

BANDALI SALIBA AL-ĠAWZĪ (1871-1942),
A RUSSIAN ORIENTALIST FROM JERUSALEM

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The object of this study is to present a scholar of linguistics and a critical historian, a pioneer of social, economic and intellectual history, who has not so far received the attention he truly deserves. What follows provides but a bare outline of his accomplishments. al-Ġawzī came from Jerusalem at the late Ottoman period, and completed his university education in Russia, where he contributed extensively to the field of Orientalism.

It seems necessary, before pursuing the biography of this personality, to give a descriptive assessment of the environment within which he was born, where he belonged and worked: that is, Palestine and Russia. This review will clarify the two dimensions which affected his intellectual output.

Palestine, in its modern meaning, had not, through history, a separate existence within "Greater Syria" or "*Bilād aš-Šām*". Apart from this, it did have a special indication, based on the notion of the "Holy Land", and it acquired a further significance in Arab history. The "Image" of Palestine as an outlined area became more distinct since the 19th century, following the increase of Western ambitions, including Zionism, over Palestine (Porath 1974: 6-9).

Palestine had fundamentally contributed to the heritage of human civilization, and throughout Arab-Islamic history, it was one of the important centres of culture (al-Ḥusaynī 1946: 12). The 19th century witnessed a cultural revival which was an outcome of a host of new educational, social and political developments. These developments, however, were not quite different from those happening in near by regions, but due to the important location of Palestine and its religious status, and because the political pressures had become harder, the cultural life there had acquired its own stamp and peculiarity (Kasmieh 1997).

Jerusalem, Ġawzī's home city, of all cities of the world, is unique in its status due to the spiritual wealth it possesses. It is the niche, "*Qibla*" of the three main religions (Manneh 1990: 3). In the second half of the 19th century it was emerging, in a way, as the capital of Palestine, which became a political and administrative entity beneath the surface of the fluctuating provincial divisions of the Ottomans (Scholch 1939: 228).

It should be mentioned that, in the course of the late decades of the 19th century, Palestine in general and Jerusalem in particular, were caught up in the whirlpool of European rivalries in striving for influence. The easiest way to establish influence was the policy of religious cultural penetration (*ibid.*: 228).

Although at that time, the spirit of secularism was gaining ground in Europe, there was an upsurge of religious enthusiasm about the "Holy City" in the Foreign Offices of the European Powers. France had the Catholics to protect, while the Russians claimed to defend the interests of the Orthodox. To draw even, England and Prussia (later Germany) had to find, or create, their own minorities to protect.

One result of the activities of the European Powers towards intensifying their interests in Jerusalem and several cities of Palestine, was an unprecedented increase of the number of hospitals, monasteries, churches, printing presses, libraries and missionary schools (Khalidi 1981: 61). As education under the Ottoman system of *Millets* was the responsibility of each community (Hopwood 1969: 139), the competing European missionary schools became an important part of the educational tableau there. The activity of these missionary schools had a double effect: these schools were not entirely limited to Christians, but they catered for Muslims as well, who gradually began to attend foreign missionary schools. Moreover, the fact that those schools were better developed than were state schools served to stimulate educational reform (Findley 1992: 134).

These schools had, on the other hand, negative consequences: in a country made up of different religious denominations, the diversity of missionary activity was bound to lead to conflicts, the more so since the missionaries allowed themselves to be used as tools of political infiltration (Ghazaleh 1973: 8-9). This orientation was obstructed by the fact that it was dangerous for Christians to break the close ties linking a Christian Arab to his community. Historically, the Muslims and the Christians of the geographical Syria had been united in language and interests (Hopwood 1969: 176-177).

It is true that the number of students who benefited from the educational institutions, native, state and foreign, was small in comparison with the total population of the country. It should be remembered, however, that the society was in the process of rapid change, with education and general development always increasing the number of those who joined the educated sector of the society (Muslims and Christians alike) (Ghazaleh 1973: 98). All the ideas of the West and the cultures of foreign nations wove themselves into the fabric of this sector's higher curricula (Khalidi 1981: 62).

al-Ġawzī, an Orthodox Christian from Jerusalem, represented the afore-mentioned educated sector, which got acquainted with the cultures of other nations, and mastered foreign languages.

The Orthodox people of geographical Syria¹ were the heirs of a once flourishing Church. They were all Arabic-speaking Christians who considered themselves true Arabs and vigorously denied that they were Arabized Greeks (Hopwood 1969: 27).

¹ Almost 90,000 at the beginning of the 20th century.

The Orthodox believers of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem² were scattered over some 70 villages and towns in Palestine and in one or two areas beyond the Jordan (Hopwood 1969: 9-26). In Jerusalem itself, the Orthodox Greeks and Arabs represented about one half of the total population. They had, as inhabitants of the "Holy Places", an importance far outweighing their numbers (*ibid.*: 19).

The Palestinian "Holy Places" had always been dear to the Russian believers' hearts (*ibid.*: 9). The Patriarch of Jerusalem was of prime importance in the relationship between Moscow and the Orthodox East (*ibid.*: 10). In spite of the fact that Greeks continued to play an important role in the Orthodox world under the Ottomans, the Russian churches claimed that their rulers were the protectors of the Orthodox faith (*ibid.*: 2). Russia's intrigues and desires ranged wide, but it was "for the sake of Jerusalem", as the centre of the Orthodox East, that much of her effort was expended, an effort that brought her into close association with the Orthodox Arabs of the East, especially, of the church of Jerusalem (*ibid.*: VI).

Russia considered that the greatest threat facing the Orthodox Arabs in the mid 19th century was the growth of foreign missionary schools, which held great attraction for the Orthodox Arabs, who were starved of education (Findley 1992: 135).

The Russian Church, in an effort to emulate other European Powers, and also out of Russia's concern with Syria in general and Palestine in particular, launched an educational campaign aimed at the Orthodox Arabs. The educational activity was weak and ineffective until it took an effective and organized shape after the establishment of the "Imperial Russian Orthodox Palestine Society", 1882 (Hourani 1991: 302). Although the Society's work had been restricted for different reasons, yet it left its traces, which were not as deep as those left by other foreign powers. The Orthodox Arabs were set on a distinct path which would have been notably different, had it not been for Russian intervention (Hopwood 1060: VII).

By fostering education, Russia stimulated an interest in western secular civilization among the Orthodox Arabs. Russian was taught at the schools of the "Society", so as to give the students access to Russian literature, as in several subjects there were no satisfactory text books (*ibid.*: 144). Many observers had become aware of a marked appreciation of Russian secular literature among the graduates of the society's schools (*ibid.*: 156-157).

It is worth mentioning that the Russian schools made it their special concern to teach Arabic besides Russian (Dağır 1901: 901-904). This had twofold results: first, the appearance of Arab publication, since the late 19th century, to restate the Arabs claims for the "Holy places" against the Greeks³. This served indirectly the Arab national movement. The second result of teaching Arabic at the Society's schools was

² Almost 50,000 at the late Ottoman period.

³ Those translators were mostly graduates of the Russian Teachers' schools at Nazareth and Beit-Jala.

the emergence of leading translators from Russian into Arabic. Thus they helped to acquaint Arab readers with the works of Gorky, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, and other prominent figures of Russian literature (Yağī 1968: 109-110).

The Russian Society used to send the best graduates of its schools to continue academic studies in Russia. But most of these, to its deep regret, became naturalized, found employment, and were unwilling to return (Hopwood 1969: 140). Some contributed to developing Orientalism in Russian universities. al-Ğawzī is a good example of these.

To trace the beginning of Russian interest in the field of Orientalism, it is worth to refer to Russia's relations with the Arab Moslem World during the Middle Ages, through the visits of merchants from Baghdad to Russia, and Russian pilgrims to the "Holy Land" (al-ʿAqīqī 1965: III, 915). Following the fall of the Mongolian Empire⁴, Russia expanded beyond its borders towards Asia, thus linking her religiously, historically and culturally with the Arab Moslem World (*ibid.*: 916). Russia under Peter the Great and Catharine emulated other European countries in the field of Orientalism. The earliest steps were to send students to learn Oriental languages, including Arabic, and to establish institutes for the same purpose, especially to train ambassadors and interpreters (*ibid.*: 917).

Orientalism became a distinct subject in 1804, with the introduction of an university system which included Semitic languages (Arabic, Persian, Turkish etc.) in the curriculum of the higher institutions. The first university to apply this system in teaching Arabic was Kharkov (*ibid.*: 918)⁵. Kazan University (established 1804 near the river Volga) came next to teach Arabic, in 1807⁶.

Other Russian universities, institutes and colleges, had established chairs for Oriental languages since the beginning of the 19th century⁷. The new regime that followed the 1917 Revolution witnessed a great interest in Oriental (especially Arabic) studies. It organized the existing institutes, and established new ones⁸ (*ibid.*:

⁴ The Mongolian Empire dominated part of Russia at the end of the 14th century, and left its impact there.

⁵ One of the most prominent Orientalists who supervised Arabic studies there was Dorean (1829-1836), who was invited by the Tzar from Germany.

⁶ The Tzar entrusted the Dept. of Semitic Languages at the University to the German Orientalist Fran 1807-1817.

⁷ E.g: Moscow, Lazarev, Saint Petersburg. The Eastern College at the last University became the residence of great Orientalists such as Roseen and Parthold.

⁸ Such as the Institute of Eastern Languages at Leningrad and the Central Institute for Modern Eastern Languages in Moscow. Moreover, the government installed Orientalists at several universities, such as Kiev and Baku.

920). The government held academic seminars for disseminating Eastern cultures, and gave Orientalists moral and financial support (*ibid.*: 921).

Many professors from Arabic and Eastern countries had their share in teaching Arabic and contributed to the flourishing of Oriental studies in Russian institutes and universities. al-ĞawzĪ was one of these.

Born in Jerusalem, he received his early education at the Orthodox Monastery of al-Musallaba. He followed his clerical studies at the Monastery of Kifteen, near Tripoli. He got a scholarship to study theology in Moscow, but he discovered later that he had no mental inclination towards theological studies, and decided to study history and literature (al-Asad 1957: 32-34) at Kazan University, which enjoyed high reputation for its interest in Arab studies⁹ (*ibid.*: 939).

His M. A. research subject, in 1899, was "al-Muġtazila, a scholarly historical research in Islam". Following his graduation, he was appointed professor at the Faculty of History and Literature at Kazan University, to teach Middle Eastern history (al-Asad 1957: 32-34). In 1920, he got a post at the Eastern College, Baku University (Azerbaijan)¹⁰ (ŠawqĪ 1993: 93). In 1921, he got Ph. D. in Arab literature and language; in 1930, he was appointed to the chair of Arab language and literature at Baku University. Between 1932-1937 he suffered from a heart attack, which prevented him from work. He resumed his activity in 1938, the year of his retirement. He remained in Baku until his death in 1942 (*ibid.*: 95).

During his active years, he toured many countries of the Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Palestine) for academic purposes: composing books and delivering a course of speeches. He published extensively in the Arabic press of Egypt and Syria, where he excited much attention for the novelty and profundity of his subject-matter and treatment¹¹.

During his years of residence in Russia, he was too much occupied by an earnest longing for his home country. His several visits to Jerusalem (1909, 1928, 1930) were a clear proof of this attachment. During these visits, in addition to the academic goal, he tried hard to raise the level of public opinion, and to stimulate the consciousness of the people about the forthcoming dangers¹² (*ibid.*: 102-104). This caused the British authorities to issue an order for him to leave the country, for fear of his political activity (*ibid.*: 12-13).

⁹ Russian Orientalists had their contributions during their tenure at Kazan University, e.g: Fran 1782-1851, Gottwalt, 1813-1897.

¹⁰ During his tenure there, he contributed to the creation of the new Alphabet of the Azeri language.

¹¹ Khalidi 1981: 71. The Arab press referred to him as Bandali al-ĞawzĪ, the Soviet Palestinian or Bandali al-ĞawzĪ, the Russian Orientalist. ŠawqĪ 1993: 14.

¹² He used to disseminate his liberal ideas at a public cafe in Jerusalem called "aš-Ša'ālĪk" (Paupers), a meeting place for prominent politicians, scholars and men of literature.

Most of al-Ġawzī's works were in Arabic, though he mastered many ancient and modern languages, notably eight: Arabic, Syriac, Hebrew, Greek, French, German, English and Russian. He was excellent in many other languages too: Turkish, Azeri, Latin, and he could read fluently Italian and Spanish (*ibid.*: 136). He made early translations from German¹³ (*ibid.*: 137), and wrote some books on teaching Russian and English to Arab speakers. He might be considered as a rare example of those who master the art of writing in foreign languages (al-Khateeb 1990).

al-Ġawzī worked hard to develop Orientalism at the Russian universities, and to present Arab culture to the Russian milieu. The Orientalists described him as their fruitful source, calling him Pendeli (Kasmieh n.d.).

His historical works are of special merit; the range of topics he dealt with is sweeping. It is worth mentioning a few of his works in Arabic and Russian¹⁴: "al-Muṭazila" 1899, "The History of Jerusalem Church" 1910, "Mount Lebanon, its History and Present status" 1914, "Research in the Koran" 1914, "Muslims in Russia and their Future" 1917, "Egyptian - British Relations" 1930. His magnificent work in history "From the History of the Intellectual Movements in Islam" was first published in Jerusalem in 1928.

Despite the diversity of the subjects of al-Ġawzī's works, the achievements of classical Arab-Islamic culture were given prominence. He did not confine himself to the traditional interpretation of Arab-Islamic history, instead, he took great care to ascertain its social and material dimensions. In spite of the different views towards what al-Ġawzī presented, he remained for a long time a pioneer historian of Arab social and economic history, of populist movements and of intellectual history in its social milieu (Khalidi 1981: 73). "al-Ġawzī has been something of a hero to the Arab intellectual, left for some years" (as-Sayyid & Alluš 1977).

He was distinguished from the nationalists in avoiding fanaticism, without ignoring the appeal for Arab unity and the constant aspiration for the progress and development of the Arab nation. He warned his nation of the consequences of weakness and division, raising his voice against all the views which degrade the Arabs' (and other Eastern nations') civilization (*ibid.*).

The major theme he dealt with was, broadly speaking, the encounter between the Orient and the West. His evocation of the East-West theme grew out of his profound familiarity with both classical Arabic and Western culture, and his prolonged stay in the West (Khalidi 1981: 70).

¹³ E. g. *Gassan Princes from al-Jafna*, composed by the Orientalist Nöldeke. Dr. Q. Zureiq presented some of his ideas for the Arabic version, which was published at the Catholic Publishing House, Beirut. 1933.

¹⁴ All were printed in Kazan, except the last one.

He acknowledged the contributions that Western Orientalists had made to the study of Eastern countries, but he had, nonetheless, a cautious attitude towards their intolerance and distortion of the history of the East and its inhabitants. In a passage entitled "The Unity of Social Laws", al-ĞawzĪ attempted to show how Western Orientalists have constructed one sort of a progressive image of their own history and civilization, and another image of a static, arrested East, "If we bear in mind the fact that the first to formulate the principles of the science and the methods of historical criticism were Western historians, like Niebuhr, Ranke, Schlosser and others, and that these historians based their rules and theories on western history alone, since they knew little of Eastern history, it becomes easier for us to realize how strange and heedless are the remarks of certain western historians regarding the East".

al-ĞawzĪ quoted several damaging remarks and continued as follows : "Suffice it for us here to state that the origin of these barren and corrupt ideas is, firstly, ignorance of the history of Eastern nations by those who hold these ideas, and their inability to analyze the historical material which they then possessed in a purely scientific manner. Secondly, those writers based their judgement on the future of Eastern nations on the basis of their cultural and social state of affairs in the recent past ... It is exactly as if an Arab Muslim of the 10th or 11th centuries were to visit Europe of that age and, observing their ignorance, religious prejudice and poverty, condemned them to stagnation and dismissed their future, saying ("they cannot possibly have a social life in the accepted meaning of the word in this present age").¹⁵

al-ĞawzĪ concluded that both East and West follow the same laws of social development, and that neither possesses a natural advantage over the other. The rise and decline of civilizations and states have independent, material causes, totally unrelated to religion or national character.

al-ĞawzĪ's writing reflects his scholarly thoroughness, his sources were the classical Arabic ones; he showed much skilfulness in research, investigation, a care for accuracy and scientific honesty. He wrote in a simple, marvellously refreshing style, rigorously pruned of rhetoric.

¹⁵ This passage comes from the introduction to his famous work *"From the History of the Intellectual Movements in Islam"* (Arabic). It would be instructive to compare this passage with another, written by Rūḥī al-Kalīdī, an intellectual from Jerusalem (1864-1913), thirty years earlier in his study *Introduction to the Eastern Question* (Arabic), a lecture presented at the Centre of the Academic Societies in 1897. (Later published in a book, Jerusalem 1925).

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