

Saint George and the Land of Palestine

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Saint George: Basic Facts

- Born in Diospolis, later known as Lydda/Led/Lod, in late 3rd Century AD.
- Mother was born near Bethlehem on the historic Jerusalem-Hebron road, father was a Roman General, Officer or Centurion.
- Georgios means “tiller of the land.” Arabic version is Al-Khader.
- Was a renowned officer in Emperor Diocletian’s service.
- Was also a Christian through his mother.
- Martyred on April 23rd, 303 AD (Julian Civil Calendar) in Nicomedia, modern-day Asia Minor – 8 years before an edict of tolerance for Christians made by Emperor Galerius and 10 years before Emperor Constantine’s Edict of Milan.
- Relics brought to present-day Lod (near Tel Aviv).

Byzantine Era/Pre Crusades

- Depicted as martyr-saint; was clearly venerated by pilgrims in the Holy Land.
- Not depicted on horseback.
- Veneration of Saint George spread from the Holy Land and Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) to newly Christianized peoples in East and West. (Example, listed by Venerable Bede as a Martyr.)

Crusades

- Becomes a central iconographic figure during the Crusades after appearing at the siege of Antioch in 1098 and at the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099.
- Chivalric Orders dedicated to Saint George (and the English flag of Saint George) are a consequence of the Crusades. Many churches abbeys and shrines across Western Europe are dedicated to him. Around this time, the image of Saint George on a horse begins to appear.

Post-Crusade to Mid-Ottoman Era

- In the west, Saint George undergoes a religious and cultural expansion in many countries as a saint to cultural icon, example of chivalry, etc.
- In the East, he remains a central part of Orthodoxy and nobility (ex: symbol of Moscow).
- In the Ottoman Empire, he becomes a symbol of endurance for Christians, and a saint venerated by almost all indigenous Christian communities as well as Muslims to some extent.

Late Ottoman Era/British Mandate to Present

- Saint George was “encountered” once more by both Western missionaries who either distanced their new flocks from him (ie non-denominational Evangelicals) or incorporated him (Catholics, Anglicans and arguably Lutherans).
- Orthodox Christians from the Holy Land, Middle East, Greece, Russia, Romania, south Caucus and the Balkans, and elsewhere supported the revival of the visibility of Saint George through pilgrimage, patronage of new or rebuilt churches, etc.
- Scouting assisted in the contemporary contextualization of Saint George.
- Saint George has now become a symbol of identity for Palestinian Christians, and in some cases, a political icon against Israeli narratives and policies towards Palestinians.
- However, new Christian communities in the Holy Land, some of whom identify as Israelis, also venerate Saint George.