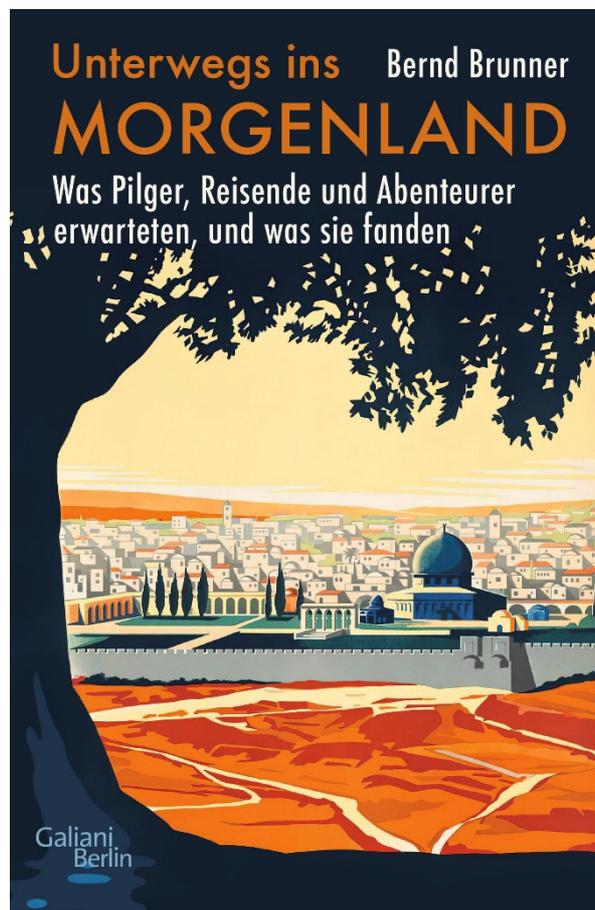


THEY CAME TO THE HOLY LAND **What Pilgrims, Travelers and Adventurers Expected and** **What They Found**

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Non-Fiction/Cultural History

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[Chapters in bold print are included in the sample translation]

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The Holy Land, a destination of longing and promise

For centuries, the regions at the edge of the Arabian Desert, on the River Jordan, and the shores of the Nile, Euphrates, and Tigris were home to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Palestine was the homeland of Jewish kingdoms before becoming part of the Roman and Byzantine Empires. From the sixth century on, various Muslim rulers and kingdoms followed and from the sixteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, the region came under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

The Holy Land, a slim transit zone between Egypt and Mesopotamia on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean, bordered to the East and South by desert, and to the north by the Lebanese mountains, was a region that held great emotional significance for Christian pilgrims as a destination of longing, utopia and promise.

Unlike Rome, which owed its attraction to the martyrs and the papacy, historic Palestine, with its unclearly delineated borders, was synonymous with the events in the Old Testament and what was passed down in the Gospels. Mainly in Galilee, but also other regions beyond modern-day Israel and the Palestinian Autonomous Territories, was where Jesus spent his earthly life: ‘ubi steterunt pedes eius’ – ‘where he walked the earth.’

Jerusalem, which was far away from important trade routes in the Judaeen Mountains and lacked fertile hinterland, was the main pilgrim destination, not least due to its important status in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. When pilgrims arrived, they threw themselves onto the ground, kissed the earth, and began searching for 'Biblical atmosphere'. The Holy Tomb, a chamber hewn into a rock massif with adjoining chapels, was always central to the pilgrims' journeys. Despite no complete body ever being recovered in Golgotha, except for a skull allegedly belonging to Adam, reverence for the site where Jesus died and Adam was buried continued unabated.

By contrast, the former Temple of Solomon, which was superseded by other structures over time, was an extremely sacred site for Jews. In its incarnation as the second Temple of Herod, it was located on a hill with a raised plateau. When the Babylonians destroyed the temple, the site lay derelict until Muslims laid claim to it in the seventh century, building the Al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock on it in an impressive, octagonal form. This is where the stone slab with the imprint of the Prophet Mohammed's foot lies, which was made as he ascended into heaven. The western side of Temple Mount is considered one of the holiest sites in Judaism, where the Wailing Wall can be found, the western wall of the former temple complex that belongs to the Jewish quarter of the Old City.

Temple Mount has been the site of clashes between Jews and Muslims from that time on.

By visiting these holy sites, pilgrims wished to absolve themselves of sin, be knighted, and pray that wishes to bear children would be fulfilled, or that sicknesses would be healed. Many, too, wanted to witness firsthand the mystery that surrounded these places. Although the majority of travelers to the Holy Land came from the Middle East with few exceptions, those who wrote extensively about the region were mostly European and, from the nineteenth century on, American. The region became a literary topos, opening up a world to Western readers that seemed familiar in some respects but was at the same time foreign.

The Holy Land did not first need to be invented in these written reports. It was already firmly anchored in the culture and self-image of the Western world through well-known Bible stories and characters that populated the collective memory. In this respect, it stood fundamentally apart from other areas of 'the Orient'. Jews and Muslims were also among those who traveled to Palestine but far fewer reports exist from these explorers in comparison to Christian pilgrims.

For many, traveling to the Holy Land involved a search for past traces of their own religion. However, the Christianity that pilgrims encountered there was different. The Christian community in Palestine

comprised a staggering sixteen different confessions. Oriental Christians not only seemed foreign in appearance but also in their interpretation of faith. What's more, Jews and Muslims who lived there further complicated the picture. Some pilgrims did not find the Holy Land they were looking for; rather, their 'prayers on foot' led nowhere.

After the Ottomans came to power, Palestine was part of Syria and did not form a separate administrative unit: the new rulers repartitioned the region or allocated land to different districts. Despite being a fixture in the *Geographia Sacra*, Palestine only became the focus of international attention at the beginning of the nineteenth century after the weaknesses of the Ottoman Empire became increasingly evident, Napoleon failed to conquer the area and European powers wanted to secure their position and influence there. According to the Eurocentric narrative, Palestine was an underdeveloped Ottoman province – a backyard, even – which now had to be rediscovered and refined.

Improved travel opportunities soon led to an increase in visitors who wanted to form their own impressions or confirm what they had read about the region. Their sentimental expectations were often not met by what they found there. The journey became a touchstone for the strength of their own faith. Many travelers were plunged into a deep crisis by the obvious disparity between their expectations and reality. In addition, European and American Christians, whether Catholic or Protestant, were not a

homogenous body by any means; rather, they had significant differences of opinion. The relationship between Protestants and Orthodox Christians was not as troubled as the one between Catholics and Protestants, whose animosities were already several centuries old. Protestants and Orthodox Christians, meanwhile, were united by their resistance to the primacy of the Bishop of Rome.

While the behavior of many Christian pilgrims towards Muslims in the Holy Land was problematic, colored as it was by their orientalist views, the same was true of their behavior towards Jews in the region, as well as members of other confessions, such as Orthodox Greeks, Armenians, Maronites, and Copts. Those who looked ‘foreign’ to visitors were often lumped together as ‘Orientals’. Once they had turned away from the overcrowded Biblical sites in disappointment, some pilgrims even believed they recognized Biblical figures in the Muslim Arabs they encountered in rural areas. Yet reports such as these do not follow a single pattern. They act like a window onto historical Palestine before the British mandate.

The Holy Land became a stage on which people encountered each other, a contact zone where representatives of different religions met. It was a country of dreams, a projection screen for all things biblical, a place of fulfillment or disenchantment. ‘From our first moment in the Promised Land, we had to become accustomed to looking past the uninspiring present and search everywhere for traces of the great past through eyes of faith,’

wrote the German Protestant theologian Karl Ohly in 1898 in his book, *Recollections of Travels to the Holy Land* (Reiseerinnerungen aus dem Morgenland).

In any case, there was much to document: thousands of reports were written during travels to the Holy Land. From the late eighteenth century onwards, explorers and adventurers arrived, soon followed by missionaries and tourists, whose paths and intentions sometimes overlapped and sometimes contradicted one another. They certainly cannot all be lumped together. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, Western emigrants also came to Palestine. They believed that the Apocalypse was approaching and that Christ would soon be resurrected. Parallel to this in the second half of the nineteenth century, the first settlement attempts took place, stoked by European anti-Semitism. Zionism started to take on increasingly concrete forms.

Reports by pilgrims, nature explorers, missionaries, adventurers, and fearless crossers of frontiers demonstrate a colorful, barely known chapter in the West's encounter with the Holy Land before Palestine was placed under British mandate, before the United Nations partition plan for a Jewish and an Arab state, and the foundation of Israel.

The Holy Spirit blows where it wishes – how holy are holy sites?

Are some sites holier than others? Early Christians have an unambiguous stance on this issue: only in the congregation of the faithful does God show his presence, not in a specific place. Jesus arose from the dead and ascended into heaven; but the places where he lived and died were not ascribed any particular importance. ‘Where one or two gather in my name, I am among them,’ as the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 18, states. The words of Saint Augustine of Hippo, born in Northern Africa in 354, also come to mind: God is omnipresent. In his *Confessions*, he wrote: ‘People go abroad to admire the height of mountains, the mighty waves of the oceans and the cycles of the stars, yet they pass unthinkingly by the secret of their own lives.’ Curiosity, which always played a role in pilgrimages, even if it was hardly talked about, was considered a vice by Augustine.

In a letter written in around 395, Saint Jerome tried to dissuade Saint Paulinus of Nola from undertaking a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. ‘I do not dare to confine the almightiness of God to narrow boundaries, nor to limit it to a small strip of land that does not include heaven. Believers are not weighed individually according to the diversity of their dwelling place, but according to the merits of their faith. And true worshippers do not pray to the Father nor Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim. Because God is spirit and those who pray to him have to pray in spirit and truth. The Holy Spirit blows where it wishes, the Earth and all that is in it belongs to the Lord . . . the gates of

heaven are just as open in Jerusalem as in Britain. The kingdom of the Lord is within you.’ Considering this passionate plea, it may come as a surprise that Saint Jerome wrote this letter in Bethlehem, of all places, where he lived from 386 and spent the rest of his life.

In the spirit of the gospels, then, there was no need for the faithful to travel to holy sites – neither those near their own countries nor those in the far-off Holy Land. Following this line of thought, the Crusades were unnecessary too because it was unimportant to the faithful who was in power in Jerusalem. But events took a different course: countless groups of pilgrims moved to Jerusalem, despite continual complaints about the city’s teeming crowds and the distractions people encountered there.

Egeria was not the first female pilgrim to visit the Holy Land. In ancient times, the leading pilgrim among rich ladies with ascetic tendencies was the Christian imperial patron saint, Helena, who gave the movement a certain respectability. As early as 326/327, she set off for the Holy Land, more than half a century before Egeria. According to legend, she supposedly ordered the excavations that led to the finding of the cross of Christ, including the nails used in his crucifixion, as well as the Holy Sepulchre and the Church of the Nativity. In the late fourth century, Constantin the Great declared some sites sacred that had allegedly come into contact with Christ’s body before he ascended into heaven and ordered the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the basilica above the Church of the

Nativity on the Mount of Olives. The original sites mentioned in the gospels had been lost when Hadrian razed ancient Jerusalem to the ground in the year 135 after the Bar Kochba Revolt. New creation myths linked to specific sites had to therefore be created. Cults of saints and martyrs added to the mix, also linking certain burial sites to places.

Thus the Holy Land offered Western European pilgrims something that could not be found at home and exerted a magnetic pull. From 451, it became the seat of the Patriarchate. For zealous Christians, the Holy Land became the 'heavenly Fatherland on earth', as the Swiss cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt described it in 1851 in *The Time of Constantin the Great* (Die Zeit Constantins des Großen). 'In countless believers, an irresistible urge grew to visit sites in person which they thought to be holy.'

In the year 614, Jerusalem was captured by the Persians, and in 638 by the second Caliph Umar, who then reconstructed the city. From then on, Jews were no longer permitted to enter the old Temple Mount; its western periphery, the Wailing Wall, became a symbol of devotion to Jerusalem and a destination for Jewish pilgrims as the last remains of the former temple. Although the conquerors severely subjugated the Christian population, its community survived and pilgrims continued to visit the country – albeit on suspicion of spying. During this time, pilgrims were mostly noblemen from France and Lotharingia, as well as Scandinavia, who traveled overland to the Holy Land via Constantinople. This gave them the advantage of being

able to visit the architecture in Byzantium, even though the city was not considered a pilgrimage destination.

A trip undertaken by the Frankish Bishop Arculf is known to have lasted at least two years, including long stays in Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Constantinople. Arculf came to Jerusalem after it was conquered but before the Dome of the Rock was constructed (687–691). He was praised for his precise descriptions of churches, mentioning, for example, a shroud laid in the tomb above the head of the Lord and the lance of the soldier who pierced Jesus's side while he was hanging on the cross. It seems odd from today's point of view that Arculf did not include aspects of Islam or Muslims in his descriptions of Jerusalem. However, there is this report: 'On the famous site near the eastern wall where the ancient temple used to stand in all its splendor, the Saracens have erected a square prayer house with upright planks and great beams that stands on top of the remains of the ruins. They visit it diligently and it is reported to hold up to 3,000 people.' Owing to his use of the term 'prayer house, this was presumably a mosque; the term 'Saracens' was used during that period as an umbrella term for various Muslim groups in the eastern and southern regions of the Mediterranean. He goes on to describe 'never-ending crowds of various tribes' who 'gathered on 12th September every year in Jerusalem from all around to exchange, sell and buy goods.'

Venetian and Byzantine shipping traffic did not intensify until the Arabs lost their strongholds in Italy and France. In the battles of Tours and Poitiers in 732, the French defeated the Moors and restricted their expansion north of the Iberian peninsula. When Byzantine power was restored in the strategically important Emirate of Crete in 961, maritime transport became safer in this region of the Mediterranean. Crete, which later became part of the Republic of Venice, was first conquered by the Ottoman Empire in the mid-seventeenth century.

The largest mass pilgrimage in the period before the Crusades was probably led by Bishop Gunther of Bamberg from 1064 to 1065, together with Archbishop Siegfried of Mainz and the Bishops Wilhelm of Utrecht, Otto of Regensburg and other religious dignitaries. They traveled to the Holy Land with more than 10,000 people. The Bishop of Bamberg left a report for posterity describing the torturous conditions of this journey which he wrote in the Syrian town of Latakia, shortly before he arrived at their destination. 'We went through fire and water, terrified by Hungarians, attacked by Bulgarians, beaten and forced to flee by Turks, suffered tribulations from the arrogant Greeks in Constantinople, and fits of rage by the Cilicians . . . But I fear that the worst is yet to come.' His predictions were correct: the entourage of pilgrims was attacked by Arabs just before they reached their destination not far from Caesarea. The bishop managed to

reach Jerusalem but then died on the return journey– of natural causes, it seems – and never saw his home country again.

It was precisely during this period that Christians, who suffered from constant oppression, began to form a concentrated community in the Christian quarter which was also the seat of the Patriarchate. From then on, Golgotha and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre were considered sacred sites of great importance. A decisive turning point was reached when in 1071, the Seljuqs emerged victorious from the Battle of Manzikert (Turkey's modern-day eastern Malazgirt region) and Byzantium had to forfeit most of Asia Minor. The Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus appealed to Pope Urban II for military aid and the Council of Clermont, which convened in 1095, resulted in the First Crusade – a kind of armed pilgrimage, and a consequence that the Emperor surely had not reckoned with. Four years later in 1099, Jerusalem was stormed by mounted Crusaders, and part of the population was massacred. Muslims and Jews were driven out of the city, ending the hitherto relatively peaceful coexistence of Muslims, Jews, and Christians. The mosques were converted into the seats of the Crusaders and the Byzantine temples were restored. Further to this, the Crusaders perpetuated the old Muslim *dhimma* system of protection, with the difference that Christians and Jews were no longer obliged to pay per capita tax but Muslims and Jews instead.

The relationship between the Latin Franks and Christians in the region – mostly Greeks and Armenians – was tense. The complete change in the region's circumstances resulted in a boom in pilgrimages to Jerusalem and the profit made from trade with pilgrims became the most important source of income in the city. As bandits more or less controlled the routes to and within the Holy Land, the journey remained highly risky and required travelers to be armed. During the Easter feast of 1120, 30 members of a party of 700 pilgrims were killed and 60 were taken prisoner. Although the route by sea to Jaffa via the Mediterranean entailed risks of its own and was more expensive than the overland route, demand in the twelfth century increased.

Even though the crusades continued until 1270, and the kingdom was maintained, at least in formal terms, the Battle of Hattin in 1187 ended in defeat for the Crusader states. In 1244, Jerusalem returned to Muslim jurisdiction, and in 1291, Acre was besieged and occupied by the Mamluks. The pilgrims found themselves in enemy territory once more and the flow of travelers ebbed. It wasn't until the fourteenth century that Christians undertook pilgrimages to Jerusalem once again.

[...]

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Jewish pilgrims from all corners of the earth

After King Solomon erected a temple in Jerusalem in the tenth century BC, the city became a destination for Jews to celebrate Passover, the Pentecost, and Sukkot. ‘Next year, Jerusalem!’ was a popular refrain. Benjamin of Tudela (whose birth name was Benjamin bar Jona) embarked on a legendary journey in the twelfth century from the northern Spanish kingdom of Navarra, which had been united with Aragon at the time and was one of the first provinces reclaimed from Muslims during the Reconquista. Not much is known about him except that he probably traveled as a commercial trader. He wanted to find out what conditions his fellow believers were living in and wrote reports on the Jews he encountered or whom he had heard about ‘from credible people’. He was also interested in the co-existence of Jews and non-Jews. His matter-of-fact account was written in Hebrew but contains a plethora of words in Arabic. Tudela traveled in 1168 via Italy and Byzantium – rather than North Africa and Egypt, as was usual for Jews living in the Muslim parts of Spain – to Palestine, which was still under the rule of the Crusaders. One of his remarks about Jerusalem was the following: ‘It is a small, well-fortified town with three city walls. Many people live here – the Muslims call them Jacobites, Arameans, Greeks, Georgians and Franks. One meets people who speak many different languages here. In the town, there is a dye works, for

which Jews have to pay the king the purchase price every year anew to reserve the dyeing business in Jerusalem for Jews alone. Around two hundred Jews live here. They live around the Tower of David in a corner of the town.’ He said of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre: ‘This is where the man is buried to whom all pilgrims make their way.’

Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinoro (Emilia Romagna) set off to the Holy Land in 1485 and several letters addressed to his brother and father have survived. He arrived during a period of great hardship. ‘Many of the Jews I saw begging for bread one or two days earlier have starved to death, and there was no one to give them any. People were found dead in their houses and many fed on grasses, going out like deer in search of pasture.’ He says this of the people he encountered: ‘You find many nationalities here, from Christian countries, from Babylon and Abyssinia. Arabs often go to the temple to pray. They have great respect for this place . . . no Jews are allowed on Temple Mount. When the Arabs sometimes let in wood turners or money changers for work, no one wants to go there because we are all tainted with impurities. I don’t know whether the Arabs enter the Holy of Holies.’ Obadiah found a house in the quarter near the synagogue. ‘In the courtyards surrounding my house, there are five apartments occupied solely by women. Only one blind man lives here, and the women provide for all of his needs.’ He never returned to Italy.

An anonymous Jewish traveler left for the Holy Land a few years later, in August 1495, taking a route via Venice, Corfu, Rhodes, Beirut and Damascus. He left Safed in Galilee ‘in the company of several Sicilians who joined other caravans of Jews, Christians, and Arabs. They were carrying a great fortune and therefore had to travel in convoy. We all paid 120 silver pieces per person for the trip to Jerusalem for which the leaders ensured we were exempt from all taxes.’

On the following morning, they reached the environs of Jerusalem. ‘On Friday 18 Heshvan, when I saw the desolate, bleak city, and the ruins of Mount Zion, where the lions and jackals now dwell, my heart shed tears and I sat down, cried, and as is custom, made two rips in my shift. Turning towards Temple Mount. I prayed that God would soon lead the captives of Israel back to their land, that we may yet see the dwelling place of the Lord, Amen.’

He remarked on the religious events in the city in the following way: ‘Jerusalem has some 200 Jewish families who keep themselves free of every kind of sin and fulfill God’s commandments with great zeal. There is no difference between them; rich and poor gather in the evening, morning, and midday to pray. Two god-fearing hazzans lead prayers quite reverently and speak each syllable clearly. The entire community rushes twice a day to hear the lectures of the 80-year-old Rabbi Zechariah Sephardi, may God bless

him and his descendants. He keeps them to a quarter of an hour after the morning and evening prayers so as not to inconvenience the public.’

He mentions his intention to visit the ‘tombs of the patriarchs’ in Hebron. ‘On the way is Rachel’s Tomb. I haven’t visited it yet because the routes through the Bedouins’ land are unsafe. Only recently, a Jew from Hebron who came here with his family was robbed of all he owned en route. I hear that Jews from Cairo and Damascus who come here to celebrate Passover travel in safe company on their way to Hebron. I’ll use this opportunity to go there if God lets me live.’

A slim volume with the title *Darke Zion* is written more in the style of a practical travel guide. Its author was Mose ben Israel Naftali Porges also known as Moses Präger and was probably published in Frankfurt am Main in 1650 in Jewish-influenced German. It gives exact details of the cost of certain routes and shows the two alternative paths from Constantinople to Jerusalem, by water or by mule in a caravan, which was estimated to cost ‘at least 33 löwentaler coins including taxes, excluding provisions and other individual expenses usually incurred when trekking.’ But he gives the following warning: ‘Not everyone can endure the ride, especially women, as one’s feet have to be at the same level and it is backbreaking owing to the lack of a backrest, which is why female travelers should have a sedan or a chair made in Constantinople that is tied to the mule. However, this increases costs as someone has to lead the mule.’

When staying in Jerusalem, Präger recommended that ‘travelers should not take too much silver and gold, even if one is wealthy, because it attracts a great deal of attention. Gold is also cheaper in Jerusalem than outside the [Holy] Land. Beautiful furs should not be taken due to appearance.’ Further, he reports on the conditions of Jews living in the area: ‘Every head of the family, every father, even the poor ones without homes, has to pay 3 löwentaler coins in land tax, half in the summer and half in the winter. All kinds of food and drink can be found in Jerusalem, but little money. For the rich, everything is cheap but the poor here go without more than in the entire world because the community is in great debt since the great devastation in Poland [1545] from where thousands have come every year.’ Präger renders many of the terms in his text in Hebrew too.

The fact that Jews ended up in Jerusalem via very circuitous routes is shown by the example of a certain Mattityahu in the 1890s. He came from the city of Mashhad in northeastern Persia where in 1839, the resident two thousand Jews were forced to convert to Islam and from then on, practiced their own religion in parallel in secret. To prevent suspicion that they were not real Muslims, some of them set off on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Hajj (Pilgrim) Mattityahu was among them, his tefillin, or prayer boxes concealed under his turban. On the route home, he broke away from the caravan and walked back to Jerusalem where he found accommodation in housing designed by the Württemberg-born archaeologist and architect

Conrad Schick. There, a synagogue was also later erected by his family in his name.

Pious Muslim pilgrims

Documents show that pious Muslim travelers made their way to Jerusalem, the third holiest city in Islam after Mecca and Medina. The nimbus of al-Quds, or ‘the Holy’ – the Arabic name for Jerusalem – derived not only from the fact that Jesus is an important prophet in Islam but also that it was Mohammed’s destination during his Night Journey, when, according to legend, he returned to Jerusalem and finally to Mecca, which was interpreted as proof of his godliness. What’s more, one interpretation is that he ascended to heaven during this journey with the help of a ladder from Judea. Jerusalem is also considered by Mohammedans as the site where the Last Judgement will take place. In the early period of Islam, Muslims prayed toward Jerusalem. Later the orientation was changed to centre on the Kaaba in Mecca.

The splendor of the architecture on Temple Mount bears witness to its major importance in Islam. Whether the erection of the Dome of the Rock as a holy shrine, finished in 691 under the direction of the Umayyad Caliph, Abd al-Malik, was truly linked to an intention to reroute the *hajj* or annual Islamic pilgrimage from Mecca to Jerusalem – because Mecca had

fallen into the hands of insurgents during this period – is not certain. Mecca has always retained its status as the most significant destination for Muslim pilgrims.

Jerusalem did not lie along usual pilgrim routes between Syria and Egypt or to Mecca so Muslim travelers always had to make a conscious decision to go there. And some did. The Franciscan monk Niccolò di Poggibonsi, who undertook a pilgrimage lasting several years from 1345 onwards, mentions Saracens who weren't able to travel to Mecca and who went instead to Hebron. 'Many of them come from Syria and Egypt and from the city of the sultan which is six days' travel away through the desert. Many come for the provinces, some for reasons of piety, others, to see what Christians worship.' The latter remark was probably wishful thinking on the part of the monk. In the surroundings of the Al-Aqsa mosque, there were several hospices reserved for Muslim groups.

In 1326, the legendary traveler Ibn Battuta from Tangiers in Morocco came to Jerusalem for a week. According to his descriptions, the city's defensive walls lay in ruins and the water supply had to be partially supplemented. 'God ennobles [Jerusalem] – the third most important city after the two holy mosques [in Mecca and Medina] and the site of the ascension of the Prophet [Mohammed] – God bless him and give him peace – from where he was taken into heaven.' He visited the Al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock. From Jerusalem, Ibn Battuta traveled on to

Damascus where he arrived during the Muslim month of fasting, Ramadan. There, he joined a *hajj* caravan that traveled onwards to Mecca.

In the Middle Ages, schools, mosques, and centers of instruction attracted scholars from the entire Islamic world. Jerusalem's magnetism for Muslims was emphasized by the high numbers of Sufis who had settled there. They came from Morocco, Crimea, Anatolia, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. A census in 1670 that was carried out by the Ottoman governor of Jerusalem, Jawishzadah Muhammad Pasha, found that at least seventy Sufi Orders were represented in the city. The renowned Istanbul-born explorer Evliya Çelebi, who spent a major part of his life traveling the Ottoman Empire and who visited Palestine in 1649 and 1672, even characterized Jerusalem as a 'Mecca for dervishes' and as an extremely diverse cultural and religious city. He added to these his impressions of a relatively densely populated country, mentioning hundreds of tombs, shrines, and monuments to holy figures from the Old and New Testament and Islamic history. He also remarked on the 'infamous Easter festival', saying that five to ten thousand Christians came to Jerusalem to attend, whom he describes as unbelievers who shall inherit hell. He also wrote about Jewish rituals and dwellings in a similarly derogatory way.

A famous Muslim pilgrim destination was, and continues to be, Nabi Musa, where tradition places the tomb of Moses, one of the most important Muslim prophets. Like Jesus, he is considered a predecessor of Mohammed.

The small walled-in mosque lies in Jordan Valley not far from the river. Pilgrimages mostly took place at the beginning of May. While there are hardly any documents on the subject because the culture of writing was barely developed at the time, the authors of *Through the Eyes of the Beholder*, Judy A. Hayden and Nabil I. Matar, assume that the number of Muslim pilgrims to Jerusalem and wider Palestine outnumbered those of Christians in the early modern period. ‘The annual pilgrimage caravans to Mecca and Medina, coming from Anatolia or central Asia, or the Maghrib, included thousands of men and women, many of whom visited the prophetic sites in Jerusalem and al-Khalil (Hebron).’

[...]

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Afterword

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the largest section of Palestine's population of around 375,000 people lived in the district of Jerusalem, with a further 200,000 to 250,000 people in the subprovinces (*sanjaks*) of Nablus and Acre, which were still part of the province of Beirut, and another 100,000 inhabitants in the region of East Jordan. Jerusalem also ruled over Gaza, Jaffa, Hebron, Bethlehem and Be'er Sheva. Since 1887, the *mutessarifat* of Jerusalem has been under the direct authority of the Sublime Porte in accordance with its increased importance.

The majority of the Muslim population in the region – a mixture of Arabs who invaded from the seventh century on and those already living in Syria – encompassed around 600,000 people. The rural population was divided into settled farmers (*fellahs*) and Bedouins or shepherds. Besides these groups, there were also Circassians, Kurds, and Druze in Upper Galilee. European Christians accounted for approximately 5,000 of the population, with the majority (3,000) being German, and of these, most were Templars from Württemberg. The number of Jews had meanwhile risen to around 100,000.

Numerous Jewish colonization companies and organizations worked in and for Palestine. In 1860, the Alliance Israélite Universelle was founded

to improve conditions for Jews living in the Holy Land. For a long time, emphasis was placed on French education and language at school, so that students graduating could emigrate to other countries. The Esra organization, which was founded in Berlin in 1884, differed in this regard; it aimed to help steer ‘the flow of Jewish emigrants from the Christian West to the countries of the Mohammedan Orient, especially to Palestine and Syria.’ The settlement of Yemeni Jews posed a challenge, who arrived from around 1882 onwards from South Arabia. The first Yemeni families sailed northwards on dhows from Sana’a. The colonists of Rehovot, the city where immigrants were initially given employment by labor unions, quickly identified their hardworking qualities and the possibility of using this cheap labor to be less dependent on Muslims. Besides this, the Yemenites proved to be a link in the chain between the colonists and the Arab population because they could speak both Arabic and Hebrew.

The Aid Organization of German Jews (Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden), founded in Berlin in 1901, who concentrated their efforts on developing a Jewish education system in Palestine, wrote in its report in 1909:

‘If the Orient develops as predicted, and if our fellow Jews in Turkey take part in this development to an outstanding degree, it will thereupon be possible to bring Russian, Galician and Rumanian Jews, who have to endure such terrible conditions at the moment, to Asia and thereby divert some of

those emigrating, possibly a very significant number, from current destinations, which are overcrowded developed countries and the United States to the Orient . . . Our fellow Jews in the Orient seemed predestined to become the mediators between Western culture on the one hand and the slowly developing culture of the Orient on the other.’

Western travelers often saw the people living in the Holy Land as ‘Orientals’ connected by a common culture. They envisioned the Jews, orthodox Christians, and Muslims who lived there as a kind of living museum. They were puzzled by the iconodulism, icons, and pronounced spiritualism of the Christians. But didn’t they have more in common than the things that set them apart? Hadn’t the journey to this region of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam resulted in more respect and humility?

A problematic issue was that Jerusalem, which was an important destination for most travelers – sometimes the *only* destination – came to represent the entire Holy Land, even though the composition of its population did not match Palestine, which had had a Muslim majority for centuries.

Reports exist of both peaceful coexistence and tensions among the various religious and ethnic communities. A book by the American historian Michelle Campos investigates the relationships between Muslim, Christian, and Jewish families and neighbors in Jerusalem’s Old City in the late

nineteenth century: these groups shared a courtyard, paid each other visits, and maintained long-standing business relations. ‘Muslim girls learned Judeo-Spanish from their Sephardi Jewish neighbors; Christian and Jewish musicians performed at Muslim weddings and holidays; and all three shared beliefs and traditions about the evil eye, droughts, and visiting the tombs of local saints. At the same time, religious, economic, and political rivalry appeared from time to time, and the practical aspects of “living together” could be a source of tension. Christians and Jews in particular had fraught intergroup relationships, especially around religious holidays and religious holy sites,’ Campos writes in *Ottoman Brothers* (2010).

It wasn’t until the final stages of the Ottoman Empire that Muslims and Jews living in Palestine began to see each other as rival political communities, both laying claim to *Filastin* (a term for Palestine that had long since fallen out of use), or *Eretz Israel*. Initially, they did so as citizens of the Ottoman Empire, even though Palestinian Muslims and Turks were somewhat estranged. Khalil as-Sakanini, a renowned Palestinian Christian and intellectual in Jerusalem, who had spent a few years living in America, conveyed in 1913 how weak nationalist feeling was at the time. ‘He pinned his hopes on the next generation and on emigrés who, he believed, would return to Palestine and spread nationalist ideas,’ according to the Israeli historian Shimon Shamir. As-Sakanini himself was allegedly not certain of his national identity. ‘Many Ottoman pashas believed that the Christians,

unlike the Jews, did not sincerely wish to integrate into the Ottoman society, but desired to overthrow it with the help of Christian European powers,' notes Shamir's colleague, Moshe Ma'oz in the same volume, *Studies on Palestine during the Ottoman Period* (1975).

Between 1915 and 1917, the British government signed three agreements regarding the division of the Ottoman Empire. Together with Hussein ibn Ali, Sharif of Mecca, which belonged to the Ottoman Empire, they supported the creation of an Arab kingdom. The negotiations over the exact drawing of the borders proved tough: in the Sharif's eyes, he wanted all of Syria and Mesopotamia to belong to his kingdom. In May 1916, the British and French signed the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, which established their respective spheres of influence in Syria and Mesopotamia for the postwar period. Germany, the Ottoman Empire's ally and Great Britain's adversary in the war, played no role.

On 2 November 1917, the British foreign minister Arthur Balfour promised in a letter to Lionel Walter Rothschild, honorary chairman of the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland, a vaguely worded 'national home for the Jewish people,' provided that 'nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.' The wording was chosen in agreement with the

American President Woodrow Wilson. It entered history as the Balfour Declaration and brought about a radical development. In December of that year, after a bloody battle, General Edmund Allenby marched his troops to victory through the hills leading to Jerusalem and through Jaffa Gate. After the end of the war, the League of Nations conferred Great Britain with a mandate to govern Palestine and Iraq, while France administered the territories of Syria and Lebanon. The political situation was thereby decisively altered and the end of the Ottoman Empire came as a surprise to many living in Palestine. It was turned into a political entity. In July 1922, the League of Nations officially gave Great Britain a mandate over Palestine. Transjordan was established to the east as a semi-autonomous emirate.

The influx of pilgrims soon began once more. Jewish travelers arrived on 'Zionist tours'. This strengthened their ties with *Eretz Israel*. They wished to have firsthand experience of the conditions there and develop their own attitude towards them. Later many immigrated there or were forced to flee their own countries. In the meantime, conflicts and tensions between the Muslims and Jews who already lived there began to simmer.