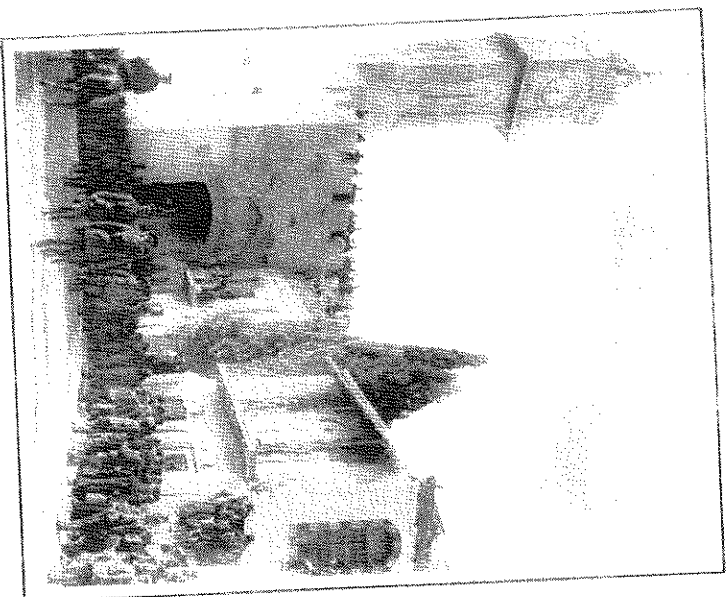


A L S O B Y T O M S E G E Y

The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust
1949: The First Israelis
Soldiers of Evil

O N E

P A L E S T I N E ,
C O M P L E T E



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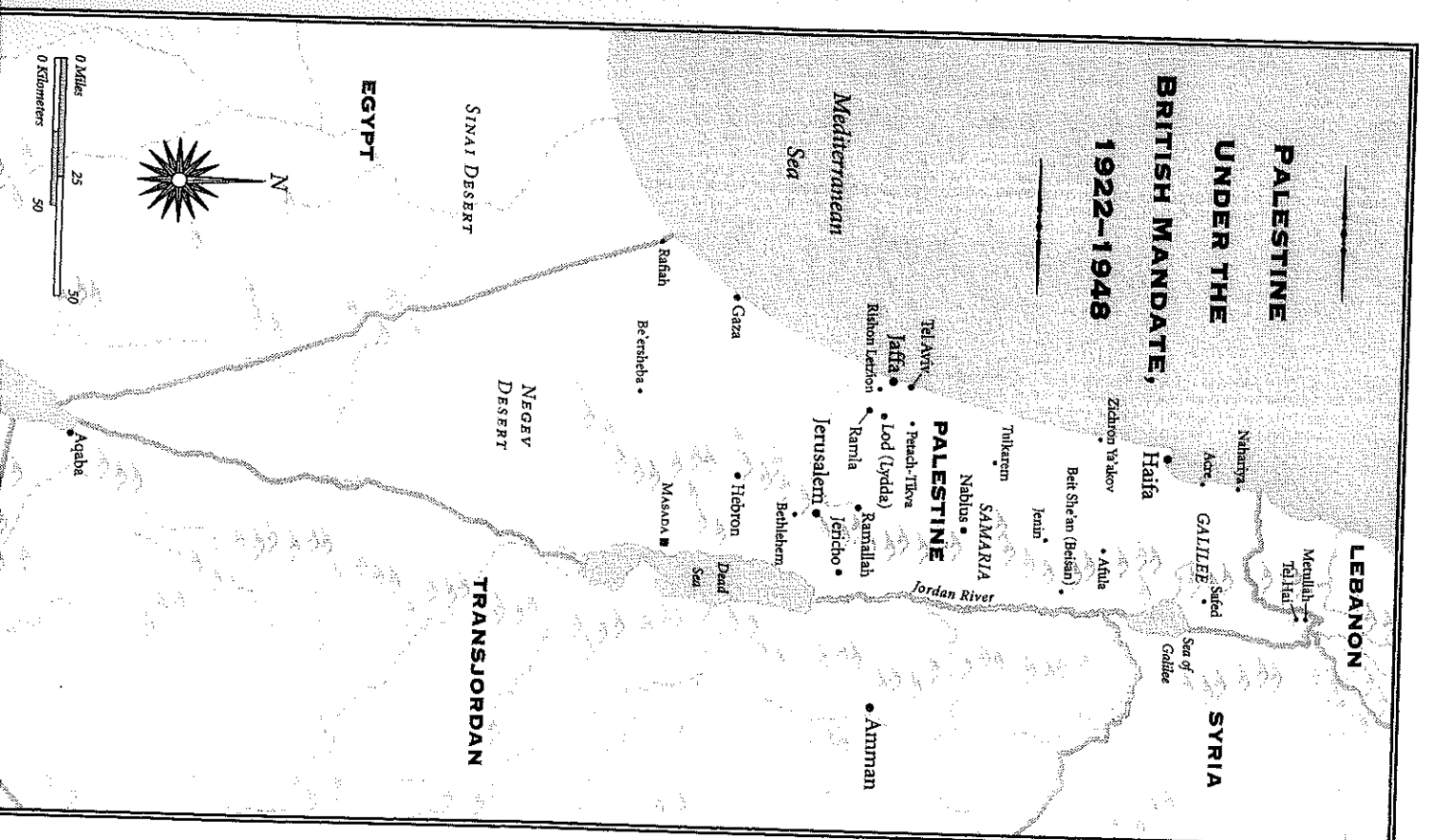
ONE PALESTINE, COMPLETE

*Jews and Arabs Under
the British Mandate*

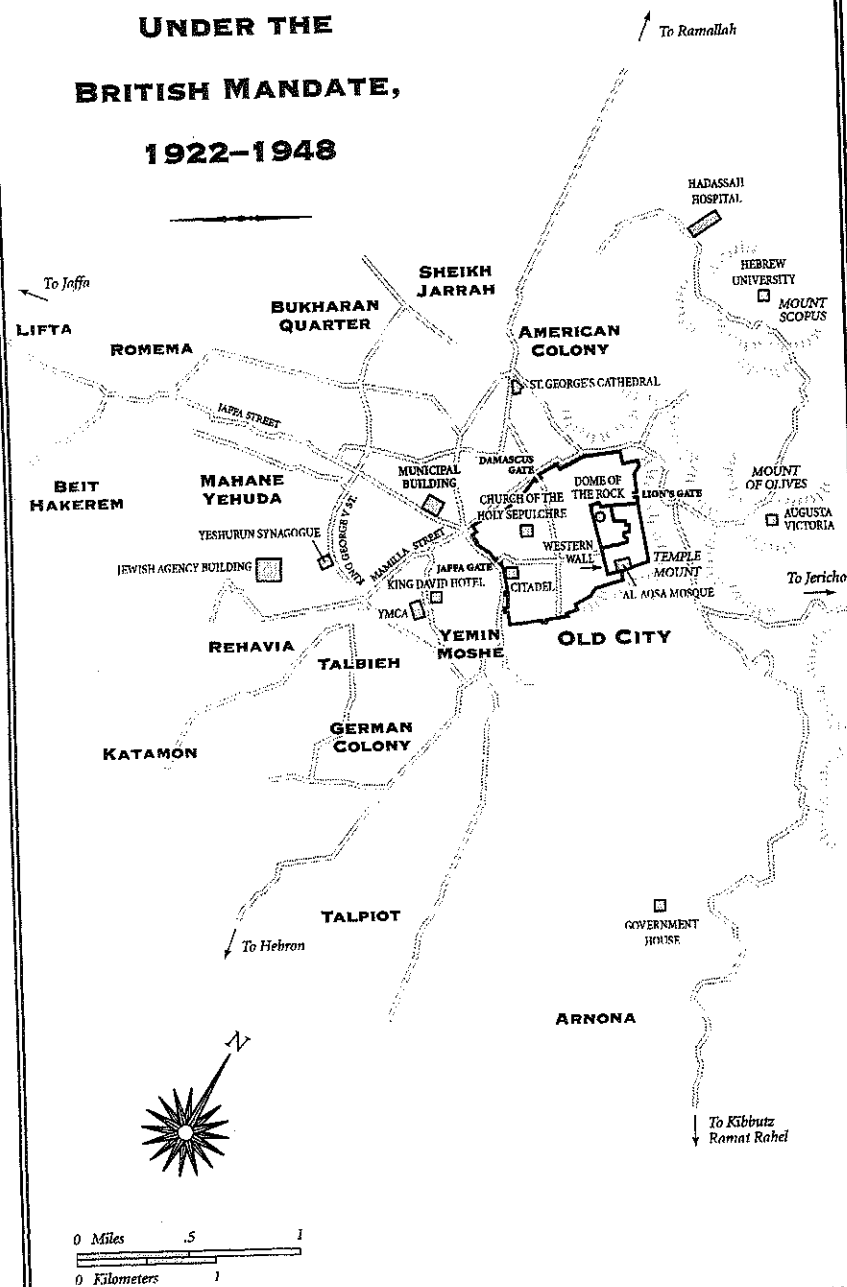
TOM SEGGEV

TRANSLATED BY HAIM WATZMAN

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**JERUSALEM
UNDER THE
BRITISH MANDATE,
1922-1948**



*Introduction:
Until We Meet Again*

On the southern slopes of Mount Zion, alongside the ruins of biblical Jerusalem, lies a small Protestant cemetery. The path to it wends through pines and cypresses, olive and lemon trees, oleander bushes in pink and white, leading to a black iron gate around which curls an elegant grapevine. Perhaps a thousand graves are scattered over the terraced hill; ancient stones peer out from among red anemones. Not far away, on the top of the mountain, is a site Jews revere as the grave of King David as well as a room in which Catholics say the Last Supper was held; in a nearby basement chamber, they believe, eternal sleep fell over Mary, mother of Jesus. The Muslims have also sanctified several tombs on the mountain.

Bishop Samuel Gobat consecrated the cemetery in the 1840s to serve a small community of men and women who loved Jerusalem. Few had been born in the city; the great majority came as foreigners, from almost everywhere between America and New Zealand. Engraved on their headstones are epitaphs in English and German, Hebrew, Arabic, and ancient Greek; one headstone is in Polish.¹

When the first of the dead were interred here, Palestine was a rather remote region of the Ottoman Empire with no central government of its own and few accepted norms. Life proceeded slowly, at a pace set by the stride of the camel and the reins of tradition. Outsiders began to flock to the country toward the end of the century, and it was not until the

from its Levantine stupor. Muslims, Jews, or Christians, a powerful religious and emotional force drew them to the land of Israel. Some stayed only a short time, while others settled permanently. Together they created a magical brew of prophecy and illusion, entrepreneurship, pioneerism, and adventurism—a multicultural revolution that lasted almost a hundred years. The line separating fantasy and deed was often blurred—there were charlatans and eccentrics of all nationalities—but for the most part this period was marked by drive and daring, the audacity to do things for the first time. For a while the new arrivals were intoxicated by a collective delusion that everything was possible.

An American brought the first automobile—that was in 1908. He traveled the length and breadth of the country and created a sensation. A Dutch journalist arrived in the Galilee, dreaming of teaching its inhabitants Esperanto. A Jewish educator from Romania opened a nursery school in Rishon LeTzion, a tiny experimental Zionist settlement, and was among the editors of the first Hebrew children's newspaper. Someone began making ice cream—that was Simcha Whitman, who also built the first kiosk in Tel Aviv. A man named Abba Cohen established a fire department, and a Berlin-born entrepreneur built the first beehives. A Ukrainian conductor founded a local opera company, and an Antwerp businessman set up a diamond-polishing shop. A Russian agronomist who had studied in Zurich planted eucalyptus trees, and an industrialist from Vilna launched Barzelit, the first nail factory. A Russian physician, Dr. Aryeh Leo Boehm, set up the Pasteur Institute, and a man named Smiatitzki, who came from Poland, translated *Alice in Wonderland* into Hebrew.² George Antonius, a prominent Palestinian Arab, dreamed of an Arab university and in the meantime sought funds to support the publication of an Arab dictionary of technological terms.³ Antonius had come to Jerusalem from Alexandria, Egypt. Others of the country's Arabs had come from Turkey and Morocco, from Persia and Afghanistan, and from half a dozen other countries; there were also former black slaves who had escaped from their masters, or who had been freed.⁴

Tens of thousands of people, most of them Jews, came from Eastern and Central Europe. Among them were courageous rebels searching for a new identity, under the influence of Zionist ideology. Others had fled persecution or poverty; most came unwillingly, as refugees. A. D. Gordon, a white-bearded farmer-preacher, a kind of local Tolstoy, proclaimed a gospel of manual labor and return to nature in the Galilee. He had come from the Ukraine and was one of the fathers of labor Zionism, the politi-

cal movement that led the Jews to independence. A young woman, fanatic and mad, galloped over the Galilee mountains dressed in Arab garb; her name was Manya Wilbushewitz. She came from Russia, where, in great spiritual turmoil, she had pledged her soul to the Communist revolution. In Palestine she was among the founders of a communal farm, an early incarnation of the kibbutz, and one of the first members of HaShomer, a forerunner of the Israel Defense Forces.⁵ Some Jewish immigrants embarked on new lives in the first Zionist agricultural villages; others decided to build themselves a new city on the Mediterranean shore. It was called Tel Aviv.

The Christians, for their part, brought with them the imperial aspirations of their native lands; they were drawn largely to Jerusalem. "And so Palestine, and particularly Jerusalem, became a veritable Tower of Babel," remarked Chaim Weizmann, who led the Zionist movement.⁶ Indeed, the Christians all tried to mold the city in their spirit and in their image, as if it were an international sandbox. The Russians covered their church with onion domes, like the Kremlin in Moscow; the Italians built a hospital and next to it erected the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. On Mount Zion, the Germans built a church inspired by the cathedral in Aachen, Charles the Great's capital. The German Colony in the southern part of the city looked like a Black Forest town—a few dozen small stone houses with red-shingled roofs, inhabited by a community that was largely made up of members of the Templar sect. "Odd people are safe in Palestine," wrote Estelle Blyth, the daughter of the man who built the Anglican cathedral in Jerusalem, a structure inspired by Oxford's New College.⁷ A lawyer from Chicago settled not far from there. He and the members of his sect established the American Colony, and dreamed of spreading love, compassion, and peace throughout the world.⁸

The founding fathers of the American Colony are also buried in Bishop Gobat's little cemetery. Not far from them lies the son of a German banker who financed the first rail link between Jaffa and Jerusalem. The grave of a Polish doctor is nearby. He opened the first children's hospital, on the Street of the Prophets. On that same street, Conrad Schick, buried next to the doctor, constructed houses that made his reputation as the greatest builder of modern Jerusalem. In his native Switzerland Schick had built cuckoo clocks. On a higher terrace lies an Englishman, William Matthew Flinders Petrie, considered by some the father of modern archaeology. He did much work in Egypt and excavated in Palestine as well. In his old age he settled in Jerusalem, dying at nearly ninety. Before

his burial, his widow had his head severed from his body. The head was placed in a jar and covered with formaldehyde, and after being packed in a wooden crate was sent to London for a pathological examination meant to discover the secret of the late man's genius.*

In the Protestant cemetery lie the many foreigners who fell for Palestine, among them soldiers who fought in the strife-torn decades of the Mandate period. Enemies and comrades-in-arms are buried side by side. Adolf Flohl, a German pilot during World War I, had come to join in the defense of his country's ally, the Ottoman Turks. He was shot down and killed in mid-November 1917, less than four weeks before the British victors marched into Jerusalem and took control of Palestine. Not far from Flohl lies Sergeant N. E. T. Knight, an English policeman. He was killed in April 1948, less than four weeks before the British left Palestine. Together they frame an era of promise and terror.

The Great War that shoved Europe into the twentieth century changed the status of Palestine as well. For more than seven hundred years the land had been under Muslim rule. In 1917, as part of the British push into the Middle East, it passed into Christian hands; indeed, many of the conquering British soldiers compared themselves to the Crusaders. However, even as the British took control of Palestine the tide was going out on their empire; when they left the country thirty years later Britain had just lost India, the jewel in the crown. Palestine was little more than an epilogue to a story that was coming to an end. In the history of empire, then, Palestine was an episode devoid of glory.¹⁰

It was an odd story from the start. Altogether, the British seemed to have lost their bearings in this adventure. They derived no economic benefit from their rule over Palestine. On the contrary, its financial cost led them from time to time to consider leaving the country. Occupying Palestine brought them no strategic benefit either, despite their assumptions that it did. Many top army officers maintained that Palestine contributed nothing to the imperial interest, and there were those who warned that rule over the country was liable to weaken the British. There were early

signs that they were getting themselves into a political problem that had no solution. These were reason enough not to take over the country. But the Holy Land elicited a special response; its status was not determined by geopolitical advantage alone. "Palestine for most of us was an emotion rather than a reality," one official in the British administration commented.¹¹

At first, the British were received as an army of liberation. Both Arabs and Jews wished for independence and assumed they would win it under British sponsorship. Confusion, ambiguity, and disappointment were present at the very beginning. Before setting out to war in Palestine, the British had gotten themselves tangled up in an evasive and amateurish correspondence with the Arabs, who believed that in exchange for supporting the British against the Turks, they would receive Palestine. Just before the conquest of the country, however, His Majesty's Government announced, in the famous words of the Balfour Declaration, that it "views with favour" the aspiration of the Zionist Jews to establish a "national home" for the Jewish people in Palestine. For all practical purposes, the British had promised the Zionists that they would establish a Jewish state in Palestine. The Promised Land had, by the stroke of a pen, become twice-promised. Although the British took possession of "one Palestine, complete," as noted in the receipt signed by the high commissioner, Palestine was riven, even before His Majesty's Government settled in.

The British kept their promise to the Zionists. They opened up the country to mass Jewish immigration; by 1948, the Jewish population had increased by more than tenfold. The Jews were permitted to purchase land, develop agriculture, and establish industries and banks. The British allowed them to set up hundreds of new settlements, including several towns. They created a school system and an army; they had a political leadership and elected institutions; and with the help of all these they in the end defeated the Arabs, all under British sponsorship, all in the wake of that promise of 1917. Contrary to the widely held belief of Britain's pro-Arabism, British actions considerably favored the Zionist enterprise.

In standing by the Zionist movement, the British believed they were winning the support of a strong and influential ally. This was an echo of the notion that the Jews turned the wheels of history, a uniquely modern blend of classical antisemitic preconceptions and romantic veneration of the Holy Land and its people. In fact, the Jewish people were helpless; they had nothing to offer, no influence other than this myth of clandestine power.

*Israeli writer Meron Benvenisti relates that when the crate reached London there was no one to identify it and that it was lost in the huge basement of the British Museum. "Flinders Petrie's head," Benvenisti wrote, "thus lies in the most fitting location—among the treasures of the past that he excavated and studied." This legend is so captivating, so quintessentially Jerusalem in its bizarre eccentricity, that one hesitates to touch it, lest it be revealed as mere

The British pretended, and perhaps some of them even believed, that the establishment of a national home for the Jews could be carried out without hurting the Arabs. But, of course, that was impossible. The truth is that two competing national movements consolidated their identity in Palestine and advanced steadily toward confrontation. "To be a Palestine nationalist hardly left any room for compromise with Jewish nationalism and its backer, the Western powers," wrote historian Isa Khafaf.¹² From the start there were, then, only two possibilities: that the Arabs defeat the Zionists or that the Zionists defeat the Arabs. War between the two was inevitable.

And Britain was caught in the middle. High Commissioner Arthur Wauchope compared himself to a circus performer trying to ride two horses at the same time. Of these two horses, he said, one cannot go fast and the other would not go slow.¹³ For a time the British clutched at the hope of creating a single local identity in Palestine, common to both Jews and Arabs, and in this context they even spoke of the "people of Palestine." These were empty words. The British were fooling the Arabs, fooling the Jews, and fooling themselves, Chaim Weizmann once commented. He was right.¹⁴ It is a fascinating story, but not always a laudable one. As with national revolutions elsewhere, both peoples in Palestine tended to put nationalism above democracy and human rights. The leader of the Arab national movement even made common cause with Adolf Hitler.

Twenty years after the British conquest, the Arabs rose up to throw them out. By 1939, the Arab rebellion had brought the British to the verge of a decision to go home. It would have been better for them had they left then, but it took them nearly ten more years to act. In the meantime, World War II broke out, and after the war British forces were hit by Jewish terrorism as well. Thousands of them paid for the adventure with their lives.

Indeed, most of those interred in the back plots of Bishop Gobat's cemetery were killed in the outbreaks of violence that were regular features of the thirty years of British rule. Lewis Andrews is buried there; he was murdered by Arab terrorists. Not far from him lies Thomas Wilkin; he was killed by Jewish terrorists. Andrews, a forty-one-year-old Australian, was assistant to the district commissioner of the Galilee. In September 1937 he came to Sunday evensong at the Anglican church in Nazareth. Four pistol-wielding Arabs ambushed him near the church. They fired nine shots and killed him on the spot; the policeman who

Andrews was a friend of the Zionists. Judge Anwar Nusseibeh described him as an Arab hater. The circumstances of Andrews's death, on the way to church, elicited from Nusseibeh this comment: "He met his creator at a time when he was in the process of seeking him."¹⁵ Thomas James Wilkin was a member of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Palestine police; he was killed in 1944 for his part in the arrest and death of "Yair," the leader of an underground Jewish terrorist organization. Wilkin did not hate all the Jews, however. Among those in his funeral procession was Shoshana Borochoy, the daughter of one of the founders of Jewish socialism in Russia. She and Wilkin were lovers.¹⁶

Looking out from Bishop Gobat's cemetery on Mount Zion over the Hill of Evil Counsel, one sees Government House, the British administrative headquarters. To the west, one can see in the mountainous vista other stone structures the British left as memorials to their generation in Palestine. They radiate authority and majesty. The first of these that catches the eye is the Scottish church, with its rectangular bell tower; at the beginning of the summer it used to be surrounded by a sea of wildflowers. Farther west lies Tabieh, a neighborhood of luxurious mansions inhabited largely by affluent Arabs, many of them Christian—they did well during the British period. One resident, an attorney named Abcarius Bey, built a large house for a Jewish woman he loved, Leah Tennenbaum. She was thirty years younger than he was, and when she left him he rented the Villa Leah to Haile Selassie, the exiled emperor of Ethiopia.¹⁷

Then one's gaze catches a broad avenue the British built to give the city a look befitting one of the empire's capitals. They named it after their king, George V. At the end of the avenue stands a luxury hotel bearing the name of King David. It opened in 1930 and was considered one of the wonders of the East, an object of pilgrimage for aficionados of the good life from all over the world. "It is magnificent!" exulted Edwin Samuel in a letter to his mother, wife of the first high commissioner. One tourist from America thought it was the renovated Temple of Solomon. Jerusalem mayor Ragheb al-Nashashibi had his hair cut there.¹⁸

The hotel was famous for its kitchen and service staff. The waiters were towering black Sudanese athletes in tight-fitting red jackets who circulated among the guests, offering them whiskey and coffee from golden trays. The King David turned into a center and symbol of British power, and one of its wings held British administration offices. On July 22, 1946, Jewish terrorists managed to sneak several milk cans filled with explosives into the hotel's basement. Ninety-one people were killed; most of them

were buried on Mount Zion. Some of the tombstones proclaim that the dead gave their lives for Palestine. Others say simply, "Until we meet again."

Across from the King David, a huge stone phallus rises among the neighboring roofs. This is the YMCA tower, a fertility symbol. It, too, was erected in the 1930s and was considered one of the architectural marvels of its time, designed by the same firm that drew up the plans for the Empire State Building in New York.¹⁹ Mandatory administration officials and high society sipped lemonade on its terrace. The men sported pith helmets and the women shaded their faces with white silk parasols. They carefully observed the rules of good English society. In the afternoon they had tea, and they dressed for dinner. From time to time they could be seen at evening lectures or concerts; sometimes they attended the dances held in their honor by Miss Annie Landau, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish school principal, or they might pay a visit to the house of Katy Antonius, wife of George Antonius and a legendary Arab hostess.

The British preserved a rigid class consciousness: soldiers and NCOs spent their time in pubs and brothels; the officers went on fox and jackal hunts. The British hunting club in Ramle offered its members the opportunity to purchase red coats and buttons emblazoned with the club name, Ramle Vale Jackal Hounds. (None of the club's members forgot to mention the jacket in their memoirs.)²⁰ The road paved by the authorities between Latrun and Ramallah was meant mostly to serve British officials off on weekend picnics.²¹ And they played tennis. People played soccer in Palestine even before the Mandate, but the British brought tennis; it was part of their colonial culture and mentality.²² Ronald Storrs, governor of Jerusalem, documented the following scene in his diary: Colonial Secretary Lord Milner came to visit Palestine. He drank tea with the governor of Hebron and his guests and afterward they went to play tennis. Two Arab criminals were brought specially from the prison to run around the court and collect the balls; their legs were in irons throughout the game. Milner seemed to endure it with fortitude, Storrs wrote.²³

The colonial method of government, wrote District Commissioner of the Galilee Edward Keith-Roach, was "totalitarianism tempered with benevolence."²⁴ Many of the British brought with them imperialistic arrogance and a powerful sense of cultural superiority. There were those who saw their dominion as a destiny and a mission. Herbert Samuel, the first high commissioner, proposed that his government conquer Palestine in order to "civilize" it.²⁵ When he eulogized one of his men who had

died, Samuel honored him with the warmest praise he knew: "as head of the civil service staff he bore the brunt of the work of building up almost from the foundations the structure of a modern state."²⁶

There were those in the British administration who identified with the Jews and those who identified with the Arabs. There were those who found both repugnant. "I dislike them all equally," wrote General Sir Walter Norris "Squib" Congreve. "Arabs and Jews and Christians, in Syria and Palestine, they are all alike, a beastly people. The whole lot of them is not worth a single Englishman!" This was a common sentiment. Police officer Raymond Cafferata put it more politely: "I am not anti-Semitic nor anti-Arab, I'm merely pro-British." So felt many, perhaps most, of those who served in Palestine.²⁷

Their regime was a kaleidoscope of perceptions and positions and conflicting interests constantly tumbling over one another and rearranging themselves. Officials, diplomats, and politicians, military men and journalists contended and competed in a never-ending torrent of words, intrigues, alliances, and betrayals. The Prime Minister's Office, the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the Treasury, the India Office, the War Office, and the different branches of the military were only some of the agencies that sought a role in governing Palestine. The local administration also had a bureaucracy that was full of opposing forces and contradictions, a checkerboard of branches and departments and sub-departments and bureaus full of people. They wrote memoranda and reports and letters, a total of hundreds and thousands of sheets of paper. Almost every paper they wrote begat at least one more piece of paper—and generally more than one—that said the reverse.

The British had found an underdeveloped country when they arrived, and they left behind much progress, especially among the Jews. But they also left behind much backwardness, especially among the Arabs. Shortly before leaving the country one senior official estimated that the British had never in fact had a policy for Palestine, "nothing but fluctuations of policy, hesitations . . . no policy at all."²⁸ He was right. Commissions of inquiry came one after the other, studied the Arab-Jewish situation, and left. The British government generally adopted their recommendations, then changed its mind and sent more commissions. "If all the books of statistics prepared for the nineteen commissions that have had a shot at the problem were placed on top of one another they would reach as high as the King David Hotel," wrote Henry Gurney, the last of the Mandatory government's chief secretaries.²⁹ Like most of his colleagues he devoted

Palestine disappointed, cynical, disgruntled, and sad. The last high commissioner claimed that the British left "with dignity," but that was incorrect. Gurney wrote that they departed with a clear conscience, and that, at least, was true of many of them.³⁰ "England is an odd country," David Ben-Gurion concluded.³¹ Still, as the British were about to leave, he went to London to convince them to stay, just for a little while longer.

PART I

ILLUSION

(1 9 1 7 - 2 7)

Jane Lancaster was an odd person, an Englishwoman, Christian, not married. She lived in a Jewish neighborhood in southern Jerusalem. No one knew why she had come to Palestine, but there was one thing that they did know—Miss Lancaster loved the land of the Bible. Once a year she would set out for the Judean hills to plant narcissus bulbs and cyclamen and anemones.

*Khalil al-Sakakini
Receives a Visitor*

1.

In the early-morning hours of Wednesday, November 28, 1917, someone knocked on Khalil al-Sakakini's front door and brought him great misfortune, indeed almost got him hanged. Sakakini, a Christian Arab, was an educator and writer, well known in Jerusalem. He lived to the west of the Old City, just outside the walls.

He'd had trouble falling asleep that night. He'd tossed from side to side, then got up, lit a lamp, set up his nargileh, and sat down to write a letter. "Even the worst—it's not so bad," he wrote. By the time he'd finished, three o'clock was approaching. Sakakini went back to bed, but a few minutes later he heard the boom of mortars very close by—it seemed as if they were firing on his street. He got up again, as did his wife, Sultana; they climbed to the upper floor and listened. The noise came from the west, from the area of Mea She'arim, the Jewish neighborhood, but Sakakini and his wife saw nothing. It was now around 4:30 A.M. They had just gone back to bed, thinking they might still manage an hour or two of sleep, when the artillery barrage began. The shells were falling closer than before and crashing like thunder. "We were afraid the whole house was going to collapse on top of us," Sakakini wrote in his diary.¹ The British army was advancing swiftly; Prime Minister David Lloyd George wanted

At dawn Sakakini went to draw himself a bath; at that moment he heard a knock at the door. He went down to open it and found himself facing Alter Levine, a Jewish insurance agent and an acquaintance. Levine asked Sakakini's permission to hide in his home. The Turkish police were after him, he explained. In recent nights he had been running from house to house and now he had nowhere else to turn.

Levine's troubles had begun in April, when America entered the war on the side of the Allies. Levine, a U.S. citizen, thus became, along with his country, an enemy of Turkey. The departure of the American consul from Jerusalem signaled the end of Levine's protection; he was slated for deportation. The count of Ballobar, the consul of Spain, which had remained neutral in the war, had advised Levine to leave the city. Levine moved to Petach Tikva, a Jewish town near Tel Aviv, while his family went to Rehovot, a Jewish settlement south of Petach Tikva. In September, Levine learned from Count Ballobar that the Turkish authorities suspected him of being a spy.^{3*}

Levine was indeed a man of mystery. He traveled frequently and maintained contacts with diplomats at a large number of embassies. The American consul, Otis Glazebrook, had been one of his friends, and Levine had very probably briefed him from time to time on the situation in Jerusalem. However, Levine's personal papers contain no hint of espionage.

Levine returned to Jerusalem as soon as he could. At one point he was arrested. The reason is unclear—at the time many people were arrested for no specific reason. Perhaps it was simply his U.S. citizenship; other American citizens were being deported from Jerusalem.⁵ Perhaps a book of poems he had published had led to suspicions that he was fomenting pro-Zionist, anti-Turkish sentiments.⁶ Whatever the reason, Levine had apparently managed to bribe someone and was released. But he continued to be a wanted man. "From that time on my father became elusive and hid with various acquaintances," his daughter Shulamit later wrote, "because he was afraid of spending too much time in any one place lest they discover his hideout."⁷ Levine's wife and three daughters also went

into hiding. "In the afternoon we left where we had been in the morning, and come the morning we left where we had been at night," Shulamit Levine wrote.

The Turkish police found the family anyway. The girl watched the police rough up her mother. In prison they whipped Gittel Levine in order to extract her husband's whereabouts. Consul Ballobar confirmed afterward that the woman had been tortured severely and that it had affected her nerves. In fact, she lost her mind.⁸ Levine, in the meantime, had knocked at the door of Khalil al-Sakakini, "a teacher, Christian and friend," as Levine would later describe him.⁹

Sakakini was alarmed: "God save me from bringing a spy into the house," he thought, but his conscience would not permit him to send Levine away. He did not know what to do. He had never faced such a momentous decision.¹⁰

2.

Three years earlier, in 1914, a few days after Turkey had linked its fate with that of Imperial Germany and entered the World War, a small crowd staged a demonstration under the window of the Spanish consul's home in Jerusalem. The count of Ballobar, Antonio de la Cierva Lewita, came out to his balcony to greet the crowd, and afterward made a note that the city's residents were demonstrating their loyalty to the sultan. At a prayer assembly conducted at the Al-Aqsa Mosque it was announced that Turkey's cause was a jihad—a holy war. The Jewish community was also quick to declare its allegiance. Many of its members donned tarbushes, albeit unwillingly, and ostensibly became patriots, related Meir Dizengoff, the mayor of Tel Aviv. When they heard that British Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener had drowned at sea in June 1916, the Jews of Tel Aviv decked out the streets and organized parades to celebrate. The Christian residents of Jerusalem, the Spanish consul wrote in his diary, were profoundly frightened.¹¹

At the outbreak of war, Khalil al-Sakakini was planning a big celebration in honor of his son Sari's first birthday, but the party was canceled. "Because of the current situation we have decided to make do with kissing him a thousand times," Sakakini wrote. Like many people, he believed the war would be short. God willing, he thought, it would be possible to have a big party for Sari on his next birthday.¹² In the meantime, Sakakini did all he could to avoid joining the Turkish army. Most Jews were afraid

of enlisting. too

*Years later, Aziz Bek, a Turkish intelligence officer, wrote in his memoirs that contrary to the accepted view—that the British capture of Palestine had been best aided by the famous Jewish spies of the Nili network in Zichron Ya'akov—one particular Jew living in Jerusalem had been even more helpful. Aziz Bek identified this master spy by name: Alter Levi. According to Aziz, Levi (that is, Levine) traveled freely among the cities of the Levant and set up a chain of brothels in which intelligence information was obtained from clients

Many of the immigrants to Palestine had not renounced their previous citizenships; among them were thousands of Jews, most of them Russian subjects. With Russia allied to France and Great Britain, the Jews of Palestine were faced with a cruel choice. They could leave the country or wait until they were expelled; alternatively, they could accept Ottoman citizenship and enlist. The threat of deportation prompted a Zionist initiative in favor of accepting Ottoman citizenship despite conscription; its purpose was to prevent a decline in the number of Jews in the country. Proponents of the initiative included two seminal figures in the cause of political Zionism: Jerusalem linguist Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, later to become known as the father of the Hebrew revival, and David Ben-Gurion, a low-ranking politician then in his twenties.

As he went around trying to persuade Jews to take on Ottoman citizenship, Ben-Gurion sported a tarbush and dressed like a Turkish government official; when he spoke about the Ottoman Empire he called it "our country." He believed the Turks would win the war and hoped that after the hostilities they would help establish Jewish autonomy in Palestine in exchange for their subjects' loyalty. For this reason he proposed setting up a Jewish battalion within the Turkish army, in opposition to a vocal group of Zionists who, convinced that Britain would win the war, preferred to throw their lot in with the Allies. This group advocated establishing a Jewish force as part of the British effort. "Maybe we were wrong, maybe we weren't," Ben-Gurion would later write.^{13*}

Although the Ottoman authorities had restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine and the purchase of land on which to settle immigrants, by 1914 the Zionist movement had a number of achievements to its credit. In the decade that preceded the war, tens of thousands of Jews had settled in Palestine; the Turks had allowed them to establish agricultural villages, as well as an independent Hebrew school system.¹⁴ But largely pro-Western, of Allied citizenship, and a threat to Islamic hegemony, the Zionists found themselves increasingly persecuted during the course of the war.

Many of the Jews living in Palestine did not support Zionism; indeed, much of the pre-Zionist Jewish population—that is, those who lived in Palestine before the 1880s—were ultra-Orthodox. They were deeply hostile to the notion of secular Jewish autonomy in the Holy Land, which, according to religious doctrine, would be redeemed only through divine

intervention in the messianic age. To the traditional Jewish population of Palestine, the Zionist ideal of secular redemption was sacrilegious. "A deep abyss separates the two parts of the Yishuv," Ben-Gurion wrote, calling for war against "the rabbis who are betraying their people." In addition to their abhorrence of Zionism's secular ideals, they feared that Zionist activity would cause the authorities to act against all the Jews, and saw the increasing power of the Zionists as competition for the leadership of the community.¹⁵ Knowing of this split, Jamal Pasha, the sultan's governor in Palestine, was always careful to claim that he was opposed only to Zionism, not to all the Jews. Consul Ballobar recorded in his diary a piece of gossip that had reached his ears—that Jamal Pasha had in fact married a Jewish woman. He received later confirmation of the rumor from Jamal himself. People in the streets of Jerusalem's Old City said his wife was a whore.¹⁷

Jamal also carefully monitored Arab aspirations for independence. In his journal, Ballobar described with trepidation the first executions of members of the Arab national movement. The Turkish practice was to exhibit the bodies of hanging victims at the city gates, and Ballobar could see them from his consulate window. At least once he identified among the hanged men a personal acquaintance—the mufti of Gaza. Jamal once joked that he would hang Ballobar as well. The consul was not amused.¹⁸

By the time the war reached its end Ballobar, a pivotal figure in Ottoman Jerusalem, simultaneously represented a dozen countries, many of which had fought each other, including the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and German empires, France, the British Empire, and the United States. It is doubtful whether the annals of diplomacy could produce another man who became the envoy of so many countries.¹⁹ When the war began, the count was still in his twenties. His mother was Jewish; his father had met her while serving as military attaché at his country's embassy in Vienna. A short, thin man with a pointed nose and large mustache, the consul dressed carefully, always wearing pressed suits and a fancy Panama hat. He was remembered as an "attractive and amiable young man."²⁰ A pilgrim

*The term has its roots in ancient sources of the Hebrew language, and one of its meanings, according to Eliezer Ben-Yehuda's dictionary, is "a small number of Jews living in non-Jewish villages." *Yishuv*, which literally means "settlement," is also the opposite of "wasteland" and of "destruction." The word was used, consciously or not, to indicate that the Jews were living in a wilderness devoid of human beings, that is, Arabs. One Zionist leader objected to the use of the Hebrew word *moshava* to designate Jewish agricultural towns. *Moshava* is "a place of settlement."

*Despite his loyalty to the regime, Ben-Gurion would soon be expelled from Palestine

from his country whom he met in Jerusalem became the love of his life. Ballobar was famous for the sumptuous meals he served at his home in west Jerusalem, opposite the Ethiopian church and next door to Eliezer Ben-Yehuda. Jamal Pasha was a frequent visitor. The two men would sip champagne, then smoke fine cigars and sit on the verandah for a game of poker that would last until after midnight. Indeed, they saw much of each other, often going horseback riding together in the Judean wilderness.

Ballobar's interest in Palestine was primarily guarding the monasteries and the churches, but he was sympathetic to Jewish concerns as well.²¹ His diary paints local politics as a colorful kaleidoscope of intrigue, deception, and duplicitous schemes, of pashas and patriarchs, captains and *chargés d'affaires*, merchants and mercenaries. Their voracious appetite for fine food and flattery at an endless round of dinners and receptions was matched only by the verve with which they cheated, exploited, bribed, and spied on one another, trading gossip and innuendo while wallowing in the decay and corruption of a crumbling empire.

The young count bore his yoke of responsibility with a good deal of winning self-irony. He was a sensible man and a good observer and writer who learned much from what he saw. He described the wretched-looking Turkish soldiers setting out to capture the Suez Canal, their uniforms ragged, their discipline loose. He observed the frequent victory parades they mounted before their departure; at one of these, Ballobar noticed a soldier pushing his drinking water in a baby carriage most likely stolen from a Jewish courtyard. He recorded a scene he witnessed at the southern exit from the city, on the road to Bethlehem: a group of women and children were at forced labor, digging trenches. The Turkish soldier overseeing them was knitting. With such an army, the count thought, the Turks could not win. "We'll meet on the other side of the canal—or we'll meet in heaven," Jamal Pasha had once said to Ballobar. The diplomat considered the second possibility more likely, but was careful not to make the Turk party to his assessment.

In January 1917 Ballobar noticed five military trucks loaded with Turkish soldiers parked by his house. They remained there all day, plagued by an irritating drizzle. The consul noted that the soldiers did not eat the entire time. A bit before five in the evening they were each given a tiny roll and a can of thin lentil soup. Ballobar watched the hungry young men with pity. Off to the desert to save the empire, they didn't stand a chance.²² If the enemy didn't get them, then surely hunger would. Some

camels for the meat. One Jerusalem boy recalled a Turkish soldier rushing at him on his way to school, grabbing his half pita.²³

Many Turkish soldiers fled the army. Bertha Spafford Vester, whose parents founded the American Colony, saw a group of conscripts arriving in the city. Their commanders had put them in chains.²⁴

3.

Sometime after the unsuccessful Turkish attack on the Suez Canal in the spring of 1917, the British army launched its campaign to conquer the city of Gaza. They tried twice and were repelled both times. The battle for the city cost thousands of soldiers' lives on both sides, and Gaza's inhabitants suffered greatly.²⁵ Many were forced to leave by the Turks, who feared the population would get in the way of the troops. "A terrible panic has fallen not only over the residents of Gaza but over the entire country," wrote Moshe Smilansky, a farmer and leading Zionist thinker and writer. "What is the purpose of this expulsion? Will the whole country be expelled before the British come?" The roads were filled with refugees, Smilansky wrote, all of them ravaged by hunger, fear, and disaster.

One Gazan woman provided an account of the Turkish evacuation. Soldiers went from house to house, whips in hand, lashing out left and right and forcing residents onto the street without any of their belongings. According to Smilansky, 40,000 people were expelled from Gaza, including a few Jewish families. Arab historian Aref al-Aref, later governor of the city, estimated the number at 28,000; about 10,000 had left the city ahead of the fighting.

The well-off Gazans settled in Hebron, Ramle, and Lydda; the poor ones scattered among Palestinian villages or lived in orchards and fields. According to Smilansky, the Ottoman authorities had plans to settle some of the Arab refugees in Jewish villages. "We were very anxious about having these particular guests," Smilansky wrote, "because of the crowding, the filth, the general disturbance. But we took some comfort—better the Arabs should be sent to us than we should have to go to the Arabs."²⁶ The plan was never implemented, but a few weeks later—as the fighting came closer—many residents of Jaffa and Tel Aviv were also forced to leave their homes; some of the Jewish exiles did take refuge among the Arabs.

At that time there were 50,000 people living in Jaffa, among them some 10,000 Jews; about 2,000 Jews also lived in nearby Tel Aviv.²⁷ The authorities claimed that the evacuation of Jaffa was necessary to protect the civilian population. The soldiers were afraid that the Jews would join the British

hearing the screams of women and children, Jamal Pasha explained to Consul Ballobar.²⁸ A few young Jews were allowed to remain in the city and guard the houses; the rest were forced to go.²⁹

The evacuation took two weeks. Orderly at first, it quickly turned to chaos. A local reporter described a confused crowd of people, horses, and mules, and piles and piles of belongings. Men, women, and children lay sprawled on their bundles for days, waiting under the open sky for their turn to leave. Wagon after wagon set out, tens and hundreds—wagons loaded with pianos, rugs, heavy furniture, Torah scrolls, wheat, and other foodstuffs. They left a trail of dung behind them. Smilansky observed a baby carriage hitched to a donkey, with two children driving it.³⁰ "Tel Aviv is a wasteland," he wrote. "A deathly silence pervades the streets. It is as if the place has been blighted by a plague." A local journalist made out some graffiti scrawled on a wall in a child's hand: "Goodbye Tel Aviv."³¹

The expulsion from Jaffa and Tel Aviv brought an end to the Jewish community's willingness to support the Turkish interest. "We will never forgive Jamal Pasha this crime!" wrote Mordechai Ben-Hillel Hacoheh, a businessman and public figure who was one of the founders of Tel Aviv. He had a personal reason to be angry; his son David was serving in the Turkish army. Hacoheh had taken pride in his son's officer rank, but on being driven from his home he felt that his son had risked his life in the service of a rotten empire; all were now praying for its collapse.

Ben-Hillel (Marcus Hillelovitch) Hacoheh had come to Jaffa from Mogilev in White Russia. At the first Zionist Congress in 1897 he had been the first delegate to give a speech in Hebrew. A founding father of the Zionist establishment in Palestine, he saw one of his daughters married to the son of influential writer and philosopher Ahad Ha'am and another to Dr. Arthur Ruppin, a major figure in the Zionist settlement enterprise. When he first learned of the order to evacuate Jaffa, Hacoheh toyed with the idea of resisting. If Jamal came to realize that the Jews were not prepared to go like "lambs to the slaughter," he wrote, the pasha might be deterred from carrying out the expulsion. But that was only a passing thought, an expression of helpless anger, "because in the end," he concluded, "what can a herd do, and how can sheep range themselves against the wolves of the desert?" The choice before Hacoheh was one that Zionist society in Palestine would confront repeatedly: between compliance and resistance, restraint and combat; between Jewish patriotism, which could endanger the population, and communal responsibility, which

But Hacoheh's own weakness infuriated him, and he vented his rage by accusing the Arab population of primitivism and disloyalty. Many of the Arabs had succeeded in remaining in Jaffa despite the evacuation order, and many others were able to return to their homes soon afterward. "We are Europeans, loyal, accustomed to obey orders and to follow them precisely on time," Hacoheh wrote partly with arrogance, partly in self-pity. As he faced the inevitable and left his home at 11 Herzl Street in Tel Aviv, Hacoheh gave a last look at his two oleander bushes, one by the fountain, the second by the verandah. In a few days their beautiful flowers would release their scent, he realized, but who would be there to smell them? He choked on his tears and swore he would return. "Our entire existence has collapsed," he wrote.³²

Most of the Jewish exiles settled at first in Petach Tikva, to the east. As the fighting threatened to spread, they were forced to move again, northward to the Galilee. Writer and teacher Yosef Chaim Brenner was on this journey; he recorded the sight of a woman sitting on the ground next to a dead baby. Many of the exiles were housed in harsh conditions; within a few weeks typhus was raging among them. "One disaster after another," Moshe Smilansky wrote.³³

Conditions were similar throughout Palestine. In some Jewish villages laborers ate only once every two days. A few soup kitchens were set up here and there, but these barely sufficed. Many people died of cholera. Consul Ballobar doggedly documented the spread of the disease—he himself stopped brushing his teeth out of fear that his water was contaminated. Moshe Smilansky recorded his impressions of a visit to the ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Mea She'arim, where he had been deeply shaken. "My God!" he wrote. "I never imagined that such wretched poverty really exists and that there really are such dark and filthy corners. . . . [O]ld men and women bloated with hunger. Children with an expression of horror, the devastation of hunger written on their faces. And they cry as well, a miserable, ceaseless whimper in their throats—the whimper of hunger. And all of them are almost naked, covered with tattered rags and crawling with all sorts of vermin. . . . On their faces and hands and all over their bodies, slime, filth, disease, and sores. . . . That people can live like this without losing their minds!" One source noted that many people killed themselves by jumping off roofs or throwing themselves into wells, just so they didn't have to watch their children die.

Smilansky found equally horrific conditions among the Arabs. . . .

"On all the roads," Smiliansky wrote, "under every fence and in every stream and well there are dead bodies. If a man gets sick, he might be left in his field or on the road for days until he dies, and no one comes to his aid." Bertha Spafford Vester reported that Arab women had appeared in the yard of the American Colony offering to sell their babies for food. Boris Schatz, a local artist and founder of the Bezalel School of Art, recorded the story of a Jewish woman who, having heard the dog in her Arab neighbor's yard barking incessantly for several days, went to see what was going on. "When she opened the door to the house," Schatz wrote, "she saw three children lying dead on the ground and the mother embracing her eldest daughter as they sat on a pile of rags in a corner of the house. She approached them and was aghast to see that they, too, were dead. Rushing out of the house, she left the door open as she went to call some other neighbors. Returning to the house, they found that the dog had already eaten one of the children." Izzat Darwazza, a leader of the Arab national movement in Palestine, wrote that there were women who ate the flesh of their babies.³⁴ Estimates are that by 1917, the prewar population of 700,000 Arabs and 85,000 Jews had shrunk by 100,000, including 30,000 Jews. Some were killed or died of hunger; others fled, were exiled, or were deported from the country.* Of those who remained, many longed for the British to arrive.

4.

The British troops set out from Egypt in the spring of 1917, advancing from south to north, via the Sinai desert. Their progress depended on the construction of railroad tracks, an enterprise that employed 56,000 laborers and 35,000 camels. Pipes also had to be laid to supply water. The force was commanded by General Sir Edmund Allenby, a tall man with an impressive aquiline nose who exuded strength, authority, and charisma. He set his command tent at the front, earning the admiration of his soldiers. The scion of a family that claimed Oliver Cromwell among its ancestors, he was a professional soldier, fifty-six years old, a great believer in feint, surprise, and the power of the horse. Before being dispatched to Palestine he had fought in South Africa and France.

Allenby was an avid reader of the Bible and took an interest in the history, geography, and flora and fauna of the country he was about to con-

quer. In letters to his wife he told her about the birds and the trees and, like an anthropologist on a field trip, he reported on the people, who all looked like biblical characters, he wrote. His biographer wrote that "birds, beasts, and flowers interested him more than his soldiers." At the end of October 1917, Allenby's forces took Be'er-sheba and, on the third try, Gaza.³⁶

The battle gave birth to one of the classic tales in the history of counter-intelligence. At its center was a British colonel, Richard Meinertzhagen, whose mission was to convince the Turks that the British intended to attack Gaza a third time, when in fact they planned to attack Be'er-sheba first. Meinertzhagen recorded the plan in his diary:

I have been busy lately compiling a dummy Staff Officer's notebook containing all sorts of nonsense about our plans and difficulties. Today I took it out to the country north-west of Be'er-sheba with a view to passing it on to the enemy without exciting suspicion. . . . I found a Turkish patrol who at once gave chase. I galloped away for a mile or so and then they pulled up, so I stopped, dismounted, and had a shot at them. . . . They at once resumed the chase, blazing away harmlessly all the time. Now was my chance, and in my effort to mount I loosened my haversack, field-glasses, water-bottle, dropped my rifle, previously stained with some fresh blood from my horse, and in fact did everything to make them believe I was hit and that my flight was disorderly. They had now approached close enough and I made off, dropping the haversack which contained the notebook and various maps, my lunch, etc. I saw one of them pick up the haversack and the rifle, so now I went like the wind for home and soon gave them the slip. . . . If only they act on the contents of the notebook, we shall do great things.

According to Meinertzhagen, the ruse worked—the attack on Be'er-sheba surprised the Turks. The story spread: one of the top officers in the German army thought it necessary to defend the reputation of Germany's allies and deny it.

Meinertzhagen invented another method of hitting at the enemy. At sunset British planes would circle over concentrations of Turkish forces and drop opium cigarettes on them. Allenby forbade this, but according to Meinertzhagen, the scheme continued without Allenby's knowledge.

*Most of the Arab population was Muslim and lived predominantly in villages or nomadically in the desert. Most of the Christian Arabs lived in the cities, as did most of the Jews.

Sheria and Gaza were drowsy and fuddled. Some of the prisoners taken were scarcely coherent and quite incapable of resistance."³⁷

The British soldiers were tormented mostly by the heat of the desert. "We have now completed the second stage of our long journey," one soldier wrote from the desert. "I must say that I'm not feeling particularly cheerful just now. Am writing in a beastly tent the temperature being 106 in the shade so if you notice a few grease spots on the paper you will know what it is. Before sitting down to write I had to chase a small snake out of the tent, a dear little thing about 18 inches long, some other beastly animal has just taken a flying leap over my legs. I think it was a lizard. It was about 10 inches long, but moved so quickly I hadn't time to get a good look at it. This is a glorious place you get all sorts of animals crawling all over you and the flies are lovely. I'm one mass of bites and blisters already."³⁸

Allenby's force was composed of 75,000 infantrymen, 17,000 cavalrymen, and 475 artillery pieces. More than half of this force participated in the battle of Be'erseba; six tanks took part in the attack on Gaza, and the city was almost leveled.³⁹ The force continued northward; two weeks later, in mid-November, it reached Jaffa and Tel Aviv.

The first British soldiers who entered Tel Aviv were most impressed by the opportunity to obtain fresh bread and a bath. "Europe! Europe!" they cried happily. Mordechai Ben-Hillel Hacoen, who quickly returned home, took this as a compliment. The British had not expected to find, in the wilds of Asia, a well-ordered city with pretty houses and clean, straight streets, he wrote proudly in his diary.

Some of the soldiers looted. They broke into Tel Aviv homes whose tenants had not yet returned, destroying furniture, mutilating books, pulling down doors and window frames to burn for heat. One of the city's veteran residents recalled that her mother had managed at the last minute to save a piano soldiers had stolen. She also heard about "all kinds of undesirable incidents that happened to little girls." Hacoen and community leaders from Jaffa went to complain to the commanders of the force. The commanders "suggested" they forget about the complaints; otherwise the looting soldiers would be court-martialed and sentenced to death. Hacoen and his associates thought it best to back down—there was no choice but to accept the soldiers' rowdiness with love, Hacoen wrote. He comforted himself with the idea that maybe they thought Tel Aviv was a German neighborhood and were engaged in short-term vengeance. The British, he believed, would eventually bring law and

order, justice and discipline. "We have been saved, we have been redeemed!" he wrote.

Many of the soldiers fighting in Palestine were Australian. "They are all charming, and their faces are handsome," Hacoen noted. "They have good faces like big children," he added. "The Australians were generous and freehanded," one of the city's girls later wrote. "Once, when I was jumping rope in front of the house, an Australian soldier joined in and jumped with me. Both of us laughed. He took the rope and wrapped it around his hand and I tried to jump high with him. At the end he gave me a big bar of chocolate." The soldiers brought an orchestra with them, and Tel Aviv sent them Moshe Hopenko, one of the city's first violin teachers.⁴⁰

Moshe Smilansky met his first Australian while wandering through an orange grove. The soldier was a shepherd by profession. "He had left his herd of sheep to volunteer for the army that went to conquer Palestine," Smilansky wrote. "As a schoolboy he studied the Bible and knew that the land of the Bible had been taken from the people of the Bible and that it was under the yoke of Turkish rule. . . . And when the world war broke out and the Australian people were called to volunteer and the ladies of Australia collected money for the war in Palestine, he too put his hand to the sword and his mother and his sister gave him their blessing and said: Go restore the homeland to the one nation left without a homeland." Smilansky recorded the young man's name and so ensured his place in history: Sid Sheerson.⁴¹ The war was not yet over, however. German planes bombed Jaffa, Petach Tikva changed hands several times, and in late November Allenby turned to his next objective: Jerusalem.

The British marched to the city along two major routes: one from the south, parallel to the Hebron road, and the second from the west, along the Jaffa road. The Turks fought back. On several occasions they succeeded in halting the British advance and even in repelling it. The Turks controlled fortified mountain redoubts, like Kastel and Nebi Samuël; the British attacked from below. Here and there the forces engaged in hand-to-hand combat, with bayonets and swords. "Galloping horses are hard to handle one-handed while you have a sword in the other," wrote a British cavalry commander. "Hindered by the clutter of rifle butt and other equipment, troopers found it nearly impossible to get at a low dodging Turk. One missed and missed again until the odd Turk wasn't quite quick enough. . . . I have been asked how one felt on that day. In all honesty, I

too occupied and the final excitement was pretty intense. Altogether like champagne on an empty stomach."⁴²

The British were well organized. Unlike the Turks, they were not hungry. They received all their provisions, including bread, from Egypt. The supplies came part of the way by train; on the last section of the tracks, which stopped at Be'ersheba, the British used mules to pull the cars. Then from Be'ersheba supplies were sent northward by mule, after which they were loaded on trucks, and then finally onto camels. Many of the camels could not manage the muddy, soggy journey through the mountainous approach to Jerusalem, and several died. The soldiers shot other camels to end their suffering and rolled the carcasses down into the wadis. "They were quickly seized upon by watchful natives . . . and no doubt afforded excellent dinners to numerous Palestinian families," one of the officers later reported. Battle memoirs of the time also describe the suffering of the horses scrambling to climb the Judean mountains; many were hit by Turkish shells. Finally, Allenby ordered a thousand donkeys to be brought from Egypt. The heavy cannons transported from Egypt had to be left behind.

But the common enemy of the Turks and the British was now the winter. At the end of long weeks of combat that had begun in the heat of the desert, many British soldiers were still wearing summer uniforms, including shorts. The British force included Egyptians, Indians, New Zealanders, and Australians—all of whom were plagued by the cold. One general compared the Judean hills to the Himalayas.⁴³

Life in Jerusalem went on almost as usual, even as the city was about to fall. Next to the famine-ridden lanes of Mea She'arim, Simlansky wrote, "sit people with full bellies in clean homes . . . and they are not driven mad by what they see."⁴⁴ Count Ballobar attended a masked ball held at the home of the Mani family, one of Jerusalem's elite Sephardic dynasties. He dressed as a Turkish woman and everyone thought he was the governor's daughter. It was great fun.⁴⁵ An advertisement published a few days later in *HaHerut*, the last newspaper still being published in Jerusalem, promised the Jewish residents "a sidesplittingly funny Purim play" and an appearance by a comedian. At the end of March, as Gaza suffered its first assaults, the Fig cinema screened a Sherlock Holmes film. His tricks and maneuvers would provide "uplifting enjoyment," the ad claimed. Only a few days later the newspaper was shut down; the lead type was confiscated by the authorities and melted down to make ammunition.⁴⁶

In April, following the evacuation of Jaffa and Tel Aviv, Jamal Pasha

his headquarters on the Mount of Olives. The meeting took place in a castle inspired by a Hohenzollern palace in Germany and was named after Empress Augusta Victoria. Jamal intended to notify the foreign consuls that in preparation for battle he had decided to evacuate Jerusalem as he had done in Gaza and Jaffa. But Count Ballobar made a prediction in his diary: Turkey's German allies would force the Ottomans to preserve the integrity of Jerusalem and abandon it without a fight.⁴⁷ He was right: Berlin understood that the city was of no military value and it was better to give it up than have the Germans bear responsibility for destroying holy places. By November, after the fall of Be'ersheba, Gaza, and Jaffa, Jerusalem's residents could hear the thunder of the approaching cannons and knew they were on the verge of a new era. "Jerusalem is about to fall, tomorrow or the next day," wrote Khalil al-Sakakini on November 17. He was off by only three weeks; in the meantime, Alter Levine appeared at his door.⁴⁸

5.

Sakakini was afraid to take the Jewish fugitive into his home. He knew that if he was caught, the Turks would charge him with treason. But if he sent Levine away, Sakakini told himself, he would be a traitor to his cultural heritage. He believed Levine was not seeking his personal protection, but rather the refuge offered by traditional Arab hospitality. "He asked for sanctuary in the culture of my people, which preceded Islam and will remain after it," Sakakini wrote. "I have to say that he has granted me a huge honor with his request of sanctuary in my house, because it allows me to represent the spirit of our history and the spirit of our culture. . . . I hope my people will rejoice in a foreigner having requested sanctuary among them and through me, and I have received him in their name, after his own people denied him and his family shut their doors to him."⁴⁹ Levine promised that no one knew of his arrival. Sakakini let him in.

In the days that followed the two had many long conversations and got to know each other well. Both were extremely complex men, full of contradictions and with many doubts and questions about their cultures and their identities. Levine, who had been born in Russia, was then about thirty-five years old, the father of three daughters. Sakakini, a native of Jerusalem, was thirty-nine and had one son. Levine's father, Morris, who had managed estates in the Minsk area, had come to Palestine with his family at the beginning of the 1890s, but shortly thereafter had left for the United States to raise money for a yeshiva and a hospital in Jerusalem. Most of Jerusalem's Jews then lived off donations collected in the United States.

emissaries like Morris Levine. A few years later he obtained American citizenship. His son Alter had studied in yeshiva but later left the Orthodox world in which he had grown up. As an adult, he considered himself a traditional Jew, but since he was a Zionist, ultra-Orthodox Jews saw him as a traitor.⁵⁰

Khail al-Sakakini's father had been a carpenter and, like Morris Levine, had taken an active part in his community. Sakakini himself had studied at the Greek Orthodox church school and then at the Anglican school founded by Bishop Blyth.⁵¹ Later, he quarreled with the Greek Orthodox patriarch and his followers over corruption in the church and its Arab national character, which Sakakini supported. "I cannot be under the leadership of this corrupt, base priest, nor be numbered among this hateful denomination," he explained, and he left the church. "I am not Orthodox! I am not Orthodox!" he wrote emphatically. Like Alter Levine, his inclination was to define his identity according to a liberal nationalism while adhering to his religious roots; in his will he instructed his son to live in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount.⁵²

Levine was a modern businessman, conscious of the spirit of the new century in which he had come of age. He began work as an agent of the Singer sewing-machine company, whose product was a revolutionary innovation in Palestine, and went on to import typewriters. Next he represented several foreign insurance companies, specializing in life insurance, itself a novelty. He did well in business and was soon known as Palestine's "King of Insurance," with agents and subagents in many Middle Eastern cities. When he came to hide in Sakakini's house, Levine was a rich man who owned land and houses around the country, and he was a moneylender as well. Before deciding to hide, he was careful to transfer power of attorney for all his interests to his father-in-law.⁵³

Sakakini was a pioneer in his field as well, in the spirit of the new century. In the school he founded, he instituted a revolutionary method of education. The language of instruction was Arabic, not the usual Turkish, and the pupils did not learn by rote; instead they were expected to understand the material. There was no homework, no tests, no report cards. Sakakini preached the "liberation of the pupil"—he said he hated nothing more than a school run on violence. The teachers were not supposed to punish children or humiliate them, as was common practice, but rather to help develop their personalities. Relations between teachers and pupils were supposed to be open. He encouraged the pupils' social activities, including the publication of a school newspaper as well as sports, all

quite exceptional at the time. Both Sakakini and Levine had an almost mystic faith in the power of physical activity to purify the soul. The school also had a dormitory and a kindergarten, further innovations.⁵⁴

Sakakini had joined one of the Masonic lodges in Jerusalem, and Levine was also one of the "brothers." The two had much in common. They would talk each evening, late into the night, men of books and action given to soul-searching. As church bells rang in the background, the muezzins' cadences floated in the air, and distant cannons thundered, they exchanged ideas and visions of Palestine. Levine hoped to see a million Jews living between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates, the biblically promised borders. At the same time, he conceded that the dream of reviving the Jewish nation in Palestine was dead: the country could not absorb all the Jews of the world—at most, it could take two or three hundred thousand. He advocated Jewish-Arab coexistence. "The Land is our sister," he wrote in a poem, "a single crescent has made the two of us into nomads in the night."⁵⁵ For his part, Sakakini said he hated Zionism because it tried to build itself on the ruins of others; in conquering Palestine, Sakakini felt as if Zionism were trampling the heart of the Arab nation.⁵⁶ He too, however, could soften his approach, and assert that the world was heading toward unity. The day would come, he'd say, when there would be only one nation on earth.⁵⁷ In less sober moments, though, the two were extremely conscious of cultural and political contention, almost national enmity.

Sakakini tried to distinguish between Jews and Zionists; to Levine this meant little. While he had cast aside most religious observance, Levine preserved various Jewish practices, as did most secular Zionists. He would eat only kosher food, which meant he could not partake of the Sakakinis' cooking. His host noted that Levine ate only bread with olives and drank only tea, and this offended him: "May God forgive you, man," he wrote. "Why shouldn't you eat our food? If you consider our food impure, then we too are impure because we eat impurity. Why, then, did you ask for sanctuary among us?" He recorded the incident as if Levine stood for all Jews and Sakakini represented all Christians: "How many crimes have you committed against us and how numerous are your victims?" he wrote.⁵⁸

But Sakakini's annoyance was more than just cultural conflict; he had good reason to be exasperated with his guest. Levine had no intention of remaining hungry—a day or two after arriving at the Sakakini residence, he had spotted a Jewish passerby from the window and asked him to make contact with his mother-in-law.

mother-in-law began to bring him kosher meals. Two or three days later she also brought the Turkish police.

At three in the morning on December 3, a large police force surrounded the house; Sakakini heard the policemen coming up the steps, and he heard them cocking their guns. He had no doubt they had come to arrest Levine. "I jumped out of bed and went to our friend's bed," Sakakini wrote. "I knocked on the door, perhaps I would manage to get him out. But he did not wake up. In the meantime the soldiers were standing at the inner door of the house and there was nothing for me to do but surrender." He opened the door and they broke in; Levine's mother-in-law was with them. They arrested Levine and took Sakakini with them as well.⁵⁹

6.

Five more days remained of Turkish rule. "Fear overcame us all," wrote Aliza Gidoni, a Jerusalem resident who had been a girl at the time. She remembered oxcarts carrying the dead and wounded, both Turks and the German soldiers who had fought on their behalf. "The screams and groans of the soldiers were appalling; their blood dripped on the road." The wounded were taken to improvised hospitals in Jerusalem and elsewhere, and Gidoni asked herself whether any would survive.* Antonio de Ballobar was moved by the dreadful sadness on the faces of the wounded. There was an exceptional amount of commotion in the city, Judge Gad Frumkin later recalled. "The road from the train station and Bethlehem was full of vehicles and mules and infantrymen, disorganized and undisciplined, heading eastward by way of the post office to Jericho. It was obvious that this was not an orderly retreat but a hasty flight." In one neighborhood, Frumkin saw a Turkish soldier sprawled helplessly on the ground, begging for bread and water. He clearly had not eaten for several days. In other parts of the city, Ottoman soldiers were reportedly willing to hand over their weapons in exchange for food. Many abandoned their arms so as not to be weighted down as they ran; some fled barefoot.⁶¹

Khalil al-Sakakini described the view from the window of his prison cell. "The war was at its height," he later noted, "shells falling all around, total pandemonium, soldiers running about, and fear ruling all." The last of the foreign diplomats finished burning their documents and left the city.⁶²

At Augusta Victoria castle, Sister Theodora asked commander in chief General Erich von Falkenhayn what she and the few remaining nuns should do if a mob broke into the building after the soldiers left. In previous months von Falkenhayn had opposed those of his countrymen who wanted to evacuate Jerusalem without a battle, but his opinion was overruled. Now he did not really know what to tell the good sister; he probably suggested that she pray. He ordered a large oil portrait of the kaiser to be removed from the church vestibule: the portrait, at least, would be protected from the mob.⁶³

Throughout the chaos, Count Ballobar had continued to dine with commanders of the German army, enjoying until the end his daily custom of sharing a glass of cognac with one of them. Ballobar also continued to record faithfully all he heard and saw, but during the last week of Turkish rule, even he conceded in his diary, "I don't understand anything!" His connections were still of some use, though. As a macabre farewell gift, the Turks planned to blow up Jerusalem's flour mills. When he learned of this, Count Ballobar borrowed a carriage and rushed to army headquarters on the Mount of Olives, where he succeeded in persuading the soldiers to spare the mills.

Then the chaos in the city finally reached the Spanish consulate and produced the following operatic scene. Ballobar had agreed to grant asylum to two leaders of the Jewish community: Jacob Thon, a Zionist representative in Palestine, and Siegfried Hoofien, the movement's banker. Both were designated for deportation, together with a number of other Jewish public figures. Once he learned of the two men's whereabouts, the Turkish police chief appeared at the Spanish consulate and demanded that the count hand them over. The consul, however, had sent them to hide behind a curtain. As the police chief entered, Ballobar promised to hand the two men over the next day. The two Zionist leaders, quaking behind the curtain, were convinced that the consul intended to give them up.⁶⁴ But Ballobar was fairly certain that twenty-four hours later the Turks would have left the city, and he proved correct: Izzat Bey, the city governor, hammered the last telegraph machine to smithereens. He left a writ of surrender, meant for the British, in the hands of Jerusalem's mayor, then stole a carriage from the American Colony in order to depart from the city, as befitted him, in honor.

On December 8 a violent rainstorm raged over the Judean mountains; a heavy fog reduced visibility to zero. The British forces had to halt. That same day they had already marched through Bethlehem, where they were

*Fighting for his life in one of those hospitals lay a German soldier named Rudolf Hoess, later commandant of Auschwitz.⁶⁰

received as liberating heroes; some of the forces had already reached Ein Kerem, John the Baptist's village, just southwest of Jerusalem. Toward evening the storm began to subside.

Count Ballobar went out to the roof of his house to take in the view. The sky was sprinkled with stars. A sudden stillness had fallen over the city. Just a single cannon firing at regular intervals disturbed the night, and a few dogs barked. Ballobar heard a car in the distance and tried to guess who its passengers were. He meditated a moment on the vicissitudes of time and went to sleep. There was shooting that night, but he slept soundly.⁶⁵

2

"A Contract with Jewry"

1.

The British entered Palestine to defeat the Turks; they stayed there to keep it from the French; then they gave it to the Zionists because they loved "the Jews" even as they loathed them, at once admired and despised them, and above all feared them. They were not guided by strategic considerations, and there was no orderly decision-making process. The same factors were at work when they issued the Balfour Declaration, their proclamation of support for Zionist aspirations in Palestine. The declaration was the product of neither military nor diplomatic interests but of prejudice, faith, and sleight of hand. The men who sired it were Christian and Zionist and, in many cases, antisemitic. They believed the Jews controlled the world.

The first British proposal to conquer Palestine and eventually establish a Jewish state there appeared before the cabinet in the form of a memorandum in January 1915, less than three months after Turkey entered the war. Its author was the postmaster general, Herbert Samuel, a Jew. In his characteristically cautious way, Samuel was a Zionist; he seems to have seen Zionism as a bridge between his Judaism and his liberal values. He was thirty-four years old when the World War broke out.¹

Samuel was aware of the difficulties. "The attempt to realise the aspiration of a Jewish State one century too soon might throw back its actual realisation for many centuries more," he wrote in his memorandum. The