

INTRODUCING OLIVE CULTURE IN PALESTINE

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Olive picking season near Ramallah. Photo by Osama Silwadi, 2018

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About the EU Funded Project “My Heritage! My Identity!”

In 2018, the European Union provided a grant to fund a project titled, “My Heritage! My Identity!”¹ in Palestine. The project is being jointly implemented by four partners: AFRAT - France (www.afrat.com), Bethlehem University / Institute for Community Partnership - Palestine (www.bethlehem.edu), Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between People - Palestine (www.pcr.ps) and TÉTRAKTYS - France (www.tetraktys-association.org).

It aims to contribute to preserving and promoting cultural heritage located along the community-based walking Masār Ibrāhīm (trail) in Palestine, in an effort to enhance Palestinian citizenship and identity.

What’s more, the project offers activities that will contribute to the cohesiveness of the Palestinian people. It promotes inclusion and trust and aims to create a sense of belonging in order to positively influence relations among the diverse groups in Palestinian society.

For more information on the project, please visit the project website at the following link: www.myheritage.ps and the Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/myheritagemyidentity

¹ The original title of the EU project was “Promoting Governance and Citizenship in Palestine”. EU project reference: ENI/2017/390-692.

About the research process

The present research project has been developed within the framework of the EU funded project “My Heritage! My Identity!”.

The four project partners collaborated with academic experts from Palestine and France to identify six topics related to Palestinian cultural heritage. A scientific committee was established at the beginning of 2018 to select relevant topics.

The scientific committee is composed of the following scholars:

Palestinian researchers :



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Jacques Barou
Research fellow and lecturer in Ethnology & sociology (Political Sciences Institute of Grenoble)

The scientific committee identified six topics, five of which were selected for completion:

- The maqāmāt as a place of popular practices: evolution and diversity
- From terraces to settlements: the testimony of Masār Ibrāhīm landscapes
- “The one who has olive oil will never be poor”. Material and political aspects of a Palestinian symbol.
- Architecture and ways of living: traditional and modern Palestinian villages and cities
- Ḥikāyāt Palestine through the Masār Ibrāhīm: dialects, oral memories and histories

Furthermore, the members of the committee have been involved throughout the research process to support the researchers.

Finally, three Palestinian members of the committee, Dr. Al Jubeh, Dr. Abed Rabo and Dr. Khader, were in charge of the final proof reading and copy editing of the research projects.

To discover the five researches, please visit the project website: www.myheritage.ps²

About the Author

Maissoun Sharkawi, a researcher and lecturer, holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of Lorraine- Nancy. Her thesis explores the social, historical and economic environment in which the concept of Palestinian cultural heritage has been formulated throughout the past two centuries. Her research focuses on the material archive that documents the economy of the village in 19th century Palestine.

She taught a course on Introducing cultural heritage in the Arab world in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at Aix-Marseille University.

² To quote this report: Sharkawi M., 2019. “Introducing Olive culture in Palestine”, EU funded project “My Heritage! My Identity!” (ENI/2017/390-692), available at: www.myheritage.ps



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Sharkawi holds an MA in Cultural Heritage Studies on Conservation and Development of Cultural Industrial and Economic Heritage from the University of Nantes.

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Introduction

“Al- ʿArd zeghret wen-nas ketret.”³

A farmer from Walajeh, Bethlehem

Hiking has become an important tool to reinforce our comprehension of the complex history and geography of Palestine. Masār Ibrāhīm is a 330-kilometer-long cultural hiking trail that runs from Rummanah village, northwest of Jenin, to Beit Mirsim, southwest of Hebron. It is part of the Abraham Path Initiative which maintains a trail that starts in Harran, Turkey, and ends in Palestine. Although the name carries religious connotations, the main purpose of the initiative is non-profit, non-religious, and non-political. It is run by an organization whose aim is to engage different partners in the development of tourist-attraction themes and sites along the path.

The Palestinian trail passes through more than 50 different cities and villages, and even though the area covered by the trail is quite small, it is characterized by great ecological diversity and various geographical regions and altitudes, traversing a number of climates that range from moderate Mediterranean to harsh desert environments. The area’s fauna and flora display all their diversity, as more than 2,800 plant species have been identified and more than 470 bird species have been reported.

Masār Ibrāhīm’s main aim is to develop important cultural and natural attractions, such as the local flora and fauna as well as archaeological and heritage sites such as monasteries, *maqāmāt* (shrines), ancient agricultural industries, agricultural terraces, olive orchards, water pools, channels, among others. It mostly targets “responsible cultural tourists,” serious locals and internationals who visit cultural heritage places in order to learn something new and expand their knowledge of the history and the complex geography of Palestine. Simply put, these tourists are very enthusiastic about cultural heritage. Even though they are difficult to satisfy, such tourists remain the main source for the sustainability of hiking-path tourism because they can both be supporters of and stakeholders in heritage preservation.

Cultural heritage has always been a very important touristic resource. Pilgrimage, today referred to as religious tourism, is perhaps one of the oldest forms of heritage tourism. People have been traveling for centuries in search for religious serenity and as an expression of religious

³ “The land has shrunk and the population has increased,” an interview with Abu Ali Alwaljeh, held by the author on 24. August, 2018.

responsibility. The destinations they frequent include birth or burial sites of famous religious leaders and places of mystical importance that may have witnessed miracles; here, *maqāmāt* (holy shrines) were built to keep alive their memory. Therefore, the notion of “patrimonialisation” has always existed in Palestinian society, and this concept extends beyond cultural heritage. In fact, patrimonialisation is all about capturing the memory of our cultural heritage sites, thereby transforming them into memorial spaces, or in Pierre Nora’s words, lieux de memoire.

The area encompassing historic Palestine has long been a major destination for religious touristic markets. The sector further expanded with the development of transport systems (mainly in the 19th century), which happened to coincide with the rise of the colonial project (towards the end of the 19th century). Over the past two centuries, Palestine and Palestinian society have undergone substantial changes in the geographical, social, cultural, and political scenes that have influenced their lives in the past and are still forming their lives today. These changes have greatly impacted not only the history of Palestinians, but also their relationship to their cultural heritage and the ways by which important events have been collectively remembered. As David Lowenthal points out, “The interaction with one’s heritage continually alerts its nature and context, whether by choice or by chance.”⁴

My contribution to the project titled “My Heritage! My Identity!” shall be the description of olive culture through Masār Ibrāhīm. The cultivation of the olive tree can be regarded as a sign of wealth, according to the proverb that says: “The one who has olive oil will never be poor”.

I am proposing a path that starts from the area south of Hebron namely, from the town of **al-Dhahiriya**, or **az-Zahiriyya**, as pronounced in the local colloquial Arabic. The main remarkable sites **al-Dhahiriya**, **Rujum al-Jurayda**, and **Khirbet Umm-Dumeina** are related to special techniques that were used for olive oil extraction during the Late Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. Currently, however, this small area of the southern Hebron district is hardly recognized for olive oil production, certainly not when compared with the present central zone and, more particularly, with the northern part of the country.

This paper suggests that for the “Olive tree path” to become part of Masār Ibrāhīm it has first to run in parallel to the path for 20 kilometres before it reaches the ancient city of **Hebron**, where

⁴ Lowenthal, (1985), cited in Daher, R., (2014), *The Politics and Practices of Cultural Heritage in the Middle East*, I.B. Tauris London and New York.

the “Roman”⁵ olive trees that grow in a grove on **Tel Rumeida** overlook the well-known and heavily disputed site **al-Haram al-Ibrahimi (The Sanctuary of Abraham)**.⁶ Hebron and the Ibrahimi Mosque have recently been registered as **World Cultural Heritage sites under the category “Hebron/al-Khalil Old Town.”**⁷

Two museums that document the history of olive oil production are now open to the public in Hebron’s old city and can be included in the program of visits to be arranged for hikers.⁸ The **Badd al-Natshah Museum** includes an olive oil press that dates back to the 19th century, at which time the famous Victor Coq imported a manual iron screw press from France. It is worth mentioning here that some members of the al-Natshah family still own olive trees at Tel Rumeida. The **Shajaret Eddor Museum** includes a semi-mechanical olive press that was built by the Palestinian Iron and Brass Foundry at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as other interesting machinery that was imported from London to improve the quality and quantity of olive oil produced in the city.

The path could then continue towards the area south-west of Jerusalem and visit the terraced hills of **Battir Village** (listed on the **World Heritage List** as “**Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir**”), lead through **Makhrou Valley**,⁹ and climb up to the lands of **Cremisan Monastery**. Tourists can discover beautiful hills, valleys, and terraces that are in danger of being annexed by the settlements of this area.¹⁰ In their way to the **Cremisan Monastery**, tourists shall come across a landscape art installation by the prominent young architects Elias and Yousef Anastas, entitled "While We Wait".¹¹

⁵ These are very old trees that are said to date back to the Roman era.

⁶ The Ibrahimi Mosque is one of the most important and disputed cultural landmarks of Hebron.

⁷ The Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hebron Municipality, and the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee submitted the file concerning the city's nomination to UNESCO's World Heritage List and obtained approval in July 2017.

⁸ See Hebron Localities Can Offer a Unique Path.

⁹ The Palestine Museum of Natural History (PMNH) and the Palestine Institute of Biodiversity (PIBS) of Bethlehem University have recently launched a project titled "Biodiversity Conservation and Community Development in Al-Makhrou Valley, Bethlehem." The main objectives of the project are to strengthen communities through the valuation and conservation of their ecosystems, to revive traditional farming methods, and to enhance ecotourism activities.

¹⁰ See Youtube video titled *Cremisan Valley: uprooting of olive trees*, EAPPI WCC, published on August 22, 2015, accessed on November 6, 2018 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIR5vbL-DpQ>.

¹¹This work formed part of the London Design Festival, Credit. <https://www.alamy.com/london-uk-15-september-2017-palestinian-architects-elias-and-yousef-image159430396.html>

In **al-Walaja Village** hikers can find one of the oldest olive trees in the world (supposedly 5,000 years old). It grows in the area named **shajret al-badawi**, which is believed to be blessed by the wise *wali* who more than 200 years ago used to live near this olive tree.

In Bethlehem's old city, hikers can visit another two very important sites related to olive culture. **Badd Giacaman Museum**, known as **Mathaf al-Badd**, is open to the public and documents the history of Bethlehem.¹² At this site during the olive picking season (October to November), tourists and school children can engage in activities related to olive oil production because all the necessary equipment for olive oil extraction still exists and can be reactivated. It is also important to note that this site will be included in the valorising project planned by Bethlehem Municipality. **Badd Giacaman Museum** furthermore includes an olive crushing installation that features a manual iron-screw press that was built in Jaffa at the end of the 19th century. The story of this machine illustrates the history of the colonial project in Palestine around the end of the 19th century as outlined below. Only a five-minute walk away, another remarkable building **Badd al-Bandak**, hosts a lever-and-screw weight press¹³ that exist intact in situ.¹⁴ The entire and beautiful area around Bethlehem and Beit-Jala furthermore offers unique tracks that **document the history of olive oil production as practiced for centuries**. Hikers can be made familiar with stories and documents from the late 18th and 19th century which illustrate how the rural and urban bourgeoisie utilized olive oil production to exert control over the local peasantry.¹⁵

Moving on north towards the villages surrounding **Salfit**, hikers can visit the area that is most famous for olive oil production in Palestine. It should be noted that most of the rural areas in this locality are very much in danger of being annexed by settlements; agricultural lands suffer constant violation of their very old olive trees, and farmers are not allowed to reach their lands during most months of the year. Bringing hikers to this area can help assert Palestinian ownership of the land, preserve olive-related heritage, and secure the livelihoods of local farmers.

¹² The building was restored in 2014 by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹³ The lever and screw press *'assarat alrafe 'a belowlab*

¹⁴ The equipment was put in place in the late 19th century; however, major restoration work was done at the building as part of the project "Bethlehem 2000."

¹⁵ See chapter in this study titled Olive Oil Production: A Rural Proto-Industry.

Finally, the **old city of Nablus**, as the most important centre for olive oil production, marks another important olive culture-related milestone. In the late 18th century, soap manufacture in Nablus expanded and adopted industrial production methods. *Nabulsi* soap became the most profitable among Palestinian exported goods and was exported to Egypt and Anatolia.¹⁶ Hikers can visit the **Tuqan Soap Factory**¹⁷ that still practices the traditional methods of soap production. It is one of the around 30 soap factories that were once located in the old city; only a few of them still manufacture small amounts of soap that are produced mostly from imported Spanish olive oil.

During the field work that was conducted for this project, many interviews were held to enquire about the visited sites. This research also utilised previous interviews that I conducted in Palestine for my doctoral dissertation related to this topic.

Masār Ibrāhīm passes through numerous villages most of which are related to olive culture. The trail that I propose shall lead from southern Hebron to Bethlehem and then towards Salfit and Nablus, in order to raise awareness and enrich the visual memory that documents olive culture in Palestine.

¹⁶Bontemps, V. (2009). *Naplouse, le savon et la ville. Patrimoine familial, travail ouvrier et mémoire au quotidien* (Doctoral dissertation, Université de Provence-Aix-Marseille I).

¹⁷ See link *Tuqan* factory: Stavanger, E. M. (2015). Nablus Soap Factory 2014 [Documentary]. Aug 27. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWmFMDr7y0U>.

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I. Olive Culture in Palestine: An Ethno-Ecological System¹⁸

The names of many Palestinian villages are associated with olive culture and either related to the cultivation of the tree or to the extraction of its oil. Just to mention a few: the name of *al-Ma'sara* village, which is located south of Bethlehem, means the olive pressing plant. Two villages in the Nablus area, one in the north and the other in the south, are named 'Asira, which is derived from the word pressing and relates to olives. The name of the village *Zeita*, which is located near Nablus, is derived from oil. 'Ein al-Zeitūn (a now depopulated village north of Safad inside the Green Line area) means the fountain of olives; *Birzeit*, located to the north of Ramallah, means the well of oil; and *Silūn*, located between Ramallah and Nablus, means the flow of oil. Furthermore, many villages and towns in Palestine are established on the ruins of older sites known as *khirab* (sing. *khirba*) that often contain ancient remains of olive oil extraction installations, villages and towns such as Jifna, near Ramallah, and ad-Dahiriyya and Dura, in the Hebron area, stand as good examples.

The olive tree, *shajarat al-zaytūn*, and its oil, *zeit al-zaytūn*, have been symbolic to Mediterranean societies for centuries as the most important zones of olive cultivation are situated around the Mediterranean Basin. The olive tree has prospered throughout history, growing mainly in the mountainous areas of this region, where it flourishes due to the breeze of the sea that is accompanied by a moderate climate. Olives have played a major role in the rise of many civilizations since the first human settlements in Jericho 9000 years BCE, as they were an important commodity for the development of the economies of most Mediterranean civilisations. Monotheist religions deemed them a heavenly gift.¹⁹

Olive oil can be regarded as the petroleum of antiquity.²⁰ Its production is among the oldest and most important trade industries. In Palestine, archaeological evidence shows that olive oil production started in the Neolithic Period (8300 to 4500 BCE) and continued until the oleo-culture

¹⁸ Ethnology implies the understanding of relations between human modes and their integration into the ecosystems of our biosphere; it retraces the intersection between social and cultural evolution of a society. Claude-Lévy Strauss defines it as the trans-disciplinary study of relations between societies, their natural environments, and their "popular" know-how.

¹⁹ According to Assmann, knowledge that has been culturally memorised is a starting point for a better understanding of the past and the present.

²⁰ Warnock. (2007). P.2

sector was mechanized by the introduction of semi-mechanical machines, notably the manual-iron-screw press in the middle of the 19th century.

Therefore, the rural zones of the Mediterranean with their agricultural social structure and unique climatic environment have allowed the development of olive cultivation. The progress associated with the introduction of new technologies related to oil extraction and the flourishing of industries derived from olive oil have enhanced and accelerated the region's development.

Palestinian olive trees, as described by Dalman,²¹ are evergreen trees that always appear in groups and bear the sign of proximity to a village or a monastery.²² The most important area of this culture spreads throughout the northern mountainous area of historic Palestine, from Akre to Safad, and is prominent particularly in the village of Rameh, which is known as the Queen of Oil, *malaket ezzeit*.²³ Here, an old olive tree of 5 metres height with a trunk diameter of 12 metres was observed there by Ataher.²⁴

In the central area, olive trees mostly grow on land that belongs to the villages located in the Nablus mountains (Jabal Nables), the Jerusalem Wilderness (Jabal al-Quds), and the mountains around Hebron (Jabal *al-Khalil*), and they flourish at altitudes up to 1000 metres. The tree is frequently cultivated on terraces, *salassel ezzaytoun*, which give the landscape a typical traditional image that resembles many other villages situated around the Mediterranean Basin. Travellers from the late Byzantine (324-640 CE) and early Muslim (634- 1099 CE) periods have described greater Syria, referring mainly to Palestine, by stating that the chain of mountains that reaches from the Upper Galilee to Hebron as well as the mountain groves around the city of Jerusalem were covered with olive groves.²⁵ (See Figure (1): Battir terraces).

²¹ Gustaf Hermann Dalman, a German Protestant theologian, philologist, and palestinologist, was the first director of the German Evangelical Institute of Antiquity in Jerusalem (1902-1917). He contributed in a number of papers and books to many fields. They include *Palestinian Folklore: Palästinensischer Diwan (1901)*, which is a collection of Arabic folksongs from Palestine, Transjordan, and Syria, as well as *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina (Work and Customs in Palestine)* (7 Vols., 1928–42; reprinted 1964), which addresses all aspects of the Palestinian economy of his time, including terminology.

²² Gustav Hermann Dalman (2013), *Work and Customs in Palestine*, Dar Al Nasher, p. 60.

²³ Ali Nasouh Ataher, who worked during the British Mandate (between 1930 and 1946) in several centers in the Directorate of Agriculture and wrote a book titled *Shajarat al-Zaytūn (The Olive Tree)* on olive culture in Palestine, documenting important data he collected throughout his career.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ J Frankel, J. (1987), "Oil and Olives in the Land of Israel in the Early Muslim Period (634-1099)", in Michael Heltzer, David Heitam eds., *Olive Oil in Antiquity: Israel and Neighbouring Countries from Neolith to Early Arab Period, Conference 1987, Haifa*, University of Haifa Press, pp. 57-62.

These terraces can be considered as a concrete evidence for the prosperity of oleo- and viticulture in Palestine throughout history.²⁶ They retain the soil during the torrential winter rains that are typical for this region and protect the soil during the long dry Mediterranean summer droughts. Palestinian olive trees prefer the harsh rocky limestone soils and climatic conditions found in Palestine’s central mountain areas. In many villages, olives are named according to the type of stone that composes the land. Villagers refer to *zeitūn ḥawari* as the trees that thrive in areas attributed to the kind of stone known as *ḥowar*;²⁷ the old olive tree near al-Walajeh, *zeitūnet al-badawi*, is of this type. (See Figure (5): *al-Badawi* olive tree, al-Walajeh Village).



Figure (1): Battir terraces, a world heritage site for cultural landscape. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi, September 1, 2018

²⁶ Zertal, A. (1987), “The Cultivation and the Economy of Olives During the Iron Age I in the Hill Country of Manasseh,” in *Olive oil in Antiquity*, pp. 196-202.

²⁷ The limestone named in Arabic colloquial.

It is also believed that olives planted in rocky mountain areas produce oil of better quality and with a preferred taste than the olive oil that is produced in coastal areas. Agronomists assert that trees produce better yields if planted in rich soils, average oil if grown in average soil, but still can produce olives in poor soils.²⁸ This may be why the Roman agronomist Columella in his agricultural treatise called olives “the queen of trees.”²⁹

The Domestication of the Olive Tree

The Greek philosopher and traveller Theophrastus (372- 287 BCE) stated:

“There can be no growth or bloom of Thyme where there is no sea breeze...

Neither can do without sea breeze the Olive tree.”³⁰

The olive tree has been cultivated in the eastern part of the Mediterranean basin along the entire coastal area from modern Syria to Palestine, mainly for its oil.³¹ The culture starts to disappear as we move farther away from the Mediterranean Sea.³² According to botanical remains, specialists confirm that the origin of olive culture occurred in the Levant,³³ mainly in the geographical area of modern Syria. Yet, recent research has shown that the tree appeared earlier in the valley *Teleilat Ghassoul*, located in today’s Jordan,³⁴ mainly in its eastern area, close to the Dead Sea.

Archaeological evidence shows that the commercial development of olive oil was practiced in the Levant as early as the Bronze Age (3150-2200 BCE) and continued during the Iron Age (1200-537 BCE).³⁵ Later on, the Phoenicians introduced the olive culture in their settlements throughout

²⁸ Aṭaher p.20

²⁹ Frankel, R. (1994). P.21

³⁰ Lamilakis, A.P. (2006). The Culture of the Olive tree. *Ode to the Olive Tree*. Athens. Academy of Athens. Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. (157-174)

³¹ Warnock, P., (2007). Identification of Ancient Olive Oil Processing Methods Based on Olive Remains. England. Archaeopress. P.10

³² Brun, J.P. (2006). *Le vin et l’huile dans la méditerranée antique*. (Errance). Paris. P.126-127

³³ Liphscitz, N., (1996). Olives in Ancient Israel in View of Dendroarchaeological Investigation. *Olive oil in Antiquity*. Padova. Sargon srl. (7-13)

³⁴ Hadjisavvas, S., (2006). In Praise of Olive Tree: Ode to the Olive Tree. Athens. Academy of Athens. Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. (54-61)

³⁵ Eitam (2000) and Frankel (1999).

the western Mediterranean region, Northern Africa, Sardinia, and Spain, and the tree reached Italy and France through the Greeks.³⁶

It is possible to imagine that olive oil was marketed in the western Mediterranean before the cultivation of the tree was practiced in these areas. For many centuries, the countries of the Mediterranean Basin were part of the Roman Empire (37 BCE-324 CE) and constituted a settled countryside that produced grain, fruits, wine and oil; trade of these goods was carried out along peaceful sea-routes.³⁷

The Prosperity of the Olive Culture in Palestine: A Historical Overview

Under Assyrian influence in the Philistine region (2500 to 605 BCE), traditional modes of olive oil production shifted to an industrial system in order to increase production and supply Assyria with olive oil. In this endeavour, the empire was motivated not only by land acquisition, but also aimed to maximize its resources and supply its heartland.³⁸

Historically, as documented by archaeological remains, the area of historic Palestine constituted the largest industrial olive oil production centre in the region.³⁹ It dates back to the 7th century Iron Age (1200-586 BCE) in Khirbet al-Muqann', also known as Tel Miqne- Ekron⁴⁰ which refers to the Roman city that was later built on the ruins of Khirbet al-Muqann'.

Today, in most Palestinian villages, old olive trees are referred to as *zeitūn rumi*, Roman olives. This designation does not necessarily mean that the tree dates to the Roman Period; rather, it is a way to express that the tree is very old and likely dates back to ancient times. (See, Figure (2): An old olive tree at the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Hourani, A. (2013). *A history of the Arab peoples: Updated edition*. Faber & Faber. P.7-8

³⁸ Faust, A., (2011). The interest of the Assyrian Empire in the West: Olive Oil Production as a Test Case. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, (54), 62-86.

³⁹ Faust, A., & Lev-tov, J. (2011) The constitution of Philistine identity: Ethnic dynamics in twelfth to tenth century Philistia. *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 30 (1), p. 13-31

⁴⁰ One of the five cities of philistine, pentapolis, is located southwest of Canaan. Today the site is 35 km west of Jerusalem.



Figure (2): An old olive tree at the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018⁴¹

Late Byzantine to Early Arab Muslim Period: Testimonies from Travellers and Geographers

After the collapse of the Byzantine Empire (324-640 CE) and with the rise of the Arab Muslim Empire (634-1099 CE) no remarkable damage to the agricultural system in historic Palestine occurred. Arabs invested in new technology and developed agriculture in marginal zones of the country.⁴² Nevertheless, from the late 10th century onwards a decline in the agricultural system took place when the regimes of the Muslim empire enabled Bedouin tribesmen and Turcoman to enter and settle in farming zones in Palestine. Although this caused damage to fields and orchards, the local economy that depended on live oil remained intact.⁴³ During the Umayyad and

⁴¹ Child's height 1,44 m

⁴² J. Frankel (1987), "Oil and Olives in the Land of Israel in the Early Muslim Period."

⁴³ Ibid.

Abbasid eras, the surplus of olive oil was exported to neighbouring countries and cities, mainly Cairo, as olive oil was collected from villages, sent to Jaffa, and traded from its port.⁴⁴ Agricultural production networks stretched mainly from Syria's districts (*Bilad Ash-Sham*) to Cairo, which was the centre for the commercialisation of agricultural products.

Testimonies from travelers and geographers assert the prosperity of the olive culture in Palestine, as part of Greater Syria. Thus, the Arab geographer Ibn Faqih al-Hamadani (flourished during the second half of the 9th century) noted how proud the people of Greater Syria were of their olives.⁴⁵ Al-Maqdisi, describing Syria in the year 980 CE, lauded how unequalled this land was for its common olive oil,⁴⁶ and that the area around *Jabal Nablus* abounded with olive trees. Nasir-i Xusru,⁴⁷ who visited Palestine in 1047 CE, mentioned that olive cultivation spread along the Mediterranean coast around Acre and along the road from Caesarea to Ramla.⁴⁸ Dimashqi wrote in the year 1300⁴⁹ that despite the damage that had been inflicted by the Crusaders (1099-1291 CE), Nablus was still surrounded by olive trees.⁵⁰

During the Ottoman rule (1517, 1918 CE), in order to control the olive oil industry and increase production, the Ottoman administration applied strict laws that forbade peasants to leave their villages and live elsewhere without the permission of their local administrators.⁵¹ The cultivation of the olive tree was a local specialty for this province of the Ottoman Empire which focused on the monoculture of olive cultivation. Since olive oil was a commercial crop, Palestinian villages paid their taxes in olive oil. Records from the year 1596 CE show how the villages 'Attil, Jaba, and 'Illar, located in the central area of *Jabal Nablus*, paid their taxes:⁵²

⁴⁴ J. Frankel (1987) in "Oil and Olives in the Land of Israel in the Early Muslim Period" cites letters by Jewish traders that were written in the middle of the eleventh century, during the Muslim era. For example, Jacob son of Samuel al-Andalussi sent a short letter from Jerusalem to Cairo, saying: "I have already informed you that I bought you olive oil in two containers and sent them with Ibn al-Tuffahi to Jaffa. And the olive oil was then transported to Egypt by boat."

⁴⁵ J. Frankel (1987), "Oil and Olives in the Land of Israel in the Early Muslim Period."

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Also spelled *Naser Khosrow* (1004–1088 CE); he was a Persian poet, philosopher, Isma'ili scholar, traveller and one of the greatest writers of Persian literature.

⁴⁸ J. Frankel (1987), "Oil and Olives in the Land of Israel in the Early Muslim Period."

⁴⁹ Dimashqi died in 1327 CE, while in Safad.

⁵⁰ J. Frankel (1987), "Oil and Olives in the Land of Israel in the Early Muslim Period."

⁵¹ Suraiya N. Faroqi, ed., (20016), *The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603-1839*, Cambridge University Press.

⁵² Zertal, A. (1996) p.310.

Table (1): Taxes paid in olive oil, measured in Uqqa.⁵³

Village	Paid Quantity
‘Attil	6000
Jaba ‘	1500
‘Illar	3500

II. The Utilization of Olive Oil

Olives were mainly cultivated for their oil that was utilized daily for lighting and for dietary consumption. Since ancient times, olive oil has furthermore been an important ingredient for beauty treatment and body care, and it has been used as a basic ingredient for folk medicine to treat health ailments and skin irritation. Today, many entrepreneurs are reintroducing olive oil as a base for their products. And finally, it was used for soap making as one of most important olive oil-derived products for industrial purposes that influenced the social relations between Palestinian villages and towns, especially in the area around *Jabal Nablus*. (See the chapter that deals with soap production below)

Dimashqi described the area of *Jabal Nablus* in the year 1300 CE as follows:

“The oil of its olives is carried into all the lands of Egypt, Syria and Arabia (the Hijaz and the Arabian Desert). They send oil to Damascus, for use for the great Omayyad Mosque, yearly a thousand qintars of Damascus measure⁵⁴...From the oil produced in Nablus they made soap of a fine quality, which is exported to all lands, and to islands of the Mediterranean.”⁵⁵

⁵³ 1 Uqqa (*uqiyyas*) equals 400 dirhams or 1.280 kg

⁵⁴ quintar, qintar, quintal, or centner, from Latin *centenarius* ("hundredlike"), is a historical unit of mass in many countries. It is usually defined as 100 base units of either pounds or kilograms.

⁵⁵ Le Strange, 1890, pg. 513, cited in J. Frankel (1987), "Oil and Olives in the Land of Israel in the Early Muslim Period."

Lighting

Olive oil has been used to light dwellings and for offerings when lamps were lit in churches and mosques. Those who were unable to visit these holy shrines in Jerusalem were advised to send olive oil to be lit there instead.⁵⁶

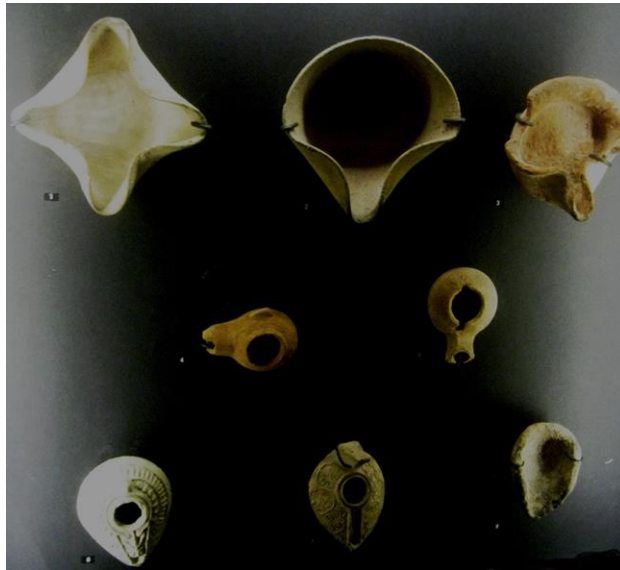


Figure (3): Various oil lamps, exhibited at Badd Giaqamann Museum, Bethlehem. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018

In the year 780 CE, Hugelburc⁵⁷ described the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem as follows:

*“Inside there is a shelf on which the lord body lay, and fifteen golden bowls stand on the shelf, they are filled with olive oil and burn day and night.”*⁵⁸

In the eighth century, the consumption of olive oil in al-Aqsa Mosque was of 100 *qist* per day.⁵⁹ Every night, fifteen hundred *qandil* (lamps) were lit here, while in the Dome of the Rock three hundred *qandil* were lit. The large mosque of Acre provided its own oil as described by Al-Muqaddasi:

⁵⁶ Hadith, according to Ibn Faqih in: *muhtacir katab el-baldan*, M.DE. GOEJ edition Leiden 1938

⁵⁷ A nun who wrote a story of an English pilgrim Saont Willibald who traveled to the Levant between 724 and 730 A.D.

⁵⁸ Frankel, J. (1987). Oil and Olives in the Land of Israel in the Early Muslim Period (634-1099). In *Olive Oil in Antiquity: Israel and Neighbouring Countries from Neolith to Early Arab Period: Conference 1987, Haifa* (p. 57-62). University of Haifa.

⁵⁹ A *qist*, derived from the Greek *xestes*, is generally understood to mean a pint, or 16 fluid ounces.

“In its court is a clump of olive trees, the oil from which suffices for the lamps of the mosque, and yet besides.”⁶⁰

The Mediterranean Diet

Olive oil, wheat and wine have been the most important crops since ancient times; they have contributed to the creation of the Mediterranean diet that is mostly based on olive oil. After olive oil has been extracted from the fruit, it can be consumed immediately as food and could be used for cooking. The consumption practices of olive-oil-producing societies differ from those of non-producing societies. Due to the plenitude of oil here, it is served for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and used to preserve food (meat, olives, and vegetables).

Most Palestinian dishes that are cooked with meat can also be cooked with olive oil instead. Main dishes in Palestinian cuisine such as *wara* ‘*el-enab* (vine leaves), *koussa* (zucchini), aubergine, and ochre are cooked either with meat or olive oil. Dishes cooked only with olive oil are called *siami* (cooked without meat), or fasting dishes, in reference to the Christian fast.

Olive oil was also offered for use in *tekeyas* (waqf establishments run as sanctuaries for guests and the poor). *Tekeyas* prospered during the Arab Muslim era (at least since the 9th century), and mainly during the Ottoman period. In these establishments, several people were appointed to offer food daily. They basically included a cook, a baker, and a servant. Still today, in the city of Hebron, *tekayat sayidna Ibrahim* is located near al-Haram al-Ibrahimi and serves guests and poor people in the city.

Al-Muqaddasi⁶¹ describes contemporary meals offered in *Tekeyyas* that were based on olive oil:

*“They present a dish of lentils and olive oil to every poor person who arrives.
And it is even set before the rich if perchance they desire to partake of it.”*

⁶⁰ (Al-Muqaddasi p.29-30 in description of Syrian including Palestine circ. 985 A.D. translated by Guy le strange London 1886). Frankel, J. (1987). Oil and Olives in the Land of Israel in the Early Muslim Period (634-1099). In *Olive Oil in Antiquity: Israel and Neighbouring Countries from Neolith to Early Arab Period: Conference 1987, Haifa* (p. 57-62). University of Haifa.

⁶¹ Al-Muqaddasi was a scholar originally from Al-Quds (Jerusalem) who travelled through the Islamic world in late 10th century and produced one of the most original works of Arabic geography. This work, due to its sociological and ethnographical tone, was and remains appealing to contemporary scholars.

And he adds that in Hebron, “they used to boil beans with olive oil, sprouted and then fried them, which is a dish sold to be eaten with olives.”⁶²



Figure (4): Palestinian Meal, Sliman Mansour (1980).⁶³

Soap Production

Another important usage of olive oil was in the manufacture of soap. In fact, olive oil was the main raw material used for artisanal production of soap. The abundance of olive oil was a major factor facilitating population growth in Syrian villages, and in order to increase their income and improve livelihoods farmers were forced to be creative in their productions and created a form of “rural proto-industrial practices.” They transformed soap manufacture from artisanal to industrial production, particularly in the central area of *Jabal Nablus* where villages were producing most of the olive oil produced in Palestine from the mid-18th century up to today.⁶⁴

⁶² (Al-Muqaddasi p.51 & 80). Frankel, J. (1987). Oil and Olives in the Land of Israel in the Early Muslim Period (634-1099). In *Olive Oil in Antiquity: Israel and Neighbouring Countries from Neolith to Early Arab Period: Conference 1987, Haifa* (p. 57-62). University of Haifa.

⁶³ *From Catalogue of Sliman Mansour. Tina Sherwell (ed.). Mansour, S. (1980). Palestinian Meal [Painting]. Widad Qawar, Jordan*

⁶⁴ Bontemps, V., 2009.

There is a particularity in olive oil which makes it essential to soap production and much more suitable than other oils, such as sesame oil which is also very common in the *Jabal Nablus* region. Olive oil produces more solid acid at medium temperatures, which offers a better result during saponification. On the other hand, soap cannot succeed without the use of another important substance: *qeli alkali*, a semi-desert plant that, when reduced to ashes, gives an alkaline product that makes saponification possible. This plant is supplied to the manufacturers by Bedouins. It was mostly produced around al-Salt in Balqaa in today's Jordan and sold to manufacturers in Nablus. Mount Nablus and Balqaa were one *sanjaq* (district) during the late Ottoman Period.

III. Olive Oil Production: A Rural Proto-Industry

Olive oil was an integral part of the Ottoman Empire's economy. A policy of investment in this sector was reflected in the yearly planting of 500,000 olive trees in order to increase production as the olive tree requires 10 to 12 years before being productive. Olive oil was mainly produced for commercial uses, and foreign trade was the main factor in the development of the olive oil production and soap manufacture sectors. As in any pre-industrial society, trade at this time was a form of capitalism or a social formation of pre-capitalism. This pre-system of capitalism, similar to practices in rural Europe during the rise of the industrial era, increasingly made merchants richer and peasants poorer.

How olive oil was obtained from peasants is explained in Doumani's research in the archives of Nabulsi families. The *salam* contracts established between merchants and peasants, as he outlines, were very common in 18th and 19th-century Palestine and illustrate the exploitation of peasants, as outlined below.⁶⁵

Palestinian Villages in the 18th and 19th Centuries

The Palestinian village was composed of *fallahin* (peasants) and *mallakin* (rural middle-class peasants, the "rural bourgeoisie" represented by the *sheikhs* and *mukhtars*).⁶⁶ The *felaḥīn*,

⁶⁵ Doumani, B. (1995). *Rediscovering Palestine: merchants and peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900*. Univ of California Press.

⁶⁶ The term "middle class peasants" was coined by Doumani.

especially those living in the villages of the central highland, were active members of society along with the rural middle class whose members were also responsible for collecting taxes from peasants. *Sheikhs* and *mukhtars* played the role of intermediaries in the relations between the city-dwelling merchants and the peasants in the rural areas of Palestine. They ensured the circulation of capital, which was represented by olive oil and mainly designated for commercial use such as export and the supply of soap factories.

Due to an increase in the export of olive oil from the main Palestinian portal cities (Jaffa, Haifa, and Acre) during the second half of the 19th century, urban merchants were encouraged to increase their efforts to secure this valuable commodity from peasants. They needed large quantities of olive oil to be available every year, even though its agricultural production alternates between productive and less productive years.

In their efforts to secure a constant supply of olive oil, soap merchants were ruthless with peasants. Via the rural middle-class peasants, merchants developed a credit system called *salam*. The principle of contract forged under this system can be summarized as follows: An immediate advancement of money is given by the merchant or the bourgeois peasant (the *sheikh* or the *mukhtar*) to the peasant who must then assure the delivery of a defined quantity of olive oil at a reduced price, fixed at the time of the contract. Through this form of credit, the merchants reserved the surplus of olive oil for themselves.

In this way, the merchant might initially pay the taxes of the peasants of an entire village; but these were then forced to supply the soap factory with a specified number of olive oil jars, as stated by the merchant in the contract. Certainly, creditors worked for merchants who had a thorough knowledge of the market and were able to influence the price of olive oil.⁶⁷ The peasants, on the other hand, were seldom in a position to negotiate the amount of olive oil they had to supply in the following season because generally they had to take such a credit in order to meet their basic needs, be it to pay the taxes that were imposed by the Turkish government or to fulfil other obligations – which could be to recover after a year of poor agricultural yield or to afford marriage expenses.

⁶⁷ Doumani, B. (1995). *Rediscovering Palestine: merchants and peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900*. Univ of California Press.

A Story from Beit-Jala that Documents Conditions in the 18th and 19th Centuries

A woman from Beit-Jala told this story to the wife of the British Consul in Jerusalem, Mrs. Finn, who documented it. In the mid-nineteenth century, when the woman's family needed money to pay their taxes, her father-in-law had approached a soap merchant named Sulayman Asali. The woman said:

“He [the woman’s father-in-law] pledged his olive trees for 500 piasters and wrote a bond upon himself to pay fifteen jars of oil to Sulayman Asali; and if there is any deficient, he has to pay two jars of oil next year for everyone. That year was a bad one, and our olives were stolen, and we had only three jars of oil; so Sulaiman wrote a bond upon my father-in-law for twenty-four jars of oil for the next harvest, and if any were deficient, two were to be given for everyone... We now owe him eighty jars of oil.”⁶⁸

The beautiful landscape around Beit-Jala and the abundance of olive presses in its surrounding rural areas retain the memory of that era over time.

IV. The Moderate Mediterranean Climate

It is the moderate climate of the Mediterranean region that facilitates the flourishing of the olive tree more than the area's soil and the extension of the culture is ultimately due to the region's moderate climate.⁶⁹ The olive is a thermophilic tree that tolerates poor soils, arid climate, and long periods without rain – which is why it is the perfect tree for Mediterranean villages.⁷⁰ The main characteristics of this climate are its warm summer days and mildly-cold, wet winters. Yet, the tree might die if the temperature drops under -7^o Celsius for several consecutive days. The tree

⁶⁸ Doumani, B. (1995). *Rediscovering Palestine: merchants and peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900*. Univ of California Press.

⁶⁹ Brun, J.P. (2006). *Le vin et l'huile dans la méditerranée antique*. (Errance). Paris. P.123

⁷⁰Ibid.P. 126

flourishes at an altitude of up to 1000 metres.⁷¹ It needs a minimum precipitation of 400-500 millimetres.

The Olive Tree

Olea Europa L. *Stavia*, is the scientific name given to the cultivable olive tree that in colloquial Palestinian Arabic is called *zeitūn jawī*. There are four hundred species of the tree, and *Syringa* (lilacs) and *Jasminum* (jasmynes) are other members of the *Oleaceae* family. Within natural landscapes, it is very common to observe wild olive trees whose scientific name is *Olea Europa* L. *Oleastre*, called *zeitūn barrī* in colloquial Arabic. They are the ancestors of the cultivable olive trees *zeitūn jawī*. The main characteristics of wild olive trees are that they look more like shrubs and are very thorny; they give small olive fruits that are very poor in oil and inedible. However, wild olive trees carry the genetic material essential for grafting, so cultivated olive trees are maintained by vegetative propagation; they are in fact clones. Wild olive trees reproduce from seeds. They then become the rootstock since the small branches of cultivable olive trees, *urmeyya*, are grafted into the trunks of wild olive trees. This operation takes place one or two years after the sprouting of the tree. In ancient times, olive oil was extracted from wild olives (oleasters); it was reputed for its sweet taste and could be preserved for longer periods than oil produced from cultivable olives.⁷²

⁷¹ Other areas in which the tree can flourish include North Africa, where the tree is found at an altitude of 1000 metres. In areas such as Auras and Kabylie, remains of olive trees were found even at an altitude of 1500 metres.

⁷² Brun, J-P. (1986). p.23.



Figure (5): Al-Badawi olive tree near Al-Walaja village. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018

The cultivable olive oil tree can reach a height of 6 to 7 metres and an age of 1500 years. It is considered among the oldest trees of the Near East and Europe. However, the more it grows in age, the more its trunk hollows from the inside – yet it continues to bear olive fruits. This fact makes the determination of the tree’s age impossible by means of the technique of dendrochronology.⁷³ (See Figure (7): Old olive tree at Tel Rumeida, Hebron)

The Palestinian agronomist Ataher states that the olive tree can produce fruit for centuries; unlike figs and vines- important Palestinian agricultural crops that lose the ability to produce fruit with age. It is believed that the olive trees that grow in the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem are 2000 years old.⁷⁴ (See Figure (2): Old olive tree at the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem).

The *al-Badawi* olive tree in al-Walaja village near Bethlehem and the trees at the olive orchards of Tel Rumeida are the oldest trees in the West Bank. (See figures (6) and (7))

⁷³ Warnock, P., (2007). Identification of Ancient Olive Oil Processing Methods Based on Olive Remains. England. Archaeopress. P.9-10

⁷⁴ Ibid.



Figure (6): An old olive tree at Tel Rumeida faces the Haram al-Ibrahimi. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018



Figure (7): A hollow olive tree at Tel Rumeida, Hebron. Photo ©Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018

The Olive Fruit

Olives are stone fruits, like cherries, with seeds covered by a fleshy fruit.⁷⁵ The flesh (epicarp) and the fleshy pulp (mesocarp) contain the oil and make up 15 to 35% of the fruit's weight. The stone (endocarp) represents 18% of the fruit's weight and contains 2% of its oil.⁷⁶ The fruit furthermore contains vegetable water, called amurca, which represents 45 to 60% of its weight. Amurca contains a bitter sugar (*oleuropeine*) that makes the olives not consumable immediately after picking, neither as table olives nor for their oil. Therefore, table olives should be cut slightly and then soaked in water several times to get rid of the bitter sugar. This method has been practiced since antiquity, as described by Caton.⁷⁷ Olives are then preserved in water and salt until they become edible. Mature black olives are consumed only as table olives. They are olives that stay longer on the tree. After they are picked, they are covered with a good amount of salt to withdraw the bitter sugar they contain. After that, Palestinians tend to preserve black olives in olive oil rather than with water and salt.

Dalman explains from his observations in Palestine that the solidity and the bitterness of the olives deter animals from eating this fruit.

V. Farmers' Knowledge, Traditional Skills, and the Modes of their Transmission

The Palestinian agricultural year is divided into seven cycles. Each cycle consists of fifty days called *khamasīnāt*. These divisions are carried out and adjusted to the Eastern Christian calendar and adopted by farmers *fallahin* in most villages until this day. There are several proverbs that have been collectively memorized and show the strong attachment of Palestinians to agriculture and particularly olive culture.

The Agricultural *Khamasīnāt* Divisions and Proverbs Linked to Olive Culture

⁷⁵ Warnock. (2007). P.11.

⁷⁶ Brun. (1986) p.392.

⁷⁷ In Brun, J-P. (1986). p.23.

By the month of September, we are within the sixth agricultural *khamasīnayya*. It coincides with the period of the full maturity and ample sweetness of grapes, which are harvested from September to November. Assuring the importance of the grape and olive cultures in this region and asserting the accuracy of the *khamasīnāt*, the proverb says, “*Min el-‘anṣara lil-manṭara umin el-manṭara lil-ma‘ṣera khamsīn yom imqadara.*” (From Pentecost until the time of guarding the grapes, and from guarding the grapes until pressing the olives, fifty days are allotted to each season.)⁷⁸

The word *mantara* (the place to guard or to watch), as used in this proverb, refers to structures built by fellahin called *mintar* (pl. *manatīr*), also known as *al-qosūr al-zera‘eyya* (agricultural castles), which are high structures built on agricultural holdings to allow farmers to remain on their land and watch over mainly their figs and vines. From July to September, farmers would leave their homes in nearby villages and settle in *manatīr* in order to carry out the agricultural practices related to these two cultures (from harvesting to drying figs and raisins). These structures can still be found in fields. (See Figure (8): *Manatir*)



Figure (8): *Manatir* in the valley between Battir and Makhrouf. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018.

⁷⁸ " من العنصرة للمنطرة ومن المنطرة للمعصرة خمسين يوم مقدرة" (Gustav Dalman, 2013, p.574)

During the month of August (*āb*), olives ripen and oil flows into the fruit, as expressed by the *fallahīn* in the proverb that says, “*Bī‘eid el-‘adra em ennūr betaih ezzeit bī ezzetūn.*”⁷⁹ (On the Feast of the Virgin, the Mother of Light, let the oil flow into olives.)⁸⁰ The Feast of the Virgin is celebrated on August 15; it is followed by the Feast of the Cross, celebrated between September 14 and 27.

The olive picking season, *mawsem az-zaytūn*, as well as the olive pressing season belong to the seventh cycle and last *khamasīnayya* of the Palestinian agricultural year. In Greek villages, practices are very similar to those of Palestinian villages; they relate to the Christian agricultural calendar, particularly when it comes to olive culture. The Greeks say that it is easier to pick olives when they are moist with the Rain of the Cross.⁸¹ For Palestinians, the Rain of the Cross (*matret essalīb*), the first rain that falls at the end of September, is considered as an official call to start preparations for the olive picking season. It is expressed by elderly people in most villages through the proverb, “*Lin hal elūn-taḥ ez-zet fiz-zetūn (...).*”⁸²

In fact, the olive season starts in March (*azāar*) since the amount of rainfall during this month determines the quantity of oil for the upcoming olive season. The local proverb says: “*In dafa‘ fi Azāar, Ayloulou jrār.*”⁸³ (If it rains in March, the jars are plenty in September.) This is true in the low-lying planes, such as in Tulkarem, where the season begins earlier; in mountainous areas, however, the proverb applies differently, and the jars are full by October or November, since the olive picking season differs from one zone to another, depending on the climate and soil.

Rain that falls at the end of the olive picking season, especially during December (which generally is a dry and cold month), is also very valuable for the trees. The proverb says, “*Sayl ezzeitūn min sayl Kanun.*”⁸⁴ (The torrent of olives is linked to the torrents of December and January.) By the beginning of May, the buds of the olive trees, just like the buds of vines, start to flourish again.

⁷⁹ بعيد العذرا أم النور بطيح الزيت بالزيتون

⁸⁰ Dalman 574-575.

⁸¹ Kamilakis, P. (2006). Traditional Olive Tree Cultivation in Crete. Ode to the Olive Tree. Academy of Athens, Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Pp.177-213.

⁸² Dalman, 2013, p. 60 "إن هل أيلول طاح الزيت بالزيتون" : "When September arrives, olive oil falls into olives."

⁸³ Ataher "إن دفع بأذار أيلولو جرار"

⁸⁴ Dalman, 2013, p. 337

The Biannual Character of the Crop

“*Ya rabb es-semum-ind ‘aqd ez-zetun win aja ezzer ‘ will ‘omro ma aja.*”⁸⁵

(Oh God, give the *semum* when the olives nodes, may the grain come now or never.)⁸⁶

This proverb shows how agriculturally important the production of olive oil is in Palestine – even more important than wheat production.

The olive season, *mawsem az-zaytūn*, is not constant, since it depends on the climatic conditions, mainly rain and the Sirocco winds, that touch the region. This wind is good for grains but dries the earth and thus dries certain crops, especially olive trees. Therefore, in most Mediterranean olive-producing countries, the olive season is known to be a biannual crop. In fact, it has been known since antiquity that the olive yield occurs biennially. A good year, called *sana masia*, is usually followed by an average or a bad year, *sana shlatona* or *sana maḥla*. According to some people who were interviewed by the author, the biannual nature of the crop is due to the nature of the tree and to the warm wind of May, the Sirocco, known in colloquial Arabic as *al-reyaḥ al-khamsiniyya*.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, Palestinian farmers hope that their olives shall be fruitful in every season.

During the field work for this report, it was noticeable that many “modern” olive pressing plants contained special wells, set up to store the surplus of olive oil that is collected in a good year, to be used in the following year. (See Figure Burham).

The biannual nature of the crop has been observed since antiquity and was recorded by Lucius Columella and other agronomists. They assumed that this phenomenon is mostly related to the harsh picking practices that are frequently exerted on the trees. Therefore, it was recommended that olives on branches out of hand’s reach should be knocked down carefully with a reed, rather than a rod, in order not to hurt the upcoming buds of the following year. Recent research suggests that the biannual crop is also due to the poverty of the Mediterranean soil, as well as to the brutality exerted on the trees while picking, the Sirocco wind, and irregularities in precipitation.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p.337.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ The wind, blowing in this south-eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, it is an atmospheric depression that starts in the great desert of North Africa and settles towards the east of the Mediterranean Sea.

Practices of the Olive Picking Season, *Mawsem Lijdād*

“When we mistreat the olive tree by striking and shaking branches, the tree will not offer us fruit for the following year.”⁸⁸

From the gentle way the olive trees tend to be treated, one can easily guess whether a family (rather than a hired worker) is picking its olives.⁸⁹ Olive “milking” is a term used by Rosenblum,⁹⁰ who explains that olives should be picked gently from their branches, exactly like milking a goat. This is the only way to keep the tree healthy and the olives intact, but this practice is slow and puts a high demand on labour. The main reason why this principle must be respected is because it protects the fruits from the damage that increases the acidity rate in olive oil.

The olive picking season, *mawsem lijād*, is announced immediately after the Rain of the Cross, *matret as-salīb*. Elderly people remember that in former times the picking season never began before the end of October. They assert, “We waited for the fruit to turn blue, we would postpone

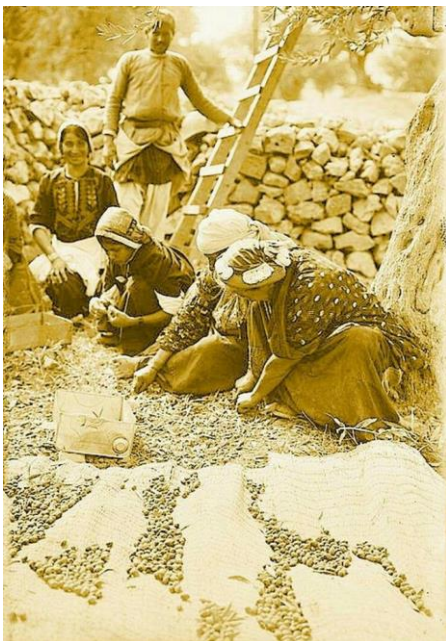


Figure (9): Women separating olives. Photo courtesy of Palestine Remembered.

⁸⁸ Interview at ‘Ajjou village (2014). Age 84. Farmers usually used to express in interviews:

⁸⁹ Plichter see Warnock. (2007). P.17

⁹⁰ Rosenblum, M., (1996). The Life and Lore of a Noble Fruit. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. P.336

the picking until the end of December, sometimes even until early January, if the season was good.

The grass of early spring used to grow while we were still picking.”⁹¹

In the Salfit area, which used to be a locality in the Nablus governorate and is still reputed for the cultivation of olives, the local farmer committee sets strict rules regarding the starting date of olive picking. According to these rules, “Olives should be completely mature before they are picked, and the season should not start before the first of November,”⁹² even though these groves are located on the plain that oversees the Mediterranean coast. Olives in nearby localities with the same geographic features are mature before that date, and in these places olive picking starts early, in October.

According to my observations during the year 2016, the season started at the beginning of October, after the Feast of the Cross, which is usual. This happened even though the rain that is expected to fall at the end of September and tends to wash the olives before they are picked, was lacking. Owners of olive trees and olive groves said: “We must go to our groves precisely at this period; we cannot wait until the maturity of the fruit... In this period, we can obtain labour because of Jewish and Muslim religious feasts. During these holidays, everyone can participate in the picking. Labourers who work in Israel return and work in olive groves, and everyone in the village can help in the picking season. That’s why we have to start earlier than expected.” Some others added that “Olive oil extraction practices today are ultra-modern; they no longer require the complete maturity of olive fruits to facilitate oil extraction.”

Until recent decades, an essential practice called *al-talqat*, derived from the Arabic word *intalaqa* (which means heading towards a place), was used in reference to the olive groves of a village. Following a call on the evening before picking, made from the village mosque or church, women and men were divided into groups, usually along family ties. One group would head towards the eastern olive groves, the other towards the western groves of the village.⁹³

⁹¹ Interview, at Abu Shukheidim village (2014) age 86.

⁹² Martina (2001) and Warnock (2007) p.17

⁹³ Interview (2014) Abu Shukheidim village. Age 80s

Al-ʿona (from *ʿawn*, to offer help) is a habit associated with *al-talqat* that was practiced until a few decades ago in all Palestinian villages. Families of the same village would offer help to each other. In fact, the process of picking olives is very demanding and requires a great deal of labour; it includes the separation of the olives from the leaves, the transportation of olives to the village, and the watch over the olive orchards throughout the *mawasem*. Furthermore, olive picking should be done quickly as soon as the olives are ripe. Many people who were interviewed mentioned that men alternated in guarding the groves so their olives would not be stolen.

Women were very present not only when olives were collected, they also took care of many other tasks that link to olive culture. Elderly ladies have pointed out that whereas today, plastic sheets are spread under the trees to collect olives that fall on the ground during picking, “We used to sit under the tree to collect and sort the olives, keeping the intact ones for the table. Most of the collected harvest was put into bags and transported to the village, in order to be sent to the *maʿsara*, the oil pressing plant. This trend of using plastic sheets is new. Previously, we had to collect the olives directly from the ground.” They would show their hands that were rough from the thorns they had to deal with in order to pick up the olives.



Figure (10): Olive trees-Palestine-1880-1920. Forms part of: Frank and Frances Carpenter Collection (Library of Congress), accessed at <https://www.loc.gov/item/00651202/>.

Experts of the oleo sector in Palestine are aware that the trees are struck and shaken today more than at any time in the past due to many reasons, including the lack of labour, the slowness of the process of olive picking, and the high cost of labour.⁹⁴ The mechanization of the sector is unlikely and difficult according to experts, especially because these days olives are picked – in contrary to old traditions and practices – before the fruits have fully matured. If olives were to be left until they are ripe enough, milking olives by hand would be much easier. However, because nowadays olives are being picked while they are still strongly attached to their branches, more force is required, trees are struck and shaken, and damage tends to be inflicted upon trees and olives.

Synthesis 1: The Appropriation of Cultural Heritage in Hebron

During the olive picking season, many initiatives take place that aim to help and support Palestinian families in their groves. This is necessary because many Palestinian families need special permits to reach their lands and pick their olives during the season. A special event is organised in the city of Hebron by Youth Against Settlements (YAS).⁹⁵ In 2018, this event took place between October 20 and November 10, both at Tel Rumeida, which lies next to the old of city Hebron, and in olive groves located near the Kiryat Arba' settlement.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Al-Jabi, F. (2006). The Olive Sector in Palestine. PACU

⁹⁵ Youth Against Settlements is a nonviolent direct action group that seeks to end the building and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements through non-violent popular struggle and civil resistance. For more information please visit <https://hyas.ps/about-us/>.

⁹⁶ The event announcement on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/events/2223688917645890/>) reads: We call upon our international supporters to come join us for the Olive Harvest Campaign of 2018. It will run from the 20th of October to the 10th of November in the olive fields of Tel Rumeida and those close to the Kiryat Arba settlement. The olive tree is a symbol of sumud, meaning “steadfastness” in Arabic. The trees in Hebron are some of the oldest in Palestine, dating to the Roman period. This harvest is an ancient tradition which makes up a vital part of the Palestinian cuisine, with many families making enough oil to sustain themselves until the next year. This practice is now threatened by the occupation.

Families must often ask for special permissions from the Israeli Civil Administration to carry out the harvest. Many of these permits are only valid for 30 days, while a normal harvest usually lasts for nearly two months. Israeli settlers consciously try to burn the olive trees and throw stones at Palestinian families as they attempt to pick their olives, and steal crops, in attempt to push Palestinian families to leave their homes.

Many of the olive pickers are usually elderly people. The process of picking would go slowly without additional help. Local and international support accelerates the harvest process and provides protective presence and protection against settlers' attacks. By working side by side with Hebronite families one can support the financial independence

The old city of Hebron is literally a military zone under the control of the Israeli army.⁹⁷ Hebron has been well known for several centuries for its agricultural production and several olive oil extraction sites have been found in the surrounding villages. Tel Rumeida features old olive trees that are presumed to date back to the Roman Period; it lies on a top of a hill that dominates the city and overlooks the second-best known and disputed site in Palestine, al-Haram al-Ibrahimi (The Sanctuary of Abraham), also called the Tomb of the Patriarchs.⁹⁸ (See Figure (10): al-Haram al-Ibrahimi)

This particular site is very much affected by the Israeli occupation and by the spread of settlements, and here the question of the appropriation of cultural heritage can clearly be raised. Archaeology and tourism have played a central role throughout the colonial history of the Levant and North Africa, and frequently they have served to legitimate the appropriation of cultural heritage sites and artefacts.

of Palestinians and stand in solidarity with these families. Come to Hebron to support Palestinian resistance and this ancient tradition.

⁹⁷ Following Baruch Goldstein's massacre of Muslims praying at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in 1994, the army declared the site a military zone.

⁹⁸ The first holy site for Muslims is al-Haram al-Sharif, known by Jews as the Temple Mount.



Figure (11). al-Haram al-Ibrahimi seen from Tel Rumeida. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018

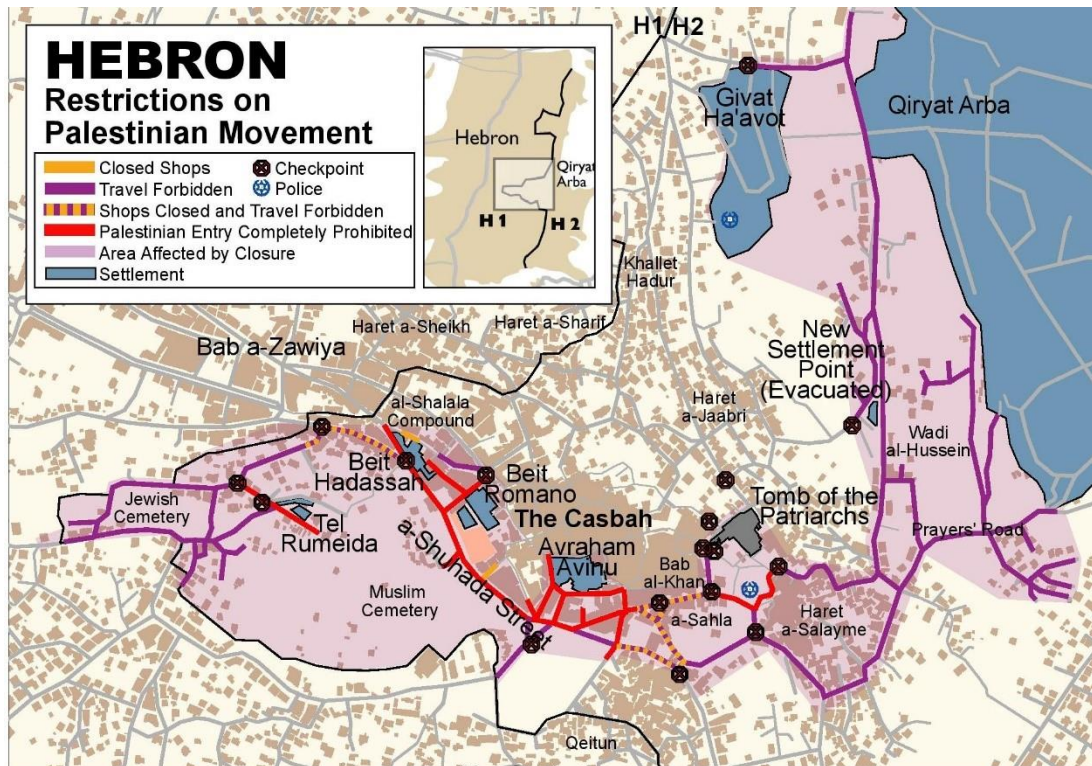
At Tel Rumeida (called Tel Hebron by settlers), the Jewish settlement Admot Yishai (literally Jesse’s Lands) was erected in 1984 on land that belongs to several Palestinian families (Natsheh, Abu Haikal, and others)⁹⁹. To this day, several of these families’ homes are located on top of the Tel and on its sides, but they are only accessible when the Tel is entered via a checkpoint. (See Map (1))

The site Tel Rumeida is today an important national Jewish heritage site, especially after an archaeological park was inaugurated on top of Tel Rumeida near Palestinian olive groves.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Mizrahi, Y. (November 2014). Tel Rumeida Hebron’s Archaeological Park. Emek Shaveh. Source: <https://alt-arch.org/en/tel-rumeida-hebrons-archaeological-park/>

¹⁰⁰Archaeological excavations have been taking place since 2014, carried out by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) and the university of Ariel with an initial budget of 7 million NIS, allocated for this mission by the Ministry of Culture and

Archaeological excavations at the site began in 2014¹⁰¹ and the site is now open to the Israeli public. The Jewish community in Hebron is offering tourists visits to the predominantly orthodox, traditional religious public, and the archaeological park highlights biblical agriculture and sites that include holy tombs, synagogues, and more.¹⁰² (See figures (11) and (12))



Map (1): Restrictions on Palestinian Movement in Hebron.¹⁰³

According to article 4 of the Israeli law of Antiquity of 1978, antiquities that are discovered become Israeli state property.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, paragraph 418 of the military law is still applicable in Area C (which is why Israeli excavations can take place in the West Bank). The Israeli military law governs

Sports. See Mizrachi, Y. (November 2014), "Tel Rumeida Hebron's Archaeological Park," *Emek Shaveh*, accessed at <https://alt-arch.org/en/tel-rumeida-hebrons-archaeological-park/>

¹⁰¹ IAA will grant scientific patronage to the excavation, despite the fact that almost all excavations in the West Bank are managed by the Civil Administration's special staff officer for archaeology.

¹⁰² The excavation in Tel Rumeida coincided with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's 2014 declaration that Hebron will remain in Israel's hands in any peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

¹⁰³ Retrieved from: Mizrachi, Y. (November 2014). Tel Rumeida Hebron's Archaeological Park. *Emek Shaveh*.

Source: <https://alt-arch.org/en/tel-rumeida-hebrons-archaeological-park/>

¹⁰⁴ See law at Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website.

and controls all urban planning and land use in all Palestinian areas and decides on how to deal with elements that represent the cultural or natural heritage of the area.¹⁰⁵ It includes a very important rule that states that farmland which has not been cultivated for a period of 4 years is by default allotted to the state of Israel. However, it is important to note that in the current political and geographical reality, the security measures that are being applied after the establishment of a settlement or the opening of a road, as well as on paths that lead to Palestinian-owned olive groves situated on the other side of the Separation Wall, frequently make these lands inaccessible for their owners during most of the year. This inaccessibility may easily exceed 4 years, which then ‘legalizes’ the confiscation and annexation of these lands by the Israeli state.



Figure (12): The Tel Rumeida archaeological site is surrounded by Palestinian houses. Photo © Ayman Al-Rjoub, 2018

¹⁰⁵ 53% of cultural sites are in area C.



Figure (13): Marking of the Israeli touristic path that is only accessible for Israelis. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018

Hebron Localities Can Offer a Unique Olive Path

The history of olive oil extraction, as well as the contemporary obstacles that olive culture in Palestine is faced with, are interrelated with the problems associated with cultural heritage within the Palestinian context.

The suggested hiking trail can offer unique observations that both document and assure the continuity of techniques carried out in such localities; which includes the sites of Rujum al-Jureida, Khirbet Umm Dumein and Khirbet al-Kum in Dura., with its lever-and-weight press (not excavated yet but documented for the project).

The city of Hebron can stand as a prominent example of the reality that cultural heritage field in general, and olive culture in particular, are faced with in Palestine. Two museums related to olive culture can be visited in the old city of Hebron. The first is ***Badd an-Natsha***, which features a **19th century olive pressing installation by Victor Coq**; it was most likely imported from southern France to improve olive oil production for the an-Natsha family that was known to own large olive groves in the rural area around Hebron's old city.¹⁰⁶ The building documents an important era in the industrial production of olive oil, which was very prosperous during 19th-century Palestine. The main incentive behind importing these (at the time) ultra-modern machines was the opulence of olive trees, the existence of the necessary means to facilitate export, and a market that demanded

¹⁰⁶ The building was restored by the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee in 2013 in order to document the attachment olive culture to the city.

olive oil and its derivative products (which includes the soap industry for which the rural area supplied the raw material, namely olive oil).¹⁰⁷ According to statistics published by the British administration in Palestine, 523 similar pressing installations were counted between 1928 and 1941.¹⁰⁸ Today however, very few of these machines that document the history of industrial olive production remain or can be seen.

The second museum that one can visit today in the old city of Hebron is the **Abd al-Nabi Shajarat al-Durr Olive Press**. Built during the late Ottoman era (1517- 1918) in the early 20th century, it was one of the largest olive oil-producing plants of the city of Hebron. This press documents the continuity of applying modern equipment to the industrial production of olive oil. The engine in use at this building was imported from England, probably during the Mandate Period (1918-1948). It was used to activate the olive-crushing mill, the wheat mill, and the pressing installation that was locally produced by the Palestinian Brass Foundry, established in Jaffa in 1931.

Olive Pressing



Figure (14): Victor Coq manual iron-screw press at an-Natsha, family ma'sara. Photo

©Maissoun Sharkawi



Figure (15): Crushing installation al Badd, Dar an-Natsha. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi

¹⁰⁷ See Soap production p.23

¹⁰⁸ Weinryb, B.D. (1947). Industrial Development of the Near East. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 61 (3), pp 471-499.

“*Min alshajar ila alhajar*” (Once they are picked, olives must immediately be put under a stone to be crushed.)¹⁰⁹

Three essential operations are practiced in order to extract olive oil from freshly picked olives. The first one requires crushing olives to reduce them into paste. This operation is done in preparation for the second operation, the pressing, in which pressure is exerted on the paste to extract an olive oil juice. Finally, the olive oil is separated from the vegetable water that is called *zibar*.

The scientific names agreed upon by most researchers to designate the apparatuses used in the various techniques practiced for olive oil extraction are installation (*munsha`a*),¹¹⁰ crushing installation (*munsha`at adarss*), and pressing installation (*munsha`at al`asr*), as named by Khaled al-Nashef.¹¹¹

The oldest crushing installation found in historical Palestine dates back to the Chalcolithic Period (4th millennium BCE). Since crushing installations are mostly made of stone, many vestiges remain, are documented, and can be observed *in situ*. Because pressing installations are largely composed of organic materials such as wood, rope, and leather and only partly made of stone,¹¹² frequently only the latter has remained and can offer practical insight into the technologies that were used to obtain olive oil in ancient Palestine.

The following will outline two primitive techniques that were used to produce small quantities of olive oil: mortar-and-pestle and portable-limestone installations.

¹⁰⁹ "من الشجر الى الحجر"

¹¹⁰ Others like J-P Brun used the term engine to designate these apparatuses.

¹¹¹ Al-Nashef, Kh. (2009). Ma'aser Ezzaytun fi Falastin @olive pressses in Plaestine. Archeology and Anthropology Yarmouk College, pp. 24-52.

¹¹² Frankel, R. (1994). Ancient Oil Mills and Presses in the Land of Israel. Technology of Olive Oil in the Holy Land (pp.19-86). Olearius Editions.

VI. The Mortar and Pestle Technique

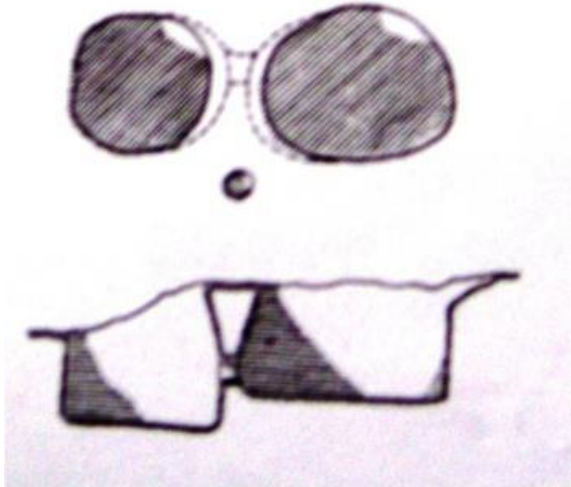


Figure (16): Mortar-and-pestle technique with upper and lower vats.¹¹³

Figure (17): Mortar-and-pestle technique facility at the archaeological park at Tel Rumeida. Photo © Ahmad Al-Rjoub, 2018.

Such installations had a dual purpose; they were used for crushing and for pressing olives. The extraction operation took place in two stone depressions at two different levels. Fresh olives were crushed by a pestle in the upper vat; hot water was then poured over the crushed olives, and the olive oil and juice mixture was filtered through a canal into the lower vat. Here, olive oil that floated to the surface was collected with special utensils and put into jars.

Many researchers believe that these agricultural facilities were used for the production of both wine and olive oil, as grapes ripen just before olives.¹¹⁴ Indeed, this installation is very similar to the simple wine press in which grapes, that are softer than olives, were grinded in the same way, then filtered, and collected from the lower collecting vat.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Forbes, H.A., & Foxhall, L. (1978) Frankel 1999; Wolff, 1976, Warnock, 2007.

VII. The Crushing Mill Mola Olearia (al-Badd)

Most of the olive extraction plants that were visited during the fieldwork of this study are from ancient to 19th-century sites and were operated with a unique, vertical stone. In colloquial Arabic these animal-activated crushing mills are mostly known as *al-badd*, and the vertical stone is known as *hajar al-badd*.



Figure (18) : Khirbet Umm Dumein. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi 2018.

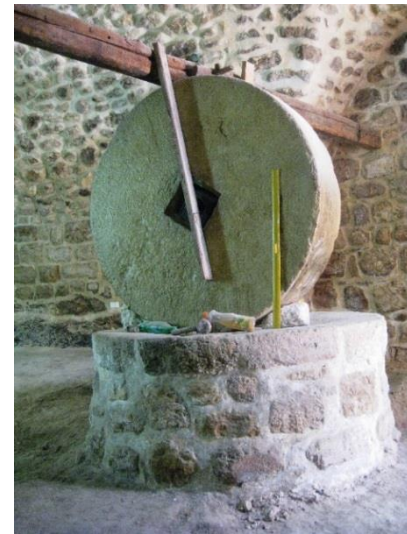


Figure (19): Crushing basin and a vertical crushing stone at badd al-Bandak, Bethlehem Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi 2018.

All over the Mediterranean, the most famous olive crushing installation is the crushing mill, *munsha'at adarss* or *molae* . Certainly, the originality of these mills is that they consist of one or two vertical stones that turn on olives that are spread on a horizontal basin. Most of the crushing installations found in historical Palestine operated with only one crushing stone rather than two.

The introduction of the crushing mill marked a turning point in the history of olive oil extraction throughout the Mediterranean basinsince it replaced primitive manual installations, such as the mortar-and-pestle technique (See figures (16) and (17). This technique was innovative because

it facilitated the production of large quantities of olive paste. (See Figure (18). Crushing basin and a vertical crushing stone at Khirbet Umm Dumein).

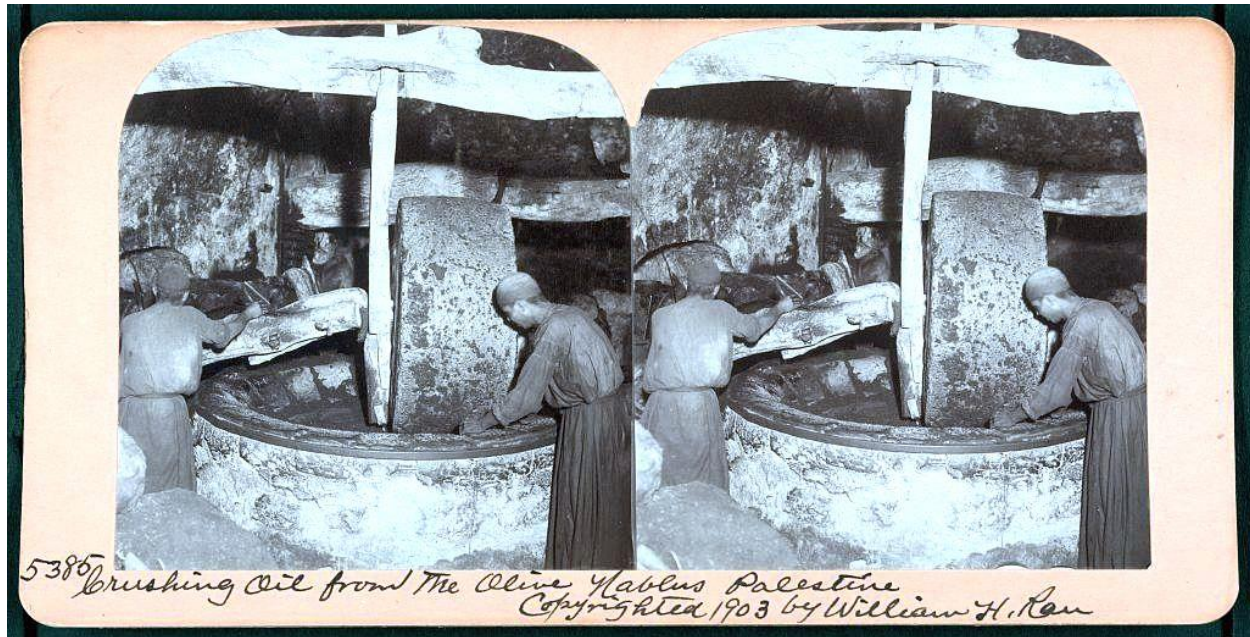


Figure (20): Badd installation, crushing mill in Nablus, 1903. Title: Crushing oil from the olive, Nablus, Palestine.

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VIII. Olive Pressing

After the crushing mills that can process large quantities of olives had been introduced, the processes that demanded a real innovation consisted of the pressing of the paste in order to extract olive oil. In any case, before oil can be extracted, the crushed olives must be put into special vessels that facilitate the application of the necessary force over the paste and allow for the extraction of the olive juice. The best-known of such vessels in the Syro-Palestinian region are special baskets, *qfaf*, that are made from date palm fibres,¹¹⁵ as the holes found in these baskets facilitate the flow of the fruit juice. These vessels are called in Latin *fiscnae* and *scourtin*

¹¹⁵ Avitsur, Sh. (2004) and Frankel, R. (2010).

in French. It is safe to assume that since antiquity, baskets have been of circular form, as this can be determined from the circumferential grooves that are observed on pressing beds in Palestine.



Figure (21): Beit Jibrin (between 1920-1933). A man filling baskets with olive paste. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs

The Press

Pressing installations, *al-m'aşara* or *muncha`at al'aşr* (Latin: *praelum*), have experienced several changes over time, due to the slowness of the olive juice extraction process, the large space that these installations required, and the several consecutive, complex operations that were needed to extract the fruit juice. Nevertheless and over time, simple olive oil extraction techniques have coexisted with very complex methods. The first evidence of pressing installations in the Syro-Palestinian region dates back to the Bronze Age (3150 to 1200 BCE).

Researchers in the sector argue that it is difficult to accord each method of olive oil extraction to a very specific historical period since the technical process depends on several social and economic factors. In most ancient olive plants, there is one crushing installation, accompanied by several olive pressing units.

In order to obtain a good quality of oil, freshly picked olives need to be pressed immediately. Therefore, it is most likely that this tradition is practiced in most Palestinian villages today.

The Lever

The most important element that has contributed to the improvement and development of olive oil-production techniques since antiquity is the innovation of the lever, *praelum* in Latin and *al-rafe'a* in Arabic. Lever-based pressing installations are very present for the two main olive oil extraction techniques that have widely been used since antiquity and until the early 20th century in Palestine.

The Lever and Weight Press, '*Assarat Al-Rafe'a Zat Alathqal*'

This method of pressing varies from simple to complex. According to archaeological evidence, it was practiced during and after the Iron Age (1200-586 BCE) and was very common in this region. The pressing operation can be summarized as follows: one end of the lever is inserted into a wall niche to form fulcrum. Baskets filled with olive paste are stacked into a column on top of a pressing bed. The stone weights, each of which can reach up to 400 kilograms, are attached to the other end of the lever in order to apply the driving force on the baskets on the scourtins.¹¹⁶ In order to maintain the horizontal position of the lever, it was necessary to adjust the height at the niche end of the fulcrum more than once during the pressing operation. The fruit juice then dripped from the baskets into a collecting vat.

While lever and weight presses in the north of Palestine feature lateral collecting vats that are placed next to the column of baskets, in the southern parts of the country collecting vats lie underneath the baskets. The latter arrangement makes the entire process rather complex, since after each pressure exerted on the baskets, they must be removed in order to allow for the collection of the olive oil that floats on the surface of the fruit juice.

¹¹⁶ Wagner, D., (1996)



Figures (22) and (23): Lever and weight press (Beit-Jibrin) [Photo]. Maston (G.Eric and Edith collection 1920-1933). Library of Congress.

The Lever and Screw Press, 'Assarat Al-Rafe'a Bel-Lawlab'¹¹⁷

What rendered this technique truly innovative was the use of the wooden screw that was utilized that, in turn, transformed the entire technical process of olive oil extraction into a highly mechanical operation. While lever and screw presses were mostly used during the Byzantine period (324-634 C.E.), archaeological evidence show that it was used earlier in Palestine, namely towards the end of the Hellenistic period of the Roman Empire (37 BCE-324 C.E.)

¹¹⁷ Arabic names are used according to Al-Nashef Kahled in olive presses in Palestine. (2009). Archeology and Anthropology Yarmouk College press.



Figure (24): Crushing basin and a vertical crushing stone at Khirbet Umm Dumein. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018.

When this method was further innovated, the screw became essential for most olive oil extraction techniques since it is able to efficiently exert pressure on baskets. The introduction of the screw paved the road towards the innovation of important machinery that influenced the production of olive oil from the end of the 19th century until the mid-period of the 20th century.¹¹⁸

The lever-and-screw type of press was in use in several Mediterranean countries until very recent periods (early 20th century). Evidence of such installations has been documented in Greece, Cyprus, northern Syria, Spain, and North Africa.

¹¹⁸ Frankel, R. (1994)

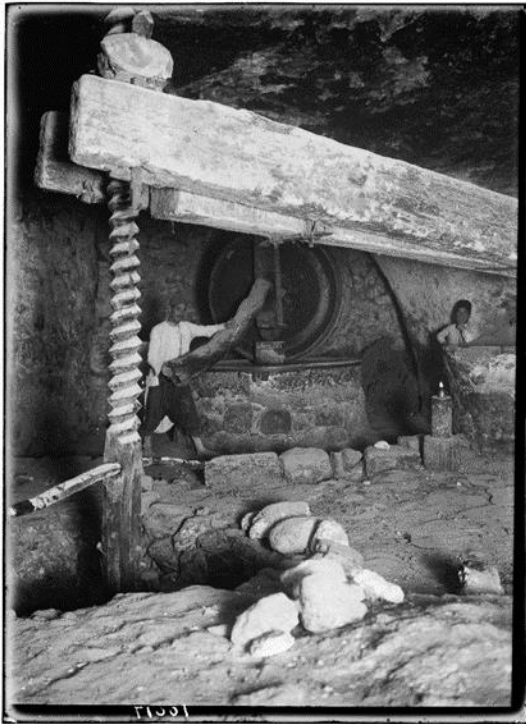


Figure (25): Wooden screw of the lever and screw weight installation. (1934-1938) Beit Sahur-Bethlehem.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs.



Figure (26): Screw weight of a lever and screw weight pressing installation.

Badd al-Bandak-Bethlehem. Photo ©Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018

Badd al-Bandak

The Al-Bandak building contains a 19th-century olive pressing plant.¹¹⁹ This renovated building is located in Bethlehem's *haret al- 'anatra* (Anatra quarter) on the road that leads to the Milk Grotto. It has the only lever-and-screw weight press that still exist *in situ*. Its wooden screw can still be viewed in the building. Levers used for this kind of pressing installation were usually made of acacia woods. The acacia tree is widespread in the *wadis* (valleys) of the southern part of the country and near Jericho. Acacia wood was also used for the beams that served to support different units of the crushing installation.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ See also, Figure (19): Crushing basin and a vertical crushing stone at badd al-Bandak, Bethlehem.

¹²⁰ Wagner, D. (1996). P. 304

IX. Traditional Hand-Made Olive Oil

There are two rare, special kinds of olive oil that can still be obtained in small quantities in some Palestinian villages, namely *zeit tfah* and *zeit badodyeh*. During interviews, it was explained to the author that these two types of olive oil are produced by the end of September, before the official start of the olive picking season, although *zeit badodyeh* in particular could be prepared even during the picking season.

Zeit Tfah

For *zeit tfah*, olives are first reduced into a paste that is poured into a bowl. Water is heated (warm not boiling) and poured over the paste to facilitate the separation of oil from the paste. The mixture is then squeezed by hand and left to settle for a while. The oil that floats to the surface of the water is called *zeit tfah*, which literally means floating oil. It is collected by passing the palms through the water, to catch the oil, and poured into another bowl or vat.

According to Brun, who observed a similar process in Morocco, this oil has a particularly soft taste. It was expressed in many interviews that this oil has the best taste since no force and only minimum human intervention is exerted on the olive paste.

Below are some photos from az-Zawya village north of Salfit, where *zeit tfah* is still produced. The interviewed old lady said that the oil is produced at the end of the olive picking season, while according to interviews in other villages, this oil was mostly produced from fallen mature olives, picked from the ground (a practice also known as *jol*).¹²¹

¹²¹ Figures (27-30). Woman crushing olives az-Zawya village, were captured from a video published on Youtube on Jan 31, 2015. Azmy Shuqai (journalist) permitted the use of these photos for this study. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkVUZgOcX5c>

Women Preparing Zeit Tfaḥ



Figure (27): Crushing Olives



Figure (28): Pouring hot water on the olive paste.



Figure (29): Collecting floating olive oil from the surface.



Figure (30): Pure olive oil.



Figure (31): Women crushing olives-Jerusalem between (1900-1920). G.Eric and Edith Matson Collection-Library of Congress.

Zeit Badodeyya

The other type of oil, *zeit badodeyya*, is frequently produced in the groves during the olive picking season. It is also produced in small quantities. Olives are roasted until they are completely reduced in size as a result of water evaporating from the fruit; then they are struck with a stone. The obtained paste is put into a tissue and then twisted to exert pressure and extract the oil. In some interviews, people mentioned that the paste was pressed with hands in order to extract fruit juice. This oil has an original, roasted taste and is highly regarded by the elderly in the villages. One bottle of this oil is much more expensive than oil produced in olive plants.

X. The Geopolitical Context: Uprooting Olive Trees

Most Palestinian villages and their surrounding rural areas are located in a very complex geographical reality, since the Palestinian Authority (PA) does not have integral sovereignty over the entire geographical area of the eleven districts of the West Bank (WB). The WB is divided into four zones, and the great majority of villages that were visited during the fieldwork of this study – and are part of Masār Ibrāhīm – are in areas B or C. Area C represents 60% of the West Bank and is where most of the Palestinian villages are located. The area controlled by the PA, however, is Area A, and it represents only 18% of the total area of the WB that covers 5655 square kilometres.

This reality leaves little room for urban expansion and has led to significant transformations of the landscape. Urban expansion must continue, however, as the population continues to grow, even though it remains restrained and concentrated in the very limited space of area A. Today, the WB is witnessing a significant building boom. Its total population is of 2.86 million.¹²² According to an estimate by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and published by the United Nations, the population has doubled since 1997. In fact, the Palestinian population has increased significantly since 1950 when it counted 1 million inhabitants. It reached 3.8 million in 2005 (for the WB and Gaza), and is estimated to reach 10.3 million people in 2050. Because the population is

¹²² The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. (2015)

concentrated in urban areas,¹²³ significant changes will affect the overall landscape of the WB that is known for its rural character and growing of olives. Moreover, as it is accompanied by a lack of governance and planning, urban expansion is putting many sites of natural, cultural, historical, and archaeological significance at risk. (Show map. 2)¹²⁴

Geopolitical reality contributes heavily to the decay and destruction of the historical and visual culture of the Palestinian rural landscape. Thousands of ancient olive trees have been uprooted for the construction of settlements and related infrastructure, and hectares of olive groves have been annexed or destroyed, supposedly in order to ensure the safety of the settlements. Since the occupation of the West Bank in 1967, 1.2 million olive trees on several thousand hectares have been destroyed. Since the signing of the Oslo Accords, and particularly during the Second Intifada, more than 465,000 olive trees have been uprooted. Moreover, since the year 2002 and with the erecting of the Segregation Wall, thousands of olive trees have been uprooted in order to advance its construction. The wall is 125 kilometres long, its surrounding area is between 50 to 100 metres wide, and in most places, it is an 8-metres high concrete wall. It separates Palestinians from a major part of their agricultural, cultural, and recreational landscape. The ministry of agriculture apparently published a report between 2011 and 2014, and it mentions that 73,000 trees have been destroyed by settlers, causing farmers a loss of up to \$91 million.¹²⁵

One major consequence of the wall is that many villages are separated from their rural surroundings and agricultural land, including extensive olive groves. As a consequence, Palestinians now need a *tasreeh* (entry permit) to tend to their olives and are given only a few days to do so during the olive picking season.¹²⁶

These factors are contributing to the destruction of the olive sector that has provided economic and food security for the region for thousands of years. Olive oil is the second largest crop produced in Palestine. But it is illegal to establish large farms in Area C. Ecological trends furthermore affect the olive production. Rainfall has been below average for a number of years,

¹²³ al-Houdalieh, S., Sauters, R., 2009.

¹²⁴ **Nature Reserves and National Parks:** Digital data - Geographic-Ecological Information Center, GIS Unit, Department of Teleprocessing and Information Systems, Israel Nature and Parks Authority
State Lands, Regional Councils and Firing Zones: The Civil Administration

¹²⁵ <http://www.miftah.org/Display.cfm?DocId=25491&CategoryId=4>

¹²⁶ Braverman, I., (2009). Uprooting Identities: The regulation of Olive Trees in the Occupied West Bank. *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*. Vol.32, No.2 (November 2009), pp.237-264. American Anthropological Association.

while 99% of olive trees are rain-fed (*ba'leyya*, planted on 415,706 *dunum*) and the remaining 0,84% depend partly on irrigation (planted on 3,124 *dunum*).

Olive Tree Industry

The olive tree industry is considered one of the most important agricultural sectors in the WB and constitutes a source of substitutability for the many villages in this area. The olive tree is spread over 45% of the agricultural land of the West Bank and represents 80% of the fruit trees of this region. It represents 13% of the rate of agricultural production during good years, since the nature of the crop is biannual. Olives are also an important component of the food security of the WB. The annual olive oil production rate is estimated at 20,000 tons, 11,700 tons of table olives and 55,000 of solid residue, *jifit*.¹²⁷As a result, the oleo-cultural sector has a social importance as it helps decrease the migration of villagers towards the city.

The following table summarizes the areas of olive groves and the number of olive trees. It is based on a survey made by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and adopted by the Palestine Economic Research Institute (MAS)¹²⁸ for their 2016 study on the olive oil sector under the PA.¹²⁹

Table (2): Geographical distribution of olive trees and their planted area in dunums.¹³⁰

	Area in <i>dunum</i>	Number of trees	Percentage
PA	498,415	7, 797, 651	100%
West Bank (WB)	481, 568	7, 436, 211	95%
Northern WB	341, 578	5, 134, 087	66%
Central WB	73, 829	1, 102, 299	14%
Southern WB	66, 161	1, 199, 825	15%
Gaza Strip	16, 847	361, 440	5%

¹²⁷ *Jifit*: solide residue obtained after the extraction of olive oil from the olive paste

¹²⁸ Abdallah, S., Hussein, I., (2016). Towards Enhancing the Competitiveness of the Palestinian Olive Sector. Palestine Economic Policy Resaerch Institute- Mas. 1-114. P.28

¹²⁹ PA, designates localities controlled by the "Palestinian Authority" that include area C and Gaza strip.

¹³⁰ 1 *dunum* = 1000 m²

According to World Bank, the uprooting of olive trees and the destroying of olive groves violate the commercial policies of the Paris Protocol of the 1994 Oslo Accords, which calls for the free access of Palestinian merchants to the Israeli market and vice versa.

Destroying olive trees is also a clear violation of article 23 of the Hague Convention, which states that it is prohibited to destroy the property of the enemy in the event of conflict.¹³¹

Below are two prominent examples in which Palestinian rural cultural heritage sites in areas that are known for their prosperous olive culture are endangered: the Cremisan Valley near Beit Jala, and Iskaka Village in the Salfit District.

The Case of Cremisan: An Endangered Cultural Heritage Site

Israeli forces started to uproot olive trees that belong to Palestinians of the Beit Jala and Bir 'Onah areas, as part of the construction of the wall. Many people and organizations, both local and international, gathered every morning to resist in a mass protest against the illegal confiscation and closure of these important, rich agricultural lands. And as has happened in the case of Tel Rumeida in Hebron, simultaneously with the construction of the wall in the Cremisan area, archaeological excavations by the Israeli Antiquities Authorities started at close-by Khirbet An-Najjar in 2016. The site contains ruins of human settlements that date back to the Roman Era.

¹³¹Sharkawi, M. (2018). *Les pressoirs olive a vis a activation manuelle du XIXe siècle comme objet de patrimonialisation, dans le contexte du patrimoine culturel palestinien*. Université de Lorraine : Doctoral dissertation.



Figure (32): A view of Cremisan Valley with Jerusalem in the distance, seen from inside the Cremisan Convent. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018



Figure (33): Art work for "While We Wait", observed towards the road of Cremisan Monastery¹³². © Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018

At the far end of the town of Beit Jala, 850 metres above sea level, lie the Salesian Sisters Convent and School, the Salesian Monastery, and the Cremisan Cellars (Cremisan is famous for its wine

¹³² *While We Wait*, by Bethlehem-based architects Elias & Yousef Anastasis a meditative installation about the cultural claim over nature in Palestine. The towering structure consists of elements of stone from different regions of Palestine, fading upwards in colour from earthy red to pale limestone. See: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/while-we-wait>

cellars and the production of olive oil). The monastery was built in 1885 on the ruins of a 7th-century Byzantine church. The whole site links Beit Jala with Jerusalem, only 2 kilometres away. The area has a breath-taking panoramic view of Jerusalem. The valley is full of olive trees, grapes, apricots, pine trees, and cypresses. Similar to the nearby village of Battir, Cremisan has a potential opportunity to be an integral part of the serial nomination “Palestine, Land of Olives and Vines” for the List of World Heritage Sites.

Today, Cremisan finds itself between two principal Israeli settlements south of Jerusalem: Har Gilo, established in 1968, and Gilo, established in 1973. Both were constructed on lands that belong to people from the northern part of Beit Jala, mostly from the villages Al-Walaja, Sharafat, and Beit Safafa. (see Map (2) below)



Map (2): Cremisan, Path of the Israeli segregation wall.¹³³

In 2006, the Israeli military authorities announced an order for the construction of a separation barrier in the area. In June 2015, the Israeli High Court (IHC) approved the construction of the

¹³³ POICA. Cremisan (08/2014). Salesian Monasteries Last fortresses defending Palestinian lands before the Israeli Segregation Wall. Source: <http://poica.org/2014/08/cremisan-salesian-monasteries-last-fortresses-defending-palestinian-lands-before-the-israeli-segregation-wall/>

Segregation Wall, in the process of which the two monasteries, together with lands of 58 Palestinians (from the Bir ‘Onah area) would be annexed. As a consequence, the Salesian Monastery would be cut off behind the wall and separated from its sister convent and school. It would thus be inaccessible to the communities of Beit Jala and Bethlehem. Approximately 50 families of labourers who work in the Salesian Friary’s Cremisan vineyards in Beit Jala will be without work. These workers have been coming to Cremisan from local villages, pruning and hand-tending the vines, and harvesting the grapes as their families have done for more than 100 years.¹³⁴

“The nuns were told in September 2011 that the Apartheid Wall would bisect their land. By separating their convent and school from the villages, particularly al-Walaja, where the school children live, the peaceful town of Beit Jala will become another Hebron... For us it’s not good at all. If the fence passes here and they put us on the Israeli side, the children won’t be able to reach us. There’s only one road to the monastery. The fence will create a checkpoint here with soldiers.” (Haaretz, 5 January 2012)



Figure (34): Israeli Occupation Machineries working to seal off Cremisan Valley from the rest of Beit Jala city lands.

<http://poica.org/2017/03/israeli-occupation-machineries-to-seal-off-cremisan-valley-from-the-rest-of-beit-jala-city-lands/>

¹³⁴ (Haaretz, 5 January 2012)

19th Century Olive Oil Extraction Evidence at Cremisan Convent

The Victor Coq manual iron screw press with its olive crushing installation (figure 35&36) that can be seen today at Cremisan’s garden was bought from the nearby convent Sisters of Zion¹³⁵ in the neighbouring village of Ein Karem that is part of Jerusalem in order to help facilitate the production of olive oil from the vast olive groves of Cremisan Valley. This model is among the presses that have been documented by the French Merimee database for the general inventory of Palestinian cultural heritage.¹³⁶ Most particular about these manual iron screw presses – that were common in Palestine in the late 19th century – is the fact that those imported in the mid-19th century document the modernisation of olive oil production history, and those produced in Jaffa-Palestine document colonial interests in Palestine. A screw weight can also be seen in the garden as an indication of previous techniques, mainly lever, as the screw weight technique was used for olive oil extracting that took place at the site.



Figure (35): crushing installation (left). Figure (36): Victor Coq’s French-made manual iron screw press (right). Photo © Maissoun

¹³⁵ Email exchanges with the Cremisan convent. Source: Thesis dissertation of the author.

¹³⁶ French Ministry of Culture and Communication. (11/09/2011). Inventaire général du patrimoine culturel.



Figure (37): Screw weights remaining from an ancient lever and screw weight installation. Photo © Maissoun Sharkawi, 2018

Victor Coq of Aix-en-Provence began to design and build agricultural machinery in 1863. He distributed his machines everywhere in the Mediterranean.¹³⁷ Farmers from North Africa (Algeria and Tunisia) and the Levant were more interested in his practical olive presses than the other olive oil extracting machines of the region, that Coq opened another factory in Algeria around 1911.¹³⁸ The model that stands in the garden of Cremisan won the gold medal in the 1889 Paris Industrial Fair. Coq exported his vini-culture materials as well as olive presses with their crushing installations to most of the French colonies known for these cultures. He was conferred knighthood of the French Legion d'honneur for his successful enterprise and for the services that he offered to the agricultural and industrial sectors until his death in 1924.

¹³⁷ Amouretti, M. C., Comet, G., Ney, C., & Paillet, J. L. (1984). A propos du pressoir à huile : de l'archéologie industrielle à l'histoire. *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome*, 96(1), 379-421.

¹³⁸ Les entreprises coloniales. (2017). Victor coq Aix en Provence ; machines agricoles et viticoles. Source: www.entreprises-coloniales.fr.

Iskaka village

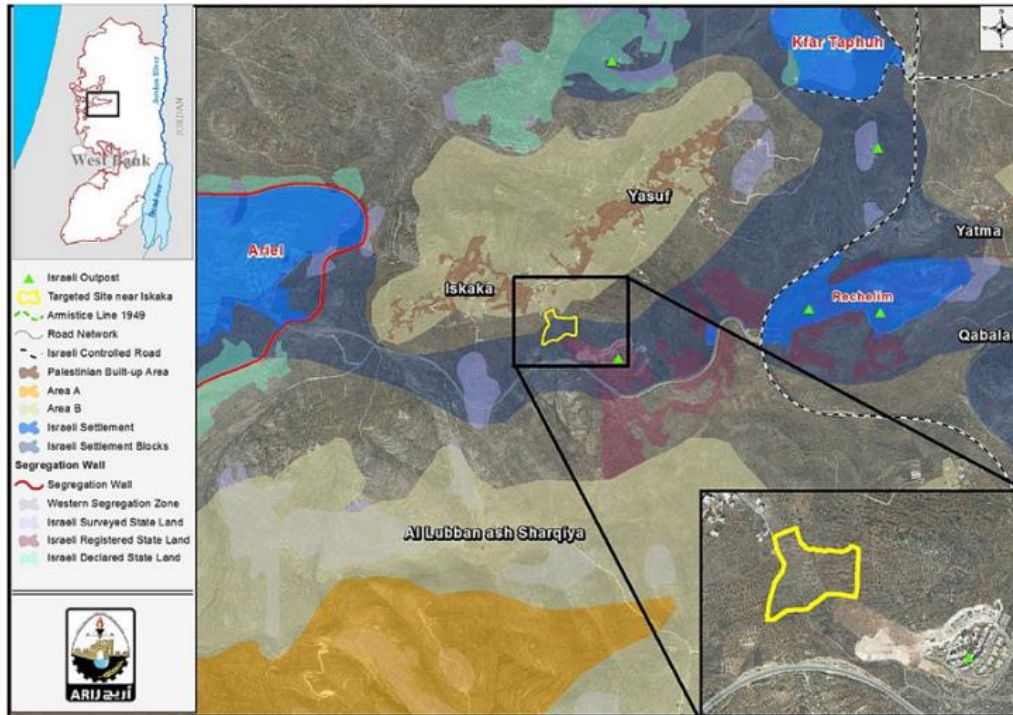
Another example of cultural endangerment is Iskaka village located in an entirely rural area north of Salfit. The table below shows the distribution of land between the various areas of jurisdiction. The agricultural sector of this village represents 75% of its economic activity.¹³⁹ Fruit trees, mainly olive trees, are planted on an area of 2,494 *dunum*.

Area A	0 <i>dunum</i>
Area B	1,366 <i>dunum</i>
Area C	4, 110 <i>dunum</i>
Total Area	5,476 <i>dunum</i>

The village is surrounded by the settlements Ariel, Kfar Tafuh, and Rechelim which were established in the year 1978 on the lands of the lands of Salfit district villages. In the year 2002, in order to construct the new settlement Nofei Nehmia, 250 olive trees were uprooted, and around 30 *dunums* were annexed from the al-Bayyada area and classified as Israeli state land. (See map (3), the yellow area designates the Nofei Nehmia settlement).

A large part of Iskaka’s rural areas has been annexed by the surrounding settlements either for their expansion or for the building of housing or of related infrastructure. Seven hundred *dunum* of the rural areas belonging to Iskaka Village are closed in by an iron fence, preventing farmers from reaching their lands. They can access their lands only by obtaining a permit which is given, if they’re lucky enough, once a year for a period of 2 days and usually during the olive picking season. This land loss and restricted land access have had a detrimental effect on the economic situation of local farmers since 1978.

¹³⁹ ARIJ. Iskaka Village. (Fact Sheet). <http://vprofile.arij.org/salfit/pdfs/factsheet/Iskaka.pdf>



Map (3): Iskaka Village in the Salfit Governorate.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ POICA. Monitoring Israeli Colonization Activities. *Nofei Nehmia outpost expands on lands of Iskaka village in Salfit Governorate.* <http://poica.org/2016/08/nofei-nehmia-outpost-expands-on-lands-of-iskaka-village-in-salfit-governorate/>



Figure (38): Uprooted olive trees near Iskaka village.¹⁴¹

Harb, a farmer from Iskaka whose lands have been heavily affected by the settlements, says:

“Today, I can’t reach my land to tend to it...during the olive picking season, I can only reach my land for 2 days; my land needs at least 10 days to collect the olive fruit from the trees. Therefore, I have to leave the fruits on their mother. However, there are some areas we are forbidden to reach.”¹⁴²

Harb adds:

“In a good season, al-sanah al-masseyah, ... I lose 50 tankeh (canisters) of olive oil, because I’m prevented from reaching my lands and collect my olives... behind the barrier the majority of our lands are planted with old olive trees. There is plain land as well where we used to plant wheat and barley. Today, these lands have become arid zones and unproductive. Land needs daily care from farmers through ploughing, stripping, and collecting fruits and to build terraces to maintain the soil.”¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Palestinian olive farmers check damage to their olive trees that were allegedly cut down by Israeli settlers in October 2013. (Issam Rimawi/Flash90) Source: JUDAH ARI GROSS. (10 August 2016). Israel uproots 400 olive trees in West Bank village. The Times of Israel. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-said-to-uproot-250-olive-trees-in-west-bank-village/>

¹⁴² Ula Muqidi (30/09/2018). *Asyejja wa bawabat tofareq bayn Eskaka wa Zaytounha*. Palestinian News & Info Agency. WAFA http://www.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=0xOpoda837769157214a0xOpod

¹⁴³ Ibid

XI. The Symbolism of the Olive Tree in Palestine

Questioning the undisputable significance of the olive tree, the Palestinian national poet Mahmoud Darwish writes in his renowned long poem titled *The Tragedy of Narcissus, The Comedy of Silver*, “

“Was there enough meaning in the olives ... to fill Christ's palms with serenity, his wounds with basil, and pour our souls over him as radiance?”¹⁴⁴

Perhaps there is no tree anywhere that is loaded with as much meaning as the olive tree in Palestine. In fact, the olive tree in the Palestinian context is not simply a generously-fruitful, ever-green, long-standing tree. It is much more than that. Besides being a holy tree mentioned in the three holy books, it occupies a special status in the collective consciousness of the Palestinians and bears unique cultural significance that is equal to, if not higher than, its importance in the agricultural and economic domains. Long years of Palestinians resisting the Israeli occupation of their land have charged this tree with an abundance of meaning and have rendered it a symbolic icon.

While olive oil is significant as a basic staple of the Mediterranean diet, it has been a resource for lighting, heating, and soap manufacture since antiquity; and to this day it holds economic and dietary importance in modern Palestine. The olive tree itself has become a symbol of steadfastness and of Palestinian's attachment to the land.

Contemporary Palestinian society has many cultural structures that operate within highly complex and fragmented political geographies where the question of cultural heritage is defined through the construction of multiple Palestinian cultural identities. Therefore, the tree, its branches and groves figure prominently in Palestinian artistic and literary works, whether they are produced in Palestine or in the diaspora. By successive generations of artists and writers, the tree has been rendered a symbol to represent the connection of Palestinians to their land. In fact, the subject of peasantry life and landscape has been dominant in Palestinian painting ever since the Nakba of 1948 with the subsequent displacement and uprooting of the Palestinian people, their expulsion from major urban centres, the erasure of at least 450 of their villages, and the occupation and geopolitical division of their land.

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/the-tragedy-of-narcissus-the-comedy-of-silver>.



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After the Nakba, the question of the lost homeland became a main preoccupation in the artistic and cultural expression of most Palestinian writers and artists, especially among those who found themselves either displaced in their own country, refugees in neighbouring Arab countries, or in exile. To counter Zionist narrative that has persistently been trying to strip Palestinians of their right to their land, Palestinians have revolved their narrative around their historical close connection to their land. They have idealized peasantry life and created utopian images of the village on the one hand, while reviving all forms of cultural heritage related to village life, such as *dabkeh*, traditional music, and most importantly embroidery, on the other.



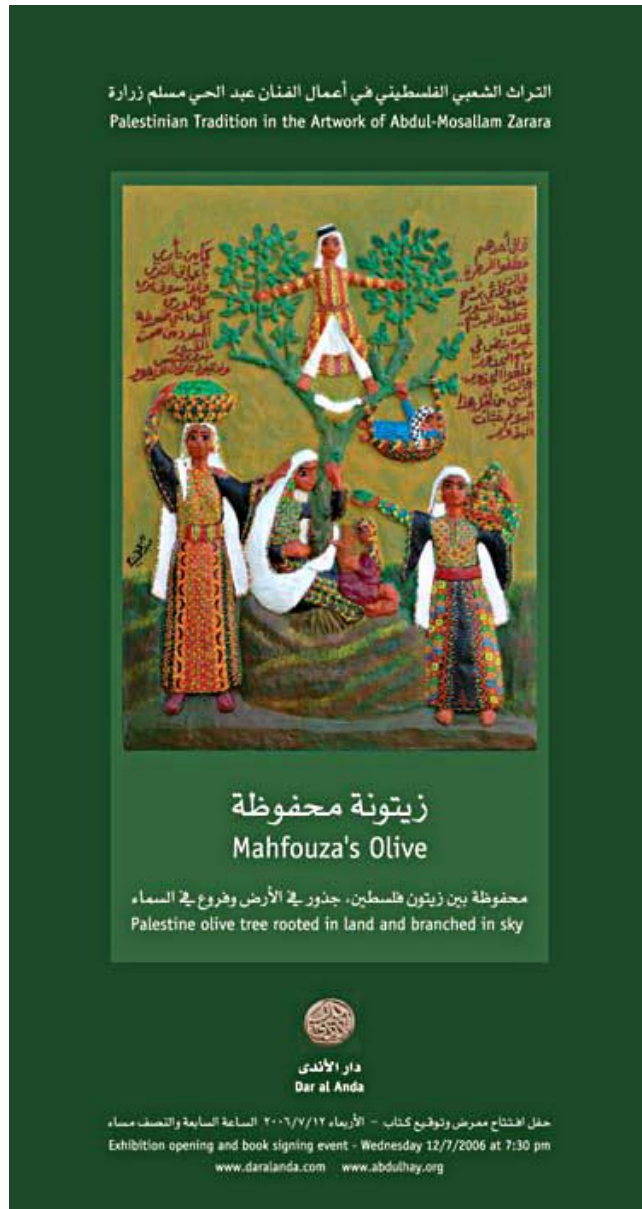


Figure (39): Invitation to a book launch in Amman by Palestinian artist Abdul Hay Mosallam, 2006.

Displaced Palestinian artists and writers tended to recreate the past and visualize the life they had lost in utopian images of villages and towns. Therefore, the representation of Palestine as a lost Paradise began to appear as a frequent motif in both literary and visual productions, especially during the decade that followed the Nakba. Since then, utopian Palestinian villages could be seen in works by artists such as Ibrahim Hazima (born 1933 in Acco).



Figure (40): A painting, Ibrahim Ghannam

The young artist Ibrahim Ghannam (1930-1984) who had to flee Haifa at the age of 17 to live in Tel Za'tar refugee camp, pictured in his paintings peasantry life in idealistic landscapes. His paintings demonstrate in utopian images village communities enjoying collective work during the wheat harvesting or olive and orange picking seasons.



Figure (41): Harvest, Abdul Hay Mossallam

Poets of Palestinian resistance such as Tawfiq Zayyad (1929–1994), Samih Al Qasim (1939–2014) and Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008) featured in their early writings the olive tree as a symbol of steadfastness and of the historically strong and long connection between Palestinians and their homeland. Mahmoud Darwish published in 1964 his first poetry collection and gave it the title “Olive Leaves.” This collection includes a poem titled “About Steadfastness” that reads: “If the olive trees knew the hands that planted them, their oil would become tears.” This poem, which has become very famous and popular among Palestinians, has been reproduced and cited in other works of art or craft, especially in posters, which has given it new life and better access to the collective memory.

In another collection titled “The Birds of Galilee” (published in 1967), Darwish writes “Jerusalem took the shape of a bleeding olive tree.” (p. 46).

And Tawfik Zayyad writes in one of his most popular poems, titled “Here We shall Stay:”¹⁴⁵

Here we shall stay,
sing our songs,

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/here-we-will-stay/#content> (19/9/2018).

take to the angry streets,
fill prisons with dignity.
In Lidda, in Ramla, in the Galilee,
we shall remain,
guard the shade of the fig
and olive trees,
ferment rebellion in our children
as yeast in the dough.

After the 1967 war that resulted in the occupation of what had remained of the Palestinian land, Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip felt suddenly isolated from their Arab context. The works of the artists and writers who lived in these areas started to reflect the image of the places in which they were living. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which was established in 1965, put at the core of its agenda the building of a Palestinian national identity and started to mobilize artists and writers as crucial and key players in the liberation project. Vigorous and consistent efforts were undertaken towards the construction and expression of the Palestinian national narrative. Land and peasantry were at the heart of this narrative and the olive tree became yet again the main symbol of the land. In her article “The Figure of the Peasant,” art critic Tina Sherwell states that “The peasant was imbued with the symbolism of steadfastness and patience, qualities that Palestinians in the occupied territories adopted strategically in the late 1970s and early 1980s in order to remain on the land despite Israeli policies that made their daily lives strenuous and indeterminate.”¹⁴⁶ Artists such as Sliman Mansour (born in Birzeit in 1947), Taisir Sharaf (Jerusalem 1937-2001), Nabil Anani (born in Latrun in 1943) as well as many others were prominent and dedicated agents in this endeavour. Their paintings over the past five decades stand as a live archive of the Palestinian landscape with its terrains full of olive groves.

¹⁴⁶ Tina Sherwell, *Sliman Mansour*, 2011.



Figure(42): The Village, Sliman Mansour.year

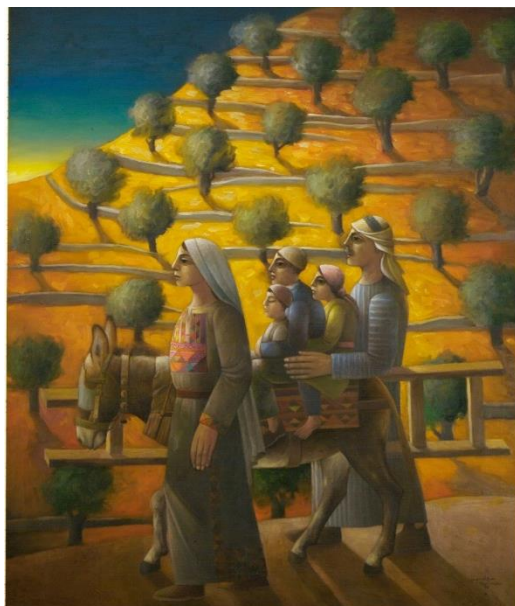


Figure (43): Early in the Morning, Sliman Mansour, 1978.

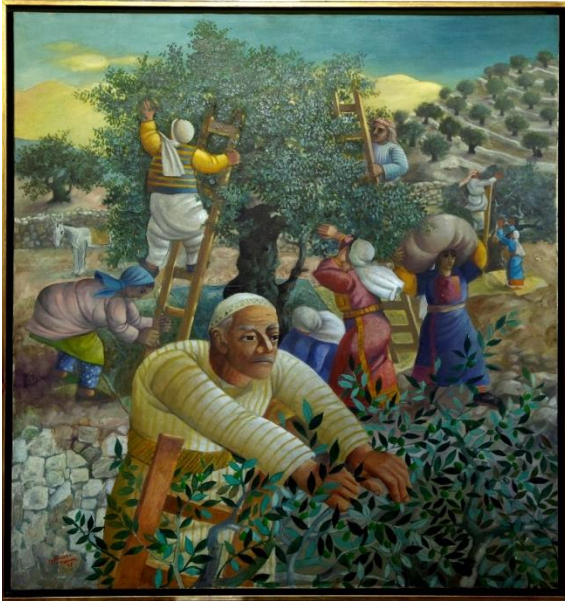


Figure (44): Olive Pickers, Sliman Mansour, 1986.

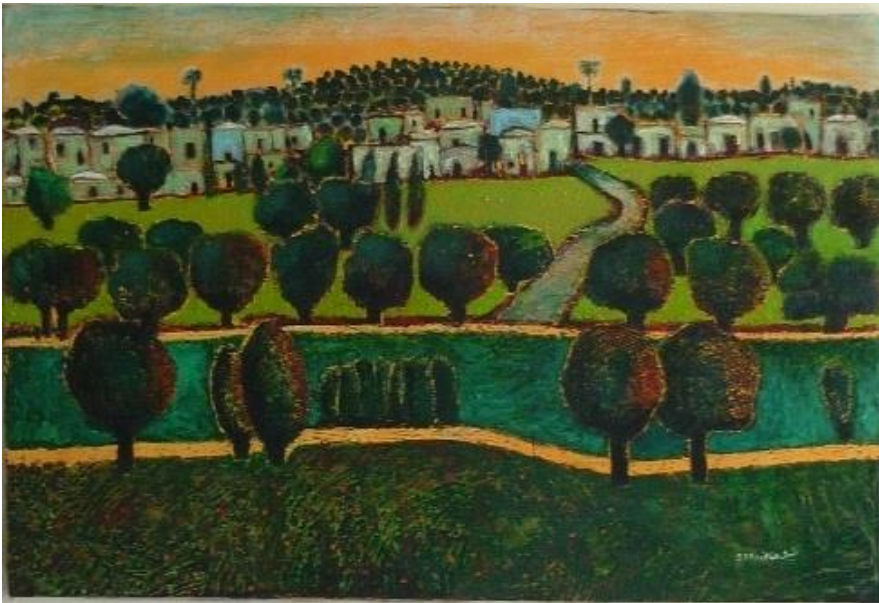


Figure (45): Untitled, Nabil Anani.

Recent works by Sliman Mansour in which he re-visits his old paintings of landscape, olive orchards, and olive picking, stand as a record of the continuous loss of this land – as a direct

effect of the construction and expansion of the Israeli settlements and Separation Wall on the one hand, and because of the building boom and real estate trade in Palestine on the other.



Figure (46). Olive Pickers, Sliman Mansour, 1997.



Figure (47) Olive Field 2, Sliman Mansour, 2009.

There are persistent violent practices towards the olive tree in the Palestinian territories exercised by the Israeli occupation apparatus, including the military forces and settlers. As Sonja Karkar

states in the article *Heritage Uprooted*, “In more than forty years, Israel has uprooted over one million olive trees and hundreds of thousands of fruit trees in Palestine.”¹⁴⁷ This continuous violence has caused an endless number of contemporary images to be produced by Palestinian and international photo journalists and artists. One can recall the remarkable pictures taken by Palestinian photo-journalist Alaa Badarneh, especially the one that captures an old Palestinian woman strongly hugging the trunk of an olive tree trying to protect it from the nearby Israeli tanks.¹⁴⁸



Figure (48): Salem village, Photo by Alaa Badarneh, 2005

This recurrent visual motif of what has become an almost common scene in Palestinians’ daily struggle highlights the sacrifices they must make and pain they must endure in their effort to protect and defend this tree, further augmenting the tree’s symbolism. The above picture by Alaa Badarneh has been disseminated widely. It has been reproduced in posters, as for example by Hasan Qasem who juxtaposed elements of Badarneh’s photo with Mahmoud Darwish’s above-mentioned poem in order to give expression to the concept of steadfastness and resistance.

¹⁴⁷ <https://electronicintifada.net/content/heritage-uprooted/7126>.

¹⁴⁸ <https://theecologist.org/2015/nov/07/destruction-palestinian-olive-trees-monstrous-crime>.

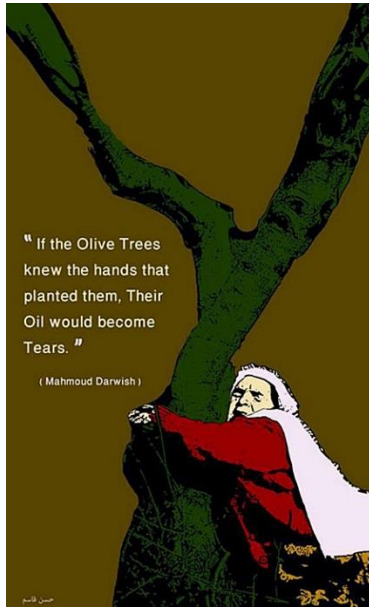


Figure (49): Poster by Hasan Qasem

The olive tree as a symbol has inspired also the new generation of contemporary Palestinian artists such as Khalil Rabah (born 1961) and Larissa Sansour (born 1973) who brought the symbolism of this tree, in both its cultural and political context, to new international frontiers.



Figure (50): Nation Estate, Larissa Sansour, 2013.

Conclusion

The olive tree is the central cultural element in Palestine's rural areas. Olive oil production techniques are the important substance of this culture. Besides food production, these techniques were also used to produce olive oil for body care, perfumery, pharmacy, textile crafts, and lighting. The utilized methods and machinery represent remarkable instances of technical development and exemplify how Palestinian society and their ancestors have continuously accumulated know-how and adopted technological progress in order to foster economic development – ever since the Neolithic Period.

However, the oleo-culture sector has undergone a remarkable degradation since 1967 as the Israeli military and civil authorities control the laws applicable to Palestinians and exploit their agricultural lands. Continuous urbanization, rapid population increase in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as the geopolitical context place immense burdens on the rural landscape and the oleo-cultural economy. One way in which these measures affect the oleo-culture is the continuous reduction of the number of olive trees, which stands as a major problem the sector is faced with.

Another important reality that affects cultural heritage is the Israeli 'legal' land appropriation practices in both areas B and C. According to Article 4 of the Israeli Law of Antiquity, archaeological remains discovered in whichever zone they were found become property of the Israeli state.¹⁴⁹ Military Law 418 is still applicable throughout area C and controls all urban planning and land use, including the elements that represent the natural and cultural heritage of the area. According to the Palestinian Database of Archaeological and Historical Sites, the occupied Palestinian territories (within the international boundaries of 1967) gather about 7000 sites of cultural importance, of which 53% are in Area C. But the 47% of the cultural and natural heritage sites that lie in areas A and B suffer from a lack of preservation and protection as well. The situation is aggravated by the challenges the Palestinian government is faced with in light of the on-going rapid urban expansion and the lack of legislation that would protect the land and the cultural heritage associated with this land.

¹⁴⁹ Antiquity law of 1978: source: Israeli ministry of foreign affairs



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By creating a hiking trail that highlights important elements of Palestinian oleo-culture, awareness of its historical and current economic and cultural importance can be raised and efforts to find solutions to the on-going challenges could be better supported.



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