

Episode 9: Palestinian Life during the Ottoman Time and the British Mandate

Guest: Prof. Awad Halabi, Associate Professor of History and Religion at Wright State University

Hosts: Yusuf, Efe, Mert

Bio: Awad Halabi is Associate Professor at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, where he established a minor in Middle East and Islamic Studies. His research focuses on Palestine under Ottoman and British rule, exploring identity, memory, resistance, and religious festivals. His acclaimed book *Palestinian Rituals of Identity: The Prophet Moses Festival in Jerusalem, 1850–1948* examines how Palestinians forged collective identity through rituals, symbols, and shared space. His work has been recognized with the Malcolm Kerr Dissertation Award from the Middle East Studies Association and Wright State's International Education Award for advancing global awareness.

In this episode: This episode explores Palestinian life, identity, and politics before 1948. Professor Awad Halabi paints a vivid picture of everyday life under the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate, examining social hierarchies, class structures, gender roles, and the impact of empire. He traces the history of the Nabi Musa Festival, a pilgrimage dedicated to Moses that became a powerful site of identity formation, religious practice, and interreligious coexistence. The conversation highlights the emergence of Palestinian identity, reactions to the rise of Zionism - including the famous 1899 letter from Jerusalem's mayor Yusuf Diya al-Khalidi to Theodor Herzl - and the profound changes brought by British rule after World War I. Professor Halabi also reflects on missed opportunities for coexistence, the promises and failures of colonial powers, and the legacies of this formative period for Palestinian history. This episode offers listeners a nuanced introduction to the social, cultural, and political dynamics that shaped Palestinian identity before 1948.

Links:

Prof. Dr. Awad Halabi: <https://people.wright.edu/awad.halabi> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Halabi, Awad. *Palestinian Rituals of Identity: The Prophet Moses Festival in Jerusalem, 1850–1948*. University of Texas Press, 2023. <https://utpress.utexas.edu/blog/2022/12/01/halabi-on-ritual-colonialism-palestinian-identity/> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Norris, Jacob. "The Rise and Fall of Nabi Musa." *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 95, Autumn 2023, pp. 129–133. <https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/jq-articles/The%20Rise%20and%20Fall%20of%20Nabi%20Musa.pdf> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

1920 Nabi Musa Riots: Unfortunately we did not have enough time to cover the 1920 riots at the Nabi Musa Festival. Please check out Prof. Halabi's book and the resources below. The 1920 Nabi Musa riots, also known as the Jerusalem riots, occurred from April 4 to 7, 1920, during the Muslim festival of Nabi Musa. They started the second day of Passover, the highest Jewish festival. They were characterized by violent attacks against the Jewish population in Jerusalem, resulting in casualties and significant property damage. 5 Jews and 4 Muslims were killed and some 200 people injured. The British authorities' response was criticized for being insufficient, leading to increased tensions between Jews and Arabs in the region. In June of the same year the Haganah, the Jewish defense organization in Mandatory Palestine was founded by the Labor Zionist party Ahdut HaAvodah. It became the direct organizational precursor to the IDF. The massacres of 1929 and the Great Arab Revolt of 1936–1939 represent further violent chapters in the conflict, preceding the 1948 violence, which is remembered as the War of Independence by Israelis and as the Nakba by Palestinians. The renowned Israeli historian Tom Segev calls the 1920 riots „the opening shot for the struggle over the land of Israel.”

Segev, Tom. *Once Upon a Time in Palestine: Jews and Arabs before the Establishment of the State of Israel*. 4th ed., Pantheon, 2006, pp. 142–161. Chapter “Nabi Musa 1920.” Here: p. 142.

Cohen, Hillel. *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: 1929*. 1st ed., Brandeis University Press, 2015.

Letter from Yusuf Diya al-Khalidi to Theodor Hertzl - March 1, 1899, only two years after the first Zionist Congress 1897. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Letter_from_Yusuf_Diya_al-Khalidi_to_Theodore_Hertzl.jpg (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Answer from Theodor Herzl to Yusuf Diya-uddin al-Khalidi - March 19, 1899 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Letter_from_Theodore_Herzl_to_Yusuf_Diya-uddin_al-Khalidi_-_19_MARCH_1899.jpg (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Please also check our other episodes to explore multiple perspectives:

On Palestinian Identity and Life under the Ottoman Empire and during the British Mandate: Simon Fuchs, Victor Kattan, Muriel Asseburg, Gudrun Krämer

On the Settler Colonial Paradigm: Simon Fuchs, Victor Kattan, Michael Brenner, Derek Penslar, Gudrun Krämer, Omri Boehm

On the Mandate Period: Victor Kattan, Oren Kessler, Derek Penslar, Michael Brenner, Gudrun Krämer

On Balfour: Simon Fuchs, Michael Brenner, Victor Kattan, Muriel Asseburg, Gudrun Krämer

On the Great Arab Revolt: Victor Kattan, Oren Kessler, Gudrun Krämer

On the Hussein-McMahon Korrespondence: Simon Fuchs, Victor Kattan, Gudrun Krämer

On the coexistence of Jews and Arabs in North Africa and the Middle East: Norman Stillman

Dedication:

We dedicate this Podcast to all victims and survivors of October 7, the hostages and their families, to all innocent civilians killed and injured in Gaza and their grieving families and friends. To our dear guests Udi Goren, Khalil Sayegh, Sima and Mai who shared their losses so powerfully with us. To their families: Tal's wife Ella Haimi, their children Nir, Einav, Udi and Lotan, who never got the chance to meet his father. To Khalil Sayegh's mother and siblings, to Mai's and Sima's family, to her mother Bushra.

To the blessed memory of: Tal Haimi, Lara Sayegh, Jeris Sayegh, Mahmoud, Danny Darlington and Haim Perry.

Disclaimer:

In each episode of this podcast, the invited guests speak on their own behalf. They share their experiences, assessments, and expert perspectives. These contributions are central to the multiperspectivity of the project but do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial team or producers.

Legal & Historical Anchor Episodes:

This podcast may include controversial legal terms of specific technical significance. Their legal applicability requires a thorough expert contextualization; for this, we refer to our legal chapter. All relevant terms of international law, its institutions, current controversies, and the state of jurisprudence are explained in the anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Claus Kreß LL.M. (Cambridge) (Episode 36). He is co-author of the Rome Statute, Special Advisor to the International Criminal Court, and Judge at the International Court of Justice in the parallel Gambia vs. Myanmar genocide case.

Historical matters are discussed from multiple perspectives in this podcast. Please check the cross-references in the shownotes of the respective episodes for details. All historically contested issues are addressed in the history anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Gudrun Krämer (Episode 21), author of the comprehensive work *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the*

Founding of the State of Israel (Princeton 2008), a standard reference in the field. For her scholarly achievements as a historian, she was awarded the *Preis des Historischen Kollegs* in 2025, the highest distinction in her discipline in Germany.