

BICOM Briefing

The Royal visit to Israel

May 2018



Introduction

On 1 March, Buckingham Palace announced that at the request of Her Majesty's Government, "the Duke of Cambridge will visit Israel, Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian territories in the summer" adding that the visit "has been welcomed by the Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian authorities." While no date has been set for the trip, it will represent the first official Royal visit to Israel and the West Bank.

Leaders in Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) praised the announcement. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the Duke of Cambridge would be "received here with great affection," while Israeli President Reuven Rivlin said he looked forward to welcoming "a very special guest, and a very special present for our 70th year of independence". The office of PA President Mahmoud Abbas, said it "welcomes this important visit, which we hope will contribute to strengthening ties of friendship between the two peoples".

Jordanian-British ties date back to 1921 when then Secretary of State for the Colonies, Winston Churchill, carved the eastern part of Palestine in order to create the Emirate of Trans-Jordan. Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip paid a five day visit to Jordan in 1984 while King Abdullah meets the Queen during his visits to London. The UK has contributed \$750m to help the country face the repercussions of the refugee crisis from the Syrian civil war, before adding \$250m last year and a similar sum this year.

Royal Family and street names

Two main streets in Israel, one in Jerusalem and one in Tel Aviv are named after King George Street V. King George Street in Jerusalem was established on 9 December 1924 by Sir Hebert Samuel during the British Mandate in honour of the seventh anniversary of the British conquest of Jerusalem under General Allenby.

The street in Tel Aviv was originally known as Carmel Street, as it is located near to the Carmel Market. In 1935, it was changed to King George Street to mark the monarch's silver anniversary.

William's itinerary

While the itinerary for the trip has not been finalised, it is likely that the Duke of Cambridge will be met by a senior Israeli Government Minister at his arrival at Ben Gurion airport for a short welcoming ceremony. William will have a meeting, potentially lunch or dinner, at the Prime Minister's residence; a formal meeting with President Rivlin; a visit to Yad Vashem with an official ceremony; and a likely journey to the Mount of Olives to the grave of Prince Philip's mother and possibly to the British War Memorial on Mount Scopus. He may also arrange an event related to civil society or coexistence. In addition, the Prince may visit some Holy Sites in Jerusalem – such as the Anglican St George's Cathedral which was established in 1899 – and other historic religious sites located in the Old City, although these would likely be under the framework of a "private tour". During his time in the West Bank the Prince will have a formal meeting with Abbas and is likely to visit Bethlehem, potentially visiting the Church of the Nativity.

The British Ambassador to Jordan, Edward Oakden, stressed that the visit to Jordan will be a "strong" opportunity to enhance historic ties between the two countries, adding that the Prince will meet senior officials in what he termed a "politics-free" visit.



The controversy over the absence of Royal visits

The Duke of Cambridge's visit will be the first to Israel and the West Bank since Israel's establishment in 1948, a topic that has been a sour point in the very close relations between Britain and Israel. The former editor of *Haaretz*, David Landau, a British Jew who immigrated to Israel, asked in an [2012 opinion piece](#) whether there was "another member-state of the United Nations that the British Royals have so consistently and assiduously snubbed in this way".

The conventional wisdom has been that the Foreign Office recommended against a Royal Visit until an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. In 2006, now Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office Sir Simon McDonald, then-UK Ambassador to Israel, said: "The key issue in deciding a state visit is peace, and when there is peace, there will be a state visit."

This view was reinforced in December 2015 by a British government source who told the *Telegraph*: "Until there is a settlement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the Royal family can't really go there. In Israel so much politics is caught up in the land itself that it's best to avoid those complications altogether by not going there." However, an official in the Foreign Office BICOM spoke to denied the existence of such a policy.

There has also been a perception amongst some in British circles that any visit might be exploited for public relations purposes by Israel. In 2007, in leaked correspondence from Prince Charles's then-Principal Private Secretary Sir Michael Peat to his deputy Clive Alderton referring to an invitation from the then Israeli ambassador, Alderton wrote: "Safe to assume there is no chance of this visit ever actually happening? Acceptance would make it hard to avoid the many ways in which Israel would want [Prince Charles] to help burnish its international image."

Controversy surrounded Prince Charles in late 2017, when a letter was revealed that was penned by him to his friend Laurens van der Post in 1986 following the conclusion of an official visit to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and

Qatar. In the letter, the Prince wrote that "I now begin to understand better their (Arabs') point of view about Israel. Never realised they see it as a US colony. I now appreciate that Arabs and Jews were all a Semitic people originally and it is the influx of foreign, European Jews (especially from Poland, they say) which has helped to cause great problems... Surely some US president has to have the courage to stand up and take on the Jewish lobby in US? I must be naive, I suppose!"

After the letter surfaced, a Clarence House spokesperson attempted to distance the Prince from the views expressed in the letter arguing that they were "not the Prince's own views," but instead reflected the opinions of those he met on his trip.

The curious case of Prince Philip and Sergei's Courtyard

According to a cable sent from the US Embassy in Israel and revealed by Wikileaks, Prince Philip once claimed ownership over "Sergei's courtyard" in Jerusalem (also known as the Russian compound). The compound was built in the 19th Century by Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, the fifth son and seventh child of Tsar Alexander II of Russia as accommodation for Russian pilgrims. It houses government offices and the headquarters of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel.

While the compound was nationalised during the British Mandate, Israel transferred ownership over the Courtyard to the Russian government in 2009. According to the cable, Prince Philip claimed rights to the buildings based on his family connection to Sergei as Philip's grand-aunt was Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna, the wife of Nicholas II – the final ruler of the Russian Empire – and youngest sister of Elizabeth who was Sergei's wife.

It is believed that Prince Charles first raised the claim to the property in the 1980's with the Wikileaks documents suggesting demands persisted until recently. In an article from 2011, the Daily Telegraph reports that "despite pleas from some Israelis, the Duke did not intervene as the plot was handed to Russia as a goodwill gesture."

Unofficial Royal Visits to Israel

While no member of the Royal family has officially visited since the 1880s, Princes Philip, Charles and Edward have all made *private* visits.

The first of these was by Prince Philip. In 1994 he came with his sister, Princess George of Hanover, to visit his mother's grave and attend a ceremony honouring her as "Righteous among the Nations" because she hid three members of the Cohen family – Rachel, Tilda and Michelle – in her palace in Athens during the Nazi occupation of Greece in 1943-44. In later life, Philip's mother, Princess Alice of Battenberg – also known as Princess Andrew of Greece and Denmark – became a Greek Orthodox nun, and her wish that her coffin be placed at the Russian Orthodox church on the Mount of Olives next to the tomb of her aunt Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna, (the Grand Duchess of Russia and wife of wife of Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich) was fulfilled in 1988.

Prince Charles went to Israel to attend the funerals of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 and Israeli President Shimon Peres in 2016, after which he paid a visit to his grandmother's grave.



The Duke of Edinburgh attending the ceremony honouring his mother as "Righteous among the Nations" at the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Centre in 1994. Image courtesy of Yad Vashem

In September 2007, the Earl of Wessex, Prince Edward, arrived in Israel on what was described as a "working visit" after accepting an invitation by the Israel Youth Award programme, a self-development group for Jewish and Arab youth affiliated with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award International Association.

Why now?

Despite the long standing absence of official royal visits since Israel's establishment it seems likely that the change in policy has been driven by several reasons:

As Brexit approaches, the British Government's vision of Global Britain requires it to reach out to friends and allies outside Europe and the government views Israel as a key future trade partner, especially related to technology and innovation. This motivation, coupled with strong pro-Israel positions of many in the British government as well as the anomaly that the Royal Family has never visited Israel, most likely generated the idea that a visit to Israel and the West Bank, as well as to a key ally Jordan, was an elegant solution to the long running absence of a visit. Moreover, having visited Israel and Jordan, the visit may subsequently make it easier for the Royal family to arrange future visits to other key allies in the Middle East in the Gulf if they so wish.

Appendix

British Princes and the Holy Land

The Duke of Cambridge will follow in the footsteps of three British Princes who made historic trips to the Holy Land in the 19th Century. These visits came in the context of greater British interest in the region, partially caused by an evangelical revival which promoted a greater interest in the Bible in the late 18th century and early 19th century; and by British military intervention in Egypt and at Acre during the Egyptian–Ottoman War (1839–41), which reflected the increased strategic importance of the Mediterranean.

In 1862, Queen Victoria's eldest son, Prince Albert Edward, then the 20 year old Prince of Wales who later became Edward VII, visited Jerusalem as part of a five month tour of Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. Accompanied by Francis Bedford, the first photographer to join a Royal tour, as well as Major General Bruce, Major Teesdale, Lt Col Keppel, Honble R. Meade (second son of Lord Clanwilliam) and Dr Minter, the Prince arrived in Jaffa on 30 March, before visiting Jerusalem accompanied by Turkish cavalry and staying in tents pitched between the Damascus gate and Gate of St. Stephen's (Lions' Gate). He subsequently visited the Temple Mount, Western Wall and Tomb of David, where the keepers of the site objected to opening the door, as they felt it too holy for Christians to see it. Before leaving Jerusalem on 10 April, he was treated by the Pasha to a lunch comprising over 62 dishes. Prince Albert Edward also bathed in the Dead Sea and the River Jordan as well as visiting Hebron, Jericho – where he writes he experienced evening entertainment of 20 to 30 dancing Arab women in a "wild fantastic way"; Nablus – where he became the first Christian to visit the mosques; Solomon's Pools – where according to his diary he unsuccessfully tried to shoot some birds; and Lake Tiberias. According to Israeli academic Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, the trip set the standard for others to copy both up to and after the First World War. The historian Simon Sebag-Montefiore writes that the Prince of Wales's visit encouraged the expedition of a red-coated British officer and archaeologist, Captain Charles Wilson, who discovered the monumental Herodian arch of the great Bridge reaching across the Tyropaeon Valley to the Temple. It is still known as Wilson's Arch.

In 1882, Albert Edward's children, the young heirs to the British throne, Prince Albert Victor (the future Duke of Clarence, known as Prince Eddy) and his brother George (the future George V) also visited the Holy Land. Writing a diary in "The cruise of Her Majesty's Ship 'Bacchante' 1879-1882," Albert Victor describes how the Princes landed in Joppa (Jaffa) on 28 March describing its "narrow streets" and "sandy beach that lies to the south of the town". From there, they travelled to Lydda (Lod) and passed through the Biblical sites of Beth-Dagan, Bethel (Bet-El), Ai and Michmash before arriving in Jerusalem on the 31 March and pitching camp in the same field and under the same olive trees as their father had. They visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and other places connected to Jesus and the Cross, as well as the Temple Mount and the Western Wall, where they describe some of the stones as comparative in size to those in Osaka Castle in Japan.

Also following in their father's footsteps, the Princes acquired tattoos on their arms of the five crosses and the three crowns of Jerusalem. It was given by the Razzouk family, Coptic Christians specialising in tattoos who came to Jerusalem in 1750 from Egypt and who still have a parlour today located on Saint George street just inside the Jaffa



The Razzouk family tattoo parlour in Jerusalem's Old City. The Razzouk family tattooed Prince Albert Edward in 1862 and Princes Albert Victor and George in 1882.

Gate in Jerusalem's Old City (although in years past it was located in the Christian Quarter).

Before leaving Jerusalem the Princes celebrated Passover at the house of the Sephardi Chief Rabbi, Raphael Meyer Panigil where they are said to have been touched by a prayer he made for the health of the Royal Family.

During the trip the Princes also visited the Judean Hills and Hebron, where they become the first Christians to ascend the minaret at the north-west corner of the Al-Haram al-Ibrahimi, (the Sanctuary of Abraham) known to Jews as the Tomb of the Patriarchs. They subsequently visited Amman and Jerash (in what is now Jordan), and Nazareth, Tiberias, Damascus and Beirut, all in all "585 English miles" as they write in the diary.

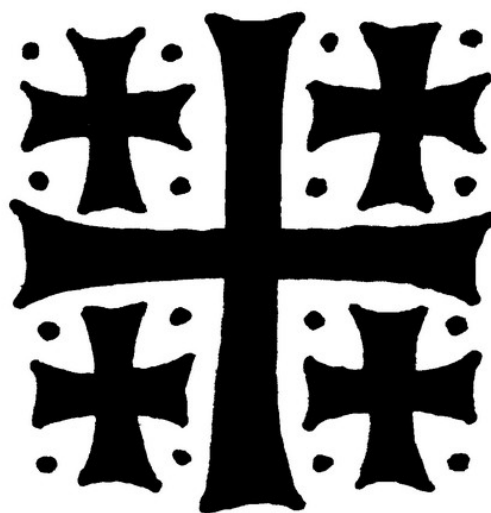
The Princes' tour from Jerusalem was organised by Thomas Cook and his son, Francis, who accompanied the Princes. By 1880 they were pioneers of the new tourism, hiring small armies of servants, guards and translators to protect against any attack by Bedouin or the so-called "Abu Ghosh clan", who dominated the road from Jaffa and had to be either bribed or co-opted. Thomas Cook's offices were located at the Jaffa Gate by Jerusalem's Old City. The sign outside the office read: "Thomas Cook and Son have the largest staff of dragomans and muleteers, the best landaus, carriages, camp, saddlery etc in Palestine!"

Pilgrims' Tattoos

The Christian tattoo tradition traces back to the Holy Land and Egypt as early as the 6th or 7th Century, from which the tradition spread throughout Eastern Christian communities. With the advent of the Crusades in 1095, the existing practice of tattooing pilgrims to the Holy Land expanded to include European visitors. Several accounts from the 1600's describe Christian pilgrims taking part in already long-existing customs of receiving a tattoo upon completing a visit to the Holy City. The Jerusalem Cross Tattoo first appears as a symbol in 1096 during the first Crusade in the coat of arms of the first Latin ruler of Jerusalem, Godfrey of Bouillon, traditionally marked pilgrims' visits to the Holy Land and is still in use today.

Crusading Royals

Richard I (Richard the Lionheart) travelled to the Holy Land as part of the Third Crusade with the aim of restoring Jerusalem to Frankish control following Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi's (Saladin) victory in the Battle of Hattin in 1187 and subsequent capture of the city. Richard arrived at the siege of Acre with 25 ships on 8 June 1191 before capturing the city on 12 July. On the 22 August, Richard led his army, which comprised three divisions marching in parallel to the sea, south on the coastal road as they chanted "Sanctum Sepulchrum adjuva, Help us Holy Sepulchre". They were headed for Jaffa, a distance of 60 miles and a trek that included eight river crossings. On the 30 August, the army reached Caesaria, arriving at the port of Arsuf a week later where Richard won a victory against Saladin's forces. After setting up headquarters in Jaffa, Richard marched to Ashkelon before spending Christmas at Latrun. In the first week of January 1192, Richard's army were 12 miles from Jerusalem at Beyt Nuba. Yet Richard realised that even if he were to take Jerusalem, he would be unable to hold it. After refortifying Ashkelon, and carrying out an offensive in July that protected Jaffa from Saladin's forces, Richard and Saladin finalised a treaty on 2 September 1192 which granted Muslim control over Jerusalem but allowed Christian pilgrims to visit the city. Richard departed the Holy Land, without having set foot in Jerusalem, on 9 October. Geoffrey Hindley writes that Richard's "conduct of the campaign in Palestine



The Jerusalem Cross design traditionally tattooed on Christian pilgrims to the city.

showed his qualities as a strategist” and that although he didn’t capture Jerusalem, it was “largely thanks to Richard [that] for close on a century the Christian cause had a bridgehead of territory from which its recovery was at least theoretically possible”. Sir Steven Runciman refers to Richard as “a bad son, a bad husband, and a bad king, but a gallant and splendid soldier”.

Richard’s Great Nephew and son of Henry II, [Edward Longshanks](#), (meaning long legs or long shins), who was heir to the British throne, also travelled to the Holy Land as part of the 8th Crusade. He arrived at Acre with 1,000 knights in May 1271 and successfully defended the city against Baibars, the fourth Sultan of Egypt in the Mamluk Bahri dynasty. However, Edward objected to the negotiated truce the city made with the Sultan, which led Baibars to allegedly order his assassination. Having survived being stabbed by assailants with a poisoned dagger, Edward tried in vain to organise a new alliance offering to help the Mongols fight Baibars in return for the Crusaders recapturing Jerusalem. In his book, *The Silk Roads, A New History of the World*, Peter Frankopan explains that “for Edward I it turns out that there were problems closer to home that were more important. Rather than forming a grand alliance with the Mongols against Muslim Egypt, the English King was forced to head to Scotland to put down the rebellion of William Wallace. With other European monarchs similarly preoccupied, the Christian presence in the Holy Land finally came to an end two centuries after the knights of the First Crusade had captured Jerusalem, the last footholds gave way. Sidon, Tyre, Beirut and Acre surrendered to the Mamluks in 1291.”

Edward ultimately left Acre on 24 September on his way to Sicily, where he heard the news that his father had died. When he returned to England as Edward I, he promoted himself as “Hammer of the Scots”. Before he left the Holy Land, Edward established a new tower in Acre destined for guardianship of a new English order of St Edward of Acre and on his death he was mourned as “Jerusalem’s flower of chivalry”.

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