

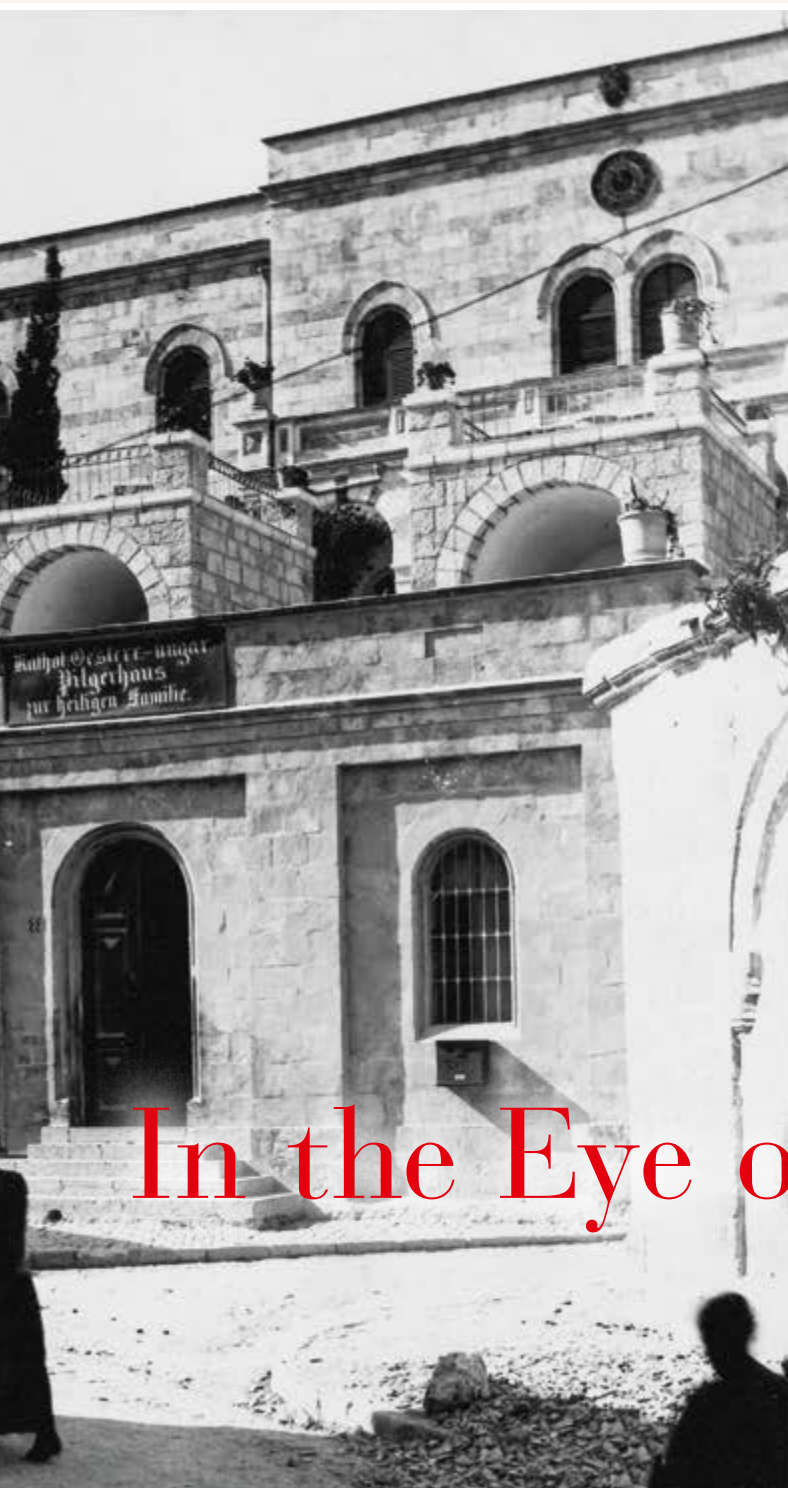
JERUSALEM

Korrespondenz

Bi-annual report of the Austrian Pilgrims' Hospice



AUSTRIAN
PILGRIM-HOSPICE
JERUSALEM



In the Eye of the Storm

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Volunteering Oasis Austrian Hospice

BY JEREMIAS KNIRSCH

The Austrian Pilgrim Hospice: An oasis in the Old City.” If you stay in the House long enough, you are sure to encounter a tour guide ushering a group of tourists into the Hospice with the above words. Looking around, you readily understand what they are talking about: the garden and the Viennese coffee house stand in stark contrast to the hustle and bustle on the Via Dolorosa. When you come in, you are finally given the chance to experience peace, to pause for a moment and take a breather.



Photo: © ÖPH

Jeremias Knirsch

When the Middle East conflict becomes reality

As you prepare for your volunteering abroad your head is full of thoughts. One of the topics you grapple with when you go to Jerusalem for the year is the Middle East conflict. Most applicants for a position in the Hospice say they want to learn more about the matter. You read history books and newspaper articles and of course think about whether you yourself might experience the conflict for real.

However, no matter how much you talk about it in the preparation seminar, the conflict remains – at least for me – removed from reality.

It turns out that it isn't so far from reality after all. My first few months amounted to a fairly standard volunteering in Jerusalem. But on October 7th, when I was awoken by the siren (missile alarm), an unlikely scenario became reality.

Everything takes on a different hue than expected. You lose control of your own life. All plans for the next months fell through: the camping trip that was planned for Monday, the reception at the Austrian Embassy on the occasion of the national holiday, trips to the sea in Tel Aviv and the desert hike with Father Gregor all postponed until further notice. All these things, part of the normal course of volunteering in Jerusalem and the life of a young person, were replaced in the first weeks of the war by monotonous days spent in an almost empty Hospice. The catch-phrase was: wait and see.

When most of the volunteers left on account of the prevailing security situation and pressure from their families, the situation began to feel a little more serious for those of us who remained here. The streets of the Old City were almost empty. The following weeks were full of uncertainty. We kept hearing in the media that the situation could get worse at any moment – but fortunately it didn't. Our colleagues returned to Jerusalem at the end of November and our social life became increasingly normal.

During all this time, however, the Hospice's doors remained open. More than once, guests and visitors thanked me that our coffee house was still in operation. At times like these, you realize how important it is for people to have such an environment in which to relax. An oasis in the Old City of Jerusalem. A place where you can briefly forget the outside world and find peace.

“Blessed are those who do not see and yet believe.”

Thomas' unbelief has become proverbial. Thomas's typology of a person who doesn't care about the testimonies of others, no matter how diverse and credible they may be. “If I don't..., I don't believe.”

On closer inspection, the Lord's answer is a bit unfair: “Because you have seen, you have believed!” Doesn't the Gospel tell us that Jesus appeared to the disciples behind closed doors? So everyone saw him and found faith precisely through the appearance of God!

Perhaps the “Blessed are those who do not see and yet believe” is not aimed at Thomas at all, but rather at those who convey and listen to this story: us.

We today are not given such an impressive and unambiguous revelation of God. Not even at the second attempt are we able to see the risen Christ like Thomas. We don't recognize him directly, we don't hear his voice, we don't put our hand in any open side. Caution is advised towards any man or woman who babbles about following the will of God. You would not be the first to confuse the voice of the Holy Spirit with the echo of your own chatter.

But how are we supposed to believe when we don't see? Neither the glorious Christ nor the signs of God's reign in the midst of all earthly troubles?

The key is not hidden in the following words, but formulated quite explicitly:

“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples. But these are written down so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah who brings you true life.”

Photo: © Andrea Krogmann



“Written down so that you may believe!”

Those who shared in the grace of Jesus' contemporaneity have given us their testimony in the books of Holy Scripture, which bring us news of past events throughout the ages.

This time has irrevocably passed, these witnesses to the fathers have fallen asleep, the scope of the Bible has been irrevocably fixed.

This legacy, this mission of the Church's first generation of Christians, must be passed on by the Church to all those born after it, handed down, remembered and kept sacred.

Scripture alone, tradition alone will not be enough. We know all too well in what fragile vessels we carry this treasure of Christ when we consider the failings and weaknesses of individuals and groups in the history and present of the Church.

Only to those who not only allow themselves to be informed by the message in a sober and detached manner, but also let themselves be moved by the only Christ in history, do the dead letters become the bubbling source of life, old parchment the rock of all hope and consolation of all sorrow; resurrection as a symbol of a new life in Jesus Christ.



Photo: © Fotostudio Floyd



Photo: © Martin Schaumberger



Photo: © Martin Schaumberger

Esteemed Pilgrim Friends

The “eye of the storm” denotes the cloud-free and absolutely still point in the centre of a violent storm. This is how we feel right now, in the Austrian Pilgrim Hospice in Jerusalem.

In the initial weeks of the current war, Hamas rockets from the Gaza Strip targeted the Holy City, but things have long since returned to “normal” here. For our institution in the region, “normal” necessarily involves phases in which the House stands empty because guests and pilgrims are absent. If I may make an optimistic forecast at this point: in the coming weeks we will once again welcome more individual travelers and at Easter we shall start to receive individual pilgrim groups again. God grant that it is so!

“Eye of the Storm” is also the title of Florian Schiemer’s book, a meticulously prepared and annotated chronicle of our House. The same applies here too: while storms rage around us, our House represents an “oasis of peace” in the heart of the Old City that continues to carry out its tasks undeterred.

Letters and documents from the chronicles of our House testify to the city’s conflicts and wars, but also to drunkards and pleasure-seekers who refused to comply with the strict House rules of the time. The events and situations that my predecessors committed to paper to preserve for posterity resonate with me today and I can clearly relate to their words.

Many “ghostwriters” thus contributed to the current issue: rectors and sisters who have long since passed away and who bravely withstood the storms that confronted them. And who ensured the continuity of the Hospice for the next generation. Does this remind you of the pandemic era? It does me.

Sebastian Leonhartsberger and Jeremias Knirsch have selected some memorable and pertinent extracts from the wealth of material, taking us on a journey through time and opening our eyes to the fact that each and every crisis was followed by a new and hopeful beginning. Even if peace seems remoter than ever right now, we will never give up hope.

Never!

Markus St. Bugnyár

RECTOR MARKUS ST. BUGNYÁR



AUSTRIAN
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I. Beginnings

Emperor Franz Joseph stayed at the Austrian Pilgrim Hospice from November 9th to 13th 1869. En route to the opening of the Suez Canal, the first leg of his journey – to the Empire's eastern border – was covered by rail. That was followed by ship to Constantinople and via Athens to Jerusalem and finally to Egypt. It was the longest foreign trip that Franz Joseph undertook during his reign.

He was accompanied, among others, by the Benedictine Father Beda Dudik, who diligently took notes (lost while visiting the Great Pyramid, but mercifully retrieved), which were published in March 1870 as a book reporting on the Emperor's trip.

In 2020 we republished this book with an introductory commentary and additional footnotes. It was published under the title "Journey to Jerusalem" by the Be&Be Catholic publishing company of the Heiligenkreuz College. Available from any well-stocked specialist retailer or directly from the publisher. An unchanged second edition reprint was published at the beginning of 2024.

Rector Franz Horvath (in service from 1868 to 1870) writes about the Emperor's visit in our House chronicle.

(Note: Quotations from the chronicles are reproduced with the volume and page number; the archive holdings are reproduced under their respective signatures.)

1869: The Emperor takes up residence

"The happiest moment for the Pilgrim House came on November 9th of this year at around 1 o'clock in the afternoon when His Majesty Franz Joseph I, Emperor of Austria and Apostolic King of Hungary, moved to the Pilgrim House and took up residence here. His Majesty the Emperor came to the holy city as a pilgrim and as such set the most sublime and beautiful example. His Majesty visited the Holy Places; he and his entourage received the holy sacrament on November 10th 1869 at 7 a.m. in the morning in the Holy Sepulchre and the days of his stay here are stamped with acts of charity.

Holy masses for himself & the Empire, for the most high Imperial Family, for the unfortunate Emperor Max V. Mexico etc. were read at the request of His Majesty at the holy grave, on Calvary, at the Altar of the Invention of the Holy Cross [in the Helena Grotto of the Holy Sepulchre, the altar of which the later Emperor of Mexico himself donated] etc.

Donations for churches, monasteries, hospitals, alms-houses; alms for the poor of all nations, of all religions and of all languages, were distributed in abundance. Decorations, souvenirs were donated and every wish was granted, every request answered. The memory of the imperial pilgrim will forever be a blessed one.

Bethlehem and the Jordan were visited, the journey to the Jordan involved a stop at Jericho with encampment; from there to the Jordan, to the Dead Sea, to Jericho and from here after a fine repast back to Jerusalem. This trip took 1½ days. [The Greek Orthodox Monastery] Mar Saba was not included.

Every day, His Majesty heard a Holy Mass (except at the Jordan); on the very day of his departure, His Majesty heard a Holy Mass at 7 a.m. celebrated by Father Ratisbonne in the Ecce Homo Church before embarking on the return journey at 8 am.



Photo: © ÖPH

Franz Malecek was rector of the Hospice between 1894 and 1897.



Photo: © ÖPH

Stephan Csarszky first served as vice-rector (1895-97) and then as rector (1897-1902).

His Majesty had such reverence for this city that He walked through it on foot and mounted his horse only at the gates of the city. And if time hadn't been so short, His Majesty would have traversed the entire Holy Land to visit all the places sanctified by some act of the Saviour. The intention to do so was clearly expressed, good will was far from lacking, but the short time allotted to the illustrious traveler meant that it was not possible.

His Majesty had the grace to enter his name in the memorial book of the Pilgrim House and thus the illustrious name of the imperial pilgrim Franz Joseph I honours the memorial book as a permanent symbol of the "beautiful, sublime example" given to his subjects by the most high father who came as a pilgrim to the Holy Land. (ÖHC 2: 30-33)

Early pilgrims enjoyed a "free home" for their first three nights. Only those who wanted to stay longer had to pay or to take on some activity in the guesthouse. This routine was financed by donations from the dioceses of the monarchies – after all, it was in their interests to know that their compatriots were taken good care of and were well fed.

Which isn't to say that the rectors of the time didn't have trouble with certain guests who hardly considered themselves pilgrims. The "break" between classic pilgrim caravans and modern tourism is clearly identifiable from the sources. We later readers often smile at the conditions back then.

Rector Richard Joch (in service from 1892/3 to 1895; he came from Mährisch Weißkirchen) noted the following in our House chronicle:



Photo: © ÖPH

Emperor Franz Joseph I. included a trip to the Jordan on his pilgrimage; the Sultan had a tent built for him here.

1894: Saxons and Protestants

“On August 2nd, a very strange caravan of tourists, mostly Saxons and Protestants, arrived. Of the 150 members, 39 found accommodation in the Pilgrim House. As soon as they had eaten lunch, they rode off to the Dead Sea, in true Swabian style, as if there was nothing in the world more important or necessary than a glimpse of the Dead Sea. So they only had half a day for Jerusalem, during which they visited the Mount of Olives, the Mosque of Omar and the holy grave! Don’t even ask how they did so! In the end they felt short-changed, which resulted in a general protest regarding their somewhat early departure. Poor souls who are so attached to their whims that reason and faith are completely lost. And of course the House Rules were considered mere suggestions to be ignored.

But estote misericordes [in the sense of: let us be merciful]. Characteristic of such caravans is the absence of human warmth and charity. How great is the contrast with a group guided by the true pilgrim spirit! Where everything is *cor unum et anima una*! [One heart and one soul.]

The whole thing ended with a sense of dissatisfaction about the cost of board and lodging. Some of the caravans were actually very underhand. Four went without paying. No, never again! – Someone who initially claimed to be a Catholic, but did nothing to prove it, demanded pilgrimage certificates for everyone (Protestants) and when I explained that he was not a confessor, he said that I should just cross out the passage in question, which I did not agree to.” (ÖHC 2: 110)

Puppi (black) and Marta (fair) were the names of our two pet dogs from an earlier generation.



Photo: © ÖPH

1896: Freemasons are also drawn to the site of Solomon's Temple

The newly-published book on the Emperor's journey offers you an approximately 70-page introduction to the topic, which sheds light on the historical circumstances that motivated Franz Joseph and addresses the political context in Europe at the time. In my introduction I stated:

"Even at this time, however, it was not only the religious factor that brought people to Jerusalem. The rectors recognized the signs of the times, which manifested themselves in the difference between groups of pilgrims who were religiously motivated to knock on the door and "pleasure seekers", i.e. the earliest example of mass tourists who saw the Pilgrim House as nothing more than a hotel. Rector Richard Joch (1893-1895), for example, had to assist an American guest, against his better judgement, in the search for his badge of Masonic affiliation."

Rector Franz Malecek (in service from 1895 to 1897) makes his displeasure quite clear:

So it's the sign of the (Masonic) 32nd degree. Very charming indeed! In general, it is a sacrifice for the heads of the House to have to deal with such caravans, which basically see in the Catholic priest hardly anything other than a hôteleur who is only doing his duty." (ÖHC 2: 101)

1897: Uninvited guests

We know from later years that the Hospice dogs were primarily intended to control the rat infestation (at least on our property) in the Old City at that time. They were certainly also used as guard dogs and will have made an impression on many an uninvited guest. However, it is not documented whether this or that drunkard was deterred by our small white dog.

"Tantur" is first and foremost the name of a small hill south of Jerusalem on the way to Bethlehem, but also of a Maltese settlement built on it. Today this property belongs to the Holy See and serves as an ecumenical research centre. It is unclear whether the dog was found in this area or came to us as a gift from the German-speaking Maltese.

From the pen of the Hungarian-born rector Stephan Csarszky (in service from 1897 to 1902) we read:

"On September 20th [1897] we got a little white dog from Tantur, which is said to be of good service to the House, especially at night. On the same day in the evening a zabdiye [turk. zaptiye: refers to the Ottoman gendarmerie in the city before 1923] escorted a drunk man into the Pilgrim House and left him there; I immediately called two policemen, who only came when I called them a second time, who took the man away again." (ÖHC 2: 177)

II. House Rules

Of course, there were “House Rules” in the Catholic guesthouse that everyone had to adhere to – at least in theory. The list has grown over time from the experiences of former rectors and sisters who – informed by “incidents” – sought to give the House form and direction.

Currently we do not have House Rules in this strict sense. However, the time-honoured question is still relevant: how and what distinguishes a pilgrim hostel from a “normal hotel”? Back then there were almost only hostels run by the three local religious communities: Jewish, Christian and Muslim. Very close to us was Beit Wittemberg, where the famed writer Mark Twain once stayed in 1867 - unfortunately not with us.

Today no-one would express themselves as they did back in 1902. However, I have to admit: anyone in Jerusalem working in the pilgrim hospitality field will have an immediate affinity with our predecessors’ descriptions.

Very practical things are also alluded to: how do you successfully manoeuvre the mail past the censor? How do locals produce their wine? How do you recognize potential cheats who run off without paying their bills? And yes: These people still exist today. You wouldn’t believe it.



Photo: © ÖPH

The young Franz Fellingner;
probably during his term of office
from 1900-1902.

The text in the second volume of the Chronicle goes back to the famous Austrian rector Franz Fellingner: born on March 23rd 1865 in St. Thomas (Upper Austria), he was ordained a priest in Linz in 1888. He served as rector of the Hospice twice, 1902-1906 and 1913-1935. On February 29th 1929 he was promoted to auxiliary bishop of Jerusalem and was ordained on April 7th 1929 by Patriarch Luigi Barlassina. At the same time as working in the Hospice, he served as vicar general in the Latin Patriarchate. Franz Fellingner died on July 22nd 1940 and was buried in the crypt of the Co-Cathedral of the Patriarchate.

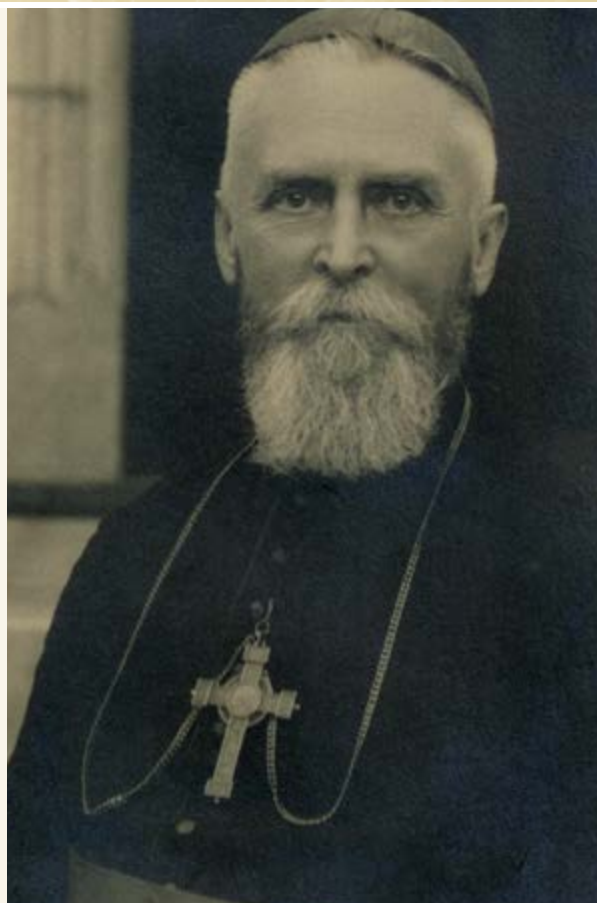


Photo: © ÖPH

Franz Fellingner ultimately remained in office, with interruptions, until 1935; but also acted as vicar general and auxiliary bishop in Jerusalem.

1902: House Rules and other important Issues

Under the heading “Housing Foreigners, Non-Austrians” the following (albeit in current times not politically correct!) paragraphs can be found in the Chronicle:

The English: these people come often. Both the prospect of good food, for which our Hospice is renowned, and cheaper living, are the reasons they come to us. They usually come for lengthy stays in order to pursue their passions: painting, archaeological studies or just doing nothing. At first they are very modest, but once they have settled in, they demand all sorts of comforts, cold and hot baths, the right to spend hours in the dining room, and to eat whenever they want in the evening. If at times it is difficult to refuse them admission, for example at Easter, at least make conditions tougher for them in advance, because they think they can get away with 5 francs a day. But the burden they place on you is incalculable.

For example, just today a Mr. C. introduced himself as a friend of the Austrian consul and the English bishop. But after he revealed the actual reason for his arrival – he was feeling miserable in the Casa Nova etc. – and there was in fact no recommendation from the Honorable Consul, I calmly bade him leave. I couldn't have taken him in for less than 10 francs. Don't fall for such tricks. And be careful!

Jews: If they are poor or homines vagi [itinerant wanderers], they like to pose as “Reformed”, especially those from Hungary. In fact, they should rather be called Reform Jews. I often find out the truth through a catechism test. But there were among them some respectable sons of Israel, for example a young gentleman and his spouse. It was evening and the weather was very bad. I escorted them in and talked to them a little. I didn't think they were Jews, but rather secular folk. But I had the fortuitous idea of asking them for their papers. Their passport was of course in the suitcase. A business card alone told me that Mr. Daniel Israel couldn't



Photo: © ÖPH

Door watchmen and guards of honour used to be called Kavass (turk); in the picture Ali (1910).

possibly be a Christian, except by some miracle. After I explained to them that I couldn't possibly host a Jew and why, my offer that they nonetheless spend the night here on account of the bad weather was turned down, which was all the better for us.

Austrians from the Levant: Take them in, but watch some of them closely. Unfortunately, a wolf often lurks behind sheep's clothing. Especially when it comes to employment in the House as cooks, housekeepers, decision-makers. First comes a female pilgrim who seems very pious, complains about the ungodly lives of others, gives good advice about running the House and makes secret confessions, wants to talk in private, criticizes the servants or incites her table companions to complain about the food. Outsiders (even consuls) are assessed secretly. Afterwards comes "the husband," whom she of course doesn't know at all. At best, he is her "brother-in-law," about whom she has already said nice things. One should be careful not to make comments to such people that one would not want to make [in public]. Be careful when speaking! Nor should one give them a job in the House too readily. When it comes to work, clara pacta [clear agreements]! When leaving, you should carefully lock up all utensils. Unfortunately, first-class crooks often come here from Austria. People who leave the House should take their passport and other papers with them, otherwise there will be trouble afterwards. If they want to leave their suitcases here for a while, take no responsibility, but refer them to the House servant who will lock the cases up in a safe place.

Homines vagi [itinerant wanderers] especially like to come when there is a new rector. Take your time, first look in the pilgrims' book (register) to see how often they have stayed here and how they distinguished themselves. Drunkards can usually be recognized by their appearance. 1. Question: Have you already been here or: You have already been here! – 2. Why did you come here? – Usual answer: I just want to worship and look for work. 3rd question: Something from the catechism. – As soon as you have taken them in (promise them only 2-3 days), ask them to come up for a general test on religion. For there are people that have an unholy respect, and we have noticed that since then the influx has almost completely ceased. You can give them a few more days later.

Pilgrimage certificate:

If the subject is sine dubio capax vel dignum [undoubtedly capable and worthy], let them know immediately. But if there is doubt, the following wordage would be recommended:

LF! [An abbreviation in German possibly for "Dear friend!"]? We are not sure] You could damage the pilgrimage certificate on the trip, lose it, etc. and you don't actually need it while you are here. When you are back in your homeland, go to your clergyman and ask him to write a few lines of recommendation about you, stating that he knows you as a devout person, etc authorised with a parish stamp. Then send that to me and I will immediately send the pilgrimage certificate to the clergyman (...) – This method prevents fraudulent requests. Confirmations for the purpose of obtaining the pilgrimage certificate from Saint Saviour's Monastery [the seat of the Franciscan Custody] are not recommended since a somewhat summary procedure pertains there for the issuing of the pilgrimage certificate.



Photo: © OPH

For every group of pilgrims, a photo in the entrance area with the officiant is considered good form.

Book shipments from Europe:

How can one avoid the considerable difficulties of the censor etc. Write the following emphatic letter to the bookseller: "Never, ever send me a package of books in the form of a postal package, but under the cross band with the clear declaration: "printed matter". Each such package can weigh up to 2 kilos. It doesn't matter how many of these you send me at once. If you don't do that, I for one won't accept the shipment. – Then you will have to bear the costs yourself." This ensures that the books arrive via post directly at the House address without censorship and other such travails of Muslim state wisdom. Of course it costs a little more, but the whole nuisance is eliminated. Other things should be sent as "samples of no value", because up to 350 grams can be sent by post and cheaply. 50 grams for 3 kreuzers. This means you can send rosaries, books, etc. abroad.

To those foreigners who are too demanding, our point of view should be made clear in no uncertain terms: they have to be completely satisfied with the facilities in the House and understand that it is our custom to ask anyone who is not satisfied to use a hotel; our House is

not dependent on their money. They have to understand it as a (special) grace that they are here. That the House was established for Austrians and is maintained by monies received from Austrian Catholics and that a pilgrim has no business looking for good food etc. Everything in a very conciliatory tone, but with cold-blooded determination. By the way, it rarely happens that this becomes necessary. People who have already stayed in Casa Nova are usually not accepted here.



Photo: © ÖPH

Pilgrimage certificates like those of yesteryear
are still available at the Hospice.

Photo: © ÖPH



This memorial plaque is located inside the old
k.u.k. Post Office building; today the Christian
Information Centre.



Photo: © ÖPH

The household with rector and vice-rector, women religious and lay employees along with the Arab Kawasses at the turn of the century.

Foreign caravans usually contact hoteliers here in advance and make strict arrangements about room, board, etc. The Dragomen (a translator or travel guide) meddle behind the scenes and try to push the services of the Hospice; the undermined hoteliers get angry and are known to complain in person to the rector of the Hospice. It is therefore advisable to tell the Dragomen straight away: guests will only be admitted in the event that the legal claims of the hoteliers are not damaged.

The tourist caravans are the crown of thorns of the Pilgrim House rectors. Things never proceed smoothly. Arguments always arise over the beer bottles! Who owes how many bottles. It would probably make most sense to introduce beer stamps with numbers for the people concerned. Of course, it would be best if such caravans sought to spare the House, where certain court actors and Freemasons of the 32nd Degree swarm around. The rectors are always seen as more or less solid innkeepers.

Beggars: like to come when a high-ranking person, an archduke, prince or bishop is residing in the House. They ask for accommodation for a night and then brazenly attack the guests behind their backs. Ergo. Without a cross. People who don't want to make a cross are relegated to second class wherever possible.

Wine: If the wine is filled from the press into the barrels, without any further to do, as we have just observed so far, it should be tapped after a month, non obstante quavis consuetudine etiam immemorabili hujus (sic) civitatis [on account of a previously unthinkable habit of this city]. This makes it clear faster and also much finer. In general, the more often you tap it, the better. It is particularly important to note that it must be tapped around February, when the weather changes to the constant warmth of spring and before the flowering of the vines, then in August before the yellowing of the leaves, but never in cold and unstable weather. (ÖHC 2: 320-333)



Photo: © ÖPH

Rector Fellinger with the sisters of the House.

III. The First World War and the 1930s

This text was also written by Rector Fellinger; however, it is not found in one of our chronicles, but in his private correspondence, which he conducted with the Viennese auxiliary bishop Hermann Zschokke and the acting rector Richard Joch in 1917. This material is part of our in-house archive.

Hermann Zschokke was ordained a priest in 1861 and received his doctorate in 1863. From 1864 to 1866 he served as second rector of the Hospice in Jerusalem. In 1868 he became court chaplain in Vienna and was a lecturer in Semitic dialects and the Old Testament at the Catholic Theological Faculty of the university, where he was also rector in 1884/85. After his retirement from university service, he took on tasks in the cathedral chapter of St. Stephen in 1892. In 1901 he became a member of the Upper House of the Austrian Reichsrat; 1905 head of section for relations between church and state. Pope Pius X appointed Zschokke auxiliary bishop of Vienna in 1910 (with the titular diocese of Caesarea Philippi, which once again linked him to the Holy Land). On December 11th 1910 he was ordained by Cardinal Franz Xaver Nagl in St. Stephen's Cathedral. In 1911 he finally gave up his job as rector of the Pilgrim Hospice. His successor in this role was a former rector: Richard Joch.



Photo: © OPH

**A formation of Austro-Hungarian soldiers
in front of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre,
May 1916.**

1914-1917: First World War

Letter from Franz Fellingner to Richard Joch on August 3rd 1914:

“The outbreak of the First World War has reached Jerusalem and our Hospice.”

Rector Franz Fellingner reports that the pilgrim guests from Bavaria and Tyrol are leaving; Vice-Rector Ludwig Reinprecht is also leaving the country: “(...) the difficulties involved in the return journey are not yet that great.”

In the city of Jerusalem itself, all horses, donkeys and mules have been appropriated for military service, just as all young men have been drafted.

“People who understand how things will turn out and how long the war will last are being especially careful with money so as not to have too little in the future.” (Sig. K.19140803. Fellingner.Joch)

A short time later, on November 25th 1915, Rector Fellingner wrote to Hermann Zschokke in Vienna:

“In Jerusalem, life and activity goes on as usual, except that instead of tourists and pilgrims you see officers and soldiers. If they weren't to be seen, you wouldn't even suspect that we were living in wartime.”



Photo: © ÖPH

The undated photo from the archive shows a variety of different uniforms beside our tower

Almost exactly two years later, on November 22nd 1917 (when events of the war reached the Holy City), Fellingner wrote again to Zschokke:

“The entry of the English into the Holy City is a matter of days. The Turkish army near Hebron is intact, but the English are pushing in from Bab el Wad (Jaffa Street) and from Ramallah. The Turkish army is out of food, so there is nothing for them but to retreat. The black smoke of English guns has been rising from Nebi Samuel since yesterday evening, there is constant thundering and blasts from the west.”

A little later the text declares:

“Just now, at 1 o'clock in the afternoon, English planes are circling over the city. In my room I hear the sound of bombs being dropped. There was aerial combat between a German and 2 English pilots, which ended in a draw.” (Sig. K.19171122.Fellinger.Zschokke)

Rector Franz Haider (1935-1954) suffered a particularly difficult fate during the war. First he was deported, on March 8th 1940, to Akko by the British Mandate as a member of an enemy state and finally sent to Australia with other German families at the end of July 1941. On September 27th 1959, with the permission of the relevant Jordanian authorities, he succeeded in returning to his post in Jerusalem.

1936: An Austrian among the dead

Rector Haider tells us about a fatal incident in the Holy City in which the Hospice was involved:

“Our House has to mourn a victim: On May 18th, our servant Karl Breitingner, a native of Vienna, was felled by a bullet fired at Breitingner's head by an unknown person from behind. Despite my warning, Breitingner had been reckless in going into the Jewish New Town wearing Arab head covering (tarbush) on the turbulent days that followed a shooting in the Eden cinema. There, on the street of the Prophets, in front of the Abyssinian Consulate, he met his sad fate. We have lost a very skilled, versatile and honest worker. His funeral, which coincided with various dramatic incidents and which the Arabs would have liked to turn into a large [?] political demonstration, took place on the day of his death. He was buried in the Catholic cemetery on Mt Zion. R.I.P.” (ÖHC 1: 25)



Photo: © ÖPH

Hermann Zschokke was the second rector of our House and remained here for a long time.

1937: Notes on the political situation and the House

“On July 8th, the report and recommendations of the so-called Peel Commission were published (a copy of the publication is in the House library): Palestine is to be divided into a Jewish and an Arab state, while the holy places Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth are placed under a new English mandate. A “corridor” is planned from Jaffa via Jerusalem to the Dead Sea.

The Arabs unconditionally and unanimously reject this “partition” because it severely limits their national territory and is in total opposition to their aspirations for self determination. The Jews also sometimes act as if they are dissatisfied with this solution (sic! added later) since their intention is focused on Palestine in its entirety, the land of their fathers (Hebrew letters: ארץ ישראל = the land of Israel). In reality, they would be happy if this partition plan came to fruition, as they would then at least have a piece of it in their safe possession.” (ÖHC 1: 27) 1937:

“July 27-29, the Hospice hosted a Czech tour group consisting of 43 participants, which was led by Czech Catholic academics. The priestly members of this group expressed their displeasure with the arrangement of the trip. Two Czech students who arrived before this group and who also lied to me (they said that they belonged to this group) left the Hospice after several days without thanks and without paying! Fraudsters!

On October 8th, His Excellency Bishop Dr. Franz Fellingner, who had stayed on in the Hospice after his retirement, announced his intention to move to the Latin Patriarchate. The only reason he gave was that the daily journey from the Hospice to the Patriarchate was too difficult for him, but that he still wanted to fulfill his duties as Vicar General of the Patriarch. On the afternoon of Oct. 23rd, he left the House to move into his new apartment in the Patriarchate. The lunch here was a farewell meal, attended by the Austrian Consul General Dr Ivo Jorda and his wife. The speeches given by the Rector, Bishop Fellingner and the Consul General emphasised the excellent understanding between them.” (ÖHC 1: 28)

“The servant Karl Plischek was in the House from April 2nd to April 14th Oct. 1937. He came as a job seeker and begged to be taken on. Skilled at carpentry, he did much good work but, not being entirely mentally stable, he ultimately had to be dismissed because of impudent behaviour.” (ÖHC 1: 29-30)

IV. Founding of the State of Israel and the Arab hospital in the Pilgrim Hospice

1948: The Hospice in the war of 1948

Here we read some of Rector Franz Haider's comments:

The Israel War of Independence was a military conflict between the newly founded State of Israel and Arab armies supported by Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. On November 29th 1947, a resolution was passed in the UN that provided for the division of the British mandate into a Jewish state of Israel and a Palestinian state. After Israel's independence was proclaimed by David Ben Gurion on May 14th 1948, the neighbouring states responded by starting a war against Israel with the aim of destroying the partition plan.

With support from the Americans, the Israelis surprisingly managed to defend themselves and achieve victory on all fronts. The young state now went far beyond the boundaries envisaged in the partition plan and resulted in the expulsion of approximately 800,000 Palestinians from their homeland. In Arabic this event is called an-Nakba, the catastrophe. At the same time, a similar number of Jews were expelled from the Arab countries in the region, almost all of whom emigrated to the new Israel.

On the 14th of May 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed and a bloody war broke out and the Hospice filled with wounded Jordanian soldiers. After the cease-fire, the military hospital was converted into a civilian hospital by the Jordanians and a formal rental agreement was concluded between the Jordanian government, represented by the Minister of Health, and the Austrian Hospice, represented by Mr. Antoine Albina, Jerusalem Salah-Eddin Street, owner of the Albina Tours travel agency, authorized by Rector Dr. Franz Haider, according to which Jordan had to pay 1,400 dinars annually in advance as rent for 49 rooms in the Hospice – a minimal sum!” (ÖHC 1:39)

“On May 24th 1948, the Red Cross flag was raised over the Hospice. The British withdrew to the north and the fighting developed into full-scale war in May. Despite the Red Cross flag, the Hospice was shelled by the Jews, not only with rifles but also with heavy artillery. The German priest Eilers [?], chaplain to the Sisters of Zion, [who] witnessed the war in the Old City, writes: no other place within the walls of Jerusalem was shelled like the Austrian Hospice and the Armenian Church. The most amazing of miracles is that the shells fell heavily around the Hospice, damaging the plaster and walls; one shell fell into the shaft of a cellar window, another tore off part of the stone parapet from the balcony, killing an orderly and injuring two others. None of the numerous water pipes leading from the roof

into the cisterns remained undamaged, many window panes were broken, window frames torn, a chapel window was shot through. Despite this hail of shells all around the Hospice, miraculously no damage occurred to the inside. A higher power protected the Hospice, chicken coop, patients and staff.

The sisters who with Arab nurses helped in caring for the injured, remained well, and the sisters' house in the corner of the garden, where the sisters through the strength of their trust in God have held out bravely and with dignity since it was confiscated by the mandate power, also weathered the storm well. On the night of July 16th to 17th 1948, more than 30 shells exploded around the Hospice, writes a sister. As long as the fighting lasted, the House was managed by the Red Cross, while the head doctor, Dr. Canaan, a devout Lutheran renowned for his knowledge of Palestinian lore who received his medical training in Germany, paid rent until his departure at the end of October 1948. Then the Transjordanian military took it over, later the Jordanian government. As the sisters were pushing for rent, a contract had to be drawn up. Since Reverend Father Sonnen did not have permission to cross from the Jewish side to the Arab Old City, Reverend Father Franciscan Eugene Hoade concluded the lease agreement with the Jordanian government. The contract, which was concluded in April 1949, began retroactively on December 1st 1948 and terminated on November 30th 1949. Father Eugene was satisfied with the rent, 50 dinars per month, which had previously been paid by the mandate government. Only when the contract was due to be renewed in November did he demand a slightly higher rental fee. He was referred to the Tenant Protection Act, which precludes rent increases, and subsequently refused to renew the contract under the previous stipulation [agreement]. The result was that

the government paid no rent at all. This was the state of affairs that prevailed when the rector returned to Jerusalem on September 27th 1950. It took a two-year battle to breach the Tenant Protection Act in this particular case, and the noble victor, Mr. Antoine Albina, deserves great credit for the fact that he was successful." (ÖHC 1: 36-37)

1949: Letter to Cardinal Innitzer

Father Johannes Sonnen (responsible for the administration of the German Paulushaus, located directly outside the Damascus Gate) was entrusted with the care of the Hospice during the exile of Rector Haider. On October 18th 1949, he wrote to the Protector of the House in Vienna, Archbishop Cardinal Theodor Innitzer, about a visit to the Old City of Jerusalem the previous summer:

"The Hospice suffered damage as a result of the fighting. But, thank God, the grenades failed to cause any serious damage to the solid structure."

At the time of writing, any damage to the building had already been repaired. Father Sonnen makes a point of telling the Archbishop of Vienna about the sisters in the Hospice who carry out their service in the "most faithful manner imaginable".

The sisters are doing well considering the circumstances. Living conditions are satisfactory and the sisters do not need any support in this regard. (Sig. K.19491018.Sonnen.Innitzer)

1951: Jordanian King Abdallah I. and our Hospice

On July 20th 1951, Jordanian King Abdallah I was the victim of an assassination attempt on the grounds of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Contrary to what is often described, the king did not die immediately, but was taken to the nearest hospital for emergency care – namely, to us. After his death, Abdallah was briefly laid out in the entrance area of the House and his body was then flown to Amman. He was accompanied by his grandson, the future King Hussein I, who witnessed all of this at a young age.

From Helmut Wohnout, The Austrian Hospice in Jerusalem: History of the Pilgrim House on the Via Dolorosa, pp. 153-154:

“A dramatic and tragic event took place on July 20th 1951 within the walls of the Pilgrim House. When Jordanian King Abdallah visited Jerusalem with his grandson, Crown Prince Hussein, he was the target of a gun attack carried out by an Arab in the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Mortally wounded, the 68-year-old monarch was wrapped in a prayer mat and taken to the Hospice for first aid. Sister Liliosa Fasching, who was involved in giving first aid, was among those who were present when the king died. Ten years later, this sad incident was the catalyst for King Hussein’s visit to the Pilgrim House to see the place where his grandfather died.”



Photo: © OPH

The young King Hussein I. visits the Hospice and thanks Sr. Liliosa in our House chapel.

1953: A Jordanian Hospital for Rent

This text also probably comes from Rector Haider:

“On March 18th the rector finally signed a rental agreement with somewhat better conditions (100 Jordanian dinars tax-free per month). The representative of the responsible minister (for transport) only gave his signature on June 20th. There was still a remaining impediment in the contractual details. The rector had declared on March 18th 1953 that he would only sign if a clause was inserted into the pre-printed form that the tenant was not allowed to make any changes to the leased property without the consent of the rector of the Hospice. The two officers involved were kind enough to make the correction. We thought everything would now be fine; however, since the lease agreement was not sent to the rector for months and reminders remained unanswered, there was nothing left but to go to Amman, where the rector was told that the ministerial director could not sign the contract with the correction without the minister's permission. As the minister was not there, the rector was requested to come back in 2 days. Thus, after waiting 2 days, he returned on June 20th. The minister did not raise any objection to the inserted clause. Strange, this minister was Muslim, his predecessor, who had put off signing for so long, had been a Catholic. The contract determined that the Hospice would be leased to the [Jordanian] government for 3 years from April 1st 1953 to March 31st 1956, with an express stipulation [agreement] that it might only be used as a hospital. When the rector finally had the contract in his hands, he sent letters to the minister for transport and public works as well as to the minister of health, asking the government to take note that he would be unable to extend the lease after a year's term, since the Hospice was at long last to be returned to its original purpose. It would probably be necessary to remind the government of this fact repeatedly in order to get it to finally move forward with the construction of a government hospital. After the lease expired, the interior of the House would need a major overhaul. Since a state of war persisted, the lease was renewed again and again.” (ÖHC 1: 37)



Photo: © ÖPH

One of the few photos in our archive from the time of the hospital.

1954-64: The good sisters from Vöcklabruck

Rector Franz Haider again:

“During this interregnum of 10 years, our good Vöcklabruck sisters looked after the Hospice, kept an eye on the condition of the building and set an example of Christian charity throughout (...) [17] years of unpaid nursing service in the Jordanian government hospital, which earned them the respect of patients and doctors as well as everyone else, especially the neighbours, who knew them. Without the courageous and helpful work of these 4 sisters, our Hospice would not be what it is unreservedly and generally recognized as – namely an Austrian church property, well preserved in its substance, whose legal owner is the respective Archbishop of Vienna, currently Archbishop Dr. Franz Cardinal König: At the end of their activities in Palestine, the British Mandate handed over the Hospice they had confiscated, for which they always paid rent, to the Jordanian government as a military hospital.” (ÖHC 1: 39)

1955: A new rector

Rector Haider announces his successor: Ernst Bannerth. However, due to the Hospice being leased to the Jordanian government for use as a hospital for the city's Arab population, he will not reside in Jerusalem but will regularly check on things. Rather, it is the sisters who continue to hold the fort and bear responsibility. They are the Austrian presence on the ground.

“With the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955 and the establishment of diplomatic missions, for example in Beirut for Lebanon and Jordan, and in Tel Aviv for Israel, the Hospice also received new support at a diplomatic level and with it the hope that the Austrian Hospice could be liberated and returned to its original purpose as soon as possible. At first it seemed so: prominent personalities, diplomats and politicians once again visited the Hospice: Dr. Otto Habsburg and his wife on 27th October 1955, Archbishop Dr. Franz Jachim, Coadjutor of the Archdiocese of Vienna and Auxiliary Bishop Dr. Josef Streidt, Vicar General of Vienna, signed the pilgrim guestbook on 28th March 1959, as did Johannes Schwarzenberg, Ambassador in London.

“In 1960, Empress Zitta (sic!) arrived and on April 25th 1961, King Hussein visited the Hospice accompanied by the Austrian envoy Dr. Albert Filz (Beirut) and toured our house chapel. The Austrian ambassador Dr. H. Peinsipp (Tel-Aviv) visited our House repeatedly and thanks to Ambassador Dr. Arthur Breycha-Vauthier, our House has a permanent supporter and patron, as well as a diplomatic advocate with the government in Amman. It is not least thanks to his efforts that finally, albeit rather late, a new rector for the Hospice was appointed by the Archbishop of Vienna, Dr. Franz Cardinal König, in the person of the university lecturer Dr. Ernst Bannerth (for Islamic Studies), professor of religion and lay priest of the diocese of Eisenstadt, resident in Cairo.” (ÖHC 1: 39-40)

1967: The Six-Day War

The June or 6-Day War was an armed conflict between Israel and the Arab states of Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Preempting an Egyptian attack, the Israeli air force struck and succeeded in crushing its Egyptian opponents under the leadership of President Gamal Abdel Nasser. The Israelis also achieved victory on the Jordanian and Syrian fronts in a very short space of time. Thanks to the war, Israel had now conquered the entire West Bank with East Jerusalem and its historic Old City from Jordan, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from the Egyptians and the strategically important Golan Heights from Syria. The 6-Day War has an enormous impact on the geopolitics of the Middle East to this day and helped Israel achieve the status of a regional superpower. In 1982, as a result of negotiations, the Sinai Peninsula was returned to Egypt and in 2006 Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip. Parts of the West Bank and the Golan Heights remain occupied by Israel to this day.

The then superior of the community of sisters in the House, Sr. Gerfrida Saxenhuber, records for posterity:

“It was reported in the press that the new hospital would be completed at the beginning of 1967, but the work fell far short of these promises, the desired financial aid from the Austrian government did not materialize, and structural damage to the Hospice was getting worse. At the end of July, Rector Dr. Ernst Bannerth returned to Cairo; hardly any of the vague promises came to fruition. The authorities knew that they would be safe from the rector's representations and submissions for another year, and Vienna does not seem to have responded to the rector's suggestion that King Hussein should be approached directly to clear the Hospice as quickly as possible.” (ÖHC 1: 41-42)

“Ambassador Dr. Breycha-Vauthier appealed to the Austrian government to provide material aid – a lift etc. There is some prospect of realization, in fact the writer of these lines – meaning Sister Superior Gerfrida Saxenhuber – was commissioned to take and pass on the exact measurements required for a lift to be delivered from Vienna. Too late – the June (Six-Day) War took bitter revenge on the Jordanians for their heming and hawing.” (ÖHC 1: 42)

“Primarius Dr. Stepantschitz asked who would pay for the construction and who would pay for the operation of the outpatient clinic. The rector explained that the construction costs would have to be paid for by Austria or the Austrian Hospice through donations, while the Jordanian government would probably have to pay for the running of the outpatient clinic and no contribution could be expected from the patients. The Primarius then said, “then the best thing would be to build a coffee house – with charming service – on the Hospice terrace with its wonderful view; the clinic could easily be maintained from the proceeds.” These words soon made the rounds as far as Tel Aviv and it was remarked that this was a truly Austrian solution. But the Six-Day War in June 1967 also put paid to these plans. During an inspection of the hospital rooms in the Hospice, the words “these are a sanitary scandal” were uttered.” (ÖHC 1: 48-49)

“New Year’s Eve: A large group of Carinthian pilgrims visited the Hospice and invited the rector to their New Year’s Eve party at the Pilgrim’s Palace Hotel, which turned into a wonderful Carinthian evening, with the old, fateful year 1967 fading away to joyful singing and witty poems.” (ÖHC 1: 57)

1970: Disastrous; but the rector has a lioness at his side

Franz Sauer, a university professor from Graz, was committed to his duties at home at the same time as being rector of the Hospice from 1966 to 1987. He did not reside in Jerusalem but came several times a year for inspections at the Hospice, which was entrusted entirely to the care of the Vöcklabruck sisters. At Christmas 1984, he suffered an attack of weakness, whereupon the Viennese Dominican priest Manfred Kniewasser was placed at his side as vice-rector and should have become the new rector when the Hospice reopened. However, the latter’s death at a young age in 1987 prevented this.

Sr. Liliosa Fasching deserves special mention; from 1933 to 1988 she was the protector and pillar of the House. In an article dated June 2nd 1985, Dieter Kindermann bestows on her the honorary title “Lioness of Jerusalem”, by which we are still familiar with her today.

“The sanitary facilities, which were in a dreadful state, were partially repaired at the hospital’s expense, but their improper handling repeatedly led to burst and blocked pipes, which caused major damage to the masonry. Sometimes it took weeks before repair was carried out, or had to be arranged by and at the expense of the rectorate. Sister Liliosa is often the driving force behind this and has been given the honorary title of “policeman” by hospital employees in recognition of her efforts. She carries out an inspection tour of the hospital rooms almost every week.” (ÖHC 1: 67)

V. War and two Intifadas

1987-1993: First Intifada

The First Intifada (uprising), also known as the “War of Stones” was an ongoing conflict between Palestinians and the Israeli military from 1987 to 1993. The First Intifada was triggered by a collision between an Israeli truck and two Palestinian taxis, in which four civilians were killed. The first mass demonstrations began in December 1987 and eventually violent riots broke out. The reasons for the escalation are diverse. On the one hand, there was a demand for an end to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza areas annexed by Israel in the Six-Day War. On the other hand, economic difficulties and high unemployment meant that young people found themselves without prospects and with no alternative means of livelihood. As fertility rates among Palestinian women rose dramatically in the 1980s, approximately 70 per cent of the population was under 30 years old. The years 1988 to 1991 in particular saw an unprecedented state of emergency in all areas of everyday life, from strikes, squatting of buildings to street battles. The First Intifada took the lives of almost 1,000 Palestinians and 200 Israelis. The de-escalation that began in 1991 culminated in the beginning of the Oslo peace process in 1993, when the Intifada was officially declared over.

The Sister Superior (Mater) Maria Glasauer is known to many friends of the Hospice. In a meeting of the Board of Trustees on November 18th 1988, she reported on the era of the First Intifada:

“The mood in Jerusalem is very tense. The military is frequently to be seen sitting on the steps of our main entrance on the Via Dolorosa. Israeli soldiers are of the opinion that we are still a hospital. The Israeli military wanted to station soldiers on the wall. This was rejected and the letter from Dr Kollek was presented, in which the status of the House was made clear. The soldiers then abandoned their plan. Twenty young Arabs were arrested in front of the House on Sunday, with one Arab boy being kicked. Pilgrims are also harassed when they enter the House. The soldiers act arbitrarily. They

demand a work permit for an Arab employee, which they are not allowed to do. So far there has been peace in the Hospice itself.” (Sig. OD.19881118.001)

1990-1991: Gulf War

The Second Gulf War (also called the First Iraq War) was an armed conflict fought from August 1990 to February 1991 between Iraq and a coalition of numerous states, primarily the USA and Saudi Arabia, as well as other states of the Arab League and Europe. On August 2nd 1990, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded neighbouring Kuwait for its oil and gold. Within two days, Iraqi troops gained the upper hand and installed a puppet government. The anti-Iraqi coalition, which was founded shortly afterwards, began the ground offensive on February 24th 1991; it ended on February 26th with the withdrawal of Iraqi troops and the liberation of Kuwait. Israel was not unaffected by the events of the war. In total, around 70 civilians died as an indirect or direct result of rocket attacks. At the request of the Americans, Israel did not take part in the coalition in order not to jeopardize support of Arab states hostile to Israel.

We read here how Johann Krammer (assistant to the then Rector Wolfgang Schwarz) experienced the period between January 3rd and 30th 1991:

“The period from the beginning of January to the end of this year’s Gulf War was certainly the most tense for the Austrian Hospice since its reopening. The threat of war resulted in the cessation of pilgrim trips. No one felt safe in this region, not even those living in the “Holy City”. The concern of the employees and volunteers, especially their relatives, was understandably great. Rector Schwarz, who was in Austria from January 3rd to 30th, and I deliberated the most important decisions in almost daily telephone calls. The situation in the Arab areas of the country, including in the Old City of Jerusalem, was very tense. There were even rumours that the Hospice would be used as a hospital again in case of an emergency. Arabs actually came twice and asked to

set up first aid rooms here. Tension prior to the outbreak of war grew with the uncertainty of the consequences for the entire country as well as for our House. I was in constant contact with the Austrian Embassy in Tel Aviv, as well as with Austrian UN employees in the various organizations here in the country. I consulted with the director of Notre Dame, with the Latin Patriarchate, with the Apostolic Delegation and many other institutions. The first volunteers embarked on their journey home at the beginning of January."

The public also paid tribute to Sr. Liliösa Fasching's longstanding work; here in the Kronen Zeitung 1985

"During all these weeks I suffered the constant tension of having to make decisions in face of the unforeseeable unfolding of events. I also asked myself whether and for how long it made sense to stay here given the situation. My family at home, my friends and acquaintances were worried; they couldn't understand my decision to stay longer. Together with my wife, who was in Cyprus, I struggled to come to a decision for myself. The main justification for staying was that I was not comfortable asking someone else to look after the Hospice for us Austrians in case of emergency or danger. Even if the people here had no way of leaving, that was no reason for their being expected to stand in for us. In this sense, I would in no way describe my remaining as a heroic act, but as a sign of respect for these people." (Sig. OD.19900201.001)



Photo: © Newspaper article from our archive. Courtesy of Kronen Zeitung

Die Löwin von Jerusalem



Seit 52 Jahren betreut Schwester Lilliosa nicht nur den Hospizgarten, sondern auch die Hospizkirche mit ihrem prächtigen Kupelwieser-Gemälde. Die 82jährige Ordensfrau steht jeden Tag um 4.30 Uhr früh auf, um den noch nicht „beschlagnahmen“ Pilgerhausbereich auf Hochglanz zu halten.

FORTSETZUNG

morden, dem 1. und 2. Weltkrieg, verbunden. Die Engländer requirierten das Pilgerhaus jedesmal als „Feindgut“ (widerrechtlich, weil es Kirchengut war und ist): Es diente als Internierungslager für Ordensleute aus den Feindstaaten, als Polizei- und Militärschule (Sprachlehrer: Israels späterer Außenminister Abba Eban), als jordanisches Militär- und Zivilspital. Österreichs Nonnen hielten in all den blutigen Kriegswirren unerschrocken die Stellung. Österreichs Nonnen wurden immer wieder gedrängt, das Haus zu verlassen, ins Exil zu gehen, doch sie hielten trotz aller Gefahren eisern die Stellung. Schwester Lilliosa erzählt darüber: „Nach Ausbruch des 2. Weltkrieges schien unser Exodus unvermeidbar zu sein. Doch unser Rektor, Weihbischof Fellinger, der damals mit dem Tod rang, verhinderte das Schlimmste, indem er den Engländern sagte: ‚Wenn die Ordensfrauen ausziehen müssen, kann ich nicht in Ruhe sterben.‘“

Lilliosa Fasching, die all die Kriegswirren hautnah miterlebt hat, stammt aus einer Münzkirchner Bauernfamilie und trat mit 20 Jahren („Gott hat mich gerufen“) dem Vöcklabrunner Schwesternorden bei. Die Generaloberin entsandte 1933 fünf Nonnen nach Jerusalem, von denen nur noch Schwester Lilliosa (trotz ihrer 82 Jahre) voll im Einsatz ist: Sie steht jeden Tag um 4.30 Uhr auf, besucht die heilige Messe, betreut Kapelle, Rektorat, Pilger und vor allem den Garten. Da wachsen Märzentee, Knob-



lauch, Schnittlauch, Kohlrüben, Salat, Kren und Erbsen. Da blühen Rosen, Zymen, Mariengold, Sonnensterne, Zitronen-, Orangen-, Gummi-, Feigen- und Maulbeerbäume. Ja, Schwester Lilliosa betreibt sogar eine kleine Hühnerzucht, die sie jetzt aber auflassen will. Nicht etwa, weil ihr einmal Araber sieben Hendlern aus Rache erdrosselt haben, sondern weil ihr das „bunte Federvieh“ zuwenig Eier legt.

Aber was hätte Schwester Lilliosa Einsatz, Zivilcourage genützt, wenn ihr nicht von Kardinal König Dr.

Manfred Kniewasser als „Schutzengel“, als Vizedirektor des Hospizes, zur Seite gestellt worden wäre. Der junge Dominikanerpater fand bald heraus, daß die israelischen und arabischen Behörden das Hospizspital am liebsten aus medizinischen Gründen schließen würden (und es nur aus politischen Gründen nicht tun). Kein Wunder, wo es in dem jordanischen Krankenhaus (wegen der terrassenförmigen Architektur) weder Aufzüge noch in den Pflegezimmern fließendes Wasser gibt. Der Sauerstoff wird auf abenteuerli-

che Weise von einem Kammerl auf Straßenniveau über Röhren entlang dem Mauerwerk in den Operationssaal geleitet. Jerusalemer Zeitungen schlugen Alarm, daß Patienten infolge technischer, aber auch hygienischer Unzulänglichkeiten verblutet seien.

Tatsächlich wollte die jordanische Regierung ihr Krankenhaus schon vor 18 Jahren räumen und in einen neuen arabischen Spitalsbau in Jerusalem nach Sheik Jerach übersiedeln. Die Übergabe des Hospizes an Österreich scheiterte aber im letzten Augenblick, weil 1967 der Sechstagekrieg ausbrach und die Israelis den Spitalsbau von Sheik Jerach als Polizeistation beschlagnahmten. Seitdem tobt in der Heiligen Stadt ein unheiliger Krieg um den Gebäudekomplex in der Via dolorosa, bei dem die Erzdiözese Wien mit ihren Besitzansprüchen auf der Strecke zu bleiben droht:

● Die Araber wollen Österreich aus dem Hospiz hinausdrängen, es als Spital weiter ausbauen, obwohl alle Architekten sagen: „Das ist technisch einfach unmöglich.“

● Die israelischen Gesundheitsbehörden beanspruchen zwar nicht das Hospiz, wollen aber in dem Gebäude eine Rote-David-Stern-Station (israelisches Rotes Kreuz) errichten. Das würde unweigerlich zu einer Konfrontation mit den Arabern führen, für die ein weiterer jüdischer Stützpunkt in der Altstadt eine schwere Provokation wäre.

Kardinal König hat jetzt einen letzten verzweifelten Rettungs- und Vermittlungsversuch unternommen, indem er dem israelischen Gesundheitsminister Gur das einmalige Angebot unterbreitete: Die Erzdiözese Wien selbst würde auf Straßenniveau eine Ambulanz mit Operationssaal usw. bauen und betreuen, wenn sie das Hospiz endlich zurückerbekäme. Damit wäre die ärztliche Erstversorgung von Patienten in der Jerusalemer Altstadt gesichert. Die Voraussetzung dazu ist freilich, daß die Araber in Jerusalem ein eigenes, neues Krankenhaus zugestanden bekommen. Dafür gibt es, wie der aus Altösterreich stammende Bürgermeister Teddy Kollek der „Krone“ versicherte, mehrere praktikable Möglichkeiten: „Das Problem mit dem Hospiz ist sicher in zwei, drei Monaten gelöst. Wir geben es den Österreichern zurück.“ Die Botschaft hört Schwester Lilliosa wohl, allein ihr fehlt der Glaube: „Mein Gott, wie oft ist das schon versprochen und nicht gehalten worden.“ Der neue Vizelektor des Hospizes, Dr. Manfred Kniewasser, wälzt jedenfalls schon Zukunftspläne: „Das Hospiz soll einmal ein religiöses Kulturzentrum, eine Stätte der Begegnung zwischen Christentum, Islam und Judentum werden.“

Photo: © Newspaper article from our archive.
Courtesy of Kronen Zeitung

From 1895 onwards, women religious worked in the Austrian Hospice. We are currently collecting all the data and names: it is time to properly honor these deserving women.

2000-2005: Second Intifada

The Second Intifada (also called Al-Aqsa Intifada) was a violent conflict between Israel and insurgent Palestinian civilians and terrorist groups between September 2000 and February 2005. The reasons for this Intifada are also varied. The main cause, however, was the failure of the Oslo peace process and the abrupt end of the negotiations. Triggered by several visits by then Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to the Arab-held Temple Mount (Al-Aqsa) in Jerusalem, the escalation spread like wildfire across the entire country. Israel responded strongly to the terrorists and masterminds behind the attacks. This intifada differed from the first in terms of the level of violence and the number of victims. Above all, the type of resistance changed drastically. While stones were thrown at soldiers during the First Intifada, the Second Intifada was characterized by countless suicide attacks by Islamist groups on busses and in public places, with Israeli civilians in particular being killed. The construction of a border fortification between Israel and the West Bank is also a direct result of this intifada. With the death of Yasser Arafat in autumn 2004, the intifada lost its strength.

Our Friends newsletter at the time was called "Hospice Notes." A total of 37 issues were published between October 1987 and March 2006. All of these editions are available online on our website www.jerusalemPilger.at. In the November 2000 issue we read:

"The last group left us on October 13th. For several days, the Hospice accommodated a few journalists and individual travelers waiting for their departure. Since the beginning of October, Sr. Cordis has been deleting pilgrim group bookings from our reservation books...". "How long the current crisis in the Holy Land will last and the extent to which it will develop is unclear." (Sig. GB.Hospice publications.006)

On May 31st 2001, Faisal Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini, a Palestinian politician from an old and influential family, died. He had gained popularity particularly through the First Intifada and was considered the unofficial mayor of East Jerusalem for the Palestinian population in the 1990s. He was also active during the Second Intifada and incited the masses to violence. He died of a heart attack during a visit to Kuwait in 2001.

Rector Schwarz (rector of the house from 1987-2004) reported on his burial in the Al-Aqsa area of the Old City on June 1st 2001:

"In the afternoon the funeral of Faisal Hussein will take place on the Temple plaza. The coffin will be carried from the Orient House through Damascus Gate. A large group of radical Palestinians marches ahead of it through the street and past the Hospice, tearing down all the video cameras that the police have installed – including those on the wall of the Austrian Hospice. They attempt to tear down the Hospice's camera, but the brother of one of our employees prevents this by shouting an explanation to them. Fortunately, the camera is only turned upwards and not damaged. The marchers drum on the doors of the shops and chant battle cries. It later becomes clear that there were a group from the West Bank that breached the checkpoints between Ramallah and Jerusalem. Fortunately, the Israeli army did not intervene; the consequences would probably have been a bloodbath. The streets of the Old City were completely free of police and army. When a journalist residing in the AH started taking photos in front of the House, her camera was immediately knocked out of her hand, even though she waved her Palestinian Authority-issued press card. A sense of alarm permeated the AH. The procession with Hussein's coffin was far more moderate. As soon as it passed the AH, silence fell. Older men from the AH area immediately began to collect up all the debris from the earlier kerfuffle and pile it up in front of the House. And just a little while later no-one would have been able to guess what had happened in front of the AH just an hour earlier." (Sig. OD.20010906.001)

“20 years of Rector Bugnyár”

as a welcome occasion
to focus on the
Christians of the
Holy Land.



Photo: © ÖPH

The photo with the newly appointed rector was taken soon after he officially took up office on May 1st 2004.

Eminence should of course be right: My original interim appointment as rector of the Hospice in Jerusalem in 2004 for just one year turned into a much longer period. May 2024 will mark the 20th anniversary of my start in this religiously, culturally and politically-charged place. It seems like it was yesterday. And I'm anything but tired of office!!

The next major project in the general renovation of the main building has moved beyond the planning stage and will be gradually implemented from April 2024. As a first step, we will take care of the basement, where a beautiful, large, new, well-ventilated and bright dining room will be created.

As expected, there will also be some special events within the framework of my “anniversary year”. Unfortunately, as a result of the war, I still have to be sparing with the details, as it is difficult to plan at the moment. As always, I am an optimist and pray that the hostilities will end soon. That a lasting solution for the people of the Holy Land will appear at the very least on the distant horizon.

In cooperation with the Otto von Habsburg Foundation, we are planning an exhibition for May. At the same time, a Hungarian translation of my book “Journey to Jerusalem” will be published. Of course, the “German-West-Hungarian” in me is very happy about this; in addition, it will accrue invaluable marketing benefits for our House across borders.

An academic symposium is planned for September: At the Cradle of Faith – the Power of the Gospel. A biblical, pastoral and ecclesiastical look at the beginnings of evangelization and mission in the Holy Land – combined with a look at our homeland and the current challenges for us as Christians and the Church. We will be paying particular attention to the people of the Holy Land. They are the “living stones” of the Church of origin. And they have experienced a great deal of grief and suffering in these months.

On the occasion of my 20th anniversary as rector, we are also expecting one or two distinguished guests and you can look forward to one or two publications in our Academy series.

I am not talking about “Bugnyár festivals” or the twenty-seventh rehash of our House history. The anniversary is a welcome opportunity for me to get back on track after the pandemic and war, to focus on the Holy Places and to explore and talk about the significance of this House for the Church in Austria.

It will be an exciting and instructive year – with many more to come. I am grateful to the protector of the house, Cardinal Schönborn, and to my home bishop in Eisenstadt, Ägidius J. Zsifkovics.



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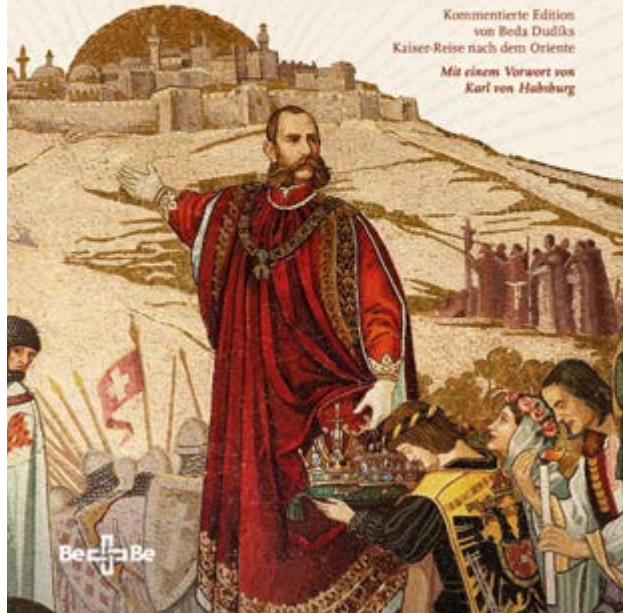


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