

City of Oranges: An Intimate History of Arabs and Jews in Jaffa recounts the lives of six families, three Jewish and three Arab, living in Jaffa from the 1920s until the present day. The book begins in 1921 as Julia Bohbout, a young Jewish woman, is preparing for her wedding to David Chelouche, a scion of one of Jaffa's great Sephardi dynasties. But tension is rising between Jews and Arabs and the city is about to explode into violence. This is an extract from the first chapter:

In Jaffa, in the spring of 1921, a young Jewish woman called Julia Bohbout was planning her wedding. Julia was twenty-one, dark-haired and vivacious with lively eyes, a popular girl who made friends easily. She was fluent in Arabic and French, played the piano, and was gifted at needlework. Julia danced the waltz and even the daring new import from South America, the tango. The Bohbout family lived on Nagib Bustros Street, the heart of Jaffa's commercial center that drew shoppers from across the Levant. The shop windows displayed the latest European fashions and household goods, while neighboring cafes were crowded with customers drinking coffee, smoking and eating ice-cream. Spacious Italianate apartments were built above the shops, overlooking the street. The flats had stone floors, high ceilings to let the sea breeze flow through, arched windows and long balconies decorated with fine ironwork.

Julia had recently returned to Jaffa from a two month trip to Cairo to see her relatives, and prepare her trousseau. Her fiance, David Chelouche, was considered quite a catch. David was ten years older than her, tall and pleasant looking with dark eyes, but much more than looks was at stake, for the Chelouche family was one of the most respected dynasties in Jaffa, if not in all Palestine. The Chelouches were leaders of Jaffa's Jewish community, who had helped found neighboring Tel Aviv. The Chelouches, like the Bohbouts, were Sephardim from North Africa. The Chelouches and Bohbouts usually spoke Arabic, not Hebrew, at home. Jaffa's Sephardic families were linked together by marriage, blood and business. David's uncles owned a thriving shop on Nagib Bustros Street that sold building materials and patterned tiles. The Chelouche brothers' pipes, bricks and ironwork were designed for modern European-style homes, but the brightly colored symmetrical patterns on the tiles were rooted in the Orient. Jaffa's profitable

commercial life was testimony to the web of social and business links that still bound together Arab and Jew.

Jerusalem was Palestine's religious capital, but Jaffa was its cultural and commercial center. With its British, French, Italian and Arab language schools, artists and writers, three newspapers and many printing houses, the city was proud of its vigorous intellectual life. The Near East radio station broadcast from Jaffa and much of the Palestinian political elite came from the city. Its cinemas offered romance and adventure films from Cairo, and the latest Hollywood releases. It boasted two soccer teams, one Muslim and one Christian. The city was scented by its orange groves, the fruit of which was famed across the world for its quality. Its mosques, synagogues and churches dated back centuries.

Despite the depredations of the First World War, when Jaffa had been bombed, shelled, plagued by locusts, and its Jews deported by the Turks, the 'Bride of the Sea' looked better than ever. The heart of the modern city was Clock Tower Square, a long octagonal piazza, flanked by rows of shops. Nearby were Jaffa's famous markets, including the Souk al-Balabseh (textile bazaar), and the Souk al-Attarin (sweets bazaar). The centerpiece was the Clock Tower itself, built by Sultan Abdel Hamid II at the start of the twentieth century, one of more than a hundred across the Ottoman empire. But down by the port it seemed as if little had changed since the Biblical era. Hawkers and peddlers sold vegetables and fruits, spices and trinkets. Overloaded donkeys struggled down narrow alleys. Camels strode disdainfully, their riders swaying past women wrapped in the habra (black cloak).

Julia's engagement had begun with a visit by David Chelouche's father, Avraham Haim, to her father, Josef Bohbout, at his textile shop. Josef Bohbout had travelled back and forth for years between Jaffa and Manchester, where he owned a wholesale shop at 14 Albert Square. Despite his repeated entreaties, his wife Esther had refused to join him, as she was scared of sea travel. Josef eventually set up not just a business, but a whole other family in Manchester - he had a mistress and two daughters there. But with his health

failing, he eventually decided to return to Jaffa. It seems neither Josef's family nor Avraham Haim Chelouche knew anything of his double life.

Avraham Haim Chelouche explained that he wanted to marry one of his sons, Marco, to Julia. Julia's father nodded. Few families were offered such an opportunity. Sephardic marriages, like Arab betrothals, were usually arranged. The bond was based on mutual suitability and social standing. Love and romance would hopefully follow later. Julia had her portrait taken and the picture was sent to Paris where Marco and his brother Zaki were studying. Marco wrote back thanking his father, but explained that he did not want to marry Julia. Avraham wrote then to Zaki, and ordered him home immediately to Jaffa. But Zaki was having the time of his life in Paris. Zaki looked like the actor Tyrone Power and he made the most of his looks. The last thing he wanted was to go back to the suffocating demands of a traditional Sephardic family. Zaki wrote back, explaining he had fallen in love with an actress. When Zaki's letter reached Jaffa his father was first scandalized, then enraged. An actress! Avraham stormed around the room, waving the paper. His eyes fell on his third son, David. 'You will marry this girl,' he instructed his son. 'Which girl?' asked David, who did not know what his father was talking about.

Once Avraham had calmed down and explained, David did not argue. He had already met Julia at a party and liked her, and anyway he had not so far had much luck with women. He fell in love with a young woman called Leah and proposed to her. Leah had refused him, telling him she wanted to marry a doctor. David duly enrolled at medical school in Beirut. It was proving difficult. Every time there was a dissection class and the corpse was opened, David fainted. He went back to Jaffa. The next time he saw Leah she told him she was married... to a doctor.

David was keen to marry Julia. She was not swept off her feet - another Chelouche would do that - but nevertheless David was a fine young man. He had spent the war in Cairo, working at a bank. He came back to Jaffa by train, with a belt of gold coins hidden under his trousers. He now worked at the Anglo-Palestine Company with his uncle Yaakov Chelouche. 'He was a dark boy, friendly,' Julia wrote in her memoir *The Tree and the Roots*, an evocative portrait of a cosmopolitan world, now long vanished. Julia records

that before her engagement she had dreamt that she was standing on Nagib Bustros Street, outside the Chelouche Brothers construction company's office. Yaakov Chelouche had placed a necklace of jewels around her neck. Now it seemed Julia's dream had come true, for the jewels symbolized his nephew.

For David and Julia these were idyllic days. There were parties, picnics on the beach and trips to the Eden cinema, the first in Tel Aviv, by horse-drawn buggy. In that same year, 1920, Aharon, the great patriarch of the Chelouche dynasty and David's grandfather, died. The family sat shiva for a week. They prayed every evening, and received the stream of visitors, of all faiths, who offered their condolences. Aharon Chelouche had lived to 93. His death marked the end of an era, for the Chelouches, but also for the old Jaffa, where Jews and Arabs lived side by side, if not always in harmony, then at least mostly in peace. That world was about to be turned upside down, and would never be righted.