10-1-1982

Phillips, Good, Bonfils, and the Human Image in Early Holy Land Photography

Yeshayahu Nir
Phillips, Good, Bonfils, and the Human Image in Early Holy Land Photography

This contents is available in Studies in Visual Communication: http://repository.upenn.edu/svc/vol8/iss4/3
Phillips, Good, Bonfils, and the Human Image in Early Holy Land Photography

Yeshayahu Nir

The work of a few early French and British photographers in the Holy Land and the Near East is a famous chapter in the history of photography. The region was part of the European historical consciousness. Biblical scenes were a perennial feature in the arts. Timeless landscapes and medieval monuments lit by the Eastern sun suited early photographic technologies as well as the period’s romantic and “Orientalist” attitudes. As a natural consequence, the Holy Land became one of the prominent subjects in early photography.

The first photographer had already arrived in Jerusalem by December 11, 1839, only four months after the dramatic publication of the invention of photography by Daguerre. And yet, the following two decades did not produce any portraits of local persons. Engraved reproductions of daguerreotypes printed in France and Great Britain included small drawn-in imaginary “enlivening” figures. These did not depict the local population; they merely indicated its presence in the scenery and its scale. George Bridges, an English clergyman, photographed at least twice in 1849 a figure that appears on his calotypes: both persons were dressed in European clothes and one of them was possibly Bridges himself. Nothing comparable to the millions of daguerreotype portraits produced all over the world in the 1840s and 1850s appeared in the Holy Land. The famous albums of calotypes produced in Jerusalem in the 1850s showed it as a ghost city. True, Jewish and Moslem traditions opposed the making of images. But this was only part of the story.

The first known picture with human figures was a “wet-plate” photograph signed Roberton and Beato, taken most probably in 1857. A single such picture, among two dozen included in their magnificent album, Jerusalem, published in 1865, showed a group of Jews praying at the Wailing Wall. It is a dignified beginning, not a breakthrough. The figures are medium-small silhouettes, part of the subject, not the subject itself. In the spring of 1858, Francis Frith captured on one of his many wet plates from Palestine another group of local inhabitants, at a similar distance from the camera. Rarely published, the photograph shows a ruin of an ancient arch near Ramleh, a town on the way from Jaffa to Jerusalem. In the shadow under the arch, a dark tent is pitched. The wet process necessitated the close proximity of the camera to the darkroom, and the tent most likely served this purpose. (“Because of the heat,” Frith wrote. “I used to develop my plates in ancient tombo...”) The figure in local dress, most likely, Frith’s own staff. Beato’s and Frith’s cameras were not suited to capturing unstaged scenes.

But technical problems also represented only a part of the story. A year later, an American traveler from Petersburg, Virginia, Dr. William Mason Turner, had his own likenesses taken in the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem by Deniss, a local photographer of Russian Protestant origin. Such “touristic pilgrim” portrait photography has been part of the local scene ever since. Peter Bergheim, another local photographer, a converted Jew, had such a portrait published in 1865, in the Ordinance Survey of Jerusalem, a well-known photographic album produced by the British

Yeshayahu Nir is a Senior Lecturer at the Hebrew University. He is also Consultant on the History of Photography in the Near East, Semitic Museum, Harvard University, and in 1981 was Visiting Professor, Department of Cinema Studies, New York University. Dr. Nir plays an active role in Israeli film and television policy-making and is a leading scholar and critic in these fields.

Figure 1 H. Phillips, “Group of Polish Jews, Jerusalem,” 1867. Albumen print.
Royal Engineers. It shows two women at the Wailing Wall, one most likely a local woman, her face completely veiled, the other facing the photographer in the characteristic pose of a tourist visiting a monument. Even at this place, no interdiction to photographs seems to have existed. The publishers of the album, uninterested in people, entitled the photograph “Detail of Masonry at the Wailing Wall.” In the 1860s, the studio at the Armenian convent took primacy in the trade. As a matter of fact, portrait photographs were produced in the Holy Land from the 1860s onward, but only in the 1880s found some distribution. Extant portraits from this period are rare; written evidence of them is almost nonexistent. I therefore considered these photographs and those of later decades as primary evidence of their own mode of production and their own history.

H. Phillips (1866–1887)

It was nearly three decades after the invention of photography before the first series of “ethnographic” portraits of the Holy Land’s inhabitants reached Europe. The first photographer to produce such pictures was Sergeant H. Phillips, Royal Engineers, of the Palestine Exploration Fund (P.E.F.) expedition, in 1867. The P.E.F. had designated “manners and customs” as an area for a future survey. Phillips made a modest start in this direction, although his superiors did not request such pictures at the time. His assignment related to sites in the investigated areas; he produced altogether 366 pictures. His twenty-seven “ethnographic” pictures showed, in descending order of numbers, Samaritans in Nablus; Armenian priests in Jerusalem; Arab village women in Jerusalem; Polish Jews (Figure 1); Russian pilgrims; and Ta’amirah Bedouins. There were a few single pictures related to the daily life: of a village, irrigation equipment, an “Arab Kawass” (consular clerk), women grinding corn, a threshing floor, a Bedouin camp. This was a remarkable achievement, the first of its kind. Significantly, it was made by a photographer attached to a scientific expedition, possibly in his spare time. As a survey, however, Phillips’s work was even more limited in scope than in quantity, and it was biased toward minorities. His choice and selection are of particular interest.

First, more than half of these pictures portrayed two of the smallest communities in the Holy Land, the Nablus Samaritans (Figure 2) and the Armenians in Jerusalem. The Samaritans of Nablus were an old indigenous sect less than two hundred in number. They obeyed the Pentateuch, rejecting the later Scriptures. Nablus is located on the route from Jerusalem to Nazareth frequently used by pilgrims. Francis Bedford, in 1862, and many later photographers took pictures of their Bible, a very ancient scroll. The Samaritans were literate and worked as clerks and crieres in Nablus. Their particular culture and status explain why traveling photographers found them both interesting and accessible: isolated among Moslems, they welcomed contacts with foreigners who were interested in their faith, and were far more open to them than the other townspeople, fiercely religious Moslems. Phillips took one photograph of Samaritans at prayer, and arranged the others as a group or a family in Europe might pose; he also took a photograph of the head of the community with the head of the exploration party.

The Armenian quarter is located on the way from the Jaffa Gate, the main entrance to Jerusalem for travelers coming from Jaffa Harbor to the Temple. The Armenian quarter is located on the way from the Jaffa Gate, the main entrance to Jerusalem for travelers coming from Jaffa Harbor to the Temple.
Mount. This latter site was the main subject of the P.E.F. excavations, to which Phillips was assigned. The Armenians were a tiny and respected enclave of some 400 Christians, and as such were easily accessible to Europeans. Involved as they already were at that time in photography, the Armenians must have welcomed Phillips, who took their portraits indoors, with his models, Armenian priests, in seated poses. The photographs of Armenians and Samaritans show no ethnographic element other than dress.

Second, only about one-third of the portraits show any of the more than 300,000 Arabs, the overwhelming majority of the population. These do not show the results of a systematic survey of Arab society and its "manners and customs" (the title of the section in the P.E.F. catalog) either. Photographs of villagers were mostly taken in Jerusalem. The Ta'annirah Bedouin were partly urbanized and worked in the tourist trade. Phillips’s Arabs at least partly belonged to the segments of the population most exposed to Western travelers’ "manners and customs." More accessible to photographers, they were less typical of peasants in the hill country, Bedouins in the desert, and the majority of the Moslem townspeople. Phillips’s photographs of Arabs represent a beginning but in no sense a representative sample.

Two of Phillips’s photographs show Jews, and the seven "models" in each picture are the same people; they merely changed their position, adding an overcoat and fur caps. A numbered hanger on the wall, in the background, indicates that the place where the photograph was taken was not the environment proper to the models but belonged to a European institution—perhaps the P.E.F. exploration party’s lodgings. I would not discard even the possibility that Phillips’s Jewish models were photographed at the premises of the London Jews Society, a missionary establishment and hospital founded by the Church of England and oriented toward the Jewish population, located between Jaffa Gate and the Armenian quarter. The use of the same setting and subjects twice perhaps illustrates the limited access to sitters. In Jerusalem, the biggest town, the majority of the population was Jewish, about 11,000 out of 19,000 in 1860. To make wider Jewish contacts as well as wider Moslem and Christian contacts—4,000 Jerusalemites were Christians—Phillips would have needed, perhaps, more time and interest than he had. In conclusion, the common denominator of all Phillips’s subjects appears to have been not representativeness but ease of access.

Phillips stayed in the country for a longer time than any of his predecessors and worked for an expedition that employed local manpower. Phillips was in this respect the most advantaged of his Victorian contemporaries. However, he did not and possibly could not show a cross-section of the majority of the local population and reflect authentically its "manners and customs." The relationship with local people that he and his party had was deeper than that of other foreign photographers and of longer duration, but it was limited to groups ethnically and socially marginal to the bulk of the local population. Phillips’s primacy also points to the importance of the photographers’ market. Traveling commercial photographers who worked in publishing apparently viewed their equipment, their profession, their publishers’ needs, and the public taste as related only to landscape photography; the P.E.F. catered to a noncommercial, highly interested audience. The buyers of Phillips’s photographs were the subscribers to the Exploration Fund. Photographs were distributed by the Fund’s organizational network in portfolios and loose pictures. The relationship between the P.E.F. party and the very specific groups of local inhabitants, on the one hand, and between the P.E.F. and its supporters, on the other hand, was an exception both in Palestine and in England. Of all wet-plate photographers, only Phillips had the advantage of both.

The caption "Two Women Grinding Corn," for one of Phillips’s photographs of Arabs, was followed in the P.E.F. catalogue printed in the 1890s by an interesting text in small letters: "Illustrating the prophecy: 'Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, the other left.' The corn is still ground in the manner shown, as in former days." The photograph was not included in the published portfolios; if the text was written by Phillips or his superior in 1867, it has to be considered an interesting precedent, an interpretation that became current in photography of later decades.
Frank Mason Good (1867, 1874)

Englishman F. M. Good was the last traveling landscape photographer of the wet-plate period to visit the country. The first definite information about his own work in the Holy Land is an article published in London in 1868, praising his stereoscopic pictures from the Holy Land. He was thus Phillips’s contemporary and counterpart in the commercial field.

Unfortunately, these pictures or their listings have not survived. In 1875 Good’s portfolio of new photographs from the Holy Land (photomechanically reproduced by the “woodburytype” process) was reviewed in London. Good still preferred the wet-plate process, although the new “dry-gelatin” process was already known and used. Good made some portraits but the reviewer did not mention them. For him, apparently, Holy Land photography was still synonymous with landscape.3 Representing a novelty in the commercial field, Good’s portraits are technically superior but formally not different from Phillips’s. His “Group of Native Women” (Figure 3) is a portrait of three sitting persons, taken from close range, in their natural environment. A drawing made after this photograph, entitled “Christian Oil Sellers,” was published by Dr. Lorlet in his luxurious travel account of 1884 entitled Syria Today. (Palestine had no political or traditional geographic identity and Holy Land photography were often entitled “Syria.”) The drawing was often reprinted in the 1890s. Another Good photograph shows “Pilgrims Bathing in the Jordan Near Jericho,” with the figures distant and small. This is a scene of a ritual in a holy place and recalls Beato’s photograph of the Wailing Wall; obviously, the former is not a photograph of local people.

Local people are portrayed in a new manner in another two of Good’s pictures. One, taken near Nablus, shows Arab men sitting at “Jacob’s Well,” revered as the place where Christ talked with the Samaritan woman. Water jugs are arranged next to the well. Normally, women (or children) carried jugs to and from wells; men are almost never seen near wells in later photographs. They may well have been Good’s own staff or, not less likely, guardians and guides at this place, a frequent subject of photographs in later decades. Frith’s photograph is a precedent, but here people were arranged by the photographer at a holy place and stared at him.

A real novelty was a photograph of “Fishing Boat on the Lake of Gezezareth.” People stand in their boat, busy with some chore, posing as if in action. Although too far away for faces or details of dress to be recognized, they are close enough to let us understand that they stood still for the sake of the photograph. The novelty is the strong biblical echo of the picture. We are here in the region linked to the story of Jesus Christ’s life. In Good’s and his buyers’ eyes, the fishermen were not a mere ethnographic or geographic subject. Good’s picture is, like Beato’s praying Jews, both from life and a metaphor rich in biblical connotations. The meaning of Good’s scene, however, is different. Beato’s subjects mourned after the glorious past; Good’s fishermen represented it in their daily work. Photographers who followed Good would share this approach and further develop this type of photography. It became a genre.

Good’s approach to people was consistent with his approach to landscape. Photographs of mountains, fields, trees, and villages abound in his work. Monumental architectural views and the topography of towns, subjects preferred by his predecessors, were to him secondary. Good’s photography may have been inspired by personal sensitivity or religious orientation to the natural landscape and the people who were part of it. Good may also have seen that his predecessors had saturated the market with views of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Dome of the Rock, the city gates, and so on, and had the wisdom to offer additional views—so well as portraits—which earlier had seemed marginal or less attractive. Allusions to the biblical inhabitants and customs allegedly represented by present-day inhabitants did no harm to sales.

Early wet-plate photographers and their clients seem to have resented having photographs of beautiful and impressive sites connoting the past “marrued” by the inclusion of Turkish soldiers and wretched-looking Hassidic Jews. That the most beautiful buildings on the Temple Mount represented postbiblical Moslem architecture, that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was of Byzantine origin and in the opinion of many nineteenth-century travelers and photographers of doubtful authenticity, did not lead in their eyes to denigration of the biblical images associated with the location. Ancient monuments spoke for ancient glory: that was the motto. Portraits of the present population could not but destroy this discourse. If nineteenth-century inhabitants were prominent in photographs of monuments, they would cause a transfer of connotation from the past to the present. Good added a new dimension, representing the landscape as seen through the eyes of the biblical figures. He mythologized the portrayed inhabitants and transformed them into representatives of the past. He saw both landscape and people historically, as related to the Bible. The approach was not new; theological and literary precedents are numerous. Good was the first to use it in his portfolio of photographs.

Neither Good nor any of the later photographers depicted Palestinian Jews in scenes representing David’s and Solomon’s kingdom. This role was reserved for Arab inhabitants. That many of Good’s human subjects were, as in Phillips’s series, Christians and tourist-trade people is another story. So is the fact that the Galilean (Ghizezarethian) fishermen did not share his biblical vision of themselves.
Felix Bonfils (1867–1884)

While Good was redefining Bible life and landscape, Felix Bonfils, a French photographer who settled in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1867, became the chief supplier of photographs for pilgrims and travelers, as well as for writers and publishers who bought from his stock. From the 1870s to the end of the century, Bonfils’ house produced landscapes, Bible scenes, and portraits of all kinds (Figures 4–14). On the level of technology, his work represented a bridge spanning the transition from wet-plate to dry-plate negatives and from single-album prints to mass-produced reproductions in books, magazines, and newspapers. By the time he published his catalogue in 1876 and his albums Souvenirs d’Orient (1877–1878), Bonfils’ image of the Holy Land was the image that became known in the Occident. Lortet’s Syria Today (1884) was illustrated by dozens of drawings made, among others, after Bonfils’ photographs. In the 1890s, when books became illustrated by photographs reproduced by the half-tone process, the Bonfils image dominated the market. This reflected the image this Frenchman had of the region as well as the image he had of his clients. These were as far from each other as could be imagined.

Bonfils’ photography of local inhabitants was manufactured in three categories: studio portraits of individuals and groups, staged outdoor “scenes,” and straight “documentary” pictures, arranged for exposure. Technically, there was a fourth category: montages composed from several negatives. A fifth category, Good’s biblical scenes, was more developed by others in the 1890s. Bonfils’ company made at least two contributions, with “Lazarus’ Tomb” and “Ruth and Boaz” (see Figure 7). These were outdoor photographs, as were Good’s and all other “biblical” scenes. The Eastern landscape was their only ingredient of authenticity. “Lazarus’ Tomb” is a place traditionally linked to the story of Christ’s activities in Bethany, near Jerusalem. There are two versions of this photograph. In both, one figure stands within the tomb and might be interpreted as “playing the role” of the biblical figure. The figures that surround the entrance might be the customary guardians. This is one of the rare photographs in which figures of inhabitants represent New Testament characters. Almost all “biblical” photographs relate Old Testament stories and figures, as does “Ruth and Boaz.” This photograph literally represents the scene, “models” personifying specific characters. Ruth, the poor girl, wearing a poor robe, women in the background wearing the better Bethlehem dress (used in Bonfils’ studio portrait “Bethlehem Woman”; see Figure 9). The rich landowner, Boaz, speaks to Ruth. The setting is neutral and the picture might have been staged near Beirut or Olochowro in the region. More than an allegory, this is a tableau vivant, exceptional to the Bonfils style.

Bonfils’ original contribution to Holy Land photography was his studio portraits, entitled, in the 1876 catalogue published by Bonfils himself, “Costume Views.” The least characteristic of real life, they were also the most successful. Many of them were technically superior to most outdoor portraits. Often used, and misused, they were attractive, lively, and “Westernized.” “A Jew from Beyrout” was one of the earliest published reproductions engraved after a Bonfils studio portrait. Printed in Lortet’s book, it showed a squatting Jew holding an implement for carding cotton. A head of the same person, now captioned “Polish Jew” (see Figure 4a) appeared as an engraving in a London magazine in 1885, on a plate of “Types of Palestine.” A year later, the same magazine published an engraving of the same figure holding the tool as “A Jew of Algiers” (see Figure 4b). A Swiss album of photographs carried it, reprinted by “phototypie,” an early photomechanical printing process, in 1887, with the caption, “A Jew of Jerusalem” (see Figure 5). A half-tone reproduction — using the modern and cheap process — of the same person, without the carder and also called “A Jew of Jerusalem,” was published in a Viennese book in 1892. No book credited the photographer.

Beirut, Algiers, Jerusalem? A cotton carder or a Bonfils model? The tool was indeed in use in Jerusalem — there is a Bonfils outdoor photograph showing it — but also in the entire Eastern Mediterranean region (see Figure 6). The fur cap and the black coat are authentically and unmistakably Eastern European Jewish. The striped robe beneath the coat was worn in Jerusalem; coat, robe, and cap appear in Phillips’ 1867 photograph of Jews in Jerusalem. Beard and sidelocks look authentically Jewish. The portrait itself is of professional quality and pose: the figure displays the tool (which looks like and recently was described to be a musical instrument) and is isolated from its real environment by a neutral gray studio background. Who the model was remains an enigma. The numerous and contradictory captions — due to error or to purposeful misuse — are no less typical of the period and of the use of Bonfils’ photographs than his photographic style and especially his studio “costume” portraits.

More often than not, Bonfils’ figures were overloaded with parts of costumes and decorations. A real “Young Woman from Nablus” (see Figure 11), this fiercely religious town in the hill country, would only very exceptionally, if at all, have decorated her headcovering with flowers, with jewels usually worn as pendants, and have painted her fingernails as she appears in a Bonfils photograph. Lortet’s book of 1904 includes a very similar drawing of a head, entitled “Lady from Beyrout.” It is more than likely that
the drawing was made after this or after another very similar photograph. The lady depicted could have been one of the Beirut "models" or a tourist who assembled her costume and head decorations from Bonfils' wardrobe. To be sure, there is some ethnographic truth in Bonfils' "Costume Views," but there is not all of the truth, and there is usually more than the truth. Sometimes the costume is typical and the wearing is not. Charming little locks that make the face of a "Turkish Woman" (see Figure 8) more coquettish quite transcend the Moslem rule that the head covering has to cover the hair. In a genre scene of a group of Bedouin women, faces unveiled (as usual in rural regions, in opposition to towns), clapping hands to accompany a musician, one young woman displays her breast. Even though there is a baby in her arms, the display is ostentatiously for the viewer. Bonfils has other similar portraits with and without babies. A naked breast does not transcend the local code of behavior. But together with other elements, the staged pose with the studio backdrop negates au

authenticity and represents one of Bonfils' many little voyeuristic sins — local color being only a pretext in an exploitative mode of photography.

Bonfils' Jewish female subjects are young, his Jewish male models old. So are, I too exclusively, his Arab models. Dragomans and kawasses (guides and consular guards) are often young.

Bonfils used neutral gray or romantic painted European backdrops. "Bethlehem Woman" and other models allegedly from this country were photographed against a background of birches, trees unknown in the region; the "Nablus Woman" and the "Bethlehem Bead Sellers" (see Figure 10) appeared with the same "salon" of decidedly European design behind their backs. Sometimes Bonfils treated the negative to disguise the familiar backdrops, elsewhere he modified the position of the props, most often of the papier-mâché stones and of plants. All these ingredients were arranged to make the "native" models both attractive and acceptable to the Western buyer. To do this, Bonfils simply applied the conven-
like Beirut, which he must have equated with European cities. Figures representing Palestine were usually standing, or when seated, used invisible stools or visible papier-mâché stones. His Bethlehem woman sat on these stones as if they were a European loveseat. Some figures sat on the floor.

Only one visitor left a written record describing Bonfils’ studio models. Abbe Raboisson, the French writer and photographer who toured the region in 1882, noted in his diary: “Sunday, 23 April: I have to take a group photograph of natives in Bonfils’ atelier which will allow me to acquaint our readers with the Moslem models procured for me by Madame Bonfils” (Raboisson 1887:317). No doubt this was a professional enterprise.

Also, only one written record relates to Bonfils’ outdoor photographs. The Reverend Lucien Gautier, who visited Palestine with his wife in the late 1890s, supplies accidental evidence about subjects Bonfils photographed on location. Gautier recognized some of his local acquaintances from a village in Upper Galilee “in the beautiful collection of photographs of Palestine in the Bonfils house in Beirut No. 729 under the caption ‘Group of Metrooquis’ showing our people from Hounin, among them the Moukhtar with his long pipe, and at his left our friend Oakid.” Not all of Bonfils’ portraits were “adapted” merchandise.

Gautier photographed the same people in Hounin and showed them his results. As he tells us, they failed to recognize themselves: “When our relationship with the inhabitants became closer and even intimate I tried to show them photographs, including photographs of some of those present. They stared at the image and unable to unravel the similarity they resorted to what seemed to them plausible . . . that the photographs were of the ‘Sultan’ or the ‘priest.’” (Gautier 1890:333–335). These villagers had faced a camera, possibly twice (Bonfils’ and Gautier’s), but they still did not understand that it was their own images being taken.

Lortet published a Bonfils’ Metrooquis picture in his 1884 book, and he tells a story that might throw some light on Gautier’s. While visiting a bigger Metrooquis township, Hanaoue, closer to the coastal towns of Tyre and Sidon, Lortet noticed that the interior of the houses was “covered by images, which is as opposed as possible to the Sunnite (Moslem) spirit. These are, first of all, the portrait of the Schah of Persia . . .” (Lortet 1884:134). Most likely, the Hounin people saw these images in Hanaoue or elsewhere and identified the concept of a picture with that of a ruler or dignitary.

Gautier’s story should not be generalized. Upper Galilee was a remote region. Nevertheless, photography was considered generally as the stranger’s affair. People gradually learned and accepted to pose for the former’s purpose and his money. But the biblical
metaphor or scene for which they were asked to stand or status-conferring European postures meant nothing to them.

For a traditionally noniconic culture and a society unexposed to technical novelties, photography was a one-sided process. "Closer and intimate" relationships as described by Gautier (who spoke Arabic) certainly helped the photographer to dissipate suspicions and create the proper atmosphere. Remuneration, small talk, politeness, and even intimidation could help, but the "Moukhtars" and the "Gáids" were only passive participants in the interaction between photographer and photographed. At the turn of the century, some travelers noted more active attitudes of "natives," who struck the anticipated poses and so reacted to a photographer's presence. Money was always the only and surest motif. Traveling photographers were not met with smiles and free response from the people to be photographed—this attitude was nonexistent until the end of the century.

Characteristically for Bonfils' commercial flair, he did not include any of his "costume views" or outdoor scenes in his own editions of the Souvenirs d'Orient published in 1877 and 1878, although his 1876 catalogue testifies without doubt to their availability prior to the publishing of the albums. Lortet, who traveled in the region between 1875 and 1880, either purchased the photographs in Beirut or after returning home to Paris. His 1884 book is the earliest source of visual evidence to Bonfils' studio and outdoor portraits.

The popularity of Bonfils' "costume" genre with editors in the 1880s and 1890s contrasts with a lack of interest in his straight portraits made on location in fields and streets between 1873 and 1890. Some were not published at all, others infrequently. Bonfils' photographs acquired by the Harvard Semitic Museum in 1890 included photographs of this type. The collection provides, of course, evidence of their worldwide availability by that time.

Bonfils' portraits and genre scenes owe their success to two composite layers, one relating to the person viewed, the other to the viewer. Costumes, head coverings, tools, represented the region, its way of life, figures and scenes as any traveler might have seen them. Their decorative mixture provided a romantic "Oriental" tonality. The conventions of the photographer's studio conveyed acceptability, prestige,
Figure 8: "Turkish Woman." Prototype reproduction. Original studio portrait attributed to Bonfils. Published in *Le Palestine Illustrée*, Lausanne, 1888.
Figure 9  “Bethlehem Woman.” Half-tone reproduction of the most popular Bonfils studio portrait, ca. 1880. See birch trees on painted backdrop. Published in Album de la Terre Sainte, Paris, 1896.

Figure 10  “Bethlehem Bead Seller.” Half-tone reproduction. Photograph by Bonfils, mounted from three negatives, merchandise paint-in. Published in Album de la Terre Sainte, Paris, 1896.
structure. “Costume” portraits obviously had to have some real ingredients and be realistic enough to be believable. They also had to conform to the viewer’s preconceptions and stereotypes, both of the Orient and of respectable bourgeois photography. Familiar European settings and poses modified and deviated from the reality of the country but guaranteed the reception of the foreign and exotic features of the subjects. Bonfils did not work for scrupulous ethnographers nor for the anticolonialist sensibilities of a later time. He offered organization and titillation, verisimilitude and kitsch, codes of behavior and their transgression, the recognizable and the strange. To today’s eyes, Bonfils’ portraits refer both to subject and audience; double reference is in their very nature.

The emergence of the human image in Holy Land photography appears generally to have been influenced by two factors—the degree of access to the various parts of the population a photographer could have had, which determined the number and choice of the portrayed subjects; and the cultural biases proper to the photographer and to his audience-market, which were felt mostly in the photographic interpretation of the accessible subjects. The classical history of photography is based on the consideration of contemporary photographic technologies, on the one hand, and of artistic trends on the other, as the main factors that influenced a traveling photographer’s work. Elements of social access and cultural bias were not less influential in determining the nature of his output. The role and importance of these factors in the history of photography in Israel and probably elsewhere equal those of more generally recognized technical and artistic factors.
Notes

1 Both Jewish and Moslem artistic traditions are decorative and mostly nonfigurative. Lack of tradition of portraiture and possibly also superstition contributed to the local reluctance toward photography. Moreover, given the general poverty and the technological gap, photography was considered a stranger's business: strangers, equipped with unknown instruments, were suspect. The assumption that Jewish and Moslem inhabitants of nineteenth-century Palestine refused to have their portraits taken for religious reasons cannot be substantiated by written evidence.

2 To produce large-format landscape photographs, wet-plate photographers had to use large-format cameras, as enlargement was not yet practicable. Large-format cameras necessitated long exposures, lasting sometimes for dozens of seconds. Hence, the smaller the picture in the figure, the less perceptible a blur caused by an eventual movement during exposure. Smaller cameras like the "stereoscopic" camera were available but not used; this decision points to the priority given to landscape photographs.

3 The Palestine Exploration Fund was founded in London in 1865 and conducted archeological and geographical research that culminated in the 1880s by the publication of the Survey of Western Palestine. The exploration was conducted by Royal Engineer officers, and the photographers belonged to the same army corps. Exploration of ethnography, called "manners and customs," was intended in very general terms for later periods of work but was never executed.

4 The Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews was founded in 1809 as a mission to London Jews. It operated in Jerusalem after 1829, and James Graham, its secretary, practiced photography there between 1854 and 1857. Peter Berggren's father, Paul, was the pharmaceutical assistant since 1839. Peter was educated at the missionary school and most likely initiated there into photography. J. A. Hanauer, a missionary, was acquainted with Captain Warren, one of the heads of the P.E.F. exploration party; an amateur photographer, he published in the late 1850s and early 1900s, many photographs of archeology.

5 Good's photographs from Palestine were reviewed in the London Photographic News of January 9, 1866, and August 20, 1875. Considered here one of the best landscape photographers in Britain, Good was later nominated a lifetime member of the Royal Photographic Society.

6 Bonfils' photographs were apparently first made known in 1871 in Paris. No portraits were mentioned. See Gavin 1876:456. Bonfils published his own catalogue in Alais, France, in 1876. This catalogue lists 32 photographs of 16x21 cm, entitled "Costumes Divers," of which three refer to Palestine. Another section, entitled "Costumes Stereoscopes," includes 98 pictures, of which 26 were allegedly taken in Palestine (Catalogue des Vues Photographiques de l'Orient, Egypte, Palestine (Terre Sainte), Syrie, Grece et Constantinople Photographies et Editees par Bonfils Felix, Alais (Gard), 1876). The "costume" pictures were most likely produced between 1873 and 1876; a short notice published in 1873 in Paris refers to the availability of this city of Bonfils' landscapes, in numbers sensibly close to those listed in Bonfils' own catalogue (Gautier de Clauziry 1873). No portraits were mentioned there. For Bonfils' family biography see Gavin et al. 1980. In his Harvard Library Bulletin article, Gavin writes, "Professor Nir contends that some Bonfils studies of Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem seem to show blind men who may not have known they were being photographed" (1978:457). This was never my interpretation; Gavin quotes from memory and must be referring to another source unknown to me.

Figure 13 "Rabbis Commenting the Talmud." Half-tone reproduction. Outdoor portrait Bonfils' signature and original caption partly erased. Published in Album du la Terre Sainte, Paris, 1896.
References

• Gaulier de Clauvery, H.

• Gautier, Lucien
  1899 Souvenirs de la Terre Sainte, avec 59 illustrations d’après des photographies de Mme Lucien Gautier. Lausanne: Georges Bridel & Cie.

• Gavin, Carney E. S.

• ———, Elizabeth Carella, and Ingeborg O’Reilly

• Lortet, Dr.

• Haddisson, T. 1806

Figure 14 “Group of Bedouins.” Half-tone reproduction. Bonfils studio portrait. Published in Hellig Jord. ed. by E. Blaumüller, Copenhagen, 1898.