



Jerusalem and the Question of Palestine in Syrian Curricula and Theses

Damascus University as a Model (1925–2024)

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Jerusalem and Palestine remain central in Syria's political and cultural discourse, where they are regarded as integral parts of the Arab homeland. Geographically and historically, Palestine and Syria form part of **Bilad al-Sham**, with Palestine historically serving as the gateway to the **Mashriq** (the Eastern Arab world).

Jerusalem and the Palestinian question are also present in educational curricula at all levels of basic and university education. Their presence has remained uninterrupted at every stage since the establishment of the nucleus of Damascus University (formerly the Syrian University), which served as a cradle of student political activism rejecting Zionist activity in Palestine and continues to do so to the present day.

This continuity has been maintained through the teaching of Palestine and its cause in the course **National Arab Culture**, which is compulsory for all first-year students in Syrian universities across all faculties. In addition, several faculties address the Palestinian cause either through dedicated courses or through specific chapters within certain courses.

Furthermore, this topic has also featured prominently in university theses at the master's and doctoral levels, as well as in graduation projects, across a range of disciplines, including political, social, economic, and urban studies.

First: Introduction

This study examines the extent to which the curricula at Damascus University address Jerusalem and the Palestinian question. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no previous studies have addressed this subject, apart from a few brief writings on certain websites which appear not to have consulted the syllabi and university theses of Damascus University. Consequently, these writings are far removed from reality and cannot be considered reliable.

For this reason, it is necessary to conduct a survey of the courses and university theses at Damascus University in order to determine the extent to which the university has addressed the foremost cause of the Arab nation. The aim is to measure the commitment of scientific institutions in Syria to this cause and to its symbol, Jerusalem, within an environment characterized by normalization with Israel.

Accordingly, the following questions arise:

- Why did Damascus University become the principal center of student activism?
- What mechanisms did it adopt in support of the Palestinian cause?
- To what extent has this commitment been sustained over time, in both its scope and its quality?

Based on the above, the study adopts a **descriptive survey method**, focusing on the courses and theses that address Jerusalem and the Palestinian question without entering into an analysis of in the concurrent political course of events.

Second: Early University Engagement at Damascus University with the Palestinian Cause

Damascus University—formerly known as **the Syrian University**—is considered the oldest public university in the Arab world. More importantly, from **15 June 1923**, it succeeded in preserving its Arab character in both administration and the language of instruction, which had been Arabized through the efforts of **Dr. Rida Said in 1919**.

This Arab character remained a constant source of strength throughout the university's history, including during the period of the **French Mandate**. After the end of the Mandate, the university continued to serve as one of the most important beacons of **Arab nationalism** in the Arab world.

Therefore, it is impossible to understand the interest of university curricula in Syria in the Palestinian cause without shedding light on the nationalist political activism of the university's students since its founding. These students formed the core that shaped Syrian awareness of the Palestinian question and became the incubator for everything that later emerged from that stance.

The **Medical Institute**, which constituted the nucleus of the Syrian University, was at that time the only institution in the Arab world that taught in Arabic. Students flocked to it from various Arab countries. The Mandate authorities failed to affiliate the university with a French university, unlike **Saint Joseph University in Beirut**, however the university received support from the French authorities between **1923 and 1929**.

Despite the strong scientific reputation enjoyed by the Syrian University, this did not prevent its students from pursuing national and Arab causes. This contrasted with many of their peers studying at foreign universities and institutes in Beirut, whose political mobilization was weaker than that of the students of the Syrian University.

This is evident in the large student demonstrations that took place on 8 April 1925 during the visit of Lord Balfour, held in support of the Palestinians. The demonstrations followed a call by **Omar al-Bitar**, head of the **Muslim-Christian Association in Palestine**, for a strike protesting Balfour's arrival in Jerusalem as honorary president



of **Cambridge University** to inaugurate the **Hebrew University of Jerusalem** on **1 April 1925**.

Because of the demonstrations that erupted against him while he was staying at the **Victoria Hotel in Damascus**, Balfour was forced to shorten his visit and travel to Beirut under heavy guard, remaining in Damascus for only **nineteen hours**. The unrest did not end there: his train was attacked at **Ezraa station**, and its windows were smashed.

These demonstrations alarmed the **French High Commissioner in Syria and Lebanon, General Sarraïl**, who subsequently declined Balfour's invitation to attend the inauguration ceremony of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

In an attempt to deter the students, **President Subhi Barakat al-Khalidi (1889–1939)** issued **Decree No. 55 on 14 April 1925**, ordering the expulsion of any student proven to have engaged in political activity or participated in demonstrations or associations of a political nature.

Nevertheless, Syrian students were not deterred. Students studying in **Paris** called for a conference in **Geneva on 25 August 1925**, whose most important resolutions included recognition of the independence and sovereignty of **Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine**, and the establishment of a union among them under a single government.

The students of the Syrian University closely followed political developments in the region. Just as they were concerned with Syrian national issues, they were equally committed to Palestine and to supporting the struggle of its people against Zionism.

When the **al-Buraq uprising** broke out in **1929**, university students went on strike and demonstrations spread throughout Syrian cities. Notably, **female students** also participated in these demonstrations, such as the Damascene student **Mari Qatina**, who addressed hundreds of students in front of the university.

As a result, some law students were punished for leading the demonstrations, including **Suhail al-Khouri**, the son of **Fares al-Khouri (1877–1962)**, a professor at the Law Institute.

In **1936**, Palestine once again became the central concern of university students. They went on strike on **2 November 1936**, joined by students from the **Tajhiz School**. They sent protest telegrams to the **British High Commissioner in Palestine** and to the **British Foreign Office**.

At the same time, **Professor Fares al-Khouri** of the Faculty of Law wrote an article on **11 July 1936** entitled "*The Jews' Claims in Palestine*," which the press described as "**a serious defense that strikes at the very heart of the Zionist cause.**"

When al-Khouri headed the Syrian delegation to the **Arab Parliamentary Conference in Cairo in early October 1938**, he delivered a speech in which he attacked the

postwar partition of Syria, declared that Syria regarded the **Balfour Declaration as null and void**, and denounced the **British Mandate over Palestine** and the **partition plan**.

The Palestinian cause, alongside the struggle for Syrian independence, remained the central preoccupation of the students of the Syrian University. The penetration of political parties into their ranks did not weaken their defense of these two causes. This was especially evident on the anniversary of the **Balfour Declaration**, which became an occasion for affirming support for the Palestinian cause and organizing demonstrations proclaiming that **Palestine is Arab**.

Further evidence of this commitment can be seen in the memorandum issued by the **Association of Graduates of Higher Scientific Institutes in Damascus**, headed by **Dr. Shawkat al-Shatti (1900–1978)**, addressed to graduates of higher institutes in the **United States of America**, affirming the invalidity of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine.

Fares al-Khouri also wrote a series of articles on the Palestinian question published in the press.

In **March 1945**, large student demonstrations swept Damascus and brought the city to a standstill in protest against **President Roosevelt's statement** that the doors of Palestine should be opened to unrestricted Jewish immigration. The demonstrators argued that such a policy contradicted the principles of freedom championed by the world's democracies. They affirmed that **Palestine is an integral part of the Arab nation**. Student committees also contributed to the establishment of the **Committee for Combating Zionism**.

With the end of the **French Mandate over Syria**, several faculties were established at the university, including the **Faculty of Arts**. Its nucleus had originally been established on **1 August 1928** by **Decree No. 368** under the name **School of Higher Literary Studies**, but it was closed by **Decree No. 1863 on 16 November 1933**. It was reopened at the dawn of independence in **1946**, when the Syrian University founded several faculties, including the Faculty of Arts.

Through its curricula, this faculty adopted the national cause that the university had previously championed through the political activism of students in its medical and law institutes in support of Arab and national causes.

In this context, it is impossible to overlook the Syrian historian and thinker and leading figure of the Arab nationalist movement, **Professor Dr. Constantine Zurayk (1909–2000)**, who served as president of Damascus University between **1949 and 1952** and coined the term "**Nakba**" (**Catastrophe**). By this term he meant that the defeat was not merely political and military but also a **civilizational defeat**.

On this subject he wrote his book *Meaning of the Nakba* (1948), followed by *Meaning*



of the *Nakba Revisited* (1967). In the latter, he did not place great emphasis on the rise of armed Palestinian struggle or on the activities of the **fedayeen** around Palestine. In his view, the Arab world was experiencing a profound civilizational crisis that extended beyond the immediate conflict over Palestine.

More importantly, a number of prominent scholars in Syria and elsewhere were influenced by Zurayk's nationalist thought. They contributed to the establishment of the **History Department at the University of Jordan in 1962**, including **Ali Mahafzah**, who studied in Damascus, as well as **Nur al-Din Hatoum, Abdul Karim Rafq, Ahmad Badr, Muhammad Muhafaza, Nabih Aqil**, and others.

Third: Jerusalem and the Palestinian Question in the Curricula of Damascus University

Some curricula at Damascus University address Palestine and its question more extensively than many other topics. This reflects an awareness of the importance of this question and its long-term impact on the stability and development of the region, particularly since Zionism is viewed as an instrument of Western colonialism. Curricula covered geographical, historical, archaeological, economic, social, and other aspects of Palestine.

Before examining the syllabi that deal with Jerusalem and the Palestinian question at Damascus University, it is necessary to note that the course **“National Arab Culture”** (Committee of Specialists, 2021) is a revised and updated version of the course **“Socialist Arab National Culture”** (Group of Professors, 1976), which was introduced in the early 1970s on the basis of new and objective perspectives aimed at mobilizing the factors of strength within Arab national culture.

The justification for teaching this course, as stated in its introduction, is that national culture constitutes **“one of the most important foundations of national and pan-Arab cohesion, aimed at building the Arab citizen capable of confronting the most pressing issues facing Syria and the Arab homeland through various means, thereby enabling the nation to achieve its goals”** (Committee of Specialists, 2021, p. 7). It was therefore natural that this course should address the Palestinian question in an extended chapter entitled **“The Palestinian Question and the Arab-Zionist Conflict”** (Committee of Specialists, 2021, pp. 117–154).

Geographical Dimension

Jerusalem is geographically part of Palestine and belongs to the region of **Bilad al-Sham**. Accordingly, it has been studied in terms of physical geography, including its relief and natural, climatic, geological, hydrological, and biological characteristics. Human geography has also been addressed through the study of the population, their various activities, and the successive civilizations that emerged in the region, such as the Phoenician civilization.

When the term 'Palestine' is used, it is described as 'occupied' rather than 'Israel,' even though the Zionist entity is an established political reality. Some instructors treated Palestine as a political unit based on the division approved following the **Sykes–Picot Agreement** at the **San Remo Conference (18–26 April 1920)**. This was not done as a form of recognition, but rather as a reflection of the reality experienced by Palestine, an approach similarly applied to other Arab states.

Since the textbook—according to its title—addresses **“Geography of the Contemporary World – Geography of the Arab Homeland,”** the geography of Palestine has been defined according to the **armistice agreements concluded in 1949** with neighboring Arab states, in terms of area, territorial extension, and borders (both land and sea). It also examines natural geography in all its divisions, as well as the cities of Palestine, including Jerusalem, which was divided in **1949** into two parts, a division that significantly affected its characteristics.

The economic situation in **occupied Palestine** and within the wider Arab environment has also been addressed, albeit briefly. This brevity is expected, since a university textbook is intended mainly to provide students with basic concepts and analytical tools for further specialization, rather than exhaustive, highly detailed studies.

The **Department of Geography** has also devoted attention to teaching what is referred to as **“The Political Geography of Palestine.”** This course is regarded as one of the most important in the modern human sciences because it examines how political behavior reshapes a state's geographical dimensions. Accordingly, the course approaches Palestine from political, historical, geographical, and strategic perspectives—locally, regionally, and internationally—while also examining its resources and geopolitical status.

Historical Dimension

In general, undergraduate courses in **ancient and medieval history** have not treated Jerusalem or Palestine as independent topics through separate courses or dedicated chapters. Rather, the southern region of Syria (**Bilad al-Sham**) has been addressed as part of a broader historical whole. This approach appears in courses such as:

- **Prehistory**
- **Ancient Archaeology of the Arab Homeland – Eastern Archaeology**
- **Anthropology and Archaeology**
- **History of the Ancient Near East – Civilizations of Western Asia**
- **Ancient Syria**
- **Ancient Syria: History, Archaeology, and Civilization**
- **Eastern Archaeology**



With respect to topics that address Jerusalem as part of southern Syria during the earliest historical periods—the era of the first cities and the Hyksos, Canaanites, Hebrews, Philistines, and Israelites, roughly from 4000 BCE to the late seventh century BCE—these subjects are covered in the course **“History of Ancient Civilization in the Arab Homeland.”**

Similarly, courses dealing with the southern region of **Bilad al-Sham** examine the historical periods that include the **Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine eras**, from the end of the seventh century BCE until **626 CE**. During these periods Jerusalem witnessed many of the events that affected Western Asia more broadly, and these developments are examined in courses such as:

- **History of the Ancient Arab Homeland – Bilad al-Sham: Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine**
- **Studies in Greek History**
- **History of the Arab Homeland in the Classical Ages**

In the latter course, the territory corresponding to present-day Palestine is allocated a section discussing its subjection to the **Ptolemaic Greeks** for more than a century (**318–198 BCE**), during which it paid an annual tribute of eight thousand gold pieces. The Ptolemies allowed the Jews a degree of self-government there, and this situation continued until Palestine was annexed to the **Seleucid Empire in 198 BCE**.

Jerusalem then witnessed intense struggles involving Jewish communities, which ultimately led to an end to persecution and to the granting of freedom to practice their religious law and to live in the Holy City alongside groups inclined toward Greek civilization.

Later, the **Romans occupied Jerusalem in 63 BCE**, abolishing the autonomy previously enjoyed by the Jews due to the unrest they instigated both in their relations with the Greeks and among themselves within Jerusalem. After a series of disturbances, the Roman commander **Titus (39–81 CE)** besieged Jerusalem for six months until the city fell in **70 CE**.

This period is also addressed—though less extensively—in the courses **“The Byzantine Empire”** and **“Political History of Byzantium.”** Despite the different chronological scopes of these courses, they all examine Roman rule in the region, including Jerusalem, between **63 BCE and 636 CE**, often focusing on the Jewish revolts in the city and the Roman suppression of these uprisings, which included the burning of the city and the captivity of many of its inhabitants.

Roman rule ultimately ended with the entry of the **Arab Muslim armies into Jerusalem in 636 CE** following a six-month siege. Patriarch **Sophronius** agreed to surrender the city on the condition that the **Rashidun Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab** personally come to receive it. The keys of Jerusalem were handed to him,

and guarantees of religious freedom for Christians were granted in exchange for the payment of **jizya (poll tax)**. This agreement, later known as the ‘Covenant of Umar,’ was signed by the caliph on behalf of the Muslims and witnessed by Khalid ibn al-Walid, Amr ibn al-As, Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf, and Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan in late April 637.

The courses mentioned above are not the only ones addressing the historical phases of Jerusalem and Palestine. Numerous courses since the **1960s** have addressed Jerusalem in a similar manner. Courses dealing with early Islamic expansions refer briefly to conditions in the city, as in **“History of the Era of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs.”**

Particular attention is given to the **Dome of the Rock**, constructed during the reign of **Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan**. In the course **“Studies in the History of the Umayyad Period,”** Nabih al-Aqil discusses the construction of the Dome of the Rock and the adjacent **al-Qibli Mosque**, noting the divergence of historical sources regarding whether their construction should be attributed to **Abd al-Malik** or to his son **al-Walid**. Drawing on foreign sources that examine the issue through the **Aphrodito Papyrus**, al-Aqil concludes that **al-Qibli Mosque was built during the reign of al-Walid**, whereas **the Dome of the Rock dates to the reign of his father Abd al-Malik**.

By contrast, the courses **“Arab Islamic Civilization”** and **“History of the Arab State – Political and Cultural History of the Umayyad Period”** devote only a few lines to the Dome of the Rock. Similarly, the course **“History of the Abbasid Period”** mentions only briefly that the Abbasids replaced the names of the Umayyads inscribed on certain buildings.

One example concerns **al-Aqsa Mosque**: when the structure was damaged during the reign of the Abbasid caliph **al-Mamun**, who visited Jerusalem in **215 AH / 830 CE**, he ordered its restoration. When the restoration was completed, the name of the Umayyad caliph **Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan** was replaced with that of **al-Mamun**, though the craftsmen failed to change the year of construction. This inscription appeared above the columns supporting the southern roof of the mosque.

Earlier, the mosque had been affected by a series of earthquakes in the region, leaving visible damage. During the caliphate of **Abu Jafar al-Mansur**, the gold and silver plates covering the mosque’s doors were removed, melted down, and minted into **dinars and dirhams** to finance restoration works.

The **Crusades (1096–1291)** constituted a major turning point in the history of the **Mashriq**, particularly for Jerusalem, which became a decisive symbol of victory or defeat for both Muslims and Christians. The declared justification for these Western campaigns was the ‘liberation of the Holy Land’ from Muslim rule and the recovery of Jerusalem.”



This period therefore received considerable attention from faculty members specializing in medieval history, particularly regarding Jerusalem and other cities of **Bilad al-Sham**. The course “**Crusader Wars**” examines the **Frankish occupation of Jerusalem** and the establishment of a Frankish kingdom there between **1099 and 1291**.

Initially limited to villages and small towns, this kingdom later expanded to encompass **historical Palestine, Lebanon, parts of Syria and Jordan, and even Sinai**. Attempts were also made to extend its borders into **Fatimid Egypt**, though without success.

The kingdom ultimately failed to withstand the sustained campaigns of the **Zengids and later the Ayyubids**, culminating in the recovery of Jerusalem and other cities in **1187**. The Franks then transferred their capital to **Acre**, before their state was finally eliminated in **1291** by the **Mamluk sultans al-Zahir Baybars and al-Ashraf Khalil**.

Despite the disappearance of the Frankish political presence, the social structures and military-religious orders they established—such as the **Templars, Hospitallers, and Teutonic Knights**—left lasting political and social legacies in the region.

Jerusalem subsequently became a provincial capital subordinate to **Damascus**, except for certain periods when it enjoyed a special administrative status. Under the peace treaty between **Sultan Qalawun** and the Franks, Jerusalem was designated the “**Kingdom of Noble Jerusalem**,” whose ruler was appointed by the sultan.

In courses dealing with **Mamluk history**, Jerusalem is allocated substantial coverage encompassing political, economic, social, and urban life, based on numerous historical sources.

In courses on **modern and contemporary Arab history**, Jerusalem and the Palestinian question appear prominently, since the roots and consequences of the colonial project date back to this period. For example, **Professor Abdul Karim Rafq**, in his textbook “**The Arab Mashriq in the Ottoman Era**,” emphasizes the need to study the history of the **Zionist movement during the Ottoman period** in order to understand both its origins and its later dangers.

They were able to occupy important positions in administration, as they were known for their recognized expertise in financial administration during both the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. One of the most notable points that drew attention was their use of Hebrew writing in their records, enabling them to continue monopolizing this profession. As evidence, reference is made to a poem composed by the Homs poet Sheikh Amin al-Jundi (1766–1841), in which he praised the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II (1785–1839) (al-Jundi, 1321 AH, p. 75).

Despite the small number of pages that addressed the beginnings of Zionist activity before the Balfour Declaration was issued, they nevertheless shed light on several

aspects, most notably the Indo-European origins of the Jews, such as the Khazar Jews, and their long-standing preoccupation with establishing a national homeland for themselves. The foundations for this were eventually made possible with the support of Britain and the United States, after Jewish settlement in Palestine had become an element of international policy since the late eighteenth century, when the Directory government in France (1795–1797) attempted to gain the support of the Jews of the East by promising them the establishment of a Jewish “Commonwealth” in Palestine in order to facilitate its plans for the colonization of the Arab East.

Attention was also given to Napoleon’s interest in Jewish support, and his attempts to entice them with the restoration of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and how Britain adopted the idea and began working toward establishing a national homeland for them. From this came Britain’s protection of them in the nineteenth century and attempts to settle them there. The course also focused on the mechanisms used by Britain to support Western Jews and support their activity in Palestine. This coincided with the increase of their activity in France and the establishment in 1860 of the “Alliance Israélite Universelle” in Paris, in addition to other centers in Europe for spreading education and professions and promoting the Hebrew language among the Jews of Palestine and Jewish immigrants arriving there, whose numbers increased despite all the Ottoman measures that attempted to limit their arrival to Palestine.

These events became intertwined with the beginning of the First World War, ultimately serving the interests of the Zionist movement supported by colonial powers, which continued to support it until the issuance of the Balfour Declaration.

In the course “**Modern History of the Arab East**” (Tarbin, 1982), which is still adopted as a university course for fourth-year students in the Department of History since the early 1960s, Jewish immigration was discussed from the time its first waves began from 1830’s in Greater Syria, when small numbers of Jews settled in Jerusalem, Safed, and Tiberias for religious reasons. Their numbers later increased, but for settlement purposes financed by wealthy Jews. The Ottoman position rejecting Zionist projects was also discussed, despite the fact that these attempts were not successful (Tarbin, 1983, p. 363), especially after the approval of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration.

“There is no need to say that the birth of this declaration and the circumstances of its issuance cannot fundamentally be separated from the issue of separating the Arab East from the Arab West by inserting a foreign body that would occupy the inevitable Arab launch in confronting colonialism and its interests in the Arab homeland, which its enemies fragmented against its will and against its interests. Nor can it be separated from the issue of the French-British struggle over the Holy Land, the fortress of the Suez Canal, and the excellent land and air gateway to the East.” (Tarbin, 1983, p. 401).



Ahmed Tarbin then explains the nature of the Balfour Declaration, its strategic dimensions, and Britain's support for the Zionist movement in implementing the declaration: "In July 1922, when the British Mandate over Palestine was officially declared, the Balfour Declaration was incorporated into the preamble of the Mandate document so that it would have the sanctity and authority of international treaties." (Tarbin, 1983, p. 433).

The most important aspect included in the course is the author's conscious discussion of the political development of the Zionist movement under the British Mandate from 1917 until 1948, passing through the events of the Second World War and the subsequent American support for Zionist policy. As Weizmann stated in the United States of America: "Jewish ambitions are no longer satisfied with the idea of the national home, but rather seek to transform the whole of Palestine into a Jewish Commonwealth." Weizmann justified this shift by the possibility of the emergence of an Arab union extending from Iraq to Libya, which could threaten the national home by dissolving it within this turbulent Arab environment. Therefore, its geographical scope had to be expanded so that its territorial possession would include Palestine as defined by the Mandate (Tarbin, 1983, p. 600).

Much of what was included in the previous course had been quoted in large part from an earlier course entitled **"Studies in Arab Society"** (a group of university professors, 1967, pp. 336–373), in which Professors Shakir Mustafa and Ahmad Tarbin presented a study focusing on introducing the Palestinian issue, the alliance between Zionism and colonialism, and the Zionist invasion. The history of the issue was divided into three stages: the first was the gradual invasion under the British Mandate beginning with the Balfour Declaration and ending with Britain's abandonment of the Palestinian issue to the United Nations (a group of professors, 1967, pp. 337–349). The second stage dealt with the unjust partition decision. The third stage dealt with the military invasion and the establishment of Israel, highlighting the Arab uprising against the partition decision, colonial preparation for the establishment of Israel, then the armistice, the catastrophe, and the Nakba and its effects locally, regionally, and internationally.

In the course **"Contemporary Global Issues"** (Saleh, Youfa, 1999), Jerusalem and the Palestinian issue were studied in terms of their international strategic dimension, as well as the positions of the Eastern and Western blocs toward them and the positions of some international, Islamic, and Arab organizations and institutions toward them.

However, due to the importance of the issue locally, regionally, and internationally, a special course was dedicated to it since the 1980s in the Department of History at Damascus University entitled **"Studies in the History of the Palestinian Issue"** (Bahlawan, Saleh, 2005), in which Palestine was studied geographically and historically from its origins until the present from all its aspects.

Legal Dimension

From a legal perspective, the Palestinian question has been addressed in the **Faculty of Law at Damascus University** in the course **“The Palestinian Question and Contemporary Problems – Some Legal Features.”** This course argues that the Mandate over Palestine violated the basic legal principles of the League of Nations, that the procedures adopted by the **United Nations** in this regard were unlawful, and that the establishment and status of Israel have been regarded in this legal framework as illegal since 1948.

The second part of the textbook examines in detail a number of issues arising from the conflict, including the question of **Jerusalem**—such as divided Jerusalem, annexation, and proposals for internationalization—as well as the problem of **Palestinian refugees**, including the position of the Arab states, Israel’s responsibility, the expansion of Jewish settlement, and the increasing responsibility of the United Nations.

The third part addresses more recent issues, such as the **inalienable rights of the Palestinian people**, the **Palestine Liberation Organization**, the **Camp David Accords**, and the **Egyptian–Israeli Peace Treaty**.

Although the legal aspects of the Palestinian question are now taught as part of the course **“Contemporary International Issues,”** that course continues to address Jerusalem historically up to the establishment of the Zionist entity, the positions of the **League of Nations** and the **United Nations**, and the illegality of the occupation. It also examines Jerusalem in relation to Arab and Islamic positions, the **Oslo Accords** and their implications for the city’s legal status, the **United States’ recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel**, and the consequences of that decision—including **President Trump’s declaration**—while reassessing the foundations of the conflict in light of **international law**.

Literary Dimension

The Palestinian question has also figured prominently in several **Arabic language courses**, both in prose and in poetry. Among the most prominent scholars in this regard was **Professor Abdul Karim al-Ashtar (1929–2011)**, one of the leading figures in the **Department of Arabic**, who specialized in the **literature of the Nakba** and produced important studies on its narrative representations.

He enriched the course **“Introduction to Modern Arabic Prose and Its Genres”** with analyses of this body of prose writing, and he also devoted considerable attention to it in poetry and criticism in the course **“Landmarks in Modern Arabic Criticism.”** Following his example, subsequent instruction has continued to focus on this literature alongside **resistance literature** and other forms of writing related to the Palestinian question in poetry, prose, and various artistic genres.



This is clearly evident in the course **“Modern and Contemporary Arabic Poetry,”** which assigns considerable importance to the themes of **resistance, steadfastness, and attachment to the land**, and traces the successive stages of the Palestinian question as represented by Palestinian poets from its beginnings to the present. The course emphasizes the role of poets in fostering the spirit of struggle by rejecting occupation while at the same time calling for the legitimate rights of the oppressed Palestinian people, as illustrated, for example, by the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, notably his poem ‘Waiting for the Returnees.’”

The same course also focuses on the artistic dimension, particularly the use of **symbolic, historical, and mythological references** by Palestinian poets. In the course **“Lectures on Modern Arabic Poetry,”** the modernist poetic movement is studied, especially **free verse** and **prose poetry**; here, the principal examples used are poems by **Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim**, and other poets of the Palestinian cause.

The course **“Modern and Contemporary Arabic Theatre”** examines the work of Syrian dramatists who address the Palestinian question and its evolution, the reasons for the loss of land, and Zionist practices both within Palestine itself and in exile, while also presenting possible solutions.

In the field of criticism, **Abdul Karim al-Ashtar** and **Professor Husam al-Khateeb (1932–2022)** were among those who laid the foundations of this discipline for students in the **Department of Arabic**, with a particular focus on the Palestinian question and Jerusalem. Al-Khateeb devoted a detailed study to **“Literary Criticism in the Palestinian Homeland and the Diaspora,”** and produced works such as **“Palestinian Echoes in the Literary Experience,” “Ruhi al-Khateeb, Pioneer of Comparative Literature,” “The Palestinian Translation Movement: A Study and Bibliography,”** and **“Comparative Literature: Theory and Practice.”**

Through these studies, he provided his students with rich material presented in distinctive pedagogical forms. Consequently, some of his students, who later became faculty members in the Department of Arabic, sought to do justice to “al-Khateeb—the son of Palestine» as one of its leading literary critics, alongside **Ihsan Abbas (1920–2003), Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1920–1994), Abd al-Rahman Yaghi (1924–2017), Faisal Darraj (b. 1943), Muhammad Yusuf Najm (1925–2005),** and **Yusuf Sami Yusuf (1938–2013).**

The course **“Modern and Contemporary Critical Trends”** addresses an important portion of the critical work of these figures, while also engaging with new publications on the Palestinian question by Palestinian and other scholars in ways that underscore the role of Palestinian literature, in its various forms, in the struggle over identity.

Fourth: Jerusalem and the Palestinian Question in University Theses

Historical, Legal, and Political Studies

The importance of what has been addressed in university theses on Jerusalem and the Palestinian question derives from the nature of the thesis itself as an academic work and a major source of information. It represents the culmination of scholarly work and the outcome of scientific research based on rigorous academic and methodological principles. Accordingly, through its theses, Damascus University has contributed significant scholarly output on this subject in several fields, which will be outlined below.

These theses have addressed a range of themes across the different historical phases through which Palestine has passed. Among them is the master's thesis **"The Political History of the Jews of Palestine in the Roman Period, 63 BCE–135 CE"** (Muhammad, 2015), which examines the history of the Jews in Jerusalem through a study of the history of Palestine. Another master's thesis, **"Internal Crusader Conflicts in the Second Kingdom of Jerusalem – The Third and Fifth Crusades, 1187–1221"** (Al Alabi, 2009), investigates intra-Frankish struggles over the throne of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the conflicts that took place among Western powers during the Third and Fifth Crusades, with particular focus on Jerusalem.

A doctoral thesis entitled **"Damascus and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem from the Late Eleventh to the Late Twelfth Century, 492–569 AH / 1098–1174 CE"** (Juni, 1992) analyzes the military conflict between Damascus and the Latin Kingdom in the region surrounding Lake Tiberias and the Hauran, the position of the Damascene atabegs toward Frankish expansion in central **Bilad al-Sham**, the rise of **Imad al-Din Zangi**, and the subsequent political developments in the region, including the siege of Damascus during the **Second Crusade in 1148**, its failure, and its consequences for both Damascus and the Franks in the Mashriq.

For the Ottoman period, the master's thesis **"Palestine in the Writings of Selected Arab Travelers from the Late Sixteenth to the Late Nineteenth Century: An Economic, Political, Social, and Urban Study"** (Khayrbek, 1990) examines Palestine through seven travel accounts, with Jerusalem occupying the largest share of the material, given that pilgrimage to Jerusalem was regarded as the **"lesser pilgrimage"** heralding the **"greater pilgrimage"** to Mecca. The thesis compares the accounts of Arab travelers with those of Western travelers who visited Jerusalem during the same period. Its importance lies partly in its inclusion of information on Jerusalem and Palestine that had not previously been noted, especially regarding travel routes and their development between Medina and Damascus, from Damascus to Jerusalem, and from there to Egypt during the Ottoman era. The thesis also contains political and social observations which, though recorded as travelers' impressions, in fact provide valuable information on Jerusalem in particular and Palestine in general, thereby filling important gaps in the record of the Ottoman period.

Another doctoral thesis, **"A Political Study of the Situation in Jerusalem, 1831–1914"** (Nader, 2016), examines the administrative changes in Jerusalem during



and after the Egyptian occupation, the major political developments following the withdrawal of **Ibrahim Pasha** from Palestine, Western intervention, and the principal foundations established to entrench and perpetuate that intervention through support for the Zionist movement and its establishment of colonies, as well as the Arab and Ottoman responses to these developments.

A subsequent master's thesis, **"Foundations of the Zionist Project in Palestine: Immigration, Settlement, and Displacement, 1882–1967"** (Al Nasser, 2021), follows these foundations up to 1967 and analyzes the Palestinian national responses to them. Given Jerusalem's importance, symbolism, and delicate political status, a doctoral thesis in the Faculty of Law, **"The Fate of Unified Jerusalem between International Resolutions and Settlement Mechanisms"** (Al Khateeb, 2012), was devoted to this issue. It examines the question of internationalization through the **Partition Resolution** and the international position toward it, Jerusalem between Zionist measures and international resolutions, international reactions to these measures, and mechanisms for resolving the status of unified Jerusalem through Arab treaties, concluding with an assessment of the city's future in light of two competing demands: the concept of peace for Arabs and Jews, and the path toward a **"complete Jerusalem."**

Given the significance of Zionist settlement in Palestine and its far-reaching implications, the issue is also treated as a key mechanism through which Western support for the Zionist movement enabled the occupation of Palestine and the commission of a crime against the Palestinian people. (Maqqali, 2015) examines settlement as an issue of international law. It links the concept, nature, and definition of the crime of settlement to international efforts—through the **United Nations**—to codify settlement as an international crime, both before and after the creation of the UN. The thesis analyzes Israel's expropriation of Arab land under various laws classifying such properties as **"state lands,"** and studies the demographic, social, political, and security consequences of this policy, as well as the international and Israeli responsibility for the crime and its effects. Most importantly, it evaluates the legal options for invoking international responsibility vis-à-vis Israel and for holding it accountable, including mechanisms for prosecuting Israeli perpetrators of the crime of settlement, which had been facilitated by the British Mandate authorities in Palestine.

In a related vein, the doctoral thesis **"Economic and Social Conditions in Palestine under the British Mandate, 1922–1945"** (Taamari, 1989)—as described by a later study (Al Aqrabawi, 2011)—documents the persecution, displacement, and repression practiced by the Mandate authorities, as well as the demographic engineering resulting from their encouragement of Jewish immigration to Palestine and the establishment of colonies. It shows how this compelled Palestinians to reject the imposed reality and to adopt peaceful forms of struggle to defend their identity and homeland, including

conferences, strikes, protests, demonstrations, and negotiations.

Despite the hardships then faced by Arab countries and their preoccupation with confronting colonial rule, many states responded to Palestine's call for assistance. Nationalist movements took clear positions against the policy of the British Mandate in Palestine and its support for the Zionist movement. This is evident in the doctoral thesis **"The Position of Nationalist Movements in the Maghreb Countries toward the Palestinian Question: Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco between the Two World Wars"** (Khayrbek, 2004), which traces the positions of various political currents from the late nineteenth century onward. It shows an early awareness of the Palestinian question, coupled with concern for its future, rooted in the similarity between the colonial project in Palestine and that in the Maghreb —especially Algeria—where France pursued a policy of **Frenchification** and identity erasure analogous to the **Judaization** of Palestine. The fact that the Maghreb countries, especially Algeria, had been subjected to French colonialism earlier than other Arab states heightened their awareness of the schemes being directed against Palestine. Consequently, they were more inclined to support it through demonstrations, protests, fundraising and remittances, conferences and seminars, and press coverage of conditions in Palestine in order to raise public awareness of what many leading thinkers of the **Nahda** described as the greatest crime being plotted in history.

The **Nakba of 1948** had far-reaching consequences, among them the issue examined in **"The Question of Palestinian Refugees as One of the Issues in the Arab–Zionist Conflict, 1948–1963: An Analytical Study of International Projects Concerning Refugees, 1948–1963"** (Al Asbahi, 2007). This thesis examines efforts to reach a settlement on the refugee and water questions, first during the period **1948–1953**, then **1953–1961**, and finally **1961–1963**. During these periods, numerous committees were established and many plans were developed to address the problem, which was only one aspect of the new reality faced by Palestinians—whether as refugees outside Palestine or as people living under occupation in their own land.

The consequences of this reality also appear in studies such as **"The Problematic of Palestinian Civil Society under Zionist Occupation"** (Deeb, 2021), which draws on Western conceptions of civil society and their evolution in the classical and Enlightenment periods in Europe, before examining their emergence in the Arab world, their place in Arab thought, and the development of Palestinian civil society before and after the establishment of limited self-rule in **1994**. It further analyzes international and regional conventions governing the formation of civil associations, the legal and legislative environment of Palestinian civil society, its developmental role, and the challenges of funding.

Among the principal challenges arising from Zionist settlement in Palestine is **"The Problematic of the Unity of the Palestinian Political Project in Light of Social Transformations in Palestinian Society"** (Baytari, 2010), which traces demographic,



economic, and political transformations from the British Mandate period to the post-Oslo era and assesses their impact on Palestinian social reality and, consequently, on the current socio-political landscape.

At the level of Palestinian politics, the doctoral thesis **“The Role of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Managing the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict, 1993–2009”** (Khalil, 2011) traces the beginnings of Palestinian national mobilization against the Mandate and Zionist activity, the establishment of the **PLO**, the rise of **Fatah**, the **1967 war** and its regional repercussions, the events of **Black September** in Jordan (1970), the impact of the **October 1973 war** on the organization’s policies, the **Camp David Accords (1978)** and their effect on the course of the Arab–Israeli conflict, the invasion of Lebanon (**1981–1982**) and its implications for PLO policy, the evolution of conflict management, the establishment of the **State of Palestine**, and developments up to the **Camp David Summit**.

Syrian journalism has also not been absent from academic analysis of one of the most sensitive moments in the history of the Palestinian question—**President Trump’s declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of “Israel”**—as shown in the thesis (Al Zubi, 2021), which examines the methodological framework used by Syrian newspapers in addressing the issue, the theoretical framework of the conflict, the historical development of U.S. foreign policy on the question, and Trump’s declaration in the media.

Given the developments the question has undergone in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, it has also been examined at the international, regional, and local levels in theses such as **“U.S. Foreign Policy toward the Palestinian Question: A Comparative Analytical Study of the Presidents’ Administrations, 2001–2020”** (Isa, 2022), **“German Policy toward the Palestinian Question and Its Evolution, 1949–2008”** (Haydar, 2011), **“Soviet Policy toward the Palestinian Question, 1947–1991”** (Zaydan, 2014), and **“The Role of the Arab League in Supporting the Palestinian Question, 1945–1978”** (Khalil, 2023).

Just as Western preparation in support of the Zionist movement was long-term and penetrated all spheres of life, so too has the impact of the Palestinian question on Palestinians—and on Arabs more broadly—been profound, shaping the political socialization of Arab generations. This is apparent in **“The Role of Palestinian Resistance in Political Socialization: A Field Study of Palestinian Youth in the Syrian Arab Republic”** (Khoury, 1990), which assesses the importance of political socialization among Palestinians, the stages of Palestinian national action, the theoretical background of socio-political socialization, its phases, and its ideological framework. The thesis complements its theoretical discussion with a field study of the **Democratic and Progressive Youth Organizations**, examining their organizational structures, areas of activity, the content of their cultural production, and its actual impact.

The doctoral thesis **“The Role of Women in the Arab–Zionist Conflict, 1948–1991”** (Ali Bek, 2024) similarly underscores that women’s participation in multifaceted nonviolent struggle and in armed resistance is rooted in their social upbringing within Palestinian society, which has endured displacement, oppression, and deprivation. It is also the outcome of the work of civil society and governmental institutions to empower women educationally, politically, economically, socially, and in terms of health, as demonstrated in the doctoral thesis **“The Reality of Development Institutions in Empowering Palestinian Women and a Proposed Strategy for Their Development: A Field Study in the Gaza Strip”** (Najm, 2012).

Literary Studies

The Nakba of Palestine left a profound mark on those who departed and on those who remained, at all levels, including the cultural sphere. Its impact is evident in the literary production—both prose and poetry—of Palestinians, to the point that Palestinian literature has come to reflect the nature and forms of the conflict itself, grounded in the essence of the Palestinian question, its principles, constants, and national and pan-Arab significance. This, in turn, has galvanized Arab intellectuals, including Syrians, particularly at Damascus University, where numerous theses have been defended on various issues relating to Jerusalem and the Palestinian question.

Among these is **“Jerusalem in Modern Arabic Poetry in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, 1948–2000”** (Al Islam, 2006), which traces the various orientations in poetry about Jerusalem, including appeals to national sentiment, nostalgia, calls to conscience, celebration of the Arab past, the role of youth in the uprisings of the 1980s, the role of Arab and Muslim women, Islamic awakening, revolution and jihad, steadfastness and resistance, martyrdom and the figure of the martyr, political conscience, and peace. The thesis also examines the language of these poems, their stylistic features, imagery, external and internal musicality, genres, and distinctive characteristics.

Researchers have also not overlooked **“The Use of Folk Heritage in Palestinian Resistance Poetry in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century”** (Al Faqs, 2022), which analyzes the factors behind and importance of employing Palestinian folklore, Israeli practices targeting it, and the forms of folklore that appear in resistance poetry, including songs, folktales, epics and popular sagas, proverbs, beliefs, and customs, as well as the aesthetic qualities folklore acquires when incorporated into resistance verse.

Myth has likewise been employed in the service of poetic art and poetic ideas so as to enhance their impact, as discussed in the thesis **“Symbol and Myth in Modern and Contemporary Palestinian Poetry”** (Ghunaym, 1989). **“Representations of Self and Other in Contemporary Palestinian Poetry”** (Ubayd, 2009) explores the life



of the Palestinian individual searching for identity amid a multiplicity of surrounding identities, to the point that self-recognition becomes difficult and compels a search for identity in history and in the many faces of the **“other.”** This problematic of self-discovery is reflected in the poetic texts analyzed by the thesis.

Due to the aesthetic and functional importance of intertextuality in Palestinian poetry, it has also been studied in **“Intertextuality in Palestinian Arabic Poetry in the 1990s”** (Al Faqs, 2007), which examines its sources, forms, and characteristics. Even death received extensive attention in the thesis **“Death in Contemporary Palestinian Poetry, 1963–1995”** (Shamma, 2001), which addresses both individual and collective death in the context of martyrdom.

Given that the novel develops the ability to think about life situations and to form attitudes toward them, while also helping to build and advance society by reinforcing human and ethical values, its elements have likewise been studied, particularly the character. When the central character is the hero, its importance increases and its presence dominates the events of the novel. Around this figure secondary characters emerge, defined through their interaction with the hero and the hero’s interaction with them. This is the focus of the doctoral thesis **“The Hero in the Palestinian Novel, 1965–1990”** (Al Qadi, 1995), which examines, among others, the intellectual hero (as in the works of **Nabil Khoury, Afnan al Qasim, Hasan Sami Yusuf, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Samih al Qasim, and Edmond Shahada**), the resistance hero (**Ghassan Kanafani, Salwa al Banna, Faisal Hourani, Muhammad Ayyub**), the negative hero (**Emile Habibi, Salman Natour, Afnan al Qasim, Ghassan Kanafani**), the female hero (**Nasser al Din al Nashashibi, Ghassan Kanafani, Salwa al Banna, Tawfiq Fayyad**), the people as hero (**Rashad Abu Shawar, Faisal Hourani, Sahar Khalifeh, Zaki Darwish, Yahya Yakhlaf**), the Arab–Israeli conflict and the Palestinian question (**Ali Surur, Hani Abu Naim, Yahya Yakhlaf, Ahmad Omar Shahin**), and the relationship between the intellectual and political authority (**Abdul Rahman Munif, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Ibrahim Nasrallah**).

Land is a central pillar of the Palestinian novel, not only in a geographical or spatial sense but also in an existential one. It is the axis around which most Palestinian literary production has revolved since the early twentieth century. Land and identity are the core of the conflict and the entry point into the literary imagination in its various forms. Palestinian writers and intellectuals, fully aware of the stakes of the struggle between the Palestinian national movement and the Zionist project over land, place, identity, and the destiny determined by that struggle, have made land a focal theme.

As the conflict has continued, the representation of land has shifted from one stage to another, as shown in the doctoral thesis **“Land in the Palestinian Arabic Novel, 1965–1982”** (Al Saleh, 1991), which covers the period from the outbreak of armed struggle to Israel’s invasion of Lebanon under the declared aim of eliminating the PLO. The thesis examines the relationship between land and human figures—the

peasant, the landlord, the village headman, the religious figure, the fighter, the intellectual, the woman, and the Zionist.

Women, particularly Palestinian women, have also been a central focus of many novels, regardless of their ideological orientations, because they constitute a rich artistic source of suggestive and expressive meanings. This prompted the doctoral thesis **“Woman in the Palestinian Novel, 1965–1985”** (Al Shami, 1997), which analyzes the reality of Arab women in general and Palestinian women in particular in terms of their relationship with men, society, and the homeland. It examines various female character types: the traditional, the revolutionary, the educated, and the marginalized.

To render these figures convincingly, the novelist must create human characters capable of persuading readers of the authenticity of the roles they embody, engaging them and influencing them so that they continue reading. The thesis therefore studies the Palestinian woman in the novel artistically in terms of character, place, time, and narration. A later study (Qatneji, 2021) examines the **“other”** as **“the Jew between religion and politics,”** as reflected in literature and media. It concludes that portrayals of this **“other”** are not static, but differ across historical stages: before 1948, between 1948 and 1967, from the **June 1967 defeat** to the **First Intifada (1987)**, from that point to **Oslo**, and then from Oslo to the early twenty-first century. It also finds that the depiction of the **“other”** in novels set inside Palestine differs from that in exile literature, with numerous and diverse representations in each.

Just as the Palestinian novel has contributed to the development of the Arabic novel through its varied trajectories and settings—between an interior in which people experience estrangement on their own land and a diaspora marked by constant longing—the Palestinian short story has also been the subject of study. The thesis **“The Palestinian Short Story: A Textual Study of Artistic Forms, 1970–1990”** (Abd al Rahim, 2011) examines a range of themes and artistic techniques, including the axial, fragmented, homogeneous, harmonious, interwoven, reportorial, abstract, and dialogic forms, each associated with writers who excelled in its use.

Under the title **“The Critical Movement among Palestinian Writers in the Diaspora”** (Hammoud, 1988), another thesis surveys the contributions of Palestinian writers to literary criticism in exile, seeking to combine documentation and social analysis with the identification of literary features. It draws on comparative criticism in the works of **Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Husam al Khateeb, Abd al Rahman Yaghi, Faisal Darraj, Muhammad Yusuf Najm, and Yusuf al Yusuf.**

Heritage-Focused Studies

Palestinian heritage in all its forms safeguards the identity of the Palestinian people—their customs, traditions, cultural assets, national values, and sacred sites with deep



historical roots—within a geographical space long recognized as the cradle of civilizations. Yet this deeply rooted heritage is currently subjected to marginalization, erasure, appropriation, uprooting, distortion, obliteration, and **Judaization** by an occupation whose crimes defy description. It is therefore essential to protect this heritage, beginning with exposing the occupation's practices toward Palestine—land and people—and devising mechanisms for its preservation. Scientific research constitutes one such mechanism.

For example, **“The Impact of Judaization and Its Consequences for the Erasure of the Popular Heritage of the City of Jerusalem, 1948–2020”** (Qasim, 2021) documents Zionist practices—by the government, army, and institutions—aimed at Judaizing Jerusalem administratively, geographically, demographically, urbanistically, politically, and socially. At the same time, the study notes that the residents of Jerusalem have refused to submit to the reality imposed by the occupation, rejecting the Judaization of education by refusing Zionist curricula and instead relying on private schools and **waqf** schools. They have engaged in peaceful resistance—demonstrations, legal struggles, strikes, protests, civil disobedience, petitions, and media campaigns—and have developed active civic initiatives with regional and international impact that have drawn attention to their suffering and to the attempted Judaization of their capital.

Despite this resistance, Zionism continues to pursue a systematic and carefully planned policy of stealing Palestinian heritage in all its forms. The study **“Palestinian Heritage between the Risk of Loss and the Effort to Preserve It: Popular Palestinian Dress as a Model”** (Ashmawi, 2021) examines the occupation's methods for effacing Palestinian heritage and appropriating and distorting symbols of Palestinian national identity. Examples include **El Al's** use of the Palestinian **thob** as an official uniform for its flight attendants and the registration of examples of this dress as **“Israeli”** in global encyclopedias and international exhibitions, as part of a deliberate strategy to Judaize all tangible and intangible heritage in order to justify settlement and the theft of land.

The study emphasizes that the occupation is fully aware of the importance of traditional dress as a heritage value, with its distinctive motifs, elements, and classifications, enhanced by embroidery that adds aesthetic, decorative, expressive, and symbolic dimensions. Concerned artists, fearing the Judaization of this heritage, have sought ways to preserve it, beginning with exposing Zionist Judaization policies that aim to erase Palestinian identity and steal its heritage, and by reviving and disseminating that heritage widely, particularly among children. They advocate the development of school curricula on heritage for private schools and **UNRWA** schools, comprehensive documentation of all forms of heritage in encyclopedic projects that highlight its history and continuity, and, crucially, broad-based training for younger generations in the craft of producing embroidered garments.

In the same vein, the study **“The Palestinian Thob: Heritage and Identity of What Remains of a Homeland”** (Hussein, 2020) underscores the antiquity of Palestinian dress, its components, colors and their connotations, and its deep **Canaanite** roots. The embroidery adorning the dress narrates the history of its people; it has its own rules, norms, patterns, threads, and fabrics. Protecting this dress is therefore a duty, for it is not merely a garment but the embodiment of history, identity, and the trajectory of a people whose roots run deep in their past.

Preservation begins with the study of its elements and decorative motifs, their meanings and symbols, and their variations between urban, rural, and Bedouin contexts. The study distinguishes among cities, villages, and Bedouin areas, reflecting their specific geographical and historical conditions, and traces developments in this art over the years as a logical result of successive civilizations that have left their imprint on the dress. Palestinian women, at home and in the diaspora, have recognized the magnitude of their responsibility in safeguarding the identity embodied in this dress. They have taught the craft of making and embroidering it on a wide scale and extended its use to new forms, including garments suited to different occasions, large and small bags, and various types of coverings adorned with Palestinian embroidery to enhance their beauty, quality, and distinctiveness. Significantly, embroidery as a craft is widespread throughout the Arab region, not only in Palestine, both by hand and by machine, in response to consumer demand.

Interest in this dress has gone even further, inspiring Palestinian visual artists who have incorporated embroidered motifs into their paintings, transforming them into icons that adorn walls. This led to the study **“Decoration and Symbolism in Palestinian Visual Art”** (Al Saleh, 2000), which highlights how decorative art, long used to embellish pottery, later adorned traditional clothing for children, women, and men, and has now been adopted by artists with all its aesthetic, decorative, expressive, and symbolic values.

Fearing the Judaization of all aspects of Palestinian heritage, artists have incorporated these elements into their paintings, which function as a kind of living archive of both material and immaterial culture. Even the Palestinian **dabke** has been incorporated into visual works in order to preserve its deep and continuous history, ensuring that it is immortalized on canvas and that artists themselves are remembered through the visual heritage they have renewed with brush and color. They have elevated it to a realm difficult to appropriate, especially given that its roots lie in an ancient tradition whose present condition is fragmented. Artists therefore strive to reassemble it using all expressive forms at their disposal, depicting women in distinctive Palestinian dress, Arabian horses, **“decorative and calligraphic motifs and mythical heritage elements used symbolically to express contemporary Palestinian reality and its transformations from the beginning of the Nakba to the revolution....”** In this way, artists have lived the reality of confrontation and have been driven not only to



represent reality, but also to connect it with heritage roots through symbols such as the woman, the dove, the Arabian horse, the fighter, traditional dress, broken shackles, olive and orange trees, folk celebrations, flute playing, buildings, and domes.

As part of the broader effort to safeguard Palestinian heritage, it has also been necessary to document **“The Palestinian Wedding and Its Chants and Songs between Past and Present: The City of Safad as a Model”** (Awad, 2018), on the basis that weddings form part of the culture and heritage of any society. The study documents key terms denoting all stages of the wedding, from the initial proposal to the bride’s move to her husband’s house, in both material and symbolic terms. It also records the Palestinian wedding as an element of Palestinian folk heritage in both past and present, its importance in consolidating kinship ties, the stages of the wedding, the social and economic factors affecting it, and the bands, musical instruments, and folk songs used at each stage of the celebration.

Other Topics

Among the theses defended in the **Department of Geography** is **“The Use of Geographic Information Systems in Studying Population Services in Palestinian Refugee Camps in Damascus and Its Countryside: A Geomatics Study”** (Hassan, 2012). This thesis examines the distribution and characteristics of Palestinian refugees in Syria, the phases of their displacement, and the characteristics of the camps themselves. It also analyzes the factors influencing variations in residents’ needs, the construction of a **GIS database** for Palestinian camps, and the services available in Palestinian camps and gatherings at the general level. In addition, it addresses urban characteristics and services through a case study of **Khan al-Sheikh Camp**, and applies spatial analysis within GIS to identify the optimal location for a proposed school.

In the **Department of International Economics**, the thesis **“Practices of the Israeli Occupation and Their Repercussions for the Palestinian Economy”** (Mousa, 2012) analyzes the Palestinian economy and the implications of its development, including its resources and the constraints on its growth between **1967 and 1993**. It studies the impact of the **Oslo Accords** on the Palestinian economy, the condition of the economy on the eve of the **al-Aqsa Intifada**, the effects of the Intifada on both the Palestinian and Israeli economies, and the economic consequences of the uprising, as well as the future of the Palestinian economy and the possibility of disengaging it from the Israeli economy.

In the **Department of Economics and Planning**, the thesis **“A Proposed Econometric Model of Production and Cost Functions in the Palestinian Banking Sector”** (Odeh, 2007) addresses the evolution of the monetary and banking system in Palestine, previous studies in this field, the theoretical framework of the study, a descriptive analysis of financial and banking indicators of banks in Palestine, and the results of the statistical analysis.

In the health field, within the **Faculty of Medicine**, a study entitled **“A Field Study of**

Sickle Cell Anemia in the Dannun Camp for Palestinian Refugees” (Al Qassar, 1979) was conducted. This study consists of both a theoretical and an applied field component and assesses the prevalence of this disease among children in the camp, as well as the extent to which preventive care can be provided through vaccination and antibiotics.

Conclusion

On the premise that the Palestinian question, including Jerusalem, is an **Arab national cause** and not merely a national issue concerning the Palestinian people alone, Syria has shown sustained interest in it at all levels. This interest has not been merely a matter of sympathy, but rather a response to the need to contain developments whose effects have extended across the entire region, not only to Palestine and its immediate surroundings.

Accordingly, it has been necessary to adopt various means to address this issue, foremost among them the incorporation of Jerusalem and the Palestinian question into **university curricula** and **graduate studies**, given the central role of education in forming citizens capable of engaging with the issues of their nation.

It is therefore unsurprising that **Damascus University**—formerly the **Syrian University**—has served as an incubator for student and faculty activism, including protests, demonstrations, and lectures in support of Palestine. Subsequently, university courses and theses were entrusted with continuing this role without interruption up to the present day and across all faculties.

At the graduate level, a large number of theses have been defended on specific aspects of the history of Jerusalem and the Palestinian question in diverse fields. Although some of these theses may not be entirely novel in their topics, they offer fresh approaches to the issues they address. This represents a positive contribution and clear evidence that interest in the question remains vivid in the minds of students.

It also serves as an incentive to continue studying the question and its ramifications, especially at a time when it is passing through an extremely critical and sensitive phase.

Recommendations

- Encourage continued research on topics related to the Palestinian question and Jerusalem, as well as the developments affecting Jerusalem and other Palestinian cities, within university curricula, on the basis that this is a civilizational issue and Arab national issue, while also recognizing its specific national dimension.
- Place greater emphasis on studying Palestinian heritage in all its forms as part of the heritage of **Bilad al-Sham**, while respecting its particularity, since this constitutes proof that such heritage is **Arab Palestinian heritage**. This may be achieved through comparative studies with the traditional dress and cultural heritage of the broader Arab geographical environment surrounding Palestine.



- Increase the number of **field studies** conducted in Palestinian refugee camps and among Palestinian communities outside the camps.
- Document the initiatives undertaken by **Damascus University** throughout its history in support of Jerusalem and the Palestinian question.

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