

Sarah Irving, Karène Sanchez Summerer, and Sary Zananiri

INTRODUCTION: VOCABULARIES OF TRAVEL AND
TOURISM IN THE “HOLY LANDS,” 1870-1950



In 2023, travel between Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and the rest of the Levant— when the barriers presented by passports and visas do not render it impossible—entails multiple border crossings, flights, and likely interrogations and potential denial of passage. In the Ottoman period, no formal borders divided the territory, although local divisions (official or unofficial) often determined where a foreigner might go. During the Mandatory era, formal regimes were imposed, not without contestation and ongoing processes of undermining.¹ For those in privileged positions, though, travel was possible in ways unimaginable in the twenty-first century: a Thomas Cook advertisement in the 1920s boasted of an overland trip of fifty-five hours from Damascus to Baghdad, with frequent connections from Jerusalem or Haifa, and the train journey from Cairo to Jerusalem could be completed overnight on a line which included stations at Rafah and Gaza.² Tourists were increasingly tempted by the reduced journey time offered by steamships, and by package tours which removed the necessity of searching out individual dragomans or staying in intimidating, alien spaces.

A growing literature on tourism in Palestine in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries has emerged in recent years. This special edition seeks to both build on and challenge aspects of this body of work, and particularly to address the paradox presented by the fact that the “Holy Land” was actively produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as an ancient and Biblical land, yet beneath this image lay the modern infrastructures that

Sarah Irving is Lecturer in International History and a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at Staffordshire University. Email: sarah.irving@staffs.ac.uk

Karène Sanchez Summerer is Professor and Chair of Middle Eastern Studies at Groningen University. Email: karene.sanchez@rug.nl

Sary Zananiri is Research Associate at De Montfort University. Email: sary.zan@gmail.com

facilitated first religious pilgrimage and later more secular forms of tourism. Work by scholars such as Kobi Cohen-Hattab, Daniella Ohad Smith, and Cyrus Schayegh has broken new ground, considering histories such as the ways in which pilgrims' hostels or khans intended for traders were complemented or displaced by hotels modeled on European and American examples and aimed at travelers from these places, and the ways in which technological developments in the nineteenth century changed the profiles of those visiting Palestine.³ This was also accompanied by the growth of nationally based, foreign-led institutions to facilitate pilgrimage, such as the Austrian Hospice, the Russian Compound, or the Notre Dame de France in late-nineteenth-century Jerusalem.

However, "Vocabularies of Tourism" seeks to broaden and deepen these studies in various ways. Firstly, it challenges the implicit or explicit focus of many existing works on mainly Christian tourists from Northwestern Europe and North America, considering in addition the presence and experience of travelers from Russia (the source of most Christian pilgrims, at least until the Bolshevik Revolution), and from India. Secondly, it seeks to interrogate the distinction between tourists and pilgrims—with the underlying implications of modernity versus premodernity with which these terms are often used—and stresses the presence of Muslim as well as Christian travelers in Palestine in the first half of the twentieth century. And thirdly, it foregrounds the many diverse experiences of the ordinary residents of Palestine as they interacted with the tourist industry: as guides, phrasebook authors, business owners and employees, and producers of images and souvenirs. This collection investigates how citizens of late Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine, both Arab and Jewish, interacted with the imaginaries imposed on them by foreign travelers and by the needs of an industry which provided a livelihood for large numbers of people of various classes and ethnicities. In doing so, the issue considers them as consumers as well as producers of the travel industry and complicates the unidirectional image often presented of tourism.⁴

In addition to these considerations, "Vocabularies of Tourism" examines the issue of travel in the broadest possible sense, looking not only at the practices and writings of tourists and travelers which often form the focus of tourism studies of the "Holy Land" but also at travel as a social phenomenon entangled with the society, culture, and economy of Palestine and the wider Levant. Facets of this approach include studies of how Palestinians (including Ashkenazim who

became integrated into Ottoman society) in this period reacted to and interacted with travelers by producing tourist guides and language manuals; how the production of souvenirs for tourists and pilgrims entailed international networks and cultural change; and the changing meaning and practices of visits to Jerusalem by Muslims from British-ruled India.

The period on which “Vocabularies of Tourism” focuses is 1870–1950. This fifty-year period engendered much dynamic and rapid change, marked by the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the establishment of the British Mandate, the Nabi Musa and Buraq Wall riots in the 1920s, the Great Arab Revolt of 1936–39, and culminating in the Nakba with the creation of the Israeli state in 1948. The studies featured in this issue explore how these political events and the transnational interconnections that were entwined with them impacted the ethnoconfessional diversity of populations in Palestine. How can we frame issues of mobility in ways that consider the links between the long-term movements of the migrant with the shorter-term shifts of the tourist or pilgrim? This special issue actively addresses these questions through a microhistorical analysis of individual actors alongside a mesolevel analysis of supranational actors such as religious institutions, the aid sector, and industry, and the macrolevel analysis of the marketing of Palestine abroad and the export industries of cultural products.

The vast political changes that occurred through this fifty-year period were entangled with changing ethnoconfessional affiliations, the impacts of British Mandate policy on the creation of museums and the “musealization” of the region, and the impacts of periods of unrest borne of the nationalist competition and contention through the interwar years. Tourism was one of these fields of competition and change, in which Arab nationalism and Zionism interacted, both locally in the changing circumstances of Palestine and internationally in the ways they addressed colonial and other global networks. In considering the latter, the framework of cultural diplomacy is fundamental to the ways in which groups in Palestine sought to create influence through far-flung ethnoconfessional networks.⁵ This special issue focuses on Arab cultural production, both textual and image-based, and the ways in which this may have formed as a response to Western scholarly interests in the region, particularly fields like archaeology, which had become increasingly entwined with Western diplomatic aspirations in the Levant and incorporated into the circuits of popular tourism. In this respect, the biblical overtones of “Holy

Land” tourism are both a product of modernity (especially the technological infrastructures that enabled it) and a projection into an ancient past that undermines such modernity.

By looking at the changing ways in which influence was sought through the tourism industry by both local and foreign individuals, institutions, and organizations, papers in this collection shed light on the ways in which culture was utilized in political ways. The underlying attempts to address different touristic audiences in Palestine during the first half of the twentieth century elucidates on the attempts to mobilize the image of Palestine—both textually and visually—not just for commercial concerns but as a means of bolstering political influence. Other studies focus more on the social and economic level, such as how Palestinians in the Mandate era navigated life under British colonialism on an everyday basis and what their daily environments looked like. In doing so, this issue contributes to a wider understanding of the social and political context of Palestine during the period as well as how cultures of mobility interacted with the political, cultural, and economic spheres.

This special issue is by no means intended as an overview of the subject of travel and tourism in late Ottoman and Mandate Palestine. There is still much research that needs to be done to present a more comprehensive picture. As Jasmin Daam’s book notes, the question of tourist numbers for Palestine remains unanswered as those numbers which exist bear the hallmarks not only of the different presentations of government versus industry needs and other skewing factors but also of the controversies over whether tourist visas were being used to facilitate illicit immigration into interwar Palestine.⁶ Economic and political concerns engendered many different narratives and images of tourism in Mandate Palestine, and “Vocabularies of Tourism” explores some of these many angles in ways which acknowledge and work with the complex and multiple perspectives of the time.

The present day also brings its challenges to this research; the events which spurred the development of the workshop leading to this special issue included the shuttering of the Thomas Cook archives in Peterborough in 2019 when the famed travel company went into receivership and the sudden closure of the newly opened Vatican archives of Pope Pius XXII in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.⁷ Cook’s Tours was the first package tour company to bring travelers to Ottoman Palestine,⁸ while the period of Pius XXII’s papacy (1939–1958) was formative for various types of group tourism, and for protonational (and later national) rhetoric around tourism, with new

transnational secular and religious touristic agendas. These two closures highlight the difficulties of researching tourism. The most pertinent archives are often those of companies and individuals, not states and large institutions, and are thus more vulnerable and transient. And the material culture of travel and tourism is often inherently fragile and temporary in nature: souvenirs may be cheap and soon thrown away; guidebooks, intended for a single visit, are often printed on low-quality paper which deteriorates or are dispensed with after use.⁹ Such items are rarely given space in official or scholarly libraries and collections and are more often to be found, at comparatively low prices, in the listings of secondhand book dealers and on eBay. Likewise, souvenirs – both religious and secular – that might be used to assess material cultural production are often disposed of or difficult to trace.

The loss of such ephemera and archives obscures an important aspect of Palestinian history, an industry which saw networks usually thought of and studied as discreet and independent overlapping – be they those of Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians or of “Christian” powers with geopolitical and imperial interests in the “Holy Land”; of religious and politically or culturally Zionist Jews; or of Muslims inspired by the hajj or by common pan-Islamist narratives, especially in the wake of the ending of the caliphate by Atatürk in 1924. The technologies, infrastructures, and knowledge bases of travel and tourism cause these networks to intersect in ways not anticipated by many other strands of the historiography of late Ottoman and Mandate Palestine. Such approaches also highlight the regional aspect of tourism in Palestine in this period, now lost to the political borders mentioned at the start of this introduction. As articles in this special issue show, Ashkenazi Jews living in Palestine often holidayed in Lebanon; hotel owners in Jerusalem or Jericho also owned property or businesses in Amman or Beirut; crafters of souvenirs in Bethlehem or Jerusalem might well be exporting their goods to Latin America or East Asia; guidebooks to Palestine also covered southern Syria; and Muslim travelers to Palestine might, on the one hand, be extending their hajj journey to encompass the al-Aqsa and Bayt al-Maqdis, or they could be pan-Islamist political figures traveling between South Asia and the center of the British Empire in London.

This is not to idealize the tourist industry or practices of travel in late Ottoman and Mandate Palestine. The processes of production and consumption embodied within them were often exploitative on levels such as class, gender, and race, and the advertising materials and

information were imbued with divisive nationalism, particularly those produced by the Zionist movement, or casual racism, especially those by Euro-American writers.¹⁰ The imaginaries involved in producing the “Holy Land” were a process of alienation, objectification, and Orientalization, often entangled with religious narratives. The paradox of projecting the “ancient land” through modern industries and technologies demonstrates a complex meeting of cultural producers and consumers in the tourism market, and the transnationally classed interplay between modern subjectivity and the “Holy Land” as an object. Indeed, producers and consumers from all sides frequently engaged in practices which were closely intertwined with colonialism and social inequalities, as demonstrated by the objectification of Palestinian rural imagery, life, and bodies in producing the perception of an “authentic” Biblical past frozen in time.¹¹ While these representations ultimately served the purposes of colonial domination, they were also often produced within the context of local commercial mercantile networks who both benefited from and contributed to the construction of the “Holy Land” imaginary.

In this way, indigenous populations within Palestine reacted to, encouraged, manipulated, and profited from the presence and impacts of international travel, but also mobilized tourism and pilgrimage as a force of resistance in shaping perceptions of Palestinian indigeneity.¹² Human movement was entangled with the travel and transport of objects and ideas, and the inhabitants of tourism and pilgrimage destinations were not simply passive recipients of visitors but active shapers, beneficiaries, and critics of processes of movement. Through this connected approach to regional itineraries and transcolonial networks, “Vocabularies of Tourism” interrogates mobility into and out of the region. It considers the movement of tourists and travelers as well as the impacts of tourism as an economic sector and cultural phenomenon that played a formative role in late Ottoman and Mandate Palestinian society.

NOTES

¹ Toufoul Abou-Hodeib, “Sanctity Across the Border: Pilgrimage Route and State Control in Mandate Lebanon and Palestine,” in *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Middle East Mandates*, eds. Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 383–94; Abou-Hodeib, “Involuntary History: Writing Levantines into the Nation,” *Contemporary Levant* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 44–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20581831.2020.1710674>.

² Edward Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999), 25.

³ See Kobi Cohen-Hattab and Noam Shoval, *Tourism, Religion and Pilgrimage in Jerusalem* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Daniella Ohad Smith, "Hotel Design in British Mandate Palestine: Modernism and the Zionist Vision," *Journal of Israeli History* 29, no. 1 (2010): 99–123. Cyrus Schayegh and Giancarlo Casale, "Mobility, Spatial Thinking, and MENA's Global Interconnectivity: A Primary Source Roundtable," *Mashriq & Mahjar* 9, no. 2 (2022): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.24847/v9i22022.340>; Liat Kozma, Cyrus Schayegh, and Avner Wishnitzer, eds., *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880–1940* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014).

⁴ Although with notable exceptions, such as Andrea Stanton's study of tourism from Mandate Palestine to Lebanon. "Locating Palestine Summer Residence: Mandate Tourism and National Identity," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 47, no. 2 (2018): 44–62.

⁵ For a wider exploration of this issue, see the chapters in Karène Sanchez Summerer and Sary Zananiri, eds., *European Cultural Diplomacy and Arab Christians in Palestine, 1918–1948: Between Contention and Connection* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55540-5>.

⁶ Jasmin Daam, *Tourism and the Emergence of Nation-States in the Arab Eastern Mediterranean, 1920s–1930s* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2023).

⁷ Zoe Jackson, "History in the Present: Saving the Thomas Cook Archives," *Doing History in Public*, 7 April 2020, <https://doingshistoryinpublic.org/2020/04/07/history-in-the-present-saving-the-thomas-cook-archives/>.

⁸ Cohen-Hattab and Shoval, *Tourism, Religion, and Pilgrimage*, 1–2.

⁹ See Sarah Irving, "'This is Palestine': History and Modernity in Guidebooks to Mandate Palestine," *Contemporary Levant* 4, no 1 (2019): 67.

¹⁰ Kobi Cohen-Hattab, "Zionism, Tourism, and the Battle for Palestine: Tourism as a Political-Propaganda Tool," *Israel Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 61–85; Irving, "'This is Palestine,'" 70–71.

¹¹ Karène Sanchez Summerer and Sary Zananiri, *Imaging and Imagining Palestine: Photography Modernity and the Biblical Lens 1918–1948* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 12, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004437944>.

¹² Sary Zananiri, "Indigeneity, Transgression and the Body: Orientalism and Biblification in the Popular Imaging of Palestinians," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 42, no. 6 (2021): 717–37.