

## France, Western Europe and Palestine 1799-1917

November 9-11,1998

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**FRANCE, WESTERN EUROPE AND PALESTINE 1799-1917**

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Organized by the Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem, the “**France, Western Europe and Palestine 1799-1917**” conference was the first concrete outcome of the *Gallia Palestina* project. This encounter demonstrated that beyond apparently well-known points, the unexplored areas of analysis remain enormous. This observation was made possible through the contributions of speakers, participants and the public from France, Israel and the Palestinian autonomous area. This diversity multiplied perspectives: the presence of representatives from different fields enabled the conference to cover a maximum number of angles (with specialists in economic and military history, geographers, anthropologists, jurists, archeologists, archivists, clergymen, diplomats,etc.). This scope was intended to reflect the scholarship of Professor Jean-Marie Delmaire, to whom the conference was dedicated.

After the introductory address by Stanislas de Laboulaye, Consul General of France in Jerusalem, who stressed the past and present specificity of the role of France in the Holy City, Dominique Bourel emphasized one of the main roles of the conference; namely, to fill a gap: research on the role of France in the region, since other countries are studied more extensively. Hence the call for joint projects as of now.

An overall approach, conducted by Roger Heacock, places Palestine in the framework of the international relations of the time. Palestine was first a peripheral region of the Ottoman Empire, and then progressively became the pawn of growing rivalry between powers. To illustrate this feature, Haim Goren, who highlighted the need to convey knowledge by translating research, took the example of the Catholic and German perspective, with the rise of

institutionalism and nationalism that coincided with the visit of Wilhelm II to Palestine. The German point of view was also presented by Shlomo Shpiro, who discussed the role of the intelligence service in the region. Here again there was institutionalism with the early establishment of a network of agents. However, the German-Ottoman alliance, beyond the myths, remained deficient and led to its defeat in World War I.

Palestine was also a zone of mutual understanding, as was shown by Yigal Sheffy. This was the case for Franco-British cooperation in the intelligence arena. It led to the victory of modern technology and was particularly impressive in the innovative area of joint airborne units. Sheffy expressed his regret that on the research level in intelligence matters France was not enough represented.

The Monday afternoon session dealt with perceptions of the actors in Palestine. Ruth Klark described the first Protestant kibbutz, the *American-Swedish Colony*, with its communal and millenium orientations, concerns very similar to some current ones. Rina Cohen-Muller studied the four first consuls of France in Jerusalem. In contrast to their Prussian counterparts, they were not necessarily Orientalists. They applied the policy of the French Catholic protectorate strictly, became the covert advisors of the Ottoman governor and were not affected by the upheavals in the capital. I described the intertwining of politics and religion through the specific example of the awarding of the custody of the Abu Gosh basilica to the French Benedictines. This was one instance where religion put itself in the service of politics and politics directly served religion in a context of rising international competition.

Another facet of the European presence in Palestine: the economic and social features, which were the topic of the morning of November 10. During the period which Ran Aaronsohn terms the “end of the Middle Ages” the great powers used the economy to impose themselves. This was the case for the hospital network, described by Norbert Schwake, which became disproportionate compared to real needs. This raised the issue of the gratuity and humanitarianism of these institutions. Countries were also represented by individuals, in particular by merchants and Frédérique Schillo described the French component. Her detailed study of a numerically small group demonstrates the utility of these people to the French consular representatives. The official intent is clearer in the case of the Crédit Lyonnais of Jerusalem, with, according to Jacques Thobie, its problematic task of combining political imperatives with good management. The problems of the Jerusalem branch seem to mirror those of France in the region, as its clients illustrate the variety and the difficulties of institutions in Palestine.

Cultural and legal means emerge as another mode of action used by

European powers in Palestine. In the case of France, this can be seen in its archeological activities, whose history was outlined first by Father Jean-Michel de Tarragon. He presented a collection of little-known photographs from Notre-Dame de France, pictures of daily life that take on greater importance with the passing years and create problems of restoration and dating. This promising collection prompted discussions on its best use, as is the case for similar series. Gabriel Barkay, who inventories the activities and the figures involved in French archeology in Palestine, highlighted the vast differences in quality, but also the innovative and long-lasting contribution of Charles Clermont-Ganneau.

Two other features of the French presence were then explored. The first was codification of the status of protected institutions, presented by Moussa Abou-Ramadan. The Mytilene agreement (1901) and the Treaty of Constantinople (1913) were indicative of French will to implement the current, but debated, validity of these texts. France also tried to place itself in the forefront of the enormous pilgrimage enterprise. Catherine Nicault pointed out that these journeys are not well known and can be researched from many angles. She stressed that codification became rigid over time, when the Consul of France in Jerusalem attributed increasing importance to it. The focus of foreign policy as much as domestic policy, these pilgrimages gave rise to an idealized vision of France and marked a truce between the Catholic and anticlerical camps.

During the third day, two papers dealt with Judaism and one of its political outgrowths – the colonization in Palestine. Yoram Mayorek analyzed the figure of Emile Meyerson, the philosopher turned director-general of the Jewish Colonization Association: a commitment which enabled him to apply his ideas concerning the selection of “human material” (an idea adopted later by the Zionists). Esther Benbassa dealt with the concerns of Alliance Israelite Universelle in Constantinople, where a Francophile, pedagogical attitude clashed with the momentary German Zionist and *Hilfsverein* camp. This conflict illustrates the contradictions or the dialectical relationships between two conceptions of the Jewish question.

The relationships with the Powers was also affected by a community which had been neglected in the discussions up to this time; namely, the Moslem sector which appears in the paper presented by Qustandi Shomali concerning the Arab press. According to Shomali, the conflict with the West, a dominant feature at that time, is characteristic of a renaissance of the local culture with the rise of nationalistic feeling. Cultural and political poles developed later with the gradual awareness of international focus on Jerusalem. This greater interest is also shown by the arrival of a new presence in Jerusalem: Protestant Germany. Thorsten Prine explains that Germany, in the country since the 1840s, purchased the Muristan, a plot of land disputed over by several communities.

The German community was able to settle there and build a church very close to St. Sepulchre. It was able to exhibit its splendor during the visit of Wilhelm II in October-November 1898.

Political-religious interest was stressed during the last afternoon, devoted to Catholicism. Thomas Stransky laid the groundwork for this correlation by his examination of the decade between 1840-1850. Claude Langlois studied the case of the French communities with their extremely early feminist avant-garde, followed later by a massive rise in French institutions. This prompted him to question the motivations for this phenomenon, stressing that Palestine remained in fact a secondary mission site. The patron Amédée de Piellat, who was instrumental and provided assistance to these communities, was described by Zvi Schilony. A classic representative of a certain France, it was in the name of France, technique, and art that he worked and profoundly changed the landscape of the City.

Catholicism in Palestine also involved Vatican policy. In a very lively paper, Sergio Minerbi stressed the contradictions involved. The Vatican slowly distanced itself from affairs in Palestine, and played on the rivalry between Catholic powers. Morally under the French Protectorate, the Vatican still made use of this, even when ties were broken with Paris. Although World War I and its aftermath hinted at an internationalization which would have given it the lion's share, the failure of the Sykes-Picot agreement gave precedence to what it had at first ignored: the establishment of a Jewish national homeland. This led S. Minerbi to put forward an iconoclastic conclusion: Wouldn't the Vatican have preferred the maintenance the Ottoman Empire, which would have preserved its power?

The closing remarks were delivered by the Ambassador of France to Israel, Jean-Noel de Bouillane de Lacoste. In his view, the European powers have apparently learned at least one lesson from the rivalries of the past: for the moment they present a united front in the region. For the participants, this is the point of departure for new research.

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