

Situating Radio in the Soundscape of Mandate Palestine

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Abstract

This article situates radio within the broader soundscape and social world of 1930s–1940s Mandate Jerusalem. It examines several layers of the radio soundscape: the sounds of the broadcasting studio, the sounds and noise that radio listeners might have experienced from their set, and the sounds of radio broadcasting as mingled with other kinds of sound in Jerusalem’s public and private urban spaces. Contextualizing radio sounds within the broader urban soundscape improves our understanding of radio’s position within the social world of Mandate Jerusalem, and of the broader interrelations between sounds and the lived experiences of Mandate Jerusalemites. Jerusalem provides a worthwhile case study because of its historic religious importance, its increased political importance as capital of the Mandate administration, and because the Palestine Broadcasting Service, the state radio service, was headquartered there. Laying out the contours of this broader soundscape also helps move us closer toward a “sounded history” of this period – one in which scholars integrate sounds of various kinds into their analyses, as integral parts of Jerusalemites’ lived experiences. Understanding the richness of this aural landscape, which included communications technologies like the telegraph and telephone, and transportation technologies like buses and trains, helps bring to life the broader societal and political context of the Mandate’s major events and developments.

Keywords

Mandate Jerusalem; soundscape; radio; music; cinema; religion; telephone; language; technology.

In a 1935 letter to the editor of the pro-Zionist, English-language *Palestine Post*, an irate resident of Jerusalem complained of the city's assault on his ears:

In a most commendable manner the police have lessened street noises by forbidding the unnecessary use of automobile horns. But this does not help the people who live on or near Jaffa Road where the radios and gramophone shops are responsible for a noise which is ten times worse than automobiles. I refer to the loud speakers.

If I am not mistaken, the merchants in the Suq were forbidden some years ago to play gramophones in the street. Is not this terrific noise, which reminds one of Red Indians, much worse? This is especially true in the New Russian Building where two adjacent shops play different tunes at the same time. Passersby believe themselves to be suddenly removed to a lunatic asylum where the patients are performing in an orchestra.

In most of the civilized states of Europe the use of loud-speakers in the street or near open windows is forbidden. Why not forbid it in this country too? Residents and tourists who are looking for peace in this city, called the Holy City, would be extremely grateful.¹

For this unhappy letter writer, a holy city was a quiet city. He disliked car horns. He disliked radio and gramophone shops because they advertised their goods by playing them, with loudspeakers to attract customers. He liked the policing of car horns. The quiet he so desired was associated with “civilized states” of Europe; by contrast, noise called forth the writer's racialized assumptions about Native Americans and ableist statements about people with mental illness. However, with his complaint, he also entered into the historical record a complex and multi-layered description of the soundscape of Jerusalem in 1935, or at least of parts of it.

This article draws on such period sources, including the Arabic-language press, but also memoirs and photographs, to situate radio within the broader soundscape – and social world – of later Mandate Jerusalem. Historians like Ziad Fahmy and Carole Woodall have worked to reinsert sound into our understandings of the past, both in terms of discerning what life sounded like in past contexts, and in terms of accounting empirically and analytically for those sounds in historical scholarship.² Radio forms a particularly useful lens through which to consider the broader soundscape, because it engages with so many varied aural elements: public versus private sounds; the amplification (or suppression) of political, commercial, and religious sounds; the interplay between naturally produced sounds and those powered by electricity or batteries; and, as the letter above makes clear, debates over agreeable versus disagreeable sounds.

Radio came to Mandate Jerusalem in the late 1920s and early 1930s, inserting itself into a rich world of musical, educational, and religious sounds – among others. However, it is important to recall – especially from the perspective of the saturated media world of the twenty-first century – that it did so only at specific times. No

broadcast media form operated without interruption in its early years, and radio was no exception: radio stations broadcasting during the interwar period were on air for a limited number of hours per day. Take, for example, the early January 1940 (see table 1) broadcasting schedule for the Palestine Broadcasting Service (PBS) – the only station broadcasting in Palestine until September 1941, when the British intelligence-operated, Arab nationalist station Sharq al-Adna/Near East Arab Broadcasting Station began broadcasting from Jaffa. By this point in time, the station operated two daily broadcasts: a short one-hour news-focused broadcast in the afternoon, and a longer, four-and-a-half-hour broadcast in the evening. In total, the PBS operated roughly five to six hours per day. Most of its on-air time was devoted to musical entertainment, punctuated by news broadcasts, weather announcements, and scripted lectures.³

Afternoon Program	1:30 pm	Time signal, then Hebrew music
	1:40 pm	First news announcement in Hebrew
	1:45 pm	Time signal
	1:50 pm	Program of what the Arab listeners want – recordings
	2:00 pm	Time signal then first news announcement in Arabic
	2:10 pm	Program of what the English listeners want – recordings
	2:20 pm	First news announcement in English
	2:30 pm	Time signal and shut down
Evening Program		
<i>Hebrew Program</i>	5:30 pm	
<i>Arabic Program</i>	6:15 pm	Talk to farmers – “the home garden” [<i>hadiqa al-manzil</i>]
	6:35 pm	Musical program – Tayseer Faydallah Jaber and the Arabic broadcasting band [<i>firqa</i>]
	7:00 pm	Solo performance on <i>bazaq</i> – Muhammad ‘Abd al-Karim
	7:15 pm	Musical performance – Muhammad Ghazi and the Arabic broadcasting band
	7:30 pm	Weather, then second news announcement in Arabic
<i>Hebrew Program</i>	8:00 pm	
<i>English Program</i>	9:30 pm	Weather, then second news announcement in English
	9:50 pm	Talk on foreign affairs
	10:00 pm	Shut down

Table 1. PBS broadcasting schedule, as published in *Filastin*, 2 January 1940.⁴

While the station expanded its services from the 1930s until the Mandate ended in 1948, there was nothing unusual about such short broadcasting sessions. The BBC’s

Arabic Service and the Egyptian State Broadcasting Station in Cairo, for example, were on air for similar durations each day. If period observers noted the common presence of radio sets in coffee shops in the 1930s and 1940s, for example, it is likely that they were only tuned to Arabic-language stations for specific minutes and hours each day. (It was also likely that many were battery-operated. Radio set advertisements in period newspapers and Mandate government archives suggest that battery- and electricity-operated sets were both common, although battery-operated sets were more common in rural areas.)⁵ Making sense of radio sounds in Mandate Jerusalem, as in the rest of the interwar Middle East, thus requires reinserting them within the broader aural context of specific times and places. This article offers a descriptive portrait of the sounds of Jerusalem in the 1930s and 1940s, asking how radio broadcasts might have fit within this broader context. It examines a sampling of written and visual materials for evidence of sound: newspapers and memoirs that describe urban or rural, usual or unexpected sounds, and photographs that depict objects that produced sounds, from horses' hooves to gramophones.

Memoirs and other autobiographical texts have played a crucial role in writing the social history of Mandate Palestine, at times offering rare insight into the sensory experiences of the past.⁶ Photographs offer a complementary perspective on the aural landscape of Mandate Palestine, often enriching the written record or providing a sense of the impact of sounds that may be difficult to convey in text. As Issam Nassar has demonstrated, local photography in Jerusalem dates back to the 1860s, and by the Mandate period it was well developed.⁷ Collectively, these photographs, along with personal histories and community memory, offer a rich trove of visual material for historical research, as the Facebook community page British Mandate Jerusalem Photo Library, with over nineteen thousand followers as of March 2021, suggests.⁸ Among the largest (and most accessible) collections of photographs from Mandate-era Jerusalem is the G. Eric and Edith Matson Collection, drawn from the archives of the American Colony Photography Department, a for-profit enterprise associated with the American Colony that includes some twenty-two thousand photographic negatives and transparencies taken in Palestine between 1898 and 1946.⁹ Despite its name, many of the photographers and members of the colony – including the photographer Eric Matson – were Swedish, although local photographers, including Hanna Safieh, also worked for or with them.¹⁰ Matson and his American wife emigrated from Palestine to the United States in 1946, and in the 1960s gave their collection of photographs, negatives, and albums to the United States' Library of Congress. Although the collection, like others produced during the Mandate period, was not created to highlight the aural qualities of life in Jerusalem during the Mandate, its contents help evoke key characteristics of the city's soundscape.

Contextualizing radio sounds – entertainment programs, news broadcasts, broadcasting languages – within the broader urban soundscape improves our understanding of radio's position within the social world of Mandate Jerusalem, and of the broader interrelations between sounds and the lived experiences of Mandate Jerusalemites. Jerusalem provides a worthwhile case study because of its historic

religious importance, its increased political importance as capital of the Mandate administration, and because the Palestine Broadcasting Service, the state radio service, was headquartered there. Laying out the contours of this broader soundscape also helps move us closer toward a “sounded history” of this period – one in which scholars integrate sounds of various kinds into their analyses, as integral parts of Jerusalemites’ lived experiences.¹¹

The radio soundscape of later Mandate Jerusalem had multiple layers, in terms of the different stations, broadcasts, sounds, and static available on air at different times and in different years, and in terms of its interaction with the other kinds of sounds circulating through the city. This article takes a case study approach, highlighting some of the various sound issues associated with radio broadcasting in Mandate Jerusalem. It focuses on the British Mandate’s national state-run radio station, the Palestine Broadcasting Service, which broadcast from Jerusalem (with the main transmitter in Ramallah) from 1936 to 1948. However, it recognizes that many radio stations reached Jerusalem – from within the region and from Europe – and that many people listened to multiple stations, making the radio soundscape itself more multilayered. Further, people listened to radio for different reasons: news, entertainment, education, religion, and business. As the only broadcast medium of the interwar period, radio commanded significant attention from listeners.

But radio did not exist in a vacuum. Understanding the richness of this aural landscape helps bring to life the broader societal and political context of the Mandate’s major events and developments. In particular, this article will look at the way radio, along with other communications technology like the telegraph and the telephone, impacted the relationship of Jerusalemites to space and distance, exposing them to communications and broadcasts from well beyond the Mandate boundaries, and allowing instantaneous communication over vast expanses; the way radio interacted with the cinema, the gramophone, and live musical performances to shape a world of arts and leisure; and how radio fit into a shifting soundscape of the everyday, with its porous boundaries between private and public, and rural and urban. It begins by discussing the soundscapes of religious and national identity, focusing on the belief that radio was an important venue for promoting proper language, and that proper language was particularly important for inculcating a proper national self-identification among Palestine’s population.

Religious and National Identity

Religious Sounds and Public Activism

Although the Jerusalemite who complained about noise pollution to the *Palestine Post* imagined a “Holy City” as a quiet one, this seems to ignore the great number of sounds produced by religious institutions in and around the city. All houses of worship had regular services, involving various sounds, and all had holidays – festive and somber. Church bells and calls to prayer might have been the most regular sounds that emanated from religious buildings, although the sounds that neighbors and passersby

would hear depended on the day of the week and the neighborhood.

Like other city buildings, Jerusalem's churches and synagogues were connected to the electrical grid in the early 1930s, with mosques reportedly electrifying more slowly.¹² Electrification in this moment might primarily have involved lighting. Although some houses of worship might have had microphones and speakers, it was not yet typical for most (see figure 1). The sounds of group prayer and scriptural recitation might also have been audible, whether coming from courtyard of a mosque, emanating from a house on a Friday evening, or wafting through the open windows of any house of worship, since few had air conditioning. While not always amplified by microphones and speakers, religious sounds, whether daily, weekly, or annual holiday sounds, would have been a regular part of Jerusalem's aural landscape – modulated by the religious affiliations of each neighborhood.

During the later Mandate period, the population of Jerusalem hovered around 60 percent Jewish, around 20 percent Muslim, and around 20 percent Christian.¹³ Starting in the late 1800s, communities had begun expanding into new neighborhoods, built outside the Old City's walls – but the growing European influence in the late Ottoman Empire resulted in a proliferation of churches, convents, Christian schools, and other religiously-affiliated buildings and enterprises.¹⁴ The Old City's division into ethnic and religious “quarters” was echoed in the population distributions of the newer neighborhoods. As a 1948 urban planning text noted: “In the new town the Jews are grouped principally to the west, the Christians to the south-west and the [Muslims] to the north and east.”¹⁵ The sounds of religious life – in ancient houses of worship and newly-constructed ones – generally reflected these geographic divisions, with some overlap. They also transcended geographic location by appearing on the radio, with religious broadcasts from al-Aqsa Mosque, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and other significant houses of worship on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim holy days.¹⁶



Figure 1. “Calling to prayer from Saladin’s Tower, [Jerusalem].” Matson Collection, Library of Congress, online at www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2019709885/ (accessed 29 May 2021).



Figure 2. “Jewish protest demonstrations against Palestine White Paper, 18 May 1939. Crowd leaving [Yeshurun] Synagogue [Jerusalem].” Matson Collection, Library of Congress, online at www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2019709116/ (accessed 29 May 2021).

However, a photograph of protesters against the 1939 White Paper at the Bauhaus-style Yeshurun Synagogue, built in 1936 across from the Jewish Agency building (see figure 2), in the lead-up to a Zionist-led Jewish general strike is a reminder that the sounds emerging from and leading to houses of worship were not only religious. Such protests and demonstrations – sometimes linked to funerals and festivals – demonstrate the intersectional connections between religious identity and political aspirations for many in Mandate Palestine. The link between communal identity and political struggle, so significant in this period, is particularly evident in the question of language and its uses over the airwaves and beyond.

Linguistic Communities

The Palestine Broadcasting Service broadcast from the outset in Arabic, Hebrew, and English. While the news broadcasts were the same duration for each language, the Arabic service consistently enjoyed more airtime – roughly 60 percent of the weekly broadcasting hours. This decision reflected the larger Arabic-speaking population in Mandate Palestine, as well as the British administration’s concern to attract Arabic-speaking listeners, in Palestine and around the region. They seemed to doubt that listening to the PBS would make Arabic-speakers pro-British, but believed that at least it would keep them from listening to Radio Bari, the Italian Arabic-language station, which broadcast anti-colonial and anti-British rhetoric.

Meanwhile, the local press tracked and reported the number of radio licenses registered annually in Arabic, English, or Hebrew as proxies for the numbers of Arab, British, and Jewish listeners respectively.¹⁷ By the end of 1936, the station's first year of operations, for example, two-thirds of the new licenses were issued in Hebrew. Less than 10 percent were issued in Arabic.¹⁸ The issue increasingly raised hackles as the decade continued. In June 1939, the Vaad Leumi petitioned the Mandate government to make the proportion of broadcast time in each language reflect the licensed listening audience. "The Jewish share in the general programs was in inverse ratio to the number of wireless licenses," it argued. "While Jewish listeners constitute at least 80 per cent of the licensed public, the Vaad Leumi states, the Jewish share in the broadcast programs was no more than 30 per cent, and even the larger part of that time was given over to general musical programs jointly shared with the English Hour."¹⁹ World War II seems to have redirected public attention away from the issue of language equity – the station's administration was militarized and broadcasting controls were tightened. Still, an aural perspective offers a reminder that for listeners in Palestine, tuning into the local radio station meant encountering languages that might affirm or challenge one's linguistic and national identity.

Coupled with the question of which language to use for broadcasting was the question of the role of broadcasting in conveying proper or correct language. Eight months before the PBS opened, a *Palestine Post* editorial suggested that its broadcasts would improve Hebrew-language speech in Mandate Palestine. The editors wrote:

Enormous improvement in the diction and syntax employed in speaking our official languages might well follow from model lessons on the air. English as it is spoken and written today endangers the very understanding of the tongue; the varieties of Hebrew pronunciation and the many new words being coined . . . call for some competent instruction, while even Arabic, more rooted here than the other languages, is yet spoken in so many dialects and so many varying degrees of literacy, that practice in its literary expression will be very useful.²⁰

Although modern Hebrew was already well developed by the 1930s and 1940s, the PBS's last director, Edwin Samuel, described the station as playing an important role in supporting correct use of the language. In 1947, he stated on air that "the PBS now is one of the most potent factors in determining the way in which Hebrew should be written and pronounced. The PBS is rightly considered by many Jewish listeners to be an authoritative body as far as the Hebrew language is concerned."²¹ He explained that the PBS maintained rigorous language standards, with Hebrew-language advisors and courses for announcers. However, he noted, even the most distinguished guest speakers often failed to use proper Hebrew. "Some of them have learnt Hebrew late in life and speak it painfully with a foreign accent. This jars on the ears of many of our Jewish listeners, especially the younger generation for whom Hebrew is the mother tongue." Samuel concluded by promising that the station would "refuse to let such people broadcast in the future," even if they had previously served as on-air speakers.

Radio broadcasting also offered opportunities to promote the Arabic language and to debate the level of language broadcasters should use on air for news broadcasts, talks, and entertainment programs. ‘Ajaj Nuwayhid, the controller of the Arabic section in the early 1940s, noted in his memoirs how proud he was when regional listeners praised the quality of the Arabic being broadcast. He proudly contrasted the quality of the Arabic spoken on the PBS with that of other Arabic stations, praising the work of Khalil Baydas, the intellectual and nationalist, who reviewed scripts for grammatical errors and monitored the on-air broadcasts.²² So broadcasting in Mandate Palestine became a pedagogical and thus national linguistic act, as did listening. This careful attention to language helped connect the soundscape of radio to the broader political, societal, and cultural contexts in Palestine.

The multiple languages in which the Palestine Broadcasting Service broadcast could be found echoes the many languages spoken in Jerusalem. Jacob Nammar described his parents – his Arab Palestinian father and Armenian mother – as speaking multiple languages to one another, their children, and others in the community.²³ Hala Sakakini recounted her experiences growing up in a family that regularly spoke Arabic at home and English and German at school or work.²⁴ Liora Halperin describes the array of language practices – and debates over language choices – in which members of the Zionist immigrant community engaged. Hebrew was considered critical to nation building, but community members’ mother tongues were the language of the home.²⁵ Although many Jerusalemites spoke more than one language, British Mandate educational and other policies treated Palestinian residents as members of two proto-national communities who should be educated and sign government documents in Arabic, English, or Hebrew – thus eliding Armenian-, German-, Greek-, and Russian-speaking communities, among others.²⁶ As a state-run station, the PBS reinforced this trifurcation of language, contributing Mandate government notions of national and language identities to the radio soundscape.

Changing Space and Distance

At the same time that it sought to reinforce a notion of two proto-national communities in Palestine, radio also brought listeners in Palestine into contact with numerous other nations. Radio listeners in Jerusalem may have only been able to tune into local stations at specific times and for limited durations, but they were able to receive additional radio stations with various degrees of clarity from elsewhere in the region, Europe, and even the United States. It would have been possible, then, to tune into some station’s broadcast at most hours of the day. The program guides published in various local newspapers and reproduced in government documents suggest the variety of stations available to listeners in Palestine (see table 2). It is likely that additional French stations like Radio PTT, regional stations broadcasting in multiple languages like Beirut’s Radio Orient, and even North American stations broadcasting in English, could be heard depending on the time of day and atmospheric conditions. Even if incomplete, this list offers a sense of the rich aural array of broadcast sounds available

in Jerusalem by the late 1930s. Listeners could tune into many stations if they were willing to adjust their schedules and tuners. Meanwhile, those wishing to listen to a specific station might have to deal with overlapping frequencies and broadcasting interference – issues that might not have deterred someone from listening to a news broadcast, but might have led them to tune into a different station for recorded music or other entertainment.

Stations with Arabic programming	Stations with no Arabic programming
BBC Arabic Service	BBC Empire
Palestine Broadcasting Service	Radio Bordeaux
Radio Baghdad	Radio Brno
Radio Bari	Radio Bucharest
Radio Cairo	Radio Kosce
	Radio Lubljana
	Radio Lugano
	Radio Lyon
	Radio Montpellier
	Radio Prague
	Radio Sofia
	Radio Strasbourg
	Radio Tour Eiffel
	Radio Warsaw

Table 2. Stations available to listeners in Palestine in June 1938, compiled by author.

Like radio, the telephone brought the promise of a changed relationship between proximity and sound: connecting people in one place with those in another, simultaneously, for conversation or broadcasting/listening. For Jerusalemites, the city soundscape might expand and contract depending on whether they were listening to sounds produced in Jerusalem or by people, musical instruments, or records coming through a radio broadcast or telephone line. The British Mandate government had worked to establish telegraph and telephone networks starting in the early 1920s, developing a technological and administrative infrastructure for Mandate Palestine (see figure 3).²⁷ The rise of radio broadcasting and listening seems to have gone hand in hand with the rise of the telephone, although the number of active radio sets in Palestine was more than twice the number of telephones by 1938.²⁸ Jerusalem’s telephone operations shifted from a manual to an automatic exchange in June 1938, meaning that telephone users used dial telephone sets to route their calls, rather than speaking to a human operator. This upgrade was considered necessary to support the growing number of telephone subscribers – residential, commercial, and governmental – while also minimizing misunderstandings between callers and operators, due to the

wide variety of languages spoken in Jerusalem.²⁹ While relatively few Jerusalemites would have used telephones on a regular basis, the sound of a telephone's ring – technically, the sound of a ringing electromechanical gong – would have been familiar as one of the “modern” sounds being produced and heard in Jerusalem.

Music, Cinema, and Leisure

While the aural landscape of later Mandate broadcasting was broad and rich, the spoken sounds of some stations may have been unintelligible to many listeners. As noted above, many of the accessible stations did not broadcast in Arabic, Hebrew, or English. Whether that kept people from tuning in to stations broadcasting in French, German, Polish, or other languages is unclear: although governments

tended to believe that news broadcasts were the most important aspect of radio broadcasting, live and recorded music also drove listener interest. Jerusalem listeners may have tuned into stations to hear music rather than spoken broadcasts.

Music and poetry dominate the pages of memoirs written by Mandate-era Jerusalemites. Wasif Jawhariyyeh – himself a musician – described musicians moving between Jerusalem and other cities around the region for professional opportunities, a practice that continued from Ottoman times. They performed at religious celebrations, such as weddings, as well as religious and other festivals. Less formally, young men might play instruments or sing together during evening gatherings – or someone might play an instrument in a family setting.³⁰ Reja-e Busailah, who was blind, also mentioned a neighbor who played the oud regularly, although not professionally, and recalled asking him to play Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s “The Train.”³¹ Jawhariyyeh also describes his childhood activity of paying a local man who owned a large gramophone to play one of his many Arab world disc recordings, praising it as an invention that enabled people to hear music from elsewhere in the world, to access music, and to learn how to appreciate what he considered good quality music. Nimrod Ben Zeev’s



Figure 3. “Repairing telephone lines on Jaffa Road, 31 October 1938.” Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, online at www.loc.gov/pictures/item/mpc2010004369/PP/ (accessed 29 May 2021).

research on rural building materials industry workers and their practice of singing about the rigors of their work suggests that workers in urban areas might also have turned to song as a means of passing time in aesthetically and emotionally meaningful ways.³² These accounts suggest both the prominence of music in daily life, and also the ways in which mechanically-played, recorded music was integrated into existing practices of musicmaking and family or community sociality.³³

Music was also important for cafés and restaurants applying to the Mandate government for a license that allowed them to add a surcharge to drinks and snacks purchased when music “other than by records was provided.”³⁴ As Maayan Hillel has argued for Haifa, cafés and similar spaces “were a major venue for the emergence of new recreation patterns in Palestinian society” during the Mandate period, thanks to their combination of food, drink, and entertainment that ranged from radio broadcasts to live performers by regional musicians or dancers.³⁵ Cafés that provided radio broadcasts offered customers without access to a radio at home the opportunity to listen to entertainment as well as news broadcasts – as well as the pleasure of enjoying a live music broadcast or discussing the latest news development with other café patrons. In this way, radio contributed to a new form of café sociality (or business sociality, for stores and factories that had radio sets).



Figure 4. “Debut of the P.B.S. Choral Society, concert broadcast from Y.M.C.A. auditorium on 22 November 1938.” Matson Collection, Library of Congress, online at www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2019713305/ (accessed 29 May 2021).

Memoirs and some photographs attest to the synergistic relationship between the Jerusalem radio station and other musical events, including those focused on European classical music. The Matson collection includes a photograph of the Palestine Broadcasting Service's Choral Society, which gave a live performance at the then new YMCA in 1938 that was also broadcast on air (see figure 4). Robert Lachmann's 1936–37 "Oriental Music" broadcasts included a mixture of live studio performances and his lectures that he hoped would form a complement to European classical music studies.³⁶ Jawhariyyeh, Busailah, and Sakakini all mentioned the music played on the Palestine Broadcasting Service, describing it as having an important, if contested, role in supporting and strengthening Palestinian identity.³⁷ They praised the Arabic section broadcasters and controllers, while criticizing the British Mandate government and the station's upper administration.



Figure 5. [Princess Mary Street with Rex Cinema in background, West Jerusalem], [between 1940 and 1946]. Matson Collection, Library of Congress, online at www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/matpc/item/2019704314/ (accessed 29 May 2021) NB: title created by LOC staff.

Numerous Jerusalemites mentioned the cinema as a critical part of their visual and aural entertainment. The Rex Cinema on Princess Mary Street featured in several Jerusalem memoirs, including those of Wasif Jawhariyyeh and Jacob Nammar – who loved the English-language films about Tarzan and Zorro, despite what he described as the “poor sound quality.”³⁸ Film ads from local cinemas appeared regularly in Mandate Palestine newspapers, and the Palestine Broadcasting Station (and others) broadcast recorded and live versions of the films’ songs. For example, advertisements for the 1935 Egyptian film *Dumu’ al-Hubb* (Love’s Tears), a romantic drama that featured Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wahab and Nagat ‘Ali, appeared regularly in the Jaffa-based newspaper *Filastin* in January, February, and March 1936. At the end of March, when the Palestine Broadcasting Service launched, Nagat ‘Ali performed live as part

of the opening ceremonies, singing a song from the film.³⁹ The PBS and other stations also played recordings of famous film songs. For example, it devoted thirty minutes of a 135-minute evening broadcast in April 1939 to recordings of ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s film songs.⁴⁰ Cinema, radio, and the gramophone appear as interconnected media forms, reinforcing the self-consciously modern aspects of Jerusalem’s soundscape with their twentieth-century technology, while weaving in the evolving musical forms and romantic narratives of period Egyptian cinema.

Radio and the Everyday

Public and Private Conversations

In addition to the sounds emanating from buildings where people gathered in worship or for entertainment, sounds traveled from one house or apartment to another. Reja-e Busailah described his family’s experience living in Lydda, where the houses were built wall-to-wall, with adjacent courtyards. “We heard each other distinctly. Mother and our neighbor, Imm Ali Shammout, would sometimes talk to one another over the wall separating our courtyard from theirs. I liked that.”⁴¹ His description echoes Fahmy’s characterization of the aural connections within and between urban residential buildings in early- and mid-twentieth-century Egypt: “Most walls could hardly stop wanted or unwanted sound from traveling.” Further, “windows, balconies, and doors enhanced this sonic penetration and served as sensory portals connecting residents with their neighbors and their neighborhood.”⁴² As Fahmy notes, residents did not necessarily consider this aural permeability negatively, since “connecting with your neighbors and interacting with street hawkers was not only convenient but the expected norm.” The construction of separated houses in the newer neighborhoods beyond the Old City gave some additional space between residents in those neighborhoods. Salwa Sa‘id, who delivered a series of talks on the PBS in 1941 titled “The New Arab House,” contrasted her ideal modern house with multifamily buildings, framing it as both an issue of extended family interference and of noise. In large, multifamily buildings, “We whisper when we speak, we are quiet when we cough and when the children play, so that we do not disturb our neighbors, as they do us most of the time.”⁴³ However, Sa‘id’s perspective reflected a particular socioeconomic class position. Living in connected houses or on one floor of a multifamily building was still common, and – as Brownson notes, “people likely knew most others in the urban neighborhoods of Mandate Palestine,” making it possible for neighbors to connect the sights and sounds produced in homes and yards with particular individuals and families.⁴⁴ In other words, the aural landscape of Jerusalem included the sounds of neighbors’ voices, indoors and out, mingling with the sounds of musical instruments, radios, or gramophones.

Trains, Buses, and Cars

Radio, telephone, and gramophone sounds reflected technological advances, but so did other kinds of sounds. A photo of a row of Ford motor cars parked outside the

Damascus Gate, taken between 1934 and 1939, suggests the modern transportation sounds – along with those of the Jaffa–Jerusalem railway, inaugurated in 1892 – that helped comprise the Mandate Jerusalem soundscape (see figures 6 and 7). Reja-e Busailah described listening to the sounds of cars and trucks while waiting to cross Jerusalem’s streets, listening for the rumble of the train that his family took between Ramla and Jerusalem.⁴⁵ These vehicles shaped the soundscapes of people inside as well as outside them. Hala Sakakini took two city buses each day to and from school, part of the Jerusalem bus system which had begun expanding in the 1920s.⁴⁶ She described the social interactions she saw and heard: passengers would greet the driver and other passengers when boarding, “and the greeting was promptly returned by all.”⁴⁷ Neighbors and friends would try to pay for one another, slowing the paying process with “noisy but friendly” arguments. Passengers would converse – often starting as a conversation between two people who knew one another, but then others “seated in front of them or behind them or across the gangway” would join the conversation.



Figure 6. “Ford cars parked in Damascus Gate area” [between 1934 and 1939]. Matson Collection, Library of Congress, online at www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2019694557/ (accessed 29 May 2021).

These social encounters and exchanges continued practices carried over from face-to-face encounters on neighborhood streets and in local shops – but city buses and other official and unofficial forms of public transportation shifted the geographies of these encounters. They may also have introduced new forms of socioeconomic stratification,

along with the sounds of horns, brakes, and engines. An elite few owned or could hire cars, while others could afford to take the bus or an informal taxi – regularly or on occasion – and some could only afford to walk. Whether welcome or unwelcome, Jerusalemites did not “tune in” to these sounds in the same way that they might consciously choose to listen to a radio program or a gramophone record. But transportation vehicles added to the aural picture of movement and modern living, both in the sounds they produced and in the various kinds of social interactions in which Jerusalemites using each form of transportation could participate.



Figure 7. “Jaffa to Jerusalem. Train at Battir. Pulling up the steep grade” [between 1920 and 1933]. Matson Collection, Library of Congress, online at www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/matpc.15152/ (accessed 29 May 2021).

Rural–Urban Interface

Finally, it may be helpful to remember that in many cities in the interwar period, including Jerusalem, urban and rural were permeable categories. A sheep market outside Herod’s Gate (figure 8) offers a reminder that although many photos of Jerusalem are animal free, animal sounds were a likely part of at least some of the Jerusalem aural landscape. Jacob Nammar, for example, described his childhood home in lower Baq‘a as being next to a small forest, Horsh al-Nammara, where he would play with friends and take their dog for a walk.⁴⁸ Reja-e Busailah similarly mentioned playing outdoors with family and friends, in semi-rural parts of their neighborhood. He also described the sounds of the horse- or mule-drawn vegetable cart, with its “four metal wheels” and of the coach that transported people between Ramla and Lydda: “The horses were well shod and I liked the sound of their clomp, clomp, clomp as they ran. The sound was rich [and] sumptuous.”⁴⁹ These accounts suggest the ways in which “rural” and “urban” were interconnecting categories for many people living in Jerusalem, and that the sounds associated with rural life were also sounds associated with life there.



Figure 8. “Sheep market outside Herod’s Gate” [between 1898 and 1946]. Matson Collection, Library of Congress, online at www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2019698690/ (accessed 29 May 2021).

Conclusion: Sound and Noise in the Written Archives

Working on the aural aspects of bygone eras offers a challenging but valuable historical challenge. Looking across multiple forms of historical documents and objects – written, visual, oral, material – helps create a richer and more complex understanding of the past, in terms of how ordinary people experienced daily life. In this case, using written documents and photographs together offers a way to think through the intersections of sound and social contexts in Mandate Jerusalem. These intersections in turn point to the relationships between sound and lived experience, whether in the areas of culture, politics, religion, work, or other areas, providing a richer understanding of Jerusalemites’ multilayered, aural lived experiences. These relationships then help provide a better appreciation of radio’s location within the world of Mandate Jerusalem – a useful case study both as a large city in Palestine’s interior and as its religious and political heart. While radio introduced new sounds, it

was not the only source of new sounds; rather, radio sounds amplified, competed with, and complemented the sounds of gramophones and telephones, the Jaffa–Jerusalem train, and ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s film songs. Nor did radio and other new sounds replace the older sounds of neighborly conversation, animals, or the call to prayer. This combination of new sounds and old sounds helped establish a distinct soundscape during the Mandate era. Considering history in terms of soundscapes, in Mandate Palestine and elsewhere, offers alternative ways to imagine (or, perhaps, listen to) changing attitudes to politics, leisure, and the everyday and new configurations of space, distance, and linguistic and religious community.

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Endnotes

- 1 *Palestine Post*, 3 February 1935, 4.
- 2 See, for example: Ziad Fahmy, “Historicizing Sound and Noise in the Middle East,” *History Compass* 11, no. 4 (2013): 305–15; Andrea Stanton and Carole Woodall, “Bringing Sound into Middle East Studies” (roundtable), *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, no. 1 (2016): 113–14.
- 3 For a general overview on the Palestine Broadcasting Service, see Andrea Stanton, *This Is Jerusalem Calling: State Radio in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).
- 4 “Wireless Radio Jerusalem Station” [daily broadcasting schedule], *Filastin*, 2 January 1940, 3.
- 5 Stanton, *This Is Jerusalem Calling*, chapters 2 and 3.
- 6 See, for example, Issam Nassar and Salim Tamari, eds., *Dirasat fi al-tarikh al-ijtima’i li-bilad al-sham: qira’at fi al-siyar wa-l-siyar al-dhatiyya* [Studies in the Social History of Bilad al-Sham: Readings in Biography and Autobiography] (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2007). On the sensory experience of a particular Palestinian memoir, see Sandy M. Sufian, “Discovering Mandate Palestine through Disability: The Life of Reja-e Busailah,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 77 (Spring 2019): 136–41.
- 7 See Issam Nassar, “Early Local Photography in Jerusalem: From the Imaginary to the Social Landscape,” *History of Photography* 27, no. 4 (2003): 320–32. There were many photographers active in Palestine during the Mandate period, including Khalil Ra’d, Ibrahim and Khalil Rassas, Hanna Safieh, Militad Savvides, and ‘Ali Za’rur, as well as numerous Jewish and Zionist photographers. Some, like Safieh and Ra’d, focused more on landscapes, rural scenes, and ethnographic or folk subjects – sometimes later criticized as Orientalized – and others, like Za’rur, specialized in photojournalism. As Rona Sela had documented, several – including Za’rur and the Rassas family – had their collections lost or confiscated after the creation of the state of Israel. See: Rona Sela, “Imprisoned Photographs: The Looted Archive of Photo Rissas (Rassas),” *Intermedialités* 32 (Fall 2018), online at www.erudit.org/en/journals/im/2018-n32-im04484/1058469ar/abstract/; and Rona Sela, “Ali Za’rur: Early Palestinian Photojournalism, the Archive of Occupation, and the Return of Palestinian Material to Their Owners,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 73 (2018): 48–56. Other collections are now primarily available in books, such as: Raffi Safieh, *A Man and His Camera: Hanna Safieh: Photographs of Palestine, 1927–1967* (Jerusalem, 1999); and Rona Sela, *Khalil Ra’d: tazlomim, 1891–1948* [Khalil Ra’d: photographs, 1891–1948] (Ramat-Hasharon: Raphaeli, 2010).
- 8 See British Mandate Jerusalem Photo Library, online at www.facebook.com/BMJerusalemPhotoLib (accessed 29 May 2021).

- 9 This article uses photographs from the Matson collection to illustrate particular aspects of sound in Jerusalem during the Mandate, due to their open-source availability, and with no intent to marginalize the Palestinian or other photographers working in Mandate Jerusalem. The collection is available online at www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/matpc/colony.html (accessed 29 May 2021).
- 10 On the American Colony Photography Department, see Barbara Blair, “The American Colony Photography Department: Western Consumption and ‘Insider’ Commercial Photography,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 44 (Winter 2010): 28–38; and Nada Awad, “Waiting for the Second Coming: The New Photographic Collection of the American Colony Archives,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 61 (Winter 2015): 101–12.
- 11 For a discussion of how music can be incorporated analytically into sounded history, rather than used solely to illustrate a mood or a moment, see Marc A. Hertzman, “Toward and Against a Sounded History,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (2016): 249–58.
- 12 See Fredrik Meiton, *Electrical Palestine: Capital and Technology from Empire to Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 191. See also Ronen Shamir, *Current Flow: The Electrification of Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013). Meiton argues that Jerusalem electrified at a slower pace than other cities.
- 13 Ruth Kark and Michal Oren-Nordheim, *Jerusalem and Its Environs: Quarters, Neighborhoods, Villages, 1800–1948* (Detroit and Jerusalem: Wayne State University Press and Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2001), 147.
- 14 Kark and Oren-Nordheim, *Jerusalem and Its Environs*, 377–78.
- 15 See Henry Kendall, *Jerusalem: The City Plan: Preservation and Development during the British Mandate 1918-1948* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1948), 34.
- 16 See, for example, Rioli and Castagnetti’s account of the Franciscan *schola cantorum*, whose liturgical singing was broadcast by the Palestine Broadcasting Service and the BBC: Maria Chiara Rioli and Riccardo Castagnetti, “Sound Power: Musical Diplomacy within the Franciscan Custody in Mandate Jerusalem,” in *European Cultural Diplomacy and Arab Christians in Palestine, 1918–1948*, ed. Karene Sanchez Summerer and Sary Zananiri (Springer, 2021), 79–104.
- 17 The Palestine Broadcasting Station followed the British BBC model in requiring that radio set owners pay an annual license fee, which went to support the station. Unlike the BBC, the PBS’s budget came primarily from government funds and not license fees, but they did contribute to the station’s operating revenues.
- 18 “Nearly 19,000 Radio Licenses, Remarkable Increase since April Last,” *Palestine Post*, 9 December 1936, 5.
- 19 “Jews Would Control Their Section of Palestine Broadcast Service,” *Palestine Post*, 9 June 1939, 1.
- 20 “Jerusalem Calling,” unsigned editorial, *Palestine Post*, 8 July 1935, 4.
- 21 *Between Ourselves* script, 15 August 1947, 3–4 (Edwin Samuel author and broadcaster) (RG14 1879 1).
- 22 See ‘Ajaj Nuwayhid, *Sittun ‘amm ma’a al-qafila al-‘Arabīyya* [Sixty years with the Arab caravan], prepared by Bayan Nuwayhid al-Hut (Beirut: Dar al-Istiqlal, 1993), 258–61; and Elias Sahhab, “This is Radio Jerusalem... 1936,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 20 (2004): 52.
- 23 See Jacob Nammar, *Born in Jerusalem, Born Palestinian: A Memoir* (Northampton, MA: Interlink, 2012).
- 24 See Hala Sakakini, *Jerusalem and I: A Personal Record* (Amman: Economic Press Company, 1990).
- 25 See Liora Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920–1948* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).
- 26 See, for example, Suzanne Schneider, “Monolingualism and Education in Mandate Palestine,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 51 (2013): 68–74.
- 27 See Kark and Oren-Nordheim, *Jerusalem and Its Environs*.
- 28 For telephone statistics, see *Statistical Handbook of Middle Eastern Countries* (Jerusalem, 1945), 18 (listed under “telephone instruments”). For 1937 and 1938 radio license statistics, see *Report by His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Palestine and Trans-Jordan for the Year 1938* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1939), 276. Despite radio’s far greater popularity, there seems to have been

- some use of a “wired” radio transmission, a system of transmitting radio signals by wires or cables (including electric and telephone wires) rather than by radiating radio waves.
- 29 See “New Era in Telephone History: Jerusalem’s Automatic Exchange,” *Palestine Post*, 17 June 1938, 4.
 - 30 See Wasif Jawhariyyeh, *The Storyteller of Jerusalem: The Life and Times of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1900–1948*, ed. Salim Tamari and Issam Nasser, trans. Nada Elzeer, (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2014).
 - 31 See Reja-e Busailah, *In the Land of My Birth: A Palestinian Boyhood* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2017), location 434; Jawhariyyeh, *Storyteller of Jerusalem*, 189–90.
 - 32 See Nimrod Ben Zeev, “The Sound of Danger: Voice, Noise, and Risk in Building Material Production in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine,” *International Journal for History, Culture, and Modernity* 7 (2019): 492–503.
 - 33 Jawhariyyeh, Sakakini, and others also described poetry and other literary recitation playing important roles in their lives, both in formal school contexts and in informal, family contexts.
 - 34 The Israel State Archives includes numerous licensing records for cafés in towns around Mandate Palestine. See, for example, the 1947 file about the license for the Vienna Café in Jerusalem, ISA – Mandatory Organizations – Mandate Commerce – 000a143.
 - 35 See Maayan Hillel, “Constructing Modern Identity: New Patterns of Leisure and Recreation in Mandatory Palestine,” *Contemporary Levant* 4, no. 1 (2019): 75–90.
 - 36 See, for example: Ruth F. Davis, “Ethnomusicology and Political Ideology in Mandatory Palestine: Robert Lachmann’s ‘Oriental Music’ Projects,” *Music and Politics* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2010).
 - 37 Busailah, *In the Land of My Birth*; and Sakakini, *Jerusalem and I*.
 - 38 See Jawhariyyeh, *Storyteller of Jerusalem*; and Nammar, *Born in Jerusalem*. The Matson collection includes photographs of the cornerstone laying in 1935 and a street scene between 1940 and 1946. For the latter, see [Princess Mary Street with Rex Cinema in background, West Jerusalem], online at www.loc.gov/resource/matpc.12908/ (accessed 29 May 2021). NB: title created by LOC staff.
 - 39 For the film ads, see, for example, *Filastin*, 26 February 1936, 3. For the newspaper’s praise of Nagat ‘Ali’s performance and the radio station’s launch ceremony, see “The Broadcasting Station is Behind the People,” *Filastin*, 1 April 1936, 5.
 - 40 See “Palestine Station Schedule,” *Filastin*, 22 April 1939, 6.
 - 41 See Busailah, *In the Land of My Birth*, location 2040.
 - 42 See Ziad Fahmy, *Street Sounds: Listening to Everyday Life in Modern Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 49–51.
 - 43 Quoted in Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 63. For more on Salwa Sa‘id’s broadcasts, see Stanton, 140–47.
 - 44 See Elizabeth Brownson, *Palestinian Women and Muslim Family Law in the Mandate Period* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2019), 90.
 - 45 See Busailah, *In the Land of My Birth*.
 - 46 Kark and Oren-Nordheim, *Jerusalem and Its Environs*, 141.
 - 47 See Sakakini, *Jerusalem and I*, 103–4.
 - 48 Nammar, *Born in Jerusalem*, 25.
 - 49 See Busailah, *In the Land of My Birth*, location 2432.