The Diversity of Photographic Viewpoints on and from the Middle East

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The first pictures of the Middle East were taken in 19th-century, and the visual approach sought to establish nothing less than the reliability and veracity of Bible stories. Many travellers from Europe and United States went to the Middle East to experience first-hand those sites full of history and religious meaning. Afterwards, when the State of Israel was proclaimed in 1948, photography was called to play a key role when publicising the successes achieved in this new country and promoting emigration towards Palestine. Many photographers born or living in the country had their own studios or worked for the local press. The expansion of the printed press opened the doors to the emergence of two new forms of photographic expression: photojournalism and documentary photography. In this context, the photographs taken by Father Ubach and his assistants, monks of the Montserrat Abbey in Catalonia, belong to the genre of biblical photography but also adopt other enriching points of view and influences.

The Biblical Viewpoint

In 1842, only two years since Louis Daguerre presented to the public the first photographic images obtained through the method of his own invention, Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey took what are considered the first photographs of urban buildings and landscapes in the Middle East. Pictures that he published to great success in 1846 under the title of *Monuments arabes d'Egypte, de Syrie et d'Asie Mineure* (Girault de Prangey, 1846), and which would lead to a growing interest in these early photographs of a Middle East that, in the Western imaginary, was still perceived from the perspective of the religious and historical narrative about the "Holy Land".

The visual approach to those territories, produced for centuries using complex fictitious backgrounds which kept changing at the pace of the successive pictorial styles, then found a solid and apparently definitive point of reference: the photograph. This, in its apparent objectivity, provided a reliable representation of the exact place in which a specific event of the sacred history would have occurred, while enabling viewers to know directly and without other filters or devices the tangible characteristics of the remains of that moment, which the growing archaeological research was gradually bringing to light.

Thus, to some extent the photograph inherited the nature of the pious and devotional image held hitherto exclusively by

sacred pictorial depictions, while becoming evidence in a new approach to the texts of the Old and New Testament. It was a positivist approach that, through the accumulation of probative evidence from different sources, such as textual criticism and archaeological and ethnological research, sought to establish nothing less than the reliability and veracity of Bible stories.

This coincided with the relaxation of the conditions applied until then by the Ottoman Empire to regulate the access of foreigners to those territories and with the formation of an Eastern branch of the Grand Tour, which, starting in Greece, extended towards Constantinople and, from there, reached Egypt, with an intermediate and almost compulsory stop at Jerusalem and other Palestinian towns such as Bethlehem and Nazareth, which had an important place in the imaginary of the Christian West.

The stories and photographs of those early privileged travellers spawned a public in Europe and the United States who yearned to go there and experience first-hand those sites full of history and religious meaning, while a group of companies and individuals sought to indulge their desires and profit from it. Thus, from the late 1860s, Jerusalem witnessed the establishment of the early tourist agencies aimed at providing services to travellers and pilgrims (Thomas Cook and American Express), and in the following decade the first travel guides to Palestine were published (Cobbing, 2012).

Photography became a tool to promote this new (and not so new) tourist and pilgrimage route while opening new economic opportunities that were convincing enough to attract the attention of foreign photographers such as Maxime du Camp, Auguste Saltzman, Robertson, Beato, Francis Frith and Henry Phillips in search of business opportunities. During the last decades of the 19th-century, there was an increase in the publication of illustrated travel/pilgrimage books and collections of postcards intended to be compiled in personal albums, which became a key piece both to attract new visitors and keep and share the memories of the growing number of travellers who went there (Behdad, 2017).

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Thus a "biblical viewpoint" produced by foreign professionals was firmly established and was very successful among the foreign public at which it was targeted. And the main feature of this foreign viewpoint, now centred on Palestine and much of the Middle Eastern lands, was to "biblify" the focus of its attention. Thus, a retrospective vision was applied that, far from seeking to express the object of interest through its current nature or characteristics, prioritised the evocative power of what was photographed, the links that could be established with the events told by the Bible stories and that would have taken place in the same setting but from which one would be separated by a distance of time that is not measured in centuries but millennia.

The strategies employed by the photographers who use a biblical viewpoint were diverse but, in most cases, involved isolating the object of their attention from its time and social context. The populations or sites docu-

mented were identified not with their current names but those they had in the remote era of the biblical text. Similarly, compositions and framings of landscapes, monuments or even urban scenes were prioritised, disregarding any reference to modernity or any form of human presence. The few cases of the latter would always be portrayed in a very limited way, through a single individual or a very small group in order to serve as a visual reference and reveal the monumental character of what was to be documented and never as an object of interest in itself.

The bare landscape became particularly prized because it encapsulated a kind of absence, a completely unnecessary lack of religious ostentation

Following this approach, the photographers of that first generation showed their discomfort at the presence of local populations who were not only considered backward and culturally alien but substantially incongruent with the religious past that they sought to evoke. A discomfort which, in the case of some of the professionals working for a Protestant public, led them to portray, almost exclusively, landscapes that were unique because of their doctrinal significance, such as the Mount of Olives or the Garden of Gethsemane, while being more reluctant to focus their view on other more popular settings of the Holy Land, such as the Church of the Nativity or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which they saw as losing their essence because of the monumentalising actions undertaken at the initiative of the Catholic Church (Nir, 1985, pp. 49-50).

From this perspective, the bare landscape became particularly prized because it encapsulated a kind of absence, a completely unnecessary lack of religious ostentation that could distract the viewer's attention in the effort to devotionally imagine and revive the Bible scenes (Coleman, 2002, p. 283; Nassar, 2021). This communication strategy enabled the perception, among the Western public, of Palestine and even Jerusalem as a country composed of barren landscapes and sites of monumental yet uninhabited ruins. A conception that perhaps is not completely distanced from the notion that, a few decades later, became a veritable motto for the publicists of the Jewish colonisation: that of Palestine as a land without a people, aimed at becoming the land for a people without a land (Nassar, 2006, pp. 320-323).

The Viewpoint of the Jewish Colonisation

The Zionist movement emerged during the second half of the 19th-century as a reaction to the increase in the anti-Semitic persecutions experienced in several Eastern European countries. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), the key figure of that new movement, advocated in *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*, 1896), the need to build a national homeland for the Jewish people that ensured their emancipation and survival. One year later, the First Zionist Congress held in Basel proposed undertaking a project of mostly agrarian colonisation in the Ottoman province of Palestine as a first step in the creation of a Jewish national state in what had been their ancestral territory.

This project had the precedent of some settlements that had been established a few years earlier on the outskirts of the port

town of Jaffa (Petah Tikvah, 1878; Rishon LeZion, 1882...) thanks to the determined economic support of outstanding members of the Jewish Diaspora, such as the Hirsch or Rothschild families. The initiatives of the former finally took on a more institutional tone through the creation of the Jewish Colonisation Association (1891), aimed at acquiring land in order to establish new populated settlements, thus creating a model for the Jewish National Fund (1901), promoted by the World Zionist Organization and destined to become the most important of the colonisation agencies. These two were complemented by the United Israel Appeal (Keren Hayesod, 1921) and the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association (1924), which oversaw the settlements supported for decades by the Rothschild family. These initiatives were aided by the allied victory in the war and the British government's commitment to the creation of a national homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, expressed through the Balfour Declaration, which encouraged the arrival of settlers to this territory, so that the Jewish population, which in 1917 accounted for five to ten percent of all inhabitants in Palestine, increased, in the short span of a generation, to a third of the population when the independence of the State of Israel was proclaimed in 1948.

Although some of these agencies specialised in the acquisition of land such as the Jewish National Fund and others did so in the most advanced phase of the implementation of the settlements (*Keren Ayesod*), all of them shared a common final goal, and participated, at some stage, in a process that comprised the following steps: the acquisition of land from large – often absentee – Arab owners, the suppression of the rights that the local tenant farmers might claim, who in some cases had farmed for generations; the overall planning of new settlements as well as the transportation or irrigation infrastructures necessary for the farms that had to earn their living; and, last but not least, the attraction and establishment on the land of the new communities formed by settlers of European origin. And it is in this last consideration, the promotion of emigration towards Palestine, that photography was called on to play a key role when publicising the successes achieved, stimulating donations and awakening future expectations among potential emigrants.

The photographers hired by the Jewish colonisation agencies worked within the framework of a pictorialist style, prioritising the static depictions of landscapes

The photography of the colonisation agencies is characterised as having been mainly produced by European professionals, to target a European and American public, and to mainly centre on rural thematic areas. The latter aspect should be related to the main line of its narrative discourse, focused on exalting the notion of redeeming land through work, a leitmotif that had the virtue of also being attractive to the most religious groups as it was inspired by the biblical idea of the *ge'ula*, and the settlers most influenced by socialist ideology, a majority among the first generations of emigrants. They both adopted it as a legitimising argument to back taking control of the new territories and a stage prior to the construction of real national sovereignty in Eretz Israel.

Initially, the photographers hired by the Jewish colonisation agencies worked within

the framework of a pictorialist style, prioritising the static depictions of landscapes in which the breadth of the panoramic views contrasted with the subordinated role of the figures of the workers, as well as formally rigorous architectonic compositions. This approach changed during the second half of the 1920s thanks to the conjunction of multiple renewing influences such as Bauhaus, Russian constructivism, the photographic current of the New Vision (*Neues Sehen*), cinematographic expressionism, and the rapid transformations of the visual language that both Central European advertising and photojournalism began to experience.

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Now the Jewish colonisation was depicted through images that emphasised its dynamism, as well as the emotion and dramatic significance of the enterprise. Zoltan Kluger (1896-1977), who is possibly the most emblematic and popular representative of the Zionist photography of the pre-state period, contributed like no other to the creation of the stereotyped image of the "new Jew" embodied by the *halutzim* (pioneers). A depiction that combines social realism with the exaltation of the heroism of the generation of the pioneers and that draws on aesthetics that then prevailed both in the Soviet Union, fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

Moving on the blurred border between posed composition and the spontaneity of the photojournalism genre he turned the fields of the new settlements into the main setting of a national construction that finds its legitimacy in the return to the fertility of land that was now desert because of the negligence attributed to the Arab populations that had occupied the place of the Jews after their exile. The actors of this renewal appear to us as highly masculine and physically vigorous heroes while showing the technical knowledge and command of the modern machinery necessary for the success of their enterprise, while their gazes, focused on a fixed distant point, accentuate the transcendence of their pose. Moreover, women settlers are portrayed in more circumscribed settings (barns, yards, lines of fruit trees...) while their attitudes tend towards a concentrated withdrawal and a somewhat tender circumspection. Both always have brown skin, tanned by working outdoors, reflecting health strengthened by vigorous physical labour, while often being portrayed with low level shots in which, through the use of a studied balance between light and shadow, the human figures are cut out against the sky and isolated from their immediate context, emphasising the moral dimension of the task in which they are immersed.

The individual pictures of the settlers, understood as prototypes rather than as individuals, coexist with others (group work, dances and games, education...) in which the collective dimension of the national construction is exalted, where the group occupies centre stage and the composition enhances the need for community feeling and the dilution of individuality, personal origins and backgrounds into a new and more successful unit.

The Viewpoint of the Local Photographers

In contrast to biblical and Zionist photography, mainly produced outside Palestine and for an equally foreign public, local photography was the work of photographers born or living in the country, regardless of their ethnic origin or religious affiliation, and was mainly aimed at their fellow citizens (Nassar, 2003, pp. 323-325). In contrast to the photography designed to publicise the Jewish colonisation, which focused above all on the rural communities, local photography was produced from the cities and targeted at a public that mostly belonged to the urban bourgeoisie.

The local photography in Palestine would emerge through Yessai Garabedian, who had arrived in the city to work as a librarian in the Armenian Seminary of Jerusalem

The reforms undertaken by the Ottoman government during the period of the *tanzimat* (1839-1876), which aimed to strengthen the presence of the state throughout the empire, increased the tax incomes and reduced the power of local tribes and aristocracy, and enabled the development of the urban middle classes that adopted different economic growth strategies depending on the ethnic or religious affiliation. Thus, while the Muslim bourgeoisie established itself as a landowner and rentier class thanks to the commoditisation of the arable lands and pastures promoted by the 1858 Land Code, their Christian and Jewish fellow citizens and those from other minorities specialised in liberal, financial and administrative professions (Watenpaugh, 2014, p. 24).

And it was precisely within one of these minorities – the Armenian – where the local photography in Palestine would emerge through Yessai Garabedian, who had arrived in the city to work as a librarian in the Armenian Seminary of Jerusalem and became, in the final years of his life, the patriarch of that community. Before this, however, in 1859 he began giving photography courses in the Church of Saint James and his students included the founder of Palestinian professional photography, the Armenian Garabed Krikorian, who opened the first photography studio in Jerusalem, in 1870, specialised in portraits of important figures and the local bourgeoisie, as well as the production of photography with biblical themes and portraits for tourists and pilgrims (Abushama, 2020).

In the 1890s an apprentice who would became perhaps the most reputed and prolific photographer in the region trained at the Krikorian studio: Khalil Raad. Born in Beirut in an Arab family converted to Protestantism, as a child he emigrated to Jerusalem and after his training period with Krikorian he founded his own studio close to his master's, on Jaffa Road. Thus began a long and prickly competition between them that would only end, some years later, with a marriage that united the two families and ensured the continuity of the Krikorian studio focused on the field of portraiture, while the one on Raad Road diversified its interests, including coverage of public events, everyday life, landscape and archaeological photography (al-Hajj, 2001, pp. 37-38) and becoming the official photographer of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War (Tamari, 2013).

Jerusalem is, moreover, the scenario of the activity of Jewish photographers, such

as Yeshayahu Raffaelovich and Tsadok Bassan. In 1900, the latter, who was a member of a family established in the city for three generations, opened a studio in the Old City, which would be frequented by many families from the *vella yishuv* (migrations prior to the Zionists, which began in 1882). Meanwhile, he actively contributed to fundraising and distribution of donations for charity and care institutions in the city, such as orphanages and hospitals.

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In those years, Hebron, Haifa and, especially, Jaffa saw the emergence of local photographers. Closely linked to the capital as the natural port and preferential route of entry through the railway built in 1892, it was in Jaffa where Daoud Sabounji (a member of a renowned Syriac family of Christian photographers settled in Beirut) and Issa Sawabini developed their activity. A special mention should be made of Karimeh Abbud, the daughter of a Lutheran pastor from Bethlehem, who between 1930 and 1940 had her own studio in Nazareth, thus becoming the first woman who worked as a professional photographer in the Middle East (Nassar, 2011).

A series of features characterise the members of these early generations of local Palestinian photographers. On the one hand, almost all belonged to minority communities (Armenians, Christians, Jews) or were in states of confessional liminality (Khalil Raad, for instance, was a member of a Muslim family recently converted to Protestantism and married a Swiss woman, also Protestant). Moreover, they saw photography not as an art but as a functional tool at the service of the expression and consolidation of the prevailing ideals among the urban bourgeoisie of their time: Ottomanising Reformism (*osmanlicilik*) promoted by the government of Istanbul, the gradual configuration of a national awareness encouraged by the cultural and political movement of the Arab *nahda* (awakening), the definition of a set of social and aesthetic practices that gave cohesion and exceptionalism to the wealthy classes and that were manifested through the model of the *effendiya* (inspired by European dandyism), as well as, finally, the updating and perpetuation of a patriarchal family model.

Coinciding with the last decades of Ottoman dominion and driven by the millenarianism that impregnated some currents of Evangelic Christianity, many congregations and groups of a diverse religious nature arrived in Palestine. One of them was the American Colony, established in Jerusalem in 1881 in order to undertake shared life and philanthropic activities awaiting the second advent of Jesus Christ, which they believed was near. The Messianic convictions that had characterised the first generation of the members of this community gradually vanished as their children took over, many of them already born in the city and fully integrated into local life, so that they finally transformed the American Colony into a company supplying services of accommodation, guidance and production of images for tourists and pilgrims.

The photographic production of the American Colony is possibly the most extensive and varied in Palestine prior to 1948. Although it

initially focused on the provision of biblical images aimed at foreign visitors, it soon diversified until becoming a real cross-over pole for the creation of photographs to provide a service both to the Jewish colonisation agencies and the British colonial administration or the local and foreign press. It achieved, therefore, a triple position of centrality as, if on the one hand it acted as the main supplier of photographic services and bank of images, on the other it subcontracted work from already established professionals and contributed, ultimately, to the training of those members of the younger generations of local photographers who were beginning to enter the profession (Bair, 2010).

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The revolution of the Young Turks and the subsequent proclamation of the new constitution in 1908 prompted a boom in the written press, so that, at the end of that same year, fifteen new Arab newspapers had been founded in Palestine. And the number did not stop growing until 1914, when it reached thirty-five. Meanwhile, in the city of Jerusalem alone, four newspapers were published in Hebrew (Hassan & al-Kayyali, 2018, pp. 332-334). At the end of the First World War and with the establishment of the British mandate for Palestine this trend only increased with the appearance of some newspapers that are still important today, such as *Haaretz* (1918) and *The Jerusalem Post* (1932), which joined others previously created, such as *Filastin* (1911).

This expansion of the printed mass media opened the doors to the emergence of two new forms of photographic expression in Palestine: photojournalism and documentary photography. And with them came a new generation of professionals of the interwar period, in which Muslim Arabs would play the key role they had lacked during the previous stage. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the names of Hanna Safieh, Ali Za'rur and Khalil Rissas. In contrast to the previous generation, in which portraiture had a preeminent place in the feasibility of their businesses, the members of this new generation combined the work of illustration for the written press and a more or less stable contractual relationship with official bodies such as the British colonial administration and the Hashemite government of Transjordan, which were also beginning to need the photographic image in order to document and publicise their activities.

The new generation of Arab photographers would also be a politically more combative and committed generation than the preceding one, possibly because they had to live through a more convulsive period. Thanks to them we have the images that, from the Arab side, document both the Great Palestinian Revolt of 1936-1939 and the first Arab-Israeli War of 1948-1949, two events that ended with defeats for the cause of Palestinian nationalism. This explains why much of the work of these photographers was confiscated by the Israeli military authorities, who have only recently started to declassify it and allow it to be studied and returned to the descendants of its creators (Nassar, 2000; Sela, 2018a, 2018b).

The Photography of Father Ubach and His Assistants: References and Influences

Bearing in mind that the photographs taken by Father Ubach and his assistants were, in the end, conceived to illustrate the Great Bible of Montserrat, suggesting that their work may belong to another genre other than biblical photography would be incongruent. However, it would be no less imprecise and reductionist to state that the photography practised by the Montserrat monks is strictly circumscribed to the features characteristic of this type of representation, without diverting from it or adopting other points of view.

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In order to analyse the characteristics and influences concerning the choices made by the illustrators of the Bible, we have, on the one hand, over six thousand photographs from this collection and, on the other, additional and reference materials that Father Ubach and his assistants purchased in order to prepare this work. Thus, both the *Scriptorium Biblicum* and the library of the Abbey keep a sizeable number of engraving and photography books, postcard albums and commercial catalogues by photography studios in the Middle East that can help understand the legacy of the previous images and aesthetic approaches upon which they built their own visual treatment of the work they were dealing with. The two main groups of influences identified is, on the one hand, a series of specifically biblical works and images and, on the other, books of photography and photo-essays of a generically Orientalist theme.

Biblical Photography

A reference that is particularly relevant for illustrators of the Great Bible were the pictures by the studio established in Beirut by the French photographer Félix Bonfils in 1867 and continued by his son Adrien until 1894, when he sold the photographic collection to one of his trainees. He, in his turn, continued to market it until 1932 under the name *Photographie Bonfils, successeur A. Guiragossian, Beyrouth.* Many of the postcards compiled by Father Ubach in travel albums come from this studio, as well as some catalogues of the photos and glass plates they possess, and a luxurious photo-album entitled *Souvenir de Jerusalem*, held at the *Scriptorium Biblicum* in Montserrat.

Considered the most prolific studio in the Middle East, at its peak it had representatives in Jerusalem, Damascus and New York, as well as a photographic printing workshop in France. Its production is framed within the aesthetic references of pictorialism, aimed at a foreign public, and continues the usual themes of the biblical imagery, with its images of ancient documents, landscapes replete with sacred stories, stereotyped portraits of human types and genre scenes (Thomas, 1979; Apostolou, 2013). The latter, "staged" in the studio and embodied through extras regularly hired, enjoyed great success as they appealed to the desire for exoticism and to the then prevailing conception of an

Orient eternally anchored in the past (Nir, 1982).

We do not know if Father Ubach had a photographic background prior to his first sojourn in Jerusalem (1906-1910) but we know that he took photographs during his trip to Sinai in 1910, because he used them to illustrate the publication of that journey. Very likely, it was in these years, following his studies at the *École* Pratique d'*Études* Bibliques in Jerusalem, when he became familiar with the use that some of his teachers made of the photographic image to document and disseminate knowledge about the Bible lands.

In contrast to other religious congregations in Jerusalem, which saw in the production and marketing of biblical photography an additional source of funding, during those years the Dominicans of the Biblical School built an extensive collection of images conceived for exclusive internal use and intended as support for their teaching activities, as well as for the illustration of their academic publications. Their photography was conceived, therefore, with a strictly documentary function, prioritising the rigorously scientific representation of the objects to be documented over any other consideration of an aesthetic or devotional nature.

Given the quality and quantity of their work, two teachers stand out over the others: Father Antonin Jaussen and Father Raphael Savignac. They worked together and while the former – Arabist, archaeologist and ethnographer – specialised in stereoscopic photography and small format cameras, the latter – epigraphist and photographer – used large format cameras supported on a tripod. So, if the photography of the former is much more dynamic and sympathetic with the subjects to be documented, the latter is more rigid and frontal, but at the same time more accurate from a geometric and formal point of view.

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Both Jaussen's photographs and the increasingly more ethnological approach seem to have had a notable influence on Father Ubach, who shares an interest in Bedouins with this master, as well as the conviction that the nomadic forms of life are a reference that can help better understand some of the texts of the Old Testament (Escande, 2014; Neveu & Sanchez Summerer, 2021). He also shared with him – and with much of the Catholic clergy of Palestine – many prejudices regarding the Zionist colonisation enterprise which, over time, would turn to positions of outright rejection (Vidal Palomino, 2015, pp. 341-342).

It could be argued that, although the photographs of the Bonfils studio are a good example of the still prevailing end-of-the-century tradition and imagery on which Father Ubach and his assistants drew, the ethnographic vision of the Dominican Savignac and Jaussen of the Bedouins of Transjordan and the north of the Hijaz (A. Jaussen, 1908) points, in contrast, to a new reposition of the focus of interest on the forms of life of the local population, which would also become the hallmark of the Montserrat photographers.

Orientalist Photography in the Interwar Period

Father Ubach's purchases of photography books specialising in the Middle East during the mid-1920s, when he was just beginning his project to translate and illustrate the Bible, provide some clues on the forms of visual representation that he had in mind to develop. Notable among the books bought then are three German photographic essays on Palestine, all printed in 1925, as well as another on the city of Jaffa, from 1929.

The photographer's approach is quite uncommon, as, although he is very interested in the biblical narrative and references, the captions often combine the holy Christian texts with Jewish and Muslim texts.

The first of these works is *Palästina, Arabien und Syrien* by Karl Gröber (Gröber, 1925), focused on the traces of ancient and medieval Christianity in countries that he presents as anchored in a remote past. Of special note is his visual approach, still quite influenced by pictorialism, but that already paid detailed attention to the appearance of the local populations, their clothes and accessories as well as their attitudes and facial expressions. Moreover, the book by Ludwig Preiss *Palästina und das Ostjordanland* (Preiss, 1925) adopts a vision in keeping with the tradition of Orientalist photography, with a predominance of desert landscape, a lack of images of cities, and human portraits reduced to the usual characteristic types, all through a patina of modernity provided by the fact that some of the photographs are already in colour.

In contrast, the book by Georg Landauer, *Palästina: 300 bilder* (Landauer, 1925) offers a much more contemporary vision of Palestinian society in all its multifaceted diversity by including pictures by different photographers, such as Khalil Rissas, Zvi Oron and some of their colleagues at the Department of Photography of the American Colony. It is particularly interesting because of the contrast in this work between the "biblifying" traditional and Orientalist images, and the photographs of the Zionist colonies, which are shown as the epitome of a modernity that is possible even in those lands (Grossmann, 2018).

The only two volumes published of *Palestine illustrée: tableau complet de la Terre Sainte par la photographie* point to the same line of diversification of the perspectives in which the Dutch Frank Scholten (Scholten, 1929) presents the society of the port city of Jaffa. The photographer's approach is quite uncommon, as, although he is very interested in the biblical narrative and references, the captions often combine the holy Christian texts with Jewish and Muslim texts. At the same time, Scholten emphasises both the cultural diversity of the city of Jaffa and the transformations it experiences inside and outside its walled site in which Tel Aviv, which had been founded in 1909 as a suburb, had already taken on an urban category and was beginning to grow apace. Two clear ideas determine his portrayal of Palestinian society: on the one hand, to showcase it in all its diversity, not only religious but also social, and, on the other, to document the transformation underway in the country towards modernisation. And it is in his portraits where we better see this twofold aim because not only does he strive to obtain a true taxonomy of all the religious or cultural communities but he also seeks a balance in the representation

of the different social groups, portraying both the elites and the working classes. His photography of groups and individuals is mainly empathic, never imposed or stolen, the result of a dialogue and prior agreement between the photographer and the person photographed (Zananiri, 2021).

The anthropological and humanist approach that presides over both Landauer's and Scholten's photographs and that is also present in the surprising female portraits with which Antonin Jaussen, Father Ubach's former professor at the École Biblique, illustrates his last major study, devoted to the city of Nablus (J. A. Jaussen, 1927), seems to have had a notable influence on the photography of the Montserrat monks, in which we can see the same commitment to diversity and closeness to the subjects documented that we find in these last bibliographical references. Father Ubach and his assistants share with them the same relationship of interest and affection towards the individuals they photograph, as well as some sense of urgency to document a world, which was rapidly and irreversibly vanishing before their eyes.

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