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The Uneven Age of Speed: Caravans, Technology, and Mobility in the Late Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Middle East

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Abstract

This article explores the way overland mobility was transformed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during “the age of speed.” Beyond the already well-known caravan-to-car story, it argues that slow means of transportation such as caravans kept their own rationale and were instrumental in producing an economic geography that proved resilient in the face of the celebrated steam- or fuel-motorized means of accelerated mobility. Adopting the caravan traders and travelers’ vantage and foregrounding their life stories offer new insights on the way rail and automobility were experienced and adopted in the post-Ottoman Middle East. Such experiences cast a different light on the global rechanneling process affecting the circulation of persons and merchandise across the region during the interwar period. Exploring the resilience of caravans in an uneven age of speed does not only illuminate the transnational geographies underpinned by the overlapping networks of both slower and faster mobilities. It also helps to understand the many dimensions of their gradual albeit very uneven demise.

Keywords: camels; caravans; mobility; economic history; trade; transportation

On 4 March 1923, a few months before the French mandate in Syria and the British mandate in Iraq came into force officially, the French consul in Baghdad, Roger Maigret, crossed the 805 kilometers between the Iraqi capital and Beirut in twenty-one hours, in the car of two Damascus-based traders, Bishra ‘Asfar and Muhammad ‘Abd Allah “Hajji” al-Bassam. A few days later, Maigret sent an enthusiastic report to the French minister of foreign affairs in which he praised the benefits of the desert route and envisioned the possibility of traveling from Bombay to Beirut in ten days.¹ Shortly afterward, the British consul in Damascus, Clarence Edward Palmer, and the British liaison officer in Beirut, Major Duncan McCallum, tried their luck in the opposite direction. Starting from Damascus on 1 April, they reached Baghdad on 4 April before returning to Damascus. In the account of their expedition, Palmer and McCallum explicitly mentioned the example of Muhammad ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam smuggling gold across the Syrian-Iraqi border to champion the appropriateness of their itinerary. The Damascus trader and his agent in Baghdad were, according to Palmer and McCallum’s account, the only purveyors of the necessary Bedouin companions for the route.²

Although Muhammad ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam was better known to the French and British authorities as a cross-border gold smuggler in the early 1920s, his experience as a member of the ‘Aqil network of caravan trade was crucial in establishing motorized connections across the territories that had formerly been parts of the Ottoman Empire. ‘Aqil (pl., ‘Uqaylat) traders who originated from Najdi cities formed

¹Archives diplomatiques, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, La Courneuve (hereafter MAE), Correspondance Politique et Commerciale, E, Irak, 48CPCOM/42, Maigret, Beirut, 12 March 1923, enclosed in Consulate, Baghdad, 4 December 1924.

²Archives diplomatiques, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Nantes (hereafter CADN), Syrie-Liban, Cabinet Politique, 702, “Report on reconnaissance by motor car from Beyrouit via Damascus to Bagdad,” n.d.

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an efficient network of caravan trade that connected the Arabian Peninsula to the Iraqi and Syrian Ottoman provinces until the late 19th century. Muhammad ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam was a native of ‘Unayzah and his reputation as a prominent ‘Aqil trader moving between Damascus and Baghdad was well attested in the Ottoman archives and private Arabic correspondence. He provided the Nairn Company’s first convoys between Baghdad and Damascus with companions (*rifāq*, sing. *rafiq*) recruited from among his ‘Aqil men. The company, established in the aftermath of World War I by Norman and Gerald Nairn, had already organized a mail and passenger service between Haifa and Beirut. Muhammad al-Bassam secured their vehicles’ protection on the new Damascus–Baghdad highway by subsidizing the Bedouin shaykhs he was acquainted with. By way of compensation, he was allocated a percentage of the mail contracts’ returns, amounting to nearly £2,000 in gold per annum in the first years of the company’s operations.³ Al-Bassam was thereby instrumental in what contemporary observers described as the displacement of slow caravans by the accelerated motion of “modern motor and lorry services” between Damascus and Baghdad, and the reduction of this “ancient way” of moving for local and short-haul traffic across the Syrian and Iraqi steppes.⁴

In scholarship from the 1970s, the decline of the Asian and Middle Eastern caravan trade has been interpreted as the result, first, of competition by the oceanic trade led by the European maritime companies in the 17th and 18th centuries, and, second, of the superseding of animals by much faster steam- and fuel-motorized devices in the 19th and 20th centuries.⁵ From the 2000s onward, scholarship on the post-Ottoman Middle East has focused again on the impact of new motion infrastructures and technologies upon the region’s politics and economy.⁶ As in the last quarter of the 19th century, and with even more intensity during the first decades of the 20th, speed and its modern devices came to be considered primary elements of modernity in the Middle East, the effects of which were debated in the Middle Eastern press and travelogues as soon as the first decades of the 20th century.⁷

By reevaluating the agency of mandatory or protectorate subjects such as traders, pilgrims, and Bedouin shaykhs in the use of new technologies, a range of studies have recently offered stimulating insights into the sometimes unsuspected ways local and regional patterns of mobility were adapted to

³Christina Phelps Grant, *The Syrian Desert: Caravans, Travel and Exploration* (London: A. & C. Black, 1937), 270–76; Maurice D. Hendry, “The Cadillac versus the Camel,” *Veteran and Vintage Magazine* (1968): 184–86. On Buraydah and ‘Unayzah as origins of prominent ‘Aqil traders, see ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ‘Abd al-Ghani Ibrahim, *Najdiyyun wara’ al-Hudud: al-Uqaylat, 1750–1950*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2014), 167–70.

⁴Grant, *Syrian Desert*, 156–58.

⁵Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century: The East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); David Gutelius, “Caravans,” in *Encyclopaedia of World Trade: From Ancient Times to the Present*, ed. Cynthia N. Northrup (New York: Routledge, 2005), 144–45; Ibrahim, *Najdiyyun*, 148–49. For technology-oriented approaches, see Richard W. Bulliet, *The Camel and the Wheel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975). For discussions of the decline argument, see Farouk Tabak, “Local Merchants in Peripheral Areas of the Empire: The Fertile Crescent during the Long Nineteenth Century,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 11 (1988): 179–214; and Morris Rossabi, “The ‘decline’ of the central Asian caravan trade,” in *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350–1750*, ed. James D. Tracy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 351–70. On similar approaches to the history of trans-Saharan caravan trade, see E. Ann McDougall, “Camel Caravans of the Saharan Salt Trade: Traders and Transporters in the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Workers of African Trade*, ed. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Paul E. Lovejoy (London: Sage, 1985), 99–121.

⁶On technological development of accelerated motion and its imbrication with imperialism in the Ottoman Empire, see Peter Mentzel, *Transportation Technology and Imperialism in the Ottoman Empire, 1800–1923* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 2006); Michael B. Miller, “Pilgrims’ Progress: The Business of the Hajj,” *Past and Present* 191 (2006), 189–228; Daniel Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French Mandates: Insurgency, Space and State Formation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Murat Özyüksel, *The Berlin–Baghdad Railway and the Ottoman Empire: Industrialization, Imperial Germany and the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016).

⁷Christoph Herzog and Raoul Motika, “Orientalism ‘alla turca’: Late 19th/Early 20th Century Ottoman Voyages into the Muslim ‘Outback,’” *Die Welt des Islams* 40, no. 2 (2000): 139–95; On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 145–50; Nile Green and James L. Gelvin, eds., *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2014); Mikiya Koyagi, “The Vernacular Journey: Railway Travelers in Early Pahlavi Iran, 1925–1950,” in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47, no. 4 (2015): 745–63; Nile Green, “Fordist Connections: The Automotive Integration of the United States and Iran,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 2 (2020): 290–321.

technological and colonial modernity.⁸ Licit or illicit trade across the borders of the post-Ottoman Middle East and the effects of fuel-motorized transportation upon moving people such as nomadic tribes have unsurprisingly been challenging topics.⁹ Quite tellingly, although his involvement in regional traffic has been on occasion appreciated in such studies, Muhammad ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam has been styled as “a sheikh of the Ruwala,” a “desert tribal leader,” or a crafty smuggler of gold from Syria to Iraq.¹⁰ Muhammad al-Bassam’s experience in overland mobility did not derive from his tribal pedigree and desert orientation, however. The al-Bassam family belonged to the tribe of Banu Tamim and the sedentary (*ḥaḍarī*) population of Najd. His skills and knowledge were the result of his long career as an urban-based caravan trader, although this business would connect him to Bedouin groups such as the Ruwala quite closely and, on occasion, prompted him to move gold from Syria to Iraq. This career and the many ways it was reported by contemporary sources hint at the necessity of a more qualified story of the late Ottoman and early post-Ottoman Middle East traders and travelers’ reaction to possibilities of accelerated motion and to the widening variety of available kinds of mobility (Fig. 1).¹¹

The valorization of speed and availability of steam- or fuel-motorized devices in the Middle East often implies that older and slower means of transportation quickly lost their significance or that they were reduced to localized and niche activities as the region entered modernity, which, as argued by On Barak, “we implicitly ascribe to the political, social, spatial, and temporal effects of the aforementioned technologies.”¹² Already in the mid-1920s and early 1930s, mechanical achievements and the travel comfort they offered soon relegated mules and camel caravans to vestiges of an outdated era.¹³ Two Beirut entrepreneurs and brothers, Francis and Alfred Kettaneh, established the Eastern Transport Company to operate a Beirut–Damascus–Bagdad service through Palmyra as a rival to the Nairns’ route. In the advertisements for the services of the Nairns and their rival over the Damascus–Baghdad overland route (inaugurated with the help of al-Bassam), the caravans were depicted either as overtaken by fast vehicles or charming ancient relics (Fig. 2).

Although speed and technology are valorized in recent scholarship as they were in the early 20th century, older forms of slower, nonmotorized mobility persisted, and caravans still figured in the story of moving Bedouin, border police, and regional traders in the modern Middle East. Muhammad ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam’s story, therefore, can be envisioned from different perspectives. Most familiar is the

⁸Such studies include Françoise Métral, “Changements dans les routes et les flux commerciaux du désert syrien, 1870–1920: Le sort incertain des oasis du nord de la Palmyrène,” in *The Syrian Land: Processes of Integration and Fragmentation in Bilad al-Sham from the 18th to the 20th century*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Birgit Schäbler (Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner, 1998), 29–52; Anthony B. Toth, “Tribes and Tribulations: Bedouin Losses in the Saudi and Iraqi Struggles over Kuwait’s Frontiers, 1921–1943,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (2005): 145–67; Chatty Dawn, ed., *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa: Entering the 21st Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); “Transformations de l’élevage nomade et économie bédouine dans la première moitié du vingtième siècle,” in *Les marges arides du Croissant fertile*, ed. Ronald Jauber and Bernard Geyer (Lyon, France: MOM, 2006), 81–101; Johann Büssow, “Negotiating the Future of a Bedouin Polity in Mandatory Syria: Political Dynamics of the Sba’a-‘Abada during the 1930s,” *Nomadic Peoples* 15, no. 1 (2011): 70–95; and Mehdi Sakatni, “From Camel to Truck?: Automobiles and the Pastoralist Nomadism of Syrian Tribes during the French Mandate (1920–1946),” *Comparative Studies of South Asia and the Middle East* 39, no. 1 (2019): 159–69.

⁹William and Fidelity Lancaster, “Integration into Modernity: Some Tribal Rural Societies in the Bilad as-Sham,” in Chatty, *Nomadic Societies*, 335–69; Cyrus Schayegh, “The Many Worlds of ‘Abud Yasin; or, What Narcotics Trafficking in the Interwar Middle East Can Tell Us about Territorialization,” *American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (2011): 273–306; Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, “The Great Depression and the Making of the Turkish-Syrian Border, 1921–1939,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 2 (2020): 311–26.

¹⁰Robert S. G. Fletcher, “Running the Corridor: Nomadic Societies and Imperial Rule in the Inter-War Syrian Desert,” in *Past & Present* 220, no. 1 (2013): 196; Cyrus Schayegh, *The Middle East and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 159.

¹¹On mobility as a functional process that not only connects people and places through the movement of persons and goods, but also entails differentiated experiences of moving across territories, see Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman, eds., *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 1–15; Colin Divall, “Mobilities and Transport History,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities*, ed. Peter Adey, David Bissell, Kevin Hannam, Peter Merriman, and Mimi Sheller (New York: Routledge, 2014), 36–44; and Peter Adey, *Mobility* (London: Routledge, 2017), 57–63.

¹²On Barak, *Powering Empire: How Coal Made the Middle East and Sparked Global Carbonization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 4.

¹³Grant, *Syrian Desert*; Albert de Boucheman, *Une petite cité caravanière: Suḥné* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1937), 90–92.



Figure 1. Muhammad ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam, ‘Abd Allah al-Jalis, Muhammad Pasha al-‘Usaymi, and Yasin al-Rawwaf in Damascus, c. 1920. Source: Private archives, Faisal Muhammad ‘Abd Allah al-Bassam, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

displacement of slow caravans by faster, more competitive, and usually imperial- and state-controlled connections. Steam- and fuel-motorized devices accelerated the transportation of goods and people across the Middle East, while imperial authorities and more recently established national apparatuses struggled to channel mobility inside their territories and across their boundaries. Another perspective, adopted here, is to envision the resilience and the rationale of caravan networks and traders whose skills and wide-ranging businesses contributed to the implementation of new means of mobility such as the motorized services between Baghdad and Damascus, while keeping active older and slower means such as the caravans. Until the mid-20th century the conjunction of fast and slower patterns of motion characterized most of the experiences of mobility of regional traders and travelers. This conjunction was a by-product of the widening range of available technologies for motion and of the coherent yet gradually diverging economic geography. The coexistence of caravans and faster devices on connected albeit distinct networks reflected the interweaving rather than the succession of different regimes of mobility.¹⁴

Put differently, the age of speed was an uneven one. The demise of caravans, as we shall see by focusing on the different ends of major trade routes connecting Bilad al-Sham to the Gulf, occurred at different paces, depending on social groups, routes, and trades. And the most up-to-date means of transportation such as steamships, trains, and cars entailed differentiated experiences of mobility, depending on their users’ socioeconomic status and purposes.¹⁵ Envisioned from the caravan traders and travelers’ vantage, the age of speed also included contemporary, sometimes overlapping, and yet different forms of mobility that did not all hold speed as a determining factor. Traders and travelers could contemplate alternative and connected options while adapting their mobility to the challenge brought about by new and faster means of transportation across the region.

Although the resilience of the caravans and their contribution to the infrastructures of modern transportation have occasionally been noted by recent scholarship on mobility in the modern Middle East,

¹⁴See Barak, *Powering Empire*, 24–26 and 47–48, about the assumed succession of “energy regimes.”

¹⁵Valeska Huber, *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalization in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869–1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 49–54, 263–71; Nile Green, “The Rail Hajjis: The Trans-Siberian Railway and the Long Way to Mecca,” in *The Hajj: Collected Essays*, ed. Venetia Porter and Liana Saif (London: British Museum Press, 2013), 100–7; Barak, *On Time*, ch. 2 on “double standards” in the Egyptian railways and ch. 5 on Cairo and Alexandria trams; Koyagi, “Vernacular Journey,” 754–58 on the railway space as a “microcosm of the nation”; David Lambert and Peter Merriman, eds., *Empire and Mobility in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2020), 1–28.

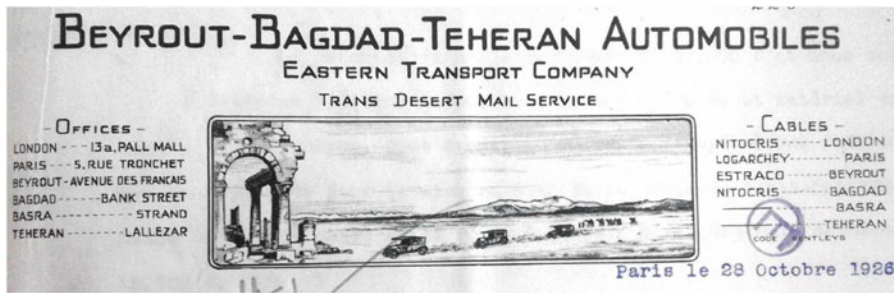


Figure 2. The 1926 heading of B.B.T.A. Eastern Transport Company's writing paper. Source: Archives diplomatiques, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, La Courneuve, Correspondance Politique et Commerciale, E, Irak, 48PCOM/43, B.B.T.A. to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 28 October 1926.

rarely has this been envisioned from the caravan traders' vantage point. Envisioning their experience of the age of speed is not only a way of understanding their multifaceted reaction to the availability of new modalities of travel and trade. When Ottoman and Arab sources are added to the records, we are able to relate a more qualified story of the time-space compression that geographers hold as a characteristic of globalization and the experience of modernity.¹⁶

The traders' stories incorporate forms of mobility that resist both time-space compression and the global "channeling" of mobilities, while proving resilient in the face of the challenge of speed. Although they were usually under the radar of the recording institutions, slower forms of mobility did not just exist concurrently with newer and faster technological options. They were comparable as well. As such, they could be combined in unevenly channeled circuits of travel and transportation. For many overland traders and travelers, it was the combination of both slow and fast modes of transportation that, indeed, characterized the age of speed. As it entailed the compression of such mobilities into a reduced number of usually preexisting and nonetheless recently standardized circuits, the overland funneling process of the interwar period also made such movement more uniform.

The first part of this article draws on the career of Muhammad al-Bassam and his colleagues trading across Syria and Iraq in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to examine the economic place of slowness in the age of speed, the specific geography into which older, slower modes of transportation contributed and fit in, and the most common experience of combining fast and slow mobilities. It argues that, although steam- and fuel-motorized devices did challenge older means of transportation, caravans retained an economic rationale of their own, with enduring impacts on the territory. The article then moves to study the way al-Bassam and his successors envisioned overland mobility once rail, and later cars, made the age of speed more widespread in the interwar post-Ottoman Middle East, albeit at an uneven pace. The argument is that the expansion of train and automobility concurred with the implementation of standardizing and channeling measures to undermine the rationale of combining overland modes of travel. This concurrence eventually led to caravans being increasingly out of place on the circuits of exchange in the region. The caravan traders and travelers' experiences illuminate, again, the uneven pace and the comprehensive geographical dimensions of such transformations.

The Rationale of Slowness

Although in 1923 Muhammad 'Abd Allah al-Bassam's cars followed a direct route running from Baghdad to Damascus through 'Ana (on the right bank of the Euphrates) in Iraq, al-Suknah and Palmyra in the Syrian steppe or alternatively through Hit (160 kilometers west of Baghdad on the Euphrates) in Iraq then eastward via Kubaysa (20 kilometers west of Hit) up to Dumayr (40 kilometers east of Damascus) through the desert, many experienced caravan traders like him preferred to go via the much longer Euphrates route that connected Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul to Aleppo through Deir ez-Zor

¹⁶Scott Kirsch, "The Incredible Shrinking World? Technology and the Production of Space," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13, no. 5 (1995): 529–55.

and Raqqa. At the same time that imperial harbors of the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Gulf flourished thanks to developing steamers' lines, overland domestic trade also expanded. The increase of trade in cities such as Baghdad and Damascus was not only the result of global trade expansion, with growing amounts of imported merchandise trickling down to inner markets. In many regions of the Ottoman Middle East, agriculture, handicraft, and industrial production nurtured an active overland trade served by caravans as much as by railways and maritime or fluvial steamers. Caravans were, in turn, instrumental in marketing this production.¹⁷

As the Ottoman authorities had established new garrisons and brokered new deals with Bedouin shaykhs to secure the development of markets and agricultural settlements from the mid-19th century, the Euphrates route between the Gulf and Bilad al-Sham was better protected from Bedouin attacks.¹⁸ Although it would take traders two months to get from Baghdad to Damascus through Aleppo instead of the average twenty days by the direct steppe route, the longer route provided regular watering places for caravans. Its intermediate markets offered additional opportunities for trade along the way.¹⁹ When their caravans were subject to attacks by the Bedouin, the traders were quick to complain to the highest Ottoman authorities and require from officials on the spot that they honor the sultan's reasserted commitments to ensure the security of routes and settlements. Copious correspondence with Ottoman officials illuminates the overland trade's briskness on routes connecting Iraq to Syria in the early 20th century. In 1906, a group of Damascene traders and their Baghdad partners petitioned the ministry of interior when one of their caravans that consisted of 5,000 loads was attacked and plundered while on its way along the Euphrates. The value of robbed merchandise alone, they claimed, was worth 20,000 Ottoman pounds.²⁰

A crossing point on the Euphrates, garrisoned by Ottoman troops since 1864, Deir ez-Zor experienced an unprecedented development that owed much to caravan trade and the settlement of traders from Mosul, Aleppo, Hamah, and Damascus. From 5,000 inhabitants in the early 1880s, the population grew to 20,000 by the late 1890s. As their business was challenged by the expansion of the Euphrates caravan trade and, starting from the late 1900s, by the Hijaz Railway, traders from older caravan cities such as al-Sukhna and Palmyra relocated to Deir ez-Zor as well.²¹ Muhammad 'Abd Allah al-Bassam himself routed his caravans through the city, even if these caravans would on occasion branch off and take the direct route to Damascus, according to trading opportunities.²²

Although several khans were built on the route to Aleppo with the support of the Ottoman authorities, business was not limited to transit trade between Iran, Iraq, and Syria. A booming caravan trade developed in synergy with the maritime global trade served by steamers calling at the ports of the Mediterranean coast and Basra. Exports from Deir ez-Zor were to a large extent made up of agricultural and pastoral productions (grains, sheep, leather, and wool). They exceeded imports and found their way to Syrian cities and ports like Beirut and Alexandretta, and eventually wound up in Europe.²³ For traders

¹⁷Norman Lewis, *Nomads and Settlers in Syria and Jordan, 1800–1980* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 36–37; Sarah D. Shields, "Take-Off into Self-Sustained Peripheralization: Foreign Trade, Regional Trade and Middle Eastern Historians," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 17, no. 1 (1993): 1–23; Donald Quataert, "The Age of Reforms, 1812–1914," in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914*, ed. Halil İnalcık with Donald Quataert (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 828–37.

¹⁸On the extension of the Ottoman influence in the late 19th century: Frederick Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Eugen Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850–1921* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁹MAE, Correspondance Consulaire et Commerciale, 23, Consulate, Baghdad, 1 October 1866; Métral, "Changements," 38.

²⁰Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office (hereafter BOA), DH. TMIK. 236–78, 1907.

²¹Norman Lewis, "The Syrian Steppe during the Last Century of Ottoman Rule: Hawran and the Palmyrena," in *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East*, ed. M. Mundy and B. Musallam (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 33–43.

²²A 300-camel caravan belonging to Muhammad 'Abdallah al-Bassam is mentioned in BOA, DH. TMIK. 253–76, 1907, when the Ottoman authorities in Damascus and Deir ez-Zor certified the restitution of "most" of the merchandise robbed by bandits from the Huwaytat and Shammar tribes between the two cities.

²³Vital Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*, vol. 2 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1891), 276 and 292–94; Edmond Édouard Charles Perthuis de Laillevault, *Le Désert de Syrie, l'Euphrate et la Mésopotamie* (Paris: Hachette, 1896), 157; Jean Hannoyer, "Politique des notables en Syrie: La naissance d'une ville (Deyr al-Zôr)," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 41–42 (1989–1990): 113–42.

who kept opting for the lengthy Euphrates route to Aleppo and Damascus, movement was not “a cost and dead time” spent on crossing empty spaces.²⁴ Opportunities for safe business with Bedouin tribes and agricultural settlements on the way, and the strengthening of intermediate markets like Deir ez-Zor, endowed longer ventures with an economic rationale of their own. By supporting the reorganization of route networks and the development of intermediate markets at the expense of others (for example, the Euphrates route through Deir ez-Zor and Aleppo rather than the more direct route to Damascus across the steppe), caravan trade was both instrumental in the geographical processes of territorialization and nurtured by the same processes. The slow pace of camels did not preclude the caravans from reciprocating, overland, processes at work in the hierarchies of Mediterranean and Indian Ocean ports during the age of “speedier and timelier” steam services.²⁵

Although the Istanbul–Baghdad railway was not completed until the late 1930s and steamers on the Tigris rarely went beyond Baghdad from Basra, the persistence of caravan trade between Damascus and Baghdad was not just a default option. In the late 1890s, traders actually could choose to send their merchandise to the Mediterranean through Basra, and the other way round through Beirut or Alexandretta. Local trading houses with agents in Baghdad, such as Hamad al-Bassam, a relative of Muhammad `Abd Allah, could arrange the shipping to Port Said and Europe. As far as we can judge from published European sources however, the costs of maritime freight were still high in comparison to those of caravans. Sending goods to Port Said on steamers would cost the same price as to London: freight varied between 27.5 and 30 shillings per ton between the 1890s and 1910. Because of the necessary transshipment, freight for Beirut and Jaffa would start from 48 shillings for a metric ton (almost £2.5), and 52 shillings for Alexandretta, Smyrna, and Istanbul.²⁶ In relation to the steamers’ speed (a mere twenty days to connect Basra to Suez) and the distance separating the Gulf from the Mediterranean (8000 kilometers), these costs were low. However, additional costs such as insurance fees and freight from Baghdad to Basra or from Beirut, Jaffa, or Alexandretta to Aleppo or Damascus applied. Freight between ports and inland cities was still high in the late 1890s and the early 1900s: around £1.9 a ton by caravan between Beirut and Damascus (camels being the most competitive option) or £1–1.3 for steamboats between Basra and Baghdad. In the mid-1890s, caravan freight from Baghdad to Mosul started at £4.2 a ton, and £4 from Mosul to Aleppo.²⁷

Before their investments in infrastructures were recovered, railway companies did not fare much better than caravans. What is more, as they were challenged by maritime, river, and rail alternatives, the caravans’ freight kept decreasing on many overland routes throughout the region. It remained a competitive option after the opening of railways such as the Beirut–Damascus line in 1895. Caravans were even compulsory between the Beirut railway terminus and the harbor located one mile away from the station. Until the early 1910s, rail freight was so high that most Aleppo traders preferred commissioning caravans in their business with Alexandretta to using the Aleppo–Tripoli rail connection. Between Jerusalem and Jaffa, rail freight came to approximately £0.7–0.9 a ton. Once they had been unloaded in Jerusalem, however, most of the trains had to return almost empty to Jaffa. The structural commercial disequilibrium between the two cities impinged on the railway’s cost effectiveness and compelled the company to keep freight prices high. The line, inaugurated in 1892 and stretching 90 kilometers, thus suffered from fierce competition with slower but much cheaper (£0.5–0.7 a ton) camel caravans. Once in Jerusalem, caravans could follow their journey southward to Gaza and Egypt, without incurring the train’s financial losses. In Jaffa, camels were even compulsory for transshipment between the port and the rail station, which was 1.5 kilometers away; they were equally compulsory for transshipment between Jerusalem’s station and the city (1.2 kilometers).²⁸ Because of additional costs to reach inland cities from the coast or the closest railway station, and because of the economic rationale of incremental albeit slow

²⁴Cresswell and Merriman, *Geographies*, 1–15.

²⁵Green, “Rail Hajjis,” 101–2.

²⁶Vital Cuinet, *La Turquie d’Asie*, vol. 3 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1894), 247; MAE, “Situation économique de la province de Bagdad en 1910,” 206CPCOM476, 1910.

²⁷Vital Cuinet, *Syrie, Liban et Palestine: Géographie administrative, statistique, descriptive et raisonnée* (Paris, 1896), 44; Charles Issawi, *The Fertile Crescent, 1800–1914* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1988), 220–21.

²⁸Noël Verney and George Dambmann, *Les puissances étrangères dans le Levant en Syrie et en Palestine* (Paris: Guillaume et Cie, 1900), 251–59; Issawi, *Fertile Crescent*, 214 and 221–22; on the Julfa–Tabriz Russian line, Green, “Fordist Connections,” 298.

mobility, caravans were not supplanted by new means of transportation suddenly, nor did they lag far behind in their competition with steam and rail on routes that could be traveled either way.

By repeatedly highlighting the synergetic relations between steam and rail on the one hand and animal (mostly camels, but also mules and horses) locomotion on the other, recent scholarship has challenged the assumed inherent competition of older and new transportation systems. Camels not only connected stations and harbors to unequipped hinterlands. They provided the fuel for faster modes of mobility as well. Along the Suez Canal and Egyptian railways, as in the Hejaz beyond the Medina rail terminus and between the harbor of Jeddah and inland Mecca, from the late decades of the 19th to the early decades of the 20th century increasing numbers of caravans supported the operations of steamers and trains by transporting water or coal and providing connecting overland transportation to disembarking travelers and pilgrims.²⁹ As many other caravan traders, al-Bassam had a share in such synergies. In the early 1900s, he provided the Ottoman authorities with hundreds of camels for the construction of the Hijaz Railway (1901–1908). Although he apparently supplied the animals on a nonprofit basis, al-Bassam subsequently asked for payment of the fares and compensation for 300 camels that died during the construction. The archives of the Ottoman Ministry of Interior (Dahiliye) do not say if al-Bassam managed to be reimbursed, nor do they disclose the trader's actual losses. Yet, by carrying materials, wood, water, provisions, and workmen along the rail track, these hundreds of camels were instrumental in the development of a major and much celebrated steam-powered Ottoman infrastructure (Fig. 3). Men like Muhammad al-Bassam, who bought their camels from Bedouin tribes, were the nexus that linked two seemingly concurrent kinds of mobility and made them synergetic. Through their agency, Bedouin providers of camels, guards, and guides could derive some benefits from the Ottoman and European investments in new infrastructure and investors and entrepreneurs could secure their operations on the spot.³⁰

From that perspective, al-Bassam's later involvement in the Nairn lines between Syria and Iraq was only a further instance of such synergies. He was a player among many others in the brisk camel trade between Bilad al-Sham and Egypt. Although some of the camels they had bought from Bedouin tribes in Najd, Iraq, and the Syrian Desert were used as pack animals, caravan traders such as al-Bassam repeatedly traded in camels meant for different uses during their long business ventures. Depending on their pedigree, camels could be used as beasts of burden for local transportation and agricultural needs, and sometimes for slaughter. Between the Syrian and Egyptian markets, Palestine was the main corridor for this trade, which, although it was a transnational and long-ranging one, could nonetheless supply local circuits of mobility. On the eve of World War I, an estimated 100,000 camels were carried every year from the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq to Egypt via Deir ez-Zor, Damascus, and Gaza.³¹

Muhammad al-Bassam grasped other opportunities for investments along the rail tracks of the Ottoman Empire. In the early 1910s, with a trading partner, he embarked upon the purchase of lands in the vicinity of Nusaybin in northeastern Syria. Al-Bassam and his partner reportedly bought 400 dunums of land for an estimated 30,000 Ottoman pounds. As railway construction progressed across the region, land value increased in proportion to agricultural prospects. Although al-Bassam insistently denied it, the Ottoman governor of Diyarbakir and the interior ministry suspected him of engaging in land speculation with foreign investors. While addressing the matter of land purchases along the Baghdad rail track, however, the governor of Damascus, Mehmed 'Arif Bey, tempered his colleagues' suspicions by reminding them of al-Bassam's fame in the Ottoman domains and of his financial losses a decade earlier in the Hijaz construction works.³²

²⁹Huber, *Channelling Mobilities*, 161–67; Ibrahim, *Najdiyyun*, 231–32; Barak, *Powering Empire*, 34–35 and 46–47. On the competition of caravans and the Bedouin economy by the Hijaz railway, see William Ochsenwald, *The Hijaz Railroad* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1980); and Murat Özyüksel, *The Hedjaz Railway and the Ottoman Empire: Modernity, Industrialization and Ottoman Decline* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 88–89 and 154–62.

³⁰An account of al-Bassam's financial situation by the Syrian governorate is found in BOA, DH. İ. UM. EK., 89–35, 1914. For al-Bassam's activity as a camel contractor for the Hijaz railway, see BOA, DH. ŞFR., 421–98, 1914; and BOA, DH. İD., 205–7, 1914.

³¹Arthur Ruppin, *Syrien als Wirtschaftsgebiet*, 1916, quoted in Issawi, *Fertile Crescent*, 327.

³²One donum amounted to 1,000 square meters in Turkey and Syria. On Muhammad 'Abdallah al-Bassam's investments: BOA, DH. İD., 205–7, 1914; and BOA, DH. İ. UM. EK., 26–48, 1917. On land investments along the railway track, see Özyüksel, *Berlin–Baghdad Railway*, ch. 1.



Figure 3. A caravan carrying supplies of water during the construction of the Hejaz Railway (1906). Source: Abdülhamid II Albums, Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, 90605-0083.

In Damascus during the early 1910s, al-Bassam was still known to the Ottoman authorities and his colleagues for his involvement in the ‘Aqil caravan trade between Najd, Iraq, and Bilad al-Sham. When his fellow ‘Aqil traders were accused in 1911 of selling firearms to the Bedouin, none other than al-Bassam was called by the governor of Damascus to vouch for the caravan traders. The many overland routes and the opportunistic mobility of caravan traders such as the ‘Uqaylat made it impossible for the Ottoman authorities to monitor the actual use of the weapons they brought with them. When some of the traders refused to hand their firearms over as they were requested to do upon entering the settled regions (*bilād al-‘ammar*), al-Bassam had to justify their need to be armed to protect their merchandise on the way from Najd to the Syrian cities. In a letter he sent from Cairo to one of his partners in Kuwait that year, the Najdi trader Muhammad ‘Abd Allah al-Qar‘awi gave a detailed account of al-Bassam’s repeated interventions on behalf of the caravan traders between Syria and the Arabian Peninsula.

Himself a caravan trader who planned to return from Egypt after selling his merchandise, al-Qar‘awi could only praise al-Bassam’s role in regional overland trade. While his letter to Kuwait was shipped by one of the Bombay lines’ steamers via the Indian Ocean to convey quickly the usual and yet much needed information on markets and prices, al-Qar‘awi told his partner that he was about to leave for Medina, and, from there, to Najd. Although he did not make it explicit, at least half of his journey back (the part between Medina and the Najd) had to be on a camel’s back. On the Suez–Medina segment, available means included steamers (via Jeddah), sailing ships (via Yanbu‘), and caravans. From Medina to Najd and the Gulf beyond, caravans were, until the early 1930s, the only affordable means in addition to offering many business opportunities en route. Although speed obviously mattered for the transmission of business information, slow land-borne transportation still had its own economic rationale in the view of al-Qar‘awi and his colleagues.³³

A few years later, between 1917 and 1918, the Ottoman Ministry of War entrusted Muhammad al-Bassam in Damascus with more than 35,000 Ottoman pounds that had to be transferred to the army in Yemen.³⁴ As the British and French navies enforced blockades that cut maritime connections

³³Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, Kuwait City, private correspondence, Muhammad al-‘Abd Allah al-Qar‘awi, Cairo, to Fahd al-Khalid al-Khudayr, Kuwait, 17 June 1911.

³⁴The Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Hariciye*) asked the French mandatory administration in 1922 for help recovering the money from al-Bassam (BOA, HR. SYS. 2729-8, 1922).

through the Suez Canal and the Gulf, and because the Hijaz Railway that al-Bassam had helped to build was subject to attacks and sabotage with increasing frequency, the Ottoman Army resorted to al-Bassam and his fellows' caravans for what appeared to be the safest means of transporting valued items. Although the transition to accelerated and channeled mobility was made even more urgent by war operations along the Suez Canal and the functioning Middle East rail tracks, slow and unchanneled forms of mobility mastered by traders like al-Bassam proved vital to the war economy and overland trade. Through their incremental mobility covering territories from cities to steppes, caravans were instrumental in sustaining networks inherited from the Ottoman Empire that were now becoming transnational. The war made this only more evident.³⁵

At the very same time as he was helping French and English diplomats cross the desert, in 1923 (in the anecdote that opened this essay) al-Bassam was closely tracked by mandatory authorities for his involvement in smuggling gold from Lebanon and Syria to Iraq. The depreciation of silver currencies and the deficit of the Syrian balance of payments to Iraq were powerful incentives for gold exports from Bilad al-Sham to Iraq, the Gulf, and, beyond, the Indian Ocean. In the 1920s, these Ottoman era incentives concurrently with French franc fluctuations, heavy customs duties collected on imported goods by Syrian and Iraqi authorities, and the developing maritime trade between the Gulf and the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal stimulated what was now considered by mandatory regimes as gold smuggling.³⁶ Together with well-established associates in Beirut, Aleppo, and Damascus, al-Bassam would collect gold specie from other traders and retailers in Lebanon and Syria in exchange for sterling pounds he had bought in Iraq. Clients were eager to obtain pounds at good rates to clear the debts they owed to their Iraqi, Egyptian, and British correspondents for merchandise shipped from Baghdad or Basra to Jaffa, Beirut, or Alexandretta. On a weekly basis, al-Bassam's associates carried the collected gold across the desert and cashed it in the Baghdad-based branches of English banks. More often than not, the gold specie collected by al-Bassam and his associates was hidden in camels' loads up to the Syrian-Iraqi border. There, the peacetime flow of caravans and the many origins of their merchandise made contraband much harder to track.³⁷ Once they had dodged the French-monitored customs in Deir ez-Zor and Abu Kamal and entered the recently defined Iraqi territories, the caravans' traders and guides would transfer the gold to cars and carry it faster to Baghdad. On 4 March 1923, whether he knew it or not, French Consul Maigret probably joined one of Muhammad's return smuggling trips from the Iraqi capital to Damascus.³⁸

In a letter he wrote from Baghdad in 1925 to his partner Muhammad 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Ajaji in Bahrain, the caravan trader Hasan al-Hadban gave further evidence of these fast-moving currency channels and their vital importance to the much less timely caravan trade connecting Iraq, Syria, and the Arabian Peninsula in the 1920s. The outbreak of the Great Syrian Revolution in Syria had made the route dangerous and brought the exchange of gold specie to a standstill. Some business was still being

³⁵Jon May and Nigel Thrift, *TimeSpace: Geographies of Temporality* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 7–8; Valeska Huber, "Connecting Colonial Seas: The 'International Colonisation' of Port Said and the Suez Canal during and after the First World War," *European Review of History* 19, no. 1 (2012): 141–61; Özyüksel, *Berlin-Baghdad Railway*, ch. 5. On caravan trade (often labeled "smuggling") during World War I, see "Routes," in *A handbook of Arabia*, vol. 2 (Admiralty War Staff, 1917), 19–20; Harry St. John Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis* (London: Constable, 1928), 27, 222; *Arab Bulletins*, ed. Robin Bidwell (London: Archive Editions, 1986), vol. 2: 306–19, 378–85, and vol. 3: 124–35 and 172–83; Ibrahim, *Najdiyyun*, 175–79; and Peter C. Valenti, "State-Building in Central Arabia: Empires and Regional Actors at the Crossroads of al-Qasim" (PhD diss., New York University, 2015), 450–67.

³⁶For economic incentives for gold smuggling out of Syria to Iraq in the 1920s, see MAE, Correspondance Politique et Commerciale, E, Irak, 48CPCOM/29-30, Consulate, Basra, 18 March 1921; Charles Issawi, *Egypt in Revolution: An Economic Analysis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 31; Roger Owen and Şevket Pamuk, *A History of Middle East Economies in the Twentieth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 31–32; and Mohammed Ali El-Saleh, "Une évaluation de la gestion mandataire de l'économie syrienne," in *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 385–413.

³⁷Synergy of cars and camels for internal smuggling is mentioned by Albert de Boucheman in the 1930s. Smugglers would get their merchandise out of Aleppo and Hamah by car, driving up to the smaller Syrian steppe cities for redistribution by caravans (*Une petite cité caravanière*, 94–95).

³⁸On these operations and the joint use of camels and cars, see CADN, Syrie-Liban, Cabinet Politique, 854, Report by Maigret to the High Commissioner, 15 March 1923.

carried on, however, on a reduced basis. As he arrived in Baghdad from Kuwait on a routine business trip and considered a still unscheduled but nonetheless imminent return, al-Hadban urged his partner al-'Ajaji in Bahrain not to stop arranging trade to Syria. Camel and stock caravan trade, in particular, was still active. Most importantly, drafts on London-based banks enabled the traders to settle their account balance in Ottoman and British pounds or rupees (the rates of which are duly mentioned in the letter) without transporting hard currencies.³⁹

The availability of steam- and fuel-motorized devices actually provided al-Bassam and his colleagues with means of fast transportation they valued highly for gold, drafts, and information on the market. Gold had not only to be smuggled out of Syria through monitored borders in the 1920s; it was submitted to frequent price changes as well, which made fast shipments vital to catching opportunities on the global exchange market linking Damascus, Aleppo, and Beirut to Baghdad through British banks. Such fast circuits existed in connection with slower caravan mobility on many other routes. A famous Hijazi businessman of the interwar period and the creator of a successful family company in Saudi Arabia, Sa'id ibn Muhammad Bin Zaqr mentioned in his memoirs the increasing number and thriving business of the exchange counters inaugurated in Jeddah by Meccan traders in the 1930s. The expansion of motor vehicle connections between the two Hijazi cities were, according to the trader, the driving factor in that increase, although most pilgrims still traveled from Jeddah to Mecca on camels' backs.⁴⁰ For money exchange, slow mobility was not relevant. Space had to be crossed uninterruptedly and, contrary to the caravans traveling on the same routes, movement was deemed a "dead" time. On the whole however, fast and slow circuits were equally useful to regional traders. As in the flow of correspondence between al-Qar'awi and al-Hadban, the synergy of such networks of fast circulation with resilient (and sometimes developing) forms of slower mobility played a key role in upholding the coherence of the post-Ottoman regional economy between Egypt or Bilad al-Sham and the Gulf.⁴¹

Although many pilgrims and traders switched to celebrated steamers and trains to ship their merchandise across the Middle East or to get to Mecca and Medina, the shift was far from complete. For overland traders and travelers in Syria, Iraq, and even later in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula during this time period, fast connections were additional options—not exclusive—to incremental, opportunistic, and relatively slow mobility.⁴² Their experience was one of a widening range of available options, combining fast and slower, channeled and unchanneled forms of mobility, cars, trains, steamships, and camels. Access to accelerated and technological means of motion, celebrated as they were by foreign observers as much as by their elite and middle-class local counterparts, should not distract our attention from persistent and seemingly out of date ways of moving and transporting across the region. The age of speed included slower mobilities that were neither circumscribed to specific activities nor to segments neglected by modern infrastructures. At the regional and local levels, even where and when a full range of fast and slow motion devices was available, speed was not held as the only determining factor of mobility.

Combining and Standardizing Overland Mobilities

From 1923 onward, perhaps because they knew they were under close surveillance, Muhammad al-Bassam and his associates dispensed with the usual camel expedition and resorted, at least occasionally, to fully automobile journeys from Damascus. On 15 March 1923, at the end of an epic chase on the Damascus–Baghdad direct route, two of their cars were brought to a halt by a military airplane, and the drivers were arrested by French police who had pursued them by car. The officers found the equivalent of more than 30,000 gold sterling pounds (a huge amount of money) astutely hidden in the cars' bodies. In addition to the two drivers (one French, the other Kurdish), the three arrested "travelers" were, not

³⁹Ghassan al-'Ajaji (@ajajigh77), Letter from Hasan al-Hadban to Muhammad 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Ajaji (26 September 1925), Twitter, 9 November 2020.

⁴⁰Bin Zaqr Private Archives (Jeddah), Sa'id ibn Muhammad ibn 'Ubayd Bin Zaqr, "Memoirs," part 3, 1984.

⁴¹A similar argument has been formulated by Ghislaine Lydon on the "paper economy" that supported the development of caravan trade on a regional level in the Sahara—although not explicitly connected to speed; *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ch. 5.

⁴²On the industrial hajj rather than the "whole sequence" of pilgrimages culminating in Mecca, see Green, "Rail Hajjis," 101.

surprisingly, tribesmen who had most probably been hired as *rifāq* or security companions. One of them, caught as he was running away, was reported to bear the name of Sulayman Mohamed Ibrahim Aguel ('Aqil).⁴³ Whether his apprehension by the French police was a serious blow to his overland trading business or only a failed attempt in an otherwise successful transition to mechanized trade, al-Bassam's automobile expedition stands in sharp contrast with his previous journeys combining caravans and automobiles. It exemplifies, once more, the changing patterns of regional trade and mobility and emphasizes the unevenness of that change. It also underscores how caravan traders and travelers were in no way passive victims of imperial and technological powers—the fast-moving police cars and military airplane in al-Bassam's 1923 venture. Ironically, al-Bassam and his associates' cars had proved easier for the French police they were meant to evade to track than the usual caravans.

On the Baghdad–Damascus route, as elsewhere in the post-Ottoman Middle East, fast, motorized devices challenged the monitoring of mobility by mandatory and national authorities.⁴⁴ At the same time, motorization was instrumental in the channeling of these mobilities. Although they were usually localized on existing caravan routes, automobile roads, stopovers, and their facilities as well as new border posts and border-crossing procedures agreed on by the post-Ottoman States worked together to standardize overland transportation. Available accounts by caravan traders from the Gulf frequently mentioned how, once they arrived in Palestine or Egypt, they had to arrange their travel by train between the two countries. Although it was rarely needed as long as they traveled in caravans, they usually had to procure a passport with the help of established businessmen (more often than not ex-caravan traders from Najd), such as Fawzan al-Sabiq in Cairo, to enter Egypt and come back to Palestine by train. The many rounds of inspection (*tafiṣh*) during the rail trip between both countries required as many tricks from the traders to pass the gold currencies they received from sales and money transfers in Egypt, although they were in dire need of it to arrange their caravans' return ventures. In the mid-1940s, Ibrahim al-Musallam's father even resorted to the help of a caravan trader's son, who was employed in the rail companies or mandatory administration, to smuggle his currencies while returning from Egypt to Palestine by train.⁴⁵

Caravans were still active between Aleppo and Mosul, a major caravan route before it was supplanted by maritime connections via the modernized port of Beirut in the early decades of the 20th century.⁴⁶ Until the late 1930s, short-haul camel caravans were vital to connecting villages not accessible by roads with Aleppo, Hama, and Deir ez-Zor.⁴⁷ The unevenness of mobility was even more pronounced in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula where 'Aqil and other traders kept caravan mobility active in combination with faster, mechanized mobilities. In 1932, Musa'id Ya'qub al-Badr, the scion of an important Kuwaiti merchant family, traveled to Mecca on hajj. In the account of his three-month journey, al-Badr

⁴³MAE, Syrie–Liban, Cabinet Politique, 854, Report by the French Intelligence Officer Bucheton to the High Commissioner, 19 March 1923.

⁴⁴On the technological dimensions of power and automobility in imperial contexts, see Georgine Clarsen and Lorenzo Veracini, "Settler Colonial Automobilities: A Distinct Constellation of Automobile Cultures?" *History Compass* 10, no. 12 (2012): 889–900. For Syria, see Robert Blecher, "Desert Medicine, Ethnography, and the Colonial Encounter in Mandatory Syria," in *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 255–56; Daniel Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 129–31; Kristin V. Monroe, "Automobility and Citizenship in Interwar Lebanon," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, no. 3 (2014): 518–31; and Sakatni, "From Camel to Truck?" 164–65.

⁴⁵For 'Abdallah al-Humaydi's first caravan venture to Egypt in 1922, the necessity of passports, and conveying gold currencies by train, see interview of 'Abd Allah 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Humaydi by Sayf Marzuq al-Shamlan, TV program "Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwayt," al-Qurayn Channel, YouTube video, 13 December 1980, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-J2TEGqwbmE>. On Ibrahim al-Musallam's father, see Ibrahim al-Musallam, *Rihlati ma'a al-'Uqaylat* (Riyadh: al-Jam'iyya al-'Arabiyya al-Sa'udiyya li-l-Thaqafa wa-l-Funun, 1988), 180.

⁴⁶Although they were usually not seem, caravans became visible when attacks by Syrian or Iraqi tribesmen stirred disagreements between the French officials in Syria and their British counterparts in Iraq. For attacks on caravans in the vicinity of Nusaybin (1925) and al-Maskanah (1927), see CADN, Syrie–Liban, Cabinet Politique, 562, Secretary of the French High Commissioner, Beirut, to British Residency, Baghdad, 30 July 1925, and British Resident, Baghdad, to the French High Commissioner, Beirut, 5 August 1927.

⁴⁷Grant, *Syrian Desert*, 156–58. For Anatolia until the 1950s: Onur İnal, "One Humped History: The Camel as Historical Actor in the Late Ottoman Empire," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 1 (2020), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743820000987>.

described the mixed caravan he traveled with and the many combinations available for mobility across the Arabian Peninsula. Trading opportunities accounted for the slow progress of the caravan. Pilgrims (about fifty tents) accompanied loads of merchandise being traded between the Gulf and the Hijaz via important markets on the caravan's path, such as Buraydah.⁴⁸ Many other pilgrims from Kuwait with whom al-Badr eventually caught up in Medina would get to the Holy Cities by steamers and come back either directly or, more often than not, via Bombay. As his caravan got close to Medina, its path ran parallel to what al-Badr interestingly called "the motor-way" (*jādat al-mawātir*), to distinguish it from his caravan's path. Upon arriving at their penultimate stopover, the Saudi governor sent a car to pick up a member of the Kuwaiti princely family who had traveled with al-Badr and the other pilgrims.⁴⁹

Although caravans could still run in parallel and sometimes combine with cars and trucks between the Gulf and the Hijaz, on the Damascus–Baghdad route the former were gradually being displaced by the latter's services. Syrian, more specifically Damascus-based, merchants gradually lost their interest in the overland trade to Iraq, whereas their partners in the Gulf such as al-'Ajaji began resorting to maritime connections. Although Syria and Iraq ranked behind Lebanon and Palestine in motorization, both countries were home to a growing number of cars and trucks. Whereas Syria counted only 100 motorized vehicles at the end of World War I, by 1937 some 2,515 automobiles, 348 buses, and 873 trucks were on the roads. In Iraq, the number of motorized vehicles leapt from "a few dozen" in 1920 to 3,500 private cars and 1,000 trucks in 1930.⁵⁰ The rapidly expanding availability of automobiles, however, was not the only driving factor leading al-Bassam and his colleagues to abandon their camels. Nor was the later expansion of automobiles in the neighboring countries of the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf the sole reason for the caravans' resilient overland trade with the Bilad al-Sham.

French and British officials had deemed the Damascus–Baghdad route to be essential for imperial communication between Europe and Asia. A transit agreement between Syrian and Iraqi authorities was signed in 1925 to ease cross-border trade. A series of free-trade agreements were concluded between Syria, Palestine, and Transjordan between 1921 and 1925, which sometimes predated border definition agreements and kept those markets integrated throughout the interwar period.⁵¹ Ibrahim al-Musallam's ventures in Bilad al-Sham, which I will cover in the remaining part of this article, should not, therefore, come as a surprise. By contrast, between Syria and Iraq on the one hand, and between Syria and Egypt on the other, overland exchange was decreasing to a limited amount of merchandise (cereals, livestock, mechanical equipment, and textiles). During the 1930s, the caravan trade of Syria with Iraq and Egypt would face rising tariffs, in addition to increasing travel restrictions such as quarantines and customs inspections as the camels moved across boundaries. The bulk of the Syrian–Iraqi trade was now a transit trade carried by steamers through the Suez Canal.⁵²

What fit well with scheduled and direct automobile or rail services eventually undermined the rationale of the incremental and opportunistic pace of caravans. Whereas businessmen like Muhammad al-Bassam and the Nairn brothers were still in the need of 'Aqil guides for their journeys through the desert in the early 1920s, they also would employ European or Kurdish drivers and mechanics whose technical skills prevailed over their ignorance of tribes and intermediary markets. As the steppe and the desert turned into "a fast-moving landscape" between main cities, the Nairn brothers themselves

⁴⁸Musa'id Ya'qub al-Badr, *al-Rihla al-Maymuna ila Bayt Allah al-Haram* (1932), ed. 'Abdallah Yusuf al-Ghunaym (Kuwait: Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 2011).

⁴⁹Ibid., 133–37.

⁵⁰Stephen H. Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950: A Political, Social, and Economic History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 207–8; Maamoun Challah, *L'évolution de la situation économique en Syrie de 1935 à nos jours* (Damascus: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1960), 141–45; Stephen H. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1968), 277–78. Figures for Lebanon and Palestine can be found in Anat Helman, "Taking the Bus in 1920s and 1930s, Tel Aviv," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4 (2006): 625–40; and Schayegh, "Many Worlds," 284.

⁵¹Frank Peter, "Dismemberment of Empire and Reconstitution of Regional Space: The Emergence of 'National' Industries in Damascus between 1918 and 1946," in *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives*, ed. N. Méouchy and P. Sluglett (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 425–27; Schayegh, *Middle East*, 157–64.

⁵²On the diminution of caravan trade between Najd and Syria, see Peter, "Dismemberment of Empire," 415–46; and Ibrahim, *Najdiyyun*, 180–81. Ibrahim al-Musallam gives many examples of the increasing channeling procedures caravan traders had to comply with as they crossed boundaries in the mid-1940s (*Rihlati*, 89–90 and 200).

in 1926 dispensed with al-Bassam's role as an intermediary with Bedouin shaykhs and companions, although not without giving him a number of the company's shares.⁵³

Available reports about al-Bassam's gold expedition by car did not mention any other merchandise. Yet the gold specie smuggled overland probably helped a lot in settling the accounts of Syrian and Iraqi traders. As the bulk of trade between the Mediterranean and the Gulf was carried on steamers, Nairn and the other companies operating motor vehicle connections between Baghdad and Damascus made most of their profit from transporting people, not freight.⁵⁴ Along the routes of Palestine between Bilad al-Sham and Egypt, the numbers of camels traded decreased, because of the extension of mechanized transport in Egypt for local and national connections, increasing border impediments, and the reorientation of the Egyptian market for camels toward supplies from Sudan.⁵⁵ As a result of protectionist tariff policies and the promotion of national economy development, the markets of once intensely caravan-connected countries gradually diverged. Policies adopted in relation to the Great Depression only accelerated this process. Economic divergence undermined the coherence of long and lengthy caravan routes followed by traders like al-Qar'awi between the Gulf, Syria, and Egypt, while it fostered the channeling of mobility through newly defined corridors and customs. The policies adopted by the Middle East governments in reaction to the Great Depression intensified the nationalization of their economies.⁵⁶

What happened between Syria and Iraq unfolded somewhat later between the neighboring countries of Bilad al-Sham and the Arabian Peninsula. The contrast between the two regions highlights the unevenness of the standardization of mobilities overland as envisioned by regional traders. The journey of Ibrahim al-Musallam and his father's (an 'Aqil trader) caravan over a three-year span (1945–48) is a case in point.⁵⁷ His circuit (*maṭāf*) from Najd (inner Arabia) to Transjordan, Palestine, and Egypt not only confronted al-Musallam with a faster means of transportation that prevailed in Egypt and Bilad al-Sham earlier than in the Arabian Peninsula; he also faced the repurposing of caravans' mobility in the transforming geography of the Middle East, a more complex transformation than the mere reduction of caravans to the service of local routes.

The slower pace of caravans continued to enable the traders to keep active a dense and coherent transnational network. Lengthy periods of camping during winter and the camels' grazing seasons provided many occasions to meet Bedouin shaykhs. When 'Uqaylat in Amman, Gaza, al-'Arish, and Cairo helped his father's business and administrative procedures, al-Musallam could observe this trading network's enduring reliability and appreciate the true value of prolonged stopovers and unhurried motion. Villages and stations where the Saudi and Egyptian states had located their checkpoints and bureaucratic apparatus remained places of usual sociability between caravan traders from Najd, Syria, and Transjordan. Key information on markets and partners could be gathered, and new partnerships could be established. Local officials such as the treasury officer in al-Nabak (northern Saudi Arabia, close to the Saudi-Jordanian border) hosted frequent dinners with visiting traders. Once they had checked the caravans' documents, patrol officers were invited for tea and coffee, exchanging information as before.⁵⁸

Al-Musallam's account nonetheless makes clear that mechanized devices were now playing a major role, even when it came to caravan trade. Automobiles and trains actually enabled the traders to go ahead of their caravans to strike their deals directly by dispensing with intermediaries, multiply business ventures in parallel to the progress of their caravans, and check the situation of the markets ahead of their

⁵³ Grant, *Syrian Desert*, 275; Schayegh, "Many Worlds," 293; Barak, *On Time*, 34.

⁵⁴ For monthly reports ("Transports transdésertiques") of the 1930s, see MAE, Syrie-Liban, Cabinet Politique, 702; and Grant, *Syrian Desert*, 282.

⁵⁵ John B. Glubb, *Handbook of the Nomad, Semi-Nomad, Semi-Sedentary and Sedentary Tribes of Syria* (London: Headquarters, Ninth Army, 1942); Françoise Métral, "Transformations de l'élevage nomade et économie bédouine," in *Les marges arides du Croissant fertile. Peuplements, exploitation et contrôle des ressources en Syrie du Nord*, ed. Ronald Jaubert and Bernard Geyer (Lyon: Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée Jean Pouilloux, 2006), 90–91.

⁵⁶ Charles Issawi, *An Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 159–60, 179–80; Peter, "Dismemberment of Empire," 419–27. Öztan, in "The Great Depression," offers a similar assessment in his study of the role of economic determinants in the making of the Turkish-Syrian border.

⁵⁷ Al-Musallam, *Rihlati*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 67, 87–90, 152–53, 197.

camels' arrival. Even caravan traders like Ibrahim al-Musallam's father were now moving by car, autobus, and train in Bilad al-Sham, Egypt, and Iraq. They would meet up with their caravans (and the employees in charge) only as they approached the markets and customs points. Many among the 'Aqil traders al-Musallam met in Amman and Cairo had actually settled there definitively and fully converted to steam- and fuel-motorized trade, exchange, and banking activities.⁵⁹

The privilege given to direct and fast connections extended to the local level as well. Al-Sukhnah, an important provider of caravan traders and camels and a major stopover for caravans in the Syrian steppe until the early 20th century, was gradually being transformed into a "nest of mechanics and drivers succeeding the camel drivers." The city's traders were now "exporting the products of a tiny local market" directly to the main Syrian towns.⁶⁰ Trucks and cars were extending the reach of main commercial centers deeper into sedentary zones around capital cities such as Beirut and Damascus, whereas intermediate markets and even bigger ones such as Aleppo retained only a local redistributing role. Equipped with cars and trucks, urban traders, rural producers, and Bedouin shaykhs could now, over time, dispense with the caravans that used to connect them.⁶¹ The businesses and networks of caravan traders were challenged by the segmenting of previously coherent routes, the growing distance between previously densely connected capitals and intermediate markets, the concentration of regional trade in a limited number of major towns, and the resulting prevailing of faster and direct over slower and incremental connections.

The interplay between rail or automobile transportation and caravans was not always a smooth one. And yet nowhere in his account did Ibrahim al-Musallam describe them as in competition. Although his father's trade in camels in the Palestinian and Egyptian markets was subjected to repeated failures and prices that hardly balanced expenditures, he did not ascribe it to the extension of cars and rail for local connections. Automobile traffic sometimes had to be interrupted for several hours to let the camels walk, but the only incidents over the use of routes occurred with Bedouin, not car drivers. Ibrahim al-Musallam appreciated the comfort and speed of the *sayyarāt* (automobiles) and the autobuses as they enabled him to travel with his father between the main towns of Transjordan, Palestine, Iraq, and Egypt smoothly. Autobuses and cars occasionally brought much-needed supplies to the caravan during the winter encampments.⁶² When they had to hurry back from Amman in 1948 because of the war and the border closure, al-Musallam was quickly put into a car by his father and reached Riyadh in a mere three days.⁶³

A few years before this, when al-Musallam had traveled from Saudi Arabia to Jordan, the slow path of the Najdi traders' caravans had been challenged by the fast-moving vehicles of their colleagues and rivals from Tabuk. In July 1939, the traders of Tabuk asked the Saudi Ministry of Finance for the authorization to import their merchandise from Transjordan directly by car. Until then, they had to transfer it on camels once they entered the Saudi territory. The traders of that important trading town of Saudi Arabia, 250 kilometers from the Saudi-Jordanian border, actually required permission to trade with Transjordan, and, through it, with Syria without interruption. According to the local treasury officials, the bulk of the prevailing caravan trade with Syria and Transjordan was carried by Najdi caravans through the Saudi border village of al-Qurayyat, east of Tabuk. There, Najdi traders used cars "only rarely" to bring their merchandise from Syria and Transjordan. When they did so, they would transfer their merchandise to camels once they had passed through Saudi customs.⁶⁴

In addition to the fears of contraband entering by fast-moving vehicles from neighboring countries deep into Saudi territory, local customs officials were obviously concerned about the competition between two different means of transportation. By contrast, the council of ministers was easily convinced of the economic benefits resulting from fast and direct trade. Cars following the only highway (*tariq*) suitable

⁵⁹Ibid., 91, 103, 115–20, 162, 182.

⁶⁰De Boucheman, *Une petite cité caravanière*, 98.

⁶¹Sakatni, "From Camel to Truck?" 166. On truck-supported and city-related transformations of Bedouin economy somewhat later in the 20th century: Dawn Chatty, *From Camel to Truck: The Bedouin in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage Press, 1986).

⁶²Al-Musallam, *Rihlati*, 115–119, 142.

⁶³Ibid., 202–3.

⁶⁴Institute of Public Administration, Riyadh (hereafter IPA), 6824: Decision (*qarar*) no. 210 by the Council of Ministers (*Majlis al-Wukala'*), 14 July 1939; 6919: Note (*khitab*) of the King's Office, 1 August 1939; 6992: Note, 20 August 1939.

for automobile between Tabuk and Syria, it was argued, could easily be channeled and submitted to border regulations. Although, in so doing, they were actually bypassing the long-established networks of Najdi traders to get a slice of the growing import market, Tabuk's traders also managed to persuade the authorities in Riyadh that the benefit (*maṣlaḥa*) of automobile transport did not encroach on their business.⁶⁵ As their circuits had not been fully standardized yet, cars and camels could still be envisioned not as inherent rivals, but as distinct modes of mobility.

Tabuk's traders and their Najdi counterparts were not, indeed, supplying the same local markets. Their itineraries had still not been unified by trading regulations and border agreements. Between Tabuk and Bilad al-Sham, as elsewhere in the Middle East, the number of routes suitable for motor vehicles remained limited until the early 1940s. Only in 1932 had an automobile connection for travelers been inaugurated between Kuwait and Riyadh.⁶⁶ The extent of motor vehicle transportation also was constrained by the limited number of petrol and repair stations (usually referred to as "garages" in Arabic) scattered along the existing roads, at the main stopovers and border posts.⁶⁷ In addition to supporting the channeling of automobile mobility along a limited set of fixed itineraries, such features explain why al-Musallam and others' caravans could still venture along extended networks that bypassed the circuits of mechanized transportation, without being confined to short segments and resenting the competition of mechanized means of transportation.

Although his account of the routes, prolonged stopovers, and many redirections is modeled on medieval geographers and encyclopedists such as Yaqut al-Hamawi to give a sense of permanency, Ibrahim al-Musallam's 1945–48 story nonetheless highlights the developing challenges of overland mobilities. Caravans between Najd and Bilad al-Sham would have to follow set itineraries through specified checkpoints and border stations (*marākiz* and *makhāfir*). Traders had to submit to controls that increased as they approached boundaries, and bureaucratic procedures at departure points would fix their otherwise opportunistic ventures once and for all. Al-Musallam recorded that his father and his associates took great care to comply with bureaucratic formalities and submitted to the many controls of their manifests, the counting of their merchandise and camels, and the paying of customs duties. As they were afraid of being suspected by border patrols of smuggling, caravan traders such as his father even preferred not to move during the nighttime hours anymore, a very odd strategy for caravans crossing the desert.⁶⁸ In so doing, Ibrahim's caravan submitted to a process that duplicated the differentiation, regulation, standardization, and bureaucratization of mobility described by Valeska Huber for connections across the Suez Canal. Although it was never fully complete and triggered many forms of evasion, this funneling or channeling process affected overland travel and gave an advantage to faster and standardized connections. Similar processes gradually unfolded across the Saudi-Kuwaiti and Kuwaiti-Iraqi frontiers in the late 1930s and early 1940s, whereby economic transformations combined with states' endeavors to standardize cross-border trade along fixed circuits, to the detriment of the caravans.⁶⁹

Automobiles fared better in that changing economic geography and the channeling of mobilities which, albeit belatedly, reflected processes at work earlier in Bilad al-Sham and Egypt. Ibrahim al-Musallam often crossed paths with cars and trucks, sometime driven by fellow countrymen from

⁶⁵IPA, 6824: Decision no. 210 by the Council of Ministers, 14 July 1939.

⁶⁶On the development of roads in the 1930s in Iraq, see Longrigg, *Iraq 1900 to 1950*, 207–8. For Iran: Patrick Clawson, "Knitting Iran Together: The Land Transport Revolution, 1920–1940," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 3–4 (1993), 235–50. For Kuwait and Saudi Arabia: India Office Records, London, R-15-5-535, "Administration Report of the Kuwait Political Agency for the year 1931"; R-15-2-1345, Police Report dated 23 July 1934; Harold R. P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), 236–37; Harold R. P. Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), 43, 571.

⁶⁷The first volume dedicated to the region in the famous French collection of guidebooks "Les Guides Bleus" gives a detailed inventory of their locations in the early 1930s. See Marcel Monmarché, *Syrie–Palestine, Iraq–Transjordanie* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1932), 326, 478–79.

⁶⁸IPA, 7560: Note from the Viceroy Office to the Royal Cabinet on the proposed delimitation of caravan routes for trade between Najd, Syria and Transjordan, 18 May 1940; al-Musallam, *Rihlati*, 26 (on the reasons for walking by night), as compared with 87–92 and 200–1.

⁶⁹IPA, 49885: Saudi Arabia–Kuwait Cross-Border Trade Agreement, 20 April 1942 and 1 May 1943; Anthony B. Toth, "Tribes and Tribulations: Bedouin Losses in the Saudi and Iraqi Struggles over Kuwait's Frontiers, 1921–1943," *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 2 (2005): 145–67; Huber, *Channelling Mobilities*, 317–21.

Najd. As they came closer to Bilad al-Sham or moved between the main cities of Iraq, he and his father shifted into cars with increasing frequency. On their quick journey from Transjordan to Baghdad in November 1947, they were driven on the itinerary inaugurated by Muhammad al-Bassam twenty-five years earlier. Once in Baghdad, they prepared to arrange for a new caravan to return home (to Najd) and carry out trade en route. Merchandise was carried by car to Najaf, where the camels were available. Once assembled on the camels' backs, the caravan departed to Najd.⁷⁰

Conclusion

During the interwar period, caravan traders had to adapt to a series of economic, bureaucratic, and technological transformations that radically affected the patterns of overland mobilities. These transformations gradually but unevenly converged to undermine the geography that had hitherto allowed the coexistence and combining of faster and slower, direct and circuitous, standardized and opportunistic mobility. The prevailing of standardized and direct connections at the local and the regional levels, the increasing nationalization of the Middle East economies (only intensified by the reaction to the Great Depression), and the subsequent divergences between hitherto interwoven markets contributed to the erasure of the geography that had fit the slow caravans so well. Speed and technology, thus, were part of a comprehensive reconfiguration that not only had a channeling and standardizing effect on the ways of transporting goods and moving people overland, but gradually reduced the heterogeneity of overland mobility. Although it unfolded at a very uneven pace between Bilad al-Sham and the Gulf in the period leading up to the 1948 Palestine war, this double process brought the caravans to a final stop.

Quite tellingly, the end of caravans was not ascribed solely to the triumph of steam, rail, or trucks in the accounts of Ibrahim al-Musallam and other regional caravan traders. Rather, it was the end of the integrated geography in which the caravan's slow pace had fit so well that was thought to have had the most brutal impact. The race from Amman back to Riyadh at the outset of the 1948 Arab–Israeli War closed al-Musallam's account and put a final end to “what [he] had endured during these journeys.” He would not take over his father's regional business. He opted, instead, for the career of civil servant with his hometown postal service. World War II and the 1948 War were turning points in the accounts of cross-border traders. They are envisioned as a culmination of the process that entailed the closures of such vital corridors as the Palestinian routes between Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, and Bilad al-Sham, a general tightening of transnational trade regulations by national governments and police, and transformations of the regional and local economic geography that undermined the rationale of slow and lengthy mobilities.⁷¹

This does not mean that the opening of the Suez Canal and the expansion of rail and motor vehicle transportation had not been challenging caravans for a long time or that slow mobility had remained as competitive in the age of speed as before. Caravan traders and travelers had managed to deal with such challenges by adapting their circuits and combining mobility options. Resorting to slow means such as the caravans on parts of a transnational journey was not the default option modernist travelogues and European accounts would have us believe. In the age of speed many options were actually available. Fast and direct connections were not always the most efficient, nor the most competitive.

Envisioning the story of mobility in the late Ottoman and post-Ottoman Middle East from the traders' vantage point also enables us to go beyond the story of the displacement of caravans by overwhelming steam- and fuel-motorized devices and the expansion of Foucauldian government in the Middle East, as exemplified by the states' control over mobility. Well into the 20th century, the slow (as opposed to fast), incremental (as opposed to “Fordist” connections), and unchanneled pace of caravans supported the integration of transnational networks of trade inherited from the Ottoman common market. Although they fell under the radar, these networks were not confined to niche or illegal activities. Highlighting the traders' experience is a way of understanding the rationale that underpinned the persistence of the “old” as a common experience of modernity, even by well-off urban traders and

⁷⁰ Al-Musallam, *Rihlati*, 184–95.

⁷¹ Yusuf bin 'Isa al-Qina'i, *Safahat min Tarikh al-Kuwayt* (Cairo: Dar Sa'd, 1946), 91–92; Interview of 'Abdallah 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Humaydi by Sayf Marzuq al-Shamlan, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-J2TEGqwbmE>; al-Musallam, *Rihlati*, 202–3; Ibrahim, *Najdiyyun*, 306–8.

travelers.⁷² Switching from camels' backs to trains and cars was not only a technological experience. It entailed heterogeneous experiences of territories along the trade routes. This also reminds us that transnational not only succeeded, but very often predated national frameworks in the post-Ottoman Middle East, even though older transnational mobility was more often than not regarded by upper class travelers and the post-Ottoman states' standards as underpinning a "smuggling" or "Bedouin" mobility. As such, the caravans' mobility and the many networks of both slow and fast mobility these caravans helped to organize exemplify the economic and geographical dimensions of the Ottoman legacy along the lengthy routes between the Gulf and Bilad al-Sham.⁷³

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⁷²David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (London: Profile Books, 2008), 6.

⁷³Schayegh, "Many Worlds," 305. On despised "Bedouin" mobility and the identification of caravans to Bedouin only: Huber, *Channelling Mobilities*, 144–47. On the other dimensions of the Ottoman Empire's shaping legacy as challenged by British and French mandatory policies in the Middle East: Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017).