



The War Photography of Khalil Raad: Ottoman Modernity and the Biblical Gaze

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An examination of the war photography of Khalil Raad is significant for two reasons. First, it sheds new light on a little known aspect of his work, and challenges his assessment as a predominantly portrait and landscape photographer; and second, it modifies a dominant perception of Raad as a biblical and a nativist photographer who has adopted and internalized the “Orientalist” image of the Holy Land. Moors, for example, suggests that “Raad’s presentation of Palestinian Arabs often used biblical connotations that conscribed their lives as static.”¹ In his images of military personnel and scenes of warfare, which I will discuss here, he is clinical, “realistic,” and very much engaged in the Ottoman political agenda in Syria and Palestine. Yet in the otherwise comprehensive compendium of Raad’s work, published recently by Rona Sela, not a single image of his war

Boat in transit to the Dead Sea. *Source: Library of Congress.*



K. Raad, "Traitor hanging at Damascus Gate, Jerusalem 1915. Source: Raad/Saunders Collection, St Antony's College, Oxford.

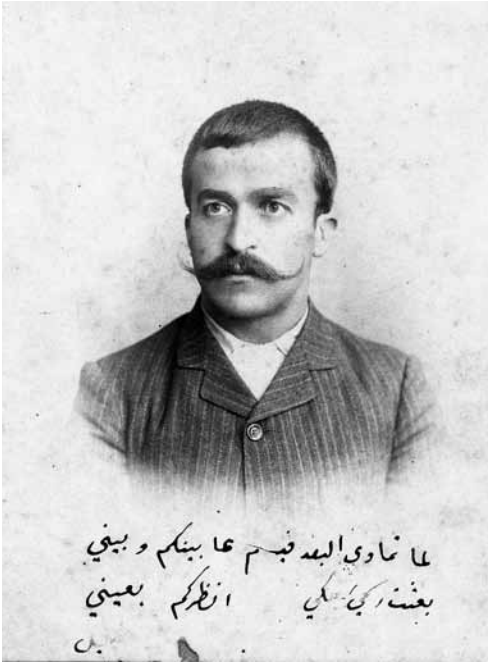
photography is included.² In two other photographic compendiums using Raad's work, those by Walid Khalidi (*Before their Diaspora*) and Elias Sanbar (*Les Palestiniens: la photographie d'une terre et de son peuple*), there are a few references to public protest images, as well as portraits of Turkish military commanders such as Enver Pasha and Jamal Pasha – but these photographs are marginalized by the focus on Raad as a landscape photographer and studio artist.³

Raad's Career as a Propagandist

On the evening of Monday March 29, 1915, Khalil Raad was summoned by Nihad Bey, deputy commander of the Jerusalem garrison, to the headquarters of the *Manzil* – the Commissariat of the Fourth Imperial Army in the sequestered Notre Dame building near the New Gate. Amiralai Ali Roshen Beyk, the head of the *Manzil*, had at the behest of Jamal Pasha organized a publicity "cinematographic" record of Ottoman army preparations in Palestine, and particularly in the Jerusalem areas of Nabi Samuel, and Baq'a.⁴ The event on March 31, 1915 was the public launching of the motorized boats of the Ottoman Navy in the Dead Sea, with the mission of providing grain supplies from Transjordan to the Beersheba-Sinai battlefields on the Sinai Front.

For that particular event Raad was chosen to provide the still photography – while Lars Larsson, of the American Colony team, was charged with shooting cinematic footage. Raad took a historical photograph of the commander and staff of the Notre Dame Commissariat as they were loading the boat onto the wooden carriage that was to transport the vehicle to Jericho and the Dead Sea. That event launched Raad himself on a long journey of collaboration with Jamal Pasha and the Ottoman army, one that took him to Beersheba, Gaza, al-Arish, Hafir, and the length and breadth of the Sinai Front.

Raad's involvement with public photography, as distinct from his work in studio portraiture and staged "biblical" scenes, began at a juncture in his professional career when his niece Najla married John, the son of his mentor and later fierce competitor on Jaffa Road, photographer Garabed Krikorian, in 1913. The marriage sealed a partnership, which ended a long-standing and fierce rivalry between Raad and Krikorian, his former benefactor and teacher. The deal involved a division of labor whereby the Krikorian Studio would specialize in portraiture, while Khalil would devote himself to public events, and street life.⁵ One of his earliest works in this period was a number of shots he took of public hangings by the Fourth Army of soldiers accused of collaboration, presumably with the British. These were taken at Damascus Gate in mid-1915 and preceded the famous public executions of Arab nationalist



Sakakini by Raad 1906. Source: S. Tamari.

figures in Beirut and Damascus. But Raad continued to work with studio portraits during the war. He had already established himself as a master in the field while working with Krikorian. One can catch a glimpse of the exceptional qualities of his portraiture in the iconic photo of Khalil Sakakini (Raad, 1906) which the writer had commissioned the photographer to produce as a memento for his fiancée, Sultaneh Abdo, before his fateful trip to America. Sakakini's portrait, with his reflective gaze and natural ease, became a famous reference point for the freethinking group that constituted the literary Party of Vagabonds after the war.

During the war it became customary for local middle class conscripts to have their portraits taken dressed in army uniforms and bearing their guns, swords and other military paraphernalia provided by the studio against an idyllic natural (mostly European) background. For some reason, many of these backdrops were country roads lined with trees, or cutting through woodlands. The figures assumed standard heroic postures in portraits meant as souvenirs for family, fiancées, and friends before the subjects were shipped to the front or other military locations. These portraits were standardized issues, and Raad's were basically similar to those taken by Krikorian, Savides, Sawabinji, and other native studio photographers, many of them Armenians. During the war, however, and possibly because of his direct involvement with the military, Raad began to capture soldiers in more engaged and animated postures that departed from the conventional soldier's portrait. We see this new look in the portrait of the two Khalidi brothers, young Jerusalem



Canaan by Krikorian 1915. Source: Krikorian.



Emile Tamari by Savides 1915. *Source: Savides.*



Khalidi brothers by Raad 1915. *Source: Khalidi family collection.*

doctors who were conscripted in early 1915, immediately after their graduation from medical college in Beirut. Hasan-Shukri and Hussein-Fakhri al Khalidi were pictured facing each other and looking beyond the camera, with a certain apprehension about their immediate future. Hasan was soon transferred to Janaq Qal'a (Galipoli) where he was severely wounded. Hussein managed to stay close to the home front and went on to become the Mayor of Jerusalem.

At the beginning of the war Raad was able to gain special access to Ottoman official circles and to military installations – access that was probably enhanced by his father's personal friendship with Jamal Pasha.⁶ According to Bader al-Hajj, Jamal commissioned Raad to take a series of publicity photos of Ottoman army installations and activities. These were “clearly...intended for use as propaganda by the Ottoman forces.”⁷

Ruth Raad, Khalil's daughter, remembers that Ahmad Jamal granted full access to Raad to visit the Egypt-Palestine front in order to perform this task.⁸ Except for the collection preserved in the St Antony's archives in Oxford, reference to this collection in the literature has all but disappeared. It is most likely that Raad suppressed these photographs as they could have compromised him with the British military government, possibly exposing him to charges of collaboration with the enemy. They certainly do not appear in his 1933 catalogue inventory. The British had already punished a number of Palestinian public figures, including, Abdul Qadir al Musaghar and Sheikh As'ad Shuqairi, the Mufti of the Fourth Army, for their work with Jamal Pasha's administration.



General Kriss von Krissstein. Khalil Raad. *Source: Library of Congress.*



Miralai Ali Fuad Pasha, the last defender of Jerusalem; K. Raad. *Source: Khalil Raad.*

Portraits, Installations and Action Photographs

Raad's war photography can be grouped in five categories:

1. Portraits of Ottoman (and German) commanders taken between 1915 and 1918, along with a huge number of standardized pictures of army conscripts and officers for the same period.
2. Military installations and battle preparation and combat scenes from the Ottoman front (1915-1918). Many of these were commissioned propaganda stills taken at the behest of Ahmad Jamal Pasha.
3. Entry of the British army into Palestine and the occupation of the southern sector in December 1917.
4. Scenes of the 1928-29 demonstrations, and the 1936-39 rebellion – mostly depicting curfews, army check-posts, searches of the civilian population, and street scenes of urban strikes. No pictures of rebels are available from Raad (except for his presumed portrait of Qassam below).
5. British military presence in the 1940s.

Raad's commissioned work for the Ottoman forces includes a variety of subjects: official portraits of military commanders (Ali Fuad Pasha, Enver Pasha, Ahmad Fuad, General Falkenhayn, Ali Roshen Bey); army installations (anti-aircraft guns, signaling units, trenches, engineering workshops, army hospitals, and field kitchens); army maneuvers in Jerusalem, Beershiva and Sinai; telegraph and railroad lines; and political events such as celebrations of



Generals Kress von Kressenstein, Falkenhayn, and Prince Hohenlocke. *Source: Khalil Raad.*

the Sultan's birthday at the *Manzil*, review of troops before going to battle, visits by parliamentary delegates from Istanbul to the front, Jerusalem notables entertaining German officers, and other occasions.⁹

Many of the photographs in the Ottoman collection can be found in other historical archives (e.g.s. Matson and Yildiz collections)¹⁰, especially those that involved visiting dignitaries. However few of the photos were of sensitive military character, taken in out-of-bounds zones or at the battle front. The fact that they were printed as postcards, thus ensuring wider circulation, must have been intended to impress a wider European public (and possibly enemy intelligence) or to raise public morale at the home front. Of significance here are pictures of anti-aircraft guns, taken at a time when enemy aircraft were threatening advanced Ottoman positions in Suez and Beersheba.¹¹ Another picture (5/1/10 Saunders Collection) shows soldiers of the signaling units on Nebi Samuel. Almost all those pictures are either posed, or show soldiers in regular training exercises. They are obviously intended to signify discipline, preparedness, and command of the latest in military technology (telegraph lines, field telephones, high powered anti-aircraft guns, and so on). One of the most interesting stills of military installations shows underground technicians putting out the newspaper *Juul*, the organ of the Ottoman army in Beersheba.¹² [See photographs at the end of this essay.]

The portraits of Ahmad Jamal Pasha, the military ruler of Syria and Palestine, Mersinli Jamal Pasha (commander of the 5th Army Corps in Palestine), and Friedrich Kress von Kressenstein (1870-1948), commander of the 8th Army Corps in Defense



Ottoman 'Volunteer Labour Brigades' building military roads in Beersheba; Khalid Raad IPS Catalogue no. R-516. *Source: IPS Raad Collection.*

of Gaza, and Miralai Ali Fuad Pasha, Commander of the 20th Army Corps and the last defender of Jerusalem – and many others, show a degree of intimacy and familiarity with the subjects that contrasts with other formal portraits of officials taken by Raad.¹³ This is particularly noticeable in the series taken of Mersinli Jamal Pasha on horseback at the St George compound, and those with his assistant and two children playfully engaged with the photographer. A close-up portrait of Ahmad Jamal, then Minister of the Navy and the fearful dictator of Syria and Palestine, as well as a second portrait of the same Jamal Pasha taking afternoon tea with the children and ladies of the American Colony (attributed to Raad) suggest that our photographer was consciously involved in providing a “human face” to the Ottoman leadership, which was finding itself increasingly alienated from the civilian population.

Jamal Pasha, very conscious of his image and the need to publicize his military achievements in Palestine, commissioned Raad to do a series of forty propaganda images of army maneuvers, battle preparations and combat scenes. Those began with the cinematographic project of the Ottoman forces in Jericho and the Dead Sea, referred to earlier, and continued in Gaza, Beersheba, Sinai and the Suez Front.

Raad also accompanied and took a number of stills of the military leadership while on missions – the most famous of which is General Kress von Kressenstein in an open vehicle with General Falkenhayn and Prince Hohenlocke, taken on Jaffa Road on the eve of the Suez Campaign.

However it would be a mistake to assume that Raad’s work on the Ottoman army



Izz al Din al Qassam by Khalil Raad? Source: *Unknown*.

was all for publicity purposes, or of propagandistic value alone. At least on two occasions Raad's work reflected astutely on the cruelties of war, and could have been used as damning evidence of Jamal's cruel behavior towards the civilian population. The first image, "Traitor Hanging in Damascus Gate" (R-55) shows the gruesome figure of a hanged man, with a large billboard in Turkish and Arabic announcing his presumed crime ("collaboration with the enemy"). A second image, of the Ottoman Volunteer Labor Brigades (*tawabeer al 'amaleh*) shows a number of old, helpless men doing the back breaking work of carrying rocks by hand to build the southern military road

to Beersheba (R-516)¹⁴. Both the hanging and the forced labor were major issues of contention among the civilian population, as were the forced relocation of civilians and exile of "suspect" groups. That Raad chose to take these pictures, and later display them, would soften and perhaps qualify his role as an instrument of propaganda for the authorities.

Raad's Public Photography During the Mandate

In contrast to the Ottoman period, Raad's work during the Mandate was more reflective of public sensitivities to the presence of an occupation army. Except for the initial phase of the British military government period (1918-1920) which showed the triumphal entry of General Allenby and allied soldiers to Jerusalem, the 'twenties and 'thirties yielded numerous photographs of curfews, police action against demonstrations, frisking of civilians by Indian and British soldiers, and the presence of military vehicles and armed soldiers in the streets.

There is a noticeable absence of rebels and rebellious activities in Raad's work, even though Badr al Hajj claims that the portraitist took the only known photograph of resistance leader Izz Eddin al Qassam. But this is unlikely and there is no evidence that this photograph is taken by him. Raad pictures during the late 'twenties and 'thirties of urban clashes with the police and rural resistance show neither romanticism, nor images of heroism such as we have seen of Ottoman troops, nor do these Mandate photos display the intimacy of portraits that he took during the Great War of Jamal, Ali Fuad, Mersinli, Roshen Beyk and General von Kressenstein.

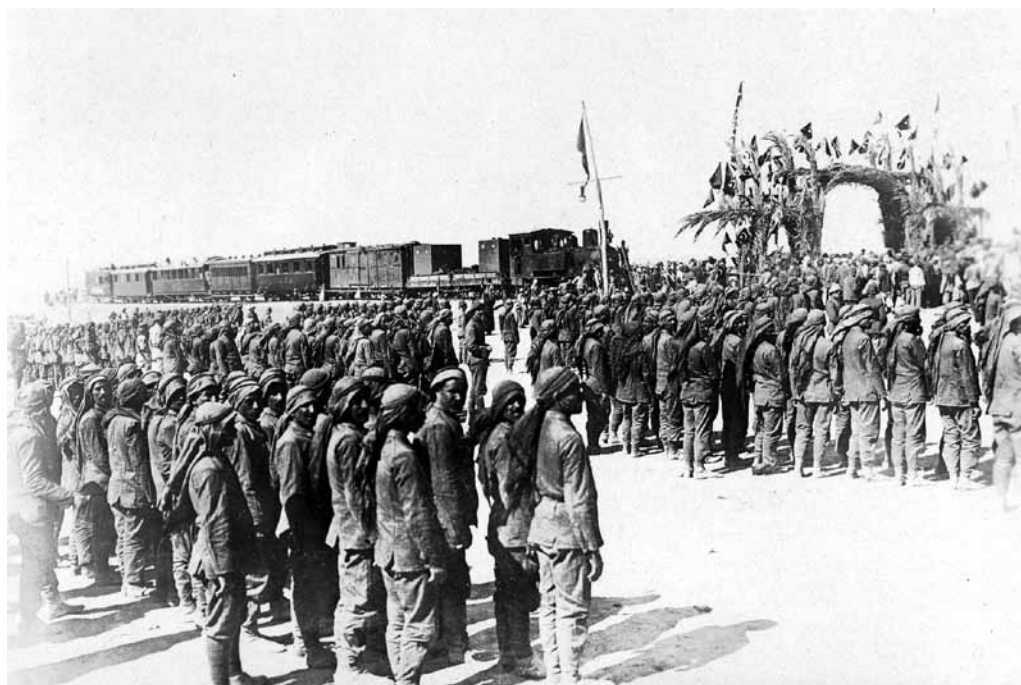
Khalil Raad continued his monitoring of public events during the Mandate. His

main “war related” photos include: the entry of General Allenby into Jerusalem from Jaffa Road; police action against the November 1929 anti-Balfour demonstrations; British army installations outside Jerusalem; Indian and British soldiers on guard duty in public spaces; riot police controlling demonstrations (no dates provided); curfews and strikes during the 1936 rebellion in Jaffa and Jerusalem; and British mechanized divisions moving into urban areas (R-1289, 1291, 1296, 1290). There are numerous photos showing Indian and British troops and police accosting and frisking civilians in the street (R-1318-1337). They include Arabs and Jews, and several Muslim and Christian religious figures. These are the only images where women also appear in the photos, as bystanders, onlookers, and companions of the searched males. Otherwise Raad’s war photography is an exclusively male domain.

One feature that separates Ottoman military figures – Turks, Albanians and Arabs – from the British in Raad’s work is the degree of intimacy and familiarity with which he engaged the former, and the distance he maintained towards the latter. This is no doubt due to the fact that he worked closely with the Ottoman military commanders in Jerusalem even during times of hardship and disintegration of the war front. With the British one gets the impression that he was documenting an army of occupation dealing with population control and the suppression of rebellion. Whether this distinction betrays differing political views held by the photographer towards Turkish and British rule is hard to establish. What we can say however is that Khalil Raad, as a photographic artist and craftsman, remained a product of the Ottoman era. His frame of mind was shaped by the communitarian structure of Jerusalem. His intellectual development was clearly influenced by the city and the country as a product of the biblical imagination – which impacted him as a commercial photographer for tourists and pilgrims. His portraiture was shaped by his training under Ottoman-Armenian traditions of photography (Krikorian, and the Abdallah Brothers). But the Great War created a rupture with these traditions, and compelled Raad to think of Palestinian modernity in new terms, dictated by military machines, airplanes, railroads, telegraphic signals, and the thousands of men who operated this technology. In the crucial years of the war he provided us with a record of these events that is free of the Orientalist gaze, and biblical reconstructions.

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Khalil Raad's Commissioned Photographs from WWI Front (selections)



The Arab Battallion attached to the Fourth Ottoman Army in the Inauguration of the Beersheba Station of the Hijazi Railroad (1915). *Source: Raad/Saunders Collection, St Antony's College, Oxford.*



Prince Fuad and Ahmad Jamal Pasha visiting al Haram al Sharif. *Source: Raad/Saunders Collection, St Antony's College, Oxford.*



Feeding the Fourth Army, Beersheba. Source: Raad/Saunders Collection, St Antony's College, Oxford.



Production of "Juul" (Desert) Newspaper, Underground location, Beersheba, 1915. Source: Raad/Saunders Collection, St Antony's College, Oxford.



Boot workshop for the Ottoman Soldiers, Jerusalem 1915. Source: Raad/Saunders Collection, St Antony's College, Oxford.



Anti-Aircraft Unit, Beersheba, 1915. Source: Raad/Saunders Collection, St Antony's College, Oxford.

Endnotes

- 1 Quoted in Tim Jon Semmerling, *Israeli and Palestinian Postcards: Presentations of National Self* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 6. See also Annalies Moors and Steven Machlin, "Postcards of Palestine: Interpreting Images," *Critique of Anthropology* (7) 2: 61-77. This latter work displays one certified photograph by Raad (Bethlehem Girls, p. 64), but it is misattributed to Bonfils. I believe the two authors also overinterpret "the assumed sensuality" of the female figures, and the presentation of Bethlehem women by the photographer as "models of virtue." There is no question that Raad had internalized biblical and Orientalist motifs in his work, but not consistently. The fact that the picture was (mis) judged to be the work of Bonfils may have helped in finding Orientalizing features in it. Raad may have simply found Bethlehem girls more accessible through his personal and family connections. The picture in question is very playful and engaged with the eye of the camera, and hardly exhibits any exotic features.
- 2 Rona Sela, *Ḥalil Ra'ad, tatsumim 1891-1948* (Tel Aviv: Muze'on Naḥum Guṭman, 2010). Sela includes the very useful 1933 catalogue of Raad's work in her book. It is quite revealing that under "Turkish War Pictures," with the possible exception of two or three images, the catalogue excludes the forty images Raad produced as publicity for the Ottoman army. Only nine pictures are listed in the catalogue for that period. It is also striking that Raad uses the term British Occupation for the Mandate period – a term he does not use for the period of Ottoman rule. (cf. Sela, pp. 244-245).
- 3 Walid Khalidi, *Before their Diaspora: a Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876-1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1984); and Élias Sanbar, *Les Palestiniens: la photographie d'une terre et de son peuple de 1839 à nos jours* (Paris: Hazan, 2004).
- 4 This event is reconstructed from the diary of Ihsan Hasan al Turjman, who was an eyewitness to the "cinematographic" record. See Salim Tamari, 'Ām al-jarād: al-Ḥarb al-'Uzmā wa-maḥw al-māḍī al-'Uthmānī min Filasṭīn (Bayrūt: Mu'assasat al-Dirāsāt al-Filasṭīniyah, 2008). The diary entry is for March 31st, 1915.
- 5 Badr al Hajj, "Khalil Raad, Jerusalem Photographer," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 11:37-38.
- 6 Hajj, 38.
- 7 Hajj, 38-39.
- 8 Cited by Hajj, 35
- 9 Khalil Raad in the Alan Saunders Photo Gallery: Palestine First World War, at the Middle East Centre Archives, St Antony's College, University of Oxford. <http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/mec/mecaphotos-saunders.html>, last accessed November 12, 2012.
- 10 For the Yeldiz collection see Kerim Balci, *Al-Quds, Jerusalem in Historical Photographs* (Istanbul: IRCICA., 2009.) For the Matson Collection at the Library of Congress see <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2005676184/> last accessed November 5, 2012. Raad's name does not appear at all in the former collection, and he is identified as the photographer, along with Krikorian, of only three items in the Matson Collection at the Library of Congress.
- 11 Alan Saunders collection. Item number 5/1/10, Raad album, Middle East Centre Archives, St Antony's College, University of Oxford.
- 12 Alan Saunders collection. Item number 5/1/7. Raad album, Middle East Centre Archive, St Antony's College, University of Oxford.
- 13 The reference to this photograph and Raad as its maker can be found in the "Axis Forum", <http://forum.axishistory.com/viewtopic.php?f=80&t=129705&start=30>, last accessed November 5, 2012.
- 14 Reference here and elsewhere is to the Raad Catalogue number in the IPS Raad Photographic Collection in Beirut.