x 40 meters, as well as allocations of public areas and roads.³² In addition, the new city plan included common spaces, public areas, places for religious buildings and gardens, and main streets that diverted traffic from the Old City north and east to the centers of the Galilee and along the coastal plain to Safed and Haifa. At the center of the plan he drew an oval square, which may have been the site of the civic center - a park or a public garden. In the northern section Schumacher designated a future zone for later development of the city. It seemed that Schumacher assumed that this might be another area for the city's growth.³³

The buffer zones near the walls, the disturbed areas with all the diggings and moats, remained open spaces. These areas positioned the main streets that led from the old city of Acre to the new city in the western, northern and eastern parts of the city.³⁴

However, it is apparent that the Schumacher plan did not give much attention to the transport component rising at the time, paving the route of the railroad tracks and stations. Not until 1913 was Acre connected to a railway that led southward to Haifa in the eastern part and from there to the Hejaz railway, which led eastward

²⁷ Kark, "The Rise and Decline of Coastal Towns in Palestine." 71-74; About Templar activities in Palestine and their contribution to its economic and urban development, see Carmel, *Die Siedlungen der württembergischen Templar in Palästina*.

²⁸ Berman, "The Evolution of Beersheba," 315-16; Biger, "Ottoman Town Planning," 27-28.

²⁹ Stanislawski, "The Origin and Spread of the Grid Pattern Town," 105-10.

³⁰ Waterman, "Pre-Israeli Planning in Palestine: The Example of Acre," 85-86.

³¹ Waterman, "Pre-Israeli Planning in Palestine: The Example of Acre," 87, 89; Schumacher, "Population List in the Liva of 'Akka," 175-80; Richter, "Phönizische Hafenstädte im Östlichen Mittelmeerraum," 54-56.

³² Waterman, "Pre-Israeli Planning in Palestine: The Example of Acre," 89.

³³ Waterman, "Pre-Israeli Planning in Palestine: The Example of Acre," 89-90; Schumacher's Plan for Acre did not survive in its entirety. The location of the original map is unknown. A copy was made during the British Mandate (1917-1948) by Mr. A. Kahane of the Jerusalem Municipality.

³⁴ Waterman, "Pre-Israeli Planning in Palestine: The Example of Acre," 94, 96.

toward Syria. This transportation operation reflected the rise of Haifa's superiority (located approximately 20 km. south of Acre), based on its rising demographic development and transportation center, which commemorated the decline of Acre's status.³⁵

It seemed that at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, before the outbreak of World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, many changes took place in Palestine. In the past, great attention had been given to military and security needs; yet in the modern era, the Ottoman authorities were required to address the needs of the population and the development of civic issues via the city structure, instead of planning fortified cities. New ideas of urban planning surfaced, ideas that demanded openness, breaking walls and changing the structure of cities. These issues included a different approach to adapting public health, developing spaces and addressing social needs. These matters integrated with economic and commercial development and the rise of the influential factors at the time, rail movement and the development of ports, and Acre became part of this global trend. The medieval city within Acre remained in its density and closeness, and a new city was designed and later developed far from the antique walls that lasted without being demolished in the late Ottoman period at the beginning of the 20th century. Old and new zoning sections were united together in Acre, in a new model combining streets and neighborhoods.

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³⁵ Talbot, "The Exalted Column, the Hejaz Railway and imperial legitimation in late Ottoman Haifa," 255-60.

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