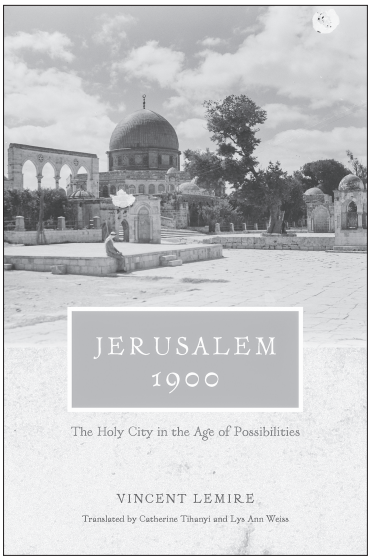

Jerusalem 1900: The Holy City in the Age of Possibilities, by Vincent Lemire, translated by Catherine Tihanyi and Lys Ann Weiss. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. 224 pages. $45.00 cloth, e-book available.

REVIEWED BY RANA BARAKAT

Jerusalem 1900: The Holy City in the Age of Possibilities is an English translation of Vince Lemire's book originally published in French in 2013. When it first appeared, the book enjoyed a receptive audience, both in terms of the actual text and the Open Jerusalem project that followed.‡ The thread that unites the book's chapters, as well as the subsequent project, can be summarized as "possibilities," which the author wields throughout. In his historical overview of Jerusalem in the years under investigation (1870–1900), Lemire describes the cosmopolitan nature of Ottomanism in Jerusalem. Rather than reading the city using a nationalist framework, whether Zionist or Arab, the author urges a kind of rereading of what was/what could have been. Lemire's "possibilities" (p. 5) in historical inquiry are the result of an exploration of "between time," (p. 2) employed by the author to battle the overdetermined hegemonic reading of Jerusalem as a site of conflict between Zionism and Palestinianism. Further, the author advocates for an unreading of the history of Jerusalem using what he describes as a local methodology and previously unused archival material (pp. 7–8).

Over seven chapters, in addition to the introduction and the conclusion, *Jerusalem 1900* explores a wide array of analytical tools that can be used for writing a new history of Jerusalem. These include critical cartography, toponymy, and spatial studies, particularly in reference to holy sites, signifiers, and landscape construction. Beginning in chapter 1, this historiographical critique rightfully takes on the modes of historical framing. Toward this goal, Lemire argues that properly reading the history of mapmaking reveals that prior to 1837, when the first European (British) consulate was built in Jerusalem, local cartographers had not inscribed any ethnoreligious divisions onto the city. Lemire contends that these foreign and imposed ethnoreligious signifiers were further institutionalized in the 1905 census, and he argues for focusing on the local as a remedy to the Orientalist historical framework. Thus, for example, local maps in Arabic are an alternative source to be consulted. Here, the politics of categories is a pivotal aspect of Lemire's argument. How did residents self-identify at the time and how much have historical Orientalist modalities affected how we read the past, he asks.

As his critique comes to life in the early chapters, Lemire offers the methodological means for unreading nationalist history. In disputing the "four-quarter" religious division of the Old City as a product of European reinvention, not only does social history trump retrospective genealogy, but questions of naming also arise: Whose toponymy of Jerusalem shall we adhere

‡ See the Open Jerusalem website, https://openjlem.hypotheses.org/.

to, local naming or the retrospective naming of spaces by nationalist historians? Segueing into the book's middle chapters, Lemire uses the notion of the Western gaze to argue that the history of Jerusalem is largely what the tourist gaze desired: a biblical Jerusalem as imagined through European eyes.

While the European literature he critiques in this survey is not all of the same variety or quality, or even contemporary to each other and the time period in question (the aesthetic of the ruin in European imagination came much earlier in the nineteenth century), the overall argument is a useful way of thinking about how the history of Jerusalem has denied the city its lived and local reality. Using Maurice Halbwachs as his informer, Lemire explains the potential fluidity of space and place in Jerusalem and how, once again, in Europe's desire to make the place holy and exclusively depicted as a pilgrim destination, Jerusalem's fluidity was lost to a sacred history of the city. This kind of foreign intervention, then, makes Jerusalem's story one of a history denied and conquest achieved.

Lemire presents a rereading of history and argues that to recover this forgotten Ottoman history of Jerusalem, one should explore new archives, sources, and methodology. Specifically and most notably, Lemire focused on the Ottoman archives of the municipality of Jerusalem. Prior to the 1993 opening of these archives, historians, as Lemire argues, relied mainly on foreign sources (that is, travel narratives or consular archives), and "these documents, which take an outside view of the city, tinged at best with a well-meaning orientalism and at worst with a total contempt for local reality, have helped bias perceptions of the city before World War I" (p. 7).

While Lemire's unreading is actually quite convincing, his rereading has subtle but significant political consequences. His focus on the municipality becomes his "proof" of what has been lost in history—the mixed nature of the institution as representative of Jerusalem as a place. In this focus, Lemire interestingly reads Jerusalem as an urban community.

However, it is also misleading, for as he describes the urban consciousness of the place, he reiterates a traditional and elitist history of Jerusalem with an equally questionable focus on the mixed nature of the running of the institution. Never clear in this reading of the municipality is that a significant portion of the community he discusses is settlers brought into Jerusalem through the work of Zionist settler colonialism, and this abstraction of a mixed community and shared history is one that elides the questions involved in settler conquest. This turn of the historical lens onto the municipality is key to his argument against overdetermined nationalist histories whose chronologies misrepresent or ignore the years of possibilities understood through historically preserving Ottoman modernity. Missing, however, in Lemire's critique is that Jerusalem, like the rest of Palestine, has been the site of Zionist settler colonialism. Moreover, the question of identity—of space, place, and people—looms large over this entire project. By the end of the book and his focus on "the enlightened ideals" of revolutionary thinking in Ottomanism, Lemire's liberal project becomes more clear. At times implicit, and at times quite explicit, Lemire is also making an argument about exceptionality and Jerusalem. Treating Jerusalem as an exclusive location, however, takes the "lived" out of this city as it did not (and does not) function separate from its surrounding geography. The mixed/shared and lived space in the constructed landscape of Lemire's rendering requires Jerusalem's removal from the past and present, which is in some ways a

reiteration of the city seen through the lens of the Orientalist gaze. Ottoman modernity can perhaps be saved in the historical record, but we must ask ourselves: at what cost and for what reason?

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