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Tobacco Pipes, Cotton Prices, and Progress

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Dear Peter,

Is it possible to draw a sharp line between the past and the present-- to determine precisely when "ancient times" ended and when the "modern era" began? For many archaeologists working in the Middle East, such border-marking is not only possible, it's essential-- as an exercise of their professional identities.

Archaeology is, after all, at least by its dictionary definition, the study of ancient peoples and cultures; the modern peoples and cultures of the region have rarely provided much more than an exotic and colorful background. The main interest of archaeologists in the Middle East-- who until recently have been predominantly European and American-- has been to explore those historical periods seen as the "foundations" of western culture: the early empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the biblical kingdoms, and the later empires of the Greeks and Romans. There have, of course, been a few excavations of sites from the early Islamic and Crusader periods, but the Middle Ages are about as far as most archaeologists are willing to go.

Antiquities laws in the various countries of the region (largely inherited from the statutes of European colonial administrations) have maintained a legal boundary between the present and the past. In Israel, for instance, the Department of Antiquities has no formal jurisdiction over architecture or artifacts that postdate 1700 AD. As a result, the remains of the last 300 years are seen by many archaeologists as being of little or no archaeological value. And all too often-- not only in Israel, but throughout the region-- excavators take advantage of the laws' provisions, using bulldozers to clear the uppermost levels in order to get to the more intellectually interesting layers below.

The situation may be slowly changing for the better. In recent years, the developing theories of "New Archaeology" have stressed the potential importance of all archaeological remains. Excavations like those undertaken at the sites of 18th century iron foundries in Sweden, of 19th century slave quarters in Mississippi, and of early 20th century tenements in New York City have demonstrated that archaeology need not necessarily study ancient cultures to be useful. Its ulti-

mate challenge may be to derive a broader understanding of the nature of human material culture in general, and of the mechanics of cultural change.

While most Middle Eastern archaeologists are still trained as specialists in the earlier periods, there is now a growing awareness among some of them that the primary goal of their excavations shouldn't be just to fill museums with attractive artifacts or to uncover new national parks. One of the most promising archaeological developments in the countries around the eastern Mediterranean is an interest in regional studies-- examining the changing settlement patterns and cultural connections of entire geographical or environmental units-- rather than restricting the digging and the historical conclusions to individual sites.

Among the most ambitious archaeological projects of this type currently underway in Israel is the Yoqne'am Regional Project, sponsored by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In an attempt to break through the traditional compartmentalization of archaeological research in this country, the project is studying the changing patterns of economy and settlement over approximately 300 square kilometers of the western Jezreel Valley. The largest ancient site in this area is Tel Yoqne'am, presumably the region's urban center in antiquity. And this site, as well as several of its ancient satellite settlements have been selected for intensive investigation.

The western Jezreel Valley offers clear advantages for a broad, regional approach. It is one of the most well-watered and fertile agricultural regions of the country, and its location at an important road junction makes it a natural focus of communication and trade. The five seasons of exploration and digging already completed by the staff of the Yoqne'am Regional Project have provided clear evidence of the importance of environmental and geographical factors throughout much of the area's human history. Although the precise date of the establishment of the first permanent settlements is still uncertain, the team has been able to trace alternating rhythms of prosperity and decline from the Bronze Age to around 1400 AD.

And there, in the Middle Ages, the human history of the region suddenly seems to stop. On Tel Yoqne'am itself, the latest level of significant building has been dated to the Crusader period, when the city was known as Caymont and served as the center of a feudal seigneurie. The last period of occupation-- dated by the excavators to the century after the Crusaders' abandonment of the site in 1283-- seems to be only of a few squatters. No remains dating later than 1400 have been distinguished, creating a clear boundary between the present and the past. The excavators have suggested that Tel Yoqne'am, one of the main urban centers of the rich western Jezreel Valley, lay abandoned of any significant human habitation until the founding of nearby Kibbutz Yoqne'am in 1935.

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Five hundred years is a long time for desolation, especially in

light of the natural advantages that the site of Tel Yoqne'am possesses. And it's particularly strange, since it is the only such extended gap in occupation in the area's long human history. Even if the conditions in the country under the Mamluks and Ottomans were unsettled, even if the region's population declined steeply, it's difficult to explain the site's total abandonment. But the excavators at Tel Yoqne'am have uncovered an archaeological clue that may, in fact, provide the missing link between the last squatters of the Mamluk period and the farmers of the modern kibbutz.

In the rubble of a Crusader church near the summit of the ancient city, the excavators found a number of small clay bowls of smoking pipes, elaborately decorated and distinctive in shape. Similar clay pipe heads had been found in the upper levels of tells in neighboring countries; at Hama in Syria and at Baalbek in Lebanon, they had even suggested a similar historical context. There, they were ascribed to short-lived settlements of the early Mamluk period, whose abandonment marked the end of permanent occupation at those famous sites at around 1400 AD. But the pipes at all three sites may have an entirely different significance. If an American scholar is correct, those clay pipes were used for smoking tobacco and thus could not possibly have been dropped or discarded at Baalbek, Hama, and Yoqne'am before the tobacco habit reached the Middle East from its birthplace in the New World sometime in the early 17th century.

In a recent article in Hesperia, the journal of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, Rebecca Robinson published one of the first detailed studies of this class of artifacts, based on the dozens of examples found by the American excavations at Corinth and at the Athenian Agora. Because the layers at those sites were comparatively well dated by coins and historical records, the pipes found in the various levels could therefore be arranged chronologically. And Robinson came to the conclusion that not only are the clay pipes all from the Ottoman period, they preserve evidence of the diffusion of new cultural ideas from the West.

Those ideas were carried on the smoke of burning tobacco, the various species of the plant genus Nicotiana, native to North America and widely smoked by the inhabitants of that continent from around 500 BC. Although the seeds of Nicotiana rustica were first brought to Europe in 1558 by the Spanish explorer Francisco Fernandez and were subsequently popularized as a wonder-cure for migraine headaches by the French ambassador to Portugal, Jean Nicot (in whose honor the genus was named), it was not until a few years later, around 1562, that the early French explorers of Florida took their first drag. Soon afterwards the British and Dutch explorers farther up the eastern seaboard were also contentedly puffing, and the popularity of tobacco then spread through Europe like wildfire. Quickly becoming the latest word in modern fashion, the habit rapidly gained acceptance in the taverns and drawing rooms of Europe, reaching, by around 1600, the divans, garrisons, and caravan stops of the Ottoman Empire.

The form of the pipes in which the tobacco was smoked may reveal the routes of diffusion. Robinson noted that two distinct types crossed

the Atlantic with the dried tobacco leaves. The familiar, one-piece, white clay pipe of the Dutch and the English was adapted from the pipes of the Indians of Virginia and the area of the Middle Atlantic states, with whom the English and the Dutch came into closest contact. And the chibouk, or small clay bowl attached to a separate reed stem was derived from the local types of Florida and the lower Mississippi Valley, from which it spread through the agency of the French and the Portuguese to Africa and ultimately to the Near East.

The similarity of the pipes of the tribes of southeastern North America and the pipes that became common in the Ottoman Empire provides a convincing disproof of their Mamluk (and pre-Columbian) date. And Robinson has noted that the pipes may have additional chronological significance; she observed that after their arrival in the Middle East in the early 17th century, the Turkish versions of the "southern" American pipes went through several clear stages of development. As tobacco became cheaper and more readily available, the bowls gradually increased in size. And in the examples from Corinth and Athens she studied, there seem to be specific decorative patterns characteristic of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.

Serious archaeological study of Turkish pipes is just beginning; since this class of artifacts is so relatively "modern," it has never been intensively dealt with before. But Robinson's initial theories about the date of their appearance and the development of their decoration seem already to be confirmed by the discovery of additional pipes at ongoing excavations of Ottoman sites in Turkey and on the Balkan peninsula. Pipes may, in fact, soon prove to be the key to an archaeological breakthrough. For once the chronological ranges of specific types are established, it will be possible to date the pottery and other artifacts that are found with them, and the Ottoman period may become a proper field for archaeological research at last.

And that brings us back to the clay pipes found in the rubble of the Crusader church at Tel Yoqne'am, which were initially identified by the excavators as Mamluk hashish pipes of the 14th century AD. A comparison of the Yoqne'am pipes with Robinson's published examples reveals a striking similarity to her types of the late 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, filling a long part of the site's supposed occupational



C.F. Silvestre, Differents habillements de Turcs (1700). Within a century, the pipe and the puff of smoke had become part of the costume.

gap. And it may be possible to go even further; the clay pipes of Yoq-ne'am may reveal the first evidence, not of abandonment and desolation, but of a significant economic boom.

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Despite the lack of archaeological interest in the Ottoman period in Israel, there are several sources of abundant written evidence. A number of Israeli historians have already begun to go through the detailed Ottoman tax records of this period, which provide indirect testimony to the country's settlement patterns, population, and economy. And another source of information-- the account books, journals, and correspondence of the French commercial agents resident in the country in this period-- suggests that far from being a neglected backwater, the Palestinian provinces of the Ottoman Empire were profoundly affected by Europe's Industrial Revolution.

One of the first focal points of that industrial revolution was the mechanization of the European textile industry. With innovations like James Kay's "flying shuttle" (1733) and James Hargreave's "spinning jenny" (1764), spinning and weaving were transformed from handicrafts to mass production, and with the greatly increased potential for output, there was a corresponding rise in the European demand for raw materials. Wool could be obtained from the herders of Europe, but cotton-- needing a drier climate and plenty of sunshine-- could not. And since the best quality cotton for spinning and weaving in all of the Ottoman Empire was raised in the foothills of Galilee and southern Lebanon, it did not take long for the European traders in the area to take advantage of that natural resource.

In the early 18th century, when the Industrial Revolution was just beginning in Europe, the cotton-growing areas of the Galilee and Lebanon fell under the jurisdiction of the governor of Sidon, whose main preoccupation was personal profit, not economic development. In accordance with the elaborate system of "tax-farming" that had developed throughout the Ottoman Empire, he had gained his position by submitting a high estimate of the taxes he thought could be collected from the province; anything above that sum was his to keep.

The result was expectable. The Ottoman administration in the province of Sidon, as elsewhere, concentrated on extracting the greatest possible amount of taxes from the region's farmers, and their yearly payments were often in arrears. But in this system of tax-farming lay the seeds of its own destruction. Since cotton was becoming such a valuable commodity in Europe, the foreign traders in the region began to advance money for the tax payments to the local farmers in exchange for the right to purchase their entire cotton crop at an attractive, pre-determined price.

This unofficial arrangement was profitable to both the traders and the farmers and the economic changes it brought about can be traced. Larger crops brought advances that exceeded even the exorbitant tax levies and before long, the extent of cotton cultivation in the region

was dramatically increased. The European demand was increasing even faster, however, and the prices for cotton steadily rose. And since the local farmers were not only fulfilling their tax obligations but also making an increasing profit, the forces of economic self-interest slowly transformed the agricultural regime of the province of Sidon from its traditional mix of crops for subsistence to dependence on cotton as a major cash crop.

In the earliest stages of this process, the European traders established separate arrangements with the sheikhs of each of the Galilee villages, but it did not take long for the highly profitable economic system to become centralized. And that development came as the result of local initiative; Dahir al-Umar, the ambitious scion of a prominent Galilee family, the Zaydanis, gradually extended his power over the entire region to become the unofficial ruler of a cotton principality. Dahir's rise was due not only to the force of his personality. He knew how to make the most of the Europeans' demand for the cotton of the Galilee. And here the story took on an ominously modern aspect, for Dahir al-Umar had the foresight to demand that part of his advance payments from the traders be made in the form of European ammunition and guns.

If the worried tone of the Ottoman dispatches is any indication, Dahir's effective control of the entire Galilee and his contempt for the authority of the governor of Sidon was a serious threat to the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. The influences from the West, once assimilated and manipulated by a local leader, had effects that were hard to anticipate. With firm control over the region's cotton crop and its export, Dahir changed the face of the land. The ancient port of Acre was rebuilt and a new port at Haifa was established, making the links between Galilee and Europe closer than ever before. And throughout the villages of the hill country, internal administration and security was ensured by the construction of fortresses, watchtowers, warehouses, and caravanserais. For the first time in centuries, the country enjoyed a large measure of political union and autonomy.

This chapter in the history of Israel is largely forgotten; the most recent biography of Dahir al-Umar was published in 1944. Although many of the public buildings he erected during his period of power in the 18th century are still standing, they have attracted no archaeological interest at all. Here and there throughout the Galilee, the fortresses, caravanserais, and storehouses built by Dahir al-Umar and the other members of his family are crumbling, beyond the protection of the country's antiquities law. But are they of any less interest than the ruins of the Bronze and Iron Ages or of the Greco-Roman period?

Of course archaeology doesn't have to be static; it doesn't have to make such a sharp differentiation between archaeological remains. The architecture, artifacts, and settlement patterns of the country in the 18th century can be used to trace the initial stages of modernization that is still going on throughout the Middle East. For even after Dahir's death in 1775, the country's contacts with the West and its political and economic centralization continued to intensify. And in

that perspective, an examination of the Ottoman period would not merely fill a gap in the knowledge of the country's history, it would place the last few centuries-- otherwise largely disregarded-- into a completely different light.

And once more we come to the clay pipes of Tel Yoqne'am, which seem to provide a link between the present and the past. Their distinctive forms indicate that at least the earliest of them were deposited at the site during the heyday of Dahir al-Umar's cotton kingdom, and they lend confirmation to a written record of human occupation at the site in the 18th century. One of the most detailed Arabic histories of Dahir's dynasty, the Mulakhkhas Tarikh al-Zaydanah (Extract from the History of the Zaydanis), written by Na'aman Qasatli in the early 19th century, specifically mentions Dahir's construction of a fortress on al-Qaimun-- the Arabic name of Tel Yoqne'am.

That is a situation that fits well with the character of settlement in the western Jezreel Valley during the earlier periods of its history, for Tel Yoqne'am was a natural point of control for the region's trade and agriculture. But because the material culture of the 18th and 19th centuries lies outside the interest of most archaeologists, the role that Tel Yoqne'am played in the cotton boom and the beginning of the country's modernization remains not only unexplored and unstudied, but stubbornly invisible.

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I've neglected to tell you the end of the story, which reveals the ultimate historical significance of the era of Dahir al-Umar. The profitability of cotton led Dahir's successors to overlook the danger of dependence on a single cash crop. For more than a century, with continuous, high European demand for Palestinian cotton, cotton estates spread all over the Galilee, making the region's economy increasingly inflexible. And when European demand suddenly dropped, a painless economic reorientation was impossible.

The same part of North America in which the pipes and tobacco of the Ottoman Empire originated finally put an end to the Galilee's cotton trade. The expansion of cotton cultivation throughout the American South in the early 19th century caused a glut on the world commodities markets, driving down prices to the point where the farmers of Galilee simply couldn't compete. By 1852, the exports of Palestinian cotton had dropped by more than 90% both in total quantity and in price per pound, and except for a brief rise in prices during the American Civil War and the resulting world "Cotton Famine," the era of prosperity that had begun with Dahir al-Umar in the 18th century was over.

The land that was once so valuable was now virtually worthless. Many villages were abandoned and vast fields lay uncultivated, presenting a desolate landscape to the European explorers and travelers of the later 19th century. But because those travelers and explorers had only passing interest in the recent history of the region, they ascribed this sad state of affairs to centuries of Mamluk and Ottoman misrule,

thereby delineating a long period in the history of the country that could be safely ignored.

The situation was, as we've seen, far more complex. The Ottoman period, like all others in the country's history, witnessed both prosperity and boom. And the end of that last period of prosperity paved the way for the next stage of development. The depopulation of the agricultural regions of the north of the country and the desire of the landowners to unload their worthless real estate were two of the factors that made possible the settlement of a new population in the region-- a mass movement that would ultimately result in the establishment of the State of Israel.

So the archaeological remains of the rise and fall of Dahir al-Umar's cotton kingdom can provide not only a fruitful field of study, they might also provide the final link between the country's present and its past. There is no reason to maintain a scholarly separation between "ancient times" and the "modern era," when the remains may reveal the fact of its obvious continuum. If projects of a regional nature can discern long-range patterns of settlement and economy, there's no reason to stop at 1700 and merely maintain the misperceptions of the European archaeologists of the last century.

The change is, in fact, coming. A younger generation of archaeologists born and educated in this country are beginning to investigate this forgotten period of the country's history in order to establish their own link to the land. The excavations of Bir Zeit University-- the most prominent Palestinian university-- and the work of some graduate students of the Hebrew University have, despite the present political gulf that separates the two groups, begun to establish a common goal. For them, archaeology can no longer be the study of only ancient peoples and cultures. Their excavations and study of Ottoman period sites may allow them to explore their own common history.

It's not easy to begin a new field of study, especially if the old field-- as if planted with cotton-- has always produced a standard yield. But to understand the Ottoman period is an essential archaeological challenge. For while the cultural changes in other, more remote periods of the country's history may be no less significant, the cultural change we call "modernization" has a continuing effect today. And in beginning to examine its nature and mechanics, the country's archaeologists may be able to assume a new social role-- and a new professional identity-- in bridging, not reinforcing the gap between the present and the past.

Best Regards,

Nail

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