**The Evolution of the Hebronite Regionalism 1929–48**

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**Abstract**

The article discusses the integration of the Mount Hebron area into a distinct social and political region during the time of British Mandate in Palestine and the emergence of a regional “Hebronite” identity encompassing both the city of Hebron and the villages of the area. The study demonstrates that, while in many areas of the country such regional integration, or regionalization developed through the gradual growth of economic, administrative, and political networks in the nineteenth century, the regionalization of Mount Hebron took place much later. It was not due to the same dynamic as in other regions, but mainly a reaction born of chronic insecurity, as well as the social and even environmental hardships experienced in the region. The determination to overcome these challenges was translated in the 1940s into the construction of a stable system of regions that had significant intra-Palestinian and even geopolitical consequences. The study also shows that, while the Hebronite identity was a sub-national one, it had strongly symbiotic characteristics with regard to the Palestinian and Arab national identities, albeit sometimes ambivalently appreciated. Moreover, it was in no way a primordial but clearly a modern phenomenon.

**Keywords**

Hebron, Palestine, Regional Identity, Regionalism

During the British Mandate over Palestine (1920–48), the administrative district of Hebron extended from the Dead Sea in the south-east to the village of Tal al-Ṣāfī in the north-west (Figure 1). In the heart of this district was the Mount Hebron (Jabalal-Khalīl) area that encompassed the city of Hebron (al-Khalīl) and 35 villages and spanned most of the southern half of the territory known since 1950 as the West Bank.

The fact that Mount Hebron was already part of an administrative district by the end of World War I meant little in terms of social and political cohesion or a communal sense of belonging among the region’s people. The shared administrative umbrella was merely one of the diverse array of forces and networks that created regional integration in other areas. Since other social, economic, and political networks in the Hebron District remained underdeveloped, the fact of it being an administrative region was not enough in itself to create broader regional integration. It was also insufficient to create among the inhabitants of Mount Hebron a strong shared perception of community with a regional identity (see below). Instead, the most common identities were local, based on small groups’ loyalties to clans, villages, Ṣūfī orders, and allegedly pre-Islamic Qays and Yaman affiliations. The strength of these local references contributed to the deep divisions that characterized the region’s society. However, following a series of upheavals starting in the late 1920s, the entire area underwent processes that created a distinctiveness for it and regional integration within it. These processes occurred along with the emergence of a regional sense of belonging that I call “the Hebronite identity.” This phrase derives from the term al*-*Khalayla (“The Hebronites”) that designates the people of Mount Hebron, city and village dwellers alike, as one group.

Figure 1

Three terms require definition. In this article, “regionalism” refers to the idea that a certain region is distinguished from others, regardless of its acceptance in any case. This concept is supported by a process (“regionalization”) that integrates local and other human identities through the development of various social, economic, administrative, and political networks at the level of that region. These networks create a regional entity that embodies both a concept and a functional system. Rulers and other elite forces often construct both in a top-down way, but regionalism also needs to be adopted as a common perception by the people of the region in bottom-up fashion to become meaningful and able to drive collective action. This perception is what I mean by “Hebronite identity” in the case in point and, more generally, regional identity. Regional identity may rely, among other things, on pre-existing practices, notions, folklore, and even networks loosely attributed to a region by its inhabitants, a phenomenon often described by scholars as regional consciousness. However, this consciousness or “regionhood” is vaguer, weaker, and less binding than the more coherent, constructed, and interest-motivated regional cohesion,[[1]](#footnote-1) and therefore less likely to support regionalism and regional collective actions.

The case of Mount Hebron provides interesting perspectives on such processes in terms of periodic and local variation across different areas of Palestine. It was Mount Hebron’s elites who drove its regionalism, albeit accompanied by a grassroots movement and this process came to maturity in the 1940s. It was reflected in the emergence of a regional socio-political system, as well as a public sentiment among the people of Mount Hebron toward regional solidarity in the light of the water, health and other crises that befell the area. This emergent regionalism and regional identity spurred cohesion throughout the hitherto divided Mount Hebron area and profoundly impacted the geopolitics of the entire West Bank by leading it into the annexation to Jordan in 1950.

The article seeks answers to three main questions: What were the circumstances that engendered regionalism and the Hebronite identity and how did these circumstances differ from those of other regions? What was the role of the various social groups in Mount Hebron in shaping the Hebronite regionalism? How can the strength of the Hebronite regionalism and identity be assessed in terms of capability for collective action and how did these interact with the Palestinian and Arab national identities?

I argue that the process of regionalization in Mount Hebron was significantly different to those in other regions in Palestine. Firstly, it was late to begin and matured only in the 1940s, long after the emergence of other regional networks distinguishing a certain area from others in the country. Secondly, while other regions such as those of Jerusalem, Nablus, and Gaza gradually became regions through the accumulation and consolidation of economic, administrative and political networks within them, the main driver in Mount Hebron was the reaction against persistent lawlessness, political turmoil, and economic hardships after 1929. This stymied the growth of networks that could have driven the kind of regionalization seen in other regions. However, these dire circumstances were the main catalyst for Hebronite regionalism and solidarity. The study also shows that their emergence was in no way “primordial” but, like other regions in Palestine, the result of new processes.

While not primordial, the sub-national nature of the emergent Hebronite identity attracted suspicion from the beginning and created a further complexity between it and Arab and Palestinian nationalism. This was evident, among other things, in the considerable difference in attitudes between the city of Hebron and its rural environs toward the concept of regionalism. Since the late 1920s, the urban elite had cultivated an inclusive regionalism that sought urban-rural collaboration and was strongly linked to Arab and Palestinian nationalism. In the Mount Hebron villages, however, regionalism developed with a separatist focus on the peasants’ needs that showed little interest in the national dimension.

The 1936–39 Great Palestinian Revolt and WWII exacerbated the social, political, and economic crises in the late 1930s and early 1940s, something which underscored the desperate imperative of regional social cohesion and collective action. In the mid-1940s, the separate urban and rural processes converged around an interest in improving conditions for all and ending divisions through encouraging regionalization and Hebronite solidarity. Although late to evolve, Hebronite regionalism and its sense of belonging were strongly evident during the 1948 War, when effective collective action successfully prevented Mount Hebron from lapsing into anarchy and division and enabled far-reaching military and geopolitical achievements.

Section 1 presents the literature on the concepts and definitions essential to our discussion. Section 2 overviews the socio-political situation and the dominance of local identities in Mount Hebron of the late Ottoman and early British Mandate periods and compares them to the processes of regionalization in other areas of Palestine. Section 3 analyses what led to the emergence of a regional agenda in Mount Hebron after 1929. Section 4 examines the effect of the Great Palestinian Revolt and the subsequent anarchy (1940–41) in Mount Hebron on the maturation of regionalism and a regional identity. Section 5 examines the establishment of this regional identity, while Section 6 examines the consequences of Mount Hebron’s regionalization in the context of the 1948 War.

The study draws on hundreds of archival and press reports in Arabic, Hebrew, and English published in Palestine during the British Mandate. Many of the Arabic press reports have only recently become more easily accessible thanks to extensive digitalization projects. These sources provide first-hand information that enriches the material offered by the British and Israeli archives and provides Arab perspectives. Yet, a critical reading of all these sources must constantly bear in mind their mainly urban and often outsider interpretation of Mount Hebron, as well as other biases, including commercial and political ones. As we shall see, both Arabic and Hebrew press reports often portrayed the situation in Mount Hebron in dramatic, sometimes even apocalyptic terms. Although such reports, including the language they used, should not be dismissed, I have evaluated their perspectives wherever possible against other sources, preferably from archives. Many of the archival sources are those of the Hagana Information Service (HIS), which offer a wealth of information usually gathered by Arab informants and Jewish agents, though one must take their aims and biases into account. Unfortunately, there are no equivalent Arabic archives, although the HIS documents do contain Arabic materials gathered in various ways. It was important to take the political affiliations of each of the various outlets of the Palestinian Arabic press, divided then between the *majlisiyūn* and the *muʿāraḍa* (see Section 3), into account too. The research is also draws on memoirs by Arab, Jewish, and other protagonists of the time, particularly Hebronite ones.

1. **Regionalism and regional identity**

The term “regionalism” has many qualifiers applied to it, such as “early,” “old,” “new,” “political,” and “comparative.” This study sees regionalism as the concept, regardless of the extent to which it is accepted, that certain areas are distinct from others. Regionalism is supported by a process of regional integration (regionalization) that combines various social, administrative, and political networks that make a region functionally distinct from other areas. Castells, Väyrynen, and others distinguish between physical regions that are constructed by state agents and functional regions that are defined by economic, environmental, and cultural factors constructed by non-state actors.[[2]](#footnote-2) One of the implications of their being constructed by humans is that perceptions of them and their characteristics and boundaries are constantly changing. Therefore, one should avoid falling into the “territorial trap,” as Agnew calls it, of perceiving regions as static units.[[3]](#footnote-3) Murphy and Adler also suggest understanding territories as dynamic cognitive structures, regionalized by institutional and economic ties. Paasi suggests additional ties pertaining to all spheres of life that may contribute to regionalization.[[4]](#footnote-4)

 Regional identity is defined here as the adoption of the perception of a region as distinct by the people identified with that region. It has become a popular term in scholarship on globalization in recent decades.[[5]](#footnote-5) There is wide agreement that regional identity is a key factor in constructing and maintaining regionalism. Paasi and others describe regional identity as identifying with boundaries, institutions, environmental conditions, culture, and other characteristics intended to distinguish a specific region from others.[[6]](#footnote-6) Mutanen argues that, like national identities, regional identities are continually reconstructed to maintain their instrumentality.[[7]](#footnote-7) Constructivists see regions and regional identities as imagined and constructed to promote political and economic interests.[[8]](#footnote-8) In 1976 for example, Saddam Hussein’s regime transformed his birth province of Tikrit into the new *muḥāfaẓa* (district) of Salāḥ al-Dīn, expanded by territory annexed from Baghdad District. This included reconstructing the historical narrative of Tikrit and the area to serve the worship of the leader’s personality and to reward its residents for supporting the regime. This policy strengthened the regional identity of the people in this new district,[[9]](#footnote-9) illustrating Bloom’s argument that a regional identity is unconvincing to its populus unless it successfully interprets the reality they experience for them.[[10]](#footnote-10) In other words, regional identity is a product of a dialogue between top-down efforts and bottom-up adoption.

Also pertinent in this context is the relationship between regionalism and nationalism. Contemporary scholarship largely rejects the classic perception of region-building as contradictory to nation-building. Schnaudt et al. support the view that multiple identities, including regional and national, co-exist rather than being always exclusive.[[11]](#footnote-11) Knight describes the formation of the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century as the uniting of four groups (English, Scots, Welsh, Irish), each of which had a separate territorial and even semi-national identity. While ‘Englishness’ became a key cultural foundation of the British national identity, the other groups retained their regional identities within it.[[12]](#footnote-12) Some studies argue that nation-building may draw on region-building and even emphasize the interdependence between the two.[[13]](#footnote-13) Mutanen sees regional identity as a bridge between personal and national identities that was born of the fear of globalization.[[14]](#footnote-14)

 While numerous studies have addressed the history of Palestinian society in relation to particular locations, the subject of regionalism has received only modest attention.[[15]](#footnote-15) Works of note include books by both Nimr and Doumani on the regionalization of Mount Nablus (Jabal Nābulus) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through the establishment of diversified regional networks.[[16]](#footnote-16) ʿAqīl offers a comprehensive historical perspective of the Wādī ʿĀra area,[[17]](#footnote-17) and Ben-Bassat discusses the emergence of regionalism in the sub-district of Gaza in the late nineteenth century as result of the Ottoman *Tanẓīmāt* reforms (see more on this below).[[18]](#footnote-18)

Schölch focuses on the impact of top-down policies on regionalization and demonstrates how the moves toward Ottoman centralization within the *Tanẓīmāt* reforms, as well as European influence, served to create three distinct types of urban economy across Palestine. He also discusses the divisions in the Palestinian elite between local dignitaries, families, and the Qays and the Yaman and argues that Ottoman centralization eliminated these localized forms of power structure.[[19]](#footnote-19) Offering a more bottom-up perspective on regionalism and regionalization, Büssow argues that interactions between the Palestinians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were confined to small spaces such as neighborhoods and villages. He analyses various regions, including Mount Hebron, which he describes as ridden with internal feuds and unrest. Drawing on geographer Benno Werlen’s work, Büssow defines a “region” as an entity that reflects everyday practices and some degree of a regional identity.[[20]](#footnote-20) The definition used in the current article is quite similar to Büssow’s, as it sees a regionalism as a concept and reality born of a certain area’s distinct functionality from other regions.

The present study’s contribution is that it provides another perspective on the development of regionalism and regional identity in one of the country’s historic centers. It emphasizes not only the importance of the elites’ construction of regionalism but also of its popular adoption. The case of Mount Hebron demonstrates this clearly, revealing the distinct grassroots sentiment that adopted regionalism from the early stages. The study also provides insights into the relationship between regionalism and the broader national Palestinian and Arab identities with which Hebronite identity appears to have co-existed, despite often fraught relations.

1. **Regionalism in Palestine and the anomaly of Mount Hebron**

Many areas of nineteenth-century Palestine showed advanced levels of regionalization, with the gradual emergence of diversified administrative, social, economic, and political networks that made regions functionally distinct from one another. The city of Nablus had, by the late eighteenth century, become a trading hub for channeling goods from its surrounding villages to the region more broadly and globally. This, alongside the Ottomans’ designation of Mount Nablus area as a district, made it distinct functionally, administratively, commercially, and socially, as can be seen, for instance, through the marriages between merchant family members within it. By way of comparison, it was not until later that the integration of the Jerusalem area between the city and its rural environs took place. The 1831–40 Egyptian occupation of Palestine raised the city’s prestige as a both a spiritual center and international hub for public services that tied in the surrounding villages. This development was followed by the establishment of other regional economic, social, and political networks. In the Jerusalem area, as in many others, the Ottoman Land Code of 1858 enabled urban elites to purchase rural lands, further cementing regionalism through ties with their cities. By the end of the century, coastal areas had also undergone regionalization, with the port cities of Haifa and Jaffa becoming important international gateways. In the Gaza area, regionalism grew out of the local resistance to the Ottoman *Tanẓīmāt*, which sought to strengthen governmental administrative networks and tighten control over the provinces. Ben-Bassat cites the collective action of rural *mukhtār*s, local representatives appointed by the Ottoman government, to petition Istanbul on various issues as a clear expression of the consolidation of regionalism and a regional identity.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Such regionalization processes were often constructed by rulers, both Ottoman and Egyptian, as well as by regional-level elites. Occasionally, they relied on a pre-existing regional consciousness not in itself sufficient to foster regional cooperation and collective action. However, people accepted top-down policies of regionalization if there was a practical logic to them, whether in times of difficulty or of opportunity, such as those that brought economic prosperity to the cities in Palestine during the 1860–80s. Regionalization did not necessarily erase traditional tensions, for example, between urban and village dwellers, as seen, for example, in Aburish’s memoirs about Bethany and other villages near Jerusalem.[[22]](#footnote-22) Yet, local loyalties gradually became less important in defining one’s identity.

The Mount Hebron area of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was largely an anomaly against this broader trend. It had already been designated as an administrative district and had developed some economic and social networks on a regional basis, for example, between rural families and their branches in the city of Hebron. However, unlike those in other regions, the city was not a significant commercial hub. The villages of Dūrā, Bayt Jibrīn, Yaṭā, and al-Ẓāhiriyya had their own large markets and commercial sources,[[23]](#footnote-24) meaning that the economic system was decentralized in a way that did not encourage regionalism. There were also common values and practices that moderated urban-rural tensions, which were less pronounced compared to other regions. This was very much because the town and the country were more demographically, economically, and politically balanced. There were no significant economic and social implications from the 1858 Land Code, for instance, in the Mount Hebron area because most of the lands were held as endowments from the *waqf*. This made trading in these lands difficult and largely obstructed their takeover by the city’s elite, as happened in other regions. However, this also prevented the diversified city-village networks and, hence, the regional integration that followed such takeovers in other regions.[[24]](#footnote-25) From a social-cultural perspective, all groups in Mount Hebron respected Bedouin culture and heritage,[[25]](#footnote-26) and an important outcome of this was a distinct form of *ṣulḥa* (*sharīʿat al-Khalīl*) for conflict resolution throughout the region. Another regional cultural dimension was the annual Spring pilgrimage to Nabī Mūsā near Jericho, where the Hebron contingent stood out with its green flag among other regional groups.[[26]](#footnote-27)

Such ties, practices, and values resulted in what I have defined as a “regional consciousness.” This awareness was too vague to boost regionalism and regional identity that produced cooperation and collective action in Mount Hebron area in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; in fact, quite the opposite. The different impact of the 1858 Land Code and the decentralized commercial landscape contributed to the region’s exceptionalism, as already noted. However, the principal factors preventing regionalism were the persistent instability caused by Mount Hebron’s divided society, insecurity, harsh economic and environmental conditions, as well as government indifference, all of which numerous primary sources mention.[[27]](#footnote-28) This is also supported by Schölch and Büssow, who describe Mount Hebron of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a region the clans of which resisted Ottoman regional consolidation of power.[[28]](#footnote-29)

The region contained three blocs of villages. Each of these was bound together internally by multiple local kinships, Qays or Yaman affiliations, as well as economic, patronage-based, and political networks. The first bloc, in the southern mountainous region, was known as al-Qaysiyya al-Fawqā and included villages such as Yaṭā, Banī Naʿīm, and al-Samūʿ that were led by the ʿAmrū family of Dūrā. The second, Ṣāf al-ʿAẓ, spanned the western mountain slopes and encompassed villages led by the al-ʿAza family of Bayt Jibrīn. Relations between these two blocs were characterized by occasional eruptions of animosity.[[29]](#footnote-30) The third rural bloc, Ṣāf al-ʿĀmīla, in the north, was led by the Salāma family from Ṣūrīf.[[30]](#footnote-31) The city of Hebron, a fourth socio-political bloc, was divided into localized identities based on familial ties and approximately eight Ṣūfī *ṭarīqā*s. These Ṣūfī orders congregated as small interfamilial alliances in distinct neighborhoods where they developed their own vernaculars as markers of social boundaries. *Ṭarīqā*s in the Levant often reflected cross-border networks.[[31]](#footnote-32) However, such networks could not foster regionalism because they perpetuated vertical social divisions and competition for alliances among *ṭarīqā*s. Another large and powerful group in the nineteenth century were the Bedouins, who were scattered across the entire area.[[32]](#footnote-33) Additional ways of distinguishing between groups that strengthen local identities and loyalties included ethnicity, lineage, narratives of origin, and external appearance.[[33]](#footnote-34)

And so, while cities such as Nablus, Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Safad evolved in the mid-nineteenth century into regional hubs with satellite villages, the city of Hebron and other parts of the area were ruled for long periods between 1827 to 1852 by a rural warlord from Dūrā, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿAmrū. In the 1850s, fierce Qays-Yaman wars raged between the blocs of Mount Hebron, finally quelled by an 1858–59 Ottoman military campaign.[[34]](#footnote-35) Yet, other rifts persisted and the insecurity they caused drove large parts of the population into villages, making them relatively much larger than in those of other regions, generally speaking.[[35]](#footnote-36) Mount Hebron also did not benefit from the economic prosperity of the 1860–80s that strengthened regionalization through the creation of commercial networks in other regions.

Despite a shared regional consciousness, local identities thus remained key characteristics of Mount Hebron. A journalist visiting Hebron in 1912 lamented that “the ancient city deserves to reclaim its past grandeur […] but this is unlikely to happen due to its countless internal disputes.”[[36]](#footnote-37) The view that the people of Mount Hebron suffered more than any other region in Palestine in WWI was commonly held too,[[37]](#footnote-38) although historical research shows that Gaza had suffered much more from the war.[[38]](#footnote-39) In October 1917, the British army defeated the Ottomans, who retreated northward from southern Palestine, including Mount Hebron, though their full withdrawal from the country took place only a year after. Before the British authorities could be fully deployed, the local social order in Hebron collapsed and residents began to flee and looters take over. Jabāra et al. describe men standing guard with flaming torches to defend their families from others. After a few days of chaos, a local delegation set out to Beersheba to ask the British to expedite their entry into the region.[[39]](#footnote-40)

British occupation did not change the character of Mount Hebron, with it retaining its image as an isolated area plagued by trenchant economic and security problems. For years, buses from nearby Jerusalem did not enter the region and transportation relied mostly on pack animals.[[40]](#footnote-41) Like several other cities in the country, Hebron lacked basic water, sewage, electricity, and communications infrastructure.[[41]](#footnote-42) The attention the area received until 1929 was largely shaped by the persistent lack of security there. A Hebrew-language newspaper in 1919 attributed the high crime rate in the Hebron District to its proximity to the Judean desert, a bandit hideout,[[42]](#footnote-43) while a 1925 report in an Arabic-language newspaper stated that it was “well-known that the Hebron region’s isolation serves as fertile ground for thieves, and that the Jerusalem-Hebron Road is one of the most dangerous in all of Palestine.”[[43]](#footnote-44) Other commentators suggested that Hebron’s notorious crime rate was due to its dire economic situation.[[44]](#footnote-45) The people of Mount Hebron responded to this reality by stockpiling weaponry.[[45]](#footnote-46)

Another cause of instability was the nationwide rift between two camps headed by two Jerusalem elite families: The Ḥusaynī family that led the “council members” (*majlisiyūn*) and the Nashāshībī family that led the “opposition” (*muʿāraḍa*). In 1922, the British established the Supreme Muslim Council, headed by the Grand Mufti Ḥājj Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, and granted it nationwide control over the religious establishment and its financial resources.[[46]](#footnote-47) This polarized and destabilized social-political relations throughout Palestine, particularly in Hebron with its numerous religious endowments and trusts. Families traditionally allied with the Ḥusaynīs, such as the ʿArfa, Bakrī, al-Tamīmī and ʿAbadayn families, retained their traditional positions and privileges. Others, such as the Ṭahbūbs, lost these and joined the opposition to the Ḥusaynīs.[[47]](#footnote-48)

1. **The emergence of a regional agenda 1929–36**

Mount Hebron was already in a deep economic crisis when the British Mandate was established.[[48]](#footnote-49) Hebron’s traditional industries, such as glass-working, were gradually declining and some even entirely disappeared.[[49]](#footnote-50) Water and other resources were scarce, contributing to disputes.[[50]](#footnote-51) An Arab journalist visiting Hebron in early 1929 expressed deep upset at the squalor he saw there and described extreme overcrowding and neglect.[[51]](#footnote-52) However, there was bigger crisis looming. On Friday 23 August 1929, riots broke out in Jerusalem, spreading throughout the country. The following day, on the Jewish Sabbath, rioters from the city of Hebron and the neighboring villages descended upon the city’s long-established though small Jewish community, killing 67 members of it and leading to the community as a whole abandoning the city.[[52]](#footnote-53) Arab newspapers frequently cited the events of 1929 as the main cause for the area’s deterioration. Many years later, an HIS agent corroborated the Arab and Hebrew press reports that at the time often sounded exaggerated. The agent reported that the Hebronites he met claimed that “the massacre had reduced them to a being a backward rural district.”[[53]](#footnote-54)

The Mandate administration responded to the massacre by arresting hundreds and imposing heavy economic and security restrictions on the area, including a months-long nightly curfew.[[54]](#footnote-55) Confiscation of personal property and hefty fines were issued to individual perpetrators of the massacre and a collective fine of 14,000 Palestinian pounds (PL) imposed on Hebron and three villages that refused to turn in suspects. Visitors to the Cave of the Patriarchs described throngs of beggars, trachoma-afflicted children, and destitute worshippers praying for deliverance from their misery.[[55]](#footnote-56) Dramatic, even apocalyptic descriptions like this should be viewed with caution, of course, but they were very common in a wide range of Arabic and Hebrew reports and, therefore, probably indicative of the grave situation in the region.

Since the late nineteenth century, it had been a common general practice for Jewish settlers in Palestine to collect unused manure from Arab villages. However, in 1933, farmers in Mount Hebron villages sold all their manure to Jewish farming communities instead of using it to fertilize their own fields. The Hebron District governor told the villagers to stop the sales, since they endangered their crops and soil quality, but they continued to do so.[[56]](#footnote-57) Poverty among villagers also led some to sell their lands to Jews.[[57]](#footnote-58) A Jewish newspaper quoted a British authorities’ national health report stating that “poverty was more evident in the villages, and in several districts, Hebron in particular, the situation is dire.”[[58]](#footnote-59)

The severe situation in Mount Hebron drew the attention of the Arab newspapers, which reported about it under grim headlines such as “The Catastrophes of Hebron” and “The Most Miserable Place in Palestine.”[[59]](#footnote-60) A Jewish newspaper cited a government report from 1936 that the recorded child mortality rate in Mount Hebron of 13 percent and only three doctors served the population of around 62,000. Education provision was also severely lacking, with only ten schools and widespread illiteracy throughout the district. The Chamber of Commerce reported that the total annual income of residents in the area was 40,000 PL, of which 32,000 PL was spent on repaying loans, leaving families very little left to live on.[[60]](#footnote-61) Another indication of the hard times was a decline in the number of weddings, with adequate dowries out of the reach of many families.[[61]](#footnote-62)

The events of 1929 marked a tipping point in Palestinian politicization and institution-building throughout the country. This was evident in the formation of new political organizations during the 1930s, as well as in the entry of new social strata in the public sphere, including a new, mainly urban middle class.[[62]](#footnote-63) Such new groups emerged in Mount Hebron too, but they largely had different motivations, goals, and social profiles. The consequences of the 1929 events in Mount Hebron were the main drivers for the emergence of new groups that offered a remedy in the form of a regional agenda. Some of them were local extensions of national organizations, but their focus was clearly regional. In fact, there was not even full agreement on the exact form regionalism should take in Mount Hebron in the 1930s. Urban dwellers promoted an inclusive regional vision that encompassed both the urban and rural sectors and engaged with Palestinian and Arab nationalism. However, rural communities strove for a village-oriented localism that primarily addressed the woes of simple farmers with little if any regard for the national framework, as we discuss later.

Unlike in other areas of Palestine, particularly in the coastal cities, in which the emerging Palestinian middle class was a prominent promoter of regionalization, its promoters in Mount Hebron cannot be considered and did not define themselves as a middle class. They were typically representatives of the longstanding local elite groups, particularly the urban elite, the *ʿulamāʾ*, and rural landed families. The chronic economic crisis in Mount Hebron also did not foster the conditions for a middle class emerging there. However, other local realities and identities changed significantly due to processes that were not only regional.

The first process that weakened local identities was the Islamic reform movement that undermined the legitimacy of Ṣūfī Islam in the early twentieth century.[[63]](#footnote-64) In 1928, the Egypt-based al-Shubbān al-Muslimūn movementopened a chapter in Hebron that attracted teachers and young leaders from Hebronite elite families. al-Shubbān strongly promoted Islamic reform and its influential members became key agents for regionalism and influenced young people through novel social, religious, and political ideas that far transcended local and even regional identities.[[64]](#footnote-65) During the post-1929 troubles, al-Shubbān organized regional awareness events to aid imprisoned perpetrators of the massacre and their families, referred to as “casualties” (*mankūbūn*) of the catastrophe. It also promoted putative solutions to other problems in Hebron and the region,[[65]](#footnote-66) organized professional training,[[66]](#footnote-67) founded a sports committee that established the Hebron soccer club, which became a symbol of regional identity,[[67]](#footnote-68) and founded an education committee that promoted free teaching to eradicate illiteracy and to improve schools.[[68]](#footnote-69) It also held joint activities with the movement’s other chapters in Palestine and, while generally nationally-oriented, also had a strong Hebronite regional issue focus, such as visiting Hebron-area prisoners in Acre Jail.[[69]](#footnote-70) The vigor of the Hebron chapter captured the attention of the movement’s leadership in Egypt, which, in turn, raised money for Mount Hebron.[[70]](#footnote-71) Al-Shubbān also enjoyed the support of the national Palestinian leadership body, the Arab Executive Committee, which used it as an intermediary in Mount Hebron disputes.[[71]](#footnote-72)

The spirit of al-Shubbān inspired a new grassroots movement that aimed to represent the aspirations of the region’s young people: Shabāb al-Khalīl al-Aḥrār (The Free Youth of Hebron).[[72]](#footnote-73) Shabāb al-Khalīl al-Aḥrār cultivated a regional solidarity that they presented as a foundation within the national framework. For example, they called for a moratorium on holiday greetings in solidarity with the Mount Hebron region and encouraged the buying of only Palestinian goods. The enthusiasm of al-Shubbān and Shabāb al-Khalīl al-Aḥrār transferred itself to other young people too. In another example of a grassroots initiative, the boys of al-Hidāya school in Hebron staged a play and held other activities to raise money for the school and the *mankūbūn*, gaining countrywide publicity.[[73]](#footnote-74) The school’s boy scouts organized monthly field trips to the Mount Hebron villages to gather demographic data and other insights with the aim of compiling a geographic study on the area.[[74]](#footnote-75) These activities show how urban Hebronites tried to cultivate an inclusive identity. Propagandists such as one known by the pen name Abū Hishām who wrote in *al-Liwāʾ*, wrote about social issues in order to foster regional solidarity among Hebronite readers.[[75]](#footnote-76)

Women activists also became increasingly prominent in Hebron’s public arena. They organized social activities, demonstrations, and petitions on regional issues, their activities sometimes bringing urban and village dwellers and Muslims and Christians together.[[76]](#footnote-77) Although these Hebronite women were not part of national women’s organizations, such as the Women’s Association or the Arab Women’s League, their activities had a strongly nationalist character. They condemned the Balfour Declaration and “the attempts to annihilate the country’s Arab people to establish a Jewish kingdom.” The women also called for an Arab government in Palestine and a ban on “selling lands to the enemy.” The Arab press covered these activities extensively and Hebron’s women activists gained public support,[[77]](#footnote-78) despite occasional friction with the city’s traditionally conservative nature.[[78]](#footnote-79)

As noted, these urban groups were often led by members of the city’s long-established elite: Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Jaʿbarī, the leader of al-Shubbān in Hebron, Ṭālib Marqa, Yāsīn Abū al-Filāt, Amīn al-Hamūrī, Rashād al-Khatīb al-Tamīmī, and many others.[[79]](#footnote-80) Although they clearly encouraged regionalism and promoted a regional Hebronite identity, they maintained that doing some complementary to the advocacy of wider national Palestinian and Arab identities. By the early 1930s, all of these regionalism advocates appeared to have successfully convinced the public in Hebron and its nearby rural environs that such a merged identity was credible. For example, in November 1929, prisoners from the Hebron area marked the Balfour Declaration anniversary with a hunger strike and politically-charged letters to their families.[[80]](#footnote-81) In June 1930, the city and the nearby villages jointly protested the execution of two men convicted of participating in the massacre.[[81]](#footnote-82) Hebronites continued to commemorate the executed men and to assist their families through many collective initiatives thereafter.[[82]](#footnote-83)

In his memoirs, Bahjat Abū Gharbiyya indicates that the annual pilgrimage to Nabī Mūsā during the interwar period began to reflect the integration of the emergent Hebronite regional identity with the Palestinian and Arab ones in its rituals and symbols.[[83]](#footnote-84) In 1934, Abū Gharbiyya and his Hebronite friends formed an armed group called al*-*Ḥurriya that operated in Jerusalem and Mount Hebron. While they were supported by the Ḥusaynī camp, al-Ḥurriyya operatives worked independently and kept its Hebronite regional identity and solidarity hidden from the Mufti’s people.[[84]](#footnote-85)

As supralocal identities grew stronger, tensions between them and local especially familial ones grew too. In 1932, an attempt to form a party to represent Hebronite clans of Kurdish descent stirred objection on the grounds that this would awaken old hatreds and tensions.[[85]](#footnote-86)

After 1929, rural leaders also made visible efforts to cultivate a regional identity in their communities. Their main objective was to advance a regional agenda that would improve life for the peasants in this unforgiving region, where poverty was aggravated by punitive taxes and loan interest rates. Proponents of this regional rural agenda held mass gatherings in March 1930 to advance their ideas, which some urban observers found to be somewhat underdeveloped but also worrying because of their village-centric focus. The Arabic press extensively covered al-Shubbān’s attempts to draw the peasants closer to their inclusive regional position by sending delegates to village gatherings.[[86]](#footnote-87) National leaders such as Akram Zuʿaytar were concerned by the apparent disregard of Mount Hebron’s rural regionalization proponents in the general national agenda and particularly in relation the sale of lands to Jews.[[87]](#footnote-88)

In March 1930, the Arab Executive Committee tried to persuade a large rural convention to declare support for the national leadership. They were rebuffed by the organizers, who explained that the national agenda was irrelevant to the conference, which focused on the peasant issues.[[88]](#footnote-89) *al-Jāmiʿa al-ʿArabiyya*, a newspaper affiliated with the Ḥusaynīs, denounced these conferences as Zionist-driven campaigns.[[89]](#footnote-90) These claims appear to reflect the Ḥusaynīs’ concern that the peasants were moving under the umbrella of the opposition.[[90]](#footnote-91) The Ḥusaynīs’ lack of empathy to Mount Hebron’s predicament was also evident from their newspaper’s silence on the topic, while *al-Difāʿ* newpaper covered it extensively. This did not help the Ḥusaynīs’ relations with the rural areas of Mount Hebron, something that would have long-term and strategic consequences.

1. **The Great Palestinian Revolt and the subsequent period of anarchy (1940–41)**

In April 1936, the uprising known as the Great Palestinian Revolt erupted with a countrywide general strike. Hebron joined in with a trade strike and widespread demonstrations with a strong presence from the new youth and women’s groups. By May, Hebron had marked its first martyr – a young Hebronite who lived in Jerusalem — which intensified the protests, sparked fiercely nationalistic public rhetoric in discourse, and prompted attacks on British patrols.[[91]](#footnote-92) The British retaliated by banishing prominent leaders of the Ḥusaynī camp in Hebron: Muḥammad Ṣabrī ʿAbadayn, Rashād al-Khatīb, and Muḥammad ʿAlī Jaʿbarī, the leader of al-Shubbān.[[92]](#footnote-93) The six-month strike devastated the Mount Hebron economy, as it did to other Palestinian local economies, and once again destabilized the region. Bombs in the streets of Hebron became commonplace and in August 1936, acting mayor Naṣr al-Dīn was murdered. An Arab journalist wrote that Hebron had regressed to nineteenth, that is, the “divisive century.”[[93]](#footnote-94)

In the villages, the Revolt had started with massive gatherings demanding an end to Zionism and imperialism.[[94]](#footnote-95) These demonstrations showed that, despite the peasant-focused agenda that the rural elite promoted in the 1930s, they were not indifferent to the national issues. Nonetheless, the ongoing predicament of rural life soon returned to the top of the agenda. In February 1937, for example, Mount Hebron village *mukhtār*s petitioned the High Commissioner to repeat its government loan of the previous year to relieve catastrophic poverty and hunger.[[95]](#footnote-96) However, the Revolt also posed a serious challenge to rural leaderships. The al-ʿAza family of Bayt Jibrīn was concerned about new actors moving into their territory, such as ʿIsā al-Baṭāṭ, a young rebel from the village of al-Ẓāhiriyya.[[96]](#footnote-97) On 10 January 1938, al-Baṭāṭ’s group dragged renowned British archaeologist James Starkey out of his vehicle and shot him dead. The murder shocked the British, who launched a campaign until the group was apprehended. al-Baṭāṭ himself escaped but was caught and killed in May that year. The newspapers’ narrative, accepted by various writers was that al-Baṭāṭ was killed by British forces that raided his hideout after being tipped off by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿAza.[[97]](#footnote-98) However, according to the HIS, whose agents were well-connected to the al-ʿAza family, al-Baṭāṭ was in fact killed by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, and a British raid was staged after the fact to cover it up.[[98]](#footnote-99) ʿAbd al-Raḥmān himself was assassinated in 1947, but it is unclear whether this was related to the killing of al-Baṭāṭ.[[99]](#footnote-100)

ʿAbd al-ῌalīm al-Jūlānī’s group’s took the place of al-Baṭāṭ’s in attacking British targets.[[100]](#footnote-101)Although city dwellers throughout Palestine occasionally suffered at the hands of such rural rebels, al-Jūlānī and his group enjoyed widespread support in Hebron, which once again indicated that village-city relations in the region were generally better in comparison to those in other areas.[[101]](#footnote-102) Despite this, new fault lines were erupting in the rural areas and old ones re-emerging, leading to operations failing and testing the regional identity that had taken shape in rural areas since the early 1930s. Villagers lived in constant fear of robbery and extortion by rebels and outlaws and British collective punishments exacerbated the situation.[[102]](#footnote-103) As throughout Palestine, the unity that prevailed in Hebron during the first six months of the Revolt had already begun to waver by late 1936. Rivalry had resumed between the Ḥusaynī hardliners, who rejected the Peel Commission’s recommendation to partition Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states, and the *muʿāraḍa*, which was more accommodating toward the plan. From 1938 onward, rural Mount Hebron was torn apart by the frequent assassinations of leaders in what evolved into a small-scale civil war,[[103]](#footnote-105) causing chaos in rural areas and effectively removing any leadership from them. This ultimately drove the population to support the *muʿāraḍa* and demand an end to the Revolt. In December 1938, rural leaders convening in Yaṭā condemned Grand Mufti Ḥājj Amīn al-Ḥusaynī using unprecedented rhetoric, accusing him of orchestrating the “terror” that was “tearing the people apart.”[[104]](#footnote-106) Still, the Ḥusaynīs had no intention of withdrawing from the region.

Officially, the Great Revolt in Palestine ended in 1939, but effectively continued in Mount Hebron into 1941, albeit in changed forms. Whereas the rebels operating in Mount Hebron during the 1936–39 period had been almost all local, the position turned so that most rebels were outsiders, something which probably weakened the authority of local rebel commanders such as al-Jūlānī. Given this new political instability, outlaws of all sorts prospered, plunging the region into anarchy.[[105]](#footnote-107) The HIS estimated that, between rebels and outlaws, there were around 600 armed men active around Mount Hebron in 1940.[[106]](#footnote-108)

The Ḥusaynīs’ fingerprints were evident in much of this activity that was designed to exploit WWII conditions to mobilize the local population against the British.[[107]](#footnote-109) However, the Ḥusaynīs’ strategy had the opposite effect on their relations with the population. Worn down by years of turmoil, the people of Mount Hebron, including those who had initially supported the Revolt, refused to mobilize under the Ḥusaynīs’ banner.[[108]](#footnote-110) Britain’s enemies, Italy and Germany, also exploited the region’s vulnerability and parachuted agents into the area in 1939 and 1940 with hopes of establishing an entry point to stir up unrest in tandem with pro-Ḥusaynī leaders.[[109]](#footnote-111) The local population probably could not tell and/or did not care what the difference between outlaws and rebels was at this stage. One HIS agent reported that the population was extremely agitated and that there was “a change from one extreme to the other in the locals’ practices,” including “a decline in their hallmark hospitality.”[[110]](#footnote-112) Locals were openly calling on the government to act against outlaws and foreign agents at this point, “before the country falls prey to the Italian occupation,” as one leading figure put it.[[111]](#footnote-113) Despair was so deep that it often transcended familial loyalties and some outlaws were even turned in to the British by their own families.[[112]](#footnote-114)

The widely-held belief that the Ḥusaynīs were responsible for the anarchy of 1940–41 had significant political consequences. Until 1938, the Ḥusaynīs had enjoyed some support in the region and ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ḥusaynī operated freely in Mount Hebron.[[113]](#footnote-115) But the Ḥusaynīs’ role in the anarchy that emerged eventually cost them the public’s sympathy even among former loyalists,[[114]](#footnote-116) especially since *muʿāraḍa* leaders were working to bring peace to the region.[[115]](#footnote-117) Before long, the *muʿāraḍa* assumed key religious and political positions in the region and won over formerly loyal Ḥusaynīs.[[116]](#footnote-118) Mount Hebron’s shift toward supporting the *muʿāraḍa* gave it greater political coherence and directly contributed to regionalization processes and collective action capabilities, the first expression of which was a clear call for the restoration of order.[[117]](#footnote-119)

1. **Establishing a regional system 1942–48**

Increasingly heavy-handed British policy, coupled with popular despair over the lack of security and diminishing support for the rebels brought some improvement in social conditions in late 1941. Yet, a greater improvement was underway with the rise of a socio-political system that cultivated regionalism and essential ties of trust between hitherto divided communities. Four key developments contributed to this: The disintegration, during the Revolt and the subsequent anarchy, of the longstanding village blocs; the ripening of the regional agenda that had existed since 1929; an urban-rural consensus around prioritizing the region’s pressing issues; and the emergence of a new urban leadership that spearheaded the revival of regionalism and established a socio-political regional system encompassing the city and the countryside.

The key figure in the new urban leadership was Muḥammad ʿAlī Jaʿbarī who, as the head of the al-Shubbān al-Muslimūn, catalyzed efforts to promote regionalism. He had begun as a sympathizer with the Ḥusaynīs,[[118]](#footnote-120) but shifted his support in the late 1930s to their arch rival, Amīr ʿAbdallāh of Transjordan, who fervently wanted to extend his rule into areas of Palestine. In 1940, the British appointed Jaʿbarī the mayor of Hebron, something which gave him the status and resources he could use to forge collaboration with urban family leaders in pursuit of a common vision, structure, and action for the region.[[119]](#footnote-121) The collapse of the Ḥusaynīs’ popularity in the Hebron region during the Revolt probably bolstered such collaboration and eased the tension between the pro-Ḥusaynī camp and their opponents. Initially, the urban leadership focused on urgent problems of hunger, sanitation, typhoid, and other matters often afflicting entire villages.[[120]](#footnote-122) It also utilized the municipal budget for major infrastructure projects for long-term improvements and, no less importantly, for building public trust. Its success was evident in the way it secured public support and donations despite the tax levies required for such massive efforts,[[121]](#footnote-123) and indicated the urban leadership’s growing ability to take action for the collectivity. In 1945, an Arabic press article urged other municipalities in Palestine to follow Hebron’s example.[[122]](#footnote-124)

Another major development was the expansion of the urban leadership’s authority into the villages, bridging a century-wide gap between Hebron and other established hubs in the region. The disintegration of the longstanding rural blocs and decline in traditional leaders’ standing during the 1936–41 period removed old socio-political boundaries in the area. This was traumatic but essential for the creation of new region-wide networks. A key regional network in this regard was the *ṣulḥa* system. The collapse of the rural leadership enabled the city leaders to serve as the *ṣulḥa*’s arbitrators, turning it into a key instrument for promoting social harmony and a regional sentiment. The *ṣulḥa*’s role in the area torn by disputes ongoing since the Revolt was vital and it became a cornerstone for regional arrangements for regulating social, economic, and political relations between different groups.[[123]](#footnote-125) To further strengthen the *ṣulḥa*, the urban leaders persuaded the British to grant their arbitration courts official jurisdiction over disputes throughout the region.[[124]](#footnote-126)

Urban leaders also engaged with other issues previously the purview of the rural leadership, ranging from financial and welfare needs to preventing land sales to Jews.[[125]](#footnote-127) As the most prominent leader of this emergent regional system, Jaʿbarī frequently convened meetings with Palestinian municipal leaders in 1946–47 to raise support for Beersheba and Mount Hebron, which were suffering from severe drought.[[126]](#footnote-128) The joint urban and rural drought crisis committees established at these gatherings provided the organizational basis for strengthening regionalism and Hebronite regional identity.[[127]](#footnote-129)

The ascendant Hebronite regional leaders were very critical of the Ḥusaynī-led Arab Higher Committee (AHC), accusing it of failing village dwellers.[[128]](#footnote-130) This sought to bolster support for Amīr ʿAbdallāh and his ambitions in Palestine and added to the existing sense of alienation felt toward the Ḥusaynīs. The people of Mount Hebron had strong and diverse historical ties with Transjordan and the long years of revolt and anarchy pushed the region’s people even further away from the Ḥusaynīs. The stability and order offered by Amīr ʿAbdallāh added to political consensus in the Hebronite regional system and mass gatherings honoring him were held.[[129]](#footnote-131) In February 1944, the mayor of Hebron sent him a letter praising his work in Palestine which, he stressed, was an integral part of the Arab world.[[130]](#footnote-132) Although this might have been and still be perceived as empty pandering to Arab nationalism over Palestinian particularity, it nevertheless became clear, a few years later, that this sentiment foreshadowed the determined action that was to bring the entire West Bank under Jordanian rule.

1. **The 1948 War: Testing collective action**

The 1948 War was a powerful test for the maturing regionalism, regional identity, and collective action capability in Mount Hebron. The region’s population collectively took on three challenges during the war: The elimination of Jewish settlements in Mount Hebron; the prevention of anarchy’s return; and Jordan’s annexation of the West Bank.

From 1946, violence between the cluster of Jewish communities known as the Etzion Bloc and their Arab neighbors intensified.[[131]](#footnote-133) Some tensions revolved around local disputes over farming and grazing lands. However, the rapid escalation in them proved to be part of the wider context of national conflict.[[132]](#footnote-134) A string of violent attacks began in the Spring of 1947 against British patrols, Jewish transport convoys, local dignitaries, and land dealers.[[133]](#footnote-135) In December 1947, a week after the war broke out, tens of thousands gathered in Hebron chanting nationalist slogans and the city soon became the center of regional protest mobilization.[[134]](#footnote-136) A month later, a fierce battle between the Etzion Bloc and a joint force from the surrounding villages resulted in numerous casualties.[[135]](#footnote-137) Cohesive action and coherent political energy were not a given in other Palestinian communities, but Mount Hebron was far better prepared for war, including by having large weaponry stocks.[[136]](#footnote-138) As the region’s leader, Jaʿbarī led the campaign against the Etzion Bloc.[[137]](#footnote-139) In another battle in January 1948, an entire Jewish platoon trying to reach the Etzion Bloc was killed near the village of Ṣūrīf. Signaling that his power extended to the entire region, Jaʿbarī announced that he was in poisession of the slain fighters’ personal documents.[[138]](#footnote-140) In April 1948, he urged the Transjordanian forces to destroy the Etzion Bloc[[139]](#footnote-141) and, the following month, played a key role in the final assault of the Arab Legion and local irregulars that defeated the Bloc and killed 127 of its members.[[140]](#footnote-142)

Amid the heightened political tensions of 1947 and lingering drought and famine, robbers once again plagued the region and anarchy threatened to return.[[141]](#footnote-143) This time, regional leaders took immediate and determined action to secure government food aid[[142]](#footnote-144) and to maintain order. Mass gatherings released numerous statements that reflected public expectations of regional solidarity in addressing the conflict. An attack that killed a British was immediately condemned by the Hebron National Committee (HNC) established to manage the region during the War. HNC chairman Jaʿbarī stressed that the regional leadership positively endorsed cooperation with the British and promised the incident would not be repeated.[[143]](#footnote-145) He also published a newspaper article denouncing those robbing “their brethren” as traitors, saying they were “dead of conscience” and should be punished accordingly.[[144]](#footnote-146)

At the same time, the regional leadership also began actively promoting the region’s annexation to Transjordan. Only three days into the war, Jaʿbarī and others publicly declared their disappointment in the Ḥusaynī leadership and invited Amīr ʿAbdallāh to establish order in Palestine.[[145]](#footnote-147) The timing was odd, considering that the Ḥusaynī militias had the upper hand against the Jewish forces at this point. This indicates that the statements were part of a strategy to promote the annexation agenda. In January 1948, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ḥusaynī organized a network of local military forces,[[146]](#footnote-149) but doing so was a grave mistake that enabled the Jewish forces to defeat the Palestinians, because the latter operated did not act conjointly. However, the disciplined collaboration of the Mount Hebron villages uniquely led to them defeating the Etzion Bloc while, rejected by the locals, ʿAbd al-Qādir lost his foothold in the region.[[147]](#footnote-150)

It was the HNC as a formal regional body that united all these groups and ironically helped make the annexation to Transjordan a reality. This was established in November 1947 on the AHC’s orders to aid the Palestinian national effort. Jaʿbarī wrote in his memoirs that he feared the war would reawaken old social divisions, so he turned the National Committee into a framework for coordinating between all the region’s players.[[148]](#footnote-151) In May 1948, Egyptian forces entered Mount Hebron seeking to seize control, probably trying to support the interests of the Mufti, who was in exile in Cairo at the time, by stymying ʿAbdallāh’s ambitions in the region.[[149]](#footnote-152) However, the Egyptians met with a firm, united, armed, and hostile front.[[150]](#footnote-153) Jaʿbarī led local resistance to the Egyptians, since the region much preferred annexation to Transjordan. Egypt’s occupation was short-lived, its forces ultimately retreating from the region after being cut off from its troops in Beersheba in October 1948.[[151]](#footnote-154) In the following months, Jaʿbarī led Palestinian discussions that led to the annexing of the West Bank to what became called Jordan. On 1 December 1948, he presided over the Jericho Convention, which paved the way for definitive annexation in 1950.[[152]](#footnote-155)

**Conclusion**

Ongoing division, instability, and lack of security were the main factors that hampered the emergence of regionalism and regional identity in Mount Hebron. There were objective obstacles as well. In other parts of Palestine, regionalization was driven by gradual and cumulative processes of administrative, economic, and social integration. For Nablus, Haifa and Jaffa, for example, there was a commercial and industrial logic that enabled them to become regional hubs for their rural environs. In Jerusalem, regionalism was driven by international, diplomatic, religious, and political interest in the Holy City, and various forces within it strengthened ties between the rural and urban populations.

Mount Hebron had none of these. It was geographically isolated with a harsh terrain in which people struggled to eke out a basic living, with little chance of any surplus to support commerce and economic regionalization. From physical infrastructure to administration and economy, it lagged far behind other regions, a fact which bothered neither the Ottomans nor the British. A never-ending succession of forces exploited these circumstances, perpetuating the region’s plight.

It was these relatively negative and reactive attributes regionally that eventually supplied a powerful incentive for change through cultivating regionalism and a regional identity. This came from both the grassroots forces of the women and youth groups and top-down leadership efforts. The longstanding regional consciousness of the people of Mount Hebron was not enough to mobilize regionalization and to forge a strong regional identity. For that situation to reverse, the people there needed to experience the dramatic, often traumatic events of the British Mandate’s final two decades. The 1929 massacre and its aftermath were the first spurs to regionalism, albeit that the city pursued inclusive regional consolidation while the villages cultivated a regional one for rural areas at this early stage.

The next great spur was the Great Palestinian Revolt and the anarchy that followed it. In this period, the rural leadership collapsed and a new leadership arose in the city to take advantage of this to advance a regional agenda, ultimately producing the social cohesion that prevented anarchy returning in 1948. This was an impressive feat for Mount Hebron society, all the more so considering the grave and confused situation throughout Palestine at the time.

Eliminating the Jewish settlements in the region and securing the annexation of the entire West Bank to Jordan were also the direct result of the emergence of a regional system. In these last two achievements, one can see the ambivalence between Hebronite regional identity and national Palestinian and Arab identities embodied. It would be a mistake to see Hebronite identity as “primordial” since it was a clearly modern development and emerged in different circumstances than in other regions. Hebronite identity was therefore not primordial but undoubtedly sub-national, which caused suspicions against it from its beginning and complicated its relationship with the broader national identities. Hebronite identity evolved within a clear commitment to the national identities and assumed a wider national context when regional conditions were especially challenging after 1929. However, the 1948 War underscored the tension between Palestinian national identity and the coherence of Hebronite identity and capacity for collective action that helped Amīr ʿAbdallāh realize his broader Arab ambitions. This tension continued to define the Khalayla’s relationship with the rest of Palestine well into the future.

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