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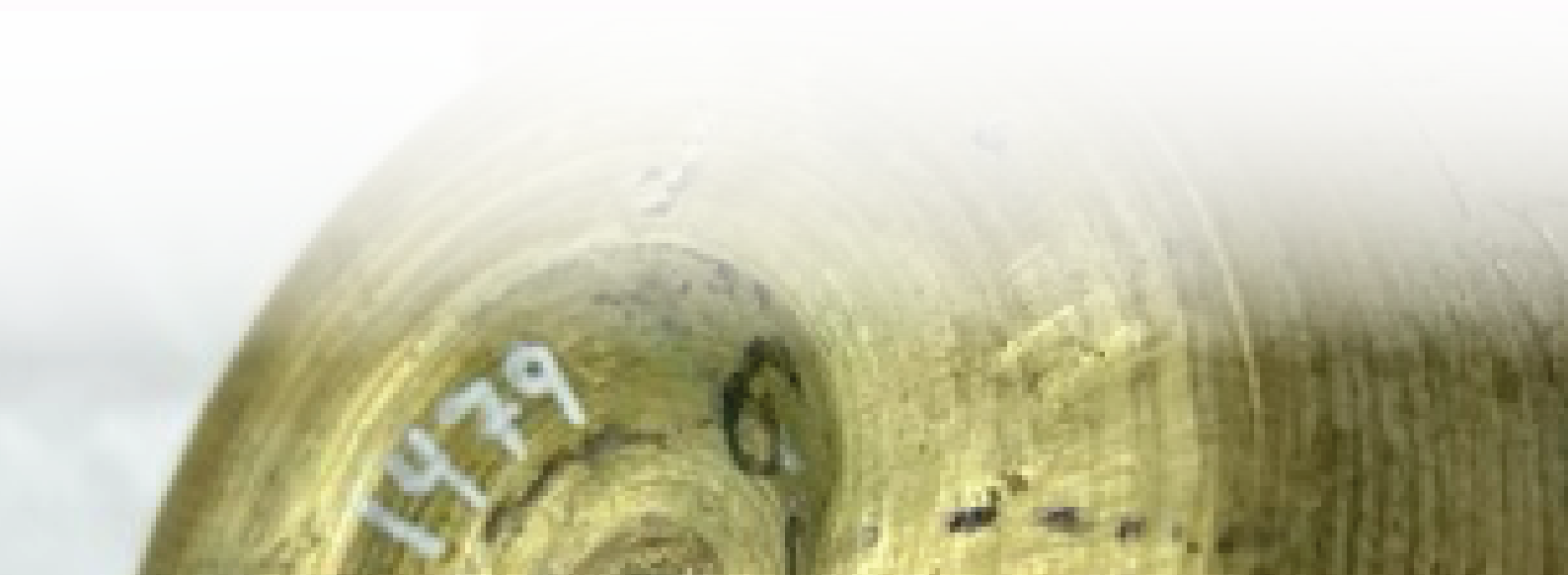

Salvage or Plunder? Israel's "Collection" of Private Palestinian Libraries in West Jerusalem

Gish Amit

During April–May 1948, almost the entire population of the residential Arab neighborhoods of West Jerusalem fled the fighting, leaving behind fully furnished houses, some with rich libraries. This article is about the "book salvage operation" conducted by the Jewish National and University Library, which added tens of thousands of privately owned Palestinian books to its collections. Based on primary archival documents and interviews, the article describes the beginnings and progress of the operation as well as the changing fortunes of the books themselves at the National Library. The author concludes with an exploration of the operation's dialectical nature (salvage and plunder), the ambivalence of those involved, and an assessment of the final outcome.

Over the last decades, with the declassification of most of Israel's official documents pertaining to the 1948 war and the emergence of a new critical Israeli historiography, much has been written about the dispossession and dispersal of Palestinians,[1] yet only limited attention has been paid to its catastrophic consequences on Palestinian culture. This is due to several factors: the nature of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, which has made the Palestinian experience difficult to reconstruct in later years;[2] the erasure from memory of the urban spaces where that cultural and intellectual life thrived;[3] and the trauma of the Palestinian catastrophe itself, making it both impossible to escape and difficult to discuss.[4]

During the first half of the twentieth century, Palestinian society underwent an accelerated transformation from widespread illiteracy in the countryside to extensive dependence on the written word. After World War I, bookshops, libraries, and public reading rooms opened all over Palestine. The ensuing cultural awakening and the proliferation and wide dissemination of books and journals ended abruptly with the upheavals of 1948: private and

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public book collections were annihilated and stories were lost with those who carried them in their memories.[5]

This article is about the books, journals, and manuscripts left behind by private Palestinians in West Jerusalem during the 1948 war. The principal repository of these books is the Jewish National and University Library—hereafter referred to as the National Library—which was (and is) a department of the Hebrew University. According to the last official figures available,[6] approximately 30,000 books were collected between May 1948 and late February 1949 and incorporated into the National Library collections. It is possible that a greater number was collected, but it has not been possible to obtain written documentation to this effect. It should be emphasized that the focus here is the books collected solely in West Jerusalem; the article does not address the fate of the tens of thousands of books abandoned elsewhere in the country.[7]

BOOKS AND LOOTING

Looting was common both during and following the 1948 war and is mentioned frequently in contemporary documents. David Ben-Gurion referred to the issue explicitly in a government meeting in June 1948: "The only thing that surprised me, and bitterly so, was the discovery of moral flaws among us, flaws whose existence I did not suspect. I am referring to the mass plunder to which all sectors of the country's Jewish community were party."[8] The press also devoted considerable attention to this matter at the time. On 15 June 1948, an editorial in the leftist MAPAM daily *Al HaMishmar* declared, "Restraining the thieves in our midst has become a vital issue that necessitates an immediate solution. . . . Those among us who have a law unto themselves, taking rights that were never given them, are crumbling our resilience from within. They constitute a great danger and must be fought by means of law and punishment." Several days later, on 21 June, an unnamed *Al HaMishmar* reporter noted that "The looting and plunder issue has not subsided in Jerusalem. Despite the appeals and warnings, lootings in the city are numerous. . . . The people of Jerusalem ask: Shall our governing bodies be content with mere appeals, or shall they also take harsh steps against these criminals?"

Although the looting of carpets, paintings, and valuable furniture attracted greater attention, books were not spared. On 15 August 1948, the military governor of Jaffa, Meir Laniado, issued the following order:

> No Arabic book is to be taken beyond the limits of the city of Jaffa. A committee appointed by the Minister of Minorities and headed by Dr. Israel Ben Ze'ev, an expert on Arabic literature and history, will collect all Arabic books in Jaffa and accumulate them inside the city. Any person within the city who is in possession of any book of any kind is to inform the Governor's office, so that those charged with this task may come and collect it.[9]

The books collected in Jaffa were stored in a library set up for this purpose in the neighborhood of Jabaliyya (renamed Givat Aliya). When Ben-Gurion visited Jaffa on 9 December 1948 and his hosts took him to the Arabic library, he wrote in his diary: "I visited with Sasson the State of Israel's Arabic library in Jaffa. They had assembled tens of thousands of Arabic books. Mr. Zemach and [Dr. Israel] Ben Ze'ev work there. The books have not been sorted or catalogued yet. The collecting continues."[10]

Books from deserted homes in West Jerusalem were also being collected. At a government meeting on 20 December, one of the ministers, Yitzhak Gruenbaum, described his observations in the city:

> [W]hen I first entered Katamon, I was surprised. Apart from a few damaged houses, the neighborhood appears untouched. I walked into houses that had been stormed and captured, and saw no sign of plunder. Needless to say, had civil authorities followed the army and taken possession of enemy property immediately after occupation, we could have prevented 60–80 percent of the looting. . . . Recently the University organized a committee that follows in the wake of the army and collects books from homes. There are two ways, I think, to stop the pillage: shooting, or organizing a public body that will follow the army step by step and take over enemy property.[11]

FIRST STEPS

Following the Haganah's Operation Nachshon, which was launched in early April 1948 and targeted the Jerusalem corridor, large numbers of non-Jews left West Jerusalem. By the end of May, the mainly Arab West Jerusalem neighborhoods of Qatamon, Talbiyya, Baq'a, Musrara, the German Colony, the Greek Colony, and Abu Tor had fallen to the Zionist forces. Before the war, the Palestinians of West Jerusalem, one of the wealthiest Arab communities of the region, had numbered about 28,000 persons. By the time the fighting subsided, only about 750 non-Jews remained in West Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods, many of them Greeks who had been permitted to remain in their Greek Colony homes.[12]

Already by 25 April, the director of the National Library, Curt Wormann, was referring to "the book collection operation in the captured territories" in a letter to his administrative superiors at the Hebrew University.[13] The actual collection by National Library staff began in late May,[14] following the capture of Qatamon on 1 May and other West Jerusalem Arab residential quarters such as Talbiyya and Baq'a on 14 May.

On 10 June 1948, Hebrew University administrator Werner David Senator forwarded a memorandum written by Wormann to the Jewish Agency Executive, then the provisional government of the new state, calling for an "urgent discussion." The topic was summarized in the memorandum's title: "Regarding the Urgent Need for a Central Authority Which Would Have

Custodianship over Abandoned Public and Private Libraries and Books." Specifically, Wormann requested that the National Library be given the status of

> an official central authority whose function it will be to manage matters of abandoned libraries, whether public or private. . . . [For] we believe that the National Library is precisely the appropriate institution to receive books of the kinds we have specified and to have guardianship of them. The National Library has the means to keep the books in the proper conditions, as well as to return them to their lawful owners, should such owners appear.

The memo added that the lack of a recognized official authority had been "hindering the book-salvaging operation considerably. Among the many obstacles in our way, particularly noteworthy is the deplorable competition among various public institutions that wish to acquire this prize."[15]

Most of the approximately 30,000 books collected in West Jerusalem during the first nine months of statehood were in Arabic, the remainder being in English, French, German, and Italian. Also collected were thousands of books owned by churches and educational institutions. The books were in various disciplines: Islamic law, Qur'anic exegesis, translations of European literature, and a few texts in science, history, and philosophy. Progress was rapid. On 26 July 1948, Shlomo Shunami, head of the lending department in the National Library who had been named "coordinator of the book collection operation,"[16] wrote to Wormann:

> According to my estimate, over 12,000 books have been collected so far. A large part of the libraries of Arab writers and scholars is now in safekeeping. We also have several large bags of manuscripts whose value has not yet been ascertained. Most of the books come from Katamon, but we have also reached the German Colony, Baka and Musrara. We have found some splendid Arabic libraries in Musrara. From Musrara we also removed part of the Swedish School's library. Things have not yet quieted down in this area, but I hope we can continue working there over the coming days.[17]

To collect the books, the National Library needed the consent and support of government and army institutions. Within a few weeks, most of the bureaucratic disagreements impeding the project were resolved. Although the National Library's status was not made official, it gradually became recognized as a body entrusted with collecting and safeguarding Palestinian libraries.

The new government helped the book collection operation in numerous ways. For example, on 10 December 1948, Wormann wrote to Dov Yosef, military governor of Jerusalem, complaining that "the permit we received from the military government does not authorize us to remove from the captured territories books that are the property of foreign institutions. This causes the loss of many books, some of great value and importance." Wormann then asked that the collection permit be extended to correct

this.[18] Consequently, and despite additional difficulties, on 9 January 1949 the relevant authorities were informed that Mr. Shunami, representing the National Library, had permission to collect books from foreign institutions and were requested to "assist him in the performance of his duties."[19] A week later, on 16 January 1949, Wormann was able to report that approximately 1,000 books, mostly in Swedish with the remainder in Arabic or English, had been removed from the Swedish School, and that about 500 books, almost all of them in English, had been removed from the storerooms near the Church of St. Paul.[20]

Of particular value to the operation was the major role played by the military in locating libraries and relaying the information to the National Library.

Of particular value to the operation was the major role played by the military in locating libraries and relaying the information to the National Library. As Shunami recounts in a March 1949 report,

> Within a few weeks word of our activities had spread to all fronts in Jerusalem and given rise to a sort of spontaneous intelligence service manned by military personnel and civilians with an affinity for books. Enlisted members of the university community, students foremost among them, actively participated in this intelligence service. Reports on concentrations of books came in quick succession and often we did not have the time to follow them all. Most of the information was genuine, but we also received inaccurate reports based on rumors, which led to futile investigations and loss of precious time. Occasionally we were also told of a large or a small library, which, by the time we came to salvage it, had disappeared. It is hard to make even a rough estimate of the quality or quantity of books that changed hands in this illegal manner.[21]

In the June 1949 issue of *National Library News*, Shunami explicitly expressed his institution's gratitude for the help received. "We take this opportunity," he wrote, "to thank the people of the military and those in charge of the relevant government ministries for their great help and for their understanding and sympathy regarding this important task."[22]

JEWISH ENLIGHTENMENT/EUROPEAN COLONIALIST JUSTIFICATION

The Hebrew University, of which the National Library had been a department since 1925,[23] was founded in the 1920s in the spirit of Ahad Ha'am's ideas on the spiritual role of Zionism; the university had been a symbol of unity between Israel and the diaspora and an opposing force to political/territorial Zionism.[24] After the establishment of the State of Israel, however, the university was expected to lend itself to the advancement of "state causes." As a result, the institutional autonomy it had enjoyed in previous decades was significantly curtailed, and gradually it accepted the government's instrumental and ideological yoke. In effect, the university was nationalized by Ben-Gurion.[25]

The collection of Palestinian libraries illustrates the dialectical complexity of the far-reaching changes of the period: the operation was simultaneously an act of exclusion of Palestinians from the national collective, defined as solely Jewish,[26] and a realization of Zionism's self-conception as a cultural agent whose moral mission was to bring enlightenment to this outpost of Europe at the margins of the Middle East.[27] In addition to reflecting the ideas of the Jewish Enlightenment, the book collection project also echoed the European justification for transferring to Europe the intellectual and cultural assets from their colonies abroad: these properties were to be salvaged in the interests of humanism and universalism[28] in the political context of a national struggle for culture and heritage.[29]

But indisputably, the operation also enriched the library's holdings. Occasionally, specific collections were even targeted with the library's needs in mind, as illustrated in Shunami's 26 July 1948 memo to Wormann:

> After Dr. Unger complained to me that we had not made enough effort to save medical books, during the last few days, I took out, among others, the library of the health department of the German Colony. This was immediately protested by the Jerusalem Health department of the Israeli government. We are conducting negotiations, and I hope that we will be able to reach an agreement.[30]

Eliyahu Strauss (later Ashtor) was director of the National Library's Department of Oriental Sciences, which in turn was linked to the Hebrew University's Institute of Oriental Studies. In a September 1948 document titled "Processing Arabic Books from the Captured Areas," Strauss emphasized the importance of the Palestinians' books to the development of this institution:

> Since the National Library was given the right to collect abandoned libraries in the captured areas and extensive operations began in the Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem, almost 9,000 Arabic books have been collected. More Arabic books have been brought to the Library in this way than had been collected by us in all the years of the institution's existence. Not only is there a large percentage of books among those found in the occupied territories which we did not have, there are also series of journals (beautifully bound) which are not in the Library's archives. . . . If a substantial number of these books are bestowed on the National Library, we will be able to extend our research opportunities considerably.[31]

Strauss went on to explain the advantages of the Department of Oriental Sciences over its counterparts in Arab countries:

> Examining the books that have come into our possession necessitates bibliographic processing based on accurate knowledge of our requirements, and needless to say, precisely in that aspect the National Library's Department of Oriental Sciences is superior to similar institutes in other Near East

> countries—institutes that may be rich in books but are not sufficiently well-ordered and do not enable the reader or researcher to do work such as is possible here.[32]

The Institute of Oriental Studies, which opened in 1926, focused until the late 1940s primarily on the study of classical Arabic and the Muslim heritage of the Middle Ages[33] and was dominated by professors whose claim to recognition as experts on Arab affairs derived not from any experience with the local people but from their scholarship and philological training at German universities.[34] The 1930s and 1940s, however, witnessed increasing demand for changes in the institute's character and aims. The conflict in approaches peaked after Israel's establishment, and within a few years the purely scientific model had been gradually replaced by one in which teaching and research activities were conducted alongside Arabic and Islamic studies in the aim of training government officials, experts on Arab affairs, and members of the security forces.[35]

"FLOUR SACKS OF BOOKS": SORTING AND CATALOGUING

At its beginnings, the book collection project seems to have been somewhat improvised. As Shunami recounts in his 26 July 1948 report to Wormann,

> Several days ago the University assigned two or three of its staff to this operation. This has made for great productiveness in the work which has lately been done by only three men: Goldman, Eliyahu [Strauss], and myself. The [initial staff] were not even employed on a daily basis, but from time to time. A room was put at our disposal in Bergman's home, and at Itingon's home we discovered a small storeroom. These two rooms have solved the space problem for the time being.[36]

Later, the operation was apparently moved to the seminar library of Hebrew University's Department of Arabic in the Terra Santa building in West Jerusalem's Rehavia quarter, to which the university had transferred most of its activities in early April 1948 when Mount Scopus became inaccessible because of the fighting.[37] A second facility was set up as an "extension of the National Library" after the government created the "Custodian of Absentee Property" in March 1950 to take possession of Arab properties, mainly buildings and land but also movable objects such as books. The Custodian's Library was housed on the first floor of a residential building south of the YMCA complex. According to one testimony, by 1956 approximately 15,000 of the books that had arrived at this second facility had been shelved.[38] The work continued simultaneously at both locations, apparently until 1961 when the new National Library building opened on the Givat Ram campus and the operations moved there.

The sorting and cataloguing work was done by junior, part-time staff hired from among the Arabic-speaking undergraduates at the Hebrew University. Some had learned Arabic at Hebrew University: Michael Schwartz, for example, worked for the National Library from 1952 to 1957 at the Terra Sancta

seminar library location.[39] In contrast to the National Library senior staff in charge of the operation, who were almost all of central European origin, many of the junior staff, especially in the early years, were either Palestinians who had remained in Israel after the 1948 war or Jewish immigrants arriving from Arab countries in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Butrus Abu-Manneh, born in Lydda, worked at the Custodian's Library from 1956 to 1959 while studying at the Institute of Oriental Studies.[40] Kurdish-born Yona Sabar, later professor of Hebrew and Aramaic linguistics at the University of California, and Iraqi-born Naim Shaharabani both worked at sorting and cataloguing the books collected in the wake of the war.

Uri Palit began working at the National Library as a student in 1961 and later became a librarian in the library's Oriental department, where he remained until 2001. While in the process of sorting and cataloguing, he remembers encountering books about the French Revolution and the agricultural sciences.[41] Nazareth-born Aziz Shehadeh, who worked there from 1963 to 1965, catalogued many dozens of ancient Arabic manuscripts.[42] Like Schwartz and Abu Manneh, Palit and Shehadeh both remember handwritten dedications, names, and notes on book covers and pages. "These books clearly belonged to erudite people, aristocrats," Shehadeh recalled. "I remember that some of them had dedications: 'I am honored to present you with my book, and should be glad of your opinion.' There was one philosophy book called *Between Religion and Philosophy* that particularly interested me and I took it home for the weekend."[43]

According to all testimonies, the cataloguing took many years, and possibly is still not complete.[44] Although the process began in 1948, most of the books remained in their bags for years and did not begin to be registered in the National Library catalogue until the 1960s. Of the years 1963–65, Shehadeh recalls "large flour sacks containing books [. . . that] lay at the back of the department's reading hall. We'd receive dozens of sacks, up to a hundred, and catalogue them."[45] Palit estimates that he catalogued about 6,000 books during this two-year period. All four interviewees report that the source of these books was known to all.

The cataloguing process was slow and cumbersome. "Often it took a long time to identify the author," Palit recalled. "The names weren't always printed in full, or else we had to decide whether the book was written by a grandfather or his grandson, both of whom may have had the same name. We had to search through the catalogs of large libraries all over the world, which sometimes took days or weeks."[46] The process greatly slowed after the 1967 war, when numerous books from the newly occupied territories reached the library.

A comparison of the testimonies of Abu-Manneh and Schwartz, employed by the National Library in the 1950s, with those of Palit and Shehadeh, employed there in the 1960s, indicates that a significant change had taken place: "Every book had a sequential number," said Abu-Manneh, "and beneath it we wrote an abbreviation of the owner's name in English. For example, the

letters SAK stood for Sakakini, NIMR meant Nimer, and so on. Those letters appeared both on the inside cover and on the index card."[47] By the 1960s, the owners' names had been removed and replaced by the generic notation "AP," for "abandoned property." It is this designation that appears to this day on the books' covers and in the National Library's computerized catalogue.

It is not known how the decision to remove the owners' names was made, but the transformation is important. The fact that the books in the 1950s were catalogued to the extent possible by their Palestinian owners' names could indicate Israel's willingness in the early years to pay compensation for the abandoned property.[48] Whatever the case, from the 1960s onward the direct personal connection was severed, eliminating not only any possibility of the books' return but also the unique and nonduplicable memory of human beings, preserved in the library for over a decade and now lost in a general archive. This occurred not at a time of war and chaos but during a period of political and military calm. Similar actions were occurring in other domains: in 1965 the Israel Land Administration began an operation in which over 100 deserted Arab villages were razed to "clean up" the country and permanently prevent Palestinians from returning to their homes.[49] The purpose of both erasures, deliberate and premeditated, was to render the outcome of the war a final, irreversible reality.

Paradoxically, however, the new notation system reaffirmed Palestinian ownership of these cultural assets and prevented the books from merging completely with the National Library collections. Physically, too, the "AP" books—at least the Arabic ones, those in foreign languages having been absorbed into the general collections without a trace—are set apart from the rest of the library. Thus these books constitute a strange monument that binds together destruction and conservation, demolition and salvage: the new masters of the land took charge of the books, conserved them, and at the same time separated them from their owners and histories, cutting them off from the living fabric of the present.

The National Library catalogue[50] is now online, making it possible to view the titles from any home computer. Some 5,787 books in the catalogue are marked AP,[51] though the list has somehow come to include several books published after 1948 (wrongly designated as they could not have been collected during the war). Any of these books can be requested by library users for reading. Apart from those on view in the Department of Oriental Sciences' reading room, the "abandoned books" of West Bank Palestinians collected in 1948 are concentrated in their own section of shelves in the library storeroom. Except for two other collections—manuscripts and rare books—this is the only collection in the library that is kept separately.

THE OWNERS

The March 1949 report by the National Library included a list of sixty Palestinians whose books had been collected up to that point. The list,

arranged in two parallel columns by neighborhood of origin, was in Hebrew and sometimes incorrectly or incompletely transcribed: "A. Khelmi" of Qatamon, for example, is probably Ahmad Hilmi Pasha Abdul Baqi (1880–1963), a distinguished economist who in September 1948 became head of the Cairo-based All Palestine Government. "Fuad Abu Rahmeh" is in fact Fayez Abu Rahmeh (b. 1929), a former member of the Palestinian Council and a representative in the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to the 1986 peace talks. "Franissis Kiat" of Musrara is in fact Francis Khayat (1892–1978), a judge appointed to the Palestine Supreme Court in 1932.

The men listed were scholars, writers, educators, businessmen, members of the liberal professions, and more generally members of prominent and influential families—in short, a who's who of the Palestinian educated stratum in what became West Jerusalem.[52] Compiled by Shunami, the list constitutes a group portrait of a Palestinian elite already destroyed: when the war ended it became evident that in addition to their homeland, homes, and property, the Palestinian people had also lost their aristocracy.[53]

The owners of the books were scholars, writers, educators, businessmen, members of the liberal professions—in short, a who's who of the Palestinian educated stratum in what became West Jerusalem.

Among the names is Khalil Sakakini (1878–1953), a well-known educator and writer who fled his Qatamon home in April 1948. Some of his treasury of books now in the National Library still bear his name, written in black ink in his own hand;[54] one book is inscribed in the name of his oldest son, "Sari Sakakini, Jerusalem 1940."[55] When Khalil's daughters, Hala and Dumya, visited the National Library in summer 1967, they found some of his books with the notes he habitually wrote in the margins still visible.[56] Some years ago, Knesset member Jamal Zahalka appealed to the National Library to allow Sakakini's books to be transferred to the cultural center named for him in Ramallah. According to Zahalka, the response was that the request could not be discussed until he had provided a complete list of Sakakini's books in the library's possession.[57] Sakakini's cousin, Ya'qoub Farraj (1874–1944), leader of the Greek Orthodox congregation in Jerusalem and for many years the Christian deputy mayor of Jerusalem, was also on the list. So was Henry Cattan (1906–1992), a London-educated lawyer and member of the Palestinian Law Council from 1940 to 1948 who represented the Arab League in talks with UN mediator Folke Bernadotte. Fleeing his house in Baq'a for Damascus and Beirut, and ultimately Paris, he continued his legal and literary pursuits in exile. Khalil Baydas (1874–1949), educated in Czarist Russia, was principal of the Russian Schools in Jerusalem and Damascus, and became renowned as an author, essayist, and translator of classic Russian works into Arabic. In April 1948 he fled Baq'a to Jordan and later Lebanon. In his autobiography, Edward Said describes Baydas, who was his father's cousin, as an elderly man "with a thick moustache, who always wore a dark suit and a fez, continuously smoked cigarettes which he inserted into an ivory holder, and frequently coughed through the rings of smoke that veiled his head with fog."[58]

A prominent figure known to have had an important library who was not on the National Library's list was Dr. Tawfiq Canaan (1882–1962), a medical doctor known today for his closely observed studies of local folklore and ethnography based on his travels around the countryside, where he also collected folklore items and talismans, now displayed at Birzeit University in Ramallah. He also published essays on these topics, principally in the *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society (JPOS)*.[59] Canaan's substantial library was well known, and the National Library's interest is evident in a letter sent from Shunami to David Senator in early August 1948:

> Dr. Wormann conveyed your question about Dr. Canaan's library to me, and I hereby inform you of the details: during the very first lull in the fighting I visited Dr. Canaan's home with Professor Bennett. We hoped to find a collection of books on local folklore, and that was why we went there, despite the warning by the commander of the nearby army post that we were in danger of being captured by the Arab Legion unless we were extremely careful. But on arrival we found a collection of classics and a small number of medical journals. We found no trace of a folklore library. We both thought that these books did not justify endangering additional people in order to remove them.[60]

The Canaan family fled their home in what later became the no-man's land between East and West Jerusalem on 9 May 1948, finding shelter on the eastern side thanks to the Latin Patriarch who assigned the family a room in a monastery. According to Canaan's daughter, Leila Mantoura, he had earlier entrusted his talisman collection to an international organization in West Jerusalem, but the family's other belongings were looted. Describing this period, Mantoura wrote, "Mother and father would go daily to the top of the Wall of Jerusalem to look at their home. They witnessed it being ransacked, together with the wonderful priceless library and manuscripts, which mother guarded jealously and with great pride. They saw mother's Biedermeyer furniture being loaded into trucks and then their home being set on fire."[61]

Another important figure whose name was not on the list was Muhammed Is'af Nashashibi (1882–1948), whose library was known to be among the largest private libraries in Jerusalem during the Mandate period and which was regularly frequented by Arab writers and scholars. Born into one of the wealthiest and most prominent families in the city, Is'af himself wrote and published poetry and prose as well as academic texts. During World War I he taught at the prestigious Ottoman Sahaliyya College. In the early Mandate years he was principal of the Ar-Rashidiyya school and later a Department of Education school inspector until resigning in 1930. Is'af's mansion was in the Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem, which was not permanently occupied until 1967. However, in early April 1948, the neighborhood passed back and forth between Jordan's Arab Legion and the Haganah, and in the process his library was lost. According to Is'af's nephew, Nasser Eddin

Nashashibi (b. 1923), the books were stolen by Jews and Palestinians alike: "Robbers have no nationalities. Books stolen by Palestinians were transported eastwards, and books taken by Jews made their way west, to the Zionist library." Nasser Eddin added that after 1967 he attempted to retrieve some of these books. He met with Israeli scholars and offered to pay five dinars per book, but they all refused. "I remember meeting an Israeli professor from the Hebrew University in 1968 and telling him this. He replied, 'Look, there was a war on, we didn't know what to do with the books.'"[62]

International law issues pertaining to the seizure of cultural assets during wars and armed conflicts are a relatively new phenomenon: it was not until the early nineteenth century that the victors' right to appropriate cultural properties of the enemy was questioned.[63] The 1919 Treaty of Versailles after World War I stipulated that works of art, books, and manuscripts should be returned to the states from which they were taken.[64] World War II, along with the unprecedented destruction of cultural assets, also gave rise to new regulations and agreements aimed at protecting such assets in future. The 1954 Hague Convention, while allowing that an army has the right to use and appropriate certain enemy property, wholly forbids the confiscation or plundering of private property in occupied territory. The convention specifies that the absence of the owners does not justify plunder or causing damage to property and a receipt must be issued for any item taken. All movable property taken, whether owned privately or by the state, must be returned after the war, or else compensation must be given.[65]

In his book *The Arabs in Israel*, Sabri Jiryis[66] noted that in expropriating Palestinian property after 1948 the state relied on two interlocking methods: force and legislation. As already mentioned, the Custodian of Absentees' Property was established soon after the war's end to take control of assets captured in the fighting; the fact that the custodian was authorized to sell the land of absentees to official bodies for exclusive Jewish use[67] clearly shows that the mission was not to safeguard it on behalf of its lawful owners but to dispossess them of it.[68] Some goods, materials, and equipment were transported to specially built warehouses, though most were transferred directly to the hands of the army. What remained was sold to public organizations bound by a set of priorities informed by state interests.[69]

Although some legal attempts to recover land seized by the state have been made, no such attempts have been recorded with regard to cultural property, including books.

AN OPERATION WITH A DUAL NATURE

Perhaps more than other assets covered by the Absentees' Property Law of March 1950, the Palestinian libraries caused those charged with collecting them a certain degree of unease. National Library bulletins through mid-1949 are at pains to emphasize the operation's character of benevolence and salvation. Typical is the April 1949 report, which states that books are taken

into "custody" and kept "under the National Library's care" and "Thousands of books were *saved in this way from the ravages of war and from annihilation*."[70] Variations of this phrase appear repeatedly: the June 1949 bulletin reports that "the National Library has collected tens of thousands of abandoned books during the war, thus *saving them from annihilation*," and goes on to note that the activity "involved great devotion by some of the staff and *posed risk to lives*."[71]

Many reports, however, convey or imply the essentially dual nature of the operation: salvage and plunder. Most reflect a combination of the two. The March 1949 National Library report, for instance, is almost defensive when describing the staff's doubts and hesitations:

> When it was decided to tackle books of this kind we approached the task with hesitation regarding "what people would say." And indeed there were occasional rumors: "Are the National Library's people descending upon the loot?" But since we realized that if we refused to salvage these books they would be fated for theft and destruction, all our initial hesitations disappeared and we energetically began collecting.

The report emphasizes the staff's self-imposed restrictions even while clearly recognizing how the National Library benefited.

> We have made it our principle to remove books only from houses that are unlocked or that have already been forcibly opened. We did not remove books from locked residences, neither did we enter residences whose owners had not abandoned them. . . . The abandoned book salvaging operation brought the National Library storerooms tens of thousands of books and hundreds of manuscripts. At a time of turmoil and bewilderment a vast amount of intellectual property has been salvaged.[72]

It is this same memorandum which, in describing the book-salvaging operation, comes closest to stating frankly that it was first and foremost an act of plunder—after first establishing the more noble "concern about the fate" of the book collections and expressing the need to protect them:

> Immediately on the occupation of Qatamon and the adjacent neighborhoods by the Defense Forces, many literary persons became concerned about the fate of private and public book collections located there. Several of the University's staff, as well as other men of letters, suggested and demanded that the University's National Library remove the books from the occupied neighborhoods, where they were at risk, and place them under its protection. . . .
>
> Although the salvaging of the books was done for its own sake and its immediate aim was saving intellectual property from loss and destruction, *we did not conceal from the relevant authorities our hope that a way would be found to transfer some, perhaps the majority, of those books to the possession of the University*—when the time comes.[73]

In these texts, the difficulty of separating the two views of the operation—salvage or plunder—becomes clear. Even interpretation as an act of benevolence and salvage cannot conceal the reality that the operation was founded on plunder (even while rejecting the categorization); in order to adopt the "salvage" viewpoint, those involved had to imagine what would have befallen the books without their intervention. It seems, then, that the misgivings did not disappear but continued to be present through their very absence, and were all the more perceptible for the efforts to suppress them.

Yet the final result remains that the libraries were preserved, and at least nominally (in the designation "AP") acknowledged as Palestinian patrimony. Without the National Library's intervention (whatever the motives involved), many of these libraries certainly would have undergone the fate reserved for the Canaan and Nashashibi collections—at best dispersal, at worst destruction. This final assessment is shared by both Palestinian and Jewish Israelis who participated in the Palestinian library project by sorting and cataloguing the books collected. Butrus Abu-Manneh, who later became professor of Middle Eastern history at Haifa University, stated in an interview that "Whoever decided to collect and store them deserves a prize. Everything else notwithstanding, it is important cultural material." To this day, he sees the book-collecting operation as an act of kindness: "The intention was to safeguard the books in order to return them. They meant the books to be in temporary safekeeping. I'm sure it was done in honesty, based on the idea that this was cultural property and should be preserved."[74]

Aziz Shehadeh, who ultimately became a lawyer, worked at the library every day. "At the time I had no political consciousness," he said. "Anyway, in the work situation our attitude to the books was professional. I remember occasionally saying to my co-workers 'Look what an interesting book,' or 'this man has an impressive library.' But that's all. It wasn't us who stole the books. We worked there to make a living. At the time politics didn't bother me. Humans are more important than books. If human beings have been exiled and scattered over the wide world, what good will books do them?"[75]

Michael Schwartz and Uri Palit express similar views, although they incorporate them in different interpretations of the events of 1948. According to Schwartz, who later became a professor of Jewish philosophy at Tel Aviv University, the issue was

> part of a much bigger problem to do with buildings and land. Books are a small matter compared to those. I knew that some of those people had left, and some were no longer alive. I also think that the intention really was to return the books to those who might claim them. Besides, it wasn't robbery, because they'd left. Those libraries belonged to rich, educated people. The poor people, who didn't have the means to get away, stayed. As I understand it, in 1948 most of those who left did so voluntarily, out of fear and also because the fighting leaders suggested that they leave temporarily, until the fighters had eliminated the Jews.[76]

Schwartz believes that there might be a point in trying to restore the books to their owners, "but that's very hypothetical. The chances are minimal, however good the intentions." Palit referred to the issue in terms of a human tragedy: "Between 1949 and 1956 there were thoughts of finding a quick solution for the problems between Israel and the Arab countries. The books were kept as property to be returned to its owners. It's a human affair: one day people had to abandon their homes, and compared to homes and land, books were a fairly minor issue." He added: "I remember telling my wife about the books, just as I'd told her about other experiences at work. Besides, during my first year at University, in the late 1950s, I lived in an abandoned Arab house in Talbiyya. I told you: the matter of the books pales in comparison to this. Both for us and for the Arabs."[77]

ENDNOTES

1. Tamar Berger, *Dionysus in the Mall* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1998); Baruch Kimmerling, *Immigrants, Settlers, Natives: Israel between Plurality of Cultures and Cultural Wars* [in Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved, 2004); Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 11; Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London: Oneworld, 2006); Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

2. Rashid Khalidi, "The Palestinians and 1948: The Underlying Causes of Failure," in Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 12–36.

3. Hassan Manar, "The Destruction of the City and the War against Memory: The Victorious and the Defeated" [in Hebrew], *Theory and Criticism* 29 (Fall 2005), pp. 197–207.

4. Nurit Gretz and George Khleifi, *Landscape in Mist: Space and Memory in Palestinian Cinema* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am-Oved, 2006).

5. Ami Ayalon, *Reading Palestine: Printing and Literacy 1900–1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), p. x.

6. A March 1949 National Library report, Israel State Archive, Jerusalem (hereafter ISA), GL 1429/3.

7. Tens of thousands of Arabic volumes, predominantly of an educational nature, were collected from schools and institutions in cities such as Haifa, Jaffa, Nazareth, and others. They were kept in their respective cities in stores organized by the Ministry of Education until the late 1950s, sometimes resold to Palestinians at public auctions. In 1957, the state pulped 26,000 of these books on discovering that they were of no financial value while some were perceived as a threat to national security. For an exploration of the books collected beyond Jerusalem, see Gish Amit, "The Destruction of Palestinian Libraries" [in Hebrew], *Mita'am, a Review of Literature and Radical Thought* 12 (2007), pp. 41–52.

8. David Ben-Gurion, *War Diary* [in Hebrew], Gershon Rivlin and Elhanan Oren eds. (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1982), p. 524.

9. *Al Hamishmar*, 1 September 1948.

10. Ben Gurion, *War Diary*, p. 871.

11. Tom Segev, "The First Secrets," *Ha'Aretz* [in Hebrew], 2 March 1995, pp. 12–13.

12. Nathan Krystall, "The De-Arabization of West Jerusalem 1947–1950," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 2 (Winter 1998) pp. 5–22.

13. Letter by C. D. Wormann to the Hebrew University directorship, 25 April 1948, The Jewish National and University Library, Archives

Department, Jerusalem (hereafter JNULA), 793/200.

14. National Library report, ISA GL 1429/3.

15. The Central Archive of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem (hereafter HUA), 042/1948.

16. HUA, 042/1948. Shunami himself wrote in July 1956 of his task: "In 1948, during the War of Independence, I was charged by the present director, Dr. C. D. Wormann, with the coordination of a book salvaging project in the deserted Arab neighborhoods" (HUA 793/212).

17. JNULA 793/200.

18. ISA, GL 271/60.

19. ISA, GL 271/60.

20. ISA, GL 271/60.

21. ISA, GL 271/60.

22. National Library bulletin, June 1949.

23. Dov Schidorsky, "From Abarbanel Library to the Jewish National and University Library," in Moshe Shlohovsky and Yossef Kaplan, eds., *Libraries and Book Collections* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2006), pp. 396–411. Note that pagination in bibliography differs.

24. Many of the first generation of Hebrew University professors—including Gershom Scholem, Yehuda Leib Magnes, Werner David Senator, Martin Buber, and Shmuel Hugo Bergman—belonged to Brith Shalom, an organization founded in 1925 in reaction to revisionist Zionist radicalism. Its goal was the establishment in Israel of a binational regime based on equal political rights for Jews and Arabs and autonomy for both. See Joseph Heller, *From Brit Shalom to Ichud: Judah Leib Magnes and the Struggle for a Binational State in Palestine* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004), p. 13.

25. Uri Cohen, *The Mountain and the Hill: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem during the Pre-Independence Period and the Early Years of the State of Israel* [in Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved and Tel-Aviv University Press, 2006), pp. 123–30.

26. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Exile within Sovereignty: Towards a Critique of 'Negation of Exile' in Israeli Culture" [in Hebrew], *Theory and Criticism* 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 23–56.

27. Sara Chinski, "Eyes Wide Shut: The Acquired Albino Syndrome of the Israeli Art Field" [in Hebrew], *Theory and Criticism* 20 (Spring 2002), pp. 57–86.

28. Ella Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (Tel-Aviv: Bimat Kedem, 2001), p. 300.

29. Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 242–45.

30. JNULA 793/200.

31. JNULA 793/200.

32. JNULA 793/200.

33. Cohen, *The Mountain*, pp. 78–81.

34. Gil Eyal, "Dangerous Liaisons: The Relations between Military Intelligence and Middle Eastern Studies in Israel" [in Hebrew], *Theory and Criticism* 20 (Spring 2002): 137–64; Michael Milson, "The Beginning of Islam and Arabic Studies at the Hebrew University" [in Hebrew], in Michael Hed and Shaul Katz, eds., *The History of the Hebrew University* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), pp. 575–88.

35. This new model manifests unmistakably in a book published by the Hebrew University to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding: "If 1948 was a year of war, so also was it the year of an historic achievement: the founding of the State of Israel. The young State needed a university no less than it needed an army. People with university training in various disciplines were required to assist the government, and many were found among the scientists of the University: geologists, archeologists, statisticians, experts on Jewish law, experts on the Arabic language, customs and traditions, linguists, and many others. They responded to the call to serve the state without abandoning their posts at the University." The Hebrew University, *The Hebrew University in Jerusalem—1925–1950* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Press, 1950), p. 59.

36. JNULA 793/200.

37. Author's interview with Michael Schwartz, 20 March 2007.

38. Author's interview with Butrus Abu-Manneh, 14 March 2007.

39. Author's interview with Michael Schwartz, 20 March 2007.

40. Author's interview with Butrus Abu-Manneh, 14 March 2007.

41. Author's interview with Uri Palit, 20 February 2007.

42. Author's interview with Aziz Shehadeh, 28 February 2007.

43. Author's interview with Aziz Shehadeh, 28 February 2007.

44. Palit, who worked at the National Library until 2001, reports that the storerooms still contain 4,000 uncatalogued books.

45. Author's interview with Aziz Shehadeh, 28 February 2007.

46. Author's interview with Uri Palit, 20 February 2007.

47. Author's interview with Butrus Abu-Manneh, 14 March 2007.

48. W. Ronald Zweig, "Restitution of Property and Refugee Rehabilitation: Two Case Studies," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 6, no. 1 (1993), p. 60.

49. Aharon Shay, "The Fate of Abandoned Arab Villages on the Eve of the Six-Day War and Its Immediate Aftermath" [in Hebrew], *Katedra* 105 (2002), pp. 151–70.

50. It should be noted that the National Library system catalogues books sequentially rather than by subject, according to an inventory system wherein the books are given consecutive numbers by order of arrival at the library. Moreover, most are arranged in storerooms not by subjects but by letters. "A," signifies books written in Hebrew or in Hebrew script (e.g., Yiddish or Ladino). "B" is for books in Judaic studies, "C" for the humanities, and "D" for the natural sciences, these latter in all languages but Hebrew. Journals are marked "P" plus one of the above letters to refine the search.

51. The author has been unable to discover the reason for the wide discrepancy between the National Library's March 1949 figure of 30,000 Palestinian books collected in West Jerusalem up to then and the figure represented today in the catalogue.

52. Unless otherwise specified, the biographical details and English transliterations in this section are taken from Mahdi Abdul Hadi, ed., *Palestinian Personalities—A Biographic Dictionary* (Jerusalem: PASSIA, 2006).

53. Ilan Pappé, *The Aristocracy of the Land: The Husayni Family* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 2002), p. 364.

54. AP [Absentee Property] 3908.

55. AP 3249.

56. Hala Sakakini, *Jerusalem and I* (Amman: n.p., 1987), p. 121.

57. Author's interview with Jamal Zahalka, 14 June 2006.

58. Edward Said, *Out of Place, A Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1999).

59. Salim Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 96–97. The journal, in print from 1920 to 1948 , published articles on the history, philology, archeology, and ethnography of Palestine; Eliezer Ben Yehuda and Yitzhak Ben Zvi were also among its contributors.

60. HUA, 042/1948.

61. Quoted in Khaled Nashef, "Tawfiq Canaan: His Life and Works," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 16 (2002), p. 21.

62. Author's interview with Nasser Eddin Nashashibi, 22 February 2007.

63. J. Patrick Boylan, "The Concept of Cultural Protections in Times of Armed Conflict: From the Crusades to the New Millennium," in Neil Bordie and Kathryn Walker Tubb, eds., *Illicit Antiquities: The Theft of Culture and the Extinction of Archeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 45.

64 Boylan, "Cultural Protections," p. 49.

65. Jeanette Greenfield, "The Spoils of War," in Elizabeth Simpson, ed., *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath—The Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 1997), p. 38.

66. Sabri Jiryis, trans. Merick Dobson, *The Arabs in Israel* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1968).

67. Yifat Weiss, *Wadi Salib: A Confiscated Memory* (Jerusalem: Van-Leer Institute, 2007), p. 88; Alina Korin, "Crime, Political Status, and Law Enforcement: The Arab Minority in Israel during the Military Regime 1948–1966" [in Hebrew] (Ph.D.

dissertation, Hebrew University, 1996); Haya Bambaji-Sasportas, "Whose Voice Is Heard/Whose Voice Is Silenced: Structuring the Discourse on 'the Palestinian Refugee Problem' in the Israeli Establishment, 1948–1952" [in Hebrew] (M.A. thesis, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, 2000).

68. Dalia Habash and Terry Rempel, "Assessing Palestinian Property in West Jerusalem," in Salim Tamari, ed., *Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighborhoods and Their Fate in the War* (Jerusalem: The Institute of Jerusalem Studies & Badil Resource Center, 1999), pp. 154–83.

69. Berger, *Dionysus in the Mall*, pp. 61–62.

70. JNULA 793/200 (emphasis added).

71. JNULA 793/200 (emphasis added).

72. ISA, GL 1429/3.

73. ISA 1429/3 (emphasis added).

74. Author's interview with Butrus Abu-Manneh, 14 March 2007.

75. Author's interview with Aziz Shehadeh, 28 February 2007.

76. Author's interview with Michael Schwartz, 20 March 2007.

77. Author's interview with Uri Palit, 20 February 2007.