

# ARCHEOLOGY, ZIONISM AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN PALESTINE: ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF DIMENSIONS OF PEOPLE IN PHOTOGRAPHS

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## ABSTRACT

The physical dimensions of people in archeological photographs in Palestine from before 1948 and in Western tourist landscape photography have played a role in forms of local documentation. The study discusses how this component affects readings and perceptions of photographs. It addresses Jewish propaganda photographs in which pioneers were intentionally enlarged and centered in photographs. It discusses forms of visual empowerment in relation to constructed dimensions of people as a form of Zionist defiance of British colonialism in Palestine.

**Keywords:** photography, archeology, Zionism, colonialism, Palestine.

## INTRODUCTION

This study explores the use of the physical dimensions of people in photographs in Palestine before 1948, which has affected the way Western viewers perceived the local population. I have chosen to analyze this evolvement, focusing on the subject of dimensions, exploring the contextual and historical circumstances that influenced this phenomenon, starting from archaeological photographs in which people were used as “human scales”. I expand to European tourist landscape photographs in which local people were photographed at a distance. Lastly, I discuss how Zionist photography in Palestine intentionally enlarged images of local pioneers. Zionist photography is presented through the work of Zoltan Kluger (1896-1977), chief photographer of the Jewish National Fund from 1933 to 1958.

The study analyzes the progression of human dimensions and sheds new light on forms of visual manipulations employed in photography in Palestine under British colonialism. It presents sample photographs selected from archives for the analysis.

Archaeological photographs of sites in Palestine from the end of the 19th century were created on behalf of archaeological explorations and expeditions and were at times photographed by professional photographers on expeditions (such as American Colony photographers). Of note are the Palestine Exploration Fund, the American Palestine Exploration Society, and the German Society of Oriental Research. Colonialism and archaeology have worked in tandem in Palestine, serving the imagined realities of colonialism and its power struggles. Viewing the world from a European perspective implied a belief in the superiority of Western culture in Palestine, presenting the Orient and its people as a land

ready for imperialistic claims, based on the premise of superiority of Western colonialism over the region and its inhabitants and notions of Orientalism.

Archeological photography developed an aesthetic of its own, based on a visual language of science and its own visual grammar. The photographic artefacts contributed to the visualization of archaeological knowledge (Guha, 2013). Abu El-Haj claims (2001: 2) that archeology in Palestine, as a science, serves as a domain in which "foundations of a colonial-national-cultural imagination were given shape". It enjoyed the status of a scientific practice "defined by rigor, accountability, methodology, and objective facts" (Riggs, 2016: 27). The camera was perceived as a positivist tool that created accurate, objective depictions of the natural world. Though merely constructs of chemicals and light, photographs constituted scientific evidence, serving as epistemic markers. Scales became compulsory components in archaeological knowledge, integral for historical records, "the most important signifier of an archaeological photograph" (Chadha, 2002: 389).

Not all archaeological photographs employed scales, while some used rod scales (from the 1950s onwards, archaeologists switched to using metal rod scales) (Carter, 2015), although using indigenous people as human scales resulted in diminishing the appearance of people in comparison with the site itself. Technical limitations of large format cameras positioned on tripods for long exposures plus the distance required to capture the entire site, all minimized the physical size and appearance of the people and blended them into the background, making them appear small or blurred. This went beyond the technicality of the photograph. Baird (2011: 432) argues, "Using people for scale objectifies them ... the many images that include workers almost never note that there are people in them". He adds that when workers appear as scales "the captions note only the structures they stand in; it is as if the workers—as people were invisible" (Ibid).

People serving as scales in archaeological photographs unknowingly became subjugated in a discursive argument of power struggles that objectified the people while perpetuating colonial discourse, which was legitimized by archaeological epistemology. Wheeler (1954: 202) explains: "Where the scale is a human being, as is often desirable in large subjects, the individual thus honored must remember that he is a mere accessory, just so many feet of bone and muscle ... . The figure shall not occupy a disproportionately large portion of the picture ... the figure shall not look at the camera but shall ostensibly be employed in as impersonal a manner as possible."

There existed an illusion that archeological photographs presented evidence, yet they lacked "material stability" (Edwards, 2001: 102), although they constituted part of the material culture of the excavation. In general, photographs under colonial rule functioned beyond data, they were about empowerment and repossession (Edwards, 2001: 12). Furthermore, semantically, creating photographs is about seizure; photographers "shoot" photographs and "capture" moments. Sturken and Cartwright (2009: 21) explain that looking at photographs is tied to ideology; all images are created within the dynamic of social power and ideology. This is augmented by the social dynamics of circulation and distribution. As Tagg (1988: 63) explains, photography's "status as a technology varies in the power relations that invest it".

**Fig. 1. Stereograph glass dry plate of ruins of ancient Jericho, south end of mound. American Colony photographer. Courtesy of the Library of Congress and the American Colony Archive, Jerusalem**



In Figure 1, we see a woman standing barefoot in the middle of the site in Jericho, her downward gaze suggests cooperation. Her central positioning makes her stand out in the site. She participates as an instrument of scientific visual data of an archaeological site, yet she does not successfully function as a neutral human yardstick since her body posture and clad hands are discernible as much as her lack of return of a gaze. The materiality of the photograph is indicated by the plaster on the right and the duplicity of the frame. The signs of the glass plate's social life, of being man-handled, scratched, chipped, and archived, show that the photograph is not a reflection of reality but only a representation of reality. What it signifies, in relation to the woman is her subjugation in the background. Her mundane appearance decreases the aesthetic impact of the photograph.

## **TOURIST PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE HOLY LAND**

Archeological photography interfaced with Western tourist photography in style and context. Interest in Palestine and the Holy Land was particularly affected by Britain's imperial ambitions. The volatile and unstable political situation in the Ottoman Empire gave room for photography to influence concepts of ownership. Orientalism presented a patronizing and superior attitude of the Western world towards the people in Palestine, a period in which European imperialism expanded and acted on a global scale. Western Tourist photography was defined by Orientalism, which Behdad and Gartlan (2013: 4) describe as "a network of aesthetic, economic, and political relationships that cross national and historical boundaries".

Palestine attracted the attention of the Western world to its potential economic development at a time in which the Industrial Revolution in Europe created a new class in society, the middle class, with the means and leisure to travel. Palestine served as a magnet for photographers discovering the Holy Land, targeting pilgrims, tourists, missionaries, painters, and amateur photographers, on their Grand Tour (Bar & Cohen-Hattab, 2003; Hannavy, 2008). The photographic colonial gaze stood out in the Holy Land, indigenous

people were often presented in a biblical context, or “seen from a patronizing point of view” (Sela, 2007: 108). The local inhabitants were presented as backward, primitive beings, depicted as ethnic types, idle men in dilapidated surroundings. Kabha (2008: 279) claims that the identity, life, and ambitions of the people living in Palestine were of little interest to the Western visitors. The sparse and underdeveloped landscape was presented as a virgin land, awaiting colonial revival. Thus, landscape photographs situated the West as the benefactor of the East and the Orient, the promoter of modernization, justifying the Western Colonial aspirations (Sela, 2007: 108).

**Fig. 2: Unknown tourist photographer, Mount of Beatitudes: Ruins of Capernaum, ca. 1890-1900. Courtesy of PikiWiki Israel, free image collection project**

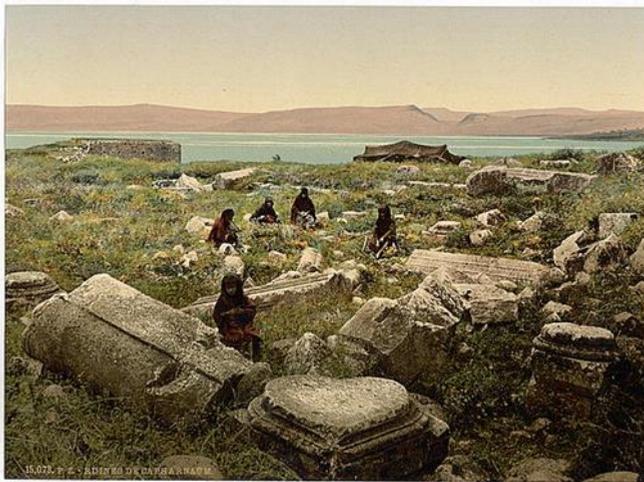


Figure 2 presents a tourist photograph in the archeological ruin of Capernaum. The people appear small, distant, static, and dark, indiscernible as individuals, which highlights the sparseness of the surroundings; they do not obstruct or disrupt the landscape. The archeological ruins in the background serve as an artistic backdrop. The integration of the aesthetics of antiquarianism and the aesthetics of archeology became a developing practice of tourist Orientalist photography. This image is a hybrid of landscape photography and archeology that bridges archeological documentation and tourist photography in Palestine in style and essence, of viewing remnants of a glorious past in decay. Once again, the diminished size of the people subjugates them in the eyes of the viewers. The hand-tinted colors resonate of a painterly style of landscape painting.

The European viewer looking at landscape and archeological photographs with a Colonial gaze feeds into a mechanism of not only as to what photographs show, but also how they influence viewers. Mitchell's phenomenological theorization (1994) asks not what landscape “is” or “means” but rather what it “does” and how it works as social practice. Landscape photographs can serve as instruments and agents of cultural power. “Every image embodies a way of seeing; our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing” (Berger, 1972: 10). Landscape and archeological photographs co-exist as part of a cultural practice, they circulate and become sites of visual appropriation; they are cultural and ideological constructions, which play a tool in regional power controls. Thus, the viewer

finds himself engaged in bridging the gap between the past and the present and the intentionality of the photographer. Berger (1972: 8) explains, “The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe”. He adds that “When we 'see' a landscape, we situate ourselves in it” (Ibid., 11). The sense of identification that occurs when viewing landscape photographs derives from notions of reverence of land, based on mythical origins that go back in time. “In the mythological imagery of most traditional nations, land is construed as the creation of either God or a mythical hero...land is perceived as a goddess who mothers all living creatures” (Kark, 1992: 63).

## IMAGES OF ZIONIST PIONEERS

In contrast to the previous examples, Zionist photography in Palestine, before 1948, intentionally empowered people in their photographs. Zionism saw its goal in defining the land in Palestine as the Jewish homeland. The land, the landscape and its archeological monuments gradually became embedded in the Zionist vision. “Archeology constitutes the most fundamental stratum in the narrative of the people's historical emergence and of the land's development. In this sense, archeology underwrites and validates all segments of the narrative layered above it” (Shavit, 1997: 51). The narrative provided by archeological findings supplied the pioneers with historical roots with the land, which they lacked in the Diaspora. “Archeological findings nurture a sense of continuous Jewish habitation of the land” (ibid: 56). The post-biblical link to the land enabled by archeology strengthened their bond and sense of ownership over the land.

The Zionist pioneers claimed their biblical historical rights over the land, while considering themselves subjects of the British Mandate (1917–1947), struggling for independence. Their visual struggle for independence consisted of constructing images geared at the creation of a new visual mythology and visual terminology, with recurrent themes. “Through recurrent representation, the landscape images and their items – the mountain, the sea, water sources, the land, the tree and the path [...] became objects of identification with the place and part of the discourse of the new national identity” (Oren, 2006: 172). The Zionist pioneers saw their calling to build the land, to redeem it by means of construction, paving roads, building cities, and bringing modernism, positioning Zionism above nature. Constructing these visions entailed photographing pioneers in manual labor, a practice that extended to images of farming on *kibbutzim*. The photographs of *kibbutz* pioneers served the purpose of constructing an image of the *kibbutz* pioneer as a new Jew: a muscular Jew who toiled the land, who came into being under the overarching umbrella of Zionism (Barromi-Perlman, 2015). The visual symbol of the “new Jew” was of an energetic, enlarged pioneer, at the foreground of the image; his body language proud and forceful, controlling the frame.

Zionist propaganda comprehended the mechanisms of mass communication, photojournalism, and the potential of constructing imagined realities and utopias. The Jewish photographers working on behalf of the Zionist institutions arrived in Palestine in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century bearing Western photographic culture. The photographers were mostly refugees, fleeing persecution, who trained in photography in Europe. The hired photographers, working on the behalf of the Jewish National Fund (JNF), established in 1901, like Zlotan Kluger, were passionate about Zionism. Their passion affected their work and style, as explained by Guez (2015: 105). He writes how the spirit of the time affected photographers, that photographers became recruited emotionally and spiritually for the cause of documentation, absorbing the scenery in body and soul (as described by Samuel J. Schweig, a German photographer (1902–1983), working on behalf of the JNF). The

Zionist propaganda department attempted to create a visual iconography to recruit support for their cause from Diaspora Jewry. The iconography incorporated landscape photography in various formats. Oren (2006: 172) explains that landscape photography can reinforce the affinity with the place. Photographs can actually develop a collective affinity as well as a place of belonging (ibid: 176). Landscape photographs can constitute a photographic lexicon of a visual heritage, The Zionist movement understood this mechanism as well as the concept that the land can be appropriated visually by looking at it, or by putting up signs, which functions as a form of cultural appropriation (Haikin, 2006: 199). Long (2009: 65) writes that the land of Palestine "is variously described as 'a godforsaken land', a 'desolate' place populated only by 'barren hills and abandoned rocks ... This ancient landscape is an imaginative one, carved out of biblical references and artistic representations of a green and forested land". The imagined landscape was photographed as a wasteland and Kluger's photographs focus on barren land, covered with weeds and thistles, in which the shrubs bend to the upward march of the pioneers. For the settlers, the land was only an empty surface to be built on, with no natural, cultural, or demographic rights to be visually considered. Bar-Gal (2003) explains that the JNF developed notions of surrounding wasteland, which was the antithesis of the countryside and the forests, fostered and developed by the JNF. The desert, the mountain, the valleys, and anywhere Arabs lived comprised wasteland and hostile territory, because of its challenges of malaria, drought, and swamps and because of the Arab inhabitants. The local inferior Arab population would supposedly benefit from the activities of the Jewish pioneers who brought with them modernism, which was similar to the essence of colonial archaeological photography.

**Fig. 3: Zlotan Kluger. Kibbutz Ma'ale Ha'ha'misha, 1938. Courtesy of the KKL-JNF Photo Archive**



Figure 3 presents a group of pioneers marching briskly, swinging their shovels and picks upright on their backs. The low angle suggests power, the tools allude to weapons; their determination resembles military marches. Faster cameras and high-speed film allowed spontaneity and photography in action. The use of extreme angles and dynamic composition in the context of the working class derives from the style of Soviet photography in which the worker is visually enhanced by the strength of the masses (Barromi-Perlman, 2015). Kluger's organized frames, low angles, high contrast, and images crisscrossing the frame were also influenced by the European style of New Objectivity (Oren & Raz, 2008). The worker in

front reaches the extremity of the frame, from top to bottom, as if protruding from the limits of the frame, which creates an analogy to the goals of the pioneers. The men extend from right to left, completely occupying the space of the composition.

**Fig. 4, 5, 6: Zoltan Kluger, 1934–40. Courtesy of the Government Press Office and the KKL-JNF Photo Archive**



The smiling pioneer's brisk walk in Figure 4 complements the scythe held up high, as well as his large size and physical prowess. The muscular activity of the worker in Figure 5 is emphasized by the diagonal lines of the machinery; his thrusting arms dominate the frame. Figure 6 shows a woman on a tractor on a kibbutz (images of gender equality, deriving from their socialist lifestyle and ideology were prevalent). Figure 6 was taken from a low angle, empowering the woman. The frame is filled with the machine she is employing, creating a dynamic between her actions and symbols of modernity and technology. Kluger positioned the workers in all three photographs in the center of the frame. The trampled landscape becomes immersed with physical and technological intervention; it no longer exists in its own right, but rather as a platform for Zionism.

## DISCUSSION

The study argues that the manipulation of dimensions of the people in photographs was a common denominator in documentation in Palestine, under British colonialism in various visual arenas. Western archeological photography existed in an interface with European tourist photography. Both considered themselves as agents of progress, which in reality threatened the existence of the Orient by plundering and colonialism, and both diminished and distanced people in images. In contrast, Zionist photography was nurtured on notions of belonging to the land, of bringing progress to the land, while being subjected to British colonialism. Zionism, being both indigenous and foreign at the same time, relied on Western culture yet defied it, finding itself in an interplay of struggles and political discourses, developed an original visual response of self-enlargement and self-empowerment.

Not all photographs of diminished or enlarged people were created in response to colonialism. Behdad and Gartlan (2013: 4) explain, "Photographic representations of the Middle East do not entail a binary visual structure between the Europeans as active agents and 'Orientals' as passive objects of representation. And just as Western photographic

representations of the Middle East are not all expressions of colonial power, indigenous practices of photography do not necessarily constitute a locus of resistance to Orientalism". Yet, photographic representations of Palestine have contributed to changes of cultural and national perception in the history of the region, commencing from archeological photography.

I argue that a strong component in this process was the intentional alteration of the dimensions of people. The accumulated effort of photographing the region and modifying the dimension of people, practiced initially in archeological photography which extended to tourism and Zionist photography, succeeded in creating a plethora of complex readings of photographs of the landscape and its various inhabitants. The complex readings have gained a life of their own; they remain historically and socially active. The interplay has not subsided, rendering the photographs into carriers of a multiplicity of discourses. Photographs are consistently playing a role in regional power struggles through methods of visual appropriation by means of selective forms of presentation of the people.

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