

Palestine, 1933: A Journey

Our film is on two DVDs labeled “Palestine, 1933 (Reel 1)” and “Palestine, 1933 (Reel 2)” from the University Libraries at the University of Southern Carolina, Moving Image Research Collections. The only additional information we initially received was a suggestion that the film might have come from “a Jewish family from Chicago.” Each disc runs a little under one hour, and features movies of the travels and home life of what seems to be one family (possibly Jewish – when traveling in Palestine they show much more interest in what appear to be nascent *kibbutzim* than touring spots from the New Testament – and very probably from Chicago, given the amount of time spent in parks there on disc 2.) After reviewing all of the footage, we found the first 33 minutes of disc 1, depicting a journey in and around the Mediterranean, to be the most fruitful section for research and description, and the most sensible to treat as a discrete item apart from the rest of the footage. This report will, therefore, focus almost exclusively on that portion of the film.

Historical Significance

While this film maintains a light tone throughout, its historical importance should not be underestimated. Its depiction of the carefree life of a wealthy pre-war (and potentially pre-depression, depending when the film proves to date from), American family is a valuable document, subject to all kinds of personal and economic considerations. For its depiction of pre-war Europe it is unlikely to be very unique, but provides valuable information nonetheless, and

does in places show an uncommon interest with people over sightseeing. The fact that it almost certainly predates 1933 – and therefore the rise of Hitler – makes the apparent Palestine footage invaluable as a document of Zionism and the kibbutz movement in the later days before Nazism became an explicit motivator. A more precise dating would obviously be a huge help toward placing the film in its historical context, but whether it turns out to be 1923, 1932, or any year between, its significance is beyond question. We chose to map out the destinations of this journey to evaluate the people and places captured in this footage at this period in time. It is not only important to identify the locations but to understand how these areas have and populations have changed over time. This footage serves as crucial historical footage that documents daily life, economy, transportation, architecture, agriculture, communities, culture, and the state of these countries and cities just before the outbreak of World War II. We will identify these various aspects captured in this footage to provide useful information for metadata and future research.

The Itinerary

Starting from the assumption that the locales shown were in Palestine, 1933, we had quite a hard time at first to figure out the identities of many of the sites visited. Our research quickly became more productive when we began to consider the possibility that all the footage may not have come from that region. The discovery that a church shown at 5:25 was the Duomo di Amalfi in Italy opened our eyes to the breadth of location possibilities. Upon researching past routes, we found advertisements in the Chicago Tribune that indicate that in 1933 the Mauretania was actually doing rounds of the West Indies, but that another Cunard ship, the RMS Aquitania, was making stops at "Madeira, Gibraltar, Algiers, Villefranche, Haifa, Port Said,

Rhodes, Istanbul, Athens, Naples, Villefranche, Gibraltar."¹ Looking further back, we found that the Mauretania made the Mediterranean trip from at least 1923-1929. A particularly complete advertisement from 1923 closely matches the sites and order of this film, though the footage does not include every port listed on this itinerary²:

THE AZORES (Ponta Delgada) -- Donkey or carriage trips, picnic in famous Valley of Sete Cidades.
THE MADEIRAS (Funchal) -- Cog wheel to summit Terreiro da Lucta, bullock or motor trips.
GIBRALTAR -- Famous fortress, Moorish markets. Optional trip to Tangier.
SPAIN (Cadiz) -- Rail trip to Seville. Optional expense trip to Granada.
ALGIERS -- Trips to the Arab Quarter, Jardin d'Assal or Botanical Gardens, etc.
MONACO -- Motor trip over the famous Corniche Drive to Nice. Monte Carlo.
ITALY (Naples) -- Capri, Sorrento, Amalfi, Pompeii. Optional trip to Rome.
DARDANELLES -- Through the famous straits close to Gallipoli, into Sea of Marmora, anchoring in the Bosphorus off the Golden Horn.
CONSTANTINOPLE -- Two full days sightseeing, Mosques, Bazaars, Museums.
GREECE (Athens) -- Two days among the historical treasures, Acropolis, Parthenon, Odeon, Temple of Zeus, etc.
PALESTINE (Haifa) -- Extensive tour to Holy Land on optional expense, rejoining party at Cairo.
EGYPT (Cairo) -- Twelve days amid the fascinations and mysteries of the Nile Country, seeing Sphinx, Pyramids, etc. Optional expense trip up the Nile to the lac[?] Cataract, visiting Luxor, Thebes, Assuan.
CORSICA (Ajaccio) -- The home of Napoleon.
PORTUGAL (Lisbon) -- Carriage and motor trips including Cintra Castle and gardens.
ENGLAND (Southampton) -- Special train to London (5 days).
CHERBOURG -- and home.

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¹ Display Ad 55 -- No Title; *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963); Oct 8, 1933; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1989), pg. E7

2

² Display Ad 74 -- No Title; *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963); Jan 14, 1923; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1989), pg. 21

The Locations

Madeira

From 0:22-0:46, the travelers seem to be in Madeira. This is borne out by the sign at 0:35 that reads "Industria Madeirense," a Portuguese phrase loosely translated as "Madeiran Industry." Additionally, the sort of eel proudly held by the boy at 0:42 was iconic on Madeira at this time, with Madeirans doing good business gutting and cleaning eels for tourists.

Gibraltar

From 0:47-1:40, the family is on a boat off Gibraltar. At this point in our research, we had the interesting experience of looking at a film which, when it was shot, would presumably have been recognizable to an average person living in the West. Today, however, it was not until one of us located a piece of film from the same era online³, nearly identical to the pan down the coast from 0:56-1:15 in this film, that it became evident that we were looking at the iconic Rock of Gibraltar.

Algiers

Starting at 1:41 the group appears to be in Algiers. The clues start around the 2-minute mark with a license plate containing the letters "AL" (inconclusive, but consistent with a later shot of a license plate in Algiers) and a number of women in traditional Algerian *haik*⁴.

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³ "Gibraltar," Travel Film Archive, Clip #: TFA-35G. Last accessed Oct 22, 2013.
http://www.travelfilmarchive.com/results.php?country_id=82

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Appearing at 2:19 is La Medersa d'Alger in the Casbah of Algiers, a large, white, domed building resembling a mosque without minarets, which began as a French school in the early 20th century before becoming a center of resistance against the French, and a madrassa. At 2:25-26, there is a line of Arabic graffiti on a wall, which we are at a loss to translate. There is a troop of Goumiers at 2:47, followed at 2:58 by a shot of a battleship with stripes consistent with the French tricolor; these support the hypothesis that these shots depict French-occupied Algeria.

More uncertainty creeps in from 3:05-3:35, when we see shots of men riding on a small boat, a woman ascending the steps in an alleyway or narrow street, some animals (perhaps goats) walking in a street, a group of French soldiers walking with donkeys under a sign reading "Maison F Ardisson," a brief street scene with motor vehicles, a very short visit to what appears to be a sort of stadium, and a shot from behind of somebody waving signal flags atop an old tower. These could all very well be in Algiers, but there are fewer tell-tale signs, and there could well be another stop on the cruise before reaching Italy. It must also be noted that without seeing the original film itself, it is hard to say where there might be cuts that could put pieces out of sequence.

Amalfi

From 3:35-3:45 we see shots of the family aboard a boat with life preservers labeled "Emile Paris," followed from 3:45-4:01 by a shot of the Amalfi Coast in Italy, and then of members of the family on smaller boats. Next, from 4:02-4:13, we see a panning shot from near the water in Amalfi up to a tunnel on the roads along the Amalfi Coast. From 4:14-5:06 we are

□ "Algerians seek return of haik," by Mouna Sadek. *Magharebia*, Mar 28, 2013. Last accessed Oct 22, 2013. http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2013/03/28/feature-02

treated to shots of segments of the family's drive on those roads, which we were able to recreate using Google Street View⁵. We found (predictably) that significant work has been done on the roads since this film was taken, but that quite a number of buildings there are still standing 80+ years later. There are interesting perspectival differences between the film and Street View images, some of which (e.g. the apparent distance between a house on the road and one in the far-off hills behind) must be chalked up to the difference between the camera lenses, but others of which (the apparent elevation and visible sides of a house seen in the distance and then passed on the road) seem to indicate that significant grading or rerouting work may have been done on the road. This may be verifiable through records in Italy, and probably does not call for too extensive a forensic analysis, but it is interesting to see a moving image record of the differences between an identifiable stretch of road 80+ years ago and today.

From 5:06-6:44 the family is at the Piazza Flavio Gioia, in front of the awe-inspiring Duomo di Amalfi. There is a great shot of the church, but much more of this sequence is given to scenes of buying from the peddlers by the cathedral steps, and of the children playing in the fountain on the Piazza and, later, crying. There is what seems to be a deliberately edited moment when the scene cuts from one shot of a little boy crying and burying his face in his mother's coat, to a little girl crying, and back to the boy.

Next, from 6:44-7:55, the family is sailing on the Mauretania. There are several

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□ The drive begins here:

https://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=Via+Giovanni+Augustariccio,+Amalfi,+Salerno,+Italy&aq=0&oq=Via+Giovanni+Augustariccio&sll=40.639843,14.614324&sspn=0.000678,0.00142&vpsrc=6&t=h&ie=UTF8&hq=&hnear=Via+Giovanni+Augustariccio,+Amalfi,+Salerno,+Campania,+Italy&ll=40.624599,14.583497&spn=0.000678,0.00142&z=20&layer=c&cbll=40.624599,14.583497&panoid=MnGH4mCdDOF_v4OjZag5lQ&cbp=13,20.98,,0,0

charming shots of deck games, the ship's wake, and the family in deck chairs, horsing around, and posing for the camera.

From 7:55-8:01 is a shot of three women in the family standing outdoors on land, across the street from modern-looking houses with deciduous trees out front. The locale is unknown -- the next identified stop is Athens, but the "itinerary" above (which is not by any means the last word on destinations) allows for the possibilities of more Italy, the Dardanelles, and Constantinople before Athens, so pending some compelling argument we are bound to keep an open mind.

Athens

8:01 to 9:36 shows the family among the ruins of ancient Athens, including the Erechtheion and the Odeum of Herodes. 9:37-9:43 is a street scene, probably still in Athens, including children outside of a window labeled "φαρμακαποθηκη | Κωνστ Β. Πατερακη" (or "Pharmaceutical Store | Konst B. Paterakis,") followed from 9:43-9:49 of one final ruins shot in which one of the young women runs toward the camera in what may be the Panathenaic Stadium.

Probably Palestine

At 9:49 we get what seems to be our first look at what is probably Palestine. An elderly couple is seen outside of a restaurant whose windows are labeled "ארוחת צהריים בוקר ערב", or "Lunch, Breakfast, and Dinner."⁶ This is followed by a brief shot of two children standing in

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⁶ Thanks to Angel Eads, David Weltman, and Elizabeth Salkin for their help with this and the other Hebrew translations.

front of another building, and then a shot from 10:04-10:30 of a football or rugby game on a field that resembles, at least in backdrop and atmosphere, the Tel Aviv stadium built for the Maccabiah Games⁷.

Starting from 10:30 the family start visiting what circumstantially seem to be *kibbutzim*. The first one we see features a large, white, very modern house, and we see the family walking out of the house with others who we may guess are members of the kibbutz. There are then scenes of planting seeds and small trees, laying irrigation pipes, tilling, and then of leaving the farm in a car through an arch upon which is wrought a verse from Isaiah chapter 58: “(ישעיהו נ"ח) 11 ויהיית כגן רווה, כמוצא מים אשר לא יכזבו מימיו” or "and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."

At 14:56 the film cuts to an old ruined stone house, and a group of similarly aged structures that may or may not also have been in current use. At 15:28 we see the inside of a populated walled city, followed very quickly by a scene at an unidentified train station, and one of family members striding happily toward the camera in a settled area with a dome in the background. This is followed by a scene of several older men in suits and one young woman, all walking toward the camera in a well built-up area.

At 16:25 begin beach scenes at an unknown beach – perhaps on the Dead Sea, perhaps the Sea of Galilee, perhaps elsewhere – featuring many children and adults, and playful fights between males of all ages, including one of the young men in the family and a man who appears

⁷ Seen in this video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wcf5cJ69Gw>

to be dressed like a Bedouin.

At 17:45 we return to what seems to be another farm (perhaps a kibbutz, perhaps not.) First, we see a young man carrying a pitchfork and a book unfolding a tri-folded sheet of paper. The next shot is of hills with many buildings at the top in the distance, panning over to a foreground of some old or old-fashioned stone buildings with men in keffiyehs standing with a couple of motorcars.

At 18:23 we see a brief shot of two of the women in the family, followed quickly by a cut to a tall, imposing, European-looking two-story stone building. It has old, tall trees all around it, but the camera also pans out to much scrubbier, more barren-looking surroundings. There are several more shots of these grounds, including one of a young woman running out a very distinctive doorway with a unique lotus-like decorative element over the entrance. The situation of this building and grounds among the surrounding scenes is unclear, and after less than a minute we are away from it.

From 19:13-21:47 is a series of scenes around what seems to be a farm. There is a sequence of shots of women carrying jars of water on their heads, a man operating a well with his feet, and a group of people watering something in the ground. This is followed by shots of camels and crates, a Bedouin family, tents, the family pictured throughout this footage, several locals, and many dogs gathering in front of the camera. We also see a number of buildings, including a large one with a distinctive style of brickwork, part of which has a thatched roof and outside of which chickens are kept. 21:48 finds the family in a field grassier than anything we have seen thus far, then we cut back to the building with the chickens, and then back to the area with the camels and crates, where men and women wrap and pack oranges under the supervision

of a boss in a fez.

From 22:20-25:56 the family are back on what appears (again from a life preserver, this time blurry rather than partially obscured,) to be the Mauretania. The main attraction of this section is a roughly two and a half minute sequence of on-deck boxing, first of the traditional kind, then between three blindfolded contestants! The boxing sequence is also curious for a brief shot of the legs of lounging women that it cut into (or perhaps simply shots between shots of) the blind three-way fight. The rest of the section, about another minute of footage, is dedicated to other play on deck including jumping rope, a game in which contestants throw a ring back and forth over a net, and a sort of close quarters shuffleboard-in-a-box game. We also see several shots of family members walking toward the camera and smiling.

From 25:57-26:20 we are on a farm again – one of the previous farms or a new one, we do not know – for a panning shot of a lot of well-kept fields, some clearly planted. There are a number of large white buildings visible on the farm. At 26:20 the camera cuts to a parade in a city, in which there are many creative floats, including one in the shape of a shark, and several ridden by people in fanciful costumes. There is a group of painters who walk in the parade using their ladders as stilts, and then several more business-related floats. One is labeled in English "The Palestine Cold Storage Supply Co."; it is accompanied by a partially obscured Hebrew-lettered (but perhaps Yiddish-language) logo with words to a similar effect: "Israeli Cooling and ...". A business by this name has been identified as having operated in Tel Aviv. Another float has a Hebrew sign that is largely too blurry to be read, but from which one correspondent believed he read the words "ב*ש" ("Beersheva") and "עולמות" ("worlds"). These may or may not be useful clues in identifying the location of the parade. Perhaps more helpful will be some of the distinct buildings seen in the background. From 27:26-32:02 we are back on the farm seen

before the parade, and there are landscape shots, scenes of hoeing and camel, donkey, and horseback riding, planting what may be orange trees off of horse-drawn carts, trying out irrigation pipes, and loading a huge crate into a building. The crate is labeled, seemingly in Latin characters, but they cannot be read because of contrast and blurriness. A better scan of the film may help to clarify this label, which could offer a clue as to the location of the farm. The newness and style of the farm, buildings, irrigation system and primarily non-Bedouin workforce on the farm suggest that this may also be a kibbutz.

At 32:03 the film cuts abruptly to a shot of a port, evidently taken from the side of a ship. A train is stopped, and we see many officers wearing fezzes standing around. A crowd walks down to the dock, which is lined by two rows of the officers, who salute a line of men with fezzes in dark outfits walking down the dock and up the gangplank of the ship from which the scene seems to be filmed. The railing of the gangplank bears a banner reading "Messageries Maritimes," a company that ran ships into many ports in the region including Haifa and Port Said. The last we see of the port is at 32:39. This last shot is followed by about a minute of unknown coastlines, after which the film moves onto another family vacation in the Western United States.

Recommendations for Presentation

While the title "Palestine, 1933" is itself a not a bad hook to lure in a curious viewer, it is unspecific, under-descriptive of the content, and very likely inaccurate in its matching of place and time. Better description would be the first key to helping the films find a bigger audience. Searchable metadata with specific names of cities, streets, buildings, and so forth could aid a searcher who wants to see – for instance – footage of the Casbah of Algiers, which they would

never look for under "Palestine, 1933." Though we have not been able to pin down a precise date for the trip, the evidence of the Mauretania casts the 1933 date into doubt, so a wider date range – c. 1920s-1930s, perhaps – would be both less misleading, and likely to draw in a wider range of relevant researchers.

Finding contexts in which to show the film would also not go amiss. Putting the film online would get it out to internet searchers whose individual areas of knowledge and expertise could quickly identify things that we could never, with any amount of brain and hand wringing, ever work out from our perspectives. The University of South Carolina's website, the Travel Film Archive, Archive.org, and YouTube would all be channels that might get the film to just the right sets of eyes. Another possibility would that the University could show portions the film at the Home Movie Day that they host annually – the right sections are bound to amuse, and a public screening might bring out information from audience members who might otherwise never have the opportunity to see the film and share their knowledge.

Additionally, it may be useful to break the film into more titled sections. Of the two hours of film we looked at, we ultimately focused on a discrete 33 minute section depicting this family's Mediterranean vacation. Later sections, similarly discrete, show their Western vacation, training for the Army Air Corps during World War II, family time in the Chicago area in the 1940s, and a later camping trip. Some of these may be less content-rich than this first tour, but all have their share of locations and material culture to identify. Separating them into their own titles, or into more headings under a larger title, would be a help.

Potential Partners

A basic problem with access to these films is their lack of obvious connection to the

institution that holds them. Establishing who this family is, and what their connection to South Carolina may be, could be helpful in promoting the film to the university's researcher base. If no connection can be found, the university may or may not wish to keep the films in its collection. But whether there is a connection or not, reaching out to institutions and organizations concerned with the film's subjects and sites would help them find their audience.

While much of the film is fairly regular tourist footage, the focus on farms and apparent pre-war *kibbutzim* in Palestine may be of interest to those looking at the history of the kibbutz movement, the State of Israel, and pre-1948 Palestine. Reaching out to the Israel Film Archive may help make good historical connections here. And if the family is Jewish, their footage may more generally be of interest to organizations dedicated to Jewish history. The Stephen Spielberg Jewish Film Archive, the National Center for Jewish Film, the Jewish Museum, and Chicago's Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership, are four of any number of potential good connections. The family's clear Chicago connection established on the second disc also makes strong contenders organizations such as the Chicago Historical Society. For the ruins footage in Athens, it may also be worthwhile to reach out to relevant archaeological and anthropological organizations.

Google Earth and Street View were of extraordinary utility in researching and presenting the information in this film, and both incorporate user-submitted still photos of locations for illustrative purposes. In the case of Amalfi, where Street View provided such a fascinating comparison of a drive on the coastal road now to the one in the film, it might be a useful and intriguing to submit stills from the film for superimposition over Google's images of the sites today. Many of the other identifiable sites cannot be accessed by road, and are therefore not likely candidates for this Street View treatment, but stills of those sites could be uploaded to

Google Earth as images clickable from overhead satellite photos.

Recommendations for Preservation

The film is, on the whole, not in bad condition. There are some scratches throughout, especially before and after splices, but they are black, and so are likely on the base rather than the emulsion. It has visible splices in some places, though so long as they don't catch in the film transport mechanism, their aesthetic effect is eminently forgivable in a set of home movies. The film's current digital transfer leaves much to be desired: it is sometimes overly bright, with brighter whites edging toward blue, and the contrast is quite low across the board, though it may be that the latter complaint has all to do with the film and nothing to do with the transfer. There is also a moment when a frame slips and the frame line rolls up the screen. We would recommend checking and repairing the film's splices, and performing a new, careful, high resolution wet gate scan to reduce the effect of the base scratches and hopefully mitigate the brightness and contrast problems, which could be especially helpful in deciphering currently unreadable text. Sharing the current transfer online and with other interested institutions, as described above, could potentially bring the film to the attention of some party sufficiently interested in the content to fund such a transfer.

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