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Rory Miller, ed. *Britain, Palestine and Empire: The Mandate Years*. Ashgate: Farnham, Surrey, 2010. 194 pages. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6808-4.

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Reviewed for H-Diplo by **Janice J. Terry**, Emerita, Eastern Michigan University

This collection of nine articles evolved out of a 2008 two-day conference at King's College, London marking the 60th anniversary of the British withdrawal from Palestine. The authors, scholars from France, Israel, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Netherlands, offer a number of thought provoking observations on the implications and impacts of the British Mandate in Palestine from the 1920s to 1948. The essays are based on wide array of government documents, private papers, and published sources. The editor, Rory Miller, provides a useful introductory overview of each article and author.

In "Flawed Foundations: The Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate," (Chapter 1) James Renton offers a highly nuanced analysis of the 1917 statement; he emphasizes that the majority of British policy makers viewed the document as a wartime measure (17-18) and that most did not, at the time, envisage it as laying the foundations for an actual Jewish state. However the reference to the "native population" rather than specifically naming the Palestinians left them at a distinct disadvantage in future negotiations. Since the Balfour Declaration did not specifically mention the Palestinians (citing only the "non-Jewish population") they were subsequently viewed as a "disparate series of peoples" (35) and were therefore little considered or often ignored altogether. The recently published full-length book, *The Balfour Declaration* (2010), by Jonathan Schneer, provides a further expansion on the many motivations for and impacts of the 1917 Balfour statement.

Susan Pedersen describes the relative strengths of Zionist and Palestinian arguments for statehood in "The Impact of League Oversight on British Policy in Palestine" (Chapter 2). Pedersen convincingly demonstrates the pro-Zionist stance of the League's Mandates Commission. She also details the successful efforts by Zionist leaders, particularly Chaim Weizmann, in putting their case before the international community. Indeed, the essays in this collection effectively highlight how the Palestinians were consistently out-manuevered

and out lobbied by the Zionists in the corridors of power in London and Geneva and even within Mandate Palestine. Thus the League increasingly came to support the argument that Mandate had been established to create a Jewish state and that it did not entail a “dual obligation” (58) as many British policy makers increasingly came to believe.

In Chapters 3 and 4, “Our Jerusalem’: Bertha Spafford Vester and Christianity in Palestine during the British Mandate” and “Views of Palestine in British Art in Wartime and Peacetime, 1914-1948” Heleen Murre-van den Berg and Antoine Capet respectively offer thoughtful expositions of the Orientalist views of American Protestants and European artists toward Palestine and its peoples. Capet posits that the depictions of Palestine during the interwar period were based mostly on an imagined reality (85) that was based on a long tradition of Western fascination with the Holy Land (85).

Amos Nadan’s “No Holy Statistics for the Holy Land: The Fallacy of Growth in the Palestinian Rural Economy, 1920-1930” (Chapter 5) is perhaps the most closely argued and probably most controversial piece in this collection. As the title indicates, Nadan argues that contrary to popular belief the Palestinian agricultural economy did not expand during the interwar years. He largely refutes previous studies, especially those by Jacob Metzer and Oded Kaplan (see their: *The Jewish and Arab Economies in Mandatory Palestine: Product, Employment and Growth*, 1991). Nadan presents extensive statistical analyses and graphs to buttress his conclusion. In particular, he emphasizes that in the 1920s some underestimation of production by those in the agricultural sector was likely because taxes were based on it but that from 1935 onward, taxes were levied on property not production and therefore underestimation was much less likely. As Nadan argues, the end result was “very low growth per rural inhabitant” or even some “negative returns” (117).

“The Peel Commission and Partition, 1936-1938” (Chapter 6) by Penny Sinanoglou traces how members of the committee came to support the partition of Palestine. She describes the actual report, most of which was devoted not to the partition recommendation but rather to the historic and political background and situation in Palestine. This is a thoughtful discussion of the inner workings of the Commission and the push/pull forces that influenced their final recommendations. She also points to the successful Zionist attempt to shape the partition plan to match “their ideal vision of a Jewish state” (130). This once again gives ample credit to Weizmann’s successful diplomacy behind the scenes. In contrast, there are no records of Palestinians meeting informally with Commissioners (132). Although Sinanoglou has used an impressive array of primary materials, she notes the relative absence of documents regarding the actual decision to recommend partition; however, she does not speculate on the possible causes for this curious omission.

In “Lawlessness was the Law” (Chapter 7) Matthew Hughes examines British military policies and the legal system underpinning its actions during the Arab revolt of 1936-1939. He raises issues of whether the legal system “restricted or legitimized brutality in the country” (141). Given that British actions included collective punishments, destruction of Arab property and villages, house demolitions, burning of villages, use of hooded informers,

looting, destruction of urban centers (especially in Jaffa) under the guise of improving health and sanitation (148), imprisonment and executions, one may reasonably conclude that destruction was “a systematic, systemic part of British counter-insurgency operations” (146). As Matthews mentions in passing, Israel continues to employ these same techniques against the Palestinians to the present-day (156).

Rory Miller focuses on possible lessons learned or applied from the Irish revolt and the struggle for independence from the British in “An Oriental Ireland’: Thinking about Palestine in Terms of the Irish Question during the Mandatory Era” (Chapter 8). He concludes that although all parties to conflict -- Great Britain, the Zionists and Palestinians - - on occasions compared their individual situations to the Irish question, all eventually concluded that the Irish case was not “a viable model for their own predicament” (175).

The collection ends with a description of Gordon Cunningham’s tenure as the last British High Commissioner in Palestine by Motti Golani; the essay is based on his soon to be published book *Alan Gordon Cunningham and the Jewish Yishuv, 1945-1948*. Somewhat surprisingly, Golani characterizes Cunningham’s tenure in office as a “relative success” (187). A more cynical approach might be that British government offered what promised to be a hopeless task to Cunningham when all others had refused it. Other than mentioning Cunningham’s determination to make up for his failures as a commander in the North Africa theatre during World War II, Golani does not delve deeper into his motivations for accepting a position where failure was almost certain.

Although many of these articles retrace rather well trod ground, a wide variety of readers will still find much in this collection of interest and many offer some original and thought provoking analyses. Of course the debate over the failures and successes of the Mandate will continue just as the conflict between Israel and Palestine remains unresolved through the present-day.

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