

**FRANCE, WESTERN EUROPE AND PALESTINE
1917-1948
(29-30 November – 1 December 1999)**

The conference FRANCE, WESTERN EUROPE AND PALESTINE 1917-1948, organized by the Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem strengthened the impression emerging from the 1998 meeting (see *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem*, 3, Autumn 1998, pp. 163-166) that beyond points that are apparently well established, the unexplored areas of research are enormous. This observation is the direct outcome of the contributions made by the sizeable number of participants, lecturers, and the public, from France, Italy, Great Britain, Israel and the Palestinian territories.

After introductory remarks by Dominique Bourel, in the presence of the honorary François Nicoullaud, Director General of the DGCID, Mr. Denis Pietton, French Consul General in Jerusalem stressed the importance on a personal level of a symposium of this type -- not only as a newcomer to Jerusalem but also as a diplomat who deplors the low level of exchange between diplomats and historians.

Opening the first morning session, devoted to **Marks of the Mandate Presence: Urbanism, Architecture, Culture**, Yehoshua Ben Arie (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) outlined the "Stages in the Development of the City of Jerusalem during the British Mandate". He noted the intense activity characteristic of this period and the rapid, radical transition to development after the Ottoman lethargy. He stressed the role of the British, Herbert Samuel, the first High Commissioner, and Ronald Storrs, the first governor of Jerusalem, and the fact that the other foreign powers played a much lesser role than in the period preceding the Mandate. In addition, the local Jewish and Arab populations contributed enormously to changing the skyline of the city. As a fitting illustration to his remarks, Ron Ruchs (Techion, Haifa) dealt with a leading figure: "William Harvey in Palestine 1908-1938". He emphasized the British paternalistic and colonialist attitude as regards the overseeing of the development of the city. Replete with preconceived notions, Harvey sent recommendations from London for the restoration of the Holy Sepulchre, ignoring the religious communities who traditionally had decision-making power. Through these measures, Britain sought to reinforce its own image, invented after the capture of Jerusalem in December 1917. The attempt ended in failure however as Eitan Bar Yosef (University of Oxford) showed in "The Last

Crusade? British Propaganda and the Staging of the Palestine Campaign 1917-18”, which highlighted the artificiality of the maneuver, demonstrating that more thought was given to the motherland than to the Holy Land.

In his lecture inaugurating the afternoon session on **Physical Development and Political-legal Order**, Gideon Biger (Tel Aviv University, “The British Contribution to the Development of Palestine”) described the British motivations for activity in Palestine. He focused on Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine, an area designated for development under the Society of Nations mandate, showing that colonial interests were not entirely absent. Another example of modernization was discussed by Yossi Ben Arzi (University of Haifa) in his paper “The Development of Haifa During the Mandate Period: Conflicts in a Mixed City.” According to Ben Arzi, Haifa provides the best mirror of urban development in the Mandate period. He showed that the British also had their share of ulterior motives: developing Haifa was also a way of preparing the *hinterland*, including the Iraqi pipe-line and its distribution points. Jews and Arabs also viewed the city as a major center of their own growth, which can only give greater weight to the tragic events occurring at the end of this period. In his lecture, Benny Shadmy (“Jerusalem: The City and the People: Who is in Charge? – Considering the Development of Jerusalem during the British Mandate (1917-1948)”) completes this picture by showing that as regards urban planning the mandate period was a transition from nothing to enormous dynamism, a policy which has left profound imprint today.

In attempts to make a mark on the region, the development of infrastructures was not the only means. Assaf Likhowski (Tel Aviv University) in his lecture “Law as the Site of Cultural Conflict in Mandatory Palestine” showed that law was a way of imposing a cultural identity. The British came to Palestine with a pre-established schema, whereas the Jews developed a parallel legal school which suited their own national agenda. In this areas as well the impact can be seen today.

The lectures on November 30th 1999 dealt with **The Presence of Influence of Other Powers: Continuity or Discontinuity? Religion, Culture, Images and Representations**. In his lecture, “The Sources of the History of Palestine 1917-1948 preserved in the Center for Diplomatic Archives in Nantes”, Bruno Richard (Center for Diplomatic Archives in Nantes) presented a systematic overview, stressing the importance of archives in the historian's work. At the same time he showed how much preliminary work must be done before consulting the documents, with collections growing constantly as they are released to the public. These papers helped me in part in my study of “The French Cultural Ambition in Palestine in the Inter-War Period.” This time period is noteworthy in that France was forced to make radical changes in its policy due to the events of

the time, including the inception of an apparently purely religious policy towards a rapidly growing population, the Jewish community. The upheavals I described were also discussed in Catherine Nicault's (University of Poitiers) paper: "The France-Palestine Association: Ambitions and Fate of a Zionist Influenced Group in France in the Inter-War Period." She showed that good ideas most often do not come to fruition, accentuating the sense of "missed opportunity" described in her book of the same name. In a very lively presentation, Dominique Jarrassé (University of Bordeaux, "French Visions of Palestine between the Two Wars: Orientalism, Colonial Art and Zionism") provided pictorial support for the concepts presented in the two preceding talks. A number of artists interested in Palestine remained entrenched in conformist views and adhered to the canons of colonial art.

Paolo Pieraccini (University of Florence) spoke on the "Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and France, 1918-1940." His research shows that during a period of time when France was preoccupied with defending its Catholic gains, it found it difficult to accept a Patriarch who appeared to favor Italy (but was in fact above all Catholic). Sarah Kohav (Tel Aviv) discussed "Messianic Christian Zionism and the Balfour Declaration: The Advent Testimony Movement," tracing the parallel between a revolution in the status of the Holy Land and readiness for the new coming, a movement which did not have a real impact on the British policy. In any case, the Mandate Period was unprecedented, eliciting curiosity, and at times the support of European leaders. For instance, Yeshayahu Jelinek (Beer Sheva) discussed the "Visit of a Friend: The Czechoslovakian president Thomas G. Masaryk in the Holy Land, April 1927". The first such high ranking individual to visit Palestine, he took an interest in all the features of the region, in particular Zionist expansion. A humanist, he encouraged this experience; as a Christian he denounced its communist features.

The final contribution to this day spent establishing the points of view on the Holy Land was provided by Qustandi Shomali's (Bethlehem University) description of the "Cultural Development in Palestine during the Mandate Period." He inventoried the various areas of Arab cultural expression, stressing that this period, despite the restrictions, was indeed a time of awakening and expansion.

The last half-day session was devoted to the "**Acceleration of History: the End of the Mandate Period.**" Henry Laurens (INALCO, Paris) presented the results of an ongoing study on "France and the Mufti of Jerusalem, 1945-1951". The Mufti at that time was a fairly undesirable figure for Paris, who was nevertheless able to somewhat impede Great Britain and the Zionists. H. Laurens examines the history of their mutual utilization: an ephemeral dialogue where no one was fooled, and there were no constructive outcomes. This took place while France was seeking a

means to preserve or recover its former status. Tsilla Herscho (Yad Tabenkin) reported on the French Catholic institutions which still are “A Major Factor in French Policy towards the Question of Palestine”, and source of hesitation as regards French policy towards the fate of Jerusalem. The fate of Palestine in general has been the focus of international concern, as shown by Dan Bitan (CRB Foundation, Jerusalem). The title of his talk, “The 1947 Partition Plan: A Confederation Controlled by the West?” underscores the challenge to a notion now part of history. Rather than a partition, it would be more appropriate to use the term confederation, under Western supervision. The fact that not all the parties involved were consulted in the settlement of the fate of Palestine was brought to light in a paper by Ilan Pappé (University of Haifa) on “Dividing the Mandatory Spoils: Palestine without the Palestinians.” From this point of view, in 1947-48, everything was decided in advance between Hashemites and Jews, which left no part to the Palestinians. A statement which could only lead to heated debate.

This discussion ended both the paper and the conference. It highlights once again the stridency of debate as well as the value of hearing other points of view on the same event. An avenue of exploration for the future.

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