

UNEARTHING OTTOMAN PALESTINE

Late Ottoman Palestine: The Period of the Young Turk Rule. Edited by Yuval Ben-Bassat and Eyal Ginio. London: I.B. Tauris. vi + 278 pages. Bibliography to 298. Index to 310. \$99.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Dana Sajdi

This collection brings together thirteen essays by established senior Ottomanists such as Butrus Abu-Manneh and younger scholars of Palestine such as Johann Büssow and Michelle Campos. The chapters cover various aspects of late Ottoman Palestine in the years between the Young Turk Revolt of 1908 and the final dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I.

The topics covered include the purely political, such as elections to the recently reestablished Ottoman parliament (in relation to Jerusalem and Nablus) and the discussions of Zionism in a 1911 parliamentary session; the administrative, such as public works project proposals by the Ottoman government and the reorganization of ecclesiastical and minority communities in Jerusalem; the journalistic-literary, such as Arab-Ottomanists' dismay with the Young Turks, the concerns of the Jewish press (in the various languages and locations in the empire), and Ottoman Sephardi Zionists' unique views; the social-cultural, such as the emergence of the concept of childhood in Palestine; and even Baha'i responses to the Young Turk Revolt. However, it is not so much the topics per se that make this book important but the variety of voices it allows. Precisely because of its unearthing of voices that had been buried by dominant nationalist narratives, this book is a poignant reminder of the fluidity of identities at a time when empire was being definitively transformed

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into nation(s), and the kind of nationalisms that could have consequently evolved.

The Young Turk period represents a pivotal point when nationalist sentiments on both the Arab and the Turkish sides were slowly crystallizing, partly in opposition to one another. At the same time, what the Zionists call the second *aliyah* (the second wave of Jewish colonial settlers) to Palestine was underway, with its particular ideological injection of the principles of Jewish labor and conquest of the land, which in turn created a particular brand of Zionism that resulted in the definitive exclusion of Palestinian Arabs, with repercussions for Ottoman Jewry. This short period is critical, and the editors of the book, Ginio and Ben-Bassat, have done well to put together a collection that successfully portrays these decisive years in vivid color and detail.

In the essays, we hear the voices of people such as Sa'ïd Abu Khadra, a Palestinian who contended for a seat in the Ottoman parliament, referring to the "homeland" as variously "Jerusalem . . . Palestine . . . and [the Ottoman] Empire as a whole" (p. 27) (and being endorsed by the nationalist newspaper *Filastin* p. 44). We also hear Nissim Malul, an Arabic-speaking Zionist, calling on all Jews to learn Arabic to create "a Semitic nationalism and not blur it with European culture" (p. 170), while his anti-Zionist co-religionist, David Fresko, called on Jews to "assimilate, learn Turkish, and openly display patriotism" in the pages of his Ladino-language newspaper, *El Tiempo* (p. 253). We hear voices such as that of Sa'ïd al-Husayni, a Palestinian parliamentarian, extolling the virtues of the *yishuv* in Palestine while opposing more Jewish immigration thereto and stressing that his position was not "anti-Semitic but merely anti-Zionist" (pp. 111–12); and Moiz Kohen, an Ottoman Jew, getting increasingly frustrated with anti-Semitic reactions to Zionism while actually being "a fierce enemy of Jewish nationalism" (pp. 109–10). We likewise hear Khalil al-Sakakini, the famous Palestinian educator, declaring himself to be a "patriot" only insofar as he was engaged in the betterment of his surroundings, "whether they are American, British,

Ottoman or African, whether they are Christian, Muslim or pagan" (p. 138). To my mind, these now-unorthodox, even unthinkable multivalent voices are the most valuable takeaway from the book. Inasmuch as one is interested in critiques of nationalism, this book helps one imagine what could have and perhaps should have been.

While the introduction to the collection could have offered tighter thematic leads (e.g., the theme and title "Civilizing Mission' and the Center-Periphery Relationships" does not really speak to the chapters therein), and as in any other edited book, the essays vary in quality, the volume is nevertheless an excellent starting point for students of Ottoman Palestine, Ottoman Jewry, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (PhD candidates, take note!). The variety of primary sources, in terms of both language—Arabic, Ottoman, Hebrew, Ladino, French, English—and form, such as archives, newspapers, official documents, letters, and memoirs, which are conveniently collated in one place (pp. 279–83), offers the reader an essential preparatory guide to the field of Ottoman Palestine, where different peoples and ideologies did once find a home, even if uncomfortably.