



Commemorations of Saladin (Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn) and Nation Formation in Palestine/Zion

Daniella Talmon-Heller, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev & Johannes Gutenberg-Universität

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Palestinian and Jewish/Zionist/Israeli academic and popular narratives about Saladin reveal a rich repertoire of remembering and forgetting. My paper analyzes his role in Palestinian and Zionist nation formation, based on an inquiry of the development of myths about the twelfth-century sultan, and his commemoration in texts and rituals. Six themes are explored. On the Palestinian side: the celebration of Saladin's Hattin victory of 1187 as an anti-colonial struggle marking the salvation of Muslim and Christian Palestinians from foreign rule; the attribution of popular annual shrine-visitation (mawāsīm) to Saladin's strategy; and Saladin's prominence in Palestinian toponyms and dating devices. On the Jewish side: Saladin's era as a golden age for Jews in medieval and modern historiography; Saladin as enabling Jewish resettlement and presence in the Land of Israel; and Saladin as a paragon of interfaith tolerance. Finally, the paper shows that the interweaving of "Saladin narratives" that establish territorial attachment to the ancestral homeland and its sacred sites was performed by the two national movements, which have been found to mirror each other in many other ways.

DANIELLA TALMON-HELLER is an associate professor at the department of Middle East Studies at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Currently, she is a Mercator Fellow at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität in Mainz. Her research interests include the history and historiography of the medieval Middle East, Islamic thought and practice, and comparative religion.

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Institute for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Societies

Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies

Lerchenweg 36

3012 Bern

www.islamwissenschaft.unibe.ch

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