

Race as a Global Political Category: Empire and the Paradox of Emancipation in Mid-Nineteenth
Century and Early Twentieth Century Palestine

Eric Sera

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By: Eric Sera

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair

Ted McCormick

_____ Examiner

Andrew Ivaska

_____ Examiner

Elena Razlogova

_____ Supervisor

Wilson Chacko Jacob

Approved by _____

Chair of Department, Matthew Penney

August 4th, 2019

Dean of Faculty, André Roy

ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores how the perception of race, influenced by Enlightenment concepts of the nation and the political, was deployed as an operative category by the British Empire in nineteenth century Palestine. It will show how a racialized political hierarchy was substantiated through the humanitarian rhetoric of “protection” of minorities in late Ottoman Palestine. This line of thinking would be appropriated by the British Empire again in the twentieth century, and guided British policy-makers, such as the man under discussion in this thesis, Sir Mark Sykes. By studying Sykes’ diplomatic decisions as the “British expert of the Middle East” throughout World War I, which engendered the creation of new nation-states based on ethno-national lines in the former Ottoman territories, this thesis shows how a process laid out by proto-Zionists and British officials in the nineteenth century, culminated with the espousal of the Balfour Declaration in November, 1917. The declaration guaranteed British support for the “Jewish National Home” as a fulfillment of emancipation, but paradoxically erased Palestinians not only from a new international political reality, but from historical narratives as well.

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INTRODUCTION AND ARGUMENT

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) had a profound affect on many disciplines and fields from comparative literature and anthropology to area studies—especially Middle East studies—and post-colonial theory. Presupposing the ontological and epistemological distinction between the "Orient" and the "Occident", Said argued this style of thought gave birth to "a family of ideas the essence of which is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority."¹ How did this figure into diplomatic thinking and the rise of the new modern internationalist order of the mid-nineteenth century? As my research will show, racist thinking was inherent in the decision making of imperial agents.² My first thesis argument shows how they were one of the vectors for spreading race across the globe as an operative category.

There is no question that as the arrival of Western modern political ideas, grounded in Enlightenment principles, found their way to the Middle East in the nineteenth century, Palestinians³ were aware of the emergent nationalisms of their Jewish and Arab neighbors. However, the Jews and Arabs there identified themselves primarily by religious categorizations. This is not to say that Palestine was isolated from Europe, on the contrary, it was intertwined with the “modern” European world in the eighteenth century. Its location in the Ottoman Empire, which was Islamic but had a multi-religious and multi-ethnic population and was traditionally more tolerant than its European counterparts, ensured the diversity of Palestine. It could safely remain a place important to Christians, Jews and Arabs alike.

¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 42.

² It is imperative to clarify that when referring to “race” and “racism” in this paper, I am alluding to the historically specific deployments of race as a scientific-analytical category, in this case of nineteenth century European imperial powers. These deployments affected Zionist thinking which led to a quasi-biological view of humanity that needed to be directed by political elites and mobilized in the struggle for national survival. I am not referring to their contemporary colloquial (over)usage.

³ For the entirety of this thesis, unless otherwise noted, the term “Palestine” refers to the geopolitical space, which encompassed the British Mandate of Palestine (1922).

As the French Revolution (1789) spread the concept of the nation-state and its accompanying nationalisms across Europe, extolling the emancipatory effects of its fulfillment, the social constructions of race, nation and religion coalesced in a way that would fundamentally alter the history of Palestine. The nineteenth century brought with it increased interconnectivity, where a multitude of divergent social spheres became intertwined in a number of different areas, especially in Palestine.

The second thesis will present a historical narrative that will show how traditional notions of religion fused with political pragmatisms. By first expounding upon the revitalized religious zeal of Protestant England and its effects on the “Jewish question”, or the resettlement of Jews to their ancestral homeland, I will show how the British began appropriating humanitarian language that called for the protection of Protestants and Jews in Palestine. With the establishment of the British Consul of Jerusalem in 1838, the first of its kind in the city, British influence expanded significantly in the region. Travellers, missionaries and British officials all made their presence increasingly felt, altering the landscape as the British, along with other European powers, began formulating their needs and desires in the Ottoman land in their attempts to answer the “Eastern Question”.⁴ Europeans, Jewish and Gentile alike, postulated the return of the Jews to Palestine in a plethora of ways, through travel logs, ethnographies and eventually, political manifestos.

When the second half of the nineteenth century was underway, the push to settle Jews in Palestine took on an increasingly political tone, which served to justify the constructed historical

⁴ The Eastern Question refers to the geopolitical competition amongst major European powers in the 19th century vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire. The diplomatic contest for control of the Ottoman lands increasingly took shape as changes to the Ottoman Empire took place. As this thesis will show, the waning geopolitical power of the Ottoman Empire, accompanied by changes in its holdings and its acceptance of the concept of Western territorial sovereignty, would be repeatedly exploited by European powers attempting to establish a foothold in the region at the expense of their competitors. The Greek revolution of 1820, Crimean conflict (1853-56), Balkan crisis of 1875-78, and Balkan Wars of 1912-13, were all examples of this.

reality of “the times”, as the restoration of the Jews would render complete the regeneration of Palestine. Regeneration meant the transplant of European Jews, banished from their ancestral homeland of Palestine and then maligned in their adoptive European countries, back into the Holy Lands. This notion dovetailed perfectly with the British desire to first establish a more consistent presence in the region, then later, to remove the Ottomans from power and undo any semblance of its historical past and customs. The eventual establishment of a Zionist state would provide the British with a buffer in the area from other European powers, and the Arabs who surrounded them.

Using an analytic framework that will bring into question how knowledge is produced and disseminated, this thesis will show how sweeping transnational social and political currents, rooted in modernization and reform, engendered race as a global political category, which in turn created a racialized hierarchy of the political imaginary. It will clearly show how the antecedents of the modern Zionist (1897) political movement were a product of global political categorizations that not only produced, but also substantiated new political technologies of the modern world. This shift brought upon a new international order that would spawn the League of Nations (1920), which would legally enshrine the Balfour Declaration (1917) in the Palestine Mandate (1922), securing the place of the Jewish National Home in Palestine. The latter would not have been possible without the formulations of the Zionist movement through an historical process that appropriated Western notions of racial identificatory categories, which would come to render invisible the native Arab majority of Palestine. Of course, Arab Palestinians were present along the rocky path that led to the Balfour Declaration, though the “other” society in Palestine did not fit historical narratives.

I argue that the increased British presence in Palestine stemming from the nineteenth century that appropriated the religious and national longing for the Jewish return to Palestine, functioned to substantiate an imperial agenda, guided by new global political categorizations informing the new modern world and international order. The build-up to the arrival of the Zionists on the global political scene was fashioned on a fusion of national, imperial, religious and scientific ideals. The aforementioned was made possible because of new technologies, which the British diplomat Mark Sykes made use of extensively during his travels in the Middle East as a child, teenager and predominantly as the “Middle Eastern expert” of the British Empire. The second chapter of my thesis will deal with Sykes’ hopes and beliefs for the new world. My argument will be substantiated through a global and diplomatic history focused on Orientalist and racial discourses of the region, which places Sykes at the helm of British Middle East policy-making. Sykes oversaw the spatial-temporal and geographical imaginary known as Palestine becoming a political reality for the Zionists and the British, to the detriment of Palestinian statehood. Though Sykes passes away during negotiations at the Versailles Peace of 1919, the political architecture he envisioned for the division of the Ottoman lands after World War I, and its division into border-bounded states devised through his perception of ethno-national categorizations, would be upheld for generations to come.

Historical Backdrop of Late Ottoman Palestine and the rise of the International

In order to better comprehend the European fascination with Palestine in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the period under analysis in this thesis, a historical sketch of Ottoman Palestine is necessary to understand the ways race and Orientalist discourses fashioned empire.

Bilad al-Sham, or "Greater Syria" as it was referred to by Europeans, was never a homogenized or centralized state in a political or geographical sense. However, following the Tanzimat reforms (1856), the Levant area was part of the Ottoman vilayet (province) of Syria. The area we now know as Israel (plus the West Bank and Gaza) was comprised of three sanjaks (districts): Acre, Nablus and Jerusalem. In 1874, Jerusalem was placed under direct control of the Sultanate, becoming a mutasarriflik (independent sanjak) comprising Bethlehem, Hebron, Jaffa, Gaza and Beersheba, as a result of increasing European interest seeking to establish a closer grip on Jerusalem and the "Holy Lands".⁵ These lands would increasingly be desired by the great European imperial powers, and the "protection" of minorities in Ottoman lands became a means of realizing imperial desires.

This cultural-geographical region encompassed present day Israel (Palestine), Lebanon, Syria and Transjordan. Its socio-political transformation in the nineteenth century can be attributed to the integration of the region and the Ottoman Empire as a whole into the European dominated world economy. In practical terms this involved, the (re)construction of cities and deployment of economic and political technologies that linked the Ottoman interior to the coastal regions. In turn, those material and administrative transformations produced new cultural and political sensibilities and reshaped regional identities. However, this longer history is frequently overlooked by historians of Israel/Palestine, and of the modern Middle East in general, though it is imperative in elucidating both the struggle for Palestinian statehood, as well as Palestine's absence within the new international order burgeoning after World War I, and confirmed after

⁵ On pages 12-13 of Yan Porath's, *The Emergence of the Palestinian Arab National Movement 1918-1929* (London: Frank Cass, 1974), the author also shows how "internal interests", mainly those of Christians over the status of the Holy Places, also precipitated this decision. Regardless, it becomes clear that influence from Europe had guided this decision and that the idea of "Palestine" was becoming prevalent.

World War II. This absent-presence and its fraught relation to the international would come to monopolize our understanding of the region's modern history.

Bilad al-Sham, like the coastal regions of the Ottoman Empire, was increasingly in contact with the West. High imperialism and the scramble to attain new territory marked the nineteenth century. Egyptian governor Muhammad Ali Pasha attempted to bring this region under his control in 1830 and held it until 1840.⁶ Muhammad Ali's annexationist designs had prompted Ottoman officials to unify the sanjaks (administrative districts) of Jerusalem, Nablus, and Akka (modern Palestine) in order to create a more unified military and political defence against Muhammad Ali's army. In 1840, the Sultan proposed the governorship of Palestine to Muhammad Ali, spanning Ra's al-Naqura in the north and up to the Jordan and the Dead Sea in the east, stretching down to the Negev and the Sinai.⁷ Though that never came to fruition, a plan to amalgamate the sanjaks was proposed in July of 1872. The Ottomans considered combining the sanjaks of Jerusalem, Acre, and Nablus to form what the Europeans called, "the Province of Palestine" (Mutasarrifate of Jerusalem), under the governance of Thuraya Pasha, then governor of Aleppo. That proposal was dismissed a month later. The Ottomans therefore divided Palestine into two zones, the vilayet (province) of Beirut (which included the sanjaks of Acre and Nablus) and the sanjak (district) of Jerusalem, which would fall under direct rule of Istanbul. In 1876, the autonomous mutasarriflik of Jerusalem was the first time a semblance of "Palestine" was mapped as an administrative unit.⁸

⁶ Britain supported the Ottoman Empire and worked to uphold its borders as a buffer state to other European powers, and helped remove the Egyptian occupiers from Greater Syria, though this had the effect of furthering European influence and drawing the Ottomans more firmly into the global capitalist market. By 1850 the Ottoman Empire was Britain's second largest export market.

⁷Alexander Scholch, *Palestine in Transformation 1856-1882* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies trans., 1993), 13.

⁸The Ottoman Empire took unprecedented steps, such as the amalgamation of the South Syrian sanjaks, in order to stave off European imperial powers especially after their losses in the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78).

This may have been a result of European encroachment. Already Europeans had benefited from the capitulations (extraterritorial legal rights and preferred trade privileges) once awarded to Europeans at the height of Ottoman military and political power.⁹ Separating the province of Jerusalem into two zones would not only hinder European influence (and calls for the protection of the Holy Land), but create a barrier that would prevent further aggression by the Egyptians.¹⁰ During this period of "Ottoman decline", the Empire suffered military losses and would cede three provinces to Russia after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. It was therefore in their best interests to strengthen their grip on territorial possessions, centralizing the empire. This division of Palestine remained intact until the beginning of World War I. The Ottomans clearly viewed this region as powering a geographical imagination that was constitutive of different collective identities that could easily fall prey to European colonial rhetoric and influence. It should not be lost on the reader that the proposed amalgams of 1830, 1840 and 1872 were to become the template for the borders of the British Mandate for Palestine later on.¹¹ The spatial boundaries of modern Palestine were then set by the imperial bureaucracy of the Ottoman state, reacting to the dangers of the new Eurocentric internationalist order. Though it acted as an Empire in retreat increasingly diminished by European encroachment, the construction of

⁹ The British-Ottoman Commercial Convention of 1838 (Treaty of Balta Liman) was an important factor drawing the region into the world economy. At the height of Ottoman power in the 16th century, the Ottomans had granted certain privileges in order to increase trade with European powers. However, these agreements took on a different meaning with the declining political power of the Ottomans, and with increased competition amongst European power for influence over the region, with agreements becoming more exploitative. The 1838 agreement can be seen as a precursor for the new inter-state system I allude to in this thesis, and the process of bounding international law to the Mandates system.

¹⁰Salim Tamari, *The Great War and the Remaking of Palestine* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 30-31.

¹¹ Alexander Scholch first traced this genealogy in his book *Palestine in Transformation* (1993).

modern institutions by the Ottomans was what allowed a distinctly Ottoman and Palestinian identity to emerge.¹²

As Palestine was pulled increasingly into the new global order, local identities formed in Bilad al-Sham, with the people of Palestine identifying themselves as Syrians, and by their religious affiliation, Christian, Muslim, Druze or Jew. Though the area began witnessing the arrival of a new type of Jew, the European Jew. European capital flowed through Bilad al-Sham, and the Ottoman state clamped down on its territorial possessions as interconnected markets became increasingly intertwined. Cities became the centers through which the Ottomans administered their control and where urban notables and Ottoman agents intermingled, resulting in the development of new collective identities, Ottoman nationalism politically, and Arabism culturally. It was here that people lived in the "modern" world, and where they were connected to various transnational worlds.¹³

It is therefore crucial that the history of the Modern Middle East as a whole, and of its states in isolation, avoids falling into the trap of historical trajectories and watershed moments which color nationalist, Orientalist and imperial historiographies. A result of treating this region's history as temporally homogenous has been the view that the region is bereft of the qualities necessary for achieving the supposed benefits of Western Civilization. Conversely, it reinforces the perception that there was a distinct difference between "the West" and "the rest". Incredulously, studies of the newly created Mandates either stop or start in 1918, constraining the interlinked spaces in the Middle East to the borders given to them by the victorious Entente powers. These Orientalist tropes arose congruently with the rise of the nation-state and

¹² See Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹³ Cyrus Schayegh, *The Middle East and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 40-41.

nationalism in the West and was central to the Western imaginary and imperial thinking, which viewed the Ottomans as despotic and an impediment to progress in the Middle East.¹⁴ The view of history as a succession of civilizations, and of Islam as a once-great civilization on the decline, was a prevalent belief in the nineteenth century and still holds true today.¹⁵

For the British, Mark Sykes led the charge in dictating policy in the Middle East to restore its past greatness. Sykes formed part of an informal network created by British “Middle Eastern experts”, amongst them T.E. Lawrence (of Arabia), Gertrude Bell, Ronald Storrs and others, who imagined the Middle East of the past and contemporarily to justify decisions and policies to create the Middle East of the future. Like other Orientalists of his time, Sykes affirmed his superiority by holding up a mirror to the Middle East, which reflected Ottoman inferiority and decadence.

I argue that the deployment of race as a scientific-analytical category affected Sir Mark Sykes, the British diplomat and baronet under main examination in this thesis. However, his thinking also reflected a willingness to “protect” the various ethnic communities living in Palestine, ushering in the liberal humanitarian ideals of a new global order with Britain at the helm. Paradigms of racial distribution became intermingled with orientalist history and knowledge. Sykes helped set the stage for a new internationalist order which, as a result of increased globalization, left behind the days of Concert of Europe diplomacy. This ushered in a

¹⁴The tendency to view the region's history through a national lens not only reinforces this belief, but it obscures and makes incomprehensible alternative historical possibilities. It also dominated historiography until the 1960s, before critiques of the Ottoman Decline Theory began appearing. See Roger Owen, "The Middle East in the Eighteenth Century, An 'Islamic' Society in Decline? A Critique of Gibb and Bowen's Islamic Society and the West", in *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1976), 110-117, and Ariel Salzmann, "An Ancien Regime Revisited: 'Privatization' and Political Economy in Eighteenth Century Ottoman Empire", in *Politics and Society*, Vol 21, No 4 (1993), 393-423.

¹⁵ Zachary Locman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 74.

multi-layered colonial order in the Middle East mired in legal hermeneutics and a global oversight body in the League of Nations.¹⁶

The mandate system produced by the international community not only dismantled most Ottoman imperial institutions, but caused a “progressive rupture of the Arabs’ understanding of Ottoman subjecthood and national belonging.”¹⁷ The new global context conferred upon Palestinian Arabs a differing authority that manifested itself in a multitude of ways. One such example was the relationship between the mandate as a proto-state with the population under its semi-colonial legal jurisdiction. The coloniality of new international law ensured Palestinian Arabs would experience what Partha Chatterjee refers to as, “the rule of colonial difference”, or the paradox of colonialism that cannot but exclude the “other” from the supposed benefits of Western modernity and the universality of its legal system.¹⁸ I propose that this colonial difference was rooted in both a biological view of humanity and was informed by a series of cultural discourses about the Arab people, Islam and Middle Eastern social structures. It also laid the roadmap for the failure of Palestinian statehood, and aided the success of the Zionist drive for a Jewish National Home.

The reconciliation of the Zionist program and the protection of the Arab peoples in Palestine would be impossible to achieve, as many noted before the imposition of the Mandate. Regardless, British officials like Mark Sykes would push the British imperial agenda and its dual obligations in Palestine, leading to the political erasure of Palestinians. Said undoubtedly viewed

¹⁶ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁷ Lauren Banko, *The Invention of Palestinian Citizenship, 1918-1947* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 6.

¹⁸ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

the Western projection of Islam as part of the entire system of representations "framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire."¹⁹

These historical forces were shaped by the increasing European interest in Palestine—a rediscovered Holy Land—which was a space imagined by religious and secular agents of the West, through a plethora of travel books, print media, and even British imperial planning. To this day, the fascination with Palestine remains high as a result of its religious significance to Arabs, Jews and Christians alike.²⁰ A British pamphlet from the time reads, "Britons rejoice! It will fall to you to lead the long dispersed members of the neglected race of Judah back to their beautiful land and, by planting in their homeland a colony (whose bond to its protector cannot be doubted) put another obstacle in the path of the menacing intruder", referring to the Russians after the Crimean War.²¹ The restoration of the Jews to the Holy Lands, and the restoration of the prior glory of Palestine fused with imperial goals, created a litany of reading materials pertaining to the Holy Lands for consumption back in Europe and even America.²² The "imagining", redrawing and remapping and recreation of what was known as the "Near East" or "Asia Minor" or "Asiatic Turkey", was undoubtedly taking place outside of the "Middle East", even before

¹⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 242.

²⁰ See Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Conflict over Israel and Palestine*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Lion Hudson Limited, 2015).

²¹ *The Final Exodus; or, the Restoration to Palestine of the Lost Tribes, the Result of the Present Crisis; with a Description of the Battle of Armageddon, and the Downfall of Russia, as Deduced Wholly from Prophecy*. London, 1854. The anonymous author correctly predicted the definitive return of the Jews to Palestine under British protection, after the Russian Empire would be overthrown.

²² For example, the book written by Old Testament scholar and theologian, George Adam Smith, *Historical Geography of Palestine* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), which was first released in 1894. In his book the importance of religion is paramount to the history of Palestine, though the narrative ends with the Arab conquest in AD 634 and does not resume until Napoleon's invasion of Palestine in 1799, completely eschewing the history of the Arabs there during that time. More importantly, the maps included in this book reflected those of biblical times, and were considered so historically accurate they were consulted by the British in the drawing of the Mandate for Palestine. I will discuss this book later in the second chapter. See also, Michael Russell, *Palestine or the Holy Land from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1846) and Lord Lindsay, *Letters on Egypt, Edom and the Holy Land* (London: Henry Colburn, 1838).

Mark Sykes began popularizing the term in England to reflect the region.²³ As voices emanating from London had much to gain in the imperial game, they would soon affect, and be affected by, a relational matrix that, to borrow Tony Ballantyne's terminology, resembled "webs of empire" allowing for the circulation of colonial and Eurocentric ideas and concepts that contributed to the history of colonial knowledge production.²⁴

The (re)construction of the Middle East, in particular the lands of Palestine, becomes a prevalent narrative espoused by British diplomats and Zionist sympathizers alike. The ability to create, shape and mould the physical geography of Palestine, as well as demarcate its borders and what's contained within them became both an exercise and exhibition of power.²⁵ This spatial imagination and the importance of its reconfiguration is not lost on Sir Mark Sykes, whose ideas reflected not only nineteenth century Eurocentrism but the need to physically alter the Ottoman landscape geographically, as well as demographically, by endorsing Zionism and establishing state borders that reflected ethno-national lines. As this thesis will show, Zionism played into the British imperial agenda greatly, and gave it the perfect cover in its constructive efforts in the new settlement of the world after the war.²⁶ Though Sykes had hopes Zionists and Arab sentiments would coalesce after the establishment of the Mandate for Palestine, the British-

²³ Cecil Bloom, "Sir Mark Sykes: British Diplomat and Convert to Zionism." *Jewish Historical Studies* Vol 43, 2011, 141. Though Sykes began popularizing the term in England, it first appeared in the September 1902 issue of London's *National Review*, and coined by a US naval officer named Alfred Thayer Mahan. See, Roger Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East, 1902-1922* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 22-26, for the genealogy of the British cultural labelling of the area as the "Middle East".

²⁴ Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

²⁵ See Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), where the author shows how archaeology in Israel has become a practice through which national identity and national rights come to substantiate themselves. The confluence between science and politics constitutes archaeology in an attempt to establish tradition and depict the past and present Palestine/Israel. See also, Eyal Weizmann's, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London, New York: Verso Books, 2007).

²⁶ See Cecil Bloom, "Sir Mark Sykes: British Diplomat and Convert to Zionism", 156. Throughout the article, Bloom cites a number of articles published in the overwhelmingly pro-Zionist newspaper, *The Manchester Guardian*, that covered Sykes' speeches at Zionist meetings in which he espoused the benefits of Zionism on the rest of the world.

backed Jewish Agency (1923) established in Palestine ensured that Zionists had the upper hand, creating a proto-state and road map for Israeli statehood. As Edward Said makes clear, the success of the Zionist doctrine in establishing a state and its effectiveness in making its way against Arab political resistance can be attributed to its “being a policy of detail, not simply a general colonial vision.”²⁷

Amongst these details, we can count the idea of the Jews as a “people”, in the biological as well as political sense of the term. In this way, we can better understand the thinking behind the historical processes unfolding in Modern Palestine, and view the Zionist movement in Palestine and ultimate realization of a state there in 1948, as products of European colonialism and a late event of European nationalist sentiments.²⁸ Just as ideas and plans for the Middle East shaped and reflected a Eurocentric social imaginary, the histories written by Zionists, Arab nationalists, Palestinian nationalists and Turkish nationalists after the war, continued to propagate ideas of Orientalist discourses, such as the view of the late Ottomans as despotic, reinvigorating and re-laying the spider’s web of empire woven by the nineteenth century British Empire. The following chapter will describe the nineteenth century social and political climate that made the Jewish return to Palestine a political destiny.

²⁷ Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books edition, 1992), 95.

²⁸In Raphael Falk’s, *Zionism and the Biology of the Jews* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Publishing, updated from original Hebrew version, 2006), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Genetics and Philosophy of Science professor shows how as a result of Enlightenment values espoused during the period under consideration in this thesis, socio-political movements were increasingly viewed in biological terms. It was at this time that the Jews as a “race”, an invention of a presumed “biological entity”, and their physical traits became part of their biological essence. By the 1870s and 1880s, claims that Jews belonged to a race that could be discerned in terms of the natural sciences, were repeatedly brought up, and hatred against them became more ethnic in character. It was against this backdrop that the plight of the Jews took on a political character. Zionists then used the idea of Jews as belonging to a specific nation-state in order to promote the Jewish National Home agenda. See also, Nadia Abu El-Haj, *The Genealogical Science: The Search for Jewish Origins and the Politics of Epistemology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Chapter 1 – Historical Longing and the Formulation of Racialized Political Categories

This chapter will provide a historical perspective on identity and narrative construction in the nineteenth century relative to the region referred to as "Greater Syria" by the West, or Bilad-al-Sham to its locals. It will attempt to show how historical genealogies linking what was referred to as the Holy Lands in modern-day Palestine/Israel and the Great Powers of Europe, were appropriated by proto-Zionists, and then by Theodor Herzl and the modern political Zionist movement, as well as Great Britain in an attempt to satisfy colonial needs. Chapter 2 will show how a sense of Western superiority, marked by tensions, pragmatism, imperialism and an "utter contempt for other civilizations"²⁹, guided Mark Sykes' vision for the modern "Middle East", with Palestine as the emphasis.

Chapter 1 traces the process which lent credence to Sykes' thinking, or in other words, the process through which the emancipatory effects of a Jewish return to Palestine dovetailed with the new modern world dominated by the nation-state. It will show how an engendered racial hierarchy of the political imaginary would eventually find its way into political planning and imperial decisions. By retrieving a diplomatic and global history of Palestine and the forces that conspired to create a regenerated nation that would fit Western concepts, ironically invalidating Palestinian statehood in the process, it will focus on Orientalist discourses of the region and show how racial categorizations guided them. The drive for the restoration of Palestine to its past greatness, through the Western imaginary, and imperial thinking that was increasingly based along concepts of race and its deployment as a political category, was used to justify the intervention of European powers on behalf of oppressed "nations".

²⁹ Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 52.

The geographic construct of Palestine would breed numerous nationalisms which reinforced paradigms of emancipation increasingly linked to territorial identity, state-formation, and the vague state of “being modern.”³⁰ The new "international"—an order made of abstract ideas and very material objects—would be predicated on legal regimes and political technologies that substantiated its presence in the twentieth-century, though the historical processes that shaped this presence were under way the century prior. In the nineteenth century, Palestine would become subject to European penetration that viewed Palestine as a "promised land"³¹, an object of curiosity that sparked interest in the West, as it became a prophetic site for the final destiny of the human race. British policy-makers, who hoped to piggyback off this evangelical fanaticism in order to substantiate their presence in the region, would appropriate this historical current in their favor. It would then be interpreted as a means of countering the pan-Islamist tendencies of the Hamidian era of Ottoman rule.³²

By focusing on British and Jewish interest in the region, this chapter will argue that dominant narratives guiding the moral, ethical as well as political regeneration of Palestine and the Middle East in the twentieth-century, coupled with the political regimes which upheld them,

³⁰ This phenomenon has carried over to Zionist historiography. The founders of the Jewish History Department at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, such as Itzhak Baer and Ben-Zion Dinur, "believed that a Jewish historian's very nationalism was what lent him the necessary empathy to understand Jewish history from within, thereby making it easier to write objective history." See Yoav Gelber, *Nation and History: Israeli Historiography between Zionism and Post-Zionism* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2012), 105. For the formation of Palestinian identity, and its reformulations throughout history, see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). This was a general globalized condition as shown in Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) and Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870-1940* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011).

³¹ For this conceptualization see, David J. Goldberg, *To the Promised Land: A History of Zionist Thought from Its Origins to the Modern State of Israel* (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

³² Abdul Hamid II was the 34th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (ruling from 1876-1908). He was deposed at the beginning of the Young Turk Revolution. He oversaw what is generally considered to be “a period of decline”, though he inaugurated a major reorganization and modernization of the Ottoman bureaucracy and society. While establishing the First Ottoman Constitutional Parliament in 1876, he then suspended it two years later, citing what he perceived to be the negative ramifications of European influence.

can be traced to the nineteenth-century when the interplay of race, cultural-spatial imagination and political power shaped the region known as "Palestine". Each step played a crucial role in eventuating Zionism as the political amalgam best suited to reconstitute Palestine in the twentieth-century, thrusting forward not only a British/Eurocentric enclave in the new state-driven region, but a process of "othering" to justify its presence there. In order to better focus on this development which occurred in the long nineteenth century, the first section will give a historical backdrop of the origins of the "Palestine Question" in British imperial planning, looking at the role of the British Consul and proto-Zionists beginning in 1830, which will be focused on since most Zionist historiographical accounts of the Jewish ethno-national movement tend to focus on 1882 with the arrival of the first European Jewish immigrants in Palestine.³³ The British were in fact trumpeting the horn of a proto-Zionism as early as 1830 as a response to French and Russian political maneuvering as it pertained to the "Eastern Question". The second section will offer an assessment of books which reflected notions of European Jewish sympathizers and British policy-makers in the first, and then the second-half of the nineteenth century, when scientific principles fused with state-planning in spatial-temporal conceptions of Palestine.

Religious Deliverance as a Humanitarian Construct and the Rise of the Jewish "Nation"

Beginning in the nineteenth century, there was an evangelical revival occurring in England. "The second Puritan Spring" dovetailed with political motivations and the "Eastern Question", or how to pursue policy with the "declining" Ottoman Empire that would preoccupy

³³ For a discussion of the various historiographies of the Palestine region, see Beshara Doumani, "Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians Back into History." *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol 21, No 2 (1992), 5-28.

the great powers of Europe throughout the nineteenth century. The role of the British in Palestine became a lively debate in the 1830s. On the question of Jewish emancipation from the Ottoman Empire in British parliamentary debates of 1833, James Silk Buckingham, a traveler and author of many books including one on his travels to Palestine in 1823, claimed “As to those who inhabited Palestine, the oppressions under which they suffered, and the degradations to which they were subject, were such as to make their abode a continued scene of suffering ; and accordingly, as soon as they could possess themselves of the means of competency, or even of removal, they generally hastened with all possible speed to get away from the country and its persecution.”³⁴ Silk claimed that while an attachment to their ancestral homeland was pervasive amongst British Jews, most with the means to visit Palestine did not do so, even “out of curiosity.” This was not only a call for British support to the Jews of Palestine, but an early nineteenth-century claim that the Jews had been dispossessed, and that a “restoration of their nation, and the establishment of a temporal kingdom at Jerusalem” would be needed, and should be encouraged by Christians, in order to fulfill their spiritual emancipation.³⁵ It also follows in the Zionist/Orientalist trope that the Jews expelled from Palestine had become more civilized, and were therefore accountable for those who remained and were suffering in despair.

By the 1830s, there was a notion and push to describe Jews as a “nation”, as a people. Beginning in 1840, after helping with the removal of the Egyptian governor Muhammad Ali Pasha, the British sought to impose more willfully their presence in the Holy Lands. How did conceptions of race come to delineate the validity and political worthiness of certain "nations" in Palestine? How did twentieth-century Zionists, whose program depended greatly on "Western

³⁴ “Emancipation of the Jews” in *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates: Forming a Continuation of the History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803. Third Series. Vol XIX, Comprising the Period from the Second Day of July to the Twenty-Fifth Day of July, 1833. Vol 5 of the Session* (London: T.C. Hansard, 1833), 1075-1082.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

enmity towards Islam and the Orient", come to see itself as an ethno-national liberation movement? A movement they claimed was comprised of peoples who had emancipated themselves from the "worst of Eastern excess", by relocating to Europe and formulating a notion of "peoplehood".³⁶ This peoplehood, rooted in Western conceptions of the world and Western modernity, confirmed the belief in British imperialists that Arabs and Jews should not be viewed on the same footing. Why did the British believe the Zionists were better equipped and more deserving of statehood? The following chapter will trace the genealogy of this belief.

The Tanzimat reforms of the Ottoman Empire, inaugurated by Sultan Abdulmecid in 1839, propelled the Ottoman modernization effort through a reorganization of the state. Western education and military reorganization, as well as an empire-wide reformulation of legal practices took place. This modernization project created a modern bureaucracy and new economic infrastructure, while strengthening its ties to the West. This moment in history is usually perceived as a watershed moment that allowed the Ottomans to finally embrace Western modernity.³⁷ Despite the fact that historians have corrected the decline narrative, it should be noted that the Ottoman Empire viewed their subjects through the same lens as their Western imperial counterparts, in effect, substantiating and reinforcing the concept of race in global imperial discourses of reform and modernization.³⁸ However, we should view the Tanzimat as a response to increased globalization as well as a response to Orientalism. During this period, there was a fundamental rethinking of Islamic themes within the Empire, which can also be seen as a

³⁶ Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 27-28.

³⁷ See Cem Emrence, *Remapping the Ottoman Middle East: Modernity, Imperial Bureaucracy and the Islamic State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 17-21, for a discussion of the historiography of Ottoman modernization.

³⁸ Ussama Makdisi argues that the Ottomans did this in order to reform and discipline their subjects to fit the terms of civilization laid out by proponents of the Western Enlightenment and the benefits of European modernity. "The Ottoman man's burden" was to produce a modern subject (though not a citizen, as the Ottoman subject was perceived as not yet prepared for citizenship) while upholding the values of Islam. See Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism." *The American Historical Review* Volume 107, Issue 3, June 2002, 768-796.

response to European penetration. New types of loyal Ottoman subjects were to be created that reflected the "currents" and "spirit" of the time. These words were also espoused by Western travelers to the East and European policy-makers throughout the nineteenth century, and reflected in the decisions of twentieth-century policy makers. While the Europeans painted a picture of a decaying Ottoman Empire for people back home, increased European influence in the form of consulates pushed forward the renewed interest in the Holy Lands, and British interest in that region.

The British Consulate in Jerusalem was opened in March 1839 and closed in November of 1914. William Tanner Young was the inaugural consul. He was the first European consular representative appointed to Jerusalem. The Consulate was presented to Ottoman officials as a check on Muhammad Ali Pasha's ambitions in Palestine. Initially, on September 18, 1838, Young's instructions were to relay information regarding commercial, navigational and other information to the Secretary of State. He was to reside in Jerusalem. Though recommendations would then be made for the legal protection of Christians and Jews living in Palestine. Seeing an opening for Britain to enter the competition for influence in the Ottoman lands, or staking a claim to the "Eastern Question" as it was referred to, Lord Palmerston instructed Young to push for such an agenda in order to establish a foothold in the region.³⁹ "It will be a part of your duty, to afford protection to the Jews generally; and you will take an early opportunity of reporting to [Lord Palmerston] upon the present state of the Jewish population".⁴⁰ The official change in

³⁹ The French had laid claim to protection of Catholics in Syria while Russia claimed to protect Orthodox Christians in Greece and Armenia. Russian interest in Palestine began in 1837 with the Imperial Palestine Society established to help pilgrimaging. France's capitulatory rights stemmed from the sixteenth century and were remodified in 1740 following the Peace of Belgrade.

⁴⁰ PRO/FO 78/34. Cited in Albert Hyamson, *The British consulate in Jerusalem in relation to the Jews of Palestine, 1838-1914* (London: The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1939). Henceforth, Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*: See Introduction.

policy was criticised by British officials. An official duty “of protection to the Jews generally” was unheard of, and extremely vague. Though it would point to a new language and structure that would be appropriated time and time again when British officials had difficulty developing official policy and orders, especially when these policies came in imperial declarations, and with those that were legally binding later.⁴¹

Ottoman officials were suspicious of British interests. Alexander Scholch estimates that the population of Palestine in 1850 had about 350,000 inhabitants, 30% of whom lived in 13 towns; roughly 85% were Muslims, 11% were Christians and 4% Jews.⁴² Britain could not expect to act in such a way towards other European powers, either legally or by custom. Unfortunately for the Ottomans, capitulatory rights created a new avenue for diplomatic intrusion. Early attempts by Lord Palmerston to establish the British as intermediaries between the Jews and the Ottoman government were rebuked.⁴³ The Ottoman Porte reluctantly accepted its modus operandi of acting as a representative to elaborate on general complaints members of Ottoman society would make, but could not accept the prospect of a foreign power issuing protection of a segment of the Sultan’s subjects.

Nevertheless, Lord Palmerston laid the framework for the proto-Zionist state, though his religious zeal, if any, could be attributed to early evangelical activities in the nineteenth century. Chief amongst this evangelical scene was the 1809 London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews (the London Jewish Society).⁴⁴ This group pushed for the restoration of the Jews

⁴¹ Such as the several war-time pledges that would come to shape the region before, during and after World War I, which will be explored later.

⁴² Alexander Scholch, "The Demographic Development of Palestine, 1850–1882." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 17, No. 4 (November 1985), 485–505.

⁴³ Viscount Ponsonby to Viscount Palmerston”. Constantinople, 21st January, 1841, FO 195/185 (No. 19). Cited in Hyamson, *The British Consulate in Jerusalem*, 35

⁴⁴ John James Moscrop, *Measuring Jerusalem: The Palestine Exploration Fund and British Interests in the Holy Land*. (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 14.

in the Holy Lands because they saw it as the necessary step preceding the return of Christ in the chronology from the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation. This millenarian doctrine, or the foundations of Christian Zionism, espoused the physical and religious return of Jews to their homeland, which was their “inalienable right”. Whether or not the conversion of the Jews was to occur before or after their restoration to the Holy Lands however, remains unclear.⁴⁵ Regardless, the architecture for an enduring convergence of the return of Jews to Palestine with British imperial aims was laid.

Events seemed to unfold perfectly as Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper (thereafter seventh Earl of Shaftesbury), an ardent supporter of the London Jews Society and related to Palmerston by marriage, increasingly had his ear.⁴⁶ Regardless of the motivation behind the Consulate, what is clear is that Britain appropriated a humanitarian cause for political goals. Britain saw itself as the nation capable of emancipating the Jews, hence fulfilling both a dogmatic and messianic mission. Numerous arguments were made on behalf of the benefits of Jewish immigration to the lands of Palestine. These included social and economic benefits. These arguments reflected British culture and painted a picture not in the least lacking in Orientalist tropes of decline, backwardness, and Turkish inability to rule. A Foreign Office dispatch from Lord Palmerston to Viscount Ponsonby clamouring for the return of Jews to Palestine claims:

There can be no doubt that very great benefit would accrue to the Turkish Government, if any considerable number of opulent Jews could be persuaded to come and settle in the Ottoman Dominions; because their wealth would afford employment to the people, and their intelligence would give a useful direction to industry; and the resources of the State would thereby be considerably augmented.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See Alexander Scholch, *Palestine in Transformation* (1993), 62-63. And for elaboration, Regina Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism: Its Roots in Western History* (London: Zed Books, 1983).

⁴⁶ See Mayir Verete, “Why was a British consulate established in Jerusalem?” *English Historical Review* Vol. 85, No. 335 (April 1970), 316-345. Verete contends that as a result of the Egyptian occupation being more receptive to British diplomatic representation, Palmerston had the idea for the British Consulate as a means for primarily curbing Russian and French influence as early as 1837.

⁴⁷ Viscount Palmerston to Viscount Ponsonby. 24th November, 1840, FO 78/391 (No. 248). Cited in Hyamson, *The British consulate in Jerusalem*, 34.

Though this convergence was initially evangelical and biblical in nature, it would take on a more political role in the second half of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the difficulties behind British attempts at settling Jews in Palestine were evident from the get go. The Ottomans had the French and Russians to contend with, and did not want to extend further privileges to another major European power. The British were attempting to claim protection of a peoples outside their sphere of sovereignty. That issue notwithstanding, it was unclear what, if any, complaints Jews living in Palestine really had against the Ottoman Empire, and if a settlement in Palestine would in fact be beneficiary to any of the groups involved.

One dispatch from the Consulate surmised, “It might be in fact inconvenient to the Porte and not useful to the Jews to give them *special immunities*. They would probably be abused and they would certainly excite *demands that could not be granted to others*.” (Emphasis mine)⁴⁸ With eerie foreshadowing, the men on the ground were able to predict the precise calamity that would stem from future schemes of Jewish settlement in Palestine. Moreover, it leads one to question the religious aspect of this endeavour to resettle Jews in Palestine. Were these men truly invigorated with messianic fanaticism, or was it a thirst for expanding British territory and control that needed to be quenched?

Today, the idea of Palestine as a sacred space holds water for all religions. This idea can be traced to a nineteenth-century revival in the Holy Lands, which the British precipitated. While the Russians claimed “protection” of the Orthodox Christians, the French laid claim to protecting the Catholics in the Ottoman Empire. That left an opening for the British to claim protection of Protestants and Jews in Palestine, especially after the establishment of the British Consul in Jerusalem in 1838. The relationship of the Jews and Palestine, and the British role in re-

⁴⁸ Viscount Ponsonby to Viscount Palmerston, Therapia, 27th March, 1841, FO 195/185 (No.113). Cited in Hyamson, *The British consulate in Jerusalem*, 39.

establishing Jews in the Holy Lands, invigorated English politics and society from 1830 to 1858.⁴⁹

An Italian-born and wealthy English-Jewish philanthropist named Sir Moses Montefiore made numerous visits to Palestine between 1827 and 1875. His visits had convinced him of the viability of the Jewish agricultural colonization of the region, and in 1855, he managed to secure two firmans⁵⁰ from the Ottoman Porte. The first allowed him to purchase land outside the city walls of Jerusalem and begin building for charitable uses, the second allowed him to rebuild the crumbling Khorbah Synagogue in the Old City for the Ashkenazi community.⁵¹ In 1860, he completed construction of the first Jewish residential neighborhood outside the walls of Jerusalem and proceeded to build synagogues around the area. This was no small feat, as the construction of churches and mosques required special permission from the Ottoman Porte. Montefiore was well connected to the British intelligentsia, holding enough sway to have a British Consul replaced in 1861.⁵²

While Montefiore's attempts at wide scale colonization proved unsuccessful, he laid the roadmap for eventual Jewish immigration and settlement for many generations to come.⁵³ In 1838, his idea for a British railway stemming inland from Jaffa can be seen as an impetus for

⁴⁹ Albert M. Hyamson, *British Projects for the Restoration of the Jews* (London: The British Palestine Committee, 1917), 3.

⁵⁰Firmans were issued by the Ottoman Sultan and granted special permission to non-Ottomans subjects.

⁵¹ A.L. Tibawi, *British Interests in Palestine: A Study of Religious and Educational Enterprise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 100.

⁵² *Ibid*, 140.

⁵³ Despite this, Montefiore has not been the subject of extensive research in modern academic works, and is scarcely mentioned in history books. The best account of his life is, Lucien Wolf, *Sir Moses Montefiore: A Centennial Biography, with Extracts from Letters and Journals* (London: J.Murray, 1884), though this is essentially a primary source as it was an authorized biography. See also, Paul Goodman, *Moses Montefiore* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1925) and Umberto Nahon, *Sir Moses Montefiore, Leghorn 1784-Ramsgate 1885: A Life in the Service of Jewry* (Jerusalem, Bureau for Jewish Communities and Organizations of the Jewish Agency, 1965). Two other books have been written on him based on secondary source material.

Mark Sykes' perceived importance of the city, discussed later, by a half century. The extent of his influence was far and wide. In 1865, Montefiore was commemorated by the City of London for his hard work in aiding not only in the pursuance of "liberty and enlightenment" in London, but "ensuring the world still moves" through his discovery and philanthropy.⁵⁴ This type of language reflects the notion of Western modernity and of a homogeneous temporal framework leading to modernity through religious and political emancipation. Montefiore's endeavors were indicative of British interest in the Holy Lands coming off the heels of Ibrahim Pasha's forced withdrawal in 1840. Though he is also important as laying the framework for future European intervention on the grounds of humanitarian relief.⁵⁶

The "rediscovery" of the Holy Lands by travelers and the plethora of travel-logs and Palestine related reading materials by the British had without question an impact on Montefiore. The historical-geographical recovery of Palestine and its inhabitants was imperative for both the spiritual and physical regeneration of the Holy Land. The Ottoman world needed to be rescued from "ignorant and fanatical rulers". This rhetoric was being espoused as early as the 1840s. In a correspondence with Sir Moses Montefiore, then the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, British Consul for Syria Charles Henry Churchill, laid the foundations for political Zionism fifty years before its adoption by European Jews. The correspondence between the two would represent important inroads for the development of the British plans for Jewish

⁵⁴ The quotes appear from a *Montreal Herald* article on November 5th, 1864, which itself quoted the speech given in honor of Montefiore in London, included in the re-print of a sermon given by Reverend Abraham De Sola in Montreal. The author claims that Montefiore's recognition, which extolled the virtues of British values and philanthropy, was a "cheering sign of the times". The sermon can be found in, Abraham De Sola, *The Righteous Man: A Sermon Commemorating the bestowal of Public Honors on Sir Moses Montefiore by the City of London: preached in Montreal on Sabbath* (Most likely published in Montreal, 1865).

⁵⁶ For the European appropriation of humanitarianism to justify intervention in the Ottoman Empire, see Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

colonization of Palestine, though not officially successful at the time, it effectively upheld new cultural notions predicated on protection. In this plan for the restoration of Jews to the Holy Lands under the supervision of European powers, he proclaimed that civilization must progress, and that various elements of commercial prosperity must be developed under the eye of the British, since “such will never be the case under the blundering and decrepit despotism of the Turks”.⁵⁷ Churchill argued tirelessly for the need to take up the mantle of “Oriental supremacy”.

Associating the demands of civilization and the success of humanity with the rescue of Palestine from the Ottomans, he called upon all Englishmen to adopt a political doctrine reaffirming the Jewish right to Palestine. Following Napoleon’s belief that Acre was “to be the key to the East”, he conferred upon Englishmen that when, “Palestine ceases to be Turkish, it must become English, or else form part of a new independent state.”⁵⁸ Not only would this benefit the region economically, an argument previously used before by Palmerston, but it would “draw together and unite the hitherto divergent races of mankind in the humanizing relations of fraternity and peace.”⁵⁹ Once again categorizations based on race and Western concepts of humanity permeate Churchill’s thinking. What’s more, it makes clear the division, and the dissimilarity of the “human” and “inhumane”, and the necessity to repopulate the lands of Palestine with the civilized, often portrayed as a "backwater" or "barren land".

⁵⁷ Colonel Churchill to Sir Moses Montefiore. June 14, 1841, Minute-Books of Board of Deputies 1841-1843. Cited in Lucien Wolfe, *Notes on the Diplomatic History of the Jewish Question: With Texts of Protocols, Treaty Stipulations and Other Public Acts and Official Documents*. (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1919), 119-123.

⁵⁸ This proclamation on the future of Palestine was taken from Churchill’s book, Charles Henry Churchill, *Mount Lebanon, a ten years’ residence, from 1842 to 1852, Describing the Manners, Customs, and Religion of its Inhabitants*. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1853) Vol 1: V-X. Additionally, Mark Sykes would espouse a similar belief to the War Department in 1915 before the making of the Sykes-Picot Agreement which spelled the future for Palestine and the Middle East.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

What is indeed interesting about the early nineteenth century Orthodox messianic Jews who longed for the preservation and revival of Judaism, is that they worried about the estrangement of Jews to their faith. They longed for a return to Judaic piety, rather than to a physical homeland. They cared for spiritual redemption, since Jews were increasingly becoming assimilated in European countries, not national redemption.⁶⁰ Though this spiritual redemption would become interlocked with political redemption, with authors such as Moses Hess writing a pamphlet calling for national unity and the redemption of Jews in Eretz Israel in 1863.⁶¹ Though these calls went unheeded, and were lamented by Churchill as an opportunity missed for the British to colonize Palestine, the call would not again be overlooked in the future when political recognition and aims were tied to the colonial project. This would be especially true in the case of Mark Sykes, given that he had travelled extensively through the Ottoman lands as a child and was familiar with Arab and Ottoman culture.⁶² As we shall see, it would also come to dictate the ways in which Mark Sykes envisioned the “new world” to be created by the British after the war.

While this marked the beginning of British intrigue and influence in the lands of Palestine, it also established our modern geographical understanding of the borders of Palestine. In a dispatch sent by Colonel Patrick Campbell to William Young at the beginning of the establishment of the Consulate, Campbell instructed Young that he would be receiving a Firman (mandate issued by the Ottoman Empire) from the Porte recognizing his appointment as Vice

⁶⁰ Gudrun Kramer, *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 103.

⁶¹ Moses Hess, *Rome und Jerusalem* (Paris, 1860). English trans. (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1918). Hess' idea was fashioned after the recent Risorgimento (unification) of Italy. This book stressed the importance of Jews to return to Palestine in a socialistic “repletion of the soil”. This book would influence future Zionists and was the impetus for Herzl's programs.

⁶² Between 1890 and 1897, Mark visited the Ottoman lands four times with his father, Tatton Sykes. The Ottoman Empire was the “center of Mark's interest” and at a young age began buying maps and books on the Ottoman Empire. See “Early Travel and Education 1890-1897” in Roger Adelson, *Mark Sykes: Portrait of an Amateur* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), 35-51. His early impressions of the Ottoman Empire would continue to condition his outlook on the Ottoman Empire and its supposed decline.

Consul in Jerusalem and Palestine. Though it also recognized that ports of Jaffa and to the north as far as Sidon were “within the limits of Palestine.”⁶³ This geographical scaling of Palestine, based on the biblical-historical delineations of Filistin, would guide future map-making as well. It was through these books that formulations of the Jewish peoples as a “race” and “nation” were first conceptualized.

The 1840s and 1850s thus represented a “transitional phase” in which the viability of Jews to the imperial goals of Britain started taking shape.⁶⁴ As the renewed promulgation of Protestantism was taking place in England, the Jews were viewed as a tool that could fix the problems regarding Britain’s place in the “Eastern Question”. Since the Reformation, the conversion of Jews to Protestantism was seen as necessary for the second coming of Christ. The British would appropriate this evangelical logic to presuppose their presence in Palestine. After the Crimean War (1853-56), Palestine would be seen as important to the protection of the land routes to India. The “question of Palestine” was engendered through formulations of Enlightenment-backed principles, through the scientific scaling of its borders and map-making. As mentioned in the introduction, these were important not only in justifying a historical connection to the land, but because only administrative regions had been fixed in Palestine, though never in a geographic sense. This would be necessary in order to create any semblance of a territorial political settlement.

⁶³ Colonel Patrick Campbell to WM. T. Young, Cairo, 21st November, 1838, FO 78/368. Cited in Hyamson, *The British consulate in Jerusalem*, 2.

⁶⁴ Lorenzo Kamel, *Imperial Perceptions of Palestine: British Influence and Power of Late Ottoman Times* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

An Assessment of Emancipation Literature and its Influence on Policy Making and Identity Formation

The next section will rely on primary sources such as books, travel logs and pamphlets while weaving a historical narrative that shows the appropriation of British messianic evangelism and the Orientalist and racial discourses which accompanied it, both before the Crimean War and after. The first text examined is Samuel Alexander Bradshaw's *Tract for the Times, Being A Plea for the Jews* (1844) ⁶⁵.

Bradshaw begins his plea for the Jews by stating, "As they exist in the scientific and mechanical world, it is the writer's aim to lay before the public eye, and before the eye of Christians in particular... [a] plea in favor of those who have long been forgotten under wrongs for ages entailed upon them."⁶⁶ Right from the start, Bradshaw appeals to his audience by claiming this plea stems from the urgent necessities of our time. He appeals to the logic of a world rooted in science and mechanics, or Western civilization and the progress it has espoused. The necessity now is on salvaging the maligned Jewish population of Palestine, in order to follow in the temporal journey to civilization and emancipation. Despite the fact that it was now generally understood in Britain that the Jews would "ultimately return to their own land", not enough was being done by the British to right an historical wrong.

Appropriating the language of the scripture was a tactic used by Lord Palmerston in order to substantiate the British Consul and its purpose in Jerusalem. Bradshaw follows suit by claiming that "on this momentous topic... Scripture is not silent... therefore it is the duty of all

⁶⁵ Samuel Alexander Bradshaw, *Tract for the Times being A Plea for the Jews* (London: Edward and Hughes, 1844).

⁶⁶ Bradshaw, *Tract for the Times*: 3.

enlightened by wisdom from above, to watch the signs of the times”.⁶⁷ The time seems none the riper to right the wrongs of the past and work towards the “recovery” and regeneration of the Jewish people in Palestine. Since the opening of the British Consul, Palmerston had been attempting to cast a wide net of protection to include Jews and Protestants, with the intended goal to convert the Jews to Protestantism and increase the number of British immigrants there. A plan was proposed to establish with the King of Prussia the recognition of the Protestant Church in Turkey. This would be done to, “improve the condition of the Christian population in the Ottoman Empire... for affording to European Protestants encouragement to settle and purchase land in the Turkish domains; and for securing to Protestant, whether native subjects of the Porte or foreigners who have settled in Turkey, securities and protections similar to those which Christians of other denominations enjoy”.⁶⁸ This plan served two functions, first for imperial strategic reasons. With the departure of Ali Pasha, and the extension of the capitulations that favored Britain, England staked their bet not only on the Ottoman economy, but on the religious aspect as well. The conversion of Jews and their protection substantiated the first function.

Though Bradshaw lamented the failures of the British in establishing a firmer stronghold in the area, which as this correspondence makes clear, had imperial motives behind them, he no less stressed the importance of fulfilling their duty as the world’s imminent power. He wished to see the “uprising of Israel as a nation” but insisted this cannot be done, as Churchill before him had claimed, without the courtesy of a “British helping hand”. Citing the wrongs which Jews had labored under for centuries, it was time to repay them for their contributions to Britain, “whether religious, moral, social, political, literary or commercial, are to be traced up severally as comes

⁶⁷ Ibid, 4.

⁶⁸ Viscount Palmerston to Viscount Ponsonby, July 26, 1841, F.O. 424/1. No. 187, Confidential Print: Middle East, 1839-1869, The National Archives, UK.

to us by the Jews.”⁶⁹ This plays into the reshaping of the region in the Western mould. Jews carry with them all the great character traits of the British, and by consequence the West. Therefore, their emancipation will serve a two-fold function. First, it will regenerate Palestine and instill a sense of civilization there amidst the presence of the Arabs, and second, it will remove the Ottomans from power there.

In line with narratives and British and Zionist legal proclamations of the future, *A Tract for the Times* conveniently eschews in its forty-six pages any mention of the Arabs in Palestine, reinforcing the notion that the land was empty, therefore making way for “an effort that the Jews may come forth of the nations, crowned with their offerings and benediction”.⁷⁰ The Ottomans are mentioned only once, in a footnote. Bradshaw sees no problem usurping them, again playing in to the Ottoman narrative of decline. In his opinion, “The Ottoman or Turkish empire offers no greater resistance to the project before us than may be cleared away by compensation.”⁷¹ He continues by stating, “Although the Jews are the only proper owners of Jerusalem and the Land of Palestine, the Mosques and other acquired possessions of the Turks in Jerusalem, are evidently to be obliterated by money power.”⁷² Though he acknowledges the existence of any semblance of a Muslim presence, it is revealing that he believes these can easily be removed, and simply through financial compensation.

While Bradshaw’s plea labored on the messianic, British statesmen appropriated this trend as it fused with scientific and imperial reasoning. After the Crimean War ended, the British were keen to establish a stronger presence amidst the declining political power of the Ottomans.

⁶⁹ Bradshaw, *Tract for the Times*, 21.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 41.

⁷¹ Ibid, 40.

⁷² Ibid

Young's mission to establish British protection of religious minorities would be surpassed by his successor James Finn, who devised a plan to increase Jewish settlement in Palestine. This plan is important because it again brings to light the fact this region needed to be developed, and developed by a minority England can lay claim to and abrogate foreign influence.

Finn put forward quite an extensive plan to persuade Jews to establish agricultural settlements. In tune with those before him, citing the economic benefits that would "arise from such means of developing the natural riches of the country, [this] could not but be great: besides the security which ought to arise from a counterbalance of interests in the varied populations."⁷³ Adding to the appeal of settling in Palestine, is the fact that the Jews who reside there had been to America and Australia, and always decide to return. "Even without the allurements of agriculture and its concomitants", he had "seen a shipload and heard of another" comprised of Russian Jews.⁷⁴ Foreshadowing future arguments made in the favor of Zionist settlement of Palestine, Finn argued that they would be best suited "to people a half-empty Turkish province... I ought not to conclude without observing that the peculiar cultivation to this region, would yield a very speedy return for the support of those engaged in reclaiming waste lands—of which two thirds of Palestine consists."⁷⁵

Appropriating these ideas in the second half of the century was Moses Hess, a French-Jewish philosopher and socialist, a founder of Labor Zionism, who would come to influence Theodor Herzl immensely, and as a result, the conceptions of race and state appropriated by the British. Hess, like his European counterparts, viewed the logic of history advancing with the

⁷³ James Finn to the Earl of Clarendon. Jerusalem, 15th September, 1857, F.O. 78/1294 (Pol. No. 36). No. 186. Cited in Hyamson, *The British consulate in Jerusalem*, 249.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 252.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 251-252.

French Revolution, “the equinox in the life of historical peoples... Resurrection of nations becomes a natural phenomenon.”⁷⁶ In 1860, he appealed for the revival of Jewish nationalism and a return to Palestine. His plea is indicative of the temporal schism shifting the evangelical and religious backing of the Jewish return to that of the political for Jews, which could be pounced on even easier by the British.

In an embattled cry for the return, Hess cites the “racial instinct and cultural and historical mission to unite all humanity in the name of the Eternal Creator, this people has conserved its nationality, in the form of its religion and united both inseparably with the memories of its ancestral past.”⁷⁷ He continues by arguing that “no modern people” can deny the right of the Jewish their former lands. Insisting on listening to the “voices that are heard from various parts of the world” he demands the “national regeneration of Israel”, whose justification comes “in the Jewish cult, the national character of Judaism, and, even more, in the general process of development of humanity and its obvious results, and finally, in the present situation of human life.”⁷⁸

Hess manages to apply a number of Western principles of modernity and emancipation, the national character, the benefits of science, and ultimately the advancement of the human race. Hess sees these all coalescing if only the “reformers in science and knowledge”, realize the political situation and successfully implement “the establishment of Jewish colonies at the Suez and on the banks of Jordan.”⁷⁹ Doing so would rectify what is hidden from the problems of nationality and freedom, the “deeper problem which cannot be solved by mere phases, namely,

⁷⁶ Moses Hess, *Rome und Jerusalem*, 35-41.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 36.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 37-38.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 40.

the race question, which is as old as history itself and must be solved before attempting the solution of the political and social problems.”⁸⁰ The race question for Hess comes to denote the need for Jews to realize there is both a religious and a national character to Judaism, the “progressivism” which dots the idea of the nation-state and emancipation. It also denotes a dissatisfaction with the European powers who, at that point, failed to view the advancement of the Jews as a race and as a nation, capable of expounding all the benefits and glories of Western civilization upon Palestine. The race question would be undoubtedly connected to the “Eastern Question”, and the “Question of Palestine” for years to come.

French intervention in 1860s Lebanon signaled the first of European humanitarian intervention in the Middle East, with the French citing religious protection of the Catholics there.⁸¹ But its effect triggered the British to increase its “protection” of the lands they had interest in. The declining political authority of the Ottomans had a dual effect of a decline in political autonomy as well, especially after the Russo-Turkish Wars of 1877-78. The British Consul took the opportunity to document and intervene more aggressively in matters which concerned British interests. Consul Richard Francis Burton, a traveler, diplomat and orientalist, in 1871 wrote to the Earl Granville about the importance of extending the Consulate of Syria from Damascus, in effect getting closer to Palestine, and establishing a presence through a railway that would connect the Levant to Euphrates.⁸² He noticed the increased “European

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ See Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁸² Consul Burton to Earl Granville, Damascus, July 24, 1871, F.O. 406/12. No. 53, Confidential Print: Middle East, 1839-1869, The National Archives, UK.

interest” and “jealousy” there, and noted that Ottomans hated the European influence, due to its being “an obstacle to their freedom and maladministration.”⁸³

The atmosphere was ripe for increased British penetration. With Jewish immigration growing, the Ottomans placed a ban on Jewish immigration into the administrative regions that comprised Palestine. This was done in anticipation of the first Aliyah (1882), and the growing presence of the British and the Jews that they were protecting in the area. Discussing acts of violence perpetrated by Syrian peasants, Burton claimed that in all his years of travels around the world, he had never seen anything of the sort. “In Syria, however, party feeling carries everything before it. The mere fact of my having prevented Monsignor Niffon, Bishop of Nazareth, from seizing ground which belongs to the Jews of Tiberias, under the protection of Great Britain, was enough to place me in complete antagonism with him, his turbulent and fanatical flock.”⁸⁴

After detailing numerous instances where he protected different ethnic and religious peoples from dangerous situations, involving shootings and village riots, he makes mention of an English colonist’s admiration and pride in his efforts. “We are very proud of the affair at Nazareth, *the English in Syria are looking up at last.*” (Emphasis mine)⁸⁵ Burton lauded the British as bringing stability and order to “travellers who can answer for the respect with which they are now afforded.” The moment could not be better, “as the absence of the safeguard of public opinion, and of the European element, the deficits of Turkish government and vice of the

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Consul Burton to Sir H. Elliot. Damascus, June 18, 1871, F.O. 406/12. NO.54, Confidential Print: Middle East, 1839-1869, The National Archives, UK.

⁸⁵ Ibid. The plight of the English in the Middle East would be a concern of Mark Sykes, detailed in Chapter 2.

Arab character leave a very wide door open to intervention.”⁸⁷ These reflected Orientalist attitudes towards the locals and Ottomans. The English and Zionist partnership would eventuate and substantiate the belief that they should remain in the region later on.

⁸⁷ Acting Consul Jugo to Sir H. Elliot. Damascus, September 28, 1871, F.O. 424/27B. Inclosure in No. 82, Confidential Print: Middle East, 1839-1869, The National Archives, UK.

The Fruits of Western Modernity in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century in Palestine



Appendix A. The Map that Confirmed Palestine's Geopolitical Borders in the Twentieth Century, produced by George Adam Smith. Notice how the geographic scope is identical to that of Young's jurisdiction as Consul. That area was based on biblical histories of Palestine, which Smith appropriated here.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Map inserted at end of George Adam Smith. *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (1894)

In May of 1865, a little less than twenty years before the first wave of European Jewish immigration to Palestine, the London-based Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) was established through the auspices of the British Foreign Office. Its aim was to establish a society devoted to the scientific exploration of “Palestine”, a “geographical and geological survey... as a preliminary to the scientific exploration of the country.”⁹⁰ Colonial science and cartography would permit for the presence of a physical space named Palestine to materialize and be present in people’s minds. Work began on the Survey of Western Palestine in 1871. Cloaking their aims as a mission that would produce “great value to the Ottomans’ administrative needs”, the survey’s true intention was to produce a map in the eventual outbreak of war in the region, but primarily it was to expound Palestine’s biblical past.⁹¹ The (re)mapping of Palestine by the PEF can be seen as an attempt to create a comprehensible world in Palestine for Europeans to traverse and read about.

Making that world more visible to people at home was Old Testament scholar and theologian, George Adam Smith, who wrote *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (1894) based on his travels there, which was reprinted over thirty times.⁹² In his book the importance of religion is paramount to the history of Palestine, though the narrative ends with the Arab conquest in AD 634 and does not resume until Napoleon’s invasion of Palestine in 1799, it completely eschews the history of the Arabs during that time. However, his book is important in that Smith’s travels took place in the 1880s and 1890s, and was published only 3 years before the First Zionist Congress in Basil. It thus reflected and reconstituted the “spirit of the times” at the

⁹⁰ Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 22.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 23.

⁹² George Adam Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (1894). I am using the sixteenth edition, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910).

end of the nineteenth century when political Zionism began gaining steam, and the Ottoman Empire grew wearier of Jewish immigration and what they perceived again as a European threat to their autonomy. More importantly, the maps included in this book reflected those of biblical times, and were considered so historically accurate they were consulted by the British in the drawing of the Mandate for Palestine and at the Versailles Peace. This book was highly important in developing British conceptions of the Holy Land, as well as to the historiography and mythology of the State of Israel.

The scope of Consul Young's jurisdiction, alluded to earlier in this paper⁹³ reflects almost exactly the geographical borders of the Palestinian map drawn by George Adam Smith and included as an insert to the book. The genealogy of the borders of the Holy Land and of Palestine can be traced back to maps predicated on biblical histories and Smith's spatial-geographic demarcation mirrors this almost perfectly. According to Smith, the "form of the land and its historical consequences" were shaped by numerous nations, though the nation which truly owns it is that of the Jews.⁹⁴ Palestine is important because it lies between two continents, Asia and Africa, it represents the glory of Eastern civilization.⁹⁵ Smith reflected the attitudes of his European counter-parts when in 1891, returning after an absence of eleven years, commented upon, "The great increase of red and sloping roofs in the landscape. These always mean the presence of Europeans: and when they appear, and the flat roofs beloved of Orientals are not visible, then the truly Western aspect of nature in the Holy Land asserts itself."⁹⁶ That process

⁹³See footnote 60.

⁹⁴ George Adam Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 59.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 19.

unfolded in 1891, and would only increase with the arrival of Theodor Herzl on the scene, and the second Aliyah (wave) of immigration.

In 1897, a Hungarian journalist named Theodor Herzl founded the Zionist Organization. Though he was born twenty years after the aforementioned British-backed Zionist policy, Zionist historians credit him as the main protagonist behind the launching of the Zionist political agenda in Europe.⁹⁷ Although there are variations, Zionist ideology was essentially based on the belief that the plight of Jews, "the Jewish problem," was a result of a lack of political power, which in turn was a result of the dispersion of Jewish peoples across the world making them incapable of achieving sovereign political power. As anti-Semitism spread throughout Eastern Europe and beyond, Zionists looked to a modern political program that fashioned itself as a nationalist movement. Thus, Zionism at its infancy was a movement striving to establish a Jewish national home in a state where a distinct political, cultural and social character could be developed. It was, at its roots, a colonial project. The yearning for a return to "Eretz Israel", or the "land of Israel", was grounded in an early messianic redemption of the repopulation of Palestine. Though as we have seen, biblical beliefs made way to a largely secular political movement that would become increasingly predicated on settler-colonialism.⁹⁸

Herzl's insistence that, "We are a people -- one people"⁹⁹, reflected the world climate in which nation-states and recognized national groups were proliferating and peoples associated

⁹⁷ Chief amongst these, as well as being one of the earliest to set the dominant framework for Zionist historiography, was Nahum Sokolow, who was second only to Chaim Weizmann in the WZO. His book was written shortly after Mark Sykes' death, and interestingly contained a 20 page tribute to Sykes and his efforts supporting the Zionist agenda. See also, Alex Bein, *Theodor Herzl* (New York: Atheneum Publishing, 1941), Nahum Sokolow, *History of Zionism: 1600-1918* with an introduction by Lord Arthur Balfour (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1969).

⁹⁸ See, Gerson Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: 1882-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991)

⁹⁹Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) (1896). Translated from the German by Sylvie D'Avigdor, Adapted from the edition published in 1946 by the American Zionist Emergency Council, PDF E-BOOK at www.mideastweb.com, 5.

themselves as members of an imagined community nursed within state borders. Herzl thus categorized Jews along ethno-national lines, and appealed to European powers to help the Zionists establish a state that would house the Jewish national home.¹⁰⁰ Speaking in front of a Jewish-German audience of over 1,000 in Berlin, Herzl equated the settlement of the Jews in Palestine to the imperial endeavours of the British and Germans and their policy of overseas expansion. "Don't you know what a colonial age we are living in?", he asked, as he explained the dangers of assimilated Jewish Europeans remaining in their country of citizenship and insisted they create a homeland bringing "a measure of relief to all mankind."¹⁰¹ The Zionist movement can therefore be seen as a reflection of the modern world shaped by the globalization of the long nineteenth century.

Certainly, the Jews were people before this historical moment, but their distinct character as a "people", at this point and time, reframed their identity as a group distinguishable from the rest of Europe, and eventually the rest of the Ottoman Empire, necessitating the acquirement of a state.¹⁰² The late nineteenth century political climate laid the perfect breeding grounds for the emergence of Zionism, at the intersection of liberalism, imperialism, and the classification of civilizations, or as Edward Said would claim, the sphere of culture.¹⁰³ Jews undoubtedly faced the well-entrenched anti-Semitism of Europe during the nineteenth century. However, thanks to

¹⁰⁰ Herzl was heavily influenced by Eugen Duhring's, *The Jewish Problem as a Problem of Race, Morals and Culture* (Brighton: Nineteen Eighty Four Press, 1881). His book was the first to frame the Jewish problem not as a religious and cultural problem but one based on the inherent and unchangeable character of the Jewish people. See the introduction.

¹⁰¹Theodor Herzl, "Who Fears a State?" in *Theodor Herzl, Zionist Writings: Essays and Addresses, vol. 1, January 1896-1898*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1973), 211-215.

¹⁰²In C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: 1780-1914* (Padstow: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), the author claims that as interconnectivity amongst peoples and nations made peoples' lives similar, what distinguished this new technologically induced globalization from older eras of globalization is the need to distinguish one's self-image from other nations and peoples, often by inventing an identity. Certainly, the "Jews" as a political categorization of peoples was a construct measured against the European standard, just as Ottoman Orientalism was.

¹⁰³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993). In his follow-up to *Orientalism* (1978), Said argues that the ability to create or block narratives by imperial powers creates a culture in which a "set of experiences" comes to shape man's attitude and his beliefs vis-à-vis overseas colonies and the other world.

the formulation of Zionism as a political concept, European Jews were presented to the world in a different light, one that reflected the historical currents of liberalism and the modern world. Writing the introduction for Nahum Sokolow's, *The History of Zionism* (1919), Arthur Balfour succinctly described this shift in culture as he claimed that the establishment of a Jewish national home would assimilate the Jews both nationally and internationally, "to that of other races" and "mitigate what remains of ancient antipathies... mitigate the age-long miseries created for Western civilization." ¹⁰⁴

This chapter presented a historical narrative that showed how British and Jewish support for the remapping of Palestine unfolded. The establishment of the British Consul can be seen as the impetus for successive British intervention in Palestine, increasingly grounded in the humanitarian language of "protection" of the Jews. Racial and Oriental conceptualizations of the Palestinian and the Arab effectively eliminated his presence from the historical narrative, as a racial order favoring modern Western civilization came to the fore. The spirit of the times called first for an evangelical mission to protect the downtrodden Jewish population from Ottoman despotism. This merged conveniently with British imperial aims, as the British looked to respond to French and Russian encroachment of the Ottoman territories. Projections of Western superiority, grounded in Enlightenment principles and a revived interest in British Protestantism, led not only to an increased interest of Palestine on behalf of British society and its policy-makers, but also an increased physical presence in the Holy Lands. That presence precipitated the need to delineate the borders of Palestine, a geopolitical construct and political technology that, similar to the rest of the Middle East, served to legitimate and reinforce Western conceptualizations of the nation-state and its supposed emancipatory effects.

¹⁰⁴ "Mr. Balfour's Introduction" in Nahum Sokolow, *History of Zionism: 1600-1918* with an introduction by Lord Arthur Balfour (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1919), LIII-LIV.

A linear projection of history guided the (re)discovery of Palestine and the hopes and desires for what was deemed an empty and barren wasteland. An historical cohesion was established through paradigms of the Jewish return to Palestine, fulfilling the destiny of the Jewish nation, and by consequence, the human race. The second half of the long nineteenth century saw the fusion of Jewish religious zeal and British humanitarian pragmatism coalesce with proto-Zionist political emancipation and imperial planning. The forces of change grew stronger as the result of the Crimean War swung the door open for more British influence. As Ottoman political autonomy waned, Zionist interest in Palestine would increase and British racial categorizations of the native population became engrained as a political technology of domination and power. This was evidenced by the misgivings and duplicitous nature of their imperial negotiations and diplomatic actions during and after World War I which, much like the projection of Ottoman weakness in the plethora of Orientalist material dealt with in this chapter, diminished the visibility of the “other”.

This chapter concluded with the modern political origins of Zionism as an attempt to break with usual periodizations related to the history of Palestine, especially of the Zionists. It was my aim to show how social change affected a series of cultural and political transformations that suited both (proto)Zionists and the British alike, and how modern historical developments fused with traditional elements of the nineteenth century, bringing into question the linear temporality of the history of Palestine in the nineteenth century. Cultural trends influenced by a burgeoning transnational sphere of politics would come to dominate twentieth century policy-making.

CHAPTER 2 – MARK SYKES AND HIS VISION FOR THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST



Appendix B. Caricature of Sykes in *Vanity Fair*. June 26, 1912. "Man of the Day".¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶*Vanity Fair*. "Man of the Day: Our Mark". June 26, 1912.

The first half of this thesis dealt with the construction of historical genealogies linking the Holy Land and the great powers of Europe. It revealed how geographical space and identity were coopted and formed to meet imperial needs, and how various nationalisms appropriated and influenced these fin-de-siècle constructions. Dating back to the 1840s, Chapter 1 showed how Britain's yearning for influence in the Near East continued to evolve citing the religious "protection" of Protestants and Jews, a remodelling of Palestine that fit the image of a Christian past, and attempts at a proto-Zionist state. This would be the forerunner of the political protection afforded to Zionists in the build-up and aftermath of World War I.

This chapter will show how British imperial needs fused with humanitarian pragmatism once more, arguing that the racial hierarchy of the nineteenth and twentieth-century political imaginary created new global political categorizations that guided Mark Sykes' vision for the modern Middle East. His attempts to bring progress and civilization to the East, typical of Orientalist discourses, were an attempt to establish his role as protector of oppressed nations within the Ottoman Empire. This longing for the Ottoman past again reflected Orientalist discourses that romanticized the old days while denigrating the modern Ottoman society. It will make clear the steps taken to enshrine a new international system and geopolitical order that suited "the modern world" with the Great Powers replacing the Ottomans in the Middle East, uprooting Ottoman influence. The chapter will conclude with the espousal of the Balfour Declaration and the British entry in Jerusalem in December of 1917, since the historical functions of the return of Jews to Palestine, and the British eradication of the Ottoman Empire were achieved. Sir Mark Sykes had devised a plan to unearth the greatness of the Middle East and bring it to the modern world. However, as we shall see, Sykes' contradictory decisions

reveal a schism within his thinking due to the inability to reconcile ideology grounded in tradition with the strategic requirements of the imperium.

The man under analysis in this chapter was born in Westminster, London in 1879. He was born into a wealthy family and was a baronet. From a young age, he travelled the lands of the Ottoman Empire with his father and became interested in the region.¹⁰⁸ According to biographer Roger Adelson, Sykes' earliest impressions of Syria and Palestine were colored by Isa Kubrusli, the English speaking Christian tour guide his father hired through the Jerusalem Office of Thomas Cook's travel agency. Isa impressed upon young Mark a number of prejudices, among them the idea that the English had declined in the East, and that the "Europeanized Moslem of the town" is nasty because he no longer stringently follows the teachings of Mohammed.¹⁰⁹ Isa reserved his harshest criticism however, for the Jews of the Middle East. These prejudices dotted Mark's beliefs and would be reflected in his writings. Sykes' disdain for European influence on the region, and of the various ethnic permutations and nationalisms of the Ottoman Empire, could be seen as the product of globalization and the Ottomans' embrace of it. There would therefore, need to be a revival and resurgence of the genuine, of the principles of Eastern society that the Ottomans had failed to preserve.¹¹⁰ Sykes thought so highly of the tour guide that he chose Kubrusli as his guide when he returned on his own several years later. We shall see how these early visits colored Sykes' thinking later in life.

After several tours of the Middle East, Sykes was voted into Parliament representing the Conservative Party for Hull in 1911. He had fought in the Boer War (1897) and was a

¹⁰⁸ Mark Sykes' dad Tatton Sykes had a large estate and was a wealthy globetrotter. His son frequently accompanied his father on trips around the world. By the age of 15, Sykes had visited the Dervish frontier, Arabia, Mexico and India. See Chapter 1, Shane Leslie, *Mark Sykes: His Life and Letters* (London: Cassell and Company, 1923).

¹⁰⁹ Roger Adelson, *Mark Sykes: Portrait of an Amateur* (London: Johnathan Cape, 1975), 37-38.

¹¹⁰ Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire 1914-1921* (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1978), 70-72.

commanding officer at the start of World War I. However, he never saw action because his “expertise” was required by the Intelligence Department of the War Office under Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War. He became an important advisor to the War Cabinet during World War I and was recognized as an expert of the region due to his authoring of two travel books, *Dar-Ul-Islam (The Home of Islam, 1904)*¹¹¹ and *Through Five Turkish Provinces (1900)*¹¹². He also wrote *The Caliphs' Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire (1915)*¹¹³. He died in 1919 while working towards peace at the Versailles Conference and never lived to see the fruits of his labor.

By analyzing the travel books and various political documents, letters and correspondences produced or influenced by Sir Mark Sykes between 1915 and 1918, this chapter will show how political deployments of race and ethno-nationalism figured into the geopolitical strategic choices made by the British, even long after Sykes’ death in 1919. It will elucidate how Ottoman modernization efforts stemming from the mid-nineteenth century until the empire’s fall, discussed previously, were viewed as inadequate and perceived as a slight towards Arabs that Sykes believed only the British, and then Zionists, could correct. Sykes was a staunch supporter of British entente policy, and repeated without fail the necessity for England and France to play the role of intermediary between the peoples of the Middle East and the new states he hoped would spring up after the war, rather than incite division and foster anger towards the various groups.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Mark Sykes. *Dar-Ul-Islam: A Record of a Journey Through Ten of the Asiatic Provinces of Turkey* (London: Bickers & Son, 1904).

¹¹² Mark Sykes. *Through Five Turkish Provinces* (London: Bickers & Son, 1900).

¹¹³ Mark Sykes. *The Caliphs' Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1915).

¹¹⁴ Note on separate peace with Turkey, 1917, DDSY(2)/11/62, Draft letters from Sykes to G.F. Clayton about general situation; anti-French feeling, DDSY(2)/11/61, Memorandum on Asia Minor agreement, by Sykes, 14 August 1917, DDSY(2)/11/65. All found in the online archive, The Middle East, its division into countries and the

Only then would the regeneration of the Middle East be possible. Though what Sykes failed to see—undoubtedly as a result of his romanticized view of the Middle East stemming from his childhood travels—was that a genuine Arab, a genuine Middle East, devoid of foreign influence, did not ever and would not exist. These ideas were incompatible with the time; they ran counter to the global current and the system of internationalization he was working on behalf of. Indeed, the very war that had shed a spotlight on Zionism and its validity in the modern world, as well as British commitment to it, was a consequence of European competition and the Eastern Question. However, Sykes wished to unleash the ancient greatness of the various cultural groups. Cloaked in Wilsonian ideals of national self-determination and international human rights law, this system would fundamentally alter colonialism by promoting a liberal order which legitimated and institutionalized new political and social relations of domination. Sykes' romanticization of the Ottoman past would influence his postulations for the division of newly created states in the Middle East, which would be under the tutelage of the British and French.

On the eve of Ottoman entry into World War I, Mark Sykes was returning from a tour of the Middle East, putting the finishing touches on his book, *The Caliph's Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire* (1915), which included details of his travels from 1906 to 1913. The book is littered with characterizations of the people of the Middle East, both in his travel logs, and its historical portion which is, unsurprisingly, devoid of references. What we find in his writings is a general disdain and prejudice towards the various ethnic groups of the Ottoman Empire. These beliefs substantiated his belief that the “oppressed nations” of the Ottoman Empire needed to be emancipated from Ottoman rule.

creation of Israel, 1879-1919: The Papers of Sir Mark Sykes, 1879-1919: the Sykes-Picot Agreement & the Middle East. British Online Archives. Henceforth: The Papers of Sir Mark Sykes, BOA.

Delineating differences between Arab and Turk, Sykes mused, “A Turk will understand an Englishman’s character much sooner than he will an Arab’s... the Turk is not, truth to tell, very brilliant as a rule, though very apt at assuming Western cultivation.”¹¹⁵ Though the Turks are apt at assuming the qualities of the West, since many have travelled to the West, and are extremely patriotic, one should not “suppose” that the Ottomans are intelligent enough to realize serving their country is not the only “duty of citizens.” Additionally, “this leads one almost to suppose that Turks might be Europeanized by an educational process without any prejudicial result, for at present they have every quality of a ruling race except initiative, which is essentially a European quality.”¹¹⁶ As we saw in Chapter 1, the Ottomans were perceived as poor administrators, establishing a belief that few could save it from its decay. While he privileges the Arab over the Turk, who at the minimum, understands patriotism, the Arab’s lack of an understanding of nationalism presupposes their inability to govern themselves. If only the Arabs could be emancipated from the Ottomans, they might realize their potential as a nation.

The Middle East Expert

Sykes came to be entrusted as the Middle East expert when Prime Minister Asquith undid a decades old policy of supporting the Ottoman Empire as a buffer to its imperial competitors, especially Russia, when the British declared war on the Ottomans. Though not a proponent of the modern Ottoman state system, he believed a strong overarching state was needed in order to guide these various nations, and that the declining Ottoman Empire had now turned these once dignified lands into a wasteland shaped by Western attitudes and the appropriating of Western technologies. The Young Turk Revolution (1909) only hardened Sykes’ belief that the Western

¹¹⁵ Sykes, *Dar-Ul-Islam*. 65.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

transplant of modernity in the East had ruined the grandeur of the past. Sykes' bemoaned the influence of European ideals on the Arab lands, claiming that "young officers were learning to say 'J'adore le jambon. Je bois le koniak... Nous avons la liberte. Nous avons le progres.' The Christians were beginning to quarrel among themselves; the Jews were beginning to peer and peep and talk of Zionism'." ¹¹⁷

Ultimately, it was the Turkish influence, and the European, or "Levantine"¹¹⁸ influence that had hampered the historical possibilities of these nations. The Middle East would be regenerated by the authentic and traditional Arab and Jew, the ones who had not been influenced by the outside world.¹¹⁹ Sykes was said to be an ardent religious man, and in the idea of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine he was able to fulfill both an imperial and pious function. As Chapter 1 has shown, several schemes for British colonization of Palestine had been previously envisioned, though never successfully applied, by Lord Palmerston and Charles Churchill. Conversely, it would be by the grace of Mark Sykes that the British would finally and successfully implement a plan for the establishment of a Jewish national home.

Forever the visionary, and looking to play the role of historical architect of the Middle East, Sykes had found himself part of an interdepartmental committee of the cabinet created to help formulate Britain's requirements and priorities with respect to the postwar "desiderata" concerning the Ottoman Empire. The de Bunsen Committee is where we hear Sykes' ideas, heavily influenced by his travels in the Middle East as noted above, voiced in diplomatic circles for the first time. While he is credited primarily as the author behind the never implemented but

¹¹⁷ Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, 365.

¹¹⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century the term "Levantine" came to denote denigration. Throughout Sykes' writings we find numerous observations about the negative European influence on Arabs and Turks.

¹¹⁹ Ironically, his support of the Zionists would ensure this to be impossible, both because the Zionists were European Jews, and because they wished to undo Arab tradition.

much discussed Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916, it was his support for Zionism which played a much larger role in British imperial planning¹²⁰. His diplomatic influence played a formidable role in drafting the Balfour Declaration in 1917, which promised Jews a national home in Palestine. What differentiated Sykes from his predecessors in the nineteenth century was his will to support Zionist aspirations not as a crutch to uphold the Ottoman Empire, but as a means of substantiating its division into numerous states under British guidance. Sykes proclaimed, “Zionists, owing to my insistence and education, are now ready to co-operate with the Arabs and freeing Syria and the remaining parts under Turkish thrall.”¹²¹ It seemed that Sykes truly believed Arab nationalism and Zionism were compatible. His presuppositions reflect the supposed emancipatory effects of the nation-state, and his role as an idealist whose far-reaching concepts did not always materialize. Nevertheless, he laid the foundations for the new European balance of power politicking of the twentieth century.

Despite the fact that Sykes’ name is included in almost every history book of the modern Middle East, not much is acknowledged about Sykes’ diplomatic role in the remapping and recreation of the “Middle East”.¹²² Though he is well-known, the exploits of another Englishman

¹²⁰ Despite this fact, the only (dated) major historiographical works which deal with Sykes’ contributions to Zionism in any considerable detail are: Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration* (London: Simon and Shuster, 1961) and Isaiah Freedman, *The Question of Palestine 1914-1918: British-Jewish-Arab Relations* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1973). Nahum Sokolow offers a lengthy 20 page tribute to Sykes and his efforts supporting the Zionist agenda in, *History of Zionism: 1600-1918* (1919). Another Zionist work appreciating Sykes’ contributions is Walter Lacquer’s, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Schocken, 1972).

¹²¹ Copy of letter from Sykes to G.F. Clayton about need for Arabs to combine with Jews and Armenians; proposals for a joint committee, DDSY(2)/11/74, The Papers of Sir Mark Sykes, BOA.

¹²² Only two books before the centenary of the Balfour Declaration (1917) were devoted to Mark Sykes, and both are biographies. The first is Shane Leslie, *Mark Sykes: His Life and Letters* (London: Cassell and Company, 1923), whose author did not enjoy the luxury of the full archive of documents used for this thesis, and Roger Adelson, *Mark Sykes: Portrait of an Amateur* (London: Johnathan Cape, 1975), who was invited to peruse the documents used in this thesis at the Sledmere House where Sykes’ papers rest. Recently, another biographical monograph was released by a retired British historian, Michael D. Berdine, *Redrawing the Middle East: Sir Mark Sykes, Imperialism and the Sykes-Picot Agreement*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018). For his influence on English decision-making, see Chapter 3 “Sir Mark Sykes” in Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire 1914-1921* (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1978), 67-87.

who had designs of his own on the region are better reproduced, those of TE Lawrence (of Arabia). Sykes had just as large a role to play in devising the 1916 Arab Revolt led by Sharif Hussein which began in Mecca. Sykes' diplomatic feats are overshadowed by Lawrence, who became a media darling and had films made in his honor. Lawrence, along with Gertude Bell and Ronald Storrs, were British orientalist/experts who wished to impose their vision of a new world on the Middle East. Orientalists of this period each had their own interpretation of how the Eastern Question should be answered, and how the regeneration of the region should be accomplished. This often put members of the British expertise network at odds with each other.¹²³

Orientalist Discourses and their Ramifications

However, they were all similar in that they believed that nationalism was the redemptive force that would bring the Middle East back to civilization, in tune with the thinking of late nineteenth and early twentieth century discourses.¹²⁴ These "nations" had to be liberated from the Ottoman yoke. Though Sykes had overestimated Arab disdain towards their Ottoman rulers. The influence of Western conceptions of the nation-state permeated Sykes' thinking. Sykes' grand design was based on the assumption that the Jewish, Arab and Armenian races would co-exist in a new state-system built off the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, and guided by European powers. In his opinion, if Arab nationalism opposed Zionism in post-war Palestine, "the situation would become not only complicated, but difficult to control; Arab nationalism will subside into its

¹²³ In, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), TE Lawrence called Sykes, "an imaginative advocate of world movements...a bundle of prejudices, intuitions, and half sciences. His ideas were of *the outside*, and he lacked patience to test his materials before choosing his style of building." P.23. (Emphasis mine). Perhaps Lawrence is alluding to the fact that Sykes' lavish lifestyle and upbringing conditioned his views, those of the "outside", on the Middle East, while Lawrence fought side-by-side with the Arabs in their countries.

¹²⁴James Renton, "Changing Languages of Empire and the Orient: Britain and the Invention of the Middle East, 1917-1918." *The Historical Journal* Vol. 50, No. 3 (September 2007), 653.

natural elements of desert, town, village, Christian and Muslim, and there will be nothing to pull it together.”¹²⁵ This idealistic view feeds into the narrative that Arabs were incapable of governing themselves, they were “idle beyond all hope, vicious as far as their feeble bodies will admit; ready to riot and slay for the sake of fanaticism as long as there is no danger; detesting Europeans with a bigoted, foolish, senseless hatred.”¹²⁶ It also makes clear his belief that the emancipation of the Arabs could only be possible through the guidance of the European Zionists. If not, they would revert to their sectarian nature, of which he referred to as “treacherous.”¹²⁷

This rhetoric is symptomatic of the fears Sykes’ had of a pan-Islamic movement, or the entire breakdown of the region that could arise in the vacuum of a strong imperial power. It plays into notions of a lack of Arab civility, progress, and governability. As we shall see, Sykes’ insistence on “guiding” all nations of the Middle East, was ostensibly a means of carrying forward ideals of democracy, civilization and progress to the arena. In the case of Arab desires however, they were continually being spoken for, or “represented”, as Edward Said would say, rather than actually being consulted.

The political and historical destinies of modern Palestine and its borders were created and decided by men largely outside of the Middle East, the majority of which were sitting behind a desk in London. They believed they knew what was best for the region and its peoples, and were not concerned with consulting the native inhabitants. They believed they were following in the footsteps of the Crusaders, of Napoleon, and completing the mission that would deliver the region from Ottoman despotism, bringing civilization to the area. While it is unlikely that their direction of policy would have been radically different had they not visited the Middle East, Sir

¹²⁵ Copy of letter from Sykes to G.F. Clayton about need for Arabs to combine with Jews and Armenians; proposals for a joint committee. The Papers of Sir Mark Sykes, BOA.

¹²⁶ Sykes, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, 178.

¹²⁷ Page 596 in the index of *The Caliph’s Last Heritage* (1915) reads: “Arab Character: See also Treachery”.

Mark Sykes' travels there secured him the role of Britain's diplomatic "Middle Eastern expert", and confirmed his role as disseminator of knowledge. It is also imperative to note that the private meetings, conversations and the letters these men shared with each other, are much more revealing than official documents. There was an inherent and blatant hypocrisy when dealing with the Middle East, Palestine specifically, since it was viewed as an "exceptional situation".¹²⁸ Conversely, it is also important to note that these men were acting in accordance with the colonial logic of their time, as was established in the previous section of this thesis. European powers justified intervention in Ottoman lands on the grounds of religious protection of minorities.

Mark Sykes became an ardent advocate of Zionism in 1916. Though he was not always fond of the Jews, or many other of the ethnic groups of the Ottoman Empire. Speaking of the various ethnic peoples he met in Kurdistan, Sykes claimed, "Kurds and fellahin Arabs are hospitable, kind, and gracious; but the Shammar Bedawin, being a sort of cross between a gypsy mountebank and a Jew money-lender, has none of these characteristics."¹²⁹ In the case of Greater Syria, Sykes viewed the population as, "so inharmonious, a gathering of widely different races in blood, creed and in customs."¹³⁰ This duality would come to shape not only Sykes', but the British dealings with Palestine and more generally the Arabs in the area. War-time expediency and imperial needs would come to shape decision-making and the contours of

¹²⁸ The desires of the natives were not important enough to undo this civilizing mission. An example of this line of thinking is Lord Balfour's oft-quoted comment in 1919 that stated: "Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions (emphasis mine), in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit the land". "Memorandum by Mr. Balfour (Paris) Respecting Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia", in E.L. Woodward and Robin Butler, eds., *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, 1st series, Volume 4 (London: HMSO, 1952), 340-348. Importance is placed on "age-long traditions" that reflect the West and the Christian-Judeo history of the region, while absolving the natives who "now" live on the land, despite the fact they have lived there since the Arab conquests of the seventh century.

¹²⁹ Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, 442.

¹³⁰ Sykes, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, 54.

contradictory statements, agreements, and actions. It was at that point that Sykes appropriated nationalism and sparked its flames in order to garner support of the locals against the Ottomans.

Unable to continue blatant colonialism denying native populations of their right to self-determination as a result of the espousal of Wilson's Fourteen Points, empires turned to a new liberal internationalism, and its institutions, to justify their presence in foreign lands. It was agreed through the Constantinople Agreements in 1915, that Russia would occupy the "straits" zone above Istanbul. This agreement would eventually lead to the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which would effectively divide the lands of the Ottoman Empire between England, France and Russia. The non-Turkish areas of the Ottoman Empire were split into two sections, A and B, with France presiding over Area A, and Britain over Area B. Though Palestine fell under Britain's sphere of influence, Palestine was to be ruled as an international protectorate. This came as a result of its religious importance, as previously noted, carefully constructed throughout the nineteenth century.

France laid claim to Palestine, as did the British. Though as we shall see, Britain would not allow Palestine to fall under French control, an endeavor made more difficult for the French and their negotiating ability after the British would successfully gain control of the Middle East through its military operations.¹³¹ Flawed Western assumptions about Islam, about Arabs, and about the region as a whole would come to dictate how experts implemented policy, regardless of the admiration they may or may not have had for the local ethnic groups and their way of living. A cultural arrogance permeated Mark Sykes thinking and other experts who viewed new national structures as a prerequisite for attaining modern statehood. In order to erect these

¹³¹ The two best works on British military operations in the Middle East and how Palestine figured into British policy are: Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2015) and Matthew Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East, 1917-1919* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1999).

national structures, a sense of ethnic belonging and an attachment to the land was necessary. New legal categories of peoples, created by the nation-state, also brought with them the idea of “minorities” and “ethnic groups” or “races” that needed to be protected.

Imperial Aims Fuse with Racial-Hierarchical Political Categorizations

By 1915, the British also deduced that "decentralization, federation and the eventual independence of the regions of the old empire were inevitable" after several decades of Ottoman decline.¹³² After the espousal of the Fourteen Points, American President Woodrow Wilson all but confirmed that the outright British annexation of Palestine was impossible. The British therefore laid their eggs in the basket of the new international order, citing Zionism as the nation needing to be safeguarded in Palestine, the perfect guise for their continued presence in the region. The League of Nations would become arbiter of a new global geopolitical structure that had mutated to fit the time. Nevertheless, as Mark Mazower contends, “Although organizationally the League was a radical departure from the past, in other ways it fitted squarely into an earlier Victorian tradition of Great Power paternalism . . . that coexisted comfortably with both liberal Christianity and racism.”¹³³ It was not one process, but a number of intermingling historical currents which would come to shape the advent of the new modern world. In the case of Palestine, they would be left wanting, as their political situation was constantly being negotiated for them, rather than by them.

As a result of imperial necessity, the British wanted to avoid a total collapse of the political and social order of the Middle East once the Ottomans were deposed. Sykes' suggestion

¹³²Robert Johnson, "The de Bunsen Committee and a revision of the 'conspiracy' of Sykes-Picot." *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol 54, No 4, 621.

¹³³ Mark Mazower, “Strange Triumph of Human Rights.” *The Historical Journal* Vol. 47, No. 2 (Jun., 2004), 382.

to achieving this was to promote Arabism, prop up Zionism, and push for Armenian nationalism. This was a response to his belief that a pan-Islamic threat, due to the inability of Arabs to perceive themselves as a nation, presented a greater threat to usurping the British in the area after the First World War. They would then be able to build a state together, composed of the three “oppressed” minorities in Palestine.¹³⁴

However, there lied the basis of constant issues relating to the paradox of Palestinian sovereignty, namely that Palestinians were never considered capable of attaining nationhood on their own. Instead, Sykes thought like others of his time, and foreshadowed the League of Nations Mandate system by insisting the lands of the Middle East be administered by international powers. He stressed the importance of England and France working in conjunction in order to achieve a lasting peace (or a lasting domination) of the Middle East, and guide the region into the future. The decisions formulated by Sykes and taken by the British would form the antecedents of what Beshara Doumani calls the "iron laws", or the historical forces, that have continually denied Palestinians political recognition while rendering a viable national consciousness inadmissible to the international community¹³⁵. British policy was to attempt to keep things the same on face value, in order to appease the native Arabs and the international community, while establishing control and uprooting the political and social order paved by the Ottoman world.

Arab Christians began formulating their opposition to the encroaching Zionists through Arab nationalism. Therefore, we can assert that Arab nationalism was a product of European

¹³⁴ Copy of telegram from Sykes to Sir Reginald Wingate, Cairo, about need for Arabs to cooperate with Jews and Armenians, DDSY(2)/11/73, The Papers of Sir Mark Sykes, BOA.

¹³⁵Beshara Doumani, “Palestine versus the Palestinians? The Iron Laws and Ironies of a People Denied.” *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol 37, No 4 (Summer 2007), 51.

influence, and as a result, then turned against that same influence. Anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist and anti-Arab rhetoric was a result of a whirlwind of dissenting opinions flowing into the Middle East from Europe. Sykes played no small role in propagating these discourses. In his eyes, “There is only one policy, the Entente first and last, and the Arab nation the child of the Entente... Ten years tutelage under the Entente and the Arabs will be a nation.”¹³⁶ These historical currents worked to the detriment of Palestinians, even if the British were not pro-Zionist. The idea that Zionism represented a cosmopolitan and wide-ranging international force, wrapped as it was in the European concepts of progress and modernity, served to isolate the Arabs who wished to resist these forces, as well as prop up Zionist importance to the region and beyond through British eyes.¹³⁷ In Sykes, the Zionists found a receptive audience for the idea of British annexation of Palestine, and the promulgation of the Zionist agenda.¹³⁸ Though Sykes was also influenced by racial categorizations of the time,¹³⁹ it was only through the Zionist

¹³⁶ Ms. and ts. copies of letter from Sykes to Sir Eric Drummond, against postponement of a decision on the Arab Legion to the Paris Conference; efforts and difficulties of himself and F. George-Picot, 20 July 1917, DDSY(2)/11/60, The Papers of Sir Mark Sykes, BOA.

¹³⁷ Historians Tom Segev in *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate*. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001) and James Renton in “Flawed Foundations: The Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate”, in Rory Miller ed., *Britain, Palestine and Empire: The Mandate Years* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010) place a high importance on the Balfour Declaration being passed as an attempt to win the sympathy of global Jewry in support of the British during and after the war. The importance of global Jewry was often exaggerated as a result of the efforts of Zionists and their transnational financial backing, especially in the USA. On page 33 of *One Palestine*, Segev writes of British policymakers, “The men who sired [the declaration] were Christian and Zionist and, in many cases, anti-Semitic. They believed the Jews controlled the world”. Segev therefore pushes the propaganda motivation behind the document, negating the military and diplomatic motivations. Though as this thesis argues, all of these motivations were present and influencing the others. In the end, what was important was the protection of Britain’s possessions. The language and appearance used to cloak this endeavor becomes less important.

¹³⁸ Chaim Weizmann claimed that Mark Sykes was one of their, “greatest finds”, though not consistent or logical in his thinking, he had conceived of the liberation of the Jews, Arabs and Armenians, “three downtrodden races par excellence”. *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann*. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949); 181.

¹³⁹ His dislike for Jews supplanted only by that of the Armenians. In his 1900 book *Through Five Turkish Provinces*, he wrote on page 30, “Even Jews have their good points, but Armenians have none. Perhaps the educational labors of the missionaries may produce some good effect”. Sykes viewed this revulsion as going beyond any influence Ottoman tyranny may have brought upon them. In 1900, Zionism as a political movement was still only in its infancy. Political expediency forced Sykes to change his stance on these “oppressed” peoples, later using them as a means of substantiating British intrusion in Palestine.

political agenda that he became a proponent of Jewry and Zionists, a result of the internationalization of their movement. It is through Sykes and his agents looking to establish a Zionist order in Palestine that we can tell the story of the international paradox, a global history powerful in its assessment of representation and practice, but also in its obfuscation of divergent political realities.

Since the beginning of the war, Sykes had placed an utmost strategic importance on Palestine, even as other British policymakers claimed Palestine was “of no value whatsoever.”¹⁴⁰ In May of 1915, he managed to convince the de Bunsen Committee that Palestine did indeed lay in the British sphere of influence. A flurry of events sparked in 1915 set Britain on the path to supporting Zionism, a path which merged perfectly with Sykes’ insistence that Britain take Palestine. Sykes’ meetings with transnational actors such as the head of WZO Chaim Weizmann, and the first Jewish Englishman elected to parliament Herbert Samuel, and other Zionists had impressed upon Sykes the importance of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine. These “strategical Zionists”¹⁴¹ became a tremendous weapon in British hands.

Popular narratives of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the de Bunsen Committee findings before its espousal, undoubtedly cast Sykes as one of the preponderant figures who helped shape and carve up the Middle East, acting solely for the benefit of British imperialism. However, less is made of the fact that Sykes himself claimed that the agreement named after him was a product of his imperial handlers, an agreement to which he was instructed to negotiate, and did not

¹⁴⁰ This point was made by Lord Kitchener, who Mark Sykes was representing on the de Bunsen Committee in 1915. Though Sykes had successfully managed to change Kitchener’s opinion, and successfully presented this idea to the War Committee when asked about the Arab question in 1916. See Elie Kedourie, “Sir Mark Sykes and Palestine 1915-1916.” *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol 6, No 3 (Oct 1970), 340-345

¹⁴¹ This is the term Mark Sykes’ son, Christopher Sykes, used to describe Zionists who understood and took advantage of British imperial policy to fulfill their own goals. *Crossroads to Israel: 1917-1948*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973), 20-21.

necessarily want his name attached to.¹⁴² This hole in the dominant historiography will be the focus of this section. Much has already been written on the Balfour Declaration¹⁴³ and the months leading up to it (from April to November 1917), though there is a “shocking near-total lack of documentary evidence on its earlier history.”¹⁴⁴ There is also much written on the Sykes-Picot Agreement¹⁴⁵, and Hussain-McMahon Correspondences¹⁴⁶, which precipitated it. This section will instead focus on Sykes and his dealings with transnational Zionists, influential Arab figures, and imperial decision-makers across Europe in an historical moment where numerous factors were shaping the Eurocentric internationalist world order that would follow World War I.

Doing so will allow us to better comprehend what Sykes and Britain’s motives were for shaping the new Middle East. What’s more, as he became more faithful to the Zionist cause, he recognized the agreement’s incompatibility with the plan for a Jewish national home in Palestine, since under the agreement Palestine would fall under international control. It should therefore be noted that Sykes championed the Arab cause as he did that of the Jews and the Armenians, all ethnic groups viewed as victims of Ottoman despotism.

If we take into consideration Sykes background as a member of the nineteenth century British elite, one colored by his travels to numerous British embassies across the world, is it not

¹⁴² His biographer Adelson mentions on p.280 of *Portrait of an Amateur*, that Sykes claimed he was simply following orders by acting as the conduit for British policy-makers. It should also be noted that throughout his writings he tends to call the agreement the Anglo-French Agreement, not the Sykes-Picot Agreement, perhaps denoting a willingness to distance himself from the document which bears his name.

¹⁴³ See Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1961). The various arguments are explored in, James Renton, "The historiography of the Balfour declaration: Toward a multi-causal framework" *The Journal of Israeli History* Vol 19, No 2 (Summer 1998), 109-128. William M Matthews, "War-Time Contingency and the Balfour Declaration of 1917: An Improbable Regression" *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 40, No. 2 (Winter 2011), 26-42.

¹⁴⁴ Sahar Huneidi, *The Hidden History of the Balfour Declaration*. (New York: OR Books, 2019), 9.

¹⁴⁵ For a more recent global history see, Maryanne A. Rhett, *The Global History of the Balfour Declaration: A Declared Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁴⁶ Elie Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and its Interpretations, 1914–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977) remains the pre-dominant work.

fair to assume that his vision for a federated cluster of states under British guidance in the Middle East, a federation in which numerous ethnic-groups were represented, was not in line with other British imperial forays of the new world? Moreover, was it not more in tune with the history of the region that saw a strong central power administering several administrative units? Even if wishing to aid the various groups under discussion however, his cultural arrogance and his insistence on dividing these groups along ethno-national lines and borders laid the architecture for the Middle East and the bloodshed we have today. The following section will unpack Sykes' thinking, taking into account the influence of various agents of political decision-making, and attempt to present an analytical challenge to established narratives regarding the build-up to and espousal of the Balfour Declaration. Sykes' beliefs at beginning and then at end will show the difference.

Sykes' policies were flawed from the start. Sykes perceived the mobilization of Islam, or a jihadist revolt, as the major strategy conceived by the Ottomans and the Germans to foment opposition within the Ottoman Empire to the British, especially that of Indian Muslim "discontent and fanaticism"¹⁴⁷. Though he overestimated Arab dislike of the Turks, and failed to see any relation between pan-Arabism and Islamism, which would hamper his decision-making. His racial and cultural attitudes had deemed Arabs incapable of ruling themselves from the start, they would be brought into the modern world and guided by Britain.

Sykes viewed Britain as natural successor to Napoleon and the Ottomans in Palestine. Though the French held substantial influence in Syria, culturally and financially, Sykes was of

¹⁴⁷ Policy in the Middle East, 1, Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Mark Sykes, Section III, "General Situation", 1915, IOR/L/PS/18/B217, India Office Records, Qatar Digital Library.

the impression that Arabs were all "pro-British", and "frightened of French colonial methods."¹⁴⁸ Though he was concerned about the possibilities of a pan-Arab movement that could arise in the absence of a strong imperial oversight and challenge British authority, as much as he was the inability of Arabs to rule themselves. While pushing for independent client states, he realized as early as November of 1915 that an "Indianization" policy should be avoided in Mesopotamia and Syria.¹⁴⁹

Sykes was fully aware of the dangers European modernity could bring upon the British position in the Middle East, claiming, "As time goes on and intercommunications grow easy between Irak and Syria, we shall be confronted with the tendency of the Arab to reassert himself once more, and in that tendency we shall find the seeds of much political difficulty."¹⁵⁰ It was essential that the British establish a foothold in the region, and it was thus necessary to promote Arabism through decentralized states bounded by what Sykes believed were historical nations. These were Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia and the Arabian Peninsula. Sykes believed that was the only way to unleash their full potential "under the control and tutorship of a European power. The Arabs are not ripe for self-government."¹⁵¹ However, he also believed that the peoples of these "nations" deserved proper governance and representation in areas based on ethno-national lines, to be pulled out from the "Ottoman yoke."¹⁵² A once dominant and "great fighting race", it had "gone down before the steadfast, unsparing drive of the Turk. There is no

¹⁴⁸ Minutes of meeting of War Committee of Cabinet, attended by Mark Sykes to give evidence on Arab question. Suggestions for an Anglo-French agreement, DDSY(2)/12/3, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

¹⁴⁹ By this Sykes meant that the Indian style of British colonization would not work in these areas due to the different historical backdrop in the Middle East. Here we see Sykes playing the role of "expert". In his eyes that system of governance would be incompatible, and would only lead to further dissension amongst the people and against the British as arbiters.

¹⁵⁰ Policy in the Middle East, 1, Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Mark Sykes. "Political Situation in Mesopotamia", 1915, IOR/L/PS/18/B217. India Office Records, Qatar Digital Library.

¹⁵¹ File 705/1916 Pt 1-2 Arab Revolt, Appendix C "The Arab Movement", 1916, IOR/L/PS/10/586. India Office Records, Qatar Digital Library.

¹⁵²Ibid.

comparison between the two races as exponents and agents of civilization.”¹⁵³ In the case of Syria, its emancipation would be accomplished through laws different from the other provinces, “for obvious reasons”. An analysis of his suggestions on the de Bunsen Committee will elucidate these reasons.

The de Bunsen Committee as the Precursor for the Sykes-Picot Agreement

Was TE Lawrence correct in asserting Sykes was a “bundle of prejudices”? Lawrence was definitely correct that Sykes had a vivid imagination in tune with British assumptions. Without question, Sykes was not at all fraught about lending his “knowledge” and disseminating the information he had collected through a number of journeys in the Turkish lands. After a tour of the Ottoman lands following the Young Turk Revolution, Sykes believed that there was a profound change occurring in the Ottoman Empire. For Sykes, the fall of Sultan Abdulhamid had been not the fall of a despot, but of a people and an idea. Good or bad, he was the representation of a way of life, “a scheme of things, an idea, a tradition, a faith, a species of continuity.”¹⁵⁴ His appreciation and yearning for the traditional, of the old, and of the Caliphate represented the best of his early excursions as a child. It also pointed to a failed progressive modernization effort, reserving the most vitriolic of disparagements for the modern German-trained soldier, a far cry from the “Terrible Turks” of a bygone time.¹⁵⁵

It was through this exuberance and tireless enthusiasm that he would be called upon by British decision-makers, and would play a pivotal role in their thinking. In a memorandum prepared detailing the history of the Khalifate in the Middle East, Sykes concluded that the

¹⁵³ Arab Bulletin No. 48. Cairo, SECRET. April 21, 1917, DDSY(2)/11/33, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

¹⁵⁴ Sykes, *Caliph's Last Heritage*, 508.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 509.

“theoretical ideal” of all Sunni Muslims, “ignorant and educated” alike, would be to conceive of Islam as an international world state.¹⁵⁶ Though he often presented a biased and prejudicial view of the Ottomans, here we also see how mind-boggling conclusions of Muslims as a whole were reached almost exclusively on opinion. It also points for the need to educate the people along the lines of the secular West. Despite claiming the Ottomans were suppressing their Arab subjects, he believed the system they left in place was the best in order to quell any potential unrest in a region that had seen its fair share of warfare through the years. Unrest that in Sykes’ opinion, had been effectively subdued by the Ottoman state¹⁵⁷, and unrest that included the possibility of an Islamic uprising.¹⁵⁸ It was in Sykes’ estimation, also a region suffering from a declining and decaying Ottoman Empire.¹⁵⁹

A clear and coherent plan for British influence in the Middle East was not established when Britain declared war on the Ottomans.¹⁶⁰ This seems unlikely given the preponderance of attention now given to the Sykes-Picot partition scheme. Though protecting the Suez Canal route to India, and Egypt was paramount. Ronald Storrs and General Gilbert Clayton had proposed an Arab kingdom based in Egypt, and proposed a British-ruled Syria with Kitchener at the helm.

¹⁵⁶ Note on the Khalifate, by Sykes, 25 May 1915, DDSY (2)/4/85, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

¹⁵⁷ Note by Sykes on the proposed maintenance of a Turkish empire in Asia without spheres of influence, 3 May 1915, DDSY(2)/11/3, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

¹⁵⁸ There was very little possibility of this happening. As Eugene Rogan notes in, “Rival jihads: Islam and the Great War in the Middle East, 1914–1918.” *Journal of the British Academy* Vol 4 (Jan 2016), 1–20, the jihad proclaimed by the Ottomans at the outset of World War I in order to incite Muslim rebellion in the Allied countries, and across the Muslim world, was a major failure. It did however force the British to account for this possibility.

¹⁵⁹ However, see: “Journey through Turkey”, 1909, DDSY(2)/04/009 in Sykes Papers. What is interesting, and pointing to a pervasiveness in Western culture, is how terms such as “decay” and “decline” used by disseminators of knowledge like Sykes are still today prevalent in the historiography of the Ottoman Empire as much as in common parlance.

¹⁶⁰ See: Letter from G.F. Clayton in Cairo to Sykes about Arab legion and affairs; French in Syria; Lawrence with Feisal; possible eventualities following victory, 18 October 1917, DDSY(2)/4/160, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA. Clayton says, “I cannot help but feel that we are not absolutely straight with these people”, referring to both the duplicitous actions towards Arab unity and the French claims to Syria. Ultimately, the British would cite the lack of French military action in and around Palestine to negate their claims of protection and special interest, showing how whimsical these Western constructions were.

These were swiftly dismissed as France was considered to have a special interest in Syria. Sykes' influence in the less publicized and maligned de Bunsen Committee would shape the region for decades.

Sykes' inclusion in the Committee, appointed by Prime Minister Asquith on 8 April, 1915, whose goal was to establish British "desiderata" in the Ottoman lands after World War I, reveals how much his opinion was revered. Featuring members of the War Office, India Office, Foreign and Colonial Offices, Sykes was the only non-senior member of the group, and the only one not attending in an official capacity. Sykes was sent as Lord Kitchener's representative¹⁶¹, and soon became the dominant voice of the group.¹⁶² Sykes first proposed a postwar partition of the Ottoman lands with Turkish sovereignty in a Turkish kingdom, and the rest of the lands under administration by European powers. After a visit of his troops in France a month later, he proposed dividing the empire into five historical and ethno-national provinces, Turkey (Anatolia), Armenia, Syria, Palestine, and an Iraqi-Arabian province. This would "counter the evils of Turkish rule", and allow the provinces to develop independently, though with British foreign advisors at the helm, staving off French and Russian interest in the region. Given the substantial French investment in Ottoman public debt, Sykes preferred to establish British rule south from Constantinople, which was being cited as falling into Russian hands. Sykes claimed that under a scheme of partition or spheres of influence Britain would "stand square with our allies, with instruments we can adhere to, *boundaries we can see*.... If we miss it now we miss it at the *initiation of a new era*, which must differ strategically and politically from *anything that*

¹⁶¹ Kitchener was a decorated field marshal and chief of staff, with extensive duty in the Middle East, Africa and India since 1874. It was through this relationship that Sykes became the preponderant voice on Middle Eastern affairs during the war.

¹⁶²Berdine, *Redrawing the Middle East*, 21.

has existed in the past.” (Emphasis mine) ¹⁶³ Sykes therefore envisioned the modern-state system we currently see in the Middle East. Britain did not accept the former, as any vestige of Turkish influence needed to be eliminated in the post-war order.

French influence also needed to be curbed. The partition scheme was nixed, with a preference for the devolution scheme. No matter, the proposals made by Sykes were never officially implemented. Though the maps Sykes prepared for the de Bunsen Committee, would come to be used time and time again by the British in post-war negotiations demarcating state boundaries. Sykes’ insistence that Haifa, rather than Alexandretta, be made a British port and stronghold, with a 1000-mile railway connecting it to the Euphrates became a lauded proposition amongst British officials. Various plans to stretch the railway to the area “lightly termed ‘Mesopotamia’... the country to be developed in the future lies between the TIGRIS and the EUPHRATES from a few miles north of Bagdad to Kurnah” (Emphasis his) ¹⁶⁴, were considered as a result of Sykes’ vision for Britain in the Middle East. Though these plans were not realized, the partition scheme favoured by Sykes would be used as the basis for British planning the next year. Within the period leading up to that decision, Sykes toured the Middle East in order to gauge both British and international sentiment for the implementation of British policies devised by the Committee. It was here that Sykes met high ranking officials, including royalty, government officials, soldiers, journalists, notables and Zionists who would mould Sykes’ stance on British postwar desiderata. The report's final conclusion also stipulated that Palestine should come under the influence of Britain, though recognizing Russian and French interests, as well as

¹⁶³ Note by Sykes on the proposed maintenance of a Turkish empire in Asia without spheres of influence, 3 May 1915, DDSY(2)/11/3, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

¹⁶⁴ Memorandum on ports and railways of Syria and Mesopotamia, by Major S.F. Newcombe, 17 July 1915, DDSY(2)/4/87, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

religious interests in the area. It also doomed Palestine to international obscurity, solidifying its place as a zone of "special" interest:

Still less do the Committee desire to offer suggestions about the future destiny of Palestine, but since that territory has been included within the geographical limits assigned to the British sphere in the two schemes, of partition, and of zones of interest, they desire to repeat that they see no reason why the sacred places of Palestine should not be dealt with as a separate question. They have felt free to deliberate on the assumption that the French claim will be rejected, since they are convinced that the forces opposed are too great for France ever to make that claim good, but for the same reason they consider that it will be idle for His Majesty's Government to claim the retention of Palestine in their sphere. *Palestine must be recognized as a country whose destiny must be the subject of special negotiations*, in which both belligerents and neutrals are alike interested. (Emphasis mine) ¹⁶⁵

Sykes never signed the final de Bunsen Committee report when it was submitted on June 30, 1915, as he was out gauging international sentiment for British desiderata, on Kitchener's orders. Sykes' suggestions did in fact greatly influence the issuance of the Sykes-Picot (Anglo-French) Agreement of 1916, signed between the English and French in May 1916. Sykes was charged with finding a way to make clear to the French that Palestine would have to come under the British orbit of influence. This duty was in no small part the result of Sykes' lobbying for the annexation of Palestine, and his shrewd negotiating skills which found a voice amongst Lord Balfour, Lord Kitchener, Prime Minister Asquith, and subsequent Prime Minister Lloyd George. Discussing his opinion on the "Arab question" after a tour of the region, Sykes concluded that the Sherif of Mecca would undoubtedly be killed and replaced by CUP-backed officials, that Christians in Syria would be "exterminated", Armenians would continue to be threatened, and that French-Levantine economic influence in Syria could lead to the upholding of the Ottoman

¹⁶⁵ Maurice de Bunsen. Report of the Committee on Asiatic Turkey (Report of the de Bunsen Committee): British war aims in Ottoman Asia. 30 June, 1915.

state unless the British swoop in and "liberate" those who could aid the British cause, amongst them "upper-class" European-educated Syrians.¹⁶⁶

A Line in the Sand

Sykes thus proposed to draw a line in the sand "from the 'E' in Acre to the 'K' in Kerkuk", essentially espousing British control, once again, from Haifa to Mesopotamia.¹⁶⁷ When asked what he proposed the British do regarding Palestine he responded, "I should like to retain for ourselves such country south of Haifa as was not in the Jerusalem enclave, which I gather the French themselves admit. I think it is most important that we should have a belt of English-controlled country between the Sharif of Mecca and the French."¹⁶⁸ The idea that Palestine should come under British influence would from that moment be officialised. Sykes cited the economic benefits and again, the "protection" of the peoples of the region, as others before him did. It would also allow for a safe-route to India, and help quell any potential unrest or "jihad" arising in British possessions. The proposal of Palestine being English, not French, took off with no end in sight.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was negotiated between Sykes and French diplomat Georges Picot between November 1915 and December 1916, and was ratified by both governments in May of 1916. It stipulated that the Allied powers were "Prepared to recognize and protect an independent Arab state or a Confederation of Arab states ... under the suzerainty of an Arab chief", while the overseeing powers would retain exclusive trading and banking rights, as well as

¹⁶⁶ Minutes of meeting of War Committee of Cabinet, attended by Mark Sykes to give evidence on Arab question. Suggestions for an Anglo-French agreement, DDSY(2)/12/3, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

the right to "supply advisers or foreign functionaries" in their respective areas.¹⁶⁹ A special international zone would administer Jerusalem (closely resembling the Ottoman sanjak) and the region considered "the Holy Lands" (a portion of the map shaded in yellow), replacing the Ottomans. A British Haifa and Acre were established, though the proposal Sykes had made to the War Committee could not be realized under this agreement. The term "protect" came to have a new meaning in the international lexicon, falling outside the guise of a protectorate, but implying that the native population needed guidance from a foreign power. This was the antecedent for new international legal regimes produced in Europe and expropriated to extra-European peripheries.¹⁷⁰ By splitting the area discussed in the de Bunsen Committee into two areas (A) and (B), with France holding the northern part, and England holding the southern part, Sykes' vision to connect Haifa to Baghdad could theoretically be accomplished, though his railroad would not come to be. This agreement remained secret until it got published in the *Guardian* newspaper on November 26, 1917, after being leaked by the Bolsheviks in Moscow three days prior. Its publication made public the duplicitous nature of British negotiation with the Sharif of Mecca.

Sir Henry McMahon had promised the Sharif an Arab kingdom in the area delineated by the Sykes-Picot Agreement, in exchange for leading an Arab Revolt against the Ottomans which began in June of 1916. It also made clear that Sykes had been duplicitous in his meetings with

¹⁶⁹ British and French Governments, The Sykes-Picot Agreement, May 15-16, 1916, in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, Eds. *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict* 7th Ed (New York: Penguin Books, 2008): P.13-16

¹⁷⁰ In fact, M. Paul Cambon, French Ambassador to the Court of Saint James, sent Viscount Grey a letter wondering if "uphold" should replace the word "protect" in the phrase "protect an independent or Confederation of Arab states", since a protectorate was not agreed upon, rather full independence was stated. Cambon was referring particularly to Syria in the letter, denoting not only French fears that Britain would claim Palestine for itself, but also the shift in British legal hermeneutics and language that would be employed extensively after World War 1. This letter was found in "Papers brought out from England" [by Mark Sykes as head of British Political Mission with Egyptian Expeditionary Force], in DDSY(2)/12/6, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

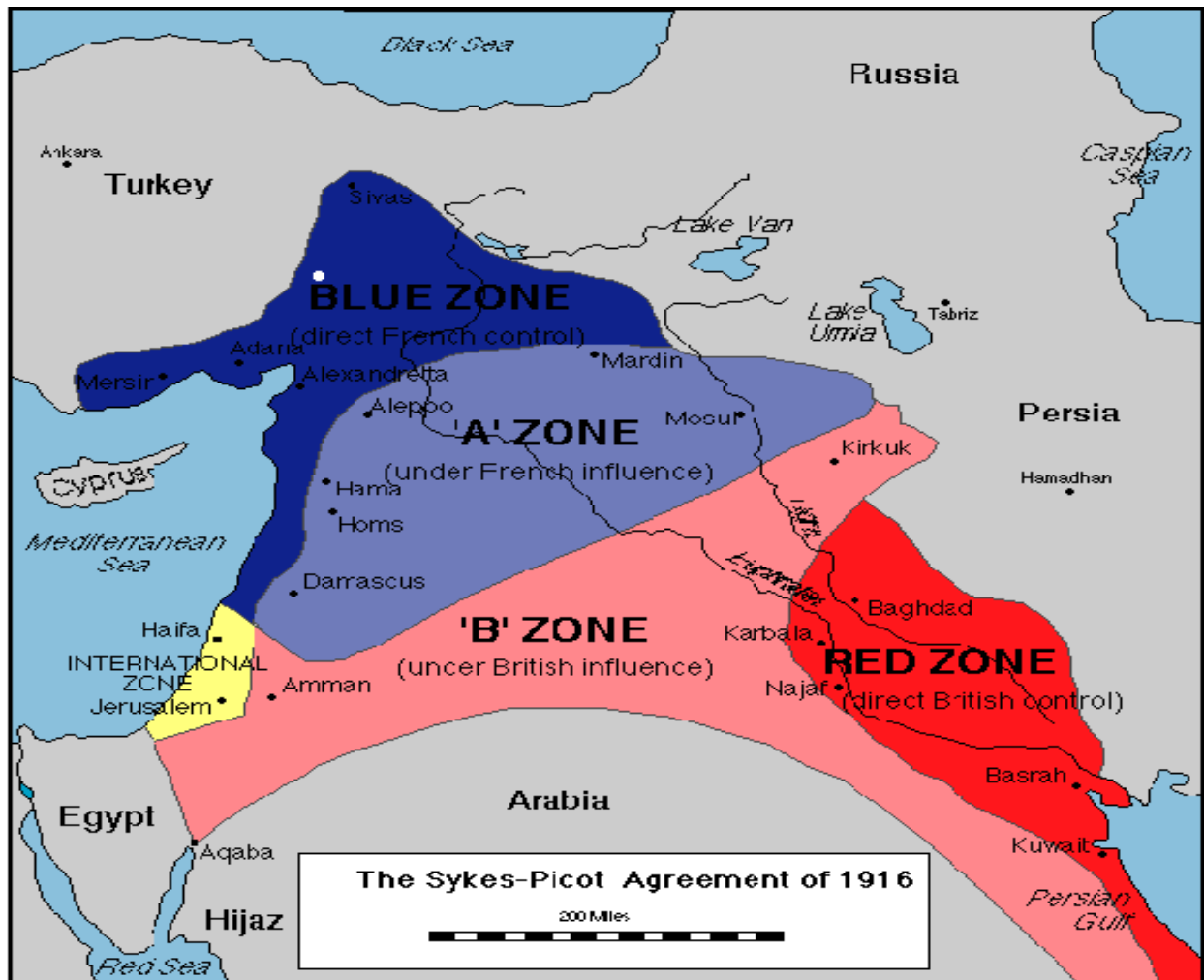
the Sharif and TE Lawrence.¹⁷¹ Sykes was well aware that the agreement ran counter to that of the McMahon agreement with the Sherif of Mecca, though Sykes remained silent about the Sykes-Picot Agreement with both the Arab Bureau in Cairo, and in meetings with the Sharif throughout 1916 and 1917.¹⁷² However, Sykes did not portend this creating any problems at all with the local population. His concern was getting the French to acquiesce to the idea of a British Palestine, which would then “smooth the way” for French acceptance of the rest of Syria. As a Foreign Office document clearly states, it was Sykes who was personally responsible for the inclusion of the “special administration of Palestine” within the agreement. Sykes truly fashioned himself as an agent of historical change, capable of providing answers to question of Palestine. Recounting his return to Syria at the end of the war, Sykes saluted the Arab flag he had designed for the Arab Revolt as he proclaimed: “Black fess for the Abbasids of Baghdad, white for the Omayyads of Damsascus, green for the Alids of Kerbela, and red chevron for Mudhar heredity.”¹⁷³ Each color represented a different dynasty of the former Islamic caliphates that preceded the Ottoman Empire. The Western-backed Arab Revolt was to fly a flag created by a British imperialist. Those colors are still present in the flags of Syria, Palestine and Jordan today. According to Sykes, “Arabs will always welcome any extension of our sphere of enterprise”.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Sykes was a staunch proponent in turning the local population in order to gain an upper hand on the Ottomans. Militarily, the goal was to open an Eastern Front because the perception was the Ottoman army was weaker and would be easier to defeat than those in the European theatres of war. However, after the military failure in Gallipoli and the Dardanelles in 1915, considered an embarrassment, alternative plans, such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and pledges to Hussein ibn Ali were devised. The Arab Revolt, led by TE Lawrence, was supported by Sykes. He first made note of this in the 1915 memorandum found in: Policy in the Middle East. I. Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Mark Sykes. 28 October, 1915, IOR/L/PS/18/B217, India Office Records, Qatar Digital Library. Sykes was routinely informed of TE Lawrence’s advances in the area, and Sykes insistence that Palestine be taken under British auspices was frequently relayed by General Clayton to Lawrence.

¹⁷² For the role of the Arab Bureau see, Bruce Westrate, *The Arab Bureau: British Policy in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

¹⁷³ Leslie, *Mark Sykes Life and Letters*, 280.

¹⁷⁴ Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916: provision regarding the special administration for Palestine. F.O. 424/208. E 1367/6/31, Confidential Print: Middle East, 1839-1869, The National Archives, UK.



Appendix C. Proposed zones of influence drawn up by the Sykes-Picot Agreement. ¹⁷⁵

Nation-State Borders as Political Technology

The Balfour Declaration of 1917, laden with intentionally vague language and “intended principally as a piece of wartime propaganda, the aims of which had little to do with the Holy Land and its future”¹⁷⁶, would color the Mandate for Palestine and legally enshrine the basis for the Jewish National Home there. The Mandate would make the Balfour Declaration, initially

¹⁷⁵ Jewish Virtual Library. "The Middle East Per the Sykes-Picot Agreement". Accessed at: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-sykes-picot-agreement-1916>.

¹⁷⁶ James Renton, “Flawed Foundations: The Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate”, in Rory Miller ed., *Britain, Palestine and Empire: The Mandate Years* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 16.

promulgated as a war-time pledge, a legal instrument ratified through the Palestine Mandate and enforced by the League of Nations in 1922. The currents of history would change when Lloyd George became Prime Minister in December of 1916. Arthur Balfour was appointed the head of the Foreign Office, and Sykes as assistant secretary to the War Cabinet. Sykes became the de-facto voice on Middle Eastern affairs, which would make him an extremely valuable asset to the Zionists.¹⁷⁷

The idea of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine was first espoused in English parliament by Sir Herbert Samuel. Prophetically, Samuel would become the first High Commissioner for Palestine in 1920, two years *before* the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine was ratified. In a January 1915 memorandum written for the British cabinet, Samuel echoed claims by Zionists such as Theodor Herzl. He pushed for British annexation of Palestine, as the historical moment was ripe for it. British protection of Jews would facilitate “the dream of a Jewish state, prosperous, progressive and the home of a brilliant civilization”, while at the same time allowing for England to fulfill “in yet another sphere her historic part of civilizer of the backward countries.”¹⁷⁸ The proposal was rejected, for as Samuel himself claimed in the document, such an endeavor would be difficult given the overwhelming disparity between Jews and Arabs, of which the latter numbered five times the population of the former. The idea of a Zionist state acting as a buffer for the English in the area, acting as a safeguard to the Suez Canal was an idea already advocated by Storrs, Kitchener and chiefly by Sykes. Regardless, this document established the idea amongst policymakers of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine,

¹⁷⁷ David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), 146.

¹⁷⁸ Sir Herbert Samuel, SECRET. “The Future of Palestine”. January 1915, CAB 37 123 43. Accessed at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Future_of_Palestine_Herbert_Samuel_memorandum_1915_CAB_37_123_43.jpg.

the viability of Zionism to British imperial interests, as well as the notion that Jews were a race, one in which “for fifteen centuries in Palestine produced a constant succession of great men... If a body be again given in which its soul can lodge, it may again enrich the world.”¹⁷⁹

Samuel may have championed the idea of the Jewish return to Palestine, influencing future Prime Minister Lloyd George and Zionist Arthur Balfour in the process, but there is an extremely limited amount of government published documentation regarding the reasons why the Balfour Declaration was proclaimed in December 1917.¹⁸⁰ In an attempt to deduce why the British had in fact supported the drafting of the Balfour Declaration, the Colonial Office set out to gather information in government archives. However, on January 23rd, 1923, Under-Secretary of the Colonial Office, William Ormsby-Gore, claimed that Sykes was the first to “broach the matter” in early 1916, and that he, Lord Balfour, WZO members Chaim Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow were the main protagonists behind its creation, also claiming that Sykes’ papers had been “unfortunately dispersed” and that nothing documenting its development in 1916 was available.¹⁸¹

Sykes had left for Cairo in July of 1915 and toured the area for six months after the de Bunsen Committee had concluded, and travelled to Petrograd two months later with Picot in March of 1916 to seal the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Throughout these travels Sykes was in contact with numerous Zionists stemming from three different continents. He established correspondence with Chaim Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow of the WZO in Europe, a Zionist

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

¹⁸⁰ There is almost no mention of the Balfour Declaration or the Sykes-Picot Agreement in his official biography produced in 1923 by Shane Leslie. Only 10 pages were allotted to what the author refers to as “the arrangement” (official name given to the document by the Foreign Office) between England, France and Russia known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. Leslie Shane, *Mark Sykes: His Life and Letters*, 250-260, 271. Also of note is the insistence on the term “arrangement”, rather than “agreement” as it is commonly referred to.

¹⁸¹ Minute, Shuckburgh to Ormsby-Gore, 10 January 1923, CO 733/58. Cited in Sahar Huneidi, *The Hidden History of the Balfour Declaration* (New York: OR Books, 2019): 81.

judge Justice Brandeis of the USA, and Zionist rabbis in Palestine. The following will attempt to ascertain how Sykes' conception of race and nationality were forged through meetings with actors of social and political change outside of London. Doing so will help explain how minority protection, humanitarian intervention, and population transfer came to be theorized in the legal thinking ascribed to the ascendant international system.¹⁸²

Two elements had come to overturn the internationalization of Palestine through the Sykes-Picot Agreement: British imperial strategy and Zionism. As we have seen, Sykes and policymakers in London did not see Arabs fit to rule Palestine. In addition, imperial expediency had forced the British to declare Palestine British territory, to block German expansion from Syria towards the Suez, which would threaten sea communication of the Empire. It was still important to the protection of routes to India and as a buffer to Syria, which increasingly seemed destined to the French. With the ascension of Lloyd George as British Prime Minister in December of 1916 came a shift in full support for Zionism, he proclaimed: "You mustn't give responsible government to Palestine."¹⁸³ Lord Balfour was now the head of the Foreign Office, a man, like Herbert Samuel, who believed Jewish claims to Palestine held more weight than those of the Arabs, a result of the mystic Zionism that viewed the restoration of the Jews in Palestine as the natural succession of history.¹⁸⁴ Sykes had been named the assistant secretary to the War Cabinet. Sykes told Georges-Picot, "If the great force of Judaism feels that its aspirations are not only considered but in a fair way to realization, then there is hope of an ordered and developed Arabia and Middle East."¹⁸⁵ Sykes was the man charged with steering British and Zionist policy.

¹⁸² See, Umut Özsü, "Ottoman International Law?" *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* Vol. 3, No. 2, (November 2016), 369-376.

¹⁸³ Frank Hardie and Irwin Herrman, *Britain and Zion: The Fateful Entanglement* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1980), 94.

¹⁸⁴ This was explained in Chapter 1.

¹⁸⁵ Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration*, 280.

Following Sykes' post-de Bunsen tour of the Middle East, it was concluded by Sykes, at the insistence of British officials in Cairo, that Palestine must come under British influence. The agreement concluded with Picot was also deemed untenable, since the northern part of what is today Israel would come into French influence, and the internationalization of the Holy Lands ran counter to checks on other European powers' advances. Could it be that Sykes' endorsement of Zionism was an attempt to undo the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which came increasingly under criticism by the British and Arabs?¹⁸⁶ Or was it a genuine appreciation for the emancipatory aspects of Zionism which drove Sykes to support the agenda?

Support for Zionism is Confirmed..."It's a Boy!"

The British decision to support Zionism was first considered when on March 11, 1916, a Foreign Office telegram was sent to Petrograd that a proposal had been received for a declaration of British support of a Jewish national home in Palestine. It was deliberated since it would arouse the support of powerful international Jewry to the Allied cause, the "Zionist idea has the most far reaching political possibilities."¹⁸⁷ Thinking along the lines of the ethno-national unit, demarcated by state borders, had been present in Sykes' thinking since his 1915 proposals for Ottoman partition. Demographic engineering could legitimate European intervention and its presence in the new regional order. Race would play a large role in substantiating the shift to colonial population control, eschewing the need for direct management of areas based on ethno-national constructions. Zionists became the perfect conduit to accomplish this colonial scheme. In Sykes' opinion, having known Palestine since 1886, he believed the population of 700,000 could easily be doubled by British colonization in seven years if security, roads, and a modest

¹⁸⁶ Huneidi, *The Hidden History of the Balfour Declaration*, 41.

¹⁸⁷ See Mayir Verete, "The Balfour Declaration and its Makers," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Jan 1970), 57.

railway system were devised. “If Zionists do not go there I am confident someone will. It took the Turks to keep the country a desert before the war, if it remains in their hands after the war they will be too exhausted to resist the spirit of the time.”¹⁸⁸ As we have seen, the British wanted the Ottoman legacy repudiated, both for imperial and social control. Sykes also renounced Turkish influence on the Arabs. Willingly or not, these factors coalesced to produce a new international order.

Around the time of the March 11th, 1916 Foreign Office telegram, Sykes’ had been in communication with Herbert Samuel regarding the Zionist agenda. Found in his personal papers, is an article sent by one of Sykes’ local contacts in Jerusalem, AP Albina (a Latin from Jerusalem) entitled “The Future of the Arab Race”. Sykes had sent this paper to at least two people in the British intelligentsia, claiming what was included in the text defined what a “real Arab” is.¹⁸⁹ The author begins the article by denoting that the term “Arab” refers to Syrians, Palestinians, those living in the Arabian Peninsula and Mesopotamians. Assessing European influence in the region, Albina concludes that the British have done the least to sway Arab opinion, but that the Arab revered the British “with awe and respect”, notwithstanding the recent British military failures of the Gallipoli expedition.¹⁹⁰ While the French have managed to spread a wide net of influence, stemming from their missionary schools which have impacted Syrians the most, what needed to primarily be considered by the Allied powers when deciding the future

¹⁸⁸ Memorandum by Sir Mark Sykes, 30 October 1917, showing that Curzon was misinformed about Palestine’s potential, F.O. 371/3083/143082. Cited in, Isaiah Friedman Ed., *The Rise of Israel*, V.8, 134-137.

¹⁸⁹ Article. The future of the Arab race, by A.P. Albina, June 1916, DDSY(2)/4/102, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA. In a handwritten note by Sykes, addressed “My Dear Herbert”, Sykes asks for the opinion of the letter’s recipient, saying that it was “quite good”, and that copies could be sent to Sir Henry McMahon if the War Office had no objection. It is unclear whether this letter was addressed to Herbert Samuel or not, though Sykes’ appreciation for the article’s content is telling of his elitist attitude toward the British colonial project, the “race” of Arabs, and the need for a strong “nation” to intervene in settling these countries.

¹⁹⁰Ibid.

of the political situation in the Ottoman lands was the “diffidence among the Arab population” regarding “the effects of Turkish secular treachery.”¹⁹¹

Albina determines three potential settlements worthy of consideration: the first was complete independence and self-rule, the second a “protectorate of interested powers”, the third autonomy under European rule. Albina believed that a protectorate under European guidance would be the best solution, because:

With regard to complete independence this is advocated only by a small number of irresponsible and unscrupulous Arabs seeking personal power and ambition, no intelligent and sane-minded Arab can, at the present moment, wish complete independence for the race, as he knows that it would spell disaster for his country and throw it in the throes of chaos and anarchy, worse even than the Turkish rule. For centuries past, the Arabs have been ruled by the Turks, who always managed, for their own aims, to keep alive the spirit of hatred and intolerance amongst the various religious denominations, not only by inciting Moslems against Christians, but also by sowing dissensions amongst the different sects of Christians. It will take years of wise and impartial rule to undo the evil wrought by the Turks and restore good will and union amongst the different creeds. To grant the Arabs self-government at present would mean discontent and trouble, a renewed interference of European Powers and an open gate for German intrigues.¹⁹²

The conclusions disseminated by Albina seemed to conform to British beliefs and prejudices. It also presented a coherent discourse regarding Ottoman tyranny and the necessity for British influence in the region, upholding many of the binaries created by the West in the preceding century. What’s more, it opened the door to the idea of Zionist colonisation, even if not explicitly mentioned. Albina concludes by stating that the Christian element, which was predominantly in Bilad al-Sham, had been neglected when considering the future of the region, saying for the good of the country “they should be given their fair share” since they were supporters of England and France.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

The same notion could obviously also be extended to the Jews in the region (even if they were much smaller in population). Furthering this idea of British intrigue in the region, Albina ends by saying, “I am of opinion that if the Allies intend really to crush Turkey, their best way lays in the occupation of Syria and Palestine. It will mean a very hard if not a fatal blow to Turkey.” By coming out victorious England would regain its prestige and still be the greatest power in the world. The Zionist agenda and British imperial aims became interchangeable, and Palestine was the apple of the British eye. Sykes therefore looked at Zionism as an exculpatory means of establishing not only a British presence in the region, but a way out of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. This would be made possible through what years ago seemed impossible to British policy-makers hoping to establish a foothold in Palestine, though Sykes’ unconventional methods can be summarized with this line from a letter sent only months before reading Albina’s letter: “When we bump into a thing like Zionism, which is atmospheric, international, cosmopolitan, subconscious, and unwritten nay often unspoken, it is not possible to work and think on ordinary lines.”¹⁹⁴

At the same time, Sykes’ was enumerating the “problems of the Near East” in 1916 to the War Office. Insisting on taking control and swaying opinion in the Ottoman lands, upholding the Arab Revolt which was just underway, he warned of the dangers a post-war Germanized Turkey would bring. Control of military bases and the Baghdad Railway would foster internal problems wherever the British had Muslim subjects, giving it “an international pawn in Palestine which gives her a hold at once over the Zionists, the Papacy and the Orthodox”... as well as “a monopoly of certain oilfields essential to maritime, aerial and industrial power.”¹⁹⁵ Imperial aims

¹⁹⁴ Sir Mark Sykes to Sir George Arthur, March 18th, 1916, full letter quoted in Elie Kedourie and Mark Sykes, “Sir Mark Sykes and Palestine 1915-16.” *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Oct., 1970), 344.

¹⁹⁵ Memorandum. 'The problem of the Near East', by Sykes, 20 June 1916, DDSY(2)/11/13, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

were increasingly intertwined with those of the Zionists, especially after the Gallipoli military failures. Zionism was the backbone of Sykes' plans for the acquisition of Palestine.

On the political side of things for the Arabs, Sykes urged for a clear and logical attitude towards them as a whole, "Whether independent, allies, vassals or subjects."¹⁹⁶ Their faults laid in the fact tribes were easily divided, they were "fickle and easily discouraged". It was imperative therefore that the British work up the virtues of the Arabs, namely that they are "very intelligent, revengeful, and they have *no national spirit in our sense of the word*, but they have got a sense of *racial pride*, which is as good." (Emphasis mine)¹⁹⁷ According to Sykes, to the Arabs, nationalism was an "unknown quantity." While they could not comprehend or perceive of the notion of an Arab nation, the "nearest approach" to this idea was the total independence of the Arab "race".¹⁹⁸ That sense of racial pride would make it easier for the Arabs, so easily discouraged and divided, to rally around a sense of common identity, racial pride, in the absence of any nationality in the fight against the Ottomans. Sykes also gave the following suggestions to Colonel Davies of the War Office when producing reading materials to be read to Arab soldiers: the purposes of these materials were to foster Arab unity, create Anglo-Arab friendship, and stimulate "Arab sense of nationality."¹⁹⁹ This would be accomplished by publishing articles "appealing to Arabs on lines of past Empires and past grandeur", as well as historical stories and "anecdotes" of the past that could be related to current famous Arabs.²⁰⁰ Sykes envisioned the future regional order of the Middle East through an ethnoreligious connection to land and a

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Transcript of evidence of Sykes to War Committee about political side of the Arab situation, 6 July 1916, DDSY(2)/11/15, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

¹⁹⁸ Summary of the Arab situation, by Sykes, 30 August 1916, DDSY(2)/11/20, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA. This points both to the inability of Arabs to govern themselves, and any imminent threat they may pose to Western concepts of the state.

¹⁹⁹ Copy of letter from Sykes [to Col. Davies, War Office?] about set up [of Arab Bulletin?], 31 July 1916, DDSY(2)/11/17, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

²⁰⁰ Ibid

political belonging. He parlayed this with burgeoning Zionist aspirations. However, the articulation of political belonging in Palestine would be reserved solely for Zionism.

The Zionist movement in Palestine was predicated through new interpretations of “minorities” which needed to be protected, in this case, the Jews of Europe were considered minorities within what Herzl termed their “host nations”. The Zionists clung to British imperial aid, presenting the Zionist case in “an important conceptual leap” where mass settlement into Palestine would be presented as a humanitarian strategy that would help both the Zionists and the British by establishing a Western enclave in the Middle East. It also presented the British a viable means of cloaking their imperialist ambition by presenting the Zionists as such, guaranteeing their protection in the Wilsonian order predicated on national self-determination.

Until October 18th, 1916, when Mark Sykes meets Aaron Aaronsohn, a respected Jewish agronomist and Zionist from Palestine, he was a self-professed anti-Semite. Sykes “saw the Jew as the embodiment of international capitalism, and despised what he saw as the rootlessness of the wealthy assimilated Jews of Britain.”²⁰¹ Indeed, Sykes revelled in the “sight” of what he perceived as genuine Jews at Nisibin, in Northern Mesopotamia, whose “appearance is much improved by Oriental costume... it is indeed a pity that their brethren at home have assumed European attire.”²⁰² Regardless, Aaronsohn was a farming researcher who was testing techniques for the Ottomans and helped them with locust infestation, despite his close connection to the Ottoman state, he felt a disconnection to the Ottomans, especially after the persecution of Armenians. He established the Jewish Agricultural Station in Athlit in 1910. Though he had a basic knowledge of Zionism from what he learned from Herbert Samuel and Rabbi Moses

²⁰¹Berdine, *Redrawing the Middle East*: 115.

²⁰² Sykes, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, 141. He concludes by saying, “Imagine how picturesque and interesting a walk in the City near the Stock Exchange would become, if the children of Israel retained their ancient and handsome dress!”

Gaster, his intrigue and appreciation for Zionism increased when Aaronsohn had told him of his failed effort to convince British officials in Cairo of an intelligence scheme he had devised.

He believed the members of his settlement, who established a spy network NILI, the initials for what in Hebrew translated to “The Eternal Israel Will Not Lie”, could offer valuable information about Ottoman troop movement in Palestine. Aaronsohn then travelled to London, spying in secrecy for five months, and told Major Walter H Gribbon of the Military Intelligence Directorate at the War Office all the information he had learned.²⁰³ Sykes had become intrigued by this commitment to the cause. Sykes also saw the usefulness of Zionists to British war-aims, especially since the Zionist movement had started in Russia, and garnering support to the Zionist cause might lead Zionists to convince Russia to stay in the war on and on the Allied side, should there be a Bolshevik Revolution. Sykes remained in correspondence with Aaronsohn for a year, claiming that he was the reason he was inspired to uphold the Jewish regeneration in Palestine.²⁰⁴ This newfound appreciation for Zionism dovetailed perfectly with the rise of Lloyd George as British Prime Minister, who together with Arthur Balfour, would come to be extremely influenced by the efforts of transnational leader of the World Zionist Organization, Chaim Weizmann.

Weizmann, the President of the WZO and future President of Israel, was born in Belarus and like many other Zionists, had studied in Europe and travelled extensively to promote the Zionist agenda. He became the president of the British Zionist Federation on October 31, 1917. Weizmann had established an important Zionist political base in Manchester, and travelled frequently to London where he had dealings with Balfour and Herbert Samuel. Weizmann met

²⁰³See, Samuel Katz, *The Aaronsohn Saga* (Jerusalem: Gefen Books, 2007), pages 95-123, for information on his trip to London and further meetings with Sykes.

²⁰⁴ Norman and Helen Bentwich, *Mandate Memories 1918-1948*. (London: Schocken Books, 1963), 13.

Sykes in January of 1917. It was at this time that Zionism was passing from a theoretical ideal to a practical reality in Palestine. Despite Weizmann claiming he believed Sykes saw Zionism only as an “appendage to the bigger scheme with which he is dealing, the Arab scheme,”²⁰⁵ it seems clear from the Sykes’ papers that Zionism presented an awesome opportunity to strengthen Britain’s grip on the Near East.

Correspondences with Zionists urged Sykes to view Zionists as a minority in need of protection, to be equated with the Arabs in the Ottoman lands, who also needed to be freed from their oppressive government. In January of 1917, the Rabbi Moses Gaster, a Romanian Zionist with ties to Weizmann and Sokolow, suggested to Sykes that any future plans for Palestine under the Sykes-Picot Agreement, include the British protection of the Jews there, citing its “international character”. The answer to the Jewish problem, or the establishment of a National Home, could simply be corrected by recognizing the Jews as a “nation”, no different from the “other inhabitants in the country.”²⁰⁶

Sykes had been instrumental in pushing the Zionist agenda forward. Leopold Amery, the other Assistant Secretary of the War Cabinet, claimed that Sykes had turned him on to the importance of Zionism as an asset to Britain. “Both of us, as old travellers in the regions which we now, somewhat illogically, refer to as the Middle East, believed that nothing could bring so regenerating an influence to those ancient centers of the world’s civilization.”²⁰⁷ Amery cited a “fresh contact with Western life” as the impetus to regenerate a land that had long been on the decline. Becoming “modern” in Palestine for Europeans either be projecting past glories or

²⁰⁵ Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, 192.

²⁰⁶ Correspondence comprises items to M. Gaster. Jan 31, 1917, DDSY(2)/4/203, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

²⁰⁷ Leopold Amery, *My Political Life* (London: 1953), 115-116.

erasing those glories to create a new beginning.²⁰⁸ Chaim Weizmann, the head of the World Zionist Organization, worked as tirelessly as Sykes' to implement Zionist policy in British war aims. British negotiations with Zionists began in 1916, and they can be attributed largely to the aforementioned.

The critical meeting with Sykes and Zionist leaders took place on February 7, 1917. Present were Rabbi Moses Gaster, Lord Rothschild, Herbert Samuel, Harry Sacher, Nahum Sokolow and Chaim Weizmann. There Sykes would impress upon the Zionists the need to convince the French that the Jewish National Home be established in Palestine. Rabbi Moses Gaster, the Romanian vice-president of the Zionist Congress, had opened proceedings by stating in general terms the aims of the Zionists. They were: the desire to have no internationalization or condominium in Palestine as that would be "fatal" to Zionists aims, and second, that the Jews be recognized as a "nation" or a millet in Palestine.²⁰⁹ Chaim Weizmann emphasized two points, that "the Jews who went to Palestine would go to constitute a Jewish nation and be 100% Jewish, not to become Arabs or Druze or Englishmen", and that no restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine be made.²¹⁰

The idea that European Jews represented a national "minority" outside of Palestine needing to be protected, virtually constituting Jews as citizens of Palestine outside their homeland, was made clear in this meeting by Henry Sacher who deliberated on the differences between nation and state. A state was needed since inclusion in a nation was spiritual in nature and did not require political obligation, Sacher claimed, while a state was by nature a political

²⁰⁸ Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 41.

²⁰⁹ Memorandum on a conference in London between Sir Mark Sykes and Zionist Leaders, 7 February 1917, which opened with a general statement about the two Zionist goals, CZA L6/90/I. Cited in Isaiah Firedman, Ed., *The Rise of Israel: A Documentary Record from the Nineteenth Century to 1948*, V.7., page 17.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*: 21.

entity which necessitated political participation. What should be interpreted from this meeting is that Jews outside of the country would be members of the “nation”, owing in part to their membership in a common ethno-national group.²¹¹ That diaspora could then lay claim to its rightful place in Palestine, in order to re-establish the Jewish polity in Palestine, fulfilling the restoration of the Jews to Palestine. While Samuel emphasized the strategic importance of Palestine repeatedly in this meeting, Sykes endorsed the development of Palestine through a chartered company, and Balfour emphasized “his hearty agreement with the building up of a Jewish autonomous colony in Palestine.”²¹² Though he also claimed that he did not predict any issue with the local population arising, contingent that the “Holy Places were guaranteed”, and that publicly promoting the wishes of the Arabs would strengthen their cause.²¹³ It was decided and then arranged for Nahum Sokolow to meet Georges Picot the next day, in order to assuage French resistance to a British controlled Palestine.

In April of 1917, Sykes sent the findings of a meeting he had with three delegates representative of Muslem Syrian feeling regarding the possibilities of an Arab state to Picot. The three realities of this meeting were that, the Entente was a political force one and indivisible, that the Arab race would be promoted with common blood and tongue, and that the Entente would work to “realise its destiny as a factor in the civilized world.”²¹⁴ According to Sykes, it was

²¹¹ The day after the Balfour Declaration was declared, a meeting comprised of Sykes, Weizmann, Sokoloff and Aaronsohn took place to discuss the best methods of discussing “the full political advantages” of the Declaration and pulling support for Zionism across the world. Sokolof and Jabotinsky were dispatched to Russia, Aaronsohn to the USA, and Weizmann to Paris to “concert with Edmond de Rotschild” in order to start a “vigorous propaganda [campaign] in all fields”,

Note by Graham to Hardinge, 3 November 1917, circulated by Balfour to the Cabinet, considering how best to obtain full political advantage of the declaration, FO 371/3083/143082. Cited in, Friedman Ed., *The Rise Of Israel* V.8, 145.

²¹² Ibid. This dovetailed with Herzl’s initial plans of founding a Jewish joint-stock company subject to English jurisdiction, centered in London, and under the protection of Britain, as espoused in: Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 95.

²¹³ Berdine, *Redrawing the Middle East*, 123.

²¹⁴ NO. 18. To: Prodrone London. From: Sir Mark Sykes. Cairo. April 29. 1917, DDSY (2)/11/35, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

agreed that the stipulations inserted into the Sykes-Picot Agreement would be adhered to, and that Palestine “presented too many international problems for a new and weak state” for the Arabs to administer. As such, it was concluded that if the Jews be “recognized as a millet or ‘nation’ in Palestine they insisted that the actual population must have equal recognition.”²¹⁵ At the same time, he urged Picot to tell Weizmann that it “would be best” if he kept all negotiations for Zionist policy between him and Sokolow.²¹⁶

Sykes believed that a permanent Anglo-French alliance allied to Jews, Armenians and Arabs would be the best way to stave off the threat of pan-Islamism and protect the imperial routes to India and Africa. In August of 1917, Sykes urged the Foreign Office not to annex any of the territories of the Middle East, as this ran counter to “the spirit of the time... and really must be dismissed.”²¹⁷ Ultimately, Sykes believed Zionism would be the glue that would hold the region together, as the linear history of the Jewish return would replenish not only the Holy Lands, but the lands of those around it, which would come under more European influence. Sykes envisioned, and pushed for a French-controlled Syria with a separate Lebanese entity, both under different national flags, and a Palestine under British trusteeship. Anticipating the Mandates system and the League of Nations system, Sykes mused that the appearance of ruling the future countries under discussion in accordance with the people would put them on firmer ground at any future conference.²¹⁸

Sykes and the British hedged their imperial future in the region with the Zionists, culminating an almost eighty-year process to bring the Jewish people back to their ancestral

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Memorandum on Asia Minor agreement, by Sykes, 14 August 1917, DDSY(2)/11/65, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

²¹⁸ Ibid

homelands. The Balfour Declaration officially announced support for the Jewish National Home in Palestine on November 2nd, 1917. Though not yet legally binding, it can be seen as a response to British war-time aims and the “structural conditions giving rise to the asymmetry in power.”²¹⁹ In the case of Palestine, that asymmetry was created by the “othering” of the Arabs as mentioned in the declaration itself, which would become legally binding in 1922. It claimed the establishment of the Jewish National Home would not interfere with the locals, stating “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”²²⁰ Conveniently omitted are the “political” and “national” rights of the “non-Jewish population”. This seems incredulous as Palestinians made up the vast majority of the population in Palestine, and were not even referred to as “Palestinian” or even “Arab”, simply “non-Jewish”, despite the Arabs accounting for ninety percent of the population.²²¹

This public display of support by the British signalled to the Palestinians that the concept of the nation and the political had eschewed their grasp. It also signalled to the world the imposition of new legal regimes and international law that would favor the settler-colonialism of Europeans while disregarding the native population. It confirmed Western notions that Palestine was indeed a “special” case. In an all too familiar scenario, Mark Sykes had managed to enshrine racial belonging as a fundamental political category. The Zionist program gave Britain the opportunity to practice new forms of global governance by instilling structures that emphasized ethnic belonging, an aspect critical to modern statehood formation.²²² When the

²¹⁹Noura Erakat, *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 5.

²²⁰ Arthur Balfour. *The Balfour Declaration*. (November 2nd, 1917), cited in Laqueur and Barry, Eds. *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict*, 16.

²²¹Erakat, *Justice for Some*, 16.

²²² Laura Robson, *States of Separation: Transfer, Partition and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 2-3.

British Cabinet finally approved the document, Sykes enthusiastically exited the Cabinet room and shouted to Chaim Weizmann, “It’s a boy!”²²³ British control of Palestine was then consolidated on December 9, 1917, when General Edmond Allenby marched into Jerusalem.

²²³ Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, 229. I should add that this shows not only the racially hierarchical conceptions of the political by Sykes, but the gendered conception of it as well.

CONCLUSION

When General Edmond Allenby entered the gates of Jerusalem flying the British imperial flag, he was said to have “made ready to enter in the official manner which the Catholic imagination of Mark Sykes had devised.”²²⁴ The restoration of the Jews to Palestine would fulfill Sykes and Britain’s messianic and imperial goals. The Balfour Declaration was a war-time pledge amongst a host of others, espoused out of war-time necessity in hopes for fostering international support for the war. However, unlike the others, its guarantee was honored with the ratification of the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine in 1922, five years after the declaration was first heard. This points to a continuation of the historical structures laid out in the first chapter of this thesis, and substantiated the racial order guiding the imperial policies of British policymakers seen in Chapter 2.

The safeguarding of the Jewish National Home propagated by European Zionists ensured that, “Jewish national development, cultural, agricultural and economic [was] inevitable and natural in Palestine at the end of the war.”²²⁵ Following along the lines of the rhetoric espousing the redemptive capacities of nationalism, and the ultimate conclusion of history through the resettlement of Jews in Palestine, Zionists alluded both to their natural right to be constituted in Palestine, as well as their position in the racialized order of Palestine: “At the present Palestine is not a geographical expression, and the boundaries of Palestine will have to be defined by the Peace Conference. Within these boundaries the Jews will seek to be regarded as Palestinian

²²⁴ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 358.

²²⁵ Correspondence respecting Eastern Affairs. Part 1. No. 1. [147225] Report On the existing Political Situation in Palestine and Contiguous Areas by the Political Officer in charge of the Zionists’ Commission, August 1918 (Secret), F.O. 406/40, Confidential Print: Middle East, 1839-1869, The National Archives, UK.

Nationals with National rights and obligations. Outside those boundaries they will be foreigners and colonists.”²²⁶

Time and time again, Zionists would refer to their historical and religious redemption and the legal guarantees that protected their right to be on Palestinian land. That would not have been possible if not for the structures that were laid down during the late nineteenth century, a period of interconnectivity that shaped things to come in the Middle East. British policy towards Palestine must be viewed in the wider framework of a global, colonial history. The break-up of the Ottoman Empire ensured that a new international order with Britain at the helm would come to be, but as imperial necessities changed Britain found that the Zionist political movement in Palestine would become more of a hindrance than a benefit. Certainly, “the sacred trust of civilization” that Britain inherited in the form of the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine in 1922 presented considerable problems from the outset.

Its failures to evenly administer its duties as Mandate power pointed to the impossibilities of its “dual obligations” towards Jews and Arabs. Despite Sykes' hopes that Jews and Arabs would be able to coexist in Palestine, it seemed clear to those who were on the ground that that scenario would be unlikely. General Clayton, the intelligence officer who supervised the Arab Revolt, wrote to Sykes in 1917 only days after the "historic" British entry to Jerusalem. Though he revelled in British military might, he told Sykes that despite claims Zionist leaders like Weizmann and Sokolow made about coexistence with the Arabs, and regardless of whomever the British installed as Arab delegates, "the Arab does not believe that the Jew with whom he has to do will act up to the high flown sentiments which may be expressed at Committee Meetings. In practice he finds that the Jew is a far better business man than himself

²²⁶ Ibid.

and is prone to extract his pound of flesh. *This is a root fact which no amount of public declarations can get over.*" ²²⁷ (Emphasis mine)

Two political groups increasingly associated themselves with the land they inhabited. This would create a skewed outlook in both Palestinian and Middle Eastern historiographies, as well as the future of the conflict which would consistently come to be defined through racial, nationalistic terms, as well as validity of claims to the lands of Palestine. The British and the League of Nations would create facts on the ground that upheld these dichotomies. The Zionists followed suit when the State of Israel was created. This exacerbated the current political conflict, as a settler-colonial war is still being waged. However, had it not been for modern political technologies of the state and the racial ideologies and assumptions they operated within, alternative historical possibilities for Palestine could have been possible.

²²⁷ Letter from G.F. Clayton to Sykes about capture of Jerusalem; future plans. December 15, 1917, DDSY(2)/11/83, The Papers of Mark Sykes, BOA.

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