

You have probably learned something about the Arab-Israeli conflict so far. This problem is one of the political debates that has been the focus of the longest discussions in the modern age.

While this conflict seems more complicated due to media and politicians, these flashes are trying to draw a simpler picture. It is an indisputable fact that Palestine is a multiethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious region of the Eastern Mediterranean, which has existed between modern Lebanon and Egypt for four thousand years.

However, this indisputable history of Palestine faced a great threat in the nineteenth century. White European colonists, known as Zionists, initiated an attempt to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. For this purpose, local people living in Palestine for centuries were systematically forced to migrate, those who do not want to go were killed and European settlers were brought to this region. This is the real basis of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

As the debates on this conflicting policy continue increasingly, these intermittent conflicts will try to draw an accurate, evidence-based picture of Palestinian history. After all, only by learning and understanding history accurately can we shape a brighter tomorrow and try to correct past unjust practices.

## Chapter 1 - Palestinian history dates back to the Late Bronze Age about 3,200 years ago.

As archaeological discoveries are made, our perspective on history often changes. Our view of history has changed as a result of the discovery of a 3,000-year-old Palestinian cemetery near the modern Ashkelon in Western Israel in 2017.

The presence of ancient people, known as Philistines in Palestine and Israel, is widely accepted today.

Nevertheless, the discovery of the cemetery was incredibly striking. This discovery enabled to refute a theory in the Israeli academy that defends Philistines were the pirates coming from the Aegean Sea to invade the region. The five inscriptions in the graveyard have proven that the Palestinian presence dates back to a long time. It has been shown in the inscriptions that "Peleset", known as an early written form of "Palestine", was written in them. This allowed archaeologists to conclude that the Palestinians did not come to the country from anywhere else, but already exist in the region.

It is a series of old texts that prove the existence of thousands of years of indigenous Philistines- a name that later turned into "Palestinians." One of these ancient inscriptions is an Egyptian text as old as a graveyard of about 3,000 years. The text tells about the neighboring people in the region where the Egyptians fought against. In that case, those border neighbors were the Philistines.

The results of this discovery, of course, contradict the Biblical Canaanite narrative told by the Zionists who tried to claim the Palestinian territory since the 19th century. It is technically

correct that Canaan exists as a region, however, history proves to us that Canaan is only a biblical term that expresses the Phoenician civilization that covers only Lebanon today. And the term "Canaan" was used to describe this region for a short time around 1300 BC.

By the way, Philistia refers directly to the region that is in the south of Phoenicia. And after the eighth and seventh centuries BC, the whole southern Levantine region, known as modern Israel, Palestine, and even South Lebanon later, was no longer referred to as Canaan or other ancient names and was defined as Philistia.

In the 6th and 5th centuries BC, the early Iron Age, Palestinians became a developed urban civilization. While having advanced shipbuilding techniques, as understood from the archaeological excavations in the entire ancient Palestinian region, they have a heritage of artistic craftsmanship for pottery, metalwork, and ivory carvings. During this period, many ancient Palestinian cities such as Ghazzah, 'Asgalan, and Isdud were established. Although these cities exist today as Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ashdod, Israel expelled the inhabitants of local Palestinians living in Ashkelon and Ashdod in 1948.

According to archaeological discoveries, the ancient Palestinian city-states are very similar to the developed city-states in ancient Greek civilization. The Philistine city-states have established developed trade networks with neighboring civilizations such as Egypt, Phoenician, and Arabia. While trade has kept the economy alive in ancient Palestine, it has also created a multicultural and polytheistic society.

## Chapter 2 - Ancient Palestine continued its development under Greek and Roman rule.

In the fifth century BC, the modern cognate of Philistia- called Palestina in Greek and Palestine in Latin, has become known as the general name of the region between modern-day Lebanon and Egypt. This nomenclature would continue to be valid for the next 1200 years until the conquest of Islam in 637 AD.

It is known that the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote detailed texts on Palestine using this term in the fourth century BC. Herodotus, called "Father of History", defined Palestine as a polytheist, commercially developed region in the fifth century BC. The Arabs living in the southern port cities of Palestine controlled the frankincense trade route that connected to India, which added wealth and status to Palestine as well as eastern spices and luxury goods.

Especially during the Roman rule in Palestine between 135 and 390 AD, the name of the Roman province in the region was Syria Palaestina.

In the written sources of this period, the multicultural structure of Palestine is clearly stated. The religion of Christianity was practiced by people who speak Arabic, Greek, and Aramaic. People speaking Greek and Aramaic also practiced Judaism and Palestine was also counted as the home region of Greek and Latin-speaking polytheist people worshiping many different gods.

Throughout the history of Roman Palestine, the name of the region has slowly changed from Syria Palestine to only Palestine, as can be seen especially in the text of the Greco-Jewish philosopher Philo and Roman geographer Pomponius Mela.

Pomponius writes in detail the geography of the region in his works. In 43 AD, he describes Judea, a small Roman province in the center of Palestine. And, as Herodot wrote 500 years ago, he tells us that Palestine is the region from Lebanon to Egypt. In his works, he even includes Palestinian Arabs living in the region and the "mighty city" in Gaza.

Classical Palestine was important for Roman rulers in terms of advanced infrastructure and urbanization works.

The name "Jerusalem" was almost forgotten and not used during the Roman period. The name of Jerusalem was changed to "Aelia Capitolina" by Emperor Hadrian as a result of the practices of renaming the cities that continued in the Hellenistic period. "Aelia" was the second name of Hadrian, and "Capitolina" was given to refer to the chief god in the pantheon of the Roman gods.

In the records of the Palestinian Arabs, it shows that they adopted the name "Iliya", which was Arabized to refer to the city long before the Islamic conquest. Even until the tenth century, this term was used next to a new Arabic word for the city - "Bayt al-Maqdis" or "the Holy City".

## Chapter 3 - In Byzantine Palestine, Christianity spread to wider areas and Arabs rose in the ranks of power.

When Christianity became the official state religion of the Roman empire in the fourth century, the state of Palestine gained new significance. Because Palestine was the birthplace of Jesus of Nazareth and the spiritual center of Christianity.

In the fourth century, the Byzantine Roman Empire, which adopted the Christian religion, divided Palestine into three new administrative districts— Palestina Prima, Palestina Secunda, and Palestina Salutaris. These regions correspond to today's central, northern, and southern Palestine. Strangely, these regions were named as such because they were designed to reflect the three-in-one concept of the Christian Trinity. And, like the Trinity, these regions would never be attributed completely separate from each other. Until the Muslim period in the seventh century, this unity between regions continued politically, culturally, and religiously.

These three regions formed world-famous Great Palestine, with its vibrant cities, breathtaking architecture, large libraries, philosophical centers, and a large population.

According to some estimates, the Palestinian population reached up to 1.5 million during the Byzantine period. About 100.00 of this resident population lived in Caesarea Maritima, the most important city and capital of Palaestina Prima. The cosmopolitan city was the home of

a lively coexistence of different ethnicities, languages , and religions. There were Christians, Jews, Sumerians, and even polytheistic Arabs, who spoke Greek, Arabic, and Aramaic.

The city was important for the early Christian philosophy, and important people like Origen saw this city as their home in the third century. He played an active role in establishing the Caesarea Library, which was led the city to be known as one of the most important cities of Classical Antiquity. At its highest position, the library contained 30,000 manuscripts. At that time, only the Alexandria Library in Egypt had more inscriptions.

This philosophy and learning atmosphere has spread to a wider area in Palestinian society. Basic education was common even in the villages. The aim of education, covering Greek and Latin, rhetoric, law, and philosophy, was to provide talented administrators and leaders to state and church structures.

It is seen that the Arab population of Palestine also increased during the Byzantine period. As we mentioned earlier, archaeological evidence points to Arabs living in Palestine for a while. The truth is that the Arabs were there 500 years before Jesus' birth! And at the beginning of the third century, the Arab population in Palestine increased with the arrival of Christian Arabs, who emigrated from Yemen, a region on the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. The future generations of these Arabs continued to rule over Palaestina Secunda and Tertia in the seventh century, centuries before the arrival of Islam.

## Chapter 4 - With the conquest of Palestine in 637 AD by Muslims, there was an increase in prosperity, more Arabization and Islamization.

The conquest of Palestine by Muslim armies effectively changed the region. Also, the conquest made the use of the Arabic language permanent, which will be spoken by the majority of people in the region over the next 1,300 years.

During this period, Palestine began to be called Filastin, the modern Arabic name derived from ancient Philistia. Together with neighboring Dimashq or Damascus, the Filastin formed the basis of the new Muslim empire or the "Caliphate".

The spread of Islam in Palestine, where mostly Christian people live, was accomplished with the spread of the Arabic language. Arabization was already carried out for centuries with the growth of the Palestinian Christian Arab population and their increasing political power.

Neither Islamization nor Arabization posed significant difficulties to the local people. This transition was relatively easy, as Arabic was closely linked to the most common language, Aramaic. And given that the religion of Islam is a continuity of a monotheistic belief such as Christianity and Judaism, accepting the religion of Islam after the conquest of the region by Muslims happened with less conflict than the polytheistic regions conquered by the Muslim armies.

This gradual Islamization was combined with the fact that the new Muslim rulers in Palestine implemented a religious and cultural tolerance for the region's Christian and Jewish people. After Muslims dominated the region, Palestine started intensive urbanization efforts, especially in the holy city of Jerusalem. For Muslims, this city was attributed to being the third holiest place after Mecca and Medina. As a result of this perception, many large religious monuments such as the Rock Dome, which still stands today, were built in 691 AD.

Jerusalem has been attributed so important that Muslim rulers even thought of making it the capital of their empire instead of Damascus. Although various Zionist narratives describe early Palestine in decline under Muslim rule, the historical reality was rather different. During this period, the Palestinian economy developed more than ever. Caliphate tax records proved that Palestine was the richest region in the Levant during the early Caliphate period.

Palestine exports such as olive oil, wine, and soap were made throughout the Mediterranean region and glassware made by Arab Jews reached even European markets. The conquest of Muslims and the "Golden Age" of Islam, which followed, made Palestine a technologically and culturally developed region. This was stated in 1099 when the invading European crusaders who came to occupy the region were confused by encountering a more developed society than Europe.

## Chapter 5 - After the European Crusaders were defeated, the Ayyubid and Mamluk dynasties ruled Palestine, respectively.

The European Crusaders had destroyed Palestine since 1147 to establish the supremacy of Europe and Christianity on the Holy Land. However, the heroic military commander Salah al-Din restored Muslim rule in Palestine in 1187, preventing the Crusader invasions in the region at the Battle of Hittin. This Muslim rule over the region would continue over the next seven centuries.

Besides Salah al-Din's military successes, there was also a failure. He was unable to reclaim the firmly strengthened coastal city of Acre, occupied by the French crusaders. However, his grandchildren could go further and save the city from the oppressive crusader rule in 1291. With the regaining of Muslim rule, Jews and Muslims were able to practice their religions again freely without persecution, and sacred religious sites were restored to their former glory.

When it came to power, the Ayyubis made some important administrative changes in Palestine. The most important of these changes was making Jerusalem the capital of Palestine, a status that would continue for the next 700 years.

The Crusaders continued to attack Palestinian coastal cities, contributing to the overall decline of these cities and the rise of inner cities such as Jerusalem. The Ayyubids made a tough decision to make sure that the Crusaders could not use their deadly siege techniques in future conflicts—they destroyed the walls of big cities and prevented future sieges.

This radical plan was an ingenious breakthrough. Jerusalem, a unique city in medieval times as a large city without fortification, grew beyond its old walls. This growth continued with a

period of peace brought by the Mamluk dynasty, which came to power in Palestine by defeating the Mongolian invaders in 1260. This protected peaceful political environment enabled Jerusalem to become a great pilgrimage city.

This encouraged the Mamluk dynasty to increase the construction of the bathhouses and to provide clean water because they were indispensable for pilgrimage cities at that time. Hamam al-Ayn, one of the many baths built at that time, is still standing today.

Jerusalem, along with other inner Palestinian cities, experienced the renaissance of construction during the Mamluk rule. The city's famous white stone architecture has evolved and many of them can still be seen today.

## Chapter 6 - Ottoman rule in Palestine led to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the 18th century.

After the Mamluk Sultanate, Palestine started to be ruled under the rule of the Turkish Ottoman Empire in 1517. Palestine continued to refer to the region of Arabic-speaking people, mostly Muslims, between Egypt and Lebanon. This naming of the region was not only used by indigenous Palestinians-European cartographers also continued to use the term Palestine to describe the area until the twentieth century. Even Shakespeare has referenced this region!

The Ottoman period proved to be a very important moment in Palestinian history. For the first time in history, Palestinians have created their states and identities as a nation. Traditional history conveys Palestinian nationalism as a European export that came with westernized Ottoman reforms in the 19th century. However, a more detailed study of history draws a different picture.

In reality, Palestinian statehood goes back a century before the traditional narrative of history. It did not originate from the elites that reigned under the idea of nationalism. Instead, the first Palestinian state emerged as a result of the people's opposition to oppressive forces.

The eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire was now a weak world power and they were tired of the Palestinian oppressive rule of the Galilee region. Take Dhaher al-Umar al-Zaydani, now known as the father of modern Palestine.

With an army of Christian and Muslim peasants, al-Omar succeeded in defeating the Ottoman army in every round in the 1720s and 1730s, and ultimately to establish an autonomous state with the Palestinian borders. Ottoman administrators, who were humiliated by the defeat in 1768, recognized the autonomous Palestinian State. While Palestine was still an official border region within the Ottoman State, it had become a de facto sovereign state.

Thanks to the leadership of El-Umar and the intensive support of the peasantry, Palestine became an economic center at the end of the eighteenth century. The Palestinian cotton industry has developed tremendously thanks to the demand of industrialized states such as

France and Britain. These new economic developments led Palestine to turn to international trade with Europe.

The administration of Al-Umar enabled Palestine to get rid of the negative effects of the economic crisis affecting other regions of the Ottoman Empire. In addition to its new economic development, Palestine has managed to establish a fair taxation system to support this self-governing state. Many new urban development projects have transformed the whole region. For example, Haifa became a lively metropolis within ten years from being a small village.

This autonomous Palestinian state continued from the 1720s to the death of Al-Umar in 1775. In the traditional historical narrative, the British Mandate of Palestine, established after World War I, was cited as the first example of Palestinian self-government, but this is a misinterpretation. Under the leadership of al-Umar, the first autonomous Palestinian state survived for fifty years.

## Chapter 7 - Modern Palestinian nationalism first appeared in the early nineteenth century and found intense support against the Zionist movement.

Twenty years after the death of Al-Umar, change began to occur on the Mediterranean coast of Europe. France's new emperor Napoleon launched a war in Europe and North Africa, including attacks on Egypt and Palestine. However, his attacks were interrupted when he could not capture Acre, the Palestinian coastal city, where he was defeated by an Anglo-Ottoman coalition in 1799. This showed that the colonial British attention had shifted to Palestine.

In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, British Protestants began to arrive intensively in the region, and travel companies such as Thomas Cook began organizing tours of Palestine. When a delegation came here in 1871 to draw a detailed map of Palestine, the British attention became official. Taking into account the possibility of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the British were prepared to take on the role of the colonial power in the region. England thought Palestine would be useful as a safe stop on the road to the Indian colony.

The map drawing delegation also became a precursor of the events that will happen later. The seriousness of the British's interest in Palestine was further understood by the establishment of the British Palestine Exploration Fund in the region. The fund was partially led by Biblical scholars who had a missionary interest in the region. Charles Warren, one of the founding members, was a Protestant Christian Zionist. They advocated the idea that a Jewish state must be established in Palestine to speed up the Second Coming of Christ.

In line with the growing interest of the British in Palestine, there was a developing Palestinian nationalism dating back half a century before the start of Zionism. At the beginning of the century, the Palestinian population was overwhelmingly Muslim and Christian Arab peoples, with an Arab- Jewish minority of about 25,000. Until the beginning of the settlement of Jews

from Europe in the late 19th century, different Palestinian religious groups lived together peacefully.

Palestinians from all religious groups felt the influence of nationalism, which at that time increased with an industrial economic revolution and the growth of secular education. The increase in literacy resulting from these developments significantly affected Palestinian nationalism, as newspaper publications such as "Falastin" was widely distributed in the early twentieth century.

Even the name of the newspaper emphasizes the importance of Palestinian national identity. Instead of naming the newspaper "Palestine" or "Filastin", the region's traditional Arabic name, the editors chose the pronunciation of "Falastin" in local Palestinian Arabic. The newspaper became an important anti-imperialist publication.

Ultimately, during World War I, England reached its centuries-old purpose. While the Ottoman Empire was defeated, the British army occupied Palestine. The newly created League of Nations handed over the new British Mandate of Palestine to Britain.

## Chapter 8 - The basis of the Zionist project was the colonialism and racism of European settlers.

The nineteenth century was a period when European colonialism began to spread worldwide. However, the view has been put forward that European interests always precede the interests of colonized indigenous peoples.

The ideology of Zionism created in the region was not different from other forms of colonialism. Zionists had the same beliefs about the Palestinian people, as the British colonists believed that the people of India were uncivilized and could not self-govern. However, Zionism had a feature that distinguished it from British colonialism. For example, the British colonialists exploited India in their interests to achieve an economic advantage. Zionism, however, was a settler-colonial project, whose goal was not only to achieve economic interest. It was the main target of the Zionists to replace the indigenous Palestinian people with non-Palestinian Jews.

In the nineteenth century, the Zionists created propaganda that Palestine was land for people without people for a people without a land. Contrary to the common misunderstanding, this perception does not match the demographic of Palestine. The Zionists were, of course, aware that Palestine had a large indigenous population. Unfortunately, according to the European colonial mindset of the time, people living in Palestine were not considered completely human.

Jewish Zionists received support from valued allies like the British Christian Zionists to achieve their goals. Leading British politicians of the time, such as future Prime Minister David Lloyd George, embraced this ideology.



As a result of the union of the British Zionist lobbying activities with geopolitical interest, the 1917 Balfour Declaration was created. This declaration means that Britain, which officially supports the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, has made it a state policy.

Before the declaration, Zionist ideas about the indigenous Palestinians and what will happen to them after the Jewish state was founded were often driven by indifference or racist superiority. After the British Mandate was proclaimed, the anti-Zionism movement increased in Palestine. This led the Zionist leadership to the idea that the only way for a Jewish state to survive here was to force Palestinians out of their ancestral homelands.

By practicing this, the Zionists would establish an ethnically "pure" white Jewish colony in the Middle East.

This was precisely the case when the state of Israel was proclaimed in 1948. Let's give an example of the ancient Palestinian city of Jaffa. In the context of what is called "Nakba" or disaster today, Zionist militants displaced Muslim and Christian Arab inhabitant peoples from the city and replaced them with white European settlers.

## Chapter 9 - The deliberate destruction of Palestinian history by Israel is well-known and well-documented.

Jaffa was not the only city freed from its local people. Starting in 1948, the newly established state of Israel began to destroy any historic Palestinian structures in the new colonial territory.

Now Zionists who control almost the entire historical Palestinian land started the systematic marking process of Zionism as a return of the indigenous people to their homeland after a 2,000-year break. The basis for this is based on practices by the new Government Names Committee.

This committee was created by the Polish Zionist and Israel's first Prime Minister David Grün. He changed his family name from Grün to "Ben-Gurion", which made more sound in the Bible. In the early years of the State of Israel, most senior elite Israelis did the same.

However, only changing surnames was not enough. The Zionists needed a language to create a country for themselves and started by creating Modern Hebrew in the late nineteenth century. Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the inventor of Modern Hebrew, previously known as Lazar Perelman, paid attention to using Arabic words, sounds, and grammar spoken in Palestine for this new language. He also incorporated many European languages such as Yiddish and Polish into Modern Hebrew.

After the Nakba incident in 1948, the Zionists controlled 80 percent of the historic Palestinian region, where most of the real inhabitants were removed. 700,000 Palestinians have now become refugees and expelled from their ancestral homelands.

However, the Palestinians showed remarkable determination despite these difficult conditions. The Palestinian culture continues to evolve even if there is a danger that a

settling population will replace them and their history will be destroyed. In the past few decades, many novels, films, archives, websites, and such deposits have been created that reflect Palestinian identity and these are widely spreading throughout the Palestinian civil society today.

Much of this cultural identity awareness is dependent on the Palestinian nationalist sentiment of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, the author thinks this will change. Hopefully, Palestinian educational institutions will expand their focus to the long and multicolored tapestries in Palestinian history. After all, modern Palestinian Arabs are descendants of a mixed union of peoples. Arabs, Greeks, Canaanites, Philistines, and more are among them.

## Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History by Nur Masalha Book Review

The name "Palestine" has been the most common term that has defined the Mediterranean region between Egypt and Lebanon for 3,200 years. Throughout its long history, Palestine has been a region hosting different religions, languages, and ethnic origins. Today's Palestinian Arabs have ancestors, a mixture of Greek, Palestinian, Israeli, Arab, Roman, and other ethnicities that have settled in the region over the years. Although Islam has been the most dominant religion in the region for the last 1,400 years, Christianity and Judaism have also been practiced by the locals for thousands of years. Zionism, a European colonial project trying to prove Palestine is a Jewish region, endangered the permanent presence of the Palestinian people in the region by removing Palestinians from their cities and appropriating their culture and language.

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