

مجموعة توفيق كنعان

الموارد / منشورات عن توفيق كنعان

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The Great War in Palestine: Dr Tawfiq Canaan's Photographic Album

Norbert Schwake

The year 2014 marks the centenary of WWI, called by the British until today “the Great War.” For the history of Palestine this was indeed a great and decisive war.

A marvelous documentation of World War I is a photo album found among the belongings of the late Israeli archeologist Pesah Baradon.¹ The album has no owner's name, but without much doubt it seems to have belonged to the famous Palestinian physician Dr. Tawfiq Canaan.² The photographs in the first part of the album have captions written in German in white ink, faded in many places. The album shows mainly German and Turkish medical personnel in places where Dr. Canaan was stationed, and also unique pictures of him and his family and friends.

Some of the photographs were most certainly taken by a non-professional amateur or amateurs, most likely by Dr. Canaan himself. Almost every German soldier at the Palestine front had brought along his camera – Tawfiq Canaan, living in a German milieu, was no different. On the civilian side the well-known professional photographers of the American Colony in Jerusalem were mostly Protestants like Canaan. Others, like Garabed Krikorian, were very much linked to Canaan's Protestant community. Therefore it is no surprise to find in his album high quality photographs that must have come from these professionals.

The album starts with pictures from the itinerary of a German soldier coming to the Palestine front: the railway station of Bozanti (Pozanti) at the northern entrance of the Taurus tunnel, another station of the Anatolian railway, the bifurcation to the Baghdad railway at Muslimiye north of Aleppo (called “Aleppo station” in the caption) and then the German headquarters in Aleppo. Following these there are several photographs of Baalbek and its ruins. Baalbek was on the railway track from

Aleppo to Damascus and every German soldier went to see the famous sun temple. Next is an aerial view of Rayak, the junction station to Beirut or Damascus. A photograph of the main street of Damascus is followed by a view of Haifa and the railway station of Tulkarm.



The German Headquarters ("Etappe") in Aleppo.

These photographs certainly were collected by Dr. Canaan and not his own snapshots. It is difficult to check the photograph of Pozanti, but the caption "Eisenbahnstation der Kleinasienbahn" (Anatolian railway station) is erroneous and proves that Canaan never saw this railway station. In fact this is the Maqarin station in the Yarmuk valley on the Haifa-Der'a line which was part of the Hijaz railway, but certainly not of the Anatolian railway like Pozanti. It is a unique picture of the station where German engineers under the command of Lieutenant Rudolf Beyschlag (later professor at the Technical Academy of Berlin) tried to produce shale oil. It is most interesting that this completely forgotten anticipation of the most recent oil production operation was not even known to people like Dr. Canaan a century ago.



Anatolian railway station.



Oil producing facilities at El Maqarin. *Source: State Archive, Düsseldorf.*

The photograph of the Tulkarm station is followed by a view of Nablus. Today only few remember that Nablus, too, had a railway station at the time of World War I. In this photograph the unfinished station can be seen as a one-storey house with a gable, still unroofed.



Panorama of Nablus with the unfinished railway station in the foreground.

At this point the album shows us a beautiful group portrait of a notable Nabulsi family. Their name is not given, but it is mentioned that this family owns the building that housed the Turkish army laboratory where Dr. Canaan worked.



The owners of a building in Nablus where the Turkish army had a laboratory.

The captions do not provide the date of the Nablus pictures, but they were surely taken after the fall of Jerusalem in December 1917. One shows a public demonstration against the British occupation of Jerusalem. In the background appears the building that housed the headquarters of the 7th Turkish army.



Anti-British demonstration with Turkish 7th Army headquarters in the background.

A third interesting photograph shows the Turkish medical staff in Nablus in 1917.



The three officers in the light-colored uniforms are Dr. Attiyeh, the unnamed division chief physician, and Dr. Halaby. The two nurses are Arab Catholic Rosary sisters.

After the “itinerary” photographs we find a group of Jerusalem scenes. Among them we find one of Enver Pasha and Ahmad Jamal Pasha visiting al-Haram al-Sharif – a photograph that shows up in many other collections. Canaan does not forget to append the appropriate honorific “S.E.” (His Excellency) to their names.

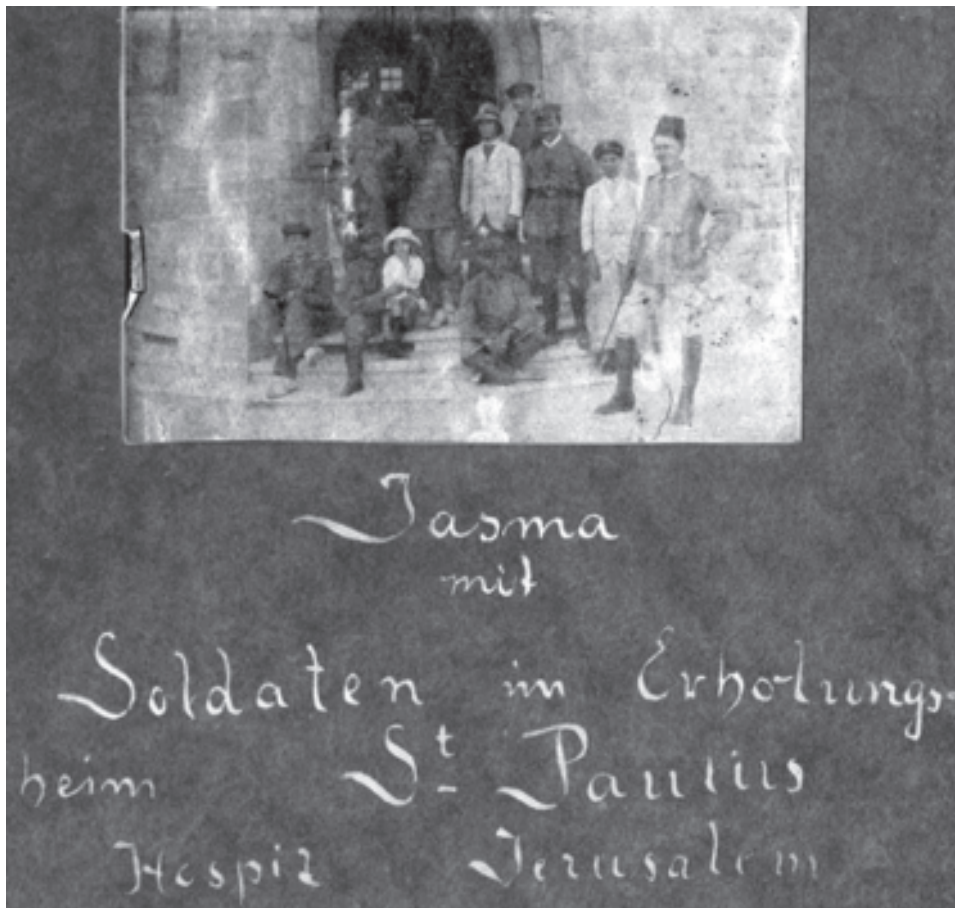


Enver Pasha (left, with religious leaders) visiting the Dome of the Rock.



The Turkish logistical command (“menzil”) in the Notre Dame building in Jerusalem. In the center, with the huge mustache, sits the commander Ruşen Bey.³

The Jerusalem photographs include some interesting Canaan family pictures. Besides some pictures of Ascension Day at the Augusta Victoria Hospice with many German soldiers we see Dr. Canaan's eldest daughter Yasma (Jasma) (1912-2000) as a tiny child amid a group of German soldiers on the doorsteps of St. Paul's Hospice.



Yasma (two years old) with German soldiers.

One of the most important pictures in the album was taken in Sharafat, where the Canaan family liked to spend their free time. At the left sits Musa Alami (1897-1984) the son and grandson of former mayors of Jerusalem and a neighbor of the Canaans – here in the uniform of a Turkish officer. After WWI he studied law at Cambridge and then started a career as a legal officer with the British mandatory government, rising to become the personal secretary of High Commissioner Wauchope. In 1936 he was fired because he took part in the Arab revolt. He then became one of the chief Palestinian negotiators with Zionist leaders Ben Gurion and Sharett and the British government. It is said that he contributed significantly to Chamberlain's "White Paper" of 1938 which

drastically limited Jewish immigration. After 1948 he founded an agricultural project to help Palestinian refugees, the “Arab Development Project” in Jericho that still exists. Next to Alami is Nora Eilender, the unmarried sister of Dr. Canaan’s wife Margot. Next to her is Dr. Canaan’s sister Badra, who was militantly anti-British and spent several years in prison during WWII. Last on the bench is a German soldier named Stenzel, and lying in the hammock is Angelo Eilender, a brother of Nora and Margot.⁴



Musa Alami, Nora Eilender, Badra Canaan, Stenzel, and Angelo Eilender.

Some photos of the surroundings of Jericho follow the Jerusalem series. An old bridge is captioned the Old Jordan bridge.



“Alte Jordanbrücke”



This bridge looks like the Damya Bridge as it appears in a German photo collection,⁵ rather than the Shueib Bridge (later called Allenby) near Jericho.



An early British photograph of the Jordan bridge near Jericho.⁶

The Canaan album follows no real chronological order. The Ottoman Empire was officially in the state of war as of 2 November 1914. On 19 December the first Turkish troops reached Jerusalem. The plan was, to attack the Suez Canal in order to disrupt British supply routes to Europe. Auja el-Hafir (in Turkish Hafir el-Auja or Hafir ul-Avca) at the Sinai border⁷ was selected as the starting point of the so-called “Egyptian Expedition.” Dr. Canaan was among the first recruited officers. Photograph no. 82 shows the beginning of his war experience.



Dr. Canaan (written in white ink) in Ein Arrub in his way to Auja el-Hafir, Jan. 1915.



The Hafir complex in Canaan’s album. The buildings were used as hospitals. The building on top of the hill was unfinished.

Tawfiq Canaan was from the beginning one of the most important persons on the front. He must have been on very good relations with Ahmad Jamal Pasha, the Ottoman ruler of Syria, and the ultimate military commander of Palestine.



Dr. Canaan in the rear of Jamal Pasha's personal car. The driver is Friedrich Fast, the owner of the Hotel Fast near Jaffa Gate, who was responsible for the army's food supply.



Dr. Canaan (second right) with German nuns (Borromäerinnen) in the desert of Hafir. From left to right: Dr. Hans Kickton, Major Hans von Ramsay, the nuns, Dr. Canaan, director Otto Haussmann.

Ramsay (1862-1938) was an important explorer of Tanganyika and Cameroon and a lecturer at the Oriental Seminary in Berlin. Dr. Kickton (1880-1945) had survived dangerous battles as a physician of the German “Schutztruppen” in South-West Africa. After WWI Kickton became the personal physician of emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia.



Dr. Hans Kickton, Haile Selassie’s physician and Dr. Cnaan’s friend.⁸

One strange and exceptional character on the Sinai front whose picture is unique in Canaan's album, is Baron Otto von Graeve, who spent many weeks on the front as a diviner searching for water with his rods.⁹ The caption calls him "Graefe," which means that Canaan only heard his name. An amateur photograph shows him together with his "Expeditionsführer" Theophil Wagner in the Wadi el-Arish.



Major Otto Edler von Graeve with Theophil Wagner in Wadi el-Arish Oct. 1915.



Baron von Graeve.¹⁰



Theophil Wagner of Nazareth.¹¹

A comparison of the three photographs makes it seem probable that the man with the goatee and the dog is Major von Graeve and the soldier with the mustache wearing a long-sleeved white undershirt is Theophil Wagner.

The Ottoman medical service was supported not only by the previously mentioned German nuns, but also by Arab Catholic nuns, the Rosary Sisters, and by the Lutheran Deaconesses who were sent from their St. John's Hospital in Beirut together with an American medical team from the Syrian Protestant College (which later became the American University of Beirut). There were also some lay nurses, volunteering with the Ottoman Red Crescent.



Dr. Canaan talking to a Rosary Sister in Hafir el-Auja.

The American medical expedition left Beirut in January 1915. Using two hundred and eighty camels they brought thirty tents, more than one hundred beds, an operation tent, tents for washing and laundry, a pharmacy and a huge amount of other equipment. The leader of the group was Dr. Ward. He was assisted by two other physicians and by twelve medical students. Four German deaconesses went along. Dr. Canaan, who had studied medicine at the American medical school in Beirut, was responsible for the laboratory. The Americans reached Hafir on 6 February, early enough to receive the first wounded who came back from the battle near the Bitter Lakes and the Timsah Lake, fought on 3 February.

After the failure of the first Sinai expedition the hospitals of Hafir were moved to Beersheba. One Ottoman, one German and for some time also one Austrian field hospitals were active in the capital of the Negev.



The medical team in Beersheba. From left to right: Dr. Wilhelm Landgraf (field hospitals 212 and 213), a red cross nurse, Dr. Gerard Jorns (chief physician of the "Egyptian Expedition," two deaconesses, Dr. Iwan Saphra (field hospital 213), a red cross nurse, Prof. Carl Hegler (chief bacteriologist). Reclining in the front row: an unknown German physician, Prof. Herman Schrötter von Kristelli (commander of the Austrian Reserve Hospital), Dr. Robert von Homeyer (commander of field hospital 213).



Dr. Iwan Saphra, Dr. Tawfiq Canaan, Mrs. Margot Canaan, and Dr. Moshe Krieger in front of the Beershiba mosque.

Dr. Saphra was the son of Friedrich Saphra, an extraordinary rabbi who used to preach in Esperanto in synagogues all over Europe (he was a personal friend of Ludwik Zamenhof, the inventor of Esperanto). After the war he became a general practitioner in Suhl, Thuringia. Dr. Saphra emigrated from Nazi Germany in 1939 and became a well-known bacteriologist in the USA.¹² Dr. Moshe Krieger was born in Lithuania, studied medicine in Berlin and Paris and immigrated to Palestine in 1912. He was an Ottoman medical officer in the Balkan wars. In WWI he was stationed in Ibni and Kuseima, Beersheba and later in Damascus. After the war he was involved in many public activities.¹³

A very important place in Canaan's album is reserved for his younger brother Wadie Immanuel, who otherwise became an almost totally forgotten personality. Wadie held German citizenship and became an officer in the mixed German-Ottoman machine gun companies 601-608 when complete German units were brought to the Sinai front.



Lieutenant Immanuel Wadie Canaan is third from right in the standing row.

Several photographs show Wadie's comrades in his machine gun company, among them Hermann Schneller who later was the director (third generation) of the Schneller institutions in Jerusalem. Another photograph is the unique picture of Lt. Erwin Cordier, the only German officer who was killed in action in the first Gaza battle. The album even shows his first grave in Gaza, next to that of Sergeant Heinrich Lind. Later the remains of the lieutenant were disinterred and moved to Jerusalem; Cordier had a grand funeral service in the Church of the Redeemer, attended by Jamal Pasha himself. He was buried on Mount Zion. Sergeant Lind was left in Gaza, his tomb lost and forgotten. Only Tawfiq Canaan's album honors his memory.



Lt. Wadie Canaan in Beersheba (second right). The others, from left to right, are Lt. Hermann Schneller, Kremer, Schlaun, Major Schumacher (in white uniform) and Major Mayer, the commander of the machine gun battalion. The photographer is mentioned, too: Dr. Canaan. Major Schumacher is the famous German architect and archeologist Gottlieb Schumacher from the Templars colony in Haifa.



Officers of the Machine Gun Company 601-105 Nazareth 1918.
Lt. Wadie Canaan sits at the far left.

Except for the two previously mentioned Nablus pictures and maybe some photographs of the road from Jerusalem to Nablus there is only one photograph in the album that was taken in the months following the British occupation of Jerusalem. Dr. Canaan was now separated from his friends in Jerusalem, among them the professional photographers who now worked for the British. The whole German community, including the Eilender family, had been deported to Egypt. Canaan probably now worked in Nablus, but he never mentions this period in later reminiscences. He also never mentions the commander of the 7th army in Nablus, Mustafa Kemal, later known as Atatürk, whom he followed to Aleppo at the end of the Palestine Campaign, though earlier he had been a close friend to all Ottoman and German commanders.¹⁴

The only photograph from that period is the one of his beloved younger brother Wadie whom he lost in this war. Lieutenant Wadie Canaan was severely wounded in the 20 September 1918 British attack on Nazareth. He was brought to the empty German field hospital 213, where Dr. Wilhelm Lübke was taking care of the severely sick or wounded German soldiers left behind by the fleeing German troops. Though in desperately bad shape he was taken as a prisoner to Egypt, where he died of his wounds on 9 October. He was buried in the German war cemetery in Old Cairo.

Norbert Schwake is a former theologian and a retired physician who worked in several hospitals in Israel. Until 2003 he was the head of the geriatric department of the Holy Family Hospital in Nazareth. This hospital was used as a German field hospital in World War I. Dr. Schwake is the custodian of the German War Cemetery next to the hospital.

Endnotes

- 1 His son Doron intends to hand it over to an academic institute in order to preserve it for future generations.
- 2 I make this deduction on the basis of the predominance of Canaan's family members and friends, as well as the written captions accompanying the images.
- 3 A figure prominently featured in Salim Tamari, *Year of the Locust: a Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
- 4 Prof. Fauzi Mantour helped in the description of the photograph.
- 5 "Holzhausen Nachlass" in the archives of the German Foreign Ministry, Berlin.
- 6 Courtesy of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.
- 7 Near today's Nitzana border crossing. The area was a demilitarized zone between 1948 and 1956. After the Sinai campaign the Turkish buildings were demolished.
- 8 Courtesy of Dr. Kickton's daughter Carlote, in Cologne.
- 9 W. Mönch: "Herr aller Gewässer in der Wüste." Der Wünschelrutengänger Otto Edler v. Graeve im Kriegseinsatz an der Sinaifront 1915, in: *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie*, Jahrgang 32, Freiburg 1990.
- 10 Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- 11 Courtesy of Mrs. Lore Decker, née Wagner, of Melbourne, Australia
- 12 Interview with the late Mrs. Ilse Saphra, New York.
- 13 Nissim Levy and Yael Levy, *The Physicians of the Holy Land, 1799-1948* [Hebrew], Zikhron: Itai Bahur, 2008).
- 14 His grandson Prof. Fauzi Mantoura found that Dr. Canaan reached Aleppo at the end of the war. There he fell sick like most German and Turkish soldiers.