

**Palestinian Emigration to America, 1876–1945:  
The Push-Factor Effects**

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**Abstract**

Emigration to the New World is not a new demographic phenomenon in the Middle East. By the end of the nineteenth century, people in the region, particularly, Christian Syrian-Lebanese and Palestinians, had already begun immigrating to the Americas. At the basis of this emigration from the region lies a combination of economic, demographic, social, and political push and pull factors. To date, this subject—the push factors of Palestinian emigration to the United States—has not been researched. By and large historians dealing with Syrian emigration during this period have not investigated the push factors promoting it. They have focused mainly on the emigres after their resettlement. Therefore, the goal of this article is to identify the factors that prompted those living in the mountainous areas around Jerusalem such as Bethlehem, Bet Jala, and Ramallah, as well as those in Nazareth, Safed, and the nearby villages of Al-Jish, Fassuta, and Kfar Yassif to emigrate abroad. The main findings of the study show that 1913-14 was the peak year for emigration from Palestine. Initially, it was young people who wanted to create an economic base for themselves in the United States who left, seeking America's economic opportunities. After that, many families followed them. There were a number of economic factors that together prompted this decision: the loss of sources of employment and income, the burden of the heavy taxes imposed by the Ottomans, and policies designed to incentivize peasant farmers to sell their land to major landowners. Other factors included the activity of American missionaries in the region in both the educational and religious fields that raised awareness about life in the United States. In addition, improvements in ships between 1840 and 1920 made travel easier, quicker, safer, and more affordable. Finally, the opening up of American consulates in the region and ticket agencies for steamships made it easier to obtain the necessary travel documents.

**Keywords:** Emigration, Palestine, America, fellahin, push factors.

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## Introduction

Emigration is not a new demographic phenomenon in the Middle East. Even by the end of the nineteenth century, the people of the area, mainly, Syrian-Lebanese and Palestinians, mostly Christians, had begun immigrating to America. Many of these young merchants wanted to establish an economic base for themselves in the United States. Subsequently, many families followed their example. An analysis of the emigrants' place of origin, according to the newspaper *Filastin*<sup>1</sup> and the periodical *Al-Hilal*<sup>2</sup>, shows that the first wave of emigration from this area came from Bethlehem. Of the Palestinian emigrants at that time, 90% were Christian, and only 10% were Muslim. Most of them did not return to their place of origin. Instead, they settled in the new country, where they established successful Arab communities, which then served as magnets attracting additional Palestinian emigrants from other parts of Palestine.

Emigration from Palestine to the United States increased during periods of economic hardship as well as social and political hardships. World War II brought this period of immigration to an end. The establishment of the State of Israel led to a new type of emigration from Bethlehem, which was characterized largely by émigrés who had acquired higher education and were seeking employment. This movement resulted in a brain drain in the area.

To date, the push factors promoting Palestinian emigration to the United States between 1876 and 1948 have not been researched. Historians dealing with Syrian emigration during the period under discussion, by and large have not related to the push factors; they have focused mainly on the émigrés after their resettlement (Hitti, 1924; Khater, 2001; Naff, 1985; Orfelea, 1988; Safe, 1966).<sup>3</sup>

A combination of economic, demographic, cultural, political, religious, and even psychological factors all of which can be categorized as either push or pull factors compelled people to emigrate. While the pull factors are well known, with the United States being portrayed as the land of opportunity, the push factors are less known. In the case of Palestinian emigration, they included economic poverty and high taxation; the burden of Ottoman rule; demographic density; the influence of missionary

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<sup>1</sup> *Filastin* (Jaffa, 1911): *Filastin* is considered one of the most important Arabic newspapers of the British Mandate period. Publication of the newspaper began on January 15, 1911. The founder of *Filastin* was 'Isa Daud al-'Isa (Jaffa, 1878-Beirut, 1950), and he was later joined by his paternal cousin Yusuf Hana al-'Isa (Jaffa, 1870-1948).

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Hilal* : (The Crescent) is a monthly Egyptian cultural and literature magazine founded in 1892. It is among the oldest magazines dealing with arts in the Arab world. *Al-Hilal* was founded by Jurji Zaydan, a journalist from Beirut who had come to Egypt in the 1880s. The first issue of the monthly was published in September 1892. After Jurji Zaydan's death, the journal was edited by his sons, Emile and Shukri Zaydan. Shortly after its start *Al-Hilal* became as popular a magazine as *Al-Muqtataf*. The magazine, published in Arabic, is based in Cairo. It is one of the state-owned publications in the country.

<sup>3</sup> As in the books of Philip Hitti, namely *The Syrians in America* (New York, 1924); Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), Elie Safe, *L'emigration Libanaise* (Beirut, 1966); Gregory Orfelea, *Before the Flames: A Quest for the History of Arab Americans* (University of Texas Press, 1988); and Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (University of California Press, 2001).

activity; and the beginning of tourism and the effect of travel agencies.

This article surveys the complex push factors prevalent among people living in the mountainous region of Jerusalem and adjacent villages (Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Ramallah, al-Bireh, Bir Zeit) as well as in Nazareth and Safed and their adjacent villages (al-Jish, Fassuta, Kufur Yasif, and others). The study of Palestinian migrations with their various factors and motives occupies a special importance in modern and contemporary Palestinian, Arab, and international studies. It is considered a global issue, and one of the most important Arab and Palestinian problems in particular. There is no doubt that Palestine experienced different patterns of the emigration of its people, especially Christian Arabs. It first came as part of the extensive migration of the people of the Levant to the Americas in the late nineteenth century (Adawi, 2020), individually and voluntarily, and then turned into forced mass migrations.

The historiography of Palestinian migration thus far has focused mainly on Palestinian immigration to the United States and other countries after 1948. Their main starting point has been the Arab-Israeli conflict and specifically the 1948 war as the catalyst for immigration. Few historians have sought to reexamine the narrative of Palestinian immigration before 1948 and the reasons why, regardless of whether it was caused by push or pull factors. In addition, by 1899, all Palestinians were identified as Syrians, making it difficult for researchers to identify Palestinian immigration within US immigration documents.

## Previous Studies

Most previous theoretical studies have not focused on the factors driving the immigration of Palestinian Arabs to America between 1876 and 1945. Rather, they have recounted the story of Arab immigration and the mechanism of their integration into the United States after 1948. Examples include the first study by Sabella (2002) in which he reviewed the driving factors for the migration of Arab Christians from Palestine in the aftermath of the wars in 1948 and 1967. Similarly, Badwan (2009) discussed the movement of Palestinians in the wake of the Israeli takeover of Jerusalem and its environs in 1967. Musallam Adnan's (1990) study dealt with the refugee issue and the difficult conditions they faced in their countries of exile. In the same year, Sabella (1990) conducted a study among Palestinian Christians in the regions of Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. Finally, using information from *The Book of Immigration* from the Al-Liqa' Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land, Hassasian (1990) focused on the political and economic motives for the emigration of the Palestinian Arabs beginning in 1948.

Our review of the academic research did not reveal any articles in Arabic devoted to identifying the push factors promoting emigration factors through popular literature and the Palestinian newspapers. The only exception is Jabr (1986). His study of a village called Turmosaya revealed that 70% of its 530 participants stated that they left for economic reasons, followed by political, academic, and social reasons.

Our study differs from previous research in terms of the years covered and the use of primary sources we utilized. We relied on Syrian-Palestinian folk literature and Palestinian newspapers, both of

which had an influential and important role in making decisions. Articles, reports, stories, and messages of immigrants' success in the countries of emigration, as well as promotional advertisements for foreign transport companies and ships, had a strong impact on the decision to emigrate.

Thus, we used sources such as the Palestinian newspapers published at the time that provided information for potential immigrants, including articles, advertisements, and letters published by the émigrés to the United States. *Filastin*, published in Jaffa (1911), covered information about sailing benefits and Western shipping agencies that were established in Palestine to facilitate the immigration of Palestinians to America. The Haifa newspaper *al-Karmil* (1908) carried similar information for potential immigrants from Palestine. Popular literature at the time regarding Palestinian immigration is thought to be an important and reliable source that encouraged Palestinians to immigrate to America (Khafaji, 1973; Rashid, 1916; Saydah, 1956).

These sources were supplemented by articles in contemporary Arabic periodicals written by Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals, graduates of the American University of Beirut. For example, early periodicals, such as *al-Muqata'af*, which was published in Beirut in 1876, and later periodicals, such as *al-Adib* published in Beirut in 1942, contained articles that referred indirectly to the impetus for the emigration of Palestinians to America. We also used a variety of important secondary sources to identify the factors pushing Palestinians to immigrate to America.

## **The Origin and Scope of the Emigration**

Our focus is on those living in the mountain areas of the Lebanon Mountain, Jerusalem, and the towns nearby (Bethlehem, Bet Jala, Beer Zeit, and Ramallah), as well as Nazareth, Safed and the villages nearby (al-Jush, Fassuta, Kfar Yassif and others) (Adawi, 1992). By 1913, there were 3,000 people living in Bethlehem, Bet Jala, and Ramallah. Of the emigrants, about 90% were Christians and the rest were Muslims (Sunnis and Shiites) and Druze (Adawi, 1992).

### ***The Emigration from Bethlehem***

Most of the historians who have written about Palestinian emigration claim that it began in 1876 from Bethlehem. Maik George Salman, however, mentions in his article that the first emigrant to depart for North America was from Ramallah by the name of Hanna Khalil Murqus in 1851 (Mustafa, 2008:9,7; Salman, 1989:305; Totah and Khuri, 1923:90; Walid, 1974:41-46).<sup>4</sup> However, this appears to have been an isolated incident. Emigration began in 1876, as stated earlier, when a group of merchants set out from Bethlehem (including a few from Zahala in the Lebanon Valley al-Biqā') to America in order to visit the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia (Houghton, 1911:483-485; al-Ma'luf, 1907-1908:102). Some of them settled there and acquired American citizenship (*Filastin*, July 17, 1913).

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<sup>4</sup> However, according to Mustafa, the first to emigrate may have been three brothers of the Hanzal family who left Bethlehem in 1854 in order to display their mother-of-pearl, olive wood, and embroidery products from the Holy Land at an international exhibition in Washington, DC (p. 40).

Those who traveled to the exposition brought with them oriental perfumes, olive wood carvings, gold filigree, amber beads, clay vases, and olive wood beads as well as religious artifacts and objects made in Bethlehem. This religious and commercial connection between residents of Bethlehem and the pilgrims who visited the Holy Land (*Filastin*, June 29, 1912; Kafajii, 1953:84; (Mehdi, 1978:4; Shatara, 1919:116-139) encouraged the residents of Bethlehem to export their goods to the markets of Europe and the United States (Jacobs, 2019:76-91).<sup>5</sup> Missionaries were also involved in exporting products from the Holy Land to the United States.

Between 1904 and 1914 many Palestinians immigrated to other lands for economic reasons. Many left their wives and children behind. Eventually, the women and children had to follow their husbands to the lands of emigration because they were unable to support themselves and their children due to their poverty (Shatara, 1919:117-118). Thus, between 1899 and 1914 the phenomenon of Palestinian emigration, especially from the towns of Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Beit Jala, acquired a pronounced social and familial dimension. In 1911, the *Filastin* newspaper also reported about the emigration of Palestinians for similar reasons (*Filastin*, July 30, 1911). The spread of tuberculosis in the Old City of Jerusalem (Shatara, 1919:116-119), mainly from Khan al-Zeit, Suq al-‘Attarin, and Suq al-Kabir, was another motivating factor for healthy young people to depart for the New World.

*Filastin* also mentions the flight of thirty-five Palestinian émigrés, mainly *fellahin* (peasants) to North America. They were forced to emigrate due to the economic backwardness, lack of employment, and poverty reigning in Palestine. Unluckily for them, they were apprehended at the mouth of the *Nahr al-‘uja* (Yarkon River) before their departure from Palestine to their hoped-for destination, and were returned in handcuffs to Jerusalem to be interrogated by the authorities about their illegal escape (*Filastin* March 13, 1913).<sup>5</sup> Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh (1897–1889) testified that due to the above-mentioned circumstances he witnessed the emigration of young Palestinian villagers at the start of the twentieth century, especially from the villages north of Jerusalem such as Beit Dako, Beit Hanina, Turmus-‘Ayya, al-Mazra‘a al-Sharqiyya, ‘Ain Yabrud, ‘Ain Jarir, Bitin, Deir Debwan (al-Dabbagh, 1984:286, 300, 340, 350, 352; Escriban and el-Joubeh, 1981:151), and Bitunya (mainly the clan of Dar al-Haddad, some of whom settled in Chicago). They left for North and South America in search of economic circumstances better than those they endured in Jerusalem and its environs. Moreover, the *Palestinian Encyclopedia* states that there was also urban emigration from Ramallah and Beit Jala to North and South America for the same reasons (Baer, 1974:489; al-Dabbagh, 1984:444; Totah and

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<sup>5</sup> The leading travel agents who brought these tourists were Thomas Cook, Clarke, Barakat, and Farajalla. Most of the tourists came from America and Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century (1856–1900). To them, of course, should be added the pilgrims who arrived with organized tours before World War I. Their numbers have been estimated at between 15,000 and 25,000. This information is taken from the following sources: *Filastin* June 29, 1912. See also January 2, 1893 and August 20, 1906 in *Dispatches from United States Consuls in Jerusalem, Palestine, 1856-1906*, vols. 8–9 (Washington, 1969). See also Fu’ad Shatara, “al-Islah al-sihhi fi Filastin” in *Filastin wa-tajdid hayatuha*, ed. Hanna Salah (New York, al-Matba‘a al-tijariya al-Suriya al-Amrikiya, 1919), 116–139.

Khuri, 1923:115).<sup>6</sup>

### ***The Emigration from Bethlehem and Ramallah***

The Jaffa newspaper *Filastin* claimed that, starting in 1888 Ramallah's residents began to emigrate to the American continent in the footsteps of the Bethlehem residents in order to seek additional sources of income (*Filastin*, August 2, 1913).<sup>7</sup> Yusuf Jiryis Qaddura, a past mayor of Ramallah, tells us how the American Society of Friends (Quakers) played a role in encouraging emigration to the United States. As early as the 1860s, the Quakers began establishing their center of operations in Ramallah, first setting up a primary school for boys. Then, in 1889, they began building a school for girls. They commissioned builders and craftsmen from Bethlehem due to the dearth of skilled workmen in Ramallah. As the school was being built, workers from Ramallah supposedly overheard the workers from Bethlehem discussing at length the "remote land" called America, to which residents of Bethlehem had traveled in order to conduct business. They were able to aid their relatives financially, and later returned home with a great deal of money (Qaddura, 1954:114).<sup>8</sup>

Qaddura mentions an additional reason for the emigration of Palestinians from Ramallah. He states that most of the residents of the town were simple fellahin, living in poverty and ignorance. In this city of 3,000 people, only 10 could read and write (Ibid: 114; Shahin, 1982:19). This description of Ramallah remained accurate until the start of the twentieth century.

The residents of Ramallah became increasingly impoverished at this time. As a result of the decline of agriculture in Ramallah, the landowners were forced to transfer their land to farmers from the township, but on condition that they implement the system of *al-Mushatara*<sup>9</sup> (Qaddura, 1954:115; Shahin, 1982:19). According to this system, the produce was divided equally between the landowner and the tenant. The landowners, who were for the most part wealthy, preferred to emigrate to America. They settled primarily in Chicago and later in New York where they invested their capital in commerce. Indeed, many succeeded in establishing businesses, although some, who were less fortunate, became

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<sup>6</sup> On the epidemic of tuberculosis in Palestine, see Fu'ad Shatara, "Al-Islah al-Sihhi fi Filastin," (Hanna Salah, ed.), *Filastin wa-tajdid hayatuha*. (New York, 1919), 116–119. The author was one of Palestine's émigrés.

<sup>7</sup> Deir Dibwan has had a tradition of emigration since the end of the nineteenth century, mainly to Latin America, especially Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela, See Marisa Escibano and Nazmi El-Joubeh, "Migration and Change in a West Bank Village: The Case of Deir Dibwan," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 11, no. 1 (1981): 151. See also al-Dabbagh, *Biladuna Filastin* 8, pp. 284, 296, 300, 340, 350, 352.

<sup>8</sup> During the first half of the twentieth century, mainly made up of young people with economic motives.

<sup>9</sup> *Mushatara*: Linguistically, according to Arabic dictionaries, it means "participation" (*musharaka*), "sharing" (*muqasama*), and "equal shares" (*munasafa*). The *Mushatara* was one of the methods used for land cultivation for farming in the late Ottoman era. Landowners used to give their land for cultivation to other farmers who did not own land. The terms of sharing were that the land's yield of agricultural crops be divided equally (in halves/ *munasafa*) between the landowner and the farmer who worked it (*al-fallah*). See: 'Aziz Shahin, *Kashf al-Niqab 'an al-Judud wa-l-Ansab fi Madinat Ramallah* [Lifting the Veil on the Ancestors and Genealogy in the City of Ramallah] (Birzeit: Birzeit University Research Center, 1982), pp. 111-115.

peddlers, competing among themselves for business so that they could send money to their relatives.

According to the former mayor of Ramallah quoted above, the sums of money remitted to Ramallah created social, economic, and cultural upheavals. For example, enough funds were sent from immigrants in the United States to construct new and elegant homes, pave new roads, and build markets, resort hotels, national parks, and primary and secondary schools. Eventually, a municipal government was established and charged with maintaining public projects in Ramallah. Hanna Salah, an engineer who earned his degree in the United States and became the engineer for the municipality of Jaffa, estimates the number of Arab emigrants who left the above-mentioned cities, in addition to Nazareth and the villages adjacent to Jerusalem during 1900–1919, at 13,000 (Hanna, 1919:25).

### ***Emigration from Nazareth***

Palestinian emigration was not a phenomenon exclusive to Jerusalem and its environs. Emigration from the area of the Galilee (al-Jalil) first began from the town of Nazareth. Nazareth's economy had been hurt by the sale in 1921-1925 of most of Marj Bani 'Amir (the Jezreel Valley) to Jewish settlement agents. Many of the city's residents, especially those from the eastern neighborhood, used to lease part of their lands, and merchants earned their livelihood from the land before it was sold. Nazareth also served as the commercial center for the residents of the Jezreel Valley. The disappearance of these two resources—land and livelihood—following the purchase of the Jezreel Valley by Jewish settlement agents severely and adversely affected Nazareth's economy.

The rise in real estate prices because of Jewish immigration to Palestine also tempted many landowners to sell their property to Jewish settlement agents. According to the estimates of the *Palestinian Encyclopedia*, more than 8,000 Palestinian peasants abandoned their land in 22 or more villages in Marj Bani 'Amir, subsequent to its sale (al-Mawsu' al-Filastiniya, 1990:302).

These factors drove the young, landless sector of Nazareth, who could find no alternate employment after having lost their main livelihood, to emigrate from the city. Many first went to Haifa (Palestine Commission on the Disturbances of August 1929, vol. 1 1930: 48, 453-454; Yazbak, 1986), and some headed to the United States and Egypt. Later, they migrated primarily to North and South America. *Filastin* claimed in 1927 that while the population of Nazareth in 1920 stood at more than 10,000, at least half, perhaps more, of the population emigrated (*Filastin*, February 4, 1927).

### ***The Emigration from the Western Galilee***

Rafael Bulus states that Arab emigration from Palestine to other countries also took place from Safed and adjacent villages in the Western Galilee and from Kufur Yasif during the Ottoman period, mainly during the reign of Sultan Abd al-Hamid II (1876–1908) (al-Mawsu'a al-Filastiniya, 1990:302; Mansur, 1924:87-88). This emigration occurred for a number of reasons, but most of it was due to a dearth of sources of livelihood and the poverty that existed in Kufur Yasif. Other reasons included oppression and subjugation by the Ottoman administration, the flight from compulsory military conscription into the

Ottoman army, and the heavy tax burden (Bulus, 1985:75).<sup>10</sup> Family and factional quarrels also played their part in determining whether or not to emigrate.

Of the Arab emigrants from Kufur Yasif, mostly Christians, several leading families emigrated to North and South America during the reign of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II. Examples include Jeris Shahada, Salim Dawood, Raji Shahada, Jeris Bsit, Jadi Sam'an Murqus, Nayif al-Haj, Ilyas Jeris, Amin Jeris, and Salim Abu 'Aql. Most of these immigrants later returned to their home village, Kufur Yasif because they could not keep up with the new life and conditions in the New World. Most of the returnees were Arab Christians. However, between the end of the Ottoman Empire and the outbreak of World War I, some of these people decided to emigrate again and return to the New World (Bulus: 76). Examples of the returnees are Bulus Ibrahim Bulus, Jamil Khuri, Salim Abu 'Aql, Raji Shahada, Jadi Murqus, Khalil Tuma, Jeris Bsit, Ilyas Jeris, and Amin Jeris.

### **The Push-Factor Effects**

#### **The American Missionaries and Their Contribution to Palestinian Emigration**

American Protestant missionary activity in Palestine from the second quarter of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of World War I was an important factor in encouraging the emigration of Palestinians to the American continent mainly for the purpose of seeking economic opportunities. The American missionaries also encouraged them to travel to the United States in order to continue their education and were also supportive of those who left because of feelings of deprivation and lack of freedom (Arieli, 1967:10-19).

The principal intention of the missions of all sects was to win souls for their faith and to spread the gospel (Jessup, 1910:16).<sup>11</sup> To this end the American missions worked to spread literacy and education, first by bringing printing presses to Lebanon and Syria, and second, by establishing schools for boys and girls, mainly in Lebanon and Palestine. Eventually, they fulfilled their missionary aim by establishing colleges, including the Syrian Protestant College in 1866, which later became the American University of Beirut. According to Henry Jessup's testimony, between 1819 and 1908, there were 153 American missionaries working in Greater Syria (Hitti, 1955:114-116; Ibid, vol. 2:797; Tibawi, 1966:12).

American missionary activity in the field of education was clearly based on interests other than education for its own sake. In retrospect, these interests proved beneficial to the United States: the propagation of the English language and of Protestant religious education could also be seen as preparing the students for a future in the United States. According to Jessup, "the establishment of a

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<sup>10</sup> Including Christians, who were also drafted starting in 1909.

<sup>11</sup> Among the sources available were books written by the American missionaries themselves such as Henry Harris Jessup, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*, vol. 1–2 (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1910). Henry Jessup was an American Presbyterian missionary who lived in Syria for 53 years, initially in Tripoli in 1856 and afterwards, in 1860, in Beirut. He supervised the Presbyterian schools.

<sup>12</sup> Elias Audi was the mayor of Ramallah and the Clerk of the Ramallah Friends meeting (1910–1921).



school is a prerequisite for the success of the mission and through it the gospel can be spread in a given area" (Jessup, vol. 2:797).

The Quakers, who were Protestants but not part of the Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, began to operate in Palestine during the second half of the nineteenth century. They successfully established two modern schools in Ramallah with separate dormitories for girls and boys. Later, in 1899, Eli Jones established the Friends School and Dormitory for Girls in Ramallah (Ibid, vol.2:95-100). This Friends School became one of the long-standing, important private schools in Palestine and continues to exist until today. The Quakers also continued to run elementary schools in villages surrounding Ramallah (Diaries Office: Friends Ramallah Missionary, 1930:1,42; Landau, 1975:504-505; Lee, 1912:13-15; Tibawi, 1961:158-159). One source noted that by establishing schools in Ramallah and the surrounding area, the Quakers awakened the Palestinians to the idea of a "marvelous country in the New World," and that they could continue their higher education in American universities (Katul, 1950:177-179).<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, the American missionaries succeeded in transmitting universal values and messages prevalent in the United States to those who studied in their schools in Greater Syria. American mission schoolteachers helped create awareness of America among Palestinians, removing its aura of being an alien entity and the cultural barriers between the teachers and the population who studied in the American missionary schools.

The historian Philip Hitti quotes the words of one of the Syrian émigrés in New York, taken from the editor of the New York periodical, the *Independent*:

The teacher (in an American mission school in Syria) had a great many pictures of American cities, streets and scenes and I could see that life in that land was very different from ours. I heard about the telephone, the telegraph and the railroad and as I already knew about ships on account of seeing them go by on the water (Hitti, 1924:54-55).

The American missionaries' transmission of values and universal messages to the residents of Greater Syria made the United States a sought-after place for those who fell under their influence. Consequently, the United States enjoyed much more admiration and support in the East than other countries, which became a catalyst for Arabs to leave for its borders.

According to Hitti, many American mission school graduates were attracted to the West. Thus, the mission school served as the first stage in preparing for emigration, although the missionaries themselves did not foresee this possibility. These émigrés were motivated by the possibility of realizing cultural aspirations or achieving a higher living standard and ensuring opportunities for their children, as well as a life of freedom (Ibid:56). Most of the Palestinians who emigrated to continue their education at this time subsequently found employment in the United States, many in the field of commerce. In

most cases, those who continued their higher education did not return to Palestine.

In addition to their missionary activities, commercial ties between the United States and the Ottoman Empire were established as well. Ami Ayalon stresses that the United States began to develop a more active interest in the East, especially after signing the US-Ottoman Commerce and Navigation Treaty on May 7, 1830 (Ayalon, 1982:9). This treaty constituted America's first entry into the Arab East. The United States continued to expand its presence in the Arab lands under the control of the Ottoman Empire by establishing American consulates in cities such as Alexandria and Beirut. An American consulate was established in Jerusalem on June 2, 1857 (Hurewitz, 1979:245-247; Tibawi, 1951).

In other words, missionary activity, the commercial ties between the United States and the Ottoman Empire, and the presence of official American representatives created a convenient framework for emigration. The development of marine transportation to the American continent was another factor easing emigration. Most emigrants left to seek employment opportunities.

### **Ottoman Authorities and the Tax Burden**

The folk literature about emigration also identifies two other factors promoting emigration--taxation and compulsory military conscription. Expressions such as: "*Yā niyyālak yā halquṭṭ, yallī ʿal-ḥiṭān bi-tnuṭ - Māl mīrī mā ʿalik wa-nizāmiyya mā bi-tḥuṭṭ*" (O' lucky cat jumping and leaping upon the walls—You pay neither land tax nor tax to the army recruiter) highlight these factors (Hitti, 1924:56).

Palestine's Arab population, especially the impoverished fellahin class, was forced to pay many taxes. Among them was *al-ʿushur*, the tithe tax, which, by the end of the century, was 12% or more of a person's net income (Granovsky, 1927:22; Qabalan, 1970:49). According to another estimate by the economist Sa'id Hamada, at the start of the twentieth century, the *al-ʿushur* tax had risen to than 30% of the fellah's net income (Hamada, 1950:430).<sup>13</sup> According to Muhammad Kurd 'Ali's statistics, it had even reached 35% in al-Sham (Syria) (Kurd Ali, 1925:213), a figure also quoted in *Filastin* with regard to the Palestinian fellah's production there as well. The *wirku*, or land tax, was between 0.004 and 0.01 per mil (Abcarius, 1938:516). There was also the *al-aghnam* (herd tax) (Hablas, 1987:110). Non-Muslims paid an additional tax called *al-badal ʿan-jundiyya* or *al-ʿaskariyya* (military service exemption law) tax, amounting to 28 grush per annum (Bannura, 1982:71; Granovsky, 1927:64). In addition, there was the *al-tamattu* (a tax on annual income) at a rate of 2% to 10%. The *al-karrusa* was an annual fee of six grush, imposed for paving highways. And finally, there was the *al-ma ʿārif* tax, for providing services for the school system.

One could argue that the goal of these and other agricultural taxes in addition to customs duties on essential commodities was to intentionally bankrupt the fellahin and force them to sell their land to

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<sup>13</sup> See the villages of Turmus ʿAyya, al-Mazra ʿa al-Sharqiyya, Abu Falah, ʿAin Yabrud, ʿAin Jarir, Butin, Deir Dibwan in Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, *Biladuna Filastin* 8, pp. 284–296, 338, 340–352, 371. Most of the village population mentioned is Muslim. It is reasonable to assume that Muslim emigration to America took place as well during the first half of the twentieth century, mainly made up of young people with economic motives.

the large landowners. The high taxes constituted a factor that drove the peasants—after abandoning their land—to sail from Jaffa to New York and other lands, such as Australia, Brazil, and West Africa.

In addition to the tax burden, compulsory military conscription (for Muslims, and after 1909 for Christians as well) (Musallam, 1990:4) was a significant factor motivating many young people to immigrate to the New World. During a period of four years, starting from the moment the government subjected all young men to the Compulsory Military Service Law in 1909, the number of émigrés increased dramatically in all religious communities. Most émigrés were men ages 15–54 (Totah, 1919:109), seeking to avoid compulsory military service. Initially, only Christians emigrated, but later, Muslims followed their example. Citing an American newspaper, (*The New York Sun*, March 2, 1913), Philip Hitti added that the American correspondent in Haifa reported that every steamer bound for North or South America was crowded, mostly with Christians anxious to evade the military draft (Abraham, 1983). The attitude of the Christians toward the Ottoman Empire was extremely negative, as they felt compelled to leave their homes.

Thus, the combination of the heavy taxes imposed by the Ottoman government on the peasant population during the regime of Abd al-Hamid and later during the decline of the Ottoman Empire— as well as the mounting economic problems over the course of the nineteenth century—were the decisive factors driving many to abandon their villages and emigrate to the North and South American continents in hopes of improving their standard of living.

### **The Growth of the Palestinian Population**

Justin McCarthy, an expert on Palestinian demography, wrote that, “Starting in 1870, the population of Palestine began a period of accelerated growth. This was a common phenomenon in the Ottoman Middle East, throughout the Ottoman Empire, a consequence of a long period without war and of a developing economy” (McCarthy, 1990:37-38). The growing population would lead to emigration, as in the case of Beit Jala, as Yosef Washitz describes in his book *The Arabs in the Land of Israel* (Washitz, 1947:138).

Table 1 lists the increase in population in Jerusalem and its surrounding villages between 1800 and 1922. We can see that far-reaching changes took place during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in this area. Interestingly enough, the population increased fourfold or fivefold between 1800 and 1922 despite the emigration. The encyclopedic *Biladuna Filastin* notes that in 1912 there were 4,500 residents in Beit Jala. However, in 1931 it had declined to only 2,731, because of emigration mainly to North and South America for economic reasons.

*Table 1: Population Increase in Jerusalem and Surrounding Villages Between 1800 and 1922*

Years	1800	1840	1860	1880	1922
Jerusalem	10,000	13,000	20,000	30,000	62,500
Ramallah	2,000	2,500	3,000	3,500	7,400
Bethlehem	1,500	2,500	3,570	4,750	6,658
Beit Jala	2,000	3,000	3,000	4,500	3,102

**Sources:** Charles Issawi, *An Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Routledge, 1982), I; Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, "The Population of the Large Towns in Palestine During the First Eighty Years of the Nineteenth Century According to Western Sources," in *Studies on Palestine During the Ottoman Period*, ed. Moshe Ma'oz (Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 1975) 68; Yusuf Jiryis Qaddura, *Tarikh madinat Ramallah* (New York: Matba'at al-Huda, 1954), 136. Qaddura notes that the population of Ramallah between 1905 and 1910 as it appears in the city records reached 3,214; Tuma Bannura, *Tarikh Beit-Lahm, Bayt Jala, Beit Sahur* (Jerusalem: Matba'at al-ma'aref, 1982), 147.

Most of the émigrés chose to immigrate to the United States. However, following the enactment of laws in 1921 and 1924 limiting immigration to the United States, immigration to Latin America increased. In later years, the proportion of those heading for North America again increased because the means at their disposal in Palestine continued to be limited, and the sources of employment were inadequate for supporting their families (McCarthy, 1990:37-38).<sup>14</sup>

However, the flow of Palestinian immigration - with the end of the First World War and the closing of the gates to the United States as a result of the laws of 1921 and 1924 and the economic crisis of 1929 - was halted as a result of the difficulty in ensuring the departure of Palestinians from the Mediterranean ports towards the two parts of America, the North and the South, until the annual average reached 100 immigrants between the Years:(1921-1939)(Hooglund, 1987:17-35).

### **Developments in Marine Transportation and the Establishment of Shipping Agencies and their Effect on Palestinian Emigration**

Given the various factors driving the wave of emigration of Palestinians to the American continent, the question arises: How did the Palestinian émigrés reach the New World?

From the middle of the nineteenth century until World War I and later, marine transportation developed significantly. Western shipping companies established shipping agencies in Palestine. These changes helped Palestinians immigrate to the North and South American continents. Beginning in the 1840s steamships began to appear in Syria's Mediterranean ports, mainly in Beirut, Haifa, and Jaffa. Their primary function was not only the transport of goods, but also of passengers (*Filastin*, August 6, 1911; Hagopian and Zahlan, 1974:35).

<sup>14</sup> See an advertisement from *Filastin*, May 15, 1923. This company had offices in Palestine and Transjordan, both of which attracted and encouraged potential emigres. The brevity of the journey and its distance were mentioned

From the year it was founded in 1911, *Filastin* continuously published advertisements such as "To sail to America aboard the fastest French ships on Messageries Maritimes, contact the company's office in Jerusalem near Jaffa Gate" (*Filastin*, July 6, 1911). This advertisement was repeated in every edition until 1945. These advertisements for steamships in the local Arabic press certainly facilitated the travel of Palestinian emigrants and might have contributed to motivating them to leave for North America.

The steamships of six passenger ship companies appeared in Jaffa port during the period preceding World War I (Alexandersson and Norstrom, 1963:464; Kark, 1976:72; Tolkowsky, 1924:182; Totah and Khuri, 1923:81-82).<sup>15</sup> The French line, Messageries Maritimes, operated from the ports of Egypt to Jaffa, Haifa, and Beirut; every week its steamships transported many Lebanese merchants and emigrants (Avitzar, 1975:194-195; Ben Arie, 1980:33). The Austrian line, Lloyd from Trieste, sailed from the ports of Egypt, Jaffa, Haifa, Sidon, Beirut, and other Lebanese-Syrian ports down to Alexandria. Western and Central European travelers considered this line the fastest. The Russian line from Odessa sailed via Constantinople, Izmir, Marseilles, and other ports down to Beirut, Haifa, and Jaffa and to the ports of Egypt. The Khedival Mail Line was an English line that operated from Alexandria via Port Said to Jaffa, Haifa, and Beirut. Once every two weeks, ships from this line continued on to Tripoli, Alexandretta, Marseilles, and Istanbul (al-Bustani, 1908:107). Two Italian shipping companies, Marittima Italiana and Servizi Marittimi, each maintained a bi-weekly line from Venice and Genoa via Alexandria, to Jaffa, Haifa, and Beirut, and from there to Tripoli, Alexandria, and Marseilles (Avitzur, 1975:30).<sup>16</sup>

After World War I, three more shipping lines operated in the ports of Jaffa, Haifa, and Beirut. The Austro-American Cosulich Line offered regular transportation between Jaffa and North and South America via Piraeus in Greece every fifteen days from Jaffa to Piraeus on ships of Triestino Lloyd. There was a direct line from Patras to New York and North America aboard luxury liners (*Filastin*, May 15, 1923). According to the general travel agencies that operated at this time in Palestine and had offices in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Jaffa, and Amman (Ibid), the British passenger line, the Byron Line, docked in Jaffa and sailed on the same day to New York via Alexandria and Piraeus. Another line, the French Fabre Line, operated fast steamships such as "Britannia," "Canada," and "Braga" from Jaffa to North and South America (*Filastin*, August 21, 1926).

Between 1840 and 1930, at least nine shipping lines sailed from Palestine on regular weekly or monthly schedules. Their announcements appeared in the Arabic newspapers from 1908 onwards and attracted the interest of the urban Palestinian population in places like Jerusalem, Jaffa, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Beit Jala who were considering migrating to the New World. The large number of these

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<sup>15</sup> *Filastin*, July 6, 1911. The text of the advertisement in Arabic reads: "Min ajl al-safar li-jihat Amrika fi baburat Messegeri al-Fransawiyya al-mukhabara fi maktabat al-sharq fi al-Quds kharij Bab al-Khalil (Bawwabat Yafa)."

<sup>16</sup> The Royal Mail Line: This company was willing to carry most passengers to all parts of America on the ships of the English "Royal Mail Line," well known for their speed, size, and luxury.

announcements in Palestinian newspapers is evidence of an emigration movement and most likely directly influenced the increase in emigration. The shipping agents, in Sa'id Hamada's opinion, were excessive in their encouragement of the Lebanese and Palestinians with their extravagant descriptions of destination countries and reiterations that the New World was a "paradise" where one could easily achieve happiness (Hamada, 1938:16; Hamada, 1950:430).

According to Hitti's testimony, the shipping agents made prodigious efforts to encourage the Arab population to immigrate to destination countries. They traveled from village to village throughout Palestine on donkey or horseback to spread this attractive propaganda, offering many inducements including loans to cover the fare to America (Hitti, 1900:122-123). Similarly, the historian Gregory Orfalea notes that at the close of the nineteenth century, people would travel by donkey or on foot to the ports—Beirut, Haifa, and Jaffa—to meet the shipping agents. These agents tended to give as much assistance to the new arrivals as they could, at first by bribing the Turkish emigration officials, later by insuring the purchase of a steamship ticket at a reasonable price (about US \$30–\$50), and finally helping them to board one of the boats ferrying passengers to the steamship anchored far from the port (Orfalea, 1988:73). He adds that besides bribing Turkish emigration officials, the émigrés had to pay three more bribes before they could reach their ship anchored in Beirut harbor. The émigrés paid half a *majidiyya* (\$1.50) to the official who stamped the boat tickets, \$0.50 to the captain of the boat anchored in the harbor for the service of transferring them onto the boat anchored outside the harbor, and \$0.50 more to the official standing next to the boat's ladder (Ibid:73).

### **The Image of Social Success: The Messages of the First Immigrants**

Another factor that encouraged emigration were the letters from the first immigrants that appeared in the Palestine newspapers, telling their success stories in America. These tales provided the psychological encouragement for immigration. Even those whose economic situation was good began to immigrate with the aim of increasing their wealth. Likewise, after the establishment of Arab communities of immigrants who had succeeded in adapting and integrating into American life, there was an increase in the flow of immigrants from Greater Syria, especially Palestinians and Lebanese. Evidence of this economic success in the New World came in the form of money that was sent by Palestinian immigrants to their families in Palestine, which led to an increase in the standard of living and to the expansion of agricultural projects (Palestine Newspaper, 1922).

For example, an educated Palestinian immigrant, Dr. Fouad Shatara, was a member of the New York Society of Surgeons, an elite organization of the leading 75 surgeons in the world. He encouraged Palestinian youth to come to America in order to complete their higher education, saying (Palestine Newspaper, 1922): "Then, right without force is lost, so the nation must prepare and increase its strength by strengthening commercial and economic projects and by sending a large number of young men to study in high schools in Europe and America, and we can help in this project..." (*Filastin*, February 22, 1922).

### **The Decline of Emigration after World War I**

In 1906–1907, the periodical *al-Hilal* quoted an article that had appeared in the periodical *North American Review*, indicating that the American government had set limits on immigration in order to stop the stream of mass immigration from around the world. According to *al-Hilal*, the restrictions included imposing a head tax of \$2–\$5 on people entering the United States; the prohibition of allowing those, who upon undergoing a medical examination, were found to be ill or suffering from mental or physical retardation that would prevent them from supporting themselves; and the prohibition of allowing all those under the age of 17 who arrived unaccompanied by their father (al-Hilal, 1906-7:319-329; *Filastin*, January 19, 1913). With the outbreak of World War, I the stream of emigration from Palestine stopped due to the war and the difficulty of securing departures from the ports of Lebanon and Palestine to North and South America.

With the end of World War I, however, a massive wave of immigration once again reached the United States. In reaction to the immigration, a phenomenon known as nativism emerged, later becoming a movement of isolationism (Higham, 1972:35) and xenophobia, a trend seeking to protect American Protestant values and way of life throughout America. This trend reached its peak during the 1920s when it succeeded in locking America's gates against the unwanted immigration of Catholics, Jews, and people from southern and eastern Europe, while attempting to force puritanical Prohibition laws on the entire country (Curan, 1975:21-22).

The movement for restricting immigration began with the law of 1882 under the stewardship of the Federalist movement. This movement, which peaked during 1896–1897, refused entry to the United States to those who were labeled as insane, idiots, illiterate, and those who could not support themselves, as well as those who were unacceptable to American society. To limit the number of low-paid workers of foreign extraction, the US Congress enacted a law according to which workers could be brought into the country only by contract (Harper, 1975:21-22; Higham, 1972:11).

Under the influence of isolation and xenophobia, the United States enacted laws in 1920–21 that put an end to the traditional policy of welcoming new immigrants and that controlled both the quantity and quality of the immigrants entering the United States. Thus, the annual numbers of immigrants entering the United States after this period were reduced. The law of 1921 fixed an annual quota of 3% of the number of immigrants that had arrived from each country during 1910. Subsequently, a tougher law was enacted, which reduced the number of immigrants entering the United States from each country to 2% of those who had entered in 1910 (Harper, 1975:6-7).

The movement favoring limits on immigration continued to flourish against a background of isolationism. It demanded restrictions on the number of immigrants, the criteria being the country of origin. Article 13 (c) of the law of 1924 prohibited immigration of those ineligible to become citizens of the United States, namely, Asians. Although the article's text<sup>1</sup> was intended to prevent Japanese immigration, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1822 and the Asiatic Barred Zone of 1917 had already prevented the immigration of other Asian peoples (Hutchison, 1981:65; al-Sharqawi, 1937:121-123). With this article, America unilaterally abrogated the gentlemen's agreement according to which Japan

had reduced the number of its immigrants to the United States since 1908. The Japanese referred to this article as the Japanese Exclusion Clause (Ibid, 1937:101-102). In short, the number of immigrants to the United States rose and fell over time as a consequence of the laws of 1921 and 1924. Thus, the annual number of Lebanese Syrian immigrants (which included Palestinians) fell to 2064 in 1926 and in 1928 to 954.



*Table 2: Number of Palestinian Immigrants to America during the Period of the British Mandate (1922-1941)*

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Immigrants</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Immigrants</b>
1922	1,436	1932	—
1923	1,481	1933	—
1924	604	1934	—
1925	1,949	1935	387
1926	2,064	1936	405
1927	1,907	1937	639
1928	954	1938	716
1929	1,089	1939	977
1930	1,324	1940	492
1931	680	1941	790

Sources: Walter, Francis Willcox, *International Migration* Vol. 1: *Statistics* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1929), 899; Great Britain, *Geographical Handbook Series: Palestine & Transjordan*, B.R.514, Naval Intelligence Division (December 1943), 183.

Table 2 lists the number of Palestinian emigrants to American during the British Mandate from 1922 to 1941. As the table indicates, the number of Palestinian emigrants who came to America declined during the period of the British Mandate in Palestine. Starting in 1922 the number of emigrants reached 1,348 and in 1923, 1,481; but in 1924, the year that the Quota Law was passed, the number fell to 604. In 1926, 2,064 emigrated; in 1927, 1,907; in 1928, 954; and in 1929 (the year of the Great Depression) 1,089. In 1930, 1,327 emigrated, and in 1931 only 680 Arabs emigrated. The economic depression of 1929 completely thwarted the personal aspirations and ambitions of immigrants who were primarily economically motivated. According to Table 2, after the economic crash in 1929, only 442 Arabs entered the United States. In 1930, the number declined even more to 332. In 1931, only 180 Syrian Lebanese left for the North American continent, with the average dropping to 100 immigrants per year between 1921 and 1939. From 1931 until the outbreak of World War II in 1939, only a few hundred emigrants left the country each.

## Conclusion

This article deals with the period of the end of the nineteenth century until World War II, with 1913 constituting the peak year for emigration from Palestine. The last quarter of the nineteenth century marks the process of massive emigration from Palestine, in which the phenomenon reached considerable proportions and can serve as a model of the general phenomenon of emigration to the United States at this time.

At first, the emigrants from Palestine were young people who wanted to establish an economic base for themselves in the United States, given the economic opportunities offered there. Subsequently, many families followed them. This type of emigration ended with the outbreak of World War II. During the period immediately after World War II, most of those who came to the United States were educated emigrants. The reason for this migration was most likely due to the economic growth in the region, particularly, the result of oil exploration. There was also emigration to the oil producing countries, although in most cases, this emigration was intended to be temporary for the purposes of work. In addition, in 1948, many Palestinians found themselves stateless with the establishment of the State of Israel in that year. Thus, in its wake, the migration to the United States was of a selective nature.

We can identify a number of push and pull factors that encouraged emigration from Palestine. The first is the economic factor, evident in the Syrian-Palestinian folk literature and the newspaper *Filastin* indicating that extreme poverty and the heavy tax burden caused peasants to immigrate from Palestine to America. In addition, even those who were financially comfortable saw an opportunity to increase their wealth by emigrating. The second factor is the political and social situation. The tyranny of Ottoman rule, the stifling of freedom of expression, and injustice and repression prompted people to seek a better life. In addition, there were outbreaks of disease in Palestine, especially in the poor neighborhoods in the Jerusalem area. The third factor is the growing awareness of a better world outside the region. American missionaries brought with them a different vision of the world that they taught to the children in their schools. Advertisements in Arab newspapers from steamship companies indicated that the New World could be reached through the developments in marine transportation. That form of transportation was also financially accessible. Tickets could be purchased from local agents with money sent by relatives who were already in the New World. The documents needed to travel could be obtained from the local American consulates. Letters from those who had already sought a new life in the Americas showed that it was possible to find work in the New World and succeed there. Palestinian intellectuals in the Diaspora such as Fouad Shatara who had achieved a high level of education urged young people to study in the institutions of higher education in America and Europe. Thus, for many Palestinians in 1840 to 1920, there were many factors attracting them to life outside the region and making those areas much more accessible.

In particular, the Ottoman government treated the Palestinian Christians as a distinct religious minority, especially during the time of 'Abd al-Hamid II. In contrast, the Palestinian Christian emigrants who went to the United States did not feel any such distinction. It seems that after the first generation of emigrants, their connection with the homeland attenuated. They assimilated into their new societies

despite attempts of the local periodicals such as *al-Jam'a* to maintain the ties between them and the Palestinian homeland and to encourage their return to their homeland.

This emigration has many implications for Palestinians today. The number of Christian Palestinian émigrés abroad is greater than the number of those who chose to remain in Palestine. During the last two generations, as a result of the loss of places of residence after 1948, many Palestinians, both Muslim and Christian, found their way to the United States. It is possible that the emigration would have been even larger if not for World War I, the American anti-immigration legislation of 1921 and 1924, and the Great Depression of 1929. All of these factors combined together to limit immigration from all over the world, including Palestinian, Lebanese, and Syrian emigration. Given the access to new sources such as the archives of the Quakers, we can anticipate future research that will delve deeper into the factors driving the emigration of Palestinians (Graham-Brown, 1980; Quaker Archives, September 10, 1930; January 3, 1933).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Some of those sources would be: Orfalea, *Before the Flams*; Sarah Graham-Brown, *Palestinians and their Society 1880- 1946: A Photographic Essay*, (London & New York, 1980); Quaker Archives: American Friends Board of Mission, Richmond, Indiana, September 10, 1930; Quaker Archives: American Friends Board of Mission, Richmond Indiana, January 3, 1933.

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