

# Before Painting: Nicola Saig, Painting, and Photographic Seeing

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## Abstract

This article hopes to excavate a history of modern painting in the Ottoman Arab world and its relationship with the practice of photography by examining the work of the Palestinian artist, Nicola Saig (Niqula Sayigh). The rise of painting in the Ottoman Arab world in the nineteenth and early twentieth century among its native bourgeoisie should not be understood as a crass derivation or mimicry of the European tradition. Nor was it only as an outgrowth of indigenous traditions such as handcrafts, iconography, miniature painting, illuminated manuscripts, Muslim visual practices, and Eastern Church aesthetic traditions. The rise of painting, especially at beginning of the twentieth century, was a manifest, visual expression of the radical social, political, and economic transformations of the era and generated through the intellectual and cultural circuits in provincial cultural capitals such as Jerusalem. The rise of modern oil painting, therefore, is historically contingent on the naturalization of a modern Arab scopic regime that is particular to photography and one that fascinated and facilitated the project of capitalist modernity of the new Arab bourgeoisie and nationalist classes. In other words, both visual practices were only made possible by the reordering of Ottoman Arab society and the creation of new local elites due to shifts in the political economy of self, society, polity, and material life, where the aesthetic was less European criteria than the effort to create a modern project appropriate to the new Arab individual of capitalist modernity (and national identity).

## Keywords

Nicola Saig; Palestine; Jerusalem; painting; photography; Kamal Boullata; Arab subjectivity; Nahda; British Mandate; Late Ottoman Empire.

“Photography was not the bastard child left by science at the doorstep of art, but a legitimate child of the Western pictorial tradition,” or so Peter Galassi famously stated in *Before Photography*.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the dominant historiography of photography is enmeshed in the art history of the West. The rise of the obsession with verisimilitude was, as the putative theory goes, rooted in the history of the perfect perspective and the Albertian geometric balance of a framed scene. The quattrocento sensibilities reconceptualized spatial representations on new criteria of depth, proportion, scale, and texture, as seen through the eye of the spectator positioned at the top of a visual prism.<sup>2</sup> Galassi removes the history of photographic vision from Albertian perspectives to a new “pictorial syntax” of nineteenth-century landscape oil painting. Oil painting expresses the same “synoptic perceptions” that, he says, the “embryonic spirit of realism” does and share the same contingent “syntax of photography.”<sup>3</sup>

While Galassi attempts to locate photography within a more flexible history of linear perspective, Jonathan Crary challenges the very dialectical relationship between photography and painting, relocating photographic vision in the development of optics and technologies that preceded the invention of the camera.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Geoffrey Batchen takes to task the apparent binary between formalistic and “post-modern” approaches to photography. He asserts the historical specificity within “Western culture” that made the discourse and practice of, and indeed the desire for, photography possible.<sup>5</sup>

Until recently, the scholarship on the photography of the Middle East has been, in many ways, to approach photography (and modern art production, namely, oil painting) either as a derivative of European photography or within a context of “difference” to it. In the case of the Arab world, any assertion connecting the rise of photography with the development of modern, indigenous art practices has been complicated, not assisted, by the established prevailing art history paradigms regarding the Middle Eastern artistic traditions, ranging anywhere from folk art to the iconographic traditions within the Christian churches to the Ottoman tradition of secular portraiture.<sup>6</sup>

Contrary to the assertion that Islam prohibits image making, painting enjoyed prominence in the Ottoman court and among the empire’s aristocracy. This ran concurrent to the centuries-old tradition of illuminated manuscripts and miniature painting.<sup>7</sup> In addition to Bellini’s famous portrait of Sultan Mehmed II, oil painting grew within Ottoman circles. The success and popularity of the polyglot reformer Osman Hamdi Bey, himself trained at the hands of the French Orientalist painter Jean-Léon Gerome, demonstrates not only the social status of oil painting but also the relationship between it and the new class of bureaucrats, technocrats, and bourgeoisie in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>8</sup> These very classes were responsible for, simultaneously, the prevalence of city and landscape frescoes on walls in the new types of homes found throughout Istanbul and the provinces.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the history of modern Arab painting, so deeply rooted in Ottoman and Persian art, often occludes the rich and differing traditions of religious painting and iconography among various Arab Christian communities as well.<sup>10</sup>

With these factors in mind, one is not surprised to learn that Oleg Grabar interrogated the very meaning and coherency of the term “Arab painting,” recognizing not only the cultural, historical, and aesthetic complexity of divining such a definition but also its ideological pitfalls.<sup>11</sup> The history of modern Arab painting, if not photography (which may or may not be related to that aesthetic history), must be approached less through formalism than through a consideration, as Martin Jay might say, of a history of modernity’s scopic regime in the Arab world.<sup>12</sup> Ironically, in closing his discussion on three competing scopic regimes of modernity, Jay carelessly concludes that, “there may well have been some link between the absence of such [rationalist] scopic regimes in Eastern churches . . . and their lack of indigenous scientific revolution.”<sup>13</sup>

The shockingly Orientalist presumption of Jay is, in fact, quite contrary to the historical record. If nothing else, the life of Osman Hamdi, painter, archaeologist, and founder of the Academy of the Fine Arts, verifies that the rising scopic regime of the Ottoman elite, organic intellectuals, and new middle classes coalesced around rationalist paradigms of progress, “civilization,” and positivist knowledge. Likewise, the establishment of the School of Fine Arts in 1908 by Youssef Kamal, the grandson of Ibrahim Pasha, was related to the Egyptian ruling elite and its emergent bourgeoisie’s belief in the social value of the fine arts in the project of national progress and education. While this chapter does not intend to reinscribe some inexorable relationship between painting and photography (particularly, the latter’s inevitable pedigree as a form of art, as Galassi suggests), it certainly asserts that “modern painting” in the Arab world emerged from the same scopic regime of photography. To amend Geoffrey Batchen’s assertion that desire for photography was made possible only by the particularities of Western culture at a given historical moment, I argue that the rise of modern oil painting is historically contingent on the naturalization of a modern scopic regime that is particular to photography. In other words, both visual practices were only made possible by the reordering of Ottoman Arab society and the creation of new local elites due to shifts in the political economy of self, society, polity, and material life.<sup>14</sup>

The shifts in society, economy, and selfhood were also expressed in visual culture, producing new types of viewers who were “participants in the contingent experience of everyday life.”<sup>15</sup> However, the rise of oil painting was not coterminous with the introduction of photography and its vision certainly did not precede photography. Rather, photography’s explicitly rationalist vision “enframed” the oil canvas, the “eye” of the modern artist and the viewing subject. In this regard, looking at the rise of painting in the Arab world, one necessarily must look less at *a priori* form than to the discursive and social formations that structure form.

## The World as Picture

The very creation of a viewer seems particularly important in the Ottoman Middle East. This is not because of some fantastic prohibition of imaging making in Islam or because the Arab world did not have an established tradition of visual culture. Rather, the genesis of a new viewer was the product of a series of modern discourses that

naturalized the subject-citizen as the center of society and vision. This is the Cartesian perspectivalism of which Jay speaks, which itself resonates with Timothy Mitchell's observations in *Colonizing Egypt*, where:

The experience of the *world as picture* set up before the subject is linked ... to the unusual conception of the world as a limited totality, something that forms a bounded structure or system... The world arranges itself into a picture and achieves a visual order, in accordance with the laws of perspective.<sup>16</sup>

Mitchell's discussion of experiencing "the world as picture before the subject" draws our attention to the nexus between the social transformations of the day, shifting notions of selfhood and how they both were expressed in various new forms of visual culture. He locates the Heideggerian world as picture, or *Weltbild*, as the central visual paradigm of colonialism. Elsewhere, I have argued that Giambattista Vico's elastic *verum factum* allows us to conceptualize the formation of a photographic sensibility, or "photographic perspective" as a mode of knowledge production. Using *verum factum* acknowledges that the process of "knowing" (*scire*) involves piecing "together the element of knowing things," combining "discursive thought" (*cognitatio*) and Divine knowledge (*intelligentia*).<sup>17</sup> The facticity and legibility of the photograph is a combination of knowledge but also the power to compose it. Early Arab Ottoman photography, that is, visualized the epistemology of Arab Ottoman modernity and naturalized the knowledge of a particular sort of Nahda subject, the modern Arab subject who emerges in the nineteenth century through a series of intellectual, cultural, and social formations.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the facticity of photography evokes an affectation beyond the knowledge produced by the image, what could be considered by Vico as that of Divine knowledge and which elicits the internal worlds created within communal, national, gender, class, and individualist subjective formation.

In the case of tracing the archaeology of a modern Arab painting, Heidegger's *Weltbild* provides us specifically with an understanding of representation with the context of modernity, an understanding that we may want to trouble or problematize in the Global South. It describes the "world picture of modernity" or the "modern world picture," in Heidegger's words, where "the being of beings is sought and found in the representedness of beings."<sup>19</sup> The world as picture is the scopic regime of modernity par excellence.

Visualizing the self in a universalized world with a framework of universalized history informs the discursive contours of Arab thinkers, activists, scholars, literati, artists, and politicians of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. All are calibrating Arab social and economic (and therefore subjective) changes and new formations within the rise of European political, economic, and intellectual hegemony, a hegemony that is read as the "natural" end point of "progress" (*taqaddum*). Yet, Heidegger's framing of the world as picture is complicated by Palestinians' confrontation not only with the emergence of capitalism and new social classes but also British colonialism and Zionist settler colonialism, which must always be displaced as secondary to a universal history

and vision in which the radical (modern) individual finds themselves. The world as picture points us away from “picturing” itself and toward the epistemology of a vision that can only imagine ourselves through visualization. The practice of oil painting emerged in the Arab world in the late nineteenth century from this epistemology, an epistemology that contends not only with the place of Arab self in “the world” and in history but in a history and world in which they fight not to be expelled, as Amílcar Cabral writes.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, this article is unable to offer even a general overview of this history, which would involve not only a formalistic review of the development of genres, media, and artists in Istanbul, Beirut, Cairo, Alexandria, and Jerusalem, not to mention North Africa, but would also require the examination of the array of commentaries on art, aesthetics, education, social progress, and cultural reform.<sup>21</sup> However, grounding the approach of the birth of modern Arab painting within the understanding of *Weltbild*, we can note, first, that this concept is one that is created in the “worlding” of the Arab world during the Nahda, during the formation of Arab modernity itself, and therefore must not be seen as derivative of European modernity or aesthetics. That is to say, the origins of oil painting cannot be separated from the zeitgeist of the Tanzimat, the nineteenth-century reform and modernization movement within the Ottoman Empire, in particular the formation of new types of individual, class, national, communal, and gendered subjects. This aesthetic facilitated local (Jerusalemite), confessional (Christian), and national (Arab Palestinian) identities that drove the re-organization of social hierarchies and economic organizations, as shown by Sherene Seikaly.<sup>22</sup> Like so many other forms of modern cultural production from fiction to political thought, the genesis of modern Arab painting has been explained as yet one more example of how Easterners integrated or mimicked Western cultural forms.<sup>23</sup> The fact that the aforementioned Osman Hamdi and Yousef Kamal both studied in Paris is used as evidence. However, as Jessica Winegar, Özge Calafato, and Hisham Khatib have shown with a more contemporary context, the artistic identities and pedigrees along with artistic and vernacular genres did not exclusively match European definitions per se even if they may be uncannily reproductive of them on the surface.<sup>24</sup> In fact, albeit in passing, she notes that “during the Ottoman period” among others, the “system” and discourse of art and artistic education was “geared toward the scientific, industrial and technological development of the country.”<sup>25</sup> In this regard, painting in Egypt, Ottoman Turkey, and Syria as well as Palestine, should not be seen only as an outgrowth of indigenous traditions, such as handicrafts, iconography, miniature painting, and illuminated manuscripts, as Bashar Shamout shows us.<sup>26</sup> Equally important, painting was a manifest, visual expression of the radical social, political, and economic transformations of the era, a visual language generated by a new class of Arab artists.<sup>27</sup> This article hopes to excavate a history of modern painting in the Arab world and its relationship with the practice of photography by examining the work of the pioneer Palestinian artist, Nicola Saig (Niqula Sayigh).

## Jerusalem's First Painter

Little is known about Nicola Saig (1863–1942) other than Kamal Boullata's invaluable work on the painter, based largely on oral interviews and personal experience.<sup>28</sup> This lacunae reminds one of the fragility of the lives and works of Palestinians that is the consequence of the ongoing colossal cultural violence of the Nakba and genocide. Despite the absence of any written documents in his own voice, Saig's persona as a leading and seasoned iconographer and painter in Jerusalem emerges forcefully. His life and atelier were the center of Jerusalem's icon production. Jerusalem itself was a center for religious, particularly Orthodox, iconography, developing in the previous century its own distinct *maqdisi*, or Jerusalemite, style.<sup>29</sup> Saig's atelier was the epicenter for iconography in the early decades of the century, also responsible for training other pioneer artists such as Zulfa al-Sa'di.

Boullata asserts that Saig's work was a linchpin in secularizing figurative and landscape painting in Palestine. No doubt, Saig developed a vernacular that was infused by religious and iconographic painting and European "secular" oil painting. As such, his hybrid language is symptomatic of his generation's "overlapping senses of identity" and as preserving a "multifocal identity."<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, he states that Saig "seems to have provided the prototype compositions for many of the different historical scenes," which were "laboriously copied by the younger generation of painters who have studied under him as well as by other colleagues who fell under his spell."<sup>31</sup> Saig's real contribution to the development of Palestinian, and indeed Arab, art, however, lays in the fact that the artist developed a "synthetic language that addressed the realities of his world," synthesizing a mixture of iconographic techniques and painting.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Boullata concludes, "Saig's hybrid language fusing iconic referrals and illusionist styles embodied his unceasing shuttle between religious and secular painting."<sup>33</sup>

Saig's oeuvre squarely falls in the historical trajectory of the transformations of modernity in Palestine. While Boullata does not delve deeply into the political economy and social changes at the time, he correctly states that Saig's historical paintings were "attempts at a *metaphoric* interpretation of the political moment Palestinians were living during their struggle for national independence."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Boullata's analysis correctly suggests that Saig's development came as "a result of understanding the new knowledge disseminated by the changing world around him."<sup>35</sup>

## Symbolism to Allegory

Boullata's work introduces to us the potential synthetic nature of Saig's work, whose religious compositions were initially rooted in the Jerusalem ateliers of religious iconography but morphed into secularized oil painting and iconography. The syncretism of Saig's art fused the idealism of two radically different artistic traditions, iconography and figurative oil painting. Boullata notes the different formalist traditions within Eastern Orthodox iconography itself, and between Greek, Russian, and post-

Byzantine styles as well as the iconography of Eastern Uniate churches within the development of Palestinian art. But to locate Saig within a larger, regional context, one certainly might look at the figurative similarities between the icons and frescos of the Maronite, Greek Catholic, and Orthodox churches to ferret out a potential embryo of a syncretic regional, if not only, religious vernacular. Considering this, Saig's work might parallel with earlier artists such as Kanaan Dib and even Daoud Corm, who should be seen not as part of a neighboring national (Lebanese) tradition but precisely as a part of the Arab Ottoman and Eastern (*sharqi*) tradition. However, perhaps more important than stylistic vagaries within the burgeoning of a regional or national aesthetic, is that religious iconography has more in common with medieval European Christian frescos or the miniatures in illuminated Arabic manuscripts than visual codes and the form of oil painting. That is, in looking beyond formalism, the impact of Saig's oeuvre can be relocated to the plane of signification, meaning, vision, and indeed epistemology. The force of his work, then, can be seen as larger than an artistic transformation or development but as a common historical moment of modernity in Palestine itself.

Certainly, innovations on the manifest surface of the canvas clue us in to the radical social, economic, and political changes underway. Yet, the true rupture lay in the visual and representational language of the image itself. For an icon, its representational composition is not based on proportion, perspective for viewer or the viewer him or herself, but rather on the non-narrative content of the image and on the symbolic and social hierarchies that were represented. The Orthodox iconography of Jerusalem certainly followed the Antiochian tradition that hermeneutically understood texts as unmediated, direct, and literal communications with the flock.<sup>36</sup>

However, instead of the presence of the divine in the company of the faithful or the representation of the sacred reaching into the profane world, the icon for Saig ceased to function on the symbolic level. Similar to artists in Beirut and Cairo previously, Saig and his apprentices secularized the Palestinian icon, in a more profound shift. This gradual secularization of oil painting and even religious iconography indicates a larger epistemological shift. Indeed, Saig's work has much in common with the portrait painting of his Beiruti contemporary Daoud Corm. Their oil painting marks more than a development in artistic practices but a shift in ways of seeing itself.<sup>37</sup>

By the early twentieth century, the visual paradigm of modernity structured Saig's artistic language, when he began to paint on an allegorical level. The "Arab Renaissance" (*al-nahda al-'arabiyya*), the Ottoman Tanzimat, and the cultural trends of Cairo and the provincial capitals undoubtedly informed Saig's relation to the world as much as the ever-increasing presence of Zionist colonial settlers or the arrival of the British Mandate.<sup>38</sup> Just as the classical prose narrative, *al-maqama*, with its overly ornate sensibilities became obsolete, arcane, and empty of its utility in offering a socially relevant narrative, so, too, did the icon on the larger level of reflecting social relations. Therefore, new narratives, in particular the historical, didactic, and romance novel, coincided with Saig's reworking of visual narratives in an attempt to paint allegorically.

The shift from iconography's symbolism to painting's allegory is not only a formalistic development. The two operate on different epistemological levels, on mutually exclusive echelons of signification, recognition, and narrative. The symbolic nature of the icon offered the believer an unmediated image of divinity. Owen Barkfield's famous metaphor of painting before the Scientific Revolution fits in the context of the Orthodox icon where the world of its depthless, sacred surface "was more like a garment" than a "stage."<sup>39</sup>

The "*metaphoric* interpretation" of Saig's historical painting was not a coincidental new way of rendering contemporaneous events. Rather, his allegorical painting sees the "world as a picture" that entails a new social and economic reality that called to be visually imagined. In this regard, allegory does the hard work of casting the narratives of the present into its historical analogue, and into a visual language and coherent visual nomenclature in which Palestinian Arabs could recognize themselves. Or, as Craig Owen explains, allegory in the visual arts had been enlisted in the service of historicism to produce image upon image of the present in terms of the classical past. This relationship was expressed not only superficially, in details of costume and physiognomy, but also structurally, through a radical condensation of narrative into a single, emblematic instant – significantly, Barthes calls it a hieroglyph – in which the past, present, and future, that is, the historical meaning, of the depicted action might be read.<sup>40</sup>

Saig's choice of historical painting certainly condenses the narrative of burgeoning Palestinian identity into "emblematic" glyphs as Owen and Benjamin might suggest. But the shift from symbolism to allegory was possible because a new visual language had been established during the preceding *al-nahda al-'arabiyya* and Ottoman Tanzimat. The representational content of the image was hollowed out and recoded along a new structure of language, identity, and selfhood.

The icon's figures of saints, Church Fathers, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary may be religiously sacred but the icon's materiality and representational content no longer signify God's omniscience in a mystified world. Rather, the icon is metaphorical of the presence of the holy in the profane lives of the faithful. Yet, even by the time of Saig's childhood, let alone World War I, Palestine had undergone massive transformations in political economy, including changes in the land tenure system, the creation of new petty middle classes, and the emergence of urban bourgeoisies to compete with traditional elites.<sup>41</sup> The political impact of these developments, found in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, was amplified by increased Jewish immigration from Europe. While Palestine would remain the "Holy Land," this Orientalized paradigm did not inform the self-view of Palestinians, who were fully entrenched in rationalization of every aspect of society from agriculture to art. The icon could only be recoded as an element of Palestinian Christian culture and religiosity. The relationship to the icon could not encompass the new social relations between the peasantry, church, elites, and Ottoman and British administrators, let alone express their relation to the land, which would become so tantamount to their national struggle.

In this regard, the allegorical depth of painting would be the expression of an



epistemological shift, a shift essential to Arab modernity. When we speak of “decolonizing” art, painting, or thought, this is the juncture to which we must look. That is to say, allegory becomes a particular form of translating and recoding social positions, expectations, and hierarchies into universal fixture of “national” history and the bourgeois individual’s place in it. Allegory, as Owen and Roman Jakobson explain, is a “projection of a structure.” That structure at turn-of-the-century Palestine was the positivist developmental paradigms of the Nahda, the Arab renaissance. In shifting to allegory, “syntagmatic or narrative associations were compressed in order to compel a vertical reading of (allegorical) correspondences.”<sup>42</sup> Moreover, it “is revealed to be the projection of the metaphoric axis of language onto its metonymic dimension.” Owen notes that Jakobson “defined this projection of metaphor onto metonymy as the “poetic function.” Jakobson coupled “metaphor with poetry and romanticism, and metonymy with prose and realism. Allegory, however, implicates both,” bisecting style and form.<sup>43</sup>

In the context of Saig, the move to allegory does not commit the author to one referential index over another. Saig’s use of allegory does not derail his art from the metaphoric function of the icon. Theoretically speaking, iconography’s axis of selection or simultaneities, as Jakobson and Sussure respectively would say, is not transferred onto painting’s axis of combination or succession. Rather, the use of allegory reflects that the social relations of the image had been transformed and that the language of painting projected the new narrative structure of modernity in the Middle East, the syncretism between wrenching social and economic transformations, material culture, and communal identities, and the creation of a new visual language of modernity.

## Historical Painting

Saig’s *Caliph ‘Umar at Jerusalem’s Gates* (c. 1920) may very well be an example of the “birth of the secular icon” although certainly not the birth of Arab secular painting.<sup>44</sup> The image refers to a famous moment when the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Sophronius surrendered the city in 637 to the Caliph ‘Umar, who in turn granted Christians religious and civil freedoms, along with allowing Jews to worship in the city for the first time after their expulsion some five centuries earlier.

Boullata stresses the awkward use of perspective, scale, and light, which, along with its sense of gesture, seem to be influenced by Saig’s craft as iconographer. The image’s color palette, figures, and softness reek of an academic composition. Therefore, the painting’s idiosyncrasies may not relay Saig’s inability to paint as an academic painter but, rather, insinuate a synthetic use of Jerusalemite iconography, itself noted for its use of softer figurative features, in contemporary oil painting. Boullata himself recognizes the syncretic nature of the canvas, artistically and socially. Saig’s painting for him invokes “Jerusalem’s interfaith harmony,” endowing “the image of the Muslim Conqueror with the Christian traits of the Prince of Peace.”<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps Boullata intentionally avoids the heavily laden term of allegory but clearly Saig's painting is allegorical. The reading of allegory, however, goes beyond Boullata's initial observations. Certainly, secularism and intersectarian harmony were essential for Palestinian national resistance to the double threat of Zionist settler colonialism and British imperialism. However, also, this stress on "unity" (*ittihad*) and "concord" (*ulfa*) arose out of Palestine's Ottoman tradition – in particular the reformist tradition in which Palestinian intellectuals and elites were ensconced. This tradition, it must be said, was an essential idiom during the rise of new property owners, compradors, and bourgeois classes. These economic and social transformations radically shook Arab societies in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria. Saig's syncretism, then, is a critical class articulation. In creating a visual language for the new Palestinian Arab subject – and a new way of "seeing" as a modern Arab – Saig's syncretism reaches beyond the binary of iconography and oil painting, communal and national identities, tradition and modernity. It pushes us beyond the asymmetrical "projecting" of iconographic metaphor onto the axis of metonymy.

Saig's use of allegory presupposes a shift in seeing and narration. His oeuvre in general took place *within* well-established artistic, literary, and intellectual practices of synthesizing elements of native modernity, one that conscripts Muslim as well as Christian Arab subjects into its vision. But these practices participated in a stripping away of registers that made "traditional" iconography and narrative practices socially relevant and intelligible. Panofsky's concept of "synthetic intuition," albeit naïve and not without problems, is helpful to understand the shift that is required to approach Saig's painting. That is, Panofsky defines the third level in understanding art as based on the viewer's ability to comprehend and conceptualize the symbolic content of the image. Built on the overt "factual" content and culturally informed "conventional" meaning of the image, the viewer's "synthetic intuition" conceives its more profound "history of cultural symptoms."<sup>46</sup>

If in allegory one text is read through another, then the story of 'Umar is read through a political lens of secularism and co-existence.<sup>47</sup> However, more importantly, the historical painting of the Arab caliphate entering Jerusalem can be read through the medium of oil painting itself, the genre's perfect perspective, scale, and rationalism. The medium itself is the allegorical material of modernity as opposed to the beautifully, ornate metallurgy and tempera on wood or plaster. The shift itself parallels the movement of Palestinian society, and indeed all West Asian societies, from communities built on the surface tangibility of social arrangements (tribal affiliations, patron-client relations, confessional affiliations, etc.) toward the "rational" and transparent organization of social *qua* national relations not primarily mediated by the surface, tradition, or confession.

In other words, the allegory that *Caliph 'Umar at Jerusalem's Gates* invokes can only be meaningful if its narrative and compositional codes are recognizable by its Palestinian and Arab viewers and who are able to pull religious, historical, and national allegory into a galvanizing narrative. The iconographic elements deployed

by Saig are “projected” onto the metonymic axis of oil painting. However, the multiplicity of the allegory of ‘Umar, its “poetic function” and prosaic force, is only intelligible because of the epistemological shifts that make allegorical narrative (and painting and novel, for that matter) possible. That is, the compositional syncretism expresses that the social relations of the viewer have been radically transformed. Indeed, the image itself speaks to a new viewing subject; a subject where the lessons of interconfessional unity in the face of Zionism, British imperialism, and capitalist transformations and modernity itself are not only coherent and intelligible but call for the necessities of paintings’ production. The Caliph ‘Umar is transformed into a national secular leader, one that very much reflects the cross-sectarian, cross-class social relations of Jerusalemite (and Palestine’s) *a‘yan* (notable) families, who were transforming themselves into national leaders. On the other hand, this viewing subject – very likely, the same subject who might be the sitter in the photographic studio – participates, on the one hand, in producing meaning that makes the allegory of ‘Umar politically poignant. In this regard, we may consider that the portraits and photographic images of notables and notable families, both staged and during ceremonies, that cut through the photographic albums of the Mandate figure, Wasif al-Jawhariyya, are aesthetically, epistemologically, and socially primed by an image such as Saig’s.<sup>48</sup>

## The Stripping of Saul

The allegorical content of *Caliph ‘Umar at Jerusalem’s Gates* was predicated on a new “synthetic intuition” of the Palestinian Arab viewer, one conditioned by the social and political transformations over the previous fifty years. This intuition is the culturally and historically informed ability to recognize the visual syntax of the image or at least its most basic representational content that present the analogues of the allegory. Saig’s “Caliph ‘Umar” certainly screams out for an allegorical unpacking while its uncanny artistic syncretism communicates that the image expresses several poignant social relations (for example, modernity’s arrival at the gates, interconfessional unity, the nationalist covenant between elites and the masses, the necessity to speak of history in a modern artistic milieu). Yet as unbalanced and idiosyncratic as his Caliph entering Jerusalem, Saig’s body of work itself is highly erratic and variegated.

More challenging than the allegory and syncretism of *Caliph ‘Umar at Jerusalem’s Gates* is Saig’s complex *Conversion of Saul* (figure 1). The image is a dense and unbalanced rendition of St. Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. The painting is strikingly different from the painter’s lighting and discrete use of space in *Caliph ‘Umar at Jerusalem’s Gate*. This painting is patently Baroque and more reminiscent of Rubens’s *Fall of Phaeton* than the nineteenth-century academic palette and figuring in “Caliph ‘Umar.” The painting’s use of chiaroscuro illuminates the diagonally cascading, muscular figures, which contrast with a gaping, empty space off-center in the frame.



Figure 1. Nicola Saig, *The Conversion of Saul* (c. 1920), Khalid Shoman Private Collection.

Perhaps, too, this image could be read allegorically. The conversion could very well be the conversion of the artist from one artistic tradition to another cast in the language of the late Mannerist masters. The figure of the Roman soldier isolated at the edge of the frame and separated by black space and bursting celestial light could stand for any one of the empires with which Palestine found itself politically involved. Yet, the true value of this piece is not the potential allegorical content or even the gesture toward Counter-Reformation painting at a period that coincides with the fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire's mandate over Palestine, and the invasion of Zionist settlers. Rather, Saig's diverse use of styles seems to reflect the very disintegration of the epistemology of sacred iconography, replaced by a visual language that speaks to narrative not form, allegory not symbol, metonymy not metaphor.

Boullata states that Saig confronted a paradox between “a centuries old Eastern form of visual expression he inherited and a Western language that invaded his world.”<sup>249</sup> Yet, Saig's oeuvre does not seem to be conflicted but precisely syncretic, expressing the social relations between artistic indigenous and non-indigenous practices. In his discussion of the relationship between turn of the century Muslim reformers and conservative Orthodoxy, Talal Asad tells us that “secular” reformers did not import exotic concepts into Islam and Arabic culture but relied on the creation

of “new vocabularies,” or, what I have called elsewhere, new nomenclature, which “are linked and connected to older ones.”<sup>50</sup> Saig’s secularization of painting was involved, in other words, in a process of recoding. It recoded iconographic art as an expression of national identity but also recoded Orthodox iconography into new visual and narrative forms, vacated of its exclusive sacred meanings and origins.

In some ways, the idiosyncratic *The Conversion of Saul* is the artist’s least visually conflicted painting, but it is one that is bereft of the syncretism of his other works. That said, the comprehensively Baroque composition expresses that the sacred had already been stripped away from even religious narratives. The sacred use of images was obsolete and Saig’s canvasses, and perhaps even panels, then, must be seen as structured by a new, modern vision that rested on a new “synthetic intuition” cobbled together through the cultural, literary, and intellectual activities of Saig’s Levantine and Egyptian peers. Likewise, this “synthetic intuition” was predicated on the naturalization of a “positivist vision,” a vision of photography.<sup>51</sup>

*The Conversion of Saul* might seem almost slavish in its homage to late Mannerism yet the spatial composition is eerily modern. That is, the Vitruvian perspective of Mannerism is offset by the “rule of thirds” that defines classic photographic landscape. Saig’s work indeed exhibited, if not participated in, a stripping of the mystic aura of the icon, recoding it with a narrative structure of the secular and profane. Yet, he is not responsible for the re-engineering of the painted image. His work, like the two-third’s compositional imbalance of Saul’s conversion, is only an expression of it.

## Before Painting

Hans Belting’s magisterial work, *Likeness and Presence*, has shown, perhaps inadvertently, that medieval Western panel painting derived much of its inspiration, formalism, and style from the “living painting” of Eastern iconography.<sup>52</sup> European painting turned from the Eastern tradition sometime in the last medieval period. Peter Galassi states that photography, in turn, is “a legitimate child” of the later developments in the Renaissance and in modern Western painting.<sup>53</sup> Saig’s oeuvre, like that of Daoud Corm or the former’s prolific student Daoud Zalatimo, make us reconsider the relationship between Arab and Ottoman painting (whether on canvas, plaster, parchment, or panel) and photography.<sup>54</sup> Rather than observing the birth of photography in contrast or response to the pictorial tradition of iconography, illuminated manuscripts, or miniature portraiture, early modern Arab painters give witness to the reification of a photographic vision that precedes their painting.

This assertion is plainly supported by one of Saig’s perhaps most historically significant paintings *Husseini’s Surrender* (figure 2). This oil painting is based on an even more famous photograph taken by Eric Matson or Lewis Larson of the American Colony in Jerusalem. The photograph, Boullata and Barbara Blair remind us, commemorates mayor Salim al-Husayni’s surrender of the city to the British on 9 December 1917 in Lifta, a village to the northwest of the capital that would be completely depopulated

in 1948.<sup>55</sup> Boullata lauds the painting of the surrender of Jerusalem as marking “a turning point in Saig’s career, establishing his reputation as the pioneering master whose craftsmanship not only transgressed the bounds of religious iconography but competed with the most modern means of laying claim to reproducing images of reality.”<sup>56</sup>

A painting by an iconographer from a photograph to canvas seems poignant. Walter Benjamin’s notion of aura certainly is amplified in Eastern iconography, which held sacred value for centuries, but also became a mark of cultural and religious “self-assertion.”<sup>57</sup> Photographic vision is void of such aura. Indeed, it strips

the image and world of such aura, seeing it through a rationalist, positive perspective. Yet, in painting the surrender of Jerusalem, Saig codifies more than an event. His move to painting and the secularization of his pictorial syntax freed him from the symbolic and sacred, from being a “craftsman” to becoming an “artist” in the modern sense of the word. Painting from a photograph clearly embodies that Saig’s work was no longer metaphorical but allegorical. It was narrative. Photography arises out of the impulse to prioritize what “really happened.” It works in concert with a number of mechanisms, cultural forms, and genres, including the novel.

Similar to the phenomenon of the shift from the rhyming prose of *saj’* to the novel, the aura was reconfigured into a language of painting that would speak to the viewer, who is now not exclusively a subject of God but an individual, a citizen, an Arab, and a Palestinian. In this regard, Saig’s painting relates not only the event of the British conquest of Ottoman Palestine but also relates the story of Palestine’s passing from imperial possession to a mandate, and the passing of Palestinians from a society where icons represent social relations to a nation that communicates rationally in painting.



Figure 2. Nicola Saig, *Husseini's Surrender* (c. 1918), Khalid Shoman Private Collection.

## Positivism and Pathos

A series of vectors transverse Saig's oeuvre: the secularization of iconography, allegorical narratives, positivist vision, and the new positionality of the viewing subject. Photography as a way of seeing predates portraits and landscapes in oil but also it enframes the allegorical painting of Saig. Photographic vision as hinted at by *The Conversion of Saul* and literally evinced by *Husseini's Surrender* is apparent in *Escape of the Holy Family to Egypt* (figure 3), another unsuspecting canvas held by the Khalid Shoman Private Collection. Its biblical scene, Boullata suggests, is copied from a staged photograph, commonly sold to European Christian pilgrims to Palestine.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, many photographs of "daily life" in the Holy Land were repurposed to accommodate the demand for biblical images in catalogues and postcards.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the staging of the image is reminiscent of the photographic subgenre of documenting religious holidays and rituals that was popular among local Palestinian Orthodox and Jerusalemite Armenian communities, as well as Western pilgrims.



Figure 3. Nicola Saig, *Escape of the Holy Family to Egypt* (c.1920), Khalid Shoman Private Collection.

The figures in *Escape of the Holy Family to Egypt* are not modelled on idealized biblical iconography but on contemporaneous Palestinian peasantry. For Boullata, "The Jerusalem painter dissolves the religious and the secular traces encountered in his environment and thus he elevates an everyday sight of his provincial countrymen to the mythical status of representing the Holy Family."<sup>60</sup> The practice of using contemporaneous Palestinian



character-types (peasants, water bearers, shepherds, merchants, etc.) was popular in expatriate photography, dating back to the nineteenth century. Boullata's observation sidesteps the clear Orientalist implications of having Palestinians stand in for timeless biblical characters in order to make a powerful claim regarding Palestinian cultural identity.

Acknowledging the origins of the condensation of how biblical tropes arose from older Orientalist narratives does not discredit the formation of Palestinian national identity or culture at this time. To the contrary, typographical origins of these tropes that collapse modern Palestinian peasants into biblical figures emerge from the tradition of photography in the Holy Land. This is not limited, however, to postcards for foreign markets. The act of self-Orientalizing, whether through biblical or Orientalist representation, was equally popular especially among the nascent middle classes and bourgeoisie in the photographic studios of Jerusalem and Haifa.<sup>61</sup>

Along with Saig's "Nativity Scene," Boullata stresses the bi-temporality of painting, or how the modern Palestinian peasant condensed into biblical imagery. This temporality marks what I have noted as the "heterchronies" of Palestinian photography: that is, the ways in which Palestinian photography, even appropriated Orientalist photography, is knotted within different temporalities to create political and subjective meaning.<sup>62</sup> On the one hand, this bi-temporality indicates that Saig frees himself to "venture into new territories in which secular subjects may be explored."<sup>63</sup> Equally important for the author, the Palestinian peasant family as a metonym for the Holy Family clearly makes the painting an expression of national identity at a time when the relationship of the Palestinians to their land was beginning to be called into question by Zionist ideology and colonization.

Therefore, the photographic structure of the *Escape of the Holy Family to Egypt* tells us much. Indigenous photographic portraiture, as much as expatriate tourist photography, enframes the compositional structure of Saig's historical painting (for example, figure, costume, and movement/direction). Also, the biblical tropes and Orientalist narratives, even the most objectifying, were deployed to signify Palestinian national identity. While this process sounds simple, it involved shifts in visual narratives, representation, and selfhood. The self-Orientalizing imagery moves Saig's image beyond the religious into the secular. Religious representation was deterritorialized of the exclusivity of the sacred, thereby allowing it to be recoded with the social value of cross-confessional Palestinian cultural and social identity.

The stripping of the sacred in the construction of the secular national self synchronically accompanied the collapsing of the ancient biblical Palestine with the contemporary countryside. Folding biblical narratives into the rural realities of Palestine was a class act committed by Indigenous elites as much as it was an act of Orientalism by the imperialist metropolises. In imagining a modern, native subjectivity, the new bourgeoisie, the traditional notable families, and the emerging middle classes along with their organic intellectuals, often objectified peasants, workers, craftsmen, and women as laying outside of modernity.<sup>64</sup>

If we are to return, then, to Panofsky's "synthetic intuition," Saig's *Escape of the Holy Family to Egypt* can be seen as a rationalizing text. The direction of the image



moves from right to left as an Arabic text. As such, the heterogeneous painting asks the viewer to read it. This said, the tableau is predicated on a new reading subject and a modern subjective vision that places the individual as the origin of seeing, experience, and social identity. Photography enframes this vision, which itself expresses a new syntax of selfhood that finds its expression in the depth of allegory and narrative.

## Conclusion

Saig's allegorical painting is powerful because it is juxtaposed against his iconography, which recodes it with a very particular cultural cachet. The flatness of the icon, indeed the certainty of its meaning, contrasts the many layers of the allegory. This contrast reminds us to think of "perspective as symbolic form."<sup>65</sup> As Panofsky suggests, the "depth axis" in painting solves the problem in how to "depict the unfolding of an act over time, in a single static scene."<sup>66</sup> Within the colonial context, we would want to complicate such a depth axis, not only of a new perspective emerging with new social formations (that is, classes and individuals) but these always enframed within a colonial modernity against which the nomenclature of Arab modernity is contending. *The Escape of the Holy Family* relates a religious story in a peasant vernacular, a sort of indigenizing of the biblical narrative as Yazan Kopty might say.<sup>67</sup> Its representation of the sacred is in the profane medium and visual language of oil painting. The composition's spatial relations construct the "stadium" of a photograph. The image could not be farther from the icon, then, relating the visual narrative not only of the Holy Family but the Palestinian national self and, even, national heritage.<sup>68</sup> But like Arabic's turn to the novel even when it itself deploys the *maqama* as in the case of al-Shidiyaq's *al-Saq 'ala al-Saq* (Leg over leg) or al-Muwaylihi's *Hadith 'Isa ibn Hisham* (The narrative of 'Isa ibn Hisham, often translated as "A Period in Time"), the visual structure of a painting – mediated through the photographic prism – alerts us that the icon's viewing subject has been fully transformed into a new Cartesian subject of Arab modernity but one that reclaims the "perspective" as a part of Arab visual heritage.<sup>69</sup> In other words, for Saig, it is Arab eyes that are looking at this painting, a painting in which the Arab viewer may locate themselves through a parallax vision of present, past, and the viewer.

Indeed, this photographic vision is the consequence of the positive paradigms that circumscribed the cultural, social, and political thinking of late Ottoman Empire and early Mandate period. These paradigms are not imports but generated over decades by Arab intellectuals, who are naturalizing capitalist modernity and the formations of new forms of class hierarchy, property ownership, commodity production, and consumption. In other words, photographic vision is linked into an epistemology of modernity that locates subjectivity in the individual upon whom community, society, and nation are enacted. Saig's painting as an articulation of Palestinian identity especially during the British Mandate period and a formative step in the development of modern Palestinian art cannot be understated. However, more powerfully, it exhibits the scopic regime of a new perspective, a perspective where Palestinians were locating themselves in a "world as a picture" in which their own presence could

be articulated especially against British colonial control and the encroachment of Zionist colonization. This statement is not meant to be anachronistic, just as the idea that the scopical regime that enframes Saig's painting in the late Ottoman and Mandate periods is a photographic vision should not be seen as tautological.

Rather, before photographs become reproductive tools of dominant discourses, before they become historical documents, before they become contested spaces, before they represent new national identities or express their anxieties and ambivalences, photographs must first be understood as a secondary by-product of an a priori constructed subject. The photograph and photographic vision can, therefore, only exist after an epistemology of its visual language has been reified and its subject naturalized. Upon this language and this episteme, Saig began to translate his iconographic craft into a narrative of Palestinian identity but this translation itself was only of the vision syntax enframed by photography, positivism, and the cultural production of his peers and predecessors, not only in Palestine but throughout the Arab Mediterranean.

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#### Endnotes

- 1 Peter Galassi, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography* (New York: MOMA, 1981), 12.
- 2 For the canonical account, see Beaumont Newhall, *A History of Photography* (New York: MOMA, 1964); or for an important formalist and reactive approach to photography, see John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: MOMA, 2007).
- 3 Galassi, *Before Photography*, 19 and 25.
- 4 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On the Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).
- 5 Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 52.
- 6 The modern art history of the Arab world has been changing over the past decade with studies by scholars such as Nada Shabout, Anneka Lennsen, Sarah Rogers, Kirstin Scheid, Jessica Winegar, Patrick Kane, Hala Auji, and Cynthia Becker, among others. For a critical commentary on the absence of nineteenth-century art from the canon of "Islamic art" history, see Margaret S. Graves, "Feeling Uncomfortable in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (June 2012): 1–27.
- 7 For a canonical work in English on Ottoman miniatures, see Richard Ettinghausen, *Turkish Miniatures from the 13th to the 18th Century* (New York: New American Library, 1965). For an interesting discussion on the history of

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- 8 See Wendy Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 98–105.
  - 9 See Stefan Weber, “Images of Imagined Worlds: Self-Image and Worldview on Late Nineteenth Century Damascus” in *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, eds. Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, and Stefan Weber (Beirut: Ergon, 2002), 145–71.
  - 10 For an example, see Karène Sanchez Summerer and Sari Zananiri, eds., *Imaging and Imagining Palestine: Photography, Modernity and the Biblical Lens, 1918–1948* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2021).
  - 11 Oleg Grabar, “What Does ‘Arab Painting’ Mean?” in *Arab Painting: Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts*, ed. Anna Contradini (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 17–22. In this contribution, Grabar engages the canonical description of the Arab painting as set forth by Richard Ertinghausen’s seminal *Arab Painting* (Geneva: Skira, 1962).
  - 12 The term “scopic regime” was coined by Christine Metz in *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977). For the reference regarding the scopic regimes appropriate to modernity, see Martin Jay, “Scopic Regimes of Modernity” in *Vision and Visuality*, no. 2, ed. Hal Foster (New York: New Press, 1988), 3–23. Also, for a history of “seeing” in Western Europe, see Jay’s *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
  - 13 Jay, “Scopic Regimes of Modernity,” 20.
  - 14 For a series of discussions on the socioeconomic and political shifts in nineteenth-century Palestine, see David Kushner, ed., *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period: Political, Social, and Economic Transformations* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).
  - 15 Galassi, *Before Photography*, 14.
  - 16 Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), 22. My italics.
  - 17 Giambattista Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language*, trans. L. M. Palmer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 46.
  - 18 For a discussion, see Stephen Sheehi, *Arab Imago* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 96–97.
  - 19 Martin Heidegger, “The World as Picture,” in *Heidegger: Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 66–67.
  - 20 Amicar Cabral, “Theory as a Weapon,” *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings of Amilcar Cabral*, trans. Michael Wolfers (New York: Monthly Review, 1979), 123.
  - 21 For a rare examination of the formation of “taste” in the late Ottoman Empire, see Toufoul Abou Hodeib, *A Taste for Home: The Modern Middle Class in Ottoman Beirut* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).
  - 22 Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).
  - 23 For example, see Michel Fani, *Dictionnaire de la peinture libanaise* (Saint-Didier: Edition de l’Escalier, 1998).
  - 24 See Hisham Khatib, *Palestine and Egypt under the Ottomans: Paintings, Books, Photographs, Maps, and Manuscripts* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003).
  - 25 Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckoning: Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 55. Also, see Özge Baykan Calafato, *Making the Modern Turkish Citizen: Vernacular Photography in the Early Republican Era* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).
  - 26 Bashar Shammout, *Al-’irth al-Filastini al-mar’i wa-l-masmu’*: *Nash’atuhu wa tashtutuhu wa-l-hifath al-raqmiu ‘alayh* (The audiovisual Palestinian heritage, origin, dispersion, and digital preservation: Preliminary studies and future prospects) (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2020)
  - 27 For an overview, see Nada Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).
  - 28 I am grateful to the late Kamal Boullata for

- his generosity in suggesting and discussing his work with me. See Kamal Boullata's groundbreaking book, *Palestinian Art: 1850 to the Present* (London: Saqi, 2009). For a helpful review article, see Joseph Massad, "Permission to Paint: Palestinian Art and the Colonial Encounter," *Art Journal* 66, no. 3 (2007): 126. Discussing books on Palestinian art by Gannit Ankori, Samia Halaby, and Boullata, the article was the center of some controversy, as Massad suggests that Ankori's thesis borrowed from Boullata without proper citation.
- 29 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 45.
  - 30 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 120.
  - 31 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 61.
  - 32 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 108.
  - 33 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 119.
  - 34 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 61, my italics.
  - 35 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 107.
  - 36 While the icon might have been a vessel by which the faithful could be in the presence of divinity, this certainly does not preclude it from its own social history. Boullata stresses the Russian influence of iconography on image making in Palestine. It seems that despite their efforts, Russian influence was declining by the end of the century due to bickering within the Palestinian Orthodox community and more concern for Russian interests and pilgrims in the Holy Land than for the native Orthodox faithful. In some ways, such a statement refocuses on the importance of why Saig might be opting to represent a national narrative of Palestinian secular identity, a narrative that Christian Palestinians were key in propagating. While the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society eventually began to focus on Palestinian Orthodox, the influence of French and Catholics (as well as various Protestant churches and Britain) increased. See Hanna Kildani, *Modern Christianity of the Holy Land* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2010), 124–25. On the other hand, the few religious schools established in Palestine were themselves quite adversarial to the modernist tendencies of art in Europe. Also, both the Russian Orthodox Holy Synod and the Czar's Foreign Ministry ran Russian activities. The tendency, then, to paint, say, more or less Russian than Jerusalemite, certainly holds its own political and social relevance. See Kildani, *Modern Christianity*, 137 and for the initial goals of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, Kildani, *Modern Christianity*, 130.
  - 37 For a rare and critical discussion of Daoud Corm, see Sarah Rogers, "Daoud Corm, Cosmopolitan Nationalism, and the Origins of Lebanese Modern Art," *Arab Studies Journal* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 46–77.
  - 38 For some critical examination of *al-nahda*, see Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); Shaden Tageldin, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); and Samah Salim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880–1985* (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2004).
  - 39 Owen Barfield's famous *Saving the Appearance: A Study in Idolatry* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988 [first edition, 1965]), 94.
  - 40 Craig Owen, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (1980): 76.
  - 41 See Alexander Scholch, "Was There a Feudal System in Ottoman Lebanon and Palestine?" in Kushner, *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period*, 130–45; Ruth Roded, "Social Patterns Among the Urban Elite of Syria in the Late Ottoman Period, 1876–1914," in Kushner, *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period*, 146–71. Also, Fred Gottheil, "Money and Capital Flows in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Palestine: A Physiocratic Model Applied," in Kushner, *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period*, 211–29.
  - 42 Owen, "Allegorical Impulse," 76.
  - 43 Owen, "Allegorical Impulse," 73–74.
  - 44 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 114. For a reproduction of the image itself, see Issam Nassar, Stephen Sheehi, and Salim Tamari, *Camera Palaestina: Photography and Displaced Histories of Palestine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022), 15.
  - 45 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 115–16.
  - 46 Ernest Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1962), 15–16.
  - 47 Owen, "Allegorical Impulse," 69.
  - 48 See Nassar, Sheehi, and Tamari, *Camera Palaestina*.
  - 49 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 120.
  - 50 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 222. For the nomenclature of reform of *al-nahdah al-'arabiyya*, see Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 24–25.

- 51 For a discussion of “positive vision” within the context of modernism’s reception in the Arab world, see Stephen Sheehi, “Modernism, Anxiety, and the Ideology of Arab Vision,” *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 28, 1 (2006 [2008]): 72–97.
- 52 Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: The History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 261–64. See on the “Eastern origins” of the icon and how the mysticism and aura of the icon was “more important as an idea than as a fact,” Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 332.
- 53 Galassi, *Before Photography*, 12.
- 54 See Kamal Boullata’s article, “Daoud Zalattimo and Jerusalem Painting during the Early Mandate,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 44 (Winter 2010): 70–74.
- 55 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 117.
- 56 For a discussion of the photographic studio and the American Colony, along with the original image of *Salim Hussein’s Surrender*, see Barbara Bair, “The American Colony Photography Department: Western Consumption and ‘Insider’ Commercial Photography,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 44 (Winter) 2010: 28–38. Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 118.
- 57 Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 17.
- 58 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 108. See also Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969): 217–52.
- 59 See Annelies Moors, “Presenting People: The Cultural Politics of Picture Postcards of Palestine/Israel,” in *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity*, ed. Jordana Mendelson and David Prochaska (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 93–105; and Annelies Moors and Steven Wachlin, “Dealing with the Past, Creating a Presence: Picture Postcards of Palestine,” in *Discourse and Palestine: Power, Text and Context*, ed. Annelies Moors, Toine van Teffelen, Sharif Kannana, and Ilham Abu Ghazaleh (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1994), 11–26.
- 60 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 110.
- 61 For a discussion of self-Orientalizing bourgeoisie and Romanticism, see Sheehi, “Modernism, Anxiety, and the Ideology of Arab Vision.” For a brief discussion of self-Orientalizing in the photographic studio, see Issam Nassar, *Laqatat mughayira: al-taswir al-futughraphi al-mubakkir fi Filastin* [Different snapshots: early local photography in Palestine] (Ramallah: Kutub and Qattan Foundation, 2005), as well as his “Familial Snapshots: Representing Palestine in the Work of the First Local Photographers,” *History and Memory* 18, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2006): 139–55; and Badr el-Hage, “Khalil Raad, Photographer of Jerusalem,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 11–12 (Winter 2000): 34–39. Also, for a discussion of the practice of self-Orientalizing and photography within the Iranian context at the turn of the century, see Ali Behdad, “The Power-ful Art of Qajar Photography: Orientalism and (Self)-Orientalizing in the Nineteenth Century Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 34, no. 1–4 (2001): 141–51.
- 62 Stephen Sheehi, “Our Photography: Refusing the 1948 Partition of the Sensible,” in Nassar, Sheehi, and Tamari, *Camera Palaestina*, 116.
- 63 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 112.
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- 66 Martin Lister, John Dovey, Seth Gidding, Iain Grant, and Kieran Kelly, *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003), 130.
- 67 Yazin Kopty, “Edward Keith-Roach’s Favourite Things: Indigenising the National Geographic’s Images of Mandatory Palestine,” in Sanchez Summerer and Zananiri, *Imaging and Imagining Palestine*, 309–39.
- 68 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1982), 27–28.
- 69 Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq, *al-Saq ‘ala al-saq fi ma huwa al-Faryaq* [One leg over another, concerning al-Faryaq] (Paris: Duprat, 1855) and Muhammad al-Muwaylihi, *Hadith ‘Isa ibn Hisham aw fatra min al-zaman* [The narrative of ‘Isa ibn Hisham, or a period of time] (Cairo: Matba‘at al-ma‘arif, 1907).