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# Martyrdom, Liberation, and Belonging: An Ethnography on the Popular Saint George Veneration among Palestinian Christians

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**ABSTRACT:** Among the broad religious spectrum of the Levant, the figure of Saint George/Al-Khader stands out. As the patron saint of Palestine, Saint George is one of the most popular saints among Palestinian Christians. Traditionally, the popular Saint George veneration has been associated with phenomena such as Canaanite rituals, shared shrines, blood sacrifices, and rural culture. This centuries-old practice survived and is still widely alive among local Palestinian Christians. Based on a critical study of textual sources and twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork in the West Bank, this article provides an ethnographic-theological account on the Palestinian Saint George veneration, focusing on the controversial political uses and the spiritual meaning of this figure in the Palestinian context. I argue that this popular faith expression has transformed from a cult focused on human flourishing to a platform for grassroots theological ideas, mainly concerning themes like martyrdom, liberation, and belonging to the land.

**KEYWORDS:** Al-Khader, ethnography, grassroots theology, Palestinian Christianity, Saint George

## Ethnography, Theology, and World Christianity

Traveling to Palestinian Christian communities, one notices the presence of Saint George nearly everywhere. Numerous churches are dedicated to the saint, a sculpture of Saint George is found above the doorway of many Christian

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houses or at central places in villages and towns, and a significant number of boys are named after him. Some Palestinians, specifically children, wear an image of the hero on a pendant and others have even tattooed Saint George on their body, in particular the right underarm. As patron saint of Palestine, Saint George is no doubt one of the most popular saints among Palestinian Christians, not only in Palestine but also all over the Middle East, with especially interesting local practices in Palestine, Syria, and Turkey (see Couroucli 2010; Wolper 2000). He is also the patron saint of England, Catalonia, Portugal, Lithuania, Serbia, Georgia, and Ethiopia. The popularity of Saint George is widespread and the legend knows many faces, which demonstrates his adaptability to interact with diverse cultural and political environments in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

Many people know the image of the young, strong, medieval-looking knight on his rearing horse slaying the dragon with a long spear. Relatively unknown is the story behind the icon, the controversial political uses and the spiritual meaning this figure has for people. In this article, I provide an ethnographic-theological account on the Palestinian Saint George veneration. I am most interested in the social and religious practices involving Saint George, and in the theological and ideological ideas that form the basis for those activities or are developing from it. I argue that the characteristics of Saint George are to be sought in the behavior of those who interact with them (Manuira 2009). Like Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille have argued in their edited volume on sainthood in the Middle East, transposing Clifford Geertz's classical formulation: "Sainthood can be understood as particular nested relationships with extraordinary persons, living or dead, that function as models *of* and *for* action" (Bandak and Bille 2013, 12). Thus, sainthood goes beyond the religious domain. This article is based on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork between August 2017 and August 2018 in the Palestinian Christian village Taybeh, a small, traditional, rural village in the West Bank. Taybeh is located ten miles northeast of Ramallah and has about 1,300 inhabitants.

In order to understand the Palestinian Saint George veneration, one needs to study the social, political, and theological dilemmas Palestinian Christians are facing, by using theological and ethnographic research methods. The Christian commitment of theology and the secular nature of anthropology and ethnography seem to be radically opposed. From the 2000s onward, however, developments in World Christianity and other related fields brought the academic discourse to a point where the rigid boundaries between theology, anthropology, and ethnography became more porous. First, I would like to mention the ethnographic turn in theology. Theologians like Mary McClintock Fulkerson (2007), Christian Scharen and A. M. Vigen (2011), Natalie Wigg-Stevenson (2014), and Pete Ward (2017) started to use ethnographic research methods as a

means to ask and answer theological questions. They argue that theology could not just be a “texts-about-texts” any longer, and that it must also be a reflection of the many forms of wisdoms that are to be found in nonacademic places. Second, a group of anthropologists, led by Joel Robbins and Fenella Cannell, started to advocate for an anthropology of Christianity (Cannell 2006). Their work brought the discipline to a point where some anthropologists developed an interest in the dialogue with theology.<sup>1</sup> In 2006 Robbins published an article underlining the “awkwardness” of the relationship between anthropology and theology, yet he argues to move beyond treating theology with suspicion and be open to transformation and revision by theologians.

World Christianity could be the field *par excellence* to merge ethnography and theology in a transformative way. Where anthropologists and theologians could be limited to the framework of their own disciplinary background, World Christianity scholars have this certain flexibility and elasticity that their field of studies allows them. The history of the discipline does not only allow interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity, it encourages scholars to look beyond the known. Peter Phan (2008) has, for example, argued that in the context of World Christianity theology expands to new sources and resources, namely the ordinary people, stories of women, texts and practices of non-Western religions, philosophy, monastic traditions, and non-Western cultures. Another example is Diane Stinton’s (2004) work on African Christologies, for which she not only studied African texts, but also interviewed ordinary African Christians in Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana. However, expanding the theological sources and solely relying on interviewing is not enough. Here comes the importance of ethnography. The holistic approach of ethnography leads to a rich analysis with sometimes unexpected insights that otherwise might be overlooked. This could be called “implicit theology,” a term borrowed from Edward Bailey (1997), which is a form of nontextual theology that is found in such sources as people, language, art, social norms, or social structures. Thus, ethnography is a method that accesses both the human experience and the experience of the divine. The task of the researcher is to be in conversation with the people being studied and to articulate the contextualized theological understandings operative in their lives.

By using this methodology, I intend to formulate the implicit grassroots theology of Palestinian Christians concerning the Palestinian Saint George veneration. I will demonstrate that this brings us a more contextualized and richer textured understanding of the Palestinian Saint George veneration. Accordingly, the first section of this article provides an ethnographic description of traditional religious expressions related to Saint George. In the second and main part of this article, I argue that in the changing context of Palestine, this popular faith expression has turned into a platform for grassroots theological ideas, mainly concerning the themes of martyrdom, liberation, and belonging.

## Levantine Piety of “*Nidhr*” and “*Baraka*”

According to the Christian tradition, Saint George was born in 275 CE in Cappadocia, current Turkey. After the martyrdom of his father, he fled with his mother to Lod, Palestine—the homeland of his mother. In 303 CE Roman emperor Diocletian started to persecute the Christians. Not succumbing to this threat, Saint George held on to his Christian faith and eventually died as a martyr by beheading. Hence, Saint George has a mixed Turkish-Palestinian origin, explaining the popularity of this saint in Anatolia and the Levant. The oldest testimonies of the Saint George cult date back to the sixth century in Lod, a city in current Israel with a Greek Orthodox monastery dedicated to Saint George and a church housing the bones of the saint (Bagatti 2010, 197). Another center of the Saint George veneration is a monastery in the small Muslim-village of Al-Khader, near Bethlehem, dating from the seventh century (Bagatti 2002, 32).

Anthropologist Ali Qleibo (2013) noted that the feasts of Saint George are associated with the agricultural calendar: the feast in November in Lod parallels the disseminating of the seeds for wheat, and the feast in April/May in Al-Khader near Bethlehem marks the harvest of the grain. During the feast in Al-Khader in May, people buy bread from the church with stamps of Saint George, symbolizing the harvest of the grain. The Saint George churches in Lod and Al-Khader are popular places for seasonal pilgrims.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, there are about thirty-five local Saint George shrines (sg: ‘*maqām*’, pl: ‘*maqāmāt*’) in Israel-Palestine, and about thirty shrines in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan together (Augustinović 1972).

One of those local shrines is the sixth-century ruin of a Byzantine church in Taybeh. Taybeh is unique in the sense that it has a fully Christian population, while only 1.7 percent of the population of Israel and the Palestinian Territories are Christian (Raheb 2017, 9). Saint George is the patron saint of the village and thus is their Saint George veneration lively. The locals pray on this site, light candles, make blood sacrifices, and bring votive offerings to a cave on the site, such as candles, icons, statues, rosaries, and crosses. These votive offerings and the blood sacrifices are made after fulfillment of a vow (*nidhr*) to Saint George, mainly concerning healing, pregnancy, or financial success. I have recorded several cases where the locals believe people have been healed from cancer, a case where a blind woman was healed, one where Saint George protected a man during a major surgery, and several cases where Saint George blessed a couple with a baby boy, the preferred gender in the Arab society. To fulfill the vow, one slaughters a sheep ritually on the threshold of the ancient church, according to the way of the *al-dhabīḥa*, by cutting the throat of the sheep and let it bleed to death. The butcher of the village usually performs these actions. After that, people (especially women) dip their hands in the blood and imprint them on the walls of the ruin by way of blessing. In case a baby boy is given by the saint, this child gets the

name “George” or “Jerjes,” the Arabic Christian name for the saint. These children will be dedicated to the saint, and the parents promise to visit the church or shrine when the baby is one year old. Other ways to fulfill the vow is to bring oil, incense, or candles to the shrine, to donate money or the first fruits of the harvest to the church, or perform ritual practices like fasting or walking barefoot to a church—this will all be done according to the vow made to Saint George.

Another traditional religious practice related to Saint George veneration in the Levant is the concept of *baraka*, which means “blessing” or the power that is present in holy places, holy people, and holy objects (Laird 2013). Based on this idea, people touch icons and tombs, dip their hands in oil or blood, kiss the hand of living holy people or touch their garments. Locals believe that praying in holy places is more holy, when one could sometimes hear the hooves of the horse of Saint George while praying, or even see him in visions or dreams. The *baraka* is why saints have certain powers: Saint George is associated with the cycle of life,



Figure 1 | Al-Khader in Taybeh. This picture features the Saint George shrine in Taybeh. The stairs lead to a rocky area, where the locals believe that Gideon received the sign of the fleece, as described in Judges 6:36–40. Behind the wall is a cave where locals bring votive offerings, such as candles, olive-wooden crosses, rosaries, and icons of popular saints (not exclusively of Saint George). In the background, the ruined Saint George church is visible. The blood sacrifices find place on the threshold of the ancient church. Photo by Elizabeth Martejijn.

fertility, power over nature—the reason why people could pray to Saint George for rain—and healing. Oral history records stories of children being healed, notably stories of children with speech impediment, or persons with mental disability or illness (Massou 1999).<sup>3</sup> In Ottoman times, an asylum was located next to the monastery in Al-Khader, where persons with mental or psychological disorders were chained to the wall of the church or sanatorium (Laird 2013, 55). Locals believe that Saint George has been bound in chains during his imprisonment and torture, which are still kept in Lod and Al-Khader. It is believed that these chains are endowed with *baraka*, containing healing powers and providing protection.

### Saint George Veneration as Grassroots Theological Platform

Despite the growing academic interest in Christianity in the Middle East, popular faith expressions have been a blind spot in the literature. Scholars who have written about these phenomena fear that popular religion is in a state of crisis in Palestine (Sugase 2014). Locals have indeed reported that the festivals in Lod and Al-Khader have shrunk in size. Checkpoints have made the movement of people more difficult; this is why pilgrimage is not as big as it was before. Yet, this centuries-old practice has survived and is still widely alive among Palestinian Christians. The churches were literally packed during the feast days in Lod and Al-Khader—it was hot, airless and there was nearly no space to walk. In summertime, the grounds at the Saint George shrine in Taybeh were often bright red, and the deep splits between these Roman stones were filled with puddles of blood—indicating fresh blood from a sacrificed sheep.

The young informants during my fieldwork in Taybeh believe strongly in *nidhr* and *baraka* and they do not expect change in the popular Saint George veneration (see also Poujeau 2010). My observations do not indicate a crisis in Palestinian popular religion. On the contrary, it demonstrates rich practices and strong beliefs. I do argue, though, that the Palestinian Saint George veneration has undergone development. Based on the dramatic changes the Palestinian context has undergone this last century—like the establishment of the state of Israel, the rise of militant Islam, modernization, and the ongoing emigration—I argue that this popular faith expression has transformed from a cult focused on human flourishing to a platform for grassroots theological ideas and inspirations, mainly concerning themes like martyrdom, liberation, and belonging, an idea that will be explored below.

#### *Martyrdom*

Talking to both clergy and laypeople about the figure of Saint George, one of the first things they will mention is Saint George's martyrdom. This theological

topic has been dominant in the early history of the church in the Middle East and became current again after the eruption of *Dā'ish*, in the west better known as Islamic State or IS. The circulation of images like the twenty-one Coptic martyrs being beheaded by IS-members in February 2015 had a disruptive influence on the Christian population in the Middle East—a process that was already taking place due to a general rise of religious extremism in the area. Angie Heo has written about sainthood, martyrdom, and politics among the Copts in Egypt. She argues that the collective acts of remembering martyrs, old and new, are possibilities for communal self-transformation and political forms of agency (Heo 2018). Heo reflects on Copts rehearsing memories of their persecution as a “foundational act of belonging” (Heo 2013, 59), representing national attachment, sacrificial death, and remembrance for the sake of justice.

In the Palestinian context of oppression and ongoing migration, elements from the Saint George story, like the saint's mixed Palestinian origins, his resistance to the Roman oppressor, and his martyrdom, become a source for perseverance and steadfastness. The remembrance of Saint George's suffering helps Christians to endure their daily difficulties. Hence, the symbol of martyrdom is based on a more passive form of martyrdom, the idea to be a suffering witness in the Holy Land. This Christian interpretation of the term differs from other Palestinian groups, as for example Hamas, whose rhetoric is characterized by a more active form of martyrdom. On a linguistic note, the Arab word for martyrdom is *istishād*, derived from the root *sh-h-d*, meaning “witness.” The theme of “witness” could also be found in the works of Palestinian church leaders like Michel Sabbah (2009), Munib Younan (2012), and others, who advocated it is the vocation of Palestinian Christians to bear witness of Jesus in the land—the message is to stay in the Holy Land and help the society flourish. This vision of martyrdom does not portray Christians as passive victims, but as active contributors to society in general. This relates to a different discourse concerning the figure of Saint George, namely the discourse of “liberation and unity.”

#### *Liberation and Unity*

In the Palestinian society, and in the broader Levant, the figures of Saint George, Prophet Elijah, and Al-Khader are intertwined (Augustinović 1972).<sup>4</sup> In Islam Al-Khader (“the Green one”) is a legendary superhuman being and the mystical companion of *Musa*, Moses (see Francke 2000). He wanders the world, invisible to humans, but sometimes reveals himself to people to protect them from danger and death. Historian H. S. Haddad (1969) speaks about “Georgic cults,” compromising these three figures. He describes this phenomenon as a common undercurrent of religiosity between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, and associates these practices with the rural communities in the Levant.



In practice, this association came to a point where people became confused if the figures could be distinguished or are one and the same (see also Couroucli 2010). To illustrate this confusion, Christians usually call Saint George by the name Al-Khader, even though the official Arabic Christian name for the saint is *Mar Jeries*. Palestinian Christians could use the phrase “*Yā Khader!*” when they are startled, afraid, or disappointed, alongside phrases as “*Yā Adhrā!*” (“O, Virgin Mary!”) and “*Yā Allah!*” (“O, God!”). On feast days, one could observe a considerable amount of Muslims visiting the church, lighting candles, and touching the holy chains of Al-Khader. As a concept found both in Christianity and Islam, *baraka* exceeds communal divisions. Its powers are accessible to adherents of both religions, as well as to the nonreligious. This was visible on both the feast days in Lod and Al-Khader, where local Christians, Muslims, and other pilgrims came together to venerate the saint.

Anthropologists have reflected on this sharing of shrines of Al-Khader as a symbol for liberation and for Palestinian national-cultural unity between Christians and Muslims. In his study on pilgrimage to the shrine in Al-Khader in the 1990s, Lance Laird observed that the narrative of “triumph in defeat” that symbolizes the martyrdom of Saint George was a leading narrative of the revolutionary fighters during the Palestinian nationalist movement of the 1970s and 1980s (Laird 2013, 71f)—and later adopted by Palestinian political leader Yassar Arafat after his triumphal return to Palestine in 1995 (Khalidi 1997, 146–49). Laird (2013) recorded the following story told by locals of the village Al-Khader: When the Israelis invaded the village in 1967, they were defeated by Saint George; Saint George appeared, drove the soldiers away and even grabbed the governor by the throat. Christians from Beit Jala, another village near Bethlehem, reported a similar story, telling that Saint George rode along the border to protect the town from Israeli invasions during the Second Intifada. I observed an identical discourse in Taybeh, where the Orthodox Christians claim that Saint George, the strong fighter, protects their church from destruction. It is believed that Saint George has helped to rebuild the church three times after being destroyed. In this context, where history is marked by violence, these people believe that Saint George helps to continue the presence of Christianity in the area.

Glenn Bowman (1993), another anthropologist who has conducted ethnographic research in the area of Bethlehem in the 1990s, emphasized the national and intercommunal identity that shared shrines of Saint George help to create. The practices involving Al-Khader could also be linked to the emergence of Palestinian liberation theology in the 1980s, seen in the works of local theologians like Naim Ateek (1989) and Mitri Raheb (2014), who tried to liberate the Bible from Zionist interpretations. The narrative of “liberation” was often heard in the 1980s and 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, in which the dominant discourse was one of co-resistance, a united Palestine where Muslims



Figure 2 | Saint George as Liberator. Saint George as Liberator breaking down the separation wall surrounding the Bethlehem area. Picture taken in the (old) meeting hall of the Saint George's Monastery in Al-Khader. Photo by Elizabeth Marteiijn.

and Christians live peacefully together and resist against the Israeli occupier. Here, the boundlessness of Al-Khader/Saint George and the power of *baraka* to cross communal divides, which has historically characterized traditional Saint George veneration, is used in a modern and politically meaningful way.

### *Belonging*

A third major discourse on Saint George veneration among Palestinians is to define this popular religious expression as a spiritual continuity from the Canaanite religions to modern forms of Abrahamic religions (Wolper 2000; Albera 2008; Qleibo 2013; Bowman 2013). It is striking to note that many of those Saint George shrines are found on the top of a hill or a mountain, echoing Old Testament verses that describe Canaanite worship “on every high hill and under every green tree.”<sup>5</sup> There are indeed resemblances between the story of Saint George and the story of Baal (Haddad 1969, 21–39). The eternal struggle between Baal and the Canaanite God Yam parallels Saint George’s fight with the dragon. Furthermore, Baal and his female companion, Anat, look like Saint George and the virgin. Both Saint George and Baal attract rural devotions connected to the seasonal year. In fact, the Greek name Georgios means “land worker” or “peasant.”

Accompanying people from Taybeh to their shrine of Saint George, they could tell in a rather nativist or postcolonial rhetoric stories of how the Canaanites were the original population of the land—like them—and have always belonged to this place. Taybeh people describe this hill as “the oldest place on earth where God was being worshipped, from Baal to JHWH to Jesus.” Engaging in practices involving *nidhr*, they feel this spiritual continuity of the sacrifices being made to Baal, to JHWH, and now to their Christian God. There is a tradition in Taybeh that remembers the exact location where Gideon built an altar and had the sign of the fleece, as described in Judges 6:36–40. This hill is called *Jabel Jizza*, which means “Hill of Fleece” in Arabic and is the exact same hill where the shrine for Saint George is now located. This example illustrates how the issue of land is more than just territory for Palestinian Christians. The land is what connects them to the Bible and therefore effects a merger between biblical history and their own secular contemporary history.<sup>6</sup> This “Canaanite reading of the Bible” (Said 1986) is a response to the contestation and essentialist understanding of (Christian) Zionists, who portray Palestinian Christians as “Philistines,” “Gibeonites,” and “Canaanites”—the violent enemies of biblical Israel. Palestinian writers used the “Canaanite ideology” to prove their point that pagans, Christians, Muslims, and Jews all derive from the same Semitic background and should share the land (Cattan 1969; Qumsiyeh 2004). Hence, the Palestinian Saint George veneration is a rite of identification and belonging that affirms the indigeneity of Palestinian Christianity and their connection to the Palestinian land.

Related to this discourse of belonging, the figure of Saint George gets yet another new meaning in the new context of migration. When Yacoub (pseudonym) came to visit his Palestinian home village Taybeh during Christmas 2017, he expressed how the figure of Saint George gives new meaning for him as migrant to both the “Palestinian people” and the “Palestinian land.”<sup>7</sup> Yacoub is in his late thirties and migrated to the United States of America, where he married a Palestinian-American woman, and together they became the parents of two little girls. When the family visited their Palestinian home village, the shrine of Saint George was one of the most important places to show to their children who are born outside of Palestine. The story of the saint and the importance of this shrine is a way for these parents to educate their children about the meaning of being Palestinian and belonging to the Palestinian land. The Al-Khader shrine tells the story of their ancestors, who also worshipped on this place. On “the Al-Khader”—which is how Taybeh people refer to this place—the girls can touch, see, and smell their own roots in the old stones, filled with crosses, rosaries, statues, and other holy objects. From this hill, one could see the whole village of Taybeh, the surrounding Muslim-villages, and the Israeli settlements. On a clear night, one could even see the lights of Jerusalem to the southwest and of the Jordanian capital Amman to the east. The Al-Khader tells the story how Christianity has long survived internal and external threats, and how it will survive future challenges. At this place, these children can experience and soak in the stories they hear from their parents and grandparents to take back with them to the United States.

In this way, Saint George veneration becomes a mixture of “ancient Semitic religious practices mixed with Greco-Roman paganism and survived in Christian forms” (Qleibo 2013, 348), or simply an identity symbol for the nation, the village or the church—in both roles Saint George serves as a symbol of belonging to the Palestinian Christian community.

## Conclusion

Concluding, in the context of Israel-Palestine, Saint George is not mere a miracle worker or holy fighter—he is a symbol for different theologies and ideologies present in the Palestinian society. As martyr, he represents the suffering of the Palestinians. As liberator, he is a symbol for spiritual, national and cultural unity in the fight against occupation. Finally, Saint George represents this feeling of belonging to a long and complex history in the biblical land. In this article, I have shown how this process is being strengthened by migration. Studying the rich spiritual and political meanings of Saint George, one could get a glimpse of the pious and deep religiosity of Middle Eastern

Christians. The portrayal of Saint George as fighter, liberator, and protector of Palestine shows parallels to the work of Palestinian liberation and contextual theologians, and other grassroots theological reflections. Hence, by using ethnographic and theological research methods in the field of World Christianity, this study has demonstrated that in the new context of migration, the figure of Saint George serves as a platform for grassroots theological reflection and engagement, and as a social force to establish a connection to the Palestinian history, land, and community.

The transformation of Saint George into an empowering symbol is part of a broader revival of Christianity in Palestine, like the indigenization of religious leadership in the 1970s and 1980s in the Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations, the emergence of Palestinian contextual theology from the 1980s onward, the growth of interreligious dialogue through organizations as Al-Liqa' ("Encounter"), and theological activism of Sabeel ("The Way") and Kairos Palestine. Figures like Roman Catholic Emeritus-Patriarch Michel Sabbah, liberation theologian and Anglican priest Naim Ateek, and Greek Orthodox Archbishop Theodosios play key roles in this revival of Christianity. This renewal bridges the gap between Palestinian elite theologians and grassroots practices, as martyrdom, liberation, and belonging are central themes in the works of Palestinian theologians like Mitri Raheb and Rafiq Khoury as well.

Popular religious practices, such as the Palestinian Saint George veneration, interact with these societal, cultural, political, and theological changes occurring in Palestine. These religious practices function as a symbolic reservoir for people to give meaning to the changing world around them. The three responses that have been identified in this article—martyrdom, liberation, and belonging—might change over time. The discourse of liberation and unity that prevailed in the 1980s, 1990s, and the beginning of the 2000s might well be replaced by a martyrdom-approach if processes such as the emergence of religious extremism, the growing rift between Christians and Muslims, and the often self-inflicted sectarianism of Palestinian Christians keep continuing.

Furthermore, the development of the popular Saint George veneration into this moral symbol shows the ambiguous struggle Palestinian Christians are living through. They have to juggle between opposing forces like modernity versus traditionalism, sectarianism versus nationalism, secularism versus religious extremism, migration versus living witness, and official religion versus popular religion. These dimensions cannot be separated. The Christians seem to be in an ambiguous and fluid process of mixing elements from the traditional veneration of *nidhr* and *baraka* with a nationalist-secularist discourse of unity and liberation and with the sectarian and reassuring principles of the image of Saint George as martyr. In the figure of Saint George all these paradoxes seem to come together.

**Elizabeth Marteiijn** is a Ph.D. candidate at the Centre for the Study of World Christianity of the University of Edinburgh, and holds degrees in theology and cultural anthropology from the VU University Amsterdam. Marteiijn now specializes in Christianity in the Middle East. Her Ph.D. thesis examines how theology and context influence each other within the Palestinian Christian community. In this study, she employs a combination of theology and ethnography to explore the complex intersection between theology, tradition, politics, and interreligious encounter, and how Palestinian Christians negotiate these multiple factors.

#### NOTES

1. Fruitful collaborative projects: Meneses and Bronkema 2017, Lemons 2018.
2. The feast in Lod is every year on November 15 and 16, and in Al-Khader on May 5 and 6, according to the Julian calendar, used by the Greek Orthodox Church whose clergy leads both feasts. According to the Gregorian calendar, Saint George day falls on April 23.
3. Cf. Archimandrite Ananias Revelakis, Hegumen of the Saint George's Monastery in Al-Khader, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Al-Khader, April 25, 2018
4. In the literature, one could also find this name spelled as "Khidr" or "Hader," because of the flexibility in implicit vowels in the Arabic language. I have chosen for the spelling "Al-Khader," because this spelling is most used in the current Palestinian society. In Turkish, one knows this figure as "Hizir," in Hebrew as "Hudr," and in Farsi as "Kisir."
5. Deuteronomy 12:2; 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 16:4, 17:10; 2 Chronicles 28:4; Jeremiah 2:20, 3:6, 3:13; and Ezekiel 6:13.
6. I delve deeper into this discussion in Marteiijn 2020.
7. Field note entry by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Taybeh, December 31, 2017.

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