

## Putative Alignments Among the Peasantry of Palestine

Among the peasantry, factional alignments were expressed during the 19th century and for a good part of the twentieth, within the framework of putative, or fictitious affiliations which cut across regions, religious sects and classes. The most important of those peasant divisions were the Qaisi and Yemeni factions.

Although common to many regions of greater Syria under the Ottoman Empire, Palestine was unique in that these divisions persisted as forms of political affiliations a long time after they lost their (seeming) function. In Syria and Lebanon Qaisi and Yemeni factions seem always to have been expressed through clan alignments (Haddad, 1920:212). In the majority of cases extended families, and certainly individuals, could not belong to different factions within the same clan, but there were exceptions (Hoexter, 1973:269). Nominally these factions trace the origin of the clan to its fictitious roots in northern or southern (Yemeni) Arabia during the Arab migrations to greater Syria after the Islamic conquest. In practice however, they had the primary function of establishing the basis for loose alliances in the event of inter-clan conflicts. Such alliances cut across the village/city dichotomies and often united Christian and Muslim families. Haddad, a Palestinian ethnographer writing after WWI notes:

In Jerusalem the headship of the Qaisi is in the hands of the Haldi family, of the Yemeni with the Husseinis. There are still (in 1920) traces of the old party rivalry; when the peasants get into trouble with the government, or find themselves in pecuniary difficulty, they resort for help to the patrons of their respective parties. In nearly every village there are members of both parties. In some districts most of the inhabitants belong to one faction, as for example in the district of Hebron, where the majority is Qaisi. In Beit Jala most are Qaisi; in Bethlehem on the other hand, most are Yemeni, etc. (Haddad, 1920:213).