

The World War I Photo Archive in St. Anne Monastery, Old City of Jerusalem

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Although some of the Catholic religious communities in Jerusalem are old enough to have survived the rough conditions of World War I, few have kept a memory of it. This is for the clear reason that most of the monks or friars were foreigners and belonged to the “enemies” of the Ottomans after their entry into the conflict in November 1914. Among the nationalities that were declared enemies were the French, British, Russians, and, later, in August 1915, the Italians. All were subject to deportation or expulsion. Those same nationalities (French and Italian) were historically the main source of the surge of Catholic institutions in the Holy Land at the end of the nineteenth century. The Ottomans also decided to expel French and Russian (and later Italian) female religious communities, so the nuns’ institutions were evacuated. The result, for historians, is a lack of documentation from these religious communities. For instance, the French clergy of that time were simply absent from Jerusalem. The tradition of writing a diary in each community stopped for a period. A great deal of information, meanwhile, comes from the published war diary of the Spanish consul, Count de Ballobar.¹ Spain was not an enemy of the Ottomans, and Ballobar stayed in Jerusalem throughout the war. He was commissioned to be in charge of the “interest of the enemies’ religious communities.” His involvement with French Catholic communities is thus of tremendous importance for those wishing to know about the fate of those institutions between late 1914 and late 1917.

Additional documentation belonging to the Catholic community known as the “White Fathers” (in local Arabic, *al-Ṣalahiyya*) can be found in St. Anne Convent. Since it was an official French church, the main staff of the White Fathers went into exile. The first step, however, was actually to dismantle peacefully

their seminary for Arab youths from the Greek Catholic, or Melkite, local church. The community itself, prior to deportation, decided to send the boys back to their families in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Transjordan, for security reasons. The staff remained alone, awaiting the sad events of November 1914. The French themselves went back to Europe. The buildings accordingly remained almost empty. But a kernel of five Dutch friars (non-priest clerics) and one priest – Nicolaas van der Vliet – stayed behind and kept the institution running with great difficulty. Although the Netherlands were not part of the war against the Ottomans, the Ottoman military administration nevertheless took over all the buildings except the church proper.

The Dutch White Father Nicolaas van der Vliet (1876–1966) spent most of his life – from 1901 to 1949 – in Jerusalem. At the time of World War I, he was in charge of the administration and finance, the “bursar” of the community and the seminary. We have inherited from him two precious items: a small set of personal photographs; and a diary written in French just at the end of the war. The diary has been printed as a leaflet by the Franciscan Printing Press in 1921, and rare exemplars are probably available.² The one we read was provided to us by his nephew, Father Tom Wijffel, himself a White Father at St. Anne.³ The war diary covers late 1914 and all of 1915, but, sadly and strangely, nothing of 1916. We also found six pages he typed on an old typewriter, a copy of his handwritten diary dating from late 1917 to the beginning of 1918, titled “The Liberation of Jerusalem.”

This article aims primarily to present van der Vliet’s previously unpublished photographs, which we had the chance to scan at the École Biblique photo archive. This was done as part of the broader program of scanning their complete photo archive. Thanks to the kind co-operation of Father Frans Bouwen, we began scanning in 2010, and have now reached a total of 2,246 old photos from St. Anne’s archive, including 705 glass negatives. In this case, the originals are not negatives, but small prints, with some captions in French.

Nicolaas van der Vliet used a camera of the “folding” type. We can see the case in image 1127, in the right hand of Spanish consul Ballobar (the left hand holds a small cigar). This photo and another (image 1126, not shown here) were taken at the same moment, and we can guess the game: image 1126 was shot by Ballobar, who is absent from the scenery, while Father van der Vliet is sited on the lower step, right; image 1127 is the opposite shot: Ballobar is there, joyfully extending his arms, and the photo is taken by van der Vliet, who is (logically) not seen in the shot. All of this is dated precisely to Sunday, 14 November 1915, when the men spent the morning at Tantur and the afternoon at Artas.⁴ The venue in these images is the Artas church. Information on the others pictured can be drawn from images 1128 and 1129 in the collection (not shown here). By chance, image 1129 has the names written underneath: “Souvenir d’excursion à Tantour. R. P. v/d Vliet, Mgr. Fellingner, Mr. le Consul d’Autriche, Mr. le Vice-Consul d’Autriche.” These four are also in the two photos, images 1126 and 1127, at Artas. We can identify the vice-consul of Austria who is wearing the same jacket in both sets of photos – at Artas, he is standing close to the lady. The consul of Austria, Mr. Krauss, is seated on the middle step, close to Mgr. Fellingner. This last gentleman was an Austrian Catholic



Image 1127. Spanish consul Ballobar (arms extended) and others gathered in front of the Artas church, 14 November 1915, photograph by Nicolaas van der Vliet.

prelate, serving in Jerusalem as the caretaker of the Austrian Hospice in the Old City. Standing on the right is Father ‘Isa Bandak, caretaker of Artas; the other priest, seated on left, is not identified (he is also in image 1128). A shared connection emerges from these four photos: Spain, the Netherlands, and Austria, three “neutral” – or even, in the case of Austria, Ottoman-allied – nationalities during the war.

Some of these individuals also appear connected to Jamal Pasha in a curious, unofficial way, as some photos *infra* will show – a state of affairs confirmed by the diary of Count de Ballobar, who wrote about his links with Jamal Pasha and the kind of friendship the commander of the Fourth Army granted to him. Before turning to Jamal Pasha, who appears in few photographs from the van der Vliet collection, let us explore other links between Ballobar and van der Vliet. These shed light on some experience shared by both during World War I, as attested, too, in both men’s diaries.

Images 1131 and 1139 – as well as images 1130, 1133, 1140, and 1141, not included here – show the guests of the Spanish consul Ballobar, including Father van der Vliet, going on a visit to Jericho for fun. The French caption reads: “En route pour Jéricho, avril 1915.” Ballobar’s published war diary corroborates the captions on the photos,⁵ as does the war diary of van der Vliet: “Wednesday, 21 March 1915. The consul of Spain invited me to go with him to Jericho next Saturday. We will stay there a few days. As there is nothing special to do now, I accept.”⁶ In fact, the trip to Jericho began on Friday, 23 April 1915, and finished on the afternoon of Sunday, 25 April.⁷ In image 1130, taken by van der Vliet, Ballobar is leaning against his carriage – notice his consular guard (*qawwas*), ‘Abid, who will help us in the identification of other photos. The gentleman with a *tarbush* is Mr. Ra’uf Lorenzo, the dragoman of the Spanish consulate.⁸ In image 1131, Father van der Vliet is standing close to the employees of the Spanish consul. The



Image 1139. Father van der Vliet at the Dead Sea, April 1915.



Image 1137. "Ermitage de Aïn Hogla, dans la plaine de Jéricho, 12 février 1916. Mr. Hasboun. R.P. v/d Vliet; R. P. Serapion; Mr. Bchara Massoum."



Image 1131. Father van der Vliet and employees of the Spanish consul, including the *qawwas*, who stands with an open umbrella, in Jericho, April 1915.

qawwas stands with open umbrella, used as a true *shamshiyya* against the sun. Van der Vliet has a bag on his right shoulder, and the camera case. In between the two shots, the carriage has been moved (in 1130, the horses are drinking). In image 1133, we see Ballobar and his *qawwas* visiting the archaeological dig of Tal al-Sultan (photo by van der Vliet). The caption reads: “Murs de l’ancienne Jéricho, avril 1915. Mr le Comte de Ballobar.” Another photo is symmetrical: Father van der Vliet among the ruins of Tal al-Sultan, taken by his friend, Ballobar. Another photo, image 466, by van der Vliet, shows Ballobar on the top of the Mount of Temptation in Jericho. The caption is: “Au sommet de la Quarantaine, avril 1915.” The diary of van der Vliet says that this was on the first day of the trip, Friday, 23 April, at 4 PM; Ballobar’s diary also mentions the visit to the Mount of Temptation.⁹ On the same trip to Jericho, the party went to the Dead Sea. Images 1139, 1140, and 1141, again present the now familiar alternation of the two photographers, van der Vliet and Ballobar. One caption reads: “Comte de Ballobar au bord de la mer morte, avril 1915.”

Father Nicolaas van der Vliet also went hunting in the Jericho area with Ballobar in 1916, as is shown in four photos from his camera. In his diary, Ballobar wrote on 15 February 1916: “I have returned from a hunting excursion to Jericho, where I went with the Dutch priest Van der Vliet.”¹⁰ The photos don’t show Ballobar himself – presumably because he is the photographer. Rather, in each of the four photos, van der Vliet is portrayed. The caption of image 1135 (not shown here) reads: “À la chasse dans les dunes du Jourdain, 12 février 1916. P. V.D. Vliet ; Cte de Ballobar” – evidence at the actual presence of Ballobar. We see Father van der Vliet holding a double barreled hunting gun. The other hunters are named in the caption of image 1137: “Ermitage de Aïn Hogla, dans la plaine de Jéricho, 12 février 1916. Mr. Hasboun. R.P. v/d Vliet; R. P. Serapion; Mr. Bchara Massoum.” We



Image 1121. "Jamil Bey, Director of the Koullie Salaheddin. Pasha of Damascus." March 1917.



Image 1149. Count de Ballobar (far right), Jamal Pasha (second from right), the Greek consul, Mr. Raphaël, with his hat (second from left), and an unidentified consul (far left), 1916.

see three of the four hunters nicely in image 1135: Mr. Hasboun on the left, Father van der Vliet in center, and Mr. Bchara Massoum on the right. The fourth hunter is Ballobar, behind the camera.

Now, let us turn to the small photos of Jamal Pasha . . . They are anecdotal, surely, and will not change anything in the history of the Great War. They serve to illustrate, however, the published memoir of Count de Ballobar, who describes how Jamal used to rest at Artas, away from his military staff, and drink alcohol, mainly champagne, with foreigners. We discover here that Artas was not the only place where Jamal Pasha drank. Image 1148 is the best, on account of its amusing caption: “Jamal Pacha, après une orgie” – which we should understand to mean, Jamal Pasha after a drinking party.¹¹



Image 1148. “Jamal Pacha, après une orgie,” 1916.

Another copy of the same print, in St. Anne’s collection, bears the caption, “Jammal [*sic*] Pacha à Jéricho avec des Consuls, 1916”; and a third copy, “Jamal Pacha. Consul de Grèce, à Jéricho 1916” – the words “Consul de Grèce” (Greek consul) are written under the man seated with a cigarette. So, three copies of the same little print exist. Question: Are they from the camera of van der Vliet? If so, we must surmise that, though the camera was his, the venerable priest Father Nicolaas van der Vliet was not himself the photographer, as he was not a friend of Jamal Pasha – and certainly not one used to frequenting *orgies*. The photographer is presumably the gentleman missing in the photos. There were four consuls: the Greek consul, identified by the caption; Ballobar (seen in image 1149, and, perhaps, his white colonial hat on the table, image 1147, not shown here); and two other consuls (seen in images 1148 and 1149). Four of the gentlemen, including Jamal Pasha, were horseback riding, as indicated by their dress and boots. (Father van der Vliet was not at all known to partake of riding – a further clue that he was not present. It is likely that he received the prints as a gift from Ballobar.) In image 1149, Jamal is center, Count de Ballobar is on the right, and the Greek consul, Mr. Raphaël is to the center-left, with his hat.¹² The fourth gentleman, far left, has a tiny camera in his hand, which appears also in image 1148. The same group appears in image 1147, sitting in the garden of their hotel in Jericho. Jamal Pasha is in the shadow, left; the Greek consul is seated with his hat; as for the two other consuls, one is seated at right and the other is standing. The fourth consul should be Ballobar, taking the picture.

One more question for the historian-archivist: Is it the case that Khalil Raad, professional photographer, could have been on the seashore of the Dead Sea the same day? The famous photography of Jamal on horseback, image 1150 (not shown here), is from Raad’s studio. But Jamal Pasha could have been riding around Jericho many times,



Image 1191. “Fr. Prölle, from Trier, at Nablus.”

with consuls and with others. In any case, the riding excursions to Jericho pleased Jamal Pasha, and he commanded Raad to take his portrait on horseback there.

Another photo, image 1121, is connected to the fate of St. Anne’s convent during the Great War. On the cardboard to which this little print is glued, it is written “March 1917.” The names of the main Turkish officials are written directly on it: “Jamil Bey, Director of the Koullie Salaheddin. Pasha of Damascus.” The pasha has a nice camera in his hands. We don’t know who took the photo, surely not van der Vliet. Could it be Khalil Raad?

Two photos from St. Anne, not included here, display German soldiers in Nazareth – image 1183 bears the caption, “Germans in the Salesian Convent, Nazareth”; image 1184, “Nazareth, 1918” – and one in Nablus. This last, image 1191, stranger still, is captioned, “Fr. Prölle, from Trier, at Nablus.”¹³ The meaning must be that the German soldier in Nablus is a Catholic cleric, a friar, originating from the German city of Trier. Is he a Salesian, connected to the Salesian monastery of Nazareth? But why are the three photos of German soldiers kept today in the St. Anne photo collection?

Another photo from the collection, image 1185, appears with the caption “Prison, Caïffa” – a jail in Haifa. It reminds us of the rough conditions for so many Palestinians in those times. Here, they are in jail, guarded by Ottoman soldiers. From their dress, it is clear they are not military prisoners. On the very left margin, we might divine another German soldier (from his cap, the same as in images 1183, 1184, and 1191). The presence of this German soldier (a Catholic, probably) explains why this photo is included in the set of German (Catholic) soldiers’ photos kept at St. Anne.



Image 1185. "Prison, Caïffa."

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Endnotes

- 1 Antonio de la Cierva y Lewita, Conde de Ballobar, *Diario de Jerusalén, 1914–1919*, ed. Eduardo Manzano Moreno (Madrid: Nerea, 1996); translated into English as: *Jerusalem in World War I: The Palestine Diary of a European Diplomat, Conde de Ballobar*, ed. Eduardo Manzano Moreno and Roberto Mazza (London: I. B. Taurus, 2011).
- 2 Nicolaas van der Vliet, *Journal de Guerre* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1921).
- 3 Nicolaas van der Vliet was the brother of Rev. Wijffel's mother.
- 4 In the printed war diary of Nicolaas van der Vliet, *Journal de Guerre*, ch. 19, p. 4.
- 5 Such independent crosschecking is most welcome. Ballobar's war diary records: "26 April 1915. . . / . . . I have taken an excursion to Jericho in the company of Rafael Lorenzo and Father Van der Vliet, a Dutchman." Ballobar, *Jerusalem in World War I*, 61.
- 6 French original: "Mercredi 21, 1915. Le consul d'Espagne me propose de l'accompagner à Jéricho pour samedi prochain. Nous y resterons quelques jours. Comme il n'y a rien de particulier en perspective, j'accepte." Van der Vliet, *Journal de Guerre*, 80–81.
- 7 Van der Vliet, *Journal de Guerre*, 81–82.
- 8 In his diary, Ballobar sometimes refers to Lorenzo as Rafael – for Ballobar, equivalent to Ra'uf (see quotation in endnote 4, above).
- 9 Ballobar, *Jerusalem in World War I*, 61.
- 10 "15 February 1916. I have returned from a hunting excursion to Jericho, where I went with the Dutch priest Van der Vliet." Ballobar, *Jerusalem in World War I*, 88.
- 11 The war diary of Ballobar gives some clue about those drinking parties (and poker games) at Artas. See Ballobar, *Jerusalem in World War I*, 112.
- 12 Name given in Ballobar, *Jerusalem in World War I*, 34.
- 13 The two original captions are: "Allemands dans couvent des Salésiens, Nazareth" and "Fr. Prölle, de Trèves, à Naplouse."