

Nablus, Palestine: The Impact of Ottoman Presence on the City through Time

Dr. Ahmed Metwally Abdalla

Nablus during the Ottoman Era: A Historical Overview

Nablus, a city with rich historical and cultural significance, flourished during the Ottoman period (1516-1918). As part of the broader administrative structure of Ottoman Palestine, Nablus belonged to the vilayet (province) of Bilad al-Sham, which was further divided into smaller administrative units called sanjaks. In the case of Palestine, five key sanjaks were established: Jerusalem, Gaza, Lajjun, Safed, and Nablus.

Economic and Architectural Landmarks

One of the prominent Ottoman-era landmarks in Nablus is the **Khan al-Tijar** (Merchant's Caravanserai), also known as Sultan's Market. Built by Mustafa Pasha between 1563 and 1569, this historic khan served as a vibrant hub for trade and commerce. It underwent renovation in 1690 and has since stood as an enduring symbol of the city's economic vitality during Ottoman rule.

Located in the heart of the old city, Khan al-Tijar features impressive arches and intricately decorated stonework. With a length of approximately 200 meters and 52 well-aligned shops, it served the needs of traders and visitors alike. Today, the khan remains one of Nablus' busiest and most popular sites, blending historical charm with modern commerce.

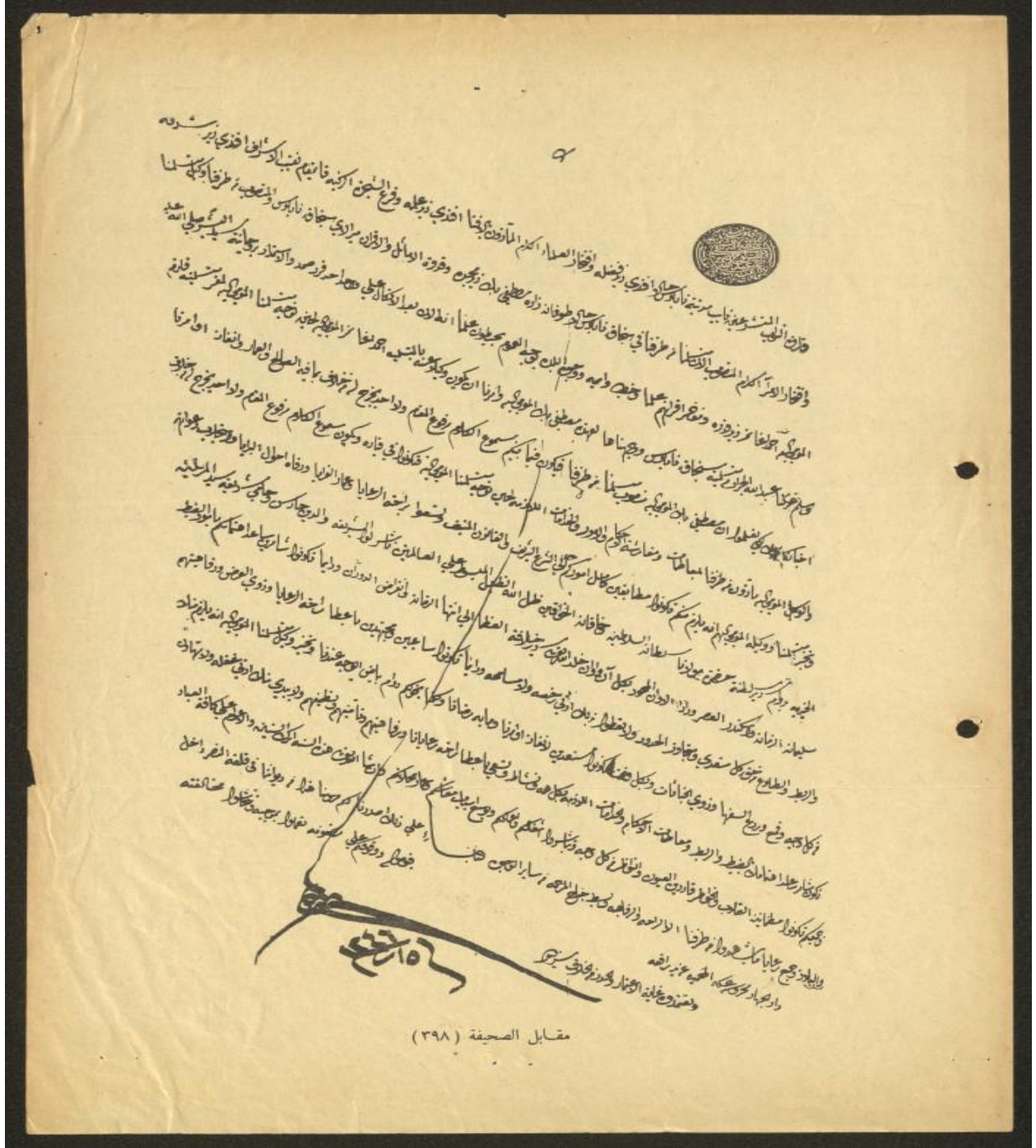
Symbolic Ottoman Gifts: The Manara Clock Tower

The **Manara Clock Tower**, situated in the city's central square, serves as another testament to Nablus' Ottoman heritage. Erected in 1318 AH (1900-1901 CE), this tower was built to commemorate the birthday of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. The clock itself was a gift from the Sultan, symbolizing his benevolence and connection to the city's residents.

This square-shaped structure consists of four levels. The ground floor contains the main entrance, the second floor features stone balconies and windows, the third floor houses the clock faces on all four sides, and the top floor holds the clock weights. Residents of Nablus relied on this clock to regulate their daily routines. It has since become a cherished emblem of the city, reflecting both its Ottoman legacy and architectural ingenuity.

Administrative Governance

Ottoman governance in Nablus was characterized by a centralized administrative structure. Archival documents provide insights into local appointments and governance practices. For example, a surviving **Ottoman firman** (official decree) highlights the temporary appointment of Ahmad Nimr as the acting qa'im maqam (district governor) on behalf of Mustafa Bey. This document emphasizes the importance of obedience to the appointed representative, showcasing



مقابل الصحيفة (٣٩٨)

This document is an Ottoman firman (official decree); it includes an order from the Ottoman Sultan appointing Ahmad Nimr as a deputy on behalf of Mustafa Bey. The firman emphasizes the necessity of adhering to the tasks assigned to him as a representative of the state. This document is part of the Sharif Masawra Collection in the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive.

Chronological Significance of Ottoman Presence

The Ottoman presence in Nablus was marked by a deliberate effort to integrate the city into the empire's broader administrative and cultural framework. Early in the Ottoman rule (16th century), the establishment of sanjaks like Nablus reflected the strategic importance of the city. By the 17th century, the construction of economic hubs such as Khan al-Tijar underscored the city's role in regional trade networks. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, symbolic structures like the Manara Clock Tower highlighted the Ottoman emphasis on modernization and imperial identity. Such developments reveal a consistent Ottoman focus on governance, economic integration, and cultural patronage in Nablus.

Conclusion

During the Ottoman era, Nablus stood as a significant cultural, economic, and administrative center. From the bustling corridors of Khan al-Tijar to the symbolic presence of the Manara Clock Tower, the city's landmarks narrate a story of resilience and growth under Ottoman rule. Archival materials, such as the aforementioned firman, further reveal the intricacies of governance and local administration. Together, these elements paint a vivid picture of Nablus as an essential part of Ottoman Palestine.

References

1. "Palestine Under the Ottoman Turks," Alexander Schölch, Oxford University Press, 1993.
2. "Ottoman Administration in Syria and Palestine, 1516-1918," Albert Hourani, Macmillan Press, 1955.
3. Local historical studies on Nablus, compiled by Khalil al-Sakakini, "Nablus: A Historical and Cultural Journey," published in Jerusalem, 1978.
4. The Palestinian Museum Archive, the Sharif Masarweh Collection, Birzeit, Palestine.