Exploring the life of amulets in Palestine: from healing and protective remedies to the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets

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Chapter 5. Amulets as Palestine's cultural heritage.

> "Collections construct identity, not just that of the social group whose reality is interpreted through the objects on display, but also that of the collection's authors. Collections also fashion the identity of their audiences, who interpret according to their own discourses and desires the stories that the objects tell." [439]

5.1 Outline

The T.C.C.P.A. as it appears in 1995 stands as the starting point of my attempt to peel off the different layers of meaning added to this collection. Its naming and later on its first exhibition in 1998 was informed with ideas of national belonging and pride, and expressed the socio-political and ideological background of the 1990s. Although the first exhibition *Ya Kafi Ya Shafi* addressed Canaan's scientific motivations as a physician in acquiring the objects, the way it was framed was entirely determined by contemporary ideas about exhibiting material culture. These ideas were based on practices that had developed alongside the revival of Palestine's folklore since the 70's.[440]

This chapter revolves around the conceptualisation of the Canaan objects as Palestinian amulets. Starting with the Collection's arrival at BZU, I will peel off the layers of meaning added in the years since its inception through the collecting activities of Taufiq Canaan (analysed in Chapter 3) and his work on the collection as a collector-cum-ethnographer. I begin by analysing the process of naming the collection and how the amulets were addressed in the first exhibition *Ya Kafi, Ya Shafi*. Based on my correspondence with members of the exhibition committee, as well as by analysing the catalogue and reports and reviews of the exhibition, this chapter explores the message this exhibition aimed to convey. The chapter then moves on to how amulets have been catalogued and approached after the exhibition. Since these approaches have referred continually to the time of the Collection's formation, the second part of the chapter aims to trace how Taufiq Canaan approached the amulets as Palestine's material culture. This second part aims to show that the Palestinian identity of the objects is not merely a product of the 1990s but is based on Canaan's own experience. Since the chapter also touches upon how the formation of national identity is intimately

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[439] S. Mejcher-Atassi & J.P. Schwartz, edit. *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World*, p.2

[440] Collecting material culture came hand by hand with the folklorist revival of the 70's and 80's, which stressed the specificity of Palestinian traditions and culture. Cfr. V. Tamari. Op. Cit. p.39

connected with collecting, displaying and exhibiting material culture of the past, it also includes Taufiq Canaan's political views and considerations on the Palestinian-ness of the material he collected. This second part analyses the development of Canaan's collecting process in the light of the political events and their effect on identity formation as well as the engagement with Palestine's material culture.

5.2 Canaan's amulets arrive to Birzeit University

In 1995 Ms. Leila Canaan Mantoura, Yesma Styring and Nada Batten[441] donated to BZU 1380 small objects that had been collected by their father Taufiq Canaan in the early 20th century. The aim of this donation was to give it to an academic institution where this could be kept, studied and exhibited as part of the remnants of the material cultural heritage of Palestine that had survived years of war and Israeli occupation.

The fact that the daughters of Taufiq chose to donate this collection to BZU deserves further attention. Established in 1924 as a girls school and evolving over the years to become the first university in Palestine in the 1970's, BZU is the result of perseverance, resistance and adaptation to the political situation. It has played a key role in Palestinian educational, social, cultural and political life and the university community could be considered a "microcosm of the Palestinian people."[442] According to Salim Tamari, it has provided space for political activism as well as for interaction among men and women away from the repressive social conventions, setting a fora for intellectual debates and an arena for organised students' activity at a national level.[443] Thus, choosing BZU as the final destination for this important collection, shows that Canaan's daughters felt this collection fitted that atmosphere.

Baha Jubeh recalls how the transfer of the Canaan amulets took place in 1995.[444] In a very discreet way, the objects were taken out of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) premises in West Jerusalem where they had been kept since the occupation of Jerusalem in 1948. The objects were put in boxes, in the trunk of Leila Canaan Mantoura's car, and taken to the West

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441 V. Tamari, "Tawfik Canaan - Collectioneur par excellence: The Story Behind the Palestinian Amulet Collection at Birzeit University" in *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World*, edited by Sonja Mejcher-Atassi and John Pedro Schwartz, 71-90. England: Ashgate, 2012.

442 I. Audeh. (Ed.) *Birzeit University: The Story of a National Institution*. p.89

443 I. Audeh. (Ed.) *Birzeit University: The Story of a National Institution*. p.21

444 Personal communication with B. Jubeh during my fieldwork in the Autumn of 2015

Bank. This operation was very risky because the flux of people and goods between Jerusalem and the West Bank was under surveillance and control. The donation took place thanks to the relation of Leila Canaan Mantoura with Vera Tamari, Tania Tamari and Hanna Nasser, scholars affiliated to BZU.[445] The 1380 amulets plus 250 icons —icons that have not been studied yet, were the only belongings that Taufiq Canaan and his wife Margot Eilander managed to take with them after the occupation of Jerusalem in 1948, when they were forced to leave their home in al-Musrarah Quarter. The rest of their possessions, including the priceless library, and many manuscripts were ransacked and then burnt.[446]

> "As our house was in the firing zone, we decided to move. The Greek Orthodox Convent gave us one furnished room. We carried a few things from home, hoping that we could soon return back. But our house was completely lost with all our furniture, my beloved library and several unpublished articles." [447]

In 1948 with the total occupation of the Palestinian coastal cities and West Jerusalem by the Israeli military, residents were forced to abandon their houses and migrate to East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Transjordan, Gaza Strip and Lebanon. An immense number of valuable objects, such as films, photographs and audio recordings that had been left in these homes, were appropriated by the Israeli Defence Forces eventually ending up in their archives.[448] Although most of this looted material has been kept as restricted and is not available to the Palestinian public, a few Palestinian researchers have been granted access to Israeli archives where they —in some cases— have found private documents that belonged to their own families.[449]

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[445] Details about the donation of the Collection to BU were obtained in private email correspondence between Baha Jubeh and the author of this research.

[446] K. Nashef. "Tawfik Canaan: His Life and Works." Translated by Khalil Sleibi. *Majallat ad-Dirasat al-Filastiniya* 50 (2002): 69-91., p.24

[447] T. Canaan, "The Taufiq Canaan Memoirs. Part 2" *Jerusalem Quarterly* 75, p. 140

[448] The study and publication of an important part of these archives has been done by the Israeli scholar Rona Sela. Cfr. Ofer Aderet, Why Are Countless Palestinian Photos and Films Buried in Israeli Archives? Haaretz July 01, 2017.

[449] Private conversation with Baha Jubeh; See also *Looted and Hidden* a film by Rona Sela that describes the looting of Palestinian belongings by the IDF; *The Great Book Robbery* a film by Benny Brunner.

Taufiq Canaan, from among these displaced Palestinians, managed to afford protection to some of his belongings due to the network he had built over the years. As a member of the YMCA since its foundation in Jerusalem in 1912, he was granted some protection and got the chance to keep his collection of amulets and icons in the Jerusalem building many years. During these years, research on Palestine's culture and history developed; in the 1970's scholars working on folklore, magic, amulets, etc. became acquainted with Canaan's written work but never with the material he collected.

After having remained hidden for almost 50 years the Collection only surfaced in 1995, after Canaan's daughters had accomplished a successful move to BZU. This time the move was to a safe place where the collection could be studied and displayed openly. By that time, only one year had passed since the ratification of the 1994 Oslo Accords, an event that granted some political stability through the international recognition of a Palestinian National Authority. Considering this relative stability, Canaan's family might have felt that this was a good moment to take the collection to the West Bank.

When the daughters of Taufiq Canaan donated the collection, they and the Founding Committee for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage at BZU with Vera Tamari as the chairperson, decided to name it *The Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets* in Arabic *majmū'a tawfīq kan'ān li l-ḥujub*. The naming of the collection is precisely the starting point of this chapter. It discloses the way the objects were conceptualised at a very particular moment in the history of Palestine, namely the years that followed the Oslo Accords and the formation and recognition of the Palestinian Authority. It is within this socio-political context that the story of the Canaan amulets began to be narrated within a framework of nationalist sentiment. The name of the T.C.C.P.A., as we know it today, gives the false impression that it was conceived from the beginning as a collection of Palestinian heritage intended for public display; this idea comes from how its story has been narrated, mainly focusing on the collection as a whole. However, as argued before, if the attention is shifted to the Collection as a process and to the amulets as objects that have a life and agency, then the plot would not only begin in the early 20th century when Canaan acquired the first items, it would probably begin even earlier because many of the amulets had been in use for a long time prior to them having been collected. The story then would extend to the year 1948 when Canaan had to pack his collection and hide it, continue in 1995 when it was made public, and so on until the last time the collection, or some items of it were exhibited. It would have to include the stories about it from 1948 to 1995, initially told by Canaan in some of his articles where he referred

to his amulets, and rephrased by scholars after him referring to his work. Keeping the collection at the premises of YMCA might have been a tough decision since we know that Canaan kept working on his medical and ethnographic research until his death in 1964. Evidence of this are all the articles he wrote after 1948.[450] Thus, two processes were central to the formation of the T.C.C.P.A., collection formation and its Palestinisation which can be traced from the time Taufiq Canaan started to collect until the donation and naming in 1995.

5.3 Establishing the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets at Birzeit University

The T.C.C.P.A. was established in 1995 after its donation to BZU. This is not to say that the Collection did not exist before, it was created by Canaan but it was neither conceived as a collection of Palestinian heritage nor aimed to be exhibited as such even though Canaan's thoughts about this, evolved. To acknowledge the involvement of Canaan's daughters and BZU's staff in the naming and establishment of the Collection does not deny Canaan's collecting process in the shaping of the Collection, but it highlights the different moments in the conceptualisation of the amulets and the Collection as Palestinian heritage.

The naming of the objects as a "collection of Palestinian amulets" allows us to reflect on two issues. On the one hand it gives the idea that the collection was devised from the beginning as a single entity, meaning that it was the expected result of a project. The collecting process of Canaan, however, went through different stages, in some of them he did not even foresee the amulets as a collection. (A more detailed discussion about the stages of Canaan's collecting process is found in Chapter 3.) When we approach a collection not as a result, but as a dynamic creative process and the objects in it as coming from different settings, we must differentiate the objects themselves coming with their own stories from the collection as a narrative that uses the objects to construct itself. Paying attention to individual objects in a collection and the stories they bring with them such as the way they circulated and were used, helps us to deconstruct this imposed Palestinian identity, and to understand better the Palestinian identity in time and space.

The second issue to reflect on is that the naming of the collection in 1995 was based on a particular understanding of the present and a particular configuration of the past. Three moments in the development of the political situation explain this articulation, they are analysed in depth in section 5.5. The label "Palestinian" was deliberately chosen to describe the collection as a whole despite the fact that many of the objects in it were not manufactured in Palestine or by Palestinians,

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[450] The complete list of Canaan's works is available in the Bibliography of this thesis.

and in a few cases they were not even used in Palestine. Examples of the first case are those amulets manufactured in Amman, Damascus, Aleppo, Beirut, as well as a few from Egypt, Mecca, Yemen, Iran and Germany that belonged to individuals (Palestinians and non-Palestinian), some of whom had travelled and acquired them abroad. Despite their origin, these amulets eventually made their way into Palestine's local medical, magical and religious culture. Examples of amulets that were never used in Palestine is the big group of *phylacteria* acquired in Aleppo, bought by Canaan during his medical stay in Syria. These phylacteries came from a particular Syrian Christian background, and for Canaan it was important to collect them as they were part of religious healing practices. Although they entered Palestine exclusively as collectibles and they were not used as amulets anymore, they were collected as representatives of common practices among Christian communities in the Levant, including Jerusalem and Nazareth, from where other phylacteries originated.

The use of the term Palestinian in labelling a collection of objects from different places and periods, used by members of different communities raises questions about the formation of the Palestinian identity through time and space. Canaan's interest in healing practices led him to collect objects used among different communities, some of them non indigenous who had recently immigrated. Some of them were Jews who had settled and brought with them their own forms of healing and protection. These amulets were indeed part of the socio-cultural landscape of Palestine and for Canaan they served to exemplify the "popular" forms of healing that existed alongside the modern medicine he represented. However, as we turn to the framework of the nationalist political sense of the term Palestinian, these objects should not even be considered part of a collection of Palestinian amulets.

Labelling the objects Palestinian and placing them in the collection overruled the fact that the amulets had their own biographies as objects. If collecting is narrating, then what did Canaan want to narrate as he collected the amulets, and how different is this narrative to the one presented in the first exhibition in the 1990s? Both, the story of the exhibition and the underlying story that Canaan wanted to tell, had an impact on the way the objects were represented.

To label the Canaan objects as Palestinian was a political statement to contest the *de facto* presence of a Palestinian entity but the absence of the Palestinian state. The signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and the subsequent Interim Agreement (Oslo II) in 1995 led to the formation of a Palestinian National Authority, providing the first international recognition to the Palestinians. Under that same agreement the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Archaeology was officially

given responsibility for the management, protection and preservation of cultural heritage sites.[451] The foundation of such institutions also brought a status of political liminality that enhanced and evidenced the lack of power over many issues, among them the administration of cultural heritage.[452] The label "Palestinian" seemed to have contested this liminal situation by asserting that Canaan's amulets were part of Palestine's cultural heritage. Moreover, defining the amulets as such tackled at the same time the major narrative of the state of Israel, which since its foundation has opted to neglect the existence of a Palestinian people by not using the term "Palestinian" when referring to the indigenous population simply because it implies recognition of a national group connected to the land. Rather, the Israeli narrative has preferred the term "Arab" because it connects the inhabitants of Palestine with those from other Arab countries "whom they are welcome to go and join".[453]

This self-conscious use of the term Palestinian explicitly for this collection, fitted into the attempt to record, study and document all things Palestinian as a political act. Using the term for objects that dated back to the late Ottoman and Mandate periods was a way to proof the existence of a Palestinian culture that preceded the first national sentiments. Although Rashid Khalidi has located the beginning of Palestinian national sentiments to the period during the years between the outset of World War I to sometime early on in the British Mandate, this feeling of locating Palestine's ancient existence in the land developed much later.[454] In contrast these first forms of national identification that developed within urban upper and middle class groups in the 1930's had to do with the imbalance that the British Mandate had brought in terms of employment and opportunities, granting more benefits to the Jewish population and causing an erosion of the existing way of living and social relations. As prominent members of this social elite, Canaan and many of the donors who collaborated in the formation of his collection, consciously thought of the amulets as belonging to their own Palestinian culture. In Canaan's own experience, the identification of the amulets as representatives of the Palestinian culture came only late in his collecting activity. Prior to WWI, he considered the amulets he collected in the first decade rather as

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[451] S. al-Houdalieh. "The Destruction of Palestinian Archaeological Heritage: Saffa Village as a Model" in *Near Eastern Archeology* 69 (2): 102-112, June 2006

[452] R. Saunders. "Between Paralysis and Practice: Theorizing the Political liminality of Palestinian Cultural Heritage." p.471

[453] R. Kanaaneh. *Birthing the Nation*, p.12

[454] R. Khalidi. *Palestinian Identity*, p.150

part of a folklore that existed in the land but that shared features with practices in the Levant and beyond. His focus was not on Palestinian versus others, but on rural vs town, and on traditional healing vs new forms of medicine. Canaan's suppliers too did not label the objects they were using as Palestinian, they would refer to their origin by mentioning the name of the manufacturer, the market where they had acquired them, the village or town, or the region.

The Palestinian-ness attributed to the objects in the 1990s also derived from the way Taufiq Canaan has been identified. It is true that the Palestinian identity of the author defines aspects of his work, but I argue that the Palestinian character of the objects is based —to some extent— on an overemphasis of Canaan's commitment to his land that is best represented in his political activism and writings of 1936. As part of the narrative of the national culture, Canaan has been portrayed above all as a Palestinian doctor and ethnographer, whose medical and ethnographic research and activities were in tune with his commitment to the land of Palestine and its people. However, seeing Canaan only in this way disregards the critical attitude he had towards the customs of Palestinian peasants and the way he praised the benefits brought by modern Western medicine.[455] Moreover, we should not discard that much of his work and achievements might have aimed at gaining individual recognition as a good doctor, a good anthropologist, and a good scholar. The focus on his Palestinian-ness based only on his commitment to a national project, that indeed happened from 1936 onwards, blurs overlapping identities. Besides being a Palestinian man, Canaan was also a Lutheran, a modern Westernised man, an Ottoman citizen, a native from Beit Jala, a resident of Jerusalem, a doctor committed to Western medical science, and an anthropologist/ ethnographer of the Levant. The overemphasis on his commitment to his nation has also kept out of sight the fact that as a product of his time and place, he was very critical towards his study objects, the *fellaḥīn* and bedouin —at least this is the message he conveyed in some of his articles and speeches.[456] Canaan's writings show that he did not agree with and look down their way of life, especially regarding customs that contradicted his notion of hygiene and the treatment of women.[457] In fact, when he stated that village culture was worthy to be collected, his aim was only to record it but never to keep it alive. This critical attitude raises few questions about his direct engagement with his patients, the sellers of many amulets. If he looked down upon their customs, how did he show

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[455] P. Bourmaud, "A Son of the Country", p.117

[456] P. Bourmaud, *Ibidem*.

[457] Canaan was very critical towards customs regarding children, which discriminated girls. Cfr. T. Canaan, "The Child in the Palestinian Arab Superstition." *JPOS* 7 (1927): 159-186

interest in their products? What was his attitude towards his patients during the medical consultations? Was he condescending or patronising? Did the patients not care?

The Palestinian-ness attributed to the objects also comes from the idea that they are reservoirs of a lost practice and belief system. Canaan's ethnographic work and collecting have been seen as part of a larger project of safeguarding material culture that was undermined by colonisation and urbanisation. However, if we see how everyday religion is practiced, nowadays we can find some of the amulets are still in circulation.[458]

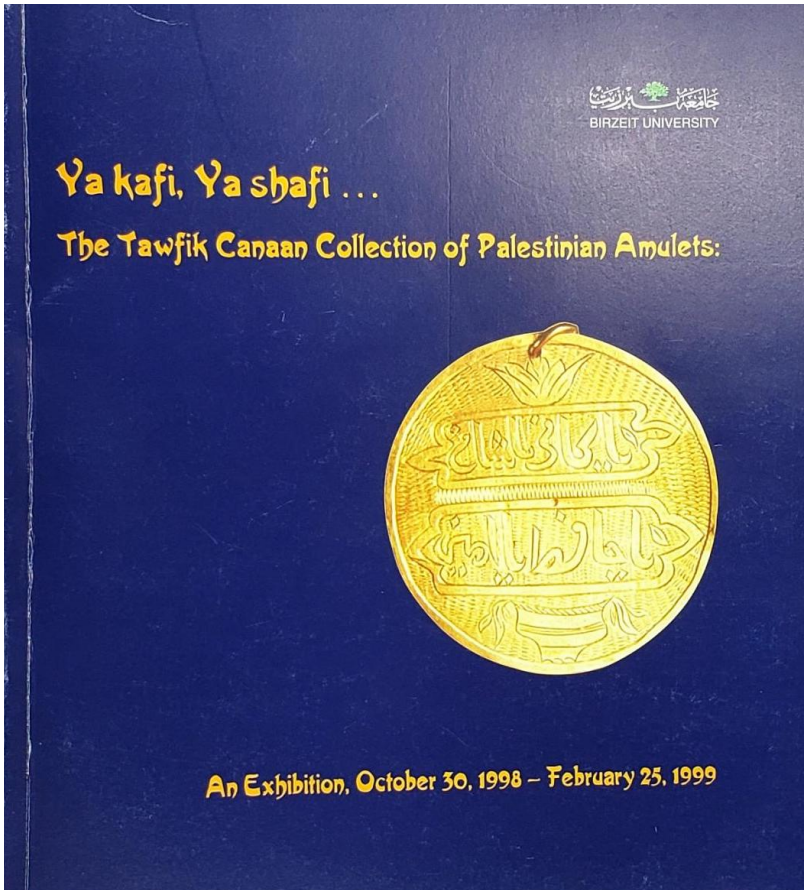

Figure 24. Cover of the catalogue from the exhibition *Ya kafi, Ya shafi…* The Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets.
Photo taken by the author

5.4 *Ya Kafi, Ya Shafi… An exhibition.*

Exhibitions narrate particular stories, construct identities and fashion the identity of the audience. Exhibitions do not necessarily narrate the objects' first stories, neither the collection's original

[458] For contemporary use of amulets in Palestine, see A. Abu Rabia."The Evil Eye and Cultural Beliefs among the Bedouin Tribes of the Negev, Middle East." Folklore 116, no. 3 (2005): 241-254.

story. In exhibitions, objects are extracted from their repository and organised in a particular way; they end up being subsumed under the aim of the exhibition. When BZU organised the first exhibition of the T.C.C.P.A., what story did the curators/organisers want to tell? How was Taufiq Canaan introduced to the Palestinian public of the West Bank --a very different audience from that which saw the Collection in its formation process. What kind of image was there constructed of him and his collection? As with the naming of the collection, we need to ask as well what the social-political situation was that made room for this exhibition.

In 1998, three years after the donation to the BZU, a selection of objects from the Canaan Collection was exhibited under the name *Ya Kafi, Ya Shafi… The Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets*, curated by Gisela Helmeke from the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. The exhibition took place from October 30, 1998 to February 25, 1999. By 1998, Helmeke had curated previous exhibitions on Palestine such as *Palästinensische Volkskunst* in 1978, and had published texts about related Palestinian objects in the Museum of Dresden, some of which had been collected by Lydia Einsler for the International Hygiene Exhibition. The name of the exhibition that took place in BZU was coined by Khaled Nashef who at that time occupied the post of Director of the Palestinian Institute of Archeology at BZU. The name came from the inscription of one of the pendants in the Collection made of gold. This item appears on the cover of the catalogue (See Fig. 22). The formulaic expression *yā kāfī yā shāfī* is a way to address God, but also a prophet or a *walī,* and it is used when a person seeks protection and healing. This expression, chosen to name the exhibition showed the interest in addressing the healing and protective qualities of the amulets, aspects that were central in Taufiq Canaan's own approach to the amulets, and that were used by the curator as the main categories to organise the objects in the exhibition. The choice of using such an expression comes from the fact that it appears in other amulets as well, but also because it represents the general attitude that users of amulets had when seeking for the protective and healing power. The contextualisation of such an expression with the only amulet made of gold may also point to the preference most curators had for beautiful precious objects.

According to Vera Tamari, the aim of the exhibition was twofold: "to show to the community of BZU the pride of the rich heritage of the Palestinians, as well as to raise awareness of the need to protect it, promote it, and nurture it."[459] When exploring how the exhibition took place and what kind of audience it targeted, I argue that the exhibition not only presented the objects

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[459] V. Tamari. Personal correspondence

(representatives of the rural culture of the peasantry) as Palestinian heritage, but also chose to stage Taufiq Canaan as a key figure of Palestine's historical patrimony. He was put forward as a repository of scientific knowledge (medicine and folklore), a man full of love and commitment to his country, and one that was well-aware of the loss of his land and the vanishing of his culture. The general message was that, had it not been for Canaan's conscious process of collecting and recording this part of Palestine's cultural heritage, meaning the amulets, would have never been known.

In 1998, in the framework of the 50th anniversary of the Nakba, the exhibition was inaugurated within an atmosphere of commemorating events. Everywhere in Palestine protests were organised to commemorate 50 years of Israeli occupation. In this context, the exhibition of the Canaan Collection was not only presented as a result of pure scientific interest, it also addressed the common topic of the commemorations. Besides presenting a group of amulets as part of traditional medicine, the exhibition placed Taufiq Canaan at the core of the display as a folklorist and researcher.

Folklorists have been recognised in Palestine as key figures in the organisation of the "know-how" around patrimony (*turāth)*.[460] Since the aftermath of 1967 they have been in charge of compiling, analysing and spreading elements of Palestine's folklore. Their work has been central because they have the ability to trigger visual imagination through descriptions of the physical spaces and rituals, mainly contained in folktales and memorial books.[461] They have compiled stories, sayings, and described rituals and spaces. Through their description they inform the reader about landscapes, geography, traditions, etc. They aim to give a visual context so that the reader's visualisation and imagination are triggered. Because Canaan's works are so full of descriptions, they were adopted as ways of triggering these visual images about sanctuaries, rituals around saints, wells, demons, etc. from the pre-Nakba period. He provided a later generation of folklorists with the resources to assert other aspects of Palestinian cultural nationalism.[462] The aim of remembering and creating images of the past is a characteristic of post-Nakba collective memory. Canaan's works have been included in this collective national memory from the 1970's onwards despite the fact that his writings reflect his lived reality not a memorised past. Their authenticity rests on the fact that

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[460] V. Bontemps. *Ville at patrimonie en Palestine. Une etnografie des savonneries de Naplouse.* p.16

[461] R. Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011

[462] P. Bourmaud, "A Son of the Country", p.104

they were produced before the Nakba and already show the preoccupation with the undermining of Palestinian culture. Canaan's works were so attractive because, contrary to post-Nakba folklorists whose aim was to connect their present with the days before the Nakba through their memories, Canaan himself and his descriptions belong to this pre-Nakba period.

Roger Heacock has advanced a triptych scheme for Palestine's heritage that includes elite, popular and official forms of remembering, forgetting and surviving the occupation. These three forms are perhaps not exceptional to the case of Palestine, however, their dynamics in conjunction to the absence of a sovereign Palestinian State is what makes them important to consider.[463] These forms of heritage have resulted from the interactions of different social groups with their own past as well as with a common past of Palestine. These three forms of heritage pertaining to different social groups draw elements from each other and coexist in the absence of a Palestinian State. Following Heacock's model, I would argue that the boundaries between these three forms of heritage are sometimes blurred.

The exhibition *Ya Kafi, Ya Shafi… The Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets* presented a kind of heritage, that according to Heacock's model, came from the popular sphere, meaning that the objects belonged to the everyday life of the *fellaḥīn* and bedouins. However this popular heritage was exhibited/arranged through the eyes of an elite. Taufiq Canaan, a member of the Jerusalemite bourgeoisie, moved in elite circles that included other collectors, ethnographers, religious and political public figures. A second layer of elite culture was added after Canaan's death. His daughters continued to be part of an elite society and as time passed, they were involved in the exhibition that remembered their father. The donation of the Collection and the exhibition that celebrated the memory of their father's had obvious repercussions for Canaan's family own position in Palestinian society. *Ya Kafi, Ya Shafi*, was in this sense an exhibition about popular heritage and elite heritage; about Canaan's amulets and Canaan himself, about the pre-Nakba rural culture and about the urban Jerusalemite culture. The curatorial work of this exhibition discloses how a particular group of Palestine's society, i.e., scholars and intellectuals from Ramallah/Birzeit remembered the past and wanted others to remember it. The exhibition had a twofold aim, on the one hand to present Palestine's common past (the amulets and practices attached to them), and on the other hand, the elite's own past through their connection with individual figures, heroes of

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[463] R. Heacock. "The Palestinian Triptych: Official, Elite and Popular Heritage" *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies,* 2012: 14.2, p. 297-311

Palestine's preservation and resistance.[464] In *Ya Kafi, Ya Shafi* Canaan's work was displayed in a way that was connected with the actual living elite.

5.4.1 Analysis of the Catalogue.. different writings, different tones

The exhibition *Ya Kafi, Ya Shafi* and its corresponding catalogue delineated the first semantic framework of the Canaan objects. It has been mentioned that the Canaan amulets entered BZU as a donation. Important to recall here are the implications of donating or gift giving already explored in Chapter 4. Donating a collection to the University implied something in return, and in this case the recognition of Canaan and his family as contributors to Palestine's cultural heritage. Motivated by the feeling of duty to safeguard part of Palestine's cultural heritage, Canaan's relatives chose this private institution to take care of. The Founding Committee for the Development of Cultural Heritage of BZU was responsible for the acquisition of the collection.[465] All objects in the Collection without distinction were subsumed under the category of Palestinian amulets. Up to this point no overview had been made and no analysis had been done of what the objects in the collection were. Three years later however, the exhibition took place after the analysis of the material and a close reading of Canaan's writings, which helped to understand the amulets in context. With a more accurate knowledge about the amulets, particular objects were chosen to represent on the one hand, the entire collection and Canaan's ethnographic work, and on the other hand, Palestine's folklore. Moreover, as a kind of political statement, the exhibition was planned to inaugurate the Ethnographic and Archaeological Gallery that the University had created to exhibit material culture that was considered Palestine's heritage.

The central place that was granted to the Collection's author, Taufiq Canaan, becomes clear in the catalogue, which stands as the written memory of how the exhibition was conceived and took place. The catalogue comprises sections written by the people involved in the organisation: Hanna Nasir, president of BZU; Vera Tamari, Palestinian visual artist and founding member of the Committee for the Development of Cultural Heritage; Leila Canaan Mantoura, daughter of Taufiq Canaan; Wissam Abdullah, and Gisela Helmeke. The contents and tone of the sections differ and demonstrate how each one of them related to Canaan, and to the objects as part of a Palestinian

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[464] Cfr. R. Heacock. "The Palestinian Triptych: Official, Elite and Popular Heritage" in *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 14:2, 297-311, p.302

[465] Founded in 1997, its members included Vera Tamari, Rema Hammami, Penny Johnson, Nazmi Jubeh and Sharif Kanaaneh

past. However, they all share a sort of nostalgia, prevalent in the Palestinian collective memory about the pre-Nakba period, also called "the days of lost paradise".[466]

Two topics prevail in the catalogue: the amulets as part of Canaan's scientific work and the amulets as part of Palestine's heritage. In the first, Canaan is placed at the centre, and the amulets are seen as a by-product of his scientific research; in the second, the objects are central to the extent that they are seen as remnants of Palestine's rural culture, which has been epitomised as national heritage. While we can detect that both topics are intertwined, it is possible to distinguish two different approaches to Canaan and his amulets; on the one hand a scientific approach to the amulets, in which they are analysed as part of a systematic classification of healing and protective practices, on the other a more romantic view of Canaan and his collecting activity as part of Palestine's cultural past.

The scientific approach is present in Gisela Helmeke's contribution. As the curator of the exhibition, her text aimed to present Canaan as a man of science and product of his time. She engaged with Canaan's writings and with the way he understood, studied and organised the amulets. Helmeke's choice of arranging the 162 objects according to their function in magic and popular medicine corresponds to the same categories that Canaan employed in his *Aberglaube und Volksmedizin im Lande der Bibel* in 1914. For the exhibition, the objects were divided in ten groups: 1. Protection against the *Qarīna*, 2. General Protection, 3. Protection of Children, 4. Relief of Difficult Labor and Birth, 5. Votive Offerings, 6. Protection against the Evil Eye, 7. Protection against the Evil Soul, 8. Amulet Quality Jewellery, 9. Healing from Diseases, 10. Talismans and Pilgrimage Certificates.[467] The description of the objects in each group tell us what is obviously there; no extra information is given on who used them and how were employed to achieve the desired protection. No further explanation is given about the *qarīna*, how the evil eye worked, or how objects from sacred sites —such as pilgrimage certificates, were used as protective or healing devices. The disposition and descriptions chosen are the exact same words that Canaan registered in his own catalogue, meaning that although there was curatorial work in selecting and organising the objects, there was a conscious choice of presenting Canaan's own descriptions and approach to the amulets without much extra information or interpretation.

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[466] F. Aboubakr. "Peasantry in Palestinian Folktales: Sites of Memory, Homeland and Collectivity" in *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2017), p. 224

[467] K. Nashef, (Ed.) *Ya kafi, Ya shafi, The Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets.* Palestine: Birzeit University Publications, 1998

The largest part of the contributions displays a nostalgia for the Palestinian culture of the past represented by Canaan and his objects. Canaan is presented as a person committed to his country, and aware that the political situation could lead to the disappearance of much of Palestine's material culture. He is depicted as part of the rich cultural life that Jerusalem had before the Nakba characterised not only by intellectual output but also by political awareness. Nostalgia is also expressed towards the amulets and the world they represent. As discussed, Canaan himself viewed the amulets as nostalgic reminders of the rural culture that was disappearing. So in an intricate way, the nostalgia towards Canaan and his amulets overlaps with Canaan's own nostalgic view of his present and past.

The way nostalgia is articulated in the catalogue draws from a particular reading of Canaan's works. Mentioned before is the fact that the exhibition used as a basis Canaan's scientific methodology, however, the exhibition also draw elements from a particular interpretation of Canaan's view of his country and the amulets. Canaan expressed in many occasions that his research on Palestine's folklore aimed to record what he saw under threat of disappearing. This willingness of recording however, should not be confused with a willingness of preserving. For Canaan the amulets and other aspects of folklore had to be recorded, but there was no question that modernity was the best option, especially regarding hygiene and medical practices. Based on this view, the exhibition presented the amulets as relics of a life that no longer existed. This understanding of the amulets is problematic, because it sets them in a frozen past, as if they had stopped circulating at all, whereas in fact amulets still circulate as protective/medical devices, and continue to live as commercial, ethnographic, museum, art, and nationalist objects.

Father, friend and inspiration, is how Leila recalls her father. Her contribution to the catalogue revolves around her father's life, his impact on the way she relates to her country, and the development of her individual and social life. Regarding the amulets, she recalls how her father's interest began as he carried out medical visits in the countryside during his appointment as Director of the Muslim-funded polyclinic in the Old City, and later as itinerant doctor during the First World War. Reaching out to the rural population was decisive in developing his interest in folklore. During this period her father obtained many amulets through constant encounters with patients, who also provided information about the objects as analysed in previous chapters. What is interesting to note here is that Leila does not mention any other way in which her father obtained amulets, although

from other sources we know that most of them were actually bought and not in this period.[468] Leila's focus on this period and this way of amulet acquisition as the most remarkable for the assemblage of the collection may be explained from the way peasant culture had been revived and placed at the centre of Palestine's folklore during the years of the Intifada. The image of Canaan engaging with the rural population through his medical encounters, and getting amulets directly from the users, gives authenticity to his collection as a representative repository of Palestine's indigenous population's culture.

5.5 Socio-political background

The importance given to the pre-Nakba period through the figure of Canaan and the material culture in *Ya Kafi, Ya Shafi* is better understood when analysing the historical events. There are three moments in the development of the political events that help to understand the background of the exhibition: the Oslo Accords and the relative stability it represented for exhibiting material culture; the post 1967 Palestinian Awakening and the study of folklore; and the democratising aspect of the Intifada and the symbolism of the *fellāḥīn* culture.

The exhibition took place in a time of relative peace after the long years of the Intifada, which came to an end in 1993 followed by the signing of the Declaration of Principles on September 13 of that same year. This was the beginning of the peace process known as the Oslo Accords which eventually led to the recognition of a Palestinian National Authority as the formal official body representing the Palestinian people. As a two-edge weapon, this political agreement created on the one hand, a framework of relative stability and security in some areas of the West Bank and for some Palestinians; it was a pact that benefited particular sectors of the society and inhabitants of particular towns. On the other hand, it meant the establishment of new political boundaries between Israel and Palestine, and the fragmentation of the West Bank in area A, B and C, which divided the society and made difficult the mobility of Palestinians throughout the West Bank. Quoting Ilan Pappe, the Oslo process can be summarised as "the paving of highways, the digging of tunnels, (which connected Israel and the settlements in the West Bank) and the cantonisation of the West Bank"[469].

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[468] K. Nashef. Introduction to the Canaan´s catalogue in Arabic.

[469] I. Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine,* p. 243

The Oslo Accords gave Palestine a status of political liminality. Although after the agreement Palestine had for the first time an internationally-recognized political authority, in practice it did not have sufficient autonomy to pass laws. This liminality not only affected the way people moved and lived, but also the way narratives about heritage were constructed.[470] Until 1993, the 1929 Law of Palestinian Archaeology or Antiquities Ordinance[471] enacted by the British High Commissioner in Palestine was the only applicable law for the protection of cultural heritage.[472] Even after the formation of the Palestine National Authority and its legislative arm the Palestinian Legislative Council, the Council was not been able to enact newer drafts for the protection of cultural heritage. According to the 1929 Law, the kinds of materials worthy of conservation were objects whether constructed, shaped, inscribed, excavated, produced or modified by human agency that date back to earlier than 1700CE.[473] In this definition of cultural heritage, ethnographic material was definitely not included; in other words, all material objects coming from the inhabitants of modern Palestine remained out of any kind of protection.

The liminality of Palestine regarding this matter became clear when modifications to the 1929 Law were proposed by the recently founded Palestinian National Authority. After revisiting the Law and after the failure to reform it, much awareness has been raised on how to deal with cultural heritage that is not included in it. In the absence of a State, private institutions have taken over the duty. These have taken responsibility for protecting material that is not considered in the official law. Chiara Di Cesari[474] and Veronique Bontemps[475] have shown how NGO's and private institutions have played an important role in defining, recovering and administering forms of *turāth* in contemporary Palestine. The Tawfik Canaan Collection composed of ethnographic material from

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470 R.R. Sauders. "Between Paralysis and Practice: Theorizing the Political Liminality of Palestinian Cultural Heritage" Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archeological Congress 2008,

471 Antiquities Ordinance No. 51, 1929". Official Gazette of the Government of Palestine. Gazette Extraordinary: 1190–1191. 31 December 1929.

472 R.R. Saunders. *Op. Cit.* p.475

473 Article 2 of the 1929 Antiquities Ordinance; Cfr. R.R. Saunders. p.467

474 C. De Cesari. (2014). World Heritage and the Nation-State: a view from Palestine. In C. De Cesari, & A. Rigney (Eds.), *Transnational memory: circulation, articulation, scales* (pp. 247-270). (Media and cultural memory; No. 19). Berlin: De Gruyter.

475 V. Bontemps. *Ville et patrimoine en Palestine. Une ethnographie des savonneries de Naplouse*, Paris, Karthala-IISMM, 2012, 348 p.

the early 20th century would have never been subjected to protection if it was not for private initiatives.

5.5.1 *Folklore studies, Palestinian awakening*

The Nakba is the most important event that has changed the history of Palestinians and the way they relate to their past. Due to its disastrous consequences such as forced migration and displacement, the Nakba occupies a central place in the collective memory affecting the way other historical events such as the Naksa (1967 War) and the Intifadas are remembered and symbolised. Memories of the past come from generations who have experienced the events in different ways, and articulate two periods: one before, and one after the Nakba. They have developed their own particular imageries about their land and people either from the diaspora or from within the actual boundaries of Palestine.[476]

The 1967 War, or Naksa, is another particular moment of the Palestinian identity formation process.[477] The strengthening of the conception of a Palestinian national state and its right to exist were formulated after 1967 and expressed in what Nazmi al-Jubeh has identified as the "Palestinian Awakening",[478] a moment of consciousness of losing all which led to the preservation of archaeological sites and historical buildings, and to the "museumisation" of ethnographical remains such as traditional dresses, jewellery, amulets, artefacts of daily use, etc.[479]. This awakening implied a wave of awareness of the threat posed by the Israeli occupation. People became aware of the precariousness of losing what remained of the Palestinian cultural heritage, evidence of identity and historic rootedness. A growing concern of the erasure of elements of urban and village life led to the formation of collections and the exhibition of objects such as manuscripts, books, the manufacture of traditional dress, including weaving and embroidery, the fabrication of jewellery and other kinds

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476 S. Tamari. "Burgeois Nostalgia and the Abandoned City" in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 23, Number 1 & 2, 2003, pp. 173-180

477 In this research I am not interested in going deep into the identity formation process, but to highlight that such process is relevant in the study of specific moments of the Collection, namely when it was created, named and exhibited.

478 N. al-Jubeh. "Palestinian Identity" in *Palestinian Identity in relation to Time and Space*, edited by Mitri Raheb, Beit Jala: Diyar Publisher, 2014.

479 Museumisation is when "objects that previously had plural, ritualistic and culturally specific functions and meanings are now fossilised and displayed under the label of cultural heritage and used as a channel for political mobilisation." L. Taraki. "The Development of Political Consciousness among Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, 1967-1987" in *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads*, ed. Jamal R. Nassar and Roger Heacock (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990) p.64

of handcrafts, traditional medicine and amulets, and non-tangible forms of culture such as story-telling.[480]

This Palestinian Awakening, of the aftermath of the 1967 War, was developed by those Palestinians who remained in the West Bank. This is not to say that prior to 1967 there was a lack of awareness of the devastating effects that the political situation had on Palestine's cultural heritage since the Nakba. First and second generation of refugees living in the diaspora were aware of the situation, nevertheless due to their residency abroad they remained excluded from the narrative that emerged in 1967.[481] This Awakening urged to protect and "cling" to whatever material (and inmaterial) remain that could be found such as old houses, photos, clothes, etc., arousing at the same time the interest in forming collections and of establishing museums in order to preserve the national heritage from being lost, dispersed — or even appropriated by the Israelis as their own.[482] With this awareness in mind, people who were forced to let go their family treasures and sell them to get some income, carefully chose where to place these valuable objects. Ms. Widad Kawar[483] relates how, as her collection of Palestinian attire became known, women from villages would choose to sell their dresses and accessories to her and not to shops where they could end up cut into pieces or sold to people who were not interested in preserving Palestine's folklore.[484] These women knew that Ms. Kawar could take care and give to their belongings proper place as part of Palestine's *turāth*.

Folklorists played a very important role in the Palestinian Awakening. In 1989 Sharif Kanaana, one of the most renown folklorists, published a collection of Palestinian folktales: *Speak,*

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480 There are many examples of the "museumisation" of Palestinian heritage through the foundation of different organisations and associations such as Inash Al-Usra Association, Dar al-Tifl Museum, Birzeit University Museum, El-Funoun Palestinian Popular Dance Troupe, among many others.

481 S. Tamari. "Bourgeois Nostalgia and the Abandoned City" in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 23, Number 1 & 2, 2003, pp. 173-180

482 V. Tamari. Personal electronic communication, Nov. 2017

483 Widad K. Kawar is one of many Palestinians who collected objects considered part of the Palestinian heritage. She is known as *umm al-libās al-filasṭīnī,* the mother of Palestinian dress. Cfr. Kawar, W.K., *Threads of Identity*, Rimal Publications, 2011

484 W.K. Kawar. *Threads of Identity*, p. 22

Bird, Speak Again,[485] and in 2001 its correspondent Arabic version *Qul Ya Tayer*.[486] Originating from the rural environment, these folktales disclosed the language and culture of the peasantry. They contain descriptions of the culture of the *fellāḥin*. Farah Aboubakr has analysed these and other collections of folktales, and points out to how by using paratextual elements, folktales shaped the image of the Palestinian peasant, the *fellāḥ,* as a national signifier; a process that, according to Salim Tamari, already started in the 1920s and 1930s,[487] and that developed later phases throughout the 20th century. In the 1960's after the occupation of the West Bank and later during the first intifada (1987 to 1993), we can recognise this linkage between peasant culture and the national spirit as a later stage of this Palestinian Awakening.[488]

The First Intifada (1987) played an important role in the process of the Palestinian Awakening. It was an event that led to structural and ideological changes. It has been defined as a broad-based Palestinian resistance to defend the national identity.[489] It is considered the first major mass mobilisation of Palestine's population as a whole.[490] It came as a response to the destruction of the political, social and economic infrastructures of the occupied Palestinian population, which since 1967 was left completely dependent on the Israeli economy. Because the entire society had been shaken from within and because the destruction affected all social groups, the First Intifada included people from different social, economic and religious backgrounds. It has been considered a distinct stage in the struggle for national liberation in which common interests united all sectors of society.[491] This democratisation of the struggle was an organised revolt on a national level despite the fact that during the years it lasted, it generated conflict between social groups. During the revolt, traditional social and political structures became ineffective, and changes in a structural and

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485 S. Kanaana and I. Muhawi, *Speak, Bird, Speak Again. Palestinian Arab Folk Tales,* L.A. California: University of California Press, 1989.

486 S. Kanaana and I. Muhawi, *Qūl yā ṭayr, ḥikāyāt lil-aṭfāl min al-turāth al-sha'bī al-filasṭīnī*, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Dirāsāt al-Filasṭīnīya, 2001

487 S. Tamari, "Soul of the Nation", p.77

488 F. Aboubakr. "Peasantry in Palestinian Folktales: Sites of Memory, Homeland and Collectivity" in *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2017), pp. 217-238

489 E.S. Kuttab. *Op. Cit*. p.72

490 E.S. Kuttab. "Palestinian women in the intifada: Fighting on two fronts" in *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Spring 1993, Vol. 15 Issue 2, p.69-86

491 E.S. Kuttab. *Op. Cit*. p. 70

ideological level were implemented allowing the foundation of new organisations, which in turn helped in creating a national awakening and identity consciousness. [492]

During the First Intifada particular cultural elements were placed at the core of the national discourse. The mobilisation of all kinds of social groups required the creation of particular symbols, effective for everyone. It is during these years that elements from Palestine's folklore became part of the narrative of the nation. The rural culture was re-appropriated through the figure of the peasant, the *fellāḥ,* who became a central figure in West-Bank Palestinian culture.[493] Ted Swedenburg has analysed how this sort of identification with the peasantry became part of Palestine's national culture. He argues that its centrality was established by leaders of the national movement, who by using it as a symbol, were able to unite and mobilise all social groups against a specific form of settler-colonialism. The *fellāḥ* turned out to be the most suitable figure to make claims about national identity because of his inherent relation to the soil, the land, the territory, as well as what he stood for, namely the repository of accumulated unchanging customs and beliefs that linked the present to the ancient past.[494]

The creation of the *fellāḥ* as a national symbol has affected the approach of the Palestinians towards the rural culture. The culture of the *fellāḥīn* has become an identification marker for most Palestinians, even for those who are not related to rural life at all. In 1998 when the exhibition *Ya Kafi, Ya Shafi* was planned, this rural culture had already been placed at the heart of Palestine's culture, therefore an exhibition on folk practices around protection and healing would occupy an important place within this imagery of national symbols. Since every Palestinian personified a peasant, the relation to the objects exhibited must have been quite interesting. Material culture that once belonged to a particular social group, was now received as part of the national culture, that certainly had to be protected and promoted.

5.6 The museographical work around the objects

After the donation of the collection to BZU, and as part of the research made for the exhibition, the Collection was subjected to analysis and classification. Besides the categories established by Taufiq Canaan and used by G. Helmeke for the exhibition of 1998, another classification had to be made

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[492] E.S. Kuttab, *Op. Cit.* p.73

[493] T. Swedenburg. "The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier" in *Anthropological Quarterly;* Jan. 1 1990; 63, 1; ProQuest, pp. 18-30.

[494] T. Swedenburg. *Ibid*. p.19

for museographic purposes. Based on the materials and the object's shape, this new classification showed the richness of Palestinian cultural heritage. Materials such as red coral and cowrie shells from the Red Sea, *al-mīs* wood beads from Jerusalem, milk beads from Bethlehem, stamped soaps from Nablus, Nabi Musa stones from the Jericho area, and many other objects coming from different parts of the country were all categorised as Palestinian amulets.

These categories highlighted the diversity of the Palestinian regions, but simultaneously detached the objects from their use in medical treatments. This museographic classification of the amulets, which focused more on materials rather than on the form of use, differs from Canaan's analysis of the amulets in context, that we find in his published articles. However, the classification resembles somehow some of the cardboards on which Canaan arranged the amulets, according to kind of material and type of amulet. This classification based on materials is very interesting, because it discloses the artificiality of the nature of collections and the way objects can be used and placed in many ways according to the story (some)one wants to convey.

Below is the list of categories made by the curator/museographer at Birzeit University Museum, Baha Joubeh and the anthropologist Khaled al-Nashef. Arranged on the basis of materials employed and the way amulets were used, nine groups emerged under which the amulets were classified. All the data to determine to which group each amulet belonged come from the cardboards on which Taufiq Canaan placed and enumerated the amulets.[495]

- The first comprises those objects that are known as *ḥujub*, which are talismans written on paper and placed in triangular cloth, leather wrappings or in cylinders or silver cases.
- The second group comprises jewellery including necklaces, bracelets, rings and semiprecious stones; kinds of items that are still used although their talismanic properties have been dropped.
- The third group contains glass beads and stones of many different kinds, which are used mainly in healing and repelling the evil eye.
- The fourth group are paper amulets that include talismans, supplications and prayers which were hung to protect homes and their occupants.
- The fifth group comprises pilgrims' certificates bearing religious symbols, either in the form of stamps or writings, which were given to pilgrims who visited holy sites in Jerusalem and Hebron.

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[495] B. al-Jubeh. "Magic and Talismans. The Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets." *Jerusalem Quarterly* 22-23 (2005): 103-108.

- The sixth group comprises votive offerings made of silver in the shape of human body parts such as hands, feet, hearts, heads, foetuses, etc.; these were hung in churches and on religious icons to heal illnesses and protect the health of children.
- The seventh group contains organic materials such as animal bones and tortoise shells, often bearing talismanic writings.
- The eighth group are the *fear cups*, which are bowls that contain inscriptions of Qur'anic verses and supplications; water was placed in the cups and left for a particular amount of time in order to get beneficial properties for it to be drunk by a child or a frightened person.
- The ninth and last group were ceramic dishes on which talismanic inscriptions were written to cure diseases and facilitate the birth of children.

These museographic categories, however, are not fixed and might overlap with others when arranging the objects from a different perspective. In fact, in the particular case of my research, amulets from all nine groups are considered to show that no mater what shape or material, all have gone through different moments in their life. In each phase they have been subjected to the cultural construct that gives meaning and sense to their use in concrete situations.

5.7 Taufiq Canaan, the Palestinian

So far the Palestinian-ness of the Canaan Collection has been analysed within the context of its donation to BZU in 1995 and its exhibition in 1998. It has been explained how historical events such as the Nakba, the 1967 War, and the First Intifada shaped the way Palestinians approached cultural heritage as part of their national identity by the time of the donation and the exhibition. The Canaan amulets were presented to the public as part of this cultural heritage through the figure of Taufiq Canaan, a representative of the political consciousness that started to emerge in the pre-Nakba period. The amulets were also presented as part of the cultural heritage because they came from the peasant culture, which because of its association with the land, had become embedded in how Palestinians self-identify.[496] By the mid 1990s when the Collection was acquired, studied and exhibited, the centrality of the rural culture in the national identity made it easier for the audience to approach and understand the Canaan objects, which after all were part of all Palestinians' cultural heritage.

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[496] T. Swedenburg. "The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier", *Anthropological Quarterly*; Jan 1, 1990; 63: 1, p. 18-30

In this section as a way to complement the historical development of the identification of the amulets as Palestinian, I turn into the period of formation of the Collection to explore how this Palestinian-ness was constructed around them. The Palestinian-ness in question started to emerge during Canaan's early life, but evolved and had different features in later decades. This section analyses how politically embedded Canaan's collecting activity was when looking at his gradual involvement in the political life of his country. His collecting activity was intertwined with his medical work, ethnographic research, and political activism, and it took place as a result of his interactions with people from different backgrounds, such as other physicians, anthropologists, collectors, antiquarians and political figures, such as we have explored in the previous chapters. Therefore, it would be naive to neglect the impact of Canaan's political ideas in the formation of his identity and consequently in the Palestinian-ness that he attributed to the folklore he studied and the objects he collected.

Considering that collections disclose aspects of the identity of the collector, how was the development of Canaan's self-identification as a Palestinian man reflected in the amulets he chose to collect? How in turn, did the process of forming a collection affect Canaan's identity? How did Taufiq Canaan engage with the amulets as objects from a "Palestinian" culture, in other words, how was this Palestinian-ness understood by him? How did it take shape during the years he collected? The aim of this section is to show how the Palestinian-ness of the amulets was gradually constructed during Canaan's collecting years. Spanning from 1905 to 1947 and taking into account the events that marked Palestine's social and political life, it is possible to trace the development of Canaan's identification with a Palestinian cause, as well as his different attitudes towards the peasants and their amulets, from objects of scientific research to representatives of a valuable national culture.

Taufiq Canaan has mainly been studied as an ethnographer; he indeed carried out extensive ethnographic work and published vastly about Palestine's folklore. However his ethnographic works were part of a larger corpus that also included medical and political writings, which were in a sort of dialogue. Taufiq Canaan was a very much engaged in politics, and as we go through his biography it is possible to contextualise his ethnographic and medical works in the political life of the country. Philippe Bourmaud has addressed the entanglements between Canaan's political views and his work. He mentions that his ethnographic research was not politicised.[497] Although the contents of his writings might have remained scientific in nature, Canaan's involvement in different

[497] P. Bormaud, *Son of the Country*, p. 114

associations of archaeological research played a role in the development of his political ideas. After all, researchers in these archaeological institutes were working within a framework set by the political agendas of the respective countries that sponsored them. His medical activity, on the other hand, has been analysed by Sandra Sufyan as part of the larger medical scene that took place in early 20th century Palestine. Medical activities were part of healthcare projects and their entanglements with political activism were clear.[498] Taufiq Canaan's major political activism took place through his medical activity, particularly through the foundation of the Palestinian Medical Association.[499] It has been very recent, however, that Canaan has been approached from his political writings. Sarah Irving's PhD research has explored for the first time Taufiq Canaan political pamphlets disclosing in detail his involvement in the political life of his country.[500]

So far, the political aspect of Canaan's medical and ethnographic research does not include his collecting activity. The Collection was hidden for long time, from 1947 to 1995; a fact that explains why his collecting activity has not received the same attention as his numerous publications despite the fact that since 1998 the collection is available to the public and it is known as the largest collection of Palestinian amulets in the world. The exploration of Canaan's collecting enterprise in relation to his political activity might bring new insights on how collecting different kinds of material, not only reflected but shaped his identity as a Palestinian.

2.8 Collecting as a political act

Taufiq Canaan's collecting enterprise developed throughout the decades. His changing attitudes towards what was considered "Palestinian" can be seen throughout his writings and in his involvement in the politics of his country. In this sense, his motivations in collecting and his approach to the amulets as remnants of a Palestinian rural culture changed through the years. According to Vera Tamari, Canaan "dealt with the amulets in a pedagogical way and from a scientific viewpoint rather than from a national viewpoint".[501] It is true that he devoted his time to the study of Palestinian folklore, to preserve material evidence of traditional healing and

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[498] S. Sufian. *Healing the Land and the Nation: Malaria and the Zionist project in Mandatory Palestine, 1920-1947,* University of Chicago Press, 2007

[499] P. Bourmaud, *A Son of the Country*, p. 114

[500] S. Irving. *Intellectual networks, language and knowledge under colonialism: the work of Stephan Stephan, Elias Haddad and Tawfiq Canaan in Palestine, 1909-1948.*

[501] V. Tamari. Op. Cit., p.71

prophylaxis, and to compare "popular medicine with medicine in the scientific meaning of the word and its related branches"[502]. However, it is difficult to assert that there were no nationalistic motivations in Canaan's actions, since he was very politically active and became involved in refuting the Zionist propaganda in the 1930's. This can be seen when comparing the first years of his collecting enterprise, when there was a relative stability and the relations with the Jewish community were still working well, with later years when working conditions became increasingly difficult for the Palestinian population due to foreign settlement in the country.

Canaan's collecting activity was shaped through his interaction with other collectors and scholars interested in Palestinian folklore as analysed in Chapter 3. One of the ethnographers who influenced Canaan's ethnographic work was Hilma Granqvist, the first woman who carried out long fieldwork periods (in the Bethlehem area) in order access the private life of local inhabitants. Canaan learned this methodological approach and applied it to his ethnographic work. From his interaction with other scholars, Canaan also became aware of the access that Arabic as his mother tongue gave him, specially during his years of medical practice when he acquired amulets from his patients. Translators were very much in demand by foreign scholars, and the fact that he was a native speaker differentiated him from many others. He could establish relations with his patients in a more intimate way from the fact that he could speak the same language, but also because he was a physician and paid medical visits regularly.

The shaping of Canaan's identity as Palestinian might also have been influenced by how foreigners perceived him as a native ethnographer. This perception was quite positive and from it developed some collaborations. Canaan was seen as a key scholar due to his cultural background in combination with his Western education. In 1929 Canaan was hired to carry out research due to his Arab background and his skills in European languages. Stated in the preface of *Studies in the Topography and Folklore of Petra:*

> "The expedition sent to Petra by Mr. Henry Mond in the spring of 1929, under the leadership of Mr. Geoge Horsfield Director of Antiquities on Transjordan, was able to secure the services of Dr. T. Canaan for three weeks. He was peculiarly qualified to investigate the topography and folklore of Petra, as only an Arab, with the capacity to cope with a formidable periodical literature in English, French and German could have sifted the chaotic nomenclature in so short time… Dr. Canaan's profession was an additional asset, as aided

[502] K. Nashef, Op. Cit., p.19

by a travelling medical outfit, he was able to obtain confidence of the local Bedouin. The result was a collection of legends connected with the monuments…"[503]

Canaan's collecting was entangled with his political activities in a very particular way. His collecting activity was indeed a fundamental part of his ethnographic work, it was complementary to his writings in some cases, but also much of what he collected inspired him to write particular papers on Palestine's folklore. Because Canaan was active in different fields he forged a network that included European and Arab collectors, merchants, antique dealers, religious and political figures. This network of acquaintances did not only play a role in the kinds of material Canaan acquired (like the pilgrimage certificates, and the objects that some acquaintances donated to him); there are records of all the people involved in Canaan's collecting that included political figures with whom Canaan established specific relations with political purposes. The acquaintances also played a role in shaping Canaan's forms of collecting, such as collecting for others, and collecting with the aim to represent Palestine's medical culture abroad.

Canaan's political activism took place mainly through the membership of different societies and associations. Through his publications we know that he was involved with the institutions of the German Society for the Exploration of Palestine (*Deutscher Palästina-Verein*), such as the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology (*Deutschen Evangelischen Instituts für Altertumswissenschaft des heiligen Landes*) founded in 1900 in Jerusalem. Having being raised in a German Protestant environment, Canaan was in contact with researchers of this institute, particularly with Gustaf Dalman, appointed the first director from 1902 to 1917, and editor of the Journal Palestine Yearbook from 1905 to 1926.

Taufiq Canaan was also a member of the Palestine Oriental Society, which was founded in 1920 after the British opened the field of archaeology and gave green light for excavation projects promoting an important influx of scholars from different nationalities.[504] The POS was inaugurated in Jerusalem, it aimed to expand the study of antiquities of the Holy Land, cultivate and publish academic work on the Ancient East, but foremost, to create a space that for the first time would gather scholars from different countries, societies and religious bodies.[505] The international

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[503] Preface written by A.C. Conway. Cfr. T. Canaan. *Studies in the Topography and Folklore of Petra*, Jerusalem: Beyt al-Makdes, 1930, p.III

[504] JPOS Vol I. p.2

[505] JPOS Vol.I, p.1

character of the POS allowed Canaan to publish in close cooperation with Jewish scholars and scholars affiliated to the missionary institutes. By 1924 Canaan had developed from just a member of the POS into being one of the editors of the POS journal; a position in which he had to engage with the authors over the contents and style of their articles. It is in this involvement that I found Canaan's activities in the POS politically loaded.

Nadia Abu El-Haj has brought to the attention the role of Jewish archaeology during the British Mandate in creating material facts for legitimating a nascent national narrative. The foundation of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society in 1914 and its activities since 1920 may have had an impact in the way Palestinian scholars carried out research. The JPES was in charge of the excavation work in archaeological sites and led the project of hebraisation. The study of the Hebrew language in turn led to the situation where scholars of the Jewish community started changing personal and geographical names from the way they were called and used by actual inhabitants into the Hebrew version. This hebraisation of the landscape was part of a larger project of "returning to their nation"[506] Members of the JPES were known through the publication of the JPES bulletin. Some of them were also contributors to the Journal of the POS, with whom Canaan must have had interesting debates. So when debates about the historical origin of places began to emerge, Canaan found himself right in the middle of them due to his involvement in archaeological institutes and societies.

Canaan's involvement and contribution to the POS disclose how the Journal of the POS had become for Canaan a sort of battlefield where, in a very subtle way, he was counteracting articles with a political load. In the issue of 1930 Canaan published for the first time a paper that did not revolve around folklore; he published two new documents on the surrender of Jerusalem to the British in December 1917. This volume was published within the framework of some ongoing discussions among the members of the POS about the closure of the Society. The hesitance of keeping the Society alive might have been the result of the political instability of Jerusalem after the August 1929 Buraq Uprising. In the introduction of this volume, F.M. Abel, the president of the POS at the time, thanks the particular efforts of Taufiq Canaan and M. Hertzberg for keeping the Society alive. In the volume, we find the contribution of the Ottoman Historian Asad Jibrail Rustum from the American University of Beirut; the first published paper from a scholar located outside Jerusalem. Rustum's paper on the 1839 Peasant's revolt in Palestine presented a couple of new documents for the study of this revolt. Although the author does not discuss the relevance of the

[506] N. Abu El-Haj. "Producing (Arti) Facts." p.52

revolt itself, it is not fortuitous that this topic appeared in a time of political instability. In fact Canaan's and Rustum's papers were the first ones published in the JPOS that dealt with the modern history of Palestine, and addressed key events in the political life of Palestinians.

The POS was for Canaan a platform from where he could reach out to a wider public for his articles. In 1927 Luzac & Co., an English publishing house in London, published the second edition of Canaan's remarkable monograph *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries*. The first edition of it was in the JPOS, and appeared in four parts in the volumes issued in 1924, 1925, 1926, 1927. It was published in Jerusalem, but read in Palestine and abroad.[507] The work, in English, was intended for an English-speaking audience that included British, Americans and other European nationals living in Palestine under the British government, who had been somehow obliged to learn and use English as a vehicular language. The publication of a second edition disclosed the success of its reception, but also the networks that Canaan had built over the years. By 1927, Canaan had become president of the Palestine Oriental Society, he had already created a network that was spread beyond Jerusalem, he was known through his medical and ethnographic work, as well as for his role as board member in the Palestine Oriental Society since 1920, and the editor of its journal since 1924. His decision to publish this monograph in England says much of Canaan's interest to be read abroad, in the centre of the British power. One year later, in 1928, the Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies of the University of London published a review pointing out the value of Canaan's research for the scholarship on Arab folklore, and praising his knowledge on the subject, his familiarity with Palestine's rural life, plus his acknowledgement of contemporary scholars such as Goldziher, Dalman, Curtiss, Jaussen, Lane, among others.[508]

In this second edition Canaan mentions in the preface:

> "The primitive features of Palestine are disappearing so quickly… Thus it has become the duty of every student of Palestine and the Near East of Archaeology and the Bible, to lose no time in collecting as fully and accurately as possible all available material concerning folklore, customs and superstitions current in the Holy Land. Such material is… of the

[507] Members of the POS lived mainly in Palestine, England and the U.S. according to the list of members published in 1924. Diverse academic institutions, particularly American Universities and Libraries collaborated with the POS. Cfr. JPOS, vol. 4, 1924, p215-220

[508] M. Smith. "Reviewed Work: Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine by Taufik Canaan". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies,* University of London, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1928): 169-171

> greatest importance for the study of ancient oriental civilisation and for the study of primitive religion… I, as a son of the country, have felt it my special duty to help in this scientific work…"[509]

From this excerpt we can see that Canaan's motivation to collect and record sprang from his concern about the disappearance of elements of Palestinian culture. His use of the term "primitive" should not surprise us, it was very much used among anthropologist in an evolutionist sense; primitive features were valued because they reiterated the advancement of modernity. For Canaan, a modern man, these primitive features were the traces of the existence of his people "the Canaanites" in the Levant, and therefore a way to claim legitimacy over the foreign settlers.[510] Canaan's need to collect seemed to be different from that of foreign students of Palestine and the Near East, whose feelings of duty to preserve the "primitive features" relied more on their interest in studying it, in keeping it alive merely for scientific purposes. In the quote Canaan also mentions that the main factor of the disappearance of such features was the change in local conditions, like the introduction of European education, migration, and the political influence of the Mandatory Power. For Canaan, migration includes all waves and groups of migrants, not only Jewish. He also mentions that part of the change stem from the fact that many Palestinians are migrating to Europe and the U.S., where they stay or get education that is later applied when they go back to Palestine.

In this second edition of *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries,* Canaan openly expresses his uneasiness with Palestine's situation; a concern that does not appear in the first publication, and which informs us of Canaan's ways to manoeuvre in different settings. He openly talked about this concern to a public that was mainly living in England, something that he never did in the JPOS. Important to highlight is that in the JPOS, Canaan was not alone, he was always part of a bigger group of scholars that included many Jews, some of them active in the political live of the Yishuv. So, in order to maintain an atmosphere of peaceful academic cooperation, Canaan had to be subtle in the way he expressed his political opinions.

Even though Canaan's always kept a sense of diplomacy, part of his ethnographic work and his collecting activity, to record what is disappearing due to colonisation, was in fact a political statement. When Canaan openly expresses his duty to collect what is being threatened particularly by the British policies, he is giving value to this that must be recorded. And when he mentions his concern about the disappearance of certain forms of life, he is referring to the primitive elements of

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[509] T. Canaan. *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine.* London: Luzac & Co., 1927

[510] Personal communication with Salim Tamari, October 2020.

Palestine, embodied in the *fellāḥīn*. For Canaan they represent the living heritage of an accumulated past that included many ancient cultures that dwelled in Palestine, like the Canaanite, Philistine, Hebraic, Nabatean, Syrio-Aramaic, and Arab peoples.[511]

2.8.1 The duty of collecting

In the last years of the Ottoman period and during the transition to the British Mandate, Palestinians became aware of the transformation of their land after seeing waves of foreigners settling in the biggest towns, on the coast and the hinterland. Canaan's collecting process followed a rising awareness of the loss and displacement, leading him to consider his collection an important reservoir of Palestinian culture. Taufiq Canaan lived in a period of very fast changes in which Palestine went from being part of the Ottoman Empire, to become a British colony, and to end up being an occupied region dependent on the State of Israel. Throughout these decades and as a result of these political events, Canaan's view of Palestine changed substantially. His writings show his development as a physician and ethnographer, but also his involvement in the political situation of his country. In the same manner, the objects that he collected and the kinds of objects he researched reflect a multifaceted and dynamic vision of Palestine.

The way Canaan depicted the peasantry in his writings discloses the meaning he attached to the amulets he collected from them. When he depicts the peasants related to a Biblical past, the amulets are also considered part of that image, but when he presents the peasants as living subjects who have the agency to transform their present, the amulets become valuable representatives of such agency of the owners. In revising the development of his writings, we see a gradual dissociation between the Biblical remains and the actual practice of the peasant culture. Canaan gives more and more agency to the *fellāḥīn,* showing how they had managed to change through time and adapted to everyday life. In his research on Petra, the agency of the native people is very clear in the way they have named and related to the topography of their environment. They have given names to places as the result of their everyday engagement with the landscape and the people.

The process that we see in Canaan's work, where he grants increasingly more agency to the peasants and Bedouins, mirrors what happens in the political life of the country. Looking for its own voice, Palestinians peasants start to become active in counteracting the British policies. Similarly, Canaan also saw his work developing away from depicting peasants as remnants of a Biblical past and their amulets as part of it, towards a kind of ethnographic work that is more in

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511 S. Tamari. "Lepers, Lunatics and Saints", p. 98

tune with a contemporary Palestine. A good example of this point is his later work on the status of Arab women in Palestine.[512]

In this sense, we can notice a subtle different approach to the amulets from the first items Canaan collected to later acquisitions. At first, his acquisitions followed his interest in traditional medicine, which he compared to the biomedicine that he practiced in his. Traditional medicine was seen as part of Palestine's folklore. Simultaneously, the items represented a reminiscence of the primitive, but were a link between the Biblical past and the present. Canaan's collecting activity eventually reached a point where amulets became representatives of the life of contemporary peasantry, who despite their cultural difference, were as Canaan, heirs of the land. Peasants' amulets became valuable because they embodied the strong connection that Palestinians have with their land. This change of attitude is well worthy to be analysed since it shows how in four decades Canaan, as maybe other urban Palestinians did, developed ideas of national belonging and transformed his views towards the missions' policies, immigration, and the peasantry. Canaan always oscillated between the multiple components of his own identity, his ambivalence can be seen in many layers but also gradually changing through the years.

Contrary to the idea that Canaan did not feel threatened of losing it all,[513] I argue that in his last years of collecting Canaan was aware of the implications that Jewish settlements in Palestine would bring in the coming years. So the picture that Canaan built his collection as a pure scientific interest, fails to recognise him as a changing, ambivalent person who felt the duty to record features of the culture of Palestine that were tending to disappear. Collecting out of duty representative objects of a fading present seemed to be a sort of protonational attitude.[514] What follows highlights specific moments in the development of this "feeling of duty".

Rashid Khalidi has pointed out that the start of the First World War was one of the factors that awakened the first sentiments of a Palestinian national identity. The Great War, as it is referred to in Palestinian historiography, had substantial economic and political consequences in the Middle East. The instability that it brought can be seen not only in a national, but also in an individual scale. Palestinian men were recruited by the Ottoman army to fight, Canaan was no exception. In

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[512] When Canaan's house was invaded in 1948, he lost many books. Canaan mentions that his greatest loss was his not yet published book "Die arabische Fray v.d. Wiege bis zum Grab". Cfr. T. Canaan, The Taufiq Canaan Memoirs II, p.136.

[513] S. Mejcher-Attasi, *Archives, Museums,* p.4

[514] S. Tamari. *Mountain Against the Sea*, p.2

1914 Canaan was appointed doctor of the 27th Infantry Regiment and sent to Nazareth.[515] During his enrolment in the Military he was far from his family, friends and acquaintances. Outside of his urban milieu of Jerusalem, Canaan found himself confronted with his inability to communicate since most of the soldiers in his regiment were Turks. In his memoirs Canaan expressed his feeling as an outsider. In addition to the isolation and language problems, he also struggled because he was unable to practice medicine up to his standards due to the poor quality of medical services provided by the Ottoman Army to its soldiers. Moreover, he remarks the superiority of the missionary hospitals (particularly the Austrian Hospital in Nazareth), which were the only ones providing medicine.

That same year the whole division was transferred to Ma'an (south of Jordan), and after a week Canaan was sent to Damascus to the headquarters of the army where he got sick and eventually was sent back to Jerusalem to recover. The second time Canaan was sent to the army was through Prof. Muhlens, who had been sent to the desert to offer medical services. Canaan was then sent to Bir Sheba where he organised a laboratory under the supervision of Prof. Hegler. A few months after, he was transferred to another laboratory in Hafir al-Auja. The last position in the Sinai front was Beit Hanoun. After losing the Sinai, Canaan was sent to Damascus and then to Aleppo where he directed the biggest laboratory in the south of the Ottoman territories.[516]

During this period, Canaan got a lot of experience treating wounded soldiers and dealing with all kinds of infections. He was sent to different locations to serve as a doctor in the army, and had to cope with the death and sickness of soldiers, civil population and himself. However, as we read the entry on the War in his diaries we learn that this period was extremely gratifying, because as a doctor he had the chance to save many lives and improve the health of many people. Additionally, he expressed how fruitful this period was in terms of experience and knowledge in the medical field.

Regarding the formation of his identity, this episode in the army must have sparked some conflict in him. He was fighting on the side of the Ottomans, receiving his medicine through the European missionary, while being an Arab. In the entry of the War of his diary, he repeatedly distinguished himself from the Turks, which represented the Ottoman state. Despite being an Ottoman citizen himself, and having recognised in other moments of his life the privileges of the

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[515] T. Canaan, "The Taufiq Canaan Memoirs I", p.24

[516] T. Canaan, The Taufiq Canaan Memoirs I, p. 25

Ottoman citizenship[517], Canaan brings his Arab-ness to the fore. He repeatedly affirmed his identity as an Arab and expressed shared features with other non-Palestinian Arabs. This identification must have come from comparing the Ottoman institutions with the missionary ones and they role during the War. Canaan was critical of the flaws of the Ottoman state constantly expressing the superiority of missionary institutions. By the beginning of the 20th century, the missions had impacted the Jerusalemite population in such an important way, that Canaan not only showed great sympathy for the their work, but also felt part of the culture they had introduced. These institutions contributed to the cosmopolitanism and the modernisation of Jerusalem's society, something that Canaan valued a lot. As we go through his biography, Canaan often mentions the different origins of his acquaintances and close friends, and expresses how the presence of such diverse population played a role in the formation of the urban culture of the city.

Comparing the years he spent in the different posts in the army with the years he acquired his amulets, we see that during the War, he kept collecting amulets. Particular groups of items were acquired during his stays in the Nazareth, Damascus and the Negev Desert. These amulets are part of the group of objects that he acquired directly from patients. Since this is the period when he carried out many medical visits in the countryside, it is when he actually gathered most of the amulets that appear in the catalogue with information about their uses and applications.

5.8.2 Collecting for others

Collections are formed in different ways and with different goals in mind. Collecting material with the purpose of analysing it and eventually writing about it in an academic journal is very different from collecting material with the purpose of exhibiting it. Exhibiting implies conscious choices of what to include and exclude in order to present a particular story to a target audience. For this, the collector must know what this audience is and anticipate what they are looking for.

As mentioned before, Canaan was a well-known physician and ethnographer, and throughout the years he also became known as a collector. The development of his activities in these three fields led him to move in different networks. In the scientific societies discussed above (on medicine and folklore) Canaan was in contact with other scholars, who contributed to his work. As a collector, however, his network grew wider. Not only scholars, but also amateur collectors, and anyone aware of Canaan's interests in collecting, could become part of his collecting enterprise by

[517] This can be exemplified with the time he got married and advised his wife Margot to become an Ottoman subject. Cfr. T. Canaan, The Taufiq Canaan Memoirs I, p.25

giving him an amulet. Many were the contributors to his collection who, knowing about Canaan's interest in folk medicine, were motivated to donate. His collection might have represented something bigger since it raised the interest of many people who were not related neither to the study of folklore nor to the medical field. Some of the donors were involved in the political life of the country, others came from religious backgrounds. Some contributors might have seen Canaan's collection with curiosity, others as an assemblage of elements that formed a national identity. Especially if Canaan openly talked about the reasons why he collected, and that his collection aimed to record what colonisation was wiping out. Following this narrative, his interlocutors, political leaders included, must have been enthusiastic to collaborate in such an enterprise.

Canaan was in contact with other collectors. It has been said that collecting was part of the cultural activities of many scholars of his time. The case of Lydia Eisler and her relation with Canaan is very interesting as discussed in Chapter 3. She was the wife of Adolf Einsler, Canaan's colleague and she was also an amateur collector of Palestine folkloric artefacts. Her collection, described in Chapter 3, contains very similar objects to the Tawfik Canaan Collection. We know that she specifically gathered a group of objects with the intention to present them in the International Hygiene Exhibition that took place in Dresden, Germany in 1911. By this year, Canaan had already begun working as a doctor in the Jerusalem Hospital and had gathered some amulets. However, his collecting activity had not been systematic. He had acquired items during his medical visits in a rather ad hoc manner. As for his research on amulets, he had not published any article on Palestine's folklore yet.

Next to Lydia Einsler's collection, Canaan later contributed to the creation of other collections. By 1932 when he carried out a research stay in London for the study of tropical diseases, Canaan had already established good relations with Henry Wellcome, an American-British pharmaceutical entrepreneur who was also a keen collector of medical artefacts and who requested from Canaan a small collection of Palestinian amulets. In his diaries, Canaan mentions that it was precisely that same year 1932 when his son Beshara (known in England as Theo) started studying at the University of London, and that it had been thanks to the sponsorship and recommendation of Henry Wellcome that the admission process had gone with ease. In the same entry of his diary, Canaan mentions having already sent the 230 amulets to Wellcome's medico-historical museum, a deal that had helped to establish a good relation with him.[518]

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[518] T. Canaan, The Taufiq Canaan Memoirs I, p.29

The research stay in London in 1932 seems to have been very useful. First because it took place the same year Theo moved to London, and I assume that Canaan helped him setting up in his new home. Second, because during this stay Canaan involvement with English researchers granted him a good name in England as well as in Palestine. Canaan says that after this stay the number of patients back in Jerusalem increased, particularly among some of the highest British officials.

During his stay in London, Canaan must have visited the Historical Medical Museum where the objects he had collected were on display. Canaan had customised this small collection. When Henry Wellcome first knew about Canaan's collection of amulets, he tried to purchase it as a whole, but after some failed attempts, he eventually agreed in accepting a smaller collection. It is not clear when and how the relation between Canaan and Wellcome started. It is unknown to me where they met or how they knew about each other. The communication between them took place through a good friend of Mr. Wellcome, who in Canaan diaries appears as Mr. Saint-John, but who may actually have been Peter Johnston-Saint (1866-1947), who worked for Wellcome from the 1920's onwards and whose role was to create and arrange the collections for the Historical Medical Museum.[519] After his career as an officer in the Indian Army and Royal Flying Corps, Johnston-Saint was sent on "collecting tours" and in 1928 became the "full-time roving ambassador for the Museum"[520] Besides being an acquisitions agent, he was a representative of the Museum at international conferences to expand the network. He was in charge of the public relations in the Museum's development, and in 1934 he was appointed Conservator of all the collections. He was not the only person who collected for Wellcome, but he was assigned the Mediterranean, Middle East, Persia and India collections.[521]

Johnston-Saint is a key figure in Canaan's process of collecting. Aware of Canaan's collection of amulets, Johnston-Saint was the one who negotiated with Canaan what kind of objects to include in the small collection for Mr. Wellcome. By the time their communication took place, Canaan's own collection was in the process of formation. Objects collected before 1932 where of various kinds, and these where the ones that Johnston-Saint had as a reference point. Of course Canaan was known as a specialist and was granted the freedom to arrange the material according to

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519 P.J. Johnston-Saint (d.1947) Travel diaries, reports and correspondence related the to work for the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, Reference : WA/HMM/RP/Jst, WA/HMM/CO/Sai https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/N13846539

520 J. Symons. "The development of the Wellcome Collections" in *Newsletter (Museum Ethnographers Group)* No. 20 (Feb.1987) p.12

521 J. Symons. *Op. Cit*. p.12

his own insights, but Johnston-Saint's instructions must have had an impact on Canaan's own collecting practices as well. Canaan sent the 230 objects to England knowing that these would be immediately on display.

The Historical Medical Museum was founded as part of Wellcome's altruist projects. It was inaugurated in London in 1913 apropos of the XVIIth International Congress of Medicine.[522] The development of the collections of the Museum are registered in three handbooks that contain information about the objects in each of the Museum's sections. The handbooks were published in 1913 (year of the Museum's opening), in 1920, and in 1927 after the re-opening of the Museum.

The museographic details registered in these three handbooks show the development of the collections, particularly the creation of new museographic categories, which explains the interest in acquiring material such as the Palestinian amulets from Canaan. The handbook of 1913 mentions eight glass cases containing charms and talismans located in the Gallery of the Hall.[523] Without any specification about their place of provenance, the entire collection of charm and talismans was not big enough to divide it per region. The only two cases grouped under "Egyptian" did not even refer to the geographical area, but to the culture of origin, which by the way occupied a central place in all kinds of collections in late 19th- and early 20th-century Europe. In the handbook of 1920, in comparison, there is an entire section dedicated to folk medicine including charms, talismans and amulets from all parts of the world. With a two-page introduction, this handbook describes what an amulet, charm, and talisman is, plus the different kinds included in the collection. Defined as objects used in every-day traditional prophylactics, amulets are described as objects that prevent or ward off evil influences and diseases, but also cure them[524]. Collecting folk material culture had become among the interest of the Museum by 1920. That was the same year Johnston-Saint began working for the Museum. In my sources it is not certain when the Museum acquired the amulets from Canaan, since they are not catalogued as coming from him, neither is the date of acquisition given. What is important to reflect on, is that the interest of the Museum in folk medicine, and the kinds of objects collected so far might have provided the guidelines of the objects that the Museum wanted from Canaan.

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[522] Opening ceremony of the Historical Medical Museum. https://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b24921257

[523] Handbook of the Historical Medical Museum, 1913, p.43

[524] Handbook of the Historical Medical Museum, 1920, p.15

Figure 25. *qā'a kan'ān.* Tawfik Canaan Station, Birzeit University Museum
Photo taken by the author

By 1920, Canaan's own collection was still in the making. So far he had acquired a good number of objects, through his fieldwork in the countryside while being sent to work as an itinerant doctor, as director of the polyclinic of Jerusalem, and as doctor of the Ottoman Army during the First World War. This phase of Canaan's collecting from 1910-1918 included unique objects that his patients used for healing. These objects were not amulets that could be obtained in shops, instead they had been manufactured by local amulet makers or by the patients themselves. The uniqueness of these items and the information that Canaan had acquired from the users must have been

astonishing for Johnston-Saint, and for any one else interested in traditional medicine; and must have been the main reason for requesting a smaller selection.[525]

5.9 Conclusion

The amulets collected by Taufiq Canaan during his life ended up forming one of the most important collections of Palestinian cultural heritage. Nowadays located at Birzeit University Museum, the Tawfik Canaan Collection of Palestinian Amulets is object of national pride. Some of its items are exhibited permanently at the Library of the University where all members of the university community can see them. The way they have been placed at the entrance of the main library shows the passer-by the value of Taufiq Canaan's works, reminding everyone, specially students, that they —the university/the Palestinians— posses one of the greatest collections of amulets. The exhibited items also remind students that being aware of the political past and being politically active as Canaan was, is a quality that must be cultivated, admired and emulated.

Even though most of the items remain in storage, they are accessible at all times. The staff of the Museum is in charge of granting access to students and researchers interested in Palestine's cultural heritage. To see the amulets one needs to go to a special room called: *qā'at kan'ān* or the Canaan Station, where all the objects are kept in drawers. The amulets share this room with traditional clothes that form the second collection of BZU. Next to the items exhibited at the Library and at the storage room, the access to the amulets has also taken place through larger exhibitions, in which selected items from the Canaan Collection have been incorporated.

The objects that Canaan collected had a life even before becoming collectables. People had been using them, buying and selling them, making them and disposing them, and exchanging them for medical services. However, the load or meaning they got as political signifiers added one more layer to their many existing functions, probably the most visible one. They became representatives of Palestine's indigenous culture, first during Canaan's lifetime and Palestinian national tokens during the "Palestinian awakening" of the 1970s.

The amulets have been catalogued and studied after the *Ya Kafi, Ya Shafi* exhibition, always in connection to Taufiq Canaan and his ethnographic-medical work. (even when material features

[525] The negotiations between Canaan and Johnston-Saint need more exploration, as well as whether the small collection was sold to the Museum or was just donated. This aspect of the Canaan's collecting could add interesting insights on the commoditisation of amulets as collectibles took place.

are the focus of the approach, they are always analysed in parallel to Canaan's ethnographic work). While Canaan considered his amulets as representatives of a disappearing rural culture, they are clearly connected to urban culture as well. Some amulets were donated to Canaan by acquaintances that lived in Jerusalem and that were part of the Jerusalemite urban middle class and political elite. Other amulets came from peasants who had been forced to settle in the town or that were involved in Jerusalem's trade. Even when amulets came from rural areas, they are connected to Palestine's urban culture inasmuch as they were collected, studied, and given value for being ethnographic data. The idea behind collecting samples of traditional medicine was for Canaan a way to record material culture from a particular reality in Palestine, that of the *fellaḥīn* and bedouin. As we approach his collecting activity and the resulting collection with ethnographic eyes, we discover that it does not only disclose everyday practices among the *fellaḥīn*, but also cultural practices of middle class Jerusalemites interested in Palestine's folklore, and people whose political activity led them to share with Canaan the interest in collecting parts of the land that was being threatened. In this sense, the Palestinian-ness of the collection, I argue, must be understood within the context of its formation, exhibition and reception.