



JERUSALEM QUARTERLY

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Focus: Shrines

Red Pitched Roofs

A (Post)Colonial Genealogy of Architectural Identity in the Jerusalem Area

Gabriel Schwake

Sacred Space/Contested Place

Intergenerational Memory and the Shifting Meanings of the Shrine/Tomb of Joseph

David J. Marshall

An Air-Smelling Event

The Metamorphosis of Simon the Just and His Shrine

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Sharing the Holy Land: Islamic Pilgrimage to Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem during the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods

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JQ ROUNDTABLE

On Settler Colonialism, Environment, and Health

Osama Tanous

Palestine, Prehistory, and the “Origins of Agriculture”

Brian Boyd

Gendered Impacts of Environmental and Social Transformations in the Jordan

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* Peer reviewed article.

EDITORIAL

A Whiff of Everyday Religion

Palestine's construction as the Holy Land, a place coveted by Christians and studied by Orientalists for its associations with a biblical past, has ironically overshadowed the ways in which its inhabitants have understood its holiness (or, perhaps more accurately, have related to the holy within it) in more quotidian terms. Several contributions to this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* address the place of shrines, holy sites, and religious festivals within Palestinian society. Over the past two centuries – and especially since 1948 – these spaces and events have undergone radical transformations, reshaped by the modernization of religion and the rise of nationalism, but most radically by the settler-colonial ethos of exclusionary appropriation that has characterized the Zionist project in Palestine.

As Fadi Ragheb shows in “Sharing the Holy Land: Islamic Pilgrimage to Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem during the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods” – the winner of this year's Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem – Muslim visitors to Jerusalem in the premodern period frequented sites holy to Christians. Islam's reverence for Jesus and Mary meant that sites central to Christianity were significant for Muslims, too. Drawing on *Fada'il al-Quds* (Merits of Jerusalem) literature as well as Muslim travelogues, Ragheb shows that Muslims not only visited such sites, but offered prayers there, and even participated in Christian celebrations. Repeated questions in this literature as to the desirability or permissibility of Muslims entering or praying in

churches, for example, pointed both to the anxiety aroused by such practices and their prevalence.

Salim Tamari's rumination on the festival of Simon the Just (*Shimon haTsadik*), "An Air Smelling Event," shows that Jewish-affiliated locations were also known for multiconfessional celebrations. Indeed, the late Ottoman and early Mandate descriptions of the festival associated with Simon the Just capture the transitional period during which such social intermingling was undone by newly dominant colonial and nationalist ways of being. This same period, for example, saw the transformation of the Nabi Musa festivities in Jerusalem into a nationalist event, as explored by Awad Halabi in his recent book *Palestinian Rituals of Identity: The Prophet Moses Festival in Jerusalem, 1850–1948*, reviewed in this issue of *JQ* by Jacob Norris. Tamari also offers a glimpse of an alternative possibility, in which multiconfessional festivities briefly seemed as though they might continue as "secular" revelries – in which local sharing of music, food, and language took precedence over religious rituals. Given that Zionist settlers have since used claims to Shimon HaTsadik's tomb to justify displacing Palestinians from the Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood where it is located, such alternatives can seem almost unimaginable today.

The changing relationship between communities and religious sites and festivals is also at the core of David J. Marshall's "Sacred Space/Contested Place: Intergenerational Memory and the Shifting Meanings of the Shrine/Tomb of Joseph." Marshall's interviews with Palestinians of different generations who reside near Maqam Yusuf, outside Nablus, indicate that the shifting political context in which the site is situated has led to its transformation from a place associated with social activities and celebrations (particularly for women) to one linked to violence in the minds of a younger generation (particularly young men). Although Marshall cautions against an overly romanticized notion of a peaceful and harmonious past – suggesting Robert Hayden's notion of "antagonistic tolerance" as one way of understanding multiconfessional interactions at holy sites – he also picks up on the possibility for alternatives hinted at in the "air-smelling event" of Simon the Just, alternatives that seek the resanctification of local sites, figures, and events in open and inclusive ways that refuse the exclusive claims of settler colonialism.

This issue of *JQ* also features two sections devoted to current and ongoing concerns for Palestinians in and beyond Jerusalem. The first of these is education, where Jerusalem has become a focus of Israeli efforts to Zionize Palestinian education. The previous Israeli government devoted significant energy (and funds) to push Palestinian Jerusalemites into schools that use Israeli curricula. Although the current far-right government of Benjamin Netanyahu – in particular, the extremist finance minister Bezalel Smotrich – has indicated some reluctance to devote funding to what it sees as services for Palestinians, efforts to "de-Palestinianize" education in Jerusalem are ongoing. Parents of some 460 students of al-Sal'a Boys School in Jabal Mukabir have organized daily protests since the start of the school year. They are refusing to send their children to a new school for al-Sal'a secondary students – whom the old school building cannot accommodate – because it intends to impose the Israeli curriculum.

In Kafr ‘Aqab, the Iliya School – one of several new schools built in East Jerusalem to introduce the Israeli curriculum – was painted with oppositional graffiti and set on fire. Meanwhile, Israeli police continue to harass Palestinian students at al-Haram al-Sharif, searching their bags and confiscating schoolbooks that depict the Palestinian flag or any other form of national sentiment, including maps or slogans, on the claim that it represents “incitement.” The two reports here, by Anwar Qadah and Zayd al-Qiq, have been translated from Arabic to provide background to the ongoing Zionist assaults on Palestinian education in Jerusalem, a multidimensional campaign that has received little sustained coverage in English.

Health and environment – global concerns that have been exacerbated by a pandemic and intensifying climate crises, including droughts, storms, wildfires, and extreme temperatures – are the focus of a roundtable in this issue with contributions from Osama Tanous, Maysaa Nemer, and Brian Boyd. These worldwide phenomena are particularly acute in the Palestinian case, where access to basic needs fundamental to survival (food, water, a livable environment) is a constant struggle. Moreover, Palestinians’ conditions illuminate the fact that, as a species and a planet, we cannot expect to address the global challenge of climate change without first reimagining our relationship to the environment. This reimagining requires acknowledging and dismantling the violent colonial approaches to land, resources, productivity, and science that lie at the root of Palestinians’ dispossession and oppression. The intertwining of health, reproduction, and colonial modernity is also central to Frances Hasso’s *Buried in the Red Dirt: Race, Reproduction, and Death in Modern Palestine*, reviewed in this issue by Nadim Bawalsa.

Rounding out this issue of *JQ* is Gabriel Schwake’s article on Palestinian and Israeli housing architecture, “Red Pitched Roofs: A (Post)Colonial Genealogy.” Finally, this editorial offers an opportunity to express *JQ*’s enormous appreciation for the co-editorship of Lisa Taraki. Over the past year and a half, and especially in *JQ*’s transition from the longtime leadership of Salim Tamari, her steady comradeship and critical eye have been an indispensable boon to the journal. Though her name no longer appears on the masthead, it is important to acknowledge that this issue also benefited from her input.

Red Pitched Roofs: A (Post)Colonial Genealogy of Architectural Identity in the Jerusalem Area

Gabriel Schwake

Abstract

Focusing on the implementation and perception of red roofs in the context of Palestine-Israel, this paper examines how it turned into a symbol of settler-colonialism. Conducting a genealogical analysis of the use, and avoidance, of using this architectural element, this paper explains how it constantly shifted from one side to another, starting as an urban Palestinian component in the late nineteenth century, turning into a sign of Zionism, and then becoming Palestinian once again by the early 2000s. Using the framework of *schismogenesis*, that is, the act of self-definition through differentiation, this paper first challenges the common conception of the red roof as a foreign colonial element and shows how its appropriation and reappropriation were an integral part of national narratives. Therefore, more than asking whether red roofs are colonial or not, this paper asks when they became perceived as such, examining the consistent inconsistency of nation-building processes and their relationship to architecture.

Keywords

Architecture; identity; Jerusalem; Palestine; post-colonialism; genealogy; schismogenesis; red roofs; settlements; nation-building.

A mural from 2020 in the Palestinian city of Rafah, in the Gaza Strip, expresses defiance against the proposed Israeli plan to annex the West Bank by depicting a fist with a Palestinian flag crushing an assemblage of houses,

symbolizing Jewish settlement in the occupied territories, laid over a broken blue six-pointed star (figure 1). Beyond the explicit symbolism of the Israeli flag-blue Star of David, the architectural characteristics suggest that the houses – white cubes covered by red pitched roofs – are meant to represent an Israeli settlement. This painting is not an extraordinary example, as these features have become a common technique to depict Israeli settlements, frequently used in Palestinian and anti-occupation demonstrations and campaigns.¹ The Israeli establishment also uses such images to denote Israeli settlements, as seen in some parts of the Wall, where the Palestinian landscape is effaced by the appearance of an Israeli one (figure 2). This article focuses on how red pitched roofs became associated with Israeli housing. If architecture is a cultural text, that is, a set of signs and symbols that reveal cultural meanings,² then how can we *read* red pitched roofs? Are they truly a colonial element, or are they just perceived as such? If the latter, then what does this tell us about the correlation between architecture, identity, and nation building?



Figure 1. A Palestinian woman and her son walking in Rafah, Gaza, beside a mural against Israel's West Bank annexation plans, 14 July 2020. Photo by SOPA Images Limited/Alamy Stock Photo.

Using the framework of *schismogenesis*, literally the creation of division, I explain how the use or avoidance of specific architectural styles contributes to the development of national awareness. I rely on aerial photos, plans, architectural drawings, interviews, and archival materials to examine the evolving use of red pitched roofs in the Jerusalem metropolitan area, and analyze the use of this architectural element by both Palestinians and Jews. Analyzing these sources in conjunction with the vast

literature on architecture in Palestine and Israel, the article follows the development of the image of red pitched roofs; it explains how its associations shifted, starting as a modern urban Palestinian element beginning in the late nineteenth century, adopted as a rural Zionist component in the pre-state years and later a symbol of Israeli settler colonialism during the 1980s, and eventually appearing in Palestinian construction once again by the early 2000s.



Figure 2. Israeli mural on a separation wall, Jerusalem area in 2006. Photo by Keith Limited/Alamy Stock Photo.

Drawing a line between different periods by focusing on the shifting implementation, and perceptions, of red roofs, this article raises questions about how the history of the built environment in Palestine is written and how this influences perceptions of the local built environment. Therefore, more than a paper on the history of architecture, this article is mainly a paper on the historiography of architecture in Palestine, proposing a new theoretical framework for analyzing historical architectural changes in a settler-colonial context. The paper does not seek to “prove” that the use or eschewal

of red roofs was done to create a visible difference between Zionist and Palestinian architecture; rather the schismogenetic perspective enables us to understand how the use and perception of a single architectural element constantly shifted. Schismogenesis does not form an Archimedean point that explains all architectural processes in settler-colonial contexts, but the endeavor to differentiate through negation forms an additional layer in the performative role of architecture in contested environments.

On Architecture and Nation-building in Palestine and Israel

Access to land constitutes perhaps the main dimension of settler-colonial conflicts, and thus for settlers the built environment is both a means and ends.³ Correspondingly, Israel's territorial campaign and its ongoing project of spatial production and transformation has led to an enormous body of literature analyzing its political, economic, ecological, and cultural implications.⁴ The house itself, not only as a nurturing element that is connected to the idea of nation-building, but also as an image, has become a pawn in this conflict. As Yael Allweil has shown, Zionism could be read as a housing regime, promoting a new national identity through architecture.⁵ Moreover, the Israeli establishment's recurrent attempts to appropriate Palestinian houses constitute a struggle over narrative and historical right to the land.⁶ Likewise, the house keys that Palestinians carried with them after their expulsion from Palestine in 1948 became symbols of resistance and a prominent image of Palestinian *sumud*, the famous idea of national steadfastness.⁷

By reading architecture as cultural texts, it is remarkable how ideologies, politics, and conflicts manifest in the local built environment. It would not be too farfetched to claim that even a non-expert visitor to Palestine/Israel can tell the difference between a Palestinian town and an Israeli one, on either side of the Green Line. Of course, these differences are significantly influenced by considerations of power, neglect, economic disparities, ethnic segregation, and spatial control. However, to claim that these are the only factors would deny the performative aspects of architecture, and how it symbolizes, expresses, represents, and displays the desires, ideologies, interests, and beliefs of its inhabitants and developers, whether as individuals, corporations, or regimes.⁸ Therefore, it is important to ask how, on the performative level, architecture becomes distinct.

For Zionist settlers, promoting a national renaissance was simultaneously a physical and spiritual process that included the formation of a new Jewish identity that would negate that associated with the diaspora, including the common and antisemitic image of Jews as wandering moneylenders.⁹ This process focused on giving birth to a newly unified nation through Jews who would synchronously "build and be built,"¹⁰ by settling, farming, and constructing in Palestine.¹¹ It is important to remember that all Zionist ideologies perceived Jews as part of, if not the only, indigenous population of Palestine, and thus rejected (and still do) acknowledgement of being a foreign colonial entity. Accordingly, as Joseph Massad explains, Israel forms a "post-colonial colony," a settler entity that denies its foreign origin and insists on its connection to the

context.¹² Unlike other “Western” settlers, who brought their building typologies to the colonies from Europe and even imported their building materials, among Zionist settlers there was a constant focus on the local context. Early Zionist settlers thus sought inspiration from the local Palestinian community, due to its “authenticity,”¹³ relying on Palestinian laborers and artisans and even applying Palestinian housing typologies in both rural and urban settlements.¹⁴ Eventually, as mainstream Zionism sought to distance itself from Palestinian culture,¹⁵ inspiration from the local built environment remained as an act of appropriation to highlight the settlers’ connection to the land. Zionist fascination with the Arab village and Palestinian architecture – seen in examples like the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, built as a modernist version of a local village, and in preservation projects in Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem, and other cities – and their post-modern pastiche of Palestinian elements¹⁶ served as a tool to possess the local built heritage by adopting and adapting its morphology while bypassing its population, denying the connection of Palestinians to the land.¹⁷

Zionist ideology did not have a monopoly on the idea of nation-building through architecture; we can see similar endeavors connected to Palestinian nationalism. One of the first texts discussing Palestinian architecture was written by Tawfiq Canaan, a prominent figure among the Palestinian bourgeoisie of Jerusalem, who held a strong nationalist ideology.¹⁸ Canaan, who was not unsullied by self-Orientalism, initially adopted the “biblical” perspective of Palestinian historiography when discussing the supposed authenticity of local architecture.¹⁹ At the same time, he focused on urban Palestinian houses, including the central hall typology and analyzed this architecture as a modern local phenomenon.²⁰

After the Palestinian Nakba, with the expulsion of more than seven hundred thousand Palestinians before and during the 1948 war and the depopulation of more than four hundred towns and villages, the “home” itself turned into an object of national awareness. Consequently, the history of architecture in Palestine became a question of remembrance, emphasizing the connection to the houses that were emptied of their residents and then appropriated.²¹ As Salim Tamari has shown, the Palestinian national agenda highlights the historical relationship between the people and the land, and thus the *fellah*, the peasant, became the protagonist of the national narrative, and the focus on agriculture and rural life.²² If the grey concrete of the refugee camps represented Palestinian dispossession and repression in the homeland and the diaspora, then the historical rural setting represented what needed to be reclaimed, a future aspiration based on the image of the past. In line with this perspective, the yearning for pre-1948 Palestine is clearly visible in Palestinian architectural historiography, which is embedded somewhere between the monumental and an antiquarian focus on vernacular and traditional architecture, in contrast to Israeli settlements and the refugee camps,²³ and despite some recent research, the main literature usually disregards urban architectural history.²⁴ Accordingly, as Kareem Rabie has recently noted, the morphological resemblance of the new Palestinian town of Rawabi to Israeli settlements and its detachment from so-called traditional rural typologies formed points of criticism for those portraying it as a foreign, inauthentic, and even colonialist project.²⁵

Architectural historians even slightly familiar with the Palestinian context know that the local architecture is far more complex and diverse than simple cubes merging with the local topography, and that the history of Palestinian architecture includes wide-ranging typologies and spatial practices. In the same manner, not all Israeli settlement construction is topped with red roofs. Nevertheless, such simplified images tend to dominate. By focusing on the use and avoidance of red roofs by both Palestinians and Israelis, I aim to illustrate the consistent inconsistency of ideas of a national architectural style. I use the framework of schismogenesis, where one group defines itself as a negation of another, to provide an additional layer of analysis, by showing how architecture in contested and settler-colonial contexts is constantly perceived and reconceived in relation to an “other.” Before applying the framework of schismogenesis to the red roofs of Palestine, let us first discuss it in more detail.

Schismogenesis and the Taste of Difference

British anthropologist Gregory Bateson coined the term schismogenesis to explain people’s tendency to act differently from others and then to define themselves by these differences.²⁶ Bateson’s studies of the Naven people of New Guinea provided an insight into how people, both as groups and as individuals, would embrace behaviors to differentiate themselves from other groups and individuals, thereby developing behavior not through imitation, but rather through negation and contradistinction. Following Bateson, one’s identity is defined by knowing what one should not do almost as much as by what one should do. Bateson’s analysis focused on internal group dynamics and explained endless social relations concerning class, age, and gender differences and their accompanying manners. More recently, David Graeber and David Wengrow applied the concept of schismogenesis on a larger level, explaining not only internal group dynamics, but also how closely related groups eventually become distinct.²⁷ According to Graeber and Wengrow, while theories of social evolution and cultural geography tend to explain cultural developments as an outcome of a group’s surrounding environment or as part of a larger ethno-lingual framework, schismogenesis provides an explanation on how groups sharing the same geography and language can develop not only different, but even conflicting behaviors, beliefs, and customs.²⁸ Cultural development, often seen as inevitable and explained in deterministic terms, is thus recast as an outcome of relationships, in which one group seeks to differentiate itself from the other.

Schismogenesis can be applied usefully to several historical architectural phenomena. Unlike Patsy Healey’s account of ideas, concepts, and techniques in planning “traveling” through cultural exchange and thereby being adopted in new and “foreign” contexts, schismogenesis explains how architectural cultures of closely related groups become distinctive.²⁹ Heinrich Wölfflin’s *Principles of Arts History* discusses history as a series of contrasting developments, the linear versus the painterly, the plane versus recession, closed versus open, and multiplicity versus unity, best seen in the transition from Renaissance to Baroque. Yet it is difficult to ignore the fact

that this transition is entrenched within the context of the counter-Reformation, with the Baroque forming an extravagant contrast to Protestant iconoclasm.³⁰ Accordingly, Protestants and Catholics defined themselves (architecturally) in part through the difference between somber and richly decorated interiors. Another famous example from the twentieth century is the Nazis' response to the modernist Weissenhof Estate of 1927, which included the works of leading architects such as Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Gropius, Taut, and others. The white cubic buildings of Weissenhof constituted an alien form that threatened German culture according to the Nazis, who went as far as mockingly naming the project New Jerusalem and distributing a photomontage that included Arab-looking characters with camels around Weissenhof.³¹ After the Nazis rose to power, they promoted a nearby exemplary project, the Kochenhofsiedlung, which consisted of traditional German houses decorated with pitched roofs. The roof, flat or pitched, was one of the main issues in this controversy and while for the architects in Weissenhof the flat roof signified the proper use of material and truthfully represented the values of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), for the Nazis, such a roof was a threat to German identity. Therefore, for the Nazis the deliberate rejection of flat roofs was as important as the use of pitched ones, as a "true" German house is one whose roof is not flat.

Schismogenesis also provides an interesting perspective on cultural exchange between colonizers and colonized, and is thus highly relevant to the context of Palestine.³² Zionist architectural schismogenesis is identifiable through the attempts to negate the diaspora and the Orient, while simultaneously appropriating local practices to establish a colonizing rootedness that allows the settler to claim to be "more native than the natives."³³ Palestinian architectural schismogenesis, meanwhile, is manifested in the emphasis on the pre-1948 rural environment as a negation of exile, the camp, and Israel. These dual processes of Zionist appropriation through negation and Palestinian decolonial antiquarianism illuminate a kind of mutual schismogenesis. Yet, we cannot forget the inevitable exchanges that also take place in settler-colonial environments, including mutual influences between Jewish Israeli culture and Palestinian culture.

While the adoption of Palestinian customs by Jewish Israelis is usually considered a form of cultural appropriation,³⁴ it is also unsurprising that Israeli culture, consciously or unconsciously, would take on some Palestinian traits. At the same time, these exchanges are a two-way street: for example, as 'Abd al-Rahman Mar'i has shown, Hebrew has had an enormous influence on the Arabic spoken by Palestinian citizens of Israel, leading to unique bilingual combinations and expressions.³⁵ And with Palestinians forming the main workforce in the Israeli construction sector, German professional terms such as *gehrung*, *pauschale*, and *spachtel* (miter joint, flat rate, spatula), that Jews brought with them from Europe became widely used on both sides of the Green Line. Just as Rudolf Wittkower warned against writing off the entire Baroque as a simple counter-Reformation style, schismogenesis cannot explain all architectural transformations in Israel/Palestine.³⁶ Like Aby Warburg's concept of *Nachleben*, which refers to the way in which anachronistic motifs reappear in contemporary art,

we should opt for a complex perspective that takes into consideration that negation is inseparable from exchange, and that the negated object would also resurface.³⁷ In that sense, the red roof and its shifting association from one architectural culture to another offers an ideal object to study architectural nation-building through negation, subjected to the constant return of the object of contradistinction.

Revisiting pitched red roofs in Palestine through the framework of schismogenesis, and examining their recurrent use over the past 150 years, this article challenges simplistic explanations that conceive of this element as a colonial and foreign motif. Analyzing this architectural element as simultaneously an object of cultural exchange, appropriation, reappropriation, and avoidance, it will shed light on questions of architecture and nation-building, focusing on the Jerusalem metropolitan area. Starting with the early appearances of pitched roofs in Palestine during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, moving to post-1948 urban and rural construction, and then examining the reemergence of pitched roofs in Jewish areas and settlements in comparison to adjacent Palestinian neighborhoods, it will analyze how these roofs became a hallmark of Israeli territoriality. The article closes by noting the disappearance of red roofs from Jewish Israeli contexts and their reemergence in particular Palestinian contexts.

North–South, Not Just West–East

Despite the common conception of red pitched roofs as a Zionist architectural element, in the late nineteenth century they were a standard, and even a characteristic, feature of the developing Palestinian urban context. Existing documentation of the Old City of Jerusalem and its environs fits the common architectural history narrative of small-scale cubic houses with vaulted tops, a product mainly of a lack of varied construction material in Palestine, especially timber, which thus limited housing typologies.³⁸ Whereas monumental buildings contained light-weight domes or relied on imported cedars from Lebanon – as in the case of al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as the myth regarding Solomon’s temple a millennium earlier³⁹ – most residential construction had to rely on traditional masonry, limiting the possible dimensions of residential units and resulting in the typical domed houses that historically characterized both urban and rural Palestine. This is evident in the Old City of Jerusalem and the villages in its vicinity, such as Silwan, Lifta, Bayt Hanina, and Bayt Safafa (figure 3). The residential units that characterized the Palestinian landscape thus represented the reasonable use of local building resources, relying on local materials, craftsmanship, and well-coordinated group labor.⁴⁰ With a combination of mud and mortar, the vaulted ceilings received a “flattened” exterior, which became the image of both urban and rural Palestine (figure 4).

In the mid-nineteenth century, a new element began characterizing the local landscape – the pitched red roof. Different documentation of Jerusalem depicts a growing presence of red roofs by the turn of the century in all of Jerusalem’s historical quarters, and especially in the new neighborhoods built outside the city walls.⁴¹ In the same years, Jerusalem witnessed increased involvement of European powers

reflected in the built environment, starting with the Russian compound (1860) and proceeding with the German colonies (1873), and new Jewish neighborhoods like Mishkenot Sha'ananim (1860) and Mea She'arim (1874).⁴² The buildings in these new developments were mainly topped with red-tiled roofs.⁴³ Consequently, the red roof became associated with foreign presence in Palestine, and its use in Arab buildings was usually depicted as a sign of Westernization; that these tiles were imported from Marseilles offered evidence to support this assumption. This conception began already with European travelers of the late nineteenth century, who with an Orientalist nostalgia mourned the disappearance of the traditional roovescape, as apparently they would have liked to encounter “authentic” domes.⁴⁴ Arab construction outside the walls simultaneous to, if not preceding, that of Western agents – beginning with Shaykh Jarrah and then spreading out to other urban clusters⁴⁵ – also included residential buildings with red roofs, creating a visibly distinct, unified “red” (and literally “western”) aerial view that contrasted with the Old City.⁴⁶



Figure 3. “Jerusalem (El-Kouds). Village of Siloam [Silwan],” south of Old City of Jerusalem, c1898–1914. G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Washington, DC; online at ([loc.gov](https://www.loc.gov/bit.ly/3FnVcPj)) [bit.ly/3FnVcPj](https://www.loc.gov/bit.ly/3FnVcPj) (accessed 31 August 2023).

While the growing popularity of the red roof in late nineteenth-century Palestine could be seen as an outcome of colonial intervention and of a west–east axis, it was in fact more of a Levantine north–south influence. One of the main factors in the



Figure 4. “Building stone house in village in hill country,” c 1898–1946. G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Washington, DC; online at (loc.gov) bit.ly/46DZddK (accessed 31 August 2023).

adoption of red roofs in Palestinian cities was the popularity of the central hall house, a new residential typology that emerged in Lebanon during the 1800s, and which swiftly began appearing in the main cities of the Levant, becoming the dominant architecture of the new local bourgeoisie.⁴⁷ A two-story residential building with an upper floor consisting of two symmetrical rows of small lodging spaces surrounding a central dwelling area, this new typology constituted a development of former housing practices, facilitated by new building materials such as Marseilles tiles, timber, and iron beams, that allowed builders to cover greater spans with simplified techniques and reduced construction time.⁴⁸ The characteristic triple-arched facade indicates the location of the central dwelling area and reflects the typology’s connection to the centuries-long practice of *liwan* (long entrance hall) houses, with influences from Ottoman typologies like the *konak* (large house) and *yali* (waterfront mansion).⁴⁹ The central hall

typology was already widespread in Lebanon and Syria well before Western settlers reached the shores of Jaffa.⁵⁰ Thus, it is more accurate to see the red roof as a Levantine element, arriving in Jerusalem from the north, despite the materials it relied on having arrived from the “West.”

Even when adopted by European communities in Palestine, a comparison of the roofs of “Western” houses in Jerusalem with those used in these communities’ country of origin emphasizes the extent to which the red-tiled roof became a local element. In the Kingdom of Württemberg, the origin of the German Templers who settled in Palestine by the turn of the twentieth century, the houses during the 1800s were built with a steep double-pitched roof, comprising two to three stories of dwelling and storage functions. In Palestine, however, most Templer houses had a modestly sloping four-directional roof that functioned simply as a decorative cover, just as with most Palestinian Arab central hall houses (figure 5). Moreover, the German settlers even initially tried to use local techniques and imitate the local “flat” roofs that relied on vaulted ceilings; yet due to a combination of the settlers’ lack of expertise and problems maintaining flat roofs, they eventually switched to slightly pitched ones, which were more easily constructed.⁵¹ Contrary to the interpretation of red roofs in Jerusalem as a colonial

influence, then, it would be more accurate to see them as a local element also used by foreigners. The reason foreign builders adopted the local technique of red roofs derived from their reliance on local Arab labor. Accordingly, even Zionist Jewish settlers (as distinguished from the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community that was largely anti-Zionist) initially applied local dwelling practices and relied on Arab manpower as well, leading to the construction of Palestinian housing typologies in Zionist neighborhoods.⁵²

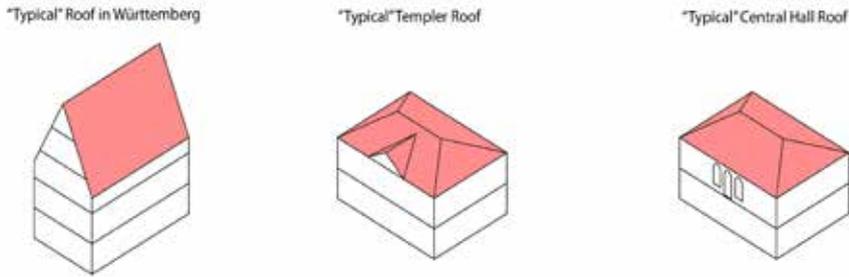


Figure 5. Roof types showing the connection between the Templer house origin and the local central hall typology. Illustration by author.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the red roof became the main characteristic of the local urban environment, adopted by Muslims, Christians, and Jews, Arabs, and Europeans; however, following World War I and the increase in Zionist construction and settlement, the “Arab” connotations of the pitched red roof would lead to its gradual marginalization.

The Red and the Grey

The visual variation of the Jewish built environment went together with Zionist nation-building processes during the British Mandate. With the gradual implementation of modernist architecture on the one hand, and the growing emphasis on Hebrew Labor, that is, hiring Jewish workers instead of Palestinians, on the other, the Zionist building industry replaced local stone, associated with Palestine’s Arabs, and implemented new materials, like cement blocks and bricks, that were more suitable to the unskilled manpower.⁵³ This change accompanied Zionist attempts to develop a new national architectural style, seen in the eclectic buildings of the 1920s, which were perhaps “Oriental,” but clearly not Palestinian, and the modernist turn of the 1930s.⁵⁴ Consequently, in the ethnically mixed cities of Palestine, it became possible to demarcate the border between Arab and Zionist neighborhoods from the contrast between Marseilles tiles and flat concrete roofs. In the context of Jaffa, Sharon Rotbard ties these differences to the birth of the concept of the White City, the modernist and positively perceived Tel Aviv, versus the Black City, the old and negatively perceived Jaffa.⁵⁵ However, if aerial photos had been in color, it would be possible to speak instead of a grey city versus a red city.

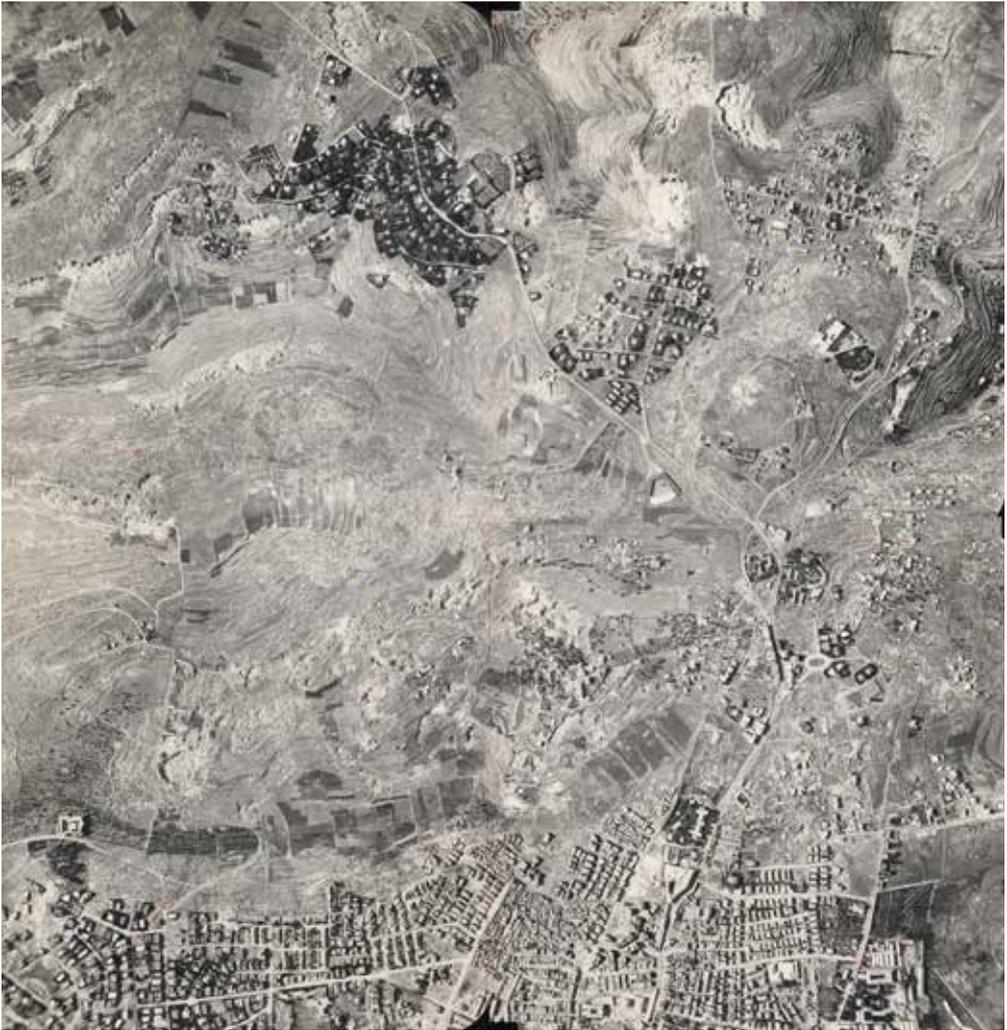


Figure 6. Rehavia and its flat roofs (bottom right), in contrast to the red roofs of all other Jewish neighborhoods – Beit Hakerem and Kiryat Moshe (left) and Ohel Moshe and Makor Baruch (upper right), western Jerusalem, 1944. Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Geography Archives.

The separation between the red and the grey became highly noticeable in Jerusalem in the 1930s–40s.⁵⁶ The main catalyst behind this change was the construction of Rehavia neighborhood. Planned by German-born architect Richard Kauffmann, who was in charge of key Zionist urban and rural projects in Palestine, and executed by workers of the Yosef Trumpeldor Labor and Defense Battalion (Gdud HaAvoda), a pioneering ideological group involved in promoting Zionist settlement and Hebrew labor, Rehavia embodied the spatial shift in labor Zionism toward modernism.⁵⁷ Its garden city layout and the international style of architecture created a clearly distinct spatial entity, in terms of both urban planning and design.⁵⁸ Had it not been for the

urban regulation to clad all buildings in the city with limestone, the distinctiveness of Rehavia would have been much more noticeable.⁵⁹ Consequently, a clearly divergent Zionist urban unit began to emerge, its visual character distinguished from the Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods of Mea She'arim, Geula, or Nahalat Shiv'a, the Palestinian Talbiyya, Shaykh Jarrah, and Musrara, and the European complexes (figure 6). Moreover, while most neighborhoods in the newly developing areas outside the Old City of Jerusalem functioned as distinct compounds housing specific communities,⁶⁰ Rehavia, despite its seemingly suburban garden city layout, functioned more as an urban neighborhood that would eventually form the backbone of the post-1948 “western” city.⁶¹ Modernist architecture was not limited to Jewish Zionists before 1948 – one could indeed find several Palestinian examples – but in terms of scope, Rehavia was unparalleled.

The red–grey distinction continued to grow in the decades following the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. When the western side of the city became the capital of the Zionist state, it witnessed substantial construction characterized by modernist architecture, as in the neighborhoods of Kiryat HaYovel, Gonenim, or Ir Ganim, which differentiated visually from the depopulated Arab neighborhoods, for example, of Qatamun, Baq'a, or Malha.⁶² The tilted roof and its red tiles became a relic of the “other's” architecture. The fact that most depopulated Palestinian neighborhoods were settled by impoverished Mizrahi Jewish families who had recently immigrated from Arab and Islamic countries only emphasized the negative connotations of Palestinian architecture and its structural elements. Zionist architecture continued to distance itself from the red roof after 1967 and the occupation of East Jerusalem. The wave of new construction in the newly “unified” capital included a series of experimental housing projects that signify the Israeli transition from modernist architecture to brutalism. These projects were clearly influenced by the newly “liberated” Old City of Jerusalem, and thus included architectural motifs such as arches, alleys, and courtyards.⁶³ These references to the “ancient” left the red roof once more out of the dominant Zionist architectural toolbox, discarded as a foreign and contemptable element.

In more rural parts of the Jerusalem metropolitan area, however, the separation between the red and the grey was actually reversed in the period before and immediately after 1948.⁶⁴ In the Zionist rural sector, where metal beams and concrete casting were less available than in the urban sector, pitched roofs were a common feature. Relying on small-scale construction, usually initiated by the settlers themselves, and unskilled labor, rural settlements were built using modern brickwork or concrete blocks covered by a sloping roof, which formed the most simple and efficient method to cover a small dwelling unit.⁶⁵ In Palestinian villages, meanwhile, the use of concrete and flat roofs enabled a more efficient construction of the traditional dwelling units. Accordingly, red roofs became typical of pre-state and early-statehood Zionist rural settlements,⁶⁶ while the white domes of Palestinian villages gradually became flat grey roofs, as one can see in the comparison between the village of Bayt Hanina and the nearby settlements of Atarot or Neve

Yaacov (both abandoned in 1948) (figure 7). The use of red roofs continued to characterize the construction of new moshavim initiated in the Jerusalem area by the state and the Jewish Agency, usually built on depopulated Palestinian villages and lands that Palestinians had owned and worked.⁶⁷ These simple cubes and their red roofs, would become what Allweil referred to as the Zionist *good house*, the dormitory of the ideological pioneer – the *halutz*, the main protagonist of Labor Zionism, characterized as hardworking, ideological, and humble, a kind of Zionist interpolation of the Palestinian *fellaḥ*.⁶⁸ Yet, while the *halutz* and the *fellaḥ* were imagined with similar qualities, they were also imagined as inhabiting houses with different kinds of roofs – an architectural marker of schismogenesis that operated in reverse fashion in the urban context, as in the case of Jerusalem. This would begin to change by the 1980s, however.



Figure 7. Bayt Hanina (bottom) and the Zionist settlement of Neve Yaacov (top), north Jerusalem, 1945. Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Geography Archive. Note the difference in the shape of the roofs, seen in the gradient shading in Neve Yaacov (indicating tilted roofs), in comparison to the consistent shading in Bayt Hanina (indicating flat roofs).

Urbanizing the Rural and Suburbanizing the Colonies

In the late 1950s and the 1960s, the red tiled roof began to disappear in both Arab and Zionist construction. The expulsions and depopulation of 1948 produced a physical rupture in the Palestinian built environment, with hundreds of Palestinian towns, villages, and cities rendered desolate landscapes and dozens of refugee camps springing into being in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and neighboring Arab states.⁶⁹ The loss of major Palestinian cities like Jaffa, Haifa, 'Akka, al-Ramla, and Lydda, as well as the division of Jerusalem, shifted urban-rural dynamics, limiting internal Palestinian migration from the countryside to the cities and putting unprecedented pressure on villages. Rural localities in the larger Jerusalem metropolitan area witnessed an intensive construction boom, and the Corbusian *Maison Dom-Ino* of concrete slabs held by reinforced concrete columns, provided a suitable structural framework to support these developments while promoting a new modernist Palestinian architecture. Bayt Hanina, which until 1948 was a small rural village and during Jordanian rule was merged into Jerusalem's municipal area, expanded in the 1960s into one of the city's fastest developing neighborhoods, home to a series of upper-middle-class single-family and low-rise multifamily dwellings (figure 8). Other, less well-off villages, like Silwan, Sur Bahir, and Shu'fat (and its neighboring refugee camp), which were also merged to Jerusalem, became homes of necessity, and were quickly urbanized, their narrow multistory buildings of unfinished concrete becoming the image of East Jerusalem.⁷⁰



Figure 8. New Bayt Hanina in north Jerusalem, during its occupation by Israeli forces in June 1967. Photo by Zeev Spector, Israeli Government Press Office.

The historical village, the image associated with pre-Nakba Palestine and the antithesis to this new condition, thus became a site of longing, and the red roof that decorated the Palestinian urban space disappeared both physically and in the Palestinian imagination. At the same time, Israeli rural settlements after 1967 would also differ architecturally from the Zionist pre-state and early-statehood moshavim and kibbutzim, mainly due to a new feature that entered the scene: the prefabricated house.⁷¹ These prefabricated concrete dwelling units formed the main settlement tool in the areas occupied by Israel in the 1967 war. In the greater Jerusalem metropolitan area, the settlements of Gush Etzion in the south and Ofra in the north (figure 9), began as assemblages of minimalistic concrete units assembled on site.⁷² Until the 1980s, then, the use of pitched red roofs gradually decreased throughout Palestine, whether by Palestinians or Israelis.

This shifted again in the 1980s, when pitched red roofs began reappearing in the Israeli built environment. A key factor in this architectural renaissance was the Israeli suburban turn that affected local building style on both sides of the Green Line.⁷³ Newly developing “rural” settlements throughout the Jerusalem metropolitan area went through a process of suburbanization, which included a new clientele of settlers interested in large detached private houses that corresponded with their socio-economic class and desire for distinction.⁷⁴ Therefore, the prefabricated units topped with pitched red roofs, usually from asbestos and not clay tiles (figure 10), gave way to lavish villas designed with sloping roofs.⁷⁵ This was part of a broad stylistic transformation, intended to provide settlements a more “rural” and “aesthetic” appearance that would attract future homeowners, and which would eventually lead these features to be associated with the stereotypical appearance of an Israeli settlement.⁷⁶

The Israeli fascination with red roofs during the 1980s was not limited to suburban settlements. As the sloped red roof became the symbol of desired suburban living standards, and the same architects and planners were being commissioned for both suburban and urban projects, the red roof began decorating not only low-rise buildings in urban neighborhoods, but also multistory ones, leading to high-rise buildings that mimicked the appearance of a suburban house.⁷⁷ This enlarged suburban typology became, due to both regulations and aesthetic preferences, the new norm in Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem, which sought to appeal to a clientele desirous of suburbia, yet unable to afford it. Accordingly, Pisgat Zeev, Gilo, and Har Homa settlements became characterized by an urban-suburban hybrid of large-scale construction covered with tilted red roofs (figure 11). This was also the case of Ma’ale Adumim settlement, northeast of Jerusalem, which began as a modernist suburban settlement, and whose roofs gradually turned red throughout the late 1980s and 1990s.⁷⁸ The new image of the desirable Israeli environment was accompanied by the growing Israeli perception of the Palestinian built environment as an assemblage of grey concrete cubes.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, by the early 2000s new forms of cultural differentiation emerged in Jerusalem’s architecture. Revisiting the Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem, we can see how this took shape.



Figure 9. A general view of the West Bank settlement Rosh Zurim in Gush Etzion settlement bloc, south of Bethlehem, 1976. Photo by Moshe Milner, Israeli Government Press Office.



Figure 10. View of new Israeli dwellings in the West Bank settlement of Tekoa, built on land confiscated from nearby Tuqu' village, with Herodion in the background, 1982. Photo by Chanania Herman, Israeli Government Press Office.



Figure 11. Pisgat Zeev settlement in East Jerusalem in the 1990s, showing the growing use of red roofs and the urban-suburban hybrids in the background, 1997. Photo by Moshe Milner, Israeli Government Press Office.

Neo-modernism and Palestinian Self-expression

During the early 2000s, Israeli architecture witnessed a neo-modernist wave. While this was a global phenomenon,⁸⁰ the renaissance of the so-called Bauhaus style had deep political and ideological connections to the concept of the White City in Israel. Architectural neo-modernism was thus an integral part of attempts by the veteran secular Ashkenazi hegemony to retain its cultural distinction, portraying its architecture as clean, modern, Western, yet simultaneously also local, in contrast to the decorative, extravagant, and supposedly vulgar taste of Palestinians and Mizrahim in Israel.⁸¹ This Tel Aviv-focused phenomenon made its way to Jerusalem, and by the second decade of the 2000s, titled red roofs began disappearing (again) in the post-1967 neighborhoods and the more suburban settlements, like Giv'at Zeev and Ma'ale Adumim, giving way to more “clean” and seemingly “modern” architecture. Consequently, the “typical” Israeli settlements began losing their stereotypical image, becoming superficially minimalistic yet practically exclusive: white cubic volumes of apparently high-end construction materials and details like metal beams, large windows, marble, wooden panels, and architectural concrete.⁸²

In the Palestinian sector, however, it is possible to notice a contrary trend. In his book *Architecture*, Kobi Peled analyzes the architectural styles applied by Palestinians

living inside Israel and the dual process of influence from their Jewish neighbors (and employers) and (national) self-expression through differentiation.⁸³ In that sense, Peled discusses the offensive Israeli term of “Arab taste,” which by the early 2000s referred to architecture that did not follow hegemonic neo-modernism. The sloped red roof increasingly became associated with Palestinian architecture inside Israel.⁸⁴ This shift gradually began defining Palestinian residential architecture on both sides of the Green Line.

In the past two decades, it became almost impossible to ignore the wide use of red roofs by Palestinians in East Jerusalem. Red tiles had

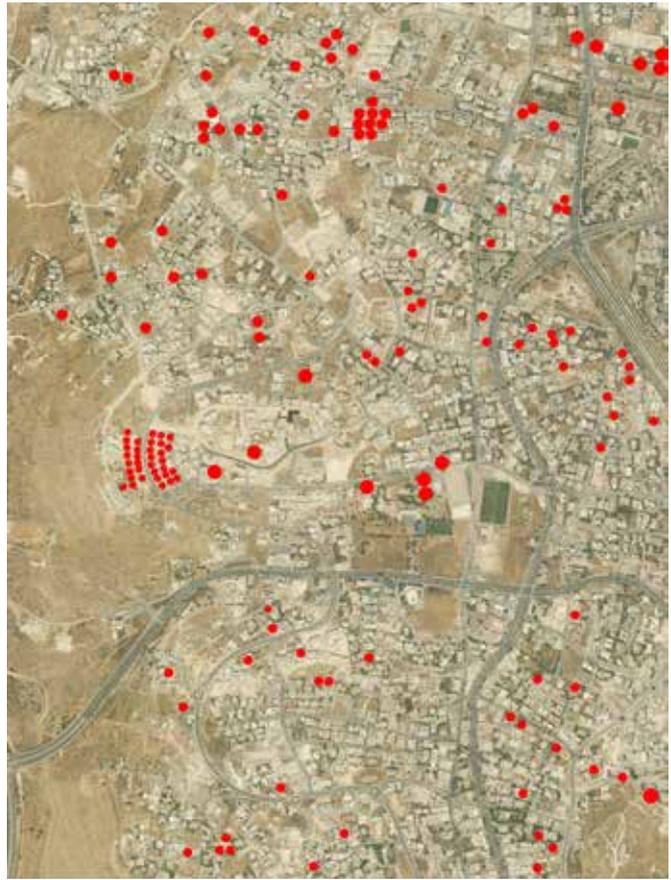


Figure 12. Red roofs built in Bayt Hanina between 2005 and 2022. Jerusalem Municipality GIS, 2022.

been used in Palestinian construction previously, but to a limited degree and mainly to cover staircases leading up to a flat roof. However, this element began gradually to expand, to cover roofs over entire buildings. Moreover, if before 1948 it was the Palestinian urban bourgeoisie who most commonly used the red roof, it was now used in both rural and urban contexts. Across the West Bank, the sloped red roof turned into a recurring architectural element, characterizing expanding Palestinian villages and private urban construction. While the large-scale development of Rawabi and other similar initiatives supported by the Palestinian Investment Fund opt for simple repetitive residential buildings, within Palestinian cities like Ramallah, Nablus, Qalqiliya, and Tulkarm, it is possible to notice a significant increase in red roofs since the early 2000s, covering new projects and multistory structures. A similar process is noticeable in the Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem: turning to Bayt Hanina once again, peaked red roofs are proliferating, especially in comparison to neighboring Jewish neighborhoods where this element had become obsolete (figure 12).

After an absence of more than seven decades, the red-tiled roof returned to the

Palestinian urban context, yet only after appearing and disappearing from the Israeli one. This may be a mere coincidence or a circumstantial change of fashion. However, in Israel/Palestine, where everything is politicized, the use or absence of a certain architectural element can also be read as a kind of schismogenetic cycle: for Israelis red roofs could be used only after being de-Arabized, and for Palestinians they could be used only after losing their association with colonialism, producing a recurring cycle of appropriation, differentiation, and reappropriation (figure 13).

		1882 - 1918		1918 - 1948		1948 - 1960		1960 - 1980		1980 - 2000		2000s	
		Arab/Palestinian	Jewish/Zionist										
URBAN													
RURAL													

Figure 13. The changes and transition in the use of red roofs in Palestine/Israel. Illustration by author.

Conclusions

Revisiting the use of red roofs in Palestine, it is clear that, instead of an element of colonization, the pitched red roof is an element that underwent colonization, as it was appropriated and made to appear as a foreign component detached from the local context. What is peculiar here is that both Israelis and Palestinians have played a role in this process, integrating red roofs into architectural narratives linked to nation-building processes and their connection to built heritage. In retracing the genealogy of red roofs in Palestine, we might ask whether the idea of red roofs being attributed to colonial enterprises is itself a colonial perspective, belittling and patronizing the local population as being unable to independently import foreign elements and technologies, and thus relying on European settlers and their projects to enter the modernity of the twentieth century. Defining the pitched roof and its red tiles as an integral part of Palestinian architecture, by contrast, offers a more nuanced history of the local built environment and a multilayered perspective on pre-1948 urban Palestine.

The disappearance of red roofs could simply be attributed to the increased use of concrete, which allowed flat roofs to cover wide spans. Had the red roof not reappeared as a decorative element, then there would be no cause to question its genealogy. Yet, in the 1980s, when red roofs reemerged for the sake of beautification, or perhaps normalization, of Israeli settlements, they became inextricably tied to settler colonialism. Although their subsequent use seems to have gone back and forth between Israeli and Palestinian built environments, potentially shedding light on architectural schismogenesis, as we have seen, even when Palestinians themselves promote projects with red roofs, there remains a certain equation of red roofs with Israeli and flat roofs with Palestinian construction. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek revisits Marx's reference to the manifestation of ideology as, "They do not

know it, but they are doing it,” and claims that a cynical view of ideology is more accurate: “They know very well what they are doing, yet still, they are doing it.”⁸⁵ Applying this to Palestine-Israel, we might suggest that it is known very well that red roofs are not (just) colonial, yet still the equation is made.

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Sacred Space/ Contested Place: Intergenerational Memory and the Shifting Meanings of the Shrine/Tomb of Joseph

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Abstract

David Marshall examines the case of *Maqam Yusuf* (the Shrine of Joseph, commonly referred to as Joseph's Tomb in English), a contested religious site near the northern West Bank city of Nablus. Often called a "microcosm" of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the shrine has long been viewed as a site of religious intolerance, marked by regular violent confrontations between Palestinian youths and Israeli soldiers. Such a view obscures deeply rooted traditions of multireligious shrine visitation and veneration practiced by Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Samaritans at Maqam Yusuf and other sites throughout Palestine, traditions that themselves predate the arrival of Abrahamic monotheism. This article presents an alternative perspective, namely, that conflict over the shrine is not one of inherent religious rivalry but is rather a conflict of settler-colonial acquisition and resistance. Going further, this paper considers the violence of erasure, and the politics of forgetting as a form of resistance. Drawing on multigenerational oral histories, Marshall charts the shifting meanings of Maqam Yusuf against the changing geopolitical dynamics of the Israeli occupation, highlighting the silences and gaps in generational memory that surround the site. In particular, the article demonstrates how Maqam Yusuf transformed from a site where women practiced and fashioned their social and religious selves, to a site where young men perform a resistant masculinity.

Keywords

Memory; shrines; settler colonialism; religion; oral history; Nablus.

Joseph was Jacob's son. I remember, he used to tend to his sheep. He would water his sheep at Jacob's well, then graze them here in this valley. His brothers left him in a well, maybe this well, God knows. Caravan traders on their way from Syria took him to Egypt, where he was imprisoned for seven years. He was freed and became a minister for the king. He died in Egypt and was buried there. God knows. This maqam is a shrine for Yusuf, but not a tomb. The tomb is for another holy man, named Yusuf Dwaykat, who was a holy man who is buried there. They did archaeological digs here in 1909 that did not reveal any historical connection to Nabi Yusuf.

In the past, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Samaritans all used to visit the tomb. There was no difference between us. We lived together. No difference. We all say, "There is no God but God." Jews are Muslims. They are Muslims because they submit to one God.... All the heavenly religions lived together on this land here. It was European colonialism that divided us like they divided the Ottoman Empire. The Zionists are European colonizers. They came here to make a state for them alone.¹

These are the words of a ninety-year-old man whom my research assistant Nadia and I met by *Maqam Yusuf* (Joseph's Shrine) in Balata al-Balad, a Palestinian village wedged between the contiguous conurbation of Balata refugee camp and the city of Nablus. Though notorious today as a site of perceived religious intolerance and violent confrontation between Palestinian youth and Israeli soldiers, most observers are largely unaware of the role this site once played in everyday Palestinian life. Even this man's words, weaving together centuries of religious and historical narrative as his own first-person recollection, speak to the tomb's political rather than personal significance.

Moving beyond debates about the site's religious authenticity, spectacular accounts of violence, or idealized narratives of coexistence, this article brings the memories and voices of ordinary Palestinians into the story of Maqam Yusuf, while also examining the silences that surround this site today. In doing so, it explores a generational gap between remembering and forgetting, and the divergent meanings that different generations of Palestinians have attached to this site over time. Drawing on multigenerational oral histories of Maqam Yusuf from Palestinians who live close to it, this article examines the memories of this site, charting its shifting meaning in relation to changing dynamics of the Israeli occupation. In particular, it demonstrates how the shrine has transformed from a site where women once practiced and fashioned their social and religious selves, to a site where young men perform a youthful, resistant masculinity.

Called Maqam Yusuf in Arabic and *Qevar Yosef* (Joseph's Tomb) in Hebrew, the site has long been revered by Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims due to its association with Joseph, biblical patriarch and Qur'anic prophet.² Adherents of these faiths have historically differed between and among themselves as to whether the tomb is the burial place of Joseph, or a shrine commemorating his boyhood dwelling place near the ancient Canaanite city of Shechem (Nablus). Some accounts give the Tomb

of the Patriarchs in Hebron as Joseph's final resting place, while other sources claim his burial site is near Jerusalem, or in Safad in the Galilee. There is no archaeological evidence to verify any of these claims. Archaeologists regard Maqam Yusuf as a relic site, rather than a historic site *per se*.³ Indeed, it is possible that the tomb is the site of an ancient shrine to a Canaanite deity later reinscribed with biblical significance.⁴ Today, many Palestinians claim that the tomb belongs not to Nabi Yusuf (Prophet Joseph), but to Shaykh Yusuf Dwaykat, a local *wali* or holy person.⁵ These are not mutually exclusive claims, given the practice of sharing and reusing sacred sites from one era to the next.

My purpose is not to adjudicate these claims, but rather to examine how the shrine has emerged as a contested site within the context of the so-called Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since the Israeli invasion of the West Bank in 1967 and subsequent expansion of Israeli settlements throughout the occupied territory, Maqam Yusuf has become a flashpoint between Palestinian youths and the Israeli army who frequently escort settlers and other Jewish worshippers to the tomb. The shrine has witnessed repeated clashes, killings, and destruction. As such, it has become a cliché for observers to refer to it as a "microcosm" of the conflict.⁶ Maqam Yusuf, the story goes, is the conflict in miniature: a small piece of indivisible sacred property claimed by two rival religious groups within a zero-sum contest over territory.

Rather than evidence of long-simmering animosity between two primordial tribes, however, we can instead view clashes at Maqam Yusuf as the effect of a settler-colonial conquest that has produced a conflict between an occupier seeking to normalize its connection to the land, and an occupied people seeking to resist that normalization. Indeed, the recent history of conflict is only part of the story. Many Palestinians regard Maqam Yusuf as symbolic of Palestinian religious pluralism. Older Palestinian residents, particularly women, fondly recall the central role Maqam Yusuf once had in their social and religious lives as a site of ceremony, worship, and leisure. We can read the painful erasure of such memories as part of the trauma inflicted on this site. Like attempts at physical erasure, forgetting serves as a sacrificial act of survival intended to deny the occupier a territorial foothold. In addressing forgetting as a tactic of self-preservation, this research contributes to the literature on the politics of memory as well as that on shared shrines. Moreover, by examining narratives that gesture toward the resacralization of shrines like Maqam Yusuf, and calls to revive long-standing traditions of multireligious veneration of such sites, this article presents alternatives to settler-colonial temporalities of inevitable erasure.

Before turning to Palestinians' memories of Maqam Yusuf, this article contextualizes the site within biblical and historical narratives. Rather than present a linear unfolding of history as an inevitable clash between two mutually exclusive narratives, I offer a palimpsestic reading of place as produced by multiple overlapping narratives, some coming to the fore and others being erased at various points.⁷ These narratives include stories of conflict and coexistence disappearing and reappearing together at various points to reveal complex configurations and juxtapositions. From these historical narratives, I turn to debates about whether shared shrines like Maqam Yusuf serve as examples of multireligious coexistence or what Robert Hayden refers to as "antagonistic tolerance."⁸ Like Hayden, I argue for widening our historical frame

beyond contemporary clashes and considering the changing contexts in which sharing or conflict occurs. Moreover, I argue that, in Palestine, settler colonialism offers a useful lens through which to analyze Maqam Yusuf as a site of contested memory. As Zionist activists seek to assert their claims over the site, erasing its significance to local Palestinian communities, both memory and forgetting can be understood together within a framework of indigenous Palestinian counter-memory. First, however, I turn to a description of the research methods employed in this study.

Methods and Limitations

Drawing on recent work on intergenerationality from children's geographies, this study puts younger and older generations into dialogue to better understand different perceptions of place within constantly shifting social and political contexts.⁹ Specifically, I use place-based narrative oral history interviews with different generations of residents who live near Maqam Yusuf, or who used to visit it, to understand how meanings and practices associated with the site have changed.¹⁰ In summer 2018, I began conducting ethnographic visits to Balata al-Balad. During this time, I made several visits to the shrine itself, speaking with Palestinian security, residents, and elders. In addition, I began interviewing shopkeepers and residents in the Old City of Nablus, based on the suggestions of the older residents of Balata al-Balad who recall families from the Old City visiting Maqam Yusuf regularly.

In summer 2019, I returned to Nablus to conduct interviews with different generations of residents living near Maqam Yusuf, as well as older residents of Nablus who recall visiting the tomb prior to the restrictions imposed upon the space. This older generation, whom we can call *jil al-Nakba*, is the generation born either just before or just after the Nakba of 1948, and thus remember Maqam Yusuf after the establishment of the state of Israel, under Jordanian rule, and after the 1967 invasion and occupation. I also conducted interviews with members of a middle adult generation, whom we can refer to as *jil al-Naksa*. They largely came of age after the Naksa of 1967, spent their formative years growing up under Israeli occupation, and remember the first intifada of 1987.¹¹ Finally, I interviewed Palestinian young people aged thirty years and younger who grew up during the post-Oslo era, came of age under the Palestinian Authority, and remember the second intifada, or its immediate aftermath. I returned in summer of 2022 to conduct further interviews. I conducted most of the interviews in Arabic, sometimes with the help of two Palestinian research assistants (one male, one female), though some were conducted in English.

In all, I conducted interviews with forty-four people (thirty-one men and thirteen women). By national identity, religion, and gender, interviewees were: thirty-four Palestinian Muslims – twenty-two men, twelve women; five Palestinian Samaritan community representatives – four men and one woman; three Palestinian Christian community (Nablus) leaders (two clerics, one layperson) from Nablus – all men; and two Israeli Jewish representatives, both men (one American-Israeli settler, one Israeli) from an Israeli Jewish religious organization that sponsors repairs to the tomb and facilitates monthly visits.

By age and gender categories, twelve interviews were with Palestinians over sixty-five years of age (six women and six men). Another twelve interviews were with the middle generation, thirty to sixty-five years of age (eight men and four women). Ten interviews were conducted with younger Palestinians, under thirty years of age (eight men and two women). The gender disproportion in the latter groups is a drawback of the intergenerational interviewing technique I used.¹² I conducted most interviews in family homes, with multiple generations present, including the elder patriarch or matriarch of the family. Most often, their adult son would assist with the interview, helping to clarify questions and add details to the responses. When we arrived chronologically to a time period that the adult son remembered (usually the 1970s), he would share his own recollections. Eventually, opportunities arose to engage younger members of the family (usually sons in their late teens or twenties), who had been sitting in deferential silence, helping with refreshments. These youth would sometimes share stories of clashes at Maqam Yusuf and would often remark that they had never before heard their grandparents' stories about traditions at the shrine.

These intergenerational interviews helped address gaps of memory and fill the silences of forgotten stories. However, patriarchal family dynamics and conservative gender relations also placed limitations on this interview technique. Adult women were often busy preparing tea, coffee, or food, and would only offer fleeting input as they came in and out of the interview setting. The three substantive interviews I conducted with adult women took place in public spaces with their children present. Younger men in the family would offer insights, but due to parental oversight, were unlikely to speak freely. For this reason, I also conducted additional one-on-one interviews with youth in coffee shops. Female youth were rarely present during family interviews. The two female youths I interviewed (recent university graduates) were previous acquaintances from Balata al-Balad who had offered to assist with research and find potential interview subjects. Though they were able to recommend older family members and neighbors to interview, attempts to recruit their female peers were revealingly unsuccessful. As one interviewee explained: "The girls I talked to said they have nothing to do with that place, and that I should talk to the *shabab* [young men]." As detailed below, this perspective illustrates a generational shift in the meaning of Maqam Yusuf, from a site of particular religious and social importance to women and children, to a site of political struggle for male youths. The next section contextualizes these shifting meanings within deeper religious and historical narratives.

Between Biblical and Historical Time

In the story of Joseph and his brothers, there were clear signs to those who seek answers.

Qur'an, 12:17¹³

The Qur'an extolls the hermeneutical prowess of Joseph and invites listeners to ponder the meaning of his story, which it calls "the best of stories." Surat Yusuf, or the chapter of Joseph, tells the story of Joseph – from his brothers throwing him in the well, to his

imprisonment in Egypt, to his rise as a vizier in the Egyptian court, and to his eventual reunification with his family – as a single, continuous narrative. This contrasts with the circuitous storytelling style for which the Qur’an is renowned. Tradition holds that the Prophet Muhammad received all 111 *ayat* (verses) of this surah in a single sitting in Mecca before the Muslim *hijra* or migration to Medina.

Not included in the Qur’anic narrative, however, is Joseph’s death and burial. For that, the Hebrew Bible apprises us, prior to Joseph’s impending death, his brothers pledged to return his remains to the land of his fathers in Canaan. According to biblical scholar Shalom Goldman, the story of the return and interment of Joseph’s remains as narrated in Exodus and the Book of Joshua occupies a “pivotal point in Biblical narrative,” rhetorically linking “the period of the patriarchs, with its roots in Mesopotamia, the Hebrew bondage in the land of Egypt, and the conquest and settlement of Canaan.”¹⁴ Samaritan accounts dating back to the fourth century CE locate Maqam Yusuf at the foot of Tell Balata, a mound in the valley between mounts Ebal and Gerizim, near the entrance of Shechem. According to biblical accounts, Shechem fell within a territorial allotment given to the Israelite tribe of Ephraim, from whom Samaritans claim lineage. For centuries, Samaritans have revered Maqam Yusuf as one of their holiest sites, second only to Mount Gerizim. Some Jewish sources uphold the biblical narrative of Joseph’s burial near Shechem, while others uphold rabbinical tradition that the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron holds Joseph’s remains or place his tomb in Safad.¹⁵ The competing sites indicate regional as much as religious rivalry, as localities vied for the honor of hosting the patriarch’s remains, and their attendant pilgrim traffic.

The early Byzantine period introduced a dispute between Samaritan and Christian authorities over access to Maqam Yusuf and potential removal of his remains. Records from that era indicate that some relics from the tomb were removed and taken to Constantinople in 415 CE (today, visitors to Topkapı Palace in Istanbul can view a robe said to be Joseph’s). The mosaic map of Madaba from the sixth century shows a site associated with Joseph near Nablus, though it lacks the usual modifier “holy” indicating a saintly relic.¹⁶ According to Crusader-era accounts, the tomb had fallen out of use by Christians, becoming a Muslim pilgrimage site maintained by Samaritans.¹⁷

Following Salah al-Din’s victory over the Crusaders, shrines flourished in Palestine. In addition to building shrines to the *sahaba* (companions of the Prophet Muhammad), as well as other Muslim *salihin* (righteous people) and *shuhada’* (martyrs), the Ayyubid and later Mamluk dynasties maintained shrines dedicated to Old Testament figures and even rabbinic sages as *awqaf* (Islamic endowments).¹⁸ In doing so, Muslim authorities took on the role of custodians of the Abrahamic tradition, bolstering their political and religious influence. They also continued a long-standing local custom of shrine-construction harkening back to Canaanite-period pagan traditions. This shared reverence among monotheistic faiths for saints, sages, and shrines, itself an echo of pagan practices, is not an indication of irreconcilable religious differences, but of religious affinity.

Muslim travelers and geographers writing in the twelfth through fourteenth

centuries CE note the existence of a shrine to Joseph near Nablus, though some also record the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron as a potential burial site.¹⁹ The present structure, a domed Islamic *maqam*, dates to a reconstruction of the shrine in 1868, during the centralization of Ottoman rule in Palestine.²⁰



Figure 1. Interior of Maqam Yusuf as it appears today, showing the internal structure of the Islamic maqam constructed in 1868, and the more recently renovated cenotaph and floor. Photo by author, 27 June 2019.

European Christian travelers also describe a shrine dedicated to Joseph near Nablus. Oxford scholar and Church of England clergyman Henry Maundrell described a small mosque built over the sepulchre of Joseph just outside the city of Nablus in 1697.²¹ In the 1800s, European travelers to the Holy Land seeking to map biblical geography onto the physical and cultural landscape of Ottoman Palestine relied on Arab guides, Arabic place names, and local legends, often taking them as historical fact.²² In his 1838 account, Irish author William Cooke Taylor, who helped popularize Maqam Yusuf within the modern European Christian imaginary as the resting place of the Patriarch Joseph, encountered a shared shrine revered by the multiple religious communities that inhabited the area.²³ Mark Twain reproduced much the same scene in *Innocents Abroad* (1868):

Few tombs on earth command the veneration of so many races [sic] and men [sic] of diverse creeds as this of Joseph. Samaritan and Jew, Moslem

and Christian alike, revere it, and honor it with their visits. The tomb of Joseph, the dutiful son, the affectionate, forgiving brother, the virtuous man, the wise Prince and ruler. Egypt felt his influence – the world knows his history.²⁴

Multireligious veneration was not, however, unique to this tomb, or even tombs associated with biblical prophets. A 1903 expedition through Syria and Palestine by Lewis Paton, Samuel Curtiss, and Stuart Crawford documented numerous “high places” and “holy trees,” half of which were shared by Muslim, Christian, and Druze Palestinians.²⁵

Following the establishment of the British Mandate in 1922, archaeological expeditions increased, and European archaeologists interpreted their findings through a biblical lens, affirming Christian and Jewish Zionist claims to the land.²⁶ As the Zionist movement galvanized Palestinian nationalist opposition, prominent holy places such as the Western Wall (Buraq’s Wall) and the Cave of Patriarchs (Ibrahimi Mosque), to which Jewish access had been restricted, took on political significance. According to an elder of Balata al-Balad who grew up during the Mandate period, these tensions were felt at Maqam Yusuf as well:

When I was a child, we were under the British. They would bring in the Jewish religious people. We would throw pebbles at them, small stones! By God, we didn’t know who they were, but we knew they wanted to come and take our village. We knew! [laughs] They would yell at us and curse our religion and curse Muhammad, peace be upon him [laughs].²⁷

Nevertheless, he recalls tourists, Christian and Jewish alike, in later periods, coming on buses to visit the site “in peace.”

After 1948, Israeli archaeology continued the legacy of European biblical archaeology.²⁸ The newly established state built and named new settlements in a way that accentuated a sense of historical continuity and national unity,²⁹ and the Israeli Ministry of Religions supported the processes of mapping and “expropriating” Muslim holy places and turning them into “exclusively Jewish holy places.”³⁰ This was replicated after 1967 by Israel’s military and civil authorities operating in the West Bank, where Israeli settlers also established settlements on the sites of archaeological digs. Palestinians with whom I spoke remember busloads of visitors coming to visit Maqam Yusuf. One older woman who grew up in Balata al-Balad recalled collecting antique coins and other artefacts to sell to international tourists prior to 1967, and also recalls receiving Israeli visitors after 1967.³¹

Jewish settlers began visiting Maqam Yusuf in the mid-1970s, while the extremist religious settler movement Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) was attempting to establish an outpost settlement near Nablus at Sebastiya.³² During this time, the Israeli military established a checkpoint forbidding Palestinian access. In 1982, settlers from Yitzar and surrounding settlements established a yeshiva named *Od Yosef Chai* (Joseph Still Lives) at the shrine under the protection of the Israeli army. Some of the

residents whom I interviewed remember the yeshiva students walking down the main street to their lessons in the shrine, even stopping at the local shops on the way home to buy sweets. Some also recall tensions arising with students from a Palestinian boys' school next to the shrine: Palestinian students clashed with Israeli soldiers at a military checkpoint established to secure the yeshiva. After the first Palestinian intifada of 1987, Maqam Yusuf became the site of frequent and intense clashes between the Israeli military and Palestinians, especially from nearby Balata refugee camp, which had become a locus of activism.

In 1995, an interim agreement signed as part of the Oslo accords specified that responsibility over "sites of religious significance" or "Holy Sites" in Areas A and B would be transferred to the Palestinian Authority, stating that, "Both sides shall respect and protect the ... religious rights of Jews, Christians, Moslems and Samaritans," including free access and freedom of worship.³³ The agreement excludes Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem and Maqam Yusuf in Nablus (listed Jewish holy sites), which would remain under direct Israeli control, despite being located in Palestinian built-up areas. Jewish settler visits and renovations to solidify the shrine's Jewish character increased during this time, and the military checkpoint, which remained at the site, continued to be a frequent flashpoint. In 1996, Palestinian protestors and militants overran the tomb during a day of demonstrations triggered by the opening of an Israeli archaeological tunnel running adjacent to the Haram al-Sharif, killing six Israeli soldiers.³⁴ The heavy cost of securing a site in Area A, particularly one of questionable religious authenticity, prompted the Israeli army, the Israeli border police, and the Shin Bet intelligence services to request that the Israeli government relinquish control to the Palestinian Authority.

Maqam Yusuf was once again engulfed in violence after Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Haram al-Sharif in September 2000 ignited the second intifada. In October, a Druze officer in the Israeli army was killed during a standoff with Palestinian fighters.³⁵ Outcry over his death and the continued cost of defending the tomb eventually led to the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the area. Palestinian protestors damaged the tomb following the evacuation and a rabbi was killed attempting to enter the area at night. Though the Palestinian Authority secured the area and began repairs the next day, workers repairing the tomb sparked controversy when they restored the dome to its former color – green, which Israelis took as an assertion of Muslim dominance over the site. Under U.S. and international pressure, Palestinian workers were forced to paint the dome white again.

The Israeli withdrawal from the area was short-lived, as Israeli forces invaded and reoccupied Nablus in April 2002. The invasion placed the city and surrounding refugee camps and villages, including Balata al-Balad, under curfew for weeks at a time, and inflicted heavy loss of life and widespread damage. Taking advantage of these conditions, settlers began surreptitiously visiting the site. As a young Israeli settler from Itamar settlement who used to visit the site at this time told me in an interview: "If you are prevented from going to a place that is yours, a place you believe belongs to you, you will try to go there twenty-four hours a day."³⁶ Israeli military forces

began facilitating monthly visits, providing armed escort to several hundred Jewish worshippers in the middle of the night. In 2005, the military suspended these visits due to security concerns.

In 2007 and 2008, members of the Breslov Hasidim sect, who incorporate singing and dancing as part of worship, requested access to the site, concerned about the gap in visitation and potential damage. In 2009, monthly visits were resumed under Israeli military protection. In August 2010, the Israeli military and the Palestinian Authority reached an agreement on renovating the site and allowing regular visitation, and PA security services routinely coordinated with Israeli forces to facilitate regular visitation to the shrine.

In 2015, Palestinian demonstrators who were protesting Israel's demolition of a house in the village attempted to attack the shrine, but Palestinian security forces repelled them. Busloads of mainly Breslov Hasidim settlers, at times numbering over a thousand, engage in raucous singing and dancing at the shrine during monthly midnight visits, lasting until the early hours of the morning. During these visits, Balata al-Balad is placed under twelve-hour curfew, from around nine o'clock in the evening until nine o'clock the next morning. Israeli soldiers set up checkpoints around the area and take up positions atop Palestinian residential buildings, often sequestering the families living within them. Palestinian protestors meet the Israeli army entourage with resistance. Shootings and arrests at the checkpoints are common. Israeli soldiers have shot and killed over a dozen Palestinian youths, as well as bystanders, in confrontations at the site since 2015. The indiscriminate use of tear gas during incursions takes a heavy toll on families living in the area. The seemingly unending violence has all but erased any other memories of this place.

Shared/Contested Sacred Sites

Current scholarship on shared/contested shrines pivots between two polarized perspectives, one emphasizing the inevitability of conflict that results from two or more religious communities claiming the same site, and the other emphasizing how shared sites increase contact and cooperation.³⁷ Ron Hassner's view that "sacred places cannot be shared" typifies the first perspective, which regards religion as the main driver of difference and separation as the only way to resolve religious conflict.³⁸ This has largely been the approach taken in Israel/Palestine, both on the political level and in everyday life.³⁹ Against this view, peaceful interactions between different religious groups is a regular occurrence at sites throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, including Israel/Palestine, and South Asia.⁴⁰

What conditions help (or hinder) such coexistence? Hayden argues in favor of ethnographic methods that take into consideration a broader context, emphasizing that sacred sites are "inherently linked to social processes that are larger than the purely local."⁴¹ He also notes that the mere presence of multiple religious communities is not necessarily proof of amicability: coexistence might merely be constrained hostility or, at best, "passive non-interference."⁴² Hayden's model of "antagonistic tolerance"

provides a framework for understanding “both long periods of relatively peaceful interaction and shorter periods of violent conflict” between religious communities in a particular area. These moments of “intertemporal violence” that punctuate long periods of peace, Hayden argues, occur during times of political transition or contested dominance.⁴³ In other words, violence flares up in the absence of a clear and uncontested authority. That violence has intensified around Maqam Yusuf since the Oslo accords introduced ambiguity about authority over the shrine seems to support this view.

Such an analysis is helpful in its attentiveness to how the politics of sacred space plays out within broader power dynamics. Meanwhile, an intersectional approach to multireligious shrine sharing is necessary to attend to the various vectors of commonality and difference within and between religious groups including along lines of language and race/ethnicity.⁴⁴ For example, although Zionist discourses have tended to homogenize a singular Jewish community, the Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Arab Jews, including indigenous Palestinian Jewish communities and immigrants from Yemen and North Africa, have historically differed in their attitudes toward intermingling across religious and gender lines at shared holy sites.⁴⁵ While the antagonistic tolerance model seeks to understand how religious groups in a particular area negotiate sacred space amid a changing field of power relations, it does not explain the power dynamics of dichotomization and homogenization that, in the case of Israel/Palestine, constructed “Arab” and “Jew” as distinct and incongruous ethnoreligious groups in the first place.

The settler-colonial framework is useful in moving beyond reductive views that take the situation in Israel/Palestine as an exceptional zero-sum religious conflict. Although the dominant view is that the conflict in Israel/Palestine is an ethnonational and religious struggle, a settler-colonial lens allows us to see how conflict, partition, displacement, and occupation have, in part, shaped Palestinians into a distinct polity in opposition to Zionism.⁴⁶ This formulation follows Fanon’s observation that settler colonialism produces the native “as such” through interpolation.⁴⁷ Zionism, like other settler-colonial projects, seeks to dominate the indigenous population with the ultimate goal of removing and replacing them. Spatially, it seeks to steadily Judaize space – over which it can claim sovereignty and displace Palestinians – and wall off and isolate Palestinians within ever diminishing confines.⁴⁸

When it comes to Jewish-claimed holy sites embedded within Palestinian space, the strategy of spatial segregation manifests in what Bowman, referring to Rachel’s tomb, calls “encystation,” describing its capture and enclosure for exclusive Israeli use and control.⁴⁹ Unlike Bethlehem, near the Green Line, this strategy is much more difficult near Nablus within the hills of the northern West Bank. While regular visits by settlers seek to normalize Maqam Yusuf as a Jewish-Israeli space, Palestinian protests disrupt this process. In this formulation, the conflict over Maqam Yusuf is not a religious conflict (at least not *wholly* holy), but an attempt by settlers to Judaize the site within a larger project of colonization and by Palestinians to deny settlers any claim to the land that the tomb may represent. However, denying Jewish connection to the shrine also threatens denying an indigenous ontological relationship to that site,

in the form of memories and folk traditions deeply interwoven into the socio-spatial fabric of Palestinian (multi)religious and social life. I turn now to those memories.

Collective Religious and Social Memory

The prophet Jacob, peace be upon him, became very sad about his lost son [Joseph]. He would go to a cave, which is now the Green Mosque in the Old City, it was built around this cave.... We kept the memories of the family of Jacob until today. We named the fields below Jacob's Field, and every year we gave a portion of our harvest to the mosque for distribution to the poor and we called it *awqaf Ibrahim al-Khalili*, because Abraham was Jacob's grandfather, the father of Isaac and Ishmael, God grant all of them peace.... Some say that *bani Isra'il* brought Joseph's remains with them when they came to this land. Maybe they buried him in Jerusalem, maybe in Hebron, maybe somewhere around here, or maybe he is still in Egypt. God knows.⁵⁰

This narrative, given by an octogenarian from Balata al-Balad, resembles that which opened this article in the way it recounts religious and historical narrative as first-hand memory. "But if you want the truth," his son, a man in his fifties, interrupted, "it is not Joseph's tomb [*qabr*]. It is just a shrine [*maqam*]. Just so the people can remember him, and send peace to him, and greet him [*tahyatuhu*], because he was from here." When I asked the man's father what he would like to see happen to the site, however, the old man said, "God willing, in the future, I hope it goes back to the way it was before, an important place for all the people, like it was in the past. I wish it would go back to being a tomb." In the historical time of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict over land, a *maqam* is not and cannot be a tomb. As such, the man longs for a resacralization of time and a re-enchantment of the cultural landscape, to return sacred space to being sacred space rather than national territory.

For the older residents of Balata al-Balad, *Maqam Yusuf* was not just a religious space, but also a functional social space. In addition to being a shrine, it was a mosque, a school, and a place where important occasions were held, including weddings, ceremonial haircuts, circumcisions, birth celebrations, and religious holidays. Given the central role that women play in family ceremonies like weddings and births, and given that women are less likely to pray in the male-dominated space of the local mosque, *Maqam Yusuf* was a central site in the social and spiritual lives of Palestinian women. The women elders whom I interviewed would light up when asked to recall their memories of the shrine. Umm Shadi, born in 1956, remembers how women would come to *Maqam Yusuf* in the days before the occupation:

I remember, all of us young kids, every Friday, the men would be at the mosques, and we'd see the women coming, bringing their children, bringing their supper, coming from Nablus, from different neighborhoods, and from villages and the camps, too – from 'Askar, from Balata. They

would come from all around and the neighborhood would be full. They would pray Friday noon prayers there. They would eat breakfast there, drink, have supper there, and at the end of the day they would go home. We were kids and we would go up to see what they were doing. We would go out and see the ladies. Just like that. It was freedom. If you wanted to go in to see the Prophet Yusuf you could go in. There wasn't anyone to forbid us. That was in the days of Jordan, when the Jordanian government was in control of Palestine. The Jordanian army. Before the Naksa [1967 war]. There weren't any problems, it was freedom.⁵¹

In this telling, Maqam Yusuf was an important social space for all women of different class backgrounds, gathering urbanite, villager, and refugee women.

In one intergenerational interview, a man in his fifties and his elderly mother fondly recalled weddings that were held at Maqam Yusuf. I replicate their conversation at length to illustrate the intergenerational exchange of memory:

Walid: The last wedding party was in 1985. 1986 passed, then 1987 the first intifada started, so that tradition stopped. It was like the *hajja* said, the day of the wedding was usually Friday, after Friday prayer, people would go, dressed in their finest, to the groom's house, where he was getting bathed.

Umm Walid: They would eat a big meal there.

Walid: Or at the house of one of his relatives. They would have supper and the bathing of the groom. The family of the groom would feed the group, and they would bring a horse, decorated in finery.

Umm Walid: Gold.

Walid: ... and bring an umbrella.

Umm Walid: With *lirat* [coins] hanging from it.

Walid: And the groom would ride the horse holding the umbrella, because of the sun, because most of the weddings would be in the summer... So, they would go from a place called *harat al-'ayn* [neighborhood of the spring].

Umm Walid: Where the settlers come now.

Walid: That was like "downtown" Balata. They would walk through the neighborhood with the horse, the men would be in two lines in front of the groom, they would be doing the Palestinian salutations, walking in front of the groom and the groom behind them. Then behind the groom would be the ladies, ululating. They would keep walking for about an

hour, around the neighborhood, until they reached the open area of Nabi Yusuf. As I remember it, from when I was small. Now there are two schools, but at the time there were no schools, and the area was open.

Umm Walid: They would grow onions, herbs, and vegetables.

Walid: In the summer, yes, it was a garden ... it was a big open space. So, the people would come when the groom arrived, and sit in the *zawiya* [religious gathering space] and bring in instruments and dance Palestinian *dabka* in the circle there. And there was, I remember at that time, every person had a horse, so they would bring them, and race their horses in the field east of the maqam. So those were the traditions that were present at that time.

Umm Walid: They would come from the village, from Nablus, and from other villages to come and see the races.... All those traditions, where did they go, do you know?⁵²

In this way, the site functioned as a central social gathering space and a site of religious significance. As Umm Walid put it, Fridays at Maqam Yusuf were “like a picnic, but also worship.” She continued:

At birth celebrations we would remember the prophet, praise the prophet, and things like that. Ladies, you know. I mean, life was beautiful – freedom, freedom. Everyone would go, dress up their kids. And we would all drink water. There’s a waterwell with cold, delicious water.... The women would say “blessings and peace to you our Prophet and our Master Yusuf.” Things like that. We were all young and we would watch the women.⁵³

Similarly, as Walid recalled, women would seek to be blessed with a child, saying, “O Lord, if you bestow on me a son, I will cut his hair, here at Nabi Yusuf.”⁵⁴ In interviews with older women and their adult sons, some would suggest that these beliefs and traditions were just the naive superstitions of women. As Umm Shadi put it: “We’d say, ‘Let’s go to Nabi Yusuf’... We would celebrate births and supplicate [*nad’i*], which they say is innovation [*bid’a*] now. What did we know? We didn’t know anything ... only God knows.” Here we can see an almost apologetic disavowal of women’s folk religious traditions, perhaps owing to the influence of Salafi-inspired Islamic revivalism as well as concerns that such traditions might reinforce Israeli claims to Maqam Yusuf as a Jewish space. Indeed, this sudden claim to Jewish space came as a shock to many Palestinians, as Umm Shadi recalled: “It was a great place, for everyone. You could hear the women supplicating ‘O our Lord, o our Master Yusuf ...’ Then they took it. ‘This is *our* prophet.’ Really, this shocked us when they said that.”⁵⁵

Such statements challenged the idea that Maqam Yusuf was a site whose

significance was exclusive to a single community, but my research also complicated somewhat romantic depictions of religious coexistence. Muslim residents could not recall Samaritans or Christians visiting Maqam Yusuf, and suggested they may have gone on different days. Interestingly, Palestinian Christians describe many of the same practices undertaken by Muslims at Maqam Yusuf, such as prayer, picnics, special social occasions, and religious ceremonies. However, they recall them taking place not at Maqam Yusuf, but at nearby Jacob's well, which was then a field of ruins where the Greek Orthodox church, built in 1893, had been destroyed in the earthquake of 1927. Likewise, Samaritans describe practices at Maqam Yusuf similar to those described by Palestinian Muslims, namely prayer and supplication. Though Samaritan visits to the site continue today, they are severely restricted by the occupation. Samaritans also visit the nearby holy site of Maqam Nabi 'Uzayr in the village of 'Awarta, which is also revered by Muslims and is a site of incursion by Israeli settlers. Samaritans describe visits to this site that include prayer, picnics, and leisure, much the way residents of Nablus and Balata al-Balad remember Maqam Yusuf. We can view these shared sites not as representing some idealized coexistence or even antagonistic tolerance but as spaces for a form of "parallel pray," where Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans engage in similar customs, albeit in different times and places.⁵⁶

Conflict, Erasure, and Amnesia

As most interview subjects indicated, Israel's invasion and occupation of the West Bank in 1967 brought social gatherings at Maqam Yusuf to an end. Women from Nablus stopped coming to celebrate their occasions. The people of Balata al-Balad continued to hold wedding parties at the tomb until well into the 1980s, until this was interrupted by the intifada. One man from the village recalled:

We started to have problems. Youth started attacking the checkpoint at the shrine. There were clashes, and wounded, and martyrs... we felt like they took our house, like they came in and took our house when they took Maqam Yusuf and forbid us from it. We knew this was to establish a foothold in our land. They wanted to make their ideas about this tomb a reality and they wanted to make it difficult for us to live a normal life in our own homes while they make the situation normal for themselves.⁵⁷

This time of conflict came with a change in perception of the tomb, as this man noted:

Nowadays, we know this is not the prophet Yusuf's tomb. It is Yusuf Dwaykat, a *wali* from Balata al-Balad. That's who is buried in the tomb. Even if it is [the prophet] Yusuf's tomb, it doesn't give the settlers the right to take it. They can't just use any artefact and use it as an excuse to take our land. It's like *maskhara Juha* [Juha's joke], you know?⁵⁸ The youth today know it's not really Nabi Yusuf, so that's why they are angry about that place. 'We should just destroy it,' they say, 'finish with it!' In

my opinion, we want the Jews to visit it, of course, no problem, but visit it in peace, normally, not like an army of occupation.⁵⁹

This view is representative of many who feel that the tomb is being used as an excuse for Israelis to extend their territorial reach and displace Palestinians.

For many Palestinian youth today, Maqam Yusuf is a blank space surrounded by a wall to be avoided at all costs. For some, it is a place to go out and confront the occupation face-to-face. One young man in his early twenties said that he passed by the shrine for ten years on his way to school, not knowing anything about it. He, like most of the young people I spoke with, had never heard of the traditions associated with it:

When I used to walk home from school, I would pass by the shrine. It was open. There was no gate like there is now. So, a lot of students or classmates would go in there and hang out, but I was afraid to go into the place, because I didn't know what it was.... I heard terrible stories. Like, scary stories. Like horror movies. They said that settlers come here and light candles that float up in the air and move around. Childish things like that. So, I was so scared to go in there. Also, I heard there were some settlers living in there, so I was scared. I didn't know the truth. Nowadays, I still try to avoid it. As a kid, it was a scary place. As a young man, it was a political place. So, I tried to avoid it! Different reason, same result. Until now, I'm still trying to avoid it. I want nothing to do with it.⁶⁰

Once the center of social and religious life, filled with joy and celebration, Maqam Yusuf has become a place of terror, dread, and sadness.

Another young man, whose good friend was shot and killed one evening confronting the Israeli army at Maqam Yusuf, had conflicted feelings about the resistance to Israeli incursions at the site. Speaking of his friend, he said:

He got arrested when he was seventeen years old.... He was arrested for going out and throwing stones. I think he felt something would happen, because he told his mom – his mom always tells us this – the night he was martyred he said, “Mom, I feel tonight something good will happen to me.” This is what he told his mother exactly a few minutes before he was shot. To be honest, I don't think this is the right way. They do it because they love their country, but it's not the right way. I just wish the settlers could come and go normally. But then again, we have to resist the occupation. It's really hard. We can't let them just have everything easily.⁶¹

Echoing the sentiments of many others, he reiterated that he wished someday Jews and anyone else could visit the site “normally, like visitors, not like an army of occupation.” But for now, as a female youth explained, the Israeli settlers come with “full freedom behind the force of an army,” while residents of Balata al-Balad cannot even visit nearby Maqam Yusuf, let alone the holy sites of Jerusalem.

This ambiguity of longing for normality while also resisting the normalization of occupation was repeated by Umm Shadi when discussing the youth who throw stones at the soldiers and settlers during their regular incursions:

What can we do? The youth don't listen. But surrender isn't good either. If they don't defend themselves, who is going to defend us? That's the problem. I'm too afraid to defend myself. Maybe this one is sick, this one is old, this one is a child. Who is going to defend us? It's the youth. It's self-defense.⁶²

Many Israeli and Palestinian officials tout their security cooperation at Maqam Yusuf. Likewise, many Palestinian security officials with whom I spoke see it as their duty as Palestinian Muslims to protect the site. Nevertheless, many residents of Balata al-Balad feel under constant pressure and threat of violence and see youth resistance, whether admirable or annoying, as a symptom of the larger violence of occupation.

Insurgent Memory and the Politics of Forgetting

The oral history narratives of Palestinian Muslims reveal divergent perspectives on Maqam Yusuf. Taken together, these stories depict a dramatic break in religious and cultural traditions associated with the site, imposed mainly by the occupation and the intifada. As the site came under Israeli control, Maqam Yusuf shifted from being a site of spiritual and social significance for Palestinian women to a site of political resistance against occupation, mainly for male Palestinian youth. Though older respondents diverge in their views about whether the site is a tomb or merely a shrine (most contend the latter, though some say the former was once a prevailing belief), all interviewees of all ages agreed that the site is nevertheless of cultural, historic, and religious significance. As such, all agreed that it must be protected from damage and kept open to all regardless of religion or nationality, rather than being seen as the sole property of one religion. Though interviewees differed in their support or condemnation of physical confrontations with soldiers at the site, all viewed the occupation itself as the source of violence and the main obstacle preventing Palestinians from exercising their right to access this and other holy sites, including those in Jerusalem and Hebron.

Drawing on geographer Justin Tse's notion of "grounded theologies," that is, "performative practices of place-making informed by understandings of the transcendent," we can read Maqam Yusuf as made sacred through a combination of embodied social practices and transcendent understandings of place with broader religious imaginaries.⁶³ As some of the narratives above indicate, for older Palestinian men, the maqam served as a territorial marker used to map Qur'anic narrative onto the physical terrain of their surroundings, alongside sites such as wells and hills deemed sacred to local people even before the arrival of monotheist faiths. Adhering to neither archaeological accuracy nor religious orthodoxy, shrines such as Maqam Yusuf served as sacred sites for women, in particular, who congregated in them for communal worship and to pray for fertility or for the health and well-being of their families.

Whatever their social and spiritual significance in the everyday lives of ordinary believers, such sacred sites have come to play an important role in the lives of nations. Religious sites serve to establish “invented traditions” around which “imagined communities” can form in their search for a “desirable and recoverable past” and a “place in the world.”⁶⁴ They stand as *lieux de mémoire*, places vested with symbolic significance as the “memorial heritage” of national communities.⁶⁵ Maurice Halbwachs’s notion of “collective memory” emphasizes how societies continuously renegotiate memories of the past in a process that shapes group and place identity.⁶⁶ Certain places take on a “double focus” as a “a place in space and also a symbol or something of spiritual significance, something shared by the group that adheres to and is superimposed upon this physical reality.”⁶⁷ Together these physical manifestations of memory make up what geographer Karen Till calls “topographies of memory,” that is, the physical places that help give permanence to the ephemerality of the past, grounding narratives of collective memory.⁶⁸ People “learn to ‘remember’” through “social narratives and cultural practices” connected to these material mnemonic devices.⁶⁹ Stories and rituals help to solidify the link between these sites of memory and group identity, producing a sense of permanence and security. However, these habits of memory can be disrupted and thus open to contestation. As Till observes:

When everyday routines, political regimes, economic structures, and symbolic systems are in flux, the constructed “normality” of places – and their associated identities, power relations, and social practices – may be questioned. Localized struggles over the meanings, forms, and locations of places of memory are often tied to larger political disputes about who has the authority to represent the past in society.⁷⁰

We can read conflicts over spaces like Maqam Yusuf not as a conflict between competing religious claims or incompatible religious practices, but a conflict over memory, specifically a conflict between scriptural religious memory enrolled within a settler-colonial project on one hand, and indigenous religious folk memory on the other. The use of particular sites to conjure into being particular remembering publics necessarily draws lines of inclusion and exclusion. Through commemorative practices, powerful groups assert their right to narrate the past and imbue places with meaning. Nevertheless, marginalized and disenfranchised groups may contest such official narrations of memory through stories that keep alive alternative narratives and constitute what Foucault termed a kind of “counter-memory.”⁷¹

Against counter-memory tactics that continue to center “venues of official memory,” ethnographic, phenomenological, or psychoanalytic approaches might be used to analyze how “trans-generational encounters, performances, and rituals transmit and circulate understandings about the past across historical time and through social spaces.”⁷² Such approaches attend to the “multiple space times” of particular sites, examining the interactions between individual and social memory and how “stable material forms are dynamic in space and time” and also “how contestations over the significance of past narratives are given meaning within particular socio-

political contexts.”⁷³ In following this approach, this article raises the possibility that forgetting and erasure could also be a counter-memory tactic of resistance or, at least, self-preservation.

If counter-memory has been underexamined as a resistance strategy within the politics of memory, less common still are studies of forgetting.⁷⁴ However, amnesia is what one encounters when asking younger generations of Palestinians about Maqam Yusuf. Just as a wall of concrete and steel now surrounds the physical site of Maqam Yusuf today, a wall of silence surrounds memories of the shrine. The Palestinian youth with whom I spoke, born in the wake of the second intifada, know Maqam Yusuf only as a violent political flashpoint – a site of resistance where youth confront the occupation, or a place of danger to be avoided. None of the youth I spoke with knew of the religious and cultural traditions associated with the site. The silence about this site on the part of the older generations can be read as a form of self-preservation in two ways. Many of the elders described beautiful and happy memories at Maqam Yusuf, followed by the shock of its occupation and capture, and terrible memories of the violence that has since occurred there. No doubt, their silence about this site is a self-preserving trauma response. The adults from Jil al-Naksa recalled the religious and cultural traditions of Maqam Yusuf, but also tended to downplay them as the naive folk customs of women. They reject the idea of Maqam Yusuf being the actual tomb of Joseph, or at least treat such claims with ambiguity and skepticism. Memories of the site’s religious and cultural significance to Palestinians have been allowed to fade due to fear that such memories could be used to legitimize Zionist religious claims to the site and surrounding territory. Finally, detached from the social history of the site, local Palestinian youth seem willing to erase it all together, if it means relieving their community of constant incursions by Israeli army and settlers.

However, there are also inklings of alternatives to the settler-colonial temporality of erasure and its zero-sum contest over territory. Many of the older Palestinians who were interviewed long for a “return” to a time when the tomb could just be a tomb. That is, rather than deny the site’s cultural or religious significance, they long to see it resanctified, not as the exclusive property of one religion, but open to all. Some of the youth interviewed shared this sentiment, longing for an opening of this and other sites of religious, cultural, and historical significance to people of all faiths, especially Palestinians currently prevented from accessing them by Israel. The efforts of Palestinian scholars, village historians, tour guides, and heritage organizations like Sufi Trails in Palestine and Palestine Heritage Trail are helping to preserve popular memory of such sacred places in the face of their destruction, making them open to all.⁷⁵ The alternative to silence and amnesia is a narrative that upholds long-standing Palestinian traditions of multireligious shrine visitation and preservation.

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Endnotes

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- 11 Those who were young during the intifada are also sometimes colloquially referred to as *jil al-hajar*, the generation of the stones.
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 - 20 Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*; Schenke, “Jakobsbrunnen – Josephsgrab – Sychar”; Alsaud and al-Qobbaj, “Joseph’s Tomb.”
 - 21 Henry Maundrell, *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem, at Easter, A.D. 1697* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1845).
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 - 23 Taylor writes: “The present monument is a place of resort not only for Jews and Christians but Mohammedans and Samaritans; all of whom concur in the belief that it stands on the verifiable spot where the patriarch was buried.” William Cooke Taylor, *Illustrations of the Bible from the Monuments of Egypt* (London: Charles Tilt, 1838), 205. Taylor’s account was famously illustrated in an 1839 lithograph by the Scottish Orientalist painter David Roberts. On Taylor’s influence, see Shams, “Why Do Palestinians.”
 - 24 Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad: Or, The New Pilgrims’ Progress, Being Some Account of the Steamship Quaker City’s Pleasure Excursion to Europe and the Holy Land* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1911), 291.
 - 25 Bowman, “Sharing and Exclusion,” 30–31. According to British sources from the Mandate period, some eight hundred shrines dotted Palestine’s cultural landscape. Today, no more than about seventy shrines still stand in present-day Israel, along with about one hundred in the West Bank and Gaza. See: Seth J. Frantzman and Doron Bar, “Mapping Muslim Sacred Tombs in Palestine During the Mandate Period,” *Levant* 45, no. 1 (April 2013): 96–111; and Mahmoud Yazbak, “Holy Shrines (Maqamat) in Modern Palestine/Israel and the Politics of Memory,” in *Holy Places in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Confrontation and Co-existence*, ed. Marshall J. Breger, Yitzhak Reiter, and Leonard Hammer (London: Routledge, 2009), 243–60.
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- 38 Ron E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 3. See also Ron E. Hassner, “‘To Halve and to Hold’: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility,” *Security Studies* 12, no. 4 (2003): 1–33.
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- 41 Hayden et al., *Antagonistic Tolerance*, 70.
- 42 Hayden, “Intersecting Religioscapes,” 324.
- 43 Hayden, “Intersecting Religioscapes,” 322–23.
- 44 Hayden’s focus (in “Intersecting Religioscapes”) on the competitive construction and contestation over multiple religious sites across wider religioscapes, which draws heavily on experiences in the Balkans, privileges the perspectives of patrons and political or religious authority figures above the everyday practices of ordinary laypeople. The effect is the homogenization of religious communities, viewing them as having singular, coherent interests and agency. While competitive construction of religious sites is clearly apparent on the Bosnian landscape, several studies also point to a traditional ethic of everyday neighborliness, including assisting with the upkeep of shrines and sanctuaries from differing faiths. Either way, while there is a clear analogy between historic multireligious cohabitation of Slavic Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the Balkans, and Arab Muslims, Christians, Druze, Jews, and Samaritans in historic Palestine, both cases are distinct from the political conflict that characterizes Palestinian Arab resistance to European Jewish settlement in Palestine over the last century. See: Bojan Baskar, “Komšiluk and Taking Care of the Neighbor’s Shrine in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*, ed. Albera and Couroucli, 51–68; David Henig, “‘Knocking on My Neighbour’s Door’: On Metamorphoses of Sociality in Rural Bosnia,” *Critique of Anthropology* 32, no. 1 (March 2012): 3–19; and Cornelia Sorabji, “Bosnian Neighbourhoods Revisited: Tolerance, Commitment, and Komšiluk in Sarajevo,” in *On the Margins of Religion*, ed. Frances Pine and João de Pina-Cabral (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 97–112.
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 - 53 Balata al-Balad family interview by author, in Nablus, 25 July 2019.
 - 54 Balata al-Balad family interview by author, in Nablus, 17 July 2019.
 - 55 Balata al-Balad family interview by author, in Nablus, 25 July 2019.
 - 56 The use of multiple similar sites by multiple religious groups was the subject of subsequent research and will be the subject of a separate forthcoming publication. This article focuses on the experiences of the majority Muslim population, paying attention to differences in gender and generation.
 - 57 Family interview by author, Balata al-Balad, 24 July 2019.
 - 58 The term *maskhara Juha* (Juha's farce) refers here to a story of the wise fool Juha who lent a nail to his neighbor, only to use it as an excuse to request more and more favors.
 - 59 Interview by author, Nablus, 7 July 2019.
 - 60 Interview by author, Balata al-Balad, 18 July 2019.
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 - 74 Margaret E. Farrar, "Amnesia, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Place Memory," *Political Research Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (2011): 727; Katharyne Mitchell, "Monuments, Memorials, and the Politics of Memory," *Urban Geography* 24, no. 5 (2003): 442–59; and James A. Tyner, "Violent Erasures and Erasing Violence: Contesting Cambodia's Landscapes of Violence," in *Space and the Memories of Violence: Landscapes of Erasure, Disappearance and Exception*, ed. Estela Schindel and Pamela Colombo (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 21–33. In the Palestinian context, Israeli place-making has been predicated on the erasure of Palestinian memory and cultural presence. See, for example: Saree Makdisi, "The Architecture of Erasure," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (2010): 519–59.
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An Air-Smelling Event: The Metamorphosis of Simon the Just and His Shrine

Salim Tamari

Abstract

The appropriation of Simon's shrine as an exclusively Jewish site of worship marks a progression of national-religious claims over several sites that used to be shared (as well as celebrated) by multiple religious communities. These include Rachel's Tomb (at the northern entrance to Bethlehem), Nabi Samwil (northwest of Jerusalem), and Nabi Rubin (south of Jaffa), a particularly important shrine, whose festival brought revelers from the central and southern townships of Palestine every August. The promotion of Jewish claims over joint communal shrines did not take place until two decades after the Israeli occupation of 1967. It coincided with the ascendancy of nationalist ideological hegemony over religious parties (Degel haTorah, Shas, and other Mizrahi movements).

Keywords

Simon's shrine; religious festival; nationalist ideology; pilgrimage sites; Shaykh Jarrah.

An "air-smelling event" (referencing the Arabic phrase *shamm al-hawa* – or what the Egyptians call *shamm al-nasim* [smelling the breeze]) is the term used to describe the spring festival of Simon the Just (Shim'on ha-Tsadik in Hebrew, also known as Simeon the Just or Simon/Simeon the Righteous) in a 1927 *National Geographic* account of this popular pilgrimage site in northern Jerusalem.¹ In the nearly hundred years since that article was published, the celebration, its physical site, and its audience have undergone major transformations. The moment of comity described in 1927 would quickly be overshadowed by the

communal strife of 1929 and the outbreak of the Arab Revolt of 1936–39.² During the 2021 clashes in East Jerusalem, the shrine of Simon the Just became a focus of Jewish zealots' claims for a foothold in the Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood. The claims were linked not only to historical entitlements over the tomb/shrine, but also to surrounding properties whose leases were held by Jews before 1948.³

One feature of this contestation was the meaning and relevance of shrines and *maqamat* (sing. *maqam*) for popular religious belief and their transformation in the twentieth century from syncretic sites of worship and visitation to exclusive nationalist domains for their new “born again” adherents.⁴ This development marked several sites in Bilad al-Sham, and Palestine in particular. Shrines dedicated to al-Nabi Musa (Jericho), al-Nabi Rubin (Jaffa), St. George/al-Khadr (Lydda, Bethlehem), and al-Nabi Salih (Ramla) were leading sites in central and coastal Palestine that served Muslim, Jewish, and Christian adherents during their “seasons” or *mawasim* (sing. *mawsim*).⁵ These sites provided healing and therapeutic functions throughout the year, but they were mainly the sites of public festivities during their associated holy persons' seasons.⁶ During the late Ottoman and early Mandate period, many of these sites of public celebration became subject to communal and sectarian clashes as the Zionist movement asserted territorial claims over land. This process led to a “nationalization” of shrines/maqamat as exclusive domains for their putative religious community. This was particularly the case with Nabi Musa (Moses) whose maqam turned into an arena for nationalist mobilization during the 1920s and 1930s.



Figure 1. The only published image from Maynard Williams, “Simon the Just Festival,” as it appeared in Edward Keith-Roach, “The Pageant of Jerusalem,” *National Geographic* 52, no. 6 (December 1927).

In what follows, I examine and discuss the transformation of the shrine of Simon the Just in Shaykh Jarrah from a site of communal visitation to a nationalist shrine

of territorial contestation. Although ostensibly a tomb for an ancient Jewish rabbi, its festival came to be celebrated as a “coming of spring” by local Mizrahi Jews, as well as Christian and Muslim Palestinians.

The historical roots of these celebrations indicate the substantial transformation that has engulfed popular attitudes toward the saint, as well as the manner in which nationalism and ethnoconsciousness affected these attitudes. Simon the Just was the Jewish high priest during Alexander’s conquest of Palestine (333 BCE) and held office for forty years. Josephus claims that Alexander travelled to Jerusalem expressly to meet with Simon the high priest, where he demanded that a statue be constructed for him in the temple. Simon reputedly refused, promising that instead all sons of priests born that year will be named after Alexander.⁷ According to Josephus and other Jewish sources, Simon rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem that had been destroyed by Ptolemy.⁸



Figure 2. Rembrandt, *Simeon with the Infant Jesus in the Temple* (1669), Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, available through the Web Gallery of Art, online at (wga.hu) bit.ly/3F7jT2d (accessed 16 August 2023).

It seems that the veneration of Simon the Just by Jewish pilgrims at the Shaykh Jarrah site was a much later practice. In the twelfth century, Benjamin of Tudela identified Timna, near Tiberius, as the site of Simon's shrine. By the fourteenth century, it shifted to the Jerusalem site, although others continued to visit it near the Sea of Galilee. It was revived again in the early nineteenth century with the increased pilgrimage to Jerusalem during the late Ottoman period.⁹ In 1871, however, Charles Clermont-Ganneau, the leading French archeologist at the time, discovered an inscription in the supposed site of Simon's tomb that indicated that it was the tomb of Julia Sabina, a Roman matron, leading him and later archeologists to question the authenticity of the gravesite.¹⁰ This, however, did not deter continued Jewish worship at the site, and, according to Isaac Reiter, a Jewish residential presence developed around the tomb in the last third of the nineteenth century. During this time, the shrine became the center for shared spring communal celebration by Jews, Muslims, and Christians, as witnessed by cotemporary visitors.¹¹ Such accounts indicate that the festival's ritual dimension was primarily Jewish. The site itself was under Arab ownership, but Jews performed the actual celebrations, which included "candle lighting, dancing, prayers, haircuts for children, and monetary donations."¹² Muslims and Christians, though, came out to "smell the air." This shared observance of the shrine of Simon the Just is most likely a modern nineteenth-century phenomenon, facilitated, I would suggest, by increased security outside the city walls and the growth of Shaykh Jarrah in the second half of the nineteenth century as a bourgeois neighborhood for Jerusalem's primarily Muslim upper class.

Two important sources are available for the communal veneration of Simon the Just at the site in Shaykh Jarrah in the twentieth century. Wasif Jawharriyeh's description in the early twentieth century of *shat-hat al-Yahudiyya* (Jewish outdoor festival), attesting to the recognition by Palestinian Arabs at that time of the holy figure's Jewish origins, and Maynard Owen Williams's ethnographic notes and images from his visit to the site in 1927.¹³ The latter were produced as part of a work commissioned by *National Geographic* magazine, accompanying an article penned by Edward Keith-Roach, the British district commissioner of Jerusalem, published under the exotic title "The Pageant of Jerusalem."¹⁴ Only one of Williams's photographs appeared alongside Keith-Roach's article, but unreleased and unpublished archival material (mostly photographs) provide insight on the shrine and its uses in the early Mandate period and before the transformation of these religious sites into arenas of exclusivity.¹⁵

The immediate post-World War I period marked a kind of liminal period for the shrine as a site of a shared communal Palestinian event. Ottoman communal events were still being celebrated, and the impact of nationalist appropriation of religious motifs with the onset of Zionism had not yet fully set in. These shared celebrations of Simon the Just were vividly captured in the 1920s by Williams's camera. However, the bulk of Williams's notes and his photographs remained dormant in the National Geographic archives until they became accessible in 2021. This cache constitutes an important eyewitness account of these communal celebrations. In particular, Williams vindicates the observations of contemporary writers like Jawhariyyeh about the nature of the festival of Simon the Just and its attendees.

Jerusalemite *Shat-hat*

In his memoirs, Wasif Jawhariyyeh refers to two spring festivals that took place in north Jerusalem. Those were the summer outings (*shat-hat*) of Sa‘d wa Sa‘id, and the Yahudiyya festival in Shaykh Jarrah. Both outings were held within the same area separated by less than half a kilometer. He describes the former as a festival “merely intended to provide locals, both Christian and Muslim, with an opportunity to go out, and had no religious basis.”¹⁶ Rather, the festival seemed oriented around enjoying the green space outside the city’s walls during the heat of the summer: “Olive trees abound in this area [Sa‘d wa Sa‘id], and since it is close to the Old City ... the people of Jerusalem have long taken to the habit of going there at sunset when the gates of the city are closed. Thus, in summer, families with children left the city every afternoon and went there for a promenade.”¹⁷

The Jewish festival by contrast was a much wider event involving Arab Christians and Muslims as well as Jews. Jawhariyyeh writes:

There are two caves in the quarter of Shaykh Jarrah in Jerusalem, near the lands of Abu Jubna’s mortmain which Jews believe to be the graves of Shimon. I think Jews visited these graves twice a year, spending the day under the olive trees. Most of them were Eastern Jews who observed the Eastern traditions, the country’s Arab traditions in particular. They had string bands. I remember Haim, the oud player from Aleppo who had a voluptuous high voice and sang Andalusian *muwashah* [free verse] mostly. And so, everyone spent the entire day singing songs and *uhzuja* [ditties]. The Christian and Muslim Arabs of Jerusalem celebrated with Jews, and families went along to take part in what is known to the Arabs as *al-Yahudiyya* [the Jewish Festival]. That part of the mountain was therefore crowded all the way down to the valley with locals and ambulant sellers. My brothers and I never wasted an opportunity to be among them.¹⁸

Although Jawhariyyeh distinguishes between the “secular” Sa‘d wa Sa‘id festival and al-Yahudiyya, which was based on veneration of Simon the Just, the putative sectarian origin of the site did not impede its shared veneration, as was the case of al-Khadr, Nabi Rubin, Nabi Salih, and other biblical and Qur’anic figures. Jawhariyyeh also emphasizes the Mizrahi Jewish (what he calls “Eastern Jewish” – *yahudi sharqi*) presence at al-Yahudiyya. These observations about the syncretic nature of Simon the Just are particularly valuable since references to the festival in contemporary memoirs by local or European sources are scarce. Another exception is the account of Pinhas Grayevsky (1873–1941), a Jerusalem historian who lived in Yemin Moshe (west of Bab al-Khalil) and wrote about Jewish life in Jerusalem in the 1870s. He noted that Arabs participated in the festivities of Shimon haTsadik and that “the wives of the Ishmaelites [that is, Arabs] would also come and stake a permanent place on the hill facing the square.”¹⁹

An Olfactory Moment

Maynard Williams described the Feast of Simon the Just as a remarkable event “because at this time Jews, Moslems, and Christians get together near the beginning of Nablus Road at the extreme north edge of the city outside the walls for an ‘air smelling’ sort of picnic and country fair.”²⁰ Williams’s caption is accompanied by a striking series of eight images that were never used with the original article. These “captured moments” take the viewer to an era that has largely disappeared from the annals of Palestinian history – Arabs of various religions and Mizrahi Jews, quite often indistinguishable in their dress, reveling in socializing, food and drink, and music. One photograph in the series shows a children’s playground equipped with a small (obviously temporary) wooden Ferris wheel. Across from the playground sit the villas of the Jerusalem aristocracy – the Husaynis, the Jarallahs, and the Nashashibis – who have already expanded into the northern hills of Shaykh Jarrah.

The single photograph that appeared with the original Keith-Roach article does not convey the intensity of the interaction between the revelers found in the archival photographs. Rather it presents an idyllic picnic scene with a caption describing Jerusalem as “a city of three faiths, that is still the holy city for all.”²¹ Keith-Roach writes: “The religious festivals bring their own pageantry to the city. There are Moslems with all



Figure 3. Detail from “Arab Jews,” one of Maynard Williams’s unpublished photographs of the Simon the Just Festival, Jerusalem, 1927. National Geographic Archives.

their adherents ...; Christians of all denominations ...; the Jews divided into Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Karaites, Yeminites, etc.”²² The impression he gives is of three communities coexisting, but each in its separate domain – the “mosaic society” that Teddy Kollek elevated several decades later.²³ It seems clear that Williams and not Keith-Roach had recorded the syncretic features of the event. Williams’s images, I suggest, show not only Jews, Muslims, and Christians celebrating and intermingling but a moment of de-ethnicized communal gathering. The olfactory moment (the “air-smelling”) united the crowds, and – at least momentarily – created a shared experience of public euphoria.

Williams also captured the festival at a significant moment during which the communitarian character of the event was turning into a social outing while still retaining traces of being a religious shrine visitation. But Williams was not particularly attuned to the ethnic character of the Jerusalem ceremonials. His main concern, as he confessed, was modernity’s destructive impact on the disappearing world of Palestinian tradition. “Here was a city, sacred to Moslem, Jew, and Christian,” he wrote, “losing the character for which it had been distinguished for centuries. I longed to record something of it before it was too late.”²⁴ Like Tawfiq Canaan and others, Williams wanted to record the ethnography of Palestine before it was overtaken by modernity, preserving what he saw as the “immutable east” by freezing a fusion of these contradictory moments in his photographic images.

A similar kind of logic can be seen in the recordings of Robert Lachmann, a German ethnomusicologist who moved to Shaykh Jarrah in the 1930s and lived in the vicinity of Simon the Just’s shrine.²⁵ While in Jerusalem, Lachmann recorded performances by native musicians, as well as pieces by migrant Yemenis, Kurds, Moroccans, and “gypsies.”²⁶ I could not locate a recording of any celebratory incantation from the festival of Shimon haTsadik, but there are many recordings of Coptic, Samaritan, Jewish, and Muslim festival music – all aimed at preserving the “purity” of these traditions’ original performances from Lachmann’s Orientalist and essentialist perspective.²⁷

But contemporary observers of the urban ceremonial scene, such as Khalil al-Sakakini and Jawhariyyeh, were not saddled with either biblical themes or exoticism when observing or participating in such events, and did not particularly see their city as a mosaic of coexistence. Rather, they experienced these events as a common ground for the urban population whose religious affiliation, though distinct, was not paramount. Attendees were there, and participated, as compatriots sharing the same common space of the city. They shared the music, food, and language of the city. Religious iconography lurked in the background, but it had largely been replaced by “secular” revelries.

Williams’s unpublished images vividly reveal this shared communal moment of “air-smelling.” In one, the large number of celebrants fills the area outside the tomb area, apparently oblivious to any religious ritual that may have been taking place there.

Neg.#43261-A-Photo by Maynard Owen Williams

PALESTINE - JERUSALEM

The Feast of Simon the Just, remarkable because at this time Jews, Moslems, and Christians get together near the beginning of the Nablus Road at the extreme north edge of the city outside the walls for an "air-smelling" sort of picnic and county fair. Jerusalem, Palestine.

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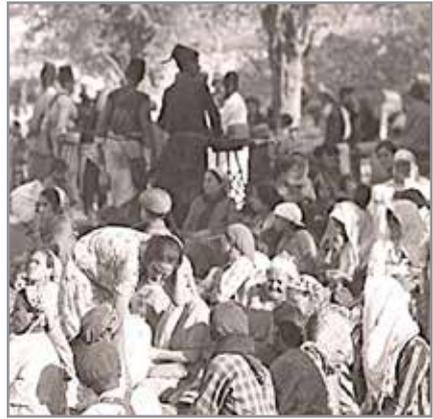


Figure 4. Among Maynard Williams's unpublished photographs with description of the Simon the Just Festival, Jerusalem, 1927. National Geographic Archives.

A second photograph reflects the carefree picnic-like nature of the event. Men are dressed in *frangi* jackets with *tarabish* (fezzes) and *qanabiz* (traditional robes) and women wear European skirts and dresses. Men and women intermingle in the open space – a phenomenon that does not occur in traditional *mawasim* like *Nabi Musa*. In the latter *mawsim*, probably the largest and most “national” of the spring festivals in Palestine, viewers and participants alike were engulfed in the militant atmosphere that accompanied the revelers, as well as with the conspicuous presence of the state through its gendarmes and public officials.

Williams's photographs convey an apparent spontaneity and tranquil atmosphere. This contrasts clearly with images of the crowds at formal and state-sponsored events such as the procession of *Nabi Musa*, which took place around the same time of year. Michael Talbot, discussing the reaction of the Jerusalem crowds to celebrations by Ottoman musical bands, noted the significantly less spontaneous nature of *Nabi Musa*.



Figure 5. “Smelling the Air with the Ishmaelites.” Additional unpublished photographs from Maynard Williams’s images of the Simon the Just Festival, (wooden Ferris wheel, lower left) Jerusalem, 1927. National Geographic Archives.

The formal, static, wooden stances and carefully composed diversity of the Jerusalemite crowd mirror those of the official photographs and the newspapers’ panegyrics and laudatory narratives. Just as the joy spread by the band in the accounts of *Havatzet* [newspaper] was formulaic and repetitive, so too are the images of a populace awkwardly represented by endless posed images of silent, straight-faced gatherings under arches and outside public buildings.²⁸

Talbot’s detailed analysis of the photographic images of musical performances punctures the illusion that these events were “joyous public celebrations,” ignited by “sparks of happenstance” in official parlance. The tension between the official narrative and the photographic record, Talbot suggests, “tells us something important about the relationship between state and subject in that one moment, from which broader ideas can be explored.”

Although the scene has not been staged for the camera, it shares an aesthetic with the wider corpus of posed Hamidian images. The band conveys an image of professionalism, but the reaction of the crowd gives a hint at the quality of their performance. The diversity of the crowd is itself illusory, a temporary gathering that would soon dissolve back into its constituent parts.²⁹

One reason for these “wooden stances” was the nature of the photography arranged during the musical event, which required participants to remain still for extended periods. But state sponsorship of Nabi Musa proceedings, with gendarmes ensuring law and order, was a distinguishing feature that helps explain the difference between it and the relaxed and spontaneous character of revelry at Simon the Just. In this regard, Simon the Just’s festival likely shared more in common with Nabi Rubin festivities held on the southern shores of Jaffa. In Nabi Rubin, as in the case of Simon the Just, the state and its gendarmes were absent, freeing celebrants to express themselves and engage with the event spontaneously and with minimal official regulation.



Figures 6 and 7. Nabi Rubin celebrations, c. 1935. G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

The Limits of Communal Boundaries

Ethnography and historical photography can illuminate these lost worlds of communal shared space. Simon the Just, a sage in Jewish tradition, was celebrated as a local holy figure by Jerusalem Muslims during *shat-hat al-Yahudiyya* even though he does not appear in the Qur'an or any Muslim tradition. Unlike Moses (Musa), Jacob (Ya'qub), Reuven (Rubin), Simon the Just has not been Islamicized. Even Clermont-Ganneau's 1871 discovery of epigrams indicating that the tomb belonged to a Roman matron called Julia Sabina did not deter his followers from their annual spring visitation. We have little evidence from contemporary records that the site was visited by Ashkenazi pilgrims; the bulk of its pilgrims at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth appear to have been Yemeni and Moroccan Jews, as well as local Muslim and Christian revelers. Wasif Jawhariyyeh gives a vivid description of the syncretic celebration by Jews, Muslims, and local Christians of the spring festival of *al-Yahudiyya*. The term *al-Yahudiyya* is significant since it distinguishes the site's Jewish origins without necessarily establishing it as an exclusively Jewish festival. This should be contrasted to Nabi Musa, Nabi Rubin, and Nabi Ayyub festivals – all celebrating Old Testament prophets, and in which Jews and Christians actively participated, but whose patrons were mainly Muslims. The synergies of these religious ceremonies were not only formal attestations of coexistence between the three communities; they were shared communal events. The Jewish performers in the event honoring Simon the Just were also Jawhariyyeh's partners in a "secular" music band that celebrated weddings in the Old City.³⁰ But although events like the Simon the Just festival were neither denominational nor sectarian, to describe them as "secular" is problematic given their ritually religious character.

Two major transformations had significant impact on the veneration of Simon the Just, along with most other *mawasim* dedicated to popular holy figures and prophets in Palestine. The first was a process of secularization that essentially reconfigured the ceremonial into a social event, a public outing almost bereft of its religious origins. This is what we witness in the case of Nabi Rubin celebrations in Jaffa.³¹ The second was a process of nationalization of the ceremonial. This is what happened to the *mawsim* of Nabi Musa in the 1930s, ostensibly as a return to its original purpose as established by Salah al-Din in the twelfth century as a preemptive deterrence against the possibility of Christian pilgrimage turning into a military campaign. During the rebellion of 1936, Nabi Musa became a rallying cry for Palestinian mobilization against Zionist immigration and the Balfour Declaration.³² Simon the Just's tomb, however, remained largely free of politicization until the 1990s, more or less the same trajectory as the Nabi Rubin site in southern Jaffa.³³

Both Wasif Jawhariyyeh's account of *shat-hat al-Yahudiyya* and Maynard Owen Williams's notes and photographs thus captured the communal celebration of Simon the Just at a crucial transition period, while also documenting a moment

of unique intermingling of dress codes and genders, not common to other Jerusalem mawasim such as Nabi Musa. These joint celebrations should not, however, blind us to the communal boundaries that separated religious communities in urban neighborhoods. Although religious quarters were never insular in habitation, social mixing, or ritual, they were nevertheless demarcated by distancing mechanisms rooted in the language of difference. Festivals were often clearly identified as Christian (Sabt al-Nur, Good Friday, Ghattas), Muslim (Laylat al-Qadr during Ramadan), or Jewish (Lag baOmer, Purim), even when members of other religious groups participated in the festivities.



Figure 8. The ambiguous ethnicity of Simon the Just’s celebrants. Detail from Maynard Williams’s unpublished photographs of the Simon the Just Festival, Jerusalem, 1927. National Geographic Archives.

In 2010 the Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem, where the shrine of Simon the Just is located, became a battleground between Jewish settlers and Palestinians over the expanded settlement activities in East Jerusalem. The appropriation of Simon’s shrine as an exclusively Jewish site of worship marks an advancement of national-religious claims over several sites that used to be shared (as well as celebrated) by multiple religious communities. These include Rachel’s Tomb (south of Bethlehem), Nabi Samwil (northwest of Jerusalem), and Nabi Rubin (south of Jaffa). The latter was, by most counts, a particularly important shrine, whose festival brought revelers from the central and southern townships of Palestine during the month of August.³⁴ The promotion of Jewish claims over joint communal shrines did not take place until two decades after the Israeli occupation of 1967. It coincided with the ascendancy of nationalist ideological hegemony over religious parties (Degel haTorah, Shas, and other Mizrahi movements).

The eviction of Palestinian families from around the Shim’on haTsadik, Karm al-Mufti, and Umm Harun areas in Jerusalem’s Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood began in earnest in 1985 and accelerated in 2008, 2010, and 2022.³⁵ Protests against the evictions succeeded in halting some of these evictions and in legal recognition of Palestinian rights in some of these properties. At issue was Jewish putative ownership of properties in the area before 1948, and new purchases made by the American Jewish financier Irving Moskowitz.³⁶ The forcible imposition of Israeli legal ownership over these properties,

however, was seen as potentially opening Pandora’s box with regard to much larger Arab claims for restitution of lost properties inside Israel, including substantial claims in West Jerusalem (Talbiyya, Qatamun, Musrara, Baq‘a, and so on).³⁷ This explains the initial hesitancy of Israel’s government and courts in proceeding with these evictions. Settling the area of the shrine became the overriding factor that justified Israeli state support for religious (and non-religious) Zionists taking over Palestinian homes in Shaykh Jarrah, relegating all possibilities of shared space, as well as shared communal celebrations, to the distant past. Though Simon the Just’s tomb is a minor religious shrine, its fate was emblematic of similar encroachments at the national level – Nabi Samwil, Qabr Rahil (Rachel’s Tomb), and Nabi Rubin are the most recent examples.

One victim of Zionist claims and impositions in the case of Simon the Just, however, is the demise of a historical practice in Palestine where the sharing of shrines and their seasonal festivals heralded the promise of an overlapping shared identity in society at large – in which different neighborhoods, social status, and religious identities were not sources of conflict, but reinforced a communal urban space that came to be renewed every spring.

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Endnotes

- 1 Edward Keith-Roach, “The Pageant of Jerusalem: The Capital of the Land of Three Great Faiths Is Still the Holy City for Christian, Moslem, and Jew,” *National Geographic* 52, no. 6 (December 1927): 635–81.
- 2 In this sense, the 1927 festivities predated what Hillel Cohen called “year zero of the Arab-Israeli conflict”: Hillel Cohen, *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1929* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2015).
- 3 Nazmi Jubeh, “Hayy al-Shaykh Jarrah wa ma‘arakat al-baqa’” [Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood and the battle of survival], *Majallat al-dirasat al-Filastiniyya* 127 (Summer 2021): 34–66.
- 4 Yitzhak Reiter and Lior Lehrs, *The Sheikh Jarrah Affair: The Strategic Implications of Jewish Settlement in an Arab Neighborhood in East Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Studies, 2010), online at (jerusalemstitute.org.il) bit.ly/46xIyZp (accessed 21 July 2023).
- 5 Andrew Petersen, *Bones of Contention: Muslim Shrines in Palestine* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
- 6 Tawfik Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* (London: Luzac, 1927). See also Marcela A. Garcia Probert, “Exploring the Life of Amulets in Palestine: From Healing and Protective Remedies to the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets” (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2021).
- 7 Wilhelm Bacher and Schulim Ochser, “Simeon the Just,” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, online at (jewishencyclopedia.com) bit.ly/3PHDpXY (accessed 10 October 2022).
- 8 See Bacher and Ochser, “Simeon the Just.” There is also a Christian Simon the Just (or Righteous) venerated by Catholics and the

- Orthodox Church. Charles Seymour, Jr., writes: "According to the Evangelist Luke (2. 25–35) Simeon (Symeon) was the 'just man' who received in his arms the Infant Christ when He was presented at the Temple." According to various traditions, Saint Simon is buried in Constantinople, Croatia, or Venice. Charles Seymour, Jr., "The Tomb of Saint Simeon the Prophet, in San Simeone Grande, Venice," *Gesta* 15, no. 1–2 (1976): 193–200, quote at 193.
- 9 Yosef Eisen, "Shimon Hatzadik (Simeon the Just)," Chabad.org, online at (chabad.org) bit.ly/3tgX09Q (accessed 21 July 2023); Bacher and Ochser, "Simon the Just."
 - 10 Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem: The Biography* (New York: Vintage, 2012), 63; Dan Bahat, *Illustrated Atlas of Jerusalem* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 67.
 - 11 Wasif Jawhariyyeh, *The Storyteller of Jerusalem: The Life and Times of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904–1948*, ed. Salim Tamari and Issam Nassar (Northampton, MA: Interlink, 2013), 58; Keith-Roach, "Pageant of Jerusalem."
 - 12 Reiter and Lehrs, *Sheikh Jarrah Affair*, 16.
 - 13 Wasif Jawhariyyeh, *al-Quds al-'Uthmani fi al-mudhakkirat al-Jawhariyya: al-kitab al-awwal min al-musiqi Wasif Jawhariyya, 1904–1917* [Ottoman Jerusalem in the Jawhariyya memoirs: the first book of the musician Wasif Jawhariyya, 1904–1917], ed. Salim Tamari and Issam Nassar (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2003).
 - 14 Keith-Roach, "Pageant of Jerusalem"; Maynard Owen Williams, "Color Records From the Changing Life fo the Holy City," *National Geographic* 52, no. 6 (December 1927): 682–707.
 - 15 Maynard Owen Williams, National Geographic Archive (1927, indexed 1942).
 - 16 Jawhariyyeh, *Storyteller of Jerusalem*, 61.
 - 17 Jawhariyyeh, *Storyteller of Jerusalem*, 61.
 - 18 Jawhariyyeh, *al-Quds al-'Uthmani*, 74–75.
 - 19 Reiter and Lehrs, *Sheikh Jarrah Affair*, 16, quoting Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *'Ir bi-re'i tekufah: Yerushalayim ba-me'ah hatsha'-esreh* [A city in the reflection of an era: Jerusalem in the nineteenth century] (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, 1977), 39–41; and Pinhas Ben Zvi Grayevsky, *Sefer haYishuv* [Book of the Yishuv] (Jerusalem: Solomon Press, 1938–39). It was not uncommon in the late Ottoman period for Ashekanzi Jews to use the term "Ishmaelites," and it was not necessarily pejorative, although it performed a *distancing* function. See, for example: Michael Talbot, "Sparks of Happenstance: Photographs, Public Celebrations, and the Ottoman Military Band of Jerusalem," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 45, 47.
 - 20 Maynard Owen Williams, Negative #43261, National Geographic Archive (1927, indexed 1942).
 - 21 Keith-Roach, "Pageant of Jerusalem."
 - 22 Keith-Roach, "Pageant of Jerusalem," 667.
 - 23 Meron Benvenisti, "Teddy Kollek: The Last Optimist," *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical, and Geographical Studies*, Teddy Kollek volume (2007): xi–xiv.
 - 24 Williams, "Color Records," 68187–88.82.
 - 25 Lachman had already established himself as an authority on popular Arab religious music from his work on Jewish incantations from Jerba in Tunis. See Robert Lachmann, *Cantillation and Song in the Isle of Djerba* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Archives of Oriental Music, 1940). See also Robert Lachmann, *The Oriental Music Broadcasts, 1937–1936: A Musical Ethnography of Mandatory Palestine*, ed. Ruth F. Davis (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2013).
 - 26 Many, such as the incantation of a Samaritan priest from Mount Gerizim in Nablus, were recorded *in situ*, but most were recorded in the studios of the Palestine Broadcasting Service on Prophets Street where Lachman hosted a program called "Oriental Music." See Ruth Davis, "Ethnomusicology and Political Ideology in Mandatory Palestine: Robert Lachmann's 'Oriental Music' Projects," *Music and Politics* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2010). Apparently, Lachman's main language was German and he spoke Arabic but not Hebrew while he was in Jerusalem.
 - 27 Ironically, this essentialism undermines and transcends the Arab-Jewish binary that became a standard framework for viewing folk traditions from this period. One can see this subversion in several episodes recreating Lachman's recordings, including a Sephardic Jerusalemite singer chanting in Ladino and Arabic and a Nabulsi Samaritan rabbi's incantation from the Torah, in Jumana Manna's film *A Magical Substance Flows into Me*. See: Elisa Adami, "Jumana Manna, Chisenhale, London, 18 September to 13 December," *Art Monthly* 391 (November

- 2015): 29–30; Rebecca John, “Giving a Voice to Gaps and Cracks: Archival Critique in Jumana Manna’s ‘A Magical Substance Flows into Me’,” *Roots and Routes: Research on Visual Cultures* (June 2020), online at (roots-routes.org) bit.ly/48I0key (accessed 29 September 2023); and Hanan Toukan, “Music, Borders, and the Sensorial Politics of Displacement in Jumana Manna’s ‘A Magical Substance Flows into Me’,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 67 (Autumn 2016): 117–23.
- 28 Michael Talbot, “Sparks of Happenstance: Photographs, Public Celebrations, and the Ottoman Military Band of Jerusalem,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 33–66, quote at 65.
- 29 Talbot, “Sparks of Happenstance,” 66.
- 30 See Jawhariyyeh, *Storyteller of Jerusalem*, 87–88.
- 31 Mahmoud Yazbak, “The Muslim Festival of Nabi Rubin in Palestine: From Religious Festival to Summer Resort,” *Holy Land Studies* 10, no. 2 (November 2011): 169–98.
- 32 Awad Halabi, *Palestinian Rituals of Identity: The Prophet Moses Festival in Jerusalem, 1850–1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2023).
- 33 Reiter and Lehrs, *Sheikh Jarrah Affair*, 19.
- 34 Notably, no similar Jewish claims were made over the site of Nabi Musa or his spring festival. This is most likely due to the Jewish traditional narrative in which the burial place of Moses is in Mount Nebo in Jordan. Nabi Musa is also distinguished as a rallying ground for mobilization against European encroachment during the Crusades and later, in the 1920s and 1930s, against Zionist activities during the Mandate.
- 35 Jubeh, “Hayy al-Shaykh Jarrah,” 54.
- 36 Jubeh, “Hayy al-Shaykh Jarrah,” 56. Palestinian refugees from the Haifa and Jaffa regions who were expelled in 1948 were housed by UNRWA and the Jordanian government in properties in the area of Shim’on haTsadik. See Reiter and Lehrs, *Sheikh Jarrah Affair*, 93.
- 37 Reiter and Lehrs, *Sheikh Jarrah Affair*, 65–69.

Sharing the Holy Land: Islamic Pilgrimage to Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem during the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods

Fadi Ragheb

Abstract

The Holy Land was the destination for many Muslim pilgrims during the late medieval and early modern period. In addition to worshipping in Jerusalem's Haram al-Sharif, Muslim pilgrims in the Holy Land also visited important Christian holy sites, such as the Mount of Olives, the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, the Church of the Ascension, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. With a genre of medieval Islamic pilgrimage texts known as *Fada'il al-Quds* (Merits of Jerusalem) serving as their guide, Muslims visited these places and joined Christian worshippers in contemplating the sacred. *Fada'il al-Quds* texts informed Muslim pilgrims of the blessings (*fada'il*) of Christian holy sites by citing Islamic traditions, such as Qur'anic verses, hadith literature, and Companions' sayings (*athar*), to sanctify each Christian site and to command Muslims to perform certain Islamic prayers and rituals there. Despite the debate on the legality of Muslim pilgrimage to churches and protestations against the practice by some conservative '*ulama*', the *Fada'il al-Quds* corpus, along with travelogue literature, reveals that Muslims increasingly visited churches, shared sacred spaces, and even participated in Christian ceremonies into the Ottoman period. Using *Fada'il al-Quds* and travelogue literature from the medieval and early modern period, this study¹ demonstrates that Muslims in the Holy Land shared sacred spaces with Christians in Jerusalem for centuries before the onset of the modern era.

Keywords

Jerusalem; Holy Land; Islamic Jerusalem; Crusades; Islamic pilgrimage; Fada'il al-Quds; Arabic travelogue literature; shared sacred spaces.

The Holy Land was the destination of many Muslim pilgrims and travelers during the late medieval and early modern period.² Seeking the blessings of Bayt al-Maqdis, many *'ulama'* (religious scholars), Sufi mystics, and everyday pilgrims visited Jerusalem and contemplated the sacred at its many Muslim holy sites. During their pilgrimage itinerary, Muslims visited the Haram al-Sharif compound, the Muslim epicenter in Jerusalem, and its plethora of holy places there, including many important spots in the Dome of the Rock, al-Aqsa Mosque, and other sites located on the sacred esplanade (see figure 1). Intriguingly, while visiting the Holy Land, medieval Muslim pilgrims also visited Christian holy places, such as the Mount of Olives, the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity, where they sometimes performed Islamic rituals and contemplated the sacredness of figures holy in both Islam and Christianity.

During these medieval pilgrimage tours of Jerusalem, Muslims visiting the city's sacred confines were directed by the *Fada'il al-Quds* texts, the pilgrimage guides composed to lead Muslims around the Bayt al-Maqdis's labyrinth of holy sites. These *Fada'il al-Quds* works also instructed medieval Muslim pilgrims regarding the sanctification rituals associated with each spot, including Christian churches and sacred spaces.³ Indeed, many of the traditions in the corpus inform Muslims of the blessings (*fada'il*, sing. *fadila*) of certain Christian places in the Holy Land. The *Fada'il al-Quds* traditions extol these Christian sites by citing Qur'anic verses, hadith literature, the sayings of early generations of Muslims (*athar*), eschatological traditions, and biblical narratives connected to them.

On the other hand, some traditions in the *Fada'il al-Quds* genre went against the sanctification of churches. They forbade Muslims from visiting these non-Islamic places. Some traditions, for example, warned against the multiplication of sins in churches, while other precepts, authored mainly by Sunni Hanbali scholars, forbade Muslims from visiting Christian sacred spots altogether. Yet interestingly, late-medieval *Fada'il al-Quds* texts also began to debate whether Muslims should enter churches in Jerusalem. For example, Sunni Shafi'i authors writing in the post-Crusades Mamluk period (1250–1517/648–923 AH) addressed the legality of a Muslim's visit and prayer in a church, and the conditions needed to render such an action permissible. They opined on and judged the practice, with some Shafi'i authors, as this study will reveal, permitting the practice as long as certain conditions were met and satisfied.



Figure 1. Yusuf al-Natsheh, “Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary),” in *Discover Islamic Art*, Museum with No Frontiers, 2023; online at islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=monument;IS-L;pa;Mon01;1;en (accessed 21 September 2023).

The Fada'il al-Quds corpus thus reveals a rich reservoir of traditions both sanctifying and downplaying Christian sites in the Holy Land. It points to a complex religiohistorical phenomenon of Muslims and Christians sharing sacred spaces in Jerusalem and Palestine,⁴ a practice that was also evident in Greater Syria and the wider Mediterranean during the pre-modern period.⁵ Therefore, a close examination of the Fada'il al-Quds literature discloses and delineates the Christian sacred sites visited by medieval Muslim pilgrims in the holy city and the sanctification and incorporation of these sites within the Islamic landscape. After providing a short overview of the Fada'il al-Quds literature, this essay explores which Christian holy sites were extolled and visited by Muslims according to these texts; how these Christian holy sites were incorporated into the medieval Islamic heritage; and what rituals Muslims performed there. Finally, it analyzes how the debate on whether Muslims were allowed to visit and enter churches changed across time and according to Sunni *madhhab* (a school of Islamic jurisprudence), comparing texts composed before the Crusades with those written during and after the Crusades, up to and including the early modern Ottoman period. The study will thus demonstrate how, paradoxically, as a result of authors

incorporating the debate on the legality of entering churches into the Fada'il al-Quds, Muslims increasingly began to visit churches and even participate in Christian ceremonies for centuries before the onset of the modern period.

Fada'il al-Quds: A Brief Description and Historical Survey

Fada'il al-Quds, or "Merits of Jerusalem," are a corpus of religiohistorical texts composed during the medieval and early modern period to extol the sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam. These texts include Islamic traditions from the Qur'an, hadith, *athar*, and End of Days eschatology, together with biblical material, such as narratives of the biblical prophets (*qisas al-anbiya'*) and ancient Israelite accounts (*isra'iliyyat*), that describe the city, its central religious role in the monotheistic faiths, and its ancient past.⁶ They also include reports from chroniclers and geographers on the history of Jerusalem under early Muslim rule and, in some late-medieval works dating from the Mamluk period, the history of the city during the Crusades.

The main purpose of Fada'il al-Quds texts is to inform the reader of the religious merits of the city in the Islamic tradition. Naturally, accounts of the Prophet's nocturnal journey to Jerusalem (*al-isra'*) and his ascension to the Heavens from the city (*al-mi'raj*) feature prominently.⁷ Fada'il al-Quds works also offer historical reports on the history of Jerusalem's conquest by the second caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, and the building of the Dome of the Rock by the seventh century Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685–705/65–86 AH), thus serving as an important source for the early history of medieval Islamic Jerusalem.⁸ The corpus also stresses the city's role in the End of Days⁹ and, importantly, the more quotidian aspects of Jerusalem's sacredness, such as the spiritual reward of visiting, praying, fasting, living, and dying in Jerusalem.¹⁰

Although Fada'il texts on cities such as Mecca and Medina were composed early in Islamic history, the collection and writing of complete Fada'il works on Jerusalem appeared relatively later.¹¹ While individual Fada'il traditions on Jerusalem circulated as early as the late seventh to early eighth century CE (late first to early second century AH), the first collection only appeared during the ninth century (third century AH).¹² Indeed, the earliest Fada'il al-Quds text is attributed to al-Walid ibn Hammad al-Ramli (d. ca. 912/300 AH), although there are no surviving manuscripts of this work.¹³ However, two major Fada'il al-Quds treatises were produced in the eleventh century by scholars from Jerusalem: *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* (The merits of Jerusalem), composed not later than 1019–1020 (410 AH) by Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Wasiti, and shortly later *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis wa-al-Khalil wa fada'il al-Sham* (The merits of Jerusalem and Hebron and the merits of Greater Syria) by Abu al-Ma'ali al-Musharraf Ibn al-Murajja al-Maqdisi (d. after 1047/438 AH).¹⁴ Both were composed only decades before the first Crusade, but continued to serve as the main sources for later Fada'il al-Quds tracts composed after the Frank's Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 CE (492 AH) and during the Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods.¹⁵

Fada'il al-Quds treatises composed during the Ayyubid period (1171–1250/567–648 AH) were primarily circulated to renew the sanctity of Jerusalem in the Islamic

consciousness in service of recapturing or holding onto the city during waves of Crusader attacks.¹⁶ The major works on the merits of Jerusalem composed during this period are *al-Mustaqsa fi ziyarat al-Masjid al-Aqsa* (The comprehensive survey into pilgrimage to Jerusalem) by the Damascene scholar Shafi'i al-Qasim Baha' al-Din Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn 'Asakir (d. 1203/600 AH), the son of the illustrious Damascene historian Thiqat al-Din Abu al-Qasim 'Ali ibn 'Asakir (d. 1176/571 AH); *Fada'il al-Quds* by the renowned Hanbali Baghdadi Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Ali ibn al-Jawzi (1116–1201/510–597 AH); and *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis* by the esteemed Damascene Hanbali Diya' al-Din Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahid al-Maqdisi (d.1245/643 AH).¹⁷

The Fada'il al-Quds genre flourished during the Mamluk period (1250–1517/648–923 AH). By the time the Crusades ended and Mamluk rule over Palestine stabilized in the fourteenth century (eighth century AH), the city experienced long periods of peace, which naturally helped increase the number of Muslim pilgrims to the region.¹⁸ As a result, Fada'il al-Quds literature peaked during this period, with tens of different texts produced by both Jerusalemite and non-Jerusalemite authors.¹⁹ Indeed, the Mamluk period produced some of the most important Fada'il al-Quds texts, including *al-Uns al-jalil bi-ta'rikh al-Quds wa-al-Khalil* (The sublime companion to the history of Jerusalem and Hebron), the major Fada'il -cum-chronicle on Islamic Jerusalem by the city's chief Hanbali judge Abu al-Yumn Mujir al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-'Ulaymi (d. 1522/928 AH), and *Ithaf al-akhissa bi-fada'il al-Masjid al-Aqsa* (The gifting of friends with the merits of Jerusalem) by the Egyptian Shafi'i scholar Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Shihab al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 880/475 AH).²⁰ The rise of non-Jerusalemite authors, in particular, reflects the increasing number of pilgrims and other Muslim travelers visiting the city during the Mamluk period.²¹ By the sixteenth century (tenth century AH), however, and with the beginning of the Ottoman period, the Fada'il al-Quds literature on Jerusalem began to decline.²²

Jerusalem's Christian Holy Sites in Fada'il al-Quds

The first important Christian holy site cited in the Fada'il al-Quds texts is the Mount of Olives (*Tur Zayta*).²³ The Fada'il literature includes several traditions relating to the importance of the Mount of Olives and its connection to Christian narratives. For example, authors mention that the Mount of Olives is the location from which God raised Jesus to the Heavens (in keeping with the alternative Islamic narrative on Jesus's crucifixion, in which God raised him to the Heavens to prevent his death on the cross).²⁴ Indeed, one of the holy sites located on the Mount of Olives that is cited in the Fada'il literature and sanctified by the traditions is the Church of the Ascension (see figure 2). Referred to as *kanisat al-Tur* in the genre, the Church of the Ascension is identified by some Fada'il authors as the location where Jesus was raised to the Heavens.²⁵ This Christian holy spot also became a destination for Muslim pilgrimage after Salah al-Din's conquest of the city, where "pilgrims of both religions prayed in different locations at the site."²⁶

The Fada'il literature also links the Mount of Olives to the location of al-Sahira, a site in Islamic tradition connected with the eschatological events of the End of Days.²⁷ Authors cite Qur'anic verse 79:14 that mentions al-Sahira and proceed to describe its location and its role during Judgment Day.²⁸ According to the Fada'il traditions, al-Sahira is the valley at the foot of the Mount of Olives (Kidron Valley, Wadi al-Jawz, or the Valley of Jehoshaphat), where souls will translocate before being admitted to Heaven or to Hell.²⁹ Fada'il texts direct Muslims to visit al-Sahira and perform the supplication (*du'a*) that, according to the Islamic tradition, Jesus had recited before he was lifted to the Heavens.³⁰



Figure 2. Yusuf al-Natsheh, "Qubbat al-Su'ud (Dome of Ascension)," in *Discover Islamic Art*, Museum with No Frontiers, 2023; online at islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=monument;IS-L;pa;Mon01;5;en (accessed 21 September 2023).

The Tomb of the Virgin Mary is also cited in several different Fada'il al-Quds traditions (see figure 3).³¹ One tradition found in almost all texts is connected with Prophet Muhammad's Nocturnal Journey to Jerusalem – *al-isra'*.³² As part of the *isra'* narrative, the Fada'il texts describe hadiths that detail the Prophet's journey on

the mythical creature al-Buraq along with the Archangel Gabriel. During the flight, Muhammad spots two shining lights, one to his right and the other to his left. Gabriel informs Muhammad that “on your right hand side is Mihrab Dawud and on your left-hand side is the tomb of your sister Mary [mother of Jesus].”³³ As Dionigi Albera explains, there is evidence revealing that the Tomb of the Virgin Mary was in fact frequented by Muslims, where they shared sacred spaces with Christians at the sepulcher.³⁴



Figure 3. Yusuf al-Natsheh, “Church of the Tomb of Mary,” in *Discover Islamic Art*, Museum with No Frontiers, 2023; online at islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=monument;IS-L;pa;Mon01;24;en (accessed 21 September 2023).

The Mount of Olives is also, according to Mujir al-Din, the location of the presumed tomb of Rabi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, the early female mystic who some Muslims in Jerusalem believe is buried atop the mountain “next to the place where Lord Jesus Peace Be Upon Him was raised to the Heavens [that is, the Church of the Ascension]” (*bijiwar mas‘ad al-sayyid ‘Isa ‘alayhi al-salam*).³⁵ Mujir al-Din also writes that her tomb lies below a set of stairs, and, importantly, it is frequented by many.³⁶ Building on Benjamin Z. Kedar’s research and applying his typology of shared sacred spaces, Ora Limor describes how this holy site was a shared sacred space among adherents to all three monotheistic religions who undertook pilgrimage to this central holy site on the Mount of Olives. Christians, Limor reveals, visited the tomb since it is believed within their tradition that it is the burial place of Saint Pelagia of Antioch, while Jews

during the fourteenth century began to claim that the same burial site belongs to the prophetess Huldah who dates back to the reign of King Josiah.³⁷

In the same traditions on the Prophet's *isra'* journey to Jerusalem, Muhammad describes how he and the Archangel Gabriel flew over Bethlehem when, "Gabriel told me: 'This is the birthplace of your brother Jesus so dismount [from al-Buraq] and pray there.'" ³⁸ It is interesting to note here that whereas traditions praising the burial place of Mary are cited without noting the specific location of her tomb, here the city of Bethlehem is mentioned by name as the birthplace of Jesus. Moreover, in *al-Uns al-jalil*, Mujir al-Din goes one step further and specifically cites the location as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (see figure 4).³⁹ Indeed, in a unique discussion on Byzantine history, Mujir al-Din describes the religious building program undertaken by Emperor Constantine's mother Helen in Jerusalem.⁴⁰ He lists several churches that she had erected in the Holy Land, such as the Church of the Nativity, the Church of the Ascension, the Tomb of the Virgin Mary (here referred to as *al-kanisa al-Jismaniyya*, since the tomb is located in the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat at the lower end of Gethsemane), and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.⁴¹



Figure 4a. Yusuf al-Natsheh, "Church of the Nativity," in *Discover Islamic Art*, Museum with No Frontiers, 2023: online at islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=monument;ISL;pa;Mon01;23;en (accessed 21 September 2023).

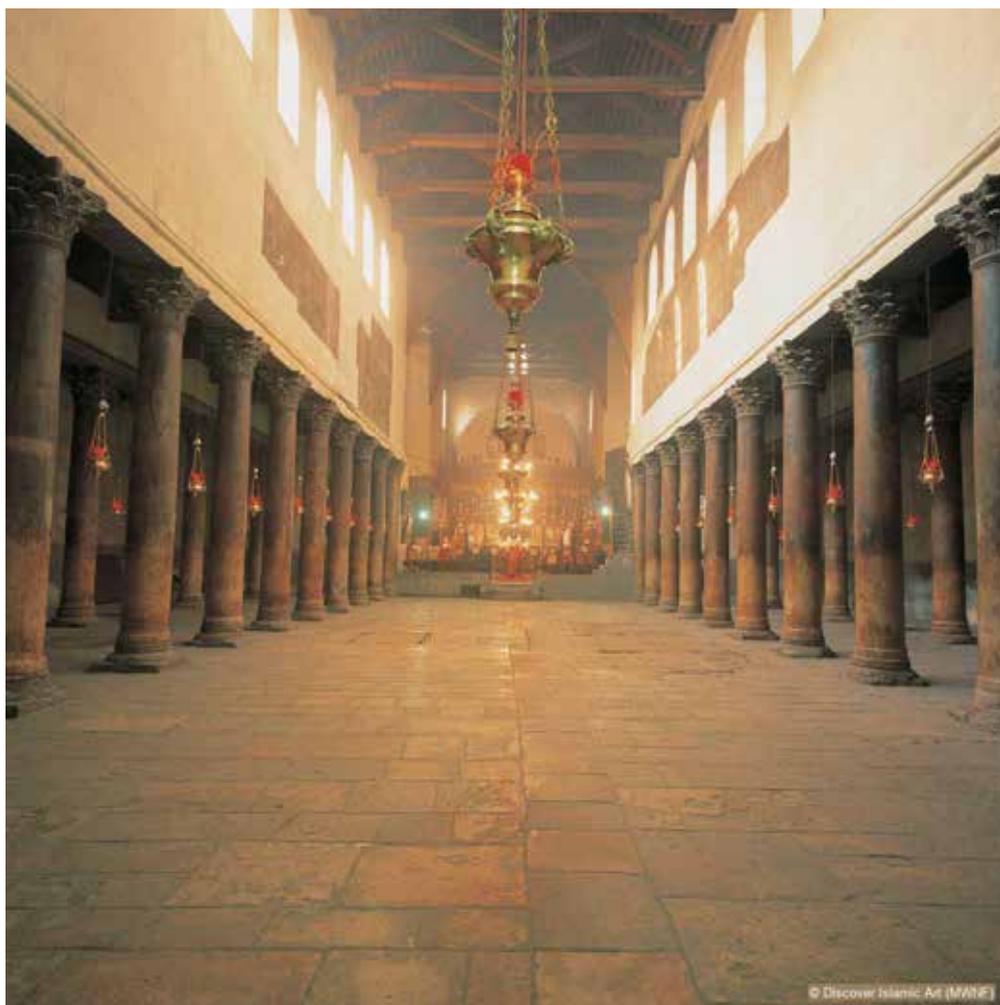


Figure 4b. Yusuf al-Natsheh, “Church of the Nativity,” in *Discover Islamic Art*, Museum with No Frontiers, 2023.

In addition to Bethlehem, the Fada’il al-Quds texts cite traditions on a few other locations special to Christianity. One such place is the Jordan River. According to Ibn al-Murajja, the Jordan River is sanctified in Islam since it is the location where John the Baptist (*Yahya*) had moved for quiet contemplation of his fate.⁴² In *al-Uns al-jalil*, Mujir al-Din specifically links the Jordan River to John’s baptism of Jesus.⁴³ Mujir al-Din also includes Nazareth within his description of sacred sites in the Holy Land, citing Nazareth as the place to which the infant Jesus and his mother Mary returned to after escaping Herod’s persecution in the Holy Land.⁴⁴

Mujir al-Din also refers, albeit indirectly, to the location of the Last Supper. In his discussion of the Tomb of David, Mujir al-Din explains that David was buried at the Church of Saint Mary of Mount Sion (*kanisat Sahyun*),⁴⁵ which was captured and

controlled by the Franks until the Muslims expelled them (see figure 5).⁴⁶ Now, he adds, this location “is in the hands of the Muslims, and there is in it *kanisat Sahyun*, a place that the Christians extol.”⁴⁷ It is well known that the second floor above the Tomb of David is the location of the Cenacle, the medieval chamber where Christians believe the Last Supper took place.⁴⁸ Therefore, it can be deduced here that Mujir al-Din is referring to the site of the Last Supper.



Figure 5. Entrance to the Tomb of David located in the Church of Mount Sion (Jabal Sahyun). Yusuf al-Natsheh, “Maqam (Sanctuary) of the Prophet David,” in *Discover Islamic Art*, Museum with No Frontiers, 2023; online at islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=monument;is-l;pa;mon01;35;en (accessed 21 September 2023).

There are several other holy sites in the Islamic tradition that, though not necessarily sacred in Christianity, receive their religious importance due to their association with Christian figures. For example, Fada’il al-Quds traditions extol the sacredness of what is referred to as *Mihrab Maryam* or *Mahd ‘Isa*.⁴⁹ This site is located at the southeastern corner below the *Haram al-Sharif* complex and, according to the Islamic narrative, it is the site where Mary stayed during her pregnancy with Jesus, receiving sustenance from God.⁵⁰ Another account characterizes it as the location where the Annunciation to Mary took place.⁵¹ According to the *Fada’il* texts, a Muslim should stop by *Mihrab Maryam/Mahd ‘Isa* and should pray there and recite the Qur’anic chapter of Mary

(*surat Maryam*). Specifically, texts implore Muslims to recite the supplication of Jesus when, according to Islamic tradition, God raised him to the Heavens. As Ibn al-Murajja writes, for example:

Then [the Muslim visitor] should proceed toward Mihrab Maryam ... which is known as Mahd ‘Isa ... and to intensify his supplication, for supplications here are well-received, and pray there and read *surat Maryam* ... and prostrate as ‘Umar [ibn al-Khattab] did at Mihrab Dawud ... and the best supplication is that of Jesus – peace be upon him – that he recited when God raised Jesus to Him from the Mount of Olives, and [the Muslim pilgrim should] repent and thank God for his visit to this blessed place. If one does this, his sins would be remitted as on the day when his mother gave birth to him.⁵²

In addition to Mihrab Maryam/Mahd ‘Isa, Fada’il texts encourage Muslim visitors to Jerusalem to stop by Mihrab Zakariyya, a sacred Islamic site located in the Haram complex.⁵³ Named after the father of John the Baptist, this space is described in the Fada’il literature as a place where Mary had stayed while Zakariyya provided for her during her pregnancy with Jesus.⁵⁴ Traditions here guide Muslims to pray there and “ask from God the reward of Heaven.”⁵⁵

The Spring of Siloam (‘Ayn Silwan) is also connected to Mary’s pregnancy with Jesus in the Fada’il al-Quds literature.⁵⁶ The Spring of Siloam is generally considered a blessed site in Islamic tradition and is part of the itinerary of each Muslim pilgrim visiting Jerusalem, for it is connected to the Well of Zamzam in Mecca and is believed to be one of the springs of Paradise.⁵⁷ The Spring of Siloam is also linked with the episode when, according to Islamic tradition, Mary came to the spring to hide her pregnancy; Mary drank from its blessed waters and, as a result, her pregnancy was kept secret.⁵⁸

Although Mary is extolled repeatedly in Fada’il al-Quds texts, some traditions within the corpus provide cautionary precepts on holy sites associated with her. On the one hand, for example, we have seen that Mary’s burial site (*qabr Maryam*), or the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, located, as previously mentioned, in the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, is given special place within the Islamic tradition.⁵⁹ The Tomb of the Virgin Mary is sanctified in almost all the Fada’il texts since, as explained earlier, it appeared to Muhammad during his *isra’* journey to Jerusalem.⁶⁰

On the other hand, the Fada’il texts also provide somewhat contradictory traditions on this holy place: although the Tomb of the Virgin Mary is considered sacred in these texts, authors warn Muslims against visiting the church that houses it – referred to as *kanisat Maryam* (the Church of Mary) or sometimes *al-kanisa al-Jismaniyya* (the Church of Gethsemane). As previously explained, the term *al-kanisa al-Jismaniyya* is connected with the location of Mary’s tomb and the church housing it. Indeed, Denys Pringle reveals that the so-called *al-kanisa al-Jismaniyya* is the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is the lower church in Gethsemane.⁶¹ Ka‘b al-Ahbar, a seventh century (first century AH) Jewish convert to Islam and one of the

main sources for the biblical legends in the Fada'il al-Quds, is cited in this regard: "Ka'ab said: Do not visit *kanisat Maryam* [meaning the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat] ... [for Christians] never built a church unless it was in the Valley of Hell [*Jahannam*]."62 Other traditions claim that 'Umar ibn al-Khattab paid a visit to *kanisat Maryam* and prayed there, only to regret his visit once it was revealed to him that this specific church was in the Valley of Hell.63

Similarly, while the Fada'il al-Quds includes traditions that sanctify the Mount of Olives and compels Muslims to visit it, there are also interpretations among Fada'il al-Quds authors that claim that the Mount of Olives and/or the valley situated at the foot of it, where the Tomb of the Virgin Mary lies, is also the location of al-Sahira. As previously detailed, the place al-Sahira is cited in Qur'anic verse 79:14.64 It has been connected with, in the analysis of some medieval scholars, the End of Days, such as the "spot where all souls shall gather on the Day of Judgment" (*ard al-mahshar wa-al-manshar*),65 and, in some interpretations, the location of Hell (*jahannam*) itself.66

One could argue, therefore, that the main reason why this tradition is exhorting Muslims not to visit the Church of Saint Mary is religiogeographical – or, simply, a question of eschatology. It could be postulated here that Muslims are being admonished from visiting the church because it is located in what the Islamic tradition considers as the Valley of Hell. What if this church was *not* located in such an "unblessed" site? Would it still be inadmissible for Muslims to visit it? Is the area considered the Valley of Hell *because* this church is located there? Or did it happen that the church simply exists in the larger area of the Valley of Hell, and so it is recommended for Muslims not to visit this place and the sites located there, such as the Church of Saint Mary? In other words, if this tradition exhorted Muslims not to visit the Church of Saint Mary because of its location in the Valley of Hell, what about churches in less inauspicious locations?

Can a Muslim Enter a Church in Jerusalem?

In fact, the issue of whether Muslims could visit this or any other church is touched upon in the two earliest extant Fada'il al-Quds texts prior to the Crusades. In the eleventh century (fifth century AH) texts of al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja, the authors added to the end of the tradition extolling the sanctity of Mihrab Dawud and the Spring of Siloam an enjoinder against entering churches: "And do not enter the churches nor buy there what is being sold, for one sin [in a church] is equal to one thousand sins, and a good deed [*hasana*] is equal to one thousand good deeds!"67

On the surface, the directive seems to discourage Muslims from visiting all churches. However, it is important to note that while sins, according to the tradition, multiply, *so do good deeds*. The concept of multiplication of good deeds and sins is associated with Jerusalem's Islamic holy sites more generally, which are, naturally, sanctified and visited by Muslims in the city.68 Additionally, this concept can even be found in Fada'il traditions on Mecca and its al-Masjid al-Haram sanctuary housing the Ka'ba.69 In other words, a church may also be seen as a holy site for Muslims where,

as is the case with other Islamic holy spots in Jerusalem – and in Mecca – both sins and good deeds committed within its confines are multiplied. Therefore, the fact that a church, or an area housing a church, has the power to exaggerate the consequences of actions committed therein should not necessarily mean that Muslims should be prohibited from entering it. If anything, it may mean that one should be more careful and attentive to his/her behavior within the confines of this place – as a sacred place.

Yet these traditions that seemingly discourage Muslims from visiting churches took a significant turn in Fada'il al-Quds texts composed in the period after the Crusades. During the Mamluk period, authors adopted novel and original approaches to debates around the permissibility for Muslims of entering a church in Jerusalem. Suleiman Mourad has argued that the Crusades had a significant impact on the content and form of the Fada'il al-Quds literature.⁷⁰ According to Mourad, texts composed during the Crusades, particularly during the Ayyubid period and after, adopted a more Islamicized view of Jerusalem, emphasizing, for example, citations of Jerusalem in the Qur'an and hadith, and began to “dissociate Jerusalem gradually from its non-Islamic heritage,” and emphasize “the exclusive Islamic dimension” of the city.⁷¹ This, Mourad finds, was accomplished partly through contributions to the genre by major Ayyubid scholars of hadith, including al-Qasim Ibn 'Asakir and Diya' al-Din al-Maqdisi, whereas during the pre-Crusades period, Fada'il al-Quds were composed by “average scholars,” such as al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja.⁷² Further, texts composed during the period when Jerusalem was ruled by the Franks in the twelfth century (sixth century AH) were produced for the “purpose of preaching and propaganda ... for public impulse for the liberation and protection of Jerusalem.”⁷³

With the fall of Acre in 1291 (690 AH) and the expulsion of the last Crusader post on the Syrian coast, Mamluk rule over Jerusalem stabilized the city and consolidated its Islamic character through intensive religious building programs.⁷⁴ With the seeming end to the European threat and the return of political continuity, pilgrimage to Jerusalem also increased.⁷⁵ One manifestation of this increased pilgrimage activity is the significant proliferation of Fada'il al-Quds texts composed during this period. As a result, emphasis on the Islamic dimension of Jerusalem continued during the Mamluk period, and therefore Fada'il al-Quds texts from the period also exhibited an increasingly Islamic form.⁷⁶

Mourad reveals that, as a result of the impact of the Crusades on the genre, two major trends on the sanctity of Jerusalem emerged in the corpus. On the one hand, Shafi'i circles inherited Fada'il al-Quds texts that continued to include biblical traditions on the city, such as the work of the Shafi'i al-Qasim Ibn 'Asakir, “not only as necessary but as foundational for a proper understanding of the sacredness of Jerusalem in Islam.”⁷⁷ On the other hand, Hanbali circles, including, Mourad points out, the major renowned Hanbali scholar Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Halim ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328/661–728 AH), inherited the text of Diya' al-Din al-Maqdisi which only emphasized Islamic traditions on the city, where the biblical material was sidelined and replaced with traditions strictly associating the sanctity of the city with the life events of the Prophet, the Qur'an, and the Apocalypse.⁷⁸

This *madhhab*-based bifurcation in post-Crusades authors' approaches to the composition of Fada'il al-Quds texts is evident in the debate over whether Muslims should enter churches, a question which, during the Mamluk period, drew increasingly on religious authorities and sources. For example, in his *Ithaf al-akhissa*, the Shafi'i Shams al-Din al-Suyuti includes the tradition that discourages Muslims from visiting the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which houses the Tomb of the Virgin Mary. However, immediately after, al-Suyuti introduces the reader to the opinions of Islamic scholars on whether Muslims are generally allowed to enter churches. Such a discussion was an innovation of al-Suyuti's work and does not appear in any pre-Crusades Fada'il al-Quds texts. Al-Suyuti first cites *Kitab al-badi' fi tafdil al-Islam* (The sublime book on the superiority of Islam) of Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abi Bakr al-Maqdisi, which states that Muslims are forbidden to enter the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat (referred to here as *al-kanisa al-Jismaniyya* based, as explained earlier, on its location near Gethsemane), which houses the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, "except with the [Christians'] permission since they hate that [Muslims] enter it" (my emphasis). He also cites an opinion that instead limits Muslims' visits to those churches that lack portraits or images (*tasawir*).⁷⁹ Al-Suyuti continues to delineate the views of other important 'ulama' on this issue, indicating that some prominent earlier figures such as Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, a companion of the Prophet, had prayed in churches.⁸⁰

Al-Suyuti finally settles the debate by citing the Shafi'i scholar Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn al-'Imad al-Aqfahsi (before 1349–1405/750–808 AH) and his *Tashil al-maqasid li-zuwwar al-masajid* (Simplifying the objectives of law for visitors of mosques), an *ahkam* (legal precepts and rulings) manual on mosques.⁸¹ Al-Suyuti writes that according to *Tashil al-maqasid*, Ibn al-'Imad al-Aqfahsi allows Muslims to enter churches and pray there only if four conditions are met:

Firstly, that [Christians] give permission to [a Muslim] to enter ... Secondly, that there should be no images [*tasawir*] for if there were images on its walls, which is usually the case, entering it is prohibited, for entering an abode that has images is forbidden. However, if it had images that are not removable, then yes [entry to that church] is allowed on the authority of al-Istakhri and Ibn al-Sabbagh Thirdly, it is forbidden if there is an increase in their black clothing and their rituals and their prayers and the glorification of their worship. Fourthly, that there should be no impurity [*najasa*] in it for if there was impurity then it is not allowed except if it is changed.⁸²

Al-Suyuti ends the discussion with the example of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, which he states is forbidden for a Muslim to visit since it contains images.⁸³ It is not clear here why this would be the ruling since, as al-Suyuti adjudicates based on the authorities he cites, if images cannot be removed then entry to the church should be allowed. In fact, as will be demonstrated later, Muslims did visit the Church

of the Nativity, especially during the Ottoman period, as the accounts of Ottoman travel literature on Jerusalem reveal.

However, al-Suyuti's introduction here of certain conditions that enable Muslims to enter churches is in contrast to the Hanbali view on the matter. Writing during the fourteenth century (eighth century AH), Ibn Taymiyya addresses this question in his *Qa'ida fi ziyarat Bayt al-Maqdis* (A legal treatise on undertaking pilgrimage to Jerusalem), a work opining on the legality of visiting Islamic and non-Islamic holy sites in the city.⁸⁴ In this short work, Ibn Taymiyya asserts that traveling to Jerusalem with the intention of undertaking pilgrimage (*ziyara*) and praying there is permissible, as long as the rituals practiced are legally-sanctioned worship (*'ibada mashru'a*).⁸⁵ In other words, Ibn Taymiyya permits practicing *ziyara* to Jerusalem but with limitations on what a pilgrim can or cannot do there. He thus proceeds to list certain *ziyara* rituals and practices that are forbidden in and around the city. One of the pilgrimage rituals Ibn Taymiyya opposes is visiting churches and other Christian sacred sites in Jerusalem. For example, he opposes pilgrimage to Jabal Sahyun (Mount Zion), the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (*al-mawdi' al-musamma bi-al-qumama*), and Bethlehem.⁸⁶ Ibn Taymiyya thus inherits the post-Crusades Hanbali approach to the Fada'il al-Quds, which not only eliminates biblical material from the corpus, but also, as the case here with Ibn Taymiyya's *Qa'ida*, forbids Muslims from entering churches altogether.

Ibn Taymiyya's precepts banning Muslims from entering churches represents the Hanbali inheritance of strictly Islamic traditions on Jerusalem, while al-Suyuti's more flexible approach provides the Shafi'i ruling on the question of whether Muslims can enter churches in the city. Nevertheless, both *madhhabs'* articulations on the question are an interesting attempt to locate this issue within Islamic law, and can therefore be read as part of the increased Islamic character of post-Crusades Fada'il al-Quds works. Yet by introducing such analysis to the Fada'il al-Quds corpus, authors paradoxically relaxed the outright prohibition on entering churches cited in pre-Crusades works. Muslims were now able to visit churches subject only to specific conditions. As a result, the door was left open for Muslims who desired to visit churches, and Christian holy sites became increasingly incorporated within the Islamic sacred landscape of Jerusalem. The practice of visiting churches in Bayt al-Maqdis became even more widespread, especially during the Ottoman period.

The View from the Early Modern Ottoman Period

The early modern Ottoman period experienced a decline in new Fada'il al-Quds works.⁸⁷ In comparison to the many works of Fada'il al-Quds produced during the Mamluk period, less than ten known works were composed during the Ottoman period.⁸⁸ In place of Fada'il al-Quds texts, Arabic travelogue literature specifically on Jerusalem thrived during this period. Muslim travelers who visited the city and toured the Holy Land composed these works and, indeed, through these Arabic travel writings on Ottoman Jerusalem Fada'il al-Quds traditions were preserved during the early modern period.⁸⁹ Arabic travelogue literature on Jerusalem contains

detailed observations and reports on the city, but they also quote earlier sources on Jerusalem, including referencing extensively from the Fada'il al-Quds literature.⁹⁰ In fact, many of these travel writings reproduced Fada'il al-Quds works in full.⁹¹ As such, the Arab travelers' accounts on Jerusalem during the Ottoman period serve not only as a rich historical source for the city during this period, but also constitutes a reservoir of Fada'il al-Quds writings, thus maintaining and continuing this important religiohistorical genre.

Some of the surviving Fada'il al-Quds texts composed during the Ottoman period provide further insight into the debate over whether Muslims should visit Christian sites in the Holy Land. For example, in *al-Mustaqsa fi fada'il al-Masjid al-Aqsa* (The comprehensive survey into the merits of al-Aqsa Mosque), Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Khidr al-Maqdisi (d. 1545/952 AH) cites the same debate on the legality of Muslims entering churches that al-Suyuti had earlier expounded upon in his *Ithaf al-akhissa*. Following his account of the traditions on the Tomb of the Virgin Mary and its church near Gethsemane, Ibn



Figure 6. Yusuf al-Natsheh, “al-Madrasa al-Salahiyya” [Church of St. Anne], in *Discover Islamic Art*, Museum with No Frontiers, 2023; online at islamicart.museumwnf.org/database/item.php?id=monument;ISL;pa;Mon01;33;en (accessed 21 September 2023).

Khidr al-Maqdisi delineates the opinions of several scholars before outlining the same four conditions that permit a Muslim to enter a church.⁹² Interestingly, Ibn Khidr al-Maqdisi cites another sacred space that is connected to Mary – the Church of St. Anne (see figure 6).⁹³ Built first by the Crusaders, the Church of St. Anne was named after Mary's mother. Following Salah al-Din's capture of Jerusalem, the church was converted to a madrasa bearing the Ayyubid sultan's name – al-Madrasa al-Salahiyya.⁹⁴

On the other hand, in *Lata'ifuns al-jalilfitaha'ifal-Quds wa al-Khalil* (The elegances of the sublime companion in the gifts of Jerusalem and Hebron), another Fada'il al-Quds work from the Ottoman period, Mustafa As'ad al-Luqaymi (d. 1759/1173 AH) reports the tradition that discourages Muslims from visiting *any* church, warning that committing one sin in a church is equivalent to a thousand sins (and that a good deed done in a church is similarly multiplied).⁹⁵ Yet, in other sections he openly describes how Muslims visited and prayed in certain churches. For example, in his account of *al-kanisa al-Jismaniyya*, al-Luqaymi states that this church and Mary's tomb within it are frequented by both Muslims and Christians: "and on the Mount of Olives there is a church called the Church of Gethsemane ... that holds the Tomb of Mary peace be upon her, a place visited by Muslim and Christian pilgrims."⁹⁶ Yet even though he reports the visits of Muslims to this church, al-Luqaymi immediately follows this account with the reports of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab's regret for praying there and Ka'b's exhortation to Muslims not to enter it.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, al-Luqaymi continues to detail the shared sacred spaces among Muslims and Christians in the city. According to al-Luqaymi, *kanisat Sahyun* was a highly frequented sacred space, visited by Muslims and Christians.⁹⁸ This *kanisat Sahyun* is, as explained earlier, the Church of St. Mary of Mount Sion, which houses the Cenacle of the Last Supper frequented, naturally, by Christians, as well as the Tomb of David, which is sacred to and visited by Muslims and Jews.⁹⁹ Even al-Luqaymi's detailed description of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem betrays his earlier precepts on visiting churches in this Fada'il al-Quds work. Indeed, in his report on the towns and villages surrounding Jerusalem, al-Luqaymi mentions Bethlehem, the town "where Jesus was born,"¹⁰⁰ describing its population as mainly Christian before proceeding to provide a detailed description of both the outside *and* the inside of the Church of the Nativity:

And within [Bethlehem] there is a well-built church, within it there are three *mihrabs*, one of which is facing the blessed *qibla*, and the second facing eastward, and the third toward the Blessed Rock [*al-sakhra al-sharifa*] [in al-Haram al-Sharif]. And its roof is made of wood, raised upon fifty pillars of yellow marble, in addition to the walls built of rocks, and its floor furnished with marble ... And it is built by Helen [mother of Emperor Constantine], and within it is the birthplace of Jesus peace be upon him, in a cave ... between the three *mihrabs*.¹⁰¹

Considering the great details in his report, it is safe to assume that al-Luqaymi had paid a visit to this church, which he himself confirms in his travelogue on Jerusalem, *Tahdhib mawanih al-uns bi-rihlati li-wadi al-Quds* (The refinement of the companion's pleasantries in my voyage to the Valley of Jerusalem).¹⁰²

Indeed, in *Tahdhib mawanih al-uns*, al-Luqaymi directly reports on his visits to several churches. For example, during his stay at Bethlehem, al-Luqaymi writes that he in fact visited the Church of the Nativity.¹⁰³ Although he laments that Christians controlled the church, he nevertheless emotes on the beauty of the site and includes a

long description of Jesus's life.¹⁰⁴ During his tour of Jerusalem, al-Luqaymi writes that he visited the church at Gethsemane where Mary is buried – the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat – and recited the Qur'an at its door.¹⁰⁵ He then writes an ode to Mary, followed by an account of his visit to the Mount of Olives where he composed another ode to Jesus and the episode in which he was raised to the Heavens by God.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, in the travelogue *al-Hadra al-unsiiyya fi al-rihla al-Qudsiyya* (The sublime presence in the Jerusalemite voyage), 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (1641–1731/1050–1143 AH) reports on his visit to several churches during his travels to the Holy Land in 1690 (1101 AH). In Bethlehem, al-Nabulusi visited the Church of the Nativity, and stood and recited the Qur'an there. He follows this report with one of many of his poems, including an ode to Bethlehem and to Jesus. Al-Nabulusi further describes in great detail the Grotto of the Nativity, where it is believed that Jesus was born.¹⁰⁷ He also describes the Mount of Olives and how, according to Islamic tradition, God had raised Jesus to the Heavens from the Mount, after which he recounts a visit to the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, a famous place that, according to the author, "is frequented by many people including Muslims and Christians," adding that "this church is built by Helen mother of Constantine."¹⁰⁸ By visiting the church and attending to Mary's tomb, al-Nabulusi thus overlooked the tradition's prohibition against Muslims entering churches.

The relaxation of such prohibitions – and the resultant frequent visits paid by Muslims to Christian holy sites – during the Ottoman period is further evident in the late eighteenth century (twelfth century AH) travelogue of Muhammad ibn 'Uthman al-Miknasi, *Ihraz al-mu'alla wa al-raqib fi hajj Bayt Allah al-Haram wa ziyarat al-Quds al-Sharif wa-al-Khalil wa-al-tabarruk bi-qabr al-Habib* (Reaching [God] the Noble and the Watchful in the hajj to God's Noble Sanctuary [in Mecca] and pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Hebron and attaining the blessings of the Prophet's Tomb [in Medina]) (tr. 1785).¹⁰⁹ Like al-Luqaymi and al-Nabulusi before him, the Moroccan al-Miknasi paid visits to several churches in the Holy Land. For example, during his visit to the Mount of Olives, al-Miknasi entered Mary's Tomb. Like al-Luqaymi, al-Miknasi lamented Christian control of this sacred space, where he also recited the *Fatiha*, the opening chapter of the Qur'an. Al-Miknasi also visited the Chapel of the Ascension. Here, al-Miknasi reveals his knowledge of the importance of the place, explaining that it was from here that "Jesus peace be upon him was raised."¹¹⁰ He also stopped in Bethlehem and, against al-Suyuti's precept, visited the Church of the Nativity there, entering inside to view the cradle of Jesus and read the *Fatiha*.¹¹¹

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre: An Exception to the Rule?

What about the most sacred Christian site in the Holy Land, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre? Fada'il al-Quds texts are replete with negative traditions regarding the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (see figure 7). The church is commonly referred to with the derogatory title *kanisat al-qumama*, the Church of the Dunghill, a play on the

name of the church in Arabic, *kanisat al-qiyama* (the Church of the Resurrection).¹¹² According to Islamic traditions in Fada'il al-Quds works, Christians during the Byzantine period would dump their refuse (*qumama*) onto the Noble Rock on the Temple Mount.¹¹³ Following the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem during the seventh century (first century AH), the Rock, according to the Fada'il traditions, was cleaned of the piles of refuse and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre began instead to be referred to pejoratively by Muslims as *kanisat al-qumama*.¹¹⁴



Figure 7. Yusuf al-Natsheh, "Church of the Holy Sepulchre," in *Discover Islamic Art*, Museum with No Frontiers, 2023; online at islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=monument;IS-L;pa;Mon01;20;en (accessed 21 September 2023).

Although the Fada'il al-Quds literature does not extol the sanctity of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, nevertheless there are indications that Muslims did in fact visit this church. The earliest source describing visits by Muslims to Christian holy sites dates back several centuries before Ibn Taymiyya had composed his treatise. As early as the tenth century (fourth century AH), medieval Arabo-Islamic authors have reported how Muslims shared sacred spaces with fellow Christians in Jerusalem. For example, in his *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawhar* (Meadows of gold and mines of gem), Abu al-Hasan 'Ali b. al-Husayn al-Mas'udi (born probably a few years before 893/280 AH and died 956/346 AH) wrote on the city and its Christian

holy sites.¹¹⁵ While describing the days of Easter, al-Mas‘udi reports on the celebrated day of the Miracle of Holy Fire, describing, significantly, the presence of Muslims during the festivities at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre:

On the 5th day of the (Syrian) month Tishrin I (October) is the festival of the Kanisah al Kumâmah (Church of the Sepulchre) at Jerusalem. The Christians assemble for this festival from out all lands. For on it the Fire from Heaven doth descend among them, so that they kindle therefrom the candles. *The Muslims also are wont to assemble in great crowds to see the sight of the festival.* It is the custom also at this time to pluck olive leaves. The Christians hold many legends there anent; but the Fire is produced by a clever artifice, which is kept a great secret.¹¹⁶

Guy Le Strange remarks that al-Mas‘udi’s reports here, which were composed in 943 (332 AH), are significant since they were written only several decades after Bernard the Wise had made his observations on the Miracle of Holy Fire in 867 (252 AH), which, according to Le Strange, is the first known report made by a medieval Western European on this curious festival.¹¹⁷

A couple of centuries later, the presence of Muslims inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is further confirmed by Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Harawi (d. 1215/611 AH).¹¹⁸ Writing in his twelfth century (sixth century AH) pilgrimage manual, *Kitab al-isharat li-ma‘rifat al-ziyarat* (The book of signs to inform pilgrimage), al-Harawi lists the holy sites in Jerusalem, including important Christian churches in the city.¹¹⁹ He explains that the greatest church here is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and proceeds to provide details about the place, including descriptions of both its interior and exterior. Ending his account of the church, he adds that, concerning the Miracle of Holy Fire (*nuzul al-nur*), he was able to, after staying in Jerusalem a considerable duration, figure out how it happens.¹²⁰ He also writes elsewhere that he had recorded measurements and outlines of the entire church, although his observations were – frustratingly – lost when his ship sunk off the coast of Sicily.¹²¹ Considering his detailed knowledge of the inside of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, his familiarity with the Miracle of the Holy Fire and its apparent workings, along with his (lost) architectural measurements of the church, it can be safely hypothesized that al-Harawi had visited Christianity’s holiest spot.

Similarly, and during the same century, al-Idrisi also recorded in detail the inside of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In his 1154/548 AH geography work *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtiraq al-afaq* (The voyage of the yearned to penetrate the horizons), Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah b. Idris al-Hammudi, known as al-Sharif al-Idrisi, describes the geography and topography of Jerusalem and its important holy places, including Christian sites. Here al-Idrisi provides an even more detailed description of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. While it is known that al-Idrisi had travelled in the western Islamic lands, it is not certain whether he had visited Jerusalem during his travels. However, his elaborate portrait of the interior of the church may lead one to believe that he may have visited the Holy City.

Three centuries later, the Hanbali Mujir al-Din reports in *al-Uns al-jalil* that during the Fatimid period (909–1171/297–567 AH), Muslims were known to not only visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre but also to participate in Christian ceremonies during Easter.¹²² Mujir al-Din notes that Muslim participation during these festivities continued into the latter part of the fifteenth century (ninth century AH), at the time when he was writing his *al-Uns al-jalil*:

And they [the Christians] until today ... [perform their Easter ceremonies] in the [Church of] Qumama [Church of the Holy Sepulchre] ... That day [of the Miracle of Holy Fire] is called Holy Saturday (*Sabt al-Nur*), and there committed on that day the wrong (*al-munkar*) in the presence of Muslims, which should be forbidden for Muslims to see or hear.¹²³

Not only does Mujir al-Din report the presence of Muslims at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre during Easter, but he, as a Hanbali scholar writing after the Crusades, is also forbidding Muslims from entering churches, in this case Christianity's holiest spot.

Although Mujir al-Din admonishes such practices in the strongest terms, the presence of Muslims in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre during Easter is revealing. Despite the protestations by Mujir al-Din and other Hanbali 'ulama', Muslims continued to visit churches in Jerusalem. They even participated, in one form or another, and side by side with Christians in performing certain rituals in churches throughout the Holy Land for centuries.

Conclusion

Such reports on Muslims and Christians sharing sacred spaces in Jerusalem must have caused great consternation among the conservative Muslim establishment. As revealed in this study, the Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya was thus compelled to write his *Qa'ida* against certain pilgrimage rituals in the Holy Land.¹²⁴ Yet Ibn Taymiyya's exhortations seem to have gone unheeded and, furthermore, it represented only the Hanbali teachings on the matter. As analysis of Fada'il al-Quds literature and Ottoman travelogue works on Jerusalem shows, Muslims visited and extolled the sanctity of certain Christian sacred spaces before, during, and after Ibn Taymiyya's lifetime. Different Christian holy sites, including the Mount of Olives, the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, the Church of the Ascension, and the Church of the Nativity were sanctified in the Islamic tradition based on their connection with figures and episodes significant to both Christianity and Islam.

While certain traditions in pre-Crusade texts discouraged Muslims from visiting churches, Fada'il al-Quds works written after the Crusades began to show a more flexible attitude toward this phenomenon. As part of the increasing Islamic character of the genre, scholarly authors began to rely on Islamic authorities to settle the debate over the legality of Muslims visiting churches, especially in the Shafi'i *madhhab*, which paradoxically resulted in setting forth conditions that allowed Muslims to visit

churches. By the time of the Ottoman period, evidence from Fada'il al-Quds and travelogue literature dating from the early modern era indicated that Muslims of the period frequently visited churches and performed Islamic rituals within the confines of these sacred Christian spaces. Even the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, with its contentious and less than flattering image in the Fada'il al-Quds traditions, was, according to authors of the period, frequented by Muslims for centuries. They not only entered the church but also participated with fellow Christians in Easter ceremonies.

It must be said that there were tangible divisions, hostilities, and barriers to mixing, which were set up by some Hanbali *'ulama'* at the time and even by political authorities. There was Ibn Taymiyya's religious treatise against visiting churches in Jerusalem. There were also architectural efforts by Mamluk authorities, such as, for example, the highly symbolic construction of the Salahiyya minaret and the renewal of the minaret of Jami' 'Umar (the Mosque of 'Umar), which were flanking the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.¹²⁵ These building contributions can be seen as expressing perhaps an act of Islamic hostility towards and/or domination over Christianity's holiest site. Yet one could argue that these religious and architectural policies were in fact pursued as a result of anxiety over increased Islamic pilgrimage to Christian holy sites in the city. For example, Ibn Taymiyya clearly felt compelled to author his treatise as a result of an increase in Islamic pilgrimage to churches and other Christian sites in the Holy Land. Similarly, it could be argued that the Mamluk authorities built the Salahiyya minaret and the minaret of the Mosque of 'Umar partly due to the increased number of Muslims visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Were the authorities merely expressing Islamic domination over the Christian presence in the city, or was there perhaps tangible anxiety among the religious and political authorities over the flocking of Muslim pilgrims to the gates of the Christian martyrdom? Were the two minarets built to remind Muslims who visited there every Easter, as Mujir al-Din informs us, of the importance and paramountcy of the Islamic faith, and thus compelling them to turn around and not enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre? It is also interesting to note that the Sufi lodge al-Khanqa al-Salahiyya was also established immediately adjacent to the church, which would have further increased Muslim traffic around, and perhaps even inside, the church, thus perhaps further fueling the anxiety over an increased Muslim presence at Christianity's holiest spot.

I have argued elsewhere that due to the scattering of many Islamic holy sites across Mamluk Jerusalem, along with the construction of many religious institutions and living quarters to accommodate the exponential growth of Muslim pilgrims and their worship, study, movement, and lodging throughout these places, the Islamic holy sphere in Mamluk Jerusalem diffused throughout the city – in the Haram, around it, deep within the confines of the urban fabric of the city, and even around and outside Jerusalem's walls.¹²⁶ Such diffusion of the Islamic religious sphere, I have stated, blurred the boundaries between the city's sacred and secular quarters. One major consequence of this blurring of "liminal spaces" is that the Islamic religious sphere expanded over and overlapped with the Christian religious presence in the city. As this study has shown, the diffusion of the Islamic religious sphere can also be

seen through the many holy sites Muslims shared with Christians, a religiohistorical phenomenon that is only inevitable for a city so defined by its central role within the three monotheistic faiths as the city of Jerusalem. Demarcating where Muslims can worship and where they are prohibited from visiting becomes as impossible a task as separating exactly where in Jerusalem the sacred sphere ends and where the secular profane begins. Naturally, then, sharing sacred spaces among Muslims and Christians simply becomes an inescapable feature of Jerusalem and its past; it is hoped as well that this syncretic tradition can only continue today and in the immediate and distant future.

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Endnotes

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2 For studies on Islamic pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Palestine, see Taufik Canaan,

Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine (Jerusalem: Ariel Publishing House, 1927); Yehoshua Frenkel, "Muslim Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Mamluk Period," in *Pilgrims and Travelers to the Holy Land*, ed. Bryan F. Le Beau and Menachem Mor (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 1996), 63–87; Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Andreas Kaplony, *The Haram of Jerusalem, 324–1099: Temple, Friday Mosque, Area of Spiritual Power* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002); and, most recently, Fadi Ragheb, "City as Liminal Space: Islamic Pilgrimage and Muslim Holy Sites in Jerusalem during the Mamluk Period," in *The Friday Mosque in the City: Liminality, Ritual, and Politics*, ed. Hilal Ugurlu and Suzan Yalman (Bristol: Intellect, 2020), 75–122. On translations of descriptions of Jerusalem by medieval Muslim geographers, travelers, and chroniclers, see the indispensable work, Guy Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems: A Description of Syria and the Holy Land from A.D. 650 to 1500* (London: Alexander P. Watt, 1890); and A. Sebastianus Marmardji, *Textes géographiques arabes sur la Palestine* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1951). For an edited Arabic volume of travel writings on Jerusalem, see Kamil Jamil al-'Asali, *Bayt al-*

Maqdis fi kutub al-rihlat 'inda al-'Arab wa-al-Muslimin (Amman: Kamil Jamil al-'Asali, 1992).

- 3 On the Fada'il al-Quds genre, its manuscripts and authors, see the following biobibliographical catalogues: Kamil J. al-'Asali, *Makhtutat fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis* [Merits of Jerusalem manuscripts] (Amman: Manshurat Mujma' al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya al-Urduni, 1981); Mahmud Ibrahim, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis fi makhtutat 'Arabiyya qadima* [Merits of Jerusalem in ancient Arabic manuscripts] (al-Safat, Kuwait: al-Munazzama al-'Arabiyya li'l-Tarbiya wa-al-Thaqafa wa-al-'Ulum, 1986); and Shihab Allah Bahadur, *Mu'jam ma ullifa fi fada'il wa tarikh al-masjid al-Aqsa wa-al-Quds wa Filastin wa muduniha* [Lexicon of what has been written on the merits and history of al-Aqsa mosque, Jerusalem, and Palestine and its cities] (Dubai: Markaz Jum'a al-Majid li'l-Thaqafa wa-al-Turath, 2009). For studies on the Fada'il al-Quds, see J. W. Hirschberg, "The Sources of Moslem Traditions Concerning Jerusalem," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 17 (1951–52): 314–50; A. H. Busse, "Sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam," *Judaism* 17 (1968): 441–68; M. J. Kister, "You Shall Only Set Out for Three Mosques," *Le Museon* 82 (1969): 173–96; Emmanuel Sivan, "The Beginnings of the Fada'il al-Quds Literature," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971): 263–71; Isaac Hasson, "Muqaddima," in Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Wasiti, *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, ed. Isaac Hasson (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979); M. J. Kister, "A Comment on the Antiquity of Traditions Praising Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Cathedra* 1 (1981): 185–86; Ofer Livne-Kafri, "A Note on Some Traditions of Fada'il al-Quds," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 14 (1991): 71–83; Moshe Sharon, "The 'Praises of Jerusalem' as a Source for the Early History of Islam," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 46, no. 1 (1992): 56–67; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem, passim*, especially 1–22; Isaac Hasson, "The Muslim View of Jerusalem – the Qur'an and Hadith," in *History of Jerusalem: Early Muslim Period, 638–1099*, ed. Joshua Prawer and Haggai Ben-Shammai (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 349–85; Ofer Livne-Kafri, "The Muslim Traditions 'In Praise of Jerusalem' (Fada'il al-Quds): Diversity and Complexity," *Annali* 58 (1998): 165–92;

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 - 6 On biblical material in the Fada’il al-Quds, see Hirschberg, “Sources of Moslem Traditions”; Sharon, “Praises of Jerusalem.”
 - 7 On the connection in the Fada’il al-Quds between the sanctity of Jerusalem in early Islam and Prophet Muhammad’s Nocturnal Journey, and the debates in modern scholarship on this issue, see Hasson, “Muslim View of Jerusalem,” 353–59.
 - 8 Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 6–22.
 - 9 See, for example, Livne-Kafri, “Jerusalem in Early Islam.”
 - 10 Sivan, “Beginnings of the *Fada’il al-Quds*,” 267; Ragheb, “City as Liminal Space,” 80, 81–84.
 - 11 On the development of the genre, see al-‘Asali, *Makhtutat*, 1–15; Sivan, “Beginnings of the *Fada’il al-Quds*”; Hasson, “Muqaddima”; Hasson, “Muslim Literature in Praise of Jerusalem”; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 6–22; and Mourad, *Fada’il al-Quds*.
 - 12 On the early circulation and the writing down of the Fada’il al-Quds traditions, see Kister, “You Shall Only Set Out”; and Kister, “Comment on the Antiquity of Traditions.”
 - 13 Recently, Suleiman Mourad reconstructed al-Ramli’s work from later Fada’il al-Quds texts: Mourad, *Fada’il al-Quds*. See also Mourad, “Symbolism of Jerusalem in Early Islam.”
 - 14 Al-Wasiti, *Fada’il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*; Abu al-Ma‘ali al-Musharraf Ibn al-Murajja al-Maqdisi, *Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis*, ed. Ayman Nasr al-Din al-Azhari (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2002). Hasson states that Ibn al-Murajja’s text was composed some three or four decades after al-Wasiti’s work: Hasson, “Muslim View of Jerusalem,” 369.
 - 15 On the influence of the texts of al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja on later authors during and after the Crusades, see al-‘Asali, *Makhtutat*, 28–29, 37; Ibrahim, *Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 161; Mourad, “*Fada’il* of Jerusalem,” 272–74. There are several theories on why the Fada’il al-Quds texts composed by al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja emerged only during the eleventh century (fifth century AH). Sivan hypothesized that al-Wasiti (and Ibn al-Murajja) may have written his text as a result of – and in justification for – the persecutions of Christians by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim and his destruction of the Holy Sepulchre: Sivan, “Beginnings of the *Fada’il al-Quds*,” 269–70. Hasson counters that one reason there were no Fada’il al-Quds works composed before the eleventh century was the lack of madrasas in the city and, more importantly, that the collapse of the larger dome of Qubbat al-Sakhra after the earthquake of 1016–17 (407 AH) led al-

Wasiti, in a “fund-raising campaign” style, to compose his tract to help collect funds to rebuild the damaged structure above the *sakhra*: Hasson, “Muslim Literature in Praise of Jerusalem,” 173. I would posit that another major factor may have contributed to the composition of Fada’il al-Quds books by al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja during the eleventh century (fifth century AH). In the history of medieval European pilgrimage, the eleventh century is considered, as Jonathan Sumption had elegantly put it, the “Great Age of Pilgrimage” to the Holy Land, when thousands of Europeans, including members of the ruling classes, undertook the long journey to Palestine to visit the Holy Land and pray at its Christian hallowed sites. It is possible that al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja were motivated to compose their treatises on Jerusalem when witnessing the increased number of European Christian pilgrims descending onto their city. Their compositions were thus efforts to counter the heightened Christian presence in Jerusalem, providing an intellectual response to the influx of Christian pilgrims by renewing the Islamic sanctification of Bayt al-Maqdis in their texts. See Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 114–45.

- 16 On the Muslim ideological response to the Crusades, including the proliferation of Fada’il al-Quds literature, see Emanuel Sivan, “Le caractère sacré de Jérusalem dans l’Islam aux XIIe-XIIIe siècles,” *Studia Islamica* 27 (1967): 149–82; *L’Islam et la Croisade, idéologie et propagande dans les réactions musulmanes aux Croisades* (Paris: Paris Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, 1968). For a chronological list of Fada’il al-Quds composed before, during, and after the end of the Crusades, see al-‘Asali, *Makhtutat*. See also Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 162–65, 175–80; Mourad, “Did the Crusades Change Jerusalem’s Religious Symbolism?”
- 17 Al-Qasim Baha’ al-Din Hasan ibn ‘Ali ibn ‘Asakir, *al-Mustaqsa fi ziyarat al-Masjid al-Aqsa*, in *Arba’ Rasa’il fi Fada’il al-Masjid al-Aqsa li-Ibn ‘Asakir wa-Ibn al-Firkah wa-al-Maqdisi*, ed. Muhammad Zinham (Cairo: Dar al-Nada, 2000), 31–50; Abu al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Ali Ibn al-Jawzi, *Fada’il al-Quds*, ed. Jibra’il Sulayman

Jabbur (Beirut: Dar al-Afaq al-Jadida, 1979); Diya’ al-Din Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahid al-Maqdisi, *Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis*, ed. Muhammad Muti’ al-Hafiz (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1985). On these authors and their texts, see Mourad, “Did the Crusades Change Jerusalem’s Religious Symbolism?”

- 18 Michael Hamilton Burgoyne and D. S. Richards, *Mamluk Jerusalem: An Architectural Study* (Essex: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1987), 61a-b; Donald S. Little, “Jerusalem under the Ayyubids and Mamluks,” in *Jerusalem in History: 3,000 B.C. to the Present Day*, ed. Kamil J. Asali (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997), 189–94; Ghalib Anabsi, “Popular Beliefs as Reflected in ‘Merits of Palestine and Syria’ (*Fada’il al-Sham*) Literature: Pilgrimage Ceremonies and Customs in the Mamluk and Ottoman Periods,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 1 (2008): 61; Frenkel, “Muslim Pilgrimage to Jerusalem,” 70–76; Ragheb, “City as Liminal Space.”
- 19 Al-‘Asali, *Makhtutat*, 41–114: here al-‘Asali cites no less than twenty works produced during the Mamluk period. See also: Mourad, “Did the Crusades Change Jerusalem’s Religious Symbolism?”
- 20 These include *Ba’ith al-nufus ila ziyarat al-Quds al-mahrus* by Burhan al-Din ibn al-Firkah al-Fazari (1262–1329/660–729 AH); *Muthir al-Gharam ila Ziyarat al-Quds wa al-Sham* by Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hilal al-Maqdisi (d. 1363 [765 AH]); *al-Rawd al-mugharras fi fada’il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* by Abu al-Nasr Taj al-Din ‘Abd al-Wahhab ibn ‘Umar al-Husayni al-Shafi’i (d. 1470/875 AH); Shams al-Din al-Suyuti’s *Ithaf al-akhissa bi-fada’il al-Masjid al-Aqsa* (1475/880 AH) and Mujir al-Din al-‘Ulaymi’s *al-Uns al-jalil bi-ta’rikh al-Quds wa al-Khalil* (1496/901 AH). All of these Mamluk Fada’il al-Quds texts have been published: Burhan al-Din ibn al-Firkah al-Fazari, *Ba’ith al-nufus ila ziyarat al-Quds al-mahrus*, trans. Charles D. Matthews, *Palestine, Mohammedan Holy Land*, Part I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949); Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hilal al-Maqdisi, *Muthir al-gharam ila ziyarat al-Quds wa-al-Sham*, ed. Ahmad al-Khutaymi (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1994); Abu al-Nasr Taj al-Din ‘Abd al-Wahhab ibn ‘Umar al-Husayni al-Shafi’i, *al-Rawd al-mugharras fi fada’il al-bayt al-muqaddas*, ed. Zuhayr

- Ghanayim ‘Abd al-Latif (Amman: Dar Jarir lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzi’, 2009); Muhammad ibn Shihab al-Din al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-Akhissa bi-Fada’il al-Masjid al-Aqsa*, ed. Ahmad Ramadan Ahmad, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Misriyya al-‘Amma li-l-Kitab, 1982); Mujir al-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-‘Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil bi-ta’rikh al-Quds wa-al-Khalil*, ed. Muhammad Bahr al-‘Ulum, 2 vols. (Najaf, Iraq: al-Matba’a al-Haydariyya, 1968). On Mujir al-Din’s text, see Donald P. Little, “Mujir al-Din al-‘Ulaymi’s Vision of Jerusalem in the Ninth/Fifteenth Century,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 2 (April–June 1995): 237–47.
- 21 Shams al-Din al-Suyuti, like some other authors, composed his text during his visit to Jerusalem: see al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 82–83.
- 22 Al-‘Asali, *Makhtutat*, 9; Hasson, “Muslim View of Jerusalem,” 377–79. A post-Mamluk, Ottoman-era work was composed in 1541 (948 AH) by Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Khidr al-Maqdisi, *al-Mustaqsa fi fada’il al-Masjid al-Aqsa*, ed. Mashhur al-Habbazi (Jerusalem: Bayt al-Shi’r al-Filastini, 2008).
- 23 On sharing sacred spaces on the Mount of Olives during the medieval period, see Limor, “Sharing Sacre Space,” 227–29; Luz, “Shared Sacred Sites,” 44–45; and Versteegen, “How to Share a Sacred Place,” 37–39.
- 24 Anna ‘Isa ibn Maryam rufi’a min Tur Zayta: al-Wasiti, *Fada’il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* 48, 70; Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 324; Ibn al-Jawzi, *Fada’il al-Quds*, 70–71; Shihab al-Din al-Maqdisi, *Muthir al-gharam*, 79; al-Husayni al-Shafi’i, *al-Rawd al-mugharras*, 171–72, 183; al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 222–23; Mujir al-Din al-‘Ulaymi, *Al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 167, 266. On the Islamic narrative of Jesus and his crucifixion, see Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009); and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 25 Al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 213–14; and Mujir al-Din al-‘Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 167, 170. See also Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 140, 145–46; and Ragheb, “City as Liminal Space,” 89.
- 26 Luz, “Sharing the Holy Land,” 44.
- 27 Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 98, 322–23; Ibn al-Firkah, *Ba’ith al-nufus*, 6, 17, 20, 21; Shihab al-Din al-Maqdisi, *Muthir al-gharam*, 77, 241; al-Husayni al-Shafi’i, *al-Rawd al-mugharras*, 181; al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 222. On al-Sahira, see Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 141–44.
- 28 The word al-Sahira is cited in the Qur’an in verse 79:14 (*fa-idha hum bi-al-Sahira*).
- 29 Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 322–23; Shihab al-Din al-Maqdisi, *Muthir al-gharam*, 241; al-Husayni al-Shafi’i, *al-Rawd al-mugharras*, 181; al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 222.
- 30 Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 98; Ibn al-Firkah, *Ba’ith al-nufus*, 6, 17, 20, 21.
- 31 On Islamic pilgrimage to the Tomb of the Virgin Mary and other Christian sacred spaces associated with Mary, see Moore, “Shared Sacred Spaces in the Holy Land.”
- 32 On *al-isra’*, see Frederick Stephen Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey: Tracing the Development of the Ibn ‘Abbas Ascension Discourse* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008).
- 33 Al-Wasiti, *Fada’il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* 49, no. 73 (all translations are mine unless stated otherwise); Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada’il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 334; Ibn al-Jawzi, *Fada’il al-Quds*, 121; al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 214, 238. The exact location of Mihrab Dawud differed across time during the medieval period, with some authors of the *Fada’il al-Quds*, such as al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja, pointing to the Tower of David in Jerusalem’s citadel, while later Mamluk authors, such as Mujir al-Din, situating it on the Haram compound.
- 34 Albera, “Muslims at Marian Shrines,” 66.
- 35 Mujir al-Din al-‘Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 291–92. See also, Denys Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*, 4 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993–2009), III, 342–46. The mystic is assumed to have been buried in Basra, Iraq: see Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Harawi, *Kitab al-isharat li-ma’rifat al-ziyarat*, ed. Janine Sourdel-Thomine (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1953), 28; Limor, “Sharing Sacred Space,” 228.
- 36 *Wa huwa fi zawiya yunzal ilayha min daraj wa huwa makan ma’nus yuqsad li-l-ziyara*: Mujir al-Din al-‘Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 292.
- 37 Limor, “Sharing Sacred Space,” 227–29, and

using Kedar's typology to analyze the type and location of the shared sacred spaces here: Kedar, "Convergences."

- 38 *Fa-lamma mararna bi-Bayt Lahm qala li Jibril: Hatha mawlid akhuk 'Isa fa-inzil fa-salli*: Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 343–45.
- 39 Mujir al-Din al-'Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 170.
- 40 Mujir al-Din al-'Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 170.
- 41 See Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, III, 287–306. For discussion of the Church of Holy Sepulchre, see below.
- 42 Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 182–83.
- 43 Mujir al-Din al-'Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 158–62 (*wa 'ammadahu Yahya ibn Zakariyya*).
- 44 Mujir al-Din al-'Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 161.
- 45 On the Church of Saint Mary of Mount Sion, which also houses the Tomb of David and the Cenacle of the Last Supper, see Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems*, 212; Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, III, 261–87. On sharing sacred spaces here at the Tomb of David, see Limor, "Sharing Sacred Space," 223–27.
- 46 Mujir al-Din al-'Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 117; see also Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 334.
- 47 *Wa yuqal inna qabr Dawud alayhi al-salam bi-Kanisat Sahyun ... wa hiya al-lati bi-zahir al-Quds min jihat al-qibla wa fi Kanisat Sahyun al-madhkura mawdi' tu'azzimuhu al-Nasara ... wa hatha al-mawdi' huwa al-an bi-aydi al-muslimin*: Mujir al-Din al-'Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 117. On the Tomb of David and Church of Sion in medieval Arabic travelogues, see Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems*, 203, 212.
- 48 Limor, "Sharing Sacred Space," 223.
- 49 Al-Wasiti, *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 85, no. 137; Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 97, 176–81; Ibn al-Firkah, *Ba'ith al-nufus*, 20, 22; al-Husayni al-Shafi'i, *al-Rawd al-mugharras*, 180; Mujir al-Din al-'Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 160, 273. See also: Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems*, 164–66; Priscilla Soucek, "The Temple after Solomon: The Role of Maryam Bint 'Imran and Her *Mihrab*," in *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Art: Studies in Honor of Bezael Narkiss on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Bianca Kühnel (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998), 34–41; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 93–97; Kaplony, *Haram of Jerusalem*, 664–73; Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, III, 310–14; Nabil Matar, "The Cradle of Jesus and the Oratory of Mary in Jerusalem's al-Haram al-Sharif," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 70 (Summer 2017): 111–25.
- 50 Al-Wasiti, *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 85, no. 137; Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 97, 176–81; Ibn al-Firkah, *Ba'ith al-nufus*, 20, 22.
- 51 Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 176–81.
- 52 Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 97.
- 53 Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 97; Ibn al-Firkah, *Ba'ith al-nufus*, 20, 22; al-Husayni al-Shafi'i, *al-Rawd al-mugharras*, 180; Mujir al-Din al-'Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 160, 273. See Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 117–30; Kaplony, *Haram of Jerusalem*, 662–64, where Kaplony argues that *Mihrab Zakariya* is actually in the northeastern corner of the Haram inside the eastern Haram wall.
- 54 Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 97; Ibn al-Firkah, *Ba'ith al-nufus*, 19; al-Husayni al-Shafi'i, *al-Rawd al-mugharras*, 180.
- 55 Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 97.
- 56 On the Spring (Pool) of Siloam, see Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems*, 74, 162, 179, 212, 220, 223; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 62–63, 68, 80–81, 133, 171.
- 57 Ibn al-Firkah, *Ba'ith al-nufus*, 23.
- 58 Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 341–42; Shhab al-Din al-Maqdisi, *Muthir al-gharam*, 182; al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 212.
- 59 Al-Wasiti, *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 21–22, no. 24; Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 346–47, 361; al-Husayni al-Shafi'i, *al-Rawd al-mugharras*, 59; al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 213–14; see also Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems*, 209–10. On the Church of Saint Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, see B. Bagatti, M. Piccirillo, and A. Prodomo, *New Discoveries at the Tomb of Virgin Mary in Gethsemane* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1975); Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, III, 287–306; Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 138.
- 60 Al-Wasiti, *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 49, no. 73; Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 334; Ibn al-Jawzi, *Fada'il al-Quds*,

- 121; al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 214, 238; Mujir al-Din al-'Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 116–17, 168.
- 61 Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, III, 288. See also Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 138.
- 62 *Qala Ka'b: La ta'iyi Kanisat Maryam wa la al-'amudayn ... ma banu [al-nasara] kanisa illa fi wadi jahannam*: al-Wasiti, *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 21–22, no. 24; Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 346–47, 361; al-Husayni al-Shafi'i, *al-Rawd al-mugharras*, 59; al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 213–14. On this debate, see Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 138–41. Nasser Rabbat contextualizes the opposition by Ka'b al-Ahbar to visiting churches in Jerusalem within the history of the city during the periods of its conquest by 'Umar, the reign of 'Abd al-Malik, and the relations of the latter with Byzantium. Rabbat explains that Ka'b's exhortation against entering churches can be seen through the lens of Jewish-Christian relations after the conquest and during the early Umayyad period, and the competition between the two groups in the city after the beginning of Islamic rule. See Nasser Rabbat, "The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Muqarnas* 6 (1989): 12–21, 16.
- 63 Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 346–47; al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 213–14, 239.
- 64 *Wa idha hum bi-al-Sahira*.
- 65 Ibn al-Firkah, *Ba'ith al-nufus*, 6, 25; al-Wasiti, *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* 48, no. 71; Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 322–24; and Shihab al-Din al-Maqdisi, *Muthir al-gharam*, 241–42.
- 66 On the connection between the Mount of Olives and al-Sahira, and medieval authors' different interpretations on the exact location of al-Sahira, see Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 141–44; Ragheb, "City as Liminal Space," 87–89.
- 67 *Wa la yadkhu al-kana'is wa la yashtari fiha bay'an fa-inna al-khati'a fiha mithl alf khati'a wa al-hasana mithl alf hasana*: al-Wasiti, *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 13, no. 13; Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 341. See also, for the later period, al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 212.
- 68 For example, there are traditions in the Fada'il al-Quds that state that in Jerusalem itself good deeds and sins are multiplied: al-Wasiti, *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, 24, no. 31; Ibn al-Murajja, *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 295–97; Ibn al-Jawzi, *Fada'il al-Quds*, 91; Shihab al-Din al-Maqdisi, *Muthir al-gharam*, 205–7; al-Husayni al-Shafi'i, *al-Rawd al-mugharras*, 123–24; al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 143–44; Mujir al-Din al-'Ulaymi, *al-Uns al-jalil*, I, 230.
- 69 In Mecca, some Fada'il traditions also command that committing deeds in Islam's holiest city has multiplicative consequences, including committing good deeds, sins, prayers, etc.: see, for example, the *ahkam* precepts and rulings manual of Abu Bakr b. Zayd al-Jura'i al-Salihi al-Hanbali (d. 1478/883 AH), *Tuhfat al-raki' wa-al-sajid bi-ahkam al-masajid*, ed. Faysal Yusuf Ahmad al-'Ali, 3rd ed. (al-Shamiyya, Kuwait: Lata'if, 2012), 155–56, 212–13.
- 70 Mourad, "Symbolism of Jerusalem in Early Islam"; Mourad, "Did the Crusades Change Jerusalem's Religious Symbolism?"
- 71 Mourad, "Symbolism of Jerusalem in Early Islam," 98–98.
- 72 Mourad, "Did the Crusades Change Jerusalem's Religious Symbolism," 4.
- 73 Mourad, "Did the Crusades Change Jerusalem's Religious Symbolism," 4–6.
- 74 Burgoyne, *Mamluk Jerusalem*, 33a–b; Frenkel, "Muslim Pilgrimage to Jerusalem," 72–76; Ragheb, "City as Liminal Space," 91–95.
- 75 Burgoyne, *Mamluk Jerusalem*, 61a–b; Anabsi, "Popular Beliefs," 61; Frenkel, "Muslim Pilgrimage to Jerusalem," 70–72. On the increase in Muslim visitors from the Maghrib, see Yehoshua Frenkel, "Muslim Travellers to Bilad al-Sham (Syria and Palestine) from the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries: Maghribi Travel Accounts," in *Travellers in Deserts of the Levant: Voyagers and Visionaries*, ed. Sarah Searight and Malcolm Wagstaff (Durham, UK: Astene, 2001), 109–20.
- 76 Mourad, "Did the Crusades Change Jerusalem's Religious Symbolism," 6.
- 77 Mourad, "Did the Crusades Change Jerusalem's Religious Symbolism," 7.
- 78 Mourad, "Did the Crusades Change Jerusalem's Religious Symbolism," 7. On Ibn Taymiyya's treatise on *ziyara* to Jerusalem, see Charles D. Matthews, "A Muslim Iconoclast on the Merits of Jerusalem and Palestine," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56 (1936): 1–21.
- 79 *Wa yanbaghi idha kana fiha suwaran an*

- yuharram: al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 214.
- 80 Al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 214–15 (my emphasis).
- 81 Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn ‘Imad ibn Yusuf al-shahir bi-Ibn al-‘Imad al-Aqfahs, *Tashil al-maqasid li-zuwwar al-masajid*, ed. Ahmad Farid al-Mazidi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1971), 32–33.
- 82 Al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 215 (my translation).
- 83 Al-Suyuti, *Ithaf al-akhissa*, I, 216 (*wa qadiyyat tahrim dukhul Kanisat Bayt Lahm fa-huwa lima fiha min al-suwar*).
- 84 Matthews, “Muslim Iconoclast.”
- 85 Matthews, “Muslim Iconoclast,” 7.
- 86 Matthews, “Muslim Iconoclast,” 13.
- 87 Al-‘Asali, *Makhtutat*, 6–9, 115ff. Al-‘Asali argues that by the sixteenth century (tenth century AH), which also coincided with the fall of Cyprus and the final end of the Crusader threat to the Muslim Near East, Fada’il al-Quds writings on Jerusalem reached the end of its peak and entered a phase of decline.
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FILE: EDUCATION IN
JERUSALEM

Education in Jerusalem: A Tool of Soft Colonialism

Anwar Qadah

Translated from the Arabic by
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Perhaps the most burning question in Jerusalem today is the question about the immense escalation in the Israelization and Judaization of the city on all fronts – the long game that has been neglected, sidelined, and constrained for decades – and how to explain the immense Israeli governmental spending and investment in the eastern part of the city today, especially in the education sector. In addition to the recent international and regional changes and normalization with the Arab world, the most important factor remains to be the change in the Israeli approach to the city and its residents.

In 2021, Ze'ev Elkin, minister of Jerusalem Affairs, boasted: “All along, the left said, ‘We’ll give it [East Jerusalem] back anyway, so it’s a pity to invest,’ and the right said, ‘Arabs – it’s a pity to invest in them,’ and I broke that paradigm.” He added: “It is precisely because I don’t see Jerusalem being divided in the future that we must invest. It’s our duty to invest in the city’s eastern part, otherwise Jerusalem will not be able to function as a city.”¹

Ofer Or, former Shin Bet intelligence commander of Jerusalem, explained the unrest in Jerusalem in 2014 by saying: “You can say, ‘I am not developing East Jerusalem, because my point of departure is that they will eventually leave here by themselves. But if your premise is that they are not going anywhere, you understand that they will constantly feel that the Jews are out to get them. They see the public parks in West Jerusalem and they know they are paying municipal taxes just like we do.’”²

Thus, spending has become associated with consolidating Israeli sovereignty. The five-year plan for



Figure 1. Eleventh-grade students in the Arab Evangelical Episcopal School carry out an awareness campaign to explain to students from first through twelfth grades the Israeli policies and the persistent attempts to Israelize the curricula and Palestine identity. This activity was part of the social studies class with teacher N.B. (Ramallah 2022).

Jerusalem allegedly aims to promote welfare and equality between the two parts of the city, but in reality, it serves the goals of the radical right: “Judaization,” which means fewer Palestinians and more settlers. Hence, only Palestinians who conform to the standards of the Zionist institution will live in the city. To achieve this, then Israeli education minister (and later prime minister) Naftali Bennett announced, “The time has come that also in East Jerusalem [students] will learn the Israeli curriculum from first grade. Jerusalem must be united in actions and not [just in] words. The deeper the learning based on the Israeli curriculum, the more we will continue to strengthen the education system in East Jerusalem, because this is how we build a future.”³

The effort to undermine and Israelize the Palestinian school curricula has taken place in several phases: The first started immediately after the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, when East Jerusalem schools were placed under the jurisdiction of the occupation’s municipality and the Israeli curricula was forcibly introduced. However, these measures failed drastically, confronted by Jerusalemites’ resistance and their refusal to enroll their children in al-Ma’arif (Israeli Ministry of Education) schools affiliated with the municipality of Jerusalem. This forced the occupation authorities to yield and reinstate the Jordanian curriculum, but only after removing

all elements that promoted national or patriotic sentiments, or religious ones that encouraged jihad and liberation.

The Oslo accords paved the way for the second phase. Occupation authorities sought to take a proactive step to hinder any potential Palestinian plan to develop a national curriculum that awakens historic memory and deepens national identity. The agreement thus required that educational curricula promote peace between Israel and the Palestinian people and regionally. Each party was also required to strengthen mutual understanding and tolerance, and refrain from incitement, including using hostile propaganda against each other.⁴ Although these terms may seem broad and loose, they were adapted by the occupation's skillful communication and institutional channels to impose relentless pressure on the Palestinian Authority (PA) to change its curricula, interpreting the provisions according to the whims of the occupation and its long-term goals and giving the Israeli narrative dominance once more.

The third phase of Israelizing the Palestinian curriculum began with the introduction of a new Palestinian curriculum in 2000. Occupation authorities viewed this new curriculum with doubt and suspicion, and Zionist organizations were mandated or established to study and analyze curricular content. International organizations were also pressed into this effort – the Georg Eckert Institute, based in Germany, for example, undertook a project in 2021 to analyze Palestinian textbooks. Israeli political decision-making circles use these studies to support claims about Palestinian curricula undermining the peace process and inciting violence to turn international public opinion against Palestinians.⁵ Israel submitted reports to the U.S. Congress and the European Union pushing them to condemn the Palestinian curricula and cut off financial support, and encouraging representatives to raise the issue of Palestinian curricula in their parliaments.

Since 2010, the Israeli Knesset's Sports, Culture, and Education Committee has held several sessions to discuss Palestinian curricula. Committee members asked how it was possible to allow such textbooks in schools operating under Israeli jurisdiction and funded by Israeli taxpayers. Consequently, the Ministry of Education in Jerusalem hired a private Israeli company to review the Palestinian curriculum and remove anything that could be perceived as “incitement” against the occupation, Israeli, or Jews, or that referred to Palestinian political identity. New revised and manipulated textbooks were then printed and distributed to schools affiliated with the ministry.

Manipulation of the curricula took four forms: substitution, erasure, changing the substance, and distortion. These changes targeted anything that reinforces Palestinian national identity, such as songs and poetry about the homeland, intifada, martyrdom, and sacrifice. They also aimed to erase terms such as Nakba, Naksa, al-Buraq Wall, and al-Aqsa Mosque, and replace them with names consistent with the Zionist narrative, like Independence, the Six-Day War, the Wailing Wall, and the Temple Mount. The name *Filastin* (Palestine) is replaced with *Balastina* (Palaestina). The texts are scrubbed of all references to refugees, refugee camps, the right of return, or even the nostalgia for return. They also omit anything to do with the history of Jews during the time of Prophet Muhammad, like the Jews of Banu Qurayza and Banu al-

Nadir. A new revised edition appeared in 2022, using language that reinforces the Israeli narrative – for example, “Israel” appears next to “Palestine” – and adding passages described as promoting coexistence between Jews and Arabs. The pictures above (figure 1) show a page from the sixth-grade social studies book titled *Palestine: The Land of Canaan*.

In the 2011 academic year, the revised curriculum was introduced not only in all schools under the jurisdiction of the Israeli municipality, but also in private Palestinian schools that began receiving Israeli funding at the turn of the millennium, and thereby lost their independence. More recently, six private schools – al-Iman Schools and the Ibrahimiyya College – were threatened with closure in the 2023–24 academic years if they do not agree to use the Israeli textbooks.⁶

Israel considers the use of the revised curricula a temporary phase, meant to prepare Palestinian Jerusalemite society for the reintroduction of the Israeli curricula – an effort that failed when it was first attempted in 1967. To this end, in 2013–14, the Israeli Ministry of Education introduced the cluster system, opening branches that teach the Israeli curricula in five schools in occupied Jerusalem, located in Bayt Hanina, Sur Bahir, and Shaykh Jarrah. These areas were considered weak links, where educational performance is substandard and student achievement rates are quite low. These branches tried to sway some Palestinian parents and convince them that the Israeli curricula is best for their children, as it is easier and caters to market needs.

Naftali Bennett served as minister of education from 2015 to 2019, marking a turning point in the ministry’s attempt to Israelize the city through education. As



Figure 2. The original (top) and “revised” (bottom) texts from *Palestine: The Land of Canaan*. Images courtesy of the Faisal Hussein Foundation. The original text reads, “Palestine was called the land of Canaan, as is mentioned in the letters of Tall al-‘Amarna, about 1500 BC. Canaanites were Arab tribes that migrated from the Arabian Peninsula and settled in the Levant [*bilad al-Sham*].” The revised text reads: “Palestine and Israel were called the Land of Canaan. The Canaanites were a Semitic ethnic group that is likely to have included elements from Arab tribes from the Arabian Peninsula, and they were united by the Canaanite languages, of which the Hebrew language remained, circulating in Palestine and Israel at that time, as the language of the children of Israel [*Bani Isra’il*].”

funds were allocated to schools that teach the Israeli curriculum, the number of Jerusalemites that sat for the *bagrut* (Israel's high school matriculation exam) and enrolled in relevant prep programs multiplied. Further, using Israeli textbooks became a prerequisite for funding during Bennett's term as minister of education.⁷ These efforts were crowned with the launch in 2018 of a five-year plan for East Jerusalem that clearly focused on education: of the total budget of at least 445 million shekels, some 200 million were earmarked for promoting the Israeli curriculum in schools, teaching Hebrew, technological education, and extra-curricular programming, among other educational goals.⁸

Beyond the massive funds spent on Israelizing the curriculum, Israeli authorities also took advantage of the crises it created in the education sector in Jerusalem. Israel addressed the problem of the sector's multiple administrative authorities in Jerusalem by closing the Palestinian Directorate of Education and waging war on any Palestinian Authority jurisdiction in Jerusalem. Further, it announced several times that it intends to shut down UNRWA and its institutions in Jerusalem, thus becoming the only authority for the education sector, free to develop a philosophical vision and educational policies consistent with the Zionist vision. The Jerusalem municipality also took advantage of the problem of rundown school buildings in Jerusalem, most of which are in rented residential buildings, offering to build new modular schools and kindergartens affiliated with the Israeli Ministry of Education – in other words, schools that teach Israeli textbooks.

This same approach is also used to take advantage of other problems that Palestinian schools face in Jerusalem. For example, Jerusalem Awqaf administration schools and some private schools face a teacher shortage, especially in scientific subjects. This problem arose after the separation wall's construction, which prevented West Bank teachers from commuting to Jerusalem, and was exacerbated by the inability of Awqaf and private schools to match the salaries and benefits paid by the Israeli Ministry of Education. The economic factor thus made al-Ma'arif schools the preferred choice for many teachers in Jerusalem because of the better salaries they offer. The Ministry of Education also refused to recognize some degrees from Palestinian universities. This forces many Palestinian teachers to re-enroll in specific colleges and programs to accredit their qualifications according to Israeli specifications, a step that costs additional years and money. This sums up the reality of the city today: if you want to find a job in Israel, where Israeli law presides, it is preferable to have a degree from an Israeli university and speak Hebrew instead of the headache associated with Palestinian universities. And your chances of getting into an Israeli college increase if you graduate from a school that teaches the Israeli curricula!

Whichever way one reads the sad reality of the education sector in Jerusalem, one finds the same vicious circle of Israelization and dominance of the Israeli narrative. Yet, the written narrative, although important, is persistently being defied by lived reality: even a child in kindergarten, whatever their curriculum, can recognize a heavily armed soldier as a foreign entity and a symbol of oppression and terror.

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- 5 See Georg Eckert Institute, “Report on Palestinian Textbooks” (2021), online at owncloud.gei.de/index.php/s/FwkMw8NZgCA-JgPW (accessed 6 October 2023). Among the most important organizations pushing the Israeli agenda in this regard is IMPACT-se.
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Toward the Israelization of Education: What are the Implications of Closing the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem?

Zayd al-Qiq

Translated from the Arabic by
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The education sector in Jerusalem has not been spared policies of Israelization and Judaization since the first moment the city was occupied. In fact, education was one of the first sectors the Israeli occupation targeted, seeking to control it by eliminating existing curricula and replacing them with those developed and written by Israel. The aim was to falsify history and alter facts to change the convictions of Palestinian students, eradicating anything that could contribute to their nationalist upbringing.

This paper is not a historical review, but rather an overview of some of the findings from our two-year research about the most important measures taken by the occupation regarding education in Jerusalem. The paper highlights the critical junctures in the history of Jerusalemites' defense of their right to use a curricula that maintains for them and future generations their values and national legacy. This helps us understand the implications of the occupation's decision on 20 November 2019 to close the Palestinian Directorate of Education in the Old City after detaining the director of education, Samir Jibril, who was then placed under house arrest after his release.¹ Jibril and his colleagues in the directorate were banned from doing their job from anywhere within the borders of the "State of Israel."

The first phase of this history commenced with the occupation of the city, manifested in the occupation's attempts to forcibly change and control the education sector. In 1968, occupation forces arrested the Director of Education at the time, Husni al-Ashhab. This step was followed by measures aimed at controlling and changing the entire

education sector in occupied Jerusalem. These attempts, however, were defeated by an epic teachers' strike supported by the parents and families of the students. Consequently, the occupation adopted a policy of negligence and marginalization, resulting in schools under the jurisdiction of the occupation suffering from high dropout rates and insufficient financial and human resources.

The second critical juncture was on 7 March 2011, when the Israeli Ministry of Education made amendments to the content of Palestinian curricula through an "expert" committee assigned with this task.² The committee then sent a letter to the schools demanding that they only buy textbooks printed by the Israeli ministry and banning them from procuring textbooks from any other source, alluding to those printed by the Palestinian Ministry of Education. In doing so, the occupation attempted once more to control the schools and to make the Israeli ministry the official authority. The ministry was meant to replace the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem in running public schools, known as endowment or *awqaf* schools, and private schools, meaning private and non-governmental schools also supervised by the Directorate of Education in Jerusalem.

Later, the Israeli Ministry of Education threatened to send inspectors to check the textbooks in students' hands. However, it backed down based on the recommendations of the Israeli security establishment, which warned against any provocation that might push Jerusalemites to engage in resistance against the occupation. The security establishment suggested instead a new plan to improve the economy in East Jerusalem, in an attempt to change living conditions in the city and keep Jerusalemites from engaging in resistance or confrontations with Jewish settlers attempting to desecrate al-Aqsa Mosque. This was to be coupled with changes to the substance of curricula taught in East Jerusalem to influence the position of Jerusalemites and urge them to cooperate with – or at least discourage them from resisting – projects to Judaize the city.

Following the recommendations of the Israeli security establishment, the third phase began, represented by earmarking huge budgets to increase the number of classrooms and schools that teach Israeli curricula in East Jerusalem. Private and endowment schools were left to teach Palestinian curricula, but the ministry tightened the screws on them, subjecting them to financial extortion on the one hand, and interference in their internal affairs on the other. These measures intensified after U.S. president Donald Trump announced the U.S. embassy's relocation to Jerusalem. According to a plan published in *Haaretz* in May 2018, at least two billion shekels were allocated to strengthen Israeli sovereignty over the capital by increasing the number of schools teaching Israeli curricula.³ Allegedly, these financial incentives aimed to integrate Palestinians in occupied Jerusalem into the Israeli education system, facilitating their assimilation into the Israeli labor market and consequently the state.

The Directorate of Education's closure took place in conjunction with the policies of this third phase, and marked the beginning of a new phase that may be the most dangerous yet, given the symbolic and political significance of the directorate's geographical location and the critical implications of the latest decision. This decision,

which isolates the administrative body of these schools and expels it from Jerusalem, might succeed in undoing Palestinian education in the city. The escalation inherent in the decision, the duration of the closure (which is extendable), and the arrest of the director of education and his placement under house arrest suggest that there will be further consequences that are just as critical. Based on our research, we attempt in this article to offer those interested and invested in education in Jerusalem with a view of what is to come and the repercussions of the directorate of education's closure.

The gravest implication is the increase in the number of classrooms and schools that teach Israeli curricula and repression of schools that teach Palestinian ones. First, it is important to mention that at least 50 percent of Jerusalemite students study the Palestinian curricula in schools administered under the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality.⁴ Supported by parents' committees in Jerusalem, these schools are fighting an intense battle to continue teaching Palestinian curricula. Yet parents' committees and volunteers cannot withstand for long a state that is mobilizing administrations, departments, and fulltime employees to control education in Jerusalem. Further, the ability of these schools to resist has become even weaker given that the municipality is the body that appoints principals and inspectors.

During the last decade, specifically since Nir Barkat became mayor of Jerusalem, at least nine new schools were established, all teaching the Israeli curricula.⁵ These are in addition to new classrooms added to existing schools to exclusively teach Israeli curricula – classrooms promoted through social media as attractive educational environments. Unfortunately, this managed to convince a significant number of families to enroll their children in these schools.

In contrast to schools affiliated with the Israeli municipality of Jerusalem, there are awqaf schools, private schools, and UNRWA schools. The decision to close the Directorate of Education will have a significant impact on awqaf schools, as stripping their official sponsor of legitimacy will render them even weaker. This new threat may jeopardize their ability to continue to teach Palestinian curricula in their classrooms, especially when added to the low rates of enrollment in some awqaf boys' schools.

Private schools will face similar consequences, as, like the awqaf schools, their official sponsor will be stripped of legitimacy. The next critical challenge is a court decision that these schools receive financial allocations for admitting students that the municipality was not able to accommodate due to the shortage in school buildings. These allocations are conditional on the "unavailability of buildings." The reports of the state comptroller over the past five years mention a shortage of about four thousand classrooms.⁶ However, the 2018 report indicates a shortage of only two thousand classrooms, which means that the court-stipulated allocations may no longer be offered if these classrooms were provided by the municipality. Israel seems intent on providing them, as it is building new schools in Bayt Hanina and Shu'fat (North).⁷ If the government decides to reduce the allocations granted to private schools, they would face a significant challenge.

As for UNRWA schools, they have been facing serious financial problems since Trump's decision to end financial aid to UNRWA. This decision added new challenges

to existing ones, to say nothing of the occupation's attempts to eliminate any organizations associated with UNRWA or refugees inside the Old City and Jerusalem, even inside Shu'fat refugee camp.⁸

In sum, we cannot do true justice to the problems of Israelization of education by offering a few recommendations here. Nevertheless, it is important to insist on reinstating the Directorate of Education with all its employees in the Old City, and to refuse to relocate it anywhere else. If there is a message to be sent, we say to all those who encourage the adoption of Israeli curricula, under the pretext that the Palestinian ones are weak in comparison, that any educational system has its strengths and weaknesses, and Palestinian curricula are no exception. Yet, it is noteworthy that those who studied using the Palestinian curricula and then enrolled in the college of medicine at al-Quds University passed the medical licensing exam on the very first try.

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JQ ROUNDTABLE

Shrinking Spaces, Excluded Communities, and Transformed Environments: Exploring Health and Environment among Palestinians through Eco-Social Approaches

Osama Tanous

Brian Boyd

Maysaa Nemer

This roundtable emerged out of panel at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) annual conference and was sponsored by the Palestinian-American Research Center (PARC).

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Abstract

Ecosystem degradation and land alienation for native populations are inevitable products of the settler-colonial process. The loss of sovereignty over land, the change of landscape, the transformation of trees, herbs, and livestock are ubiquitous in different settler-colonial settings. These changes have their effect on human health. As is characteristic of settler-colonial contexts, a key feature of the Zionist settler-colonial project in Palestine has been the continued expropriation and fragmentation of Palestinian land through various means, including bureaucratic and administrative control of land, water, populations and localities. Exclusionary policies and measures, including multiple forms of violence, aimed to increase control and erasure of the native population are continuously employed and shape the lived realities and spaces that Palestinians inhabit. The continuous colonial engineering of space has transformed the environment, including altering natural ecosystems, expediting urban sprawl, and producing environmental hazards to vulnerable populations. While these environmental transformations in their own right are a subject of study, they also have important, and often overlooked, implications for the health and well-being of Palestinians.

Ecosocial theory urges us to understand the health of populations, including health disparities between settler and native populations, as a product of historical trauma, land alienation, exposure to racism, socioeconomic disparities and other processes. Political, environmental, societal, and economic conditions interact with community, family, and individual conditions to produce health conditions. Our bodies reflect these structures that shape our bodies and the spaces in which we are born into, age, become sick or disabled and eventually die in.

A growing body of literature speaks to the effects of war, conflict, and settler colonialism on the health and well-being of populations, including in Palestine. While this literature has made important contributions, much of the focus tends to be on direct, and oftentimes acute, exposures to various forms of political violence. Examinations of the interplay between environmental transformations, resulting from exclusionary spatial policies and settler-colonial encroachment, and health in the Palestinian contexts are less common. In this roundtable, we center the discussion on the environment and the conceptualization of how settler-colonialism impacts health. We explore how settler colonialism as an ongoing process in Palestine has largely shaped the habitat, landscapes, behaviors and movements, and social ecologies of Palestinians in all of the fragmented geographies of Palestine and how that translates into different health conditions, including avoidable diseases and disabilities. Our speakers will explore the intersections between environment (including built environment, pollutants), social worlds, and health in various fragmented geographic contexts ranging from the West Bank to Jerusalem, Gaza and '48 Palestine.

Keywords

Settler colonialism; Indigenous health; environment; ecocide; occupation; Palestine; Israel.

On Settler Colonialism, Environment, and Health

Osama Tanous

The Pima Indians of Arizona offer one of the clearest examples of the connections between settler-colonial environmental engineering and health. The community suffers from one of the highest rates of diabetes in the world, with over half of the adult population diagnosed with the disease.¹

In 1877, the U.S. Congress passed the Desert Land Act, allowing settlers to claim arid or semiarid “public” lands in exchange for irrigating and cultivating them, thereby expressing in legislation a settler-colonial logic that views the frontier land as arid, in need of irrigation to produce crops and profit for settler communities. Subsequent “developmental” projects based on such reasoning, like the Roosevelt Dam (1903) and the Florence Diversion Dam (1922), have decreased the Pimas’ water access by more than 60 percent,² caused irreversible damage to their food sovereignty and lifestyle, and introduced highly-processed market food with high sugar and fat content – a diet that has led to an epidemic of obesity and diabetes. Similar patterns can be seen among indigenous peoples across Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, where settler-colonial projects shattered the fabric of societies and destroyed indigenous farming, fishing, and food gathering practices, contributing to epidemics of obesity, hypertension, and heart diseases.³

Despite following a clearly similar pattern, Palestinian health is often excluded from discussions

of “indigenous health” and is reduced to other labels: “minority health” for Palestinians inside the Green Line, “conflict health” for Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and “refugee health” for Palestinian refugees.⁴ Moreover, Palestinians’ behavior is often blamed for their bad health outcomes, seen as resulting from their food culture and unhealthy lifestyle.

Zionist settler colonialism in Palestine occurred several centuries after earlier settler movements, after the emergence of national identities and advance of technologies. Unlike previous settler-colonial societies that developed their own national or racial identity of American, White or Australian in the colonies while eliminating the indigenous in their expansion from shore to shore, Zionism developed in Europe, prior to colonizing any land, as the direct product of exclusionary European nationalism and the failure of European ideals of modernity, equality, and citizenship to accept European Jews in the nation state as equal citizens.⁵ The settler colonization of Palestine did not occur in an overseas continent in the “new world,” but rather in a relatively small and bordered piece of land in the “old world.” The frontiers of the colony were largely predetermined by the French and British division of the Ottoman Empire. These two factors, the pre-colonization settler-collective identity and the already defined border of the future colony created a different situation. The settler grip on the land and management of resources was largely a collective and centralized, rather than a scattered, private project.

Within a few years after the 1948–49 Nakba, Israel doubled its population and claimed 93 percent of the lands inside the Green Line as state lands.⁶ Israel’s 1959 Water Law declared public ownership of all water resources. Such a high percentage of nationally owned land and resources enabled a centralized, tightly controlled strategic national planning of the population and environment.⁷ The building of scattered Jewish-only agricultural settlements was a tool to create facts on the ground and prevent the return of Palestinian refugees and internally displaced people, while squeezing the Palestinians that remained in their homeland into little ghettos that were neither urban nor rural. The Israeli National Water Carrier was similar to water management projects undertaken by other settler-colonial projects and transferred water from Lake Tiberius to the Naqab desert in order to support agricultural settlement and tighten settler control over land and water. Such plans to “make the desert bloom” and establish water-intensive agriculture in water-scarce regions were legitimized in the name of national security and “securing the frontiers,” while being ecologically destructive.

The celebrated trope of “blooming the desert” employs several modes of structural and direct violence toward the environment and the native population. It omits the history and experiences of native communities that live, farm, practice animal husbandry and thrive in their environment, and promotes the idea of an empty desert that requires radical transformation in order to “bloom”

to be able to host the settler population that cannot simply adapt to the desert as it is.⁸ These technologies and processes are often celebrated as the embodiment of development and modernity while ignoring the genocide–ecocide nexus associated with settler colonization.⁹

Palestinians in general, and Bedouins in particular, were stripped of their land and water and went through a process of depeasantization and forced urbanization. Bedouins who were subjected to forced urbanization and concentrated in townships suffer from significantly higher diabetes rates than those that remained in unrecognized villages, despite the latter suffering from official neglect and lack of connection to water, electricity, and health infrastructures.¹⁰ Life in these new ghettos is associated with a forced transition from traditional food to market food, and thus a higher intake of processed high caloric food, along with a decrease in physical activity.¹¹ Once an extremely rare disease among the Bedouins, diabetes has become a prevalent condition and a public health crisis, affecting up to 70 percent of adult women.¹² Palestinians develop diabetes at a significantly younger age (fifty-seven years old on average compared to sixty-eight among Jewish Israelis).¹³ Palestinian women older than fifty have an alarming rate of diabetes, up to 50 percent.¹⁴

Settler colonialism in Palestine transforms the demography of the colonized area in an effort to minoritize, displace, and eliminate the Palestinians. It also transforms the environment under the trope of development and produces toxic living conditions and adverse health outcomes for the indigenous Palestinians. The settler-colonial invasion and theft of land, and the subsequent environmental degradation, land alienation, and change in nutrition should be framed and studied as an upstream driver of indigenous morbidity in Palestine as elsewhere, often termed neutrally as an “epidemiologic transition” The ill health of Palestinians is a result and an integral part of the settler-colonial “logic of elimination.” The Palestinian struggle for land and water is a struggle for food sovereignty, and an integral part of the larger struggle for liberation and decolonization. It should be framed and understood also as part of the global struggle for health equity and environmental justice.

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Palestine, Prehistory, and the “Origins of Agriculture”

Brian Boyd

At the 2022 Middle East Studies Association meeting, Omar Tesdell and I outlined how our current projects with communities in the West Bank may offer some thoughts for the future reconfiguration of local/traditional ecological relationships in the reality of Palestine’s deeply altered social landscapes.¹ These local challenges to historical and ontological understandings of land, landscape, and biodiversity are central to discussions of real-world issues of food sovereignty and social well-being that are crucial to the maintenance of social ecologies within and between local communities throughout Palestine. But these social ecologies have a deep history – an archaeology – that reaches far beyond contemporary conceptualizations of land property, ownership, and claims. The archaeological study of changing human-plant relations in prehistory has come to be characterized largely as the search for the origins of agriculture and domestication. Here, I trace the “origins of agriculture” debate within the archaeology of Palestine, in particular within the development of what is called “prehistory,” that peculiar construction of European late modernity, during the first decades of the colonial British Mandate.

Historical and theological perspectives have dominated archaeological research in Palestine since its inception as a formal academic discipline in the early twentieth century.² But alongside historical and theological perspectives runs the study of “prehistory,” that is, the study of preliterate societies/communities, from the earliest known hominin presence in the Jordan Valley (around 1.5 million years ago) to those of the late Chalcolithic (approximately

5,500 years ago). Research and teaching on prehistory in Palestinian universities is scant compared to institutions across the Green Line, and active fieldwork projects on prehistoric sites are likewise rare in contrast to the plethora of Israeli excavations and surveys both in Israel *and* in West Bank Area C.³ Further, there exists a perception that prehistory is somehow separate from, and stands outside, the politicization of archaeology so prevalent in contemporary nation state and settler-colonial discourse in Israel/Palestine and elsewhere. This is not the case. As I outline here and elsewhere, the study of prehistory in Palestine is equally entwined with archaeology's settler-colonial history and present, and with the search for European origins.⁴

The kind of prehistory established in Europe by the 1920s was largely concerned with Europe's own origins and development. The archaeologist V. Gordon Childe was among the first to argue for a "Near Eastern/Fertile Crescent" origin for European society by arguing that a number of key features of European prehistory – transformations or revolutions in technology, material culture, economic and social organization, and ritual/religious practices – originated in the prehistoric "cultures" of the "Near East."⁵ The archaeological narratives Childe and his contemporaries established in the late 1920s and 1930s were characterized by discussions of cultural origins, the evolution and spread of ethnic groups, and key revolutions in the development of humanity (the agricultural revolution, the urban revolution) – a colonial search for the "origins of civilization." When European prehistorians arrived in Palestine in the 1920s, these were the kinds of nascent archaeological lines of inquiry they carried with them. The archaeological research questions and the interpretive and epistemological frameworks embedded in the infrastructures of European colonialism thus served as the interpretive scaffolding for the study of prehistory in Palestine. The temporal, chronological sequence that developed for Europe – from the Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) to the Neolithic (New Stone Age) – was imported wholesale into Palestine by the "prehistorians" of the colonial British and French Mandates, and it is from within this context that the "origins of agriculture" debate in southwest Asia emerged.

In Palestine, we can trace the archaeological preoccupation with the origins of plant cultivation, agriculture, and domestication back to the work of Dorothy Garrod, René Neuville, and Frances Turville-Petre, scholars affiliated with the British and French schools of archaeology in Jerusalem in the mid-late 1920s and early 1930s.⁶ Amid the dominant "biblical" and historical perspectives of the time, these scholars carried out the first (relatively) systematic prehistoric excavations at a number of "mesolithic" sites in Palestine, reporting what Garrod summarized as "evidence for a primitive form of agriculture afforded by the large number of sickle-blades and hafts discovered."⁷

In our recent ethnographic interviews in the village of Shuqba, in Wadi al-Natuf northwest of Ramallah, we often hear that Wadi al-Natuf is the place "where people first broke the land."⁸ This comes from a ubiquitous local understanding of the historical significance of the archaeological material that Dorothy Garrod and her workforce of local villagers discovered in Shuqba Cave, immediately to the south of the village, in 1928.⁹ A scholar of European prehistory, Garrod inferred that the Shuqba material (mainly stone sickle blades and bone hafts) was similar to Mesolithic material in Europe

that indicated plant cultivation and incipient agriculture.¹⁰ Following her work at Shuqba, she and teams of local villagers excavated in Wadi al-Mughara (Mount Carmel) and found further similar material there, specifically at al-Wad (cave and terrace), leading her to argue that evidence for the earliest known steps toward cultivation and agriculture was in Palestine.¹¹ Neuville, at the same time, found comparable material in the caves and rock shelters of Wadi Khareitun, south of Bethlehem, and Turville-Petre's excavation at Kebara, Mount Carmel, in 1931, provided further lithic and bone artefact evidence to support this interpretation.¹²

This archaeological fieldwork – and interpretations of the material evidence – in 1920s and 1930s Palestine laid the foundations for all subsequent research into the prehistory of southwest Asia, establishing long-lasting key questions into what Garrod labeled the “Natufian culture” (approximately ten to fifteen thousand years ago). Over the twentieth century, the Natufian came to be regarded as a bridge – a transition between the nomadic hunter-gatherers of the Paleolithic and the settled farmers of the Neolithic – where scholars located the origins of plant cultivation practices that led, around 10,500 years ago, to domestication, agriculture, and, perhaps, the very beginnings of those profound environmental and ecological changes that some researchers today identify as the onset of the Anthropocene.

If, from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, European study of plant life aimed to “generate hypotheses about the nature of matter and, by extension, the order of the cosmos,” and from the eighteenth-century became “a project for ordering, visualizing, labeling, and classifying life,”¹³ then over the past century, the study of *ancient* plants – archaeobotany – can be characterized by a dominant concern with the notion of *domestication*. Domestication continues to loom large in archaeological narratives, in which locating an initial temporal point of departure – an origin or origins – for direct human involvement in the reproductive cycles of plant and animal species is regarded essential to “understanding the roots of complex societies.”¹⁴ In the biological sense, domestication is broadly conceptualized as management of the nonhuman by the human. It is regarded as something people did to make their world more secure and easier to manage; to make living in it better. Nimrod Marom and Guy Bar-Oz emphasize domestication as a process, rather than an event, which we need to detail archaeologically to understand “the role of humans as constant modifiers of their ecological niches.”¹⁵

Until the turn of the twenty-first century, the general archaeological consensus was that the earliest known plant domestication took place in the southern Levant (modern-day Palestine, Israel, Jordan) around 11,500 years ago (followed by the domestication of goats and sheep around ten thousand years ago, and cattle and pigs slightly later). It has now become clear, in light of recent archaeobiological and genetic research, that the earliest domestication of what are often referred to as the “founder crops” of einkorn and emmer wheats and pulses, along with nonhuman animals mentioned above, occurred not in the southern Levant but in the Upper Tigris and Euphrates valleys (in modern-day Syria and Turkey) around 11,500 years ago or slightly earlier.¹⁶ But we should bear in mind that these assumed points of origin are in fact the “end points” of domestication

processes. In southwest Asia, such processes lasted many, many thousands of years, and so such gradual long-term changes may have gone largely unnoticed by people in their daily lives and interactions with plants (and nonhuman animals).¹⁷ It is only through our contemporary retrospective lens that we observe this domesticated “point of arrival.” In this sense, the archaeological narrative or concept of domestication as a key component in human social evolution is part of the origins “trope of modernity,” one of human mastery over nature.¹⁸ In discussing this relationship as one of “our existing great divides,” Severin Fowles argues that archaeologists’ “major contribution [to the project of modernity] has been the evolutionary ontostory of how the modern liberal humanist subject has come to be and of how the world of nonhumans has been drawn increasingly into his (the gendering is necessary) sphere of control.”¹⁹

The archaeological “origins of agriculture” debate has another late modernity tale to tell – a story entwined with the settler-colonial control of Palestine and its agricultural landscapes and practices. Tracing this history from the mid-twentieth century onward, we can see how the interpretive framework embedded in the infrastructures of European colonialism in Palestine was carried forward in the settler-colonial archaeologies (prehistories) of Israel. The prehistoric narrative of human progress from cultivation to domestication and agriculture, developed by and for Europe, has been replaced in Israeli prehistoric research by a settler-colonial version of the same narrative. The historian Dipesh Chakrabarty terms this “historicism,” a situation where local narratives about origins and their subsequent development replace those constructed by earlier colonial narratives.²⁰ This is a perspective consistent with the epistemology of the cultural-historical archaeology of the mid-twentieth century: a retrospective narrative preoccupied with locating origins, and with tracing continuities (as well as ruptures and transitions) from those assumed prehistoric origins to the present. European archaeological search for the origins of plant cultivation and agriculture was a colonial search for European origins in the “Near East,” the self-narration of Europe’s origins; this has become a narrative about the settling of the landscape through cultivation, agriculture, and domestication – a prehistoric version of “making the desert bloom.” Palestine is fixed in a prehistoric pastoral imaginary of the archaeologists’ own making, with the political realities of rural life (agricultural land confiscation, restriction of movement, the banning of gathering wild food plants, uprooting of trees, and so on) obscured to emphasize the domesticated, civilized, settler landscape. These contemporary landscape and territorial perspectives have their roots planted firmly in the prehistoric archaeology of the European colonial occupation of Palestine.

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Endnotes

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- 16 Melinda A. Zeder, “The Origins of Agriculture in the Near East,” *Current Anthropology* 52, Supplement 4 (October 2011): S221–35. According to Larsen, Piperno, Allaby, and Fuller, these processes “encompassed a wide range or relationships, from commensalism/mutualism to low-level management, and direct control over reproduction.” Larsen, Piperno, Allaby, and Fuller, “Current Perspectives,” 6140.
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Gendered Impacts of Environmental and Social Transformations in the Jordan Valley

Maysaa Nemer

The Jordan Valley – a region covering about 1,600 square kilometers and constituting almost 30 percent of the West Bank – is one of the main agricultural areas in Palestine and has historically served as the main source of a wide range of crops used throughout the West Bank.¹ It is home to about sixty-five thousand Palestinians, who are scattered across thirty communities and some small villages.² Nearly 90 percent of the Jordan Valley is now classified as Area C, under full Israeli military control, as a result of the Oslo accords.³ Those areas classified as Area A or B, including the city of Jericho, are surrounded by lands designated Area C and are therefore isolated from one another. Israel forces Palestinians to stay within the boundaries of their communities and prohibits Palestinian construction in Area C, including housing, agricultural construction, public buildings, and infrastructure.⁴ Israel also prohibits Palestinians from using 85 percent of the land, limits their water resources, and reduces their access to healthcare and education.⁵

Women are the Jordan Valley's primary agricultural labor force and one of the most vulnerable groups in the population – though their conditions are not the focus of press or academic coverage of the region.⁶ Women typically work in agriculture to support their families and because other job opportunities are scarce.⁷ This prompted my engagement in a study of agricultural changes in the Jordan Valley, particularly after Oslo, and their effects on farming women's working and living situations.⁸ Two Jordan Valley communities, al-Jiftlik and al-Nu'ayma al-Dyuk, served

as the study's locations. These villages differ from one another in geographical, political, and social aspects, allowing comparison of various elements that might affect women who work in agriculture. The main difference is that Jiftlik is classified entirely as Area C, while part of Nu'ayma al-Dyuk is classified as Area A and the rest as Area C. Jiftlik residents and those in "C" areas of Nu'ayma al-Dyuk have poor infrastructure, insecure and unsanitary dwelling conditions, limited services, and difficult transportation, and live in constant fear of having their homes demolished. Residents of the "A" areas of Nu'ayma al-Dyuk have better infrastructure and housing conditions, as well as better access to better services.

Throughout the Jordan Valley, Israeli settlers have confiscated land and imposed increased restrictions on farmers, including on water access and marketing products, which have decreased Palestinian revenue from agriculture. To make up for these losses, some women were forced to seek employment outside of the family farms where they previously worked. Some moved with their families to other villages for work there during the agriculture season. Others began working in agriculture at the nearby Israeli settlements or on large farms owned by Palestinians.

Compared to local workers (those who stayed in their villages), migrant workers (those who moved to work in other communities) experienced more challenging living conditions. Local workers maintained more stable social relationships, better living conditions, and better housing conditions overall. Most migrant workers lived in tin-roofed quarters or tents on the farm with few social relations. One migrant woman told us: "I spend the whole agriculture season living with my husband and four kids in one room. My only dream is to have my own house."

At the same time, women who left family farms to work at nearby Israeli settlements had more interaction with the outside community and more financial independence. Women working with the family are typically unpaid for their work because it is considered part of their domestic chores. However, those employed in settlements endure a challenging, strenuous, and unforgiving work environment, lengthy workdays that last until late at night, and poor wages. They are generally paid per day, are denied vacations, and work throughout the year, even during the hottest months. As one woman who worked in a settlement said, "We used to work the whole year; any day that you don't show up [you] will not be paid." Another woman who worked in a settlement described the difficult physical conditions of the work: "I used to harvest green peppers in a very large [plot of] land. As you walk more, you would get farther from the place where you need to put the filled container. It was very heavy and we needed to fill it several times."

Women who work in agriculture to support their families financially have been particularly hard hit by the damage that Israeli policies have inflicted on Palestinian farmers' infrastructure and on their native environment, including water resources, homes, and farms. Due to challenging living conditions and inadequate infrastructure, many women find household responsibilities difficult and stressful. In many circumstances, they had to bring water for household use from outside tanks, and to cook outside the house. Women do all this difficult housework alone, in addition to

their major role in agriculture, putting more burden on them. One woman said of her husband: “We finish working together in the farm, and when we go home, I will start cooking and cleaning while he will lay down and start asking for stuff: sometimes coffee, or tea or something to eat.” Another spoke of inadequate rest and recovery after giving birth: “After giving birth, I used to go back to the farm directly – three days later – and bring my newborn baby with me.”

In farming families, many issues related to family structure persist, negatively affecting women. There was a distinct division of labor between men and women, with males preparing land for planting and transporting crops to market (which needs less effort) and women weeding and harvesting (which is physically intensive labor). Women also had a limited role in making decisions and managing the family’s income. Women had little economic independence since men controlled the family’s money and because women performed unpaid farm work as part of their domestic duties. Even women who earned money from jobs outside the family farm spent it all on improving family living conditions, leaving no money for their own needs. Very few women in the Jordan Valley have access to agricultural extension education or training.⁹ Families increasingly relied on women’s work to survive, whenever men were arrested or injured, increasing the workload on women who had to do both domestic and agricultural work, as well as men’s tasks. One woman described her situation: “When my sons were around, they did not allow me to carry the vegetable boxes. But now since they are all arrested, I have to carry them to the car.”

Agriculture in the Jordan Valley now faces extra threats due to environmental destruction and climate change, as the region has been hit hard by heat waves, droughts, land degradation, and water scarcity. These conditions, combined with political forces and economic insecurity within this context of restrictions and limitations, have affected farmers, causing some to adapt their work practices. Farmers began planting different crops, as those they had previously planted became less profitable and required more time and input to achieve yields. This has meant switching from cultivating vegetables to cultivating dates, which can withstand severe weather and require less fresh water. Farmers also began shifting the start of the agricultural season from September to October or November, when the weather begins to cool and the crops require less water. This has shortened the period of cultivation, reducing the economic benefit. Other farmers, unable to endure these circumstances, sold their agricultural land to investors, who used the land for other purposes, including construction for tourism and factories, changing the area’s former agricultural landscape.

The combination of challenging living and working conditions addressed here has also affected women’s health. Prolonged bending while harvesting and lifting large loads have caused musculoskeletal problems. Some women claimed to have allergies, asthma, and respiratory and skin conditions due to chemical exposure. Some suffered from dehydration and poor nutrition as a result of working long hours, even in extreme heat, with little access to food and drink. These conditions also have potential negative repercussions for the well-being of dependent families and children. The gendered experiences and impact of political and environmental changes in the Jordan

Valley on agricultural employment are significant issues affecting the well-being of agricultural workers. The changes and strategies necessary to improve the working conditions of women who work in agriculture should be the subject of more research, especially in environments with limited resources.

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Endnotes

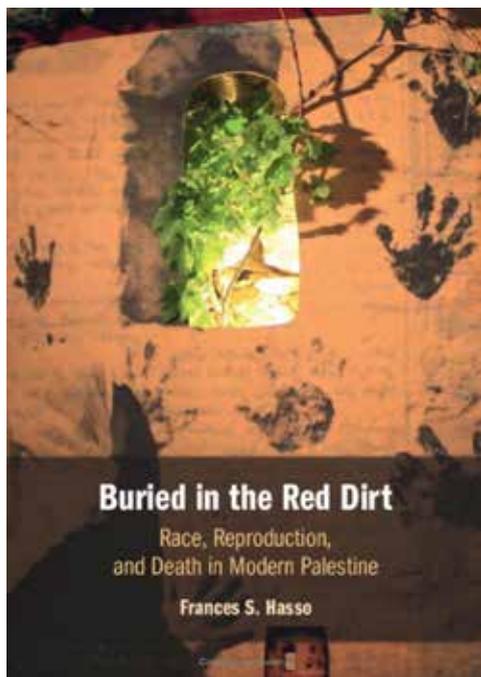
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- 8 The study was part of a research project of the Institute for Community and Public Health, Birzeit University, conducted in 2019 to 2021. It adopted a qualitative approach based on interviews conducted with thirty women, and two focus groups with twenty women. Participants were chosen using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Other members of the research team were Ahmed Heneiti, Suzan Mitwalli, and Dina Zidan.
- 9 Agricultural extension services are specially designed to provide agricultural workers with training in agronomic techniques and skills to improve productivity, food security, and livelihoods. These services are generally provided by governments; in Palestine, the PA Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for them.

BOOK REVIEW

Life, Death, and Reproductive Desire in Mandate and Present-Day Palestine

Review by Nadim Bawalsa

Frances Hasso, *Buried in the Red Dirt: Race, Reproduction, and Death in Modern Palestine*. Cambridge University Press, 2021. 288 pages. Open access: online at doi.org/10.1017/9781009072854 (accessed 17 August 2023).



Abstract

In this review of Frances Hasso's new book, *Buried in the Red Dirt: Race, Reproduction, and Death in Modern Palestine*, Nadim Bawalsa highlights the book's contributions to multidisciplinary areas of study of Palestine and Palestinians. At once a historical investigation of British and Zionist health, life, and death records during the Mandate, Hasso also offers analysis of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish legal positions on reproductive practices, including abortion practices, as well as unprecedented access to Palestinian women's intimate sexual, reproductive, and non-reproductive desires through her ethnographic fieldwork in Palestine and neighboring countries. Bawalsa stresses how Hasso's methodological and analytical ingenuity brings to light hitherto unchallenged assumptions about Palestinian women's past and present reproductive choices, refuting in the process the idea that Palestinians have been engaged in demographic competition with the Jews – an anxiety, Hasso argues, that was in fact manifested in British and Zionist racist eugenicist obsessions during the Mandate period and throughout the Israeli Zionist settler colonization of Palestine. Drawing on a multitude of sources, including archival records, interviews, literary and artistic analysis, as well as on African diasporic, Black feminist, and queer scholarship, Hasso's book offers altogether new approaches to studying Palestine and Palestinians, both past and present.

Keywords

Mandate Palestine; reproduction; death; desire; demographic anxiety; abortion; midwifery; eugenics; race; settler colonialism.

One doesn't often come by a book about modern Palestinian history that is not primarily concerned with 1948, Zionism, or nationalism. It is equally uncommon to come by a book on modern Palestinian history that doesn't rely primarily on British and Israeli archives or the Palestinian press. And it is perhaps most unusual of all to come by a book on modern Palestinian history – or any history, for that matter – that is also a contemporary ethnography. Frances Hasso's *Buried in the Red Dirt* is a rare book of this kind, an impressive achievement that speaks to Hasso's unconventional approach and multidisciplinary background.

Buried in the Red Dirt is unique not only in the breadth of source material and methodologies Hasso employs “to deepen [our] understanding of Palestinian daily life” (3) from the British Mandate to the present day, but in the themes and ideas she invites readers to ponder: life, death, and power; settler colonialism, race, and eugenics; and reproduction, breastfeeding, and abortion, among others. Hasso moves beyond narratives rooted in Palestinian political history, centered on seminal events like 1948 and 1967, to examine “nonevents such as the structural maldistribution of illness, disease, injury, hunger, and early death because of colonial, racial, and class status, as well as the sexual inequalities that allocate power, resources, pain, and pleasure unevenly.” Reading sources about “nonevents” and “ordinary” Palestinians, for both what is recorded and what is omitted, and divulging private aspects of her interlocutors' lives that most would likely never broach, Hasso offers an altogether new account of the Palestinian lived experience, past and present. The result, as she puts it in the coda, is to remind the reader that “extraction of labor and life are the very grounds of imperialism and colonialism and are always legitimated by racializing the abjected group” (244).

That British Mandate and Zionist Israeli health and reproductive policies toward Palestinians were and are fundamentally racialized may not be new or surprising information, but Hasso takes it a step further: controlling Palestinian life and death over a century indicates British and Zionist demographic anxieties and obsessions. In fact, as Hasso shows, the stereotype that Palestinians procreate to demographically defeat the Jews is nothing but a projection of Zionist fears. For Palestinians, Hasso states matter-of-factly, “commitment to sustaining kin ties” following decades of exile, dispersal, and massacres, “differs from having babies for the purpose of demographically competing with Jews” (214). Hasso uses interviews with Palestinian women, as well as Palestinian literature and film over the last few decades, to show that “Palestinian creative work has been more likely to express pessimistic futurities, dwelling on the grounds of social and biological death rather than reproduction” (242).

Following an extensive and weighty introduction that reflects the author's diverse scholarly interests and priorities, Hasso's first two chapters dive into British health records during the Mandate to expose “British developmental colonialism and welfare austerity” in their policies toward sick and healthy Palestinian infants. This she contrasts with Zionist organizations' investment in Jewish health during the same period, showing not only the clear imbalance in quality of healthcare offered to Jews compared to Palestinians, but how it was profoundly attached to civilizational rhetoric that both British authorities and Zionists used to deprioritize Palestinian lives and bodies. Rather

than stop there, though, Hasso offers a fascinating account of irreverent and “unlicensed” Palestinian nurse-midwives and healers who “worked and collected fees independently of government sponsored clinics” (111), in contravention of British colonial policies.

Hasso’s next chapter compares Palestinian (Muslim and Christian) and Jewish birth and death records during the Mandate. She finds that “British authorities frequently expressed concern with higher Palestinian birthrates” (115) and that they regularly complained that records for Palestinians were inconsistent and incomplete, often leaving out “villages and pastoral communities whose members moved seasonally” (123). By contrast, she shows that statistics for Jews were meticulously recorded thanks to the plethora of Zionist health institutions “and the high use of them by Jewish people in Palestine” (124). Hasso contends that this discrepancy evinces British and Zionist authorities’ demographic anxieties and obsessions in Palestine, constantly seeking to overcome Palestinians’ demographic dominance.

Focusing on Western eugenicist discourse and locating its manifestation among Zionist health authorities in Palestine, Hasso shows how this demographic anxiety informed the transnational breastfeeding and mothercraft campaigns that came to Palestine, and sought to “improve the health of only some children” (144). British and Zionist obsessions over infant mortality were invariably racialized and gendered, a point clearly demonstrated in Hasso’s discussion of breastfeeding; after all, the mother and her breastmilk – and not bottled milk – were seen as essential to ensuring a “strong and sturdy population” (149). Thus, Hasso tells us: “Debates regarding ‘natural’ versus ‘artificial’ feeding, timed feeding, and the weaning of babies in Palestine were most relevant to Zionist health practitioners in their work with Jewish women, infants, and children, which was guided by the logic of improving the racial fitness of the Jewish ‘nation’” (146).

At the book’s midpoint, Hasso shifts gears, moving from British and Zionist colonial records to an examination of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim legal and religious conceptions of sex, contraception, and abortion, as they relate to Palestine. Through this rich discussion, Hasso shows not only that Muslim and Jewish traditions are “far more flexible and plural” than Christian ones on these issues (181), but that Ottoman, British, Jordanian, and Israeli restrictions on birth control say infinitely more about state interests than culture or tradition. This legal examination and the conclusions reached offer helpful background information for the final two chapters’ foray into the lives and reproductive choices of Palestinian women.

For these, Hasso puts on her ethnographer hat, offering unprecedented access to the most intimate and private aspects of her interlocutors’ lives: their sexual, reproductive, and non-reproductive practices and desires. Provocatively titled “I Did Not Want Children” and “The Art of Death in Life,” chapters 5 and 6 emphasize Palestinian women’s agency, so often unacknowledged within the suffocating walls of imperial and colonial archives. In chapter 5, Hasso uses stories from the Hebrew press during the British Mandate, as well as information she gleaned from interviews with more than two dozen elderly Palestinian women, “to foreground Palestinian anti-reproductive desires and birth control practices from the 1940s to the present” (46). Through her interviews, Hasso discovers that Palestinian women have sought and found various ways to actualize

their desires to *not* have children, often resorting to “informal” termination practices with the absence of contraception. These included “sitting on hot tiles in Turkish baths while massaging a woman’s belly button until she bled, inserting a *surra*, sage stick, or *mulukhiyya* [mallow] stick into the uterus, putting sugar cubes into the belly button, and drinking castor oil (which contracts the uterus) or boiled cinnamon” (196). Findings like these will be of particular interest not just to multidisciplinary scholars of gender and Palestine, but also to those of medicine and science.

Hasso convincingly argues in chapter 6 that Palestinian women’s reproductive decisions reflect their own desires for creating or not creating life, and that any other interpretation is a projection – often imperial, patriarchal, nationalistic, and settler-colonial in nature – imposed on them. The chapter is ambitious in scope, combining archival analysis with first-person testimonies of twenty-six individuals recollecting decades-old memories. However, Hasso’s writing style is inviting, keeping the reader more interested in what her interlocutors have to say next than methodological complexities. Exploring the nuances of Palestinian women’s choices of life and death under occupation and in exile – which Hasso does through a discussion of Palestinian artistic expression since 1948 – evinces compelling themes about Palestinian conceptions of futurity that are overlooked in the framework of demographic competition with the Jewish occupier. “Indeed,” she writes, “I found death more relevant than reproduction in my analysis of Palestinian poetry, fiction, and film” (211). If the choice to reproduce fits into the politics of dispossession and military occupation, then it is about survival, not resistance.

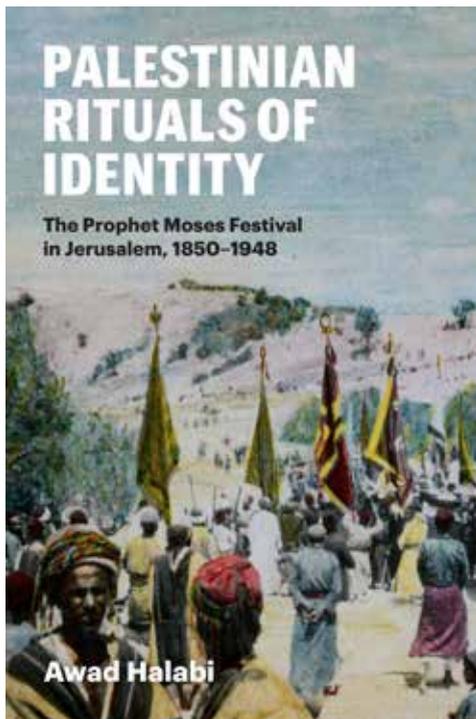
Buried in the Red Dirt succeeds in Hasso’s mission to “tell a story about life and death, and about missing bodies and experiences” (1–2) as they relate to Palestine and Palestinians. At once a historical account that exposes British and Zionist anxieties, obsessions, and schemes around Palestinian birth, death, and life, the book is also a vivid ethnography about Palestinian women’s intimate choices. The outcome is altogether new and critical: in examining the range of reproductive and non-reproductive desires of Palestinians through archival files, interviews, art, literature, and film, the book “challenges the assumption that Palestinians after 1948 absorbed the demographic competitive logic of Zionist,” and instead, “shows how demographic research on Palestinian fertility ... often reproduces Zionist ideological assumptions and projections” (242). Drawing on African diasporic, Black feminist, and queer scholarship, Hasso proposes that an alternative to this skewed perspective is in fact to emphasize anti-reproductive desire as part of the Palestinian experience of decolonization, past, present, and future. If the ethnic cleansing of Palestine is a fundamental compulsion of Zionism, Hasso concludes, then it is worth considering the multifaceted ways Palestinians continue to negotiate life, death, and regeneration in the face of ongoing efforts to erase them.

Nadim Bawalsa is a historian of modern Palestine and author of Transnational Palestine: Migration and the Right of Return before 1948 (Stanford University Press, 2022). He earned his PhD in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies from New York University in 2017, and currently serves as associate editor of the Journal of Palestine Studies.

The Rise and Fall of Nabi Musa

Review by Jacob Norris

Awad Halabi, *Palestinian Rituals of Identity: The Prophet Moses Festival in Jerusalem, 1850–1948*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2022. 271 pages. \$55.00 hardcover.



Abstract

Awad Halabi's monograph breaks new ground in uncovering the societal changes contained within Palestine's most popular Muslim festival. Focused mainly on the Mandate period, the book charts the festival's reinvention in the early twentieth century as a major vehicle for Palestinian social and political protest. Far from constituting a platform for purely elite concerns, Halabi demonstrates the multiple ways that subaltern actors expressed their concerns and priorities through the festival's rituals.

Keywords

Palestine; pilgrimage; Nabi Musa; Jerusalem; British Mandate; Ottoman Palestine; Islamic history; shrines.

The Nabi Musa festival has long been assigned a special position in the Palestinian imagination. As Palestine's largest Muslim pilgrimage, worshippers have gathered in Jerusalem on the Friday before the Christian Orthodox Good Friday since at least the early Ottoman period. From this starting point, pilgrims embarked on the twenty-one-kilometer walk eastward to the shrine believed to contain the tomb of Musa (Moses), nestled in the barren hills of the Jerusalem area wilderness. While the festival has been subject to constant change and reinvention over the centuries, it was the events of 1920 – when the first mass protests against Zionism and British colonialism erupted during the gathering in Jerusalem – that cemented Nabi Musa in the Palestinian national consciousness.

Despite its prominent religious and political status, we know surprisingly little about Nabi Musa's longer history as a regional pilgrimage and how that history intersects with the sociopolitical upheavals of Palestine's modern era. Enter Awad Halabi's new monograph, *Palestinian Rituals of Identity*, the first book-length study in English of the Nabi Musa festival through the late Ottoman and Mandate periods (1850–1948). Packed with previously unused documentary sources and fresh analytical insight, the book represents an important and impressive new contribution to the historiography of modern Palestine.

Halabi's core method consists of applying classical anthropological writing on pilgrimage and ritual (Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, Talal Asad, and so on) to the festival's ever-changing panoply of practices, all with a view to teasing out how Palestinians "understood the challenges of modernity, particularly the expansion of market capitalism, the arrival of Western culture, and the formation of new social hierarchies" (3). This means that much of the book sees Halabi unpacking specific ceremonial elements of the festival, examining how such rituals "do not just represent power, but also help forge power" (72), in an echo of Geertz's classic axiom that "power served pomp, not pomp power." At times, the application of anthropological theory feels a little forced – can we really describe the elite Nashashibi family as employing Scott's "weapons of the weak"? – but overall the approach is effective in taking us beyond the surface level of pageantry and political rhetoric, illuminating the festival's role as a key site of contestation within emerging social formations.

Surprisingly, and a little frustratingly, Halabi skips through the tumultuous events of 1920 relatively quickly, largely summarizing existing work on the riots that broke out that year. But perhaps this is part of the wider point. For Halabi, the festival was not suddenly politicized that year; rather it had always been political, reflecting and shaping ever-shifting power relations within Palestinian society. Thus, the goal is to see events such as 1920 within a longer-term picture of change and continuity. As Halabi insists, "The violence [of 1920] did not evolve from Arab protesters suddenly introducing politics into the festival, but from a new, sectarian environment that Britain had stoked in Palestine" (52). Building on this, the book posits three discursive goals pursued by the British at the festival: historical continuity with the Ottomans, a racialized understanding of Palestinian society, and a vision of the British as bearers of communal tolerance and harmony. If these seem potentially contradictory, that is probably because they were. Indeed, Halabi does a good job of dissecting the underlying tensions within and between these discourses, etching them onto a wider canvas of colonial violence and willful ignorance. Nabi Musa, it seems, could be anything to anyone, as long as you willed it hard enough.

The book seems most at home in the Mandate period, devoting five chapters to the period (chapters three to seven), while the periods before 1850 and from 1850–1917 receive only one chapter each. Moreover, the sweeping labeling of the pre-1850 pilgrimage as "the traditional festival" sits somewhat awkwardly against the book's wider goal of seeing the festival as a constant reimagining of social relations, serving instead to flatten out this earlier period as simply "the singular essence of

pilgrimage: attaining proximity to the sacred” (3). Likewise, the chapter on the late Ottoman period feels a little rushed, making sweeping statements on the “modernity” projected by Ottoman elite actors, with relatively little concrete examples to explore the complexity of such concepts or the messiness of their enactment. No doubt a relative paucity of sources from the Ottoman period played a role in this unevenness, but the reader inevitably comes away with the impression that chapters one and two are simply a prelude to the main event: the Mandate years.

From chapter three onward, the book comes into its own, presenting a more vivid picture of the festival’s rituals and their significance for understanding the wider social changes sweeping Palestine at that time. Through a rich variety of source material – diaries, memoirs, newspaper reports, colonial documents, photographs – the reader gains a more visceral sense of the great cacophony of sound, color, and fervor that descended upon Jerusalem every spring and then made its way twenty-one kilometers eastward to the sanctified shrine of Moses. Banners, songs, dances, sword fights, and votive prayers all feature, demonstrating the enormous variety of meanings inscribed into the festival by its multifaceted participants.

Following chapter three’s assessment of Britain’s colonial ambitions, chapter 4 examines the hold exerted by Palestinian elites over Nabi Musa for much of the Mandate period. A good deal of this chapter is devoted to the Husayni family, and in particular the newly appointed “grand mufti,” Hajj Amin. As well as implementing a host of new ceremonial rituals emphasizing the mufti’s pre-eminence, the Husaynis broadened the range of participants by inviting delegations from beyond the country’s hilly interior. Jaffa, Ramla, Haifa, and a host of other towns and villages in the northern and coastal areas that sent processions for the first time, alongside scouts and other youth groups, giving the festival a national coverage. But rather than an expression of burgeoning national identity, Halabi insists they were merely attempts to solidify the personal power of the mufti. We might question why we cannot see both personal gain *and* rising nationalist sentiment in this widening of the festival’s parameters, but Halabi’s gaze in this chapter remains firmly focused on the cultivation of elite sensibilities. Various other wealthy families (most notably the Nashashibis) challenged Husayni dominance over the festival, but they all shared a common set of “modern” values. These included a Western-oriented sense of civic duty, the propagation of orthodox Sunni Islam, a rhetorical commitment to the inclusion of women and religious minorities, and, perhaps most significantly, a commitment to non-violence that ultimately rendered these families complicit in Britain’s colonial project.

It is in chapters five and six that the focus shifts to rank-and-file participants at the festival. Chapter five looks at nationalist youth activities, documenting how a new generation of activists articulated a more militant, Arab-focused vision of the nation through the tactics of mass politics: chants, slogans, and the reification of figures both historical (Salah al-Din) and contemporary (Izz al-Din al-Qassam) that valorized anticolonial resistance. Chapter six, meanwhile, explores a wide range of “non-national inflections,” emphasizing the multiple ways in which subaltern actors

subverted the authority of national and colonial elites. Peasants and Bedouin – both men and women – are given center stage here, revealing themselves capable of imposing their own visions of Nabi Musa on the annual proceedings. In the gathering of pilgrims in Jerusalem we find villages like Baytunya and ‘Ayn Karim defying the festival’s organizers by demanding to march as separate contingents complete with their own banners. At the shrine itself, “folk culture” (Halabi’s term) comes to the fore, as ritual practices of devotion – based on localized understandings of sacred geography far removed from orthodox Sunnism – flourished with little oversight from religious officials. Among this jamboree of “folk culture,” village and nomadic women reveled in the festivities, not as passive subjects of segregation and patriarchy, but as complex actors whose experiences of the festival mirrored the multilayered social relations of their home village or tribe. For Halabi, the festival was no “liminal” space where women could liberate themselves from patriarchal hierarchies. Rather it was an expression of continuity with their daily lives, a regular form of *ziyara* (a visit), or simply “a local outing with family members and friends, feasting and eating sweets” (146).

The final chapter and conclusion push the narrative into the late Mandate period (post-1937) and then the post-Nakba. In both cases, the festival is diminished by increasingly repressive regimes of control (British, Jordanian, Israeli), appearing as a shadow of its former self. Gone is the sense of vibrancy, contestation, and spontaneity as colonial powers strip proceedings of any meaningful political expression, constantly fearful of its potential to foment social unrest and articulate Palestinian national sentiment. I was left wondering how much this view of a submissive and subdued Nabi Musa is itself the result of nostalgia for the pre-1937 festival. As Halabi regularly points out in earlier chapters, the reality of those earlier incarnations of Nabi Musa was far more complex than national memory suggests, subjected as they were to colonial and elite forms of manipulation. What, then, is so different about these more recent years? Ultimately, the conclusion does not have the space to address this question fully, but we are given glimpses that a more profound shift has taken place, especially since the onset of Israeli control over Jerusalem’s holy sites. No longer an arena for new forms of social ordering to be trialed and contested, Nabi Musa now appears as an ossified re-enactment of an imagined past. In this sense, the author’s accounts of his own experiences at the pilgrimage in 2014 are poignant and revealing. The most striking absence, in Halabi’s view, is the revered banner of the Prophet Moses itself, once the centerpiece of the procession’s departure from Jerusalem but now kept in the personal possession of a member of the Husayni family. Somehow it seems fitting that the banner is now guarded from view, preserved as a historic artifact, rather than a living totem of Palestine’s most fervently celebrated festival.

Taken in its entirety, Halabi’s book artfully illuminates these tensions between family, village, town, region, and nation that have cut through the Nabi Musa celebrations since its inception. He has provided us with a valuable contribution to our understanding of modern Palestinian history, reminding us of the rich possibilities religious practice holds for the study of social and political change. From the

Ottomans' transformation of the festival into a pageant of civic modernity, through the British reimagining of Nabi Musa as an expression of colonial benevolence, to local Palestinians' tussles to inscribe their own beliefs and identities on the celebrations, the festival has always been so much more than a set of religious rituals. Thanks to Halabi's richly textured and thoroughly researched book, we can now incorporate these struggles into our own summations of Palestine's modern story.

Jacob Norris is senior lecturer in Middle Eastern history at the University of Sussex, UK. His latest book is The Lives and Deaths of Jubrail Dabdoub (Or How the Bethlehemites Discovered Amerka) (Stanford University Press, 2023).

Submissions General Guidelines

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JQ sends all manuscripts to designated readers for evaluation. Authors may also specifically request that their article be peer-reviewed. Authors should allow four to eight weeks from the date of submission for a final evaluation and publication decision.

Please direct submissions or queries to the *JQ* team: jq@palestine-studies.org

General Guidelines

Material submitted to *JQ* for consideration should adhere to the following:

- **Length:** Articles for peer-reviewing should not exceed 8,000 words; essays should be between 3,500 and 5,000 words; “Letters from Jerusalem,” reviews, and submissions for other sections should not exceed 3,000 words. All submissions should include an abstract of a maximum of 200 words; a list of up to 10 keywords; and a brief author’s biography of a maximum of 25 words. NOTE: the above word-count limits exclude footnotes, endnotes, abstracts, keywords, and biographies.
- **Spelling:** American English according to Merriam-Webster.
- **Text style:** Refer to *Chicago Manual of Style* (CMOS) for all questions regarding punctuation, capitalization, and font style.
- **Transliteration** of names and words in Arabic, Hebrew, and Turkish should follow the style recommended by the *International Journal for Middle East Studies*, but modified for Arabic transliteration by omitting all diacritical marks except for the ‘ayn (open single quotation mark) and hamza (closed single quotation mark). No right-to-left letters are allowed, except for very limited instances of crucial need.
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11 Lives

Stories from Palestinian Exile

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