

The Khâlidiyya Library in Jerusalem
1900–2000 †

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Jerusalem's Khâlidiyya Library is a fascinating institution in two ways: It is one of the foremost private libraries open to the public in the Arab world, and it is a remarkable example of an Arab cultural institution in Jerusalem as it asserts its Arab character in the face of encroaching assimilation of the city by Israeli occupiers. Thus it seems all the more appropriate to explore this institution and its history on the occasion of its centenary.

The Khâlidî family. It is, needless to say, impossible to mention the Khâlidiyya Library without recalling the famous Jerusalem family to whom the Library owes its existence. The family traces its ancestry back to the companion of the Prophet Khâlid ibn al-Walîd. Whatever these ancient connections might be, the *nisba* “Khâlidî” has been known in Palestine since the seventh century of the Hijra. Family tradition has it that the Khâlidîs left the city of Jerusalem just before it fell into the hands of the Crusaders, and that they sought refuge in Dayr ‘Uthmân in the Nablus region (where their *nisba* Dayrî originated). The family did not return to Jerusalem until Saladin retook the city.

There is copious information (thanks to the Mameluke historian Mujir al-Dîn) on Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallâh Shams al-Dîn, who died in 1433 at the aged of 90: He was *Qâdî ‘l-Qudâ* and *Shaykh al-Islâm*, and his reputation was such that he was invited in 1416 to go to Cairo as *Qâdî* by the great Mameluke sultan Mu‘ayyad Shaykh. He had five sons, on four of whom we have information. From Mameluke times, then, the Khâlidîs have played a prominent role in the judiciary of Jerusalem. In the Ottoman period, they acted as *Ḥanafî qâdîs*, secretaries (*kâtîb*) to the courts, surrogates (*nâ‘ib*) to the Turkish *qâdî* in Jerusalem, and as judges in other cities (Medina, Istanbul, and Tripoli, among others). Thus the Khâlidîs were one of the most influential families in the religious, intellectual, and cultural life of Jerusalem during the Ottoman era.

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In the nineteenth century, several members of the family were active in the reform movement under way in the capital and in the larger provincial cities, in particular as members of modernizing institutions. Mûsâ was linked with Sultan Mahmûd II. Yâsîn worked closely with Muḥammad Râshid Pâshâ and Midḥat Pâshâ. Khalîl was one of the founders of the party of Unity and Progress. It was Râghib (died in 1952) who announced in Jerusalem the Young Turks revolution and the constitution of 1908. Yûsuf (1842–1906) studied at Roberts College in Istanbul, worked as a Consul in Russia, was president of the municipality of Jerusalem (*baladiyya*) from 1867 to 1873, and was a deputy in the first Ottoman parliament. His brother Yâsîn (died in 1913) also presided over the municipality (1891–1901). Yâsîn’s son, Rûḥî al-Khâlidî was a scholar, diplomat, and respected politician. His studies took him to Nablus, Tripoli, Beirut, Istanbul, and Paris (where he taught Arabic in the School of Oriental Languages). He also took part in the Congress of Orientalists in 1897, was the Turkish Consul General to Bordeaux, thrice deputy in parliament. He introduced comparative literature into Arab literature in *Târîkh ‘Ilm al-Adab ‘inda al-Ifranĵ wa-al-‘Arab* published in Cairo 1902–1903. In short, the Khâlidîs, at the end of the nineteenth century, were pre-eminent citizens and leading members of the intelligentsia of Palestine.

The constitution of the Khâlidiyya Library came about as a result of a long process dating back as far as the seventeenth century. The Khâlidîs, as they were involved with religious and judicial activities, naturally owned and made use of private libraries. Very early they decided to consolidate these, by turning them into *waqfs*: The oldest was that of Sheikh Abû ‘l-Riḍâ Ṭâhâ (who died in 1660) whose *waqfiyya* (dated 1067/1656) was made up of a collection of 50 manuscripts held in trust for the sheikh, his descendants, and after them “to the Muslim scholars of Jerusalem and elsewhere”. The real core of the Khâlidiyya, though, came from Muḥammad Şun‘ Allâh (died in 1726): His *waqf*, constituted in 1720, consisted of 560 manuscripts—all precisely inventoried. Equally precise were the terms of the deed (*waqfiyya*): The *Nâẓir* (trustee) would not allow books to be taken out of the library except when an *‘âlim* needed to consult them; then he could study them in the presence of the *Nâẓir*. Afterwards, the manuscript had to be replaced on the shelves. It was possible to borrow a document for a month for a payment of a deposit. This *waqf* was really the beginning of a proper public collection. Şun‘ Allâh’s son established a *waqf* of 260 manuscripts, which, it was stipulated, could be lent out for three days only. In the nineteenth century, a time when the original collection had suffered

some losses, it occurred to Rûhî ibn Yâsîn to acquire books to enrich the collection with the aim of creating a public library in Jerusalem (1885–1886). His efforts, however, did not have immediate results.

It was Râghib Efendi, active in the judiciary of Jerusalem, then later in Jaffa, who revived the idea and brought it to fruition, with the intention of contributing to the revival of the Muslim cultural heritage of Jerusalem. He had in mind to unite various manuscripts and books, then dispersed among the family, and thus create a library that would be open to the public. His mother Khadija established a *waqf* which would be funded mainly by the al-‘Ayn bath. The location chosen for the library was the site of an ancient monument—the tomb of Emir Ḥusâm al-Dîn Barka Khân (built 1264–1280) to which would be added an adjacent plot of land, suitable for construction of the library building. The premises for the library, then, included the tomb, the second oldest Jerusalem Mameluke monument listed by Burgoyne (*Mamluk Jerusalem*, 1987, number 2), a reading room, an open courtyard where the emir and his two sons were buried, and another building. It is located right in the heart of the old town of Jerusalem on Bâb al-Silsila Street leading to al-Ḥarâm al-Sharîf gate. The library was officially opened in 1900 under the name of *Maktabat al-Khâlidîyya*.

The core of the original collection consisted of the manuscripts Rûhî had accumulated, plus others donated by several family members before and after the inauguration of the library. Under the supervision of the *Nâzir* of the *waqf*, the library was to be open to the public, but it was stipulated that works were not to be removed from the building. Shortly after its opening, Sheikh Ṭâhir al-Jazâ‘irî, previously keeper of the public library of Damascus, who had been exiled by the sultan, came to Jerusalem. As a friend of Râghib al-Khâlidî, he helped organize the original contents of the Khâlidîyya. The first official index listed 685 manuscripts and 471 printed works—a total of 1156 volumes.

The development of the library over the next decades was, inevitably, influenced by the changing fortunes of Palestinian history in the twentieth century.

From its inauguration until 1948, it was regularly enlarged by donations of Khâlidî family members who added to the original collection, in particular Yâsîn (died 1901), Yûsuf (1906), Rûhî (1913) and Naẓîf (1916). By 1917 the number of works reached 4000, and by 1948 they exceeded 6000. It became a renowned institution, appreciated and used by local and visiting scholars—most notably in the latter category were D. S. Margoliouth, Louis Massignon, and H. A. R. Gibb.

The crisis of 1948 had a serious negative effect on the operation of the library, because of the emigration of many members of the Khâlidî family, who went into exile after the division of Palestine and the founding of the State of Israel. Ḥâjj Râghib himself, founder of the library, died in Nablus in 1952 at the age of 82. The Israelis had confiscated his library, which was located in Jaffa. In addition, the financial resources needed for the upkeep of the library had been reduced as a result of the occupation of part of Palestine. The division of the city of Jerusalem was equally detrimental to its development.

It was, of course, the occupation of East Jerusalem, however, in 1967 that adversely affected the library most and at times threatened its very existence. The quarter of the city in which it is located had been profoundly disturbed by the destruction of the area close to the Wailing Wall and the expulsion of its inhabitants. The library shared the fate of all the Arab institutions in the old city, insofar as they were threatened by alienation under Israeli law, particularly according to the dispositions relating to confiscation of “absent owner” properties. The Israeli army occupied the building to the East of the Library courtyard. A Talmud school was established above the courtyard, which was the source of much controversy and difficulty, especially when restoration work was planned for the library building itself. This situation led to long litigation in Jerusalem courts, which happily resulted in a favorable decision, preventing, it was hoped, any possibility of confiscation and allowing restoration and construction work.

The Khâliidiyya collection’s importance and its role in the cultural life of the country can be best appreciated when it is compared with other Muslim public libraries in Palestine. There are fourteen in the country, of which six are in Jerusalem and three in Nablus. The holdings of the most important collections are surpassed by the Khâliidiyya’s with its 1209 Arabic manuscripts. In Jerusalem the library of the mosque al-Aqṣâ holds 666 manuscripts, the Budayriyya 636, and the Islamic Museum’s 644. The Khâliidiyya is distinguished by its holdings in the area of the Islamic sciences and by its wealth of printed materials, quite apart from the importance of its archival documentation.

The most significant and comprehensive of the Library’s holdings are its manuscripts: 1209 Arabic, 18 Persian and 36 Turkish. Some of these manuscripts are collections (*majmûc*) of texts—bringing the number of titles up to a total of 1970. The collection contains texts from the fifth through the fourteenth centuries of the Hijra. The oldest is dated 418/1027. There

are rarities also: 288 manuscripts are only to be found in this library; 112 are autographs (one of which is a *majmûc* of Taqî al-Dîn al-Subkî, written in 1340–1348); 250 bear corrections in the hand of the authors. A total of 720 authors are represented in the collection, of which 70 are not found elsewhere. From these manuscripts, we can identify 536 copists—some of whom are Khâlidî family members. Marks of ownership, indications of public readings (*samâc*), or of ownership by a *waqf*, greatly add to our knowledge of the cultural life of Palestine.

The largest part of the collection covers Islamic religion, sciences, and law, which together comprise 1336 of the total of 1970 titles—a quite logical proportion in a collection brought together by *‘ulamâ* whose principle activities related to religion and the law.

Among the disciplines represented in the collection are:

Korans 11
 Ḥadîth (Prophetic traditions) 152
uṣûl al-fiqh (legal sources) 156
fiqh (jurisprudence) 533
taṣawwuf (mysticism) 103
âdâb shar‘iyya 164

Other disciplines are less strongly represented:

Arabic language 167
adab ‘arabî (literature) 146
 history 12
mantîq (logic) 97
 science 91

The library also contains a variety of documentary materials, legal writs, deeds of *waqfs*, firmans, and personal papers largely concerning the Khâlidî family history. Donald P. Little and A. Üner Turgay compiled an inventory of 45 of these documents covering the Ottoman period. The oldest dates back to 1643 (a *berat* issued in Edirne, bearing the *tughra* of Ahmad II, relating to the nomination of Şun‘ Allâh Efendi to the post of *bâsh kâtib* at the court in Jerusalem) and the most recent to 1914 (copy of a title deed to land acquired in 1875.) (“Documents from the Ottoman Period in the Khalidi Library in Jerusalem.” *Die Welt des Islams* 20 (1980): 44–72). The Khâlidî’s ties to Jerusalem have been so close and for so long a period that the historical importance of these documents is unquestioned. This collection has been considerably further enriched by the accidental

discovery—during restoration work on the roof in 1987—of an important number of documents and pages detached from registers (*daftar*).

The library also contains a sizeable collection of printed works (numbering about 6000) in Arabic, Turkish, French, English, German and Hebrew, most of which date back to the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth centuries.

Recent work and Overall Perspective The recent resolution of the legal problems of the Khâlidiyya Library caused by the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem has allowed the Khâlidî family to embark on an large scale program of improvement of the institution and to look to its future with a positive attitude.

Thanks to aid from the Dutch Government, two stages of restoration and refitting have taken place (1991–1994 and 1995–1997). Work has consisted of a complete restoration of the old building and the construction of an annex situated just close by, on the northern side of the road, which also belongs to the family *waqf*. The aim is to house the manuscripts in the older buildings and keep the printed material and the Khâlidî archival documents separately in the annex. Accommodation is being provided for small seminars, exhibitions, and lodging for visiting researchers.

Much work has also been undertaken on the facilities inside the Library, including installation of modern shelving and furniture. In addition, restoration has been done on damaged documents with the help of European specialists and institutions. Microfilming of manuscripts has been accomplished. Where necessary, printed works have been rebound. The most urgent task—that of cataloguing all the Arab manuscripts—has been in the hands of Dr. Nazmi al-Jubeh, a professor at the university of Bir Zeyt. The now completed catalogue will be edited in three volumes.^{††} Thus, the whole collection of the Library will be accessible to researchers.

An association of Friends of the Khâlidiyya Library was set up in 1989 to help preserve the Khâlidiyya complex and its collection, and to develop it as a research center. An international academic consultative council is composed of members from Chicago, Heidelberg, Harvard, Cambridge, and Aix-en-Provence Universities.

^{††} Editor's note: *The Catalogue of the Khalidiyah Library of Jerusalem* is being published in London by Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation. See *Jerusalem Quarterly File* Issue 3, 1999: Libraries and Archives "The Khalidiyah Library". (<http://www.jqf-jerusalem.org/journal/1999/jqf3/khalidiyah.html>).

The overall objective now at the centenary of the Library is to transform it into a research institute for scholars interested in utilizing its rich resources. To this end an acquisition policy has been developed with the aim of adding reference and other basic works to the collection. The Library, which is one of the most prestigious Arab institutions in the Old City of Jerusalem, can thus be fruitfully used by students, teachers, and researchers from all the numerous universities in Palestine, as well as by researchers from abroad. One of the fields in which the Library would be further equipped and developed is research into the history of Arab Jerusalem, where the library is actually situated, and where its very existence expresses, in a symbolic way, the continuity of the Arab presence in the city.