

# Jacob Israel de Haan

## A Queer and Lapsed Zionist in Mandate Palestine

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### Editor's Note

A notable contribution to the Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem, in the 2021 Round.

### Abstract

This essay focuses on a large group of preeminent dissenting intellectual and Orthodox Jewish voices from the start of the twentieth century who were critical of the suitability of Israel as a site of return and who stood in solidarity with Palestinians. It focuses on the victim of Israel's first political assassination, Jacob Israel de Haan, and raises the then permissible notions of sexuality in Palestine. Since the de Haan's death in 1924, his journalistic writings, essays, and poems, written over a five-year period in Mandate Palestine, have yet to be published in English or Arabic. The author examines the trajectory of de Haan's rescinding Zionist attitude as something increasingly common upon arrival in Palestine. De Haan's work as a litigator uniquely placed him to affect and destabilize the colonial infrastructure in formative Israel, which ultimately led to his murder.

### Keywords

Mandate Palestine; anti-Zionism; queer studies; Balfour Declaration; political assassination; Orientalism; King Husayn bin Ali; Muhammad Asad; psychoanalysis; Sigmund Freud.

The year sneaks in in God's capital city  
Near the Western Wall  
Tonight, what is it that I long for?  
The sanctity of Israel, or an Arab male prostitute?

— "Doubt," in Jacob Israel de Haan, *Kwatrijnen* (Quatrains) (1924)

In *Freud and the Non-European*, Edward Said wrote of the importance of reading history proleptically; of reading characters whom we might consider controversial or offensive but to pay greater attention to how much they were bound by, or were part of, their cultural moment.<sup>1</sup> In this essay I want to reflect upon a queer, lapsed Zionist Dutch lawyer – Jacob Israel de Haan – a character who appeared perpetually at odds with his cultural moment. He was shot three times in the chest outside of Shaare Zedek Hospital in western Jerusalem, on 30 June 1924, by fellow Jews, one of whom was an off-duty policeman who owed the lawyer money, and who were given orders, according to the killer, from Ben Zvi who would later become Israel's second president.<sup>2</sup>

De Haan was, in part, a Jewish nationalist but with a particularly contrarian and deeply nuanced relationship with his fellow Jews and Palestinians. He was a lover of young Arab men and became a legal defender of Arab nationalist interests, yet harbored many negative views of Arabs that dissipated the longer he stayed in Jerusalem. In a decolonial context, the Dutch lawyer and writer is as much a complex, peculiar, and problematic figure now as he appeared to be in 1920's Jerusalem. His relationship with the British Mandate was one of curiosity, eventually culminating with de Haan being a Palestine correspondent for the British and Dutch press before his sudden killing. In a queer context, de Haan is a cult figure, yet largely unknown outside of Israel and Holland. Today, one can go on a queer literary tour of Jerusalem<sup>3</sup> and on 20 June each year pashkevilim or broadsides are fly-posted around Jerusalem's Jewish Orthodox neighborhoods to commemorate his death. His letters and archive can be found at the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana at the University of Amsterdam (hereafter, Ros. de Haan #). His Palestine writings, journal, reports, and poems include: *Jerusalem* (1921) and *Palestine* (1925, published posthumously), *Quatrains* (1924) – a series of erotic poems – and his vast feuilletons in the newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad*. The *Handelsblad* text consists of some four hundred entries, written from 1919 to his death in 1924.<sup>4</sup>

The targeted killing of de Haan was carried out not just for a single specific act but for a culmination of many activities – from his legal prowess and his political writings to an international audience, to his meetings with local Arab delegates, particularly King Husayn bin Ali al-Hashimi and his son Abdullah, the Emir of Transjordan, who were particularly fond of de Haan. It was also as a result of his plans to travel to London insisting on using only a Palestine passport, which did not exist at the time, and to be accompanied by other members of the Agudat Yisrael to attempt to repeal the Balfour Declaration. De Haan's death came two weeks before the trip, and directly after de Haan attended King Husayn's inauguration where he declared himself caliph at his son Abdullah's winter camp at al-Shunah. His death was shortly after described by the German writer Arnold Zweig as "Israel's first political murder."<sup>5</sup>

## Delusion and Disillusion

De Haan's arrival to Jerusalem on a rainy day, 5 April 1918, was by his account an ignoble affair, with him complaining about the weather, the lack of a welcome party,

and attempts by his baggage handler to extort him.<sup>6</sup> He had left his wife Johanna and Holland behind, partially in disgrace due to a homoerotic text called *Pipelines* that led to his expulsion teaching children in Holland, and had travelled to Palestine via Cairo, Rome, Paris, and London.<sup>7</sup> His application to the Zionist Foundation was not met with enthusiasm and with de Haan being neither young nor athletic, it took some convincing by Israel Zangwill for Chaim Weizman to admit de Haan's usefulness to their plans.<sup>8</sup> After being in Jerusalem for two years, his membership became more strained which is revealed in his entry "The City in Uprising," dated 8 April 1920,<sup>9</sup> when de Haan witnessed first-hand the Nabi Musa riots. This moment seemed to crystallize just how politically naive he was when he first arrived, both in regards to Zionism and the British Mandate, and the local Orthodox and Arab sentiments against both.

A month earlier, in March 1920, de Haan was elected to the seventy-member City Council for the Ashkenazi Community, the religious haredim community's governing body, with the expectation that he would lead the prosecution against the Zionist Organisation. Paradoxically, a few months later, after the riots de Haan comically defended, while on a stretcher, the right-wing militant Ze'ev Jabotinsky, alongside five members of the Haganah, would later arrange his assassination.<sup>10</sup> In 1921 he underwent his Baal Teshuva, converted fully to Orthodox Jewry, and became a litigator and a representative of the haredim Agudat Yisrael.

De Haan's development of anti-Zionist views, in both the press and in his classes, brought frequent complaints, which first began in 1922 from his students' parents, his fellow professors, and the students themselves attending his classes on Ottoman Penal Law at the Government Law School, later to become Hebrew University.<sup>11</sup> Ironically, this was a class which he set up with the help of Jabotinsky, under the watchful eye of the Mandate attorney general Norman Bentwich and his secretary Frederic Goadby. De Haan's tenure at the school was intermittent, fractious, and from a series on regular exchanges with the Legal Secretary's Office, there appeared to be a series of quite exhaustive misunderstandings (mainly by de Haan) – and numerous attempts by the office to instruct him to desist from political activity.<sup>12</sup> He often failed to turn up for his own classes, which were only half full – and he was told he would not be paid. However, as he was being paid a salary for writing in two newspapers and also taking on legal cases and meeting and interviewing local people, as well as his romantic dalliances, it seemed that he was not that concerned about money. In one case, attempting to overturn an imposed tax on flatbread, he collected some 1,600 local signatures around Jerusalem. The case was initially rejected with de Haan paying the £100 legal costs out of his own pocket. He retried the case and was successful the second time around.<sup>13</sup> His tenacity and skill as a lawyer were much admired, which was particularly noted by Horace Samuel in his 1930 book *Unholy Memories of the Holy Land*. Samuel (not related to the Mandate high commissioner Herbert Samuel) was a judge in Palestine from 1918–28 and relates with some amusement of the "one-man wrecking ball" de Haan, sometimes deliberately taking on cases of some "wretched debtor of the Zionist Executive, basing himself on the quite formidable



Figure 1. “Dr. de Haan Shot Dead in a Courtyard,” *Daily Express* (London), 2 July 1924, Daily Express Archive.

legal point that the Zionist Commission, not being a juridical entity, was not entitled to sue.<sup>14</sup> Surely, this was a sore and humiliating point. De Haan was first discharged from teaching in March 1922, then re-appointed in 1923 on an experimental basis with the agreement that he would stop writing for the press, which again proved to be a failure and he was again dismissed, this time permanently but on good terms with Bentwich and Goadby.<sup>15</sup> Bentwich condemned de Haan’s assassination, saying: “One cannot speak sufficiently ill of de Haan”<sup>16</sup> to warrant such an action.

## Conscientious Objectors

De Haan’s death preceded a growing, vociferous Jewish elite in the early twentieth century that consisted of, to name a few, high-profile figures like Freud, Einstein, David Grossman, Arnold Zweig, and Hannah Arendt, who, like de Haan, focused on questioning the rule of law as applied to the state.<sup>17</sup> Like the Mizrahi Orthodox community, of which de Haan was a member (before moving to represent Agudat Yisrael), all these figures questioned the suitability of the site of the new Israel as a deeply problematic return,<sup>18</sup> a view that is expressed in the pashkevilim commemorating de Haan with one line, “To be brothers in misfortune alongside the Arab people,” being particularly prominent.<sup>19</sup> In her book *The Last Resistance*, Jaqueline Rose examines

how these well-known Jewish literary figures sit contrapuntally – or in the words of Said, *proleptically* – to the development of Israel, from both a psychoanalytical and a modernist literary perspective. Rose’s book examines the various personal crises – spiritual, existential, moral, ethical, political, religious, religion-as-a-political-pretext-for-colonial-expansion – that they and many others were challenging and foreseeing.<sup>20</sup>

Many were already living in exile from antisemitism and pogroms in Russia, Poland, and later Nazi Europe. Arnold Zweig’s *The Case of Sergeant Grischa* (1927) was a critique about bureaucracy and antisemitism within the German army in the First World War, in which he served. The subjects of nationalist conditions of religious exile, the moral and ethical conditions that surround it (that is, the asymmetry with the subsequent Palestinian exile from 1948), and the burden of the land, provided a significant amount of political disagreement, who in 1932 Freud refers to disparagingly as “baseless fanatics” with “misdirected piety” worshipping “a piece of a Herodian wall”:

But, on the other hand, I do not think that Palestine could ever become a Jewish state, nor that the Christian and Islamic worlds would ever be prepared to have their holy places under Jewish care. It would have seemed more sensible to me to establish a Jewish homeland on a less historically burdened land. But I know that such a rational viewpoint would never have gained the enthusiasm of the masses and the financial support of the wealthy. I concede with sorrow that the baseless fanaticism of our people is in part to be blamed for the awakening of Arab distrust. I can raise no sympathy at all for the misdirected piety, which transforms a piece of a Herodian wall into a national relic, thereby offending the feelings of the natives. Now judge for yourself whether I, with such a critical point of view, am the right person to come forward as the solace of a people deluded by unjustified hope.<sup>21</sup>

The notion of mythistory is something that colonially has long manifest itself in various forms of historical cultural bias, reappropriation, and misrepresentation, insofar as to say that mythistory/cultural bias/myopia is the beating heart of colonial vernacular

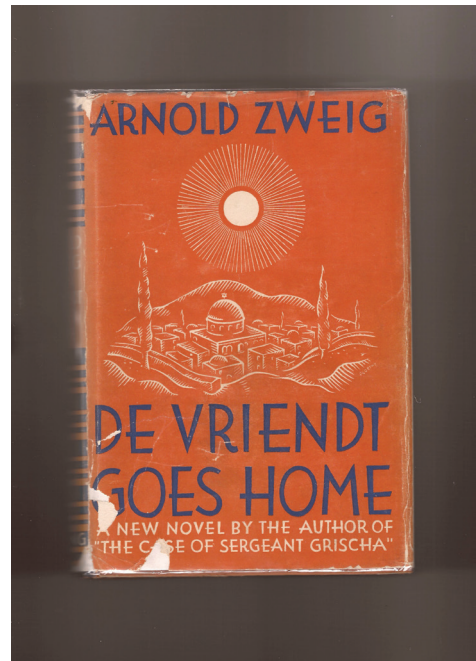


Figure 2. Dust jacket of Arnold Zweig’s *De Vriendt Goes Home* (New York: Viking Press, 1933).

and nationalism.<sup>22</sup> De Haan's myopia is loud and clear in his diaries, which his news editors had to temper by reminding him they were seeking "news, not views."<sup>23</sup> Again, in the context of the colonizer and occupier, nationalist [myopic] mythistory is something that is diametrically opposed to the constant Palestinian struggle to reclaim memory, and is an active tool for suppressing it. Jacqueline Rose, in the essay "David Grossman's Dilemma," describes Grossman's book *Someone to Run With* (2000) as confronting Israel's "historical burden" and the writer's overwhelming feelings of guilt and the subsequent desire to strip the land of its many "meanings" with the ignominious dates of 1897, [1918], 1929, 1936, 1948, 1967, 1987 reading like a nightmarish roll call.<sup>24</sup> The

following song sarcastically mocks the violence of Herzl's "plan," saying how well it is going and illustrates both anti-national sentiment and unwillingness to participate:

A Star of David broke into two,  
Herzl's opinions died with the man.  
Rotten in the grave, with spikes of Sabra fruit  
But everything goes according to plan.

Like a man to hold a gun in my hand,  
Blow off heads, like a man,  
Like a man, march to my death, all alone,  
And everything goes according to plan

And then all of a sudden, from all corners of the yard,  
even the dance floor, rose the roar: "*Fuck the plan.*"<sup>25</sup>

De Haan's assassination, his cynicism, and anarchic nature, echo in the song and the members' unwillingness to participate in "the plan." These dissenting voices



Figure 3. "Jacob Israel de Haan Certificate of Provisional Citizenship, 1922," issued by Mandate authorities, online at [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacob\\_Israel\\_De\\_Haan\\_prov\\_citizenship\\_fr.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacob_Israel_De_Haan_prov_citizenship_fr.jpg) (accessed 11 October 2021).

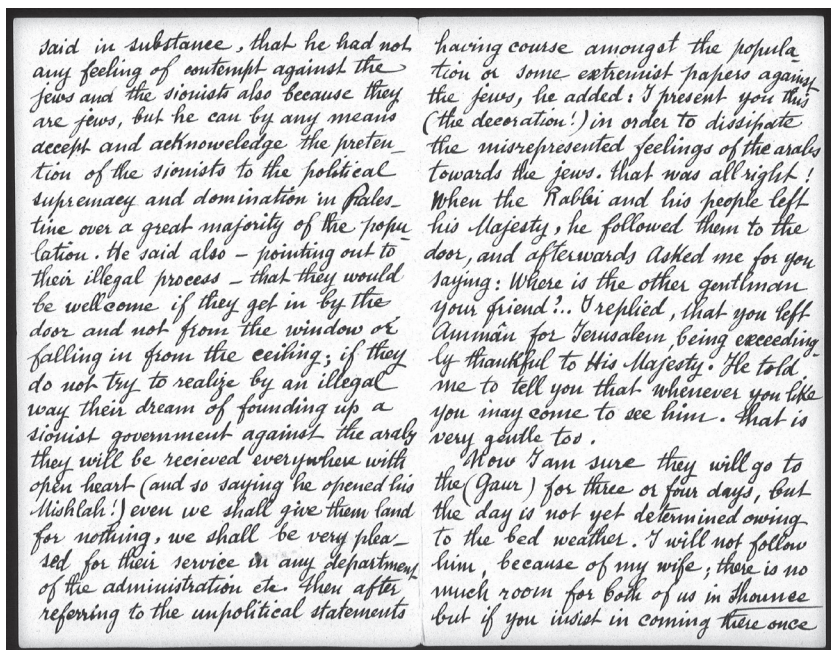
directly challenge the exceptional morality of the Zionist return narrative. Similarly, in the “Disillusion of War,” Rose asserts that Freud places the killing of [rebellious against] the father squarely in the middle of the religious collective. She argues that Freud’s boldest move is to place at the heart of the group what it would most like to dispose of,<sup>26</sup> which in this case means the killing of de Haan, from the perspective of the Zionists. One final Freudian motif that Rose presents for us is regarding the religious collective and how, on many levels and not just subconsciously, its members can become implicated as a “partner in crime and guilty by association,” reminding us that: “We are all killers, or capable of being so.”<sup>27</sup>

A year before de Haan’s shooting, the Swiss psychoanalyst, Dorian Feigenbaum (1887–1937) tried to introduce the study of psychoanalysis at what was termed the only psychiatric hospital in Palestine.<sup>28</sup> Feigenbaum was also psychiatric consultant to the Mandate administration and in April 1923 delivered a lecture titled “The Mind in Health and Illness,” divided into three parts: “The Unconscious,” “Dreams,” and “The Modern Theory of the Neuroses.” Echoing the unrest similar to that experienced at de Haan’s lectures, the second two parts of Feigenbaum’s talk were not made due to a hostile reaction to the talk “The Unconscious,” and the hospital forbade the talks to continue. A year later at the Hadassah Nursing School in Jerusalem, run by the Mandate, Feigenbaum presented another series of lectures which were better received: “Experimental Psychology and Freud’s Depth Psychology,” “The Unconscious,” and “Hypnosis, Sleep, and Dreams,” leading to an additional lecture on “Childhood Masturbation.” Soon after, however, he was dismissed, and in an article for the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* he complained, anonymously, that the outlook in Palestine was not hopeful and that psychoanalysis in Jerusalem had become too fashionable among the young but was not fully understood. He then left Jerusalem for America, leaving his precocious nephew Leopold behind.<sup>29</sup>

Leopold Weiss had converted to Islam, assuming the name Muhammad Asad, and had recently arrived in Jerusalem from Vienna. He was one of those impressionable young migrants that his uncle disapproved of, and who was, by his own admission: “drunk on psychoanalysis.”<sup>30</sup> He also hated his ardent Zionist father, Aryeh Leopold Feigenbaum who was director of ophthalmology at the Rothschild Hospital in Jerusalem. In the summer of 1923 and later in 1924, he accompanied de Haan on a

18 154-I-11  
Ammân the 10<sup>th</sup> February 24

My dear Professor,  
Since you left the land of Moab,  
we had a lot of trouble with the  
horrible winter ~~weather~~ weather; there  
was a terrible waterfall on the hills  
of Ammân; then the river flooded  
all around obliging us to keep quiet  
in our poor house without any com-  
munication with the so called capital.  
So we had no bread during four days  
and we were quite happy with maca-  
ronies instead of it.  
Fortunately the Jews deputation hea-  
ded by the Rabbi came before that  
time to Ammân, and I was intro-  
duced with them in audience before the  
King Hussein. The King received them  
with exceptional favour, made a very  
good and sound speech in which he



number of visits to Jordan to meet King Husayn and Abdullah, both of whom had a growing admiration for de Haan and sympathy to the cause of the Agudat. In Asad's book *The Road to Makkah* he describes the car journey, recalling what apparently were newly revised concerns by de Haan that went against his initial decision to migrate:

Two thousand years of exile and unhappiness have taught them [the Zionists] nothing. Instead of making an attempt to understand the innermost causes of our unhappiness they now try to circumvent it, as it were, by building a "national home" on foundations provided by Western power politics: and in the process of building a national home, they are committing the crime of depriving another people of its home.<sup>31</sup>

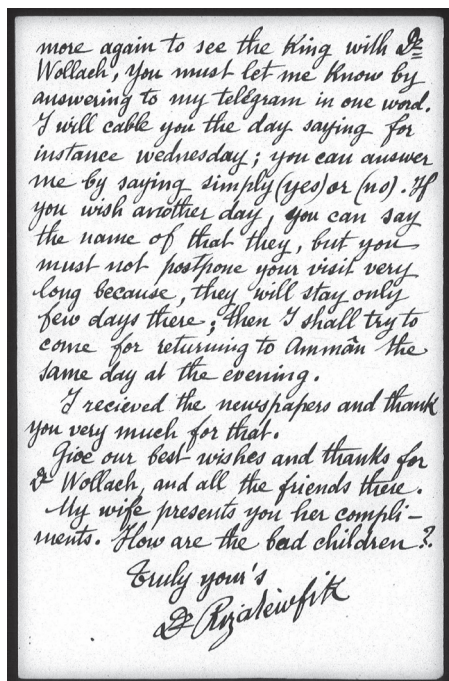


Figure 4. Letter to de Haan from Riza Tawfik, Amman, 10 February 1924. Copyright Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, University of Amsterdam.

Unlike with de Haan's gradual transition, or complete turnaround, this view was something Asad thought long about before he left for Jerusalem, echoing the Freudian sentiment on the psychological and cultural burden associated with overloading meaning onto the land, specifically when "the malady must be sought in the foundation of Zionist thinking itself. It is a sick idea to think that the only solution to the bitter fate of the Jewish people and its longings is the homeland."<sup>32</sup> De Haan, Freud, Asad, and Zweig all refer to a more psychological, spiritual, religious, moral, and ethical complaint that paradoxically is situated both inside and outside of the colonial association.

From 1923 de Haan and Asad met regularly with an exiled former Turkish minister, poet, and philosopher Riza Tawfik in Jordan. Tawfik acted as a delegate for Sharif Husayn and was also the chief advisor of the emir, Abdullah; he was a former university professor, later to become minister of education for the Turkish cabinet and was involved in the Young Turkish Revolution. He was exiled from Turkey in 1922. A brief account of the Shunah and Amman trip is mentioned in Asad's *The Road to Makkah*. A beautifully written letter can be found in the Rosenthalana archive detailing how much Tawfik and the king and Abdullah were looking forward to de Haan's next visit. This was written a month after de Haan attended the king's inauguration. Tawfik talks fondly of a harsh winter in Amman and floods that kept him and his family locked in their homes for four days without bread. But there was the more pressing issue of increased Jewish migration, with Tawfik stating that the king did not have a problem with Jewish people coming to Palestine as long as they "get in by the door and not from the window, or falling from the ceiling." He goes on to discuss the legality of some of the Zionist's "pretensions," British dissatisfaction with them, Arab responses towards the Jewish boycott of Arab labor, and the king's desire via the Anglo-Hijaz treaty to find an amenable way to rescind the Balfour Declaration and install an emir in Palestine – and to do this in a way that would not upset the Zionists. At the end of his letter Tawfik cryptically inquires of de Haan: "How are the bad children?"<sup>33</sup>

The scenes in which the letter is set can be found in three of de Haan's later feuillets.<sup>34</sup> He details some interesting facts regarding the numbers of Jews leaving Palestine in disillusionment, stating that at the start of the Balfour Declaration the Zionists expected half a million Jews in a few years but that, according to de Haan, about thirty thousand entered Palestine and almost half as many left: "The number of immigrants is now no more than five hundred monthly. Figures for the exodus are not officially provided. But I happen to know from [one] month that nearly seven hundred left the country."<sup>35</sup> De Haan was reporting these meetings in the press and was in some sense abusing his position as a journalist, being forced to print retractions for making false statements from Husayn towards the Zionists. The Zionists also had begun to set up a fund for a legal committee to counter de Haan through Frederick Kisch of the Zionist Executive in 1923, and started to defame de Haan via discussing his sexual proclivities. These were the last days of de Haan and also Husayn's complex reign and his own subsequent short exile to follow.

## **“How innocent is the 25th when one is not assassinated on the 24th.”**

Nine years after de Haan's killing, the German writer Arnold Zweig, while exiled from Germany, and like many fleeing from the newly elected Nationalist Socialist Workers/ Nazi Party, moved to Mount Carmel in Haifa and worked on an account of de Haan's murder. In a series of correspondence between the two writers, Zweig additionally echoes the existential crises when he stated to Freud that he wished that his *aliyah* would be to return to a reunified post-Nazi Germany and *not* to Eretz Israel.<sup>36</sup> In Haifa, Zweig was deeply miserable and like de Haan, he soon abandoned his early Zionist beliefs, which is set out in a letter to Freud, dated 1 September 1935:

Meanwhile I have been going through various crises. Firstly, I have established quite calmly that I do not belong here. After twenty years of Zionism this is naturally hard to believe. It is not that I personally am disappointed, for we are really doing quite well here. But all our reasons for coming here were mistaken.<sup>37</sup>

Zweig's depression and his researching of de Haan “to tread the path of disillusionment yet further, as far as necessary, or possible – further than was good for me”<sup>38</sup> was no doubt compounded, as it was for many of his exiled, newly arrived German compatriots (figures such as Walter Benjamin and Max Brod). It also followed the trauma of the World War I and witnessing first-hand the dangers of extreme Nationalist Socialism in Germany. Zweig's struggle to speak Arabic, Hebrew, or English made writing and life in general very difficult and, due to the account of de Haan's assassination being published in those three languages, Zweig admitted that he had made a huge error in believing that, for seven years, de Haan was murdered by Arabs:

The figure of this Orthodox Jew who “reviled God in Jerusalem” in clandestine poems and who had a love affair with [an] Arab boy[s] – this important and complex character gripped my imagination while the blood was still not dry in the whole affair. It compelled me.<sup>39</sup>

De Haan first became aware of an attempt on his life in 1923 and, in a letter to Colonel Frederick Kisch, who held a particular dislike of the Dutch author, de Haan wrote: “I got a letter (in a government envelope) telling me that I shall be killed if I do not leave Palestine before the 24th. I know that the question whether it is advisable or not to kill me is seriously discussed in the circles which you have the honor to represent.”<sup>40</sup>

Later, in May 1923, de Haan received another letter, which read: “I hereby inform you that unless you leave our country by the 24th of this month, you will be shot like a rabid dog,”<sup>41</sup> The letter was signed “The Black Hand.” It is difficult to know the meaning of the date “the 24th.” De Haan filed a complaint with the police, but

he greeted the death threat nonchalantly, and apparently whenever he made an appointment he would often smile and add: “That is, if I’m not murdered beforehand.” De Haan wrote in his journal on 25 May, the day after the death threat had expired, surely relieved: “How innocent is the 25th when one is not assassinated on the 24th.”<sup>42</sup>

Another provocation from de Haan came when he headed off a Zionist greeting party for the English press baron Lord Northcliffe, who was arriving in Jerusalem by train from Egypt in 1924. De Haan bought a ticket to Egypt so that he could board the same train back to Jerusalem that Northcliffe would be arriving on – in order to befriend Northcliffe and warn him about the Zionist Committee and their intentions. As the train pulled into Jerusalem, with both the Zionist Committee and the British delegation staging a ceremonial welcome for Northcliffe, they found Northcliffe getting off the train smiling and laughing with de Haan who had talked to him for the entire journey, warning him of the Zionists and British plans. It is difficult not to admire de Haan’s sheer tenacity and will. He was killed later that year; according to a friend, H.A. Goodman who recalled the murder:

When news of the murder reached Rabbi Sonnenfeld, he tore his clothes in mourning. De Haan’s funeral on the Mount of Olives was a demonstration of the entire religious population against this strange murder, for this was the first time in our generation that Jew stretched out his hands against Jew. Rabbi Sonnenfeld and many other Rabbis and communal leaders came to grant him the final honour, all of them outraged by the murder. During the seven days of mourning, representatives of the Arab Executive and the Muslim-Christian Association paid visits of condolence to Rabbi Sonnenfeld.<sup>43</sup>

De Haan became the main political liaison between the Agudat and the Arab opposition to the Zionists and a crucial partner. In the years leading to his death, de Haan, along with his rabbi, Chaim Sonnenfeld, was increasingly meeting more Arab committees in Palestine and Amman, from the head of the Muslim Christian Association to various mayors, and was on good terms with the grand mufti, Kamil Effendi al-Husayni. De Haan would return back to his house early in the evening before setting off in the night with Adil Effendi to meet various Palestinian nationalist parties, some whom had long been at odds with the Turks. Invariably they would get a train to Lydda (or Ludd or Lot as de Haan always referred) and set off on horseback underneath the moon and the stars, with the writer commenting on the beauty of the painted stones guiding their way. Among the eulogies of de Haan’s death was a tribute from the mufti’s brother, Musa Kazim al-Husayni, the mayor of Jerusalem.

His assassins and their employers were not unsubtle about their motives for carrying out the killing. In November 1970 – and rebroadcast on 21 November 1971 – de Haan’s assassin Avraham Tehomi went on Israeli national TV and radio to proudly declare the righteousness of taking de Haan’s life and putting aside any doubt about this being anything but an act sponsored by a nascent state. Journalists interviewed Yehuda Slutski, editor of *Kitsur Toldoth ha-Haganah*, and police officer David Tidhar. Tehomi

proudly confessed in the interview for Israeli TV that Yosef Hecht, commander of the Haganah, had received instructions to eliminate the “traitor, Jakob de Haan, Dutch poet, novelist, diplomat, former Zionist, and spokesman for Agudat Israel against the creation of a Jewish State,” and had relayed the orders to Zechariah Urieli, Haganah commander of Jerusalem. Tehomi admitted that he had carried out the order, openly stating: “I have done what the Haganah decided had to be done. And nothing was done without the order of Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. I have no regrets because he [de Haan] wanted to destroy our whole idea of Zionism.” Tehomi went on: “This was not Hecht’s decision alone. Someone very important in the country was involved in this . . . this was a very high-level decision (I hope this does not appear in the broadcast. . . ) He received permission . . . the time has still not come to reveal the truth.”<sup>44</sup>

Police officer David Tidhar stated: “I regret I was not chosen to liquidate him, my job was to protect those who did . . . I moved into the area and waited for the shots . . . Naturally I appeared on the scene immediately. Since I knew in which direction the gunman had to escape. . . .”<sup>45</sup> Ironically Tidhar went on to have a career as a celebrated crime writer and rather incredibly had owed de Haan money for subsidizing Tidhar’s first novel. They fell out over the debt and, not long before the shooting, de Haan asked Tidhar to repay him, demanding that he bring his IOU note to settle the debt.

What seems missing from the archives – and from many of his many detractors – is any outright condemnation of de Haan’s sexual activities, which, in contrast to his wild and eccentric behavior, appeared more discreet than people give him credit for. The criticism was greater coming from his European counterparts, most notably and

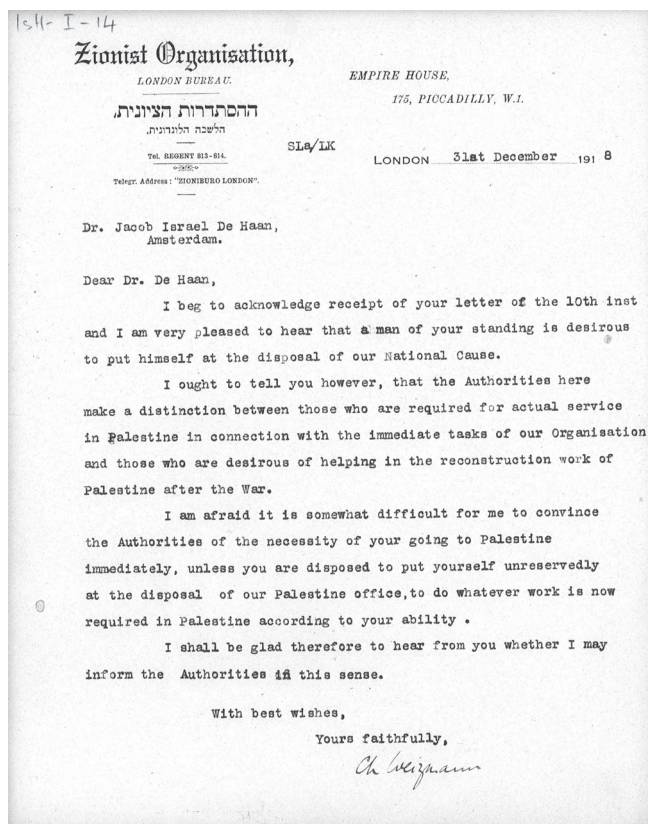


Figure 5. Letter to de Haan from Chaim Weizmann regarding application to join Zionist Organization, 31 December 1918. Copyright Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, University of Amsterdam.

understandably, de Haan's wife, Johanna. Secondly, much of the criticism toward de Haan's sexuality and any perceived sexual activities was mainly directed as responses to his literary works. Zweig, in a 1932 letter to Freud, for example, refers to having a "special distaste" to the queer elements of his research on de Haan. As part of Zweig's ongoing self-analysis, he talks of his reluctance of removing his own repressed sexuality. De Haan spoke of it awakening his own hidden desires: of self-identifying as being, and empathizing with, both a young [Arab] boy and an impious-Orthodox lover, referring to the Freudian notion of the taboo:

You see I am answering your letter, but first I want to spin my thread yet further. The homosexual component in this book, which I am dictating with special distaste and with specially great concentration, challenged me right away to self-analysis. I was both, the Arab (semitic) boy and the impious-Orthodox lover and writer [de Haan]. I am afraid that the removal of these repressions is the main cause of my depression.<sup>46</sup>

## Essentialism

The practices surrounding homosexuality in early twentieth century Palestine were not unlike the newly arriving European and Zionist concepts of nationality, which is to say they were distinctly European and foreign concepts. Notions of comparing East (*turka*) to West (*franja*), deemed essentialist, were phenomena, argued as being constitutive of the political, economic, and military battles that were occurring at the time.<sup>47</sup> Joseph Massad and Khaled el-Rouayheb, who discuss sexual attitudes in nineteenth-and-early-twentieth-century Palestine and the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia (MENA SA) region, write that the term homosexuality, or queer became (interpreted as being) universalized in late nineteenth century Germany.<sup>48</sup> They write that sexual practices were perceived to be part of a person not having a particular or fixed sexual identity *per se*, or that such an identity differed from any other aspect of one's personality. Furthermore, this identity represented to Europeans more fluid notions of gender during adolescence, much of which seems to revolve around what is regarded as legally permissible and what is gazed upon as an ideal notion of beauty. This legal permissibility was linked to the age of maturity from boy to man (fifteen lunar years.) and where Islamic law protects the boy. Islamic and Sufi practices of beardless boy-gazing (*amrad*) were often used to inspire notions of beauty in literature and art and, like all of the orthodox Abrahamic faiths, also extreme attitudes towards idolatry and images of the human form. Yet, along with pretty young male servants in Paradise, the *ghulam* (boy) was, and still is, considered *haram* or taboo.

Some notions have often been either overlooked or overamplified by the West, according to Massad, in an environment that was predominantly liberal and where, crucially, class played a decisive role, such as in having access to possibly more obscure types of literature. This canon, he argues, is analogous to an Orientalist type of archaeology, which has apparently played a deciding factor in how the admiring gaze

is to be interpreted. This canon consists of an archive of mediaeval love poems, and medical treatises on treating – and legal treatises on punishing – same sex desires and practices.<sup>49</sup> Rouayheb also points to poetry books having separate sections for love poems addressed to males (by males) and to females (by females).<sup>50</sup> Such texts range from *al-Qanun fi al-tibb* (Canon Medicinæ) by the Islamic intellectual Ibn Sina (980–1037), and *Risala fi al-Ubna* (Message to his son) by the Persian physician, al-Razi (925), to Syria's Ibn Tamiyya's (1263–1329) treatise against *Nazar ila al-marda'* (The contemplation of the beardless), *Risala fi fihrist kutub...* al-Razi (the section "I'lajat al-Ubna"

(The Treatment for Ubna) by al-Biruni (973–1050), and *Bustan al-atibba'* wa *rawd al-alibba* (Garden of the Physicians and Meadow of the Intelligent) by Ibn al-Matran (1191) of Damascus. Also worth noting is a work by al-Saffarini (d.1744), a Hanbali scholar from Nablus, *Qar' al-Siyat fi Qam' Ahl al-Liwat*,<sup>51</sup> an invective against predominantly Turkish "sodomites" in Nablus.

Among this Orientalist archaeology there is a culturally entrenched vernacular (or possibly, a derogatory glossary), with various specific terms used to denote who is active, (*Luti*, From the people of Lot) and who is passive, (*ma'bun*) and also the interchangeability of a person from one to another (*bidal/mubadala*), or the gender ambiguity, or effeminacy of a young male (*mukhannath* or *rijal mu'annathin*). *Liwat* and *ubna* were terms used to describe homosexuality as a whole, and much like many other places it has been used to describe queer behaviors and practices as an illness – a negative attitude that still prevails. Al-Razi referred to *ubna* as a "hidden illness" (*Al-da' al-khafi*).<sup>52</sup> *Liwat*, however, is used more in a negative context to describe a crime that has been committed, specifically, extra-marital intercourse and is subject to Islamic laws of *zina*, which has caused much discussion as to what is legally permissible. Without trying to essentialize de Haan's lovers, his *Quatrains* reflect the Arabic poetic tradition reflecting upon the *amrad* and also the Sufi practice of *sama'* (Turkish: *suma*) of boy gazing.

Oh, the night will also be empty for him and hot,  
Who rides beside me, Adil, a naughty boy?  
Will it live full of pleasure and pain are cruel,  
One torture waking and sleeping?

— "Adil Effendi"

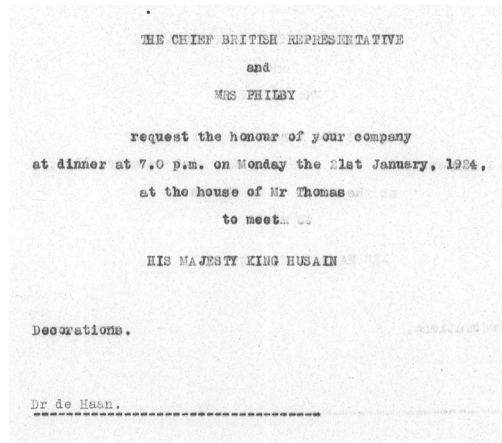


Figure 6. British representative John Philby's invitation to de Haan to meet King Husayn in Amman, 21 January 1924. Copyright Bibliotheca Rosenthialana, University of Amsterdam.

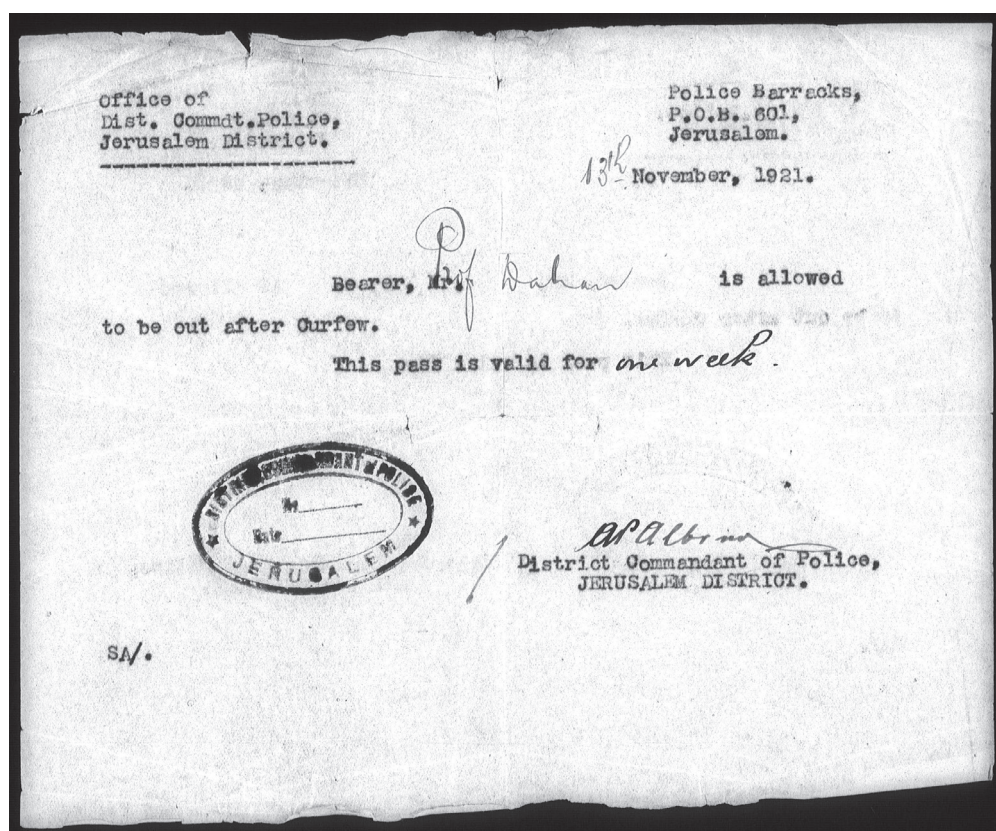


Figure 7. Police permit to walk around after curfew, 13 November 1921. Copyright Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, University of Amsterdam.

Adil E. A. (1900–1963) was de Haan’s closest friend in Jerusalem, lover, tour guide, student, teacher, and also landlord, with de Haan renting Adil’s brother’s summerhouse in the Old City from his uncle Ibrahim. Ibrahim worked as a high-ranking police officer in Jerusalem.<sup>53</sup> Effendi, or “naughty Adil” as de Haan often referred to him, was twenty years younger than de Haan. He taught the lawyer Arabic and how to ride,<sup>54</sup> and often accompanied him on trips through the countryside and on many walks at night, of which de Haan wrote more tenderly in his *Quatrains* than in the diaristic feuilletons. De Haan often referred to Adil as just his “friend,” but he was clearly more than that, not just as partner and lover, but someone very special and dear: de Haan saying: “I know all his secrets.” The two were like a couple of naughty boys and partners in crime, with de Haan ironically being the quite useful lawyer, able to bail out Adil or their friends, and Adil, often the light-fingered kleptomaniac, who “has no intentions of paying for that lawfully,”<sup>55</sup> which seemed to amuse de Haan.

In the amrad, the objects of both chaste and sexual amorous male attention were often prepubescent and adolescent boys. These boys, defined as smooth-skinned or

downy-cheeked, ranged in age from their early teens (sometimes even younger) to as old as twenty. The *amrad*, also referred to as *ghulam* and *hadath*, is common in the Arabic literature of the Ottoman period. As El-Rouahyeb comments: “Much if not most of the extant love poetry of the period is pederastic in tone, portraying an adult male poet’s passionate love for a teenage boy.”<sup>56</sup> One explanation for this widespread phenomenon is that children inhabited a “gender limbo” of sorts until they reached full physical development. For boys, that milestone was marked and frequently publicly celebrated by the appearance of the beard, typically at around fifteen. Islamic law decreed that age, in the absence of clear physical signs of maturity or of the youth’s own declaration of physical maturity.

De Haan had previously worked with children for many years and was happiest in the boys orphanage; he wrote a children’s page for a Dutch newspaper *Het Volk* from which, after publishing *Pipelines*, he was sacked and put on a register forbidding him to teach children; he also taught at the Evaline de Rothschild girls school in Rehavia. There is a definite desire not to misrepresent de Haan regarding children of which he clearly was eternally affectionate, kind, and generous towards, but some of the quatrains found in the DBNL have a slightly odious, predatory air about them, particularly while often referring to notions of innocence. When de Haan laments about the boys he went to school with, he talks as if they were missed opportunities, and in the poems he applies the same wistful sentiments to the young boys while he was watching them, unbeknown, while they tended to their flocks:

They know nothing, my Arab boys,  
Of all that my panting heart alarmed.  
They die blessed, as they were created,  
In licentiousness and lust heart.

— “Young Shepherds”

In 1923, the Mandate distributed what was surely interpreted as a bizarre sex questionnaire that was part of a general survey into the sexual attitudes and practices of Palestinians.<sup>57</sup> The questionnaire itself was identical to a previous survey earlier conducted by the British in India in the nineteenth century and had the word “India” crossed out on the cover and replaced it with the word “Palestine.” The six reports focused on the districts of Jerusalem, Nablus, Ramallah, Acre, Jaffa, and Safad, and were written by six local officers who were either Palestinian Muslim or Christian Orthodox. They looked at a wide range of sexual practices in Palestine, ranging from polygamy, lesbianism (“sophism”), homosexuality (“sodomy”), pederasty, bestiality, incest, and even necrophilia to which, according to the questionnaire at least, no one had, thankfully, ever heard of the practice.<sup>58</sup> The focus on polygamy in the questionnaire might understandably allude to a concern regarding population density and influx due to increased Jewish migration to Palestine, but this point does not seem to be made. What is clear is that arriving Europeans increased the contrasting notions of puritanism and Orientalism. One night on a drive through Qatamon with Adil, de

Haan asks quite innocently – and without any irony – if he is indeed such a person, after being called a “strange Orientalist” at a dinner party in Jerusalem. This coming from a fellow Dutchman, working for the East India Company.<sup>59</sup>

One of the local citing officer’s reports that the “practice” of lesbianism as “sophism” was something imported from Damascus and Cairo, and suggested that Nablus was Palestine’s most liberal city, possibly as a result of its ties with Damascus. In Nablus, referring to one historic example, a text by Muhammad al-Saffarini (d.1744), a Hanbali scholar from Nablus, the practice of gazing upon beardless boys or clean shaven, predominantly Turkish, men had been for some time a part of everyday life in Nablus. Al-Saffarini composed an invective against what he called the “sodomites of his time” who, he bemoaned, were increasingly present in his homeland. They were often recognizable by certain distinctive physical attributes, such as “clean-shaven faces and long moustaches, and by specific habits, like frequent congregation in cafes.” Al-Saffarini was unequivocal about this: the sodomites were “a plague that had to be suppressed.”<sup>60</sup> Despite the offence of the statement, it is worth remembering that this type of negative view also existed as a defence among scholars who had experienced much criticism for their boy gazing. Similar psychological denials and cultural attitudes still exist today.

De Haan’s sexual activity was well-known to the Zionist Organization and to the British, but it did not add to existing problems they had with him about his political activities because he was an exceptional lawyer. In one year he wrote fifty-five legal papers. However, attacks on his sexuality became a last resort that the Zionists, particularly Kisch, decided to use against de Haan after the meetings with Husayn and Abdullah. The Orthodox Jews, local Palestinian communities, and the Jordanians embraced de Haan when he was shunned by both the Zionist and the British administrations. They paid little attention to his sexual proclivities and, to the end, he was fiercely loyal to his rabbi, Chaim Sonnenfeld. Ending with one affectionate quatrain and in a typically mischievous fashion, de Haan speculates whether his rabbi has ever entertained homoerotic thoughts – and if he ever gave in to them. The poet addresses his death and contentedly wanders off in the night with his beloved Adil:

He was a lad. Did he ever succumb?  
He became a man. Did he always resist?  
Soon I will wander again with Adil through the country  
Of light and shadow in the full moon.

— “Rabbi Chaim Sonnenfeld”

De Haan’s short time in Jerusalem can be looked at in many ways: he was a religious zealot, a political activist, an Orientalist, or even as a mischievous sex tourist of sorts. De Haan’s kind and lasting words “Such a boundless desire for friendship,” taken from his poem *To a Young Fisherman*, can be found today inscribed in the pink triangle homo-monument in Westermarkt, Amsterdam, situated directly underneath the house of Anne Frank.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Edward Said, *Freud and the non-European* (New York, NY: Verso Books, 2014).
- 2 According to the history of the Haganah (*Toledoth ha-Haganah*, vol. 11 Part 1 (1964), 251–53), the order allegedly came from Joseph Hecht, then the coordinator of the organization, who instructed Zachariah Urieli, the Jerusalem commander, to have de Haan killed by the smallest possible group. Zionist newspapers named the assassins as Abraham Krichevski (Giora) and Abraham Silberg (Tahomi); the former is said to have died in Tel Aviv in 1942, the latter to have immigrated to California. Zionist papers have identified Isaac Ben-Zvi, his wife, Rahel Yanait, Moses Eisenstadt, and Aviezer Yellin as prominent in the Haganah's Jerusalem branch at the time. Hecht was later dismissed from his command by the Zionist leadership as the result of an investigation into the Haganah's failure to give prior warning of the 1929 riots.
- 3 Nir Hasson, "Forget Paris, This Is 'Gay Jerusalem'," *Haaretz*, 11 February 2011.
- 4 All can be found at De Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren in The Hague, online at [www.dbnl.org/](http://www.dbnl.org/) (accessed 7 October 2021).
- 5 Ernest Freud, *The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Arnold Zweig* (Hogarth Press, 1970), 42. For an account of the precedent of the Jewish political assassination that cites de Haan as one of the three major examples of political assassination in Israel see Nachman Ben-Yehuda: *Political Assassinations by Jews: A Rhetorical Device for Justice* (State University of New York Press, 1992).
- 6 Jacob Israel de Haan, *Feuilletons from the Algemeen Handelsblad*, #21. DBNL, The Hague.
- 7 Clinton Eliot, *Hidden: The Intimate Lives of Gay Men Past and Present* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2014), 88.
- 8 Item from the Bibliotheca Rosenthiana archive. Number *Ros. de Haan*, 9 (1918, letter and envelope from Weizman).
- 9 Jacob Israel de Haan, *Feuilletons from the Algemeen Handelsblad*, #140. DBNL, The Hague.
- 10 Ludy Giebels, "Jacob Israel de Haan in Mandate Palestine: Was the Victim of the First Zionist Political Assassination a 'Jewish Lawrence of Arabia'?" *Jewish Historical Studies* 46 (2014): 110.
- 11 Items from the Bibliotheca Rosenthiana archive. Comprising a series of seven letters/telegraphs. A full account of these complaints and correspondences can be found in item *Ros. de Haan*, 4.
- 12 Bibliotheca Rosenthiana, *Ros. de Haan*, 4.
- 13 Moses Blau, *Amuda di-Nehora* (Jerusalem, 1932), 75–79.
- 14 Horace Samuel, *Unholy Memories of the Holy Land* (Hogarth Press, 1930), 122–24.
- 15 Item from the Bibliotheca Rosenthiana archive. Number *Ros. De Haan*, 4, letter from Bentwich, 30 September 1923.
- 16 Giebels, "Jacob de Haan," 126.
- 17 Jacqueline Rose, "The Body of Evil: Arendt, Coetzee, and 9/11," in *The Last Resistance*, (New York: Verso, 2007), 145–48. This discusses Arendt's seminal text *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil in a Freudian Context* (1963). Rose masterfully lays out numerous literary examples of the temptation of evil and, through Eichmann's trial, odious circumstances in history when the superego dominates the self.
- 18 Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (New York: Verso Press, 2010), 64–128. Israeli historian Sand refers to the history of Jewish exile as a largely European narrative and a historically inaccurate representation of the Jewish people who remained/returned to Palestine and the MENA SA region shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple, long before the Balfour Declaration and Sykes Picot Agreement.
- 19 I would like to thank Ziv Neeman and Galit Eilat for help in the translation of this

- pashkevil.
- 20 Rose, *The Last Resistance*.
  - 21 Sigmund Freud, Letter to the Keren Hayesod (Dr. Chaim Koffler), Vienna, 26 February 1930. See also "Mass Psychology" in Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 68.
  - 22 For one example of many cultural misrepresentations and biases in Palestinian archaeology and architecture see Mahmoud Hawari, "Capturing the Castle: Architectural History and Political Bias at the Citadel of Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 55 (2013).
  - 23 Item from the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana archive. Number, *Ros. de Haan*, 3, Letter from the editor, Crossby Sutcliffe, 1 June 1923.
  - 24 Rose, *The Last Resistance*.
  - 25 Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 121.
  - 26 Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 79.
  - 27 Rose, *The Last Resistance*. This notion is underscored again by Rose in her discussion of Hannah Arendt.
  - 28 Eran Rolnik, *Freud in Zion; Psychoanalysis and the Making of Modern Jewish Identity* (Routledge, 2012), 44.
  - 29 Rolnik, *Freud in Zion*, 48.
  - 30 Rolnik, *Freud in Zion*, 49.
  - 31 Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Makkah* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1954), 99.
  - 32 Gunther Windhager, *Leopold Weiss Alias Muhammed Asad: Von Galizien nach Arabien 1900–1927* (Wein, Austria: Bohlau Verlag, 2002) 125.
  - 33 Item from the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana archive. Number, *Ros. de Haan*, 9, letter dated 10 February 1924
  - 34 De Haan, *Feuilletons*, #394, "The King is Coming," 3 February 1924; *Feuilletons*, #395, "The King of Mecca," 7 February 1924; and *Feuilletons*, #386, "The King," 14 February 1924. DBNL, The Hague.
  - 35 De Haan, *Feuilletons*, #384. DBNL, The Hague.
  - 36 Freud, *Letters*, 108.
  - 37 Freud, *Letters*, 108.
  - 38 Freud, *Letters*, 108.
  - 39 Freud, *Letters*, 108.
  - 40 Liel Leibovitz, "Jacob de Haan, Israel's Forgotten Gay Haredi Political Poet," *Tablet Magazine*, October 2014, online at [www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/jacob-de-haan-political-poet](http://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/jacob-de-haan-political-poet) (accessed 29 September 2021).
  - 41 Leibovitz, "Jacob de Haan."
  - 42 Leibovitz, "Jacob de Haan."
  - 43 *Jewish Post*, 6 May 1960.
  - 44 The account was first documented in *Toldoth ha-Haganah* (History of the Haganah), vol. 11, Part 1, 1964, 251–53. The Israeli TV and radio reports followed in 1970.
  - 45 See "event notes" online at [www.wertheimer.info/family/GRAMPS/Haapalah/ppl/3/a/bc437ac01174b7235a3.html](http://www.wertheimer.info/family/GRAMPS/Haapalah/ppl/3/a/bc437ac01174b7235a3.html) (accessed 28 September 2021).
  - 46 Freud, *Letters*, letter dated 29 May 1932.
  - 47 Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).
  - 48 Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 41.
  - 49 Massad, *Desiring Arabs*.
  - 50 Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab World* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 8.
  - 51 This manuscript can be found in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ar 4907 (2), 10b-11a.
  - 52 Franz Rosenthal, "Ar-Razi on the Hidden Illness," *Bulletin on the History of Medicine* 52 (1978): 45.
  - 53 De Haan, *Feuilletons*, #91, "Along All Roads." DBNL, The Hague.
  - 54 De Haan, *Feuilletons*, #91.
  - 55 De Haan, *Feuilletons*, #99.
  - 56 El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 1.
  - 57 Ellen Fleischman, "'Unnatural Vices' or Unnatural Rule? The Case of a Sex Questionnaire and the British Mandate," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 11/12 (Winter 2001): 14.
  - 58 Fleischman, "Unnatural Vices," 14.
  - 59 De Haan, *Feuilletons from the Algemeen Handelsblad*, #98, "A Long Day," 4 December 1919, DBNL, The Hague.
  - 60 Sara Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World: 1500–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).