At times—notes Zvi Elpeleg, editor of al-Hajj Amin al-Husaini’s texts as published in the Egyptian newspaper Al-Misri in 1954, and in three book editions until 1957—“I even doubted the rationale of translating this collection and dealing with its contents.” Some of the arguments it advanced, he acknowledged, were so groundless or hardly worth discussing.

Hitler and al-Husaini on November 28, 1941 in Berlin: The German publicized their meeting only on December 9, 1941.

Zvi Elpeleg was military governor in the Israeli Triangle (in Hebrew Hameshulash, Arabic al-Muthallath, covering a mostly Arab populated area between Jenin, Tulkarm and Nablus in northern Israel) in the mid-1950s, in Gaza in 1956-57, West Bank and Gaza in 1967, in Egyptian area of Fayid in 1973 on the Great Bitter Lake as Israelis held parts of Egypt at the Suez Canal, and in southern Lebanon in 1982. From 1995 to 1997 he served as ambassador to Turkey. Since 1972, he served as a researcher at the Dayan Center of Tel Aviv University.

Perhaps, Elpeleg explains further in the preface that the book would have been unnecessary were it not for three considerations: (1) the essays were written by a man who had founded and led the Palestinian national movement for decades; (2) they constitute the primary source material he left behind; and (3) his political doctrine which influenced millions in the region was based on the premise of a British-Jewish plot to empty Palestine of Arabs, destroy the al-Aqsa Mosque, rebuild Solomon’s Temple, and expand the Zionist endeavor to other Arab lands.

Al-Hajj Amin al-Husaini was the Grand Mufti (1921-1948) and Palestinian leader until his death in 1974. Elpeleg is known for his book on al-Husaini’s life,[1] and his present book has two parts. The first includes al-Husaini’s essays and Elpeleg’s responses in endnotes. The second contains Elpeleg’s articles on the al-Aqsa Mosque and Solomon’s Temple; the issue of land; the alleged British-Jewish plot; and the Arab invasion and the reasons why Palestine was not created in 1948.

Now for the first point (1), namely, that al-Husaini’s built the Palestinian national movement. In European terms, however, he did not yet have a nation nor any idea of individualism and citizenship in the accepted Roman sense. Thus, this book presents political fatwas offered by al-Husaini in the traditional question-answer style (1954-1957). Elpeleg adds valuable comments.

But how did this book come about? As a spy reported from Cairo, al-Husaini prepared this third edition together with the Nazi agitator Johann von Leers, giving it the title Haqa’iq An Qadiyyat Filastin (The Truth on the Palestine Question).[2] In addition, it was also to be
published in Germany by Karl-Heinz Priester of Wiesbaden,[3] a former SS officer. Priester came to Cairo in 1957 and discussed with Leers how to sway nonaligned states. Leers, for his part, favored establishing an aid society for “nationalist groups imprisoned by court orders or prosecuted for their beliefs,”[4] a sort of Nazi Amnesty International. Thus, the third edition appeared at the height of Nazi activities in Cairo as advocated by al-Husaini and von Leers.

U.S. report on al-Husaini and the Nazi Johann von Leers in Cairo. Hans Eisele was "doctor death" in several concentration camps who had fled to Cairo where the government protected him since 1958.

There was an American claim that in 1959 von Leers became “chief propaganda adviser” to President Abd an-Nasir.[5] Although this is doubtful, von Leers’s impact was considerable. In October 1958, the Egyptian read The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which von Leers had earlier disseminated. As Abd an-Nasir soon told an Indian journalist, the book convinced him that Europe was in the hands of three hundred Zionists.[6] He also claimed that the Holocaust was a fiction. His brother Shauqi, who edited the Protocols in Arabic, was still tirelessly propagating them in 1981.[7]

An American diagram of von Leers’s network included Ali Sabri, state minister of presidential affairs; Anwar as-Sadat, president of the Afro-Asian Council; Muhammad Khaliq Hasuna, secretary-general of the Arab League; al-Hajj Amin al-Husaini; General Abd al-Azim Ibrahim Fahmi, director of general investigations of the Interior Ministry in Egypt and Syria; and Sayyid Hafiz Abd al-Karim, secretary-general of the Economics Ministry. The Arab League paid Umar Amin von Leers well, some eighty to a hundred Egyptian pounds monthly.[8]

Al-Husaini and von Leers added documents to the book. The former, for his part, had been under a decade of pressure. In 1946 U.S. secretary of state Dean Acheson announced publication of a White Paper on al-Husaini’s files. Out of concern for Muslim feelings, however, it never appeared. A few days later al-Husaini claimed that his American-captured records included forgeries by Zionists.[9] In turn, al-Husaini wanted to publish some files for the purpose of disproving his “alleged pro-Axis steps as claimed by the Jews.”[10] However, these so-called "records of innocence" never appeared.
On July 16, 1948, al-Husaini published a report on his Higher Arab Organization suddenly stressing its social activities.[11] Only the third edition of The truth on the Palestine question included some documents. Elpeleg removed most of them like the "Writ of Mandate" or the "Balfour Declaration." Unfortunately, in his edition of Through the Eyes of the Mufti he omitted some al-Qur'an verses, claiming that they had no actual relevance. On the contrary, for Middle East historians and the general public those verses as added and edited by al-Husaini were and continue to remain relevant. Otherwise, the Grand Mufti would not have included them. So editing them out represents a loss for those who are researching the roots of the currently triumphant national and global Islamism which fully emerged after the revolts of 2011.

A comparison of al-Husaini’s collection in the third edition of 1957 with his final memoirs published four decades later reveals many similarities. The 1999 book, however, includes many more documents. Elpeleg’s book, which is especially well versed in the relevant Hebrew literature, is an additional tool for the academic community. In a further edition some missspelled names can easily be corrected such as Khalid al-Qarqani, Musa Kazim al-Husaini, Shakib Arslan, al-Hajj Amin al-Husaini, or Fauzi al-Qawuqji, to mention a few. But “nakbat Filastin”—that is, the Palestinian debacle, or loss of land and of the war in 1948-1949—should never be translated as “Palestinian Holocaust.” Unfortunately translator Rachel Kessel, who otherwise did fine work and the editor indiscriminately used this term throughout the book (XVI, 16, 23, 125, 128, 145, 209). There is no real equivalence between the two events, the more so as this “nakba” was rooted in al-Husaini’s deeply flawed political doctrine, which the reader can discover in this book. As it is explained here, al-Husaini’s was the architect of the nakba and he was an accomplice to the Holocaust.[12]

As to Elpeleg’s second point mentioned at the beginning (2), we cannot regard this book as the “primary source material” left by al-Husaini or as his “memoirs.” He was industrious, issuing thousands of pages of sermons, speeches, radio addresses, letters, leaflets, and memoranda. He edited booklets on the al-Aqsa Mosque in 1929[13] and on Islam and Jewry in 1937.[14] A Nazi biography of 1943 indicates his influence on Muslims and Islamists.[15]

The 1957 collection, then, is a minor part of the bigger picture. Al-Husaini’s early memoirs appeared partially in the journal Filastin in 1970; his final memoirs, as mentioned, in 1999.[16] Why Elpeleg did not use this material, as well as the more recent literature, is unclear. Still more major findings on al-Husaini are expected, including his roles as activist of a “Jew-free Middle East,” accomplice to the Holocaust, aide of Adolf Eichmann even after 1945, plotter of the murder of Lebanon’s ex-premier Riyad al-Sulh and of Jordan’s King Abdullah in 1951, and in secretly agreeing in writing to King Husain’s annexation of the West Bank so as to enable al-Husaini to rule Gaza himself, a move that Cairo blocked in 1964.

As for the third point (3) concerning al-Husaini’s political doctrine, in part two of his book Elpeleg presents its key components. He concludes that the Palestinians were a parochial society divided by tribal allegiances, only in the initial stages of developing nationhood both politically and economically (176). He notes that the British high commissioner Herbert Samuel bestowed on al-Husaini the title of Grand Mufti shortly after May 8, 1921 (181), empowering him against Istanbul. This is not correct, because his half-brother, who passed away, already assumed the title and function of the Grand Mufti. However, in keeping this order Samuel empowered him, in a departure from the vanishing traditional rules of Ottoman Istanbul in managing the local and regional hierarchies of muftis and grand muftis. Elpeleg refers to him often as just "the Mufti," which is clearly wrong. (In a recent book on "Hitler’s Muslims," Volker Koop also made the same mistake. He tried even to convince the reader that the Nazis got it wrong in calling al-Husaini a Grand Mufti.[17]

In the most interesting essay, Elpeleg raises the question why an independent Palestine did not emerge in 1948 and suggests that the Grand Mufti and the Arab states were responsible for most of the failed efforts. He observes that al-Husaini was an extremist and a fanatic by nature, qualities that prevented him from being more flexible when it might have helped the Palestinian cause. Indeed, al-Husaini’s nemesis, King Abdullah, had the means at his disposal to prevent al-Husaini and his aides from sufficiently activating the existing institutions. On December 20, 1948, the Transjordanian ruler made Shaikh Husam ad-Din Jarallah the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Elpeleg also expressed the view that it was the Arabs in neighboring states which prevented the launching of an independent Palestinian state.
All in all, this book is a treasure trove of information on the first global Grand Mufti and the spread of his political ideology, now called national and global Islamism. His contribution was to make the synthesis between Islamic learning and Hitler’s National Socialism.


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[2] Muhammad Amin al-Husaini: Haqa’iq An Qadiyyat Filastin: Tasrihat wa Ahadith Li-s-Sayyid Muhammad Amin al-Husaini kashafa biha as-Sitar an Ashab Karithat Filastin wa Alaqatuha bi-l-Mu’amarat ad-Duwaliyya al-Yahadiyya (The truth on the Palestine question: Announcements and Interviews by Saiyyid Muhammad Amin al-Husaini in which he unveiled the reasons of the Palestinian Catastrophe and their relations to the global plots of the Jewry (Cairo 1957, 3rd ed.) [Arabic].

[3] The planned German title was The World Fight against Imperialism and Colonialism.


[5] Ibid., Von Leers Chief Advisor to Abd an-Nasir, 02/02/1959, 1.


[10] USArchII, RG263, Al-Husaini to publish files refuting accusations on his alleged pro-Axis activities as spread by the Jews, 06/09/1947.


