Ramla

City of Muslim Palestine, 715-1917
Studies in History, Archaeology and Architecture

edited by

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Michael H. Burgoyne

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Preface

This book had its genesis in the Medieval and Ottoman Buildings Survey (MOS) that was sponsored from 1988 by the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem (BSAJ) and later by the Council for British Research in the Levant, into which the BSAJ merged in 1998. The principal aim of the MOS was to continue the work of surveying and documenting the surviving Islamic architecture of Jerusalem up to the end of the Ottoman period that the School had been pursuing in collaboration with the Department of Islamic Waqfs since 1968 (see Burgoyne 1987a; Auld and Hillenbrand 2000; 2009; cf. Hawari 2007), by extending its scope beyond the city's walls to include all the other Islamic buildings of the same period of which architectural remains survived or were known about within the boundaries of mandate-period Palestine. This was to be achieved through a combination of documentary research, undertaken largely in the archives of the former Department of Antiquities of Palestine housed in the Palestine Archaeological (Rockefeller) Museum in Jerusalem, library work in Jerusalem and elsewhere, and new survey work in the field. The first part of project, covering the buildings of pre-1967 Israel was published in 2001 (Petersen 2001) and a further volume remains to be published covering those of the Palestinian territories of Gaza and the West Bank.

Most of the surviving Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman buildings of Ramla were surveyed as part of the MOS in 1992, 1993 and 1994 (Petersen 1995) and others more recently. In view of the particular concentration of such buildings in Ramla, however, the special place that the city occupied in early Muslim Palestine, and the insights that new rescue excavations were beginning to provide about its early development, it was decided to delay the definitive publication of the survey of its buildings in order to present it as part of a more general discussion of the cultural, social, economic and topographical development of the city from the time of its foundation around AD 715 until the ending of Ottoman rule in 1917 (see Pringle 1999). Although our initial hope was that the existence of such a study might contribute towards the framing of research agendas for future archaeological work in the area, unforeseeable delays in the publication of the volume mean that its present appearance is taking place after a phase of rapid expansion in the number of development-led rescue excavations in the city. One compensating benefit of this, however, is that in consequence it has been possible to give greater prominence to the results of recent excavations than would otherwise have been the case and thereby provide a more balanced survey covering both the below- and the above-ground archaeology of the city.

The first section presents a historical outline from Ramla's foundation to the start of the British Mandate, with separate chapters on the Early Islamic (Robert Hoyland), Crusader (Peter Edbury), Ayyubid-Mamluk (Donald S. Richards) and Ottoman periods (Matthew Elliot). In the archaeological section, Gideon Avni presents an overview of the results of the excavations carried out between 1990 and 2018, focusing in particular on the early Islamic period. This is followed by an account of the aqueduct that supplied the city with water from Gezer in the Umayyad period by Amir Gorzalczany and an analysis of the value of First World War aerial photographs for understanding the city's topographical development by Benjamin Z. Kedar. The principal chapter in the architectural section, Andrew Petersen's corpus of the Muslim buildings, is followed by a reassessment of the architecture and dating of the standing remains of the White Mosque by Michael H. Burgoyne, an account of the Christian buildings of Ramla by Denys Pringle, and an analysis of the late nineteenth-century reconfiguration of the Great Mosque (formerly the Crusader parish church) at the time of the last Ottoman sultan, Meḥmed V, by Katia Cytryn-Silverman. The final section, dealing with numismatics and epigraphy, includes chapters on the Umayyad coinage of Ramla by Nikolaus Schindel, the Arabic inscriptions by Mehmet Tütüncü, and the late medieval Christian pilgrims' graffiti by Denys Pringle. The volume concludes with three appendices presenting respectively: the late K.A.C. Creswell's report on the White Mosque, written around 1919–20 and published here for the first time; Denys Pringle's gazetteer of villages documented in the Crusader lordships of Ramla, Lydda and Mirabel in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; and an endowment deed (*waqfiyya*) of July 1713, relating to the palatial residence in Ramla known as Qaṣr Waqf Abūʾl-Huda, here translated by Maher Abu-Munshar.

In bringing the Ramla project to completion, the editors gratefully acknowledge the help and support that they have received from the Council for British Research in the Levant and its predecessor organization, the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, both supported by the British Academy. We are also grateful to the Israel Antiquities Authority for their active interest in the project and for assistance in providing licences to survey and access to archives. Finally, we are indebted to our contributing authors, all of whom responded with alacrity to our requests for chapters, although some have had to wait much longer than was ever intended to see them finally appear in print.

Chapter 1

Early Islamic Ramla (715-1099)

Robert Hoyland

In the centuries before the Arab conquests the capital of the province of Palestine was the mighty Mediterranean port city of Caesarea. The Persians, though based in far-away Seleucia-Ctesiphon, in Iraq, maintained the primacy of Caesarea when they captured it in the course of their major assault on the Byzantine Empire in the early seventh century. The Muslims, however, when they finally conquered the city in AD 640–41 after a lengthy siege, broke with this age-old tradition. The commander of Syria, Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, allegedly executed the troops of the city garrison for their refusal to surrender, exacted tribute from the residents and otherwise left the settlement to its own devices. This much is clear, but which city the Muslims initially chose to serve as the seat of their administration in Palestine is less sure. Contemporary evidence is inconclusive. Seventh-century coins struck in Palestine bear, alongside the name of the province, three mint names: Iliya (Latin: *Aelia*), that is Jerusalem, in the highlands, and Yubnā and Ludd (Lydda/Diospolis), both on the coastal plain, south and southwest of Jaffa respectively. Papyri from an archive found in two churches in the small southern Palestinian town of Nessana mention Gaza both directly and indirectly (by using the calendar of Gaza) and name three governors, one of whom, Ḥassān ibn Mālik ibn Bahdal, is known to have been responsible for all of Palestine (Kraemer 1958: 32–3). Some Muslim sources speak of more than one regional centre in Palestine – for example, al-Ṭabarī (*Taʾrīkh*, I, 2407) says that the caliph ʿUmar I divided Palestine into two, with one governor based in Jerusalem and the other in Ludd – and it may well be that in this staunchly pro-Byzantine, and also very wealthy, province early Muslim rulers thought it prudent to maintain garrisons at a number of locations.

Ramla under the Umayyads (705–50)

This ambiguous situation changed when Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik was appointed to the governorship of Palestine by his brother Walīd, who took up the reins of the Muslim realm in 705. At first, he chose to reside in Ludd, which perhaps indicates that this city had come to be the principal seat of the governor of the province, but then 'he inaugurated the city of Ramla and made it the capital (*miṣr*),' as we are informed by the ninth-century Persian bureaucrat and historian al-Balādhurī (*Futūḥ*, 143), who goes on to say:

> The first thing he built in it was his palace and the installation known as the dyers-works, in the middle of which he installed a cistern. Then he laid out the mosque and built it. He acceded to the caliphate before he had completed it, but he continued to build in it while he was caliph. Subsequently ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz completed it, although he reduced the original plan. When Sulaymān had constructed (a residence) for himself, he permitted the people to build (their own houses), and they did so. Furthermore, he dug for the people of Ramla the canal which is called the Barada and he excavated wells. He put in charge of the expenses of the building and of the congregational mosque a Christian secretary, of the people of Ludd, called al-Baṭrīq ibn al-Nāka. Before Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik there was no city of Ramla; in its place was just sand (*ramla*).

Little is known about the governor's palace, which presumably served as an administrative seat (*dār al-imāra*) as well as an official residence, and it is the congregational mosque that has received most attention, from both writers and archaeologists (see Avni 2014: 159–90, and Chapters 5 and 9 below). The fullest description is given by al-Muqaddasī:

> The chief mosque of Ramla is in the market, and it is even more beautiful and graceful than that of Damascus. It is called the White Mosque. In all Islam there is no finer prayer niche than the one here, and its pulpit is the most splendid to be seen after that of Jerusalem; also it possesses a beautiful minaret that was built by the caliph Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik... The columns (of the mosque) are very thick, tall and beautiful. The covered portion of the mosque is flagged with marble and the courtyard with other stone, all carefully laid together. The gates of the main building are made of cypress wood and cedar, carved in the inner parts, and very beautiful in appearance. (*Taqāsīm*, 165; trans. Le Strange 1890: 305)

What prompted Sulaymān to embark upon this venture? Our sources tend to give rather anecdotal answers, such as the following:

Ramla (Archaeopress 2021): 1–6

> The reason for his building of it (Ramla) was that a scribe of his, called Ibn Baṭrīq, had asked the people of Ludd to give him a plot of land that belonged to the church so that he might erect a house on it. They refused him and he said to them: 'By God, I shall bring it to ruin, that is, the church.' He then said to Sulaymān: 'The commander of the faithful ʿAbd al-Malik erected a dome within the sanctuary of Jerusalem, over the rock, and he became famous for that. Al-Walīd constructed the mosque of Damascus and he became famous for that. Now if you were to build a mosque and a city and you moved people to the city (you would become famous for that).' So Sulaymān built the city of Ramla and its mosque, and this was the cause of the ruin of Ludd. (Yāqūt, *Muʿjam*, *s.v.* 'al-Ramla'; cf. Jahshiyārī, *Wuzarāʾ*, 48)

A much later but evidently related account makes Sulaymān the one who is trying to acquire land in Ludd, namely a very fine and fertile orchard next to the church. He asks his personal advisor, Rajāʾ ibn Ḥaywa, a high-ranking member of the Umayyad administration, to arrange its purchase for him so that he might build on it and Rajāʾ at once sets up a meeting with the priest who owned the land and who was also in charge of the church. However, the priest foils the purchase by making over the orchard as a charitable donation to the church, thus rendering it inalienable. Sulaymān is initially furious and wants to kill the priest, but he is placated by Rajāʾ, who takes him for a jaunt to a beautiful location just outside Ludd and suggests to him to establish there a monastery for Christians and a mosque for Muslims and to let it be known to all Christians and Muslims that all who made their home there would enjoy his protection. In this way the church would be upstaged by the monastery and the city of Ludd would be outdone by the new city (Ibn Faḍlallāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik*, 221–3).

It is of course common in anecdotes to ascribe major decisions to a single trivial factor, here refusal of a request for land, and for the same motifs to recur in different guises. Yet we are perhaps justified in taking two points from these narratives: first, that land was not easily available in the already ancient city of Ludd, whereas a new foundation provided greater scope and opportunities for large-scale building; and second, that Sulaymān was attracted by the glory that the inauguration of a grand new city would bring him and by the desire to outdo his predecessors. It is also worth noting that Ramla conforms to a common early Islamic urban type, that is, a new foundation established a short distance away from an older settlement (thus also Baṣra, Kūfa, Ayla, Qinnasrīn and Fusṭāṭ, situated respectively near Ubulla, Hira, Roman Aila, Chalcis and Babylon respectively).

Ramla under the Abbasids (750-870)

In 750, the Umayyad dynasty was overthrown by a different family from within the prophet's tribe of Quraysh, known as the Abbasids. For military muscle they had relied upon the frontier army of Khurasan, in northeast Iran, and they distrusted the Syrian tribesmen, who had been the mainstay of the Umayyads. For this reason the centre of gravity of the Muslim empire moved from Syria to Iraq. Whereas Ramla lay only 130 miles (210 km), along good roads, from the former Umayyad capital of Damascus, it was over 560 miles (900 km), on a difficult route across the Syrian desert, from the new Abbasid capital of Baghdad. This inevitably reduced the importance of Ramla to some extent, although it remained the capital of Palestine. Moreover, increased taxation and frequent appointment of governors from outside the Levant provoked discontent in the region as a whole, leading to recurrent revolts, especially among the Syrian tribes, which had a dampening effect on the economy (Von Sievers 1979).

Yet the Abbasids did not entirely neglect Palestine. The caliph al-Manṣūr twice visited Jerusalem, in 758 and 771, albeit mainly to raise extra taxes (Amitai-Preiss 2015), and the caliph al-Mahdī arrived there with a large retinue in 780. An inscription from the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (786–809) on one of three enormous subterranean cisterns in the city offers evidence of at least some degree of Abbasid investment in Palestine (see Chapter 8, no. 49, and Chapter 13, no. 42). Al-Balādhurī suggests that this was not just a one-off display, but part of a continuing commitment:

> The House of the Dyers passed to the heirs of Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿAlī ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAbbās because it had been seized together with the assets of the Umayyads. The Umayyads had spent much money on the wells of Ramla and the water channels after the time of Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, and when the Abbasids took charge they continued this spending, and so it went on from one caliph to the next. Now when the commander of the faithful Abū Isḥāq al-Muʿtaṣim came to power, he made a permanent decree of that expenditure; thus the payment became an ongoing charge dealt with by the agents of the fisc and accounted for by them. (*Futūḥ*, 143–4)

In addition, we hear about a number of Muslim scholars active in Ramla in the early Abbasid period. One of the first to come to our attention is Usayd ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (Abū Zurʿa, *Taʾrīkh*, I, 258), who died in 761, and thereafter a steady stream of scholars are depicted in biographical dictionaries as making Ramla their home, demonstrating that it was more than just an administrative centre (Gil 1992: 291–2). Since there were at least two Melchite churches in the city (Pringle 1993: II, 195–6; and Chapter 10 below), it is very likely that there were Christian scholars living there too, but, except for a copyist of Christian manuscripts named Stephen of Ramla, who flourished in the late ninth century (Griffith 1985: 40–45), we have virtually no information about them. The same is true of Jewish scholars of Ramla, about whom we hear almost nothing until the late tenth century, when documents from the Cairo treasure trove known as the Geniza shed some light on Jewish intellectual life in Palestine (Goitein 1967).

Ramla under the Tulunids, Abbasids and Ikhshidids (870–969)

The Abbasids found it difficult to maintain the integrity of the Arab Empire established by the Umayyads. Spain went its own way almost immediately, usurped by a member of the Umayyad family fleeing from the Abbasid armies marching from the east. Then pieces of North Africa gradually fell under the control of locally based dynasties, such as the Idrisids in Morocco (789–926), the Rustamids in Algeria (777–909) and the Aghlabids in Tunisia (800–909). Even in Iran, where the Abbasids had found their strongest supporters, these centrifugal tendencies were evident, with dynasties like the Tahirids (821–73) and the Saffarids (861–1002) displaying increasing autonomy. Integral to this development was the rise of military men of Turkish origin, who in the course of the ninth century came to play an increasing role in imperial politics. At first they did not have much to do with governance at a local level. For example, Ashnas al-Turkī was appointed governor of Syria, Egypt and north Mesopotamia in 839, but he left most of the local leaders in place to deal with the day-to-day running of affairs. However, the assassination of the caliph al-Mutawakkil in 861 ushered in a period of factional in-fighting which meant that central government was all but paralysed for a time, allowing various strong-men to seize power in the outlying regions (Gordon 2000).

A good example of this is given by the career of ʿĪsā ibn al-Shaykh, an Arab of the tribe of Shaybān. During the reign of al-Mutawakkil he had served in the army of the senior Turkish commander Bughā the Younger, and he seems to have used this connection to obtain the governorship of Palestine in the 860s. This was contested by the governor of Damascus, the Turk Nūshrī ibn Ṭajīl, who fought and defeated ʿĪsā and then occupied Ramla himself. When he was in turn replaced by another Turkish general, Muḥammad ibn al-Muwallad, ʿĪsā seized his chance to return to Ramla, holing himself up in a fort that he had built just outside the city. With the support of local Arab tribesmen, to whom he distributed money that he had acquired by intercepting the tax revenues coming from Egypt, he was able to maintain his authority there until 870, when he accepted an offer of amnesty and the governorship of Armenia in return for relinquishing Palestine to the officially appointed governor, the Turkish general Amājūr (Gil 1992: 299–300; Cobb 2001: 37–40).

The revolt of ʿĪsā ibn al-Shaykh marks the beginning of the gradual secession of Palestine, and its capital Ramla, from the control of the central government in Iraq, and its increasing attachment to an ever more autonomous Egypt. The next stage in this process came with the arrival of Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn, son of a Turkish freedman and general, in Egypt in 868. He was there as the representative of his stepfather, who had been appointed governor of Egypt by the caliph al-Muʿtazz (866–9). However, Ibn Ṭūlūn was not content to remain simply a regent, and when a slave revolt in southern Iraq escalated in the early 870s, tying the hands of the Abbasids, he seized the opportunity to establish his independence over Egypt and much of Syria and Palestine. He went to Ramla to meet the son of Amājūr in person, offering to keep him as governor of Palestine if he swore allegiance to him. On his death in May 884, Ibn Ṭūlūn was succeeded by his son Khumārawayh, who had to contend with a number of Turkish generals loyal to Abūʾl-ʿAbbās ibn al-Muwaffaq, nephew of the caliph Muʿtamid (870–92). In February 885, Khumārawayh went to Ramla to consolidate his rule over Palestine and 'camped by the waterway with the flour mills' (Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VII, 414). The troops of Ibn al-Muwaffaq engaged him there and initially seemed to be winning, but one of Khumārawayh's generals managed to turn the battle around and force the Abbasid army into retreat. However, the Tulunids came under increasing pressure as the Abbasids strove to reassert their authority after the end of the long-running slave revolt in lower Iraq in the 880s and as the leaders of a new Shiʿite sect, the Ismaʿilis, fought to gain a foothold in the Levant. In 905, they buckled under the strain and, despite a heroic last stand by their general Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Khalanjī, who worsted the Abbasid governor of Palestine by Ramla's Gate of Olives and called for support for Ibrāhīm son of Khumārawayh in Ramla's main mosque, Tulunid rule in Egypt and Palestine came to an end.

Yet not all Tulunid officials were disgraced. One of the senior generals of Khumārawayh, a Central Asian potentate by the name of Ṭughj, had a son named Muḥammad, who was absolved of the sins of the father and became assistant to Takīn, the Abbasid governor of Egypt. In 928, he became governor of Palestine and settled in Ramla and then, in 931, he was promoted to governor of all Syria. It is said that 'he made a grand entrance into Damascus' and he dispatched al-Rāshidī, the former governor of Syria, to take his place in Ramla (ʿArīb ibn Saʿd, *Ṣila*, 159). On Takīn's death in 933, Ibn Ṭughj was nominated to replace him; this was blocked for a while as different parties contended for the lucrative position, but as Egypt descended into chaos the caliph recognized that a strong man was needed to restore order and in 935 Ibn Ṭughj entered the province with land and sea forces and quickly crushed all opposition. Equipped with these forces he was well placed to repel a major assault on Egypt by Ismaʿili contingents that had been making gains in northwest Africa, and for this he received the thanks of the caliph al-Rāḍī, who also allowed him to use his family's ancestral title of Ikhshid, inaugurating the dynasty of the Ikhshidids. They initially held the capitals of Ramla and Damascus, along with their hinterlands, but the powerful Ibn Rāʾiq, flexing his muscles as the first to hold the new office of the caliph's commander-in-chief (*amīr al-umarāʾ*), ousted the Ikhshidid governors from these cities in early 940 and then marched on to al-ʿArish, on the border of Egypt, where, however, despite an initial win, he was defeated by Ibn Ṭughj. The latter's brother, Abū Naṣr, set off in hot pursuit of Ibn Rāʾiq and engaged him in northern Palestine, but was himself killed in the battle. As a token of his sadness and commiseration, Ibn Rāʾiq presented his own son to Ibn Ṭughj, who responded with equal magnanimity by marrying off the youth to his own daughter. This paved the way for a peace agreement between the two great men, whereby Ramla and southern Palestine were returned to the control of the Ikhshidids (Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, VIII, 272–3), who regarded this region as intrinsic to their realm (Bacharach 1985).

Our literary sources tend to mention Ramla in this period only as a place of contention between warring factions. Yet biographical dictionaries list a substantial number of Muslim scholars with the surname Ramlī (of Ramla) for this period, suggesting that cultural life was sustained to some extent. Certainly, quite a few very famous intellectual figures spent time there, such as the poet al-Mutanabbī, who was received in honour by the city dignitaries, al-Nasāʾī (d. 915), who wrote one of the six canonical collections of hadith, and the mystic Abū ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Jallāʾ (d. 918), who was allegedly a disciple for a time of one of the most celebrated of all early Muslim mystics, the Egyptian Dhū ʾl-Nūn (Gil 1992: 320–21, 328, 332). Another hint of continuing cultural life comes from two substantial and impressive inscriptions on marble that record charitable endowments (*waqf*s) made in Ramla in the early tenth century (Sharon 1966, 1997b; see also Chapter 13, nos. 51–52). One concerns arable land and associated irrigation works owned by one Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Madharāʾī, who was vizier to Hārūn ibn Khumārawayh (895–905), the last Tulunid ruler of Egypt. With the Abbasid reconquest of Egypt in 905, he was transferred to Syria, where he joined his uncle Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad, who was in charge of the region's taxes. They belonged to a well-to-do family, originally from Iraq, who had attained substantial influence and wealth serving the Tulunid dynasty and had bought land in Syria and Palestine, where they evidently counted a plot in Ramla as part of their portfolio. In the second inscription, one Fāʾiq the Eunuch, son of ʿAbdallāh the Slav, the client of the caliph al-Muʿtamid (870–92), dedicates an inn, 'including its entire boundaries and all its rights, its land and its building ... for the use of its beneficiaries.' A third inscription on marble was discovered recently in Ramla, recording the building of a bridge (*jisr*) by the 'emir' Muḥammad ibn Ṭughj, which indicates continuing investment in transport infrastructure in the area (Gorzalczany 2009a; see Fig. 5.17 below). Ramla began its existence in the early eighth century as a result of the involvement of the provincial governor and this engagement of the very highest echelons of Muslim society evidently continued at least into the tenth century.

Ramla under the Fatimids (970–1073)

Two of Ibn Ṭughj's sons succeeded him as rulers of Egypt, namely Unūjūr (946–61) and ʿAlī (961–6), but increasingly power became concentrated in the hands of his Ethiopian eunuch Kāfūr, who had risen to become his master's vizier and guardian of his sons. Were it not for him the dynasty would probably have collapsed after the demise of its founder; but Kāfūr was a particularly adept and efficient leader and he managed to maintain Ikhshidid rule for a further two decades, despite strong challenges from external powers on all sides. The greatest threat came from the Fatimids, an Ismaʿili Shiʿi sect that began to spread in the 870s with the aspiration to unite all Muslims under one divinely guided messianic ruler (*mahdī*), who would usher in the rule of God on earth and the end of days. Their organizer-in-chief, ʿAbdallāh (or ʿUbaydallāh), established a base of operations in Salamiyya in northern Syria and dispatched missionaries across the Islamic world. In 899, as anticipation of the arrival of the *madhī* reached fever pitch, ʿAbdallāh declared himself to be the expected messiah, though deferring the onset of the end of time until a lengthy period of rule by him and his descendants. He also claimed to be directly descended from Fāṭima, daughter of the prophet Muḥammad – hence the name of the dynasty he founded – via the sixth Shiʿite imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (Daftary 1998: 36–50).

As Abbasid authority was re-established in Syria at the beginning of the tenth century, ʿAbdallāh left his headquarters in Salamiyya and stayed for a short time in Ramla before heading westwards to Egypt and then the Maghrib. Having won over to their cause the Kutāma

Berbers, ʿAbdallāh and his supporters were able in 909 to overthrow the most powerful dynasty in northwest Africa, the Aghlabids, and to found a new capital in Ifrīqiyya (modern Tunisia), the city of Mahdiyya. From there the Fatimids launched attacks on Egypt in 913–14 and 919–20, but each time they were repelled with much loss of life. However, in 969, as chaos prevailed in much of Egypt and Palestine after the death of Kāfūr, the Ikhshidid governor in Ramla, Ḥasan ibn ʿUbaydallāh, invited the Fatimid caliph al-Muʿizz (953–75) to come to Egypt to restore order. In the course of the 960s, Ḥasan had to fight the Qarmatis (sometimes written as Carmatians), a branch of the Ismaʿili Shiʿis who had not accepted the Fatimid claim to leadership, on numerous occasions in and around Ramla. He managed to hold his own for quite a while, but in late 968 the Qarmatis scored a victory and looted Ramla for two days until its inhabitants paid a ransom, and it was soon after this that Ḥasan decided to turn to the Fatimids for aid. In the summer of 969, Fatimid troops entered the Egyptian capital of Fusṭāṭ and, once they had entrenched their command there, they marched north and took charge of Ramla in May 970 (Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd, ed. Kratchkovsky, I, 811–12, 817–21 [113–14, 119–23]).

Ramla and the province of Palestine remained under the control of the Fatimids in Egypt for the following century, but they found it difficult to consolidate their rule there (Eddé 2010: 164–72). Initially the main threat came from the Qarmatis, who, strengthened by an alliance with various local bedouin tribes, were able in September 971 to capture Ramla. They minted coins there in the years 971–73, suggesting that they made the city their headquarters during this time, but then their alliance fell apart, allowing the Fatimids to return. Next the Qarmatis joined forces with the Turkish warlord Alptakin and, in March 977, retook Ramla. After only a few days, however, the Qarmati leader, Ḥasan al-Aʿṣam, died in the city and once more the Qarmati coalition collapsed and the Fatimids returned to Ramla. Alptakin, who was based in Tiberias, was not going to give in so easily and he marched with all his men to Ramla in the summer of 978 to engage the Fatimid troops, who were headed by the new caliph, al-ʿAzīz (975–6). Although Alptakin made early gains, his men were outnumbered and soon scattered in all directions. The Qarmatis diminished as a threat from this point on and the challenges to Fatimid rule thereafter were religious tensions, which were particularly enflamed by the harsh policies of the caliph al-Ḥākim (996–1021), who destroyed many synagogues and churches in his realm, including the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and by uprisings of bedouin tribes. Of the latter it was the Jarrāḥid clan of the tribe of Ṭayy that caused the Fatimids the biggest headache. In 1012, they went so far as to appoint a rival caliph, an ʿAlid from Mecca known as Abūʾl-Futūḥ, and minted coins in his name; his accession was celebrated in the mosque of Ramla in September of that year (Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd, ed. Kratchkovsky, II, 504 [296]; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*, IX, 233).

Yet although chronicles record numerous military confrontations in and around Ramla, other genres of texts let us know that all was not doom and gloom and that its residents managed to varying degrees to weather the storms. Al-Muqaddasī, who completed a description of the Muslim world in 985 based on his own travels, is surprisingly upbeat about the city and its environs, considering that he must have been there when the contest between the Fatimids and their enemies was in full flow. He does offer a cautionary note about the problems caused by heavy rains in winter and a long, hot, dry summer, but in general he has only good things to report, though it is true that he tends to wax lyrical about most places in his home province of Palestine:

> It is a delightful and well-built city. The water is good to drink and flows freely; fruits are abundant and of every possible kind. It is situated in the midst of fertile rural areas, splendid cities, holy places and pleasant villages. Trade here is profitable and the means of livelihood easy... It is situated in a productive countryside, with walled towns and pleasant suburbs. It possesses elegant hostelries and pleasant baths, superb food and condiments in abundance, spacious houses, fine mosques and broad streets. It is highly advantaged, being on a plain, yet near to mountain and sea. It has both fig trees and palms; its fields yield without irrigation; in fact, it has many advantages and excellences. (*Taqāsīm*, 164; trans. Collins, 139)

Al-Muqaddasī also specifies that the city had eight main thoroughfares (*durūb*) and observes that the markets were by the congregational mosque. Further on, he refers to 'the cloth merchants in Ramla', and one would therefore assume that textiles were traded at these markets, as well as what he says are the specialities of the city, such as figs, olive oil and waist-wraps (*ibid.*, 181, 183; trans. Collins, 151, 154).

A severe earthquake struck the city in December 1033 and, according to Arabic sources, destroyed a third of the city (Amiran 1996: 128; Amiran, Arieh and Turcotte 1994: 268). This receives corroboration from the Persian traveller Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who visited Ramla in March 1047 and reported that over one of the porches of the great mosque was an inscription recording that on 15 Muḥarram of the year 425 (10 December 1033) there was an earthquake of great violence, which threw down a large number of buildings. He also notes that the city had 'strong walls built of stone, mortared, of great height and thickness, with iron gates' (trans. Le Strange 1890: 306; cf. Thackston, 25–6); presumably these had either not been affected by the earthquake or had been repaired. Not so long afterwards, in 1068, another large earthquake hit Ramla and apparently this time the city was close to the epicentre and suffered much more widespread destruction (Amiran 1996: 128; Amiran, Arieh and Turcotte 1994: 269). Some sources portray this as signalling the death knell of Ramla, and yet the historian William of Tyre, describing Ramla 'when the Christian army first arrived in the land of Syria' at the end of the eleventh century, says that 'it was a populous city surrounded by a wall with towers' (*Chronicon*, 10.16 (17), ed. Huygens, 472). The same impression is conveyed by the Jerusalemite judge and historian Mujīr al-Dīn al-ʿUlaymī (d. 1522), who says that 'up to the year 500' (AD 1106) Ramla 'possessed an encompassing wall, a citadel (*qalʿa*), twelve gates... and four markets' (*Uns*, II, 68; trans. Sauvaire, 205–6). One might be wary of this statement, since Mujīr al-Dīn does not specify his source and is seeking to denigrate the Franks, contrasting Ramla's ancient prosperity with the ruinous condition that it had been brought to by 'a century of Frankish occupation'; but his detailed description of the four markets and the way they linked with the gates and the main mosque suggest that he at least had access to a pre-Crusader text. In sum, even if the earthquake inflicted substantial damage on the city, its inhabitants must have deemed it worth staying to rebuild.

The richest window on to the life of Ramla in the eleventh century are the corpus of letters from and to Jews of Ramla and neighbouring cities that were fortunately preserved in that treasure trove of documents known as the Cairo Geniza. They become more common from the 1020s onwards, when the synagogue of the Palestinians in Cairo was being rebuilt after its demolition during the reign of the caliph al-Ḥākim. They concern a wide range of ritual, legal and commercial affairs and intra-communal politics. Sometimes they are also treat external events, such as the upheavals caused by the rebellious bedouin Arabs, and there is a letter from someone who had lived through the earthquake of 1033 and relates at length how 'many died under the ruins for they could not escape' and how the survivors 'went out from their houses into the streets because they saw the walls bending and yet intact' and slept outside 'for their owners feared lest they tumble down on top of them yet before daybreak' (Mann 1920: 156–8). One group of documents sheds light on an intriguing factional struggle between the adherents of Solomon son of Judah, the Jewish leader (*gaon*) in Jerusalem, and Nathan son of Abraham, his rival, who established himself in Ramla. During the years 1003–42, Jewish communities as far afield as Syria and Africa were forced to take sides in the dispute as the two contenders strove to win over the loyalties of Jewish communities all around the Mediterranean world (Rustow 2004: 347–52).

The Turkish interlude (1073–99)

In 1055, the Seljuq clan of the Ghuzz Turks swept into power in Baghdad on a wave of Sunni support, ousting the Shiʿite Buyid dynasty. They demonstrated their credentials as saviours of Islam by initiating a new war against the Byzantines, whom the second Seljuq sultan, Alp Arslān, defeated in a memorable battle in 1071 at Manzikert, in modern eastern Turkey. They also sought to mete out the same medicine to the Shiʿite Fatimids, whom they regarded likewise as enemies of Islam. To that end a Khwarazmian mercenary from the court of Alp Arslān, named Atsīz ibn Uwaq, besieged Jerusalem and Ramla on behalf of the Seljuqs and extended his control over Syria through the 1070s. The Sunni Muslim population seem initially to have been receptive to the new rulers, presumably assuming that they would fare better under men of the same creed, but Atsīz was a predatory figure and the constant fighting between Turks and Fatimids and between different Turkish generals brought much instability and suffering to the local population. A family in a deed of compensation issued by the Palestinian Jewish academy in Jerusalem mentions that 'Ramla was despoiled and they became captives, naked and hungry,' and a Jewish notable in Jerusalem writes to a friend in Egypt saying that he cannot travel to see him because of the general insecurity around him: 'there is fear and hunger' and 'no one can leave Jerusalem for Ramla, as all the roads are dangerous' (Gil 1992: 412). Of course, the picture cannot have been all bad. The earthquake of 1068 was so destructive that some said Ramla would never recover, but since William of Tyre, as noted above, remarked that the city was populous with strong encompassing walls, some reconstruction must have been done in the intervening years. Yet it is true that the Crusaders arrived at a chaotic moment in the history of Muslim Palestine.