
A French Presence in Palestine – Notre-Dame de France

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A FRENCH PRESENCE IN PALESTINE

NOTRE-DAME DE FRANCE

The general framework for the study presented below is a broader research project under the auspices of the Centre de recherche français in Jerusalem, dealing with French and German presence in Palestine over a 100 year period starting in the 1840s.

This paper looks at one example of the French presence. This type of analysis helps highlight one of the foreign policy implemented by Paris in the specific environment of modern Palestine, namely, the critical relationship between Paris and the growing number of religious establishments founded in Palestine during the 19th century. This presentation forms the groundwork for a more theoretical modeling of a specifically-designed institution that was intricately linked to French foreign policy. One aim is to define mission of each institution, whether set by the clergy themselves or by their supervisory bodies.

At the same time however, this description also helps define the mental universe of this type of institution. “Mental” in this sense refers to the imaginary mind set formed prior to settlement in Palestine, the institution’s image of the region, and the real ties between the institution and the outside world.

Notre-Dame de France, a fairly eloquent example of this type of institution, was chosen for this article. Before delving into the analysis proper however, it is worth presenting the setting in which this institution developed.

The rediscovery of Palestine

Forgotten for many years, shunted to the sidelines and viewed as an appendage to the field of operations of the vast Ottoman Empire, Palestine only comes to the fore over the course of the last ten centuries in times of great crises or profound upheavals. What dominates in Western memory is the Latinate kingdom of Jerusalem, a period of time which collective recollection

embellished for many years.¹ To a certain extent, during the centuries which followed the fall of this kingdom in 1187, all eyes were fixed on the Holy City which was once again in the hands of “infidels.” All vowed (with real or feigned intent) to recapture the city and preserve it once and for all from Moslem grasp.

The Crusades set about to fulfill this vow concretely, but in later years reconquest took the form of literary evocation of the city and its surroundings. Through reference to pilgrims’ accounts that served to emphasize the immense loss, concern was restricted to observation from afar.²

Renewed attention in the region only started during the Enlightenment and its Oriental movements³ followed later during the Egyptian campaign and its inroads into Palestinian (Jaffa and Acre). This emerged first in literature and the arts, with strong religious connotations. Scientific interest was then added to political concern. All this composed the true “rediscovery of the Holy Land”⁴ which began in the first decades of the 19th century. It was no longer satisfactory to plunge into the reading of personal accounts, regardless of their brilliance⁵; rather and above all what counted was to found religious institutions for the long term. As of its inception, this movement involved a close and ambiguous intertwining of political and religious concerns: all the players presented themselves in religious garb, and each denomination marched under the banners of a country or group of countries. For example an English consulate was set up in 1838 in Palestine, authorized by the liberalized foreign policy of Mehemet Ali (1832-1840). At about the same time, an Anglo-Prussian Protestant bishopric was founded as mission in early November 1841.⁶ This first major European mission was soon followed by others: in 1842 Prussia and in 1843 France set up permanent delegations in Jerusalem.

Thus the rediscovery of the Holy Land was not solely political, and the

¹ A more critical view of this period is much more recent: among the most well known are the scientific works by Edward Said (*L’Orientalisme - L’orient créé par l’Occident*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1978) and works for general readership by Amin Maalouf (*Les Croisades vues par les Arabes*, Paris, Lattes, 1983).

² For example, the pilgrimage/imaginary voyage of Messire Jean de Mandeville. A version can be found in Régnier-Bohler, R. (ed) *Croisades et pèlerinages – Récits, chroniques et voyages en Terre Sainte, EII-EVI siècle*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1997, p. 1393 sq.

³ For example Lessing’s use of Jerusalem as the setting for *Nathan the Wise* (1779).

⁴ Ben Arieli, Y. *The Rediscovery of the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century*, Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 1979.

⁵ The inevitable example of Chateaubriand’s *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (1811).

⁶ See Stransky, T., “Origins of Western Christian Missions in Jerusalem and the Holy Land”, in Ben-Arieh, Y., Davis, M. *Jerusalem in the Mind of the Western World*, Praeger, Westport Conn.- London, 1997.

European religious revival expressed itself concretely by the setting up of institutions encouraged and at times financed by various governments. Following in the steps of the re-establishment of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (1847) a number of French Catholic institutions were set up including the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1851, the Frères des écoles chrétiennes, in 1867 and the Carmelites in 1873. Gradually as the multitude of concerns became more sharply defined, such as the duties fulfilled by these primarily charity-oriented institutions became clearer: piety, charitable works, tool for colonization, mechanism for cultural and economic development, dissemination of propaganda, mission of conversion...

The pilgrimage movement in France and in Palestine

Parallel to the increase in the number of French religious institutions in Palestine, a pilgrimage trend was developing in France itself. This trend also corresponded to a religious revival in France, rocked by the military and political upheavals of the century. The prime examples occurred at La Salette (1846) but above all at Lourdes (1854). Pilgrimages sparked the interest of French churchgoers although they did not always have the means to fund the journey or organize the trip to sites of visitation of the Virgin.

These reasons rapidly prompted the Assumptionists, an order founded several years earlier, to take over this mass devotional movement. It set up an infrastructure that enabled Catholics to pray at the spot where Bernadette Soubirous saw the Virgin.

Something of a parallel developed between this devotional activity on a small scale and the mixture of thirst for culture and religious (or anti-religious) feeling which motivated the writers who made the trip to Palestine.⁷ The first group of pilgrims set out at the same time for Palestine (1853) with the support of the diplomat and French Orientalist, the Marquis de Vogüé.

However it was not until the 1870s that the pilgrimage movement truly gained momentum, in particular after the catastrophe of 1870-71. Many French people, in particular among Catholics, blamed the defeat of the French on the French Revolution and the upheavals that it caused. Just as French intellectuals began to analyze the causes of the French defeat and founded institutions designed to restore France, Catholics placed France in the center of their prayers. A certain consensus began to form and on July 24, 1873 the Chamber of Deputies voted to build Sacré Cœur de Paris cathedral to atone for the sins committed by France.⁸

⁷ Lamarline went as early as 1832-33, Flaubert in 1849-51.

⁸ See Langlois, Cl. "Catholiques et laïcs," in Nora, Pierre (ed) *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, III.

The trend took two directions. The Vatican, isolated in a hostile Italy, mobilized its troops and launched the idea to revive pilgrimages.⁹ Secondly, French Catholics, in their desire to uplift the nation, seized the opportunity to crystallize public fervor.

The motivation in Palestine was both religious and patriotic. The goal was not only to save the soul of France but also initially to resist the rise of Russian Orthodoxy. Although allies of France in Europe they were rivals in the Middle East, bring enormous caravans of pilgrims to Jerusalem and were granted permission to build an entire neighborhood for them to live – what is known today as the Russian Compound. As they did in France, the Assumptionists played a major role here since Father Picard the Superior General of this congregation was named to lead French pilgrimages during a meeting with the Pope on May 13, 1881.

The first French pilgrimages in Palestine

The French pilgrimages to Palestine were thus the outcome of a combination of Catholic and French interests. They are also connected to France's colonial expansion which was at its height. In the language of the time, these pilgrimages express the importance of the French mission the world over. The endeavor is crowned by a papal brief dated March 6, 1882 sending French pilgrims on the road to Jerusalem. This first "penitential pilgrimage" was a success in that 1,000 people signed up (a figure never to be surpassed). Among the clergy who take part in the trip were representatives of 25 congregations, most of whom were affected by the anticlerical measures of the time¹⁰. Their participation symbolized the importance of prayers for France, whose salvation is in the balance, and who has neglected her role as the "elder daughter of the Church."¹¹

Strangely enough, the success of this first French pilgrimage was disturbing. First of all, it pointed to the gap between Catholic France and anticlerical and secular France, in a country which was unable to put an end to conflicts arising from the French Revolution.¹² Second, the Ottoman authorities, as was the case

Les France, tome 1 *Conflits et partages*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992, p. 141 sq.

⁹ Message by Mgr. Poyet, Vicar General of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, February 6, 1874.

¹⁰ Expulsion of congregations and elimination of Sunday no-labor laws in 1880; followed by the restoration of divorce in 1884 and removal of crucifixes in schools in 1883.

¹¹ See Remond, R. "La fille aînée de l'Église", in Nora, Pierre (ed) *Les Lieux de Mémoire, III les France*, tome 3 *De l'Archive à l'emblème*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992, p. 541 sq.

¹² The "Algiers Toast" delivered by Cardinal Lavigerie in an address to the

for other orders in Palestine, could only look upon such enthusiasm with distrust.

There was also concern on the part of the pilgrims and the organizers since Jerusalem, which at that time only had a population of roughly 60,000, was ill equipped to host such a crowd. The first French pilgrimage, which was a success from the point of view of faith, teetered on the verge of catastrophe several times. The arrival in the Holy Land on May 5, 1882 literally submerged the various communities that hosted pilgrims, communities which themselves had only just finished settling. An enormous tent camp was set up to lodge these “peaceful crusaders” as best as possible.

Since the problem of lodging arose again the next year, despite the drop in the number of participants (500) and improvements in organization, it was decided to construct a building which could provide shelter for pilgrims in future years, arriving at the rate of two caravans a year.

Notre-Dame de France

Notre-Dame de France was created out of the need to lodge the faithful satisfactorily. It is an enormous building which still dominates one of the many hills of Jerusalem; a high and powerful edifice testifying to past glory.

Notre-Dame de France was not only a building designed to lodge pilgrims. It was above all a symbol of the French involvement in Palestine at a time when heated international rivalry was expressed by the construction of ever more impressive buildings.

The building was also meant to symbolize a permanent presence and to be on the horizon both literally and figuratively, as though it were marking the ultimate stage in the development, of the city and signifying a French victory. By constructing Notre-Dame de France, Paris and the Assumptionists hoped to demonstrate to the entire population of Jerusalem (local authorities, rival orders, the local population) like the Holy See¹³, that France was indeed *the* foreign power in Palestine. It was the proud, long-lived inheritor of the Crusader tradition, provider of good works and all-powerful protector of Catholics in the Holy Land.

Various sources are available to study the significance, role and destiny of an institution such as Notre-Dame de France. First and foremost are French diplomatic documents, in particular correspondence from the consulate in

Mediterranean fleet only dates back to 1890, see Renault, F. *Le Cardinal Lavignerie*, Paris, Fayard, 1992, p. 591.

¹³ Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris (henceforth Paris), Affaires diverses politiques, Turquie, 26 Jerusalem 1882-1892, note concerning the recognition by the Ottoman government of the ND de France hospice, October 1898.

Jerusalem¹⁴ which indicates the official point of view on this institution including estimates of financial transactions sent to an institution of this type under the heading of “religious support¹⁵”, and French institutions abroad.¹⁶ Diplomatic records from foreign sources can also be useful; for instance, comments as is the case here on the establishment of a rival institution.¹⁷ The main sources are nevertheless the institution’s own documents. This has been done here for the first time. Notre-Dame de Jerusalem no longer belongs to the Assumptionists and its archives are deposited in Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, the institution they are affiliated with. These archives include the publications of this community¹⁸ “official” publications, on sale to the public, and publications for a more restricted readership (such as *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, aimed at former pilgrims to Jerusalem), internal correspondence either typeset or in more elaborate formats (*Souvenirs, Lettres à la Dispersion, Nouvelles de la Famille*). Lastly, an original and interesting collection are the house documents: the day books, lists of clergy and pilgrims, but above all correspondence with the outside world, calendars, priests’ diaries...

All these different documents help reconstruct what Notre -Dame de France symbolized.

Notre-Dame de France and the outside world

Notre-Dame de France and the Jerusalem landscape

Notre-Dame de France is first of all a building, designed to shelter pilgrims to Jerusalem from inclement weather. It is named for a statue located in the Puy in the center of France molded out of lead melted down from the canons of Sebastopol.¹⁹ The name, a military symbol of the victory over the Russians during the Crimean War, quickly became the religious symbol of the hoped-for victory over the “schism” and its many institutions in the Holy City. A cult arises around the name later on. During meetings in France of former pilgrims when information on building is provided regularly, or in the pages of Assumptionist publications, which refer to it more familiarly as the “French

¹⁴ Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Nantes (henceforth MAE, Nantes) Correspondance de Jérusalem, series 4, file 81.

¹⁵ MAE/Paris Affaires diverses politiques, Secours religieux, files 24 to 29.

¹⁶ MAE/ Nantes, Files in series O and D.

¹⁷ This is the case for archives of the German consulate of Jerusalem, which are preserved for the most part in the Israel State archives (henceforth ISA), group 67.

¹⁸ Its editorial tradition is old and reputed: some of its periodicals still exist such as *Le Pèlerin*, founded in 1873 by Fr. Picard and *La Croix* founded in 1883 by Fr. Bailly.

¹⁹ *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 7, October 1890.

Hostel” it is designed to consolidate the ties which unite the building to France.²⁰ A “French hostel” with a French flag overhead²¹, which welcomes pilgrims marching behind the national emblem²².

Donations for the building were organized as of 1884. The Count of Piellat, benefactor of French establishments in Palestine²³ and a regular participant in French pilgrimages is asked to purchase a plot of land. After obtaining permission from the Latin Patriarchate and the Franciscan Custody, which would have been justified in fearing competition with its Casa Nova in Jerusalem, a plot of land was purchased on the same spot where the tent camp was set up in 1882.

France thus directly contributed to the expansion of the city initiated by the Russian and Jewish groups. Urban development now took place *extra muros*, which had several advantages in the case of the Assumptionist edifice. The first is the possibility to get away the Old City and its dirty alleyways; the second is to make a definitive statement of French establishment in the Holy Land since a new building in the Old City would not have made much of an impression. Third, this provided the opportunity to construct an ambitiously large building, vast enough to host all the members of each group. A sufficient number of cells needed to be built, each of which was donated by one or several persons and all bore the name of a French saint. Lastly, there were no adjacent constructions to the plot of land, and hence no restrictions on future acquisitions of land, or additional buildings. In fact Notre-Dame would become the largest of all French institutions. Completed, the building could host nearly 600 people, “a grandiose monument that will heighten national prestige in the eyes of the residents and firmly established foreign powers.”²⁴

This new building was part of a deliberate effort to put an end to the urban disorder that had typified Jerusalem. The Notre-Dame de France land borders on the area where work on the St Louis Hospital began in 1879. It is located between the Russian quarter and the Old City, and was intended to halt the rapid advance of the Orthodox. Aside from creating an obstacle between the Saint Sepulchre and the ‘schismatics,’ the construction of a building of this type responded to the desire to create a true “French quarter.” In this respect France

²⁰ *Souvenirs*, n. 333, January 15, 1898, p. 19 *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 75, November 1899, p. 255.

²¹ *Souvenirs*, n. 408, November 1899, p. 262.

²² *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 84-85, August-September 1900.

²³ See Shilony, Z. “The activity of the French Comte de Piellat in the Holy Land, 1874-1925” in *Cathedra*, 72, June 1994, p. 63 sq (in Hebrew).

²⁴ Chalenard, M. A. *Jérusalem – Notre-Dame de France 1882-1870, Aujourd’hui Notre-Dame de Jérusalem*. Institut Pontifical, Paris, Tequi, 1984, p. 28.

was no different from other countries which developed certain sections of the city that still bear their names today (Greek colony, German colony, American colony, Russian Compound...). Some Assumptionists texts mention this “French quarter”, in particular when the consulate of France moves closer to its administrative subjects and locates in the same part of the city.²⁵ The first part of the building, designed by a French priest, and one of the first pilgrims, was inaugurated in 1888; in 1889 the southern wing was finished. The statue of the Virgin was completed in 1904 and still overlooks the central chapel. At the time it was the largest symbol of the mother of Christ in Ottoman lands.

The architecture draws French buildings of the same period. Like Notre-Dame de la Garde in Marseille or Notre-Dame de Fourvière in Lyon, the twin towers of Notre-Dame de France in Jerusalem dominate the city.

Notre-Dame de France is not just a French building in the Orient; it is also a building which is at least partially oriental in style. Overall, the style is clearly French Catholic of the late 19th century but its chapel in particular is similar to other French institutions in the region. An oriental inspiration can be found in the alternating colors of the stones, the domed Islamicized shape, and the excessive use of mosaics so frequent in the Byzantine churches that dotted the landscape in Palestine in the first centuries of the Christian era. Notre-Dame de France is thus the apostle of conciliation between East and West in its architecture, and – as we shall see below – in its religious form.

A center of life and activity, with its many visitors, picturesque chronicles and regular festivities, Notre-Dame de France and the Assumptionist are also the marks of an eternity presence. The initial intention was to settle for a long period of time, as the size of the building suggests. The growing French presence in Jerusalem also meant that some of its members would find their last resting places there too.²⁶ This is why the first Superior of Notre-Dame de France, Father Germer-Durand, suggested purchasing a new plot of adjoining land for a tomb. In 1887, the domain of Saint Peter in Gallicantu was purchased²⁷ and in

²⁵ *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 16, May-August 1892: “We learned with joy that the Consulate General of France in Jerusalem is moving from its house near the Russian settlement to another house closer to the city and to Notre-Dame de France. The Berghem house which is to become the Consulate of France is located on the road to Jaffa thus it is only separated from it by the new public garden of the city. It is close to both St Louis Hospital, Notre-Dame de France and to the New Gate. The French quarter is thus developing more and more.” (77). Note however that the term “French quarter” was never really popularized.

²⁶ “...The France who stays like (...) the France who passes by,” *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 88, December 15, 1900, p. 168.

²⁷ There, according to tradition, “Saint Peter shed tears over his denial” (Archives Notre-

1892 a cemetery was dedicated. The “French quarter” now has its “French cemetery,” hence demonstrating the establishment of France in Jerusalem.²⁸ To further emphasize its presence, the funerals of French citizens who died in Jerusalem, pilgrims, priests, and members of the consulate were marked by ceremonies that attracted the attention of the whole city. Thus the unity and wealth of the French people in the city were put on display, in particular during hard times.²⁹

Notre-Dame de France: the Western Contribution to the Orient

Notre-Dame, in the minds of those who planned and built it, was a Western contribution to the East. The building thus reflects the task the colonizers set for themselves in conquered lands and the one that the clergy of the major powers gave themselves when they arrived in their missionary destinations. The responsibility is religious when it involves waking the slumbering Christian East. It becomes one of purveyor of civilization when it involves demonstrating a certain Western superiority over peoples who have forgotten their noble pasts. Very concretely, Notre-Dame de France and France, were proud to be the bearers of technological progress. At a time when Jerusalem had little of the infrastructure needed for an expanding city, the Assumptionists were among the first to deal with the water problem, although in the beginning they were dependent on the vagaries of the weather and the capacities of their water tanks. They were extremely proud to have quickly installed electricity. This was used in particular to light a cross on the building on special occasions.³⁰ Modern equipment was also a way to emphasize who was really bringing light to the Holy City. Electricity also provided an effective means of asserting oneself. For instance during the highly touted visit of Wilhelm II to Jerusalem in October 1898, the Assumptionists supplied the electricity for the Imperial encampment.

Dame de France, henceforth NDF, 1: généralités, titres de propriétés, liste des religieux, file: généralités, 1’Assomption de Jérusalem – Deux mots sur Notre-Dame de France, undated)

²⁸ This is the name given to the plot of land of Saint Peter in Gallicantu in the Mytilene treaty of 1901, which specifies the institutions under French protection (NDF, 3: rapports avec les autorités militaires, file: dommages de guerre, Notre-Dame de France et Saint Pierre en Gallicante – relation sur l’expulsion des Augustins de l’Assomption les 13 et 14 décembre 1914, Inventaires approximatifs des Biens occupés et confisqués par les autorités ottomanes, Rome, 15 mars, 1915, P. Athanase Vanhove).

²⁹ *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 75, November 1899, with the participation of the sailors of the Mediterranean fleet, visiting Jerusalem, at the funeral of the wife of a chancellor of the consulate.

³⁰ *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 104, April 1902, for the Jubilee of Leon XIII, “The electricity was wonderful”, p. 62.

This was a religious victory of Catholicism over Protestantism. It was also patriotic victory when the Emperor, denounced because he had stressed the German presence in the Holy Land, was forced to turn to the French for assistance.³¹

The Assumptionists also rapidly set up a printing press that was also used by other communities and occasionally by the Consulate of France. They contributed to immortalizing Palestine and Jerusalem as pilgrimage sites through a photography service.³²

These ties to modernity did in fact create moral problems for the clergy whose concern was to preserve Jerusalem-on-Earth, and restore its image which had been transmitted from generation to generation. City modernization was viewed with distrust and disappointment; the installation of water and electricity prompted the Assumptionists to comment that “Soon it will no longer be Jerusalem, but a city like any other.”³³ This suggests that the priests were not really ready to see progress extend to the Holy City.

Missions of Notre-Dame de France

What were the functions of Notre-Dame de France?

Like the many French institutions in Palestine, the Assumptionist institution had a variety of facets. Its main role was naturally to lodge pilgrims visiting the Holy City. Whether the pilgrims were French or foreigners, the many groups staying at Notre-Dame de France and the size of the building meant employing considerable staff.³⁴ To handle this challenge, the Assumptionists demonstrated great common sense by combining religious and hotel imperatives. The idea was to found a seminary in Jerusalem where the future generations of this congregation would be trained. The house of study could instantly become a labor force ready at a moment’s notice to interrupt its lessons to welcome pilgrims.³⁵

³¹ *Souvenirs*, n. 364, September 17, 1898, “...Thus Luther, who came to Jerusalem to bring a certain kind of light started out by asking the Assumptionists for the elementary means to see clearly”, p. 311.

³² *Souvenirs*, n. 60, December 31, 1889, “Father Germer is practicing the art of photography. Soon we will have pictures of all of Palestine.” p. 446.

³³ *Lettre à la dispersion*, n. 64, January 27, 1910, p. 255. This distrust is comparable to the Vatican’s position, which somewhat later denounced the modernization of Jerusalem by the English and indirectly by the Zionists as a denaturing or even perverting element, (see Minerbi, S.I. *The Vatican and Zionism – Conflict in the Holy Land 1895-1925*, New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, chap. 4. An Era of Quest, p. 41 sq.)

³⁴ It even lodged part of Wilhelm II’s entourage, in October 1898.

³⁵ This life style emerges clearly in the day books of Notre-Dame de France, included in

However the Assumptionists' goal was not only to concentrate this form of domestic service in Jerusalem, since they would also need a shelter for priests and their disciples threatened with French anti-clericalism. Since many of their ranks were affected by the expulsions of 1880 and regularly under fire afterwards,³⁶ the Assumptionists decided to set up a refuge. They were assisted in this endeavor by France itself, since clergy living abroad were exempted either fully or partially from military service.³⁷ Paris viewed this 'draft dodging' positively since French missionaries in the Orient constituted a cheap labor force for the preservation of the "French name" abroad. In actual fact the French consuls in Jerusalem rapidly grasped the importance of the institution. The religious dimension of the pilgrimages was overshadowed by much more earthly considerations, and France did its utmost to enable Notre-Dame de France (and others) to obtain allocations from the Foreign Ministry.³⁸ In Palestine itself the consuls generally had excellent relationships with the clergy of the "French Hostel." The connection was not only one of mutual gain since there was also great affinity between these men of the Church and the French civil servants themselves fervent adepts of the Catholic religion.³⁹

In addition, Notre-Dame de France and its house of study was also a scientific institution. From the outset the institution was directed by an "archeologist missionary," Father Germer-Durand. He conducted the first excavations carried out by the Dominicans on the St. Stephen land and by the Assumptionists at St. Peter in Gallicantu. He also described the Roman roads

the archives of St Peter in Gallicantu.

³⁶ In particular during and after the Dreyfus affair when *La Croix* clearly takes sides against the Jewish officer.

³⁷ NDF 2 : rapports avec les autorités civiles, file: relations avec le Consulat de France (1889-1926), Documents de 1891, 1892 et 1893, listes des missionnaires dispensés du service militaire présents à Jérusalem [list of missionaries exempted from military service present in Jerusalem].

³⁸ MAE/Paris Secours religieux, 26-1891. Figures concerning allocations for schools and hospitals, appendix n. 14: hospice for French pilgrims in Jerusalem: "The sum of 10,000 francs is the minimum which should be allocated to the hospice for French pilgrims (...). Other foreign countries use all their means to increase in Palestine the hospices and similar institutions to give their national pilgrimages the character of political manifestations designed to strengthen their influence in the Holy Sites. It is imperative that we should not be outdistanced in the field."

³⁹ This is why, for practical reasons as well as affinity, Consul Gueyraud – in Jerusalem from 1908 to 1914 – was lodged by the Assumptionists in a villa located on their land (NDF, 3 : rapports avec les autorités militaires. File: dommages de guerre. Notre-Dame de France et Saint Pierre en Gallicante – relation sur l'expulsion des Augustins de l'Assomption les 13 et 14 decembre 1914, inventaire approximatifs des Biens occupés et confisqués par les Autorités ottomanes, Rome, 15 March 1915, P. Athanase Vanhove).

and published the inscriptions of the military road markers in Palestine.⁴⁰ He opened a museum at Notre-Dame which many well-known city figures and foreigners visited.⁴¹ Germer-Durand had vast archeological ambitions for Notre-Dame, namely to transform it into a high level scientific institution by attracting the attention of the representative of France to this real potential. “Official France has its schools of Rome and Athens. Why shouldn’t Catholic France have its Institute of Higher Learning in Jerusalem?”⁴² Germer-Durand also held scientific conferences in the institution when he was not lecturing at other institutions that were more specifically geared to scholarly pursuits.⁴³ In this area as well, Notre-Dame de France received special treatment from the French representatives who arranged for the Ministry of Public Instruction to donate books for a library which would hold 15,000 volumes.⁴⁴

The view from Notre-Dame de France

The documents on Notre-Dame de France are also a major source of information on the attitudes of the Assumptionists. However they also shed light on the views of a whole era. The private and public papers, destined to be read by the community alone by brothers in religion, or by more numerous readers capture the perceptions of the epoch.

As was the case for architecture, the French image involves making an Oriental statement, or rather one involving a certain view of the Orient. The Assumptionists settled permanently and intended to make their own personal contribution, but also remained open to their environment. The environment, in turn, was expected to adhere to their ideas. The Assumptionists make one contribution through architecture. Although the plans for Notre-Dame de France were not primarily the work of an Assumptionist, they were made by someone who headed numerous projects and French constructions in the city and the

⁴⁰ With numerous publications in *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, and in a purely scientific journal, *Cosmos*, or the periodical of the Dominicans of Jerusalem, *la Revue biblique*.

⁴¹ Supplement to *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 90, January 1901.

⁴² *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 2, October 1888. Germer had to resign himself to opening a “Bible Study School” two years later, under the direction of the Dominicans (Murphy-O’Connor, J. o.p. *The École Biblique and the New Testament: A Century of Scholarship (1890-1990)*, *Novum testamentum et Orbis Antiquus* 13, Fribourg-Göttingen, 1990, introduction).

⁴³ He spoke for instance at the École Biblique, *Aux Frères de la dispersion*, December 1900.

⁴⁴ MAE/Paris, Secours Religieux, 25-1890. Letter from the Minister of Public Instruction to the MAE, August 8, 1890 and Letter from the MAE in Jerusalem, August 14, 1890, Ribot.

surrounding area: Father Etienne Boubet, who also designed the Church of Notre-Dame de France, St. Peter in Gallicantu (consecrated in 1931).⁴⁵, the Latrun Monastery, the chapel of the 4th station of the Via Dolorosa, the blueprint for the Ourtas Convent. He was also the contractor for the Monks' Chapel in Bethlehem, the church in Ramallah, the Convent at Abu Gosh. His architectural contribution also extends to secular buildings: he is responsible for the plan for the new consulate of France, in 1910⁴⁶ and during his stay in Jerusalem in 1900, an Abyssinian mission also asks him to lay the foundations for a palace for the Empress of Ethiopia.⁴⁷

This influx of Christian construction in Palestine was a victory of sorts at a time when the local authorities were not involved in architectural dynamism. The European powers and their institutions firmly intended to crown each of the hills of Jerusalem with ever more splendid edifices.⁴⁸ They believed that each building should be topped with towers, with bells if possible. Notre-Dame de France is graced with two towers, and “whereas the *Germer* will have the French flag, the *Etienne* tower will have its bells.”⁴⁹ This victory itself corresponds to a desire to change the physiognomy of the city, in line with the major developments carried out in their time by the builders of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. The crusaders had returned, and wished to leave tangible evidence of their passage, hence this partly traditional, partly colonial architecture.

This style, which dates the building, reflects the ideology of the priests who came to settle in Jerusalem but also the powers behind them. Consul Charles Ledoux (1885-1898) stated that Notre-Dame de France was not only an institution designed to create a permanent France for transitory French people. Rather, the institution marked the arrival of a new type of crusader, “the Frankish crusader,” members of the “peaceful crusade” – the pilgrimages. This was indeed the original motivation and remained the official mentality for many years. In 1888, in his welcoming address to pilgrims coinciding with the official inauguration of the first part of Notre-Dame, Ledoux stressed that the location chosen by the Assumptionists had even greater significance because it was the site of the first crusader camp in 1099.⁵⁰ The association created in 1894 to support the work of Notre-Dame de France takes the name of “Crusaders of

⁴⁵ *Lettre à la Dispersion*, n. 389, April 23, 1931, p. 101.

⁴⁶ MAE/Nantes, Jerusalem correspondence, series A, 140. Consular building, Letter from the Foreign Ministry to Jerusalem, April 5, 1910.

⁴⁷ *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 87, November 15, 1900.

⁴⁸ See Benvenisti, M. *Jérusalem - Une histoire politique*. Aries, Solin-Actes Sud, 1996, chapt V., “Planification de la catastrophe,” p. 131 sq, in particular pp. 142-143.

⁴⁹ *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 87, November 15, 1900, p. 148.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, n. 1, July 1888.

Purgatory.”⁵¹ The metaphor was also used by the supreme authorities of the Church⁵², and the government of the Republic followed suit. The church that traditionally hosts the high mass of the pilgrimage in the presence of the consul general of France in full uniform, is the national Saint Anne Basilica, called “the beautiful Crusader church”.⁵³ One of the consuls who had the greatest impact on the pilgrims was this same Charles Ledoulx. He employed military-religious imagery when he stated on May 24, 1888 for the opening of the Assumptionist institution, that Notre-Dame de France should become the “Headquarters of our operations.”⁵⁴ He also called regularly for the need to finish building this imposing edifice. In his view, Notre-Dame was only an illustration of the “fundamentally national” revival taking place through the founding of Catholic and French establishments in Jerusalem.

The names of the great crusader chevaliers, such as Godefrey of Bouillon or Tancred are found throughout the literature on Notre-Dame de France. The founding of each new French institution in Palestine is considered to be a victory. This is perceived in the regular expressions of satisfaction by the Assumptionists and French officials – French interests are well defended against the greed of their adversaries. France dominates even when the ‘schismatics’ become more threatening, because “*Deus vult.*” (God wills it). When the wall of Jerusalem is breached to open the New Gate in 1889, this is viewed as a French conquest. “We have just taken Jerusalem!” exclaim the *Échos*,⁵⁵ mirroring the entry of the Crusaders into the Holy City, on July 14, 1099. This new gate, which from a practical standpoint makes the trip to the Holy Sepulchre much shorter from the “French quarter,” is a triumph over “the immobile Orient”, “the triumph of Catholicism over the Moslem barbarity and the invasion of the Russian schismatics.”⁵⁶

Notre-Dame de France and its environment

These details show in what ways the documents on Notre-Dame de France also provide a picture of the world around the French establishment in Jerusalem at that period of time – in a perspective that is obviously distorted by the preconceived notions mentioned earlier.

Relationships with the local authorities were affected in similar ways. Whether dealing with the Ottoman Empire, the authorities of the British

⁵¹ *Souvenirs*, n. 194, November 21, 1894.

⁵² Letter from Leon XIII to Cardinal Langenieux, in *Souvenirs*, n. 368, October 15, 1898.

⁵³ *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 69, March 1899, p. 45.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, n. I, July 1888, p. 12.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, n. 5, January 1890, p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 4.

Mandate, or later with the Israeli administration, local government is synonymous with hostility to the institution that was born, is growing and making a place for itself on the Jerusalem skyline. There is hostility on the part of the Ottoman authorities who are forced to cave into French injunctions and grant firmans⁵⁷ to the new institution and its annexes⁵⁸; there is hostility with regard to the expansion of Christianity in Moslem lands, characterized by repeated difficulties. There was animosity as well from the British authorities after 1918, who are unhappy with the presence of large hostels for pilgrims (and increasingly for tourists) and try to restrict tax exemptions. The Assumptionists are requested on several occasions to provide a copy of old Ottoman documents proving their right to special status.⁵⁹ The Consulate of France in the new context of the Palestinian Mandate was offended by the British whim to eliminate what it still considered to be standard practice. The Mandate authorities was expected to adhere to the London accord which promised to comply with the Mytilene lists, which themselves were the ultimate humiliation to the Ottoman empire by foreign powers.⁶⁰ Lastly, there was hostility from the Israeli authorities who challenged this anachronistic system, oftentimes the only way to preserve an institution which has outlived its needs.⁶¹

These strained relationships with the local authorities underscore the problems France faced in making a place for itself despite these difficulties in Jerusalem. This 100-year period, although it was one of increased French growth, was also a time when this growth was challenged. In most instances however, the French officials managed to overcome the demands of the local

⁵⁷ Authorization to build new institutions under French auspices, which are in particular tax-exempt.

⁵⁸ NDF, 1. Généralités, titres de propriétés, liste de religieux, file: titres de propriétés, 1. Imperial firman recognizing Notre-Dame de France hospice: translation of Firman (September 18, 1890) and 22: communautés : rapports, cartes de visite, curie generalice, rapport semestriel envoyé le 21 mai 1911, granting a firman for St Pierre.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2. Relations avec les autorités civiles, file: relations avec les autorités civiles, problèmes fiscaux, letter from the mandatory governor to Leopold Dressaire, Superior of Notre-Dame de France, March 7, 1922 and letter from the British governor to Dressaire, April 19, 1922.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* file: relations avec le Consulat de France (1889-1926), circular from the French Consulate to "Messieurs les directeurs et Mesdames les directrices des établissements français en Palestine" [Ladies and Gentlemen the directors of French institutions in Palestine] January 25 1926, Doire.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 19: correspondance religieux, religieuses, letter from ND de France to the Jerusalem city hall, December 19, 1953, Brunet, which asks the mayor of Jerusalem to show some tolerance since "by virtue of the Treaty of Mytilene, we are exempt from all fees and taxes."

authorities by involvement in the communities' long and arduous negotiations.

These relationships with the local authorities are also indicative of the ways in which a community like the Assumptionists perceived the outside world. In general, they found it hard to adjust to, despite the fact that living in Jerusalem should have been the high point of their ecclesiastic mission. Their description of the local populations, in particular Jews and Moslems takes a similar line. The official documents, reports and newspapers are replete with details showing to what extent Jerusalem from the Assumptionist, French and Catholic late nineteenth century point of view had declined since the fall of the Latinate Kingdom.

The epithets applied to Jews are negative to say the least, and are an accurate reflection of a form of anti-Semitism that was still wide spread in France at that time, in particular among Catholics. They stress their pitiful state and their obscurantism, notably in prayer at the Wailing Wall.⁶² The Jews, the majority of the population in Jerusalem when the community settled there, could at times elicit disgusted pity or in any case pseudo-scientific curiosity.⁶³ In this, the Assumptionists of Jerusalem mirrored the state of mind of their Parisian counterparts. The Assumptionist newspaper *La Croix* at the same period ceaselessly attacked the "Jewish-Masonic plot" against the Catholic Church and the "true France." The Jews in metropolitan France as well as in Palestine were thus objects of rejection or subjects of conversion. This perception was primarily colored by religious missionary zeal and then by political irony when Zionist efforts and their vanity are disparaged.⁶⁴ They generate distrust when it becomes more and more obvious that the British are supporting them. Zionist activism enters into the domain of military concerns when the Notre-Dame de France building becomes a target for Jewish terrorists.⁶⁵

However these considerations concerning Jews also chart the gradual changes in the general attitude of the Church towards them, following the

⁶² *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 74, August-September-October 1899, p. 167.

⁶³ This was the case for example for the long series of articles which appeared at the start of the 20th century in the *Échos* devoted to the Jews of Jerusalem (n. 120, September 1903; n. 121, October 1903; n. 122, November 1903; n. 123, December 1903; n. 124 January 1904; n. 125, February 1904; n. 126, March 1904.)

⁶⁴ This was the case for example of the description of the fairly unsuccessful inauguration of the Hebrew University and the festivities surrounding it, in early April 1925 (NDF, 14: day books 1923-1937, entries dated March 25 and 31, April 1 and 2, 1925).

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 22: communautés, rapports, cartes de visite, curie generalice, file: correspondance avec les supérieurs majeurs, letter from ND de France to R.P. Gervais, Rome, December 20, 1946.

transition from condemnation of the eternally cursed “murderers of God” to the tolerance which reigned during the Second Vatican Council. In Jerusalem, a more tolerant attitude is adopted towards those who are to become the masters of the destinies of the region.⁶⁶

The chroniclers of Notre-Dame de France hardly treat Moslems any better. Moslems are systematically associated with the Ottoman authorities, denounced for their fanaticism, described as being as little inclined towards hygiene as the Jews,⁶⁷ and fundamentally opposed to the arrival of western Christians in Palestine. Thus the enormous Notre-Dame de France building and the caravans of pilgrims it lodges can clearly be the object of “ferocious Moslem” opprobrium. Nevertheless, Providence renders enormous services to the Christian cause and strikes Moslem injustice, since among the chronic diseases which ravage the city, the chronicles state that cholera for example “only affects Moslems.”⁶⁸ Here again perceptions change for the better as well. This was due in part to the fact that at the end of Ottoman control over Palestine, Moslems are no longer bound by the local authorities and seem less aggressive. Primarily though there is collusion between Moslems and Christians against the pro-Jewish support exhibited by the Mandate.⁶⁹

In this Palestinian setting, the Christian population obviously receives more encouragement. The local community is only rarely mentioned in the documents concerning Notre-Dame de France and when it is, it is almost always full of admiration and respect for the French presence. In addition this community appears to better assimilate the contributions of civilization: Oriental Christians are better dressed than Jews and Moslems⁷⁰ and their state of cleanliness is “less superficial.”⁷¹ They thus are favorable to French Catholic influence even though “unfortunately” many have succumbed to the illusions of the schism and blindly follow the fanaticism of the Greek popes. However, the Catholic institutions are there to help them. It is worth noting that the Assumptionist

⁶⁶ NDF, 1: généralités, titres de propriétés, liste des religieux, file: généralités, Jalons pour une étude de la présence assomptionniste à ND de France, R. Gabriel Slater, November 1969.

⁶⁷ With their holy and dirty slippers that they prefer to “modern and secular pumps” (*Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 74, August-September, October 1899, p. 163).

⁶⁸ *Souvenirs*, n. 63, October 19, 1890. But at the time of death of the very Christian Ledoux, in January 1898, no mention is made of the fact that he died of malaria.

⁶⁹ This alliance is concretized by the early creation of the Islamo-Christian Committee (see Minerbi, S. *op.cit.*, chap. 10, The Pope's Outcry, p. 129 sq.) In addition Great Britain as a Protestant country had the nerve, in the eyes of the Catholic community, to name a Jew, Sir Herbert Samuel as the first High Commissioner in Palestine.

⁷⁰ *Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 74, August-September-October 1899, p. 132.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, n. 89, January 15, 1901, p. 5.

documents salute their redemptive activities. Logically enough, any arrival of a new congregation in the city or the surrounding areas is commented upon enthusiastically.⁷²

Notre-Dame de France and History

The documents dealing with Notre-Dame de France provide more than a glimpse into the history of Jerusalem or a chronicle tinged at times with petty comments. Aside from their ability to provide a very subjective description of daily life in the city they also furnish us with a better understanding of history as it developed in this part of the world. The political-religious trials and tribulations that surface in the numerous incidents opposing Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox⁷³ mirror the vast international debates over an increasingly desirable region. This is why commentary which appears biased or shocking to the modern reader should be taken as illustrations of the atmosphere of that era and the expression of much greater stakes.

One such instance was the visit of Wilhelm II to Jerusalem in 1898 which called for a "Catholic and French response" (which took the form of the pilgrimage of 1899). Another instance is the French victory when the daring Ottomans believe they can impose their law at the end of 1901 and are finally forced to accept injunctions from Paris which extend the special status of French institutions in Palestine.⁷⁴

It is also worth examining the importance of ties with French officials during this entire period. Naturally there are mild and rare complaints on the part of the Assumptionists as regards Paris for instance when France is accused of thinking too much in French terms and not enough in Catholic ones. There is somewhat of a dichotomy between the priests settled in Palestine and a government that is primarily concerned with the political stakes of Palestine.⁷⁵ But these

⁷² *Aux Frères de la dispersion*, October 1900, with comments on the installation of Benedictines from the French provinces in Abu Gosh and on the "Mount of Scandal". The next year this latter institution prompted the following comments: "This hill, desecrated by altars to vile divinities by this inconceivable Salomon will be purified and sanctified by the Christian altar, tended by monks." (*Aux Frères de la dispersion*, November 1900, p. 151).

⁷³ This was the case for the violent incidents that took place on the steps of St. Sepulchre between Franciscans and Greeks in early November 1901 (*Échos de Notre-Dame de France*, n. 99, November 15, 1901.)

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, with the conclusion of the Mytilene agreement.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190. The ministry in no case intends to finance purely religious institutions that it considers to be useless to France (MAE/Paris, Secours religieux 25-1890, note pour la commission du budget, demande d'augmentation des crédits de secours affectés

recriminations should not overshadow the prolonged support by the Republic to this congregation for its Jerusalem institution, given that during this entire period the Assumptionists were subject to legal pursuits and official anticlerical persecution, in particular by Minister Combes in metropolitan France. The rocky relationship between Notre-Dame and France also sheds light on changes in French mentalities. This can be traced through the time of the great debates of the end of the 19th century, the separation of church and state, and finally the reuniting after World War I, when the communities (in particular the Assumptionists) could celebrate their return to the bosom of the nation after having demonstrated their total loyalty to their country in the trenches.⁷⁶

The documents of Notre-Dame de France also provide a fairly accurate reflection of changes in Palestine. Behind (he superficial judgments are the upheavals that affected the region. The metamorphosis of a geographical gradually makes it the center of attention of the world. Events such as the death throws of the Ottoman empire⁷⁷, the allied conquest of Jerusalem⁷⁸, demographic changes in Mandate Palestine and the massive increase in the Jewish population which brought with it a radically different image of Jerusalem⁷⁹, the rise in violence between the different populations of the city and in Palestine in general all contributed to this new focus. Violence forced the Assumptionists to alter the schedules of the pilgrims whose steps are becoming less frequent in the long corridors of the building⁸⁰.

aux oeuvres d'Orient, [note for the budgetary commission, request for more financial assistance for religious establishments in the Orient], April 1890).

⁷⁶ After the War, the Assumptionists tally their losses: during the War the congregation lost 30 of its members including one who had studied in Jerusalem (*Nouvelles de la famille*, n. 305, June 2, 1919).

⁷⁷ With the particularly detailed diary of Athanase Vanhove, the Superior before the War, who for example describes the tragic evacuation of western religious communities by the Turkish forces in December 1914 (NDF, Vanhove Documents).

⁷⁸ With the presence of Assumptionists in the French detachment of Palestine and Syria and the lodging at the partially ransacked Notre-Dame de France, of Francois Georges-Picot, High Commissioner of the French Republic in Palestine and one of his aides, Lieutenant Louis Massignon, on December 14, 1917 (NDF, 30: liste de pèlerins 1917-1936).

⁷⁹ *Lettre à la dispersion*, n. 515, January 31, 1934

⁸⁰ NDF, 14: day books 1923-1937. This was the case for the incidents of 1929 (for example the entry for August 24: "The city is extremely agitated since yesterday. Thousands of Moslems from Palestine and Transjordan threaten to kill the Jews. There are Jews wounded. The government asks the Custody not to do the Stations of the Cross. Father Marcel advises his pilgrims at noon not to go out. There are gun shots and grenades from all sides. It is forbidden to go out between 6:30 at night and 6 in the morning. It is impossible to estimate, even approximately, the number of victims.").

Notre-Dame de France however also plays a religious role in the history of its century. The Assumptionists and their institution in Jerusalem are also the representatives – albeit modest ones – of a trend which emerges at the end of the 19th century during the papacy of Leon XIII. We have seen that the Orthodox were taken into consideration by the priests of the pilgrims' hospice, even though they were wary of them. Beyond this denigrating perception of Orthodoxy however there were gestures in their direction. Whether personal gain was his motivation or not, the Assumptionists were part of Leon XIII's "oriental policy" of Leon XIII, which aimed at the unification of Christian churches. Notre-Dame de France was involved in this initiative and its efforts were viewed favorably by Paris. The government of the Republic in fact weighed the advantages of having this trend take on a clearly French speaking coloration since initial steps were being made in this direction. In Jerusalem two French institutions are there as proof: the Greek-Catholic Seminary of Saint Anne, run by the White Friars and the Syrian-Catholic seminary on the hill south of the Mount of Olives, run by French Benedictine monks.

Notre-Dame de France was involved in these developments in several ways. It is worth noting that Cardinal Langenieux, the Papal Legate, laid the cornerstone of the church of Notre-Dame de France in 1893. Further, this ceremony took place at the same time as the Eucharistic Congress of Jerusalem organized specifically in the Holy City to accentuate the Vatican's gesture towards the Eastern Churches.⁸¹ In addition, Notre-Dame de France hosted several sessions of this meeting that was considered to be crucial for new Vatican policy.⁸² The interest generated by the works of this Congress was even more enthusiastic in that it constituted free publicity for the Assumptionist establishment. This came in particular at a time when construction was behind schedule because of lack of funds and when the French pilgrimage movement did not always fulfill the expectations of earlier days. Notre-Dame de France demonstrated that it is part of this trend when, despite the many criticisms it voices against the Greek Orthodox movement, the Assumptionists are favorable to promoting unification. Notre-Dame de France suggests using its location in the midst of 'schismatic Christianity' to supply its own trained priests by teaching them the Greek rite. The ultimate step in this proposition would be to

Further in 1936-39 (entry dated May 21, 1936: "We hoped to go up to the Mount of Olives. We were forbidden and we did not hold the ceremony since the Catholics are shocked by the death of a young Austrian killed in broad daylight."

⁸¹ Soetens, C. *Le Congrès eucharistique international de Jérusalem (1893) dans le cadre de la politique orientale du Pape Léon XIII*, Louvain, Bibliothèque de l'Université catholique de Louvain – Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1977.

⁸² *Souvenirs*, n. 144, June 11, 1893.

transform the chapel into a Greek Orthodox Church.⁸³

Notre-Dame de France: reflection of France in Jerusalem?

As sketched above, the Assumptionist institution of Notre-Dame de France in Jerusalem provides a fairly accurate portrait of France in the Holy City throughout the period studied here, exhibiting both positive and negative features. As we have seen, the priests of Notre-Dame de France tended to view the outside world in negative terms. Although it made many solid gains, and progressively dominated the Jerusalem landscape – if only architecturally, the final impression suggests an institution on the defensive. This attitude was followed by a policy of reaction, imitating on a lesser scale of the behavior of France in Palestine during this era. In this case French institutions, both Catholic and otherwise, were numerous and powerful and the “French name” was still widespread. Overall however France’s role is increasingly derided by its rivals (who are regularly denounced). This perspective on Notre-Dame de France suggests the experience was painful. Although the building clearly contributes to the modernization of Jerusalem, but its setting *extra-muros* places it symbolically outside the protective walls of the old city. Its highly exposed location became a kind of metaphor for the feeling that France is being attacked on all sides.

The size of the edifice itself makes it a prime target. This explains why its legitimate owners were dispossessed and the building was used by armies at various times during its existence. It becomes a rest stop for the Turkish troops during World War I after the community is expelled. It lodges soldiers from the French detachment to Palestine and Syria on mission to protect the Holy Sites between 1918 and 1920. It is requisitioned along with its outbuildings at Saint Peter in Gallicantu by the British authorities before⁸⁴ and during World War II.⁸⁵ Its strategic importance at one of the main intersections between the Old City and New Jerusalem make it a natural victim of wartime activity: ransacked by

⁸³ *Souvenirs*, n. 382, February 25, 1899. Audience of Father Joseph with the Pope, with presentation of the argument that the Assumptionists are better prepared to do this than others. Naturally the Protestants are active too and have more funds but they do not have the Virgin to attract the Greeks to them.

⁸⁴ NDF, 14. Day books 1923-1937, entries on the 4 (“A British commission comes to visit the house. They want to use it as a hospital in case more serious unrest takes place, which appears to be in the making.”), and the 17 of September 1936 (“The English will occupy the house; we are moving out of all the rooms.”)

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 4: relations avec les autorités militaires 2: file: armée britannique (1936-1943). Folder “Dommages causés par l’armée anglaise 1936-1943” file with inventory of damage.

the Turkish troops it was damaged even more by the battles of the Israeli Arab War of 1948.⁸⁶ More recently it was occupied by Israeli troops which partially transformed it into a border post between 1948 and 1967.⁸⁷

The degree of damage also mirrors the decline in public interest. Created to host ever larger pilgrimages, occupied during the year by Assumptionist novices before World War I, the number of visitors to Notre-Dame de France drops considerably. In metropolitan France, the improvement in relationships between Church and State after the War deprive it of its role as a seminary-refuge. The lack of French pilgrimages prompt it to open its doors. The institution had always accepted religious groups other than those organized by the Assumptionists, but tourists became the prime clientele. Between the two World Wars, Notre-Dame de France logically catered to the French officers stationed in Syria and Lebanon who spent their vacations in Palestine. It also lodged visiting French dignitaries.⁸⁸ Finally the question arose of the rational use of this vast edifice which no one seemed to know what to do with. This happened at a time when France itself was tempted to abandon its tradition of religious establishments in Jerusalem (the *Cartel des Gauches* – which governed France from 1924-1926, then the *Front Populaire* – from 1936-1938) and when French institutions no longer maintained their traditional signs of respect to French officials.⁸⁹

Between 1948 and 1967, aside from the occupation by Israeli troops, the building lodged new immigrants cheaply and was disadvantaged by its position on the dividing line between Israel and Jordan. The Assumptionists felt it was no longer possible to remain true to the original purpose of the building. In this “*fin de règne*” atmosphere, the building was sold to the Hebrew University at the end of the 1960s, for purposes of transformation into student dormitories. The priests

⁸⁶ And because of this holds a key position in the unfolding of these events, *O Jerusalem*, by D. Lapierre and L. Collins, 1971.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 4. Relations avec les autorités militaires 2: file: autorités militaires israéliennes. While the St Peter site is damaged by the Arab troops (*ibid*, 2: file: armée britannique (1936-1943), letter from the French Consulate in Jerusalem (21) to the Superior of ND de France, hôpital français, January 18 1949, Neuville, with appendix: Letter from Abdullah Tell, Military Governor of Jerusalem to Neuville, January 16, 1949). The Assumptionists also record a human loss, with the death of Father Mamert, killed by a stray bullet.

⁸⁸ Notre-Dame de France hosts Albert Londres during his stay in Jerusalem to report on the 1929 Judeo-Arab conflict (14: day books 1923-1937, entry dated October 7, 1929). The institution regularly hosts members of examination juries who award degrees at the Universities of Cairo and Beirut, or French scientific missions.

⁸⁹ MAE/Nantes, Service des œuvres Françaises & l'étranger, Serie O, 369 Palestine, Letter from Jerusalem (148/11/C) to the MAE, August 16, 1933, Caumeau.

relocated on the smaller property of Saint Peter in Gallicantu. But this radical change was not approved by the Vatican. In exchange for the promise to build another student dormitory, it recovered the building at the last moment and decided to transform it into a hotel. *Finis* Notre-Dame de France, *salve* Notre-Dame de Jerusalem. And despite sensitive local politics, die Virgin still graces the buildings.

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