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Experiencing Palestine. Multisensorial Testimony in Felix Salten's *Neue Menschen auf alter Erde*

by Mathias MEERT

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Abstract

Felix Salten's travel book *Neue Menschen auf alter Erde*, published in 1925, depicts the author's journey to Mandatory Palestine. Against the historical background of the Zionist immigration of Jews to the land of Israel, Salten's travel book both describes the ongoing transformation of the country while also triggering an autobiographical reflection on his own Jewish identity. In this contribution, Salten's hybrid travel narrative is considered as an ideal genre to study the intricate nexus between writing, testimony, memory and travel. The following analysis contextualizes Salten's position toward Zionism and investigates his depiction of Palestine as an intertextual memory landscape. In particular, this contribution asks how Salten's narrative depicts the travel experience as an affective constellation that engages various sensorial modes of the traveling subject.

Keywords

Felix Salten, travel literature, Palestine, Zionism, multisensoriality, testimony

Résumé

Le récit de voyage *Neue Menschen auf alter Erde* de Felix Salten, publié en 1925, documente le voyage de l'auteur en Palestine mandataire. Dans le contexte historique de l'immigration sioniste des Juifs en Terre d'Israël, le récit de voyage de Salten à la fois décrit la transformation continue du pays et déclenche un processus de réflexion autobiographique sur sa propre identité juive. Dans cette contribution, le récit de voyage hybride de Salten est considéré comme le genre idéal pour étudier le lien complexe entre l'écriture, le témoignage, la mémoire et le voyage. L'analyse suivante contextualise la position de Salten envers le Sionisme et étudie sa description de Palestine en tant que paysage mémoriel et intertextuel. Cette contribution analyse en particulier comment le récit de Salten représente l'expérience du travail comme constellation affective qui engage les différents sens du voyageur.

Mots-clés

Felix Salten, littérature de voyage, Palestine, sionisme, multisensorialité, témoignage

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Experiencing Palestine. Multisensorial Testimony in Felix Salten's *Neue Menschen auf alter Erde*

by Mathias MEERT

In 1925, Austrian author Felix Salten (1869-1945) published his *Neue Menschen auf alter Erde* ('New People on Ancient Soil'), a travel book which depicts the author's journey to Mandatory Palestine in 1924. Born in Budapest in 1869 as an assimilated Jew by the name of Siegmund Salzmann, Salten developed a close friendship with prominent members of the literary circle of *Jung Wien*. He started his own literary career and quickly established himself as a leading (theatre) critic, journalist and feuilletonist in Austria. A celebrated writer by the early 1930s, Salten was known for his literary works – including the animal novel *Bambi* (1923) – and his activities as chairman of the Austrian PEN-Club and president of the Association of Jewish writers and Artists (HERZOG: 2011, 42-44). Compared to research on other Viennese modernists, academic scholarship had until recently only rarely taken Salten's work into account. To this date, there is no edition of his collected works, and systematic analyses of his literary, dramatic or journalistic texts are scarce. Most studies on Salten sketch a biography of his life, provide an overview of his most important works and situate him at the crossroads of various networks, discourses and disciplines that are constitutive of (classical) modernity (Cf. MATTL: 2006; SEIBERT and BLUMESBERG: 2006; GOTTSTEIN: 2007; EDDY: 2010; ATZE: 2020).

A topic frequently touched upon by academic research is Salten's engagement with the Zionist movement. His connection to Theodor Herzl, the father of modern political Zionism, is well known and documented: Herzl hired Salten as a journalist for his journal *Die Welt* in 1897, and after Herzl's death in 1904, Salten succeeded him as head feuilletonist for the *Neue Freie Presse* (cf. ADUNKA: 2000, 507-508; BELLER: 2004; HECHT: 2020, 65-66). The legacy of Herzl remained an important topic in Salten's life and career. In 1924, twenty years after Herzl's death and at the invitation of his publisher Paul Zsolnay, Salten travelled to Mandatory Palestine and witnessed at first hand the massive transformations taking place in the Biblical 'promised land'. In the same year, Salten published two short feuilletons in which he detailed some of his early travel experiences. One year later, in 1925, he published his eponymous travel book *Neue Menschen auf alter Erde*. Per definition, the author of travel writing bears witness to topographical sites of importance, historical events and his/her own travel experiences. The genre thus presents an ideal case study for research into the connections between witnessing, literature and (inter)mediality. As Giorgio Agamben pointed out in his study *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999), the etymological (Latin) root of the word 'witness' is twofold, referring both to 'testis' and 'superstes' (AGAMBEN 1999: 17). On the one hand, 'testis' designates the person who,

in a trial or lawsuit, stands between rival parties and occupies the position of a so-called third party. ‘Superstes’, on the other hand, refers to a person who has lived through an experience and can therefore bear witness to it. The following analysis starts from the hypothesis that Salten oscillates between both etymological dimensions of the concept in his Zionist travel narrative from 1925. The book cover provided by the Szolnay Verlag for the first edition of Salten’s text already indicates the author’s journey as a meaningful personal experience that bridges the gap between the country’s past and present:

In his latest work, Felix Salten describes Palestine, which became an experience for him. With captivating memorability, the historical prerequisites are vividly pictured and the reconstruction movement is organically developed. This book stands above every party, religion and nation as a purely human document. (SALTEN: 1925, my translation)¹.



Fig. 1: Book cover of Felix Salten’s *Neue Menschen auf alter Erde*.
Photo: Wikimedia commons, CC-PD

1 “Felix Salten schildert in seinem neuesten Werk Palästina, das ihm zum Erlebnis wurde. Mit hinreißender Einprägsamkeit werden die historischen Voraussetzungen bildhaft gestaltet und die Aufbaubewegung organisch entwickelt. Dies Buch steht über jeder Partei, Konfession und Nation als ein rein menschliches Dokument.” (SALTEN: 1925).

Apart from acknowledging the important travel experience for Salten (i.e. the discovery of Palestine as a meaningful experience (“Erlebnis”)), the publisher’s paratext also hints at the different genre traditions the book evokes. On the one hand, Salten’s text presents itself as a travel book that retrospectively details his 1924 journey. It has a clear autobiographical dimension, offers descriptions of the landscape and provides the reader with important information on the history of Palestine. On the other hand, the travelogue seems to go beyond the purely descriptive. It not only records, but also actively legitimizes and reflects on the (re)construction works taking place in Palestine in the 20th century. *Neue Menschen auf alter Erde* thus positions Salten as a privileged witness to a specific period in the history of the Zionist ‘*Aliyah*’, i.e. the historical emigration and return of Jewish people to Palestine and the idea of ‘Ere(t)z Israel’, i.e. the promised (Biblical) land of Israel (cf. PONTZEN and STÄHLER: 2003).

From the point of view of genre, Salten’s travel book addresses several interconnected issues: the biographical and ideological importance of the travel experience, the textuality of the travelogue, the foregrounding of the author-narrator’s perspective and the travel book’s generic hybridity. In academic scholarship, there is a “near-consensus” (YOUNGS: 2013, 6) that features associated with different literary genres abound in travel writing. Jonathan Raban famously defined travel writing as a “notoriously raffish open house where different genres are likely to end up in the same bed” (RABAN: 1987, 253). The boundaries between travel writing, diary, essay, memoir, (auto)biography and journalism are often fluid, and the generic hybridity of travel texts has repeatedly led to problems of definition, typology and classification. According to Guillaume Thouroude, the belief that travel writing is hard to classify should not be viewed as negative. Generic hybridity, on the contrary, constitutes the genre’s identity: “As a work, or as a group of works (i.e. a genre), it is obvious that no strict limitations can be accepted when categorising travel writing and its forms, and that hybridity is constitutive of it” (THOUROUDE: 2009, 389). However, as Thouroude also points out, accepting travel writing as generically hybrid should not imply a latent ideal of generic purity: “[...] it is misleading to consider travel writing as a quintessentially hybrid genre *as opposed* to other presumably ‘pure’ genres” (THOUROUDE: 2009, 383, emphasis in original). On the contrary, the genre forces readers and scholars “to detect a fundamental attitude connected to travel, displacement and territories in contemporary literature” (THOUROUDE: 2009, 383).

The generic hybridity of travel writing also raises questions on the boundaries between the factual and fictional character of these texts (cf. YOUNGS: 2013, 5-6). Travel books often create or maintain an appearance of factuality, as they document specific travel experiences, describe historical sites of interest and interact with different regimes of truth and claims of authenticity. Whether or not a depicted travel has actually taken place thus requires historical research that goes beyond the text itself. Barbara Korte nonetheless admits that “[a]s far as the text and its narrative techniques are concerned, there appears to be no essential distinction between the travel account proper and purely fictional forms of travel literature.” (KORTE: 2000, 10). Some critics even state that the actual experience of traveling is always reconstructed, “and therefore fictionalized, in the moment of being told” (KORTE: 2000, 11). Furthermore, travel books frequently fall back on intermedial strategies,

as they include for instance pictures and/or photographs into the narrative text, or create the illusion of involving other media through intermedial references. However, travel books do not only engage with other media, but also with other modes and (sensory) modalities. In this contribution, travel books are analyzed as multimodal narratives. The following analysis will focus on the complex nexus of writing, testimony, memory and travel. In particular, this contribution addresses Salten's complex position vis-à-vis Zionism, the intertextuality of his travel narrative and the different strategies of multimodal narration that Salten uses to construct his journey as a meaningful biographical and ideological experience ('Erlebnis').

Salten and Zionism

The short book cover provided by the Szolnay Verlag (fig. 1) refers to Salten's travel book as a document that transcends different parties, nations and religions. On the one hand, this emphasis can be read within the context of the travel narrative as such, referring to the quasi-universal importance of travel experiences for every reader, independent of the specific historical context of Zionism. On the other hand, it can also be read as a strategic gesture of transcending differences within the Zionist community itself, i.e. as a reaction to the internal division that fractured Zionism since the publication of Herzl's essay *Der Judenstaat* (1895). Herzl's plea for the establishment of a Jewish homeland was fundamentally political in nature and took shape as a response to increasingly violent anti-Semitism and the continuing persecution of Jews in the East (cf. ROBERTSON and TIMMS: 1997; ROTENSTREICH: 2007; ENGEL: 2013). Herzl's essay provided a pragmatic outline for the development of a new country, ranging from the purchase of land and the establishment of political institutions to urban planning and industrialization. Since the 1st Zionist congress organized in Basel in 1897, Zionism had fractured into different political, ideological and religious groups. In the run-up to the 5th Zionist congress (1901), the so-called Democratic-Zionist fraction, which consisted amongst others of Martin Buber, Chaim Weizmann and Leo Motzkin, endorsed a program of cultural Zionism ('Kulturzionismus'). Based on the works of Achad Ha'am, cultural Zionism centered on those aspects that were felt to be neglected in Herzl's original program: it advocated the urgency of a cultural-spiritual revolution taking place *before* the political establishment of a new homeland and developed around the idea of a renaissance of the Hebrew language, Jewish culture and Jewish knowledge (cf. KILCHER: 2016).

Various scholars have labelled Salten as a poetic and literary Zionist. His position towards Zionism and its different fractions was nonetheless complex. As Dieter Hecht argues, Salten primarily saw himself as a supporter and defender of Herzl. For Salten, Zionism should primarily focus on creating a safe haven for the persecuted Jews in eastern Europe, whom he repeatedly described as a 'rootless' community ("die Wurzellosen") (cf. HECHT: 2020, 66-67). At the same time, Salten personally connected with Buber, the 'Jewish Renaissance' and supported cultural Zionist initiatives. Nonetheless, he never explicitly declared himself as belonging to any specific fraction. In a speech written in 1929 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Herzl's death, Salten defined his identity primarily as the attitude of a Jewish man steeped in the 'ethos' of the Bible:

We have learned from him [Herzl] that there is nothing else than simply acknowledging and accepting oneself. [...] I am not your party member, just as little as I belong to any other party as a member. I am nothing more than a simple man steeped in the ethos of the Bible [...] But I am your brother in Herzl's sense, and if I may speak to you today, then I have no other legitimation than the fact that I was so happy to meet, understand and love Theodor Herzl in his fateful hour. (SALTEN 1929: 4, my translation)²

Rather than declaring himself as specific party member, Salten adopts the humanistic position of a (Jewish) 'brother' commemorating the legacy of Herzl. Extending the family metaphor, this legacy ideally forces Western assimilated Jews to reflect on their own identity due to the increased contact with their eastern-European kin, whom Salten perceived as the "Urelemente" (SALTEN: 1929, 4) of Jewish culture. Salten strategically depicts Herzl as a father figure who transcends the different Zionist fractions (cf. HECHT: 2020, 63; MATTL: 2009). The emigration of Jews to Palestine is thus perceived by Salten as a sign of the relevance of Herzl's project. In Salten's view, this emigration fulfills the ancient rallying cry of Jewish prophets and rebels to escape bondage: "out of Mizraim, out of slavery" (SALTEN: 1929, 4, my translation)³. Salten's image of Herzl is strongly imbued with the authority and iconography of Moses. In a short text from 1933, Salten stated that Jewish culture *in se* comprised two basic traditions, each named after their eponymous Biblical leaders: David and Moses (SALTEN: 1933, 401). Whereas the Davidic tradition could be labelled as conservative, the Mosaic can be thought as revolutionary and rebellious, advocating the same call to escape slavery and bondage that Salten ascribes to Herzl in his speech from 1929.

Historically speaking, Salten's journey to Mandatory Palestine in 1924 took place in between the third (1919-1923) and fourth historical wave (1924-1928) of the *Aliyah*, when large numbers of immigrants from Poland, Russia, Romania and Lithuania arrived in Palestine (cf. BERMAN: 1987; MEHMEL: 2003). The journey to Palestine and the contact with Jewish migrants provoked an autobiographical reflection on Salten's own Jewish identity which is structurally imbedded in the travel book. The author confesses that although he was born as a Jew in an assimilated and liberal family, as a young boy, he never felt Jewish at all. Only at a later age, during his studies and after having met Herzl, did Salten become aware of his own heritage. Whilst traveling through Palestine, Salten – despite the occasional rhetoric of the journey as a solitary experience – ultimately admits he never felt alone, as he felt surrounded by his Jewish ancestors: "All my ancestors surrounded me" (SALTEN: 1986, 184)⁴. *Neue Menschen auf alter Erde* can thus be read as an autobiographical narrative of self-exploration that strongly emphasizes how the

2 "Wir haben durch ihn [Herzl] gelernt, dass es nichts anderes gibt, als sich einfach zu sich selbst zu bekennen. [...] Ich bin nicht Ihr Parteigenosse, so wenig wie ich irgendeiner andern Partei als Genosse angehöre. Nichts anderes bin ich als ein einfacher Mensch, der vom Ethos der Bibel durchdrungen ist [...] Aber ich bin Ihr Bruder im Sinne Herzls, und wenn ich heute zu Ihnen sprechen darf, so habe ich keine andere Legitimation, als dass ich so glücklich war, Theodor Herzl in seiner Schicksalsstunde zu begegnen, zu begreifen und zu lieben." (SALTEN: 1929, 4).

3 "heraus aus Mizrajim, heraus aus der Knechtschaft!" (SALTEN: 1929, 4).

4 "Alle meine Ahnen umgaben mich." (SALTEN: 1986, 184).

author belongs to a vast genealogical network of Jewish culture and history. At the same time, Salten frequently downplays his own biography and is deeply concerned with the background of the newly emigrated Jewish population: “[...] it is so unimportant who I am, [...] but all the more important, who this villager is, and so interesting, to know where he once came from” (SALTEN: 1986, 36, my translation)⁵. Seemingly adopting the position of a reporter, Salten frequently engages in conversation with emigrated individuals and presents a multifaceted portrait of the newly settled Jewish population that seeks to cultivate and transform the Palestinian land into a social utopia. In so doing, Salten continuously oscillates between a historical and Biblical perspective on Palestine (‘Ancient Soil’), an autobiographical reflection on his own identity and a dialogic focus on the Jews in Palestine (‘New People’, cf. the title of his travel book).

Viewed against this background, Salten occupies an ambivalent position when bearing witness to the third phase of the *Aliyah*. His travel book can be read as a document of the Agambian ‘superstes’, documenting the transformations taking place in Palestine as a direct response to the rising antisemitism in Europe. However, academic scholarship has made clear that Salten never considered emigrating himself (HECHT: 2020, 69; SCHWARZ: 2018, 367). In other words, the idea of *Aliyah* is mainly presented as a narrative for younger (and future) generations, as opposed to (the generation of) Salten himself who remained deeply rooted in Austrian culture. Nonetheless, much like the author himself, the young Jewish migrants who are described in the travel book come from an assimilated background. When describing several Jewish colonies, Salten notices that the tents of these young migrants are decorated with reproductions from Van Gogh and Cezanne, while they listen to Beethoven and Brahms and read Taine, Montaigne and Marx (SALTEN: 1986, 48). At the same time, they seem almost religiously connected to their Zionist mission, even though the majority of them are atheist and secular. Rather than positing this hybrid identity as a source of potential (psychological) conflict, Salten univocally admires how this pioneer generation copes with their twofold being (“Doppelwesen”, SALTEN: 1986, 48) and hybridity. In the long run, Salten implies that a new Jewish identity founded in Palestine should transcend the (European) ideology of nationalism. Nationalism, as Salten warns his readers, is repeatedly considered the root cause of barbarism and misfortune. At the same time, Salten lacks the neutrality that Agamben etymologically associates with the juridical position of the ‘testis’, who occupies the place of a third party between two rivals. Although he oscillates between different (Zionist) positions, Salten’s return to Herzl – as well as his mosaic re-interpretation of Herzl’s legacy – goes beyond a “metapolitical” (MATTL and SCHWARZ: 2015, 75) understanding of Zionism. And even though Salten strongly admires all Jewish migrants and celebrates their ‘sacrifices’, his own opinions and critiques are also subtly voiced. Throughout the narrative, Salten details his encounters with various Jewish communities in Palestine, who, similar to the Zionist movement itself, are far from homogenous. Amongst others, he describes his encounters with so-called “Misrachi” (SALTEN: 1986, 77), conservative-orthodox communities who primarily interpreted Jewish identity through religious scripture. These conservative groups differ greatly from the proto-communist and collectivist societies of the ‘Chaluzim’, i.e. pioneers in building up the state of Palestine, who were primarily grouped in agricultural

5 “[...] es ist so unwichtig, wer ich bin, [...] dafür so wichtig, wer dieser Dorfbewohner ist, und so interessant, woher er einst gekommen war.” (SALTEN: 1986, 36).

communes. In a dialogue with a member from such a commune, Salten subtly expresses his own doubts about the rigid collectivist ideology expressed by these agricultural pioneers:

“Would you like to begin with abolishing fathers and mothers?” “Why not?” he replied with quick boldness. „Here, every child has many mothers...“, .. „and many fathers“, I add. He looks at me, notices I’m joking, and we both laugh. Then he becomes more serious and explains: “I want to say that we are all one, big family here.” “Communism....?” I intervene. He shrugged his shoulders. “You can call it whatever you want it is the future.” “How lovely”, I note, “that one only needs to be young in order to know the future.” Without hesitation he responded: “I don’t pretend to know the future, but I believe in the future.” And after a few seconds pause, softly: “why else would I be here?” (SALTEN: 1986, 49-50, my translation.)⁶

The (proto-)communist attitude of these ‘Chaluzim’, combined with the collectivist education of children and the confiscation of private property, strongly differs from the values Salten (re)discovered during his travels, i.e. the belief in the traditional family as the basic unit of human society and history, the importance of individual responsibility and the continued importance of faith. As far as the latter is concerned, Salten is unwilling to commit himself and oscillates between a broad, cultural-historical ideal of Jewish (Biblical) faith and a secularized faith in Palestine, an attitude typical of several young pioneers. The above quoted political discussion nonetheless shows that even when both participants gain insight in the reasoning of the other, this only leads to temporary small concessions. Fundamental differences cannot be bridged or the aporia is merely circumvented through the repeated emphasis on an abstract image of the future.

Palestine as Memory and Intertext

Salten’s travel narrative, as Siegfried Mattl and Werner Michael Schwarz have emphasized, can be seen as a generic umbrella concept that is characterized by a rich stylistic, narrative and structural diversity: dialogues and topographical comments are mixed with philosophical reflections and descriptions of animals and buildings. Lengthy passages are written in direct discourse, free indirect discourse and in stream-of-consciousness (MATTL and SCHWARZ: 2015, 76). Given the importance of description for the genre of travel writing, it is not surprising that Salten resorts to the metaphor of the ‘book’ when describing the landscapes he encounters. Salten’s journey starts in Égypt and he travels through the (Sinai) desert in order to reach Palestine. From the start, the author addresses the idea

6 “Wollen Sie damit beginnen, Vater und Mutter abzuschaffen?“ „Warum nicht?“ antwortete er mit rascher Keckheit. „Hier hat jedes Kind viele Mütter...“ „ Und viele Väter“, ergänzte ich. Er sieht mich an, merkt, dass ich spaße, und wir lachen beide. Dann wird er ernster und erklärt: „ich will sagen, wir alle sind hier eine einzige, große Familie.“ „Kommunismus....?“ Werfe ich ein. Er zuckt die Achsel. „Man kann es nennen, wie man will... Es ist die Zukunft.“ „Wie herrlich“, bemerke ich, „dass man nur jung sein braucht, um die Zukunft zu kennen.“ Ohne Zögern erwidert er: „Ich behaupte nicht, dass ich die Zukunft kenne, aber ich glaube an die Zukunft.“ Und nach einer Sekundenpause, leiser: „Wäre ich sonst hier....?“ (SALTEN: 1986, 49-50).

that cultures and civilizations shape the landscape, which is metaphorically described as an open 'book': "Nearly all civilizations have inscribed themselves into the open book of this land" (SALTEN: 1986, 20).⁷ The metaphor of the book filled with traces provides the basis for Salten's physiognomic understanding of space. Architecture, constructions and ruins that have been left behind are read as material signs of the mentality of a specific culture. But also the state of the landscape itself is personified and reveals the psychology of a cultural community. Palestine is described as barren, dry and desolate. For centuries, the country has been stripped bare of its resources and has been plundered by occupying forces. According to Salten, it shares a fate similar to that of the Jewish people:

But the land lay there and waited. It never fully recovered since its native children were torn away, uprooted, just like the forests with all their trees who were afterwards torn away from the bosom of the mountains. The land lay there, it suffered and waited. It did exactly the same thing as the Jews: suffering and waiting, for nineteen centuries. (SALTEN: 1986, 24, my translation)⁸

Rather than deploring its state of decline, Salten sees the stripped and barren Palestine as the ideal building plot for the future.⁹ The promise of rebuilding is furthermore strengthened by constantly comparing the land with Biblical narratives on Jericho, Jordan, Jerusalem, Sodom, Gomorra and Tiberias. In Salten's travelogue, the Biblical grand narrative is omnipresent. It determines the interpretation of the landscape – "Biblical sites as far as the eye can see (Salten: 1986, 91, my translation)¹⁰" – and merges the Biblical past and the region's current state into a symbolic, meaningful whole. Salten's Palestine thus functions as a 'memory landscape' ("Gedächtnislandschaft", MATTL and SCHWARZ: 2015, 78), a multifaceted memory landscape that (re)vitalizes specific sites of biblical importance. It turns the 'ancient soil', to which Salten refers in the title of his travel book, into a familiar landscape. Merging Bible and myth with his own experiences, Salten depicts the landscape as a space where time itself seems to have stopped. Chronotopically speaking, Salten's Palestine repeatedly blurs the boundaries between past and present: "The life of these Bedouins differs little from the life of our patriarchs in the dim and distant past" (SALTEN: 1986, 5, my translation).¹¹ Biblical intertextuality also manifests itself in the structure of Salten's journey itself, which symbolically re-enacts the mythical departure of the Jews from Egypt. Imitating Moses, Salten also starts this journey in Egypt and describes the discomforts and experiences his ancestors felt when traveling towards the promised land: "Poor people, who took this hard, lonely path towards liberation" (SALTEN: 1986, 2, my translation).¹²

7 "Fast alle Völker haben sich in das offene Buch dieses Landes eingezeichnet" (SALTEN: 1986, 20).

8 "Aber das Land lag da und wartete. Das Land hatte sich niemals wieder erholt, seit ihm die eingeborenen Kinder weggerissen wurden, entwurzelt, wie ihm nachher der Wald mit allen Bäumen von der Brust der Gebirge gerissen worden ist. Das Land lag da, es litt und wartete. Es tat genau dasselbe wie die Juden: leiden und warten, neunzehn Jahrhunderte lang." (SALTEN: 1986, 24)

9 "Nichts mehr ist dieses Land als der leergeräumte Boden für eine Aufgabe" (SALTEN: 1986, 23).

10 "Bibelstätten, wohin das Auge sich wendet" (SALTEN: 1986, 91)

11 "Nur wenig unterscheidet sich das Leben dieser Beduinen da von dem Leben unserer Patriarchen in grauer Vorzeit" (SALTEN: 1986, 5).

12 "Armes Volk, das diesen harten, einsamen Weg der Befreiung gegangen ist." (SALTEN: 1986, 2).

Salten's memory landscape establishes Herzl as the founding father of 20th century Jewish Palestine. The author's personal connection to Herzl is elaborately emphasized, strengthening the position of Salten not only as a witness, but also as a personal friend of Herzl. Much like the various sites of Biblical importance, the legacy and influence of the author of *Der Judenstaat* is presented as being very much alive: "He is so alive today, [...] that he still seems to be among us" (SALTEN: 1986, 118, my translation)¹³. Portraits of Herzl furthermore adorn the walls of hotels, schools and various other buildings. The intertextual connections to Herzl have also been picked up by academic scholarship. Both Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* (1896) and his utopian novel *Altneuland* (1902) have been analyzed as intertexts to Salten's travelogue (cf. SCHLEICHER: 2006; EDDY: 2010, 355; MATTL and SCHWARZ: 2015). Herzl's novel, to which Salten refers in the title, depicts a model welfare society in Palestine; a fictionalized, utopian vision based on the political blue print of *Der Judenstaat*. Juxtaposing both texts, Schleicher has convincingly pointed out the structural similarities of both narratives: both are divided in 30 chapters, both reenact the same travel route from Egypt to Palestine, both protagonists visit Jerusalem twice and describe the manifold constructions undertaken in Jewish colonies. Both texts also naively state that although problems with local Arabs occasionally occur in what Salten euphemistically calls a "peaceful conquest" ("friedliche Eroberung", cf. SALTEN: 1986, 186), the Arab community will ultimately accept the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine based on shared interests, religious brotherhood and humanitarianism (cf. SCHLEICHER: 2006, 36-42). Herzl's *Altneuland* nonetheless confronts its reader with an end product, a fictionalized country already transformed, whereas Salten's travel book merely documents a historical region in the first stages of its transformation. Set against the messianic image of the future, Salten's homage to the Jewish pioneers interprets their sacrifices as nothing more than a transitional phenomenon, an "Übergangswesen" (SALTEN: 1986, 48) that will disappear when future generations ultimately realize the Herzlian promise.

Multisensorial experience

From a genre-historical point of view, Salten's 1925 travel book is but one example in a long list of German-Jewish travelogues to Palestine set during the various stages of the *Aliyah*. Other popular examples in the German language area include Arthur Holitscher's *Reise durch das jüdische Palästina* (1922), Bruno Weil's *Palästina: Reiseberichte* (1927), Alfred Wiener's *Kritische Reise durch Palästina* (1927) and Herbert Eulenburg's *Palästina: Eine Reise ins gelobte Land* (1929).¹⁴ Interestingly, Salten's travelogue contains

13 "So sehr lebendig ist er heute, [...] dass er immer noch mitten unter uns zu weilen scheint [...]" (SALTEN: 1986, 118).

14 For an overview of German-Jewish travelogues to Palestine in the 20th century see KAISER: 1992. French and British Jews also published Zionist travel narratives in the 1920s. In France, for instance, Fernand Corcos published his Zionist reflections on the workforce of the so-called Chaluzim in *Israel sur la terre biblique* (1923), which was followed by a later report entitled *À travers la Palestine Juive* (1925). The French Jewish poet André Spire clearly opposed productive Jewish communities from the apparently uncultured Arabian population in his travelogue *Un Voyage en Palestine en 1920* (1929). See MARZANO: 2013 for a short overview of French, British and other Zionist travelogues from the early 20th century. According to Marzano, the increasing number of Jewish tourists to Palestine during the British mandate

no photographs, statistics or maps and largely avoids the rather “technocratic” (HECHT: 2020, 73) impression created by such materials in Palestinian travel literature. Although Salten’s travel narrative does not integrate visual documents, it nonetheless makes use of various sensory modalities that emphasize the experientiality of traveling and witnessing.

Travel is per definition an embodied experience, involving different perceptions, senses and experiences. The study of travel writing has nonetheless predominantly focused on the visual aspect of travel. In Western culture, this “ocularcentrism” (TOPPING: 2015, 78) has prioritized the role of seeing in the travel experience. The book cover provided by the Szolnay Verlag also uses a visual metaphor when it states that the “historical prerequisites [of the Palestine region] are vividly *pictured*” (SALTEN: 1925, my emphasis, my translation) and portrayed in Salten’s travel book. The notion of the witness, too, has long been valorized as a visual concept, whose epistemological authority relies on the subject’s identity as an eye-witness. In the context of travel writing, this seems evident in the basic assumption that the travel narrative offers an “auto-optic account” (TOPPING: 2015, 79), i.e. the writer describes events, places or phenomena that he/she has supposedly seen in person. Salten’s text indeed contains a strong visual component that is part of the writer’s authority as witness to the *Aliyah* and as a personal friend of Herzl. In dialogue with both the Biblical and the Herzlian narrative, Salten’s comparative gaze can be thought of as presenting his readers with an update on the current state of (Zionist) affairs and the transformation of the landscape. He is not only an observer, but also an active participant. The 20th century landscape is thus thrown into relief by comparing and equating it to the landscape of Biblical times, which is visualized through memory and intertextuality.

On several occasions, the text makes clear that Salten’s gaze is strongly determined by his European intellectual background. On one such occasion, the author specifically refers to (Western) art history in order to outline and contextualize his visual interpretation of a specific scene. When Salten witnesses a marriage ceremony, he instinctively compares the young bride with a painting from Rembrandt: “The girl [...] looked straight ahead, with eyes that saw no one. She resembled Rembrandt’s Jewish Bride, which hangs in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam” (SALTEN: 1986, 87).¹⁵ Paradoxically, such a comparison alienates the woman in question by transforming her into an historical *tableau vivant*. At the same time, it also tries to liberate the Palestinian populace and landscape from exotism and the topos of radical alterity, exactly by making them look ‘familiar’, recognizable and part of the gestural and visual canon. Interestingly, Salten goes beyond an exclusively visual regime and also relates to the sensory experience of smell. In so doing, he exceeds the visual dynamics of witnessing and presents Palestine as a multisensorial landscape, characterized by its tropical climate, scorching sun and cool breezes, its wildlife and (partial absence of) flora and forests. The impact of the construction works is thus not only visible, via the construction of schools, houses and other buildings. Eucalyptus trees, tobacco plants and orchards are also planted *en masse*, and oranges, citrus fruits, olives and tobacco plants are grown and harvested by many Chaluzim. This turns the region particularly into a vibrant, dynamic and intercultural ‘smellscape’, which Salten equally documents in his travel book:

gave rise to a new typology of Zionist travelers.

15 “Das Mädchen [...] schaute geradeaus, mit Augen, die niemanden sahen. Sie glich der Judenbraut von Rembrandt, die im Reichsmuseum in Amsterdam hängt.” (SALTEN: 1986, 87).

Many of the perfumes of Arabia, not all, but many flow through the narrow bazaar streets of the old city, mingling with the vapors of work and poverty, with the miasmas of misery. [...] from American canned food to large-leaved vegetables just dug out of the ground, from the piles of oranges to the bloody scraps of freshly butchered mutton meat [...]. In addition, enormous quantities of sweets, candies and jellies and Turkish honey, and large chunks of solid apricot jam [...]. (SALTEN: 1986, 85-86, my translation)¹⁶

The multisensorial depiction of Palestine is part of an overarching affective constellation that engulfs the overall narrative. Seen from this perspective, Florian Krobb is right when he identifies Salten's travel writing as a "Gefühlzionismus" (KROBB: 2003, 149-150), an affective and emotional Zionism, which presents Salten as an emotionally (and multisensorially) triggered witness whose own emotions in turn can also trigger readers into identification (cf. KROBB: 2003, 159). Already in a 1925 review of Salten's book published in the *Leipziger Jüdische Zeitung* (cf. HECHT: 2020, 73), an anonymous critic pointed out how Salten's travel book strongly differs from those of his colleague-travelers:

This most lively and original of Salten's books differs from the numerous travelogues of Palestine [...] in that its main emphasis is not on factual description and assessment, but on experiencing the idea and the country. [...] In this book of a poet, emotions shine through all factuality [...]. Instilling love and longing for Palestine, Salten shows the path that the Galuth [i.e. diaspora, M.M] Jew, who is sophisticated in European culture, has to take in order to remain in contact with Palestine: to concentrate on a historical experience that connects the Jewish past and present and emotionally grasps it. (*Palästinaliteratur*: 1925, 3, my translation)¹⁷

According to the reviewer, Salten's travel book is predominantly emotional and affective in nature. It is structured around the multifaceted experience of Palestine, both on a biographical, cultural, ideological and also – as this analysis has shown – multisensorial level. Salten's text is larded with an affective vocabulary which indicates his feelings, emotions and state of mind. He feels tired, scared, overcome with joy, comfortable ("behaglich") in his many conversations, as well as astonished ("erstaunt") and touched

16 "Viele von den Wohlgerüchen Arabiens, nicht alle, aber viele von seinen Wohlgerüchen durchströmen die engen Basargassen der alten Stadt und mengen sich mit den Dünsten der Arbeit und Dürftigkeit, mit den Miasmen des Elends. [...] von den amerikanischen Konservenbüchsen bis zu den großblättrigen, eben aus der Erde gegrabenen Gemüsen, von den Orangenbergen bis zu den blutigen Fleischfetzen frischgeschlachteter und zerteilter Hammel [...] Dazu die Süßigkeiten in ungeheuren Mengen, Bonbons und Gelees und türkischer Honig, und in großen Stücken die feste Aprikosenmarmelade" (SALTEN: 1986, 85-86).

17 "Dieses lebensvollste und ursprünglichste der Bücher Saltens unterscheidet sich von den zahlreichen Palästinaereiseberichten [...] dadurch, dass sein Hauptgewicht nicht in Tatsachenschilderung und -wertung, sondern im Erlebnis der Idee und des Landes liegt, [...]. In diesem [...] Buche eines Dichters ist alle Tatsächlichkeit von Gefühl durchleuchtet. [...] Palästinaliebe und -sehnsucht weckend zeigt Salten den Weg, den der in europäischer Kultur differenzierte Galuthjude, um in Kontakt mit Palästina zu bleiben, gehen muss: zur Konzentration in ein Geschichtserlebnis, das jüdische Gegenwart und Vergangenheit verknüpft und seelisch erfasst." (*Palästinaliteratur*: 1925, 3).

("gerührt") (cf. SALTEN: 1986, 155, 165). As Patrick Colm Hogan argued in his study on *Affective Narratology*, emotions are not just thematic parts of stories, they also *make* stories (HOGAN: 2011, 1-2, my emphasis). According to Salten himself, his emotional state of mind clearly influenced his travel itinerary. Travelling from Cairo, Salten first arrived in Jerusalem, yet immediately left the city and continued his journey so as to return to the capital only towards the end of his travels:

The city was too confusing for me to begin with, it intimidated me, it was too difficult for me, it pressed itself on me with too much, too bad disharmony. Never in my life has a city made me so nervous. I just ran away. (SALTEN: 1986, 65)¹⁸

Salten's exploration of the city of Jerusalem, from nervous anticipation through joy to nostalgia and back, is an important part of the experientiality of his travel narrative. It is the travel equivalent of Salten's coming to terms with his own Jewish identity, a circular and lifelong process of spiritual growth which started since his childhood in catholic schools, was sublimated in a pantheistic phase and grew into the epiphanous acceptance of his Jewish heritage under the auspices of Herzl.

Conclusion

Felix Salten's *Neue Menschen auf alter Erde* (1925) documents the author's journey to Mandatory Palestine after the third phase of the historical Aliyah. From a generic point of view, the travel narrative is hybrid: it mixes autobiographical comments, dialogues, landscape descriptions and subjective reflections. Salten's travel book documents both the historical changes and transformations taking place in Palestine as well as his own position towards Zionism. Although Salten is far from blind from of the (political) heterogeneity of the Jewish migrants living in Palestine, he positions himself as a "brother in Herzl's sense" ("Bruder im Sinne Herzls", SALTEN: 1924, 4), a supporter of the Herzlian legacy whose founding father is strategically depicted as a unifying force within the inner-Zionist (political) spectrum. Salten is far from external to the world he depicts and his narrative is characterized by the strong experientiality of the once-in-a-lifetime travel. Salten's physical journal corresponds with an affective and spiritual journey: it depicts Salten as an emotionally triggered subject in Palestine, a country that functions both as a site of (cultural) memory and as a multisensorial landscape. Beyond the posture of the eye-witness, Salten engages various sensorial modalities. His perspective is not only dialogically oriented towards the pioneers cultivating the Palestinian land, but also to the Herzlian and Biblical narrative which structure and determine his involved gaze.

18 "Die Stadt war mir zu verwirrend für den Anfang, sie schüchterte mich ein, sie war mir zu schwer, drang mit zu vielen, mit zu argen Disharmonien auf mich ein. Niemals im Leben hat mich eine Stadt so nervös gemacht. Ich lief einfach davon." (SALTEN: 1986, 65).

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