

Book of the Month I



Returning

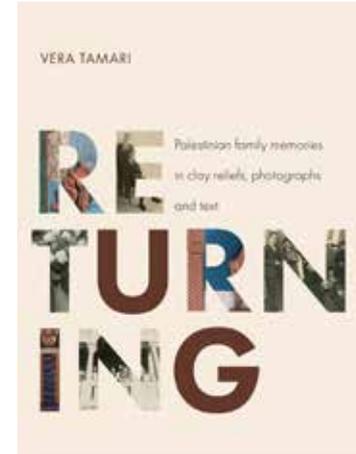
Palestinian family memories in clay reliefs,
photographs and text

By Vera Tamari

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of Jaffa. Eventually, other Jaffa families took up a life in the very provincial (at the time) town of Ramallah, where the lights of Jaffa could be seen as a star-like mirage shining in the distance.

There are nostalgic snapshots of visits to exiled family members in Lebanon, of dances at the casino of the Grand Hotel, and of lunches with other Jaffa exiles in the hotel garden, where the lights from Jaffa at dusk provoked that poignant longing for a life that was only a memory.

This family saga takes the reader into life after the forced exile. There is adaptation and success as people adjust. There is always a sense of the creativity of the Jaffa women, such as Vera's mother and her uncle's wife, Marie (*Im Salim*). These women were educated and fluent in French and English as well as Arabic. There is the underlying truth that these mothers instilled in their children artistic creativity and the importance of education and advancement.

One of the most moving parts of the text focuses on the deportation and exile into Jordan of Hanna Naser, her brother-in-law, who eventually followed his young family. It was an exile that was to last 19 years!

I love this book! It is beautifully written and informative, and has an attractive format. It is a moving tribute to what "once was" and to the resilience of the Palestinians, then and now.

Review by Donn Hutchison, who can see those lights of Jaffa from his kitchen window.

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TO SHARE



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Returning is a stunning work of art. Beautifully, provocatively, and movingly written, it captures an era of Palestinian history that no longer exists – except in wonderful old photographs, diaries, letters, and the memories of those who loved Jaffa. It is presented creatively, each chapter starting with an old family photo that Vera selected from the collection of her father,

Faik Tamari, who was an avid amateur photographer. On the opposite page, Vera has placed a corresponding image of one of her clay bas-reliefs from the *Family Portrait* series she created in the early 1990s.

The reader is led to visualize the life of Jaffa's middle class prior to the *Nakba*, when there were masquerade dinner parties, handsome young men in the newest fashion posing for portraits, and family gatherings in which the members dressed up in traditional Oriental costumes and posed as Ottoman sultans. Family picnics were held at the beach, and men and women mixed casually at outings. These scenes seem like fairy tale moments at a time when one could still envision the promise held by the future. There seemed to be something magical about Jaffa.

And then came the 1948 flight from Jaffa. Many people felt that they were leaving only for a short period of time and packed accordingly, yet locked the door of a house to which they were never to return. Families were dispersed to the hills around Beirut, to hotels along the Nile. The house of Faik and Margo Tamari who, after their wedding in 1940, had taken up residence in Al-Bireh, became a temporary shelter for some family members who were fleeing the dreadful shelling