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## INTRODUCTION

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*And thus is the way of the world.  
No, rather, thus is the way we have made the world.*  
—Anonymous

In this book we shall examine one of the most widely known and complex conflicts of the modern period. Scarcely a week goes by without some reference in our daily press or television news to the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors. In some ways this is curious. The Arab-Israeli conflict is only one of the forty or so separate wars fought since the end of World War II; the loss of life of both soldiers and civilians has been small compared to Korea or Vietnam, for example; and the area being fought over is tiny in world terms.

Yet many reasons lie behind why this conflict attracts so much attention, and why we should seek to understand the causes and course of events taking place. It has been a particularly tragic conflict in that there is scarcely a family on either side in the immediate region of the conflict in which a relative has not suffered injury or loss of life. In addition to being the modern expression of an historic territorial battle between two traditional ethnic rivals, the Arab-Israeli conflict directly involves two great world religions; it is caught up in the great-power rivalries of the Cold War, and the outcome is of major concern to Jewish, Islamic, and Christian communities around the world. Furthermore, the establishment of Israel is the pivotal event of the last 2,000 years of Jewish history, and the attitude toward Israel is central to Islam's response to the modern world.

Finally, given the seeming absolutes at stake, the threat of the activities of either party to the conflict escalating into a nuclear holocaust cannot be ignored. And to date, despite the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, and movement on the question of the Palestinians, there seems little sign of a resolution of the fundamental issues.

The primary object of this study is to make the Arab-Israeli conflict more intelligible without the distortions that result from oversimplification. This involves tracing the broad sweep of the history of the region and the perceptions both parties have of each other. Both the Arabs and the Israelis are locked into the histories they have created for themselves—into the dreams of their pasts. Both also seek to set in our minds favorable cultural images and symbols of themselves and unfavorable ones of their opponents. Remember that legitimizing one's position is an essential element in any international conflict—that is one reason why the Arab-Israeli conflict is so passionately argued over, by participants and observers alike. The distinction between the past and the present is an artificial one; there is only the present. But constructing and controlling "the truth" about the past to justify one's actions in the present is an important function of all political activity, and one of your tasks as a student is to separate the rhetoric designed by both sides to create a usable, legitimizing, and heroic past from the reality of past events. The primary sources included in this text will provide you with the opportunity to reach your own conclusions as to the issues involved and the way they are portrayed by both sides.

It is also important to recognize that neither side is a monolith; there are divisions and tensions within both sides along ethnic, class, and religious lines that lead to many different political attitudes. One aim of this book is to assist you in sorting out the various groups and their opinions, assessing which ones are more likely to lead to peaceful rather than violent solutions. As David K. Shipler points out in *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land*: "The time has passed when Jews and Arabs could face each other in simple conflict. They live together now in rich variety. There is no single Arab-Jewish relationship; there are many, and they require an elusive tolerance that must somehow run against the forces of war, nationalism, terrorism and religious certainty."

## DEFINING THE QUESTION

How, then, can the Arab-Israeli conflict be explained? Is it a religious war between the followers of Islam and Judaism in which the protagonists are driven by deep-seated suspicions and hostilities concerning the Divine instructions to each other? Is it an ethnic war between traditionally rival groups, reflecting changing demographic patterns? Is it a war of territorial expansion in which one state is attempting to expand its borders at the expense of its neighbors? Is it a war of self-defense in which a newly established state is defending itself against the determination of its neighbors to destroy it? Is it a war of national liberation in which rival militant nationalisms are seeking to establish their "place in the sun?" Is it an imperial war reflecting the history of the rivalries and ambitions of the imperial states of Europe, and more lately the United States and the Soviet Union in the Middle East? Is it the inevitable consequence of the disruptive process of transition from traditional society to modern state taking place in the Middle East? Or is it simply a series of random, unconnected events that have had tragic and unforeseen consequences for the people involved?

All these elements are present in the Arab-Israeli conflict, but to single out any one of them as *the* explanation for the events that make up the conflict is to oversimplify a situation that has developed over the past century. As we shall see, the tragedy of the Arab-Israeli conflict is that it is the collision of two sets of historic and

moral rights of groups who are both victims—victims of outsiders as well as each other's violence. The opposing claims differ, of course. In Shipler's words: "To draw the boldest outline of the past is to make Israel's basic case. To sketch the present is to see the Arab's plight."

## WHO ARE THE ARABS AND JEWS?

We must begin with a definition of Arabs and Jews. Both terms have a historical and cultural meaning. Mythically, Arabs and Jews have a common origin. Thus, some regard Noah's eldest son, Shem, as the ancestor of the Hebrews and Arabs. Arabs as well as Jews see themselves as descendants of the patriarch Abraham, and therefore as inheritors of the Promised Land—Palestine. Arabs trace their lineage to Ishmael, Abraham's first son born of Hagar, Sarah's handmaiden, while Jews, or Israelites, trace themselves to Isaac, son of Abraham and his wife, Sarah. In the Hebrew Bible, known to Christians as the Old Testament, the term Arab referred to the nomadic inhabitants of the central and northern Arabian Peninsula. Over the centuries, these nomadic tribes, headed by a sheikh who acted as a first among equals, developed a structure shaped by the harsh deserts and dependent on the camel. Survival depended upon the strength and solidarity of the tribe, and on obedience to custom and an unwritten code of honor called *muruwwa*. We can learn more about Arab values and the Arab experience during the period just before Muhammad through the heroic poetry they spoke and sang in the sixth and early seventh centuries. The greatest of these poems are the "Seven Odes" or "Mu'allaqat" (qasidahs of Imru al-Qays, ruler of an ephemeral desert kingdom between the fourth and sixth centuries). When the Arab conquest of the Middle East occurred in the seventh and eighth centuries of the common era (C.E.),\* following the founding of Islam, Arabic became the language and Islam the religion of the region. The term Arab acquired a new cultural definition that lasted during the period of Arab hegemony until the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258. Not all the inhabitants adopted the new language and religion, however. Some remnants of early Christianity remained: Nestorians in Persia and Iraq, the Christians of Syria, the Maronite Christians of Mount Lebanon (who use Syriac in their liturgy but recognize Rome as the head of the Christian Church), and some Greek Orthodox. And, of course, Jews resisted the new conquerors.

Arabs today do not form one nation-state although, like Jews, they consider themselves a people and national group. They constitute a majority in many modern nation-states (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, South Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Sudan, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria). Today there are more than 100 million in the region from Morocco to Iraq who consider themselves Arab. Nor are Arabs a race in the commonly understood sense. Neither are they a religion, for many Arabs—about 5 million—are Christian. And only about one-fifth of the world's Muslims are Arab. Indeed, the largest concentration of Muslims in the world is in Indonesia. In the final analysis, Arab can be applied to those who use Arabic as their language and identify with Arab culture and Arab causes.

\*The term C.E. is preferred by Muslims and Jews to the corresponding designation A.D. (the year of Our Lord).

The term Jew is as difficult to define as the term Arab. Jews trace their history to the Semitic tribe or groups of tribes who claimed descent from Abraham through his son Isaac who were known as Hebrews or Israelites. Although Jews consider themselves a people, as do the Arabs, Jews are not simply a nationality, not a race, and are more than a religion. They are at once an ethnic group, a religious group, and a cultural group. Even identifying as Jews those who use Hebrew as a language does not help us much as it is the native language of only about one-third of the inhabitants of Israel, and many who identify themselves as Jews have little or no familiarity with the language. The term Jew can be best applied to those who have a Jewish mother, or who call themselves Jews because of conversion to Judaism.

One problem for Europeans in discussing Arabs and Jews is to free themselves from the distorting lens of two destructive ideologies: anti-Semitism (in the sense of anti-Jewishness), and Orientalism (anti-Arabness). Irrational suspicion, fear, and hatred of Jews, as Jews, have characterized European history for centuries, leading to almost uninterrupted oppression and persecution of Jews throughout all the countries of Europe. Anti-Semitism—the term was first used by the German racist Wilhelm Marr in 1879—in its modern form defined and attacked Jews in terms of race rather than religion and relied on pseudo-scientific Social-Darwinist theories in attempting to prove the superiority of the “Aryan” race over the “inferior” Semitic Jews. These twisted ideas found their ultimate expression in the Holocaust, in Hitler’s attempt to exterminate the Jews.

Westerners have also exhibited a contempt, disregard, and sense of arrogance toward Arabs and Muslims. Thus, as they have also done with Jews, Westerners have failed to recognize the intrinsic value and contributions of Arabs to history. These assumptions, or more correctly, limitations, have been defined by one scholar, Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, as “Orientalism.” Said describes Orientalism as the racist way we view the inhabitants of the Orient, including the Middle East, in relation to ourselves as Europeans. The West, Said argues, has tried to establish the idea that Europe, by defining the political, economic, and cultural characteristics of the people of the Orient as inferior to those of the West, has the right to hegemony or dominance over the Orient. Thus non-Middle-Easterners have come to regard the Middle East as politically despotic, economically backward, and culturally decadent. As a result, there is a tendency to overlook completely the contributions of the Middle East to the development of Western European civilization and, in restructuring the realities of Middle Eastern life and history, to distort them. The cultural or intellectual assumptions that Occidentals bring to their study of Jews and Arabs make an understanding of the Arab–Israeli conflict considerably more difficult.

More serious as far as solving the conflict is concerned, Jews and Arabs bring their own prejudices and negative stereotypes—exaggerated by past and recent history—to bear upon each other. For Jews, the most pervasive stereotype of the Arab according to Shipler is “the fearsome violent figure of immense strength and duplicity. . . . Capable of great cruelty, given to fanatical disregard for human life, he murders easily, either out of a crazed lust for blood or as an emotional animal easily incited and manipulated by murderous leaders.” Arab stereotypes of Jews are remarkably similar to those of their Jewish counterparts. Jews are seen by Arabs as violent and cowardly. Ignoring the ancient ties of the Jews to Palestine, the Arabs regard them as aliens, as outsiders, as interlopers who do not belong. Jews and Arabs also share Western views of each other as backward and primitive. Needless to say, these prejudices add significantly to the passions of the participants in the conflict.

## THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION: ISLAM AND JUDAISM

Much of the Arab–Israeli conflict is secular, involving issues of territory, security, and ethnic and cultural differences. In many respects the sources of tensions are non-religious, resembling those of any conflict. But religion is an element of the conflict and adds an extra dimension and sense of inevitability to the unfolding events. Despite the fact that only a minority of Arabs and Jews are strictly observant religiously, religion has been, and continues to be, a focal point for the peoples involved in this conflict. And religion significantly shapes the attitudes of the protagonists toward each other, which is, no doubt, why the conflict is sometimes described as a religious war.

Judaism is the oldest monotheistic religion and is the forerunner of both Christianity and Islam. Judaism refers to the faith and ceremonies of Jews, and is a faith that is revealed by God and interpreted by religious teachers, namely rabbis. In its widest sense, Judaism is the entire Jewish tradition and Jewish way of life. Central to Judaism is the belief that God acted personally in history through a Chosen People, the Jews (the people called Israel), and that God entered into a Covenant with the Jews that if they obeyed God’s teachings He would, through them, save all mankind. God’s instructions to the Jews are contained in the *Torah* (literally teachings), or Pentateuch, which consists of the Five Books of Moses. The Torah contains the laws God revealed to the Jews, including the Ten Commandments. It also includes the message to establish an independent society based on Divine precepts, which are elaborated in great detail. One finds in the Torah, as well, God’s promise to establish the Jews in the land of Israel—the Promised Land—the state in which people would live in truth, justice, and peace. Thus the Torah is more than just a “Bible”; it is a blueprint for existence, and in the minds of many religious Jews today it should be the constitution of any Jewish state.

Judaism has gone through several stages in its long history. The first stage could be said to be that described in the Hebrew Bible, consisting of the Torah, the books of the Prophets, and a collection of other writings such as Chronicles, Kings, Ruth, Esther, and the Song of Solomon. It tells of the Jews’ search under Moses for the land promised them by God after their expulsion from Egypt (the Exodus), and describes the Kingdoms of David and Solomon.

The northern part of the kingdom, or Samaria, was conquered by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E.\* The Jews of the Southern Kingdom, or Judea, were exiled to Babylonia in 586 B.C.E. after the destruction of the First Temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem, which had become the center of Jewish worship until it was destroyed by the army of King Nebuchadnezzar. Restored to Palestine by the Persians, the Jews built a Second Temple in Jerusalem and lived autonomously under a succession of foreign rulers until 70 C.E. when the Romans destroyed the Second Temple and dispersed them (the Diaspora).

Following the destruction of the Temple and the disappearance of the priestly class, synagogues (places of worship, study, and community gathering) came into existence throughout the Jewish world, and teachers, or rabbis, interpreted the law. This oral law of the rabbis was later codified in a work known as the *Mishna*. The accumulated mass of law and lore based on the Torah and Mishna and known as the Talmud was then codified by about 500 C.E. In subsequent centuries, living under Muslim or Christian rulers, Jewish thinkers and teachers continued to study and in-

\*The term B.C.E. (before the common era) is used throughout the text and corresponds to the designation B.C.

interpret their traditions. In the Middle Ages, Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides (1135–1204), a Jew living in Islamic Spain, immigrated to Egypt, where he served as a physician at the court of the Muslim rulers. Recognized as the most learned and authoritative figure of his age, Maimonides codified Talmudic law up to his time in the *Mishneh Torah*, and dealt with fundamental theological and philosophical questions in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Maimonides distilled thirteen articles of the faith, and enumerated 613 positive and negative commandments found in the Torah, which form the basis of Judaic law and faith.

Further changes took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the Jews of Western Europe were emancipated and as many older customs and rituals were rejected to enable Judaism to accommodate the modern world. Thus Reform Judaism, Zionism, and secular Yiddish culture emerged. Today, the largest Jewish communities are in the United States, the Soviet Union, and Israel. Devout Jews maintain traditional Jewish observances in their individual and familial practices, including attendance at synagogue, observing special holy days, periods of fasting, and ceremonies. Although divided into Reform, Orthodox, and Conservative branches of Judaism, the vast majority of Jews in the United States support the existence of the Jewish state of Israel.

Islam asserts that God has revealed himself several times in history and accepts the validity of scriptural religions like Judaism and Christianity. Muslims believe that the transmitter of God's final revelations to mankind was Muhammad, a member of the Quraysh tribe of the trading city, Mecca. Muhammad was born about 570 C.E. and is regarded by Muslims as the last of God's prophets in a line that includes Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Not much is known about Muhammad's life, except that he came from a poor family of the clan of Hashim, married Khadija, a wealthy widow fifteen years his senior, became a successful businessman, was ambitious, and was also deeply religious. According to tradition, the archangel Gabriel (the same archangel who appeared to Mary in Christian tradition) appeared to Muhammad and revealed the word of Allah (al-Allah, or The God), whom Muhammad accepted as the One True God—the same monotheistic deity of the Jews and Christians.

Around the year 610 C.E., Muhammad began to preach the word of God, and the passages of rhythmic prose that he uttered were copied down and later collected to form the *Quran* (or Koran), the holy book of Islam, considered by pious Muslims to be the divine word of God. Within a few years, and especially after his flight (*Hijra*, or Hegira) from Mecca to Medina in the year 622, the year 1 of the Islamic calendar, Muhammad was the acknowledged religious, political, and military leader of a new community of believers, or Ummah, as it was called.

In 630 C.E., after taking over Mecca and reconsecrating the Kaaba (a cubelike structure that had previously housed 360 idols) to Allah alone, delegations of tribes from all over Arabia accepted Muhammad's authority. The precepts of the Quran thus became, theoretically, the law of a new religious-political entity. Muhammad died in 632 C.E., however, and it was left to his successors, the caliphs (who inherited his manifold functions, but not his power of revelation), to put down revolts of recalcitrant tribes and then to lead Muslim Arab armies out of Arabia to conquer within a century an area extending from the Pyrenees in the west to the Punjab in the east and the borders of China in the North. Arabic soon became the language of the entire Middle East and Islam the dominant religion, and it remains so today.

Islam means *submission*, and for Muslims the purpose of existence is to submit to the will of God as revealed in the Quran. Muslims believe, like Jews, that the state should exist to do God's will; the Quran, covering all aspects of living, therefore, became the foundation of a legal system for a community in which religion and politics

(or church and state) were one and the same thing. The Sharia, or "straight path," the corpus of Islamic law that developed over about three centuries, consists of the Quran, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad himself (*Hadith*), and, for Sunni Muslims, legal points derived from analogous situations (*Qiyas*), and material accepted by the consensus (*Ijma*) of the community, or more accurately, by the learned men or jurists, often based on local traditions and customs. The entire Sharia, once compiled, was considered to be divine; it continues to form the basis of the legal system in many Middle East countries today.

Islam is no more unified than Christianity, and conflicts over the question of leadership in the early community led to a schism between the followers of tradition (Sunnis), who insisted on an elective element to the position of caliph, and the followers of Ali (the Shia or Shiites), the fourth caliph, Muhammad's son-in-law and the father of Muhammad's only two grandchildren to survive into maturity, Hassan and Hussein. Regarding the leadership of the Ummah, the Shiites insisted on the principle of designation in the house of the Prophet through Ali's family. They called their leaders *Imams*. This conflict, which continues into the present day, began as a political rather than as a theological one. The great majority of Muslims, however, are Sunnis; the Shiites constitute about 10 to 15 percent of Muslims (about 50 million to 60 million), although they are in a majority in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Yemen.

Islam has no centralized authority, no overall clergy; a religious elite—*ulema* (learned theologians, jurists, and teachers)—wield authority. Islam is more than a religion as such. It is a sense of belonging to a cultural tradition; a kind of "secular" identity that, for many Muslims, is closely related to being an Arab. The major problem faced by Islam today is to bring about change within sanctified tradition, and not go counter to those traditions. As in Judaism, there is no division between the secular and sacred, or the temporal and spiritual realms, in Islam.

The expansion of Europe in the eighteenth century challenged the power of Islam. Because Islam had established and maintained various Islamic empires for centuries, accepting other political and religious structures on equal terms was a major problem; Muslims were especially confounded by the military and economic superiority of European colonialism. Thus, the Arab response to the establishment of Israel is, in part at least, a particularly acute example of the difficulties Muslims have in accepting the political sovereignty of a previously "tolerated minority." The sense of Islamic community that all Muslims share was weakened at first by the impact of Western colonialism, but later, and especially since World War II, Muslims believe Islam has helped them in their struggle to gain political freedom and independence. Most states with Muslim majorities have created modern political and economic infrastructures and are in the often slow and painful process of accommodating Islam to modern social patterns.

Because Christianity and Islam both emerged out of Judaism, it is not surprising that a number of striking similarities exist among these three Middle Eastern religions. They all believe in the existence of the same God. All three religions believe in a final Day of Judgment; all have prophets, in many cases the same ones; and all are intolerant of what they regard as deviation, or heresy. Where they differ is in their historical experience. Thus, Islam and Christianity became universal religions whereas Judaism remained the religion of a single group. This has led to the particularism or exceptionalism that characterizes Judaism, but there is little reason to think that had the Jews of Palestine had a different historical experience, had they taken an imperial path, for example, they would not have adopted the universalistic principles of Islam and Christianity that all mankind could—indeed should—belong to their religion.

The major departure of Islam and Judaism from Christianity stems from their different attitudes toward Jesus. Muslims and Jews do not believe the claim, accepted by Christians, that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, the Son of God sent to redeem mankind. Indeed, it has been Judaism's unwillingness to accept this claim, at times even hostility to it, together with the perceived role of Jews in the events leading to the death of Jesus, that has led to much of the Christian hostility toward Jews throughout history. Christianity takes the view that the failure of the Jews to recognize the divinity of Jesus means that they can no longer claim to be the Chosen People, and indeed many have used the term "Chosen People" in pejorative ways to reinforce hostility against the Jews. Judaism, on the other hand, retains the continuity of the Jews as God's Chosen People, and the religion teaches that the Messiah (the anointed Saviour) is yet to come.

Islam and Judaism differ from Christianity in other fundamental ways. First, neither religion has a hierarchical clergy as most Christian churches do. Because there are no sacraments, neither the ulema nor the rabbis perform sacerdotal functions as do the Christian clergy, and they do not act as mediators between the people and God. They are learned men who live in the community at large, marry, have families, and act as teachers and guides rather than as priests and bishops. Judaism differs from both Islam and Christianity in one important respect, however. Both Islam and Christianity were militarily and politically successful over the centuries, establishing empires or states in which their respective beliefs and principles were put into practice. Judaism had no such experience from the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. until the establishment of Israel in 1948.

Judaism is unique in that it is a religion limited to one people, and while not all Jews live by their Judaic traditions, religion is a central element of their history, binding them in a spiritual, as well a historical, unity. The emphasis of Judaism upon the Jews as the Chosen People links the salvation of the Jewish people and all of mankind through a restoration of the Jews to Palestine. In this book we will examine the two pivotal events in modern Judaism: the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel. Both events have raised the fundamental question of Judaism in the most dramatic way for 2,000 years—namely, the nature of the presence and role of God in history in relation to God's chosen people.

Although in many respects Judaism and Islam are similar, important differences exist that lead to tension between the two religious groups. Bernard Lewis in *Semites and Anti-Semites* has observed:

Jews have lived under Islamic rule for fourteen centuries, and in many lands, and it is therefore difficult to generalize about their experience. This much, however, may be said with reasonable certainty—that they were never free from discrimination, but only rarely subject to persecution; that their situation was never as bad as in Christendom at its worst, nor ever as good as in Christendom at its best. There is nothing in Islamic history to parallel the Spanish expulsion and Inquisition, the Russian pogroms, or the Nazi Holocaust; there is also nothing to compare with the progressive emancipation and acceptance accorded to Jews in the Democratic West during the last three centuries.

While Judaism is not a proselytizing religion, and does not seek converts, Islam, with its universalistic implications, divides the world into two groups: the first, where Islamic law and order prevail (*Dar-al-Islam*—the House of Submission); the second, which constitutes the areas that have not yet submitted to Allah (*Dar-al-Harb*—the Abode of War). One of the important duties of Muslims is to extend Islam through all means such as international diplomacy, economic pressure, and war if necessary. The

*Jihad* (Holy Struggle or Holy War) is increasingly interpreted by Muslims these days as the duty to fight a defensive rather than aggressive war, although the term is very flexible and capable of various interpretations—indeed, it has been used to justify initiating war across a wide range of situations. We should not infer, however, that Arabs oppose Israel simply because Jihad (often falsely construed as forced conversion) is a duty for Muslims, just as we should not infer that because it does not make converts, Judaism has a live-and-let-live attitude. Arabs and Israelis have other reasons besides religion to oppose each other, as we shall see in the following chapters. The establishment of Israel has not only raised central questions for Judaism but has also dramatically highlighted a major question facing Islam today. That issue is how to accommodate other political and economic structures on equal terms. The Arab and Muslim response to Israel is, in part at least, a particularly acute example of the difficulty this poses.

A key question in both religions as far as the Arab-Israeli conflict is concerned is: what is the attitude of the religion to the outsider? Both religions are ambiguous and contradictory in relation to this question. They make positive and negative references to others, and are both welcoming and exclusive. As in all religions, in both Islam and Judaism, justifications can be found to sanctify the basest as well as the noblest actions. Disturbingly, increasingly, fundamentalist (a term borrowed from Protestantism) religious leaders on both sides—imams and rabbis—responding, in part at least, to the perceived failure of secular nationalism to meet people's spiritual and material needs, are lending their voices to the cause of violence.

## THE TASK OF THE HISTORIAN

At the outset, we must ask ourselves: just what is the task of the historian? Is the historian a participant in the events he or she describes, or simply an observer? Does the historian set out to make a political case for one position or another, or to "tell the truth"—letting the chips fall where they may? Determining what we mean by the truth is difficult enough as it is. Does the historian set out to re-create the past as fully as possible? What do we mean by this expression, and how would we set out to re-create the past? What kind of events should the historian look at: political, social, cultural, economic? Should we look at society from the top down; that is, at leaders, or from the bottom up; at those who were the actual hewers of stone and carriers of water?

There are, of course, no easy answers to these questions. It is difficult to tell where the boundaries between these categories begin and end. They are all intellectual constructs, and our perceptions and interpretations are in constant flux. In this book we have tried to relate what we regard as the most important events and to explain how both sides have interpreted the unfolding of these events.

One of the central questions historians investigate is the role of force and violence in history. Force and violence are certainly one of the major aspects of Arab-Jewish relations over the past century. How much could have been avoided? Need violence continue? These are crucial questions. It is essential, we believe, to keep in mind that history is not some sort of seamless web of necessity. There is no law of inevitability in history, however passionately politicians may argue that in such and such a case the use of force was "necessary." History is not a process determining events in which humans are powerless to act and to change things. Human agency is the key to understanding the past, as it is to an understanding of the present and future. Throughout history, there have always been alternatives to the resort to force, es-



pecially war, however unpalatable those options might have appeared to leaders at the time. Throughout this text we have tended to assess actions with this thought in mind.

All investigations must begin with an awareness of self and how we define ourselves in relation to others. The distinguishing element in the study of history is to explore how that definition relates to, and changes over, time. Central to how we define ourselves is an understanding of our relationship to the space around us. A knowledge of the environment, or at the very least the landscape, of the Middle East—especially that area embracing Palestine—is crucial to an understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The most important aspect of landscape to the Jews and Arabs of Palestine is the concept of homeland and the meaning attached to this concept.

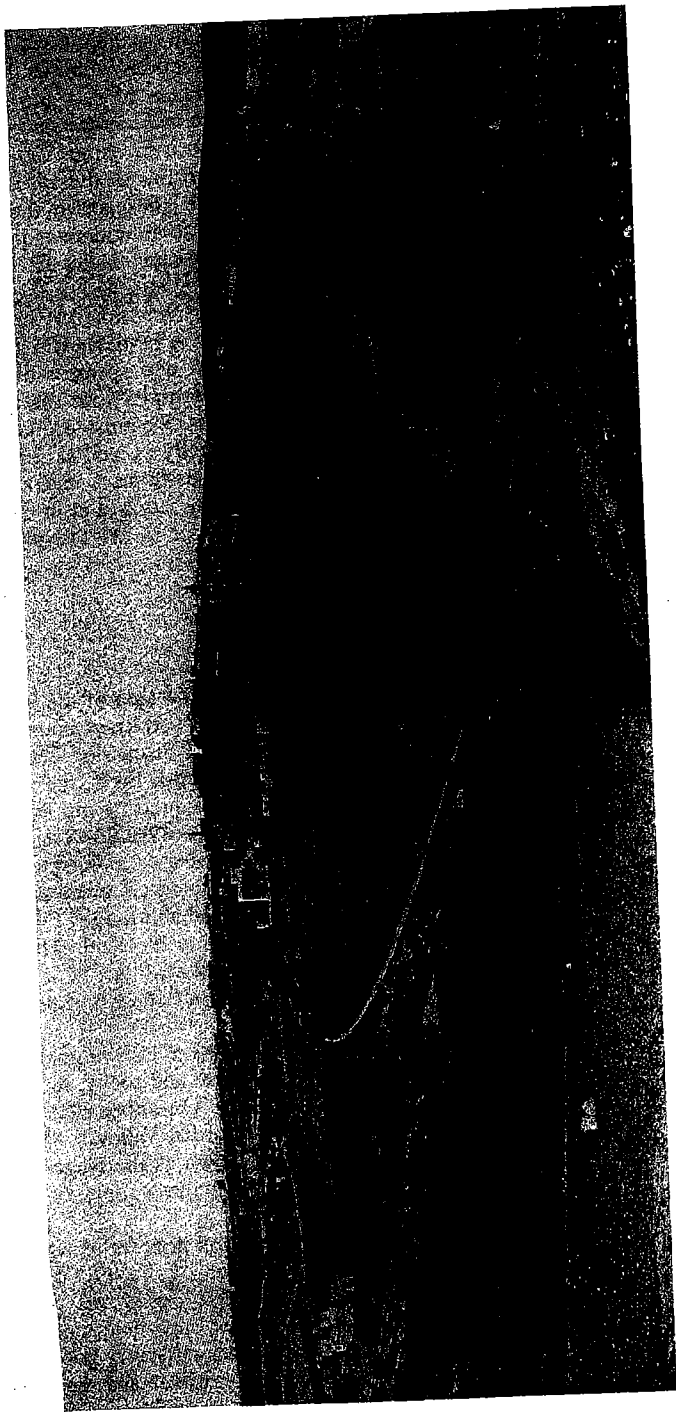
Almost all concepts of homeland have included the notion that such a place is the center of the world and that it is of supreme value. A homeland is usually tied to a specific location spiritually; it is a place to consort and speak with the gods, and continuity with the location takes on a special meaning, with dislocation causing chaos. This was especially true of the ancient religions. We must also keep in mind that the value peoples attach to such concepts are historically as well as culturally derived. A homeland provides nourishment, permanency, reassurance, and an identification with the soil, and it provides historical ties of identity. Looked at in this way, we can quickly see that Palestine takes on special significance to the two groups who have been in such bitter conflict for almost a century.

### THE LANDSCAPE OF PALESTINE

Let us now turn to the landscape of Palestine itself. The area of the former Ottoman Empire today thought of as Palestine received its rather arbitrary boundaries between 1920 and 1922 as the result, as we shall see later, of discussion between the great powers following the end of World War I. Throughout this book, the area we refer to when we speak of Palestine is that which was administered by the British as a mandated territory between World War I and 1948. It does not include Transjordan, which was administered separately after 1921. It is impossible to understand the depth of feeling on both sides without an awareness of the ecological or environmental relationship that exists between the Jews and Arabs who inhabit the region, as well as the historical and cultural ties that link the two peoples to the land. These boundaries circumscribe a total land area of about 26,320 square kilometers, about the size of New Hampshire (see accompanying map in which Palestine/Israel is superimposed on a map of Southern California drawn to scale).

The center of the country consists of a central mass of hills running from northern Galilee to southern Judea. While these are often steep and rocky, their very highest peaks reach an altitude of only 2,400 to 3,000 feet. On either side of the hills lie lowlands—the Maritime plain to the West and the Jordan Valley to the East. On the South sprawls the desert district now commonly known as the Negev. Bisecting the hills on a northwest to southeast axis are the contiguous valleys of Esdraelon and Jezreel, which separate Samaria from Galilee.

The hills of Palestine cover approximately 2 million acres of which over a half million are largely uninhabited wilderness. That area of the hills that is inhabited consists of some scattered valleys of great fertility, but overall the steepness of the hillsides, the numerous rock outcroppings, and the very high limestone content, combined with an unpredictable rainfall, make the area generally very poor agriculturally. Much of it is simply uncultivable. The terracing of hillsides and the exploitation of



Jerusalem in late nineteenth century.

those springs and streams that do exist have enabled the limited cultivation of grains, olives, vines, and deciduous fruits.

The hills are surrounded by five principal plains. The largest and most important is the Maritime plain from Rafah to Mount Carmel, which includes, in its northern section, the Plain of Sharon. This plain occupies over 800,000 acres, of which two thirds or more are capable of being irrigated. The mild lowland winters and the light sandy soils make this excellent citrus-growing country. The Plain of Acre covers about 140,000 acres lying along the coast north of Haifa. Here there is plentiful water from springs and streams, and the heavy alluvial soils lead to intensive cultivation of a wide variety of vegetables, fodders, and deciduous fruits. The Plain of Esdraelon, which comprises about 100,000 acres, has traditionally been regarded as the most fertile and productive district in Palestine, and cereals and fruit are grown on its alluvial clays. The Huleh Plain is to be found in the extreme northeast corner of Palestine, and about one-fifth of this plain, the area to the south ending in Lake Huleh, was marshlands before it was reclaimed. Lastly, there is the valley of the Jordan River, which if the Jezreel Valley is included—and Jezreel is even richer than the Esdraelon—occupies about 250,000 acres. This region is extremely productive when irrigated with the waters from the Jordan river. Palestine also includes the mostly desert region south of Beersheba (the Negev), which extends over 3,140,000 acres or about 48 percent of the entire country. Irrigated parts of this district have proven fertile.

There has been, and still exists, a very close link between the landscape and the pattern of settlement in Palestine. These patterns, reinforced by historical, cultural, and religious experiences, reflect fundamental attitudes that the inhabitants, both Arabs and Jews, hold about the region and their identification with it as place and homeland. Both groups have sought once again to give practical expression to these attitudes and aspirations over the past century, and in so doing have revealed vastly different visions. How those visions have led to the bloodshed of the past century will be the subject of our inquiry.

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# PALESTINE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

## CHRONOLOGY

1516– 1918	Ottoman rule over Palestine	1892	Railroad between Jerusalem and Jaffa completed
1791	Pale of Settlement established in Russian Empire	1894	Trial of Alfred Dreyfus in France
1860– 1904	Life of Theodor Herzl	1896	Publication of Herzl's <i>Der Judenstaat</i>
1879	Establishment of Anti-Semitic League	1897	Formation of World Zionist Organization at the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland
1876– 1909	Rule of Sultan Abdul-Hamid II	1901	Establishment of Jewish National Fund
1881	Assassination of Czar Alexander II of Russia	1904	Second <i>aliyah</i> begins
1882	Beginning of first <i>aliyah</i>	1905	Railroad between Haifa and Deraa completed
1882	Landing of first group of Zionist <i>Hibbat Zion</i> at Jaffa	1908	Young Turk revolution
1882	Turkish legislation restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine	1909	Abdul-Hamid II deposed
		1909	Establishment of Tel Aviv

For us to understand nineteenth-century Palestine, we must view the topic from several sides. We need to look at the diplomatic history of the European powers who struggled for influence in the area—notably England, France, and Russia—and the impact these nations left on the local society. We must also examine the political, socioeconomic, and cultural-ideological developments among the local population. These developments include the rise of local leaders and notables, demographic changes and economic conditions, intercommunal relationships, the status of the Jewish population, and the emergence of the Zionist and Arab national movements. In this chapter we shall try to bring these aspects together to describe the situation in Palestine at the beginning of the new era, which began in 1914.

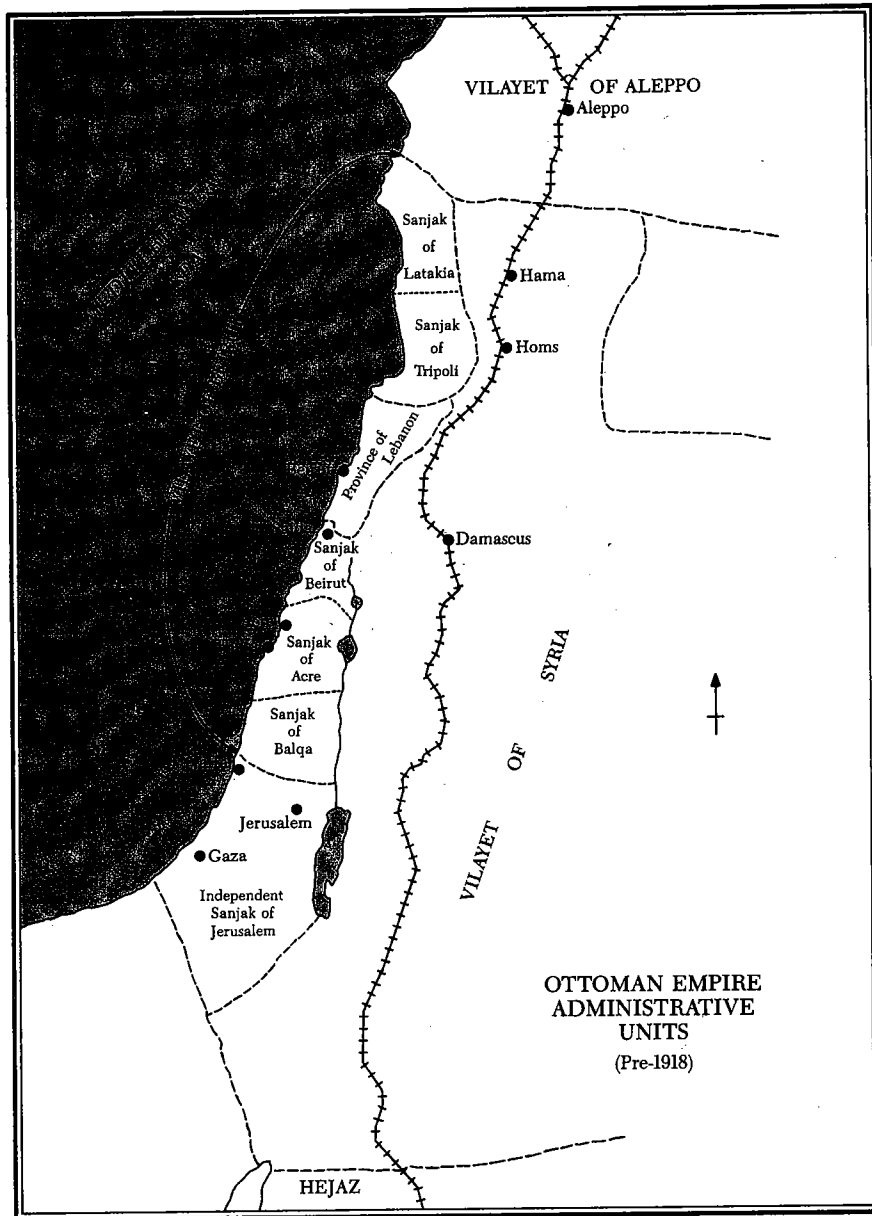
## PALESTINE UNDER THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Under Ottoman rule, which lasted four centuries (1516–1918), Palestine never formed a political administrative unit of its own. It was divided into several districts, called *sanjaks* and these were part of larger provinces or administrative units, called *vilayets*. Most of Palestine was part of the vilayet of Syria governed by the pasha of Damascus, but after 1841, following a decade of occupation of the region by Egypt, except for an area east of the Jordan River, which remained part of the vilayet of Syria, it consisted of a northern portion placed in the vilayet of Beirut, and a southern portion, the sanjak of Jerusalem (see map 1–1). The Ottoman government in Constantinople did not attach much importance to the Palestine districts until the middle of the nineteenth century; the area raised very little revenue, it had little military or strategic importance, and its borders were not precisely defined. The Muslim Sultan did feel a political and religious obligation to protect the Holy Places of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. His need to maintain cordial relations with the European powers meant that he also had to protect Christian and Jewish pilgrims to Palestine.

The attainment of virtual autonomy from the Ottoman Empire by Egypt in the mid-nineteenth century, and Anglo-French strategic rivalry to control the Suez isthmus, meant that the Palestine districts became more strategically and politically important to Constantinople. Accordingly, the Ottomans tightened their control of Syria and Palestine. The sanjak of Jerusalem was given higher status and made directly responsible to Constantinople in an attempt by the imperial government to regain central control over the region and to make the administration more efficient. Palestine had been a poor and neglected part of the Ottoman Empire. Over the previous two centuries, local governors had become independent of Ottoman control, had become corrupt and had neglected their duties, with the result that there was considerable disorder and insecurity; public works had not been carried out; agriculture and trade had declined; and the majority of the population were impoverished and oppressed.

Much of this oppression had come from local leaders like the rural sheikhs of Nablus, the Judean Hills, and Hebron; Druze emirs in southern Lebanon and northern Palestine; and Bedouin chiefs in other areas. Heads of prominent families, called *notables*, sought to gain political power in order to collect land taxes and security payments from pilgrims. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans gradually reestablished central control, Bedouin attacks became less frequent, general security increased, oppression of the urban population diminished somewhat, and the European powers greatly expanded their involvement in Palestine, as in the rest of the Levant. As a result, the areas's economy and the conditions of the inhabitants significantly improved. Under Sultan Abdul-Hamid II, who ruled the Ottoman Empire

MAP 1-1



Source: William R. Polk, David M. Stamler and Edmund Asfour, *Backdrop To Tragedy*, Boston, Beacon, 1957. p. 53.

from 1876 to 1909, important changes took place in Palestine. Abdul-Hamid encouraged modernization in communications, education, and the military in order to strengthen his control. When he began his rule, Palestine had no railroad, hardly any carriage roads, and no developed port. There were few medical services, and disease and illiteracy were widespread. Within a few years of Abdul-Hamid's accession, new roads were opened and European companies completed a railroad between Jerusalem and Jaffa in 1892, and another between Haifa and Deraa, Transjordan, in 1905. In reorganizing the Ottoman Empire and attempting to strengthen central control by using European engineers and investors, the Sultans, paradoxically, encouraged the very European penetration of Palestine they were seeking to prevent.

## THE ARABS OF PALESTINE

The population of Palestine, which reached around 650,000 by 1914, was heterogeneous and divided, especially among the Arabs. In addition to the divisions among urban, rural, and nomadic populations, continual rivalries existed within the villages and among the nomads. There was a great gulf between the Palestine gentry and the peasants (*fellahin*). City dwellers had nothing but contempt for the peasants and had almost no contact with them. Much of the land in Palestine was state land (*miri*). Whether state or private, the land was cultivated by fellahin who exercised a kind of communal, as opposed to formal-legal, ownership over it. The fellahin were frequently in debt and did all they could to avoid paying taxes. Peasant reluctance to pay taxes or gain legal title to their land was stimulated in part by their fear of being subject to military recruitment.

The villages of Palestine were small, isolated, and poor. In northern Palestine, the vast majority of the fellahin were tenant farmers who lived in villages while working the land owned by absentee landowners, most of whom lived in Beirut or Damascus. By the time of Zionist immigration in the 1880s, the land had, legally at least, passed from the peasants to Palestinian notables, many of whom had gained wealth as tax collectors or as merchants living elsewhere. Consequently, some Arabs of Palestine regarded themselves not as Palestinians but identified themselves with Syrian or Lebanese centers. By the last quarter of the century, only 20 percent of the land in the Galilee and 50 percent of Judea remained in the hands of the fellahin. Nevertheless, the land they possessed represented two-thirds of the arable land, for much of the land purchased by the notables and absentee landowners was not being tilled. The primary identification and loyalty of the peasants was undoubtedly a kind of "village patriotism," which stemmed from their attachment to the land they worked, regardless of who had legal title to it, and to the village in which they and their families lived.

Villagers supported themselves by growing crops and raising a few sheep or goats. Methods of agriculture had changed very little over the centuries, although demand for Palestinian grain, cotton, and citrus fruits had increased in the last half of the century. Nevertheless, many villagers sought some relief from their poverty by moving into the towns. The social relations of the village were based on kinship; this was because the village was frequently made up of one or more extended families. Thus, what might seem to modern Europeans to be a lack of privacy, or overcrowding, in the village was to the Palestinian peasant a sense of security, continuity, and familial cohesiveness. In southern Palestine, most of the population were the nomadic Bedouin who made a meager living through raising and selling sheep, camels, and goats.

There were also religious divisions within the Arab population of Palestine.

Sunni Muslims, Shiites, and Druze were at odds, and there were constant rivalries between Muslims and Christian Arabs (approximately 16 percent of the population—mostly Greek Orthodox). The Muslims of Palestine were overwhelmingly Sunni, and the local Muslim elites to whom they gave their loyalty gained their political identity and position through loyalty to the Sultan. As a result of all the factors mentioned above, there was no strong impetus toward Palestinian nationalism among the Muslim Arabs during this period. Any sense of nationalism that did exist among the Arabs came mainly from the Christian Arabs who were influenced by their European Christian contacts, both in the Middle East and in Europe. They were in the forefront of a literary and cultural movement in the nineteenth century that led to the rediscovery of the glorious heritage of the Arabs and reawakened a sense of ethnic identity. Initially, these Arab nationalists were concerned about parity between Arabs and Turks, and between Arab Muslims and Arab Christians within the Ottoman Empire. (See Documents 1-1 and 1-2.)

Several significant events occurred in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century. The Young Turk revolution of 1908 brought to the forefront Turkish nationalists who intended to preserve the Ottoman Empire through ruthless policies of centralization and Islamization. As historian Zeine N. Zeine has noted, the seeds of Arab nationalism sprouted from the soil of Turkish nationalism. Groups now formed that were dedicated to achieving political independence as Arabs from the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, as the century progressed, nationalist sentiment among Arabs, including those in Palestine, also grew as a response to the strong nationalist feelings of Jews toward Palestine, or *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel).

Like Arab nationalism, Jewish nationalism remained a religious and cultural phenomenon until the nineteenth century, when the idea of creating a Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael assumed the character of a political ideology. It was the product of the European environment, and was influenced by Western ideologies like rationalism and secular nationalism. The situation of the Jews in Europe had taken a different course from that of the Jews who lived under Islam. In the Islamic world, Jews had lived for hundreds of years as *Ahl-ad-Dhimma*, or people of a contract or covenant, with the Muslim rulers. As *dhimmis*, Jews, like Christians, were given the status of second-class citizens. They were subject to heavy land and poll taxes (*jizyah*) and discriminatory social regulations, and were forbidden from exercising control over Muslims, although these restrictions were sometimes ignored. *Dhimmis* were allowed to worship freely, to live under their own laws, and to enjoy a large measure of self-government. There were no restrictions on their travel or economic life. Although there were occasional massacres of Jews, attacks against them, and sometimes even forced conversions, no Islamic ruler ever instituted a policy of wholesale expulsion or extermination of the Jews. Arabized Jews tended to take on the characteristics of their surroundings. Defined in terms of their religion, they tended to think of themselves as a religious group. Moreover, like their Arab neighbors who lived under Ottoman imperial rule until the twentieth century, they were affected somewhat later than their European counterparts by Western developments and ideologies such as secularism and nationalism.

## THE JEWS IN EUROPE

The history of Jews in Christian Europe was different from the Jewish experience under the Muslims. This is a story that reflects very little credit on European Christianity, as it

is a story of almost uninterrupted oppression and persecution of Jews throughout all the countries of Europe. And, of course, it culminated in the horrific genocide of Hitler's "final solution," which Jews since that time have called the Holocaust. Historians have offered several reasons for the shocking ways Jews were treated in Europe, especially during and after the Middle Ages, and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that it was based largely on irrational and ill-informed religious prejudice. This has led most interpretations of Jewish history to concentrate on the religious and ideological aspects of anti-Semitism and Jewish responses to it, to the exclusion of social and economic factors present. We believe that this emphasis distorts our understanding of Jewish history. The traditional view tends to stress the image of Jews as victims and emphasizes the importance of Zionism as an ideology in recent Jewish history. Recent historians, however, while acknowledging the importance of religious identification as a factor in shaping both Christian and Muslim attitudes and behavior toward Jews, have drawn a more complete picture of Jewish history.

By placing more importance on the socioeconomic elements in the story, recent historical interpretations have restored dignity and pride to Jews. Throughout European history Jews made significant contributions in all walks of life; something quite inconsistent with the picture of a small religious, passive minority suffering unmitigated persecution and oppression. There is no doubt that Jews suffered persecution because of their religion at various times in European history, but that is far from the whole story. The Jewish people have maintained their ethnic, religious, and linguistic characteristics through the centuries primarily because they have been an ethnic minority that has fulfilled a distinct socioeconomic role in the societies in which they have lived. Most historians agree that Jews migrated from Palestine voluntarily long before the Christian epoch, forming merchant classes around the Mediterranean basin. The destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in the year 70 C.E. led to a considerable increase in the number of the Jewish Diaspora, as those Jews who lived outside Palestine were called, and they were gradually transformed into a mercantile class.

In the Roman Empire, Jews played an important role in the economy as traders, financiers, goldsmiths, jewelers, and craftsmen, and, in doing so, they preserved their ethnic identity and separateness. After the Christianizing of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, during the Middle Ages, although Jews were permitted communal autonomy and self-government, religious antagonism against them led to Jews being gradually deprived of their rights as citizens and they were increasingly limited to certain professions.

In the High Middle Ages, Jews functioned primarily as moneylenders, and were dependent upon the rulers for protection. When Italian and other bankers began to take over their limited economic functions, the Jews were expelled, as from England in 1290, from France by the end of the next century, and from Spain in 1492. Where Jews remained in Europe, they were forced into prescribed residential areas that we know as *ghettos*. The first ghetto appeared in Italy in the sixteenth century. Many Jews left Western Europe for the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Europe—particularly Greater Lithuania (which included much of what is today western Russia and the Ukraine) and Poland—where they were initially welcomed because of their commercial skills. The Jewish community of greater Poland became the largest in the world, with impressive political and cultural institutions, but economic rivalry and religious antagonism eventually impoverished and threatened the community.

The growth of industrial capitalism more or less altered the economic function of Jews in Western Europe, and Jews gradually integrated into the capitalist and professional classes. The rationalism of the eighteenth century Enlightenment had also bene-

fitted Jews and paved the way for their "emancipation" after the French Revolution. The ideals of the French Revolution nurtured the ideology of secular nationalism, so that by the end of the nineteenth century Jews had widely assimilated into the population of most Western European countries.

In Eastern Europe, however, the slow rate of industrialization and the hostile political and religious conditions led to the dislocation of Jews there, forcing them to seek new social and geographical horizons. As for the Russian Empire, ever since 1791 the Jews had been restricted to a region between the Black Sea and the Baltic known as the Pale of Settlement where they lived in poverty in small towns called *shtetls*. Much of the Pale was formerly Poland (in the late eighteenth century Poland was partitioned among Russia, Prussia, and Austria), and about three quarters of a million of the inhabitants of the Pale were former Polish Jews. Jews were excluded from the larger Russian cities and other parts of the country. In Czarist Russia, the ideas of the French Revolution were anathema, and Jews continued to be a scapegoat of the Russian people and Orthodox Church. Throughout the century Russian Jews were subjected to numerous restrictions and state-sponsored persecutions (pogroms). By 1850, there were about 2.3 million Jews in Russia, and despite massive emigration, forced conscription into the Russian Army, and deportations this figure was 5 million by the end of the century. In the 1880s, under the impact of successive savage pogroms in Russia and discriminatory legislation, many Eastern European Jews fled to the United States and, to a far lesser extent, to Palestine.

The Russian government sponsored massacres, restrictions, and persecutions of Jews following the assassination of Czar Alexander II of Russia in 1881 in which one of the plotters was found to be a young Jewess. The restrictions enforced within the Pale and in other Russian areas led to a mass migration in the next twenty years. Over a million people fled to the United States between 1880 and 1900; and this figure was to reach over 2.6 million by 1914. Others stayed and tried to revolutionize the system, but few chose this course. Those who did joined a radical socialist organization called the Bund, which, although it represented only a minority of the Jewish population, constituted a dynamic faction within the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia. Another solution was the reaffirmation of Jewish identity in a secular, socialist form through a movement whose goal was an autonomous Jewish nation-state. This was advocated by Leo Pinsker in his book, *Auto-Emancipation*, written in 1882, following the 1881 pogroms. However, the movement which would come to be known as Zionism received its greatest impetus from events that occurred in France in the 1890s.

## THE BIRTH OF MODERN ZIONISM

The emancipation of the Jews in Western Europe aroused powerful anti-Semitic reflexes among the middle classes. Racial anti-Semitism—which defined and attacked Jews in terms of race rather than religion—emerged both in Germany and France from the 1840s on. Racial anti-Semitism relied on pseudo-scientific Social-Darwinian theories to "prove" the superiority of the Aryan race over the inferior Semitic race, and it was largely in response to this outbreak of anti-Semitism that modern Zionism emerged as presenting a viable alternative. It became clear to some that complete emancipation and equality of Jews was unobtainable even in advanced and enlightened Western Europe. Their solution was an autonomous Jewish nation-state.

This aspiration tapped another trend among the traditionalist Jews of Eastern Europe—that of preserving Judaism and the Jewish tradition through the reestablish-

ment of a religious-based Jewish culture located in the traditional Jewish homeland Eretz Yisrael. The coming together of these two aspirations—one secular, the other religious—led to the birth of modern Zionism as a political ideology and organizational tool, and it contributed to the settlements that became the foundation of the economic, social, and cultural rebirth of the Jewish nation. Small groups of Jewish youths (mainly students) met in Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe and planned the kind of settlements they would set up in Eretz Yisrael.

The first small group of the new movement, known as *Hibbat*—or *Hovevei*—*Zion* (Lovers of Zion), numbering fourteen and including one woman, landed at Jaffa on July 7, 1882. This was the beginning of the first modern wave of Jewish immigrants to Palestine, which lasted from 1881 to 1903 and is known as the first *aliyah*, which means "going up" to the Land of Israel. By 1903 about twenty new agricultural villages had been founded, about 90,000 acres of land had been purchased, and some 10,000 Jews had settled in the country, about half of them on the soil. Hebrew was being spoken and taught in a few schools, but by and large the settlers were not accustomed to farm work; they had insufficient funds, and had it not been for the generous support of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, who assisted the newcomers, the entire venture could have failed. As it was, the scheme had come to a standstill by 1903.

The French philanthropist Baron Edmond de Rothschild was not a Zionist, but he was interested in sponsoring Jewish settlement in Palestine as an investment, and as an act of piety. He bought land from the Arab effendi (landowners), now and then using bribes to do so, and drove the fellahin off the land. They were then replaced by Jewish settlers. By 1900 he had subsidized over 350 families and 19 Jewish settlements and had established a Jewish agricultural school: altogether a population of around 5,000 and over 68,000 acres. Until he transferred the venture to the Jewish Colonization Association, led by Baron Maurice de Hirsch in 1900, Rothschild maintained strict control over his settlements, and several Jewish settlers soon took to employing Arabs as peasant farmers, in some cases treating them with hostility and cruelty, rather than working the land themselves.

By 1904, these early Jewish settlements were Jewish in name only, as almost all the labor was performed by Arab peasant workers. One observer noted that for every few dozen Jews, there appeared to be hundreds of Arabs. We should note that Rothschild was not the only wealthy Jew the Ottoman Sultan had allowed to purchase land for Jewish settlement in Palestine. Sir Moses Montefiore, a British Jew, was permitted to buy land as early as 1856, and the Belgian railroad magnate Baron Maurice de Hirsch, an associate of Rothschild, was another who poured millions of francs into Palestinian settlement schemes.

## SOCIALISM AND ZIONISM

The second *aliyah*, which began in 1904, was made up of many young Russian pioneers who were committed to a return to the land. Dismayed at the course which Zionist colonization had been taking, they attempted to reintroduce the idea of Jewish labor. They differed from the earlier settlers also in that the land they worked was purchased by the Jewish National Fund (established in 1901) and was deemed to be inalienable Jewish national property and thus protected from property speculation and the kinds of contracts imposed on the settlers by Rothschild. The new pioneers were also strongly influenced by socialist ideas and many belonged to the *Poalei-Zion*—

Socialist or Labor Zionist—party that was formed between 1903 and 1906. Among the leaders of this group were David Ben-Gurion and Izhak Ben-Zvi, and they introduced a spirit of enterprise in the settlements and also in the towns. This aliyah, for example, established the garden suburb of Tel Aviv on the outskirts of Jaffa in 1909. By 1914, it had a population of 2,000. In 1909, the first collective settlement, or *kibbutz*, Deganiah—the birthplace of Moshe Dayan—was established, and, in 1921, the first *moshav*, or cooperative village—an outgrowth of the *kibbutz*—was established.

Of the approximately 40,000 new immigrants who arrived between 1904 and the outbreak of World War I, a very large number left the country because of the inhospitable climate and conditions. Some estimate the figure of emigrants as high as 90 percent. By 1914, there were about forty Jewish settlements in Palestine, owning about 100,000 acres, but only about 4 percent of this land was owned by the Jewish National Fund. The population of Palestine at that time was over half a million (estimated to be 650,000); 85,000 (13%) were Jews, of whom about 12,000 belonged to *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*. About 5,000 Arabs worked on Jewish land. Between 1882 and 1914 more than 100,000 Jews had emigrated to the Holy Land, but only about 50,000 remained.

Many Zionists have explained the increase in Jewish settlement in Palestine as a reflection of the growing appeal and strength of Zionism. The difficulty with this explanation is that, despite the deep feeling of attachment to the land of Israel, which is such a distinctive feature of Jewish self-identity, the simple reality is that Jews did not move to the land of Zion, a land they prayed to be delivered to three times a day. This is the paradox of Zionism. Only about 1 percent of the almost 3 million Jews who emigrated from Russia in the thirty-five years following 1880 went to Palestine, and very few emigrated from Western Europe. Zionism was not the answer to the “Jewish question” for the great majority of Jews. This is largely because Zionism was not seen as a solution to the traditional Jewish problems of economic, political, social, religious, and racial oppression in Europe. Indeed, the Jewish experience in the United States, where so many settled, has proven a viable alternative to resettlement in Palestine. And despite the exceptions, in the period between 1815 and 1914, Jews had moved from the periphery to the center of European society; they had been great beneficiaries of the Enlightenment, Emancipation, and Industrial Revolution. From any conceivable point of view, the nineteenth century was the best century Jews had ever experienced, collectively and individually. The European Jewish population increased from 2 million at the end of the eighteenth century, to 7.5 million in 1880 and 13 million by 1914. This was twice the rate of population increase of non-Jews. The Jewish problem by the end of the nineteenth century was a new one: how could Jews and Christians define themselves in an emancipated and liberal secular environment where none of the traditional religious barriers existed?

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of the modern, secular liberal state in Europe, and increasingly Christians began to identify themselves in these secular and ethnic terms. Zionism was the Jewish answer to establishing this secular identity—a national state for Jews. It is sometimes called “secular messianism.” It was this nationalist dimension that transformed the passive, quietistic, and pious hope of the Return to Zion into an effective social force. Zionism, then, was not simply an assertion of the links of Jews to Palestine; nor was it just a reaction of a people to persecution. It was a quest for self-determination and liberation in a modern, secular, and liberal age. Zionism was also a recognition that it was futile, impossible, and pointless to try to fight anti-Semitism; Zionism was an escape from it. Looking back, especially at events in Nazi Germany, the fears of Zionists seem to have been reinforced beyond

all measure. Understanding Zionism in this way enables us to explain the role of Theodor Herzl.

## THEODOR HERZL AND THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL ZIONISM

Theodor Herzl, more than any other person, has become identified with the emergence of modern Zionism. His life (1860–1904) has acquired legendary proportions, his portrait one of the trademarks of Zionism, and the symbolism of charismatic leadership attached to his personality has become a powerful element in Zionism. In many ways this is strange, because few of Herzl’s ideas were new or original. He had no financial backing and no political support; indeed, many Jewish leaders saw him as an eccentric, irresponsible egotist. He was not a political extremist; in fact, his politics were conservative and reflected his middle-class background. But Herzl was incredibly successful in bringing ideas that were known only in Jewish communities to the attention of the world and into the general consciousness of the age. He transformed one solution to the plight of Jews into a major issue in world politics.

Herzl was born in Budapest where his father was a well-to-do merchant. When he was young, his family moved to Vienna where he graduated in law and became one of the most popular journalists of the liberal Viennese newspaper, the *Neue Freie Presse*. Herzl was a typical product of the emancipation of European Jewry, and as a journalist in Vienna, and from 1891 in Paris, he worried about the increasing ambiguity of the position of Jews in Europe, and the anti-Semitism that was so dramatically illustrated by the notorious Dreyfus Affair.

Alfred Dreyfus was a Jewish officer of the French General Staff who in 1894 was convicted of treason and sentenced to a life term on Devil’s Island. Herzl was one of many who believed that Dreyfus had been framed and the trial rigged. That this was the case emerged later with the confession in 1899 of one of the French officers involved, and the lifting of Dreyfus’s sentence, following a second retrial, in 1906. But Herzl, who covered the trial and public disgrace of Dreyfus for the *Neue Freie Presse*, was



Theodor Herzl with his mother.

shocked by the anti-Semitism the trial unleashed in France, the land of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. The Dreyfus Affair became the symbol of Jewish inequality and anti-Semitism in Europe and confirmed in Herzl's mind the belief that anti-Semitism was an incurable Gentile pathology. The only solution was for Jews to have a nation state of their own. Herzl set out this proposition in his book *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jews' State*), published in 1896. (See Document 1-3.)

An early theoretician of Zionism had been Moses Hess, a German Jew who in his youth was associated with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Hess, unlike Marx, maintained his Judaism and kept up the Yiddish he learned as a child. Hess wrote two works outlining his ideas for Jewish return to Palestine: *Rome and Jerusalem* (published in 1862) and *Plan for the Colonization of the Holy Land* (1867). However, Hess's books, which advocated the colonization of Palestine as a solution to the Jewish problem, were not considered seriously, as Western Jews felt settled in the countries in which they had lived for hundreds of years, and Eastern Jews were yet to experience the pogroms of twenty years later. Herzl, as noted above, had also been foreshadowed by Leo Pinsker. The word "Zionism" itself was probably first used in an article published in 1886 by Nathan Birnbaum. The term has come to mean the movement to reestablish a Jewish nation in Palestine, although for many years the more vague phrase "national home" was used.

The turning point in the history of Zionism came with the first Zionist Congress, which met in Basel (Switzerland) on August 29, 1897, with 204 delegates from all over the world. The assembly defined the objective of Zionism: "to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law." To achieve this goal the assembly resolved to promote systematically the settlement of Palestine with Jewish agriculturalists, artisans, and craftsmen; to organize all Jews and strengthen the national consciousness of Jews; and to seek the approval of whatever governments were necessary to achieve the goals of Zionism. (See Document 1-4.)

What is important to recognize about these goals is their vagueness or open-endedness. We must keep this in mind when we consider the response of Herzl and later Zionist leaders to offers that were made to them by various governments in subsequent years. Herzl was quite prepared, for example, to consider the British offer of the el-Arish region in the Sinai Peninsula made in 1902, and the offer in the following year of a territory in Kenya (the so-called Uganda Plan), although Russian Jews were not happy with these schemes. Cyprus had also been considered briefly in 1899. Nevertheless, however vague Herzl's Zionist vision, dependence upon a European power was prophetic of what later happened.

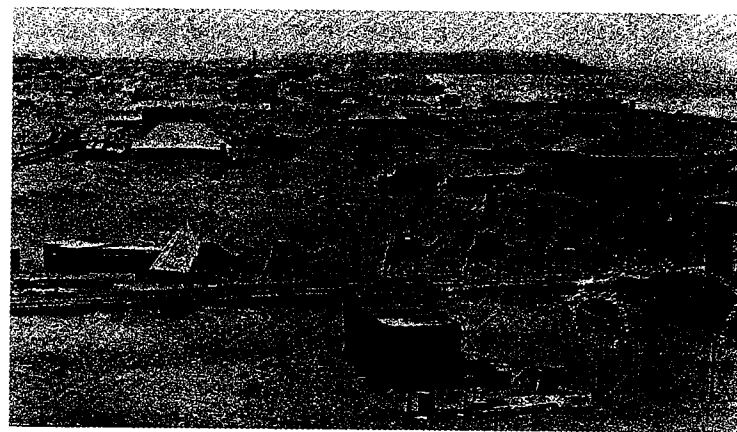
Although Herzl left open the specific location of the Jewish homeland, he had a clear idea of how to implement the plan. A Jewish company would be formed to purchase land and to organize the settlers, rather like the Rhodesian experience. Following the Basel Congress, the newly formed World Zionist Organization set out to build the financial and economic instruments and political structure to achieve these aims. In 1901, the Jewish National Fund was established for the purchase of land, and in 1908 the Palestine Land Development Company, linked to the Jewish National Fund, was also created to assist in the colonization. Herzl continued his efforts to gain international support for the plan, but he was unsuccessful in his negotiations with the Sultan Abdul-Hamid, with the German Kaiser, and, in October 1902, with British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain. Although a persuasive speaker and a striking figure of a man, Herzl was unable to gain the support he needed from Europe's political leaders, or within the Zionist organization he had done so much to create.

Herzl's political goals, for example, were not supported by all Zionist leaders. Asher Ginsberg, a Russian intellectual better known by his pen-name Ahad Ha-Am ("One of the People"), one of the most influential voices in the Zionist movement, feared the consequences of a purely political entity. He saw Zionism as a spiritual-cultural phenomenon, and envisaged the gradual building up of Palestine by only those committed to the task. Moreover, unlike some Zionists leaders who viewed Palestine as a "land without people for a people without land," Ahad Ha-Am recognized the Arab presence in Palestine, and, in an 1891 essay again attacking the "mere" political Zionism of Herzl, he warned against neglecting the Arab question.

## JEWS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY PALESTINE

The Jewish population of Palestine and Syria at the beginning of the nineteenth century totalled about 25,000. Most were *Sephardim*; that is, descendants of Spanish Jewry and ancient local families, and they were Ottoman subjects. The rest were *Ashkenazim*; that is, Jews of European origin who had come to the Holy Land throughout the centuries, and they retained their former citizenship. The Jews lived mostly in cities: about half of them in the four towns particularly holy to Jews—Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, and Tiberias, and half in the Syrian cities of Aleppo, Damascus, Beirut, and Tripoli. The Muslim-Ottoman state was organized on a system of self-governing groups (*millets*), and the Jewish communities were given a considerable degree of autonomy and self-government in matters of religious worship, education, and other areas, but overall the position of Jews was precarious. The Ottoman state was based on the principle of Muslim superiority, and the Jews, along with the Christians, were regarded as unbelievers and second-class citizens (*dhimmis*), and had to pay a special poll tax (*jizyah*) for the protection of the state, and as a sign of their inferior status.

Jews were subject to a number of discriminatory regulations. For example, their testimony against Muslims in a court of law was not accepted; they were normally not



Tel Aviv in 1921 with the Arab city of Jaffa in the background (Photo courtesy of the Israel Office of Information).

eligible for appointment to the highest administrative offices; they were forbidden to carry arms or to serve in the army; and they were often subjected to oppression, extortion, or violence by both the local authorities and the Muslim population. During the 1840s and 1850s the position of Jews in Palestine improved, however, This significant change in their religious, economic, and political conditions led to a considerable increase in the numbers of Palestinian Jews through immigration from Europe, and by the end of the century they had consolidated their position.

The improvement in the situation of Jews in Palestine coincided with the end of the decade of Egyptian rule of Palestine and Syria, which occurred between 1831 and 1840. The change was brought about partly because of reforms within the Ottoman Empire itself (the Tanzimat reform), which aimed at political and religious equality for all Ottoman subjects, and partly because of increasing indirect European involvement and intervention in the affairs of the Empire. Consular reports from the 1850s indicate, for example, that Jews obtained more redress from the local governors in Palestine and that the oppression of the Turkish governors almost completely ceased. Jews observed their religion without opposition, and they gradually obtained better treatment and more justice in the courts. Some European consulates, particularly the British, and to a lesser extent the Russian, Austrian, and Prussian, also intervened more actively on behalf of Jews of their nationalities.

### BRITISH AND RUSSIAN POLICY

The British Government in particular began showing an interest in the Jews of Palestine. This interest was both humanitarian and political. Even at this early stage, Viscount Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary, perceived the emerging Jewish national feeling for Palestine, and he hoped that he could gain the support of the Jewish community for British aims in the Middle East in return for British protection. During the 1850s, the Russian government also assisted Russian and Polish Jews in Palestine and even allowed Jewish emigrants to travel cheaply in Russian ships that were sailing from Odessa to Palestine. Not surprisingly, the number of Jews emigrating from Europe, especially from Russia, dramatically increased during these decades. Thus, the Jewish population of Jerusalem increased from around 5,000 in 1839 to about 10,000 by the late 1850s. Of course, European protection of Jews was not comprehensive because most Jews in Palestine were Ottoman subjects, and sometimes foreign protection was a liability rather than an asset, because such Jews were regarded as collaborating with foreign powers.

In the final analysis, the welfare of local Jews was dependent upon the attitudes of the local Ottoman authorities and the Muslim population, and during the second half of the nineteenth century the attitudes of both these groups toward Jews underwent a gradual improvement because of the new generation of more liberal pashas. The Jews of Palestine also made an effort to live independently of assistance from Europe, making their living as artisans, craftsmen, and agricultural workers. At the same time, Western European Jews were becoming increasingly aware of the depressed condition of their brethren in Eastern Europe and they increased the level of their aid. The improved Muslim-Jewish relations provided the Jews of Palestine the opportunity to consolidate their position, to advance socially and economically, and, perhaps even more importantly, to increase considerably in number through immigration from Europe, and to become an important element in the country.

### PALESTINE ON THE EVE OF WORLD WAR I

By the outbreak of World War I the Jewish community (*Yishuv*) numbered about 90,000 people, or about 12 to 14 percent of the total population of Palestine. This represented a higher proportion of Jews than in any other country, and in some sanjaks, like that of Jerusalem, they represented about 25 percent of the population. Jewish population figures in the major centers were as follows: 45,000 out of 80,000 in Jerusalem; 5,000 out of 8,000 in Tiberias; 7,000 out of 15,000 in Safed; 12,000 out of 50,000 in Jaffa; and 3,000 out of 20,000 in Haifa. The Jewish community presented a strange paradox, however. It constituted the center of traditional Judaism and of the Jewish national movement; but at the same time it was the most divided Jewish community in the world. Not only did it fail to establish an organization uniting the Jewish population of the country as a whole, but it also had great difficulty in unifying individual local communities.

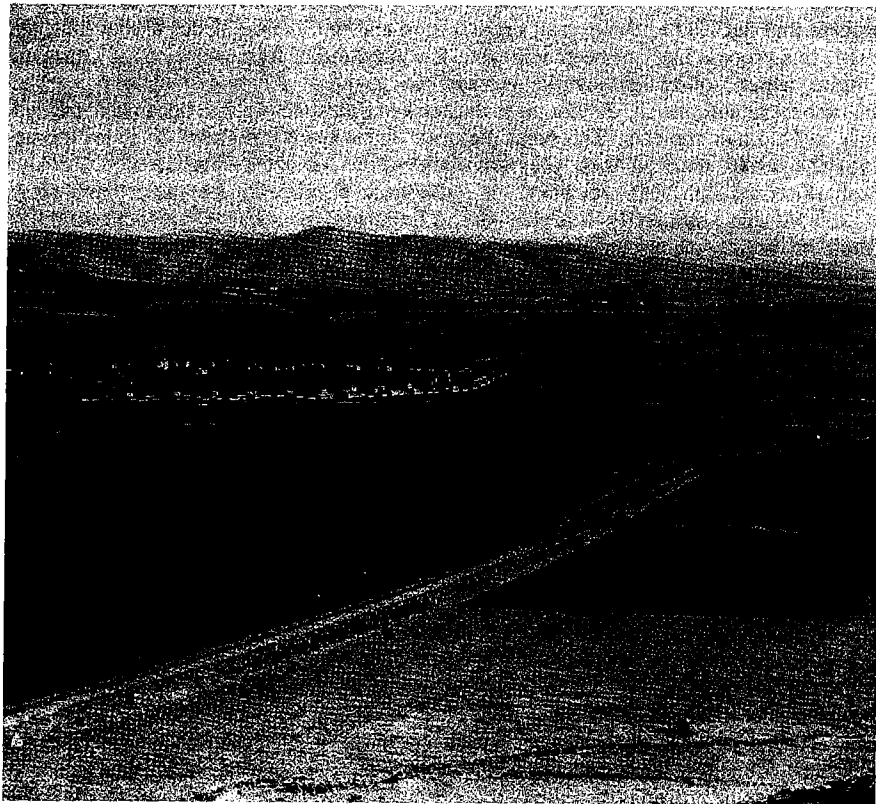
Internal divisions before 1914 were so deeply entrenched in the social character of the *Yishuv* that even "practical" Zionists, those determined to establish a modern title to Palestine through Jewish economic enterprise and colonization, were unable to achieve much success. Events in the Ottoman Empire after 1908 set in motion a process that did lead to the overall organization and unification of the *Yishuv* but, by 1914, this process had not been achieved. Even the millet framework of the Ottoman Empire, which, following the millet law of 1865, granted fairly wide judicial powers to the rabbinical authorities, did not unite the Jews of Palestine—again because it applied only to Ottoman subjects. The great majority of Jews who migrated to Palestine up until the 1880s retained their previous nationalities, and the division between the Sephardic (non-European) Jews and the Ashkenazic (European) Jews kept them apart organizationally, ethnically, liturgically, and linguistically. Attachment to a particular ethnic or national community was stronger for most Jews than attachment to the *Yishuv* as a whole.

The new settlements of the early 1880s—the "new" *Yishuv*—carried with them the idea of national unity, but they lacked cohesion from the very beginning. They were not the result of a comprehensive organization or program, but were founded by various associations and individuals who lacked a practical economic plan. Nor did they consider the relationships that should exist among the new settlements and the existing Jewish communities, the local population, or the government. Indeed, the early groups did little beyond purchasing land and setting up newly formed settlements. They did not seek Ottoman citizenship, but, as in the case of one of the first such settlements, Rosh Pina, instead sought to establish separate Jewish settlements adjacent to existing Arab communities under the protection of the European consuls.

While there was contact between the existing Jewish community and the new settlers, there was little sign of communal unity before 1908, although some young intellectuals, merchants, and professionals did form groups such as *Bnei Israel* and *Bnei Yehuda* to overcome communal divisions. The *Hibbat Zion* movement attempted without much success to unite the various national communities. The conflict was based on ideological and practical differences between the old and new *Yishuv*. The new settlers regarded the existing Jewish community as nonproductive, living off *halukkah* (donations from Jews abroad). The older community, which comprised a large number of artisans, unskilled laborers, small shopkeepers, and Talmudic scholars, did live a rather precarious life. Nevertheless, they resisted attempts to change their traditional ways. Some of the new *Yishuv* also moved into the cities, but where

they did so, in towns like Jaffa and Haifa, they took up trades and commerce so as to be independent of overseas support. The Young Turk revolution in 1908 highlighted the divisions between the old and new Yishuvim. The older Sephardic intelligentsia and leadership saw the revolution as leading to Jewish development within the Ottoman Empire. The new Yishuv and "practical" Zionists, on the other hand, believed that little could be achieved through negotiations with Constantinople and stressed the importance of strengthening the Yishuv in Palestine, independently of Constantinople.

There was little unified Arab opposition to Jewish immigration and land purchases in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ottoman officials and large landowners in the north seemed willing to ignore regulations restricting Jewish immigration and land sales. Local authorities frequently allowed Jewish land purchases in return for financial favors. Initial Arab peasant opposition subsided when the peasants realized that Jewish landowners would maintain the tradition of permitting them to work the land and keep their income. Interestingly, public opposition to Zionist settlement was led by the Greek Orthodox Christians of Palestine. The editors of the two newspapers most vociferous in their hostility to Jewish settlement and exclusiveness, *al-Karmal* (established in 1908) and *Filastin* (1911), were both Greek Orthodox.



Jewish settlement in early twentieth century, Palestine (Photo courtesy of The Library of Congress).

We can see then that at the outbreak of World War I Palestine was at a critical juncture as far as relations between Palestinian Arabs and Jews were concerned. There was, on the one hand, a rapidly increasing Jewish population with very different attitudes and aspirations from the traditional Jewish population both with regard to the future of the land itself and the existing Arab population. And, on the other hand, there was an Arab population experiencing dramatic changes as the result of the actions of their own leaders, as well as those of the Jewish arrivals and their supporters overseas. Not only was some of the Arab land they worked on being sold to Jewish settlers, but Palestine was being slowly but surely integrated into the European world economy. This was bringing with it changes in the traditional methods of agriculture, and in the government and administration of their lives. The region was also being drawn into the diplomatic vortex of the world powers; all this was to change Palestine in ways no one could have foreseen in 1914.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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