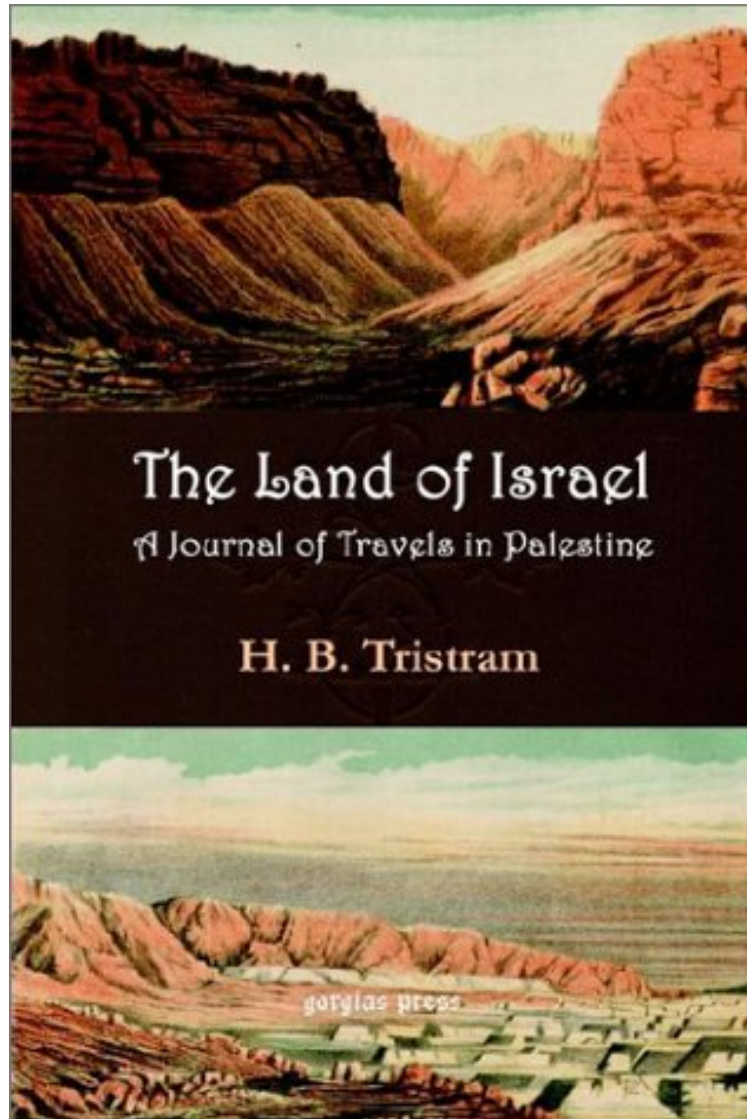


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The Land of Israel: A Journal of Travel in Palestine

Henry Baker Tristram, H. B. Tristram
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Henry Baker Tristram, H. B. Tristram : The Land of Israel: A Journal of Travel in Palestine before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Land of Israel: A Journal of Travel in Palestine:

13 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Unvarnished historyBy Alyssa A. LappenAs Moshe Brower reports in a 1994 Israel Affairs, earlier generations of travelers and scholars recorded considerable upheaval, distress, decline, droughts, disease, earthquakes, hostilities, and oppression in 19th century Israel. Villages were abandoned to

avoid onerous taxes, conscriptions and internal wars--ruins of which "remained well into the twentieth century." H.B. Tristram's 633-page *Land of Israel* is one such account. I am fortunate to own a copy of the fourth, 1882 edition. During 10 months, Tristram traveled the length and breadth of Israel with a "small party of friends, in 1863-4," whose object was to "convey the observations and impressions of each day as to the scenery, features and products of the country through which we were passing....," including drawings of his friends M.C.P. Medlycott and P. Egerton-Warburton and photographs of H.T. Bowman. The most significant thing about Tristram's log is its age; he wrote it in 1865, well before what Israelis call the first Aliya, when longtime Jewish residents were joined by others from Eastern Europe and elsewhere in the Middle East. Tristram's findings largely tracked those found earlier and later. Dr. Robinson's 1841 *Journal of Travels in the Year 1838* had recorded numerous disasters that left many Holy Land villages deserted and in ruins. Brawer similarly reports, a 1944 study based on detailed, then-recent Survey of Palestine maps and similar competent sources, listed 2,077 abandoned rural villages, hamlets and smaller sites and only 1,051 inhabited Arab and Jewish villages and 223 hamlets, some strictly temporary. Accompanying Tristram's party was Constantino, "a Greek by birth" and native of Chio, who had earlier traveled Israel with M. de Saulcy. He recalled the Muslim massacre of Greek infidels in April 1822, and the deportation of Chio's masses as slaves. Constantino had "escaped only to be sold as a slave boy into Egypt" (p.4). Evidently, massacres of Christians were fairly common, as Tristram reports such atrocities in Damascus and Hasbeiya in 1860, whose news had brought representatives of the Western Powers to "Beyrout." British Consul James Finn in his 1858 and 1860 reports to the Earl of Malmesbury also reported routine oppression and massacres of non-Muslims, as did Consul James H. Skene from Aleppo in 1859 and many others. Indeed, the author himself was attacked by stone-throwing Muslim boys, "who pelted me for a Christian dog." (p. 399) Taxes were equally oppressive. Tristram describes an Ottoman "system of finance which ruthlessly extorts an annual tax of several piastres for every fruit-tree from the very year it is planted, even when, as in the case of the olive, it is forty years before it arrives at perfection." Given the hardships and oppressive Turkish rule, it is not surprising that Tristram found the land largely barren and empty and its villages poor -- often, abandoned. In Jaffa, he found increasing development, the product of non-Muslim immigrants. A "Russian hospice is drawing a suburb along the Jaffa Road." Outside Jerusalem, Tristram likewise found more agriculture, in an area that six years earlier, he wrote, was barren and filled with rubbish heaps. Here, too, the development grew not from Muslim or Arab labor, but the efforts of Russians, Greeks and Jews. On the Bethlehem Road, Sir Moses Montifiore "has built a neat range of small houses for poor Jews, and both Greeks and Jews have been enclosing and cultivating largely on the slopes." Gardens that had previously been limited to cabbage patches on Mount Zion, now straggled down to the Hinnon Valley and beyond. Vines and olives were being planted. "The curse is upon the land," Tristram observed, "but it is the curse of poverty; not on its soil, but on its indolent, degraded, and oppressed inhabitants." The Ottoman system of corvee regularly pillaged animals and plantings. The hill fortress of Sanur north of Jaba, for example, had been destroyed following Robinson's 1838 visit. And nearby, Tristram found the large "meadow of sinking," the undrained Merj el Ghuruk swamp into which the hills emptied their spring rains. In Tiberias, similarly, the "Mohammedan quarter, is almost wholly in ruins, having been overthrown in the great earthquake of 1837." In fact, Tiberias was "almost exclusively a Jewish town," where residents opened their doors to welcome the Sabbath. This book is one of the sources cited by the wrongly maligned Joan Peters. It was also cited by Arieh Avneri in *Claim of Dispossession*. Tristram puts the lie to current-day myths surrounding 19th century "Palestine." Then known more commonly as Syria, the 19th Century Holy Land was little more than a ruined, oppressed wasteland, its roads ruled by brigands, where new immigrants were awakening agriculture and development and were eager to make the desert bloom. This impression was confirmed in 1904 by Schwobel, who found 329 inhabited rural Galilee areas--and at least 460 ruined villages and hamlets. Ottoman rule, another study found, brought devastation and abandonment to at least 50% of Hebron area villages and hamlets, 26-27% near Tulkarem-Nablus and 85% in Lower eastern Galilee and the central Jordan Valley. As Brawer shows--and we learn here, first hand--from a long-term perspective Israel's 1948 War of Independence constituted but one "destructive episode" in rural Palestine, albeit extensive. For a report unvarnished by modern day revisionists, look no further.--Alyssa A. Lappen

A fascinating travel journal in the Holy Land and neighboring countries by one of the most prominent writers of the nineteenth century, fully illustrated.