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Unsilencing Palestine 1922–1923: hundred years after the beginning of the British Mandate – the Frank Scholten photographic collection revisited

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ABSTRACT

This piece presents an interview conducted by Karène Sanchez Summerer and Sary Zananiri with Salim Tamari and Yair Wallach about the Frank Scholten photographic collection (now available with Creative Commons access), discussing the archive's significance and use for researchers of the history of Mandate Palestine. During the turbulence of the period after the First World War, Dutch photographer Frank Scholten (1881-1942) travelled to Palestine with the aim of producing an 'illustrated Bible'. He arrived in Palestine in 1921, where he stayed for two years. While the bulk of his photo collection consists of images of Palestine, his camera lens gives a snapshot into modernity in the Eastern Mediterranean more broadly. The entire Frank Scholten collection, consisting of 12,000 negatives and 14,000 prints, represents a work in progress towards a 16-volume set of books on the 'Holy Land', only two volumes of which were ever published. One of the hallmarks of Scholten's collected work is the thoroughness with which he imaged Palestine. His images of people cut across religious and confessional lines, ethnic backgrounds, and class and urban-rural divides. He imaged people at work as well as in their leisure time, but most of all, he imaged people in the context of their daily life, rather than divorced from the landscape.

KEYWORDS
Palestine; historical photography; Frank Scholten; photo archives; social history; queer Middle East history; British Mandate; Palestine

This piece presents an interview conducted by Karène Sanchez Summerer and Sary Zananiri with Salim Tamari (ST) and Yair Wallach (YW) in June 2023 at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Sanchez Summerer and Zananiri introduce the Frank Scholten photographic collection (now available with Creative Commons access via https://www.nino-leiden.nl/collections/frank-scholten-legacy) and then discuss the archive's significance and use for researchers of the history of Mandate Palestine with Professor Salim Tamari (Birzeit University) and Dr Yair Wallach (SOAS).

Introducing Frank Scholten in context: photographing the 'Holy Land'

During the turbulence of the period after the First World War, Dutch photographer Frank Scholten (1881–1942) travelled to Palestine with the aim of producing an 'illustrated Bible'. He travelled first through Italy and Greece in 1920, arriving in Palestine, where he would stay for two years, in 1921.

While the bulk of his photo collection consists of images of Palestine, his camera lens gives a snapshot into modernity in the Eastern Mediterranean more broadly. The entire Frank Scholten collection, consisting of 12,000 negatives and 14,000 prints, represents a work in progress towards a 16-volume set of books on the 'Holy Land', only two volumes of which were ever published (Scholten 1929, 1930, 1931, 1935).

Scholten died in 1942 and bequeathed his photographic archive and documentation to NINO (The Netherlands Institute for the Near East). The photographic collection was then transferred from NINO to Leiden University Library (Special Collections) in 2007. Although it is one of the most numerous visual collections depicting Palestine, it has been only occasionally accessed by researchers until 2017, when the NWO research group Crossroads took the initiative in researching it (Zananiri 2021), and organised 7 photographic exhibitions (among them, at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, summer 2020; *Frank Scholten: Archaeology and Tourism in the 'Holy Land',* Rijksmuseum Oudheden (National Museum of Antiquities), Leiden, The Netherlands, June–October 2020; *Eastern Orthodoxy, Nationalism and the 'Holy Land',* INALCO (School of Oriental Studies), Paris, June–July 2022 and Groningen University Library).

The collection has been very recently digitalised and is accessible online, though its proper cataloguing (and thus, optimised search within this immense digital photographic database) will take more time.

As they exist in the physical archive, the original photographic prints are small and some of the negatives show signs of editing with white marks. There are also several photographic albums. Except for his two-volume book of photographs – published in short runs first in French, then German, English and only one of the two volumes in his native Dutch – Scholten's sole exhibition *Palestine in Transition* was held at the Brook Street Art Gallery in London, 15th to 19th February 1924. Unfortunately, no catalogue exists from this exhibition.

The landscapes of the 'Holy Land' had long been of interest to Western photographers, and histories of photography in Palestine have been entwined in very particularised modes of imaging. The first photograph of Jerusalem was taken in 1839 by Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet, making Jerusalem one of the first cities outside of Europe to be photographed. The interview with Salim Tamari and Yair Wallach presented below situates Scholten in relation to the history of portrayals of Palestine in European and North American photography, and discusses the extents to which his work overlaps or diverges from other depictions.

Apart from being prolific, Frank Scholten's work is incredibly diverse, covering subjects as broad as events, both religious and secular, and architectural explorations from villages that no longer exist to major cities like Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem and the fledgling township Tel Aviv, which was but a decade old when he arrived. He photographed historical and archaeological sites alongside modern building projects as well as various Jewish and German colonies. And, of course, he photographed people. Perhaps one of the hallmarks of Scholten's collected work is the thoroughness with which he imaged Palestine. His images of people cut across religious and confessional lines, ethnic backgrounds, and class and urban-rural divides. He imaged people at work as well as in their leisure time, but most of all, he imaged people in the context of their daily life, rather than divorced from the landscape.

The first question is about 'intimacy'. How do we explain the relationship with the subjects and the intimate relationship to them in the production of these photographs?

ST: What is striking in Scholten's images is the engagement with their objects, in a way you don't see with other contemporary European photographers. There is something about intimacy in Scholten's camera: people are less staged, such as what you see a lot with the work of [Palestinian-Lebanese photographer] Khalil Raad (c.1854-1957). There the materials in which the Holy Land is presented are a *tableau,* involved in the oriental tradition of Biblical representation. In Scholten's photographs, the staging and stiffness is not there. There is also a very modernist, almost 'impressionistic' approach: people are speaking to the camera, which is a contradiction because in many pictures, they seem not to be aware of the camera. Yet

when they are engaged with the camera, they are speaking to him. So, he must have spent some time with those subjects before. In the famous photograph we observe the little girl on stairs on Easter Sunday holding an egg, going down the road – that is so endearing and typical, I think, of Scholten's images of children (Figure 1).

YW: I think he must have had some unique personal skills, and an ability to make people feel at ease. In so many photographs, people are smiling and laughing. Sometimes the subjects put on a stern face, but in most cases, they don't. That's true both with men and with women, across social class and ethnic differences, and that is really the extraordinary thing. Some of them probably had the experience of being photographed in a photo studio, so they knew how to pose, but they look very relaxed in front of his camera, what we would qualify as 'natural' pose. He must have had also techniques to make people relax, but he probably had some kind of 'presence' that helped.

It's in a stark contrast, for example, to Ottoman official photographs, which were staged and very formal, and seem to us today sombre and even depressing. So maybe the subjects in these photographs knew how to pose, but Scholten got something completely different out of them. Maybe it's just about being a really good photographer, which he is.

SZ: There is also an element of performance in some of the photographs as well.
I'm thinking particularly about two incidents. One is two photographs of a young man in Tel Aviv: the first one is him just wearing ordinary clothes, and the second one has a caption on the back, he is wearing a tarboosh, and it mentions 'Trying on a tarboosh'. There is this element of playfulness, he has a smile on his face, but also a context where he appears to test inhabiting a different subject position. The other example that I'm thinking of is a press clipping where Scholten was interviewed years later, and talked about trying to take the photo of a shepherd boy who really did not want to be photographed. So according to what Scholten described in this interview, his chauffeur colluded, suggesting that a war with Italy was going to break out if this photograph was not taken and delivered to the Italians. We might consider this as a rather unethical practice from a photographic perspective, but this also gives us a sense of playfulness in his collusions and interactions with people, as much as indicating some of the classed power dynamics at play (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Girl with an egg, UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Porte_Entree_101-150_000.

Figure 2. UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Fotos_Doos_17_0188.

How do you think his Dutch cultural background shaped his view of the people, the way he documented and taxonomised them?

ST: One feature of his Dutchness, I suspect, is his limitless curiosity about people and what they are doing. It's interesting you ask this question, because of all the people we mentioned, the most religious of them is Scholten. Since he was a convert to Catholicism, he looked for Biblical themes as 'background' while ignoring their classical stereotyping at the same time. So I don't know if this is about Dutchness, but his presence is less pronounced in these 'posings' than any of his other contemporary photographs. It is as if he was one of the people from the area. He must have looked familiar to them, maybe because he lived there, they saw him on a daily basis, and was much more engaged with his subjects.

YW: Maybe in his humour. In the captions, you can see his own humour, which I think may be Dutch humour, which I can't quite define probably.

You've touched upon captioning, and what is interesting about taxonomy is to notice that there seems to be a fairly equal representation of different sects. How does this equal representation, which isn't necessarily the same as a representation of demography, play out in terms of the captioning, according to you? Taxonomising and captioning, in many ways, go hand in hand.

ST: The taxonomising part probably came from his preparation for producing a book out of his photographs. The way he carried his camera went along with the fact that he probably did not go around looking at people as prototypes. If you look at the pictures haphazardly, that is not something that come out. It probably came after the fact. There are a lot of buildings and landscape scenes of road trips that have nothing to do with taxonomising place or people, it must be something that came later, as he reordered these images in preparation for his book.

Do you think there are particular aspects in terms of the perspective of a project about modernity and modernisation?

ST: He had a modernist perspective he was always aware of, when he's looking at the carriages, cars, trains, like Jawhariyyeh before him (1897-1972, Palestinian composer, oud player, poet and chronicler, known for

his memoirs spanning from 1904 to 1968), but I'm not sure if he actually wrote about this, he wanted to capture Palestine before it was lost to modernity, in the manner that Tawfiq Cana'an also approached his ethnography (Palestinian nativist ethnographer Cana'an, either implicitly or explicitly, framed their work as a kind of 'rescue anthropology,' recording the details of Palestinian rural culture before it was obliterated by modernity, Tamari 2008, Furani and Rabinowitz 2011). This attempt to capture before loss is something you can see in the reordering of the pictures. Whether he was doing it consciously or not, is hard to tell.

This is something that is consistently said about his project, in terms of the press clippings of his books and exhibition.

YW: What is striking is that he doesn't identify modernity or modernisation with one group, I think that is very clear from the collection. So unlike, for example, the introduction to the English edition of his *Palestine illustrée* (Scholten 1931), which equates modern development with Zionism, this is really not what you see in the images. You see for example German colonists and some Jewish scholars, but also poor Jewish communities in the cities, and Arab elites, Arab orange groves around Jaffa. He depicted the transformation of Palestine, which was wide ranging, and as we know not restricted to one group.

ST: I think the depiction of modernity is very much visible in his treatment of his Jewish subjects because, on the one hand, he was almost obsessed with preserving/capturing traditional costumes and manners of several Jewish communities in Jaffa, Jerusalem and in other places, but also showing, on the other hand, the colonial settler communities. In these Jewish settlements, especially in Petah Tikva and Rehovot, he showed the contrast between the Eastern and perhaps native Yemenites and the European new settlers. This also appears in his depiction of life in Tel Aviv, and the way he depicts the new modernist buildings, and the skeletons of buildings coming out of the dunes. But it's not clear what his attitude towards Zionism is or was in this depiction.

He seems to treat Zionism as a modernist subject in the Holy Land, not necessarily as a settlers' project. He also has a section devoted to the German millenarian settlers [the Templers], at Sarona for example. The treatment of Sarona and the Jewish settlement seems to be similar, the conceptual border is blurred between Jews and Germans settlers (Figures 3–5).

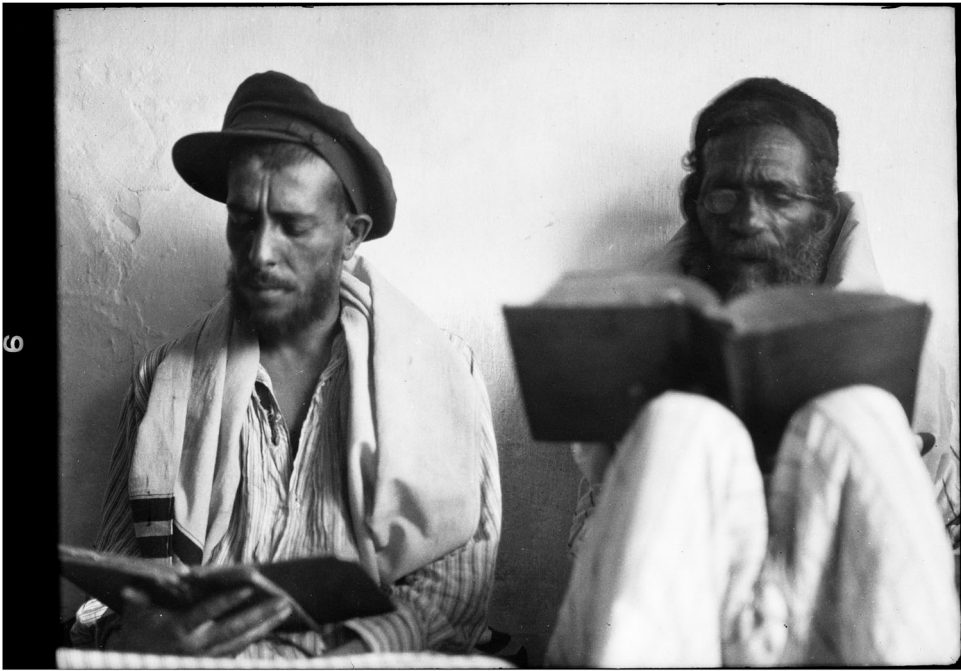**Figure 3.** UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Jaffa_Tel-Aviv_Sarona_06_0051.

Figure 4. UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Jaffa_Tel-Aviv_Sarona_10_0082.

Figure 5. UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Palestine_Choses_Interessantes_01_006 2.

What is unique or different about Scholten's in comparison with other European photographers in Palestine at the time, on top of this 'intimacy' mentioned earlier?

ST: I think, and maybe this is a tentative reading, that unlike most visiting Europeans, he was interested in the *'quotidian'*, while others like Bonfils were looking for prototypes of Biblical figures and events. And indeed, Scholten was also looking for prototypes, but it was a minor issue for him, he wanted to show what he saw, Palestine as it was, in its reality, rather than from a preconceived notion, which is astonishing given that he probably was the most religious among his cohorts. The most comparable ones here would be the American Colony's photographs (the American Colony was established in Jerusalem in 1881 by American expatriates, A. and H. Spafford, and their associates in Ottoman Palestine. Its photographic department, founded by E. Meyers in 1898, helped fund their philanthropic work). But they were much more commercialised than Scholten, they were thinking of postcard pictures for tourists, like many other photographers, whereas he did not seem to be moving in that direction, and that is a distinction for Frank Scholten indeed.

If we come back to this idea of modernities in different communities, also looking at that photo of your uncle (Salim Tamari's uncle, of whom there are several photos in the Scholten collection. They obviously knew each other relatively well) dressed as Bedouin, how do you see this playful dressing up as a kind of performance?

ST: The whole issue of dressing up in the carnivalesque pictures, as well as in scenes among the bourgeois middle class families in Jaffa, strikes me as depicting people who were assured of their own modernity. So much so that they dared to dress up like Bedouins or peasants. There is an element of political intervention here too. In 1936, middle-class Palestinians moved away from wearing the urban tarboosh to wear keffiyeh, because they wanted to protect the rebels from being arrested. Or in some cases they were cajoled into this position by the rebels.

There is also the question of crossdressing, which we see in Scholten, but we also see this in other pictures at the time. You asked me about my uncle: my uncle was very close friend of Sheikh Shaker Abu Kishk, who was the head of the Abu Kishk tribe, north of Jaffa. He went a lot to their encampments and it seems that Scholten was also there, so it may be that the Abu Kishk encampment was a meeting place for middle class Jaffa people like my uncle, and Scholten. But I'm not sure, because my uncle appears in the collection in several poses, each time dressed in a different mode. One particular poignant picture shows him as a press photographer examining a dead rebel or murdered man (Figures 6–8).

Maybe Scholten understood modernity at the beginnings of British Mandate Palestine in multiple ways, not just, aesthetically, as something that looked new, but as a sort of a social phenomenon, in which these different performances functioned in different ways? (Figure 9)

ST: That's an absence in the collection, actually, you don't see any demonstrations, you don't see any political activity. Of course, this is 1921-1923, so still very early, but of course, by then, there were instances of nationalist agitation, both in Jerusalem and in Jaffa, that you don't see in these photographs. Why? Either Scholten was not aware of it, or he chose to ignore it, we don't know. He was aware of a national expression, because there are a number of pictures showing the newspapers being distributed, being read, and these were instruments of nationalist mobilisation at the time, but other than that, you don't see any awareness of the transformation of Palestine into modern nationalist politics.

In the books, for instance, the portrait of Issa al-Issa, the editor of *Falestin*, is described as the biggest Arab 'propaganda newspaper in Jaffa' (Figure 10)

YW: There is one picture I noticed in the albums of an Ashkenazi Jew and an Arab in Tel Aviv, and the caption says 'in harmony' or something like that, and of course when you point out this 'coexistence', you already signal that you are aware that there's a conflict. But that's the only thing I can think of. Otherwise, there are lots of pictures in which you see both Jews and Arabs, but they don't make a fuss about there being both Jews and Arabs. It looks like just a normal way of life.

ST: The 'harmony' picture show two Jewish young men on a bicycle and an Arab one, much poorer, so it's kind of ironic in a sense.

YW: In the photos of the colonies, you can also see Palestinian workers, and the colonists, and you can see the class difference. But in many pictures, you don't get the sense of ethnic/class stratification like that necessarily. For example, you see a policeman in a Jewish ceremony and the policeman could have been Palestinian or a Sephardic Jew, it's very difficult to tell. What is also visible is Hebrew commercial signage as a part of the scenery of the Arab town of Jaffa, which is interesting.
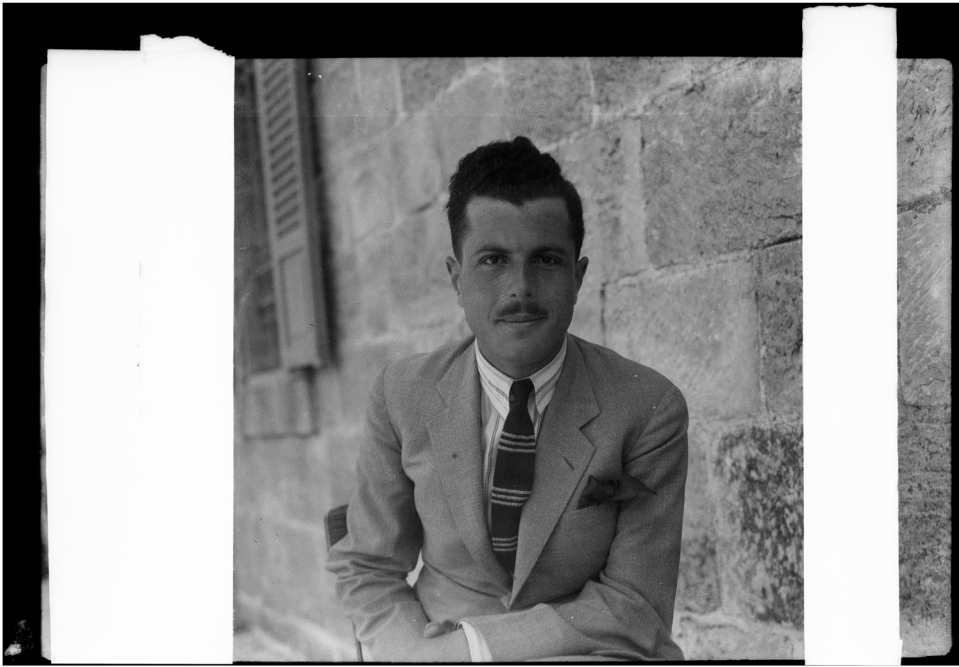
Figure 6. [Fig. Faiq Tamari] UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Jaffa_01_0090.

Figure 7. [Fig. Faiq Tamari] UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Jaffa_01_0091.

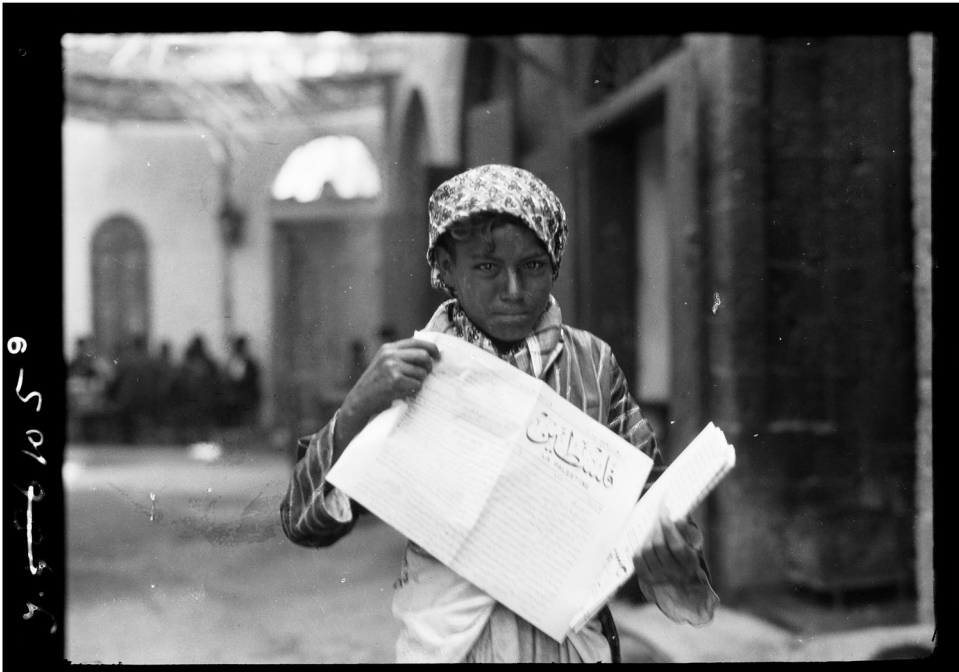**Figure 8.** [Fig. Faiq Tamari] UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Jaffa_01_0094].

Figure 9. Newspaper Falestin, UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Jaffa-la-Belle_101-150_0043].

Figure 10. Issa al-Issa holding his son Raja in his house in Jaffa, UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Porte_Entree_101-150_0011].

Could you comment on one photo that struck you in the collection, and tell us about the reasons for your choice?

YW: I could just describe the following picture: a mother with her two children, two girls, there is something so intelligent in it, the way she looks at the camera, slightly amused (or not, I am not sure), so piercing. It's very difficult for me to think of anything parallel. He has quite a few of these pictures, they almost look contemporary, not the clothes obviously, the way they hold themselves, the way they look at the camera, the presence, it's really difficult to think of other people like that during the 1920s. Even in the volume *Before Their Diaspora* (Khalidi 1984), these are mainly elite photographs, and even these are very staged. When you talk about the society that was destroyed, it comes to life in those photos in a way that is quite painful to see. I have to say, quite moving (Figure 11).

ST: I discovered Scholten through this image of the Easter egg girl [Figure 1]. I was working in Durham, in the north of England, and I found in an antiquarian shop, two volumes of Frank Scholten's Jaffa book, in 1984. I was mesmerised by these images of my hometown, where I was born, and what was amazing is I could see figures of my own family. In those days, my uncle Faiq did not appear in that book, I did not notice him, but I noticed images of people I knew, in their older age, but then I came across this beautiful lyrical picture in the old town, of a girl coming down a staircase with an Easter egg and a ribbon in her hair. It was love at first sight, it was so haunting, that the whole project of looking at this book became a trip in itself. I kept looking at them and then I took the book and I had the photographs scanned professionally, at huge expense, in Durham. I started going over them again and again. Then I discovered, to my great amazement, a picture which links me to my wife: her father in the Boy Scouts movement. His name was Mohammed Adib al-Amiri from Manshiyyeh. He was holding the big banner of the Jaffa boy scouts movement, he was in shorts, about 16 or 17 years old, maybe 15, I'm not sure (Figure 12). There were five of these pictures, and he appears in four of the five pictures. I knew him from his picture as an old man, from the 1980s, but his face was unmistakable in this picture. So, I took a scan of these pictures and sent them to the family: they were amazed, because he had left Jaffa early on as a young man, to work and study in Lebanon, and then he went to Transjordan, so he had lost his connection to Jaffa. This was also a moment uniting my own Jaffaite family both from my father's side and my mother's side, and on the side of my future wife at the time.

Figure 11. Palestinian woman and daughters, UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Jaffa_00_0014].

Figure 12. Scout M. A. Adib al-Amiri, UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Porte_Entree_201-250_0004].

Given Scholten was queer, how do you understand the role of masculinity in so many of these photographs, in the ways in which it might have shaped his understanding of Palestine and his approach to it?

YW: I think maybe he's aiming to see them primarily as men, and then he sees the ethnic or religious, the humanising dimension is maybe because he is interested in them aesthetically, and even perhaps sexually. Maybe that allows him to reach them in a fresh way. They stage themselves – or he stages them – as pretty boys regardless of who they are, and that's quite remarkable.

ST: The pictures that show men, and especially boys, as an object of desire, are mainly at the beach, young men and boys swimming naked. Queerness is also present in his engagement with peasants and working-class people like drivers, coach attendants, camel boys. It is also very present in the Nebi Rubin festival, but what is amazing is that his attention to men and women is almost equally distributed. You see an aesthetic in his ability to capture individuals in a very playful mood, which none of the other European photographers or Arab photographers were able to do. He had a kind of engagement with his subject, and the others did not, and this applies to boys, men, women, Bedouins, especially farmers and peasant women, but the ones with the naked boys are most striking, when you think of him as a gay photographer (Figures 13 and 14).

Salim, you have been looking for this collection for a long time, without being able to access it. For almost 80 years very few people accessed this collection. How do you understand these silences around this collection? How do you understand that such a visual collection of the Middle East was not released before?

ST: It might be due to the fact that Scholten was not a commercial photographer. Except for his books, he did not try to market his photographs to tourists or collectors. There are many other photographers, maybe not as good as Scholten, who are still dormant. We discover them in family collections – so it's not that he was 'dormant', it's probably that he was not yet 'discovered'.

YW: It's interesting, because some of the photos became relatively famous. I knew a few of them before, for example the boy selling the Filastin newspaper; I've seen it probably 15 years ago. I also saw the picture of the City Council of Jaffa around that table in other places.

ST: Maybe he did that on commission, by the way (Figure 15).

YW: These are striking photographs of a clearly talented photographer. Just the published volumes are amazing in themselves, and many more photographs could have become more well-known. I think on some level, the fact that these photographs didn't fit the Biblical narrative of Palestine probably continued to work against their popularity. Scholten has many pictures of the Jewish colonies that feature Arab workers, in a way that is uncomfortable for the Zionist narrative. We all know there were Arab workers in the colonies, that's part of the reason that this colonial model was replaced by the kibbutzim. And yet it's quite a different thing to see those workers. Or for example, another well-known story is the Yemenite [Jewish] workers in the same *moshavot* (form of rural Jewish settlements in Ottoman Palestine, Halperin 2021), and how they were maltreated. To see them in the photographs is very striking and brings these stories into life. In the Zionist representation of colonisation, there was no place to look for this kind of images.

Do you think there is a similar dynamic at play perhaps with the modern images Scholten produced of Palestine, in comparison with the more commercial/ Biblical images we evoked earlier?

ST: Yes, we see the transformations brought about by modernist discourse and modernist technology. Scholten was very much interested in that aspect, possibly because he was also interested in the opposite, which is the way modernity is undermining the village structure, the village fabric, and the communitarian bonds in rural Palestine. And we see something else that is quite amazing, namely the details of their visions of daily life in a series of villages, all the way from Jaffa to Jerusalem, going from Yazur to Qastal, villages that totally disappeared after the Nakba. He recorded extremely detailed *vignettes* of daily life in all of them and they're very different villages. This is the beauty of Scholten: he was not looking for a prototype that keeps appearing, he went into every one of these villages, on the road, as well as on plateaus that have archaeological remains, like Gezer in Abu Shushah for example and recorded them in a way which made him very distinct. He actually labelled the events taking place, sometimes making fun of people, like 'burglars' or 'robbers', so he was very much bring playful about them. Here we have records of villages that probably do not exist anywhere else, villages that were obliterated in the war of 1948. That corridor, more than any other place in Palestine, was recorded for posterity to reconstruct (Figure 16).

Figure 13. Near Nabi Rubeen, UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Jaffa_11_0053].

Figure 14. Beach, Tel Aviv, UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Tel Aviv_14_075].

Figure 15. Jaffa council, UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Jaffa-la-Belle_001-050_0012].

Figure 16. UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Jaffa_18_0004].

How do you envisage this Scholten collection as a piece of cultural heritage and its reappropriation?

YW:　People will do with the collection what they want to. The beauty of this collection is that it allows alternative selections and readings. Some will focus on pictures that are convenient for them. If somebody wants to celebrate Tel Aviv through that, it's possible, but it would be a very selective reading of it, because the collection celebrates Jaffa just as much, also other villages, and other people.

Hopefully it will not become associated with a narrow reading of 1920s Palestine. For me, what is interesting is to think that it captures a moment when Tel Aviv was just a neighbourhood of or outside Jaffa, and the major Jewish commercial ventures were still in Jaffa. At least until the mid-1920s, this was still a single city, in which Jews had a place in the city's economy. And that's different from the common narrative of separation between an Arab Jaffa and a Jewish Tel Aviv, and that there was no possibility of real Jewish life in Jaffa, which is really not the case.

What is also really interesting is how Scholten conceived his oeuvre as a religious person. He did photograph many religious sites, sanctuaries, pilgrimages and religious people, but unlike so many other photographers, he made no attempt to recreate Biblical scenes. In the published volumes, we see quotes from holy scriptures attached to the photographs, but the photographs are not illustrations of these quotes. Rather, these quotes are read through the photos, which are about a living society, that's what makes them so different. He does not see them as relics of an unchanging land – the land of the Bible which hasn't changed for 2000 years. He sees Palestine as a living modern country, and as a religious person, he is able to see the scriptures through that changing land, rather than see it as a kind of bygone relics of a different era. He sees the divine in people around him, I think.

ST:　Why do you think he chose to use these Biblical and Qur'anic references, given that he was trying to 'biblify' the city?

YW:　I think he was a deeply spiritual person, and he turned to these spiritual sources to read reality through them. But it was a contemporary reality, not a fantasy of the Bible. That's what he's trying to do. So, he can take a totally modern person and connect them to a Biblical or spiritual quotation.

Figure 17. UBL_NINO_F_Scholten_Jaffa-la-Belle_001-050_0009].

ST: I found it one of the most irritating features in the captioning of Scholten's photographs: to take a living city with a social dynamic of its own and then put these clichés and religious attributions (Biblical and Qur'anic) in a very mundane and unhelpful manner. Paradoxically, when looking at the press clipping, I was struck by a contemporary Catholic newspaper in Washington celebrating these Biblical references to the image as a great achievement of Scholten, 'attributing the features of the city to this Bible instead of giving us useless references to the people and buildings', celebrating what I found a very disruptive way of framing his photographs.

SZ: When you actually look at the references that he's using, you understand his perspective a lot better. For instance, the photograph of Issa al-Issa is labelled 'the editor of 'La Palestine', the most popular paper of Arab propaganda in Jaffa', and added the Biblical reference 'He sought by all means to advance his people'.

ST: That's an exception, where the man, the place, the moment is identified and then he goes back to the book.

SZ: I agree, but we find the same thing with the photo of the British police band of Jaffa. There are four Biblical quotes in the book, and three of them are about false kingship with this band that's playing 'God save the King' on the king's birthday in celebration of this British national holiday (Figure 17).

YW: I imagine that he would see everything around him, not just in Palestine, through this spiritual world and the scriptures. I don't know, because he didn't produce a volume on the Netherlands. I don't read it as a literal reading of people in Palestine, just as illustrations for this kind of Biblical quote. In that sense, he was completely different from the Orientalist approach of other Europeans.

Notes on the Frank Scholten collection

All photos are accessible online.
https://collectionguides.universiteitleiden.nl/resources/ubl674,
https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/collection/frankscholten
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Photographs_by_Frank_Scholten
https://www.nino-leiden.nl/collections/frank-scholten-legacy

The collection is currently organised by type of material, primarily negatives, photo prints, albums and clippings. Within these categories, the negatives were kept in the order applied by Scholten himself. Negatives were recently sorted out on Wiki commons according to 7 categories, after Leiden University special collections (Photography department), under the supervision of the curator of photographic collections, dr. M. van Heuvel. UN and NINO have also organised volunteer work on the collection (mainly focusing on texts added to the photo prints and negatives by Frank Scholten himself; no historian of Mandate Palestine or historians of photography were actively involved at this stage) https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/2023/03/workshops-palestinian-history-in-frame—frank-scholten-photographs. The rest of the photographic prints have been ordered according to Scholten's (geographical) designations. Other materials collected by Scholten are ordered by surname of the person who published it at the time (image maker or author/editor of the publication from which the item comes).

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Disclosure statement

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Karène Sanchez Summerer is Professor and Chair of Middle Eastern Studies and Co-director of the Centre for Historical Studies at Groningen University, The Netherlands. Her research and teaching interests include Christian Arab communities of and in the Middle East, a relational cultural and social history of Ottoman and Mandate Palestine, and minorities in and from the Middle East. From 2017 to 2022, she was the PI of the research project (2018–2022), 'CrossRoads- A connected history between Europeans' cultural diplomacy and Arab Christians in Mandate Palestine' (project funded by The Dutch Research Council NWO), and from 2017-2021, co PI of MisSMO consortium project ('Christian missions and societies in the Middle East 19th-20th centuries'). She is the co-editor of the series Languages and Culture in History with W. Frijhoff, Amsterdam University Press. Her last publications include Sanchez Summerer, K. and Zananiri, S., Imaging and Imagining Palestine- Photography, Modernity and the Biblical Lens (1918-1948) (Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2021); Sanchez Summerer, K. and Zananiri S., European Cultural diplomacy and Arab Christianity in Mandate Palestine. Between Contention and Connection (Palgrave McMillan, 2021); Irving, S., Nassif, C. and Sanchez Summerer, K., The House of the Priest. A Palestinian life (1885–1954). Leiden/ Boston: Brill, CJMS 7, 2022.

Sary Zananiri is a cultural producer, theorist and heritage specialist. He is currently writing a monograph, Photographing Biblical Modernity: Frank Scholten in British Mandate Palestine (IB Tauris, forthcoming). He has co-edited two volumes with Karène Sanchez Summerer, Imaging and Imagining Palestine: Photography, Modernity and the Biblical Lens (Brill, 2021) and European Cultural Diplomacy and Arab Christians in Palestine: Between Contention and Connection (Palgrave McMillan, 2021). He has written numerous book chapters and journal articles on Palestinian visual culture. Recent exhibitions include the Qattan Foundation, Ramallah (2023), University of Groningen Library (2023), INALCO, Paris (June-July 2022), the Mawjoudin Queer Film Festival, Tunis (September 2022), the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (December 2021-February 2022), the National Glass Museum, Wagga Wagga (July-November 2021), Rijksmuseum Oudheden, Leiden (May-October 2020) and Der Haus Der Kunst der Welt for ALMS, Berlin (June 2019). He was a Postdoctoral Fellow on the NWO funded project CrossRoads: European Cultural Diplomacy and Arab Christians in Palestine 1918-1948 and the Netherlands Institute for the Near East at Leiden University, a visiting scholar at Dar al Kalima in Bethlehem, an Honorary Fellow of the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens and is currently a cultural heritage consultant in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

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