

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: Albert Schuler's "Jaffa Gate"¹ and the History of Holy Land Photography

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"At the time these pictures were published, more photographs were being published of the Holy Land and Egypt than of any other part of the world ... which means that the ones you have are not so rare as if they were of, say, Canada."² This was the response that Gertrude Schuler received from the National Geographic Society as she tried to sell or donate her late father's photographic and lithographic collection. After much searching, John H. Chilcott, Professor of Anthropology Emeritus at the University of Arizona, recommended to Dr. Robert H. Dyson, Junior Director of the Penn Museum, that his wife's aunt had a collection that he believed would be useful for research purposes in the Penn Museum. Following Gertrude Schuler's death in December 1994, the collection of her father, Albert Schuler, was donated to the University of Pennsylvania Museum. This collection includes four albums of photographs Schuler took during his travels in Palestine, Egypt, and Switzerland from 1893 to 1897, as well as two travel guides, a dictionary, and a brief biographical manuscript of Albert Schuler himself.³ The photographs provide more than a glimpse into the reality of life at that time. They also illustrate the constructed, Orientalist notions of life in the region that were held by the visiting Europeans. "Jaffa Gate," in particular, is a strikingly beautiful photograph of the Jaffa Gate of Jerusalem's Old City, taken by Albert Schuler and colorized by the Photochrom Zürich company, that has a history of its own and represents much broader historical developments.

“Jaffa Gate” is one of the many photographs of the ‘Holy Land’ in Albert Schuler’s albums, two of which are devoted to Palestine. The Jaffa Gate is the focal point, but it is characteristic of many Holy Land photographs in the 1890s to present scenes “of busy markets and streets and include passersby and their animals.”⁴ The description of the photograph, provided by Photochrom Zürich, states “For centuries this was the most animated place before the gates of Jerusalem. This famous gate way is built in the angle and from the outside one cannot see into the city. At the time of Christ, the Tower of Hippicus occupied the present site of the Jaffa Gate, and at the epoch, the travelers from Rome or Greece would look in vain for a sign of “Cook’s Tours” as it now appears.”⁵ This description evokes the Biblical history of the Jaffa Gate into a snapshot of real life in Palestine. While Jaffa Gate was built in the 16th century by Suleiman and is thus not a Biblical site, the present site where it stands is reportedly the site of the Biblical Tower of Hippicus. Holy Land photography at the time often sought “to establish the historical authenticity of Biblical sites,” and “to prove the truth of Christianity with reference to a concrete, observable reality.”⁶ “Jaffa Gate” itself presents a snapshot of life in the Old City, but its description transforms it “into a living museum, its historical and contemporary character erased.”⁷

In the photograph, there is a sign directing travelers to Cook’s Tourist Office inside Jaffa Gate and a single carriage, perhaps carrying European travelers to this office. The carriage and sign are indicative of broader trends of international tourism. Thomas Cook & Son’s travel agency was one of the most prestigious and influential travel companies, producing the *Cook’s Tourists’ Handbook for Palestine and Syria* (1878). These guidebooks were “an important source of information for the nineteenth-century visitor to Jerusalem” and provided “practical information about the whereabouts of hotels, inns and hospices, as well as a wealth of information, tips, and advice about the city, sanitation, places to visit, religious customs, financial matters, and so forth.”⁸ In fact, Schuler’s collection at the

University Museum contains two of the guidebooks that he used when traveling throughout Palestine, Egypt, and Syria. These travel agencies and their guidebooks, especially Thomas Cook & Son, rapidly changed the tourism industry throughout the late 1800s.

Beginning in the 1860s, Thomas Cook & Son transformed international tourism by setting up official tours and by providing itineraries and coupons for transportation and housing, which could be prepaid and pre-arranged.⁹ The scene in “Jaffa Gate” took place in the 1890s during a boom in international tourism, aided by the introduction of American and German competitors to the Cook’s business, which previously held a monopoly over Holy Land tourism. These companies helped grow this “middle-class phenomenon” which subsequently fostered resentment among the upper and middle classes of Europe that “‘social inferiors’ would now be invading their favorite destinations in different parts of the world.”¹⁰ In reality, a tour to the Holy Land was inaccessible to the ‘lower classes’ of Europe. This fueled demand for Holy Land photography, matched by technological developments that “made it possible to reproduce images cheaply and en masse on picture postcards or as illustrations printed in magazines and books.”¹¹ The “Jaffa Gate” photograph thus serves as a representation of the parallel growth of the international tourism industry and developments within the photography business, which, together, increased accessibility of the Holy Land to the European and American publics.

In “Jaffa Gate,” prior to entering the gate, there is a market to the left and an unmarked building to the right. Presently, neither of these structures exist outside of the Jaffa Gate.¹² In that regard, this photograph captures this moment in time, while allowing the viewer to postulate the potential purposes of these structures. The small market on the left of Jaffa Gate likely provided a multitude of products to those entering the Old City by way of Jaffa Gate. This view is representative of the photographic genre of “straightforward portrayal” which gained popularity between 1876 and 1890,

in contrast with the staged genre that was popular at the time.¹³ While the prevailing rule in staged photography was that “the simpler and more authentic the photograph, the less often it was published,” many photographers, such as Schuler, shifted the genre toward “landscape scenes taken from a distance that included people moving about in marketplaces, busy city streets, or squares with fountains,” specifically “in the vicinity of landmarks that pilgrims and tourists frequented.”¹⁴ It is less important to know exactly what was sold at this market; the significance is inherent in its inclusion in the photograph as it has the capacity to represent an aspect of daily life in Palestine at this time as well as the broader trends in photography, particularly ‘Western’ photographers in the Middle East.

The left side of the photograph reveals that there was a structure outside of Jaffa Gate in the 1890s, when this photograph was taken, but provides no indication of its purpose. It is possible that this building was the first stop for travelers and pilgrims who “had first to deal with formal matters of quarantine before being allowed into the city. This was ordinarily done at the Jaffa Gate, where a certificate of health was presented and approved, before the traveler was let into the city.”¹⁵ In 1842, a traveler from England, named Reverend George Fisk, stated that “a sort of quarantine had been established at Jerusalem for fear of plague; and we were not permitted to enter till the medical officer had seen us... in a tent pitched near the gate.”¹⁶ Since Schuler took this photograph during his travels from 1893 to 1897, it is not unreasonable to assume that the medical office may have upgraded from a tent to this structure due to the growth of international tourism from Europe. The inclusion of this building in “Jaffa Gate” allows for insights and academic exploration into the past, as well as broader historical trends in tourism to the Holy Land.

The colorization of “Jaffa Gate” is significant and demonstrates the efficiency of the photochrom process that was used on the photograph. The process is indicated by the “characteristic caption in gold lettering along the base of the print, with a serial number and “P.Z.” for Photochrom,

Zürich.”¹⁷ This process was innovated by Orell Füssly, the company where Schuler was apprenticed and later commissioned from 1893 until 1897 to travel in the Middle East. The photochrom process was popularized and nearly perfected by the Photochrom Zürich company. The process was complex as “each color in the final print required a separate asphalt-coated lithographic stone, usually a minimum of six stones and often more than ten stones.”¹⁸ Since “one stone was required for each color...a registration system had to be designed that was so efficient that even today one needs a magnifying glass to discover minute imperfections in the printing process.”¹⁹ The prints made through this process “have almost the appearance of natural color photographs, although under a magnifying glass they will show a delicate grain pattern.”²⁰ The photochrom process enabled mass production of colorful prints, which were sold “at tourist sites and through mail order catalogs to globe trotters, armchair travelers, educators, and others to preserve in albums or put in display.”²¹ “Jaffa Gate” was likely taken by Schuler and colorized by Photochrom Zürich in order to be marketed to a mass public, driven by the developments in photography that permitted and increased the demand for these colorful prints of the Holy Land.

Beyond the broader historical and technical photography trends that “Jaffa Gate” represents, it also connects the Penn Museum to the history of Albert Schuler and Photochrom Zürich. Albert Schuler’s life was directed by his prowess in photography, as he achieved “success in the technical field,” while “the hoped for financial success, however, did not materialize.”²² Born in 1874 in Zürich, Schuler was known by his adopted name Albert Vollenweider during his youth. At the age of 14, he began his apprenticeship with Orell Füssly and, at the age of 19, he was commissioned to travel throughout the Middle East from 1893 to 1897. These travels produced the photographs that now belong to the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Following his travels, Schuler was assigned to establish a

subsidiary of Orell Füssly in North America, which ultimately brought these photographs to the United States.²³

In the United States, Schuler acquired the license for the photochrom process from Orell Füssly and established the Detroit Publishing Company, which manufactured prints and postcards, especially with scenes from national parks in the United States. However, the company was bankrupted by World War I as international tourism decreased and postal rates increased. After the bankruptcy, Schuler set out to innovate the photomechanical and colorization processes, searching “for ways to produce color prints at only half of the former price.”²⁴ Schuler’s innovation was a success – particularly for the advertisement industry. The ‘Schuler process’ spread throughout the United States, increasing the production of color advertisements. Schuler established “a plant of his own to exploit his invention profitably,” but was unable to turn his technical success into financial success.²⁵ After the venture failed, Schuler, along with his wife and daughters, moved to Royal Oak, a suburb of Detroit, where he lived until he died at the age of 80 years old.

“Jaffa Gate” is thus much more than a photograph of Jaffa Gate. It represents the legacy of Albert Schuler, who lives on through his photographic collection and his success in the field in spite of never attaining financial success. It represents the technical developments in the photography industry, and the many photomechanical and colorization processes that have failed and succeeded over time. Beyond Albert Schuler and the advancements in photography, however, it is a monument of the long and oftentimes problematic tradition of so-called ‘Holy Land photography.’ “Jaffa Gate” offers a snapshot in time, offering clues into the reality of life in Palestine, generally, and Jerusalem, specifically, while containing enough ambiguity for stimulating academic inquiry. Albert Schuler’s “Jaffa Gate” may just be one photograph, but it is emblematic of a broad and complex past that weaves together the

surprisingly interconnected histories of international tourism, the photography industry, Europeans in the Middle East, and the University of Pennsylvania Museum.



Courtesy of the Penn Museum, image no. 165978.

Josh Kadish was a member of the graduating class of 2019. During his time at Penn, Josh was a double major in Political Science and Modern Middle Eastern Studies and was ultimately told by his advisor that he was taking “too many” courses on Israel. Naturally, he decided to go to graduate school in Israel and is now studying Security and Diplomacy Studies at Tel Aviv University.

Endnotes

¹ “Jaffa Gate,” image no. 15008, MA1994-9, Albert Schuler Collection, Penn Museum Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, circa. 1893-1897.

² Correspondence from the National Geographic Society to Gertrude Schuler, 5 December 1994, MA1994-9, Albert Schuler Collection, Penn Museum Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

³ Albert Schuler Collection, MA1994-9, Penn Museum Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

⁴ Yeshayahu Nir, *The Bible and the image: the history of photography in the Holy Land, 1839-1899*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 195.

⁵ “Jaffa Gate,” image no. 15008, MA1994-9, Albert Schuler Collection, Penn Museum Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

⁶ Annelies Moors, “Presenting Palestine’s population premonitions of the Nakba,” *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* 1, (2001): 15-26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸ Rupert L. Chapman III, *Tourists, Travellers and Hotels in 19th-Century Jerusalem: On Mark Twain and Charles Warren at the Mediterranean Hotel*, (Routledge, 2018), 1.

⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁰ Ibid., 14-15.

¹¹ Moors, "Presenting Palestine's population premonitions of the Nakba," 16.

¹² "Jaffa Gate," Google Maps, accessed May 4, 2019,

<https://www.google.com/maps/@31.7766794,35.227316,3a,75y,70.21h,84.09t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sYfjpBMR78YCdc9hkbxnEjg!2e0!7i13312!8i6656>.

¹³ Nir, *The Bible and the image: the history of photography in the Holy Land*, 159.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Chapman III, *Tourists, Travellers and Hotels in 19th-Century Jerusalem*, 2.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John Hannavy, *Encyclopedia of nineteenth-century photography*, (Routledge, 2013), 1074.

¹⁸ "Photochrom Prints - The Photochrom Process," The Photochrom Process - Prints & Photographs Online Catalog (Library of Congress), January 01, 1890. Accessed April 14, 2019. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/pgz/process.html>.

¹⁹ Hannavy, *Encyclopedia of nineteenth-century photography*, 1074.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "Photochrom Prints - The Photochrom Process."

²² "Old Schlieren Villagers: Fragments from the Life of Albert Vollenweider-Schuler" by Gertrude Schuler, unpublished manuscript. MA1994-9, Penn Museum Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "Old Schlieren Villagers: Fragments from the Life of Albert Vollenweider-Schuler" by Gertrude Schuler, unpublished manuscript.

²⁵ Ibid.