

The Palestinian seafront of the future — Joséphine Baker in Haifa

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القتال على أبواب كيبف ونيبر بتروفسك
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والنصف من مساء الغد



This essay focuses on one night — 3 October 1943 — when the Arab and Jewish elite of Haifa, a Mediterranean port town then under the British Mandate, were gathered in the Bat Galim Casino, along with British officers and international businesspeople,

to hear the legendary Joséphine Baker¹ in a performance benefitting General Charles de Gaulle's Free French fighting force. That night, eighty years before the attacks of 7 October and their genocidal aftermath, now seems just a heartbeat before the Nakba. Many of the people watching Joséphine Baker would later be expelled from the city they loved, possibly by others sitting next to them in that same casino. Many Palestinians driven out of Haifa found refuge in Gaza, Lebanon, and the region. Where are their descendants now?

Announcement of Baker's performances in Haifa and Jaffa from the front page of the newspaper Falastin, 3 October 1943

Minor detail²

A few years ago, exploring the Municipality of Haifa's archives, I found an unframed color copy of a photograph. The print had developed bent corners, or dog-ears. (In German we call them donkey ears, and in Hebrew, so my husband says, there is no term for this phenomenon. Growing up in Haifa, he thought it's just how photographs are.) The dog-ears were probably created because the print had been stored among other loose pages too large to fit the archive shelf, and because it was subject to the city's humid climate. The photograph, preserved only in this one color copy, had lost the vividness it possessed when it was developed in a local photo shop. Its damaged state strangely mirrors that of the object it depicts.

The photograph, taken in 1994, shortly before the building was demolished, is of the Bat Galim Casino. It is an interior shot the likes of which I have not seen — perhaps because the building was closed off for so long and the photographer must have snuck in to take the photograph. Along with the severe decay of the structure — bleached by the salty winds that blew in through the broken windows — one can still discern the faded blue, white and red of a French tricolor, immediately adjacent to a section of the ruin that seems to have been a performance stage. Against the walls covered in graffiti that have long since lost their meaning and color, the flag appears to be an original feature.

What is a French tricolor doing painted across the full height of a casino in British Mandatory Haifa?



Remnants of a painted tricolor on the theater stage of Bat Galim Casino in Haifa, shortly before the building's demolition, 1994.

(Photographer: Simcha Afek ?. Courtesy of Buildings & Sites Conservation Department, City Planning Office at the Haifa Municipality.)

But what is a French tricolor doing painted across the full height of a casino in British Mandatory Haifa? Though I have searched exhaustively in archives and libraries, this is seemingly the only evidence of the flag to be found. I would have gone further still and undertaken an analysis of the paint layers, but the original building no longer stands. An investor bought the site in 1991 and convinced the Preservation Department of the Haifa Municipality to let him raze the original structure and start from scratch. Yet the new casino remained an unfinished, bunker-like shell that straightaway began its own process of deterioration, never having been used for anything other than maintaining its property value.

This one spectral image of the tricolor serves as a clue, a faded ghost connecting us to the larger geopolitics of the region. I hope the reader will join me on this venture through the casino's architecture and its history. In the meantime, you can bend the corner of the next page for a glimpse of the night Joséphine Baker performed here.

The neighborhood, the architect

Bat Galim, begun in the 1920s, was one of a series of residential and municipal developments by the German-born émigré architect Richard Kauffmann, intended to form « a small part of the Palestinian Seafront of the Future. »³ Thus, the « Palestinian Riviera » that US President Donald Trump demanded in February 2025 had already been born here, one hundred years earlier — a Riviera that Kauffmann hoped would run « from Gaza via Jaffa, Tel Aviv, to Haifa-Akko » (« Akko » being the Hebrew name for the city of « Acre »), and that unlike Trump's repugnant proposal would include Arabs among its residents and proprietors. In the light of what followed, an upscale Arab-

Jewish development like Bat Galim might sound almost utopian, but in fact Kauffmann's urban planning schemes were part of a colonial settlement project that has now come full circle.

In his master plan for the Palestinian Seafront of the Future, Kauffmann designed the Bat Galim garden neighborhood as part of the modernist seafront and bay area, with a palm-lined avenue as the main boulevard running perpendicular to the sea and a bathing beach. In 1933, when the new neighborhood began to grow into an elegant residential area for British military personnel and their families, the Society for the Development of Bat Galim asked the architect Alfred Goldberger to design a casino and a swimming pool at the end of the same boulevard.

Goldberger had only recently arrived in Palestine from Vienna: a city charged with ideas of the early Viennese modernists, the Bauhaus, and the Soviet constructivist avant-garde. He was twenty-six years old, and his prior experience had been limited to a doctoral thesis entitled *Das Klubhaus*, which included plans for a gentlemen's club — suggestively phallic in shape — complete with billiards and gaming rooms and a performance stage. Goldberger's proposal for an elite gentlemen's club, including what he termed the « Damenparagraph », where women would be allowed, may have been ill-judged in Haifa — a city marked by socialist sympathies, strides toward gender equality, and a cautiously liberal spirit — but it nonetheless won him the commission.

Goldberger's design for the casino was not a masterpiece, but rather a haphazard catalogue of different ideas then in circulation. The image of the newly opened building, with its crude drainage and sewage pipes running from the roof, over and across the south façade, would make any teacher of architecture shudder.



The Bat Galim Casino on the bay
(Dan Hadani Collection, The Pritzker Family National
Photography Collection, The National Library of Israel.)

There is a certain clumsiness about its form, perhaps indicative of the insecurity of a young architect still finding his way. Yet the result, set at the end of a promenade, close to the waves of Haifa Bay, was not unimpressive. Seen from the sea and juxtaposed against the spectacular Carmel Mountain, it resembled a giant vessel docked, or beached, on the shore.

Overconfident in the durability — and availability — of reinforced concrete, Goldberger placed the casino structure on giant concrete pillars, which elevated the building over the rocky coastline. After a few decades, the elements worked their way into and under the layers of concrete and plaster, rusting the iron that reinforced the structure from inside, leading to cracks that ran from the wet foundations through lines of least resistance, from offices, changing rooms, the main hall and service areas, all the way to the rooftop — reducing the whole edifice to a ruin.

A social powerhouse

In the 1930s and early 1940s, Haifa offered promising business opportunities to Arab traders and investors. With the opening of the oil pipeline from Kirkuk to Haifa, hard borders were being drawn between the British and the French mandates. Nonetheless, the Casino's scale and program won it unique status in the Middle East, attracting well-off businessmen from Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. Compared to other fashionable places of entertainment in Haifa, the casino, frequented by both Arabs and Jews, was considered posh. A photograph of four young men of the Midawwar family taken on the terrace of the Haifa casino shows them in elegant suits and fashionable two-tone shoes. It comes from a family archive carefully collected by the Haifa historian Johnny Mansour, and reveals Haifa's thriving Palestinian bourgeoisie.📷



« Officers' club »

To the British stationed in the Bat Galim neighborhood near the harbor's warehouses and the military garrison, the Casino was often referred to as « an officers' club. » Even if it wasn't officially authorized for this purpose, it may have been perceived as such — especially toward the late 1930s, when the British military, in response to escalating tensions between Jews and Arabs and increasing Arab resistance to colonial rule, deployed infantry from Egypt to reassert control. In 1936, around 25,000 soldiers were sent, followed two years later by an additional 30,000 to divisions already stationed in Jerusalem and Haifa.

In a British guidebook for army personnel in Haifa — a book in which soldiers from outposts of Empire were guided to the African Club and the Taj Mahal Club, both on Jaffa Road — the Bat Galim Casino was advertised as offering « Excellent Cabaret Shows and Dancing. »

The casino's first managing director was Arnold Eismann, who organized marionette theatre, ballroom music, international solo singers, classical chamber music and small orchestra performances. For the Passover holidays in 1937, Eduardo Bianco and his Argentine Orchestra were contracted for two weeks to play tango music. In the early 1940s, legendary strongman Emil Koroščenko, who fought with the British in Egypt and Palestine in World War II, performed sensational spectacles such as bending pennies with his teeth and lifting enormous weights. His Iron Man performance opened an international wrestling match in the casino which also included Mustafa Halawani, the boxing champion of Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. In December '42, the casino hosted a « Russian Night » to raise funds for Soviet workers and war-wounded.

The initial investors of the Bat Galim Casino may have also hoped to offer betting and gambling. When it opened in April

1936 for the summer season, the word « casino » appeared in quotation marks. This hesitancy may be due to the Gaming Ordinance Act, introduced by the British in 1935 in response to the spread of « gaming machines » and betting practices in hotels and cafes throughout British Mandate Palestine. It is quite possible that this regulation was a major blow to the Haifa casino managers' financial calculations. In the summer of 1945, a scandal erupted when a gambling machine known as « The Little Runner » was confiscated in a police raid on the Bat Galim Casino, and the Casino Seashore Entertainment Company and six of its employees were fined for keeping a « common gaming house ». At the trial, a witness for the prosecution, Mr. George Haddad from Haifa, stated that he lost over 140 Palestinian pounds (£P) on the game, a considerable sum at the time.

By 1943, the management of the Bat Galim casino seemed to have run into financial difficulties. Still, for approximately four decades, the casino hosted international artists and performers on tour, and became one of the principal venues for concerts, charity events, comedy shows, costume balls, and wedding parties. « It was our Staatsoper! » Zvi Skolnik, a resident of Bat Galim, said in a 2015 interview.

At night, the building was intended to shine. And shine it did. Coordinated with the sunset and a performance about to start, the three-story-high glazed staircase towers on both sides of its slightly curved central tower appeared fully lit. To Haifaïtes the building resembled a giant light bulb, illuminating the beach promenade and the surrounding neighborhood.



Bat Galim Casino lit at night, Charlotte and Gerda Meyer.
Courtesy: Haifa City Archive.

Photographs and lamps

In the early 1940s, the sister photographers Charlotte and Gerda Meyer took a series of black-and-white photographs of the Bat Galim Casino. One of these photos helped me revisit the image of the tricolor that inspired this essay. It shows the stage wrapped by large curtains — one made of thick dark fabric draped over the proscenium arch, the other a translucent veil falling from the edge of the ceiling around the semicircular apse of the stage. The bright Mediterranean light shines through the windows, revealing elements of the apse that protrudes from the main façade into the palm-lined avenue of the Bat Galim

promenade, but the curtains mask the place where the tricolor would be painted on.



and Gerda Meyer. Courtesy: Haifa City Archive.



Photography Charlotte and Gerda Meyer. Courtesy: Haifa City Archive.

The sisters had fled Berlin and settled in Haifa in the 1930s. In Palestine, they became part of a small community of Arab and Jewish women photographers who set out to document their

environment. Among them was Karimeh Abbud, who photographed Palestinian families, but also Haifa life and surrounding landscapes. Charlotte and Gerda focused on documenting new Jewish sites of industry, agriculture and culture, as well as the workers and farmers who inhabited these places. Their work is a rare snapshot of a transitional period in the history of Palestine. Despite the Meyers' evident urge to capture signs of the fledgling Jewish community's « Europeanness », the Orient always finds a way to shine through. In their photograph of the casino, the stage is decorated with thin, potted olive trees and seems to be prepared for a chamber orchestra. Besides the curtain mentioned above, both the front of the stage podium and the floor are covered with shiny dark glass tiles that reflect the light as if the surface were wet, or as if the sea were allowed in. Remnants of these tiles are still recognizable in the photograph from 1994. Other photographs in their series reveal a restaurant whose space is awkwardly austere, with relatively low ceilings hanging over the seating areas. Whatever glamor there might have been was relegated to the chandeliers hanging from the dining hall ceiling and the smaller delicate glass lamps dangling down the concrete pillars on the terrace. The design of the latter can be traced back to the 1930 catalogue of Goldschmidt & Schwabe, a German lighting firm associated with the Bauhaus artists and architects. The company had been hugely successful with lighting designs that embraced the restless nightlife and technological euphoria of Weimar Republic Berlin.



Charlotte and Gerda Meyer. Courtesy: Haifa City Archive.



Charlotte and Gerda Meyer. Courtesy: Haifa City Archive.

Goldschmidt & Schwabe closed its Berlin production line and shops in 1933. The owners, Alfred Goldschmidt and Walter Schwabe, emigrated to Palestine, where they succeeded in establishing two branches of their company, one in Tel Aviv and the other in Haifa, selling lamps adapted somewhat to the local

taste. In 1934 they provided the pendant lamps for the main pavilion of the Levant Fair in Tel Aviv, which could probably be traced back to Bauhaus graduate Otto Rittweger's design. Winning the contract to make the lamps for the interior of the casino in the same year must have been an important commission which helped raise the company's local profile.

A French Tricolor

The curtains captured in the Meyer photographs could have veiled that French flag for years. But what was it doing at all in what was, in effect, a British officers' club? Of course the Vichy French weren't popular in these parts at that time. But also, after the end of war, the British would realize that former members of their supposed allies, the Free French Army, were secretly backing Zionist terrorists in their bloody guerrilla-style struggle against the British Mandate in an attempt to end British rule.⁸ The British, having participated in the liberation of France, felt betrayed. In the light of such a conflict, finding a huge French flag painted in such a prominent space in Haifa seems unusual.

To unpack its meaning, we'll need to rewind a bit in the historical narrative.

After World War I, the region had been radically reorganized. The border between the French and the British areas of influence ran along the so-called Sykes-Picot line, drawn by the British and French diplomats Sir Mark Sykes and François Picot in 1916 and ratified in Versailles in 1919. This line infamously divided the Ottoman Orient between the « e » in « Acre », a small port town, and the last « k » in « Kirkuk ». It was drawn with a thick red wax pencil. Haifa, only a few miles south of Acre, was swallowed within the red thickness of the line — not exactly a testimony to the town's importance. That would soon change. In 1927 the British-owned Iraq Petroleum Company started building a pipeline between the newly discovered oil

fields at Baba Gurgur near Kirkuk and the port in Haifa, where they quickly built refineries. The oil was loaded onto ships and carried to Britain and the rest of Europe. In 1928 huge oil silos were built on the bay of Haifa, next to the harbor, which was deepened and modernised. By the time the pipeline was operational in 1934, the British had installed in Haifa a complex infrastructure of roads, bridges, harbors, airports, power stations and custom houses and around them, places of trade, administration, education and culture. This matrix of nodes, connected by transport and delivery lines, was the hallmark of British colonial rule, and it would eventually serve the nascent Jewish state.

Housing projects for oil industry workers followed. The four-story Raj Raïs housing complex, built by the Lebanese investor who gave it its name and by the architect Antoine Tabet in 1936, was probably one of the biggest concentrated residential housing projects in Haifa at that time.

Fully synchronizing the architectural modernism of Haifa requires inclusion of the work of Arab architects like Tabet, a French-trained Communist who was active in Haifa from the 1920s through the founding of the State of Israel in 1948.

There are many similar « war hotels » in the region that still haunt our imagination.

Tabet was also the architect of the St. Georges Hotel in Beirut. Built in 1934 and famous for its clientele of officers, journalists and spies throughout the war years and into the 1950s and 1960s, the St. Georges Hotel presents something of a cultural counterpart to the casino in Haifa. There are many similar « war hotels » in the region that still haunt our imagination.¶

Tabet was an architect without borders. His work in Syria, Palestine and Lebanon exemplified the model of a fluid,

hyperconnected, navigable Middle East under colonial rule. But he was not a colonial architect. His sympathies rested neither with the British nor with the French, but rather with the Soviet economic model, and he saw architecture as a vehicle for political work, forming international connections with engineers, intellectuals, poets and politicians. The fragmented space between Gaza, Jaffa, Damascus, Haifa and Beirut, which is today torn by clashing nationalist visions, was then more or less united. British Mandate Haifa and French Mandate Beirut were particularly close.

By the start of World War II, fractures had surfaced within the British Empire. Certainly by the time of the 1936–39 Arab Revolt, the British had fought a long bloody war of counter-insurgency against the Palestinian Arabs, who rebelled against what they perceived, not without reason, to be the Mandatory authorities' pro-Zionist policies. By then, the French had switched sides: the collaborationist Vichy regime, with its French colonies in Africa, Syria and Lebanon, was allied with the Axis powers. With the 1 April 1941 coup d'état of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, Iraq became briefly independent from the British, serving as a base for the German army in the Middle East. Erwin Rommel's North Africa campaign captured Benghazi on the Libyan coast and threatened British bases in Egypt and even the Suez Canal. To fight on these approaching fronts, Britain eventually supported General Charles de Gaulle's Free France government-in-exile as well as the Resistance in occupied France, in the French colonies of North Africa and in the Middle East.

Hence, while in the interwar years, Haifa had grown from a small Ottoman town into an industrial port city and a regional metropolis, during the war it became a frontier town, a mere sixty kilometres from the border of Lebanon and the Axis zone of influence. Haifa thus provided a forward base for the Free French forces that were seeking to topple the Vichy French

government of Syria and Lebanon. (Note that the French Consulate in Haifa was until 1942 still under Vichy French authority, before it shifted alliance with the Free French. I take a particular interest in reconstructing the conflicts within institutions such as national embassies, whose employees were torn by their common sense, their friendships, and their brief to represent their countries in the midst of these tremendous geopolitical storms.)

In June 1941, the British invaded Syria and Lebanon to preempt the Vichy French army's joining Rommel's forces and attacking the British forces in Egypt from the north. A local newspaper's headline read: « Gen. Charles de Gaulle has established headquarters in Haifa. »

« J'ai deux amours »

While these conflicts raged, the Bat Galim Casino in Haifa became a hub for officers, intelligence agents, and journalists — a clientele that demanded high-class entertainment. On 3 October 1943, the legendary African-American-French jazz performer Joséphine Baker appeared at the Bat Galim Casino, as part of her Middle East tour to support the struggle against the Nazis.

Baker had first gained fame in the 1920s with her mesmerizing dances in « *La Revue negre* » at the Théâtre de Champs-Élysées, soon becoming a worldwide sensation and icon of Modernism revered by artists from Picasso to Gertrude Stein.

Her political commitments were uncompromising. In 1938, Baker joined the International League against Racism and Antisemitism. Soon after the German occupation of France, she signed up with the Free French Army to serve in its counterintelligence wing, the so-called Deuxième Bureau. Her commander, Jacques Abtey, under the guise of being her private secretary, worked closely with her during her missions

throughout the Middle East between 1941 and 1944. In *La guerre secrète de Joséphine Baker*, Abtey recounted stories of her heroism, shrewdness and charm.

After the war, she reminisced about how she'd hidden messages in her stockings.

In January 1941, Baker and Abtey left Marseille on a mission to establish networks with allies in North Africa. For a black woman and a Jew — Baker had converted in order to marry Jean Lion, who was Jewish, in 1937 — being a spy between the shifting front lines of the war carried acute dangers.^[10] Baker was frequently invited to receptions attended by diplomats and celebrities. Building upon the access that came with her fame, she enticed Vichy and even German officers to confide in her. Fooled by her air of goofiness, they boasted recklessly in her presence, disclosing sensitive information. After the war, when she was awarded the Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur by Charles de Gaulle for her service to the Resistance, she reminisced about how she'd hidden messages in her stockings.

Her travels continued from Algeria to Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. Moving with the Allied troops as an entertainer, she was permitted to cross many borders and checkpoints. On 27 September 1943 she performed in a military hospital in Damascus. A few days later she arrived in Haifa. Her brief was « to entertain and to embolden » soldiers close to the front line and to collect funds for the Red Cross and the intelligence work of the Free French.

3 October 1943

3 October 1943 was exceptionally warm. Meteorological stations around the Middle East recorded an unprecedented heat wave. That year, the Muslim festival of Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of Ramadan, coincided with the Jewish New Year.

That evening, several cars stopped to drop off notables in the small square outside the Bat Galim Casino. Through the glass staircase one could see the shadows of guests climbing the stairs on either side of the central concrete bay that held the theatre stage. Some of them stepped out on the small balcony on the first floor, from which they could overlook the crowd approaching from a tree-lined alley lit by lamps that reached deep into the neighborhood. (Four years later, celebrating the UN General Assembly's vote in favor of the Partition Plan for Palestine, the rabbi of Bat Galim would collapse in excitement on the same balcony.)^[1]

התחרות בינלאומית להתאבקות
AN INTERNATIONAL WRESTLING MATCH

AT **CASINO GARDEN** **בגן הקזינו**
 BATH-GALIM **בת-גלים**

SUNDAY 8.8.43 **יום ראשון**
 at 6 p.m. **בשעה 6 אחה"צ**

התאבקות לפי שיטה יונית-רומנית
Greco-Roman Style of wrestling and Catch-as-Catch-Can

Participants:

KOVATCH vs. **BERGMANN**
 Halls European Champion

ARIE vs. **MUSTAFA HALAWANI**
 Tel Aviv Champion of Syria, Lebanon and Iraq

LICHTENFELD vs. **BASHIR HUSSEIN**
 Jewish World Champion Arab Wrestler and known Sportsman

EMIL KOROSCENKO vs. **LIBAUER**
 Czechoslovakia Lithuania

ברגמן נגד **קובאטש**
 זמסרין אירופי

מוסטפה חלבני נגד **אריה**
 זמסרין סוריה, לבנון ואיראק

בשיר חוסין נגד **ליכטנפלד**
 ספורטאי ארבי ומשורר

אמיל קורוסצנקו נגד **ליבאור**
 צ'כוסלובקיה ליטאניה

כרטיסים להשיג בקניון בכל יום בשעות 6-9 אחה"צ במחירים 150 מיל כרטיס ישיבה, 100 מיל כרטיס עמידה.
 Tickets obtainable every day in Casino from 6 till 9 p.m. 150 mils Seat, 100 mils Stand

In the performance hall, the audience was seated both on the mezzanine balconies and on the ground floor around small tables with white tablecloths that soon would be covered with handbags and soiled with cigarette ash, lipstick and spilled drinks. The room was populated by Haifa's dignitaries, both

Arab and Jewish, travelers, merchants, diplomatic officials and military personnel, but also by newly arrived refugees from Europe and North Africa — many of them eager to return « home » once the war was over. Only a few of them would.

This gala performance at the Bat Galim was organized « under the patronage of General de Gaulle and the auspices of the French Consul in Haifa » nominally to help the Fighting French War Fund. A ticket cost one Palestinian pound. Among the special guests were members of the Haifa Friends of France Libre. In September 1942, the chairman of the « Friends », Victor A. Khayat, an expert in antiquities and an Arab notable of Haifa, had already presented a sum of £P 100 to support the French troops fighting in Bir Hakim, Libya.

*Under the patronage of
General DE GAULLE
and the auspices of
the French Consul in
Haifa, the world fam-
ous star*

**JOSEPHINE
B A K E R**

*will give a gala per-
formance of*

SONGS AND DANCES

*at the Casino Bat Galim,
Haifa, today, Sunday,
October 3, 1943.
Entrance fee LP. 1.*

As the chandeliers in the audience room dimmed, the chatter subsided, the curtains opened, and Joséphine Baker came out on stage. Spotlights revealed swirling dust particles. Behind her, a French tricolor was painted on the wall. Baker, at age 37, was still an entrancing performer although she no longer performed topless in her banana skirt; instead, she was draped in costumes that she changed with almost every song, from the military uniform of the Free French resistance to a tulle dress in tricolor. She sang from her own repertoire, but also popular military

songs. A simple staircase led her directly into the crowd, moving among the tables, she greeted guests with « La Madelon »: « And why should I take one man, when I love a whole regiment? », followed by her famous « *J'ai deux amours* ».

The reviews of her appearance at the Bat Galim Casino were ecstatic: « The air was filled with awe », they wrote, adding that the audience could feel as if they were at the Folies Bergères.

I would like to imagine that on this night in Haifa, many of the academics, soldiers, architects, journalists, physicians, administrators, lawyers, politicians and tradesmen gathered there — some of whom had cruelly been uprooted from their countries and who knew that they were living during Europe's darkest hour — were captivated by the rare and unexpected performance that history offered them. Listening together to Baker's bewitching voice in front of the tricolor, their paths for a few precious moments fell into physical synchrony.

507 tickets were sold that night. The casino offered the venue for free. After deducting the costs of flowers, advertisement and staff, the management of the Bat Galim Casino would pass on the £P 700 that Baker earned for the Fighting French War Fund — an enormous sum for that time.

After the final encore, Baker was collected by Jacques Abtey, General of the Deuxième Bureau of the secret service of the Fighting French, and by H.E. Mohammed Pasha el Bebi (Si Menebhi), son of the pasha of Marrakesh, who had driven Baker and Captain Abtey in a jeep across the entire length of North Africa. The next day their tour continued to Jaffa and Tel Aviv, to Jerusalem and Tiberias. After a short holiday in the Dead Sea, Si Menebhi proceeded on pilgrimage to Mecca, while Baker and Abtey returned to the troops in Cairo.

Though I don't have any document or photograph that would conclusively attest to this, I believe that the tricolor may well

have been painted on the wall as a stage set for Joséphine Baker's gala show. Abtey writes in his memoir of Baker's travels through the Middle East:

Partout nous avons fait flotter le grand drapeau à croix de Lorraine, symbole de la Résurrection de la France, partout nous avons répandu la gloire des groupes de la Résistance française et collecté de l'argent pour ces groupes.

[Everywhere we had flown the great flag with the cross of Lorraine, symbol of the Resurrection of France, everywhere we had spread the glory of the groups of the French Resistance and collected money for these groups.]¹²

4 October 1943

The night after her Haifa triumph, Baker performed at the Cinema Alhambra in Jaffa. Opened in 1937, it was one of the most modern cinemas of its time, designed by the Lebanese architect Elias Al-Mor. Here the performance seemed to have been rather disastrous. Baker's dresses and equipment failed to arrive in time and she was in a bad mood. The air was no longer filled with that « awe ». Somehow Baker, who had traveled intensively through North Africa and lived in the Arab world in the last three years, seemed out of tune with the Jaffa crowd that was still celebrating Eid, but did not warm to Baker's show.

« It is a great thing thus to belong to both of the persecuted races. »

5 October 1943

A day later, having left the Palestinian Seafront of the Future, Baker's spirits seem to have improved. The papers report on yet another wrestling win of Koroščenko in Tel Aviv, and how in

her Jerusalem hotel lobby, Baker proudly displays her souvenirs. In a box between layers of cotton wool she has collected a delicate antique glass with Jewish emblems, a knot in her handkerchief holds a coin of Herod Agrippa. Surrounded by journalists, with a beautiful new Hebrew-French prayer book in her handbag, Baker goes to the Western Wall to pray for the family of her husband, M. Lion of Metz:

Her pitch-black hair can be seen above the pious worshippers [...] Gravely she explains to us how wonderful it is that at that time Jews all over the world remember that same place in their prayers, and how marvellous to be at that hour in Jerusalem and to go the Western Wall. We should be proud to belong to the world's most ancient and pious nation, just as she was glad to have married a Jew.

And she adds: « It is a great thing thus to belong to both of the persecuted races. »

Baker could not have foreseen that the Palestinian Christians and Muslims to whom she'd been performing would soon join the ranks of the persecuted.



This essay draws on research related to two forthcoming books by Weizman, *The Architectural Casino: Conversations about Modernism in Haifa* (Diaphanes, 2025) and *Joséphine Baker and the Colonial Modern* (Sternberg, 2026)