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# Palestinian Historiography: 1900-1948

TARIF KHALIDI\*

Between the end of the first Arab *Nabda*, or cultural renaissance, and the beginnings of the second stretches a period of intellectual history (c. 1900-1948) which relative scholarly neglect has made to appear one of unfulfilled promise. Not only did the Franco-British mandates fail to keep their political promises to the Arabs, but the *Nabda* too seems not to have fulfilled its intellectual promise. The heroes of the first *Nabda* had all died out by the year 1914 or thereabouts and, with the exception of a few outstanding individuals, the period of the mandates appears one of stunted intellectual growth. The bewilderment and frustrations of a political period appear to have infected its intelligentsia who, in turn, failed to match the excellence of their predecessors.

This conventional image of half a century of Arab cultural barrenness is only recently being revised.<sup>1</sup> From such adjustments of focus one gains an empathic awareness of the cultural equidistance of all generations from a supposedly ideal pinnacle. Brilliance or decadence are no longer adequate descriptions of the intellectual contributions of one era as compared to another. The Arab past speaks to us in many voices rather than in an alternating sequence of eloquence and triviality, renaissance and decline. Having abandoned subjective judgements of this kind, the historian of ideas

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the forthcoming *Intellectual Life in the Arab East: 1890-1939*, ed. Marwan Buheiry (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1981), where various intellectual figures and trends of this period are analysed.

may well turn to the analysis of the networks of culture in specially designated periods. Periodization itself becomes more useful when it sets aside these arbitrary criteria of excellence and seeks instead to distinguish and assess the particular cultural reflexes of particular Arab historical environments, each of which is as worthy of attention as the next.

The case for the barrenness of this period, however, cannot be so easily dismissed. To begin with, image and reality are of equal importance in history, and imagined barrenness deserves as much attention as real. Furthermore, where this half century is concerned, Arab political literature in general, and Palestinian literature in particular, register the anger and confusion of a generation that was taught to expect better of Albion. As one Arab country after another began to negotiate its independence, the volume of Palestinian rhetoric and polemic seemed to increase. The law, teaching and journalism, all of which are declamatory professions, attracted the vast majority of Palestinian intellectuals, creating and fuelling the polemic directed against the Mandate and its clients, the Zionists. The lawyers dissected to shreds the twentieth century's most fateful letter, the Balfour Declaration, in which Britain chose to brand their nation as the "non-Jewish" inhabitants of Palestine. The teachers instilled in their pupils the history and ideals of a homeland menaced by a danger perceived to be worse than brute force: fundamental injustice. The journalists pointed out the economic havoc and social violence engendered by the adamant pro-Zionism of British policy. Little wonder, then, that this frantic commitment to the cause of Palestine should produce a pervasive cultural tone of anguish and disgust, of resentment, resistance, rebellion and death. A "passionate intensity" appears to mar or at least to sour the literature of an entire generation. The historian of ideas encounters this passionate intensity in Palestinian literature of the Mandate period. However, to see nothing but polemic in this literature, as one recent Israeli writer has done,<sup>2</sup> is to engage in counter-polemic, the objective of which is, in this particular instance, to rebuke and vilify an entire cultural generation.

<sup>2</sup> Y. Porath, "Palestinian Historiography" in *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 5 (Fall 1977), pp. 95-104. This study begins with sweeping generalizations about Arab Muslim historiography where, according to the author, "no attempt is made to differentiate between reality and ideal", goes on to describe the transition from pre- to post-1948 historiography as one from "general-national to factional-personal apologetics" and concludes that "these low standards of Palestinian historical literature are bound to endure until the Palestinian Arabs attain a considerable degree of maturity in defining and fulfilling its (*sic*) identity", even though in the text itself, the author frequently describes this same literature as "important" and "illuminating." This highly polemical account of Palestinian historiography must be balanced by the brief but suggestive treatment of the same theme in Adnan Abu Ghazaleh, *Arab Cultural Nationalism in Palestine* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1973), chapter V.

The object of the present study is quite different. It is founded on the premise, alluded to above, that there can be no scientific or otherwise objective reasons to cause one to suppose that any one cultural generation is less endowed with intelligence than any other, less capable of giving of its best than its predecessor. Hence, a study of Palestinian historiography in a conveniently designated political period — the Mandate — must include a descriptive assessment of the socio-cultural environment of Palestine, the network of cultural relationships and the diffusion of cultural institutions. All these topics are worthy of analysis. All of them together illustrate the manner in which a culture and a society adapted themselves to a period of extreme national distress. This process of adaptation can only be understood on its own terms. It is neither a mechanistic projection of certain socio-economic conditions nor a list of ideas associated with a series of individuals. Least of all can this process be described as if it had been a flurry of useless nationalist rhetoric

Palestinian historiography constituted, of course, a special segment of Arab cultural life in the Mandate period. But the political pressures to which the Palestinians were subjected were undoubtedly more fearsome than those in any other Arab country of that era. Thus, the cultural scene in Palestine was more heavily charged with questions like nationhood and self-determination, communal reform and justice among other, equally “passionate”, questions. Historiography, in Palestine or anywhere else, involves the projection, and frequently the justification, of a particular communal self-image. But it is always an important key to the understanding of history itself.

#### THE ORIGINS

The Western onslaught on Palestine antedated the British Mandate by at least half a century. The British, French and Russian missionaries had begun to intensify their interests in Palestine, building schools, hospitals and churches in a bid to win the hearts and political allegiance of specific segments of the population. The Ottoman Sultanate had also fitfully embarked on a policy of educational reform, the object of which was to create military and civilian cadres for state service. The Arab population of Palestine was thus exposed to a host of new educational, social and political pressures. These pressures, however, were not uniformly felt by all groups. The Christian Arabs, both Orthodox and Protestant, were, at first, more vulnerable to Western influence than the Muslims, for these latter were forbidden to attend Christian missionary schools. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that a general relaxation of proselytizing enabled the Muslims to begin to join Western missionary schools. By the beginning of the twentieth century, these competing Western school systems

had succeeded in attracting Christian and Muslim Arab students, and instilling in them both an increased consciousness of an Arab cultural identity.<sup>3</sup>

Concurrently, the major cities of Palestine (Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa) were feeling the effects of economic changes that seemed to be transforming the Arab Near East as a whole in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The symptoms may be observed in such changes as the expansion of cities beyond traditional city limits, increased labour migration from countryside to city, the growth of the citrus industry and the opening of new railway lines. This quickening in the tempo of social life meant more intimate links with other Arab countries and with the West, bringing with it a new prosperity but also new tensions. The stirrings of nationalism, in the form of the rediscovery of the classical Arab literary heritage, coincided with a slow but steady influx of Jewish immigrants, many of whom were Zionists. Thereafter, the lengthening shadow of Zionism haunted the minds of an increasing number of Palestinian writers and journalists. The cities of Jaffa and Haifa were the first to feel the effects of these economic transformations and were also the entry points for Jewish immigrants. It is therefore not surprising that these two cities produced the three most influential newspapers in modern Palestinian history: *Filastin*, *al-Karmil* and *al-Difa'*.

By the year 1908, the Arabs of Palestine had received the educational benefits of over fifty years of native, regional and foreign schools and colleges. Although the number of students who benefited from these institutions was small, the impact on both the cities and countryside was considerable, creating a lasting enthusiasm for education that was often commented upon during the Mandate period.<sup>5</sup> These schools varied a great deal in their standards and their socio-political orientations. The rich clearly had greater access to education but poor students of merit had, by 1908, a far greater chance to obtain an education than heretofore. Furthermore, the colleges and schools of Cairo, Beirut and Istanbul attracted increasing numbers of Palestinian students, many of whom were to sharpen their sense

<sup>3</sup> On missionary activity, the works of A.L. Tibawi are of course authoritative: see, for example, his *British Interests in Palestine, 1800-1901* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); *Russian Cultural Penetration of Syria-Palestine in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Luzac and Co., for the Royal Central Asian Society, 1966); "The Genesis and Early History of the Syrian Protestant College" in *Arabic and Islamic Themes* (London: Luzac, 1976). See also D. Hopwood, *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine, 1843-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> See M. Buheiry, "British Consular Reports and the Economic Evolution of Palestine: the Mutasarrifiyya of al-Quds al-Sharif, 1885-1914" (Paper presented to the Amman University Conference on *Tarikh Bilad al-Sham*, April 1980).

<sup>5</sup> See A.L. Tibawi, *Arab Education in Mandatory Palestine* (London: Luzac, 1956), pp. 172-76, which notes the zeal of villagers for education.

of Arab nationalism in the intellectual ferment of foreign environments. Themes like Islamic reform, social Darwinism and secularism wove themselves into the fabric of their higher curricula, while in Palestine itself the native Arab Christians were fighting within their churches against foreign domination and the Arab Muslims were beginning to question the very foundation of their relationship to the Ottoman empire. It is from this pre-war period that the historian detects in Palestine the increasing pride that a series of outstanding teachers took in classical Arab history and literature, a pride which they consistently transmitted to their eager students. The names of *al-Mu'allim* Nakhla Zurayq (1861-1921) and *al-Mu'allim* Amin Faris (1867-1938) stand out among those early teachers of Arabic, figures of enormous respect and affection to their many students.<sup>6</sup> They and others strove not only to instruct their pupils but to transform their lives in accordance with the ideals of Arab *adab*, which seemed to thrive in the climate of the English schools of that period.

The tightening of censorship in the late Hamidian period restricted the scope of ideological discussion, driving many Palestinian intellectuals into an exile of one sort or another in Egypt and Europe, but the restoration of the Constitution in 1908 was a signal for many of them to return to Palestine. A great number of newspapers and journals were to appear in the period 1908-1914, offering, at least at first, a free forum for the expression of all shades of views to an intelligentsia that seemed to crave such freedom. It is from this period also that Zionism began to attract the regular attention of Palestinian writers like Najib Nassar (1865-1948), Ruhi al-Khalidi (1861-1913), 'Isa al-'Isa (1878-1950) and others. On the eve of the Great War, the Arabic press in Palestine and in cities like Cairo and Beirut had become fully alive to the dangers of the Zionist programme and thoroughly well-informed on the history of the Zionist movement.<sup>7</sup> From that period and up to the end of the British Mandate, the debate between Arabs and Zionists was largely a debate about history and historical rights. This debate

<sup>6</sup> For biographies of Palestinian intellectuals, see the biographical dictionary of Ya'qub al-'Awdat entitled *A'lam al-Fikr wa al-Adab fi Filastin* (Amman: n.p., 1976). This was published after the death of the author by a committee of his friends and although not fully comprehensive, contains a great amount of valuable biographical and other data, the judicious use of which would yield insights of much value into the cultural history of Palestine in the Mandate period. I have followed 'Awdat for most of the biographical material in this study.

<sup>7</sup> For a list of the Palestinian newspapers, see Yusuf Khuri, *al-Sabafa al-'Arabiyya fi Filastin 1876-1948* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1976), pp. 7-26. Khuri lists 15 new newspapers and magazines in 1908 alone. On Zionism and the Arab press in this period, see especially the two articles by Rashid Khalidi, "'Abd al-Ghani al-'Uraisi and *al-Mufid*" in M. Buheiry, ed., *Intellectual Life in the Arab East: 1890-1939*, and "The Question of Zionism in the Arab Press, 1908-1914" (Paper presented to the Amman University Conference on *Tarikh Bilad al-Sham*, April 1980).

was a major factor in moulding and then diversifying Palestinian historiography of that period.

#### EARLY RESEARCH

For reasons that will become evident below, a chronological treatment of Palestinian historiography that divides it into “periods” will not be attempted here. A number of major themes dominated historical writing in the Mandate period, and these themes were diffused through diverse media: the press, school textbooks, learned periodicals, regional and general histories, club lectures, school plays and radio broadcasts. Under the growing weight of the Zionist presence, most of this historical activity came to centre on the history of the Arabs and of Palestine, in an attempt to re-define the place that Palestine occupied in the Arab world in general and to emphasize its ties to Egypt and Syria in particular. Throughout the Mandate period the teaching of history was a constant source of friction between Palestinian patriots and the Mandatory power, for history had become closely linked with the issue of national identity.<sup>8</sup>

For most Palestinian historians, history was a national legacy to be used for reinforcing the on-going debate with the Zionists and the British over the issue of the right to Palestine. History was a storehouse of examples which new Palestinian generations must learn and digest. But much historical work was also produced which one might term antiquarian, having no other ostensible purpose than to unearth or record various aspects of Palestinian and Arab history and culture. However, as the Mandate progressed and was perceived to be dedicating itself to the realization of the Jewish National Home, the “antiquarian” scholars became more “nationalist.” Thus, on the eve of the dismemberment of Palestine in 1948, Father A.S. Marmarji (1881-1963) capped a lifetime of work in Semitic philology with a monumental topographical historical dictionary of Arab Palestine (*Buldaniyyat Filastin al-'Arabiyya*). In the introduction, he wrote:

In these days of crisis especially, truest patriotism is being demonstrated in Palestine and the solidarity of Arab nationalism is at its peak among Muslim and Christian Arabs. Their hearts are united; they are in full agreement; their sacrifices have multiplied; indeed, their blood has been spilt on the field of righteous battle... The texts cited in this topographical and historical anthology (*diwan*) are manifest proof of the Arab character of this land for many centuries past.<sup>9</sup>

As things turned out, the *Buldaniyyat* of Marmarji was a kind of epitaph for Arab Palestine. It remains, however, a basic work of reference, containing

<sup>8</sup> Tibawi, *Arab Education*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>9</sup> A.S. Marmarji, *Buldaniyyat Filastin al-'Arabiyya* (Beirut: Jeanne d'Arc Press, 1948), p. ج

extracts mainly from classical Arab geographers relating to the towns and villages of Palestine, and arranged alphabetically.

This work, besides demonstrating the shift from antiquarianism to nationalism, is typical of a certain genre of Palestinian historiography, one which sought to survey all aspects of the Palestinian scene. In the historical work of A.S. Khalidi (1896-1951), for example, much attention was paid to the Palestinian countryside. In a work reminiscent in its arrangement of Marmarji's *Buldaniyyat*, Khalidi wrote a biographical dictionary of prominent men from the Palestinian countryside (entitled *Abl al-'ilm wa al-bukm fi rif Filastin*), the material having been collected from various classical biographical dictionaries (*Kutub al-Tabaqat*).<sup>10</sup> In such works, and in others to be discussed below, the matter is scholarly but the spirit is nationalist. They are shot through with a sense of urgency, an awareness that the very soil of Palestine was about to change its character, while the dictionary form seeks to capture a fleeting historical reality and to record it for posterity.

The ethnographical studies of T. Canaan (1882-1964), Stephan H. Stephan and 'Umar al-Salih al-Barghuthi (1894-1965), all of which appeared in the *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, strove likewise to describe the folklore of the Palestinian countryside. Their articles contain a wealth of information of interest to linguists, historians and cultural anthropologists. The subjects ranged from "Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine" to "Animals in Palestinian Folklore" and "Judicial Courts Among the Bedouin of Palestine." Canaan was an active member of the Palestine Oriental Society and came to folklore through epidemiology. Within the Society itself, Canaan and his colleagues opposed Arab culture to the thinly-disguised Zionist attempts to highlight Jewish antiquities in Palestine. Stephan's wide knowledge of peasant life makes his articles far more informative than is suggested by their somewhat narrow titles. Barghuthi's investigations of the legal procedures and customs of the Bedouins throw light on more ancient Arab legal practice and lore. The voice that speaks in their ethnographic works is the voice of the cultural historian striving to show the Semitic roots of the Palestinian peasant as an ancient and continuous occupier of the land. A way of life is being threatened and the balanced prose of Canaan betrays a well-founded anxiety: "The European civilization which is bringing to Palestine many a blessing is eradicating at the

<sup>10</sup> A.S. Khalidi, *Abl al-'ilm wa al-bukm fi rif Filastin* (Amman: Ministry of Culture and Information, 1968). Two other works of considerable historico-ethnographic interest are Rafiq al-Tamimi and 'Ali Bahjat, *Wilayat Bayrut* (Beirut: Dar Lahd Khatir, 1979; offset of the 1916 edition), and Ilyas Marmura, *al-Samiriyyun* (Jerusalem: Maktabat Filastin al-'Ilmiyya, 1934). The first contains very detailed sociological information on northern Palestine in the early twentieth century, while the second is a careful and scholarly history of the Samaritans.

same time many a beautiful and sound moral principle.”<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to the historiography of the countryside, there was a historiography of the cities of Palestine. Typical of that genre is the work of historians like the Reverend As‘ad Mansur (1862-1941), ‘Arif al-‘Arif (1892-1973) and Ihsan al-Nimr (b. 1905). The first is a historian of Nazareth, the second of Jerusalem, Gaza and Beersheba, and the third of Nablus. All these writers included material of a topographical, sociological and archival nature in their works. Mansur’s work on Nazareth is especially valuable on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His history, interestingly enough, grew out of a personal diary, which explains the vividness of the modern section of the work and also the advice he gives his readers: “I hope that the people of the country (*wataniyyun*) will take greater care than before to record events in their diaries, which is a pleasant thing for them to do and a service to future generations.”<sup>12</sup>

The work contains a detailed topography of Nazareth, its markets, quarters and buildings. There is equally detailed information on the Muslim and Christian families of Nazareth, who are, in fact, his immediate audience, and to whom he occasionally quotes the Koran. His account of the church affairs of Nazareth is indispensable to the understanding of the politics of a city which was a focal point of missionary activity. His use of Fahum and other family documents reflects his scholarly thoroughness, but serves also to remind modern readers of the vast amount of Arab family archives and libraries that were destroyed when Israel was created in 1948.<sup>13</sup>

The other two historians, al-‘Arif and al-Nimr, breathe the same air. The first was a political writer and historian, a journalist and, later, a civil servant under the Mandate. His administrative posts in various Palestinian cities gave him easier access to his materials. Like Mansur, al-‘Arif plainly strives to recreate a pre-Hebraic Palestine and to divorce Arab from Islamic history by giving the first a more ancient lineage: “For we must consider Gaza to have been an Arab city all through the ages... and that the Muslim conquest... was merely a new consolidation of the Arab conquest which preceded it.”<sup>14</sup>

His history of Gaza includes the same range of material as Mansur’s Nazareth, though it is less tightly constructed. The topography and sociology of the twentieth century is probably the most profitable part of the work,

<sup>11</sup> T. Canaan, “Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine,” *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, 7 (1927), 186.

<sup>12</sup> As‘ad Mansur, *Tarikh al-Nasira* (Cairo: Matba‘at al-Hilal, 1924), p. 3

<sup>13</sup> The libraries of, for example, ‘Abdullah Mukhlis, ‘Ajjaj Nuwayhid, Darwish al-Dabbagh, Ishaq Musa al-Husayni, Wasif Jawhariyya and Khalil Baydas, to name only a few. A comprehensive study of this issue would be of considerable interest.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Arif al-‘Arif, *Tarikh Ghazza* (Jerusalem: Matba‘at Dar al-Aytam al-Islamiyya, 1943), p. 114.

since he disclaims any originality for the earlier history of Gaza, asserting that he merely collected and arranged the accounts of Arab and Western predecessors.

For al-'Arif, Gaza's importance is primarily strategic: it is the key to Egypt and has been so throughout history. As a historian, his audience was always the Arab nation: it is they who are to be acquainted with the history of the "small pieces of land" that constitute Arab Palestine. The Arab unionist sentiments of the author animate all his histories. His *History of the Sanctuary of Jerusalem*, written on the eve of the collapse of 1948, echoes with the thunder of the gathering storm, a beleaguered Palestine fighting desperately to retain its Arab character.<sup>15</sup> Here too no claim is put forward for any originality and his sources are the classical Arabic authors and some contemporary English accounts. To his credit, however, is the fact that he, like Mansur, used archival material, in this case the records of the Jerusalem *Shari'a* Court. His minute description of the various architectural features of the *Haram* are reminiscent of the Arab medieval *ziyarat* genre of historiography, popular especially in times of major national crises.

The third historian, Ihsan al-Nimr, published the first volume of his history of Nablus (entitled *Tarikh Jabal Nabulus wa al-Balqa'*) in 1938.<sup>16</sup> The clan of al-Nimr had been a powerful group in Nablus, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when they acted quite often as *mutasallims* (financial agents) of the city. The family, according to al-Nimr, kept the most extensive family documents in the Nablus region, and he used these and other family papers to construct a history of a city and its region withstanding a succession of Bedouin attacks, civil wars, tribal polarization and revolts against the central authority. The work is encumbered by a massive array of names and dates and the thread of the "story" is frequently invisible. He writes from within a feudal tradition spanning both sides of the Jordan (hence the title of the work) and this, among other things, helped him to determine the geographical limits of his chosen region and to date the modern history and prosperity of Nablus to the late seventeenth century. His own family plays a prominent role in the story but many other families, family trees and family histories are recorded and a large amount of correspondence between governors and local potentates is quoted at length. In later volumes, al-Nimr deals with the society of the region, attempting to highlight the progress achieved by the city, especially in the fields of commerce and learning.

The various city and countryside historians and ethnographers discussed

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*, *Tarikh al-Haram al-Qudsi* (Jerusalem: Matba'at Dar al-Aytam al-Islamiyya, 1947).

<sup>16</sup> Ihsan al-Nimr, *Tarikh Jabal Nabulus wa al-Balqa'* (Damascus: Matba'at Zaydun, 1938).

above are probably a fair sample of the topographical genre. Seen as a whole, their histories constitute a kind of land survey where the authors seek to repeople the terrain with the thick presence of ancestors, as if in response to the continuing obliteration of Palestine by Zionist settlements. They seem anxious to lay their hands on the maximum amount of information, like landowners harassed by a complex law suit. This massive Arab historical existence on the land of Palestine was a means of forging a sense of national unity, but also a reminder to both enemy and friend that violence was near.

#### TEACHING HISTORY IN SCHOOLS

The greatest amount of history disseminated was, of course, through school textbooks. These texts were tightly controlled by the Mandatory government and were presumably excised of all their "inflammatory" material. What remains, however, is a large number of textbooks on Ancient, Syrian and Palestinian, Arab and European history, well printed, frequently illustrated, and often provided with maps and genealogical tables.

The image of history projected by these textbooks was, as was noted above, a subject of considerable controversy in Arab Palestinian circles. Government censorship was accused of banishing Arab history from the curriculum and some of the very earliest history textbooks seem to reflect the heavy hand of the censor. In one such textbook (1926) which deals with Europe from the end of the Roman Empire to World War I, only three paragraphs are devoted to the Arabs, and these stick out of the rest of the book like Stendhal's "pistol shot in the middle of a concert". The passage is worth quoting in full:

*The Age of Scientific Renaissance – Greek Philosophy and Sciences Transmitted by the Arabs: Introduction:* The Arabs assaulted the Byzantine Empire from the south. When they entrenched their power in the land, they Arabicized their bureaus of government and made their subjects address and write to them in Arabic and did not act like other conquerors. In order to dispense with foreign languages, they translated into Arabic what they needed and added thereto their own knowledge. They translated from all languages but mostly from the Greek. They relied on the Greeks for philosophy, medicine, geometry, music, astronomy and logic and translated other sciences to the point where they seem to have inherited the sciences of Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Persians, Indians and Greeks. They mixed all this together and extracted from them the sciences of Islamic civilization. However, most of their translations and works are lost and only a little remains. It was this upon which the Europeans relied in their scientific renaissance.<sup>17</sup>

This passage bears no relationship to the rest of the book except as a sort of footnote appended to an account of European history by an Arab who obviously was barely allowed to insert a few words into a tale of European

<sup>17</sup> Hanna Dahdah Farah, *al-Tarikh* (Jerusalem: Matba'at Bayt al-Maqdis, 1926), pp. 44.

kings and battles. Even the dates of this “Arab renaissance” are lacking. The work, entitled only *al-Tarikh* (History), was evidently written to conform with the syllabus of the Government for the fifth elementary class. This syllabus was to undergo considerable change in the thirties, when Arab pressure both within and without the Department of Education forced the inclusion of more sizeable chunks of Arab history and the appearance of Arab Palestinian history textbooks. Almost all were produced by practising teachers of history, a group that had a considerable impact both inside Palestine and on surrounding Arab countries, especially Syria and Iraq.

A few words about the teachers before turning to some other textbooks. Between the two wars, a number of dedicated history teachers in Palestinian schools, many of whom were graduates of the American University of Beirut (a hub of nationalist thought in the twenties and thirties), used history to arouse a feeling of Arab communal unity — Christian and Muslim — in the face of foreign menace. A series of new and secular Arab schools had begun to appear in Palestine as early as 1908, with the Dusturiyya school of Khalil Sakakini (1878-1953). With the coming of the Mandate and the adoption of Arabic as the principal teaching medium, other national and secular schools were founded, such as the *Rawdat al-Ma‘arif* of Shaykh Muhammad al-Salih (d. 1939), the *Najah* school in Nablus (1918) and the *Umma* school (1938) of Shukri Harami (b. 1898). The foreign schools (British, French and Italian) were also involved, although indirectly, in this assertion of communal history, as were the Government schools, of course, and the various church and Muslim Council schools. No amount of censorship could prevent history teachers from infusing their pupils with a heightened sense of nationhood. It was the combined impact of a determined generation of teachers which forced the Mandate to accord greater space to Arab and Palestinian history in the syllabi of the thirties and forties.<sup>18</sup>

The history textbooks examined reveal the gradual growth of a collective endeavour in the process of authorship. These textbooks vary little in format and arrangement of material. Chapters are usually quite short, especially in elementary level histories, and these are frequently followed by historical tables and by sample questions for classroom use. Much care was taken to adapt the material to the presumed mentality of schoolchildren. As might be expected, they are heavily weighted on the side of political history and the deeds of great men, although some contain social material, for example, definitions of such things as nomadism and sedentarism, or of major

<sup>18</sup> Among these teachers, one might name Darwish al-Miqdadi (d. 1961), ‘Abd al-Latif Tibawi (b. 1910), Shukri Harami (b. 1898), Wasfi ‘Anabtawi (b. 1903), Khalil Tawtah (1887-1955), ‘Umar al-Salih al-Barghuthi, Niqula Ziyada (b. 1907) and Mahmud al-‘Abidi (b. 1907).

economic upheavals such as the Industrial Revolution in Europe. The tone is on the whole didactic, pointing out the virtues of communal or national unity in history and the evils of sectarianism. The achievements of classical Arabic and Islamic culture are given prominence but not the history of, say, trade and commerce. Great care was taken to ascertain the accuracy of dates and events, and many texts were provided with footnotes, a result of the wide vetting of textbooks before and during their official prescription in schools. They seem to present a picture of daily life in ancient times which is more vivid than that of modern times and most of them make history end with the First World War, avoiding the controversies of contemporary history. Their coverage of time is often immense, perhaps too immense. But their accuracy, their readability and their attractive format and illustrations give them a unique place in the history of Arab school textbooks.<sup>19</sup>

#### THE CHALLENGE TO ORIENTALISM

The accuracy of these history textbooks is itself a reflection of the sustained attention that a constant number of Palestinian schools gave to the history of their homeland and of the larger Arab world. Because of the breadth of topics they dealt with and their diverse attitudes and methodologies, it would be a difficult, and perhaps also a mechanical, task to go about ordering and arranging them by period, group, class, region or some such criterion. First and foremost, it is their “voice” which must be recaptured, together with the ripples which this produced. The two major themes they dealt with were, broadly speaking, civilizational: the encounter between the Orient and the West and the place of Palestinian culture in the Arab world as a whole.

Where the East-West theme is concerned, the historical works of Ruhi al-Khalidi and Bandali al-Juzi (1871-1943) are of special merit. These two are, in a sense, the pioneers. Their evocation of the East-West theme grew out of their profound familiarity with both classical Arabic and Western cultures – in Khalidi’s case Turkish and French and in Juzi’s Russian – and of their prolonged stay in the West. Both came from Jerusalem families with scholarly traditions, both completed their university education in the West

<sup>19</sup> The following school textbooks were examined: Mahmud al-‘Abidi, *Tarikh al-‘Arab* (Nablus: Hajjawi, 1938; 6th ed., 1947); Sa’id al-Sabbagh, *al-Madaniyyat al-Qadima wa Tarikh Suriyya wa Filastin* (Jaffa: al-Tahir, 1944); Rafiq al-Tamimi, *Tarikh al-‘Asr al-Hadir* (Jaffa: al-Maktaba al-‘Asriyya, n.d. [1946]); Muhammad ‘Izzat Darwaza, *Durus al-Tarikh al-Qadim* (Jerusalem: Dar al-Aytam al-Islamiyya, 1936); *idem*, *Durus al-Tarikh al-‘Arabi* (Haifa: al-Maktaba al-Wataniyya, 1934); Wasfi ‘Anabtawi and Husain Ghunaim, *al-Mujmal fi Tarikh al-‘Usur al-Mutawassita wa al-Haditha* (Jaffa: al-Maktaba al-Asriyya, 1943). The most controversial of these textbooks was ‘Umar al-Salih al-Barghuthi and Khalil Tawtah, *Tarikh Filastin*, published in 1922 and concerning which, see Tibawi, *Arab Education*, p. 198. In the same work (pp. 90-91), Tibawi examines the history syllabus briefly.

and both married foreigners. Both published extensively in the Arabic press of Egypt and Syria, where they excited much attention for the novelty and profundity of subject-matter and treatment. They both wrote in a simple, marvellously refreshing style, rigorously pruned of rhetoric or circumlocution. The range of topics dealt with was sweeping in each case. Khalidi wrote books and extended essays on the history of the Eastern Question, the history of comparative Arabic and French literatures, an account of the events of 1908, and histories of comparative linguistics and of Zionism (the last two still in manuscript form). Juzi wrote on the history of intellectual and revolutionary movements in the Arab world, the history of the Church of Jerusalem, Anglo-Egyptian relations, and a Russian-Arabic dictionary.<sup>20</sup> Ruhi's contributions to the first *Nabda* is only recently being assessed while Juzi has been something of a hero to the Arab intellectual Left for some years, but neither has so far received the attention he truly deserves. What follows provides but a bare outline of their accomplishment.

In Khalidi's posthumously-published *Introduction to the Eastern Question (al-Muqaddima fi al-Mas'ala al-Sharqiyya)*, an account is given of the origins of the Question up to the second quarter of the eighteenth century. It is, in fact, a neo-Ibn Khaldunian *Muqaddima*, in which the fate of the Ottoman Empire is placed in the much older context of the pendulum of conflict between the Islamic East and the Christian West, and of Asia against Europe. In the introduction, and after having acknowledged the contributions that Western orientalists had made to the study of the Eastern Question, Khalidi proceeds as follows:

For I believe that the flash of truth shines forth only with the clash of ideas. If we all join in this endeavour, we can in future furnish the Ottoman nation with a comprehensive history of its political life. European scholars ('*ulama' al-Ifranj*) who have written on this subject, in spite of their great concern for truth and justice and their lack of ignorant prejudice, have often sacrificed the interests of Eastern countries to the interests of European states. The best proof of this is in the distinction they make as regards the subject of international law between Christian and non-Christian countries, as if justice in the first were different from justice in the second. Sound reason dictates that justice is indivisible and does not change with time nor with differences of countries and religions. Furthermore, the

<sup>20</sup> The works by these two writers examined for this study were: Ruhi al-Khalidi, *al-Muqaddima fi al-Mas'ala al-Sharqiyya* (Jerusalem: Matba'at Dar al-Aytam al-Islamiyya, n.d. [1925?]); *idem*, *Tarikh 'ilm al-Adab 'ind al-Ifranj wa al-'Arab*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1912); "al-Inqilab al-'Uthmani" in *al-Hilal*, 17 (1908), 67-83 and 131-71. Bandali al-Juzi, *Min Tarikh al-Harakat al-Fikriyya fi al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Rawa'i, n.d.). On Ruhi, see Nasir al-Din al-Asad, *Mubammad Ruhi al-Khalidi* (Cairo: League of Arab States, 1970). For some of Juzi's shorter writings, see Bandali Saliba al-Juzi, *Dirasat fi al-Lugha wa al-Tarikh al-Iqtisadi wa al-Ijtima'i 'ind al-'Arab*, eds., Jalal al-Sayyid and Naji 'Allush (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1977). Ruhi's two manuscript works, *Kitab 'ilm al-A sina* and *al-Sahyuniyya*, are in the possession of the Khalidi family.

ignorance among political historians of oriental languages and of the basic truths of the Muslim law gets them lost in the intricacies of the Eastern Question and leads them astray from the path of truth (written in 1897).<sup>21</sup>

It would be instructive to compare this passage with another, written some thirty years later, by Juzi. This comes from the introduction to his famous work entitled *From the History of the Intellectual Movements in Islam (Min Tarikh al-Harakat al-Fikriyya fi al-Islam)*. The introduction, entitled “The Unity of Social Laws,” attempts to show how Western orientalisks have constructed one sort of progressive image of their own history and civilization and another image of a static, arrested East.

If we bear in mind the fact that the first to formulate the principles of the science of history and the methods of historical criticism were Western historians like Niebuhr, Ranke, Schlosser and others, and that these historians based their rules and theories on Western history alone since they knew little of Eastern history, it becomes easier for us to realize how strange and heedless are the remarks of certain Western historians regarding the East.<sup>22</sup>

He quotes several passages from the Orientalists, the most damaging of which are the remarks of Ernest Renan and which he says time has demonstrated to be false, and continues as follows:

Suffice it for us here to state that the origin of these barren and corrupt ideas is, firstly, the ignorance of the history of Eastern nations by those who hold them and their inability to analyse the historical material which they then possessed in a purely scientific manner. Secondly, those writers based their judgements on the future of Eastern nations on the basis of their cultural and social state of affairs in the recent past.... It is exactly as if an Arab Muslim of the Tenth or Eleventh centuries were to visit the Europe of that age and, observing their ignorance, religious prejudice and poverty, condemned them to stagnation and dismissed their future, saying “They cannot possibly have a social life in the accepted meaning of the word in this present age.”<sup>23</sup>

Juzi concludes that both East and West follow the same social laws of development and that neither possesses a natural advantage over the other. The rise and decline of civilizations and states have independent material causes, totally unrelated to religion or national character.

Both writers thus adopted a more realistic view of the international struggle of their day. The interest of the passages quoted above lies not so much in the disenchantment with Orientalism, born no doubt of the close familiarity of both men with the Orientalist corpus, but in the fact that they were free from the love-hate syndrome towards the West from which many Palestinian historians suffered during the Mandate period — the bitter

<sup>21</sup> Ruhi al-Khalidi, *al-Muqaddima fi al-Mas'ala al-Sbarqiyya*, author's introduction, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Bandali al-Juzi, *Min Tarikh al-Harakat al-Fikriyya*, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Juzi, *Min Tarikh*, pp. 11-12. The book first appeared in 1928.

discrepancy between the idealism of a British education, for example, and the reality of British mandatory policy.<sup>24</sup> Juzi was a pioneer historian of Arab social and economic history, of populist movements and of intellectual history in its social milieu. Khalidi, in his unpublished essay on Zionism written between 1909 and 1912, gives a sweeping and brilliant account of the history of the Jews, especially of Russia and the Ottoman Empire, and of his own observations of Zionist activity in the Ottoman capital in the late nineteenth century. Zionism he defines as Jewish eschatology, hence its attraction for underprivileged Jews. He highlights the socio-economic factors in the rise of Zionism and makes frequent and illuminating comparisons between, for example, the Jews of Russia and the Huguenots of France. He describes Herzl's role as one of transforming the "Zionist question or the Colonization of Palestine" from its early origins as a charitable and agricultural movement to an economic and political one, and he ends by listing all Zionist establishments in Palestine up to the year 1909. As a member of the Ottoman parliament, he was a consistent and forthright critic of Zionism, right up to his death in 1913.

The work of scholars like 'Abdallah Mukhlis (1878-1947), the Reverend Ilyas Marmura (1887-1974), Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi and 'Abd al-Latif Tibawi (b. 1910) takes us right into the heart of the Arab history of Palestine.<sup>25</sup> These scholars mapped out the basic outline of the story in a host of monographs, journal articles, lectures and broadcasts. There is intense concentration in their work and an urgency to communicate the results of their research to the widest possible audience. In some, the appeal to Egypt for help is evident in the choice of topic; in others, it is an appeal to the common cultural heritage of the Arabs through the investigation of specific cultural institutions or trends. In all cases it is a thickly footnoted historiography, sober and objective in its conclusions, anti-sectarian, tolerant, using sources in several Eastern and Western languages in addition to Arabic, often microscopic in theme. Contacts with Egyptian and Syrian scholars were frequent and close and Palestinian historians were regular

<sup>24</sup> A typical instance of this widespread feeling of disenchantment with British justice is in T. Canaan, *The Palestine Arab Cause* (Jerusalem: The Modern Press, 1936), p. 16. Canaan writes, "We Arab Christians of Palestine who were mostly educated in British schools... admiring British justice, British manners and British policy are those at present who hate most bitterly the unchristian policy of Great Britain."

<sup>25</sup> A fairly complete listing of all books written by Palestinian authors until the year 1946 is to be found in *al-Kitab al-'Arabi al-Filastini*, published on the occasion of the First Palestinian Arab Book Exhibition (October 1946) by *Lujnat al-Thaqafa al-'Arabiyya fi Filastin* (Jerusalem: Matba'at al-Liwa', 1946).

contributors to the leading Arab literary journals of the period.<sup>26</sup>

Mukhlis wrote with meticulous care on such topics as “The Minaret of the White Mosque in Ramlah” – in reality a short history of the town itself – or “Muslims and Christians,” originally a lecture, which sketched the history of the relations between the two communities through the classical Arab period and attributed the modern causes of friction to the independence of the Christian territories of the Ottoman Empire and to missionary schools, which he accused of glorifying European nationalism at the expense of Arab. He believed that Christian-Muslim understanding was essential for the preservation of the Holy Land as an Arab country. Mukhlis was also a distinguished textual editor, as evidenced by his edition of the history of Fatimid wazirs by Ibn Munjib al-Sayrafi. Together with other Palestinian men of letters, like Khalil Sakakini and Is‘af al-Nashashibi (1882-1948), Mukhlis was elected a member of the Arab Academy of Damascus in recognition of his distinguished literary achievement.<sup>27</sup>

Like Mukhlis, Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi also edited a number of important manuscripts of the classical *fada’il* genre of historiography, dealing with the “virtues” of Jerusalem. These texts were in origin designed to rally Muslim sentiment and also, according to Khalidi, to warn would-be invaders of the sanctity of every foot of Palestinian soil. Towards the end of his life, Khalidi turned to a more extended treatment of such topics as the history of Muslim educational institutions, especially the institutions of Jerusalem. According to Khalidi, this history displays certain characteristics, such as the concern for pure knowledge, the journey in quest of learning, the building of enormous libraries, and the contribution of women to education and culture, as well as the sustained interest of various Muslim states in the welfare of educational institutions and students. These were the “lessons” of history, but they were plainly guidelines to present and future practice also. Palestine

<sup>26</sup> The appeal to Egypt is explicit in such works as Khalil Sakakini, *Filastin ba’d al-Harb al-Kubra* (Jerusalem: Matba’at Bayt al-Maqdis, 1925), pp. 32-33 and 50, and implicit in A.S. Khalidi, *al-Ma’abid al-Misriyya fi Bayt al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem: al-Matba’a al-‘Asriyya, 1946). On Arab education, see Khalil Tawtah, *al-Tarbiya ‘ind al-‘Arab* (Jerusalem: al-Matba’a al-Tijariyya, n.d. [1933?]), which sketches the contribution of the Arabs to the theory and practice of education. A work in a similar vein is Qadri Hafiz Tuqan, *Turath al-‘Arab al-‘Ilmi fi al-Riyadiyyat wa al-Falak* (Cairo: Matba’at al-Muqtataf, 1941), which seeks to remind modern Arabs of their valuable scientific heritage.

<sup>27</sup> The following two works by Mukhlis were examined: *Ma’dhanat al-Jami’ al-Abyad fi al-Ramlah* (Beirut: al-Matba’a al-Adabiyya, n.d. [1925?]); *al-Muslimun wa al-Nasara* (Haifa: Matba’at al-Zahra, 1928). His edition of *al-Isbara ila man nal al-wizara* by Ibn Munjib al-Sayrafi is in *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale*, 25 (1924), 49-96. Mukhlis published most of his works in Syrian and Egyptian, as well as Palestinian, journals. His unpublished memoirs, preserved under the title *Awraq ‘Abdullah Mukhlis* in the library of the PLO Research Centre in Beirut, cover the years 1937 to 1939 but are disappointing because the author is obsessively concerned with proving his innocence of the charge of selling land to the Zionists.

was thus portrayed as a centre of perennial importance in Arab cultural history.<sup>28</sup>

'Abd al-Latif Tibawi is probably the foremost living Palestinian historian. Most of his work was completed after 1948, but even in Palestine Tibawi was already noted for his serious and careful historical analysis. He wrote and lectured on a wide range of topics, mostly from the classical Arab period. Within that context, Tibawi dealt with a variety of themes, social, cultural and military, many of which were originally radio broadcasts. They are succinct, well constructed accounts in which Arab history is depicted as evolving by slow degrees rather than "erupting" from period to period, and much attention is given to the operation of social dynamisms.<sup>29</sup>

Other writers dealt more explicitly with modern and contemporary history. Of these, the most accomplished is undoubtedly *The Arab Awakening* by George Antonius, which is still the starting point for any study of the origins of Arab nationalism. The final chapter of the work is an examination of the mandates in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, and the book ends on an ominous note: "But the logic of facts is inexorable. It shows that no room can be made in Palestine for a second nation except by dislodging or exterminating the nation in possession."<sup>30</sup>

Antonius, like other Palestinian historians of the modern period, while telling a story is also pleading a case. Arguably the best of them, Antonius is nevertheless only one of a number of Palestinian lawyer-historians who chronicled their own period by marshalling its data like legal briefs, documented, armed with analogies, fortified with facts and dates, well-informed on the arguments of adversaries and ready with answers to them, often cynical in tone but still, curiously enough, hopeful of convincing an imaginary jury of "honest men and true" in the Western world. Such is the spirit of works written by 'Isa al-Sifri (d. 1949), Yusuf Haykal, Sa'di Bsisu

<sup>28</sup> Khalidi's works include his partial edition of *Muthbir al-Gharam* by Ibn Surur al-Shafi'i (d. 765/1364) (Jaffa: Maktabat al-Tahir, 1946), as well as his edition of *al-I'lam bi fada'il al-Sham* by Ahmad ibn 'Ali al-Manini (d. 1172/1758) (Jerusalem: al-Matba'a al-'Asriyya, n.d. [1946]) and of *Tarhib abl al-Islam fi Sukna al-Sham* by 'Izz al-Din al-Sulami (d. 660/1262) (Jerusalem: n.p., 1940). See also his *Rijal al-bukm wa al-idara fi Filastin* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1947) and his articles entitled "Tatawwur al-Ma'ahid al-'Arabiyya" in *al-Abbatb*, year 2, vol. 1 (March 1949), 43-60 and "al-Madrasa al-'Arabiyya" in *Al-'Arab wa al-Hadara al-Haditha*, edited by the Arab Studies Programme at the American University of Beirut (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li al-Malayin, 1951), 60-84.

<sup>29</sup> A bibliography of Tibawi's works may be found in the Festschrift entitled *Arabic and Islamic Garland: Historical, Educational and Literary Studies Presented to Abdul-Latif Tibawi*, ed. R. el-Droubie (London: Islamic Cultural Centre, 1977), pp. 19-27. Most of his pre-1948 output is collected in the two volumes entitled *Mubadarat fi Tarikh al-'Arab wa al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1963 and 1966). See also his radio lectures printed in *Hadith al-Idha'a*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: For the Arabic Section of the Palestine Broadcasting Service, 1942) on the army in Islam and on Islamic education.

<sup>30</sup> George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (Beirut: Khayats, 1955), p. 412.

(b. 1912) and Michael Abcarius (1884-1953). Zionism is carefully taken up, examined stage by stage and then dissected and analysed argument by argument.<sup>31</sup> The law, as a profession, attracted a considerable number of Palestinian intellectuals, especially after the establishment of the Jerusalem Law Classes soon after the beginning of the Mandate.<sup>32</sup> Turning to modern history, these lawyers discovered the tangled web of legalities in which the Arabs of Palestine were enmeshed and they saw this modern history, naturally enough, in terms of a people arguing their way out of that web by constructing their own historical legitimacy.

History was something of a national pastime for Palestinian Arabs of the Mandate period. The survey of Palestinian historiography attempted above is clearly incomplete. Many works have proved unobtainable and many have been read but not cited because they seem in spirit to be not unlike others that have been discussed. Subject to a British Mandate, a Zionist quasi-Mandate, and to the stresses and strains of nationalism and of social development, Palestinian intellectuals turned in bulk to history. Perhaps no other Arab people of that period were as obsessed by the past, as eager to document their existence, as determinedly pan-Arabist in sentiment. Menaced by the present, they sought reassurance in the Arab past whose monuments lay ready to hand. That past was contrasted with the Israelite and found to be not only longer but more organic. It was a past which all Palestinians seemed to have shared, men and women, Muslims and Christians, countrymen and city men. In building this image, they were of course rededicating their sense of national unity, and the very skyline of their cities, their mosques huddling close to their churches, must have confirmed them in their urgent, and ultimately desperate, attempts to become a free people.

<sup>31</sup> See 'Isa al-Sifri, *Filastin al-'Arabiyya bayn al-Intidab wa al-Sabyuniyya* (Jaffa: Maktabat Filastin al-Jadida, 1937); Yusuf Haykal, *al-Qadiyya al-Filastiniyya* (Jaffa: Matba'at al-Fajr, 1937); Sa'di Bsisu, *al-Sabyuniyya: Naqd wa Tablil* (Jerusalem: al-Matba'a al-Tijariyya, 1945); Michael Abcarius, *Palestine Through the Fog of Propaganda* (London: Hutchinson, 1946).

<sup>32</sup> See Tibawi, *Arab Education*, p. 54.