Nineteenth-century Palestine was an intriguing place. The country rose from the relative obscurity into which it had fallen under the Ottoman Empire following the tumultuous years of Crusader wars and Ayyubid, Mongol, and Egyptian Mamluk rule. Napoleon’s failed attempt to conquer the Holy Land at the century’s turn and Egypt’s brief reign in the 1830s preceded European countries’ increasing engagement and intervention that started in mid-century, possibly due to the Ottoman Empire’s decline. This rich issue illustrates numerous aspects of how history in the Holy Land unfolded during this time, in particular, the conditions and developments in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, shedding light also on the so-called Status Quo agreements. Particularly interesting are the population’s continuous efforts to defend their rights and livelihoods, the early voices that warned of the Zionist threat, and the country’s rich cultural life, exemplified in the highly educated Palestinians who led and documented the developments of their times.

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Our Personality of the Month is publisher Najib Nassar who issued early warnings of impending developments. Our Artists of the Month are Irina and Maher Naji from Gaza. Visit Steve Sabella’s Elsewhere, our virtual Exhibition of the Month, or cook a warming soup according to Riyam Kafri AbuLaban’s recipe. In Where to Go, Bassam Almohor takes you to Beit Felasteen in Nablus. And in Ahlan Palestine Postcard, Malak Hasan and Bisan AlHajHasan invite you on a hike near Ramallah.

From the entire team at TWiP, we wish you a healthy month of February,
From Provincial Town to Metropolis

Tourism and Souvenirs

Hamidi Jerusalem

Muftis, Niqabat al-Ashraf, and Mayors of Jerusalem

Scholars, Chroniclers, and Jerusalem Archivists

Bayt al-Dajani Daoudi

The Church of the Nativity in the Nineteenth Century

Bethlehem in the Last Century of Ottoman Rule

Pilgrims and Colonizers

One Hundred Three Years Later
From Provincial Town to Metropolis
Jerusalem in the Nineteenth Century

By Issam Nassar

The nineteenth century was a time of great transformation in Palestine, in general, and Jerusalem, in particular. To be more precise, what is meant by the nineteenth century in our case is the period that spans from the attempt of Napoleon to conquer Palestine in 1799, to the collapse of Ottoman rule in the country in 1918. During this period, Palestine was transformed from a backdrop in the empire to a vibrant region with a growing economy, complex administration, and sophisticated cultural life. From defending northern Palestine against the French occupation to the demise of the Egyptian rule in 1840, the country changed hands internally and externally. Its population doubled from 350,000 around the turn of the nineteenth century to close to 700,000 just before the start of the Great War in 1914. The population of Jerusalem at the turn of the century was only around 8,000, but by its end, it grew to close to 60,000; a growth rate that points to the amazing increasing significance of the city.

The long century opened with the victory of the wali (governor) of Sidon, the Bosnian Ahmed Pasha al-Jazzar – which means the butcher – who ruled Palestine from Acre until his death in 1804. Another significant event that took place early in the century was the revolt by the tribal leader Ibrahim Abu Ghosh against the wali of Damascus, Mustafa Pasha, who planned to garner extra taxation on the pilgrimage caravans that went through Palestine. In 1826, the notables of Jerusalem led a revolt that was suppressed by the authorities in Damascus and Istanbul. In 1831, the Egyptian forces under the leadership of Ibrahim Pasha arrived in Bilad al-Sham, including Palestine. The decade of Egyptian rule brought some modernizing steps and opened up Palestine to foreign interests, but it also faced serious opposition from local landed leaders starting around 1834. By the time the Egyptian control of Palestine came to an end, the country had its first European consulate – the British consulate in 1838 – and a more tolerant attitude towards the Christian religious communities prevailed.

When Palestine reverted to Ottoman rule in 1840, the empire was in a process of reorganization, known as the tanzimat. During this period that lasted until 1876, new laws were being implemented, including a new land law in 1858 (that is still applicable today), a citizenship law in 1869, a constitution, and a parliament. In 1867, Jerusalem was among the first Ottoman cities to form a municipal council.

Still, an important milestone in the situation in Palestine was connected to the interference of the European powers. This became apparent during the Crimean War (1853–56) that was fought between Russia and the Ottomans, and supported by the French and the British, which was one, but perhaps not the most important, of the reasons for that war. The conflict arose over the Sultan granting rights to France’s Napoleon III over holy sites in Palestine that were under the control of the Orthodox Church. Conflict arose in Jerusalem and Bethlehem over the two historical churches of the Holy Sepulcher and the Nativity. The Russian Tzar Nicholas I “retaliated by sending a mission to recover the Greek Orthodox rights.” When the conflict broke out in the Black Sea between the Russians and the Ottoman Turks, the Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia in 1853, and the Crimean War ended in 1856 with a treaty that restored the status quo ante in Palestine.

Palestine in the Nineteenth Century

Between Napoleon’s attempt to conquer the Holy Land and the beginning of WW I, the population of Palestine doubled from 350,000 to 700,000, whereas the number of Jerusalem’s inhabitants grew from 8,000 to 60,000.
and the Ottomans in 1853, the issue of the holy sites in Palestine was heavily exploited by Russia, which had assumed the role of the protector of the Orthodox Christian subjects of the empire through a broad interpretation of the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynardac of 1774. France claimed a similar right, as a defender of the Catholics in the empire, based in Jerusalem and under the direct control of the central government in Istanbul. The new mutessarifat of Jerusalem included the subdistricts of Jaffa, Gaza, Hebron, and Bir Saba’, Nazareth being added at a later date. The subdistricts of Nablus and Acre were not included but were placed as part of the mutessarifat of Beirut.

Part of the reorganization was the redrawing of district boundaries. In the case of Palestine, more specifically the district of Jerusalem, placing it under the direct authority of the Sublime Porte in Istanbul allowed for more effective decision-making while also providing the chance for European empires to exert influence on the internal affairs of Palestine. Still, the new status of the mutessarifat increased its internal organization. Jerusalem would be second to Istanbul to form a municipal council around 1874, and when the constitution was introduced in 1876 and a parliament (majlis al-mabouthan) was established, the city sent one of its citizens to represent the district: Yusuf Dhia’ al-Khalidi (1842–1906), Jerusalem’s first mayor. However, the sultan was quick to dissolve the parliament and suspend the constitution in its infancy. Still, the elevated status of the district of Jerusalem, along with the influx of European pilgrims and tourists in the second half of the century paved the way, partially, for the development and expansion of cities, especially Jerusalem. Paved lit streets, sanitation, and a booming economy were the result. As Omar es-Saleh observed when he moved to Jerusalem in 1898: “I saw horse-driven carriages for hire, driving in broad avenues asphalted and leading to Nablus, Jaffa, Hebron and Jericho.” The economy of Palestine was growing with the influx of tourists and visitors from Europe, thanks to the steamships, arriving at the ports of Jaffa and Haifa. This gave rise to the transportation economy that fascinated Omar es-Saleh, and brought about major growth in the tourist industry and in the sale of religious paraphernalia, souvenirs, and postcards from the Holy Land. New hostels were built to accommodate tourists, and road safety increased between cities and towns. The opening of a railroad line between Jerusalem and Jaffa in 1892 – through which the traveler could connect to Istanbul or the Hijaz – only added to the sense of safety among the travelers. The pilgrims and tourist markets were not limited to the main cities, but even small villages joined in to reap the benefits. As Wasif Jawhariyyeh noted in his memoirs:

The Russian pilgrims went around the Holy Land on foot, for example walking from Jerusalem to Jericho to the River Jordan and back, although some of them were over eighty or ninety years of age. Wherever they happened to arrive, they would sit to drink tea on the side of the main roads. Many families in our country depended on these pilgrims for their living, selling them tea, sugar, bread, cheese, and meat, earning large sums of money which sufficed them for the whole year.”

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Despite the despotic rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II in the last quarter of the century, the pace of life was changing in dramatic, and perhaps exciting, ways. Palestine was entering the age of modernity, albeit slowly. Jerusalem moved from a small provincial town in the early years of the century to a metropolis, being a center of government, learning, and diplomatic activities by the end of the century. Jaffa was transformed into an important port city with a large number of steamers arriving each year – 242 in 1882 alone. The city witnessed increased centralization in the mid-nineteenth century weakened the role of traditional rulers while strengthening their hold of the land at the expense of the peasantry.

The last decade of the long century was hard on Palestine internally. The Ottomans were at war from 1911 until 1918. Starting with the Balkan Wars (1911–1913), through the Libyan War (1913), and ending with the Great War (1914–1918). The Ottoman economy suffered greatly as a result of the wars, and productivity was low. Being part of the Ottoman world, Palestine was affected as well. With the entry of the Ottomans into WWI in 1914, the economic condition in the country deteriorated, especially in light of the war economy. Young men (the working force) were conscripted into the army to fight abroad, and deforestation due to the need for wood to run the trains, heavy taxation, and famine were the order of the day. The great famine during the war resulted partly from the French and British blockade of the east Mediterranean waters, but also coincided with the untimely arrival of the locust in 1915 that devastated the agriculture of the entire Syrian region. Needless to say, the war years were harsh and remain the population’s last memories of Ottoman rule to this day.

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2 Conflicts over control of the Christian holy sites, particularly in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, had arisen repeatedly. In 1757, an Ottoman firman (decree) addressed the issue, outlining rights and responsibilities, followed up by confirmations in the early and mid-nineteenth century. The Treaty of Berlin, however, made the earlier agreement international, as one article in the agreement explicitly reaffirms it.
5 For further information, see Mahmoud Yazbek, “Jaffa Before the Nakba,” in Majalat al-Dirasat al-Falastinyeh, 93 (Winter 2013), pp. 36–49.
6 Ibid., pp. 69–70.
7 Alan Dowty provides many examples of conflict between the colonists and the peasants, particularly in chapter four of Arabs and Jews in Ottoman Palestine, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019.
Hamidi Jerusalem
Tumult, Turbulence, and Tribulations in Nineteenth-Century Palestine

“... it was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair...” Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities

In the discourse on Jerusalem, the nineteenth century is portrayed as a highly turbulent, profoundly transformative era that represents the dawn of modernity. In the interim period between Napoleon’s expedition and the Egyptian occupation, Palestine dissolved into a state of chaos and anarchy. The second half of the nineteenth century may be characterized by the infiltration of Western influences, modernity, a general optimism, relative economic prosperity, increased tourism, regional peace, the florescence of missionary presence, and colonial expansion. It boasted the introduction of technological, scientific, and cultural innovations, chief among which stands the steamship that transformed the Mediterranean Sea into a traversable lake and incorporated the Levant within the European classical tour.

Palestinian nationalism, Westernization, and the socioeconomic transition to modernity developed within complex historical, geopolitical circumstances. Throughout the first decades of nineteenth-century Jerusalem, traditional Islam and diverse Sufi schools were constitutive elements of individual identity. Almost each family had its Sufi affiliations and belonged to one zawiya or another. The honorific Sufi appellation Qleibo, a case in point, was a nickname attached to a social registry name, indicating a spiritual state of gnosis and the rank of descent from the Alkhalyly al-Tamimi al-Dary lineage and corollary endowments. My clan was affiliated with the Khalwati Sufi Tariqah and had a family banner that distinguished them from other Sufi patrician families, namely, the Abu Sa’ud, Alami’, Husseini, Qutob, and Daoudi-Dajani. Towards the end of the century, the epithet Qleibo was stripped of its symbolic, religious connotative value. The orthography in Arabic (Quleib’boh),

Along with the overwhelming intellectual changes of European colonialism and missionary settlement of Palestine came a series of cultural and geographical changes. Among the most important historical processes was the pernicious concept of nationalism. To its supporters, nationalism was the embodiment of progress and modernity. To its detractors, nationalism was a dangerous force that threatened the existence of a particular way of life, ideology, and socioeconomic framework which the concept of cosmopolitanism represents. The forces of both cosmopolitanism and nationalism emerged as essential parts of “the paradox of modernity,” a paradox that survived the long nineteenth century and that persists to this day, disguised in the rhetoric of local/global dualities and its expression in Zionism, Palestinian nationalism, and neoliberalism.
which describes a heart brimming with divine love, was reduced to Qleibo. In the wake of Sultan Abdul Majid’s *tanzimat*, a series of reforms following the Crimean War (1853–56), a new socioeconomic order was inaugurated as well as an ethical system based on newly developed values in which religion became a constituent element of individual identity in lieu of its previous constitutive role, a fact observed in the newly forged four-name system.

The Hamidi ethos, after the era of Sultan Abdul Hamid who reigned from 1876 to 1908, sought to modernize Arab Muslim culture and political structures without straying from traditional religious principles. The Hamidi discourse infused new values, precepts, and career possibilities throughout the Ottoman Empire that shook up the traditional social order. Into this Hamidi world view my father was born in 1892. My family reinvented itself. The Qleibo centuries-old close religious affiliations with Al-Aqsa’s imams, jurists, muftis, theologians, and sheikhs of the Sufi Khalwati order gave way to a new generation of lawyers, doctors, scholars, businessmen, and merchants. Abd al-Razzaq, my oldest uncle, born in 1884, trained in Istanbul as a lawyer in preparation to join in the political economic social order in the making, in lieu of Al-Azhar in Cairo, as was the family tradition. By the end of the nineteenth century, the process of the secularization and modernization of Palestine was well on its way.

To appreciate the totally Arab Muslim character of 1830 Jerusalem, i.e., before the restoration of the Latin Patriarchate circa 1840, prior to the 1854 entry of Western powers into the Crimean War and the consequent Ottoman sultan’s concessions to his French and British allies, we have to imagine an urban landscape that bears no resemblance to the present. Al-Quds al-Sharif in 1820 had neither the Lutheran nor the Franciscan belfry in its silhouette. Neither the Latin Patriarchate in the New Gate Quarter nor the Frères’ three-story edifice nor the Franciscan complex that included the first modern carpentry, the European blacksmith, and the print house would have existed. Imagine Al-Waad St. and the Via Dolorosa without the Austrian Hospice and without the immense edifice of Ecce Homo.

Outside the walls, olive groves, vineyards, and sesame and wheat fields covered the slopes from New Gate to Herod’s Gate and climbed up Mount Scopus. In these fields not a single trace of the Notre Dame compound, St. Louis Hospital, St. Etienne Monastery, or the Russian Compound could be discerned. A few manor houses dotted the landscape, chief among which stood Qasr al-Sheikh Alkhalyly, my family home built in 1714, outside Herod’s Gate, that of the Nuseibehs in Sheikh Jarrah, and on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, the Ansari homestead a few meters uphill, west of the Muwaqett castle.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, Ottoman hegemony over Palestine sustained two major challenges that compromised the traditional status quo and set the ground for European intervention in the shaping of Middle Eastern history. In the wake of Napoleon’s withdrawal from Palestine, the Palestinian countryside succumbed to a state of social political disorder, and the Palestinian villagers became victim to pillaging Bedouin tribes. Villages would be raided at harvest time, their produce stolen. Money was forcibly exacted from the poor, defenseless peasant, and once-thriving villages and towns became deserted ruins, with their populations forced to take shelter elsewhere. Al-Khudera and Al-Affula in the north
and Beit Jibrin in the south were pilfered and destroyed by marauding Bedouin tribes. In Artas, the villagers took shelter in the Ottoman fortress adjacent to Solomon’s Pools out of fear for their lives!

The Palestinian countryside degenerated into a general state of anarchy and petty local wars. Rivalries and vendettas between Qaysi/Yamani Palestinian tribes flared up. These tribal ethnic social groupings conform to the pre-Islamic primordial tribal split that had provided a source of cultural identity and social solidarity as well as a point of social friction and conflict. Whereas the Yamani tribes trace themselves to an ancestral figure, Qahtan, the Qaysi tribes trace their descent to Adnan. These cultural ethnic divisions conform to ancient Semitic tribal settlements throughout the Fertile Crescent, maintaining thereby genealogical roots in the Arabian Peninsula. Whereas Yamani tribes trace their descent to southern Arabia, the Qaysi tribes trace their roots to northern Arabia.

Post–Napoleonic local turbulence in Palestine was compounded by the invasion of the Egyptian army led by Ibrahim Pasha, the son of Mohammad Ali, viceroy of Egypt. Mohammad Ali seceded from the Ottoman Empire and, under the command of Ibrahim Pasha, the Egyptian army swept over Palestine, occupied Greater Syria, and reached as far as Konya in Asia Minor. Through British intercession, the invading army was stalled, and a treaty sealed the end of the first Egyptian-Ottoman war in 1833. It was arranged that Ibrahim Pasha would stay in Palestine for a while. In 1839 the Ottoman army moved into Syria to recapture the lands seized by Ibrahim Pasha. The second Egyptian-Ottoman war ended in 1840, through British intervention on behalf of the Ottomans to negotiate a peace with Mohammad Ali, the viceroy of Egypt. The treaty guaranteed Mohammad Ali and his progeny sovereignty over Egypt. In return he pledged to evacuate Ibrahim’s beleaguered army back to Alexandria. Moreover, he renounced all claims to Syria, submitted to the sultan, and returned the Ottoman fleet. Ibrahim Pasha withdrew his army in 1841, having plunged the country into two rival camps, one supporting the caliphate in Istanbul and the other standing in defense of the occupying Egyptian army. Henceforth, culminating in the Crimean War, the sultanate came to depend on its Western allies to protect its sovereignty. It was a propitious moment in which European economic expansionism, colonialism, missionary work, and tourism conjoined to witness the development of a new social political Palestinian leadership.

The story of the rediscovery and Western exploration of the Holy Land in the nineteenth century is a fascinating chapter in the long history of religious and secular tourism and colonialism in Palestine. Napoleon may not have visited Jerusalem during his occupation of Palestine, but in his expedition a slew of scientists came along. Their documentation of Egypt and Palestine sparked the Western imagination and initiated great interest in the Ancient Near East and the Land of the Bible. Palestine had been terra incognita from a scientific point of view, but by the end of the century, the foundations for the scientific study of the country were firmly laid down. Surveys, maps, travelers’ sketches, guidebooks, and artists’ paintings and engravings brought the people and scenery of the land to the attention of the Western public.

Once steamships replaced the old sailboats, travel time across the Mediterranean was dramatically reduced and made easier. The three-week lengthy distance from London to Istanbul took less than a hundred hours. Various travel itineraries were developed by the 1830s, with steamboat stops in Napoli, Malta, Alexandria, Izmir, Salonika, Athens, Venice, and Constantinople. It is on one of these early steamships that the famous obelisk was transported from Luxor to its current position in Place de la Concorde in Paris! With the newly forged alliances with Turkey, the Mediterranean enjoyed an unprecedented state of safety.
Shortly after the Egyptian campaign in Palestine and the Crimean War, the newly wedged alliances, and the corollary Ottoman concessions, the Near East became, on par with Italy and Greece, part of the classical European tour. By 1870, Egypt had become top choice as a winter-season resort, and Palestine had its share of enthusiastic visitors.

Nineteenth-century travelers – be they pious pilgrims or visionary poets, righteous missionaries or libertine dilettantes, Muslim, Christian, or Jew – had already experienced Jerusalem through sacred scripture, traditional religious narratives, and travelogues prior to their arrival in Palestine. Muslim literature has throughout the centuries deployed a special literary discourse extolling the virtues of Jerusalem and laying out the itinerary for Muslim pilgrims, outlining places of significance associated with Prophet Muhammad and Abraham. Christian and Jewish pilgrims were attracted by Biblical stories and by the scenes of the last days of Jesus in Jerusalem as described in the New and Old Testaments. The firsthand narratives of the Holy Land and the Near East by nineteenth-century authors, such as Herman Melville, Mark Twain, François-René de Chateaubriand, Alphonse de Lamartine, and Gustave Flaubert, further inflamed the European imagination about the Orient.

The publicity of various navigation companies to promote the new mode of travel included inviting great authors free of charge, provided they would write of the comfort of steamboat travel. The list of these illustrious guests – novelists, poets, travel writers, scholars, and journalists – is extensive. Travelers increased; the faithful and the nonconformist, the dilettante and the biblical scholar, the missionary and the debauched; all flocked from all the corners of the earth to Jerusalem. As early as 1869, the carriage road from Jaffa to Jerusalem was paved to accommodate royalty for a side trip to the Holy City after attending the opening of the Suez Canal and the grandiose opera house in Cairo.

Political and economic developments, improved standards of living and increased scientific discoveries, and massive literary output allowed for the tourist industry to thrive. By the early 1840s, foreign missions were established. The first, in 1839, was the British consulate on Melawiya Road in the heart of the Muslim Quarter. Germany came next in 1842, and soon after, France, Italy, Austria, and Russia followed suit. Numerous incipient discourses were forming along Orientalist colonialist lines (the analysis of which is beyond the scope of this article). The Ottomans astutely protected their hegemony over the many ethnic groups and maintained their Western alliances through the deployment of major series of reformations, initiated after the Crimean War and known as the Tanzimat Constitutional Reforms. In 1872, Sultan Abdulaziz was deposed by his ministers, killed, and replaced by Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Soon after, the second tanzimat were issued, whereby foreigners were given rights to purchase land in Palestine. The millet system granted the various ethnic groups in Jerusalem, and the empire at large, legal rights and protection by the law, including the right to purchase property. The first local newspaper, Filistin, in Turkish, was launched that year. Jerusalem was declared an independent mutasarrifia (a subdivision of the Ottoman Empire’s area) and encompassed all the provinces that constitute present-day Palestine. According to Baedeker, the total population was 24,000, of which 13,000 were Muslim, 7,000 Christian, and 4,000 Jewish. It was a period of prosperity, stability, and relative peace; elements that were propitious for the religious
and secular tourism industry, a period in which the foreigners often outnumbered the local population.

Nineteenth-century travelers included writers, poets, and painters who toured with their Bibles in their hands to “read” the landscape and the realities of the Holy Land against a sacred text. Though the majority of voyagers were religious pilgrims inspired by the Holy Scripture, a substantial number of tourists, the secular literati, travelled to Jerusalem to identify with the universe through expatriation. They were not typical travelers. Rather literary tourists, they were seekers of textual evidence as they quested for meaning and identity, in search of a meaningful personal encounter with the Holy Land. It is one of the characteristics of Palestine that so many travelers “see” the place through the distorting lenses of their sacred texts, cultural myths, and national narratives.

Mark Twain, who visited Jerusalem in 1867, noted that all peoples, races, religions, and languages were there. In his book, Innocents Abroad, an edited compilation of his published newspaper articles and journal describing his travels to Palestine, he wrote, “it seems to me that all races and colors and tongues of the earth must be represented among the fourteen thousand souls that dwell in Jerusalem.”

The number of publications on the Holy Land by nineteenth-century Western writers is astounding. Handbooks for travelers, the precursor of modern guidebooks, provided extensive itineraries for foreign visitors. The first English-language guidebook was published in 1858 by John Murray, Handbook for Travelers in Syria and Palestine. A few years later, it was followed by Karl Baedeker’s Palestine and Syria, Handbook for Travelers. The guidebook first appeared in German in 1875 and in English in 1876.

The flood of travelers and itinerant tourists increased the demand for Murray’s guidebook that had many reprints. The author, Josias Leslie Porter, who described in the foreword the various motives underlying the rage to travel, wrote: “One is in pursuit of health, another of pleasure, another of fame, another of knowledge, another of adventure, while not a few travel for the mere sake of travel — to satisfy a restless and ‘truant’ disposition.”

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Jerusalem lived its golden age. Missionaries – Protestant, Catholic, and Greek Orthodox – flocked to the city: Germans, Swedes, Finns, and Swiss Lutherans found an embodiment of their faith. The Millennialists had started their mission in anticipation of the second coming of Jesus; they flocked to Jerusalem to convert the Jews to be ready for the Day of Judgment. Various missionary schools, clinics, and hotels were being built – the Zion Boys School headed by Bishop Gobat, the Schneller Vocational Training School, German Colony. The De La Salle Brothers had settled in Jerusalem and were to begin to build the Collège des Frères, the best school in Palestine. Augusta Victoria, the Dominican convent, and Dormition Abbey were in the making. This was an exciting moment.

In the travel books, Jerusalem was promoted as a marvelous city where peoples and cultures coexisted: a cosmopolitan city. Citadel Square within Jaffa Gate (Omar Ibn al-Khattab Square) was lined with Thomas Cook’s Travel Bureau, the American Colony Photography Shop, the Meo family souvenir shop, and the grandiose Mediterranean Hotel (now Petra Hotel) on the northern side, counterpoised by the American consulate and the post office on the eastern side. William Hepworth Dixon, in his travel book The Holy Land (1863), describes the spectacular comingling of whirling Sufi dervishes and Armenian monks with pointed hoods, the naked Nubian slave on sale, and the kavas (the ceremonial consular guards with their crimson jackets laced with golden thread and loose-fitting pantaloons), the colorful Moroccon mystics, Bedouin sheikhs clad in white, and Indian and Afghani Muslim pilgrims next to the German, Swiss, and American missionaries dressed in their national ethnic costumes. He writes of the magic of Jerusalem:

All centuries, all nations, seem to hustle each other in this open court under David’s tower. In pushing through the crowd of men, you may chance to run against a turbaned Turk, a gaudy Cavash, a naked Nubian, a shaven Carmelite, a bearded papa, a robed Armenian, an English sailor, a Circassian chief, a basha, and a converted Jew. In crossing from the gateway to the convent you may stumble on a dancing dervish; you may catch the glance of a veiled beauty; you may break a procession of Arab school-girls headed by a British headmistress. . .

Herman Melville, author of Moby Dick, described his experience in Jerusalem in the longest epic poem in Western history, Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land. The oeuvre is longer than Homer’s Iliad and Milton’s Paradise Lost, and in conjunction with the journal he had kept on his voyage, he proffers Jerusalem as a marvelous and mystical city. Melville’s descriptions and reflections, his spiritual longing and ultimate disenchantment punctuate the development of another remarkable narrative – that between the traveler and the Holy Land: namely the quest for Identity through immersion in experiencing otherness.

In his journal we glimpse a Jerusalem that is dynamic, vital, and energetic with things budding everywhere. It is the period when the city was teeming with all kinds of people, and dreams were in the making. Melville’s narrative underscores the global and plural character of Palestine, presenting it as a polyglot world where culture and peoples circulate and interact and where creeds dovetail into each other...
Hamidi Jerusalem is a microcosm, a context representative of the diversity of humanity and human visions of the world. Jerusalem and Palestine are the global contexts where multiple cultures come together in what constitutes a representative sample of humanity. Americans, Europeans, Asians, Africans; Muslims, Jews, Christians; Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Calvinists, Anglicans, Dominicans, Franciscans; atheists, devout believers, hedonists, and lunatics encounter one another in the emblematic city of Jerusalem which, in the twentieth century, was to become the core of tragic human collisions.

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The history of families is a notoriously difficult subject. In the Arabic-Islamic world, in particular, the attachment to genealogy has been so deep that it has overcome the strictures of the Qur’an and Prophetic Hadith. In numerous Arab homes from Morocco to Iraq, one will find a prominently displayed family tree that allegedly traces descent from some eponymous hero of the Golden Age. But why is the subject notoriously difficult? Because the stronger a family’s attachment to a time and a place, the more determined it is to construct and, by constructing, to invent a history of belonging. The family tree is, of course, the most common way to display such belonging, but it can in no way be regarded as certain proof of lineage unless each branch of that tree and each bird on that branch are attested elsewhere in histories, biographies, or court documents. The tree by itself is no proof. This must be posited as a caveat before we begin this step-by-step sketch of the Khalidi family history.

The Khalidis assert that they are descendants of Khalid ibn al-Walid, a towering conqueror of early Islam, a Meccan aristocrat, and an eleventh-hour Muslim who retained in many of his character traits something of the rebelliousness of the pre-Islamic period, its attachment to freedom, its epic spirit. Did he die childless, as many early and modern accounts claim? Well, not quite. Al-Qaysarani al-Khalidi, a poet from Aleppo who died in 1153, traced his ancestry back to Khalid. This is mentioned in a famous biographical dictionary of the thirteenth century. All we can say at this point is that the claim to descent from Khalid was alive and well in the twelfth century.

What is the earliest attested mention of someone called al-Khalidi in Jerusalem? It occurs in a manuscript on jurisprudence in the Khalediya Library (no. 963 in the catalogue) written by a certain Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Rahman ibn `Abd al-`Aziz al-Khalidi who, as we can deduce from internal evidence, lived in the mid-eleventh century, and most probably before the Crusader occupation of the city in 1099. We know that this occupation caused a mass exodus from Jerusalem, scattering its families in all directions. A family tradition has it that the Khalidis sought refuge in the village of Dayr `Uthman, in the province of Nablus and returned to Jerusalem after Saladin recaptured the city on October 2, 1187. When they came back, they were known as Dayris or Dayri/Khalidis, but this remains a mere possibility because it is unattested in the sources.

The third stage in the premodern period is best attested in the sources, and its members may be put forth confidently as the direct ancestors of the modern family. The series begins with Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn `Abdullah al-`Abs al-Dayr al-Maqdisi who was born in Jerusalem around 1343 and died there on November 2, 1424. His father was a merchant, originally from a Nablus district called al-Dayr. Encouraged by his father, Muhammad studied in Jerusalem, Damascus, and Cairo and then became a Hanafite mufti of Jerusalem and a distinguished scholar and teacher. Two of Muhammad’s five sons achieved the same renown as their father: Sa’d al-Din Sa’d who was born in Jerusalem in 1367 and died in Cairo in 1463 and succeeded his father both as chief judge of the empire and as rector.
of the Khaniqah. The second son, Burhan al-Din Ibrahim, was born in Jerusalem in 1407 and died in Cairo in 1471. This father and two sons were the first in a long line of notables in a scholarly Jerusalem dynasty that has remained unbroken and well attested in the biographical dictionaries and court records until the present day. Their lineage back to the Khalidis of the eleventh century is unattested, but their connection with the long line of judges, muftis, and scholars who followed is richly documented. Many of these descendants had careers in both Cairo and Jerusalem, and when the Ottomans replaced the Mamluks as overlords of Syria and Egypt, the Dayris continued to fulfill the same functions both in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire.

It is almost certain that the Dayris became Dayri-Khalidis in the mid-seventeenth century, at a time when many families of notables throughout the Arab world stretched their lineages back to distinguished ancestors. The reasons are not entirely clear but may have been related to a surge of Arab proto-national sentiments among these city notables that need further investigation, feelings that in any case were never entirely absent from consciousness and explain the later appeal of Arab nationalism.

From the sixteenth until the eighteenth century, the family supplied all rectors of the Madrasa Farisiyya in Jerusalem, appointed by an edict issued by the sultan in Istanbul. They also seem to have monopolized the offices of chief clerk of the Shari'a Court in Jerusalem and deputy judge of the city right until the end of the nineteenth century. The family was Ottoman in sentiment until the very end of Ottoman rule in 1917.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were particularly rich in prominent sons and daughters of the family, now numbering perhaps a few hundred. Among them, two women played crucial roles, the first in establishing the core collection of manuscripts (MSS) and the second in housing that collection in the Mamluk mausoleum, the site of the Khalidi Library since 1900: Tarafanda Khanum joined her husband, Muhammad Sun`allah, in establishing around 260 MSS as a pious endowment or waqf, dated February 4, 1787. About a hundred years later, Khadijah Khanum left a considerable sum of money in her will to refurbish the mausoleum and house its collection, a task accomplished by her son, Hajj Raghib, in 1900.

Scholars do not generally lead “exciting” lives. Hence, in selecting to highlight the following four nineteenth-century biographies, I chose judges, jurists, and scholars whose lives impacted the political life of their age.

The first was Musa Shafiq (d. 1831), grandson of Sun`allah mentioned above. Musa Shafiq rose in the judiciary ranks of the Ottoman Empire until he became Judge of Medina, a prestigious appointment, given the city’s sanctity in Muslim culture. He then became Kaziasker, a chief military judge of Anatolia and the second-highest judiciary post in the empire, and ex officio member of the Imperial Council. On July 17, 1798, he addressed an open letter to the notables of Palestine, informing them of the fall of Alexandria to Napoleon and warning them that the ultimate goal of those “accursed French” was the conquest of Jerusalem. Musa Shafiq must, of course, have seen Napoleon’s expedition as a latter-day crusade. Exactly one hundred years later, other Khalidis publicly warned of the dangers of Zionism.
The second Khalidi in this list is Muhammad-`Ali (d. 1864), a nephew of Musa Shafiq, who succeeded his father as chief clerk of the Shari`a Court and deputy judge of Jerusalem. During the Russian-Ottoman war of 1828–29, an edict arrived from Istanbul ordering the execution of the Greek Orthodox patriarch and his clergy. Relations between the family and the Christian communities had always been cordial, so, at a great risk to himself, Muhammad-`Ali disobeyed the imperial order and hid the patriarch and his clergy in a cave near the Bab al-`Amud (Gate of the Column, also known as Damascus Gate). When the war ended, everyone applauded his action. In appreciation, a large portrait in oil still hangs outside the office of the patriarch of Jerusalem.

The third is Yusuf Dia Pasha Khalidi (d. 1906), son of Muhammad-`Ali. He was probably the first in the family to receive both a traditional Islamic and a European education. Joining the Ottoman civil service, he rose to become governor of Anatolian Kurdistan (qaimaqam of a qada in the Bitlis region, and later of other qadas), where he composed the very first Kurdish-Arabic dictionary. He was the first mayor of Jerusalem (1867–1873) and the deputy for Jerusalem in the first Ottoman Parliament (1876–1878). Yusuf Dia was a reformer and constitutionalist and a friend of the celebrated Muslim reformer Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. He also taught for some years as a lecturer at the University of Vienna, where he edited the Diwan by Labid, a major pre-Islamic poet. His correspondence with Theodor Herzl and his warnings against Zionist colonization in Palestine are well-known to modern historians of Palestine.

The fourth Khalidi in this list is Ruhi (1864–1913), a nephew of Yusuf Dia and in many ways his disciple. Like his uncle, he received his elementary religious education in Jerusalem and supplemented this with a more “modern” education; he studied in Tripoli, Beirut, and finally at the prestigious Sultani College (Mekteb Sultani) in Istanbul. Having graduated with flying colors, he immediately was offered judicial posts in Palestine – which he adamantly refused, insisting against strong parental objections (especially those of his doting mother) on completing his education in Europe. So he finally ended up in what was to become Sciences Po (the Paris Institute of Political Studies) where as an impoverished student, he studied European history and international relations. Ruhi was also active in Orientalist circles, and his critique of Orientalist discourse in several of his writings is arguably among the earliest attempts by an Arab writer to come to grips with the Orientalists. He was appointed consul general of the Ottoman Empire in Bordeaux (1898–1908), returned to Jerusalem after the 1908 Revolution, was elected deputy for Jerusalem in the Ottoman Parliament, and eventually became its deputy speaker. Ruhi was a prolific author on an astonishingly wide spectrum of...
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Palestine in the Nineteenth Century

The Khalidi Library façade. Photo courtesy of Jack Persekian.

Exhibition about the Khalidi Library. Photo by Aline Khoury.
Tourism and Souvenirs in Nineteenth-Century Palestine

On a visit to a museum in Athens, I remember seeing a proskynetarion, an icon of sorts, that mapped the Holy Land and its various important Biblical events. Proskynetaria fall somewhere between souvenirs and religious objects that were produced as late as the early twentieth century and bought by Christian pilgrims who came to Jerusalem and wanted to take a representation of the Holy Land back to their home countries. Proskynetaria often had a note on the back certifying that an individual had undertaken such a pilgrimage. This particular proskynetarion was painted in 1839, the same year that photography was invented.

While Palestine, with all its religious connotations, had always had a significant history of pilgrimage, the nineteenth century was a transformative period. Enabled by modern advancement, from transport technologies – such as ships and trains – to the advent of photography and print-media industries that broadcast images of the Holy Land far and wide, the nineteenth century saw the birth of the modern tourism industry as we know it today.

The traditional religious pilgrimages to see the holy sites had obvious historical importance, but with the beginning of the Ottoman Empire’s Tanzimat Reforms in 1839, Palestine’s landscape shifted dramatically. Among other things, the reforms enabled foreign ownership of land. This reality, coupled with a growing appetite for modern tourism, precipitated the emergence of many institutions during the second half of the nineteenth century, accommodating the desires of the modern tourist.

From nationally run religious institutions that facilitated pilgrimage, such as the Russian Compound, Notre Dame de France, and the Austrian Hospice, to antiquities and souvenir stores such as the Boulos Meo Store and the American...
Colony’s Vester and Co., both at Jaffa Gate, cities like Jerusalem changed rapidly during the second half of the century. Added to this were travel agencies and tour groups run by foreigners and locals alike, such as Thomas Cook and the Awad Travel Agency. These institutions and many others showed both local and foreign interest in Palestine, but perhaps most importantly, and often overlooked, is the series of cultural materials produced either as artworks or souvenirs that met the Western appetite for the Holy Land. Indeed, as early as the 1850s, Louis Félicien Caignart de Saulcy, a French gentleman and amateur archaeologist, would discuss the natural majesty of the Dead Sea and the Jordan Valley, positioning its authenticity against the modernity of Jerusalem and the many tourists who constantly flocked to visit its holy sites.

Alongside the significant industry that facilitated Western visitation was another that catered to visitors once they had arrived. When we consider the size of the Palestinian tourist industry, we can begin to understand the number of goods that were produced as souvenirs to address the demands of the market, quietly distributing Palestinian cultural materials across the globe in ways that often go unnoticed.

The market for Holy Land souvenirs included a diversity of industries from icon painting, both religious and commercial, to ancient industries, such as mother-of-pearl and olive wood carving that were reinvigorated, to items drawn from the physicality of the landscape itself, such as rocks painted with crosses or pressed flowers glued to pages of booklets. With the advent of photography, new images of the Holy Land were added, especially postcards, as local photographic studios came to be established through Armenian networks from the 1860s onwards.

Such materials, both secular and religious, form a corpus that hints at how Palestinians marketed Palestine to tourists as well as offer insight into the ways that visitors perceived Palestine in the nineteenth century.

To gain a sense of the materials that were sold, we might look to Lars Lind, a member of the American Colony. Later in life he wrote in his memoirs of the Russian pilgrims who travelled to Palestine in the late Ottoman period, before the Russian revolution of 1917 disrupted what had been one of the largest tourist demographics. He described their experience of the city:

[P]ilgrims were first taken to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Golgotha. As they emerged from the eastern gate alongside what was the Municipal Garden, both sides of the narrow street were lined with small shops and booths catering to the pilgrim trade. They were stocked with crosses and rosaries in olive wood and mother-of-pearl, crucifixes, bright lithograph pictures of Bible scenes along with likenesses of the [Russian] Czar and Czarina, Jordan water in flat bottles embossed with the Crusader cross, pebbles from Galilee with crosses painted on, pressed flowers on cards, bits of incense and small artifacts blessed at the Holy Sepulchre and spina Christi thorn plants in dried up balls. This hardy thorn looked like fingers bunched together in the hand, but when put in water opened out into a sizeable plant.

This description gives us an insight into the world of objects produced in Palestine, but also a sense of just one of the many global distribution points. To consider souvenir culture in Palestine, we must think about an intricate set of networks that range from the artisans who made them to the merchants who sold them and the tourists who would buy them, taking them to their countries of origin. When we think of the spread of such objects, their reach was global.

Henry Selous’s view of Jerusalem in 1860. It is considered one of the largest engravings of Jerusalem. Image courtesy of Yasser Barakat Gallery.
One of the most prolific industries was mother-of-pearl carving. Indeed, during the course of the nineteenth century, Bethlehem-carved mother-of-pearl was so popular that Palestinian trading posts were set up in Manchester, Paris, Kiev, Manila, Singapore, and Port-au-Prince. These trading outposts sold carvings made in Palestine and also sourced raw materials for new production. This led to much innovation with the addition of new pearl-shell colors. Looking at changing styles of carving, we also see evidence that artisans addressed different markets in different ways. This image shows an Italian rendering of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper* in the material so strongly associated with the Palestinian industry.

These enterprising merchants and artisans were well aware of the cachet held by goods produced in Palestine. They actively marketed their production in the Holy Land as part of the allure of ornately carved mother-of-pearl both locally and abroad. Indeed, the Boulos Meo Store’s receipt book made explicit reference to the sale of carved mother-of-pearl and olive wood.

Similarly, the painted rocks, pressed flowers, and vials of Jordan River water were valued precisely because they were fruits of the landscape itself. While often religious in nature, when we examine the visual culture of souvenirs, it becomes apparent that there was an interesting meeting of Palestinian souvenir makers and merchants with their Western clientele in which the land was made fundamental.

Perhaps one of the most enduring legacies of the nineteenth-century souvenir market was the image of Palestine itself. The market for Biblical and Orientalist images spurred an entire photographic genre that supported a significant ecosystem of photographic studios. Such photos of course built on the earlier painting and printing traditions of such artists as David Roberts, but the new photographic industry also made photography accessible to Palestinian communities themselves.

This produced a paradox. Typical Biblical images, on the one hand, may have problematically enabled the imagining of an empty and ancient land or one filled with Biblical characters. On the other, for local communities, photographers also documented Palestine’s modern social life. In many ways, the rift between marketing an ancient land and the modern technologies that enabled such marketing, as well as tourism itself, shows just how modern the conception of Palestine’s ancientness is.

Along with photography, a more reliable global postage system produced the postcard. For those who could not visit Palestine, photography, and postcards in particular, enabled viewers at least a version of a Palestine visit. Some of the earliest postcards in Palestine were produced by Boulos Meo and sold through his store, a Jerusalem landmark at Jaffa Gate.

Speaking to Rami Meo, the great-grandson of Boulos Meo, who ran the store in the 1980s and 1990s, gives us some insight into how strongly the nineteenth-century image of Palestine was ingrained in the touristic imagination. Meo...
recalls going on buying trips to London to purchase British-authored books and images of Palestine, particularly those of David Roberts, which he would then sell to tourists visiting from abroad at the shop in Jerusalem.

The desire of more recent tourists to find a souvenir that reflects their expectations of the romanticized Biblical Holy Land of the nineteenth century persists to this day. In such instances, “authentic” souvenirs become a mirror that not only presents tourists with what they expected, but that also shows the ongoing ingenuity of contemporary merchants and the reciprocal interaction between trader and tourist that the tourism industry continues to offer.

Only when we begin to map the various souvenirs and cultural goods produced for the tourism market can we understand the important reach of the industry in the nineteenth century as it marketed Palestine abroad. More importantly, it also speaks to how the marketing of nineteenth-century merchants and artisans has, for better or worse, created an enduring legacy in how the Holy Land is still imagined today.

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Muftis, Niqabat al-Ashraf, and Mayors of Jerusalem

The Husseinis

By Khalid Zaki Husseini

The southwestern part of Syria – known since the twentieth century as the political entity Palestine, with Jerusalem as its heart – is blessed by its location at the intersection of continents, civilizations, and faiths. But this pronounced location also proved to be a misfortune, as Palestine has been the subject of competition for possession and control among both regional and global imperial powers. Nineteenth-century Palestine, a prized part of the Ottoman Empire, witnessed many threatening and destabilizing events. The century started with local actors reorganizing and reshuffling power relations once the invading French forces had retreated. In 1806, Palestine was used as a base and pathway to reclaim Mecca from Wahabi control. In 1808, during instability and a power struggle at the imperial capital of Istanbul, a large part of the Church of Holy Sepulcher was damaged in a fire. In 1809, the Janissaries revolted in Jerusalem. Between 1817 and 1823, a rivalry took place between various political and feudal families. Violent in some instances, the events of this rivalry started in the Nablus area and then spread to the rest of Palestine and took the form of a conflict between Qaysi (also known as Adnani or Arabs of northern origins) and Yemeni (also known as Qahtani or Arabs of southern origins) tribes. Between 1825 and 1826, the Christians, Muslims, urban, and rural people of Palestine united in their revolt against the local Ottoman government and set up self-governance. Between 1831 and 1840, Palestine was occupied and ruled by the Egyptian army, in defiance of the Ottoman Empire, as Palestinian reaction to this rule was mixed. Between 1840 and 1878, the Ottoman government applied the tanzimat, imperial reform laws and regulations that significantly impacted the political, social, and economic life in Palestine while European foreign influence increased greatly. During the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876–1908), Palestine enjoyed special attention, and development in infrastructure and services progressed.

In nineteenth-century Palestine – although it was geographically not quite defined at the time – administrative lines changed several times, but it was divided mainly into two parts. At the end of the century, the southern part was consolidated in the Jerusalem district that included, in addition to the city and its environs, Jaffa, Hebron, Bir Saba’, Jericho, Bethlehem, and Gaza. The Jerusalem district was attached to the Province of Syria and eventually became an independent district, directly administered by the central government in the capital Istanbul, known as the Sublime Porte. The northern part comprised the Nablus and Akka districts and part of the province of Beirut. Each province was ruled by a governor, appointed by the imperial head of state, the sultan, and reported to the Sublime Porte. Each district was governed by a mutasarrif, an appointed administrator. Imperial armed forces served the governors and administrators to keep law and order. Since religion was not separated from state, and Islam was one of the Ottoman Empire’s pillars, the grand mufti (supreme Islamic authority figure of the empire), known as Sheikh al-Islam, appointed a local mufti for each district as an extension of his authority. Another influential state institution in the Ottoman Empire was the Syndicate of the Descendants of the Prophet (Niqabat al-Ashraf), and the local heads of this institution in each district were appointed by Istanbul. The level of Ottoman government centralization in nineteenth-century Palestine varied depending on the conditions and events that took place. It is safe to conclude that this period witnessed a higher level of autonomy than the previous century. It became standard to appoint the three significant local positions and other local posts of social, political, religious, and economical nature from among local Palestinian personalities who became known as the notables. Security and administrative posts, including tax collection, remained to a large extent with commanders and...
bureaucrats from other areas of the Ottoman Empire, at least until the later part of the century. This class of notables not only acted as mediators between the people in Palestine and the authorities in the capital Istanbul, thus promoting decentralization and advancing local population interests, but also set the stage for Palestinian nationalism in the twentieth century. Notables also contributed to the blurring of administrative lines and defined Palestine, as known in the British Mandate period.

Similar to most imperial hierarchies around the world, including in the Ottoman Empire, that were based on lineage in addition to achievement, diligence, and intellectual abilities, the Palestinian class of notables rose from local, urban, scholarly achievers with noble lineage. Notable families developed from individuals when major positions became hereditary. Several Palestinian urban families joined the notable class, such as the Alami, Husseini, Abu al-Sauod, Jimai, and Khalidi families in the Jerusalem district. In addition to the urban notables of Jerusalem, a class of rural notables rose to positions of power and prominence, such as the Touqan, Abdulhadi, Nimer, Jarar, Al-Ahmad, and Madi families in the north and the Samhan, Abu Ghosh, Amer, Amleh, and Azzeh families in central and southern Palestine. The chieftains of large Bedouin tribes, mainly in the Negev, such as the Azazmeh, Tayaha, Tarabeen, Jbarat, Wahaidi, and others were also part of the notable class and played important roles in the management, development, and governance of Palestine. The relationships between the various notable families, whether rural or urban, were complex and included competition, rivalry, alliances, and cooperation.

The Ottoman Empire appointed locals to hold the secular administrative posts of governor and mutasarrif (district supervisor) and the religious posts of mufti (judge of religious courts) and naqib al-ashraf (supervisor of the descendants of the prophet Muhammad).

During the early 1820s, the Greeks separated from the Ottoman Empire, and local officials and officers in Jerusalem launched an unprecedented campaign of harassment, intimidation, and incitement against the Greek Orthodox community, in particular, and Christians in general, and the threat of a massacre was real. The Jerusalem notables, led by Mufti Taher Husseini and Naqib al-Ashraf Omar Husseini, took a strong stand against the Ottoman officials and issued a public statement defending the Christians and condemning the Ottoman officials and military. This incident increased the animosity of the rulers of Damascus who demanded additional taxes and penalties from the Jerusalem district. The population resented this request for payment as much as they objected to the behavior of the foreign Ottoman troops stationed in the city. Eventually, Governor Mustafa arrived with his army, stormed Jerusalem, and took Omar Husseini as prisoner, along with his ally Abdurrahman Abu Ghosh, a rural notable from Al-Annab village near Al-Khalil (Hebron). In a camp outside Jaffa Gate, they found the head of the Greek Orthodox monastery of Mar Saba being tortured in plain sight. A Jewish community leader was also held hostage. This event prompted Mufti Taher Husseini to call for a large meeting that was attended by Jerusalem notables, the heads of the Christian communities, rural leaders from near and far, and representatives of the Nablus notables. The revolt of 1924, in which Jerusalem was bombarded with cannon fire for the first time in history, started that day as a direct result of this meeting.

As all the members of the notable class played vital roles in the social, economic, and political developments in Palestine as an emerging national entity, the Husseini clan was an exceptional phenomenon in that class during that transitional century. During the nineteenth century, the Husseinis managed to hold the highly contested and powerful position of mufti, with the exception of short periods, starting with Hassan Abdulatif Hussein (1778–1809), followed by his nephew Taher Abdulysamad Hussein (1809–1834), his son Mustafa (1834–1865), and his son Taher (1865–1908). The position of naqib al-ashraf was also almost
Whereas appointees to local administrative posts were chosen partly based on personal merit, such as achievement, diligence, moral values, and intellect, the families of these individuals also rose in esteem and standing. As in many societies worldwide, a class of notables developed in Ottoman Palestine, and many such posts became hereditary.

a monopoly for the Husseini family, as it was held by Omar Abdulsalam Husseini (1800–1834) and his son Mohamad Ali Omar Husseini (1834–1875), Rabah Mohamad Ali Husseini (1875–1886), and later by Rasem Saed Hussein when the position lost its significance. In addition to the two top traditional posts in the pre-reform years of the nineteenth century, the Husseinis held several key modern positions in the last three decades of the century. Musa Taher Husseini held the positions of chairman of the trade council, was a senior member of the administrative district council, and served as head of the commerce courts as well as mayor of Jerusalem. Omar Fahmi Husseini also held the mayor’s position, as did Saleem Hussein Husseini (1884–1897). In addition to these local positions, other members of the family held several senior administrative positions in various provinces of the empire.

The success of the Husseinis in dominating the political scene in such an intricate and fluid environment and during such changing and challenging times can be attributed to several combined reasons. Many families in Palestine, including the Husseinis, had an honorable lineage as descendants of the prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and nephew Ali. This was a very important advantage in public life, as they were revered by both the state and the people. But lineage on its own would not be sufficient to achieve their status and accomplishments. The Husseinis consistently pursued the highest level of education possible at the time. By maintaining consistent access and connections to all levels of the state, sustaining cordial working relationships and the ability to build coalitions with the other notable families, attaining popularity and earning the trust and respect of the masses, the family was able to maintain its power position even under dire circumstances. Keeping peace and solidarity within the family also proved useful to maintain their privileges. Although the Husseinis were not a feudal family and started from economically humble beginnings, they managed to acquire a significant fortune through investing their high income in agricultural land, commercial rental properties, and industries, which gave them the significant advantage in politics of independent wealth. The Husseini family employed and reasonably applied religious and moral values to governance and leadership, such as fairness, humility, loyalty to the state, standing up to tyranny, social justice, moderation, and tolerance. In addition, the Husseinis kept strong connections to other areas and capitals of influence in the empire, such as Cairo, Beirut, and Damascus.

The Ahmad Rasem Al-Husseini photos are courtesy of Sa’id Husseini.

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Bayt al-Dajani Daoudi
A Prominent Jerusalem Family Deeply Rooted in Palestinian History

By Zeina M. Barakat

Bayt al-Dajani (the House of Dajani) is a prominent Jerusalem family historically estimated to be the largest in Palestine. It has deep roots in the country’s history, especially that of Jerusalem. In Sacred Law in the Holy City: The Khedival Challenge to the Ottomans as Seen from Jerusalem, 1829–1841 (Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage), Judith Mendelsohn Rood describes the Dajani family as members of Jerusalem’s ashraf (اشراف, supervisor) class. She explains that the ashraf and the ‘ulama (علماء, scholars) in Jerusalem and the surrounding towns made up the afandiyyat (الافندية), an Ottoman term for the clerical class that “included the Husaynis (الحسيني), the ‘Alamis (العلامي), the Khalidis (الخالدي), the Abu Sa’uds (ابو السعود), and the Daoudi-Dajanis (الداودي الدجاني).” In his book, The Notables of Palestine at the End of the Ottoman Period (1800–1918), Adel Manna’ states: “The Dajani family in Jerusalem was one of the largest families in number and wealth.”

The family carries the double name Dajani Daoudi, where Dajani refers to the extended family, whereas Daoudi alludes to the family’s role as custodians and caretakers of King David’s tomb on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

In the fifteenth century, the Dajani family – originally from Saudi Arabia – settled in Morocco, where Sheikh Ahmad Shihab Din Dajani (1480–1562) established himself as a renowned Sufi leader. When in a waking vision, Al-Dajani saw the spirit of God’s messenger David who pleaded, “Save me, oh Ahmad, for my rescue will be at your hands,” he understood that David’s tomb at Mount Zion was not well taken care of by the Christian monks. The latter were denying access to any other sect or faith. He led a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and worked hard to control David’s tomb. When bloody riots had repeatedly broken out between Christians and Jews over control of this site, the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman (ruled 1521–1566) issued a decree that appointed Sheikh Ahmed Dajani and his family as the site’s hereditary guardians, custodians, and caretakers, a position they held until the end of the British Mandate in May 1948 when Israel seized the site.

Having become the head of the Sufis in Palestine and Jerusalem, Sheikh Ahmad al-Dajani died in 1561 and was buried at Mamilla Cemetery in Jerusalem, where his shrine still can be found. Highly esteemed and pious, the family’s founding head became a role model for his community and descendants. By the nineteenth century, many family members were serving as spiritual leaders in the Jerusalem community (some issued fatwas). Others became muftis, judges, lawyers, administrators, doctors, teachers, businesspeople, etc., holding important functional, political, social, and educational roles in their communities and serving, for example, in various administrative, judicial, and religious posts. They steered away from day-to-day politics even though the family exercised much power and influence within the Jerusalem community and Palestinian society. The following highlights some of the family’s more prominent members.

When the Ottomans began to establish municipal councils, they instated the first municipality in Istanbul in 1858 and inaugurated their second municipal council in Jerusalem in 1863, completing actions the Egyptians had undertaken while ruling Jerusalem during the era of Ibrahim Basha (1831–1840). As part of administrative reforms, the newly appointed wali (governor) formed an advisory board, a consultative council, to help and advise him in the management of city affairs that included five appointed members: three Muslims, one Jew, and one Christian, whereas Abdul Rahman Afandi Dajani was chosen to serve as the first mayor of Jerusalem, 1863–1867. Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh in his book Our Homeland Palestine, points out that Palestine “was a small entity with limited authorities, minimum revenues that did not exceed 500 gold liras, and without a bylaw.”
The municipality provided services for residents, such as constructing and maintaining public buildings, roads, and markets, supplied residents with water, registered births and deaths, and provided security. Returns of the municipality came from municipal taxes and funds provided by the central government.

Haj Yusuf Wafa al-Dajani (1840–1950) was one of the most prominent merchants in Jerusalem, known as Bandar al-Tujar (بندر التجار, head of traders). He imported goods and distributed them to other merchants in the city, helped merchants solve their problems, and was known for his honesty and piety.

Politician (Mohammed Aref) Baker Pasha al-Dajani (1856–1930) was born in Jerusalem to a father who was a well-known jurist in the city and who taught him religion. Baker was fluent in Arabic, Turkish, and French, studied law in Istanbul. Upon graduation, he worked as a lawyer in Jerusalem, was appointed to various administrative posts during the Ottoman era, and later became a judge. He published and translated several books.

Abdul Mutaleb Abdel Mu’ti al-Dajani (1877–1945) was born and lived in the Nabi Daoud Dajani neighborhood. He worked as a money changer and in the silver trade and promoted cultural and artistic events in the Old City.

Major Khalil Zaki al-Dajani (1878–1957) was born, raised, and educated in Jerusalem. He joined the Ottoman army and was appointed governor of Jericho and transferred to Yemen before returning to Palestine to be the Ottoman legion commander. The German government granted him the Medal of Courage for his bravery.

Judge Ra’fat Baker al-Dajani (1886–1959) was born in Jerusalem and studied law in Istanbul. Upon graduation, he worked as a lawyer in Jerusalem, was appointed to various administrative posts during the Ottoman era, and later became a judge. He published and translated several books.

Jawdat Said Bakr al-Dajani (1888–1930) was born and raised in Jerusalem. Initially, he worked in the Ottoman government, and after the First World War became one of Jerusalem’s most prominent merchants. He was known for his boldness, courage, and generosity towards the poor and needy.

Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani (1890–1938) graduated from the University of Cambridge with a law degree and became a leading lawyer, politician, journalist, and thinker. He established Al-Muntada al-Adabi (The Cultural Forum) in 1919 and launched the newspaper Al-Quds al-Sherif (Holy Jerusalem) in 1920. Having joined the Hizb al-Difa’ al-Watani (National Defense Party), he was also one of the leading figures of the Dajani-Nashashibi faction that opposed the...
Husseini clan in the struggle for Palestinian politics. In 1930, he helped found Hizb al-Ahrar (Liberal Party). In 1936, he published the newspaper Al-Liwa’ (The Standard). He is the author of two books in Arabic, Fi Sabil al-Islam wa al-Arab (For the Sake of Islam and the Arabs) and Tafsil Zalamat Filastin (Explaining the Case of Palestine), and translated into Arabic Hizar (Beware), a novel by Turkish novelist Nameq Kamal.

His assassination in mid-October of 1938 left a considerable impact on the family and the community. It signified the escalating terror employed by extremists to silence the moderates. His funeral demonstrated his popularity; among the many attendees were representatives of all Jerusalem’s leading families.

As is the case for all Palestinians, the 1948 Nakba was a significant setback for the Dajani family, dispersing many family members in Arab countries and elsewhere throughout the world. Moreover, when the Arab-Israeli war broke out in 1948, Israel took control of the Nabi Daoud neighborhood’s Dajani homes. The mosque where the Last Supper was held, and King David’s tomb area are now under Israeli control. The Dajani family sought a restoration of their rights but without any success.

King David’s tomb and the walls of the Last Supper room were decorated with exquisite ceramic tiles before Jewish extremists vandalized them. A few years ago, the Israeli Antiquities Authority carried out restoration and preservation work at the site. Layers of paint were removed in the original building and original ceramic tiles were uncovered. The original ablaq (red or black-and-white Mamluk architectural ornamentation) was revealed. When vandals destroyed these restorations, the Dajani family unsuccessfully called upon those in charge to renovate and redecorate the walls with its original ceramic tiles. The two Dajani cemeteries located in the Nabi Daoud neighborhood were also vandalized and the grave markers were broken and destroyed to wipe out the Dajani family’s cultural heritage. Though the physical property has been damaged and the rightful residents are evicted and gone, the intangible heritage remains. The memory lives on; a day will come when justice prevails.
Throughout the ages, the Canaanite dwelling of Bethlehem has held a prominent place in the politics, religion, and archaeology of the Levant region. Best known for being the cradle of the birth of love and peace, incarnated in Jesus Christ, Bethlehem is holy for Christians, Muslims, and Jews, the followers of the three monotheistic religions. Thousands of pilgrims have visited Bethlehem since the fourth century. Historical Christian chronicles cite Bethlehem as one of the oldest religious sites, in existence since the second century. The history of the city’s churches – particularly the Church of the Nativity, one of the oldest in Palestine and the entire Christian world – as well as its monasteries and religious literature have attracted the interest of countless studious researchers.

Bethlehem also has a rich cultural history. Its houses have been destroyed time and again as a result of invasions, wars, and natural disasters. But they have been reconstructed, and today’s city has maintained its natural landscape with deep valleys and ravines in the north, east, and south, and has preserved its sacred twinning with the Holy of Holies, Jerusalem. But detailed information on Bethlehem’s economic and social life – the relations between the various population segments and their diverse religious, professional, and family affiliations – is generally lacking. This article aims to present an overview of the major events that took place in Bethlehem in the nineteenth century, under Ottoman rule, based on the accounts and diaries of visiting travelers who were eyewitnesses of critical events as well as on the information contained in Ottoman Shari’a documents. Back then, Bethlehem was a small town located on a hill, looking like a fortress surrounded by olive groves and vineyards, by almond, fig, and pomegranate trees, and by fields of grain, corn, and other crops. Travelers were enthralled by the beautiful natural landscape.

During the sixteenth century, Bethlehem had prospered like all other towns in Palestine at the time. In the seventeenth century, however, and until Napoleon’s invasion of the town at the end of the eighteenth century, the kasaba of Bethlehem (an Ottoman term for a medina [town] that is larger than a village and smaller than a city) and its population were adversely affected by a sequence of dramatic events and circumstances that included the tyranny of Ottoman rulers, the forceful imposition of high taxes, gruesome treatment by the authorities, bribery and corruption of authority officials and feudal lords, banditry, and Bedouin invasions. These practices had a deleterious effect on the population, and many people were compelled to leave Bethlehem.

In 1806, François de Chateaubriand wrote in his travelogue that Bethlehem was an isolated town with houses that were in miserable condition. He describes the topography and lists the agricultural products, also mentioning the dilapidated tower of Saint Paula of which no traces exist today* and disclosing that the Armenian Church had custody over the Church of the Nativity. When Chateaubriand left the town, he was escorted by six guards armed with daggers and rifles. He lauded the courage of Bethlehem’s men and denigrated the Bedouins who stopped him on his way to Mar Saba Monastery and forced him to pay entry tax to the monastery.

Ali Bey visited Bethlehem in 1807 and in his travelogue relates his meeting with shepherds who were on their way to Jerusalem to lodge a complaint at the court against shepherds from Hebron who had attacked their cattle and stolen two camels. William Turner in 1819 talks about highwaymen who threatened to attack the monasteries for refusing to pay taxes. Had it not been for the intervention of Jerusalem’s ruler, the
The refusal of Bethlehem’s residents to pay the unbearable impositions of taxes led to years of disobedience and conflict with the Ottoman Empire. From 1802 to 1803, the mutasallem (Ottoman-appointed administrator) of the Jerusalem sanjak (district) was Mohammad Al-Maraq, a despot who oppressed not only Bethlehem’s population but also Christian pilgrims. He imposed heavy taxes that burdened the population, and thus the people of Bethlehem revolted and brought their complaints to the governor of the Levant. The imposition of taxes that amounted to ten times what the population could afford also caused the Al-Quds Revolution, when from 1825 to 1826, the people of Bethlehem rebelled against the Ottoman authorities – which made it more difficult for the mutasallem to collect taxes. Peasants and farmers, headed by sheikhs from the Bani Malik tribe, the Abu Gosh family, and the sheikhs of Bethlehem, eventually managed to overthrow both the mutasallem and his successor, which prompted the governor of al-Sham (Greater Syria) to order his army to head to Bethlehem and levy the taxes. Fearful of the governor’s vengeance and wrath, the population, leaders, and farmers of Bethlehem took refuge in the monasteries and refused to surrender, whereupon the governor of al-Sham threatened to blow up the monasteries. The monks acted as mediators – and the population was forced to pay taxes as usual. However, no sooner had the governor left the area than the rebels resumed their disobedience and occupied Jerusalem’s citadel, as Bethlehem’s community leaders again refused to pay the tithes. This time, the Ottoman authorities subdued the rebels, hitting Jerusalem with artillery from the Mount of Olives.

Taxes also played a major role in conflicts during Egyptian rule. In 1831, the Egyptian forces of Mohammad Ali, led by Ibrahim Pasha, took control of Palestine and Syria. Ibrahim Pasha introduced reforms in the administrative system, cancelled some taxes, and engaged the population in the government by appointing local leaders as administrative rulers. On April 25, 1834, he issued orders to recruit one out of five young men for the Ottoman army and sent out instructions to collect all weapons in order to limit the authority of sheikhs and local leaders. Lastly, he imposed new taxes. In the ensuing discontent of the population, village leaders and sheikhs held a meeting and decided to revolt against Ibrahim Pasha and his army and to refuse, again, to pay taxes. The revolution broke out on April 28, 1834. The rebels surrounded Jerusalem and asked the Egyptian guards of the citadel to leave; but the guards refused, and a battle ensued that went on for several days. The rebels were victorious, entered Jerusalem, and looted the barracks of the Egyptian army after fierce street fights. When Ibrahim Pasha returned to Jerusalem, the revolution had already spread throughout Palestine. He hit the rebels in the north with artillery and defeated them in the area of Mikhmas; then he moved on to Beit Jala, where the rebels were barricaded among olive trees. But the Egyptian army broke through the barricades. Next, the
rebels pulled the army of Ibrahim Pasha to the area of Artas, where rebels were hiding around Solomon’s Pools, camouflaged. The Egyptian soldiers were resting near the lower pool, when all of a sudden and out of nowhere the rebels attacked, killing around 600 soldiers. Initially, Ibrahim Pasha was forced to retreat, but when the Egyptian army received new supplies, he proceeded to Hebron, Bethlehem, and Beit Jala and quelled the rebellion. Pasha ordered Bethlehem’s community leaders to collect all arms, and he completely destroyed the Fawaghreh Quarter from where the rebellion’s leaders had come. Nevertheless, as James Finn writes in his travelogue, the people of Bethlehem were a strong match for Pasha, and he himself described them as unyielding.

Edward Robinson reports that the number of weapons that Ibrahim Pasha had asked Bethlehem’s population to submit far exceeded the number of weapons the people actually had. As a result, they were forced to buy additional weapons to hand over lest they be imprisoned, banished to Egypt, or have their property confiscated. Robinson also relates that Pasha ordered ten elders and notables of Bethlehem to appear before him bound in chains. He rebuked them and imposed a fine of one hundred piasters. Titus Tobler writes that Pasha succeeded in quelling the revolution by using merciless power. He adds that at this time, the population of Bethlehem dropped dramatically as a result of wars, exile, and diseases (cholera broke out in Bethlehem in 1839).

But Bethlehem suffered not only from man-made destruction. On the morning of May 13, 1834, during the revolution against Ibrahim Pasha, an earthquake hit Palestine and caused severe damage to buildings, houses, churches, and monasteries. The belfry (al-rasas) of Bethlehem was entirely destroyed, and houses were made unfit for residence. Hundreds were killed. Aftershocks lasted for ten days. Carl Ritter relates that the people of Bethlehem suffered much from earthquakes that devastated the town, and Tobler writes that many people died as a result of the earthquake.

But the Bethlehemites managed to recover their town from hardship. In 1839, according to Robinson, Bethlehem’s economy was thriving, the town had several narrow entry points, and its houses were strong. He added that Bethlehem’s population worked mainly in agriculture but also made beads, crosses, and other artifacts from olive wood and mother-of-pearl. “The people of Bethlehem are restless,” Robinson concluded. In 1850, Reverend Jesse Ames Spencer expresses astonishment about the quality, solidity, and size of Bethlehem’s houses. And in 1858, Joseph Arezzo describes the people of Bethlehem as “simple, committed to Sunday service, and some of them go barefoot. The women of Bethlehem cover their chests and heads with a scarf, and the men wear a coarse garment.” He adds, “Probably, tailors in Bethlehem have very little work to do.” According to Arezzo, Bethlehem had a boys’ school that also served meals and a girls’ school, both overseen and funded by the Custodian of the Holy Land. Victor Guérin writes that Bethlehem was divided into eight quarters: Al-Farahiyye, Al-Najareh, Al-Qawawse, Al-Tarajme, Al-Hreizat, Al-Deir, Al-Anatra, and Al-Fawaghreh, whereas most sources cite seven quarters, based on the various Christian denominations, combining Al-Anatra with Al-Deir, and noting that Al-Fawaghreh was inhabited by the town’s Muslim residents.

When in 1840, after the Egyptian withdrawal, the Ottomans returned, they were so impressed by the reforms Egypt had implemented that they introduced their own reforms that historically became known as the Ottoman Charitable Organization, or Islahat (Reforms). Furthermore, the Ottoman authorities issued law reforms and edicts that included the Provincial Administrative Regulations of 1864, the Land Act of 1867, the Land Registry Law of 1868, and the Law of Proprietorship for Foreigners of 1868, all of which regulated ownership of land for individuals and the state.

In addition, the Ottoman authorities introduced procedures and administrative regulations into the government, such as establishing local and regional councils and initiating the election of elders’ councils. In fact, the election of the first council in Bethlehem – consisting of elders from the three main

It had been foretold that Bethlehem would be great among the nations, and it has proven so, if not in size then in the wealth of its history and culture.
During the 1850s, an Ottoman reform movement encouraged Western religious and civil organizations to build monasteries, schools, and hospitals in Palestine. Some permits were given even before the law allowing foreigners to own property in the empire was issued in the mid-1860s. Thus, St. Joseph’s School was founded in 1853, the Salesian School in 1863 and its church in 1877, the Omari Mosque in 1864, the Carmelite Sisters Convent in 1876, the English School in 1886, the French Hospital in 1891, La Salle Christian School in 1892, the Lutheran Christmas Church in 1898, and the Casa Nova Guesthouse in 1906. The Saraya, or Government House, was renovated in 1897 and included the police station and the headquarters of Bethlehem’s municipality. Furthermore, the Ottoman authorities established a post office in 1899 and constructed new roads in Bethlehem and Hebron. Around 50 vehicles carried passengers and the luggage of merchants to Bethlehem’s train station from where trains commuted to Jerusalem and back.

Looking back to sociopolitical developments in the middle of the nineteenth century, we can observe a strengthening of the phenomenon of partisanship. Villages were traditionally divided into two major organizations that reflected the power of tribes and their elders, the strongest of which lived in Hebron (the Qais) and in and around Jerusalem (the Yemen). Lack of road security, weak authorities in the countryside, and Bedouin invasions were among the main reasons for the emergence of a tribal system that was characterized by frequent battles and conflicts. Bethlehem’s inhabitants, like the people of Abu Ghosh, belonged to the Yemen tribe. Count De Volney discusses tribal disputes in the Bethlehem area at the end of the nineteenth century and mentions that around 600 men in Bethlehem were fully armed in order to resist the tyranny and despotism of belligerent villages. He adds that common security interests among the people were more important than the religious differences between Christians and Muslims. Even James Finn, the British consul, intervened as a mediator in one of these disputes.

When in the middle of the century, the Ottoman Empire gradually became more cooperative and appeasing, and European countries began to intervene in the internal affairs of the Holy Land, imposing themselves as protectors of Christian communities, the question of the holy places was removed from the Ottoman divan and carried into the international arena. The issue became an instrument of political power that first involved...
France and England, then Tzarist Russia; Prussia and Austria followed suit, and Germany and Italy soon entered the picture.

Competition and frequent disputes and conflicts characterized not only secular concerns but also the relations among the various Christian denominations, as each sought custody of the holy places and strove to have exclusive rights to the renovation of existing holy sites and the construction of new monasteries and churches. Conflicts over control of the holy places had steadily increased between the Franciscan Catholics, Greek Orthodox, and Armenians. Whichever party, according to its influence, enjoyed preference at the Sublime Porte (central government of the Ottoman Empire) was able to get full access to and control over the various churches. Such differences persisted over more than two centuries. But in the late eighteenth century, after painstaking negotiations, France obtained the right to protect Catholics in Palestine from Ottoman power, whereas Russia was granted the right to protect the Greek Orthodox and in 1808 gained the right to protect the holy places in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The Armenians were able to establish their ownership of parts of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and of the Church of the Nativity between 1810 and 1829.

After 1841, however, hostilities were renewed mainly between notables of the Orthodox and Catholic faiths. Russia began to rebel against the Ottoman state when the Franciscans accused the Greek Orthodox (protected by Russia) of having stolen the Nativity Star, which led to the Crimean War (1853–1856). Attempts to reign in such disputes were made in 1852 and 1853, when the Treaty of Paris stipulated that no changes could be made to holy sites without the consent of all denominations – affirming a firman (decree) issued in 1757 by the Ottoman sultan Osman III to determine the ownership and responsibilities of the various Christian denominations regarding the holy sites.

But conflicts continued to arise. In 1873, Greek Orthodox monks attacked Catholic priests, and both the local authorities and the French consul had to intervene to put an end to the fight. In 1869, a fire broke out in the Church of the Nativity, and the curtains were burnt, causing serious disputes between Greek Orthodox and Catholic priests as to which party had the right to buy new curtains. In 1877, Armenian and Greek Orthodox priests engaged in conflicts over who would clean the church walls and over putting a carpet on the floor. From M. Russel and De Vogue we know about conflicts that took place during Christmas celebrations in 1860, leading to the canceling of the Christmas Eve midnight mass due to a physical fight. The 1878 Treaty of Berlin (that reconstructed the regional map after Russia had won the Russo-Turkish war) mentions for the first time what has become known as the Status Quo arrangement that outlines rights and responsibilities over Christian holy sites in Palestine.

Many travelers, including A. Tristram (1857), S. Munk (1863), Qasatli (1874), Thomson (1875), T. Dumas (1880), and Bazelaire (1894), wrote about the manufacture of religious relics such as crosses and beads, made by skilful Bethlehem artisans and sold to pilgrims and tourists in souvenir shops. Some merchants displayed their goods in Manger Square in front of the Church of the Nativity, and some participated in international exhibits such as the Vienna Exhibit of 1873. The brothers Michael and Gabriel Dabdoub took part in the Chicago Exhibit in 1893, the Handal brothers exhibited in Philadelphia in 1896 and in Saint Louis in 1904, and Suleiman Jacir and partners in Paris in 1913. Moreover, merchants from Bethlehem opened commercial stores in European cities such as Paris and Rome, and in New York, with some going as far as the Philippines. When in the late nineteenth century, the political situation had stabilized and Bethlehem showed signs of prosperity, people started to move outside the old town’s historical boundaries, expanding Bethlehem first towards Ras Fteis Road (today Star Street) to the south, then also to the north and east. Families successful in making and trading religious relics left for the United States and Europe to do business, among them the Dabdoub, Handal, Jacir, Michael, Jaar, and Abu Khalil families. Many had done well and become wealthy, and some returned to Bethlehem for investment purposes, building extravagant houses and palaces in the early twentieth century.

Alexander Schölch asserts that Bethlehem was prosperous late in the nineteenth century, explaining that the city was changing and developing constantly as a result of European influx, the marketing of religious

**Bethlehem became a city in 1894, when the Ottomans established a municipality.**
In 1894, Schölch cites Palmer in the following categorization of professions in Bethlehem:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Number of Professionals in 1894</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructors</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsmen</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services and Trade</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Producers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Church of the Nativity and local monasteries were the only large buildings that existed in and around Bethlehem. When the town’s citizens gained in prosperity and even wealth, they renovated and expanded their homes. While families such as the Ghazawi, Sabbagh, and Qattan families built and expanded their large houses inside the old city, others built outside the town’s traditional center, which changed the urban landscape. The following palaces have become landmarks around Bethlehem: Jacir Palace, built in 1914; Hermas Sons Palace, 1912; Saleh Giacaman Palace, 1908; Suleiman Handal Palace, 1912; and Anton Jaar Palace, 1914.

Khalil Shokeh received a bachelor of arts degree in social science (history was not yet offered) from Bethlehem University, a master’s degree in academic administration from Southern Illinois University, and a diploma in management from Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne in England. He held numerous academic and administrative positions at Bethlehem University before being appointed director general of the first Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education and then director general of the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Mr. Shokeh archived the relevant materials in the Bethlehem municipality in preparation for digitizing the archives. He has published several social historical books and articles, most notably *The History of Bethlehem during the Ottoman Period, 1517–1917* (in Arabic, 2000); *A Tour of Battir Village (in Arabic)*; *A Tour of Beit Jala’s History (in Arabic and Spanish)*; *Picturesque Bethlehem, Bethlehem: Origin and Development of Bethlehem Municipality, 1880–1967* (in Arabic and English); *Bethlehem and Record 366, Palaces and Mansions in Bethlehem; and 115 Bethlehemite Personalities* (in Arabic, 2020). Currently, he is the director of Dar al-Sabagh Diaspora Studies and Research Center.

At the time of Saint Jerome, Paula was a wealthy woman who built this tower to have a place to live and pray near the birthplace of Jesus, since at that time women were not allowed to live in monasteries.

Selected sources that offer a glimpse into the rich history of literature on Palestine

- François-René de Chateaubriand, *Travels in Greece, Palestine, Egypt, and Barbary during the Years 1806 and 1807*, Vols. 1 and 2.
- Leonie De Bazelaire, *Chevauchée en Palestine*, Tours: Mame, 1890.
- C. F. Volney, *Travels through Syria and Egypt in the years 1783, 1784, and 1785*, London 1878.
Imagine a deserted piece of land void of any culture. A country whose population is mainly nomad, with no attachment to the land and a poor economy. Could this description apply to a country that over 100 years ago hosted diplomatic representations from all the main Western colonial powers? Certainly not. Palestine’s historical, archeological, and religious richness is unquestionable, and references to a “land without a people” or a “desert” that was made to “bloom” by others, incomers, must be understood as Orientalist political marketing by these others to legitimize their control, not expressions based on reality. This article is not comprehensive, yet it describes some of the aspects that shaped the work of diplomatic representations in Palestine during the last years of the nineteenth century.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Palestine’s population amounted to almost 600,000, the vast majority of them Arabs, and over 12 percent of them Christians. The Jewish population stood at around 3 percent, considerably less than the thriving Jewish communities of Syria, Iraq, and Egypt at that time. Those were the years when the Zionist movement was created. Its founding father, the Austro-Hungarian journalist Theodor Herzl, wrote in “The Jewish State”: “We should there [in Palestine] form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism.”

This was certainly a suitable starting point to gain the sympathy of European colonial powers. Pro-Zionist British officials, such as James Balfour and Lloyd George, tended to agree with such perceptions, including the justification to negate the rights of the indigenous Arab Palestinian population. It was also a period when Christian Zionist narratives were not rare in the United Kingdom and part of Protestant missions in Palestine.

Palestine’s religious significance and privileged geographical location attracted pilgrims, foreign congregations, and foreign workers who needed consular services. But this was just the beginning. Around 1870 – before the Zionist Congress, the First World War, Sykes-Picot, Hussein-McMahon, and Balfour – the main colonial powers had already collected vast amounts of information about Palestine, the land and the people.

French intellectual Victor Guérin produced several volumes of his *Geographic, Historical, and Archeological Description of Palestine between 1868 and 1880*. Meanwhile, the British Palestine Exploration Fund had prepared some of the most detailed maps of Palestine, including extensive archaeological descriptions. European travelers wrote descriptions of Palestine that excel in the number of details they provide, many of them unrelated to religion.

An important part of the Berlin Treaty of 1878 was the ratification of the Status Quo agreement over rights and responsibilities at the Christian holy sites, involving a set of regulations and practices that aimed to prevent any disputes or changes over the most important sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The Status Quo later included other sites and was not reduced only to the Christian presence, including notably Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound. In terms of practice, the agreement strengthened the importance of the Western diplomatic missions, with the French in charge of protecting Catholic interests in Palestine, and confirmed the role that, since the eighteenth century, Russia had increasingly played in protecting Orthodox interests.
closely linked to the country’s assumed role as protector of Catholic interests in the East. In Palestine, other countries entered this exclusive club, not necessarily without creating rivalries. The most relevant was the inclusion of Italy (that opened its Jerusalem consulate to represent the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia before the country’s unification in 1843), Belgium (1851), and Spain (1853).

In 1847, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem was reestablished in an attempt to expand the Roman Catholic presence in Palestine. The initiative was partially encouraged by the increasing presence of Protestants (supported by the British) in Jerusalem and by the fact that the Franciscans of the Custodia did not speak Arabic and had not ordained Palestinian monks. Father Joseph (Yousef) Valarga became the Latin patriarch that year. He was young (34 years old) and fluent in Arabic, having served as a Holy See diplomat in Syria. He was welcomed by the French consul (who had already reported to Paris that the new patriarch was from “Sardinia,” insinuating the rivalry with the French interests) and impressed the faithful by delivering his first sermon in Arabic. This was warmly welcomed by the Palestinian Catholic community, yet it increased the existing tensions with the Franciscans and with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. Patriarch Valarga strongly pushed the idea of a national church, with Palestinian priests, arguing that “A patriarchate without national clergy is a mockery, something like a ghost.” This was not necessarily a popular idea among the foreign clergy who had monopolized the control of Jerusalem’s main churches for centuries.

The Latin Patriarchate contributed to the expansion of the services provided by Catholic institutions for all Palestinians. Saint Louis Hospital in Jerusalem, for example, attended to 1,200 patients in 1897, only a year after its completion. Almost half of these were Christians from various denominations (mainly Latin, Orthodox, Armenian, Copt, and Protestant), whereas the other half were Muslims. Three Jewish patients were also treated. Among the most fascinating documents that describe this process are the diaries of Soeur Emilie de Vialar, the French founder of the Saint Joseph congregation who created a network of institutions in Jaffa, Bethlehem, Ramleh, Jerusalem, and Ramallah for the benefit of the Palestinian population.

But here comes the clash: Despite the fact that Patriarch Valarga’s popularity and enthusiasm had brought fresh blood to the local Catholic Church, it was France, the “protector of the Catholic interests in the East,” who initially opposed the move—without considering the reality of Palestine. “I believe that the establishment of a Catholic diocese in Jerusalem will not be a good project in itself for us. In fact, it is not useful and is perhaps harmful,” wrote French Foreign Minister Guizot in 1847 to his ambassador in Rome. One of the French concerns was that the existence of a “Bishop of Jerusalem” would lead the British to do the same and install an Anglican bishop, expanding the British interests in the area.

The United Kingdom had already opened a consulate in 1839, and Prussia (which later became Germany) had established its diplomatic presence in Jerusalem in 1842. By the end of the nineteenth century, Germany had consuls also in Jaffa and Haifa. The...
first Protestant missions in Palestine were part of a Prussian-British decision to establish a joint presence in Palestine. Mainly political differences split the church a few decades later, consolidating separate Anglican and Lutheran missions.

Eventually, France changed its position and cooperated with the Latin Patriarchate. This cooperation ranged from financial contributions to the strong defense voiced by Consul Paul-Emile Botta when members of Beit Jala’s Orthodox community, opposing the establishment of a Latin church in their town, besieged Patriarch Valerga in the property acquired by the Latin Patriarchate, even shooting at him. The siege ended with the intervention of the French consul who pressured the Ottoman authorities to take action. The patriarch was “exiled” to Jaffa, where he had to await a verdict from Istanbul.

Patriarch Valerga’s case remains a testimony to the intermingling between diplomatic engagement and nationalism in Palestine during the second half of the nineteenth century. Notably, the parties that opposed his appointment shared their disregard for the aspirations and rights of the local population.

In other words, was it a coincidence that most if not all foreign congregations discouraged the presence of Arab Palestinian priests? Certainly not. A struggle between the Arab congregation and the Greek hierarchy in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem had already manifested itself during the early nineteenth century and kept the parties’ relationship tense. Greece established its consulate general in 1862, a logical move considering the geographical proximity, religious importance, stream of Greek pilgrims, and growing Greek population in Palestine, a common trend in other Arab countries, such as Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, as well.

During the British Mandate, though, it became clear that Athens’ essential diplomatic goal was “the preservation of the Jerusalem patriarchate’s Greek national character,” as explained by Konstantinos Papastathis.

The various examples of diplomatic engagement in Palestine during the nineteenth century are a testimony to the country’s rich history and geographical importance. France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom, Russia, Greece, and even the United States (since 1844) are among those who can simply open their diplomatic archives to attest to what has happened to the people of Palestine since the nineteenth century. Perhaps this exercise will also help them realize the moral responsibility they have in remedying the catastrophe committed against the land and the people of Palestine.

The case of the Arab Palestinian Orthodox community can be taken as one of the seeds of the Palestinian national movement. It is not a coincidence that most notable Palestinian nationalist media outlets in the first years of the twentieth century – notably Falastin newspaper edited by Issa al-Issa in Jaffa – included broad coverage of the Orthodox Church affairs section with regard to the demands to fulfill the rights of the local congregations. This case also attracted the attention of the Russian Orthodox Church that developed its own outreach in Palestine and was perceived to be close to the Arab-Palestinian faithful. Russia opened a consulate in Jerusalem in 1858 and built a complex for Russian pilgrims, with Russian diplomacy also getting involved in ecclesiastical matters.

The mixture of interests – including Western colonial ambitions, Arab demands for independence, and the collapsing last years of the Ottoman Empire – represented a particular scenario in Palestine, a land whose centrality to religion and archaeology attracted explorers and diplomatic missions, though this eventually served as a first step that evolved into colonialist ambitions against the inalienable rights of the indigenous Palestinian population.

The various examples of diplomatic engagement in Palestine during the nineteenth century are a testimony to the country’s rich history and geographical importance. France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom, Russia, Greece, and even the United States (since 1844) are among those who can simply open their diplomatic archives to attest to what has happened to the people of Palestine since the nineteenth century. Perhaps this exercise will also help them realize the moral responsibility they have in remedying the catastrophe committed against the land and the people of Palestine.

Xavier Abu Eid, a political scientist, has a master’s degree in diplomatic studies.

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Footnotes:
3 Ibid., p. 250.
The Ottomans exercised their authority as a sovereign state over the holy places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, issuing decrees that defined the different rights of the various Christian denominations. Some of these decrees reflected realities on the ground, others the empire’s changing political interests or the effectiveness of pressure groups that lobbied especially in Istanbul. Thus the rights of one denomination might be expanded at the expense of those of another. The Ottoman Empire’s weakness during the last two centuries of its reign played an important role in these arrangements, especially when concessions to Western powers began to erode the bones and structure of the state, gradually affecting also the holy sites.

Due to its demographic percentage, the Greek Orthodox community occupied a prominent place in the empire’s calculations. Not only did the many Christians in Arab countries have to be taken into account, including Arabs, Syriacs, Copts, Chaldeans, Armenians, and more, but also those living in Turkey, Greece, and Eastern Europe. Tsarist Russia, as the largest Orthodox country, played a considerable role in this matter and acted as the protector of this community. Russia was a direct neighbor of the Ottoman Empire, and the relationship was marred by long-term wars and hostile relations. Furthermore, the empire’s alliances and changing interests were taken into account, such as when Istanbul, for example, in 1536 recognized France as the protector of the Catholics and granted additional privileges to Latin Catholics (Roman Catholics).

The restoration of churches was a major source of conflict among the various Christian denominations. Substantial repairs were impossible to carry out without permission from the Ottoman authorities, either the central administration or officials in the periphery, or even both. But such regulations should not be viewed as absolute, as the Ottoman state during this period was not a “state of law” in the contemporary sense. Bribery, administrative corruption, personal interests of local rulers, and the ability of this or that denomination to circumvent the law played a significant role. Concerns of internal peace and security should not be ignored either. Moreover, the churches’ so-called historical rights fluctuated continuously according to internal balance considerations and the empire’s changing international interests.

I tend to believe that permission was necessary in cases where the restoration required the import of materials from outside the Ottoman Empire or in the case of foreign funding for restoration work. But in cases of limited restoration and periodic maintenance work, the various Christian dignitaries did not need permission from the central authorities in Istanbul or even from local authorities. I reached this conclusion after reviewing dozens of documents, records, and sources. But such modes of operation could not be taken for granted, as sometimes even slight interferences in church matters needed permission. The philosophy that prompted the various Christian denominations to obtain restoration permits considered this act as serving to protect the historical rights and confirm church ownership of the party that made the request.

In the last two centuries of Ottoman rule, in light of its declining authority in all fields and the growth of internal and external forces, the idea of reaching as much consensus as possible between the Christian denominations without the empire’s intervention encouraged them to resolve their differences and
The Ottoman state did not invent all the laws that are related to the Church of the Nativity and other churches in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, as some date back to Mamluk rule, and some problems resulted from the arrangements imposed by Saladin after his defeat of the Crusaders. During the Mamluk era, it was impossible to carry out restoration work in the Church of the Nativity without the permission of the sultan himself. For example, in 1480, permission was granted to restore the roof of the Church of the Nativity, and the restoration was implemented with the support of King Edward IV of England, Philip Duke of Burgundy, and the Doge of Venice, whereby the first provided lead, the second wooden beams, and the third secured transportation to Jaffa port and provided craftsmen and technicians.

A similar manner was adopted in 1842, when the Church of the Nativity remained severely damaged from an earthquake that had struck in 1834, and the Orthodox Patriarchate obtained permission to carry out the necessary restoration work. During these works, the marble wall panels were replaced with plaster, much of the roof timber was replaced, as were the lead sheets that covered the roof and the windows, while the remaining wall mosaics were protected, the bema and the surrounding areas in the northern and southern naves were covered with large marble tiles, and the church hall was paved with stone tiles that are still in use. These comprehensive works strengthened the Orthodox Patriarchate’s authority over the Church of the Nativity, rendering it the semi-absolute owner of the church. The Latins (Roman Catholics) retained only a share in the Cave of the Nativity.

In 1847, the Latins reacted by adding to the Nativity site a silver star that bore a Latin text, which was considered a declaration of presence in the holiest spot in the Cave of the Nativity. The Greek Orthodox understood the symbolic meaning of the star and thus removed it. And since the Ottoman Empire was obliged to take the international dimensions of such a matter into consideration, Ottoman Sultan Abdul Majid I (r. 1839–1861 AD) placed an alternative star on his own account in 1852.

Obviously, decisions regarding the Christian holy places in Palestine were integral in the empire’s international conflicts, such as with Russia, France, Britain, Italy, Austria, and other countries. Thus, international intervention and French pressure prompted Ottoman Sultan Abdul Majid I to make concessions in favor of the Latins. In particular, he was urged to restore the rights of restoration to how they had been in the eighteenth century, in other words to limit the growing authority of the Greek Orthodox, as embodied ostentatiously through the restorations of 1842. But the abdication in favor of the Latins infuriated Tsarist Russia, the patron of Orthodoxy.

A clearer outline of the respective rights and responsibilities of the Christian denominations was in order. In 1757, a firman (decree) had been issued by the Ottoman Sultan Osman III to outline and divide the rights and duties in the various Christian holy places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. In 1852, after long efforts that entailed a field survey as well as internal and international consultations – including with the Franciscans, the Catholic community that since the twelfth century had held historical rights – Sultan Abdul Majid I issued a decree to confirm what has come to be known as the Status Quo arrangements, reiterating his decision in 1853. These arrangements were furthermore confirmed in the Treaty of Paris (1856), the Treaty of Berlin (1878,
where the term Status Quo was officially mentioned for the first time, and the Treaty of Versailles (1919).

The 1852 firman affirmed Greek Orthodox domination over the most important Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. But even though the sultan had consulted with the various denominations, his decree can be considered a form of fait accompli imposed on everyone. Thus, the majority of the affected church notables expressed their utter dissatisfaction, alleged its injustice, and protested the disregard of their historical rights. But they respected the decision because it put an end to bitter and embarrassing conflicts—well aware that the consequences of these conflicts had international repercussions. The great powers announced their recognition of these arrangements, deeming it a declaration of a truce rather than a final arrangement. They monitored its application and quibbled over its application, which led to the fabrication of problems around the smallest details.

The firman did not outline clearly enough the responsibilities, mechanisms, and financing of restorations. The various problems became evident when most of the holy sites began to deteriorate, suffering from a lack of maintenance, until some of them reached advanced stages of erosion. For example, in the Church of the Nativity, problems became clear when its ceiling, column paintings, and wall mosaic eroded and largely collapsed due to a lack of agreement among the denominations regarding restoration. Their conflict was exacerbated by an Ottoman law that stated that whoever owned a roof owns the entire building, which rendered the notables of the Latin and Armenian churches unlikely to allow the Greek Orthodox to repeat the restoration work, as carried out in 1842, even though the church had fallen into a dangerous state.

Other disputes the firman failed to solve related, for example, to the Cave of the Nativity, where the Greek Orthodox did not recognize the historical rights of the Latins. In 1869, a fire in the cave destroyed most of its furniture, especially the embroidered curtain that had covered a large part of the walls of the sacred cave. The fire’s cause and whether or not it was started intentionally remained unknown. But this situation turned into an international affair when negotiations were held between France and the Ottoman Empire over who had the right to replace the curtains. The solution was delayed because France was preoccupied with its war with Prussia (1870–1871). In 1872, the Greek Orthodox took advantage of France’s defeat in the war and hung their own curtain on the walls of the cave. France reiterated its agreement with the Ottoman Empire that France would finance a new curtain and asserted that the Greek Orthodox action was contrary to the rules of the Status Quo. The French curtain was put up in March 1873. A month later, it was snatched from its place and torn. France intervened again and agreed with the Ottomans to reinstate the Status Quo through a committee formed by the Ottomans. The committee fined the Greek Orthodox the cost of the torn curtain, paid the sum to the Latins, and a new curtain was hung. It depicts the story of Jesus’ birth with a Latin text and the emblems of the Franciscans, Terra Santa, and the Latin Cross of Jerusalem. The new curtain, made of fire-resistant asbestos, is still present in the Cave of the Nativity.

The costs of the asbestos curtain were paid by French President Patrice de MacMahon (presided 1873–1879) from his own pocket, and the hanging of the curtain took place in 1874 in the presence of representatives of the Ottoman authority and the French consul. But this story would not have been laid to rest without huge sums paid by France and the Franciscans to senior officials of the Ottoman authority in Jerusalem. Such occasions do not end without the paying of bribes to “facilitate the implementation of the law,” a matter that was known and accepted as part of the existing system.

In any case, even though the implementation of Status Quo arrangements is frequently marred by problems and disputes, they became international law when they were incorporated into several international treaties that were approved by international conferences.

The Greek Orthodox, Armenians, and Latin (Roman) Catholics share ownership of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The Coptic, Syriac, and Ethiopian churches perform minor rites as well.

Notwithstanding the repeated violations and ongoing quarrels that the Church of the Nativity witnessed until the end of the Ottoman period, and regardless of who was satisfied with the Status Quo arrangements, who refused them, and who expressed reservations, they regulate the relationship among the denominations and their rights and obligations with regards to the Church of the Nativity to this day.

Dr. Nazmi Jubeh is the director of Birzeit University Museum. He is also a member of the Presidential Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Nativity. Dr. Jubeh has authored a number of books in addition to many articles on Jerusalem, Hebron, and the holy sites and cultural heritage in Palestine.
One Hundred Three Years Later

Bringing Balfour to Justice

One hundred three years after the Balfour Declaration, Palestinians have finally decided to tackle the origin of their national catastrophe and ongoing suffering, searching for new means of resistance in their attempts and efforts to restore their rights. Thus, an integrated project under the title “Following Up on Palestinian Rights through Legal Means” has been initiated by the president of the National Palestinian Independents Party and leading businessman Munib R. Masri. This project entails the legal pursuit of the British government as part of a comprehensive plan that has begun before the Palestinian national judiciary and that will soon be taken forward to British and international courts.

Mr. Masri explains that the case’s foundation builds on the Balfour Declaration as a sinister racist statement and moral crime par excellence. Not only did the famous declaration promise the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, granting them full-fledged political and civil rights, but also it attempted to reduce the Palestinians – the country’s indigenous people – to mere “existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” It recognized nothing but Palestinians’ civil and religious rights, even though they constituted over 92 percent of Palestine’s population at the time.

Mr. Masri adds that the Balfour Declaration stands as a heinous crime against humanity because it set the path for the suppressive colonial methods that the British Mandate applied in Palestine and eventually gave birth to the Israeli occupation state and its oppressive measures that are being implemented to this day. The Balfour Declaration was used to justify the displacement of more than 60 percent of a people, the theft of their lands, and the committing – with impunity – of war crimes and crimes against humanity, both in the past and ongoing to today.

On November 16, 2020, a group of plaintiffs from the hundreds of thousands of victims of the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate’s brutal military-occupation practices were brought forward by Mr. Masri. He asserts that turning to the Palestinian national judiciary was in no way futile or in vain. After a delay of 103 years, Palestinians are launching their message from Palestine, telling the world that they have not forgotten, nor will they forget, and they will pursue anyone who violates their rights. Mr. Masri adds that they are heading to the Palestinian judiciary to strengthen the sovereignty of their nascent state that has been recognized by more than 140 countries worldwide and that joined the United Nations General Assembly as an observer state in addition to being part of numerous international agreements that allow it to exercise universal jurisdiction against gross violations of human rights. These crimes are not subject to the statute of limitations nor are they limited by the judicial immunity of states.

The Nablus Court of First Instance decided three sessions during which it listened to technical experts and the pleading of lawyer Nael Al-Houh, the head of the legal team, and the testimony of witnesses and plaintiffs who have suffered and were subjected to displacement, their relatives tortured or killed during the British Mandate. Hajj Mohammad Jadallah (Abu Nihad), 103 years old, stood as one of the most notable witnesses, a living contemporary of the military occupation and British Mandate over Palestine.

The Nablus Court of First Instance decided during its last session to set February 21, 2021 as the date when it will announce the verdict of this hearing. Mr. Masri considers this day to be historic and predicts that a historic judgement will be issued in the name of the Palestinian people to condemn the British government, confirming that under its auspices and patronage Palestine was looted and handed over to the Zionist movement.

Mr. Masri notes further, “On this day we will announce the details of our legal action to be brought before the British judiciary, as we have begun to consult the world’s leading lawyers and human rights defenders. We will move forward to the British judiciary once the Palestinian judiciary has defended our human value, national and human rights, and justice.”

Mr. Masri will send a message to the British people, explaining that this move is not directed against Britain or the British people who embody civilization and ethics, rather it is an act to defend human values, the principles of human rights, and the rights of the Palestinian people who are still suffering daily as a result of the Balfour Declaration. In the message, Mr. Masri strongly condemns the statement of former British Prime Minister Theresa May who on the centenary of the declaration stated that she was proud of it, forgetting the thousands of innocent people who were killed as a consequence. He also stresses and clarifies the fact that the problem of the Palestinian people is not with Jewish people around the world, as Palestinians reject the Zionist racist occupation that has no connection to Judaism as a divine religion. Mr. Masri states that he expects all human rights organizations and people of conscience, in Britain and worldwide, to support this project.
In the summer of 1914, Nassar called on Palestinian youth to work independently of their traditional leaders, encouraging them to be self-reliant in seeking to improve conditions in the country and urging them to exert moral pressure on Arab landowners and discourage them from selling their land to Jews.

When Nassar opposed Turkey’s entry into World War I on the side of Germany, he was forced to go into hiding, first with the Fahaum family in Nazareth and then with the Sadryya tribe in Transjordan, where he worked as a shepherd for two and a half years. In 1918, he finally decided to turn himself in and was taken to the military tribunal in Damascus, where he received a pardon before the war’s end and returned to Palestine.

Nassar renewed his social and political activities in Haifa following the British occupation of Palestine. He reissued Al-Karmel newspaper and called for the establishment of Arab Economic and social harmony among them.” Moreover, Nassar continued to respond to pro-Zionist articles that appeared in some Egyptian and Lebanese newspapers. That year, he also campaigned for criticism of an agreement between Zionist leaders and some Arabs, as reported in the two Egyptian newspapers Al-Muqattam and Al-Ahram.

Throughout the British Mandate, Nassar continued to criticize Zionism in his newspaper. His wife Sadhij edited Al-Karmel and was arrested for one year in 1938, charged with supplying the rebellion with arms. The Mandate authorities suspended Al-Karmel several times and closed it down permanently in 1944, in accordance with the Emergency Regulations enacted in 1939 to deal with World War II.

At the end of his life, Nassar suffered a great deal, as he saw all his fears and warnings about Zionism, with its ambitions and plans, come true. He spent his last years travelling between his house in the village of Balad al-Shaykh in Haifa district and Baysan, visiting his relatives, the Wahba family, and spending time in his banana orchard. It may have been God’s grace that spared him from witnessing the fall of his beloved Haifa and of Balad al-Shaykh to Zionist forces in April 1948: he died in Nazareth on March 12, 1948, where he was buried.

Nassar was a man of great foresight, discernment, and steadfastness in both views and principles. A pioneer of political journalism in Palestine, he was rightly named its father figure. He was also among the very first to thoroughly study Zionism and persist in calling attention to the threat it posed. Proud of his Arab identity, he adopted the pen name “Muflih al-Ghassani” in some of his writings.

*This article is an adaptation of Nassar’s biography available at https://www.paljourneys.org/en/biography/6570/najib-nassar, which also contains a list of his writings and other sources (in Arabic).
Elsewhere

By Steve Sabella
Available online at https://stevesabella.com/elsewhere/

Steve Sabella (b. 1975 in Jerusalem, Palestine) is a Berlin-based artist with an MA in photographic studies from the University of Westminster, London, graduating in 2008 with the Caparo Award of Distinction; and a second MA in 2009 in art business from Sotheby’s Institute of Art, London. Among the many rewards Sabella has received is the Ellen Auerbach Award from the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, which led to a major monograph study on his art from 1997–2014, with a foreword by Kamal Boullata that ends with: “Sabella’s photographic images are a dream to discover.”

Sabella’s works have been exhibited at distinctive venues throughout the Arab and Western world and are in major museums worldwide and prominent private collections. Numerous documentaries on his work have been produced, and he has released short films and published essays on art. In recent years, Sabella has begun to explore image-making through words, beginning with his award-winning memoir, The Parachute Paradox (2016).

Images of Jerusalem and notions of the past and transience have featured prominently in Sabella’s recent work. In an interview with poet Asmaa Azaizeh in September 2020, “Liberating the Imagination from the Poisons of the Occupation,” he expressed how from the beginning of 2020, he was very productive, producing work that would normally take him five years to create, adding that he gained more clarity with every finished project. Among the many projects, The Sound of Jerusalem is 360-degree photography of Jerusalem’s skylines transformed into soundwaves. Similar in concept to Elsewhere, Palestine UNSETTLED is a liberating photobook journey to the “Palestine that once was, to the Palestine that thrives in our spirit… a voyage between image and imagination by looking directly at reality. The visuals float between painting and photography, revealing layers of history, where it becomes felt how the Palestinian culture was embroidered together by people who embrace life.”

About the exhibition Elsewhere, Sabella writes:

“Elsewhere is a journey to the land that once was, the land, the place that lives in our imagination. This is my seminal work after all those years of looking into images digging to discover their hidden realities. I recently wrote about how the archaeology of the future is the archaeology of the image and its genealogy. These are black and white images, photo-chromes from nineteenth-century historical Palestine, with a few images from Syria and Lebanon, colored in the past to give them a sense of reality. I collaged them, recreating the feeling of the place, as if one had traveled through a time machine and was suddenly present.”

Elsewhere consists of 20 plates of history. Like The Great March of Return, Elsewhere is the renaissance of culture and life constantly under erasure. Yet, the spirit of the place and its people will always be alive. We can only carry the torch forward.”

More information on the sources and works mentioned are available at https://stevesabella.com/.
Irina and Maher Naji

Born in Primorsky Territory, Russia, in 1965, Irina started painting at a very young age. She studied arts from 1976 to 1980 in Sevastopol, Ukraine, and fine arts from 1984 to 1989 at Baron Stieglitz Academy of Art and Architecture in St. Petersburg, Russia, where she met the artist Maher Naji. They married in 1987 and moved to Gaza in 1994. Their first shared exhibition was held at the Ministry of Culture in Gaza City in 1995.

Irina and Maher have four children, three of whom were born in Gaza. Having spent most of her time engaged in raising her children while painting on the side, Irina worked from 2004 to 2012 in various cultural centers and organizations, including the A.M. Qattan Foundation’s Children’s Center, Palestine Is Our Home Center, and the Women’s and Community Empowerment Center, while also giving art lessons at various organizations. Since 2012, she has been working as a freelance artist. Fond of the Palestinian people and their culture, traditions, and aesthetic heritage, she made the conscious decision to express their plight in her artworks.

Irina has participated in many regional and international art events and exhibitions. Her first solo exhibition took place at Dar Zahran Cultural Center in Ramallah in 2014; she was unable to attend due to travel restrictions. Among her most recent projects is the series Cities of Palestine that displays a new style. Irina’s paintings have been exhibited and bought by the Palestine Museum US in Woodbridge, CT, and by private collections in Canada, Germany, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and elsewhere. You can find her work on Instagram or Facebook under Irina Naji.

The Naji family originated in the now depopulated village Al-Sawafir Al-Shamaliyya on the southern Palestinian coast, and Maher Naji was born in 1963 in Jabalya Refugee Camp, where he completed his primary and secondary education. In 1983, he went to Russia, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in art and a PhD in architecture at Baron Stieglitz Academy of Art and Architecture in St. Petersburg. Having returned to Gaza in 1994, Maher worked as a lecturer at the Islamic University’s Faculty of Architecture. Until 2007, he also served as director of the Department of Housing Policies at the Palestinian Ministry of Housing.

At the same time, Maher continued his career as an artist, exhibiting his paintings in Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Dubai, the United States, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and elsewhere. More than 150 works have been sold worldwide. Currently, Maher is working on two projects: documenting traditional Palestinian folk costumes and visually representing the lives of Christ and the Virgin Mary in the context of the true Eastern environment in which they lived.

For more information and to view a display of Maher and Irina’s artworks, visit naji-art.com/en.
We are a fusion of our experiences, the places we’ve lived and the cuisines we’ve been exposed to. I often imagine myself like a jigsaw puzzle with a piece from every place, every experience, every celebration, and every loss. This recipe brings together my Palestinian lentil-soup inner child, with my Southern sweet-potato-loving adult. The discovery of the sweet potato came late in my life, when I was living in Tennessee where I attended graduate school. The merging of both flavors only came to be when I was searching for a cross between the density of lentil soup and the sweetness of potato, and I add ginger to give your tastebuds a sharp bite with each mouthful.

**Lentil and Sweet Potato Soup**

By Riyam Kafri AbuLaban

**Ingredients**

- 3 medium-to-large sweet potatoes, cubed
- 2 medium-to-large regular potatoes, cubed
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 cups lentils
- A piece of ginger (2 inches long)
- 1 chicken-bouillon cube in 2 liters of boiled water (or 2 liters of chicken broth)
- 1 tbsp butter
- Salt to taste

**Method**

1. Melt the butter in a saucepan.
2. Add the chopped onions and sauté until they become clear.
3. Add the sweet and regular cubed potatoes and sprinkle with salt.
4. Stir the mixture a bit, then lower the heat and cover the pot for a few minutes to allow the potatoes to steam cook and become tender.
5. Add the washed lentils and stir.
6. Add the water and chicken bouillon, bring to a roaring boil, then let simmer until everything is cooked (around 30 minutes).
7. Turn off the heat, allow the soup to cool, then purée using a blender.
8. Pour the puréed soup into a pot; grate the ginger into the soup.
10. Serve with lemons and a dash of ground cumin.

On weekends, Riyam Kafri AbuLaban’s kitchen smells of za’atar, cinnamon, lemon, and honey. She writes her own food story on www.riyamoskitchentable.com and can be found on Instagram @riyamoskitchentable.
By Bassam Almohor

Beit Felasteen (House of Palestine) on Mount Gerizim, south of Nablus, rises like a balcony over the ancient city that sprawls between and along the sides of the two mountains Ebal and Gerizim, the latter known as a holy mountain. The house was built during the second Intifada at the location where Bir al-Hamam, a Byzantine monastery dating back to the fifth century AD, was unearthed during the construction work. The monastery of Bir al-Hamam is well-kept with its magnificent mosaic, structures, and findings in the basement of the house. Two rooms of a museum were built to showcase the findings in situ. (Location: 32.210102° N, 35.265194° E.)

Beit Felasteen was influenced by Villa La Rotonda in Vicenza, built by the renowned sixteenth-century Italian architect Andrea Palladio. But as philanthropist and businessman Munib Rashid al-Masri, 87, points out, “Beit Felasteen is ten meters higher than Palladio’s villa.”

Wide, broad stairs lead to the house’s four matching sides, which all lead to the main rotunda, named by Mr. Masri the Dome of Mercy. The name Allah and those of the four prophets Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad are written on its sides in golden Arabic calligraphy. A marble statue of Hercules stands under the dome as a symbol of strength and steadfastness.

The house’s four wings are named after Palestinian cities: The Jerusalem-al-Khalil (Hebron) wing contains the study that houses more than 5,000 books and manuscripts, among them invaluable collectibles, as well as a two-meter-long ancient camera and a fossil shell that dates back millions of years. In the Nablus-Jenin wing stands a bronze statue of al-Buraq, the winged horse of Prophet Muhammad. The Haifa-Jaffa wing houses a gilded throne that belonged to Khedive Ismail Pasha (1830–1895) and a rare Picasso painting. The fourth wing, the Bethlehem-Nazareth section, is filled with rare wall paintings and frescoes.

Mr. Masri proudly leads visitors to the memory section, housed in another wing, that tells the story of Palestine and the Palestinian people. Murals cover the walls from floor to ceiling. They recount the Nakba and the mass expulsion of Palestinians and depict the Palestinian leaders who have written the recent history of the ongoing struggle. On the opposite side, a map of historic Palestine is illuminated in full color, surrounded by the names of the 530 Palestinian villages and towns destroyed during the Nakba.

Beit Felasteen lies in the middle of a 300-dunum garden (74 acres) that is planted with more than 8,000 olive trees. The southern front faces a wide round fountain with sculpted horses in its center. The historic glass house nearby belonged to Napoleon III and was brought by Masri from Paris. The elegant gardens were designed by the famous French architect Louis Benech.

“Beit Felasteen is not only a family house,” says Masri, “it belongs to all Palestinians and visitors.” Newlywed couples come to take photos in its beautiful, spacious gardens, and Masri holds important political meetings and events here. At the northwestern end, outside the surrounding walls, Masri built a grand mosque that overlooks the ancient city center of Nablus.

For more information and guidance, contact Ziad Abu Rdeneh at +970 59 938 2049 or aburdenehziad@gmail.com.

Bassam Almohor can be reached at almohor@gmail.com, +972-52-458-4273, or Facebook @toursmore.
Swim, Hike, and Discover Flora near Ein Qinya

While avid hikers prefer longer trails, walking from Ein Qinya to Ein Bubin is a perfect hike for beginners or for people looking for more than just a walk.

Only seven kilometers northwest of Ramallah lies the small village of Ein Qinya. The surrounding area is known for its lush landscape, fascinating stone terraces, muntar,* and numerous freshwater springs. It is also surrounded by Wadi al-Dileb, a nature reserve that begins west of Ramallah and ends west of Bil’in village.

On an early Friday morning, we hiked the part of Wadi al-Dileb that passes by Ein Qinya to reach Ein Bubin, a natural spring in the adjacent village of Deir Ibzi’. We parked our car near Ein Qinya’s mosque and descended into the valley to the south, leaving behind the village’s paved streets.

Turning right, we walked along the valley bed, passing ancient olive groves and wild plants, herbs, and flowers. Guessing their names is a favorite game of ours, and along this trail, you will not be disappointed by the natural diversity. The area is a nature gem, and whereas the path that leads to Ein Bubin is only two kilometers long and can be completed in less than an hour, we took our time, stopping to examine the Roman structures, take photos, and drink in the surrounding beauty.

Halfway through, we reached an intersection where we turned left to ascend a steep hill. This part can be challenging for some, but we enjoyed it because we got a bird’s eye view of the valley we’d just walked.

At the end of the climb, we turned left again to descend to the natural spring of Ein Bubin. It was easy to find by following the sound of trickling water and the thriving farmland that shoulders the road on both sides. Its large freshwater pool greeted us with serenity. The place is the perfect escape from a busy lifestyle, and you can enjoy it all year round: in the summer, a jump into the pool is all you need, and in the colder months, you can skip the dive and relax poolside while enjoying a warm cup of tea.

You can return to Ein Qinya by the same route or take a loop hike that we found enticing because it allowed us to see the valley from way up. Leaving the pool behind us, we took a narrow path to the left. After a short climb, we reached an unpaved road that circles around the mountain towards Ein Qinya. It led us to a huge oak tree that casts its shadow over another large freshwater pool.

Here, overlooking Ein Qinya, we used an already built stone campfire site to prepare our lunch: A pan of tomato with green chili and garlic and a side dish of scrambled eggs with the wild asparagus that we’d picked along the way. We were lucky to run into one of the local shepherds who frequently visit the place with their herds, seeking food and water, and from whom you can also purchase some fresh goat’s milk.

After a hearty meal and a good chat, we descended the mountain and headed back to our car. The full hike took us close to four hours, including the two stops. If you do not own a private car, you can reach Ein Qinya via public transportation; the ride from Ramallah takes less than 15 minutes.

Malak and Bisan are the founders of Ahlan Palestine, a travel blog that promotes tourism in Palestine. You can follow their adventures by visiting their social media platforms @ AhlanPalestine.

* Stone structures on fields and in olive groves. Sometimes also called farmers’ castles, they were used to store tools and crops and house farmers during the planting and harvest seasons.
**BOOK LAUNCHES**

**Wednesday 10**

**EXHIBITIONS**

**Wednesday 24**
18:30–20:00 Sign Language Virtual Tour of Printed in Jerusalem: Mustamloun, presented by sign language interpreter Thaer Daraghmeh, covering the exhibition’s five sections. Organized by The Palestinian Museum and exhibited through The Palestinian Museum social media platforms.

**Sunday 28**
14:00 Concluding tour of Printed in Jerusalem: Mustamloun, curated by Baha Jubeh, Abdel-Rahman Shabane, and Assistant Curator Sandy Rishmawi, which explores the history of Jerusalem through the city’s publications and printing presses (in Arabic). Organized by the Palestinian Museum. To participate, please register at activities@palmuseum.org.

**FILM SCREENINGS**

**Wednesday 24 and Sunday 28**
The Invisible Link presents weekly thematic videos about the challenges faced by the creative and cultural industries in Palestine and France at a time of social distancing. Audiences are able to view the video capsules at any time, ask questions, fill in surveys, comment, and enrich them in turn with additional content. Organized by the French Institute, Jerusalem, and Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, Ramallah. For more information, please visit https://www.facebook.com/iframallah. Broadcast via https://invisible-link.ps/.

**LECTURES**

**Wednesday 17**
18:00 “Object-in-Focus: Fatema Muhib,” organized by The Palestinian Museum and presented by George Al-Ama, will shed light on the biography of Fatema Muhib who left an indelible mark on the history of Palestinian art through her many works, inspired by the landscape around her, and through her illustrations of historical figures in school textbooks that were printed in Jerusalem. The event will be in Arabic and broadcast via The Palestinian Museum social media platforms.

**Sunday 28**
19:30 Podcast: Tracing the Hijaz Railway, organized by The Palestinian Museum and produced by Haneen Saleh with the contributing researcher Marah Khalifeh, traces and examines Palestine’s position along the railway’s route at a time when Palestine was linked seamlessly to its Arab surroundings. It highlights the social and political dimensions of the Hijaz Railway as well as its geography, impact, lineage, and disconnection. The event will be in Arabic and broadcast via The Palestinian Museum social media platforms.

**SPECIAL EVENTS**

**Thursday 4**
18:00 “Made in Palestine” is a workshop on the artworks produced by the participants through archival research that uncovered the branding once printed on the products of bygone Palestinian companies prior to and immediately following the occupation, presented by Ahed Izhiman. The workshop is organized by The Palestinian Museum in partnership with Palestinian Art Court – Al-Hoash as part of the Printed in Jerusalem: Mustamloun program. Broadcast via The Palestinian Museum social media platforms.
CULTURAL CENTERS

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Palestinian Heritage Museum
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The Edward Said National Conservatory of Music (ESNCM)

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Photo courtesy of ESNCM

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Dar Al-Sabagh Centre for Diaspora Studies and Research
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I felt almost vindicated when Facebook recently banned me for a mere 24 hours because of a post that didn't “follow our community standards on harassment and bullying.” To be honest, prior to that, I was feeling somewhat jealous of those who came back from a ban thinking that their posts were obviously feisty and effective while mine were rather insipid! I was banned for calling someone a “Racist stupid creature,” but I'd do it again because that creature was practically mocking a young Palestinian laborer who was trying to earn a living by sneaking into Israel very early one morning when some soldiers stormed in. The poor guy got so scared that he had a heart attack and died. I was fuming.

As for engaging in online exchanges, I tell you, things are not what they used to be a few years ago. Palestinians’ comments and their replies to Zionist comments on Israeli social media pages have increased considerably. They have also gotten more sophisticated. Often, Palestinians win the virtual battles; imagine! Not only that, but pro-Palestinian comments from non-Palestinians are way more frequent and way bolder. Admittedly, as futile as these cyber battles are, not to mention the risk of being monitored by Big Brother, I console myself with the thought that when Zionists read one of my comments, it will not only bother them, but it might even keep them awake for a while at night. I have never changed an interlocuter’s opinion on Palestine, and never will; I know. But it’s still worth it to make comments, and it is often amusing.

Nikki Haley, infamous for her “I wear high heels because...” is probably my favorite to pick on because of the outrageous material she posts on her page. In a usual criticism of President Joe Biden, she recently wrote: “Why reopen the Palestinian mission in DC without requiring that they come to the negotiating table? This signals a reversal towards peace in the Middle East.” My comment was: “May I remind you that the Palestinians are the ones being occupied by your favorite apartheid state under international law...” I’m omitting the rest which ends with “30 pieces of silver!” Another person then wrote, “The Palestinians are at the moment under the total control of the Israeli [Army] (called occupation in many other languages, other than Sanskrit). An indigenous population, at the mercy of immigrants, has to ‘come to the negotiating table?’ Negotiating about what? The fact that one deity did not choose them to live there?” And the fun continued!

The fact remains that as long as there is injustice, there will always be someone to gnawingly remind the world of this injustice. Social media has simply made resistance easier, more effective, and more peaceful, if you will.

Long Live Palestine!

Sani Meo
Publisher

www.thisweekinpalestine.com