

Visiting British Palestine: Zionist travelers to *Eretz Israel*

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Abstract

At the beginning of the 20th century, Ottoman Palestine became a popular destination for tourists, and their number rose significantly during the British Mandate. In particular, Jewish tourists increasingly visited Palestine and among them a new typology of travelers developed, i.e. Zionist travelers. This article draws on travelogues published in the 1920s and 1930s and aims at demonstrating that these travelogues, while presenting personal and direct experiences of Eretz Israel, corresponded perfectly with – and bolstered – the narrative that Zionism was using to describe its enterprise.

- Introduction
- Tourism to British Palestine: Zionist Itineraries
- The Zionist Travelers: more than Tourists
- The Zionist Achievement in *Eretz Israel*: Redeeming the Land
- A Jewish Land: Encounter with the Arabs
- Conclusions

Introduction

At the end of World War One, a transformation occurred in the typology of visitors travelling to Palestine, which had just become a British Mandate. If during the second half of the 19th century Eastern European pilgrims - in particular from Russia - represented the principal type of visitors to Ottoman Palestine, by the beginning of the 1920s things had changed. While Catholic and Greek-Orthodox pilgrims were replaced – at least partially - by Protestants,¹ pilgrims were no longer the only travelers to Palestine and tourists increasingly began to visit the Holy Land.² While traditional religious motivations for visiting remained solid, people began travelling to Palestine for a wide variety of reasons, from business to personal curiosity, from cultural

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¹ See Stephanie Stidham Roger, *Inventing the Holy Land: American Protestant Pilgrimage to Palestine, 1865-1941* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011).

² On the difference between pilgrims and tourists, see Erik Cohen, *Pilgrimage and Tourism: Convergence and Divergence*, in *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, ed. Alan E. Morinis (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), in particular 48–9. On the reasons for traveling, see also Erik Cohen, “A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences,” *Sociology* 13/2 (1979): 179–201.

reasons to pleasure.³ A considerable proportion of tourists were Arabs from neighboring countries.⁴ However, an increasingly significant percentage of them were Jewish. In particular, “in the first decade of the twentieth century, a new type of tourist began visiting Palestine: the Zionist traveler.”⁵

Historiography has recently started concentrating on the growth of tourism to British Palestine⁶ and has highlighted the efforts carried out by the *Yishuv* [the Jewish community in Palestine] to increase Jewish tourism by organizing alternative tours to Christian pilgrimages. While it has been pointed out how Jews started challenging the traditional Arab monopoly of Palestinian tourism,⁷ historiography has not sufficiently concentrated on the travelogues that were published by Zionist travelers once they returned home after having visited *Eretz Israel*.⁸ This article analyzes some of the travelogues that were published in the 1920s and the 1930s and intends to underline that this form of “travel writings”⁹ supported the battle Zionism was conducting on two fronts: in Palestine, in order to challenge the Arab monopoly of tourism; and among the Diaspora Jewish communities, to successfully present the progress being made in *Eretz Israel*. In fact, these travelogues bolstered the Zionist narrative by presenting the travelers’ personal experience using the same rhetoric employed by Zionism while describing its enterprise in *Eretz Israel*.

³ See Doron Bar, Kobi Cohen-Hattab, “A New Kind of Pilgrimage. The Modern Tourist Pilgrim of Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century Palestine,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 39/2 (2003): 131-148; Kobi Cohen-Hattab, Yossi Katz, “The Attraction of Palestine: Tourism in the Years 1850–1948,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 27/2 (2001): 178–95.

⁴ In order to accommodate these tourists, the Arab High Committee decided to build the Palace Hotel in Mamilla (nowadays renewed as the Waldorf Astoria), quite close to the King David Hotel, which was built to host rich Jewish tourists. See Noam Shoval, Kobi Cohen-Hattab, “Urban Hotel Development Patterns in the Face of Political Shifts,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 28/4 (2001): 916.

⁵ Daniella Ohad Smith, “Hotel Design in British Mandate Palestine: Modernism and the Zionist Vision,” *The Journal of Israeli History* 29/1 (2010): 101.

⁶ For example, see Kobi Cohen-Hattab, Yossi Katz, “The Attraction of Palestine: Tourism in the Years 1850–1948,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 27/2 (2001): 166–177.

⁷ Kobi Cohen-Hattab, “Zionism, Tourism, and the Battle for Palestine: Tourism as a Political-Propaganda Tool,” *Israel Studies* 9/1 (2004): 61-85.

⁸ Jews had referred to Palestine with its ancient Hebrew name, *Eretz Yisrael* [the land of Israel], for centuries. Given that Hebrew was an official language of the Mandate, along with English and Arabic, Zionists were demanding the adoption of *Eretz Yisrael* as the official name of Palestine, thus stressing Jewish claims to the country. For this reason, in this article I will use the expression *Eretz Israel* (in its more common transliteration from Hebrew) when dealing with Jewish travelers, who referred to Palestine in that way. On this issue, see Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 18.

⁹ I have adopted Luca Clerici’s definition of “travel writings” as opposed to “travel literature,” since, starting with the 19th century, most texts concerning travels were produced without any literary ambitions. Clerici, *Introduzione*, in *Scrittori italiani di viaggio*, ed. Id, Vol. 2 (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 2008), xxvi.

Tourism to British Palestine: Zionist Itineraries

Soon after the birth of the British Mandate, Zionist institutions realized that tourism to Palestine could be a useful tool to advance the Zionist cause among Diaspora Jews. They began implementing policies with the purpose of increasing the number of Jewish tourists and, simultaneously, enhancing their pro-Zionist feelings. This attempt became progressively more important with the increase that tourism experienced in those years, particularly in the second half of the 1920s. For example, “in 1927 the number of visitors amounted to approximately 59,000” people, which was considered a very high number for a country whose population numbered about 600,000.¹⁰ Actually, the number of tourists during the Mandate was very high. According to Kobi Cohen-Hattab, “the available statistical evidence shows that between 1926 and 1945, some 1,600,000 foreigners toured Palestine.”¹¹

One of the tools used by the *Yishuv* was offering ‘Zionist tours,’ i.e. creating itineraries that combined visits to religious Jewish sites - both biblical and non-biblical (for example ancient synagogues and/or Rabbis-saints’ tombs) - and to non-religious sites, mainly the newly-established agricultural settlements.¹² This combination would confirm the enduring and uninterrupted Jewish attachment to *Eretz Israel* and, at the same time, would demonstrate the progress being made by Zionism in Palestine. For example, in 1922, the Department of Trade and Industry of the Palestine Zionist Executive published a 32-page pamphlet, titled *Eretz Israel for Jewish Tourists*.¹³ This one was intended to provide tourists with useful information, from transportation from Europe,¹⁴ to the best traveling season – the months between March and June – to travel expenses, passports, and currency. But the majority of the book (22 out of 33 pages) was dedicated to tours. As stated, the selection of itineraries was considered very important in increasing support for Zionism among Jewish travelers. It is not a coincidence that the suggested itineraries included visits to the Jewish agricultural settlements as a crucial part of each tour. More specifically, the

¹⁰ Report “Travellers in Palestine and Colonisation Problem,” 25 June 1928, in Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (CZA), S25\3974.

¹¹ Cohen-Hattab, *Zionism, Tourism, and the Battle for Palestine*, 80. A detailed table with the number of tourists who visited Palestine between 1926 and 1945, year by year, is in Id. *Latur et Eretz-Yisrael. Ha-taiarut be-Eretz Yisrael be-tekufat ha-mandat ha-briti* [Touring Eretz Israel. Tourism in Eretz Israel during the British Mandate] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Tzvi, 2006): 41 (Hebrew).

¹² Itineraries that travelers would concretely follow started to be identified for both individual and groups in the 1890s, with “the development of the proto-package tour.” In Stidham Rogers, *Inventing the Holy Land*, 36.

¹³ In CZA, Keren Kayemeth le-Israel (KKL), box 818. See also Cohen-Hattab, *Latur et Eretz-Yisrael*, 228.

¹⁴ The book suggested taking a steamer from Europe (the ports were Marseilles, Teulon, Trieste, Venice, Genoa, Naples, Brindisi) to Alexandria and Port Said – from there a train would lead to Jerusalem respectively in 22 and 18 hours – or to take “a direct service by the Messageries Maritimes line from Marseilles, by the *Lloyd Triestino* from Trieste and by Khedivial Mail Line from Constantinople.” “Eretz Israel for Jewish Tourists,” 4-5, *Ibid*.

book suggested three types of tours: 1) Jerusalem, Judaea and Samaria; 2) Jaffa and the Coastal District; 3) Haifa and the Galilee. All tours were supposed to last from a minimum of 4 days to a maximum of 17 days, and they were entirely 'Jewish,' which meant privileging Jewish ancient and modern sites over Christian and Muslim ones.

In 1925, the *Zionist Tourist Information Bureau* (ZTIB) was established. As Cohen-Hattab states, it was financed and run jointly by the Palestine Zionist Executive, the Jewish National Fund and the United Israel Appeal. It had three main tasks: contacting tourists potentially interested in visiting Palestine; dealing with the visitors while they were in Palestine in order to cultivate their support of Zionism; connecting them with Zionist groups and organizations once they returned home, so that they could reciprocally influence and reinforce each other. In this way, the ZTIB was to become the most important tool of the Zionist movement in promoting Jewish tourism, while concurrently generating propaganda that targeted Jewish communities worldwide.¹⁵

The ZTIB established contact with several Jewish and Zionist organizations, which asked for suggestions and advice in organizing tours for Jews who wanted to visit Palestine. For example, on January 19th, 1925, the American Bureau of the *Keren Kayemeth Le-Israel* wrote to the Jerusalem Office of the KKL to request the News Bulletin that the newly established ZTIB published. According to the American KKL branch, the Bulletin would help American Jewish tourists who intended to visit Palestine.¹⁶ In a note released a few days later, the American office, after having highlighted that "the tourist traffic [wa]s constantly on the increase with the Jews constituting the principal tourist element" clearly stated that it was important that the American Jews willing to visit Palestine were given "the opportunity to see the Palestine of the Jews, especially the Palestine of the *Chalutzim* [pioneers] which is a phase of the country chronically neglected by the established tourist agencies."¹⁷ A similar request of support came from the *Federation des Sionistes de Belgique* in the same January of 1925. It is interesting to note that the Belgian Zionist Federation not only sought information to organize tours to Palestine, but also for material that could be used for "propaganda among Jews as well Gentiles for pleasure trips in Palestine" to be published in Belgian newspapers and periodicals, specifically those dealing with tourism.¹⁸

In December 1925, the KKL sent a letter to several Zionist groups and

¹⁵ Kobi Cohen-Hattab, "Zionism, Tourism, and the Battle for Palestine: Tourism as a Political-Propaganda Tool," *Israel Studies* 9/1 (2004): 67. Cohen-Hattab actually refers to it with a different name: Zionist Information Bureau for Tourists.

¹⁶ Letter of 19 January 1925, in CZA, KKL\818.

¹⁷ Note for release "Information Bureau Opened for American Tourists in Palestine," 23 January 1925, in CZA, KKL\818.

¹⁸ Letter to the Palestine Zionist Executive, 28 January 1925, in CZA, KKL\818.

organizations of Western Europe, proposing a “Cheap Palestine Tour.” The trip was meant to last 12 days, to cost £ 40 per person, to take place the following May, and to start and return to Marseilles.¹⁹ In the letter, the KKL highlighted “the importance for Palestine propaganda in general of well conducted tours of the country” and explicitly stated that “special attention [should] be given to the Zionist Settlements.”²⁰ It was another confirmation of the value that the Palestine Zionist Executive attributed to Jewish tourism, especially if directed toward Jewish agricultural settlements, considered the flagship of the Zionist program.

The importance that the ZIBT attached to the presence of tourists in *Eretz Israel* was evident in 1929, after “normal conditions were once more restored in Palestine” following the bloody clashes between Arabs and Jews in August of that year. The Bureau considered “it urgently necessary that every effort be made to increase and strengthen the tourist traffic,” not only because “from the economic point of view, the Yishuv ha[d] suffered much from the disturbances” and “a good tourist season would be calculated considerably to relieve the situation,” but because

Great benefit would accrue to the Zionist movement as such from the visit of as many friends of our cause as possible, as that they could see with their own eyes that the Yishuv has remained intact and is prepared to continue the upbuilding work with greater energy than ever.²¹

In addition, the Office of the *Keren Hayesod* in Jerusalem supported the organization of trips to Palestine, both for Jewish groups and non-Jewish groups. For example, in August 1931, the Keren Hayesod organized a “Ten Days in Palestine” trip for a Recreational Group located in Venice. (*Fig. 1*) It was not specifically organized for Jewish tourists, but it was a Zionist tour, meaning that the advertisement clearly focused on the Zionist project: “Israel’s return to the Promised Land is made possible in particular thanks to the Keren Hayesod, and a visit to the land that was God’s motherland could not be organized in a more competent way.”²² The program, which was intended for non-Jewish tourists, included the Catholic sites, such as the Holy Sepulcher, the Via Dolorosa, Bethlehem, the Samaritan well, Nazareth, the Tabor Mount, Capernaum, the Galilee sea. But it also included – and was obviously the main aim of the Keren Hayesod – the relatively new and well established Jewish settlements, such as Rehovot, Rishon le-Tzion, the agricultural school of Mikveh Israel, and the valley of Jezreel/Esdraelon. It was a Zionist tour

¹⁹ Letter of the KKL, Jerusalem, 23 December 1925, in CZA, KKL\831.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Letter of the ZIBT to the Zionist Federations and Unions, the Keren Hayessod and the Keren Kayemeth Committees, Jerusalem, October 1929, in CZA, KKL\3653.

²² “Dieci giorni in Palestina. Viaggio promosso dal Circolo Sociale Mestre-Merghera di Venezia, 29 luglio – 17 agosto 1931,” in Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem (CAHJP), Fund Cividalli (P/140 A), box 2.

framed as a Catholic pilgrimage.

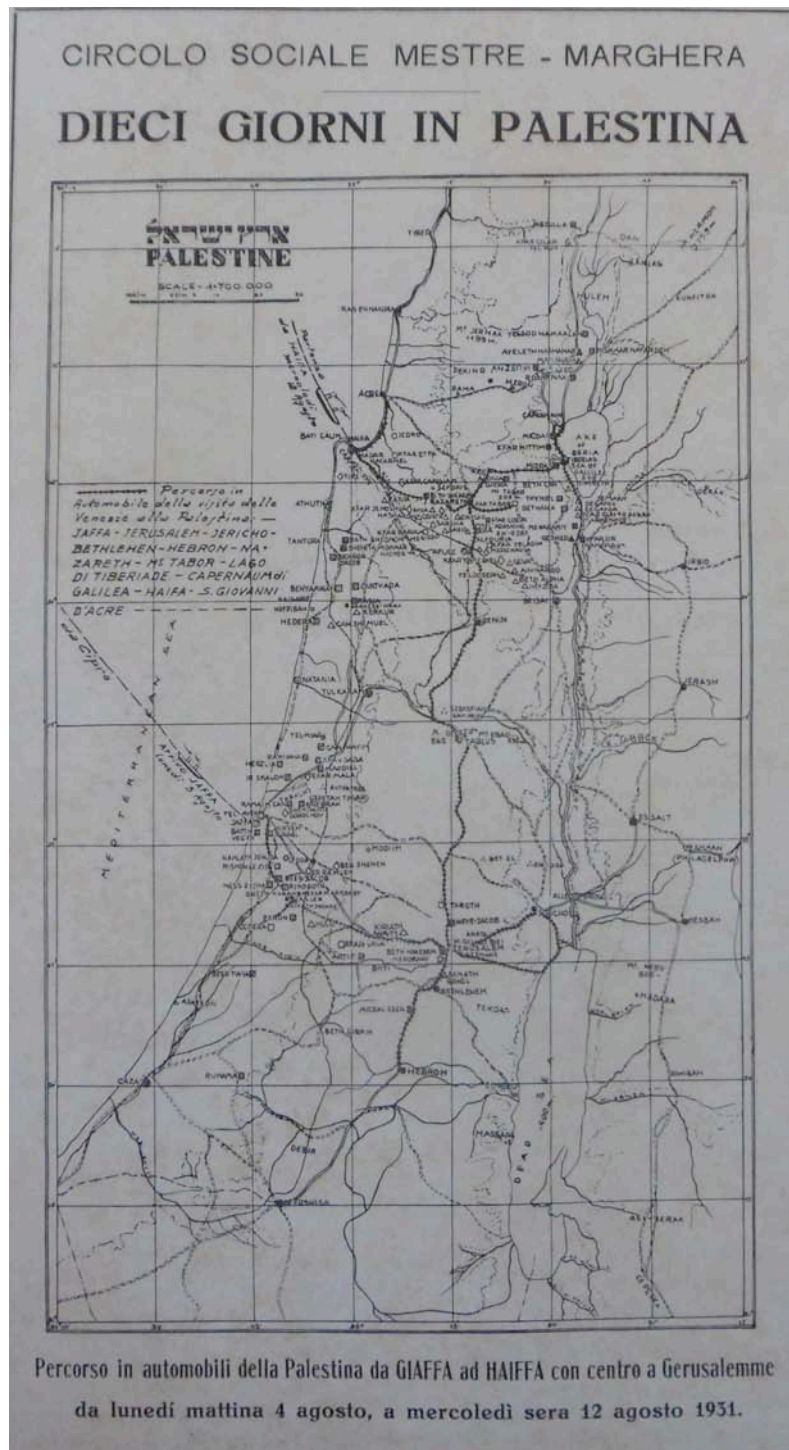


Fig. 1: Dieci giorni in Palestina [Ten days in Palestine]

The ZIBT engaged several travel agencies to organize tours to Palestine.²³ Among them was the Palestine Lloyd, which published advertisement brochures in different languages, such as English, French and German. The English brochure *Tours in Palestine*, for example, included four different types of tours, according to their length: a 3-day itinerary, a 6-day itinerary, a 10-day itinerary, and a 14-day itinerary.²⁴ All of them were Zionist tours, i.e. focusing on the Jewish sites of Palestine, from the Biblical spots (Tomb of Rachel, Solomon's pools, Cave of Makhpelah), to religious sites (Tombs of Rambam, Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes, and Rabbi Akiva), to the agricultural settlements (Jezreel/Esdraelon valley, Balfouria, Degania A and B, Mikveh Israel). Longer trips also included other sites, such as newly created schools, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, or the site of Tel Hai, where Joseph Trumpeldor had been killed in 1920, an event which would later become one of the cornerstones of Israeli civic religion.²⁵

In 1926, the Palestine Lloyd produced the French brochure *Excursion en Palestine*, which presented two alternatives. The first itinerary would be a 24-day tour (12 days were needed to travel from France to Palestine and return, while 12 days would be spent travelling in Palestine); it would last between February 23rd and March 18th, and it foresaw spending the Jewish holiday of *Purim* in Palestine - perhaps with the intention of seeing Tel Aviv's famous *Purim* carnival parade, the *'adlayada*. The second trip would be 30 days long, lasting from March 23rd to April 21st, and it was designed to celebrate the Jewish holiday of *Pesach* in Palestine.²⁶ The two itineraries included the most prominent cities, i.e. Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias, Haifa and the Jewish colonies along the Mediterranean Coast and in the Jezreel/Esdraelon valley. The same brochure was also published in German, with the title *Gesellschafts – Reisen nach Palästina*.²⁷ German tourists would reach Marseilles by train, but otherwise the proposed itineraries were identical.

It is worth writing a few words on the images used to adorn the covers of the brochures. As to the first one (*Fig. 2*), at the center of the image there is a tree, while on the left there is a tall palm and on the right two short buildings. Nothing else is drawn aside from what appears to be a path. What is the visual message that this image intends to convey? Even if it is not entirely obvious, what emerges from the picture is that Palestine is a barren and empty land,

²³ Cohen-Hattab, *Latur et Eretz-Yisrael*: 21-25.

²⁴ "Tours in Palestine," The Palestine Lloyd Ltd., no date, in CAHJP, P/140 A, box 2.

²⁵ On the construction of civil religion in Israel, see Charles S. Liebman, Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), and on the role Tel Hai had in the construction of Israeli identity, see Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), in particular 39-47.

²⁶ "Excursions en Palestine," Palestine Lloyd Paris, 1926, in CAHJP, Fund Pacifici (P 172), box 97.

²⁷ "Gesellschafts – Reisen nach Palästina," Palestine Lloyd Ltd., in CZA, KKL\831

apart from the palm, the little village and the big tree. In particular, the centrality of the tree might represent the role of Zionism (and KKL) in Palestine in terms of planting trees and therefore making the land fertile once again.

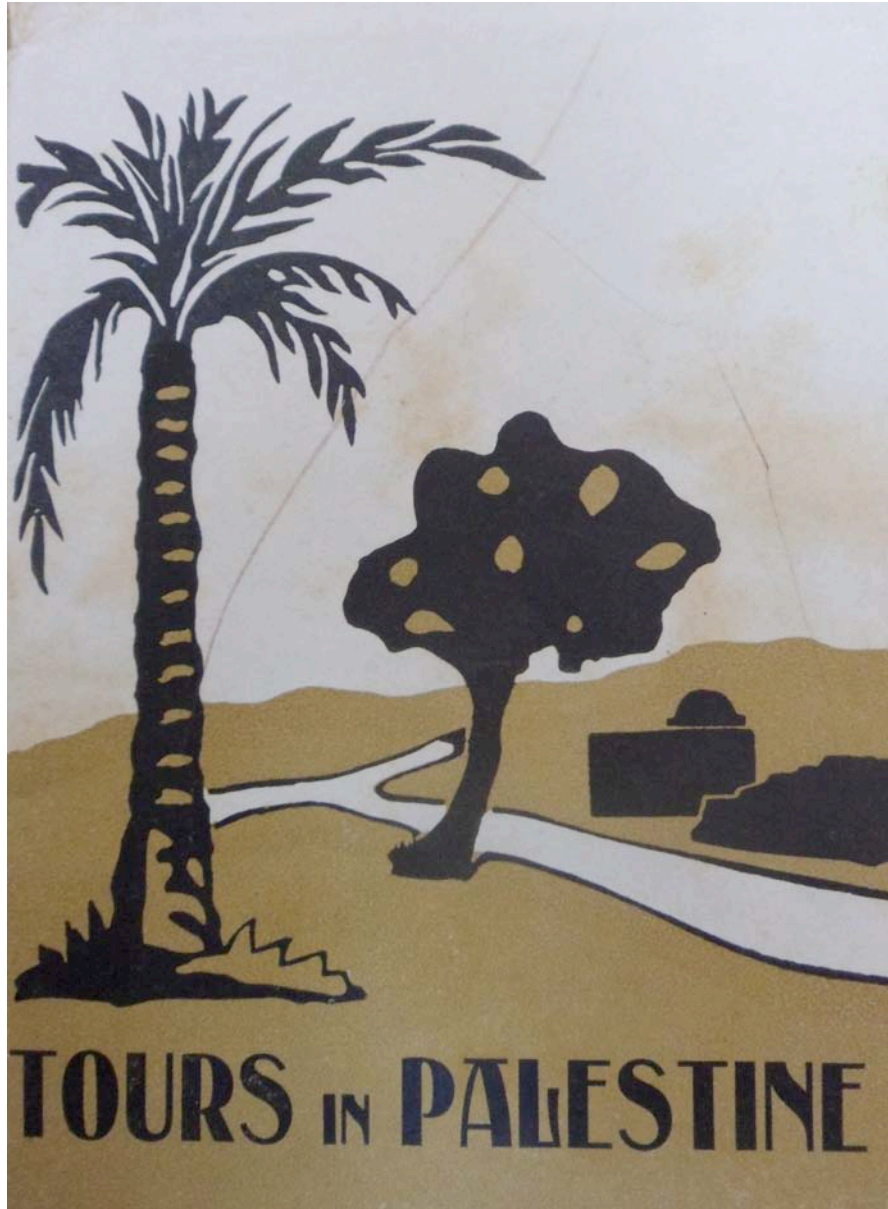


Fig. 2: Tours in Palestine

Palms and trees, similar to the ones depicted in this brochure, are recurring symbols found in other images of that period. One of the most known is the poster “Come to Palestine,” drawn by Ze’ev Raban (1890-1970, a teacher in Bezalel, one of the most influential Jewish artists and a famous designer in

Israel) and produced by the Society for the Promotion of Travel in the Holy Land in 1929.²⁸ In this case, Palestine is presented as an idyllic place, that both Jewish (reference to biblical times are obvious, given the biblical verse at the bottom of the poster)²⁹ and Christian tourists (the recognizable Sea of Galilee where Jesus is believed to have walked was obviously a reference for Christians) should be willing to visit. The prevailing feature of this image is its Orientalist approach, which is not present in the first brochure, but is, in contrast, evident in the second brochure's image. (*Fig. 3*)

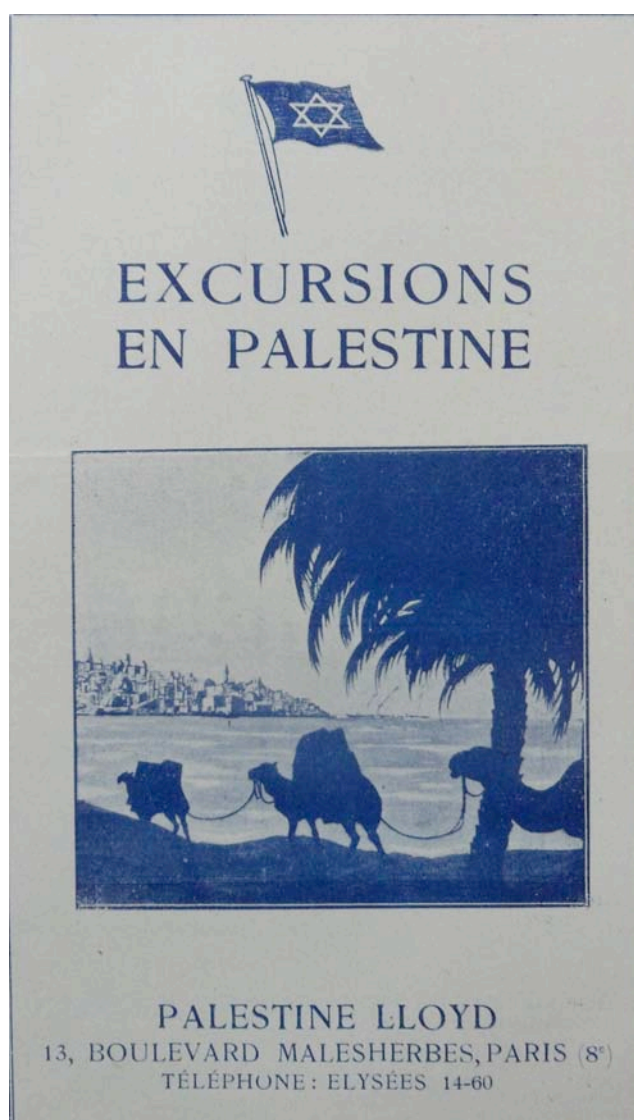


Fig. 3: Excursion en Palestine [Excursions to Palestine]

²⁸ The image is available at <http://www.english.imjnet.org.il/popup?c0=13606> (accessed 18 September 2013).

²⁹ See Dalia Manor, "Biblical Zionism in Bezael Art," *Israel Studies* 6/1 (2001): 55-75, in particular 58.

In this illustration, the scene is dominated by three camels in a caravan, with a palm tree on the left and what appears to be Jaffa in the background. What the brochure seems to convey is the sense of visiting an exotic location, with a hint of what would probably be the first view of Palestine. Only the Star of David in the flag at the top of the leaflet suggests the Zionist bent of the trip that the Palestine Lloyd is advertising.

If we compare the first image with another famous poster, “Come and See Erez Israel” - painted by the same Ze’ev Raban and chosen by the Association of Jewish Guides as publicity to promote Jewish tourism³⁰ - the message expressed by the first brochure becomes clearer. The building in that brochure bears a striking resemblance to Rachel's tomb as it is presented in Raban's poster (second small picture on the bottom-right), so what at a first sight seems to be a village might actually be a Jewish biblical site. And palms and trees – which are used to represent Rishon le Tzion and Metulah at the bottom corners of the poster – might therefore allude to the newly established Jewish agricultural settlements that the brochure describes. If this interpretation is correct, what emerges as the major theme is the combination of ancient and modern Jewish sites, reinforcing the message that those tours intended to communicate to tourists through the brochure.

Another agency that handled a significant part of Jewish tourism was the *Palestine and Egypt Lloyd* (PEL). For example, it organized a three-day trip to “Judean Settlements, Jerusalem, Samaria, Emek-Efer”. In this itinerary, apart from the Old City of Jerusalem, the focus was exclusively on Zionist achievements, from the agricultural settlements to the schools and training institutions (such as the WIZO Girl's Farm in Ayanoth), to the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. The trip was a type of full immersion into newly re-established Jewish life in *Eretz Israel*.³¹ Finally, in cooperation with the World Zionist Organization (*ha-bistadrut ha-tzionit ha-olamit*), the *Lloyd Triestino* also decided to organize a 20-day tour to Palestine, between February 21st and March 12th, 1934.³²

Among the actors that organized Zionist tours there were a number of varied Diaspora Zionist groups and organizations. For example, despite the small number of Italian Jews and, specifically, of Italian Zionist Jews, the Italian Zionist Federation organized several tours. The first one took place in August 1931, and lasted 20 days. The program was very similar to the one organized

³⁰ The image is available at <http://www.touchwoodnurit.com/index.files/Page65862.htm> (accessed 18 September 2013) and has been reproduced, among the many, in Manor, “Biblical Zionism,” 60.

³¹ The leaflet is in CAHJP, P/140 A, box 2.

³² “Il prossimo anno a Gerusalemme! Viaggio speciale turistico ebraico in occasione della festa di Purim 1934 (5694),” in CAHJP, P 172, box 99.

by the Palestine Lloyd for the French Jews,³³ only a bit shorter, as the travel route of Trieste-Brindisi-Jaffa was slightly quicker than Marseilles-Alexandria-Jaffa. Additional trips were organized in 1932 and in the years following.³⁴

Finally, apart from collective tours organized either by the *Yishuv* or by Zionist organizations based in the Diaspora, there were also private trips arranged by individuals. It is difficult to give an account of these tours. In fact, in most cases, people travelled by themselves and no traces of their experiences are left. An exception is represented by those trips that, despite involving only individuals, were arranged with the involvement of Zionist institutions because of the travelers importance. For example, in 1935 Mrs. Stern, the wife of a rich Austrian-born Jew who had become a French citizen by marrying her, visited Palestine. Before her departure, the French branch of KKL contacted the Palestine Executive requesting that she be offered particularly good treatment, given that she was quite influential among French Jews and winning her ‘heart and mind’ was believed to be very useful in advancing Zionist propaganda among French Jewry.³⁵ A few months earlier, the same thing had happened for the former President of the French Zionist Federation, Mr. Louis Roubach, and his wife Mrs. Fuilderman, vice president of the WIZO – French section. The French branch of KKL stressed the possibility that they might invest money in Palestine if the trip impressed them, by showing them the success of the Zionist project.³⁶

The Zionist Travelers: more than Tourists

Who were the Zionist travelers? They were not Zionist in the sense that they aspired to make *‘aliyah* and take part in the building of a new Jewish state. Some of them did actually migrate to Palestine after having visited it, but others did not. They were Zionist travelers in that their decision to visit Palestine was not motivated by tourism, i.e. curiosity to have new experiences, but was based on different motivations. First of all, they felt they were tied to *Eretz Israel*, as part of the traditional and abiding Jewish attachment to that land. Secondly, they were interested in understanding what exactly Zionism was doing in Palestine because they had been exposed to Zionist literature and propaganda. Finally, they supported Zionism and therefore wanted to have a firsthand experience of what they believed to be either an important project, a great triumph or even the fulfillment of a dream that could inspire and enrich

³³ “Viaggio in Eretz Israel 12-31 agosto 1931,” Ibid.

³⁴ See Arturo Marzano, *Una terra per rinascere. Gli ebrei italiani e l'emigrazione in Palestina prima della guerra (1920-1940)* (Milano: Marietti, 2003), 60-69.

³⁵ Letter by the KKL - Commission Centrale de France, Paris to the Central Bureau of the KKL, Jerusalem, 10 May 1935, in CZA, KKL5\6660.

³⁶ Letter by the KKL - Commission Centrale de France, Paris to the Central Bureau of the KKL, Jerusalem, 26 February 1935, in CZA, KKL5\6660.

their everyday lives by being part of something greater.³⁷ As Daniella Ohad Smith states, for Zionist travelers “visiting the sites of the Zionist project elevated them from the ordinary to the extraordinary.”³⁸ Interestingly enough, the Palestine Executive that was logistically supporting Jewish travelers considered that “practically all the visitors [we]re Zionists in one degree or another.”³⁹

The idea that going to Palestine was not simply a question of tourism but involved a different type of emotion is evident from the reports of some of the travelers. For example, the Italian Jew Alfonso Pacifici - one of the founders of the Italian Zionist movement⁴⁰ - visited British Palestine in 1925 and wrote:

My spirit clearly knows something: ‘this’ journey is not similar to any other; no other journey could take me so far as does this one. It is neither a transit journey, nor a pleasure or curiosity trip: ‘what’ I will see does not interest me, just as I do not think that the features of an abandoned mother might interest her son, who cannot remember them for not having seen them for so long. She is his mother, no matter what expectations the child might have; she is his mother and nothing else. This is a journey of ‘return’, as it might be defined; a trip back home, to his own home!⁴¹

And another Italian Zionist, Giulio Raccah, who would also migrate to *Eretz Israel* later on, reported after his trip in 1934:

Even if during the nine-day trip to Erez Israel we could not see everything, we have seen – though prepared to see miracles - much more than anyone else could expect. And we must indeed be happy that a lot more has been done, without any regret of not seeing it, since whoever has been once to Erez Israel returns back there.⁴²

Even if tourism was not the main motivation of Zionist travelers, this does not mean that they did not tour *Eretz Israel*. On the contrary, they did, according to the already mentioned Zionist tours that included both the Jewish traditional sites and the Zionist newly established settlements and cities.

³⁷ In a certain way, “Zionist travelers” might resemble the “political pilgrims” that would visit Communist countries in order to believe in something greater than what they experienced living in Western democracies. On this issue, see Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba 1928-1978* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

³⁸ Ohad Smith, “Hotel Design in British Mandate Palestine,” 101.

³⁹ Letter by Menachem Ussishkin to L. Schen, H. Levin, Rabbi Schwarz, and I. H. Hubin, 16 April 1933, in CZA, KKL5\4989.

⁴⁰ Alfonso Pacifici (1889-1981) was the Director of the Zionist weekly *Israel*. With his activity, he influenced an entire generation of Italian Zionist Jews in the 1920s and 1930s. He made *‘aliyah* in 1934. On him, see Marzano, *Una terra per rinascere*, 19-22.

⁴¹ Alfonso Pacifici, “Trieste-Gerusalemme,” *Israel*, 6 October 1924. Four other articles concerning his travel to Palestine appeared in the same weekly on 23 October 1924, 25 December 1924, 19 February 1925 and 5 March 1925.

⁴² Giulio Raccah, “Nove giorni in Erez Israel,” *Israel*, 1 June 1934.

Compared to earlier periods, travelers to British Palestine visited a country that was undergoing huge changes. Apart from the places that previous Jewish travelers traditionally presented in their travelogues – Jerusalem and Safed (two of the ‘four holy cities’) more than any other place - Zionist travelers also focused on the innovations in Palestine, i.e. new quarters of already existing cities, such as Jerusalem and Haifa; the newly-born Tel Aviv; the recently established agricultural settlements.

By analyzing some of the travelogues that were produced in those years, it appears that Tel Aviv was the city that received considerable attention,⁴³ given its status as the “first Hebrew city.”⁴⁴ To Ludwig Lewisohn,⁴⁵ who visited Palestine in 1925 and published an entire book on his experience,⁴⁶ Tel Aviv actually seemed a bit disappointing: “One must not expect too much. The houses in Tel Aviv are not too beautiful. Some are cheap and pretentious and seem to have been built in imitation of the worst period of American domestic architecture.”⁴⁷ Yet, its Jewishness was striking.

I was myself less offended by the ugliness of the houses in Tel-Aviv than I was pleased at the names of the streets which are called after poets, Yehuda Halevy and Bialik, after thinkers, Moses Hess and Achad Ha'am, after prophets of various sorts and ages, Rambam (Maimonides) and Herzl, after benefactors, Rothschild and Balfour. (...) That is what I should expect of a Jewish city; it is by the example of such things that a Jewish city can justify itself among the cities of the world. (...) Tel-Aviv, moreover, is a young city. It was in 1909 that sixty families met on the sand-dunes north of Jaffa and determined to build a clean

⁴³ For example, the Vilna-born American Louis Miller defined Tel Aviv as “the most beautiful and interesting creation in all of Palestine.” Miller visited *Eretz Israel* in 1911 and in his reports he emphasizes the greatness of Tel Aviv, a city that “emerged from nothing, (...) truly a miracle - and all of it the fruits of Jewish labor.” See Ehud Manor, “‘A source of satisfaction to all Jews, wherever they may be living.’ Louis Miller between New York and Tel Aviv, 1911,” *Quest*, 2 (2011): 273-274, in <http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=224> (accessed 18 September 2013). On the tourist attractions of Tel Aviv in those years, see Cohen-Hattab, *Latur et Eretz-Yisrael*, 53-67, and Michael Berkowitz, *Western Jewry and the Zionist Project, 1914–1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 137.

⁴⁴ This is the way Tel Aviv was perceived all over the world. For example, this is how the Israeli poet Chaim Guri defines it. See Joachim Schlör, “Tel Aviv: (With Its) Back to the Sea,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 8/2 (2009): 228. Albert Londres, who visited Palestine in 1929, defined Tel Aviv as “the only city in the world to be composed of Jews one hundred per cent.” Albert Londres, *Ho incontrato l'ebreo errante*, translated from French [*Le Juif Errant Est Arrivé* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1930)] by Marili Cammarata (Genova: ECIG, 1997), 150.

⁴⁵ Novelist and translator, Lewisohn (1882 – 1955) was born in Germany, but migrated as a child to the United States. Converted with his entire family to Methodism, he later returned to Judaism and became very critical of American Jews’ tendency to assimilate. He strongly supported the Zionist cause and was an honorary secretary of the Zionist Organization of America.

⁴⁶ On his travel to British Palestine, see Ralph Melnick, *The Life and Work of Ludwig Lewisohn. “A Touch of Wildness,”* Vol I (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 375-383.

⁴⁷ Ludwig Lewisohn, *Israel* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925): 192.

and healthful residential suburb there. Sixteen years have passed and on those dunes has arisen a city of thirty thousand inhabitants with schools, colleges, temples, libraries, banks, shops, factories, hotels, newspaper offices. And no jail. Jewish policemen, unarmed, keep order and regulate the traffic. There is no prison in Tel-Aviv. The people of the city hope that it will never be necessary to build one.⁴⁸

The Italian Zionist Leo Levi,⁴⁹ who visited *Eretz Israel* in 1932 before migrating there a few years later, was also clearly struck by Tel Aviv. To him, the city represented a perfect encounter between West and East:

It is in particular the wind: a warm, scented wind, which you feel in the colonies as well as on the seashore in Tel Aviv. And it is a wind that – whenever you are able to listen to it – recounts the ancient times; close to here, I was told, there was Modiin, the center of the Maccabean revolt. And when you feel so close to the life that used to be our life, you feel at home with a thrill of joyful emotion: in Tel Aviv you feel at home because it is part of the West. But, bringing the West to the heart of the East is it not the best result of Zionist Palestine? And if this is a time of transition, you feel the birth of a new society: a modern society, more than in Italy, an American-style society, which you feel in the wineries and in the factories. And the hope for the future lies in the new [Palestinian Jewish] type, who is really wonderful: they are like us [Jews in the Diaspora] but they are strong, beautiful, healthy.⁵⁰

Yet, more than its cities, it was the nature in Palestine which was most concentrated on in these travelogues. For example, American Zionist Judah Leon Magnes,⁵¹ had already been stirred by the landscape in *Eretz Israel* when he visited Palestine and Syria in 1907:

The country between Miqveh [Israel] and Rishon [le-Tizon] gave me the first clue to the constant comparison I have been forced to make between California and Palestine. Everyone knows how brown California is in summer. The fields are parched, the trees are covered with dust, the sun is hot, and yet there is green wherever there is water, besides there is a peculiar odor of hay and of the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 192-193.

⁴⁹ Leo Levi (1912-1982) migrated from Turin to Palestine in 1936. In Italy, he was the main founder and leader of the 1930s Zionist summer camps, where Italian *chalutzim*-to-be were meant to prepare themselves before migrating to Eretz Israel. On him, see Arturo Marzano, *Leo Levi: Contro i dinosauri. Scritti civili e politici (1931-1972)* (Napoli: L'Ankor del Mediterraneo, 2011).

⁵⁰ Letter by Leo Levi to his mother Sara Bolaffio Levi, 26 August 1932, in CAHJP, P/252, box 6.

⁵¹ Judah Leon Magnes (1877-1948), a Reform Rabbi in the United States, visited Palestine twice, in 1907 and 1912, before migrating there in 1922. Among the founders of the Hebrew University, he was its President between 1935 and 1948. He was in favor of a bi-national State in Palestine, sharing similar ideas to those of the pacifist group *Brit Shalom* [Covenant of Peace]. On him, see Daniel P. Kotzin, *Judah L. Magnes: An American Jewish Nonconformist* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010). On *Brit Shalom*, see Hagit Lavsky, *German Zionists and the Emergence of Brit Shalom*, in *Essential Papers on Zionism*, eds. Jehuda Reinharz, Anita Shapira (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 648-670; Shalom Matzabi, *Between Zionism and Judaism: The Radical Circle in Brit Shalom, 1925-1933* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2002).

meadows. A large part of Palestine is similar to California in many respects. Around Port Costa, for example, the country rolls in hills that are golden from the gathering of the harvest. Here too the land rolls and the blades of hay shine smooth and golden under the blue sky.⁵²

The Zionist Achievement in Eretz Israel: Redeeming the Land

In fact, it was not the natural scenery alone to impress the Zionist travelers. Connected to the land as its inseparable element, one of the elements that most captured their attention was the work of the *Chalutzim* [pioneers] and their ideological enthusiasm in cultivating the land.⁵³ As the Italian Zionist Emilio Stock wrote in 1921,

Our Chaluzim (...) are happy in their situation and they are our brightest hope. Most probably, no other people have witnessed in their own history a similar fact. Educated young boys and girls have decided to choose a life of huge sacrifice in order to meet their ideals; they work very well even if they do the most exhausting jobs.⁵⁴

According to the French Zionist Fernand Corcos,⁵⁵ the “*Poolim* [workers] at work” - the title he gave a chapter in the book he published after visiting Palestine⁵⁶ – were the most significant issue of *Eretz Israel*: “their work is the richest and the most valuable experience that has ever been tried and carried out positively.”⁵⁷ For Corcos, the value of Zionism’s role in Palestine was connected to the conditions of the country when Jewish immigrants arrived there in the 1880s: “Palestine in its entirety must be considered a devastated region, not by war, but by centuries of abandonment.”⁵⁸ Corcos was affected by the *Chalutzim*’s “sane air, their cleanness, their physical beauty; meaning with that, sanity and equilibrium.”⁵⁹

⁵² “Magnes’ diary of a trip to Palestine and Syria, 28 July 28 1907,” 148-149, in CAHJP, Fund Judah Leib Magnes (P/3), box 297.

⁵³ On the *Chalutzim* ideology, see Ben Halpern, Jehuda Reinharz, The Cultural and Social Background of the Second Aliyah, *Middle Eastern Studies* 27/3 (1991): 487-517; Gershon Shafir, *Land, labor, and the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1996); Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel. Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁵⁴ Emilio Stock, “Impressioni di viaggio in Erez Israel,” *Israel*, 10 March 1921.

⁵⁵ F. Corcos (1875-1959) was an active Zionist, among the founders both of the French branch of the *Keren Hayesod* and of the association “France-Palestine.” On him, see the brief article by Frédéric Viey, *Fernand Corcos*, January 2013, in http://www.judaicultures.info/IMG/pdf/FERNand_Corcos.pdf (accessed 18 September 2013).

⁵⁶ Fernand Corcos, *Israel sur la terre biblique* (Paris, Jouve, 1923). Corcos made another trip to Palestine two years later, and his report was published with the title of *A travers la Palestine juive* (Paris: Jouve, 1925).

⁵⁷ Corcos, *Israel*, 172.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

The idea of Jews redeeming the land was, of course, a cornerstone of Zionism⁶⁰ and was actually an ideal shared by many other travelers, both Jews and non-Jews.⁶¹ For example, the French Catholic Priest Marie André Dieux, who was not immune from traditional Catholic anti-Judaism (according to him, the only solution to the Jewish question could be conversion to Christianity)⁶² was struck by the “miracle” of the agricultural colonies that the Jews were building in Palestine⁶³ and by the “marvelous orange fields” that had been set up there.⁶⁴ Ludwig Lewisohn, mentioned earlier, also felt the *Chalutzim* were Palestine’s greatest and most notable feature:

A Jewish pioneer who has fought the wilderness and won the fight. A profound satisfaction breathes from him. (...) He is pioneer, farmer, thinker, too. (...) An intrepid and yet quiet spirit. He has literally turned the wilderness into a garden; he has reclaimed a portion of Eretz Israel and set an example for the generations to come. Now he tells us has come the age of a Jewish and a quiet life in the old land. A Jew. He has conquered his piece of earth, but he does not dream of power or force. He dreams of the creative activities of the Jewish spirit for his posterity, for his people, for mankind...⁶⁵

Directly linked to the redemptive work of the *Chalutzim* was the transformation of Palestine from an arid land into a green and fertile one:

We drive on through the heavy, burning sand. Suddenly shadows fall across the path – shadows in this weary land. The Jewish tree? Yes, it is a eucalyptus grove. The desert is a desert no more. From the trees comes a group of Chalutzim. Young men stripes to the waist. Newcomers who want to get sun-tanned and, so, become sun-hardened as soon as may be. Road workers. Next season this will be not a desert-road but a well-kept chaussée, and motor-cars will spin up and down it. The Chalutzim wave to us. Shalom! Morning and evening and through the bitter burning of the moon-time, through want and inconceivable hardship. Shalom! Work, hope, peace...⁶⁶

⁶⁰ On the concept of redemption of the Land of Israel, see *Geulat Ha-Karka' be-Eretz Yisrael: re'aion ve-ma'ase* [Redeeming the Land of Israel: Idea and Practise], ed. Ruth Kark (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1990) [Hebrew]. On the link between the Jews and *Eretz Israel*, see Shmuel Almog, “People and Land in Modern Jewish Nationalism,” in *Essential Papers in Zionism*, eds. Jehuda Reinharz, Anita Shapira (New York: New York University Press, 1995): 46-61; Tzili Doleve-Gandelman, “The Symbolic Inscription of Zionist Ideology in the Space of Eretz Yisrael: Why the Native Israeli is Called Tsabar,” in *Judaism Viewed from Within and Without: Anthropological Studies*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996): 257-284.

⁶¹ The already mentioned Albert Londres described the transformation Palestine went through thanks to the work carried out by Jewish workers in this way: “Slowly slowly, the Palestinian mummy got up.” Londres, *Ho incontrato l'ebreo errante*, 156.

⁶² Marie André Dieux (R. P. de l'Oratoire), *De Jérusalem à Rome. Méditations d'un pèlerin en Terre Sainte* (Paris: Librairie-Éditions A. Giraudon, 1929): 18.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁵ Lewisohn, *Israel*, 161.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 164.

By underlying the fact that Palestine was a “devastated region (...) by centuries of abandonment” and that the Jews were transforming “the wilderness into a garden,” both Corcos and Lewisohn were not simply describing *Eretz Israel* as it appeared to them, but they were also – and primarily – *producing* it for European and American readers, thus constructing a land in need of being saved and redeemed by Zionism and in particular by the work of the *Chalutzim*.⁶⁷

Among the various regions of Palestine that had been redeemed by *Chalutzim*, the travelogues most focused on the Jezreel/Esdraelon valley. This is not a surprise, given the importance that the valley had in the Zionist enterprise,⁶⁸ and that it was included in all itineraries suggested by the Zionist Institutions and served as the basis of their Jewish tours.

For example, according to a guidebook published by the above-mentioned Palestine Zionist Executive, the settlements that were imperative for tourists to visit were precisely those of the Jezreel/Esdraelon valley. This book – titled *Book of Sightseeing* – was quite staunch in pointing out that the most meaningful success of the Zionist movement was related to the newly established agricultural settlements. According to the book, this was particularly remarkable since it happened after centuries of negligence of Palestine, whose history was – once again – reduced to a vacuum between its Jewish presence before the Destruction of the Second Temple in the First century, and the Twentieth century:

The history of Palestine, the cradle of the Jewish race, is one long round of invasion and conquest: from the time of Abraham it has served as a military highway for the warring armies of the surrounding countries, making Palestine its battlefield, and leaving behind them a new culture with each conqueror. Historians without number mention the fertility of the country, during times of peace, when the peasantry were able to cultivate their lands. The mountain slopes were abundant with forests, and the terraces of the hills were covered with olive groves, vineyards and gardens. Centuries of neglect and destruction have allowed almost the whole country to fall into a state of ruin. After many vicissitudes the country came under the Power of Turkey, which power had many to contend against [sic]. The Great War brought Palestine into the arena again and in 1916 Gen. Allenby occupied Jerusalem with his victorious British troops, assisted by the Allies, and a few Jewish Battalions. (...) A Civil Administration succeeded the Military Army of Occupation and since that time the country had made remarkable progress under the stimulus of Jewish immigration. The tourist who make a comprehensive tour of Palestine today will find that in the country districts the ancient fertility of the land is being restored by the flourishing agricultural settlements which have been established in the

⁶⁷ I employ the term “produce,” in the way in which it is used by Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2008, 2nd Ed.), 4.

⁶⁸ See, for example, the booklet by Jacob Ettinger, *Emek Jezreel: A Flourishing District, its Decline and Rise* (Jerusalem: Keren Hayesod, 1926).

past three years.⁶⁹

After this historical Introduction – and before presenting various tours, according to their length and their geographical destination (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa) – the *Book of Sightseeing* focused on the agricultural settlements, including a long list of those that merited a visit. In particular, it was the Valley of Jezreel/Esdraelon to receive attention and to be presented in detail:

The greater part of the colonizing activity of the Zionist Organization has been concentrated during the post-war years in the Valley of Jezreel or Plain of Esdraelon, which stretches from Carmel on the West to the Jordan on the East and faces Nazareth in the North and Jenin (Ain Jenim) in the South. Here will be found the outstanding success of Zionist settlements' work. Most of the area now occupied by flourishing villages was covered with swamp (...) when acquired by the Jewish National Fund, which carried out extensive reclamation works (...). The Keren Hayessod has established a series of settlements in the centre and eastern half of the valley, which have progressed in a remarkable manner. No visitor in Palestine can afford to devote less than several days at least to a tour of the Emek [valley] settlements that show the Zionist achievements in Palestine.⁷⁰

As remarked, it should not be considered a surprise that the Jezreel/Esdraelon valley was cited in all travelogues. For example, between September 1936 and March 1937, the Polish-born French journalist Joseph Milbauer⁷¹ published a report of a tour he had previously done on the pages of the *L'Univers Israélite*, the Consistory's weekly. The report, called *La Palestine vous parle* [Palestine Speaks to You] and divided into 7 parts, highlighted different aspects of *Eretz Israel*, from Jerusalem⁷² (with the Hebrew University⁷³ and the Art school Betsalel)⁷⁴ to Tel Aviv⁷⁵ (*Fig. 4*) and Jaffa.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ *Sefer shel tiurim* [Book of Sightseeing], Introduction, 1-2, in CZA, KKL\881.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷¹ Born in Poland, he lived in France for several year, working as journalist. He was editor-in-chief of *L'Univers Israélite* between 1932 and 1943. Being “a committed Zionist,” during his direction, the weekly changed its anti-Zionist stance into a “benevolent neutrality.” He moved to Palestine in 1944 where he was director of the department for French publications of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem. A few lines on him are in Catherine Poujol, “The Daily Life of a Propagandist at the Paris Bureau of the Jewish National Fund (K.K.L.) 1926-1936,” *Bulletin du Centre de Recherche Français à Jérusalem* 8(2001): 173-183. On the relationship between Zionism and French Judaism, see Nelly Las, *Le Mouvement Sioniste en France entre le Deux Guerres*; Id., *Les Juifs de France et le Sionisme. Un bilan: Les années 1927-1930*, in *Les Juifs de France, le Sionisme e l'Etat d'Israel*, eds. Doris Bensimon, Benjamin Pinkus (Paris: Publications Langues'O, 1987), respectively 117-132 and 133-141.

⁷² “Sainte Jérusalem,” *L'Univers Israélite*, 25 September 1936.

⁷³ “L'Université hébraïque de Jérusalem,” *L'Univers Israélite*, 11 September 1936.

⁷⁴ “Un atelier d'art à Jérusalem,” *L'Univers Israélite*, 9 October 1936.

⁷⁵ “Tel Aviv: Un Dahlia Blanc,” *L'Univers Israélite*, 11 December 1936.

⁷⁶ “Jours de deuil et d'orgueil,” *L'Univers Israélite*, 15 January 1937.



Fig. 4: La rue Allenby. Joseph Milbauer, “Tel Aviv: Un Dablia Blanc”

But it was the Jezreel/Esdraelon valley (Fig. 5, 6, 7) to be described as the most important site for any visitor travelling to Palestine:

The Jezreel valley, adorable valley! Your name sounds to any ear as a call. Thanks to you, I would be able to reply to any detractor. Here you are: once there was a frightful desert, painful like sterility. Then people came. They have drained swamps, cleared land, wooded hills, traced furrows, worked, spaded, seeded – and here you are: everything vibrates, lives and sings. And these people are the Jews.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ “L’adorable Vallée,” *L’Univers Israélite*, 5 March 1937.



Fig. 5. *Ain-Harod. Joseph Milbauer, "L'adorable Vallée"*



Fig. 6. *On se rend aux champs. Ibid.*



Fig. 7. *L'Homme et la terre. Ibid.*

Of course, a description of the Jezreel/Esdraelon valley was found in Lewisohn's travelogue as well:

When you cross the highlands of Samaria north of the Arab city of Jenin there spreads before you the famous valley of Jezreel. It extends almost from the Jordan on the east to a point beyond Nazareth on the west and north. (...) Here Sisera was pursued by the men of Barak; here the Midianites and the Amalekites assembled themselves together while on the valley's eastern edge, near the spring of Harod, Gideon and all the people that were with him encamped. The valley

has known the tread of the Egyptian and the Syrian and of the elephants of Antiochus. A knoll is pointed out at which in this old land ended the triumphant march of Napoleon. In the last days, the legend runs, the battle of Armageddon will be fought upon this plain.

During recent centuries this valley, like every other part of Palestine, fell into utter ruin and neglect. But while drought reigned in the hills, poisonous swamps made life impossible here. The springs that abound in the valley overstepped their basins and the old watercourses and turned the land into marshes. The Arabs called the western spring Ain Samune or Poison Well, and believed that anyone who drank of the water was certain to die of malaria. Forty years ago it was attempted to found a German colony here. The colonists died or fled. Pestilence steamed from this piece of earth and the Arabs avoided it in both real and superstitious terror.

Four years ago the Jewish National Fund began the work of drainage. Three years ago the Keren Hayesod began to plant colonies on the drained land. Today the greater part of the Emek Jezreel is in our hands. Jews of the Gdud Avodah, the battalion of labor, entered the steaming swamps; they turned the waters of the springs into natural channels or pipes; they gathered the swamp-water into reservoirs; they discovered that the western wells had been polluted by the sheep of the natives. Today malaria is stamped out. The valley is a place of woods and fields and delightful villages. We stood beside the spring of Harod and saw it gushing from the deep cave in the hillside and leaned over and scooped up the water in our hands and drank. We entered the cool cave and breathed the clean, fresh air, and came out into the sunlight and drew in the warmer air fragrant with the scents of harvest.⁷⁸

In this long passage, two aspects are worth mentioning. On one hand, his description of Palestine as a land that “fell into utter ruin and neglect” was clearly part of a much larger narrative, i.e. the way in which many Americans described the Holy Land at that time. In fact, as Hilton Obenzinger states, “most American Holy Land authors depict[ed] the land in ways similar to the way in which it was described by Mark Twain, who lament[ed] that ‘Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes.’”⁷⁹ On the other hand, Lewisohn was strongly influenced by the Zionist narrative concerning *Eretz Israel* as well. In fact, in his account, 1900 years of Palestine’s history were completely missing: all the centuries following the destruction of the Jewish Temple - starting with the Romans, through the Arabs and up to the Ottomans - where other populations had ruled the country, had disappeared and been summarized in the two words, “ruin and neglect.” In this way, Lewisohn was doing nothing more than presenting the Zionist narrative, according to which there was a direct continuity between the biblical Jewish presence and the Zionist presence, as if nothing had happened in the interim.⁸⁰ At the same time, Lewisohn portrayed the Jewish presence as closely connected to both redeeming the land and

⁷⁸ Lewisohn, *Israel*, 176-177.

⁷⁹ Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), xvi.

⁸⁰ On the way Zionism reconstructed the history of the Jewish people, see, among the many contributors, Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 13-21; Uri Ram, “Zionist Historiography and the Invention of Modern Jewish Nationhood: The Case of Ben Zion Dinur,” *History and Memory* 7/1 (1995): 91-124.

eradicating malaria; that is, bringing civilization and progress to Palestine. This element, of course, also played a huge role in Zionism's narrative concerning its presence and activity in *Eretz Israel*.⁸¹

A Jewish Land: Encounter with the Arabs

Tel Aviv and the agricultural settlements were therefore the two most evident achievements of the Zionist movement. Yet, they made differing impressions on travelers. While Tel Aviv was considered the “first Hebrew city” and its entirely Jewish population was most striking, the newly established agricultural settlements gave an opportunity for travelers to reflect on the encounter between Jews and Arabs.

For example, the Italian Zionist Paola Malvano visited Palestine in 1932 and she wrote of her reaction to the city of Tel Aviv in a report published in *Israel*, the leading Italian Zionist monthly at that time:

The shop signs – how precious to our eyes! – were written in stylized modern Hebrew characters. And in every store the seller was Jewish, of course. Horse-drawn carriage drivers; bus drivers; people selling shoe laces; beggars squatting on the sidewalk; young boys walking side by side with their beautiful girls; those old ladies with shopping bags. They were Jewish. All of them were Jewish. This was extraordinary. And I was one of them. The exceptions were the ‘others’, those who were not wearing European clothes: both the Arabs and the British policemen who were wearing brown uniforms. And for the first time in my life I realized in its full reality that I was Jewish, that I had been born Jewish; neither Catholic, nor Greek, nor Arab, but Jewish.⁸²

In writing this, Paola Malvano did not differ from Lewisohn's reflections on Tel Aviv, and the fact that Jews - and only Jews - had built it:

The Jews have built a city. They have not built it as entrepreneurs, furnishing the capital and hiring labor. They have built a city with their own hands. Every spadeful of earth has been turned up by Jews, every brick has been laid by Jews. The large ugly houses and the small charming houses and the superb Rutenberg Electric Light and Power Station have been planned by the minds and built by the hands of Jews.⁸³

Travelling in the Galilee was obviously different, given that the majority of the population was Arab and that the Jews there made up a tiny minority. This

⁸¹ On this topic, see Sandra M. Sufian, *Healing the Land and the Nation. Malaria and the Zionist Project in Palestine, 1920-1947* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Marcella Simoni, *A Healthy Nation. Zionist Health Policies in British Palestine 1930-1939* (Venezia: Cafoscarina, 2010).

⁸² Paola Malvano, “Impressioni di un viaggio in Erez Israel,” *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 7/9 (1932-33): 423. During an interview I conducted with Paola Malvano in 1998, she told me that the feeling of being in an “entirely Jewish place” was still the most amazing memory she had of that trip. Author's interview with Paola Malvano, Jerusalem, 15 May 1998.

⁸³ Lewisohn, *Israel*, 194.

actually gave the opportunity for the travelers to address the issue of the Arab presence in Palestine.

Among them, it is worth mentioning the French Jew André Spire.⁸⁴ He accompanied Chaim Weizmann on a tour to Palestine in 1920 and in 1929 published a travelogue in the French monthly bulletin *Palestine*. Spire - who was previously in favor of "Territorialism"⁸⁵ and had been close to Israel Zangwill, the leader of this group - had joined Zionism, thus becoming "a Zionist if not because the first territory concretely open to the Jewish people was Palestine; Zionist, if possible, in spite of myself, reluctantly, aware of the contradictions implied by the Balfour Declaration, anxious for the difficult and, apparently, unsolvable Arab [sic] and Christian problems that the reconstruction of a Jewish National Home in Palestine presents."⁸⁶

Spire's first meeting with the Arab population took place in one of the agricultural settlements established by Zionists close to a large Arab city, Lydda [nowadays Lod]. Spire describes the difference between a group of Arabs "beautifully dressed, but whose majority had ill eyes, devoured by flies" and "a group of Jewish Boy-Scouts, both boys and girls (...) with the rucksack on their shoulders, in their net and simple khaki uniform, slender, straight, with bronze-colored skin, a frank look, a noble posture."⁸⁷ The difference between Arabs and Jews is depicted in an even stronger way when Spire refers to "a young Jew," a member of the settlement of Zikhron Ya'akov – one of the first Jewish agricultural settlements created in Palestine at the end of 19th century – who was riding a "bay-brown mare, his quivering legs, inebriated by the cool evening air, of his audacity, of his youth, of his health."⁸⁸ In these two episodes, Spire compares the strength and the health of the Jewish population with the weakness and illness of the Arab one, thus completely supporting the Zionist narrative concerning both the 'regeneration of the Jew'⁸⁹ and the medical

⁸⁴ A. Spire (1868-1966) was a French poet, member of the *Conseil d'État* and an active Zionist. In 1940 he left for the United States, where he taught French Literature at the *École libre des Hautes études* in New York.

⁸⁵ It was a Jewish political movement that advocated for the creation of a sufficiently large Jewish territory (or territories), not necessarily in *Eretz Israel*. A Territorialist Jewish Organization was established in 1905, but it was dissolved in 1925. On this issue, see Gur Alrorey, " 'Zionism without Zion': Territorialist Ideology and the Zionist Movement, 1882–1956," *Jewish Social Studies* 18/1 (2011): 1-32.

⁸⁶ André Spire, "Un voyage en Palestine en 1920," *Palestine* 3/1 (1929): 18.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸⁹ On the creation of a new type of Jew, a "muscular" one compared to the weak Diaspora Jew, see Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Todd S. Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration* (New York: Routledge, 2007), in particular Chapter 5 "The Land of Regeneration." On the importance of the corporeal in Jewish life of *Eretz Israel* during the 1920s and 1930s, see Nina S. Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture. Aesthetics, Athletics, and Dance in the Jewish Community of Mandate Palestine* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), in particular Chapter 2 "Promoting Sport: The

progress Jews were bringing to Palestine. In fact, as said, land reclamation and the simultaneous fight against malaria, as well as many other illnesses, were the main accomplishments of the *Yishuv* and of Zionist propaganda during the British Mandate.

A few lines later, Spire presents another typical comparison between the flourishing and green Jewish cultivated fields and the spoiled and barren Arab (un)cultivated lands. While traveling towards the Galilee, Spire has the chance to gaze out the Jezreel/Esdraelon valley:

European houses, orchards, quantities of vegetables. Everywhere around, well cultivated fields, swivel ploughs, cheerful reaper-binders, yellow and red, rising above the ground their small wings that made them look like reversed tiny wind-mills. And then we go back to the outback, where there are occasionally dark tents hosting nomads, stone-coloured sheep and black goats with silky pendants on their ears, whose teeth have devoured flowers, herbs, even their roots, and rough and thorny bushes; we cross fields that are lazily ploughed by the traditional swing ploughs, pulled by oxen and donkeys decorated with amulets, Arab villages with their graves that are covered with crumbling mud, houses and towns without any tree, any shade if not the one provided by destroyed wells or by hostile fence sticks.⁹⁰

For Spire, Palestine was not a mother, as it was for Alfonso Pacifici, whose profile was never forgotten by her sons. Neither was it a “poor widow,” as one of the Sephardi Jews “who regretted the time when they used to live peacefully under the Turkish tolerance” had told him. Thanks to the Zionist presence, Palestine had now become a “magnificent adolescent, whose hand all parties would soon dispute.”⁹¹

As Spire’s description shows, travelogues presented a dichotomized picture in which superior cultured and productive Jews lived alongside uncultured and unproductive Arabs. In this way, they were certainly recalling Zionist propaganda, such as in the case of the movie *Aviv be’erets yisrael* [Spring in the Land of Israel], which showed “the desolate landscape before the construction of Tel Aviv, [with] pictures of the stony desert landscape.”⁹²

Lewisohn’s accounts fit very well into this category. According to him, no progress had been made by Arabs, who were passive in using their time and primitive in their cultivation of the fields and in building their houses. In this regard Lewisohn was also influenced by the American narrative vis-à-vis the Arabs, particularly that of Protestant travelers. As Stephanie Stidham Roger states, Arabs living in Palestine had become, in their eyes, the “noble savage,”

First Maccabiah Games, 1932.”

⁹⁰ Spire, *Un voyage en Palestine*, 19.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁹² Yoram Bar Gal, *Propaganda and Zionist Education, The Jewish National Fund 1924-1947* (Rochester: The University of Rochester Press, 2003), 158.

and several accounts of travels to the Holy Land highlighted the “primitive” way of life that had “remain[ed] remarkably unchanged” since the time of Jesus.⁹³

In contrast to the Arabs’ idleness there was Jews’ activity, which Lewisohn described both in terms of the advanced systems of land cultivation they used and of the destiny they were able to shape and determine:

A village of Arab *fellabeen*, or peasants. The huts are grayish-white, built of mud and mortar. They are small, irregular cubes, more like tombs than houses. They huddle together or are connected by crumbling walls, so that the village straggles up the hillside in a compact, irregular, inextricable mass. Windows are few. The door-holes are dark and cavernous. Some of the flat roofs are of mud, some thatched with rotting straw. There is no tree. By the walls men sit in the sun cross-legged. A few children play feebly. A woman is grinding corn between two stones. (...) Beyond the village, at the foot of the hill, stretch a few ragged fields. A man is plowing. He has a bullock hitched to a wooden plow. The grinding of the corn, the plowing of the field have not changed in a hundred generations... Still farther on, if the village is lucky, there is a grove of small orange trees. Near the orange-grove is the well used for irrigation and a tired, dispirited camel walks round and round and round turning the handle of the primitive irrigation pump. (...) The village is listless. The squatters in the sun hardly move. People on the road are unaware of time. A man, sitting sidewise on an ass, trots at a snail’s pace. It will take him a long, hot day to ride from Nazareth to Nablus... Another on his ass leads a camel on which are all his household goods: a few sacks, a few earthenware jars, a few bits of brass. His wife trudges behind the camel in the deep sand... Suddenly there is a rattling. A wagon full of grain or fruit drawn by two vigorous mules. A youthful driver with a face full of intelligence and energy. In the back of the wagon two others: bare arms and throats, taut muscles, sun-browned by labor in the open fields despite near-sighted eyes and the foreheads of thinkers. Chalutzim. (...) The road turns and the Arab village disappears. Across well-cultivated fields appear the barracks and houses of a Jewish colony. The houses are roofed with orange tiles, and these orange tiles will soon be as characteristic of the land as the cube-like Arab huts. Trees appear: the inevitable eucalyptus that drain swamps, but also the broad-leaved figtree, the almond and the olive, the peach tree and the palm. (...) Afar comes the inimitable melancholy sound – half cry, half wail – of the mechanical irrigation pump. In the immediate foreground olive trees border the field. A group of pickers is at work: vigorous girls in neat white head-kerchiefs, youths in open blouses. The car stops. Shalom! They smile and give us handful of olives. They are bringing to the land, they are bringing to themselves life and peace...⁹⁴

There is barely a need to highlight the extent to which these lines are soaked with Orientalist stereotypes. Jews are associated with every possible positive aspect: intelligence, culture, innovation, vigor, activism, progress, friendship, future, life.⁹⁵ In contrast, Arabs are linked with the opposite qualities: primitivism, lack of progress, passivism, laxity, past and death: the one that

⁹³ Stidham Roger, *Inventing the Holy Land*, 68.

⁹⁴ Lewisohn, *Israel*, 149-150.

⁹⁵ This passage, which highlights the intelligence and energy associated with vigor and muscles, strictly recalls Max Nordau’s thoughts on that issue as well as the wider Zionist ideal of the ‘muscled Jews.’ See Todd Samuel Presner, “‘Clear Heads, Solid Stomachs, and Hard Muscles’: Max Nordau and the Aesthetics of Jewish Regeneration,” *Modernism/Modernity* 10/2 (2003): 269-296.

emerges from their houses, similar to tombs, and the one that they are responsible for having so far brought to all of Palestine. On this point, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's statement seems particularly accurate: "the 'redemption of the land' (...) was also its redemption from the East, and its reintegration into the West. The transformation of the Jew into the new Jew was also the transformation of the land that attempted to preserve the Arab 'view'."⁹⁶

Conclusions

The travelogues that Zionist travelers published in the 1920s and 1930s ended by being subsumed into a wider Zionist discourse concerning *Eretz Israel*. In a way, the attempt of the *Yishuv* to win the 'hearts and minds' of Jewish tourists by presenting them with the achievements of Zionism was even more successful than expected. The travelers completely supported the Zionist discourse and narrative, enriching it with their personal experience. Once again, it is useful to read what Lewisohn wrote in his book:

My description of the land of Palestine and of the people and of the work there has been tentative and fragmentary. But it has been so quite consciously. For what I have desired to communicate is a vision that I saw, an atmosphere that I felt, a hope that is going forth, a dream that has been dreamed so long and so passionately that it has passed, that it is passing into the world of reality. (...) To not a few of my readers what I shall now say will be a twice-told tale. But to the majority of Americans it will not be so. I am sure that there are thousands of thoughtful people, even of Jews, in America who have but the vaguest notion of those international events and agreements that have transformed the Zionist aspiration into a historic fact and into an inescapable obligation upon the Jewry of the world.⁹⁷

It is beyond the scope of this article to evaluate whether Lewisohn succeeded in reaching thousands of American Jews, or to assess whether the other travelers circulated their travelogues in the Jewish communities they belonged to. Nevertheless, what is sure is that these travelogues were available to the larger public and became part of Zionist literature not only on Palestine, but also on the achievements of the Zionist project in *Eretz Israel*.

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⁹⁶ Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "The Zionist Return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish Perspective," in *Orientalism and the Jews*, eds. Ivan Davidson Kalmar, Derek J. Penslar (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 170.

⁹⁷ Lewisohn, *Israel*, 230-231.

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