



Desert and mountains of the southern border of Palestine, 1925-1927

## The Biblical Scholar's Viewpoint

Instant of Eternity. The Middle East  
in Fr. Ubach's Photographic Collection



Fr. Bonaventura Ubach (1879-1960) devoted his life to gaining a better understanding of biblical texts and sharing them through the project of the Great Bible of Montserrat. This collective work directed by Fr. Ubach, with its twenty-eight volumes published between 1926 and 1974, is one of the most painstaking translations ever produced in Catalan and a tribute to an exceptional generation of Montserrat monks. One of the most characteristic traits of the Great Bible of Montserrat, along with its faithfulness to the original text and the abundance of critical apparatus, is the extensive graphic and photographic illustrations. Illustrations that occupy three entire volumes and that visually translate the comprehensive knowledge acquired by Fr. Ubach and his assistants of the landscapes and peoples of the Middle East,

in general, and Palestine, in particular. Their photography has a documentary nature and shows a strong dependence on the biblical text, which it serves as illustration and graphic commentary. This visual choice determined both the subjects to be documented and the approach. Thus, when they had to capture the landscapes or monuments of the narration, they did so by accentuating their timelessness and disregarding or limiting the human presence. In contrast, when they had to evoke historical figures, rites or ceremonies they did so with great empathy for the local population, which they presented with almost ethnographic care. The viewpoint of Fr. Ubach and his assistants focused on those Middle Eastern segments of society that helped them to illustrate the text and disregarded the rest. Thus, they photographed the rural world much more than the urban,

inland areas more than coastal zones, and Christian and Muslim communities more than Jewish ones. They were particularly interested in the tangible and cultural traces of the biblical past while ignoring the manifestations of modernity, the anti-colonial struggle or the conflicts stirred up by the growing Jewish emigration. The importance of this photographic collection, unique in Catalonia, lies in offering an exceptional testimony of Middle Eastern societies, especially of Palestine, in the decades prior to the proclamation of the State of Israel. This was a moment when the effects of modernity were just becoming noticeable, and traditional lifestyles that, for those who observed them, seemed to have varied little from biblical times began to change.

Jaffa Port. 1926





We can find all the combinations contained in the Bible in Bedouins, from the family reduced to the simplest elements to the tribe, almost the people, who only find unity in the recognition, and often worship, of the same eponymous ancestor.”  
( M.- J. Lagrange, 1908 )

The more than six thousand negatives of photographs taken by Fr. Ubach and his assistants have been restored by Montserrat Abbey and the European Institute of the Mediterranean. The digitalised photographs on display in this exhibition and many others are freely available at <https://bibliotecademontserrat.cat/ubach>

Services: Guided tours for groups and schools.  
Times: Visit [www.museudemontserrat.com](http://www.museudemontserrat.com)

**Museum of Montserrat**  
08199 Monastery of Montserrat  
T 00 34 938 777 27  
[museu@larsa-montserrat.com](mailto:museu@larsa-montserrat.com)  
[www.museudemontserrat.com](http://www.museudemontserrat.com)  
[www.abadiamontserrat.net](http://www.abadiamontserrat.net)



## The Biblical Scholar's Viewpoint

### Instant's of Eternity

The Middle East in Father Ubach's Photographic Collection

Museum of Montserrat  
12.11.21 - 17.07.22



**IEMed.**  
European Institute of the Mediterranean