ARAB HISTORIOGRAPHY IN MANDATORY PALESTINE, 1920-1948

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By

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the historical works produced by the Arabs of Palestine during the period of British Mandatory rule. First I trace the perception of late Ottoman rule in Palestine, suggesting that, at first, the vicious war years left a profoundly bitter impression of Ottoman rule for most writers. In the 1920s, the Ottomans were, for the most part, deemed tyrannical and backward usurpers who failed to bring civilization to the Arabs. As the war years faded in the mid-late 1930s and 1940s, we find a much more positive portrayal of late Ottoman rule over Palestine. Second, I trace attitudes towards British rule. It may be surprising, for many scholars bent on demonizing the colonial powers, that the British were, at first, embraced with white flags and flying colors. For many Arabs in Palestine, they continued to be considered liberators rather than colonizers for the first few years after their arrival in Palestine—notwithstanding their support for Zionism and their broader colonial ambitions in the Near East. By the mid-late 1920s and 1930s, to be sure, this attitude had all but vanished and a strong anti-British feeling came to dominate Arab historiography in Palestine until the very end of the Mandate. Third, I trace loyalties and identities during the Mandate period. I argue that, in the 1920s, local loyalties to cities and towns were the most significant identity markers, followed by Arab and religious loyalties, both of which were also very important. In the 1920s, a territorial identification with Bilad al-Sham or Suriyya rivaled if not trumped a territorial identification with Filastin. Even in
the 1920s, though, it would be a mistake to consider either of these broader territorial identifications *loyalties* insofar as they did not trigger a sense of self-sacrifice nor did they carry with them much emotive power. Not until the late 1920s and early 1930s did Palestine triumph over broader territorial identifications such as Syria and not until the mid-late 1930s and 1940s did this territorial identification with Palestine emerge as a key source of loyalty for many of the region’s inhabitants. All the while, the historical works suggest the growing importance of an Arab identity and the declining importance of religious loyalties.
I would like to acknowledge Salim Tamari, Sara Scalenghe, Aviel Roshwald and Mustafa Aksakal for reading previous drafts of this paper and providing very helpful comments. I would also like to thank the Cosmos Club, the Oman Research Grant, the Beinecke Scholarship and the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University for providing generous funds to collect materials and carry out the research for this paper. Finally, I would like to thank Jon Rose, Lawrence McMahon, Daniel Balson and Sara Bergamaschi for many enlightening conversations. I dedicate this paper to my pet mouse, who has seen this project through from its earliest stages.

Many thanks,
Zachary J. Foster
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INTRODUCTION

SECTION ONE

Introduction

This is a study of the historical works produced by the Arabs of Palestine during the period of British Mandatory rule. I will focus on three aspects of this vast corpus of literature: how the historians perceived their erstwhile Ottoman overlords, the British and themselves (i.e. their loyalties and identities). Of course, the Mandate spanned some three decades, so we will need to pay close attention to how these works evolved over the course of the period. It will also be necessary to assess the historiography in light of other sources for the period if the goal is to understand broader trends in Arab society.

In section one I trace the perception of late Ottoman rule in Palestine, suggesting that, at first, the vicious war years left a profoundly bitter impression of Ottoman rule for most writers. In the 1920s, the Ottomans were, for the most part, deemed tyrannical and backward usurpers who failed to bring civilization to the Arabs. As the war years faded in the mid-late 1930s and 1940s, we find a much more positive portrayal of late Ottoman rule over Palestine.

In section two I trace attitudes towards British rule. It may be surprising, for many scholars bent on demonizing the colonial powers, that the British were, at first, embraced with white flags and flying colors. After four years of misery and mass death – i.e. World War I – most people were quite happy to see British rather than Ottoman soldiers in control of the region. For many Arabs in Palestine, they continued to be considered liberators rather than colonizers for the first few years after their arrival in Palestine—notwithstanding their support for Zionism and their

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1 For a reasonably comprehensive list of historical books published by Arabs from the region that would become British Mandatory Palestine, see appendix 1.
broader colonial ambitions in the Near East. By the mid-late 1920s and 1930s, to be sure, this attitude had all but vanished and a strong anti-British feeling came to dominate Arab historiography in Palestine until the very end of the Mandate.

The third section utilizes the historical works to trace loyalties and identities during the Mandate period. I argue that, in the 1920s, local loyalties to cities and towns were the most significant identity markers, followed by Arab and religious loyalties, both of which were also very important. In the 1920s, a territorial identification with *Bilad al-Sham* or *Suriyya* rivaled if not trumped a territorial identification with *Filastin*. Even in the 1920s, though, it would be a mistake to consider either of these broader territorial identifications loyalties insofar as they did not trigger a sense of self-sacrifice nor did they carry with them much emotive power. Not until the late 1920s and early 1930s did Palestine triumph over broader territorial identifications such as Syria and not until the mid-late 1930s and 1940s did this territorial identification with Palestine emerge as a key source of loyalty for many of the region’s inhabitants. All the while, the historical works suggest the growing importance of an Arab identity and the declining importance of religious loyalties.

**Literature Review**

This section will review previous scholarly efforts to make sense of historical writing in Mandatory Palestine. Tarif Khalidi’s excellent article “Palestinian Historiography: 1900-1948” situates Palestinian historiography within the broader story of the *nahda*, the rediscovery and growth of, alongside the explosion of writing, reading and printing in the Arabic language.
beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. His main argument is that “much of this historical activity came to centre on the history of the Arabs and of Palestine, in an attempt to re-define the place that Palestine occupied in the Arab world in general and to emphasize its ties to Egypt and Syria in particular.” I believe Tarif Khalidi is correct; indeed, I think he underestimates just how important a role Egypt and Syria played in the growth, trajectory and development of Palestinian intellectual life, particularly historical writing. If he undervalues the significance of Damascus, Beirut and Cairo, then, I believe he overemphasizes the importance of Palestine as a source of loyalty or identity—at least in the 1920s and early 1930s.

The next significant work, Beshara Doumani’s “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine,” focuses on Palestinian and Israeli historiography of late Ottoman Palestine, making his essay relevant primarily for section one of this paper. He suggests that Palestinian historiography from its origins in the 1920s through the 1980s can be grouped into two broad categories. The “Call to Battle” genre, written largely by an emerging middle class, “focused primarily on exposing the goals, strategy and methods of the Zionist movement, the motivations of British policy, and the sources of Palestinian resistance and thus paid little attention to the Ottoman period.” By contrast, the “Affirmation of Identity” genre, written by an older generation of notables, he suggests, focused to a greater extent on the Ottoman period, utilized more indigenous forms of writing (i.e. biographical dictionaries, local histories) and exploited local archival sources—such as shari’a court records. Doumani’s broad temporal scope is impressive, but it precludes him

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2 Khalidi, “Palestinian Historiography.” He suggests that with the advent of foreign missionary schools, the expansion of literacy, the Zionist onslaught and the Constitutional Revolution in Istanbul that led to the publication of dozens of periodicals and newspapers in Palestine, the environment was ripe for Palestinian historical writing to emerge in the 1920s.

3 Doumani, “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine,” 10
from making analytical distinctions among works written in the 1920s, 1950s and 1970s. This is why, for instance, his argument about Arab historians’ views of the Ottomans during the Mandate period is based entirely on the works of Ihsan al-Nimr. I believe with a more analytically careful focus and more attention to nuance we can offer a more compelling explanation for general attitudes towards the Ottomans during the Mandate period, and how this perception evolved from the 1920s to the late 1940s.

The third significant work on the subject, Adnan Abu-Ghazaleh’s *Arab Cultural Nationalism in Palestine*, stresses two dominant trends of the historical works of the Mandate period—although his focus is the late 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and beyond rather than the Mandate period. The “traditional Islamic tendency to deal almost exclusively with the Islamic era,” he writes, coupled with the “Arabist tendency” to deal with the “indivisible historical mission of the Arabs” are the two main foci of historical writing for the period. This paper agrees with his assessment that Islamic and Arabist tendencies were central. Abu-Ghazaleh, however, fails to consider loyalties to both cities and to Palestine, subjects that will be dealt with at some length below. Moreover, he fails to examine change over time, such as the growing importance of an Arab identity and the diminishing importance of an Islamic identity, as I shall argue below. With the exception of these three article-length works, however, very few scholars have paid much attention to the Arabic historical works of Mandatory Palestine.

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4 Abu-Ghazaleh, *Arab Cultural Nationalism*, 70. See also his article, “Arab Cultural Nationalism,” which covers some things not dealt with in the book chapter.
5 A few others have touched on the historical works. However, they either focus in principle on a later period, such as Porath, “Palestinian Historiography,” deal with the historiography in a terse and fleeting manner, such as Litvak, “Constructing A National Past,” or focus on a mere subset of the works with a historical nature, such as Salim Tamari’s excellent chapter on nativist ethnographical writing in Mandatory Palestine. See Tamari, *Mountain Against the Sea*, ch.6.
Thus we can garner from Tarif Khalidi, Beshara Doumani and Adnan Abu-Ghazaleh that (1) the Ottomans were at once regarded as backwards despots, ignored and romanticized (i.e. they were everything and nothing at the same time) and that (2) the most important subjects of interest were Palestine (according to Khalidi), British/Zionist (according to Doumani), Arab (according to Khalidi and Abu-Ghazaleh) and Islamic (according to Abu-Ghazaleh). The present study seeks to make sense of all this in a few key respects. The first is to be reasonably comprehensive. The second is to pay close attention to how these attitudes and loyalties evolved over the period. Third is to pay close attention to how much was written about what. Forth is to assess these works against other sources for the period to see if we can make broader conclusions about Arab society in Palestine during the Mandate period.

As for a roadmap of this paper, the normative perceptions and attitudes towards the Ottomans will constitute section one, their attitudes towards the British section two, and the ways in which their works shed light on aspects of their identities and loyalties will occupy the final (and longest) section. Let us begin, however, with a brief biographical sketch of our authors.

**Biographical Sketch**

These men (it seems there were no women) were by all accounts the *crème de la crème* of Arab society in Palestine. They served as public intellectuals, lecturers, politicians, lawyers, educators, newspaper editors, school principals, Mandatory officials and priests. Although none of them were trained historians, they are the closest thing Arab Mandatory Palestine has to them; they were writing history without any formal training in the methods, sources and analytical and theoretical strategies of the historical profession. They nevertheless made use of a variety of incredibly innovative sources, far more innovative than their counterparts writing in Western
Europe or the United States on similar topics – especially on nineteenth and twentieth century history of the region itself. They utilized published works in a variety of languages, local newspapers and journals, oral history, family papers and personal correspondences, unpublished manuscripts as well as eyewitness testimony. This is not to say they got everything right, or that they were objective. But, on the whole, I would characterize many of these works, including those by Kanaan, Totah, al-‘Arif, al-Darwaza, Mansur, Bahri, al-Sabbagh al-Akkawi, al-Nimr, Tuqan, Ziyadah, al-Sabbagh, Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi, Antonius and others as very serious attempts to understand what happened in the past.

Let’s take a closer look at their backgrounds. Khalil Totah, one of the more prolific writers of the period, was born to Quaker converts in Ramallah, later taught English there, and continued on for his B.A. at Clark College in the U.S. He was the principal of the Friends Boys School in Ramallah from 1912-14 and then again from 1927-1944. He pursued his M.A. and Ph.D in

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6 Nimr, Jabal Nablus wa al-Baqar (vol. 1), 4-5; Totah and Shihadah, Tarikh al-Quds, 9; al-‘Arif, Tarikh Ghazza, 3-5; al-‘Arif includes a lengthy list of published sources he consulted, including 40 books in Arabic, 25 in English, 4 in French and 3 in Turkish; al-Barghouthi and Totah list some 25 Arabic language sources consulted and 11 works in English, al-Barghouthi and Totah, Tarikh Filastin, 287; See also al-Sabbagh al-Akkawi, Tarikh al-Shaykh Thahir al-‘Umar al-Zaydani, 7-8.
7 Totah and Shihadah, Tarikh al-Quds, 103. They consulted the following newspapers in Arabic, English and Hebrew: Mir‘at al-Sharq, Bayt al-Maqdis, al-Aqsa, Barid al-Yawm, Palestine Weekly, Davar Hayom and Ha‘aretz; the journals: al-Nafa‘is al-‘Asriyya, Majallat Bayt-Lehem, Majallat Dar al-Mu‘alimin; al-Sabbagh al-Akkawi consulted the Egyptian paper Muqtataf and the Beirut paper al-Janan founded by Butrus al-Bustani in 1870, see al-Sabbagh al-Akkawi, Tarikh al-Shaykh Thahir al-‘Umar al-Zaydani, 8.
8 See, for instance, al-‘Arif, Toldot Bi‘r Sheva, 4; Totah and Shihadah, Tarikh al-Quds, 33. In the later, they seemed to have gathered stories and memories from Ibrahim Pasha’s occupation of Palestine in the 1830s.
10 al-Sabbagh al-Akkawi, Tarikh al-Shaykh Thahir al-‘Umar al-Zaydani, 4-6.
11 Mansur, Tarikh Nasira, 106
12 We should mention here that Porath describes Palestinian historical writing from the 1950s and 1960s as biased often inconsistent with the facts. See Porath, “Palestinian Historiography.” Insofar as our focus is the Mandate period, his argument is less relevant here.
education at Columbia University, all the while serving as the principal of the Governor’s Teaching Training College in Jerusalem.13

Bulus Shihadah, a Christian from Ramallah, served as a teacher in Acre, Gaza and Bethlehem, acted as the spokesman for the Haifa branch of the CUP, was a confidant of and adviser to Abbas Efendi, son of the founder of the Bahai faith, wrote a number of significant works of poetry and was a frequent contributor to the Lebanese and Egyptian literary scene before the war. Shihadah later played a number of important leadership roles in the al-Hizb al-Watani party (the linchpin for the mu‘aridun [opposition] faction in Palestinian politics of the Mandate period) and founded and edited the newspaper Mir‘at al-Sharq, one of the longest-running Arabic newspapers published in Palestine during the Mandate period.14

‘Umar Salih al-Barghouthi, who, unlike most of our authors, hails from rural Palestine (Dayr Ghassana, north of Jerusalem), was shipped off for schooling to Jerusalem and Beirut. He founded the clandestine al-Jam‘iyya al-‘Arabiyya al-Sirriyya (The Arab Secret Society) in the late Ottoman period and later joined another secret movement—al-‘Ahad. Graduating from the Institute of Palestinian Law (al-Ma‘had al-Huquq al-Filastini) in 1924, he served as a lawyer, law professor and an extremely prolific writer. Politically, he joined the al-Hizb al-Watani (alongside Shihadah), and, in the 1930s, the pan-Arab Istiqlal party – maintaining his strong opposition to the al-Husseini-dominated national leadership.15

13 Interview with Joy Totah, daughter of Khalil Totah, San Diego, CA, 20 November, 2009. See also Khalili A. Totah and Eva Marshall Totah Papers, HC.1210, Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections (http://www.haverford.edu/library/special/aids/totah/totah.pdf), accessed 4 April, 2011; See also Ricks, Turbulent Times in Palestine.
14 Mir‘at al-Sharq 22 March 1928. For a more detailed study of his newspaper, Mir‘at al-Sharq, see Foster, “Arabness, Turkey and the Palestinian National Imagination.” For more on Palestinian factional politics of the Mandate, see Porath, The Emergence, ch. 5; Wasserstein, The British in Palestine, ch. 10.
15 See also al-Barghouthi’s memoirs, al-Barghouthi, al-Marahil, 13-14.
Muhammad ‘Izzat al-Darwaza, another extremely prolific writer, was born to a prominent Muslim Nablusite merchant family. He was an Ottoman bureaucrat, one of Faysal’s chief advisors in Damascus from 1918-20 and secretary of the First Syrian National Congress, principle of the al-Najah school in Nablus, and founder of the pan-Arab Istiqlal party. In 1937 the British exiled him to Damascus for instigating revolt, where he spent a number of years in prison, after which point he spent some time in Bursa, Turkey.

‘Arif al-‘Arif, born to a Muslim family in Jerusalem, studied politics and economics in Istanbul, worked as translator for the Ottoman Foreign Ministry, founded the newspaper Suriyya al-Janubiyya (Southern Syria), a short-lived post-War newspaper in Palestine, and later served many important positions in the British Mandatory government. He was one of the more careful and serious historians of the period, and, in the 1960s, was one of the earliest writers to utilize Shari’a court records.

Jamil Bahri was a key literary figure in Palestine, having established the al-maktaba al-jama’a printing press of Haifa in 1920 as well as two literary journals, Zahrat al-Jamil and al-Zahra in 1920. He dramatized many fictional texts and was fond of translating detective stories from European languages until his premature death in 1930. As‘ad Mansur was a Protestant (Anglican) priest and the head of a Nazareth Church beginning in 1905. Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi was educated in Jerusalem, at the American University of Beirut, later served as principal of the Arab College and, in 1941, Deputy Director of Palestine’s Education

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17 Many of his works, however, were lost or destroyed in 1948. See Bahri, Tarikh Haifa, 28; Jayyusi, Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature, 13.
18 Mansur, Tarikh al-Nasira, 102, 198, 214, 260-1. He had already begun writing his extraordinary rich and detailed history of Nazareth before the war, see Peled, “Palestinian Literature.”
Department. Ihsan al-Nimr hailed from one of the most prominent Muslim families of Nablus, lived off the revenues of family properties and spent much of his time in scholarly pursuits and political activism.\textsuperscript{19} al-Nimr, to the best of my knowledge, is the earliest historian anywhere in the Arab world or the West to utilize shari‘a courts records (in 1938) to write social history.

What emerges from this biographical snapshot is that many if not most of the Palestine’s historians were educated abroad in the regional epicenters – Cairo, Beirut and Istanbul – they hailed from elite-urban families, which, as we know, grew in prominence in the late Ottoman period due to the Tanzimat reforms. They were also disproportionately non-Muslims, many of who had benefited most from European economic and cultural penetration in the late Ottoman period. Although not mentioned above, most also served in the Ottoman army during World War I in largely bureaucratic or other non-combat roles.\textsuperscript{20} After the war they took up the most important positions in the British Mandatory government and became the intellectual leadership of Palestine (and, in some cases, the region) throughout the period under consideration. It is noteworthy, as well, that many were involved with or supported the oppositional faction, the Nashashibi clan, rather than the Husseini family-clan, which dominated most of the national bodies throughout the Mandate period, such as the Arab Executive and the Supreme Muslim Council. Alas, many died in exile in the post-1948 period.

\textit{Methodological Considerations}

It is important to note that many of the history books were written at the behest of the British authorities for use in the Mandatory education system. It is worth considering, then, if British

\textsuperscript{19} Doumani “Archiving Palestine,” 9.
\textsuperscript{20} This also suggests that the intellectual class of Palestine managed to avert the worst dangers of war by financial subvention, bribery or by possessing technical, literary or medical skills that helped them escape the front line.
oversight of the school textbooks hinders our ability to garner information about attitudes and identities. To be sure, British tutelage no doubt tempered potentially hostile remarks directed towards the British.\textsuperscript{21} Although a great deal of self-censorship certainly obtained in the history books commissioned by the British, it would appear that in some cases the textbook writers wrote what they wanted to anyway.\textsuperscript{22} I believe, then, that with careful attention to detail, semantics and tone, there is much to discern from even the textbooks about genuine attitudes, loyalties, and identities in Palestine during the Mandate period. In any case, most of the historically minded books written were not earmarked for the Mandatory education system and it seems censorship was less pervasive in these cases. Moreover, many authors chose to publish their works in Cairo, Beirut and Sidon, meaning they would have averted British censorship altogether.\textsuperscript{23} Thus, we should be careful in our analysis to distinguish between books commissioned by the British and books written indigenously.

The reader will retort, as well, that many of the Mandate period’s most prominent historians, including Tawfiq Kanaan, Niqua Ziyadah, Khalil Totah, Bulus Shihadah and As‘ad Mansur and others hailed from non-Muslim minority communities who, on average, tended to have rather different views and loyalties than their Muslim counterparts, such as their stronger identification

\textsuperscript{21} See, for instance, Totah and Shihadah, \textit{Tarikh al-Quds}, 1.

\textsuperscript{22} This is the case with al-Barghouthi and Totah’s \textit{Tarikh Filastin}, which was extremely critical of Zionism. This is, according to Tibawi, the reason why it was temporarily banned. See Tibawi, \textit{Arab Education}, 198. Other writers, like Totah and Shihadah, discuss all of the Holy sites of Jerusalem—that is, all of the Christian and Muslim sites. There is virtually no mention of anything Jewish of historical importance in the city. Thus, it is not clear what effect, if any, the British censorship had on making their book “even-handed.” Third, a number of authors take opposing positions on certain issues—such as the nature of late Ottoman rule in Palestine, to be discussed below, a fact which points to relative freedom of expression. Fourth, even when the narrative itself is dry and ostensibly dispassionate, as we would expect given the censorship, a careful reading suggests subtle undertones. This is the case for instance, with Sa’id al-Sabbagh, who writes an extremely dry and dispassionate narrative of World War I and the Faisal period in \textit{Bilad al-Sham}, all the while describing the Arabs who fought and died defending Faisal’s regime with great pride. The Arab heroes (abtal), he writes, triumphed (taghallabat) in great sacrifice and bravery against the French invaders in July 1920. See al-Sabbagh, \textit{al-Madaniyyat al-Qadima}, 182-3.

\textsuperscript{23} More work is needed in the French archives to determine what if any French censorship existed.
It is certainly the case that Christians were earlier to develop nation-state loyalties in the Middle East, including in Palestine. I do not deny this possibly, although, to the best of my knowledge, there exists no serious comparative study between Christians and Muslims of the development of a Palestinian national identity, which means that the jury is still out on this question.

Critics will also retort that Christians tended to be more pro-British. To this I would suggest that when we consult a broader array of sources for the first few years after the British arrival in December 1917 (the period in which I claim there were widespread pro-British attitudes), including memoirs, dairies, traveler accounts, Zionist reports and the Arabic press, we get the sense that these historians were not solely appeasing the British nor speaking merely for their own religious minorities but rather describing a genuine feeling of euphoria and pro-British sentiments which took hold in Palestine in the years following the war, as we shall see below. And indeed, by the 1930s and 1940s, most writers were anti-British, regardless of religious background, so this issue becomes less problematic.

We should emphasize that our writers do not in any literal sense represent Palestinian society: au contraire, they are mostly, although not entirely, social and political elites from the

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24 According to a 1922 British census, population figures were as follows: 589,177 Muslims, 71,464 Christians and 83,790 Jews. The disproportionate number of Christians in any study of intellectual history in Palestine is well-known to the careful observer. It is a general problem that many of the extant sources for the period were written by Christians. The major newspapers, for instance, such as Mir‘at al-Sharq (Bulus Shihadah), al-Karmil (Najib Nassar) and Filastin (‘Isa al-‘Isa), al-Nafir (Ilya Zaka), al-Akbar and Bayt al-Maqdis were all edited by Christians. See “Summary of the Arab newspapers published in Eretz Yisrael” (in Hebrew), 19 December 1921, Central Zionist Archives (CZA) S22/389. We should add that one would be hard pressed to find a single scholar who dismisses the press as a “Christian” phenomenon and does not use it as evidence for general attitudes. Many of the memoirs and diaries from the late Ottoman and Mandate periods were also written by non-Muslims, such as Wasif Jawhariyya, Khalil al-Sakikani and Khalil Totah (a Quaker). Moreover, a disproportionately large number of Christians were hired to work in the British Mandatory apparatus. In 1921, there were 2751 civil servants in Palestine, 1338 Christians, 719 Muslims and 514 Jews. See Filastin 13 August 1921; see also Wasserstein, The British in Palestine, 169. Thus the problem of source bias is largely inevitable.
urban centers of Palestine. Nevertheless, their ideas informed the public debate; their books were read throughout the Arab schools in Palestine, private libraries and homes of interested readers; they were prominent politicians, educators and priests; their newspapers were read aloud in village and city cafes, they were distributed across urban and rural centers alike; and their influence over Arab education in the Mandatory government was significant. Moreover, a wide range of other sources for the period corroborates much of what they wrote, as we shall see below. This essay, then, is more than just an exercise in understanding elite male behavior. It is a study of how historical writing can shed light on the attitudes and identities of the Arab population of Mandatory Palestine.

Section Two

Late Ottoman Rule

The historical works from the 1920s tell the hackneyed story of “Ottoman despotism.” In the first place this is suggested by the extremely terse treatment by most writers of the period as well as by the fact that not a single writer wrote a book on the Ottoman period per se. Bahri, for instance, writing in 1922, summarizes the pre-World War I past in two pages. Totah and Shihadah in their *Tarikh al-Quds* (1920) dedicate merely three pages to “Turkish” rule (including the Mamluks), concluding that the “Turks” did not leave behind a historic imprint on Jerusalem, nor did they “work towards advancements in education, commerce, agriculture or public health.” Through the period of “Turkish” rule, al-Sabbagh al-Akkawi writes in (1927/35?), we witnessed tyranny (jawr) malice (sharr) and people lived in constant terror (rahba) and fear.

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25 For more on literacy rates, newspaper distribution figures and reading culture, see Ayalon, *Reading Palestine*; al-Najjar, *The Arabic Press*, ch. 2; Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, ch. 3.
27 Totah and Shihadah, *Tarikh al-Quds*, 34.
(khawf) from the government. Totah and al-Barghouthi, writing in 1923, are no more generous. Having ruled us for 300 years, they add, the “Turks did not leave behind any semblance of civilization.” In a rhetorical outburst, they ask, “Where are their [the Turks’] military barracks? Where is there urban development [in Palestine]? Where are their [the Turks’] schools and scientific institutions? Where are their architectural feats and progressive reforms?”

If we move from general attitudes to the last few years of Ottoman rule—i.e. World War I—the perception becomes even grimmer. Bahri (1922) merely describes the war as an “anniversary of pain.” Al-Barghouthi and Totah (1923) squarely blame the Ottomans for many of the problems that beset Palestine during the war. They write that after the locusts destroyed much of the crop in 1915, the government appointed Turkish soldiers and officers to manage the situation, thereby condemning the people of Jerusalem to their own destruction. The economic situation was put in shambles, commerce and trade were brought to a standstill, living expenses skyrocketed, land-reserves turned dry and the “poor experienced unbearable anguish.” Mansur (1924) is no more congenial. He includes probably the most detailed extant description of the Ottoman military occupation of Nazareth, beginning on 21 August 1914. The Ottoman army in Nazareth—comprised largely of Arab soldiers—demanded a courtesy payment of 2500 to be paid in kind upon their arrival. Having disposed the mayor, he writes, they proceeded door-to-door for cash and loot, gathering about 2500 Ottoman lira in the first week of the military occupation of the city. They pillaged the marketplace, plundered personal savings, perfumes,

\[\text{28} \text{ al-Sabbagh al-Akkawi, } Tarikh al-Shaykh Thahir al-'Umar al-Zaydani, 4.\]
\[\text{29} \text{ al-Barghouthi and Totah, } Tarikh Filastin, 226.\]
\[\text{30} \text{ Bahri, } Tarikh Haifa, 35.\]
\[\text{31} \text{ al-Barghouthi and Totah, } Tarikh Filastin, 252.\]

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towels, silk stockings, carpets, chairs and other luxuries that were “totally irrelevant for military purposes,” as Mansur suggests.\textsuperscript{32} What was stolen was immediately turned around and sold to other soldiers and friends. “If [the Ottoman army] needed ten houses [for military purposes], Mansur writes, “they would place a military order on one hundred houses, take ten for military purposes, and extract bribes from the owners of the other ninety.”\textsuperscript{33} Many other sources would seem to confirm strong anti-Ottoman attitudes during the war and the immediate post-War period.\textsuperscript{34}

At the same time, however, Turkey emerged from the ashes of the “evil empire” as a beacon of progress and modernity, a source of emulation, heroism, strong leadership, national unity and a symbol of resistance to colonial occupation, at least in the eyes of many Arabs in Palestine. It seems that by shedding itself of its Ottoman past, the new Turkish republic was able to win the loyalty and confidence of his Arab counterparts in Palestine.\textsuperscript{35} And, to be sure, there is some evidence of pro-Ottoman attitudes even in the early 1920s, although usually the pro-Ottoman attitude is juxtaposed to anti-British sentiments.\textsuperscript{36} The evidence, therefore, is somewhat mixed.

\textsuperscript{32} Mansur, \textit{Tairkh Nasira}, 106.
\textsuperscript{33} Mansur, \textit{Tairkh Nasira}, 106.
\textsuperscript{34} In many cases, the Arabic press, memoirs and diaries of the period similarly disparage the Ottomans for their cruelty, despotism, negligence and backwardness in the 1920s. See \textit{Filastin}, 8 June 1921, 3 December 1921; \textit{Mir’at al-Sharq} 22 December 1921, 30 January 1926; for memoirs and diaries, see, for instance, Tamari ‘Am al-Jarad, especially 79, 148, 276; Ricks, \textit{Turbulent Times in Palestine}, 194, 205, 208, 210-11.
\textsuperscript{35} For evidence of pro-Turkish attitudes, see, for instance, \textit{Filastin} 19 April 1921, 25 June 1921, 11 August 1922; \textit{Mir’at al-Sharq}, 27 May 1922; 19 June 1926. In one instance, \textit{Mir’at al-Sharq} published a full-blown panegyric to Kemal titled “We Want a Man like Mustafa Kemal: Where is He?, \textit{Mir’at al-Sharq} 13 February 1926; For more, see a petition in Kayyali, \textit{Watha’iq al-Muqawama al-Filastiniya al-‘Arabiyya}, 66; Jawhariyya, al-Quds al-Intidabiyya, 94; Foster, \textit{Arabness, Turkey and the Palestinian National Imagination}, 72-4; Porath, \textit{The Emergence}, 161-169; Muslih, \textit{Origins of Palestinian Nationalism}, 200.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Filastin} wrote on 17 August 1921 that “the Turkish government had established schools called the sultaniyya schools… the sciences taught were extremely advanced… mechanical engineering, theoretical mathematics, philosophical comptuation, astronomy… They taught Arabic, Turkish, French, German, English.” The paper added that “it is important to remember that the Turkish government produced great improvements in its Sultaniyaa schools so much so that its degrees became accepted in France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Australia, and they are
On the whole, however, the Ottomans did not find a happy place in the historical memory of Arab writers in the decade after the arrival of the British. It seems that by the late 1930s and 1940s we begin to find a more positive portrayal of late Ottoman rule in Palestine in the historiography. The war memories faded, and the Ottomans did not seem all that bad after some two decades of British rule. Al-Sabbagh, writing in 1944, exalts late Ottoman rule in Palestine, especially Sultan Abd al-Hamid II and his appointee for the governor of Syria, Midhat Pasha. The later, described as a “great man,” improved agriculture, paved roads, drained swamps, buttressed industry, established Islamic charity organizations and spread education. On the last point, al-Sabbagh is particularly proud of Midhat Pasha, adding that he established a number of national schools in Syria which contributed to the Syrian nahda. The Ottoman Turks built primary and secondary schools as well as law, medical, administrative and military colleges. In a successful effort to improve transportation and commerce, he writes, they extended railways from Jerusalem to Jaffa (1892), Beirut-Damascus-Mazirib (1895), Riyaq-Aleppo (1902), Homs-Tripoli (1911), as well as the Hijazi line, beginning in between Damascus-Dar’a, also connection Haifa, Acre, from Dar’a to Amman (1908).³⁷ Even al-Sabbagh’s treatment of the war years is reasonably generous to the Ottomans. The Ottoman state, he notes, dispatched Jamal Pasha to Syria to strengthen security and prepare for

qualified to enter the great universities without an entrance exam in specialized branches of science like medicine, law, agriculture, pharmacy, commerce.” For more evidence of pro-Ottoman attitudes (usually linked to strong anti-British/anti-Zionist sentiments) in the early Mandate period, see Filastin 27 May 1921, in which the paper wrote that “we must remember that the Turks protected this country, they resisted Zionist greed, imperialism and occupation.” Still, the article is ambivalent. At the same time, “they [the Ottomans] worked to establish mistrust among Arabs and stunt their political ambitions and education opportunities.” In 1925 Mir’at al-Sharq wrote in similar vein that each province of the empire sent delegates to the representative assembly in Istanbul. The paper added with a heavy dose of nostalgia about Arab-Turkish relations. “They had representatives, they had representatives, they had ministers, we had ministers, they had arbiters, we had arbiters, they contributed soldiers, we contributed soldiers.” Mir’at al-Sharq 27 April 1925.

³⁷ al-Sabbagh, al-Madaniyyat al-Qadima, 176.
an attack on the Suez Canal. Jamal Pasha abolished the capitulations previously granted to foreigners and persecuted the Arabs who had fought against the Turkification policies before the war. To be sure, al-Sabbagh acknowledges that Jemal Pasha sentenced many Arab nationalists to death. But he adds that the death sentences were issued on account of evidence found in the French consul, proving that some of them sought assistance from the French government to undermine the Ottoman state. Jamal Pasha, he adds, considered this treasonous, and condemned them to death by hanging.\footnote{38 ibid, 178-9.} What differentiates al-Sabbagh from the historians writing in the 1920s is that he explains why Jamal Pasha condemned them to death and neglects to describe the regime as despotic, backwards or oppressive.

To these writers we can add Muhammad ‘Izzat al-Darwaza, who, in the 1940s and early 1950s, is extremely proud of the Turks in the present and equally nostalgic about the Arab and Turkish shared past. The Ottomans, according to al-Darwaza, undertook medical, cultural and religious missions to establish hospitals, clinics, schools and churches in Palestine and all over \textit{al-Sham}.\footnote{39 al-Darwaza, \textit{Hawl al-Haraka al-‘Arabiyya} (vol. 3), 14-5} In a separate work on Turkey, titled \textit{Turkiya al-Haditha}, Muhammad ‘Izzat al-Darwaza explains his interest in the country.\footnote{40 He spent a number of years in Turkey in the 1940s in exile, which in part explains why he wrote the book. al-Darwaza, \textit{Turkiya al-Haditha}, 7.} “The events of Turkey and the sources of its rise are of great worth because we find in Arab history many of the same issues…it is important that the Arabs study the methods, manners, plans, steps and results appropriate for them [the Arabs] to emulate what is beneficial and to take note of how they [the Turks] erred or failed.” He added that the circumstances of the Arabs resemble to a great extent those of the Turkish nation. “We lived side by side together for 1,000 years or more. Their [Arab and Turkish] history, culture,
blood, spirit as well social, spiritual and political lives have been united to a great extent.”

One important reason for the decline of the Ottoman empire, he adds, was the oppressive European countries did not allow the Ottoman state to succeed. Although the vast majority of Darwaza’s work is extraordinarily dry, occasionally he hints to his own bias in the matter. Turkish history and the Turkish national spirit “are no doubt worthy of emulation,” he writes. If there was one thing Arabs can learn from the Turks, he suggests, it would be their uncanny ability to propagate and consolidate their power and their fervent national commitment to reason and science.

al-Nimr’s *Tarikh Jabal Nablus wa al-Balqa’* (vol. 1), published in 1938, is similarly nostalgic for the Ottoman period. al-Nimr writes that the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries constituted a “golden age” in the history of Nablus, a city which was ruled by just and noble rulers. It is necessary to point out, however, that al-Nimr’s pro-Ottoman bent can be explained in part by his intense attachment to family— which rose to prominence during the Ottoman period and declined as a result of the Tanzimat reforms, the Egyptian occupation in 1830 and finally the British occupation in 1917—a family story not unlike many village family notables of Palestine’s mountainous interior. Thus, in some ways, al-Nimr is pro-Ottoman not as a result of anything Ottoman per se, but rather because, as a mere coincidence of history, his family rose to prominence during this period. Still, he can be partially included in the late-Mandate period authors who have much fonder recollections of the Ottoman period than their

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44 For al-Nimr, see *Tarikh Jabal Nablus*, vol. 1, 139. For more romanticizing of the Ottoman period, see vol. 2, 343-359, cited in Doumani, “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine,” 15, n. 41.
counterparts writing in the 1920s. This shift to more pro-Ottoman attitudes in the late 1930s and 1940s is once again confirmed by other sources, including the press.\footnote{In one case the newspaper Filastin published a political cartoon in 1937 in which Jamal Pasha thanks Sir Wauchope because “The Arabs have not forgotten my tyranny and bless my memory,” Filastin April 1937, cited in Aql et. al, Jihad Filastin al-‘Arabiyya, 270. On the one hand the cartoon suggests that most people had fond recollections of the Ottomans in the 1930s. Although, to be sure, in lampooning this terribly ironic scenario, the paper is at the same time reminding people of the horrors of the Jemal Pasha’s rule over Palestine.}

To be sure, plenty of Arabs in Palestine in the 1940s still remembered late Ottoman rule as “the most oppressive period the country has ever witnessed.”\footnote{Lajnat al-Thaqafa al-‘Arabiyya fi Filastin, al-Kitab al-‘Arabi al-Filastini, 4.} ‘Arif al-‘Arif added in 1951 that “everyone knows that the Sultan Abd al-Hamid [II] period was one of oppression and despotism. No one was able to engage in politics or express their opinion.”\footnote{al-‘Arif, Tarikh al-Quds, 120.} On the whole, however, after decades of British rule and their sponsorship of the Zionist project, the Ottomans no longer looked as bad as they once did. As the war memories faded, the Ottomans were remembered increasingly for their positive contributions.

To bring our story down to the present day, at some point the Palestinian attitude shifted again, and the Ottomans were once again viewed as barbaric despots in the 1950, 1960s and 1970s.\footnote{See Doumani’s excellent article, “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine.”} With the British out of the picture, the Ottomans now took their place once again as the despotic and barbaric rulers of Palestine. Although the Ottoman despotism view has persisted well into the present day and still predominates among those writing in Arabic in the Middle East,\footnote{See, for instance, al-Ahmad, Suqut al-Khilafa.} the attitude began to shift \textit{yet again} in the 70s, 80s and 90s, as a new generation of Arab and Palestinian historians (writing mostly in English) formulated a more positive view of the
Ottomans,\textsuperscript{50} reflecting broader trends in English-speaking academic circles. In the Middle East, a parallel trend to the Ottoman despotism story has been an Islamicizing tendency to view Abd al-Hamid in a more positive light.\textsuperscript{51} One wonders how the next generation of Arab, Palestinian and other historians will write the history of late Ottoman rule in Palestine and the Arab provinces. Now we turn to the arrival of the British.

\textit{The Arrival of the British Rule}

In many scholarly circles it has become accepted wisdom that the British “occupation” and “colonization” of Palestine beginning in December 1917—much like other European colonial enterprises—was a morally repugnant project based on the racist belief that the colonized peoples were of inferior racial and cultural extraction in need of enlightened Europe’s benevolent assistance. Leila Parsons summarizes this position nicely, writing that, “partly as a result of [Edward] Said’s work [Orientalism], most recent historians of the Middle East have produced scholarship that is strongly critical of the British and French colonial projects in the region. These are works that have exposed the power of colonialism to destroy not only lived lives but also imagined futures.”\textsuperscript{52}

It is worth asking, then, if the British were considered liberators or occupiers upon their arrival in Jerusalem in December 1917? Notwithstanding the incredibly tempting urge to demonize the colonial powers—there was no doubt a great deal of optimism, hope, and even admiration for the ostensible colonial onslaught. The opportunity for a new era in Palestine’s


\textsuperscript{51} Good examples of this include Hallaq, \textit{Mawqif al-Dawla al-'Uthmaniyya}, al-‘Ahmad, \textit{Suqut al-Khilafa}, 509-511. For more on this phenomenon, see Reinowsky, “Late Ottoman Rule over Palestine,” 71-2.

\textsuperscript{52} Parsons, “Micro-narrative,” 84.
history emerged, where, in the view of many Arabs in Palestine, Ottoman despotism would be replaced by enlightened British rule. The day the Ottomans retreated in the rain from Jerusalem to Jericho was, for Totah and Shihadah (1920), “the most glorious day” in the history of Jerusalem. Bahri’s narrative, published in 1922, slows to a standstill with the arrival of the British, recalled with poignant detail: “On the 23rd of September at 3pm, a Monday, the allies came with their occupying armies led by General Allenby after a brief exchange of artillery fire that lasted roughly twenty-four hours.” History once again moves in slow motion in Mansur’s account (1924) of the arrival of Australian soldiers to Nazareth. “At around 5:00 in the morning on 20 September 1918, two young Australian horsemen entered Nazareth from the South.” When the Allied troops opened fire on civilian areas, the Ottomans fled northwards. Thus “ended Turkish rule in Nazareth and heralded the beginning of British rule,” he declares, “which everyone, including Muslim and Christian, had eagerly longed for despite the Balfour Declaration (intatharuhu al-jami‘ bi-shawq al-muslim wa al-masihi ‘ala siwa’ innama wa’id balfour).”

These observations are consistent with many of the extant sources from Palestine in the first few years after the British occupation. A sense of euphoria took hold of Palestinian society after the arrival of the British. A certain pro-British attitude prevailed in part because the military

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53 Totah and Shihadah, Tarikh al-Quds, 36.
54 Bahri, Tarikh Haifa, 9. This approach is not all that different from, for instance, Zionist historians who dwell on the ancient Jewish kingdoms, ignore the intervening two thousand years with a fast-track to the magical date of 1882 with the first wave of Zionist immigration. The Ottomans become the whitewashed and irrelevant backdrop against which history begins anew.
55 Mansur, Tarikh Nasira, 119. He added that both Catholics and Protestants supported a British Mandate. ibid, 121
56 Salim Tamari argues that the memoirs of Wasif Jawhariyya, for instance, convey “the spirit of emancipatory anticipation that engulfed Jerusalem (and Palestine) during the critical three years of military rule.” See Tamari, “City of Riffraff,” 23-4. Consider also testimony from Dr. Masterman: “The streets [are] thronged with … tens of thousands of Jews, also Moslems and Christians of all nationalities … there appeared in public young men for the
government that ruled Palestine from 1917-1920 was well-known to have disliked Zionism.\textsuperscript{57} This began to erode significantly with the appointment of Herbert Samuel, a staunch Zionist, to the position of High Commissioner in 1920. The Nebi Musa riots of 1920, recall as well, were directed against the Zionists, not the British.

It is important to note that, even though the British were welcomed in Palestine, a British Mandate over Palestine was not the optimal choice for either the traditional elites or the young generation of political activists in Palestine.\textsuperscript{58} When given a choice, the Arabs of Palestine, in the first few years after the liberation of Jerusalem, most often chose unity with Faysal’s government in Syria, as we shall discuss below, and, after that failed, their optimal choice was an independent government to be elected by the Arabic-speaking inhabitants (Jews, Christians and Muslims) of Palestine before the war, with some kind of British guidance or assistance.\textsuperscript{59}

By the early 1920s there are steady and increasing signs of great discontent with the British authorities. At least one history book, by al-Barghouthi and Totah (1923), very clearly coupled the British occupation with Zionism at one fell swoop and had very few flattering remarks towards about the British.\textsuperscript{60} Many other staunch Arab or Palestinian nationalists vehemently opposed any sort of colonial tutelage. Still, this anti-colonial attitude was only just developing in

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\textsuperscript{57} Metague, “The British Military Administration.”

\textsuperscript{58} On this division, see Muslih, The Origins, 158-74

\textsuperscript{59} See petitions collected in the volumes of Kayyali, Watha’iq al-Muqawama al-Filastiniya al-‘Arabiyya; Zu’aytir, Watha’iq al-Haraka al-Wataniiyya al-Filastiniyya.

\textsuperscript{60} As previously mentioned, the British banned the book briefly for its putatively inflammatory and incendiary comments about Zionism. See al-Barghouthi and Totah, Tarikh Filastin, 229-232.
the early 1920s and had not yet become widespread until perhaps the mid-late 1920s. Even though the Arab historians of Palestine uniformly rejected Zionism,\textsuperscript{61} then, the image of the British was largely positive from 1917-1920 and began to erode from 1920-1924 when it appeared as though the British support for Zionism was not going to change.

By the 1930s and 1940s, of course, British rule was regarded as oppressive and illegitimate. In his discussion of the history of tourism in \textit{Ghazza}, for instance, al-‘Arif, writing in the 1940s, discusses Mr. Churchill’s visit to Palestine in 1921. Churchill, he writes, congratulated himself on the putatively warm reception he received by the Arab masses, something al-‘Arif describes as a total façade.\textsuperscript{62} He uses vicious language to lambast British support for Zionism. It took some time, however, for strong anti-British sentiment to develop, something that is often forgotten among many contemporary observers. My argument, then, is that Arab historical writing, and more broadly, Arab society, evolved from pro-British in the late 1910s and early 1920s (i.e. Bahri, Mansur, Totah and Shihadah) to the anti-British sentiments of al-‘Arif and others that we find in the 1930s and 1940s. The rest of this paper will explore how these works shed light on identity in Palestine.

\textbf{Section Three}

\textit{Methodological and Conceptual Considerations}

The subject of identity in late Ottoman and early Mandatory Palestine has witnessed a tremendous boom in the past twenty years. Much ink has been spilled over the question of when a uniquely \textit{Palestinian} identity first emerged and when it began to predominate alongside other

\textsuperscript{61} It seems that all of them opposed Zionism. See, for instance, Bahri, \textit{Tarikh Haifa}, 18; al-Barghouthi and Totah, \textit{Tarikh Filastin}, 230-232; al-‘Arif, \textit{Tarikh Ghazza}, 247.

\textsuperscript{62} al-‘Arif, \textit{Tarikh Ghazza}, 247.
markers—including familial (i.e. al-Husseini, Khalidi, al-Nimr), tribal (i.e. Qays v. Yaman), city-based (i.e. Jerusalemite), regional (i.e. Jalili, Shami), national/ethnic (i.e. Arab), civic (i.e. Ottoman, constitutionalist, decentralizationist, British subject) and religious (i.e. Muslim). At this juncture it will be necessary to address what Rashid Khalidi has termed “polycentrism.” The idea means that “it would be normal for a Palestinian to identify primarily as an Arab in one context, as a Muslim or Christian in another, as a Nablusi or Jaddan in yet another, and as a Palestinian in a fourth.” 63 I do not by any means claim identities in the Mandate period were somehow contradictory or mutually exclusive. I mean to say, instead, that to claim identities are entirely context-dependent is shying away from the task of writing history. It is the laborious and painstaking task of the historian to sift through the sources and understand the relative importance of each identity in relation to other identities at any given moment in time and space. 64

Insofar as writing the nation into history is a central task of modern national movements, as Anthony Smith suggests, 65 and insofar as these historical works reflect the attitudes of a broader social milieu in Palestine, as we have previously demonstrated, and will continue to demonstrate,

64 Indeed, I don’t think Khalidi would disagree with this point, based on his discussion of an article published in Suriyya al-Janubiyya in 1920. Khalidi, discussing the article, writes that “this Society would have a positive effect in terms of ‘al-wataniyya al-Filistiniyya khususan wal ‘Arabiyya ‘umuman’ (Palestinian nationalism/patriotism in particular, and Arab nationalism/patriotism in general.” Khalidi adds that “the crucial distinction between Palestinian and Arab patriotism, while [the article] ostensibly putting the two forms of patriotism on the same level, in fact privleged the former, for it was necessarily this form that was operative in practice in the day-to-day political activities of Palestinians in this period and afterwards.” Khalidi, Palestinian Identity, 169. Thus, Khalidi clearly believes that identities are not merely contextual. His shortcoming, however, is that although he includes this kind of analysis here at the micro-level of one newspaper article, he fails to deal with this issue on a macro-scale over the course of the Mandate.
then they may serve as an important source for uncovering when a Palestinian particularism first emerged and when it began to predominate in relation to other identity markers.

Before we begin it is worth saying a brief word on family and village loyalties, which are not included in the analysis below. For a variety of reasons, Arabic-speakers in Palestine did not write histories of their families, and wrote almost nothing about their villages. Perhaps family issues were too private to write about for a public audience. This is not to discount family loyalties as unimportant, but rather that there was simply no tradition of writing family-histories in the region. Similarly, the dearth of village histories does not mean that villages were not important identity markers. Rather, their inhabitants were far more likely to be illiterate, less likely to be politically conscious, and have little access to the kinds of things necessary for writing history: books, newspapers, libraries, mobility, printing presses, and so on.66

Nothwithstanding these exceptions, though, historical writing about religion, the nation (either Arab or Palestinian) or one’s territorial space, be it Jerusalem, Palestine or Syria, were all exant in the Arab East at the outset of the Mandate period, so we have reason enough to believe that people should have written about these topics if in fact these were the most important topics for them.

**Overview**

Whereas in the first two sections I examined subjects I deemed interesting (e.g. their attitude towards Ottoman and British rule) – the first very logical approach to understanding their

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66 Indeed, the growth of writing on villages does not really emerge until the early 1980s. See Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories.*
identity is to determine what they deemed interesting enough to write about. Everyone who writes – indeed, everyone who reads – knows that we write and read about what interests us, what we care about. This means that the subjects of interest for the historians of Mandatory Palestine may tell us a great deal about their identities and loyalties. Although some contemporary writers discussed at the beginning of this paper, such as Tarif Khalidi, Beshara Doumani and Adnan Abu-Ghazaleh, have offered typologies of the historical works (e.g. “Call to Battle” or “Affirmation of Identity”), none have presented a comprehensive (let alone quantitative) overview of the subjects of interest during the Mandate period. Appendix one, to the best of my knowledge, is the most comprehensive available list of works written with an eye towards something historical in British Mandatory Palestine from 1920-1951, organized by year published and subject of inquiry. It is certainly not exhaustive, but it should nevertheless offer a reasonably full picture of the topics of interest for Mandatory Palestine’s historians.

If we crunch a few numbers, we find that the most important subject of interest overall for the Mandate period was a tie between Arab (28) and Palestine (28)—if we define our topics broadly enough to include all works whose subject may be something else (i.e. architecture, Bedouins, water demons, saints and sanctuaries, religious scholars etc.) but whose contours of inquiry are limited to that geographical space (i.e. Syria or Palestine). This is followed by regional histories (21), city histories (19) and Islamic/religious history (12) (see table 1). The

67 It is an interesting twist of history that the historians of the Mandate period wrote not a single book on the Ottoman period (although one was written in 1909 – see Kamal, Kitab Fatiha). Yet in the past two-three decades, both Ottoman Palestine and the historiography of Ottoman Palestine have been the subject of much interest (on the latter point, see, for instance, Doumani, “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine,” Reinowsky, “Late Ottoman Rule” and this paper as well.)

68 I include works published through 1951 to account for those written during the Mandate yet published afterwards. Having said this, works published after 1948 that deal with the First Arab-Israeli War itself (a.k.a the War of Independence of the Nakba) are not included, insofar they were obviously not written during the Mandate period.
next flurry of genres—histories of the Middle Ages (5), ancient history (6) and general history (6) were largely commissioned by the British authorities for the purposes of the education system, as mentioned above. Thus they were probably not as significant in terms of identity as their numbers may suggest. These were followed by a smaller number of works on biography (4), minority groups (3), Zionism (3), religious sites (2), the British Mandate (2), European history (2), the history of the Holy Land (2) archeological history (1) and American history (1).

Table 1. Historical subjects of inquiry in Mandatory Palestine, by decade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Subject of interest</th>
<th>1920-1929</th>
<th>1930-1935</th>
<th>1936-1951</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab focus</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine focus</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional focus</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic/Religious focus</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Zionism focus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

City-based Loyalties

The first city-history produced in the Mandate period was Totah and al-Barghouthi’s *Tarikh al-Quds* (1920), followed by Bahri’s *Tarikh Haifa* (1922), Mansur’s *Tarikh Naisra* (1924), Mikha’il Niqula al-Sabbagh al-Akkawi’s *Tarikh al-Shaykh Zahir al-‘Umar al-Zaydani: Ḥakim ‘Akka wa-Bilad Ṣafad* (1927), al-‘Arif’s *Tarikh Bi’r Sab‘ wa-Qaba’iliha* (1934), Nimr’s *Tarikh Nablus wa al-Baqa‘* (1938), al-‘Arif’s *Tarikh Ghazza* (1943) and many others. It is worth emphasizing that almost all if not all of these books were written not for the British Mandatory education system but rather out of the authors’ own passion and love for their hometown.
Indeed, as these authors remind us time and time again, they wrote these books because they felt a sense of loss that their city was so neglected in the literature and a sense of pride and passion about their place of origin.

Moreover, that the subject of inquiry here is city (or city plus its ruler, tribes or hinterland) is more significant, I think, than most people realize in understanding conceptions of self among the regions’ inhabitants. Today the nation-state is typically treated as the basic unit of analysis to understand the history of Middle East. The majority of what we know about the Middle East in the nineteenth and especially post-World War I periods is temporally and spatially confined by the modern nation-state (to be sure, this paper is, regrettably, a prime example of said phenomenon). Even when Western scholars undertake to study a city or city-hinterland region they often locate their narrative within the master narrative of the history of the nation or the national territory. This was not the case during the Mandate period. The nation, as it seems, did not yet displace, what was, before the British occupation, perhaps the most important identity marker in Palestine: one’s city, town or village.

A closer look at these works reveals a profound attachment to city. As’ad Mansur (1924(, for instance, dedicates his book to the “Galilean’s in general and the Nazarenes in particular.” He proudly boasts of his city’s glorious, ancient and sacred past. It is no surprise that Nikula al-Sabbagh (1927/35), from Acre, has nothing but glowing remarks for his Akkawi predecessor,

69 For the historical development of a city plus its hinterland in the region, see Philipp, “Identities and Loyalties”; Doumani, Rediscovering Palestine, 20
70 Obviously it would be futile to list all of the works that do this. What seems much easier is to point out the (literally) handful of scholars who cross “nation-state” boundaries during the inter-war period. See, for instance, Schayegh, “The Many Worlds of ’Abud Yasin”; Nassar and Tamari, Dirasat fi al-Tarikh al-Ijtima‘i.
71 For Palestine, see Levine, Overthrowing Geography; Doumani, Rediscovering Palestine; Seikaly, Haifa: Transformation of an Arab Palestinian Society. Of note, this is in contrast to Palestinian scholars born and raised in Israel/Palestine. See note 162 in the conclusion.
Shaykh Zahir al-‘Umar al-Zaydani: he was modest, self-educated, gifted, wise. He pursued just and intrepid policies and established an independent state in the heart of the Ottoman Empire at its zenith of power. He renewed Acre and contributed to its cultural and political development.\(^\text{72}\) Ihsan al-Nimr (1938) is interested in recording the history of the most important families from Nablus, their genealogical tables, and their refusal to sell land to Jewish organizations. Not one inch of Arab land in the district of Nablus was sold to the Jews, he proudly boasts.\(^\text{73}\) Whether or not those from Jaffa or Haifa sold land to Jews seems of little importance to him.\(^\text{74}\)

To be sure, even a cursory look at other extant sources for the period reveals that attachment to city was central throughout the Mandate period.\(^\text{75}\) In the first instance, then, city-based loyalties commanded a great deal of attention and loyalty in the historical works of the Mandate period. At the same time, the major outpouring of writing on cities took place in the 1920s, and experienced only steady growth thereafter. In contrast, Arab and Palestinian topics witnessed a


\(^{73}\) al-Nimr, *Tariikh Jabal Nablus* (vol. 1) p.ii, 19-20. Beshara Doumani writes of al-Nimr that it is not clear from his books which of his many proud identities—Nablusi, Muslim, Arab, Ottoman, Palestinian—he is most proud of. See Doumani “Archiving Palestine,” 12. It is, to me, rather surprising that Doumani would write this. The first volume of al-Nimr’s *Tariikh Jabal Nablus*, published in 1938 is about Nablus, with a lengthy section that can only be described as a full-blown panegyric to the most important families from Nablus. There is very little mention of Palestine or anywhere in Palestine aside from Nablus in his colossal 350-page work. The second volume, published in 1950, is fundamentally a book of Arab history, as we shall see below in the section on Arab foci. Again, Palestine is elided completely. It seems that the tendency to shy away from saying anything sufficiently argumentative about identity that we saw in Rashid Khalidi is similarly reflected in Doumani.

\(^{74}\) al-Nimr, *Tariikh Jabal Nablus* (vol. 1), 3-5. That the Nablus district chose to isolate itself from Jerusalem or look to the north for political and economic ties is corroborated by a variety of other sources. In 1910, for instance, local notables from Nablus petitioned against a proposal to annex the Sancak of Nablus to the Mutasarriflik of Jerusalem “so as not to be infected by the Zionist Germ,” since Zionists were everywhere in Jerusalem and nowhere in Nablus. See Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism*, 173. Moreover, the delegates from Nablus (rather than Jerusalem) were the ones who pushed for unity with Syria in 1919 and afterwards. See Porath, *The Emergence*, 80-3.

\(^{75}\) See, for instance, al-Barghouthi, *Marahil*, who dedicates the first few chapters to the history of his village, Dayr Ghassana; the diary of Ihsan Tourjaman, Tamari, *Am al-Jarad*, who desires very much to carry out his Ottoman military service in his hometown of Jerusalem. It is also noteworthy that the vast majority of newspapers during the period were local, city-centric, such as, for instance, *Bayt al-Maqdis, Mir‘at al-Sharg, al-Aqsa, Barid al-Yawm, al-Akhbar, al-Salam, al-Nafir, al-Carmel, al-Tabal*. Only one paper used the word *Filastin* in its title. See “Summary of the Arab newspapers published in Eretz Yisrael” (in Hebrew), 19 December 1921, CZA S22/389.
tremendous explosion of writing in the late 1930s and 1940s, something that cannot be said for the city history. It seems, then, that the city history declined in terms of relative importance over the course of the Mandate period.

**Arab Foci**

Although we find fewer total works on Arab history per se during the 1920s, the historians tend to contextualize their city narratives not in the context of Palestinian history but rather Arab and/or Islamic/Christian history. Khalil Totah’s *The Contribution of the Arabs to Education* (1926), for instance, is an unabashed and unrestrained apologetic and polemical tract of Arab history. In his discussion of Arabs as administrators, “the fresh, simple, and democratic tenets of Islam were preferred, in Syria and Egypt, to the dogma and degeneracy of Byzantine Christian theology.”76 The Arabs conquerers ruled justly and wisely; “once the invaded territory was settled, the Arabs busied themselves with the arts of peace”; they erected beautiful buildings; medicine was a highly professional and developed field of study; hospitals were widespread; they made important astronomical calculations; they developed trigonometry;77 The Abbasid period witnessed an “eager thirst for knowledge”; higher learning was widespread; “Scholarships were numerous, and those who thirsted for knowledge drank from a source which never went dry;”78 Students “always paid proper respect to their teachers;”79 The apologetics reach their height in Totah’s discussion of “conservation” institutions, such as the Nizamiyyah [sic] college, who dismissed teachers for embracing putatively heretical beliefs. “Of course, we of the

76 Totah, *The Contribution of the Arabs*, 4. He adds that “Islam is undeniably democratic in its social conception.” ibid, 44.
77 ibid, 4-11.
76 ibid, 25-6.
76 ibid, 45.
twentieth century are not in a position to condemn such intolerance and suppression of academic freedom…”

In a broad historical work written in the 1940s, we can sense a profoundly pan-Arab pride in Sabbagh’s discussion of Faysal’s government when he writes that “there was no difference between an Iraqi or Palestinian, Lebanese or Hijazi, because everyone was a companion and partner in the effort to liberate the Arab nation.” Of course, he needs to emphasize this fact precisely because, by 1944, a great number of differences had in fact obtained among these Arab regions. Ihsan al-Nimr’s second volume of his study of Tarikh Nablus, published in 1950, is an important contribution to “Arab history,” in his words. He divides his book into four sections: Madi al-‘Arab, Hadir al-‘Arab, Islah al-‘Arab and Tawjih al-‘Arab. Hopefully, in years to come, he writes, the “Arab nation” will benefit from this book. Tarif Khalidi, writing in 1981, has already observed that, in the prolific writings of scholars like Abdullah Mukhlis, Ilyas Marmura, Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi and Abdul Latif Tibawi, we find an “appeal to the common cultural heritage of the Arabs through the investigation of specific [Arab] cultural institutions or trends.” If we look at broader trends, then, we notice that much less was written about the Arabs in the 1920s and early 1930s. When pan-Arabism and Arabism began to pick up steam in the 1930s and 1940s, there emerged a similar explosion of writing on the history of the Arab nation. In terms of sheer number, Arab topics predominated over all other topics in the post-1935 period, whereas this was certainly not the case in the 1920s and early 1930s. This suggests that an Arab identity grew increasingly important over the course of the Mandate period.

80 ibid., 32.
81 al-Sabbagh, al-Madaniyyat al-Qadima, 182
82 al-Nimr, Tarikh Jabal Nablus (vol. 2), 3-5
83 Khalidi, “Palestinian Historiography,” 73.
Christian or Islamic Foci

It would be a great mistake to discount traditional religious loyalties, which served, for most of the population as an extremely important source of identity. While noting that Jerusalem is a holy place for all three monotheistic religions,\textsuperscript{84} Totah and Shihadah, in their \textit{Tarikh al-Quds}, proceed with a sixty page discussion (comprising two-thirds of the monograph) of the Muslim and Christian holy sites of Jerusalem followed by roughly zero pages on the Jewish holy sites. Jerusalem may in theory be holy to the Jews, as they suggest, but the Arab, Islamic and Christian character of the city is highlighted while the Jewish connection is simply deleted from memory. This trend to diminish (or delete altogether) the Jewish connection to the land, and emphasize the Muslim and Christian connection to the land is similarly reflected in a great many other sources for the entire Mandate period.\textsuperscript{85}

A good number of other history books written in the Mandate period, published largely in the 1930s and 1940s by people like Muhammad ‘Izzat Darwaza, Qadri Tuqan, Mahmud al-‘Abidi, Niqula Ziyadah, Muhammad Rafiq al-Tamimi and others, focused on classic Islamic history such as the life of the prophet Muhammad or wars of defense in early Islamic history. It is clear the Islamic foci were absolutely central, and formed the broader context for many of the historical narratives in the Mandate period. If we compare writing on religion to writing on other topics, however, we notice an interesting trend. The total number of books on religion is roughly equal to those on Palestine, regional and Arab subjects through 1936. In the late 1930s and 1940s, religious topics experience no growth whereas other subjects – especially Arab and Palestinian –

\textsuperscript{84} Totah and Shihadah, \textit{Tarikh al-Quds}, 9.
\textsuperscript{85} See petitions collected in the volumes of Kayyali, \textit{Watha’iq al-Muqawama al-Filastiniya al-‘Arabiyya; Zu’aytir, Watha’iq al-Haraka al-Wataniyya al-Filistiniyya}.
experience a monumental explosion in writing. It seems, then, that religion as a source of
loyalty became increasingly less important over the course of the Mandate period, as it was
replaced by Arab and Palestine loyalties. Now we shall turn to a subsection of the Arab identity
– which is a particularly strong connection among these writers to *Bilad al-Sham* (Greater Syria)
and to Egypt.

**Syria and Egypt: Cultural and Political Centers**

As the numbers suggest, the regional history was key throughout the period under discussion.
This should not be particularly surprising to the careful observer, insofar as *Bilad al-Sham*
formed a fluid regional space in the late Ottoman period, in which there were no borders and
people moved freely between regions. This sense of regional integration is reflected in the
historiography in a variety of ways. First, it meant that, if the Arabs of Palestine were going to
write about a territorial unit broader than their native city or town, they often times felt as
comfortable writing geographies or histories of a non-nation state region—such as al-Jalil or
Greater Syria—as they did Palestine. Second, editors, texts, readers, newspapers and printing
presses moved among and between these places rather frequently. Third, the Arabs of Palestine
frequently looked to the regional epicenters—Istanbul, Cairo, Beirut and Damascus—for cues on
a variety of social, cultural, economic and political issues. Forth, this fluid regional space often
led the Arabs of Palestine to propose the political subordination of Palestine to one or another of
the regional epicenters. And fifth, this regional space led many Arabs in Palestine to consider
Palestine merely part of a broader territorial unity: Syria. Each of these topics will be dealt with
in greater depth below.
We have already discussed Turkey as the first regional heavyweight above. Let us move to the Arab world, in particular Damascus, Beirut and Cairo, which offered the Arabs of Palestine publishing houses, printing presses and a larger reading audience. It is no surprise, in the first instance, that many of the Mandate’s historians had their works published in Cairo, Beirut and Sidon.\(^86\) This is probably where you published if you wanted the who’s-who’s in the Arab world to read what you wrote. al-Barghouthi and Totah, for instance, suggest very clearly that their interest in writing a history of Palestine stemmed from having witnessed the establishment of universities and intellectual advancement in other countries.\(^87\) Moreover, papers and publishing houses would frequently move among and between Palestine, Syria and Lebanon – such as the newspaper \textit{al-Tabal} and the printing press \textit{al-Maktaba al-Jama’a}, as Bahri notes.\(^88\) Indeed, the historical works time and again place their intellectual contribution within the context of the broader Arab \textit{nahda} movement and, in particular, constantly allude to their close ties to Egypt and Syria.\(^89\)

The Arab Cultural Committee in Palestine published a book in 1946, \textit{al-Kitab al-Arabi al-Filastini}, which they described as an organization whose aim, inter alia, was to establish cooperation with cultural organizations in Arab countries. They wrote the book, in large part, to show Arabs elsewhere that “indeed, cultural life in Palestine exists.” “The Arab nation (\textit{al-umma al-'arabiyya}) in Palestine,” they wrote, “is an essential contributor to the Arab tradition, even

\(^{86}\) See, for instance, the works of ‘Arif al-‘Arif, As‘ad Mansur, Ihsan al-Nimr, Muhammad ‘Izzat al-Darwaza, Abdullah Mukhlis and others.

\(^{87}\) al-Barghouthi and Totah, \textit{Tarikh Filastin}, 5

\(^{88}\) Bahri, \textit{Tarikh Haifa}, 32.

though it has been obscured from view." 90 Other sources as well suggest Palestinian papers found eager reading audiences abroad. 91 Arabs in Palestine were not writing for their comrades merely in Palestine, they were speaking to an Arab East with centers in Beirut, Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, Alexandria, Baghdad and elsewhere.

The evidence presented above, however, suggests that relationship between the Arabs of Palestine and the Arabs of Egypt and Syria was not always an equal one. Rather, Arabs in Palestine looked abroad for political and cultural cues. Jamil Bahri notes that a publishing house he established in Haifa with Yusuf Faris Asaf would frequently import books from Cairo and Beirut necessary for the schools and training colleges in Palestine. 92 Filastin and Mir’at al-Sharq frequently re-printed articles from Egyptian and Syrian papers. In these papers, Syria and Egypt often become sites for cultural and political emulation, beacons of modernity and sanctuaries for exemplary national struggles, as I have argued elsewhere. 93 One young Arab from Jerusalem even wrote in his diary in 1916 that Beirut is the mother of the Arab country [umm al-bilad al-

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91 al-Salam, a short-lived yet influential Jaffan paper (1920-23) edited by Nissim Malul, an Arab Jew, sold hundreds of copies in Syria and Egypt and found eager readers in Tyre, Alexandria, Cairo and even Baghdad. According to Malul, many of the subscribers, including those outside of Palestine, requested the paper daily. Some even requested complete collections of the paper from its first issue. See Letter from Dr. Nissim Malul to Dr. Tahatz (in Hebrew), 18 July 1920, CZA L18/6118.
92 Bahri, Tarikh Haifa, 27. In ten pages of brilliant analysis, Ayalon has documented the “impact of the neighborhood,” i.e. the literary scenes in Istanbul, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon on the literary scene in Palestine. See Ayalon, Reading Palestine, 48-57.
93 On Syria, see, for instance, Filastin 10 September 1921, 3 January 1928; Mir’at al-Sharq 19 May 1920; 10 November 1920; 21 June 1922; 22 September 1922; 24 May 1925; 18 November 1925; 23 November 1925; 27 February 1926; 3 March 1926; 19 June 1926; 11 September 1926; 4 November 1926; 31 March 1926; 7 February 1926. On Egypt, see for instance, Bayt Al-Maqdis 12 January 1920; Filastin 19 April 1921; 9 July 1921; 13 July 1921; 24 August 1921; 4 January 1922; 8 March 1922; July 7 1922; 11 August 1922; Mir’at al-Sharq, 27 May 1920; 1 June 1920; 1 March 1921; 9 June 1921; 13 May 1922; 19 November 1924, 26 November 1924; December 3 1924; 16 January 1926; February 13 1926; 4 November 1926; 31 March, 1927. For more, see Foster, “Arabness, Turkey and the Palestinian National Imagination.”
Arabs in Palestine, then, did not always consider themselves equal partners in the nahda.

What makes this last point even more compelling is that, in some cases, the gaze eastwards transcended mere emulation and led Arab historians and others inside Palestine to ponder its political subordination to one of its neighbors. Al-Barghouthi and Totah note rather casually that Palestine would soon be politically subordinated to Egypt or Iraq. “A variety of states have ruled over Palestine,” they indicate, and “a single nation (umma wahida) did not inhabit it (Palestine).” Instead, they add, Palestine “was incorporated (mundamaja) into Syria or affixed (mulhaqa) to Egypt, and in the past it would have been impossible for it to have been an independent country (bilad mustaqalla) as a result of its geographical position, small size and varied population. So, too, in future days, it may be connected to Egypt or Iraq.”

We tend to forget that for many centuries, Palestine was ruled from Istanbul, Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad rather than Jerusalem. They conclude that “the past is a like mirror or water – it always reflects back on itself.” We should emphasize that the historians al-Barghouthi and Totah were certainly not writing in isolation when they predicted a Palestine subordinated politically to one of its Arab neighbors. Proposals to unite Palestine and Egypt, Palestine and Syria, Palestine and Transjordan, and Greater Syria with the Hijaz pre-date World War I and find a comfortable place

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96 This evidence flatly contradicts what Haim Gerber has previously argued on the idea of Palestine as part of Syria in 1918. Based on a report by the Palestinian editor Muhammad al-Qalqili of the Egyptian paper al-Kawkab, who traveled around Palestine, Gerber concludes that “Syria, and the idea of Palestine being a part of Syria…are not even hinted at, since obviously such a union was not yet thought of, and it was not a natural thing in the mind of Palestinians.” Gerber, *Remembering and Imagining Palestine*, 84. Doumani, by contrast, offers a slightly more nuanced discussion, suggesting that the concept of “Palestine” as a social and geographical space in the late Ottoman period can neither be category denied nor assumed as natural. See Doumani, “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine,” 9-10.
in the extant documentary evidence from the mid 1910s to the late 1920s.\textsuperscript{97} It must have been quite a strange idea for many Arabs in what was hitherto the Mutasarriflik of Jerusalem and the sancaks of Acre and Nablus to accept the fact that they must now direct their political loyalties to Jerusalem rather than Damascus, Beirut or Istanbul.

\textit{Palestine in Syria: The Geographical Perspective}

If we move from what was important for our historians to what they regarded as a matter of basic fact, we discover that many of them considered Palestine a constitutive part of Syria. Bahri, for instance, writes that Haifa is among the “mother cities of Syria broadly and Palestine specifically.”\textsuperscript{98} In his brief biography of Abid Baha’ Abbas, the founder of the Bahai faith, Bahri also lists all of the countries or regions with Bahai populations: Iran, Japan, China, India, Egypt, Syria (\textit{Suriyya}), Europe and America. Insofar as there were many Bahai in “Palestine,” it only makes sense that Palestine was assumed as part of Syria in Bahri’s laundry list, or else it would have been an embarrassing oversight to neglect Palestine.\textsuperscript{99} Barghouthi and Totah add that Palestine “remained part of Syria, and a natural border did not separate it (Palestine) from it (Syria), and was not distant from it racially or historically, and therefore historians have not...
singled it [Palestine] out with a distinct name but rather they have related to it [i.e. naming, in terms of] the peoples and tribes living in it.”

A decade and a half later in 1936 the eminent and extremely prolific writer Tawfiq Canaan did not forget that Palestine was the southern part of Syria at the end of Ottoman rule. He writes that in contrast to “the Arabs of Hijaz, and Transjordan, the Iraqians [sic], the Egyptians, and the Syrians [who] have attained their long-desired independence…only the Arabs of Palestine, which was part and parcel of the Arab world, and in effect constituted at the time of the Turks the southern part of Syria, have been deprived of such a natural privilege.” Similarly, in 1938 George Antonius uses the word Syria to describe the entire Bilad al-Sham region throughout his book. “Of the countries surrounding Egypt, Syria was the most important from a military point of view.” That is to say, it was still perfectly natural for him to write Syria to refer to places like Bir Sab’ and Ghazza. al-Nimr adds in 1938 that Nablus is located in the heart of Southern Syria (qalb Suriyya al-Janubiyya).

Even by the 1940s, the word Suriyya was still occasionally preferred when writing about what we would call Palestine, especially during the late Ottoman period. Al-Sabbagh discusses the region as a whole, for instance, in his laundry lists of Ottoman attempts to expand state infrastructure such as railways, as well as in his list of important “Syrian intellectuals” of the late Ottoman period, including, inter alia, Sheikh Yusuf al-Asir, Butrus al-Bustani (Dibbiye, Lebanon), Ahmad Faris Shidyaq (‘Ashqut, Lebanon), al-Sheikh Abd al-Rahman Kawakibi

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100 al-Barghouthi and Totah, Tarikh Filastin, 10
101 Canaan, Conflict in the Land of Peace, 109
103 al-Nimr, Jabal Nablus (vol.1), 34.
(Allepo, Syria), Yusud Diyya Pasha al-Khalidi (Jerusalem, Palestine), George Zaydan (Lebanon), Ya‘qub Sarruf (Suq al-Gharb, Lebanon).

Although we are deviating slightly from the genre of historical writing to examine the geographical works of the Mandate period, particularly the 1920s, I believe this brief detour will shed much light on the question of the relationship between Palestine and Syria, especially insofar as many of our historians seem to have moonlighted as geographers as well. Indeed, the tendency to consider Palestine a part of Syria that was suggested in Bahri, al-Barghouthi and Totah, Antonious and Canaan is consistent with the geographical studies of the period written by Arabs residing in both Palestine and Syria. In the first place, let us recall that discussions of Palestine are included in the classic histories of Syria written by Yusuf Dibbs and Jurji Yanni in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first Jughrafiyat Filastin was published in 1921 and seems to have been destined for the Mandatory education system. The authors, Totah and Khuri, write that there is no natural border between Syria and Palestine. Do they mean there is merely nothing natural about putting a border there? Are they reflecting a generally pro-Faysal attitude that engulfed Palestine around the time they would have been writing the book (i.e. 1919-1920)? We cannot really know.

In some cases, though, the borders of this Filastin were very different from the Mandatory borders. For Sabri Sharif Abd al-Hadi’s Jughrafiyat Suriyya wa Filastin al-Tabi‘iyya, published in 1923—six years after the British arrived in Jerusalem—there is no neat border between Syria

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105 Indeed, there was no neat division of labor between thinkers and educators, journalists and academics, historians and social scientists, geographers, teachers, priests, humanists and activists.
106 Doumani, “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine.” Jurji Yanni, for instance, included sections on Haifa, Nablus and other cities most people consider part of Palestine. Yanni, Kitab Tarikh Suriyya, 520-521; Dibbs, Tarikh Suriyya (vol.1), 35, 53, 153; (vol. 2) 212.
107 Totah and Khuri, Jughrafiyat Filastin, 2.
and Palestine. In some cases, the plains and mountains of Palestine and Syria bleed into one another. Marj ibn Amir, for instance, otherwise known Jezreel Valley (in “Palestine”), is discussed within the “Syria” section. Amman, Salt and Wadi Mujib constitute parts of south-east Syria. Elsewhere, within sections discussing Syrian plains, for instance, Abd al-Hadi moves seamlessly from Nahr al-‘Asa (“Syria”) into a discussion of suhul Filastin – and then from al-Karmil and Yafa (“Palestine”) – back to Antakya (“Syria”).

In the same book by Abd al-Hadi, there is a fascinating table which divides the mountains by region (see table 2). Notice the categories Jibal Filastin, Jibal Karmil, al-Jibal al-Shamaliyya, Jibal al-Janubiyya al-Sharqiyya, Jibal al-Jalil, Jibal Lubnan al-Sharqiyya, Jibal Lubnan al-Gharbiyya, Jibal al-Nasiriyya and others. Each of these major headings has a number of mountains and hills listed below it, but only Jibal Filastin has new sub-groupings; Jibal Nablus (the Mountains of Nablus), Jibal al-Quds (the Mountains of Jerusalem) and Jibal al-Khalil (the Mountains of Hebron). For Abd al-Hadi, Filastin was a region within Syria much like the Jalil was a region within Syria, only that Filastin was a slightly larger region such that it merited its own subgroubings. Interestingly, Nazareth, Haifa and the Galilee were not part of Palestine, at least not as this table portrays it (see figure 1).

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108 Abd al-Hadi, Jughrafiyat Suriyya, 7
109 ibid, 19-20. Indeed, these areas were part of the Vilayet of Suriye during the late Ottoman period.
110 ibid, 21-27. It is worth noting that Rashid Khalidi misinterprets this book, claiming that its importance lies in “the fact that all over Palestine, students were already learning that Palestine was a separate entity, a unit whose geography requires separate treatment [from Syria].” Khalidi, Palestinian Identity, 174. As we indicated above, however, this book suggests much the opposite: that there was great confusion over what was Palestine and what was Syria, and that Palestine was a region within Syria. We must be careful to go to the primary sources before accepting Khalidi’s interpretation of the evidence, something I failed to do in a previous work, where I quoted Khalidi on his misinterpretation of Abd al-Hadi’s book, See Foster, “The Emergence,” 16.
111 There is a great deal of ambiguity on whether Haifa is located in Syria or Palestine both here and elsewhere. The pre-war paper al-Nafir published in Haifa (meaning this would be reasonably reflective of what people from Haifa thought), describes Haifa as a city in Syria. See al-Nafir 28 July 1909. The same paper, moved to Jerusalem in May
1910, published one article which describes Haifa as a part of Suriyya, and another article on the same page which notes "fi Hayfa (Filastin)." See al-Nafir, 10 May 1910.
Abd al-Hadi, however, was without a doubt less influential than Said al-Sabbagh, the man who cornered the market on geographical writing in the Arab East throughout the Mandate period. In his *Jughrafiyat Suriyya al-‘Umumiyya al-Mufassala*, first published in 1924, al-Sabbagh writes that the borders of Syria extend from the Nur Mountains (a.k.a. the Amanus or Gâvur Mountains) in what is today the Hatay Province of south-central Turkey, all the way to the Sinai Desert, and from the *al-Sham* Desert to the Mediterranean Sea. The southern border extends from Rafah, a town south of Ghazza, to the Aqaba Gulf.\textsuperscript{112} While much of the book treats Palestine separately from Syria, other parts deal with Palestine and Syria in one full geographical swoop. The Bisan Valley (“Palestine”) and the Dead Sea, for instance, are mentioned in a discussion of Hawran and Damascus.\textsuperscript{113} Al-Sabbagh adds that the Acre plain is within the Syrian plains rather than the plains of Palestine.\textsuperscript{114} As late as the 1940s this book continued to be reprinted – the twelfth edition came out in 1946. al-Sabbagh wrote another book called *Durus al-Jughrafiyya al-'Ula*, designed for elementary school students in both Syria and Lebanon.\textsuperscript{115} The work begins with a general introduction to the study of geography. At the end al-Sabbagh includes brief sections on four geographical units: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Trans-Jordan Emirate. Even when the colonial divisions are utilized to discuss the geography and history of the region, then, al-Sabbagh must have felt that they should nevertheless be taught together and that they are the four most important geographical units for the Syrian or Lebanese student to study.

\textsuperscript{112} al-Sabbagh, *Jughrafiyat Suriyya*, 22.
\textsuperscript{113} al-Sabbagh, *Jughrafiyat Suriyya*, 33-34.
\textsuperscript{114} al-Sabbagh, *Jughrafiyat Suriyya*, 33.
\textsuperscript{115} al-Sabbagh, *Durus al-Jughrafiyya al-'Ula*. Interestingly, on pages ten and thirty-six, where the word “Suriyya” appears in the general description sections, someone pasted a piece of paper with the word “Lubnan” over it. It seems that, although originally written for Syria, the book was quickly convertible for use in the Lebanese elementary school curriculum.
Ambiguous, porous and inconsistent conceptions of geography predominated in the Near East well into the Mandate period. Palestine was inextricably tied to a larger territorial unit, Syria. In some cases it was a constitutive part of it and in other cases Palestine did not include Haifa, Acre, Tiberias, Tzfat, Nazareth, the Bisan valley and other areas. When we consider that, in the late Ottoman period, “Palestine” had no administrative status and “Palestinians” called themselves “Syrians,” this is not so surprising. The attempt by the British and French to transform much older conceptions of space and self, usually by resort to force of arms, did not happen overnight. I would suggest that the attempt to trace the “earliest manifestations” of the national or proto-national identity, as Khalidi, Gerber and Fishman have done, has inadvertently reified the naturalness and inevitableness of the development of nation-state borders, geographies and loyalties in the region, things that were simply not indigenous to the region and were brought to the region by the colonial use of force.

Another implication of this section is that the various pro-Syrian unity positions taken by the Arabs of Palestine from 1918-1920 were probably not as “fleeting” and “ephemeral” as everyone seems to believe. The decision of the First Palestinian National Congress to call Palestine “Southern Syria” in hopes of uniting with Faysal’s government in Syria, may itself have been an innovation, but in name rather than substance. The idea that Palestine was a part of Syria

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116 Many “Palestinians” or “Lebanese” in our contemporary conceptions of the words identified themselves as “Syrians” in the late Ottoman period. Khalil Totah, Khalil al-Sakakini and Khalil Gibran all defined themselves as “Syrian” while living in the United States (even though to our modern sensibilities the former two were “Palestinians” and the later was “Lebanese”). See Ricks, *Turbulent Times in Palestine*, 194; Sakakini, *Yawmiyyat Khalil al-Sakakini*; See Gibran, *Visions of the Prophet*, 54. I would like to thank Salim Tamari for pointing out the al-Sakakini and Gibran references to me.

117 For works that regard the Congress’s decision as an ephemeral political maneuver to avert the Zionist onslaught and achieve independence from colonial rule rather than a genuine display of loyalty to Faysal or Damascus, see Gerber *Remembering and Imagining Palestine*, ch.3, Muslih, *The Origins*, ch.6; Porath, *The Emergence*, 100-111; Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine*, 90-91.
continues to be perfectly acceptable to Palestine’s Arabs in the 1920s and even as late as the
1930s and 1940s. We have examined city-loyalties, Arab and Islamic loyalties and the role of
the regional epicenters. Now we shall turn to Palestine.

“Palestine” and “the Palestinians”

Recall that we must weigh all of the evidence above against the evidence below if we are to
understand the relative importance of Palestine in the Mandate period. Whereas, to the best of
my knowledge, scholars in recent decades have written a total of zero books on “Arab identity”
(although some on pan-Arab issues)\(^{118}\) in the Mandate period, a bit on religious identities
(although a couple on Islam during the period),\(^{119}\) zero on “city identities” (there are plenty of
books on cities), zero on a “regional identity” (there are almost no works on this regional space
during the Mandate period\(^{120}\)), a bit one factionalism and class identities,\(^{121}\) one very recent work
on “Ottoman identity” (in the late Ottoman period),\(^{122}\) we have many works on “Palestinian
identity.” This can only be described, I think, as the projection of contemporary prerogatives
onto the past. Today scholars want to know when a Palestinian identity first emerged, but they
seem much less interested in determining what people themselves in the 1920s and 1930s
actually cared about.

\(^{118}\) Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism and the Palestine Question*; Matthews, *Confronting an Empire.*

\(^{119}\) Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Muslim Council*; Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism and the Palestine Question*; Budeiri,
“The Palestinains.”

\(^{120}\) Schayegh, “The Many Worlds of ˁAbud Yasin.”

\(^{121}\) Tamari, “Factionalism and Class Formation”; Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine.*

\(^{122}\) Campos, *Ottoman Brothers.*
As best I can summarize this obsession with a Palestine and Palestinian identity, scholars have concerned themselves with the origins of the (1) analytical concept “Palestine” (Filastin), (2) the emergence of the noun in Arabic Filastiniyyin to describe the region’s modern inhabitants, (3) the emergence of a non-politicized Palestinian identity, and most importantly, (4) the origins of a modern Palestinian national identity. We can summarize the scholarly findings as follows: Many scholars have placed a unique and particular non-politicized Palestinian identity—at various moments in the 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th-15th, and pre-1914 20th centuries. Elsewhere I have argued that much of this work rests on almost no evidence; the

125 See Gerber “‘Palestine’ and Other Territorial Concepts”; Gerber, Remembering and Imagining Palestine, ch.2
126 Mohammed, “Maqdisi.”
127 Haim Gerber, Remembering and Imagining Palestine, 48-51.
128 Khalidi, Palestinian Identity, 30, 32, 152. He mistakenly finds such a loyalty in 1701 and 1726. Khalidi discusses the case of a French consul in Sidon who paid a visit to Jerusalem in 1701, which provoked many Jerusalemites to sign a petition demanding the Ottoman ruler revoke permission for such a visit. The petition, for Khalidi, shows “Palestine as a special and sacred space,” ibid, 29, and “recapitulates the idea of Palestine as a special and sacred land with Jerusalem as its focus,” ibid, 30. It is strange that the closest the document comes to mentioning Palestine, at least the way Khalidi presents it, is a reference to “in this holy land,” ibid, 30. The word “Palestine” appears nowhere, a strange omission for a document that mentions Palestine, at least the way Khalidi presents it, is a reference to “in this holy land,” ibid, 30. The word “Palestine” appears nowhere, a strange omission for a document that putatively evidences a loyalty to “Palestine.” It should go without saying that, analytically, discursively and conceptually, “the holy land” and “Palestine” are very different things (lest the Qur’an 5:22 portended a Palestine loyalty).

Khalidi again confuses Palestine with other identities and loyalties in a separate historical document dated to 1726. The document warned that, in Khalidi’s words, “the transfer of waqf property to foreigners in Jerusalem constituted a threat to the future of the city, which must be built up and populated if Jerusalem were to be defended against the covetousness of these external enemies,” ibid, 30. For Khalidi, this document shows that this “modern nationalism was rooted in long-standing attitudes of concern for the city of Jerusalem and for Palestine as a sacred entity…” (my emphasis), ibid, 30. But again, the evidence seems to confirm much the opposite: there was no mention of Palestine in the document, only in Khalidi’s analysis of it.

130 Khalidi, Palestinian Identity, ch.3-6; Fishman, Palestine Revisited; Porath, “The Political Awakening”; Poarth, The Emergence, ch. 1; Mandel, The Arabs and Zionism, 226; Gerber, “Zionism, Orientalism and the Palestinians.” Most cogent among these pre-World War I scholars on Palestinian identity is Haim Gerber, who has attempted to show for the period 1908-1914 that “the prevailing self-perception of the country at the time was that they were living in a country called Palestine (not Southern Syria), that they were referred to as Palestinians, and that their ethnicity was Arab” (my emphasis). Gerber, “Zionism, Orientalism and the Palestinians,” 27-28. Gerber argues elsewhere that some sort of unadulterated or pristine Palestinian nationalism was afoot in 1918, a blend of
little evidence that exists to make such claims is frequently distorted; the evidence itself usually
has multiple interpretations, although, coincidentally enough, the authors almost always choose
an interpretation of the evidence that locates a Palestinian non-political identity as early as
possible. Moving along, the period 1914-1923 is what, the most influential of these writers,
Rashid Khalidi, has called the “critical years,” in his widely-praised Albert Hourani award-
winning work on the subject, *Palestinian Identity*. He argues that as a result of the “rapid,
momentous, and unsettling changes” from the outset of World War I in 1914 to roughly 1922 or
1923, “the sense of political and national identification of most politically conscious, literate and
urban Palestinians underwent a sequence of major transformations. The end result was a strong
and growing national identification with Palestine.” Important, Khalidi writes, this full-
fledged national loyalty was felt by a “significant proportion of the Arab inhabitants of
Palestine” and by 1922, “important elements of the country’s Arab population had already
come to identify *primarily* with Palestine” (my emphasis). He adds that the “most common
self-description of political groupings during the mandate was as Palestinian Arab.” Khalidi

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Palestinian nationalism and Arabism. His evidence for these claims are a handful of newspapers from the 1908-1914
period. He examined a collection (of no more than a dozen some newspapers) from the personal files of the
somewhat narcissistic David Yellin, who meticulously kept newspapers that referenced himself. Personal
correspondence with Haim Gerber, 22 May 2008. His second piece of evidence is a single British report in which
Muhammad al-Qalqili, a Palestinian editor of the Egyptian newspaper Kawakab, writes “I, as a Palestinian….”. See
Gerber, *Remember and Imagining Palestine*, 85.
131 See Foster, “Book Review.”
132 I have been able to locate some 14 book reviews, all but two of which are nothing short of *glowing*. The two
non-glowing reviews do not point to distortions or inaccuracies, instead merely describing the work as mediocre
scholarship and unoriginal.
133 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 149.
134 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 58, 144. Khalidi never resolves how, on the one hand, the new identity was felt
principally among urban, liberal, and politically conscious individuals, while, on the other hand, it was felt by a
“significant portion of the population.” After all, the vast majority of Palestine’s Muslims and Christians, even by
1923, were illiterate, rural and probably not especially politically conscious.
concludes “clearly, no one who disputes the widespread existence of Palestinian identity, and the emergence of a Palestinian national consciousness during the Mandate period, can have examined the press or the country’s education system during this early phase [i.e. early 1917-1923] in even a cursory manner.”\footnote{Khalidi, 
\textit{Palestinian Identity}, 174.} We again need break down Khalidi’s sweeping generalization of Palestinian national consciousness during the Mandate period as a whole—which witnessed, over the course of some three decades, tremendous social, cultural, political and economic transformation. That is, we need to pay close attention to change over time. Although Khalidi might like to think that “no one” could possibly dispute the widespread existence of a Palestinian identity during this thirty year period, with careful attention to evidence rather than hyperbole and polemic, I believe we can gain a much more accurate understanding of precisely when, how and why a unique Palestinian identity became widespread.

Of course there has been some resistance to the Khalidi thesis, but it has mostly fallen on deaf ears. Meir Litvak and Salim Tamari would seem to agree that the Arab character outweighed the Palestinian character of Palestine in the late Ottoman and early Mandate periods. Litvak suggests that although the historians of British Mandatory Palestine were writing on the history of Palestine—“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.”\footnote{Litvak, “Constructing A National Past,” 99. He adds that many of the official statements of the nationalist organizations, as well as the historical works from the period adopt phrases such as “the Arabs of Palestine,” “the Arab nation in Palestine,” “the Arab problem of Palestine,” “The Arab youth of Palestine,” and so on rather than the terms “Palestinians” or “Palestinian people.” See Litvak, “Constructing A National Past,” 125, f.n. 7.} Salim Tamari would seem to agree with this point in somewhat less sweeping terms, commenting in his monumental study on social history in Palestine in the
late Ottoman and early Mandate periods, *Mountain against the Sea*, that Palestine was not particularly unique or distinct from its broader *Biland al-Sham* identity. Unfortunately, however, it is Khalidi, rather than Tamari or Litvak, whose scholarly insights on a relatively early and widespread (1917-1923) Palestinian identity get repeated and reified as gospel truths.

The evidence I will discuss below suggests that, while Khalidi is right to point to the existence of an *incipient* Palestine loyalty in the 1914-1923 period, he grossly over exaggerates both its importance for the people who felt it and its prevalence in the general population. The historical works would seem to support what Salim Tamari has described as a kind of “cultural nihilism” – the idea that Palestine was not particularly important or distinct apart from its *Biland al-Sham* context, at least in the 1920s and also in the early 1930s, as we shall see in just a moment.

So, what do the historical works have to say about Palestine as a key source of loyalty in the Mandate period? As we have suggests above, in the 1920s Palestine, city and regional histories remained roughly equal in terms of sheet quantity. If we do not include the works on various *other* topics whose contours of inquiry were Palestine (the Bedouins, Saints and Sanctuaries, Architecture), however, we find only three books published on Palestine in the 1920s, one of

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139 Tamari, *Mountain Against the Sea*, 4-5.
141 Tamari, *Mountain Against the Sea*, 4-5. He writes that “Palestine was, as continues to be, part of a much larger social and political formation. Its culture and political environment are defined as much by its territorial conflict with Zionism and the Israeli state as by affinities it continues to have with the major currents of the Arab East. At the risk of sounding like a cultural nihilist, I would hold that Palestine’s cultural contributions are not specifically distinct from those of neighboring countries,” 4.
which was a collection of articles previously published in an Egyptian newspaper\textsuperscript{142} and the other two of which were commissioned for the British Mandatory education system.\textsuperscript{143} That is to say, then, that not a single book was written on the history of Palestine out of sheer passion and love for Palestine until the 1930s. As we stated previously, this is in complete contrast to the city histories – all of which seem to have been written out of the authors devotion and love for the hometown.

Continuing along to the 1930s, regional, Arab and Palestine histories remain roughly equal in number until 1936, at which point the conflict among the British, Zionists and Palestinians reached a breaking point with the outbreak of the General Strike in Palestine in the Spring of 1936, the first phase in a 3-year long revolt, today known as the “Great Arab Revolt.”\textsuperscript{144} Only then did interest in Palestine soar and come to dominate historical writing, alongside with Arab histories. In 1936 and 1937, alone, eight books were published on the Palestine issue, more books than had been published in the preceding sixteen years combined. If the historical works are a guide to identity in Palestine, then, it seems that the major shift from \textit{city} to \textit{Palestine} did not obtain until the mid-late 1930s.

Why did interest in and loyalty to Palestine explode in the mid-late 1930s? Although an in-depth exploration is fundamentally beyond the scope of this essay, some speculation is possible. The dramatic increase in writing books on Palestine in 1936 coincides precisely with the outbreak of the Arab revolt, which engulfed all of Palestine—men, women, urban and rural folk—for some three years, as we have suggested above. The revolt was both an \textit{indication} that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{142} This is al-Sakakini’s \textit{Filastin Ba’d al-Harb}.
  \item \textsuperscript{143} These are Totah and Khuri, \textit{Jughrafiyat Filastin}, which, we have already mentioned suggests that there is no natural border between Palestine and Syria. The second is al-Barghuthi and Totah’s \textit{Tarikh Filastin}.
  \item \textsuperscript{144} For the best account of the revolt, see Porath, \textit{The Palestinian Arab National Movement} (vol.2), ch.7-9.
\end{itemize}
national concerns and identities began to predominate over local ones and, at the same time, it reinforced the national over the local, especially among many villagers. The second factor was no doubt Zionist immigration, which was not terribly significant until 1930, after which point some 30-40 thousand Jewish immigrants began to flow into Palestine per year until the White Paper of 1939 severely curtailed Jewish immigration. Social and cultural factors no doubt played their part: education had expanded greatly from 1920-1936, the national umbrella organization for the Palestinian Boy Scout Movement did not form until 1936, for instance; newspapers were now printing daily in the 1930s rather than weekly or bi-weekly in the 1920s. There was also much more interaction between Arabs and Jews in the 1930s than the 1920s in places like Jaffa, Haifa and Jerusalem, which no doubt increased the national consciousness of the Muslim and Christian Arabs.

We have already said that many of the works on “Palestine” in the pre-1936 period were fundamentally about other things – but merely adopt Palestine as contours of analysis, such as Canaan’s *The Palestinian Arab House* (1933) and his *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* (1927). Let’s expand on this for a moment. Canaan is not writing about Palestine out of love and longing for his homeland, but rather because of his not unfounded awareness that many of the traditional practices among Palestine’s peasantry were quickly disappearing. In his *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* (1927), he writes that “the primitive features

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145 Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement* (vol. 2), 182, n. 153. Still, as Porath demonstrates, the heightened national awareness still did not translate into universal preparedness to bear arms.

146 Krämer, *A History of Palestine*, 256

147 In the pre-war period, a newspaper would circulate, at most, a few hundred copies. In the 1920s, the figure increased to roughly 1-2 thousand, weekly or bi-weekly. By the mid-1930s, the leading dailies, *Filastin* and *al-Difa’* were selling 4-6 thousand copies daily. This remarkable increase, from 1-2 thousand weekly or bi-weekly, to 4-6 thousand *daily*, no doubt played a key role in the creation and perpetuation of a certain Palestinian particularism. See Ayalon, *Reading Palestine*, 62-5.
of Palestine are disappearing so quickly that before long most of them will be forgotten.” 148 “It is remarkable,” he continues, “how many ideas have remained virtually unchanged for thousands of years.” To study Palestine’s peasants, for Canaan, is to unlock the secrets of the ancient east—especially as it described in the Bible. 149 From beginning to end, Canaan is obsessed with demonstrating how contemporary practices and beliefs among the peasantry mirror those of the ancient world, particularly in Biblical times, although he always fails to mention the intervening three-thousand years. 150 Much the same can be said for Canaan’s The Palestinian Arab House: Its Architecture and Folklore (1933). Here, he is chiefly interested in documenting “indigenous” forms of architecture before they were to become corrupted by westernizing influences. He explores Palestinian archeology, stones, housing construction, water cisterns, tents and the folklore of house, writing that “the Europeanization of Palestine is certainly proceeding so quickly that in most villages western architectural methods are being introduced and the old oriental ways gradually abandoned: a few years more and the Palestinian methods will probably be forgotten.” 151 To be sure, Canaan was not the only one to have imagined an unchanging East. The picture of an unchanging, pristine and unadulterated Orient corrupted by the impure indignities of the West emerges in Totah’s work on Arab Education as well. 152

148 Canaan, Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine, v.
149 Canaan, Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine, vi.
152 Its temporal contours range from the prophet Muhammad to the present-day (i.e. 1928) while the spatial contours range from Muslim Spain in the West to Khurasan in the East. In his chapter on the history of Teachers and Students in Education in the Arab world, for instance, Totah begins with the battle of Badr (624 A.D.), quickly moving into the Turkish conquests, bringing his discussion to the present day in just a few sentences. “Teachers of children did, as they do now in the Near East, receive payment…in form of checkens, eggs, milk bread, and vegetables….the village teacher in Palestine today still receives a pitcher of milk, some tobacco, and a hen from the successful pupil at the conclusion of a “surah” (chapter) of the Quran.” Totah, The Contribution of the Arabs, 34-5. So, too, Totah briskly transitions from a prophetic adage about respecting elders to an anecdote about contemporary Arab society
The other major work on Palestine in the pre-1936 period is al-Barghouthi and Totah’s *Tarikh Filastin*, but, as previously mentioned, this was written at the behest of the British authorities to be used in the Mandatory education system.\(^{153}\) To be sure, this does not make the book irrelevant for the study of Palestinian identity. It does, however, suggest that it was not necessarily a natural idea for an Arab intellectual to pen a book on “the History of Palestine” in 1923.\(^{154}\) And, indeed, this point is reinforced throughout the text, such as in their etymological discussion of this place we now call Palestine. Four names are offered which have historically been used to describe the region, *Filastin* being merely one of them.\(^{155}\) We find precisely the same historicization and contextualization of the word *Filastin* in a book published in 1934 by the Maktabat Bayt al-Maqdis titled *Tarikh Filastin min Aqdam Azmana ila Ayyamina Hathhi*.\(^{156}\)

In both of these works, rather than endowing *Filastin* with a time-immemorial historical importance, rather than obliterating previous conceptions of space, these writers, instead, point out the relative novelty of the word Palestine. These are remarkably sobering and non-nationalist treatments of the putative national homeland and repository of national memories. Palestine, in the 1920s and early 1930s, was still not considered the repository of glorious memoirs from which these writers sought to tell a story about the past – local, Arab and Islamic history, instead, played this role.

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\(^{153}\) Note that one of the co-authors of the *Tarikh Filastin* (1922), Khalil Totah, had previously co-authored a work on Jerusalem in 1920 with Bulus Shihadahh, meaning that this wasn’t even his first book.

\(^{154}\) Indeed, Totah wrote his Ph.D dissertation on the history of Arab education. Palestine is a totally irrelevant analytical category in his dissertation, as discussed above.

\(^{155}\) The other three are *‘ard kana’an*, *‘ard al-mi‘ad*, and *al-‘ard al-muqqadisa*. See al-Barghouthi and Totah, *Tarikh Filastin*, 10-11.

\(^{156}\) Maktabat Bayt al-Maqdis, *Tarikh Filastin*, 5-12.
A great many works were published on Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s. Some of them are political tracts, preaching the cause of Palestine in English before a British public, such as Tawfiq Canaan’s *The Palestine Arab Cause* (1936) and *Conflict in the Land of Peace* (1936). In other works, published in the late 1930s and 1940s, Palestine’s Arab character often trumps its Palestinian character. 157 A.S. Marmaji writes in his *Buldaniyyat Filastin al-‘Arabiyya* (1948), that “in these days of crisis especially, truest Patriotism is being demonstrated in Palestine and Arab nationalism is at its peak among Muslim and Christian Arabs…the texts cited in this topographical and historical anthology (*diwan*) are manifest proof of the Arab character of this land for many centuries past.” 158

A bird’s eye view of the historical works indicates that by the early 1920s the word *Filastin* was already in widespread use to describe the land between the river and the sea, although not without its rivals like *Syria*, as discussed above. 159 While *Filastin* emerged as a geographical, social and political space by the 1920s, it seems that “al-‘Arab” (the Arabs) or “al-Muslimin” and “al-Masihiyin” (the Christians) were still preferred over “al-filastiniyyin” (the Palestinians) throughout the Mandate period to describe the region’s inhabitants. 160 Very rarely is the word

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157 Anyone who has ever travelled anywhere in Palestine who speaks reasonably accentless Arabic, will have encountered the question: inte/i ‘Arabi/yya? (are you Arab?). At least according to the present author’s own experiences, it was significantly less common to be asked “inte/i Filastini/yye?” (are you Palestinian?). To the Arabic-speaking people I have met, whether or not I was Arab was always more important than whether or not I was Palestinian.


Palestinian used to describe the people of the region, who instead preferred to describe themselves, their culture, their land and their people as Arab.

To conclude, throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, Palestine was still often considered part of Greater Syria, it still had strong ties to Egypt and Syria, the Arabs of Palestine still on occasion imagined a political future subordinate to Cairo, Ankara, Damascus and even Baghdad, and the Arabic historians and geographers of Palestine had a conception of themselves, the past, present and future that was fundamentally about their cities rather than about Palestine, and fundamentally about Muslims, Christians and Arabs rather than Palestinians. In the mid-late 1930s, this began to change, and Palestine and Arab concerns became much more important relative to their regional, religious and city counterparts.

**Conclusion**

For a brief period in the late 1910s and early 1920s, the British were greeted as liberators in Palestine. For an even longer, perhaps a decade and a half or so after the arrival of the British in Palestine, the Ottomans were, *on average*, regarded with repulsion and contempt. By the mid 1920s, attitudes towards the British grew increasingly hostile, while, by the mid-late 1930s, attitudes towards the Ottomans grew increasingly nostalgic. The broader implication for us contemporary scholars is to be more critical about accepted narratives of the “good guys” and “bad guys” in history and be more careful about sweeping normative judgments on complicated historical periods and actors – i.e. the colonizer vs. the colonized, liberator vs. occupier, backwards vs. modern. I would recommend against, for instance, writing things such as the

_Filastin_, e.g. 36, 230. Although even Canaan is only a partial exception, insofar as he also writes about the “Arabs of Palestine.” see, for instance, Canaan, ”Unwritten Laws.”
British “colonization of Palestine that began in 1917,”

when, as we have shown, the British were, more often than not, considered liberators, not colonizers in 1917.

The second major point of this essay is to emphasize that Palestine was not a particularly important source of loyalty in the first decade and a half or so of British rule in Palestine. It took much longer than is typically assumed for a particular Palestine loyalty to develop among the region’s Arabic speakers. Certainly before the war and well into the 1930s – the prevailing attitude, subjects of interest and sources of loyalty for the historical works of the Mandate period were on the one hand, narrow loyalties—such as local city-based ones and, broader loyalties, to Islam, Christianity and to the regional space. In the mid-late 1930s, Palestine and Arab concerns emerged as central, and remained roughly equal through the end of the Mandate period. As a corollary there was a frequent gaze “Eastward,” suggesting the important role played by Egypt and Syria in both influencing historical writing in British Mandatory Palestine as well constituting a source of loyalty, pride and inspiration in their own right. Finally, evidence from the historical works as well as the geographical studies, suggests that Palestine, even in the mid-late 1920s, was still often considered a constitutive part of Bilad al-Sham or Greater Syria, nor was there agreement over whether or not places like Bisan, the Jalil, Haifa and Nazareth were even part of Palestine. To be sure, trying to convince identity to coagulate to the form and shape of an ordinal ranking is a perilous task, as Khalidi and Doumani have indicated, but it is nevertheless an essential one of the historian.

A final few points about broader implications of this study are in order. The first is that the “Mandate period” as a cohesive unit of study needs reconsideration. So frequently scholars talk

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about this period (and other periods) as monoliths. They ignore precisely when things are written and they ignore change over time. In the 1920s, there was a great deal of continuity with the Ottoman period in terms of loyalties and identities. The almost uniform tendency to deal with the Ottoman and Mandate periods separately has obliterated this continuity. I have only come to believe this after having focused on change over time within the Mandate period. If I had to write a study of identity in the first half of twentieth century Palestine, then, I would probably divide the period into the following time periods: 1908-1929, 1930-1936, 1936-1948.

Second, if Palestine was not a central point of loyalty in the 1920s and early 1930s–and had important rivals like local, religious and ethnic identities throughout the Mandate period–it may be necessary for scholars to consider units of analysis other than “Mandatory Palestine.” Perhaps we shouldn’t merely be talking about Mandatory Palestine but rather Mandatory Jerusalem (of which there is some writing) or the Mandatory Arab East (of which there is almost none). If the Arab historians wrote a great deal about their cities, their Arabness, their religions, their neighbors in addition to their Palestine, perhaps we as contemporary historians ought to also consider both narrower and broader analytical units of study. The present study is indeed subject to this very criticism, and, if I had to do a study over again on historiography in the Near

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162 We have already mentioned Khalidi as someone who describes the Mandate period as a monolith. Two additional examples of this tendency to treat long periods as history with tremendous upheaval as a monolith are Miller, Government and Society, who moves seamlessly in her analysis from the 1920s to the 1940s with disregard for change over time. The second work to ignore change over time is Davis, Palestinian Village Histories, who attempts to understand Palestinian identity in the nebulous present (page 181), by examining village histories written, beginning in 1982, continuing on to the second intifada period in the early 2000s. What’s more, Davis then conducted interviews beginning in 2005. Rapid, momentous and uneven changes engulfed Palestinian society over the course of this quarter century. Something written against the backdrop of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Oslo, the second intifada, the rise of Hamas, the Islamicization of Palestinian society, and the many other events in the interim no doubt shaped these books, but all of this is left out of her analysis. It is somewhat surprising to this author that an attempt to understand how these village books reflect Palestinian identity in the present would ignore change over time from the 1980s to the 2000s.
East, I would no doubt write a study of either the historiography of a particular city or the historiography of the Arab East—including Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Transjordan.

Indeed, I believe such an approach would shed much new light on the period under consideration. First, the city in Mandatory Palestine has attracted very little work, although, in recent years, it has received increasing attention. It is not surprising (to me) that it is principally Palestinians living in Israel/Palestine who seem not to have forgotten the importance of cities and villages, unlike their counterparts raised in the West with nation-state meta-narratives of Filastin as the homeland.\footnote{See, for instance, the works of al-‘Abassi, 
\textit{Safad fi ‘Ahad al-Intidab}, al-‘Abassi is from Safad. Yazbak, \textit{Haifa in the late Ottoman period}, Yazbak is from Haifa; Zuhayr al-Ghanayym, \textit{Liwa’ Akka}, Ghanayym is from Tulkarm; Munir, \textit{al-Lud}, Munir is from Lod; Shihadah, \textit{Ariha}, and many others. For village histories, almost all of them written by natives of the villages themselves, see Davis, \textit{Palestinian Village Histories}.} Second, the inter-War Arab East or Levant as fluid geographical space has received almost no attention. And yet, as suggested above, the broader Arab-Levantine milieu served as a fundamental point of reference for many Arabs of Mandatory Palestine. In addition to talking about a Jewish-Palestinian society, as some scholars have recently done,\footnote{See, for instance, Lockman, \textit{Comrades and Enemies}; Levine, \textit{Overthrowing Geography}; Shafir, \textit{Land, Labor, and the Origins}; Campos, \textit{Ottoman Brothers}, 19; Although Campos suggests that her own work fits into this framework, she also transcends the incipient nation-state boundaries, moving among and between the provinces and the imperial center, a refreshingly innovative approach.} perhaps we should also be talking about an inter-War Bilad al-Sham society. Scholars today might take a cue from the people they are studying and re-imagine their analytical boundaries to write histories that reflect their analytical, conceptual, ideation and spacial boundaries rather than contemporary ones. It is perhaps time to let Palestine rest in peace.
Appendix 1. List of historically-oriented works written by Arabic speakers who were born in what became British Mandatory Palestine, organized by subject.

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<th>City/Local Histories</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title and Author/Publisher</th>
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<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Khalil Totah and Bulus Shihadah, <em>Tarikh al-Quds wa-Daliluh</em> (Jerusalem: Matba‘at Mir‘at al-Sharq, 1920)</td>
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<td>(2)</td>
<td>Jamil Bahri, <em>Tarikh Haifa</em> (Haifa: al-Maktab al-Wataniyya, Tarikh al-Muqaddima, 1922)</td>
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<td>(3)</td>
<td>As‘ad Mansur, <em>Tarikh al-Nasira</em> (Cairo: Matba‘at al-Hilal, 1924)</td>
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<td>(12)</td>
<td>Na‘im Makhul, <em>Guide to Acre</em> (Jerusalem: Department of Antiquities, 1941)</td>
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<td>(14)</td>
<td>Abu Sha‘ban Hilmi, <em>Tarikh GhaZZa: Naqd wa Tahlil</em> (Jerusalem: Matba‘at Bayt al-Maqdis, 1943)</td>
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165 A few brief comments on the following appendix are in order. First is that, when not sure if something is “historical” by nature, I have tended to be inclusive rather than strict. Second, Palestinian authors often published their works in Cairo or Damascus, and Egyptians and Syrians may have published in Palestine, although the later is less likely. This renders the task of constructing this list particularly tricky, as it is often difficult to ascertain biographical details about the authors. Third, I list books only in one category even if the title suggests it fits more than one category. Forth, I do not include journal articles in, for instance, the *Palestine Exploration Fund or al-Mashriq*. This would have greatly expanded the scope of this project, and time constraints prevented such an undertaking, at least for now. Fifth, in the “totals” I have indicated, I include multiple volumes as multiple books, precisely because it speaks to the greater importance of the topic. Sixth, each section lists the works in order of publication, starting with the earliest. Important sources for constructing this list were Doumani’s “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine,” Khalidi’s “Palestinian Historiography,” Lajnat al-Thaqafa al-‘Arabiyya fi Filastin, al-Kitab al-‘Arabi al-Filastini, and the electronic catalogue of the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem. (http://www.jnul.huji.ac.il/heb/index.html). I have attempted to include as much information as available, although occasionally dates and/or publisher information are missing.

166 Books on villages or cities plus their hinterland, tribes, leaders and so on are included in this category.
The book was first published in 1909, and republished again in 1932 and 1934.

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167 Two thirds of this work covers local monuments and important sites in Jerusalem.
168 The original does not include a date. Some speculate the book was published in 1926, others 1935.
169 Jabal Tabur is located in the *Jalil* roughly five and half miles east of Nazareth.
170 The book was first published in 1909, and republished again in 1932 and 1934.
(22) Ahmad Khalifa and Radi Abd al-Hadi, *Tarikh al-Mamalik al-‘Arabiyya* (Jerusalem, 1946)
(23) Qadri Tuqan, *al-Uslub al-‘Ilmi ‘ind al-‘Arab* (Cairo, 1946)
(22) Ihsan al-Nimr, *Tarikh Jabal Nablus wa-al-Balqa’* (vol. 2) (Damascus: Matba‘at Zaydun, 1950)

**Palestine Histories**

(2) Totah, Khalil and Habib Khuri, *Jughrafiyat Filastin* (Jerusalem: Matba‘at Bayt al-Maqdis, 1923)
(9) Amin Aql, Ibrahim Najm and ‘Umar al-Nas, *Jihad Filastin al-‘Arabiyya* (Beirut, 1939)
(10) Hasan Sadqi al-Dajani, *Tafsīl Thalamat Filastin* (Jerusalem, 1936)
(12) Tawfiq Canaan, *The Palestine Arab Cause* (Jerusalem: Modern Press, 1936)
(13) Tawfiq Canaan, *Conflict in the Land of Peace* (Jerusalem, 1936)
(14) Yusuf Haykal, *al-Qadiyya al-Filastiniyya* (Jaffa: Matba‘at al-Fajr, 1937)
(16) Issa al-Sifri, *Filastin al-‘Arabiyya fi 170 Yaman* (Acre, 1938)
(18) Maktabat Bayt al-Maqdis, *Filastin* (Jerusalem, 1943)
(19) ‘Asaba al-Taharrur al-Watani fi Filastin, al-‘Uqda al-Filastiniyya wa al-Tariq ila Halliha* (Haifa, 1945?)
(21) Tawfiq Canaan, *The Hygienic and Sanitary Conditions of the Arabs of Palestine* (Jerusalem, 1946)


(27) Fu’ad Salih Saba, *Majmua’at al-Qawanin al-Tijariyya bi-Filastin* (Jerusalem, n.d.)


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**Regional Histories: al-Sham, Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sabri Sharif Abd al-Hadi</td>
<td><em>Jughrafiyat Suriyya wa-Filastin al-Tab’iyya</em></td>
<td>Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Ahliyya, 1923</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Said al-Sabbagh</td>
<td><em>Jughrafiyat Suriyya al-‘Umumiyya al-Mufassila</em></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Sa‘id al-Sabbagh</td>
<td><em>al-Jughrafiya al-Ibtida’iyya: L-Ahdath Suriyya wa-Lubnan wa-Filastin wa al-Sharq al-‘Arabi</em></td>
<td>Sidon: Matba‘at al-‘Irfan, 1927</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Al-Arshamandrit Bulus Sulman</td>
<td><em>Khamsa ‘Awam fi Sharq al-Urdun</em></td>
<td>Jerusalem, 1929</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tawfik Cannaan</td>
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<td>Jerusalem: Bayt al-Maqdis, 1930</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Basim Amin Faris</td>
<td><em>Electric power in Syria and Palestine</em></td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Stephan Hanna Stephan</td>
<td><em>Palestine by Road and Rail: A Concise Guide to the Important Sites in Palestine and Syria, with a Map and a Plan</em></td>
<td>Jerusalem: Ahva, 1942</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Said al-Sabbagh</td>
<td><em>al-Madaniyyat al-Qadima wa Tarikh Suriyya wa Filastin</em> (2nd edition)</td>
<td>(Jaffa and Haifa: al-Maktaba al-‘Asriyya, 1944)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Sa‘id al-Sabbagh</td>
<td><em>Tarikh Suriyya wa Filastin</em> (2nd ed.)</td>
<td>(Jaffa and Haifa: Sharika al-Taba’a al-Yafiyya, 1944)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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171 In this category I include all works that discuss Filastin in addition to some other geographical unit, as well as works written by Arabs in Palestine about other geographical units.

172 The book was re-published in 1924.

173 This work is a translation.

174 This book was designed for sixth grade curriculum for the Palestine Education Department.

175 This book was designed for elementary school students in Palestine and Trans-Jordan. The 1945 copy indicates this was its fourth printing, but I was not able to locate earlier editions.
Nicola Kattan, *The Geography of the Near East: With Special Reference to Palestine* (Jerusalem, 1945)\(^{176}\)

Muhammad ‘Izzat al-Darwaza, *Turkiyya al-Haditha* (Beirut: Maktbat al-Kashshaf, 1946);


Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi, *Ahl al-‘Ilm bayn Misr wa Filastin* (Jerusalem, al-Matba’a al-‘Asriyya, 1946)


Said Sabbagh, *Durus al-Jughrafiyya al-‘Ula: Bi al-Qusas wa Taswir* (Sidon: Matba’at al-‘Irfan, n.d.)

Islamic/Religious History

(1) Khuri Shihadah, *Khulasat Tarikh Kanisat Urshalim al-Urthudhuksiyah* (Jerusalem: Matba’at Bayt al-Maqdis, 1925)


(3) Abdullah Mukhlis, *al-Muslimun wa al-Nasara* (Haifa: Matba’at al-Zahra, 1928)

(4) Abdul Latif Tibawi, *Tasawwuf al-Islami al-‘Arabi* (Cairo, 1928)


(7) Muhammad Is’af Nashashibi, *al-Islam al-Sahih* (Jerusalem, 1934)

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(11) Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi (ed.) *Kitabl Muthir al-Gharam bi-Fada’il al-Quds wa al-Sham* (Surur al-Maqdisi al-Shafi’i (d.765/1364) (Jaffa: Maktabat al-Tahir Ikhwan, 1946)


(14) al-Saraj, *Majmua’at al-Qawanin al-Shari’a* (n.p., n.d.)

\(^{176}\) Roughly one-third of the book covers Palestine and the remaining two-thirds cover Trans-Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Cyprus, Arabia, the peoples of the Near East and other topics.

\(^{177}\) This book was written for British Mandatory education system, third grade.
History of the Middle Ages


Biography


General History


Minority Groups

1. Ilyas Marmura, *al-Samiriyyun* (Jerusalem: Maktabat Filastin al-‘Ilmiyya, 1934);

Ancient History


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178 This work was meant to conform to the fifth grade elementary class, see Khalidi, “Palestinian Historiography,” 69.
|---|---|
| **Zionism** | (1) Bulus ‘Abud, *al-'ArRd al-Muqaddisa wa al-Sahuniyya* (Jaffa, 1920)  
(2) Sa‘di Bisu, *al-Sahuniyya: Naqda wa Tah lil* (Jerusalem: al-Matba‘a al-Tijariyya, 1945)  
(2) Rafiq Tamimi, *Tarikh Auruba al-Hadith* (Jerusalem, n.d.)  
| **Archeological History** | (1) Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi, *Atha‘at min al-Mathaf al-Athri* (Jerusalem, 1943)  
(2) Rashid Hamid, *Tarikh wa-Dalil Athar Jarash* (Jerusalem: Matba‘at Bayt al-Maqdis, 1946) |
| **British Mandate** | (1) Wadi‘ al-Bustani, *al-Intidab al-Britani batel wa mahal* (1936)  
(2) Tawfiq Ilya Zar, *Aqwal wa Hukm ‘Arabiyya wa al-Ingliziyya Muqtatafa* (Acre: 1939) |

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179 Reprinted again in 1938, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1945, this work was written for the British Mandatory education system in Palestine, fifth grade.  
180 First published in 1942, reprinted again in 1943 and 1946, this book was written for British Mandatory education system, sixth grade.  
181 Reprinted in 1938, 1945, originally designed for the British Mandatory education system, fifth grade.
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