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Between Ruins and Remnants

Religious Reinvention and Renewal
among Christians in West Bank Palestine

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Abstract

This thesis offers an ethnography of local Christianity and its relation to the changing social, cultural, and political context of contemporary West Bank Palestine. This study argues that the changes over the course of recent history in the Middle East brought about a renewal of ancient Palestinian Christian religious expressions through which the community reinvented itself and adapted its theologies and practices to the changing socio-political circumstances. In order to build up this argument, this thesis draws on a theoretically innovative framework, developed in conversation with recent scholarship across several disciplines, and ethnographically embeds this question in the mixed Orthodox and Catholic Christian village of Taybeh.

The thesis builds on existing research relating to theology and contextualisation, but explores these dynamics differently by combining the three dynamically growing research fields of World Christianity, Middle Eastern Christianity studies and the research that has grown out of the rapprochement between theology and anthropology. Working at the intersection of these three fields, this thesis produces a theologically-informed ethnography of Palestinian Christianity. What is particularly innovative about this approach is that the thesis does not only examine theologies as produced by Palestinian theologians and church leaders, but explores theological reflection and engagement among the laity as mediated through societal involvement, biblical associations, and ritual behaviour. The ethnography is based on a total of 16 months of fieldwork that has been conducted during multiple visits in the period between 2016 and 2019, particularly in Taybeh, as well as in the greater Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah regions. With its emphasis on the village of Taybeh, this thesis is also the first in-depth study on a Christian community in contemporary rural Palestine.

Accordingly, chapter 1 provides an extensive introduction to the social, cultural, political, and religious dynamics in Taybeh, with special emphasis on the missionary interventions in its history. On the basis of this portrait it is argued that Palestinian Christian identity should be understood in an organic way in which

religious and national identities are intertwined. Chapter 2 deals with the implication of this identity and explores how Palestinian Christians relate to the broader society. The chapter shows that Palestinian Christians have emerged as a socially and politically engaged community, thereby re-integrating the study of Palestinian Christianity with the wider context of the Middle East. Chapter 3 provides a grassroots theology that forms the basis of everyday religious practices that relate to theologies of the land and, ultimately, to a deep sense of belonging. The chapter particularly focuses on how Palestinian Christians have constructed and reimagined their identity as essentially biblical. Chapter 4 shifts the attention to the Palestinian veneration of Saint George and the Virgin Mary and argues that these ancient practices focused on human flourishing have transformed into another platform for grassroots theological ideas. In this last chapter it is argued that theologies of martyrdom, liberation, and belonging are rooted in the Arabic notions of *baraka* ('blessing') and *ṣumūd* ('steadfastness'). Ultimately, the study finds Palestinian Christian vitality in common faith and everyday religious identity, thereby counteracting popular rhetoric of extinction and persecution.

Lay Summary

This thesis examines local Christianity and its relation to the changing social, cultural and political context of West Bank Palestine. By using a combination of theological and anthropological research methods, this study explores theological reflection by Palestinian church leaders and laity alike. The research is based on 16 months of fieldwork that has been conducted during multiple visits in the period between 2016 and 2019. This fieldwork has largely taken place in the mixed Orthodox and Catholic Christian village of Taybeh in central West Bank, but research has also been done in and around the major cities of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah.

An important outcome of the study is the recognition that Palestinian Christians have continuously reinvented themselves to adapt to the dramatic changes in their recent history. This is seen in the way Palestinian Christians explicitly present themselves as a community that is religiously Christian and nationally Palestinian, and that these identities cannot be separated. On the basis of this identity, Palestinian Christians have participated in social and political activities to contribute to Palestinian society. Expressions of this identity that will be mentioned in the thesis are church leaders who write theological books and pamphlets from a Palestinian perspective, Melkite Greek Catholic church leaders who speak up politically for the rights of Palestinians, and Roman Catholic church leaders who engage with civil society organisations. Christian contributions to society come not only from Palestinian church leadership, but also include, for example, Palestinian Orthodox journalists who founded nationalist newspapers and a Christian family from Taybeh who established the first Palestinian brewery.

In contrast to popular rhetoric that Christians in the Middle East are soon to disappear from the region or are a persecuted minority, the reality on the ground shows that Palestinian Christians are an integral part of society. While their struggles should never be ignored, the thesis argues that Palestinian Christians should be understood as active agents of change, and not as passive victims.

Another insight gained from the research is that everyday religious practice has undergone a process of renewal and merged with Palestinian national

sentiments. To this end, the thesis explores two case studies of religious practice from the village of Taybeh, one focused on the use of Scripture and the other on saint veneration. Through the use of the biblical association between the modern-day village of Taybeh and the biblical places of Ophrah (Old Testament) and Ephraim (New Testament), Christians have constructed theologically meaningful views on historical belonging, territorial legitimacy and hope for the future. The veneration of important saints, such as Saint George and the Virgin Mary, have transformed into platforms for theological ideas, mainly concerning martyrdom, liberation and resistance. Hence, the thesis carefully demonstrates that there is vitality in common faith and everyday religious identity of Palestinian Christians.

In conclusion, the thesis stresses that theology plays a constitutive role in Palestinian Christian self-understanding. It strengthens the Palestinian Christian connection to Christian tradition and their rootedness in the land, thereby challenging Zionist understandings of the land and the Bible.

For Maurits and Adam

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Note on Translation and Transliteration

In this thesis, Arabic terms are not presented in the Arabic alphabet but transliterated into Latin script. For the transliteration I used the system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). This means that I have used diacritical marks for transliterated terms and that all Arabic terms appear italicised in the text, except for names of persons, places and organisations. In most cases the thesis presents Arabic terms in the Palestinian colloquial dialect. Plural Arabic terms are presented in the Arabic form of the plural. Classical Arabic names will be presented in transliteration, but for modern names of persons and organisations I have honoured their preferred spelling. I used the English spelling of places that have a clearly established English name, like Jerusalem (instead of the Arabic name 'Al-Quds'). The glossary at the end of the thesis will be presented in the alphabetical order that is familiar in the English language, instead of the alphabetical order of the Arabic alphabet. This choice has been made to aid readers who are not familiar with the Arabic alphabet. When a non-English source has been used, a translation of the title is placed in the footnotes. All translations from Arabic, French, German and Dutch contained in the following pages are my own, unless otherwise stated.

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Elizabeth Martejn
Edinburgh, December 2021

Introduction

This doctoral thesis offers an ethnography of Palestinian Christian thought and practice, and how this is daily lived out in the mixed Orthodox and Catholic Christian village of Taybeh in central West Bank.¹ It is an attempt to explore what it means to be Palestinian Christian and profess the Christian faith in the context marked by (armed) conflict, dispossession and ongoing emigration. Israeli occupation, settlements and checkpoints are part of the everyday life of Palestinian Christians. On top of that, the holy status of the land makes this one of the most contested places on earth. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all make religious claims on the land. In the eyes of some Western Protestant Christians, the Palestinian ethnicity contributes to an ambiguous relationship with the biblical claims that Israel is the land of and for the Jews. These Christians often use biblical and theological arguments to support Zionism and some mistake the Palestinians with the biblical group 'the Philistines', the 'enemy' of the Jews. Hence, the conflict over land is in different ways prominent in the life of Palestinian Christians: the tragic circumstances they live in caused by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the paradoxical theological understandings of 'Israel'. To explore how Palestinian Christians daily live out their faith in these complex conditions, this thesis draws on a theoretically innovative framework, developed in conversation with recent scholarship across several disciplines, and ethnographically embeds this question in the village of Taybeh.

This study is the result of a longer engagement with Palestinian Christianity that stems from the summer of 2013 when doing volunteering work in Bethlehem and staying with a local Christian guest family. These experiences and personal lessons have inspired me to conduct further research during my postgraduate

¹ The decision has been made to refer to the land of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem as 'Palestinian Territories' or 'Palestine'. Other terms that could have been employed include 'Occupied Palestinian Territories', 'Palestinian Authority Territories', 'State of Palestine' or the more disputed term 'Judea, Samaria and Gaza'; each of them is more politically-laden. Although none of the terminology is neutral, the terms 'Palestinian Territories' and 'Palestine' are most widely used in Western scholarly and journalistic writing, and have therefore been used in this thesis as well. Israel is used to refer to the land within the 1949 Armistice Line, or 'Green Line', that comprises the borders of Israel prior to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. Furthermore, the name 'Palestinian Christians' has been employed as opposed to 'Arab Christians' to acknowledge the Palestinian national identity of the community. The term 'Holy Land' has been avoided, since this term has been used in a multiplicity of ways in different contexts and periods of history and is therefore contested as well. See: Adrian Hastings, "Holy lands and their political consequences," *Nations and Nationalism* 9, no. 1 (2003): 29-54.

studies and, eventually, led me to embark on my doctoral studies at the Centre for the Study of World Christianity from 2016 onwards. My interests in Palestinian Christianity have made me board a plane every summer from 2015 to 2019 for Arabic (colloquial) language studies and fieldwork, and motivated me to immerse myself in the life of the Christians of Taybeh for a full year of ethnographic research from August 2017 till August 2018. This thesis is the fruit of all this labour in Scotland, Israel, and Palestine.

The Contemporary Christian Community in West Bank Palestine

Who are the Palestinian Christians? Defining the category of Palestinian Christians is no easy task, not in the least because of the great internal diversity among the Palestinian people and among Christians. It is therefore necessary to provide some background information on the contemporary Palestinian Christian community while simultaneously defining the scope of this study.

Palestinian Christian communities today live in diverse locations. Around 180,000 Christians live in the modern state of Israel, with the Galilean cities of Nazareth and Haifa having the largest Christian populations.² The Palestinian Territories counts 51,700 Christians, the majority of whom live in central West Bank in or around the cities of Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Ramallah.³ Smaller Christian populations exist in Gaza and in the northern part of the West Bank, including the village Zababdeh and the neighbourhood Rafidia in the city Nablus. Life for Palestinian Christians looks very different in the bustling, mixed Israeli city of Haifa in comparison to the contested context of the Old City of Jerusalem, and major differences exist between living as a Palestinian Christian in the conservative Islamic environments of cities like Nablus or Gaza City and the more traditional contexts of villages such as Taybeh and Jifna. Contemporary research on Palestinian Christianity has largely concentrated on the major Palestinian Christian communities

² Cf. Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, *Christmas 2020: Christians in Israel*. <https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/media_release/DocLib/2020/419/11_20_419e.pdf> [accessed 28 October 2021]. Of those 180,000 Christians in Israel, 77.1% are Arab, which constitutes 7.1% of the total Arab population in Israel.

³ Cf. Rania Al Qass Collings, Rifat Odeh Kassis, Mitri Raheb, eds., *Palestinian Christians in the West Bank: Facts, Figures and Trends* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2012), 10. A roughly similar estimate of 50,000 was given by the demographic study of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in 2006. Both studies counted the Christians in East-Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Romell Soudah and Bernard Sabella, *The Sabeel Survey on Palestinian Christians in the West Bank and Israel: Historical Demographic Developments, Current Politics and Attitudes Towards Church, Society and Human Rights* (Jerusalem: Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, 2006), 48.

in Nazareth,⁴ Jerusalem,⁵ and Bethlehem,⁶ with few studies on Haifa, Nablus, and Gaza City.⁷ This thesis contributes with a study of the Palestinian Christian village of Taybeh and its contextualisation in the broader West Bank. It is striking that virtually no scholarship exists on the Christian population in rural areas. This lack is to be explained by the fact that the majority of the Christian population lives in urban areas, but certainly practical complexities – such as the remoteness of the village and difficulty to establish rapport with the community – do contribute to this lacuna as well. This thesis fills this gap and is, thus, the first in-depth study on a Christian community in contemporary rural Palestine.⁸

A second observation about Palestinian Christianity is the presence of a broad variety of church denominations from across the Christian spectrum. This study delimits to the three largest church communities among Palestinian Christianity: the Greek Orthodox Church, to which 39% of the Christians in the Palestinian Territories belong, and to the Melkite Greek Catholic and the Latinised-rite Catholic Churches, which together represent around 34% of the Christian community.⁹ These

⁴ Una McGahern, *Palestinian Christians in Israel: State Attitudes toward Non-Muslims in a Jewish state* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Emmett F. Chad, *Beyond the Basilica: Christians and Muslims in Nazareth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Dan Rabinowitz, *Overlooking Nazareth: The Ethnography of Exclusion in Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵ Major publications on Christianity in Jerusalem include: Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Sacred Space: The Old City of Jerusalem in the Middle East Conflict* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002); Anthony O'Mahony, ed., *The Christian Communities in Jerusalem and the Holy Land: Studies in History, Religion and Politics* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002); Peri Oded, *Christianity under Islam in Jerusalem: The Question of the Holy Sites in Early Ottoman Times* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Jerusalem Since 1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Daphne Tsimhoni, *Christian Communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank Since 1948: An Historical, Social and Political Study* (Westport: Preager, 1993).

⁶ Lance D. Laird, "Boundaries and *Baraka*: Christians, Muslims, and a Palestinian Saint," in *Muslims & Others in Sacred Space*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 40-73; Mitri Raheb, ed., *Bethlehem: A Sociocultural History* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publishers, 2020); Mark D. Calder, *Bethlehem's Syriac Christians: Self, Nation and Church in Dialogue and Practice* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2017); Bård H. Kårtveit, *Dilemmas of Attachment: Identity and Belonging among Palestinian Christians* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Glenn Bowman, "The Two Deaths of Basem Rishmawi: Identity Constructions and Reconstructions in a Muslim-Christian Palestinian Community," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 8, no. 1 (2001): 47-81; Glenn Bowman, "Nationalizing the Sacred: Shrines and Shifting Identities in the Israeli-Occupied Territories," *Man* 28, no. 3 (1993): 431-60.

⁷ On Haifa, see: Amelie Sa'ar, "Carefully on the Margins: Christian Palestinians in Haifa between Nation and State," *American Ethnologist* 25, no. 2 (1998): 215-39. On Nablus, see: Julie Droeber, *The Dynamics of Coexistence in the Middle East: Negotiating Boundaries between Christians, Muslims, Jews and Samaritans* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013); On Gaza: Kenny Schmitt, "Gazan Christians: Pilgrimage Permits, Migration, and the Exchange of Precarity," *Exchange* 49, no. 3-4 (2020): 316-38.

⁸ Previous reflection on Christians in rural Palestine is only found in the work of Alain Epp Weaver. In his analysis of the work of Melkite Greek Catholic theologian Elias Chacour, Weaver places Chacour's work in the context of rural Palestine and reflects on the theologian's descent from the destroyed Christian village Kufr Baram. See: Alain Epp Weaver, *Mapping and Return: Palestinian Dispossession and a Political Theology for a Shared Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 91-126.

⁹ Cf. Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden: Brill, accessed October 2021). In Israel the situation is slightly different. In Israel proper, the Melkite church is the largest community (40%), followed by the Greek Orthodox (32%), Roman Catholics (20%), Maronites (7%) and others (1%). Cf. "Table 8 Distribution of Christians in Israel by denomination," in Johnny Mansour, *Arab Christians in Israel. Facts, Figures and Trends* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2012), 23. It is no surprise that the majority of Melkites live in Galilee, as 70% of the total Christian population of Israel lives in this locality. Cf. Mansour, *Arab Christians in Israel*, 22.

denominations are part of the thirteen churches officially recognised by the Palestinian Authorities, which also includes the Armenian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Maronite Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Anglican Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Council of Local Evangelical Churches. In addition, a number of Palestinian Christians belong to the Pentecostal and nondenominational congregations that are active in the Palestinian Territories, the latter including a very small and struggling church of converts from Islam.

Most of the dramatic change in the denominational composition occurred in the mid-nineteenth century through the establishment of the joint Anglican-Lutheran bishopric in Jerusalem (1841) and the re-establishment of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem (1847). Being led by foreign, mainly Western, clergy and characterised by proselytising tendencies, these new Christian communities brought a different dynamic to the existing largely Orthodox and Melkite Greek Catholic communities. This coincided with the establishment of the Russian diplomatic mission in Palestine (1847). On top of that, in about the same time frame, other denominations successfully established patriarchal vicariates in Jerusalem, including the Armenian Catholics (1842), Syrian Catholics (1890), and Maronites (1895). This broad Christian spectrum has led to conflict and rivalries among ecclesial hierarchy, especially around holy places, but denominational mobility exists among the Palestinian laity.¹⁰ What should be taken from these paragraphs is that the Greek Orthodox, Melkite Greek Catholic and Latinised-rite Catholic communities, that are the object of this study, should thus be understood in this pluralist Christian context.

The position of the Christian population in both Israeli and Palestinian societies is that of a middle-class, highly educated bourgeoisie. The mission schools and vocational schools established by the Latinised-rite Catholics, Russian Orthodox, Anglicans, and Lutherans in the nineteenth century provided the Christian population with a competitive edge in comparison to Muslim Palestinians. Although Christians continue working in the primary sector, particularly in a Christian village like Taybeh, the majority of Christians today work in the tertiary sector, including service-providing jobs like in education, health care and tourism. From the Christian

¹⁰ Mari Parkkinen, "Denominational Mobility among Palestinian Christians," *Exchange* 50, no. 1 (2021): 30-52.

bourgeoisie in cities, some played prominent roles in the formation of Palestinian nationalism in the nineteenth century and Christians today are active in politics as well. The image of Palestinian Christians as active agents in their Middle Eastern society will be an important emphasis in this thesis, thereby deconstructing notions of Palestinian Christians as passive victims of their Muslim compatriots. Famous Palestinian Christians that will be further referred to in this thesis, such as early twentieth-century personalities like Khalil al-Sakakini (1878-1953), Tawfiq Canaan (1882-1964), and Emil al-Ghoury (1907-1984), and contemporary thinkers like Edward Said (1935-2003), Naim Ateek (b. 1937), and Mitri Raheb (b. 1962), have all pleaded for the Palestinian cause on the international stage. An important characteristic of this revival of Palestinian Christianity, that will be further examined in this thesis, is that Christian contributions to society come from a broad variety of church denominations, localities and socio-political backgrounds and that these contributions are made in a variety of different ways. This has been fundamental to the contemporary identity of Palestinian Christians and left an important mark on the way they experience and live out their religiosity.

The fact that many Christians were wealthy, highly educated and often internationally connected, makes Palestinian Christians also more prone to emigration. Nearly half of the thirteen million Palestinians live outside of historic Palestine,¹¹ and it is estimated that an even higher percentage of 60% of Palestinian Christians live abroad.¹² The largest Palestinian Christian diasporic communities are in Chile (350,000) and Honduras (280,000).¹³ Smaller diaspora communities are found in other countries in South America, in North America, Europe, Australia, the Arabian Peninsula, and in neighbouring countries Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The number of Palestinian Christians in the Palestinian Territories is continuously decreasing. According to the World Christian Database, Christians constituted 11.7% of the Palestinian population in 1900, which was 0.9% in 2020, and Christians are

¹¹ Cf. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Palestine in Figures 2020* (Ramallah, 2021), 11, <<http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2557.pdf>> [accessed 28 October 2021].

¹² Cf. Soudah and Sabella, *The Sabeel Survey on Palestinian Christians in the West Bank and Israel*, 48.

¹³ Cf. Bernard Sabella, "Palestine," in *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity: Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 143. Current studies on the Palestinian Christian diaspora include: Mitri Raheb, ed., *Palestinian Christians: Emigration, Displacement and Diaspora* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2017); Viola Raheb, ed., *Latin Americans with Palestinian Roots* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2012); Nancie L. González, *Dollar, Dove, and Eagle: One Hundred Years of Palestinian Migration to Honduras* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992).

likely to constitute 0.4% of the Palestinian population in 2050.¹⁴ The wars of 1948 and 1967 were significant push factors in the past, and today's unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, high unemployment levels, and Islamic and Jewish radicalisation, continue to push Palestinian Christians towards emigration.

Again, it should be emphasised that, while fully acknowledging the harsh situation in which Palestinian Christians are living, this thesis aims to demonstrate the agency of Palestinian Christians, who are in the process of repeatedly reinventing themselves and renewing their religious practices to adapt to the socio-political and economic challenging circumstances in which they are living.

Towards a Theologically-Informed Ethnography of Palestinian Christianity

The question at the core of this thesis is: How do theology and context influence each other within the Palestinian Christian community? There is already extensive scholarship on the question how Christian faith and practice have been shaped by their context and, vice versa, how Christianity structured its environment.¹⁵ This thesis builds on this body of literature but explores the question differently, by creatively combining the three separate but dynamically growing research fields of World Christianity, Middle Eastern Christianity studies and the research that has grown out of the ethnographic turn in theology. Working at the intersection of these three fields, this thesis produces an innovative approach to theological reflection and engagement among the Palestinian Christian community in West Bank Palestine. This section will aim to chart these three fields, how they relate to each other, and how this builds up to a theologically-informed ethnography of Palestinian Christianity.

Firstly, this thesis should be identified as World Christianity scholarship, generally understood as the study of Christianity as a world religion with multiple local manifestations. This area of research developed in the 1990s, pioneered by historians such as Andrew F. Walls and Lamin O. Sanneh who, embedded in theories of the translatability and the inculturation of the gospel, drew attention to the

¹⁴ Cf. Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Database*, (accessed October 2021).

¹⁵ Seminal works in this type of scholarship include: Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement: Vol. 2, Modern Christianity from 1454-1800* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2012); Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*. Revised and Expanded Edition (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002); Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement: Vol. 1, Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001); Robert J. Schreier, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1985).

demographic movement in the axis of Christianity to the Global South, with the Global South as a tale of remarkable expansion and European Christianity as a tale of decline and secularisation.¹⁶ Particularly after the publication of Philip Jenkins' influential and somewhat popularising book *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (2002),¹⁷ a "Global South shift",¹⁸ or "World-Christian Turn" occurred,¹⁹ with a proliferation of academic publications, chairs, journals, book series, and postgraduate programmes on World Christianity. This new field of studies embodies a shift away from a more traditional missiological nomenclature and provides a corrective to Eurocentric categories of normative Christian faith.²⁰ According to Dale T. Irvin, the field of World Christianity "investigates and seeks to understand Christian communities, faith, and practice as they are found on six continents, expressed in diverse ecclesial traditions, and informed by the multitude of historical and cultural experiences in a world that for good and ill is rapidly globalizing."²¹ Building on the work of Klaus Koschorke's polycentric understanding of the worldwide church and the "multidirectional transcontinental interactions" in global Christian history,²² World Christianity is thus, to use the words of Irvin again,

¹⁶ Andrew F. Walls' and Lamin O. Sanneh's foundational publications shaped and continue to shape the further course of this area of research, including: Andrew F. Walls, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in the History of World Christianity*, ed. by Mark R. Gornik (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002); Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1996); Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009 [1995]); Lamin O. Sanneh, *Disciples of all Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Lamin O. Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003). Although largely developed in the 1990s, it should be noted that Andrew Walls founded the *Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World* as early as 1982 at the University of Aberdeen, which moved to the University of Edinburgh in 1987 and was renamed to *Centre for the Study of World Christianity* in 2009. See: Brian Stanley, "Founding the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World," in *Understanding World Christianity: The Vision and Work of Andrew F. Walls*, edited by William R. Burrows, Mark R. Gornik, and Janice A. McLean (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 51-9.

¹⁷ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 [2002]).

¹⁸ Dana L. Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity since 1945," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, no. 2 (2000): 50-8.

¹⁹ Cf. Paul Kollman, "Understanding the World-Christian Turn in the History of Christianity and Theology," *Theology Today* 71, no. 2 (2014): 164-77.

²⁰ While World Christianity is generally understood as a new 'field of studies', it should be noted that scholars have recently criticised this and argued that World Christianity is better described as an 'approach'. See, for example: Martha Frederiks, "World Christianity: Contours of an Approach," in *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations*, edited by Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 10-39; Joel Cabrita and David Maxell, "Relocating World Christianity," in *Relocating Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies and Local Expressions of the Christian Faith*, edited by Joel Cabrita, David Maxwell, and Emma Wild-Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 1-44; Dorottya Nagy, "World Christianity as a Theological Approach: Reflections on Central and Eastern Europe," in *Relocating Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies and Local Expressions of the Christian Faith*, edited by Joel Cabrita, David Maxwell, and Emma Wild-Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 143-61.

²¹ Dale T. Irvin, "World Christianity: An Introduction," *Journal of World Christianity* 1, no. 1 (2008): 1.

²² Klaus Koschorke, "Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity," *Journal of World Christianity* 6, no. 1 (2016): 28-56. See also: Klaus Koschorke and Adrian

“at its best when studying things that are crossing (transcultural, transconfessional, transreligious) or things that take place in the interstices (intercultural, interconfessional, interreligious).”²³ The same approach will be taken in this thesis, approaching Palestinian Christianity from the perspective of an enmeshed history, with connections to Western countries through mission contact, with Russia through educational networks, and to other parts of the world through the Palestinian Christian diaspora.

However, studies of Eastern Christianity and Christian communities in and from the Middle East have a marginal position in this field.²⁴ Deanna Ferree Womack noted that while Middle Eastern Christianity has consistently been addressed in World Christianity scholarship, the region has not been a prominent area of specialisation. Indeed, surveying some key publications in the field, the treatment of the Middle East is often delimited to just its early place in Christian history without mentioning the contemporary developments in the region.²⁵ Womack, therefore, argued that “the marginalization, rich diversity, and transnational interconnections of Christians in and from the Middle East ought to make the region one focal point for the now thriving field of World Christianity.”²⁶ This thesis contributes to filling this important lacuna in World Christianity scholarship, which traditionally has had an emphasis on Anglophone Protestantism in Africa, and to a lesser extent on Latin American Pentecostalism and on Asian countries such as India, China, and Korea. Moreover, the historical trajectory of Palestinian Christians invites World Christianity scholars to look beyond bipolar lines persistent in the field, such as ‘North’ versus ‘South’, and as will later will be argued in this thesis, ‘missionary’ versus ‘indigenous’. World Christianity scholars should not solely work along the ‘North-South’ thesis, but

Hermann, eds., *Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity/Polyzentrische Strukturen in der Geschichte des Weltchristentums* (Wiesbaden: Harrosowitz Verlag, 2014).

²³ Dale T. Irvin, “World Christianity: A Genealogy,” *Journal of World Christianity* 9, no. 1 (2019): 18.

²⁴ The lack of attention given to Oriental and Eastern Orthodoxy in World Christianity has earlier been pointed out, see: Dyron B. Daugherty, “Ignoring the East: Correcting a Serious Flaw in World Christianity Scholarship,” in *Religion on the Move! New Dynamics of Christian Expansion in a Globalizing World*, edited by Afe Adogame and Shobana Shankar (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 41-59. The same argument has been made about the marginal position of Middle Eastern Christian communities in the field, see: Deanna Ferree Womack, “Middle Eastern Christianity in the Context of World Christianity,” in *The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East*, edited by Mitri Raheb & Mark A. Lamport (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 548-58.

²⁵ See, for example: David Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History* (London: Penguin, 2001); Adrian Hastings, ed., *A World History of Christianity* (London: Cassell, 1999). The same applies to the earlier referenced work of Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh. Similarly, a book such as the comprehensive *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to World Christianity* only refers to the Ottoman Period and Coptic Christianity in the modern period, providing the reader with a rather incomplete outlook on contemporary Middle Eastern Christian communities. Lamin O. Sanneh and Michael McClymond, edited by *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to World Christianity* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016).

²⁶ Womack, “Middle Eastern Christianity in the Context of World Christianity,” 555.

ask the question: What about the Global East?²⁷ It follows that, in contrast to the rapid growth of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, Christianity in the Middle East is dwindling and provides, thus, a powerful counterweight to the field's triumphalist tone and preoccupation with numerical growth.²⁸ The good news is that more recent books in World Christianity provide Middle Eastern communities in the modern period with the academic reflection they deserve,²⁹ which might have to do with the growth of Middle Eastern Christianity studies as a new area of interdisciplinary research.

The second research area with which this thesis engages is, thus, Middle Eastern Christianity studies. Despite the current explosive growth of the field, the life and history of the Christian communities living in the area were not always high on the research agenda in Middle East studies as an area study.³⁰ For decades, the study of Christianity in the Middle East received only fleeting attention. The 1980s and 1990s saw academic interest in the subject matter increase, with publications of now classics such as *Arabier en christen* (1983) by Dutch religious scholar Anton Wessels,³¹ *The Arab Christian* (1991) by British Anglican bishop and scholar Kenneth Cragg,³² and *Chrétien et Juifs dans l'Islam arabe et turc* (1992) by French

²⁷ As earlier argued in: Elizabeth Martejijn, "Looking Eastward: The Middle East in the Field of World Christianity," *Weblog of the Centre for the Study of World Christianity*, University of Edinburgh, <<http://www.cswc.div.ed.ac.uk/2018/03/looking-eastward-the-middle-east-in-the-field-of-world-christianity/#more-1124>> [accessed 30 October 2021].

²⁸ See also: Naures Atto, "The Death Throes of Indigenous Christians in the Middle East: Assyrians Living under the Islamic State," in *Relocating Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies and Local Expressions of the Christian Faith*, edited by Joel Cabrita, David Maxwell, and Emma Wild-Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 281.

²⁹ See, for example the following recent key publications: David Lindenfeld, *World Christianity and Indigenous Experience: A Global History, 1500-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 142-77; Douglas Jacobsen, *The World's Christians: Who They Are, Where They Are, and How They Got There*. 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 181-200; Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 231-8, 313-36; Irvin and Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement Vol. 2*, 125-34, 296ff, 300-9, 383-95; Noel A. Davies and Martin Conway, *World Christianity in the Twentieth Century* (London: SCM, 2008), 23-37, 91-109.

³⁰ The same applies for the position of research on Christianity in the field of Palestine studies, although this has taken a different trajectory than in the broader field of Middle East studies. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much of the historical, archaeological and ethnographic research done was permeated by the desire to create a better understanding of the Bible through the study of those Christians who have resided in the 'Holy Land'. Even when ideals of objective methods and systematic data collection came into vogue, political realities and Zionist presumptions distorted the research agenda or shifted the focus away from the local Christian population altogether. For developments in the ethnographic engagement with Palestine in the nineteenth and twentieth century which have been charted, see: Khaled Furani and Dan Rabinowitz, "The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011): 475-91. For general methodological challenges regarding doing research in Israel, see: Fran Markowitz, ed., *Ethnographic Encounters in Israel: Poetics and Ethics of Fieldwork* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

³¹ Anton Wessels, *Arabier en christen: Christelijke kerken in het Midden-Oosten*. ('Arab and Christian: Christian churches in the Middle East') (Baarn: Ten Have, 1983). The book is later translated from Dutch into English: Antonie Wessels, *Arab and Christian? Christians in the Middle East* (Kampen: Kok, 1995).

³² Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (London: Mowbray, 1991).

demographers Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues.³³ The publication of edited volumes by Andrea Pacini and Anthony O'Mahony in the late 1990s and 2000s gave more coherence to the body of literature.³⁴ At a roundtable discussion that was published in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* in 2010, it was argued that the study of Middle Eastern Christianity was picking up momentum and, as illuminated by Fiona McCallum, could be termed a new subfield of the larger rubric of Middle East Studies.³⁵ The sudden upsurge of studies on Christianity in the Middle East in the 2010s emerged alongside the confluence of a number of regional phenomena that created a historical juncture of tumultuous reconfiguration in the Middle East: the series of popular uprisings (known by the term 'the Arab Spring'), the collapse of states and the humanitarian disasters this caused (such as in Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq), and the emergence of ISIS and the genocide of Christians and Yazidis at their hands.³⁶ While the tragedies brought more attention to these Christian communities, scholars in the field of Middle Eastern Christianity emphasise that these Christians are not just a minority or an extension of Western civilization, but a critical part of the narratives of the region.³⁷ This understanding will be an important building block for the thesis. Through the investment in the study of the culturally particular expression of Palestinian Christianity in its own right, the thesis, thus, aims to re-integrate the study of Palestinian Christianity within the wider context of the Middle East. Only approaching Palestinian Christians as integral parts of society, yet simultaneously inherently global, allows for an adequate exploration of Palestinian Christianity in context.

Lastly, in order to study the lived theological experiences of Palestinian Christians, this thesis turns to a third area of research that has grown out of the

³³ Youssef Courbage et Philippe Fargues, *Chrétiens et Juifs dans l'Islam arabe et turc*. ('Christians and Jews under Arabic and Turkish Islam') (Paris: Fayard, 1992). Later translated from French into English: Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, trans. by Judy Mabro (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997).

³⁴ Anthony O'Mahony & Emma Loosley, eds., *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2010); Anthony O'Mahony, ed., *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology and Politics* (London: Melisende, 2008); Andrea Pacini, ed., *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

³⁵ Fiona McCallum, "Christians in the Middle East: A New Subfield?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 3 (2010): 486-8. Besides the reflection from Fiona McCallum, contributions at the roundtable discussion were from other leading experts on Christianity in the Middle East, including Akram Khater, Paul S. Rowe, Bernhard Heyberger, Nelly van Doorn-Harder and Febe Armanios.

³⁶ Cf. Mariz Tadros, "Christianity in North Africa and West Asia," in *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity: Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 15, 25f.

³⁷ For surveys of the field, see: Deanna Ferree Womack, "Christian Communities in the Contemporary Middle East: An Introduction," *Exchange* 29, no. 3/4 (2020): 189-213; Laura Robson, "Recent Perspectives on Christianity in the Modern Arab World," *History Compass* 9, no. 4 (2011): 312-25.

recent ethnographic turn in theology. This body of literature builds on earlier developments in theology that Karl Rahner called the “turn to the subjective at the beginning of modern time.”³⁸ This included the emergence of contextual theologies (e.g. Shoki Coe, Robert J. Schreiter, and Stephan B. Bevans),³⁹ liberation theologies (e.g. Gustavo Gutiérrez, James H. Cone, and Aloysius S. J. Pieris),⁴⁰ and a growing reflection on the relationship between theology and culture (e.g. H. Richard Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and Kathryn Tanner).⁴¹ With a theology that is not based on value- and culture-free objectivity, but practiced by a subjective person who is part of a culturally and historically bound society, and with new theological loci like human experience, world events, culture, social change, and the approach from below, theology becomes to a greater extent a matter of reflection on “God as mediated through the messy place that is the world”.⁴² In other words, theology opens up to the anthropological and ethnographic study of ordinary human life in view of the Christian tradition, in addition to the conversation partner theology formerly traditionally found in philosophy. Hence, from the 2000s onwards, theologians in subdisciplines such as ecclesiology, practical theology and Christian ethics, started to use ethnographic methods as a means to ask and answer theological questions.⁴³ Within this ‘ethnographic turn in theology’ theologians did not simply apply ethnography as complementary, but embraced it as a way to ground their theological

³⁸ Karl Rahner, “The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 324.

³⁹ Shoki Coe, “In Search of Renewal in Theological Education,” *Theological Education* 9 (1973): 233-43; Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*; Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*. An analysis of the different forms of contextual theology is written by Angie Pears, *Doing Contextual Theology* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁴⁰ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (London: SCM, 1988); James H. Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988); Aloysius S. J. Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*: (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1988). For an analysis of the different forms of liberation theology, see: Thia Cooper, ed., *The Reemergence of Liberation Theologies: Models for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁴¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*. Expanded edition (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001 [1951]); Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

⁴² Mary McClintock Fulkerson, “Ethnography in Theology,” in *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy*, edited by Charles Marsh (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 116-33.

⁴³ Michael Lamb and Brian A. Williams, eds., *Everyday Ethics: Moral Theology and the Practices of Ordinary Life* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2019); Michael Banner, *The Ethics of Everyday Life: Moral Theology, Social Anthropology, and the Imagination of the Human* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, *Ethnographic Theology: An Inquiry into the Production of Theological Knowledge* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay “On the Trinity”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Christian Scharen, ed., *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2012); Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2012); Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008); Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Nicholas Adams and Charles Elliott, “Ethnography is Dogmatics: Making Description Central to Systematic Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53, no. 3 (2000): 339-64.

work in lived experience. In their seminal edited volume *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (2011), Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen stated that theology should not simply be a text-about-a-text, but a reflection on the many forms of wisdom that are to be found in non-academic places.⁴⁴ The idea that the academic study of the theology of laypeople is fruitful is mirrored in the exponential growth of publications in this field; besides the ‘ethnographic theology’ of Scharen and Vigen these studies are now available to us in many forms, including ‘ordinary theology’,⁴⁵ ‘everyday theology’,⁴⁶ ‘implicit theology’,⁴⁷ ‘operant and espoused theology’,⁴⁸ ‘sociological theology’,⁴⁹ ‘anthropological theology’,⁵⁰ ‘grassroots theology’,⁵¹ ‘lived theology’,⁵² and lastly ‘theology on the ground’.⁵³

Since these above-mentioned theological studies mainly focus on Christian communities of the researchers’ own cultural (Western) and ecclesiastical (Protestant) backgrounds, this thesis particularly associates with the newest developments in academia regarding the rapprochement between theology and anthropology. This conversation takes place in a field of tensions, since the Christian commitment of theology is radically opposed to the methodological agnosticism of anthropology. However, as in theology, recent debates in anthropology challenged the phenomenological and ontological assumptions underlying the discipline, notably

⁴⁴ Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, eds., *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

⁴⁵ Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

⁴⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, eds., *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

⁴⁷ Martyn Percy, *Shaping the Church: The Promise of Implicit Theology* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010). Percy builds on the notions of ‘implicit religion’ and ‘invisible religion’, see: Edward I. Bailey, *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society* (Kampen: Kok, 1997); Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problems of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

⁴⁸ Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, and Catherine Duce, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

⁴⁹ Robin Gill, *Theology in a Social Context: Sociological Theology*. Vol. 1 (Boca Raton: Routledge, 2012).

⁵⁰ Todd D. Whitmore, *Imitating Christ in Magwi: An Anthropological Theology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019).

⁵¹ Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground up* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014).

⁵² Charles Marsh, ed., *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style and Pedagogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). The study of lived theology builds on the earlier work on lived religion, with the difference that lived theology is theological and searches to “understand God’s presence in human experience” (Marsh, *Lived Theology*, 7), while lived religion focuses on the phenomenon of religion in historical and social contexts. The study of ‘lived religion’ was popularised in the 1990s by scholars of American religion, see for example: Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of the 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*. 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002 [1985]; David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Harris S. Stout and D.G. Hart, eds., *New Directions in American Religious History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁵³ Naomi Haynes, “Theology on the Ground,” in *Theologically Engaged Anthropology*, edited by J. Derrick Lemons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 266-97.

relating to the religious. These changes in theology and anthropology brought the disciplines to a point that they were ready to make the rigid boundaries more porous and eventually rectify the historical split. The publication of James Clifford's and George E. Marcus' edited volume *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986) was one of those milestones and highlighted the importance of reflexivity on the ethnographers' background in textually representing other cultures.⁵⁴ The authors of this volume saw ethnography not simply as description, but as a morally charged text that makes additional, moral, and ideological statements. Another debate relates to the recent 'ontological turn in anthropology' that challenges anthropology's ontological assumptions by means of the serious consideration of the interlocutors' view, thereby opening up the space in which ethnographers fully embrace other ontologies (including religious ontologies) as analytical tools.⁵⁵ Most transformative work has been done by those who have contributed to an anthropology of Christianity, a systematic anthropological study of Christianity in multiple social and cultural contexts.⁵⁶ As articulated in an influential article by Joel Robbins, a number of anthropologists of Christianity now go beyond "the awkwardness" in their relationship with theology, and are open to transformation and revision by theologians.⁵⁷ Edited volumes such as J. Derrick Lemons' *Theologically Engaged Anthropology* (2018) and Eloise Meneses' and David Bronkema's *On Knowing Humanity: Insights from Theology for Anthropology* (2017) are examples of this lively engagement taking place between anthropologists and theologians.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁵⁵ Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). For a reflection on what this means for the study of religion, see: Eloise Meneses, "Religiously Engaged Ethnography: Reflections of a Christian Anthropologist Studying Hindus in India and Nepal," *Ethnos* 86, no. 3 (2019): 447-91.

⁵⁶ See, for example: Joel Robbins, "The Anthropology of Christianity: Unity, Diversity, New Directions," *Current Anthropology* 55, no. 10 (2014): 157-71; Timothy Jenkins, "The Anthropology of Christianity: Situations and Critique," *Ethnos* 77 no. 4 (2012): 459-76; Jon Bialecki, Naomi Haynes, and Joel Robbins, "The Anthropology of Christianity," *Religion Compass* 2, no. 6 (2008): 1139-58; Matthew Engelke and Matt Tomlinson, eds., *The Limits of Meaning: Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity* (New York: Berghahn, 2006); Fenella Cannell, ed., *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2006); Joel Robbins, "What is a Christian? Notes toward an anthropology of Christianity," *Religion* 33, no. 3 (2003): 191-99.

⁵⁷ Joel Robbins, "Anthropology and Theology: An Awkward Relationship," *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2006): 285-94. See also: Joel Robbins, *Theology and the Anthropology of Christian Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). For more reflections on the place of Christian faith and belief in anthropology, see: Timothy Larsen, *The Slain God: Anthropologists and the Christian Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Matthew Engelke, "The Problem of Belief: Evans-Pritchard and Victor Turner on 'The Inner Life'," *Anthropology Today* 18, no. 6 (2002): 3-8.

⁵⁸ J. Derrick Lemons, ed., *Theologically Engaged Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Eloise Meneses and David Bronkema, eds., *On Knowing Humanity: Insights from Theology for Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 2017).

To sum up, this thesis offers a theologically-informed ethnography of Palestinian Christianity. I approach theology here as Christian reflexive action and expression in particular contexts to which Christians respond theologically, either explicitly or implicitly. Within this approach, I look at lived theologies holistically and acknowledge the implicit and often non-textual forms of theology, found in sources like people, language, art, social norms and social structures. I understand theologically-informed ethnography, thus, as a method to access both religious social life as well as the human experience of God. My task as ethnographic researcher is to articulate the contextualised theological understandings operative in the lives of the people that I study. Hence, my emphasis will not be on affiliation and church participation, but on the religious expressions that the people consider most important. The aim is to render these theologies explicit and interpret their meaning in the Palestinian context, but engaging with them constructively falls outside of the scope of this thesis. Building on the previously described ethnographic turn in theology and the anthropology of Christianity, I study theology thus ethnographically and systematically. These theologies are found within the work of Palestinian contextual theologians, but more so in conversation with people, while visiting them in their homes, accompanying them to local shrines and joining them on a pilgrimage. More specifically, in this thesis theologies will be highlighted as mediated through societal involvement, biblical associations, and ritual behaviour. This understanding of theology will be brought in conversation with recent literature in the fields of World Christianity and Middle Eastern Christianity studies, which interdisciplinary natures are particularly suitable to merge theology and ethnographic methods.⁵⁹ This interdisciplinary approach sheds new light on the complex intersection between theology, mission, politics, tradition, the interreligious encounter and how Palestinian Christians in Taybeh negotiate these multiple factors.

⁵⁹ It should be noted that there are longstanding calls from World Christianity theologians for more attention to context, see for example: Peter C. Phan, "Doing Theology in World Christianity: Different Resources and New Methods," *Journal of World Christianity* 1, no. 1 (2008): 27-53; Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996); Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha/In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990). For World Christianity studies that go beyond a purely textual approach of theology and employ the study of sermons and interviews as a research method: Jason Carter, *Inside the Whirl Wind: The Book of Job through African Eyes* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2017); Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus in Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004). The use of ethnography in theological studies is rather understudied and new in World Christianity, but has recently gained popularity, particularly among doctoral students. See for example: Easten G. Law, "Discerning a Lived Chinese Protestant Theology: Christian Identity, Everyday Life, and Encounters with the Other in Contemporary China" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2020).

Research Methods

Following on from the theoretical and methodological decisions made, as described in the previous section, the research for this thesis was largely carried out ethnographically. The main bulk of the field research was conducted from August 2017 to August 2018 in the village of Taybeh, as well as in the greater Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah regions.⁶⁰ In this period I conducted 32 formal interviews (for nearly 50 hours of recorded data), wrote 75 field reports, recorded 215 field reports, collected 55 church (-related) documents, collected 19 Christian cartoons, took 174 videos and 4633 photographs. Additional trips during the course of my PhD studies were made in July 2016 for language study, February 2017 for a preliminary field trip, July 2017 for Arabic language study, and in August 2019 for another post fieldwork trip. Adding together, a total of 16 months has been spent on fieldwork for this PhD research that resulted in even more data than mentioned before.

The main research method was participant observation. I charted all my field data to keep an overview, kept a logbook, and wrote all my fieldnotes in separate notebooks according to the liturgical calendar. The formal interviews conducted were mostly with Palestinian academics and Palestinian church leaders throughout the West Bank and Israel. These interviews were all recorded with a voice recorder and mostly conducted in English. Several formal interviews were in Arabic, during which I made use of a translator. A list of formal interviews has been included at the beginning of the bibliography, although it should be noted that these are secondary to the data collected through participant observation. Most conversations with the people in Taybeh happened spontaneously. Some of these informal encounters were recorded with the voice recorder, but most of the material from these conversations was recorded in field reports. Encounters in the village were both in English and Arabic, for which my Arabic proficiency was sufficient. I learned the Arabic language through several classes in Modern Standard Arabic at the University of Edinburgh and the University of Cambridge, two intensive courses in Colloquial Palestinian Arabic at the Polis Institute in Jerusalem, and more casually from the people in Taybeh.

⁶⁰ In the time between August 2017 and August 2018 I made 34 field trips to Jerusalem (area), 32 trips to Bethlehem (area), 12 trips to Ramallah (area), five trips to Jericho (area), five trips to Galilee, four trips to Birzeit, two trips to Lod, two trips to Kiryat Luza and one trip to Jifna. Furthermore, numerous visits have been made to surrounding Muslim village of Taybeh.

During my fieldwork in Taybeh from August 2017 till December 2017 I lived on the top floor of a family house at the edge of the village. From January 2018 till August 2018 I lived in another house in the more densely populated centre of the village. This move coincided with the progress I made during my fieldwork. Where I needed quite some time to establish rapport at first, the people opened up to me after a couple of months living in the village. In the beginning I found the people of Taybeh friendly and welcoming towards me as researcher, but also at a distance. The move to the centre of the village helped me to become more part of the community and not be literally 'at a distance'. The fact that I volunteered at the Latin Patriarchate School in Taybeh also helped to establish rapport. The majority of my time in Taybeh was spent with people in their houses, joining them on work, study or leisure trips and attending church and village occasions. Every Sunday I rotated between Taybeh's church liturgies to keep the balance and to not prioritise one church community over the other. I also attended many feast days at holy churches and shrines throughout the West Bank, and occasionally in Israel, too. I had the privilege to attend deeply personal rites of passage, including baptisms, engagements, marriages, and burial ceremonies. During my fieldwork I had three key contacts (including their immediate family) and visited multiple other families often more than once. The Melkite Greek Catholic parish priest in Taybeh became my go-to source for religious questions which the laypeople could not answer. The periods of Advent and Lent were the most productive periods of my fieldwork, not only for the religious information but also regarding the time spent with the people.

For additional information I attended several local conferences at Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem, at the Kenyon Institute (of the Council for British Research in the Levant) in Jerusalem, at the Pontifical Institute Notre Dame of Jerusalem, at Bethlehem Bible College, and at Dar al-Kalima University in Bethlehem. I had wished to attend two local conferences on Palestinian contextual theology of Al-Liqa' Center and of Kairos Palestine, but these were unfortunately cancelled because of the political unrest caused by the United States of America's President Donald Trump's decision to move the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. While in the field I also conducted library research at Birzeit University and in the library of Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. I also conducted archival research, although not as extensive as my ethnographic research. I spent several full days in the archive of Al-Liqa' Center in Bethlehem, which houses a

treasure of writings on contextual Palestinian theology, and spent two weeks researching the Kenneth E. Bailey papers at the archive of Yale Divinity Library in person (financed by the David M. Stowe Fund for Mission Research). I consulted the digital G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection of the Library of Congress in Washington and studied the photographs taken of Taybeh and kept in the archive of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem, the latter were digitised by the archivist and personally sent to me.

It should also be mentioned that I paid special attention to study books written on Palestinian Christianity, or Middle Eastern Christianity in general, in other languages in which I have reading proficiency, including Arabic, French, German, and Dutch. Furthermore, I explicitly made the choice to include researchers from the Middle East in this thesis, not only because of the depth of their work as scholars native to the region, but also because I believe academia is still a rather Western-dominated place that would fare better with this diversity and equality.

Since this research was conducted through the doctoral programme of the University of Edinburgh it was, therefore, bound by the Data Protection Act of 1998. Before I embarked on my field research the Ethics and Research Committee of the School of Divinity granted approval of ethics level 2 assessment. During my field research, I followed the ethical guidelines for good research practice of the Association of Social Anthropologists in the UK and Commonwealth. All participants have orally been informed about my role and intentions as a researcher and asked for consent. They have also been informed that consent can be withdrawn at any moment. Children were often present while conducting fieldwork, but anything that they have said has not been revealed in this thesis. Public figures have been referred to by their real names with consent; this includes the village clergy and the owners of Taybeh Brewery. All other interlocutors mentioned in this thesis are referred to by pseudonyms, in order to safeguard their anonymity.

When I left the field I stayed in touch through social media with the people of Taybeh (and other places in the West Bank). Information learned through online conversations has only been used in this thesis with consent. On two instances in this thesis I reveal data learned through the Taybeh Facebook group. This is a group for the people of the village and the Taybeh people in the diaspora, of which I have been given the privilege to be the only Western (and non-descendent of the Taybeh community) member. The first instance is an ethnographic description of the

unveiling of two statues in the village (chapter 1), which was recorded by the municipality. Since this was a public event, I deemed it ethical to write about this. The second is an image of the Virgin Mary shared through the Facebook group. Since this is a picture that I encountered through multiple social media accounts from the larger Palestinian community, I assessed it ethical to display the image in this thesis (figure 27, chapter 4).

Thesis Argument and Outline

This PhD thesis offers an ethnography of local Christianity and its relation to the changing social, cultural and political context of contemporary West Bank Palestine. Focusing on the mixed Orthodox and Catholic Christian village of Taybeh in central West Bank, I examine the changing role of religion and theology among Palestinian Christians. The argument of this study is that the changes over the course of recent history in the Middle East brought about a renewal of ancient Palestinian Christian religious expressions that have made these practices more socially and politically meaningful. Ultimately, I will show that grassroots religious expressions have recently merged with theological discourses, mainly concerning themes like belonging and liberation. Hence, counteracting the popular rhetoric of extinction and persecution, this study finds Palestinian Christian vitality in common faith and everyday religious actions.

By engaging existing World Christianity scholarship and Middle Eastern Christianity studies, the first part of this thesis demonstrates that Palestinian Christians have reinvented themselves on the levels of communal identity and socio-political attitude. Chapter 1 argues that Palestinian Christian identity should be understood in an organic way in which religious and national identities are intertwined. This will be shown on two levels: on the level of the village and of the churches. The chapter will function as an introduction to the social, cultural, political, and religious dynamics in Taybeh, with special emphasis on the missionary interventions in its history. Each of the three communities who are present in Taybeh – the Greek Orthodox, Melkite Greek Catholics and Latinised-rite Catholics – have taken their own path to deal with foreign influence, be it through nationalism, independence, church unification, or church indigenisation.

Chapter 2 deals with the implication of this identity and explores how Palestinian Christians relate to the broader society. I demonstrate how Palestinian clergy have brought about a theological revival since the 1970s and played a significant role in creating a society based on the principles of justice, peace, and reconciliation. This development is part of a more gradual emergence of a new socially and politically engaged Christian community. This has also manifested in daily life in the village in a 'smaller revival' in the fields of civil society, tourism, and business, with the Taybeh Brewery as the main impetus of change, innovation, and rural development since the 1990s. Hence, the chapter explores Palestinian theology as mediated through the multi-dimensional contributions Palestinian Christians have made to their society.

The second part of this thesis focuses on the transformation religious expressions have undergone since the second half of the twentieth century. Chapter 3 provides a grassroots theology that forms the basis of everyday religious practices that relate to theologies of the land and, ultimately, to a deep sense of belonging. The chapter provides an analysis of how the Christians from Taybeh have enmeshed the biblical story with contemporary Palestinian history and Palestinian rural culture, thereby constructing and reimagining Palestinian Christian identity as essentially biblical. The chapter then zooms in on the writings of Palestinian church leaders who, immersed in the anti-colonial struggle, construct a theologically meaningful view on historical belonging and territorial legitimacy in a way that resonates with the grassroots theologising in the village.

Chapter 4 shifts the attention from the pages of scripture to religious practice. The chapter demonstrates that the Palestinian veneration of Saint George has transformed from an ancient cult focused on human flourishing to a platform for grassroots theological ideas. Through the Arabic concept of *baraka*, which is the holy blessing that emerges from the power that is present in holy places, holy people and holy objects, the chapter portrays Saint George as a figure that encompasses meaning beyond Christianity, thereby creating a space for Christian-Muslim unity. The chapter also examines the controversial political uses and the spiritual meanings of Saint George through the lens of *ṣumūd*, the Palestinian notion of steadfastness, and argues that figures of saints could also be interpreted as models of Palestinian *ṣumūd*, thereby making way for theologies of martyrdom and liberation as mediated through ritual behaviour.

~ Part 1 ~
Reinvention

1

Taybeh's Past and Present Reinvented

Taybeh, 22 October 2017 and 5 November 2019

During *mawsim al-zaytūn* ('olive-picking season') there is cheerfulness among the people of Taybeh. Olive farming is an important source of income and the villagers say that no less than 30,000 olive trees surround their village. The people take pride in their product, claiming their olives are among the best of Palestine. The farming lands surrounding the village are some of the highest of the West Bank, giving the olives a unique taste. Local families cook in oil made from their own olives and place a small bowl or plate with olives on the table during all three meals of the day. During the olive harvest the two schools in the village are closed for a few days, so that the children can participate and be photographed by proud parents. Young and old, the whole family works in the field, using ladders, wooden sticks and plastic combs – but most of the labour is done manually.

While conducting fieldwork, I joined a local Taybeh family during the olive harvest in late October 2017. For the oldest male member of the family, 'Abū Jeries, this time in the field brought back fond memories from his childhood in the 1950s, when his mother was still daily wearing the traditional embroidered *thūb* ('traditional dress') with *taṭrīz* ('embroidery'). He took me to a pile of stones in the midst of the family's olive grove. Giving each other support, we carefully climbed the pile of stones and 'Abū Jeries started to tell me about picking olives in the time he was young. He told me that these piles of stones are the remnants of his family's *munṭār* ('agricultural watchtower'), or as he called it: 'our family summerhouse'. During harvest time, the family slept together on this stone elevation, shielded by the *m'arrash* (a temporary roof of tree branches and leaves) and protected against wild animals such as hyenas and snakes. They ate food directly from the trees and cooked outside. The elderly man remembered this to be the best days of his

childhood. The olive trees he harvested in his old age are the same trees planted by his forefathers. For 'Abū Jeries the olive harvest was, thus, time spent between the ruins and remnants of his past.

Standing on this pile of stones, we looked at the surroundings. 'Abū Jeries pointed to the Jewish settlement Rimonim and said that the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) had confiscated parts of his land for the development of the settlement. For Palestinians like him, the olive harvest also testifies to the present painful reality of political uncertainty and occupation. Every year during the olive harvest, the media features stories of distressed Palestinians whose olive groves are damaged due to harassment of Israeli settlers or whose trees are being uprooted by the IDF. Palestinians understand the work of olive harvesting as a typical Palestinian experience. Participating in the olive harvest underlines one's Palestinian identity, not only based on the old agricultural traditions and calendar, but in the recent context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict it also becomes a time of remembering loss, suffering and resistance. The loss of land is not just about the trees, but for Palestinians about this deep connection to one's family and one's traditions. Hence, the olive tree is a symbol for both the Palestinian past and present.

Two years later, in the midst of the cheer of the olive season, the people of Taybeh saw two large Christian statues rising in their village. A large crowd came together on 4 November late afternoon to unveil a nearly three-metre high golden-coloured statue of Jesus (*Yasū*) in the centre of the village, followed by the unveiling of a one and a half metre high marble statue of the Virgin Mary (*Maryam al-'adhrā*) in the southern part of the village. Both Jesus and the Virgin Mary are dressed in long robes and portrayed in a standing position with their arms wide open. The statues are not hidden away in a corner of the village, but prominently positioned on the main roads through the village. Especially the Jesus-statue is there for everybody to see, located on the main road connecting the two major Palestinian cities Ramallah and Jericho, that runs through the village. It is clear that these statues portray Taybeh as a deeply Christian village – as do the church bells and church towers, whose crosses are brightly lit during the night. Christian culture is everywhere in the village. The transcendent and the immanent continuously meet in many places in Taybeh: icons on church walls, engraved stones above the door, magnets with saints on the fridge in someone's house, Christian posters in shops and on the street, rosaries dangling from the rear-view mirror in cars, crosses on

gold (or silver) necklaces, or digital images, and Bible verses on someone's Facebook timeline. Christianity is vividly present in both the village's private and public sphere.

These identity markers are also found in other places with Christian communities, like Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Jericho, Nablus, and Zababdeh. However, the magnitude of these statues is an exception to other places in the West Bank, where one would only find this at church compounds. This boldness is part of Taybeh's identity politics. Taybeh proudly presents itself as 'the only 100% Christian village of Palestine', a notion that will be explained in further detail in this chapter. The sign on the pedestal under the golden statue of Jesus reads 'Ephraim Square (John 11:54)' in Arabic, English and French, underlining the long Christian history which is perceived as starting with Jesus' visit to Taybeh – then known under the name Ephraim. Similar to the traditions of olive harvesting, Christianity has a long tradition in this region, going back to the Apostolic Era. The erection of a statue like the one of Jesus represents how the people of Taybeh are continuously rebuilding, reshaping and remembering the ruins and remnants of their long Christian past into a relevant Christian present.

More importantly, the unveiling of these two statues reveals how the people of Taybeh understand themselves as being both fully Christian and fully Palestinian. The ceremony symbolically started with the Palestinian anthem '*fidā'iyya*' – "Warrior, warrior, warrior, oh my land, land of the ancestors" – while all the people stood up facing the statue of Jesus, some with their right hand on their heart, as two Palestinian flags were raised at each side of the statue. Earlier that day, the community of Taybeh welcomed the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities from the Palestinian Authority, HE Rula Ma'ayah, and showed her round in village. In her purple trouser suit, she was present during the unveiling ceremony and stood next to Taybeh's mayor and the local donor whose family paid for the statue. These three people all delivered speeches during the ceremony. But the final word was for the Orthodox priest, who emphasised the religious and historical meaning of Taybeh. One of the older women stepped up to perform a *zaghrūṭa* ('ululation', a traditional blessing) for Jesus, the town and for peace, while the other women responded making ululating sounds. When the mayor and ministers unveiled the statue, the people applauded, some women ululated again, and a group of Roman Catholic parishioners started to sing a Christian hymn. The same happened at the statue for

the Virgin Mary, fittingly described as *Sayyida as-Salām*, ‘Lady of Peace’ or ‘Virgin of Peace’, where the women of Taybeh enthusiastically clapped while singing hymns for the Virgin Mary.

So how to interpret this unveiling? The *fidā’iyya*, the Palestinian flags, the presence of a representative from the Palestinian Authority, as well as the traditional *zaghrūta*, all point to a typical Palestinian occasion. The fact that two large Christian statues were being unveiled, the presence of the priests and nuns, and the singing of Christian hymns, make this also a Christian gathering to the core. This event shows us that Taybeh is both Christian and Palestinian, and that those two notions cannot be separated. A Palestinian like ‘Abū Jeries visits the church every day, and his house is visibly Christian with the presence of several Bibles and images of significant saints. Hence, notions like place, history, identity and nationalism all intersect with being Christian and one should understand Palestinian Christians in this particular way.

Understanding Contemporary Palestinian Christian Identities

The above ethnographic opening touches upon many details that will be discussed in the following chapters. One of the most prevailing elements in this description is the question of Palestinian Christian identity. The festive unveiling of the two Christian statues indicates that Taybeh’s communal Christian identity does not exist in a vacuum, but interacts with clan-based, local, national and Christian identities. When we study Palestinian Christians, we study a group of people embedded in the broad Palestinian social and cultural context. Existing research on Palestinian identities does, however, not yet provide a satisfying answer regarding the role of religion, let alone the influence of the minority community of Christians. In studies such as Mohammad Muslih’s *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism* (1990) and Rashid Khalidi’s *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern Consciousness* (1997), the nationalist narrative prevails, lacking acknowledgement for the significant role religion played for historical Palestinian political leaders.¹ Other historical studies,

¹ Mohammad Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010 [1997]).



Figure 1. *Villagers from Taybeh in front of a muntār in 1937.*
Photo from the Matson Collection, Library of Congress, Washington.



Figure 2. *Olive harvest from 'Abū Jeries' trees, October 2017.* Photo by author.

on the contrary, have overemphasised the role of religion as primary identifier. Examples are Yehoshua Porath's history of the Palestinian national movement and Daphne Tsimhoni's work on Arab Christians in the British Mandate; they both approached Christians and Muslims as two separate blocks, instead of as one single Palestinian community.² Hence, there seem to be two categories: one that includes studies that ignored the role of religion, and one that mainly focuses on religion as the primary identification triumphing over all other loyalties.

The studies that compiled and compared the various Christianities throughout the Middle East – popularised in the 1990s by European authors or editors such as Kenneth Cragg, Anthony O' Mahony, Andrea Pacini, Jean-Pierre Valognes, Antonie Wessels, and Herman Teule – contributed to a better academic understanding of Christianity in the region.³ This body of literature is still growing, including recent contributions such as *The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East* (2020) and the *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity: Christianity in North Africa and West Asia* (2018).⁴ Although these studies are impressive in their range and valuable for comparison, they are not fully adequate either. The problem of this genre is the generalising tendency and, again, the overstatement of the Christian identity of these various communities in the Middle East. The same applies to studies that cover Christians as one of the 'minorities' of

² Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement, 1918-1929* (London: Frank Cass, 1974); Yehoshua Porath, *The Palestinian Arab Nation Movement: From Riots to Rebellion. Vol. 2, 1929-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1977); Daphne Tsimhoni, "The Arab Christians and the Palestinian Arab National Movement during the Formative Stages," in *The Palestinians and the Middle East Conflict*, edited by Gabriel Bendor (Ramat Gan: Turtledove Publications, 1978), 73-98; Daphne Tsimhoni, "The Status of the Arab Christians under the British Mandate in Palestine," *Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 4 (1984): 166-92.

³ Cragg, *The Arab Christian*; O'Mahony, *Christianity in the Middle East*; O'Mahony & Loosley, *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*; Pacini, *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*; Jean-Pierre Valognes, *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient: Des Origines à nos Jours*. ('Life and Death of Eastern Christians: From the Origins to the Present Day') (Paris: Fayard, 1994); Wessels, *Arab and Christian?*; Herman Teule and Anton Wessels (eds.), *Oosterse christenen binnen de wereld van de islam*. ('Eastern Christians in the World of Islam') (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 1997).

⁴ Mitri Raheb and Mark A. Lamport, eds., *The Roman & Littlefield Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020); Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity: Christianity in North Africa and West Africa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018). See also: Harald Suermann and Michael Altripp, *Orientalisches Christentum: Perspektiven aus der Vergangenheit für die Zukunft*. ('Oriental Christianity: Perspectives from Past to Present'). (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2021); Stephan Stetter and Mitra Moussa Nabo, eds., *Middle East Christianity: Local Practices, World Societal Entanglements* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Herman Teule and Alfons Brüning, eds., *Handboek Oosters Christendom*. ('Handbook Eastern Christianity') (Leuven: Peeters, 2018); Heather J. Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Martin Tamcke, *Christen in der islamischen Welt: Von Mohamed bis zur Gegenwart*. (Christians in the Islamic World: From Mohammed till the Present) (München: C.H. Beck, 2008); Habib Badr, ed., *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut: The Middle East Council of Churches, 2005); Betty Jane Bailey and J. Martin Bailey, *Who are the Christians in the Middle East?* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003); Courbage and Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*; Robert B. Betts, *Christians in the Arab East: A Political Study* (London: SPCK, 1979).

the Middle East.⁵ Although Christians are technically a minority in all countries that are part of the Middle East, except for possibly Lebanon, this approach is unsatisfactory as it undermines the agency of Middle Eastern Christians by setting them apart from the rest of their community. We should, thus, be wary of studying Palestinian Christianity from one of those particular lenses. It is questionable to focus on Palestinian Christians ‘as Christians’ only, undervaluing other complexities present, but if we study Palestinian Christians merely from a political lens, we make ourselves guilty of downplaying the diversity that is present among the Palestinian community.

Scholars who have studied the Palestinian Christian community specifically, have all wrestled with the question what it means to be both Palestinian and Christian. A helpful start to exploring this question is Loren Lybarger’s article on Christian identity,⁶ which is an extension of the argument he is offering in his book *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories* (2007).⁷ Lybarger argues that analogous to the decisive split between a secular-nationalist discourse (Fatah) and a rejuvenated Islamist milieu (Hamas), tensions have manifested across the Palestinian Christian community. He identifies three diverging interpretations of what it means to be both Palestinian and Christian. The first group he identifies is the secular-nationalist group, parallel to Fatah, which are Christian individuals coming from activist families with political aspirations. Secondly, Lybarger distinguishes a religion-communalism among Palestinian Christians, emphasising the Christian milieu as the primary locus of identity and belonging. This could be compared to politically engaged Islamists such as Hamas. Lastly, Lybarger mentions a third group that he characterises by pietistic tendencies and a personal flight from the world. Lybarger’s article resonates with an article of Lebanese theologian George Sabra, in which he shows how context effectuates different Christian identities in the Middle East. Sabra delineated what he called “two ways of being a Christian” in the Middle East, making a

⁵ Paul S. Rowe, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Minorities in the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2018); Heleen L. Murre-van den Berg, ed., *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Mordechai Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East*. 2nd ed (London: McFarland, 2002); Moshe Ma’oz and Gabriel Sheffer, eds., *Middle Eastern Minorities and Diasporas* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2002); Kirsten E. Schulze, Martin Stokes and Colm Campbell, eds., *Nationalism, Minorities and Diasporas: Identities and Rights in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996).

⁶ Loren D. Lybarger, “For Church or Nation? Islamism, Secular-Nationalism, and the Transformation of Christian Identities in Palestine,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 4 (2007): 777-813.

⁷ Loren D. Lybarger, *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

distinction between 'Arab Christians' and 'Eastern Christians'.⁸ The 'Arab Christian' has openness to the Islamic context, motivated by the desire for acceptance and equality and striving for nationalism and secularity – similar to Lybarger's category of secular-nationalism. Sabra's 'Eastern Christians' are more characterised by trying to affirm their distinctiveness as Christians from the context – which corresponds with Lybarger's religion-communalism or even pietism.

These typologies are constructive as they do not approach Palestinian Christianity from one particular lens, either political or religious, but emphasise the variety of Christian responses to the complexities of the context. They also help to understand the transformation Middle Eastern Christianities have undergone in recent history. The problem with these typologies, however, is that reality is often more fuzzy than the rigid boundaries of typologies suggest. The typology of Sabra might work in Lebanon or other Middle Eastern countries, but unilaterally emphasises the relationship between Muslims and Christians, and hence by ignoring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict this typology falls short in the Palestinian context. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was an important stimulus for a Palestinian Christian reflection on their identity, as well as theological debates on the issue of land and supersessionism (also known as replacement theology). Lybarger's typology too strongly emphasises nationalism as a way for people to engage with being Palestinian. Lybarger is right that factors such as the demographic decline of Palestinian Christians, the failure of the Oslo Peace Process (1993-2000), Israel's ongoing annexation of Palestinian land and the rise of Islamist movements have made it more difficult for Christians in Palestine to consider themselves part of the Palestinian struggle for liberation and statehood. However, being Palestinian compromises much more than their recent political tragedy. Olive farming, as described in the ethnographic opening of this chapter, captures as much of being Palestinian as the political and nationalist struggle does.

Hence, this thesis tries to avoid essentialist understandings of Palestinian Christian identity, and agrees with a slightly more recent group of researchers who have stressed the intertwining of both the religious and national identities of Palestinian Christians. This is emphasised by scholars such as Laura Robson and Noah Haiduc-Dale, who have both focused on the interplay of nationalism and

⁸ George Sabra, "Two Ways of being a Christian in the Muslim context of the Middle East," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 17:1 (2006), 43-53.

Christianity during the time of the British Mandate in Palestine (1918-1948).⁹ Robson shows the danger of trumping religious identification in the case of the British imperial rule, which used religion as the basis for political, legal and civic participation – drawn on models from India and Africa, and similar to Egypt and Iraq. This policy sidelined the Christian community as a religious, marginalised minority and established new rigid forms of sectarianism among Palestinians. Haiduc-Dale's study complements Robson's theory by acknowledging that Christians were aware of their tenuous place in the Palestinian social order, but remained simultaneously engaged in the national movement. The historian concludes: "despite social tensions, nearly all Arab Christians maintained their dedication to the nationalist cause despite differences in opinion concerning the challenges facing them as individuals and as a religious community."¹⁰ In his ethnography of the Christians in the Bethlehem region, Bård Kårtveit refines this argument and states that nationalism may well coalesce with other forms of belonging, such as religious piety.¹¹ He approaches national attachment as generated through people's everyday practices and activities, such as the Tax Revolt of the Christian town Beit Sahour during the First *Intifāḍa* ('Uprising') (1987-1993). Kårtveit notes that these feelings of unity and national self-determination are, at times, under pressure from Christian-Muslim friction, and concludes that Palestinian identity consists of 'dilemmas of attachment'. In short, these scholars have all examined religious identification as a site of contestation and debate, and above all agree on not separating Christian spirituality and Palestinian national identity.

Building on this notion of the interconnectedness of both Palestinian national identity and Christian religious identity, I show in this chapter how place, history, identity and nationalism all intersect with being Christian and how one should understand Palestinian Christians in this organic way. The blurring of Palestinian nationalism and Christianity has been visible in the actions and rituals during the aforementioned unveiling ceremony of Taybeh's two statues. It also goes a level deeper and touches the very being and existence of these Palestinian Christians from Taybeh. As 'Abū Jeries explained, a mundane symbol such as 'the olive tree'

⁹ Noah Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine: Communalism and Nationalism, 1917-1948* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine*, 198.

¹¹ Kårtveit, *Dilemmas of Attachment*. See also: Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

has been used as a symbol for the Palestinian past and present. Being planted by one's forefathers, the tree stands for a deep connection to one's family and tradition. Planting a tree now means giving hope for the future generations to come. Fundamental questions raised about the meaning of life and history also find expression in religious symbols. The symbol 'Jesus of Ephraim' stands for a feeling of rootedness in the local land from which the people from Taybeh feel alienated through historical change and political pressure. Similarly, the symbol of 'Mary Lady of Peace' responds to the fear the people from Taybeh experience from the destructive forces in their context threatening their lives and the future. This also attests to the notion that being a Palestinian Christian consists of both religious and national components.

It is important to be aware of this interconnectedness in order to understand the identity of the Palestinian Church. This chapter describes the history of the churches of Taybeh, mostly but not solely focusing on the recent history from the late nineteenth century onwards, and underlines that these religious identities have been tied to the national identities of Palestine. In this way, this chapter forms the basis for the chapters to follow. Taybeh counts three churches: firstly, the St. George Greek Orthodox Church, led by Father Daoud Khoury (b. 1950, parish priest in Taybeh since 1986); secondly, the St. George Martyr Melkite Greek Catholic Church, led by the Reverend Archimandrite Jack Nobel Abed (b. 1958, parish priest in Taybeh since 1990); and thirdly, the Holy Redeemer Latin Church, led by Father Johnny Abu Khalil (b. 1970, parish priest in Taybeh from 2015 till 2021). With the presence of these three church communities, Taybeh is basically an ecclesiastical blueprint of the Palestinian Christian community of the West Bank. The Latin parish is the largest consisting of 850 members, followed by the Greek Orthodox parish with 300 members and the Melkite parish with 100 members.¹²

In the following discussion I aim to let the 'big stories' of religious elites, church unifications, missionary competition and a changing world order, meet the 'small stories' of local Palestinian culture and individual or collective emotions of Taybeh's Christians.¹³ This also shows that 'big' religious movements, such as the

¹² Cf. Fr. Johnny Abu Khalil, interviewed by Elizabeth Martejjn, Taybeh, 20 February 2017.

¹³ An idea borrowed from Aminta Arrington, see: Aminta Arrington, "World Christianity and the Ethnographic Imagination," *Journal of World Christianity* 9, no. 1 (2019): 103-13. Arrington claims that: "big stories without small stories lead to research that is removed and distant, focused on abstract social and historical forces, removed from everyday life, and usually, a story of the elites. Small stories without big stories lack context; they are just anecdotes." Producing knowledge at the intersection of these big stories and small stories, Arrington

missionary zeal of the Russian Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, the Melkite Greek Catholic Church Missionary Society of Saint Paul, or that of Latin Patriarch Joseph Valerga (reign: 1847-1872), and the 'small' Palestinian traditions, such as family honour and the consanguine marriage practices, are equally important for the continuation of old churches or the establishment of new churches. Hence, Taybeh people are not just passive subjects in the 'big story' of Christian missions in Palestine, but actors that have shaped the course of the 'small story' in their own village. Although most church hierarchies consist of foreign church leaders, this chapter shows that Palestinian involvement (and Arab involvement in general) made the identity of these churches inherently Palestinian. Members of each of the three church denominations in Taybeh have taken their own path in creating a localised Palestinian Christian identity – be it through nationalism, independence, church unification or indigenisation. But before these church histories will be introduced, I will portray the field site of this study: the village Taybeh.

Setting the Scene: A Portrait of Taybeh

On Sunday mornings the sounds of church bells reverberate through the whole village of Taybeh. The Greek Orthodox Church and the Melkite Greek Catholic Church start at 9.30 a.m., so their bells are always the first to be heard. It depends on your place in the village which church bell sounds louder. Both the Greek Orthodox and the Melkite Greek Catholic Churches of Taybeh have a clock tower with only one bell, which is being operated manually. The Greek Orthodox Church bells always ring in a certain melody: short – short – long – and this is repeated twice. The bell of the Roman Catholic Church is automated and plays a set melody before the Sunday mass starts at 10 a.m. The Roman Catholic Church also sounds the 'angels bells' daily at 6 a.m., 12 noon and 6 p.m., and thus structures the day of the people living in the village. People make the sign of the cross whenever they hear the church bell, wherever they are, whether this is at home, on the street, in their car, at school or at the health clinic below the Roman Catholic Church tower. When I had just arrived in Taybeh to conduct fieldwork, the church bells stood out for me. In other places in the Middle East, the soundscape of a place is usually dominated by the *adhān*, the Islamic call for prayer. In Taybeh, one would only hear

argues, finds truth in this tension, gains a sense of nearness, a greater affinity with the margins and enables us to have a more complete understanding of the social and theological facts playing a role.



Figure 3. *Taybeh in 1860*. Photo from the Latin Patriarchate Archive, Jerusalem.



Figure 4. *Taybeh in 2017*. Photo by author.

the *adhān* in the distance from mosques of the neighbouring Muslim villages. This absence of a mosque distinguishes Taybeh from other Palestinian villages, or broadly speaking from other villages in the Middle East. Anthropologist Charles Hirschkind used the words “the politics of sound” in his study on the practice of listening to tape-recorded sermons among Egyptian Muslims.¹⁴ Although the church bells may not sound direct words like the tape-recorded sermons or the sermon during the Friday prayer heard loudly from the mosque, church bells do, in fact, convey a message to the environment to underline Taybeh’s Christian identity and it reminds the people of Taybeh itself to do their religious duties. These “politics of sound” are stronger during Lent and Advent, when Christian songs are heard from the Roman Catholic Church tower to mark this period of the year.

The Christian character of the village is not only audible, but also visible from afar. Taybeh is located about ten miles north-east from Ramallah and situated approximately in the middle of the West Bank. The village is located on one of the highest hills in the immediate region that more or less forms a bridge between the Judean Hills in the west and Jordan Rift Valley in the east. On a clear day, one could see the Judean Desert and the Dead Sea to the south-east. At night, the lights of Jerusalem are visible to the south-west and so are the lights of Jordan’s cities to the east. If one approaches Taybeh from the south-east, driving from Jerusalem on road 458 or from Jericho on road 449, and then driving up the road to Taybeh with the internal checkpoint at the intersection behind you, the contours and skyline of the village loom on the horizon and slowly become more and more visible. The way to Taybeh runs through a rocky landscape of gently sloping hills planted with olive trees. On your left, you see the Muslim village Ramun, located on another hill bordering to the south of Taybeh. On your right, the car passes a cement factory, two chicken farms and in the distance a dozen huts of local Bedouins living on Taybeh land. These Bedouins live in the valley called *Wādī Ḥabīs*, roughly between the Israeli checkpoint near the settlement, Ramonim, and the pine tree-covered hilltop, which locals call *Jabal ‘Abū Ṣūf* (‘Hill of the Father of Soof’). But most striking are the three church towers of the Greek Orthodox, Melkite Greek Catholic, and Roman Catholic Churches. All three towers have crosses at the top, which are

¹⁴ Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 6.

illuminated at night during the winter period. Identity politics is also part of the skyline of Taybeh; the three church towers proudly reveal Taybeh's Christian identity.

With a population of approximately 1,400 inhabitants,¹⁵ Taybeh is one of the only Christian villages in this overwhelmingly Islamic environment. To the north, Taybeh borders the Muslim village of Deir Jarir. These two villages have practically grown together, though strict Christian-Muslim separation remains. Other villages in the area – Silwad, Kufr Malik and Deir Dubwan – are all Muslim villages, as are the Bedouins living scattered through this area. People in Taybeh are keen to describe their village as 'the only 100% Christian village of Palestine', claiming that only Christians from Taybeh own the land belonging to the village. The only few Muslims living in this village are considered as 'mere tenants'. Available statistics on the Palestinian Christian population by locality show that this statement is largely true in recent history. The British census of 1922 mentioned that Taybeh consisted of 961 inhabitants, of whom 954 were Christians and seven Muslims. With a percentage of 99.3% Christians, nearly all of Taybeh's inhabitants were Christian in 1922.¹⁶ The statistics of Taybeh's vast Christian majority remained high in the British census in 1933 (92.3%),¹⁷ the village statistics of 1948 (88.7%),¹⁸ the 1961 Jordanian census (70.1%),¹⁹ and more recently the 2012 Diyar survey (89.5%).²⁰ Similar to the sounds and visible signs, this demographic data highlights Taybeh's distinctive Christian character. Other villages with a large majority Christian population at the beginning of the twentieth century – like Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Ramallah, Bir Zeit,

¹⁵ The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) says that Taybeh has a population of 1,447 inhabitants in 2021. With inhabitants living transnational lifestyles or living in Taybeh unregistered, one could not totally be sure of this number. People in the village themselves estimated a population between roughly 1,000 and 1,300 inhabitants. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Projected Mid-Year Population for Ramallah & Al-Bireh Governorate by Locality 2017-2021*. <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/RamallahE.html> [accessed 21 May 2021].

¹⁶ J.B. Barron, "Table VII: Population by District & Sub-districts – Jerusalem – Jaffa," in *Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1922* (Jerusalem: Greek Convent Press, 1922), 16.

¹⁷ E. Mills, "Subsidiary table no. V: Christian Population by Churches," in *Census of Palestine 1931*. Vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Government of Palestine, 1933), 98.

¹⁸ 1945 Village Statistics, Ramallah District, <<https://users.cecs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/yabber/census/VillageStatistics1945/Ramallah.jpg>> [accessed 27 January 2020]. The Village Statistics of 1938 do not report a number or percentage of Christians living in Taybeh, but only distinguish between Jews and non-Jews. These statistics report 1,265 individuals living in Taybeh in 1938. 1938 Village Statistics, Ramallah sub-district, 48, <https://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE13978876> [accessed 27 January 2020].

¹⁹ 1961 Jordanian Census, Table 2.11 Distribution of Christians per district and localities more than five percent Christian, 115, <<https://users.cecs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/yabber/census/JordanCensus1961bits.pdf>> [accessed 27 January 2020]. The 1967 Israeli census reports 1,419 inhabitants living in Taybeh, but does not mention data about the religious background. The 1967 Census of the West Bank and Gaza Strip: A Digitized Version, <<http://www.levyinstitute.org/palestinian-census/>> [accessed 21 May 2021].

²⁰ Al Qass Collings, Odeh Kassis and Raheb, "Table 1: Estimated Christian Population in the West Bank by District, Select Sub-District, and Estimated Percentages of Christian Population per District and Select Sub-District," in: *Palestinian Christians in the West Bank*, 11. Other recent statistical surveys such as Sabeel's Survey (2006) and the 2017 census of the PCBS do not specify the percentage of Christian population per sub-district.

Jifna and Zababdeh – are now transformed into mixed Christian and Muslim places.²¹ While Taybeh is not completely Christian either, it is unique among all other places in the West Bank, in the sense that Taybeh is the only village that has kept a vast majority of Christians.

Asking Taybeh people themselves how these demographics make their village different from the surrounding Muslim villages, they often emphasise their difference in family values, making no room for divorce and polygamy like Muslims do. Culturally, Taybeh has a different ‘feel’ than its Muslim neighbouring villages as well. The first shop on the way from Deir Jarir to Taybeh is a liquor shop selling a great variety of alcoholic drinks. Being a Christian village, alcohol is available at all supermarkets and I was often offered a beer when I visited people in their homes. Furthermore, the women of Taybeh look remarkably different from the Islamic women from neighbouring villages, the majority of whom wear a *ḥijāb* (‘headscarf’). Taybeh women pay close attention to their appearance; their make-up, manicure, hairstyle, jewellery, and clothes always match in colour and style. By their dress and their jewellery, of crosses and rosaries, Taybeh women form a counterculture to their Islamic environment. This cultural difference is most visible during weddings, when women dress in glittering, tight, sometimes rather revealing dresses, and when men smoke cigarettes, cigars or *’arkīla* (‘waterpipe’), and drink beer, whiskey and a local liquor called *’araq* in large quantities – while alcohol is considered *ḥarām* (‘forbidden’ or ‘impure’) in Islam. Men and women dance together on a central open space in front of all the tables, though dance moves are modest and there is no touching between men and women who are not related to each other. Nevertheless, this is very different from a typical Muslim wedding in rural Palestine, where men and women traditionally celebrate in different quarters of a party hall. During my fieldwork, I sometimes wondered if the village of Taybeh has more in common with Juliet Du Boulay’s descriptions of the Greek rural village Ambeli in her classic

²¹ The British census of 1922 mentions the following percentages of Christians: Bethlehem (87.7%), Beit Jala (98.7%), Beit Sahour (81.2%), Ramallah (95.7%), Abud (53.3%), ‘Ain ‘Arik (54.8%), Bir Zeit (86.7%), Jifna (100%), Taybeh (99.3%) and Zababdeh (86.7%). Barron, *Census of 1922*, 16, 18, 29. The Diyar Survey of 2012: Bethlehem (28.3%), Beit Jala (60.7%), Beit Sahour (66%), Ramallah (4.6%), Abud (58.7%), ‘Ain ‘Arik (31.9%), Bir Zeit (49.5%), Jifna (65.4%), Taybeh (89.5%) and Zababdeh (68.2%). Al Qass Collings, Odeh Kassis & Raheb, *Palestinian Christians in the West Bank*, 11. Bethlehem’s demographic outlook has changed from being a Christian town with 87.7% Christians in 1922 to having a Christian population of only 28.3% in 2007. Due to becoming Palestine’s administrative capital and one of its largest urbanised areas, the percentage of Christians in Ramallah has dramatically shrunk from 95.3% to 4.6% in 2007.

Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village (1974),²² than with Hilma Granqvist's work on the Palestinian Muslim village Artas in *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village* (1931).²³

Despite these distinctive marks of being a uniquely Christian village, Taybeh is inherently a Palestinian village in customs and traditions similar to its surrounding Muslim villages. Rural life was central in early ethnographic works by scholars such as Tawfiq Canaan, Gustaf Dalman and Hilma Granqvist – who will be referred to in more detail in later chapters. While rural life still plays an important role in the current Palestinian society, this realm has, however, largely disappeared from the burgeoning field of anthropological studies on Palestine since the 1980s, which has been preoccupied with themes like memory, refugee studies, violence, nationalism, resistance and gender.²⁴ Researchers now could mainly find well-documented studies on Palestinian village life and culture by local authors such as Ishaq al-Hroub and Shukri Arraf,²⁵ who have both compiled studies that are nearly encyclopaedic in nature, or with ethnographers that have specifically dealt with Palestinian village life, like Suad Amiry, Marisa Escribano, Celia Rothenberg and Salim Tamari.²⁶ Hence,

²² Juliet Du Boulay, *Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); see also Juliet Du Boulay, *Cosmos, Life and Liturgy in a Greek Orthodox Village* (Limni: Denise Harvey Publisher, 2009).

²³ Hilma Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*. Vol. 2 (New York: Ams Press, 1935); Hilma Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*. Vol. 1. (New York: Ams Press, 1931);

²⁴ In their bibliographic essay, anthropologists Khaled Furani and Dan Rabinowitz argue that Palestine has served as a site of investigation in proto-anthropological studies between 1870 and 1948, after which mainstream anthropology was disengaged from Palestine until 1970. From the 1980s onwards, Palestine appeared back on the anthropological radar, mainly due to two epistemological-political transformations that took place in the West: 1) the demystification of nationalism and the nation state, and the credibility of subaltern groups making legitimate counterclaims, 2) the shift known as the “crisis of representation” in social sciences and humanities. The authors acknowledge that ethnographies on Palestine have been preoccupied with themes like memory, refugee studies, violence, nationalism, resistance and gender – realms where truths about Palestine have mainly been repressed before the 1980s – and that Palestine could also serve as a site for ethnographies that deal with themes beyond the struggle for national sovereignty. See: Furani and Rabinowitz, “The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine.”

²⁵ Shukri Arraf, *Al-Qarya al-‘Arabiyya Filasṭīniyya*. (‘The Arab-Palestinian Village’). (Jerusalem: [n.pub.] 1986); Ishaq al-Hroub, *Atlas al-Turāth al-Rīfiyy al-Filasṭīnī*/Atlas of Palestinian Rural Heritage (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2015). Also worth mentioning are the more popular and richly illustrated books on Palestinian traditional clothing: Hanan Karaman Munayyer, *Traditional Palestinian Costume: Origins and Evolution* (Northampton: Interlink Publishing, 2020); Widad Kamel Kawar, *Threads of Identity: Preserving Palestinian Costume and Heritage* (Nicosia: Rimal Books, 2011); Shelagh Weir, *Palestinian Costume* (Northampton: Interlink Publishing, 2008).

²⁶ Celia E. Rothenberg, *Spirits of Palestine: Gender, Society and the Stories of the Jinn* (Lanham: Lexington, 2004); Suad M.A. Amiry, “Space, Kinship and Gender: The Social Dimension of Peasant Architecture in Palestine” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1988); Marisa Escribano, “The Endurance of the Olive Tree: Tradition and Identity in Two West Bank Palestinian Villages” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1987); Salim Tamari, “Building Other People’s Homes: The Palestinian Peasant’s Household and Work in Israel,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 11, no. 1 (1981): 31-66. Older ethnographic studies on Levantine rural culture include: Richard Antoun, *Arab Village: A Social Structural Study of a Transjordanian Peasant Community* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972); Henry Rosenfeld, “Change, Barriers to Change, and Contradictions in the Arab Village Family,” *American Anthropologist* 70, no. 4 (1968): 732-52; Abdullah Lutfiyya, *Baytin: A Jordanian Village* (The Hague: Mouton and Company, 1966); Abner Cohen, *Arab Border-Villages in Israel* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1965); Henry Rosenfeld, “Processes of Structural Change in the Arab Village Extended Family,” *American Anthropologist* 60, no. 6 (1958): 1127-39.

while the relationship between religious and national identities has been a site of contestation and academic debate, as has been mentioned before in this chapter, so has been the nature of the contrast between the old/rural and the new/urban. This contrast is, for example, visible in the composition and architecture of the village.²⁷ Like many villages, Taybeh's oldest houses are located in *al-Madīnat al-Qadīma* ('the Old City') on top of the hill, in the centre of the village, of which some of the houses date back to the first centuries. These houses have thick limestone walls with small windows, blending naturally into Taybeh's rocky landscape. Most of the houses have flat roofs, but some are domed. As the village developed in the early twentieth century from this oldest core, people either rebuilt their houses or abandoned them for newer houses as the population grew. These houses were built on the slopes of the hill, scattered around the old village core and spread along the major routes. Lastly, new houses are continuously being built in Taybeh's valley. These modern, twenty-first century and fully equipped villas are made of white, smoothly cut stones, have bigger windows protected by iron bars, and are crowned by television antennas. In this way, the physical appearance of the village manifests the contrast between the old and the new that is so typical for Palestinian rural life.

This tension manifests itself in another related discussion about the historical continuity of rural Palestine, best seen in the literature on the *ḥāmūla* ('clan'), the patrilineal descent group that has traditionally been the basis for spatial organisation, social organisation, village land tenure (*masha'*), military defence, as well as mundane activities such as buying daily groceries. There are two *ḥāmāyil* in Taybeh, the *ḥāmūlat al-Kawana* and *ḥāmūlat al-Dyūk*, who live peacefully together. The *ḥāmūlat al-Kawana* is the largest clan of Taybeh, consisting of eleven *'ā'ilāt* ('extended families').²⁸ Oral history records that the *Kawana* clan originally came from Syria, later joined by a Jordanian man called *Y'aqūb 'Idīk*, the forefather of the

²⁷ The Palestinian village house has relatively maintained its importance in the oeuvre of ethnography on Palestine, for example: Ron Fuchs, "The Palestinian Arab House and the Islamic 'Primitive Hut'," *Muqarnas* 15 (1998): 157-77; Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Palestinian dwelling in Roman-Byzantine period* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1995); Suad Amiry and Vera Tamari, *The Palestinian Village Home* (London: British Museum publications, 1989); Gustaf Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina* ('Work and Customs in Palestine'), Vol. 7 *Das Haus* ('The House') (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1939); Tawfiq Canaan, "The Palestinian Arab House," *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 13 (1933): 1-83; Tawfiq Canaan, "The Palestinian Arab House," *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 12 (1932): 223-47.

²⁸ Andraos Hanna and Na'im Tayea, *Al-Ṭayba 'abra al-'uṣūr*. ('Taybeh Through the Ages') (Al-Bireh: [n.pub.], 1995), 200. More literature on the village of Taybeh include: Mary Khourieh and Nadira Khourieh, *Mawsū'atu al-Taybati: Al-Tārīkh wa al-Ma'ālim al-Ḥaḍārīa*. ('Taybeh Encyclopaedia: History and Civilization') (Ramallah: [n.pub.], 2017); Falk van Gaver and Kassam Maaddi, *Taybeh: Dernier Village Chrétien de Palestine*. ('Taybeh: The last Christian Village of Palestine') (Monaco: Group Artège, 2015); Maria C. Khoury, "Taybeh's plea for the last Christians of the Holy Land," *Journal of Orthodox Faith and Culture* 6, no. 4 (2010): 3-43.

Dyūk clan, consisting of four *‘ā’ilāt*.²⁹ Based on Henry Rosenfeld’s influential anthropological research in Arab villages in Israel in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the *ḥāmūla* system has generally been understood as a historical continuity that is ‘revived’ or ‘preserved’.³⁰ In line with the more conventional assumptions of lineage theory in the Middle East and the primacy of the male line, scholars like Rosenfeld emphasised notions of ‘blood’ as a form of social glue for the rural Palestinian society. Many of Taybeh’s marriages are indeed endogamous (within the group), if not consanguine (between closest paternal cousins). Those marriages that are between more distant paternal cousins serve to link the branches of the *ḥāmūla* in a web of kinship. Married couples live with the male *‘ā’ila* in a *ḥūsh*, a cluster of houses build around a central courtyard where a three or four-generation family lives, or in a *dār*, a large house or apartment block with the oldest generation living on the ground floor and the younger generations above. Some of these large family houses are located in a *ḥāra* (‘town quarter’), an area of town where only members of the *‘ā’ila* live.

In other anthropological approaches, however, the *ḥāmūla* system is portrayed in a more fluid way. Talal Asad, for example, warns against anthropological analysis of Arab village life that, unconsciously, is influenced by political ideological determinations, primarily connected to Zionism.³¹ Khalil Nakhleh emphasises the need to dismantle and demystify the pre-eminence of the *ḥāmūla* for the need to recognise social change.³² In yet another approach on the *ḥāmūla*, Celia Rothenberg wants to shift the attention to the agency of villagers and the role of women.³³ Hence, in contrast to the more static theory of Rosenfeld, these authors show that we should approach the *ḥāmūla* as a dynamic element of Palestinian culture and not as a fixed notion of continuity of the past. This statement applies to the rapidly changing, modernising Palestinian culture and society in general. The new houses in Taybeh’s valley are not entirely built according to the *ḥāmūla* system

²⁹ Idem, 201.

³⁰ See, for example: Henry Rosenfeld, “An Overview and Critique of the Literature on Rural Politics and Social Change,” in *Rural Politics and Social Change in the Middle East*, edited by Richard Antoun and Iliya Harik (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 45-52; Henry Rosenfeld, “Hamula,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 1, no. 2 (1974): 243f.

³¹ Talal Asad, “Anthropological Texts and Ideological Problems: An Analysis of Cohen on Arab Villages,” *Economy and Society* 4, no. 3 (1975): 251-82.

³² Khalil Nakhleh, “Anthropological and Sociological Studies on the Arabs in Israel: A Critique,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6, no. 4 (1977): 41-70.

³³ Celia E. Rothenberg, “A Review of the Anthropological Literature in English on the Palestinian *ḥāmūla* and the Status of Women,” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 2 (1998/1999): 24-48.

anymore, but families of different *'a'ilāt* are now neighbours. Similarly, women do not daily wear the *thūb* anymore, neither do they fetch water from the *'ayn* ('spring') or bake bread on the *ṭābūn* ('communal bread oven').

Anthropologists like Ali Qleibo have rather pessimistically written about this cultural erosion of Palestinian life, which included a rich array of social life and customs.³⁴ However, the organic and fluid character of Palestinian culture must again be emphasised. Features that have traditionally been ascribed to Palestinian village life may have faded, but they are not lost. To revisit the *ḥāmūla* yet again, as a principle from the past, the *ḥāmūla* system adapts to changing circumstances. This is most visible in the diasporic character of the Taybeh community. Apart from the roughly 1,400 inhabitants, the villagers claim that the Taybeh community also consists of 15,000 people who have migrated to other places in the Middle East, Europe, North America, South America or Australia. Cultural erosion seems to apply to the situation of Taybeh, as some houses are only inhabited in the summer and others are left totally abandoned. But community still exists in the diaspora, where people keep connected with each other through social media, yearly conferences and international social occasions, such as summer marriages that often still occur within the social boundaries of the traditional *ḥāmūla* system. On top of that, migration brings a new flow of money into the families, creating this new 'modern Taybeh' in the valley that contrasts so starkly to *al-Madīnat al-Qadīma* on top of the hill.

To sum up, as a village, Taybeh has undergone dramatic cultural and social changes due to modernisation and migration. These issues will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, in particular in chapter three. As perceptions of Taybeh's rural past blur with new modern features, we should therefore understand the Palestinian rural area in dynamic and fluid ways. This introduction to Taybeh has emphasised traits that are widely associated with Palestinian rural culture – such as farming techniques, the village composition, social organisation, strong family ties and the conundrum between continuity and change – simultaneously with the strong Christian character that is displayed throughout the village in sound, skyline, dress, values and through outspoken Christian symbolism, such as the earlier introduced statues of 'Jesus of Ephraim' and 'Mary Lady of Peace'. As a village, Taybeh is both

³⁴ Ali Qleibo, *Before the Mountains Disappear: An Ethnographic Chronicle of the Modern Palestinian* (Cairo: A Kloreus Book, 1992).

inherently Palestinian and inherently Christian. This merger goes to deeper levels in Palestinian culture, such as the *ḥāmūla* system. For instance, local history records that the *Jūda* family, now part of the *Kawana* clan, is the oldest family of Taybeh, whose name derives from 'Judah', referring to Taybeh's location on the borderland between the biblical kingdom of Judah and the biblical kingdom of Israel. The same blurring of culture and religion is visible on both the oldest and the newest houses in Taybeh. Being typical Palestinian houses, all of them are engraved with images of Saint George, the Virgin Mary or the Holy Cross above the doorway. Hence, the interconnectedness of both Palestinian national identity and Christian religious identity intersect with other notions such as place, history and identity.

Apart from religious identity and Palestinian village culture, Taybeh's recent history has been starkly coloured by the constantly changing political complexities of the region. Oral history records that the village has been part of a village group called '*Benī Sālim*' ('children of Salim') in the past, consisting of Taybeh, Ramun, Deir Jarir, and Kufr Malik. *Benī Sālim* functioned as cooperation between these neighbouring villages to protect each other and stay strong against invaders. As a village in a politically disputed land, Taybeh was occupied by the Ottomans (1516-1922), the British (1922-1948), the Jordanians (1948-1967) and the Israelis (1967 till now). People still remember which buildings the Ottomans and Jordanians used for their governance, or events like harbouring protestors during the 1936-1939 Rebellion against the British, hiding in the caves during the First *Intifāḍa* (1987-1993), the road closures during the Second *Intifāḍa* (2000-2005), or the names of Taybeh's *shuhadā'* ('martyrs') who died in the fight against Israeli occupation. Like in other Palestinian villages, Taybeh's traditional system of the *mukhtār* ('head of the village') slowly disappeared through systematic changes at the end of the Ottoman Era and during the time of the British Mandate. Politically, the situation changed more drastically in 1994 when the Palestinian Authority was established. As a result, Taybeh became a municipality on 28 May 1997 with a village council led by a mayor and nine members, a municipality that is also known as 'D-level municipalities' by the Palestinian Ministry of Local Government. The municipalities' headquarters are located in the village and operate a vehicle for the collection of waste, which is unique and absent in many other Palestinian villages. For some services, the Taybeh Municipality works together in a Joint Services Council with neighbouring villages Deir Jarir and Ramun.

On top of these changes in the local political landscape, Palestine's context changed dramatically due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Major transformations occurred during three watersheds: the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Six-Day War in 1967 and the Oslo Accords in 1993 and 1995.³⁵ It would be excessive to delve into this complicated history for now, but two elements of this conflict need further attention to understand the political situation of Taybeh: the settlement movement and the Oslo Accords. Firstly, Taybeh has first-hand experience of the consequences of the settlement movement. The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories B'tselem reports that there were 131 government-sanctioned Israeli settlements and 110 settlement outposts in the West Bank in January 2019, with a population of 622,670 people (including East Jerusalem).³⁶ There are two Israeli settlements in the direct environment of Taybeh: Ofra and Rimonim. Ofra has more than 3,500 inhabitants and has been called "the mother of all settlements",³⁷ referring back to its early start in 1975 by the Israeli Orthodox right-wing movement Gush Emunim ('Bloc of the Faithful' in Hebrew). Gush Emunim, led by Rabbi Moshe Levinger, turned a Messianic discourse into an institutionalised movement by settling on supposedly biblical sites, claiming their presence in Judea and Samaria is vital for the coming of the Messiah. In April 1968, they began the movement by settling in one of the most debated places: the centre of the Old City of Hebron. Later they expanded to other places in the West Bank, the most important being Elon Moreh, Maale Adumim and Ofra. By 1977, the right-wing political party Likud had openly supported the settlement movement,³⁸ when about 11,000 Jews had taken up residence in 84 small settlements in the West Bank.³⁹ In the same year, Nahal (*Noar Halutzi Lohem*, 'Fighting Pioneer Youth' in Hebrew), an IDF programme that focuses on the establishment of agricultural settlements, established the settlement Rimonim on Taybeh land, a smaller settlement than Ofra

³⁵ For this history I have relied primarily on the work produced by a group of Jewish historians that have called themselves the 'New Historians'. Benny Morris coined the term 'the new historiography': challenging the Zionist version of history by tackling common myths surrounding the establishment of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. See: Avi Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine: Reappraisals, Revisions, Refutations* (London: Verso Books, 2009); Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003 [1994]).

³⁶ B'Tselem, "Statistics on Settlements and Settler Population," last updated 16 January 2019. <<https://www.btselem.org/settlements/statistics>> [accessed 27 September 2021].

³⁷ Ari Shavit, *My Promised Land. The Tragedy and Triumph of Israel*. (London: Scribe, 2014), 143.

³⁸ Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*, 200.

³⁹ Kimmerling and Migdal, *The Palestinian People*, 287.

with about 650 inhabitants. In 1995, settlers from Ofra established a new outpost called Amona. This outpost was built on private land owned by people of Taybeh, Silwad and Deir Jarir. The Palestinian landowners and Israeli activists of the organisation 'Peace Now' petitioned Amona in 2005 to the Israeli High Court, and NGO Yesh Din petitioned the Supreme Court in 2008 on behalf of the Palestinian landowners. On 1 February 2017, the outpost was evacuated by order of the rulings of the Supreme Court.

Moreover, since the iconic handshake between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (1922-1995) and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat (1929-2004), who both signed the Oslo II Accord on 28 September 1995, the West Bank has been divided into three administrative areas: Area A, Area B and Area C.⁴⁰ Taybeh's land has been divided between Area B and Area C. Taybeh's built-up area and the surrounding land falls under Area B, which is 8,032 *dūnam* in total (= 803.2 hectares or 1984.75 acres, which is 35% of Taybeh's land).⁴¹ The eastern part of Taybeh land is classified as Area C, consisting of 14,936 *dūnam* (= 1493.6 hectares or 3690.77 acres, which is 65% of Taybeh's land), and includes the settlement Rimonim and a military base. With their straight streets, modern blocks and red roofs, the settlements look profoundly different from the Arab villages. There are no minarets and bell towers that illustrate a Muslim or Christian village, but military watchtowers, camera systems, barriers, walls and fences for security purposes. For the purpose of building these settlements, Israel confiscated 415 *dūnam* (= 41.5 hectares or 102.55 acres) of Taybeh land,⁴² and the areas around the settlements are forbidden terrain as well. Hence, apart from functioning as a safe haven for Christian spirituality and Palestinian culture for its inhabitants, the village of Taybeh has become intertwined with the current realities of conflict, occupation, and annexation politics.

Christianity in Taybeh: A Short History of Missions

Taybeh's churches find themselves in the context described above: a context strongly coloured by the local Palestinian culture, Christian-Muslim relations and

⁴⁰ The Oslo Accord II divides the West Bank in three administrative areas: Area A, Area B, and Area C. Area A means full control of the Palestinian Authorities. Area B means Palestinian civil control and a shared Palestinian and Israeli security control. Area C, which also applies to Taybeh, is under full Israeli control.

⁴¹ Cf. Applied Research Institute Jerusalem, *Et Taiyiba Town Profile (including Badiw al Mu'arrajat Locality)*. (Bethlehem, 2012), 20. <http://vprofile.arij.org/ramallah/pdfs/vprofile/Et%20Taiyiba_en.pdf> [accessed 14 February 2019].

⁴² Cf. Applied Research Institute Jerusalem, *Et Taiyiba Town Profile*, 22.

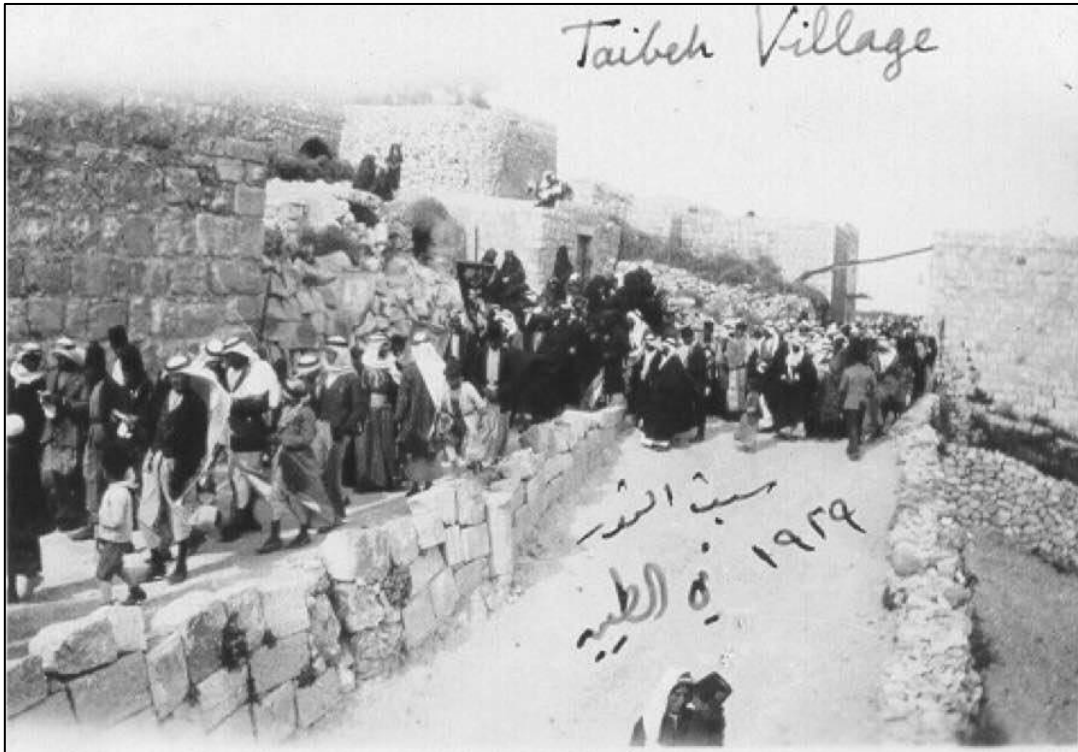


Figure 5. *Procession for Sabt an-Nūr ('Holy Fire') in Taybeh, Lent 1929.*
Photo from the family Basem Naber, Amman.



Figure 6. *Prayer at the end of the Palm Sunday procession in Taybeh, Lent 2018.*
Photo by author.

political complexities. These churches are part of the larger, rich tapestry of churches. In Jerusalem alone, one could find a Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, as well as Russian Orthodox and Romanian Orthodox Churches from the Orthodox tradition – also called Chalcedonian or Byzantine Orthodox tradition. From the Oriental Orthodox Church family – or those who follow a miaphysite Christology – Jerusalem has patriarchates, monasteries and churches from the Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, and Ethiopian Orthodox. The Catholics are represented by the Roman Catholics (Latinised-rite) in the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as well as the Eastern Catholics ('uniated' churches), including the Melkite Greek Catholics, Chaldean Catholics, Maronites, Syrian Catholics, and Armenian Catholics. Furthermore, Jerusalem has a broad variety of Protestant churches, including the Anglicans (Episcopalians), Lutherans, Presbyterians (Church of Scotland), and different flavours of Evangelical, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches. To make this picture even more diverse and colourful, one should mention the presence of the many religious (monastic) orders, the Messianic Jews and lesser known Christian communities, like the growing Asian and Latin American Catholic migrants in Israel, the Chinese missionary stations, a Korean Church on Mount Scopus, a Swedish Theological Institute in the Street of the Prophets in Jerusalem, a study centre affiliated with the Mormons (Church of the Latter-Day Saints) on the Mount of Olives, and many other specific Christian religious communities that are nearly always inspired by a form of Holy Land devotion to gain a presence in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. On an average Sunday morning in Jerusalem, one would be able to join a Divine Liturgy, mass, church service or Christian meeting from this incredibly broad spectrum of Christian expressions.

To understand the position of the local Palestinian Church, one should place the community in this diverse and complex ecclesial perspective. The Palestinian Church often employs the narrative of the Church of Jerusalem as '*Umm al-Kanā'is*' ('Mother Church'), to emphasise the biblical heritage and historical rootedness of their communal identity. Christianity is not so much 'brought to' the Palestinians by missionaries from the diverse church communities mentioned above, but as the cradle of Christianity, it originated in this very place. With the term '*Umm al-Kanā'is*', Palestinian Christians define their church as the first and original church. They see themselves as 'originator' or 'sender', rather than as 'receiver' of Christianity. Describing themselves as 'traditional Christians', this narrative is adopted by all

Palestinian Christians living in Taybeh: the Eastern Orthodox, the Eastern Catholics (Melkite Greek Catholics) and the Latins (Roman Catholics). However, it most strongly resonates with the oldest community of the three, the Orthodox.

The Eastern Orthodox Community in Palestine

The Orthodox community of Taybeh is referred to by the name *Rūm* (literally: 'Roman'). This Arabic term refers back to the year 330 AD when Emperor Constantine the Great (c. 272-337 AD) inaugurated the new capital of the Roman Empire at the European side of the Bosphorus Strait: New Rome – later known as Constantinople, now known as Istanbul.⁴³ The term has been used in the Qur'an to indicate those that are 'Byzantine'.⁴⁴ It is also reminiscent of the *Rūmi millet* ('a religiously-defined community') from the Ottoman Empire – a framework of a series of arrangements within which the Jewish and the different Christian communal authorities functioned under Ottoman rule. Tradition tells that the first of these arrangements was between Sultan Mehmed II (1432-1481) and the Orthodox monk Gennadios II Scholarios (c. 1400-1473), making the Orthodox *Rūm* the first of the different *millet*s.⁴⁵ In exchange for the responsibility of the payment of taxes by his community, the sultan made the monk the first ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, the spiritual leader of millions of Orthodox Christians reflecting a microcosm of the ethnic and linguistic variety of the Ottoman Empire. The name *Rūm* is still used by church members of all four ancient Orthodox patriarchates: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. In their view, the name refers back to the 'Umm al-Kanā'is, the first, catholic and apostolic church of the first

⁴³ Cf. Fr. George Aṭīyyeh, "The Rise of Eastern Churches and their Heritage (5th-8th Century: Churches of the Byzantine Tradition," in: *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, edited by Habib Badr (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 293-316.

⁴⁴ Cf. Jean Corbon, *L'Église des Arabes*. ('The Church of the Arabs'). New Edition (Paris: Les Éditions de Cerf, 2007 [1977]), 16.

⁴⁵ Cf. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, "Introduction," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society. Volume 1: The Central Lands*, edited by Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishing, 1982), 1-34. See also a later chapter in this volume: Richard Clogg, "The Greek Millet in the Ottoman Empire," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society. Volume 1: The Central Lands*, edited by Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishing, 1982), 185-207. Furthermore, it is important to note that instead of a uniformly adopted system, one should refer to the *millet* as a series of ad hoc arrangements between the Ottoman authority and the major religious communities of their empire: Benjamin Braude, "Foundation Myths of the Millet System," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society. Volume 1: The Central Lands*, edited by Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishing, 1982), 69-88. See also: Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East*; Erik Freas, *Muslim-Christian Relations in Late Ottoman Palestine: Where Nationalism and Religion Intersect*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

century that arose after the evangelisation of the apostles among the ethnic peoples of the *Rūmi* Empire. For this reason, the Orthodox community in Palestine is best referred to with the English equivalents 'Eastern Orthodox' and 'Arab Orthodox', or maybe even 'Chalcedonian Orthodox', as opposed to terms like 'Greek', 'Byzantine' or 'Latin' that are perceived as foreign and inauthentic.

While there is generally no lack of writings on the Eastern Orthodox community in Palestine, virtually all this literature largely focuses on the history of the Jerusalemite patriarchate, its Greek ecclesial hierarchy, or on the Arab Orthodox urban elite. To access the unique story of the Orthodox community in Taybeh, I have had to rely mainly on the oral history of the villagers. The person who probably best represents the Orthodox community of Taybeh is 'Abūnā Daoud, meaning 'Father David', being both the parish priest (*'khūrī'*) in Taybeh since the late 1980s and a valuable source for the history of the Orthodox community in the village. Born and raised in Taybeh, his facial characteristics, personality and mind-set are like that of many people of Taybeh: a relatively small man with a fine face and a neatly trimmed grey beard, hard-working and, above all, a proud Arab Orthodox. After having studied for five years at the seminary of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem when he was young, several years of work as an electronic engineer in Saudi Arabia for the company Phillips, and having studied theology in the United States of America, 'Abūnā Daoud was ordained by Patriarch Diodoros I (reign: 1980-2000) on the Day of the Transfiguration in 1986. 'Abūnā Daoud was offered the opportunity to become parish priest in Toronto, Canada, or for the joint congregation of Lod and Ramle, Israel, but 'Abūnā Daoud said he preferred to stay in Taybeh.⁴⁶ Hence, the spiritual life of this priest is entirely intertwined with his parish church in Taybeh.

According to 'Abūnā Daoud, the first Orthodox church of Taybeh was built in the fourth century and dedicated to Saint Constantine and Saint Helen, who still feature in the iconostasis of the current church. The priest pointed to the mosaics in the church, west of the first pillar of the southern row, just in front of the wooden benches close to the right side of the altar. Leading Italian archaeologist Bellarmino Bagatti confirms that these mosaics indeed indicate the Byzantine origin of the church. Bagatti translates the inscriptions made of black tesserae in these remaining

⁴⁶ Cf. Fr. Daoud Khoury, interviewed by Elizabeth Martejijn, Taybeh, 7 July 2018, and Taybeh, 20 August 2019.

mosaics to “O Lord, help Cyriacus”, but does not present the context of these words.⁴⁷ ‘Abūnā Daoud then took me to the Chapel of the Virgin Mary on the church compound, that he constructed in 1987 to preserve another ancient mosaic, old priests’ clothing, historical ornaments and icons from the old church. Again Bagatti endorses the Byzantine origin of these mosaics, and writes that the pattern of squares joined by intertwining lines and enclosing a swastika design are a well-known motif from the Byzantine period.⁴⁸ Other remnants of this ancient past are the columns near the entrance of the church and near the entrance of the chapel, a Corinthian capital at the left side of the church compound, and an old, stone, four-lobe baptismal font in the left-rear end of the church, just next to the stairs leading to the gallery. On Sundays, some women always sit at the back of the church next to the baptismal font, and after the Divine Liturgy the children play around the Corinthian capital outside the church, while their parents drink coffee in the meeting hall. Being among those ruins and remnants of the Byzantine history of their own church underlines the previously described observation that Palestinian Orthodox Christians consider themselves the ‘true’ ‘*Umm al-Kanā’is*’; they do so in a way that is stronger than the way Palestinian Christians from other denominations feel. The interconnectedness of both being Christian and Palestinian is for Orthodox Christians first and foremost based on this strong sense of original belonging and descent from the first local Christians.

The proximity of the village to several famous Orthodox monasteries in the Judean Desert is another tangible reminder of their early Christian heritage.⁴⁹ The first and most well known is Mar Saba Monastery at Mount Muntar in the wilderness around Bethlehem, around 30 miles by road from Taybeh. Mar Saba Monastery is named after its most famous monk: the founder Saint Saba (439-532). Some of the pious Orthodox men from Taybeh have stayed in this lavra for spiritual retreats. Secondly, at 22 miles drive from Taybeh lies the Monastery of Saint Gerasimus of

⁴⁷ Bellarmino Bagatti, *Ancient Christian Villages of Samaria*. Trans. by Paul Rotondi OFM (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2002), 40f, pl. 7.3-9.2.

⁴⁸ *Idem*, 40, pl. 9.2.

⁴⁹ On monasticism in Palestine, see: Fr. Shafiq AbouZayd, “Ascetic Movement in the East: Origins, Development and Dissemination. II In Syria, Iraq and Palestine,” in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, edited by Habib Badr (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 385-411; John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314-631* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). See also: Anna Poujeau, *Des Monastères en Partage : Sainteté et Pouvoir chez les Chrétiens de Syrie*. (‘Sharing Monasteries: Holiness and Power among Syrian Christians’) (Nanterre: Société d’ethnologie, 2014); Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982).

the Jordan, where Orthodox Christians flock each year in March to celebrate the feast of this fifth-century saint. Lastly, the Saint George Monastery is located around 20 miles away. Its situation in Wadi Qelt makes this a beloved place for the people of Taybeh for hikes, picnics and spiritual visits in wintertime, when temperatures are more pleasant in this lowland area than in the highland village itself. The monastery was previously known as the Ghoziba Monastery, but was renamed after the monk Georgius who lived here in the first half of the seventh century.

After these heydays of Byzantine Christianity, monastic life in the Judean Desert declined and suffered from invasions, massacres and other forms of violence.⁵⁰ According to 'Abūnā Daoud, the first church of Taybeh was destroyed at the beginning of the seventh century during the Sasanian conquest of Palestine (614). 'Abūnā Daoud said that not much is known about Taybeh's second Orthodox church, but the villagers expect that the second church must have been rebuilt with the materials of the first church. Hamdan Taha, former Deputy Minister of Tourism and Antiquities of the Palestinian Authorities, led a project of archaeological excavations on a tomb under the ruins of another sixth-century church at the edge of Taybeh in 2009.⁵¹ His research dates the use of the tomb between the sixth century and the ninth century, which is exactly this transitional period between the Byzantine Age and, after the Muslim conquest (634-638), to the Islamic Era. Taha's team found oil lamps in this tomb that contain Christian symbols like crosses, so the Palestinian archaeologist believes that Taybeh must have remained Christian in this time of political and religious change. Another significant feature of this period was the cultural and linguistic change Christians were subjected to during the Abbasid period. Scholars such as Sidney Griffith, leading specialist on Arab Christianity, showed that biblical and theological texts were being translated from Greek, the main liturgical language of Byzantine Christianity, into Arabic as early as the ninth century.⁵² In his work, Griffith argues that Christianity in Palestine and Syria had

⁵⁰ Cf. Fr. Shafiq AbouZayd, "Ascetic Movement in the East," 404-7.

⁵¹ Hamdan Taha, interviewed by Elizabeth Martejijn, Ramallah, 3 April 2018. The data of the archaeological excavations are not published, but for a more general article by Taha on the Palestinian burial practices, see: Hamdan Taha, "Ethnography of Death in Palestine," *Journal of Historical Archaeology & Anthropological Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2018): 158-63.

⁵² The earliest Christian texts in Arabic (that we have available now) are Theodore Abu Qurrah's (c. 750-825) writings, see: Najib George Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms: A Study of Theodore Abu Qurrah's Theology in Its Islamic Context* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015); Sidney H. Griffith, "Theodore Abu Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105, no. 1 (1985): 53-73.

been fully 'Arabised' by the beginning of the twelfth century, developing into a new, distinctive Arab Christian identity that we know today.⁵³

However, while local Christianity went through a process of Arabisation in Palestine, Greek clergy still dominated the patriarchate of Jerusalem. This clash between the Greek hierarchy and Arab laity in the twilight years of the Ottoman Empire and British Mandate, roughly between 1880 and 1940, is a well-researched area of the history of the Palestinian Orthodox church,⁵⁴ and an important element to understand the background to the building process of Taybeh's third church, 1927-1931. The root of this conflict dates back to the sixteenth century, when the Greeks assumed full control of the Jerusalem Patriarchate in 1534 through their representation at the Ottoman Porte.⁵⁵ The relationship between the Greek Orthodox elite and the Ottoman rulers was not simply a relationship of a conqueror and the conquered, but more a matter of negotiations in which, generally, the Greek Orthodox acquired a series of financial privileges and a high degree of internal administrative autonomy in exchange for obedience to and co-operation with the Sublime Porte in Constantinople.⁵⁶ Hence, it was as an entirely Greek monastic order, the Confraternity of the Holy Sepulchre (also known as the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre or the Fraternity of the Holy Sepulchre), from which all senior clerics

⁵³ See: Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the 'People of the Book' in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Sidney H. Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Sidney H. Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-century Palestine* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1992).

⁵⁴ On the role of ethno-nationalistic aspirations in the conflict: Samuel J. Kuruvilla, "Church-State Relations in Palestine: Empires, Arab-Nationalism and the Indigenous Greek Orthodox, 1880-1940," *Holy Land Studies* 10, no. 1 (2011): 55-71. On the role of the British colonial intervention specifically: Laura Robson, "Communalism and Nationalism in the Mandate: The Greek Orthodox Controversy and the National Movement," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41, no. 1 (2011): 6-23. On land issues and real estate: Konstantinos Papasthathis, "Church Finances in the Colonial Age: The Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem under British Control, 1921-25," *Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 5 (2013): 712-31. On the role of Communism: Merav Mack, "Orthodox and Communist: A History of a Christian Community in Mandate Palestine and Israel," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 4 (2015), 384-400. The work of Daphne Tsimhoni has long been formative in this area of studies, but has been critiqued in more recent publications: Tsimhoni, "The Arab Christians and the Palestinian Arab National Movement,"; Daphne Tsimhoni, "The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem during the Formative Years of the British Mandate in Palestine," *Asian and African Studies* 12 (1978): 77-122; Tsimhoni, "The Status of the Arab Christians under the British Mandate in Palestine." On the recent conflict about real estate, see: Itamar Katz and Ruth Kark, "The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and its Congregation: Dissent over Real Estate," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37 (2005): 509-34. On the dynamics of this conflict in Jordan: Anna Hager, "The Orthodox Issue in Jordan: The Struggle for an Arab and Orthodox Identity," *Studies in World Christianity* 24, no. 3 (2018): 212-23.

⁵⁵ Cf. Fuad Farah, "Orthodox Christianity in the Holy Land," *Studies in World Christianity* 15, no. 3 (2009): 248-57.

⁵⁶ Cf. Sotiris Roussos, "The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and Community of Jerusalem: Church, State and Identity," in *The Christian Communities of Jerusalem and the Holy Land: Studies in History, Religion and Politics*, edited by Anthony O'Mahony (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 38-56.

of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem were taken, while the lower-status clergy and laity were largely Arab.

At the end of the nineteenth century these power balances started to shift slightly. Due to the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, Russian influence started to spread in the Middle East. These influences became apparent in 1843 when, by approval of the tsar, the Russian Archimandrite Porfiri Uspenski (1804-1885) was sent to Jerusalem to found a school in Palestine. Two years later, in 1845, the Russians gained influence in the patriarchate when Cyril II (reign: 1845-1872) was chosen patriarch of Jerusalem, a Greek archbishop but known Russophile. Russian influence extended due to the work of their Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society (IOPS), established in 1882, through which the Russian Orthodox established schools to teach both the youth and to train local teachers.⁵⁷ Historians like Derek Hopwood and Theodore Stavrou make a compelling case that both this Russian educational enterprise and the dethronement of Patriarch Cyril II in 1872 sparked an intellectual and cultural movement among the Arab Orthodox, and in consequence alienated the Arab laity from the Greek hierarchy in Jerusalem.⁵⁸ Historian Sotiris Roussos called this 'church constitutionalism', which asked for a greater participation of the laity in the church's administrative affairs.⁵⁹ In 1910, during the time of Patriarch Damian I (reign: 1897-1931), who headed the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem from 1897 to 1931 as one of the only Russians in a long line of Greek patriarchs, there was an attempt to establish a mixed council of six lay Arab Orthodox members and six Greek clerics, parallel to similar efforts made in the ecumenical patriarchate in Constantinople.⁶⁰ However, the council ceased to exist three year later in 1913 because it did not function effectively. There are indications

⁵⁷ Christian missions from a broad variety of denominational backgrounds have often been related to humanitarianism (e.g. education, health care and more). For the Middle East, see: Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Karène Sanchez Summerer, eds., *Christian Missions and the Humanitarianism in The Middle East, 1850-1950* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

⁵⁸ Derek Hopwood, *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine, 1843-1914: Church and Politics in the Near East*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Theodore Stavrou, *Russian Interests in Palestine, 1882-1914: A Study of Religious and Educational Enterprise* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1963). Other texts on the Russian involvement in the nineteenth and twentieth century: Sadia Agsous, "The Palestinian graduates of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society (IOPS) and the making of the native cultural *Nahḍa*," *Contemporary Levant* 6, no. 1 (2021): 35-50; Alex Carmel, "Russian Activity in Palestine in the Nineteenth Century," in *Vision and Conflict in the Holy Land*, edited by Richard I. Cohen (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1985), 46-77; Eileen M. Kane, "Pilgrims, Piety and Politics: The Founding of the First Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem," in *Christian Witness Between Continuity and New Beginnings: Modern historical missions in the Middle East*, edited by Martin Tamcke and Michael Marten (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006), 177-97.

⁵⁹ Sotiris Roussos, "The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and Community of Jerusalem," in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, edited by Anthony O'Mahony, Göran Gunner & Kevork Hintlian (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 211-24.

⁶⁰ Idem, 218.

that the Russian influence spread to remote villages like Taybeh. It is known that Porfiri Uspenski visited smaller Orthodox villages, mainly due to his deep interest in biblical archaeology, and that the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society initially had plans to open a boys' boarding school in the Ramallah area.⁶¹ Furthermore, 'Abūnā Daoud reports that Russian nuns came to Taybeh in 1931 and hand-painted the walls and pillars in the local church. But it is not entirely clear what the nature of the contacts was between the Russian Orthodox and the Arab Orthodox from Taybeh.

Another strong impetus for the formation of an Arab Orthodox identity was the nationalist church movement in the Balkans and the reform movement in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch that resulted in 1899 in the election of Meletius II (reign: 1899-1906) as the first modern-day Arab patriarch. Modelled on this Arabisation of the Antioch Patriarchate, the Orthodox in Palestine started to develop an Arab Orthodox movement with nationalist tendencies. In her work, historian Laura Robson has shown how in the Palestinian cities like Jaffa, Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the 1920s, Arab Orthodox leaders started to make use of the organisational and anti-foreign rhetoric of the Palestinian nationalist movement.⁶² These leaders were a political elite representing a rising middle-class of educated and moderately wealthy Orthodox Christians who depicted the Greek church hierarchy as 'foreign oppressors', along the same lines as they considered foreign oppression coming from the Jews and the British. Besides, the Orthodox were among the pioneer founders of Arab newspapers, such as Najib Nasser (1865-1947) founder of *Al-Karmīl* (1908), and 'Isa al-'Isa (1878-1949) who founded and edited *Filasṭīn* (1911). These newspapers advocated Arab nationalism in light of the Zionist threat, recasting the Arab Orthodox movement as an integral part of the national struggle, claiming a political role as Arab Orthodox leaders. Other notable Arab Orthodox spokespersons for this movement were Jerusalemite nationalist Khalil al-Sakakini (1878-1953), author of the pamphlet *Al-Naḥḍa al-'Urthūdhuksiyya fī Filasṭīn* ('The Orthodox Renaissance in Palestine') (1913),⁶³ and Lebanese Orthodox Christian, George Antonius (1891-1942), author of the foundational book on the Arab national

⁶¹ Cf. Hopwood, *The Russian Presence*, 37, 142. Hopwood notes that the plans to establish the boys' school in Ramallah eventually failed. Instead, the Russians opened a girls' school in Beit Jala and a teachers' seminary in Nazareth.

⁶² Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity*, 75-100; Robson, "Communalism and Nationalism," 7.

⁶³ Khalil al-Sakakini was excommunicated for writing this pamphlet. His main objectives for writing it were to reform the Orthodox Church and Arabise it. He severely criticised the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and celebrated the Arab Orthodox movement. Cf. Robson, "Communalism and Nationalism," 15f; Mack "Orthodox and Communist," 8.

movement *The Arab Awakening* (1938).⁶⁴ Historian Noah Haiduc-Dale also brings attention to the importance of the Union of Arab Orthodox Clubs (UAOCs).⁶⁵ The first Arab Orthodox Club was established in Jaffa in 1924, soon to be followed by others in Jerusalem, Lydda, Ramle, Gaza, Haifa, Acre, Nazareth, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, and Beit Jala. At the second conference of the Arab Orthodox Clubs in Jerusalem in 1943, the Union of Arab Orthodox Clubs was established, an umbrella organisation that served as a new mouthpiece for Arab Orthodox Christians. The Union focused on enhancing religious, social, charitable and cultural aspects of Orthodox life in Palestine, thus distancing themselves from the patriarchate. Haiduc-Dale argues that the Union of Arab Orthodox Clubs was a balance between the Orthodox as a religious community and the Orthodox as being part of the national movement: the leadership embraced communal organisation while simultaneously fully embracing Palestinian nationalism.

The formation of the Arab Orthodox identity in Taybeh took another turn. Instead of the political stance of the cities, the villagers of Taybeh chose a form of independence from the Jerusalemite Patriarchate. Parish priest 'Abūnā Daoud spoke proudly about the building process of Taybeh's third church, 1927-1931. As a result of the major Jericho earthquake that took place on 11 July 1927, with a magnitude of 6.2 on the Richter scale, Taybeh's Orthodox church was heavily damaged. As the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem was only able to provide a small amount of money contributing to the building of a new church, the people from Taybeh took matters in their own hands. 'Abūnā Daoud explained that the people from Taybeh went to Syria, Egypt and other Arab countries to collect money. "We are the only national church built on the expenses of our people. (...) They built the church on their own: the builders were from Taybeh, the architect was from Taybeh, the people who cut the stones were from Taybeh – all the work was done by the people from Taybeh."⁶⁶ 'Abūnā Daoud used the words 'national church' to describe the special character of Taybeh's Orthodox church – where others in the village use the words 'independent', 'Arab Orthodox', or say that Taybeh's Orthodox church feels connected to the Arabised patriarchate of Antioch instead of the Greek patriarchate of Jerusalem. The Saint George Orthodox Church of Taybeh – renamed

⁶⁴ George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938).

⁶⁵ Haiduc-Dale, *Arab Christians*, 163-95.

⁶⁶ Cf. Fr. Daoud Khoury, interviewed by Elizabeth Martejijn, Taybeh, 20 August 2019.

in 1931 – was not officially consecrated by the Orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem, as is the normal practice. 'Abūnā Daoud continued: “We want to keep the church like this. The first priest who served in this church was my grandfather, his name was also Daoud. Then my uncle, then my nephew. Then I came, then my brother. We are a priesthood family, we want to take care of the church. We want to keep the church like this [...] it is our church, it belongs to us.”⁶⁷ Together with his family, 'Abūnā Daoud continues to take care of the church building. In 2004 he renovated the exterior of the church: the dome, the yard, the gate, the roof and the church bells. The interior of church was renovated in 2011, including the icons in the dome. Another seven years later, in 2018, 'Abūnā Daoud built a heating and air-conditioning system in the church.

This tradition of the priesthood family 'Abūnā Daoud is referring to is another unique element of this village church where the Orthodox church history meets the local village culture. For as long as the people from Taybeh can remember, the village always had two Orthodox priests: one priest of the Khoury priesthood family representing the *ḥāmūlat al-Kawana* and one priest of the Nasr priesthood family representing the *ḥāmūlat al-Dyūk*.⁶⁸ The last priest of the *ḥāmūlat al-Dyūk* was Tawfiq Nasr, who served in Taybeh from 1967 till 2011. 'Abūnā Tawfiq served alongside 'Abūnā Daoud from 1986 onwards, when 'Abūnā Daoud was ordained. After the death of 'Abūnā Tawfiq, 'Abūnā Daoud has been serving Taybeh's parish church alone. This does not mean that the Nasr priesthood family has stopped – the previous priest, 'Abūnā Zacharia, migrated to Oklahoma City in 1955, where his son 'Abūnā Constantine continued his job as Arab Orthodox priest in the diaspora.⁶⁹ 'Abūnā Constantine (b. 1945) served in the Saint Elijah Antiochian Orthodox Church in Oklahoma City from 1982 to 2011. He regularly returns to Taybeh to serve in Taybeh's parish church and established a foundation to help develop the village of Taybeh.⁷⁰ In short, in interaction with the more politicised and nationalistic Arab

⁶⁷ Idem.

⁶⁸ The village records go back to the year 1800. From the *ḥāmūlat al-Kawana* the following priests have been recorded: Issa Oweis (reign: 1800-?), Elias Kiwan (reign: 1888-?), Yousef Tafish (reign: 1918-?), Daoud Khoury (reign: 1914-1937), Ibrahim Khoury (reign: 1942-1964), Michael Khoury (reign: 1964-1982), Daoud Khoury (reign: 1986-now). From the *ḥāmūlat al-Dyūk* the following priests have been recorded: Ibrahim Nasr (1920-?), Yousef Nasr (1897-1937), Zacharia Nasr (reign: 1946-1955), Tawfiq Nasr (reign: 1967-2011).

⁶⁹ Constantine Nasr, interviewed by Elizabeth Martejijn, Taybeh, 30 October 2017.

⁷⁰ Other Orthodox clerics from Taybeh who have been serving outside the village are: Yacoub Khoury (currently parish priest in the Church of Transfiguration in Ramallah), Nikolas Dahdal (currently parish priest in the Saint George Antiochian Orthodox Church in Cicero, Illinois), Elias Nasr (currently parish priest in the Saint Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church of Syracuse, New York) as well as two bishops Simon Gharfeh (Bishop of Sebastia from 1940-1981) and Demetri Khoury (ordained in 1975, Bishop of Jableh, Syria, 1995-2003).

Orthodox movement that has taken place in the cities since the 1920s, the Orthodox community of Taybeh has taken its own path in finding an identity that is both Orthodox and Palestinian and interacts with the local dynamics of the *ḥāmūla* structure and traditional village independence.

In contrast, the position of Arab clergy in the Jerusalemite patriarchate has not yet improved. The vast majority of Orthodox hierarchy are of Greek descent, as is the current Patriarch Theophilos III (b. 1952, elected 2005). Currently there are only four high-ranking Arab clerics in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem: Archbishop Theodosios Atallah Hanna (Palestinian), Archimandrite Christophoros Atallah (Jordanian), Archimandrite Meletios Bassal (Palestinian), and Archimandrite Athanasios Kakish (Jordanian). No Greek high-ranking cleric has visited Taybeh's parish priest in recent years, while Archbishop Theodosios Atallah Hanna has officiated at several baptisms, weddings and burials, and other liturgies in the village. The conflict and cultural distance between the Greek hierarchy and the local Arab Christians has been one of the reasons why Orthodoxy has dwindled in Palestine: poverty, land sales to the Jews, the exclusion of Arab priests from having a voice in its councils, and, as we shall see in the next section, the prohibition of consanguine marriages – an intrinsically Palestinian cultural practice – have all created discontent among the Palestinian Orthodox, and thus created space for other church denominations to take root among Palestinian Christians, the first of which were the Melkite Greek Catholic.

The Formation of Eastern Catholicism in Palestine

The second church community currently present in Taybeh are the Greek Catholics. In Arabic, this community is referred to by the name *ar-Rūm al-Kāthūlīk*, indicating the continuation of the *Rūm* church and community, but being simultaneously *Kāthūlīk* ('Catholic') in their allegiance to Rome. While *ar-Rūm al-Kāthūlīk* literally translates to 'Roman Catholic', in Arabic the term has a different meaning from the one English-speaking people associate with 'Roman Catholicism'. For this reason, English-speaking outsiders often use the name 'Melkite' to speak about this group, derived from the Arabic word *Malikī* ('Royalist'). This term, too, refers to the community following the Byzantine Emperor and considering themselves Chalcedonian in their Christology, similar to what the term *Rūm* implies. These

names describe the descent of the Melkite Greek Catholics as a church unification between the Catholic Church of Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy, and a rapprochement between East and West. The Melkite Greek Catholics are part of a larger umbrella term of 'Eastern Catholicism' or 'uniatism': Middle Eastern churches united with Rome. Apart from the Melkite Greek Catholic Church (founded: 1724), other examples of Eastern Catholicism are the Maronite Church (founded: 1182), Chaldean Catholic Church (founded: 1553), Armenian Catholic Church (founded: 1742), Syrian Catholic Church (founded: 1783), Coptic Catholic Church (founded: 1895), the Ethiopian Catholic Church (founded: 1961), and others.⁷¹

When one steps into the Melkite Greek Catholic Church of Taybeh, this distinctive position of Eastern Catholicism becomes immediately visible. The church was built under the auspices of Bishop Gabriel Abu-Saada (reign: 1948-1965) and was consecrated in 1966.⁷² The church has limestone walls, a bell tower and a clear blue dome. The church interior is light: cream coloured walls, yellow painted pillars, wooden benches, icons with gold tints, and gold-coloured chandeliers decorated with the images of saints. The church is newer and more modern than the traditional Orthodox Church of Taybeh, but the Byzantine iconography and liturgical objects, as well as the appearance of the priest, indicate their Eastern Orthodox origin. Going down the stairs entering the house of the priest one notices again Byzantine liturgical books and objects, but also a picture of the priest meeting the pope in Rome, indicating the church's full communion with the Catholic Church. Moreover, Taybeh's Melkite Greek Catholic priest, 'Abūnā Jack, is a personification of this union between the Western and the Eastern Church. Born in Jaffa in 1958, 'Abūnā Jack was consecrated as Taybeh's parish priest on 26 January 1990.⁷³ The priest has a large,

⁷¹ On Eastern Catholic Christianity (uniatism): Constantin Simon SJ, "Eastern Catholicism: Modern Historical, Ecclesial and Contemporary Contexts," in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East: Studies for the Synod for the Middle East*, edited by Anthony O'Mahony and John Flannery (London: Melisende, 2010), 69-86; Patriarch Gregory III Laham, *Introduction to the Liturgy, Services and other Symbols of the Eastern Church* ([n.p.]: Eastern Christian Publications, 2009); Peter Galadza, "Eastern Catholic Christianity," in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*, edited by Ken Parry et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 291-318; Herman Teule, "De geünieerde kerken in het Midden-Oosten" ('The Uniated Churches of the Middle East'), in *Oosterse christenen binnen de wereld van de islam* ('Eastern Christians in the World of Islam'), edited by Herman Teule and Anton Wessels (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 1997), 244-55; Joseph Hajjar, *Les Chrétiens Uniates du Proche-Orient*. ('The Uniate Christians of the Near East') (Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 1962). Specifically focused on the Melkite Greek Catholic Church: Fr Ignatios Dick, *Melkites: Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics of the Patriarchates of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem* (Boston: Sophia Press, 2004).

⁷² Cf. the Rev. Archim. Jack Nobel Abed, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Taybeh, 26 February 2018, and Taybeh, 19 August 2019. Bp. Gabriel Abu-Saada oversaw the building of the Melkite Greek Catholic churches in Beit Sahour, Ramallah, Rafidia and in Taybeh, as well as the Monastery of the Benedictine Nuns of the Emmanuel in Bethlehem.

⁷³ The Rev. Archim. Jack Nobel Abed, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Taybeh, 26 February 2018, and Taybeh, 21 March 2018.

grey beard, expressive eyes and tanned skin. He becomes especially passionate whenever we talk about Saint George, the fasting practices during Lent, and the origin and history of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, professing a strong love for his Christian tradition. At the age of eleven, the young Jack decided he wanted to become a priest and entered St. Joseph's Seminary in Nazareth in 1968. He studied theology and philosophy at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome from 1975 till 1982, and then Byzantine music on Mount Athos from 1984 till 1987. Having studied in both Rome and on Mount Athos, 'Abūnā Jack is a typical Eastern Catholic cleric who is fully immersed in both the Catholic and Orthodox traditions that form the union of Greek Catholicism.

The historical development of Eastern Catholicism goes back to the times of the crusades.⁷⁴ After the siege of Jerusalem in 1099, the crusaders installed a Latin patriarch in Jerusalem and a year later in Antioch. But after the defeat of the crusades, Rome did not take its eye off Jerusalem. Even though the Latin patriarchate had moved to Cyprus in 1291 after the fall of Acre, and then to Rome, the Catholic Church kept installing titular patriarchs who resided in Rome. The Franciscans, who had arrived in Acre in 1230, remained behind for custodianship over the Holy Sites (*custodia terræ sanctæ*) and played a role in smaller missionary endeavours in the Middle East. But the major ecclesiastical event that laid the foundations for what historian Charles A. Frazee has called the "golden age of Catholic missions,"⁷⁵ was the establishment of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*) by Pope Gregory XV (reign: 1621-1623) in 1622. This college was responsible for the missionary work of the Catholic Church, especially in the East and the Americas. The *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* was invested in relinking the Middle Eastern Christians to Rome through reform and renewal, making the rapprochement and

⁷⁴ Scholars have emphasised the longstanding presence of the Catholic Church in Palestine dating back to the time of the crusades. See, for example: Fr. Salim Daccache, "Catholic Missions in the Middle East," in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, edited by Habib Badr (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 687-712; Antony O'Mahony, "Catholics," in *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity: Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 271-84; Herman Teule, "De Latijnse kerk," ('The Latin Church') in *Oosterse christenen binnen de wereld van de islam* ('Eastern Christians in the world of Islam'), edited by Herman Teule and Anton Wessels (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 1997), 260ff; Valognes, *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 67ff, 503.

⁷⁵ A turn of phrase used by Charles A. Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans: The Church and the Ottoman Empire 1453-1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 65.

unity between the Western Catholic Church and the churches of the Middle East a significant focus of Catholic missions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁷⁶

Although Catholic missions were central in the birth of the church unions, scholars like French historian Bernard Heyberger emphasise that the role of Middle Eastern Christians themselves cannot be underestimated as less active or crucial in the origin of Eastern Catholic Churches.⁷⁷ Catholicism was appealing to Middle Eastern Christians for several reasons: it was a source of spiritual renewal (through the theological writings of, for example, Thomas à Kempis and Robert Bellarmine); the connection to the Roman Catholic Church gave possibilities for access to Western science; and Catholicism was appealing because of the trade benefits based on the System of Capitulations.⁷⁸ These trade agreements between the sultan of the Ottoman Empire and the European governments were especially beneficial to merchants in cities like Aleppo and Damascus who wished to become part of an increasingly expanding world economy, a factor that strongly contributed to the development of a Middle Eastern church united with Rome.

It was these cities, Aleppo and Damascus, that played a key role in the genesis of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church as well. When the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch Athanasius III Dabbas (reign: 1720-1724) died, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch was thrown into a state of confusion. While Aleppo nominated a monk from Mount Athos in Greece, Silfastrus al-Qubrusi (Sylvester the Cypriot later known as Sylvester of Antioch), who had also been the secretary of the previous patriarch of Antioch – the Christians from Damascus nominated Seraphim Tanas (later known as Cyril VI Tanas), a more modern candidate with pro-Latinising sympathies. The two cities became each other's opponents and this disagreement led to the schism of 1724, when Patriarch Sylvester became the next Greek Orthodox patriarch of Antioch, and Patriarch Cyril VI Tanas the first Melkite Greek Catholic patriarch of Antioch of a new church in full communion with Rome. Patriarch Cyril VI Tanas tried to keep the balance between this full communion with Rome and

⁷⁶ Bernard Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient au Temps de la Réforme Catholique (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles*. ('The Christians in the Near East during the Catholic Reformation [Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, during the 17th-18th centuries]') (Paris: École Française de Rome, 1994), 227-31. See also: Fr. Salim Daccache, "Catholic Missions in the Middle East," 691-6. After the establishment of the *Propaganda Fide* in 1622, the French were the first to initiate contacts with the Middle East, see Heyberger *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient*, 260.

⁷⁷ Bernard Heyberger, "The Development of Catholicism in the Middle East (16th-19th Century)," in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, edited by Habib Badr (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 631-53.

⁷⁸ Teule, "De geünieerde kerken in het Midden-Oosten," 244-55.

maintaining the particular Oriental and Byzantine tradition. This emphasis on being a 'Catholicised church', but not fully 'Latinised', has remained the position of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, being the object of discussion during the synods about a century later in Ain Traz, Lebanon (1835) and in Jerusalem (1849), organised by Patriarch Maximos III Mazloum (reign: 1833-1855).⁷⁹ In fact, the Melkite Greek Catholic relations with Rome have not always been smooth. It took 20 years after the schism before the Pope granted *pallium* to the Melkite Greek Catholic patriarch in Antioch. Furthermore, during the First Vatican Council of 1869-1870, when Pope Pius IX (reign: 1846-1878) proposed latinisation and centralisation of the Catholic churches, Melkite Patriarch Gregorius II Yousef (reign: 1864-1897) strongly and charismatically defended the Eastern ecclesiology.⁸⁰

The nineteenth century also saw the Melkite Greek Catholic missionary expansion in the Levant, which was later overseen by the Missionary Society of Saint Paul (*Societas Missionarium Sancti Pauli*), established in 1903 in Harissa, Lebanon. 'Abūnā Jack tells that Melkite Greek Catholic missionaries came from Lebanon to Galilee, where most Melkite Greek Catholics now live, and went down to Jerusalem where they established the first Palestinian Melkite Greek Catholic community in 1840.⁸¹ Melkite Greek Catholic missionaries arrived in Taybeh in the 1840s or 1850s. From the 1860s onwards, a Melkite priest from Galilee organised small meetings in Taybeh. Slowly, the community attracted people. It expanded more substantially in the period between 1903 and 1948 when Father Youssef Da'doush came to live in Taybeh and celebrated mass in his home.⁸² Eventually, exponential growth took place after a shooting incident in Taybeh's Greek Orthodox Church in 1962. This internal conflict between two Orthodox families, the Khoury-

⁷⁹ On the life of Patr. Maximos III Mazloum, see: Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, 284-92. Under Patr. Maximos III the Melkite Greek Catholic Church underwent several other systematic developments. In 1837, the Ottoman Empire recognised the Melkite Greek Catholic Church as a *millet*. A year later, in 1838, the papacy in Rome allowed Maximos the full patriarchal title, which is still being used today: 'Patriarch of Antioch and of All the East, of Alexandria and of Jerusalem of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church'.

⁸⁰ These latinising tendencies were brought to a stop by Pope Leo XIII (reign: 1878-1903). He published the encyclical *Orientalium Dignitas* ('The Dignity of the East') in 1894, recognising the value of the oriental rites. For an online and English version of this Papal encyclical, see: <<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/l13orient.htm>> [accessed 16 September 2020]. The conflict between latinisation and Eastern ecclesiology came to the surface again during Patr. Cyril IX Moghabghab (1925-1947) and his involvement with the seminary of Saint Anne in Jerusalem, see: Bernhard Kronegger, "A Schism in the Melkite Church? The Conflict surrounding the Seminary of Saint Anne during the Mandate Period," *Contemporary Levant* 6, no. 1 (2021): 78-94.

⁸¹ Cf. the Rev. Archim. Jack Nobel Abed, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Taybeh, 26 February 2018, and Taybeh, 19 August 2019.

⁸² Taybeh had the following Melkite priests: Youssef Da'doush (reign: 1903-1948), George Habra (reign: 1956-1963), Philippe Maroun (reign: 1964-1965), Georges Habidi (reign: 1966-1980), Jacques Abu Saada (reign: 1980-1989), Jack Nobel Abed (reign: since 1990). Cf. Van Gaver and Maadi, *Taybeh*, 134f.

clan and the Tayea-clan, resulted in the departure of a whole Tayea (extended) family to the Melkite Greek Catholic Church. As we have seen in the previous paragraph, Orthodoxy was dwindling in Palestine, mainly due to the cultural distance between the Greek hierarchy and the local Arab Christians. In contrast to the rather distant leadership of the Greek hierarchy of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Melkite Greek Catholic hierarchy are nearly all Arabs from Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Jordan, and Palestine itself. Greek Catholicism formed an attractive alternative to Orthodoxy, being now the second largest church community in Israel and the third largest church community in Palestine. The current Patriarchal Vicar of Jerusalem, Yaser Al-Ayyash (b. 1955, appointed 2018), is responsible for 38 parishes: two of them in Jerusalem (one in the Old City and one in Beit Hanina), six in the West Bank (Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Zababdeh, Rafidia, Ramallah and Taybeh), and thirty in Israel (one in Jaffa and 29 in Galilee).⁸³

Anthony O'Mahony, a leading scholar on Catholicism in the Middle East, and Jean-Pierre Valognes, author of the seminal book *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, have both stated that this Arab leadership made the Melkite Greek Catholic Church into the ecumenical and politically involved church it is today.⁸⁴ The previous Patriarch Gregory III Laham (b. 1933), who led the church between 2000 and 2017, is known for his commitment to the ecumenical identity of his own church, being fully committed to both the Western and Eastern church families, as well as his involvement in negotiating with the Syrian government in a period of civil and religious conflict. Patriarch Emeritus Gregory III Laham states that the Melkite Greek Catholic Church is the indigenous Arab and Palestinian Church, as indigenous to Palestine as are mosques and Islam. This echoes the earlier notion of 'the Church of the Arabs' (1977), coined by Lebanese scholar and Melkite Greek Catholic priest Jean Corbon (1924-2001), which meant the incarnation of the Christian faith by belonging to the Arab culture.⁸⁵ When Pope Benedict XVI (reign: 2005-2013) visited Jordan in 2008, Patriarch Gregory III said in his address: "We are a Church in a daily, vital dialogue, Church of meeting, of perfect solidarity with our Arab peoples,

⁸³ Listed on the website of the Catholic Church of the Holy Land: <<http://catholicchurch-holyland.com/?cat=49>> [accessed 20 July 2020].

⁸⁴ Anthony O'Mahony, "The Latins of the East: The Vatican, Jerusalem and the Palestinian Christians," in *The Christian Communities of Jerusalem and the Holy Land: Studies in History, Religion and Politics*, edited by Anthony O'Mahony (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 101f; O'Mahony, "Catholics," 276f; Valognes, *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 320-35.

⁸⁵ Corbon, *L'Église des Arabes*.

with our different Christian communities in their diversity and richness, and also with all Muslim communities.”⁸⁶ This was also reflected during Patriarch Emeritus Gregory III Laham’s visit to Taybeh in October 2017. This was five months after his retirement as Melkite Greek Catholic patriarch of Antioch, whose headquarters are located in Damascus.⁸⁷ In his speech, the patriarch emeritus urged the community not to emigrate. The patriarch stated that if Christians leave, there will be no Palestine left. He described Palestinian Christians, as well as the Muslims and Jews, as the salt of the earth (*milḥ al-’arḍ*) emphasising the respect with which religion is practised in the Middle East. Those who have already migrated, therefore, are destined to bring depth to Christianity in the West, where faith and connection to Christ have been lost. He believed it would be his last visit to the Holy Land, as he would turn 84 in two months, so at the end of his speech Patriarch Emeritus Gregory III Laham brought his greetings to the community, and specifically greeted older people whom he remembered from the time as patriarchal vicar in Jerusalem from 1975 till 2000.

The visit of Patriarch Emeritus Gregory III Laham was a significant event for Taybeh’s Melkite Greek Catholic community, having not had such a visit for about 17 years. The patriarch arrived around 10.30 a.m. at the intersection of the road 458 from Jerusalem, where a group of men from Taybeh were waiting in their cars to accompany him on the road to Taybeh. At 10.45 a.m., the patriarch arrived in a black luxury car at the Melkite Greek Catholic Church of Taybeh with a delegation of ten Melkite Greek Catholic clergymen. After being greeted by ’*Abūnā* Jack and the four altar boys, who had impatiently been waiting in their yellow dresses playing around with the liturgical objects they must hold, Gregory III Laham solemnly entered the church, blessing the people who stood on the outer edge of the pews, while everybody respectfully stood up. The Divine Liturgy started at 11 a.m. Gradually, people from Taybeh dropped in. ’*Abūnā* Jack had sent official invitations to the people of Taybeh, stating that only two persons per family were allowed to be inside the church. This meant most of the worshippers were slightly older. Those attending were the Melkite Greek Catholics themselves, along with the Orthodox priest ’*Abūnā* Daoud, the mayor, the previous mayor, as well as other Orthodox and Latin Church

⁸⁶ Address of Patr. Gregory III Laham to Pope Benedict XVI in the Melkite Cathedral in Amman, Jordan, 9 May 2008, § 3. See: <<https://melkite.org/tag/patriarchate-2/page/9>> [accessed 17 September 2020].

⁸⁷ Field note entry by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Taybeh, 20 October 2017.

members – indicating the ecumenical and open character of the church. People were dressed in their Sunday clothes, all priests were wearing black cassocks and the patriarch was wearing a white vestment decorated with golden thread, alongside a white and gold crown adorned with little icons and gemstones. After the Divine Liturgy, the patriarch waited outside to give people the opportunity to meet him. People shook his hand, kissed the wooden cross the patriarch was carrying, and personally talked to him. This visit of Gregory III Laham indicates the different dynamics at work among the Melkite Greek Catholic Church in comparison to the Palestinian Orthodox Church.

In his speech and in his actions, Patriarch Emeritus Gregory III Laham showed he is politically and socially engaged with the community of Taybeh. The Melkite Greek Catholic church hierarchy in general has been known for their support for the Palestinian cause. Gregory III Laham's predecessor, Patriarch Maximos V Hakim (reign: 1967-2000) negotiated the return of Galilee Christians after the *Nakba* of 1948; Haifa's Bishops Joseph Raya (reign: 1968-1974) and Elias Chacour (b. 1939, reign: 2006-2014) were also known for their support for the destroyed Christian villages Iqrit and Kufr Baram. Another example is Bishop Hilarion Capucci, who was patriarchal vicar of Jerusalem from 1965 till 1974 and smuggled weapons to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO, founded in 1964) on the West Bank, for which Israel imprisoned him in 1974. Melkite piety also met Palestinian nationalism in Taybeh during the formation of the *Monastère de St. Ephrem* (Monastery of Saint Ephrem), built by French Melkite hermit Jacques Serge Frant (b. 1950) in the borderland between Taybeh and the Jewish settlement Ofra. Because of his determination to stay in the monastery, a larger part of land became Area B instead of Area C, when the land was being divided with the settlers from Ofra.⁸⁸ Historian Jean Pierre Valognes has offered several explanations why the Melkites have been able to play this pro-Palestinian role.⁸⁹ Firstly, the hierarchy of the Melkite Greek Catholic church is nearly fully Arab, making the church more personally involved with the Palestinian cause. Secondly, the main seat of authority of the

⁸⁸ Jacques Serge Frant began to build this hermitage on 24 September 1989. The hermit stayed in Taybeh through both *Intifādāt*, had a legal fight with the Israeli military court over the building on this contested land (1993), his monastery was damaged by Muslim fanatics (2003), was set on fire (2008), and has been occupied by settlers (2009). The Palestinian Authority officially thanked Fr. Jacques Frant that his courage resulted in a more advantageous land distribution for the Palestinians. Description based on personal correspondence of 22 April 2019. Unrecorded personal meetings have taken place during my fieldwork.

⁸⁹ Valognes, *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 581.

Melkites is outside Israel (Damascus, Syria), so the church leaders from Jerusalem do not have to go through Israel unlike other church denominations in Jerusalem. Hence, the historical sketch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, and the current positioning of the church as an 'Arab church', indicate how deeply religion and nationalism are interwoven in the history and identity of the community. In contrast to the Eastern Orthodox Church, this blurring of religion and nationalism is to be found along the hierarchical spectrum of the church community.

The Re-Establishment of the Latin Patriarchate and Latin Missions in Palestine

Of the three church communities in Taybeh, the history of the Latin parish church is the most recently and best documented. Historical research on the Latin parish of Taybeh was undertaken in the 1990s by Father Pierre Medebielle S.C.J., French priest and historian of the re-establishment of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 1847, and recently updated by Archbishop Emeritus Maroun Lahham, a Jordanian scholar and Latin priest who served as the first Latin archbishop of Tunis and later became patriarchal vicar of Jordan.⁹⁰ As the Melkite Greek Catholic community has been referred to by the name *Kāthūlīk*, as explained in the section above, the Roman Catholic community is called *Lāṭīn* ('Latin'). Although the church is now to a great extent indigenised, the term relates to the history and the longstanding dreams of the Holy See in Rome to establish a Latinised-rite Catholic church in Jerusalem alongside the uniatist churches, such as the Melkite Greek Catholic Church. Hence, just as the Orthodox community had to deal with the Greek and Russian foreign influence, the Latin community was influenced by foreign Roman Catholic countries, most notably France and Italy. This was, for example, visible during the consecration of Taybeh's current parish church building on 18 May 1971.⁹¹ The church building

⁹⁰Pierre Medebielle S.C.J., *Ephrem-Taybeh et son Histoire Chrétienne*. ('Ephraim-Taybeh and its Christian history') (Jerusalem: Latin Patriarchate Printing Press, 1993); thanks to Fr. Raed Abu-Sahlieh who sent me an online copy of this book. For an updated version of this work, see: H.E. Maroun Lahham, *Tarīkh ra'yya al-Lāṭīn fī al-Ṭayba*. ('History of the Latin Parish of Taybeh') (Jerusalem: Latin Patriarchate Printing Press, 2017).

⁹¹ Medebielle, *Ephrem-Taybeh et son Histoire Chrétienne*, 28. Medebielle describes that the consecration as a joyful event. Patr. Beltritti came from Jerusalem alongside the canons of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, local priests, the students of the major seminary of Beit Jala, six students of the minor seminary, Rosary Sisters and the people from Taybeh. Having arrived in Taybeh, Patr. Beltritti was welcomed by the notables of the village and then led through a procession to the newly built Latin Church. Here, Patr. Beltritti was seated on the porch to watch and listen to the performances of parishioners. Medebielle also recounted the events that followed. The patriarch proceeded to bless the outer walls of the church, cut the ribbon, blessed the inner walls, gave 75 children the sacrament of the First Communion, and then served mass for the very first time in this new church. The event lasted for three hours.

was erected under the guidance of the young, dynamic Italian missionary Silvio Bresolin, who served as Taybeh's parish priest between 1945 and 1975, and blessed by the then Italian Patriarch Giacomo Giuseppe Beltritti (reign: 1970-1987). The major difference between the patriarchal visit of Patriarch Beltritti in 1971 and the visit of Patriarch Emeritus Gregory III Laham in 2017, as described above, is the foreign church hierarchy of the Latins in contrast to the local leadership of the Melkite Greek Catholics.

This foreign influence stems from the mission history of the Latin Church in Palestine in the nineteenth century, a period that is marked by competition between Catholic missions, Russian Orthodox missions and Protestant missions from Europe and the United States of America.⁹² The competition between the Catholics and the Protestants was especially intense. The first Protestant missionaries, Levi Parsons and Pliny Fisk, were sent by the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM) to the Middle East in 1819.⁹³ In Palestine, specifically, the first Protestant missionary was the German converted Jew Joseph Wolff, sent to Jerusalem in 1822 by the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews (LSJ). Scholars agree that the growing increase of Russian influence among the Orthodox, and the growing interest from Protestants – mainly British and German (and later by the Swedish and Dutch)⁹⁴ – was paralleled by a stronger French influence among

⁹² On modern missions in the Middle East, see for example: Heleen Murre-van den Berg, ed., *New Faiths in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Martin Tamcke and Michael Marten, eds., *Christian Witness between Continuity and New Beginnings: Modern Historical Missions in the Middle East* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006); Eleanor H. Tejjirian and Reeva Spector Simon, *Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion: Two Thousand Years of Christian Missions in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁹³ On American Protestant missions to the Middle East, see for example: Adam H. Becker, *Revival and Awakening: American Evangelical Missionaries in Iran and the Origins of Assyrian Nationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Mehmet Ali Doğan and Heather J. Sharkey, eds., *American Missionaries and the Middle East: Foundational Encounters* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2011); Heather Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Abdul Latif Tibawi, *American Interests in Syria, 1800-1901: A Study of Educational, Literary and Religious Work* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966).

⁹⁴ On German missions to the Middle East, see for example: Mitri Raheb, *Das reformatorische Erbe unter den Palaestinensern: Zur Entstehung der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Jordanien*. ('The Christian-Reformed Heritage among the Palestinians. The emergence of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Jordan') (Guetersloh: Guetersloher Verlaghaus, 1990); Nicholas Railton, *No North Sea: The Anglo-German Evangelical Network in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2000). On the Sweden missions to the Middle East, see for example: Ruth Kark, "Sweden and the Holy Land: Pietist and Communal Settlement," *Journal of Historical Geography* 22, no. 1 (1996): 46-67. On Dutch missions to Palestine, see for example: Jacobus F.L. Bastiaanse, *De Jodenzending en de eerste decennia van de Hervormde Raad voor Kerk en Israël: Een generatie in dienst van de Joods-Christelijke toenadering*. ('Mission to the Jews and the First Decennia of the Reformed Council for Church and Israel: A Generation in the Service of a Jewish-Christian Rapprochement') (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1995); Gert J. van Klinken, *Opvattingen in de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland over het Jodendom, 1896-1970*. ('Views on Judaism in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, 1896-1970') (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 1996).

the Catholics, whose influence had previously been impeded due to events that had taken place at home, such as the French Revolution (1789-1799) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815).⁹⁵ Traditionally, France saw itself as the protector of the Catholic interests in the Middle East and as administrators of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem – a position the French had secured since the Capitulations of 1569, the first in a list of allegiances between Paris and Ottoman Istanbul. This made the French the most important ally of the Ottomans, and enabled them to send missionaries to the Middle East. On top of the Catholic competition with Protestant and Russian Orthodox, the Greek Orthodox Church put pressure on the Franciscan custodianship of holy places. The pressure became greater in 1847, when the Silver Star that marks the birthplace of Jesus in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, symbolising the custodianship of the Franciscans, was stolen.⁹⁶

Hence, under those circumstances, the Vatican decided they needed to have a firmer grip in the region. With the diplomatic help of the French, Pope Pius IX (reign: 1846-1878) received permission from the Ottomans to re-establish the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 1847, building on a tradition from the crusaders' time. The Holy See sent a Genoese by the name Giuseppe (Joseph) Valerga (reign: 1847-1872) to become the first Latin patriarch to reside in Jerusalem after a period of more than half a millennium. Before this period, the Franciscans cared for a group of around 4,000 (mainly European) Roman Catholics.⁹⁷ In fact, there was no Roman Catholic pastoral activity in the Palestinian villages at all. Patriarch Valerga was

⁹⁵ Cf. Eleanor H. Tejirian and Reeva Spector Simon, "Missionaries and European Diplomatic Competition," in *Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion. Two Thousand Years of Christian Missions in the Middle East*, edited by Eleanor H. Tejirian and Reeva Spector Simon (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 94-114. For a clear historical account of the emergence of the French allegiance with the Ottoman Empire, see: Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans*, 68-87. The French remained the protectors of the Catholic community in the Middle East till 1905, cf. Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient*, 60-171. More broadly on the French presence in Palestine, see: Mathew Burrows, "'Mission Civilisatrice': French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860-1914," *Historical Journal* 29, no. 1 (1986): 109-35; J.P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). On the French pilgrim movement and the history of the Notre Dame of Jerusalem, see: Dominique Trimbur, "A French Presence in Palestine: Notre-Dame de France," *Bulletin du Centre de Recherche Français de Jérusalem* 3 (1998): 117-40.

⁹⁶ The division of rights over the holy places between the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian Orthodox and the Franciscans was established in a firman of Ottoman Sultan Osman III (1699-1757) in 1757. After the increasing fights and trespassing of priests and monks in the Church of the Nativity, Sultan Abdulmejid I (1823-1861) reaffirmed in a new firman of 1852 that the division should not be changed. This agreement of the Status Quo received international recognition after the treaty of Berlin (1878) and is still in place today.

⁹⁷ Valognes, *Vie et Mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 506. Frantzman and Kark state that there were 4,141 Roman Catholics in the Holy Land in 1847, see: Seth J. Frantzman and Ruth Kark, "The Catholic Church in Palestine/Israel: Real Estate in Terra Sancta," *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 3 (2014): 373.

particularly driven to change this. In the period from 1847 till his death in 1872, Valerga added eight parishes to the nine already existing ones.⁹⁸

One of Patriarch Valerga's missionary expeditions went to Taybeh. He sent German missionary Phillippe Uhlenbrock (1833-1860) in 1859. Uhlenbrock did not stay long in Taybeh, due to his sudden death in 1860 on the road to Jericho when he was only 28 years old. In a short period of time, Patriarch Valerga had to search for a successor and appointed French priest Father Jean Marie Courtais as the next parish priest of Taybeh. Father Jean Morétain (1813-1883), the French missionary especially known for his venture to Beit Jala (1853) and his involvement in the establishment of the Latin Seminary there (inaugurated in 1858), spoke rather negatively about the first years of missions to Taybeh: "It was Mr Louis Courtois who did everything and did everything wrong, so it had to be redone."⁹⁹ Father Morétain referred to the building of the first church (inaugurated in 1865) that went terribly wrong: because of construction mistakes, it had to be rebuilt seven times, and eventually killed Father Courtois in 1866 when the roof collapsed.¹⁰⁰ One should note that, despite the foreign Catholic influence, the people of Taybeh have been active contributors in the mission history of the Latin Church in Palestine. According to Taybeh's oral history, it was the Barakat-family, a Taybeh family of which some members had migrated to Jerusalem, who donated a piece of land in the Old City of Jerusalem for the building of the Latin patriarchate. It is also important to note that a group of Taybeh Christians themselves petitioned the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem to send a priest to the village. It was common in Palestinian culture to marry between first cousins, but the Orthodox forbade these consanguine marriage practices.¹⁰¹ In order to get round the Orthodox restrictions, people from the Massis-clan went to Jerusalem to marry in the newly established Latin Church. The elders of this Massis-clan donated a piece of their land to the Latin Church for the building of a local parish when Phillippe Uhlenbrock came to their village. Similar to what happened with the growth of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church due to a conflict in

⁹⁸ Frantzman & Kark, "The Catholic Church in Palestine/Israel," 381. See also: Pierre Duvignau, *Une Vie au Service de l'Église: S.B. Mgr. Joseph Valerga, Patriarche Latin de Jérusalem 1813-1872*. ('A Life in the Service of the Church: H.B. Joseph Valerga, Patriarch of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, 1813-1872') (Jerusalem: Latin Patriarchate Printing Press, 1972); Pierre Medebielle S.C.J., *The Diocese of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Latin Patriarchate Printing Press, 1963).

⁹⁹ 'Memoires of Father Jean Morétain,' 430. Original quote in French: "C'est Mr Louis Courtois qui a tout fait et tout mal fait, et il a fallu refaire." Thanks to Fr. Aziz Halaweh who gave me permission to make use of his own digital copy of Fr. Jean Morétain's handwritten memoires.

¹⁰⁰ Medebielle, *Ephrem-Taybeh et son Histoire Chrétienne*, 26.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Fr. Constantine Nasr, interview Taybeh, 30 October 2017, 7ff.

the Orthodox Church, it was local circumstances in Taybeh itself that enabled or even nourished the growth of the Latin parish in their village.

After this rather unfortunate start, the history of the Latin parish in Taybeh became brighter. From 2 till 28 January 1889, the celebrated French Catholic priest and hermit Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916) visited Taybeh to search for seclusion and a spiritual connection to God. Later, in 1898, Charles de Foucauld wrote “*Retraite de huit jours à Éphrem*”,¹⁰² contemplating the events in Jesus’ life before his passion in Jerusalem. It is believed that Taybeh is Ephraim from biblical times, where Jesus rested before his passion according to John 11:54 – a matter that will be further discussed in chapter 3. In 1908, the Latin parish was being strengthened by the arrival of a few *Rahbāt al-Wardiyye* (‘Rosary Sisters’),¹⁰³ the first local Arab missionary movement established in 1880 by Bethlehemite nun Marie-Alphonsine Daniel Ghattas (1843-1927) and Father Youssef Tannous (1838-1892) from Nazareth. This newly established order was the first local Arab missionary movement that was staffed by and mainly directed to women, challenging the gender relations of that time.¹⁰⁴

The founding of the Rosary Sisters is an early sign of the process of indigenisation in which the leadership of the Latin Church became nearly fully Arab. This process reached its peak in the 1970s and 1980s. A significant event in the history of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem was the consecration of Patriarch Michel Sabbah (b. 1933) in 1988 as the first Palestinian Latin patriarch of Jerusalem in modern history, followed by Jordanian Patriarch Fouad Twal (b. 1940) who succeeded Sabbah in 2008.¹⁰⁵ These developments also took place in Taybeh,

¹⁰² Charles de Foucauld, *Crier l’Evangile: Retraite à Ephrem (mars 1898) et Election (avril 1900)*. (‘Shouting out the Gospel: Retreat in Ephraim [March 1898] and Election [April 1900]’) (Montrouge: Nouvelle Cité, 2004), 37-158. For an English translation, see: Charles de Foucauld, “Eight days at Ephraim,” in: *Meditations of a Hermit: The Spiritual writings of Charles de Foucauld: A Hermit of the Sahara and Apostle of the Tuaregs*. Trans. by Charlotte Balfour (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1930), 94-129. Charles de Foucauld wrote that he stayed in Taybeh for a retreat “from the Monday after the Third Sunday in Lent till the Monday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent,” which would be from 14 till 21 March 1898. It is doubtful, however, if Charles de Foucauld went to Taybeh the second time in body and mind, or only spiritually while he was staying in his monastery in Nazareth. See: Maurice Bouvier, “Introduction,” in *Crier l’Evangile: Retraite à Ephrem (mars 1898) et Election (avril 1900)*. (Montrouge: Nouvelle Cité, 2004), 10. Maurice Bouvier was postulator of the cause of the beatification of Charles de Foucauld. Pope Benedict XVI beatified Charles de Foucauld on 13 November 2005.

¹⁰³ Medebielle, *Ephrem-Taybeh et son Histoire Chrétienne*, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Willy Jansen, “Arab Women with a Mission: The Sisters of the Rosary,” *Christian Witness Between Continuity and New Beginnings: Modern historical missions in the Middle East*, edited by Martin Tamcke & Michael Marten (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006), 41-61. For other works on the role of women in missions in the Middle East, see: Deanna Ferree Womack, *Protestant, Gender and the Arab Renaissance in Late Ottoman Syria*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Inger Marie Okkenhaug, *The Quality of Heroic Living, of High Endeavor and Adventure: Anglican Mission, Women and Education in Palestine, 1888-1948* (Brill: Leiden, 2002).

¹⁰⁵ Both being established as mission churches, similar appointments took place in Protestant church communities. The Anglican Church was the first church that consecrated their first Palestinian bishop in

where 'Abūnā Johnny Sansour (1946-2021) became the first Palestinian priest to serve in Taybeh from 1975 till 1989 after a long list of twenty other non-Palestinian parish priests.¹⁰⁶ After 'Abūnā Johnny Sansour, all Taybeh's parish priests have been native Palestinians, paralleling the developments in the higher levels of church leadership. Nowadays the parish of Taybeh is completely Arabised, although remnants of its foreign Catholic mission history are still noticeable. As the parish church has been built by Italians, it contains European-style frescos with biblical themes – such as Jesus' Baptism (Matthew 3:13-17), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4-26) and Lazarus being raised from the death (John 11:38-44) – but also images of Saint George and the Archangel Raphael. The frescos feature white, realistic bodies with Jesus depicted as a white, graceful man with long brown hair, following the European artistic tradition. The statue of the Virgin Mary at the left side of the church is a feminine and realistic Mary, wearing a blue dress and a crown and carrying the baby Jesus on her right arm. This theme, the crowning of Mary, also stems from European Mariology. However, the church also contains an icon of Mary as *Theotokos* ('God-Bearer' or 'Mother of God'), a traditional theme from the East. This icon is called *Sayyida 'Īfram* ('Lady of Ephraim') and features the Virgin as a Palestinian woman carrying local symbols such as olive branches and a pomegranate. Pomegranates also appear on the lectern at the front of the church. Lastly, a watchful eye spots the newer saints of the Middle East: a painting of Marie Alphonsine, the founder of the Rosary Sisters, and a small statue of Mar Charbel, the Maronite monk from Lebanon, Youssef Antoun Makhoul (1828-1898). Hence, the church paintings and statues indicate this fusion of an ancient Mariology from the East, European art history and a localised and indigenised Middle Eastern Catholic tradition with its own new saints.

The process of indigenisation went hand-in-hand with a renewed identity of the Latin Church as a socially and politically committed actor. The appointment of Michel Sabbah was a catalyst for this identity of the Latins, as he addressed issues of violence, peace, the status of the land, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

Jerusalem in 1976, the Rev. Fayek Haddad. The Lutherans followed in 1979, when the Rev. Daoud Haddad became the first Palestinian Lutheran bishop in Jerusalem. After these appointments, both Protestant churches have solely had Arab church leadership. Foreign priests are still serving with the Anglicans and Lutherans, but in the role as mission partners.

¹⁰⁶ Fr. Johnny Sansour opened a new Latin Patriarchate School in Taybeh in 1978, inaugurated a memorial for Charles de Foucauld in 1982 (on the place of the house and primitive chapel of De Foucauld), and opened the Charles de Foucauld pilgrim's centre in 1986.

Furthermore, in Israel, Palestine and Jordan together, there are 12 Catholic hospitals, 12 charitable organisations, eight houses for the elderly and 41 schools. The Catholic presence also left a rich legacy of higher educational institutes, of which the most significant are *École Biblique et Archéologique Française* (1890) of the Dominicans, *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* (1924) of the Franciscans, the Pontifical Biblical Institute (1927) as a branch of the PBI in Rome, Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Studies (1964) established by Pope Paul VI (reign: 1963-1978) after his pilgrimage in the Holy Land, and lastly, Bethlehem University (1973), also established by Pope Paul VI and run by by the De La Salle Christian Brothers.

In the village of Taybeh, 'Abūnā Johnny, who served as parish priest of the Latin community from August 2015 till August 2021, also embodies this identity of a socially and politically committed Latin.¹⁰⁷ Born as a Jerusalemite and being brought up in this politically tense city, he remembers well the stories of his mother recounting displacement and the unfair loss of her parental house to Jewish immigrants in the neighbourhood of Talpiot.¹⁰⁸ Hence, it was no surprise that his political feelings flared up when American President Donald Trump announced his decision to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on 6 December 2017, declaring Jerusalem 'the eternal capital of Israel'. About a week later, on 14 December 2017, the Latin parish organised the yearly Christmas tree lighting ceremony as the start of the Christmas activities for the month of December.¹⁰⁹ The song that opened the ceremony was no Christmas classic like 'Silent Night', but Fairuz' well-known song on Jerusalem (1967) "It is for you O city of the prayer that I pray, It is for you O splendid home, O Flower of the cities, O Jerusalem O Jerusalem O Jerusalem, O city of the prayer, Our eyes are set out to you every day."¹¹⁰ Later

¹⁰⁷ Fr. Bashar Fawadleh (b. 1987) succeeded Fr. Johnny Abu Khalil as Taybeh's parish priest in August 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Field note entry by Elizabeth Martejijn, Taybeh, 20 February 2017.

¹⁰⁹ Field note entry by Elizabeth Martejijn, Taybeh, 25 December 2017. I have earlier reported Palestinian Christmas 2017, see: Elizabeth Martejijn, "A Palestinian Christmas," *Weblog of the Christian-Muslim Studies Network*, University of Edinburgh, <<https://christianmuslim.div.ed.ac.uk/portfolio-item/christmas-in-palestine/>> [accessed 13 July 2021]. Christmas 2017 was not solely a religious spiritual celebration, but became a platform where Palestinian Christians distanced themselves from Trump's political Christianity and affirmed their unity with the Palestinian cause. Throughout various Christian places in Palestine, the people switched off the Christmas lights to affirm the abnormality of the situation. During the day of Christmas Eve in Bethlehem, the streets around Manger Square in Bethlehem were full of banners stating "*Al-Quds 'āšimat Filasṭīn*" ('Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine') and people handed out political leaflets supporting a Palestinian Jerusalem. Traditionally, choirs from all over the world come to Bethlehem to sing during the festivities on Manger Square; but in 2017 the choirs were cancelled in order to keep the festivities minimal. This was in congruence with the policy of the Palestinian government who had announced a period of mourning the day after Trump's announcement on 6 December 2017: schools, universities, shops and government buildings were all to be closed.

¹¹⁰ For an analysis of how Palestinian Christians employ the medium of (Christmas) music to express resistance to a world audience and mobilise support for their cause, see: Jennifer Sinnamon, "Palestinian Christmas Songs

that night, both Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah and 'Abūnā Johnny delivered incandescent speeches about the status of Jerusalem, and the parade of Taybeh's scouts included banners with the slogan "*Al-quds 'āṣimat Filasṭīn*" ('Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine'). During the dedication ceremony of the American Embassy in Jerusalem on 14 May 2018, 'abūnā Johnny rang the death bell of the Latin bell tower, symbolising the Palestinian loss and mourning for their beloved city, and placed a video of this moment on his own personal social media accounts. Hence, in the case of the Latin community of Palestine, it is through this process of indigenisation that the identity and policy of the church has been led by native Palestinian leaders themselves, such as Patriarch Michel Sabbah in the centre, and parish priests like 'Abūnā Johnny in the villages.

Moreover, at the same time as this process of indigenisation occurred, the Catholic Church became more diverse. Within the jurisdiction of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, a Hebrew Catholic *kehilla* ('community' in Hebrew) emerged, also known as *Oeuvre de Saint Jacques l'Apôtre* ('Association of St. James').¹¹¹ In 1955, the Latin Patriarch Alberto Gori (reign: 1949-1970) approved the Hebrew Catholics as a distinct community, and they became a vicariate in 1990. From the 1970s onwards, the Latin Church also saw an increase in the arrival of European monastic traditions settling in the Holy Land. Some of these traditions reached Taybeh as well. The French nuns of the *Soeurs de la Sainte Croix de Jérusalem* ('Sisters of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem') started working in Taybeh from 1998 onwards, taking care of the pilgrims' house and providing French classes at the Latin Patriarchate School. In March 2009, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem invited the *Domus Juventutis – Piccoli Fratelli dell'Accoglienza* ('House of the Youth – Little Brothers of Hospitality'), a monastic order in the spiritual tradition of Charles de Foucauld. Two representatives of this order, a Columbian priest and an Italian priest, live for part of the year in Taybeh. Most recently, in 2017, the *Soeurs de Bethléem* ('Sisters of Bethlehem') (Full name *Famille Monastique de Bethléem, de l'Assumption de la Vierge et de saint Bruno*, ['Sisters of the Monastic Family of

for Peace and Justice in Sacred Place and Politicized Space," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities*, edited by Jonathan Dueck & Suzel Ana Reily (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 555-80.

¹¹¹ See: David Neuhaus, "Catholic-Jewish Relations in the State of Israel: Theological Perspectives," in *The Catholic Church in the Contemporary Middle East*, edited by Anthony O'Mahony & John Flannery (London: Melisende UK Ltd, 2010), 237-51. Dominican priest Bruno Hassar (1911-1996), who founded the Jewish-Arab community Neve Shalom (or in Arabic *Wāḥat al-Salām*, 'Oase of Peace') of 1970, is a known example of one of these Hebrew Catholics.

Bethlehem, and of the Assumption of the Virgin, and of Saint Bruno’]) settled as the third monastic order in this village. The newest development in this process of diversification is the arrival of African and Asian immigrants in Israel, including a significant group of (Catholic) Filipino workers, as well as the emergence of Latin American renewal movements who have expanded the scope of their work into the Holy Land. The Brazilian order *Filhos de Maria* (‘Children of Mary’) worked in Taybeh’s home for the elderly from 2012 till 2020, being succeeded by two Argentinian nuns of the *Instituto del Verbo Encarnado* (‘Religious Family of the Incarnate Word’). Taybeh is but a small part of this diverse and socially involved Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

To sum up, Roman Catholicism in Palestine has grown from a small group of 4,000 in the time when Patriarch Valerga arrived in Jerusalem, to a community of 150,000 members in Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Cyprus that all belong to the patriarchal diocese of Jerusalem.¹¹² Since November 2020, the church has been led by the Italian Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa (b. 1965),¹¹³ guiding 76 parishes, 120 priests and 122 religious communities (including ecclesial movements as well as monastic communities).¹¹⁴ From a mission church, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem has developed into a largely indigenised Catholic church consisting of members from diverse backgrounds. What is so special about the Jerusalemite Patriarchate, compared to other Roman Catholics around the world, is its care for a large number of international pilgrims. Although Taybeh is considered to be the Ephraim of biblical times, the parishioners from Taybeh mainly meet those international pilgrims in Jerusalem, where they attend major Christian celebrations in

¹¹² The British 1922 census of Palestine showed that the small community of 4,000 members had grown to 14,245 and in 1931 nearly quintupled to 18,895. In both 1922 and 1931, Roman Catholics made up 39% of the total Christian population in Palestine. See: J.B. Barron, “Table XII: Christian Population of Palestine Showing Members of Different Churches,” in: *Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1922* (Jerusalem: Greek Convent Press, 1922), 43; E. Mills, “Subsidiary table no V: Christian Population by Churches,” in: *Census of Palestine 1931 Vol. 1* (Jerusalem: Government of Palestine, 1933), 98.

¹¹³ H.E. Pierbattista Pizzaballa follows after a list of nine patriarchs after the re-establishment of 1847: Josph Valerga (reign: 1947-1872), Giovanni Vincenzo Bracco (reign: 1872-1889), Luigi Piavi (reign: 1889-1905), Filippo Camassei (reign: 1906-1919), Luigi Barlassina (reign: 1920-1947), Alberto Gori (reign: 1949-1970), Giacomo Giuseppe Beltritti (reign: 1970-1987), Michel Sabbah (reign: 1987-2008), Fouad Twal (reign: 2008-2016). Between 2016 and 2020, Pierbattista Pizzaballa served as apostolic administrator *sede vacante*, before being inaugurated as Latin patriarch on 6 November 2020 by Pope Francis. Pizzaballa’s appointment breaks the development of an indigenised Arab leadership slightly. However, during his instalment three out of the five patriarchal vicars are Arab, as well as the vast majority of priests. For an overview of the development of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem since 1847: O’Mahony, “The Latins of the East,” 90-114.

¹¹⁴ For statistics on the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, see: <<https://www.lpj.org>> [accessed 16 May 2019]. There are 76 parishes, of which two are in Jerusalem, one in Gaza, 13 in the West Bank, 21 in Israel (15 of the Arab-speaking community and six of the Hebrew-speaking community), 33 in Jordan and six in Cyprus. Monastic traditions as listed on: <http://catholicchurch-holyland.com/?page_id=727> [accessed 20 July 2020]. These 122 monastic traditions have a total number of 1,787 members dispersed over 340 different houses and monasteries.

large churches led by a joint delegation of Latin Patriarchate priests and international Franciscan friars. Those trips are usually taken in groups in big buses, organised by 'Abūnā Johnny and the Rosary Sisters from the parish. Those pilgrimages to Jerusalem during Holy Week are the heart of Palestinian Christian spirituality.¹¹⁵ However, the community also attends the celebrations of *Sabt al-Nūr* ('Light Saturday'), the Greek Orthodox feast of Holy Fire, taking this Holy Fire with them to their houses and parishes to light the Paschal candle, as well as partaking in traditional Arab Christian Easter customs like colouring Easter eggs, eating *m'amūl* (a delicacy made of wheat flour and semolina, filled with a mixture of dates) and visiting the graves of deceased loved ones on Good Friday. Accordingly, the Latin community of Taybeh stands with one foot in this vibrant form of global Catholicism, while simultaneously remaining firmly rooted in their Eastern Christian heritage. So, Catholicism in Palestine has not only been indigenised in its leadership, but also in its customs and traditions. Yet again, the religious elements of identity have intertwined with national elements, forming an intrinsic part of both the world church as well as the Palestinian society.

Conclusion

This chapter has established the interconnectedness between both religious and national elements of Palestinian Christian identity, arguing that Palestinian Christian identity should be understood in this organic way. Religious and national identities are intertwined – it is incorrect to elevate the one above the other. This has been shown on two levels: on the level of the village and of the churches.

Firstly, as a village, Taybeh is profoundly Christian and this is widely displayed. The recent erection of the statues 'Jesus of Ephraim' and 'Virgin of Peace' emphasises the Christian character of Taybeh, as does the prominence of the bell towers of the churches, the rather modern dress and the values regarding marriage – not to speak about the many visible Christian symbols like images of saints engraved above doors, religious posters in shops, rosaries as necklaces or crosses hanging from the rear-view mirror in cars. At the same time, Taybeh is inherently Palestinian in its customs and traditions. Its farming techniques, architecture and

¹¹⁵ Field note entry by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Taybeh, 8 April 2018. For a more elaborate description of Holy Week in Taybeh, see: Elizabeth Marteiijn, "Celebrating Easter Twice: Holy Week in a Palestinian Village," *Catholics & Cultures*, College of the Holy Cross, <<https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/palestinian-territories-christian-village-celebrates-easter-twice>> [accessed 5 October 2020].

social composition are identical to Taybeh's surrounding Muslim villages. That is to say, Taybeh's techniques of olive farming, the living conditions of the *ḥūsh* and *dār*, as well as the social and spatial organisation of the *ḥāmūla*, are no different from those in neighbouring villages Deir Jarir, Ramun, Kufr Malik, Silwad, Deir Dubwan or other villages in the Ramallah-area. On top of that, radical change and political complexities situate Taybeh in the common Palestinian discourse of conflict and occupation. To sum up, Taybeh is a mixture of both religious and national components. This chapter has demonstrated that Taybeh is not 'one' or the 'other', but both distinctly Christian and Palestinian.

Secondly, the mission history of Taybeh's churches is another case where Christianity and Palestinian identity have blurred. For each of the three church communities, these histories unfolded in a different way. Having long dealt with foreign interference in their churches, predominantly by the Greek and Russian Orthodox, as well as Ottoman, British and Jewish dominance on the national level, the urban and middle-class Orthodox community developed an Arab Orthodox Movement with nationalist tendencies in the early twentieth century in order to underline their identity that is both Orthodox and Palestinian. In congruence with this politicised movement, the villagers of Taybeh emphasise their Orthodox church as an 'independent church', emphasising their autonomy as a village parish with its own priesthood families representing each of the two *ḥāmāyil* of Taybeh, signifying the Palestinian character of the church community. As a church congregation which originated in the Middle East itself, the Melkite Greek Catholic community prides itself as an indigenous Arab and Palestinian Church. Under the leadership of Arab clerics like Patriarch Maximos V Hakim and Patriarch Gregory III Laham in Damascus, Bishop Gabriel Abu-Saada and Bishop Hilarion Capucci in Jerusalem, as well as Bishop Joseph Raya and Bishop Elias Chacour in Haifa, the Melkite Greek Catholics have repeatedly spoken up politically for the fate of the Palestinian people. Lastly, the Roman Catholic (Latin) community underwent a process of indigenisation in order to become Palestinian, being initially established as a mission church by European missionaries, notably by the Italians and the French. This process reached its peak in the 1970s and 1980s and went hand-in-hand with a renewed identity as a socially and politically committed actor. Nowadays, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem embodies Palestinian parishes in Palestine, Israel, Jordan and Cyprus, as well as hospitals, schools, houses for the elderly, and charitable organisations.

Although each does so in its own way – either through nationalism, independence, the formation of an Arab church or indigenisation – all three of these histories of Taybeh’s churches show that foreign missionary influence did not alienate Palestinian Christians from who they were before the arrival of missionaries. Palestinian Christianity remains an amalgam of ancient Eastern Christian traditions with a series of missionary incursions from other parts of the Mediterranean world. To indicate their special place among the broader church, Palestinian Christians refer to themselves as the *’Umm al-Kanā’is*, emphasising the biblical heritage and descent from the first and original church. As the cradle of Christianity, foreign missionaries preached to already existing Christian churches. While most mission history deals with the interface between modern Catholic or Protestant missions and other religious traditions, the mission history in Taybeh is about the interface between a survival of primitive Eastern Christianity and later Christian traditions, whether Greek, Russian, Italian and French (and in other parts of Palestine also with German, British and North American Protestants). The arrival of Russian Orthodox, Melkite Greek Catholic or Roman Catholic missionaries should, therefore, be seen as a ‘re-translation’ or ‘re-interpretation’ of an older pre-existing identity instead. It does suggest an inculturation process that spans not simply cultural and geographical distance, but historical distance as well.

What is more, neither should the mixture of being Christian and Palestinian be seen as a new identity that originated with the rise of Palestinian national identity. The matter should rather be approached as a reinvention of Taybeh’s Christian past, where the ruins and remnants are continuously rebuilt, reshaped and remembered in a relevant Christian future. The Eastern Orthodox community in Taybeh prays between Byzantine mosaics and columns that remind them of being *Rūm*, descending from the first Christians of the Roman Empire. The same applies to the Melkite Greek Catholics, who call themselves *al-Rūm al-Kāthūlīk* or ‘Melkite’, terms which refer to the community following the Byzantine emperor as well. Despite being the newest church of the three, the Latins are still firmly rooted in their ancient heritage, conducting pilgrimage to places whose history goes back to the first centuries. As Palestinians saw life changing, this ancient history became more important to them than ever before. In the following chapters, this idea will be further crystallised.

2

The New Face of Palestinian Christianity

Taybeh, 1 September 2017

In a bright and spacious office overlooking the hill of *al-Madīnat al-Qadīma* and surrounded by the many olive trees of Taybeh, I found Latin Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah sitting behind his large, dark wooden desk with matching bookcase. We had scheduled a meeting to speak about his rich life and influential work. The patriarch emeritus preferred not to receive people in his office in Taybeh very often; 84 years old at that time, Sabbah was still active but had slowed down. Thursday till Saturday every week, Michel Sabbah stayed in Beit Afram, a home for the elderly that was established by the Patriarchate in Taybeh in 2005.

During my fieldwork, I had the privilege of meeting Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah twice in his home office in Beit Afram, and I casually met him on several other occasions in the village. Sabbah's room in Beit Afram was sober and practical. One of the only decorations I noticed was a framed photo right next to his desk depicting Pope John Paul II's (reign: 1978-2005) jubilee pilgrimage to Israel and the Palestinian Territories in 2000. The photo has the Pope in the centre, with Patriarch Michel Sabbah at his left-hand, surrounded by the other patriarchs and heads of the Catholic churches in Jerusalem. During our conversation, Sabbah explained: "Before I became patriarch, I was not much involved in the political situation (...) but by becoming patriarch, I felt a responsibility of making peace for my community." When he assumed his post as patriarch, the First *Intifāḍa* had just started. Sabbah continued: "The First *Intifāḍa* was for me an important moment. One's spiritual life and one's human life are deepened in times of difficulty (...) The first three years were fundamental for forming my personality."

Sabbah's theology is, therefore, strongly influenced by his experiences during the First *Intifāda*. Sabbah summarised his theology with the following words: "I believe in God. Human beings are created in the image of God. We all have the same dignity: Palestinians, Jews, Muslims, Christians are all equally an image of God. That is my basic theology." Sabbah underlined that God is the Creator of all human beings, and God is a God that loves all people. The war that Palestinians find themselves in is therefore human-made and can never be of God. God is only perceived differently by those who are the oppressor and create a situation of violence and war (Israeli Jews), and those who are the oppressed and suffer at their hands (Palestinians). Sabbah elaborated on this and added: "The key of interpretation of biblical texts for me is God himself. And God is love. God is not a God of war, but God is a God of loving all people." Sabbah continued stating that his basic conviction is that "only peaceful resistance will make Palestinians more powerful than Israel and America," which he bases on the teaching of Jesus himself. In short, Sabbah urges Palestinians to meet hatred with love.

During the interview, Sabbah applied this idea to the concepts of Holy Land and the chosen people, which he both interpreted through his hermeneutical understanding of God as love and Jesus as peace. The Holy Land should be a place to love one another, Sabbah said, and people should behave like God in the Land. The same applies to the chosen people of God, the Jews, whose obligation it is to be like God and love Palestinians instead of making war with them. The patriarch emeritus ended our conversation by stating that Western politics has done much damage to the situation and should stop creating confusion and destruction.

When I left Sabbah's office after the interview, descending again in the elevator, I pondered the importance of Michel Sabbah for the Palestinian Christian community. Being the first Arab patriarch of Jerusalem in modern history, Sabbah changed the course of the Palestinian Latin community, whose church leadership is now more indigenised and socially and politically engaged than ever before. For instance, Michel Sabbah was one of the main authors of the *Kairos Palestine Document* (2009). He was also a unifier, being largely responsible for the initiative of the joint statements of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches of Jerusalem and being the first President of the *Assemblée des Ordinaires Catholiques de Terre Sainte* (ACOTS), a meeting place for all Eastern and Western Catholic churches in the Holy Land. He presided over the *Conférence des Evêques Latins dans les*

Régions Arabes (CELRA), over Pax Christi International from 1999 till 2007, as well as being a participant in other significant councils, organisations and initiatives. The development of church indigenisation, in which Sabbah has taken a leading role, as well as his political and theological outspokenness on topics like justice, peace and occupation, paved the way for a specific Palestinian theological thought, as well as public responsibility that would be visible among both the clergy and laypeople. This revival of Palestinian Christianity will be the topic of this chapter.

Palestinian Christians as Social and Political Actors

Only a few can come close in importance to the figure of Michel Sabbah for Palestinian Christianity. His teachings, church initiatives and leadership have changed not only his own community, the Palestinian Roman Catholics, but have left their mark on the whole Palestinian Christian community. Michel Sabbah was born on 19 March 1933 in Nazareth. In 1943, at the age of 10, Michel Sabbah joined the Minor Seminary of the Latin Patriarchate in Beit Jala. From 1948, he continued his religious studies and proceeded to the Major Seminary. His ordination as Roman Catholic priest followed on 28 June 1955, when Sabbah was just 22 years old. He was ordained by the then Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Alberto Gori, in the Salesian Church in his birthplace of Nazareth. Sabbah's clerical duties led him to serve and teach in Madaba and Amman in Jordan, Djibouti City in the Republic of Djibouti, as well as in the centres of Palestinian Christianity: first in Bethlehem and then in Jerusalem. As a young priest, Sabbah continued his academic studies in Arabic language at the Jesuit University in Beirut and eventually defended his doctoral thesis in Arabic philology at the Sorbonne University in Paris in 1971. From 1980 till 1987, Sabbah was President of Bethlehem University. On 11 December 1987 – when the First *Intifāḍa* had started just several days earlier – Michel Sabbah was called to his main labour in life and appointed Latin patriarch of Jerusalem. His appointment was publicly announced on Vatican Radio two and a half weeks later on 28 December. Then, on 6 January 1988, the Feast of Epiphany, Pope John Paul II consecrated Michel Sabbah in Rome as the first Palestinian Roman Catholic

patriarch of Jerusalem in modern history.¹ For a period of two decades, from 1988 till 2008, Sabbah led the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem through times of great difficulty, including two *Intifādāt* and the promise and failure of the Oslo Agreements (1993-2000).

The way Michel Sabbah communicated his theology to his parishioners was through sermons, prayers, and in a more elaborate format through the issuing of pastoral letters, often between ten and thirty pages long. Just months after Michel Sabbah assumed his post as Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, he released his first pastoral letter on 15 August 1988, in which he encouraged the reader to “proclaim the message of the faith according to God’s Will: to carry out our mission means to serve Him and our fellow-men.”² Sabbah invited the Palestinian Christians to walk in faith, which is God’s greatest gift to humanity. The patriarch acknowledged that the Christians in the Holy Land together are just a “little flock” having a hard life, and that walking hand in hand with Christ is a road “through the narrow gate” (Matthew 7:13). Yet, Christians should trust in Christ who will be with them. “Let him rather listen to Christ who says ‘Have no fear, little flock ... you are the salt of the earth’. Faith, like a small seed, has to grow and will grow, not necessarily in numbers, but in making the believer himself, even if he belongs to a minority, strong and courageous.”³ Being

¹ This was a significant event in the recent history of the Palestinian Church, highlighting the indigenisation of religious leadership in the 1970s and 1980s. As mission churches were established, the Protestant and Catholic churches have long had foreign church leaders in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The Anglican Church was the first church to consecrate a Palestinian bishop in Jerusalem in 1976, Rev. Fayek Haddad. The Lutherans followed in 1979, when Rev. Daoud Haddad became the first Palestinian Lutheran bishop in Jerusalem. Similar appointments took place in the Melkite Greek Catholic Church: Patriarchal Vicar of Jerusalem Gabriel Abu-Saada (appointed in 1948) and Archbishop of Acre, Haifa, Nazareth and All Galilee Elias Chacour (appointed in 2006). Theodosios Hanna became Greek Orthodox archbishop of Sebastia in 2005.

² Sabbah, *First Pastoral Letter “Our Faith in the Holy Land,”* Jerusalem, 15 August 1988, §5, <<https://www.lpj.org/first-pastoral-letter-of-patriarch-michel-sabbah/>> [accessed 28 October 2021]. In total Michel Sabbah wrote eight pastoral letters between 1988 and 2008. See also: Michel Sabbah, *Second Pastoral Letter “On the Feast of Pentecost 1990,”* Jerusalem, 3 June 1990, <https://www.lpj.org/cached_uploads/view/2020/07/24/2nd-pastoral-letter-of-michel-sabbah-1595580412.pdf>; Michel Sabbah, *Third Pastoral Letter, “On the Occasion of the Centennial of the Death of Father Joseph Tannous, Co-founder of the Congregation of the Rosary Sisters,”* Jerusalem, 15 August 1992, <https://www.lpj.org/cached_uploads/view/2020/05/08/3rd-pastoral-letter-of-michel-sabbah-1588928121.pdf>; Michel Sabbah, *Fourth Pastoral Letter “Reading the Bible in the Land of the Bible,”* Jerusalem, 1 November 1993, <https://www.lpj.org/cached_uploads/view/2020/05/08/4th-pastoral-letter-of-michel-sabbah-1588926825.pdf>; Michel Sabbah, *Fifth Pastoral Letter “Preparations for the Jubilee Year 2000,”* Jerusalem, 15 August 1997, <https://www.lpj.org/cached_uploads/view/2020/05/08/5th-pastoral-letter-of-michel-sabbah-1588927397.pdf>; Michel Sabbah, *Sixth Pastoral Letter “Questions and Answers on Justice and Peace in our Holy Land,”* Jerusalem, 15 September 1998, <https://www.lpj.org/cached_uploads/view/2020/05/08/sixth-pastoral-letter-michel-sabbah-of-1588927781.pdf>; Michel Sabbah, *Eighth Pastoral Letter “The Time of my Departure has Come,”* Jerusalem, 1 March 2008, <https://www.lpj.org/cached_uploads/view/2020/05/08/8th-pastoral-letter-of-michel-sabbah-1588927398.pdf> [all of the above mentioned sources are last accessed on 28 October 2021]. The seventh pastoral letter is missing from this list, since it is not available through the online sources of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. For more on Michel Sabbah’s life and work, see: Michel Sabbah, *Faithful Witness: On Reconciliation and Peace in the Holy Land.* Ed. by Drew Christiansen S.J. and Saliba Sarsar (Hyde Park: New York City Press, 2009). See also the film: Lily Habash and Mohammed Alatar (2020) *The People’s Patriarch: Reflections with the Patriarch.*

³ Sabbah, *First Pastoral Letter “Our Faith in the Holy Land,”* § 44.

attentive to the divine mystery and the struggle of the parishioners, Sabbah inspired the Christians to bear witness to serve the church, and to fulfil their part in society with the gifts and resources they have received from God himself. He wrote: “When the believer accomplishes his part of the service, and sees himself as a useful member of and for society, he remains there and feels at home there and is happy about the service he gives; society itself acknowledges him, and this acceptance is a source of stability and courage.”⁴

Hence, Michel Sabbah has theologically reflected on topics that are socially and politically significant for Palestinian Christians, such as violence, peace, justice, the place of Jerusalem, inclusivity, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. For example, in the fourth pastoral letter Sabbah studied the role of the Bible, the stories of violence that are attributed to God in the Bible, and lastly the relationship between ancient biblical history and our contemporary history, especially the influence the gift of the land, the election and the covenant have on relations between Palestinians and Israelis.⁵ He did not only relate his theological thought to his context, but also acted on it. In his Christmas Message in 2001, Sabbah also called on political leaders to have “visions of justice and have the courage to realize peace,” and to his own people, he declared, “the olive branch is the most efficient weapon in the hand of the Palestinian.”⁶ Referring to the daily struggles and violence during the Second *Intifāḍa*, Sabbah wished the people a “Merry and Holy Christmas, Christmas of hope, joy, justice, and peace.”⁷ Repeatedly, Sabbah stressed the need for peaceful resistance. Michel Sabbah’s life and thought model a specific Palestinian theological theme that I call ‘the revival of Palestinian Christianity’:⁸ a spiritual, societal and political awakening of the Palestinian Church that started in the 1970s, by which the

⁴ Sabbah, *First Pastoral Letter “Our Faith in the Holy Land,”* § 45.

⁵ Sabbah, *Fourth Pastoral Letter “Reading the Bible in the Land of the Bible.”*

⁶ Michel Sabbah, “Christmas Message 2001,” in *Faithful Witness: On Reconciliation and Peace in the Holy Land*. Ed. by Drew Christiansen S.J. and Saliba Sarsar (Hyde Park: New York City Press, 2009), 62. The homily is traditionally attended by political leaders, among who the Palestinian President, which was Yasser Arafat in 2001. The mass is also live broadcasted on Palestinian national television. The year 2001 was during of the Second *Intifāḍa* and not long before the Siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem from 4 April till 10 May 2002.

⁷ Idem.

⁸ Scholars of Coptic Christianity have earlier employed the theme of revival, see for example: Magdi Guirguis and Nelly van Doorn-Harder, *The Emergence of the Modern Coptic Papacy* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2011); Metropolitan Bishoy, “Revival of the Egyptian Church since the Middle of the Nineteenth Century,” in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, edited by Habib Badr (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 775-96; S.S. Hassan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Otto Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Civilization* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2002); Pieternella van-Doorn Harder, *Contemporary Coptic Nuns* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995).

local church developed from a rather conservative institute to an important factor for social and political change. This revival involved an increase in theological output of Palestinian indigenous church leaders, in conjunction with societal engagement and political outspokenness. This revival is an illustration of a wider and more gradual social and political engagement, in which we find Palestinian Christians contributing to society in the spheres of politics, the arts, and social welfare. Where the previous chapter explored the entanglement of both the religious Christian identity and the national Palestinian identity, this chapter looks at the implications of this circumstance, particularly how this made Palestinian Christians relate to the broader society.

It is important to place this development of revival in the broader history of the Middle East and learn that the Middle Eastern Christian contribution to society is not a new phenomenon.⁹ In the times of both the Umayyad Caliphate (662-750) and the subsequent Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258), the period of history that has been dubbed as the 'Islamic Golden Age', Middle Eastern Christians have played prominent roles. It should be pointed out that, while Muslims were the rulers, Christians were still the majority in the Middle East during most of this period. During the Umayyad Caliphate, Christians held high positions in the empire and were employed as scribes and clerks.¹⁰ For example, the Melkite ('Chalcedonian Orthodox') Christian family Manṣūr were high members in the caliph's court in Damascus for several generations. A prominent member of this family was Yūḥannā ibn Sarjūn ibn Manṣūr, who we now know as the monk, priest and writer Saint John of Damascus (c. 675-749). The contribution of Christians during the Abbasid Caliphate was primarily in the Graeco-Arabic translation movement, as Christian scholars mastered Greek, Syriac, and Arabic.¹¹ The most famous example here is the ninth-century Nestorian ('Church of the East') Christian Ḥunayn ibn 'Ishāq (808-873), who translated Galen's medical treatises, works of Plato, Aristotle and

⁹ Other researchers have previously raised awareness of the contribution of Middle Eastern Christians throughout history: Carsten Walbinder, "The Contribution of Indigenous Christians to Middle Eastern Culture," in *The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East*, edited by Mitri Raheb and Mark A. Lamport (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 436-48; Issa Diab, "A Place to Call Home: Middle Eastern Christian Experience on the Intersection of Two Allegiances," in *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging*, edited by Mohammed Girma and Cristian Romocea (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017), 83-102.

¹⁰ See, for example: Antoine Borrut and Fred M. Donner, eds., *Christians and others in the Umayyad State* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2016).

¹¹ Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998).

Hippocrates, as well as other Greek philosophical texts. Christians were not mere translators, but produced scholarly work themselves too. The leading scholar of tenth-century Baghdad, the capital of most of the Abbasid era, was Jacobite ('Syriac') Christian Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (893-974), whose philosophical work sought to cultivate a sense of humanity that transcends religious convictions.¹² Other prominent Christian scholars were Theophilus of Edessa (695-785), Theodore Abū Qurrah (750-820), and Quṣṭā ibn Lūqā of Baalbek (820-912), among many others. In short, Christians made a very large contribution to the creation and blossoming of Islamic civilisation.

The next period that parallels such a major contribution by Arab Christians to Middle Eastern history is the Arab Renaissance, commonly known in Arabic as the *Naḥḍa* ('awakening' or 'renaissance'): the cultural movement in the nineteenth and twentieth century in Egypt and the Levant.¹³ After a long period of cultural stagnation, the nineteenth century provided new opportunities for Arab Christians to rise out of their position of marginality and actively participate in society again. These opportunities were created as a result of the *tanẓīmāt* (Ottoman's modernising reforms), as well as developments brought externally via European and American missionary and educational delegates, through which Arab Christians made their acquaintance with Western ideas and technologies. The establishment of the Maronite College in Rome in 1584 was an influential step towards this renewal of Middle Eastern Christianity, bringing back highly educated and influential Maronite clergy, among them bishops and patriarchs. Eastern Christians were at the forefront of establishing national schools, such as the famous 'Ayn Warāqa School founded by the Maronites in 1789. Another category of education is the religious mission schools, established by Catholic and Protestant missionaries – of which the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut (founded in 1866 by American Protestants, since 1920 known as American University of Beirut) and Saint Joseph University in Beirut (founded in 1875 by Jesuit missionaries) have been the most prominent.

¹² Cf. Sidney Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 125.

¹³ Most of the literature on the *Naḥḍa* is written in Arabic, but two classic studies that have appeared in English are: Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*; Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 [1962]). See also in French: Samir Khalil Samir, *Rôle Culturel des Chrétiens dans le Monde Arabe* ('Cultural Role of Christians in the Arab world') (Beirut, CEDRAC, 2005). For a relatively recent reflection on the *Naḥḍa*, see: Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, *Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Naḥḍa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Middle Eastern Christians contributed not only to the educational revival; another major contribution of Christians was the establishment of national and foreign printing presses, of which the most noteworthy are: the Bulaq Press that Napoleon Bonaparte left after his demise in 1820, the American Press brought by American missionaries to Malta in 1822 and later moved to Beirut in 1834, and the *Imprimerie Catholique* established by Jesuit missionaries in Beirut in 1844.¹⁴ Syrian and Lebanese Christians were leaders in the press, particularly in Cairo, Alexandria and Beirut, and established many periodicals and newspapers. For example, Christians founded leading newspapers such as Al-Ahram (founded: 1875) in Egypt and An-Nahar (founded: 1933) in Lebanon.¹⁵ Christians were also leading figures in literary renewal, such as Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883), a Maronite convert to Protestantism and alumnus of the 'Ayn Waraqa School, who is known for the two famous dictionaries he wrote, and for his share in the translation of the Arabic Van-Dyke Bible. Also worth mentioning are Melkite Greek Catholic father and son Nasif Al-Yaziji (1800-1871) and Ibrahim Al-Yaziji (1847-1906), who are both known for their translations of the Old Testament and for their own writings. Furthermore, Christians played a pioneering role in Arab national thought and advocated secularism for Arab countries. From these intellectual discussions Arabism arose, the idea that being Arab is not based on religion, but on a common language, land and history, and, consequently, the call for independence for the Arab countries. Furthermore, Christians were political leaders, such as Antoun Saadeh (1904-1949), an Orthodox Christian from Lebanon and the founder of the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party, and Michel Aflaq (1910-1989), an Orthodox Christian from Syria and the founder of Ba'ath Party that seized power in Syria and Iraq. To recap, Christians contributed significantly to the *Nahda* in different aspects of life, but as we have seen, most notably in the field of education, literature, the printing press, journalism and in nationalist thought.

Ultimately, how we describe the position of Palestinian Christians in society comes down to how we interpret the contemporary history of Middle Eastern Christianity. There are three approaches regarding this matter. In the 1990s,

¹⁴ Listed by Jérôme Chahīne, "Christians and the Arab Renaissance," in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, edited by Habib Badr (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 802. See also: Ami Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016):

¹⁵ The two Lebanese Maronite brothers Salim and Bishara Takla founded the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram. Greek Orthodox Christian Gebran Tueni from Lebanon itself founded the Lebanese newspaper An-Nahar.

historians and Middle East experts were preoccupied with the question whether Christians from the Middle East would disappear; as Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues asked in 1992: “Will there be decline or total eclipse?”¹⁶ The statistics from the *World Christian Database* indicated this decline: in 1900 Christians in the Middle East constituted 12.7% of the population, but in 2020 this was 4.2%, and by 2050 Christians are likely to constitute 3.7% of the population.¹⁷ Based on this numerical decline, other authors of prominent books on Christianity in the Middle East chose the same approach of extinction. English Anglican bishop and scholar Kenneth Cragg, in his classic *The Arab Christian* (1991), observed “a degree of museumization” in the context of Palestinian Christians.¹⁸ The same rhetoric is used by French historian Jean-Pierre Valognes who opened his own classic *Vie et mort des chrétiens d’Orient* (1994) with the alarming message: “les chrétiens d’Orient sont en train de mourir”¹⁹, ‘Christians in the Middle East are dying’. Similarly, American historian Philip Jenkins used words like ‘decline’, ‘lost’, ‘destruction’ and ‘die’ throughout his more recent book, with the telling title *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa and Asia – and how it died* (2008). He recalled the rich history from several Middle Eastern churches in order that we should “lament the destruction of a once flourishing culture.”²⁰ The same trope is used in more popular books, for example in *From the Holy Mountain* (1997) by Scottish historian and travel writer William Dalrymple. Dalrymple wanted to tell the “dead history”²¹ and stories from his travels during the “exodus of the last Christians from the Middle East”²² in order to be one of the last travellers able to observe “the last ebbing twilight of Byzantium.”²³ These authors have a common message: the once blooming Middle Eastern Christians are not only

¹⁶ Courbage and Fargues, *Christians and Jews under Islam*, 174. Although originally published in French in 1992, here the English translation has been used.

¹⁷ Johnson and Zurlo, *World Christian Database*, accessed December 2020. For background information regarding the trends and dynamics, see: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, “Ongoing Exodus: Tracking the Emigration of Christians from the Middle East,” *Harvard Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Policy* 3 (2013-2014): 39-49. In the article, Johnson and Zurlo argue that the most dramatic decline has happened among historic Christian communities in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Turkey.

¹⁸ Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, 28.

¹⁹ Jean-Pierre Valognes, *Vie et mort des chrétiens d’Orient*, 9. Valognes warns for museum-churches, ruins, relics, ghosts and a Jerusalem that might become a ‘spiritual Disneyland’ – all phrases that indicate the distressing (future) reality of buildings without people.

²⁰ Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia – and How it Died* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2008).

²¹ William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A journey in the shadow of Byzantium*. (London: Harper Press, 2005 [1997]), 19.

²² *Idem*, 19.

²³ *Idem*, 20.

in religious and cultural decline, but they are slowly but gradually losing their presence in the Middle East altogether.

A second way of reading contemporary Middle Eastern Christian history is through the frame of Christian persecution. Roughly since the end of the 1990s, the severity of global persecution of Christians came into vogue in several academic circles and in media outlets, using phrases like ‘the global war on Christians’ to indicate the dramatic increase of violence that Christians worldwide have endured during the twentieth century.²⁴ Several organisations had already been advocating the plight of these persecuted Christians, such as Open Doors (founded: 1955), Voice of the Martyrs (founded: 1967), Christian Solidarity Worldwide (founded: 1977) and International Christian Concern (founded: 1995). Indeed, many Middle Eastern countries score particularly high regarding Christian persecution on the Open Doors’ annually published World Watch List.²⁵ One of the most devastating attacks on the church in the Middle East was the genocide of 1915 that killed at least 1.5 million Armenians. Other recent major attacks happened in Egypt in 2013, when about a hundred churches were attacked in a matter of days; in Iraq in 2014, when violence by groups aligned with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) forced about 120,000 Iraqi Christians to flee their homeland; and in 2015 in Libya, when ISIL militants killed 21 Christian immigrant workers, including 20 Egyptian Copts and one Ghanaian Christian.²⁶ The emphasis on persecution of Christians in the Middle East is specifically present in Bat Ye’or’s book *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude* (1996),²⁷ where she portrays the Middle Eastern Christian as an oppressed *dhimmi* (‘protected person’) that has to deal with a concurrent state of hostility from a Muslim majority – a state that Ye’or calls

²⁴ John Allen Jr, *A Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* (New York: Image, 2016). See also, for example: Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah, eds., *Under Caesar’s Sword: How Christians Respond to Persecution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Paul Marshall, *Their Blood Cries Out: The Untold Story of Persecution Against Christians in the Modern World* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997); Nina Shea, *In the Lion’s Den: A Shocking Account of Persecution and Martyrdom of Christians Today and How We Should Respond* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997).

²⁵ Open Doors World Watch Research, World Watch List 2021, <<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/>> [accessed 21 January 2021]. Among the top 50 countries of the World Watch list are the following Middle Eastern countries: Yemen, Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, Qatar, Jordan, Turkey, Oman, and Kuwait. The list also includes Libya, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia in North Africa. The list does not mention the Palestinian Territories or Israel as top 50 countries for Christian persecution.

²⁶ As listed by Nelly van Doorn-Harder, “Religious Conflict and Resolution in the Middle East,” in *The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East*, edited by Mitri Raheb and Mark A. Lamport (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 211-22.

²⁷ Bat Ye’Or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996). See also: Bat Ye’Or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985).

‘dhimmitude’. This notion of victimhood was a common perspective in older literature on Christians in the Middle East, but still finds resonance in recent studies.²⁸ In several of his writings, American Middle East expert Alon Ben-Meir has emphasised the widespread persecution faced by Christians in the Middle East, varying in form and degrees of intensity: from discrimination in education and employment to deadly attacks against Christian communities.²⁹ Accordingly, differing from scholars such as Cragg, Valognes and Jenkins, who saw the major danger in the silent, slow, but steady decline of Christians in the Middle East, persecution is mostly associated with sudden attacks and open, systematic violence against Christians – though language of extinction and persecution are often used in relation to each other.

Given the rich history of Middle Eastern Christians it is not surprising that scholars have interpreted current circumstances through these rather pessimistic frames of extinction and persecution. However, one could also reason the other way around: history indicates the deep-rootedness of Middle Eastern Christians in their societies and shows their steadfastness and creative potential to adapt to changing circumstances. Furthermore, the other two approaches run the risk of robbing Middle Eastern Christians of their agency and depicting them as isolated from, and victims of, their Muslim compatriots. “Christians have long been viewed as the object of other actors,”³⁰ political scientist Paul S. Rowe articulates, pointing to language of ‘dhimmitude’, and portrayals as ‘fifth columns’, or ‘pawns of Western interest’. Although these tropes still persist, recent scholarship on Middle Eastern Christians has aimed to re-integrate the study of Arab Christianity with the wider context of the

²⁸ For older literature with this approach, see: Betts, *Christians in the Arab East*; Robert M. Haddad, *Syrian Christians in Muslim Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). Recent literature with this approach includes: Habib C. Malik, *Islamism and the Future of the Christians of the Middle East* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2010); John Eibner, ed., *The Future of Religious Minorities in the Middle East* (Lanham: Lexington, 2018). Other researchers have studied particular aspects of Christian persecution in the Middle East. On the religious registration system: Jonathan Andrews, *Identity Crisis: Religious Registration in the Middle East* ([n.p.]: Gilead Books Publishing, 2016). On the unfolding genocide of Christians in ancient Mesopotamia (Iraq and Syria): Elizabeth Kendal, *After Saturday comes Sunday: Understanding the Christian Crisis in the Middle East* (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2016). On conversion and apostasy: Duane Alexander Miller, *Living Among the Breakage: Contextual Theology-Making and Ex-Muslim Christians* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016). On blasphemy laws: Elizabeth Picard, “Conclusion: Nation-Building and Minority Rights in the Middle East,” in *Religious Minorities in the Middle East: Domination, Self-Empowerment, Accommodation*, edited by Anne-Sofie Roald and Anh Nga Longva (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 325-50.

²⁹ E.g. Alon Ben-Meir, “Persecution and Martyrdom of Christians in the Middle East,” in *The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East*, edited by Mitri Raheb and Mark A. Lamport (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 188-202; Alon Ben-Meir, “The Persecution of Minorities in the Middle East,” in *Secular Nationalism and Citizenship in Muslim Countries: Arab Christians in the Levant*, edited by Kail C. Ellis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 155-70.

³⁰ Paul S. Rowe, “The Middle Eastern Christian as agent,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 3 (2010): 472-74.

Middle East and positioned Christians as integral parts of society,³¹ a reality that both the extinction trope and persecution trope prevent us from seeing. Dutch Coptologist Nelly van Doorn-Harder's *Contemporary Coptic Nuns* (1995) is an early example that breaks through these barriers, focusing on Coptic nuns who through their daily religious activities manage to redefine the gender patterns in their church tradition.³² Other studies have looked at how Christians constructed their religious practices in active engagement with the wider context, such as French anthropologist Géraldine Chatelard's *Briser la Mosaïque: Les Tribus Chrétiennes de Madaba, Jordanie, XIXe-XXe Siècle* (2004) on Jordanian Christians who identify as Bedouins and, in fact, share religious practices with Muslim Bedouins.³³ In her book *Christian Religious Leadership in the Middle East: The Political Role of the Patriarch* (2010), Scottish political scientist Fiona McCallum uses two case studies of Patriarch Shenouda III of Alexandria (reign: 1971-2012) of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt and Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir (reign: 1986-2011) of the Maronite Church in Lebanon to explore the potential of Christian religious leaders in the Middle East to act as political representatives for their communities.³⁴ Other work has focused on the history of American missions and the involvement of Arab Christians in the development of religious, educational and, in some cases, national renewal, such as Heather Sharkey's work on Egypt, Ussama Makdisi's work on Lebanon, and Adam Becker's study of Assyrian Christians in Iran, among others.³⁵

³¹ Cf. Robson, "Recent Perspectives on Christianity in the Modern Arab World."

³² Van Doorn-Harder, *Contemporary Coptic Nuns*. Other recent studies on gender and the agency of Middle Eastern Christian women past and present: Tala Raheb, "Christian Agency and Lutheran Personal Status Laws in Palestine," *Exchange* 49, no. 3-4 (2020): 278-96; Rima Nasrallah and Martien Brinkman, Heleen Murren-van den Berg, Marcel Barnard, "Rearranging Things: How Protestant attitudes shake the objects in the piety of Eastern Christian Women," *Material Religion* 12, no. 1 (2016): 74-95; Akram Fouad Khater, *Embracing the Divine: Passion and Politics in Christian Middle East* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Heidemarie Winkel, *Geschlechtercodes und religiöse Praxis: Arabische Christinnen zwischen patriarchaler Leitkultur und Selbst-Autorisierung*. ('Gender Codes and Religious Practice: Arab Christian Women between Patriarchal Culture and Self-Authorization') (Würzburg: Ergon, 2009).

³³ Géraldine Chatelard, *Briser la Mosaïque: Le Tribus Chrétiennes de Madaba, Jordanie, XIXe-XXe siècle*. ('Breaking the mosaic. The Christian tribes of Madaba, Jordan, 19th-20th centuries') (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2004). For other studies on shared religious practices in the Middle East, see: Lance Laird, "Martyrs and Heroes: Constructing Muslim-Christian Shared Space in Bethlehem," in *Bethlehem: A Sociocultural History*, edited by Mitri Raheb (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2020), 97-129; Angie Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints: Christian-Muslim Mediation in Egypt* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018); Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, eds., *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

³⁴ Fiona McCallum, *Christian Religious Leadership in the Middle East: The Political Role of the Patriarch* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010). See also: McCallum, Fiona, "The Political Role of the Patriarch in the Contemporary Middle East," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 6 (2007): 934-40.

³⁵ Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt*; Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*; Becker, *Revival and Awakening*. See also: Melanie E. Trexler, *Evangelizing Lebanon: Baptists, Missions, and the Question of Cultures* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016); Paul Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity: Evangelicals, Reformers and Education in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient au Temps de la Réforme*.

These types of study of Middle Eastern Christianity have grown during the last two decades and have allowed for an adequate exploration of the historical and societal involvement of Middle Eastern Christians in their societies. These studies go beyond the victimisation of Arab Christians and show that numerical decline does not imply isolation from their broader context per se. To conclude, recent scholarship has positioned Middle Eastern Christians as social and political contributors to their societies in a variety of ways.

The case of Palestinian Christians, specifically, has been made more complex by misconceptions that Palestinian Christians are ‘squeezed in the middle between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims’.³⁶ This representation does not only question their Palestinian identity, an issue that has been corrected in the first chapter, it questions their attachment to the Palestinian nation and their historical and societal involvement. Statements that contrast a ‘moderate Christianity’ with an ‘extremist Islam’ hinder the Palestinian appreciation of diversity and place Palestinian Christians outside the realm of politics. Along with other Christian communities in the Middle East, Palestinian Christians are often categorised merely as a “Christian neighbour to the Muslims”, “a minority in need of help (from the West)”, or, lastly, as “a threatened form of Christianity”, as dying communities of suffering victims of persecution.³⁷ While fully acknowledging the vulnerable circumstances of decline, violence and diaspora Palestinian Christians are living with,³⁸ this chapter will explore the multi-dimensional contributions Palestinian Christians have made to their society. Depicting Palestinian Christians as active contributors to society, allows for an adequate exploration of Palestinian Christianity in context, particularly the changes it has undergone since the 1980s and beyond, not only in ecclesiastical and

³⁶ Cf. Amahl Bishara, “Covering the Christians in the Holy Land,” *Middle East Research and Information Project* 43, no. 2 (2013): 7-14.

³⁷ As I have earlier argued in a blog entry: Marteiijn, “Looking Eastward.”

³⁸ Major persecution attacks from recent history include price tag attacks (e.g. the Church of the Multiplication at the Sea of Galilee in 2015), arson attacks (e.g. Windmill hotel in Gaza in 2000 because of selling alcohol), bomb explosions (e.g. near the Rosary Convent in Gaza in 2008), and even murder (e.g. murder of Rami Ayyad in 2007, the owner of a Christian book shop in Gaza, and earlier in 1979, the murder of the Rev. Archim. Philoumenos, the Hegumen of the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Jacob’s Well in Nablus) – as well as mob violence, land theft and harassment of church leaders. For more information on persecution dynamics in the Palestinian Territories, see: Open Doors World Watch Research, *World Watch List 2020 Country Dossier Palestinian Territories*, <<https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Palestinian-TerritoriesWWL-2021-Country-dossier.pdf>> [accessed 12 December 2021. Password: freedom]; United States Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom, *West Bank and Gaza International Religious Freedom Report for 2019*, <<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/WEST-BANK-AND-GAZA-2019-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>> (accessed 18 December 2020).

theological spheres, but also in the popular religious practices that will be the focus of study in the following chapters.

In short, the goal of this chapter is to chart the revival of Palestinian Christianity in order to understand communal reinvention and religious renewal. Consequently, in the first part of this chapter I demonstrate how Palestinian clergy have brought about a theological revival since the 1970s and played a significant role in creating a society based on the principles of justice, peace and reconciliation.³⁹ In the second part of this chapter I shift the attention back to the village Taybeh. The village underwent a period of rural development in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s, mainly in the sectors of business, tourism and civil society. From a relatively calm place, the people of Taybeh revived their village and contributed to the larger Palestinian society accordingly. Hence, this chapter deals with both the religious elements of this revival, as well as with the more gradual growth of societal and political engagement among Palestinian Christians.

The Emergence of Palestinian Contextual Theology

Contextual theology can be defined as “the attempt to understand the Christian faith in terms of a particular context”.⁴⁰ Roman Catholic authors such as Stephen Bevans and Robert Schreiter argue that context is at the very centre of theology. Besides the two classical *loci theologici* of Scripture and tradition, contextual theology adds a

³⁹ This section will be based on two earlier articles I have published. See: Elizabeth S. Martejijn, “The Revival of Palestinian Christianity: Developments in Palestinian Theology,” *Exchange* 49, no. 3/4 (2020): 257-77; Elizabeth Martejijn, “De publieke rol van Palestijnse theologie: Theologie in dialog met de Palestijnse context,” (‘The Public Role of Palestinian Theology: Theology in Dialogue with the Palestinian Context’), *Radix* 45, no. 2 (2019): 136-60. The theological developments are studied in their broader, holistic context instead of through a more enumerative, systematic approach, which merely focuses on thematic perspectives such as liberation, the Bible, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the influence of Protestant/Evangelical Palestinian theologians – all of which have already been studied before. For an overview with a more systematic approach, see for example: Rafiq Khoury, “Palestinian Contextual Theology: A General Survey,” in: *Christian Theology in the Palestinian Context*, edited by Rafiq Khoury and Rainer Zimmer-Winkel (Berlin: Aphorisma Verlag, 2019), 9-46. On Palestinian liberation theology: Laura C. Robson, “Palestinian Liberation Theology, Muslim-Christian Relations and the Arab-Israeli conflict,” *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations* 21, no. 1 (2010): 39-50; Nicole Patierno, “Palestinian Liberation Theology: Creative Resistance to Occupation,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 26, no. 4 (2015): 443-64; Samuel J. Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel: Liberation and Theology in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013). On the Bible: Janneke Stegeman, “Remembering the Land: Jeremiah 32 and in Palestinian Narrative and Identity,” *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 26, no. 1 (2013): 41-54; Lance C. Laird, “Meeting Jesus Again in the First Place: Palestinian Christians and the Bible,” *Interpretations* 55, no. 4 (2001): 400-12. On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Alain Epp Weaver, *Inhabiting the Land: Thinking Theologically about the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), 46-68. On Protestant/Evangelical theologians: Yohanna Katanacho, “Palestinian Protestant Theological Responses to a World marked by Violence,” *Missiology: An International Review* 36, no. 3 (2008): 289-305. For the history of Palestinian theology till 1998: Uwe Gräbe, *Kontextuelle Palästinensische Theologie: Streitbare und Umstrittene Beiträge zum ökumenischen und interreligiösen Gespräch*. (‘Contextual Palestinian Theology: Disputatious and Controversial Contribution to the Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue’) (Erlangen: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 1998).

⁴⁰ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 3.

third theological source that joins this pair, namely the locus of the human experience or the context. In his reflection on the birth of Palestinian contextual theology, Rafiq Khoury (b. 1943), Palestinian theologian and vicar of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, writes that Palestinian contextual theology indeed developed from experience to reflection, and from a generally “Christian thought” to a well-formulated body of “contextual theology”.⁴¹ Such recent events in the second part of the twentieth century as war, displacement and colonial intervention, made Palestinian Christians start asking questions about their identity. In the words of Khoury:

“It started from the base, at the grassroots level, among those who were daily living through the tragedy. It started in the form of questions that these people began to ask themselves spontaneously: Who are we? What is the meaning of our presence in the Holy Land? What is our identity? What are our vocation, mission, and witness? What does it mean to be an Arab Palestinian Christian here and now? Where do we come from? What are our roots? Where are we going? What are the questions put before our Christian conscience by the tragedy of our Palestinian people? What is our position? Our attitude? What is the originality of our contribution to the struggle of the Palestinian people? ... and many other questions besides.”⁴²

For some Palestinian theologians, the seed for theological reflection was sown during the *Nakba* (‘disaster’ or ‘catastrophe’), referring to the ‘disaster of 1948’ when more than 700,000 Arab refugees fled or were expelled from their villages. This had disruptive consequences on different levels of human existence, identity and theology.⁴³ The Melkite Greek Catholic Archbishop from Acre, Haifa, Nazareth and All Galilee, Joseph Raya, was the first church official who spoke out for the Christian victims of the *Nakba*.⁴⁴ He fought for the rights of the villagers of Iqrit and Kufr

⁴¹ Khoury, “Palestinian Contextual Theology,” 18ff. Also note his five book series: Rafiq Khoury, *Kitāb al-a’yyām*. (‘Book for every Day’) (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa’ Publications, 2018); Rafiq Khoury, *Filasṭīn fī-l qalb*. (‘Palestine in the Heart’) (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa’ Publications, 2017); Rafiq Khoury, *Al-ākhir... na’ama ’am naqima?* (‘The End... Blessing or Curse?’) (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa’ Publications, 2016); Rafiq Khoury, *Al-ḥudūr al-Masīḥiyya fī-l mashriq al- Arabbiyya bin al-māḍī wa al-ḥāḍira wa al-mustaqbal*. (‘The Christian Presence in the Near East in the Past, Present, and Future’) (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa’ Publications, 2014); Rafiq Khoury, *Naḥwa laḥūt mutjassid fī tarbiyyat bilādnā*. (‘Towards an Incarnational Theology for the Progress of our Country’) (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa’ Publications, 2012).

⁴² Rafiq Khoury, “Palestinian Contextual Theology,” 16f.

⁴³ In particular Naim Ateek interview, Jerusalem, 22 February 2018; Elias Chacour interview, Ibilin, 19 July 2018. See also: Cedar Duaybis, “The Three-fold Nakba,” *Cornerstone* 66 summer (2013): 8-9; Alex Awad, *Palestinian Memories: A Story of a Palestinian Mother and her People* (Bethlehem: Bethlehem Bible College, 2012); Audeh Rantisi and Patricia Rantisi, *Blessed are the Peacemakers: The Story of a Palestinian Christian* (Bath: Eagle Publishing, 2003 [1990]).

⁴⁴ Cf. Naim Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice and the Palestine-Israel Conflict* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 124f. For a biography on Abp. Joseph Raya, see: Lesya Sabada, *Go to the Deep: The Life of Archbishop Joseph Raya* (Newton: Sophia, 2006).

Baram, two Christian villages in Galilee in northern Israel, whose inhabitants were driven out in 1948, and which were finally bulldozed in 1951.

Other theologians point to the *Naksa* ('setback'), the Six-Day War of 1967, as the decisive event that shaped the emergence of Palestinian contextual theology.⁴⁵ Israel defeated a joint front of Arab nations, and took over the Palestinian-populated West Bank (previously controlled by Jordan), the Golan Heights (previously controlled by Syria), and the Gaza-strip and the Sinai Peninsula (previously controlled by Egypt). This defeat caused shock waves through the Arab world, but simultaneously gave rise to independent Palestinian thought, both politically and theologically. It also changed broader patterns of thinking concerning religious concepts such as violence in the Old Testament, God's covenant with Jewish people, and the identity of Jesus and his connection to Judaism. This was illustrated in the first major theological document of Arab thinkers that dealt with the Arab-Israeli conflict after the Six Day War: *A theological perspective on the Arab-Israeli conflict*, written by a group of Lebanese and Syrian theologians.⁴⁶ An important step on the road of Palestinian contextual theology was taken on 20 April 1971, with the creation of the *Justice and Peace Committee/Jerusalem* of the *Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land*, under the banner of the episcopate of the Catholic Church in Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Cyprus. This committee published its first document in 1980 on the political commitment of Palestinian Christians, and has continued to produce further publications concerning the Palestinian Christian community.⁴⁷

First Phase (1984-2000): Giving a Voice to Palestinian Christians

It was not until the 1980s that Palestinian contextual theology began to take its current shape. In 1984, Elias Chacour – also known from his ecclesial role as Melkite Greek Catholic Archbishop Emeritus of Acre, Haifa, Nazareth and All Galilee – published *Blood Brothers: The Dramatic Story of a Palestinian Christian Working for*

⁴⁵ E.g. Rafiq Khoury interview, Jerusalem, 28 December 2017; Michel Sabbah interview, Taybeh, 1 December 2017.

⁴⁶ These theologians are: Jean Corbon, George Khodr, Albert Lahham, Samir Kafity and Gabriel Habib. Many statements, conferences and studies have been produced after this document, especially by the Middle East Council of Churches. George F. Sabra, "Theology," in *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity: Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 325-34.

⁴⁷ For more information, see the website of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land: <<http://catholicchurch-holyland.com>> [accessed 20 July 2020].

Peace in Israel, a memoir that can be conceived as the first contextual theological book by a Palestinian theologian.⁴⁸ Chacour was a young priest in the time of Archbishop Raya and came from Kufr Baram, one of the Christian villages destroyed after the *Nakba*. Chacour produced a narrative theology (*lāhūt al-saradī*); he wrote his own personal story of displacement and formulated a theology on the Palestinian connection to the land. Later, this genre was also used by other theologians like Naim Ateek, Alex Awad, Munther Isaac, and Mitri Raheb, whose works are either based on biographies or on anecdotes from their own lives.

The next milestone in the history of the emergence of a Palestinian contextual theology was the publication of the document *Theology and the Local Church in the Holy Land* in 1987 by the Al-Liqa' Center in Bethlehem (*Al-Liqā'* meaning 'Encounter'), which a Melkite named Gerjes Khoury (1952-2016) founded in 1982 and presided over until 2016.⁴⁹ Since then, a Roman Catholic named Yousef Zaknoun has directed the centre. The Al-Liqa' Center was established as a small initiative, but quickly developed to one of the main institutes for local Palestinian theology. The foundational idea behind Al-Liqa' was that religion in the Middle East stands for more than religious piety and needs to be seen as a force influencing social and political movements.⁵⁰ In the opinion of the founders, the church needs to understand its own identity, using the hermeneutics of contextual theology and ecumenical cooperation to formulate an answer to the question of Palestinian Christian identity. The 1987 document was designed to serve as a starting point for a local theological movement and was used at one of the first conferences Al-Liqa' organised at Tantur, an international ecumenical institute in Jerusalem. The authors concluded: "...the task is to contribute, each within his specialization, to the building

⁴⁸ Elias Chacour, *Blood Brothers: The Dramatic Story of a Palestinian Christian working for Peace in Israel*. Updated Edition. With David Hazard (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2003). The book follows Chacour's life from his youth in Kufr Biram in the 1940s to being an internally displaced refugee in Gish and from his studies at the Saint Joseph's Minor Seminary in Nazareth, the Saint Sulpice Seminary in Paris and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem to his ministry as Melkite Greek Catholic priest in Ibillin, a village in Galilee. Chacour's later books include: Elias Chacour, *Faith beyond Despair: Building Hope in the Holy Land*. With Alain Michel. Translated by: Anthony Harvey. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008); Elias Chacour, *Israeli, Palästinenser, Christ: Sein Leben erzählt von Pia de Simony und Marie Czernin*. ('Israeli, Palestinian, Christian: His Life told by Pia de Simony and Marie Czernin') (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 2007); Elias Chacour, *We Belong to the Land: The Story of a Palestinian Israeli who Lives for Peace and Reconciliation*. With Mary E. Jensen (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

⁴⁹ Al-Liqa' Center, *Basis Document: Theology and the Local Church in the Holy Land*. 3rd ed (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa' Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land, 2015). Those involved in writing this basic document are: Rafiq Khoury, Joseph Zaknoun, Adnan Musallam, Munib Younan, George Hantilian, Peter Qumri, Shukri Sambar and Gerjes Khoury. For an overview, see: Al-Liqa' Center, *Al-Liqa' Center: The Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land, 25 the Silver Jubilee, 1982-2007* (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa' Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land, 2007).

⁵⁰ Adnan Musallam, "The Growth of Al-Liqa' Center, 1983-1992," *Al-Liqa' Journal* 1 (1992), 9-16.

of the church and the serving of society.”⁵¹ Another publication, called *Al-Liqa’ Journal* (in Arabic from 1985 onwards and in English since 1992), presents socially and politically motivated articles, written by Palestinian scholars from diverse backgrounds. The first issue printed research on how the Gulf War (1990-1991) affected Christian-Muslim relations in Palestine, and how further damage could be prevented⁵² – and later issues included articles on topics such as the social role of Arab Christians, the wrongful political closure of Jerusalem, land issues, Christian-Muslim relations, poverty, emigration, Israeli settlements, and so on.

Hence, Palestinian contextual theology emerged in the 1980s as a politically and socially committed enterprise. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, this runs parallel with the outbreak of the First *Intifāḍa* on 8 December 1987. This was a time in which the Palestinians were feeling tired, frustrated, and helpless after twenty years of occupation and felt discouraged about the political climate within both the Israeli government and the Palestinian leadership. This caused the Palestinian people to become more outspoken and seize the initiative by establishing new grassroots movements; the *Intifāḍa* can be understood as an answer of revolt, and *Al-Liqa’* as an answer from theology. This development of a Palestinian theology was advanced because of the indigenisation of religious leadership in the Catholic and Protestant denominations in the 1970s and 1980s, as described in the previous section. And thus, with the eruption of the First *Intifāḍa*, the indigenous Arab leaders made their voices heard. Less than two months after the First *Intifāḍa*, on 22 January 1988, the Patriarchs and Heads of the churches of Jerusalem issued their first of many joint statements against the Israeli occupation. These statements continue to be issued right up to the present day.⁵³

A subsequent development in Palestinian contextual theology was the emergence of a Palestinian liberation theology. Influenced by postcolonial theories, the liberation theme encompasses a broad spectrum of connected topics including biblical hermeneutics, modern Israel, the status of the Old Testament, the Exodus narrative, the covenant, election, the land, and Christian Zionism. The Reverend Naim Ateek (b. 1937), an Anglican priest, has been seen as the father of Palestinian liberation theology, although the liberation theme could also be found in the work of

⁵¹ *Al-Liqa’*, *Basis Document*, 18.

⁵² Saleem Zoughbi, “The Aftermath of the Gulf War,” *Al-Liqa’ Journal* 1 (1992), 85-92.

⁵³ For an overview of the statements from 1988 until 2008, see: Melanie A. May, *Jerusalem Testament: Palestinian Christians Speak, 1988-2008* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2010).

other Palestinian theologians, such as Munther Isaac, Yohanna Katanacho and Mitri Raheb. In 1989, Ateek published his book *Justice, and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, the first serious attempt of a Palestinian Christian to provide a counterargument to a (Christian) Zionist reading of the Bible.⁵⁴ In this book, Ateek aims to find a new biblical hermeneutic that emphasises a universal, inclusive view of God, over against the restrictive, exclusive views of some Jews and certain Western Christian theologians. Palestinian liberation theology, as developed by Ateek, differs profoundly from the Latin American variant as expounded, for example, by the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez,⁵⁵ since it addresses Zionist and colonial oppression instead of focusing on economic oppression as the direct result of colonialism.⁵⁶

From its beginning, Palestinian liberation theology has been well organised and internationally connected. For this purpose, Ateek founded *Sabīl* ('The Way'), anglicised with the name *Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center* (1989), which is currently located in Shu'afat, a neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. In 1990, a year after its establishment, Sabeel organised its first conference on Palestinian liberation theology at Tantur Ecumenical Institute. There were ten international participants from across the world, including the United States, Ireland, South Africa, Philippines, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka, joined by around forty local participants.⁵⁷ This was the beginning of a global movement with groups called *Friends of Sabeel* in several countries in North America and Europe. Nearly all Sabeel's material is written in English, which has aided Palestinian liberation theology to gain attention and support throughout the world. Where Al-Liqa' was essentially an encounter between local Palestinians focusing on ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, Sabeel (although initially addressing the local church) was more internationally connected, and its leaders' writings were characterised by theological activism.⁵⁸ In Western academia, Palestinian liberation ideas are among the most discussed theological

⁵⁴ Naim S. Ateek, *Justice, and only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989). Later, Ateek published two other books concerning Palestinian liberation theology: Naim S. Ateek, *A Palestinian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), and Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*.

⁵⁵ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*.

⁵⁶ For a comparison between Palestinian liberation theology and Latin American liberation theology, see: Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century*, 216-38; Samuel J. Kuruvilla, "Theologies of Liberation in Latin America and Palestine-Israel in Comparative Perspective: Contextual Differences and Practical Similarities," *Holy Land Studies* 9, no. 1 (2010): 51-69.

⁵⁷ Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, 130.

⁵⁸ Palestinian theologians have gained attention from outside, the most well-known are: Jewish liberation theologians like Mark H. Ellis and Mark Braverman, African theologians like Desmond Tutu, feminist theologians like Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Grey, postcolonial theologians like Michael Prior, and many more.

concepts of Palestinian theology.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, Palestinian liberation theology has not had a wide audience among Palestinian laypeople and could therefore be described as a movement of the Palestinian Christian elite. Ateek was, however, of significant importance for his own Arab church community. He served as Canon of the Anglican St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem from 1985 until 1997 and preached every Sunday during the time of the First *Intifāḍa*. After each of those services, Ateek listened to the reflections of his congregation on the sermons and on the Gospel in relation to the political situation they were living in. These moments provided inspiration for his books on liberation theology.⁶⁰

Another prominent theologian worth highlighting is the Reverend Mitri Raheb (b. 1962), a Lutheran pastor who calls himself a contextual theologian rather than a liberation theologian – although his concerns are similar to Ateek's.⁶¹ In fact, some distinguish 'Palestinian liberation theology' (*lāhūt al-taḥrīr al-Filasṭīnī*) from 'Palestinian contextual theology' (*lāhūt al-siyāqī al-Filasṭīnī*),⁶² but this thesis considers liberation theology to be part of Palestinian contextual theology. Raheb became pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem in 1987,⁶³ and started publishing in 1990.⁶⁴ Raheb's first book in English, *I am a Palestinian Christian* (1995),⁶⁵ mainly addresses the identity of Palestinian Christians and biblical interpretations of topics such as election, the Promised Land, the Exodus, violence, suffering, and loving one's neighbour. In his later work, Raheb provides arguments against what he calls "imperial theology": a divine purpose of the

⁵⁹ This becomes apparent in, for example: Michel Elias Andraos, "Palestinian Theology of Reconciliation: A Cry of Hope in the Absence of All Hope," *VOICES Theological Journal of Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians* 36, no. 1 (2013): 47-59; Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel*; Robson, "Palestinian liberation theology, Muslim-Christian relations and the Arab-Israeli conflict"; Andrea Zaki Stephanous and Jos M. Strengtholt, "Middle Eastern and Arab Theology," in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, edited by William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 537-42.

⁶⁰ Ateek recounted the history of Sabeel in: Naim Ateek, "Reflections on Sabeel's Liberation Theology and Ecumenical Work (1992-2013)," in *Theologies of Liberation in Palestine-Israel: Indigenous, Contextual, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, edited by Nur Masalha and Lisa Isherwood (Cambridge: The Lutherworth Press, 2014), 21-38. The St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem is the home of the Arab-speaking Anglican-Episcopal community of Jerusalem.

⁶¹ A comparison between the works of Ateek and Raheb has been written by Samuel Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity*.

⁶² E.g. Fr. Jamal Khader, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Ramallah, 21 December 2017; Weaver, *Inhabiting the Land*, 53.

⁶³ For an overview of his sermons, see: Mitri Raheb, *Lakulli maqāmin maqālun: 'Izaat larubu' qarn: 1988-2013*. ('For every Situation a Comment: Sermons for a Quarter Century: 1988-2013') (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2013).

⁶⁴ Raheb, *Das reformatorische Erbe unter den Palästinensern*.

⁶⁵ Mitri Raheb, *I am a Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). A similar book was first published in German a year earlier: Mitri Raheb, *Ich bin Christ und Palästinenser: Israel, seine Nachbarn und die Bibel*. (I am Christian and Palestinian: Israel, its Neighbours, and the Bible) (Guetersloh: Guetersloher Verlagshaus, 1994).

empire in an ideological or theological framework.⁶⁶ Raheb explains what this imperial theology entails for Palestinians, saying:

“It is noteworthy that, on the issue of Palestine, both supposedly liberal Western theology and conservative and fundamentalist theology are uncritical of the State of Israel and contain a pro-Israeli bias, choosing to ignore the presence and suffering of the native Palestinian people. We are still far away from the moment where Western and Jewish theologians will ask Palestinians for forgiveness for the harm done to them and their land in the name of the Divine.”⁶⁷

Raheb is a very prolific theologian: he has published sixteen books in different languages,⁶⁸ dozens of articles, and numerous co-authored or edited books. Furthermore, Raheb established the centre Dar al-Nadwa in Bethlehem in 1995 as an international forum for the dialogue between faith and culture, Dar al-Kalima College in 2006 (since 2021 Dar al-Kalima University), and Diyar publishing house in 2011. Hence, similar to Ateek’s theological activism, Raheb’s work merges theology and public engagement, contributing not only to the development of Palestinian theology, but also to Palestinian society in general.

Second Phase (from 2000 onwards): Localising the Theological Questions

While the 1980s brought the formal emergence of Palestinian theology, by the turn of the new millennium this theological revival had moved into a new phase of contextual reflection. When Pope John Paul II visited Israel and the Palestinian Territories during his Millennium Pilgrimage in March 2000, it raised the morale of Palestinian Christians. Like his predecessor, Pope Paul VI, in January 1964 – the first pope to visit the Holy Land in modern history – Pope John Paul II said that the suffering of the Palestinians must end, and that Palestinian people have a natural right to a homeland. Papal visits are a boost for the morale of Palestinian Christians.⁶⁹ In his Easter Message of 23 April 2000, Patriarch Michel Sabbah

⁶⁶ Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014).

⁶⁷ Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, 65f.

⁶⁸ Raheb also published the following books in English: Mitri Raheb and Suzanne Watts Henderson, *The Cross in Context: Suffering and Redemption in Palestine* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017); Mitri Raheb, *Sailing Through Troubled Waters: Christianity in the Middle East* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2013); Mitri Raheb, *Bethlehem Besieged* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004). He also co-authored and edited numerous books.

⁶⁹ Until now, there have been four papal visits to the Holy Land: 1) Pope John VI visited the Holy Land in January 1964, which was the first papal visit in modern history; 2) Pope John Paul II visited Israel and the Palestinian Territories in the context of the Second Millennium in March 2000; 3) Pope Benedict XVI’s papal visit took place in May 2009 and 4) Pope Francis visited the Holy Land in May 2014.

reflected on the papal visit, emphasising the Pope's times of deep prayer at the Holy Places and summarising the Pope's message with the following words: "...be courageous, accept your vocation, and accomplish your mission in your different societies in the land of Jesus."⁷⁰ Roman Catholic leadership has shown awareness of Palestinian Christian suffering.

This contrasts with the situation of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, where the Greek hierarchy has frequently clashed with their Arab priests and laity since the end of the Ottoman Empire, as has been noted in chapter 1. These conflicting relations came to light especially during the Second *Intifāḍa* when the Palestinian Archbishop Theodosios Atallah Hanna (also known as Atallah Hanna, b. 1965) acted as official spokesperson of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Archbishop Theodosios is known for his outspoken political activism, which has caused frequent clashes with the majority-Greek clergy of his church – and even more so with the Israeli authorities, who arrested and interrogated Archbishop Theodosios several times during the Second *Intifāḍa*. As one of just four high-ranking Arab clerics in the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Archbishop Theodosios Atallah Hanna is an exception to the rather distant leadership of the Greek Orthodox hierarchy.

Local Palestinian leaders such as Patriarch Michel Sabbah and Archbishop Theodosios were beacons of hope for the Palestinian Christian community during times of crisis and uncertainty, expounding their contextual theology in sermons, pastoral letters, and media appearances. In 2003, three years into the *Intifāḍa*, Father Jamal Khader (b. 1964) was appointed as the new chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies of Bethlehem University, a Roman Catholic institution.⁷¹ This was another important step forward for contextual theology, as this department started to organise local and international conferences on contextual theological topics. Further progress came in 2005, towards the end of the *Intifāḍa*, when Lutheran human rights activist Rifat Kassis (b. 1958) gathered an ecumenical group of fifteen Palestinian Christians, both clergy and laypeople, to work on a

⁷⁰ Michel Sabbah, "Easter Message, 23 April 2000," § 3, in *Faithful Witness: On Reconciliation and Peace in the Holy Land*. Edited by Drew Christiansen S.J. and Saliba Sarsar (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2009), 126ff.

⁷¹ Some of his writings include: Jamal Khader, "Religions in the Service of Peace? The Case of Palestine/Israel," in *The Role of Religion in Peacebuilding: Crossing the Boundaries of Prejudice and Distrust*, edited by Pauline Kollontai, Sue Yore, and Sebastian Kim (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018), 226-42; Jamal Khader, "Countering Violence in the name of God in Present Day Palestine/Israel," *The Ecumenical Review* 68, no. 1 (2016): 81-94; Jamal Khader, "The Context of *Kairos Palestine*," *The Ecumenical Review* 64, no. 1 (2012): 3-6.

Palestinian Kairos document, patterned on its South African counterpart of 1985.⁷² On 11 December 2009, this group presented the *Kairos Palestine Document* in Bethlehem, urging Palestinians to be steadfast, patient, and resist the occupier in non-violent ways. The text challenges churches of all denominations to get involved in current debates within the tradition of love for the oppressed. The document boldly calls the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land “a sin against God and humanity”:

“We also declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation. We declare that any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from Christian teachings, because it calls for violence and holy war in the name of God Almighty, subordinating God to temporary human interests, and distorting the divine image in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice.”⁷³

Originally published in Arabic and English, the Kairos Palestine Document has now been translated into 21 languages. After the so-called *Bethlehem-call*, a conference in Bethlehem in 2011, Kairos Palestine has evolved into a *Global Kairos Network*, which is currently present in eleven countries worldwide.

Lastly, some of the newest developments in the field of Palestinian contextual work have taken place in the young and quickly advancing strand of Evangelical Palestinian theology.⁷⁴ Centres for Evangelical Palestinian theology include Bethlehem Bible College (established in 1979) and Nazareth Evangelical College (established in 2014). The evangelical voice especially gained attention through the

⁷² The fifteen authors of the Kairos Palestine Document (2009): Patr. Michel Sabbah, Abp. Theodosios (Atallah Hanna), Fr. Jamal Khader, Fr. Rafiq Khoury, the Rev. Mitri Raheb, the Rev. Naim Ateek, the Rev. Yohanna Katanacho, the Rev. Fadi Diab, Geris Khoury, Cedar Duaybis, Nora Kort, Lucy Thalgieh, Nidal Abu El Zuluf, Yusuf Daher, and Rifat Kassis (coordinator). For background information on the Palestinian Kairos movement, see: Rifat Odeh Kassis, *Kairos for Palestine*. (Ramallah: Badayl/Alternatives, 2011).

⁷³ Kairos Palestine, *A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering* (Bethlehem: Kairos Palestine, 2009), § 2.5.

⁷⁴ For more information on Palestinian evangelicals, see: Azar Ajaj, Duane Alexander Miller and Philip Sumpter, *Arab Evangelicals in Israel* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2016). A selection of theological publications from Palestinian Evangelicals includes (listed in alphabetical order): Alex Awad, *Palestinian Memories: A Story of a Palestinian Mother and her People* (Bethlehem: Bethlehem Bible College, 2012); Munther Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020); Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth: A Christ-Centered Biblical Theology of the Promised Land* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2015); Botrus Mansour, *Looking from the Precipice: Reflections from Nazareth of a Palestinian Christian Evangelical* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2021); Botrus Mansour, *When Your Neighbor is the Savior* (Pasadena: Hope Publishing House, 2011); Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden, *Through my Enemy's Eyes: Envisioning Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine* (Crownhill: Paternoster, 2014); Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden, eds., *The Land Cries Out: Theology of Reconciliation in the Israeli-Palestinian Context* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011); Yohanna Katanacho, *Praying through the Psalms* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2018); Yohanna Katanacho, *The Land of Christ: A Palestinian Cry* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013).

first *Christ at the Checkpoint Conference* in Bethlehem 2010, which aimed to “reclaim the prophetic role in bringing peace, justice and reconciliation in Palestine and Israel.”⁷⁵ Now, once every two years, these *Christ at the Checkpoint Conferences* are organised under the auspices of Bethlehem Bible College and led by local Palestinian Evangelicals. In June 2021, the Christ at the Checkpoint Young Adults section published their first statement, entitled *Statement of Repentance and Hope*, in Arabic and English, representing the voice of the young, up-and-coming evangelical generation. The authors condemn the tribal mentality and greed for power of the current Palestinian leaders, as well as the “significant shortcoming in their statements and actions regarding the continued injustices committed against the Palestinians.”⁷⁶ They call for self-reflection, repentance, and unity in the battle for justice and peace, with which they took the shift from international advocacy and engagement to internal empowerment and development even further. Their message to Palestinian Christian leaders, specifically, is to decolonise the church from Western money and influence. Finally, the goal of the Christ at the Checkpoint Young Adults is to become a “praxis-oriented community which foregrounds a commitment to those who are voiceless and oppressed”; after all “our statements, theological books, and sermons must be rooted in the reality of our context and they are only validated by further action, otherwise they are empty.”⁷⁷

Hence, just as the First *Intifāḍa* functioned as a stimulus for Palestinian clergy and theologians to become more outspoken, the developments in the early years of the twenty-first century made Palestinian theology more localised. Currently, one can speak of a systematised body of Palestinian contextual works. Fifteen Palestinian theologians have published contextual theology books in English, Arabic or German; this number is significantly higher if one counts Palestinian theologians who have contributed to the *Al-Liqa’ Journal*, those who have spoken at national or

⁷⁵Christ at the Checkpoint Conference Committee, *The Christ at the Checkpoint Manifesto*, statement 1, <<https://christatthecheckpoint.bethbc.edu/about-christ-at-the-checkpoint/>> [accessed 5 May 2020]. For a selection of papers presented during the conferences, see: Manfred W. Kohl and Munther Isaac, *Christ at the Checkpoint: Blessed are the Peacemakers* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2018); Paul Alexander, ed., *Christ at the Checkpoint: Theology in the Service of Justice and Peace* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

⁷⁶Christ at the Checkpoint Young Adults, *Statement of Repentance and Hope*, statement 1, https://www.kairos-palestine.ps/images/STATEMENT_CATCYA.pdf [accessed 10 June 2021]. The publication of this document was timely, just after the political unrest that flared up owing to Israel’s violation of the Status Quo by restricting Muslims to pray at the Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan, and because of the eviction of Palestinian families living in Sheikh Jarrah, a neighbourhood in East Jerusalem.

⁷⁷ Christ at the Checkpoint Young Adults, *Statement of Repentance and Hope*, statement 6.



Figure 7. From left to right: Yacoub Abu-Saada (Melkite Greek Catholic), Mitri Raheb (Lutheran), Michel Sabbah (Latinised-rite Roman Catholic), Munib Younan (Lutheran) and Atallah Hanna (Eastern Orthodox) during a conference by Kairos Palestine in Bethlehem in 2005. The English translation of the Arabic script in the picture is from the Bible: “And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32). Photo by Kairos-Palestine.

international conferences, or those who teach at local universities and seminaries.⁷⁸ At the end of April 2017, the book *Madkhal ilā al-lahūt al-Filasṭīnī* (*Introduction to Palestinian Theology*) was launched.⁷⁹ This book was edited by a Lutheran theologian, the Reverend Munther Isaac (b. 1979), and contains the first systematic overview of Palestinian theology, with articles from the main players in the field. The first edited volume of this sort in English was published in January 2019 under the title *Christian Theology in the Palestinian Context*, edited by Rafiq Khoury and Rainer Zimmer-Winkel.⁸⁰

The publication of these books clearly indicates that the field of Palestinian contextual theology – since its emergence around 40 years ago – is burgeoning, with

⁷⁸ These fifteen theologians include the Rev. Naim S. Ateek, the Rev. Alex Awad, Fr. Elias Chacour, the Rev. Munther Isaac, the Rev. Yohanna Katanacho, Fr. Jamel Khader, Gerjes Khoury, Fr. Rafiq Khoury, Rula Khoury Mansour, Salim J. Munayer, the Rev. Mitri Raheb, the Rev. Audeh Rantisi, Patr. Michel Sabbah, Bp. Munib A. Younan, and Jean Zaru.

⁷⁹ Munther Isaac, ed., *Madkhal ilā al-lahūt al-Filasṭīnī*. ('Introduction to Palestinian Theology') (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2017).

⁸⁰ Khoury and Zimmer-Winkel (eds.), *Christian Theology*.

participants from across the Christian spectrum. Palestinian theologians have been pioneers, playing an exemplary role in the emergence of a broader spectrum of Arab theology, and hence have made a significant contribution to Arab thought in general.⁸¹ Palestinian theology offers a deep reflection on the recent history of the Middle East – a history of political turmoil, conflict, human suffering, and an ongoing flow of refugees. What unites all these theologians, though, is their theological engagement with their identity as Palestinian Christians, and their reflection on the social and political context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Status of Palestinian Contextual Theology Today

Palestinian theology is now an established and systematised field of contextual theology. While the spectrum of Palestinian contextual theology is broad and diverse, not all voices are equally represented. Firstly, in Palestinian theology there is an under-representation of female voices, just as there are no Arab female church leaders in the Palestinian Territories.⁸² Except for Palestinian Evangelical theologian Rula Khoury Mansour, written Palestinian contextual theology is the domain of men.⁸³ However, this does not mean that women have not played any role in this Christian revival. The three women, Cedar Duaybis, Nora Carmi and Jean Zaru, were part of the group that helped establish Sabeel. Similarly, the Kairos Palestine Document has three women among its fifteen authors: Cedar Duaybis, Nora Kort and Lucy Taljeh. Neither should one underestimate the role of the Rosary Sisters, the Arab Roman Catholic order referred to in chapter 1. Secondly, another group that is generally under-represented in the discussion of Palestinian theology is the Eastern Orthodox Christians, who in fact are the largest community among

⁸¹ Cf. Elizabeth S. Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 207-13. A similar development of contextualised Arab theology took place in other places in the Middle East, see Andrea Zaki Stephanous, ed., *Arabic Christian Theology: A Contemporary Global Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019); Antoine Fleyfel, *La Théologie Contextuelle Arabe: Modèle Libanais*. ('Arab Contextual Theology: Lebanese Model') (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011).

⁸² As of 9 February 2022, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) announced that Sally Azar will be ordained as the first Palestinian Lutheran female pastor in Israel/Palestine. To date, earlier appointments of female Arab church leaders have only taken place in Lebanon. Rola Sleiman was consecrated on 26 February 2017 in the Presbyterian Evangelical Church in Tripoli as the first female Arab church leader in the Middle East. Shortly after her consecration, on 24 March 2017, Najla Kassab was consecrated in the Presbyterian Evangelical Church in Beirut. A year later, on 11 November 2018, Rima Nasrallah was ordained in the National Evangelical Church in Beirut. The fourth ordination took place on 3 April 2022, when Mathilde Michael Sabbagh was ordained in the National Evangelical Church in Al-Hassakeh.

⁸³ Rula Khoury Mansour, *Theology of Reconciliation in the Context of Church Relations: A Palestinian Christian Perspective in Dialogue with Miroslav Volf* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2020). The publication of this book may signify the beginning of a broader theological engagement of young female Palestinian theologians who are now graduate students. See also: Jean Zaru, *Occupied with Non-Violence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

Palestinian Christians. Palestinian theologians from the Western school of theology – Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants and Evangelicals – have played the major role in the formation of Palestinian contextual theology. The most plausible explanation for their dominant role is their direct engagement with European and American Christian Zionist concepts of eschatology, the land and the covenant, as well as their much greater exposure to the liberation theologies of the Western hemisphere. It was their engagement with these questions which resulted in the emergence of a body of Palestinian contextual theology.

Another noticeable flaw, while reflecting on the status of Palestinian contextual theology, is the little influence Palestinian theologians have gained in Western theological scholarship – beyond a select few like Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb. This also applies to the field of World Christianity, despite its attention to theological developments outside of Europe and North America. This is partly because the development of Arab contextual theology came later and was slower to develop than in some other regions of the world. The other reason for this lack of academic attention is the very different status of Christianity in the Middle East, as mentioned in the introduction: in contrast to Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, Christianity in the Middle East is dwindling. Hence, the trajectory of Christianity in the Middle East does not fit the general assumption underlying the field of World Christianity that the number of Christians in the Global South is growing rapidly.

Yet, the challenges Palestinian Christians face have enhanced their sensitivity to the prophetic vocation of their faith and paved the way for theologians to become creative and for citizens to become socially committed. This becomes most apparent in the theologies of witness of, for example, the statements of the Heads of churches in Jerusalem and in the theology of Michel Sabbah. The Latin patriarch emeritus said that it is the vocation of Palestinian Christians to bear the witness of Jesus Christ “first of all, in the face of the holiness of this land, then in the face of the difficult birth of peace and justice in it, and in the face of the oppression and the violation of the dignity of the human person, which is being perpetrated here.”⁸⁴ Therefore, a Palestinian Christian theology of witness strives first of all for justice and then for a Christian contribution to society. Lutheran Bishop Emeritus Munib Younan (b. 1950)

⁸⁴ Michel Sabbah, “Homily at the Benedictine Abbey Hagia Maria Sion in Jerusalem, Pentecost Sunday 8 June 2003,” § 3, in *Faithful Witness: On Reconciliation and Peace in the Holy Land*. Edited by Drew Christiansen S.J. and Saliba Sarsar (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2009), 165-7.

calls this a theology of *martyria* (Greek for ‘witness’) and focuses on the social role of Christianity. He describes witness as a creative *diakonia*, where the Christian faith functions as an inspiration to establish schools, universities, Bible translations, and ecumenical movements.⁸⁵

Hence, theological expressions go beyond the realm of seminar rooms of theological centres like Al-Liqa’, Sabeel, Kairos Palestine, Bethlehem University and Bethlehem Bible College. Theology is part of daily life. Recently, modern media became a significant platform to strengthen the position of Christians in Middle Eastern society by spreading their message, connecting to each other and connecting to the wider world.⁸⁶ The media enables Palestinian churches and theological initiatives to reiterate their presence and identity, in conjunction with bringing their teachings to the homes of people outside the theological centres. Traditionally, television broadcasting has been an important platform for Middle Eastern churches. The live broadcasting of the Christmas message of the Latin patriarchs from the Church of Saint Catherine on Christmas Eve has long had a wide-ranging influence, being shown on Palestinian national television. Apart from Christian Arabic printed media,⁸⁷ the Middle Eastern Christian voice is daily heard through Christian television broadcasting like Télé Luminière (Noursat) from Lebanon, SAT-7 from Cyprus, the Christian Media Center from Jerusalem, and in some cases – like the Christmas message by the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem –

⁸⁵ Munib A. Younan, “Anniversary Worship Service in the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem, Sunday 17 May 2009,” in *Our Shared Witness: A Voice for Justice and Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2012), 41-5. See also: Munib A. Younan, *Witnessing for Peace: In Jerusalem and the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

⁸⁶ Cf. Sara Afshari, “Christian Media,” in *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity: Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 417-26. For a reflection by a Syrian Christian on the Arab Spring and the Christians of the Middle East: Najib George Awad, *And Freedom Became a Public-Square: Political, Sociological and Religious Overview on the Arab Christians and the Arabic Spring* (Berling: Lit Verlag, 2012). This research on the role of modern media for Middle Eastern Christianity is part of a wider body of academic literature that emphasises the potential that satellite channels, digital media and social media bring to democratisation and political reform in the Middle East. See, for example: Nele Lenze, Charlotte Schriwer and Zubaidah Abdul Jalil, eds., *Media in the Middle East: Activism, Politics, and Culture* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Melissa Y. Lerner, “Connecting the Actual with the Virtual: The Internet and Social Movement Theory in the Muslim World – The Cases of Iran and Egypt” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 4 (2010): 555-74; Jakob Feldt and Peter Seeber, eds., *New Media in the Middle East* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2006).

⁸⁷ The oldest Christian printing house is the Franciscan Printing Press, which first published a catechism in 1847 and became the main publishing house for the Catholic Church in Jerusalem and around. Al-Liqa’ Center in Bethlehem is an important publisher of Palestinian theological work, publishing books, bulletins and conference proceedings since 1983. Their first edition of the Al-Liqa’ Quarterly was published in Arabic in 1985 and in English in 1992. Furthermore, Al-Liqa’ has distributed a newsletter in English since 1989, and in Arabic since 1993. The Lutheran Diyar Printing Press has published books since 2011. Sabeel, Kairos Palestine and Bethlehem Bible College have been publishing some Christian work as well. Also worth mentioning is Sabeel’s magazine Cornerstone, published once or twice a year, and the Terra Sancta Quarterly Magazine of the Christian Media Center, published in six different languages: Arabic, English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese.

through national television as well.⁸⁸ Another important media contribution is the live broadcasts of Christian festivals. The first live broadcast from the Christian Media Center was aired on 20 March 2008, showing the ceremony during Holy Hour on Holy Thursday, commemorating the agony of Jesus while praying in Gethsemane, traditionally celebrated in the Church of All Nations next to the Garden of Gethsemane. Recently, social media has become an important platform for Christian spirituality and theology as well, in particular Facebook. Most patriarchates in Jerusalem have a media officer and most priests are active on Facebook as well. High-ranked church leaders like Michel Sabbah and Theodosios Hanna have active Facebook accounts, sending daily inspirational messages to their followers.

This brings us to the question of the interplay between the Palestinian clergy participating in the theological debates on the one hand and the laity on the other hand. Having established that Palestinian contextual theology does not represent all voices equally, but also has expressed itself through social initiatives and modern media, the question arises whether there is a gap between the Christian urban centres and the Christian rural periphery, like Taybeh? I hold this gap to be true to some extent, as the laity in a rural area like Taybeh do not participate or, in some cases, do not even know about the theological initiatives in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The books of Palestinian liberation theology, for example, have not travelled beyond the circle of the Palestinian intelligentsia. However, media and visiting priests or representatives of theological centres have brought theological ideas to the rural areas. Accordingly, Palestinian theological reflection does not stop at the theological centres. In the subsequent parts of this thesis, I will demonstrate that the Christian revival also manifests itself in forms other than theological texts, sermons or pastoral letters; the revival of Palestinian Christianity is also visible in daily life. Parallel developments have taken place in popular religious expressions such as pilgrimage and the veneration of saints, which will be the focus of the following chapters. The next section of this chapter takes us back to Taybeh, in particular to the societal engagement of local businessman, David Khoury and his immediate family, and to the building of a Christian civil society by Roman Catholic priest 'Abūnā Raed Abu Sahlieh.

⁸⁸ Télé Luminière (Noursat) is the first Arab Christian television station, founded in 1991 by a group of Lebanese Catholics. SAT-7 was founded by Terence Ascott and first aired in May 1996. The Christian Media Center was inaugurated on 12 January 2008 in Jerusalem. The Christian Media Center airs the Terra Sancta News weekly, showing the most important developments in the churches in Israel and Palestine.

Taybeh's Christian Contribution to a Thriving Palestinian State

The first day of Taybeh's annual beer festival on 16 September 2017 was a day of scorching heat.⁸⁹ Even the girl who was supposed to serve water to the guests during the opening ceremony had decided to stay home because of the high temperatures. Nevertheless, the lobby of Taybeh's Golden Hotel was packed with guests from the village, as well as church leaders, business contacts and other relations of Taybeh beer Brewery – all invited beforehand and personally greeted on the day itself with a handshake from the brothers and co-owners, David and Nadim Khoury. All three local parish priests were present, as well as Grégoire Pierre Melki (Syrian Catholic Patriarchal Exarch of Jerusalem), Munib Younan (Lutheran Bishop Emeritus of Jerusalem) and special guest this year, Michel Sabbah (Latin Patriarch Emeritus of Jerusalem). By inviting local clergy and prominent church leaders from Jerusalem, the festival was presented as an event with a clearly Christian background. In an air-conditioned room and served with well-presented appetisers, sweets and drinks, the crowd listened to the welcome words of David Khoury and the commendation of Michel Sabbah. The main message during the speeches was the importance of this event for the development of Palestine. Taybeh Oktoberfest is not just a beer festival – it is a statement. The Oktoberfest is intended to “bring people together”, show “a different face of Palestine” and promote its “cultural diversity”; while on a deeper level “bring a sense of normality to the Middle East” and function as “a sign of hope”.⁹⁰

On the day itself there were many activities to engage in. For the children there was face-painting, puppet-making, storytelling, a climbing wall, two clowns and two people dressed up as Spongebob SquarePants and as Elmo from Sesame Street (from American children's television). The grounds of the brewery were filled with stalls selling street foods such as nuts, *shāwarmā*, hamburgers, bread rolls with baked chicken, and crêpes for the sweet tooth. Not to be missed were the two large beer stalls: one that sells Taybeh's regular beers such as Golden, Amber, Dark and Light, and the other where one could try limited release special brews, some of which have a special Palestinian twist, like the Shatta Ale (brewed with locally grown hot pepper) and Sumac Sour (brewed with the Middle Eastern spice *summāq*,

⁸⁹ Field note entry by Elizabeth Martejijn, Taybeh, 17 September 2017.

⁹⁰ Quotes respectively from members of the Khoury family in their promotional video on Facebook: <<https://www.facebook.com/nadim.khoury.526/videos/1891554144286039>> [accessed 21 January 2021].

integral to the traditional Palestinian dish *musakhkhan*). Throughout the day there were performances by a European-style classical music ensemble, the village's *dabka* groups (local folk dance), Palestinian traditional and popular music bands, and a DJ, and there was a fashion show and a beer drinking competition. In the evening, when the temperatures had lowered and a light breeze had emerged, the grounds of Taybeh Brewery became busier with many people from Taybeh and the surrounding Muslim villages, as well as expats, mainly from Ramallah and Jerusalem. The music became louder and more upbeat, the area before the stage became packed with people dancing, and the queue for the beer stalls became longer. Those people from Taybeh who were not visiting the festival sat in front of their houses to watch the bustling activities going on in their normally quiet village. The staff from Taybeh Brewery all wore black t-shirts with the logo of the brewery and a slogan saying "taste the revolution". This slogan is very fitting for Taybeh Brewery, not only for its merchandise, but for the change and innovation the brewery has brought to the village, visible on a day like this.

Taybeh has long been a relatively quiet village off the beaten path. The opening of the paved road to Jericho and to the Allenby Bridge in 1948 allowed travellers to and from Jordan to pass through the village. In 1986, the Roman Catholic Church opened a pilgrim guesthouse bringing in more travellers and pilgrims to Taybeh. It all changed more dramatically when the brothers Khoury came back from the diaspora in Boston, United States of America, to establish a Taybeh microbrewery in 1994, feeling optimistic for the future after the hopeful message of the Oslo Peace Agreement of 1993. They called their beer 'Taybeh beer', after the name of the village and for the meaning of *ṭayyib* ('good', 'delicious'), the Arabic root from which the name was derived. Their first craft beer was launched on 10 August 1995 named 'Taybeh Golden'. As the first microbrewery of Palestine, their goal was to help build the Palestinian economy and to create jobs. After the successful launch of Taybeh Golden, the microbrewery released four other beers: Taybeh Dark (2000), Taybeh Light (2000), Taybeh Amber (2005) and Taybeh Non-Alcoholic (2008). In 2005, the family organised the first Oktoberfest, which attracted around ten thousand people from Palestine, Israel (including leftist Jews) and from other places of the world to this small village and helped to put Taybeh on the tourist map. Not everybody in the village was so welcoming towards a big two-day event like the Oktoberfest, which led to a major conflict in the village in 2013 about a fee and a



Figure 8: Foreign tourists visiting Taybeh's Brewery, October 2017. Photo by author.



Figure 9. Local men pour freshly pressed olive oil in a yellow jerry can, October 2017. Photo taken at the olive press in Taybeh. Photo by author.

share of the revenues and eventually resulted in the festival being moved to the Mövenpick Hotel in Ramallah for one year. Complaints were still heard in 2017 about public drunkenness, feelings of danger (which the people particularly felt from Muslims towards their Taybeh wives and daughters), and the company providing little employment beyond their own family. The family Khoury claim that they responded to these complaints by providing security services during the day, asking visitors for a small fee to enter the grounds, and inviting people from the village to sell their goods during the festival. The family business empire developed further in 2013 when Taybeh Winery was established; in 2015 with the opening of Taybeh Golden Hotel, and during the time of my fieldwork, the family was in the process of building a distillery.⁹¹ Taybeh Brewery is currently led by Madees Khoury, the daughter of Nadim Khoury, adding yet another innovation to their name by introducing Palestinian society to the very first female brewer of the Middle East. The name Taybeh enjoys fame in the region, mainly because of the Taybeh beer. Tour buses regularly stop at Taybeh Golden Hotel and the brewery, and hikers pass through Taybeh as part of the Abraham Path.⁹² Others visit Taybeh because they read about it in newspapers, tourist brochures or travel guides like *Bradt* (2011), *Lonely Planet* (2018), and *Walking Palestine* (2020).⁹³

Similar to the theological initiatives described before, the Khoury family personify the trend among Palestinian Christians to be socially and politically active. They have been the major impetus of change, innovation and rural development in the village since the 1990s, bringing economic prosperity and tourism to the village. The developments have not gone unnoticed and Taybeh received continuous national and international media coverage, both in written and visual forms, particularly between 2000 and 2015, when the village's developments were at their

⁹¹ The distillery will be led by Victor Barakat Jr, interview, Taybeh, 18 October 2017.

⁹² Abraham Path is an initiative of William Ury of a network of hiking trails associated with Abraham's journey. The trip starts in Urfa (Turkey) and ends in Hebron (Palestine). These forms of alternative tourism are growing in Israel and Palestine. For reflections on tourism in Palestine, see: Rami K. Isaac, Michael Hall, and Freya Higgins-Desbiolles, eds., *The Politics and Power of Tourism in Palestine* (London: Routledge, 2016); Rebecca I. Stein, *Itineraries in Conflict: Israelis, Palestinians, and the Political Lives of Tourism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). See also: Tom Selwyn, "The Rise and Fall of Orientalism in Travel, Tourism, and Pilgrimage: Report From Palestine/Israel," *Tourism, Culture & Communication* 17, no. 1 (2017): 7-11; Jackie Feldman, "Constructing a Shared Bible Land: Jewish Israeli Guiding Performances for Protestant Pilgrims," *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 2 (2007): 351-74.

⁹³ Taybeh is featured in: Sarah Irving, *Palestine* (Chalfont St Peter: Bradt Travel Guides, 2011), 205f; Daniel Robertson et al., *Lonely Planet Israel & the Palestinian Territories*. (London: Lonely Planet Publications, 2018), 278f; Stefan Szepesi, *Walking Palestine: 25 Journeys into the West Bank* Updated edition. (Northampton: Interlink Books, 2020), 167-76.

peak.⁹⁴ Among these developments were the endeavours of Jerusalemite Christian Butros Abu Shanab who opened a restaurant in Taybeh in 2002, as well as a heritage centre displaying archaeological findings and folkloristic artefacts of the village. Under the leadership of Roman Catholic priest 'Abūnā Raed Abu Sahlieh, who was Latin parish priest in Taybeh between 2002 and 2012, the village took more pride in its tradition of olive farming. In 2003, 'Abūnā Raed established the Olive Branch Foundation, creating more job opportunities to fight poverty and emigration. He established a modern olive press in the village, and worked together with French Fair Trade organisation Alter Eco, to export the olive oil abroad. A year later 'Abūnā Raed established the Peace Lamb Initiative, creating jobs in ceramics and more fame for the name of Taybeh. The Taybeh Cooperative Society was established in 2005 for the purpose of developing the abilities of Taybeh's women. The women created handiworks, soap, and food products such as jam, honey and *maftūl* (a type of food made from durum wheat), and sold their goods in the local shops. The development continued when the farmers of the village cooperated in 2007 and established the Taybeh Cooperative Agricultural Society. Owing to those developments, Taybeh became part of this wider trend that showed the new face of Palestinian Christianity as a socially and politically engaged community. They had their own little revival, creating a civil society in the village and an independent economy of olive oil and beer.

The existence of the social and political engagement among Palestinian Christians is not new and correlates with their access to Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran mission schools. Their position as a middle-class and highly educated bourgeoisie provided them a competitive edge in comparison with Muslim Palestinians. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Palestinian Christians filled roles of translator and travel guide because of their knowledge of European languages. Historian Jacob Norris states that the Palestinian Christian encounter with Western pilgrims provided them economic opportunities, too. The Palestinian Christians in the areas of Jerusalem and Bethlehem were particularly active in the production and sale of religious souvenirs to the growing number of pilgrims from

⁹⁴ For example, when the Israeli journalist Gideon Levy visited Taybeh in 2010, he noticed well-tended streets, elegant stone mansions, thriving businesses, and of course churches, crosses and statues of the Virgin Mary that "made it seem like Europe." Danish journalist Klaus Wivel visited Taybeh in 2012 and had the same observations: the ancient village Taybeh is booming. See: Gideon Levy, "Twilight Zone/Taybeh Revisited," *Haaretz*, 23 July, <2010. <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5152042>> [accessed 19 February 2019]; Klaus Wivel, *The Last Supper: The Plight of Christians in Arab Lands* (New York: New Vessel Press, 2013), 38-50.

Europe; souvenirs included crosses and rosaries carved of olive wood or mother of pearl, and they specialised in tattoos for the pilgrims, of which the most common was the five-fold Jerusalem cross.⁹⁵ Experts on Palestinian literature, like Qustandi Shomali and Ami Ayalon, have demonstrated that Christians in Palestine were also at the forefront of the development of the press in the nineteenth century, just as other *Nahḍawī* Christians in the wider Levant and Egypt were.⁹⁶ The first and most active printing press in Palestine was the Franciscan Printing Press (1846), soon followed by the establishment of the Armenian Printing Press (1848), Printing Press of the Holy Sepulchre (1849), and the British Missionary Church Society Press (1879).⁹⁷ During the late Ottoman period there were 25 Palestinian newspapers, of which 19 newspapers were Christian-owned.⁹⁸ The most important contributions came from Najib Nasser from Haifa, the founder of *Al-Karmil* (1908), the brothers 'Isa al-'Isa and Yusuf al-'Isa from Jaffa, the founders of *Falastin* (1911), who have been referred to before in chapter 1, and the literary and political contributions of Emil al-Ghoury (1907-1984). These newspapers were highly politicised and provided one of the earliest warnings against the dangers of Zionism for Palestinians. In fact, the first Arab protest against the Zionist immigrations in 1891 was organised by Palestinian Christians.⁹⁹ Till today, Christians have contributed with cultural-nationalist expressions in the arts. Palestinian Christian painters Sliman Mansour (b. 1947) and Kamal Boullata (1942-2019) are among the most foundational figures in contemporary Palestinian art, both in terms of artistic contribution and historical reflection.¹⁰⁰ Also worth mentioning are writer and lawyer Raja Shehadeh (b. 1951), filmmaker Leila Mansour (b. 1966), and singer Rim Banna (1966-2018).

⁹⁵ Jacob Norris, "Dragomans, Tattooists, Artisans: Palestinian Christians and their Encounters with Catholic Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Global History* 14, no. 1 (2019): 68-86.

⁹⁶ Ami Ayalon, *Reading Palestine: Printing and Literacy, 1900-1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Qustandi Shomali, "Palestinian Christians: Politics, Press and Religious Identity 1900-1948," in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, edited by Anthony O'Mahony, Goran Gunner and Kevork Hintlian (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 225-36.

⁹⁷ Shomali, "Palestinian Christians," 225; Ayalon, *Reading Palestine*, 57; Bernard Sabella, "Christian Contributions to Art, Culture, and Literature in the Arab-Islamic World," in *Secular Nationalism and Citizenship in Muslim Countries: Arab Christians in the Levant*, edited by Kail C. Ellis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 94.

⁹⁸ Cf. Shomali, "Palestinian Christians," 227ff.

⁹⁹ Cf. Anthony O'Mahony, "The Religious, Political and Social Status of the Christian Communities in Palestine, c. 1800-1930," in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, edited by Anthony O'Mahony, Goran Gunner and Kevork Hintlian (London: Scorpion Cavendish Ltd, 1995), 247.

¹⁰⁰ Themes in Palestinian Christian art, such as work by Sliman Mansour and Kamal Boullata, surround rural symbols of identity and belonging (see also chapter 3), dignity of women, and the importance of Jerusalem. Cf. Theo Sundermeier, *For An Open Jerusalem: Palestinian Christian Art Today* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2018), 81-122.

Christians have, thus, been active contributors to the Palestinian national movement from the beginning. At the time of the British Mandate, the just referenced Emil al-Ghoury was Secretary-General of the Arab Higher Committee (AHC) and Secretary-General of the Palestine Arab Party, and Khalil al-Sakakini, discussed in the previous chapter, was Elected-Secretary of the Palestinian Congress.¹⁰¹ Christians were also leaders of leftist parties, such as the Greek Orthodox Christian from Lod, George Habash (1926-2008), the founder of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP, 1967), and the Jordanian Roman Catholic Nayef Hawatmeh (b. 1938), the founder of the Marxist Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP, 1968). High-profile leaders such as Habash and Hawatmeh, and lesser-known figures like Anton Daoud (1909-1969) and Wadie Haddad (1927-1978), did not shy away from the use of armed struggle in their fight for freedom. Apart from Habash and Hawatmeh, other Palestinian Christians who have fulfilled or continue to fulfil roles in the Palestinian national movement include former Minister Hanan Ashrawi (b. 1946) and diplomat Afif Safieh (b. 1950) of the Palestinian Liberation Movement (PLO), which is currently the main political player in the Palestinian Territories. Among the Arab representatives in Israeli politics, Palestinian Christian leaders have emerged such as Azmi Bishara (b. 1956), Tawfiq Toubi (1922-2011) and Emil Habibi (1922-1996) – the latter two identify as communist.¹⁰² After a presidential decree signed by PLO President Mahmoud Abbas (b. 1935) in 2005, it was established that six out of the 132 seats of the Palestinian Legislative Council should be reserved for Christians, which is a higher quota than the actual demographic percentage of Palestinian Christians. And in 2001, then PLO President Yassar Arafat declared in another presidential decree that the ten traditionally Christian localities of the West Bank should have a Christian mayor, including Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Ramallah, Bir Zeit, Jifna, Taybeh, Aboud, Ain Arik, and Zababdeh. These two decrees are still in effect today. Hence, Palestinian Christians should not be placed outside the realm of politics. The question remains whether Christians are equal to and enjoy the same rights as Muslims. According to political scientist Fiona McCallum, religious identity is a crucial factor for political regimes throughout the Middle East in determining how to deal with Christians.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Cf. Fuad D. Farah, *Christian Presence in the Holy Land* (Nazareth: Own Publication, 2011), 145.

¹⁰² On the involvement of Orthodox Christians in Communism, see: Mack, "Orthodox and Communist."

¹⁰³ Fiona McCallum has identified three types of regime policies in the Middle East regarding Christian political participation: 1) perceiving Christians as the same (e.g. Syria), 2) emphasising Christians as loyal citizens (e.g.

Although the PLO defines the Palestinian Territories as a secular state, Christians have to navigate which roles they might be eligible for in an overtly Islamic society.

This dominant Islamic character of the Palestinian society makes the contribution of the Khoury brothers so intriguing. In contrast to the above mentioned Palestinian Christian journalists, artists, and political leaders, the Khoury brothers created a product that on first sight seems foreign to Palestinian culture and even illicit in an Islamic context. In an interview with David Khoury, he explained how his business empire began. He stated that before the brothers returned from the United States to Taybeh, they had been in the liquor business in Boston since 1986. Since the industry in craft beer was booming in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, the brothers saw opportunities to expand their business, but decided to do this back in their home country of Palestine. Nadim Khoury and his father travelled to Tunisia in 1993 to meet with Yassar Arafat, who had his headquarters there from 1982 till 1994, “to ensure that Palestine would be a democratic state and that brewing is allowed”, and Arafat personally granted the Khoury family a liquor licence.¹⁰⁴ David Khoury emphasised that alcoholic drinks were, in fact, not foreign to Palestinian culture: Jesus turned water into wine in Cana (John 2:1-11) and Christian families have made and sold ‘araq for centuries.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, in his extensive study of the history of Stella Beer in Egypt, historian Omar D. Foda argues that beer in this context is a ‘hybrid entity’: “it is neither exclusively foreign nor Egyptian.”¹⁰⁶ The popularity of beer in the Middle East coincided with the concomitant cultural change of the rise of a middle class wanting to meld both East and West, Foda states. Beer as a modern and secular entity has functioned as a powerful tool for communicating identity. The same is true for Taybeh beer. Khoury explained that the ingredients to make beer, including malted barley, hops and yeast, are all imported from Europe,

Egypt's Coptic Christians' involvement in the nationalist movement against the British in the early and mid-twentieth century), 3) institutionalisation through quotas for minority groups (e.g. Iraq, Jordan, Palestinian Territories). The political scientist concludes her review that the role of Christians in the political system “illustrates their presence but provides constraints on their influence, thus highlighting that religious difference still matters, irrespective of the extent of national unity rhetoric” (p. 16f). Fiona McCallum, “Christian Political Participation in the Arab world,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23, no. 1 (2012): 3-18. Other recent edited books on Middle Eastern Christians and politics include: Kail C. Ellis, ed., *Secular Nationalism and Citizenship in Muslim Countries: Arab Christians in the Levant* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Mohammed Girma and Cristian Romocea, eds., *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. David Khoury, interview, Taybeh, 21 October 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Nader Muaddi of Taybeh established Arak Muaddi in 2018 and operates from Beit Jala. The other major brand, Golden Arak Ramallah (1945), is operated by Nakleh and Bishara Jubran, two Palestinian Christians as well.

¹⁰⁶ Omar D. Foda, *Egypt's Beer: Stella, Identity, and the Modern State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019), 6.

and that the Taybeh beers are crafted according to the German Purity Law to guarantee the quality of the product. The Palestinianness of the beer is in the water, the main ingredient of the product, coming from the spring on Taybeh land called 'Ayn Sāmīa. The fact that the vast majority of Palestinians are Muslim does not pose a challenge either. Drinking alcohol is seen as a Christian practice and Muslims respect that, Khoury explains. In order to serve the majority of Muslims, the Khoury family launched their non-alcoholic beer. In fact, some Muslims did attend the beer festival in 2017, although these were mainly young men.

Hence, with their business empire, the Khoury family contributes to the Palestinian society economically and creates a specific Christian voice in the larger Palestinian national movement.¹⁰⁷ David Khoury declared: "When you say Taybeh beer, you say Palestinian beer." Brewing beer in Palestine becomes a matter of identity: "We do not have the state of Palestine, but I can tell you, we have our own national beer and national wine." Anthropologist Anne Meneley employs the term 'agro-resistance' to indicate these Palestinian non-violent resistance practices involving food.¹⁰⁸ In Meneley's analysis of the Taybeh Brewery, she argues that the use of local resources, in this case the water from 'Ayn Sāmīa, links to the conflict and discourse of access to Palestinian resources, and thus to the larger political project of freeing Palestine from Israeli occupation. Although the website of Taybeh Brewery is free of politics, their media output and tour of the brewery repeatedly mention the economic challenges the members of the family face because of the Israeli infrastructure of control. They are subject to checkpoints to transport their goods, and tourists and visitors are subject to the same control when they travel from the airport (or another place in Israel or Jordan) to the Taybeh Hotel and the Taybeh Brewery. The Khoury family's work connects to Michel Sabbah's earlier command to his fellow Christians to be 'in the service of society'. David Khoury understands his

¹⁰⁷ As far as I know, all microbreweries in the Levant are Christian-owned, including Taybeh Brewery (founded: 1994) and Shepherd's Brewery (founded: 2015) in the Palestinian Territories, Carakale Brewing Company (founded: 2010) in Jordan, and 961 Brewery (founded: 2006), Colonel Brewery (founded: 2014) and Elmir Brewery (founded: 2017) in Lebanon. It is not the first time that Christian identity and brewing have been so closely identified; it was also the case with the Irish beer Guinness (founded: 1759) and the English beer Buxton (founded: 2009). The history of macrobreweries in the Middle East is slightly more complicated with foreign shareholders, such as Almaza in Lebanon (part of Heineken, the Netherlands) and Stella Beer in Egypt (part of Stella Artois, Belgium). There is insufficient information available on the religious background of the leadership of those macrobreweries, so it is hard to tell if these are Christian owned as well.

¹⁰⁸ Anne Meneley, "Resistance is Fertile!" *Gastronomica* 14, no. 1 (2014): 69-78. For another academic study that deals with the Taybeh Brewery and Winery, see: Daniel Monterescu and Arien Handel, "Liquid Indigeneity: Wine, Science, and Colonial Politics in Israel/Palestine," *American Ethnologist* 46, no. 3 (2019): 313-27. It should be noted, however, that both these studies are not based on extensive ethnography in the village with the Khoury family, and that no religious perspectives have been taken into account.

labour in Taybeh both as a Christian right and a Christian duty: “We have the right to live in this village with dignity... I am a big believer that this is the originality; this [place, ESM] is where Christianity started. And we continue thriving for as long as somebody like Father Raed and me are committed to the well-being of this Christian village.” From 2005 till 2013, David Khoury served as elected mayor of Taybeh. During this time he enlarged the Orthodox school in Taybeh, helped set up an Orthodox housing project, fire station, police station, post office, and rubbish collection system. He also paid for crosses to be put on the church towers and lit up at night. As a pious Orthodox Christian coming from the priesthood family, he feels “it is my cause to keep Taybeh Christian, because I want to be able to live as a Christian.” Khoury’s corporate vision for Palestine thus merges with matters of Christian identity and is grounded in the theological conviction to be a faithful servant to God and society.

David Khoury’s “service to society”, to use the words of Michel Sabbah again, does not stand on its own. Palestinian sociologist Bernard Sabella notes that Palestinian Christians have disproportionately contributed to Palestinian society in the spheres of education, health care and civil society.¹⁰⁹ Sabella claims that 65 out of the 1800 schools in the Palestinian Territories are Christian, and two out of the 13 universities are established and run by Christians as well. These universities include Bethlehem University and Dar al-Kalima University, the former was established by Pope Paul VI in the context of his visit in 1964 and the latter in 2006 by the Reverend Mitri Raheb referred to earlier in this chapter.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, according to Sabella, about 30% of Palestinian medical services are run by Christians, such as the Caritas Baby Hospital in Bethlehem (Catholic, founded in 1953), the Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem (Lutheran, founded in 1910), and the Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza (Anglican, founded in 1882). On top of that, 54% of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and 80% of the human rights organisations are run and headed by Palestinian Christians.¹¹¹ Political scientist Paul S. Rowe argues that this “*Nahḍa* of Christian civil activism and social concern” is a survival strategy through

¹⁰⁹ Sabella, “Palestine,” 142ff.

¹¹⁰ Some might add Birzeit University to the list, which dates back to the establishment of a girl’s school in 1924 by the Anglican Nasser family. However, it has now developed into a secular national university and should not be considered as a Christian higher educational institute anymore. Birzeit University is still popular among Palestinian Christian students. The majority of the students from Taybeh attend Birzeit University as well, mainly because of its proximity to the village and its reputation as the most prestigious Palestinian university.

¹¹¹ Sabella, “Palestine,” 143.

which Christians extend their influence and make space for themselves in the Middle Eastern society.¹¹² Through his research among Palestinian Christians working in this field, he concludes that Christians are motivated to raise a distinctive voice in their community, to feel a sense of unity in the face of sectarianism, to support non-violent alternatives, to serve and transform the society, and lastly, to act as an apologetic for the resilience of the community. Anthropologist Amahl Bishara pays attention to the international character of this field, which she terms “Palestinian Christian networked activism.”¹¹³ Palestinian Christians are particularly networked via progressive Christian organisations in Europe and the United States, via Christian tourism in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and via Christian and alternative tours that foster political solidarity with the Palestinians.

Hence, the initiatives of David Khoury during his mayoralty, as well as ‘*Abūnā* Raed’s work as parish priest of Taybeh’s Latin Church, fall into this trend of Christian civil activism and social concern since the 1980s. During an interview with ‘*Abūnā* Raed, he explained that his civil service emerged from a “theology of presence in the Holy Land.”¹¹⁴ When I met ‘*Abūnā* Raed in early 2017, he had left his post as parish priest of Taybeh and was Director General of Caritas Jerusalem, the main humanitarian and development organisation of the Catholic Church in Israel and Palestine.¹¹⁵ ‘*Abūnā* Raed said about the status of Palestinian Christians: “I refuse to be called a minority. Being a minority makes us weak, indifferent and strangers in our own land. We do not look to quantity, but to quality. It is about our presence, to be a witness in the Holy Land.” His theology of presence is based on the thought that Jesus was born, crucified and resurrected in the land, and so Palestinian Christians

¹¹² Paul S. Rowe, “The Open Sanctuary: Palestinian Christian Civil Society Organizations and the Survival of the Christian Minority in Israel-Palestine,” *Journal of Church and State* 59, no. 3 (2017): 428-46. Rowe borrows the phrase “*Nahḍa* of civil society activism” from Benoit Challand, “A *Nahḍa* of Charitable Organizations? Health Service Provision and the Politics of Aid in Palestine,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, no. 2 (2008): 227-47.

¹¹³ Amahl Bishara, “Palestinian Christian Networked Activism. Reifying ‘Nonviolence’ or Divining Justice?” *Review of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 2 (2009), 178-88. In their recent edited volume, historians Anthony Gorman and Sarah Irving argue that one needs to tread carefully in portraying the interaction between Arab and non-Arab players in the Middle East, especially when (post-)colonial Europe is involved. They urge to go beyond the colonial-national narrative and its binary views of East-West, and warn not to fall into the trap of the cosmopolitan model that encapsulates the underlying impulse in Middle Eastern society for multilingual, multiethnic, and multifaith harmony, which they call nostalgic and idealist. Gorman and Irving’s model of ‘cultural entanglement’ recognises the interrelation quality of cultural practices set in a specific context and time, yet acknowledges the workings of power and privilege within these settings, too. See: Anthony Gorman and Sarah Irving, “Introduction,” in *Cultural Entanglement in the Pre-independence Arab World: Arts, thought and literature*, edited by Anthony Gorman and Sarah Irving (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 1-14.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Fr. Raed AbuSahlieh, Jerusalem, 17 February 2017.

¹¹⁵ Fr. Raed remained Director General of Caritas Jerusalem till August 2017, after which he became parish priest of Reineh (north Israel).

should remain there. 'Abūnā Raed added: "We are not here by choice. It was God's choice that we are here, so we must live under the shadow of the cross. We may even have to be on the cross, if we have to die. And no, that is not an easy life. But it is our vocation, so we must not lose hope." His theology parallels the Palestinian Christian vocation to be a Christian witness through serving the whole society, referenced repeatedly in this chapter, and it strongly counteracts the popular rhetoric of extinction and persecution of Middle Eastern Christians.

In his newest book, *The Politics of Persecution: Middle Eastern Christians in an Age of Empire* (2021), Mitri Raheb states that Christian persecution is a Western construct. He argues that it says more about the West than about Christians of the Middle East; the persecution narrative is of an orientalist perception and part of a larger geopolitical power play. While the visibility and vitality of Middle Eastern Christianity are not what they once were, Christians still get involved in the national and regional struggle towards social and political transformation, Raheb argues. He finishes his book by confirming that the story of the Middle Eastern Christians is "one of struggle, resistance, social involvement, and resilience."¹¹⁶ The story of the Khoury family and 'Abūnā Raed underlines that these Christian contributions to society, which Raheb refers to, come from a broad variety of church denominations, localities and socio-political backgrounds, and that these contributions are made in a variety of different ways.

Conclusion

Along the lines of the recent scholarship on Middle Eastern Christianity that has positioned Christians as integral parts of Middle Eastern society, this chapter has sought to explore the multi-dimensional contributions Palestinian Christians have made to Palestinian society. The chapter has established that Palestinian theology and Christianity has undergone a revival: a spiritual, societal and political awakening through which the community became more socially and politically engaged.

The revival of the Palestinian Church has emerged broadly since the 1970s. Historical events like the *Nakba* of 1948 and the *Naksa* of 1967 gave rise to an independent Christian Palestinian thought, both politically and theologically. Particularly in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, developments like the First *Intifāḍa* and

¹¹⁶ Mitri Raheb, *The Politics of Persecution: Middle Eastern Christians in An Age of Empire* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2021), 156.

the indigenisation of church leadership encouraged Palestinian Christian leaders to speak out. Since the turn of the millennium, Palestinian theology has become more localised, by not prioritising international Christian connections but by emphasising the importance of local theological discussion. Earlier theological initiatives, such as the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, the joint statements of Patriarchs and Heads of Christian communities of Jerusalem, the local theology of the Al-Liqa' Center in Bethlehem, and the liberation theology of Sabeel Center in Jerusalem, became enriched by newer theological streams such as Palestinian Kairos theology and Palestinian Evangelical theology. It is now possible to speak of a systematised body of Palestinian theology containing theological reflection on the concepts of liberation, reconciliation, witness, interreligious dialogue, and ecumenism. Throughout this chapter the importance of 'context' has been apparent. There are two different ways in which context has influenced Palestinian theology. A theology of liberation is based on a 'context of co-resistance', found in places such as Jerusalem, where Christians live together with Muslims *against* the Israeli occupier. In contrast, theology focusing on reconciliation and witness leans more towards a 'context of co-existence': living peacefully together *with* the other, with Jews and with Muslims.

This theological revival is part of a wider and more gradual social and political engagement in which we find Palestinian Christians contributing to society in the spheres of politics, the arts, and social welfare. Christians from the highly educated bourgeoisie from the cities were among the early contributors to the Palestinian national movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They have held high-profile political positions in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Palestinian Christians are also found among the leaders in Palestinian art, where Najib Nasser and the al-'Isa brothers are the most well-known examples from Palestinian literature and journalism in the early nineteenth century, and the painters Sliman Mansour and Kamal Boullata in contemporary Palestinian art. Moreover, Palestinian Christians have disproportionately contributed to Palestinian society in the spheres of education, healthcare and civil society. This chapter has demonstrated that this Christian civil activism and social concern is also found in the village of Taybeh that had its own little revival between the 1990s and the 2010s, paralleling the height of the theological revival in Palestinian churches. Through the work of local businessman David Khoury and his immediate family, and the Roman Catholic

priest 'Abūnā Raed Abu Sahlieh, the village underwent a period of innovation and rural development that resulted in a better-developed local civil society and an independent economy of olive oil and beer. Owing to those developments, Taybeh became part of the wider trend that showed the new face of Palestinian Christianity as a socially and politically engaged community.

On a more fundamental level, this chapter offered a fresh approach to Palestinian Christianity, and more broadly to Christianity in the modern Middle East. While fully acknowledging the vulnerability in which Palestinian Christians are living, the community should be approached as active citizens who are constantly reinventing themselves to adapt to the socio-political and economically challenging circumstances. Other approaches, such as the approach of a steady and slow death and the approach of systematic persecution, run the risk of robbing Palestinian Christians of their agency and depicting them as isolated from, and as victims of, their Muslim compatriots. In the next two chapters, I will build on this and demonstrate that the Palestinian Christian creative potential to adapt to the changing circumstances enabled a renewal of ancient Palestinian expressions, and that these grassroots expressions have recently merged with the theological discourses that have been described here.

~ Part 2 ~
Renewal

3

A Grassroots Theology of Land and Belonging

Taybeh, 18 March 2018

On an ordinary Sunday morning mid-March 2018, the people of Taybeh's Melkite Greek Catholic community met for coffee in the priest's house after worship. The gathering had received the holy bread from 'Abūnā Jack at the end of the Divine Liturgy and walked down the stairs to the church hall, while chatting. They entered the communal room in the house of the priest and sat down, waiting for the priest. The men and women sat separately, as is the custom in all three of Taybeh's churches, and the children played outside. In the middle of the room was a special seat reserved for 'Abūnā Jack, but 'Abūnā did not wish to sit there and placed a Bible (*al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*) on this seat. As soon as 'Abūnā Jack arrived, some women came in from the kitchen and poured strong Arab coffee into small paper cups and bottled mineral water into bigger plastic cups. Like every Sunday, the priest provided Arab confectionary, such as *baqlāwa* (filo pastry, nuts and honey) and *m'amūl* (wheat flour and semolina filled with a mixture of dates), and shared round the purple Quality Street box full of plastic-wrapped chocolates.

On most Sundays, people sit together for about twenty minutes, enjoying a brief conversation and chatting to visitors (who are usually Taybeh people now living elsewhere). They discuss the latest news from the village – such as births, marriages and deaths – and news from the Taybeh community in the diaspora. On this Sunday in the bright and sunny Middle Eastern spring, a woman there raised a particularly interesting question. 'Abūnā,' she said, 'what is the story about Taybeh in the Bible?' 'Abūnā Jack took the Bible from the 'throne' and asked the women to come and sit round. The background to the question was that the Latin parish had guests from

other parishes and the Latin Seminary in Beit Jala coming over that Sunday to celebrate Jesus' visit to Taybeh. 'Abūnā Jack asked the woman to read the Gospel of John 11:54 out loud, while everyone was listening: "Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples." 'Abūnā Jack explained that Taybeh is believed to be the New Testament village of Ephraim and the Old Testament village of Ophrah, but that the name was officially changed to Taybeh when Saladin conquered Jerusalem in 1187 and called representatives from every village to meet him. Saladin understood the names Ephraim and Ophrah to be derived from the Arabic root 'afrit or 'ifrit, meaning 'dirty', 'ugly' or 'demon', so when the people of Ophrah/Ephraim came forward, Saladin said that this name was not right for them. He called them 'Taybeh' instead, derived from the Arabic *ṭayyib*, meaning 'good' or 'pure'. The women of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church nodded in agreement, as they had all heard this story of Saladin since their childhood days.

Taybeh's Biblical Association with Ephraim and Ophrah

During the course of my fieldwork, the perceived continuity between the Old Testament village Ophrah, the New Testament village Ephraim, and the modern-day village of Taybeh was mentioned by the villagers countless times.¹ The ethnographic vignette sketched above was a collective affirmation of the origin story of the name 'Taybeh', and I repeatedly heard this story referred to in personal conversations with individuals. The inhabitants of Taybeh boost the gospel association and emphasise that their ancestors welcomed Jesus and his disciples. On top of that, the locals from Taybeh also emphasise continuity with Ophrah, mentioned in Judges chapter 6, which describes the calling of Gideon and the sign of the fleece. There is a local tradition in Taybeh that remembers the exact location of Gideon's altar in Ophrah on a certain rock on the hill called *Jabal Jizza* ('Hill of Fleece'), which is located on the edge of the village and contains the remnants of churches built in several historical periods: Roman, Byzantine and Crusader. The story goes that Gideon received the sign of the fleece in Taybeh and that the father of Gideon was buried on one of the

¹ Parts of this chapter are based on my earlier published article: Elizabeth S. Marteiijn, "The Politics of Belonging: Understanding Biblical History in Palestinian Rural Culture," *Studies in World Christianity* 26, no. 1 (2020): 4-20.

hilltops in Taybeh's direct environment. Furthermore, the people believe that Saint Elijah rested in a cave near *Jabal Jizza* and that the first church on *Jabal Jizza* was built by Saint Helen,² who also instructed to build some of the holiest churches of Christianity, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Old City of Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Apart from the famous biblical places – like Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth – it is important for the people to underline that their village has biblical significance, too.³

In these Palestinian Christian places, either famous or lesser-known biblical associations are lived out and imprinted in its religious life. Up until the 1980s it was traditional for Taybeh's Christians to walk on the Saturday before Palm Sunday to the village Al-Eizariya, which has been associated with Bethany, the biblical village where Jesus started his palm procession.⁴ Hence, walking from Taybeh-Ephraim to Al-Eizariya-Bethany resembled the same path Jesus walked before Holy Week. An artistic manifestation of the gospel association is the mosaic behind the altar of the Latin parish church, so large that it nearly covers the whole wall, depicting Jesus and his disciples entering the town and being welcomed by the locals (figure 13).⁵ The Latin parish annually celebrates this biblical event with a special mass in March, as mentioned in the ethnographic vignette above.⁶ Left of the altar a byzantine icon visualises the local oral history saying the Virgin Mary came to visit Jesus during his stay in Taybeh-Ephraim (figure 10). According to this tradition of 'Our Lady of Ephraim', the Holy Mother visited Taybeh-Ephraim just before Jesus' passion. As a

² Cf. Fr. Constantine Nasr, interviewed by Elizabeth Martejijn, Taybeh, 30 October 2017.

³ One should note that Taybeh is not the only Palestinian village with a lesser-known gospel association. The people of Zababdeh, for example, claim their village is the place where the visitation of Mary and Elizabeth took place (Luke 1:39-56). Correspondingly, the Christians of Ramallah believe that the Transfiguration happened in their city (Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36). Beit Sahour is considered to be the place where the angel appeared to the shepherds announcing the birth of Jesus Christ (Luke 2:8-20). Moreover, Palestinian religious folklore recounts many other places, water sources, hills, trees, etc. with biblical connections (see also chapter 4).

⁴ See Mathew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-44 and John 12:12-19. Currently, the palm procession starts from the Church in Bethphage, 1.2 mile from Al-Eizariya, and goes down the Mount of Olives to the Basilica of Saint Anne in the Old City of Jerusalem. The procession is led by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and attended by Palestinian Christians and international pilgrims alike. Palestinian Christians from Israel and the West Bank travel to Jerusalem in large tour buses organised by their parish. The parish priest is in charge of applying for travel permits for those eligible. This Israeli permit system for people living in the West Bank and Gaza, implemented in 1991, greatly restricts the freedom of movement and their ability to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Hence, Taybeh's tradition ended because of the challenges posed by the ongoing political situation.

⁵ According to Pierre Medebielle the mosaic was a gift from Bp. Maxime Charles (1908-1993), who served as rector of the Sacré-Cœur Basilica in Paris from 1959 to 1985. The costs of the mosaic were 1,700 dinars. Bp. Maxime Charles had visited Taybeh numerous times in the footsteps of Charles de Foucauld. The mosaic was made in Milan by a certain Professor Rivetta (on the mosaic the name 'Pit. Rivetta' is revealed in the right corner). It seems the mosaic was in place before the consecration of the church in 1971. Cf. Medebielle, *Ephrem-Taybeh et son Histoire Chrétienne*, 27.

⁶ While the Orthodox and Melkite Greek Catholics believe in the same gospel-association, their clergy do not celebrate this at a particular time of the year.

consolation for the time yet to come, the people of Taybeh-Ephraim gave the Holy Mother a pomegranate. The membranes of the pomegranate symbolised the suffering and death her son had to go through, but the red arils within these membranes would comfort her that the sweetness of the resurrection would follow.⁷ The icon depicts the Virgin Mary in an Eastern way, carrying the baby Jesus on the right arm (*Theotokos*), while simultaneously holding a pomegranate in the palm of her left hand. This tradition is also visible in the painting 'Our Lady of Ephraim' (2003) by the Florentine painter Alfredo Cifariello (1928-2015) (figure 11) and 'Our Lady of Ephraim' (2006) by local painter T. Kamel (figure 12). Similarly, the Orthodox Church has a rock on which Jesus would allegedly have prayed and a cave he might have stayed in, just as the townspeople remember an alley close to the Orthodox Church to be the oldest stones in the village where Jesus has walked. The people from Taybeh also engage in sacrificial offerings on *Jabal Jizza* after fulfilling a vow to Saint George, a practice that will be further dealt with in chapter 4. To sum up, the tradition of Taybeh as the biblical Ophrah and Ephraim is widely alive among the inhabitants of the village.



Figure 10: *Byzantine icon Lady of Ephraim, the Latin parish church in Taybeh.* Photo by author.



Figure 11: *Lady of Ephraim, Alfredo Cifariello (Italian), priory of the Latin parish church in Reneh, 2003.* Photo by author.



Figure 12: *Lady of Ephraim, T. Kamel (Palestinian), priory of the Latin parish church in Taybeh, 2006.* Photo by Raed Abu Sahlieh.

⁷ Cf. Fr. Raed AbuSahlieh, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Reineh 13 October 2017. During the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, celebrated annually on 14 September, Levantine Christians distribute pomegranates that symbolise the blood of Christ on the cross. Cf. field note entry by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Taybeh, 14 September 2017. Similarly, within the Jewish tradition, pomegranates are traditionally eaten on *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year).

It is clear that local knowledge and oral history are the main sources for the biblical association between Taybeh, Ophrah and Ephraim. However, in several instances people in the village relied on the narration of Jesus' life according to Italian Roman Catholic nun and writer Maria Valtorta (1897-1961), which is based on visions and personal conversations with Jesus. In her ten-volume book *The Gospel as Revealed to Me* (originally *Il Poema dell' Uomo-Dio*, published in Italian in 1956), Maria Valtorta describes Jesus' stay in Ephraim in 171 pages based on visions she had from 8 January till 24 February 1947, while being bedridden in Viareggio, a coastal city in Tuscany, Italy.⁸ According to Valtorta, Jesus arrived in Ephraim after he had raised Lazarus from the dead (corresponding to John 11:38-44) and was in danger from the Sanhedrin (corresponding to John 11:45-53). Therefore, Jesus sought refuge in Ephraim (corresponding to John 11:54), being located outside of the jurisdiction of Judea, just across the border in Samaria. In her book, Valtorta narrates many encounters Jesus had with the inhabitants of Ephraim and visitors who came to see him in the village, among whom were Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Claudia Procula, the Virgin Mary and several women disciples.⁹ Shortly after Jesus had left Ephraim, Valtorta writes that he embarked on a journey through Samaria visiting other villages as well as the cities Shechem (identified by some as the modern city Nablus), Jericho, and lastly the house of Lazarus in Bethany (the visit to Bethany corresponds to John 12:1-9), before returning to Jerusalem where he was welcomed with palm branches (corresponding to John 12:12-16). Based on Valtorta's descriptions, some people of Taybeh believe that Jesus stayed in Taybeh-Ephraim for more than a month. Others in the village are sceptical about Valtorta's account and claim that Jesus stayed in the village for about three days.

The question regarding the plausibility of the biblical association has also driven a handful of researchers to Taybeh. One of them was German researcher Karl-Heinz Fleckenstein, who conducted a study at the *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* in Jerusalem in the 1980s to delve into the specifics of this biblical

⁸ See: Maria Valtorta, *The Gospel as Revealed to Me*. Vol. 1-10. Trans. by Nicandro Picozzi (Isola del Liri: Centro Editoriale Valtortiano, 2012). The events happening in Ephraim are spread over 17 chapters (chapter 552-554 in volume 8, and chapters 555-568 in volume 9).

⁹ Valtorta mentions that the inhabitants of Ephraim welcomed Jesus with 'deepest signs of respect' (vol. 8, p. 492). She recounts Jesus' encounter with the three orphan children in Ephraim to whom Jesus explains the concept of original sin (vol. 8, pp. 508ff). According to Valtorta, sick people came to see Jesus in Ephraim when the news had spread of his stay there. Other notable visitors were the relatives of the orphan children (vol. 9, p. 31), people from Shechem (vol. 9, p. 37), people from Decapolis (vol. 9, p. 43), Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (vol. 9, pp. 49f) and the wife of Pontius Pilate, mentioned with the name Claudia Procula (vol. 9, p. 53). The Virgin Mary also arrives in Ephraim (vol. 9, p. 117), along with several women disciples (vol. 9, p. 117).

association between Taybeh and Ephraim and Ophrah.¹⁰ Fleckenstein clarifies that the name 'Ephraim' is used in the Bible to refer to the name of a person, the name of a tribe, the name of a mountain range and the name of a city.¹¹ The same study argues that the cities described as Ophrah, Ephraim and Ephron are the same, based on further biblical geographical references that this city is near Baal Hazor, Bethel, and Michmas.¹² Apart from John 11:54, there are several other places in the Bible that mention the name Ophrah, Ephraim, or Ephron as a city. In Joshua 18:21-23, Ophrah is described as being part of the land of the tribe of Benjamin, which is mentioned again in 1 Samuel 13:17 during the war between Saul and the Philistines. In 2 Samuel 13:23, the Bible tells that it was a place called Ephraim near Baal-Hazor where Absalom retaliated for the rape of his sister Tamar by having his half-brother Ammon killed. In 2 Chronicles 13:18-19, the place 'Ephron' is mentioned when Abijah, King of Judah, captured Bethel, Jeshanah, and Ephron of Jeroboam, King of Israel. Fleckenstein does believe Taybeh to be the modern-day Ephraim, but cannot confirm Taybeh as the place where Gideon built his altar. He mentions that Judges 6:15 describes Ophrah as being part of Manasseh in the north of Israel, and therefore Fleckenstein places this version of Ophrah between Mount Gilboa and Mount Tabor.¹³ One should note, however, that Fleckenstein's research is of a specialised nature, and somewhat disconnected from the lived biblical tradition of the people of Taybeh, as described in the previous paragraphs.

Other available written sources regarding Taybeh's biblical association date back to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. These sources are written by the hand of Western explorers and scholars who found their way to Taybeh, mostly to demonstrate the historicity of the Bible. In his extensive work *Description Géographique, Historique et Archéologique de la Palestine* (1869), French explorer Victor Guérin (1821-91) spent several pages on the history of Taybeh, which he had

¹⁰ Karl-Heinz Fleckenstein, "Eine Stadt namens Ephraim, Johannes 11,54: Eine Geschichtlich-Geographische Untersuchung." ('A city named Ephraim, John 11:54: A Historical-Geographical Study') (Master's diss., Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 1987). See also: Bellarmino Bagatti, *Ancient Christian Villages of Samaria*. Trans by Paul Rotondi (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2002), 39-45.

¹¹ Fleckenstein, "Eine Stadt namens Ephraim, Johannes 11,54," 14-50.

¹² Cf. Fleckenstein, "Eine Stadt namens Ephraim, Johannes 11,54," 31-50. Fleckenstein describes that 1 Maccabean 11:34 mentions the city Aphairema in Samaria. He argues that this would possibly be a different city north of Bethel. In Genesis 35:16-19 and Genesis 48:7 we can read that Rachel dies on the road near a place called 'Ephrata', which is described as a place near Bethlehem.

¹³ Cf. Fleckenstein, "Eine Stadt namens Ephraim, Johannes 11,54," 44.

visited just a few years after the first Catholic missionary had arrived there.¹⁴ Guérin believed Taybeh to be the biblical place Ephraim, falling back on the work of Saint Jerome (c. 347-420 AD), who mentioned that Ephraim was five miles from Bethel. The Frenchman also referred to Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339 AD) for confirmation of the biblical association. Eusebius wrote in *Onomasticon*, the primary source of geography for fourth century Palestine: “Ephron. (In) tribe of Juda [Judah, ESM]. There is now a (very) large village (named) Ephraim (Efraea) twenty miles north of Jerusalem.”¹⁵ And: “Ephraim. “Near the desert” where Christ (the Lord Jesus) came with his disciples.”¹⁶ The British explorers of *The Survey of Western Palestine*, conducted by the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) and published in 1882, called Taybeh “a large Christian village in a conspicuous position, with well-built stone houses.”¹⁷ Again based on Saint Jerome, they concluded that this place was “supposed to be Ophrah of Benjamin.”

Gustaf Dalman (1855-1941), a German theologian and enthusiastic orientalist, believed the association to be true as well.¹⁸ Dalman relied heavily on the remnants of the sixth-century mosaic map on the floor of the Saint George Church in the Jordanian city Madaba, located about 18.5 miles south-west of Amman. This mosaic is considered to be the oldest surviving map of the area and contains the following description at the east of Bethel: “Ephron or Ephraia, whereto the Lord went.” However, William Foxwell Albright, the American biblical archaeologist, considered most influential in the time of Mandate Palestine, did not believe Ephraim to be associated with Taybeh. He located Ephraim on the place of contemporary Ain-Samia, which is 2.8 miles north-east of Taybeh, based on the ruins of a church with inscriptions dating back to 557 AD.¹⁹ Except from the mosaic map of Madaba, which

¹⁴ Victor Guérin, *Description Géographique, Historique et Archéologique de la Palestine: Volume 3, Judée*. ('Geographical, Historical and Archaeological Description of Palestine: Volume 3, Judea') (Paris: Imprimé par autorisation de l'empereur à l'Impr. impériale, 1869), 45-51.

¹⁵ Cf. Umhau Wolf, *The Onomasticon of Eusebius Pamphili: Compared with the Version of Jerome and Annotated*. (Published 1971, digitised 2006). <<http://www.prenicea.net/doc4/40206-en-01.pdf>> [accessed 21 November 2021], under 'Josue' [Joshua, ESM].

¹⁶ Idem, under 'the Gospels'.

¹⁷ Lieut. C.R. Conder & Lieut. H.H. Kitchener, *The Survey of Western Palestine: Memoires of the Topography, Orography, Hydrography, and Archaeology* (London: The Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1882), 293.

¹⁸ Gustaf Dalman, *Orte und Wege Jesu*. ('Places and Ways of Jesus') (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1921). For an English translation, see: Gustaf Dalman, *Sacred Sites and Ways: Studies in the Topography of the Gospels* (New York: London Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1935), 217ff.

¹⁹ William F. Albright, “Ophrah and Ephraim.” *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 4 (1922): 124-33; William F. Albright, “The Ephraim of the Old and New Testaments,” *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 3 (1923), 36-40. Similar doubts were raised more recently by a group of scholars, who argued that the biblical Ephraim would be located in Khirbet Marjamed (close to the modern-day village Kafr Malik): Ehud

is proudly displayed in the Chapel of the Virgin Mary on the church compound of Taybeh's Orthodox Church, most of these sources are, again, not part of the lifeworld of most of Taybeh's people.

Hence, whether the associations between the modern-day village of Taybeh and the biblical places Ephraim and Ophrah are plausible as fact or not, I will approach this phenomenon from an interpretivist perspective by exploring how the people of Taybeh formulate their reality by way of attaching meaning to biblical stories. The study on the role of the Bible in the life of Palestinian Christians, or the study of Middle Eastern Christian Bible-usage in general, is vast and expansive. This body of literature encompasses studies focusing on Arabic Bible translations, such as the earlier mentioned Arabic Van Dyck translation (1865),²⁰ or Arab contextual Bible reading, such as studies on the Palestinian Christian use of the Old Testament along with its difficult passages depicting violence.²¹ Alongside these lexical and exegetical studies, I will also approach the Bible from an ethnographic perspective in order to stay close to the interpretations of the people of Taybeh. As John R. Bowen has noted in his anthropological study on the Gayo people in highland Sumatra, Indonesia, a shift from text-historical questions to local-ethnographic questions sheds light on what he calls the "social life of scriptures": the anthropological question of how people make use of texts and how people transform stories from scripture to explain local practices and ideas in world-religious terms.²² Provocative American scholars such as historian of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith and, more recently, biblical scholar Vincent L. Wimbush have also argued to study not exegesis per se, but the way actual communities interact with their sacred texts. Wimbush

Keinan, Andrew Abado and Robert West, "Where was the City of Ephraim?" *Palestine Exploration Fund* 147, no. 3 (2015): 220-29.

²⁰ The Arabic Van Dyck Bible was produced under the direction of American missionary Eli Smith (1801-1857), Cornelius van Dyck (1818-1895), Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883), Nasif al-Yaziji (1800-1871) and Yusuf al-Asir. For an in-depth study on the Van Dyck Bible, see David D. Grafton, *The Contested Origins of the 1865 Arabic Bible: Contributions to the Nineteenth Century Nahḍa* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). For a more expansive study comprising Arabic Bible translations in earlier periods of history, as well as those Arabic translations done by Jews and Muslims, see: Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*. See also: David Thomas, ed., *The Bible in Arab Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

²¹ Arab contextual biblical studies include: Katanacho, *Praying Through the Psalms*; Riad A. Kassis, *Frustrated with God: A Syrian Theologian's Reflections on Habakkuk* ([n.p.]: [n.pub.], 2016); Isaac, *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth*; Tony Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel: The Unfolding of God's Prophetic Plan for Ishmael's Line* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003). For more analysis on Palestinian Christian hermeneutics, see: Will Stalder, *Palestinian Christians and the Old Testament: History, Hermeneutics, and Ideology*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015); Janneke Stegeman, "Decolonizing Jeremiah: Identity, Narratives and Power in Religious Tradition" (PhD diss., VU University Press, 2014).

²² John R. Bowen, "Elaborating Scripture: Cain and Abel in Gayo Society," *Man* 27, no. 3 (1992): 495-516. The term "the social life of scriptures" has also been applied by James S. Bielo in: James S. Bielo, ed., *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Biblicism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

called this ‘radically excavating scriptures’, which is studying what “we make ‘scriptures’ do for us.”²³ In Wimbush’s approach the focus shifts, then, from a solely textual analysis to including “signs, material products, ritual practices and performances, expressivities, orientations, ethics, and politics associated with the phenomenon of the invention and uses of ‘scriptures’.”²⁴ In the text that will follow, we will move beyond the sole emphasis on Bible translations, Arab contextual biblical studies, Arab hermeneutics, and questions of archaeological and historical validity, and depart from an ethnographic approach to how the biblical story holds and shapes the everyday life of the modern Palestinian Christian community and, eventually, Palestinian theology itself. This does not mean that textual analysis will be excluded in this chapter, but we will include it in an ethnographic study of how the Taybeh people engage with biblical stories, based on their lifeworld.

Ethnographic studies regarding Palestinian Bible usage are, however, surprisingly scarce. Existing ethnographic research on Bible use in the context of Israel and Palestine is mainly to be found in studies on Western Protestant and Evangelical Holy Land pilgrimage,²⁵ particularly in relation to Christian Zionism.²⁶ These studies on pilgrimage and Christian Zionism bring to the fore the politicised context in which we need to understand Palestinian biblical engagement. Recent

²³ Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., “TEXTureS, Gestures, Power: Orientation to Radical Excavation,” in *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 1-20. His later work includes: Vincent L. Wimbush, *Scripturalics: The Management of Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Vincent L. Wimbush, *Scriptulizing the Human: The Written as the Political* (London: Routledge, 2015).

²⁴ Wimbush, “TEXTureS, Gestures, Power,” 3.

²⁵ Foundational studies on Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land include: Maurice Halbwachs, “The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land,” in *On Collective Memory*, edited by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992 [1941]); Glenn Bowman, “The Politics of Tour Guiding: Israeli and Palestinian Guides in Israel and the Occupied Territories,” in *Tourism and the Less-Developed Countries*, edited by David Harrison (London: Belhaven Press, 1991), 121-34; Glenn Bowman, “Christian Ideology and the Image of a Holy Land: The Place of Jerusalem Pilgrimage in Various Christianities,” in *The Anthropology of the Christian Pilgrimage*. 2nd ed., edited by John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 98-121.

²⁶ Christian Zionism is “political action informed by specifically Christian commitments, to promote or preserve Jewish control over the geographic area now comprising Israel and Palestine.” Cf. Robert O. Smith, *More Desired than Our Own Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2. In the last two decades a new field of studies emerged on Christian Zionism, see also: Fayra Shapiro, *Christian Zionism: Navigating the Jewish-Christian Border* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015); Robert O. Smith and Goran Gunner, eds., *Comprehending Christian Zionism: Perspectives in Comparison* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014); Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, & the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Klifford Attick Kiracofe, *Dark Crusade: Christian Zionism and US Foreign Policy* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009); Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon?* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004); Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis over Israel and Palestine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002).

ethnographies, such as those by Aron Engberg and Hillary Kaell, help us to understand how the state of Israel has come to occupy a central place in the imagination and articulation of Protestant and Evangelical faith and practice, which is largely built on the geography's connection to the biblical history and (dispensationalist) theologies that view the territory of Israel as being given to the Jews.²⁷ Similarly, Jackie Feldman's work reveals how the interaction between Protestant pilgrims travelling with biblical tours and their Jewish tour guide produces a 'mutually satisfying performance' that transforms Israel-Palestine as a 'Bible land', thus cementing the ties of both group and guide to the land, strengthening their commonality, while simultaneously marginalising the Palestinians.²⁸ Feldman and his colleague Amos S. Ron coined the term "the Orientalist Protestant gaze" to indicate how Protestant pilgrims have developed their own historically, socially and ideologically conditioned understandings of the land and its people. They note that Protestant pilgrims primarily focus on visiting sites of biblical significance and prioritise those in Israel – to which Palestinians have to accommodate in order to find a place in their itineraries, and participate in the tourism business more broadly.²⁹ Relying on this notion, Lena Rose has argued that a place like the living history museum, Nazareth Village – a reconstruction and re-enactment of village life in Galilee in the time of Jesus – portrays the biblical first century in a way that caters foremost to the Western Evangelical imagination of Israel.³⁰ Given that Nazareth Village is mainly run by Palestinian Evangelicals, Rose's study uncovers the complex power dynamics Palestinian Evangelicals in Israel have to navigate regarding the biblical story, consisting of ambivalent relationships with both their wider faith community (specifically in the West) as well as with the Israeli state they are part of.

²⁷ Aron Engberg, *Walking on the Pages of the Word of God: Self, Land, and Text Among Evangelical Volunteers in Jerusalem* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Hillary Kaell, *Walking where Jesus Walked: American Christians and Holy Land Pilgrimage* (New York: New York University Press 2014). Several Protestant and Evangelical groups have embraced the national restoration of the Jews to their new state in 1948 and other impressive historical achievements as the fulfilments of biblical prophecies. These Christians see the state of Israel as a sign of the end times and cherish the nation for its proximity to God. These 'pro-Israel' Christians defend Israel with much fervour in political and theological debates. Practices such as Holy Land pilgrimage, intercessory prayers for the peace of Jerusalem, and celebrating traditional Jewish holidays have become part of their Christian faith, as well as making significant financial contributions to Israel, lobbying for Israel and volunteering in Israel.

²⁸ Jackie Feldman, *A Jewish Guide to the Holy Land: How Christian Pilgrims Made Me Israeli* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 37-63; Feldman, "Constructing a Shared Bible Land."

²⁹ Amos S. Ron and Jackie Feldman, "From Spots to Themed Sites: The Evolution of the Protestant Holy Land," *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 4, no. 2 (2009): 201-16. This builds on the foundational study by Urry and Larsen, see: John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2011).

³⁰ Lena Rose, "Nazareth Village and the Creation of the Holy Land in Israel-Palestine: The Question of Evangelical Orthodoxy," *Current Anthropology* 61, no. 3 (2020): 335-55. The same approach is taken in: Lena Rose, "Palestinian Evangelicals: A Theologically Engaged Anthropological Approach," *Ethnos* 86, no. 3 (2021): 444-59; Lena Rose, "Geometries of 'Global' Evangelicalism," *Global Networks* 19, no. 1 (2018): 86-100.



Figure 13. *Detail of the mosaic in the Latin Church in Taybeh depicting Jesus and his disciples being welcomed by the inhabitants of Taybeh-Ephraim. Left corner: Charles de Foucauld. Photo by author.*

Nevertheless, these studies are somewhat limiting for interpreting the biblical association between the modern-day village of Taybeh and the biblical places Ephraim and Ophrah, as they particularly focus on the historically intertwined Protestant-Zionist relationship regarding biblical history. This overemphasis does not only fail to do justice to the overwhelming majority of non-Protestant church denominations in Palestine, but also provides distorted representations of Palestinian Christians as ‘victims’ of imperialist and Zionist biblical interpretations,³¹ a tendency that also exists in theological research regarding Palestinian Christians

³¹ A welcome exception is Mark Calder’s study on the Syriac Orthodox Christians in Bethlehem, who eloquently describes how the Old Testament is used in orthodox liturgical chanting, frequently cited in sermons and generally appreciated for the aesthetics of recitation. Calder critiques the generalisation that Christian Zionist usage of the Hebrew Bible resulted in disuse of the Old Testament by Palestinian Christians. While this might have been a problem for some Palestinian Protestants, his study shows that the Bible is woven into the fabric of Syriac Orthodox social life. Calder, *Bethlehem’s Syriac Christians*, 19-25.

and the Bible.³² By examining the biblical association presented earlier in this chapter, I argue the contrary: the Bible is a constitutive text for Palestinian Christian self-understanding. I also dispute the implication that Palestinian Christian engagement with the Bible is 'new' or 'changed' through the political changes since the realisation of the Israeli state, but assert that Palestinian Christian biblical engagement is 'renewed'. The Palestinian biblical engagement we know today did not start with the challenge of Zionism, but did undergo a process of renewal with the Palestinians themselves as the agents of change.³³

In order to corroborate these arguments, I will follow two lines of inquiry. Firstly, by embedding this question in the rural context of Palestine, it became apparent how Palestinian Christians have depicted modern-day Palestinian rural culture as being a continuation of biblical culture, thereby constructing and reimagining Palestinian Christian identity as essentially biblical – well summarised by the term *al-Hijarat al-Haya* ('Living Stones'). This idea of an ancient lineage with the 'Umm al-Kanā'is has long been present in Eastern churches, but was given a renewed meaning in the Palestinian context since their indigeneity and right to live on the land are under pressure. Secondly, by examining the written output of Palestinian theologians and church leaders, a pattern of theologies that emphasises that the land ultimately belongs to God is seen. These Palestinian Christian theologies underline that the land is not the exclusive possession of any group, but a gift from God that needs to be shared. Hence, these theologians 'Christify' (or 'Christianise') the conflict over land, in a way that resonates with the importance being given by the people of Taybeh to their village's biblical association and with the grassroots Living Stones theology.

In short, by departing from the association of Taybeh with the biblical places Ophrah and Ephraim, this chapter explores Palestinian grassroots theologies of land and belonging, with a particular emphasis on the transformative potential of the biblical story in this. This chapter thus unpacks the ideological and theological

³² Previous studies have heavily relied on the work of Palestinian Protestant theologians Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb. See, for example: Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel*; Robson, "Palestinian liberation theology, Muslim-Christian relations and the Arab-Israeli conflict"; Laird, "Meeting Jesus Again in the First Place"; Stegeman, "Remembering the land"; Katanacho, "Palestinian Protestant theological responses to a world marked by violence".

³³ With this approach I am heeding the call of Palestinian historians to understand Palestinian history not merely as a response to Zionism, but to emphasise the Palestinians themselves as the makers of the Palestinian narrative. See, for example: Basem L. Ra'ad, *Hidden Histories: Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean* (London: Pluto Press, 2010); Rana Barakat, "Writing/Righting Palestine Studies: Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Sovereignty and Resisting the Ghost(s) of History," *Settler Colonial Studies* 8, no. 3 (2018): 349-63.

operatives underlying the biblical association of Taybeh by reviewing the early ethnographers of Mandate Palestine who drew parallels between the time of the Bible and contemporary Palestine, the grassroots theology of Living Stones in Taybeh and, lastly, the theological expressions by church leaders regarding the land and the Bible. Through these acts of theological narration Palestinian Christians, immersed in the anti-colonial struggle, construct a theologically meaningful view on historical belonging and territorial legitimacy.

***Fallāḥīn* Culture between Change and Continuity**

As Palestinian society entered the twentieth century, it was still overwhelmingly agrarian. For centuries, the people had enjoyed a relatively peaceful and autonomous existence of pastoral life in small villages, which were led by the *mukhtār* and by the *shaykh* ('head of a tribe'). Outside the administrative cities of a diverse urban population of landowners and merchants, people had a relatively autonomous life. However, developments in the last two centuries dramatically disrupted Palestinian village life.³⁴ The main changes in the nineteenth century were implemented by Egyptian rulers Muhammad Ali Pasha (1769-1849) and his son Ibrahim Pasha (1789-1848), who modernised the rural way of life through agricultural reforms, centralised taxation, and a constitutional system for the local elite. Developments in the twentieth century also left their mark on the community, like the rupture with the Ottoman province of *Bilād ash-Shām* (Greater Syria, comprising present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine), the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in general, Western expansion, continuing modernisation, integration into the global economy, and the growing Jewish community that eventually culminated in the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948. Moreover, modes of agricultural production changed from a communal ownership of the land (*masha'* system) to ownership by absentee landlords, and new elites emerged in the coastal area and around Jerusalem. All these developments brought cultural and social change to the Palestinian rural population, as described in the portrait of Taybeh in chapter 1.

³⁴ Cf. Pappe, *A History of Modern Palestine*, 3-5, 14-18. Other studies confirm the dramatic changes occurring in the Middle Eastern rural societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Salim Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Beinín, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Farhad Kazemi and John Waterbury, eds., *Peasants & Politics in the Modern Middle East* (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991).

These radical changes were particularly devastating for the Christian rural population in Palestine. From Ottoman documents examined by Amnon Cohen, we learn that a slow and gradual migration process took place between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries as Christians left rural areas for cities with larger Christian populations.³⁵ Around half of the Christian villages disappeared in this timeframe.³⁶ Larger urban districts with a substantial Christian population, such as Jerusalem and Bethlehem, offered protection by the district governors who resided there, and also made proper communal and religious life possible. The people of Taybeh have also reported that people were leaving the village as early as the eighteenth and nineteenth century, particularly from the *ḥāmūlat al-Dyūk* who were richer than the *ḥāmūlat al-Kawana*, whose people were farmers and tied to the land. Taybeh's neighbouring Muslim village, Dayr Jarir, had also been Christian in the past, according to the people of Taybeh. Their Christian heritage only lives on in the term '*dayr*', meaning 'monastery' or 'convent'. In short, we should understand the small Palestinian Christian rural community in this context of radical change in the Middle East in general and demographic shifts in Christian population in particular.

Despite these changes in the Palestinian rural area, most Palestinians feel still closely related to their agricultural background. When I told Palestinians from urban areas that I was living in the village of Taybeh, they often responded by saying '*Ktīr ḥilū!*' ('very beautiful/pleasant') and their faces would brighten up with a smile. Villages are the beating heart of the Arab rural society as beacons of family and clan solidarity. Palestinians from both rural and urban areas, therefore, describe rural life as 'good', 'simple', and 'peaceful', a place for living a happy life in the warmth and safety of their family. Their description depicts a life close to nature, daily enjoying the fresh harvest of their own land. When visiting people like Taybeh's 'Abū Jeries, whom we will meet more extensively later in this chapter, I have often been shown around his garden gazing at the trees that 'brought forth so many olives, figs and grapes this year' or smelling the lemons still hanging on the tree, waiting till they are

³⁵ Amnon Cohen, "The Receding of the Christian Presence in the Holy Land. A 19th Century *Sijill* in the Light of the 16th Century *Tahrirs*," in *The Syrian Land in the 18th and 19th Century: The Common and the Specific in the Historical Experience*, edited by Thomas Philipp (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1992), 333-40. From his analysis of an order issued by the provincial governor of Damascus on 18 October 1807, directed at the religious and political-military leaders in Jerusalem, Cohen derives which places had a Christian population: Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Ramallah, Jifna, Ayn Arik, Taybeh and Yabrud. Cohen states that the 1807 order no longer mentioned Bayt Rima, Tibna, Jamala, Suba, Dayr Aban, Nahhalin, Artas and Taqu, places that had presence in the sixteenth century, but had apparently already lost this by the early nineteenth century.

³⁶ Cf. O'Mahony, "The Religious, Political and Social Status of the Christian Communities in Palestine, c. 1800-1930," 243.

bigger and more juicy than they already looked. 'Abū Jeries never let me go home without a plastic bag full of fresh fruits, such as dates he brought from Jericho, or spices from his garden, such as fresh mint and sage. Likewise, in her now classic study *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (1979), Rosemary Sayigh mentions that Palestinians living in refugee camps in Lebanon would often refer to their lost villages as 'Paradise'.³⁷ The overwhelming cultural and somewhat sentimental presence of *fallāḥīn* culture flows from the endangered status of the Palestinian nation.³⁸ The ostensibly unchanging nature of the peasant secures a national cultural timeless character, thereby confronting the drastic ruptures and fragmentation Palestinian society has endured over the course of history.

Moreover, in congruence with a broader scholarly analysis on rural communities as being areas of resistance and rebellion,³⁹ American anthropologist Ted Swedenburg reflected on how the "signifier of the peasant is used to construct a sense of a unified Palestinian notion".⁴⁰ After the centrality of the peasants in the 1936-1939 Rebellion, the most significant anti-colonial revolt in the Middle East in modern history,⁴¹ the *fallāḥ* came to be seen as a national symbol, Swedenburg argues. Their closeness to the soil and their intense love for the land transformed the *fallāḥ* into a symbolic representation of cultural and historical continuity and attachment to the land. Most importantly, it unified a diverse people by cutting across differences based on other factors, such as regional background, kinship, socio-economic class and religious affiliation. The most prominent allegories for the rural way of life are the *fallāḥ*, the *kūfiyya*, the *thūb*, and indigenous arboreal imagery such as the olive tree, the orange tree, the mulberry tree, the cactus and *za'tar* ('wild thyme'). Palestinians find unity in eating pitta, olive oil and *za'tar* for breakfast,

³⁷ Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*. 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2007), 1f.

³⁸ Ted Swedenburg, 'The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier', *Anthropological Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (1990): 19.

³⁹ E.g. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁴⁰ Swedenburg, 'The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier', 18. See also: Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

⁴¹ It should be understood that peasants were no passive subjects undergoing historical forces bigger than themselves. In the context of early twentieth century Middle East, there have been rural uprisings in Egypt, Morocco, Syria and Iraq. Under the leadership of 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam (1882-1935), the Palestinian uprising of 1936-1939 was one of the largest anti-colonial revolts of that time. A large amount of villagers took part in this uprising, which required one third of Britain's armed forces in the area to quell the uprising. Cf. Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts. Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2002), 124. See also: Kenneth W. Stein, "Rural Change and Peasant Destitution: Contributing Causes to the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-1939," in *Peasants & Politics in the Modern Middle East*, edited by Farhad Kazemi and John Waterbury (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991), 143-70.

enjoying an orange from Jaffa, and savouring the distinct flavours of Palestinian olives. Making the *kūfiyya* his permanent head covering, Palestinian PLO leader Yasser Arafat identified himself as a man of the people.⁴² The central place of rural imagery in contemporary West Bank Palestinian expressive culture and historiography is today visible in the renewed interest among Palestinian youth in dancing the *dabka* (Palestinian traditional dance), the reinvention by Palestinian women in wearing the *taṭrīz* in new ways, and in the displays of folkloristic artefacts in homes and public places, such as libraries, restaurants and hotels. Furthermore, traditional Palestinian meals such as *musakhkhan* (chicken, onion and spices on bread), *maqlūba* (rice, chicken and fried vegetables) or *ʿawrāq al-inab* (stuffed grape leaves) are considered more esteemed than hamburgers, pasta, pizza and other available dishes brought from abroad. Hence, by forging an ideology of a timeless rural tradition to cover over heterogeneity and generalise the Palestinian society into a homogeneous unity, the nationalist movement created a crucial weapon in the Palestinian confrontation with Israeli colonial policies.⁴³ In this context we should understand the notion of a timeless Palestinian village life that will be examined in the following two subsections.

Early Twentieth Century Ethnographies of Timelessness

The notion of a timeless Middle Eastern village life, of people with a thousand-year-old way of living, can be traced back to several ethnographers in the beginning of the twentieth century. A famous study about the timelessness and resistance of the Middle Eastern peasants is *Moeurs et Coutumes des Fellahs* (1938),⁴⁴ written by Henry Habib Ayrout (1907-1969), an Egyptian who studied in France to become a Jesuit priest. Ayrout claimed that the *fallāḥīn* have been using the methods of the plough, the winnowing-fork, the sickle and the straw basket for centuries. Ayrout described the *fallāḥīn* as “impervious and enduring as the granite of their temples,

⁴² The *kūfiyya* is the most important and prominent signifier associated with Palestinian peasantry. Prior to 1936, the *kūfiyya* was only worn by men in the countryside and part of a complex code of dress that distinguished people by rank, region, religious affiliation and age. When the guerilla fighters of the 1936-1939 Rebellion took the *kūfiyya* as their insignia – and later forced people from cities and towns to wear it as well – the *kūfiyya* received its status as national symbol. During the 1960s a new difference was adopted between the black-and-white checkered pattern for West Bankers, and a red-and-white checkered pattern for East Bankers. See also: Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, 30-7.

⁴³ Cf. Swedenburg, ‘The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier’, 19.

⁴⁴ Henry Habib Ayrout, *Moeurs et Coutumes des Fellahs*. (‘Manners and Customs of the Fellahs’) (Paris: Payot, 1938). Although originally written in French, this book has been translated to Arabic, English and Russian. The English translation has been used here: Henry Habib Ayrout, *The Fellaheen*. Trans. by Hilary Wayment (Cairo: R. Schindler, 1945).

and as slow to develop, once established, as this form of art proved to be.”⁴⁵ Ayrout explained this supposed timelessness by appealing to the strong and intimate bond the *fallāḥīn* have with the soil, as “the fellah is no more the product of the Egyptian countryside than the countryside is the product of the fellah.”⁴⁶

The tone is similar to the works of Ayrout’s contemporaries in Palestine, like Omar Saleh al-Barghouti (1894-1965), Elias Nasrallah Haddad (1878-1959), Stephan Hanna Stephan (1894-1949), Khalil Totah (1897-1955) and, most notably, the physician and ethnographer Tawfiq Canaan (1882-1964).⁴⁷ As the son of the first native Arab Lutheran pastor in Palestine, Dr Bishara Canaan, the young Tawfiq grew up in a Protestant milieu.⁴⁸ Tawfiq Canaan received his education at the Schneller School, the German missionary school in Jerusalem, and later at the Syrian Protestant College (now known as American University of Beirut), where he received his Doctor of Medicine degree in 1905. Canaan became a known specialist on leprosy and spent his professional life mostly in Protestant medical institutes in Jerusalem, which was then a leading centre for medical science in the Middle East. He saw the chance to combine his medical career with field trips to rural areas, where he recorded observations about *fallāḥ* religiosity and belief patterns surrounding health, and gathered folkloristic material, particularly amulets, talismans, and cups.⁴⁹

Canaan started publishing his findings in his first book *Aberglaube und Volksmedizin im Lande der Bibel* in 1914,⁵⁰ as well as in dozens of articles in the

⁴⁵ Ayrout, *The Fellaheen*, 20.

⁴⁶ Ayrout, *The Fellaheen*, 22.

⁴⁷ See also Frederick Hasluck and his ethnographic research in the Balkans and Anatolia. Frederick Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929).

⁴⁸ For more details about the life and work of Canaan, see his autobiography covering the years 1947 until his death in 1964: Mitri Raheb, ed., *Tawfiq Canaan: An Autobiography* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2020). See also: Sarah R. Irving, “Intellectual Networks, Language and Knowledge under Colonialism: The Work of Stephan Stephan, Elias Haddad and Tawfiq Canaan in Palestine, 1909-1948.” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2018); Philippe Bourmaud, “‘A Son of the Country’: Dr. Tawfiq Canaan, Modernist Physician and Palestinian Ethnographer,” in *Struggle and Survival in Palestine/Israel*, edited by Mark LeVine and Gershon Shafir (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 104-24; Salim Tamari, “Lepers, Lunatics, and Saints. The Nativist Ethnography of Tawfiq Canaan and his Circle,” in *Mountain against the Sea. Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 93-112; Khaled Nashef, “Tawfik Canaan: His Life and Works,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 16 (2002): 12-26.

⁴⁹ Tawfiq Canaan’s collection of more than 1,400 Palestinian amulets is the largest collection of its kind. The vast majority of pieces were donated to Birzeit University Library, Palestine, accessible via: <<http://museum.birzeit.edu/collections>> [accessed 13 May 2021]. See also: Baha’ al-Ju’beh, “Magic and Talismans: The Tawfiq Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 22/23 (2005): 103-8; Khaled Nashef, *Ya kafi, Ya shfi: The Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets* (Birzeit: Birzeit University Publications, 1998).

⁵⁰ Tawfiq Canaan, *Aberglaube und Volksmedizin im Lande der Bibel*. (‘Superstition and Popular Medicine in the land of the Bible’). Abhandlungen des Hamburgischen Kolonialinstitut, Band XX. (Hamburg: L. Friederischen, 1914).

Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society (JPOS).⁵¹ His most significant book became *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* (1927),⁵² in which Canaan recorded in detail the Palestinian popular religious expressions, which he did not consider as Islamic, Christian or Sephardic Jewish per se, but rather as a shared local Semitic response to the daily needs of the *fallāḥīn*. In a similar vein to Ayrout, Canaan's work is coloured by the notion of a pure and timeless peasant culture. Canaan saw the Palestinian *fallāḥīn* as a continuation and living heritage accumulated through the ancient cultures of biblical times: Canaanite, Philistine, Hebraic, Nabatean, Syrio-Aramaic and Arab. Canaan considered songs, sayings, folk norms, popular religious practices, and material artefacts belonging to the *fallāḥīn* as reflecting these earlier cultures. Evidently, Canaan was influenced by Gustaf Dalman, who then headed the just established German Evangelical Palestine Institute (GEPI). The two connected regularly until Dalman's death in 1941. The already referenced German theologian and orientalist is the author of *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina* (1928), a five-volume work consisting of detailed information about Palestinian life and customs of the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵³ Dalman emphasised the parallels between Palestinian life and that of the Bible even more strongly than Canaan did, discussing subjects like agricultural techniques, food, ways of cooking, clothing, concepts of time, religious festivals and social norms. Another illustrative example of this biblical parallelism, inspired by Dalman, is Stephan Hanna Stephan's article in the JPOS in which he compared a collection he had made of 77 Palestinian love songs to the Song of Songs of the Bible, and found startling textual resemblances in structure and in language.⁵⁴

In fact, the survival of ancient ethnographic features was a standard assumption shared by many Western researchers in nineteenth and twentieth century Palestine. This applied, for example, to the biblical archaeology of Edward Robinson (1794-1863), the map-making practices of Carl Ritter (1779-1859), as well

⁵¹ The *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* was published between 1920 and 1948 and features articles by Tawfiq Canaan on a variety of subjects, including Palestinian demonology, superstition and folklore, as well as studies conducted by Canaan on the Bedouins in Petra, Jordan.

⁵² Tawfik Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* (London: Luzac, 1927). Canaan also mentions Taybeh in his book, see: *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 164, 166f.

⁵³ In the introduction of his first volume, Dalman writes that he has also been to the village of Taybeh to learn about the Palestinian (Christian) way of life: Gustaf Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*. Band 1.1 (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1928), IV.

⁵⁴ Stephan H. Stephan, "Modern Palestinian Parallels to the Song of Songs," *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 2 (1922): 199-278.

as to other areas of research, such as folklore studies and philology.⁵⁵ Influenced by the evolutionary anthropology of Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), these Western Christian scholars generally understood Palestine as a ‘primitive society’ and as a society that had not changed since biblical times.⁵⁶ Photographs taken by Western travellers accentuated this Orientalist view, as Moors and Machlin show in their study of picture postcards of Palestine between 1890 and 1948; these photographs captured ‘traditional’ and picturesque scenes depicting the timelessness and exoticism of Palestine, but hid signs of contemporaneity and contradiction.⁵⁷ These photographs manifested an interaction between ‘biblification’ and Orientalism: they portrayed the landscape and people of Palestine in a familiar (Western) biblical imagery, while simultaneously marking the delimitation of otherness.⁵⁸ Anthropologist Nadia Abu El-Haj suggests that similar presuppositions were behind *The Ordnance Survey of Western Palestine* (1882) of the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF), which was based on cartographic, geographic, archaeological and ethnographic methods and the largest research project of its kind undertaken in Palestine up until that time.⁵⁹ The motivations of these British explorers were twofold, Abu El-Haj argues: as Christians they sought to demonstrate the historicity and reliability of the Bible – which they particularly found among the *fallāḥīn* – but being part of an imperial superpower, they also aimed to acquire cartographic knowledge for strategic and administrative value.

Because of this mixture of religious motifs (= Protestant biblical interpretation) and political motifs (= the imperial white man’s burden) underlying nineteenth and twentieth-century research, the work of Canaan and his circle of Palestinian ethnographers was a strategic response to these Western researchers and government officials. Palestinian sociologist Salim Tamari describes Canaan as a ‘protonationalist’ and his work as ‘nativist ethnography’, referring to Canaan’s

⁵⁵ Edward Robinson, *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petra* (London: Murray, 1841); Carl Ritter, *The Comparative Geography of Palestine and the Siniatic Peninsula* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1866).

⁵⁶ Lodewijk van Oord, “The Making of Primitive Palestine: Intellectual Origins of the Palestine-Israel Conflict,” *History and Anthropology* 19, no. 3 (2008): 209-28.

⁵⁷ Annelies Moors and Steven Machlin, “Postcards of Palestine: Interpreting images,” *Critique of Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (1987): 61-77.

⁵⁸ Sary Zananiri, “Imaging and Imagining Palestine: An Introduction,” in *Imaging and Imagining Palestine: Photography, Modernity and the Biblical Lens, 1918-1948*, edited by Karène Sanches Summerer and Sary Zananiri (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 10; Issam Nasser, “‘Biblification’ in the Service of Colonialism: Jerusalem in Nineteenth-century Photography,” *Third Text* 20, no. 3/4 (2006): 317-26.

⁵⁹ Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: The Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 23-44. For a reflection on Palestinian archaeology, see: Hamdan Taha, “The Current State of Archaeology in Palestine,” *Present Pasts* 2:1 (2010), 16-25.

attempt to establish sources for legitimisation for Palestinian cultural patrimony in light of upcoming modernity, British colonialism and the Zionism movement.⁶⁰ Rather than describing the *fallāḥīn* as frozen in time, Canaan approached Arab popular tradition as a vibrant and living tradition that accumulated from a versatile package of ancient and modern civilisations. Hence, though permeated by the same evolutionary and functionalist premises as Western Christian scholars, Canaan's motivations were different and his work should, therefore, be understood in a different light from that of the PEF and other researchers of that time. The way Canaan inserted biblical history into contemporary Palestinian history, and vice versa, was to search for primordial sources of identity to establish the rootedness of Palestinians in the land, rather than to describe an unchanged rural life with a way of living that is two thousand years old.⁶¹

The Finnish anthropologist Hilma Granqvist (1890-1972) – who was part of the Palestine Oriental Society similar to Dalman and Canaan – forms a middle ground between her Western and Palestinian colleagues when it comes to the timelessness of the *fallāḥīn*.⁶² Granqvist's initial motivation was to study the women of the Old Testament, about which she believed she would learn more if she observed the local customs of Palestine. After having been introduced to the village of Artas, 2.5 miles south-west of Bethlehem, she decided to change her research entirely and began her study on Palestinian women. Granqvist's work mainly focused on the important *rites de passage*: birth, marriage and death. Although Granqvist was convinced that the life of the *fallāḥīn* was likely to shed light on Bible times, she stands apart from the previously mentioned researchers in her warning of, what she

⁶⁰ Cf. Salim Tamari, "Lepers, Lunatics, and Saints," 95, 109f. In this regard, Canaan's intentions could also be compared with the nativist work of Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), written during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962). Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971). Later translated to: Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto, 2008).

⁶¹ The notion of an unchanged rural life can be traced back to several travellers, missionaries and ethnographers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See: Philip Baldensperger's studies on rural Palestinian culture and religion, see for example: Philip Baldensperger, *The Immovable East: Studies of the People and Customs of Palestine* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1913). Also worth noting is George Robinson Lees' book that describes the customs of the *fallāḥīn* with the purpose of making biblical stories more understandable: George Robinson Lees, *Village Life in Palestine: A Description of the Religion, Home Life, Manners, Customs, Characteristics and Superstitions of the Peasants of the Holy Land, with Reference to the Bible*. (London: Longmans Greens, 1905).

⁶² For more reflections on Hilma Granqvist's work, see: Falestin Naïli, "Beyond the Immobile East: Hilma Granqvist's Ethnography of the Village of Artas," in *Bethlehem: A Sociocultural History*, edited by Mitri Raheb (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2020), 63-80; Falestin Naïli, "Hilma Granqvist, "Louise Balensperger et la « Tradition de Rencontre » au village palestinien d'Artas," *Civilisations* 57, no. 1/2 (2008): 127-38; Willy Jansen, "Women Anthropologists in the Arab World: Recognizing the Pioneers," *History and Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (2000): 37-63; Kirsti Suolinna, "Hilma Granqvist: A Scholar of the Westermarck School in its Decline," *Acta Sociologica* 43, no. 4 (2000): 317-23.

called, the ‘biblical danger’: “the temptation to identify without criticism customs and habits and views of life of the present day with those of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament.”⁶³ Granqvist critiqued works such as *Folk-lore in the Old Testament* by renowned Scottish anthropologist James George Frazer (1854-1941),⁶⁴ one of the founding fathers of modern-day anthropology, by arguing that Frazer did not have much actual data from Palestine to rely on. In contrast to those ‘armchair anthropologists’, Granqvist conducted long-term intensive fieldwork in Artas, based on participant observation and full immersion in the local community, in order to systematically collect and record ethnographic data on women in rural Palestine – or in Granqvist’s words: “to investigate my little society as comprehensively as possible.”⁶⁵ Although Granqvist’s work is now only known by a select group of specialists, her work has been pioneering in the ethnographic method and in the development of the discipline of anthropology more broadly. Among Granqvist’s publications, her two-volume series *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village* (1931, 1935) is now a classic for studies on gender and rural Palestine.⁶⁶

In short, the previously examined scholars, Canaan, Dalman and Granqvist stood at the beginning of the ethnographic engagement with Palestine. By using the methods of systematic data collection in the Palestinian rural areas, they shaped the modern disciplines of anthropology, biblical studies and, to some extent, our understanding of Palestinian *fallāḥīn* history, culture and religiosity – which were all seen through the lens of a timeless Palestinian village culture and its connection to the ancient cultures of biblical times. For a scholar like Tawfiq Canaan this lens proved to be valuable in underlining the historical indigeneity and territorial legitimacy of the Palestinians, which were starting to be under pressure in light of the upcoming

⁶³ Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*.

⁶⁴ James George Frazer, *Folk-lore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend and Law*. 3 vols (London: MacMillan & Co, 1919).

⁶⁵ Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*, 3. When Granqvist arrived in Palestine in 1925 her research methodology was innovative; *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) by Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), the pioneering work in the ethnographic method, had only been published three years earlier. In her book, Granqvist engages regularly with the work of Malinowski. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge, 1922).

⁶⁶ Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*. Among Granqvist’s other books are: Hilma Granqvist, *Birth and Childhood among the Arabs: Studies in a Muhammadan Village in Palestine* (New York: AMS Press, 1975 [1947]); Hilma Granqvist, *Muslim Death and Burial: Arab Customs and Traditions Studied in a Village in Jordan* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1965); Hilma Granqvist, *Child Problems among the Arabs: Studies in a Muhammadan Village in Palestine* (Helsingfors: Söderström, 1950). Granqvist also took around thousand photographs which are in the possession of the Palestine Exploration Fund; some of these photographs are published in: Karen Seger, ed., *Portrait of a Palestinian Village: The Photographs of Hilma Granqvist* (London: The Third World Centre for Research and Publishing, 1981).

Zionist movement. Palestinian historian Basem L. Ra'ad comments that historical and cultural continuity have not been adequately studied since Canaan, Dalman and Granqvist, and emphasises that this is a "hidden", "subaltern", or, following Keith L. Whitlam, a "silenced" element of Palestinian history and culture that needs more academic reflection.⁶⁷ Palestinians today feel that their cultural depth has been covered up, mostly due to religious and political interests of the West and Israel, not least to safeguard the foundations of the existence and identity of the state of Israel. Bringing this question to the Christian community of Taybeh, the following section will examine how continuity thinking is perceived from the contemporary Palestinian Christian point of view.

A Grassroots Theology of Living Stones

When Canaan and his circle wrote about Palestinian folklore, they did so with the conviction to preserve a rich, ancient culture under threat of disappearance. In the preface of *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, Canaan wrote that he felt a special duty to 'lose no time in collecting as fully and accurately as possible all available material concerning the folklore, customs, and superstitions current in the Holy Land.'⁶⁸ Due to the ongoing modernisation of rural lifestyles and a more intensified settler colonialism, the modern-day Palestinian Christian community have the same fear as Palestinians who lived about 100 years ago. In a similar way to the way Canaan and his circle described the *fallāḥīn* through biblical parallelisms, contemporary Palestinian Christians called themselves Living Stones (*al-Ḥijārat al-Haya*). The term 'Living Stones' came into vogue after Vatican II, and was associated with Palestinian Christians in about the mid-1980s.⁶⁹ Portraying

⁶⁷ Ra'ad, *Hidden Histories*. "The problem is fundamentally related to how historical knowledge is formed, and how it is accepted," Ra'ad writes, and that "most 'scholarship' is complicit in the system, or unable to close major gaps in knowledge" (p. 3.), leaving Palestine subjected to biased and inaccurate academic reflection. He therefore aims to uncover hidden and subaltern aspects of Palestinian history and culture, thereby renewing and re-conceptualising people's understanding of the region.

⁶⁸ Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, V.

⁶⁹ Cf. Kaell, *Walking where Jesus walked*, 150. Kaell argues that the usage of the term 'Living Stones' signals a major shift in Catholic thought regarding its presence in Israel and Palestine. Where the *Custodia Terræ Sanctæ* previously saw its main function in guarding Catholic property in the Holy Land, the Franciscan friars now argue that protecting the ancient stones of holy sites cannot be without protecting the 'Living Stones', local Palestinian Christians who live and worship there. See also: Joseph H. Chinnici, *Living Stones: The History and Structure of Catholic Spiritual Life in the United States* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1989), xix-xxi. The use of the term 'Living Stones' by Palestinian Christians themselves emerged in the 1980s as a rhetorical device to underline their worth in the face of growing Christian Zionism. Cf. Sara A. Williams, "Moral Commodities and the Practice of Freedom," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 48, no. 4 (2020): 650. This device is also used in the documentary: Yasmine Perni, dir. (2013) *The Stones Cry Out: The Story of the Palestinian Christians*. A trope exists in contemporary Palestinian literature of Palestinian refugees taking stones from their (destroyed) home villages,

Palestinian Christians as the Living Stones means connecting them to the notion of an ancient lineage between contemporary Palestinian Christians and the *Umm al-Kanā'īs* of biblical times.⁷⁰ The original theological meaning of the term arises from 1 Peter 2:4-5: Jesus is the 'Living Stone' and his followers are also 'Living Stones' in his spiritual house. Hence, as Hillary Kaell notes, "to be a living stone means that one's physical connection to the land is grounded in a spiritual link to Jesus."⁷¹ Thus, the term does not only underline the indigeneity of Palestinian Christians, it also serves as a spiritual mandate to be the witness of Christ in the land. The use of the term should, therefore, be understood as an attempt to theologise the Palestinian Christian community, particularly its rural background, and thus construct and reimagine their identity as essentially biblical.

On the basis of an intimate portrait of the earlier mentioned 'Abū Jeries from Taybeh, this section will explore the meaning of the Palestinian grassroots theology of Living Stones in the daily life of Palestinian Christians. Of all the encounters I had with people from Taybeh, 'Abū Jeries was one of the most open in sharing the personal details of his life and teaching me what it means to be Christian in contemporary Palestine. 'Abū Jeries, which is not his real name, was born in 1949. He is a relatively small man, who always looks impeccably dressed in his best clothes. Having left Taybeh at a young age to find his luck in Amman (Jordan), Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) and London (the United Kingdom), 'Abū Jeries has now found home in Taybeh again. He lives all by himself: his parents have died and, except for one sister, his brothers have all emigrated to North or South America, as have his wife and two sons. On a bright morning in December in 2017, 'Abū Jeries took me to the places of his youth in the 1950s and 1960s, starting at the top of the hill on which Taybeh's *al-Madīnat al-Qadīma* is situated.⁷² When we looked to the right we saw the rolling hills on which the houses of the neighbouring Muslim village Deir Jarir are situated. With a certain melancholy that I observed among many elderly of Taybeh,

see: Barbara McKean Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

⁷⁰ One should note that this notion of an ancient lineage is shared with other contemporary Christian communities of different contexts, but the idea of going back to the Jerusalemite church (*Umm al-Kanā'īs*) of biblical times is unique to Palestinian Christians (and to a certain extent to Middle Eastern Christianity in general). For the Coptic Church, see: Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints*. For the Greek Orthodox Church, see: Juliet Du Boulay, *Cosmos, Life, and Liturgy in a Greek Orthodox Village*. For the Thomas Christians/Syrian Christians in India, see: Sonja Thomas, *Privileged Minorities: Syrian Christianity, Gender, and Minority Rights in Postcolonial India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018); Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁷¹ Kaell, *Walking where Jesus walked*, 150.

⁷² Field note entry by Elizabeth Martejijn, Taybeh, 15 December 2017.

'Abū Jeries reminisced about the days when Taybeh was still the commercial hub of the *Beni Sālim* village group – a position that has been taken over by Deir Jarir, whose population has grown nearly fourfold since 'Abū Jeries' youth, while the population of Taybeh has roughly remained the same.⁷³ When we looked to the left, 'Abū Jeries pointed to his family's olive groves, situated in what is now the borderland between the built-up area of Taybeh village and the Israeli settlement Ofra, confiscated to serve as a safety zone around the settlement. In a similar vein to the loss of his family and the glory of Taybeh, 'Abū Jeries remembered picking the olives from those now feral olive trees, playing in those fields as a child and seeing his older brother riding the family horse (figure 14). Now, he can only stare at those fields from a distance and would risk being shot from the watchtowers if he entered the ground. 'Abū Jeries life story is that of many senior people of Taybeh: a story of involuntary, painful loss.

In the same context of emigration, demographic shifts and political pressure, 'Abū Jeries wistfully feels that his generation is the last to know the traditional *fallāḥīn* way of living. He explained this when he took me to the 'ayliyya ('communal room' or 'guest house') of his *ḥāmūla* in *al-ḥāra al-fūqa* (the elevated town quarter where the more influential 'ā'ilāt lived) of *al-Madīnat al-Qadīma*, where the clan met for communal occasions such as marriages. While snacking from the almond trees growing in the gardens, 'Abū Jeries started talking about the time of his childhood in biblical terms. "You are entering a house which Jesus has also been in," said 'Abū Jeries when we stepped over the elevated threshold ('*ataba*), referring to the biblical association of Taybeh-Ephraim. Although the house was slightly dilapidated, there were still many classical features visible, such as the domed roof, the very thick stone walls, the fireplace (*mawqīd*) and a bedding niche (*qūs*). 'Abū Jeries claimed this is one of the oldest houses left in Taybeh, and because it is an 'ayliyya, he believed it is possible that Jesus visited his family house when he came to Ephraim. This narrative voices the basic thought behind the grassroots theology of Living Stones: Palestinian Christians are the direct descendants of the 'Umm al-Kanā'īs.

⁷³ Deir Jarir has a population of 4,827 inhabitants according to the PCBS-statistics for 2021, while Taybeh counts only 1,447 inhabitants. In 1967 the number of inhabitants of Taybeh and Deir Jarir were roughly the same with 1,419 in Taybeh and 1,275 in Deir Jarir. These statistics are derived from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Projected Mid-Year Population for Ramallah & Al-Bireh Governorate by Locality 2017-2021*. <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_Rainbow/Documents/RamallahE.html> [accessed 21 May 2021], and the 1967 Census of the West Bank and Gaza Strip: A Digitized Version, table 'Households and persons, by residence, sex, age, and origin from Israel territory and by locality.' (Volume 1, table 2, West Bank), <<http://www.levy.institute.org/palestinian-census/>> [accessed 21 May 2021].

Palestinians, whether Christians or Muslims, consider themselves “the descendants of an extensive mixing of local and regional peoples, including the Canaanites, Philistines, Hebrews, Samaritans, Hellenic Greeks, Romans, Nabatean Arabs, tribal nomadic Arabs, some Europeans from the Crusades, some Turks, and other minorities.”⁷⁴ In this historic imagery Palestinian Christians are, thus, indigenous to the region and have been present since the time of Jesus. They consider themselves heirs to the Bible based on descent, their rootedness in the land and, as we will see in the next paragraph, their knowledge of a way of living similar to that of biblical times.

After having visited the ‘*ayliyya*, we continued to see ‘*Abū Jeries*’ parental home, which was nestled behind a large and overgrown fig tree, and located opposite *al-maṣafa*, the place where young girls used to meet to chat and make baskets out of wheat straw. The house was approximately five by seven metres and preserved by the six children after the death of their parents in the 1980s. It contained signs of modernity, such as electricity and a radio, as well as signs of an international lifestyle, such as photographs of family holidays in Europe and a Colditz porcelain set from Germany; at the same time, the house featured utensils of the past, such as a hand-painted jar (‘*ibrīq*), a straw tray (*ṭabaq*), ‘*Abū Jeries*’ mother’s traditional dress (*thūb*) with embroidery (*taṭrīz*) and her bridal chest (*ṣandūq al-‘arūs*). While being people of the twentieth century, the traditional *fallāḥīn* way of living was similar to that of biblical times, ‘*Abū Jeries* claimed. He started explaining this by the architectural construction of the house, which is divided up into three areas. The middle floor served as the family living space (*maṣṭaba*), which was divided by large, mud storage bins (*khawābī*) and a small flight of stairs that led up to the second area, the storage place (*rāwiya*). Directly below the *maṣṭaba*, there was an area for keeping the animals and farming equipment (*qā’ al-bayt*). According to ‘*Abū Jeries*, this architectural feature informs us about the situation in which Jesus was born: Joseph and Mary did not search for shelter in an inn, as in the popular Western tradition, but knocked on the door of the crowded ‘*ayliyya* of Joseph’s *ḥāmūla* in Bethlehem, where Jesus was born among the animals in the *qā’ al-bayt* below the house. In some Arabic Bible translations of Luke 2:1-20, the place where Jesus was born is indeed translated with the word ‘*ayliyya*. ‘*Abū Jeries* then pointed

⁷⁴ Samih K. Farsoun, *Culture and Customs of the Palestinians* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 4.

to the openings in the roof, that brought ventilation and a bit of light in the otherwise solemn and dark house interior. People used these openings to feed the doves (symbol of peace), he said, or to lower produce into the house to be stored in the *khawābī*. As another example of how the *fallāḥīn* culture is close to that of the Bible, 'Abū Jeries noted that these openings were also used to lower the paralysed man into the house for Jesus to heal him (Mark 2:1-11).

Academic reflection on the connection between the Bible and the culture of the Middle East began around the mid-1900s, roughly around the same time as the ethnographies of Canaan, Dalman and Granqvist. Then specialists in biblical studies, like Morris S. Seale, Eric F.F. Bishop, Nahum Levison and Abraham Mitrie Rihbany, used observations of Middle Eastern rural culture for gaining biblical insights.⁷⁵ But it was New Testament scholar and renowned American Presbyterian missionary Kenneth E. Bailey (1930-2016) who popularised this type of biblical studies.⁷⁶ Just as 'Abū Jeries described the house in which Jesus was likely to have been born,⁷⁷ Bailey believed that the cultural settings of Middle Eastern villages held keys to understand the Bible better. Instead of looking for parallels between biblical times and present-day life in the Middle East, Bailey explained biblical passages through local customs and material culture that is 'still left'. With this assumption, Bailey became an innovator of studies of Middle Eastern Christianity and the Bible. He called this 'Middle Eastern New Testament Studies' and often used the phrase 'reading the Bible through peasant eyes'. On a more critical note, British biblical scholar, liberation theologian, Vincentian priest and Palestine activist Michael Prior (1942-2004) argued that the way the West was preoccupied with the Bible and

⁷⁵ Morris S. Seale, *The Desert Bible: Nomadic Tribal Culture and Old Testament Interpretation* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974); Eric F.F. Bishop, *Prophets of Palestine: The Local Background to the Preparation of the Way* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962); Eric F.F. Bishop, *Apostles of Palestine: The Local Background to the New Testament Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958); Eric F.F. Bishop, *Jesus of Palestine: The Local Background to the Gospel Documents* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955); Nahum Levison, *The Parables: Their Background and Local Setting* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1926); Abraham Mitrie Rihbany, *The Syrian Christ* (London: Andrew Melrose Ltd., 1919).

⁷⁶ See for example: Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 2011); Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 2008); Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983). For a reflection on the work of Kenneth E. Bailey, see: Gary M. Burge, "Kenneth E. Bailey: An Ambassador Serving the Middle East and the West," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 41, no. 2 (2017): 152-9. Bailey's method was recently picked up again by Rev. Canon Andrew Thompson of the Anglican Church in Abu Dhabi, who applied this idea to the culture of the Arabian Gulf, see: Andrew Thompson, *Jesus of Arabia: Understanding the Teachings of Christ through the Culture of the Arabian Gulf* (Dubai: Motivate Publishing, 2014).

⁷⁷ Also recorded in: Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 25-37.

ancient Israel silences both wider regional history as well as Palestinian history.⁷⁸ Along with scholars of the minimalist movement in biblical studies and archaeology (also known as the Copenhagen School), including Thomas L. Thompson, Keith W. Whitelam, Philip R. Davies, Niels Lemche, Prior criticised attempts at directly linking up the historicity of the Bible and archaeological finding, which is usually at the expense of the Palestinians.⁷⁹ They have argued, rightfully so, that modern ethnic constructs could not be backdated into the biblical periods. In this light, the notion of Living Stones is more than an ancient lineage between the ancient people of the Bible and contemporary Palestinian Christians; it turns into a political statement that underlines the indigeneity of the Palestinian people and their territorial claim.

This relates to the political application of the notion of Living Stones in the tourism sector.⁸⁰ To attract tourists and pilgrims from different corners of the world, Palestinian Christians have set up businesses and visiting centres for the purpose of sharing with these visitors their connection to the Christian faith and the Bible, or on a more political note, informing them about the daily struggles Palestinians are facing. Such an example in Taybeh is the 'Parable House'. This traditional rural house is located on the Latin compound in Taybeh and was renovated by Latin parish priest Johnny Sansour in 1974. It features agricultural tools and household utensils from the beginning of the twentieth century, which are understood to be

⁷⁸ Michael Prior (ed.), "Introduction," in *Western Scholarship and the History of Palestine*, edited by Michael Prior (London: Melisende, 1998), 2. The same argument is advanced in: Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). See also Prior's essays published posthumously: Michael Prior, *A Living Stone: Selected Essays and Addresses*. Ed. by Duncan MacPherson. (London: Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust, 2006). In addition, Prior was co-founder of the *Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust* (founded: 1984) that aims to advance education about Palestinian Christians. The biblical scholar was an early defender of the rights of Palestinians and one of the first who emphasised a new type of pilgrimage in solidarity with the Palestinian Church. Similarly, Mary Grey visits holy places and makes them theologically relevant for pilgrims. See: Mary C. Grey, *The Spirit of Peace: Pentecost and Affliction in the Middle East* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2015); Mary C. Grey, *The Resurrection of Peace: A Gospel Journey to Easter and Beyond* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2012); Mary C. Grey, *The Advent of Peace: A Gospel Journey to Christmas* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2010). The work of Prior and Grey also echoes with Edward Said's terminology of the 'Canaanite reading of the Bible', with which he indicated the essentialist understanding of some (Christian) Zionists, who portray Palestinian Christians as 'Philistines', 'Gibeonites' and 'Canaanites' – the violent enemies of Israel. See: Edward W. Said, "Michael Walzer's 'Exodus and Revolution': A Canaanite Reading," *Grand Street* 5 (1986): 103-6.

⁷⁹ Most prominent works include: Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology in the Myth of Israel* (London: Basic Books, 1999); Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996); Philip R. Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel"* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Niels Lemche, *The Canaanites and their Land: The Traditions of the Canaanites* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

⁸⁰ The Alternative Tourism Group (ATG), founded in Bethlehem in 1995, is a prominent example of a Palestinian Christian organisation that implements the terminology of Living Stones for branding and promotion. Illustratively, the Alternative Tourism Group published its theological treatise under the title *Listening to the Living Stones* (2014). See: Alternative Tourism Group, *Listening to the Living Stones: Towards Theological Explorations of Kairos Pilgrimages for Justice*. <<http://atg.ps/en/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Living-Stones-New-Nasri-Email.pdf>> [accessed 4 June 2021]. See also: Alternative Tourism Group, *Come & See: A Call from Palestinian Christians*. <<http://www.atg.ps/resources/file/pages/Guidelines.pdf>> [accessed 4 June 2021].

close to those used in biblical times and featured in the parables that Jesus told (figure 15).⁸¹ Among the agricultural tools hanging on the wall are a sickle (*qālūsh*), a winnowing fork (*midhrā*), a threshing board (*lūḥa dirās*) and a wooden plough to be drawn by mules (*fard baghil*); examples of household utensils include an oil jar (*jarrat zayt*), a quern to grind wheat (*raḥā*) and a churner to make butter (*shakwa*), which were kept either just on the ground or in small arched niches in the walls (*tāqa*). The Parable House embodies the grassroots theology of Living Stones at its best. It communicates to pilgrims the closeness of the contemporary *fallāḥīn* culture with the culture of biblical times, the Palestinian Christian rootedness in the land, and the value of learning more from the Bible through observing Palestinian folklore. By renovating the Parable House, 'Abūnā Johnny participated in the folkloristic revival of the 1970s, a time in which Palestinians rediscovered their identity through revisiting their ancient roots. Rural symbols like 'the peasant', 'the olive tree' and 'the beloved land' came into vogue in poetry,⁸² and this revival brought a renewed interest in the ethnographic work of Tawfiq Canaan and his circle.⁸³ 'Abūnā Johnny was on the forefront of a type of pilgrimage, that was later called 'Living Stones pilgrimage',⁸⁴ in which the participants aim to act in solidarity with the lived experiences of Palestinian Christians by learning from and worshipping with the indigenous Christians of the Holy Land. In this way, the Latin priest of the rural parish church in Taybeh was precursor to a larger movement, which I called 'the revival of Palestinian Christianity' in chapter 2, through which Christians came to participate in larger social and political change.

This context of holy land pilgrimage adds another layer of meaning to the Living Stones theology. As theologian Sara Williams rightly notes in her article on the

⁸¹ For an overview of these agricultural tools and other traditional artefacts from Palestinian village culture, see: al-Hroub, *Atlas of Palestinian Rural Heritage*.

⁸² Hanan Ashrawi, "The Contemporary Palestinian Poetry of Occupation," *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 7, no. 3 (1978): 77-101; Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed., *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

⁸³ Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea*, 110f.

⁸⁴ Cf. Stephen R. Sizer, "The Ethical Challenges of Managing Pilgrimages to the Holy Land," *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 11, no. 2/3 (1999): 85-90. Sizer distinguishes three types of Protestant pilgrimage to the Holy Land: 1) Evangelical: essentially visiting sites of biblical significance, 2) fundamentalist: visiting biblical sites with the added eschatological dimension, and 3) Living Stones pilgrimage: pilgrimage in solidarity with the Palestinian Church, that includes meeting and worshipping with Palestinian Christians. A small body of literature developed around this phenomenon of 'Living Stones pilgrimages', which has become an increasingly popular form of alternative Holy Land travel: Gied ten Berge, *Pilgrimage with a Mission: The Palestinian 'Come and See' Initiative from a Social-Cultural and Historical-Theological Perspective*. (Pax Christi International and Pax Christi Netherlands, 2020); See: Jackie Feldman, "Abraham the Settler, Jesus the Refugee: Contemporary Conflict and Christianity on the Road to Bethlehem," *History and Memory* 23, no. 1 (2011), 62-95; Williams, "Moral Commodities and the Practice of Freedom."

ethical dimension of 'Living Stones pilgrimages': "elevating Palestinian Christians as sacred in the same way one regards the ancient stones that compromise traditional holy sites ... signals the desire to engage with Palestinians as moral exemplars who bear Christlike witness."⁸⁵ Inspired by the connection between Christ and the dispossessed as emerged from liberation theologies, Palestinian Christians are here seen as symbols of Christological suffering. Hence, the notion of an ancient lineage between contemporary Palestinian Christians and the early Mother Church does not only underline the indigeneity and rootedness in the land (Canaan, 'Abū Jeries, 'Abūnā Johnny Sansour), providing ways to understand the Bible better (Bailey) and responding to political uses of the Bible (Prior), it also serves as a way to set Palestinian Christians apart as "moral and spiritual examples" or as "uniquely sacred originals".⁸⁶ Moreover, Hillary Kaell notes in her study on American Holy Land pilgrims that these travellers nurture a spiritual connection to the people they encounter during their travels – whether Israeli Jews, Messianic Jews or Palestinian Christians – thus cementing their own ties to the land and, in the case of the terminology of Living Stones, even to the geological lineage.⁸⁷

However, the idea of Palestinian Christians as the Living Stones is not something that should solely be associated with pilgrimage and other East-West encounters. It is an expression of a deeper spirituality that I have repeatedly referred to with the term 'Umm al-Kanā'is, similar to the biblical association with the Old Testament village of Ophrah, the New Testament village of Ephraim and the presence of prominent biblical figures (Jesus, Mary, Gideon and Elijah) and historical-legendary figures (Saint Helen and Muslim military leader Saladin). In other words, this sentiment of ancient lineage was present among the Palestinian Christian community long before the arrival of Christian missionary activity, Christian Zionism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the moralisation of Palestinian Christians. Yet, in the post-1948 context this has undergone a process of renewal in which societal complexities made the Living Stones theology politically more relevant. This will be explored in the next section, which will examine a post-colonial Palestinian reading of the Bible, with a special emphasis on biblical theologies of the land.

⁸⁵ Williams, "Moral Commodities and the Practice of Freedom," 647, 650.

⁸⁶ Williams, "Moral Commodities and the Practice of Freedom," 651.

⁸⁷ Kaell, *Walking where Jesus walked*, 202f.



Figure 14. 'Abū Jeries shows a photo of the 1950s depicting his brother picking olives in the field that has now been confiscated as a 'safety zone' around the Israeli settlement Ofra. Photo by author.



Figure 15. *The interior of the Parable House.* Photo by Custodia Terræ Sanctæ.

Reading the Bible through the Eyes of the Oppressed

Having reviewed the grassroots theologies of land and belonging from the perspective of Palestinian Christian continuity thinking, this section zooms in on Palestinian biblical theologies of land. In this section, I argue that in order to understand the biblical association of modern-day Taybeh with the Old Testament village of Ophrah and the New Testament village of Ephraim, one should also understand this Palestinian Christian continuity thinking as a political statement or claim. This is apparent in the idea of Taybeh as the 'Refuge of Christ'.⁸⁸ This interpretation arises from John 11:54, the Bible verse that 'Abūnā Jack asked one of his parishioners to read out and which opened this chapter. The verses of John 11:45-53 tell us the story of Jesus being in danger from the Sanhedrin, who "planned to put him to death" (John 11:53b). Jesus found refuge in the village Ephraim that was located just across the border in Samaria and, thus, outside the Sanhedrin's jurisdiction of Judea.⁸⁹ The theological symbolism of the village as the 'Refuge of Christ' is represented in the large mosaic in Taybeh's Roman Catholic Church, which depicts Jesus and his disciples entering the town and being welcomed by the locals (figure 13). The deeper message of the mosaic connects to the grassroots theology of the Living Stones: Jesus has been a friend of the Palestinian *fallāḥīn* since biblical times and that will remain so. Subsequently, the choice to emphasise this biblical story should be understood as a scriptural sanction against the threats represented by Jewish and Christian Zionism, such as exercised by neighbouring Israeli settlement Ofra. Their Gush Emunim rabbis have frequently negatively referred to Palestinians as the 'Canaanites, Philistines or Amalekites of today', viewed as the biblical enemies of the Jews, or called them 'Ishmaelites', expelled by Abraham, and used Joshua's destruction of the Canaanites as a biblical model for contemporary Israeli policies towards the 'Palestinian problem'.⁹⁰ Hence, the contemporary notion

⁸⁸ Cf. Fr. Raed AbuSahlieh, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Reineh, 13 October 2017.

⁸⁹ Based on this event, the celebrated French Catholic priest and hermit Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916) visited Taybeh in 1889. With this act he, perhaps unintentionally, laid the basis for an eremitical tradition in Taybeh. Currently, there are six religious orders in the village, all of which were introduced in chapter 1: the *Rahbāt al-Wardiyye* (Arab, 1908), the *Monastère de St. Ephrem* (French, 1989), the *Soeurs de la Sainte Croix de Jérusalem* (French, 1998), *Domus Juventutis - Piccoli Fratelli dell'Accoglienza* (Italian, 2009), the *Soeurs de Bethléem* (French, 2017) and lastly the *Instituto del Verbo Encarnado* (Argentinian, 2020). This number of monastic orders in Taybeh is relatively high for a village outside the main Christian centres like Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth.

⁹⁰ Cf. Nur Masalha, "Reading the Bible with the Eyes of the Canaanites: Neo-Zionism, Political Theology and the Land Traditions of the Bible (1967 to Gaza 2009)," *Holy Land Studies* 8, no. 1 (2008): 58. In this article Nur Masalha examines Neo-Zionist readings of the Bible that create the image of Jews as divinely chosen and the Palestinians as "no more than illegitimate squatters" (p. 55). See also: Michael J. Sandford, ed., *The Bible*,

of Taybeh as the 'Refuge of Christ' implicitly sends the message of Taybeh as a Christian safe haven that refuses to be taken by the violence of Jewish fundamentalists. By inserting the biblical sacred history into contemporary secular history, and vice versa, the biblical association thus speaks directly to this internal conflict of a Jewish Ofra and a Palestinian Taybeh-Ophrah, thereby affirming the historical indigeneity of Palestinian Christians and their territorial legitimacy.

To further unpack this second meaning of Taybeh's biblical association, the following paragraphs in this section will systematically review Palestinian biblical theologies of land as formulated by the Palestinian church leaders and theologians that have been introduced in the previous chapter, with the aim to explore how they have theologically supported the territorial claim that Palestinians have a natural right to live in the land. The theme of 'land' has broadly sparked interest among biblical scholars since the 1970s, particularly since the publication of *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (1974), written by Welsh New Testament scholar W.D. Davies, and *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (1977), by American Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann.⁹¹ Palestinian theologians mirror biblical scholars like Davies, Brueggemann and, later, Gary M. Burge and Norman C. Habel, that there are multiple theologies of the land operating in Scripture.⁹² The theme of land is important in all Palestinian contextual theologies, not only because of this broader academic interest in biblical studies, but more so because the Bible has been used by Jewish Neo-Zionists and Christian Zionists to support an exclusive land claim for the Jewish people in the name of God, such as we have seen in the case of Gush Emunim. The main argument advanced by all Palestinian theologians to counter these conquest theologies is that the land ultimately belongs to God – throughout the whole Bible and in all theologies operative in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Therefore, so these theologians argue, the land could never be the exclusive possession of any religious, ethnic or national group of people, but needs

Zionism, and Palestine: The Bible's Role in Conflict and Liberation in Israel-Palestine (Dunedin: Relegere Academic Press, 2016); Nur Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology, and Post-Colonialism in Israel-Palestine* (London: Zed Books, 2007).

⁹¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); William D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

⁹² Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to 'Holy Land' Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); Gary M. Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003); Norman C. Habel, *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

to be shared among its dwellers. This argument is unanimously emphasised in the work of the contextual Palestinian theologians that are examined in this thesis.

Before we delve deeper into the Palestinian biblical theologies of the land, it should be mentioned that these theologies are a form of postcolonial biblical criticism, in the sense that these Palestinian theologians employ exegetical procedures, but go a step further by producing historical insight and analysis that shifts preconceived notions of the Bible and, thereby, realigns the Bible with postcolonial causes.⁹³ Their work should thus be read alongside the postcolonial criticism made by the likes of literary critic Edward Said and biblical scholar Michael Prior. Edward Said, who was born into a Palestinian Christian family himself,⁹⁴ argued that the way the West (the Occident) spoke, thought and wrote about the East (the Orient) was a “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”⁹⁵ His famous theory of ‘Orientalism’ implies that the West conceptualises the East as inferior. Concerning Palestine, Said stated that the land was seized based on a Zionist conquering ideology that began from Europe and was biblically based on the fulfillment of God’s promise.⁹⁶ Although Said’s oeuvre does not engage much with theology and biblical studies, he did coin the term a ‘Canaanite reading of the Bible’, referring to the alternative way of reading the Bible through the eyes of the oppressed.⁹⁷ Similarly, a major theme in Michael Prior’s controversial work is the moral problem of the divine promise of land, particularly in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua, which he saw as intrinsically linked with the mandate to exterminate the indigenous peoples of Canaan, and now conveniently

⁹³ Cf. the description of postcolonial biblical criticism by Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 171.

⁹⁴ Said identified as secular humanist, but he was born in an Anglican Palestinian family in Jerusalem. In his memoir, Said recounts being baptised in the Anglican St. George Cathedral in Jerusalem and being an alumnus of the Anglican St. George School. See: Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London: Granta Books, 1999), 107. In fact, the people of Taybeh claim that the family Said originally hails from the village but migrated to Jerusalem. Said does not reference this in his memoir and I have, unfortunately, not been able to find a source to verify this statement.

⁹⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003 [1978]), 3.

⁹⁶ Cf. Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1992 [1979]).

⁹⁷ Said, “Michael Walzer’s ‘Exodus and Revolution’.” An often-overlooked aspect of Edward Said’s life and work is his involvement with Palestinian (liberation) theology, even though this was just minor. Said was, for example, the keynote speaker during Sabeel’s very first international conference in Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem in 1990. Parallels could be drawn between the work of Edward Said and the work of Palestinian theologians such as Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb in their mutual interest in postcolonial criticism and deconstruction of power systems. Furthermore, both Ateek and Raheb have shown deep respect for the work of Edward Said. In an article, Naim Ateek called Said a ‘Prophet of Justice’ and expressed his appreciation for Said’s argument to read the book of Exodus with a more inclusive approach. Mitri Raheb drew comparisons between Said and Jesus, based on the fact that they both had to flee with their family to Egypt because Palestine had fallen into the hands of an oppressor. See: Naim S. Ateek, “Edward Said: Prophet of Justice,” *Holy Land Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 2, no. 2 (2004): 144f; Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, 27ff.

identified with Palestinians. Prior argued that biblical scholars need to engage in critique of Israeli policies of conquest and should shoulder some of the responsibilities for this use of the land traditions as described in the Bible. In short, postcolonial criticism by scholars like Said and Prior and the Palestinian contextual theologians offer alternative understandings of the world and detect biases in the text and in the interpretation.

Moreover, the positionality of these Palestinian theologians in their Christian communities should be emphasised. Their biblical theologies of land have crystallised from Arab culture and the everyday experiences of Palestinian Christians at the grassroots level. For example, Roman Catholic theologian Rafiq Khoury – who was, in fact, born and raised in Taybeh – argues that the gospel has been incarnated within an Arab tent.⁹⁸ Similarly, Geris Khoury, the founder of Al-Liqa', states that Palestinian contextual theology is like an olive tree: deeply rooted in Christian spirituality and Arab culture.⁹⁹ In relation to the Palestinian rural culture the work of Melkite Greek Catholic Archbishop Emeritus Elias Chacour stands out. Chacour stems from Kufr Biram, a humble village in the far north of Galilee, similar to Taybeh, but that was depopulated and later demolished by Israeli soldiers in 1953 (figure 16). His rural *fallāḥīn* upbringing and Christian piety, in combination with his love for the land, is found throughout his books. Particularly Chacour's first book, *Blood Brothers: The Dramatic Story of a Palestinian Christian Working for Peace in Israel* (1984), includes many references to the rural lifestyle of his youth, such as references to hills, stones, the *fallāḥīn* house, agriculture (fig orchard, olive grove, vineyard), livestock (cows, donkeys, goats, chickens), the *kūfiyya*, the *mukhtār*, and his mother's cooking. In his narrative theology, which is vividly portrayed against the rural background of Palestine, Chacour repeatedly stresses the rootedness of his community and their right to live in the land. A case in point is Chacour's 'special fig tree', a prominent motif in *Blood Brothers*, symbolising the *fallāḥīn* culture, the Palestinian *ṣumūd* ('steadfastness', more in chapter 4) and Chacour's theology of unity and peace.¹⁰⁰ Just as his father had grafted six different kinds of fig tree

⁹⁸ Cf. Epp Weaver, *Inhabiting the Land*, 55

⁹⁹ Khoury also emphasises that Palestinian contextual theology is as resilient as an olive tree that, even in dire conditions, is able to grow and bring forth its fruits. See: Geris S. Khoury, "Olive Tree Theology: Rooted in the Palestinian Soil," *Al-Liqa' Journal* 26 (2006): 58-109.

¹⁰⁰ Firstly, in Chacour's youth, the fig tree functioned as his personal sanctuary – it was here where he often came to pray as a little boy and where his brother found him to announce that the soldiers were coming. See: Chacour, *Blood Brothers*, 35f; Chacour, *Faith Beyond Despair*, xiii. Secondly, the tree symbolises Palestinian *ṣumūd* in the pertinacity of Chacour's father's and brother's continued care for the fig trees in the confiscated

together to make one better tree, so should Jews and Palestinians live in unity and peace sharing the same land; just as the tree was the only thing that had survived the bombing of Biram, and the many years of desolation that followed, so should bi-nationalism be the only possible way forward. After all, Chacour argues, Christians are spiritually grafted into God's family of Israel. Chacour understands himself as 'blood son' of Israel on the basis of Galatians 3:28-29 that emphasises that there is no difference between Jew and Greek, as they are both "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise", and on Romans 9:6-8 that states that "the children of the promise are counted as descendants." Therefore, so Chacour writes, Jews and Palestinians are blood brothers, and is it not right that Palestinians "have been cut off like unwanted branches."¹⁰¹



Figure 16. *The remnants of a destroyed house in Kufr Biram.* Photo by author.

orchard. See: Chacour, *Blood Brothers*, 89; Chacour, *We Belong to the Land*, 79; Chacour, *Israeli, Palästiner, Christ*, 24f. Lastly, the tree serves as the means for advancing Chacour's broader theological claims of reconciliation and peace. See: Chacour, *Blood Brothers*, 140-7; Chacour, *Israeli, Palästiner, Christ*, 9. Chacour uses the Epistle to the Galatians 3:28-29 and the Epistle to the Romans 9:6-8 to further his theology. Because of the pivotal role played by trees in Chacour's autobiographical narrative and theological analysis, theologian Alain Epp Weaver characterised Chacour's work as 'an arboreal imagination', stressing the rootedness of Biramites and serving as a counter to Zionism's ideological portrayals of Palestine as 'a land without a people for a people without a land'. See: Weaver, *Mapping and Return*, 91-126.

¹⁰¹ Chacour, *Blood Brothers*, 147.

It is not only trees that play a theological role, the analogy of the 'Living Stones' repeatedly surfaces in the work of several Palestinian theologians as well, including Chacour, Anglican priest Naim Ateek and Lutheran Reverend Mitri Raheb.¹⁰² A compelling example of how grassroots thinking, like the many examples similar to the notion of Taybeh as the Refuge of Christ, has been theologically further developed is Raheb's thesis to conceptualise the unbroken, ancient lineage between contemporary Palestinian Christians and the Christian community of the apostolic age through an imperial theology. Raheb understands 'the empire' in the *longue durée*, in which Israel is but another link in a long chain of uninterrupted occupation: Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, Ottomans, British and Israelis. "Liberation from occupation is like a red thread that goes throughout our history from King David's time until today," Raheb writes,¹⁰³ and understands this as the central theme throughout the biblical history as well as for the current situation in the land. In this context, Raheb called the Bible "a Middle Eastern book",¹⁰⁴ and pictures the land as the 'fifth Gospel' and the Palestinian people 'as the sixth Gospel' to assert that the Palestinian context is the hermeneutical key to understanding the original context and content of the Bible.¹⁰⁵ For a better understanding of the Bible one should listen to the experiences of Palestinians; after all, Raheb states, "the Palestinians of today stand in historic continuity with biblical Israel."¹⁰⁶ Reading "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5) in this Palestinian contextual perspective of the *longue durée* provides a hope for the Palestinian people.¹⁰⁷ Where empires come and go,

¹⁰² For the many references to the analogy of the 'Living Stones' in the work of Elias Chacour, see: Chacour, *Blood Brothers*, 32f, 36, 91, 186ff. Chacour states that the spiritual heritage of Palestinian Christians is firmly rooted in the first century and that their *fallāhīn* culture is close to that of the Bible. Chacour writes that he could picture Bible stories he heard as a young child, because his life world was similar to that of the Bible (p. 33) and had wondered if one of his ancestors had perhaps been an eyewitness in a Bible story (p. 32). He grew up with the consciousness of their heritage of "an unbroken chain of history that led from Jesus and His followers to our own family" (p. 36). Chacour also organised a peace gathering to symbolically rebuild Biram with 'living stones' (pp. 186ff). See also: Chacour, *We Belong to the Land*, xii, 4, 67f, 173f; Chacour, *Israeli, Palästinenser, Christ*, 11f, 97. Likewise, Anglican priest and theologian Ateek describes Palestinian Christians as the "offspring of all the ancient tribes that inhabited Canaan," echoing the earlier described continuity thinking. He makes this personal and states that his family name 'Aṭīq means 'old', 'ancient' or 'antique', signifying that his family was one of the oldest Christian families in Nablus. See: Ateek, *Justice and only Justice*, 13ff, 16; Ateek, *A Palestinian theology of Liberation*, 15. Mitri Raheb repeatedly calls Palestinian Christians 'Living Stones' in: Raheb, *I am a Palestinian Christian*, 4, 15, 25, 115; Raheb, *Sailing Through Troubled Waters*, 106.

¹⁰³ Mitri Raheb, "Towards a New Hermeneutic of Liberation: A Palestinian Christian Perspective," in *The Biblical Text in the Context of Occupation: Towards a New Hermeneutic of Liberation*, edited by Mitri Raheb (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2012), 13.

¹⁰⁴ Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Mitri Raheb, "Towards a New Hermeneutic of Liberation," 11-27. See also: Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, 97.

¹⁰⁶ Raheb, "Towards a New Hermeneutic of Liberation," 17.

¹⁰⁷ Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, 96-100.

those who stay are the meek, the powerless. Hence, the source for Raheb's identity and Christian hope is the Bible. In his diary *Bethlehem Besieged: Stories of Hope in Times of Trouble* (2004), Raheb recounts what it is like to resist the empire: it means going to church despite breaking the curfew, continuing church even if the sound of shooting outside is louder than your voice, organising a peaceful demonstration, developing a programme for creative and fitness development of children, and renovating the church's organ despite occupational politics and political instability.¹⁰⁸ Hence, Raheb translates Palestinian continuity thinking into a Christian hope that is based on the knowledge that God dismantles empires and that Jesus understood the geopolitics of the region like no one else.¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, on a more conceptual level, Palestinian theology is engaged to 'Christify' the land. Ateek approaches this hermeneutically and states: "the word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ interprets for us the word of God in the Bible."¹¹⁰ For Ateek, Jesus Christ becomes, thus, the hermeneutical key through which Christians read and understand the Bible. His Palestinian liberation theology asserts that only texts that pass the test of the Christ hermeneutic have authority.¹¹¹ This is an important element to de-Zionise the Bible, Ateek argues, and opens the door for Palestinian Christians to use the Bible as a tool for achieving justice and peace in the land. In his fourth pastoral letter, *Reading the Bible Today in the Land of the Bible* (1993), Latin Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah advances a similar Christ-centered theology.¹¹² He emphasises that the Bible presents a salvation history in which God reveals himself to individuals, communities, and peoples. With every new stage in this history of the Jewish people, Sabbah writes, the concept of land as a promise has evolved until the Christ-event fulfilled the old covenant in Noah, Abraham, Moses and David, and offered through his redemption grace to all people, Jews and non-Jews. He concludes: "The concept of the land had then evolved throughout different stages of Revelation, beginning with the physical, geographical and political concept and ending up with the spiritual and symbolic meaning."¹¹³ Sabbah stresses

¹⁰⁸ Mitri Raheb, *Bethlehem Besieged: Stories of Hope in Times of Trouble* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 18-24, 45-9, 56, 98f, 113ff, 127-34.

¹⁰⁹ Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, 129f; Raheb, *Bethlehem Besieged*, 155ff.

¹¹⁰ Ateek, *Justice and only Justice*, 80.

¹¹¹ Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, 48.

¹¹² Michel Sabbah, *Fourth Pastoral Letter "Reading the Bible in the Land of the Bible,"* Jerusalem, 1 November 1993, <https://www.lpj.org/cached_uploads/view/2020/05/08/4th-pastoral-letter-of-michel-sabbah1588926825.pdf> [accessed 28 October 2021].

¹¹³ Sabbah, *Fourth Pastoral Letter*, § 52.

that Jesus' person, words and deeds stand in continuity with the Old Testament tradition, but that Jesus Christ brought about a new covenant in the redemption.¹¹⁴ It is, thus, theologically wrong to advocate that the land belongs to the Jewish people based on God's land promise to Abraham. As the ultimate heir to the Abrahamic promises, Jesus has inherited the gift of land. On a more exegetical note, Palestinian Greek Orthodox biblical scholar Paul Nadim Tarazi argues that the Hebrew word 'erezt has been mistranslated with the English noun 'land', implying that the 'land of Israel' is a defined property that could be owned.¹¹⁵ Tarazi offers the alternative translation 'earth' or 'ground', which would always be the property of God and never of people, he states.¹¹⁶ While the theologies of Ateek, Sabbah, and Tarazi are highlighted here, it should be reiterated that all Palestinian theologians ascribe to the theology of Jesus Christ as owner of the land.

In light of this, another common element in those Palestinian land theologies is the notion of a universalised land. In his comprehensive study on biblical theologies of the land, *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth: A Christ-Centered Biblical Theology of the Promised Land* (2015), Lutheran Reverend Munther Isaac exemplifies that Jesus has redefined and universalised the land and the people of God.¹¹⁷ In this universalisation, gentiles did not replace Jews, Isaac argues, but were incorporated into Israel. 'Israel' should, thus, not be understood in a narrow and exclusive sense, but rather in a universal and inclusive way, including people from all nations with faithfulness in Jesus. Isaac concludes that a biblical theology of the land is in its essence missional, since the gospel went from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria and into the whole world. In his second book *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope* (2020), Isaac explains that reading the biblical encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite women in Matthew 15:21-28 in light of this Christ-centered and universal theology helps Palestinians understand that Jesus abundantly rewards those of great faith, and does not discriminate based on gender, religion or ethnic and national descent.¹¹⁸ Isaac writes that he, as a Palestinian Christian, sees himself in the Canaanite woman of Matthew 15, partly because Palestinians have a physical

¹¹⁴ Sabbah, *Fourth Pastoral Letter*, § 30, 31.

¹¹⁵ Paul Nadim Tarazi, *Land and Covenant* (St. Paul: Orthodox Center for the Advancement of Biblical Studies Press, 2009), 19.

¹¹⁶ Idem, 29.

¹¹⁷ Isaac, *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth*.

¹¹⁸ Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall*, 42-6.

connection to the Canaanites and all the other people who lived in the land, but most importantly because of the shared experience of being rejected (as biblical Canaanites and modern Palestinians). Isaac calls this approach a ‘theology from behind the wall’, which he describes as theology that is “concerned with day-to-day issues in Palestine” and “preoccupied with issues of life under occupation, injustice, nonviolence, religious extremism, and peacemaking”¹¹⁹ – not written in libraries, but at the checkpoint. The Canaanite woman challenges for him exclusive theologies and asserts that God is a God of all peoples.

This brings the discussion to the last element Palestinian Christians emphasise in their land theology, which is the importance given to justice, peace and reconciliation in the land. Palestinian Evangelical Reverend Yohanna Katanacho concludes after careful exegesis of Genesis 12:1-3 that the emphasis in these texts is not on the land, but on the divine blessing, that through Abram flows to the ends of the earth.¹²⁰ In other words, God’s promises were conditionally contingent on obedience to the covenant, which means observing God’s law and living in faithfulness. Katanacho concludes that the inhabitants of the land are God’s stewards, who in turn “must honor God in his land by affirming the unique mission of the elected land.” For Christians today it follows that the land is, thus, a land of justice, peace and reconciliation and that “any political solution must reflect justice, righteousness, and biblical love for both Palestinian and Israelis.”¹²¹ This covenantal theology is echoed in the Kairos Palestine Document. The authors believe: “It is the duty of those of us who live here, to respect the will of God for this land. It is our duty to liberate it from the evil of injustice and war. It is God’s land and therefore it must be a land of reconciliation, peace and love.”¹²² The text of the Kairos Palestine Document pays special attention to the city of Jerusalem, which should be a city of reconciliation, but has become a city of discrimination and conflict.¹²³ As faithful Christians, it is therefore both a right and a duty to show creative resistance in the face of the Israeli occupation, the document states, in order to “get back the land, freedom, dignity and independence.” Examples of creative and peaceful resistance mentioned in the Kairos Palestine Document are civil disobedience and the

¹¹⁹ Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall*, 19.

¹²⁰ Katanacho, *The Land of Christ*, 37. See also: Yohanna Katanacho, “Christ is the Owner of the Haaretz,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 34 (2005): 425-41.

¹²¹ Katanacho, *The Land of Christ*, 43.

¹²² Kairos Palestine Document, § 2.3.1.

¹²³ Kairos Palestine Document, § 1.1.8 and § 9.5.

application of boycotts, divestments and sanctions against everything that is produced by Israeli occupational forces – also known under the abbreviation BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions).¹²⁴ The authors of the Kairos Palestine Document, ultimately, declare the Palestinian connectedness to the land a natural right, which is not only based on ideological and theological questions. As Palestinian Christians they suffer from misinterpretations and misuse of the Bible by some other theologians, and declare it their task to “safeguard the Word of God as a source of life and not of death, so that ‘the good news’ remains what it is, ‘good news for us and for all.’”¹²⁵ Again, the theologies regarding universalisation of the land and the place of justice, peace and reconciliation in it, are common in the work of all Palestinian theologians mentioned in this section.

Hence, it becomes evident that these biblical theologies of the land by Palestinian theologians and church leaders both differ and share commonality with the previously described grassroots theology of the people of the village of Taybeh in several ways. A first difference is the way these theologies are communicated: by the Palestinian professional theologians mainly through theological texts and written statements (as well as through sermons and prayers, which are not analysed here), and by the people of Taybeh through biblical associations (as well as in other ways as described in the previous and next chapters). It further differs in the application of technical theological specialisations, such as exegesis and hermeneutics, and in the use of specialised theological terms, such as God’s promises, the Covenant, and the universalisation of the land. The Palestinian theologians and church leaders draw on many years of theological studies, often at seminaries abroad, where they have engaged on international academic level with other biblical scholars and postcolonial critics. Nonetheless, what is more important to realise is how these different voices of Palestinian theology are interrelated, significantly in the tendency to ‘Christify’ the land and the conflict, but also in their use of Palestinian cultural symbols such as the rural background and the notion of Living Stones. These characteristics of the Palestinian contextualisation and the ‘Christifying’ (or ‘Christianising’) of the land and the conflict has been a common thread in the different theological expressions discussed here, from the biblical association of Taybeh with Ephraim and Ophrah, the continuity thinking and ‘biblification’ of Palestinian identity, and the biblical

¹²⁴ Kairos Palestine Document, § 4.2.4 and § 4.2.5.

¹²⁵ Kairos Palestine Document, § 2.3.4.

theologies of the land by Palestinian theologians. While it is essentialist to say that one form is more authentic Palestinian than the other, the case could be made to term the grassroots theologies as observed in the village of Taybeh as more decolonial than the formal theologies formulated by Palestinian theologians and church leaders, just because the latter are written according to the convention of Western academic theology, while the former are intrinsically embedded in local Palestinian culture.

Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter has established how the Bible holds and shapes the everyday religious life of the modern Palestinian Christian community. In Taybeh, the perceived continuity between the Old Testament village Ophrah, the New Testament village Ephraim, and the modern-day village of Taybeh is most constitutive for the self-understanding of the people. This manifests itself in religious art in the three churches in Taybeh, as well as in the importance of *Jabal Jizza* and the veneration of Saint George taking place there. Whilst most of the academic literature deals only with official theological biblical engagement, this study has also ethnographically examined the grassroots biblical engagement of Palestinian Christians themselves, thereby filling a lacuna in existing research.

Firstly, by embedding this question in the rural context of Palestine, it became apparent how Palestinian Christians have depicted modern-day Palestinian rural culture as being a continuation of biblical culture, and thus constructed and reimagined Palestinian Christian identity as essentially biblical. The grassroots theology of Living Stones embodies this Palestinian Christian notion of an ancient lineage between contemporary Palestinian Christians and the early church of biblical times. This thinking is daily lived out by Palestinians through the display of Palestinian folkloristic artefacts in public and private places, and by stressing the intrinsic connection Palestinians have with both their historical lineage and the land. Ultimately, both Palestinian Christian expressions of rural changelessness and rural resistance should be regarded as ways of dealing with the ongoing radical transformation of Palestinian society. In the twentieth century, Tawfiq Canaan and his circle were afraid their culture would disappear; today the same fear applies to Palestinian Christians, whose culture is under threat by political pressure, land confiscation,

restriction of movement and ongoing emigration and displacement. The Palestinian Christian response to this tragedy is, thus, a process of the 'biblification' of Palestinian rural culture, through which Palestinian Christians underline their historical indigeneity in a theologically meaningful way.

Secondly, this chapter has considered how the Bible is read through the eyes of an oppressed people, with a particular emphasis on the political and theological question of the land. Palestinian biblical theologies of the land, as formulated by Palestinian church leaders and theologians, advance the argument that the land has been universalised in Christ. It ultimately belongs to God and its inhabitants are merely God's stewards that are commanded to live according to the principles of reconciliation, peace, and love. The direct applicability of this theology to the situation in Taybeh is that the Jewish settlers from Ofra cannot call on the biblical promise to Abraham in order to confiscate land belonging to Taybeh without breaking the promise of peace. In this context, the biblical association of Taybeh with Ephraim and Ophrah should, thus, be understood as a political statement or claim: Palestinian Christians have the right to live in the land. Hence, for Palestinian Christians these grassroots theologies provide ways to position themselves in relation to time, space, and to competing religious and political narratives. Through the processes of a Christianisation of the conflict over land and the insertion of contemporary Palestinian history into biblical history, and vice versa, Palestinian Christians provide a scriptural sanction against Zionist constructions and a way to express their territorial legitimacy.

Finally, by unpacking the ideological and theological foundations underlying the biblical association between the Old Testament village Ophrah, the New Testament village Ephraim, and the modern-day village of Taybeh, we can conclude that in the context of Zionism and the anti-colonial struggle, the grassroots theology of land and belonging is, thus, a form of historical and territorial belonging, through which Palestinian Christians gave the biblical story a renewed meaning for the Palestinian context. Renewal of ancient religious practices has not only taken place on the level of Scripture, but also relates to lived Christian practices, including pilgrimage, the celebration of Christian feasts and the veneration of Christian saints. The latter will be explored in the next chapter.

4

Baraka without Boundaries

Taybeh, 2 May 2018

Whenever I visited Maryam's house in Taybeh, the juices, Taybeh beer, savoury snacks and a big bowl of *tabbūla* were usually already waiting for me on the coffee table. We would chat away while her youngest son played, with her husband or other family members occasionally popping in to say hi or to join us. Maryam is in her thirties, born and raised in Taybeh, and a mother of four. She lives on the top floor of her husband's family's *dār* in the lower part of *al-Madīnat al-Qadīma*. When I entered the *dār* this afternoon, her husband's grandmother and great-grandmother were sitting outside sorting a bunch of wild thyme in order to make *za'tar*. After we climbed several flights of stairs to reach her apartment, I noticed a major difference since the last time I had visited the house. Maryam had swapped all her decorative ornaments for statues of different Christian saints. Having a better look at Maryam, she was wearing a new necklace with a pendant of the cross and a pendant showing the serene face of the Maronite monk *Mār Sharbel*, understood throughout the Middle East as a healer and miracle worker.

Maryam started to tell me about the illness she has, for which she had to undergo an intensive surgery in a hospital in Ramallah. Before the surgery, she went on pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Nativity Church in Bethlehem and the *Mār Sharbel* Monastery (also written as 'Mar Charbel Monastery') in Bethlehem to receive the *baraka* ('holy blessing') from holy objects in those churches, hoping this would aid the healing process. On the day of the surgery, 'Abūnā Jack went to Maryam's hospital bed to pray and bless her with holy water. Furthermore, she made a *nidhr* ('vow') to Saint George to walk barefoot to his shrine on *Jabal Jizza* and burn candles in a grotto there (figure 17), if he would protect her during the surgery. She also vowed to sacrifice a sheep on the remnants

of the Byzantine church on *Al-Khaḍir* – which is what the people of Taybeh call this shrine – if Saint George would heal her from the illness (figure 18).

Maryam went to *Al-Khaḍir* to fulfil her first vow just the day before I met her. In a picture Maryam stood indeed barefoot in the grotto on Al-Khader holding a few white candles. Her youngest son, a child who had not yet turned five, accompanied his mother when she fulfilled the first part of her *nidhr* to Saint George. When I met Maryam that day, she was on the mend but still under antibiotic treatment and needed to see the doctor at least every day for a period of six weeks. The woman who was always full of laughter and enthusiasm looked more serious and withdrawn that day. It had been a stressful couple of weeks for her and she had feared for her life. In these dark hours, Maryam had called on Saint George to guide her through the pain and sorrow.

Weeks later Maryam would fulfil the second part of her *nidhr* to Saint George when she was fully healed, and sacrificed a sheep on *Al-Khaḍir* together with her family, accompanied by 'Abūnā Jack to lead them in prayer and the village's butcher to perform the actual killing of the sheep.

Veneration of Saint George and other Religious Practices in Taybeh

Maryam's story is a typical example of religious practice in Taybeh. It involves a wide array of Middle Eastern Christian religious practices, such as pilgrimage, the saint's *baraka*, bringing votive offerings (such as the candles) to saints, bodily practices in holy places, wearing pendants, making blood sacrifices and the intercession of a saint (*qiddīs*) for healing. The central place for these religious practices in Taybeh is *Al-Khaḍir*.¹ There are innumerable sanctuaries like *Al-Khaḍir* in Palestine, venerated by Jews, Samaritans, Christians, Muslims, Druze, or by several of these religious groups. These holy places are usually around a tomb of a holy person, but also exist around holy rocks, holy caves, holy trees and holy water sources (cisterns, wells or springs), and may or may not go beyond the authority of religious leadership. Many of these sanctuaries are located on an elevated place, on top of a mountain or a hill,

¹ Depending on the vocalisation in different Arabic dialects, the spellings *Al-Khaḍr*, *Al-Khoḍr*, *Al-Khiḍir*, and *Al-Khuḍr* exist as well. Following the IJMES the transliteration *Al-Khaḍir* sounds most correct in the Palestinian-Arabic dialect. The name is also seen without the Arabic article 'Al-': *Khaḍir* and *Khaḍr*.



Figure 17. Votive offering in the grotto on Al-Khaḍīr, including icons, images and statues of various saints, rosaries, crosses, and candles. Photo by author.



Figure 18. Remains of a blood sacrifice on Al-Khaḍīr. The signs of the cross and handprints have been made with the blood of the sacrificed sheep. Photo by author.

and in or near the vicinity of an ancient ruin, two elements that apply to *Al-Khaḍir*. For centuries, saints and biblical or Quranic prophets have been venerated in these holy places. Other sanctuaries are slightly newer, surrounding the cult of a local saint, such as a religious leader, miracle worker or village *shaykh* with an impeccable reputation. Another common characteristic of these shrines is their local importance, often merely for the village or the immediate environment, such as the cults of *Mār Nīcolā* (Saint Nicolas) in the Christian town of Beit Jala and *An-Nabī Ṣālih* (the Prophet Salih) in the Muslim village of Nabi Saleh, both located in the West Bank. Other shrines enjoy fame throughout the region, often because miraculous powers and healing properties are ascribed to the place. Examples of these major shrines are *An-Nabī Mūsā* for Muslims, the tomb of the Prophet Moses in the Judean Desert close to Jericho, and for Christians the Tomb of the Virgin Mary at the foot of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. It is these places that embody the spirit of religious practice of ordinary Palestinians.

The *Al-Khaḍir* in Taybeh is a local shrine as well. It is situated on the outskirts of the eastern side of the village. The village cemetery is located next to *Al-Khaḍir*, which is not uncommon for Palestinian shrines.² Archaeologists and biblical scholars agree that the original ecclesiastical structure on the site dates back to the Byzantine sixth century and was later rebuilt in the medieval period, probably by the Crusaders who also built a structure on top of *al-Madīnat al-Qadīma*.³ The structure might have functioned as a monastery, particularly because it was built somewhat outside of the village. Archaeologists also found an underground burial chamber in the hill of *Al-Khaḍir*, dating from between the sixth and ninth century.⁴ As we have seen from the story of Maryam, *Al-Khaḍir* functions now as a local pilgrimage site and is known

² Many cemeteries are located adjacent to ancient shrines. Cf. Taha, "Ethnography of death in Palestine," 159.

³ For archaeological accounts of *Al-Khaḍir*, see: Michel Vincent, "El-Khadr, Un Complexe Ecclésiastique Byzantin et Médiéval a Taybeh-Ephraim (Cisjordanie)," ('El-Khadr, a Byzantine and Medieval Ecclesiastical Complex in Taybeh-Ephraim (West Bank)'), in *Architecture et Décor dans l'Orient Chrétien (IVe-VIIIe Siècle): Actes de la Journée d'Études en Hommages au Père Michele Piccirillo*. ('Architecture and Ornamentation in the Christian Middle East (4th-8th Century): Proceedings of a Study Day in Honour of Father Michelle Piccirillo'), edited by François Baratte and Vincent Michel (Paris: Editions de Boccard, 2011), 135-60; Bagatti, *Ancient Christian Villages of Samaria*, 42; A.M. Schneider, "Die Kirche von Et-Taijibe," ('The Church of Taybeh'), *Oriens Christianus* (1931): 15-22. For biblical studies on *Al-Khaḍir*, see: Robert D. Miller II, *Baal, St. George, and Khidr: A Study of the Historical Geography of the Levant* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2021), 63-72; Robert D. Miller II, "Taybeh, Baal-Hazor, and a Failed Hunt for Baal: Archaeological Survey of Tell Asur," *Antiquo Oriente* 16 (2018): 201-38; Fleckenstein, "Eine Stadt namens Ephraim, Johannes 11,54."

⁴ Cf. Hamdan Taha, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Ramallah, 3 April 2018. Also mentioned by Bagatti, *Ancient Christian Villages of Samaria*, 42ff. The people of Taybeh themselves reported that more burial chambers are located in the hill of *Al-Khaḍir*, where people were buried if snowy weather conditions prohibited otherwise, or in times of hostility.

among the villagers as a site where miraculous healings have happened.⁵ Occasionally, religious gatherings are organised between the ruins and remnants of *Al-Khaḍir*, such as the Orthodox Feast of the Cross, the ecumenical prayer at the end of Palm Sunday and some baptisms and weddings – particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic with rules regarding social distancing and the preference for outdoor meetings. As we will later learn in this chapter, the seventieth *Nakba* commemoration also took place on *Al-Khaḍir*. An event such as this demonstrates that *Al-Khaḍir* does not only bear spiritual significance for the village, but also functions as an identity symbol. Here many marriage photos are taken, as well as photos of Taybeh’s council, its scout group and the local *dabka* group. In short, *Al-Khaḍir* is the beating heart of the village. The lived religious practices performed on *Al-Khaḍir* are, thus, best understood as a mode of living, interconnected and intermixed with other aspects of daily life of the Christians from Taybeh. In this chapter we will thus move away from the pages of Scripture, that formed the focus of the previous chapter, and shift our attention to the religious practice and behaviour of ordinary people.⁶

Scholars have formerly defined these types of religious practices as ‘popular religion’. However, this terminology is not unproblematic. The term ‘popular religion’ often refers to a two-tiered religious system between ‘the elite’ versus ‘popular’, or ‘official religion’ versus ‘folk belief’.⁷ Such definitions portray popular religion as rural, primitive, unreflexive, and traditional, in contrast to an urban, civilised, intellectual

⁵ I have, however, not yet encountered another recent study that has ethnographically collected the contemporary religious practices on *Al-Khaḍir* to the extent that I have proposed to do. This PhD thesis is therefore unique in ethnographically embedding the religious practices on Taybeh’s *Al-Khaḍir* in the broader study of modern Palestinian Christianity. In his article on the Palestinian veneration of Saint George, the *Al-Khaḍir* site is briefly mentioned in: Ali Qleibo, “Continuity and Discontinuity in Palestinian Cultural Expressions: Baal, El-Khader and the Apotheosis of St. George,” *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeological Congress* 9, no. 2 (2013): 344-55. In his survey of shrines of *Al-Khaḍir* (as Islamic figure), Saint George and Saint Elijah, A. Augustinović also reviews the site in Taybeh, see: A. Augustinović, *El-Khadr and the Prophet Elijah* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1972), 25-8. Lastly, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century explorers and scholars described the *Al-Khaḍir* site, see for example: Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 164, 166f; Conder and Kitchener, *The Survey of Western Palestine*, 325f; Dalman, *Sacred Sites and Ways*, 217ff; Lydia Einsler, “Mār Eljās, el-Chadr und Mār Dschirjis,” (‘Mār Ilias, Al-Khaḍir and Mār Jirīs), *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 17 (1894): 65-74; Guérin, *Description Géographique, Historique et Archéologique de la Palestine*, 45-51.

⁶ This chapter is loosely based on three earlier publications, including: Elizabeth Marteiijn, “Popular Religion and Christianity,” in *The Rowman and Littlefield Handbook of Christianity in the Middle East*, edited by Mitri Raheb and Mark A. Lamport (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 174-87; Elizabeth Marteiijn, “Martyrdom, Liberation, and Belonging: An Ethnography on the Popular Saint George Veneration among Palestinian Christians,” *Journal of World Christianity* 10, no. 1 (2020): 53-67; Elizabeth Marteiijn, “Saint, Liberator, Martyr: Popular Palestinian Saint George Veneration in the Village of Al-Khader,” in *Bethlehem: A Sociocultural History*, edited by Mitri Raheb (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2020), 81-96.

⁷ As, for example, Ernest Gellner has divided Islam in a two-tiered system of the Great tradition, the ‘higher’ understandings of Islam found in the towns, versus the Little tradition, the more popular ‘folk Islam’ of the villages, see: Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

and modern version of religion.⁸ To this end, the term ‘lived religion’ is usually preferred, or by extension ‘lived theology’.⁹ Scholars of the Middle East have come up with their own alternative terminologies, such as ‘local Islam’,¹⁰ ‘lived Islam’,¹¹ and ‘agrarian religion’.¹² While the former two terms do not do justice to the religious diversity of the region, particularly for this thesis on Christianity, the latter is a better option. Historian James Grehan, who coined the term ‘agrarian religion’, intended it to describe the common religious culture that transcends the differences between Christianity and Islam, that does not systematically adhere to any set of dogma or laws, and – though mixed with elements of official religion – shows a certain independence from religious orthodoxy.¹³ Furthermore, scholars like Lara Deeb, Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood popularised the study of lived piety in the Middle East.¹⁴ We should, however, be careful not to treat piety as the totalising story of contemporary Christianity in the Middle East either. Rather than focusing on a static view of two monolithic entities, we will thus focus on the dialectical character popular religion entails and simply define this as “religion as practised”,¹⁵ and treat this not as mere piety, but as a significant aspect of the social life of the various Christian communities in the Middle East.

These religious practices usually revolve around the veneration of a Christian saint. Across the broad religious spectrum of the Middle East, the figure of Saint George stands out. Throughout Palestine, numerous churches are dedicated to this

⁸ Cf. Ellen Badone, “Introduction,” in *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society*, edited by Ellen Badone (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 1-23.

⁹ On ‘lived religion’, see for example: Hall (ed.), *Lived Religion in America*; McGuire, *Lived Religion*; Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*; Orsi, *The Madonna of the 115th Street*. On ‘lived theology’, see: Marsh (ed.), *Lived Theology*.

¹⁰ Richard C. Martin, ed., *Islam in Local Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 1982).

¹¹ Jacques Waardenburg, “Official and Popular Religion as a Problem in Islamic Studies,” in *Official and Popular Religion*, edited by Pieter H. Vrijhof and Jacques Waardenburgh (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 71-116.

¹² James Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Two remarks need to be made about Grehan’s theory. Firstly, Grehan used the term to describe everyday religion in late Ottoman Syria and Palestine and acknowledges that a more strictly scriptural interpretation of religion and the sharpening of sectarian consciousness have changed the religious perception in the region. Nevertheless, his work does help to begin to understand what everyday religious practice in the Middle East looks like and where it comes from. Secondly, the theory bears resemblance to the classic theory of William Robertson Smith that ‘Semitic religion’ was an all-encompassing category in Syria and Palestine, see: William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*. 2nd and 3rd series, edited by John Day (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009 [1927]).

¹³ Idem, 14-19.

¹⁴ Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi’i Lebanon*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape*; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ William A. Christian Jr, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 178. Anthropologist and historian William A. Christian Jr noted that the term popular religion could only be legitimately applied in this way, contradicting what he called “religion as prescribed”. Christian’s definition refers to an unstructured religious expression shared by all classes and often lacking the formality of established church sections.

saint,¹⁶ a sculpture of Saint George is found above the doorway of many Christian houses or at central places in villages and towns (figure 19), and a significant number of boys are named after him. Some Palestinians, specifically children, wear an image of the hero on a pendant, and others have even tattooed Saint George on their body, in particular on the right underarm. As patron saint of Palestine, Saint George is no doubt one of the most popular saints among Palestinian Christians.¹⁷ He is not only popular in Palestine, but all over the Middle East, with other interesting local practices in Lebanon, Syria and Turkey.¹⁸ He is also the patron saint of England, Catalonia, Portugal, Lithuania, Serbia, Georgia and Ethiopia. The popularity of Saint George is widespread, and the legend knows many faces, which demonstrates his adaptability to interact with diverse cultural and political environments in Europe, Africa and the Middle East.¹⁹ The Saint George veneration on Taybeh's *Al-Khaḍir* is very strong, too. He is the patron saint of the village, and more specifically, of the Eastern Orthodox and Melkite Greek Catholic village churches as well.

But who was Saint George and how has his cult spread throughout the Middle East? According to the Christian tradition, Saint George was born in 275 AD as the son of a Roman soldier who served in Cappadocia, modern day Turkey. After the

¹⁶ Saint George's most prominent shrines are the Church of Saint George in Lod and the Monastery of Saint George in the village of Al-Khader. In Jerusalem four prominent churches are dedicated to him, including 1) the Cathedral of Saint George the Martyr of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, 2) the Coptic Convent and Church of Saint George in the Old City, 3) the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George in the Armenian Quarter of the Old City, 4) the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Saint George in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. Furthermore, numerous village churches are dedicated to him, including the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Melkite Greek Catholic Church in Taybeh.

¹⁷ For more on the Palestinian veneration of Saint George, see: Marteiijn, "Saint, Liberator, Martyr," and Marteiijn, "Martyrdom, Liberation, and Belonging." Earlier publications on the Palestinian veneration of Saint George include: Glenn Bowman, "Popular Palestinian Practices around Holy Places and Those Who Oppose Them: An Historical Introduction," *Religion Compass* 7, no. 3 (2013): 69-78; Laird, "Boundaries and *Baraka*"; Qleibo, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Palestinian Cultural Expressions."

¹⁸ On the veneration of Saint George in Lebanon: Marlène Kanaan, "Legends, Places and Traditions Relation to the Cult of Saint George in Lebanon," *ARAM* 20, no. 1-2 (2008): 203-19. In Syria: Anna Poujeau, "Monasteries, Politics, and Social Memory: The Revival of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch in Syria during the Twentieth Century," in *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*, edited by Chris Hahn and Hermann Goltz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 177-92. In Turkey: Maria Couroucli, "Saint George the Anatolian: Master of Frontiers," in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, edited by Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 118-40; Maria Couroucli, "Chthonian Spirits and Shared Shrines: The Dynamics of Place Among the Christians and Muslims in Anatolia," in *Sharing the Sacred: The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations Around Holy Places*, edited by Glenn Bowman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 44-60; Maria Couroucli, "Empire Dust: The Web of Relations in Saint George's Festival on Princes Island in Istanbul," in *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*, edited by Chris Hahn and Hermann Goltz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 200-39; Ethel Sara Wolper, "Khidr, Elwan Çelebi and the Conversion of Sacred Sanctuaries in Anatolia" *Muslim World* 90 (2000): 309-22.

¹⁹ The widespread popularity of Saint George has been studied by Samantha Riches, see: Samantha Riches, *St George: A Saint for All* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015); Samantha Riches, *Saint George: Hero, Martyr and Myth* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2005).



Figure 19. Engraved stone with a colourful statue of Saint George above the door of Taybeh's Orthodox Church. Photo by author.

martyrdom of his father, Saint George fled with his mother to Lod (in Arabic known as Lydda), Palestine. In 303 AD, Roman Emperor Diocletian started to persecute the Christians, including Saint George. Saint George was tortured and executed for not denouncing his Christian faith, but miraculously came back to life. The story goes that this happened repeatedly, until Saint George eventually succumbed to beheading and died a martyr. Hence, Saint George is indigenous to the Eastern Mediterranean; his mixed Turkish-Palestinian origin explains his popularity in Anatolia and the Levant. According to historian Samantha Riches, the earliest known accounts of the cult of Saint George occur on Syrian inscriptions dated to the mid-fourth century and other early versions of hagiographical texts on Saint George are Coptic.²⁰ His oldest shrine is located in Lod, which is now a city in Israel, located around 9 miles south-east of Tel Aviv, with a Greek Orthodox Church housing the tomb of Saint George. The oldest testimony of the Saint George cult in Lod dates back to the sixth century. A pilgrim named Deacon Theodosius wrote in 513 AD: "In Diospolis [Greek name for Lod, ESM] where St. George was martyred there is his

²⁰ Riches, *St George*, 25. Unfortunately, Riches does not provide any further details about these inscriptions, nor a reference to the source of the text.

body and many wonders are wrought.”²¹ The current church structure dates back to the Crusader period, but the church beneath is Byzantine.²² The church in Lod is now Saint George’s major shrine and owned by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which annually celebrates the arrival of the bones in this church with a Divine Liturgy led by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem. These feast days fall on 15 and 16 November, following the Julian calendar that is employed by the Orthodox Patriarchate.²³ This *mawsim Mār Jirīs* in Lod is traditionally one of the largest Christian pilgrimage festivals for Palestinian Christians.

While Saint George’s iconography of the young, strong, medieval-looking knight on his rearing horse slaying the dragon with a long spear is widely known, the story of Saint George killing the dragon is a medieval addition to his story. The earliest picture of Saint George killing the dragon appeared in the Church of Saint Barbara in the Soğanli Valley in Central Turkey and dates from the eleventh century.²⁴ According to legend, Saint George killed the dragon in what is today called Saint George Bay in Beirut, which also has Saint George as patron of the city. In her study on Saint George practices in Lebanon, Marlène Kanaan mentions that the grotto where the dragon lived is now a sanctuary for the Virgin Mary and Saint George, called ‘Our Bosom Lady’.²⁵ It is believed that Saint George washed the dragon’s blood off his hands in the water source in this sanctuary and that the water has curative powers. One should note, however, that Saint George does not have the monopoly on dragon killing. Other Christian saints killed dangerous beasts, such as third-century martyr-saints Theodore of Amasea and Demetrius of Thessaloniki. Christopher Walter’s study of the seventh century text of Theodore of Sykeon, Saint George’s loyal devotee, suggests that the saint’s miraculous powers are the reason why Saint George’s cult spread so quickly and wide, and why he gained the

²¹ Quoted in Bagatti, *Ancient Christian Villages of Samaria*, 197. This testimony is supported by two other pilgrim accounts of Antonius of Piacenza (c. 570) and Adamnanus (c. 670). Cf. Miller, *Baal, St. George, and Khidr*, 73ff; Christopher Walter, “The Origins of the Cult of Saint George,” *Revue des études byzantines* 53 (1995), 314.

²² Cf. Miller, *Baal, St. George, and Khidr*, 73ff.

²³ The Julian calendar is thirteen days later than the Gregorian calendar. Although most churches and countries use the Gregorian calendar, some Eastern Orthodox and Oriental churches, including the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, still employ the Julian calendar.

²⁴ Cf. Walter, “The Origins of the Cult of Saint George,” 320ff. The Church of Saint Barbara in the Soğanli Valley is also called Tahtali Kilise (‘Wood Church’). The first text telling his story is a Georgian text that also dates to the eleventh century and is currently preserved in the library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem.

²⁵ Kanaan, “Legends, Places and Traditions Related to the Cult of Saint George in Lebanon,” 206ff. Kanaan mentions that the legends of Saint George’s miracles in Beirut are also stated in Šālih ibn Yahyā ibn Buhtur’s history of Beirut, see: Šālih ibn Yahyā ibn Buhtur, *Tārīkh Bayrūt* (‘History of Beirut’), ed. by Francis Hours and Kamal al-Saliba (Beirut: Dar al Mashreq, 1986), 9. Another thing to note is that the pairing of Saint George and the Virgin Mary corresponds to the same tradition known in medieval England.

popularity his contemporary martyr-saints such as Saint Thecla, Saint Menas and Saint Demetrius lacked.²⁶

Saint George is still known as protector and miracle-worker, who reaches the human world through apparitions and in dreams. When I interviewed the Hegumen of the seventh-century Monastery of Saint George in Al-Khader village,²⁷ a small village three miles west of Bethlehem with a Muslim population, he claimed that he once heard the hooves of Saint George's horse and that Saint George once appeared to protect him against an evil man.²⁸ According to the prominent Palestinian folklorist, Issa Massou, local oral history speaks of this monastery being built by a merchant who was on his way to *ʿAsqalān* (now known as Ashkelon) at the Mediterranean coast.²⁹ When his travel companions left him during the night, stealing his merchandise and his camel, the lost merchant invoked the help of Saint George, vowing to found a monastery. The saint indeed helped the merchant and showed him in a dream how the monastery should be built. The spiritual dimension in which saints, angels, demons, and *djinniyy* (spirits closely resembling humans) appear is not just restricted to historical legends, religious leaders, or maybe a *darwīsh*, a member of a local Sufi fraternity. It happens to ordinary people as well. In Taybeh I primarily recorded cases of people who had seen or spoken to angels. Supernatural beings also appear in the form of animals. People of Taybeh were warned not to look in the eyes of hyenas, because they may be inhabited by a demon.³⁰ In addition, the spiritual dimension manifests itself in supernatural phenomena, such as an extraordinary light, a shadow, burning of incense, or religious music and prayers heard from the saint's shrine.³¹ For this reason, some people use magic shields to ward off evil spirits, such as formulaic prayers, talismans against the evil eye, icons and the practice of invoking the name of God or a saint,

²⁶ Christopher Walter, "The Origins of the Cult of Saint George," 295-326.

²⁷ Dating cf. Bellarmino Bagatti, *Ancient Christian Villages of Judea and Negev*. Trans. by Paul Rotondi OFM. (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2002), 32.

²⁸ Cf. the Rev. Archim. Ananias Revelakis, Hegumen of the Monastery of Saint George in Al-Khader, interviewed by Elizabeth Martejijn, Al-Khader, 25 April 2018.

²⁹ Massou, "Religious Folklore in the Bethlehem District," 95.

³⁰ Tawfiq Canaan mentioned that bad spirits are believed to live in goats and hyenas, while good spirits take the form of a dove, a green bird, a peacock, a white sheep, a lion or a rabbit. Cf. Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 243-6. In my own fieldwork I also observed that seeing an owl is regarded as an omen of bad luck.

³¹ Recorded by Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 248; and Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, 142-57. An Orthodox priest from the Bethlehem area also reported having seen an extraordinary light in the Nativity Church that he interpreted as God's calling to serve as priest. Field note by Elizabeth Martejijn, Bethlehem, 10 November 2017.

such as ‘*Yā Allāh!*’ (‘O, God!’), ‘*Yā Khadir!*’ (‘O, Saint George!’) or ‘*Bism al ‘Adhrā’!*’ (‘In the name of the Virgin!’).

Saint George’s special powers are related to the cycle of life, fertility, power over nature – the reason why people could pray to Saint George for rain – and healing.³² Hence, throughout the Middle East, Saint George has attracted rural devotions and became connected to Spring activities. In fact, the Greek name *Georgios* means ‘land worker’ or ‘peasant’, demonstrating his connection to agricultural fertility. Palestinian anthropologist Ali Qleibo notes that the feasts of Saint George are associated with the agricultural calendar: the feast in Lod in November parallels the planting of the seeds for wheat, and the feast in Al-Khader in May marks the harvest of the grain.³³ During the feast in Al-Khader village on 5 and 6 May,³⁴ people buy bread from the church with stamps of Saint George on it, symbolising the harvest of the grain. Furthermore, Saint George is the patron of seafaring, because of his powers over the sea, and known for saving people from falling in a well.³⁵ Saint George is also strongly associated with healing, in particular from mental illness and speech impediments. Healing through the saints happens in two different ways. Firstly, through accessing the healing properties of the *baraka* (‘holy blessing’) of saints, by touching holy places, holy people and holy objects. An example here is the olive oil that people pour over the tomb of Saint George in Lod, which is believed to gain curative powers through it touching the tomb (figure 21). In the Monastery of Saint George in Al-Khader people used to place the key of the church in the mouth of children with a speech impediment. Secondly, healing is sought through acts performed in a saint’s sanctuary. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the Monastery of Saint George in Al-Khader functioned as a

³² Tawfiq Canaan reported that Palestinian Christians used to pray to Saint George (alongside other saints, such as Saint Elijah, Saint Nicola and the Virgin Mary) for rain. They organised special rain processions through the village, sometimes carrying around a doll symbolising ‘Mother of Rain’. Cf. Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 219-34. In her more recent research, Marlène Kanaan reports that Lebanese laity believed that Saint George would hit upon the surface of the sea with his sword to make it rain. Cf. Kanaan, “Legends, Places and Traditions Related to the Cult of Saint George in Lebanon,” 213. Nancy W. Jabbara also wrote about Lebanese Christians and observed that ‘Mother of Rain’ practices continue to happen in a Lebanese village in the central Bekaa Valley. Nancy W. Jabbara, “Traditions in Transition. Change in Vernacular Religion in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley,” *Western Folklore* 77, no. 2 (2018): 141-70; Akiko Sugase mentions that the Feast of *Mār Ilyās* in Haifa is associated with rainfall, too. The feast is annually celebrated on 20 July, which is believed to be the first day on which the clouds start gathering on top of the northern mountains. Cf. Akiko Sugase, “The Beginning of a New Coexistence: A Case Study of the Veneration of the Prophet Elijah (Mar Ilyas) among Christians, Muslims and Jews in Haifa after 1948”, in *Christians and the Middle East Conflict*, edited by Paul S. Rowe, John H. A. Dyck, and Jens Zimmermann (London: Routledge, 2014), 91. During my fieldwork I have not observed practices related to rainfall, though I will not deny that they still exist.

³³ Qleibo, “Continuity and Discontinuity in Palestinian Cultural Expressions,” 352.

³⁴ Following the Gregorian calendar the feast of Saint George falls on 23 April. (Also: footnote 23 in this chapter.)

³⁵ Cf. Riches, *St. George*, 41ff, 94.

sanatorium for the mentally ill.³⁶ Tawfiq Canaan observed patients being chained around the neck and tied to the walls of the narthex. It was believed that Saint George would appear in the night to undo the patient from the chain, declaring him healed. Monks also performed exorcism rituals, intensive prayers or beating the devil out of the body of the patient, who was thought to be causing the disorder.³⁷

As we have learned from Maryam's story, healing among Palestinian Christians is also connected to the practice of *nidhr*. Tawfiq Canaan defined the *nidhr* as "the practice of incurring voluntary obligations to a deity on fulfilment of certain conditions"³⁸ and James Grehan described these vows as the act of "praying as a means to plead and haggle with saints."³⁹ The *nidhr* is, thus, a reciprocal relationship: in order to receive a saint's blessing, protection, healing or empowerment, one must first show the saint loyalty and give something in return. A *nidhr* is a very personal relationship, too, often concerning healing, pregnancy, agricultural fertility or financial success, and does not have to be supervised by religious authority. A *nidhr* should be fulfilled exactly in the way a person promised it to the saint, although it is not necessary to do this immediately after the wish has been granted. Fulfilment takes place in the form of lighting candles or bringing oil and incense to the shrine, donating money to the church, donating the first fruits of the harvest to the church, performing ritual practices like fasting or walking barefoot to the church, among others. Sometimes people vow to help with the upkeep the shrine, by cleaning the sanctuary or helping with repairs. When these *nuthūr* are fulfilled, people tie strips of cloth around the shrine, the trees or the bars of the windows of the sanctuary. If the *nidhr* involves the birth of a child, these children are often dedicated to the saint. In the case that a baby boy is given by Saint George, he gets the name 'George' or '*Jirīs*', the Arabic Christian name for the saint.⁴⁰ The

³⁶ Cf. Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 122-5; Massou, "Religious Folklore," 100; Laird, "Boundaries and *Baraka*," 55.

³⁷ These exorcism practices were common in the Middle East until the late nineteenth century, or in the case of the Monastery of Saint George in Al-Khader even until the early twentieth century. Grehan mentions that the mentally ill were put in insane asylums under the supervision of monks. There they were confined or chained to the walls. Some of these patients had to endure beatings, intensive prayers, laying on of hands and sprinklings of holy water. Cf. Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, 148f. Tamari mentions that a *darwish*, a member of a local Sufi fraternity, was thought to be possessed by a good *djinn* and therefore drawn closer to the presence of God. To the ordinary observer, a *darwish* looked like a childlike, simple and imbecile man, Tamari writes, but in reality his status of *majnūn* was considered to be the same as a baby: on earth and at the same time in heaven. Cf. Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea*, 103.

³⁸ Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 130.

³⁹ Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, 169.

⁴⁰ Because of the flexibility in implicit vowels in the Arabic language, which differs from region to region, this name is also spelled as 'Jeries', 'Jiryis', 'Gerjes', 'Girgis', 'Girgi', 'Jorjos', and more variants. For Armenians, Saint George's name is known as 'Kevork' and for the Syrians as 'Korkis'.

parents promise to visit the church or shrine when the baby is one year old, dressing him in a green, red and yellow gown representing Saint George (figure 20). On the feast days of Saint George in Lod and Al-Khader, many of these babies are brought to the church to receive a blessing from the priest. Sometimes, a Muslim family brings their baby to the shrine to receive a prophylactic baptism in his name, which is usually the fulfilment of a *nidhr* made to Saint George in the face of danger or dying. Another prevailing practice is to bring votive offerings to the shrine of a saint, as we have seen in the grotto of *Al-Khaḍir*. In Taybeh these are often icons, images and statues of various saints, rosaries, crosses and candles. In the Monastery of Saint George in the village of Al-Khader, the practice exists that people offer jewellery, watches or silver crosses adorned with precious stones, the most costly of which are displayed before the main icon on the left side of the church.

The ultimate *nidhr* a Palestinian Christian could make to Saint George is *nidhr dhabīḥa*, an animal slaughter, not only because of the high financial expense to buy an animal, but mostly because nothing matches the redemptive power of the



Figure 20. A mother and her child in the Monastery of Saint George in Al-Khader village. The boy is dressed in the green, red, and yellow gown representing Saint George. Photo taken with permission.

sacrificial blood. During the course of my fieldwork, I encountered sacrifices made to Saint George usually because he protected people during complicated surgeries or because he helped heal people from serious illness. Other reasons, such as pregnancy or the birth of a boy, tended to involve *nuthūr* of votive offerings and bodily practices. Blood sacrifices involve the slaughter of a healthy, living sheep to be killed on the *'ataba* of the ruined church on *Al-Khaḍir* by cutting the throat of the sheep and letting it bleed to death.⁴¹ The preferred time for a *nidhr dhabīḥa* is at sundown on Saturday and the village butcher usually performs the act. Though no set liturgy exists for these practices, the parish priest accompanies the family involved to guide them in prayers. In contrast to Muslim and Samaritan sacrifices, the Christians will not eat the meat. They distribute the meat to the poor, which in Taybeh usually means that it directly goes to the home for the elderly. The blood is the central component of the *nidhr dhabīḥa* and therefore it is left on the site.⁴² Through the act of sacrificing, the blood is considered *baraka*, so the acts of stepping over the blood and making blood imprints by hand are understood to give a person protection. Men and women attend the sacrifice and dip their hand in the blood and make handprints or crosses on the walls of the threshold of the church. The youngest participant that I encountered was an 11-month old baby boy being helped by his father to dip his hand in the blood and make an imprint on the walls of *Al-Khaḍir*. According to Tawfiq Canaan, these hand impressions represent the hand of the Virgin Mary for Christians, the hand of Fatima (the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed) for Muslims, and the hand of God for Jews. He also observed the practice in Taybeh to make the sign of the cross with the blood on the forehead of a child, and the practice to whitewash the stones of *Al-Khaḍir* with a preparation of

⁴¹ The reason why the killing happens on the *'ataba* is because of its symbolic meaning that relates both to Palestinian rural folklore and to Eastern Orthodox Christian traditions. In Palestinian rural folklore stepping over the elevated *'ataba* is understood as a symbolic gesture of transitioning from the public domain into the privacy and hospitality of the Arab home, and peasants used to utter formulaic prayers to ward off the *djinn* who was believed to hide there. This parallels the Greek Orthodox thinking in which the church is seen as the Kingdom of God. Entering the church is thus symbolically entering the realm of God, which is why Eastern Orthodox Christians make the sign of the cross or kiss the threshold of the church door before entering.

⁴² Blood is an auspicious accompaniment to all rites of passage: birth, circumcision, marriage and death. Grehan mentions that in Ottoman Syria and Palestine blood sacrifices were also made for a series of demarcation events, such as before a family inhabited a new house and when a family member had returned from a long absence (such as travel, pilgrimage, war and imprisonment). It was also customary to put blood on the forehead of a bride and to put it on the roof where a new couple would sleep. Cf. Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, 171-7. Canaan mentions that blood is believed by Palestinians to contain the soul. He argues that the shedding of blood is, therefore, the most important part of the sacrifice ritual, since it symbolises the life that has been given in the name of the people who committed to the *nidhr*. Cf. Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 173f.

limestone after the animal has been slain, both to bring good luck.⁴³ These two specific practices are not in use anymore, though the *nidhr dhabīḥa* is still considered central to the veneration of Saint George in Taybeh.

Lastly, although this chapter primarily focuses on the Palestinian veneration of Saint George, one should note that multiple saints are venerated among Palestinian Christians. The most popular saint besides Saint George is the Virgin Mary. Similar to the Saint George veneration, Middle Eastern Marian devotion is starkly coloured by the fact that the Virgin Mary is indigenous to the Middle East.⁴⁴ Traces of Marian devotion were found in the Middle East as early as the third century and amplified at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD with the pronouncement of the title of *Theotokos*.⁴⁵ The icon of the *Theotokos* is often found in churches and houses – alongside icons such as the *Hodigitria* ('Guide'), *Elusa* ('Tender Mercy'), and *Oranta* ('Praying'). After the arrival of Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century, these traditional Eastern images and roles were blended with new themes, such as the Immaculate Conception, the Lady of the Rosary, and the Crowning of the Virgin. Although traditional Marian feasts, such as the Feast of the Dormition of Our Lady in Jerusalem (25-28 August), are attended in high numbers, newer feasts, like the Feast of Our Lady Queen of Palestine in Deir Rafat, Israel (last Sunday of October), established in 1927, have undergone a revival and gained popularity as well. The Virgin Mary has become a significant role model in terms of healing, women's fertility, and female empowerment. Lastly, the Virgin Mary's image is deeply ingrained in local religious folklore. Many Palestinian (Christian) villages have religious folkloristic stories regarding the Virgin Mary or the Holy Family – such as

⁴³ Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 166f.

⁴⁴ See: Nurit Stadler, "Marian Devotion in the Contemporary Eastern Mediterranean," in *Oxford Handbook of Mary*, Chris Maunder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 213-30; Willy Jansen, "Visions of Mary in the Middle East: Gender and the Power of a Symbol," in *Gender, Religion and Change in the Middle East*, edited by Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Ingvild Flakerud (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 137-54. On the veneration of the Virgin Mary in Lebanon: Rima Nasrallah and Martien E. Brinkman, Heleen Murre-van den Berg and Marcel Barnard, "Which Mary? Eastern Christian Women Bringing their Mary into the Lebanese Protestant Church," *Mission Studies* 33 (2016): 4-25. On the veneration of the Virgin Mary in Jordan: Willy Jansen, "Marian Images and Religious Identities in the Middle East," in *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, edited by Anna-Katrina Hermkens, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 33-48. On the veneration of the Virgin Mary in Egypt: Sandrine Keriakos, "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt: Improving Relations between Copts and Muslims?" in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, edited by Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 174-201.

⁴⁵ Rima Nasrallah, "Worship and Spirituality," in *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 313-24.

the *Lady of Ephraim* in Taybeh – and this is especially strong in the context of Bethlehem.⁴⁶

Despite the growing academic interest in Christianity in the Middle East, popular faith expressions have been rather understudied. Scholars who have written about these phenomena fear that popular religion is in a state of crisis in Palestine.⁴⁷ Locals have indeed reported that the festival in Al-Khader has shrunk in size. Checkpoints have made the movement of people more difficult, which is why pilgrimage is not as prevalent as it was before. Yet, this centuries-old practice has survived and is still widely practised by Palestinian Christians. The church was packed during the feast days in Al-Khader – it was hot, airless and there was nearly no space to walk. The young informants I spoke to during my fieldwork in Taybeh believe strongly in *nidhr* and *baraka* and they do not expect change in the popular Saint George veneration.⁴⁸ Images of saints are visible in modern and trendy restaurants, and the youth are still wearing crosses. My observations do not endorse the thought that Palestinian lived religious practices are decreasing. On the contrary, my research manifests rich practices and strong beliefs. This chapter will demonstrate that these forms of lived religious practices are widely alive among Palestinians – and throughout the whole Middle East, for that matter – and function as a reservoir for people to give meaning to the changing world around them and to adapt their behaviour to it.

While these traditional meanings continue to exist, I do argue, though, that the Palestinian veneration of Saint George has undergone development. Based on the dramatic changes the Palestinian context has undergone in this last century – like the establishment of the Israeli state, the rise of militant Islam, and the ongoing emigration – I argue that this lived religious expression has turned from a cult focused on human flourishing to a platform for grassroots theological ideas, mainly

⁴⁶ For more on the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, see: Amanda Batarseh, “Reading Indigenous Grammars of Place and Narrative Permeability in Bethlehem’s Mary,” in *Bethlehem: A Sociocultural History*, edited by Mitri Raheb (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2020), 131-9; Elisa Faranacci, “The Israeli-Palestinian Separation Wall and the Assemblage Theory: The Case of the Weekly Rosary at the Icon of Our Lady of the Wall,” *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 11, no. 1 (2017): 83–110; Nurit Stadler and Nimrod Luz, “Two Venerated Mothers Separated by a Wall: Iconic Spaces, Territoriality, and Borders in Israel-Palestine” *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 6 (2015): 127–41; Nurit Stadler, “Appropriating Jerusalem through Sacred Places: Disputed Land and Female Rituals at the Tombs of Mary and Rachel,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (2015): 725-58; Issa Massou, “Religious Folklore in the Bethlehem District: Stories of Places and Persons Connected with Religious Folklore in the Bethlehem District,” *Al-Liqa’ Journal* 13 (1999): 85-104.

⁴⁷ Cf. Sugase, “The Beginning of a New Coexistence,” 93. Also mentioned by: Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, 190-208; Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea*, 109.

⁴⁸ This was also observed by Poujeau, “Monasteries, Politics, and Social Memory,” 184f.

concerning belonging, martyrdom and liberation. By stating this, I follow a handful of other scholars of Christianity in the Middle East – such as Emma Aubin-Boltanski and Glenn Bowman on Palestine, Andreas Bandak on Syria, and Angie Heo on Egypt – who read saint veneration as religious practices that imply social and political consequences.⁴⁹ As Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille have argued in their edited volume on sainthood in the Middle East, transposing Clifford Geertz’s classical formulation: “Sainthood can be understood as particular nested relationships with extraordinary persons, living or dead, that function as models *of* and *for* action”.⁵⁰ I do, however, go in a different direction by intending to formulate the implicit grassroots theologies of Palestinian Christians that are visible in the Palestinian veneration of Saint George. To demonstrate how the veneration of Saint George contributes to a sense of belonging, I will closely examine the deeper meanings of the concept of *baraka* in the second part of this chapter. As a concept found in both Christianity and Islam, I will show how *baraka* breaks down boundaries among the people of the Middle East. In the third part of this chapter, I will focus on the controversial political uses and the spiritual meaning of Saint George in relation to ideas of martyrdom and liberation through the lens of *ṣumūd*, the Palestinian notion of steadfastness, and argue that figures of saints could also be interpreted as models of Palestinian *ṣumūd*, thereby making way for theologies of martyrdom and liberation. As a way of comparison, Middle Eastern Marian devotion is also taken into consideration, but to a lesser extent than the Palestinian veneration of Saint George.

Tactile Piety and Christian-Muslim Relations

After the turn of the century, anthropologist Robert M. Hayden published his seminal article “Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans” (2002). In the article, he introduces the terms ‘competitive sharing’ and ‘antagonistic tolerance’ to indicate that shared or mixed shrines are no more

⁴⁹ On Palestine, see: Emma Aubin-Boltanski, *Pèlerinages et Nationalisme en Palestine: Prophètes, Héros et Ancêtres*. (‘Pilgrimage and Nationalism in Palestine: Prophets, Heroes and Ancesters’) (Paris: EHESS, 2007); Bowman, “Popular Palestinian Practices around Holy Places and Those Who Oppose Them”; Glenn Bowman, “Nationalizing and Denationalizing the Sacred: Shrines and Shifting Identities in the Israeli-Occupied Territories,” in *Sacred Space in Israel and Palestine: Religion and Politics*, edited by Yitzhak Reiter, Marshall Breger, and Leonard Hammer (London: Routledge, 2012), 195–227; Bowman, “Nationalizing the Sacred.” On Syria, see: Andreas Bandak, “Our Lady of Soufanieh: On Knowledge, Ignorance and Indifference among the Christians of Damascus,” in *Politics of Worship in the Contemporary Middle East: Sainthood in Fragile States*, edited by Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 129–53. On Egypt, see: Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints*.

⁵⁰ Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille, “Introduction,” in *Politics of Worship in the Contemporary Middle East: Sainthood in Fragile States*, edited by Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 12.

than temporary manifestations of tolerance that will eventually turn into situations of conflict. In fact, he argues that in later stages this can cause separation between the religious groups involved, or even result in the destruction of what once was a shared or mixed shrine.⁵¹ His article reflects a broader academic approach by scholars such as historian Bernard Lewis and political scientist Samuel P. Huntington who see the world as made up of cultural territorial blocs where clashes occur on the borders of those civilisations that represent those blocs.⁵² Other models, such as those presented in the work of political scientist Ron E. Hassner or in the edited volume by religious scholars David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, see intercommunal violence develop around sacred sites, because they “require believers to have complete and exclusive control over them.”⁵³ In their book on sacred space in Israel and Palestine, Marshall Breger, Yitzhak Reiter and Leonard Hammer argue, in line with Hassner, that holy place is by definition a place of political theatre.⁵⁴ The authors also demonstrate that religious and holy places are effective cultural elements of modern nationalism.⁵⁵ Examples of holy sites that have effectively been employed in Jewish nationalist discourse are the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem, and Masada in the Judean Desert. The Temple Mount, which in Arabic is known as the *Haram ash-Sharīf*, most particularly the golden dome of the Dome of the Rock, is the national symbol for the Palestinians. These conflict-based models echo popular discourses of the ‘clash of civilisations’ between Christians and Muslims that has gained attention since the turn of the century and particularly after 9/11, the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington in 2001, coordinated by militant Islamist organisation Al-Qaeda.

However, as another group of scholars has demonstrated, understanding religious encounters through the lens of these conflict-centred approaches may lead to the problematic understanding of (religious) identities as fixed, bounded and exclusivist. In fact, Muslims and Christians have long coexisted in the Middle East.

⁵¹ Robert M. Hayden, “Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans,” *Current Anthropology* 43, no. 2 (2002): 205-31. The same was argued by Frederick William Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans*.

⁵² Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *The Atlantic Monthly* September (1990): 47-60; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Touchstone, 1998).

⁵³ Ron E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 3; David Chidester and Edward Tabor Linenthal, eds., *American Sacred Space*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

⁵⁴ Marshall J. Breger, Yitzhak Reiter and Leonard Hammer, eds., *Sacred space in Israel and Palestine: Religion and Politics*. (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁵⁵ *Idem*, 5f.

Geris Khoury has stated that the encounter between Muslims and Christians in the region should specifically be understood as a dynamic *Arab* Christian-Muslim encounter, because of their cultural commonality, and in the case of Palestine, because of the political unity.⁵⁶ This is echoed in the work of several historians of the Middle East, including studies by Joseph Meri, Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen and James Grehan on common religious culture, and Heather Sharkey's study on the shared history of Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Middle East before World War I.⁵⁷ These studies indicate there were intercommunal relations based on shared experiences, mutual religious reverence and common cultural attitudes. This thought is also reflected in the term 'Abrahamic religions' that, since the turn of the century, has increasingly been employed in popular and academic literature to refer to a common religious patrimony in Abraham and the phenomenological similarities between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.⁵⁸ What needs to be taken from these studies is the acknowledgement that religious identities are fluid and hybrid, embedded in a history where religions have intersected and defined themselves and each other in the process. Hence, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and other religious subgroups in the Middle East, should not be engaged as monolithic and essentialist social groups, but approximated as complex and porous groups that have manifold and overlapping religious practices.

In this section, I build on the previous work of anthropologists such as Dionigi Albera and Glenn Bowman on the phenomenon of religious crossing and mixing at shared shrines in the Eastern Mediterranean – including the Balkan, the Levant, Turkey and Egypt – where Christians, Muslims, and in some cases also Jews, Samaritans and Druze, share the same sacred space, religious figures and sometimes participate in the same religious rituals. These studies on mixed worship counteract discourse of the 'clash of civilisations' and show that the barriers between religions are actually not insurmountable. Albera has noted that, even in situations of

⁵⁶ Geris S. Khoury, "Christian Muslim Dialogue in the Holy Land," in *Christian Theology in the Palestinian Context.*, edited by Rafiq Khoury and Rainer Zimmer-Winkel (Berlin: AphorismA Verlag, 2019), 183-230.

⁵⁷ Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); James Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*; Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, *Pèlerinages d'Égypte: Histoire de la Piété Copte et Musulmane, XVe-XXe siècles.* ('Pilgrimage in Egypt: History of Coptic and Islamic piety, 15th-20th centuries') (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2005); Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Middle East.*

⁵⁸ The term must be used with awareness that this is a modern construction and is usually invoked with a theological agenda and an eye towards future coexistence. The term is, therefore, not neutral and not sufficiently justified as a strategy or categorisation. For a genealogy and a critical examination of the term, see: Aaron W. Hughes, *Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

conflict, mixed practices do not always end. He points to the cases of the Church *Sayyidat al-Talla* in Mount Lebanon, where Druze continue to practice veneration despite severe violence in the past, or the continuation of Muslims visiting the Church Our Lady of Africa in Algiers, a practice that has resisted the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) and the rise of Islamism.⁵⁹ While relations between Muslims and Christians are rarely simply harmonious, Bowman argued that the interactions between these groups are far richer and more intriguing than conflict-based models suggest.⁶⁰ I am also inspired by the work of theologians such as Marianne Moyaert, Muthuraj Swamy and Kwok Pui-Lan who have called for more attention to be given to lived interreligion and inter-rituality.⁶¹ Their work indicates that prevailing theological approaches in the field of interreligious studies are rooted in a cognitive understanding of religion, with an emphasis on what people believe and not so much on what people do.⁶² This has contributed to the fact that mixed and shared practices are often overlooked in scholarly analysis on Christian-Muslim relations past and present.

Hence, this chapter will particularly focus on Palestinian Christian religious practice. I have delimited this section to the practice of tactile piety, which is best

⁵⁹ Cf. See also: Dionigi Albera, "Ritual Mixing and Interrituality at Marian Shrines," in *Interreligious Relations and the Negotiation of Ritual Boundaries: Explorations in Interrituality*, edited by Marianne Moyaert (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 137-54; Dionigi Albera, "Mary and Multi-Faith Pilgrimages," in *Oxford Handbook of Mary*, edited by Chris Maunder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 621-35; Dionigi Albera, "Religious Antagonism and Shared Sanctuaries in Algeria," in *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites: Religion, Politics, and Conflict Resolution*, edited by Elazar Barkan and Karen Barkey (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 97-129; Dionigi Albera, "Combining Practices and Beliefs: Muslim Pilgrims at Marian Shrines," in *Sharing the Sacra: The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations Around Holy Places*, edited by Glenn Bowman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 16-19; Dionigi Albera, "Conclusion: Crossing the Frontiers between the Monotheistic Religions, and Anthropological Approach," in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, edited by Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 219-44; Dionigi Albera, "Why Are You Mixing What Cannot Be Mixed? Sharing Devotions in the Monotheisms," *History and Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (2008): 37-59.

⁶⁰ Cf. Glenn Bowman, "Introduction: Sharing the Sacra," in *Sharing the Sacra: The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations Around Holy Places*, edited by Glenn Bowman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 2. Bowman also reflects on mixed shrines in: Glenn Bowman, "Identification and Identity Formations around Shared Shrines in West Bank Palestine and Western Macedonia," in: Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli (eds.), *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 10-28; Bowman, "Popular Palestinian Practices around Holy Places and Those Who Oppose Them"; Bowman, "Nationalizing and Denationalizing the Sacred"; Bowman, "Nationalizing the Sacred."

⁶¹ Moyaert defined inter-rituality as "the way interreligious encounters happen via, through and around age-old and new ritual practices." Marianne Moyaert, "Broadening the Scope of Interreligious Studies: Interrituality," in *Interreligious Relations and the Negotiation of Ritual Boundaries: Explorations in Interrituality*, edited by Marianne Moyaert (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 5. See also: Muthuraj Swamy, *The Problem with Interreligious Dialogue: Plurality, Conflict and Elitism in Hindu-Christian-Muslim Relations* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); Marianne Moyaert, "Introduction: Exploring the Phenomenon of Interreligious Ritual Participation," in *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue: Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations*, edited by Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 1-16; Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2004).

⁶² Moyaert, "Broadening the Scope of Interreligious Studies," 12.

indicated with the Arabic concept of *baraka*, which roughly translates to 'holy blessing' – the power that is present in holy people, holy places and holy objects. Based on this idea, people touch icons or tombs, dip their hands in oil or blood, kiss the hand of living holy people or touch their garments. *Baraka* is thus a haptic phenomenon. Before I continue explaining the meaning of *baraka* for Christian-Muslim relations in more detail, I will sketch an ethnographic vignette from May 2018, illustrating the ritual practices involving *baraka* in the Monastery of Saint George in the village of Al-Khader.

The Notion of Baraka in the Context of the Middle East

Every year on 5 and 6 May, Christians and Muslims primarily from the Bethlehem area flock to the colourful Monastery of Saint George in Al-Khader. These days mark the annual Feast of Saint George and are a scene of shared piety between Christians and Muslims. Many people attend this feast to fulfil their *nidhr* to Saint George – mainly concerning healing, pregnancy or financial success; others come especially for the *baraka*. Special holy breads, which are believed to contain *baraka*, are sold for 5 shekels (around 1 British pound) in the front porch of the church. The breads are either smooth, or contain a stamp with the Jerusalem cross or Saint George (figure 22). Some people eat the bread immediately, while others buy multiple breads to take home and share with their family. A large number of people, both Christians and Muslims, stand in line for the sacred chains, which are believed to have bound Saint George during his imprisonment and torture and now contain healing powers and give protection in difficult times (figure 23).⁶³ In order to receive the *baraka*, one kisses the chain three times, moves it over the head, then lowers it down the body to the feet, and steps out of the chain.⁶⁴ Two assistants help the people perform this ritual and encourage them not to delay, so that as many people as possible are able to take a turn. Another way to receive *baraka* is to dip your fingertips in the oil container below the main icon at the right side of the church and make the sign of the cross.

⁶³ The chains are currently held in three places: the Monastery of Saint George in Al-Khader, the Church of Saint George in Lod and in the Monastery of Mar Elias on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Samantha Riches reports that the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George in Cairo, Egypt, also holds Saint George's chains which are believed to cure psychiatric illness. See: Riches, *St George*, 38.

⁶⁴ Similar to the contemporary practices in Al-Khader, Tawfiq Canaan describes the practice known in Mandate Palestine to place the hand over the face and then down the body in order to let *baraka* flow through the whole body. See: Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 99.



Figure 21. Oil on Saint George's grave, Lod
Photo by author.



Figure 22. Holy bread, Al-Khader village
Photo by author.



Figure 23. Holy chains, Al-Khader village
Photo by author.



Figure 24. Lighting candles, Al-Khader village
Photo by author.

On the day before Saint George's Feast Day, people visit the monastery to take part in the *ṣalāt al-ghurūb* ('prayer at sunset') at 5 p.m. During my visit, I met a Christian mother of two little girls, who came especially for the bread. While the monastery is part of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, she is Melkite Greek Catholic. In fact, Christians from a variety of Christian backgrounds attended the feast. The woman shared that she, her daughters, her mother-in-law and another family member left their hometown Bethlehem in the morning at 6.30 a.m. and walked all the way to the monastery while praying. She had returned for the prayer vigil, like she does every year. Walking to the monastery, sometimes even barefoot, is part of the multiplicity of Christian popular practices described in the section above, such as lighting candles (figure 24), bringing oil to the shrine, and, as was also the case that day, making blood sacrifices in the courtyard. Some of these practices coincide with the Islamic ritual practices in the monastery, such as lighting

candles and taking *baraka* from the chains. While Muslims do not participate in the prayer vigil during the evening of 5 May or during the Divine Liturgy on 6 May, they visit the shrine during one of those two days to engage in these popular religious practices and say their prayers to the icon of Saint George on the south side of the church (which faces towards Mecca).⁶⁵ On the Feast Day I met a Muslim family of a mother, four daughters and a small baby boy. They lived in the Dheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem and visited the Monastery of Saint George every year. That particular visit was made in honour of their sick grandmother, who asked them to do so. Back home they celebrated Saint George Day by having a family meal together and giving each other presents.

This Monastery of Saint George is a place rich with Palestinian religious folklore for both Christians and Muslims. It reflects several practices involving *baraka*, including holy bread,⁶⁶ holy chains and holy oil. But what is *baraka* exactly? The notion of *baraka* has received attention in both classical and recent research on the Middle East, especially in the context of the *murābiṭ* (marabouts) in Morocco and in Sufism.⁶⁷ Most commonly, scholars have defined *baraka* as a 'holy blessing', but it has also been defined as a "(special/divine) grace,"⁶⁸ "(sacred/benevolent) power,"⁶⁹ "(innate/spiritual) force,"⁷⁰ "good fortune,"⁷¹ "divine favour,"⁷² or as "auspiciousness."⁷³ *Baraka* is divine in origin and bestowed upon prophets, saints and miracle-workers, who either during their life or after death transmit their *baraka*

⁶⁵ Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 14f.

⁶⁶ Bread is a recurrent symbol for *baraka* in several Middle Eastern contexts. Cf. Vincent Crapanzano, *The Hamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 237.

⁶⁷ Maraboutism refers to the Moroccan veneration of Muslim holy men. On *baraka* in Morocco: Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); Dale F. Eickelman, *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976); Paul Rabinow, *Symbolic Domination: Cultural Form and Historical Change in Morocco* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1975); Crapanzano, *The Hamadsha*; Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Edvard Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (London: Macmillan, 1926). On *baraka* in the context of Sufism, a mystical form of Islam, elsewhere in the Middle East: Paulo G. Pinto, "Performing Baraka: Sainthood and Power in Syrian Sufism," in *Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam 5: On Archaeology of Sainthood and Local Spirituality in Islam*, edited by Georg Stauth (Transcript Verlag, 2004), 195-211; Omid Safi, "Bargaining with Baraka: Persian Sufism, "Mysticism," and Pre-Modern Politics," *The Muslim World* 90, no. 3-4 (2000): 259-87; Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Islam* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997); Valerie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); Michael Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt: An Essay in the Sociology of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

⁶⁸ Cf. Angie Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints*, 83; Amira Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter: Egyptian Landscapes of the Imagination*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 265; Pinto, "Performing Baraka," 196.

⁶⁹ Cf. Safi, "Bargaining with Baraka," 275; Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints*, 99.

⁷⁰ Cf. Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 17; Crapanzano, *The Hamadsha*, 237.

⁷¹ Cf. Crapanzano, *The Hamadsha*, 237.

⁷² Cf. Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 44.

⁷³ Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood*, 271.

to people as a blessing. Anything that comes in contact with the saint contains their *baraka* as well. The most common substances are earth, water, rocks and trees, but there are also cases known of *baraka* in air, dust, light, oil, fragrance and animals, as well as the architectural forms associated with the saint, such as their shrine or their tomb, and objects that have belonged to the saint. This idea of *baraka* can be found throughout the whole Middle East: from the *imamzadeh* (Shia shrine-tomb) in Iran to the water from the Zamzam Well in Mecca; from the Evil Eye talismans in Turkey to the Muqattam Mountain in Egypt; and from the non-decaying body of *Mār Sharbel* in Lebanon to the chains of Saint George in Palestine. Hence, the holy bread, holy chains and holy oil in the Monastery of Saint George in Al-Khader are classic examples of *baraka*. Other known examples are the various pieces of Jesus' cross and the Stone of Unction on which Christ's body was laid, which is currently in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Christian icons may contain *baraka* if a healing drop appears on them. Several of these icons are known throughout the Middle East, but the icon at the Deir Sayna Saydnaya in Syria is particularly revered for its healing powers and power to resolve problems of female sterility.⁷⁴ In Islam, the Prophet Mohammed and his descendants are especially endowed with *baraka*, but the supreme manifestation of *baraka* in Islam is the text of the Qur'an.⁷⁵

The way *baraka* enters the everyday life of people is commonly through physical touch.⁷⁶ People touch, kiss or hug the person, substance, object, natural landscape or architectural form that is considered to contain *baraka*. For example, at the *qadam al-Mahdiyy* ('footprint of the Mahdi') in Bahrain, Shi'ites place pieces of cloth on Al-Mahdi's footmark for the purpose of 'transmitting' *baraka*.⁷⁷ In her study on the *pīr* (Sufi saint) in Pakistan, Katharine Pratt Ewing used the verb 'to radiate' to indicate the abundance of *baraka* these Sufi saints possess. She describes how the Sufi saint creates a channel between God and the world through which the *baraka*

⁷⁴ The power of this icon is described in: Anna Poujeau, "Sharing the *Baraka* of the Saints: Pluridenominational Visits to the Christian Monasteries in Syria," in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, edited by Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 202f.

⁷⁵ Cf. G.S. Colin, "Baraka," in (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2nd ed., edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, accessed February 2021). The term *baraka* appears three times in the Qur'an and only in its plural form: *barakat*.

⁷⁶ The manner of transmission of *baraka* varies among different places and times. Joseph Meri distinguishes four ways through which the *baraka* is transmitted: 1) through physical touch, 2) through the acquisition of knowledge and learning from saints, 3) through the possession of relics, 4) through encountering saints in dreams. See: Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 103. The transmission of *baraka* has also been identified with exorcism rituals, see for example: Crapanzano, *The Hamadsha*; Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood*.

⁷⁷ El-Sayed Al-Aswad, "Perceptibility of the Invisible Cosmology: Religious Rituals and Embodied Spirituality among the Bahraini Shi'a," *Anthropology of the Middle East* 5, no. 2 (2010): 63.

flows.⁷⁸ This is done through uttering a verse of the Qur'an and blowing it on the person concerned, or blowing it on water and giving instructions on how this water should be used. Apart from the breath, the Pakistani Sufi saints could use amulets and exorcism rituals to 'channel' their *baraka*. Amira Mittermaier describes the phenomenon of the Blessing Gaze of Sufi saints in Egypt who have reached such a high spiritual state that they can project *baraka* through their gaze.⁷⁹ Akiko Sugase notes that Christians rub the statue of *Mār Iliās* in his cave in the Convent of Stella Maris, Haifa, with their handkerchief in order to bring some of its *baraka* home.⁸⁰ In contrast to these more passive forms, in which the *baraka* is transmitted rather voluntarily and automatically through different forms of touch, other scholars have emphasised the power dynamics behind the transmission of *baraka*. In his study on Sufi saints in eleventh century Iran, Omid Safi emphasised that these saints exchanged their *baraka* for justice and patronage of the Seljuk ruler.⁸¹ Instead of 'transmitting', 'radiating', 'channelling' or 'gazing', these saints were 'bargaining' their *baraka*. Similarly, Paulo Pinto's analysis of contemporary Syrian Sufism demonstrates that, while *baraka* is not the sole element in the doctrinal definition of saintly authority in Islam, it certainly relates to the spiritual power of saints.⁸² Hence, *baraka* sanctifies saints, sets them apart from their fellows and gives saints power to interact with political leaders.

Furthermore, scholars have connected *baraka* to people's sense of place. After all, it is *baraka* that sanctifies holy places, through footsteps, caves, sacred trees, miracles that have occurred there, and more. Devotees make pilgrimage to obtain the *baraka* from holy places and holy objects. This kind of pilgrimage is not so much a state of liminoid, as foundational theorists Victor and Edith Turner have observed, a state of betwixt and between, an empowering moment of being temporarily out of time;⁸³ it is better described as "a short episode in the longer pilgrimage of life",⁸⁴ or a mode of living that is part of people's everyday life. Eastern (Orthodox) pilgrimage is the veneration of a saint in certain sacred places where the

⁷⁸ Katherine Pratt Ewing, "The Sufi as Saint, Curer, and Exorcist in Modern Pakistan," *Contributions to Asian Studies* 18 (1984): 110.

⁷⁹ Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter*, 88. In contrast to the widespread belief of the Evil Eye, the phenomenon of the Blessing Gaze is a fringe phenomenon, Mittermaier argues.

⁸⁰ Sugase, "The beginnings of a new coexistence," 91.

⁸¹ Safi, "Bargaining with Baraka".

⁸² Pinto, "Performing Baraka," 196.

⁸³ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

⁸⁴ Couroucli, "Chthonian Spirits and Shared Shrines," 44.

presence is felt the strongest, or in other words, where the saint's *baraka* is present. Locals believe that praying in holy places is more holy, where one can sometimes hear the hooves of the horse of Saint George while praying, or even see him in visions or dreams. The people of Taybeh claim that Saint George allegedly restored a blind woman's sight after she slept at the ruins on *Al-Khaḍir* for one night, which relates to the fact that his *baraka* is most abundantly present at his shrine. In Arabic this type of pious visitation is referred to by the word '*ziyāra*', which carries a different meaning from the word '*ḥajj*'. The latter indicates the more formal pilgrimage, such as the Islamic pilgrimage tradition to Mecca, and in Christian pilgrimage tradition to Jerusalem. In addition, the word *ziyāra* indicates that pilgrimage and recreation are often interrelated. Some people in the village visit *Al-Khaḍir* daily to pray and light candles, and the youth might casually visit the shrine together to engage in religious rituals. These practices at *Al-Khaḍir* are typical for many villages in the Middle East.

Lastly, in the context of World Christianity, the notion of *baraka* could best be compared with the Polynesian notion of *mana*.⁸⁵ The notion of *mana* is understood as a supernatural force found in people, nature and objects – similar to *baraka*. Because of the association of *mana* with sympathetic magic,⁸⁶ famous anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes *baraka* as a 'magical power', a 'spiritual electricity' and also a 'doctrine', but in an implicit, criticised and far from systematic form.⁸⁷ However, not all scholars agree with Geertz' explanation. Anthropologists Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille argue that *baraka* is not something one possesses – like magic – but they see *baraka* as 'a mode of thinking about the ways the sacred enters everyday life'.⁸⁸ In his work on saint veneration among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria, historian Josef Meri analyses *baraka* quite extensively and concludes that there is no historical evidence that the notion of *baraka* was once considered a doctrine.⁸⁹ Meri suspects that the origin of *baraka* is found in Christianity and shared between Christians, Muslims and Jews in the Middle East.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Cf. Heo, *Political Lives of Saints*, 83.

⁸⁶ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1890]). Other classical anthropological work on *mana* and magic: Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*. Trans. by Robert Brain (London: Routledge, 1972 [1902]); Raymond Firth, "The Analysis of Mana: An Empirical Approach," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 49 (1940): 483-510.

⁸⁷ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 44.

⁸⁸ Bandak and Bille, "Introduction," 6.

⁸⁹ Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 102.

⁹⁰ Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 102. Meri compares the Arabic term *baraka* with the Hebrew term *qadosh* (p. 17). Yoram Bilu also mentions that Jewish saints granted a special power akin to the notion *baraka*, see: Yoram Bilu, *The Saints' Impresarios: Dreamers, Healers, and Holy Men in Israel's Urban Periphery* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), 20.

Similarly, in his article on sainthood in African Islam, Lamin Sanneh notes that *baraka* is a pre-Islamic concept.⁹¹ Where the notion of *baraka* comes from, however, remains a question. So, after having analysed the workings of *baraka*, this brings us to the question what *baraka* means for Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle East.

Religious Mixing at Shared Shrines

As we have noticed, *baraka* is the foundation of several socio-cultural practices in the Middle East, including healing, collective communities (whether Christian monastic traditions or Sufi brotherhoods), pilgrimage and tactile piety. These religious practices based on tactility are shared between Christians and Muslims. We have encountered several of them in the Monastery of Saint George in Al-Khader, such as touching Saint George's holy chains and lighting candles. Other examples of shared tactile practices to be found throughout the Middle East are drinking water from holy springs, tying strips of cloth to a holy place, and leaving small pieces of paper with prayer intentions near holy places, among others. *Baraka* is commonly understood as something that is available to anyone who touches the holy place, holy object or holy person – whether Christian or Muslim. Faith in *baraka* is important in order for it to work, but not believing in Christianity per se. Hence, Angie Heo called *baraka* a “spiritual currency shared between Christians and Muslims,”⁹² and Albera described the shared tactile piety as a common vernacular lexicon: a shared “lingua franca spoken in whispers, circulating from one religion to the other.”⁹³ This does not mean that we should consider *baraka* as a form of syncretism, but rather as “ad hoc arrangements of people coming together from different religions.”⁹⁴ *Baraka* is thus a “connecting force”,⁹⁵ infra-religious and independent from theological and symbolic distinctions between the religions. In her work on shared shrines in the Ethiopian city of Harar, Camilla Gibb used the phrase “*baraka* without borders” to indicate that those shrines are not restrictive or ethnically exclusive, but fluid and accommodating instead.⁹⁶ This phrase has inspired the title of this chapter, signifying

⁹¹ Lamin Sanneh, “Saints and Virtue in African Islam: An Historical Approach,” in *Saints and Virtues*, edited by John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 127-43.

⁹² Heo, *Political Lives of Saints*, 75.

⁹³ Albera, “Conclusion,” 244.

⁹⁴ *Idem*, 220.

⁹⁵ Bandak and Bille, “Introduction,” 6.

⁹⁶ Camilla C.T. Gibb, “*Baraka* without Borders: Integrating Communities in the City of Saints,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 29, no. 1 (1999): 88-108.

the different ways in which *baraka* breaks down certain boundaries among the people of the Middle East.

Apart from the boundlessness of *baraka*, the veneration of the same holy persons is another reason why Christians and Muslims intermingle. This is best seen at the shrines of Saint George and, as we will discuss later in this section, other shared figures like the Virgin Mary. In fact, Saint George is in the Levant often understood as being intertwined with Saint Elijah and the Islamic figure of *Al-Khaḍir* ('the Green one').⁹⁷ The Islamic figure of *Al-Khaḍir* is a superhuman being and much revered by Muslims. He is considered an invisible figure who sometimes reveals himself to help people or save them from danger and death. In his study on the Islamic understanding of *Al-Khaḍir*, Patrick Francke says that this figure is not mentioned in the Qur'an by name, but consensus exists among commentators that the mythical companion of *An-Nabī Mūsā* ('the Prophet Moses') at the 'Junction of the two Seas' in *sūra* 18:60-82 is, in fact, *Al-Khaḍir*.⁹⁸ Francke notes that there are two major debates in Islam regarding *Al-Khaḍir*: firstly, regarding his status as *walī* ('friend of God') or *nabī* ('prophet'), and secondly if *Al-Khaḍir* is alive or not.⁹⁹ Furthermore, Francke considers *Al-Khaḍir* as a point of reference in an inculturation process by Arab Christians, Islamic minorities and Hindus. In his now classic study on the parallels between Saint George, Saint Elijah and *Al-Khaḍir*, Augustinović thinks this intertwining goes deeper and writes that "inside the minds of the people, El Khadr [*Al-Khaḍir*, ESM] is, precisely, neither St. Elijah nor St. George,

⁹⁷ Research on this conglomerate of religious figures of Saint George, Saint Elijah and *Al-Khaḍir* became a research trend at the end of the nineteenth century, an idea entertained by Charles Clermont-Ganneau and Lydia Einsler. In 1876 the French archaeologist Charles Clermont-Ganneau studied a statue from the Louvre Museum, Paris, of the ancient Egypt deity Horus killing his rival Set (portrayed as a crocodile), who untraditionally, is riding a horse. He concluded this statue has remarkable parallels with early Byzantine depictions of Saint George, and to a certain extent he drew parallels with *Al-Khaḍir*. Two decades later Lydia Einsler published a study on the intertwining of Saint George, Saint Elijah and *Al-Khaḍir* in the context of Palestine, also drawing on data from the shrine of *Al-Khaḍir* in Taybeh. See: Ch. Clermont-Ganneau, "Horus et Saint Georges d'Après un Bas-Relief Inédit du Louvre: Notes d'Archéologie Orientale et de Mythologie Sémitique," ('Horus and Saint George from a New Bas-Relief from the Louvre: Oriental Archaeological and Semitic Mythological Notes'), *Revue Archéologique* 32 (1876): 196-204; Einsler, "Mār Eljās, el-Chadr und Mār Dschirjis," 67f. More recently, this intertwining has been studied by, for example: Qleibo, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Palestinian Cultural Expressions"; Joseph W. Meri, "Re-Appropriating Sacred Space: Medieval Jews and Muslims seeking Elijah and Al-Khadir," *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 5, no. 3 (1999): 237-64; Augustinović, *El-Khadr and the Prophet Elijah*; D.R. Howell, "Al Khadr and Christian Icons," *Ars Orientalis* 7 (1968): 41-51; Hassan S. Haddad, "Georgic Cults and Saints of the Levant," *Numen* 16, no. 1 (1969): 21-39.

⁹⁸ Cf. Patrick Francke, *Begegnung mit Khidr. Quellenstudien zum Imaginären im traditionellen Islam*. ('Encountering Khidr: Studying the Sources of Traditional Islamic Thought'). (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000), 2. The story from *sūra* 18:60-82 is similar to the Babylonian legend of Alexander the Great, the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Jewish legend of third-century Rabbi Joshua ben Levi. Cf. Augustinović, *El-Khadr and the Prophet Elijah*, 10; Kanaan, "Legends, Places and Traditions Relation to the Cult of Saint George in Lebanon," 209; Miller, *Baal, St. George, and Khidr*, 3f.

⁹⁹ Francke, *Begegnung mit Khidr*, 306-23.

but rather both together and even something more.”¹⁰⁰ To illustrate this intertwining, Palestinian Christians usually call Saint George by the name *Al-Khaḍir*, like the Christians of Taybeh when they refer to the village’s shrine – even though the official Arabic Christian name of the saint is *Mār Jirīs*.¹⁰¹ In Turkey, this conglomerate comes together in a unique Anatolian figure called Hidrellez, as a combination of *Al-Khaḍir* and *Mār Ilīas*.¹⁰² In addition to being intertwined with the Christian figures Saint George and Saint Elijah, *Al-Khaḍir* is also conflated with Baba Ilyas Horosani in Alevism and with the figure Khawajah Khizr, revered by Hindus and Muslims on the Bukkur Island in the Indus River in what is now Pakistan. The same hybridity defines Saint George. In most legends, Saint George’s descent is of *digenis* (born of two peoples): mixed Turkish and Palestinian. All of these hybrid characteristics make it easier for people to cross the religious divide.

The previously mentioned Monastery of Saint George in the village of Al-Khader is not the only place where we see mixed Christian-Muslim veneration of this conglomerate of Saint George, Saint Elijah and *Al-Khaḍir*. During the feast day in Lod, countless Muslims came to light candles and to receive *baraka* from his tomb and his chains.¹⁰³ Before the current church building was erected at the end of the nineteenth century, Christians and Muslims shared the same half-ruined Byzantine church as their place of veneration.¹⁰⁴ Christians organised their ritual practices at the eastern end of the church, between the remnants of the high altar, and Muslims had their communal prayers in the western end of the ruins. The Greek Orthodox Monastery of Mar Elias, that is located on the main road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, is a third shared shrine. The two main icons of the church are for Saint Elijah and Saint George respectively and the monastery houses another pair of Saint George’s chains and a stone on which Saint Elijah rested during his flight from Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19), both containing *baraka*. The liturgical elements during

¹⁰⁰ Augustinović, *El-Khadir and the Prophet Elijah*, 12.

¹⁰¹ Similarly, Mizrahi Jews who were called Elijah used to Arabise their name to *Khaḍir*. Cf. Haddad, “Georgic Cults and Saints of the Levant,” 26.

¹⁰² See: Couroucli, “Saint George the Anatolian,” 119; Couroucli, “Chthonian Spirits and Shared Shrines,” 46f. According to Couroucli sources indicate that shared festivals for Hidrellez appeared as early as the beginning of the Ottoman period (fourteenth century), but might backdate to pre-Islamic Turkish practices. Couroucli mentions that there is a relationship between the feast of Hidrellez and the ancient Anatolian agricultural calendars: with Hidrellez celebrated in early May, the feast signals the beginning of the spring and summer, while Saint Dimitrios’ Day signals the beginning of winter agricultural labour.

¹⁰³ Cf. field note entry by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Lod, 16 November 2017.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, 184f. Now the Church of Saint George is built adjacent to the thirteenth century Great Omari Mosque.

the *ṣalāt al-ghurūb* are oil and bread, similar to the Saint George veneration.¹⁰⁵ Muslims also visit the monastery because of the conflation with *Al-Khaḍīr*.¹⁰⁶ A fourth important shared shrine is the Cave of the Prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel in Haifa, visited by Jews, Muslims and Christians alike.¹⁰⁷ The Church of the Stella Maris Monastery is built on a smaller cave and is the centre of attention on *ʿĪd Mār Ilīas* (Feast of Saint Elijah), annually celebrated on 20 July by Galilean Christians.¹⁰⁸ In addition, there are approximately 20 smaller *Al-Khaḍīr* shrines (sg: *maqām*, pl: *maqāmāt*) in Israel-Palestine.¹⁰⁹ Worth noting is the *Qubbat al-Khaḍīr*, a tenth-century domed shrine in the north-west corner of the central platform on *Ḥaram ash-Sharīf*, the Temple Mount, although it is questionable that Christians come here for prayers (figure 25). Different dynamics also apply to the shrine of *Al-Khaḍīr* in Taybeh, because it is mainly a shrine for the village. The people from Taybeh claim that Muslims from neighbouring villages occasionally visit the shrine, although I was never able to observe such a visit during my fieldwork.

In academic discourse this religious intertwining between Saint George, Saint Elijah and *Al-Khaḍīr* has been interpreted as a spiritual continuity from the ancient Canaanite Baal-tradition, the storm-god and fertility-god known to us from Old Testament passages and from Ugarit records. This argument was advanced by Hassan S. Haddad in his article “‘Georgic’ Cults and Saints of the Levant” (1969).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Cf. field note entry by Elizabeth Martejijn, Monastery of Mar Elias, 1 August 2019.

¹⁰⁶ See also: Bowman, “Nationalizing the Sacred,” 433-9.

¹⁰⁷ See also: Sugase, “The beginnings of a new coexistence.”

¹⁰⁸ Cf. field note entry by Elizabeth Martejijn, Haifa, 20 July 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Other shrines for Saint George, Saint Elijah and *Al-Khaḍīr* are: a fifth century Byzantine church in Ashkelon, a *maqām Al-Khaḍīr* in Deir al-Balah in the Gaza Strip, the Mosque of *Al-Khaḍīr* in the village of Duma, another *maqām Al-Khaḍīr* in Nisf Jubeil, the fountain of *Al-Khaḍīr* in Balata, a shrine of Saint George near a niche in the wall of a ruined Byzantine church in Jifna and the *maqām Al-Khaḍīr* in Banias in the Golan Heights. The Galilean shrines of the towns Kafr Yasif, Makr, Bi’ina and Safed appear to be venerated by Jews and Druze, too. It is believed that *Al-Khaḍīr* bathes in the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem and the Hammam al-Darageh in Nablus. It appears that a second *Al-Khaḍīr* shrine on the Temple Mount is located under the western stairs leading to the central platform. These shrines together number twenty, but it is probable there are more shrines that I have not encountered. This list is based on: Augustinović, *El-Khadr and the Prophet Elijah*, 13–33; Miller, *Baal, St. George, and Khidr*; Sugase, “The beginnings of a new coexistence,” 86, 88f. In addition, numerous churches are named after Saint George. Main examples of such dedicated churches in Jerusalem are: the Greek Orthodox church of Saint George in the Armenian Quarter of the Old City, the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Saint George in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, the Coptic convent and church of Saint George in the Old City, and the Saint George Cathedral the Martyr of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem. Beyond Israel and Palestine, Augustinović encountered 30 of those shrines in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan together. See: Augustinović, *El-Khadr and the Prophet Elijah*, 33-42. Saint George shrines beyond the Levant have not been investigated in this chapter.

¹¹⁰ Haddad, “‘Georgic’ Cults and Saints of the Levant.” More recently, this type of research has been followed up by: Miller, *Baal, St. George, and Khidr*; Erica Ferg, *Geography, Religion, Gods, and Saints in the Eastern Mediterranean: Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East* (London: Routledge, 2020); Qleibo, “Continuity and Discontinuity in Palestinian Cultural Expressions”; Nicolas Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001).



Figure 25. Qubbat al-Khaḍīr on the central platform of Ḥaram ash-Sharīf. Photo by author.

There are indeed resemblances between the story of Saint George and the story of Baal.¹¹¹ The eternal struggle between Baal and the Canaanite god Yam parallels Saint George's fight with the dragon. Furthermore, Baal and his female companion Anat resemble Saint George and the virgin. Both Saint George and Baal attract rural devotions connected to the seasonal year. Furthermore, the theme of killing and resuscitating corresponds to the dying-rising cycle of Baal. Baal is not the origin of *Al-Khaḍīr*, Saint George or Saint Elijah, concluded Old Testament scholar Robert D. Miller II in his recently published study on the possibility of cultic continuity, but "within Khidr and Saint George lies a good deal of Baal, and that one of the key connections is in locations of veneration."¹¹² He argues that a substantial number of current shrines of Saint George, Saint Elijah and *Al-Khaḍīr* have cultic continuity to Roman and Hellenistic Baalshamin shrines, and in some cases even to Iron Age temples.¹¹³ The Saint George shrine on *Jabal Jizza* in Taybeh is quite possibly built

¹¹¹ For more parallels between Baal, Saint Elijah, Saint George and *Al-Khaḍīr*, see for example: Hassan S. Haddad, "'Georgic' Cults and Saints of the Levant"; Miller, *Baal, St. George, and Khidr*, 84-8.

¹¹² Miller, *Baal, St. George, and Khidr*, 83.

¹¹³ Idem, 80. He notes that not all shrines are ancient, with some shrines of *Al-Khaḍīr*, Saint George and Saint Elijah dating back to medieval or Ottoman times. Miller also states that some shrines are related to other ancient deities, including Atargatis, Leucothea, Pan, etc.

on an ancient shrine of Baal-Hazor (Green Baal), Miller argues, as 2 Samuel 13:23 speaks about a Baal-Hazor shrine near Ephraim.¹¹⁴ This theory resonates with the description people of Taybeh gave, saying that the shrine of Saint George in Taybeh is “the oldest place on earth where God was being worshipped, from Baal to JHWH to Jesus.” Another possibility to consider is the presence of a Baal Ephara/Rapha cult on *Jabal Jizza*. This is a transcript of Bellerophon, the Greek or Semitic mythical Pegasus-riding hero that slayed a dragon-like monster, called Belleros. In that case, the name ‘Baal’ might have been lost and the second name ‘Ephara’ or ‘Rapha’ became later ‘Ophrah’, Miller speculates.

Another way to approach this history of spiritual continuity is through the ancient Canaanite symbolism of holy mountains and holy rocks. It is striking to note that many of those Saint George shrines are found on the top of a hill or a mountain, including Taybeh’s *Al-Khaḍir*, echoing Old Testament verses that describe Canaanite worship upon ‘every high hill and under every green tree.’¹¹⁵ The theme of rocks runs through various Palestinian religious folkloristic stories regarding Saint George, Saint Elijah and *Al-Khaḍir*. We have already encountered the rock of Elijah in front of the Monastery of Mar Elias and the caves of Saint Elijah on Mount Carmel and on *Jabal Jizza*. A similar holy rock is held in the Monastery of Saint George in the village of Al-Khader. The popular story is that a Greek Orthodox priest once spilled some of the Communion wine on his foot; that the wine pierced through to the stone he was standing on, leaving it with healing properties.¹¹⁶ Another story tells that, at one point, people tried to ship the stone to Russia, but the sailors were unable to move the ship in any direction. This was understood to be a sign that Saint George wanted to remain in Palestine. Hence, these folkloristic stories point to the

¹¹⁴ Idem, 63-72.

¹¹⁵ Deuteronomy 12:2, 1 Kings 14:23, 2 Kings 16:4, 2 Kings 17:10, 2 Chronicles 28:4, Jeremiah 2:20, Jeremiah 3:6, Jeremiah 3:13 and Ezekiel 6:13. See also: Bowman, “Popular Palestinian Practices around Holy Places and Those Who Oppose Them,” 69. Canaan has argued that many great works in Semitic religions are performed on mountains. See: Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 37.

¹¹⁶ More fully told in: Marteiijn, “Saint, Liberator, Martyr,” 91f; Massou, “Religious Folklore in the Bethlehem District,” 95f; Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*, 79f. Other holy rocks for Palestinian Christians include: Golgotha (in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem), the stone with Jesus right footprint (held in the care of Muslims in the Chapel of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives), and the rock of Bir Ona with the Virgin Mary’s knees and hands, and the knees of Jesus as well (Beit Jala). Other sacred caves include the Grotto of the Holy Nativity (Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem), the Milk Grotto in Bethlehem (contains *baraka* because the Virgin Mary spilt breast milk on her flight to Egypt), the cave of *Mār Nicolā* (Church of Mar Nicola, Beit Jala) and the Holy Stone that protected the Virgin Mary from angry workers (Church of the Lady Mary, Beit Jala). In this context one could also mention several water cults surrounding Saint George, Saint Elijah and *Al-Khaḍir*, including the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem, the Hammam al-Darageh in Nablus, the fountain of *Al-Khaḍir* in Balata, and the sanctuary for the Virgin Mary and Saint George ‘Our Bosom Lady’ in Beirut, which waters thus contain *baraka*.

baraka, but also show the special and unbreakable connection of Saint George to the Palestinian land. These ideas of cultic continuity correspond with classic theories of Maurice Halbwachs and Mircea Eliade that once a locality has gained sacrality, it remains that way in the collective memory of people.¹¹⁷ Hence, scholars have argued that sacred places, whether shared sanctuaries or not, have contributed to a sense of belonging, harmony and continuity to a given locality and that this shared sacred topography sets aside religious differences between Muslims and Christians.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, religious mixing also takes place in shared shrines of the Virgin Mary. In Christianity, Mary is commonly regarded as the Mother of God and widely venerated for her virginal purity, humility and piety. In Islam she is regarded as one of the four perfect women and mentioned extensively in the Qur'an.¹¹⁹ Muslims believe many Christian Marian shrines to be sacred, most notably the shrines associated with Our Lady of Zaytun in Egypt (as well as the broader Egyptian Holy Family tradition),¹²⁰ Our Lady of Saydnaya in Syria,¹²¹ Our Lady of Africa in Algeria¹²² and Our Lady of Lebanon.¹²³ In Palestine, shared Muslim-Christian veneration is particularly thick in the Chapel of the Milk Grotto in Bethlehem (stones of which are regarded as *baraka* for women with issues surrounding lactation or fertility), and in the *Bīr as-Sayyida* ('Well of the Lady') in Beit Sahour (an underground water cistern whose water is known for its healing *baraka*).¹²⁴ Other Marian sanctuaries with a longstanding Muslim attendance are the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Shepherds' fields in Beit Sahour, the Chapel of the Annunciation in Nazareth, the Well of Mary in Jerusalem and, as we will discuss later, the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in Jerusalem. Travel reports since the Middle Ages tell that Muslims have performed ritual behaviour in these holy places since the

¹¹⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. Ed. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992 [1941]); Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1959).

¹¹⁸ E.g. Albera, "Conclusion," 225; Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints*, 84; Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 14.

¹¹⁹ See: Muna Tartari and Klaus von Stosch, *Mary in the Qur'an: Friend of God, Virgin, Mother* (London: Gingko Library, 2021).

¹²⁰ On veneration of the Virgin Mary by Muslims and Christians in Egypt, see: Angie Heo, "The Virgin Between Christianity and Islam: Sainthood, Media, and Modernity in Egypt," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 4 (2013): 1117-38; Keriakos, "Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt."

¹²¹ Poujeau, "Sharing the *Baraka* of Saints."

¹²² Albera, "Religious Antagonism and Shared Sanctuaries in Algeria."

¹²³ Nasralla, Brinkman, Murre-van den Berg and Barnard, "Which Mary?" 10f.

¹²⁴ Shared veneration at *Bīr as-Sayyida* in Beit Sahour is described by: Bowman, "Nationalizing the Sacred"; Bowman, "Identification and Identity Formations around Shared Shrines in West Bank Palestine and Western Macedonia."

Middle Ages.¹²⁵ According to Albera, who has published several texts on Islamic-Christian inter-rituality at Marian shrines, the Church of the Nativity was part of a habitual circuit of Muslim pilgrimage around Jerusalem for centuries, and even had a section for Muslims up until the time of the crusades.¹²⁶ In short, the multitude of Marian shrines in the Middle East and in Palestine where Muslim-Christian encounters take place indicate the Virgin Mary's prominent role in encouraging devotional rapprochement between these religions.

Baraka and the Changing Face of the Interreligious Encounter

Connecting *baraka* to interreligious unity, however, is a complex matter, that I will illustrate with a shorter ethnographic vignette from the Dormition Feast (25 August - 5 September) at the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in Jerusalem.¹²⁷ The Dormition Feast is the largest event at the Tomb of the Virgin Mary, located at the foot of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem and a place abundantly present with *baraka*. I attended the feast in August 2019, together with the Orthodox community of Beit Sahour. On the first day of the Feast, we left Beit Sahour at 3.30 a.m. to attend the procession that remembers Mary entering a state of dormancy and the apostles escorting her lifeless body to the Tomb. After the death bell had rung at 5 a.m., we walked through the streets of Jerusalem's Old City to the Tomb, arriving there at 6.30 a.m. Organised by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the procession was an interesting mix of Arab, Greek, Russian and Eastern European Orthodox Christians coming together at this special place. One of the relevant events (for this study) during this procession is the presence of the icon of the *Theotokos*, an effigy of the Virgin Mary in a state of dormancy. Many people tried to kiss the icon or tried to crawl through the narrow opening of Mary's sarcophagus, a place richly endowed with *baraka*. The rituals of kissing and crawling are believed to heal people from sterility or illness. After the clergy had liturgically buried the icon in the Tomb, it remained there on display for ten days until the icon would be brought back to a monastery near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where this icon is kept during the rest of the year. The Feast attracts thousands of local Palestinian Christians and pilgrims from Orthodox

¹²⁵ Albera, "Mary and Multi-Faith Pilgrimages," 621-7.

¹²⁶ Idem, 630f; Albera, "Combining Practices and Beliefs: Muslim Pilgrims at Marian Shrines," 12-15.

¹²⁷ Based on field note entry by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Jerusalem, 28 August 2019. See also: Nurit Stadler, "Land, Fertility Rites and the Veneration of Female Saints: Exploring Body Rituals at the Tomb of Mary in Jerusalem," *Anthropological Theory* 15, no. 3 (2015): 293-316; Stadler and Luz, "The Veneration of Womb Tombs."

countries. The church was packed the morning of the procession as well as during the Feast of the Assumption three days later; temperatures rose quickly in the underground tomb, and the unholy jostling made it almost difficult to breathe. On the quieter days, I noticed Catholics and Protestants visiting the church as well.

While the Tomb of the Virgin Mary has a longstanding tradition of mixed worship – it even has a *mihrāb*, which is a niche in the wall indicating the direction of Mecca for Muslim prayers – there was an overall absence of Muslims during the days of the feast. One reason for their absence is the locality of the Tomb in Jerusalem. There is a tendency to mark religious mixing as heterodox or even as blasphemous, so these activities do not take place too close to the centres of religious authorities. While religious sharing and mixing is a well-established phenomenon in the Eastern Mediterranean, it is not an everyday practice. Sharing is fragile and clandestine, Albera and Couroucli observe in their edited volume *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean* (2012) and note that shared sanctuaries are a “local phenomenon organised along margins and interstices.”¹²⁸ The Saint George Feast was celebrated in a monastery at the edge of a Muslim village, resulting in more flexibility for Muslims to enter the shrine and participate in tactile rituals. With her many years of studies on Syrian monasteries, French anthropologist Anne Poujeau argues that monasteries are, unlike churches, “flexible denominational and communal spaces where boundaries between denominations and religious communities can be crossed.”¹²⁹ As a space marked by the saint’s *baraka*, everyone is welcome to visit monasteries, such as the Monastery of Saint George in the village of Al-Khader. Stories circulate of miracles granted by saints involving Muslims and Christians, Poujeau writes, again signifying the boundlessness of *baraka*. Furthermore, the Orthodox Church hierarchy has become protective of their ownership of the Tomb of Mary, due to rival claims of both the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land and groups of Muslims,¹³⁰ which contributes to a sharper tension at the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in comparison to the Monastery of Saint George in its rural environment.

¹²⁸ Maria Couroucli, “Sharing Sacred Places: A Mediterranean Tradition,” in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Shrines and Sanctuaries*, edited by Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 6.

¹²⁹ Poujeau, “Sharing the *Baraka* of saints,” 203.

¹³⁰ Stadler, “Land, Fertility Rites, and the Veneration of Female Saints,” 307.

Moreover, since the mid-twentieth century, mixed practices are in decline throughout the Middle East. There are several reasons for this decline, of which the most prominent are the decline of rural communities on the one hand and the growth of reformist ideas on the other hand. In a context of aggressive nationalism and religious fundamentalism, places that were once seen as shared are now claimed by nation-states striving to ethnoreligious homogeneity. This process is poignantly visible at Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem, which was a shared shrine till the first half of the twentieth century, particularly for women with fertility issues.¹³¹ After the site fell into the hands of Moses Montefiore (1784-1885), a prominent Ashkenazi Jew from Europe, a process of division started to unfold. Because the acts of reverence between Ashkenazi Jews and the existing Arab Christians and Muslims were incompatible, he built a separate and largely exclusive Jewish prayer room next to it. The tomb also became part of a larger proliferation of sacred space for national narratives. It was seen as a symbol of the Jewish return and the legendary homeland. Since 2002, the Israeli-Palestinian separation wall has been built around the tomb, cutting all further access to the Bethlehemite Palestinians, making the tomb a strictly segregated Jewish place. Sacred shrines have also turned hostile, such as the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, which was the scene of a massacre of Muslim worshippers at the hands of Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein (1956-1994) in 1994, and Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, which was destroyed by Palestinian rioters in 2000.¹³² These instances reveal that mixing and sharing are at risk of being replaced by separation and antagonism. *Baraka* has the power to bring people from different religions together, but in the context of modern political ideology *baraka* could also bring division among people.

On top of that, Islamic reform movements since the nineteenth century have caused a shift towards more strictly scriptural interpretations of Islam and more sectarian consciousness. In these attempts to a purification and standardisation of a

¹³¹ See: Glenn Bowman, "A Weeping on the Road to Bethlehem: Contestation over the Uses of Rachel's Tomb," in *Bethlehem: A Sociocultural History*, edited by Mitri Raheb (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2020), 165-88; Tom Selwyn, "Listening to Rachel: Re-Framing the Matriarch Outside her Imprisoned Tomb," in *Bethlehem: A Sociocultural History*, edited by Mitri Raheb (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2020), 143-64; Kobi Cohen-Hattab and Ayalet Kohn, "The Nationalization of Holy Sites: Yishuv-Era Visual Representations of the Western Wall and Rachel's Tomb," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 107, no. 1 (2017): 66-89; Glenn Bowman, "Sharing and Exclusion: The Case of Rachel's Tomb," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 58 (2014): 30-49.

¹³² Yitzhak Reiter, *Contested Holy Places in Israel-Palestine: Sharing and Conflict Resolution* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 247-63; Yitzhak Reiter, "Contest or Cohabitation in Shared Holy Places? The Cave of the Patriarchs and Samuel's Tomb," in *Holy Places in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Confrontation and Co-Existence*, edited by Marshall J. Breger, Yitzhak Reiter and Leonard Hammer (London: Routledge, 2010), 158-77.

universal Islam, the legitimacy of local saint veneration has been questioned and considered unorthodox. Someone like Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), a key thinker of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, wanted to eliminate the practices surrounding *Al-Khaḍir*.¹³³ Confessional tensions were also felt during the Saint George's Feast Day in Al-Khader due to the Palestinian security services patrolling the neighbouring street to prevent violence, and due to the new mosque that has been built right next to the monastery. Christians from the Bethlehem-area have reported that the number of people attending the shrine has indeed gone down. The Christian woman that was sitting next to me during the Divine Liturgy disapprovingly shook her head every time a Muslim entered the church and whispered to me "Not good, not good." This leads to the conclusion that in the current context of rising radicalisation and segregation, Christian-Muslim relations in Palestine are under pressure, visible through the changing nature of interaction reflected at the Palestinian shared shrines of Saint George and the Virgin Mary. However, Christians and Muslims still intermingle, even if the gatherings are not what they once were. It is important to take note of the connecting power of *baraka* before it gets lost. The religious dynamics surrounding *baraka* reflect a remnant of a common religious culture grounded in shared localities, religious figures and tactile piety.¹³⁴ In contrast to the orchestrated interfaith meetings of religious leaders and specialised academics, the sharing of *baraka* is a natural, spontaneous and deeply personal religious encounter. Precisely these shared moments are so very valuable for a harmonious future of Palestinian Christian-Muslim relations.

Saints as Models of Palestinian *Ṣumūd*

The role of the saints' *baraka* and the blurring of boundaries between Christians and Muslims raises questions regarding the political consequences of saint veneration. Previous studies have shown how Palestinian sacred shrines, such as the Marian shrine of *Bīr as-Sayyida* in Beit Sahour and the Islamic shrines of *An-Nabī Mūsā* and *An-Nabī Ṣālih*, have been monuments to imagining community and national unity, particularly in relation to perceptions of antagonism against a common enemy, which

¹³³ Francke, *Begegnung mit Khidr*, 374.

¹³⁴ Some scholars have argued that religious sharing and mixing is based on nostalgia for the intercommuality of the past that has largely disappeared from contemporary daily life, but is reconstructed during shared worship. Cf. Bowman, "Introduction: Sharing the Sacra," 6; Couroucli, "Chthonian Spirits and Shared Shrines," 51f.

includes foreign colonial control and/or Israeli occupational politics.¹³⁵ Sainthood in a Middle Eastern context is also connected to political power through monarchs claiming saintly succession, such as the Alaouite dynasty in Morocco and the Hashemite dynasty in Jordan, or cults around political leaders such as Turkish president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) and Lebanese Maronite militia commander Bachir Gemayel (1947-1982).¹³⁶ These studies share a focus on how people have established or destabilised narratives of political and national power through proclamations of sainthood. In this section I build on previous studies regarding sainthood and politics and demonstrate that figures of saints on a deeper level spark grassroots theologies of martyrdom and liberation, each with intertwined political consequences. By focusing on the controversial political uses and spiritual meanings of Saint George and the Virgin Mary in relation to martyrdom and liberation, I deem the lens of *ṣumūd* ('steadfastness') helpful and argue that figures of saints could be interpreted as models of Palestinian *ṣumūd*. In this section we will begin by examining the polyvalent politics of *ṣumūd*, followed by its religious usage and applicability.

The Arab notion of *ṣumūd* roughly translates to 'steadfastness' and traditionally indicates the *fallāḥ*'s strong determination to stay in the country and on the land despite the challenges of occupation and dispossession. Previously, scholars have defined *ṣumūd* as "an act of resistance,"¹³⁷ "a strategy of survival,"¹³⁸ "a way of commemoration,"¹³⁹ "a revolutionary becoming,"¹⁴⁰ or more generally, as a

¹³⁵ Glenn Bowman argues that the religious relationship both Christians and Muslims of Beit Sahour have with *Bīr as-Sayyida* is considered the central feature of the town's identity. He also notes that the municipality has taken over ownership of the shrine representing all religious communities. See: Bowman, "Nationalizing the Sacred," 439-51. Emma Aubin-Boltanski's study indicates how pilgrimage to the shrines of *An-Nabī Mūsā* and *An-Nabī Ṣālih* has been revived and used by the Palestinian Authorities as an expression of nationalist tendencies. She argues that the *An-Nabī Mūsā* riots of the 1920s have given the shrine a national character and that the Feast of *An-Nabī Ṣālih* has been used politically through the involvement of the Tamimi-family living in the village. See: Aubin-Boltanski, *Pèlerinages et Nationalisme en Palestine*.

¹³⁶ On the cult around Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, see: Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 188-203. On the cult around Bachir Gemayel, see: Sune Haugbolle, "The Secular Saint: Iconography and Ideology in the Cult of Bashir Jumayil," in *Politics of Worship in the Contemporary Middle East: Sainthood in Fragile States*, edited by Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 191-212; Ghassan Hage, "Religious Fundamentalism as Political Strategy: The Evolution of the Lebanese Forces' Religious Discourse during the Lebanese Civil War," *Critique of Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (1992): 27-45.

¹³⁷ Julie Peteet, "Refugees, Resistance and Identity," in *Globalization and Social Movements: Culture, Power, and the Transnational Public Sphere*, edited by John A. Guidry, Michael D. Kennedy and Mayer N. Zald (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 196.

¹³⁸ Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 148.

¹³⁹ Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90.

¹⁴⁰ Lena Meari, "Sumud: A Palestinian Philosophy of Confrontation in Colonial Prisons," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113, no. 3 (2014): 549f.

“way of being in the world”¹⁴¹ (“Palestinian-in-*ṣumūd*”).¹⁴² *Ṣumūd* is to be approximated through a multiplicity of practices, such as the act of rebuilding one’s house after it has been demolished, cultivating one’s olive grove despite the danger of expropriation, or having a child once again after another has been killed in the fight for freedom. In the context of World Christianity, *ṣumūd* is best compared with the South African concept of *ubuntu* that grasps community coherence, resilience and celebration of cultural heritage.¹⁴³ It was a Palestinian Christian, the Palestinian lawyer and writer, Raja Shehadeh, who first introduced the term to an international audience in his diary *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank* (1982).¹⁴⁴ Shehadeh described *ṣumūd* as a Palestinian way of living, meaning “to stay put, to cling to our homes and land by all means.”¹⁴⁵ He states that instead of choosing either “exile or submissive capitulation” or “blind consuming hate,”¹⁴⁶ most Palestinians opt for a third way: the way of *ṣumūd*.

Previous studies show the multiple and overlapping complexities of meaning that have been appropriated to the term *ṣumūd*, depending on the context and period of history. The first use of *ṣumūd* dates back to the 1960s after the Palestine Liberation Organization emerged as a leading organization in the refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon. A Palestinian living in a refugee camp was then called *ṣāmid* (male) or *ṣāmidā* (female). Being *ṣāmidī* meant being resilient in the face of overwhelming violence and suffering. In her study on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, political scientist Laleh Khalili distinguishes three different ways of

¹⁴¹ Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair*, 148.

¹⁴² Meari, “*Sumud*,” 547.

¹⁴³ For the religious meaning of *ubuntu*, see for example the work of Abp. Desmond Tutu. The *ubuntu* theology of Tutu focused on how the interconnectedness of humankind is disinherited in Christ’s inclusive body. See: Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider Books, 1999). Tutu has also been involved with the struggle of Palestinian Christians, particularly with Sabeel, and drew parallels between the Apartheid-era of South Africa and the Israeli military occupation. See, for example: Desmond Tutu, “Foreword,” in *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, written by Naim Ateek (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), xi-xii. Another connection with South Africa is found in the parallels between the South African *Kairos Document* (1985) and the *Kairos Palestine Document* (2009). Also worth noting is the relationship between Palestinian theology and Black American theology. Examples include the friendship between Bp. Joseph Raya and Martin Luther King Jr (1929-1968,) and the collaboration between Christ at the Checkpoint and Evangelical Black American theologians.

¹⁴⁴ Raja Shehadeh, *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank* (London: Quartet Books, 1982). The endurance of Palestinian knowledge and cultural practices is a broader theme in Shehadeh’s literary work. In *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* Shehadeh aims to preserve a vanishing Palestinian landscape of villages, hills, mountains, valleys and springs who are not only absent from European cartography, but also subject to colonial practices of domination and dispossession. He calls this the “language of the hills” or the “language of hill farmers”. Cf. Amanda Batarseh, “Raja Shehadeh’s “Cartography of Refusal”: The Enduring Land Narrative Practice of *Palestinian Walks*,” *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (2021): 232-52. Raja Shehadeh is also the founder of the first Palestinian human rights organisation, called Al-Haq (‘The Truth’). For more on Al-Haq, see: Lynn Welchman, *Al-Haq: A Global History of the First Palestinian Human Rights Organization* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021).

¹⁴⁵ Shehadeh, *The Third Way*, vii.

¹⁴⁶ Idem, 38.

commemoration, one of which is the narrative of *ṣumūd*.¹⁴⁷ The narrative of *ṣumūd* is different from the tragic narrative, Khalili argues, in the sense that narratives of *ṣumūd* valorise agency and the capacity to act in dire circumstances. *Ṣumūd* also differs from the heroic narrative, because it consciously values daily survival rather than glorious battles. In this context of the refugee camp, she describes *ṣumūd* as an explicit hopefulness and a “stubborn hanging on.”¹⁴⁸ The 1970s and 1980s saw further development and a more active form of *ṣumūd* developed; the meaning of the term shifting from an obstinate living in refugee camps outside of Palestine to a strategy of political mobilisation in the Palestinian Territories itself.¹⁴⁹ For example, during the First *Intifāḍa*, Palestinian *ṣumūd* was practised through an active non-cooperation with the occupier and an economic boycott of Israeli goods (for example the Tax Revolt of the Christian town Beit Sahour). Expressing *ṣumūd* during the Second *Intifāḍa* meant finding hope in everyday activities, enduring the need to a cross military checkpoint on a daily basis, and seeking normality despite all the challenges. Hence, the term *ṣumūd* has no fixed meaning. It encompasses celebrating cultural roots, exercising human care, keeping family ties alive, and expressing joy and happiness in the face of hardship.¹⁵⁰

While the notion of *ṣumūd* has been examined in these contexts of forced displacement and political mobilisation, mentioned above, the meaning of *ṣumūd* in relation to religion has, however, remained largely understudied. An exception is anthropologist Leonardo Schiocchet’s study among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, where he found that Islamic theological meanings have been connoted with the concept of *ṣumūd* with the rise of Islamic social movements and political parties

¹⁴⁷ Laleh Khalili distinguishes three ways of commemoration she observed among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon: 1) the heroic narrative, mobilising elements of nationalist discourse, 2) the tragic narrative, employing suffering as the legitimating basis of claims made, and 3) the narrative of *ṣumūd*, encompassing an adaptive resilience at times of utmost uncertainty. See: Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, 99-103. Similarly, Meari remarks that *ṣumūd* diverges from the liberal humanist binary of agent versus victim, in the sense that the sentiment of *ṣumūd* simultaneously acknowledges heroism and victimhood. See: Meari, “*Sumud*,” 552ff. This rendering of the notion of *ṣumūd* is also similar to Raja Shehadeh’s distinction between submission, blind hate, and *ṣumūd* as the ‘third way’.

¹⁴⁸ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, 196.

¹⁴⁹ The 1970s also saw a degeneration of the term after the establishment of the *Ṣumūd*-funds (*Bayt ‘Aṭfāl Ṣumūd*, ‘House of the Children of *Ṣumūd*’) in 1975, which was a policy to channel money from the Gulf States and Jordan to the West Bank and Gaza to fund agriculture, housing and education in order to keep people living there. In reality, political agendas and corruption led the money to the already rich. Cf. Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, 101, 196.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Alexandra Rijke and Toine van Teeffelen, “To Exist is to Resist: *Sumud*, Heroism, and the Everyday,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 59 (2014): 86-99.

(such as Hamas) in the 1980s.¹⁵¹ He states that *al-Ṣumūd* (in this context ‘the Eternal’, ‘the Satisfier of Needs’, or ‘the Impenetrable’) is one of the 99 Divine Names attributed to God in Islam, and that the Qur’an and *Sunna* give direct justifications for the necessity of a *ṣāmidī* posture. Hence, while the Palestinian meaning of the concept *ṣumūd* has historically been generated within a secular context of Palestinian political activism and resistance, it has been conflated with the meanings of Islamic resistance and inscribed in Islamic praxis more generally. Schiocchet calls this process the “sacralisation and ritualisation of the quotidian”¹⁵² that indicates how the suffering of loss and the pain of dispossession have become a moral imperative and that the exercise of *ṣumūd* in this context of hardship has turned into something sacred. A similar pattern is visible in Palestinian Christian theology. The text of the Kairos Palestine Document, for example, takes inspiration from the Palestinian *ṣumūd* and associates this with steadfastness, patience, and hope as mentioned in the Bible. The authors understand the Palestinian Church to be “a witnessing, steadfast (*ṣāmid*) and active Church in the land of the Resurrection” and urge their fellow Palestinian Christians to “be patient, steadfast (*ṣāmid*) and full of hope.”¹⁵³ Hence, in the Kairos Palestine Document the Christian meanings of steadfastness have been used interchangeably with the Palestinian culturally laden notion of *ṣumūd*, in a similar way that Schiocchet observed in Palestinian Islam. It is in this context of *ṣumūd* one should understand the political and nationalist usages of sainthood.

The seventieth *Nakba* Day commemoration in Taybeh on 15 May 2018 showed what *ṣumūd* looks like in a village such as Taybeh.¹⁵⁴ The event was being led by the Latin parish priest ‘*Abūnā* Johnny and took place in the form of a procession, followed by a commemoration on *Al-Khaḍīr* (figure 26). The mayor and family of Taybeh’s *shuhadā’* (honorary title for martyrs) took a prominent place in the procession, among whom Feryal Salem Kort (1948-2021), whose face was mutilated

¹⁵¹ Leonardo Schiocchet, “Palestinian Sumud: Steadfastness, Ritual, and Time Among Palestinian Refugees,” *Birzeit University Working Papers* 51 (2011), <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2130405> [accessed 16 July 2021].

¹⁵² Schiocchet, “Palestinian Sumud,” 77.

¹⁵³ These quotes are taken from § 3.5 and § 5.3 respectively of the English translation of the Kairos Palestine Document, see: Kairos Palestine, *A Moment of Truth*. In the original Arabic document the word *ṣāmid* (‘steadfast’) appears twice in the text, in § 3.5 and § 5.3, and the word *ṣumūd* (‘steadfastness’) appears four times, in § 3.2, § 3.3.3, § 5.1 and § 5.3. The term is used in the context of the mission of the church and in relation to what it means to have Christian hope. See: Kairos Palestine, *Waqfat Haqqa* (‘A Moment of Truth’), <<https://www.kairopalestine.ps/sites/default/files/Arabic.pdf>> [accessed 16 July 2021].

¹⁵⁴ Field note entry by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Taybeh, 15 May 2018.

during her fight for freedom in Jerusalem.¹⁵⁵ Most people who attended the procession wore black to mourn those who lost their lives for the Palestinian cause, and carried a lit candle, a Palestinian flag (or a flag of Fatah) and/or a *kūfiyya*. What was most interesting about this *Nakba* commemoration was the chosen location of the ruins of the Byzantine church on *Al-Khaḍir*, thereby giving the commemoration ceremony a certain religious power, amplified by the leading role of the Latin priest. Furthermore, the children of the village carried banners with politically laden slogans and a picture of the shrine of *Al-Khaḍir*. In this context, these banners are particularly meaningful because of the connection between Palestinian suffering and Saint George's martyrdom. Elements from the story of Saint George, like the saint's mixed-Palestinian origins, his resistance to the Roman oppressor, and his heroic



Figure 26. *Nakba Day in Taybeh, 15 May 2018*. Photo by author.

¹⁵⁵ The villagers claim that Taybeh has four *shuhadā*, among them Feryal Salem Kort, who was standing next to 'abūnā Jonny during the commemoration. During her fight for freedom her face was mutilated. The other three martyrs, among them were two of her brothers, died in the fight for the Palestinian cause. Cf. Feryal Salem Kort, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Taybeh, 18 May 2018. The term *al-shahīd* ('the martyr') applies to everyone who is killed as a result of occupation, and not only combatants. Also people who were killed during everyday, mundane activities are considered victims of the occupation. They, too, are public agents of Palestinian nationalism and therefore called '*shahīd*'. Experiences of and theological reflections on martyrdom have a longstanding tradition in the church of the Middle East, see: Christian C. Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam: Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

martyrdom for the Christian faith, find parallels in the current Palestinian situation of political oppression and ongoing migration, and therefore intertwine with the *ṣāmidī* posture of the people of Taybeh. If Saint George can overcome the dragon, than Palestinians can be steadfast, overcome the occupation and kill the beast of the ongoing *Nakba*, which continues to dispossess Palestinians of land and freedom. This grassroots thinking goes further than traditional understandings of saintly patronage and creates avenues that prompt theological reflection. It indicates a more passive form of martyrdom, the idea to be a suffering witness in the Holy Land, and differs in its theology from other Palestinian groups, as for example Hamas, whose rhetoric is characterised by a more active form of martyrdom.¹⁵⁶ On a linguistic note, the Arab word for martyrdom is *istishād*, derived from the root *sh-h-d*, meaning ‘witness’. The theme of ‘witness’ can also be found in the works of Palestinian church leaders like Michel Sabbah, Munib A. Younan and others, who advocated it is the vocation of Palestinian Christians to bear witness to Jesus in the land.¹⁵⁷ This reflects the Palestinian *ṣumūd* in the sense that it stresses the importance to be active, witnessing contributors to society.

This relates to a different theological discourse regarding Saint George as a model of Palestinian *ṣumūd*, namely the discourse of ‘liberation and unity’. This particularly builds on the association of Saint George with protection and military power. Saint George’s triumph over the dragon features prominently in his iconography and has also given him the name *ʿAbū Ḥarba* (‘Father of the Spear’) in Syrian rural areas.¹⁵⁸ In the Bethlehem area, several stories exist of apparitions of Saint George in times of political upheaval. In 1948, Saint George allegedly appeared in the sky saving the village of Al-Khader from doom.¹⁵⁹ Another significant apparition happened in 1967 when the Israelis invaded the village: Saint George appeared, grabbed the Israeli governor by his throat in an attempt to kill him, and thereby drove the soldiers away.¹⁶⁰ Christians from Beit Jala, another village near Bethlehem, reported that Saint George rode on his horse along the border to protect the town from Israeli invasions during the Second *Intifāḍa*. A picture of Saint George

¹⁵⁶ On Hamas: see: Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000). On PLO armed resistance: Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

¹⁵⁷ Sabbah, *Faithful Witness*; Younan, *Our Shared Witness*; Younan, *Witnessing for Peace*.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Haddad, “Georgic’ Cults and Saints of the Levant,” 32.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Riches, *St George*, 41ff.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Laird, “Boundaries and *Baraka*,” 68.

as liberator, breaking down the separation wall with his spear (figure 28), hangs in the old meeting room of the Monastery of Saint George in Al-Khader. In Taybeh, the Greek Orthodox Christians claim that Saint George, the strong fighter, protects their church from destruction. It is believed that Saint George helped to rebuild the church three times after being destroyed. Hence, anthropologists Glenn Bowman and Lance Laird, who have both conducted fieldwork on shared shrines in the Bethlehem area in the 1980s and 1990s emphasise the national unity shared saint veneration helped to create.¹⁶¹ These stories involving the protection of Saint George should also be linked to Palestinian liberation theology, seen in the works of local theologians such as Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb, who tried to liberate the Bible from Zionist misuse.¹⁶² The narrative of liberation was often heard in the 1980s, 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, in which the dominant discourse was one of co-resistance, a united Palestine where Muslims and Christians live together peacefully and resist the Israeli occupier. Here, Saint George's resistance and steadfastness reflects again his posture of *ṣumūd*. It is the boundlessness of *Al-Khaḍir*/Saint George and the power of *ṣumūd* which is used in a modern and politically meaningful way.

Accordingly, in its flexibility and everydayness, *ṣumūd* allows ordinary people to see their actions as politically significant. This model of *ṣumūd* particularly opens up a space for women who may not feel included in the more masculine forms of (armed) resistance. In her study on women in the Palestinian resistance movement, anthropologist Julie Peteet has observed that the qualities of *ṣumūd*, such as silent endurance and sacrificing for family and community, are, in fact, qualities characteristic of femininity.¹⁶³ Peteet states that *ṣumūd* commemorates women's quiet work in the family by providing sustenance and social well-being.¹⁶⁴ The archetype of *ṣumūd* is the mother of the Palestinian martyr, symbolising life-giving qualities, heroism and national sacrifice. During the Second *Intifāḍa*, grieving mothers became widely understood as icons of the nation in Palestinian popular

¹⁶¹ Bowman, "Popular Palestinian Practices"; Laird, "Boundaries and *Baraka*."

¹⁶² Ateek, *Justice, and only Justice*; Raheb, "Towards a New Hermeneutic of Liberation,"

¹⁶³ Peteet, *Gender in crisis*, 153.

¹⁶⁴ Idem, 153. Furthermore, Rosamary Sayigh mentioned that after the tragic massacres in the Palestinian refugee camps Sabra and Shatila in West Beirut in 1982, the everyday activities of women in the camps, such as cooking food and providing water, were considered a great encouragement for the fighters and the broader community. See: Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies*. (London: Zed, 1994), 238. Similarly, Ela Greenberg has argued that education was considered pivotal for girls in Mandate Palestine, so that they would grow to be educated mothers who could create nationalist families. See: Ela Greenberg, *Preparing the Mothers of Tomorrow: Education and Islam in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

culture and political rhetoric.¹⁶⁵ This is embedded in a wider feminisation of the land in Palestinian nationalism, a symbolism that is found in many nationalisms around the world.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, in times of crisis, the Virgin Mary has repeatedly been employed as a symbol of Palestinian *ṣumūd*.¹⁶⁷ Her grief over the dead body of Jesus Christ is compared to the suffering of mothers of Palestinian martyrs (figure 27). The Virgin Mary's arduous journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, while being pregnant, represents the *ṣumūd* of Palestinian mothers waiting at the checkpoint to visit their children.¹⁶⁸ Hence, in her suffering and her maternal love, the Virgin Mary has been used in popular nationalistic expressions, frequently portrayed as a Palestinian *fallāḥa* wearing a *thūb*, a *kūfiyya* or carrying an olive branch (also visible at the Lady of Ephraim, figures 10-12).

Lastly, both the culturally informed rendering of the *ṣumūd* of Palestinian women and the *ṣumūd* of the Virgin Mary should be understood in line with the widespread importance given to fertility and motherhood among Arab cultures, both considered pivotal in registering femininity. Nevertheless, in all her feminine virtues, the Virgin Mary is heralded as an alternative role model for female empowerment. In other words, it is in the fluid and contingent expectations of being modest and modern that Palestinian women could see the reflection of Palestinian *ṣumūd* in the Virgin Mary.¹⁶⁹ In his homily on the Feast of Our Lady Queen of Palestine in 2000, Patriarch Michel Sabbah illustratively pointed out: "Every faithful people are called to remain steadfast (*ṣāmid*, ESM) in their house and land, in spite of the destruction,

¹⁶⁵ For more on how grieving mothers became national characters, see: Lori A. Allen, "Mothers of Martyrs and Suicide Bombers: The Gender of Ethical Discourse in the Second Palestinian Intifada," *The Arab Studies Journal* 17, no. 1 (2009): 32-61; Julie Peteet, "Icons and Militants: Mothering in the Danger Zone," *Signs* 23, no 1 (1997): 103-29.

¹⁶⁶ For example, the famous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) approached the land as a beloved woman or a nurturing mother. In his poem *A Lover from Palestine* (1966) Darwish proclaims, "You are my virgin garden, As long as our song, Are sword when we draw them" and "Her eyes and the tattoo on her hands are Palestinian, Her name Palestinian." In *Awaiting the Return*, Darwish writes from a position of exile and approaches Palestine as a nurturing mother: "What have you cooked for us, Mother, for we will return?" Cf. Helena Lindholm Schulz and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (London: Routledge, 2003), 100ff.

¹⁶⁷ For more on the political use of the Virgin Mary, see: Batarseh, "Reading Indigenous Grammars of Place and Narrative Permeability in Bethlehem's Mary"; Faranacci, "The Israeli-Palestinian Separation Wall and the Assemblage Theory"; Stadler and Luz, "Two Venerated Mothers Separated by a Wall"; Stadler, "Land, Fertility Rites and the Veneration of Female Saints"; Stadler, "Appropriating Jerusalem through Sacred Places."

¹⁶⁸ In a similar way to the Virgin Mary, the Holy Family has been adopted to portray the suffering of Palestinian Christians. Examples are the paintings of British graffiti artist Banksy and British cartoonist Polyp, which have been shared on social media widely. Palestinian nationalist depictions of the Holy Family as Palestinian *fallāḥīn* have been produced by artists such as Suleiman Mansour, Ibrahim Hazimeeh and Maher Naji.

¹⁶⁹ The idea of Arab women being modest and modern is derived from: Nicola Pratt, *Embodying Geopolitics: Generations of Women's Activism in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020). Similarly, Lara Deeb argued in the context of the Shia community in Lebanon that women's cultivated piety is considered a key aspect of their modernity. Public participation and public piety are, thus, understood to be linked. See: Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern*.

even death, which they might face.”¹⁷⁰ Later in his homily he referred to the exemplary role of the Virgin Mary in both her modest piety and in her modern empowerment: “We meditate today the glory of our Lady Queen of Palestine and we ask for her intercession because she is the example of faith, she is the example of the strength that should fill our spirits, that strength that comes from God to strengthen us in all the circumstances of life.”¹⁷¹

Beyond the more traditional role of a self-sacrificing and virtuous mother, the Virgin Mary has also been studied as a symbol of national and local unity in the Middle Eastern context. Most extensive research has been conducted on the Apparition of the Virgin Mary in Zaytun (1968-70), a neighbourhood of Greater Cairo, which was witnessed by both Christians and Muslims alike.¹⁷² As an interfaith phenomenon, the apparitions stood as a symbol of national unity in Egypt. After the humiliation of the Six-Day War (1967) when Egypt lost Sinai and the Gaza Strip to Israel, the apparition was understood as a sign for future victory of the Arabs. A similar pattern existed more recently in a church in Bechouate in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon (2004), where a Muslim boy miraculously saw a statue of the Virgin Mary come alive, causing a wave of devotion by both Christians and Muslims. This, too, became a symbol for national unity in a context of Syrian occupation of parts of Lebanon.¹⁷³ Glenn Bowman, who studied *Bīr as-Sayyida* in Beit Sahour during the First *Intifāḍa*, also noticed how the shrine was considered a central feature of the town’s identity, for both Christians and Muslims, and connected this to a social identity that was not generated in sectarian terms but by the struggle against the Israeli occupier.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps the most striking example of national usage of the Virgin Mary is the icon *Our Lady on the Wall* on the separation wall in Bethlehem, painted by Scottish iconographer Ian Knowles. Every Friday, the Elizabethan nuns of the Caritas Baby Hospital and local Palestinian Christians recite the rosary in front of the icon invoking the Virgin’s help to dismantle the wall. Palestinian Christian nationalist sentiments regarding the Virgin Mary are particularly prominent during the feasts of

¹⁷⁰ Michel Sabbah, “Homily on the Feast of Our Lady Queen of Palestine, Deir Rafat, 29 October 2000,” in *Faithful Witness: On Reconciliation and Peace in the Holy Land*. Ed. by Drew Christiansen S.J. and Saliba Sarsar (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2009), 66ff.

¹⁷¹ Idem, 68.

¹⁷² Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints*, 115-23; Heo, “The Virgin Between Christianity and Islam.”; Keriakos, “Apparitions of the Virgin in Egypt.”

¹⁷³ Cf. Albera, “Combining Practices and Beliefs,” 20ff. See also: Emma Aubin-Boltanski, “La Vierge et la Nation (Liban, 2004-2007),” (“The Virgin and the Nation (Lebanon, 2004-2007),” *Terrain* 50 (2008): 82-90.

¹⁷⁴ See: Bowman, “Nationalizing the sacred,” 439-51.



Figure 27. The suffering Palestinian mother is widely seen as the ultimate symbol of *ṣumūd*, here compared to the Virgin Mary grieving the dead body of her son Jesus Christ. This visual analogy was shared by Taybeh people on social media, mid-May 2021.

Figure 28. Saint George as Palestinian liberator breaking down the separation wall surrounding the Bethlehem area. Picture taken in the (old) meeting hall of the Saint George Monastery in the village of Al-Khader. Photo by author.

Mary Queen of Palestine (25 October), and to a lesser extent during the feast days of Palestinian saints *qiddīsa* ('saint') Mary-Alphonsine Danil Ghattas on 25 March and *qiddīsa* Mariam Baouardy (1846-1878, also known as Mary of Jesus Crucified) on 26 August, because those days underline the special status of Palestine regarding the Virgin and in Christian history more generally.

In short, the religious interpretations of *ṣumūd* modelled in saintly figures, demonstrate that local theological understandings of suffering and martyrdom connect to Palestinian Christian grassroots expressions of nationalism and belonging. A theology of *ṣumūd* is the commitment to remain a witness in the land, based on a Christian hope grounded in the victory of Christ and the saints who have also suffered in the land. It relates to an essential dimension of Palestinian national identity that relies on remembering shared suffering and disasters, and on the view that "anyone and everyone can die at any moment, just for being Palestinian in this place,"¹⁷⁵ whether Christian, Muslim, combatant or ordinary citizen. It shows that secular monolithic nationalism is not the only option for Palestine and that Christians can have nationalist sentiments grounded in their Christian faith. In this context,

¹⁷⁵ Lori A. Allen, "The Polyvalent Politics of Martyr Commemorations in the Palestinian *Intifada*," *History and Memory* 18, no. 2 (2006): 120.

Saint George and the Virgin Mary are, thus, models of a Palestinian *ṣumūd*: powerful saints and liberating symbols for the nation.

Conclusion

In this last chapter we have examined Palestinian Christian religious practice as a mode of living, interconnected and intermixed with other aspects of daily life, and constantly adapting to the changing context of the Middle East. A shrine such as *Al-Khaḍir* in Taybeh is a palimpsest of historical and archaeological narratives, embodied in rituals and *nuthūr*, and merged with theological discourses of martyrdom and liberation – all given renewed meaning in the context of Palestinian nationalism. The Palestinian veneration of Saint George has developed from an ancient cult that focused on human flourishing into a rite of identification and belonging, which affirms the indigeneity of Palestinian Christianity and its connection to the Palestinian land. Hence, in the context of Palestine, Saint George is not merely a miracle-worker or holy fighter – he is a symbol for different theologies and ideologies present in the Palestinian society. As martyr, he represents the suffering of the Palestinians. As liberator, he is a symbol for spiritual, national and cultural unity in the fight against occupation. Finally, Saint George represents the feeling of belonging to a long and complex history in the biblical land. Hence, I conclude that the figure of Saint George serves as a platform for grassroots theological reflection and engagement, and as a social force to establish a connection to the Palestinian history, land and community.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of this renewal of the Palestinian Saint George veneration and, to a lesser extent, of the Palestinian Marian devotion, this chapter has examined the matter through the indigenous Palestinian notions of *baraka* and *ṣumūd*. In the context of the Middle East, *baraka* means several things; in this chapter, we have mainly examined *baraka* as a connecting force between Christians and Muslims. In contrast to doctrinal and institutional distinctions between Christianity and Islam, this chapter has shown a less static and more nuanced view on the interreligious encounter and established that there is religious mixing on the level of lived religion. The notion of *ṣumūd* brings to light the more political side of saints and the work religion performs towards national unity. In a rich and fragmented Palestinian past and present, *ṣumūd* refers to the steadfastness of the

Palestinian people to not give up in the face of adversity. This resonates with the 'triumph in defeat' of Saint George and the Virgin Mary, who have suffered yet found Christian patience, hope and steadfastness. A theology of *ṣumūd* is the conviction to be a Christian witness and active contributor in the land where once Jesus and the saints conquered evil.

Studying the rich spiritual and political meanings of Saint George, one gets a glimpse of the pious and deep religiosity of Middle Eastern Christians. The portrayal of Saint George as fighter, liberator and protector of Palestine shows parallels to the work of Palestinian liberation and contextual theologians, as well as other grassroots theological reflections. The transformation of Saint George into an empowering symbol is part of a broader revival of Christianity in Palestine which we examined in chapter 2, like the indigenisation of religious leadership in the 1970s and 1980s in the Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations, the emergence of a Palestinian contextual theology from the 1980s onward, the growth of interreligious dialogue through organisations such as Al-Liqa', and theological activism of Sabeel and Kairos Palestine. Figures like Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah, the Reverend Naim Ateek and Archbishop Atallah Theodosios Hanna, play key roles in this revival of Christianity. This renewal bridges the gap between grassroots popular practices and the work of theologians from the Palestinian elite, as martyrdom, liberation and belonging are central themes in the works of Palestinian theologians like Mitri Raheb and Rafiq Khoury as well.

Religious practices, such as the veneration of Saint George in the village of Al-Khader, interact with these societal, cultural, political and theological changes occurring in Palestine, and therefore the ways in which people give meaning to these religious practices might change over time. The discourse of liberation and unity that prevailed in the 1980s, 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s might well be replaced by sectarianism if processes such as the emergence of religious extremism continue. After all, it is a slippery slope between feelings of national unity and sectarian tensions. Hence, the development of the popular Saint George veneration into this moral symbol shows the ambiguous struggle Palestinian Christians are living through. They have to juggle between opposing forces like modernity versus traditionalism, sectarianism versus nationalism, secularism versus religious extremism, migration versus living witness, and official religion versus popular religion. These dimensions cannot be separated. The Christians seem to be in an

ambiguous and fluid process of mixing elements from the common religious culture of *nidhr* and *baraka* from the past, with the nationalist notion of *şumūd* along with its martyrdom and liberation theologies, and with the sectarian and reassuring principles of the image of Saint George as defender of the Christian faith. In the figure of Saint George all these paradoxes converge.

Conclusion

Taybeh, 31 December 2017

On New Year's Eve I was invited to spend the evening with one of Taybeh's families. It was an extra special celebration for New Year this year since Uncle Hanna, the pregnant Aunt Rand and their two daughters had travelled all the way from the diaspora in the United States of America to spend the Christmas and winter festivities with their family in Taybeh. Hanna was born and raised in Taybeh but went to the United States after graduating from high school to find better job opportunities. He then worked as a gardener and ran his own company. Rand was born and raised as a second-generation Palestinian immigrant in the United States and studied Education. They met at a funeral of a shared family member and fell in love. Hanna and Rand's story is a typical case of a Taybeh love that has blossomed in the diaspora, and of a transnational Palestinian family that continues to return to their country of origin, albeit with periods of several years between each visit. In fact, for the daughters, who were both primary school children at the time, this was their first ever visit to their ancestral village, Taybeh. The family had travelled from the United States to Jordan, so as to enter the West Bank through the Allenby Bridge, the border crossing between Jordan and Palestine. At the Allenby Bridge they were held up by the Israeli border control because of issues regarding visas and passports. It was a relief when the family were finally reunited with their extended families in Taybeh.

Hanna, Rand, and their daughters' visit was, thus, reason enough for the local Taybeh family to organise a barbecue, make several side dishes, buy a bottle of whisky, and for the daughters of the house to get dressed up. During the night we ate, we danced, we laughed, and we played games. When midnight was approaching, we put on our coats and our shoes and walked with a group of eight to *Al-Khaḍir*. In the grotto on *Al-Khaḍir*, everyone individually lit a candle and said a silent prayer for the coming year. Between the ruins of the crusader church, I saw another group of local middle school girls praying with their knees bent and heads bowed. Earlier that night, Hanna and Rand explained that they had taken their

daughters earlier that day to the remains of their ancestral home in *al-Madīnat al-Qadīma* and to the ruins of the shrine of *Al-Khaḍīr* to educate them about the deeper meaning of being Palestinian and belonging to the Palestinian land. The children should know their history, see where they come from and pray where their ancestors had prayed before, the parents claimed. Places such as the ancestral home in *al-Madīnat al-Qadīma* and the shrine of *Al-Khaḍīr* are places where the children can touch, see, and smell their roots in the old stones.

Moreover, these places directly connect to Palestinian Christian history and its hopes for the future. Standing on top of *Jabal Jizza*, one could see the whole village of Taybeh, the surrounding Muslim villages, and the Israeli settlements. On a clear night, one could even see the lights of Jerusalem to the south-west and the lights of the Jordanian capital Amman to the east. For people like Hanna and Rand, their ancestral home and *Al-Khaḍīr* tell the story of how Christianity in Palestine has long survived internal and external threats, and how it will survive future challenges. At these places, the daughters of Hanna and Rand could soak in the stories they heard from their parents and grandparents to take back with them to the United States. It is, thus, between the ruins and remnants of the past, that Palestinian Christian parents such as Hanna and Rand find existential meaning for today and for tomorrow. It is therefore befitting that some people of Taybeh traditionally visit *Al-Khaḍīr* during the last hours of the year to light a candle and say a prayer for the year to come.

Located on the crossroads of three continents – Asia, Africa and Europe – and having seen the rise of three world religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – modern-day Palestine is the culmination of a long, rich, and turbulent history. How Palestinian Christians experience a sense of place and time in this history has been an overarching theme throughout the chapters of this thesis. While researching Palestinian Christian thought and practice in the village of Taybeh, I often had the most insightful conversations about their perspectives of place and time while being among the literal and symbolic ruins and remnants of a complicated past. It is against this background, grounded in many ethnographic encounters, paralleling the one with Hanna and Rand illustrated above, that I have emphasised the changing

social, cultural, and political context of West Bank Palestine. I have argued that the Palestinian Christian community is continuously reinventing itself to adapt to these changing circumstances, which in turn has enabled a renewal of ancient Christian expressions that have merged with theological discourse. It is exactly here, in these processes of reinvention and renewal, that context and theology influence each other within the Palestinian Christian community. Hence, this thesis pays tribute to the way Palestinian Christians are continuously rebuilding, reshaping, and reimagining the ruins and remnants of their past into a relevant Christian future – an observation that eventually inspired the title of this thesis. In the sections that follow, I will highlight three main conclusions that have emerged from the research.

1. Religious reinvention and renewal

Through the thesis, I have argued that Palestinian Christians have reinvented themselves and I have shown how this reinvention takes place on the levels of communal identity and socio-political attitude. Palestinian Christian communal identity should be understood as an organic unity of religious Christian identities and national Palestinian identities. Although individual variation does apply, it would be incorrect to approach one identity as more important to the general community than the other. The reinvention in the Orthodox community has taken place in the form of nationalism and independence from foreign power. For the Melkite Greek Catholic community this has meant that they pride themselves on being an indigenous Arab church that repeatedly speaks up politically for the fate of the Palestinian people. The Latin community underwent a process of indigenisation and is now a socially and politically committed actor, giving witness to the Christian faith through their work in hospitals, schools, houses for the elderly, and charitable organisations. Palestinian Christians should, thus, be considered an integral part of society. Members of the community have made contributions to society in different ways, and these contributions have come from a broad variety of church denominations, localities, and socio-political backgrounds. Palestinian clergy and theologians became particularly socially and politically active from the 1970s onwards, which led to a revival of Palestinian Christianity and theology, by which the local church developed from a rather conservative institution to an important ingredient of social and political change.

From this Palestinian Christian reinvention, and creative potential to adapt to the changing circumstances, flows the idea of a renewal of ancient grassroots thought and practice which has taken place in the second half of the twentieth century. This thesis has paid attention to the contemporary continuity thinking among Palestinian Christians, and argued that this is a more politicised version of the older notion of an ancient lineage between contemporary Palestinian Christians and the 'Umm al-Kanā'is ('Mother Church') of biblical times. The argument has thus been maintained that Palestinian Christian biblical theologies of the land are not just a reaction to Zionist challenges, but a renewal of existing theological and ideological positions. A similar process is visible in the Palestinian Christian veneration of saints, most notably Saint George and the Virgin Mary. While the traditional meanings regarding saints continue to exist, the veneration has transformed from cults focused on human flourishing to a platform of theological ideas, mainly concerning martyrdom, liberation and belonging. The veneration of Saint George and the Virgin Mary, who are the most important and most popular saints among Palestinian Christians, have thus turned into rites of identification and belonging, which affirm the Palestinian Christian indigeneity, their connection to the Palestinian land, and their right to remain living there.

2. Palestinian theology in relation to time and place

Another significant thread throughout this thesis is an examination of how Palestinian Christian thought and practice are shaped by their context. This has been studied through, what I named, a 'theologically-informed ethnographic' approach, in which I examined the often implicit theologies that are found in non-textual sources, alongside the formal theological writings of Palestinian theologians and church leaders. I have drawn here on the ethnographic turn in theology and the recent rapprochement between theology and anthropology, but deviated from these approaches by engaging Eastern Christianity. Specifically, this thesis highlighted theologies that are mediated through societal involvement, biblical associations, and ritual behaviour. These theologies have been called by their Arabic names, including *al-Hijārat al-Haya* ('Living Stones'), *baraka* ('holy blessing'), and *ṣumūd* ('steadfastness'). Because these grassroots theologies and the formal contextual theologies are both crystallised from the everyday situation on the ground, they concern the same themes. After all, theology is first a grassroots experience, before

it is set into an academic theological text. To understand Palestinian theology in context, the following two sub-conclusions have been reached.

Firstly, understanding Palestinian theology in relation to time highlights how Palestinian Christians consider their relation to the worldwide church as the '*Umm al-Kanā'is*', the descendants of the original church, which gives them a responsibility towards other Christians. The Arabic names of the Orthodox (*Rūm*) and Melkite Greek Catholic (*malikī*) community attest to this self-understanding as delineating from the early church of the Byzantine Empire, as well. The theology of *al-Hijārat al-Haya* is another expression of this sense of time and history. This concept provides Palestinian Christians with a spiritual mandate to be the witness of Christ in the land. The use of this theological thinking should, therefore, be understood as an attempt to theologise the Palestinian Christian community, particularly its rural background, through which the community constructed and reimagined their identity as essentially biblical. Moreover, this grassroots theologising affirms the existing notion in World Christianity studies to look beyond rigid dichotomies like 'missionary' versus 'indigenous', and 'sender' versus 'receiver' since Palestinian Christians are all of the above. Furthermore, while most mission history deals with the interface between modern Catholic or Protestant (Western) missions and other religious traditions, the mission history in Taybeh is about the interface between a survival of primitive Eastern Christianity and later Christian incursions – in this case Greek, Russian, Italian and French. This does suggest an inculturation process that spans not simply cultural and geographical distance, but historical distance as well.

Secondly, considering Palestinian theology in relation to place brings forth the conclusion that the Palestinian Christian community is inherently nationalist. Throughout the thesis, instances have been mentioned of the use of Christianity to buttress national narratives, including the work and actions of Palestinian theologians, such as Atallah Hanna, Michel Sabbah, Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb, the many Palestinian Christian politicians and leaders in the Palestinian national movement, but also the societal and political contribution a Christian business like Taybeh Brewery provides. I have also argued that the more subtle ways, like reading historical and territorial belonging in biblical stories and the national usage of Saint George and the Virgin Mary, are ways through which Christians get involved in national and regional struggle towards social and political transformation. The political theology of *ṣumūd* reflects this grassroots expression of nationalism and

belonging, based on a Christian hope grounded in the victory of Christ and the saints who have also suffered in the land. This is also true of the interreligious theology of *baraka*, which emphasises the strong conviction that God's blessing is available to everyone who believes in him, whether Jew or Arab, Muslim or Christian. This insight shows that other political options that are often highlighted in Middle Eastern studies, ranging from a monolithic version of secular nationalism to Islamic fundamentalist political thought, are not the only options available, and that Christians in the Middle East can have nationalist sentiments grounded in their Christian thought and practice.

3. Palestinian Christians as agents of change

Ultimately, this thesis worked towards portraying Palestinian Christians as active agents of change. While this constructivist approach is by no means new in academia, Palestinian Christians – and Middle Eastern Christians in general – are still too often portrayed as passive victims. To counteract popular rhetoric of extinction and persecution, this study highlighted Palestinian Christian vitality in common faith and everyday religious identity. With this chosen approach, the thesis rectified several misunderstandings regarding Palestinian Christianity. Firstly, the thesis has deconstructed notions of Palestinian Christians as subjects of their Muslim compatriots, and portrayed them as integral parts of society. In line with this, it has argued that national and religious identities should not be separated, but that Palestinian Christians are both inherently Palestinian and devoutly Christian. Secondly, the thesis dismantled the common narrative of Palestinian Christians as victims of imperialist and Zionist biblical interpretations, but stated that Christian beliefs and practices are constitutional for Palestinian Christian identity. However weirdly self-evident the latter sounds, Palestinian Christian identity is often simplified to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which is considered as problematic for their Christian faith and practice. While I fully acknowledge the vulnerability in which Palestinian Christians are living and the endless problems the conflict creates, I have argued that the community is more than the conflict and that in order to reach a more nuanced understanding of Palestinian Christianity, one should also pay attention to the deeper layers of their history, their culture, their socio-political position, and their religiosity.

The same is true for the paradox of historical change and historical continuity in which Palestinian Christians seem to get caught. In this thesis, I have repeatedly stressed that Palestinian Christian culture and religiosity are not lost due to the pressure they live under, but are in a fluid and dynamic process of reinvention and renewal, with the Palestinian Christians themselves as the agents of that change. The changes brought through modern missions and Palestinian nationalism did not alienate Palestinian Christians from who they were before these movements emerged. Rather, the Christians themselves created a meaningful localised Palestinian Christianity that did simultaneously reflect their heritage as the *'Umm al-Kanā'īs* as well as to their national Palestinian character. In this regard, I have paid attention to the emphasis on rural culture as changeless and timeless, as visible in the biblical association between the modern-day village of Taybeh and the Old Testament village Ophrah and the New Testament village Ephraim, as a way of constructing a theologically meaningful view of historical belonging, territorial legitimacy and hope for the future. Similarly, the religious practices surrounding the ancient veneration of Saint George are constantly adapting to the changing circumstances of the Middle East. A shrine such as *Al-Khaḍīr* in Taybeh – of which there are actually many more examples throughout the West Bank – is a palimpsest of historical and archaeological narratives, embodied in ritual behaviour of *baraka* and *nuthūr*, and merged with theological discourses of martyrdom, liberation and belonging.

After we had lit our candles and said our prayers in the grotto on *Al-Khaḍīr*, we walked back to the village. On our way we passed the central square of Taybeh, just in front of the Latin Church. Teenage boys had come together and some set off fireworks from the roof of one of the *'ā'ilāt*. People passed by on foot or in their cars to wish each other *kūl sanna wa intū salmīn* (literally: 'every year and you will be better'). We reached home just before midnight, where a cake was waiting for us. Eating cake at the very beginning of a new year is an important Palestinian tradition, according to the oldest daughter of the house: "We start the year with something sweet, and hopefully – *'inshā'alla* ('God willing') – more good will follow!"

Glossary of Arabic Words

A

- ʿabū* ‘Father of’; widely used Arabic term to refer to a man as ‘father of...’ followed by the name of the oldest son; the female equivalent is *ʿumm*, which means ‘mother of...’ followed by the name of the oldest son; this prefix could also be used more symbolically and paired with a quality (e.g. Saint George’s nickname *ʿAbū Ḥarba* [‘Father of the Spear’] that refers to his quality as fighter).
- ʿAbūnā* ‘Our father’; widely used title to address Orthodox and Catholic clergy.
- adhān* Islamic call to prayer, which is heard from the mosque five times a day.
- ʿāʾila* (pl. *ʿāʾilāt*) ‘Extended family’.
- Allāh* ‘God’; name used by Muslims and Arab Christians to refer to God.
- ʿaraq* Distilled spirit made of aniseed and grapes; popular liquor in the Levant.
- ʿarkīla* (pl. *ʿarkīlāt*) ‘Water pipe’; instrument for vaporising and smoking flavoured tobacco; also known as hubbly bubbly, *ḥuqqa* and *shīsha*.
- ʿataba* (pl. *ʿatabāt*) ‘Threshold’; stepping over the raised threshold to enter a Palestinian house is considered a symbolic gesture of crossing from the public domain into the privacy and hospitality of the Arab home.
- ʿawrāq al-inab* Mediterranean dish of grape leaves stuffed with rice and meat or vegetables.
- ʿayliyya* (pl. *ʿayliyyāt*) ‘Higher room’; in the context of central highland villages in the past the term referred to the communal room where members from the same extended family gathered, or the space that was being used by the guests of the family.

‘ayn (pl. *‘uyūn*) ‘Water spring’.

B

baqlāwa A delicacy made of filo pastry, nuts and honey that is served in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries as dessert.

baraka ‘Holy blessing’; the power that is present in holy places, holy people and holy objects.

Benī Sālim Village group consisting of Taybeh, Ramun, Deir Jarir, and Kufr Malik; in the past, these villages worked together and protected each other in times of hostility.

Bilād ash-Shām ‘Land to the North’, indicating the Ottoman Province of Greater Syria, comprising present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine.

Bīr as-Sayyida ‘Well of the Lady’; a shared shrine in the Christian town Beit Sahour that was established in 1983 after the Virgin Mary had appeared there.

D

dabka Palestinian folk dance; also found in other Levantine countries.

dār (pl. *dūr*) House or apartment block for a three or four-generation family; in daily use, also refers to ‘family’.

darwīsh (pl. *darāwīsh*) Member of a local Sufi fraternity.

dayr (pl. *‘adyār*) ‘Monastery’ or ‘convent’.

dhimmi ‘Protected person’; the term *ahl al-dhimma* or *dhimmi* refers to a mutual pact between non-Muslim religious minorities and their Muslim ruler in which the *dhimmi* was protected but subordinate to the Islamic state and bound to a set of restrictions.

djinn (pl. *djinniyy*) Spirits closely resembling humans; a *djinn* could have good or bad intentions.

dūnam (pl. *dūnumāt*) Ottoman measurement unit; 1 *dūnam* is 0.25 acre or 1,000 square metres.

F

- fallāḥ* (pl. *fallāḥīn*) 'Peasant'; used to indicate Palestinian rural community life and heritage.
- fard baghil* Plough drawn by mules and used by farmers in the past.
- fidā'iy* (pl. *fidā'iyūn*) 'Fidayee warrior'; refers to a combatant with Islamic militant intentions and who is prepared to sacrifice their life for the greater good; the term also refers to the Palestinian national anthem adopted by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation in 1996.

H

- ḥajj* (pl. *ḥajāj*) 'Pilgrimage'; the word *ḥajj* indicates formal pilgrimage, such as the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca and the Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
- ḥalāl* Islamic concept meaning 'permitted' or 'pure'; the antonym is *ḥarām*, meaning 'forbidden' or 'impure'.
- ḥāmūla* (pl. *ḥāmāyil*) 'Clan'; a patrilineal descent group.
- ḥāra* (pl. *ḥārāt*) 'Town quarter'; in modern Arab cities *ḥārāt* distinguish religion and family descent; the *ḥārāt* in villages traditionally housed several 'ā'ilāt; in the *al-Madīnat al-Qadīma* of central highland villages, the more influential 'ā'ilāt lived in the elevated village quarter (*al-ḥāra al-fūqa*) and more inferior 'ā'ilāt lived in the lower village quarter (*al-ḥāra at-taḥta*).
- ḥarām* Islamic concept meaning 'forbidden' or 'impure'; the antonym is *ḥalāl*, meaning 'permitted' or 'pure'.
- al-Ḥaram ash-Sharīf* 'The Noble Sanctuary'; the term is used by Muslims to refer to the Temple Mount, one of the three holiest sites in Islam, on which the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock are built; the Temple Mount is a highly contested place that has been venerated by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike and is often the site of clashes and political unrest.
- ḥijāb* (pl. *ḥujub*) Head covering worn by Muslim women; also known as *mandīl*.
- al-Hijārat al-* 'Living Stones'; Arabic term employed to connect the Palestinian

Haya Christian community to the notion of an ancient lineage with the *Umm al-Kanā'is* of biblical times, thereby underlining their indigeneity; the term originates from 1 Peter 2:4-5.

ḥūsh Cluster of houses built around a central courtyard where a three or four-generation family lives.

I

'ibrīq Jar used in central highland villages in the past.

'īd (pl. *'a'yād*) 'Feast', used to refer to a birthday party or a holiday; also refers to a religious feast, such as the Islamic *'īd al-'Aḍḥā* ('Sacrifice Feast') and the Christian *'īd Mār Ilīas* ('Feast of Saint Elijah').

Mār Ilīas 'Saint Elijah'; an important prophet from the Old Testament; his major shrines for Palestinian Christians are in the Church of the Stella Maris Monastery on Mount Carmel in Haifa and in the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Mar Elias located on the main road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. See also: *Mār Jirīs*, *Al-Khaḍir*.

'inshā'alla 'God willing' or 'if it is God's will'; one of the many religious phrases Palestinians use in daily speech.

Intifāḍa (pl. *Intifāḍāt*) 'Resistance', 'uprising' or 'rebellion'; referring to the Palestinian uprisings of 1987-1993 (First *Intifāḍa*) and 2000-2005 (Second *Intifāḍa*) against Israeli violence and occupation.

'iqāl (pl. *'uqul*) Black headband worn by men on the *kūffiyya*.

istishād 'Martyrdom'; a martyr is given the honorary title *shahīd*.

J

Jabal 'Abū Ṣūf 'Hill of the Father of Soof'; the forested hill on the south-eastern side of Taybeh.

Jabal Jizza 'Hill of Fleece', the hill on the eastern side of Taybeh that contains the remnants of a Byzantine church and functions as a local shrine to Saint George.

jarrat zayt (pl. *jirāra zayt*) Oil jar used in central highland villages in the past.

Mār Jirīs 'Saint George'; a third century Christian martyr who died in 303 AD;

his major shrine is the Church of Saint George in Lod where his bones are kept. See also: *Mār Ilīas*, *Al-Khaḍīr*.

K

Kāthūlīk 'Catholic'; for Palestinian Christians this term refers to the Melkite Greek Catholic community, while they use *Lātīn* for the Roman Catholic community. See also: *Rūm Kāthūlīk*.

Al-Khaḍīr 'The Green One'; Christians associate *Al-Khaḍīr* with Saint George (*Mār Jirīs*) or Saint Elijah (*Mār Ilīas*); in Islam *Al-Khaḍīr* is a superhuman being, the mystical companion of *Mūsā* ('Moses'), and much revered by Muslims; in practice these figures are often, but not always, intertwined. See also: *Mār Ilīas*, *Mār Jirīs*.

khawābī Large, mud storage bins; in village homes in the past the *khawābī* stored a year's supply of dried food and functioned as a room divider between the *maṣṭaba* and the *rāwiya*, too.

khūrī (pl. *khawārīna*) 'Priest'; also a family name (written as Khoury).

al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas 'The Holy Scripture'; Arabic word referring to the Bible.

kūfiyya (pl. *kūfiyyāt*) Head covering worn by Palestinian peasants; after the 1936-1939 Rebellion adopted as a Palestinian national symbol.

L

lāhūt 'Theology'; this thesis has mentioned several forms of Palestinian theology, including *lāhūt al-saradī* ('narrative theology'), *lāhūt al-siyāqī al-Filasṭīnī* ('Palestinian contextual theology') and *lāhūt al-taḥrīr al-Filasṭīnī* ('Palestinian liberation theology').

Lātīn 'Latin'; the Arabic name for the Roman Catholic (Latinised-rite) community, headed by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (established in 1847).

Al-Liqā' 'The Encounter'; Al-Liqā' Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land is an ecumenical initiative focusing on local theology and interfaith dialogue; based in Bethlehem and founded in 1983 by Geries Khoury (1952-2016).

lūḥa dirās 'Threshing board'; in the past Palestinian farmers tied a number of animals in front of this rectangular wooden board containing numerous small blades to break the crop into small pieces.

M

al-Madīnat al-Qadīma 'The Old City'; the oldest core of an Arab village, town or city; most well-known is the Old City of Jerusalem, the walled area in the centre of Jerusalem; many Palestinian villages and cities have an area like this, often with architecture dating back centuries.

maftūl Traditional Palestinian product made from durum wheat rolled by hand.

majnūn Being crazy or mad; also being possessed by a spirit, *djinn*, or demon.

malikī 'Royalist'; the root of the word 'Melkite', by which the Melkite Greek Catholic Church has been described, indicating the Byzantine Emperor. See also: *al-Rūm al-Kāthūlik*.

m'amūl A delicacy made of wheat flour and semolina, filled with a mixture of dates (sometimes also walnut or pistachios); these cookies are traditionally eaten at Easter as their shape symbolises the crown of thorns of Jesus.

maqām (pl. *maqāmāt*) 'Shrine'; often a quadrangular building, but seen in different architectural forms as well.

maqlūba 'Upside down'; a Levantine dish of seasoned rice, meat (often chicken) and vegetables that is carefully layered, cooked and then flipped on a large serving dish before serving.

mār Arabic honorific title for a saint; also used is the title *qiddīs*.

m'arrash A temporary canopy of tree branches and leaves formed on the *munṭār*.

Maryam al-'adhrā' 'The Virgin Mary'.

al-maṣafa Place in Taybeh's *al-Madīnat al-Qadīma* where young girls used to meet to chat and make baskets out of wheat straw.

masha' Traditional village land tenure system based on collective land

	ownership; this system was common in Palestine until the early twentieth century.
<i>maṣṭaba</i>	(pl. <i>maṣāṭib</i>) 'Living space'; in Palestinian village homes in the past the <i>maṣṭaba</i> was the main family room used for sleeping, cooking, eating and socialising.
<i>mawqīd</i>	(pl. <i>mawāqīd</i>) 'Fireplace'; in Palestinian village homes in the past the <i>mawqīd</i> was the centre of the <i>maṣṭaba</i> , used for both heating and cooking.
<i>mawsim</i>	(pl. <i>mawāsīm</i>) 'Season'; the term is used to indicate one of the six agricultural seasons of Palestinian village life (e.g. <i>mawsim al-zaytūn</i> , olive picking season that usually begins late October or early November and lasts between two and four weeks); the term also refers to the gathering of pilgrims (e.g. <i>mawsim Mār Jirīs</i> , festival of Saint George in Lod that lasts for a couple of days).
<i>midhrā</i>	(pl. <i>maḍārin</i>) Winnowing fork or pitchfork that farmers used to throw the crop in the air and let the wind separate the grain from the husk.
<i>mihrāb</i>	(pl. <i>maḥārib</i>) Niche in the wall indicating the direction of Mecca for Muslim prayers.
<i>milḥ al-`arḍ</i>	'Salt of the earth'; a Christian term based on Jesus' teachings in Matthew 5:13.
<i>mukhtār</i>	(pl. <i>mukhtāṛīr</i>) 'Head of the village'.
<i>munṭār</i>	(pl. <i>munāṭīr</i>) 'Agricultural watchtower'; a stone structure that was used in the past by Palestinian families to watch over the land and as a place to sleep in a safe environment; remnants of this type of traditional Palestinian architecture are still found scattered across the Palestinian countryside; sometimes also referred to as <i>qaṣr</i> .
<i>murābiṭ</i>	'Marabout'; a Moroccan <i>murābiṭ</i> refers to a shrine of Islamic holy men.
<i>An-Nabī Mūsā</i>	'The Prophet Moses'; the term also refers to the tomb of the Prophet Moses in the Judean Desert, which is a major shrine for Palestinian Muslims.
<i>musakhkhan</i>	Palestinian (also Jordanian) dish of roasted whole chicken baked

with onions, pine nuts and *summāq*, served on a large *ṭābūn* bread.

N

- nabī* (pl. *nabiyūn*) 'Prophet'; the term is used by Muslims and Christians.
- Nahḍa* 'Awakening' or 'renaissance'; the *Nahḍa* refers to the cultural movement in the nineteenth and twentieth century in Egypt and the Levant.
- Nakba* 'Disaster' or 'catastrophe'; *Nakba* refers to the disaster of 1948 when more than 700,000 Palestinian refugees fled or were expelled from their villages; *Nakba* Day is commemorated annually on 15 May.
- Naksa* 'Setback'; *Naksa* refers to the loss of Arab states (Egypt, Jordan, and Syria) to Israel, who took over the Golan Heights (previously controlled by Syria), the West Bank (previously controlled by Jordan), the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula (previously controlled by Egypt); *Naksa* Day is commemorated annually on 5 June.
- Mār Nīcolā* 'Saint Nicolas'; a Christian bishop who lived in the third and fourth centuries; the Greek Orthodox Saint Nicolas Church in Beit Jala is built on top of a cave where the saint is believed to have lived.
- nidhr* (pl. *nuthūr*) 'Vow'; a *nidhr* is a reciprocal relationship between a saint and an individual or family that involves the saint's blessing, protection, healing, or empowerment in return for a promise.
- nidhr dhabīḥa* A vow involving an animal slaughter.

Q

- qā' al-bayt* Area below *fallāḥīn* houses where animals and farming equipment were stored.
- qadam* (pl. *'aqdām*) 'Foot' or 'footprint'; in this thesis also refers to contact relics such as the *qadam al-Mahdī* ('footprint of the Mahdī'), similar to the two imprints Jesus left in Jerusalem, which are for Christians the feet of Jesus in the Chapel of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives and for Muslims Jesus' right foot in the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

<i>qālūsh</i>	Sickle to harvest the crop from the land.
<i>qaṣr</i>	(pl. <i>qaṣūr</i>) 'Palace' or 'fortress'; see also <i>munṭār</i> .
<i>qiddīs</i>	(fem. <i>qiddīsa</i>) The Arabic honorific title for a saint; also used is the title <i>mār</i> .
<i>qubba</i>	(pl. <i>qubbāt</i>) An Islamic domed shrine.
<i>qūs</i>	(pl. <i>'aqwās</i>) Bedding niche in the walls of Palestinian village homes in the past; the <i>qūs</i> stored the bedding that was to be taken out at the end of the day and spread on the floor of the <i>maṣṭaba</i> .

R

<i>raḥā</i>	Quern or millstone made of rock that in the past women used to manually grind wheat into flour.
<i>Rahbāt al-Wardiyye</i>	'Rosary Sisters'; the Arabic name for the Roman Catholic female order established by Palestinian nun Marie-Alphonsine Danil Ghattas (1843-1927) in 1880.
<i>rāwiya</i>	(pl. <i>rāwiyāt</i>) Storage place in the back of Palestinian village homes of the past; mainly to store food such as rice, wheat, barley, corn, lentils, raisins and dried figs in <i>khawābī</i> , but also included space to store hay, dry milk and more.
<i>Rūm</i>	'Roman'; Arabic term referring to the Eastern Orthodox community; the term is used by church members of all four ancient Orthodox patriarchates (Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem), for whom the term refers back to their descent from the <i>Umm al-Kanā'is</i> .
<i>ar-Rūm al-Kāthūlīk</i>	'Roman Catholic', the Arabic name for the Melkite Greek Catholic Church (<i>Kanīsat ar-Rūm al-Malikiyyīn al-Kāthūlīk</i>), one of the Eastern Catholic or 'uniate' churches in the Middle East (founded: 1724). See also: <i>Kāthūlīk</i> and <i>malikī</i> .

S

<i>Sabīl</i>	'Way' or 'spring'; also written as Sabeel; Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre is an ecumenical initiative focusing on liberation theology; based in Jerusalem and founded in 1989 by
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	Naim Ateek (b. 1937).
<i>Sabt an-Nūr</i>	Greek-Orthodox celebration of the Holy Fire on Holy Saturday during Lent.
<i>ṣalāt al-ghurūb</i>	‘Prayer at sunset’; a term used by Palestinian Christians to indicate the prayer on the day before a major Christian feast.
<i>An-Nabī Ṣālih</i>	‘The Prophet Salih’; the term also refers to his shrine in the Muslim village Nabi Saleh.
<i>ṣandūq al-‘arūs</i>	‘Bridal chest’; in the past the bridal chest was a rectangular wooden box that stored the personal possessions of the bride who came to live in the family house of the groom.
<i>Sayyida</i>	‘Lady’; honorary title for women; the title is also attributed to the Virgin Mary (e.g. the title <i>Sayyida as-Salām</i> that translates to ‘Lady of Peace’ or ‘Virgin of Peace’, or <i>Sayyida ʿĪfram</i> that translates to ‘Lady of Ephraim’).
<i>shahīd</i>	(pl. <i>shuhadāʾ</i>) Honorary title for a martyr.
<i>shakwa</i>	(pl. <i>shakwāt</i>) ‘Churner’; a goatskin vessel hanging on a tripod and in the past used for making butter or yoghurt.
<i>Mār Sharbel</i>	Also written as <i>Mār Charbel</i> ; Arabic name for the Lebanese Maronite monk Youssef Antoun Makhlouf (1828-1898); canonised on 9 October 1977 after which his popularity spread from Lebanon to other places in the Levant; his major shrine is the Monastery of Saint Maron in Annaya, Lebanon.
<i>shaykh</i>	(pl. <i>shuyūk</i>) ‘Head of a tribe’.
<i>shāwarmā</i>	Middle Eastern street food of thinly sliced meat (often, but not always, chicken) that is layered on a vertical rotisserie; often eaten with pitta, salads and tahini sauce.
<i>summāq</i>	Ground spice made from dried berries; widely used in Middle Eastern cuisine.
<i>ṣumūd</i>	‘Steadfastness’; the term refers to the popular peasant resistance and has been used as a Christian theological term for steadfastness in the land.
<i>sunna</i>	A generally approved standard or practice based on the actions and sayings of the prophet Muhammad; it is believed to

complement the Quran and forms a primary source of Islamic law.

sūra (pl. *sawar*) A chapter in the Qur'an.

T

ṭabaq (pl. *'aṭḥbāq*) 'Straw tray'; in Palestinian village homes in the past the *ṭabaq* was an important household item for serving food to guests; also used for decorative purposes.

ṭabbūla A Levantine salad made with bulgur (made from durum wheat), finely chopped parsley, mint, tomatoes, onions and a seasoning of olive oil and lemon juice.

ṭābūn A Middle-Eastern communal bread oven; although this type of bread-baking is associated with traditional village life, the ovens are still built and used in Palestine.

tanẓīmāt 'Reorganisation'; the period between 1839 and 1876 that marked the modernising reforms of the administration of the Ottoman Empire, and enabled participation of non-Muslim minorities in many fields.

ṭāqa (pl. *ṭāqāt*) Small arched niches in the walls of Palestinian village homes from the past.

taṭrīz 'Embroidery'; referring to rich embroidery on traditional Palestinian dress, the *thūb*; every area of historic Palestine has their own traditional patterns.

ṭayyib 'Good' or 'delicious'; the root from which the name 'Taybeh' is derived.

thūb (pl. *'aṭwāb*) Female traditional dress; a long, loose dress with long sleeves, made of a thick black or white cloth, often with red (sometimes other colours are used) embroidered ornaments, known as *taṭrīz*, which are placed on the breast and sleeves (sometimes all over the dress).

U

'Umm al-Kanā'is 'Mother Church'; Arabic term referring to the Church of Jerusalem as the first and original church; Palestinian Christians consider

themselves as direct descendants of the first, catholic and apostolic church of the first century. See also: *Rūm*.

W

wādin (pl. *'awdiya*) 'Valley' or 'gorge'; distinctive markers in the Palestinian landscape; some are lesser known, such as *Wādī Ḥabīs* near Taybeh, while others are famous, such as *Wādī Qilt* (Anglicised: Wadi Qelt) near Jericho, which has attracted saints, hermits, and bandits in the past and is now a popular site for hiking, sightseeing, and picnicking for locals and international travellers alike.

walī (pl. *'awliyā'*) 'Friend of God'; a term used by Muslims to refer to an Islamic saint; the term is particularly used in Sufism, a more mystical form of Islam.

Y

Yasū' 'Jesus'; the variant *'Īsā* is used when a person is named after Jesus.

Z

zaghrūṭa (pl. *zaghrūṭāt*) 'Ululation'; a long, loud, high-pitched and vibrant sound, commonly practiced by Middle Eastern women to express emotions of honour and respect; traditionally used during weddings and other happy occasions.

za'tar 'Wild thyme'; the term refers to a herbal mix of ground thyme with some added *summāq*, salt and toasted sesame seeds; the mix is widely used in Palestinian cuisine and commonly seen as a mark of Palestinian identity.

ziyāra (pl. *ziyārāt*) A pious visit to a shrine; usually pilgrimage to a tomb, but also involves pilgrimage to a mosque or other holy place associated with a saint.

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