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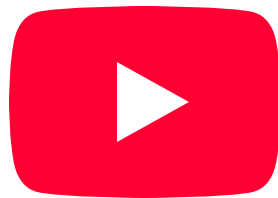


Sophie Halaby in Jerusalem: An Artist's Life

ELENI ZARAS

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POSTED ON OCTOBER 17, 2019

Sophie Halaby in Jerusalem: An...



***Washington Report on Middle East
Affairs, November/December 2019,
pp. 65-66***

Book Reviews



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**By Laura S. Schor, Syracuse
University Press, 2019, paperback,
272 pp.**

MEB: \$30

(<https://www.middleeastbooks.com/p/halaby-in-jerusalem-an-artist-s-life-l>)

Reviewed by Eleni Zaras

Many historians agree that women's voices in Palestinian history are often absent or underrepresented in mainstream discourse. This can largely

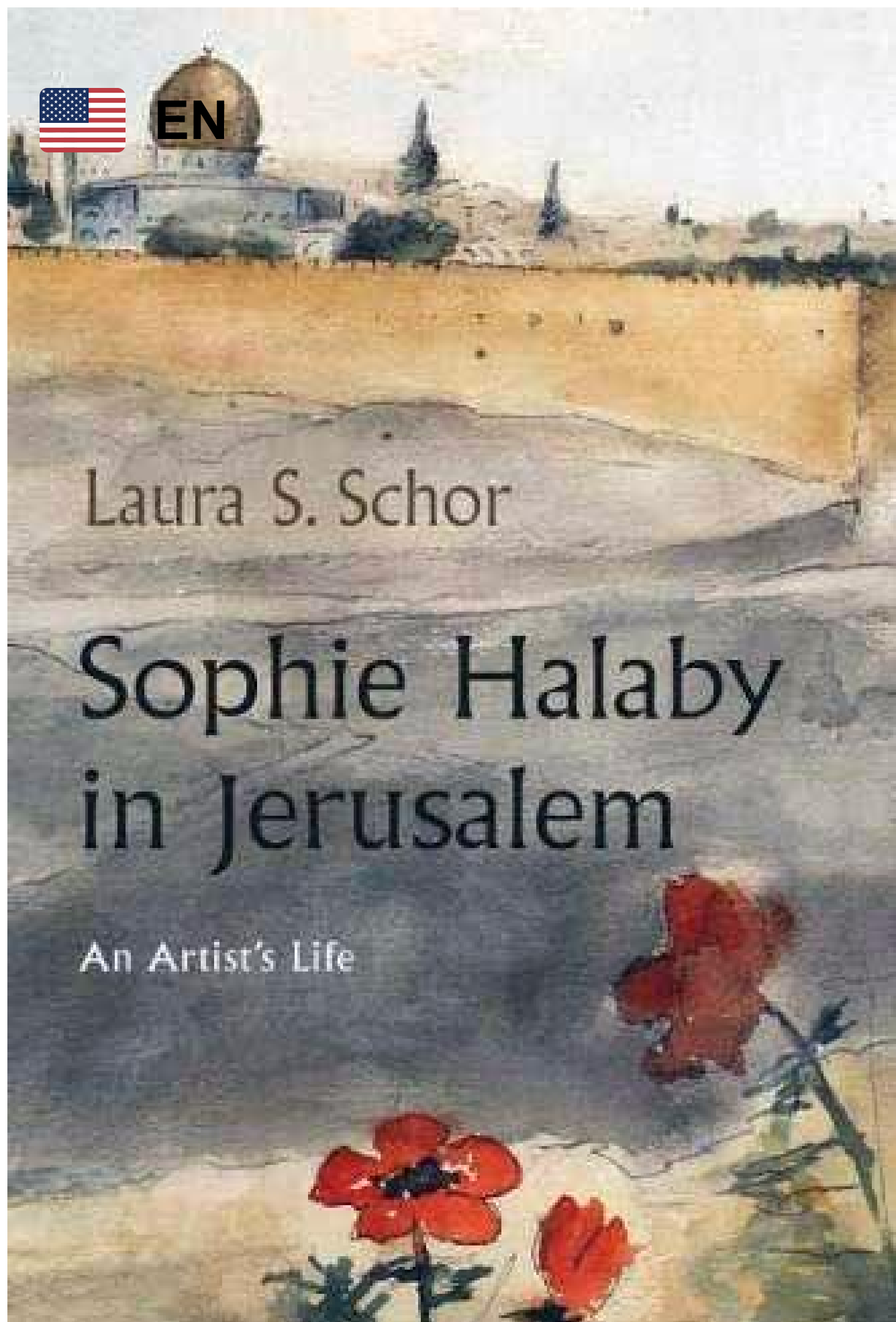


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Laura S. Schor

Sophie Halaby in Jerusalem

An Artist's Life







be ributed to dominant methodologies that privilege document-based sources over others, which have ultimately led to a dearth of scholarship about women. This is especially relevant to the story of Sophie Halaby, whose personal papers disappeared after her death in 1997. Professor Laura Schor's new book on the late Palestinian artist has succeeded in overcoming this challenge. In **Sophie Halaby in Jerusalem** ([**https://www.middleeastbooks.com/prohalaby-in-jerusalem-an-artist-s-life-by-l**](https://www.middleeastbooks.com/prohalaby-in-jerusalem-an-artist-s-life-by-l)), Schor weaves together Halaby's art, research from oral histories, papers

from family members, peers and a wide range of institutional archives to sketch the contours of the artist's life against the backdrop of 20th century Jerusalem.


While Halaby is remembered today as the first Arab woman from Jerusalem to study art in Paris, where she lived from 1929-1933, her story unfolds, not in Paris, but primarily in Jerusalem. Even for those familiar with the turbulent narrative of 20th century Palestine, studying this period through the lens of a female, Arab, Russian-Orthodox artist draws due attention not only to the

artistic vision of Halaby but, more
brly, ~~EN~~ different perspectives on
Jerusalem's history.

Having attended the diverse and
prestigious Jerusalem Girl's College,
Halaby spoke four languages, boldly
pursued her art studies abroad in Paris
in the early 1930s and floated in the
intellectual circles of Jerusalem's
society that traversed religious barriers.
Regardless of her privileged
upbringing, though, her life, according
to Schor, was still "deeply affected by
Arab and Zionist nationalism" and by
the "continuous physical changes to her
city." She and her family were subjected


to displacement, land seizures by the
Israeli  government and raids of her
home and studio.

Halaby's studies in Paris expanded her
worldview, which laid the foundations
for her artistic style and offered new
inspirations and resources. Upon her
return to Jerusalem, she brought these
influences with her and dedicated her
art to capturing impressions of her
homeland in paint and watercolors.
Her palette and style evoke the artwork
of Odilon Redon and the French
impressionists, notes Schor, and
repeated depictions of the Mount of
Olives, site of a Russian Orthodox

church and the graves of her parents, re~~CE~~anne's fixation on Mont Sainte-Victoire. While other artists in Palestine turned to overtly political themes, Halaby's art, with the exception of eight political cartoons that challenged both the British and Zionists, remained subtle and poetic.

Instead, she focuses on a single bouquet against a muted background, or a small cluster of wildflowers against soft expanses of hills and valleys.

Halaby deliberately crops out signs of urban development in her landscapes, although she includes, unassumingly, the gold Dome of the Rock and

contours of the city walls and low
buildings  the color of sand. “Her
persistent painting of Jerusalem as she
willed it to be was her private form of
resistance,” Schor explains, as she
erases the physical scars of war and
occupation that transformed the city
and her own life.

And private her work did mostly
remain: She did not participate in
exhibitions with artists of “The
Palestinian Group,” which consisted of
Jews with Palestinian passports in the
1930s; nor did she join the League of
Palestinian Artists, a collective whose
overt goal was to engage art with

politics and to liberate Palestine

(although  she did participate in a 1986 exhibition of Women's Art in Palestine).

Yet Halaby did persist in quiet, personal dissonance, importing paints and supplies from Paris, painting with colors banned by the Israeli authorities, and staking claim to her homeland through her repeated renderings. If she no longer had physical or legal control over the fate of her homeland, she could still wield agency through art—her visual testament to belonging.

Through Schor's judicious research and
writing,  EN

Sophie Halaby in Jerusalem

(<https://www.middleeastbooks.com/pro>

halaby-in-jerusalem-an-artist-s-life-by-l

recreates the world Halaby inhabited

and amplifies Halaby's quiet, but

powerful voice. Schor offers much-

needed nuance to Palestine women's

and art history and hopes that Halaby's

story will inspire others, like herself,

"to work for a better present and future

for Jerusalem and for the Palestinian

people."

Eleni Zaras is the assistant bookstore director at EN Middle East Books and More. She has a BA in the History of Art from the University of Michigan and a masters degree in History at the Universite Paris Diderot. Her studies and research have focused on the historiography of Islamic art and late-Ottoman history.

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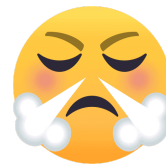
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