

# Dining Out in Times of War: Jerusalem 1914-1918

Roberto Mazza

Antonio de la Cierva y Lewita, Conde de Ballobar, served as consul in Jerusalem from 1914 to 1918 leaving behind a diary which has proved to be an invaluable source of information on war-time Jerusalem, its population, Ottoman and British administrations.<sup>1</sup> He arrived in Jerusalem in September 1914 and his main task was to re-establish a more amicable relationship with the Custody of the Holy Land, after his predecessor Rafael Casares severed relations with the Italian *Custos* and opened a conflict with the Custody - which extended to the Vatican, over the control of properties financed with Spanish money in the Holy Land.<sup>2</sup> As events unfolded and the Ottoman Empire eventually joined the war that began to rage in Europe during the summer of the same year, Ballobar found himself being part of an expected scenario. Spain remained a neutral country during the war and while the city was changing due to war conditions, Ballobar as well changed his attitude and behaviour and the aims of the Spanish consular mission adapted to the new circumstances.

War-time Jerusalem, despite the fact it suffered great distress due to lack of resources and the unfortunate invasions of locusts, was still a thriving city. The city indeed was under continuous threat and panic: censorship became harsh, people feared arbitrary actions on the part of the Ottoman army and families were exposed to tremendous poverty. Jerusalem became also a city of beggars, thieves and prostitutes, nevertheless, normal activities were radically altered but not stopped. This is the Jerusalem Ballobar lived in, different from the one he knew from the literature of the time and from previous consular reports; indeed a city where normalcy was disrupted and brutalised. However, as proved by Ballobar

himself, local society did not disappear but adapted to the new state of affairs, though at times, as clearly noted in the consul's diary it was not an easy task.

Despite the lack of resources and the altered socio-political setting of war-time Jerusalem, dining out during the First World War was not an unusual activity. Dinners, in the sense of social events, took place mainly at the residence of foreign consuls, Ottoman officials and local notables. Meals, however, were not the only social gatherings that seem to be very popular: tea, coffee, poker and lunch were also very fashionable amongst the elites of the city and well known amongst the local inhabitants. Evidence of the popularity of these events is to be found in several sources, other than Ballobar, other local residents like Ihsan Tourjman and Wasif Jawhariyyeh discussed (albeit with different focus and opinions) these social occasions.<sup>3</sup>

Dinners and social gatherings and events have been chiefly discussed by social scientists, anthropologists and archaeologists.<sup>4</sup> It has been suggested that food can be used as a system of communication, the way food and activities are organised is a reflection of a particular message.<sup>5</sup> It has also been argued that the way people use food and drink is a metaphor of the character of the relationship between the participants at the same time sociologists and anthropologists have discussed the relationship between food and class highlighting the economic and symbolic values of this relationship.<sup>6</sup> Through the analysis of the dinners and other social events described by Ballobar, we understand that these events are indeed a reflection of the historical situation and of the status of the relationships between the different actors mentioned. Looking thoroughly at the entries dedicated to the discussion of social gatherings, indeed the symbolic value of the relationship between class and food emerge quite strongly: despite the distressed conditions of Jerusalem, we should never forget that Ballobar was part of the Spanish nobility and elite which meant he had access to resources unavailable to others. We should also bear in mind that these gatherings took place during the war whose role must not be overlooked. Before discussing some of the events portrayed by Ballobar, we may consider briefly the same category of events as rendered by Tourjman and Jawhariyyeh. It is clear from Abigail Jacobson and Salim Tamari's analysis of Tourjman's diary that he was dissatisfied and angered at the Ottoman government whom, according to him, was neglecting the local population in a time of crisis. Tourjman proved also very critical of public celebrations and parties which were, 'decadent and immoral especially in a time of war.'<sup>7</sup> Jawhariyyeh, on the other hand, as a musician, was often part of these social events which he mentioned as part of his account of music, art and social of life in the late Ottoman period in Jerusalem. He was less critical and more descriptive.<sup>8</sup>

Perusing the diary of Ballobar I have selected a number of entries dealing with meals and other social gatherings in order to show the thriving social setting of war-time Jerusalem and to underline the historical relevance of the diary of Ballobar in reconstructing several aspects of late Ottoman Palestine and Jerusalem. On 25th November 1914 Ballobar dined at his residence with the civil governor Macid Bey. Ballobar indulged in the description of the dinner and he praised his Arab chef who

prepared excellent stuffed courgettes.<sup>9</sup> Ballobar was interested in getting better acquainted with the local establishment. They did not discuss particular topics, or at least none were reported, suggesting that the Spanish Consul was mainly interested in becoming familiar with the governor and gathering more information on the ongoing process of mobilisation in preparation for a possible war that started in Jerusalem in August 1914 with the proclamation of martial law.<sup>10</sup> This event indeed reveals a particular system of communication, whether intentional or not is debatable, put in place through food consumption.

A different example of social activity is represented by a billiards game followed by a dinner on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1915. Ballobar played against the Greek consul Raphaël; the two were quite close friends. After the game, they decided to pay a visit to the new military governor: Ali Riza Bey who was depicted by Ballobar as a nice person. Both diplomats were indeed interested in getting to know their new counterpart. They enjoyed the night out discussing war news, above all the Dardanelles campaign and the question of the prisoners of war.<sup>11</sup>

Later in May 1915 Ballobar was informed that Italy had joined the war. An official dinner was scheduled that night, 26<sup>th</sup> May, at the United States consular residence. The Italian, German and Austrian consuls did not attend the dinner, they all sent notes of apology to the American representative, but clearly they could not attend the same event together. Nevertheless, the dinner was no less animated in fact, the guest of honour Cemal Paşa entertained the other guests talking about the CUP and Kitchener, the British Minister of War. Cemal reported in fact that Kitchener attempted to employ a professional killer, apparently Cemal himself, in order to murder Talat, the British believed that eliminating Talat would have made it possible to take the Ottoman Empire out of the conflict. Ballobar quite ironically assed the Ottoman government:

“The Turkish Government is a triumvirate: Talat Bey is the *father*, Djemal Pasha the *son* and Enver Pasha the *holy spirit*, however Djemal is the most powerful.”<sup>12</sup>

During the dinner Raphaël and Cemal had a mild discussion, the first of many, on the role of Greece in times of war. Eventually the discussion was downplayed when the small crowd moved to the cinema where a party was organised by the local Jewish notable Antebi and where the ice cream served helped to cool down the tense Turco-Greek relations.<sup>13</sup> In this case the war is not relevant in terms of dietary change as discussed by some scholars but as influential in the behaviour of the people sitting around the table.<sup>14</sup>

In a long entry of 9<sup>th</sup> July 1916, Ballobar described several events that took place from 29<sup>th</sup> June when the Spanish consul received a late visit from Cemal Paşa. Ballobar called Raphaël and with Cemal discussed the possibility of Greece and Spain joining the war, yet according to Ballobar the situation was not tense. On the contrary, it was quite friendly. Cemal then began to discuss urban plans for Jerusalem, such as the construction of a park on Mount Zion and a new road between the Franciscan

school and Damascus Gate. A few days later, on a Friday, Ballobar again met Cemal for a short visit. They discussed the Armenians and the question of whether it was true that these people had to convert to Islam: Cemal denied it. Sitting around the table Ballobar commented upon a book by the leading Zionist Dr Ruppin. Cemal then yelled: 'He is a swine!' <sup>15</sup> On 6<sup>th</sup> of July Cemal visited Ballobar's residence where they dined on a dazzling meal. Ballobar wanted to impress his guest and it may be speculated that indeed he succeeded. The menu included Turkish soup, fish, fillets, meat pies and stuffed turkey; as desserts vanilla ice cream, pineapple and fruit were served. After dinner they played poker and discussed news coming from Europe. It seems as if the war was light years away from them and Jerusalem. <sup>16</sup> Ballobar made quite an effort to serve this meal considering the scarcity of resources, however he used this event as a metaphor to show his power and the importance attributed to his guests.

All of a sudden, on 9<sup>th</sup> of September 1916 during a dinner called by the governor of the city and held at the convent of Artas, Cemal attacked the Greek consul, accusing the Greeks of being revolutionaries paid by the Entente powers this revealed how the tension caused by the war could enter any kind of environment. Cemal mentioned 'Ali Fuad Bey, former ambassador to St Petersburg and then commander of the Western front comment against the Greek: 'We will treat them (the Greek) worse than the Armenians'. <sup>17</sup> It is clear Cemal distrusted the Greeks but also Cemal's concern was apparent in relation to the rumours of the impending British invasion of the Suez Canal, also mentioned by Ballobar a few days earlier, quoting a German newspaper. <sup>18</sup>

On 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1917 it was already clear that the situation in Palestine was to change and it was a matter of time before the British engaged in a battle for Jerusalem. Ballobar dined at Zaki Bey's place where the German consul Bröde confirmed the news that Jerusalem would not be evacuated, to the great satisfaction of the Spanish consul. They played poker and discussed the question of typhus and of America joining the war against Germany but not against the Ottoman Empire. Typhus was becoming an urgent issue according to Ballobar as in fact members of the various consular missions in the Ottoman Empire had also been affected. <sup>19</sup> From the narrative it seems in Jerusalem, amongst the commanding elites, there was some sort of sense of fatality, as if they were waiting for something to happen.

A few months later the wait was over. On 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1917 Ballobar dined for the last time in the company of German officials. During the dinner, Perfall a German officer, made an official announcement: 'The 20<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Army will defend the surrounds of Jerusalem and it will withdraw during the night, leaving only three regiments which then will take the road to Jericho.' <sup>20</sup> Food and war once again went hand in hand. Ballobar described himself as quite surprised; however, we can say that he was indeed waiting for this day to come. On 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1917 Ballobar had already written to the Ministry of State informing his superiors of the impending Turco-German withdrawal. <sup>21</sup> Ballobar then reached the Spanish consulate whilst confusion reigned due to the battle surrounding the city and the panic which spread amongst the population, and the troops. Before nine o'clock he received the visit of an Ottoman

official, Arif Bey, who asked the consul to surrender the Jews hidden in the consulate, the banker Siegfried Eliezer Hoofien and his associate Jacob Thon. Ballobar promised him that he would hand over these people to the Ottomans the day after.<sup>22</sup> Clearly Ballobar knew that by the following day the city would have been evacuated and he also knew that the Ottomans were in no position to make such a request. It is difficult to say whether Ballobar was pro or against Zionism, in fact all sources available suggest a quite neutral approach towards this particular subject; he was keen to help the Jews as he did on many occasions, but he never clearly expressed any opinion in relation to Zionism. Interestingly, not only Zionism seems missing from Ballobar's diary and other sources, in fact as soon as the British arrived also references to the previous regime and his 'old friends' Cemal Paşa and others also disappeared.

After the British arrival many things changed in the city; however, social gatherings maintained their important status. They became even more important, and indeed, fashionable considering the arrival of new people and new resources. A few months after the British occupation of the city on 8th of April 1918, Ballobar attended an official dinner which was served in a buffet style. Ballobar had never seen anything like that.

“We helped ourselves with the dinner, there was a large table with variety of cured meat, salads, pastries and puddings and many other kind of foods. [...] The system is very practical and at the same time a good system to facilitate the digestion, considering activity performed every time we were obliged to stand up and walk to serve ourselves.”<sup>23</sup>

Despite the fact that he found the buffet practical, he could not understand how a Lord could enjoy that system. During the dinner, music was played, and later a short theatrical show was represented.<sup>24</sup> He discussed the military and political situation in Jerusalem with several British officials including Allenby who was quite effective in not saying much. We may say that Ballobar was not aware of this use of food as mean of communication, it was indeed an entire new world for him to explore. It was also a new relationship between food and class that he did not know and found difficult to understand. Adapting to difficulties was a skill he learned very well, but with the arrival of the British the previous scenario was over and he was ready to go back his previous lifestyle.

In July, Ballobar dined with the new military governor Ronald Storrs who claimed that the best solution for Jerusalem was to leave the city to the Americans. Ballobar did not agree, and his personal view was that the British were not leaving the region; yet the future of Palestine and the Middle East was to be decided. Besides Ballobar thought that British rule was the best solution vis-à-vis the possibility of a Palestine ruled by French or even Italians, the strongest competitors of Spain in the Holy Land.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Storrs reported the dinner with Ballobar in his memoirs; however, he focused mainly on some comments given by Ballobar on the German and Ottoman authorities in the city: ‘Jemal was *sale type* but *bon garçon*, and Enver *aimait*

*beaucoup la boisson: Falkenhayn and Kress sympathiques.*<sup>26</sup>

The analyses of the diary of Ballobar through the lenses of the relationship between food and class and the attempt to relate his food experiences with the local context has shown an image of war-time Jerusalem almost unknown and definitely very different from the stereotyped picture produced by nearly all western sources available for this period. Despite the fact the diary is still mediated by the consul's socio-political background, it was written at the time when events were unfolding and shows several aspects of the transition from Ottoman to British Jerusalem. Interestingly, as this is a diary not reconstructed in light of retrospective thinking and judgements, through the discussion of social events that took place in the city, we can see how rapidly the Ottoman era faded away. Since 9th of December 1917, following the British capture of Jerusalem, Ballobar for obvious reasons never reported on the Ottomans, but most importantly it looked as though that era was long gone and any reference to Ottoman Jerusalem disappeared. Dining out, nevertheless, did not disappear as a social phenomenon, in fact under the British it became even more popular and more complex suggesting a renegotiation of social relationships and not the establishment of an entire new social milieu.

*Roberto Mazza is Assistant Professor at Western Illinois University.*

#### Endnotes

- 1 See article (the one to be published in the *Jerusalem Quarterly*); Roberto Mazza, *Jerusalem: from the Ottomans to the British*, (London: IB Tauris, 2009).
- 2 *Custos* is the title given to the head of the Custody of the Holy Land, traditionally an Italian. For more details on the conflict between Spain and the Custody of the Holy Land see Garcia Barriuso, *España en la Historia de Tierra Santa*, Vol. II (Madrid: MAE, 1992-94).
- 3 For details on Ihsan Tourjman and Wasif Jawhariyyeh see Salim Tamari, 'The Great War and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past' in *Transformed Landscapes*, ed. Camille Mansour and Leila Fawaz (Cairo: AUC Press, 2009), 105-135; Salim Tamari, 'Jerusalem's Ottoman Modernity: the Times and Lives of Wasif Jawhariyyeh', *Jerusalem Quarterly* 9 (2000), 5-27; Salim Tamari, 'The Short Life of Private Ihsan: Jerusalem 1915', *Jerusalem Quarterly* 30 (2007), 26-58; Abigail Jacobson, 'Negotiating Ottomanism in Times of War: Jerusalem During World War I Through the Eyes of a Local Muslim Resident' *Int. J. Middle East Studies* 40 (2008), 69-88.
- 4 See for instance Alan Beardsworth and Tessa Keil (eds.), *Sociology on the Menu*, (New York: Routledge, 1997). Beardsworth and Keil have attempted to study in sociological terms the experience of food related issues studying in particular food production and consumption. David Bell and Gill Valentine (eds.), *Consuming Geographies*, (New York: Routledge, 1997). Bell and Valentine argues that food and eating is packed with social, cultural and symbolic meanings, they also suggest that every meal can tell us something about the persons involved in the action of eating and their place in society.
- 5 Geoffrey Hunt, 'The Middle Class Revisited: Eating and Drinking in an English Village,' *Western Folklore* 50, (1991), 401-402.
- 6 P. Farb and G. Armelagos (eds.), *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 103; W. Wright and E. Ransom, 'Stratification on the Menu: Using Restaurant Menus to Examine Social Class', *Teaching Sociology* 33, No. 3 (2005), 310.
- 7 Jacobson, 'Negotiating Ottomanism in Times of War', 75. ADD SALIM TAMARI
- 8 Tamari, 'Jerusalem's Ottoman Modernity,' 5-27; Abigail Jacobson, 'From Empire to Empire', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Chicago (2006), 94.
- 9 Conde de Ballobar, *Diario de Jerusalem*, (Madrid : Nerea, 1996),68-69.

- 10 NARA, Washington DC, Consular Post Vol. 69/A, Governor of Jerusalem, 3 August 1914.
- 11 Ballobar, *Diario*, 91.
- 12 Ballobar, *Diario*, 105.
- 13 Ballobar, *Diario*, 105-106.
- 14 Mintz and Du Bois, 'The Anthropology of Food and Eating,' 105.
- 15 Ballobar, *Diario*, 147.
- 16 Ballobar, *Diario*, 145-148.
- 17 Ballobar, *Diario*, 154-155.
- 18 Ballobar, 148: 'According to the Berliner Tageblatt the invasion of Palestine by 300,000 British troops is imminent. I am not really sure about this.'
- 19 Ballobar, *Diario*, 205.
- 20 Ballobar, *Diario*, 233.
- 21 AMAE, H1927, Ballobar to Secretary of State, 20 November 1917, Jerusalem.
- 22 Ballobar, *Diario*, 235. Ballobar was asked to take care of some Jews already in May 1917 after the Spanish Ministry of State petitioned the Austrian government in order to give protection to 5,000 Jews. AMAE, H3025-020, Ministry of State to Spanish Consul in Vienna, 18 May 1917, Madrid.
- 23 Ballobar, *Diario*, 248.
- 24 Ballobar, *Diario*, 247-249.
- 25 Ballobar, *Diario*, 253-254.
- 26 Ronald Storrs, *The Memoirs of Sir Ronald Storrs*, (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1937), 303-304.