

# Jerusalem's Palestine Archaeological Museum

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## Editor's Note

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## Abstract

The Palestine Archaeological Museum, renamed by occupation authorities as Rockefeller Archaeological Museum, is a spectacular iconic monument in Jerusalem. This museum tells two intertwined histories: the civilizational history of Palestine across millennia, and the 100-year political conflict that continues over the land of Palestine and its historical narrative. The history of the museum has been closely connected to Palestinian political history in the last century. The museum was initially established in the late Ottoman period and opened its doors in 1901. Following the British occupation of Palestine, the Mandate authorities transferred the museum collection in 1921 to the newly inaugurated Palestine Archaeological Museum. Work to construct new premises for the museum began after 1925, on purchased property known as Karm Shaykh al-Khalili, opposite the Old City, and was finally completed in 1938. It remained under British Mandate administration until the Nakba in 1948, after which it was managed by an international board until Jordan took steps to nationalize it in 1966. Shortly after, the museum was taken over by Israeli occupation troops in 1967 and has since remained under Israeli control, in violation of international and humanitarian laws. The complex consists of the museum buildings, library, and headquarters of the Palestinian (now Israeli) Department of Antiquities. The museum is considered a Palestinian cultural institution under occupation in Jerusalem until its future is decided in the final status negotiations.

## Keywords

Archaeology; cultural heritage; Department of Antiquities; decolonization; Mandate period; museums; Nakba; occupation; Palestine studies; Rockefeller.

A twentieth-century Jerusalem architectural landmark, the Palestine Archaeological Museum (renamed Rockefeller Archaeological Museum after 1967) narrates two overlapping histories: the civilizational history of Palestine across millennia, and the 100-year political conflict that continues over the land of Palestine and its historical narrative. The museum's history has been deeply intertwined with the last century of Palestinian political history, going through several iterations since the initial idea of its establishment at the end of the Ottoman era. The Imperial Museum (Müze-i Hümayun in Turkish) of Jerusalem opened to the public in 1901 and remained in operation until the onset of World War I. The museum's collection of antiquities was later seized by officials of the British Mandate and relocated to the newly inaugurated Palestine Archaeological Museum, established in 1921 at the Palestine Department of Antiquities. In 1925, work began on new premises for the museum, which eventually opened to the public in 1938 and remained under British Mandatory administration until the 1948 Nakba. Following Israel's creation and the annexation of the West Bank by Jordan in the war's aftermath, the museum was administered by an international board. In 1966, the museum was nationalized by the Jordanian government, and remained under its administration for a brief eight months before being taken over by the Israeli military occupation authorities in the wake of the June 1967 war. The multi-building complex, which today accommodates the Israeli Department of Antiquities (as it had the Palestinian Department of Antiquities), has been used ever since to promote a Zionist historical narrative to serve Israel's occupation of Palestinian land.

For the Palestinians, the Palestine Archaeological Museum represents their national museum under occupation, according to both international law and the State of Palestine's Tangible Cultural Heritage Law (2018). The complexities of the museum's trajectory since its beginning merit the retelling of its history, and examining its status from the perspective of Palestinian and international law. In the following narrative, I will be reviewing some of the recent scholarly material on the antecedents and predecessors of this museum published in recent years. Most notably, the work of Beatrice St. Laurent and Himmet Taşkömür, among others, have added significant knowledge on the overlap between the early Ottoman roots of the antiquity collections and the current museum in Wadi al-Jawz. This article aims to trace the layered history of this museum and the struggle between two competing narratives, an indigenous Palestinian narrative, and a Zionist settler-colonial narrative.

## **Beginnings: The Imperial Museum (Müze-i Hümayun) of Jerusalem (1901–17)**

Although Israeli historical studies and Israel's official narrative about Palestinian archaeology and museology during the twentieth century have consistently and deliberately obfuscated the museum's history, recent studies of the Imperial Museum of Jerusalem's establishment and development at the turn of the twentieth century have shed light on the early beginnings of the Palestinian museum and archaeological studies during the period.<sup>1</sup>

The late nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of archaeology as a new field of study as well as unprecedented interest in the archaeology of Palestine by Western researchers, archaeologists, and theologians. Exploratory studies by Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, Edward Robinson, Charles van der Velde, and others spurred scientific and religious interest in the history of the Holy Land. The most ambitious project of the period was the Survey of Western Palestine that was conducted from 1871–77 by a British team and produced detailed maps of Palestine; at the same time, archaeological excavations began at Tell el-Hesi, Tal al-Sultan, Jerusalem, Tell al-Jaziri (also known as Tal al-Jazar), Tell Ta'anek, and Sabastiya.

Palestine remained under Ottoman rule for four centuries until the collapse of the empire during World War I. The late Ottoman era had been marked by European colonial powers, particularly Britain and France, scrambling to acquire the already declining empire's territories and resources.<sup>2</sup> The first Ottoman law regulating the status of antiquities, passed in 1869 in the context of the Tanzimat reforms, sought to establish a legal framework for archaeological work. It urged local provincial authorities to collect archaeological materials by all means available, including purchase, and to dispatch them to the capital (Istanbul). To stem the rise in unregulated foreign excavation and the removal of large amounts of excavated material, the law was amended in 1874 to stipulate that all excavated material constituted State property.<sup>3</sup> The law was again amended, first in 1884 and then in 1907, in an effort to stanch the flow of antiquities out of the Ottoman territories at a time when rival European colonial powers were removing archaeological artifacts on the pretext of missionary work.

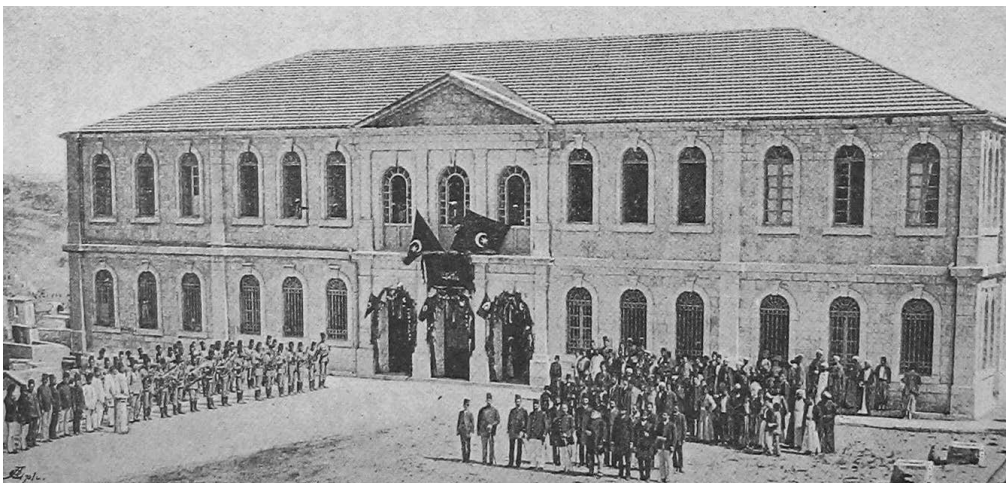


Figure 1. The Imperial Museum of Jerusalem was housed in al-Ma'muniyya School, shown here during the dedication ceremony, 1893. Source: [www.tarihteninciler.com/osmanli-kudus-mekteb-i-idadisi](http://www.tarihteninciler.com/osmanli-kudus-mekteb-i-idadisi).

During the same period, significant artifacts were assembled in Istanbul, including the Silwan Tunnel Inscription, an inscription of Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik, and

the Greco-Roman statue of Zeus from Gaza. Jerusalem's significance as a sacred site profoundly influenced the formulation of Ottoman guidelines during this period.<sup>4</sup> The Imperial Museum of Jerusalem, the first of four proposed provincial museums in the Ottoman territories,<sup>5</sup> developed with joint collaboration between the Sublime Porte, local authorities, and archaeologists from Britain's Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF).<sup>6</sup> Discussions regarding the establishment of a museum in Jerusalem had begun as early as 1891: in addition to housing and preserving Palestinian archaeological artifacts, the aim of the Ottoman project was to counter the spread of the – by then – ubiquitous biblical archaeological narrative.

The museum, known locally as the Jerusalem Government Museum, was located on the premises of al-Ma'muniyya high school (figure 1). In 1899, some 465 items were deposited in the museum collection and in 1901 it opened to the public. Alongside a Palestinian team active in the preparatory phase of the work, PEF archaeologist Frederick Jones Bliss inventoried the items and designed the displays. According to Palestinian historian 'Adel Manna', the preparatory work was overseen by Isma'il al-Husayni (1886–1945), then the mufti of Jerusalem and director of education.<sup>7</sup> Bliss's imprint was evident in the use of biblical terms for referring to chronological eras as "pre-Israelite" or "Israelite" and to pottery as "Jewish," ethnological categories that were rejected by later archaeologists. Notwithstanding his use of such language, Bliss went head to head with the PEF whose ambition was to establish a museum of biblical history. The American archaeologist complained that foreigners want to work without any Ottoman government oversight and with little regard for the laws and customs of the inhabitants of the land they were excavating.<sup>8</sup>

The museum's collection grew rapidly and by 1910 included more than six thousand artifacts from a wide range of excavation sites. The year 1909 had marked an important step in the museum's institutionalization, with the establishment of a Museum Committee and the creation of a catalogue in response to concerns about mismanagement of the museum's holdings raised by R. A. S. Macalister, formerly an assistant to Bliss who had taken over as the PEF representative in Jerusalem. The committee was made up of local citizens, including Ibrahim Khalil, Mustafa Hulusi, 'Abdallah Rushdi, Musa al-Budayri, Muhammad Kamil, and Husayn 'Awni. During its early years, the museum counted Ibrahim Khalil, Mustafa Hulusi, and Hasan Muhsin among its directors.<sup>9</sup>

With the size of the collection outgrowing the limited space at al-Ma'muniyya school, the Ottoman authorities developed a plan to transfer the museum's holdings to Qal'at al-Quds (the Jerusalem Citadel), but they shelved the plan at the outbreak of World War I. They nevertheless protected the collection during the war by storing the artifacts dispersed in various safe locations in the Old City. After the war, the items were retrieved by the British and later formed the core of the collection at the Palestine Archaeological Museum established by the Mandate government in 1921, furthering the alliance of scientific interest in the archaeology of Palestine with British imperial ambitions.

## Transition: From Imperial Museum to Palestine Archaeological Museum (1921–38)

World War I ended with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the fall of Jerusalem to British imperial forces. Designated as the mandatory power in Palestine, Britain embarked on facilitating “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” per the 1917 Balfour Declaration. Ronald Storrs, newly installed as the British military governor of Jerusalem, launched a renovation of the Citadel with a view to using it for safeguarding some 120 cases of antiquities captured from the former Imperial Museum collection.<sup>10</sup> The idea was revived of using the Citadel as the permanent site for the museum’s holdings but it was opposed as inappropriate by John Garstang, head of the Mandate’s new Department of Antiquities,<sup>11</sup> as well as the British School of Archaeology.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the museum, the Department of Antiquities consisted of five divisions – inspection, documentation, library, restoration, and photography.<sup>13</sup> Storrs introduced an archaeological advisory board, which he chaired in person, to organize excavation missions throughout the country. The board included representatives of the British, French, American, and Italian archaeological schools, in addition to two Muslim and two Jewish notables from the city.

On 31 October 1921, the British authorities celebrated the move of the Department of Antiquities into a building called Way House, located off Nablus Road, near the Dominican *École biblique et archéologique* (figure 2). The building housed the department’s headquarters, as well as the British School of Archaeology and the library of the American School of Archaeological Research library.<sup>14</sup> The Palestine Archaeological Museum was also initially housed in the British School of Archaeology, its artifacts displayed in a large hall of the school. The British move also served to lend an international colonial character to the museum endeavor, clearly messaging Palestinian heritage to be a universal rather than a national legacy. British archaeologist

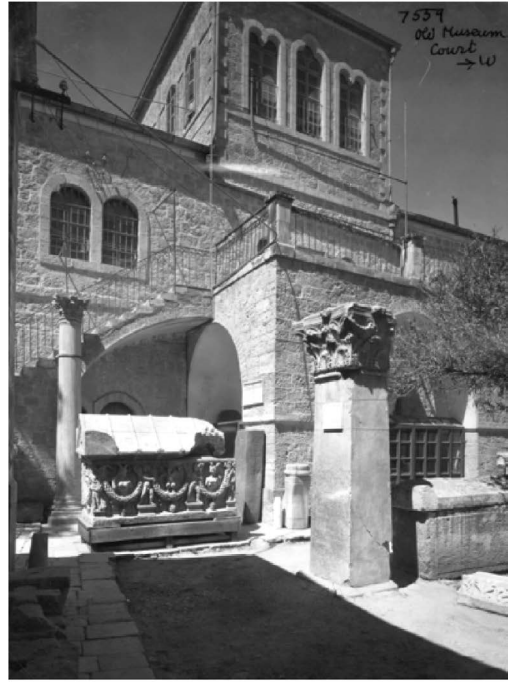


Figure 2. The internal courtyard of Way House, Jerusalem, where large artifacts of the Palestine Archaeological Museum were displayed, 1922. The building housed the Palestinian Department of Antiquities, along with the British School of Archaeology, and the American School of Archaeological Research.

Charles Phythian-Adams classified the holdings (being somehow unaware that an Ottoman catalogue already existed)<sup>15</sup> in 1924. In that same year, the British Mandate authorities levied a special tourism tax on Palestinians for the construction of new museum premises. Meanwhile, British Mandate authorities scouted for donations for their building project. This period also saw the launch of several private museums in Jerusalem, including the Islamic Museum established in the Haram al-Sharif in 1923 and the Franciscan Museum in 1920.

## **Palestine Archaeological Museum (1938–48)**

### *Museum Establishment, 1921–1938*

The Palestine Archaeological Museum commands a hill overlooking the Old City and the Mount of Olives at the end of Sultan Sulayman Street, next to al-Rashidiyya school and across from the northeastern corner of the Old City wall (Burj al-Luqluq). British town planner and sociologist Patrick Geddes, originally brought to Jerusalem in 1919 by the Zionist Organization to plan Hebrew University, went on to create the Mandate's master plan for Jerusalem, including his vision for a monumental archaeological museum on the plot known as Karm Shaykh al-Khalili, outside of Bab al-Zahra. The karm (orchard) surrounds the qasr, built by the renowned Islamic scholar and mufti Shaykh Muhammad al-Khalili in the early eighteenth century, and one of the first buildings to have been erected outside the city walls, on a spacious knoll of vineyards and olive groves.<sup>16</sup>

The site was apparently adopted by the Mandate government but major funds were needed for the construction, more than the government could provide. In 1925, American archaeologist and Orientalist James Henry Breasted<sup>17</sup> appealed to oil magnate and philanthropist John D. Rockefeller who agreed to finance the museum project for two million dollars. The agreement, signed in 1927, set out the financing conditions in a letter from Rockefeller to Lord Herbert Plumer, the newly appointed British High Commissioner to Palestine. Rockefeller's letter laid out several conditions, among them: the provision by the Government of Palestine of the Karm Shaykh al-Khalili plot, an area of twenty dunums outside the northeastern corner of the city walls; the removal of the current waste incineration site to another location; the integration of the area into the master plan for the city; the assurance that the museum would be dedicated to antiquities and not serve as a natural history museum; and, the Government of Palestine's establishment and management of the museum in consultation with an international advisory board of trustees.<sup>18</sup> Half of the grant was to be used to construct and equip the museum building and the other half for an endowment to cover the operating costs of the museum and of the Department of Antiquities. The grant was also conditioned on the preservation of the ancient pine tree that was built into the structure adjoining the two-story al-Khalili mansion. It was also agreed that the British Mandate government would appoint an advisory board to administer the museum.<sup>19</sup>

The Mandate authorities acquired the land from the Khalili family, and entrusted the design of the building to Austen St. Barbe Harrison, the Mandate government's chief architect and head of public works at the time. The original agreement stipulated that construction should be completed by 1931 but the project was delayed by political and logistical setbacks, including finding fifth-century Hellenic tombs at the site. The cornerstone was laid on 19 June 1930 in the presence of the British high commissioner, the director of the Department of Antiquities, and dignitaries of the local community. The work was tendered to a contractor from Alexandria, Egypt. On 20 May 1935, the Department of Antiquities moved into its new headquarters and work began on the museum exhibits and displays, a planning period which lasted nearly three years.

### *Floor Plan*

The Palestine Archaeological Museum (Rockefeller Museum of Jerusalem) is a large architectural complex that houses the headquarters of the Department of Antiquities as well as the museum itself. The complex is made up of exhibition halls, administrative offices, store-rooms, a library, as well as a museum garden and parking lots.<sup>20</sup>



Figure 3. Museum (Rockefeller) in Jerusalem. Museum. Telephoto from Mount of Olives (between 1934 and 1939). Matson (G. Eric and Edith) Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

A mix of Mediterranean, local, and contemporary architectural styles, Harrison's design was inspired by the rich and diverse architecture of Palestine. While the structure is basically classical in form and mostly symmetrical, it is replete with local architectural elements, such as domes, vaults, galleries, arches, windows, and courtyard. Harrison completed the blueprints in 1929 and the project was carried out by a special unit of the Department of Public Works, using local labor and local materials such as limestone quarried from the surrounding hills. The doors were made of walnut imported from Turkey, the metal window frames along with locks and handles came from Britain, and the main door was decorated with copper plates in the Andalusian style of North Africa.<sup>21</sup>

The building design is largely symmetrical, with its central axis extending from the landmark 300-year-old pine tree behind the building (which died in 1998 although its stump remains), through a central courtyard, to the main entrance to the east (figure 3). The exhibition galleries surround the central courtyard on two sides and the main entry is flanked by two diagonal wings: one housing the library, and the other a small auditorium. Along the hallways spanning out from the center of the building are offices, some of which are used as study rooms or to store collections. The exhibition galleries also feature recesses for the display of larger objects.

The museum building is an architectural gem. Its central courtyard draws its inspiration from classical Umayyad architecture, especially the Andalusian al-Hamra (Alhambra) Palace, a recognized Islamic architectural masterpiece. A reflecting pool bisects the central courtyard; a small interior court at one end of the pool is covered in the traditional blue and white Armenian glazed tiles featuring geometric designs, created by the renowned ceramicist David Ohannessian. Originally, a fountain with a small octagonal basin graced the middle of the space, now replaced by a circular basin. The courtyard is surrounded on three sides by open galleries with vaulted ceilings divided by crossed arches where larger items from the museum's collection are displayed.<sup>22</sup>

The British sculptor Eric Gill engraved ten bas-reliefs on the galleries' internal walls (facing the courtyard) representing the major cultures that left their imprint on the land of Palestine, including Canaanite, Egyptian, Phoenician, Mesopotamian, Israelite, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, and Crusader cultures (omitting the prehistoric, Persian, and Ottoman eras).

On the cornice above the arched entrance of the building (today, either removed or not visible) was inscribed: "This museum was built with a donation from Mr. John Rockefeller to house the civilizational and cultural heritage of the people of this holy land."<sup>23</sup> The museum's name, Palestine Archaeological Museum, was engraved above the doorway, although no photographs of the museum show the details of the doorway from this period.

The change in name to Rockefeller Museum was introduced by the occupation authorities after 1967 as part of Israel's relentless quest to conceal Palestinian heritage and identity. No name appears on the museum itself today. According to a report written shortly after the 1967 war, the Rockefeller family had in fact stipulated that the museum "should not bear the Rockefeller name."<sup>24</sup>





Figures 4 and 5. The central courtyard, looking south toward the Old City, and north, respectively. Photo, October 2022.

### *Collection and Exhibition Halls*

The Palestine Archaeological Museum houses items recovered from an extensive number of excavations conducted in Palestine from the early twentieth century until 1948.<sup>25</sup> The archaeological materials come from Jerusalem, Megiddo, ‘Askalan, Tal al-Duwayr, Jericho, Sabastiya, Hisham’s Palace (Khirbat al-Mafjar) (see figures 7–9), and Ein Gedi (‘Ayn Jidi). The museum also holds a collection of scrolls that were uncovered by archaeological expeditions or purchased between 1947 and 1956. Large quantities of additional archaeological materials are also housed in the museum’s storerooms.

The galleries surrounding the central courtyard feature high ceilings and large windows that provide plenty of natural light. Their ceilings are decorated with medallions, said to be inspired by the ceilings of public buildings in ancient Rome.<sup>26</sup> The displays were organized in chronological sequence by British archaeologist John H. Iliffe who was appointed in 1931 as the first Keeper of the new Palestine Archaeological Museum.<sup>27</sup>

The two main halls feature displays ranging from the beginning of the Stone Age to the Middle Ages. The southern gallery houses specific displays, such as the Bronze Age Egyptian statues from Bisan and inscriptions. The western gallery contains stucco reliefs from Jericho’s Hisham Palace excavated by Dimitri Baramki and Robert Hamilton, as well as doors from al-Aqsa Mosque, a carved stone lintel from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and a room of collections of coins, ornaments, and jewelry, as well as larger architectural fragments and stone sarcophagi.

The museum displays undoubtedly reflect an Orientalist view of Palestinian history with their focus on ancient history and a chronology ending with the Crusader period; there are no artifacts from the Ottoman period or from the Palestinian people’s heritage in recent centuries. Such deliberate oversights were ideologically driven, serving the

British Mandate’s declared aim to establish a national homeland for the Jewish people in accordance with the Balfour Declaration and producing a historical narrative that served the Zionist colonial project in Palestine. This is evidenced in the controversy caused by Iliffe’s proposal to add a Palestinian heritage collection to the museum that would round out the historical perspective. The Museum Committee rejected the inclusion of a collection that would reflect the culture and identity of contemporary Palestinians or of any other collection pertaining to human evolution in Palestine.<sup>28</sup>

### *Museum Guidebook*

John H. Iliffe compiled the museum’s original guidebook which appeared in 1937 under the title *A Short Guide to the Exhibition Illustrating the Stone and Bronze Ages in Palestine*, published by the Department of Antiquities, Government of Palestine.<sup>29</sup> In the foreword to the 1949 updated edition, Iliffe indicates that the guidebook “is merely a brief introduction to the history and civilization of each epoch, to help those who are not primarily archaeologists to follow the sequence of cultures intelligently.”<sup>30</sup> In 1943, Palestinian Department of Antiquities’ employees prepared gallery books with information on each historical period, dates, and the location of relevant artifacts in the museum by bay, display case, and individual number.

### *The Library*

Facing east, the library has a “vaulted ceiling divided by crossed arches resting on three massive columns, an apse at one end, and small service rooms on two sides.”<sup>31</sup> Its



Figures 6–8. Decorations from Hisham’s Palace (Khirbat al-Mafjar), Jericho, built in the 740s CE as a winter residence for the first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, Hisham bin ‘Abd al-Malik. The site was first excavated in 1935–48 by the Palestinian Department of Antiquities, directed by Dimitri Baramki. Top, Archives of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine; bottom photos, October 2022.

vast windows allow abundant indirect natural light, and it has a reading room. Adjacent to the library, and separated from it by a door, are the archives.

The museum houses one of the largest specialized libraries of archaeology, ancient history, and Semitic languages. By 1948, the library boasted more than seventeen thousand titles, including rare sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books and manuscripts, as well as the writings of nineteenth- and twentieth-century travelers and explorers, in addition to excavation reports and studies on archaeology and ancient languages.<sup>32</sup> According to a survey by Fawzi Ghandour

who visited the museum library and met with Museum Director ‘Arif al-‘Arif in early 1967, pre-war, the library housed over thirty thousand titles.<sup>33</sup> A study by Hani Nour Addin in 1988 asserts that the library in fact contained more than sixty thousand volumes.<sup>34</sup>

Emek Shaveh, an Israeli non-governmental organization dedicated to defending cultural heritage rights and protecting antiquities “as public assets that belong to members of all communities” in the country has recently documented and challenged the Israeli authorities’ removal of the contents of the library to a location in West Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup>

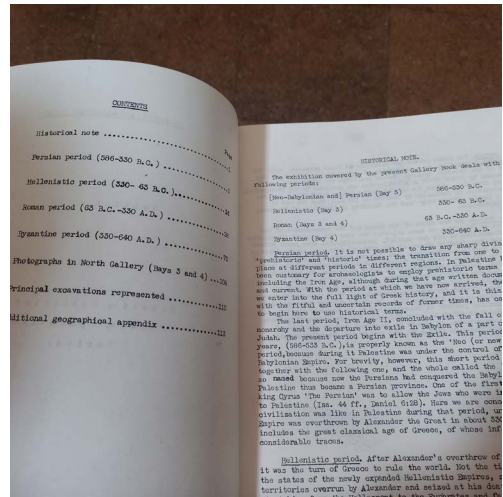
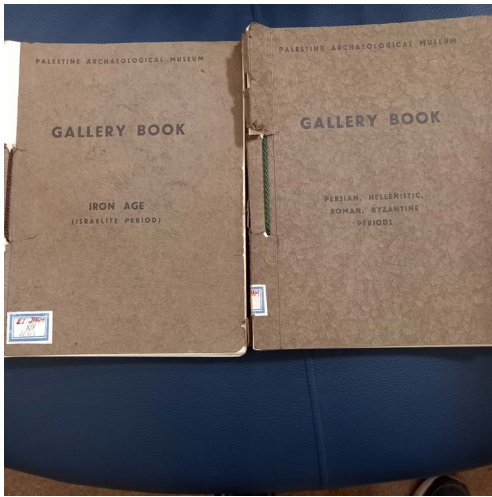


Figure 9. A monster peering over an acanthus leaf decorates a twelfth-century capital removed from the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth. Photo, October 2022.

## The International Board

In a proactive move as the end of the Mandate neared, the British authorities appointed a twelve-member international Board of Trustees to administer the museum. Iliffe, the museum’s curator, had proposed that the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in charge of the preservation of the world’s cultural heritage, should take over the museum’s administration after the end of the fighting, but his proposal met with little response. The board members consisted of: two British individuals representing the high commissioner; one each from the British Academy and the British Museum; one each from the French National





Figures 10 and 11. At left, the gallery books for the Iron Age (Israelite Period) (1200–600 BCE) and Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Periods (586 BCE to 640 CE); at right, a sample page. Photo, October 2022.

Academy and foreign ministry; two from the antiquities departments of surrounding Arab countries (Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan) in alternation; and one each from Hebrew University, the Royal Swedish Academy, the American Archaeological Institute, and the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem.<sup>36</sup> As is evident from the list, the majority of the trustees were drawn from European and American institutions as well as Hebrew University, with not a single representative of the country's Palestinian inhabitants. Letters recently uncovered by Raz Kletter indicate that, in their communications with the international Board of Trustees, the Israeli authorities had opposed the appointment of Palestinian archaeologist and academic Dimitri Baramki as the museum's director following Iliffe.<sup>37</sup> Baramki was Senior Archaeological Officer at the Palestinian Department of Antiquities at the time of the Nakba and briefly led the museum for a short time thereafter.

The international Board of Trustees carried out its work without a Hebrew University representative until 1966 when the Jordanian government nationalized the museum and reconfigured the board under new regulations.

## Jordanian and International Administration (1948–67)

In the aftermath of the armistice agreements that ended the 1948–49 war, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan annexed Palestinian land on the west side of the Jordan River while Egypt took over the Gaza Strip. Palestinian antiquities in what later became known as the West Bank were administrated by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities from its headquarters in Amman. Both the museum and the Palestinian Department of Antiquities became an extension of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, which was headed by British archaeologist Gerald Lankester Harding until 1956.

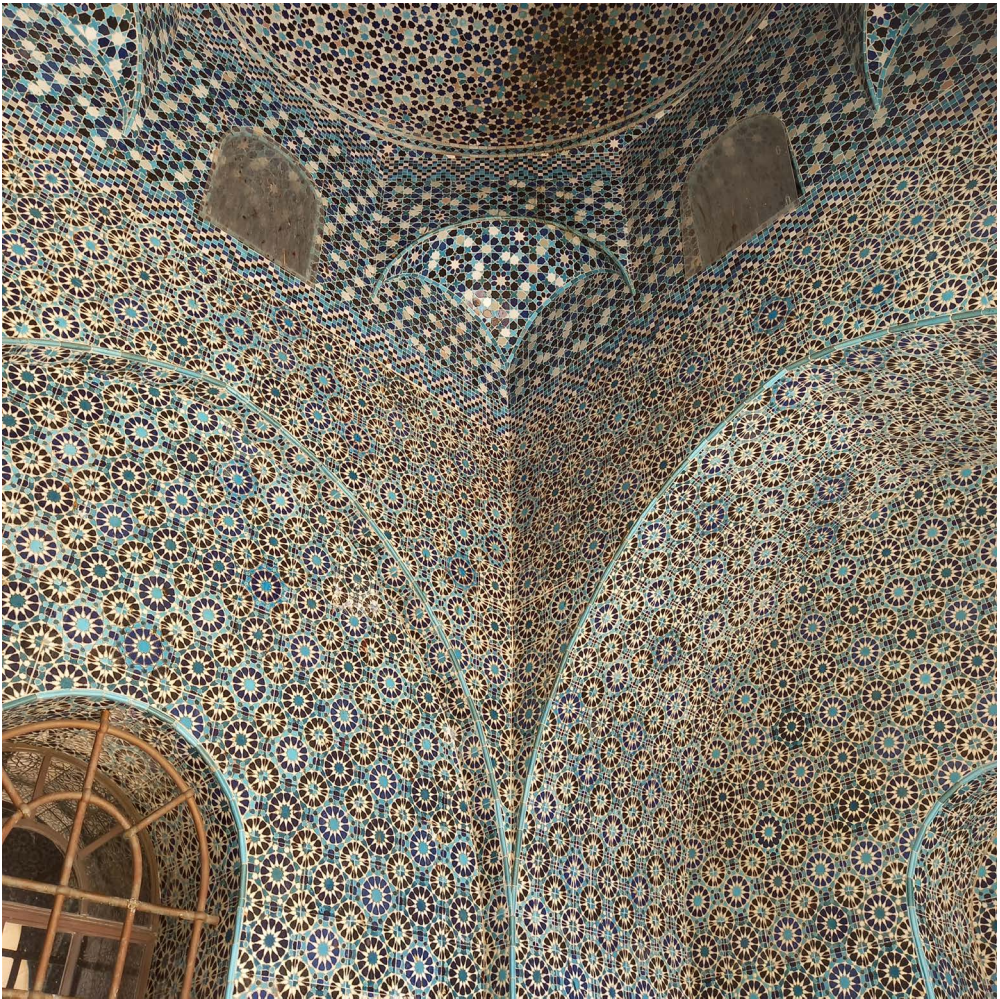


Figure 12. The vaulted alcove, paneled with hand-painted tiles by Jerusalem ceramicist David Ohannessian, at one end of the courtyard once housed the water source for the courtyard fountain.

The museum was administrated by the international Board of Trustees between 1948 and 1966, who oversaw the endowment (totaling 319,709 Palestine Pounds in April 1948<sup>38</sup>), confirming its international status. It is clear that the British were not unaware of the moves afoot, as revealed by a letter from Robert Hamilton, the British director of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities until 1948, to Gerald Lankester Harding, the director of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities who became the museum's director after the Nakba. In his letter, written in 1950, Hamilton expresses concern about the conduct of the museum's affairs, reminding Harding of the obligation of the museum administration to emphasize scientific knowledge and not political or national objectives in order to protect the institution from bias or politicization.<sup>39</sup>

Among the museum's most important holdings are the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some were discovered by individuals or obtained through purchase, others were found during the 1951–56 excavations of the Qumran caves undertaken by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities in cooperation with Father Roland de Vaux of the French École Biblique in Jerusalem, and the museum. In 1957, Yousef Sa'd, nominated "secretary" to the museum in 1948, became the museum's director and in that role issued a publication on the Dead Sea Scrolls, which was reprinted several times. Sa'd's name is associated with the scrolls that were purchased on the side of the Jordanian-French excavation in Qumran. In 1960, the scrolls were placed in the museum and declared a national heritage artifact by the Jordanian government. In 1967, Dr. Mahmoud al-'Abidi published his book, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, edited by Omar al-Ghul and republished by Yarmuk University.<sup>40</sup> The scrolls are divided into two collections: the first set, numbered I-XI, was discovered in eleven caves in the Qumran region and are considered complete, numbering 823 in total, including 11 leather capsules of manuscripts. The remaining 812 items are smaller artifacts of various sizes. Of these findings, the copper scrolls were subsequently moved to the Jordan Archaeological Museum.<sup>41</sup> The second collection of scrolls was discovered in the caves located to the north and the south of Qumran before the start of the June 1967 war, after which the Israeli military occupied the museum. They include the largest collections of Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Jordanian government's decision in 1966 to nationalize the museum and end its international status remains somewhat ambiguous since the nationalization enabled the Israeli occupation authorities to take over the museum in 1967 under the pretext that it was a government institution. According to 'Asim al-Barghouthi, it was 'Awni al-Dajani, who was appointed director-general of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities in 1960, who initiated the nationalization decision;<sup>42</sup> the measure was implemented under the auspices of the Jordanian minister of tourism and antiquities, Sa'id al-Dajani, in 1965 with the full approval of the museum's international board. For her part, Elena Corbett argues in her study that it was Anwar al-Khatib, the Palestinian governor of Jerusalem, who spearheaded the decision to nationalize the museum in 1966.<sup>43</sup> In any event, following correspondence with the international board, which approved the measure, and a green light given by the U.S government, a memorandum of understanding was signed on 26 November 1966, specifically stipulating that the scrolls were to be preserved at the museum. This is supported by discussions that took place in 1950 and by the archival records of the American School of Oriental Research, which reveal that it was the position of the principal of the American School, Mr. Henry Detweiler, in 1960. It is also supported by Beatrice St. Laurent's recent study<sup>44</sup>.

The Jordanian government issued Temporary Law No. 72 of 1966, annulling the British ordinance of 1948 pertaining to the Palestine Archaeological Museum issued by the British high commissioner, previously amended by Jordan in 1955. According to the new regulations, the property of the Palestine Archaeological Museum and its assets reverted to the Jordanian government's possession, as did moneys deposited



inside and outside Palestine, provided that the funds were used for the museum's purposes. The law also provided for the formation of an advisory council and the issuance of museum regulations by Jordan's council of ministers. The following year, the Jordanian government issued Regulation No. 16 of 1967 pertaining to the Advisory Council of the Palestine Archaeological Museum, to be made up of fifteen members appointed by the Jordanian cabinet. The council would make recommendations on the museum's annual budget, carry out improvements to the museum, and also appoint its staff. Before the council could assume its duties, however, Jerusalem was occupied by the Israeli army on 6 June 1967. Palestinian historian 'Arif al-'Arif, who had been appointed director-general of the museum after its nationalization by Jordan, retained what became an honorary position following the occupation of West Bank, until his death in 1973.

## **Museum during Its 1967 Occupation**

'Asim al-Barghouthi, as head of the museums section in the Jordanian Department of Antiquities and responsible for the exhibits, testified about the museum's final moments before the Israeli occupation,<sup>45</sup> testimony that was subsequently published in the proceedings of a seminar titled "Studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls." The seminar, held at the University of Jordan, was organized by Omar al-Ghul, professor of ancient Semitic languages at Yarmuk University's Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology. Al-Barghouthi indicated that he wrote his testimony in English in 1967 and that his attempts to have it published by the British press were unsuccessful, despite support from archaeologist Crystal Bennett, then director of the British School of Archaeology in Amman, who told him that all of the papers approached had expressed regret at not being able to publish his account of the museum's occupation.<sup>46</sup>

On the eve of the 1967 occupation, museum staff consisted of: 'Arif al-'Arif, director-general; 'Asim al-Barghouthi, head of the museums section; Ibrahim 'Assouli, exhibits officer; Najib Albina, the museum's head of photography; Sabri al-'Abbadi, a newly appointed employee; a renovations staff person; a night watchman; a member of the military police; and a receptionist.<sup>47</sup> In the library, Hamdi Nubani, the museum's secretary, and Husam Addin al-'Alami and Farah Salem worked as employees.<sup>48</sup>

After the occupation, the staff, like so many Palestinians at the time, scattered around the world. They included Najib Albina, who as the museum's master photographer between 1952 and 1967 had assembled over 1,750 photographic plates of the Qumran scrolls using large format film. These were the first and most comprehensive images of the scrolls of which only a few were intact, that made use of new infrared technology. In addition to taking five sets of these images at various points in the sorting, Albina carefully documented his technical process in a catalogue for the Department of Antiquities and the museum.<sup>49</sup>

During the June 1967 war, Albina was also witness to the fighting around the museum and helped protect its contents from being looted. He left Jerusalem after it was occupied and lived in the United States until his death in exile in 1983. When Israeli

forces were nearing Jerusalem, the museum staff tried to secure the scrolls. ‘Asim al-Barghouthi recounts that the staff wanted to wrap up the delicate scrolls and dispatch them to Amman but were not able to obtain permission to do so from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The minister instructed the museum staff to keep the scrolls in situ in a decision conveyed to them by the West Bank Antiquities Inspector, Khayr Yasin.<sup>50</sup> Al-Barghouthi goes on to recount the precautions and measures he took to put the invaluable artifacts including the Dead Sea Scrolls in fortified storage rooms following the ministry’s refusal to have them moved to Amman.<sup>51</sup>

In his testimony, al- Barghouthi also documented their arrest by the Israeli forces that broke into the museum, and how they were taken to the roof of the building and used as human shields for several hours during the fighting. Al-Barghouthi testified what he witnessed: “Passing the main hall that was full of soldiers, I saw some of the display cases vandalized and emptied of their contents. Also, I saw antiquities, necklaces, bracelets, money, jewelry, and other objects in the hands of soldiers.”<sup>52</sup> Subsequent reports confirmed that the forces that had broken into the museum were paratroopers.<sup>53</sup>

## **Under Israeli Occupation since 1967**

The museum was put under the joint administration of the Israeli Department of Antiquities and the Israel Museum following the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, in violation of international law. This was confirmed when the Israeli authorities annexed East Jerusalem despite it being considered occupied territory under international law.<sup>54</sup> The Israeli Department of Antiquities subsequently moved its own headquarters into the museum complex.<sup>55</sup>

The Palestinian employees were suspended, including ‘Arif al-‘Arif, and ‘Asim Al-Barghouthi, as well as the rest of the staff. What had been the Palestinian Department of Antiquities was taken over and for a time the museum lost its civil status under occupation as it was turned into military barracks and surrounded by fences.<sup>56</sup> Today, although it is again operating, the Palestine Archaeological Museum represents Jerusalem’s status as an occupied city. It does not attract city residents and offers no activities for Jerusalem’s Palestinian population, such as open days or community outreach activities.

After occupying the city, the Israeli authorities transferred the Dead Sea Scrolls from the Palestine Archaeological Museum to the Israel Museum in West Jerusalem<sup>57</sup>; the Shrine of the Book, a wing of the Israel Museum, was specially constructed in 1965 as a repository for exhibition of the artifacts. In the decades of occupation since 1967, the Israeli authorities have illegally removed many of the artifacts from the Palestine Archaeological Museum for exhibition tours inside and outside the country, notably at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada. Held between June 2009 and January 2010, the exhibition went ahead over formal objections lodged by the state of Palestine on the grounds that some of the exhibited materials were transferred from a Palestinian museum located in the Palestinian occupied territories, in violation



of both international and Canadian law. The empty display cases at the museum bear witness to the illegal transfer of the occupied museum's antiquities.

Israeli websites, including those of the Israeli Department of Antiquities, present a falsified account of the museum's history, omitting any mention of the 1967 occupation or that the museum stands in the occupied Palestinian territories. Among the most significant aspects of this mendacious erasure has been the change in the museum's official name from Palestine Archaeological Museum to Rockefeller Museum and its portrayal as an Israeli museum located in Israel, in violation of international law.<sup>58</sup>



Figure 13. The original bas-relief over the entrance was British sculptor Eric Gill's depiction of Palestine as the meeting between Africa and Asia. Israeli flags are the post-1967 addition to the entrance. Photo, October 2022.

In 2016, the Israeli occupation authorities in Jerusalem moved the museum library to the west side of the city, prompting Emek Shaveh to challenge the transfer measure at the Supreme Court.<sup>59</sup> The court responded by invoking precedent law in support of the transfer, arguing that the Israeli Department of Antiquities was responsible for the antiquities in the Palestine Archaeological Museum and that it had the right to transfer the library and the antiquities to West Jerusalem according to Israeli law. The Supreme Court ruled that international law was irrelevant in the case.<sup>60</sup> The absence of any official position from UNESCO (although it was a violation of its own convention) or from European governments, who always interfered in museum affairs under the Jordanian administration, was notable.

## Future Prospects

The Palestinian official discourse considers the Palestine Archaeological Museum to be a museum that has been under Israeli occupation since 1967 and that is located in occupied territory, according to international law.<sup>61</sup> Most academic research supports the fact that the museum is the Palestinian national museum under occupation.<sup>62</sup> As reflected by the publications of the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the state of Palestine continually tracks Israeli violations at the museum. The Palestinian Tangible Cultural Heritage Law decree issued by President Mahmoud Abbas in 2018 defines the Palestine Archaeological Museum as a public national

museum.<sup>63</sup> Despite Israel's claims in the media and in tourism promotion that this is an Israeli museum in accordance with its illegal annexation of the city and the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Israel, the future of both the museum and the headquarters of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities, along with all their contents and archives, are undoubtedly linked to the final status negotiations on Jerusalem. Until a peace agreement is reached between Palestine and Israel, the museum remains a Palestinian cultural institution under occupation according to international humanitarian law even while its future remains an issue of the final status negotiations on Jerusalem.

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