

## **Historiography of Palestine in the Arab Press of the Early Mandate and the Question of the Formation of Palestinian Identity**

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### **Abstract**

The development of Palestinian historiography in the Mandate period is closely related to the debate about how and when a distinct Palestinian identity has emerged. The findings of the scholars who have examined Palestinian historiography of the Mandate period through history books point to a later date for the development of the Palestinian identity than the one suggested by the scholars who have focused on that identity per se. The present study aims to contribute to this debate by focusing on the specimens of historiography published in Palestinian Arab newspapers in the 1920s, namely before the proliferation of books that treated the history of Palestine as a distinct geographical entity. It shows that in these specimens there were signs of an unmistakable attachment to Palestine and its history, as distinct from Bilād al-Shām, coupled with a strong emphasis on their Arab character. Rather than supporting the studies dating the formation of a “Palestinian Arab” identity to the 1930s at the earliest, it tends to corroborate the arguments that such an identity had crystallized by the years following the Great War at the latest, that the “Palestinian” geographical and “Arab” ethnic components within this identity were fused without one submerging the other, and that the Palestinian identity was separated from the broader Bilād al-Shām identity.

**Keywords:** Palestine, Palestinian Historiography, Palestinian Press, Arab Press, Palestinian Identity, British Mandate.

## **Erken Manda Dönemi Filistin Arap Basınında Filistin Tarihyazımı ve Filistinli Kimliğinin Oluřumu Sorunu**

### **Özet**

Manda döneminde Filistin tarihyazımının geliřimi, ayrı bir Filistinli kimliğinin nasıl ve ne zaman ortaya çıktığına iliřkin tartışmalarla yakından ilgilidir. Manda dönemi Filistin tarihyazımını tarih kitapları üzerinden inceleyen arařtırmacıların bulguları, Filistinli kimliğinin geliřimi için bizzat söz konusu kimliğe odaklanan çoğu arařtırmacının önerdiğinden daha sonraki bir tarihe iřaret etmektedir. Mevcut çalışma ise 1920’lerde, yani ayrı bir coğrafi birim olarak Filistin’in tarihini ele alan kitapların çoğalmasından önce Filistin Arap gazetelerinde yayınlanan tarihyazımı örneklerine

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odaklanarak bu tartışmaya katkıda bulunmayı amaçlıyor. Çalışmanın bulgularının gösterdiği üzere, bu örneklerde Bilâdü's-Şâm'dan ayrı bir birim olarak Filistin'e ve onun tarihine açık bir bağlılığın işaretleri bulunuyor, ülkenin ve tarihinin Arap karakterine güçlü bir şekilde vurgu yapıyordu. Dolayısıyla "Filistinli Arap" kimliğinin en erken 1930'lu yıllarda oluştuğu yönündeki tezleri desteklemekten ziyade, çalışmanın sonuçları böyle bir kimliğin en geç I. Dünya Savaşı'nın hemen ertesindeki yıllarda şekillendiği, kimlik içindeki coğrafi "Filistin" ve etnik "Arap" bileşenlerin biri diğerini bastırmadan kaynaştığı ve Filistinli kimliğinin daha geniş Bilâdü's-Şâm kimliğinden ayrıldığı savlarını destekler niteliktedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Filistin, Filistin Tarih yazımı, Filistin Basını, Arap Basını, Filistinli Kimliği, İngiliz Mandası.

## Introduction

Rashid Khalidi has pointed to the Palestinian Arab press from the end of the Great War to 1923 as a crucial source that reflects, according to him, the development of a Palestinian identity in these years.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, no attempt has been made to study the examples of history writing about Palestine found in the Arab press of the Early Mandate period and to bring these in connection with the question of the precise time of development of Palestinian identity. This study examines such examples in the Arab press of Palestine from 1919, when the first newspapers began to appear or re-appear in the Mandate period, and 1929, when a turning point was reached in the development of Palestinian Arab nationalism with the Arab-Jewish conflict on the issue of the Western Wall.

The development of Palestinian historiography in the Mandate period has been the subject of several previous studies. Abu-Ghazaleh, the first scholar to dwell on the subject, emphasizes the increasingly dominant Arab component of the Palestinian historiography in the Mandate period. He states that while in the initial period the traditional Muslim tendency to focus on the Islamic period predominated, this approach eventually lost ground before the secular Arabist tendency to treat the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods equally. Accordingly, the majority of Palestinian historians emerged as Arabists who stressed the Arabs' expansion and united resistance to foreign attacks as well as the accomplishments of Arab civilization. Abu-Ghazaleh observes that these historians related "the continuous story of a united and indivisible Arab society throughout the ages" to serve as a basis for pan-Arabism. This was because they regarded Arab unity as the only solution to the problem of Palestine and Arab pride and solidarity as the only weapons with which to fight off Zionism. In an effort to demonstrate the Arabness of Palestine and foster pride in Arab historical heritage, therefore, they retold how Arabs had made their greatest accomplishments while they were united, expelled the Crusaders, and transmitted their scientific knowledge to the West.<sup>2</sup>

Tarif Khalidi similarly stresses the preponderance of the pan-Arab sentiment and points out the importance of history for Palestinian intellectuals as a central asset in their struggle

<sup>1</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 162, 172-74.

<sup>2</sup> Adnan Abu-Ghazaleh, "Arab Cultural Nationalism in Palestine during the British Mandate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1, no. 3 (1972): 57, 59, 62; idem, *Arab Cultural Nationalism in Palestine during the British Mandate* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1973), 70, 72, 78-79, 86-87.

with the Zionists and the British. For Palestinian historians, he observes, history constituted “a storehouse of examples which new Palestinian generations must learn and digest” as well as a national legacy to use in the contest with their adversaries for the rights over Palestine. As a result of the threats they faced, he observes, the Palestinians turned to the Arab past as a source of reassurance, became almost obsessed by it, and turned out to be the most pan-Arabist Arab people of the time, the most enthusiastic to record their common past. This they compared favorably with the Jewish past as regards its longevity and organic character.<sup>3</sup>

Litvak also stresses the predominance of Pan-Arabism in Palestinian historiography of the period. Palestinian historiography, according to him, displayed the ideals of Pan-Arabism and Arab unity and independence that had been embraced in the 1920s and 30s by the Palestinian national movement like its counterparts in other Arab countries. In an effort to fight Zionism by disproving Jewish historical claims on the land, Palestinian historians set about showing the continuous Arab character of Palestine from antiquity to their own day. “Although the historians were writing on the history of Palestine,” Litvak observes, “their imagined community of the past was the collective Arab nation; they discussed the history of Palestine not as a distinctly Palestinian past, but as an integral part of the history of the Arab nation.” In order to prove their continuity in Palestine from time immemorial and to posit the Canaanites and Emorites as their Arab ancestors they subscribed to the “Semitic wave theory” originally put forward by H. A. Winkler and Leone Caetani, who had argued that all the Semitic peoples of the ancient Middle East were Arabs who had migrated from the Arabian Peninsula in successive waves. Litvak argues that Palestinian patriotism was thus stifled by broader Arab nationalism, with the result that Palestinian historians belittled the uniqueness of Palestine in antiquity and ignored or denied it in the Arab Islamic period. They preferred to dwell on the common glories of the Arab Islamic past rather than those of a particularist Palestinian past, positing themselves solely as part this greater imagined Arab-Islamic community.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from this suppression of Palestinian uniqueness by Arab-Islamic identity in Palestinian historiography, Litvak also refers to its incorporation into the wider Bilād al-Shām (Greater Syria, including Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan) identity. He indicates that one of the first works on Palestinian history, *History of Palestine* by Umar Salih al-Barghuthi and Khalil Tawta (1923), asserted that Palestine had always constituted an integral part of Syria, not separated from it by natural borders, ethnicity, or history. This disapproval of the borders that had been shaped by European intervention, he observes, endured until the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> Tamari similarly indicates that the same work employed “a historical vocabulary and a current geography in which the country was still half anchored in greater Syria.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Tarif Khalidi, “Palestinian Historiography: 1900-1948,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 10, no. 3 (1981): 64, 76.

<sup>4</sup> Meir Litvak, “Constructing A National Past: The Palestinian Case,” in *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity*, ed. Meir Litvak, 97-133 (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 98-101.

<sup>5</sup> Litvak, “Constructing A National Past,” 99.

<sup>6</sup> Salim Tamari, *Mountain Against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 2.

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Doumani as well underlines the long-time Bilād al-Shām context of history writing in Palestine and draws attention to the relatively late date by which Palestinians began producing histories of Palestine as defined by the borders of the Mandate. Once they did begin by the early 1930s, however, Palestinian journalists, lawyers, politicians, and teachers joined the global trend of nationalist history writing and produced historical works on Palestine in order to confront their Zionist and British opponents. Doumani distinguishes two main genres in this historiography, “Call to Battle” and “Affirmation of Identity.” The works in the first genre skipped over the Ottoman period, which they regarded as one of decline and stagnation, to concentrate on the development of Zionism, the intrusion of British imperialism, and the Palestinian resistance. The “Affirmation of Identity” genre, in turn, was represented by city narratives, biographical dictionaries and historical geographies that sought to prove the historical Arab character of Palestine and the existence of Palestinian people in the face of those who denied their history and right of self-determination.<sup>7</sup>

In the latest study on the subject, Foster agrees with the scholars who hold that the Arab as well as the Islamic and Bilād al-Shām identities long dominated Palestinian historiography in the Mandate period. He points out that apart from a compilation of articles originally published in an Egyptian newspaper and a textbook of history commissioned by the Mandate government to use in schools, no independent work of general Palestinian history was published until the second half of the 1930s. That was when the Great Palestinian Revolt was in course, Zionist immigration had peaked, contacts with Jews had increased, and education had spread to masses. Before that time, he indicates, historiographical composition in Palestine mainly consisted of city and regional histories and Islamic or Christian history, with a smaller amount of Arabic history. Palestine itself only served as a geographical framework for works on other subjects like Arab dwellings and sanctuaries. It was only in the latter half of the thirties that the Arab and Palestinian histories would eclipse Islamic ones. Foster takes this to be evidence that a distinct Palestinian identity crystallized only by the late 1930s. Until then “Palestine was not a particularly important source of loyalty,” he argues, and broader religious and regional loyalties as well as Arab identity were predominant. He insists in particular that even in the Mandate period Palestine was seen merely as part of Greater Syria because of the traditional absence of nation-state borders and loyalties in the region.<sup>8</sup>

All these debates about the development of Palestinian historiography in the Mandate period are of course closely related to the debate about how and when a distinct Palestinian identity and Palestinian nationalism emerged. Fishman and Gerber posit the pre-war years as the period in which a distinct Palestinian identity developed. According to Fishman, this was brought about by the need felt by the elites and the populace to coalesce vis-a-vis the threat posed by Zionism, British imperialism, and Western cultural influence and what they regarded as the Ottoman State’s failure to protect the holy sites and stop Jewish

<sup>7</sup> Beshara Doumani, “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 2 (1992): 9-14.

<sup>8</sup> Zachary J. Foster, “Arab Historiography in Mandatory Palestine, 1920-1948” (Master’s Thesis, Georgetown University, 2011), 29-32, 38, 42-43, 47-54.

migration, commonly attributed to the venality of its local representatives. So, already by the Second Constitutional Period, “there was a clear sense of ‘Palestinian identity’ among the Arab population of Palestine” and “Palestinians, Christian or Muslim, began to imagine themselves as a modern political community.” This new Palestinian identity was a local identity within the larger Arab one, based on both the determination to stop Jewish migration and to bolster their claims to the land. Fishman also criticizes the emphasis of some scholars on the Bilād al-Shām context, arguing that the Palestinians, while not unaware of belonging to a wider region, did distinguish clearly between Palestine and Syria.<sup>9</sup>

In his detailed work dedicated to the subject, Gerber similarly cites the concerns about Zionism as an element in the development of a Palestinian identity already by the Second Constitutional Period. In addition to this, he refers to the Palestinians’ long-time attachment to the Holy Land, the consciousness that they were the guardians of Jerusalem and its Muslim holy sites, the remembrance of the Crusades, and the lingering memories of Palestine as a distinct territorial unit—which was to some extent restored by the attachment of the Ottoman District of Jerusalem directly to the capital in 1872. As a result, he argues, the concept and idea of Palestine had crystallized in the minds of the Palestinians by 1914, even though many also subscribed to Arabism without deeming it to be in conflict with the former.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the relationship between the Palestinian and Arab identities, Gerber stresses that they were two sides of the same coin, parts of an inseparable whole, without either one being submerged by the other: Arabism provided the ethnic component, and Palestine constituted the homeland. So, theirs was a Palestinian-Arab identity. He observes that these two components appeared not contradictory but complementary to the inhabitants, who saw themselves as both Arabs and Palestinians and were referred to as the “Arabs of Palestine” or “Palestinian Arabs” in the documents they produced. Based on this identity, argues Gerber, a full-fledged Palestinian-Arab nationalism developed in the period 1918-1922 vis-à-vis the encroaching Zionism that sharpened the Palestinians’ determination to emerge as an independent nation with their own state.<sup>11</sup>

Like Fishman, Gerber emphasizes that Palestinian identity always remained distinct from Greater Syrian / Bilād al-Shām identity even when the Palestinians aspired to be part of the Syrian Arab state between 1918-1920: “They never, under any formula, wished to disappear as Palestinians.” Nor did they “see themselves as Syrians or their country as Southern Syria. They were either Palestinians or Arabs—in fact both.” They merely desired to govern their homeland autonomously within Faisal’s kingdom. And when it was destroyed by the French armies, Gerber points out, Palestinians displayed no signs of grief

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<sup>9</sup> Louis Fishman, *Jews and Palestinians in the Late Ottoman Era, 1908-1914: Claiming the Homeland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 67-68, 95-96, 204-5.

<sup>10</sup> Haim Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining Palestine: Identity and Nationalism from the Crusades to the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 42-44, 48, 75-76, 100, 207-8.

<sup>11</sup> Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining*, 76-77, 86, 164, 168-71, 208, 210.

about the loss of a purported “Syrian identity” but instead simply opened a new chapter of their own.<sup>12</sup>

Rashid Khalidi dates the formation of Palestinian identity to a slightly later period, the years from the last years of World War I to 1922-23. Under the impact of the momentous changes during these years, he argues, the Arabs of Palestine came to identify with Palestine and to imagine themselves as part of a single national community. Like Gerber, he refers to a number of pre-war factors that led to this identification with Palestine, including a powerful religious attachment to Palestine as the Holy Land, its conception as an administrative entity, engendered by the Ottoman administrative boundaries of 1874, and finally the fear of European and Zionist encroachment. Left alone against Britain and France dividing up the Arab lands, concerned to see Zionism gaining in strength, and disillusioned with the inaction of Faisal and other leaders who hoped to trade off Palestine to Zionists in return for Syrian independence, he argues, urban and literate Palestinians drew upon their strong traditional loyalties to develop a mature sense of Palestinian identity in the immediate postwar years. Later this identity would spread outside cities with the growing influence of newspapers and expanding education. Nevertheless, Khalidi accepts like Gerber that this identification with Palestine would continue to overlap with Arabism and religious loyalties, so that “Palestinian Arab” would become the preferred self-description. Again, like Gerber and Fishman, he points out that the postwar emergence of South Syria as a focus of identity lacked the substratum of old loyalties underpinning Palestinian identity and faded rapidly with the destruction of the independent Syrian kingdom.<sup>13</sup>

Khalidi is joined in his dating of the development of Palestinian Arab identity by Kimmerling, while Porath dates its formulation to the 1920s but its effectiveness on the larger Palestinian community to the following decade. Kimmerling, like Gerber and Khalidi, draws attention to the fact that while the boundaries of Palestine were never clear and often fragmented, it had always constituted a distinct area referred to as the “Holy Land,” with its “religious territorial identity” enhanced further by its center Jerusalem. He argues that within a short time after the Great War the Arab population of Palestine developed into “a distinct collectivity from the other surrounding states and states-in-making of the region, and at the same time a part of *al-qawmiyya al-arabiyya*.” He attributes this development to the emergence of new Arab countries that were independent or in the process of independence, the establishment of the British Mandate, and the rapid growth of Jewish settlement.<sup>14</sup> Porath, in turn, observes similarly that the Palestinian-Arab nationalist ideology was formulated during the period 1919-29, based on an “absolute rejection of Zionism” and “arguments in favour of the Arab character of Palestine.” But he notes that the degree of national consciousness among the Palestinian community was not

<sup>12</sup> Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining*, 79, 82, 91, 208.

<sup>13</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 149-151, 154, 165, 172-75.

<sup>14</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, “The Formation of Palestinian Collective Identities: The Ottoman and Mandatory Periods,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 2 (2000): 52-53, 65-66.

yet high enough in these years to prevent them from foregoing the opportunities of personal gain that Zionism offered.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the findings of the scholars who have examined Palestinian historiography of the Mandate period through history books point to a later date for the development of the Palestinian identity than the one suggested by the scholars who have focused on that identity per se, and some even argue that it was completely sidelined by Arab identity. The present study aims to contribute to this debate by focusing on the specimens of historiography published in Palestinian Arab newspapers in the 1920s, that is, before the proliferation of books that treated the history of Palestine as a distinct geographical entity. It shows that in these specimens there were signs of an unmistakable attachment to Palestine and its history, as distinct from Bilād al-Shām, coupled with a strong emphasis on their Arab character. Therefore, it tends to support the conclusions of Fishman, Gerber and Rashid Khalidi against those scholars who have concentrated on history books alone to suggest later periods for the development of Palestinian identity.

This issue is important insofar as the newspapers reached a nonnegligible part of the population by the early Mandate Period. Ayalon stresses the proliferation of newspapers and the corresponding rise in the rate of readership during the period, even though their circulation numbers initially remained at a modest level when compared with the press of Lebanon or Egypt (12,700 by 1929; an average of 1,000-1,500 issues per newspaper in a population of around 850,000). Those who did not read the newspapers through personal subscription or purchase could access their contents through borrowing them from book-lending shops or acquaintances, reading them in libraries, coffeehouses, or the reading rooms of clubs, and even listening to someone reading them aloud if they were illiterate.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the newspapers did not fail to exert a growing influence on the Palestinian Arab society in Ayalon's view:

The 1920s was a formative decade for the Palestinian press. It consolidated its presence in the public domain and became by far the most important type of text in use... The Palestinian press came to play the familiar role identified for it by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities*, that of cementing a dispersed public into a self-conscious community... It instilled in its readers a Palestinian-Arab awareness in the face of foreign intruders.<sup>17</sup>

As we shall see, the press contributed to the formation of this "Palestinian-Arab awareness" also through the historical pieces it published.

For the present study, all the available issues of fifteen Palestinian Arab periodicals published between 1919 and 1929 were examined. Of these, the following seven newspapers and journals turned out to contain series and/or individual articles on the history of Palestine, mostly dating from the period 1919-1923: *Filastīn*, *al-Karmil*, *Mir'āt al-Sharq*, *Lisān al-Arab*, *al-Tabl*, *al-Nafā'is al-Asriyya*, and *al-Zahra*. *Filastīn*, a Jaffa newspaper,

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<sup>15</sup> Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian National Movement, 1918-1929* (London: Cass, 1974), 306-7.

<sup>16</sup> Ami Ayalon, *Reading Palestine: Printing and Literacy, 1900-1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 62-63, 93-108, 138-45; idem, *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 98, 154-59. For similar points about the influence of the Palestinian Arab press already by the prewar period see Emanuel Beška, *From Ambivalence to Hostility: The Arabic Newspaper Filastīn and Zionism, 1911-1914* (Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2016), 18-22.

<sup>17</sup> Ayalon, *Reading Palestine*, 63-64.

was published since the Second Constitutional Period by Isa al-Isa, a renowned Orthodox journalist. It reflected the conservative political stance of citrus growers and other rich urban families, while also promoting local patriotism and pursuing a policy of staunch opposition to Zionism. In the first few years of the Mandate it tended to support the Hussaini family, which headed the Supreme Muslim Council, the Arab Executive, and the post of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, but afterwards it joined the opposition camp headed by the Nashashibi family. Another newspaper published since the Ottoman period and stringently opposing Zionism was *al-Karmil*. It was published in Haifa by Najib Nassar, who had converted to Protestantism from Orthodoxy and adopted a more Arabist and progressive policy than *Filastin*, dwelling on the problems of peasants and other underrepresented groups. It supported the Nashashibi camp throughout the Mandate period. Another important opposition newspaper, *Mir'at al-Sharq*, was published in Jerusalem by the Orthodox journalist Bulus Shihada, and adopted an accommodating policy toward the Mandate even though it did criticize the Zionist movement in the 1920s. *Lisān al-Arab* was published by the Lebanese journalist Ibrahim Salim Najjar, who had been tasked by the British with publishing a “moderate” newspaper that would not go very far in its criticism of the Mandate or Zionism. The satirical newspaper *al-Tabl*, published in Haifa by the journalist Ibrahim Karim, spoke “with the voice of the Arab people” in its own words. Among the two literary and historical journals under examination, *al-Nafā'is al-Asriyya* (initially named *al-Nafā'is* only) was published since the prewar period by Khalil Baidas, a notable educator and translator and an ardent opponent of the Mandate as well as of Zionism. The second, *al-Zahra* (also named *Zahrat al-Jamīl* before and *al-Zuhūr* afterwards), was published in Haifa by Jamil al-Bahri, a journalist and renowned literary figure of the city who was suspected of having links with the Zionists and murdered in 1930.<sup>18</sup>

Among these newspapers *Filastin* contained by far the greatest number of pieces on Palestinian history, including two long historical series, and it was also one of the two newspapers (with *al-Karmil*) that published historical articles by the end of the period as well as by its beginning. The remaining eight newspapers under examination, on the other hand, failed to yield any relevant material of significance: *Bait al-Maqdis*, *al-Ittihad al-Arabi*, *al-Jami'a al-Arabiyya*, *Jazira*, *al-Nafir*, *Sawt al-Sha'b*, *al-Sirat*, and *al-Yarmuk*.

The study will begin with an examination of the newspaper articles underlining the need for independent works to be written on Palestinian history. In the subsequent two sections, it will examine the series and then the individual articles published on Palestinian history between 1919 and 1923. The following section will focus on the histories of Jerusalem, published in the same period, which in fact handled the history of entire Palestine. The

<sup>18</sup> Mustafa Kabha, *The Palestinian Press as Shaper of Public Opinion, 1929-1939: Writing up a Storm* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007), xvi-xvii, xx, 25-26; idem, “The Arabic Palestinian Press between the Two World Wars,” in *The Press in the Middle East and North Africa, 1850-1950: Politics, Social History and Culture*, eds. Anthony Gorman and Didier Monciaud, 99-125 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 99-101; Aida Ali Najjar, “The Arabic Press and Nationalism in Palestine, 1920-1948” (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 1975), 64-65; “al-Tabl,” Jrayed—Arabic Newspaper Archive of Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine, <https://jrayed.org/en/newspapers/altabl>.



final section will dwell on the pieces on Palestinian history published in the newspapers during the years 1924-1929.

### 1. The Need for Works on Palestinian History

Some of the newspaper articles published between 1919-1923 pointed out the dire need for works on Palestinian history and deplored the lack of such works as well as of general historical knowledge and curiosity on the part of the Palestinian Arab public. One such example is found in a short article published in *al-Karmil* in 1922.<sup>19</sup> The author began by referring to a brief history of Haifa that had originally been published in *al-Zahra* by the owner of the journal, Jamil al-Bahri. He emphasized that this was the first book dedicated to the history of that city from the antiquity to the modern times. He thanked the author for his work, pointing out that it was the earliest step to change a state of affairs that every Arab intellectual had to deplore. "Is it not shameful," he asked,

that a foreigner arriving in Palestine to study the historical and social situation of the country is unable to find a book in Arabic that would help him in his task? And is it not necessary that a student in our primary schools should study the history and geography of the city which is his birthplace, and the country to which he belongs?

He asked further in exasperation: "Where are the books of history and geography that we should have composed to provide the new generation as well as the foreigners visiting our country with a truthful and patriotic idea about our social, moral, and historical conditions?"

The author remembered having read in Istanbul an article entitled "How Does Europe Know Us?"<sup>20</sup> The Turkish author of the article explained the Westerners' view of the Easterners and then placed the whole blame on the latter for their failure to write books on history through which they could have taught the Westerners their true situation. The author supported these comments, pointing that the Palestinians were still learning the geography and history of their country from Western books in translation. "If we have self-respect and we are aggrieved by the blames cast on us by the Westerners," he asserted, "there is no way for us but to write our histories with our own pen, because that engenders a positive image of us abroad and benefits the education of the new generation by rendering it a robust and patriotic one."

The other such article appeared in *Lisān al-Arab* a year later under the title "The Monuments and Arts in Palestine."<sup>21</sup> The author pointed out that each year thousands of travelers and visitors arrived in Palestine to see the ancient monuments and rare works of art that had been left behind by old generations to the present generation of Palestinians, so that the latter could judge by their means what beautiful works the former had produced and draw lessons from the vicissitudes they had lived through. He related how scientific delegations

<sup>19</sup> "Tārīkh Haifā" [History of Haifa], *al-Karmil*, 21.10.1922.

<sup>20</sup> This was probably an article published by Celal Nuri İleri in the editorial column (entitled *İcmâl-i Efkâr*, "The Summary of Opinions") of his literary journal *Edebiyyât-ı Umûmiyye Mecmûası*: Celal Nuri İleri, "İcmâl-i Efkâr — Avrupa Bizi Nasıl Bilir," *Edebiyyât-ı Umûmiyye Mecmûası* 2, no. 42 (1917): 257-59. See Selim Aslantaş, "Savaş Yıllarında 'Edebiyat': *Edebiyyât-ı Umûmiyye Mecmûası*." *Kebikeç* no. 16 (2003): 40.

<sup>21</sup> "al-Āthār wa'l-funūn fī Filastīn" [The Monuments and Arts in Palestine], *Lisān al-Arab*, 11.01.1923.

as well as numerous archeological societies in the West were carrying out research and exploration in Palestine, unearthing the treasures that the land had been withholding from its inhabitants. He pointed out that Western scientists were taking up the work with an ardor that knew no laxity, and the rich there were generously spending their resources on these studies. "But we are negligent and heedless," he continued, "we do not pay attention to these studies and do not draw benefit from their results as if the country were not ours and we were not its inhabitants!" "If we were in our senses," he deplored, "we would have a different standing in this cause and would not be incensed to see others preoccupied with our affairs and raising claims on our heritage, on the creations of our fathers and grandfathers."

The author then pointed out that Palestine had a deep-rooted past replete with glorious monuments, being the cradle of religions and the fatherland of great reformers and thinkers who had established civilizations and spread their banners to even the most distant corners of the world. Under these conditions, it was no wonder that the gaze of the world was directed toward Palestine and great men were concerned with it, taking an interest in the study of its monuments together with scientists. It was shameful therefore for the sons of Palestine to remain ignorant of its worth and to refrain from preoccupying themselves like Westerners with its affairs, from publishing works that documented its splendor and greatness, and from taking advantage of its treasures. "One sees the foreigners establishing associations and setting up schools and museums to facilitate the study of the monuments in Palestine, just as the Americans, the English, the French, and others are doing," he exclaimed, "but one does not hear a single national, let alone an association concerned with any of these beneficial activities." He compared his countrymen unfavorably with the Westerners in this regard:

Perhaps a cultured man from amongst us has listened to a lecture on a subject related to the monuments of Palestine, only to shrug his shoulders in contempt of their importance, despising their value as if the monuments of our country were not even worthy of mention.

The author elaborated this point by complaining that many museums were being built in Palestine to house the valuable works of art unearthed by researchers, but the local people knew almost nothing about these even though they imagined that they were dedicating some of their time to education, contemplation, and preaching.

This neglect, the author asserted, was the reason for the West's disdain of all Easterners who degraded their rights and the honor of their nation in this way and despised the history of their country out of feigned or real ignorance. There was also the contempt of fine arts, in spite of the lasting monuments built by the venerable ancestors and still bearing testimony to their mastery, fine taste, skill, and proficiency. Perhaps, he observed, those seeing the Dome of the Rock, the Mosque of Jazzar and other splendid masterpieces did not even grasp their value, and this was a most astonishing state of affairs. In conclusion he stressed that ignorance was the greatest disaster, fought by God, and the cause of decline. "Let us hope," he remarked,

that the day comes when somebody will rise to call on our people and invite them to concern themselves with the matters we have mentioned, encouraging them to study our monuments

and to collaborate with the government in protecting them with solicitude from the batterings of fate as well as of men.

## 2. Series of Articles on the History of Palestine

Concomitant with these calls for a closer interest in history were several series of articles on ancient, medieval, and modern Palestinian history that appeared between 1919-1923. These series tend to support an earlier dating of the development of Palestinian identity, to the immediate postwar years at the latest. It must also be observed however that some of these earliest efforts were unoriginal, apparently culled to a large extent from Western sources.

The earliest historical series in the Palestinian press was one that appeared in *al-Nafā'is al-Asriyya*, entitled "Syria in All its Periods" and published in seven instalments.<sup>22</sup> It purported to offer a history of Greater Syria (Bilād al-Shām) throughout history. As such, it reflected a contemporary movement among Palestinians who wished Palestine to join with Syria, at the time an independent kingdom under Faisal, as the autonomous province of "Southern Syria." In this way, they hoped, it would be saved from being converted into a national home for the Jews as indicated in the Balfour Declaration.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the series began with a description of the various historical names of the Greater Syria, its borders and geographical and administrative divisions. After this point, however, it quickly reverted to a Biblical and ancient Jewish history focused on Palestine until the destruction of the Temple. One passage, relating the Roman sack of Jerusalem in AD 71, even made extensive quotations from the Jewish historian Josephus, the only direct quotations in the whole series. There is nothing to show that it was the original creation of an Arab author, which makes it likely that most of it was translated from one or more Western sources of the period. Despite the claim in the title to cover "all periods" of Syrian history, moreover, the series did not go beyond the Roman period in at least the extant issues.

Another series published in *al-Nafā'is al-Asriyya* was entitled "Europe in Syria."<sup>24</sup> In two instalments, it related the European interest and institutions in Syria and Palestine during the nineteenth century. The author treated in order the activities of France, England, Italy, Austria, Germany, and Russia, and dwelt on the rivalries between them in the Holy Lands. It is interesting that while all the other countries were covered in the first instalment, Russia was dedicated a whole instalment in the subsequent issue, one almost as long as the first. The author gave especially detailed information on the Russian institutions of education and praised them for granting completely free and high-quality education to the children of poor families. This was no wonder as the editor of *al-Nafā'is al-Asriyya* himself, Khalil Baidas, was a graduate of the Russian Teachers' Training Centre in Nazareth.

About ten months after the end of this series Faisal's Syrian kingdom was dismantled by the invading French troops, and no article purporting to cover "Greater Syrian" history appeared after that in *al-Nafā'is al-Asriyya* or other Palestinian newspapers. This would

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<sup>22</sup> "Sūriyā fī kull adwārihā" [Syria in All its Periods], *al-Nafā'is al-Asriyya*, 26.07.1919-15.02.1920.

<sup>23</sup> Porath, *Emergence*, 304-5; Kimmerling, "Formation," 63; Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 163, 165.

<sup>24</sup> "Urubbā fī Sūriyā" [Europe in Syria], *al-Nafā'is al-Asriyya*, 15.09.1919-01.10.1919.

suggest, in support of Gerber, Fishman, and Rashid Khalidi, that the Greater Syrian identity had lost much of its relevance with the evaporation of the prospects of evading the Balfour declaration by joining Syria.

The most original and ambitious piece of historiography found among the newspapers was a series in fifteen instalments written specially for *Filastīn* and entitled “The Arabs in Palestine.”<sup>25</sup> It basically aimed to highlight the essentially Arabic character of the land since the antiquity, with the concomitant stress that the Arabs were in the ascendancy when the center of power in the Islamic world was located in Syria and Palestine. In the introduction, the editor noted that Jews were arguing with Arabs about Palestine, claiming it as their ancient homeland, while the latter were refuting this claim, asserting that it was their own land and denying the Jews any rights over it. However, he could see no Palestinian author trying to disprove the “historically baseless” claims that the Jews were clinging to. Therefore, it pleased him to offer his readers a historical study treating this important topic exhaustively. He informed his readers that it was authored by one of awakened Palestinian youths (his name was withheld, and his articles only signed as “the Scholar”). The author, he explained, proved firstly that Palestine had been Arab in its geographical location, civilization, and history before the Jews even came to know of it, and secondly that it could not be anything but Arab in character.

In accordance with this program, the author presented the Amorites and the Amalekites as Arabs and emphasized that the Arabs had come to Palestine before the Hebrews. Here was the unmistakable influence of the “Semitic Waves” theory mentioned earlier. Then he dwelt on the Arabic dynasties that were in power during the Roman period, notably the Ghassanids. He next focused on the Arabic conquests of the early Islamic era and proceeded to relate the developments during the reigns of the Umayyads, the Abbasids, and the Fatimids. He described in glowing terms how the Arabs were superior to all other nations during the Umayyad period and stressed that this happened precisely when the center of power was located in Syria and Palestine. Dwelling on the Abbasid period, the author indicated that the empire was greatly weakened when, beginning from Mu’tasim, the caliphs began to draw on the services of Turkish troops who gradually assumed real power and reduced the caliphs to figureheads. He then described the reign of the Fatimids who had taken hold of Palestine, and depicted with praise how peace, security, and prosperity again reigned in Palestine during the ascendancy of this Arab dynasty, just as in the times of previous Arab dynasties. He gave only short shrift to the subsequent centuries when the Seljuks, Crusaders, Mamluks and finally Ottomans ruled Palestine and the rest of the Middle East. Instead, he stressed that despite the coming and going of these non-Arab dynasties, the Arab stamp that had already been impressed on Palestine did not change, with the local culture, language, and mores all remaining Arab—a state of affairs which, according to the author, saved the region despite all the calamities it faced during these late centuries.

In the conclusion the author focused on the geography, describing the Arab desert and nomadic tribes bordering Palestine. He pointed out that it was all too natural for the

<sup>25</sup> “al-Arab fī Filastīn” [The Arabs in Palestine], *Filastīn*, 28.12.1921-22.02.1922.

country to bear the Arab imprint of these surroundings. He also touched on the previous movements of Arab awakening in the past millennia, which he said had gone unrecorded or little recorded in history and asserted that just another awakening was now unfolding in the present time. Under all these conditions, he observed, it would be impossible for Palestine to become a Jewish country, and even if it somehow became so, this would be a very “unnatural” development.

In the issue following the end of this series, before resuming the previously launched series “Palestine in the Nineteenth Century” to be examined below, the editor noted that many distinguished Palestinians had admired this important study on the history of the Arabs in Palestine. Some of those residing in Europe and interested in the Palestine problem had even asked him to have it translated to English. He had accordingly sent them the translation to be published in England. Dissemination of such articles among the English people, who supposed that Palestine was the historical homeland of the Jews, would indeed benefit the national Palestinian cause in the editor’s view. He thanked the author and requested him to continue producing such useful studies. Then he turned to introduce the rest of the series “Palestine in the Nineteenth Century,” which had begun earlier. He indicated that the series had been written for *Filastin* by another young Palestinian, the likes of whom were a source of pride for their nation (his name was also kept secret). He informed his readers that it would now describe the situation of the Jews in Palestine and drew attention to the pertinence of the publication of these articles about “the Jews in Palestine” right after those about “the Arabs in Palestine.”<sup>26</sup>

The series in question was published in twenty-six instalments in total.<sup>27</sup> It was basically a straightforward account of the growth of European and Jewish interest and activities in Palestine during the nineteenth century, most of which seems to have been translated from foreign sources. It began with a depiction of soldiers marching off from Jerusalem to the front at the beginning of the Crimean War. The author pointed out that the main cause of the war was the rivalry between France and Russia for protectorate over the sacred sites in Palestine. Then he described at length how this rivalry developed, and criticized the Ottoman government for following a short-sighted policy in that it continually made conflicting promises that could not be kept simultaneously. By this futile jugglery, he observed, it had annoyed both countries and caused suffering for the local communities. The author also noted that the people in Palestine had come to prefer Mehmed Ali Paşa’s rule to that of the Ottomans despite the harsh justice of the former. He admitted however that the Ottomans had corrected their ways with the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* issued shortly before their recovery of Palestine and Syria.

After the hiatus during which “Arabs in Palestine” was published, the series resumed with the subtitle “Jews in Palestine,” and focused solely on this subject until the end. The author introduced the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim in Palestine, giving information about their provenance as well as about the groups within each community. He then dedicated a great number of instalments to the portrayal of the dire socio-economic situation in which the

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<sup>26</sup> “Filastin fi’l-qarn al-tāsi’ ashar” [Palestine in the Nineteenth Century], *Filastin*, 25.02.1922.

<sup>27</sup> “Filastin fi’l-qarn al-tāsi’ ashar” [Palestine in the Nineteenth Century], *Filastin*, 14.09.1921-19.05.1922.

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Jews of Palestine found themselves by the first half of the nineteenth century. He noted that their poverty and squalor was especially acute on the eve and during the course of the Crimean War, when the aid money regularly collected from abroad was not forthcoming. He related how the British consul tried the solution of having them employed in agricultural work. Although the trial proved short-lived due to the resistance of the rabbis, who imposed a *herem* on such work and all Jews involved in it, he noted, the Jewish community would not forget this experience which had given them a taste of fresh air and healthy physical labor. He underlined that Jewish colonization had begun in this way, that is, not with the aim of taking possession of the country, but to provide poor Jews deprived of aid money with a livelihood. He also touched on the efforts of Albert Cohen, Moses Montefiore, Nissim Behar and others to provide them with a modern education and decent jobs as well as to develop the infrastructure, even though some of these efforts would fail in face of the staunch resistance from conservative rabbis. He referred as well to the *Mikveh Israel* school founded by the Alliance for educating Jews in agriculture, acknowledging that it did not have a Zionist agenda at this stage.

Then the author proceeded to describe how the pogroms and state pressure in Russia led Leo Pinsker and Hovevei Zion to embrace the idea of a return to Palestine. The Ottoman government had tried to stop Jewish immigration, but its prohibitions of land sale and immigration had largely remained on paper because of the venality of all local officials from the *mutasarrif* downwards. He then related the rise of Herzl, the differences between practical and political Zionism, and the split of the territorialists under Zangwill. He observed that the outbreak of World War I seemed to spell the doom of Zionism, but then everybody was shocked by “the disaster of Balfour Declaration breaking upon their heads.”

In the last several instalments of the series, the author first provided a list of short introductions about the main Jewish settlements in his day, following it with a brief annal of the main events since the publication of Herzl’s *Jewish State*. He also offered a longer introduction of the main Zionist organizations that had been established so far. Curiously, the very last piece of the series involved a fiery exhortation to Jews to contribute to the Jewish Fund, so that lands could be bought in Palestine, their “ancestral land.” Perhaps this was a word-by-word translation of a source, possibly a Zionist pamphlet, published by mistake without comments or quotation marks. In any case, the series abruptly ended after this instalment despite the notice at the end that it would continue.

Another, two-part series on Palestinian history appeared in *al-Tabl*.<sup>28</sup> The author began by observing that the news about Palestine were recently proliferating, with all the talk about Jewish aspirations to restore their ancient kingdom. For those of his readers who wanted to get acquainted with the history of Palestine and these Jewish aspirations but were unable to spare the time to do it themselves, he was offering this series about the history and geography of Palestine up to present time. The first instalment was dedicated to a description of the various names of the region and its history, while the second covered its geography, cities, and population. Interestingly, in contrast to the series in *Filastin*, the

<sup>28</sup> “Filastin” [Palestine], *al-Tabl*, 16-19.07.1923.

author made no mention of the history of the Arabs in Palestine before the age of Islamic conquests. On the contrary, he stated bluntly that the history of Palestine had begun since the Hebrews' arrival from Egypt after having wandered in the Sinai Desert for forty years. The rest was a straightforward telling of ancient Jewish history until their dispersal by the Romans following the Bar Kochba revolt. From here the narrative jumped to the Arab conquest of Jerusalem and then to the conquest of the Seljuks, whose plundering led to the Crusades according to the author. The subsequent conquests of the Crusaders, the Ottomans, and the Allied Powers were mentioned in quick succession. The short shrift given to the whole Islamic period was striking, especially when compared with the series in *Filastīn*.

The second instalment of the series described the geographic features of the region, ending with its cities. The chief place was given to Jerusalem, and once again the emphasis was on its Jewish period and the importance it held for the Jews. Muslims were mentioned only once, in a passage that related how they had rebuilt the city after it had allegedly remained in ruins since the conquest of Nebuchadnezzar. All this would suggest that the whole series was based on translations from Western sources.

### 3. Individual Articles on History Published during 1919-1923

The newspapers also published individual articles on the general history of Palestine during the period 1919-1923. One of these, which appeared in *Lisān al-Arab*, was a short biography of Abu Ubaida, the famous Arab commander and companion of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, it dwelt only very briefly on his activities during the lifetime of the prophet and quickly proceeded to recount at some length his role in the conquest of many cities in Syria and Palestine. Since no biography of the other famous commanders of the early Islamic period was published in the extant issues, the choice of Abu Ubaida seems significant at a time when Faisal's Syrian kingdom had already been crushed by the French while the British Mandate, with its promise to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine, was approaching the point of ratification in the League of Nations.

Another individual article on history appeared in *Filastīn* during the same tense period leading to the ratification of the Mandate in July 1922.<sup>30</sup> In this article the author fulminated against the claim raised by a Jewish newspaper to the effect that the Jews had assisted Umar bin al-Khattab in his conquest of Jerusalem. He stated that this claim was only based on a story of dubious veracity related by some historians. According to it, a certain Jew had told Umar on his arrival in Syria that he would conquer Jerusalem. The author denied that the tale in question could be used to support this claim in face of all the evidence about Jewish antagonism toward and betrayal of the prophet and his companions. Then he proceeded to list all the instances in which Jews had reportedly tried to kill the prophet and taken advantage of Muslim setbacks in order to break their agreements with them as well as to make common cause with their enemies. He claimed that when the Muslims had

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<sup>29</sup> "Fī ālam al-tārīkh: Abu Ubaida Āmir ibn Jarrah" [In the World of History: Abu Ubaida Amir ibn Jarrah], *Lisān al-Arab*, 18.03.1922.

<sup>30</sup> "al-Yahūd wa'l-Islām" [The Jews and Islam], *Filastīn*, 13.06.1922.

finally emerged victorious from their troubles, some Jews had converted to Islam with the sole aim of sowing discord and civil strife through their covert subversive activities. He even held such Jewish activities responsible for the assassinations of Umar, Ali, Husain, and thousands of Muslims including the companions of the prophet. In the conclusion, he asked how it could be claimed in view of all these events that the Jews had helped Umar to conquer Jerusalem.

Yet another article in *Mir'āt al-Sharq* quoted passages from contemporary Western works on the Khazars, whose ruling elite had adopted Judaism in the eighth century.<sup>31</sup> The author pointed out that most of the Jews migrating to Palestine were from amongst the inhabitants of Russia and Poland. Based on these sources, he argued that the origins of the Jews of these two countries went back to the Khazar Turks and then rhetorically asked whether the goal of Zionism was “making Palestine Turkish once again.” This was a precursor of the post-1948 tendency among Palestinian writers to deny the historical connections of the contemporary Jews with the ancient Hebrews, positing them instead as descendants of Khazars.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. Histories of Jerusalem

The Arab press also published series and articles on the history of Jerusalem and other Palestinian cities during the period. The series and the article dwelling on the history of Jerusalem are most relevant to this study as they contained much material on the general history of Palestine as well. The earlier piece that appeared in *al-Nafā'is al-Asriyya*, in particular, was practically a history of Palestine with only occasional passages focusing on the city.<sup>33</sup> It was basically a juxtaposition of Biblical and ancient Jewish history, early Islamic history, and Crusader history, the first and third apparently translated from Western sources. The series stressed the tolerance of the Muslim conquerors of the city and dwelt on the masterpieces of architecture like the Dome of the Rock.<sup>34</sup>

The first part of the series was in the form of a chronicle of ancient Jewish history, arranged according to years or year intervals. It seems to be based on the same source or sources as the series “Syria in All its Periods,” published in the same newspaper, since many of their passages were exactly the same, or similar with greater detail. The history of Jerusalem was covered only as part of the history of Palestine and did not occupy the center of the narrative. This part extended to the Bar Kochba Revolt and the dispersal of Jews from Palestine. Then the narrative jumped quickly to the age of Islamic conquests and abandoned the chronicle form. Now it became a general Islamic history, again without a special focus on the city of Jerusalem. Still, a full installment was dedicated to the conquest of the city and a later instalment contained a lengthy passage about the construction of Masjid al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock. Umar was praised for his tolerance, as

<sup>31</sup> “Nubdha tārikhiyya” [Historical Article], *Mir'āt al-Sharq*, 30.06.1920.

<sup>32</sup> Litvak, “Constructing A National Past,” 100.

<sup>33</sup> “al-Quds: Ashhar hawāḍithihā al-tārikhiyya” [Jerusalem: Its Most Famous Historical Events], *al-Nafā'is al-Asriyya*, 01.02.1921-01.08.1922.

<sup>34</sup> Abu-Ghazaleh, *Arab Cultural Nationalism*, 82.



manifested in his consent to respond to the call of the townspeople who wanted to surrender the city to him and in his choice to perform his ritual prayers outside the Holy Sepulcher so that it would not be appropriated by the Muslims. The Fatimids' persecution of non-Muslims in early eleventh century was not glossed over.

With the arrival of the Seljuks in the Middle East, the history changed shape once again and became a full-fledged history of the age of the Crusades, with Jerusalem occupying only a modest place as in the previous two sections. It was not coincidental that a full third of the series was dedicated to the Age of Crusades, as Abu-Ghazaleh points out that this period held a symbolic significance for Palestinians, offering valuable parallels with the modern Zionist challenge to the Arab character of the country.<sup>35</sup> Although the series referred to the Seljuks' reported persecution of Christian pilgrims, it did not belabor this point and rather focused on the war between the Seljuks and Byzantines as well as on the Byzantine Emperor's call of aid from the Pope as the primary reasons for the Crusades. It also referred openly to Saladin's Kurdish origins and did not claim that his army was manned by Arabs. In this last respect, as we shall see, it diverged from the later *al-Karmil* article on the history of Jerusalem. The series concluded with the fall of Acre in 1291.

The second piece on the history of Jerusalem appeared in *al-Karmil*.<sup>36</sup> The unidentified author began with the assertion that Jerusalem was the most famous city in the world, with the richest history and greatest dignity. He proceeded with a passage on the historical names of the city, indicating that the Arabs had named the city as al-Quds or Bait al-Maqdis, by which names it was still known. This showed, according to the author, the overwhelming dominance of the Arabic language in the region. What followed then was a straightforward historical summary from the time of Jebusites and the Hebrew conquest onwards. The author occasionally drew some interesting parallels with his own day. Noting that Christianity gained strength in Palestine during Constantine's reign, he observed that this was just like the way Judaism was gaining strength under British rule during Herbert Samuel's term of office.

Relating the Islamic conquest of the city, the author stated that the residents opened their doors to caliph Umar after he had guaranteed the security of their lives, properties, and religious freedom as well as promising to withhold his permission from the Jews to live among them. The author stressed Umar's tolerance as in the earlier series in *al-Nafā'is al-Asriyya*, noting that the caliph kept his promise and allowed no massacre or plunder to take place. Thus, he said,

the minds of the townspeople were calmed down and filled with trust as they saw the justice of the Arabs and their loyalty to their promises, the kind of which they had never seen before or indeed after, even at the present age of civilization.

In this way he expanded the tolerance theme to involve all Arabs, in keeping with the more Arabist orientation of his piece when compared with the series in *al-Nafā'is al-Asriyya*. Like the author of that series, he noted that Umar preferred to perform his ritual prayers outside the Holy Sepulcher so that the Muslims would not later claim possession of it and "justice

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<sup>35</sup> Abu-Ghazaleh, "Arab Cultural Nationalism," 61.

<sup>36</sup> "Bait al-Maqdis" [Jerusalem], *al-Karmil*, 28.02.1923.

would be assured.” He asserted that the Christians lived in rest and peace during the reigns of the Four Caliphs, the Umayyads and the Abbasids. But he conceded that the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim destroyed their churches and forced many to convert to Islam. When the news reached Rome, he noted, some attributed this to “the machinations of Jews” and those in France were persecuted for this reason. In this last note as well as in the previous one about Umar promising to forbid Jews to settle in Jerusalem, a discreetly hostile attitude toward the latter was notable.

The author also adopted a more negative stance toward the Turks than the author of the *al-Nafā’is al-Asriyya* series, asserting that after the Turkomans’ capture of Jerusalem their chiefs went far in persecuting the Christians. The news of this persecution, brought to Europe by Peter the Hermit, then led to the launching of the First Crusade and the fall of Jerusalem. The author claimed as well that Saladin took along “an army of Arabs” to fight the Crusaders, and that “the Arabs” scored a brilliant victory in the battle of Hattin, eventually recapturing Jerusalem. It was interesting that the author completely disregarded the fact that Saladin’s army was made up of Turks and Kurds rather than Arabs. He incorrectly indicated that afterwards Saladin and Richard the Lion-Heart “took a liking to each other” and became friends. At this point he once again drew a parallel with his own day, remarking that this was perhaps the beginning of the amicable relations between the Arabs and the English. Then he observed that it was precisely these good relations that later turned the Arabs and their king Hussain into hostages, since they continued to cultivate the relations in question even after the English had marred them through the Balfour Declaration. In conclusion the author observed that the lesson to be drawn from this history of Jerusalem was that if it was separated from Greater Syria and occupied by a foreign nation, that nation would find no rest but instead be subjected to sufferings and upheavals until the city would return to its “natural state.” The Jews were aspiring in vain to take possession of it, therefore, and the English were promising them in vain that they would do so.

The other pieces on urban history that appeared in the Arab press during this period included the histories of Haifa,<sup>37</sup> Acre,<sup>38</sup> and Jaffa.<sup>39</sup> Unlike the histories of Jerusalem, however, they were strictly local history and hence remain outside the scope of this study.

### 5. Pieces on History Published after 1923

After 1923, as the “iron cage” (in Rashid Khalidi’s words)<sup>40</sup> of the Mandate and the Balfour Declaration kept tightening around the Palestinians, with actual political developments engaging the attention of newspapers more and more, historical series ceased to appear in the press. Still, in the tense atmosphere of the period leading from the first disturbances around the Western Wall in September 1928 to the large-scale riots in August 1929 and

<sup>37</sup> “Tārīkh Haifā” [History of Haifa], *al-Zahra*, 02.05.1922.

<sup>38</sup> “Akkā bain al-Salibiyyin wa Zāhir al-Umar, 1290-1750” [Acre Between the Crusaders and Zahir al-Umar, 1290-1750], *al-Zahra*, 01.07.1925.

<sup>39</sup> “Mafākhīr Yāfā al-tārīkhiyya” [Jaffa’s Historical Objects of Pride], *Filastīn*, 19.10.1926.

<sup>40</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

their immediate aftermath, two newspapers did publish articles touching on Palestinian history. Three of the articles, all published in *Filastīn*, contested the Western and Jewish historical interpretations that emphasized the Jewish historical character of the land. The fourth, published in *al-Karmil*, also underlined the contrast between the Arabic and Jewish histories in the country, but did this with the aim of condemning the land sales to the Jews. In the first article in *Filastīn*, entitled “What is the Right of Jews on Palestine?”<sup>41</sup> the author referred to *The Holy Jerusalem*, a booklet on the history of Palestine with an emphasis on that city, which he had recently read. He had found in it some important historical information that corroborated that Jews had no rightful claims on Palestine and showed the true motivation of the English in occupying the country. Citing the number of years during which Palestine had been ruled by Jews, Christians, and Muslims (denoted in the booklet as 107, 255, and 1147 respectively), he asked where the Jews’ right to invade the country derived from. He also cited the observation of the booklet’s author that the true motivation of the English was not to free Palestine and grant it to the Jews as a national home, as they told the latter to secure their consent and collaboration, but to protect Egypt and its routes of communication with India against any attempt from other Christian states. Based on the booklet, the author stated that the reasons why the Jews did not hold any claims on Palestine were many, some of them historical, some of them national, and some legal. The historical reason was that the Jews had not ruled Palestine for a long time, and it was in fact not their homeland or place of origin. According to the Torah, they were Chaldeans, as their ancestor Abraham had come to Palestine from Ur to flee from persecutions, just as his sons would migrate to Egypt and return thereafter. They were later expelled from Palestine as well due to their “evil social and political actions.” And although many opportunities had been available to them in later times to return to Palestine, they had not gone back. When they were allowed by the Persians to return from the Babylonian exile, for example, they had allegedly refused to do so. The national reason was that the Christians and Muslims had been in the majority in Palestine since the periods of Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammad respectively, and if the mere fact that Jews had once inhabited Palestine was enough to grant them the right of absolute rule over it, then the Christians and Muslims also held this right. If nations were given rights according to what had belonged to them in history, the booklet’s author pointed out, Jews would have possessed Egypt and Iraq, where they had lived for a long time (here the author of *Filastīn* added that they indeed aspired to possess them now as well), the Arabs would have demanded Spain, the Spaniards South America, and so on. As for the legal rights, the author of the article observed that the Jews of Europe had adopted the nationalities of their countries and were ignorant about Palestine, even unaware of its precise geographic location. He asked by what right they were now coming to a country whose native Arabic language they did not know and with whose population they had not even established a weak connection.

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<sup>41</sup> “Mā huwa haqq al-Yahūd fī Filastīn?” [What is the Right of the Jews in Palestine?], *Filastīn*, 19.02.1929.

In the second article, published only three days after the first in *Filastīn*, the author responded to a statement by British authorities to the effect that “Palestine was not Arab.”<sup>42</sup> After offering a short history of Palestine up to the Arab conquest, he stated that even Jewish historians did not deny that Palestine had never before or afterwards enjoyed the prosperity it did during the Arab period, particularly between 661 and 809 AD. In that age the Palestinians had preoccupied themselves with agriculture and trade, and their country had become a bridge between the East and West. This had been followed by wars with the Egyptians and the Crusaders, by the Egyptian invasion of 1831-1840, and most recently by the European occupation. From this brief history of Palestine, the author pointed out, it could be inferred firstly that the Jews were not amongst its original inhabitants, and secondly that their period in it had been little else than a period of wars between Jews and its indigenous people, on the one hand, and wars between Jews and external enemies coveting the land, on the other. It could also be grasped from this history that the first real civilization that had impressed its stamp on Palestine after the antiquity was the Arab civilization, and it still bore this stamp. The author added that in a history of Palestine recently published by Jews, they themselves confessed that they had never numbered among its farmers, merchants, or craftsmen.

And despite all this, the author complained, two authorities in London (Marquis Harrington and Sir Martin Conolly) had stated: “We should not ignore the historical fact that Palestine and Syria were not originally among the Arab countries.” “We know,” responded the author, “that our country was not Arab, just as England (similarly in its origins) was not English; but we must grasp why Palestine, for example, is not Egyptian or Persian, while Egypt and Persia are still existing states from amongst the many that have seized Palestine and ruled it for long generations.” Why did Palestine have to be Jewish, he further asked, while the Jews had never held a greater significance there than the Assyrians, Amorites, and others? He concluded by pointing out the overriding importance of the Suez Canal for the British and asking sardonically whether it would not be right for this reason alone that Palestine become British.

The third article in *Filastīn*, entitled “The Holy Land That is Becoming a National Homeland,” similarly challenged the Jews’ historical claims on Palestine.<sup>43</sup> Against these, the author brought up objections based on passages that he cited from the Torah. He pointed out that Abraham was promised but never given the Holy Land, which passed only much later to the hands of Jews. Even then, however, because of “their transgressions of God’s orders, obstinacy, and adoration of idols,” they had been driven from the land by its inhabitants and scattered to the farthest corners of the world. Under these conditions, the author remarked in conclusion, he could not see any reason why the League of Nations had approved the Balfour Declaration save for their wish to get rid of the Jews in their countries at the expense of Muslims. The latter had indeed lived in peace with the Jews for centuries, but now saw their religious values and holy lands under attack by the Zionists.

<sup>42</sup> “al-Haqīqa al-tārīkhiyya al-jadīda: Filastīn laysat Arabiyya!” [The New Historical Fact: Palestine is not Arab!], *Filastīn*, 22.02.1929.

<sup>43</sup> “al-Ard al-muqaddasa allatī tusbiḥu watanan qawmiyyan” [The Holy Land That is Becoming a National Homeland], *Filastīn*, 19.09.1929.

All these historical arguments in the press about the continuous Arab presence in Palestine since antiquity, together with the emphasis that the Jews had arrived from outside in far smaller numbers, controlled it only imperfectly for a much shorter period, and spent that time fighting its indigenous inhabitants rather than developing the kind of sophisticated civilization built by the Arabs, closely resembled those put forward by Palestinians in their numerous postwar pleas and declarations to dissuade the British from implementing the Balfour Declaration. This was also the case for the argument that former Jewish rule of Palestine gave them no rights over it in the present time, any more than the Arabs could claim Spain and other nations their former lands. These were vital points insofar as they served to argue that the Arabs of Palestine, unlike the Jews, had dwelt there in uninterrupted continuity and undergone a common historical development, which implied in turn that they constituted a nation and accordingly held a right to self-determination.<sup>44</sup>

The author of the fourth article, published in *al-Karmil*, approached these arguments from a different perspective. Even though he did mention them, underlining the long history of the Arabs and the much shorter history of the Jews in the country, he compared the former unfavorably with the latter as regards their present attachment to the Palestinian homeland.<sup>45</sup> The Jews had led only a short independent existence as a small state at the time of Solomon, he noted, and were dispersed in the Roman period to other parts of the world. There they had assumed local nationalities, contributing to their respective countries and gaining status and prestige. And despite all this the idea of a return to Palestine had never left their minds, not only the minds of the poor, but also of the rich and powerful like Lord Rothschild. The latter had spent large portions of his wealth to purchase and develop lands in Palestine, when this was seen as a waste of money by others. But now those lands had gained greatly in value, and he was settling them with Jewish workers. The latter, in their turn, were resisting poverty and hardships to realize their dream of recovering Palestine.

And what were the Arabs doing, asked the author. Their history in Palestine was long and uninterrupted, full of glorious traits and deeds, be them military, cultural, social, moral, or scientific. Nobody had been able to displace them from Palestine through thirteen centuries, and on the contrary, they had driven out the Europeans in the age of the Crusades, successfully recovering their homeland. And when the Seljuk Turks had occupied the Arabs' lands before that, they had not been able to gain a permanent presence there until they had embraced "the religion of the great Arab leader" (Mohammad) and turned themselves into a group from amongst them. But now, instead of preserving their lands, buying new ones, and developing them, most Arabs were selling Jews those lands that had been bought from the Byzantines and Crusaders with their ancestors' blood. Would the Palestinians selling their lands in this way be able to retain any of the millions they were receiving in payment, the author wondered. Those who did not value their

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<sup>44</sup> Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining*, 172, 176, 184; Porath, *Emergence*, 39-42; 54-55.

<sup>45</sup> "al-Farq bain al-Arab wa'l-Yahūd" [The Difference Between the Arabs and the Jews]. *al-Karmil*, 20.07.1929.

homeland and failed to respect the jihad of their forbears would certainly fail to make good use of their newly gained wealth.

At this point the author returned to his comparison of Jewish and Arab histories in Palestine, reproaching his fellow countrymen for failing to grasp the difference. The Jews had a meager history devoid of conquests like those of Arabs, he explained, and they had been confined by the Palestinians, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Arameans to a territory that had stretched at most from Damascus to Jaffa and from Amman to the sea. He observed that the ancient Jews had no industries to speak of, drawing on the skills of Palestinians for the minting of their coins and those of the Phoenicians for the building of their first Temple. All their culture was confined to David's Psalms, the Song of Solomon, and the Book of Joshua. How could this compare with the civilization of Arabs, their buildings in Baghdad, Damascus and Andalusia as well as the Masjid al-Aqsa, with their libraries housing millions of books, with their conquests reaching the furthest corners of Asia and Africa as well as the heart of Europe? If this was the case, the author asked in conclusion, why were the Jews in his day full of the spirit of nationalism, working and dying for its cause and aspiring through it to greatness and glory, while the Arabs were "content with depravity and ignominy, selling off their homeland"? Why was their virility manifested only in their quarrels? And why did the notables among the Arabs, "sons of history and of glory," sink so low as to sell their lands to the Jews instead of developing them as a homeland for themselves? Who would understand the secret behind this decline of Arabs and the awakening of the Jews?

### Epilogue

The examples of historiography published in the Palestinian Arab press in 1919-1929, and especially up to 1923, tend to support the theses of historians who argue that a "Palestinian Arab" identity had crystallized by the years following the Great War at the latest, that the "Palestinian" geographical and "Arab" ethnic components within this identity were fused without one submerging the other, and that the Palestinian identity was separated from the broader Bilād al-Shām identity. They provide this support against the theses of historians who, relying on history books only, date the formation of that identity to the 1930s at the earliest.

As it emerges from the Palestinian Arab press, there was definitely a wish on the part of newspaper editors and writers to see more work produced on the history and monuments of Palestine and to convey historical information to their readers. Arab identity was important as well, with some newspapers focusing on the history of "Arabs in Palestine" — a history that was assumed to begin with the peoples of ancient Canaan. But there were also articles that dwelt on the history of Palestine without direct reference to Arabs, focusing on ancient Hebrew history, the modern activities of Europeans, and the recent Jewish migration. Admittedly, Palestinian history could also be placed in the context of Syrian history in the earliest examples in 1919. But even then, the focus practically remained on Palestine and no history of Greater Syria appeared after the collapse of Faisal's

kingdom, suggesting that Palestine remained a distinct entity, separate from Syria, in the minds of the authors.

Thus, even if some of these pieces on the history of Palestine were hindered from adequately realizing their aims by a lack of methodology and originality, they did show that there was indeed a mixture of Palestinian patriotism and Arab nationalism by the Early Mandate period, components of a Palestinian Arab identity that became manifest among the pages of the popular medium of the press.

#### Declarations:

1. **Ethics committee approval:** Not needed for this study.
2. **Author contribution:** The author declares that no one else has contributed to the article.
3. **Competing interests:** The author declares no competing interests.
4. **Impartiality:** The author, who is on the editorial board of the journal, has not intervened in any stage of the evaluation and publication processes, and the double-blind peer review has been completed with strict adherence to the principles of scientific impartiality.

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