

THIS WEEK IN



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Religious Celebrations in Palestine

Religious Celebrations in Palestine

This issue marks the eighteenth year of *This Week in Palestine*, and we are pleased to present you with another issue filled with articles that attest to Palestine's cultural wealth. A high level of religious tolerance and the integration of various faiths are defining facets of Palestinian culture, historically and today.

Such practice sets Palestine apart in a region where too many people have been immensely traumatized by acts of violence frequently caused by lack of tolerance, greed, and thirst for power and dominance. It is time to remember, in the Holy Land and elsewhere, that the central tenets and pillars of our religions are good will and kind deeds towards our fellow visitors on this planet.

Many thanks go to our authors that include a former Catholic Patriarch, the Imam and Preacher of Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the Palestinian ambassador to the Vatican. This issue will give you a glimpse into the variety of religious celebrations and the associated social customs of Palestinian Muslims, Christians, and religious minorities such as Sufis (a Muslim religious group), Christian Armenians, and Samaritans. Read accounts of how religious diversity enriches interfaith families and is actively pursued in Palestinian schools; find out how Muslims celebrate in London. Be intrigued by an account of Muslim holidays that may have its origins in pagan times while we tend to associate these traditional customs with Christian celebrations – and learn about native experts and their contributions to our knowledge about history. Immerse yourself in a lively account of seasonal religious celebrations and traditional songs. Enjoy the magnificence of a selection of the important shrines in Palestine and feel with the plight of Palestinian Christians for whom the *Nakba* has left scars that tend to burn more strongly at Christmastime. And if you are looking to buy a Christmas manger set, be inspired to look out for some special figurines – their image once helped preserve one of Palestine's special treasures of world cultural heritage. Our personality, artist, and book of the month allude to religious celebration, tolerance, and diversity. Do not forget to check out our rich events section.

We hope that we can count on your faithfulness – both as authors and readers – as we are compelled to move on to a subscription-only website. Your subscription will go a long way in maintaining this long-standing project of promoting and documenting Palestine. Check out the upcoming themes, and please act early to submit your intent to contribute an article. You are the stars of this magazine!

From the entire team at TWiP, we wish a Merry Christmas to those of you who celebrate this month, and a Happy, Peaceful New Year to all of you!

Warmly,
Tina Basem
Editor



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January 2017: **Palestine and the Common Good**

February 2017: **State of Justice**

March 2017: **Palestinian Poets and Poetry**

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This publication is



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turbo-design

Telefax: +970 2 2-295 1262
info@turbo-design.com
www.thisweekinpalestine.com
www.facebook.com/ThisWeekInPalestine

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Art Director: Taisir Masrieh
Graphic Designers:
Shehadeh Louis, Hassan Nasser
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Christian Religious Celebrations in Palestine



By Patriarch Michel Sabbah

Every day is a feast that we celebrate with gratitude. Palestinian Christians end the liturgical year with two feasts, honoring All Saints Day on November 1 and commemorating the dead on All Souls Day on November 2.

The main feasts for the Virgin Mary include the Annunciation on March 25, which recalls the appearance of Angel Gabriel to Mary in Nazareth as he announced that she would be the mother of the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ (Lk 1:26–39; Jn 1:1–5, 14). This day is the feast of the city of Nazareth.

Assumption Day, on August 15, recalls the old tradition according to which the Virgin Mary was “assumed” (*assumpted*, Latin for “taken up”) into heaven in body and soul. In Jerusalem, two days before the feast, a funeral statue of the Virgin Mary is carried in a large, popular prayer procession from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher through the streets of the Old City to the Tomb of the Virgin Mary near the Garden of Gethsemane.

Christmas

Christmas commemorates the Nativity of Jesus Christ and is a very joyous celebration of spiritual renewal. It is preceded by a vigil day of penitence that entails the confession of sins and participation in the Mass and Holy Eucharist. Peripheral celebrations, which dominate almost everywhere, feature trees decorated with lights and exhibitions of the manger with the Infant Jesus, Virgin Mary, shepherds, the magi, and more. The Nativity is celebrated on December 25 and followed



by the celebration of Epiphany on January 6. (See below for a discussion of the different calendars in use by various churches.) Epiphany denotes the “manifestation” of Jesus Christ to the world. Originally, Christians celebrated only one feast, Epiphany, which commemorated a number of events simultaneously: the nativity in Bethlehem (Lk 2:1ff), the visitation of the Magi, or Kings, from the East (Mt 2:1), the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by Saint John the Baptist

(Lk 3:1ff), and the first miracle in Cana of Galilee, when Jesus manifested himself to his disciples (Jn 2:1ff). The Arabic name for Epiphany has kept one memory only, the baptism, hence the name *ghitās* (غطاس) or “immersion in the water.” Christmas as a separate feast appeared in the fourth century; first in the West, then in all denominations. Today, the Western and Orthodox churches celebrate Christmas and Epiphany separately, whereas the Armenian Church celebrates only one feast, Epiphany.

To understand why the Eastern and Western churches celebrate many of the same events on different days, we need to take a short excursion. Today, the Gregorian calendar, introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in October 1582, is followed throughout the world in

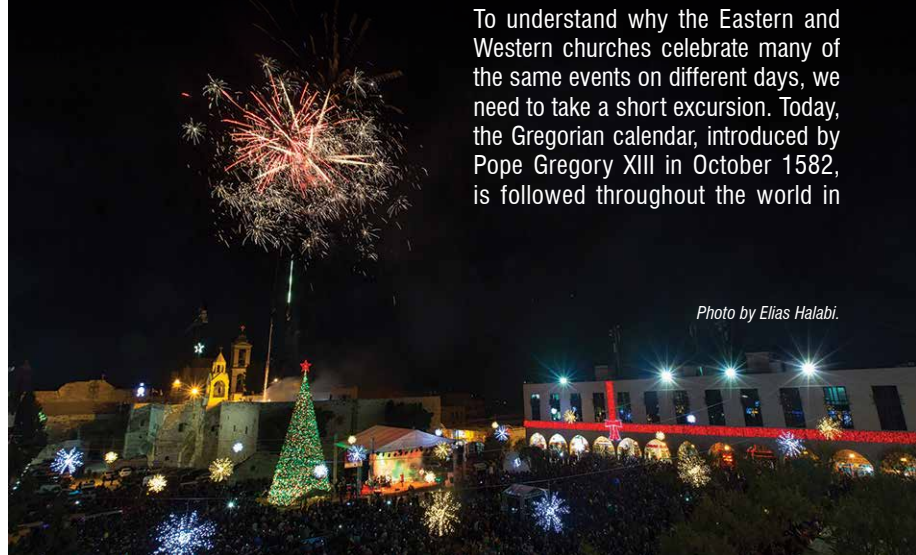


Photo by Elias Halabi.

The main feasts of Our Lord Jesus Christ commemorate his Nativity, Passion and Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, as well as Pentecost. Christmas and Easter were declared national holidays in Palestine by President Arafat.

secular matters, and for Catholics and Protestants it determines the dates of religious feasts. The Julian calendar was introduced in 46 BC by the Roman General Julius Caesar (100–44BC) and is used by the Orthodox churches to determine the dates of their feasts. Both calendars originated in Rome, but one is pagan (Julius Caesar) whereas the other is Christian (Pope Gregory XIII).

Thus, in fact, the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches all celebrate Christmas on December 25 and Epiphany on January 6. But because there is a difference of 13 days between these two calendars, Christmas falls on December 25 for Catholics and Protestants and on January 7 (25+13) for the Orthodox, whereas Epiphany is celebrated on January 6 by Catholics and Protestants and on January 19 (6+13) by the Orthodox. As Armenians commemorate Christmas and Epiphany together, they celebrate on January 19.

Lent, Holy Week, and Easter

The second main feast is the Resurrection on Easter. It is preceded by Lent, a time of fasting, special penitence, and prayer, as the faithful wish to share in the sufferings both of Jesus Christ and of people in their own land and all over the world. Lent culminates in Holy Week, during which the passion and suffering of Our Lord Jesus Christ are commemorated. Easter occurs between March 22 and May 1,

and its date differs not only from year to year but also between the individual churches. It is based simultaneously on the lunar and solar calendars, and the annual difference is due to lunar cycles shifting in the solar calendar. The difference between Eastern and Western churches is caused by the use of the different calendars, and thus celebrations of Easter may happen on the same Sunday or may differ by one to five weeks.

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday, which records Jesus entering Jerusalem amidst the warm welcome of its people, as narrated in the Gospel (Jn 12:12ff). In Jerusalem, a morning celebration takes place in the Basilica of the Resurrection; in the afternoon a solemn procession begins in Bethfage on the outskirts of Jerusalem, according to the narration of the Gospel, and moves through the village of At-Tour; it then proceeds down to the Garden of Gethsemane, and ends at the Basilica of Saint Anne, the place nearest to where the old temple is believed to have stood. Traditionally, thousands of locals and pilgrims walked in the procession, but today, the numbers of locals are limited because military permits to allow participation are given only to a few Palestinians.

Holy Week ends in the Triduum, three days that include Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. On Thursday, Christians remember the last day in the earthly life of Jesus, when he held the Last Supper and established two main institutions in Christian faith:

Many faithful consider Easter the most important Christian feast because without the Resurrection there would be no special meaning to the Nativity.



Saturday of Light, the traditional Orthodox celebration commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the Rotunda of the Church of Holy Sepulcher.

the Eucharist (a real, sacramental permanence of His presence on earth in the Blessed Sacrament), and the Priesthood, as the twelve Apostles were given the priestly power of Jesus. During this night, Jesus also gave his last commandment asking his followers to love each other and all people, and washed the feet of his disciples (Jn 12:1ff).

The washing of feet is still done in all parishes by priests and bishops who, having read the gospel, wash the feet of twelve members of the community. In Jerusalem, the Greek Orthodox patriarch performs the ceremony in the courtyard of the Holy Sepulcher before twelve bishops who are seated on a high podium and dressed in their liturgical attire. The patriarch, helped by deacons, washes their feet before a large crowd and the media. The Roman Catholic Latin patriarch accomplishes the same rite inside the Basilica during mass, after the reading of the Gospel. He washes the feet of twelve seminarians who are seated on two opposite benches before the Sepulcher.

Good Friday is called thus to indicate that this is the good day, the day on which Jesus offered his life to redeem humanity from evil and sin. In Arabic it is called Great Friday or Sad Friday. It is a day of prayer, penitence, and fasting. In Jerusalem, a liturgy is celebrated by the patriarch and the narration of the passion (suffering) is read on Calvary, a chapel inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher that denotes the place where Jesus was crucified and died. Afterwards, the people walk and pray "the Way of the Cross." They follow fourteen stations located on the streets of Jerusalem, recalling the path Jesus followed from the palace of the Roman governor Pilate (said to be where the Umariyya School is located today) up to Calvary. In the evening, in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher and in all parishes of Palestine, a popular ancient tradition is celebrated with a procession in which a funeral statue of Jesus, covered with flowers and perfumes, is carried amidst prayers and funeral dirges.

The main celebration on Holy Saturday, also called Saturday of the Resurrection, is the Ceremony of New Light. In the



Photo from Palestine Image Bank.

Roman Catholic Latin rite, burning coals are prepared at the entrance of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. After all other lights have been extinguished, the patriarch, assisted by other celebrants, in a symbolic gesture takes the new light from the coals. A big Pascal Candle is lit before the candles of the patriarch, other celebrants, and all the faithful. Then the Pascal vigil prayer starts with biblical readings and a Holy Mass. Originally, this prayer was a vigil prayer that lasted from late night until dawn of the Resurrection Day.

In the Greek Orthodox rite, appropriate preparations are made and all lights are extinguished before the patriarch, accompanied by bishops and clergy, enters the Chapel of the Tomb. According to ancient tradition the new light suddenly appears from inside the tomb in a miraculous way while he prays. The patriarch then exits the tomb chapel bearing the new light. Many faithful are there to take the new Pascal Light from this candle and carry it to other churches that may be in Palestine, Athens in Greece, or Moscow in Russia, or any other place in the world. In many parishes, religious and civil local authorities welcome this new light from the Holy Sepulcher with festivities and celebrations.

Easter Day marks the day of Resurrection, Jesus' triumph over sin and death. People greet each other on the day of Resurrection and all week long with the words *al-Masih qām* (Christ is risen), to which the answer is *Haqqa-n qām* (indeed he is risen). The message of Holy Week and Easter is spiritual, calling the faithful to renew their lives and to fill them with hope and joy. But it also carries the social and political message of strength, empowerment over evil and sin, and hope for freedom and an end to political oppression or military occupation.

Ascension and Pentecost

Jesus terminated his earthly stay by ascending to heaven (Acts 1:9ff), the memory of which is celebrated forty days after Easter on the feast of the Ascension. Because today the place of the Ascension is marked by a mosque, once a year, on Ascension Day, the Muslim authority of the mosque allows Christians to pray on the site. Pentecost is celebrated ten days after the Ascension, fifty days after Easter (Acts 2:1ff). The word Pentecost literally means the fiftieth day, while the Arabic name Ansara is of Aramaic origin and means reunion or meeting. On this day the Apostles

had gathered, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, in prayer on Mount Sion when the Holy Spirit descended upon them. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Apostles subsequently followed Jesus' command and went out to preach Christ the Savior who had died and was resurrected from among the dead. This feast is considered to commemorate the foundation of Christianity: on Pentecost day in Jerusalem, all churches, all Christians were born.

On Christmas and Easter, the patriarchs and heads of churches in Jerusalem deliver a shared message to all Christians and to all people of good will, insisting on the spiritual meaning of the feasts and on their message of justice and peace for all.



Palestinian Christians attending an Orthodox liturgy. Photo by Edmege van Rijn.

These are the main Christian annual celebrations. These religious celebrations are days for expressions of joy and occasions of spiritual renewal. This renewal includes political dimensions when people live under political oppression, as is the case for Christian Palestinians and indeed for all Palestinians. On the days of religious celebrations, prayer is a call for peace and justice and for resistance to subjugation. It is a call to humans to be more present before God Almighty, to abandon domination and violence, and to become more fully human, full of life and love.

His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah was the Latin (Roman Catholic) Patriarch of Jerusalem from 1987 to 2008. He holds a PhD in Arabic philology. Patriarch Sabbah calls for rapprochement between churches, interreligious dialogue, and justice and peace.



Muslim Religious Celebrations in Palestine



By Sheikh Yousef Abdel Wahab Abu Sneineh

Muslims in Palestine celebrate several holy occasions that include the *Isra'* and *Mi'raj* of Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him – pbuh) from Mecca to Jerusalem, the Prophetic *Hejira* or migration from Mecca to Medina, *Al-Mawlid an-Nabawi* or birth of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), and the holy month of *Ramadan* and *Laylat Al-Qadr*, variously rendered in English as the Night of Decree, Night of Measures, or Night of Value.

Not only do religious occasions have a spiritual significance for Muslims but they are also occasions for social cohesion and interaction. During religious celebrations, Muslim families meet for large meals, give each other gifts, and spend time together. In particular, women and children are well taken care of and the sick are visited and consoled.

The *Isra'* and *Mi'raj*

The *Isra'* and *Mi'raj* is one of the holiest occasions for Muslims all over the world. It is observed on the 27th day of the month of Rajab, the 7th month in the Islamic calendar. This event marks the night that Allah, or God, took Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) on a journey first from Mecca to Jerusalem and then to heaven. It

signifies the strong link that exists between the Levant in general and the Holy Land in particular and Mecca. The journey of the Prophet (pbuh) took place one year and a half before the *Hejira* or migration to Medina of the Prophet (pbuh).

Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) arrived in Jerusalem and led prayers in a gathering that was attended by all previous prophets. On the same night, the angel Gabriel brought Allah's message to the Prophet (pbuh). This clearly indicates that the Prophet (pbuh) is the last of the prophets and messengers of Allah and that the land has become Muslim by divine decree. The Holy Qur'an states, "Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid (mosque) al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing (Al-*Isra'* 17: 1).

As a result of the *Isra'* and *Mi'raj*, the city of Jerusalem has become a holy city for Muslims all over the world.

In fact, it is the third holiest city for Muslims after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. On this occasion, special celebrations are held in Al-Aqsa Mosque, attended by Muslim religious scholars, *imams*, who are the leaders of prayers in mosques, and the public. The *imams* give speeches and sing prophetic eulogies. Until the early twentieth century, there was a lock of the Prophet's (pbuh) hair in the Dome of the Rock that Muslims used to kiss on the occasion of the *Isra'* and *Mi'raj*. When the Ottomans left Jerusalem, they took with them the lock of hair that is now preserved in Istanbul, Turkey.

The *Hejira*

Every year, Muslims all over the world celebrate the *Hejira* of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) from Mecca to the Medina in the Hijaz region in Saudi Arabia. Symbolically, the *Hejira* marks the beginning of the establishment of

Dome of the Rock. Photo by Ahd Izhiman.





Muslims praying at Al-Aqsa Mosque. Photo by Tarek Bakri.

the state of Islam in Medina. Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) had migrated there together with His companion Abu Bakr Siddiq and accompanied by His venerable companions. In Medina, they all were given a very warm reception by the local inhabitants, known as Al-Ansar. Because on the very same day when the Prophet (pbuh) and His companions entered Medina, the city lit up, it was henceforth called *Al-Madina al-Munawwara* (the Lighted City).

While in the Medina, the Prophet (pbuh) lived with the migrants and Al-Ansar and mediated reconciliation between the feuding tribes of Aws and Khazraj. In addition, He initiated the construction of Al-Masjid al-Nabawi to teach His companions and the people that Islam is a religion of science, faith, and hard work. Two years after establishing the state of Islam, the Prophet (pbuh) defeated his enemies in the famous *Ghazwat Badr* (Battle of Badr), which is noted in the Holy Qur'an. It must be mentioned that the events of the *Hejira* are talked about many times in the Holy Qur'an.

Al-Mawlid an-Nabawi

Muslims celebrate Al-Mawlid an-Nabawi, the birth of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), on 12 Rabi' Al-Awwal (corresponding to February 15) each year. The prophets Abraham and Issa, as well as the Bible and Torah, prophesied the advent of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh). On this occasion, the narrative of the birth of the Prophet (pbuh) is recited, and prophetic eulogies that depict His high morals, good conduct, generosity, wisdom, and altruistic character are sung. Moreover, excerpts from the Prophetic *Hadith* (biography) and teachings of the Prophet (pbuh) are read aloud. The *Hadith* reveals that Islam is a divine religion and that people should join Islam and show knowledge, faith, and wisdom, and give a good example. In addition, the Prophet (pbuh) taught that Islam is a religion of tolerance, justice, and love. Because *Al-Mawlid an-Nabawi* signifies the birth of the Muslim nation, all Muslims should learn the moral values and wisdom of Islam and exercise them in real life.

The Holy Month of Ramadan and Laylat al-Qadr

Ramadan is the month of intensive fasting and prayer, and Muslims believe that Allah will grant them double rewards if they fast and pray during *Ramadan*. During *Ramadan*, Muslims undergo a process of self-cleansing both physically and spiritually, and ask Allah for forgiveness and salvation.

Muslims believe that *Laylat al-Qadr* is better than one thousand months. During that night, the angel Gabriel revealed the Holy Qur'an to the Prophet (pbuh). Muslims flock in large numbers to Al-Aqsa Mosque where they spend the whole night in prayer and worship.

During *Ramadan* social ties among Muslims are strengthened. People break

the fast together and the poor are invited to mosques for free food and prayer.

Eid al-Fiter and Eid al-Adha

Eid al-Fiter (Breakfast Feast) marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and is one of the holiest occasions for Muslims. Its beginning is declared by religious authorities the night before the feast when they see the first light of the crescent of the waxing moon. It is celebrated with a breakfast meal that generally includes meat. A mutton or calf is slaughtered and distributed in three parts among the family, friends, and relatives, and the poor.

Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice) celebrates Abraham's willingness to succumb to the will of God and slaughter his own son – but God gave him a lamb to be slaughtered instead. It is the holiest feast for Muslims. Pilgrimage to Mecca undertaken on this day, the *Hajj*, is one of the five pillars of Islam, required of the faithful along with *shahada*, confession of faith; *sala*, prayer; *sawm*, fasting during Ramadan; and *zaka*, the giving of alms.



Well of Souls beneath the Dome of the Rock. Photo by Shareef Sarhan.

For *Eid al-Fiter* and *Eid al-Adha*, delicious date cookies called *ka'ek* and *ma'moul* are baked and beautifully decorated, to be served with a cup of *qahwa sada* (a strong special blend of coffee that is boiled for a long time and prepared without sugar) to visitors that often include all members of the extended family who may stop by only for a few minutes to exchange the latest news and share in each other's lives, strengthening family and friendship ties.

Article translated by Sammy Kirreh.

Sheikh Abu Sneineh is the imam, teacher, and preacher of Al-Aqsa Mosque. He has an MA in Islamic Shari'a (Law) and is currently located in the Islamic Waqf Department in East Jerusalem.



Pontifical Institute Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center

An Ecumenical Sanctuary in the Heart of the Holy Land

For Christians, a visit to the Holy Land is an encounter with the living Christ, the chance to walk in his footsteps. It offers the adventure of discovering the various places where he lived, preached, and suffered for the salvation of the world, and the opportunity to get to know the main holy places and the rich complexity of this land's past in order to better understand its present challenges.

At Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center, located opposite the Old City's New Gate, pilgrims, tourists, and locals find a sanctuary that gracefully mixes past and present. We are making it our mission to be an ecumenical holy place - a spiritual, cultural, and educational center for Christians and our brothers and sisters of different faiths. Visitors and locals alike frequently attend our daily mass at 18:30 or one of the many religious celebrations that take place here, among them Christmas Eve midnight mass and Christmas and Easter masses. Located on the green line between East and West Jerusalem, the Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center is furthermore the perfect venue for religious and other high-profile meetings and conferences. During his visit to the Holy Land, Pope Benedict chose our center as the place to meet with the local congregation and officials.

The center is built on over a century of tradition and has a history that includes some turbulent moments. Notre Dame Chapel was consecrated in 1894, and the pilgrimage center was completed in 1904 with the erection of the statue of the Virgin on its rooftop. Severely damaged during the war of 1948, the center was used as a military post by the Israeli armed forces. Handed over to the Holy See in 1972, it was declared an ecumenical institute in 1978. In 2004, Pope

John Paul II entrusted Notre Dame Center to the Legionaries of Christ, stating, "We dedicate this Center to Our Lady of Jerusalem, Regina Pacis (Queen of Peace), and offer it to the world as a place of fruitful spiritual development."

Recently renovated, the Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center offers comfortable rooms and suites with a magnificent view of the Old City. Enjoy quiet time on the picturesque rooftop to peacefully take in the magnificence of the holy sites, such as the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Our restaurants serve every taste, and, most important of all, we offer the services you need to live a profoundly spiritual experience on your pilgrimage! The management and staff are here to assist you with anything you may need to make your stay special and memorable.

Finally, Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center would like to invite you to join us for our Christmas and New Year's midnight masses as well as Christmas and New Year's Eve dinners at the Cheese and Wine Restaurant and Christmas Day lunch at the Notre Dame Dining Room.

*Wishing you and your loved ones a Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year filled with joy and peace.*



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Palestinian Rites of Spring

Eggs, Pascal Lamb, and the Thursday of the Dead



By Ali Qleibo

It was the second week of April. I was driving through the countryside southwest of Bethlehem to visit my friend, Um Nassar in Beit Ummar. “Today marks *Khamees al-Bayd* (Thursday of the Eggs),” Um Nassar greeted me as I entered her lush *housh* (courtyard), only a few yards away from the ancient crusader sanctuary of St. Matthew. She took my hand in warm welcome and peered affectionately into my eyes. Um Nassar is in her late eighties and recognized as one of Palestine’s specialists in intangible heritage, a native expert par excellence. Experienced, knowledgeable, mature, and articulate, she has earned the respect of the community, which enhances the credibility of her narratives. As we sat under the luscious vine canopy, she reminisced nostalgically, “Last Thursday was *Khamees al-’Amwat*, the Thursday of the Dead.”

“The Thursday of the Dead constituted a veritable holiday,” my Bedouin friend Khalil from Al-Ma’sarah later confirmed. He had made his own inquiries among the older women of his village and was eager to share the data. “It is an Eid (holiday) in the full sense of the term and was celebrated like all the major Muslim holidays with the purchase of new clothes and the ritual sacrificial *dhabeh* (slaughter) of a spring lamb.” *Al-dhabiha* is a quintessentially Muslim element that marks major holidays in contradistinction to other commemorative minor holidays. The blood sacrifice is an ancient Semitic concept and,

significantly, is the root of the Arabic word *madhbah* (the altar).

Though most Palestinian peasants have heard of the Thursday of the Dead, their knowledge of the ritual is scanty. The extant literature on Palestinian traditions is replete with cryptic statements that describe this major holiday. But even though these writers, folklorists, and sociologists are of rural extraction, nothing substantive has been produced because their knowledge is compromised due to the lack of anthropological training. Instead of studying the event itself, their interest is displaced on identifying the contextual data, and they merely explore its temporal position in relation to Easter, as observed in the Greek Orthodox calendar, or to other seasonal pilgrimages to local Palestinian sanctuaries that take place in April. In fact, this feast is a universal celebration that is shared by the Persian *Nayrouz* (commemoration of martyrs, also marking the beginning of the Coptic new year, celebrated on September 11), the Egyptian *Sham al-Nassim* (literally

Cultural anthropology is an interpretive qualitative study. Ethnologists analyze the data they gather from first-hand observation and use information supplied by savvy natives as their point of departure. Expert natives draw their knowledge from life experience and stories collected from those who surround(ed) them, and as close friends, they form the bridge that connects an outsider with the local community.

Smell of the Zephyr, the official holiday marking the beginning of spring), and similar feasts in other cultures.

The archetypal symbolism of the egg, celebrated in Palestine on the subsequent *Khamees al-Bayd*, carries various meanings and significance in different cultures. In Palestine, the analysis of the traditional, indigenous commemoration of death, followed by



Beneath the cold sunlight of February, delicate white petals tinged with a blush of rose bloom through the grey branches. The picturesque almond blossoms are the harbingers of spring. Photo by the author.



Author Ali Qleibo with Umm Nasser. In her late eighties and recognized as one of Palestine's specialists in intangible heritage, she is a native expert par excellence. Photo by the author.

a joyous celebration involving colored eggs, is obscured by the belief of native folklorists that this holiday is integrally related to Greek Orthodox Easter celebrations. These authors—influenced by their ideological conviction that Palestinian cultural identity is at its basis Christian—tend to overlook the pagan structures that were prevalent among the Semitic Canaanite early settlers of Palestine. They fail to note the structural, systemic adaptations to Palestine (as an ecological niche) that determined integral aspects of Palestinian cultural identity among its pre-Christian population. Consequently, they overlook the original meaning of the Thursday of the Dead followed by the Thursday of the Eggs as pagan rites of spring or a *rite de passage* from winter to spring. This major rural native rite of passage that traditionally was observed by Christians and Muslims with great solemnity thus remains shrouded in mystery.

Hilma Granqvist, the pioneer of modern Palestinian cultural anthropology, provides an exquisite ethnographic description of rituals in her seminal work, *Muslim Death and Burial: Arab customs and traditions studied in a village in Jordan*, published in 1960. In the early 1920s she was fortunate to have had the opportunity to conduct her fieldwork in the village of Artas.

Over a period of 40 years she returned numerous times to continue with her fieldwork and documented the Palestinian traditional way of life in which rituals dominated the social, religious, economic, and cultural aspects of life. Her ethnographies reveal a circumspect puritanical outlook in which rituals defined the dynamics, texture, rhythm, tempo, harmony, tone, color, and form of daily life. Along with associated verbal utterances, they formed a meticulously crafted libretto, strictly defined through structures in which the binary oppositions of the sacred/profane and the pure/impure played a constitutive role. Hilma's opus reveals the musical score that was underlying everyday life in a Palestinian village before the *Nakba*.

She describes the Thursday of the Dead as a commonly observed ritual that is enacted in the village cemetery. She notes that in the weeks following a burial it was customary to visit the dead every Thursday. May I remind the reader that one hundred years ago the demographic size of the Palestinian village was much smaller; the entire population of Artas did not exceed 300 adults and children. Interpersonal relationships were very intimate, and the death of a family member was experienced as a traumatic event. Women continued to visit the dead

even six months after the burial. The Thursday of the Dead was a ritualized drama, which put an end to the close relationship with the dead and, so to speak, turned a green leaf.

The preparation for the ritual drama would take place earlier in the week. As with all ancient-Semitic solemn holy occasions, a blood sacrifice had to be offered. On this holiday a *ramsy* (spring lamb) would be sacrificed and its meat used to make meat pies. Sweet pastries would also be prepared. Both savory and sweet pies would be stacked, separately, in braided wicker baskets and piled on top of hay-woven trays to be carried early on Thursday morning to the cemetery.

It is full spring. A lush canopy of fresh blades of grass covers the cemetery ground. Here, there, and everywhere dandelions, anemones, cyclamen, wild stock, bluebells, and a great diversity of flowering grasses and shrubs are in full bloom. The almond, apricot, and plum trees are radiant with fresh green new buds amidst the white, tinged-with-rose fruit blossoms. The feeling of a joyous picnic is evoked as the cemetery is thronging with women and children who are waiting in anticipation of the ceremonial delicacies. Local poorer women and children converge onto



Hilma Natalia Granqvist, the Swedish-speaking Finnish pioneer of modern Palestinian cultural anthropology.

The analogy between modern Palestinians and ancient Canaanites that permeates my research does not seek to establish a homologous relation. Rather, the use of analogical argument is of a typological order and points to mutually shared patterns, regularities, attributes, or functions that have survived from ancient times to modernity. Such comparisons and metaphors drawing on analogical reasoning are heuristic and help interpret aspects of Palestinian cultural expressions within a wider historical and ecological niche.

the cemetery and are joined by many others from neighboring villages. Then the distribution of the meat pies and sweet pastries begins. Each woman and child is doled out a specified portion. But the good will and sense of merriness quickly give way to noisy squabbles. Friction and tension invariably arise, and the momentum of the bickering increases. Hilma is well prepared for the situation since she has already been alerted by her informants to this eventuality; the abusive verbal exchange is in fact an integral element of the ritual.

According to Hilma's account, some of the ladies present at the cemetery hide the pies in their chest pockets, underneath their garments, and ask for more food. "You did not give us anything," they protest. "I already gave you some," the ladies who brought the food answer. Refusing to give them any more pies or sweets, they say, "You are hiding the pies in your chest pockets." "We are neither thieves nor hungry. We did not come to the cemetery to eat. We have food in our houses," the women retort. An altercation develops, and as the intensity of the confrontation



Eggs as a symbol of life and rebirth are colored and presented as gifts in celebrations of different religions and traditions worldwide.

escalates, the children steal the baskets and trays with the food and run away. Order and joyous merriment dissipate into dissonant chaos. The pitch of the women's voices rises as the arguments turn into a loud squabble. The men in the village, alarmed by the raucous noise, rush to the scene brandishing their sticks and order the women and children to leave the cemetery. (Hilma notes that although on different occasions men may brandish a stick against women, they never physically hit them. It is merely a threatening ritual gesture.) Intimidated and chased away by the reprimanding men, the women grudgingly scurry out of the cemetery back to the village, exchanging accusations, scowling and growling, and announcing that they shall not visit the cemetery anymore: قطعت المقابر واللي بده يزورهم (Damn the cemetery and those who visit them).

This ritual drama, observes Hilma, brings to an end the routine visits to the dead at the cemeteries, and the intense bonds with the dead are severed – until a new round of loved ones has passed away.

Ritualized, highly dramatic gestures and idiomatic expressions emerge as the salient features that distinguish traditional peasant society. The death of ritual in Palestinian village life is a consequence of the loss of the whole of Palestine in 1967 (*Naksa*) in the wake of the *Nakba* of 1948. Consequent to these events, Palestinian peasants have lost the ability to economically depend on their land for survival, being forced to become wage laborers instead. The distinction between traditional and modern, post-*Naksa* Palestine is quite striking; in traditional Palestine, ritual played a central role and our ancestors

tended to be conservative in this regard, making sure to faithfully pass down the rites and ceremonies. In contrast, the myths that justified those rituals could change. In fact, the explanations that I have heard concerning extinct holidays and the discontinuation of rituals associated with a variety of transitional social situations such as birth, marriage, and death arose only after the original, non-mythic reason for the ritual had somehow been forgotten.

In Beit Suriq, my friend Sarah Qandeel, God bless her soul, explained to me the Feast of the Eggs within the context of the Palestinian agricultural calendar.

"Forty very cold days, called *Al-Marbaniyyeh*, literally "the forty days" in colloquial Palestinian dialect, last from December 20 until February 1 and are followed by fifty cold days, *Al-Khamsinieh*, literally fifty days,

One of the characteristics of a state is the cultural identity of its citizens. The area of land that Palestinians consider to be their homeland has been reduced to less than a quarter of its original size due to a concurrence of circumstances. In the process, an important part of Palestine's cultural and historical heritage has been lost.

which in turn are followed by the second *Khamsinieh* (fifty days of a hot, dusty wind) that begins around March 21, and whose end marks the beginning of summer proper. The fifty cold days of the first *Al-Khamsinieh* are divided into four *sa'd* (periods, literally the four fortunes). *Sa'd* punctuate the fluctuating temperatures, indicate the increasing growth rate of cereals and legumes, and mark the return to life of dry, dusty-grey trees. April is noted for its festive Thursdays. On the first Thursday of April, *Khamees al-'Amwat*, peasants commemorate the dead. Cemeteries are visited and special sweets are given as offerings to the widows, the needy, and the children.



Sarah Qandeel, native expert from Bet Suriq. Photo by the author.

The second Thursday in the month of April is known as *Khamees al-Bayd*."

Palestinian peasants proffer their own narrative of the Thursday of the Eggs in relation to the agricultural calendar. "After the seeds are planted in November and December, nature comes to a standstill. The temperature falls and the rainfall intensifies; frost and snow are common in this period. *Al-Marbaniyyeh* stretches for forty days." Sarah paused as she sought the words by which she could describe the intense wet, cold, grey January weather. These are the shortest and coldest days of the year. "No one travels anymore. We stay around the house. Children are rarely bathed and only in the daytime for fear of colds. There is little work in the fields. Even the chickens stop laying eggs. No one ventures into the fields until *Eid al-Ghitas* (baptism celebration) in the middle of February, when the warming trend begins."

The forty coldest days of the year, *Al-Marbaniyyeh*, end in early February. A cold wind heralds this shift, but then a warming trend begins. Despite its heavy rain and characteristic wet mud, February is the harbinger of the summer. The saying goes, *shbat bikhabet u bilabbet u rihetal-seiffih* (loosely translated, the adage that uses alliteration as a proof of its truth value says, though in February one trudges through the mud produced by the heavy rainfall yet whiffs of warm air forewarns of the summer to come). By this time, the cereals have grown and their saplings are visible above the earth. It is the time when vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, and tomatoes may be planted. "During the fifty cold days, the nights become shorter and daylight gradually increases. Plants begin to grow in size. Chickens begin to lay eggs again and these eggs are saved. When a hundred or a hundred and fifty eggs are collected, then the Thursday of the Eggs is celebrated," Sarah explained.

What remains of Palestinian heritage is in grave danger of being lost for future generations due to the occupation of the West Bank since 1967, its intrusive colonization and the establishment of Jewish settlement there. Hence there is a great need for intensive ethnographic fieldwork to save and reconstruct Palestinian intangible heritage.

Anthropologists invariably arrive on the scene either too early or too late. We are always at a disadvantage, our knowledge is inevitably incomplete, and our vision is constrained by our scientific paradigms. From an anthropological perspective, both the Thursday of the Dead and the Thursday of the Eggs emerge as rituals handed down meticulously through the ages and are vestiges of ancient Canaanite rites of spring. Without archaeological data that would reveal the presence of colored eggs among ancient Canaanites, our interpretation remains highly conjectural: A myth accounting for a long-extinct ritual.

Dr. Ali Qleibo is an artist, author, and anthropologist. He has lectured at Al-Quds University and held a fellowship at Shalom Hartman Institute; he was visiting professor at Tokyo University for Foreign Studies, Japan. As a specialist in Palestinian social history and through his work at the Jerusalem Research Center, he has developed the Palestinian Social and Muslim Tourism Itinerary. Dr. Qleibo has authored various books, including Surviving the Wall, Before the Mountains Disappear, and Jerusalem in the Heart. A renowned oil painter, he has held innumerable art shows. He may be reached at aqleibo@yahoo.com.



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From Conflict to Communion

Unifying Religious Celebrations among Churches



By Issa Jamil Kassissieh

One of the most important moments I have experienced as Ambassador of Palestine to the Holy See was the historic Lutheran-Catholic common prayer for the commemoration of the Reformation that took place on October 31, 2016, in Lund, Sweden. It exemplifies the path His Holiness Pope Francis is determined to follow and the result he strives to achieve.

The signs of progress toward unity among the Churches were already apparent during the pilgrimage of His Holiness Pope Francis to Palestine in 2014. It included his historical encounter with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of Orthodox Christians worldwide, in our occupied capital, Jerusalem. This was a decisive moment as the heads of Eastern and Western Churches met in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the heart of the Holy City. And it lingers in our minds, given that the aspired aim was the unity of the Word and of the Church, as wished by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The meeting in Lund between His Holiness Pope Francis and His Grace Bishop Munib Younan, a Palestinian refugee who has honored our people by serving as the head of the World Lutheran Federation, was a continuation of our journey on the path towards Christian partnership and unity. Today and during the Christmas season, we rejoice at this historical and decisive moment in the history of the Church.

Ephesians 4:3-4 "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit."



Pope Francis and the head of the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Munib Younan, Jerusalem, meeting in Lund, Sweden, for a joint commemoration of the Reformation. Photo courtesy of the Osservatorio Romano Servizio Fotografico (Vatican Press).

During the last few years, we have witnessed in Palestine, and particularly in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, how the heads of Churches have agreed to rehabilitate both the Church of the Nativity that was in a dire state and the Holy Tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Today, due to these agreements and understandings, the various Churches are continuing to walk along the path toward unity. As Palestinians, we are proud to contribute to the restoration of both

churches, which also form an integral part of Palestinian national heritage. Associated efforts include the formation of a presidential committee to lead the restoration of the Nativity Church. This year, after 500 years of severed ties, the Lutheran and Catholic churches have met and have turned their conflict into an effort toward cooperation. In 2014, the Orthodox and Catholic churches did the same. I am hopeful for accelerated steps so that a united Church would meet to pray in one united ecumenical

prayer at the place where our Lord Jesus Christ was born, and where he taught and established the first Church.

Palestine has presented the world with a strong message of unity between various faiths. It serves as an example for the rest of our region of the ways in which Christians and Muslims celebrate together Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter. President Abbas attends all three Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem: Catholic, Orthodox, and Armenian. In fact, in the last few years we have witnessed positive initiatives by the various Christian denominations in different parts in the Holy Land to celebrate Christmas together according to the Western calendar and Easter according to the Eastern calendar. It is our wish and hope that the unity of the celebrations would reach Jerusalem very soon so that we would be able to participate together in the processions in the heart of the Christian quarter with all our scouts.

As a Palestinian, a Christian, and a Jerusalemite, I aspire – just like the vast majority of my people – to symbolize unity in practice as well as in spirit. In fact, it is the strong wish and desire of the various Christian communities to celebrate Christmas and Easter united in one spirit, the spirit of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and his crucifixion in Jerusalem. We also hope to reunify both cities, currently separated by networks of illegal Israeli settlements, walls, and checkpoints.

We are living in sensitive times regarding the existence and presence of Christianity since many Christians have left due to political uncertainty and economic stagnation amidst concerns of the rise of fundamental groups in the region. Within this context, the unity of the Churches is crucial for the future of Christians in our region. As Palestinians will soon reach their fiftieth year under Israeli occupation, such signs of unity will bring hope

Unity, justice, and peace: These are three gifts from God, required from the Churches that seek unity, and anticipated by every bearer of good will.

to the oldest Christian community in the world. Let us hope that the light of justice and peace and the power of logic will shine and radiate from Palestine, the Holy Land, to include the Middle East and entire world. This is God's will. It is the message of each believer in the Holy Land.

Let us strive to achieve unity between the Churches as a key element to ensure the continued existence of Oriental Christianity in Palestine, a treasure that makes the Palestinian people proud. The challenges are tremendous and the number of Palestinian Christians is dwindling. The Israeli occupation authority's confiscation of lands from 52 Christian families in Beit Jala/Cremisan is a recipe for the Christian exodus from Palestine and one example of the tremendous challenges that threaten the very existence of Christianity in the Holy Land. The living stones of Palestine deserve no less than to enjoy justice, tranquility, equality, and love in the land of peace, Palestine, the Holy Land.

Currently serving as the Palestinian Ambassador to the Holy See, Issa Jamil Kassissieh served as one of the diplomatic advisers to the late Faisal Hussein during his time as head of the Orient House. Upon the election of President Abbas, he joined the office of the president as an adviser in diplomatic affairs. He has held the position of deputy head of the Negotiations Affairs Department. Today, he serves as Ambassador of Palestine to the Holy See.

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Nabi Musa as an Example of Islamic Festivals in Palestine



By Mahmoud Abu Eid

***O Jerusalem we've come to visit you in a celebration
At a festival that was built upon the shoulders of real men.
Your love is in our Hearts and minds
And it raises a fire in my heart [even if we are] far away from you.
Muhammad visited you and Jesus lived in you.
In you, the cross created its brotherhood with the crescent,
In you, the light of the Church of Resurrection is a candle,
And the minarets of Al-Aqsa are like the branches of beauty.
The walls of the city welcome everyone.
The Prophet said, to Al Aqsa we will head
And if I am far from you, my eye will not sleep.***

Verse of a song that pilgrims sing on their way to mawasem (regional festivals).

Similar to other Levant countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt, Palestine has established over time many collective social activities. Their aim is to gather people from all over the region in order to celebrate a common narrative or strengthen values that have roots in the life of the society. The participants in these activities come from various groups within society, and each group has tried to utilize such gatherings for its own interest. On the one hand, this phenomenon asserts the diversity and multicultural nature that characterize the adherents of the different religions and the entire people of the Levant, in general, and Palestine in particular. On the other hand, it is an indicator of the good relations between the rulers and the people, the faithful of various religious groups, and even of different social



Sufis gathering in Nabi Salih in order to join the procession that leaves the Al-Aqsa Mosque for the Nabi Mousa Festival (at a shrine near Jericho), 2014.

classes. With this background in mind, one appreciates the importance of the variety of gatherings that Palestinians hold every year with the aim to combine social life with political and religious dimensions. Some of us call them *mawasem* (plural of *mawsem*, literally meaning season), others consider them feasts or religious festivals, and they take place throughout Palestine and during different seasons throughout the year. Among them are Nabi Musa in Jericho, Nabi Saleh in Ramleh, Nabi Rubin in Jaffa, and Al-Mintar in Gaza.

In the year 1187, Salah el-Din ibn Ayyub (Saladin), the founder of the Ayyubid Dynasty, conquered the Holy Land by defeating the Crusaders, which opened a new chapter in the history of our country. Historians generally have paid attention mainly to Salah el-Din's political and military plans, stressing that he wanted to expel the Crusaders and intended to bring back to the whole region Islamic rule, culture, and traditions after 88 years of Crusader rule. Although Salah el-Din did not succeed in accomplishing his aims, his strategy became a central policy for the Mamluks, who took over

leadership in Palestine, Damascus, and Egypt 70 years after Ayyubid rule (1260). The Mamluk policy was more radical towards the Crusaders, and the agreement that Salah el-Din had signed with them in Arsouf in 1191 was terminated by the year 1292.

While the Mamluks destroyed every fortress the Crusaders had built along the Mediterranean shore to strengthen their hold on the country, they gave a large role to locals in the defense of the land and the main roads, especially those that were used by pilgrims on their way to Mecca. They furthermore understood the importance of religion in keeping social unity among the peoples they were ruling and devised special policies to this end, among them the establishment of *mawasem*. These traditional celebrations were continued during the Ottoman Period, the British Mandate, and under Jordanian rule, but they were banned from 1967 until the signing of the Oslo Agreement. Since then, true efforts have been invested to return the *mawasem* to their old form.

The *Maqam* (literally: place) of Nabi Musa (prophet Moses) lies in the desert

on a main road that used to connect the east with the west, located eight kilometers south of the city of Jericho and around twenty-five kilometers east of Jerusalem. It was considered initially to be the place where Moses saw the Promised Land that he was not allowed to enter, but in time became known as the place that holds his tomb. The Mamluk Sultan al-Zahir Rukn al-Din Baybars al-Bunduqdar, nicknamed Abu al-Futuh (Father of Conquest) for his many victories, built the first building in 1270. An inscription above the *maqam*'s entry reads as follows:

"The construction of this *maqam*, [erected] over the grave of the prophet who spoke to God, Moses, is ordered by his Majesty Sultan Zahir abu el-Fateh Baybars in the Hijri year 668."

During the reign of al-Zahir Baybars, the main body of the present shrine was built, as well as the mosque, the minaret, and some of the rooms. Pilgrimage to this site started at that time; a yearly procession from Jerusalem to Nabi Musa brought thousands of faithful who subsequently camped at the site for a whole week. In 1410, a hospice for pilgrims and a minaret were built. To accommodate the yearly increase in the number of pilgrims, the complex was extended to its present spacious dimensions during the years 1470 to 1480.

Covering an area of 5,000 square meters, the *maqam* is the third largest Islamic complex in Palestine (after the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem and the Ibrahim Mosque in Hebron). It represents a typical example of Islamic architecture of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. Surrounded by a wall, the compound houses rooms on two floors that are topped by a complex of domes and encloses an open central courtyard. Along its western wall lies the main mosque with its minaret. Inside, a *mihrab* (niche) points towards Mecca next to a *minbar* (pulpit) from which the Imam leads the prayer. A wall divides the main room into two

parts: the eastern section is designated for men whereas the western part is for women. To the right of the main entrance to the mosque, another door leads to a smaller room that houses a shrine symbolic of the coffin of Moses. The fine minaret affords a view of the compound, the Jordan Valley, and the desert hills beyond.

A double-domed structure two kilometers to the south of Nabi Musa is identified by Muslim tradition as the tomb of Hasan Al-Ra'i, the shepherd of Moses. The site also contains a cemetery for the Muslim faithful who died during the festivals.

In 1820, having restored the dilapidated buildings, the Ottomans encouraged a revival of the seven-day pilgrimage. Traditionally, the Mawsem Nabi Musa began frequently on the Friday before the Greek Orthodox Good Friday, roughly between March 22 and April 25, and lasted for an entire week. According to many historians, this timing was important: Muslims wanted to demonstrate their number and unity at the time when Christians were celebrating one of their main feasts, Good Friday, with lavish processions. Furthermore, it connected the population of the northern city of Nablus with the people from Hebron in the south. The faithful from these cities used to come to Jerusalem in special processions on different, agreed-upon days, each with their own rituals and *ahazij* (special songs for the occasion). On the Friday morning of the first day of the *mawsem*, pilgrims from all over the country met at Al-Aqsa Mosque for prayer, after which the main mufti together with the *a'ayan* (notables) of important families of Jerusalem led them in a grand procession. Singing religious songs, dancing, and playing flutes, pilgrims processed for an entire day until they reached Maqam Nabi Musa. Prayers, celebrations, and games continued for five more days around the shrine.

The following *ahazij* (songs) have been handed down over generations to celebrate the *Mawsem Nabi Musa*.

Opening

Say your prayer upon the chosen prophet, the source of lights, Mohammad, whose beauty is reflected in and beautifies your eyes like natural kuhol.

– Had it not been for you, Musa, we would not have made the effort to come, we would not have walked on gravel or sandy roads. Have a blessed evening Musa, son of Imran, dweller of the Jordan Valley and City of Houran.

–Maqam Prophet Musa, how dark are your stones! Happy is whoever visits you. This celebration is not our only source of joy, nor is the circumcision of the boys; the greatest joy is in visiting Musa, prayers and peace be upon Him.

The Song for the Nation

Our country is the heaven of the world, our dear blood, our every dear thing; it is the homeland of my father and of the father of my father; we were raised here and so are our children. O Homeland, you planted in us the spirit of humanity. We stood resilient on the rock of the knight and persevered. This olive tree from Roman times, planted with the force of our arms, to take it from the hand of my son or from my own is betrayal, and we would rather die than accept [such theft]. This strong, green, good tree is our symbol and source of livelihood. It is where we work and where we harvest in the summer. It is the work we inherited in our home from our ancestors. My homeland and my land are ours; rich hills with treasures that come to us alone.

Song of the Servants of the Shrine

Be most welcome! We receive you with perfumes of joy, you blessed noble ones, the good people we pride. Who will ever forget our gathering here today? In the cups pour the black coffee and let the horses march the streets in masses. The horses lined up at the gate and the house came to life in your presence. O star in the sky, guide the lost to this land so that every tribe will reunite with the beloved ones, with the friends and neighbors.

Sufi whirling, a physically active practice of meditation.

Noble families from Jerusalem were given special posts in the festival during the Ottoman Era, although these connections may date back to the previous century. Thus, the procession is led by bearers of *bayareq* (banners) of various families of Jerusalem. First, there is the distinctive Nabi Musa *bayraq* (banner), which the al-Husseini's conserve for the annual occasion in their *Dar al-Bayareq* (literally house of banners, a special room dedicated for this purpose in the al-Husseini home). Two flags are carried by the two families of Younis-al-Husseini and al-Husseini; the Al-Qutub family raises another two, the Dawoudi and Dajani families each raise the flag of their *maqam* (literally: place, home of an extended family with rooms arranged around a central courtyard) located on Mount Zion, and another flag is carried by the Qleibo family. In the middle of these is the banner of the Mufti. The Disi and Qazaz families follow the lead with their *mazaher* (rhythm bands) that feature drums and bronze instruments. The procession is furthermore accompanied by singers who sing the *muwashahat* (a special type of traditional song) of the Prophet, with many of the faithful singing along. In the late nineteenth century, the al-Husseini family was appointed as official custodians of the Nabi Musa Maqam and hosts of the festival. On arrival at the shrine and throughout the *mawsem*, the al-Husseinis together with the Younis-al-Husseinis carry the responsibility of providing one meal every day for all worshippers. They provide about twelve lambs, together with rice, bread, and Arabic butter, for a daily communal meal.

The Mawsem Nabi Musa, just like all the other *mawsem* throughout Palestine – some of which were only celebrated in the past, whereas others have been revived and are celebrated today – form a tradition that represents a space in the social life of our people. It is important to remember that our past is our heritage in which we must take pride and which we must preserve in all its social, religious, and even political dimensions.

The festival was also an opportunity to fulfill promises made to Allah for answered prayers, to perform circumcisions, and to cut children's hair for the first time, which is usually done at the age of one. Once their vows were taken, or vows previously taken were renewed, they were offered to the festival.



Mahmoud Jamil Abu-Eid was born in Jerusalem and has been an official tour guide since 2011. Mahmoud worked on programs involving civic education in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In 2008, he co-founded the Jerusalem Tourism Cluster, which promotes tourism that highlights the Palestinian identity in Jerusalem. Mahmoud was also a correspondent of several Arabic newspapers. He specializes in archaeology, history, anthropology and sociology.

Article translated by Rania Filfil Almbaid.

Article photos are from the Nabi Mousa Sufi Festival in 2014.

The photos are courtesy of Nabhan Albabli, head of the Refayie branch of Sufism in Palestine.



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The Tent Restaurant is a family-owned business that first opened its doors in 1999 with an original idea that is consistent with the history of the street that used to serve visitors on their way to reach Shepherds' Field. Since its opening, the Tent Restaurant has been famous for its originality – whether because of the tent-like atmosphere or because of the truly authentic cuisine of the Holy Land such as the “mak Loo-beh,” literally meaning, upside-down. This layered lamb or chicken, rice, eggplant and cauliflower casserole is inverted on a platter. Of course, there is the famous go-to barbeque platter that serves various kinds of meat that are cooked on the grill and seasoned to perfection. Alongside this very popular platter guests will discover a huge variety of starters, appetizers, and cold mazzeh. All what is served is fresh, and the dishes have the warmth of homemade food. The chef takes great care in selecting the best quality ingredients. Standard fare such as hummus and tabbouleh are well executed, but the more inventive delicacies – the savory Lebanese kebbeh nayeh, for example – bring a taste of the Levant to the small town of Beit Sahour. New menu items include the fish and seafood platters that are grilled to perfection.

In addition to the great food, the Tent Restaurant's welcoming ambiance transports customers to former happy times and rich traditions of hospitality and family warmth.



The newly renovated Tent Restaurant now boasts a garden terrace for an outdoor experience that adds yet another reason for the guests to remain faithful. Palestine is known for its hot summer days and breezy summer nights. What better way of spending those summer nights than by smoking a hookah in the Tent Restaurant garden?



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The Seat of the High Priest

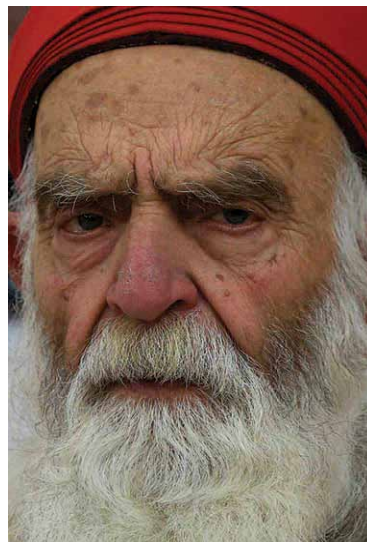
Samaritan Celebrations of Sukkot



By Jamil Dababat

This year I was late in ascending the Holy Mount to congratulate my Samaritan friends. The feast fell on October 16, while I was out of the country. For the past seven years I have kept an eye on the particulars of the *Sukkot* feast. The Samaritans, the smallest religious community in the world, celebrate this feast like all Jews, by building *sukkah* (small huts) in which the faithful live for the duration of one week. Samaritan *sukkahs* differ from the rabbinic *sukkahs* both in symbolism and form. Rabbinic tradition celebrates the travel of the Israelites through the desert whereas Samaritans commemorate the dwelling of mankind in the Garden of Eden, and thus cover their *sukkah* with delicious fruits.

When one talks about the religious fabric of Nablus, a city originally built by the Canaanites, the *Samaritans* must be mentioned. Nablus is one of the oldest cities in the West Bank. It is located between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, both of which are mentioned in the Old Testament and in the writings of Muslim travelers and of Orientalists. The Samaritan community, who used to live inside Nablus, is an ethno-religious group that originated among the Israelites. Today most of the community lives on top of Mount Gerizim. The name Samaritans



The previous Samaritan high priest. Photo courtesy of Abdallah Wasef.

means watchers or keepers of the law, as set down in the Torah. There remain only a few hundred Samaritans today, and they consider themselves the descendants of the Sabbateans, the tribes of Levi and Joseph, and their priests as descendants of the tribe of Levi. The high priest is usually the oldest man in the Cohen family. Each male member of the Cohen family initially practices a profession and after retirement devotes his life to the study of religion and the composition of

"I wonder whether this city truly is the garden of peace that Samaritans talk about all the time. Whenever I sit next to the Samaritan high priest, I hear his supplications to God for a long life so that he may one day see peace realized."

religious texts. On holy occasions such as prayers, feasts, and on Saturdays, Samaritan men wear the traditional Arab outfit that consists of the *qumbaz* (male robe) and the *tarboosh* (fez). The Samaritans who live in Nablus hold Palestinian-Israeli IDs and speak fluent Arabic and Hebrew. Since the first Intifada, they have moved to live on top of Mount Gerizim that rises 881 meters above sea level. From here, viewers can enjoy the panoramic scene of the city of Nablus and look over the rolling hills all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. It is the holiest spot for Samaritans, as they consider it the true location of the holy temple. There is only one other remaining Samaritan community that at the beginning of the twentieth century moved to Holon near Tel Aviv; its members hold only Israeli IDs.

Gathering to celebrate the feast of Sukkot, Samaritan priests wear a turban bound in white and the other men wear the tarboosh (also known as fez, head covering) on feast days. Photo courtesy of Ayman Noubani.





A Samaritan sukkah (tabernacle) is constructed with fruits and vegetables that are made into juice on the last day of the Sukkot feast. Photo courtesy of Ayman Noubani.

I have been to Nablus and Mount Gerizim dozens of times and for the past three years have been interviewing Samaritans to write my anthropological thesis on this small community. But every time I arrive in Nablus and see this mix of people that has its origins in Israeli, Palestinian, and other communities from various parts of the world, I say to myself: "This community of people with Jewish roots, living peacefully among Palestinians, is indeed a strange picture, different from what is taking place around us."

Some years ago, I sat down for the first time next to Abdallah Wassef, or, as he is called in Hebrew, Ovadia Cohen or *Hagadol* (revered rabbi). He was not a high priest then, but ranked second in the list of senior priests who take on the religious affairs of the *Samaritans*. I asked him about the meaning of the name Samaritans, and he answered, sitting and leaning on his

cane, "We are the descendants of the ancient Israelites, and we have not left this land. Like Jews, the Samaritans belong to the people of Israel, but they have somehow adapted to the Arab-Islamic culture, especially in Nablus. In contrast, Samaritans living in Holon have integrated into the Israeli community. Samaritans believe that their Torah is the *right* book and that their religion is the true religion of Israel."

During the last *Sukkot* feast, Samaritan military officers, whose insignias on their shoulders indicate that they hold senior military ranks, arrived on Mount Gerizim in military jeeps and paid their respects to the high priest. A group of Israeli soldiers arrived, carrying machine guns on their shoulders. In the same chamber where he receives journalists and visitors on ordinary days, the high priest is seated underneath the tabernacle in the middle

of the room to receive well-wishers. His chair in the center of the room is not an ordinary seat. Samaritans see themselves as bridges of peace among all peoples. Most people in the world do not know that the official calendar of the Palestinian government includes eight feasts of the Torah during which Samaritans are given official leave from work. During these feasts, the high priest receives well-wishers from the followers of the three monotheistic religions. They come, sit together, talk, and take pictures. They eat *baklava* (an Arabic sweet made of layers of thin dough and filled with nuts) or chocolates and drink juice or tea. For seven days, visitors from all over the country assemble here.

Not only do Israeli military officers and civilian officials pay their respects and admire the sumptuous seat of the high priest, but Palestinians also come to congratulate him as well. Ministers,

Followers of the three monotheistic religions gather under the tabernacle set up during *Sukkot*. Visitors praise each tabernacle and express their admiration for the large, luscious pomegranates and oranges that decorate the tabernacles in remembrance of the Garden of Eden.

officials from nearby institutions, bank managers, merchants, and individuals flock to greet the high priest and wish the Samaritans well. This year, thousands of people went to see the tabernacle. On the afternoon of the last day of *Sukkot*, the short road that leads to the Samaritan quarter on top of Mount Gerizim was crowded with tourists, Israeli military personnel, and Palestinian and Israeli civilian vehicles. It was a peculiar mixture of vehicle plates that can be seen only on the top of Mount Gerizim, and the Samaritans were tremendously joyful to see this number of well-wishers and celebrants.

Before I headed to the house of the high priest, I went to visit his brother Husni who is the curator of the Samaritan Museum. Hundreds of people visit the museum each day, and on this day he was guiding around twenty visitors of various nationalities. Some of them were wearing a *kippah* and their wives had their heads covered with hats or scarves, the typical dress of Orthodox Jews. Others were Christians who had climbed up the mountain to gaze at the seat of the high priest. Mount Gerizim becomes more hectic in the evening with the arrival of Palestinians from Nablus who have social ties and relations with Samaritans. Families arrive with their children who are fascinated by the fruits dangling from the ceiling of the tabernacle. According to tradition, on *Sukkot* each Samaritan home has a tabernacle set

up in the sitting room of the house. The high priest explains, "Setting up a tabernacle in homes symbolizes the end of the period of dispersion that began thousands of years ago."

Samaritans do not celebrate national holidays, but they demonstrate true commitment to the details of daily religious life during holy feasts, an act that has historical significance. The doors to Mount Gerizim are open to all people who wish to sit under the Samaritan tabernacle. Likewise, Samaritans in Holon have extended an open invitation to people to visit their Samaritan sanctuary. Miryam Tsadaqa and her husband Benyamin Tsadaqa, a well-known Samaritan historian, sent out an invitation on Facebook to friends and people everywhere.

When Samaritans moved to Holon about a century ago, they were looking for work and food. In Holon, where the standard of living is among the highest in Israel, they found better job opportunities. During the past two decades, trade activities between Palestinians and Israel have witnessed considerable growth, and the Samaritans were a bridge between both communities. They move between two different worlds and are in harmony with each one. They go to the *souk* (market) in Nablus to buy their vegetables and fruit and head to the beaches in Eilat or Tel Aviv for vacation.

The eighth day of *Sukkot* marks the holy feast of *Shemini Atzeret*, which literally means the assembly of the eighth (day). It is the feast of the Joy of the Torah. On this day, families pick fruits off the tabernacle and from trees in orchards and squeeze them to make juice that will be preserved for the entire year. Juice is also offered to guests during visits. Outside, Samaritans have started to burn branches from palm and laurel trees. Children sing songs. The tabernacle feast has come to an end, but this end marks the beginning of the new season, winter is coming. Husni remarks with satisfaction, "At this

The Samaritan high priest is able to go anywhere and meets with all kinds of people, including politicians, businessmen, and journalists, and his door is always open for all people.

time I remember the popular proverb in Nablus that says, 'Destroy the tabernacle and spread the carpets.'" Life renews itself, and Samaritans go back to their daily chores, moving freely between the areas on both sides of the Wall.

The Samaritan high priest receives and welcomes Jewish, Muslim, and Christian visitors during feast days. But also, accompanied by one of the Samaritan priests called Khader, and other members of his community, the high priest can be seen taking part in the annual Christmas procession in Nablus.

Three days after *Sukkot*, as I was walking toward the abandoned Samaritan synagogue in the old city of Nablus, I met three Samaritan priests, two from the tribe of Levi and one from the tribe of Joseph, who were looking for fresh vegetables. They reproached me because I had not visited them during the feast. Samaritans are as proud of being visited as they are of their tabernacles.

Jamil Dababat, a Palestinian journalist and writer, lives in Tubas in the northern West Bank, and has worked with the Palestinian News Agency (WAFA) for the past 15 years. He has covered stories in Palestine, North America, Africa, and Europe regarding Palestinian and international affairs. Jamil has won several national and international awards, and specializes in covering political, environmental, minority, and religious affairs.



*Merry Christmas
& Happy New Year*



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Christmas and the Nakba

Christmas Means Love and Steadfastness for Palestinians



By Xavier Abu Eid

On a cold Thursday, December 25, 1947, the situation was tense in Palestine. But very few imagined that this would be the last Christmas that they would spend in their hometowns. Among the hundreds of villages that were totally cleansed during the Nakba of 1948 were dozens of Christian communities, including those in Ein Karem, Beisan, Al-Bassa, Suhmata, Safad, Al-Birwa, Safad, Mansoura, and Ma'lul, among others. From this time on, Christmas had more than just a religious significance for thousands of Palestinians.



Christmas celebration in the ethnically cleansed Kufr Bir'im. Photo courtesy of Waad Ghantous.



A destroyed church in Kufr Bir'im. Photo courtesy of Waad Ghantous.

Between December 1947 and 1949, almost 800,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced, among them dozens of thousands of Palestinian Christians. Take the case of Jaffa, which in 1948 was home to almost 71,000 Palestinians, among them 16,000 Christians. After 1948, only 4,000 were allowed to remain, among them a few hundred Christians. The local Melkite Church was reduced from 2,000 faithful at Christmas 1947 to around 100 at Christmas 1948. In January 1948, 25 Palestinians and the Spanish Deputy Consul, Manuel Allende, were killed by a terror attack conducted by the Haganah against the Semiramis Hotel in Qatamon, a predominantly Palestinian Christian neighborhood of Jerusalem. They were

celebrating Orthodox Christmas. This crime, together with the prominent massacre of Deir Yassin in April, prompted the exile of thousands of Jerusalemites from the western areas of the city.

Of the 150,000 Palestinians who remained in the newly established Israel in 1948, almost a third were internally displaced people, many of them from the Galilee. Among them were the villagers from the traditional Christian communities of Iqrit and Kufr Bir'im. While some of their members had been expelled to Lebanon, the vast majority remained in the Galilee, and soon after the end of the 1948 War they decided to take their

case to the Israeli courts. The courts favored the case of the inhabitants. However, the Israeli government was not willing to set a precedent of the “return of non-Jews.” On Christmas Day 1951, Iqrit was destroyed; Kufr Bir'im suffered the same fate in September 1953. The “Christmas bombardment” of their village was witnessed with shock and desolation by the survivors who were standing only three kilometers away on the mountains of the neighboring village of Jish.

In both Iqrit and Kufr Bir'im, the only structures left standing were the respective churches and cemetery gravestones. The churches were severely damaged and soon became victims of pillage from nearby Israeli-Jewish communities that would even steal their bells. By 1972, the original Palestinian communities had reorganized themselves well and decided to repair their churches. In a matter of weeks, they were able to celebrate mass again. Despite Israeli opposition, Iqrit and Kufr Bir'im returned to life with masses in celebration of Easter and Christmas, as well as weddings, baptisms, and funerals.

In Bethlehem in May 2014, Pope Francis met a family from Iqrit. He listened to them and blessed their cause. But this was not enough to make Israel change its opposition to their return. Israeli forces have disrupted several activities organized by the village committees, including camping and the planting of trees. Though over the years the people of Iqrit and Kufr Bir'im have been able to secure the Israeli-state permission to bury their loved ones in their own cemeteries, the younger generations have stated that they want to exercise their right to return while still alive.

This Christmas, hundreds of faithful are going to fill the churches of Iqrit and Kufr Bir'im, constituting three and even four generations that have continuously prayed for justice. After mass, the elders will walk with their grandchildren towards the ruins of their homes. This is the most meaningful Christmas gift for hundreds of grandchildren of those who were originally displaced.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” (Luke 6:20–23)

Still today there are Palestinian Christians who will celebrate this year's Christmas in a refugee camp, such as the inhabitants of Al-Dbayeh in Lebanon. At the same time, dozens of churches from various denominations have been built in Jordan in order to meet the needs of thousands of Palestinian Christian refugees. But the story continues.

The 1948 *Nakba* has significantly affected Christian life in the Holy Land. In addition, since 1967, with almost fifty years of Israeli occupation, the construction and expansion of settlements, the construction of Israel's Annexation Wall around Occupied Jerusalem – separating Jerusalem and Bethlehem for the first time in 2,000 years of Christianity – the prevailing lack of access to holy sites, the siege on Gaza, and the separation from the rest of the Christian communities in the Arab world have all given Christmas a meaning that goes beyond a traditional religious occasion.

In his Christmas homily of 2001, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Excellency Michel Sabbah, said to his Palestinian congregation, “You are a Christian and a witness to Jesus in his land, and you are a Palestinian deprived of your liberty. It is necessary therefore that you be Christian, and it is necessary that you ask for your liberty. Your liberty is God's gift; you don't have the right, for any reason, to resign before any strong power in this world.” For Palestinians, Christmas is both a Christian message of love and a Palestinian message of steadfastness. This message was as true a decade and a half ago as it is today. And it will remain so until the message of Christmas prevails and love brings about justice and peace.

Xavier Abu Eid is a political scientist and communications adviser to the Palestine Liberation Organization – Negotiations Affairs Department. He can be followed on twitter @xabueid.



MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

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SHRINES IN PALESTINE

Courtesy of VisitPalestine.ps

Palestine is home to many sacred sites and very special landmarks. This place has witnessed the birth of Judaism and Christianity and plays a very important role for Muslims as well, with Jerusalem being regarded as the spot visited by Prophet Mohammed. Billions of people see Palestine as the land of divine presence, with many sites linked to events of exceptionally high importance for both believers and historians. The following brief introductions offer just a glimpse of the holy sites of Palestine.



Photo from Palestine Image Bank.

THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY (BETHLEHEM)

The Church of the Nativity (*Kaneeset al-Milad*) is one of the most ancient churches in the world that are still in use. The first Christian building was built in the fourth century AD, over the grotto where Mary is believed to have given birth to Jesus. Emperor Constantine and his mother, Helena, built a magnificent and majestic church adorned with beautiful marble and mosaics. Later, during the sixth century, the Byzantine Emperor Justinian erected a new and even more intricate church on the same spot. By the eleventh century, the Crusaders raised their flag above the Basilica of the Nativity and renovated it.

Although the Church of the Nativity is famous as a Christian holy site, it also has a long tradition of importance to other religions. There are theories that the grottos beneath the church were used by the Canaanites (third millennium BC) for fertility rites. Another tradition recounts that when Persian forces swept through the area in 614 AD destroying churches as they went, they left the Church of the Nativity untouched because of a mosaic on the church's facade depicting the Magi wearing Persian attire. Muslims also consider the church as a sacred place since they regard Jesus as a prophet.



Photo from Palestine Image Bank.

AL-AQSA MOSQUE (JERUSALEM)

Al-Aqsa Mosque (the Farthest Mosque) is a rectangular (50m x 80m) edifice also constructed within the compound of the *Haram al-Sharif*. The mosque's elegant rectangular construction with its subdued colors, when compared with the eye-catching and colorful Dome of the Rock, blends in with the surroundings.

The establishment of the sanctuary is associated with the Caliph 'Umar bin al-Khattab (634 – 44 AD) who erected a *mihrab* (prayer niche) and a simple mosque on the site where the present mosque stands. The current shape of the sanctuary is the result of various modifications and re-buildings in different periods of time. The new mosque was initiated in 705 by the Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik and completed in 715 under the reign of his son and successor, Caliph Walid. It had 15 arcades, of which only the ones on the southern wall have survived a number of earthquakes and reconstructions.

After 1099, Crusaders turned al-Aqsa into a church. But in 1187, the Ayyubid Sultan Saladin restored al-Aqsa's Islamic identity and consecrated it as a major spiritual center. Saladin installed a beautiful *minbar* (pulpit from which Friday sermons are given) made of ivory and wood. Unfortunately, it was burnt in 1969 and its remains are now stored in the Islamic Museum.



Faithful gathering inside the church, around the chapel called the Aedicule that contains the Holy Sepulcher. Photo courtesy of VisitPalestine.

THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER (JERUSALEM)

One of Christianity's holiest sites, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher – known in Arabic as *Kaneesat al-Qiyamah* (Church of the Resurrection) – is believed to be built upon the site of Jesus Christ's crucifixion, entombment, and resurrection. In the gospels, this site is called Golgotha (the Place of the Skull) and is located just outside the walls of Jerusalem. However, in 41–42 AD Herod Agrippa extended the city towards the northwest, and the Place of the Skull became part of Jerusalem proper.

It is said that before the first church was built on the site of Golgotha by Roman Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena, a Roman temple stood there until 326 AD. Since that time, the structure has often been partially destroyed and rebuilt. Nowadays, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher looks like a puzzle – it contains many small chapels and its space is shared by many different Christian denominations.

The facade of the Holy Sepulcher until now preserves the design characteristic of Crusader architecture. There are twin doors, one of which was closed during the time of Saladin (end of the twelfth century), whereas the other was entrusted to the custody of two Muslim families from Jerusalem in 1246. The Joudeh family is in charge of protecting and holding the key, and the Nusseibeh family takes care of opening and closing the door every day.

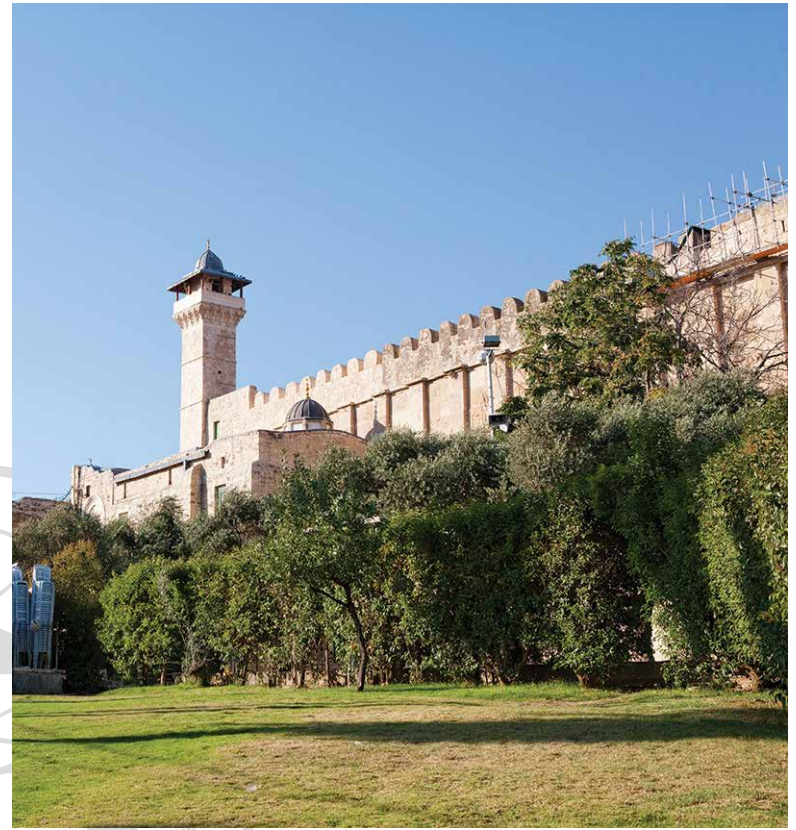


Photo courtesy of VisitPalestine.

AL-IBRAHIMI MOSQUE (HEBRON)

The Al-Ibrahimi Mosque or *Al-Haram al-Ibrahimi* (Sanctuary of Abraham) is also known as the Tomb of the Patriarchs or the Cave of Machpelah, meaning “double tombs,” as the cave is designed with several pairs of tombs, side by side. It is believed to be the burial place of Sarah, where, according to Biblical tradition, Abraham bought land from Ephron the Hittite for 400 shekels of silver to bury his wife (Gen. 23:15). The cave then became a family burial place, where Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, Jacob, and (according to Islamic belief) Joseph were also buried.

In the first century, Herod the Great built a large wall to surround the cave. The wall consists of massive blocks, some of them seven meters long. Local legend even states that these huge blocks were brought there by a *djinn* (spirit).

Religious control of the site has changed throughout its history. The ruins of a Byzantine church, built inside the wall around the year 570 AD, were converted into an Umayyad mosque in the seventh century. After the Crusaders conquered the city it was rebuilt again as the Church of Saint Abraham in the twelfth century. Later, in the same century, the city was taken over by Sultan Saladin, and the church was reconverted into a mosque.



THE PALESTINE NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Palestine New Year Tour 2016-2017



The Palestine National Orchestra (PNO) is Palestine's first professional orchestra since 1948. Established in 2010 by the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music (ESNCM), it is a festival chamber orchestra that meets once or twice per year for intensive rehearsals and concert tours. Its members are professional musicians of Palestinian origin, as well as internationals with connections to Palestine. In addition to its performances in Palestine, the orchestra's international tours have included Jordan (2012) and Indonesia (2013).

Having completed a joint project with the ESNCM orchestra in February of this year, the PNO will soon take to Palestine's stages once again for a series of special concerts with celebrated Palestinian *oud* virtuoso, Simon Shaheen, performing the Palestinian premiere of his Oud Concerto No. 1, Simon Shaheen is one of the most significant Arab musicians, performers, and composers of his generation. Although he lives and works in the United States, Simon is no stranger to Palestine's concert halls. He is a major contributor to Palestinian music education, giving regular workshops at the ESNCM and providing opportunities for young, up-and-coming musicians to play alongside him.



The PNO is also delighted to welcome ESNCM alumna Jenna Barghouti as its concertmaster. Growing up, Jenna studied violin at the Ramallah branch of the ESNCM, where she led both the ESNCM Orchestra and the Palestine Youth Orchestra, before pursuing her musical studies at the Jacobs School of Music in the United States. She is currently a violinist with the Houston Symphony and leads the award-winning Azalea Quartet.

The PNO will perform under the baton of Dutch conductor Vincent de Kort. Originally a cellist, de Kort made his conducting debut with the Oslo Philharmonic and now regularly works with renowned orchestras that include the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Staatskapelle Dresden and Rotterdam Philharmonic.

The program for the upcoming concerts includes *Prokofiev's Classical Symphony* and *the Pastoral Symphony (No.6)* by Beethoven in addition to Shaheen's Oud Concerto.

The Palestine National Orchestra

Conducted by Vincent de Kort
Accompanied by Simon Shaheen
All concerts start at 17:00

- Bethlehem Convention Palace – Bethlehem, December 30, 2016.
- Naseeb Azeez Shaheen Auditorium – Birzeit University, December 31, 2016.
- Prince Turki Bin Abdul Aziz Theater – An-Najah National University, January 1, 2017.

For reservations and more information, contact the conservatory at:

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Growing Up in an Interfaith Family



By Nadia Mikhail Abboushi

P

reamble

It all started with a mixed-marriage ceremony at home, in August 1973. The marriage contract was officially recorded by a Muslim sheikh and blessed and witnessed by both the Anglican archbishop of Jerusalem and the pastor of our church in Ramallah. Excerpts from Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* were read by several of our friends. Sameh and I exchanged marriage vows, adapted from the Anglican Prayer Book, which highlighted mutual love, trust, and respect. The ceremony, attended by close relatives and friends, was followed by an outdoor celebration under the spacious vine pergola of my father's garden. Dr. Daud Mikhail's pride and joy. I quickly exchanged my wedding dress for a white Palestinian *thob* from Beit Dajan. The guests were mostly actors and actresses, writers, singers, *dabka*-dancers and friends of the Balaleen Theatrical Troupe, of which we were founding members. Needless to say, the jubilant festivities lasted all night!

Our two sons, Faris and Tareq were raised in Ramallah. They studied at the Friends Schools, which focus on liberal Quaker ideals that recognize the presence of the divine in all humans, regardless of their religion, race, gender, or color. Sharing this firm conviction, our family celebrated both Christian and Muslim holy feasts equally.

Al-Adha and *Al-Fiter* holidays commenced the day before the *Eid* with memorable drives to their grandparents in Jenin, passing by the quaint towns and villages of the north, through the dramatic and bustling city of Nablus, and along the picturesque green pastures of *Marj Ibn Amer*. The boys were ecstatic with their brand-new clothes and shoes and trendy haircuts. *Teta* Sadouda hurriedly escorted them to the colorful *souk* to buy them chocolates, candy, and loud firecrackers. Very early the next morning they woke up to the mesmerizing sacred chants,

amplified by the loudspeakers of the nearby mosque, announcing the *Eid*. The *salon* was soon filled with relatives and neighbors who duly offered their felicitations to *Sido* Sameeh, the elder of the family, before quickly resuming their usual tour of visitations – but only after sipping Arabic coffee and eating *ka'ek* and *ma'moul*, the traditional *Eid* cookies stuffed with dates and nuts. Lunch was the highlight of celebrations, relishing *Teta*'s homemade sweet-spicy couscous à la Moroccan cuisine and *mahshi* (stuffed grape leaves and mixed vegetables). The next morning, breakfast was served on a big *tabaq qash* (straw tray) filled with warm *ftoot el eid* (a traditional Jenini homemade pastry kneaded with olive oil and anise seeds), local grilled white cheese, tomatoes, fresh mint leaves, *labneh* (yogurt), and sweet tea. We ate leisurely on the open terrace, overlooking the citrus orchard, with the scents of lemon, orange, bergamot, and grapefruit filling the air.

For Easter holidays, preparations would begin a week in advance with the whole family coloring eggs and engaging in a serious competition

"During our childhood," Faris and Tareq agree "...We had the best of both worlds... double celebrations and double the number of gifts, to the envy of friends and cousins. We felt lucky." As a university student, Faris wrote "...all faiths seek the one Truth, each in its own way. They resemble the instruments of the orchestra, where each family of instruments plays a distinctive role. But when they all play together, the wondrous harmonies that evolve are greater than the sum of their parts."

over sketching novel designs and patterns on each egg. Applying the delicate decoration of *ka'ek* and *ma'moul* Easter cookies was another ritual eagerly anticipated by the boys. When the cookies and eggs were finally laid out on the serving plate, the children would proudly point out their own masterpieces to the guests. Once Easter morning arrived, Faris and Tareq would run out into the garden for the egg-hunt fun, eagerly filling their baskets and



Faris and Tareq on the hills surrounding Ramallah.
Photo courtesy of the author.



Three generations. Photo courtesy of the author.



Gathering around the piano to sing Christmas carols. Photo courtesy of the author.

comparing their booty of collected eggs and chocolates.

Christmas brought a different kind of excitement. The season's choral music and Gregorian chants filled the air as we gathered around the table, cutting, gluing, and coloring window decorations, garlands, mobiles, and Christmas tree ornaments. Now the house would be set for the next day's Christmas-caroling party. Thirty-some guests arrived to a warm candle-lit house with the traditional olivewood manger scene tucked under the Christmas tree. Glasses of warm spiced wine were passed around while the singers gathered by the piano, joyfully singing Gloria in Excelsis Deo. To this day our boys recall how they sang their hearts out on those evenings. However, nothing beats the fun and excitement of celebrating Christmas

Eve with the grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Santa's arrival at Khalto Hanan's house would spark a joyful frenzy as sparklers were lit and Christmas songs sung. Presents were quickly unwrapped and played with among the cousins. Staying up late and sleeping over were further treats to augment the boys' delight. The next day's Christmas-lunch table displayed grandma Wadea's famous Lebanese *kibbeh* and Palestinian-style *maftoul* with chicken roasted in lemon and garlic.

Faris and Tareq both say they feel 100 percent Muslim when celebrating Muslim feasts and 100 percent Christian when celebrating Christian feasts. One Easter morning, while we were still under direct Israeli military occupation, the curfew was lifted for a few hours. Fifteen-year-old Faris rushed downtown to buy a new pair of pants for the occasion. An hour later, I received a phone call from a friend telling me she saw him being arrested by Israeli soldiers who had blindfolded and handcuffed him to then take him away in a military jeep. He was accused of joining a demonstration against the occupation. When he was released on bail, we asked him how he was feeling. Faris confided to us, "I feel 100 percent Palestinian!" That thought stuck with me. In the end, it doesn't matter if he was buying pants to celebrate Easter or *Al Adha*, his identity remains Palestinian.

Nadia Mikhail Abboushi is a pianist and piano teacher with a background in philosophy-religion and piano performance. She is a co-founder of Edward Said National Conservatory of Music, wife of architect Sameh Abboushi, and the proud mother of engineer Faris and musician Tareq.

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Cross-Border Celebrations



By Fuad Giacaman
and Toine van Teeffelen

I n a world often afflicted by a sense of exclusivism between religions, Palestine knows many instances of Muslim-Christian mutual openness and conviviality surrounding religious celebrations.

Jamila, a Muslim woman from Beit Sahour, cherishes special memories about Christmastime in her predominantly Christian town:

“As a six-year-old child, I lived near Shepherds Field in Beit Sahour. I used to meet with my Christian and Muslim friends to pray and sing Christmas hymns before the Christmas midnight mass. We used to carry oil lamps and walk barefooted at night, heading towards Manger Square to commemorate the shepherds who were guided by the star to the birthplace of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. I also remember how during the Christmas feast our Christian neighbors used to come knocking at the door to offer us Christmas gifts and sweets. From our side, we as Muslims used to give them little gifts and sweets during Islamic feasts, such as *katayef* at the breaking of the fast in Ramadan (*katayef* is a sort of sweet dumpling filled with cream or nuts, and commonly eaten during Ramadan nights).”

In cities such as Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Ramallah, where Christian communities live side by side with the Muslim majority, one can still find many traces of border-crossing traditions. In the interreligious school project “Diversity and Citizenship: Christian-Muslim Living Together,” students in the Bethlehem and Ramallah regions explore and collect stories of joint Muslim-Christian popular practices, such as Muslims inviting Christians for a Ramadan evening meal, sharing in the coloring of Easter eggs, or decorating a Christmas tree. Many of the stories are not only about popular practices, which, though still surviving, have been somewhat in decline over the last decades, but also about the great power of human gesture – a power traditionally held in high esteem in the Palestinian-Arab culture of hospitality and neighborliness.



A Christmas procession in Beit Sahour. Photo courtesy of the Arab Educational Institute, Bethlehem.

Examples abound. Surprisingly, Christians may help to reinforce the customs of Ramadan. On the streets of Ramallah and Nablus, it happens that Palestinian Christian youth distribute water and dates just before the evening breaking of the fast during Ramadan. A student writes about her village and notes that when an imam became ill, the priest tolled the church bells to announce the end of the fast! Similarly, a Christian man is said to once have taken over the role of *mousharater*, the person who wakes up the Muslim believers to take an early breakfast before the fasting starts.

The long tradition of interreligious living together in Palestine has come under pressure at times – not in the least because of the Israeli occupation that may pit Muslims and Christians against each other, for instance at checkpoints or because of religion-based allocation of travel permits. In general in the Palestinian context, solidarity between the religions often has a political dimension. For instance, a local imam once welcomed Christians to pray at the mosque because their church was damaged during a raid by occupation forces.

The personal human stories of neighborliness, lovingly written down by the students, shine most brightly. Sometimes they are told of parents and grandparents, but several students experienced such priceless moments themselves.

Palestine takes pride in its tradition of “Muslim-Christian living together,” which reveals itself in mutual openness and conviviality during Muslim and Christian religious celebrations.

A story of neighborhood is told by Lama, a Muslim student:

“The doorbell rang. Muriel, my Christian friend, and her mom were there. She came to wake us up for the *suhur* [Ramadan early-morning breakfast]. Muriel explained her coming early, ‘I did not hear your voice and was afraid you would not wake up for the *suhur* as this would keep you, my dear Lama, hungry throughout the school day.’ Then my father invited my friend to share the *suhur* with us: ‘Please help yourself and share our customs in the same way as Lama shares and participates in your Christian feasts.’ Muriel came with her parents to the evening *iftar* [breaking the fast] meal and gave me a gift as she entered the house. Then we began to eat. We broke the fast with dates and carob juice, then we all ate. It was a wonderful evening filled with joy. For the moment we could forget about the occupation.”

Sometimes it requires creativity and determination to cross religious borders. One story is about a Muslim girl who desperately wanted to take part in the wedding of her best friend, a Christian.

"My girlfriend and I have known one another since preschool. Providence brought us together, and our friendship continued after graduation. She was the ambitious and successful Christian youth and I was the creative and anxious Muslim girl. We did not feel any difference or sensitivity about religious topics. We were two Palestinian girls living in the same town sharing the same concerns and the same goals. Years passed, and the day of my girlfriend's wedding ceremony approached. We asked the church parish priest, "Can a Muslim girl be a witness for a Christian bride?" The answer was, "No, this is religion, and we can't change God's rules." Later there was a wonderful solution, however. The priest agreed to have me as a second witness in the church as that did not require the signing of any document. My girlfriend entered the church and all welcomed her. The moment I entered behind her, carrying the wreath, the attendees stood up and welcomed me wholeheartedly. My happiness was so great!"

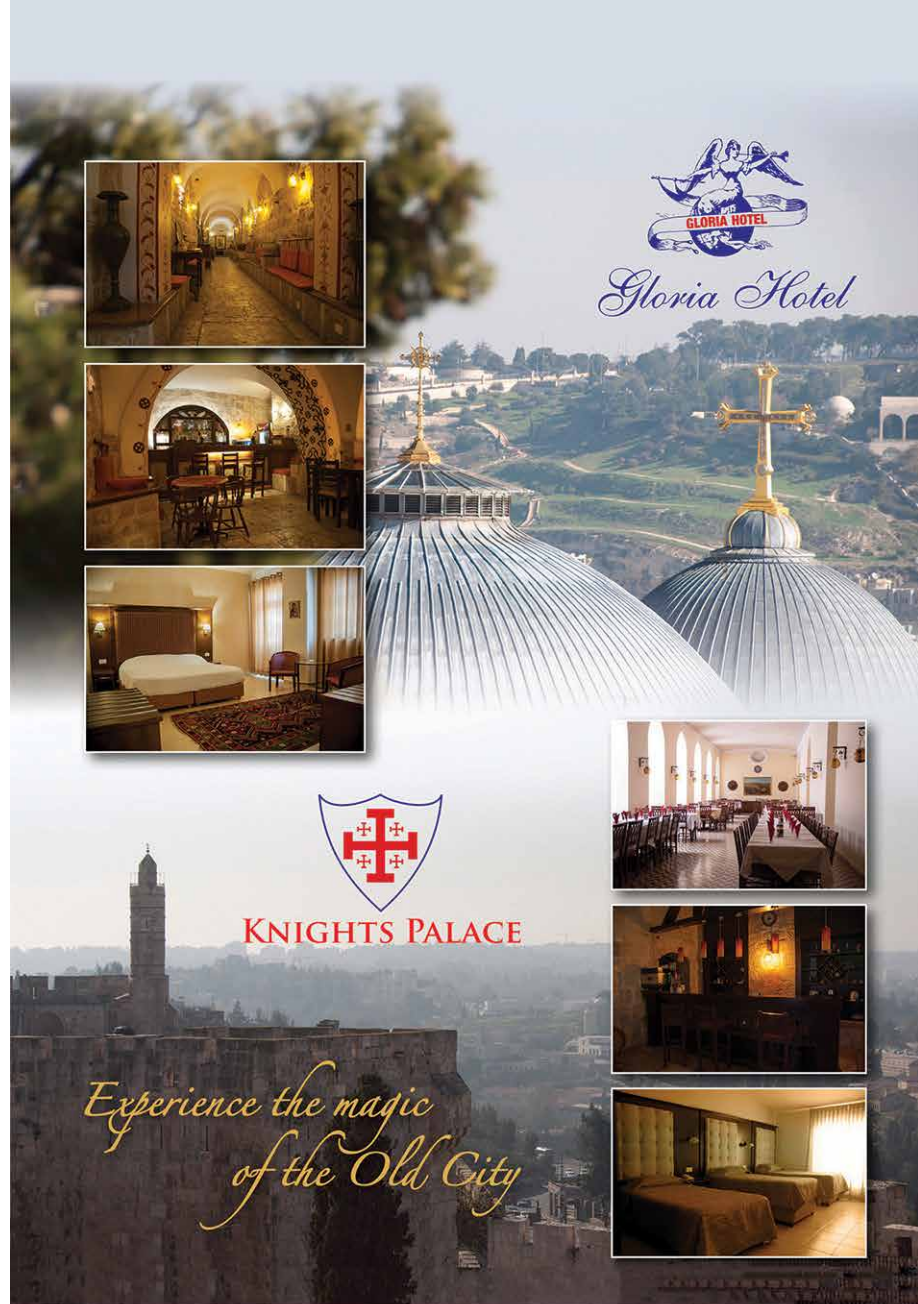
Palestinian schools strive to revive the tradition of interreligious living together. It has often been said that an open celebration of feasts enhances the atmosphere at schools, and many private and government schools with Muslim and Christian student populations presently organize joint Muslim and Christian celebrations. After studying the concept of generosity in a joint interreligious lesson, one school connected an educational campaign for needy students with the celebration of Muslim and Christian feasts. At another school, Muslim and Christian students initiated a Lenten cooking school day after the fasting period. One Christian government school teacher relates: "During the Muslim *Isra* and *Miraj* feasts [marking the night that God took Mohammad on his journey to heaven], sweets were distributed to all students and I, as the only Christian teacher, felt at ease and touched by such student initiatives."

The project "Citizenship and Diversity: Muslim-Christian Living Together," a collaboration between the Arab Educational Institute in Bethlehem and the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), encourages Palestinian students, 14 to 17 years old, at 30 private and government schools in the Bethlehem and Ramallah areas to learn about "citizenship" and respect for "diversity" through the example of "Muslim-Christian living together" in Palestine. The project aims to prevent Muslim-Christian relations from being hijacked by fear, prejudice, and exclusivism. Christian and Muslim students receive joint religious education lessons in school. The project further organizes journeys to Muslim and Christian holy sites, joint Muslim-Christian celebrations, and an essay competition for stories that are written or collected by students.

The shared celebrations at school give Muslim and Christian students an opportunity to learn about each other's customs and to respect and appreciate them. Typically, the celebrations create a sense of pride and dignity among students and teachers, as well as a deeper feeling of shared Palestinian identity.

Dr. Toine van Teeffelen is an educational adviser at the Arab Educational Institute, an anthropologist, and a guide, who lives in Bethlehem.

Fuad Giacaman is co-president of the Arab Educational Institute in Bethlehem, and head of its interreligious community program. He was the former headmaster of a Palestinian school and taught various curricular subjects at several Bethlehem schools.



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No Nativity without Al-Majous

The Wise Men's Celebration – Still Missing in the Festive Calendar of Palestine



By Andreas F. Kuntz



Everybody knows the Wise Men (also called Magi and in Arabic al-majous) who came from afar to Palestine around 2,000 years ago. They belong to Christmas celebrations, to Christmas-crib exhibitions, and are featured in many of the images that show the baby Jesus being worshiped. For Bethlehem, they mean even much more: A main street in the historic center is named after the star they followed. Star Street has been listed by UNESCO World Heritage as a pilgrimage route together with a centuries-old church, the Church of the Nativity.

But there are even more reasons why the Wise Men should have a place in Christian religious celebrations in Bethlehem. The Wise Men represent a special kind of pilgrim, coming from outside the Levant. The Gospel writer Matthew tells the story in ways that make it very clear that they had knowledge that enabled them to recognize the savior (Mt. 2). The Wise Men are a symbol for the gentiles – the people outside the covenant, the non-chosen people, the foreigners, who are to be included in the new covenant.

Moreover, they are the foreigners who refused to team up with the power that was ruling the country, embodied in this story by ruthless and paranoid King Herod. Or as one of my former students, who is now a tour guide in Bethlehem Old Quarters Walks, told the visitors: "They are like you, who have come here to look for the real story. And they were asked to collaborate..." The Wise Men found the Baby and, full of joy, venerated him and the Holy Family in Bethlehem. They experienced a transformation; they took a new way back home. And similarly all pilgrims can learn about Bethlehem and Palestine through a transforming experience of Palestinian culture – its creativity, its kindness, its hope.



St. Apollinaris Nuovo in Ravenna; the three Wise Men stepping forward with their gifts in outstretched arms.

The image of the Wise Men appears centuries after the birth when, in large churches of the imperial Christian Church, mosaics depict scenes of the history of salvation. The three Wise Men wore a specific dress known as the clothing of the priests of the Eastern cult of Mithras, a typical dress of representatives of Rome's strongest rival, the Persian Empire. A famous example in the West is found in one of the late capitals of the empire, Ravenna, Italy. In the church of St. Apollinaris Nuovo, we see the three men stepping forward with their gifts in outstretched arms. They look quite similar to each other, act rather as a group, all dressed in Persian cloth, their Phrygian caps in striking red. This image was common in the Roman Empire and can be found on precious ivory, sarcophagi, silver plates, and souvenirs from the Holy Land of that time.

In Germany, tradition dictates that the Three Holy Kings be celebrated on January 6 by children dressed in royal garments, who visit homes to sing Christmas carols, write a blessing above the entry doors, and collect donations for charities. The costumes are different but the story is the same.

Three kings from different corners of the world met on their way in search of the new king who, they believed, was indicated by the new star they had seen. Their interpretation had long been confirmed by Jerusalem's experts, the prophets, and thus they did not abandon following their star. In Cologne, Germany, the Three Kings were venerated after their relics had been transferred there via Milano, Italy, and theirs became the most important pilgrimage shrine in Central Europe north of the Alps. Their image was the one we have come to know as the three Holy Kings who came from different countries, even continents, had different ages, and a whole set of stories was developed around them. This is the image that came to Bethlehem and that has been used ever since as the image of the Wise Men in the olive-wood cribs.

When one of the famous museums in Cologne dedicated an entire exhibition to them, the curators called it "Die Weisen" – the Wise Men and The Magi. Beautiful artifacts of all ages showed the change from *al-majous* to the Holy Kings. The first images of the Wise Men as kings appeared in the tenth century, whereas

the Wise Men from the East in Persian clothes were still around for another two centuries. With the veneration of the shrine in Cologne, more elaborate stories of the three Holy Kings were told. The building of a huge new cathedral was started in 1248, but only in the nineteenth century was the Cologne Cathedral finished. The arrival of the relics is remembered to this day in a huge religious celebration and popular event in the city. In our days, the three Wise Men are a connector between the cities of Bethlehem and Cologne.

Isn't it time for Bethlehemites to celebrate the Wise Men traveling from far away, following their knowledge about stars? They played a crucial role as their image saved the Nativity Church from destruction: In the year 614, when almost all monasteries and church buildings of the Imperial Church throughout Palestine were ransacked, plundered, and burnt, the Church of the Nativity was spared. The Persians saw in the church a mosaic of the story of salvation, and when they recognized the garments of their ancestors, the Persian warriors stopped their attack on the Nativity Church. This event might be the most amazing miracle, among others, that has kept the church building standing. Indeed, it is a miracle that the Church of the Nativity is still standing – considering as well all the damage and destruction that has affected churches due to fire, earthquakes, and war. These miracles have enabled Bethlehemites to present today an impressive old church, built an incredible 1,400 years ago on foundations and walls that were built even 1,600 years ago. This old church is so dear to Bethlehemites that they tell stories about how it has survived all kinds of threats throughout history. One of them is about the Virgin Mary herself driving attackers out of the church towards Qos Azzarara, the vault where they were “pushed to the wall.”

The Wise Men have their day in the calendar of saints, and it is commemorated with a beautiful liturgy that celebrates God's decision to include all peoples in the plan of

salvation. The Wise Men are remembered for their exemplary faith, the long travel they undertook despite all the hardships, and their intuition and attentiveness to God, avoiding collaboration in an act of creative resistance: They took another way back home.

Is it time to invent a new souvenir to add to the Christmas-crib figurines that resemble those whose image rescued the Nativity Church? These days, we can find kings, but should these sets not include the Wise Men instead, the ones that once saved the Church of the Nativity from destruction? I suggested this to Jack Giacaman, a Bethlehemite and wood carver – like most members of his family. He is creative in inventing modernized sets of Christmas figurines. Jack asked his colleague Adel Said to join in the realization of this crazy idea. And Adel, from the Ta'amreh shepherds tribe, made his contribution by developing a first version of al-majous in olive wood. Maybe these three Wise Men, crafted in a Milk Grotto Street workshop, can become a model for Bethlehemite wood carvers, to pay tribute to the Wise Men who once helped preserve the Nativity Church and save it from destruction.

Andreas F. Kuntz is a pastor and researcher in culture, religion, and tourism. In 1997 he established and coordinated the Intensive Course for Palestinian Guides at Dar Annadwa Adduwaliyya Bethlehem for four years. He returned to Bethlehem in 2010 and served at Dar Al-Kalima University-College for Arts and Culture, Tourism Studies Department. In 2013 he supported the Jericho Guides in developing conflict-sensitive narratives, presenting the past and present coexistence in the oasis. During the years 2014–2015, Andreas served as peace and conflict consultant at a German NGO working for civil conflict transformation (in the Civil Peace Service program). Currently he is active as a consultant and trainer for fair tourism, conflict-transformation, and sustainable development goals. He can be reached at salameas@email.de.



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Panem et Circenses

Armenian Religious Feasts and Celebrations



By Setrag Balian

“Bread and Circuses.” The Roman poet Juvenal who coined this phrase might as well have written it as a motto for Armenians, for whenever we meet, food and entertainment follow. Perhaps it is best illustrated during the festive season, when Armenian families gather to celebrate the birth of Christ. Armenians pride themselves on being the first Christian nation on earth (yes, we did accept Christianity before the Romans, in 301 AD), and as such our religious traditions are an integral part of our culture.

Armenians have lived in Palestine for at least 1,500 years. After the country had become a Christian nation, Armenian pilgrims began to make spiritual journeys to the Holy Land, braving political crises and the incessant wars of the region. When many of these pilgrims decided to stay, an Armenian Community started to grow in the heart of the city. Throughout the centuries, Palestinian Armenians have become an indivisible populace of Jerusalem, contributing to the shaping of the city. Through craftsmanship and pioneering, they bring diversity to this already multifarious city. However, as Newton postulated, “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” Palestinian and Middle Eastern culture equally have influenced the Armenian community, gradually shaping Palestinian Armenian cuisine, language, and way of life. Notwithstanding the effects of integration, Jerusalemite Armenians – one of the smaller communities of the diaspora – have been able to preserve their identity unlike any other. Among their celebrations are traditional Christian feasts and holidays of uniquely Armenian character.



© Vince Photography

The main altar of Saint James Cathedral. Photo by Vince S Kahkedjian.

Christmas

“Among my favorite holidays to spend in Jerusalem are Christmas and New Year’s. On these occasions all the Armenian community comes together, and there is a sense of unity. Even though it is the coldest season of the year, this unity gives a feeling of warmth and happiness,” my friend Nayat, a young university student, told me. Indeed, Christmas for our community is a time when we all put our differences aside and celebrate together.

Jerusalemite Armenian Christmas is the only one held on January 19, according to the Julian calendar. “I love it!” says my cousin George. “We get to enjoy the Christmas spirit for a whole month, and sometimes we even get two presents.” After all the lights and decorations are removed elsewhere and people start putting away their Christmas trees, two Armenian scout movements, Hoyetchmen and Homenetmen, lead a parade to escort the Armenian Patriarch to the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, once again reviving the Christmas spirit in Palestine. To the sounds of drums, trumpets, and bagpipes, the Patriarch, followed by the members of the community, makes his entrance to the birthplace of Christ.

Later that evening, the Patriarchate organizes a reception in the Armenian part of the Nativity Church at which high-level diplomatic representatives are present, including in recent years, the president of Palestine. It is a way for the Armenian Apostolic Church to reaffirm its presence in the Holy Land and also a reminder that Armenians have an important role to play in the preservation of the Christian Holy Sites in the region. The Armenian Church shares joint jurisdiction of two of the most important churches, the Nativity and the Holy Sepulcher, and have full jurisdiction over many more throughout the country.

After the reception, it has become a custom for Armenians to go to a restaurant in nearby Beit Sahour to celebrate the special occasion with their closest friends and family. At this point you might all be wondering, “When does the big Christmas dinner take place, when does the ‘panem’ part of the evening start?” Unfortunately, we do not have big Christmas dinners – but do not despair; we do have tremendous dinners on New Year’s Eve.



"Eech" (Armenian tabbouleh). Photo by Setrag Balian.

New Year's

Regarding the celebration aspect, New Year's in the quarter is much closer to your stereotypical Christmas. Celebrated on January 13, it is a night of grand family dinners, a midnight church service, and oddly enough, Santa Claus. Ashken Shishmanian, who left Jerusalem 42 years ago and currently lives in Toronto, vividly remembers New Year's in Jerusalem. "On New Year's Eve, the Armenian *Kaghakatsis** had a beautiful tradition of preparing food, dessert, fruits, candies, and liquor, and leaving the door of their clubhouse open to welcome all passers-by, wishing them a Happy New Year," she recalls. Hermon Mhrianian from East Jerusalem adds, "The scouts used to go from house to house, wishing everyone good health, even offering food to the ones who were not fortunate enough to have loved ones around, making them feel a part of the bigger family, the community."

For my part, New Year's Eve has been the same for as long as I can remember. We gather at our closest family friend's house where there is an abundance of food, poets, teachers, and musicians. The night starts off slowly with the

"The parade is one of my favorite events of the year," affirms Hagop who plays the trumpet. "We get to represent our association, our country, and our church all at the same time. It is a moment when I feel extremely proud to be a Jerusalemite Armenian."

aroma of various foods travelling far beyond the walls of the house. As the mothers and grandmothers prepare the traditional dishes, which include stuffed vine leaves, *chi kofte* (raw meat), *dalakh* (stuffed spleen), *basturma* (cured meat), and *sujukh* (walnuts dipped in fruit syrup and dried), the younger generation play board games and the men crack jokes at every opportunity. As the music starts playing, everybody joins in by singing along – the cozy spirit of the season is here. We sing Christmas carols in Armenian, Arabic, and English, impatiently waiting for the food to be served. After the food is served and we've had all kinds of desserts, someone knocks at the door. It is *Gaghant Baba*, who has come to surprise the kids, bearing gifts all the way from Armenia, not the North Pole.

As we get closer to midnight, we all put on our coats and head to the main

courtyard of the Armenian Quarter where the midnight service is about to start. Here, all the families of the community gather after a long night of eating, drinking, and singing. The clock strikes 12, a group of seminarians accompanied by priests start off the service. Children enthusiastically wait for the service to finish so that they can set off their fireworks. "Yalla, when are they going to finish?" they are heard asking their parents. As soon as they hear "Amen," the fireworks start, the crowd applauds. After the fireworks, the members of the community kiss and hug, wishing each other a Happy New Year. Jerusalemite Armenians are once again united as one big family.

Vartavar: The Festival of Roses

Like many celebrations, Vartavar dates back to pagan times when Armenians worshipped Greek-like



The Hoyetchmen Scouts in the main courtyard of the quarter. Photo by Vince S Kahkedjian.



Vartavar: The Festival of Roses.

gods and goddesses. Vartavar, which literally means “rose” and “rise,” was dedicated to the Armenian goddess of water, beauty, love, and fertility, Asdghik. Armenians offered her roses, which is why it is celebrated during harvest time, 98 days after Easter. During this feast, people sprinkled each other with rosewater. As it was one of the favorite festivals of Armenians, this pagan tradition was later linked to the Transfiguration of Christ, which is an

event in the New Testament when Jesus is transfigured and becomes radiant in glory upon a mountain.

Nowadays, it is a great way to cool off during the hot summer days of August. Children impatiently wait for the day they get to drench everyone in water, including priests. “The only thing we care about is splashing someone and not getting splashed back,” says Talar, who is currently studying medicine in Armenia. All the young people gather in the main courtyard of the quarter and get ready to plan their attack on unsuspecting members of the community. Water balloons and water guns, buckets and hoses turn the whole quarter into a water battlefield. If you dare visit the Armenian Quarter on this day, expect to leave soaking wet.

In addition to the more traditional religious holidays, Armenians have many unique feasts, some of which are ancient pagan-turned-Christian holidays, whereas others are important in Christian Armenian History.

Vartanants: The Heroic Battle of Avarayr

Vartan Mamigonian, one of the most famous Armenian heroes, led the heroic battle of Avarayr, fighting alongside soldiers and priests to protect and defend Christianity against the much larger and stronger Persian army who outnumbered them more than five to one. The Persians had advanced into many Armenian provinces and made it impossible for their inhabitants to practice their faith freely as the Persian king Yazdigerd II had sent out a decree demanding that Armenians convert to Zoroastrianism. In light of the news, Saint Leontius and Mamigonian called the Council of Ardashad, and together with Armenian bishops decided to defend their faith, ready to fight to their deaths. They sent out a declaration of faith to the Persian king, thus forcing him to go to war. On May 26, 451, over 1,036 brave Armenian men, including Mamigonian, lost their lives on the plains of Avarayr. Although the Persian army won a military victory on that day, the lives of these men were not lost in vain. Eventually, after the treaty of Nvarsak in 484, Armenians were allowed to practice their religion freely, thus ensuring the protection of Armenian freedom and liberty. After his death, Mamigonian was consecrated as Saint Vartan.

Vartanants is one of few celebrations that are both nationalistic and religious in nature, which further corroborates the strong ties that exist between the Armenian people and their faith. I always remember hearing the story of the Battle of Avarayr as a child. There was even a children’s song that went “Who am I? Who am I? I am a small Armenian child, an Armenia-loving,

grandchild of Saint Vartan.” The students in the Sts. Tarkmanchatz Armenian School of Jerusalem usually act out a play in honor of the battle. The moral is that a big military defeat may hold an even greater moral triumph. It is the story of a people rejecting tyranny and oppression and choosing to fight for their freedom. Through foreign rule, occupation, and genocide, Armenians have confirmed that the spirit of Saint Vartan, conscience, and courage remain alive in each and every one of us, and Vartanants is the day on which we remember that. It is a custom, on this day, to congratulate all Armenian men who do not have a saint’s name.

The French poet Emile Henriot says that culture is what remains when all else is forgotten. After a genocide that claimed the lives of 1.5 million Armenians and scattered the survivors all over the world, robbing them of most of their historic land, the Armenian community of Jerusalem is proof that culture indeed remains deep in our souls. The Armenian-American writer William Saroyan says it best: “When two [Armenians] meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a New Armenia.”

Setrag Balian is a 19-year-old Palestinian Armenian who studied economics in France and currently studies ceramics in Madrid. Passionate about politics, he mainly writes about the Armenian Community of Jerusalem.

* There are two types of Armenians within the Palestinian community: The Kaghakatsis (locals) were the first Armenians to settle in the Holy Land, arriving from the fifth century up until 1915. The Kakhtagans are descendants of Genocide survivors whose ancestors fled to Jerusalem in 1915.



Palestinian Sufis in Gaza



By Naryman Daqqa

*"I follow the Way of Love,
and where Love's caravan takes its path,
there is my religion, my faith."*

This was the song of the Grand Sufi, Sheikh Muhi ud-Din bin Arabi, as he wandered the land of the Lord, humbly seeking divine love.

Have you ever thought of the meaning of Sufism? Sufism entered Islam as one of its schools, as a group that adopted a path different from that of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. The origin of the name is disputed. Some connect it to the Ancient Greek *sofia* (wisdom), as Sufis strive to achieve wisdom by worshiping God and attaining a pure and loving soul. The British named the Sufis after the simple *souf* (wool textile) coats that the ascetic faithful used to wear as a form of practicing endurance in order to come closer to Allah. Sufism focuses on the spiritual dimension of Islam while also adhering to its other pillars. (The five pillars of Islam are *shahada*, sincere confession of faith; *salat*, prayer; *sawm*, fasting during Ramadan; *zakat*, giving of alms; and *haji*, the pilgrimage to Mekka.) Sufism is a path a believer undertakes to reach Allah; that is, to reach knowledge of Allah through efforts extended in rituals, by way of self-discipline, and by purifying the heart of any misconduct, hoping to reach a state called *lhsan*. The belief is that *lhsan* is to worship Allah as if you saw Him; and even if you do not see Him, He sees you.

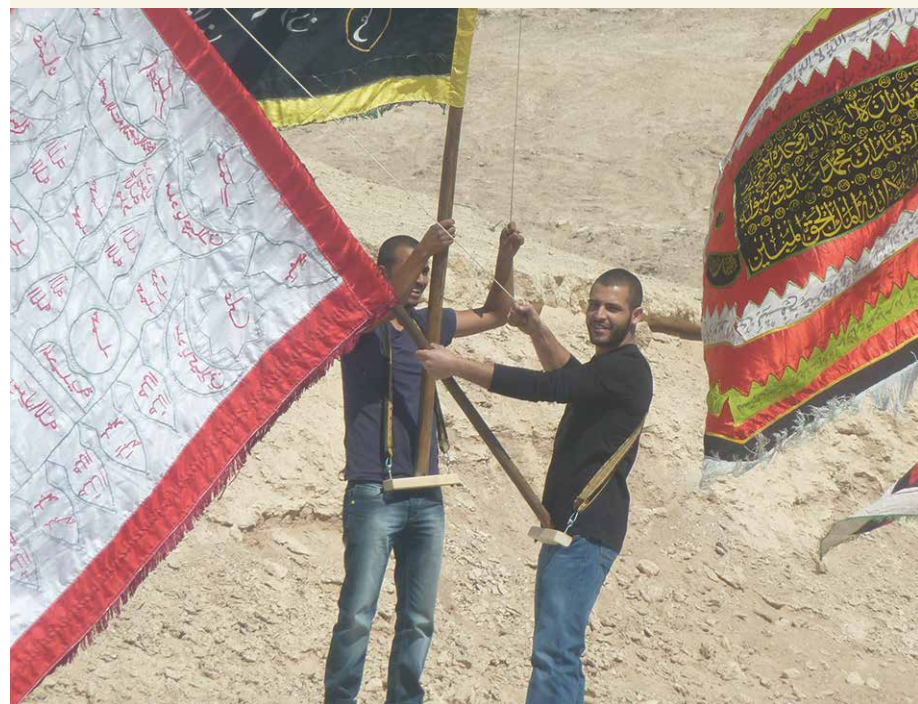
Some attribute the emergence of Sufism in Palestine to sheikhs from the Al-Qawasmi family in Hebron who enjoyed strong relations with Iraqi sheikhs from the important Islamic centers in Kufa and Basura. Around 1270, they adopted their beliefs and began to carry out their *nook* (rituals) in special places called *khalua*. Some believe that Jerusalem is the capital of Sufism as it hosts important *zawiyas* (meeting places, literally: corners) that include Qarmiah, Qadriah, and Afghaniah, all located in the Old City and East Jerusalem. In Gaza, the most common

turuq (orders, literally: paths) of Sufism include Qadiriah, following the teachings of Abdelqader Al-Jilani; Raifa'iyah, after Ahmed Al-Rifai; Al-Hamadiyah after Ahmed Al-Badawi; and Al-Shazliyah after Hassan Al-Shazli.

The *zawiyas* in Gaza are mainly centered in the Al-Nusseirat, Zaytoon, and Daraj neighborhoods. The Gaza Sufis perform their rituals in full privacy, with a deliberate effort to hide, as the Gaza community is mainly Sunni, with a minority of Salafi. Any interaction with them might lead to conflict due to differences in beliefs. Equally, Sufis have worked hard to avoid any problems with the current [Hamas] and the former PNA governments. When there is a government turnover, they make efforts to ensure that some of their members

Fitr, as well as Eid al-Adha in the same way as the Sunni society around them. People wear new clothes and visit their extended families, they give gifts to children and female relatives, and they bake *ka'ek* and *ma'amoul*.

Sufis perform their rituals under the patronage of their sheikh. The faithful meet regularly to organize their *hadra* (prayer hall), a beautiful place that looks like a museum and shows a large image of their former leader, the grandfather of the current sheikh, Nabhan al-Babli, that covers most of the hall's middle wall. There are other pictures of key Sufis from around the world, ornaments, Arabic and Persian calligraphy, and tambourines and swords that are believed to date back hundreds of years. The faithful convene



Sufi celebration in Gaza. Photo by Nabhan Albabli.

enter public offices in order to avoid any interventions of government in their affairs. This is a sensible way to preserve good relations with everybody. Sufis celebrate Ramadan and Eid al-

on Thursdays and Mondays every week to recite their prayers, rhymes, and the glorification of Prophet Mohammad, accompanied by the music of drums and cymbals.

Their songs include one by the Egyptian Sufi Yasin Al-Tuhami:

*O my Inspirer,
you know who I am.
I have lived with your breath
since the first word you pronounced.
Nothing separates us;
we are fused in our love
with our whole heart and existence.
I was away from you for some time,
but you saw me
and I knew that our meeting has come.
Love united us
and we have become the one pulse
that makes us travel together across life.*



Photo by Nabhan Albabli.

Women are rarely present in Gaza's zawiyas; some Sufi sects prohibit women's presence in the *hadra*. They may be allowed to enter to bring food, but they are not allowed to participate in the celebrations. Whereas most Gazans celebrate according to the Egyptian teachings and use little music, there are some that follow the Turkish traditions and engage in whirling, turning themselves in repetitive circles. This physically active meditation practice is performed during celebrations and ceremonies. The aim is to overcome one's *nafs* (ego, literally: self) and personal desires by listening to music and focusing one's thoughts solely on God. Whirling dervishes are aiming to reach the source of all perfection, known as *kemal* (whole).

The best-known Sufis of Gaza include Nabhan Al-Babli, known under the name of Al-Zien,

meaning the Exemplary One. He is in his fifties but looks as though he were only in his thirties. Al-Babli lives in the central Gaza Strip, more specifically in Nusseirat. He inherited the legacy of Sufism from his grandfather and father. He was called Al-Zien after a story, which he tells in this way: "Zien is the name given to my great grandfather whose name was Hussein. He lived in our hometown of Aqer and was a good man, respected all over the country. At that time, there was a gangster notorious for his wrongdoings. The gangster fought with my grandfather and dug a big hole and threw him in it. He then dumped in wood sticks and lit the fire to use my grandfather as a lesson for anybody who would dare object to what he was doing. Inhabitants of the town gathered around the fire and were surprised to see that Hussein was not harmed. Then they started calling him Al-Zien, and he became the wise man of the city. People came to him for treatment against black magic, the spells of jinn, and other superstitious harm.

It should be noted that for the past ten years, Sheikh Al-Zien, like other Sufis of Gaza, has been prevented from attending Sufi sessions that regularly take place outside the country because of the siege imposed upon the Gaza Strip. They cannot travel outside Gaza and thus cannot share with their Sufi brothers and sisters from Jerusalem in the *Mawsem Nabi Musa* (festival). However, factors such as the Israeli assaults and harsh living conditions have encouraged many young people to join the Sufis to reform their souls and establish spiritual communication with the Divine – connections they form when they meet in their *zawiyas* and through their sheikhs and the regular performance of rites.

Article translated by Rania Filfil Almbaid

Naryman Daqqa is a law student at Palestine University in Gaza City.



Artisanal handicrafts
inspired by the spirit of the past



Palestine



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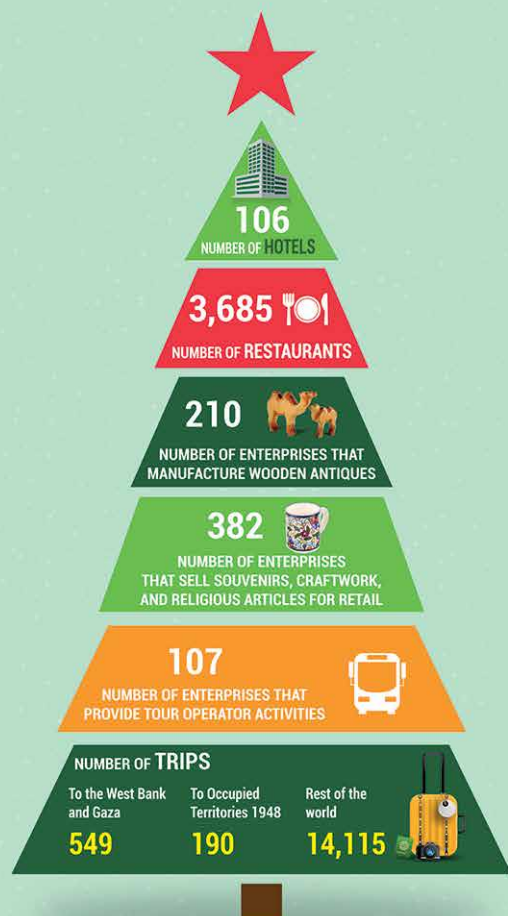
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SELECTED STATISTICS ON PALESTINE

Selected Statistics on Tourism



Selected Statistics on Children and Education¹



50,000 students experience difficulties in accessing education due to the lack of schools, exposure to danger and the risk of demolishing schools.



10,000 Palestinian children learn in tents and caravans made of tin.



More than 700 children cross 3-5 kilos to reach their schools.



2,500 children are daily have to pass through checkpoints in order to reach school.

The distribution of schools in Area "C", 2012²



30	Schools affected by the Apartheid Wall
34	Schools affected by settlements
32	Schools in Jerusalem
31	Schools in the old city of Hebron
12	Remote schools
48	Schools affected by checkpoints and curfew
187	Total (including %10 of schools in the West Bank, and %9 of students)

The percentage of children under the age of 5 according to toy type (Palestine, 2014):

Home-made toys	%17
Store bought Toys	%86
Items from inside and outside the house	%71
Have Two toys or more	%70



Selected statistics on Gaza (Post Israeli war, 2014)³



%80 of families in The Gaza Strip rely on aid



77 health facilities were completely or partly demolished.



%44 Unemployment rate



54,000 children are homeless.



600,000 housing units were completely or partly demolished.



18,749 Total Number of registered orphans at the Ministry of Social Affairs in 2014

Selected statistics on East Jerusalem⁴



545 houses were demolished by the Israeli authorities in East Jerusalem from 2004 until mid 2014-. As a result, **2,115** people lost their homes including **1,140** children.



Since 1967, around **14,000** Palestinian Jerusalemites have had their residency rights denied.

The number of children forcibly displaced in East Jerusalem due to demolition of their homes

year	# of children
2009	165
2010	69
2011	53
2012	27
2013	153
2014	111



¹ Save the Children Fact Sheet: Children's Right to Education in Armed Conflict, October 2011
² MOHE - Palestine
³ UNDP-papp research-damageassessment 2014
⁴ www.btsalem.org/ansabic/jerusalem



Archbishop Theodosios Atallah Hanna

By Nora Carmi

During the past decades, the name Archbishop Atallah Hanna, Archbishop of Sebastia (Sebastia), from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, has become widely known in local, regional, and international arenas as the eloquent and courageous voice crying out for justice for Palestine and Israel! Daring to speak the truth to power as an ordained servant of the Creator is in no way contrary to doing the will of God – even though it can be a costly discipleship that invites both positive and negative criticism, as witnessed in many countries that are struggling for a just peace.

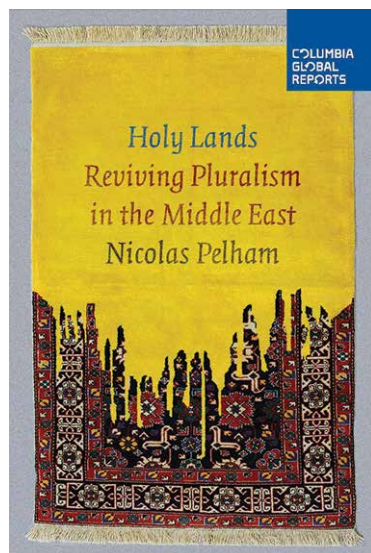
In the picturesque little village of Rameh in the Galilee, Nizar Yacoub Hanna (who would be ordained a priest as

Theodosios Atallah Hanna) was born in 1965. As the elder brother of Hanna and Khulood, he grew up in a conservative Greek Orthodox family, anchored in faith and connected to the land that had experienced a noble resistance to injustice since its occupation in 1948. It is not surprising that Rameh, like many villages in the Galilee that are proud of the warm and close relationships among their inhabitants, has molded many prominent Christian, Muslim, and Druze leaders in a variety of fields. They include the late poet Samih al Qassem and the Israeli Knesset member Bassel Ghattas. Nizar's love for prayer and church was instilled in him by his maternal grandmother (who recently passed away at the ripe old age of 98). Early in his life, Nizar acquired the nickname *nus-khoury* (half-priest) for helping the local priest in church and community events. There was no doubt in young Nizar's heart and mind about his call to serve God and his country. For one year, Nizar attended the Greek Orthodox seminary on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, studying Greek and basic religious subjects. He then continued his studies towards priesthood in Athens, Greece. Slowly but surely he discovered the important role of the church not only as a spiritual mentor but also as a staunch protector of community rights. Armed with this conviction and vocation, he was ordained in 1990. True to his Orthodox beliefs, Abuna Theodosios Atallah Hanna initially served the Greek Patriarchate well as its spokesperson. With his highly visible tall stature, he performed all religious responsibilities and proved himself an accomplished eloquent orator able to reach out to young and old. He soon became involved in nurturing stronger bonds among the various churches, but his genuine desire to unite the people extends further than the ecumenical circles. Also in civil society, Atallah Hanna serves as an active board member in a multitude

of nongovernmental and charitable organizations. He calls for the rights and liberation of all the oppressed, defending the sanctity of holy places, supporting prisoners, and comforting families of martyrs in demolished homes and on defiled land. Atallah Hanna, archbishop since 2015, fulfills his ministry faithfully, understanding very well the mission to "preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to set free those who are downtrodden." (Luke 4:18)

This advocate for a just peace is welcomed and respected in the Muslim world, in the Middle East, and in conferences and assemblies in the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Australia. A member of the Kairos Palestine movement and co-author of the document "A Moment of Truth," he does not miss an opportunity to remind all religious circles, decision-makers, and the international community of the Kairos message: the time has come to ACT NOW, and it is a universal responsibility to resist evil in a nonviolent manner. His Grace repeats the message that Palestinian Christians are not only an integral, founding component of the Palestinian tapestry but also an important presence in the whole Middle East, without whom the heritage, legacy, and rich culture of the region would be lost.

His innumerable prizes and certificates of recognition from governments, officials, and renowned global institutions testify to the integrity and commitment of the blue-eyed, soft but steadfast child of God from Galilee, a devoted Christian cleric, a deeply-rooted human being who continues to work for the unity of the Palestinian people, the preservation of humanity, sovereignty, and peace for all based on mutual respect, coexistence, and equal rights. An entire book should be written to speak about the miracles that faith, hope, and love can achieve.



Holy Lands: Reviving Pluralism in the Middle East

By Nicolas Pelham
Columbia Global Reports, New York 2016
183 pages, \$18.00

Reviewed by Mahmoud Muna, The
Educational Bookshop - Jerusalem

How did we get here? The Middle East of today is a place of no tolerance or harmony but a region full of sectarianism and racism. *Holy Lands: Reviving Pluralism in the Middle East*, an extensive work laid out in six political and historical essays by Nicolas Pelham, *The Economist's* Middle East correspondent, is an attempt to understand how a congenial culture nose-dived into the misery of today.

The book presents fresh writings that alternate between exemplary journalism and extensively researched historical accounts. Honest and accurate, Pelham goes beyond the overused tune of "experts view" or "deep studies" that tries to "analyse" the current situation in the Middle East, outside the lens of Eurocentrism. As recently as less than a hundred years ago, the Middle East

was notably more tolerant and diverse than Western Europe.

In the first chapter, the author argues that the end of the Ottoman Empire marked the end of "milletocracy," a governing system by which religious leaders, "millets," managed people but shared the control over land with other "millets" within the empire. Later on, the invention and subsequent establishment of the nation-state fostered the idea of Holy Lands over Holy People, and promoted military service as the ultimate manifestation of loyalty. Since then, "defence of the land took precedence over universal values."

In the second part, Pelham looks at the situation in Israel/Palestine with the eye of a true optimist. Although he admits that Israel is "part of the club of sectarian Middle East states," he also highlights the work of Rabbis for Human Rights and organizations such as Zochrot as a sign of hope across the divide. He later expresses his surprise at how international mediators have "shunned" religious leaders and looked to secular actors to negotiate terms at "contested holy sites."

Pelham does an excellent job in investigating, both historically and ideologically, the root of ISIS and the several armed Islamic groups that are in operation now. While many of us will agree on the similarity of their doctrine, it is well worth studying their unique beliefs and strategies to better understand them. In a subsequent chapter, Pelham clearly explains the differences within the Sunni sect as well as within the Shiite, in Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain.

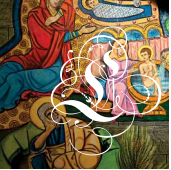
This is a Middle East book par excellence; historical events and political manoeuvres are nicely netted and connected, from Iran to Egypt, Afghanistan and Armenia to Oman, Turkey to Yemen. Hope is a recurring theme throughout the book, and the closing chapter in particular is promising. Pelham emphasizes the need for change from within, a review of how religious diversity is perhaps the key to stability, revival, and inclusiveness. He argues, "If milleticide is the product of carving the region into sectarian states, milletocracy is its antidote," the mechanism through which holy communities can once again replace holy lands.

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Johnny Issa Andonieh

Iconographer from Bethlehem

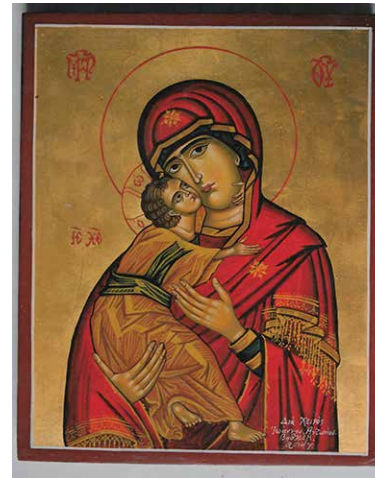


An icon is a religious painting that represents divine events. In the early church, icons came into use mainly to illustrate stories from the Bible and to aid illiterate faithful in understanding Christian teachings.

Johnny Issa Andonieh was born in Bethlehem in 1957. Interested in theology and monastic life since his youth, Johnny was introduced to iconography while in his thirties by a monk who lived at Mar Saba Monastery, located on the edge of the Kidron Valley (Wadi Nar) in the Jerusalem Wilderness. Since that time, Johnny has dedicated himself to writing icons. Between 1990 and 1992, he studied Byzantine and Russian methods of iconography in Cyprus, working in several churches with Greek and Cypriot iconographers.

As the first among his greater achievements, Johnny wrote icons for the nine chapels of Mar Saba Monastery in 1993, just after his return to Bethlehem. After that, he became recognized as an iconographer and was commissioned to paint for the Greek Orthodox churches of Shepherd's Field in Beit Sahour (1994), the Tomb of Lazarus in Bethany (1995), Prophet Eliseus in Jericho (1998), St. George in Ramleh (2000), Forefathers in Beit Sahour (2013), and currently he works for the Oratorio Residence located in Abu Gosh.

Most of these wall icons were created in Johnny's studio in Bethlehem. They were written on canvas and then placed on the walls of the monasteries. Each of the sets of icons is unique. Before picking up a brush, the artist studies each church's interior and prepares sketches and chooses the most suitable icons, many of them visualizing Biblical verses, bringing them closer to people.



The iconographer likes to surround himself with nature; his veranda in Bethlehem is filled with various kinds of plants and stones. These surroundings, the smell of incense, and daily prayer help him to focus before starting an icon. At the beginning of his journey as an iconographer, Johnny would read about each saint that he aimed to represent. Nowadays, he knows the stories of their lives by heart.

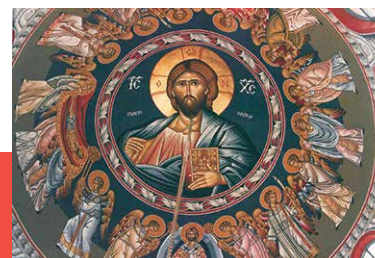
It is very possible that when visiting any Greek Orthodox Church in Palestine a person would come across Johnny Andonieh's works in a variety of shapes and sizes. However, Johnny finds the most fulfillment when writing icons from his inspiration. This is when he is able to achieve the greatest spiritual connection with an icon. These special pieces are often smaller in size than his other works and created on wooden tablets. He carefully writes them with egg

tempera paint and uses thin gold leaves to gild them. They are created in the silence and seclusion of monasteries.

While writing icons Johnny follows specific rules and patterns – almost everything within the image has a symbolic meaning. Figures have consistent facial expressions, hold attributes personal to them, and have a few conventional poses. Most icons include some calligraphic text naming the person or event depicted.

One of Johnny's personal future projects is to depict the events described in the Book of Revelation in one complex artwork. His wish is to create the masterpiece within the remoteness of one of the wilderness monasteries.

Johnny Andonieh welcomes visitors to his studio in Bethlehem. To make a reservation, contact him at iconj_andonieh@yahoo.com.

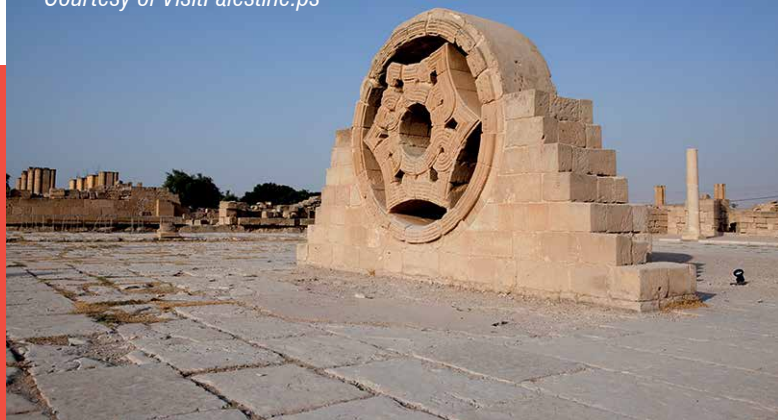




Hisham's Palace Mosaics

Waiting for the Permanent Display

Courtesy of VisitPalestine.ps



Khirbet al-Mafjar, commonly known as Hisham's Palace, is the most important Islamic-period monument in the Jericho area. It was built as a hunting lodge and winter resort in the eighth century during the Umayyad dynasty. The place is named after Caliph Hisham bin AbdulMalek (724–743 AD), who was mistakenly thought to have ordered the construction of the edifice. After experts examined the site more thoroughly, however, it was attributed to Hisham's successor and nephew Al-Walid bin Yazid (743–744 AD). The unconventional decoration of Khirbet al-Mafjar was declared to be incompatible with the righteous character of Caliph Hisham, though it fits well with the rather carefree lifestyle that Al-Walid is said to have had.

The complex consisted of an imposing two-story royal building, a prominent mosque, an ornate bath complex, and an agricultural estate. An elaborate irrigation system provided the buildings with

water from nearby springs. The site was discovered in 1873, but the major source of archaeological data comes from the excavations of Palestinian archaeologist Dimitri Baramki, who worked on the site between 1934 and 1948.

It is said that the magnificent edifice was destroyed by an earthquake that hit the area in 747 AD, shortly after construction of the palace. At that time, the present symbol of Jericho, the ornamental six-pointed star, which was placed above the entrance to the palace, fell down and shattered. Nowadays, its reconstruction stands in the central area of the archaeological site.

The interior of Hisham's Palace was adorned with some of the finest representations of Umayyad period art. Carved stucco – exceptional in style and quality – was found at the site. Of special significance is the statue that represents a male bearded figure who is holding a sword. Found triumphantly



standing atop two back-to-back stone lions in a niche above the entrance to the bath hall, it is assumed to represent Caliph Al-Walid himself.

Nevertheless, the most famous artistic aspect of Khirbet al-Mafjar are the high-quality floor mosaics in the free-standing bath complex that feature a wide variety of colors and figural motifs. They are considered to be one of the Middle East's largest carpet mosaics and consist of 38 individual designs that cover 827 square meters of the audience hall. The floor is usually covered with a thick layer of sand for conservation purposes.

In 2015, the Palestine Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Japan International Cooperation Agency signed an agreement to allow the sprawling carpet mosaics to be uncovered and prepared for display. Archaeologists recently removed the protective cover, but only for one day.

On October 20, visitors had a chance to explore the mosaics' elaborate patterns, celebrating the start of a long-awaited renovation project. The bath's floor is now covered again, but the restoration project, which is expected to be completed in 2018, will see it uncovered permanently, topped with an elevated viewing walkway and shelter.

The famous floor mosaic commonly known as "Tree of Life," which is located in a special reception room or *diwan*, depicts a lion attacking a gazelle underneath a fruit-bearing tree. This mosaic has been accessible to visitors for many years and can be viewed during the regular, daily opening hours of the complex (8 am to 6 pm).

To learn more about Jericho and other interesting destinations, visit our website at www.visitpalestine.ps, or contact the Visit Palestine Information Center in Bethlehem via info@visitpalestine.ps or (02) 277-1992.

EAST JERUSALEM

CONCERTS

Thursday 1

19:00 Christmas Concert by the Oslo Philharmonic Choir and local Palestinian choirs: Schmidt School and Amwaj, presented by the Bethlehem Destination Christmas (BDC) in cooperation with the Alliance Française. Saint Anne Church.

Thursday 8

20:00 Johann Sebastian Bach's Christmas Oratorio, I-III, performed by Redeemer Church Choir - Jerusalem, Schmidt School Choir - Jerusalem, Olive Branches Choir - Bethlehem, and the Belvedere Orchestra – Weimar, Germany. Gunther Goettsche and Erwin Meyer, conductors. Supported by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Church of the Redeemer, Old City. Entrance fee: 30 shekels.

Friday 9

20:00 Johann Sebastian Bach's Christmas Oratorio, I-III, performed by Redeemer Church Choir - Jerusalem, Schmidt School Choir - Jerusalem, Olive Branches Choir - Bethlehem, and the Belvedere Orchestra – Weimar, Germany. Gunther Goettsche and Erwin Meyer, conductors. Supported by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Dormition Abbey. Entrance fee: 30 shekels.

EXHIBITIONS

Friday 9

19:00 The Gift Art Fair is an exhibition and silent auction of artworks that features over 20 Palestinian artists, organized by Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art. Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, New Gate.

BETHLEHEM

CHILDREN'S EVENTS

Thursday 8

18:00 Christmas Parade, organized by Media Plus. Manger Street.

Friday 16 – Sunday 18

15:00 – 21:00 Santa's Village is a space that offers a great place to live the spirit of Christmas and enjoy time with your family and friends of all ages, organized by Media Plus in cooperation with Bethlehem Municipality. Manger Square.

Tuesday 27

17:30 Christmas activities for children, organized by Marie Doty Park, includes the Christmas play *Santaclore* and gifts. Marie Doty Park.

CONCERTS

Friday 2

18:00 Concert with the Arab Idol Mohammad Assaf and the Arab Music Band led by Yaoub Alatrash, featuring music by Tamer Al-Sahouri, organized by the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music. Bethlehem Convention Palace.

19:00 Concert featuring the Orchestra of the Al Kamandjati Association, Rea Garvey & Band, the musicians Yury Revich and Anna Maria Kaufmann, The Sistine Chapel Choir, and the Jasmine Choir from the Magnificat Institute, Jerusalem. The event will be recorded for the TV show "Weihnachten in Bethlehem" to be broadcast on December 24, 2016, and has been organized by Kimmig Entertainment and ZFD Television, Germany, in cooperation with Custodia Terrae Sanctae and Al Kamandjati Association. St. Catherine Church.

Saturday 3

18:00 Concert featuring *Lahn Group*, organized by The Edward Said National Conservatory of Music. Caritas Baby Hospital Hall.

Sunday 4

19:00 Christmas Concert by the Oslo Philharmonic Choir and local Palestinian choirs: Olive Branches, Schmidt School, and Amwaj, presented by the Bethlehem Destination Christmas (BDC) in cooperation with the Alliance Française. Saint Catherine's Church.

Thursday 8

17:00 A musical poetry concert to celebrate the birthday of the composer Sergei Prokofiev. Russian Center of Science and Culture.

18:00 A musical concert featuring Aisha's Team from America and Bethlehem Academy Choir, organized by Bethlehem Academy of Music. Bethlehem Peace Center.

Saturday 10

17:00 Johann Sebastian Bach's Christmas Oratorio, I-III, performed by Redeemer Church Choir - Jerusalem, Schmidt School Choir - Jerusalem, Olive Branches Choir - Bethlehem, and the Belvedere Orchestra – Weimar, Germany. Gunther Goettsche and Erwin Meyer, conductors. Supported by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Chapel of the Divine Child, Bethlehem University. Free admission.

17:00 Grand concert with Aisha's Team from America, organized by Bethlehem Academy of Music. Bethlehem Convention Palace.

Tuesday 13

18:00 Concert with the Young Musicians European Orchestra conducted by Maestro Paolo Olmi and in cooperation with Bethlehem Municipality. Bethlehem Peace Center.

Wednesday 14

18:00 Christmas performance by the Slovak Tecknik Choir, organized by the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music. Bethlehem Peace Center.

Friday 16

18:00 Brass band show organized by the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music. Edward Said National Conservatory Hall.

Wednesday 21

18:00 Christmas carols and music by Bethlehem Academy of Music. Christmas Lutheran Church.

Thursday 22

17:00 Classical music concert organized by the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music. Edward Said National Conservatory Hall.

Thursday 29

18:30 A musical concert presented by the Bible College in collaboration with the American Choir. Dar Annadwa International Center.

Friday 30

18:00 An orchestra performance by 140 musicians from various European countries. Dar Annadwa International Center.



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EXHIBITIONS

Thursday 1

10:00 Exhibition opening: "Cribbs from all Over the World." Bethlehem Peace Center.

12:00 Exhibition opening: "Events in the Life of Jesus Christ." Bethlehem Peace Center.

Thursday 15

16:00 Exhibition opening: works by the Palestinian artist Adnan Al-Zbedi. Russian Center of Science and Culture.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Saturday 3

18:00 Christmas Tree Lighting celebration with the presence of H.E. Prime Minister Dr. Rami Al Hamadallah, organized by Bethlehem Municipality. Manger Square.

Saturday 24

18:00 – 23:00 Christmas Eve of choirs and Christmas carols organized by Bethlehem Municipality to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, with a performance by the choir Cima Tosa from Trento, Italy. Manger Square.

23:00 The Inauguration of a Life-Size Nativity Scene carved by master craftsmen from the Val Di Fiemme in St Peter's Square in Rome, presented to Bethlehem at the request of the Holy See and in collaboration with the Amici del Presepio Association in Tesero, Italy. Saint Catherine Church.

Wednesday 28

16:30 A celebration of the New Year. Russian Center of Science and Culture.

SYMPOSIA

Thursday 8

17:00 – 19:00 Launching of the 7th Anniversary Conference of the Christian Palestinian Initiative - Kairos Palestine under the theme "Faith, Sumud, Creative Resistance." The conference continues throughout Friday, December 9. Dar Annadwa International Center.

THEATRE

Sunday 4

17:30 *Santaclore* Christmas play opening, organized by Diyar Dance Theatre in partnership with the Palestinian Bible Society. Dar Annadwa International Center.

Sunday 18

11:00 *Penguin on the Road*, a Christmas play by Al-Harah Theater for children and their families. The Orthodox Benevolent Society.

BEIT SAHOUR

CONCERTS

Friday 9

18:00 Concert featuring Anat Band, organized by the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music. The Elderly Club – Health Work Committees.

THEATRE

Saturday 3

16:00 *Penguin on the Road*, a Christmas play by Al-Harah Theater for children and their families. Latin Catholic Church hall.

Sunday 11

11:00 *Penguin on the Road*, a Christmas play by Al-Harah Theater for children and their families. Souk Asha'b.

NAZARETH

SPECIAL EVENTS

Sunday 18

19:00 The Nazareth Christmas Tree Lighting Celebration

RAMALLAH

CHILDREN'S EVENTS

Sunday 4, 11, 18

10:00 – 14:30 Board and video games for kids, organized by the French-German Cultural Center. Robert Schuman Library.

Sunday 18

17:00 *Christmas Carol*, a children's play, and Christmas baby event organized by Alhaneen Theatre, Nazareth. Ramallah Recreational Compound.

Thursday 22

17:00 Christmas parade organized by Media Plus in cooperation with Ramallah Municipality. City Center.

CONCERTS

Friday 2

17:00 – 20:00 Christmas carols by school choirs and the Holy Land Choir, organized by Ramallah Municipality. Rashid Al-Haddadin Square.

Saturday 3

16:00 – 18:00 Christmas carols by school choirs, Miral Ayyad, and Shepherds Music Band organized by Ramallah Municipality. Rashid Al-Haddadin Square.

Sunday 4

17:00 Christmas carols by Rana Khoury and her band, organized by Ramallah Municipality. Yasser Arafat Square.

Monday 5 – Wednesday 7

18:00 Christmas carols at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hope. Lutheran Hall.

Friday 16

19:00 Christmas carols performed by a choir from Haifa. Our Lady of the Annunciation Greek Catholic Church.

EXHIBITIONS

November 29 – December 1

10:00 – 20:00 The 13th Information Technology Exhibition – EPOTECH 2016, organized by the Palestinian IT Associations of Companies and Palestine Information and Communications Technology Incubator. Gloria Halls, Al-Bireh.

Saturday 10

19:00 The Gift Art Fair is an exhibition and silent auction of artworks that features over 20 Palestinian artists, organized by Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art. PADICO Holdings.

Wednesday 14 to Friday 23

18:00 Opening of an exhibition of paintings in the spirit of Christmas at Zawaya Gallery. Open from 12:00 – 20:00. Mövenpick Hotel.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Thursday 1

17:00 Launching of hot air balloons for Christmas, organized by Ramallah Municipality. Nelson Mandela Square, Al Tireh.

Friday 2 – Sunday 4

12:00 – 20:00 Christmas Market, organized by Ramallah Municipality. Rashid Al-Haddadin Square.

Thursday 8 – Sunday 11

18:00 The Orthodox Club Christmas Bazaar. Orthodox Club Hall.

Thursday 8 – Saturday 10

19:00 The Holy Family Church Christmas Bazaar. Holy Family Church Hall.

Saturday 10

19:00 The Holy Family Christmas Tree Lighting event. Holy Family Church Hall.

Sunday 11

18:00 – 21:00 Wine tasting of a selection of ideal wines for Christmas, wine samples, and a fine selection of cheeses and canapés to accompany your deals and special offers, organized by Mövenpick Hotel Ramallah and Jubran Wine and Liquor Store. Allegro Restaurant.

THEATRE

Friday 2

16:00 *Penguin on the Road*, a Christmas play by Al-Harah Theater for children and their families. Rashid Al-Haddadin Square.

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office@austrianhospice.com, www.austrianhospice.com

Azzahra Hotel (15 rooms, res)

Tel: 628 2447, Fax: 628 3960
azzahrahotel@shabaka.net, www.azzahrahotel.com

Capitol Hotel (54 rooms; bf; mr; res)

Tel: 628 2561/2, Fax: 626 4352

Christmas Hotel

Tel: 628 2588, Fax: 626 4417
christmashotel@bezeqint.net, www.christmas-hotel.com

Commodore Hotel (45 rooms; cf; mr; res)

Tel: 627 1414, Fax: 628 4701
info@commodore-jer.com, www.commodore-jer.com

Gloria Hotel (94 rooms; mr; res)

Tel: 628 2431, Fax: 628 2401, gloriahl@netvision.net.il

Golden Walls Hotel (112 rooms)

Tel: 627 2416, Fax: 626 4658
info@goldenwalls.com, www.goldenwalls.com

Holy Land Hotel (105 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)

Tel: 627 2888, Fax: 628 0265
info@holylanhotel.com, www.hollylandhotel.com

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Jerusalem Panorama Hotel (74 rooms; bf; mr; res)

Tel: 628 4887, Fax: 627 3699
panorama@alqudsnet.com
www.jerusalempanoramahotel.com

Hashimi Hotel

Tel: 628 4410, Fax: 628 4667, info@hashimihotel.com

Knights Palace Guesthouse (50 rooms)

Tel: 628 2537, Fax: 628 2401, kp@actcom.co.il

Legacy Hotel

Tel: 627 0800, Fax: 627 7739
info@jerusalemlegacy.com, www.jerusalemlegacy.com

Metropol Hotel

Tel: 628 2507, Fax: 628 5134

Mount of Olives Hotel (61 rooms; bf; mr; res)

Tel: 628 4877, Fax: 626 4427
info@mtolives.com, www.mtolives.com

National Hotel (99 rooms; bf; cr; res; cf)

Tel: 627 8880, Fax: 627 7007
www.nationalhotel-jerusalem.com

New Imperial Hotel (45 rooms)

Tel: 627 2000, Fax: 627 1530

New Metropole Hotel (25 rooms; mr; res)

Tel: 628 3846, Fax: 627 7485

New Swedish Hostel

Tel: 627 7855, Fax: 626 4124

swedishhost@yahoo.com
www.geocities.com/swedishhostel

Notre Dame Guesthouse (142 rooms, Su, bf, mr, cr, res, ter, cf, pf)

Tel: 627 9111, Fax: 627 1995
info@notredamecenter.org
www.notredamecenter.org

Petra Hostel and Hotel

Tel: 628 6618

Pilgrims Inn Hotel (16 rooms; bf; mr; res)

Tel: 627 2416, info@goldenwalls.com

Ritz Hotel Jerusalem (104 rooms, bf, mr)

Tel: 626 9900, Fax: 626 9910
reservations@jerusalemritz.com
www.jerusalemritz.com

Rivoli Hotel

Tel: 628 4871, Fax: 627 4879

Savoy Hotel (17 rooms)

Tel: 628 3366, Fax: 628 8040

Seven Arches Hotel (197 rooms; bf; mr; res)

Tel: 626 7777, Fax: 627 1319
svnarch@trendline.co.il

St. Andrew's Scottish Guesthouse

"The Scottie" (19 rooms + Self Catering Apartment)
Tel: 673 2401, Fax: 673 1711
standjer@netvision.net.il, www.scotsguesthouse.com

St George Hotel Jerusalem

Tel: 627 7232 Fax: 627 7233
info@stgeorgehoteljerusalem.com
www.stgeorgehoteljerusalem.com

St. George's Pilgrim Guest House (25 rooms; bf; res)

Tel: 628 3302, Fax: 628 2253
sgshostel@bezeqint.net

St. Thomas Home

Tel: 628 2657, 627 4318, Fax: 626 4684
aset@aset-future.com, www.aset-future.net

Victoria Hotel (50 rooms; bf; res)

Tel: 627 4466, Fax: 627 4171
Info@4victoria-hotel.com, www.4victoria-hotel.com

BETHLEHEM (02)

Alexander Hotel (42 rooms; bf; mr; res)

Tel: 277 0780, Fax: 277 0782

Al-Salam Hotel (26 rooms; 6f; mr; cf; res)

Tel: 276 4083/4, Fax: 277 0551, samihotel@p-ol.com

Angel Hotel Beit Jala

Tel: 276 6880, Fax: 276 6884
info@angelhotel.ps, www.angelhotel.ps

Ararat Hotel (101 rooms, mr, ter, cf)

Tel: 274 9888, Fax: 276 9887
info@ararat-hotel.com, www.ararat-hotel.com

Beit Al-Baraka Youth Hostel (19 rooms)

Tel: 222 9288, Fax: 222 9288

Bethlehem Bible College Guest House

(11 rooms; mr; pf)
Tel: 274 1190, guesthouse@bethbc.org

Beit Ibrahim Guesthouse

Tel: 274 2613, Fax: 274 4250
reception@luthchurch.com
www.abrahams-herberge.com

Bethlehem Hotel (209 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)

Tel: 277 0702, Fax: 277 0706, bhotel@p-ol.com

Bethlehem Inn (36 rooms; bf; mr; res)

Tel: 274 2424, Fax: 274 2423

Bethlehem Star Hotel (72 rooms; cf; bf; res)

Tel: 274 3249 - 277 0285, Fax: 274 1494
hlstar@palnet.com

NEW



*With Crunchy
Hazelnut
Pieces*



Casanova Hospice (60 rooms; mr; res)
Tel: 274 3981, Fax: 274 3540

Casanova Palace Hotel (25 rooms; bf; res)
Tel: 274 2798, Fax: 274 1562

Dar Sitti Aziza Hotel
Telefax: 274 4848
info@darsittiaziza.com, www.darsittiaziza.com

El-Beit Guest House (Beit Sahour) (15 rooms)
TeleFax: 277 5857, info@elbeit.org, www.elbeit.org

Eman Regency Palace (55 rooms; su (1); cr; res)
Tel: 277 2010, Fax: 274 6808
info@emanregencyhotel.ps, www.emanregencyhotel.ps

Everest Hotel (19 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 274 2604, Fax: 274 1278

Grand Hotel (107 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 274 1602 - 274 1440, Fax: 274 1604
info@grandhotelbethlehem.com

Golden Park Resort & Hotel (Beit Sahour)
(66 rooms; res, bar, pool)
Tel: 277 4414

Grand Park Hotel Bethlehem (Has 110 rooms located in 7 floors, main restaurant, dining room, conference room and bar.)
Tel: 275 6400, Fax: 276 3736
info@grandpark.com, www.grandpark.com

Holy Family Hotel (90 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res;)
Tel: 277 3432/3, Fax: 274 8650
holyfamiyhotel@hotmail.com
www.holyfamilyhotel.com

Holy Land Hotel
Tel: 277 8962/3, Fax: 277 8961
holylanhotel@hotmail.com, www.holylanhotel.net

House of Hope Guesthouse
Tel: 274 2325, Fax: 274 0928
Guesthouse@houseofhopemd.org

House of Peace Hostel
Tel: 276 4739, www.houseofpeace.hostel.com/

Hosh Al-Syrian Guesthouse
Tel: 274 7529, reservations@hoshalsyrian.com
www.hoshalsyrian.com

Jacir Palace Hotel - Bethlehem
(250 rooms; su; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6770

Lutheran Guesthouse "Abu Gubran"
Tel: 277 0047, Guesthouse@diyar.ps, www.diyar.ps

Manger Square Hotel (220 Rooms; bf; cf; mr; res; cr)
Tel: 277 8888, Fax: 277 8889
fabudayyeh@mangersquarehotel.com
Web: www.mangersquarehotel.com

Nativity BELLS Hotel (95 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 274 8880, Fax: 274 8870
nativitybells@palnet.com, www.nativitybellshotel.ps

Nativity Hotel (89 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 277 0650, Fax: 274 4083
nativity@nativity-hotel.com, www.nativity-hotel.com

Olive Tree Hotel (20 rooms; 6 su; res; sp; bar; wifi-lobby)
Tel: 276 4660 Fax: 275 3807
olivetreeshotel@yahoo.com
Facebook: olive tree tourist village

Paradise Hotel (166 rooms;cf;bf;mr;res;su;pf)
Tel: 274 4542/3 - 274 4544, paradise@p-ol.com

Assaraya Hotel Apartment
Tel: 0599 713 124 / 0548 866 410
eydam2000@hotmail.com
www.booking.com/hotel/ps/assaraya.eg.html

St. Antonio Hotel (36 rooms; mr; cf;res;pf)
Tel: 276 6221, Fax: 276 6220

Saint Gabriel Hotel
Tel: 275 9990, Fax: 275 9991
Reservation@st-gabrielhtel.com
www.st-gabrielhotel.com

Saint Michael Hotel

Tel: 276 9921/2/3, Fax: 277 2244
info@saintmichaelhotel.com
www.saintmichaelhotel.com

Santa Maria Hotel (83 rooms; mr; res)
Tel: 276 7374/5/6, Fax: 276 7377, smaria@p-ol.com

Shepherd Hotel
Tel: 274 0656, Fax: 274 4888
info@shepherdhotel.com, www.shepherdhotel.com

Shepherds' House Hotel (Facilities: Restaurant and Bar, WiFi)
Tel: 275 9690, Fax: 275 9693

St. Nicholas Hotel (25 rooms; res; mr)
Tel: 274 3040/1/2, Fax: 274 3043

Saint Vincent Guest House (36 rooms)
Tel: 276 0967/8, Fax: 276 0970
svincent@p-ol.com, www.saintvincentguesthouse.net

Talita Kumi Guest House (22 rooms; res; mr; cf)
Tel: 274 1247, Fax: 274 1847

White Diamond Hotel
Tel: 277 4041/2, Fax: 277 4010
wdh@whitediamond-hotel.com
Web site: whitediamond-hotel.com

Zaituna Tourist Village
Tel: 275 0655

JERICHO (02)

Al- Zaytouna Guest House (7 rooms; bf; res; mr)
Telefax: 274 2016 Deir Hijleh Monastery
Tel: 994 3038, 0505 348 892

Auberg-Inn Bed & Breakfast
Tel: 0523 500 041, 0522 626 067
info@housepality.net, www.auberginn.ps

Hisham Palace Hotel
Tel: 232 2414, Fax: 232 3109

Oasis Jericho Hotel (181 rooms; su; bf; cf; mr; res; ter; tb)
Tel: 231 1200, Fax: 231 1222
reservation@oasis-jericho.ps

Jericho Resort Village (92 rooms; 46 studios; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 232 1255, Fax: 232 2189
reservation@jerichoresorts.com
www.jerichoresorts.com

Jerusalem Hotel (22 rooms)
Tel: 232 2444, Fax: 992 3109

Telepherique & Sultan Tourist Center (55 rooms)
Tel: 232 1590, Fax: 232 1598
info@jericho-cablecar.com

HEBRON (02)

Hebron Hotel
Tel: 225 4240 / 222 9385, Fax: 222 6760
hebron_hotel@hotmail.com

NABLUS (09)

Al-Qaser Hotel (48 rooms; 7 regular suites, 1 royal suite; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 2341 444, Fax: 2341 944
alqaser@alqaserhotel.com, www.alqaserhotel.com

Al-Yasmeen Hotel & Souq (30 rooms; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 233 3555 Fax: 233 3666
yasmeen@palnet.com, www.alyasmeen.com

Asia Hotel (28 rooms, res)
Telefax: 238 6220

Chrystal Motel (12 rooms)
Telefax: 233 3281

International Friends Guesthouse (Hostel) (mr; res; ter; cf; pf)
Telfax: 238 1064
ifriends.house@gmail.com, www.guesthouse.ps

Saleem Afandi Hotel
Tel: 237 3338/9, Fax: 237 3340
www.saleemafandihotel.ps

RAMALLAH and AL-BIREH (02)

Al-A'in Hotel (24 rooms and suites; mr; cf)
Tel: 240 5925 - 240 4353, Fax: 240 4332
alainhotel@hotmail.com

Aladdin Hotel (27 rooms bf; mr; ter)
Tel: 240 7689, Fax: 240 7687, Mob. 0598 308 382
aladdinhotel1@gmail.com, www.thealaddinhotel.com

Al-Bireh Tourist Hotel (50 rooms; cf; res)
Telefax: 240 0803

Al-Hajal Hotel (22 rooms; bf)
Telefax: 298 7858

Al Hambra Palace (Hotel Suites and Resort)
Tel: 295 6226 - 295 0031, Fax: 295 0032
alhambrapalace1@gmail.com
www.alhambra-palace-hotel.com

Al-Manara hotel (22 rooms)
Tel: 298 8868, 298 8008
almanarahotel@hotmail.com, www.almanarahotel.ps

AlZahra Suites
Tel: 242 3019
alzahasuites@yahoo.com, www.alzahasuites.ps

Al-Wihdah Hotel
Telefax: 298 0412

Ankars Suites and Hotel (40 Suites & Rooms, su,mr,bf,cr,res,ter,cf,gm,pf)
Tel: 295 2602, Fax: 295 2603, Info@ankars.ps
Area: D Hostel (50 beds, 2 private apartments)
Mob: 0569 349 042, Info@Ramallah-Hostel.com

Area D Hostel
Mob: 0569 349 042, ehab@ramallahhostel.com

Beauty Inn
Tel: 296 6477, Fax: 296 6479
beautyinn@hotmail.com, www.beautyinn.ps

Best Eastern Hotel (91 rooms; cf; res)
Tel: 296 0450, Fax: 295 8452, besteastern@jrol.com

Caesar Hotel (46 rooms & su, 2 mr, cr, res, cf)
Tel: 297 9400, Fax: 297 9401
reservation@caesar-hotel.ps, www.caesar-hotel.ps

City Inn Palace Hotel (47 rooms; bf; cf; res)
Tel: 240 8080, Fax: 240 8091
cityinnpalace@gmail.com, www.cityinnpalace.com

Grand Park Hotel & Resorts (84 rooms; 12 grand suites; bf; cf; mr; res; sp; pf)
Tel: 298 6194, Fax: 295 6950, info@grandpark.com

Gernzo Suites (90 executive suites; cs; mr; pf; gm; res)
Tel: 240 9729, Fax: 240 9532
gernzo@palnet.com, www.gernzosuites.net

Garden Suites and Restaurant (22 suites (su, res, pf)
Tel: 298 8885, Fax: 298 8876, info@gardensuite.net

Lavender Boutique Hotel (10 rooms, cf;mr;res)
Telefax: 297 7073
reservation@lavenderboutiquehotel.com
www.lavenderboutiquehotel.com

Manarah Hotel
Tel: 295 2122, Telefax: 295 3274
manarah@hotmail.com, www.manarahhotel.com.ps

Merryland Hotel (25 rooms)
Tel: 298 7176, Telefax: 298 7074

Mövenpick Hotel Ramallah (171 rooms and Su; bf; mr; cr; res;ter; cf; gm; pf; sp)
Tel: 298 5888, Fax: 298 533
hotel.ramallah@moevenpick.com
hotel.ramallah.reservation@moevenpick.com
www.moevenpick-ramallah.com

Rocky Hotel (22 rooms; cf; res; ter)
Tel: 296 4470, Telefax: 296 1871

Palestine Plaza Hotel (100 rooms and suites; bf; res; gym; cf)
Tel: 294 6888, Fax: 297 3574
reservations@palestineplazahotel.com

Pension Miami (12 rooms)
Telefax: 295 6808

Ramallah Hotel (22 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 295 3544, Fax: 295 5029

Reef Pension (Jifna village) (8 rooms; res)
Telefax: 2810881, www.reefhousepension.ps

Retno Hotel (33 rooms & su; res; mr; gm; sp)
Telefax: 295 0022, Retno@retnohotel.com
www.retnohotel.com

Royal Court Suite Hotel (39 rooms; res; mr; ter; cf; pf; i)
Tel: 296 4040, Fax: 296 4047
info@rcshotel.com, www.rcshotel.com

Summer Bar (Ankars Garden)
Tel: 295 2602

Star Mountain Guesthouse (10 rooms; wifi; pf)
Tel: 296 2705, Telefax: 296 2715
starmountaincenter@gmail.com

Taybeh Golden Hotel
Tel: 289 9440, Fax: 970-2-289-9441
www.taybehgoldenhotel.com

GAZA STRIP (08)

Adam Hotel (76 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Telefax: 282 3521/19, Fax: 282 5580

Al-Deira (22 Suits; cf; mr; res; ter)
Tel: 283 8100/200/300, Fax: 283 8400
info@aldeira.ps, www.aldeira.ps

Al Mashtal Hotel
Tel: 283 2500, Fax: 283 2510
mashtal@arcmehotels.com
www.almashtalarcmehotels.com

Almat'haf Hotel
Tel: 285 8444, Fax: 285 8440
info@almathaf.ps, www.almathaf.ps

Al-Ouds International Hotel (44 rooms; 2 suites; bf; mr; res)
Telefax: 282 5181, 282 6223, 286 3481, 282 2269

Beach Hotel (25 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Telefax: 282 5492, 284 8433

Commodore Gaza Hotel (60 rooms;su; bf)
Tel: 283 4400, Fax: 282 2623

Gaza International Hotel (30 rooms; bf; cf; res)
Tel: 283 0001/2/3/4, Fax: 283 0005

Grand Palace Hotel (20 rooms; cr; mr; cf; res)
Tel: 284 9498/6468, Fax: 284 9497

Marna House (17 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 282 2624, Fax: 282 3322

Palestine Hotel (54 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: Tel: 282 3355, Fax: 286 0056

JENIN (04)

Cinema Jenin Guesthouse (7 rooms; 2 su)
Tel: 250 2455, Mob: 0599 317 968
guesthouse@cinemajenin.org, www.cinemajenin.org

Haddad Hotel & Resort
Tel: 241 7010/1/2, Fax: 241 7013
haddadbooking@ymail.com
www.haddadtourismvillage.com

North Gate Hotel
Tel: 243 5700, Fax: 243 5701
info@northgate-hotel.com, www.northgate-hotel.com

Key: su = suites, bf = business facilities; mr = meeting rooms, cr = conference facilities; res = restaurant, ter = terrace bar; tb = turkish bath, cf = coffee shop; gm = gym; pf = parking facilities, sp = swimming pool

EAST JERUSALEM (02)

Al-Diwan (Ambassador Hotel)
Middle Eastern, French, and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 541 2213, Fax: 582 8202

Alhambra Palace Jerusalem
Restaurant & coffee shop
Tel: 626 3535, Fax: 6263737
info@alhambrapalacej.com

Al-Manakeesh Pizza & Pastries
Tel: 585 6928

Al-Shuleh Grill Shawerma and Barbecues
Tel: 627 3768

Amigo Emil Middle Eastern, American, Indian, and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 628 8090, Fax: 626 1457

Antonio's (Ambassador Hotel)
Middle Eastern, French, and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 541 2213

Arabesque, Poolside, and Patio Restaurants (American Colony Hotel)
Western and Middle Eastern Menu
Tel: 627 9777, Fax: 627 9779

Armenian Tavern Armenian and Middle Eastern Food
Tel: 627 3854

Askidirya Italian and French Cuisine
Tel: 532 4590

Az-Zahra Oriental food and Pizza
Tel: 628 2447

Borderline Restaurant Café Italian and Oriental Menu
Tel: 532 8342

Burghoulji Armenian and Middle Eastern
Tel: 628 2072, Fax: 628 2080

Cardo Restaurant Continental Cuisine
Tel: 627 0800

Chinese Restaurant Chinese Cuisine
Tel: 626 3465, Fax: 626 3471

Educational Bookshop Books and Coffee
Tel: 627 5858

El Dorada Coffee Shop and Internet Café Chocolates, Coffee, and Internet
Tel: 626 0993

Sarwa International Cuisine with Mediterranean Flavour
Tel: 627 4626

Four Seasons Restaurants and Coffee Shop Barbecues and Shawerma
Tel: 628 6061, Fax: 628 6097

Gallery Café Snacks and Beverages
Tel: 540 9974

Garden's Restaurant
Tel: 581 6463

Goodies Fast Food
Tel: 585 3223

Kan Zaman (Jerusalem Hotel)
Mediterranean Cuisine
Tel: 627 1356

Lotus and Olive Garden (Jerusalem Meridian Hotel)
Middle Eastern and Continental Cuisine
Tel: 628 5212

Nafoura Middle Eastern Menu
Tel: 626 0034

Nakashian Gallery Café
Tel: 627 8077

La Rotisserie (Notre Dame Hotel)
Gourmet Restaurant, European and Mediterranean Menu
Tel: 627 9114, Fax: 627 1995

Dina Café Coffee and Pastry
Tel: 626 3344

Panoramic Golden City Barbecues
Tel: 628 4433, Fax: 627 5224

Pasha's Oriental Food
Tel: 582 5162, 532 8342

Pâtisserie Suisse Fast Food and Breakfast
Tel: 628 4377

Petra Restaurant Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 627 7799

Pizza House Pizza and Oriental Pastry
Tel: 627 3970, 628 8135

Quick Lunch
Tel: 628 4228

RIO Grill and Subs Italian and French Cuisine
Tel: 583 5460

Rossini's Restaurant Bar French and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 628 2964

Philadelphia Restaurant Mediterranean Menu
Tel: 532 2626, Fax: 532 2636

Shalzar Restaurant Middle Eastern, Mexican, and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 582 9061

The Gate Café Fresh Juices, Coffee, and Tea
Tel: 627 4282

The Scots Bistro Coffee and Pastry
Tel: 673 2401, Fax: 673 1711

The Patio (Christmas Hotel)
Oriental and European Menu
Tel: 628 2588, 626 4418

Turquoise Lebanese Restaurant
Tel: 627 7232, Fax: 627 7233

Versavee Bistro (Bar and Café)
Oriental and Western Food
Tel: 627 6160

Victoria Restaurant Middle Eastern and Arabic Menu
Tel: 628 3051, Fax: 627 4171

Wake up Restaurant
Tel: 627 8880

Zad Rest. & Café
Tel: 627 7454, 627 2525

BETHLEHEM (02)

1890 Restaurant (Beit-Jala)
Tel: 277 8779
restaurant.1890@gmail.com

Abu Eli Restaurant Middle Eastern and Barbecues
Tel: 274 1897

Abu Shanab Restaurant Barbecues
Tel: 274 2985

Afternoon Restaurant Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 274 7940

Al-Areesheh Palace (autumn and winter) (Jacir Palace)
Middle Eastern and Barbecues
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6154

Al-Hakura Restaurant Middle Eastern and Fast Food
Tel: 277 3335

Al-Areesheh Tent (spring and summer) (Jacir Palace)
Middle Eastern and Barbecues
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6154

Al Mekan Bar (Jacir Palace)
Snack Bar
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6770

Al-Sammak Sea Food Restaurant
Tel: 277 0376, 2743530
Fax: 277 0377

Balloons Coffee Shop and Pizza
Tel: 275 0221, Fax: 277 7115

Barbara Restaurant
Tel: 274 0130
barbra.rest1@hotmail.com

Beit Sahour Citadel Mediterranean Cuisine
Tel: 277 7771

Bonjour Restaurant and Café
Coffee Shop and Continental Cuisine
Tel: 274 0406

Christmas Bells Restaurants Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 277 6336, Fax: 277 6337

Dar al-Balad Continental Cuisine
Tel: 274 9073

Divano Café and Restaurant
Tel: 275 7276
divanocafe@gmail.com

Ewaan Restaurant (International Cuisine)
Tel: 274 3737

Fawda Cafe
Hosh Al-Syrian Guesthouse
Tel: 274 7529

Grotto Restaurant Barbecues and Taboun
Tel: 274 8844, Fax: 274 8889

Golden Roof Continental Cuisine
Tel: 274 3224

King Gaspar Restaurant & Bar (Italian, Asian and Mediterranean Cuisine)
Tel: 276 5301, Fax: 276 5302

Il'iyyeh Restaurant Continental Cuisine
Tel: 277 0047

Loyal Lounge Snack Bar
Tel: 275 0655

La Terrasse Middle Eastern and Continental Cuisine
Tel: 275 3678

Limoncello (Beit Jala)
Tel: 275 8844, Fax: 275 8833

Little Italy
Tel: 275 5161

Mariachi (Grand Hotel) Seafood and Mexican Cuisine
Tel: 274 1440, 274 1602/3
Fax: 274 1604

Massina (Breakfast)
Tel: 274 9110

Noah's Snack/ Ararat Hotel Snack Food
Tel: 749 888, Fax: 276 9887

Palmeras Gastropub Continental Cuisine
Telefax: 275 6622

Peace Restaurant & Bar Pasta, Seafood, Steaks & Middle Eastern
Tel: 274 9990, Mob. 0598 154 800

Al-Riwaq Restaurant and Coffee Shop snacks and cakes (Jacir Palace — InterContinental Bethlehem) Coffee Shop and Sandwiches
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6754

Roots Lounge (Beit Sahour)
Tel: 0598 333 665

The Tent Restaurant (Shepherds' Valley Village) Barbecues
Tel: 277 3875, Fax: 277 3876

Sima Café
Tel: 275 2058

Singer Café
Mob. 0597 492 175

St. George Restaurant Oriental Cuisine and Barbecues
Tel: 274 3780, Fax: 274 1833
st.george_restaurant@yahoo.com

Tachi Chinese Chinese Cuisine
Tel: 274 4382

Taboo — Restaurant and Bar Oriental and Continental Cuisine
Tel: 274 0711, Mob: 0599 205 158

The Square Restaurant and Coffee Shop Mediterranean Cuisine
Tel: 274 9844

Zaitouneh (Jacir Palace) Continental Cuisine
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6154

JERICHO (02)

Al-Nafoura Restaurant (Jericho Resort Village) Arabic Cuisine and Barbecues
Tel: 232 1255, Fax: 232 2189

Al-Rawda Barbecues
Telefax: 232 2555

Green Valley Park Oriental Cuisine and Barbecues
Tel: 232 2349

Jabal Quruntul Continental Cuisine (Open Buffet)
Tel: 232 2614, Fax: 232 2659

Limoneh Continental Cuisine
Tel: 231 2977, Fax: 231 2976

NABLUS (09)

Salim Afandi Barbecues and Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 237 1332

Qasr al-Jabi restaurant
Tel: 238 4180

Zeit Ou Zaater (Al-Yasmeen Hotel)
Continental Cuisine and Pastries
Tel: 238 3164, Fax: 233 3666

RAMALLAH AND AL-BIREH (02)

911 Café Mexican, Italian, Oriental
Tel: 296 5911

Andareen Pub
Mob: 0599 258 435

Al Falaha Msakhan and Taboun
Tel: 290 5124

Akasha Oriental
Tel: 295 9333

Allegro Italian Restaurant (Mövenpick Hotel Ramallah) Italian fine cuisine
Tel: 298 5888

Al- Riwaq All-day-dining restaurant (Mövenpick Hotel Ramallah) International, Swiss and Oriental cuisine
Tel: 298 5888

Awjan Seafood, Breakfast, and Pizza, Coffee Shop, Lebanese and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 297 1776

Andre's Restaurant French and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 296 6477/8

Angelo's Western Menu and Pizza
Tel: 295 6408, 298 1455

Ayysha Restaurant Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 296 6622

Azure Restaurant and Coffee Shop Continental Cuisine
Telefax: 295 7850

Baladna Ice Cream Ice Cream and Soft Drinks
Telefax: 295 6721

Bel Mondo Italian Cuisine
Tel: 298 6759

Caesar's (Grand Park Hotel)
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 298 6194

Café De La Paix French Cuisine
Tel: 298 0880

Casper & Gambini's Palestine
Tel: 298 8262

Castana Café
Tel: 297 1114

Castello Restaurant & Café Oriental
Tel: 297 3844/55

Chinese House Restaurant Chinese Cuisine
Tel: 296 4081

Clara restaurant and pub
Mob: 0597 348 335

Daoud Basha
Tel: 297 4655

Dar 53 Bar and Restaurant Mediterranean, Italian cuisine
Mob. 0599 318 191, 0597 767 832

Darna Continental Cuisine
Tel: 295 0590/1

Diwan Art Coffee Shop Continental Cuisine
Tel: 296 6483

Vintage (Royal Court) International Cuisine
Tel: 296 4046

Dream Restaurant and Pools (Jifna)

Tel: 201 1548, Mob. 0599 765 628
dream.jifna@gmail.com

Elite Coffee House Italian and Arabic Cuisine
Tel: 296 5169

European Coffee Shop Coffee and Sweets
Tel: 2951 7031, 296 6505

Escape fresh, healthy food
Tel: 295 9976, Mob: 0592 333 477

Express Pizza American Pizza
Tel: 296 6566

Fakhr El-Din Lebanese Cuisine
Tel: 294 6800

Fawanees Pastries and Fast Food
Tel: 298 7046

Fatuta Restaurant Barbecues, (Birzeit)
Mob. 0599 839 043

Fuego Mexican and Tapas Grill
Tel: 29 59426 - 1700 999 888

Jasmine Café
Tel: 295 0121

Janan's Kitchen
Tel: 297 5444

K5M - Caterers Cake and Sweets
Tel: 295 6813

Khuzama Restaurant Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 298 8289

La Vie Café Cafe, Bistro & Bar
Tel: 296 4115

La Vista Café and Restaurant Oriental and Western Cuisine
Tel: 296 3271

LEMON Palestine
Tel: 296 6933

Level 5 Fusion European
Tel: 298 8686

Cann Espresso Arabic and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 297 2125

Mac Simon Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 297 2088

Martini Bar (Caesar Hotel)
Tel: 297 9400

Mr. Donuts Café Donuts and Coffee Shop
Tel: 240 7196

Mr. Fish Seafood
Tel: 295 9555

Mr. Pizza Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 240 3016, 240 8182

Muntaza Restaurant and Garden

Barbecues and Sandwiches
Tel: 295 6835

Na3Na3 Café Italian and Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 296 4606

Nai Resto Café - Argeeleh
Mob: 0595 403 020

Newz Bar Lounge and "Le Gourmet"
pastries' corner

Mövenpick Hotel Ramallah
Tel: 298 5888

Osama's Pizza Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 295 3270

Orjuwan Lounge Palestinian-Italian Fusion
Tel: 297 6870

Rama café Resto/Bar
Tel: 298 5376

Palestine Revolving Restaurant
(23rd floor, Palestine Trade Tower)
Tel: 294 6888, Fax: 297 3574

PASTICHE Palestine
Tel: 298 5755

Peter's Place Restaurant & Bar
(Taybeh) Palestinian Cuisine
Tel: 289 8054, Mob: 0547 043 029

Pesto Café and Restaurant Italian Cuisine
Tel: 297 0705, 297 0706

Pizza Inn Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 298 1181/2/3

Philadelphia Restaurant Middle Eastern Menu
Tel: 295 1999

Philistia Restaurant & Catering
Palestinian cuisine
Tel: 298 9051

Plaza Jdoudna Restaurant and Park Middle Eastern Menu
Tel: 295 6020, Fax: 296 4693

Pronto Resto-Café Italian Cuisine
Tel: 298 7312

QMH
Tel: 297 34511

Roma Café Italian Light Food
Tel: 296 4228

Rukab's Ice Cream Ice Cream and Soft Drinks
Tel: 295 3467

Saba Sandwiches Falafel and Sandwiches
Tel: 296 0116

Samer Middle Eastern Food
Tel: 240 5338 - 240 3088

Scoop
Tel: 295 9189

Sangria's French, Italian, and Mexican Cuisine
Tel: 295 6808

Shishapresso
Tel: 296 6060

Sinatra Gourmet Italian and American Cuisine
Tel: 297 1028

Sindyan Restaurant and café
Tel: 298 9575

Sky Bar (Ankars Suites and Hotel)
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 295 2602

Sky Gate Terrace and Bar
Tel: 294 6888, Fax: 297 3574

Sushi Restaurant (Caesar Hotel)
Tel: 297 9400

Mövenpick Hotel Ramallah
Tel: 298 5888

Stones Continental Cuisine
Tel: 296 6038

Tabash (Jifna Village) Barbecues
Tel: 281 0932

Tal El-Qamar Roof Middle Eastern and Western Menu
Tel: 298 7905/6

TCHE TCHE
Tel: 296 4201

THE Q GARDEN Roof-top garden International Cuisine
Tel: 295 7727

Tornasso's Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 240 9991/2

Tropicana Mexican Cuisine, Oriental Menu, and Zarb
Tel: 297 5661

UpTown (Ankars Suites and Hotel) Continental Cuisine
Tel: 295 2602

Values Restaurant International and Seafood
Tel: 296 6997

Vatche's Garden Restaurant European Style
Tel: 296 5966, 296 5988

Zam'n Premium Coffee Coffee Shop Style
Tel: 295 0600

Zaki Taki Sandwiches
Tel: 296 3643

Zam'n Premium Coffee
Masyoun Coffee Shop Style
Tel: 298 1033

Zarour Bar BQ Barbecues and Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 295 6767, 296 4480
Fax: 296 4357

Zeit ou Zaater Pastries and Snacks
Tel: 295 4455

Ziryab Barbecues, Italian, and Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 295 9093

GAZA STRIP (08)

Al Daar Barbecues
Tel: 288 5827

Al-Deira Mediterranean Cuisine
Tel: 283 8100/200/300
Fax: 2838400

Almat'haf Mediterranean Cuisine
Tel: 285 8444, Fax: 285 8440

Al-Molouke Shawerma
Tel: 286 8397

Al-Salam Seafood
Tel: 282 2705, Telefax: 283 3188

Avenue
Tel: 288 2100, 288 3100

Big Bite Fastfood
Tel: 283 3666

Carino's
Tel: 286 6343, Fax: 286 6353

LATERNA
Tel: 288 9881, Fax: 288 9882

Light House
Tel: 288 4884

Mama House
Telefax: 282 3322, 282 2624

Mazaj Coffee House
Tel: 286 8035

Mazaj Restaurant
Tel: 282 5003, Fax: 286 9078

Orient House
Tel: 282 8008, 282 8604

Roots - The Club Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 288 8666, 282 3999, 282 3777

Abu Mazen Restaurant
Tel: 221 3833, Fax: 229 3111

Al Quds Restaurant
Tel: 229 7773, Fax: 229 7774

Golden Rooster
Telefax: 221 6115

Hebron Restaurant
Telefax: 222 7773

Orient House Restaurant
Telefax: 221 1525

Royal Restaurant
Tel: 222 7210



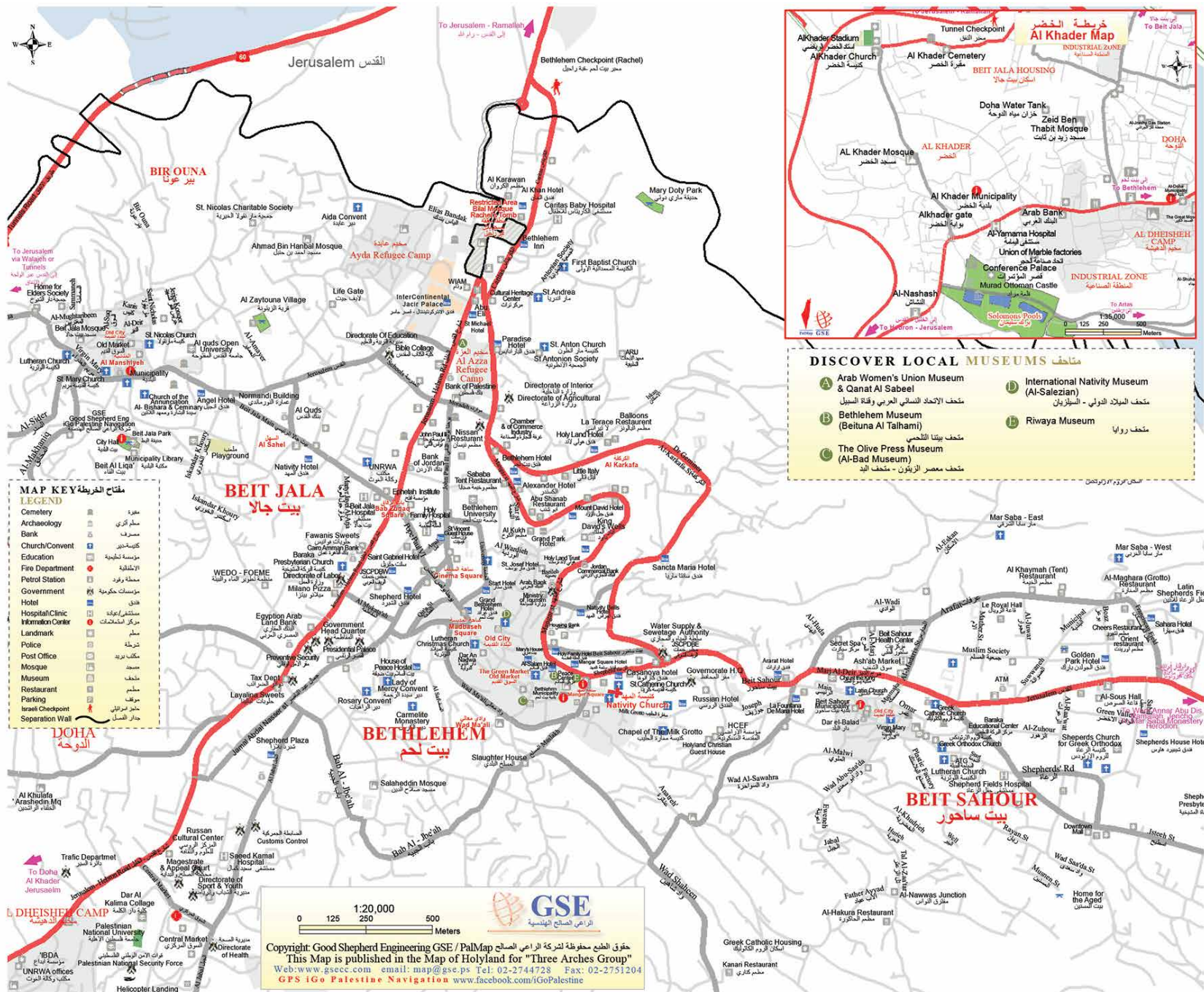
ALESTINE ROAD MAP



Map Source: PalMap - GSE

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Map source, designer and publisher:
GSE - Good Shepherd Engineering & Computing
P.O.Box 524, 8 Jamal Abdel Nasser St.,
Bethlehem, West Bank, Palestine
Tel: +970 2 274 4728 / Fax: +970 2 275 1204 (Also +972)
map@palmap.org / www.gsecc.com / www.palmap.org





It's Time to Fly

Even though it's too early to check the November 2016 statistics, those from October indicate that around 30,000 individuals visited *This Week in Palestine's* websites; 29,370 individual visitors in a 31-day period to be exact. We actually have two websites. The first is the current www.thisweekinpalestine.com, which holds the content of all the issues from August 2014 till today, and the second is <http://archive.thisweekinpalestine.com/>, which contains all previous issues beginning with the first back in December 1998 to that of July 2014. It is not surprising that approximately 84 percent of our visitors go to our archival website since it holds 195 issues with literally thousands of articles about Palestine and Palestinians. We consider this huge compilation of material to be our greatest single achievement during the 18-year history of *This Week in Palestine*. Given this accomplishment, and armed with a solid team behind the project, we believe that it is time to take TWiP to another level. It is, in fact, time to fly.

As a content-based magazine, TWiP has become a key source of information about Palestine, hence our slogan: "Promoting and Documenting Palestine." Our aim has always been to offer snapshots of various aspects of Palestine, such as tourism, the economy, cultural heritage, IT, water, gender, education, etc. At the same, though, we have never claimed to be an authority on any of the subjects we've dealt with. We have simply highlighted certain themes, hoping to arouse interest and point out stakeholders. Judging from the statistics on TWiP, however, our concept has found favor among our readers, who have grown in number as each new issue appears.

Oddly enough, every time I am asked for a description of our target group, I seem to stutter, unsure how to reply. First and foremost, I would immediately think of our local reality and answer by saying that we target Palestinians, in whom TWiP instills much needed hope. Then come the expatriates who live in Palestine. At an international level, I would reply by saying that we target friends and foes of Palestine everywhere. To be honest, though, I have never felt satisfied with my response. Irrespective of the exact identity of the magazine's target group, however, I have always sought to make TWiP a main source of information for all Palestinians, and for those of Palestinian descent, *worldwide*. The *Palestinian Time or Newsweek* magazine, if you like.

In order to address this formidable challenge, we need to engage in serious international promotion to expand our market. The lack of external funding compels us to continue to depend on our own resources. Making TWiP's website accessible by subscription only is one way to ensure the availability of resources needed for this expansion. Your subscription would go a long way to sustain and expand a project that has been promoting and documenting Palestine for the past eighteen years. It is time for Palestine to fly.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year filled with joy and peace,

Sani P. Meo
Publisher




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