

# Musa Sanad and Al-Sitt Halima



By Laila Abbas

The encounter spurred Musa to see his village with a new set of eyes. Everything around him took on an increased interest and significance. His first task was to update the village's family trees. Next, he started to document the village's different customs: from wedding rituals, burials, and circumcision, to the traditional games played by the village children, and even the village songs and folk tales. Olive trees are central to the stories and songs he documented, while olive oil is hailed as a dietary necessity and a medicinal miracle in his writings.

In his collection, Musa gathered many newspaper articles that tell the story of Hilma Granqvist and her stay in his village. To keep the torch



Musa Sanad (1949–2005).

lit, he founded Artas Folklore Centre to preserve the culture and history of the village. His dream was to make Artas the most studied village in Palestine. By obtaining copies of

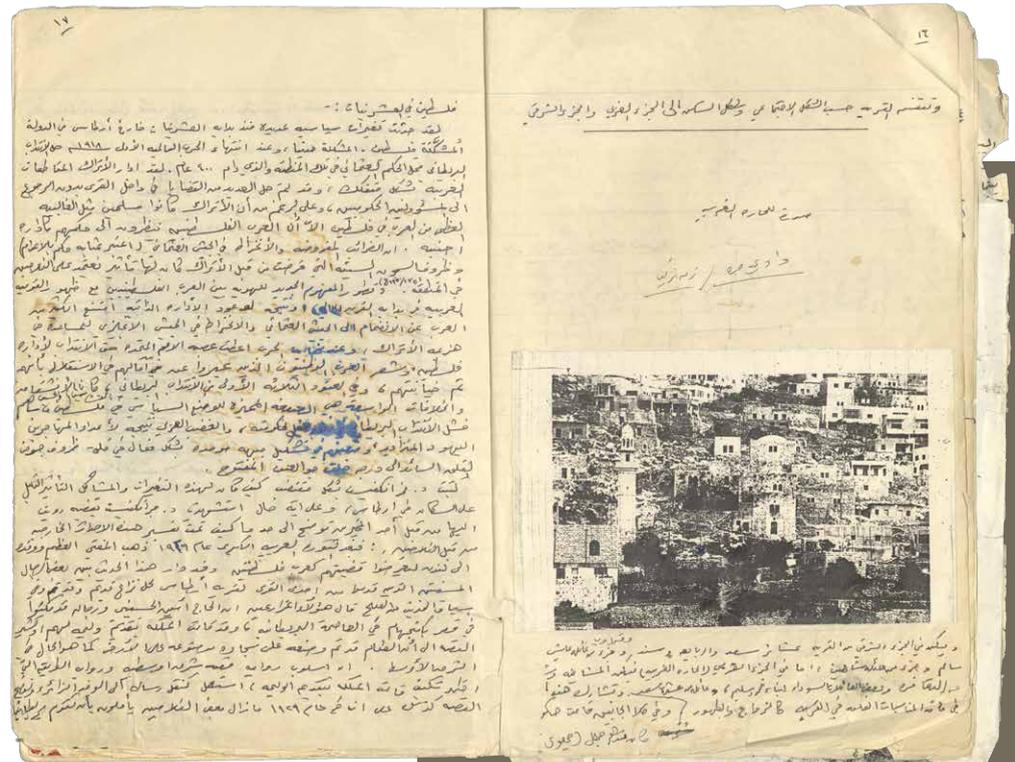
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mong the many collections in the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive, one in particular tells an especially unique story.

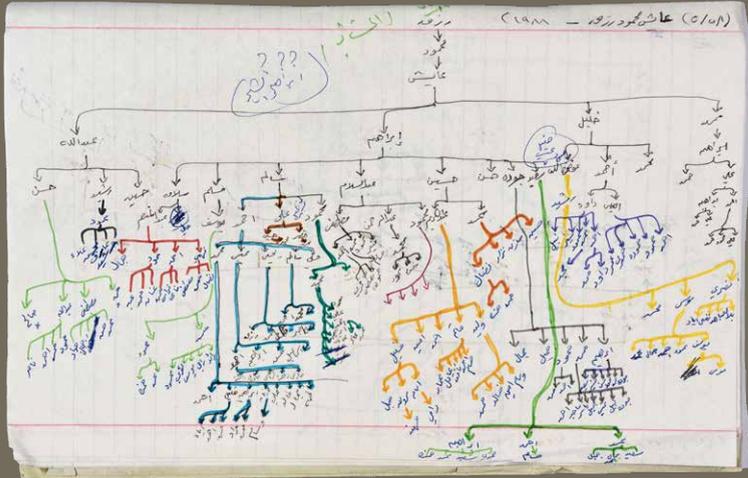
Fadi Sanad is the son of Musa Sanad from the village of Artas, southwest of Bethlehem. To honor the life and work of his father, Fadi shared

his father's documents and written material with the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive. When pieced together, this material reveals an extraordinary connection between two remarkable individuals, who, despite never having met, led lives wholly intertwined.

Fadi's father, Musa Sanad, lived and worked as a teacher in Artas. Back in the 1970s, he stumbled across a group of foreign visitors who were wandering around the village. One of them inquired about Musa's full name. The visitor then immediately opened a book and started to list the names of Musa's father, grandfather, and great grandfathers, all the way to the eldest known head of the family. Musa was startled. The book the visitor held was written by a Finnish anthropologist named Hilma Granqvist. Like most people in Artas, Musa had heard stories about a Finnish woman who had lived in the village for several years during the 1920s, writing multiple books. He knew her by the name given to her by the people of Artas: "Al-Sitt Halima," meaning Lady Halima. He even knew that his aunt, Hamdiyeh, was counted among the members of Al-Sitt Halima's "research team."



A page from one of Musa Sanad's notebooks.



One of the family trees drawn by Musa Sanad in one of his notebooks.

Hilma's books and displaying them in the center, he ensured that visitors could learn about her extraordinary experience in Palestine.

Hilma, too, wrote about birth, marriage, and children. Her journey was peppered with obstacles, as she struggled to secure the funding to complete her research project. She persevered, and after waiting three decades, she was finally able to publish her last book on death and burial customs. However, when she returned in 1959, she found another, barely recognizable Palestine. The bare mountain she had crossed on her first visit to Artas was now Al-Dheisheh Camp, populated by the thousands of displaced refugees expelled from their villages during the *Nakba*.

Musa similarly wanted his research to be read and used, and perhaps, he even wished to publish his documentation of Artas. Musa died in 2005, and while this dream never came to fruition during his lifetime, his handwritten notebooks and scattered documents are now available on a digital platform. His raw thoughts and observations, jotted in an elegant, scrawling script,

are available to the public, allowing readers and researchers from all over the world to explore his diligent attempts to become the village historian and anthropologist.

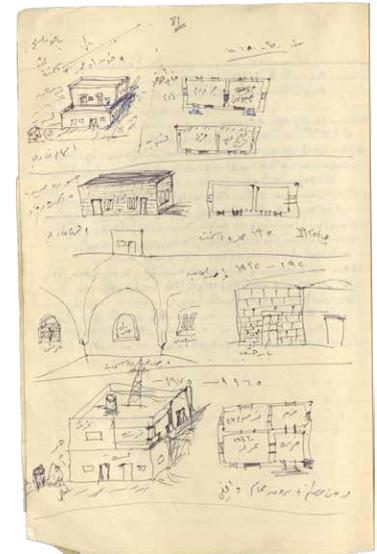
The Palestinian Museum launched the Digital Archive project in 2018 to collect, preserve, display, and revive the social history of Palestinians from 1800 to the present. As a large and freely accessible platform, it aims to combat the relentless erasure of Palestinian heritage. With a

Hilma Granqvist (1890–1972).



dedicated team of researchers, archivists, and digitizers, the Digital Archive is now home to over 400 collections from different geographical areas within Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon.

Since its inception, the Digital Archive has become the platform of choice for many individuals, professionals, families, and institutions who wish to have their archives stored in a safe environment that is also accessible to Palestinians wherever they may be. The Palestinian Museum Digital Archive took the less travelled road of telling the history of the local, the personal, and the marginalized. It attempts to be the voice of the voiceless people usually left out of the traditional, authoritarian, and elitist historical narratives.



Another page from one of Musa Sanad's notebooks.



A newspaper article from the collection.

This project is conducted in partnership with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Library, and funded by Arcadia, a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin, that supports work to preserve endangered cultural heritage, protect endangered ecosystems, and promote access to knowledge. Since 2002, Arcadia has awarded more than \$919 million to projects around the world.

*Laila Abbas is the project manager of the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive.*

To learn more about the Fadi Sanad Collection and the other collections available, visit the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive at [www.palarchive.org](http://www.palarchive.org).

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